*Étant donnés*

MARCEL DUCHAMP

John M Carvalho – 14474/16771 words

From August to November, 2009, the Philadelphia Museum of Art presented *Marcel Duchamp:* *Étant donnés*, the first major exhibition of Marcel Duchamp’s last great work, *Étant donnés: 1⁰ la chute d’eau, 2⁰ le gaz d’éclairage …* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas …)* (1946-1966). The exhibit, which included studies and supporting materials, was organized to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the installation of that work at the PMA. The accompanying catalogue by Michael R. Taylor, who curated the exhibit, provides a trove of new research, previously unpublished documents and photographs as well as technical studies of the vellum covered, plaster cast figure at the center of *Étant donnés* and the landscape in the background for the work.[[1]](#endnote-1) Only six months later, in May, 2010, Caroline Bachman and Stefan Banz organized and curated the *Symposium – Concert – Intervention – Exhibitions* in Cully, Switzerland, to celebrate and discuss the discovery of the Forestay Waterfall thought to have inspired Duchamp’s last great work. At Cully, nearly two dozen artists, art historians, critics and scholars, including Michael Taylor, took turns deciphering the meaning of *Étant donnés*, its *raison d’être* Hans Maria de Wolf called it, at a site just five kilometers from Duchamp’s supposed inspiration.[[2]](#endnote-2) Still, the meaning of *Étant donnés* remains obscure. A common view, that it is the three-dimensional projection of the two-dimensional *La mariée mise á nu par ses célibataire, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*) (1915-1923), relies on a rather obvious narrative, when Duchamp was at all times at pains to be obtuse. Is this really the scene of the Bride finally stripped bare by her bachelors, ravaged sexually and left for dead, or is there something more to it?

The group that made the pilgrimage to Cully and Bellevue-Chexbres, Switzerland, takes a slightly different approach. They take the reference in the title to *la chute d’eau*, the waterfall, to be the key to understanding the work and the very waterfall thought to have inspired Duchamp, the Forestay Waterfall, to be their key to understanding the significance of the waterfall for *Étant donnés*. While their motivations and excitement are sincere, we will not find much to be gained by shifting the viewer’s attention to the waterfall from the breach at the center of the work that the waterfall is supposed to represent. None of the papers presented at Cully account for the connection between the waterfall seen as the female sex and the rendering of that sex in the work’s central figure. As a result, we are left with a missed encounter with Duchamp and his *Étant donnés*. We will attempt to chance on that encounter by turning to a site where the formula “Given: 1. the waterfall, 2. The illuminating gas” first appeared, the so-called *Green Box* (1934), the notes collected and reproduced as a complement to the *Large Glass*. Given the title, *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, Duchamp said he wanted the *Box* “to be consulted when seeing the Glass because, as I see it,” Duchamp continues, “it [the *Glass*] must not be ‘looked at’ in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book [*Box*] and see the two together. The conjunction of the two things entirely removed the retinal aspect that I don’t like. It was very logical.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

The *Glass* in question is, of course, the just mentioned *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*. Consulting the formula, and other texts, from the *Box* we come to locate the waterfall and illuminating gas on the *Glass* in the Bride and Bachelor domains, respectively. These elements are not literally rendered on the *Glass*. They are “given” virtually or conceptually. Seeing the *Glass* through the *Box* we are freed from the tyranny of “just looking” in the sense introduced by our discussion of Duane Michals, above. Reading the *Box* through the *Glass* we confront Duchamp’s preference for the mental over the retinal but also Duchamp’s insistence that we associate the conceptual with the carnal.[[4]](#endnote-4) The waterfall is associated with the Bride’s deflowering and the gas with the Bachelor’s arousal by the actions of the Bride, but we conceive these elements on the *Glass* only by virtue of the notes collected and presented in the *Box* ten years after the *Glass* was left “permanently unfinished” by Duchamp. We are asked to make (logical) sense of what initially confronts us as nonsense.

There are contributors to the event at Cully who are, by turns, disposed to suggest that *Étant donnés*, makes sense of that nonsense. There, the waterfall and the gas are literally present, and the carnality of the work appears front and center. What these contributors do not discuss is the way the work, apart from its contents and the supposed narrative that connects those contents, reproduces what Duchamp takes to be the preferred relation of the audience to a work of art, the relation that makes a work stand out as art and that demands that the audience make sense of it. As *Étant donnés* is constructed, the work is available to only one viewer, in one respect, at one time, and this deserves our attention. There is also the view of the work available to those waiting their turn to peer through the peep holes to discuss, their tendency to stand at the threshold of the anteroom of the work, their reluctance to congregate in that anteroom while they wait their turn, or after they have taken their turn, to look.

In this context, we will introduce the element of time to our appreciation of *Étant donnés*, the time of the affect felt in the face of the spectacle and in the awareness of being a spectacle for those waiting behind you for their turn to see the work. We will also discuss time as a feature of the cognitive experience of perceiving the work through the peep holes, a question of stereoscopic and dioramic vision, and, finally, we will discuss the time of the studio introduced in our discussion, above, of James Elkins’s observations about the limits of materiality in thinking about art. We will pause, finally, to consider the ellipsis which is part of the official title of the work, *Étant donnés: 1⁰ la chute d’eau, 2⁰ le gaz d’éclairage, ….* Given the waterfall, the illuminating gas, … and then what? On the one hand, this appears to be a very small thing, but, on the other, following a suggestion by Molly Nesbit, it introduces *Étant donnés* into a register of science that makes of these “givens” precisely things that cannot be accounted for by logic and metaphysics, what we encounter sensibly, and there are apparently so many different things given sensibly in this work.[[5]](#endnote-5) At bottom, we will give an account of *Étant donnés* that returns us to the time of thought, to a case of being forced to think because we don’t know what to think about what Jasper Johns called “the strangest work of art any museum has ever had in it.” [[6]](#endnote-6)

The Forestay Waterfall

As part of an Introduction to *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay* Waterfall, Stefan Banz tells the story of the discovery of the waterfall apparently seen in the background of *Étant donnés*. In the short version, Banz identifies Felix Kälin as the one who had painstakingly identified the site in 1980 but found his discovery underappreciated by then curator of twentieth-century art and Duchamp specialist at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Anne d’Harnoncourt. The evidence documenting Kälin’s discovery was lost to posterity until Banz and Bachmann, determined to correct the lack of attention given by scholars to the waterfall explicitly mentioned in the title of *Étant donnés*, tracked it down.The main illustration for Banz’s Introduction is a full-page and full-color reproduction of Gustave Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*) (1866). The point of this illustration is to associate the most notorious representation of the female sex with the waterfall or, rather, to see in every waterfall an image of that sex which Courbet has famously pictured (not only in *L’Origine du monde* but also in *La Femme aux bas blancs* (*Woman with White Stockings*) (1861)). With the surrounding forestation standing in for pubic hair, the waterfall is thought to reproduce through the force of gravity the impulse that draws the eye from the mound of the vulva to the folds of the buttocks so obscenely rendered (working from a photograph, it is interesting to note) by the French realist. In the falling water, shimmering in the light, we are meant to see the glistening pink folds of the labia and the anticipation of penetration by the penis. On this view, every waterfall invokes the female sex, and the importance of the Forestay Waterfall is supposed to be that it inspired the elaboration on this theme for *Étant donnés*.

In his presentation for the symposium at Cully, Banz is at pains to show a connection between the Courbet and the Forestay Waterfall.[[7]](#endnote-7) Banz thinks it is not trivial that, from his lodging at the Hotel Bellevue in Chexbres, Duchamp would have had a “direct view” of “the little town of La Tour-de-Peilz” where Courbet spent the last years of his life.[[8]](#endnote-8) He opines that the photograph of the waterfall Duchamp took by turning away from the beautiful view of Lake Geneva (the *belle vue* that gave the hotel its name) captured the invisible presence of the French painter’s death, and that this presence is, in a sense, “part and parcel of the entire work [*Étant donnés*] and its significance.”[[9]](#endnote-9) Banz speculates that Marcel and Teeny Duchamp saw Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* on the occasion of a dinner party hosted by Jacques and Sylvia Bataille Lacan at their country home in 1958; the Lacans had purchased the work when it appeared at auction in 1955.[[10]](#endnote-10) Banz notes that Courbet’s painting shares a history with the invisible presence he attributes to *Étant donnés*, being hidden behind a green curtain in a private dressing room by its first owner, in the false-bottom frame of another work by Courbet (*Le château de Blonay* (1875)) by a second owner and, by the Lacans themselves, behind an oil on wood painting by André Masson, *Masque de l’Origine due monde* a.k.a. *Terre érotique* (1955).[[11]](#endnote-11) However, Duchamp took the photographs at Chexbres that would be the basis for the landscape of *Étant donnés* in 1946, and by 1958 he would have been twelve years into the construction of *Étant donnés*. It cannot have been Courbet’s *L’Origine* that inspired him to take those photographs.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Fortunately for his cause, and ours, Banz entertains a more plausible connection between Courbet and Duchamp. Citing remarks Duchamp made for a symposium at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art in 1961,[[13]](#endnote-13) in a BBC interview four months before his death in 1968[[14]](#endnote-14) and in comments collected for publication in a volume of the *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* in 1946,[[15]](#endnote-15) Banz rightly points to Duchamp’s censuring Courbet for inaugurating a century long fixation on the “retinal” in art, on an aesthetic pleasure almost entirely dependent on the impression made on the retina “without appealing to any auxiliary interpretation.”[[16]](#endnote-16) Banz quotes Duchamp as saying, “I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting…. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind…. I was endeavoring to establish myself as far as possible from ‘pleasing’ and ‘attractive’ physical paintings.”[[17]](#endnote-17) Banz takes these declarations as the promising basis for looking at the *Large Glass* and *Étant donnés* as distinct visual approaches to what is visible and what is invisible, between what is “nameable, identifiable and interpretable,” on the one hand, and “what we do not see although it is present,” on the other.[[18]](#endnote-18) The significance of Courbet for Duchamp’s installations, then, on Banz’s view, would be as a representative of everything Duchamp eschewed in art.

