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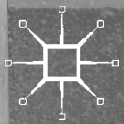
MARCEL DUCHAMP'S FOUNTAIN

One Hundred Years Later

Robert Kilroy



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To Sarah, for then and now and everything.

Preface

The primary aim of this book is to offer a new reading of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* one hundred years after its initial reception. This is achieved by retracing the critical reaction to *Fountain* through a necessarily selective approach: by aligning the most influential interpretations of the work in such a way as to present each contribution as part of a single coherent thread. Broadly speaking, the book gives an account of how each critical response to *Fountain* plays a specific role in establishing the dominant verdict on the work. In challenging this verdict, I make two central claims: first, that the reception of *Fountain*, as an act of communication, distorts the message it transmits; second, in doing so, it becomes part of this message.

The book can thus be described as an effort to construct a critical history of *Fountain* while including this history *as part of the work*. This art historical re-reading has its basis in a theoretical re-reading: the revised interpretation of Lacanian psychoanalysis undertaken by the cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek. What the book proposes, however, is not simply a straightforward psychoanalytic interpretation of Duchamp's oeuvre: on the contrary, Duchamp is read *with* Lacan and *through* Žižek, with the paradoxical aim of adopting *a Duchampian position* more definitively; that is, by reading Lacan and Žižek *through* Duchamp. What the theoretical support ultimately allows is for the reception of *Fountain* to be organized into an alternative narrative in which a new set of connections is both empirically demonstrated and then overtly displayed. While the intention is to map a single path towards the established interpretation of *Fountain*, this path is nevertheless full of surprising diversions, given that it is signposted at different stages by Duchamp himself: by elements in a

process he referred to as "The Creative Act." The book might therefore be described as a *distorted picture* of critical responses to Duchamp's *Fountain*: distorted in the sense that the picture is organized and arranged by the very artist whose work such readings are responding to.

The full implications of this point are addressed *performatively*, in the way the book communicates its message to the reader. Following Duchamp's own approach, the argument being articulated—a re-reading of *Fountain* based on a revised understanding of "The Creative Act"—acquires palpable presence in the formal make-up of the book itself. The broader implications of this move for the field of scholarship are presented not just theoretically but *methodologically*. If the "inter-disciplinary" model adopted appears unusual it is because an absolute reliance on psychoanalytic theory is seen to provide the foundation for an even stricter adherence to art historical practice. The seemingly contradictory assumption that forms the basis of this approach is as follows: the more directly the art historian engages with psychoanalytic concepts, the more empirically focused, and less theoretically orientated, his practice becomes.

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates Robert Kilroy

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For their contribution to the specific genesis of this book there are three people I would like to thank: first, Rex Butler, for sparking the impulse to mark this important centenary year and for being a constant source of advice throughout the entire process; second, Hannes Opelz, for his helpful critical feedback in the opening stages; finally, David Scott for his unwavering commitment to this project from the early years of my research through to the invaluable guidance offered during later revisions of the manuscript. As a light in what can often be rough waters, he has always helped me steady the ship. Thanks also must go to the Department of French, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies and their Textual & Visual Studies program at Trinity College Dublin for providing me with the intellectual freedom and flexibility to explore new ways of asking old questions. For first drawing my attention to the central dilemma this book attempts to address, I remain extremely grateful to Stephen Schwartz at University College Dublin.

This book owes a great deal to the unique learning environment created by my students of English literature at Lycée Français Théodore Monod, in particular Zeyad Abd El Hafez (RIP). Through their imaginative engagement with the curious features of my research, complex theoretical issues were able to find a more accessible form. For their personal support throughout the meandering path towards this book, I would like to thank my mother Ascinta, my brother John and my sister Gillian. To my late father John for instilling in me the desire to follow this path, wherever it may drive me. Finally, I would like to again thank my wonderful wife Sarah for all that she has contributed and sacrificed to help make this book a reality. It is shaped as much by her belief, passion and commitment as it is by mine.

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CHAPTER 1

Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau/2° le gaz d'éclairage

Abstract The significance of *Fountain*'s centenary is addressed on two fronts: first, Duchamp's insistence that his work was always intended for a future viewer; second, the numerous inconsistencies in our reading of the work that persist today. The author proposes reassessing *Fountain* through the lens of Duchamp's final piece, *Étant donnés*. By provoking the question "Is this art?" both *Fountain* and *Étant donnés* present a seemingly insurmountable deadlock, an irreconcilable opposition between "anti-retinal" and "conceptual" poles. A new approach to this dilemma becomes possible by reading Duchamp with Slavoj Žižek: through a shift in perspective one views the problem as its own solution and comes to recognize how the field of scholarship is included as part of the work.

Keywords Celebrating *Fountain*'s centenary • Duchamp's legacy • *Fountain* with *Étant donnés* • *Fountain* and "The Creative Act" • Readymade anti-art/conceptual art dilemma • Duchamp and Žižek • Duchamp and psychoanalysis • Duchamp and Lacan

What more can possibly be said about Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*? The upturned urinal, recently voted the most influential work of art of the twentieth century,[1] remains one of the most widely discussed and closely examined objects in art history. Over the course of the past one hundred

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years, it has provoked an ever-accumulating mass of critical responses, a swirling current of literature which has driven what Rosalind Krauss calls the "seemingly endless stream" of writings on Duchamp (Krauss, 1984, p. 199). As we mark the centenary of "The Richard Mutt Case," there seems to be very little light left to be shed on Duchamp's most famous work; when it comes to Mr. Mutt, the case would appear to be well and truly closed.[2]

It perhaps comes as no surprise, then, that the celebrations surrounding *Fountain*'s one-hundredth anniversary have been somewhat subdued. Although institutions such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Centre George Pompidou have staged exhibitions to mark the occasion, on the whole, the broader community of Duchamp scholars remain curiously reticent. As Bernard Géniès writes, *Fountain*'s centenary has provoked "ni fanfare ni flonflons" (Géniès, 2017, p. 88).[3] Where one would expect to hear a loud chorus of voices, we are instead met by a wall of eerie, almost deafening, silence. Against such a backdrop, however, Duchamp's voice begins to echo. "The danger," he once said, "is in pleasing an immediate public; the immediate public that comes around you and takes you in and accepts you and gives you success and everything. Instead of that, you should wait for fifty years or a hundred years for your true public. That is the only public that interests me" (Duchamp, 1973a, p. 133). Duchamp, here, makes it unequivocally clear that he is addressing a specific viewer, one that would not emerge until a hundred years after his work's initial reception. Such a remark adds a heightened sense of critical urgency to the *Fountain* centenary, transforming 2017 into a pivotal moment in the reassessment of Duchamp's oeuvre and a vital historical juncture in Duchamp scholarship. Taking Duchamp at his word, might it be possible that the "true public" for whom he was waiting is only now appearing, one hundred years after the fact?

The cacophony of voices which has, for so long, circulated around *Fountain* now appears to render the silence accompanying its centenary all the more unsettling. Nevertheless, this strange atmosphere still feels oddly familiar. Indeed, one is reminded of the "near total silence" that met Duchamp's final work, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau/2° le gaz d'éclairage*. As Benjamin Buchloh argues, the reluctance of scholars to engage with what was a perplexing enigma has only served to further problematize Duchamp's legacy by ensuring that his project has "fallen short of its actual historical potential." Could it be, he asks, that *Étant donnés* provides a "departure point for a new cycle of Duchamp

Studies," pointing the way out of the current cul-de-sac (Buchloh, 1996, p. 4)? This is the question I attempt to answer in this book. Like *Fountain*'s centenary, the tentative reaction to *Étant donnés* was not without good cause: the discovery of the erotic "installation" after Duchamp's death in 1968 came as a traumatic shock to the scholarly community from whom the project had been kept a secret for almost two decades.[4] What disturbed the "most dedicated Duchampians," Tomkins writes, was the fact that the new piece completely contradicted the accepted interpretation of Duchamp's oeuvre by fundamentally undermining the criteria according to which it was understood; namely, the established set of "conceptual"/"anti-retinal" principles which had, until that point, facilitated a smooth reading of his work. By positioning the viewer "in the grip of illusion," with forms that are "blatantly figurative," *Étant donnés* exploded the received verdict on Duchamp: the notion that, as the "Father of Conceptual Art," his aim was to lead us away from a focus on the purely retinal, towards a more intellectual form of artistic production (Tomkins, 1996, pp. 455–456).

Faced with such an obstacle, critical reaction inevitably collided with a familiar wall of silence. The fact remains that the rapid expansion of literature on Duchamp during the decades after his death was impeded by the state of impotence and immobility imposed by *Étant donnés*, the only response to which was an active disregard for the work's significance. In effect, a project that Duchamp had dedicated the last twenty years of life to was all but ignored. The root cause of this reaction, of course, is the "insurmountable deadlock" the work presents (Tomkins, 1996, p. 455), the fundamental question it poses: is this a work of art, an object worthy of scholarly attention and consideration alongside Duchamp's other "masterpieces" or is it simply an act of provocation, a vulgar exercise in pornographic titillation? It is this same dilemma that we now see resurface in the silence surrounding *Fountain*'s centenary. Through the lens of *Étant donnés*, the question first raised by "The Richard Mutt Case" in 1917 ("is this art?") appears to penetrate the scholarly consciousness with renewed force. As William Camfield argues in his thorough analysis of the historical reception of *Fountain*, the heated debate the work provoked has yet to be conclusively resolved:

> Some deny that *Fountain* is art but believe it is significant for the history of art and aesthetics. Others accept it grudgingly as art but deny that it is significant. To complete the circle, some insist *Fountain* is neither art nor an object of historical consequence, while a few assert that it is both art and significant—though for utterly incompatible reasons. (Camfield, 1989, p. 64)

For Camfield, our understanding of *Fountain* remains split between two diametrically opposing readings: while some still see it as a gesture of "anti-art," others maintain that it is a work of "conceptual art." "Even today," Thierry de Duve writes, "we haven't moved on from this dilemma" (de Duve, 1996, p. 128). This lack of consensus has its source, Camfield argues, in a gaping "lacunae in knowledge" at the heart of *Fountain*'s reception, the fact that, despite the overwhelming quantity of material written about the work, fundamental inconsistencies and contradictions remain:

> Duchamp's *Fountain* has become one of the most famous/infamous objects in the history of modern art. The literature on it—counting references imbedded in broader considerations of Duchamp's work—is staggering in quantity, and one might suppose that little more of consequence could be discovered. But an examination of this literature reveals that our knowledge of this readymade sculpture and its history is riddled with gaps and extraordinary conflicts of memory, interpretation, and criticism. (Camfield, 1989, p. 64)

Time, it would seem, is a vital component in understanding *Fountain* and the problems it raises. Today, in 2017, a number of significant obstacles have yet to be overcome, numerous facts that undermine the established interpretation and open up a series of unanswered questions. With no common agreement reached, and no definitive verdict declared, it is fair to assume that "The Richard Mutt Case" remains very much open for investigation. And there is undoubtedly no better moment to call for a reappraisal of the evidence then the work's centenary. How, then, can we hope to adopt the role of Duchamp's "true public" by looking at *Fountain* with fresh eyes? Is it even possible to add a meaningful contribution to the current mass of literature? Any attempt to add another piece to the pile would surely only increase the weight of the burden. That being said, new insights can often be arrived at not just by shedding light, but also by examining the light itself, from the perspective of the shadows it casts. By giving pause and listening to the silence, one comes to hear the noise in a new way. Instead of offering another particular assessment of the problem, is it possible to account for the nature of the problem itself, by reaching beneath the multitude of voices and articulating the deadlock to which they are all responding? Rather than getting caught up in the endless stream of writings on Duchamp might we be able to locate the source of the current, the force which drives it?

Let us take heed, once again, of Duchamp's words. "There is no solution," he once said, "because there is no problem. In reality, the deepest problems are not problems at all […] the solution to the problem […] is seen in the disappearance of this problem" (Duchamp in Lebel, 1959, p. 85). With this statement, Duchamp finds an unlikely companion in the philosopher, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek, who claims that today, more than ever, we need to think differently, by fundamentally altering the way problems are perceived: "What is 'true' thinking? Thinking is not solving problems. The first step in thinking is to ask these sorts of questions: 'Is this really a problem?' 'Is this the right way to formulate the problem?' 'How did we arrive at this?' This is the ability we need in thinking" (Žižek, 2013, p. 53). Echoing Duchamp, Žižek calls for a radical twist in perspective whereby, instead of striving to overcome a specific obstacle, one sees the problem as its own solution. "What if," he writes, "the actual problem is not to bridge the gap but, rather, to formulate it as such, to conceive it properly? Here, more than anywhere else, the proper formulation of the gap is the solution to the problem" (Žižek, 2009, p. 214).

Such is the task this book attempts to accomplish. What is presented is a new reading of *Fountain* undertaken through a radical art historical approach that is formed on the basis of the theoretical shift Žižek proposes. My wager is that, by viewing the gaps in the reception of *Fountain* not as problems to be overcome but as solutions in themselves, we come to perceive the process of reception itself a new way: as a central part of the message the work communicates. The question to be asked is this: what if Duchamp's intention with *Fountain* was to expose the mechanism at work in the reception of his oeuvre? My hypothesis is that only today, in 2017, do we begin to witness the full realization of Duchamp's grand project: a distorted image which, when perceived from an alternative angle, becomes visible in a new light, as a picture that includes its own reception within its frame. What begins to emerge, one hundred years after the initial event, is a story of *Fountain* that includes within its narrative the very apparatus of communication, transmission and preservation that has shaped our understanding of the work. It will be argued that Duchamp identified and anticipated the debilitating impact of this apparatus in advance and set about counteracting it the only way he saw possible: by tactically avoiding its hold until such a point as he could intervene to expose its fundamental logic.

Duchamp outlined this logic, I claim, in an important seminar delivered in 1957 where he defined the mechanism in question in terms of its effects ("the creation of art") and its internal dynamics ("the creative act"). The aim, then, is to re-read this seminar alongside other statements by Duchamp in order to elaborate a clearly defined *Duchampian position* with regard to his own work's reception. This is achieved by delineating the forces driving "the creation of art" ("*Eau & Gaz*") on all its levels ("*A tous les étages*"), the eight different elements identified by Duchamp himself: the Artist, the Onlooker, the Spectator, Tasty Affairs, Posterity, the Lighthouse, the One-Man Show and the Dealer, and, finally, the Art Historian. What will become apparent is that, at each level of the apparatus, Duchamp engages in a strategic game of chess: by not becoming too involved in the aesthetic field, by remaining elusive, he keeps his distance from the workings of the mechanism he seeks to subvert. In doing so, he retains an important degree of control over each element in the apparatus, a move that affords him the time to choose the opportune moments to intervene.

The book is divided into two halves, four parts and thirteen chapters. The first half–which consists of Parts I and II, chapters 2 to 5–is devoted to a rigorous justification of the theoretical line of enquiry being pursued, a clear elaboration of the methodological approach being adopted and, finally, a thorough unravelling of the specific nature of the problem being addressed. What is at stake, broadly speaking, is a psychoanalytic re-reading of Duchamp's work with two central objectives: to introduce art historians to the basic elements in Jacques Lacan's conceptual apparatus, and to allow scholars of psychoanalysis to view the foundations of this apparatus through an aesthetic lens.[5] The primary intention, however, is that these theoretical tools will bring an increased level of focus to bear on Duchamp himself, on his words, his works and his actions. It will be argued that, despite the apparent contradictions marking his output, Duchamp's behavior is remarkably consistent, his intentions ruthlessly pursued. His words and actions will be shown to follow a strict underlying pattern: at the level of content—what he explicitly does or says—he is steadfast in his concern for communicating a clear message; at the same time, every word and action displays a constant effort to account for the formal aspect of the gesture, by foregrounding what is stake in the act of communication. In short, his engagement is always fundamentally performative in nature: *what he says always explains what he is doing*; *what he does always demonstrates what he is saying*. The ultimate effect is that each intervention onto the aesthetic stage is designed to draw attention to the structure of the stage itself.

This point will be elaborated in the second half of the book–Parts III and IV, chapters 6 to 13. Here, it is argued that, in his strategic game of chess with the apparatus of reception, Duchamp's primary tool is *Fountain*. At this juncture, the reader may be struck by a marked shift in focus from a theoretical discussion to a direct analysis of Duchamp's statements and actions. There is a risk here that an apparent lack of conceptual rigor—the fact that Lacan and Žižek seem to recede into the background—might be misperceived as a limitation or weakness in the argument. Clarification should thus be offered. There are three reasons for the decidedly Duchampian emphasis in the second half of the book. The first is theoretical: if psychoanalytic categories are not being fully applied, it is only because such notions are, in fact, being explicitly demonstrated. The underlying thesis throughout is that, in his efforts to include the act of communication as part of the message, Duchamp's behavior follows a fundamentally psychoanalytic logic. This is why, in articulating the basic rule of psychoanalysis, Žižek offers a perfect description of Duchamp's activity: "one should not forget to include in the content of each act of communication the act itself" (Žižek, 2006, p. 21). The fact that this is not directly stated bears witness to the ("parallax") operation being attempted: an effort to show that, in the Duchampian space, the fundamental coordinates of Lacanian theory appear in their purest form.[6]

The second reason is methodological: the fact that the ideas of Lacan and Žižek are not being overtly applied does not prevent a psychoanalytic approach from being implicitly adopted. In what might appear to be an idiosyncratic reading of Duchamp's disparate statements, there is in fact a rigorous mode of analysis at work, a radical approach to art historical investigation rooted in a strict adherence to a given theoretical framework. It is a fundamental condition of this approach that a purely formalist-empirical focus precludes—having emerged from—any conceptual investigation. In short, the format of the book's second half (Parts III and IV) emerges on account of the argument developed in the first (Parts I and II). At issue, in essence, is an art historical practice unfolding as a psychoanalytic procedure. This is why, in structure and form, the second half of the book should be regarded as the material result of psychoanalytic concepts being comprehensively developed, to the extent that such concepts simply disappear under the weight of a new, unexpected (and more accessible) discourse.[7] The value of psychoanalytical theory to the art historian will thus be seen to reside in the methodology it engenders: it is only through Žižek's reading of Lacan that we can approach Duchamp's work from a distinctly Duchampian perspective, one that claims to do no

more than take Duchamp *at his word*. The aim, paradoxically, is to outline a uniquely Duchampian position as the only lens through which to read Duchamp himself.

The final reason for the narrowing of the interpretative lens is, admittedly, practical: it is simply not possible, within the scope of the current project, to properly investigate *Fountain*'s reception while also exploring the psychoanalytic significance of Duchamp's other major pieces.[8] To do so one would be required to analyze an extremely complex and opaque body of work while at the same time unpacking a highly abstruse and often impenetrable theoretical apparatus. What would inevitably become lost in the haze is the pertinence of *Fountain*'s centenary. For similar reasons, I have chosen to focus on a limited number of texts that I deem to be most relevant to the concerns this book raises. Given the difficulties involved in addressing the vast multitude of perspectives on *Fountain*, I instead engage with the work of three scholars at the forefront of developments in Duchamp Studies: Rosalind Krauss, Thierry de Duve and Hal Foster. Beyond practical concerns, this decision is epistemologically justified: when it comes to the dominant critical questions and the new scholarly directions taking place in the field today, these three art historians have led the way in breaking new ground, specifically with regard to the use of psychoanalytic theory. In attempting to reinterpret Duchamp's statements, I have also decided to focus on three particular texts, two well known to scholars—the aforementioned 1957 seminar on "The Creative Act" and Duchamp's 1967 interview with Pierre Cabanne—and one less so—Calvin Tomkins's "Afternoon Interviews" from 1964—given that the latter only appeared as recently as 2013. My hope is that, taken together, our familiarity with these seminal texts will be broken and something unfamiliar, even strange, will emerge.

Such is the nature of *Fountain*'s impact. As an interpretative aporia, it creates a kind of internal blockage in the system, a moment of rupture where the internal cogs cease to function and the dynamics at play become visible. Such points of "short-circuit" in a given network, Žižek warns us, can often appear as "faulty," if we are looking at them "from the standpoint of the network's smooth functioning" (Žižek, 2003, p. i). In truth, their liberating potential becomes perceptible only when this standpoint is fundamentally altered, a change that brings with it an uncomfortable feeling of "inherent decentering," whereby certain "unthought" presuppositions are exposed (Žižek, 2003, p. ii). If the art historian is to learn something new from this book, it is primarily in this sense that he/she might become aware of another—disturbing—truth: namely, that in Duchamp's stage-management of the aesthetic space, he/she has been included as part of the piece.

Notes

1. In a 2004 poll, 500 leading artists, dealers, critics and curators voted Duchamp's *Fountain* ahead of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as the most influential work of modern art. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/fountain-most-influential-piece-of-modern-art-673625.html
2. The story of *Fountain* has become an art historical legend, lending much to the object's mythical status. In April 1917 Duchamp bought a urinal from the New York showroom of the J.L. Mott Iron Works. He inverted, dated and signed the object "R. Mutt" and then anonymously submitted it, under the title *Fountain*, to the Society of Independent Artists, an organization modeled on the nineteenth-century Paris Salon. The group was putting together the largest exhibition of art America had ever witnessed with only one criterion for entry: a "no jury" policy that meant any artist paying $6 could exhibit. However, when the jury refused to accept Duchamp's *Fountain* on the grounds that it was "not art," they inadvertently contradicted their own founding principle. Duchamp, himself a member of the committee, stood down from his position in protest. He then asked celebrated artist Alfred Stieglitz to photograph the work for an obscure periodical entitled *The Blind Man*, which appeared in May 1917. Accompanying the image of the work was a text entitled "The Richard Mutt Case," in which details of the refusal were provided before the object was defended on aesthetic grounds. By exposing the contradiction in the Independents' stance, *Fountain* was seen to challenge the institutional notion of art in a way that fundamentally broadened our understanding of what art could be. The work's conceptual status was declared in the following terms: "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object." Soon after the publication of *The Blind Man*, *Fountain* disappeared and became more widely known later through replicas.
3. The closest, direct translation of the word "*flonfons*" is "oompa-pa" designating (sometimes despairingly) the loud music emitted by public brass bands. Given the current context, however, it is best translated as: "without fanfare" or "without pomp and ceremony." My thanks to Hannes Opelz for his help with the translation and to Valérie Kervren for drawing my attention to the article in question.
4. Working in private—to the extent that he even rented a separate apartment to conceal his intentions from his close friends—Duchamp produced a bizarre installation piece that invites the viewer to bend in front of a thick

wooden door and peer through a peephole onto a semi-pornographic scene of a naked woman who, with her face concealed from view, lies across a picturesque landscape setting with her legs openly spread.

5. This work is thus supported by my central thesis regarding Lacanian psychoanalysis: that Lacan's conceptual apparatus has its roots in a fundamentally iconological-aesthetic understanding of the clinical setting. See Kilroy (2014).
6. With a view to demonstrating this point, theoretical "signposts" will be provided in the form of short notes indicating the conceptual substratum supporting the analysis.
7. Here, it is worth remembering Freud's message, repeated by Žižek: "in the conditions in which it would finally be possible, psychoanalysis would no longer be needed." Slavoj Žižek, "Jacques Lacan's Four Discourses," www.lacan.com/zizfour.htm. Accessed June 2017.
8. These questions are to be the subject of a future publication tentatively entitled *Duchamp with Žižek: Towards a Word/Image Parallax*. For the time being, I would refer the reader to my doctoral dissertation, *Marcel Duchamp: Resolving the Word/Image Problematic*, *Afterthought*, in which all these issues are fully and comprehensively addressed. See Kilroy (2016).

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PART I

Reopening "The Richard Mutt Case": *Fountain* in 2017

CHAPTER 2

Art History and Psychoanalysis Today

Abstract New evidence of an encounter between Duchamp, the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* gives urgent critical impetus to two lines of enquiry: an interrogation of Duchamp's oeuvre on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis and an exploration of the precise influence of Courbet on Duchamp. To pursue this aim, the author builds on the work of two Duchampian scholars who have rigorously engaged with Lacan's conceptual apparatus: Rosalind Krauss and Thierry de Duve. Through a critical reading it is argued that Krauss and de Duve's efforts to address the issues raised by Duchamp's work are limited by institutional priorities that render visible the internal logic of art historical practice: how art history reformulates its interpretative models in order to ensure the stability of an established narrative.

Keywords Duchamp, Lacan and Courbet • New interpretation of Duchamp • *Fountain* crisis in art history • de Duve and Krauss critique • Psychoanalysis and art history

In late September, 1958, Marcel and Teeny Duchamp were invited to dine at the home of Jacques Lacan at 3 rue de Lille in Paris. It had become something of an after-dinner ritual for Lacan to welcome his guests into an adjoining room where he would present them with one of his prized

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possessions: Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*. The fact that the controversial painting was never on public display during Duchamp's lifetime (Tomkins, 1996, p. 460) leads us to conclude that he discovered it for the first time in Lacan's apartment. Furthermore, given that Duchamp had already begun work on *Étant donnés*, this encounter with Lacan lends weight to the claim that his final piece was influenced by Courbet's painting.[1] Knowledge of this meeting also gives increased credibility to a specific psychoanalytic line of inquiry, since any investigation of the impact of Courbet on Duchamp will inevitably lead back to Lacan's apartment in rue de Lille.[2]

Of course, a psychoanalytic interpretation of Duchamp's work is not without historical precedent. As with the history of psychoanalytic studies of art—traced in the opening chapter of Thierry de Duve's *Pictorial Nominalism*—there is also a long and well-established tradition of psychoanalytic interventions into the Duchampian field. As Paola Magi notes, the range of perspectives which make use of psychoanalytic categories in assessing Duchamp's work is both wide and varied: from Robert Lebel's brief intimations on the possible connection between the clinical setting and Duchamp's *Large Glass*, to Arturo Schwarz's thorough exploration of the libidinal forces at work in Duchamp's oeuvre, to the different interpretations put forward by Ulf Linde, Maurizio Calvesi, and Octavio Paz (Magi, 2011, p. 11).[3] One should also not forget the numerous readings offered by Lacanians themselves, such as Jean Copjec's suggestion that Duchamp may have in some way understood the aesthetic object as a form of sublimation (Copjec, 1999, p. 4). Most recently, Alain Badiou has hinted at the possibility that the psychoanalytic aspect of Duchamp's work opens up "another story" which "is probably the contradictory destiny of the most important part of modern art" (Badiou, 2008).

From within the discipline of art history, however, the two Lacanian interventions that have had the most impact on the direction of Duchamp scholarship are, without doubt, those of Rosalind Krauss and Thierry de Duve.[4] What separates Krauss and de Duve from others in the field, I argue, is the extent to which they have applied Lacanian theory to Duchamp's oeuvre. Their contributions deserve particular attention because, in my view, they have gone the furthest in developing Lacan's conceptual model into an established methodological tool in Duchamp scholarship. Krauss was one of the first to explore the precise connections between Lacan and Duchamp when, in her seminal 1986 work *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, she used

Lacanian theory to unlock the mysteries of the *Large Glass* (Krauss, 1986, pp. 196–209). This analysis is extended further in her 1994 work *The Optical Unconscious*, where she again differs to Lacan—through reference, this time, to his "L schema" apparatus—in order to put forward an "alternative" reading of modernism. Krauss leaves the reader in little doubt as to the extent of her debt to Lacan when, in the opening chapter, she outlines the specifics of her theoretical position: "Lacan, it struck me, provided the key to this refusal, a way of giving it a name" (Krauss, 1994, p. 22). In his 1991 work *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, Thierry de Duve calls for a parallel approach to the relationship between psychoanalysis and art history—what he terms a "heuristic parallelism" (de Duve, 1991, p. 4)—which uses Lacanian theory to read the work of art in terms of dream analysis. Like Krauss, de Duve does not attempt to hide the fact that his reading of Duchamp is supported by Lacan's conceptual apparatus: "And behind these artistic and theoretical resonances one hears the voice of Lacan, who, more than anyone, authorized this sort of reading and established it, epistemologically. This is what interests me here. One will soon see the important place I reserve for Lacan in the exercise of parallelism that follows" (de Duve, 1991, pp. 8–9).

For Krauss and de Duve, Lacan provides the key to overcoming the deadlocks encountered in Duchamp's work. Krauss's goal is to break the silence surrounding *Étant donnés* by using Lacan to reassess the erotic dimension of Duchamp's later output. Similarly, for de Duve, Lacan offers a way out of the interpretative dilemma presented by *Fountain*. It can therefore be argued that, in their use of Lacanian theory, Krauss and de Duve are effectively responding to the same fundamental obstacle; they are both seeking to arrive at a definitive answer to the singular question posed by *Étant donnés* and *Fountain*: "Is this art?" The problem for Krauss is that any effort to fully engage with *Étant donnés* brings its own inherent risks: either one denies the work's status as "art," dismissing it as a provocative gesture with no meaningful relation to Duchamp's other productions; or one decides to take it seriously as art, by considering its significance alongside the rest of Duchamp's oeuvre. In both cases, the consequences are potentially self-defeating: to ignore *Étant donnés* is to ensure that the historical potential of Duchamp's project remains unrealized; conversely, to properly interrogate the work is to radically question the established understanding of this project, a move that leaves Duchamp's legacy even more severely problematized. We recognize, here, the same paradox which Camfield associates with *Fountain*: the impossibility

of defining the object as "art" while simultaneously acknowledging its historical significance as "anti-art" (Camfield, 1989, p. 64). Both *Étant donnés* and *Fountain* would thus appear to confront the art historian with the same impossible choice; whatever option is taken, the outcome is always the same: no definitive verdict can ever be reached, since each answer to the question "Is this art?" leads to the same state of inherent contradiction.

De Duve offers a succinct definition of this impasse when he describes *Fountain* as the "double bind" of postmodern criticism. In order to validate the object's status as "art," he writes, to judge it as post-modern, as a critique of the modern, one must maintain the historical tradition of modernity, the very historicity the work is said to reject. The problem is that "to be postmodern a work must break with the modern" and this break must therefore be included in one's evaluation of the work. The irony, de Duve concludes, is that one's postmodern interpretation "is bound to be modern" (de Duve, 1996, p. 83). This concept of the "double bind" sheds light on the curious state of affairs outlined by Camfield: one can only judge the work post-modern on the basis of its inclusion in the modernist paradigm, as a critique thereof. *To call "Fountain" "art" one must accept its status as "anti-art."* In doing so, however, one assigns legitimacy to that which the work is supposed to challenge: its very inclusion in the modernist frame undermines its critical function, its postmodern status. *By accepting "Fountain" as "anti-art" one can no longer call it "art."* To further complicate matters, recognition of the critical injunction the work carries forces us to accept the postmodern consequences of this injunction; the fact that its inclusion in the modernist tradition threatens to dissolve the foundations of this tradition. *By accepting "Fountain" as "anti-art" one can no longer call anything "art."*

It is clear, then, that to answer the question "Is this art?" one must first overcome the "double bind" by reconciling the "art/anti-art" opposition. Krauss attempts this by insisting on the distinction between the eroticism of Duchamp's later works and the earlier "cerebral Duchamp." This allows her to account for the highly "retinal" nature of *Étant donnés* without disrupting the established "conceptual" reading. De Duve arrives at a similar outcome when he locates *Fountain* within both the modern and postmodern paradigms. His solution is to assign the work its historical locus as both the *end point* of Greenbergian modernism, when the specificity of the medium reaches its limit, and the *departure point* for a postmodern tradition, in which "art" is no longer defined in terms of this specificity. Thus, we are able to grasp the precise nature of *Fountain*'s impact on the field of

contemporary art: "you remain free to call art whatever you want" since "art" is "a name indifferent to both the modern and the postmodern" (de Duve, 1996, p. 84).

In performing this move, de Duve also allows us to glimpse the broader institutional forces governing his Lacanian reading of Duchamp. He does not conceal the fact that, in resolving the "double bind," his ultimate aim is to address a specific crisis in art history: the "highly curious situation" at the end of the twentieth century when the discipline found itself split from within along modernist and postmodern lines. On one side, the modernist "traditionalists" defended the notion of specificity and laid claims to a historicity of the medium; on the other, the postmodern radicals chose to valorize an "unclassifiable artistic quality" over all specific judgments. Each "clan," de Duve explains, defined itself in either opposition to or support for Duchamp and marked its respective territory on the basis of two alternative interpretations of *Fountain*: the traditionalists, refusing to take Duchamp seriously, dismissed *Fountain*'s credentials as a work of art; the postmodernists, on the other hand, declared the work an object of conceptual art in order to "claim Duchamp as their own" (de Duve, 1991, pp. 189–190). The roots of this division, de Duve argues, lay in an "enormous historical misunderstanding" of *Fountain*, a failure to recognize the precise dilemma the work presents. It is thus in response to the "urgent" need "to get rid of this misunderstanding," that he leads the art historian out of the double bind. In other words, he reads Duchamp with Lacan in order to resolve an inherent antagonism *within* the art historical field. As he himself admits, the primary objective is to reconstruct a coherent art historical narrative by displacing the inconsistencies and divisions that disrupt this narrative. "There is only a single history of modern art," he writes, "and the task of historians is to capture it" (de Duve, 1991, p. 190).

Through closer inspection we see the same institutional concerns at work in Krauss's Lacanian reading of Duchamp. Her analysis of *Étant donnés* first appeared as an essay entitled "The Blink of an Eye," which she wrote as a contribution to a broader initiative emerging from a three-year research project undertaken by a theory group in Irvine, California in 1985. After engaging in an inter-disciplinary study of the problem of representation, the Irvine group set themselves a specific target: to open traditional academic disciplines to new approaches in critical theory by exploring the institutional effects brought about by the "transformation in the role and function of discourse" (Carroll, 1990, p. 4). This is the precise context framing Krauss's psychoanalytic interpretation of *Étant donnés*. In line with the Irvine group's objectives, she analyses Duchamp's experiments in painting with

a view to making art historians more receptive to the "transformations in their 'object' that they resist most strenuously" (Carroll, 1990, p. 15). Like de Duve, Krauss adopts a Lacanian standpoint with the broader objective of rewriting the art historical narrative, of opening art history to new approaches based on the "the properties of discourse" (Krauss, 1990, p. 175).

