

On The Record: Notes for the “Errata Erratum” Duchamp Remix Project
at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

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“In the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal ‘art coefficient’ contained in the work. In other words, the personal ‘art coefficient’ is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed...”

Marcel Duchamp, “The Creative Act,” 1957

When I first started dj-ing it was meant to be a hobby. It was an experiment with rhythm and clues, with rhythm and cues: drop the needle on the record and see what happens when this sound is applied to this context, or when that sound crashes into that recording... you get the idea. The first impulses I had about dj culture were taken from that basic idea – play and irreverence towards the found objects that we use as consumers and a sense of permanent uncertainty about the role of art in our lives. For me as an artist it seemed that turntables were somehow imbued with the art of memory, and that they embodied what theorist Francis Yates would call “memory palaces” in a contemporary context. (Think of the scenario as Walter Benjamin’s “aura” becomes a sound wave.) Basically I wanted to show how the “phonograph” was a memory game device translated into a kind of philosophical game of intentionality mixed with what John Cage would call “chance operations.”

During the time that I spent doing research for *Errata Erratum*, I found so many examples of how dj culture intersected with some of the core tenets of the 20th-century avant-garde, that the project seems to have unconsciously absorbed them all. Composed in 1913, Duchamp’s *Erratum Musical* is based on a whole schemata of mistakes, errors—what we’d simply call “glitches” in communication between programs—within a

random card game between siblings. Duchamp wrote out a series of “instructions” about the interaction of 3 sets of 25 cards for his sisters: when each one took a card from a hat that was being passed around the room, each would sing random phrases based on a loosely defined interpretation of the patterns on the cards. Three voices in a triologue were the basis of the piece, and essentially the cards were nothing more than cues for the unconscious impulses of a quick glance at something held briefly and then put down. That was it!

To get a better idea of what this must have been like, basically, you have to imagine a fun dinner party where people sing a tune as random and individual as an interpretation of a Rorschach ink blot, and you’d have a reasonable idea of what sounds the sisters came up with. It’s not too Freudian a leap to think of the abstract familial roles played out in sound...but hey, that’s kind of the point.

I think dj-ing is essentially dealing with extended kinship systems of rhythm—one beat matches or doesn’t match a sound-flow, and it’s the interpretation of the gestures that make up the mix that creates the atmosphere in a room. Think of my “Errata Erratum” remix as a 21st-century update on the idea—now we move through dispersed networks of culture and the cards we play are icons on a screen. My remix uses a different kind of card, a reproduction of a *rotorelief*, a engraved, circular card that Duchamp made throughout his career and gave away randomly to people. A sound is assigned to each card so by manipulating the cards you get sequences of sounds.

By the end of Duchamp’s life, the card game became a signature that was profoundly paradoxical. Like all of his work it was personal and impersonal—industrial culture’s absorption of almost all “individuality” into seamless expression of individual choice amongst the varied options left in a world of pre-fabricated identities and emotions. My *Errata Erratum* echoes documentation of four realizations of Duchamp’s 1913 compositions that included *the bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even, 1.3 voices: erratum musical* and the “instruction” piece *musical sculpture*. The musical interpretations of compositions intended for voice, player piano, alto flute, celeste,

trombone and glockenspiel are of a strikingly spare, slow, and soft character that brings to mind the sound compositions of Erik Satie or Morton Feldman but are based on the interaction of the viewers with the *rotorelief* pieces that Duchamp so famously handed out over the years. In short, it's art you can download. Think of it as "downloadable sublime," or something like that.

I wanted to think of "Errata Erratum" as dj-ing "found objects" just like I would mix the records that normally compose my sonic palette. Essentially, *Errata* is an experiment with sculpture and the interplay of memory as it is shaped by the technologies of communication that have come to form the core conditions of daily life in the industrialized world. In short, it was meant to be a fun thing, and in short order it became something a lot more serious. Back then in the distant mid 90's dj-ing was still an underground phenomenon. Today now that guitars are regularly outsold by turntables, the tables have (literally and figuratively) turned. Dj-ing is a mainstream phenomenon, and mixing beats and sounds is a commonplace thing on the internet for kids... "

Errata Erratum is a migration of those values into a playful critique of one of the first artists to engage that logic of irreverence towards the art object and to apply that logic to some of the works that he came up with. I wanted to "flesh out" his ideas on the topic within net culture. So when you see those circles moving, think of loops and repetition, cycles and flows. And think of how to translate one person's thoughts into another's... and that's just the beginning. When the mix comes calling, you can't help but think of how many people are in it. This project is an attempt to bring together one of my favorite people in mix culture together with some variations on a theme—one that is as wide as the internet, as wide as people's thoughts moving through the fiber optic routing systems that hold our new version of the "digital sublime" together.