Banz takes the *Glass* to be emblematic of everything invisible. It refers, on his view, in its title and in the notes collected in the *Box*, to a bride stripped bare by bachelors, but neither a bride nor bachelors nor stripping are visibly represented on the *Glass*. The viewer is not so much a viewer, after all, then, but a conceiver or thinker who arrives at a meaning or significance by consulting the *Box* along with the *Glass*. “In *Étant donnés*,” Banz asserts, “the situation is reversed. As in *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, we see everything.”[[19]](#endnote-19) Do we, however, see everything in *Étant donnés* or *Las Meninas*? Michel Foucault has famously detailed precisely what is visibly invisible in Velázquez’s great work:[[20]](#endnote-20) in the richness of the scene at court, we precisely do not see the one or ones at whom the gazes of all the figures in the painting are directed. Is it the king and queen who seem to be reflected in a mirror at the back of the room? Is it the subject of the painting in the painting which may not be the king and queen? Is it the viewer of the painted scene? We cannot say for certain because he or she or they cannot be seen. They are visible only as the invisible object of the regards of the figures at court included in Velázquez’s painting. *Étant donnés* may seem to compare to *Las Meninas* because it inventories a tremendous number of details in the scene presented for us: the waterfall, the illuminating gas, the nude figure, the bed of dead sticks, the brick wall, the door, the peep hole, etc., but what in fact do we see there? Banz thinks that “what is obviously there has to stand for something that is not visible even though it is there in reality.”[[21]](#endnote-21) It is not clear, however, that it does.

Banz is led to his conclusion because he believes that details in the elements that make up *Étant donnés*, starting with the waterfall, “stand for” or represent Courbet who is invisible though really there in that representation. Courbet is there is the female nude and the explicit representation of that nude figure’s sex. He is there in the waterfall which, again, signifies that sex, the view of which points beyond it to Tour-de-Peilz, where Courbet died. He is there in the remains of a mill near the waterfall which Banz interprets as a metaphor for painting as aesthetic self-pleasuring (grinding one’s chocolate alone) which Duchamp presumably rejected. However, just as what is invisible in *Las Meninas* is not represented but emerges conceptually in Focuault’s interpretation of it, so what is invisible in *Étant donnés* will emerge conceptually in our thinking with it. Banz has us pointed in the right direction. By linking the *Large Glass* and *Étant donnés* and suggesting these two works are different approaches to the same end or aim, namely, a thought about the visible and the invisible, he sets us to thinking with Duchamp about art and about the relationship between art and thought. We, however, have a different end in mind for this thinking with images.

So far as the visible and the invisible are concerned, it is remarkable how few commentators in the Forestay Waterfall collection emphasize Duchamp’s rejection of the retinal in art in favor of the grey matter of the mind. Duchamp refers again and again to Courbet as initiating the retinal obsession in art.[[22]](#endnote-22) These references, Banz would say, justify attributing such a significance to Courbet in unpacking the *raison d’être* of *Étant donnés*, but Banz locates the invisible significance of Courbet in the retinal splendor of the glistening waterfall, the graphic sex of the nude figure and in the visible references to the oil mill. We wonder whether the forced requirement that one peer in on this scene as one would a peep show and the visual display we see when taking in this show should give us pause, should alert us to something that cannot be seen and cannot be imagined but must be thought, must be the subject of a distinct form of thinking. Making metaphorical associations does not require much thinking. It is more like following the rules for substituting one thing for another. The thinking we have in mind does not take the form of a deciphering. It follows Duchamp’s insistence that there is no one meaning to his works, that it is up to the viewer to say what they mean, that he worked on them for such a long period of time because he didn’t want them “to be the expression of a sort of inner life.”[[23]](#endnote-23) If we consider the *Large Glass*, for example, there is no shortage of visible elements to see on it and to see through it, but we will find that the meaning of the work is invisible and cerebral, not at all reducible to a predictable narrative about hetero-normative sex but rather more open to the effect (or affect) of a thought each person has who takes in the *Glass* with the *Box*.

When it comes to the relationship between art and thought, Banz himself reminds us that Duchamp said he was more interested in creating ideas than in creating painting. He wanted art to be something more than something to look at. He wanted to put art once again in the service of the mind. The mind, we would say, is best served by thinking, but, as we’ve already said in connection with Duane Michals, thinking that knows what to think is just following a rule. We only begin to think when we don’t know what to think, and this is precisely the thinking Duchamp’s art provokes. What are we to make of the *Large* Glass and *Étant donnés*?What do these works of art mean? Duchamp famously said about the *Large* Glass “there can be no solution when there is no problem. Problems are inventions of the mind. They are nonsensical.”[[24]](#endnote-24) Duchamp also asserted that thinking in art came down to the artist’s choice.[[25]](#endnote-25) “Choice,” he said, “is the crucial factor in a work of art. Paintings, colours, forms, even ideas are an expression of the artist’s choice.”[[26]](#endnote-26) In another interview, that same year, Duchamp associated chess with art through the common element of choice.[[27]](#endnote-27)

What if all Duchamp’s works were the consequences of different choices, different lines of thought about what makes a work a work of art, the way one conceives of a variety of ways to end a game of chess? In his contribution to the Forestay Waterfall symposium, Hans Maria de Wolf reminds us that Duchamp turned away from the traditional idea of an artist’s oeuvre being a list of her or his works initiating, instead, the idea of the oeuvre being “the formal part of an intense attitude, a way of life.”[[28]](#endnote-28) In his interview with the Belgian film director Jean Antoine, filmed in his Neuilly studio in 1966, Duchamp says he used art as a *modus vivendi*, a way of understanding life, “that is to try and make my life a work of art itself.”[[29]](#endnote-29) If there is no final purpose or meaning to life, if life is not a problem to be solved, then perhaps the artist gives his life meaning by producing works that reflect the choices he has made which choices, then, reflect a way of life, making that life a work of art. In response to the challenge posed by Samuel Becket’s *En attendant Gadot* (1953), Duchamp made art.

The *Box*

The formula “Given: 1. the waterfall, 2. the illuminating gas” first appeared on one of ninety-four loose items collected in the *Green Box* beneath the circled, underlined and italicized title “*Preface*”. The dimensions of the original *Box* and its facsimiles are 13 x 11.125 x 1 inch making the typographical translation and bound reproduction of it by Yale art historian George Herbert Hamilton and British pop artist Richard Hamilton (9.375 x 6.125 x .5 inches) deceiving. The original *Green Box* was sized to fit the documents it contained. The original *Green* Box was already a work of art. Exactly what sort of work of art, we will discuss below. The typographical translation and bound reproduction was, in its way, not so much a copy of an original as another work of art.[[30]](#endnote-30) While George Herbert Hamilton was mainly charged with translating the original French text into English, Richard Hamilton was charged with converting the loosely collected, translated and handwritten notes into a form that could be printed, bound and reproduced. In Hamilton’s typographical version of *The Green Box*, the formula in question is printed as follows:

*Preface*

Given 1. the waterfall

2. the illuminating gas,

one will determine

we shall determine the conditions

for the instantaneous State of Rest (or allegorical appearance)  
 of a succession [of a group] of various facts

seeming to necessitate each other

under certain laws, in order to isolate the sign

of [the] accordance between*,* on the one hand,

this State of Rest (capable of [all the] innumerable (?) eccentricities)

and, on the other, a choice of Possibilities

authorized by these laws and also

determining them.

In this transcription, “Preface,” “determine,” “succession,” “various facts,” “sign,” “innumerable eccentricities” and “determining them” are circled in red. At the bottom of this page, numbered one in Hamilton’s typographic reproduction, there is something of a footnote, an added exposition which reads, “For the instantaneous state of rest = bring in the term: extra-rapid.” Then, beneath a red line drawn from the left margin to the right edge of the page, with the just mentioned substitution made, Duchamp writes, “We shall determine the conditions of [the] best exposé of the extra-rapid State of Rest [of the extra-rapid exposure (= allegorical appearance). of a group . . . . . . etc.” Again, how will we make (logical) sense of this seeming nonsense?

Adding to the confusion, another version of the same formula appears on a separate sheet, numbered two and printed on the verso of the page numbered one, above, expanding on this “Preface” under the heading *Notice* again circled in red with the superscript “nothing perhaps” also written in red. Here, “Given” is qualified with the insertions “If, given” and “[in the dark],” and followed by, modifying the formula above, “1. the waterfall, 2. the illuminating gas, in the dark, …” The text goes on to describe “several collisions” succeeding one another this time “according to” certain laws again to isolate the sign of accordance between, making the substitution recommended at the bottom of the “Preface,” the extra-rapid exposition, on the one hand, and the choice of possibilities authorized by those laws, on the other: exposition and a choice authorized by the laws governing that exposition. On this page, beneath the kind of horizontal line that typically separates a text from its footnotes, we find the expression “Algebraic comparison” and under that title another formula, an algebraic formula in the sense of a general statement of relations using letters or symbols to specify those relations.

a a being the exposition

—

b b being the possibilities

the ratio a/b is in no way given by a number c a/b = c but by the sign (/) which separates a and b; a and b being (as soon as a and b are) “known,, they become (new) units and lose their numerical (relative) value (or in duration);; the sign / (of ratio) which separates them remains (sign of the accordance or rather of . . . ?. . . look for it)

On one occasion, Duchamp dates the notes in the *Green Box* to 1913- 1914.[[31]](#endnote-31) He didn’t initially have the idea of a box, he says, then, just the thought that he could collect “some calculations, some reflections” in a catalogue or album “without relating them.”[[32]](#endnote-32) He says, as noted above, he wanted the notes to be consulted when viewing the *Glass*, because the *Glass* “must not be ‘looked at’ in the aesthetic sense of the word.”[[33]](#endnote-33) Duchamp started work on the *Large Glass* in 1915 leaving it “permanently unfinished” in 1923.[[34]](#endnote-34) The notes were not made available, however, until 1934, in green felt covered boxes titled *La mariée mis à nu par ses célibatairres, même*, signed by Duchamp’s alter ego Rrose Sélavy. In a letter to Walter Arensburg, that year, Duchamp announced his intentions to reproduce in facsimile the notes of 1912-1915 made during the gestation and creation of the *Large Glass*.[[35]](#endnote-35) The facsimiles were produced in an edition of 300 including twelve deluxe versions using phototypography or a collotype process which transfers visual information accurately and with the least distortion.[[36]](#endnote-36) This choice – remembering that choice is what distinguishes a work of art from what Arthur Danto would call the “commonplace”[[37]](#endnote-37) – was not typical for the time, but Duchamp’s knowledge of printing led him to recognize collotype’s “proven ability to print in continuous tone without the aid of halftone screen, thus offering photographic accuracy in fully permanent ink on a wide range of paper stocks.”[[38]](#endnote-38) As it turns out, Duchamp would turn to the same collotype process to produce his *Boît-en-valise* (*Box-in-a-Valise*) (1935-1941) and, importantly for our purposes, the background landscape for *Étant donnés*.