What can we deduce from the fact that both de Duve and Krauss are essentially reacting to the same institutional imperative? As a development of critical theory, Lacan's apparatus is adopted primarily in response to a crisis in the discipline of art history, a paradoxical rupture which disrupts the field from within. As a tool, Lacanian psychoanalysis allows a specific contradiction—the double bind created by Duchamp's work—to be displaced so that the smooth texture of the art historical text can be restored.[5] In this sense, the institutional conditions faced by de Duve and Krauss are a repeat of a similar "crisis" that occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, when art historians were forced to assess the significance of modern art. As Eric Fernie explains, the crisis in question had its source in a problem that was structurally homologous to the "double bind": the necessity of defining a "dramatic break with the past" while also stressing "the continuity between modernism and earlier art" (Fernie, 2005, p. 16). As with *Fountain*, it proved impossible to incorporate the new works into a given tradition without fundamentally undermining the foundations of this tradition. To resolve this dilemma, Fernie writes, art historical approaches were simply adapted to meet the demands of modern art: particular elements were excluded from "the tool-kit of available methods" while new models were used in a variety of ways (Fernie, 2005, p. 16). In reading Duchamp with Lacan, Krauss and Duve can be said to perform the same procedure: responding to the double bind—the question "Is this art?" that problematizes the categories of "modern" and "postmodern"—they simply add Lacanian theory to the "tool-kit" of available approaches. By doing so, they successfully reconcile the divisions internal to the Duchampian field, thereby reaffirming the coherent logic of the established art historical narrative.

When considered together, *Fountain* and *Étant donnés* indicate the broader priorities shaping de Duve and Krauss's positions: the fact that, rather than seeking new answers to persistent questions, their efforts are focused on locating each work in a given framework, where it acquires sense in relation to other art objects. Of course, this smoothing out of chinks

and creases in the story of art is standard art historical practice. As Donald Preziosi explains in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, the principal motivation of art historical activity over the past two centuries has been the imperative of assembling "material evidence for the construction of historical narratives [...] linked by multiple chains of causality and influence over time and space" (Preziosi, 1999, p. 10). Such narratives are established, he argues, through the "fixing-in-place of individual objects within the ideal horizons of a (potentially universal) history of artistic forms," the assignment of "a locus or 'address' to the work within a finely calibrated system of chronological or geographical relationships." In short, what is (and always has been) at issue in art history is the creation of "traditionally fabricated histories of form as surrogates for or parallels to histories of persons or peoples" (Preziosi, 1999, pp. 9–11). As art historians, Krauss and de Duve's primary task is to ensure the "fixing-in-place" of two particular works that refuse to fit by assigning a historical locus that reconnects necessary "chains of causality" (Preziosi, 1999, p. 9).

The problem, however, is that this "fixing" is incomplete. De Duve and Krauss do not achieve their fundamental objectives as art historians. Instead of escaping the double bind, de Duve's approach simply reinforces the deadlock in an even purer form. His attempt to position *Fountain* in a single history of modern art does nothing to address the paradoxical status of the work that he himself identifies. On the contrary, the issue of the double bind is suppressed in favor of retaining the interpretative framework which *Fountain* disrupts. De Duve justifies the work's status as postmodern art by recognizing it as a gesture of anti-art; however, in doing so, he retains the consistency of the very framework *Fountain* is said to challenge, thus undermining the subversive quality that legitimizes its postmodern status in the first place. He includes *Fountain* in the modernist paradigm yet ignores the broader implications of this inclusion, the work's status as postmodern art. Ultimately, his claim that "'art' is "indifferent to both the modern and the postmodern" (de Duve, 1996, p. 84) merely serves to displace the modern/postmodern disjunction that *Fountain* so evidently exposes.

Krauss is guilty of the same oversight in her reading of *Étant donnés*. For a start, her approach does nothing to address the implications of Duchamp's unambiguous reference to Courbet. No attempt is made to answer the question posed by Tomkins: how can we account for the fact that Duchamp was explicitly claiming as an influence over his last major work an artist whom he had previously criticized "for setting art on its

exclusively 'retinal' course," the very attitude against which Duchamp was seen as reacting (Tomkins, 1996, p. 460)? By adhering to the view that the early "cerebral" Duchamp rejected "the world of material sensations" in favor of "the world of ideas," Krauss simply holds in place the anti-"retinal"/"conceptual" categories that the Courbet/Lacan/Duchamp question forces us to re-examine (Krauss, 1994, p. 108). She thus obscures any possible repercussions a full investigation might unearth, opting instead to preserve the very criteria called into question by *Étant donnés*.

The conclusion to be drawn is this: in their "Lacanian" interpretations of Duchamp, neither Krauss nor de Duve overcome the problem they claim to resolve. Instead of fully interrogating *Étant donnés* and *Fountain* they choose to smooth over the issues raised in order to preserve the status quo. Consequently, the limitations in their respective readings manifest themselves as an even firmer form of contradiction. Today, as fresh evidence of Courbet's influence over Duchamp comes to light, the paradoxical nature of *Étant donnés* becomes almost impossible to ignore. While it provides an access point for scholars into the latent eroticism of Duchamp's later works, it also negates the foundations of such a reading from within. The same is true of *Fountain*. In Duve's linear history, it is both the pivotal element holding the narrative together and the point of rupture subverting this narrative and exposing its artificial nature. As an object of conceptual art that breaks from the specificity of the medium, *Fountain* supports the open postmodern field in which art is no longer defined in terms of an object's inherent aesthetic value. However, as the end point in the tradition of the medium's specificity, it clearly functions as an object with inherent aesthetic value: an *object of conceptual art*. To put it another way, the presumption that a work of art is no longer defined by an object's inherent aesthetic qualities is supported and guaranteed by *Fountain*'s status as a work of conceptual art, *an object with inherent aesthetic qualities*. The paradox is thus as follows: the rejection of the modernist tendency to privilege the art object is justified by the universal acceptance that *one* specific art object enjoys a privileged status. Like *Étant donnés*, *Fountain* re-opens a fissure in art history by virtue of the simple fact that it holds the field together while also negating it from within.

This is why it is important to note how, on *Fountain*'s centenary, the question "Is this art?" reasserts itself with renewed force. What Duchamp scholars must today acknowledge is that their work remains *definitely unfinished*; we have not yet completed our primary duty as art historians, that is, to ensure the fixing-in-place of a work that, one hundred years

later, refuses to fit. But how, precisely, is this task completed? One clue is provided by Erwin Panofksy who, in the introductory pages to *Studies in Iconology*, succinctly describes the crux of art historical practice: "If […] this new individual observation definitively refuses to be interpreted according to the 'sense' of the series, and if an error proves to be impossible, the 'sense' of the series will have to be re-formulated to include the new individual observation" (Panofksy, 1972, p. 11). In the event that "an individual work of art" does not conform to the sense of the established tradition, then this tradition must be altered in line with a new set of principles. It is this precise "reformulation" that de Duve and Krauss undertake. The problem is that, in Panofksy's terms, *Fountain* "definitively refuses to be interpreted according to the 'sense' of the series" and assume the character of "fact." The whole sense of the given series must therefore be formulated anew. What, then, are the tools that should be retained and discarded? On *Fountain*'s centenary, the conditions facing scholars are as follows: increasing justification for a Lacanian interrogation of Duchamp is counteracted by an interpretative obstacle which suggests that this reading is incomplete. Hence, to build on Krauss and de Duve's work one should pursue this particular line of inquiry more vigorously; first, however, it is necessary to adapt the available tool-kit of methods to account for the unresolved issues in question. Adhering fully to the tenets of art historical practice, the challenge is to properly investigate the evidence at hand while overcoming the specific limitations encountered. So, the question is, where do we go from here?

Notes

1. Evidence of this encounter was recently brought to scholarly attention by Thierry Savatier, to whom Michael Taylor refers in the catalogue for a 2009 show marking forty years since the installation of *Étant donnés* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It becomes harder to deny the possibility that Courbet's controversial painting had been a reference point for Duchamp when one examines a series of preparatory sketches for *Étant donnés* entitled *The Lovers*, completed shortly before his death. One of the drawings refers directly to Courbet's 1861 work *Woman with White Stocking* while another is clearly taken from *L'Origine du monde*.
2. Taylor admits that, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, one is compelled to explore the connection between Lacanian theory and Duchamp's oeuvre: "his interest in the eroticization of vision offers fascinating parallels with Lacan's psychoanalytic theories […] the tantalizing connections

between the viewer/voyeur schema of Duchamp's diorama and Lacan's psychoanalytic ideas on the gaze […] gain credence with the knowledge of this meeting" (Taylor, 2009, p. 112).

3. A surprising omission from Magi's list is the name of Jean François Lyotard, whose 1977 work *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, written at a pivotal moment during the rediscovery of the artist's work in France, paved the way for all subsequent appraisals of Duchampian eroticism.
4. For a more detailed elaboration of this point and a more thorough analysis of Krauss and de Duve's positions see Kilroy (2016).
5. Lacan's concepts of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real are crucial in allowing de Duve to elaborate a "single history of modern art" in which Duchamp is positioned in a tradition governed by the figure of Cézanne. Only by relying on Lacan can de Duve read the lack of a Cézannean influence in Duchamp's work *as evidence of such an influence*: its absence is a sign, he argues, of an unconscious "agressivity directed against Cézanne," which manifests itself as "a style that does not hide its debt to Cézanne" (de Duve, 1991, p. 51). Through this highly speculative move, Duchamp's "ambivalent relationship with Cézanne" is taken as proof of "a complete inability to interpret Cézanne correctly" (1991, p. 7). With help from Lacan, Cézanne is then established as "the repressed name of the pictorial father," who shows up in Duchamp's work as a type of return of the repressed, an incarnation of "the Cézannean obstacle" (1991, pp. 49, 46).

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CHAPTER 3

Duchamp with Lacan through Žižek

Abstract In order to determine why Courbet was cited as an influence for *Étant donnés*, the author radically reinterprets Duchamp's statements on the subject. This leads to a complete reassessment of the supposed anti-retinal/conceptual interpretation of Duchamp's oeuvre. To pursue this line of enquiry Duchamp's perplexing decision to quote the poet T.S. Eliot is fully explored. It is argued that Eliot provides a precise description of the phenomenon addressed in the previous chapters: the art historical response to the dilemma presented by *Fountain*. The conclusion drawn is that Duchamp used Eliot to highlight the paradoxical logic of his work's reception and, in turn, the mechanism underpinning this reception. This justifies the use of a Lacanian-Žižekian model as the strongest interpretative tool available to art historians.

Keywords Duchamp, Eliot and *Fountain* • Challenging the established reading of Duchamp's *Fountain* • Lacan and Žižek with Duchamp • Duchamp v post-structuralism, Derrida • Lacan and art history • Art history and Žižek

The question "Where do we go from here?" was the focal point of a conference held at the Duchamp Research Centre in Schwerin, the same year the Philadelphia Museum of Art published a catalogue marking the fortieth anniversary of *Étant donnés*. This question was also the title of a

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symposium held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1961. Having been invited as guest speaker, Duchamp took the question as the departure point for his own contribution and then attempted to provide a definitive answer. "To imagine the future," he declared, "we should perhaps start from the more or less recent past, which seems to us today to begin with the realism of Courbet" (Napp, 2009). If we take Duchamp at his word, a path forward begins to appear and we are directed towards an individual observation that has yet to be fully explored: namely, the precise connection between Duchamp and Courbet. According to the standard reading, *Fountain* is an anti-retinal gesture which advocates a conceptual approach to art. From this perspective, Duchamp's intentions seem clear: to redefine art "primarily as a mental act rather than a visual one" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 12). To support this interpretation scholars usually point to Duchamp's statements, specifically speaking, his comments on Courbet, as a source of primary evidence, When, for example, the question "Where does your anti-retinal attitude come from?" was put to him, his response appears unambiguous:

> From too great an importance given to the retinal. Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. (Duchamp, 1979, p. 43)

It is difficult to refute the clear message communicated in this remark: rejecting the "retinal" tendencies initiated by Courbet, Duchamp calls for a shift towards a more intellectually based form of art. Because of Courbet, he declares, "too great an importance" has been given to the physical, sensuous, visual (that is, "retinal") appeal of painting; this, he insists, was the basic error that caused everyone to overlook the conceptual dimension of art, how "painting had other functions." Such a clearly defined anti-retinal stance inevitably leads one to interpret Duchamp's other comments as an insistence on the conceptual nature of his work: "everything was becoming conceptual, that is, it depended on things other than the retina" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 39).

How, then, do we explain Duchamp's obvious effort to contradict this stated position in his final work? If *Étant donnés* is to be considered an important cornerstone of Duchamp's project then, at the very least, such comments must be re-examined. If one is open to the possibility that Duchamp's final work was influenced by Courbet then one must also

accept that the received understanding of his statements on the subject becomes highly problematized. Note, first, a curious detail: when Duchamp declares that "since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina […] that was everyone's error" he is not directly criticizing Courbet himself; on the contrary, he is dismissing *the reception of Courbet*, the fact that *since Courbet*, *it has been believed* that painting is addressed to the retina. It is, he clearly states, *that belief* which was "everyone's error"; and it is *that error* which he defines as "the retinal shudder." He does not, as many would have it, reproach Courbet for directing painting onto a purely visual path, one which appealed uniquely to the visual senses; he is skeptical, rather, of the error in perspective that supports this view, the insistence that *since Courbet painting has appealed solely to the visual sense*. If we are to "imagine the future" it is this (mis-)reading—the fact that the recent past "*seems to us today* to begin with the realism of Courbet"—that we must address. In doing so, we take a tentative first step towards interrogating Duchamp's work outside an anti-retinal/conceptual lens.

The problematic question of Courbet's influence diverts our attention to another puzzling statement by Duchamp: his reference, in the seminar on "The Creative Act," to the poet T.S. Eliot, the only figure he ever directly cites (Duchamp, 1973, pp. 138–140). As Marjorie Perloff recently noted, the issue for scholars is that, despite their neatly overlapping chronologies, Eliot and Duchamp have always been placed "at the opposite poles of Modernist aesthetic": Duchamp was seen as the Dadaist iconoclast who, through *Fountain*, launched an attack on the very tradition Eliot was perceived as defending. This is why, much like the series of preparatory sketches after Courbet, Duchamp's decision to indicate Eliot as an influence is both highly perplexing and impossible to ignore. Indeed, Krauss's flat rejection of such an intriguing avenue of investigation merely renders her refusal to explore the Courbet question all the more telling. When, at a symposium held in Canada in 1987, the artist Eric Cameron suggested a link between Duchamp and Eliot's work, Krauss is said to have reacted with indignant disbelief, declaring herself "enormously hostile" to what she regarded as a "betrayal of Duchamp" (Krauss cited in Perloff, 2007). In order to move beyond such scholarly resistance and pursue this important line of enquiry it is necessary to, once again, take Duchamp at his word.

At this point it is worth emphasizing that, as a direct statement of the artist's position, Duchamp's seminar on "The Creative Act" lends weight to the dominant interpretations of *Fountain*. In this short paper, Duchamp

is seen to reject the notion of the artistic genius and instead underline the essential role played by the spectator in the creative process, a position that adds substance to the conceptual status of *Fountain* (Duchamp, 1973, pp. 138–140). However, the reference to Eliot, for the reasons outlined, does much to undermine this reading. The only logical conclusion to be drawn is that Duchamp was highlighting a symmetry between his own thoughts on the creative act and those expressed by Eliot. Scholars like Krauss who are reluctant to entertain such a possibility often overlook the fact that, rather than pointing us in the direction of Eliot himself, Duchamp is more directly emphasizing the significance of *Eliot's essay*, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." What is it about this short text that might prove pertinent to our understanding of Duchamp's seminar? From his opening remarks, it is clear that Eliot's defense of "tradition" is, in effect, a reaction to the dominant critical tendency of the time; namely, the emphasis on specific criteria which dictate that, for a work to be of aesthetic value, it must *challenge* tradition. The real target of Eliot's criticism, then, is the shortcomings and limitations of critical practice itself, the failure to acknowledge that, due to a specific "critical turn of mind," there is now a predominant tendency to privilege the "new"—the way a work differs from its predecessors, the way it breaks with tradition—as a fundamental criterion of aesthetic worth.[1]

For Eliot, this judgment always necessitates what he terms a "pleasing archaeological reconstruction" (Eliot, 1921, p. 42). As a principle of aesthetic criticism, a work can only acquire its true meaning in relation to tradition: for its individuality to be recognized, it must first be seen to break from established norms. This alignment of the new with the old involves a twofold operation: the new work changes in conformity with the established tradition, while the tradition itself conforms in line with the new work. He writes:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of æsthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing

> order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (Eliot, 1921, pp. 44–45)

What Eliot offers here is a precise description of the art historical "reconstruction" discussed in the previous chapter: in the face of internal division caused by the arrival of a new work, the "existing order" is maintained by being "ever so slightly altered;" through the addition of alternative methodological tools, the new is introduced and made to conform to the old. Eliot then goes so far as to pinpoint the paradoxical logic of this operation:

> To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art […] And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable because it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value—a test, it is true, which can only be slowly and cautiously applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity. We say: it appears to conform, and is perhaps individual, or it appears individual, and may conform; but we are hardly likely to find that it is one and not the other. (Eliot, 1921, p. 45)

An object has aesthetic value only if it is new; it acquires the status of a work of art only if *it refuses to conform*; but in order for it to be appreciated as such, in order for it to be perceived as "new," it must be made to fit into the established order, *it must be made to conform*. Eliot thus provides a precise definition of the double bind presented by *Fountain*: to be judged as new (as postmodern) the work must fit into the established (modernist) tradition; *for it to be new, it must conform*. However, by fitting into this tradition, it cannot be recognized as new (as postmodern); *by conforming it is not new*. One might argue, then, that by subtly guiding us towards Eliot's essay, Duchamp foregrounds the peculiar logic of his own work, in turn, exposing the internal dynamics which govern the reception of his work. If Eliot's essay provides the broader context for Duchamp's seminar, then one can only deduce that, in the seminar itself, Duchamp is examining the particular workings of the phenomenon discussed by Eliot: namely, "the creative act" as *an apparatus of reception*.

If Krauss does "not know where to look in Duchamp" to find anything that would connect to Eliot (in Perloff, 2007), it is perhaps because she is looking in the wrong place. The troubling truth she refuses to confront is this: only by considering *her own role* as art historian will the connection between

Duchamp and Eliot make sense. This is how, through Courbet and Eliot, Duchamp indicates a clear route forward, a way out of the current impasse. To take the first step, Eliot explains, the "poet" must accept the inevitable effects of the practice, the fact that the operation of reconstruction in the act of judgment cannot be avoided: "In a peculiar sense he will be aware also that he must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past, the fact that to judge a work is to relate it the standards of the past" (Eliot, 1921, p. 45). What *can* be avoided, he maintains, is the blindness towards one's precise role in this reconstruction, the refusal to account for the broader conditions of one's practice. What is needed, Eliot argues, is an act of judgment that remains *critically aware*: in assessing the work's value one must not destroy the work itself by forcing it to adhere to criteria that are accepted without question: "I say judged, not amputated [...] not judged to be as good as, or worse or better than, the dead; and certainly not judged by the canons of dead critics." In short, one must attempt to assess the work by approaching it without "prejudice" (Eliot, 1921, p. 43).

What does it mean to judge Duchamp's work without prejudice? One might begin by noting how, in attempting to reconcile the "anti-art/art" opposition, both Krauss and de Duve adhere to the same specific set of controlling principles. In essence, de Duve's reading is supported by the anti-retinal/conceptual categories Krauss works so hard to preserve: only by presupposing the notion of the "anti-retinal," can *Fountain*'s status as "modern" art be guaranteed; only when the category of the "conceptual" is retained can *Fountain*'s "postmodern" qualities be affirmed. Therefore, in order to account for the given facts, these are the specific priorities that must be discarded from the available tool-kit of methods. But what new models are to be introduced?

As has been noted, the overwhelming evidence at hand inevitably leads us back to rue de Lille, to Lacan. If all the facts point simultaneously to both the pertinence of a Lacanian reading and the limitations of such readings to date, then it is clearly a new type of Lacanian perspective that is required. At this important juncture, it is worth calling to mind Hal Foster's precise assessment of Duchamp's legacy. In an essay entitled "What's Neo about the Neo Avant Garde" Foster addresses the effect of *Fountain* on the field of contemporary art by examining, through a sustained critique of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, a dilemma that is structurally homologous to the double bind: the paradox whereby a critique of the art institution and the autonomous status of art has been transformed into *the institutional affirmation of autonomous art*. What is required to explain this phenomenon, he argues, is a revision of the "theoretical question of

avant-garde causality, temporality and narrativity" (Foster, 1996, p. 10). He maintains that, in pursuit of this aim, the most effective tool at the art historian's disposal is the Freudian model of repression and repetition. But for this model to be properly applied, a "rigorous" re-reading must be undertaken: rather than simply accepting the current status of a discourse and repeating the received ideas that deform its structure, one attempts to remove the layers that negated the discourse's critical edge in order to reaffirm its radical integrity.[2] It is Lacan, Foster maintains, who engages in this rigorous re-reading when, through his "return" to Freud, he saves the radical core of psychoanalysis. For the same "return" to be performed in relation to Lacan's own work, he argues, one need look no further than the figure of Slavoj Žižek.

It is Žižek, Foster suggests, who rehabilitates Lacan's thought to its roots by cutting through the "layers of paraphrase and pastiche" which have given rise to an interpretation distorted by prejudice (Foster, 1996, p. 6). In doing so, Žižek provides the conceptual and methodological tools for proceeding with a more complete interpretation of Duchamp's work. Citing Žižek's seminal 1989 text *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (2008), Foster makes it clear that the overlaps between Žižekian theory and Duchampian practice are too striking to be ignored:

> Duchamp criticism hardly needs another magical key to the work, but it is extraordinary how recursion and retroactivity are built into his art—as if Duchamp not only allowed for deferred action but played with it as his very subject. The language of suspended delays, the trope of missed encounters, the concern with *infra-mince* causalities, the obsession with repetition, resistance, and reception, is everywhere in his work, which is, like trauma, like the avant-garde, definitively unfinished but always already inscribed. (Foster, 1996, p. 31)

What, exactly, is at stake in Žižek's reading of Lacan and how might it open a path towards a new understanding of Duchamp? In the opening pages of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek explains the fundamental aim of his theoretical project: to correct "the distorted picture of Lacan as belonging to the field of 'post-structuralism'" by clearly articulating Lacan's "radical break with 'post-structuralism'" (Žižek, 2008, p. xxx). This post-structuralist lens, Žižek claims, wrongly positions Lacanian theory in a distinctly Derridean tradition, where Lacan's radical divergence from Derrida is subtly obscured.[3] Is it not this very "post-structuralist" picture of Lacan

that we see developed in the work of Krauss, de Duve and, indeed, Foster? As has been argued, Krauss's reading of Duchamp was broadly governed by theoretical developments brought about by a distinct post-structuralist understanding of discourse.[4] Although de Duve declares that Duchamp's "definition of the Real was strictly that of Lacan" (de Duve, 1991, pp. 78–79), this statement is founded on what Žižek calls "a fundamental theoretical error" regarding the analysis of dreams.[5] Consequently, his approach misses the properly psychoanalytic aspect of Lacan's thought, as it is articulated by Žižek, because it remains over-reliant on a decidedly Derridean understanding of the signifier. Foster, too, appears to fall into the very trap he seeks to avoid when, by mediating Lacan's concept of the symptom through Derrida's notion of difference, he severely blunts the critical edge of the symptomatic method; in short, he simply repeats the received ("post-structuralist") interpretation of psychoanalysis that, according to Žižek, deforms the its radical integrity.

The point is that Duchamp's legacy remains problematized because the dominant Lacanian readings of his work are reductive in their theoretical scope. It is not Lacan's conceptual apparatus itself which is limited but, rather, its application; the fact that, to date, art historical interpretations have been framed by alternative priorities and prejudices. A full reading of Duchamp with Lacan can therefore only be developed through a reading of Duchamp with Lacan *through Žižek*, a reading of *Duchamp with Žižek*. Only Žižek can allow us to account for the dilemma confronted by Krauss and de Duve by advocating a radical interpretative move. When confronted with the repeated emergence of a problem, he argues, one should seek not a solution but a clearer elucidation of the problem itself. To do so one must rely on a symptomatic approach: the location of "a point of breakdown" that is heterogenous to a given field while "at the same time necessary for that field to achieve its closure" (Žižek, 2008, p. 16), a particular point of exception which "subverts its own universal foundation" by "functioning as its internal negation" (Žižek, 2008, p. 17). Žižek here provides the crucial conceptual tool that helps explain the paradoxical status of *Fountain*: as both the point of foreclosure for the field of postmodern art and the element which undermines the foundations of this field from within, *Fountain* is fundamentally "symptomatic" in nature.

Žižek argues that, when faced with such a "fissure" or moment of imbalance in a field, one should resist the temptation to resolve the problem ("Is this art?") by seeking definitive answers or reconciling opposing categories ("art or anti-art?"). Instead, he calls for a "parallax" shift in

perspective whereby one reaches below the opposition in question to the inherent gap or tension that generates it.[6] The fact that *Fountain* and *Étant donnés* subvert the universal categories holding their respective fields together ("modern/postmodern," "anti-retinal/conceptual," "art/anti-art") should not be perceived as a dilemma; on the contrary, the apparent deadlock has a liberating effect since it draws our attention to the broader structure of the field, to the disavowed truth we have thus far refused to acknowledge; that is, the cogs of an apparatus in which we, as art historians, are centrally involved.

Taking a "parallax" view of the "double bind," that is, by reaching below the given series of polarities, we come to recognize the same fundamental form of activity at play: the workings of a single mechanism maintaining the consistency of a given field by displacing an internal threat. Žižek can thus be said to offer an important theoretical insight into the logic of art historical practice when, in the opening page of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he writes:

> When a discipline is in crisis, attempts are made to change or supplement its theses *within* the terms of its basic framework—a procedure one might call "Ptolemization" […] But the true "Copernican" revolution takes place when, instead of just adding complications and changing minor premises, the basic framework itself undergoes a transformation. (Žižek, 2008, p. vii)

If the term "Ptolemization" describes the institutional response of art historians to repeated states of internal crisis, the "fixing-in-place" (Preziosi), "reformulation" (Panofksy) or "reconstruction" (Eliot) that helps the discipline adapt to paradoxical works threatening it from within, then what does a Copernican revolution in art history entail? Are we not concerned with a fundamental transformation in the foundations of the discipline itself, a move which *Fountain* obliges us to take? The paradox is that this revolutionary change can only occur if the process of Ptolemization is driven to its extreme limit: in the face of Duchamp's *Fountain* we add a particular complication and change a minor premise when, discarding the anti-retinal/conceptual categories and reading Lacan *with* Žižek, we arrive at a radically new art historical approach turned *symptomatic*. In so doing, we remove unnecessary prejudices that blunt art history's critical edge and cut through to the core of its practice, to its emancipatory, revolutionary kernel.

Notes

1. It is perhaps worth considering here the curious temporal parallels between Eliot's essay and Duchamp's text, "The Richard Mutt Case." Eliot became assistant editor of *The Egoist* in 1917, the year Duchamp took on the same position at *The Blind Man*. The fact that the essay itself was published across two issues creates further overlaps with *The Blind Man*, which was also released across two editions in 1917.
2. "The implication," Foster writes, "is that, if truly radical (in the sense of *radix*: to the root), the reading will not be another accretion of the discourse; on the contrary, it will cut through the layers of paraphrase and pastiche that have obscured its theoretical core and blunted its political edge" (Foster, 1996, p. 6).
3. For a full elaboration of the precise distinction between Lacan and Derrida's notion of the signifier see Kilroy (2017). For a discussion of how this pertains to Duchamp's work in general and his use of titles in particular see Kilroy (2016).
4. Further evidence of this post-structuralist "filtering" of Lacanian theory can be seen in the way Krauss's reading of the *Large Glass* on the basis of Lacan's notion of the mirror stage relies on a simplification of Lacanian theory in terms of Jakobson's concept of the "shifter" (Krauss, 1984, p. 200).
5. This point will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
6. It is not enough, Žižek writes in *The Parallax View*, to merely insist on the fact that the gap between two opposing categories is irreducible. Rather, we should: "take a step further and reach beneath the dualism itself, into a 'minimal difference' […] that generates it (Žižek, 2009, pp. 10–11). […] "The first critical move," he explains, "is to replace this topic of the polarity of opposites with the concept of the inherent 'tension,' gap, the non-coincidence of the One with itself" (Žižek, 2009, p. 7).

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PART II

Revisiting the Crime Scene: *Fountain*'s Reception

CHAPTER 4

Art Historian as Psychoanalyst as Detective

Abstract With a view to interpreting Duchamp's *Fountain* in psychoanalytic terms, a radically new art historical methodology is developed on the basis of clinical practice. First, the author discusses what Žižek sees as a fundamental theoretical error in the standard interpretation of Freud's approach to dream analysis. This allows for a clearer elucidation of Lacan's concept of the symptom as the central element in the psychoanalytic procedure. To adapt Lacan's approach along art historical lines, Žižek's efforts to draw a homology between the work of the psychoanalyst and that of the detective are applied to "The Richard Mutt Case." *Fountain* is thus positioned at the crucial juncture between psychoanalysis and art history, a moment of "short-circuit" that allows a new type of disciplinary exchange to take place.

Keywords Psychoanalyst as detective as art historian • Psychoanalytic approach to the history of art • Art as dream • New Freudian approach to art • Duchamp's *Fountain* as symptom • Symptomatic approach to art • Freud with Lacan, Lacan with Žižek

How do we transform art history into a psychoanalytic practice, psychoanalysis into an art historical approach? The precise problem with "post-structuralist" readings of Lacan, Žižek argues, is that they fail to come to terms with the precise nature of Lacan's "return" to Freud: specifically

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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speaking, Lacan's insistence on the purely formal nature of the Freudian method as the basis for his symptomatic procedure. It is ultimately this focus on the "analysis of form" in Freud's approach to dreams which, for Žižek, separates Lacan from the post-structuralist tradition (Žižek, 2008, p. xxx). In order to fully elucidate Lacan's notion of the symptom it is therefore necessary to first discuss the central features of the Freudian method.

When attempting to understand Freud's approach to dreams, one must be careful to avoid what Žižek sees as a "fundamental theoretical error": instead of locating the "essential constitution" of a dream at the level of its representational content (the thoughts the dream represents) one should fix one's critical attention on *the form of a dream*, the mechanisms of displacement and condensation at work on its surface (Žižek, 2008, p. 5). It is not sufficient, in other words, for a psychoanalyst to simply identify the dream's latent content (its central idea, what the dream really "means"); the task is also to articulate how this content has taken on the form of the dream, how a repressed thought has come to assume such a peculiar, distorted shape. This, Žižek explains, is why Freud's analytic eye is always drawn to the distortions that disrupt a clear reading of the dream, the uncanny details which give the dream its "strange" quality: only in such moments of rupture do the primary mechanisms of construction at work in the dream become explicit; only at the points where the dream appears to break down does its formal structure become visible.

The basic mistake, then, is to become excessively invested in the realm of signification. In effect, the interpretation of dreams involves the paradoxical gesture of subtracting one's fascination with content in order to give full priority to purely *formal* coordinates. This is why psychoanalysis is not primarily concerned with uncovering hidden meaning from beneath form; rather, the hermeneutic procedure involves articulating "the process by means of which the hidden meaning disguised itself in such a form" (Žižek, 2008, p. 8). It is on the basis of this methodological "a priori" that Lacan develops his notion of the symptom. Symptoms, like dreams, are paradoxical phenomena, moments of rupture or points of deadlock when things appear to break down. As with dreams, the crucial interpretative move to be accomplished when attempting to make sense of a symptom is the disengagement from its supposed meaning through a primary focus on its form. One must renounce one's fascination with a deeper, hidden realm of signification, with a secret concealed behind the symptom's formal appearance. As Žižek puts it, in psychoanalysis the true secret is "not the secret behind the form but the secret of this form itself"

(Žižek, 2008, p. 8). Here, we strike the conceptual bedrock of Žižek's notion of the "parallax": only by resisting our natural compulsion to resolve inconsistencies and find answers, our eagerness to close gaps and reconcile contradictory poles, can we begin to view the obstacle or impasse in purely formal terms. Through this perspectival shift the problem becomes visible as its own solution when a whole series of previously unrecognizable mechanisms suddenly become explicit.

Symptoms are thus to be conceived of as enigmatic phenomena only insofar as it is their form that needs to be explained; in short, the formal status of the problem is itself a fact in need of interpretation. Like the analysis of dreams, the symptomatic approach does not seek to discover meaning; the aim, rather, is to construct a framework within which the paradoxical element—the symptom's strange formal appearance—acquires meaning *retroactively*. As Žižek explains: "symptoms are meaningless traces, their meaning is not discovered, excavated from the hidden depth of the past, but constructed retroactively—the analysis produces the truth; that is, the signifying frame which gives the symptoms their symbolic place and meaning" (Žižek, 2008, p. 58). This, he concludes, is why "the measure of the success of the symptom's interpretation is precisely its dissolution" (Žižek, 2008, p. 16). Such a radically formalist approach is ultimately what is at stake in a revised Lacanian reading of Duchamp *through* Žižek. Only by disengaging from content and concentrating on specific formal features—by considering the inconsistencies which block a clear reading as facts in need of interpretation—can we hope to adopt the position Duchamp himself outlines through reference to Eliot: an approach that is free of prejudice, one that considers nothing beyond the evidence at hand and seeks to do no more than take the artist—the man—at his word.

