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# Multiples in Late Modern Sculpture: Influences Within and Beyond Daniel Spoerri's 1959 *Edition MAT*<sup>1</sup>

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Courtesy Daniel Spoerri for *Nierika*

Fig. 1: Daniel Spoerri, Claus and Nusch Bremer reading concrete poems at the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, 1959. Courtesy Daniel Spoerri.

## Abstract

The first *Edition MAT* was founded by Daniel Spoerri in 1959 and recreated in collaboration with Karl Gerstner in 1964 and 1965, with a special *Edition MAT MOT* the same year. Consisting of sculptures that change optically, electrically, or through the audience's physical interventions, this series brought in an innovative idea of multiplication through movement. The potential of *MAT* sculptures for configuration changes within the continuity of their structure in space sets them apart from serial two-dimensional works, where any change in the gestalt requires the production of a new copy. This paper reconstructs the genesis of the *Edition MAT* and the passage from *MAT* to *MAT MOT* through increased questioning of the notion of authorship and development of the idea of portability. Particular focus will be given to the network of artistic collaborations and cross-pollination of ideas between Spoerri and Duchamp, Op artists, Nouveau Réalistes, Fluxus, and the early influence of concrete poetry in shaping Spoerri's contribution to *MAT* as both editor and artist.

Key words: multiplication, collaboration, edition, Spoerri, Sixties.

## Resumen

La primera edición *MAT* fue fundada por Daniel Spoerri en 1959 y reconstruida en colaboración con Karl Gerstner en 1964 y de nuevo en 1965, con una especial *MAT MOT* edición del mismo año. Consta de esculturas que cambian de forma óptica, eléctrica o por medio de intervenciones físicas de la audiencia, esta serie trajo una idea innovadora de la multiplicación a través del movimiento. El potencial de las esculturas *MAT* para los cambios de configuración dentro de la continuidad de su estructura en el espacio que los diferencia de las obras bidimensionales de serie, donde cualquier cambio en la gestalt requiere la producción de una nueva copia. Este artículo reconstruye la génesis de la Edición

MAT y el paso de la MAT para MOT MAT, mediante un mayor cuestionamiento de la noción de autoría y desarrollo de la idea de la portabilidad. Particular atención se le dará a la red de colaboraciones artísticas y la polinización cruzada de ideas entre Spoerri y Duchamp, artistas Op, Nouveau Réalistes, Fluxus, y la temprana influencia de la poesía concreta en la formación de la contribución de Spoerri a MAT tanto como editor y artista.

Palabras clave: multiplicación, de colaboración, de edición, Spoerri, sesenta.

## Introduction: The Inclusion of Movement in Multiples as the mirror of Social Dynamism in the late Modern Era

**T**he *Edition MAT (Multiplication d'Art Transformable)* was conceived by Daniel Spoerri in 1959 and re-proposed in subsequent editions with the co-leadership of Karl Gerstner in 1964 and 1965, with a special *Edition MAT MOT* (sometimes also called *TAM THEK*) also in 1965. The idea of movement was introduced in objects that changed “optically, electrically, or through the physical intervention of the spectator, and presenting an infinite number of variations or aspects.”<sup>2</sup> It is true that earlier Modernism witnessed the introduction of physical motion in sculpture through Alexander Calder’s *Mobiles* and conceptual motion in Marcel Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise*. It is also true that at some point in time artists became involved in interdisciplinary ventures by cultural catalysts such as the Ballets Russes of Monte Carlo, which “provided many artists with a shared stage for their talents,”<sup>3</sup> such as Picasso, Miro, Braque, Matisse, Gris and many others.

However, this is the first time that multiplication in sculpture has expanded to include a team of peers working to produce individual outcomes towards a shared vision, similar to those movements that characterized the modern era: for instance, the Impressionists, who were united in their common interest “to transmit their immediate perceptions onto canvas” being attracted by comparable subject matter.<sup>4</sup> The artists of the *Edition MAT* shared a common interest in the introduction of movement in multiples: a big-picture idea was transmitted from Spoerri, as the series’ editor, to the artists, and each of them would respond in his/her own signature artistic choice. The difference consisted in the freedom of the artists involved in the *Edition MAT* to pursue subject matter, style and content that best conformed to their individuality, but within the large-picture goals set by the edition project. Niki de Saint Phalle’s piece for the 1964 *Edition MAT* reflects the *Shooting Pictures*, for which she was already known since her debut in February 1961 at the Impasse Ronsin in Paris,<sup>5</sup> but the piece is set in a new context that requires awareness of a possible intervention by the audience, rather than the artist herself or her immediate acquaintances. The *Edition MAT* projects helped the artists involved to clarify their own vision in light of the new broader goals of the series.

A few years before Spoerri launched the *Edition MAT*, interdisciplinary collaboration emerged as new practice in the fine arts; it is the case of Robert Rauschenberg in the US, who in 1954 produced the sculpture *Minutiae* to be used by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for their ballet on music by John Cage, the first successful moment of an eleven-year subsequent collaboration.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to observe that innovation in the mid- to late fifties in sculpture occurs in communication with other disciplines, in which collaboration is a more consolidated practice. Indeed, Daniel Spoerri comes from a solid background in dance and theater.

By citing sociologist of art Howard Becker, Vera John-Steiner reminds us of the interdependent nature of art, where often artists need to rely on others, such as manufacturers for tools and art dealers for selling, and even tradition in art becomes the conceptual

<sup>2</sup> *Einladungskarte: Gallery One, London, für Oeuvres d'Art Transformables: 25 Februar 1960, adressiert an Galeria Notizie, Torino, Italy* [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, AFr. 48g ].  
<sup>3</sup> John-Steiner, Vera, *Creative Collaboration*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Berecz, Ágnes, “Close Encounters: On Pierre Restany and Nouveau Réalisme,” en Julia Robinson (ed.), *New Realisms: 1957-1962. Object Strategies Between Readymade and Spectacle*, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía y Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2010, p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Potter, Michelle, “A License to Do Anything”: Robert Rauschenberg and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company,” *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, p. 1. JSTOR.

<sup>7</sup> John-Steiner, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

framework for the artist's contribution.<sup>7</sup> In this light, preceded by Spoerri's written definition, the Edition MAT has the major ingredients of a "silent" artistic movement that takes into account the social and cultural transformations of the late Modern Era to become a late modern Avant-garde response to the raise of the network society. This paper will reconstruct some of the major influences and interdependencies that led Spoerri towards his vision of a collective and dynamic idea of multiple in sculpture. The intersection of dance, theater and the visual arts in Spoerri's background, combined with his early inclinations towards Op/kinetic art and Dadaism, will contribute to making the Edition MAT, in its own peculiar collaborative format, a catalyst for a new vision that combined multiplicity and movement within the increasingly social dimension of art in late modernism.

## Early Influences beyond Sculpture: Dance, Theater, and Concrete Poetry

Spoerri developed his particular approach to the idea of multiples and movement through acquaintance with artists that shared a similar interest in the art world, including Duchamp, Tinguely, Op and kinetic artists, as well as through a collaboration with Fluxus artists, whose scope is still largely underestimated. This notion was already rooted in his personal 'nomadic' lifestyle and lack of roots, as well as in his earlier experiences in the world of dance, theater, and experimental poetry. While all biographies report Spoerri's earlier professional experiences outside the studio arts, studies on the artist have rarely deepened the analysis of the connections between these early experiences and the subsequent development of the dialectic between stasis and movement, object and idea, death and life, real and theatrical, that we can observe throughout all the phases of Spoerri's *oeuvre*, as well as his distinctive collaborative style that enriches our understanding of the expansion of artistic network and dislocation of artistic centers and movements in late modernism. The object-sculptures within the Edition MAT, their emphasis on movement, and the precocious inclusion of the viewer in the artistic act can only be understood in light of the solid multidisciplinary formation of the editor Spoerri who choose them, as well as in the rootless artist's emphasis on building relations within a nomadic lifestyle (indeed, his *tableaux-pièges* freeze the moment).