When the green boxes first appeared, the *Large Glass* was in pieces, lots of pieces. In transport to the Greenwich, Connecticut, home of Katherine Dreier, after its first public showing at the Brooklyn Museum of Art (1926-1927), the *Glass* shattered.[[39]](#endnote-39) It would be ten years before Duchamp repaired the work, painstakingly piecing together the shards of the original, securing them between two new panes and resetting the whole in an aluminum frame.[[40]](#endnote-40) The repaired *Glass* would be shown once again at the Museum of Modern Art (1946) before it was permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1954. At the PMA, it is sometimes shown with a facsimile of the *Box* in a glass enclosed display case near it. The notes and the box that would enclose them are displayed in that case as a work of art and not as a resource viewers can consult, as Duchamp wanted, while contemplating the *Glass*. The PMA sometimes also posts a wall plaque for the *Glass* with a schematic of its contents taken from Hamilton’s typographic interpretation of the notes in the *Box*, but this tends to confuse viewers who have not consulted the *Box* in advance since it refers to several elements that are only virtually but not visibly present on the *Glass* itself. Of course, this is precisely why Duchamp wants the notes consulted in contemplating the *Glass*.

If we consult those notes, and not only the “Preface” and “Notice,” we see the *Glass* divided into Bride and Bachelor machines. This choice and organization of the *Glass* is the realization of a linear or technical “method” Duchamp deployed to “avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting,” and it is precisely in this context that he says he wants to downplay the importance of the visual element.  
“Everything was becoming conceptual, that is, it depended on things other than the retina.”[[41]](#endnote-41) This linear or technical method was inspired by the chance to join a group of friends and artists in decorating his brother’s house with small pictures. Duchamp did a coffee grinder (*Moulin à café* (1911)) which he made to explode, the coffee tumbling down alongside it, the gears appearing above it and “the knob seen simultaneously at several points in its circuit, with an arrow to indicate movement. Without knowing it, I opened a window onto something else,” Duchamp reports.[[42]](#endnote-42) Ironically, in opening this window, he happened on a plan for making a painting that was anything but a window on the world.[[43]](#endnote-43)

The Bride and Her Bachelors, Even

Duchamp himself supervised the installation of *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, the *Large Glass*, at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1954. The form and contents of the Duchamp Gallery have changed over the years, but all the variations have revolved around the unchanged, central position of the *Large Glass*. A bench is placed in the middle of the gallery where one can sit while contemplating the *Glass*. A variety of Duchamp’s other works – paintings, readymades, *objet d’art* – have been installed in a periphery around this work, on the walls, in display cases (for a time there were works that could be seen through the *Glass*) and, currently, on a slightly raised platform or stage. Importantly, for the installation of the *Glass*, a window was cut in the thick, stone wall of the museum allowing a view through the *Glass* onto the plaza that forms the entrance to the PMA. On the one hand, this intervention allows a wider world to enter the *Glass* as we look through it rather than at it, on the other hand, it introduces, really and physically, an element, the waterfall, into the work which is only there virtually in the plans for the work included in the *Box*. In the plaza leading to the east entrance of the PMA, there is a fountain, not always flowing, which can be seen to contribute, in an n-dimensional conception of the work, to the functioning of the *Glass*.

Following the algebraic formula of the “Notice” from the *Box*, we are inclined to associate the waterfall with the Bride’s domain.[[44]](#endnote-44) The fountain in the PMA plaza (*Fountain* being the title of Duchamp’s most famous readymade, signed “R. Mutt, 1917,” and a colloquial French reference to the female sex) realizes that waterfall, flowing from the Bride’s to the Bachelors’ domain and contributing to the narrative retelling of a Bride stripped bare by her Bachelors, even.[[45]](#endnote-45) Following Hamilton’s typographical reconstruction of the *Glass* based on notes in the *Box*, the Bride’s and Bachelors’ domains are more properly conceived as machines. “Duchamp likes machines because they have no taste and no feeling,” Jean-François Lyotard writes.[[46]](#endnote-46) Duchamp’s machines are anonymous. They suppress the question of the author and authority. They dissimilate. They do not belong to power or politics or technology. “It’s the mechanics of machination. Its effects are not recognizable and thus consumable beings, but singlular, misrecognizable inventions, which presuppose the exercise of a faculty of cunning.”[[47]](#endnote-47) Duchamp’s machines are not productive. If they be called celibate, it is not to describe their virtue but to celebrate their pointlessness.

If the machines that litter the *Glass* are pointless, it is because they have no purpose, no *raison d’être*. This is why it will not help to compare Duchamp’s machines with the desiring-machines of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[[48]](#endnote-48) What Deleuze and Guattari call desiring-machines are productive. They produce desiring. It is no so much their purpose. It is just what they do. Desiring-machines are one way Deleuze and Guattari account for the unconscious. To refuse a theatrical narrative that reduces the unconscious to a drama starring Daddy, Mommy and me, Deleuze and Guattari, following Jacques Lacan,[[49]](#endnote-49) return to an earlier Freudian typology of the unconscious as the condensation and displacement of cathexes or investments of desire in one or several objects or partial objects. Taking this one step further, again following Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari associate desiring machines with the drives rather than desire and multiply those drives to include not just life and death, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, but all the various ways we find ourselves compelled to produce, distribute and consummate the object cause (*objet a*) of our desiring. The result of this desiring production is not tragic, as in the Oedipal narrative, but comic, a delirium, even.

“A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model” of mental health, Deleuze and Guattari write, “than a neurotic on the analyst’s coach.”[[50]](#endnote-50) Their schizophrenic is not the “limp rag forced into autistic behavior” by “therapy” but a vibrant, animated and animating process that does not differentiate between human being and nature or between nature and industry. Everything is one continuous process of machines coupling and connecting with one another, recording these connections and consuming the productions of this continuous machinic circuitry. For this schizophrenic, the cycle of night and day, the sun, the wind and rain, are continuous, connected processes which carry seeds and nourish them to become fields of produce for human and animal consumption leading to the production of milk and meat and leather, fur and feathers that feed and clothe industrial workers whose production produces effects on the earth that effect the warmth and cold, wind and rain that provide a climate for continued production. A seed is a small machine. It connects with the earth, a much larger and equally complex machine (composition of the soil, available nutrients, resident insects, sloped toward the morning or afternoon sun, at a relative latitude and longitude, etc.). This production is at once a recording process – wheat grew well here, grapes did better there – and this recording is written on the earth itself. The wheat growing well here marks the earth at that location with all the effects of the wheat flourishing right there. In the case of the grapes, the vines will remain after the harvest, and the relative health of those vines will mark the earth with a record of their growth. This recording, as the producing, is at once a consumption: what is produced is produced for consumption and consumption contributes to production by demanding it and demanding that a record of the production and consumption, both, be kept on the earth.

The reason for this seeming digression is that Deleuze and Guattari cite Michel Carrouges’s identification of certain “celibate machines,” including *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*, in their discussion of the machinery of consumption.[[51]](#endnote-51) It should be noted that “consumption” is a translation of the French *consummation* which can mean the consumption of raw materials (food and fuel) as well as the ultimate perfection and fulfillment of something including the consummation of, for example, a marriage. So our Bride and her Bachelors have not been left behind in this discussion, but the celibate machine in Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis points to something we do not find in the Duchamp, the discernment of “something on the order of a *subject*” on the recording surface.[[52]](#endnote-52) This subject, which has no fixed identity, is defined by the share of the product it takes for itself. It stands apart from the desiring-machines and takes form as a kind of “reward in the form of a becoming or an avatar, being born of the states that it consumes and being reborn with each new state.”[[53]](#endnote-53) In our example of the earth, the dairy farmer stands out from the rancher by the different shares she takes of the earth, taking milk from her cows rather than marketing their meat, and this dairy farmer stands out from every other citizen of the earth, and defines her subjectivity, by the very particular shares of the earth she consumes.

Deleuze and Guattari borrow the term “celibate machine” from Carrouges to designate the alliance between the desiring-machines and what they call the “body without organs” which gives birth to this subject as a residuum alongside the desiring-machines, gives birth in fact to “a new humanity” alongside these desiring-machines.[[54]](#endnote-54) Now, the “body without organs” is just the degree zero of the body, the body prior to its connections with desiring-machines and the recording of those connections on its surface.[[55]](#endnote-55) The celibate machine produces on the body without organs “a genuine consummation” experienced as an erotic or automatic pleasure, “the nuptial celebration of a new alliance … as though the eroticism of the machine liberated other unlimited forces.”[[56]](#endnote-56) These forces are “intensive quantities” felt as, Deleuze and Guattari tell us, hallucination and delirium. Again, we are in the world of the schizophrenic and the Freudian typology of the unconscious: an intensity of cathexes, all positively charged, all aiming at the zero degree of intensity, the quiescence of primary narcissism, the plenum of the body without organs.

