

Étant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage

Reflections On a New Work by Marcel Duchamp

by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps

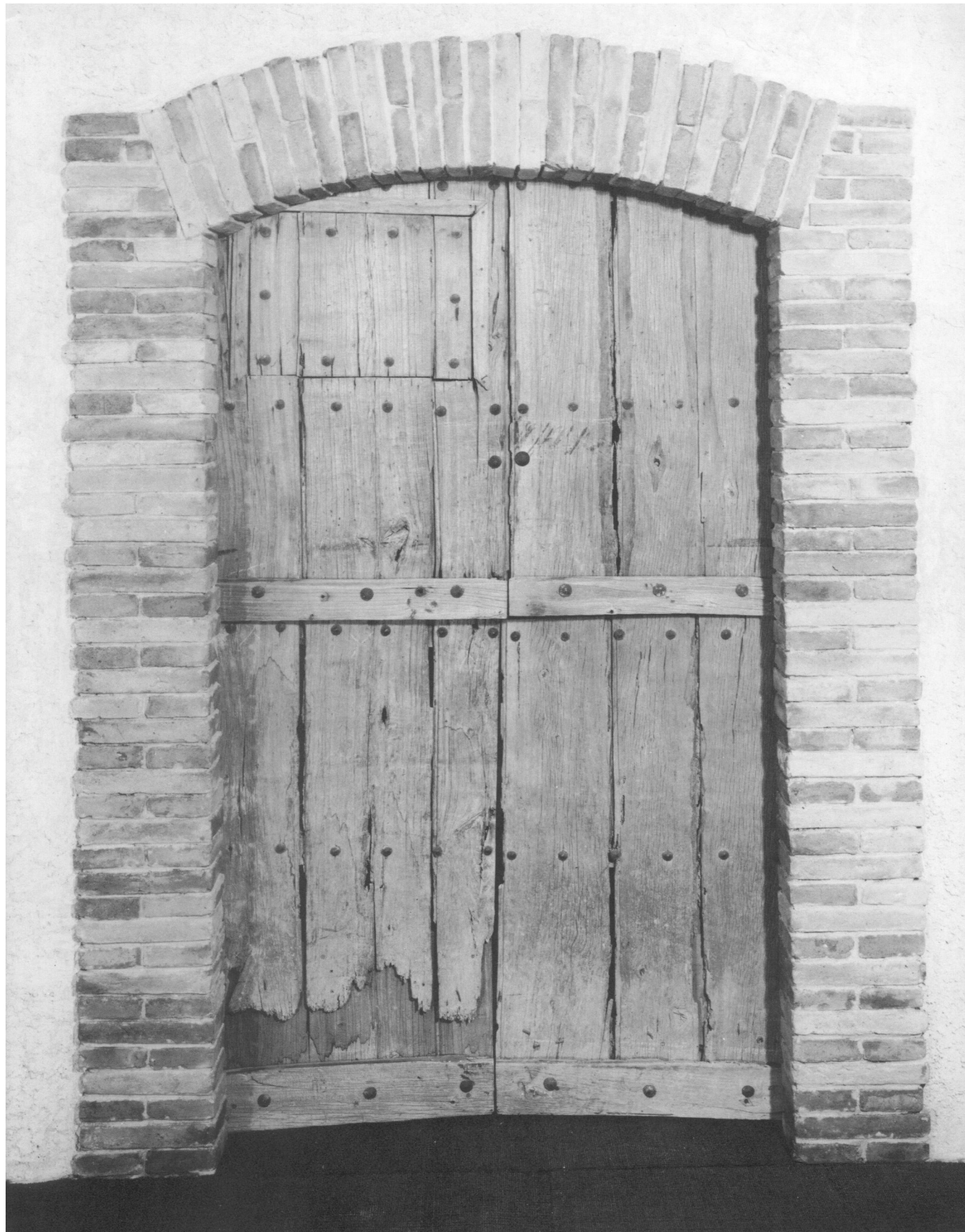
I

When Marcel Duchamp died quietly in Paris on October 2 of last year, at the age of eighty-one, one of the most influential, independent, and elusive minds of the twentieth century eluded us forever. As the century continues, it will surely become increasingly clear that his unobtrusive career, "on the margin" of major artistic movements, as he described it, was a central force in shaping the sensibilities of several generations of artists and their audiences. His influence resides visibly in a small but highly concentrated body of work—a collection of paintings, enigmatic objects, precise diagrams, and words jotted on scraps of paper—and invisibly in a long life, lived exactly as he wanted it. His friend Henri-Pierre Roché ended a few pages of "Souvenirs" of Duchamp with the words: "His finest work is his use of time."¹