Fountain therefore proves to be the key element in drawing out the overlap between art history and psychoanalysis. We have seen that the work is symptomatic in the sense that it confronts us with a seemingly impossible choice, a deadlock between two contradictory poles that is sustained by the question it provokes ("Is this art?"). As such, it marks the threshold where psychoanalytic and art historical practice meet, a moment of "short-circuit" where the wires between the two separate disciplines become intrinsically crossed. The crucial point is this: rather than using psychoanalytic *theory* to explain the meaning of *Fountain* (that is, by systematically applying specific concepts to Duchamp's work), *Fountain* should be taken as a tool for introducing the psychoanalytic *method* into art history, a way of using the symptomatic procedure to bolster the

empirical precision of art historical practice. Paradoxically, art history undergoes a revolutionary transformation when, rehabilitated to its conceptual foundations, its critical powers become re-actualized.[1]

But how do we connect these wires, fuse them together? What, as Žižek puts it, is "the new unexpected shape" that emerges when two distinct disciplines "simultaneously redeem themselves, shedding their old skins" (Žižek, 2008, p. viii). If, by re-interrogating *Fountain*, the art historian finds himself engaging in the work of the analyst, then by reopening "The Richard Mutt Case," by re-examining the evidence and calling the verdict into question, he also adopts the *investigative approach of the detective*. This is highly significant given that, according to Žižek, there is a fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of the detective and that of the psychoanalyst. Is it possible, then, that in the detective method the sparks of the short-circuit between art history and psychoanalysis ignite and give shape to a new interpretative model?

In *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Žižek explains that, like the psychoanalyst's approach to the dream, the detective perceives the crime scene as a type of false image, a staged scene which the criminal has constructed to hide his own actions. In other words, the crime scene is artificially composed with the specific aim of concealing the traumatic event in question—the crime—by offering what appears to be an obvious explanation, a direct interpretation. As with the analysis of the dream and the symptom, the detective's first step is to disengage from a direct investment in the scene's meaning: he dismisses the most obvious reading as a "lure," a deception which the criminal has constructed to divert attention from the true nature of the crime. To perform this operation, the detective relies heavily on the naivety of his "sidekick": it is he who, by immediately accepting the simplest explanation, allows the detective to see the trap set by the criminal, the luring mechanism obscuring the truth. In his fascination with what appears to be significant, the sidekick (the archetypal case being Sherlock Holmes's partner Dr. Watson) directs the detective towards the false reading and the construction which sustains it. As Žižek writes, the "the false solution toward which we are enticed" draws attention to the "convincing" character of the "staged scene" thus foregrounding the artificial nature of this very scene (Žižek, 1992, pp. 35–36).

From here, the detective gathers the evidence that establishes the link between the artificial crime scene and the crime it obscures. To do so he engages in the same interpretative move performed by the psychoanalyst: limiting his powers of observation to a focus on purely formal features, he isolates peculiar details that reveal the handiwork of the criminal. As with the symp-

tom, these details present themselves as inconsistencies or contradictions blocking the obvious reading, strange, unusual phenomena that, by appearing inconsequential, are often overlooked and dismissed. However, for the detective, such distortions are meaningful in themselves since, by pointing towards the actions of the criminal, they offer important clues in solving the crime. This is why the detective always looks for what, to the everyday eye often goes unnoticed (the cusp of a sleeve, a thumbnail, a bootlace), a small, apparently insignificant element in the natural scene that renders this scene *unnatural*. As is the case with the psychoanalyst, these "curious" features allow the detective to see how the false scene has been organized, how it was composed by the criminal as a means of concealing the crime.

The last step in the detective method mirrors the final stage of the psychoanalytic procedure: the reconstruction of a symbolic framework in which all the "clues" make sense, a linear narrative where the causal relations between events (motive—criminal—crime—lure) become clear. The final actions of the detective are thus structurally homologous to those of the psychoanalyst: he retraces the logical chain in which the details of the crime are given their precise place and location. Just as the symptom only ever acquires its true symbolic weight *retroactively*, so too the features that initially appeared strange or insignificant become meaningful only after the fact. This is why the detective's investigation is complete *not* when the criminal is identified but when the detective, having gathered all the necessary information allowing him to reconfigure a new narrative, finally tells the "real story" of what actually happened (Žižek, 1992, p. 32). The same is true of the current investigation into *Fountain*: if we are to tell the "real story" of "The Richard Mutt Case" then we must begin by identifying the all-important clues, the curious features that have for too long been ignored, the contradictions that have all too easily been dismissed as insignificant. In short, we must locate the inconsistencies in the obvious reading, the formal facts that reveal a "crime" being committed.

Notes

1. As will become obvious in the second half of this book—that is to say, Parts III and IV, chapters 6 to 13—the psychoanalytic aspect resides not in a rigorously applied theoretical apparatus but in the very approach adopted, in the formal steps being taken. If conceptual categories are applied it is only in a "parallax" manner: as a retroactive commentary which, by placing Duchamp, Žižek and Lacan side by side, asks the reader to question the broader stakes of the relation, the gap between the two levels at play.

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CHAPTER 5

The Facts and Curious Features of the Case

Abstract The newly developed psychoanalytical approach to art historical investigation is used to interpret Duchamp's *Fountain*. This involves a fundamental shift in perspective whereby the gaps in our knowledge of the work are seen to indicate the strategic logic underpinning Duchamp's actions and output: a conscious effort to both engage in and disengage from the workings of the aesthetic field in order to avoid its debilitating effects while exposing its internal dynamics. To identify this strategy, the author retraces *Fountain*'s reception, focusing on how a repeated inconsistency connects the dominant and most influential responses to the work into a single thread. What becomes apparent is that, at different levels of the aesthetic field, Duchamp was both controlling and exposing the logic of his own work's reception.

Keywords Re-reading the readymade • *Fountain*—history, aesthetics, context • Duchamp's strategy • *Fountain*—art or anti-art? • The "real story" of *Fountain* • Duchamp's false friends: Schwarz, Lebel, Breton, Apollinaire, Stieglitz

Let us begin, now, to re-interrogate *Fountain* using an art historical approach turned symptomatic; that is to say, by re-investigating "The Richard Mutt Case" using the observation skills of a detective. The first step is to establish the facts of the case by re-assessing the evidence at

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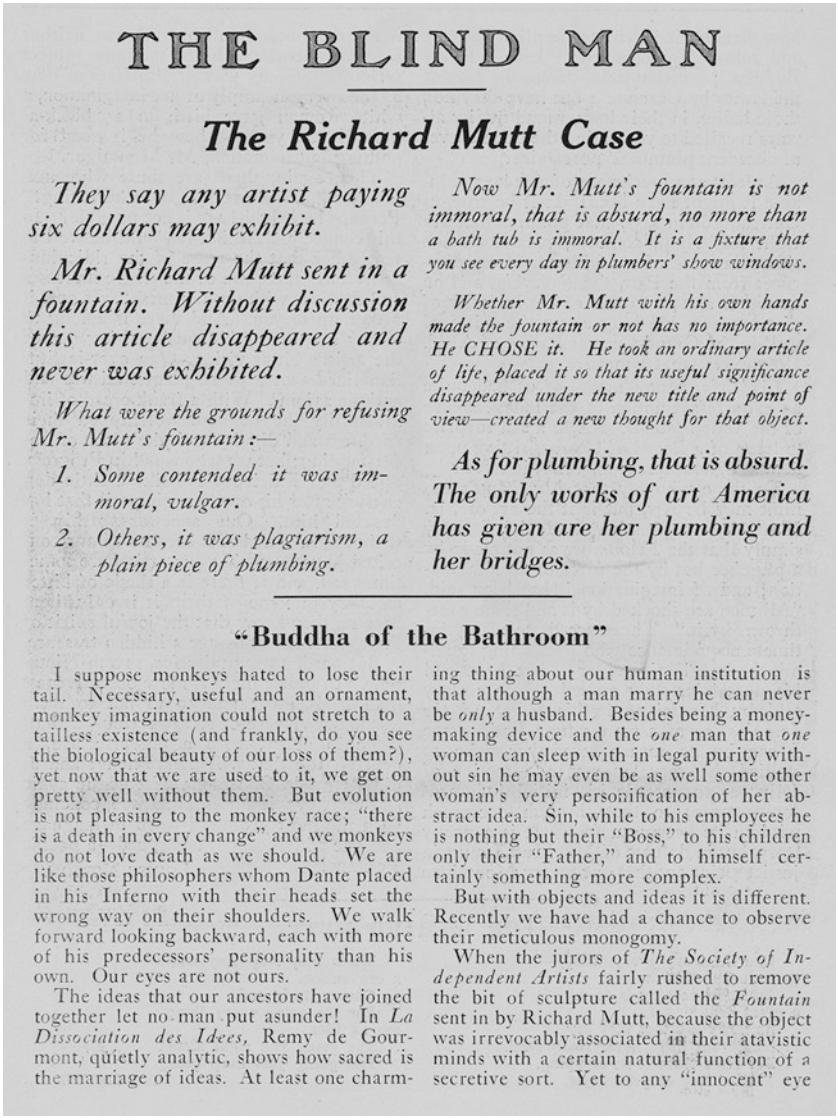
hand; only then, can we identify a new set of clues: those curious features which, by contradicting the accepted verdict, expose the "lure" and point us in the direction of the truth. To begin, let us examine the scene of the crime in more detail. As a member of the American Society of Independent Artists, Duchamp had played an integral part in organizing the group's first major exhibition in April 1917. He stepped down from his position on the hanging committee in protest, however, when the object he had submitted under the pseudonym Richard Mutt was refused on the grounds that it was not "art." Then, a month later, with the help of two friends Louise Norton and Henri-Pierre Roché, he published a photograph of the object in a journal (see Fig. 5.2) called *The Blind Man* alongside a short text entitled "The Richard Mutt Case" (see Fig. 5.1). The text described the event that had taken place and seemed to defend the object on aesthetic grounds; as a result, the original response to *Fountain* ("Is this art?") appeared to acquire a definitive answer: "Yes, this is art," it seemed to say, since by challenging the institutional hold over canons of taste, it broadened the meaning of art to include a conceptual function.

The inconsistency in this reading, as we have seen, is that the verdict itself is inconclusive: given the work's paradoxical status as both a gesture of anti-art and an object of conceptual art, the question "Is this art?" persists. But what if that which appears significant is, in reality, a "lure," a deception designed to distract us from the truth? In other words, what if the question "Is this art?" is *the wrong one to ask*? As with the dream and the symptom, by immediately accepting the obvious interpretation are we not ignoring the crucial importance of form through an over-investment in/excessive fascination with content? Instead of seeking an answer to the question "Is this art?" we should take the question itself as a fact in need of interpretation, a clue pointing towards other forces at work. For "The Richard Mutt Case" to be solved, the peculiar details preventing a clear reading, the inconsistencies, contradictions and gaps in our knowledge of *Fountain* should be viewed not as insignificant obstacles but highly significant facts. But what, precisely, do these clues reveal? What new picture appears when we look at the distortions from a different standpoint?

To answer this question, it is necessary to retrace the evidence and follow the trail of clues wherever they may lead. It has been argued that the verdict on *Fountain* we cling to today has been all too easily accepted, given the overwhelming body of evidence which contradicts it. What ultimately consolidated this verdict was a series of one-man shows dedicated to Duchamp after his death, large-scale exhibitions that ultimately laid the



THE BLIND MAN

The Richard Mutt Case

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:—

1. *Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.*
2. *Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.*

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.

"Buddha of the Bathroom"

I suppose monkeys hated to lose their tail. Necessary, useful and an ornament, monkey imagination could not stretch to a tailless existence (and frankly, do you see the biological beauty of our loss of them?), yet now that we are used to it, we get on pretty well without them. But evolution is not pleasing to the monkey race; "there is a death in every change" and we monkeys do not love death as we should. We are like those philosophers whom Dante placed in his Inferno with their heads set the wrong way on their shoulders. We walk forward looking backward, each with more of his predecessors' personality than his own. Our eyes are not ours.

The ideas that our ancestors have joined together let no man put asunder! In *La Dissociation des Idees,* Remy de Gourmont, quietly analytic, shows how sacred is the marriage of ideas. At least one charming thing about our human institution is that although a man marry he can never be *only* a husband. Besides being a money-making device and the *one* man that *one* woman can sleep with in legal purity without sin he may even be as well some other woman's very personification of her abstract idea. Sin, while to his employees he is nothing but their "Boss," to his children only their "Father," and to himself certainly something more complex.

But with objects and ideas it is different. Recently we have had a chance to observe their meticulous monogomy.

When the jurors of *The Society of Independent Artists* fairly rushed to remove the bit of sculpture called the *Fountain* sent in by Richard Mutt, because the object was irrevocably associated in their atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort. Yet to any "innocent" eye

Fig. 5.1 Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," *The Blind Man*, No. 2 (1917). Source: Published by Beatrice Wood. *The Blind Man* (No. 2). May 1917. Periodical with paper covers. Sheet (each): 11 × 8 inches (27.9 × 20.3 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950-134-1053. Copyright: © Man Ray Trust, ADAGP Paris/IVARO Dublin, 2017

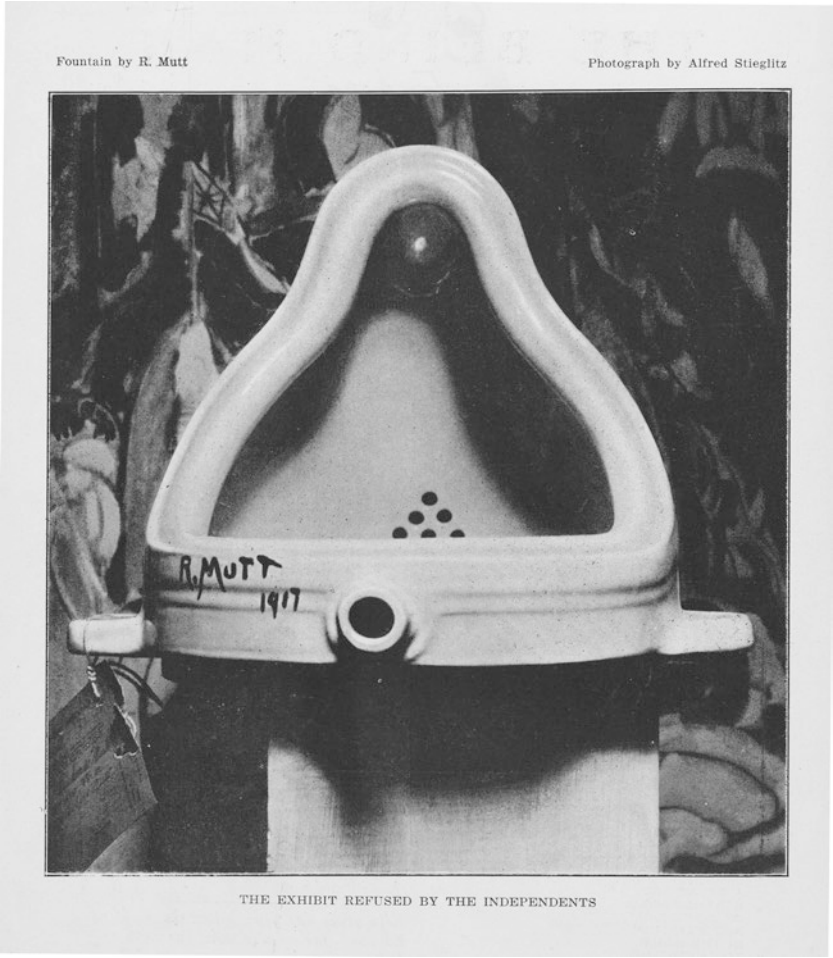


Fig. 5.2 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, *The Blind Man*, No. 2 (1917). Source: Published by Beatrice Wood. *The Blind Man* (No. 2). May 1917. Periodical with paper covers. Sheet (each): 11 × 8 inches (27.9 × 20.3 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950-134-1053. Copyright: © Succession Marcel Duchamp, ADAGP Paris/IVARO Dublin, 2017

ground for an art historical recognition of *Fountain*.[1] Unlike the retrospectives held during Duchamp's lifetime (the 1966 show at the Tate, the 1963 retrospective in Pasadena), which primarily served to secure his reputation

among a new generation of artists, these posthumous exhibitions helped validate the broader significance of his oeuvre. In effect, they confirmed *Fountain*'s status as conceptual art and Duchamp's role as paternal figure. The source of this reading, de Duve informs us, is a short essay by Joseph Kosuth entitled *Art after Philosophy* (Kosuth, 1969) that appeared one year after Duchamp's death (de Duve, 1996, p. 95). Kosuth's official endorsement coincided with the rapid expansion of Duchamp's reputation and influence in the 1970s when, as *his work* became more widely disseminated, *his name* began to acquire a certain aesthetic significance. Of course, Duchamp had already enjoyed celebrity-like status in his own lifetime with those in the emerging 1960s American art scene regarding him reverentially as an almost legendary figure. Although this 'fanbase' was relatively small—likened to a "secret society" of enthusiasts who "hovered around" him (Franklin, 2016, p. 49)—it was enough to support the cult following that would quickly develop after his death.

The important point to bear in mind, Camfield reminds us, is that the current understanding of *Fountain* is rooted in the concerns of the 1960s and 70s art world. Indeed, before Kosuth's interpretation took hold, it was first and foremost the anti-retinal reading which "dominated" critical opinion (Camfield, 1989, p. 86). In other words, before it was celebrated as an object of conceptual art after Duchamp's death, *Fountain* was primarily viewed, during his lifetime, as a gesture of "anti-art." The validity of Kosuth's verdict is thus wholly undermined by the critical atmosphere of the time. What is even more curious, however, is the fact that the anti-art interpretation of the 1960s has no basis in the work's original reception. As Camfield notes, none of the main protagonists, neither Duchamp nor his friends, ever said anything about anti-art. The reading emerged due to a sudden revival of interest in *Fountain* after a period of fifty years. The reality is that, following its appearance in 1917, the work was completely ignored. All evidence of its existence had vanished: since the object itself had disappeared it was never exhibited again. No references to it were made by anyone associated with the initial event. In fact, thirty years had passed before any commentary on the work or reproduction of the original photograph was published (Camfield, 1989, p. 86).[2] This is why, for Camfield, *Fountain*'s critical reception in the 1960s is "a phenomenon that merits a study of its own." It has not yet been explained why, after an "astonishing silence had descended upon *Fountain*," a discussion of "The Richard Mutt Case" and the issues it raised "reappeared with a vengeance" (Camfield, 1989, p. 86). If Kosuth's essay allows us to understand the "sudden pertinence" of *Fountain* for the

advent of conceptual art (de Duve, 1996, p. 95), then how are we to explain the sudden interest in *Fountain* during the 1960s?

One obvious factor is Duchamp's self-imposed retreat from the art world. This began in 1912 after his painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* was refused entry to the Salon des Independants by his friends (and brothers) in the emerging "Puteaux" group of Cubist painters. After a three-month exile in Munich he returned to Paris to work in a library where, having given up painting, he began research into the *Large Glass*, a project to which he would dedicate the following ten years of his life. His isolation from the art world intensified when, in 1923, he suddenly decided to stop work on the *Glass*, leaving it "definitively unfinished." Declaring that he had given up on art completely, he pursued a career as a professional chess player. This active retreat from the art world would be maintained for the rest of his life, broken only by occasional interventions.

While this sustained exile might account for the lack of critical interest in his work, it does not, de Duve argues, explain the delay between *Fountain*'s appearance and its art historical reception (de Duve, 1996, p. 95). In truth, what brought *Fountain* back into the limelight was Duchamp's strange decision in 1957 to allow copies of the work to be exhibited in a small gallery in Milan. Such a gesture was seen to confirm Duchamp's long established anti-retinal stance: the act of reproduction seemed to underline the fact that *Fountain* was *not art*, that the subversive nature of the gesture was more important than the inherent qualities of the object (Tomkins, 1996, p. 426). The problem is that this reading runs counter to Duchamp's own claim that the replicas of *Fountain* were produced for specific financial gain. At Duchamp's request, Arturo Schwarz, the owner of the gallery in question, reproduced several limited "editions" of *Fountain* to be sold for profit. Although Duchamp had authorized previous reproductions of other *ready-mades*, this was the first time he had sought to make money from his work. Such blatantly commercial activity understandably shocked Duchamp's acquaintances since it flew in the face of his apparent anti-retinal stance, his disdain for the workings of the art market.[3]

These actions appear all the more contradictory when we consider that Schwarz was very much a figure of the art market. Before opening his Milan gallery, he worked as an art dealer and ran a small bookstore specializing in Chest and Surrealist merchandise. Duchamp's incongruous behavior is conveniently overlooked, however, when it is viewed *not* in terms of aesthetic indifference but as evidence of *aesthetic intention*; that is to say, his collaboration with Schwarz was suddenly understood as affirmation of

a conceptual stance: the reproduction was now seen to assert *Fountain*'s status as "art" since it underlined the fact that the idea expressed is more important than the object. Facilitating this shift from an anti-art to a conceptual standpoint is the insistence that Duchamp's collaboration with Schwarz was personal, and not professional, in nature. And yet, there is no getting away from the fact that the relationship between the two men was highly unusual. Why did Duchamp, deemed to be an elusive figure even by his close acquaintances, suddenly decide to strike up a friendship with a stranger? There is no way of fully escaping the dilemma: *Fountain* is declared an object of conceptual art by virtue of the fact that it is a work of anti-art, a reading fundamentally undermined by Duchamp's activity. To further complicate matters, the very fact that the replicas undermine the status of the original completely undoes all claims to authenticity supporting an aesthetic defense of *Fountain*. We arrive here at a more nuanced understanding of the question confronted at the outset: in reproducing *Fountain* is Duchamp proclaiming it a work of conceptual art or a work of anti-art? How could *Fountain* be both a manufactured object raised to the status of art and, as the artist himself insists, "a form of denying the possibility of defining art"? And if, indeed, this was his intention then why reproduce *Fountain* for the art market, thereby validating its status as art (Tomkins, 1996, p. 405)?

Taking stock of the facts, we see that all the important clues, the peculiar details at the root of the question "Is this art?" point us in a clear direction: they highlight the curious nature of Duchamp's actions. If we look closely, we see that Duchamp's involvement with Schwarz was actually not as unusual as it appears; on the contrary, it was consistent with previous behavior. One should not forget that Duchamp's decision to cease work on the *Large Glass* in 1923 was immediately followed by a sustained involvement in the commercial and institutional aspects of the art world that continued until his death. The contradictions here intensify: he gives up making art only to then begin a career as an art dealer; he explicitly criticizes the role of the museum only to become more engaged in its institutional workings, curating numerous Surrealist shows and overseeing the final installation of his collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. He also worked closely with central figures in the art world such as Katherine Dreier, a member of the Independents establishment he had so publicly embarrassed with *Fountain*. As was the case with Schwarz, Duchamp's close collaboration with Dreier initially confounded those around him before it was widely accepted as a genuine friendship.[4]

However, as with Schwarz, the notion of friendship does not hold up when we consider Duchamp's actions after Dreier's death. Having been placed in charge of her collection, he claimed—untruthfully—that she had authorized him to release the *Large Glass* to the Arensberg collection about to be installed in Philadelphia. The reality is that no such conversation took place. What this tiny detail indicates is that Duchamp's seemingly unorthodox behavior may have been guided by a strategic intention. In what first appears contradictory—a willingness to insert himself at every level of the art world all the while retaining a guarded, reticent distance—a consistent pattern begins to appear: one of involvement and disassociation, collaboration and detachment, active engagement in the dynamics of the aesthetic field coupled with a conscious disengagement form its effects.

When we follow the trail of evidence left in the wake of "The Richard Mutt Case" we begin to notice this pattern repeat itself elsewhere. Before replicas of *Fountain* were displayed in Gallery Schwarz the work had already acquired a substantial degree of notoriety due primarily to the appearance in 1957 of the first complete monograph on Duchamp, Robert Lebel's *Sur Marcel Duchamp*. Lebel's publication is today recognized as a seminal text in Duchamp scholarship. As the first to assess his output as a whole, Lebel was responsible for rendering Duchamp's complex artwork more accessible to a wider public in Europe and the United States, thereby bringing Duchamp to the attention of younger artists. In doing so, Lebel broadened the particular significance of *Fountain* as the basis for a more general art historical appreciation of the *readymade*:

> He did not select a bicycle wheel as a beautiful modern object, as a Futurist might; he chose it just because it was *commonplace*. It was nothing but a wheel, like a hundred thousand others, and in fact if it were lost it could soon be replaced by identical 'replicas'. For the moment, resting upside down on a kitchen stool as a pedestal, it enjoyed an unexpected and derisive prestige which depended entirely upon the act of choosing by which it was selected. It was a kind of sacralization. Nevertheless, it is clear that Duchamp intends to provoke us. He protests against what he considers the excessive importance attached to some works of art and offers us instead the totally arbitrary value of an article of daily use […] essentially the ready-made challenges our ideas of value. But is the intention to reduce everything to the same level of complete equality? Certainly not, for even it depends upon a choice which is the source of its very existence. (Lebel, 1959, p. 35)

It is hard to ignore how, in assessing the *readymade* though the lens of *Fountain*, Lebel becomes locked between two opposing poles. First, he describes the *readymade* as an anti-art gesture: a "commonplace object" that can be easily replicated since its primary function is to provoke, to challenge the "excessive importance" given to works of art. Then, in the same breath, he defines it as a work of conceptual art: an object that itself enjoys a certain importance and prestige due to "the act of choosing by which it was selected." Lebel's reading is thus penetrated by a fundamental contradiction. Like Schwarz's replicas, his contribution is wholly undermined by an inconsistent response to the question "Is this art?" This did not, however, prevent Lebel's text from being taken as the authoritative source for subsequent interpretations of Duchamp's work. The reason for this is twofold: Lebel was the first to establish, upon precarious foundations it has to be said, an important art historical connection between Duchamp's supposedly anti-art stance and his "Chest" intentions. "His position," Lebel writes, "as precursor is proven by the *ready-mades* whose proto-Chest character is universally acknowledged" (Lebel, 1959, p. 40). Furthermore, Lebel was the first to fully articulate how Duchamp's conceptual stance opens up new pathways in art: "No other [artist] has so successfully put in circulation objects and ideas which have become almost anonymous because they seem so patent" (Lebel, 1959, p. 35).

It is essential, then, that one does not allow the apparent significance of Lebel's reading to obfuscate the inherent inconsistency in his position. To resist such a temptation is to recognize that the roots of the contradiction in question reside, once again, in Duchamp's behavior, his curious game of active disengagement/passive engagement. One should bear in mind that, as with the reproductions of *Fountain*, Duchamp himself effectively authorized Lebel's project; the work evolved through a close collaboration between Lebel and Duchamp, to the extent that the finished publication is often considered part of Duchamp's own artwork. The correspondence between the two men began in the early 1940s and Lebel recalls that, by 1944, he was "seeing Duchamp nearly every day." These regular meetings led to "a kind of rapport" developing and, as their friendship deepened, Lebel began showing an increased scholarly interest in Duchamp's output (Lebel in Franklin, 2016, p. 36). Following early attempts to address Duchamp's legacy in different articles, the idea for a book took shape in 1949 which would see Duchamp and Lebel, work side by side for almost a decade. As well as answering all Lebel's queries, Duchamp "contributed ideas and recommendations to nearly every aspect of the endeavor, especially its technical facets": he designed

the layout of the book, approved the selection and arrangement of the illustrations, convinced Lebel to include extra texts at the end of the volume, and even put Lebel in contact with the eventual publisher (Franklin, 2016, pp. 40–41).

As was the case with Schwarz, however, Duchamp's collaboration with Lebel appears highly unusual, given that it once again contradicts his supposed anti-retinal stance. Like Schwarz, Lebel was very much a figure of the art world from which Duchamp had voluntarily retreated: after studying art history in the Louvre School, he developed a keen interest in modern art that led to him becoming a collector; during the early 1920s, while building his personal collection, he began to hone his skills as a connoisseur; in 1929 he officially registered as an art dealer and pursued a career offering expert opinion on old master paintings; during the late 1930s, he supplemented his work as an art expert by writing criticism and organizing exhibitions. It was in the summer of 1936, during a trip to New York, that he met Marcel Duchamp for the first time (Franklin, 2016, pp. 25–32).

These apparently minor details are once again given short shrift when Duchamp and Lebel's relationship is understood as having been one of close friendship. Such a reading is convenient because it allows Duchamp's involvement in Lebel's project to be presented as a conceptual gesture, an active willingness to make his ideas more accessible. But, again, this apparent "friendship" with Lebel should not be taken at face value. Lebel himself admits that he never felt close to Duchamp, that there existed a "mutual reticence" between the two men: "I do not think my relationship with Duchamp was that intimate […] We were very good friends, but we never said 'tu' to each other, we never talked about our respective lives" (Lebel in Franklin, 2016, p. 49).[5] This sense of holding back, this active detachment on the part of Duchamp, permeated their collaboration on the book project. Despite being proposed in 1949, Lebel's work took ten years to come to fruition, a strange delay that was a direct result of Duchamp's seemingly erratic behavior. Despite having met in 1936, the two men did not become close until the 1940s because, up until this point, Duchamp remained "elusive" (Franklin, 2016, p. 33). Then, just as the idea for a book took hold, the initiative became immediately "incubated" because Duchamp's "infrequent appearances" broke the established dialogue (Franklin, 2016, pp. 39–40).[6] Duchamp's sudden decision to become involved again in 1953 saw him exert more control over the project, "urging" and coaxing Lebel to make certain changes. This was

then followed by another curious cooling off period as proceedings became stalled by "repeated delays" and unnecessary logistical hurdles, chief among them being Duchamp's insistence that the English translation be entirely re-written (Franklin, 2016, pp. 40–43).

What we recognize here is an underlying pattern to Duchamp's apparently contradictory behavior: a curious game of disengagement and intervention, an active retreat from and direct involvement in the art world. One comes to a clearer understanding of Duchamp's strategy by following the thread of clues; that is, by continuing to trace the question "Is this art?" back through the history of *Fountain*'s reception. The source of Lebel's verdict is a remark made by André Breton in 1938 that is roundly accepted as the first clear description of the *readymade*'s conceptual significance: it is, Breton writes, "an ordinary object promoted to the dignity of an art object simply by way of the artist's choice" (Breton, 1938 in de Duve, 1996, p. 93).The fact that Lebel was influenced by Breton is not at all surprising. After reading Breton's 1924 manifesto he developed a "deep affinity" with Surrealism and began actively participating in the group. A close bond with Breton then developed, with Lebel describing the friendship, in marked contrast to his relationship with Duchamp, as the "most enriching" of his life (Lebel in Franklin, 2016, p. 29). It was perhaps inevitable, then, that Lebel's engagement with and understanding of Duchamp's work would be guided by Breton. "From my adolescence," he explains, "Marcel Duchamp intrigued me, first through what André Breton said and wrote about him" (2016, p. 23).

Just as Schwarz and Lebel's contributions to the reception of *Fountain* gain credibility in light of Duchamp's involvement, so too the validity of Breton's verdict is founded on his close relationship with Duchamp. Indeed, the fact that Duchamp's isolation from the art world could never be said to take the form of a definitive retreat owes much to the consistency of his collaboration with Breton and the Surrealist group. It was an intervention that, once again, did much to undermine Duchamp's so-called iconoclastic tendencies. After having declared that he would never again take part in groups, Duchamp suddenly began curating Surrealist exhibitions and designing catalogues. When this is put to him by Cabanne—"*Still, there's a 'retinal' part of Surrealism. Didn't that bother you?*"—Duchamp responds with what, at first glance, appears to be a defense of his conceptual stance: "No, because you have to know how to use it. With them, the ultimate intention is beyond that, especially in the

fantastic things—*it's more conceptual than visual*—Exactly." However, Duchamp immediately qualifies this remark with a statement that contradicts the obvious conceptual reading: "Please note that there doesn't have to be a lot of the conceptual for me to like something. What I don't like is the completely nonconceptual, which is purely retinal; that irritates me" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 77). What makes his involvement with Surrealism even more perplexing are the similarities between the group and the Puteaux Cubists whose refusal of *Nude Descending a Staircase* had first provoked Duchamp's anti-retinal stance. Indeed, Duchamp's scathing critique of the Puteaux painters might easily be understood as a reference to Breton's strict dogmatic hold over Surrealism: "monkeys following the motions of the leader without comprehension of their significance," he declares. "Their favorite word is discipline. It means everything to them and nothing" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, p. 152). Further confusion arises when we consider the ambiguous nature of Duchamp's "friendship" with Breton. When asked "who have your best friends been?" Duchamp responds:

> Obviously, Francis Picabia, who was a teammate, so to speak. Pierre de Massot is nice, and Breton is very nice, too; only he can't be approached. He's playing the great man too much, completely clouded by the idea of posterity […] I haven't been to see him. It's come to the point where I don't dare telephone him anymore, it's ridiculous […] I don't have anything special to tell Breton. So it would be a visit out of politeness and friendship […] that's all there is to it. It's a somewhat difficult sort of friendship, you see what I mean? We don't play chess together, you understand? (Duchamp, 1979, p. 101)

Note how Duchamp differentiates between Picabia—who is a "teammate"—and Breton—with whom he does not "play chess." Unlike Picabia, Breton is described along the same lines as Pierre de Massot (both are "nice"), an art critic to whom Duchamp was not necessarily close. There would therefore appear to have been a certain distance between Duchamp and Breton that did not exist with Picabia. One might infer from this that Duchamp's relationship with Breton was more professional than it was personal. Such an obvious sense of detachment is confirmed by Duchamp's self-consciously elusive position within the Surrealist group: although involved in their activities he always actively avoided full inclusion. Again, a consistent pattern reveals itself, a game of involvement in/exclusion from the workings of the art world which, on this occasion, was aimed not at the dealer (Schwarz) or the critic (Lebel) but *the artist* (Breton).

