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Duchamp Within and Against Lacan

Abstract

Critical reception of Marcel Duchamp since the seventies has tended to elevate him into the very figure of the Artist he sought to attack. One aspect of this domestication has involved neglecting Duchamp's *fin de siècle* 'eroticism' with its sexual innuendos and double-entendres. Yet this very *readymade* vulgarity allows us to recover a Duchamp still capable of disrupting the genres of Art and the gendered Artist, by revealing a theory embedded in his work which continually reverses and displaces phallogentrism in a game consisting of the *confusion of genders and genres*. We argue that Duchamp's disruption of the discursive typologies of the genre of art can be profitably read through this apparently trivial sexualised wordplay, particularly in the transgender passage into Rose Sélavy. Reading this aspect of Duchamp *after, i.e. within and against* Lacan demonstrates how Duchamp's singular regime of signs governed by equivocity and indetermination subverts the 'phallic function' of the signifier.

Keywords

Duchamp, Lacan, Gender, Eroticism, Phallogentrism, Nominalism, (Principle of Non-) Contradiction

Still, in your work this eroticism has remained disguised [*travesti*] for rather a long time. Always disguised, more or less—but not out of prudishness?

— Marcel Duchamp, to Pierre Cabanne

Jacques Lacan, they don't even know what that is— Jules Lacue would do just as well—It's the English pronunciation of what we call, in our language, *la queue* [the dick]

— Jacques Lacan, 'Joyce the Symptom'

[...] the spoonerism returning to the lips, the inversion to the ear.

— Jacques Lacan, 'Lituraterre'

Introduction

In an important issue dated Fall 1979, the editors of *October* sought to mount a defence of the foregoing decade of artistic disruption which had challenged and compromised 'the very notion of Art itself'—a defence against attempts 'to reerect

the toppled statue of the Artist' [Krauss and Michelson 1979, 3]. Forty years on, after a period that has seen a continuing lionization of the Duchamp posthumously crowned in 1977,¹ we cannot help but ask whether Duchamp has come to occupy precisely the pedestal of the statue he was supposed to have 'toppled'. In spite of his own intentions, John Cage indicated one way of ensuring this reerection, by remaining silent on the aspect of Duchamp that is most troublesome from this point of view: his fondness for a *fin de siècle* 'eroticism' which, with its sexual innuendos and double-entendres, plunges us into a spiral of bad taste ('L'ASPIRANT HABITE JAVEL ET MOI J'AVAIS L'HABITE EN SPIRALE' [Duchamp 1975, 117]).² Could it be this very *readymade* vulgarity that allows us to recover a Duchamp still able to disrupt the genres of Art and the gendered figure of the Artist, by revealing a theory (of language, of art) that is never explicitly stated but is at work throughout Duchamp, even (or especially) in his most apparently juvenile and *fin-de-siècle* moments? For throughout his oeuvre, what looks at first sight like phallocentrism is persistently reversed, overthrown, displaced, and machinically processed in a game whose only rule seems to be that of the *confusion of genders and genres*. In this essay we seek to analyse this game in relation to Duchamp's passages between male and female *positions*, and particularly his transgender passage into alter-ego Rose Sélavy. It is these passages, we suggest, that 'disabuse us of our inherited position on art' and strategically undermine any 'nostalgic attachment to a set of exhausted conventions' [Krauss and Michelson 1979, 4, 3] connected with the figure of the Artist. (See Duchamp's famous declaration: 'Fundamentally, I don't believe in the creative function of the artist'.) In the same issue of *October*, Jean-François Lyotard, taking up where his 1977 book *Duchamp's Transformers* left off, writes:

As the contemporary arts can no longer be organized and identified by Aristotelian categories, so the interpretations brought to bear on them can no longer be distributed among the various types of discourse which have been used to speak in the past.³

¹ In February 1977 the retrospective exhibition *L'Œuvre de Marcel Duchamp* served to 'open' the Centre Pompidou in Paris, thus placing Duchamp at the heart of the new model of the museum laying claim to the legacy of 1968.

² This punning inscription on a 1926 rotating disc or 'rotorelief' that produces a spiral effect plays phonetically on '*l'habite en spirall/la bite en spirall/la bite inspirale*': 'The aspirant lives in Javel and me, I was living in the spiral/I had a spiral cock/I had an inspiring cock'. In a 1958 letter to Michel Sanouillet, however, Duchamp points out 'L'aspirant de Javel isn't one of mine [*L'aspirant de Javel n'est pas de moi*]' [Duchamp 1994, 161].

³ [Krauss and Michelson 1979, 4], [Lyotard 1979, 59] (the opening lines of Lyotard's article, 'Preliminary Notes on the Pragmatics of Works: Daniel Buren' are cited in the editorial).

Accordingly, in what follows we show how Duchamp disrupts the discursive typologies inherited from modernism by way of these transformations and passages which attack the first principle, the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, and set up a singular regime of signs in which what reigns supreme is equivocity and *indetermination* or *falsification*, hence introducing a play of differences into what Lacan calls the ‘phallic function’ and in turn subverting this second structural principle posited by the psychoanalyst as the impossible truth of the first. This perhaps is the ~~true~~ * real legacy of Duchamp, to be found in those (non) works whose (antiscientific, antiphilosophical, antipsychoanalytical) theory is somehow embedded *in the work*—as an operational, transformational device that defies the communicability of language and the requirement for an aesthetics, replacing them with the interminable deterritorialization of the *readymade* refrain of sexualization. If the latter informs and deforms our own writing strategy, the analysis terminates with the posthumous *Étant donnés*—Duchamp’s most ‘assisted readymade’?

The Hinge of the Large Glass and *Étant Donnés*

It is from the indetermination in the ‘back and forth’, governed by *afterwardsness*, that we must start once again; from the indetermination practiced by Duchamp as a method of analysis and self-analysis; from that first indetermination of the Nude, plastically and verbally brought down, *descended* from its organic academic status as a means to take on, to attack, all *genres/genders* (that of painting, especially the cubo-futurism of the time, and that of the nude, masculine or feminine...but is it really a *nude*?) *Nude descending a Staircase* (1912), or the Fall of Genre/Gender in painting—which merited its *interdiction* (prohibited from being shown, its *exhibitionism* curtailed...),⁴ and would not exactly facilitate *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (1912). This *Passage* was already marked by a ‘*pas*’, a negation, a non-passage that would continue to resonate in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*,

⁴ The painting was rejected by his cubist ‘friends’ (including his brothers: the ‘treason’ of brothers) from the Salon des Indépendants in Paris in 1912.

Even (1915–1923)—stripped bare [*mise à nu*] perhaps, but never actually laid [*mise*]. Proof of this, via the écorché-machine *Bride* (1912), might take the form of a Klein bottle—which, as everyone knows, is unrepresentable (in three dimensions) unless *drawn through itself* in a conjuring trick which makes it ‘appear’ that its pipework is nothing other than the cut through which it disappears from its surface as it fills it. Continuously traversing its two discontinuous faces, the ‘divine bottle’ is filled only with itself.... And if it is true, as Lacan says, that ‘not just anyone can do this, drawing your lining [*doublure*] out through your neck. For this is how the support of the being of the subject is constructed’ [Lacan 2001a, 202], Duchamp seems to make it a medium for the *extimacy* of painting confronted from within, in its visceral pictorial intimacy, by its outside, by its mechanical other of which it is full and to which it marries, affirming a kind of *superior* hermaphroditism: ‘*Beauty of precision* in the service of indetermination: contradictory machines,’ as Octavio Paz [2011, 18] puts it.