There is clearly a sense in which Duchamp would be delighted to have this celibate machinery thought alongside his *Glass*, but there is a profound difference between what Deleuze and Guattari and Duchamp have in mind. Like Deleuze and Guattari, Duchamp uses the logic and image of the machine to by-pass a reductive narrative order. For Deleuze and Guattari, that narrative was the Oedipal drama of Daddy, Mommy, and me. For Duchamp, the narrative has to do with painting, its retinal preoccupations but also the history and traditions that bring everything under the title “painting” to one meaning: window on the world, of the world outside us or of the inner world of the painter, in short, a representation to be understood in terms of what it represents rather than on its own terms. Moreover, while Deleuze and Guattari’s celibate machines produce residual subjects, Duchamp’s *Glass* produces subjects in the form of interpretations of it which are, in the best case, drawn but also independent from the machines which invite these interpretations. The important difference between the celibate machines of Deleuze and Guattari’s body without organs and the celibate machines on Duchamp’s *Glass* is that the former give an account of a schizoid universe presented as a preferred alternative to the universe that would reduce the schizophrenic to an autistic case. The latter, Duchamp’s machines, are more hallucinatory, more delirious still than Deleuze and Guattari’s schizophrenic. The celibate machines on Duchamp’s *Glass* do not offer a solution, an alternative universe, because there is no problem. Without saying so, Duchamp endorses the Nietzschean exhortation: *Amor fati*.

If we go back to Richard Hamilton’s typographic reconstruction of the story that fits the notes in the *Box* to the images delayed in the *Glass*, we can get a better sense of the hallucinations and delirium that attend Duchamp’s celibate machines and of why they do not represent a form of psychosis intended as an alternative model of mental health. Let’s start by noticing that the *Glass* is composed of two unequal panes of glass framed together to form a whole nearly six feet wide and over nine feet high (70 x 109 ¼ x 3 ⅜ inches). It is installed in such a way that one can contemplate it from both sides. From behind, you see the physical support for the oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire and dust delayed on the *Glass* as well as the title of the work, the artist’s name and the date handwritten on the back of what we will come to know as the chocolate grinder. From the front, you see the contents delayed in glass as part of a continuum that includes a view of the palazzo that forms the entrance to the museum as well as any museum goers who happen to pass behind the *Glass* while you consider it. Those contents include, in the upper frame, a modified version of an earlier painting, *Bride* (1912), oil on canvas, said to depict a delicate machine, a motor, the “arbor Type,” Duchamp calls her (*Green Box*), and wafting from this Bride a cloud punctuated by three irregularly shaped “windows,” “nets” or “draft-pistons.” The cloud and Bride appear to be attached to and hanging from the frame above them on hooks. In addition, what are called the “nine shots,” random black dots created by “pea-shooting” match sticks tipped in paint at the *Glass* appear suspended, below the cloud, in the right middle section of the upper domain, the Bride machine.

In the lower frame, the region of the Bachelor machine, nine “malic moulds” dominate the middle-left of the pane. The molds are stylized variants of the glass couplings used to insulate electrical connections atop high voltage towers and ordinary power poles. They are connected, by a network of “stoppages” or “capillary tubes,” to a chocolate grinder crowned with a cascade of “parasols,” “drainage slopes” or “sieves” and a chiasmus described as “scissors” at the center of the Bachelors’ domain. In addition, on the side of the molds in the lower pane, the “scissors” are attached to the “chariot,” “sleigh” or “glider” superimposed on a “water wheel” or “mill.” On the opposite side of the chocolate grinder from these mechanisms are the “oculist charts” or “witnesses” which mediate the Bride’s and her Bachelors’ desires. Finally, what physically and evidently mediates the two domains or machines are three plates of glass inserted horizontally in the frame that both join and separate them described, on one side, as the “Bride’s clothes” and the “horizon” and, on the other side, as a “gilled cooler,” the “isolating plates” and the “Wilson Lincoln System.” None of these elements are visible on the surface of the *Glass* but they figure virtually – with the “bottle of Benedictine,” the “pump” and “chute,” the “splashes,” the “weight with holes,” the “handler,” “trainer of gravity” and “juggler,” the “boxing match” and the “geared system” – in the meaning of the *Glass* by virtue of their references in the *Box*.

How are we supposed to imagine that these actual and virtual, apparently heterogeneous elements interact? Why are we supposed to imagine they interact at all? Nothing about the way the *Glass* looks leads us to see anything more than an abstraction (of what it’s not clear), a “delay in glass,” as Duchamp put it, of elements that have no obvious connection to one another. The upper and lower panes can each be read left to right, the formal properties of the elements included in each pane lend themselves to such a reading, but those readings do not connect the Bride and Bachelor machines occupying the upper and lower panes to one another. It is only by consulting the notes in the *Box*, made available a decade after *La mariée mise à nu* was left “permanently unfinished,” that we can connect the Bride and Bachelor machines. In one of those notes, Duchamp describes the *Glass* as a two-dimensional projection of objects in *n*-dimensions. On the assumption that every shadow is a two-dimensional projection of a three-dimensional object, Duchamp surmises that every three-dimensional object is a projection of a four-dimensional object, and so on. While Duchamp would extend these projections to an indefinite *n*-dimensional universe, most commentators have stopped at four and taken Duchamp’s reference to an *n*-dimension to be a reference to the fourth dimension or time, in particular the time of the narrative that would connect the Bride and Bachelor machines on the *Glass*.[[57]](#endnote-57)

On this view, we are invited to accept that this work of art works if, starting from the top, we think of water as fundamental to the Bride, an “agricultural machine” as she is also called, whose truth is to be the bearer of her husband’s children, to be pregnant and, in pregnancy, to break water, the resultant water-fall representing the defloweration of this Bride and her initiation into this “truth.” This defloweration, which perpetuates itself, is all the while prepared by a “double stripping,” once by the Bride’s own hands and, again, by her Bachelors, even. The Bride does her part by drawing on a “reservoir of timid power,” secreting a “love gasoline” into her “wasp” or “sex cylinder” and igniting this fuel with a spark from her “desire-magneto.” The result of this voluntary stripping and ignited desire is the Bride’s “cinematic blossoming” in a kind of vaporized water, the “halo of the Bride” (which the notes in the Box also call the “title”), the attendant cloud or “milky way” whose “nets” or “draft pistons” trap and sign the ciphered commands the Bride has for her Bachelors.

Meanwhile, in the Bachelors’ domain, the Bride’s water-fall turns the “water wheel” that is part of the Bachelor machine. The wheel’s turning causes a “bottle of Benedictine,” not actually seen on the *Glass* but virtually present in the notes from the *Box*, to rise and fall below the base of the “glider,” “chariot” or “sleigh” causing that “glider” to slide back and forth in lubricated grooves. That sliding, “by a certain distension of the laws of physics,” causes the “scissors” atop the chocolate grinder to open and close controlling a splash we’ve yet to describe and starting the grinder moving. This same movement of the “scissors,” by an altogether different distension of physical laws, causes the “glider” moving in the grooves to recite its “litanies:” redundancy, boredom with life, and onanism. The Bachelors who, by electrical commands, have responded to and encouraged the Bride’s voluntary stripping, attracted now by the charge of the “desire-magneto” and the smell of “love gasoline,” hear the “glider’s” litanies and mimic them by “grinding their chocolate” in a “jerking movement” like “the tiny hands on electrical clocks you [used to] see in railway stations” (*Green Box*).

This movement facilitates the passage of the Bachelors’ “illuminating gas” from out of the moldings of their malic (mannish) desire into and through the “capillary tubes” at the end of which, forced along by the pressure of their jerking off, this gas spills out as a “retail fog,” lighter than air, which mobilizes the parasols, adds to the grinder’s action, and spews out what is here described as the “planes of flow” and the “splash,” a spiral movement motorized by a “butterfly pump.” (Again, none of these elements are actually visible on the *Glass*.) It is the Bachelors’ remains, their excess, their *trait*, splashed out in the lower right corner of the bottom pane, that reflect through the “weight with nine holes,” past the “oculist witnesses” and into the Bride’s domain as the “nine shots.” This is the kind of story that is supposed to fit the notes in the *Green Box* to the contents of the *Glass*. Here, the *nth* dimension is machine time recast as the narrative time it takes the Bride and her Bachelors to pass through their erotic odyssey, but also standard time, the measure of movement, especially the movement of sex. The obvious meaning of the *Glass*, on this reading, is conveniently self-reflexive. *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataire, même* refers back to Duchamp himself and to his alter-ego, Rrose Salevy. Eros, which is the essence of life, *eros s’est la vie*, is what the narrators of this story say Duchamp wants to tell us is the essence of art, as well.

Of course, Eros is not the same as sex. Sex is the act which takes place in a seemingly infinite variety of practices. Eros is a drive, the drive to enhance life by attaching itself to as many objects as it can. It is opposed to the death drive, Thanatos, which is the drive for quiescence. We do not need to go through the proposed machinations of the *Glass* – or *Étant donnés* – to arrive at the insight that for Duchamp Eros is, if not the essence of life, a very powerful constituent of life.[[58]](#endnote-58) As late as 1966, however, while the *Glass* was still considered his great artistic accomplishment, Duchamp said he regarded humor “as one of life’s vital ingredients…. A witty seriousness … It’s such a necessary part of life that I don’t even question it.”[[59]](#endnote-59) On the same occasion, Duchamp said about the *Glass* “The analyses which have been put forward are not necessarily of any value, since I have not offered any explanation myself…. What I intended is not of interest; what is interesting is the effect the work has on the spectator, on the public who will decide if the work is important enough to survive.”[[60]](#endnote-60) It is time to offer our analysis of the importance of this work and to sketch an account of it that connects the work to *Étant donnés*.

*Inframince*

*Inframince* is a term Duchamp introduced in the 1930s, sometimes translated into English as “ultra-thin,” that he said could not be defined but only described by examples: the difference between two objects made from the same mold, say, when the maximum precision has been obtained, would be *inframince*,[[61]](#endnote-61) or the difference between “identical” twins or between two drops of water from the same source. It will guide our reading of the *Glass* returning to the “Notice” and the algebraic comparison given at the bottom of the page where Duchamp writes that Notice: “a” being the exposition, “b” being the possibilities, the ratio a/b is in no way given as a result (c) but by the sign (/) which separates them. When a and b become known, Duchamp writes, “they become (new) units and lose their numerical (relative) value (or in duration);; the sign / (of ratio) which separates them remains (sign of the accordance or rather of …?... look for it).” No algebraic solution to the formula a/b, read as a ratio, can be given without assigning values to both a and b, but as soon as these values are known, they become new units, lose their own (relative) numerical value, and all that remains is the sign (of ratio) which separates them. Read alongside the *Glass*, the fragment would have us take the Bride, whose exposition or exposure (stripped bare) is at stake, and the Bachelors, who represent the possibilities of the Bride’s being exposed, as variables in an interpretive equation whose solution is inexorably deferred. So long as the ascription of value or significance to the Bride and her Bachelors causes these variables to lose their meaning, we are left only with the *inframince* sign of their difference.