From the strictly biographical standpoint, Spoerri's interest in movement paralleled his lack of roots: born 1930 in Galati, Romania, he had to leave his native country when he was only twelve years old and follow his family's migration to Switzerland, after his father was killed by Nazis. And while the artist never went back to his native Romania, he recognized the issue finding his own place as a major source of artistic inspiration:

"I think that actually it's a question of territory. Because I had lost my territory since childhood, and even during childhood, I never had a territory. As I said before, I was a Romanian Jew, evangelical in an orthodox country, whose father was dead, without being certain that he was really dead. I swear to you, the first things I glued down were all that, that feeling."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Politi, Giancarlo. "Today at my age I know the faults that stopped me from becoming better know" (interview with Daniel Spoerri), en G. Politi (ed.), *Daniel Spoerri from A to Z*, Milano, Fondazione Mudima, 1991 (trans. Henry Martin), p. 9. The artist refers to the *tableaux pièges* originated during his association with the *Nouveau Réalisme*.

From the professional standpoint, Spoerri became interested in movement as development in space, through his own formation in dance, theater, and experimental poetry, while in the same period he was becoming acquainted with a generation of artists who in the middle of the century were exploring real or optical movement in their work.

In 1949, while in Zurich, he met Jean Tinguely, who was living in Basel and since 1944 was exploring movement in space through his machine-propelled sculptures. For the first

Edition MAT, Tinguely offered *Constante*, a bent black steel structure with a tall vertical plane and a horizontal one, on which stands a clip connected to a motor; the viewer can insert various elements in the clip, like strips of colored paper, and see them rotate to create “a dematerialized volume.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1952 Spoerri was in Paris to study dance. In 1954 he was back to Switzerland in Bern, where he was hired as professional dancer at the Stadttheater; the following two years, at the alternative space Kleintheater he directed the first production in German language of Eugene Ionesco, and then Picasso's *Le Désir attrapé par la queue*, in collaboration with Meret Oppenheim, who translated it in German.<sup>10</sup>

In April 1955, an exhibition titled *Le Mouvement* at the Galerie Denise René introduced Kinetic art in Paris, with mobiles by Duchamp and Calder, paintings by Vasarely (the theoretician of the gallery) and works by kinetic artists Agam, Bury, Soto, and Tinguely.<sup>11</sup> Along with Pontus Hultén, Tinguely was instrumental in convincing the Galerie Denise René to include Duchamp's *Rotoreliefs* as part of the exhibition.<sup>12</sup> A few years later, Spoerri approached Denise René for his Edition MAT, in consideration of her interest towards movement in art, but to no avail.<sup>13</sup> Still, many of the kinetic artists Spoerri became acquainted with during this exhibition would be invited to become part of the first Edition MAT.

Victor Vasarely was already well-known at the time of his participation in *Le Mouvement* exhibition. He was also working in three-dimensional works, in which the spectator's shifting in space would result in different perceptions: “They are panels either of glass or of plexiglass with engraved graphic forms which, when grouped in the manner of a folding screen (the base forming an N, for example), permit one, by shifting, to see the positions of the engravings of each panel constantly change in relation to each other.”<sup>14</sup> This visual effect clearly echoes the positions of words within the phrase in Concrete Poetry, and reveal the extent that the artist's vision matched Spoerri's background within this literary genre. The contribution of Vasarely to the Edition MAT, *Markab* and *Keiho*, consisted of two serigraphs encased in wooden boxes and a glass plate in the front, made corrugated by a small square pattern, with the capacity to distort the serigraphed image as the viewer moves.<sup>15</sup>

Yaacov Agam, another artist promoted by Denise René, contributed *8 + 1 in Bewegung* for the Edition MAT. It consisted of a black wooden panel with twelve holes in his central axis, and eight wooden sticks of different length that could be inserted and rotated anywhere.<sup>16</sup>

In 1957, Spoerri became involved with the State Theater in Darmstadt, Germany, as assistant to the director Gustav Sellner until 1959.<sup>17</sup> The following year, he became acquainted with Venezuelan artist Jesus Rafael-Soto, who was in Paris since 1950<sup>18</sup> and became known for his kinetic sculptures. Since 1951, Soto began to exhibit his *Répétition Optique*. According to Frank Popper, in this work the “repetition of formal elements” would create in the audience an effect of optical vibration: “Soto used repetitions as a means of getting rid of traditional concepts of form and composition (...). He had formed the conclusion that true abstraction in the plastic arts could only be achieved by a sort of transfiguration which movement alone could perform.” Made in a technique similar to relief, the series acquired “a status between painting and sculpture.” By the end of the Fifties, Soto's oeuvre has further matured: moving objects have turned into a more complex set of relations involving the pieces themselves, components of external provenance applied to them, and active spectators.<sup>19</sup> In 1957 Soto developed the *Vibration Structures*, “structures of wire or rods placed in front of a moiré background.”<sup>20</sup> During his formative years in the theater, Spoerri was particularly attracted to the notion of turning spectators into active participants. For the first 1959 Edition MAT, Soto contributed his *Vibrationsstruktur*, a series of concentric black

<sup>9</sup> Vatsella, Katerina, *Edition MAT: Daniel Spoerri, Karl Gerstner und das Multiple. Die Entstehung einer Kunstform*, Bremen, Verlag H.M. Hauschild GmbH, 1998, p. 248. This catalogue in German language is the most

complete and thorough monograph published on the Edition MAT I have seen so far. When not explicitly stated, the translations of quotes from and into English are by the author.

<sup>10</sup> Kleinschmidt, Peter, “D.S. as Director,” in Politi, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>11</sup> Hultén, K.G. Pontus, *Jean Tinguely “Méta”*, Boston, New York Graphic Society, 1975 (first edition: 1972 Verlag Ullstein GmbH, trans. from German by Mary Whittall), p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Daniels, Dieter, “Marcel Duchamp: The Most Influential Artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?,” en *The Museum Jean Tinguely Basel* (ed.), *Marcel Duchamp*. Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2002, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>14</sup> Habasque, Guy y Mona Tobin, “Notes on a New Trend: Multidimensional Animated Works,” *Yale French Studies*, no. 19/20, Contemporary Art, 1957, p. 40. JSTOR.

<sup>15</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>17</sup> Berghaus, Gunter, “Happenings in Europe: trends, events, and leading figures,” en Mariellen R. Sandford (ed.), *Happenings and other acts*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, p. 285. Web. Also Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> Barrett, Cyril. *Op Art*, New York, The Viking Press, 1970, p. 150.

<sup>19</sup> Popper, Frank, *Origins and Development of Kinetic Art*, Greenwich, CT, New York Graphic Society, 1968, pp.106 -108.