The timing of Duchamp's artistic activity always ranged between the carefully planned and the chance creation, the long-drawn-out deliberate process and the swift decision. While he spent eight years working with infinite care over the delicate tracery of *The Large Glass*, leaving it still unfinished at the end, the same years saw the sudden, sporadic appearance of the Readymades. Although it is dangerous to see patterns in Duchamp's career, since his own pattern was more intricate (or perhaps simpler?) than any an observer could devise, in retrospect it is tempting to think that we should have known that some major, long-drawn-out work was under way during the last twenty-odd years, given the occasional, casual appearance of mysterious objects from his hand, objects which seemed unrelated to any thematic context in his earlier work.

It was an integral part of the Duchamp myth, very much current while he was alive, that he had given up "art" for chess, and leisurely chess at that. It was certainly generally assumed by friends and critics alike that he had produced no major works after the twenties, when *The Large Glass* had reached its present state of being definitively "inachevé," and he had constructed his series of motorized optical devices. In the interviews he politely granted and the panel discussions in which he took good-humored part during the last thirty years, frequent reference was made to this apparently complete halt in artistic activity. When asked whether he still considered himself an artist, he was fond of replying that he was "un homme, tout simplement, un 'respirateur.'"² Although he implied that all he did was potter about, play chess, and see his friends, Duchamp rarely actually denied doing something, or the possibility of doing something, in the artistic line, while he never confirmed that he was.

The air of mysterious inactivity that puzzled rare visitors to his New York studio on Fourteenth Street was only a later version of the atmosphere in the sequence



of quiet rooms he had occupied in Paris and New York, where friends more often found him playing chess, or simply smoking his pipe, than at work on an object. Man Ray's description of the "abandoned aspect" of Duchamp's 1920 apartment with "absolutely nothing . . . that could remind one of a painter's studio"³ dates to a period when we know that Duchamp's activity was in fact intense, if imperceptible. So William Copley's more recent account of his impression of the Fourteenth Street studio should be suggestive, perhaps even prophetic in its very brevity: "There was a table with a chess board, one chair, and a kind of packing crate on the other side to sit on, and I guess a bed of some kind in the corner. There was a pile of tobacco ashes on the table, where he used to clean his pipe. There were two nails in the wall, with a piece of string hanging down from one. And that was *all*."⁴

But not quite all. Following his death, in accordance with Duchamp's expressed wish, the Cassandra Foundation offered the Philadelphia Museum of Art the gift of a major work that he had been assembling for over twenty years: *Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage* ("Given: 1. the waterfall, 2. the illuminating gas"), signed and dated 1946–66. Its existence alone upsets any number of theories or speculations about Duchamp that have been current for years. Here, all at once, is evidence of a sustained period of work on something obviously important to him, carried out in the privacy of his studio with the assistance of his wife, who shared the secret and some of the work. When he recommended that the artists of today might do well to go "underground,"⁵ he had already long since done so himself. The result of his underground activity is not only a revelation which suddenly brings a new coherence into the seemingly random group of small works produced during the fifties, but it also throws a new light on the total output, both visual and verbal, of Duchamp's long career.

Because of the secrecy surrounding its construction over the years, and because of the nature of the piece itself, *Etant Donnés* . . . will always remain far more inaccessible as a work of art than Duchamp's other major works, among which must be numbered *Nude Descending a Staircase*, the several paintings leading up to and including *The Bride*, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*, *Even* (*The Large Glass*), and *Tu m'*.

But there can be no question that this is a major work ranking with the others. It is not perhaps the culminating piece of his career (which was not a simple progression in time) but rather one which was inextricably interlocked with the thoughts and visual conceptions which made up his past (and his present) as an artist. It will throw a new light on earlier objects, remarks, and notations, while they in turn will prove to illuminate it. We have no public statements by Duchamp himself on the new piece, and he is now mercifully spared all our questions. The task of tracing the subtle system of resonance between *Etant Donnés* . . . and the rest of Duchamp's oeuvre, visible and invisible, can only be a long and delicate operation—and here only tentatively begun.