Duchamp's strategy becomes more obvious when we trace Breton's statement on *Fountain* to its origin in the first known critical appraisal of the work: Guillaume Apollinaire's 1918 text "Le Cas de Richard Mutt." Apollinaire was the first to outline the aesthetic importance of *Fountain* by insisting on its provocative nature, how it exposed the absurdity of the Independents' position: "Le point de vue de la Society of Independent Artists est évidement absurde, car il part du point de vue insoutenable que l'art ne peut ennoblir un objet ["The point of view of the Society of Independents is clearly absurd, because it is based on the unsustainable position that art is not capable of ennobling an object"] (Apollinaire, 1994, p. 22; my translation). In a statement that now serves as the definitive reference point for all future readings, Apollinaire then confirms the work's aesthetic status:

> His fountain was not immoral since it was possible every day to see similar ones exhibited in all bathroom and other plumbing stores ... whether or not he modeled the fountain with his own hands was irrelevant, the important thing being the choice he had made. He had taken a standard article from life, and removed his usual meaning under a new title, and from that point of view had given a new and purely aesthetic meaning to this object. (Apollinaire, 1994, p. 22) [7]

Apollinaire's text has been taken as a highly reliable source due, once again, to an apparent act of authorization from Duchamp himself. It was only after the events in New York were communicated directly to Apollinaire—when he was sent a copy of *The Blind Man* along with an accompanying letter—that his critical reaction was provoked.[8] This decision to directly involve Apollinaire in "The Richard Mutt Case" is perplexing since it leaves Duchamp's intentions open to question and radically problematizes the precise status of *Fountain*. If the work was meant as a gesture of anti-art then why seek aesthetic validation? At the very least, his actions indicate a desire to disseminate news of the scandal in his native France, suggesting that Duchamp consciously strove to promote *Fountain*'s status as a work of art. The "anti-art" reading is further disrupted by the fact that, like Lebel, Schwarz, and Breton, Apollinaire was a central figure in the world of avant-garde art. From 1910 he had positioned himself as the "chief spokesperson" for modern art and it was on the basis of his support that the Puteaux group began to gain recognition (Tomkins, 1996, p. 49). The fact remains, Tomkins writes, that the

history of modern art was constructed on the basis of Apollinaire's judgments (Tomkins, 1996, p. 107). Things become all the more confusing when we consider that Duchamp himself was extremely skeptical of the validity of these judgments. When asked to respond to Apollinaire's declaration that he would eventually "reconcile Art and the People," Duchamp's response is as clear as it is cutting:

> I told you: he would say anything. Nothing could have given him the basis for writing such a sentence. Let's say that he sometimes guessed what I was going to do, but "to reconcile Art and the People," what a joke! That's all Apollinaire! At the time, I wasn't very important in the group, so he said to himself, "I have to write a little about him, about his friendship with Picabia." He wrote whatever came to him. It was no doubt poetic, in his opinion, but neither truthful nor exactly analytical. Apollinaire had guts, he saw things, he imagined others which were very good, but that assertion is his not mine. *Especially since, at the time, you hardly bothered with communication with the public*. I couldn't have cared less. (Duchamp, 1979, pp. 37–38)

As is evident from this passage, Duchamp strenuously refused to accept the legitimacy of Apollinaire's verdicts. This raises the obvious question: if he was so averse to the idea of Apollinaire passing judgment on his work, then why did he actively encourage him to react critically to *Fountain*? Why, in other words, did Duchamp allow a copy of *The Blind Man* to end up in Apollinaire's hands? This important question is reduced to an insignificant detail when a familiar explanation is offered: Apollinaire and Duchamp were close acquaintances. Beginning in 1912, the two men (along with Picabia) had spent a great deal of time together at a crucial period in the evolution of Duchamp's thought. It was Apollinaire, Duchamp repeatedly tells us, who accompanied him to Raymond Roussel's *African impression*, the play that was to have dramatic effect on the direction of his work: "This play of his *which I saw with Apollinaire* helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once I could use Roussel as an influence" (Duchamp, 1973a, p. 126; author's emphasis). Given this intellectual proximity, then, it is not at all surprising that Duchamp would send a copy of the *The Blind Man* to his friend in Paris.

It should be remembered, however, that, when it comes to Duchamp, the question of "friendship" is never a clear-cut matter. If he and Apollinaire were indeed close (as close, say, as his "teammate" Picabia), then how do we explain Duchamp's inability to remember their first encounter? Having

always insisted that he saw Roussel's play with Apollinaire, most likely during the second or third week of June 1912, he began, in later years, to insist that he had in fact met Apollinaire at the Salon de la Section d'Or exhibition three months after Roussel's play had closed.[9] In several interviews during the 1950s and 1960s, Duchamp describes with absolute clarity how he received a letter from Apollinaire while in Munich and then met him for the first time when he returned to Paris in October 1912. This is clearly not an innocent mistake since it is a point he continuously emphasizes. In an interview with Vogue in 1963 he explains: "in Munich I received a letter from Apollinaire asking me for a photograph of myself, because he was writing a book on Cubism. He had never met me then; we met for the first time at the show." In private conversation with Tomkins he again draws our attention to the date: "In fact that was where I met Apollinaire. I had never met him before […] Our first meeting was in October" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 473, note 91).

Considering that Duchamp usually displayed a remarkable attention to detail and a strong recollection of specific dates, it is very unusual that he would contradict himself so explicitly when recalling the first encounter with a close friend. This seemingly idiosyncratic detail acquires increased significance when we consider another peculiarity: there is absolutely no mention of Duchamp in Apollinaire's text. This is indeed curious, considering that Apollinaire was, at the time, struggling to articulate a definitive judgment on Duchamp's work, due primarily to the latter's self-imposed distance from Puteaux "Cubism." Any indication of a connection between Duchamp and "The Richard Mutt Case" would therefore not have gone unnoticed by Apollinaire, since it would have confirmed his view that Duchamp was attempting to "unite Art and the People." This detail adds weight to Camfield's claim that Duchamp may not, in fact, have been the one to contact Apollinaire. In a postcard dated May 8, 1917, Apollinaire thanks Pierre Roché—Duchamp's collaborator in producing *The Blind Man*—for receipt of the first issue of the publication (which, curiously, was entitled *The Blindman*) released the day of the show (Camfield, 1989, p. 92). Camfield is probably correct, then, to assume, that Roché also sent the second and final issue in which *Fountain* appeared. If this is the case—and given that Duchamp and Roché worked closely together—it is inconceivable that Duchamp was not aware that Apollinaire was being sent a copy.

What we are confronted with, in essence, is a more explicit example of Duchamp's inconsistent behavior: a conscious engagement with figures in

the art world (in this case, the art critic) that is undermined by an obvious effort to distance himself from such figures. We arrive, then, at the core of the dilemma created by the question "Is this art?" when we ask: how might this specific deadlock become clearly visible as its own solution? How, in precise terms, does the contradiction in Duchamp's actions reveal itself as a recognizable pattern governed by a single intention? To perform the required shift in perspective, we must adhere to the foundational principle of our formalist model, the basic feature of the detective approach. In this instance, there is only one piece of evidence that might conceivably shed light on the issue at hand by confirming the identity of the sender: the letter accompanying the parcel sent to Apollinaire, a letter which, unfortunately (and perhaps conveniently), has been lost. One is therefore left with two possibilities: either Duchamp wrote the letter and concealed his identity, or someone else wrote the letter, with Duchamp's authorization. But what if, by subtracting our fascination with the letter's contents, we focus instead *on its form*, on how the letter is, in itself, a significant fact. Alongside the absence of any reference to Duchamp in the text, the letter's very existence renders a seemingly contradictory intention visible as a definitive *Duchampian* strategy: to inform Apollinaire about the Richard Mutt affair and prompt a critical reaction while keeping his own involvement in the event a secret; to provoke Apollinaire into offering a judgment on *Fountain* while at the same time avoiding the effects of this judgment.

Finally, Duchamp's contradictory yet consistent stance, the repeated pattern of engagement and disengagement, assumes the appearance of a coherent approach with a single objective. To properly understand this strategy, we must trace Apollinaire's verdict to what we know to be its primary source: the publication entitled *The Blind Man* that Apollinaire found inside the parcel, the text entitled "The Richard Mutt Case" that he discovered inside *The Blind Man* (see Fig. 5.1). The fact that Apollinaire (whose English was notably weak) relied heavily on this short passage is clear to see from the structure and contents of his essay. Not only is it composed as an almost mirror image of the text, it also presents itself in the form of a word-for-word transcription. Apollinaire's over-reliance on the text is also evident from the way he mistakenly attributes the title of the essay appearing below the editorial, Louise Norton's "The Buddha of the Bathroom," to the object in the photograph. If anything, such facts serve to reinforce the importance of *The Blind Man* as the foundational source for the received understanding of *Fountain*. Moreover, if the dominant trail

of reception has been followed somewhat speculatively by Apollinaire, Breton, Lebel and Schwarz, having been navigated all too deliberately by Duchamp, then there is no doubting the bedrock which forms this path, an unambiguous statement on the work from the artist himself. As Camfield writes:

> As indicated in the *Blind Man* editorial, the originality of Mutt/*Fountain* involves more than the important act of selection. Duchamp also *transformed* the object by an action that incorporated elements of place, name/title, and point of view [both visual and conceptual]. He removed "an ordinary article of life" from the context in which one normally encounters it—men's room or plumbing shop—and sought to place it in a different context (an art exhibition) with a new title ("*Fountain*") and a new point of view (turned 90° on its back and isolated on a black pedestal) so that its [former] useful significance disappeared and he "created a new thought for that object." (Camfield, 1989, p. 78)

Duchamp went to great efforts, Camfield tells us, to produce "The Richard Mutt Case" as a defense of what happened at the Independents, planning *The Blind Man* publication well in advance of the eventual refusal. Duchamp confirms as much when he states that "in *The Blind Man* it was above all a matter of justifying the '*Fountain*-Urinal'" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 56). Again, the assumption is that he wished to bring the event to the attention of the public, which, if true, constitutes an act of engagement that undermines any claims to aesthetic indifference. Yet, as with the parcel sent to Apollinaire, he also goes to great lengths to remain disengaged by hiding his involvement in *The Blind Man* project. Indeed, to this day, we cannot say with any certainty that Duchamp is the author of the text, even if specific stylistic features reveal the clear mark of his hand.

The obvious reading is further disrupted by the fact that there is nothing in the text that describes the elevation of an everyday object to the status of conceptual art. In fact, there is no obvious reference to a work of art, an art object, or any artistic context whatsoever. The word "art" only appears at the end of the text within the context of plumbing and architecture: "The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges." This peculiar detail indicates, as Camfield notes, that "some objects possess in themselves what is required to qualify as art" (Camfield, 1989, p. 78), thus introducing a fundamental rupture that

completely distorts the message the text is seen to communicate. This obstacle is reinforced by other notable features that have thus far been overlooked. But when pieced together, these curious details form an altogether different picture. For a start, the word "object" only appears once; for the most part the words "fixture," "article" and "fountain" are used. This forces us to acknowledge that "Mr. Mutt's fountain" refers not to a work of art but to "a bath tub" ("it is a fixture you see every day in plumbers' show windows"). Our understanding of the following line is therefore dramatically transformed: "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance." The change in font and exaggerated space between these and the preceding lines should not distract us from the strict connection between each point; indeed, the transition word "whether" clearly indicates that the opening line of the new paragraph continues the idea presented in the last line of the previous paragraph; namely, that "Mr. Mutt's fountain" *is "a bath tub."* The argument being made in the text thus becomes clear: Mr. Mutt's act of production—whether "with his own hands [he] made the fountain"—has "no importance" because of the basic fact that it is no more than "a fixture you see every day in plumbers' show windows." Given that there is no reference to any artistic context, there is no reason why the next line should not be understood as a development of this point: "He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view." Following the logic of the argument, the "choice" in question refers not to any aesthetic elevation but to the object's fundamental status as a "fixture" in a show window.

Understandably, scholars have chosen to overlook these obvious discrepancies in the text in order to cling desperately to the most obvious interpretation. They are justified in doing so, it has to be said, since there remains one last piece of evidence which seemingly cannot be refuted: the photographic reproduction accompanying the text clearly showing an everyday object elevated to the status of art by virtue of its location in an aesthetic context (see Fig. 5.2). As the only "proof that the title *Fountain* once had a referent" (de Duve, 1996, 96) the photograph validates the "conceptual" reading because, as Tomkins argues, it captures and preserves the work's "very real aesthetic qualities" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 185). It is difficult to deny this claim, especially when we acknowledge that Duchamp was, again, heavily involved in the construction of the image. Although the photograph was taken by Alfred Stieglitz, all the important decisions came about as the result of Duchamp's collaboration. It was

Duchamp's idea to approach Stieglitz and when *Fountain* was brought to his 291 gallery the two men were seen to engage in a long discussion (Camfield, 1989, p. 74).

One can only assume that Duchamp had offered guidance to Stieglitz regarding the display of the object, or at the very least, authorized certain decisions. The problem, yet again, is that Duchamp's engagement with Stieglitz does not make sense. Like Apollinaire, Breton, Lebel and Schwarz, Stieglitz was very much a central figure of the art world, a gallery owner who "had done more than anyone else to establish photography as an art" (Camfield, 1989, p. 78). This was an endeavor vehemently opposed by Duchamp, who made his feelings felt when asked by Steiglitz to comment on the question "Can a Photograph Have the Significance of a Work of Art?": "You know exactly how I feel about photography. I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, p. 246).

How do we reconcile Duchamp's insistence that *Fountain* was not art—"please note that I didn't want to make a work of art out of it" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 47)—with the fact that, by collaborating with Stieglitz and having the work photographed, he had allowed it to be "endorsed" as a "fully fledged work of art" (de Duve, 1996, p. 120)? There is no getting away from the fact that the choices taken by Stieglitz when composing the image ultimately contributed to the "aesthetic perception" produced (Camfield, 1989, p. 76). First, his decision to place the object on a pedestal, where it is positioned at eye level, has the effect of creating a smooth harmony of lines, thus establishing the perception of a pleasing, beautiful form (Camfield, 1989, p. 75). It was this simple frontal and curvilinear profile, Camfield argues, that led to important "anthropomorphic associations" (1989, p. 86), suggesting the head and shoulders of a seated Buddha figure. This perception was reinforced by the way Stieglitz chose to locate the object in relation to the surrounding space: he had it intentionally positioned in front of a painting entitled *The Warriors* which "is dominated by a simple, symmetrical form similar to the shape of *Fountain*" (Camfield, 1989, p. 76), a move that further emphasizes the object's symbolic status. Finally, an eyewitness reports that Stieglitz took "great pains with the lighting" (Beatrice Wood in Camfield, 1989, p. 74) so that a shadow fell across the urinal suggesting a veil, thus affirming the object's aesthetic form.

Duchamp's collaboration with Stieglitz appears to suggest a concern for the visual qualities of *Fountain*, thus indicating his intention to have the object perceived as a work of art. For this to be the case, however, the

original effect of the work, the scandal it provoked, would have to be completely neutralized: as a work of art, an object with inherent aesthetic qualities, it can no longer be seen to challenge the institutional status of a work of art, the notion that an object contains inherent aesthetic qualities. Yet, paradoxically, neither can it be "raised" to the level of art without the support of the critical function generated by the scandal. At the root of this deadlock we recognize the Duchampian strategy: despite his involvement with Stieglitz, Duchamp once again maintains a degree of distance, a reluctance to become fully engaged in the process. Although they spoke at length prior to Stieglitz taking the photograph, there is no denying that the decisions governing the composition were those of Stieglitz and not Duchamp, to the extent that there remain, to this day, some "knotty questions" concerning authorship (Camfield, 1989, p. 78).

The knots become more entangled when we consider another important point: if Duchamp had indeed sanctioned Stieglitz's efforts to present the object as a work of art, then why were certain decisions taken that risk disrupting the desired impact? Why go to such lengths to construct an aesthetic "*mise-en-scène*," only to then negate its effects by explicitly foregrounding the object's physical properties? Stiegltiz "took great pains" with the lighting yet he allowed an uneven distribution to plunge the background into darkness, creating "a touch of tension" that disrupts the overall perception (Camfield, 1989, p. 84). Consequently, his intention of bathing the scene in harmonious light is completely undone by the fact that the brightly lit object is cut off from the surrounding space. Despite carefully ensuring that the object's form corresponds to the painting in the background, Stieglitz still allows this painting to become submerged by shadows, to the point that it is almost imperceptible; as a result, *Fountain* appears pushed forward, clearly separated from the scene it is supposed to correspond to. According to Camfield, the shape of *Fountain* "cannot be made to fit onto a standard reproduction of *The Warriors* without distortion, indicating that the camera lens, the urinal and the painting were not aligned in parallel planes when Stieglitz made the photograph" (1989, p. 91). Why go to such efforts to create a correspondence between the object and the painting only to then allow for such an obvious distortion? All of this leads to a final question: why focus on positioning the object in a pleasing manner and then place it so that it takes up the entire picture space? Such a decision ensures that the plumbing features dominate the viewer's field of vision, thereby disrupting the smooth harmony of lines created by the composition. Ultimately, there is no getting away from the fact that this is a urinal *not* a work of art.

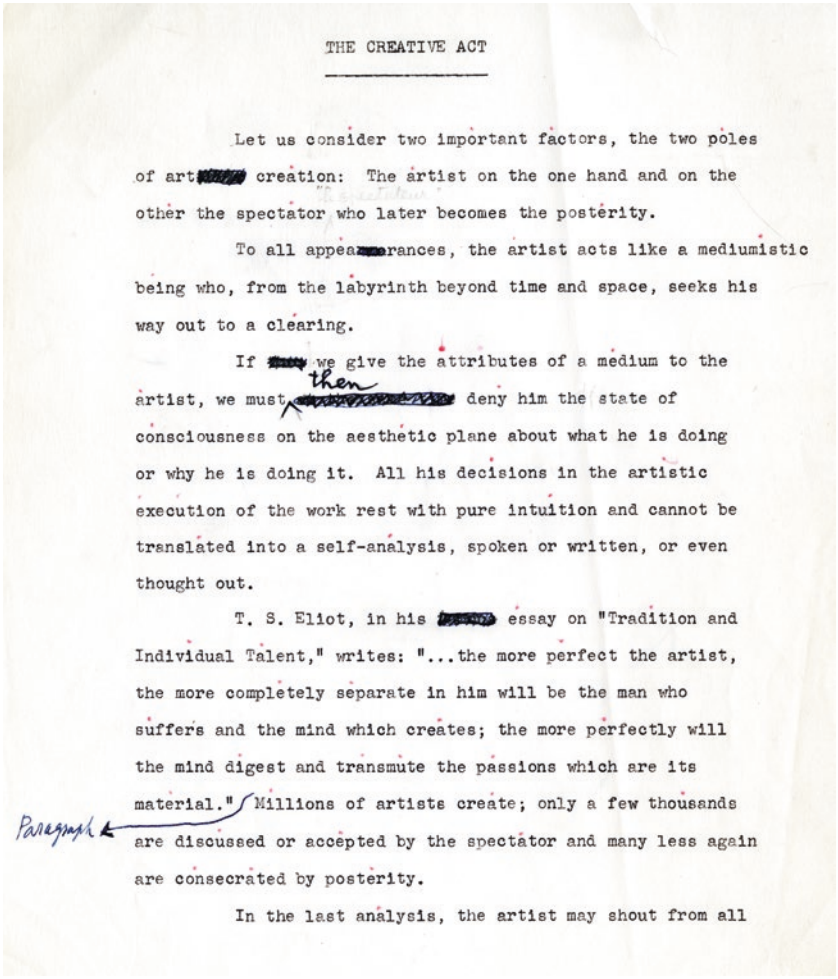
The same familiar pattern thus repeats itself: taken as clues, the inconsistencies which impede our efforts to answer the question "Is this art?" point towards the consistent nature of Duchamp's activity, his strategic game of participation and distance, involvement and disengagement. Tracing the clues to their origin, we recognize that we cannot properly answer the question "Is this art?" because the ultimate primary source—the "this" in question, the original object—no longer exists. Thus, when art historians like de Duve ask rhetorically "who would deny, today, that Duchamp's urinal is art?" (de Duve, 1996, p. 91) there is no empirical basis for either defending or countering such a claim. The essential piece of evidence in "The Richard Mutt Case" has disappeared. Nevertheless, as a clue *the loss of the object* is important in itself because it reaffirms the pattern in Duchamp's behavior: if his indifference to the object's whereabouts suggests an anti-retinal stance, then it also draws our attention to the photograph as the last surviving document, the only proof that *Fountain* actually existed. At this point the precise link between *Fountain*'s paradoxical status and Duchamp's actions and attitude reveals itself: his indifference to the loss of the object indicates that less of an importance is assigned to the original then there was to the effect it produced; at the same time, this indifference places more emphasis on the role of the photograph in preserving the object's elusive status, thus assigning more importance to the original.

In the absence of the object all that remains are the facts surrounding "The Richard Mutt Case," the conditions of the work's submission to and refusal from the Independents exhibition. If, by stepping down from his role on the hanging committee in protest, Duchamp was demonstrating his anti-institutional stance, this stance remains compromised by his involvement in the group in the first place. The Society of Independent Artists, it should not be forgotten, was modeled on the Paris Salon, the very institution that had refused Duchamp's *Nude* in 1912. Albert Gleizes, the leader of the Puteaux group who had demanded that the *Nude* be removed, was also one of the central figures involved in organizing the Independents show. Duchamp's participation thus undermines the critical force of the submission/refusal. Yet, his involvement also contains a degree of distance from the event: by submitting *Fountain* under a pseudonym he was remaining at arm's length, as he would do later with *The Blind Man*, Stieglitz, Apollinaire, Breton, Lebel and Schwarz. Of course, today this tactic is viewed as part of Duchamp's ploy to test the Independents. But if his plan was to expose the hypocrisy of the art institution, why did he

continue to insist that it was a "female friend" who submitted the work, even going so far as to mislead his sister in a letter? If, as Camfield argues, his intention was to embarrass the Independents, then surely there was no need for him to lie to his own sister, especially given that such a move risked sabotaging the overall impact of the work (1989, p. 72)? It made even less sense to keep his involvement a secret from those around him since, in doing so, he ran the risk of jeopardizing his intentions. If his overall plan was to challenge aesthetic conventions then why risk raising questions of authorship that would undo the impact of the original gesture? To this day, some argue that Duchamp was not responsible for *Fountain*, a claim that, if true, would overturn the entire course of twentieth-century art. The worrying issue for art historians is that Duchamp's statements do nothing to refute such an argument; on the contrary, the evidence would appear to support it.

By applying the detective method to "The Richard Mutt Case," we have come to identify a set of clues that reveal an underlying pattern governed by a consistent and rigorous logic: an ongoing strategy of engagement and disengagement with the workings of the art world, an active participation in and retreat from the aesthetic field. This is where a full consideration of the Courbet and Eliot evidence has taken us: approaching the facts without prejudice, we see why the question "Is this art?" is the wrong one to ask. In reality, the curious features preventing us from arriving at an answer—the contradictory anti-art/conceptual art categories—are important in themselves; they draw our attention to the source of the deadlock, the "parallax" gap that precedes the opposition itself: a strategic game which Duchamp plays on several different levels of the aesthetic apparatus: the artist, the onlooker, the critic/spectator, and the dealer, to name but four. With the consistent application of such a strategy, his intention becomes clear: to set the cogs of this apparatus in motion while remaining free of its inevitable impact.

In order to tell the "real story" of *Fountain*, we must now place all the given clues in a linear order and explain their causal relations. We begin by noting how Duchamp's strategy is most explicit in his statements on art. On the one hand, the fact that he actively participates in discussions and interviews on the question of "art" goes against the claim that he has no position on the subject. On the contrary, he is forthright in offering his opinions, never more so than in his 1957 seminar on "The Creative Act" (see Fig. 5.3).[10] In this talk, he intervenes to offer a clear opinion on art, defining it as an active collaboration between artist and spectator: "Let us



THE CREATIVE ACT

Let us consider two important factors, the two poles of art creation: The artist on the one hand and on the other the spectator who later becomes the posterity.

To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.

If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the aesthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out.

T. S. Eliot, in his essay on "Tradition and Individual Talent," writes: "...the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material." Millions of artists create; only a few thousands are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity.

Paragraph

In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all

Fig. 5.3 Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act" (1957). Source: American Federation of Arts convention. "The Creative Act" session. French and English drafts of Duchamp's lecture and preparatory material. Part typescript, part manuscript. 26 pages. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg. Copyright: © Philadelphia Museum of Art Library & Archives

the roof tops that he is a genius. He will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Art History.

I know that this statement will not meet with the approval of many artists who refuse this mediumistic role and insist on the validity of their awareness in the creative act - yet, Art History has consistently decided upon the virtues of a work of art through considerations completely divorced from the rationalized explanations of the artist.

If the artist, as a human being, full of the best intentions toward himself and the whole world, plays no role at all in the judgement of his own work, how can one describe the phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art; in other words, how does this reaction come about?

This phenomenon is comparable to a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of an aesthetic osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as pigment, piano, or marble.

But before we go further, I want to clarify our understanding of the word art - to be sure without any attempt at a definition.

What I have in mind is that art may be bad, good, or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it

Fig. 5.3 continued

art, and bad art is still art in the same way as a bad emotion is still an emotion.

Therefore, when I speak of "art coefficient" in the following explanation, it is to be understood that I never refer to "great art" only, but am trying to describe the subjective mechanism which produces art, "in a raw state" à l'état brut - bad, good, or indifferent.

In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of reactions totally subjective. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the aesthetic plane.

The result of this [redacted] struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the [redacted] artist is not aware of.

Consequently, 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.

To avoid a misunderstanding, we must remember that this art coefficient is a personal expression of art

Fig. 5.3 continued

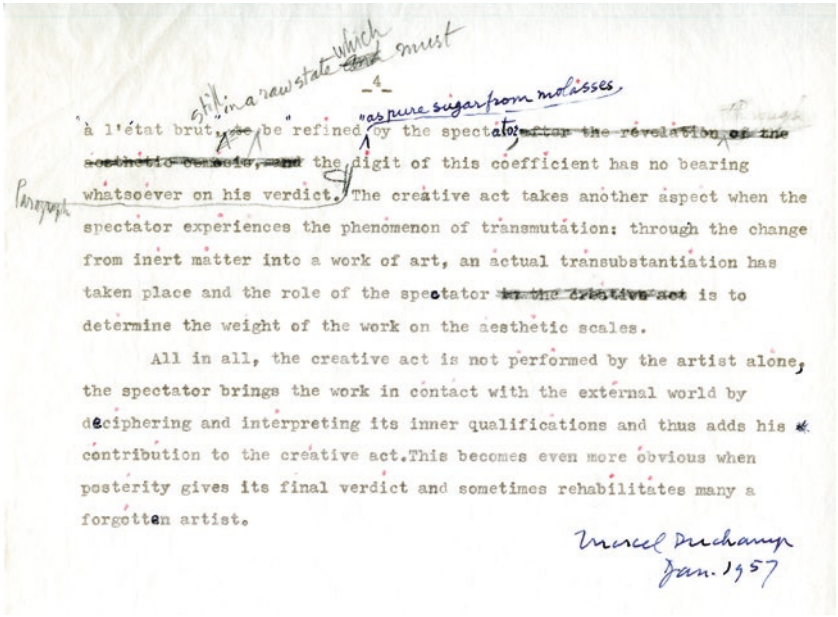


Fig. 5.3 continued

consider two important factors, the two poles of the creation of art: the artist on the one hand, and on the other the spectator who later becomes the posterity" (Duchamp, 1973b, p. 138). However, this engagement contradicts and is, in turn, contradicted by his other explicit statements on the subject. How are we to explain the contents of "The Creative Act" in light of the following, unambiguous remarks:

> I shy away from the word 'creation.' In the ordinary, social meaning of the word—well it's very nice but, fundamentally, I don't believe in the creative function of the artist (1979, p. 16).

> I doubt its value deep down. Man invented art. It wouldn't exist without him. Art has no biological source. It's addressed to a taste […] It is we who have given the name 'art' to religious things; the word itself doesn't exist among primitives. We have created it in thinking about ourselves, about our own satisfaction. We created it for our sole and unique use; it's a little like masturbation. I don't believe in the essential aspect of art (Duchamp, 1979, p. 100).

> I don't believe in art […] Art was a dream that became unnecessary (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, p. 408).

> So the magic part of it—I don't believe in it anymore, I'm afraid I'm an agnostic in art, so to speak. I don't believe in it with all the trimmings, the mystic trimming and the reverence trimming and so forth. As a drug it's very useful to many people. It's a sedative drug […] it's a sedative drug for that life we lead (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 57).

The trail of clues completes itself in the following paradox: Duchamp's statements, as a clear declaration of a position with regard to art, are undone by their own status *as statements on art*. In short, the content of these statements is distorted by their formal status *as statements*. Conversely, the formal fact of making a statement is undermined by its content, the message which such a statement communicates. The only way out of this dilemma is to view this apparent obstacle as a solution, another vital clue that renders Duchamp's consistent pattern of behavior explicit in its purest form and presents a departure point for a linear reading. It is only through a rigorous formal analysis of *Duchamp's statements* that a specifically *Duchampian position* regarding "The Richard Mutt Case" can be elaborated as an act of interpretation-investigation that locates the series of clues in a new framework and allows the unusual pattern to become readable as a new image. If the question "Is this art?" is the wrong one to ask, if the work of art is to be conceived of as a "lure," then Duchamp's words and actions expose the mechanism that, in creating the work of art, conceals the true crime.

Notes

1. As Jean-Jacques Lebel notes, the 2014 exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou, *Marcel Duchamp: la peinture, même*, should be added to the list of important one-man shows that helped establish the dominant reception of the work: that is, the 2009 exhibition in the Philadelphia Museum of Art devoted to *Given*; the 2005–2006 show at the Pompidou and the National Gallery in Washington DC; the 1977 retrospective again at the Pompidou, then the Musée National d'Art Moderne, held nearly nine years after the artist's death (Lebel in Franklin, 2016, p. 8).
2. This "astonishing silence" (Camfield, 1989, p. 86) echoes the initial reaction to *Étant donnés* and, indeed, today's curious lack of critical engagement with *Fountain*.

3. "Money passed over my head," he explains to Cabanne, "I wasn't the kind of painter who sells" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 57). "I never touched money," he declares elsewhere, "money was always over my head" (Duchamp, 1979, pp. 60–63). "I could have very well accepted ten thousand dollars, but no, I sensed the danger right away" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 106). Cabanne was therefore justified in asking the obvious question: "Wasn't your commercial activity in contradiction to your attitude?" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 74).
4. Duchamp suggests as much when questioned about his contradictory activity: "*The idea of collecting art works for a museum was rather anti-Duchamp. Didn't you feel you were repudiating your own opinions?*—I was doing it for friendship. It wasn't my idea. The fact that I agreed to be a member of a jury which determined what works were chosen didn't involve my opinions at all on the question […] it was more camaraderie than anything else" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 58).
5. Lebel appears particularly perturbed when Duchamp made his feelings clear to a third party: "just what kind of man is that Robert Lebel? I cannot really figure him out." Significantly, the third party in question was none other than Jacques Lacan, Lebel's psychoanalyst at the time: "He did not ask me, but asked Lacan, who repeated it to me. While we were good friends, we somehow held back" (Lebel in Franklin, 2016, p. 48).
6. It was this time, 1947 to be precise, that Duchamp started working in secret on *Étant donnés: 1 ° the waterfall/2° le gaz d'éclairage*. These words (EAU & GAZ À TOUS LES ÉTAGES [WATER & GAS ON ALL FLOORS]) would later appear on the cover of a box containing the grand-deluxe edition of Lebel's book (Franklin, 2016, pp. 40–41).
7. "His fountain was not immoral since one could see it every day exposed in all the bathroom and plumbing show rooms […] the fact that he modeled it with his own hands or not is unimportant, what's important is the choice that he made. He took an article of everyday life and made its normal significance disappear under the new title and, from this point of view, gave a new, purely aesthetic, meaning to this object" (my translation).
8. This fact is brought to our attention by Michael Betancourt in *The Richard Mutt Case: Looking for Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain"*.
9. As Tomkins notes, the play opened at the Femina Theater in Paris in February 1911 before closing after three performances and then being re-staged in 1912 for four weeks.
10. A thorough analysis of this short text (but one, I would argue, that retains the established interpretation) was recently offered by Julian JasonHaladyn (2015).

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PART III

Retracing the Crime: *Fountain* Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors

CHAPTER 6

The Artist

Abstract The "real story" of *Fountain* begins with a discussion of the first element in "The Creative Act": "the artist." According to Duchamp, the artist's struggle to create "art" is, in fundamental human terms, a struggle to realize his identity as "artist," to be recognized as a genius. This subjective process takes place at the basic level of language as an effort to declaratively mark one's position in the aesthetic field. What Duchamp terms the "art coefficient" is thus the gap or distortion in the artist's statement that draws attention to its broader formal conditions. Aware that the logic of the creative act cannot be stopped, Duchamp attempted to expose these conditions by rendering the art coefficient explicit in his own statements of which *Fountain* is the purest form.