<sup>20</sup> Barrett, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Politi, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Roth, Dieter and Garry Garrels. *Roth Time" A Dieter Roth Retrospective*. New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2003, p. 30. Web.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>27</sup> Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>28</sup> Hollis, Richard, *Swiss Graphic Design: The Origins and Growth of an International Style, 1920-1955*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 181-183.

paper ellipses attached in white wooden panel; another concentric series of white ellipses on Plexiglas are mounted in front of the white panel and can be moved by the observer, to react with the serigraphed ellipses and create an intense optic vibration.<sup>21</sup>

Around the mid-Fifties Spoerri became increasingly involved in Concrete Poetry, until in 1958 he edited and even distributed the first issue of *Material*, a magazine of concrete poetry and figurative art. Four volumes were published: no. 1, 2, 3, and 5. The first was an anthology of concrete poems and gathered contributions of Josef Albers, Louis Aragon, Claus Bremer, Helmut Heissenbüttel, Eugen Gomringer, Dieter Roth, Daniel Spoerri himself, and others. The following issues were dedicated to individual poets: Dieter Roth (at the time, his name was Diter Rot) for no. 2 in 1959, Emmett Williams for no. 3 published in 1959, and Gherasim Luca in collaboration with Pol Bury for no.5 published in 1960.<sup>22</sup> It is within this context that he met the future Fluxus artists Emmett Williams and Dieter Roth, who largely contributed to the 1965 Edition MAT MOT. In a later interview with Giancarlo Politi, Spoerri acknowledged that his idea for *Edition MAT* stemmed out of the specific context of Concrete Poetry; indeed, the word "MAT" for the edition includes the first three letters of the word *Material*.<sup>23</sup>

The evolution of Spoerri's concept for the Edition MAT is largely understood by the examination of his mail correspondence with Dieter Roth, which has been thoroughly analyzed and reconstructed by Katerina Vatsella. I am convinced that Spoerri's vision for MAT, through his earlier experiment with *Material* in Concrete Poetry, must take into particular consideration the idea of seriality developed through experimental journals that, just a few years before Spoerri's *Material*, were crossing boundaries between the disciplines of graphic design, visual arts, poetry, and literature.

Roth was friends with Marcel Wyss since the years of their education in Bern. In 1953 they published the first issue of *Spirale*, a magazine that "was to be a forum for contemporary graphic design, poetry, photography, theoretical essays, and reproductions," where "Roth would be responsible for the literary contributions and for contacting possible advertisers, Wyss would be responsible for the visuals (...) Eugen Gomringer joined the two friends as literary editor."<sup>24</sup> In Bern he started to frequent the same artistic cafés and at some point met Spoerri, with whom he kept an intense correspondence after he left Bern in 1956.<sup>25</sup>

The contribution by Dieter Roth created a link between *Material* and the *Edition MAT*. Dieter Roth presented *Buch aa 23*, a portfolio of 18 loose cardboard pages, where rectangular cuts of different length and position have been applied, to create a variety of compositional effects by changing the pages' superimposition,<sup>26</sup> thus extending the principle of position changes from the succession of words in concrete poems to entire pages. The principle of having a book in loose pages well responded to Spoerri's specifications for the Edition MAT: "They have the character of original art, they can be multiplied, and they embrace the principle of movement. Roth achieved the latter by means of loose pages. Recipients become active codesigners and they can create infinitely variable images by changing the order and direction of the pages."<sup>27</sup>

A Swiss freelance designer since 1953, Karl Gerstner founded in Basel the Gerstner & Kutter agency in 1959. In 1955 the young designer became well known due to his editorial role for a special issue of the magazine *Werk*, where he largely experimented with typography in the redesign of the new issue and published an essay in two sections, in which he advocated for the designer's role within society and the integration of graphic design in other disciplines.<sup>28</sup>

His involvement in the first Edition MAT with *Bunte Reihen*, consisting of fifteen individually colored wooden rods that could be rearranged in their sequence and depth to get different effects,<sup>29</sup> shows an interest toward interchangeability of color structures through the audience's intervention that he will carry in future projects, like *Carro 64*, issued as a multiple and published in the magazine *Structure* along with his essay "Serial Construction."<sup>30</sup> A grating structure, on which small squares or sticks of different colors could be moved to achieve different combinations, it was considered by Gerstner a multiple by all means, as he reports from a 1968 issue of *Schweizer Spiegel*: "Being changeable, it exists in a different version every time it is executed. Every purchaser is able to make an original for himself, no matter in how many copies the picture is produced," and he even calls it "a mass-produced original."<sup>31</sup>

The idea of interchangeability has been explored by Spoerri as an author in a concrete poem written in 1955: it begins with the phrase "das rezel kroitz wort" and develops into two stanzas, where all these words are represented in a different order within each phrase.<sup>32</sup>

In a recent interview with the author of this essay, Spoerri indicated that "kroitz wort" is the crossword, where each word needs to be connected to the others, and "rezel" is the question that prompts the search for the right word: by using all the available declinations in German, or by changing the position of the words, the semantic relationship between each word and the others changes, along with the overall meaning of the sentence.<sup>33</sup> As Anna Katharina Schaffner claims,

"The effect of this is to render the relation between the component parts fluid, language is dissected at the level of sentence: through a change of position, a semantic change occurs, syntax becomes instable and the words pair and combine in different constellations. The instability of meaning is dramatized: meaning, it becomes clear, depends on the position of the parts."<sup>34</sup>

The change of meaning with the new relationships formed by moving words in concrete poems is substantially paralleled by the concept of changing configurations through the introduction of movement in multiples, which represents Spoerri's innovative vision for the Edition MAT in sculpture.

Poesie Concrete and the Edition MAT had a physical encounter in January 1959, during an exhibition of Jean Tinguely at the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf: Spoerri, Nusch Bremer and Claus Bremer simultaneously read three poems, placed in front of them at eye level and rolled around a cylinder that rotated at its own speed as the reading progressed, so that they all had to make arbitrary choices about words, phrases, or sentences.<sup>35</sup> In March 1960, when the Edition MAT was exhibited at the Gallery One in London, Spoerri organized a simultaneous reading at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London with the audience participation.<sup>36</sup>

Until April 1959, Spoerri was still working in the Darmstadt Theater as assistant to the director, while completing the other issues of *Material* and conceiving the Edition MAT. Poetry, theater, and art coexisted at this point in his life. In this light we can understand the role assumed by Spoerri in the first Edition MAT, which can be defined as more of an "artistic animator" than properly an artist, as defined by his friend and collaborator Karl Gerstner in a 1995 interview with Katerina Vatsella.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, contrary to Gerstner who contributed work since the first Edition MAT and later on was involved also in a co-editing role, Spoerri did not contribute any work for the first Edition MAT: he would include his *Multiplicateur d'Art* only in

<sup>29</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>30</sup> Jobse, Jonneke, *De Stijl Continued: The Journal Structure (1958-1964): An Artists' Debate*. Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 2005, p. 389. Web.

<sup>31</sup> Gerstner, Karl, "Karl Gerstner," en Henri Hillebrand, (ed.), *Graphic Designers in Europe*, vol. III. New York, Universe Books, 1973, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Spoerri, Daniel, *Konkrete Poesie*, 1955 [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, AFr. 48k].

<sup>33</sup> Spoerri, Daniel, *Interview with the author*, Seggiano IT, Giardino, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Schaffner, Anna Katharina, "How the Letters Learnt to Dance: On Language Dissection in Dadaist, Concrete and Digital Poetry," en Dietrich Scheunemann (ed.) *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, B.V., 2005, p. 169. Web.[http://books.google.it/books?id=7CttwTdx04C&dq=materiale+1957-59+%2B+poesie+konkrete&lr=&hl=it&source=gs\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.it/books?id=7CttwTdx04C&dq=materiale+1957-59+%2B+poesie+konkrete&lr=&hl=it&source=gs_navlinks_s)

<sup>35</sup> Kamber, A., "Simultaneous Readings," en Politi, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

<sup>36</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Vatsella, *Ibid.*, p. 184.

the second 1964 edition, after his artistic fame was officially sanctioned by his membership within the Nouveau Réalisme movement. Indeed, with his debut into the visual arts came a deeper exploration of Duchamp's premises, which lead Spoerri towards blurring the distinctions between his roles as an artist and as editor for the following editions of MAT and for MAT MOT.