Contradictory machines perhaps, but above all a machination in the form of a ‘hinge’ and ‘mirroring’ of the sequence that will unfold between *The Bride of the Large Glass* and the posthumous *Étant donnés* (1946–1966), with an upending of the formula of the ‘abstract’ stripping bare and the bending over of its ‘transparent’ glass formula, in one last admonition to the viewer-voyeur whose male gaze is *blinded* and, in one more twist, *returned*. *Étant donnés* is the *tableau vivant* of a still life [*nature morte*] in the form of a false-cunted mannequin [*mannequin au faux con*] as readymade as it is androgyne, access to which is at once ordered and prohibited, *inter-dicted*, by an *Objet-Dard* (1951/1962), an ‘ard object’, an ‘object-dart’ feigning the phallic, with its curious curve that turns the feminine sex inside out like the finger of a phallic glove (*Female Fig Leaf*, 1950/1951). A final proof, which includes both the ‘divine

bottle' (Rabelais via Lacan) and the *joke* that comes out of its neck. For, produced 'by the inflation of this *ab-sex sense*'—to bring in as soon as possible another Lacan, he of *L'Étourdit* ['à la gonfle de ce sens ab-sexe', Lacan 2001b, 452; 2009, 38])—where what inflates is the signifier, engorged by its readymade reservoir, the 'permeability of genres/genders' that is literalised, *photo-graphed* as Rose Sélavy (1921), had for some time already been deployed, installed at 11 rue Larrey in Duchamp's modest ('miniscule', he said) apartment-studio. A topological counter-proof against the idea that a door must be *either open or closed* (didn't Felix Klein himself describe topology as the science of qualitative transformations?), *Door, 11, rue Larrey* (1927), according to Duchamp's own explanation, involves 'a single door which would close alternatively on two jamb-linings placed at right angles' [Schwarz 1970, 497]. Since the door can be open without being closed, but never closed without being open as well, the hinge collapses around its pivot, which will soon be interrogated via an 'ironic causality' [Duchamp 1973, 30] that hinges on the homonymy and homophony of the signifier unleashed by Duchamp's 'falconry [*fauconnière*]'. He gave us a first glimpse of this with the collection of *bad puns* that presents Precision Oculism's 'COMPLETE LINE OF WHISKERS AND KICKS' under the imprimatur of *Rose Sélavy* [Duchamp 1973, 103]: 'Sharpened hearing: form of torture' [Duchamp 1973, 113]. A torture in the form of the *gond de la rue Larrey* [hinge at rue Larrey], the *con qui rut à la raie* [cunt on heat in the crack] which, in its calculated topology, sets in motion an undoing of the image of the twin doors GENTLEMEN/LADIES that symbolise the laws of urinary segregation (the double cubicle or *isoloir*). An image which also, as we know, yields the distributive spacing of the signifier of sexual difference with which Lacan replaces the 'faulty' illustration of the *tree* (surmounted by the word ARBRE) that illustrates the Saussurean schema S/s where (very classically)

signification rests upon the signified [Lacan 2006a, 416–417]. This twin-door *isoloir*, whose BARRE (an anagram of ARBRE) is *sublated* by the signifier in a topology (a pure combination of places) that will end up being designated as a ‘spacing/no-space/*n*-space [*n'espace*]’,⁵ must therefore, given the weak transmission of ‘the arbor-type of the bride [...] to the motor with quite feeble cylinders’ [Duchamp 1973, 42],⁶ make one more turn, being replaced by the ‘patatopological” device of *Porte, rue Larrey*. The joinery of the door *à la raie* [at Larrey/in the crack] will be executed according to a queer pataphysics à la Rrose Sélavy which radicalises its principal twofold effect (no relation of sign to thing, no sexual relation but only the sign of the Thing), derailing, diverting and unseeing [*dé-voyant*] by the advance of a ‘delay’ any *knowledge*-function (of phallic knowledge: in relation to the Freudian Thing, to attenuate the anachronism to come) of an ‘ab-sex sense’. Which makes sense of the return to Freud in Lacanian psychoanalysis, even and especially in the key formula of ‘L’Étourdit’.⁷

From the Principle of Non-Contradiction to the Phallic Signifier (and its

Deviation)

The prologue of the play in three acts represented here could, with the Lacan of ‘L’Étourdit,’ be called ‘*oracular*,’ but for the very opposite reason to his (analytic) speech: the last thing we want to attempt here is yet another psychoanalytic reading of

⁵ Lacan again, in ‘L’Étourdit’: ‘Isn’t topology that *n'espace* to which mathematical discourse leads us, and which necessitates a revision of Kant’s [transcendental] aesthetic?’ [Lacan 2001b, 472; 2010, 3, translation modified].

⁶ The cylinders are ‘quite feeble’ and ‘leave (plastic necessity) the arbor-type at rest’ (‘Bride’ section in the *Green Box*) [Duchamp 1973, 42].

⁷ ‘Freud puts us on the track of the fact that lack-of-sense (ab-sens) designates sex [...] ab-sex sense (sens-absexe)’ [Lacan 2001b, 452; 2009, 38, translation modified].

Duchamp and of the field of art [*du champ de l'art*] which he warpspeaks [*ourdit*] all the better to stun it [*étourdire*],⁸ ‘given what we know of the connections to be made between the oral and the voice, of sexual displacement.’⁹ Which, let us agree, is the least we can do to *signal* [*faire signe de*] a ‘precision oculist’ (the *title* that Duchamp swiftly, at the beginning of the 1920s, gave on his business card) who defines the ‘art coefficient’ as ‘an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed’ [Duchamp 1973, 139]. It will therefore be a matter, if you like—and the *bon mot* is once again Lacan’s—of a ‘pass [*passé*],’ a trick (turned by Rose Sélavy?), a kind of ‘conjuring trick [*tour de passe-passe*]’ (Sélavy Duchamp?) that consists in *representing Duchamp in Lacan* as that *absent* one who, ‘like-no-other [*comme-pas-un*]’, will have had a far livelier and swifter idea (the idea of a *swift nude*?):¹⁰ that the principle of all principles, the principle that cannot be proved but to which one can only appeal, by deploying not the sequence of contradictions to which its negation would lead (as per Aristotle), but the play of differences ‘analogous to the combinations of a game that has no rules’ [Duchamp 1999, 112 N185],¹¹ well, ‘there it is: there is no sexual relationship’ (Lacan). Something of which, according to the psychoanalyst’s discourse, Aristotle ‘naturally’ had no idea, being on this point

⁸ Recall that, in place of *l'étourdi*, Lacan involves his reader in the turns of speech [*tours du dire*] of the said *ÉTOURDIT*. ‘That one might be saying [*Qu'on dise*] remains forgotten behind what is said in what is heard. [...] in any case the fact is that the saying remains forgotten behind what is said.’ [Lacan 2001b, 449–450, 2009, 32, 34]. [On the word *étourdit* and its (impossible) translation, see Kenneth Reinhard’s introduction to [Badiou and Cassin 2017]—trans.].

⁹ [Lacan 2001b, 480]: ‘Oracular, which will come as no surprise given what we know of the connections to be made between the oral and the voice, of sexual displacement.’ So that one will be able to hear all the equivocations signalling from the oral to the *lass* [*au cul*] so as to trace their occult [*occultes*] paths from the ocular to the oracular....

¹⁰ Cf. *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (1912).

¹¹ We will come back later to this important note on the principle of contradiction.

‘totally idiotic [*vachement con*],¹² since he knew nothing of ‘the potential sexual implications of the recourse to the principle of contradiction’ [Lacan 2006a, 223, translation modified]. But it will be Duchamp who is the least Aristotelian of the two, since he takes as his *mistress* ‘the presence of difference as such *and nothing else*’, *even in the very place* where Lacan characterises the signifier as ‘being that which all others are not’ [Lacan 2011, 36]. For if this is the case, the exception proves the rule: the rule of the Aristotelian game (no universal without an exception that founds it, the exception reduces the universal to...the same [*même*]) and the rule of the ‘phallic function’ erected into a new Organon of the Impossible which, to make up for the absence of sexual relation that it supports with its lack, ‘is ceaselessly not written [*ne cesse pas de ne pas s’écrire*] in a play of knowledge ‘that can only be articulated thanks to the entire edifice of analytic discourse’ [Lacan 2000, 94, 34–35, translation modified]. Need we restate that there is no more of the symbolic in Duchamp than there is of the iconic? And that, if Duchamp’s art falls into the *trans* modelling and semio-erotics of Rose Sélavy, it is because one can only speak of it as ‘indexical’ to the extent that all indices are not so much ‘deceptive’ as *faulty*, engaged with a Real that expects everything of ‘speech’, that ‘noise in which one can hear anything and everything, ready to submerge with its roar what the “reality principle” constructs there that goes by the name of the “outside world”’ [Lacan 2006a, 324].¹³ The Duchamp-formula, the formula of the field [*du champ*] thus *trans*-formed from the ‘impossible’ into the molecular revolution of *infra-thin possibilities*? ‘The deviation

¹² cf. Jacques Lacan, *Le Savoir du psychanalyste*, June 1, 1972, Unpublished seminar, quoted by Barbara Cassin in ‘Ab-sense, or Lacan from A to D’ [Badiou and Cassin 2017, 6].