Keywords The artistic identity • Art and identity • Art and language • *Fountain* as art coefficient • *Fountain* and the creative act • Duchamp and the creative act analysis • Duchamp and Lacan, the Real

Duchamp's objective in "The Creative Act" is to "consider two important factors, the two poles of the creation of art" (Duchamp, 1973, p. 138). The first of these poles, that of the artist, is defined as follows: "to all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond space and time, seeks his way out to a clearing" (1973,

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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p. 138). The first seven words of this statement ("*to all appearances, the artist acts like…*") suggest that, for Duchamp, the artist's actions do not necessarily reflect the reality of his situation. "If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist," he elaborates, "we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it" (1973, p. 138). Despite appearances, the reality is that the artist's actions are governed by the broader logic of the "esthetic plane," external forces of which he is unaware and which, by assuming a "mediumistic" role, he fails to take into account. Instead, he is guided by purely subjective conditions: "all his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition" (1973, p. 138).[1] It is in terms of this limited subjective viewpoint that Duchamp defines the creative act:

> In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane. (1973, p. 139)

To explain this struggle from intention to realization Duchamp defines the artist in fundamental terms: "as a human being," he writes, he is "full of the best intentions towards himself and the whole world" (1973, p. 139). The word "intention" refers here to the artist's self-identity: the way he sees himself and the way he would like to be seen by others. Duchamp clarifies the precise nature of this self-identity when he notes that "the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius" (1973, p. 138). The artist, in other words, sees himself as a genius and wants to be recognized as such. This is the nature of the "struggle" in question: it is a struggle on the part of the artist to realize his identity. [2] As Duchamp explains:

> There's the psychological aspect, of setting himself on a pedestal. The artist does anything to think that he's going to be part of the Louvre or the Metropolitan. Using art as a stepping ladder. That's another chapter of life, the chapter of ambition. But you have that in business too. You have that everywhere. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 57)[3]

This "psychological aspect" guiding the artist's behavior is the object of Duchamp's analysis: "I am trying to describe the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state—*à l'état brut*" (1973, p. 139). But

before elaborating his point he first addresses a possible misunderstanding of his intentions: "But before we go further, I want to clarify our understanding of the word 'art'—to be sure, without an attempt to [sic] a definition" (1973, p. 139). More than ever, Duchamp should here be taken at his word: by avoiding a definition he is asking us to understand "the word 'art'" as just that: *a word*. In his view, it is the etymological rather than creative function of "art" that is important:

> I shy away from the word "creation." In the ordinary, social meaning of the word—well it's very nice but, fundamentally, I don't believe in the creative function of the artist. He's a man like no other. It's his job to do certain things, but the businessman does certain things also, you understand? On the other hand, the word "art" interests me very much. If it comes from Sanskrit, as I've heard, it signifies "making." (1979, p. 16)

Failure to perform this crucial shift in focus from content to form causes the reader to radically misinterpret what it is Duchamp is trying to do. When the word "art" is assigned a privileged status—when we invest it with aesthetic significance—the meaning of the above sentence is fundamentally altered: a description of "the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state—*à l'état brut*" is (mis-)understood as an effort "to describe the subjective mechanism which produces *art-in-the-raw-state*." What Duchamp describes, in other words, is not the raw state *of art* but the raw state *of the subjective mechanism* which produces art; namely, the artist's struggle to realize his identity by producing art. To define this raw state he uses the term "art coefficient":

> The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of […] Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap which represents 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. (1973, p. 139)[4]

In the artist's struggle for identity, there is a crucial difference between his intention, the way he sees himself, and the realization, the way he makes himself seen to the world.[5] By reducing the artist's activity to the fundamental level of language, Duchamp's makes it clear that this gap—the

"personal expression of art '*à l'état brut*'" (1973, p. 139)—occurs at the level of the statement: the artist may "*shout* from all the rooftops"; his "decisions in the artistic execution of the work" are related to the act "*translation*," a self-analysis that is "*spoken or written*"; the artist insists "on the validity" of his actions by way of "rationalized *explanations*"; he achieves identity as a genius only when "his *declarations* take a social value" (1973, p. 139). In short, the artist might see himself as a genius but it is not until he declares himself as such that this identity acquires symbolic form. Because of this inherent subjective dimension, the statement is always performative: when shouting from all the rooftops the artist always has an audience in mind. And it is because of this declarative dimension that the message expressed is always distorted by the act of expression. This is the precise nature of the art coefficient: the difference between what the artist intends to communicate and what he actually communicates, the gap that exposes the formal conditions of his actions on the aesthetic plane.[6]

What, exactly, are these conditions? Duchamp's aim, as we have seen, is not to define art, to clarify the meaning of the word "art," but, rather, to clarify *our understanding of the word "art,"* the way "art," *as a word*, functions in relation to the way we use it: "What I have in mind is that art may be bad, good or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it art, and bad art is still art in the same way that a bad emotion is still an emotion" (1973, p. 139). When speaking about art, "we"—the community of artists—must always refer to the word "art." Before it is supplemented with an adjective (good, bad, indifferent) that increases its value, the word "art" is essentially *a word*, an empty marker holding the consistency of the aesthetic field together by acting as a point of reference for all those within the field. "There is something about an explosion in the meaning of certain words," Duchamp once said, whereby they come to have "a greater value than their meaning in the dictionary." Elsewhere he notes: "it's very curious because it's one of those words that has no meaning to begin with […] But words are taken and repeated, and after a certain number of repetitions the word takes on an aura of mysticism, of magic" (in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 61–62).

Although at the base level of intuition the artist may think he is acting in a mediumistic way, he remains unaware of what he is doing on the aesthetic plane: reflexively referring to the word "art" in order to performatively mark his position as "artist." [7] This is why the artist's decisions "cannot *be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out*" (1973, p. 139). He cannot verbally account for his own actions, since

to do so would also involve accounting for the statement itself. Even though many artists "refuse the mediumistic role and insist on the validity of their awareness in the creative act," any attempt to translate this awareness into "rationalized explanations" would be incomplete if *it did not include the act of translation as part of the explanation*. For the artist to display "a state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing and why he is doing it," his statement on the subject must reflexively refer to its own declarative, performative dimension. The self-analysis needs to demonstrate the phenomenon under analysis. In short, the logic of the art coefficient must be made visible.

This is achieved when the message communicated, however rational, is shown to be distorted in the act of communication—due to the necessity of marking one's position in the aesthetic field, in relation to the word "art." Before examining how Duchamp performs this complex procedure, it is first worth noting his disdain for the psychological dimension of the artist's activity: "they're such supreme egos. It's disgusting. I've never seen anything worse than an artist as a mind. It's very low, uninteresting as far as the relationship of men is concerned" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 32). This explains his specific citation of Eliot: "'The more perfect the artist the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material'" (Eliot in Duchamp, 1973, p. 138). The "perfect" artist ignores the fundamental human dimension of his activity, the role of the mind or ego in guiding his passions as a "suffering," "mediumistic" being. He is, in essence, a *blind man* unaware of the psychological nature of his *intentions*, the fact that his suffering is ultimately a struggle for identity. Duchamp himself is not driven by the same subjective mechanism because, at the level of his "ideal-ego", he does not *see himself* as an artist: "I was never really interested in looking at myself in an aesthetic mirror" (in Tomkins, 1996, p. 251). As a consequence, he does not feel the same compulsion to achieve an artistic identity: "I don't ascribe to the artist that sort of role […] I have a horror of such considerations." Such an attitude, he insists, "is one of the forms of need, the consequence of a need. That doesn't exist for me" (1979, p. 81).

Because he retains a state of consciousness of what he is doing and why, Duchamp is able to see that the workings of the aesthetic plane cannot be avoided: "you can't stop that," he explains, "because, in brief, it's a product of two poles" (1979, p. 70). He thus appears to have been confronted with a specific dilemma: on the one hand, he

understood the effects of the artist's statement, that any message he communicated would inevitably be distorted by the act of communication and be misunderstood; on the other hand, he was aware that these effects could not be stopped, since the declarative dimension that distorts the message is a fundamental condition of the artist's statement. In response to this dilemma, he developed a two-fold strategy of engaged disengagement, or *disengaged engagement*. First, he continued to *engage* in the activity of an artist: "They oblige you to do specific things. To refuse would be ridiculous […] I accepted because there are practical things in life that one can't stop. I wasn't going to refuse" (1979, p. 71). At the same time, he *disengaged* subjectively by remaining involved performatively. "You're on stage," he explains, "you show off your goods; right then you become an actor […] one accepts everything, while laughing just the same. You don't have to give in too much. You accept to please other people, more than yourself. It's a sort of politeness" (1973, p. 91). He describes this performative engagement, this subjective disengagement, as a "game between 'I' and 'me'":

> I was really trying to invent, instead of merely express myself […] I was never really interested in looking at myself in an aesthetic mirror. My intention was always to get away from myself, though I knew perfectly well that I was using myself. Call it a little game between 'I' and 'me'" (Duchamp in Tomkins 1996, p. 251).

Despite defining himself as "artist" at the level of the statement ("I"), Duchamp never identified himself as such at the level of his self-image or ego ("me"). Instead, he sought to avoid this psychological aspect—to get away from the "me"—by performatively creating a new identity: "I became a non-artist, not an anti-artist […] the anti-artist is like an atheist—he believes negatively. I don't believe in art" (in Tomkins, 1996, p. 408). Not only did this strategy free Duchamp from the hold of the aesthetic plane, it also provided a way for him to expose its internal logic by openly staging the performative dimension of his own activity; that is, by explicitly foregrounding the the art coefficient.[8]

We can see this strategy at work in Duchamp's seminar. As a statement, it is a "rationalized explanation" of his own actions as an artist, a translation of what he is doing into a thought out, written and spoken self-analysis. How then does he account for the art coefficient, the fact that his explanation will inevitably become distorted in its expression? How does

he include the act of translation, the fact that the seminar itself is an artist's statement, as part of the analysis? Note, first, how the seminar renders explicit the central inconsistency in all Duchamp's statements (discussed in the previous chapter): despite insisting that he is not offering a definition of art, it is hard to deny that this is exactly what he is doing. As an analysis of the creative act, the entire talk is a statement on the subject, a clearly defined position with regard to art given precise clarification in his concept of the art coefficient. But what if this obvious inconsistency is not a problem but a solution? What if such a contradiction is the exact point in the seminar where Duchamp performs the very phenomenon he is describing? When he states that "what I have in mind is that art may be bad, good or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it art," we can take it that he is describing his *intention*, what he has "in mind." The following sentence is therefore crucial, since it reveals Duchamp's awareness of how his intention is about to become distorted in its realization: "*Therefore, when I refer to the art coefficient, it will be understood that* I refer, not only to great art […]." It is inevitable, he clearly states, that his statement will be misunderstood, that his subsequent reference to "the *subjective mechanism* which produces art in the raw state—*à l'état brut*" will be interpreted as a reference to the opposite of "great art"; that is, "*art-in-the-raw-state—à l'état brut.*" He reiterates this point in the following line: "*but I am trying to describe* the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state—*à l'état brut*—bad, good, or indifferent."[9] A few lines later, he again reminds the reader that "*to avoid a misunderstanding, we must remember* that this 'art coefficient' is a personal expression of art '*à l'état brut.*'"

The crucial point to be emphasized is that Duchamp is referring not to art but to *a personal expression* of art; it is not art that is reduced to a raw state but the *expression* itself. However, our misunderstanding is essential to Duchamp's procedure since, by misinterpreting his intentions, we actively demonstrate what he is trying to say: that the message is always transformed and distorted by the act of communication. This is made graphically explicit in the annotated draft of the seminar (Fig. 5.3) where Duchamp uses alternative wording in certain sections to underscore his intentions. First, the emphasis in the opening line on "art creation" over "the creation of art" problematizes the standard (aesthetic) understanding of the overall phenomenon being analyzed. More importantly, the addition of the words "art in a raw state" shows us that, not only did Duchamp anticipate a misreading, he *actively contributed to it.* On its own, the French phrase "*à l'état brut*" marks

a break with the English sentence proceeding it, thus highlighting Duchamp's intention to emphasize "the *subjective mechanism* which produces art in the raw state" over "*art* in its raw state." The English phrase, however, causes us to completely overlook Duchamp's intention. But in doing so, *we openly perform the very operation he is attempting to describe*. This staging device is repeated on the bottom of the page: first, the hand-written words "of art" mark a disjunction that highlights the intended referent ("the subjective mechanism"); then, the reader is directly led towards a misinterpretation by the addition, again, of the phrase "*in a raw state*."

The crucial point is that the very distortions created by Duchamp's notes confront us with the art coefficient at work in our own *direct misinterpretation of his message*. By performatively exposing the difference between the intention and the realization, Duchamp stages the art coefficient by including us in the process. He brings about the material manifestation of the "arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed" (1973, p. 139) in order to draw our attention to the broader aesthetic network supporting his actions. The annotations ultimately foreground the purely formal nature of the text, the text *as a text*, the seminar as an empty statement. What we recognize is the fundamental declarative nature of this statement: how Duchamp reflexively marks his position in relation to the word "art," which, as a word, is emptied of all substantial content; how he then multiplies the value of this word through the addition of the term "coefficient." With both actions, he explicitly performs the operation he is describing: the "value" added by the term "coefficient" directly denotes the activity itself, *the act of adding value to the word art*.

By pre-empting the process under analysis, Duchamp is able to display its fundamental logic. Consequently, what is perceived as an obstacle or inconsistency functions as the instantiation of the central idea being articulated: the very term "art coefficient" gives palpable presence to the concept itself. The same procedure is also at work in the editorial text in *The Blind Man*. As has been noted, the text contains a host of unexplained irregularities which prevent a clear reading. As in his seminar, Duchamp confronts the reader with an obvious contradiction in order to produce a specifically designed effect. The apparent obstacle, when viewed as its own solution, draws the reader's attention to the formal conditions of the text, its status as an artist's statement. What we recognize is that, as a statement, it marks itself in relation to the word "art" which, appearing only once in the context of bridges and plumbing, is emptied of all significance on the aesthetic plane and reduced to its raw, empty state, to its status as a word.

Notes

1. Duchamp offers here a clear articulation of what Žižek sees as the fundamental condition of ideology, a "constitutive blindness" (2008, p. 14) operating not at the level of ideas but in the unconscious dimension supporting the activity itself; a disavowed belief which cannot be taken into account without the given ideological field dissolving itself. In a radical Žižekian twist, Duchamp can be understood as referring not to the "false consciousness" of the artist—his illusory status as a "mediumistic being"—but this mediumistic being in so far as he is supported by "false consciousness."
2. We thus encounter the psychoanalytic foundations of Žižek's notion of ideology; namely, imaginary identification with what Lacan terms the "ideal-ego": "the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves [...] the image representing 'what we would like to be'" (Žižek, 2008, p. 116).
3. In this statement, the difference between imaginary and symbolic identification becomes clear: if imaginary identification is identification with an ideal self-image ("genius"), symbolic identification ("artist") is "identification with the very place *from where* we are being observed, *from where* we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable" (Žižek, 2008, p. 116).
4. Duchamp's notion of the "art coefficient" provides an exact description of Lacan's concept of "The Real": "the irreducible gap between the enunciated content and the act of enunciation that is proper to human speech" (Žižek, 2006a, p. 18).
5. This is the result of the two-fold logic of symbolic identification, the fact that the "realization" of one's identity always involves a performative appeal, a reflexive attempt to register one's actions and mark one's position from an external point. Because the subject's actions contain a fundamental subjective twist there is always an anxiety-provoking difference or gap between the way one sees oneself and the way one appears to others.
6. By reducing symbolic identification to the level of language, Duchamp offers a precise description of the declarative dimension in question, the dimension of performativity always indicated by the "persistence of a gap between utterance and its enunciation" (Žižek, 2006b, p. 123).
7. This purely formal conception of the word "art" reduces the term to the level of what Lacan calls the "master signifier:" a "non-sensical signifier devoid of meaning," a "*signifier-without-the-signified*" (Žižek, 2008, p. 75). Duchamp thus makes clear one of Lacan's fundamental points: it is the external appeal to this empty master signifier which constitutes the performative dimension of language and symbolic identification. In Duchamp's text, we thus recognize a distinct overlap with Žižek's notion of ideology, the difference between what the subject thinks he is doing and what, in the "social effectivity" of his actions, he is actually doing (Žižek, 2008, p. 14)

8. In psychoanalytic terms, Duchamp ultimately achieves what Lacan terms "subjective destitution": full and direct identification with an external symbolic identity through the evacuation of all investment in one's ideal-ego. This state, the final stage of analysis, is attained when an explicitly performative gesture grounds the master signifier, the point to which one reflexively refers in one's activity, as fundamentally empty.
9. The word "but" is important here since it indicates an opposing idea to that which has just been expressed. It is then followed by a grammatical shift in tenses: first, the future simple denotes a decision made at the moment of speaking with regard to a future event—the fact that he is about to be misunderstood ("It *will be* understood"). In the preliminary draft of the seminar he is even more definitive: "it *is to be* understood" (Fig. 5.3). Next, the present continuous indicates an ongoing action in the present—what he is doing at the moment of speaking, what he is trying to describe as opposed to what has been understood ("I *am trying* to describe"). Again, this is clear to see from the draft: "I never refer to 'great art' only, but *am trying* to describe…."

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CHAPTER 7

The Onlooker

Abstract The second element in the "The Creative Act" is "the onlooker," a term Duchamp uses to describe the effects produced by the museum mechanism: the function of the exhibition space in aestheticizing the object. The operation of display, Duchamp argues, produces what he terms a phenomenon of "transubstantiation": a piece of inert matter is magically transformed into a work of art on the basis of a fundamental illusion. It is argued that, with *Fountain*, Duchamp seeks to openly stage this phenomenon by subtly manipulating the actions of the photographer responsible for the image of the work, Alfred Stieglitz. It is in the series of choices and decisions taken by Stieglitz that we come to recognize the very mechanism being described in Duchamp's seminar.

Keywords Duchamp, the readymade and the museum • The function of the museum • Duchamp controls museum • Duchamp and Stieglitz game • Duchamp and desire/fantasy/ideology • The art work as fetish • The museum and desire • The image and desire • Art and desire

The second of the "two important factors, the two poles of the creation of art" is that of the spectator: "All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work into contact with the external world […] and thus adds his contribution to the creative act" (Duchamp, 1973 [1957], p. 141). To fully explain the role of the spectator,

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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Duchamp first expands his definition of the artist: "when you get right down to it, what is an artist? As much as the furniture maker, say Boulle, he's the man who owns a 'Boulle'" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 70). The point here is that, before achieving his identity, the artist is first and foremost a craftsman who produces an object through his labor, such as a piece of furniture:

> I don't believe in the creative function of the artist. He's a man like no other […] Now everyone makes something, and those who make things on canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly, they were called craftsman, a term I prefer. (1979, p. 16)

The shift from craftsman to artist takes place when the object acquires a value beyond its basic functional use, when a piece of furniture becomes something more than a piece of furniture: "African spoons cease to be functional when later, they became beautiful things, 'works of art'" (1979, p. 70). Through this transformation, the object is recognized as a product of an individual maker (a "Boulle") and, consequently, the craftsman is recognized as an "artist." The crucial point is that the artist *does not exist*, his struggle to realize his intention is not complete, until the product of his labor is transformed into a work of art. Duchamp explains how this transformation occurs by defining the creative act in more specific terms as a "game between *the onlooker* and the artist" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 56):

> There are the two poles, the artist and the onlooker. If there's no onlooker there's no art, is there? The artist looking at his own art is not enough. He has to have someone to look at it. I give to the onlooker more importance than the artist […] It's a little game between the onlooker and the artist. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 56)

If an object of labor does not become a work of art until it is looked at, then it is the onlooker *who creates the work of art*: "The interaction of the onlooker […] makes the painting. Without that, the painting would disappear in an attic. There would be no actual existence of a work of art. It's always based on two poles, the onlooker and the maker, and the spark that comes from that bipolar action gives birth to something—like electricity" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 31). Thus, if the artist only exists when the object of his labor is transformed into a work of art, then it is the onlooker *who creates the artist*: "If someone, any genius, were living in the heart of Africa and doing extraordinary paintings every day, without

anyone seeing them, he wouldn't exist" (1979, p. 69). However, like his views on the artist's "mind," Duchamp does not see the interaction between the artist and the onlooker as having a positive outcome:

> There is this dilemma, as I have said, that the onlooker is as important as the artist […] I believe that when a million people look at a painting, they change the thing by looking alone. Physically. See what I mean? […] there is a physical action of the onlookers. The onlooker is part of the making of the painting but also exerts *a diabolical influence* by looking alone. (in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 56–61; author's emphasis)

In his seminar, he defines this "physical action" or "embellishment" (2013, p. 60) as "the change of inert matter into a work of art" whereby "an actual transubstantiation has taken place" (1973 [1957], p. 139). The word "transubstantiation" suggests that the transformation of an object into a work of art is a quasi-religious phenomenon whereby a piece of "inert matter, such as pigment, piano or marble" (1973 [1957], p. 139) acquires a mystical aura. This is the "magic part" of the game between onlooker and artist: as a work of art, the object acquires "all the trimmings, the mystic trimming and the reverence trimming" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 57).[1] When understood as the transformation of functional objects into "beautiful things, 'works of art'" the term "transubstantiation" acquires distinct aesthetic significance: the physical object is fetishized as something beautiful when its material properties are misperceived as containing intrinsic value.[2]

Duchamp is once again unambiguous in his refusal to accept this speculative quality: "so the magic part—I don't believe in it […] I don't believe in it with all the trimmings" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 57). For him, the "physical action of the onlookers," the aesthetic transformation of the object into "art," kills the work's original effect: "There is an action, transcendental of course, that absolutely destroys whatever you could see when it was alive" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 60). If the onlooker exerts a "diabolical influence," however, he does so without realizing it: "they change the physical image without knowing it […] they change the thing by looking alone" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 60). The onlooker can only be unaware of the fact that he is "part of the making of the painting," if the painting is *already made*. The suggestion here is that the onlooker is no more than an element in a more complex mechanism, a mechanism Duchamp explicitly identifies when he states: "it is the onlooker who makes the museum, who provides the elements of the museum" (1979, p. 70).

The museum creates the "transcendental" action that transforms the object; only through the elements of the museum can a spark of electricity be created so that the onlooker experiences "a sort of stupefaction, astonishment, or curiosity in front of a picture" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 67). What we encounter here is another aspect of the creative act of which the artist "cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane" (Duchamp, 1973 [1957], p. 139). If the museum transforms an inert object into a work of art, then it also transforms the craftsman into an artist. This, Duchamp explains, is why "the artist does anything to think that he's going to be part of the Louvre or the Metropolitan": only by having his work included in the museum can he use "art as a stepping ladder" towards realizing his intentions, by having his status as "genius" confirmed. Thus, in "the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act," the elements of the museum—the onlooker—play a fundamental role. This is why Duchamp includes the word "refusals" as part of this chain: the term highlights the influence of the museum over the artist's decisions, how the "society of onlookers" force the artist "to re-enter a normal current, or, at least what is called normal" (1979, p. 71). The "group of onlookers," Duchamp claims "is a lot stronger than the group of painters. They oblige you to do specific things" (1979, p. 71). In order for a work to be seen, for an artist to exist, he must first be known: "the artist exists only if he is known"(Duchamp, 1979, p. 70). Thus, in the struggle towards identity artists "must know what to do to make themselves known, to push themselves, and to become famous" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 70). They produce in line with the "considerations" of the public by *soliciting* themselves and their work: "soliciting is one of the forms of need, the consequence of a need" whereby the artist "feels obliged to make something" as if he "owes himself to the public" (1979, p. 81).

As an *an-artist*, Duchamp does not feel the same psychological need to produce for the onlooker: "That doesn't exist for me […] I don't ascribe to the artist that sort of role in which he feels obligated to make something, where he owes himself to the public. I have a horror of such considerations" (1979, p. 81). At the same time, he was aware that the effects of the museum could not be prevented, that the game between the artist and the onlooker is impossible to avoid: "you can't stop that, because, in brief, it's a product of two poles" (1979, p. 70). Once again, the only option open to him was to play the game in a performative manner, in such a way as to expose its rules:

> They oblige you to do specific things. To refuse would be ridiculous […] I accepted because there are practical things in life that one can't stop. I wasn't going to refuse (1979, p. 71). You're on stage, you show off your goods […] You don't have to give in too much. You accept to please other people, more than yourself. It's a sort of politeness. (1979, p. 91)

Through an act of disengaged engagement Duchamp attempts to reveal the logic of the onlooker and shed light on the broader forces at work on the aesthetic plane. This involved reproducing the art coefficient within the museum space by manipulating its internal elements. The art coefficient functions here as the gap contained within the art work itself, a difference between what the artist "intended to realize"—a piece of inert matter such as pigment or marble—and what he "did realize": a work of art, an aesthetic form, a physical object that exerts a fascinating hold. As the failure of the artist to fully realize his intention, the art coefficient appears as an obstacle blocking the full transformation of the inert object into a work of art, a gap foregrounding the disjunction between the object's physical, material qualities and its quasi-religious status.[3]

We thus arrive at a new understanding of Duchamp's "anti-retinal" stance: in exposing the art coefficient his aim was to "make works which are not works of 'art'" (1973 [1967], p. 74), objects which "must not be 'looked at' in the aesthetic sense of the word" (1979, pp. 42–43). This "renunciation of all aesthetics" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 42) involved blocking the transcendental action that produces a work of art: "I always avoided doing something tangible (1979, p. 49), [I always avoided] making a form in the aesthetic sense" (1979, p. 48). Such a blockage reverses the operation of transubstantiation: it "entirely removes the retinal aspect, which I don't like" (1979, p. 43). In doing so, it exposes the logic of the aesthetic plane, the elements of the museum responsible for this physical action.

Duchamp creates this blockage with *Fountain*. By choosing an "ordinary article of life" and emphasizing its functional status he makes it clear that the object is a piece of inert matter; by inverting, signing, dating and naming it, he exposes the process through which this inert matter is transformed into a work of art. Because it is a form that could not be looked at in the aesthetic sense, *Fountain* renders the art coefficient visible as an obstacle or distortion, a gap between intention (inert object) and realization (work of art). This gap is ultimately experienced in *its effects*, in the reaction it provoked when, first, it was submitted to the Independents and, then, it appeared as a photograph in *The Blind Man*. Both

"submissions," by forcing us to ask the question "Is this art?", direct attention to the status and structure of the work of art itself, thereby exposing the illogical nature of the transubstantiation: how an inert object comes to acquire a magical power by provoking an excessive reverence. In turn, the transcendental action supporting this (fetishistic) illusion becomes evident: how an object's physical, material properties—be it piano, pigment or marble—are misperceived as containing some immutable, essential quality.

Next, the act of refusal reveals the elements of the museum at work. The basic point is that the Independents had to reject *Fountain* if they wanted to maintain the consistency of the exhibition space; only by excluding the work, by keeping it at a distance, could they preserve the legitimate structure of the art object, its "fantastic" aesthetic form. It is curious that, in contrast to Duchamp's seminar, where it appears incongruously, the word "refusal" is notable through its absence from *The Blind Man* text. Instead, it is the logic and effects of the refusal that are described: "Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion, this article disappeared and never was exhibited." The fact that the refusal took place "without discussion," suggests a visual operation at work within the exhibition space. Given that the refusal ultimately caused an ordinary article of life *to disappear,* we can conclude that this visual operation involves a process of concealment or displacement. Duchamp indicates as much when asked if he felt the work was rejected: "No, not rejected. A work cannot be rejected by the Independents. It was simply *suppressed* […] The '*Fountain*' was simply placed behind a partition and, for the duration of the event, I didn't know where it was […] After the exhibition, we found the '*Fountain*' again behind a partition, and I retrieved it" (1979, p. 54). According to Duchamp, what first appears as a rejection or exclusion is, in reality, an operation internal to the museum space itself, a transcendental action brought about by the disappearance or suppression of an object's material properties: the concealment of the object's status as an article of everyday life by distancing the onlooker from its inert, overtly physical qualities.[4]

This point is made clear in *The Blind Man* text. In its purely functional status, *Fountain* is nothing more than a plumbing feature: "Now, Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral." The "article" is only transformed into a "fountain" when it becomes an element in a visual display: "It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows." The lines which follow

describe this operation in more detail: "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain has no importance. He chose it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view." The repetition of the word "disappear" indicates an act of suppression: the displacement of a traumatic over-proximity to the object's material qualities. Once positioned as a "fixture," the object's functional status, its overt physicality, is made *to disappear*. This ensures its transformation into a beautiful thing, a work of art, a "*Fountain*."

It becomes evident, then, that the suppression is sustained by the decisions taken in creating the display. The very act of choosing to exhibit the work, of including it in the museum space, involves *taking* an inert object and *placing* it in such a way that its physical qualities are made to disappear under a new point of view. At issue, in short, is the construction of a compositional arrangement: placing a piece of marble or pigment in such a way as to create a new perspective, a new spatial field of vision at the apex of which the onlooker is positioned.[5] The accompanying photograph renders this operation visible by directly presenting us with the phenomenon described in the text: an "article" transformed into a "fountain" when it becomes a fixture in a gallery "show window." Underneath the photograph, the word "refused" suggests that the reader is confronted with the same traumatic element suppressed by the Independents, namely the art coefficient that exposes the elements of the museum.

In the photograph, the art coefficient is experienced as an obstacle blocking the transubstantiation: namely, a disjunction between the object's functional and aesthetic form, the undeniable fact that what we see is a urinal presented as a work of art. This gap draws our attention to the workings of the aesthetic plane, the operations that produce the "aesthetic perception." Due to the emphasis placed on the object's plumbing features, we cannot help but see it as an ordinary article of life; however, the display forces us to overlook these physical properties: the manner in which it has been *taken* and *placed* on its head establishes a correspondence between lines, a symmetrical composition that creates a sense of harmony. This spatial arrangement constructs a new field of vision, a new point of view, under which the inert object disappears and a transcendental action is produced: the over-proximity to the urinal is suppressed and the onlooker sees a "*Fountain*."

The fact, however, that the object's plumbing features have been pushed into the foreground makes it impossible to fully ignore its status

as urinal. At the same time, we are unable to properly grasp it as such because the elevation of the object on a pedestal reinvests it with aesthetic value. In this state of oscillation, the museum apparatus again reveals itself as an operation of suppression: the decision to place the piece of inert matter at eye level re-establishes a new compositional structure in which the harmonious arrangement of lines is reinforced. This new point of view distances the observer from the object's explicit physicality; its functional status is concealed, displaced, and the observer perceives a beautiful, Buddha-like form.

This displacement remains incomplete, however, because of the way the urinal fills the entire picture space, its brightly lit edges cutting it off from the surrounding field and drawing attention, once again, to its physical properties. At the same time, there remains a tenuous spatial relation with the painting in the background which reasserts its aesthetic status. This disjunction exposes the libidinal dynamics at work in the museum: how the very placement of the urinal in symmetrical correspondence with another object negates its unbearable, overwhelming over-proximity. It is clear to see that a second compositional structure, by establishing another arrangement of forms, causes the inert object to disappear once again under a new point of view.

This compositional arrangement is nevertheless disrupted by the distorted relation between the object and the painting in the background: this painting is barely perceptible in the darkness while the urinal gleams under an excessive spotlight. Paradoxically, this light also reaffirms its status as a work of art, since the shadow of a veil re-inscribes a Buddha-like, aesthetic form. Such a gap draws our attention to the function of light itself in the museum apparatus: how careful illumination of the overall scene softens the physicality of all objects under a new set of atmospheric relations. This play of light and shadow establishes a harmony between all the elements in the picture space, between the urinal in the foreground and the painting in the background, which displaces the overt artificiality of the scene itself, the fabricated nature of the arrangement *between the objects*. Because of the efforts taken with the lighting effects, the act of suppression that produces the aesthetic perception is maintained. Yet, ultimately, the transformation of the inert object into a work of art remains incomplete; the art coefficient persists, since there is no getting away from the unsettling incongruity of the scene, its strange, unnatural quality.

Notes

1. At issue, here is the second fundamental element in Žižek's notion of ideology: the logic of fantasy which guides the subject's actions when, through a "fetishistic disavowal," a physical object is transformed into a "fantastic form" (Žižek, 2008, p. 19).
2. As Žižek writes, the object's material properties are seen to contain an "indestructible and immutable" essence (Žižek, 2008, p. 19).
3. At this level, we are concerned with the concept of the Real as it pertains to the structure of fantasy: a gap or distortion in the fetishized object which exposes the logic of desire regulating the subject's actions.
4. This, according to Lacan, is how fantasy functions by creating a shift from the 'object-cause' to the 'object-goal' of desire. In fantasy, the real cause of our desire for an imaginary, elusive object (an object that is, in reality, a non-existent lure) is the perceived limit that appears to block our access to this object. The role of fantasy, then, is to mark this limit by emphasizing an object's physical, opaque qualities; only by keeping the subject at a proper distance can the limit remain functional without being noticed; only by displacing or concealing the object's opaque status can the illusion of an object ("goal") concealed *beyond this limit* be created. As Žižek writes, "the act of concealing deceives us precisely by pretending to conceal something" (2008, p. 223). It is worth noting that, in parallel with *Fountain*'s final location, Lacan kept Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* concealed behind a wooden partition. For an elaboration of this point and how it relates to the avant-garde see Kilroy (2015); for a discussion of how this relates to Žižek's approach to ideology see Kilroy (2016).
5. As Lacan argues in Seminar XI, fantasy operates on the basis of a "point-to-point correspondence between two unities in space […] what is, strictly speaking, composition" (1981, p. 86).