In an interview with Vatsella, Spoerri claimed that he knew Gerstner by fame, but he actually met him for the first time in Paris.<sup>38</sup> Gerstner explained that, "Daniel and I came to art from two different corners, he from the Nouveau Réalisme, I from the constructive/kinetic. Each of us was talking in his own corner with his respective colleagues."<sup>39</sup> It is known that since 1955, several years before his membership within the Nouveau Réalisme, Spoerri has been already acquainted with several op and kinetic artists who exhibited at *Le Mouvement*; therefore, such an encounter would naturally take place at some point. It was Gerstner who convinced Spoerri to undertake the second Edition MAT.<sup>40</sup> It is interesting to point out that the friendship and collaboration between Spoerri and Gerstner continued beyond the Edition MAT: after both settled in Düsseldorf, the role assumed by Gerstner as artistic co-animator helped and supported Spoerri towards his foundation of the Spoerri Restaurant in 1968.<sup>41</sup>

Spoerri's vision for the Edition MAT clarifies in the course of a mail exchanges with several friends, especially Dieter Roth, with whom he had frequent mail correspondence between December 1958 and summer 1959, so diligently reconstructed by Katerina Vatsella in a thorough archival research of primary sources. Spoerri first envisioned going to Paris to open a gallery on the theme of movement (=bewegung), in which he would also be able to do some theater. The movement would make the work more impersonal, and this would allow reproducibility at low cost. However, soon he had to change his mind about the gallery (due to a claimed incompatibility with the business side of art), and the enterprise became dislocated and itinerant, through the galleries and museums that were progressively involved in hosting exhibitions of the Edition MAT pieces.<sup>42</sup>

## The first Edition MAT: Transformable Sculptures

A move to Paris actually occurred in August 1959, where Spoerri rented a room at the Hotel Carcassonne,<sup>43</sup> from where soon the Edition MAT, and then a year later his first *tableaux-pièges* became realities. During this period he made an encounter that has become fundamental for the development of the Edition MAT and his entire career: during a visit to the studio of Max Ernst, Spoerri met Marcel Duchamp (who at the time lived in the US, but was often visiting Paris) and explained his idea for the Edition MAT, which was well received and supported through the contribution of his *Rotoreliefs*.<sup>44</sup> Spoerri's attention towards Duchamp comes in a period, in which a surge of interest towards the Dadaist artist in Paris was supported by the publication of his book of writings *Marchand du sel* and a monograph by Robert Lebel, *Sur Marcel Duchamp* published by Trianon. Marcel Duchamp was included in the above mentioned 1955 exhibition *Le Mouvement*.<sup>45</sup> In the US, also in 1957, Duchamp was invited to a talk at the American Federation of the Arts in Huston, Texas. At the round-table, he delivered the talk "The Creative Act", whose ideas deeply resonate with Spoerri's involvement of the audience through the introduction of movement, sometimes physical, sometimes optical, in several works included in the Edition MAT. According to Duchamp, "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."<sup>46</sup> This talk was incorporated as an essay in Lebel's

<sup>38</sup> Vatsella, Katerina, "Interview mit Daniel Spoerri," 23. April 1995, en Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>39</sup> Vatsella, Katerina, "Interview mit Karl Gerstner," 30. Mai 1995, en Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> Vatsella, "Interview mit Daniel Spoerri," p. 178.

<sup>41</sup> Politi, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>42</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>45</sup> Berecz, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Duchamp, Marcel, "The Creative Act," en Lebel, Robert (ed.), *Marcel Duchamp*. New York, Paragraphic Books, 1959 (trans. George Heard Hamilton), p. 78.



Fig. 2: Daniel Spoerri, *Eaten By Duchamp*, from the series *31 Variations on a Meal*, 1964. *Tableau-piège*, 45x55cm. Courtesy Daniel Spoerri.

original 1959 edition, reproduced in the same year in the American edition. Later on, in 1968, Fluxus artist Dick Higgins published the book *The Arts of the New Mentality* with Something Else Press. Higgins defined the “new mentality” as being “characterized by simultaneous acceptance of oneself only through one’s relationship to external phenomena and by a very new tendency to take nearly anything someone else says as more serious than what one says oneself...”.<sup>47</sup> These statements clearly show the progressive interest of the artist towards including the spectator from Duchamp to Fluxus by way of Spoerri’s Edition MAT.

Particularly influential, for Spoerri, must have been Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-valise*, a collection of sixty-nine miniature replicas of his most notorious work, which was assembled in New York City where Duchamp took refuge during WWII.<sup>48</sup> We cannot underestimate the importance of some premises in Duchamp’s work that will be further explored by Spoerri in his project for the Edition MAT, namely: multiplication; an implied movement within the work’s possible configurations, echoing the artist’s nomadic life between Paris and New York (with the consequent concept of a portable, miniaturized, and traveling ‘solo show’); lastly, the idea of the artist in an extended role as curator or editor for this assemblage of ready-made replicas while opening the potential for curatorial arrangements beyond his control, which introduces an interesting blurring of professional boundaries.

The *Boîte-en-valise* was preceded by *Traveler’s Folding Item*, a typewriter cover that introduces a new idea associated with materials’ softness, thus with change imagined by the spectator’s intervention. It is interesting to notice that, while all the records of this work from 1916 have disappeared, Duchamp remade it in 1964,<sup>49</sup> the year of the second Edition MAT. For the Edition MAT, Duchamp offered his *Rotoreliefs*. Originally made in 1935 in 500 copies, then remade in a second edition in 1953 for Enrico Donati, they were the only pieces within the entire edition that were not signed. The *Rotoreliefs* were included in the Edition MAT, and for the first time a motor was applied to them, to make them move mechanically. An influence of Tinguely’s mechanically activated works may be guessed: and indeed, he suggested to Spoerri that he use a black painted wooden board to secure the motor needed to make Duchamp’s disk rotate.<sup>50</sup>

Spoerri also invited two other artists of consolidated fame that he deemed most suitable for this project: in September 1959 he wrote to Alexander Calder and to Josef Albers,<sup>51</sup> but only the latter agreed to have his work included by providing a sculptural version of his *Structural Constellation* series. The latter originated as a group of drawings during Albers’ teaching phase at Yale University to show his students how to create the maximum amount of

<sup>47</sup> Higgins, Dick, *The Arts of the New Mentality*, New York, Something Else Press, 1968, pp. 1-2 [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, AFr.68x].

<sup>48</sup> Judovitz, Dalia, “Duchamp’s “Luggage Physics”: Art on the Move,” *Postmodern Culture*, Volume 16, Number 1, September 2005. PROJECT MUSE.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> See Vatsella, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215. The work was not technically signed, but a white label, with Duchamp’s signature, was originally attached to the work and nowadays it is lost.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Fay, Brendan, *Recent Museum of Art Acquisition: Structural Constellation Drawing by Josef Albers*, pp.103-104. Web.

<sup>53</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42. This text has been reproduced by Katerina Vatsella in its original French language.

<sup>57</sup> Tancock, John L. *Multiples, the First Decade*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, March 5-April 4, 1971, n.p. [Archive Spoerri Bern, AFr.110].

<sup>58</sup> Spoerri, Daniel. Interview with the author. Seggiano IT, Giardino, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013 (largely unpublished).