¹³ In which one should hear the original that we *overturn*, namely the Real in its march toward the impossible (The Real is the impossible): ‘For the real does not wait [*attend*], especially not for the subject, since it expects [*attend*] nothing from speech. But it is there, identical to his existence, a noise in which one can hear...’ [Lacan 2006, 324].

(*écart*) is an operation’ [Duchamp 1973, 26, translation modified]. An operation in the form of a deviation in which the password of a Duchampian reading of Lacan might *even* crop up, as a rewriting of the one of which the other will have been the symptom, without that making it a *synthome*. Duchamp is not Joyce.

The Sex-Ratio of Wordplay

If, as Breton asserts, ‘Marcel Duchamp arrives more quickly than anyone else at the critical point of ideas ’ [Breton 1922, cited in Badiou 2008], it is because, to speak like Badiou after Lacan, he never compromises *the indetermination* with which he short-circuits everything that *might be heard as ‘genre/gender’ in art*. Something that can be verified in the shortest of circuits—Duchamp’s—between the *3 Standard Stoppages* (1913–1914) and *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, where he gives himself up to nothing less than a *stunning* [*étourdissante*] heterogenesis of himself in the field of the sign/of sex [*Duchamp du signe / du sexe*]. *Duchamp du signe* as swansong [*chant du cygne*] of sex? In any case, what we witness here is the swiftest of passages from the principle *of* contradiction—which he takes to the letter of its abbreviated diction (isn’t it strangely resonant with the Freudian affirmation that the unconscious knows no negation?) so as to raise indetermination into the principle of a ‘cointelligence of contraries’ [Duchamp 1999, 112] developed in ‘infra-thin’ differences which are a ‘cut’, ‘cuttage’, or ‘cuttation’¹⁴ from the logical field of non-contradiction—to the principle *that there is no sexual relation*. All of this somewhat as if the *even* [*même*] of *The Bride*, that play of retroactive ab-negation in which the end of her ‘title’ strips her of the title of bride, was lifted from the inaugural enunciation of the principle of non-contradiction: ‘[T]he *same* [*même*] thing cannot at

the *same* time belong and also not belong to the *same* thing and in the *same* respect’ [Aristotle 2016, 52–53, emphasis added]. ‘[S]uch a starting point’ would then be ‘the most stable of all’ [Aristotle 2016, 53]. On the basis of the univocity of sense which structures the world like a *determinate* and *determining* language, it holds that it is impossible for the *same* [*même*] word to both have and not have the same [*même*] sense: ‘The starting-point is [...] to *signify* something [...] [Then] demonstration will be possible, since there will already be something definite [...] For not to signify one thing is to signify nothing, and if names do not signify, discussion with others is done away with, as in truth it is even with ourselves’ [Aristotle 2016, 53–54]. Should we ask here, with Duchamp: *even* [*même*]? Or, with Lacan: *Tru-lie* [*vrai-ment*]? Isn’t Duchamp’s ‘eroticism’, onanistic and (precision) *oculistic*, here knotted very precisely with its cortege of trivially phallic wordplay? Although for a moment there may be an illusion of barracks humour (just long enough to slip it in *swiftly*, *cal-cul-atedly arse over tête*, in Rose Sélavy’s letterhead), would these puns be ‘auscultates’ so coldly into *Morceaux moisis* reduced to the bones of counternatural verbal coitus be so perfect in their aesthetic sterility if the spoonerisms (or spoonerism itself, that is to say phonetic *equivocation*) had no object other than to ‘bugger’ the principle¹⁵ of a ‘same [*même*]’ of *identification* that it counterfeits via antistrophe? Michel Sanouillet, the editor of *Duchamp du signe*, recalls the importance for Duchamp of the elementary postulate (‘the great law or the key to speech’) enunciated by Jean-Pierre Brisset, and upon whose basis his *Logical Grammar* grew into a phonetic scenography indefinitely accelerated by predominantly paronymic and paranomastic

¹⁴ ‘Use this “cuttage” or “cuttation”’ [Duchamp 1973, 31]; ‘*coupure* [...] *coupage* [...] *coupaison*’ [Duchamp 1994, 47]

¹⁵ I borrow the expression [‘*péter le principe*’] from Barbara Cassin [Badiou and Cassin 2017, 7], albeit to make a rather different use of it.

linguistic procedures: ‘There exist in speech numerous laws heretofore unknown, the most important of which is that *a sound or a series of identical sounds, intelligible and clear, can express different things* via a modification in the way in which those names or words are written or understood. All ideas enunciated with similar sounds have the same origin *and are related, in their principle, to the same object*’ [cited in Duchamp 1994, 146–47 (emphasis ours)]. Honed by Duchamp’s keen ear, we know very well what this ‘object’ is, since, as Lacan says, ‘equivocation is immediately biased in the direction of sex’ [Lacan 1979, 6] (But there is already a proof via Brisset: ‘*Sais que c’est? Ce excès, c’est le sexe* [Know what it is? This excess, it’s sex]’) Nonetheless, it is also the principle of the relation of a non-relation to Lacan that is arti-cul-ated here, ‘*à coups trop tirés*’,¹⁶ by these sentences constructed (and immediately deconstructed) out of words submitted to the *regime of coincidence*. The operation of ‘placing into relation’ relies on the replacement of the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction (where the ‘decision of sense’ [Cassin and Narcy 1989] is at play as essence) by the principle ‘there is no sexual relation’, which *L’Étourdit* puts to work even in its portmanteau and palimpsestic title, as close as possible to the signifier, inscribing homonymy and homophony in the letter as the first ‘di[t]mension’¹⁷ of the Real in ab-sense—while holding fast to the difference between the absence of sense as ‘ab-sense’ and the overly existential ‘non-sense’. Now, the *Duchamp du signe* trademark, as given in the title assigned not so much to the complete works as to the complexion of a work that belongs equivocally to art (designating, at its simplest, the definitively equivocal field of art) seems to be posited

¹⁶ *à coups trop tirés*: ‘Ball too often’—a transformation of ‘*à couteaux tirés* [daggers drawn]’ [Duchamp 1973, 108].

¹⁷ The spoken [*dit*], the enunciated, is formed of signifiers that have their seat, their ‘habitat= mansion’ in a speech haunted by the Other that resides there....

as an *intimate heterography* of this very passage, *even* [*même*]. Except that, in *making a hole* [*faire trou*] *in art*, Duchamp experiments, trying out every possible cut in it, in a constructivism of the signifier that he performs ‘anartistically’, *perforating* the phallic surface of inscription that will immediately be projected onto those *patatologies* whose protocol was drawn up, emphasizing their *dit*-mensional effect (carefully collected in the notes), from the time of the *Large Glass* (and all the related doors and windows). All of which suffices to prevent one monotony (no contradiction) being replaced by another one (no sexual relation) which Lacan hyperstructuralises¹⁸ on the basis of new (non-Aristotelian) logics where it is the exception (‘*there is one*’) that proves the universal (‘more modified than is imagined in the *forall* of the quantifier’ [Lacan 2001b, 459; 2009, 56]). That ‘there is no universal that must not be contained by an existence that denies it’ [Lacan 2001, 451; 2009, 36] confirms the rule of a new universal such that, by means of this *sophistication of writing*, the science of analysis (analysis raised to the rank of a ‘science’) becomes homologous (or enters into *hommologue*) with a function of *phallic knowledge* of the Real as ‘ab-sex sense’. According to Lacan, it is necessary to read ‘ab-sex *sense*’ as the axiomatic retroaction of a ‘gay science [*gay sçavoir*]’ consisting ‘not of understanding, of stitching meaning, but shaving it as close as possible, without gumming up that virtue’ [Lacan 1973, 22, translation modified].¹⁹ Duchamp, who, unlike Lacan, will shave sense (and the artwork) close enough to gum up a ‘gay science [*gay sçavoir*]’ (and a *gay ça-voir*— see it!) updated for the readymade era of technical reproduction, will on the contrary precipitate, by ironic affirmation of the principle *of* contradiction, a proof of the phallic monotony of the

¹⁸ The word is Jean-Claude Milner’s.