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CHAPTER 8

The Spectator

Abstract In his discussion of "the spectator" Duchamp highlights the process at work in the shift from aesthetic experience to aesthetic judgment. Due to the illusion produced in the museum space, the spectator is compelled to offer a verdict which determines the work's value on the aesthetic "scale." In doing so, however, he misperceives the content of the artist's statement as being communicated through the work's physical properties, a phenomenon Duchamp terms "transmutation." Ultimately, the artist's statement is understood on the basis of aesthetic priorities so that the art coefficient, the gap indicating the true nature of his activity, is erased. Duchamp attempts to make this operation visible by provoking his "friend" and critic Guillaume Apollinaire into offering a verdict on *Fountain*.

Keywords *Fountain* and aesthetic judgment • The spectator and the creative act analysis • Apollinaire misreading *Fountain*/"The Richard Mutt Case," Duchamp manipulating Apollinaire • Duchamp versus aesthetics • Duchamp controls spectator

If the onlooker makes the work of art and, consequently, the artist, then it is the spectator, Duchamp insists, who completes the process:

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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> Millions of artists create; only a few thousands are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity. In the last analysis, the artist may shout from the rooftops that he is a genius; he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value […] All in all the creative act is not performed by the artist alone. The spectator brings the work into contact with the external world. (1973, p. 138)

The artist's identity is secured, in other words, when the spectator validates the work of art by assigning it "social value." There is thus a distinction to be drawn between the role of the onlooker and the spectator: "I give to the onlooker more importance than the artist almost because not only does he look, but he also gives a judgement" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 56–57). At issue here is the difference between the aesthetic experience—the "stupefaction, astonishment, or curiosity in front of a picture" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 67), that spark of electricity produced in the museum—and the aesthetic judgment—the effort to "react critically to the work of art" by announcing "you have produced something marvellous" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 31).

Duchamp here presents us with another level of the aesthetic plane of which the artist is unaware: the fact that the "virtues of a work of art" have consistently been "decided upon" through "considerations" that are "completely divorced from the rationalized explanations of the artist" (Duchamp, 1973, p. 139). In his struggle to realize his intention, the artist relies not only on the elements of the museum; he is also beholden to those priorities brought to bear by the spectator. This, Duchamp explicitly states, is something over which he has no control: "the artist […] plays no role at all in the judgement of his own work" (1973, p. 139). However, as with that of the onlooker, Duchamp is aware of the debilitating effect of the spectator's contribution:

> I give to the onlooker more importance than the artist, almost, because not only does he look, but he also gives a judgement. I think this is a way of bringing the unimportant play of art in society. It's a game between the onlooker and the artist. Like roulette, or like a drug as I said before. So the magic part of it—I don't believe in it anymore, I'm afraid I'm agnostic in art, so to speak. I don't believe in it with all the trimmings, the mystic trimming and the reverence trimming and so forth. As a drug it's very useful to many people. It's a sedative drug […] It's a sedative for that life we lead. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 56–57)

In this passage, Duchamp directly connects the quasi-religious characteristics of the work of art—its aesthetic properties—to its social function: its status as a sedative "drug" for contemporary viewers in need of sedation.[1] If the "life" of the work is "destroyed" in the museum, it is the spectator's contribution which, by transforming it into an addictive source of public consumption, ultimately kills "whatever you could see when it was alive" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 60). In an effort to explain how such a "crime" occurs Duchamp asks: "how can one describe the phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art? In other words, how does this reaction come about?" (1973, p. 139). His answer begins with the following statement:

> The creative act takes on another aspect when the spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation; through the change of inert matter into a work of art, an actual transubstantiation has taken place, and the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the esthetic scale. (Duchamp, 1973, p. 139)

The precise distinction between the onlooker and the spectator is here clarified. Note the use of the present perfect ("has taken place") to indicate an action in the past with effects in the present. That is to say, when the spectator intervenes, the elements of the museum *have already* performed their role. The point is that the operation of display-suppression establishes a platform for the spectator's judgment. The distinction between the term "transubstantiation" and "transmutation" is thus highly significant. While "transubstantiation" describes the phenomenon of transformation, the change of inert matter into an aesthetic form, "transmutation" refers to the state of *having been transformed*, the direct experience of the object's altered state. If the "transubstantiation" defines the transcendental action that causes an object to acquire a magical quality, a mystical aura, then "transmutation" indicates the consequences of this action, the immediate impact of this magical, mystical object. In short, the fetishistic illusion sustained by the museum apparatus ultimately supports the spectator's verdict; only when an object's material properties (be it pigment or marble) are misperceived as containing an immutable, ineffable essence is the spectator's reaction provoked.

Duchamp articulates the logic of the "transmutation" when he explains the spectator's judgement as an act of "deciphering and interpreting" the work's "inner qualifications" (Duchamp, 1973, p. 140). On the basis of the

"transubstantiation," the spectator seeks to excavate the hidden depths of the work, to uncover and define its inherent, intrinsic qualities. An important point to be emphasized here is that, according to Duchamp, a verdict is offered not by discussing the work of art itself but by discussing the *artist*: "Millions of *artists* create,"he writes, "only a few thousands are *discussed or accepted* by the spectator" (1973, p. 138). He makes it clear that, when the work of art is brought into contact with the external world, it is not the object but the artist's statements that acquire social value: "he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that *his declarations* take a social value." To all appearances, the spectator acts as if he is deciphering the work's inner qualifications; in reality, however, he determines the weight of the work on the aesthetic scale by measuring the artist's statements *through the prism of the object*.

This occurs because, due to the transubstantiation, the spectator misrecognizes the inert object as the material embodiment of the artist's declarations. "This phenomenon," Duchamp explains, "is comparable to a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of an esthetic osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as a pigment, piano or marble" (1973, p. 139). The notion of transmutation is here further clarified: it appears to be a natural phenomenon whereby a message is passed or transferred from artist to spectator accross the physical surface of the object. But this reading relies on the very logic of transubstantiation Duchamp attempts to critically analyze; therefore, the use of the word "transference" is worth reconsidering. In its fundamental psychoanalytic sense, the term describes the projection of the thoughts and emotions of the patient onto a fetishized person or object. In the realm of art, this implies that the seemingly organic movement taking place in aesthetic experience, the direct communication between artist and spectator accross a given medium, is supported by a twofold operation of displacement and condensation: the contents of the artist's statements are projected *onto* an inert object (displacement) and, through the elements of the museum, are misperceived as being communicated *by* this object (condensation). Even though such declarations are produced separately (and often with a temporal delay), the transcendental action sustained in the exhibition space creates the appearance that they are latently present in the work.[2]

The direct consequence of the transmutation, Duchamp explains, is the disappearance of the art coefficient from the artist's statement, the elision of the gap which draws attention to the true nature of his practice, to the broader aesthetic structure governing this actions:

> To avoid a misunderstanding, we must remember that this "art coefficient" is a personal expression of art *à l'état brut*, which must be "refined" as pure sugar from molasses, by the spectator; the digit of this coefficient has no bearing whatsoever on his verdict. (Duchamp, 1973, p. 139)

When refracted through the lens of the aesthetic object, the artist's statements become purified: in the act of "deciphering and interpreting," the spectator removes all unwanted material and separates different elements along aesthetic lines.[3] The mathematical fact of the art coefficient—the declarative dimension of the artist's statement—is thus entirely removed from the equation. This is how the spectator ultimately "*adds his contribution* to the creative act" (1973, p. 140). If he decides upon the virtues of a work of art through considerations that are completely divorced from the artist's statements, then, in deciphering the work's inner qualifications, he submits these statements to a set of given criteria; he reads them in accordance with specific aesthetic concerns:

> The artist does not count. *He does not count*. Society takes what it wants. *But the artist shouldn't concern himself with this* [?] Absolutely not, because he does not know. He thinks he knows. He's painting a nude, and he thinks he knows what he is doing. His painting is nice looking. But it has nothing to do with what the onlooker sees in it: he sees an entirely different side. The priority of the connoisseur or whatever you call him isn't to speak the same language as the artist. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 31)

As with the artist, Duchamp reduces the actions of the spectator to the fundamental level of language. The concept of the art coefficient thus acquires new meaning at the level of the aesthetic judgment: "What I have in mind is that art may be bad, good or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it art, and bad art is still art in the same way that a bad emotion is still an emotion" (1973, p. 139). In judging a work as bad, good or indifferent, "we" (the spectator) are engaging in the same coefficient operation as the artist and onlooker: first and foremost, "we must call it art," we must reflexively refer to the word "art." Thus, in its raw state, the spectator's verdict is also fundamentally declarative; it is no more than an empty statement of a subjective position in relation to the aesthetic plane. This statement also involves a coefficient operation: the act of supplementing the word "art" with adjectives that increase the value of the word itself ("good", "bad", "indifferent"). Such additional categories constitute

the "considerations" through which the "refinement" of the artist's statement takes place. The art coefficient therefore appears in the spectator's verdict as the difference between what he intends to say and *what he actually says*, a gap that exposes the declarative nature of his statement, the logic of his activity on the aesthetic plane.

Duchamp's acute awareness of what the spectator is actually doing allows us to make sense of his efforts to de-legitimize Apollinaire's judgments. In short, by dismissing Apollinaire's verdicts, Duchamp sought to avoid their destructive effects: "That "Eiffel Tower" must have moved me, since Apollinaire said in his book on Cubism that I was influenced by Braque, and by Delaunay. Great! [...] You know, he wrote whatever came into his head" (1979, pp. 29–30). But Duchamp also knew that the spectator's intervention could not be averted: "you can't stop that, because, in brief, it's a product of two poles" (1979, p. 70). He thus set about foregrounding the art coefficient in his own statements in order to render explicit its disappearance through the actions of the spectator. This would explain his curious decision to send Apollinaire a copy of *The Blind Man*. By actively engaging the chief spokesperson on modern art Duchamp was deliberately staging the spectator's role in the creative act. This might also shed light on Duchamp's apparent inability to remember his first meeting with Apollinaire. He describes how he saw Roussel's play with Apollinaire but then claims Apollinaire first made contact after the play had ended, when he contacted Duchamp to request a photograph "because he was writing a book on Cubism" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 473, note 91). When viewed from an alternative perspective, this explicit inconsistency draws our attention to Apollinaire's activities as a spectator, his attempts to judge Duchamp's work in line with Cubist considerations. Furthermore, by insisting that "he had never met me then; we met for the first time at the show," Duchamp firmly locates Apollinaire in the context of the Section d'Or exhibition of October 1912 where the latter delivered a "well attended lecture" that introduced Cubism into the public domain (Tomkins, 1996, p. 107). The obvious discrepancy thus shines a spotlight on what Apollinaire is actually doing at the level of the aesthetic plane. Considered in purely formal terms, the perceived "error" effectively positions Apollinaire within the precise parameters of the creative act. As a deliberate distortion, it amounts to a strategic gesture: it forces us to view Duchamp's relationship with Apollinaire in purely professional—that is, aesthetic—terms.

This strategy of openly staging distortions and discrepancies in order to expose the actions of the spectator acquires its full force with *Fountain*. In

his blueprints for staging the internal dynamics of the creative act, Duchamp knew he could rely on Apollinaire to play his part: by sending him *The Blind Man* he provoked an inevitable critical reaction; by concealing his involvement in the publication he ensured that the rest of his oeuvre remained unaffected by this verdict. In *The Blind Man*, it is worth noting the obvious physical disjunction between the editorial text and Stieglitz's photo, that is, the gap between the artist's statement and the elements of the museum. Apart from the single demonstrative pronoun "that," there is nothing in the text to suggest a relation to the image. Although it begins with a clear reference to the Independents show, it goes on to describe not an aesthetic but *a social* phenomenon: how Mr. Mutt transforms a plumbing feature into a *Fountain* by displaying it in a shop window. If the sentence under the photograph "The Exhibit Refused by the Independents" appears to suggest a relationship between image and text, it should be remembered that the word "exhibit" indicates an event which is not represented but *repeated*. Although the words "*Fountain* by R. Mutt" appear above the photograph, there is no reason to assume that they denote the object *in* the photograph: not only is the label imperceptible, the supposed "title" ("*Fountain* by R. Mutt") appears outside the frame of the image, where it is made to mirror "Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz." Instead of establishing a connection between the text and the image, this mirroring creates a direct overlap between the phenomenon described in the text and the actions performed by Stieglitz himself.[4]

These details mark an explicit gap between the workings of the gallery/museum and the artist's statement. When Apollinaire, positioned as observer, offers his critical response, it becomes clear that an actual transubstantiation *has already taken place*. The fact that he perceives the object as a Buddha-like form highlights the role of Stieglitz's display in establishing "anthropomorphic associations" (Camfield, 1989, p. 86). Furthermore, the disappearance of the explicit gap between the editorial and the photograph, between artist's statement and museum apparatus, points towards the phenomenon of transmutation. This is why Apollinaire attributes the title of Louise Norton's article to the photograph and why his own piece reads as a word-for-word transcription of *The Blind Man* text. Not only did he see no distinction between the two elements, the contents of the text have clearly been displaced onto the image. Due to the elements at play in the museum, the photograph is misperceived as a visual representation of the events described in the text; the photograph, in effect, is transformed into the material manifestation of the artist's statement.[5]

Through this process, the statement undergoes a refinement that removes its art coefficient. In deciphering and interpreting *Fountain*'s inner qualifications Apollinaire completely ignores the gaps and discrepancies within the text. Instead, he determines the weight of *Fountain* on the aesthetic scale by separating the contents of the text along aesthetic lines, removing material that has no bearing on his verdict. Consequently, the description of a social phenomenon is completely overlooked in favor of a purely aesthetic reading:

> le fait qu'il eut modèle on non la fontaine de ses propres mains était sans importance, l'important étant dans le choix qu'il en avait fait. Il avait pris un article courant de la vie, et fait disparaitre sa signification habituelle sous un nouveau titre et, de ce point de vue, avait donné un sens nouveau et purement esthétique à cet objet. (Apollinaire, 1994, p. 22)[6]

Apollinaire goes on to assert—against all evidence to the contrary—the fundamental conditions which guarantee the work's status as a work of art: by challenging the art institution and exposing its inherent hypocrisy it highlights the absurdity of privileging an object over the forces of the imagination.

> Le point de vue de la Society of Independent Artists est évidemment absurde, car il part du point de vue insoutenable que l'art ne peut ennoblir un objet, et en l'espèce il l'ennoblissait singulièrement en transformant en Bouddha un objet d'hygiène et de toilette masculine. Quoi qu'il en soit et au risque de nier délibérément par sa détermination le rôle et les droits d'imagination, les Indépendants de New York refusèrent d'exposer la fontaine de M. Mutt. (1994, pp. 22–23)[7]

In its purely raw state, Apollinaire's verdict marks itself in relation to the empty word "art" only to reinvest this word with aesthetic significance: he supplements "art" with specific adjectives that multiply its value. We locate these adjectives when, by focusing on the difference between *The Blind Man* text and Apollinaire's response, we see precisely what he adds through his contribution. In order to judge *Fountain* to be a rejection of the world of material sensations in favor of an intellectually based art, Apollinaire has clearly decided upon its "virtues" through reference to specific "considerations." In short, he has distilled the editorial and removed its explicit inconsistencies by reading it in accordance with specific anti-retinal/conceptual priorities.

Notes

1. This is precisely Lacan's point when he addresses the value of the work of art "in the social field" from "the point of view of the libidinal relation," that is, the role of the work of art in sustaining a social (i.e. ideological) fantasy: "It is because its effect has something profitable for society, for the part of society that comes under its influence. Broadly speaking, one can say that the work calms people, comforts them, by showing them that at least some of them can live from the exploitation of their desire" (1981, p. 111).
2. What becomes visible is the "effect of retroversion" that produces "the illusion proper to the phenomena of transference": the illusion that the meaning of an element which was produced retroactively "was present in it from the very beginning as its immanent essence" (Žižek, 2008, p. 113).
3. In Duchamp's draft of the seminar the line "after the revelation of the aesthetic osmosis" has been removed (Fig. 5.3) thus indicating that the "refinement" in question is supported by a fundamental illusion. Ultimately, the raw materials of the artist's statement are used *to sweeten* the inert object through which they are interpreted.
4. Duchamp later repeats this explicit separation between textual and visual components by creating a physical and temporal delay which divides the *Large Glass* from its accompanying notes in *The Green Box*. Not only did Duchamp place one work in an exhibition space and another in a box, he also published the verbal component twenty years before installing the *Large Glass* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
5. The same illusion of "esthetic osmosis" supports our reading of the *Large Glass*: despite the physical and temporal disjunction, we have come to this object (this large piece of glass) as a visual representation of the story recounted in *The Green Box*.
6. "the fact he made the fountain with his own hand or not is unimportant. He took an ordinary article of every life and, by making its normal signification disappear under a new title and point of view, gave a new and purely aesthetic meaning to the object" (Apollinaire, 1994, p. 22; my translation).
7. "The point of view of the Society of Independent Artists is clearly absurd since it is based on the unsustainable position that art is not capable of ennobling an object when it ennobled it in a very singular manner by transforming an object of hygiene in a men's toilet into a Buddha. Be that as it may, at the risk that their determination would deliberately deny the role and rights of the imagination, the Independents of New York refused to exhibit Mr. Mutt's fountain" (1994, pp. 22–23; my translation).

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CHAPTER 9

Tasty Affairs

Abstract It is argued that, with the term "tasty affairs," Duchamp attempts to explain how the artist is subordinated to the workings of the aesthetic field when, in his struggle to achieve identity, he produces work that conforms to the spectator's taste. After having his work judged as "art," the artist (for psychological reasons) submits to the specific criteria governing this judgment, controlling principles which assume the form of a movement or "ism." Duchamp sheds light on this phenomenon by strategically engaging and disengaging in the Surrealist movement and using *Fountain* to render the logic of these tasty affairs explicit. He shows us that, in their actions, the Surrealist group were effectively adhering to the priorities laid down by Apollinaire in his response to *Fountain*.

Keywords The artist blind to aesthetics, Duchamp critique of taste • Duchamp rejection of aesthetics • Duchamp, Cubism • Surrealism as ideology • Duchamp art as drug • Duchamp *Nude* 1912 and ideology • Aesthetic field prisoner

Blind to the broader conditions of his activity, the artist is not aware that it is the spectator who confirms his identity by validating his work as "art." This is why Duchamp uses the word "decisions" when describing the "chain of totally subjective reactions" that define the artist's "struggle" (1973, p 139; author's emphasis). Overlooking the objective forces at play,

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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the artist believes he is acting freely, individually: "all his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition" (1973, p. 138).[1] What he "cannot and must not be fully self-conscious" of is the way these decisions are governed by the aesthetic plane, dictated by the priorities of the spectator (1973, p. 139). Duchamp elaborates this point by describing his own choices as an "an-artist":

> It's about how the choice of readymades never was a result of aesthetic delectation […] So that makes the selection much more difficult, because you can't help but choose things that please you. But that's just another rule you'll find on the same seashore. That is nothing at all, far from it. And the fact that manufactured objects had the advantage of being repeated, that there was an edition of it made by machine, added to the impersonality. The danger of that is that you have twenty thousand readymades a year. The danger would be to direct it toward a taste. *Tasty affairs.* You could be taken in by the readymade idea to *become an artist again. A tasty artist, choosing more and more.* Which gave me the idea of defining art as a habit-forming drug. And through the readymade I could avoid that. Art is a habit-forming drug, that's all it is, for the collector, for the artist, for anybody connected with art. It has absolutely no existence as such, as veracity or truth of any kind. As a form of definition, I'm delighted with this. I'm very convinced of it. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 54–55; author's emphasis)

The term "tasty affairs" indicates the next stage in the creation of art, what occurs *after* the intervention of the spectator. Once the aesthetic status of his output has been confirmed, the artist's only hope of maintaining his newly acquired identity—of "becoming an artist again"—is to direct all subsequent decisions in the artistic execution of his work "towards a taste." His subjective intentions, in turn, cause him to be "taken in" by the verdict of the spectator and he begins to produce in accordance with the considerations governing this verdict. The danger, as Duchamp notes above, is that by unconsciously submitting to the set of adjectives presupposed by the spectator, the artist allows his production to be controlled by specific, aesthetic criteria. The trail of the "crime" thus continues when the creation of art becomes "a habit-forming drug": to realize his identity, the artist requires validation from the spectator; to sustain his identity he must submit to the judgment of the spectator; to remain an artist he must reproduce what is judged as "art," thus continuing the chain of supply. Struggling to realize his intention the artist becomes trapped in an addictive state of

"choosing more and more" in accordance with the spectator's taste: "most artists only repeat themselves […] they believe they owe society the monthly or yearly painting" (1979, p. 81).

Duchamp expands on this notion of "tasty affairs" by noting how the spectator's judgment takes on "the form of a movement in painting" (1979, p. 84). Through a certain academic "strictness," he argues, "that sort of desire to arrange everything into theories and formulas" (1979, p. 62), the spectator translates the considerations governing his verdict into an "ism." By following this formula, the artist is "taken in" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 33) by the spectator's verdict and begins to produce accordingly. A movement such as "Impressionism," Duchamp explains, "caught the imagination" even though it is "a very, very artificial thing" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 33). Blinded by individual intuition, by their psychological need to achieve identity, a group of artists accept without question the judgment of the spectator and misrecognize a set of aesthetic principles as a series of objective facts.[2]

This allows us to make sense of Duchamp's reaction to the refusal of his *Nude Descending a Staircase* in 1912. His retreat from the Puteaux group was based, he tells us, on a "distrust for systemization" (1979, p. 26): "I've never been able to contain myself to accept established formulas, to copy, or to be influenced, to the point of recalling something seen the night before in a gallery window" (1979, p. 26). What he describes here is the logic of "tasty affairs": while the Puteaux artists insisted on the validity of their awareness, they remained under the control of aesthetic priorities mapped out as an "ism." Specifically speaking, they were adhering to the considerations put forward by Apollinaire and translated into a formula termed "Cubism". Like "Impressionism," the word "caught the imagination" even though it is "a very, very artificial thing" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 33):

> But that word Cubism means nothing at all—it might just as well, for the sense it contains, have been polycarpist. An ironical remark of Matisse's gave birth to it. Now we have a lot of little cubists, monkeys following the motions of the leader without comprehension of their significance. Their favorite word is discipline. It means everything to them and nothing […] I do not believe that art should have anything in common with definite theories that are apart from it. That is too much like propaganda. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, p. 152)

Duchamp is here reiterating the central point of his seminar: the word "art," as a word, should not be linked to theories that "are apart from it"; it should not be supplemented with aesthetic criteria that appear to multiply its value. The problem, he argues, is that through this coefficient operation, "art" has become embedded in purely aesthetic concerns, we have mistakenly come to view it as having something in common with what is, in essence, a separate set of specific concepts. From this perspective, Duchamp's statements on art begin to make sense:

> I don't see it, because I doubt its value deep down. Man invented art. It wouldn't exist without him. Art has no biological source. It's addressed to a taste […] People who talk about art have turned it into something functional by saying 'Man needs art, in order to refresh himself'. (1979, p. 100)

This is the specific "systemization" that Duchamp distrusts: the indoctrination of the artist, the distillation and translation of aesthetic theories into "a formula for a school of painting in which one follows a master" (1979, p. 43). What evidently shocked Duchamp was the speed with which his friends and brothers were 'taken in' by Apollinaire's verdict, how quickly and easily the 'tasty affairs' came into effect:

> People like Gleizes, who were, nevertheless, extremely intelligent, found that this "Nude" wasn't in the line that they had predicted. Cubism had only lasted two or three years, and they already had an absolutely clear, dogmatic line on it, foreseeing everything that might happen. I found that naively foolish. (1979, p. 17)

To be clear, what Duchamp sees as foolish is not the dogmatic nature of Cubist theories but the "dogmatic line" dictated by the "ism," the absolute adherence to the Cubist formula; it is not the theoretical categories that he dismisses as such, but the practice these categories support, the very *act of following a theoretical line* "without thinking very much about the validity of what you're doing" (1979, p. 22).[3] The refusal of the *Nude* revealed the Puteaux group to be "a little revolutionary temple": despite claiming to liberate themselves from all systems of regulation and authority, they continued to blindly follow a disavowed theoretical doctrine. "When they are ready to be themselves," Duchamp explains, "things hold them down in spite of themselves. The education is so strong in every child. It holds them down like a chain" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 83).[4]

When Duchamp declared that he "would never be much interested in groups after that" (1979, p. 83), he was not rejecting the Cubist attitude but the way this attitude was enforced by a fundamental academic edifice: he "felt it was too much of a schooling and a school, to say that you must do this and you must do that, very much of an academy attitude" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 71). The rejection of the *Nude* was "a real turning point" because it showed the artist to be a pawn in a much larger game, a game Duchamp would henceforth set his sights on playing. His retreat from the art world was an attempt to avoid the tasty affairs and escape a tradition governed by an aesthetic framework. "It was," he explains, "a matter of applying to art of the time—Cubist and Fauve and Impressionist—something that was not ever thought of by these fathers" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 83). He didn't "use their tricks or their theories" because he didn't want his work to be subsumed under a set of controlling principles or formulas that were distinctly aesthetic in nature: "I wanted to find something to escape that prison of tradition. Tradition is the prison in which you live. How can you escape from those pincers?" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 83).

This is what he achieved by producing *readymades*. Approaching the object as if he had "no aesthetic emotion" Duchamp avoids "making a form in the aesthetic sense" (1979, p. 48). "A point which I want very much to establish," he explains, "is that the choice of these 'readymades' was never dictated by esthetic delectation." In other words, through a state of "complete anesthesia," he actively avoids the tasty affairs (1973, p. 141). He chooses an object without adhering to any definitive aesthetic considerations, without "valuing the artistic facets of it or aesthetic essence of it" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 54–55). This is what he means by "visual indifference": a decision in the execution of a work that is not governed by the aesthetic plane, an effort to "make works *which are not works of 'art'*" (1973, p. 74; author's emphasis).

The word "readymade," in the fundamental sense of the term, does not signify any aesthetic intention: "The word "readymade" trust itself on me then. It seemed perfect for these things that weren't works of art, that weren't sketches, and to which no art term applied" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 48). Indeed, taken as a word, it simply denotes the gesture itself: the act of production as a fundamental act of construction. Note how, in his reference to the first readymade, Duchamp never describes anything beyond the activity or gesture: "I had the happy idea *to fasten* a bicycle wheel to a kitchen stool and watch it turn" (1973, p. 141); "when *I put* a bicycle

wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a 'readymade,' or anything else" (1979, p. 47). We find the exact same description in the *The Blind Man*: the act of *choosing* an object, *taking* an ordinary article of life and *placing* it so that its useful significance disappears under the new title and point of view. Duchamp creates "a new thought for that object" because the idea is *the act of construction itself*, creation reduced to the level of plumbing or architecture, the word "art" returned to its original (pre-aesthetic) meaning: "to make."

By blocking all conformity to taste, the readymade also reveals the logic of this conformity, how a readymade gesture is transformed into an aesthetic formula for a readymade "idea," *the "idea" of a readymade*. The fact that Duchamp's "visual indifference" has been interpreted as an aesthetic attitude—an anti-retinal stance, an insistence on an object's conceptual status—simply demonstrates this point. Effectively, the work's reception exposes the very mechanism Duchamp sought to undermine. This is why Duchamp was careful not to produce too many readymades, so as to avoid aligning his actions with the spectator's newly forming taste for the work: "you could be taken in by the readymade idea to become an artist again. A tasty artist, choosing more and more […] I could have been completely taken in by the idea" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 55). One need only note the disjunction between *Fountain* and his later readymades, like *L.H.O.O.Q.*, which are impossible to define as manufactured objects elevated to the status of conceptual art. Such gestures appear designed, rather, to block validation of this reading while also undermining its legitimacy. If the choice of manufactured objects freed Duchamp's decisions from all "aesthetic delectation," then the decision to *not choose* manufactured objects sees him de-legitimize the newly established readymade formula. Ultimately, this frees him from conforming to the dominant interpretations of his own work: "I had to force myself to contradict myself," he explains, "in order to avoid conforming to my own taste" (Duchamp in Janis and Sidney, 1945). In other words, he had to prevent the spectator's verdict on Duchamp ("my *own* taste") from being subjectively experienced as a personal position ("*my* own taste"). The readymade effectively functions as "a game between 'I' and 'me,'" a conscious effort not just to refuse the established interpretation but also to directly contradict it.

If the readymades impede and counteract the tasty affairs, then *Fountain* exposes the tasty affairs' internal dynamics. This is why Duchamp's description of the Puteaux Cubists as "monkeys following the motions of the

leader without comprehension of their significance" also applies to Surrealism. André Breton, much like Albert Gleizes, had led the Surrealist group in adopting a dogmatic line, a strict adherence to a manifesto. Duchamp clearly saw this as "a very very artificial thing": "To get back to Breton," he explain, "the way they condemned di Chirico after 1919 was so artificial that it rubbed me up the wrong way" (1979, p. 76). He also seems to have recognized the same "foolish" willingness to blindly follow the guidelines of the spectator by uncritically adopting the latest "ism": "I didn't always like the way they adopted whatever came along" (1979, pp. 76–77). As with "Cubism," the word "Surrealism" "means nothing at all." Just like Matisse's off-hand reference to "little cubes," it was an obscure play entitled *Drame Surrealiste* which "gave birth to it." Despite having only been performed once, on June 24, 1917, with Breton happening to be in attendance, this play is seen as the major precursor of the Surrealist literary movement that would follow. A curious point worth noting is that the play was written by none other than Guillaume Apollinaire.

To understand the importance of Apollinaire in the development of Surrealism, one must first note the influence of Cubism on Breton. Alongside Tzara's perceived liberation of the imagination, Cubism offered an intellectual form of art that opened the way for an exploration of the unconscious. The reality, of course, is that Breton was relying specifically on Apollinaire's definition of Cubism; his decisions were guided by the anti-retinal/conceptual categories governing Apollinaire's judgments. In this sense, Apollinaire's play was highly significant. It was performed only one month after the *Fountain* scandal in New York and only one year before Apollinaire offered his assessment of the event. If Apollinaire was to influence Breton, it was through the prism of *Fountain* that this influence would be felt.

How, then, do we assess the role of *Fountain* in the emergence of Surrealism? The importance of Duchamp to the movement can be seen as early as 1922 when, in his efforts to transform the Paris Dada, Breton identifies Duchamp as a primary source of inspiration:

> It is by rallying around his name, a veritable oasis for those who are still searching […] that we might most acutely carry on the struggle to liberate modern consciousness from that terrible fixation mania which we never cease to denounce in these pages. (Breton cited in Tomkins, 1996, p. 246)

This praise came after Breton had read a series of puns written by Duchamp in 1919 under the pseudonym Rrose Selavy, which he saw as a development of Tzara's attempts to liberate words from the realm of logic and free the regions of the unconscious. After discovering Duchamp's puns, the group began investigating Freud's approach to the analysis of dreams (a translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* had just appeared in France) and experimenting in automatic writing. While Duchamp undoubtedly had a foundational influence on the emergence of the Surrealist literary movement, Breton's fascination with his work stretches back to 1921 when the Surrealist revolution was still in its infancy.[5] Although Breton knew of the *Large Glass*, it was only after reading about the scandal at the Independents show in New York that his interest in Duchamp was sparked. To put it another way, the new "ism" emerged only after Breton took Apollinaire's verdict on *Fountain* at face value. In the development of Surrealism from a meaningless title into an artistic movement, Apollinaire's text was the all-important catalyst. His anti-retinal/conceptual formula took the form of an "ism" only because Breton was "taken in" by this formula through *Fountain*.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in Breton's 1938 definition of the readymade as "an ordinary object promoted to the dignity of an art object simply by way of the artist's choice" (Breton in de Duve, 1996, p. 93). To note the difference between the intention and the realization in this statement is to focus not on the content articulated but the form of the statement—how the actual words used by Breton directly repeat those used by Apollinaire in his 1918 text. It is this gap between what Breton says and what he is actually doing, the art coefficient, that exposes the workings of the aesthetic plane. What becomes visible is the statement's fundamental declarative form: how it marks itself in relation to Apollinaire's text and is supported by the anti-retinal/conceptual categories communicated through this text.

What we witness here in plain sight are the tasty affairs in action, that is, the artist blindly producing in accordance with the spectator's judgment. This explains the obvious overlap between Duchamp's rejection of Cubism and his distance from Breton's movement. Like his decision to conceal his involvement in the *Fountain* scandal from Apollinaire, his tentative approach to Surrealism was an attempt to avoid conforming to "his own taste." Unlike in his retreat from Cubism, however, Duchamp remained involved in Surrealist activities. This behavior, like his decision

to send *The Blind Man* article to Apollinaire, was part of the same strategy: the aim was to expose the broader conditions governing these Surrealist activities, to show how the group remained prisoners of the aesthetic field. As with his ambiguous attitude towards Apollinaire, Duchamp's cautiously close relationship with Breton and his followers hints at his long-term objectives: to avoid and simultaneously stage the creative act in motion.

Notes

1. We recognize, once again, the "effect of retroversion" that conceals the logic of symbolic identification: having seen himself, in his own imaginary self-image, as a mediumistic being, the artist, *through the actions of the spectator*, achieves this identity in symbolic terms; that is, by subordinating himself to the workings of an exterior signifying network (the aesthetic plane). Crucially, this phenomenon is obscured through "the illusion proper to the phenomena of transference": an identity that was determined by an external apparatus is misperceived as having been there from the very beginning as an immanent essence; in the inner life of his self-experience the artist sees himself as an "autonomous personality," a mediumistic being (Žižek, 2008, p. 13, 122).
2. This is the precise twofold logic of symbolic identification described by Lacan: first I see myself as "artist," then I begin to act accordingly (like a mediumistic being). The process, Žižek writes, is "by definition a misidentification […] I identify with this misperception of me, and truly 'become myself' when I, in effect, start to act according to this misperception" (Žižek, 2008, p. 45).
3. Duchamp offers us here a succinct definition of Žižek's concept of ideology: an objective form of belief which operates "at the level of what individuals *are doing*, and not only what they think or know they are doing" (2008, p. 28; author's emphasis). For a full discussion of this point see Kilroy (2016).
4. Žižek refers to this as the logic of an "enlightened false consciousness": at the level of knowledge, one claims to recognize "the distance between the ideological mask and the reality"; however, at the level of practice, one "still finds reason to retain the mask" (Žižek, 2008, pp. 26–28).
5. Breton eagerly requested that Picabia arrange a meeting with Duchamp at the popular bar Café Certa in Paris (Housez, 2006, pp. 236–237). It is significant that Breton's first meeting with Apollinaire came earlier, in 1918, when the latter returned from the war (Tomkins, 1996, p. 247).