<sup>59</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>60</sup> Edition MAT, *Kurze Presseinformation zur Ausstellung Kollektion '64*, 23. Oktober 1964 [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, AFr. 471, PARA 3].

visual ambiguity with the most economy of means: "We seem to view them from multiple positions simultaneously, while often discovering, as we trace the lines of the construction, that the object they define could not exist in real space. His orchestration of these effects sets the constellations into a kind of perpetual motion."<sup>52</sup> Movement was intrinsic to the work that would arouse such possibilities depending on the viewer. The piece for the *Edition MAT* transferred this concept from his two-dimensional work to the third dimension of sculpture: it consisted in a white geometric image engraved in a black plastic plate, which was then mounted onto a small wooden plate, and that one onto a larger wooden plane. Given the multiple planes, the viewer could decide whether to focus on the flat plastic plane, or to view the drawing as three-dimensionally developing beyond its plastic surface and through the other wooden planes.<sup>53</sup>

By August 1959, Spoerri had a short list of artists lined up (some of them ended up participating, some of them not), and also had ensured Duchamp's participation. After Spoerri's request for hosting the first exhibition was rejected by the galleries Iris Clert and Denise René, the *Edition MAT* was first exhibited at the Galerie Edouard Loeb from late November 1959 to January 1960.<sup>54</sup>

For the first *Edition MAT*, Spoerri involved Yaacov Agam, Josef Albers, Bo Ek (pseudonym of Pontus Hultén), Pol Bury, Marcel Duchamp, Karl Gerstner, Heinz Mack, Frank Malina, Enzo Mari, Bruno Munari, Man Ray, Dieter Roth, Jesus Raphael Soto, Jean Tinguely, and Victor Vasarely, with a prevalence of Op and kinetic artists. A catalogue was published, with images of work reproduced in several configurations<sup>55</sup> and an introductory text written by Spoerri, where he explained his revolutionary idea for sculpture:

"The static objective work permits only quantitative multiplication of the fixed idea present within the model; even if it was widely disseminated, multiplication would not add anything to it. For the animated work, either by itself or through the intervention of the viewer-collaborator, multiplication renders justice to the infinite possibilities of transformation."<sup>56</sup>

According to John L. Tancock, Spoerri came to realize that "only those works that incorporated movement were really suitable for multiplication," because, "Although the owners of a kinetic work produced in an edition of one hundred may own works that answer to the same specifications, in effect, they each own a unique piece as, within itself, it is always changing."<sup>57</sup>

Recently, Daniel Spoerri has further clarified the intention of the *Edition MAT* in qualitative terms, referring to some of these works as "variations on a theme or by optical means," to some others as "a transformation in the hands of the spectator, who can change something," and to some others as introducing movement through mechanical means, like Tinguely's motor. "All these three ways were interesting to me for the *Edition MAT*"<sup>58</sup>

In the correspondence with these artists, Spoerri claimed that the idea behind an artwork was more important than the artist's signature, so that "the work can be multiplied by a different person than the artist", and that the price for the work should be the same, regardless to the artist's fame, "in order to break away from the commercial mechanisms of the art trade."<sup>59</sup> The genius in Spoerri's idea for the *Edition MAT* was to have broken with the taboo regarding the uniqueness of sculpture as a fine art object by conceiving it as a three-dimensional print or graphic work that can be replicated, where the original is not the piece itself, but its design<sup>60</sup> that can assume different configurations through movement. Due to its three-dimensional nature that implies a presence in space, the multiplied

sculptural work would be able to change configurations within the continuity of its structure. This way, sculpture becomes a multiple with a quite distinct peculiarity from two-dimensional graphic art, where instead any variations must be registered by a new copy of the piece. In this particular perspective, Spoerri's claim that selling "the original in series"<sup>61</sup> was a completely new idea can be understood.

The object's pricing and the division of income was justified by the collaborative nature of the enterprise in its own peculiar terms: it was established that the sale proceeds would be distributed equally between the artist, the exhibition's host institution, the reimbursement of the materials' costs, and the editor, Spoerri himself, who would have to absorb the costs associated with the catalogue<sup>62</sup> and we could assume also the labor and costs involved with contacting galleries and museums in his editorial role.

Each artist produced an object in 100 copies that would include, within the artist's particular style, a form of movement, real or implied, that shaped the overall vision of the project led by Spoerri. Some artists chose to explore movement through optical vibration, like Albers and Vasarely, or a combination of optical and manual movements, like Soto, Agam, Mari, Munari, or a movement caused by external factors, like Man Ray's *La Retour à la Raison (Spirale)*, and Gerstner, or even with the aid of a motor, like Tinguely and Duchamp. As an individual activity by a group of artists under a shared vision led by the editor Spoerri, the Edition MAT resonates with the definition provided by Robert C. Hobbs to describe the emergence of artistic collaboration in the Sixties, which

"...has not been art's mainstay, but it has provided artists with an alternative way of looking and reacting to the world. Sociologists remind us that our society is dynamic, not static, and is concerned with acquiring experiences rather than objects (...). If this is true, and I certainly think it is, then collaborative art enables both artist and viewer a more involved and dynamic experience than earlier art."<sup>63</sup>

The *Edition MAT* also allowed Op artists to present their work alongside the future Fluxus artists, both being interested to the idea of 'movement' each in their own terms. A few years prior to the 1961 exhibition *Bewogen Beweging* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and to the 1965 exhibition *The Responsive Eye* at the Museum of Modern Art, Spoerri understood the significance of the introduction of movement, thus creating a bridge between Duchamp and Op art through the 1959 Edition MAT. The acknowledgment of Duchamp's role in shaping the vision for Op art came a few years after the first Edition MAT. Indeed, during a 1964 exhibition organized by Arturo Schwarz, director of the Milanese gallery that gave Spoerri an exhibition three years before, Ulf Linde claimed that Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase* carries an implicit idea of movement:

"In the *Nude*, the movement is an abstraction, an articulated deduction in front of the picture itself, and the spectator does not need to know whether a human being has descended a real staircase or not. It is, in the last resort, the *spectator* himself that endows the picture with movement."<sup>64</sup>

Similarly *Bicycle Wheel*, made just one year after the *Nude*, is an object that incorporates movement as imagined by the spectator.<sup>65</sup> The ideas of 'movement' and 'spectator' definitely appealed to Spoerri, given his extensive background in dance and theater in the early years of his career.

<sup>61</sup> Smals, Wies: *MAT: een gesprek met spoerri en gerstner* Kat., Museumjournaal 15/1, serie 15 no. 1, februari 1970, PARA 4, p. 31 [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, AFR. 98a].

<sup>62</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Hobbs, Robert C., "Rewriting History. Artistic Collaboration since 1960," en Cynthia Jaffee McCabe (ed.), *Artistic Collaboration in the Twentieth Century*, Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> Linde, Ulf, "MARIÉe CELibataire (Italian, French, English texts)," en Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde and Arturo Schwarz (eds.), *Marcel Duchamp Ready Mades, etc. (1913-1964)*, Milan, Galleria Schwarz, June 5 to September 30, 1964, p. 42.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Tancock, *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> Zaffarano, Luca, "Arte e Scienza. Dal Futurismo all'Arte Moltiplicata." *Ithaca: Viaggio nella Scienza, vol. III, 2014, p. 10.* Web.

<sup>68</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>69</sup> Zaffarano, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>72</sup> Zaffarano, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>73</sup> Einladungskarte: Gallery One, London, für *Oeuvres d'Art Transformables*: 25 Februar 1960, adressiert an Galeria Notizie, Torino, Italy [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, Afr. 48g ].