¹⁹ Because ‘[m]athematization alone reaches a real—and it is in that respect that it is compatible with our discourse, analytic discourse’ [Lacan 2000, 131].

‘no sexual relation’ over the most pataphysical critique possible of *scientific formalisation* (his ‘amusing physics’, which also governs the *game of the bride*). He undoes this science (or *stops* it) through the absurdity of his random ‘de-standardisations’ (the *Standard Stoppages*) in which the bar of the ‘stallion-standard’ signifier,²⁰ detached from every real relation of the signified to that which is supposed to produce it, is crossed at the speed of sound. If it is indeed this nominalist cut of the signifier that knots together Duchamp and Lacan, this confirms that the relation is *warpedsoken* [*ourdit*] out of a non-relation that produces no structure between them. For, with Lacan, the Lacan of ‘*L’Étourdit*’ who mathematically *restrains the étourdissement*, ‘[i]t is only through the test of formalization [...] that sense, touched by the real, brings about truth as ab-sense’ (Alain Badiou, ‘Formulas of “L’Étourdit”’ [Cassin and Badiou 2017, 46]), an ab-sense correlated with ‘sex’ as *stripping bare of the real qua the impossible*. The impossibility of any relation, ‘the futility of all intercourse [*coït*] with the world, in other words what has been called until now consequence’ [Lacan 2019, 90], is phallically demonstrated in the desire that is *topologically lacking* (the relationship to the law of nature), and which as such can be formalised in the *matheme qua* most radical subtraction from the world, and so subtracted from the equivocity of language. The ‘absex *sense*’ of ab-sense, which Badiou uses to his own profit, also (provisionally) puts an end to indetermination in a ‘sort of logical flaying [*écorché*] of the sexual body making the manifest duality offered in procreation and generation fall back on the symbolic instrument by which all difference in the order of logic and the concept is thought’ [Le Gaufey 2006, 168]. Whereas in Duchamp, from the *Large Glass* onward, the *ab-aesthetic* stripping bare and shop-window-displaying of the impossibility of any *phallic passage* derails Eros

²⁰ In French, where the word ‘*étalon*’ also means ‘stallion’ or ‘stud’, one says, for example, ‘*monté*

and renders it delirious *as the presentification of lack*. Consequently, the presentation of Eros as *Fountain* (1917) laid down²¹ by the designated R. Mutt who signs it (and dates it with black paint) manifests the delay in porcelain of a ‘mute’ (*muten*) reversibility of genders/genres, in the form of a dry *Mutter* (Mutt R.) impossibly placed at the Origin of the World (*urmutter*) and of the work of art (R) that *mutes* the *mutt* or ‘low art’ (that of the plumber, immoral and vulgar). For the hard of hearing: according to Duchamp himself, the urinal upended into a Madonna of the Bathrooms and of onanism had been sent to the Armory Show, who refused its *exhibitionism*, by *one of his female friends under a masculine pseudonym*.²² The Mister (*Herr*) remained mute (*Mutt*)—or *inter-dicted*, transfixed before such a *Maldonna* (a *misdeal*, transliterated by Lacan into ‘*mâle donne*’, a male donor), a double-dealing of the *sex-ratio* in which the *moi-tié* fails to find its other half.²³ Unless, that is, we admit that women can raise to the level of the signifier the shoehorn [*chaussoir*] of castration (*Fountain*—or the *chaussoir* of the Buddha of bathrooms?)—which they pass up, all the better to *pass it to the homunculus*, since ‘there is no sexual relation’. A pass [*passe*], a trick turned, a conjuring trick [*tour de passe-passe*], as we have already suggested.

The interdiction of *Fountain*, following that of *Nude Descending a Staircase*, the forbidden not so much transgressed as perverted in the direction of the ‘hu/man’ who is the prototype of the same, is indeed *the most* that could have been done for an ‘artist’—a (precision) oculist and not an analyst (unless one has passed into the other); more precisely, an artist who makes no secret of his ‘Dadaist defiance’. An *anartist*,

comme un étalon [= hung like a horse]’.

²¹ The industrially produced urinal is revolved a quarter-turn so that the face, usually vertical, is on the horizontal.

²² As Duchamp recounts in a letter to his sister Suzanne in a letter on April 11, 1917.

then, and of a peculiarly *sophisticated* type, since it is *anti-philosophy* and *anti-science* that must be ‘placed’ at the beginning of Duchamp’s trajectory as his ‘milieu,’ both ab-aesthetic (privative, through the *cuttation* [*coupaision*] of the retinal) and absolutely anti-romantic. So that *anti-philosophy* and *anti-science* move forward together on condition of the *pseudo-reality* of the anartist as *Duchamp du signe*. ‘I’m a pseudo, all in all’ [Tompkins 2013, 84]. If it is indeed the nominalist cut that knots Duchamp with Lacan, its bond is confirmed *phenomenally* by the staging of the failure of the matheme and its sublation in the poetic calculation of the homophonic games that are so rife in the punning typical of the late Lacan, increasingly as the 1970s, which open with *Lituraterre*, draw on (that is, wordplay in the form of spoonerisms, ‘literature’ placed under the sign of Joyce). A declension of anti-philosophy into a twofold anti-mathematics: ‘the knot on one side and the poem on the other: the string and the letter’, as Jean-Claude Milner excellently sums it up [Milner 1995, 168]. The string is that of the Borromean knot that resists all mathematical formalisation, and of which one must accept being the ‘dupe’ in taking ‘some stupid little thing’ as a foundation.²⁴ Meaning that the string that must be pulled is not unrelated to the thread of Duchamp’s *pseudo-scientific* demonstration by *Standard Stoppages*.

Standard Stoppages of Lacan

If ideally there were to be three moments, the **first act** is deployed in 3 *Standard Stoppages* (1913) which *de-standardises* (*de-stallionizes*) the principle of non-contradiction. $2 = 3$: this is fundamental, or rather (to borrow from Deleuze) *defundamenting* (*effondamental*) or ungrounding, to the (unmeasurable) extent that

²³ ‘Moiety in French means that it is an ego-affair (*moitié/moi*)’ [Lacan 2001b, 456; 2009, 50].

the 3, which stands as the subversion of the 2 (cipher of contradiction) is enough for chance to impose its *anti-scientific* and *anti-philosophical* law, if, following Badiou, we define philosophy (from a ‘classical’ Lacanian point of view) as the subversion of 3 by 2 (Badiou, ‘Formulas of “L’Étourdit”’ [Badiou and Cassin 2017, 56]). The one that is no longer equal to itself doubles not into 2 but into 3, the Duchampian number of delinked multiplicity which amounts to denying that ‘there is one’. This 3 is a pure perversion of all trinities, from which one makes sure not to exclude the ‘*Père-version*’ or ‘*Version-toward-the-father*’ associated with Lacan’s trinitary knot and ‘*non-dupes-errent*’.²⁵

One more reason not to allow oneself to become the dupe of the Real three times over... *Stopped*, all the better to *transform* it into something ‘stronger than the true’ (real?).²⁶ In the form of ‘Stoppages’, one associates the ‘idea of a straight horizontal thread one metre long falling [3 times] from the height of one metre onto a horizontal plane with that of its own deformation *as it pleases*’. An experiment that *results from chance*, along the thread of an ‘accident [from which] was born a carefully planned piece of work.’²⁷

The link between *tuchê* and repetition qua unlimited pursuit of the real as ‘accidental’ encounter is thus *theorematised* in the form of a new *necessity*, that of an *automaton* manipulated so as to *conserve* chance and to *force* the passage to *The Idea of Fabrication*. This title, stripping repetition bare of all ‘symbolic’ character, is that of

²⁴ Lacan, in the 17 December, 1974 session of the RSI seminar (unpublished).