It is not the specific content of the *inframince* difference between the Bride and her Bachelors, between the Bride’s voluntary stripping and her being stripped bare by her Bachelors, that Duchamp asks us to consider in contemplating the *Glass* through the *Box* or reading the *Box* through the *Glass*. It is this concept of the *inframince*, a difference that cannot be perceived but that must be conceived, that is, imagined or thought. In his interview with Jean Antoine, Duchamp says painting is an activity which has been overestimated, not all it’s cracked up to be. “Especially now when it has become completely esoteric and everyone paints, everyone buys it and everyone talks about it. I wonder if it counts for anything at all when it comes to expressing more profound thought.”[[62]](#endnote-62) An art (or a philosophy) that tells you what to think is not very thoughtful. Art that gets you to think because you don’t know what to think can begin to make a difference in your life. In the grand scheme of things, in what has become of it, on this view, art is really rather small, not all it’s cracked up to be. When one makes a work of art deserving of the attention generally lavished on art, one only makes it to think a tiny bit (*inframince*) more clearly about something.[[63]](#endnote-63) Will we ever see a urinal the same, again? Or a waterfall? Or a Spanish door?

*Étant donnés*

In fact, we missed the *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés* show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2009. Having lived with *Étant donnés* for over twenty years, we were not compelled to brave the crowds of people who would be attracted by an exhibition organized to showcase a single work of art. We took up residence in Philadelphia just two years after the fifteen-year moratorium on reproductions of the interior of Duchamp’s installation was lifted. Many, perhaps most, of those who attended the PMA show would have seen reproductions of the interior of Duchamp’s installation prior to peeping in on it through the holes in the door that make up part of the work’s exterior. What many of those who attended the exhibit saw through the peep holes, then, only more or less confirmed what they expected to find there. For them, perception was recognition. They perceived the work in much the same way as they perceive the world. It is rare when what we perceive is not something we recognize from a prior acquaintance. Our first view of *Étant donnés*, however, was unmediated by a prior acquaintance with its hidden contents. We knew there was something to see on the other side of the door, perhaps even that it would be strange or “disturbing,” but little more. We did not know, specifically, having seen it, that it would be something we would not be able to “unsee.”[[64]](#endnote-64)

Anyone who has spent time with *Étant donnés* will tell you that reproductions of the interior fundamentally misconstrue the work. There is just no way to reproduce this n-dimensional work of art in a two-dimensional photograph of it. Even multiple photographs that would include views of the anteroom where we find the door, the door seen at a distance and up close, a view of the mask that has formed around the peep holes from patrons pressing their face against the door to look inside, as well as views of the details that compose what is on the other side of that door, all of these views if they could be taken together would not add up to a view of the whole. Photographic reproductions that reduce the work to its interior, in addition to flattening the diorama and, so, missing the dramatic foreshortening of the interior scene, also fail to capture the range of experience viewers have with the work. That experience comes in different forms, from the museum patron seeing the work for the first and only time to patrons who have spent years contemplating the work to those with a custodial responsibility for maintaining the work (who may also be patrons who have spent years contemplating it). The work is so enigmatic that there are museum patrons who, through an opening at the edge of the Duchamp Gallery, peer into the room with the large wooden door set in a brick frame and walk away thinking they have seen the work. Those who see it once and only once, even those who have consulted a catalogue prior to visiting the museum, maybe still wonder what it is they have just seen.[[65]](#endnote-65)

That was our first, unmediated experience with the work. We were startled, taken aback, looking away, wanting to see it again, not wanting to see it again, forcing ourselves to look at it again. We did not know what to think and, so, we really began to think. What was it we just saw? Did what we saw through the door include seeing the door which we could no longer see while peering through it? Why were we made to see whatever it was we saw in the way we were made to see it? We were not yet in a position to consider how we were being seen by those waiting their turn to peer through that door. We were simply caught up in the affect, the vivid feeling of what we had just seen, the searing imprint of it left on our mind’s eye, and that feeling, being taken aback, giving us pause, gave us time, the time we took to think, and colored that time and that thinking with an embodied but unspecified intensity. In this way, *Étant donnés* gave us the waterfall, the illuminating gas and … time.

Then we saw it again, and again, and again, repeatedly for nearly thirty years. We took time with the work, taking note of the anteroom where you find the work, of the central position of the door on the far wall of that room, of the tendency of patrons waiting for their turn to peer through the door’s peep holes queueing at the entrance to the room. Were these patrons acknowledging the room as part of the work? Were they giving space in that room for the experience of patrons ahead of them hoping to have that space for their experience? Some patrons do look quickly and leave abruptly. Some linger with the work. When there is not a queue, the room does provide a space to spend time thinking about what you have just seen or to provide a brief respite between successive viewings. To force an extended view of the work, we made a practice of peering through the peep holes long enough to identify as many as possible of the media said to be mixed in the production of *Étant donnés*:

exterior wooden door, iron nails (once used to insert into the peep holes, no longer a part of the work), bricks and stucco, interior bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminum sheet, welded steel wire, screen and wood, Peg-Board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, collotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric lights, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin, and linoleum.[[66]](#endnote-66)

We never found the piano hinge, but the exercise forced us to give extended attention to the interior of *Étant donnés*, and in our extended regard of the work as a whole certain key features of the work turned up for our increasingly skilled engagement with it, including small changes in the work resulting from the restoration and repairs made in preparation for the 2009 exhibition.

Before getting to the affordance that turned up for us in this way, let’s pause to contemplate the work of art as it is presented. *Étant donnés* occupies two small rooms. The room on the other side of the door measures 83½ x 70 x 49 inches. In what we call the anteroom, a larger space, the would be viewer enters from the back and to the left of the door that is the only object in that room. The wall plaque is immediately to the viewer’s right. A cursory glance at this plaque will lead the viewer to note that the work consists of a Spanish door, bricks and stucco but also that long list of media just enumerated which are not obviously included in the room. Nothing on the wall plaque instructs the viewer to attempt to see what is on the other side of that door. If the viewer knows to look through the peep holes, or is motivated by some native curiosity, she will walk to the door, tripping the motion sensors to light up the scene on the other side of the door, press her face up against that door, maybe pressing a hand against it for stability, and look in on a scene that is no less macabre after countless viewings.

Through the door, our viewer, now a proper voyeur, will peer in on another scene. The peep holes are only a first filter. Through the peep holes, she finds herself in a meta-voyeuristic situation. She does not peep through an exterior door into an otherwise unexposed interior. She peeps, instead, into the scene of a view through the breach in a brick wall set back from that door onto an outdoor scene. So, before getting to the content of that outdoor scene, *Étant donnés* is structured to force us to become the voyeurs for art Duchamp thinks we are, to gratify our voyeurism with an iteration of the act, and to punish that act by confronting it with a gruesome image. About *Fountain*, the urinal he submitted to the First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, Duchamp agreed that he did it “to throw it in their faces.”[[67]](#endnote-67) Is there something in *Étant donnés* that Duchamp wants to throw in our faces?

Duchamp does not reward the effort we have made to ignore the wall plaque and cross the room, to bend down or stretch up to peer through the door with a spectacle that would encourage us to repeat those ordeals. No, he shows us something that makes us think twice about ever undertaking those ordeals, again. Yet, the work remains a source of interest and intrigue for scholars and general audiences alike. Scholarly treatment of *Étant donnés* predictably multiplied in the years after the moratorium on reproductions of the interior of the work was lifted.[[68]](#endnote-68) This includes the interpretation by Rosalind Krauss which draws on thoughts about voyeurism by Jean-Paul Sartre, who never saw the work or commented on it, and from writings by Jean-François Lyotard who may have made the trip to Philadelphia to see the work some time before 1976.[[69]](#endnote-69) Krauss maps Sartre’s account of the voyeur caught from behind peeping through a keyhole onto our encounter with *Étant donnés*. In this way, she attempts to capturethe experience of looking in on something forbidden and the feeling of being caught in the act. That feeling, Sartre calls it shame, results from an awareness that another has made the voyeur the object of her regard. The voyeur, who has made an object of the subject he sees through the keyhole, is made an object by the one who sees him, reducing him to shame.

On a busy day in the Duchamp gallery, it may happen that a short queue forms waiting their turn to peer through the peepholes onto the interior scene. One senses their presence, but it is less shame – the museum is, after all, filled with nudes – than decorum or social grace that is felt. Aware, given the way the work is constructed, that the time we are taking with *Étant donnés* keeps others from taking time with the work, we are inclined to defer to waiting patrons, especially when we will have ample opportunities for spending time with the work on other occasions. From Lyotard, Krauss draws the more useful conception of *Étant donnés* as “a kind of optical machine through which it is impossible *not* to see.”[[70]](#endnote-70) According to Lyotard, in this optical machine, the viewing point and the vanishing point, ordinarily geometrically opposed to one another, are the same. On this model, “the vanishing point, or goal of vision, is manifested by the dark interior of a bodily orifice … a physical rather than a geometrical limit to the reach of vision. And the viewing point [the peep holes] is likewise a hole: thick, inelegant, material.”[[71]](#endnote-71) Krauss follows Lyotard in concluding that the destiny of our peeping eyes is the breach between the thighs of the reclining nude figure. When our eyes see the vulva, “you can’t fail to notice,” “it’s all you see,” they see themselves.[[72]](#endnote-72)

However persuasive this view may be, we are consistently overwhelmed in readings like these with what is taken to be the uncontroversial subject of this work. Why are apparently erudite viewers or voyeurs taken in by what is calculated to spark the greatest controversy when what is most obvious may very well be intended to distract our attention from what is more interesting about the piece. What is so commonly construed as a “vulva” does not bear an obvious resemblance to any ordinary human anatomy. Where Lyotard sees “erect large labia,” “tumescent small labia,” “the gaping orifice of the vagina,” and “even the swollen vestibulary bulbs around the lower commissure,”[[73]](#endnote-73) we see something that more resembles the dehiscence formed around a wound than anything else. It looks to us as if something has been cut out between the legs of the figure in this scene and that the wound has failed to heal. It is as if Duchamp wanted to represent the evidence for castration anxiety. The little boy can only see his mother’s sex as mutilated, not as what it is, because in it he sees what will become of him if he contests his father for his mother’s love. Still, even this view of *Étant donnés* depends on accepting that wound as the sole focus, the *raison d’être*,for all the elements assembled in the composition of that work of art.