<sup>74</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*

The only other artist who, according to John L. Tancock, has been exploring the ideas of movement and series for a long time prior to the Edition MAT was Bruno Munari,<sup>66</sup> artist and designer working in Milan, Italy. Munari had introduced movement in several works made prior to the Edition MAT, including the change or deformation of the visual configuration through mechanical movement. In 1930, possibly influenced by Calder's *mobiles*, he designed the *Macchine Inutili* (=Useless Machines), a structure of geometric forms suspended from the ceiling that makes a combination of programmed forms and movements determined by elements outside itself, like the wind. In 1946 he designed the *Concavo-Convesso* (=Concave/Convex), a semi-dark environment where a curved metal net cast shadows configurations that change under different light conditions, and in 1949 the *Ambiente Spaziale Nero* (=Spatial Black Environment) for the Galleria del Naviglio a Milano, where fluorescent shapes were suspended in a dark environment. He presented first in the Studio B24 in 1953, and then at the MOMA in New York in 1955, the *Proiezioni Polarizzate* (=Polarized Projections), "micro compositions with changing colors provoked by the rotation of the Polaroid filter in front of a projector."<sup>67</sup>

Finally, in 1958 Munari made an edition of cardboard sculptures: the use of this particularly light material would make the sculpture foldable and easily transportable, and for this reason they were titled *Scultura da Viaggio* (=Traveling Sculpture). Munari was collaborating with design manufacturer Bruno Danese in the realization of this piece in 1 000 exemplars under the title *Edizioni Danese*.<sup>68</sup> The collaboration between design and art in this innovative concept for sculpture is visible in Spoerri's decision to use Spazio Danese as an Italian exhibition venue for the first Edition MAT.<sup>69</sup> Munari was obviously included in the first Edition MAT, where he presented *Artikulierte Struktur*: a movable structure consisting of eighteen multi-folded elements in aluminum that are manually interchangeable and therefore can change the appearance of the overall structure.<sup>70</sup> Spoerri also invited Munari's collaborator Enzo Mari, who gave to the Edition MAT his *Objet à Composition Renouvelable*: a sort of kaleidoscope of colored wooden forms variously shaped, enclosed between two glass panes, which randomly move with a shake of the object and form ever changing configurations.<sup>71</sup>

In turn, it is possible that the concept of the 1959 Edition MAT may have exercised an influence towards the later exhibition of Arte Programmata, which opened in May 1962 at the Galleria Olivetti in Milan, counting Munari in the leadership and the participation of the Gruppo T of Milan, the collective Gruppo N of Padua, Enzo Mari, and Getulio Alviani. The works exhibited were all activated by motors: "The programming, based on an unstable equilibrium between rules and casualness due to the type of material used and the physical forces at play (friction, gravity, elastic force, magnetic force, fluid dynamic) provokes infinite permutations" and thus becomes the "interpreter of a reality in continuous and rapid evolution."<sup>72</sup>

The Edition MAT was not meant to remain confined to Paris, but was planned as a traveling exhibition: even this aspect relates to both dynamism intrinsic to the pieces of the Edition MAT, as well as to Spoerri's relationship with movement in his nomadic life and in his early professional background in dance and theater. From the Galerie Edouard Loeb in Paris in the late 1959, in February 1960 the show moved to the already mentioned Galleria Bruno Danese in Milan and then to the Gallery One in London (with an invitation that in Dadaist joking terms announced "a free lottery by machine which will enable spectators to win any work at a price of double or nothing"<sup>73</sup>); in Stockholm in April; in Krefeld through May; in Zürich in late May; in Newcastle in June.<sup>74</sup>

## From MAT to MAT MOT: Cross-pollination with Fluxus

"After unsuccessful exhibitions in Paris, London, New Haven, Stockholm, Krefeld, and Zurich, hardly anything had been sold and Spoerri was forced to abandon the project"<sup>75</sup> until 1964, when he decided to give it a second try, this time in collaboration with Karl Gerstner, an artist who already contributed to the first Edition MAT.

What went wrong? Spoerri remembered the challenging experience in terms of difficult sales against the insurmountable hardships of the new editorial responsibilities, including managerial costs, for instance storage and transportation of pieces from one exhibition venue to another, which was all taken care personally by himself.<sup>76</sup> The initially envisioned editorial role, which Spoerri experienced in 1958 as editor of the first volume of concrete poems *Material*, has transformed into what Michael P. Farrell would define an "executive manager" role,<sup>77</sup> weighted against the very narrow budget gathered from scarce sales. It was a much different job than the previous editorial role of literary works, and carried with it a new set of problems caused by actual objects. On the other side, perhaps Spoerri's need to develop fast in this new area of artistic knowledge might have contributed to his progressive interest for sculpture and installation as the next step of his artistic career.

There is a few years' gap between the first and the second Edition MAT: during those years, 1960 to 1964, Spoerri debuted into the visual arts and became involved with the *Nouveau Réalisme*. Within that group, as well as within his loose but extremely fertile collaboration with Fluxus, he deeply explored and further pushed the implications of Duchamp's Dadaist premises on the ready-made, to the point of challenging the traditional notion of authorship and of reflecting on the idea of portability that will conduct to the Edition MAT MOT.

Spoerri's debut in the art world through his *tableaux-pièges* started a year after the first Edition MAT. He turned to installations since his membership with the *Nouveau Réalisme* (founded in Oct. 27th 1960), brought in by Tinguely, a common friend of him and Yves Klein. The vision of the leader, Pierre Restany, was to present the object through what he defined in his manifesto "a new perceptual approach to reality" and a form of its "appropriation."<sup>78</sup> Spoerri's invention of the *tableau-piège*, a fragment of reality trapped in a specific situation in time, became known as his signature style; paradoxically, being the *tableau-piège* itself a sort of *ready-made*, like Duchamp's *Fountain*, does it matter, in the end, who is the author?

<sup>75</sup> Tancock, *op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> Spoerri in Smals, *op. cit.*, p. 34, PARA 1.

<sup>77</sup> Farrell, Michael P., *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 286.

<sup>78</sup> Lassalle, Hélène, "Art Criticism as Strategy: The idiom of 'new realism' from Fernand Léger to the Pierre Restany group", en Malcolm Gee (ed.). *Art Criticism since 1900*, Manchester, UK and New York, US, Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 209. Web. [http://books.google.com/books?id=GTa8AAAAIAAJ&dq=restany+new+perceptual+approches+to+reality&source=gb\\_s\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.com/books?id=GTa8AAAAIAAJ&dq=restany+new+perceptual+approches+to+reality&source=gb_s_navlinks_s)

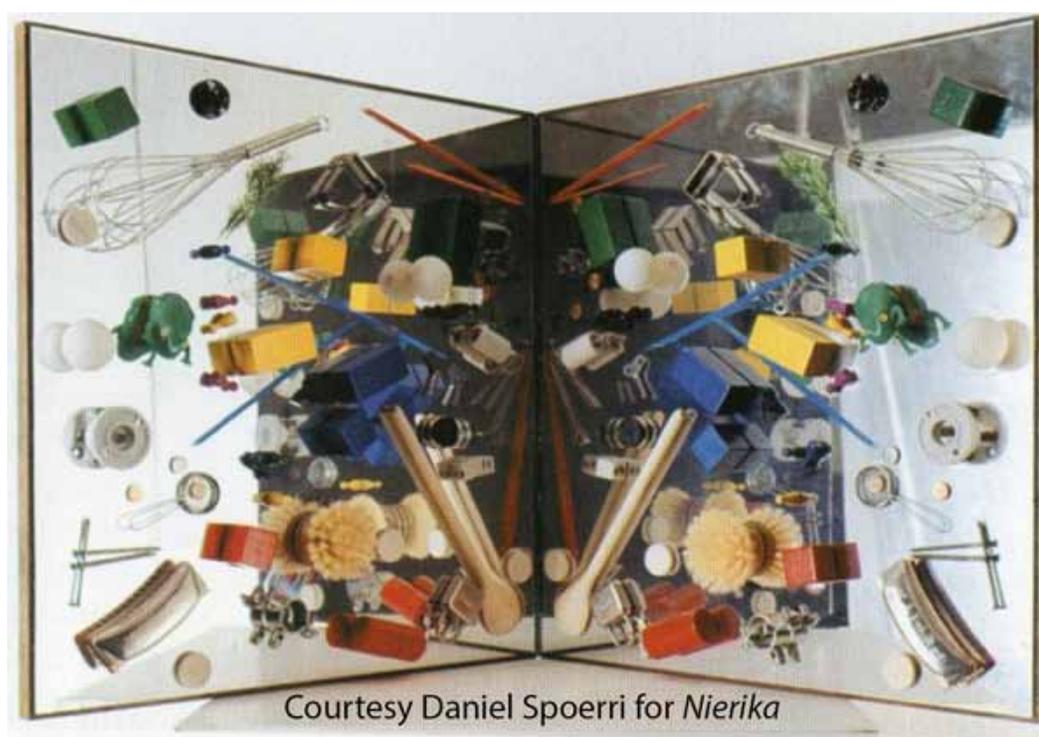


Fig. 3: Daniel Spoerri, *Multiplicateur D'art*, from *Edition MAT*, Collection 1964, 50x100x8cm. Courtesy Daniel Spoerri.