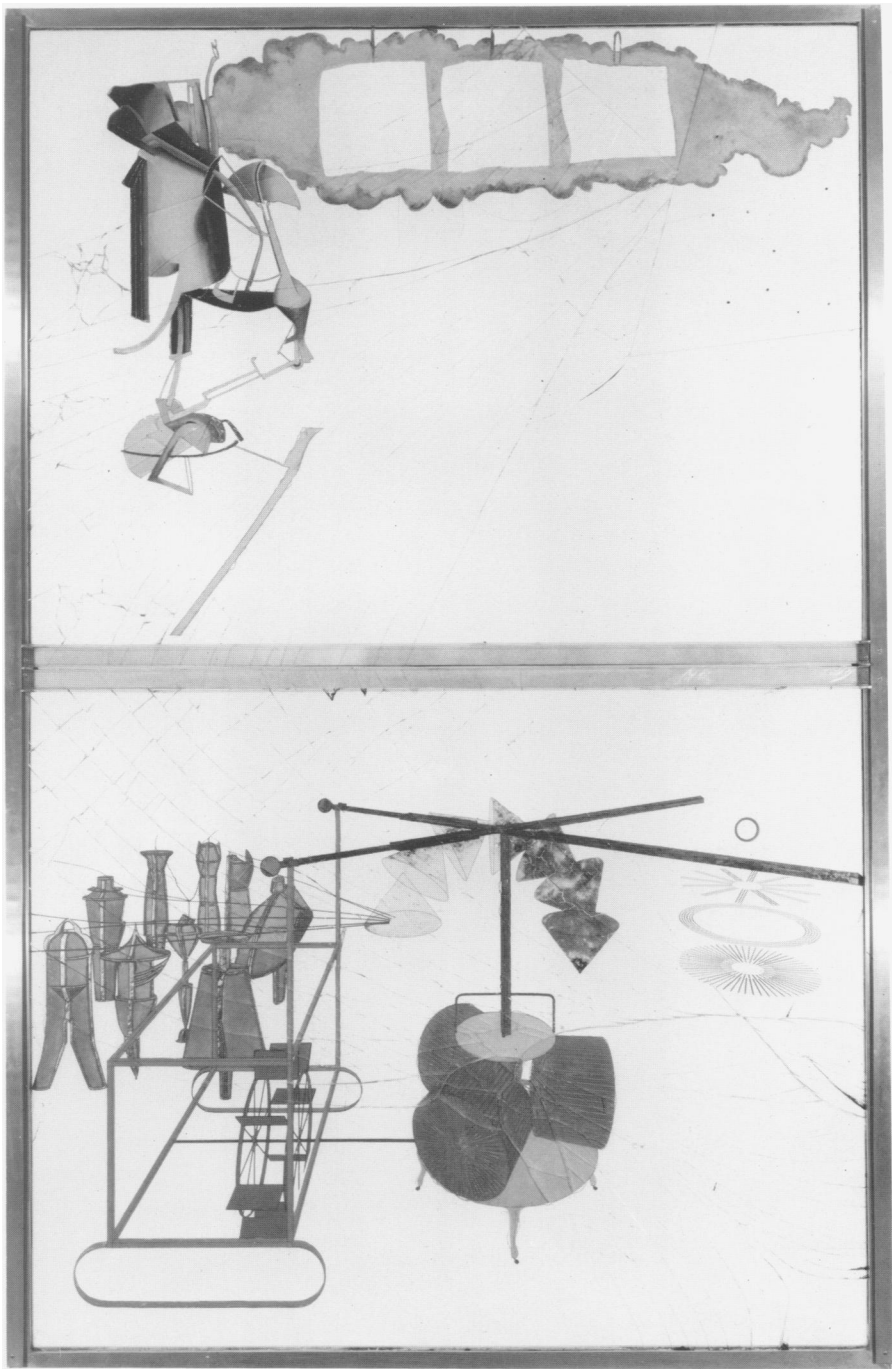
Permanently installed in the Museum, in a room behind the Arensberg Collection where Duchamp had specifically wished it to be, *Etant Donnés* . . . is approached through a large gallery devoted to his earlier work and dominated by *The Large*

Glass. The visitor passes through a doorway in the far corner of the gallery and turns to find himself in a small room, confronted with a roughly stuccoed wall extending across it from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall. In the center of the stucco wall is a large arched doorway made of old bricks, framing an old Spanish wooden door (fig. 1). The door is a weathered silver gray, studded with iron rivets, with no sign of hinges or of any knob or handle, which confirms the impression that it cannot be opened. In the middle of the door, at eye level, almost invisible from a distance, are two small holes. If the visitor accepts the invitation and strolls up to peer through the holes, the first shock of encounter with the scene behind the door will always be a private and essentially indescribable experience.