Dalia Judovitz counts the nude figure and the landscape as two hinges on which the references to sexuality in *Étant donnés* hang, but her focus remains on the sexual explicitness and excessive realism of the image of the nude seen through the peep holes in the door.[[74]](#endnote-74) This excess, “hyperrealism” she calls it, breaks up the voyeuristic equation of sight and pleasure in the visual experience of the work. What Krauss describes as shame Judovitz attributes to the objectification not of the voyeur but of the presuppositions (the givens you might say) that govern visibility in general. The image, she writes, “‘unmakes’ its viewer. The authority and the legitimacy that Western ‘retinal’ painting confers on its spectator are here undone, because the blatant sexuality of the image challenges the act of looking.”[[75]](#endnote-75) Judovitz refers to drawings Duchamp made while working on *Étant donnés – Morceau choisis d’après Courbet* (*Selected Details After Courbet*) (1968) and *The Bec Auer* (1968) – as documents of “the failure of the male gaze to penetrate or objectify the notion of sexuality”[[76]](#endnote-76) and suggests that the “reality” of the scene in *Étant donnés* emerges as a mere decoy, “an object simulating the illusions of life by acting mechanically as lifelike.”[[77]](#endnote-77)

Nevertheless, Judovitz dedicates the balance of her 1995 treatment of *Étant donnés* to a discussion of the sexuality of the nude figure.[[78]](#endnote-78) This sexuality is characterized as androgynous, but the mechanical manner of the nude’s presentation is said to render her “dead” and, by comparison with the nude figure in René Magritte’s *L’Assassin menacé* (*The Threatened Assassin*) (1926), a “dead nude,” the coincidence of Eros and Thanatos, sex and death.[[79]](#endnote-79) The eroticism of *Étant donnés*, on this reading, derives from its lifelike staging of life “more successfully than life itself.”[[80]](#endnote-80) Here we appear to have two examples of the *inframince*: masculinity and femininity set not in opposition to one another but in conjunction, and art giving us a look at life that brings out something we would not recognize otherwise. Judovitz opens her discussion of the *inframince* with a consideration of molds in Duchamp’s work. She quotes Anne d’Harnoncourt on the “paradox” of the mold, “of an impression taken from life, captured in lifeless material [that] works to create a form of realism that seems highly artificial, so intimately related to the real thing and yet so remote.”[[81]](#endnote-81) The most important mold in *Étant donnés* is, for Judovitz, the mold for the nude, formed primarily from the body of Duchamp’s lover from 1946-1951, Maria Martins.[[82]](#endnote-82) For Judovitz, the central paradox of *Étant donnés*, the *inframince*, is a form of realism, an illusion of life, artificially, mechanically, acting like a form of life, and the centerpiece of this hyperrealism is the nude.

For our part, however, we are struck by the utter irreality or artificiality of this scene. Nothing here looks like life. Neither does it look like death. What might otherwise be construed as a window onto a world, in light of Duchamp’s stated aversion to the history and tradition of painting, looks rather like the effect of a forced encounter between a voyeur and the spectacle the voyeur enacts by his actions. The voyeur does not see here what he hopes to see. He sees what he fears he might see. A voyeur, in general, sees the world in terms of the opportunities it affords his lurid intentions. The target of his intentions, something as ordinary as a man or woman undressing, is eroticized by his peeping. His voyeurism makes this man or woman a spectacle for him. In *Étant donnés*, the spectacle is eroticized in advance, and that eroticism is thrown in the face of the voyeur. That eroticism is not intended to reward the voyeur. It stages a confrontation with him. “This spectacle is the n-dimensional aim of your lurid intentions,” we might imagine Duchamp saying, and the voyeur he is addressing, here, is the general audience for art.

What the audience for art sees as art is elevated by the attention the audience gives it. That attention is characterized by the skills audiences have acquired and honed in their encounters with art. *Étant donnés* does not give its audience what their skills have prepared them to see. It turns those skills against them. It makes what they count as art an unwanted fetish. Something as ordinary and regularly revered in art as the nude female is made an optically unappealing lure, and *Étant donnés* makes its audience work to be taken in by it. As we see it, Duchamp has constructed the viewing point as two peepholes set at such a distance from one another, through such a thickness of wood, over such a fitfully perspectival landscape that the privilege of binocular vision is occluded or challenged. It is not easy to find a single vanishing point or find a single viewing point in this construction. A simple experiment performed with the work, closing one eye and then the other while peering through peep holes, shows that there are things seen through one of the holes that are not seen through the other. Precisely what things no doubt varies for different voyeurs, varies with differences in their embodiment – are they taller or shorter, older or younger, more male or more female, far-sighted or near-sighted, wearing glasses or not – and with differences in the specific skills they have acquired and refined for engaging works of art. In every case, what each specific viewer/voyeur sees not just through the peep holes but especially through the peep holes will be achieved or enacted by her or his own experience.

On a traditional theory of perception, a “snapshot conception of seeing,” this optical situation would not be considered unusual.[[83]](#endnote-83) It just heightens the circumstances of ordinary vision in which the mind produces a single, stable representation of the world from inverted, non-identical, flitting or saccadic data collected on two retinas. Conflicts resulting from differently sourced data are resolved in the visual cortex which makes a single, stable whole from the otherwise partial, binary views. On an ecological philosophy of mind, however, in which we are dynamically engaged in the world around us, perception is a fragile achievement of the thoughtful exploration of that world.[[84]](#endnote-84) Perception is active not receptive, an achievement not recognition. It is a skilled engagement with an environment full of things, affects, ideas and other active perceivers, as well. On this enactive philosophy of mind, perception enacts the world as a field of affordances for acting in the world. On this view, the art patron, the voyeur, enacts a world of art that affords his actions in that art world. If he sees himself in the wound, it is not because of a coincidence of the viewing and vanishing point but because he has engaged his skills as a patron of the arts to achieve or enact this “breach.”

This ecological view makes better sense of our experience with *Étant donnés*. The spacing of the holes, the arrangement of the objects in the diorama and the artificial perspective situation produces a challenge for a thoughtful exploration of the work and highlights the thoughtfulness required to appreciate it. What we conceive as taking place behind that bolted door, on a traditional view of perception and from the point of view of aesthetic theory and a long history of looking at works of art, may be a viewing point that is impossibly coincident with a vanishing point. What we can realize, instead, on an ecological and enactive theory of perception, precisely as we struggle to fix our gaze on any single point in this *mis en scene*, is how the aberrant series of details we attribute to this work does not readily resolve, how *Étant donnés* gives nothing, except perhaps the waterfall, the illuminating gas and, in a very different way, again, the time it takes to engage it. We already noted the time it takes to wait our turn to view the work and the time we take to feel and think about the work. Here we note that it takes time for our eyes, each of them, to skillfully negotiate the perspective divide, for the one to seduce the other into contributing a detail which gets immediately absorbed into another detail, crossing back and forth, in an attempt to see what is otherwise hidden from us. Having seen reproductions of the interior, we can attempt to recognize the scene in the fragmented details of it we get by looking through the peep holes. To really see it, however, to see it for ourselves, we must enact or achieve what is visibly hidden there and, at the same time, spilling out from the other side of the brick barriers. In the time it takes to thoughtfully explore this scene, we only successfully index the contents and enact, piece by piece, series of contiguities whose thick intersection becomes *Étant donnés*, on the basis of which *Étant donnés* gives nothing but the time we take to thoughtfully explore and think with it.

One thing that turned up for our thoughtful exploration of the work in our experience of it after the 2009 exhibition was the smell of the door. We have associated *Étant donnés* for the longest time with the smell of molding wood. As you press your face to the door to peep through the holes, there is a notch between the doors that conveniently accommodates your nose. An indication that a sense of smell be included in the appreciation of the work is found in Gianfranco Baruchello’s identification of the smell of the wood with the scent of stale sperm.[[85]](#endnote-85) We missed that smell in recent experiences with the work. Michael Taylor tells us that the door was cleaned in preparation for the 2009 exhibition. We anticipate that the smell of mold will return to the door. Whether it really smells of stale sperm (or how we could confirm such a claim) is not the point. The point is that the experience of *Étant donnés* is not limited to what we see on the other side of that door. It includes waiting our turn to peer through the door, the visual perspective forced by the construction of the piece, the smell of the door, the sense of others waiting behind you to take their turn, the difficulty of seeing what is on the other side of the door, the affect felt by enacting or achieving what is behind that door and the space of the room you step back into after seeing what you could and taking time to think.

Which Leaves Us with the Givens

Molly Nesbit’s contribution to the Forestay Waterfall Symposium is printed in a section of the volume produced from papers presented at that event given the title “Drinking Black Coffee:” it is the only essay in that section.[[86]](#endnote-86) The reference to coffee is obscure but relevant to our concerns. Nesbit refers us to comments made by Otto Neurath as part of a critique of Max Weber’s studies of society. “Empathy, understanding and the like may help the research worker,” Neurath wrote, “but they enter the totality of scientific statements as little as a good cup of coffee which also furthers a scholar in his work.”[[87]](#endnote-87) Neurath was one of the Vienna Circle scholars who sought to expose traditional philosophical problems as pseudo-problems and to transform them into questions subject to the empirical judgments of experimental science. Nesbit conjectures that Neurath was referencing Poincaré’s claiming to have been inspired, late at night, by having drunk black coffee. “The idea about coffee,” Nesbit suggest, “interferes with the standard machinery of logic; it introduces a break – it is another way of saying that in the beginning there were givens that escaped.”[[88]](#endnote-88) Neurath seems to have in mind, however, if Poincaré is indeed his reference, the idea that coffee sustains a rigorous attention to the real, empirical problems worthy of a scholar’s scientific scrutiny. Nesbit appears to have in mind, instead, Duchamp’s remark that black coffee escapes the tautologies to which logic reduces everything metaphysical, “because the senses are in control! The eyes see the black coffee, the senses are in control, it’s a truth; but the rest is always tautology.”[[89]](#endnote-89) Black coffee as a stimulant, inspires Poincaré to see his science and logic through to the end. Black coffee in its sensible, empirical manifestation otherwise points Duchamp beyond logic, beyond tautology.