²⁵ *Les non-dupes errent*, with that homophony that allows the slippage from *dupe* to the *du père* of ‘name-of-the-father’, is the title of the 1973–1974 seminar in which Lacan discusses the Borromean knot of the three functions of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary (RSI).

²⁶ As Lacan explained to students at a 1976 lecture at Columbia University: ‘The father’s mode of existence stems from this real. It’s the only case where the real is stronger than the true’ [Lacan 2013, 10].

the first note in the *Box of 1914*. It amounts to a radical paradigm shift in (*the Idea of*) art, of which the readymade, the *idea* of the readymade, is a contemporary avatar: ‘canned chance’, according to the sibylline phrase used by Duchamp to define his ‘favourite work’. The *3 Standard Stoppages mentally* grounded the readymades before Duchamp had found the ‘word’, the *wordplay*, that would definitively ‘transduce’ the *Idea of Fabrication* into the *Fabrication of the Idea*, doubly opposed to the idea of painting as pure, manually-assisted visibility, to which he will *object* the *manufactured* chosen by (the use of) chance.... This transduction (into the) readymade pro-duces the definitive formula for the destructuring operation by which Duchamp invests with ‘delay’ (he describes the *Large Glass* as a ‘delay in glass’) the most critical point of his thought. The subtraction from the common world understood as a cut with the symbolic of an art that sublimates it now stands as the *nominalist disparation of art*. It serves as an encounter with the real, projecting an *isthmus* toward *eroticism*.

What is knotted together in this ‘sort of *pictorial Nominalism*’ [Duchamp 1973, 78] practiced in the counter-painting of 1913–14 is the machination that would allow Duchamp ‘to make a picture of *happy chance*’ [Duchamp 1973, 23] beginning by projecting the *possibility* liberated by the cut of non-Euclidean geometries²⁸ onto the perspectival apparatus of the painting taken to the letter (and the most *transparent* image) of its technical apparatus. Which confirms that *3 Standard Stoppages* ought to be contextualised within the perspective of the *Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*, originally also a painting (a painting ‘of precision’ which lays out its ‘beauty of indifference’ on a ‘long canvas, upright’ [Duchamp 1973, 29, 39]) and its

²⁷ Duchamp, cited by Katherine Kuh in 1962.

²⁸ The term ‘possible’ is frequently used elsewhere in the introductions to non-Euclidean geometries that Duchamp could have consulted.

transformation into a *Large Glass*. If the latter *flays* [*écorche*] the physical laws of our world, it is only so as to figure their *distension* or *distraktion*, standing—according to the explanation given—for ““blossoming” without causal distinction’ [Duchamp 1973, 42]. To be ‘[d]evelop[ed] graphically’, Duchamp specifies, in light of an ‘actual representation [which] will be but one *example* of [...] these *principal free forms*’ that lose all ‘mensurability’ in the *Bride* [Duchamp 1973, 42, 44]. The *3 Standard Stoppages* is a scale model: a *small distension* of the geometric line. But then it is the conventionalism of Poincaré—the mathematician-philosopher of the fourth dimension—that finds itself precipitated into a frenzied nominalism that liberates ‘the immensity of immeasurable possibilities’ and invalidates ‘*irrationally* the concept of the “shortest distance between two points” (classical definition of the straight line)’.²⁹ An improbable, pataphysically oriented science-fiction, then, which adopts as part of its stratagem the *convenient* term ‘*standard*’ used by mathematicians. ‘Their so-called demonstrations depend on their conventions. It’s all just a matter of tautologies [...] Science is only mythology, its laws and even its very matter are pure myths, *and have no more or less reality than the conventions of any other game*’, says Duchamp [De Rougemont 1968, 43, 47].

The articulation of Anti-science with Anti-Philosophy is formulated quite radically by Duchamp in another 1914 note which makes of the ‘*Principle of Contradiction*’ the foundation of the nominalism at work throughout his oeuvre. From the definition that he opposes to the principle of *non-contradiction*—‘*Co-intelligence of Contraries [abstracts]*’—Duchamp deduces that it is necessary to ‘abrogate every sanction that establishes the *proof of this* in relation to its abstract contrary *that*’ [Duchamp 1999, 112n.185]. To which he then immediately adds: ‘develop’. Less abstractly, then: ‘to

²⁹ According to the explanation given by Duchamp to his stepson in 1963. Cited in [Molderings 2010,

statement A, oppose B no longer the contrary of A but different (the number of the B is infinite, analogue of the combinations of a game that would no longer have any rules)' [Duchamp 1999, 112n.185]. Here we are well beyond the opposition between scientific rules and the rules of games: the new rule of the game is to de-regulate the rules of the game themselves by playing on the difference whose peculiar rule is that it obeys no rules. So that '[a]fter multiplying B to infinity. It no longer authorises statement A (a theorem is no longer formulated nor formulable). It liberates the word from *definition*, from *ideal sense*' [Duchamp 1999, 112n.185]. On this basis Duchamp distinguishes '2 stages': in the first, 'each word has a *present sense* defined only for the moment by (sometimes auditory) fantasy. [...] the sentence still has a skeleton. (Literary examples: Rimbaud, Mallarmé)'. So here it is a matter of a *nominalism of the signifier*. In the second stage of nominalism, 'there is no longer a physical adaptation of concrete words: no more conceptic value of abstract words. The word also loses its musical value. It is only readable [...]' [Duchamp 1999, 115]. This would be the most radical form of what he calls 'literal *nominalism*' [Duchamp 1999, 115]. An (assisted) textual readymade, then, in which the unleashed telephony of the signifier over the sense that it punctures is brought back to ab-sense, to the pure gap of the signifier; a *bachelor* nominalism of pure *signifiance* which makes a literal operation of the sole subtraction of sense, of the absence of any *real* relation of the signified to that which causes it, the referent. So that the referent is properly that which the signified misses, in so far as it imagines itself master [*maître*] of its own being [*être*], that is to say when it imagines itself not to be language because it doubles it, under the rubric of extension, with an exteriority that is entirely manipulable by dint of *approximation*, in an nameless ontology that isolates the word

49, 41].

‘being’ [*être*] as a signifier of Meter [*mètre*]. The fact that this legitimates the prevalence of mathematical equipment even down to the most rudimentary geometry confirms, in place of the expected pre-discursive proof of the existence of the world, that ‘the signifier commands’³⁰ this discourse of being—of ‘being at someone’s heel, being under orders’ [Lacan 2000, 31, translation modified] *diverted, perverted* into the Master-Standard (or ‘Stalliondard’). One might think here of Duchamp’s declaration to Pierre Cabanne: ‘I don’t believe in the word “being”. [...] I don’t believe in the word “to be” [...] It’s an essential concept, which doesn’t exist at all *in reality*, and which I don’t believe in, though people in general have a cast-iron belief in it. No one ever thinks of not believing in “I am,” no?’ [Cabanne 1987, 89–90 (emphasis ours)]. From *parêtre to s’emblant*, if we want to make it resonate with Lacan,³¹ but crumpled [*chiffonné*] in a different way. And for later, in the style of Rose Sélavy: ‘Metritic system on a gonorrheal day [*Le système métrite par un temps blenorragieux*]’ [Duchamp 1973, 112, translation modified].³²

Machinic Eroticism in the *Large Glass* and its Notes

Second Act, that of the *Large Glass*, from top to bottom a proof, by text and image, but especially via the text that governs the image thus counterfeited, that ‘there is no sexual relation’. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* is Duchamp’s grand narrative, scattered across a thousand separate notes and *boxed up* (the *Green Box* and the *White Box*), and which projects onto the *Large Glass* the *writing* [*écrit*] (or

³⁰ ‘Every dimension of being is produced in the wake of the master’s discourse—the discourse of the who, proffering the signifier, expects therefrom one of its link effects that must not be neglected, which is related to the fact that the signifier commands’ [Lacan 2000, 32].

³¹ [Lacan 2001b, 491].