<sup>79</sup> Politi, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>80</sup> A. Kamber, *Eaten by...*, in Politi, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>81</sup> Wye, Deborah and Wendy Weitman, *Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples, 1960 to Now*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2006, p. 107.

<sup>82</sup> Restany, Pierre, "Forty Degrees Above Dada," 1961 (trans. Martha Nichols), en Stiles, Kristine and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1996, p. 308.

After all, it is a fragment of reality that exists independently from the artist. In 1961, during an exhibition at the Galerie Addi Koepcke in Copenhagen, Spoerri provocatively gave the art dealer license to make his own *tableaux-pièges*, this way allowing someone else full freedom to use and interpret the artist's idea.<sup>79</sup>

The group collaboration, that started with the first Edition MAT under Spoerri's leadership, continued in a series called *31 Variations on a Meal* by moving in the performative arena, where the participants acted upon Spoerri's *tableaux-pièges*, rather than presenting their own work as embodiment of Spoerri's overall vision (the latter being the case of Edition MAT). Spoerri undertook this project in 1964, while he was living for about a year in New York City, and showed it in March at the Allan Stone Gallery. Starting from a 'prototype', a table with standard dishes, glasses and cutlery in a standard always placed according to the same basic design, Spoerri organized dinners in different places and invited one artist at a time: at the end of the meal, he would glue the table and all the objects exactly in the position and condition they were left by the artist after he was finished. He made pieces that included fellow artists and critics, like Arman, Duchamp, Dick Higgins, Ray Johnson, Alison Knowles, Allan Kaprow, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rosenblum, Andy Warhol, and others; in 1964-67, some of those configurations were reproduced as tablecloths silkscreened on canvas or as placemats.<sup>80</sup> The *31 Variations on a Meal* have proven an indispensable means for a first-hand artistic exploration of the concept of seriality within the *tableau-piège*, in combination with role-play of editor vs. artist that we also see in the Edition MAT. This project introduced a concept of seriality more similar to that of two-dimensional and graphic arts than to the Edition MAT, since each different configuration of the table results from a different piece: and indeed this makes sense, being a *tableau-piège* a moment frozen in time, rather than an object in movement like in the case of the Edition MAT. This again shows the cross-pollination of ideas between graphic design and the fine arts in those years, in which attention was increasing on multiples as a fertile land for exploration and dissemination of new ideas, including the utopia of democratization of art beyond the confines of elitist collecting, increasing the social base of its reception through accessible formats and prices.<sup>81</sup>

At the same time, the series of the meal variations further pushes the interrogation of the notion of authorship started by the Edition MAT as a collaborative effort, to the point that now we can ask ourselves who the artist-author is. If Duchamp is the one who sits at the table and Spoerri is the one who glues it after dinner as a frozen moment in time, is this *ready-made* of reality about Spoerri gluing, or is it about Duchamp dining? The role of Duchamp performing within a ready-made, which is his own concept appropriated and further complicated by Spoerri through the Fluxus notion of chance, contributes to the blurring of such authorship boundaries; while enhancing the legend of this piece, at the same time transforms it into what seems to me a truly collaborative effort. The involvement of the Dadaist pioneer into Spoerri's creative process fulfills the prophecy stated by Pierre Restany in 1961 that "The dada mind identifies with a mode of appropriation of the modern world's exterior reality. The ready-made is no longer the climax of negativity or of polemics, but the basic element of a new expressive repertory."<sup>82</sup>

The passage from the Dadaist nihilism to this new fertile territory of possibilities has been also explored by Fluxus artists in the same years as Spoerri's exploration of ramifications of the *tableau-piège*. Within this new range of possibilities, the concepts of seriality, interchangeability, network that we have seen since the late Fifties in the areas of poetry (Spoerri's *Material*) and design (Gerstner) is enriched by a newly found idea of portability that will merge into Spoerri's Edition MAT MOT in collaboration with Fluxus artists.

Indeed, during those years preceding the second Edition MAT of 1964, Spoerri developed as a fine artist and increased his network between Europe and the United States with what Owen F. Smith called the “proto-Fluxus,” which started around mid-1959<sup>83</sup> and included those artists that will be invited to contribute work to the 1965 Edition MAT MOT. In summer 1961, Maciunas led the project of a book called *Anthology*, a “collection of poetry, music, performance scores, and other work” with title pages designed by Maciunas himself.<sup>84</sup> The nature of interdisciplinary collaboration of these works echo the earlier literary experiments in Europe, from *Material* to *Werk*. In fall Maciunas left the US for Europe and settled in Wiesbaden,<sup>85</sup> which became the home of the one-month long Fluxus Festival in September 1962. Most of the original Fluxus members knew each other since the publication of the first issues of poesie concrete *Material* in the late Fifties, where Spoerri himself was involved in an editing role during his stay in Darmstadt.<sup>86</sup>

Since 1962 Maciunas decided to turn the prior magazine format into that of a yearbook box that would include essays, scores, visual materials from drawings to reliefs, objects, kinetic compositions; this would mean “including actual works, not printed reproductions, and using a box to contain them. (...)”<sup>87</sup> The influence can be clearly identified as being Duchamp, who in 1934 made his *Green Box*, a box containing his notes pertaining to the genesis of his famous 1915-23 glass piece *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, thus emphasizing the making process over the final product that in Fluxus will become the record of performance scores. In 1963, in Germany George Brecht published his *Water Yam* in a cardboard box produced by George Maciunas, and contained the score of Fluxus events. The box will evolve in 1964 as Fluxkit with *Fluxus 1* edited by George Maciunas, a box which “contains objects, visual work, and essays by thirty-nine artists” from within and outside Fluxus, as well as songs, poems, even a napkin and a medical glove,<sup>88</sup> all materials meant to encourage multisensory experiences in the boxes’ recipients. Hannah Higgins claims that “the experiential dimension of Fluxus work nonetheless has the capacity (real of by way of a discourse on the empirical basis of experience) to offer ontological knowledge that connects people to a real world and to each other, expanding the individual’s sense of belonging to a place and a group.”<sup>89</sup>

In 1964, Spoerri decided to resume the Edition MAT. Growing out of the experience with Duchamp, the second Edition MAT blurs the distinctions between the artist and the editor. In this sense, it is possible to understand the promotion of Gerstner, who contributed a piece for the first Edition MAT, to this new co-editorial role while at the same time keeping his presence as artistic contributor to the following editions. At the same time, Spoerri added an artistic role to his co-editorial role as well, by producing the multiple *Multiplicateur d’Art* for the 1964 edition and *Brote* for the 1965 edition.