Tautology is an abyss. It is inspired by the intuition that everything in the conclusion of a sound logical argument must be already contained in the premise. Nesbit claims that Duchamp was fascinated by the abyss of tautology from the time of the *Large Glass.*[[90]](#endnote-90)She also connects Duchamp’s fascination with tautology to his concerns with the *inframince*. If tautology was an abyss, the only truths were experiential, like the warmth left on the seat of a chair by someone who has just left it.[[91]](#endnote-91) This sensation, however, like the sense that the coffee is black, escapes understanding. Nesbit draws this observation into a discussion of Duchamp’s *Rotoreliefs* which is not our concern. We are interested, however, with Nesbit’s remark that black intuition took the place of the *inframince* in Duchamp’s thinking about art, that the black in the *Rotoreliefs* pulled between the senses. “They make a hinge at the end of the mind. It swung outward and never closed.”[[92]](#endnote-92) These observations give us a view on the givens in *Étant donnés* that lead us to something more that an openness to what the work might mean.

In the first place, they take us back to the premises that have been guiding our appreciations of art in this volume as a whole. Any theory imposed from without, ignoring what is sensibly given, can only fall into the abyss of unproductive nonsense. Theory sees only more theory, sees only itself. This is true whether it is a theory of art, a theory of the arts or a theory of an art. We have insisted that we start with what is given, the work of art in front of us, with what is sensible and subject to the situation governing the empirical reception of what is given in that work of art. The peep hole structure of *Étant donnés* dramatizes this situation. We are forced to make a scene of our looking at a scene on the other side of the breach in a brick wall. We must take up a peculiar posture, adapt our bodies to the inelegant holes in the door, make ourselves a sight for those waiting behind us to do the same. The feeling that the time we take with the work precludes others from taking time with the work also emphasizes this situation. Lyotard is correct in this respect: *Étant donnés* is an optical machine that makes it imperative that we look, and when we look it is impossible to not see.

What we see, when we look, is the vellum covered mold of the nude figure unnaturally close to the hole in a brick wall. We’ve discussed the wound between the splayed thighs of the figure but not yet the way the location of the peep holes and the position of the nude force our gaze down on this wound. We’ve also mentioned the androgyny of the figure but not yet the way this results in part from the mold of the left arm being cast from a different body, the body of Duchamp’s second wife, Teeny, after the first arm broke. The left hand, in particular, appears unsuitably large in comparison with the body to which it is attached, and that left hand holds the lamp, the illuminating gas. What in the *Large Glass* was given allegorically as part of the bachelor machine and manifest in the trait pushed along the capillary tubes and spilling out in a retail fog is given sensibly in *Étant donnés*. When we look, what we see is a gas lamp of a specific type, the Bec Auer, powered by electricity, not gas, which illuminates a frosted bulb painted light-green to simulate the soft glow of gas light.[[93]](#endnote-93) The reference to the Bec Auer calls attention to advertisements for the lamps made by the Belgian lighting company which featured barely dressed young women holding the phallic incandescent burners in what has been described as a “moment of erotic surprise.”[[94]](#endnote-94) Whether these advertisements which appeared at the turn of the twentieth century were an inspiration for Duchamp’s adolescent onanistic pleasures,[[95]](#endnote-95) in the artificial daylight flooding the interior scene of *Étant donnés*, it gives as a sensible reminder of the way gas lighting changed the diurnal rhythms of human life. The proliferation of gas (and soon afterward electric) lighting made it possible for human beings to ignore the rhythms of the rising and setting sun, to separate from nature, including, perhaps, their own human nature. In any case, here, it is only one of the sensibly, experientially givens in this tableau.

The other specifically named given is, of course, the waterfall. The waterfall in *Étant donnés* is given in two parts: the background landscape derived from photographs taken of the Forestay Waterfall at Bellevue near Chexbres, Switzerland, on the one hand, and the shimmering apparition created by a perforated wheel turning in front of a fluorescent lamp housed in a Peek Freans biscuit tin, on the other. What have been mistakenly described as gelatin silver photographs in that background landscape are now known to be a collage of collotype prints composed of fragments cut from enlargements of the photographs Duchamp took of the Forestay Waterfall at Bellevue in 1946.[[96]](#endnote-96) In fact, Duchamp made two landscapes using this photocollage technique. In the first, from 1946, he developed the methods for the placement and layering of the photographic fragments he would deploy in composing the more ambitious backdrop for *Étant donnés* beginning in the early to the middle 1950s.[[97]](#endnote-97) For the later work, Duchamp used twelve photographic fragments from enlargements of two of seven photographs. In addition, this later work does not include any images of the buildings that can be found in the original photographs or in the 1946 study. In fact, Duchamp excludes all elements of human construction, including a church steeple visible on the horizon in one photograph. “Instead, he expanded the collage by repeating specific natural elements – trees, bushes, and foliage – primarily along the horizontal axis … in anticipation of the dimensions of the final tableau-construction.”[[98]](#endnote-98) Derived from enlargements of black-and-white photographs, the collage was hand-colored with oil paint based on notes Duchamp took during his 1946 visit to achieve the final effect of the backdrop for *Étant donnés*. What Duchamp achieves (or enacts) in this way is not a representation of a landscape but the creation of an element that plays into overall presentation of the tableau-construction.

The other part of the waterfall is fabricated by the assemblage of a biscuit tin and a motor-driven rotating disc documented in the *Manual of Instructions for Marcel Duchamp Étant donnés: 1⁰ la chute d’eau, 2⁰ le gaz d’éclairage …*.[[99]](#endnote-99) Produced by Duchamp to assist in moving the tableau-construction from the 14th floor, 80 East 11th Street commercial office space where he completed the work to its permanent installation in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the *Manual of Instructions* was published by the PMA on the 100th anniversary of Duchamp’s birth. This assemblage, which is a part of the work not seen but realized as an effect, adds to the tableau-construction of *Étant donnés* an element that moves and makes a sound. Positioned to the right and just below the lamp, on the same plane as the nude figure’s left hand, the shimmering light and the sound of the wheel turning in front of the fluorescent lamp attract the eye of the viewer/voyeur. This element complicates the attention a skilled observer gives to the work. Flitting from the wound to the shimmering light which is set too far back of the nude figure to the lamp to the wound which appears too foreshortened, straining to see around the brick barrier to the head covered in hair to the bed of sticks back to the shimmering light and so on, the saccadic movement of the skilled observer’s eyes struggle to take in the scene. Again, if we don’t come to the work with some preconceived idea of what to think of it or what to think of Duchamp, given what we see in front of us, we don’t know what to think.

How can we be worthy of this encounter with *Étant donnés*? It is not a question of having a commendable moral character but of bringing to the work what will bring out the best in it and the best in us. How, on these terms, can we best worthy of our encounter with *Étant donnés*? It is a matter of becoming a skilled apprentice in the art of this particular work of art. If we compare it, again, to the encounter of a problem in chess – given the position on the board of precisely these pieces, mate in so many moves – we are worthy of this encounter to the extent that we have studied the history of these gambits. Given what we know, the choice we make will reflect our preparation for “innumerable eccentricities” that might arise in our attempted endgame. Given the waterfall, the illuminating gas, what are we to think that will not lead us into the abyss of tautology? What are we to think that will allow us to notice (perhaps nothing) the *inframince* difference art and the commonplace in what is given to us here? This can be compared to the situation we encounter in life. Given what we know, apart from the tautologies of logic and metaphysics, the abyss of science and religion, given the situation as it presents itself, how will we choose to act? This is the point of the ellipsis in the title to Duchamp’s last work. In the face of what is given, how will we choose to act? Duchamp lived frugally to give himself “a choice of Possibilities,” to give himself choices with which he could live. Duchamp chose art as a *modus vivendi*, a way of life, a way of thinking when you don’t know what to think and gave us something to think with him.

Marcel Duchamp worked on *Étant donnés* for twenty years, including the time he spent preparing the *Manual of Instructions* for the disassembly and reassembling of his “*approximation démontable*”executed between 1946 and 1966 in New York. That we are still thinking about this work testifies to the demands that the time of the studio makes on the time for thought. Duchamp thought that a work of art lives and dies just as people do.[[100]](#endnote-100) On the one hand, what gives art life, Duchamp thinks, is mediocrity, because the vast audience for art is only capable of this level of engagement. On the other hand, exceptional works of art require a level of engagement that is accomplished and rarified, and the life of this art will be equally accomplished and rare. With *Étant donnés*, Duchamp aspires to this rare accomplishment in art, and, for us, he has succeeded in this aspiration.