³² [The range of meanings covered by Duchamp’s *métrite* also include a Master/metrical/*m’être*-ical system, and the suggestion that this system is being ‘fucked’ (*me*ttre*)—trans.].

descriptive [*décrit*]) effect of a very technical eroticism, as an isthmus or ‘ism’. The ‘ism’ of Eros will be made up of Oculism, which will also, through an *ironism* (of affirmation), echo and make heard an *au-cul-l’isme* (with ‘infra-thin caresses’ [Duchamp 1999, 47n. 28]) and the style of *lascience—la-science* in a single word so as to paraphrase the Lacan of *lalangue* inverted into a ‘*logic of appearance*’ [Duchamp 1999, 47n. 28, emphasis in the original]. ‘Eroticism’ will not emerge from this process unscathed: ‘a meta-irony on eroticism’, as Octavio Paz sums it up. Words here become hollow moulds, like the ‘malic [male, phallic] moulds’, made of red lead, essential elements of the ‘bottom’ of the Glass, whose name alone acts as a mould for the Thing, unknown to the battalion of significations except for what can be heard of the signifier in centimeter, *senti-meter/master* [*senti-maître*: to make the master-signifier felt...], the Thing that the Standard Stoppages will ‘pour’ into the uniforms-units of language. This language has no more *proper* sense than it does *figurative* sense, and relates to Nothing, unless to a science fiction of *ab-sense*, as the ‘thin blade that slits the identity of things’ [Foucault 2004, 25], projecting into it a hilarious *cosa mentale* that deviates from the approved trajectories of the *hommologization* of the world. As for the Bride, at the top, that *empirese* of our supposed *coiterations* (two of Lacan’s words, in *L’Étourdit*, that arrive *just in time*), she is supposed to draw the bachelor-spectator into ‘a cinematic blossoming [*épanouissement cinématique*]’. But this is *put on display* in the form of a device that engineers the disappointment of the desiring-perspective of the bachelors below = $n-1$, with the four-dimensional counter-perspectivism of the Bride above = $n+1$ (her ‘supplementary’ dimension), while taking up in this same device those that we see move behind the glass (and which ‘I am’), in an external world that has passed into the shop window of the most ‘assisted’ readymade that ever was. For it will be a

matter—and this is Duchamp’s *primary guiding idea*—of ‘making an *Inscription*’ of the blossoming of the bride,, but a ‘moving inscription’ whose ‘alphabetic units (their number, form, significance...)’ are to be ‘determine[d]’ [Duchamp 1973, 38]. With the consequent return to a nominalist logistics taken all the way into the void that magnetises it because the passage between the bachelor-machine and the Bride does not entail ‘direct contact’ [Duchamp 1973, 39];³³ they do not communicate with one another *except by signs*, and this ‘electrical stripping bare’ [Duchamp 1973, 42] implies an exchange of sparks at a distance, with a ‘Short Circuit if necessary’ [Duchamp 1973, 39]³⁴ or, in other words, a contact that causes its own ‘*cuttation* [*coupaison*]’. (Doesn’t Lacan remark that *sexus* is linked to and detached from *secare*, ‘to cut’ [Lacan 2007, 75]?)³⁵ The ‘passage of the bach. machine to the Bride’ [Duchamp 1973, 42] thus implies a leap into another level of reality, combining the graph of four-dimensionality with the ‘blossoming’ which, as *imaginative* ‘stripping by the desiring-bride’ [Duchamp 1973, 43], is responsible for her halo (a hazy woman [*femme nuée*]) through which, from her non-perspective, the passage could ideally ‘pass’—but thwarting the final stage, that of *consummation*, which she evades. The title however furnishes the *import* (enunciative and denotative) of what is *really supposed to come to pass*³⁶ (if indeed ‘everything revolves around phallic jouissance’ [Lacan 2007, 7]), and must without delay be translated into terms of *clockmaking*, gears, etc., symbolising the uniform gearing of the two sexes for the ends of

³³ ‘Far from being in direct contact with the Bride, the desire motor [of the bachelors] is separated by an air cooler [...]’. The cooler is made out of three sheets of glass evoking the *3 Stoppages*.

³⁴ So one might express ‘if necessary’ *the electrical connections* in the stripping bare by a ‘Short Circuit’.

³⁵ Whence, also, the fact that ‘L’Étourdit’ is a *Treatise on Cutting = coupure au sens math.? .*

³⁶ I.e. what Duchamp translates harshly as ‘*The Bride possesses her Partner and the bachelors strip their bride bare*’. (Duchamp 1999, 59 N96)

reproduction.³⁷ But it is vis-à-vis this gearing that what he describes as an ‘alternative operation’ [Duchamp 1973, 39, translation modified] in respect of the workshop of the (uniformed) bachelors asserts a ‘principle of dissimulation’³⁸ in the form of a relation of non-relation that seals the *dry* dialectical identity of contradictories: There is *no* sexual relation/There is *no* relation *other than* a sexual one. Which also means that, if it is a matter of escaping to a plane other than that of the ‘desire-gears’ (reduced to the smallest part: ‘They are only the string that binds the bouquet’ [Duchamp 1973, 42]), this blossoming is not an ‘emanation’ from the Bride but the *Bride Herself* as ‘apotheosis of virginity’ [Duchamp 1973, 39]—the reality of a pure virtual qua the *unactualisable* of an inter-dicted phallic jouissance: ‘the blossoming of this virgin who has reached the goal of her desire’—but an ‘ignorant desire’, a ‘blank desire’ [*désir blanc*] [Duchamp 1973, 42, 39], ‘before the orgasm which may bring about her fall graphically’. Duchamp adds, in brackets: ‘(will [bring it about])’ [Duchamp 1973, 43, translation modified]. All that remains, then, in order to flee the agricultural assimilation³⁹ of the tool-machine (There is nothing but the sexual act), is to counter-effectuate and *re-dress* the celibate machine (There is no sexual relation, but only the ‘monotonous flywheel’ of an ‘onanism’—‘horizontal’—for two)⁴⁰ by producing *its faultiness* [malfaçon] and *its very male fashion* [*mâle façon*], the better to take this latter into the nets and readymades of language. Sent by the mysterious R.

³⁷ It follows that in the *Large Glass*, if we are to believe Duchamp in his *Dialogues with Pierre Cabanne*, ‘It’s above all a negation of woman in the social sense of the word, that is to say, the woman-wife, the mother, the children etc.’ [Cabanne 1987, 76]. We should recall that Lacan holds that ‘woman will never be taken up except *quoad matrem*. Woman serves a function in the sexual relationship only qua mother.’ [Lacan 2000, 35].

³⁸ This is Lyotard’s main idea in his analysis of the *Large Glass* [Lyotard 2010, 91–93].

³⁹ ‘Agricultural machine’ or ‘agricultural instrument’ is one of the appellations of *The Bride* [Duchamp 1973, 44; Duchamp 1999, 49n.80].

⁴⁰ See the ‘litanies of the Chariot’ [Duchamp 1973, 56–57].

Mutt, which we can now decompose into ‘R M u-t-t’, giving us ‘*Ready-made* eût été [Readymade would have been]’—and it would have been, had it not immediately been snatched away from the public gaze (and the ‘original’ lost)—the readymade female pissoir will be named *Fountain* (1917). Laying down, it will rise *humorously* at the frontier of the ‘arrose’ and ‘c’est le vit [it’s the member]’ of *Rose Sélavy*. ‘the word “arrose” demands two Rs, so I was attracted by the second R’ [Cabanne 1987, 65]. A *Rose* in which Duchamp does not change sex without changing sex ‘itself’. Sex or *asex*, which can be heard behind the privative of a rather uncommon feminine *la (sexe)* when the *vir* is swiftly [*vite*] passed to the *virgo* detached from all ‘lack’ behind her veil.⁴¹ The *Voie lactée*, or the *voile acté*?

To paraphrase Lacan, ending up by stunning [*étourdir*] the Freudian field from below the bar of the quantifier: *in denying that there exists one, one insists that there exists at least one through which the forall, the forallmen, is fornotalled—not to wager on the ab-sense of the sexual relation*⁴² *but to be adorned with the Name-of-the-Father in its male-fashioned faultiness [malfaçon].* Something that is formulated in the *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism* (1938) as follows: ‘Low/Stockings. — Silk stockings...the thing in itself too [*Bas — Des bas en soie...la chose aussi*]. *Rose Sélavy*’ [Duchamp 1973, 107].⁴³ That is, the *Kantified* perversion of a *thing-in-itsilk* watering [*arrosant*] with its rose-water name the *Father-One [Un-Père]* in the ‘milieu’ of its desertlike Freudian thing.

