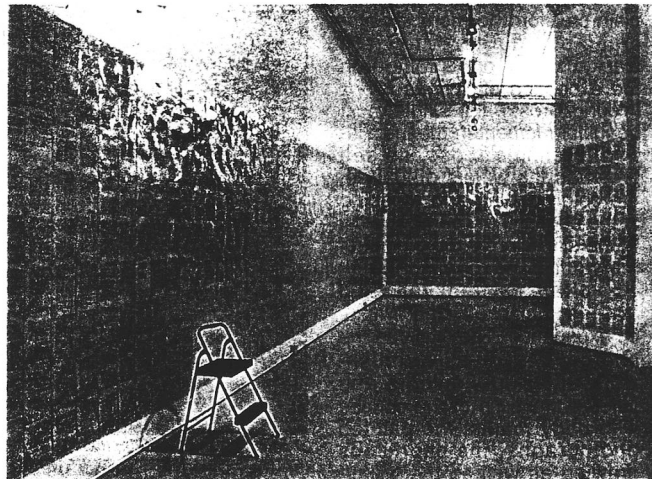


Art in America

William Anastasi at Sandra Gering

If you can imagine using your collected class notes from high school and college as wallpaper, you can picture what William Anastasi's recent two-part installation, *Du Jarry* and *Me Innerman Monophone*, looked like. Seventeen hundred sheets of ruled paper, each in its own clear plastic folder, covered the gallery walls almost floor to ceiling. (There was a ladder available for reading the top rows.) With the day and time of each entry noted, and red, blue, black or green ink used to differentiate the various voices, the handwritten manuscript presented the evidence that has convinced Anastasi that the turn-of-the-century French writer Alfred Jarry, best known for his "Ubu" plays, was the major inspiration behind most of Marcel Duchamp's works and an unacknowledged source for James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

In 1989, while reading Jarry's novel *The Supermale*, Anastasi noticed a number of parallels with Duchamp, starting with a character who unscrews urinals from their plumbing. After further study he became convinced that such parallels could be found throughout Jarry's work. Even the mustache Duchamp painted on the Mona Lisa uncannily resembled Jarry's own mustache. Anastasi concluded that Duchamp, that lover of secrets and games, had strewn his work with concealed references to Jarry. Anastasi imagined Duchamp saying to himself: "This lunatic [Jarry] is God, I will make his books the bible and what will be more amusing, I will make them my bible." Anastasi believes that Jarry, who scandalized his contemporaries with his iconoclastic writings and lifestyle, is the key to understanding not only Duchamp's renunciation of painting but also Joyce's radical transformation of the English language in *Finnegans Wake*.



William Anastasi: View of the two-part installation *Du Jarry* and *Me Innerman Monophone*, 1990-93, ink on paper, 1,700 pages; at Sandra Gering.

All very interesting, some might ask, but where is the "art" in 1,700 pages of notes? Thomas McEvilley has suggested that one way to think of Anastasi is as "outsider scholar." We could also see this project as analogous to Duchamp's devotion to playing chess or John Cage's reliance on the I Ching. Yet finally one is most struck by the intensity and extent of Anastasi's quest. In some way this evangelic obsession with Alfred Jarry points to Anastasi's own career.

In the 1960s Anastasi was a pioneer of Conceptual art, using tape recorders (*Microphone*, 1963), video (*Free Will*, 1968)

and photo-silkscreen paintings of the gallery wall hanging on the gallery wall (*Continuum*, 1970) to create insidiously tautological works. Despite some recent attention, he has been largely ignored in most accounts of the period. Thus Anastasi's influence on other artists has remained hidden from public view, just like . . . Alfred Jarry's. This suggestion of its possible psychological motivation is not a strategy to dismiss Anastasi's investigations, which actually resulted in one of the more fascinating shows of the season, but rather to suggest their depth and complexity.

—Raphael Rubinstein

Rubinstein, Raphael. "William Anastasi at Sandra Gering." *Art in America*, April 1994.