1. Michael R. Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, with essays by Andrew Lins, Melissa S. Meighan, and Beth A. Price, Ken Sutherland, Scott Homolka and Elena Torok (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Hans Maria de Wolf, “Beyond Swiss Cheese and Bullet Holes – Part II: And Some Other Elements in Duchamp’s Notorious Endspiel, *Étant* donnés,” in *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall: Symposium – Concert – Intervention – Exhibitions*, ed. Stefan Banz (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2010), 172. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Marcel Duchamp quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, with an appreciation by Jasper Johns* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1987), 42-43. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 111. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Molly Nesbit, “The Hinge at the End of the Mind: Duchamp’s Work in Progress,” in *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall*, 278-293. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Jasper Johns, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1980), 276. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Stefan Banz, “Paysage fautif: Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall,” in *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 38. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Dominique Radrizzani says Duchamp could not have seen the Courbet before his visit to the Lacan country home. Radrizzani, “’The lake changes its dress every hour’: Marcel Duchamp in Vevey,” in *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall*, 61. Whether Duchamp even saw it then is not at all certain. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Marcel Duchamp, “Where Do We Go From Here?” Remarks at a symposium at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art, 20 March 1961, trans. Helen Meakins, *Studio International* 189 (January-February 1975), 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. “BBC Interview with Marcel Duchamp.” *The Late Show Line Up*, BBC Television Post-Production Center, London; interview conducted by Joan Blackwell, 5 June 1968, in Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. James Johnson Sweeney, “Eleven Europeans in America,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, vol. 13, nos. 4-5 (1946). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Duchamp, “Where Do We Go From Here?”, 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Sweeney, “Eleven Europeans,” 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Stefan Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Stefan Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Michel Foucault, “Las Meninas,” *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1970), 3-16. See also John M Carvalho, “The Visible and the Invisible in Merleau-Ponty and Foucault,” *International Studies in Philosophy*, 25.3 (1993), 35-46. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Stefan Banz, “Paysage fautif,” 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Duchamp quoted by Winthrop Sargeant, “Dada’s Daddy,” *Life Magazine*, vol. 22 (28 April 1952), 100-11. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Marcel Duchamp, “Life is a Game; Life is Art,” interviewed by Jean Antoine, *The Art Newspaper* 27, trans. Sue Rose (4 January 1993). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Wolf, “Beyond Swiss Cheese and Bullet Holes,” 172. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Marcel Duchamp, “Life is a Game; Life is Art,” interviewed by Jean Antoine, *The Art Newspaper* 27, trans. Sue Rose (4 January 1993). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*, a typographical version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchap’s *Green Box*, trans, George Herbert Hamilton (New York: Jaap Tietman Inc., Art Books, 1960). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 42-43. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Carlos Basualdo, *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2014), 340-341. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Paul Thirkell, “From the *Green Box* to Typo/Topography: Duchamp and Hamilton’s Dialogue in Print,” *Tate Papers*, no. 3 (Spring 2005), unnumbered pages. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Arthus Danto, *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Paul Thirkell, “From the *Green Box* to Typo/Topography.” [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Cabanne, *Diallogues*, 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Basualdo, *Philadelphia*, 340-341. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 37, 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. It may help to compare Duchamp’s idea for the *Box* complementing the *Glass* with Jacques Derrida’s concept of the supplement (*Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). A supplement, in Derrida’s deconstruction, is something that appears to be secondary coming to the aid of something purporting to be primary which itself is already secondary. Writing, for example, appears to supplement speech, but speech already supplements language, and in writing we find better the displacements, the differences and the differential relations which are fundamental to language. Conceiving the *Box* as such a supplement to the *Glass* would make it a potential key to what the *Glass* itself is trying to decipher, but for Duchamp there is nothing to decipher. “There is no solution because there is no problem,” Duchamp says. For Duchamp, the *Box* complements the *Glass* just in case we consult the *Box* in our contemplation of the *Glass*, and the *Glass* complements the *Box* by giving references for what is described in that *Box*. This reciprocal relation does not obtain with the Derridean supplement as is shown in the example of masturbation (*Grammatology* 155). Far from being a supplement for sex, Derrida says masturbation is originary, the presence to ourselves that we represent in our sexual relations with others. In the fantastical narrative of *The Large Glass*, the bachelors auto-affection (masturbation) is inspired by the Bride’s voluntary stripping. The presence of the Bride to the bachelors is, indeed, an absence (she is blocked from them by her clothes on the horizon of her share of the *Glass* and, on their share, by the gilled cooler and the isolating plates), and the bachelors’ desire is represented to the Bride in the nine shots. The *Box*, however, is not an auto-affection in relation to the *Glass*, and whatever is present/absent on the *Glass* will only perversely have anything to do with sex. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Richard Hamilton’s typography of the *Glass* based on the *Box* puts the waterfall in the bachelor’s domain, and that is where the waterfall functions (turning the water wheel or mill), but that waterfall originates in the Bride’s domain on our account of it. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Responding to a question about the meaning of “even” in the titles given the *Glass* and the *Box*, Duchamp says he had come to be interested in words, and the bringing them together of words to which he added a comma and ‘even,’ “an adverb which makes no sense, since it relates to nothing in the picture or the title…. This ‘antisense’ interested me a lot on the poetic level…” (Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 40). [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice, CA: the Lapis Press, 1990), 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacque-Allain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), “The Unconscious and Repetition,” 17-67. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 18. Carrouges also turns up in Duchamp’s interview with Cabanne in connection with Carrouges description of the *Large Glass* as a “negation of woman.” Duchamp agrees that the *Glass* realizes the negation of woman in the social sense – woman as wife and mother – but not of woman as the hetero-normative object of a man’s desire. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. This body is closest to degree zero *in utero*. Deleuze and Guattari write, “The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by *gradients* marking the transitions and becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 19). As it matures, as it makes connections, records them and consumes the fruits of these connections, this body without organs is ground zero for future connections which it repels (primary repression) when it feels threatened and for the formation of subject positions gleaned from the connections it has made. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. See Craig E. Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp’s Notes from The* Large Glass: *An N-Dimensional Analysis* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983) as well as Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 110-118. A weaker argument would wager that the conception and execution of Rube Goldberg’s intricately designed machines that performed simple tasks in response to the performances of previous tasks prefigure the movement through time of Duchamp’s *Glass*, mapping a narrative reading of it. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Duchamp tells Cabanne that eroticism “was the basis of everything I was doing at the time of the ‘Large Glass.’” It remained disguised, “but not disguised out of shame,” hidden, underlying. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Marcel Duchamp, “Life is a Game; Life is Art,” interviewed by Jean Antoine. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Herman Parret, “Le corps selon Duchamp,” *Protée* vol. 28.3 (2000), 93; http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030608ar; citing Marcel Duchamp, *Notes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), 19-47. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Antoine, “Life is a Game; Art is Life.” [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1991), 382. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Unauthorized reproductions of the interior were available prior to 1986, but as unauthorized they were not taken to be a reliable representation of what there was to see on the other side of the door. As we go on to say, in fact, they were nor reliable. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. And if you fail to look through the peep holes (or if you look only once and quickly look away), have you failed to see the work of art? If not, what questions does that raise about what we experience when we experience a work of art? Are we going to allow that the one who looks into the ante-room, sees the door, perhaps looks at the wall plaque and walks away experiences the same work of art as the one who peers patiently and persistently through the holes bored in the same door? But if that holds, and Duchamp would likely insist on it, then the subject of *Étant donnés* (and of the *Glass*) is the *inframince* difference between how people respond to “works of art” and how they respond to everything else with the expression “works of art” picking out whatever these people take to be a work of art and nothing more. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. This catalogue is taken from the PMA wall plaque. It is now known that it is vellum and not parchment that covers the armature of the nude figure. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. See Thomas Gist, (Ab)Using Marcel Duchamp: The Concept of the Readymade in Postwar and Contemporary American Art,” *tout-fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, vol.2.5 (April 2003) and “Duchamp,” in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1965), 207-208. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. As Michael Taylor notes, unauthorized photographs of the interior of the work circulated shortly after it was installed and appeared in the second edition of Arturo Schwartz’s *The Complete Works of Marcel* Duchamp (New York: Abrams, 1970) and a stereoscopic projection of the interior scene was authorized by the PMA for inclusion in a Centre Georges Pompidou retrospective of Duchamp’s work in Paris, 1976. The PMA briefly considered lifting the ban on photographic reproductions of the work, but voted in 1976 to uphold it (Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 156-160). [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and* Nothingness, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 252-302; Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Leuven, BE: Leuven University Press, 2010), 48-75. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 112. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 113. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, 193. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 205. See also Dalia Judovitz, “Landscape as Ironic Causality in Duchamp’s *Étant donnés*,” in Banz, ed., *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall*, 86-97 and “Epilogue” in Lyotard, *Duchamp’s TRANS/formers*, 239-255. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 208. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 209. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. In her contribution to the Forestay Waterfall collection, Judovitz comments on the ironic causality (*cos alités*) of the landscape in *Étant donnés*, “Landscape as Ironic Causality in Duchamp’s *Étant donnés*, *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall*, 86-97. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 205. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 209. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Anne d”Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, *Étant donnés: 1⁰ la chute d’eau, 2⁰ le gaz d’éclairage: Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987), 37 cited in Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp*, 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Melissa S. Meighan, “A Technical Discussion of the Figure in Marcel Duchamp’s *Étant donnés*,” in Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 242-244. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. See Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) and David Marr, *Vision* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Sonds, 1982). [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. See Alva Noë, *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 91-96 and *passim*. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Gianfranco Baruchello and Henry Martin, *Why Duchamp: As Essay in Aesthetic Impact*, (New York: McPherson & Co., 1985). [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Nesbit’s essay is titled “The Hinge at the End of the Mind: Duchamp’s Work in Progress,” Banz, ed. *Marcel Duchamp and the Forestay Waterfall*, 278-293. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Otto Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology*, ed, Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen (Boston: D. Riedel Publishing Co., 1973), 357; cited by Nesbit, “The Hinge at the End of the Mind,” 283. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Nesbit, “The Hinge at the End of the Mind,” 283-284. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Cabanne, *Dialogues*, 107. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Nesbit, “The Hinge at the End of the Mind,” 279. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Nesbit, “The Hinge at the End of the Mind,” 285. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. Nesbit, “The Hinge at the End of the Mind,” 290. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 77. See also Marcel Duchamp, *Manual of Instructions: Étant donnés: 1⁰ la chute d’eau, 2⁰ le gaz d’éclairage*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 20. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. *Ibid.* [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Beth A. Price, Ken Sutherland, Scott Homolka and Elena Torok, “Evolution of the Landscape: The Materials and Methods of the *Étant donnés* Backdrop,” in Taylor, *Marcel Duchamp: Étant donnés*, 263-264. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Price et al., “Evolution of the Landscape,” 266. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Price et al., “Evolution of the Landscape,” 266-267. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. *Manual of Instructions for Marcel Duchamp Étant donnés: 1⁰ la chute d’eau, 2⁰ le gaz d’éclairage …* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987, revised 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Antoine, “Life is a game; life is art.” [↑](#endnote-ref-100)