The second Edition MAT was organized at Galerie Der Spiegel in Cologne in late October 1964 and included twelve artists: Arman, Jean Arp, Karl Gerstner, Arnulf Rainer, Man Ray, Dieter Roth, Jesus Raphael Soto, Paul Talman, Jean Tinguely, Jacques Villeglé, Niki de Saint Phalle, and Daniel Spoerri himself. Tinguely, Villeglé and Saint Phalle were companions to Spoerri in the *Nouveau Réalisme* adventure started in 1960. A third Edition MAT followed in 1965 again at the Galerie Der Spiegel in Cologne, and included thirteen artists: the Nouveau Réalistes Christo and Arman; Davide Boriani and Gabriele de Vecchi from the Gruppo T in Milan; François Morellet and Julio Le Parc from the Group de Recherche d’Art Visuel in Paris; Bury, Soto, Man Ray, Enrico Baj; Spoerri, Gerstner, and even Roy Lichtenstein from the US.<sup>90</sup> This edition was made in series of 100, signed and numbered, with costs ranging between 320 and 420 marks.<sup>91</sup> The collaboration between Spoerri and Gerstner as co-editors allowed

<sup>83</sup> Smith, Owen F., *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, San Diego, CA, San Diego State University Press, 1998, p.25.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>86</sup> *Zeitschrift: AQ 16*

*Fluxus: How we met or a microdemystification*, D.S. S., PARA 4, p. 72 [Daniel Spoerri Archives, Bern, AFR. 156].

<sup>87</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup> Higgins, Hannah, *Fluxus Experience*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2002, p. 34.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>90</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>91</sup> *Einladungskarte: édition MAT und MAT MOT*, 15-17.10.65, Galerie der Spiegel, Köln [Daniel Spoerri Archives Bern, AFR. 68a].

<sup>92</sup> Vatsella, Katerina, "Interview mit Karl Gerstner, 30. Mai 1995," en Vatsella, *op. cit.* p. 184.

<sup>93</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>94</sup> Lebel, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>95</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.* p. 245.

<sup>96</sup> Spoerri, Daniel, *Lo Spoerri di Spoerri*. Vercelli, Edizioni Mercurio, 2008, p. 130.

<sup>97</sup> Wye, Deborah and Wendy Weitman, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>98</sup> Smals, *op. cit.*, p. 34, PARA.1.

<sup>99</sup> Vatsella, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

a further widening of the network: Gerstner brought in Arp, Tallmann, and op artists like Boriani, De Vecchi, Le Parc und Morellet, while Spoerri brought in the Nouveaux Réalistes.<sup>92</sup>

Spoerri contributed to the 1964 Edition MAT with his *Multiplicateur D'Art*. It consisted of two mirrors mounted in a wooden frame, where an assemblage of objects fixed in a mirror (a chosen chance situation similar to a *tableau-piège*) is reflected in the other side, thus multiplied. The progressive reduction of the angle causes an increase in number of the reflected images.<sup>93</sup> In line with the purpose of the Edition MAT, this *tableau-piège* offers the viewers a wide range of possible configurations through their intervention.

Considerations related to the difficulties in transporting these sculptural multiples of the Edition MAT in touring exhibitions compelled Spoerri to think about making a more easily transportable edition. Once again, the idea comes from Duchamp, who first reflected on the idea of portability in his aforementioned *Boîte-en-valise* in 1935-41. Additionally, in 1943 Duchamp prepared a *Pocket Chess Set* in about 20 exemplars: looking like a leather wallet with inserted flat celluloid chess pieces like credit cards, and with dimensions of 6 1/2 x 4 1/8 inches,<sup>94</sup> this piece moved a step forward in connecting Duchamp with a biographical element outside the art world, as a passionate chess player. The biographical connection of this ready-made seems closer to Spoerri's *tableaux-pièges* than previous work. The already mentioned *Boîte-en-valise* helps us to connect the idea of multiple as an object that can take different configurations - through the intervention of someone other than the artist - with some of the outcomes in Spoerri's Edition MAT. Duchamp's *Pocket Chess Set* goes a step further by making a biographical connection outside the strict artistic sphere more attuned to Spoerri's capacity of synthesizing influences from dance, theater, and poetry into a concept for sculpture work that characterizes the Edition MAT. A shift in the direction of closing the gap between art and life also occurs in Spoerri's contribution to the 1965 Edition MAT: titled *Brote*, the work consisted of a Plexiglas container featuring three loaves of bread filled with ceramics fragments and metal waste.<sup>95</sup> This outcome recalls a previous 1961 exhibition, in which the Addi Koepcke Gallery in Copenhagen was turned into a store to sell food items at their original price, but signed by the artist and stamped *Attention oeuvre d'art*, with a catalogue cover featuring bread filled with trash.<sup>96</sup> Parallel to this earlier experiment, Piero Manzoni was exhibiting *Merda d'Artista*, an edition of 90 cans "said to contain his own excrement."<sup>97</sup>

Clearly, the experiments by Fluxus artists with their fluxkits contained dynamic experiential and collaborative components that were appealing to Spoerri, so that he decided to invite them in a new MAT edition of 1965, called MAT MOT or TAM THEK. This special edition consisted of black boxes that provided the artist freedom of expression within a book size limit for easy storage and display. "Our experience with the Edition MAT was that those that were genuinely interested soon had their walls so filled with the pieces that they had to store part of them in the basement."<sup>98</sup>

The Edition MAT MOT was made in 1965 in collaboration with Fluxus artists George Brecht, Robert Filliou, Dieter Roth, André Thomkins, Emmett Williams, Maurice Henry, along with Christian Megert.<sup>99</sup> The number of pieces comprising the Fluxus edition for MAT MOT did not obey the rule of 100 exemplars, which was originally established for MAT; instead, it ranged somewhere between 60 and 261.

For MAT MOT, André Thomkins presented *Dogmat-MOT*, a series of ten hexagonal card discs partially overlapping each other, capable of manually being rotated around their axis and containing words in three languages that can be interchangeable, due to their same spelling;<sup>100</sup> this work seems to echo the syntactic interchangeability of words in Spoerri's concrete poems. Emmett Williams made *13 Variationen über 6 Worte von Gertrude Stein*:

it consisted in “six words from Gertrude Stein, ‘if this you see remember me;’ each word stamped in a different color and at increasing intensity and overlapping in various directions in fifteen pages,<sup>101</sup> until their meaning is lost in color patterns. This piece echoes Spoerri’s *Variations on a Meal* made a year earlier, and reveals how Spoerri’s influence within the Fluxus movement has been largely downplayed by his founding role within the Nouveau Réalisme occurring in the same years.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

## Conclusion

By testing innovative concepts in sculpture, such as multiplication, movement, portability, interdisciplinarity, and audience involvement, Daniel Spoerri has fully participated in the spirit of Neodadaism of the late Fifties-early Sixties, when “this new generation of artists challenged the rules about what art should be, both conceptually and visually.”<sup>102</sup> Being the first edition of multiples<sup>103</sup> for the fine arts intended as a collaborative concept in terms of individual outcomes responding to a common editorial vision, the Edition MAT proposed a new editorial model that combined: the utopia of the democratization of art (through flat sales prices); the idea of movement in works capable of changing configurations that echoed earlier outcomes in concrete poetry; the inclusion of the audience in activating the change of configuration in many of these pieces; Spoerri’s editorial and managerial role combined with his nomadic lifestyle and multidisciplinary background that merged art into life; and finally, his role as artistic catalyst at the intersection of Op art, Nouveau Réalisme, and Fluxus.

<sup>102</sup> Hapgood, Susan and Jennifer Rittner, “NEO-DADA: Redefining Art, 1958-1962,” *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1, Jan. 1995, p. 63. JSTOR.

<sup>103</sup> Wye, Deborah and Wendy Weitman, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

After the Edition MAT, prominent artists working within conceptual art and Fluxus saw the connection between multiplication of art and its social function: “Portable, decentralized, and easily communicated forms of Conceptual art meant artists could participate in these new ideas across national boundaries.”<sup>104</sup> Still keeping the object as means of exchange, the Edition MAT constitutes a prime contribution to the general trend of late Modernism towards closing the gap between art and life. ■

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.