Rose Sélavy, Or the Trans-formation

⁴¹ The famous phrase from the *Écrits*: ‘Such is woman concealed behind her veil: it is the absence of the penis that makes her the phallus, the object of desire’ [Lacan 2006a, 699].

⁴² In ‘L’Étourdit’ once more [Lacan 2009, 66, 70] (‘that *forall* is *fornotalled*’).

Third act, that of the permeability of genders, with a *Belle Hélène* as the surprise guest of the anartist who, in 1922, abandons the *Large Glass* as definitively unfinished.

The inversion of gender, attacking the oh-so-phallic subject-function of the author by rebirthing him in a feminine makeover of the masculine, will have taken place ‘autobionomastically’ in *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy* (1920–1921), a very *soft-focus* photograph (a *pictorialist* portrait) by Man Ray. We see Duchamp in a *made-up hypography*,⁴⁴ swaddled in a coat with a fur stole and sporting a hat borrowed from Picabia’s mistress. He also borrows her arms and hands (she is hidden behind him for the trick shot to be taken), in a mannered pose underlined by the dedication (to the viewer) written on the left fore-arm: ‘*Lovingly, Rose Sélavy alias Marcel Duchamp*’. Duchamp explains his change of identity into an *alias* as follows: ‘In 1920, I decided that it didn’t suffice me to be a lone individual with a masculine name, I wanted to change my name in order to change, for the ready-mades above all, to make another personality from myself, you understand, to change names, simply’ [Duchamp 2002, np]. We must not read this *change my name in order to change*, without keeping in mind ‘for the ready-mades above all’, which seems to identify the *manufacture of artistic genre* with *sexual gender* in an very peculiar game—the devil finds work for idle hands. The olfactory critique of painting is further developed in another set of Rose Sélavy photographs, also taken by Man Ray. One of them will be reproduced on the golden label of a bottle of Rigaud perfume: the readymade *Belle Haleine/Eau de Voilette* [Sweet Breath/Veil Water] (1921) which Duchamp, after the war, will sign

⁴³ *Bas* can mean both ‘low’ and ‘stockings’. In 1989 Matta would make a drawing entitled *La soie en soi* [*The Silk-in-Itself*].

⁴⁴ Playing on the figurative sense of *Hypographo*, ‘putting on eye make-up’, meaning ‘to write under or at the bottom of’, and thus to sign or add a signature, ‘*putting before one’s eyes*’.

Rose Sélavy/1921. Here we also find, in the guise of a ‘veiled’ sexuality, the packaging-effect of a dada/dandy nihilism that deconstructs the history of *genre/gender in painting* to show that ‘there always was a gaze at the rear’ [Lacan 1977, 113]. Over obsessional inversion and those isolating processes so dear to modernism is preferred the archaism of a ‘*merdre, c’est la vie*’⁴⁵—in the Sélavy of a Rose placed in a socially elaborate and mentally worked-through [*perlaboré*] environment where luxury has become a means of investment (of production and of consumption) in the form of a sublimation of ‘woman’ that is no longer real, but really no longer *quoad matrem*. Which will be articulated as follows, as a perfect representation of the field [*representation du champ*]: since ‘Arrhe is to art what *merdre* is to *merde* [*Arrhe est à art ce que merdre est à merde*],’ read as an analogy of proportion ‘arrhe /art = merdre / merde’, then ‘grammatically: the arrhe of painting is feminine in gender’ [Duchamp 1973, 24].

Or even: *Given that the arrhe of painting is feminine in gender*—since *Étant donnés*, the other side of the *Large Glass*, ‘consists’ in inscribing, in a celibate optical illusion, ‘the retinal impression (and other sensory consequences)’ of the pornographic shop-window-display of the Nude fallen from her pedestal. Except that *Étant donnés* is not the hyperrealist image of the stripping-bare evaded in the *Large Glass*, but the ‘allegorical appearance’ of a pornoscopic execution of appearances carried out in the mode of the *hyperreality* of an *overimage* [*surimage*] that draws the gaze into a game of lures and *trompe-l’oeils*. One cannot simply declare, then, with Lyotard, that in *Étant donnés* there is ‘nothing to be seen but a vulva, and for that reason nothing but a cunt to see with [*rien qu’un con pour voir*]’ [Lyotard 2010, 49]. Far rather, what is seen in *Étant donnés* is a assembling/showing [*mont(R)e*] of the Rose-scented trap

⁴⁵ ‘Rabelais and Jarry are my gods, evidently’ [Tompkins 2013, 90].

that lies in wait for anyone who wants to see like an idiot [*en con*]...and anyone that would seek to *represent it*: a ‘hussy’s’ cunt [*un con de ‘gourgandine’*]. For what Duchamp re-presents is the fundamentally *unheimlich* anti-anatomical gaping hole of an ‘erogenous zone’ which the drive isolates and which is given as the fact of a cut and a *partial trait*; this ‘trait of the cut’ bound for a ‘partial object’ that is not part of ‘a total object that would be the body’ is not so much that which lacks through excess so as to forge the identity of a subject and the totality of an *identifiable subject*, as the very montage of a phantasm whose mount [*monture*] it turns inside out, turning it from *ens privatum* (the object of privation) to *nihil negativum* (a voided or *barred* object, the void of a non-object) by attacking the identification with the image that it *precipitates*. Which is why the *false-vagina* of the pieced-together mannequin obstinately refuses to be *penetrated by the gaze* and offers no return to the *origin* or the *Origin of the World*, to that place that we come from and go (in)to⁴⁶ but which, for Duchamp, on the contrary, would be the locus of the *impenetrability* of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*. Isn’t this ‘*even [même]*’ the precipitate of a *non-relation*?

Endgame Strategy

If it is indeed here, and on the occasion of the dinner hosted in Paris at the end of September 1958 by the Lacans for the Duchamps, that the relation is knotted between the two men, both of whom had ‘frequented’ surrealist milieus; and if the conversation would have to have turned around Courbet’s painting (*L’Origine du monde*, 1866) which, as we know, Lacan had owned since 1955, it is the relation of a non-relation to *The Origin of the World* that we must posit *in extremis* as *the principle*

⁴⁶ On this point see [Jones 1994, 202].

of the Duchamp-Lacan relation. At play here is the entire difference between the act of presenting, in painting, the female genitalia for itself, as Courbet does (Courbet, who avoided *cosa mentale* painting like the plague), and the act of refusing to allow it to appear except for and through a voyeur's gaze. An appearing [*paraître*] or *parêtre* whose *montage* and *montrage* makes necessary the whole apparatus of *Étant donnés*, methodically organised according to the 'operations' catalogued in the *Instruction Manual* [Duchamp 2009]—operations which all involve the voyeur and have one sole purpose: to ensure that he is not allowed to see, through the two miserable holes of a closed door, the supposedly 'erotic' scene, without also perceiving something of the 'dangerous supplement' that renders him *subject to the hole* that he believes he sees as an object (in perspective) but which gazes out at him from a dark cut which is less that of a *hole* [*trou*] than that of a *turn* [*tour*], a trick to make him fall from the hole of the hardening band. This twistedly complex device forces the gaze into the trap that it sets to undo that 'appetite of the eye [...] filled with voracity, the evil bad eye' [Lacan 1977, 115], the dark side of the eye nourished and taken in by the *cache-sexes* of painting which Courbet only brings down in order to entertain the real image of the bouquet bent over by the spectator. To trump the *trompe l'oeil* of the *origin* of *mimesis*-painting by unveiling its hidden pornoscopy may be the first watchword of 'looking at seeing' in the shop-window of *Étant donnés*. For its apparatus forces the eye to adopt the vision of the voyeur, which the looker has already endorsed by gluing to the door his scotomised gaze via a split [*fente*] and a re-splitting [*refente*] of/in space. This space is arranged in such a way that it will be the slamming shut [*rabattant*], to use Lacan's word once again, of 'the geometral function of images' onto the 'domain of *voyure*' where the subject, subjected to it, can only support itself

on the blindness of its desire. To the intention of this male gaze is objected, as a fact of castration,⁴⁷ the inevitable *maldonne/mâle donne* of his Madonna.