Duchamp's piece *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même Erratum Musical (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even. Erratum Musical)* follows the same logic and it leads us to the series of notes and projects that Duchamp started to collect in 1912, which culminated in his infamous *Large Glass*. It wasn't published or exhibited during

Duchamp's life, but the implications are clear: he wanted to invoke a sense of convergence between art and the random processes, the "generative syntaxes," of the imagination as it speaks to a world made of industrial processes. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even. Erratum Musical* manuscript was unfinished and leaves many questions unanswered. It leads us to a precipice of our own making because, like my *Errata Erratum* remix, it works within a framework of chance operations, and that is its unique signature in an arts context. It's a milieu where each remix or "musical sculpture" is unique yet completely dependent on the system that created the context. It's that old Duchamp paradox coming back to haunt us, uncannily, on the internet.

Duchamp said in his famous Creative Act lecture "all in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." Think of that as you hear Duchamp rhyming over a hip-hop dub rhythm I made especially for this project. I guess you could call him "M.C. Duchamp" because, by hip-hop standards, he has good "flow." At this point in the track, his voice is separated from the recording to become part of the musical sculpture, and like the original *Erratum Musical*, we're seeing someone's voice placed in a system of chance operations. Rhythm becomes the context for the performance, and the artist becomes part of the sonic palette he describes.

There are two parts to the manuscript notes that Duchamp wrote to describe the *Erratum Musical* compositions. One part contains the piece for a "mechanical instrument." The piece is unfinished and is written using numbers instead of notes, but Duchamp explains the meaning of those numbers, which made it easy to transcribe them into musical notes. I tried to balance that sense of uncertainty by assigning sounds to discs that can change speed and pitch, because turntables allow for that kind of variation. For *Errata Erratum* I wanted to streamline that process and give people a sense of improvisation—like Duchamp, the pieces also indicate the instruments on which it should be performed—but they are icons made of digital code. Where he would write "player piano, mechanical organs or other new instruments for which the virtuoso intermediary is suppressed" we

can click on a screen. Anyway, you get the idea. The second part of his notes contained a description of the compositional system - the title for the “system” is: “An apparatus automatically recording fragmented musical periods.”

Here, again, we’re left with the ability to make our own interpretation of a given framework, and we’re invited to run with it as a kind of game “system.” The “apparatus” that let’s you make the composition in his original notes consists of three parts: a funnel, several open-end cars, and a set of numbered balls. Think of all of them as being flattened out on your screen—and that’s what the *Errata Erratum* remix is about. In the original piece each number on a ball represented a note (pitch). Duchamp suggested 85 notes according to the standard range of a piano of that time. Today, almost all pianos have 88 notes, and most computers have about 77 keys if they’re based on the classic “QWERTY” system. Since you have some kind of device to interpret your finger movements, I thought it’d be cool to have that aspect made into a function based on how you play with the rotation of the *rotoreliefs*. In the original piece, the balls fall through the funnel into the cars passing underneath at various speeds. When the funnel was empty, a musical period was completed. When things get digital, we can assign all of those aspects to gestures made with a mouse or touch pad, and basically, that’s what makes this fun. Think of the screen as a blank canvas and that’s just the beginning.

It’s generally noted that Duchamp went through a “musical phase” between 1912 and 1915. *Errata Erratum* incorporates aspects of almost all of the pieces he wrote during that time and makes them become digital vectors of the same intentions, but updated, 21st-century style. One of the last pieces he wrote, *Sculpture Musicale (Musical Sculpture)*, is notated on a small piece of paper, which Duchamp also included in his “Green Box” piece. The *Musical Sculpture* piece is similar to the Fluxus pieces of the early 1960s and even more so to the abstract software driven music of contemporary digital culture, where fragments of sounds are constantly combined to make “tracks” in dj culture. Duchamp’s works combine objects and performance, audio and visual, known and unknown factors, and elements explained and unexplained. Of his three works of music, only two can be performed using manuscripts or some kind of system of “rules”:

the *Erratum Musical* for three voices and the *Musical Sculpture*. “The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even. Erratum Musical” was incomplete. So to give context here is important: there were no “finished” pieces and everything in *Errata Erratum* is about that gap between execution and intent in a world of uncertainty. Whatever mix you make of it, it can only be a guess. You have to make your own version and that’s kind of the point. With that in mind, I ask that you think of this as a mix lab—an “open system” where any voice can be you. The only limits are the game you play and how you play it.

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