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PART IV

Resolving the Crime: *Fountain*'s Legacy

CHAPTER 10

Posterity

Abstract For Duchamp, the term "posterity" refers to the future spectator whose judgment ultimately determines the final verdict on a work. Within the terms of the creative act, this spectator overlooks the artificial nature of the tasty affairs and presents the movement or "ism" as an objective, naturally occurring phenomenon. In doing so, he consolidates the validity of the "immediate spectator's" initial verdict. To demonstrate this point, Duchamp directly involves himself in—and then actively disengages from—Robert Lebel's monograph *Sur Marcel Duchamp*. This strategy sees him retain control over the final analysis of his work while avoiding the effects of this analysis; moreover, he performatively stages another element in the creative act by positioning Lebel in the role of posterity.

Keywords Duchamp manipulates Lebel • "Posterity" and the creative act • Duchamp stopped *Large Glass* why? Duchamp and the art market game • Duchamp plays chess with art world • Aesthetics controls artist

The fact that the spectator "adds his contribution" to the creative act "becomes even more obvious," Duchamp argues, "when posterity gives its final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists" (1973a, p. 140). Duchamp is marking a distinction here between two different forms of spectator: the "contemporary spectator" and "the posthumous spectator"

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(Duchamp, 1979, p. 76), "the spectator who later becomes the *posterity*" (1973a, p. 138). While the verdict of an immediate public causes the artist's declarations to "take on a social value," only "posterity" can ensure that his intentions are fully realized, that he is included in art history and recognized as a genius.

> Millions of artists create; only a few thousand are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity. In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius; he will have to wait until the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Art history. (1973a, p. 139)

The artist may use "art" as a "stepping ladder" "to get into the Louvre" but without validation from the future spectator his efforts ultimately prove futile. This would appear to be why Duchamp places more "value" on the verdict of posterity: "the contemporary spectator is worthless, in my opinion. His is a minimum value compared to that of posterity, which, for example, allows some things to stay in the Louvre" (Duchamp, 1979, p. 76). Elsewhere, he explains his reasoning: "the danger for me is to please an immediate public—the immediate public that comes around you, and takes you in, and accepts you, and everything" (1973b, p. 133). It is important to bear in mind, at this point, that Duchamp has no interest in being recognized as an artist. When he emphasizes the "value" of posterity, he should therefore understood as referring to its importance *within the terms of the creative act*, the fact that the final judgment has the most lasting—and debilitating—effect. He explains:

> The word "judgement": is a terrible thing, too. It's so problematical, so weak. That a society decides to accept certain works, and out of them make a Louvre, which lasts a few centuries. But to talk about truth and real, absolute judgement—I don't believe in it at all […] I have these doubts about the value of the judgements which decided that all these pictures should be presented in the Louvre […] So fundamentally we content ourselves with the opinion which says that there exists a fleeting infatuation, a style based on a momentary taste; this momentary taste disappears, and, despite everything, certain things still remain. (1979, pp. 70–71).

Despite distrusting the final judgment, Duchamp again acknowledges its inevitability: "The artist makes something, then one day, he is recognized

by the intervention of the public, of the spectator; so later he goes on to posterity. You can't stop that, because, in brief, it's the product of two poles" (1979, pp. 70–71). Thus, it was in order to avoid the impact of the creative act that Duchamp placed a "value" on the future spectator. If the "life" of the work was to survive, it was the verdict of posterity he would need to control: "There had already been other rehabilitations, and I felt, 'Wait for posterity'" (1979, p. 76).

As we have seen, the posthumous spectator responsible for the final analysis of Duchamp was Robert Lebel. Lebel's complete assessment of Duchamp's oeuvre laid the groundwork for the art historical appreciation that was to follow. With his 1957 monograph, years of silence were broken and Duchamp's declarations finally took on a social value. As one reviewer noted at the time, the book's "speculations lead the reader toward understanding of an art that speaks" (in Franklin, 2016, p. 43). It is nevertheless worth citing Duchamp's own response to the publication:

> I want to say how much this text pleases me […] in my view, the great merit of Lebel is that he helps me understand myself, because he provides me with clarifications I had never thought of about my works and my behaviour. True art criticism should be a contribution and not, as it is in most cases, a simple translation of what is untranslatable […] what may have been disconcerting for some in my attitude is that it was difficult for them to distinguish exactly the aspect of the man from that of the artist. There was, for the biographer, a pitfall that Robert Lebel alone was able to avoid, by considering the situation as a whole. (Duchamp in Franklin, 2016, p. 44).

In this passage, Duchamp can be seen to clearly repeat the central aspects of his seminar on "The Creative Act," which, incidentally (but, as ever with Duchamp, not coincidentally), was delivered the same year Lebel's monograph appeared. When closely examined, the statement has the overall effect of positioning the monograph itself within the coordinates of the creative act. First, Duchamp performatively adopts the position of an-artist, playing "a game between 'I' and 'me'" that both grounds the declarative dimension of the statement ("*I* want *to say*") and emphasizes the artist's egotistical reaction ("this text *pleases me* […] helps *me* understand *myself*"). He then highlights the fact that the artist plays no role in the judgment of his own work, that the spectator, speaking a different language to the artist ("art criticism"), decides upon the virtues of his work through considerations completely divorced from the artist's own explanations. Through such clarifications, he clearly states, the spectator

adds his "contribution" to the creative act: art criticism is not an act of translation but an act of transformation through the addition of specific criteria. Next, he paraphrases the same T.S. Eliot passage quoted in his seminar to explain why, thus far, the public have struggled to properly judge his work. With his self-imposed distance from the art world, he was refusing to separate the man who suffers from the mind that creates. In remaining silent, he was retaining a state of consciousness on the aesthetic plane of what he was doing and why he was doing it. This involved refraining from actions and gestures that would facilitate the spectator's critical reaction, an attitude that the spectator inevitably found "disconcerting." Lebel, Duchamp notes in the last sentence, was able to overcome this "pitfall" because he was in a position to offer a biographical reading that considered Duchamp's works as a whole.

This final remark draws our attention to the two principal factors that allowed Lebel to arrive at a definitive verdict. First, Duchamp himself was heavily involved in the project, providing Lebel with precise details regarding his life and work. Second, Lebel was able to assess his entire output because, only three years prior to the publication of his book, Duchamp's oeuvre was installed in the east wing of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. We are able to discern here the fundamental reason for the temporal delay between the immediate reception of *Fountain* and the sudden revival of interest in the work during the 1950s: up until this point, Duchamp's oeuvre had never been exhibited; consequently, it failed to provoke any critical reaction from the spectator: "since I didn't have exhibitions there wasn't any widespread interest" (1979, p. 84). This is why, he explains, the *Large Glass* had not yet acquired social value: "It had no value in the artistic world at that time, nobody cared for it, nobody saw it or even knew about it" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, p. 288). It was only when the *Glass* was installed in Philadelphia with the rest of Duchamp's pieces, that a spark of electricity set the whole apparatus in motion.

The crucial point is this: the entire situation was carefully stage-managed by Duchamp. His refusal to offer statements or exhibit the *Glass* had effectively blocked the museum mechanism from performing its function. This afforded him the time to prepare for the inevitable moment when the cogs of the creative act would begin to turn. When they finally did start turning, he was ideally placed to manipulate their movement. Consider, for instance, the precise factors that precipitated his sudden decision to stop work on the *Large Glass*. In 1923, Walter and Louise Arensberg, whom Duchamp had entrusted with ownership of the *Glass*, fell into financial

difficulty and were forced to sell the work to Katherine Dreier, Duchamp's colleague from the Independents scandal. It is not insignificant, then, that Duchamp inscribed the work "definitively unfinished" immediately after overseeing its transfer to Dreier's apartment. His actions from this point on indicate a single objective, ruthlessly pursued: to keep his oeuvre together and regain control over its final location. With the sale of the *Glass* to Dreier, Duchamp was clearly worried about losing control over his work's reception. "I am convinced," he said, "that my production because it is on a small scale has no right to be speculated upon, that is, to travel from one collection to another and get dispersed and I am certain that Arensberg, much like myself, intends to keep it as a coherent whole" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, p. 311). This is why, after supposedly giving up on the *Glass*, he became actively engaged in the art market. Having been made aware that the Arensbergs were eager to retrieve all the works they had sold, Duchamp re-established contact with the couple in 1930 and became their "official purchasing agent" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 294), a position that involved letting them know whenever one of his own works came up on the market.[1] As Arensberg's dealer, he was given full freedom in choosing the museum that would permanently display his work. His careful notes and sketches of the rooms in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in April 1950 show signs of meticulous planning and preparation. Ultimately, it was on the advice of Duchamp that the Arensbergs agreed to allow their collection be installed in Philadelphia. One of the main conditions that influenced their decision was the willingness of the Museum's director, Fiske Kimball, to "let Duchamp have a major say in deciding how that space was divided and the collection installed." As Tomkins writes: "Duchamp, who had played such a key role in the decision, was now poised to preside over his own posterity" (1996, p. 373).

The only problem was that, although Duchamp now retained complete control over the elements of the museum, the centerpiece of his oeuvre remained in the possession of Dreier. His motivations for developing a close relationship with Dreier after she purchased the *Large Glass* now become clear. When she was considering permanently selling her collection Duchamp advised her not to do so by reminding her of the importance of keeping it intact (Tomkins, 1996, p. 315). Their close "friendship" ultimately saw Duchamp named as one of the three executors of Dreier's will and, after her death in 1951, he became responsible for "the disposition of her personal collection" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 380). Writing to Fiske Kimball, he insisted that it had always been Dreier's personal wish to give

the work to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. "Miss Dreier," he wrote, "always had it in mind, and she actually spoke to me about it only a few weeks before she died" (Duchamp in Tomkins, 1996, pp. 380–381). However, according to Tomkins, it was Duchamp who had in fact convinced her to do so: he "had often discussed with her the advantages of having the *Large Glass* re-join its 'brothers and sisters' at the Philadelphia Museum of Art" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 380). It was only just before her death, right in time for the official opening of the Arensberg collection in October 1954, that Dreier agreed to Duchamp's wishes.

The necessary spark of electricity was immediately produced and, following the logic of the creative act, Duchamp's work began to provoke widespread critical reaction.[2] This, of course, was precisely what Duchamp anticipated: not only had he successfully avoided the effects of the aesthetic plane, in doing so he created a temporal delay between the reception of *Fountain* and the rest of his work, a delay that would openly stage the internal dynamics of the apparatus. Indeed, the numerous demands for interviews with Duchamp bear witness to the operations of transubstantiation and transmutation at work: the spectator desperately attempting to offer a critical reaction by refining the artist's statement. With the cogs now set in motion, Duchamp responded by increasing his efforts to hold open the art coefficient whenever he was asked for a statement. It was also at this time that he began carefully crafting his seminar on "The Creative Act." Although his wife Teeny claims he spent very little time writing the text, the archival evidence suggests otherwise: Duchamp made five drafts, one original, a typed version, and three revised versions, the second of which is specifically marked with red dots to mark intonation patterns.[3] Significantly, all his interviews at this time contain repeated reference to the central points of the seminar. With each declaration, Duchamp was drawing attention to the very process he was now caught up in.

This is the precise context in which Lebel's book appears. Like Apollinaire before him, Lebel is used as a pawn in Duchamp's game, assigned a role that, with Duchamp's help, would render both the performance and the rules of the game explicit. His contribution is positioned on a carefully constructed aesthetic stage as part of an arrangement that draws attention to the artificiality of the stage itself. If Duchamp had indeed decided to "wait for posterity," it is clear that it was Lebel he was waiting for, a figure rooted firmly in the art world who would play his role to perfection. As a young 16-year-old, Lebel had sat in the audience at

Apollinaire's play on June 24, 1917. He immediately developed a keen interest, alongside courses in art history which he attended at the Louvre, in Surrealism. After reading Breton's Manifesto in 1924 he began taking part in Surrealist gatherings. This is where he met Breton, through whom he learned about Duchamp. An intense fascination with the man and his work quickly ensued.

Just as Breton's infatuation with Duchamp was framed by Apollinaire's assessment of *Fountain*, Lebel's fascination was mediated by Breton's verdict on the work. Lebel effectively read Duchamp through the prism of Surrealism, on the basis of Apollinaire's (mis-)reading of *Fountain*. This is why he fits the description of posterity offered by Duchamp: at a fundamental level, his publication is no more than an "opinion which says that there exists a fleeting infatuation (Breton's obsession with Duchamp), a style (Surrealism) based on a momentary taste (Apollinaire's verdict on *Fountain*)" (Duchamp, 1979, pp. 70–71). Duchamp insists, however, that "when this momentary taste disappears […] despite everything, certain things still remain" (1979, p. 71). The verdict of posterity makes the spectator's contribution to the creative act obvious by exposing the way he judges the work in line with specific aesthetic considerations.

This is what Duchamp openly displays when, having created a temporal delay between *Fountain* and the *Large Glass*, he identifies Lebel as the figure to play the role of posterity. It is perhaps appropriate, then, that their first encounter took place at the scene of the crime, one of Stieglitz's New York galleries. Duchamp's sudden interest in working with Lebel, and the close correspondence that developed, can be understood along the same lines as his "friendship" with Dreier, Breton and Apollinaire: an active effort to manipulate the reception of his work, a strategic involvement driven by a single-minded focus on putting all the necessary pieces in place. This is clear to see from the way Duchamp, by gradually increasing his involvement in Lebel's project, began to exert almost complete control over every aspect of the publication. At the same time, the necessity of situating Lebel's work in relation to the other elements already in play explains Duchamp's cautious distance. The fact that he continuously broke their collaboration through repeated detachment—so that, from inception to publication, the project lasted almost a decade—makes complete sense when understood alongside his ongoing preparation for the final installation of his oeuvre. For Duchamp to achieve his objective, for Lebel to be properly assigned the role of posthumous spectator, it was imperative that his book appear *after*

the elements of the museum were set in motion. The fact is that the initial delay and subsequent precipitation of the publication process, caused by Duchamp's retreat from and intervention in the project, ran parallel to the development of his plans for the installation of the Arensberg collection in Philadelphia.

Once again, *Fountain* is the key element that allowed this strategy to function. When we read Lebel's interpretation of the readymade, it is hard not to hear echoes of Breton's 1938 statement:

> He did not select a bicycle as a beautiful modern object […] he chose it because it was *commonplace* […] it enjoyed an unexpected and derisive prestige which depended entirely upon the act of choosing by which it was selected. It was a kind of sacralization. Nevertheless, it is clear that Duchamp intends to provoke us. He protests against what he considers the excessive importance attached to some works of art and offers us instead the totally arbitrary value of an article of daily use […] it depends upon a choice which is the source of its very existence. (Lebel, 1959, p. 35)

In the difference between what Lebel says and what he is actually doing we also recognize the imprint of Apollinaire's original text. The precise manner in which the spectator adds his contribution to the creative act immediately becomes clear. Lebel arrives at the above verdict by supplementing the word "art" with specific considerations that multiply its value; namely, the anti-retinal and conceptual principles passed on to him from Apollinaire through Breton. This coefficient operation allows him to locate Duchamp's work in the established avant-garde tradition, where it is made to "fit" the Cubism-Dadaism-Surrealism narrative: the readymades, Lebel writes, reflect "the whimsical mood of a spoiled child taking his revenge on the arbitrary decisions of adult logic"; at the same time, he claims that "the role of his [Duchamp's] unconscious is much more important in them" than in all his other works" (Lebel, 1959, p. 35).

Notes

1. The Arensberg collection would eventually include thirty-six of Duchamp's works, thirty-five of which were acquired by Duchamp himself. As Tomkins notes, "it was clear that he kept a watchful eye on the peregrinations of his paintings and objects" (1996, p. 294). Indeed, Duchamp admits as much when he states: "I wanted the whole body of work to stay together" (1979, p. 74).

2. In November of that year, the influential French art critic Alain Jouffroy proposed doing an interview with Duchamp for the weekly *Arts et Spectacles*. Soon after, Michael Sanouillet—a Toronto University scholar—undertook a longer interview with Duchamp in the weekly *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (in Tomkins, 1996, p. 390). In January 1955 Duchamp appeared on network TV in America as the subject of a thirty-minute program on the NBC-TV series called *Conversations with the Elder Wise Men of our Day*. The program consisted of a guided tour of his oeuvre conducted by the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, James Johnson Sweeney.
3. What appears strange, at first glance, is the location of these dots: they seem to mark a stress pattern of someone clearly speaking English as a foreign language, as if Duchamp wanted to make the purely declarative nature of the statement obvious. Indeed, when one listens to the audio of the talk, it is striking how the intonation has a distorting effect: the irregular stress makes it hard to follow Duchamp's argument, thus further contributing to our misunderstanding of his message. As with the hand-written notes, the red dots might first appear as obstacles to interpretation, when in fact they mark the physical emergence of the art coefficient.

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CHAPTER 11

The Lighthouse

Abstract The notion of the "lighthouse" describes the crucial process of identification supporting the tasty affairs, the artist's strict adherence to a set of controlling principles that take the form of an "ism": the construction of an idealized figurehead or "star" with whom a group of artists can identify in order to become subjectively engaged in their work. Identification with the lighthouse ensures that the act of producing in line with a taste is firmly rooted in a fundamental psychological "need." To make this explicit, Duchamp plays with his own role as lighthouse, first within the Surrealist group and, later, within the 1950s and 60s art scene where he became an idealized figurehead for a new generation of artists to follow.

Keywords Duchamp as "lighthouse" • Artist's identification • Duchamp playing with "Duchamp" • Duchamp's legacy constructed • Duchamp legend artificial • Duchamp strategy Surrealism • Breton, *Fountain* misinterpretation

Following the logic of the tasty affairs, the artist's struggle to realize his intentions—to achieve his identity, to be an artist again—sees him submit to the considerations prioritized by the spectator. Guided by his subjective intuitions he ignores what he is actually doing and why: producing work in

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accordance with strict "academic" protocol, whereby all decisions taken are controlled by definite aesthetic theories. It was this subordination on the aesthetic plane that Duchamp, by making works that were not works of art, ultimately avoided: "it kept me from being obligated to return to already existing theories, aesthetic or otherwise" (1979, p. 88). He was acutely aware of how the spectator exerts control over the artist, how people in the art world "try too hard to get hold of you." "That's the danger," he explains, "to get involved, *engagé*, as they say. You feel obliged to follow" (1979, p. 102). He describes this phenomenon as "soliciting":

> I don't ascribe to the artist that sort of role in which he feels obligated to make something, where he owes himself to the public. I have a horror of such considerations […] soliciting is one of the forms of need, the consequence of a need. That doesn't exist for me. (1979, p. 81)

In "soliciting" the artist's "need" to achieve identity is harnessed as a means of regulating his activity. This necessitates an important act of communication on the part of the spectator: specific aesthetic considerations must be *translated* into terms the artist can first understand and, then, identify with. Through a "coefficient" operation, the word "art" is supplemented with particular adjectives and redefined in line with a given set of priorities. The goal of art is communicated to the artist as that for which he must strive when (re-)producing art. This ensures that, in his struggle to become an artist, he adheres to strict controlling principles. It is crucial, then, that the artist is engaged psychologically, at the level of his identity.[1] The spectator must therefore be attuned to the evolving nature of artistic self-conception brought about by changes in social status. For soliciting to be effective, it is not enough for the spectator to redefine and communicate the goal of art; he must also articulate *the role* of the artist in relation to "art." Only by appealing to his sense of self, by engaging him subjectively, can the spectator persuade the artist to produce in line with a given set of criteria.

For this reason, Duchamp argues, the spectator is tasked with providing a figurehead with whom the artist can identify, a "banner," or "star" which exerts an important psychological hold. He defines this figurehead as a "lighthouse:"

> Then comes Picasso, like a powerful lighthouse; he fills the role the public demands, that of the star. Manet was that way at the turn of the century. When you talked about painting, you always talked about Manet; painting didn't exist without Manet. (1979, p. 93)

> the public of any period need a star, whether it be Einstein in physics, or Picasso in painting. It's a characteristic of the public, of the observer. (1979, p. 84)

With these statements Duchamp once again underlines the distinction between the artist's subjective experience and the dimension of his activity of which he remains unconscious, the logic of the aesthetic plane. The public's (i.e. the spectator's) "need" for a figure to fill a particular role is not the same as the artist's psychological "need" to realize his identity. Thus, if the lighthouse has a particular function it is to provide a sense of direction, guidance and stability for the artist. If the spectator needs a figure to illuminate a path for artists to follow, then the artist needs the lighthouse in order *to have a path illuminated*. "I suppose," Duchamp states, "every young generation needs a prototype" (1979, p. 95). Indeed, the term itself—first coined by Baudelaire—implies both functional and psychological effects: a bright signpost mapping a route and a dazzling beacon exerting a fascinating hold. Duchamp suggests as much when he notes how a younger generation are "drawn" to artists like Manet and Picasso because they recognize "the spirit that they, themselves, wanted to represent." It is essential, he notes, that such a figure is older so that "in the eyes of the young people" he represents a "revolutionary element" (1979, p. 62).

With the concept of the lighthouse, Duchamp elaborates on the psychological aspect of the artist's activity. If, "as a human being," the artist is "full of the best intentions towards himself and the whole world," if he sees himself as a genius and would like to be seen by others as such, then in the lighthouse, he recognizes a figure with whom he can identify, an idealized gaze to which he imagines himself as responding. In the struggle to achieve identity, the lighthouse provides the artist with a point of secure identification, an ideal image in which he appears likeable to himself.[2] Security with regard to his identity in turn provides certainty with regard to his role: the artist (re)produces himself by (re)producing "art" in accordance with the adjectives that define it. The point is that these criteria only take "the form of a movement in painting" (1979, p. 84) when they become represented by the name "Manet" or "Picasso." Only then do the decisions in the artistic execution of a work acquire psychological significance. Only then do the words "Impressionism" or "Cubism" capture the artist's imagination.

As an "an-artist," Duchamp was not lured by the effects of the lighthouse. Instead, he sought to expose the purely formal, functional status of

figures like Picasso: "Picasso, *as a name* represents the living expression of a new thought in the realm of aesthetics […] this will be Picasso's main contribution to art, to have been able to start from a new source, and to keep his freshness" (1973, p. 157). "Art," in other words, was fully redefined when the name "Picasso" came to represent a new set of considerations that engaged a new generation of artists. The task of staging the logic of the lighthouse became possible when Picasso was replaced by Duchamp himself as the representative of a new direction in art. This process began in 1913 when the scandal caused by the *Nude* at the Armory Show in New York assured Duchamp a significant level of notoriety. Apollinaire then definitely marked a distinction between the man and the name by declaring that Duchamp would "reconcile Art and the People." It was Breton who, in his efforts to establish a new movement, first positioned "Duchamp" in the pivotal role of lighthouse: "It is by rallying around *his name*, a veritable oasis for those who are still searching […] that we might most acutely carry on the struggle to liberate modern consciousness from that terrible fixation mania which we never cease to denounce in these pages" (Breton cited in Tomkins, 1996, p. 246; author's emphasis). This statement, Tomkins argues, created the foundations for the Duchamp myth that "would take the place of any real acquaintance with his work for the next forty years" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 246). But Duchamp, as ever, seems to have been acutely aware of this phenomenon. When it was put to him that he was "one of the most famous artists in the world" his response is telling:

> I know no such thing. For one thing, *les petites gens*—the grocers—don't know my name, the way most of them have heard of Dali and Picasso and even Matisse. For another thing, if one is famous, I think it must be impossible, I think it must be impossible to know it. Being famous is like being dead: I don't suppose the dead know they're dead. And thirdly, if I *were* famous I couldn't be very proud of it: it would be a clownish sort of fame, I suppose that if that kind of infamy lasts fifty years, then there's more to it than just the scandal. (1963, p. 29)

Through his strategic involvement in Surrealism, Duchamp was able to stage his own status as a lighthouse. Not only did his self-imposed distance allow him to escape the tasty affairs, it also served as a firm resistance to the role being progressively assigned to him, a refusal to assume the function being established by Breton. What effectively comes to light in

Duchamp's absence from the Surrealist group is the excessive nature of the group's fascination with "Duchamp," Breton's obsessive efforts to "rally around his name." At the same time, with each of his tentative engagements in Surrealist projects, the aura he projected, the influence he held over the group, became even more obvious. Through his game of inclusion and exclusion, distance and proximity, presence and absence, Duchamp played with his own structural role within Surrealism, thereby demonstrating the lighthouse function he was made to embody. The name "Duchamp," once reduced to the place-holder of an absent man, became visible as an empty point to which the group reflexively referred to legitimize their actions, an element around which they circulated in fascination.

By responding to Breton's praise of Duchamp, Lebel continued to inscribe this lighthouse function. As the first full-length work on the artist, his monograph not only leads the reader to a fuller understanding of the Duchampian oeuvre, it also consolidates the process that began with Apollinaire and was developed by Breton: building on his established notoriety, Lebel ensures that Duchamp replaces Picasso as a figurehead for a new generation of artists to follow. His publication contributed greatly to the expansion of the Duchamp legend, paving the way, Tomkins argues, for the name "Duchamp" to exert a powerful influence in the second half of the twentieth century. Suddenly, his ideas became "more readily available to a younger generation of artists, many of whom were already primed to receive him" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 400) and, alongside the "loss of faith in other gods" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 408), his reputation began to grow. "For the first time in more than half a century," Tomkins writes, "Picasso had ceased to be the dominant force in modern art" (1996, p. 408). If the name "Duchamp" came into public consciousness in 1913, then it was through the writings of Apollinaire, Breton and ultimately Lebel that it would come to embody a new set of aesthetic principles.

Throughout it all Duchamp remained aware—and wary—of what was happening. During the 1950s and 60s he started giving numerous interviews that effectively described the process taking place. With impeccable timing, he chose the very moment of his institution as lighthouse as the time to begin articulating *his concept of the lighthouse* by directly referring to his own reception. When asked specifically about the influence he and Picabia had over the younger generation he responds by acknowledging his own role within the creative act:

> Well I don't know. I was ten years older, that's very important. Since I was ten years older and Picabia was twelve or thirteen, we were the old men. Still, in the eyes of the young people, we represented a revolutionary element. Which we already were among the Cubists, who in 1912–13 didn't approve of us very much. We had, Picabia and I, gone through it with a certain freedom, without stepping on it you see. I'm sure that's what they liked. They found that we represented the spirit that they, themselves, wanted to represent, and they were drawn to us. (1979, p. 62)

While accepting that there is no way of escaping this phenomenon, he nevertheless insists on its artificial nature, the fact that there isn't necessarily any real connection between his attitude and that of the new generation:

> I suppose every young generation needs a prototype. In this case, I play that role. I'm delighted to. But it doesn't mean any more than that. There's no glaring resemblance between what I've done and what they're doing now. Furthermore, I did as few things as possible, which isn't like the current attitude of making as many things as you can, in order to make as much money as possible. Looking at what the young people are doing now, some people thought that I had ideas somewhat similar to theirs and, consequently, we felt good about each other. (1979, p. 95)

Duchamp's point is that the idea of influence was a construction. A fictional connection is established even when, in reality, painters like himself, Picasso or Manet had little or no contact with the generation that took them as their guiding light. The reality, he maintains, is that his notoriety arose from a simple matter of geographical proximity: it "was based especially on the fact that I had lived in New York for a long time and, consequently, knew a lot of people. It all comes down to a small group, really, a small portion of the population" (1979, pp. 83–84). The notion of a "star" and the question of influence, he argues, only arises when "generally, there's some gross exaggeration […] the idea of the great star comes directly from a sort of inflation of small anecdotes." Consequently, the fiction is accepted as fact: "They admit it. Every one accepts […] influence. Of course, they always say that they did some extraordinary things themselves, but all the while accepting the origin" (1979, pp. 83–84).

Given their context, one can read these statements as an attempt to stage the art coefficient and highlight the phenomenon taking place around him. He achieved this by remaining directly involved in the publication that laid

the ground for the expansion of the Duchampian myth. As well as taking responsibility for the design and layout of Lebel's book, thus grounding its formal status—its role within the creative act—he also insisted on the inclusion, in the appendices, of two particular texts: his own seminar on "The Creative Act" and Breton's 1934 text "Phare de *La Mariée*" ("Lighthouse of the Bride"). The latter, written after the publication of Duchamp's notes in *The Green Box*, saw Breton stress the importance of Duchamp's work "in the eyes of all who attach any importance to the determination of the great intellectual motives of our day" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 298).

In this overall strategy, *Fountain* was again the crucial tool deployed: by blocking the mechanism of reception and delaying its movement, it explicitly revealed the lighthouse operation at work. We have seen that, in fixing Duchamp in line with Cubism, Dada and Surrealism, Lebel simply applies Apollinaire's reading of *Fountain* to Duchamp's entire output. Apollinaire's verdict thus supports the final analysis of Duchamp's work that, in turn, forms the basis of the Duchamp myth. For a new generation eager to exercise their critical powers—to "be an artist again" by producing "art"—Duchamp was the ideal figure with whom to identify: through the prism of *Fountain*, the name "Duchamp" was seen to represent a new "anti-retinal/conceptual" direction in art. This process of identification was supported by a refinement of Duchamp's statement in "The Creative Act." The text's complexity, the inconsistencies it presents, was swiftly overlooked so that Duchamp's position could be easily reduced to a simple formula, a central message that would resist challenge and be easily assimilated by younger artists: that the creative act is not performed or completed by the artist alone; it is the viewer who completes the work of art. This refinement is only possible, of course, if Duchamp's oeuvre is first understood on the basis of the "readymade idea," as articulated by Apollinaire, Breton and Lebel: the view that the artist's choice of an object, rather than its inherent aesthetic value, is most crucial to its art status. What emerges from this artificial construction is a clear injunction for a future generation of artists to follow. "In saying this," Tomkins writes, "he strikes a note that will be picked up by one young artist after another in the half century to come" (Tomkins, 1996, p. 397). No longer taken at his word, Duchamp's statements are permanently subsumed by the aesthetic plane.

By embodying a familiar set of fundamental principles, the figure of "Duchamp" allows art to start again from a new source. With his passing in 1968, the absence of the man left nothing but the name "Duchamp" as an

empty place-holder now free to be invested with a wealth of aesthetic content. Following the logic of the creative act, he came to represent "the living expression of a new thought in the realm of aesthetics" (Duchamp, 1973, p. 157). Artists, now "keenly aware of Duchamp" and the idea of the "readymade," began to produce in accordance with the criteria he was seen to represent, leading to an eruption of new work carrying Duchamp's so-called "anti-retinal/conceptual" stance to its limit (Tomkins, 1996, p. 458). Joseph Kosuth's essay, "Art after Philosophy," played a crucial role in this process.[3] Appearing one year after Duchamp's death, the text aims to "provide a clearer understanding of the term 'Conceptual art'" by arguing that, with Duchamp's readymades, the function of art frees itself from all aesthetic concerns with the concept becoming the central focus. Within the parameters of the creative act, Kosuth can clearly be seen to re-establish the logic of tasty affairs. First, he redefines the meaning of the word "art":

> This questioning of the nature of art is a very important concept in understanding the function of art […] what is the function of art, or the nature of art? […] a work of art is a kind of proposition presented within the context of art as a comment on art. (Kosuth, 1969)

Then, in accordance with this new definition of art, Kosuth redefines the role of the artist: "being an artist now means to question the nature of art." Finally, he connects these statements to the lighthouse by insisting that the questioning of the nature of art, the new function of art "was first raised by Marcel Duchamp": "In fact it is Marcel Duchamp whom we can credit with giving art its own identity […] All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually" (Kosuth, 1969). To support this claim, Kosuth refers to what he sees as the central message in Duchamp's 1957 seminar on "The Creative Act": that there is a marked distinction between the production of the artist and the aesthetic apparatus that assigns a work its value. Accepting the refinement of Duchamp's statement, Kosuth assures himself of the support needed to argue that the conceptual function of art is separate from the aesthetic field. Paradoxically, the complete subordination of Duchamp's work in line with aesthetic concerns disguises itself as a separation of art from these very concerns.

It was in the 1970s that this fiction was accepted as fact and everyone admitted Duchamp's influence. His "secret society" of followers expanded into an "international cult" and, with Lebel taken as an authority on the

subject, the artificially constructed verdict on his Duchamp's work began to spread (Franklin, 2016, p. 49). As the field of "postmodern" art developed in different directions, artists did some extraordinary things themselves, all the while accepting Duchamp as the origin. "What's left," Duchamp explains, "is the majority of the crowd, with its education, its habits, its idols" (1979, p. 95). And yet, this smooth development would be upended by Duchamp's final, and most radical gesture: the performative dimension of his own death. With the appearance, upon his passing, of *Etant donnés*, the mechanism Duchamp had battled against all his life, the apparatus of reception that was now primed to fully assimilate his production, became stuck on an element that disrupted its internal movement.