The object, the non-object in the form of an *objection*, arranges the passage from ‘nothing but a cunt [*rien qu’un con*]’ to ‘false cunt [*faux con*]’. Something that Duchamp suggests in relation to a 1968 engraving entitled *Morceaux choisis d’après Courbet*: in his comments on the work he explains the addition of the bird introduced into the foreground of his ‘representation’ of the *Woman with White Stockings* (Courbet, 1861): ‘He’s curious, and furthermore he’s a falcon, which in French yields an easy play on words [i.e., *faucon=faux con*]; so that here you can see a false cunt and a real one’ [Schwarz 1970, 885]. *Curious, indeed*, this ‘he’ taking the place of the expected ‘it’ for a bird that in no way represents *to the naked eye* a ‘falcon’, which *it* absolutely does not resemble: the *false image* of a falcon, a faux ‘falcon’ which, rather than a bird of prey, looks more like a ‘parrot’...or the ‘stool pigeon’ which then I am, *as a true fool* [*vrai con*]!

One *With My Tongue in My Cheek* (1959), we might add, in reference to Duchamp’s ironic self-portrait (a death mask in progress?) which belongs to a series of moulds made in *interseXion* with *Étant donnés*. After all, didn’t he include in the Eighth International Surrealist Exhibition (1959–1960), to which he himself (together with Breton) had given the theme of Eros and eroticism, this ‘bas-relief’ that literally puts the tongue [*la langue*] into the cheek so as to make it *inflate*—and it is ‘with the inflation of this lack-of-sex-sense (sens-absexe) that a topology is unfolded where it is the word that decides’ [Lacan 2009, 38]. *Except that here the word decides in favour of the falcon, the faux con of a Virgin who will never have been MARried, except to*

⁴⁷ This is the letter of the Lacanian reading, which is taken up, after Rosalind Krauss, by Hal Foster in [Foster 2004, 275].

marCEL.⁴⁸ Escaped from a ‘*fauconnière*’ that is never closed without also being open, the *virgo* has never allowed herself to be taken into the phallic enclosure of the *vir*, going right ahead to achieve the declension of her ‘ether’ into the insubordinate *hetera*, Rose Sélavy. *Rose, c’est la vie, Eros is the life* of the Insubordinate to the Two of the *heteros* that only makes One via the encounter of castration, where the signifier-woman is inscribed as privation (of the phallus)⁴⁹ in a dimension of the *semblant* that one might, with Lacan, *étourdire* at will without changing anything in the symptom except its writing as *synthome* and its rewriting of the *hetera* as *hétaira*.⁵⁰ Now, as we know, the *hétaira* of Ancient Greece was a euphemism for *pornè*, a prostitute trained for phallically oriented *jouissance* (*turgor*) for he whom ‘L’Étourdit’ qualifies as ‘*hommosexuated*’ or ‘*hommosexual*’. The two *m*’s belonging to the man sexuated by the *omos*, the *same* [*même*] in Greek which makes the similar into a hard band [*qui fait « bande »*] in the marking of the non-relation to the ‘notall’ of the woman erecting the phallus in the ‘empty’ space of her ‘lack’.

Whether or not it was because this hyperstructuralist portrait of woman as *hétaira* may justifiably be said to belong to a Freudian field familiar to the surrealists, in any case Duchamp did not hesitate to get a shot of the aforementioned ‘void’ of these ladies, as *Impair* (pronounced *Un-Père*, One-Father) *et Manque* in the ‘*Rue Surréaliste*’ which, upon his initiative, served as the entry corridor into the International Surrealist Exhibition (1938), populated by sixteen mannequins. Among

⁴⁸ Étant donnée *La MARIÉE mise à nu par ses CELibataires, même....*

⁴⁹ To say it as straightforwardly as possible: ‘not to have the phallus symbolically, is to participate in it by virtue of absence, and therefore is to have it in a certain sense’ [Lacan 1994, 153].

⁵⁰ Cf. ‘L’Étourdit’: ‘the *Heteros*, by being declined into the *Hetera*, is etherised, or even hetaerised’ [Lacan 2009, 74].

them we find the mannequin of Rose Sélavy, assembled by Duchamp in the simplest possible get-up, arranged according to an *top/bottom*: top: curly wig, made-up face, wearing a man's hat and clothes like a businessman; bottom: *nude*, apart from casual men's shoes, bringing into relief the '*faux con*' highlighted on the groin with the handwritten inscription, in capital letters, 'RROSE SÉLAVY' (the second R is very *developed*), and again underlined *in absentia* by the plaque put up alongside the transgender mannequin: '*Rue aux lèvres* [Street of Lips]'.

There is more here than a prefiguration of *Étant donnés*, and of its realisation or *production of the prosthesis* of a '*faux con*' that does over the derisory exhibition of the supposed feminine 'castration' by staging the oculo-phallicism that serves as its vector, referring it back to the phallophany of the voyeur. A voyeur who has every reason to be *surprised* by what he discovers little by little of the *mannequin deposited* by those *operations of approximation* (enumerated in the *Instruction Manual*) which relate not to sex but to the hinges of the montage which must remain 'hidden'. A dismantlable puppet which in truth makes little secret of its montage of detached pieces. In Frederick Kiesler's words: 'joints are dangerous links; they tend to dis-joint' [Kiesler 1937, 56]. The dissimulation extends to the whole body, in a game of re-splitting [*refente*] between genders, facilitated by the elision of the face. The transition between water and gas in *Étant donnés* and in its full title (*Étant donnés: 1/ the waterfall, 2/ the lighting gas*) which takes up, *to the letter*, the enunciation that figures as a preface to *The Bride Stripped Bare...* in the *Green Box* also circles back to 'Water and Gas on Every Floor' (1958). Which then suggests their coming together in the word AUER (the phallically-shaped Bec Auer type lamp of *Étant donnés*, a 'gas pipe') which—'be *aware*'—refers to the O and R of Rose Sélavy. And in the

ultimate ‘mirroric return’, the ‘cinematic blossoming’ of the Bride into... what Arturo Schwarz describes as a ‘self-induced orgasm’ [Schwarz 1970, 244].

The circle may be a vicious one but, ultimately, replaying the ‘film’ of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* in the light of its terminus in *Anemic Cinema*, from the cutting of *the view onto the vulva*, then, we see the surface of the voiding, *ceci n’est pas un con*, via the effect of its *afterwardsness*, provided with a recto and a verso, without one needing to tack, or choose a side, in order to access its underside: the *Chocolate Grinder* (1912) ‘mounted on a Louis XIV nickelled chassis’, which already uses the colours of the *Bride* (1912). The grinder of a bachelor who has hardly got out of the *infans* stage, mixing up his ‘milk chocolate’ (or his ‘milky way’), *even*. Where *even* [*même*] here means, unequivocally: without allowing oneself to be impressed by the ‘great scissors’ of the ‘Bayonet’ of the machine *that cannot shut* (the principle of their fixation to the ‘Slide [*Glissière*]’ inter-dicts it).⁵¹ ‘The blades cannot close, thus the threat of castration is cancelled’ [Schwarz 1970, 178].

The veil is drawn up [*le voile est acté*].

‘Daggers drawn [*à coups trop tirés*] perhaps, but *firing blanks* [*tirés à blanc*].

In this way, the mounting/showing [*montRage*] (with this Rrose-tinted R) of *Étant donnés* gives (onto) a long chain of signifiers which, the better to *transform* it, refers the seXual chiasmus to the regime of infra-thin games of *calibration* of the *coincidence of contraries*. The scopophilic installation of the muse in the museum finds itself *transported* into the totality of the Duchampian circuit, precipitating the Master-Signifier into a final *cul de sac*, ‘the phallus [as] the privileged signifier of this mark in which the role [*part*] of Logos is wedded to the blossoming of desire’ (‘The Signification of the Phallus’ [Lacan 2006a, 581]).

⁵¹ In the notes in the *Green Box* for *The Bride Stripped Bare...*, section 21.

And God knows, Duchamp certainly played *dirty* with that which stands for it in art:—superficially and, via the auditive hole, *orificially, even...* before driving it to the wall.

A brick wall.

Translation Robin Mackay

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