Notes

1. At issue here is the notion of ideological "interpellation," first introduced by Althusser and then developed by Žižek along psychoanalytic lines: in essence, interpellation describes the mechanism through which the subject is made to submit to an "ideological command" (Žižek, 2008, p. 43).
2. This, for Lacan, is the final element in symbolic identification, what he terms the "Ego-ideal": a personified, idealized gaze with which one identifies at the level of the ideal-ego, an imaginary place from where we see ourselves as being observed, "from where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable" (Žižek, 2008, p. 116).
3. Kosuth, it should be noted, was developing a point made by Arturo Danto in his 1964 essay "The Artworld" where he described *Fountain* as opening up a new (non-visual) category of art (see Danto, 1964).

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CHAPTER 12

The One-Man Show and the Dealer

Abstract The "consecration" of the artist takes place through his inclusion in an art historical tradition. This is only possible, however, when "the one-man show" causes an artificial construction to appear as historical fact. Through the effects of the museum apparatus, the artist's complete oeuvre is misperceived as an embodiment of the very principles according to which it had been judged. This inversion aligns the work in linear chronological terms, thus allowing it be fitted into a narrative of influence and causality. Duchamp's crucial point is that the one-man show is supported by the actions of "the dealer" in securing a work's commercial value. By asking Arturo Schwarz to produce replicas of *Fountain*, Duchamp exposed this crucial operation that proceeded his art historical recognition.

Keywords Capitalism and Duchamp • Duchamp capitalism and aesthetics • The dealer and the art work • The museum and the market • Schwarz as Duchamp's pawn, *Fountain* as commodity art-form • Duchamp commercialization of readymades; Duchamp retrospectives, fame, legacy false

When assigned the role of lighthouse, the artist acquires an almost sacred status and is recognized as a "star." It is this phenomenon to which Duchamp refers when he uses the term "consecration": the completion of

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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the artist's struggle towards realization through his inclusion in the "primers of art history." As a lighthouse, the artist and his oeuvre are recognized as being historically significant and this consecration sees him finally gain entry into the museum:

> After a work has lived almost the life of a man—twenty or forty years, it doesn't matter the number of years—comes a period when that work of art, if it is still looked at by onlookers, is put in a museum. A new generation decides that it is all right. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 58–59)

The suggestion here is that the inclusion of the artist's work in the museum precipitates his inclusion in an art historical narrative: a "new generation" accepts the work on the condition that it is "still looked at by onlookers"; that is, if it is still exhibited. This is why Duchamp consistently underlines the role of the museum in the consecration of an artist. When asked specifically about the effect of exhibitions on particular artists he replies: "Yes, Van Gogh or Turner, that's going into art history" (1979, p. 97). The artist therefore sees the one-man show as the most direct path to realizing his intention, to achieving his identity: "I think of all these young people who are trying to have their own one-man show at twenty. They imagine that's what it takes to be a great painter!" (1979, p. 92).

The one-man show is important, Duchamp explains, because of the distinct "impression" it creates: "when your memory's warmed up, you see better. You go through it chronologically; the man's really dead, with his life behind him" (1979, p. 92). The museum helps map a historical chronology in which the artist's life is narrated in a linear order, thereby framing a particular viewpoint that "warms up the memory" and allows the artist to be viewed as part of the established art historical discourse. It is on the basis of this operation that the consecration then occurs. The notion of a "star" emerges when "small anecdotes" are made to appear as objective, historical facts: "generally, there's some gross exaggeration […] the idea of the great star comes directly from a sort of inflation of small anecdotes […] it's not enough that two centuries later we have to look at certain people as if they were in a museum; the entire thing is based on a made-up history" (1979, p. 104). What we witness, once again, is the illusion produced by the elements of the museum: a transubstantiation that conceals the fact that the lighthouse is, in reality, an artificial construction; a transcendental action whereby a verdict offered *retroactively* is misrecognized as being there from the beginning. A future generation

thus contents themselves with "the opinion which says that there exists a fleeting infatuation, a style based on a momentary taste." Ultimately, it is through the one-man show that "this momentary taste disappears" (1979, pp. 70–71) and takes on the appearance of art historical reality.

As with his comments on the lighthouse, Duchamp demonstrates this point through direct reference to retrospectives of his own work. This draws our attention to a crucial fact: it was not until *after* these one-man shows that the Duchampian myth began to spread. Before it set the stage for the Duchamp legend to unfold, Lebel's monograph was very poorly received upon initial release. It didn't sell in large numbers because, despite Lebel's best efforts, there was little interest from museums in exhibiting Duchamp's work. It was not until the 1966 Tate retrospective that Duchamp's reputation began to take hold. In other words, Lebel's reading was only consolidated as the official verdict on Duchamp after the elements of the museum intervened. It was because of the Tate show that Lebel's contribution was suddenly seen to carry significant (aesthetic) weight. This is clear to see from the surge in popularity of *Sur Marcel Duchamp* after 1966. Immediate demands were made for an English translation in which Lebel would add a supplementary Foreword reinforcing Duchamp's lighthouse status:

> By comparison with Picasso's gigantic output, Duchamp's works for the past forty years have been token reminders of his presence. But once again the eternal contest between David and Goliath has a surprising outcome. No matter how scarce Duchamp's works are and however slight they may seem to superficial observers they serve to demonstrate how intense his creative powers have remained. They also explain why today more than ever before, he continues to inspire new artists, new modes of expression, new techniques and new ideas. (Lebel in Franklin, 2016, p. 44)

The point, then, is that the "impression" created by the Duchamp retrospective conceals the artificial nature of the lighthouse: Apollinaire's momentary taste and Breton's fleeting infatuations are overlooked in favor of a chronological order of events presented as an (art) historical reality. This is obvious from the speculative shift in the above passage: Lebel presents Duchamp's oeuvre as the material embodiment of the very judgment he himself had offered on this oeuvre. With such an inversion of cause and effect, a retroactive verdict becomes a natural, objective phenomenon. This is why the spread of Duchamp's reputation in the

decade after his death came hand in hand with the wider dissemination—and display—of his work during this period. Once again, the role of the museum cannot be underestimated. It was effectively a series of one-man shows that caused the enlargement of Duchamp's audience from a "secret society" of personal admirers to an international cult. The first significant posthumous exhibition of his work at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1973 saw Lebel, now considered the foremost authority on Duchamp, go to great lengths to reinforce the established reading: he gave a lecture to mark the opening of the show; he wrote an entry in the catalogue; he even went so far as to write a lengthy entry on Duchamp for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This was followed, in 1977, by a retrospective at the Centre Georges Pompidou in France and Lebel was again called upon to contribute. It was after a second exhibition in the Pompidou that same year that the link between Duchamp and Surrealism was validated and Duchamp was positioned as the central figure in the exchange between the European and American art worlds. This is despite the fact that such a narrative had always been dismissed by Duchamp. In his view, the art historical version of events in which Surrealism is seen as a stylistic development that spread from Paris to New York completely obscures the everyday (economic) reality:

> Since I didn't have exhibitions, there was no widespread interest. The interest was focused on the Americans who wanted to meet Breton, who had an enormous influence over there. It was right then that it began, because before the war, there was an official organization called the WPA [Works Progress Administration] […] which would give every artist thirty or forty dollars a month, on the condition that he give his paintings to the State. It was a complete fiasco. The State's storerooms became filled with all these artists' rubbish. Beginning with the war, thanks to the presence of European artists, all that changed; it took the form of a movement in painting called Abstract Expressionism, which lasted for twenty years. It's barely over now, with some large-scale stars, like Robert Motherwell or William de Kooning, who make their money easily. (1979, p. 84)

Duchamp chooses to underline the socio-economic factors obfuscated by the art historical chronology of cause and effect. The crucial point he alludes to is that "everyone accepts the fact of Breton's influence" (1979, p. 84) because, unlike Duchamp, the Surrealists had already exhibited their work. This comment highlights the same interplay between the verdict of posterity and the museum which would lead to the subsequent

explosion in enthusiasm for Duchamp. Within the terms of the creative act, and in line with Duchamp's views on the subject, the series of one-man shows provoked an inevitable posthumous art historical recognition. With each retrospective, the specific "anti-retinal/conceptual" considerations were gradually accepted at face value by a later generation. Ultimately, through the workings of the museum, Duchamp's output was transformed into the embodiment of conceptual/anti-retinal intentions.

As with the other elements in the creative act, Duchamp does not attempt to conceal his attitude towards this phenomenon: "as far as I'm concerned, I have nothing to say, I don't hold much for having shows; I don't give a damn!" (1979, p. 98). Again, it was *Fountain* that exposed this phenomenon. One cannot ignore the significant delay of almost ten years between the publication of Lebel's monograph and the exhibitions that would promote it. Upon publication in 1959, Lebel had tried to persuade galleries and museums in Paris to display Duchamp's work. When they all refused, he was forced to stage a show in a bookstore. This raises an important question: why, after a long period of refusing to exhibit Duchamp's oeuvre, did galleries suddenly become interested in putting on several one-man shows? When asked for his views on the matter, Duchamp offers a curious response that points towards another factor at play:

> I don't know. I never understood. I think it's a question of money […] I'm not very bothered by that. I understand it very well. If they [curators] wanted to see a show of my works here, it would be done. It's the picture dealers who are behind it. The dealers have nothing to gain from me, you understand? […] The museums are run, more or less, by the dealers. In New York, the Museum of Modern Art is completely in the hands of the dealers. Obviously, this is a manner of speaking but it's like that. The museum advisers are dealers. A project has to attain a certain monetary value for them to decide to do it. (1979, pp. 97–98)

The temporal delay in exhibiting Duchamp's work sheds light on another fundamental element of the creative act: the role of *the dealer*. Duchamp conceives of the art dealer as "a form of advanced posterity" in that, by guaranteeing the artist is included in the museum, he plays a crucial role in securing the latter's art historical recognition. The consecration of Cézanne, for example, would not have been possible without the actions of his dealer Ambroise Vollard:

> A man like Vollard is a form of advanced posterity. He could accept Cézanne and put him on a pedestal, and posterity had to accept it. He had something in himself which is comparable to what an artist may give, spiritually speaking. There are good dealers and bad dealers, like everything else. It's a very curious form of parasitism; instead of being a bother, it's an enhancer. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 34)[1]

In his role as dealer, Vollard ultimately created the pedestal for Cézanne that enabled him to be elevated into the Louvre. In describing the dealer as a type of parasitism, Duchamp reveals himself to be acutely aware of the economic forces which underpin the workings of the aesthetic field, the fundamental connection between the market apparatus and the art world:

> It was the beginning of the race for pennies. You could feel it—the beginning of the monetizing of art in the social form. You could feel that a young doctor, a young lawyer, would be attracted not by the fact that he would make money on it, no, but by the fact that he would have some art on his walls by contemporary artists. Before that it was reserved to professional collectors, and these were a species of humanity, the same as dealers were: professional. After 1920, the people at large began to understand that they could buy […] It was just after the First World War. A definitive form of people thinking of buying for speculation. But at the time art was not a commodity, it was a fancy on the part of a certain group of people who were not professionally collectors who were on the way to becoming collectors. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 35)

Duchamp goes to great lengths to underline the economic forces supporting the elements of the museum: "the only thing is, I don't object to it, but I mean, to put it in balance, the fact that they do it so fast, and so many one-man shows, it's just like a boom […] so much money involved and so much eagerness" (in Tomkins, 2013, p. 65). At the same time, he leaves us in no doubt as to his views on the dealer, whom he repeatedly describes as a type of parasite:

> They are the lice on the back of the artist. The collectors are also parasites. The artist is the beautiful flower on which all these parasites go around. I like them very much because they are very nice people, but that has nothing to do with their essential quality, which is to be a parasite on the artist. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, pp. 33–34)

Such remarks allow us to make sense of Duchamp's strange decision to become an art dealer after giving up work on the *Large Glass*. Not only

was he retaining control over the mechanism that would determine the final location of his work, he was also performatively staging the role of the dealer in the creative act. With this in mind, it is significant that Duchamp describes the readymade as an effort not just to escape the tasty affairs but also the market forces dictating these affairs:

> But you see, when I did produce things like that, it was not with the idea of producing thousands of them. It was really to get out of the exchangeability. I mean the monetization, one might say, of the works of art. I never intended to sell my *readymades*. So, it was really a gesture to show that one could do something without having, in the back of your head, the idea of making money through it […] Never did I sell them. Not only that, never did I show them. Nobody saw them until twenty years ago […] So if I am responsible for some of the gestures today, I am only responsible to a degree, not altogether. (Duchamp in Tomkins, 2013, p. 27)

With the final line of this statement, in which the act of selling is equated with the act of showing, Duchamp appears to point us in the direction of Arturo Schwarz. Simply put, Schwarz fits the exact profile of the new form of dealer that Duchamp saw emerging in the 1920s. After being "converted to Surrealism" by Breton (Tomkins, 2013, p. 425), Schwarz sought to profit from its commercial value by opening a small bookstore. The fact that this business soon evolved into an art gallery says much about the intrinsic connection between market and museum. As an art dealer, Schwarz's infatuation with the Duchamp myth being perpetuated at the time led him to contact the artist directly. Duchamp's decision to engage Schwarz is a clear sign that he saw Schwarz as playing a role in his elaborate drama; as dealer, Schwarz would prove to be a useful pawn in the complex picture Duchamp was attempting to construct. He includes Schwarz by asking him to organize an edition of fourteen replicas of *Fountain*, reproduced in precise detail by a Milanese ceramicist who worked from the photograph of the work taken by Stieglitz. The essential point is that Schwarz's actions led directly to a sudden enthusiasm for *Fountain*, as curators, now convinced by the market, became interested in putting on one-man shows.

Through his manipulation of Schwarz, Duchamp succeeds in showing us how the logic of the market dictates the workings of the aesthetic plane—and, conversely, how the market itself is rooted in an aesthetic logic.[2] If the art historian decides to accept the virtues of a work on the basis of the one-man show, then it is the forces of the market that convince

the museum to put on this show in the first place. It is the market that, by assigning commercial value to the work, legitimizes its aesthetic value, thus ensuring that it is accepted by the museum and recognized by the art historian. Effectively, Duchamp actualizes the operation described in *The Blind Man* text: if Stieglitz transforms a manufactured object into a work of art through the act of display, then Schwarz transforms a manufactured object into a commodity by placing it in a show window. What *Fountain* allows us to see is the intrinsic connection between commodity-form and art-form: the fact that the commercial value of a work depends on the logic of the aesthetic plane, the commodity's status as a work of art, while its aesthetic value depends on the dynamics of the market, the work of art's status as a commodity.

Notes

1. Lacan makes the same exact point when he writes that, before a work of art takes on the social (ideological) function of regulating human desire, "the creation of a painter" must first assume a certain level of commercial value: "before the aristocratic patron, it was the religious institution, with the holy image, that gave artists a living […] the situation is not fundamentally changed with the advent of the picture dealer. He too is a patron and a patron of the same stamp" (1981, p. 112).
2. Not only does Duchamp display an acute awareness of how "the libidinal dynamics" of capitalism (Žižek, 2008, p. 19) dictate the logic of the aesthetic field, he also appears conscious of the fact that these dynamics are fundamentally aesthetic in nature: that the commodity-form is first and foremost an art-form, that commodification is not possible without the mechanism of aestheticization. For a more complete elaboration of this argument see Kilroy (2014, 2015, 2016).

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CHAPTER 13

The Art Historian

Abstract The author returns, full circle, to view the argument presented in the opening chapter of the book from an alternative perspective: within the terms of the creative act, "the art historian" brings about the artist's consecration-identification by including his work in the established tradition. This occurs, Duchamp argues, after a temporal delay of roughly fifty years, what he terms a "rehabilitation." The exact logic of the rehabilitation is described as a "pruning" process: a work is made to fit the given canon by being viewed through the prism of specific aesthetic criteria. What Duchamp effectively describes is the procedure outlined by T.S. Eliot, the operation underpinning the reception of *Fountain*, the art historian's role in the creative act now evident *one hundred years later*.

Keywords Duchamp, the death of the work • Duchamp art history incomplete • Duchamp as art historian performance • Art history, *Fountain*, Duchamp creative act, Eliot • Art history as rehabilitation, ideology, tradition, aesthetic control

The creative act comes to an end, Duchamp tells us, with the intervention of the art historian; that is to say, the artist's struggle to realize his intention is complete when, through "the last analysis," he is included in "the primers of art history," and recognized as a "genius." Duchamp is here describing the "consecration" from the perspective of the artist's

R. Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp's* Fountain,
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subjective intuitions: the "psychological aspect" whereby he sets himself on a pedestal and uses art as a "stepping ladder" towards achieving his ambition, his inclusion in the canon of great artists, his entry into the Louvre. It is this intrinsic connection between the consecration and the museum apparatus that Duchamp emphasizes when he asks: "is the museum the final form of comprehension, of judgement?" His answer demonstrates a fundamental reluctance to accept the validity of this judgment:

> The word "judgement" is a terrible thing, too. It's so problematical, so weak. That a society decides to accept certain works, and out of them make a Louvre, which lasts a few centuries. But to talk about truth and real, absolute judgement—I don't believe in it at all. I haven't been to the Louvre for twenty years. It doesn't interest me because I have these doubts about the value of the judgements which decided that all these pictures should be presented to the Louvre, instead of others that weren't even considered, and which might have been there. So fundamentally we content ourselves with the opinion which says that there exists a fleeting infatuation, a style based on a momentary taste; this momentary taste disappears, and despite everything certain things still remain. (1979, pp. 70–71)

Duchamp's skepticism is rooted in the fact that, in offering a final judgment on a work, we all too easily "content ourselves" with accepting the questionable verdict of the spectator at face value. The problem, he clearly states, is that "art history has consistently decided upon the virtues of a work of art through considerations completely divorced from the rationalized explanations of the artist" (Duchamp, 1973, p. 139). For a more nuanced understanding of Duchamp's point, it is worth noting the context of his remarks on the lighthouse:

> Historical? I don't know […] Generally, there's some gross exaggeration. The idea of the great star comes directly from a sort of inflation of small anecdotes. It was the same in the past. It's not enough that *two centuries later we have to look at certain people as if they were in a museum*; the entire thing is based on a made-up history. (1979, p. 104; author's emphasis)

In connecting the lighthouse function to the museum apparatus, Duchamp offers us a clear insight into the precise nature of the final judgment: on the basis of the spectator's considerations, the validity of the work is accepted and the artist is integrated into a historical narrative. In this

sense, the artist is "consecrated by posterity" when the inflation of small anecdotes causes him to be recognized as a "great star." This is what happens when "posterity gives its final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists." The use of the term "rehabilitation," however, is highly significant as it implies that the consecration involves a temporal delay:

> things take place in slices of twenty or twenty-five years, or less. Where will they put it all? In the Louvre? […] Look at the pre-Raphaelites; they lit a small flame, which is still burning despite everything. They aren't very well liked, but they'll come back—they'll be rehabilitated […] Remember Art Nouveau, the "Modern" style, the Eiffel Tower, and all the rest! […] It's almost automatic, especially in the last two centuries, because during them we've seen one "ism" following another. Romanticism lasted forty years, then Realism, Impressionism, Divisionism, Fauvism, etc. (1979, p. 94)

Duchamp's argument regarding the temporal logic of the consecration is clear: every twenty-five years a rehabilitation occurs that causes a series of artificial "isms" to appear as natural stylistic shifts taking place every forty years. This rehabilitation—the inclusion of an artist in art history—is itself completed *every fifty years*: "the pruning is done on a grand scale. In fifty years, well, well! […] properly any masterpiece is called that by the spectator as a last resort" (1979, p. 70). Duchamp expands on what he means by "pruning" in the following passage:

> In the production of any genius, great painter or great artist, there are only four or five things that really count in his life. The rest is just everyday filler. Generally, these four or five things shocked when they first appeared. Whether its "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon." Or "La Grande Jatte," they're always shocking works. In this sense, I do not feel like going to admire every Renoir, or even all of Seurat […] Still, I like Seurat a lot—that's another question. I dream of rarity, what otherwise could be known as a superior aesthetic. People like Rembrandt or Cimabue worked every day for forty or fifty years, and it is we, posterity, who have decided that this was very good because it was painted by Cimabue or Rembrandt. Any little bit of trash by Cimabue is still very much admired. It's a piece of trash next to three or four things he made which I don't know about anyway, but which exist. I apply this rule to all artists. (1979, p. 69)

Within the terms of the creative act, the "production of any genius" describes the production of the artist, in the last analysis, *as a genius*; that is, his inclusion in the "primers" of art history. The rest of the statement

can thus be understood as referring to the precise logic of the rehabilitation that brings this about; namely, the pruning process whereby the artist's work is trimmed in order to fit an established tradition. This pruning involves assessing the artist's output on the basis of four or five factors and obscuring all other relevant details; in short, the particular works are judged in accordance with a specific set of given priorities. First, one focuses on their shocking nature (their subversive quality) so that anything else in the painter's life that may count is reduced to "filler." Second, one dreams of rarity (their original quality), so that all other works produced throughout the painter's life are ignored. The double meaning implied by the word "production"—in relation to the painter's output and the effect of the judgment—here proves crucial. It allows Duchamp to define the consequences of the pruning process, or, more specifically, how the pruning erases its own traces through an inversion of causal relations: first, the virtues of the work are decided upon through reference to given criteria (shock, rarity); this, in turn, brings about the production of a genius, the production of the artist as genius; finally, through a reversal of cause and effect, the works are seen as masterpieces *because they were produced by a genius.*

Duchamp here offers a precise analysis of the phenomenon described by T.S. Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Indeed, his statements clearly echo Eliot's critique of the tendency to privilege the "new" in assessing aesthetic value. Eliot's central point, it should be remembered, is that tradition operates according to the logic of rehabilitation: "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" (Eliot, 1921, p. 45). Duchamp's notion of "pruning" therefore supplements what Eliot calls a "pleasing archaeological reconstruction" (Eliot, 1921, p. 42): the recognition of a work's originality, how it breaks from tradition, through a paradoxical gesture whereby the work conforms to the tradition while the tradition conforms to the work. What we recognize are the institutional dynamics of art historical practice, bringing us full circle to what Preziosi calls a "fixing-in-place," what Panofksy terms "reformulation," what Žižek refers to as "Ptolemization." Eliot's point is that to be aware of the logic of rehabilitation supporting this operation is also to "be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities." Duchamp displays this awareness when he notes that "the difficulty is to make a painting that is alive" while also remembering "that when it dies in fifty years, it goes back into that purgatory of art history." He is referring, in this statement, to the ultimate

effect of the creative act, the death of the work: "I think a picture dies after a few years like the man that painted it. Afterward, it's called the history of art […] it has entered into history—it's accepted as that [but] that has nothing to do with what it is. Men are mortal, pictures too" (1979, p. 68). In light of these remarks, the role of the museum in securing the final verdict becomes clear:

> After a work has lived almost the life of a man—twenty or forty years, it doesn't matter the number of years—comes a period when that work of art, if it is still looked at by onlookers, is put in a museum. A new generation decides that it is all right. And those two ways of judging a work of art certainly don't have anything in common, in my opinion. That's why I say the life and death of a work of art—death meaning posterity, meaning art history. (2013, pp. 58–59)

By distinguishing between two forms of judgment that "don't have anything in common," Duchamp clarifies what he means by the "death" of a work: the moment when, no longer exerting a direct effect on the viewer, it is placed in a repository of aesthetic objects that once performed a social function. He expands on this point elsewhere:

> The history of art is something very different from aesthetics. For me, the history of art is what remains of an epoch in a museum, but it's not necessarily the best of that epoch, and fundamentally it's probably even the expression of the mediocrity of the epoch, because the beautiful things have disappeared—the public don't want to keep them. But this is philosophy. (1979, p. 67)

Duchamp's overall argument can be summarized as follows: the consecration of the artist in the primers of art history, the permanent inclusion of his work in the museum, signals the completion of the crime, the ultimate death of the work through its permanent subordination to the demands of the aesthetic plane. And yet, his attitude towards the workings of the creative act remains remarkably consistent; he knows that the "pruning" in question cannot be stopped. This is why he cites T.S. Eliot's essay in his seminar: through Eliot, he directly calls attention to the logic of his own work's art historical reception. Repeating the same approach adopted on each level of the creative act, he intervenes in an attempt to stage the process he describes, to expose the art coefficient, the gap between intention and realization that splits art historical discourse from within.

Duchamp tries to stage this gap by performatively adopting the position of the art historian. Note how, in the above statement, he directly subverts the message he intends to communicate by using the first-person pronoun "I": "I like Seurat a lot—that's another question. I dream of rarity, what otherwise could be known as a superior aesthetic […] I apply this rule to all artists" (1979, p. 69). To all appearances, Duchamp is simply offering his own personal judgment; however, this would see him contradict all other statements on the subject. Much like in "The Creative Act" and *The Blind Man* texts, we encounter, once more, a clear obstacle to interpretation that, when viewed in purely formal terms, highlights the declarative nature of the statement, the coefficient operation at work in the final judgment. When Duchamp declares that "it is *we*, posterity, who have decided that this was very good" he is building on his earlier point concerning the weakness of this judgment ("So fundamentally *we content ourselves* with the opinion which says …"). In other words, by speaking on behalf of this "we," he adopts the position of the art historian directly, *performatively*. In doing so, he renders visible the gap between what the art historian says and what he is actually doing at the level of the statement: supplementing the word "art" with considerations that, through a pruning process, cause the work to conform to the established tradition, to "fit" the given narrative.[1]

This performative procedure is repeated when Duchamp, having been asked by Katherine Dreier to write a set of biographical profiles on artists for the Société Anonyme Collection, created "a completely traditional work" but in an amusing way: "At that moment I changed my profession; I became a historian. I didn't do so well, but I tried not to be too stupid, which unfortunately I was sometimes. I made some puns." In order to distance himself from any adherence to aesthetic priorities, he insists that the text is not a judgment but a *statement*: "I didn't take sides. It was always either biographical or descriptive. It was a collection; there was no call to evaluate it, and my judgement wasn't important. I didn't want to write a book, either. It was simply a matter of putting down the things I knew" (1979, pp. 84–85). When asked why, after giving his talk on "The Creative Act," he claimed to have "played my part as an artistic clown," his response indicates a correlation between his intentions in the seminar and his later efforts to adopt a more art historical discourse:

> Naturally, because all these things I was doing were demanded, or requested. I had no reason to say, "But I'm above all that, I don't want to do it." It was

> amusing. In general speaking in public is part of the artist's life […] *it was a game for me* to see what I could do, to keep from being ridiculous […] as far as I was concerned, it broadened my horizon a little. Later, I gave talks on myself, my work. It was always the same subject […] I wasn't taking myself seriously; I was making some money. That was the main reason. To make things easy and not be obliged to go into complicated theories. I always spoke on my own work. When I used a slide projector, I explained each picture, more or less. It was a very simple system, and it's done often in the United States, where artists are often invited to speak. To students, generally. (1979, p. 89; author's emphasis)

This performative activity reaches its apex when Duchamp turns it against his own consecration. Through his death he succeeds in investing *Fountain* with the critical force necessary to stage the final element in the creative act. As we have seen, the discovery of *Etant donnés* blocked all art historical efforts to judge Duchamp's work in line with the established anti-retinal/conceptual priorities. What is rendered visible by this blockage is the logic of the judgment itself: the fact that the process of "reformulation" or "reconstruction" is an operation of "Ptolemization" or "pruning." Much like his refusal to exhibit the *Large Glass*, Duchamp's decision to keep *Etant donnés* a secret suggests he had anticipated and prepared for his own consecration in advance. Not only was he avoiding the effects of the creative act, he was also keeping a crucial element in reserve. Then, with one final piece left to play, he called checkmate with his final breath. As the cogs of the mechanism began to turn rapidly and critical reaction to his work expanded at an alarming rate, *Etant donnés* sat silently in a dark corner of a museum in Philadelphia, quietly undermining the entire process from within until the moment would come for its effects to be recognized. As a narrative device in the picture Duchamp was constructing, *Etant donnés* played a fundamental role: it called attention to the internal blockage in the system, the gap which, one hundred years later, would expose the entire apparatus on all its levels.

This is how, by understanding *Fountain* in Duchamp's own terms, we come to appreciate its legacy anew. Following the temporal delay that is inherent to the rehabilitation, *Fountain* has been fixed in the given narrative through a pruning operation. However, the "double bind" it presents—the fact that to be new, shocking ("anti-art") it must be rare, original (a work of "conceptual art")—undermines this process and makes the pruning explicit. The double bind thus marks the appearance of the art

coefficient at the final level of the creative act, that of the art historical statement. *Fountain*'s paradoxical reception ultimately reveals what art historians are *actually doing* when integrating new works into a given tradition: maintaining the consistency of the established narrative by keeping a set of fundamental *aesthetic* considerations firmly in place.

By looking at *Fountain* from this distinctly Duchampian perspective, we assign the work its place in a new narrative framework where it acquires a new level of significance, one hundred years after the fact. The narrative in question has told the real story of "The Richard Mutt Case," revealing it to be a richly woven tableau of complex connections and details. *Fountain*'s symptomatic qualities, the series of deadlocks, contradictions and inconsistencies that have persisted over the past century, simply dissolve through a radical act of interpretation. This interpretation, instead of uncovering meaning and overcoming these obstacles, has sought from the outset to explain the emergence of the obstacles themselves, of reading the problem as its own solution. What emerges is a new picture, a picture which includes us—as onlookers, spectators and art historians—within its frame. It is a picture Duchamp spent most of his life composing, by painstakingly placing all the necessary elements in position, so that an arrangement of different parts might allow the whole to become visible to a gaze willing to view the distortion from a new point of view. In this fundamental sense, Duchamp can truly be said to have made his life his art. Through his actions and his words, he marked the coordinates of the stage upon which he was performing, thus turning the spotlight on the structure of this stage and the edifice sustaining it.

Of course, throughout it all, Duchamp could not but have had a particular audience in mind: his performance was directed towards the imaginary gaze of an "ideal public," a future viewer who, from a vantage point made possible by a temporal delay, might recognize the arrangement and identify the emergence of Duchamp's picture. The unusual position adopted, that of an art historical approach *turned* detective method *turned* psychoanalytic procedure, has been paradoxical from the start: rather than imposing conceptual categories, it has attempted to free itself from such categories, to disengage from all aesthetic priorities through an extreme formalist approach, one that claims to do no more than engage with the evidence at hand and take Duchamp at his word. The investigation has led to the reconstruction of a linear order of events, a new narrative in which the chain of causal relations is established and the curious features in "The Richard Mutt Case" begin to make sense. What Duchamp's picture ultimately

reveals is an institutional "crime" that is hidden by a complex luring mechanism: the destruction of a work through its aestheticization and the concealment of this act through the creation of "art." These are the stakes of "The Creative Act," issues that now require a direct confrontation with a traumatic truth: what the work of art causes us to overlook is the very death of the work which precedes it.

With fresh eyes, it is clear to see that the detective work is far from complete. On the contrary, through the lens of this new picture, several alternative lines of investigation must now be pursued. First, a full and proper analysis of the precise relationship between art history and the aesthetic plane must be undertaken, so as to bring about a state of consciousness on the part of the art historian of what he is doing and, crucially, *why*. To follow such a path is not to condemn art historical practice but, rather, to transform it by way of an emancipatory gesture: free from the chains of the aesthetic field, the discipline will emerge in a new unexpected shape, its critical (political, ethical, *iconological*) edge sharpened and its fundamental priorities redefined.

Another important question to be answered is this: if the aesthetic plane leads to the death of the work then what gives it life? What is it about Duchamp's oeuvre that is destroyed by the creative act? At issue here is a complete exploration of Duchamp's project on the basis of Lacanian theory, a full rehabilitation of the Duchampian field to its precise psychoanalytic foundations. This line of enquiry will inevitably involve the elaboration of a new story of art, a new tradition in painting that adds a broader backdrop to the new art historical methodology being proposed. It also inevitably leads to a more rigorous reading of Duchamp with Žižek, and Žižek with Duchamp, an exchange that has important ramifications for both the field of ideology critique and visual culture. The wager is that, through the lens of *Fountain*, Duchamp's work becomes a vital tool in the analysis of contemporary ideological phenomena operating on the aesthetic—digital—plane. Such an expansion of Duchampian scholarship necessitates a complete reassessment of *Fountain*'s impact on contemporary art and, in turn, contemporary society; that is, a critical examination of how our interpretation of *Fountain*—the universal acceptance that "anyone can be an artist"—has come to legitimize and govern the aesthetic activity of today's public, their actions on a digital terrain.[2]

And so, in the end, it is clear that the case is far from closed. To follow Duchamp I will quote Eliot: "The end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. Through the

unknown, unremembered gate […] Not known, because not looked for. But heard, half-heard, in the stillness."[3] It is only now, one hundred years later, that, in the stillness of a centenary, the revolutionary potential of Marcel Duchamp's work begins to assert itself with renewed force for a twenty-first-century audience. It is only today, in 2017, that, above the silence and the noise, his voice might finally be heard.

Notes

1. Duchamp ultimately asks the art historian to recognize Žižek's central theoretical point: that the real ideological dimension of one's activity lies not in the content of the ideas or concepts being presupposed but in the constitutive blindness supporting the activity itself; the subordination of art historical practice to the workings of the aesthetic field. As was noted at the outset, to accept this point is to acknowledge an unbearable, traumatic truth, to risk dissolving the field that legitimizes one's activity and identity. The choice Duchamp faces us with is, by definition, a difficult one: either we ignore the facts and retain the status quo or accept the "problem" as a solution, an emancipatory moment of radical revolutionary change. In truth, this liberating potential is only perceived when one's standpoint is altered, when the art historian accepts that certain "unthought" presuppositions govern his/her activity and that, in the death of the work through its aestheticization, he/she is directly implicated.
2. For a more detailed discussion of this point see Kilroy (2015).
3. See Eliot (1943).

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[1]Note: Page number followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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