What one actually sees can be reduced to words, but the initial impact is one of the most crucial aspects of the work, and one which cannot be rendered second-hand. The view is not, as one might expect from the venerable age of the door and the solidity of the wall, into the musty interior of a darkened room, but out onto a brilliantly illuminated landscape. The viewer is aware of several layers of space through which his gaze passes. One looks through a jagged hole in a brick wall, apparently a few feet away, at a nude woman lying on her back among a mass of twigs and leaves. Her face is farthest away from the viewer and is hidden completely by a wave of blonde hair. Her legs extend toward the door; her feet are obscured by the brick wall. Her right arm cannot be seen, but her left arm is raised, and in her hand she holds up the vertical glass fixture of a small gas lamp, which glows faintly. In the distance a hilly, wooded landscape rises above the waters of a pond, the clouds are soft and white in a blue sky, and to the far right a waterfall flows and sparkles endlessly—the only moving element in the silent tableau, which is bathed in brilliant light from invisible sources. The scene is at once startlingly naturalistic and eerily unreal, the quality of unreality somehow focusing on the one man-made object in view: the little gas lamp, whose incongruity is yet an integral part of the whole conception.

When the viewer steps back from that extraordinary door, he has only two alternatives. He can go back for a second look through the little holes, although the view is probably stamped indelibly on his mind from his first encounter, or he can wander out into the large gallery again, to be surrounded by other objects by Duchamp. The solid stucco wall and impassable door frustrate any hope of extending his knowledge of the scene behind them. One is unable to walk around *Etant Donnés* . . . , one cannot get up close to peer at details or back away to get a different perspective. Marcel Duchamp has determined forever exactly the amount of detail and precisely the fixed perspective which he wants the viewer to perceive. The illusion is complete in itself; the essence of the piece is in the sheer visual impact of the view, and not in the materiality of the component parts assembled by the artist to create the illusion.

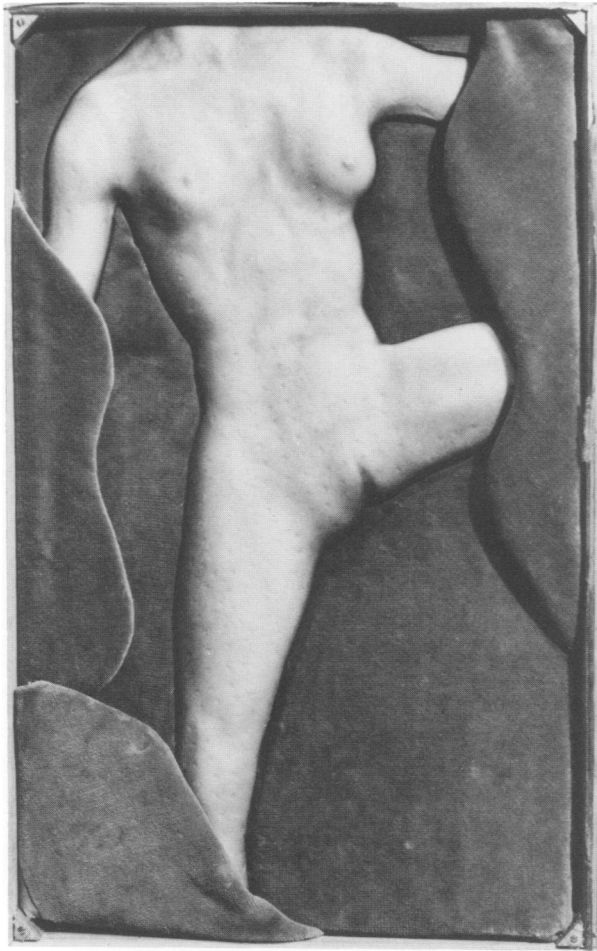
Etant Donnés . . . could be described as the alter ego of *The Large Glass* (fig. 2). Its close and complex relation to the ideas and imagery of the *Glass* will be explored later; here it is the material nature of the two works which confronts us with a great, typically Duchampian paradox. *The Large Glass* and some of its studies are, of all Duchamp's creations, the most accessible (to the point of being



2. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. 1915–23
Oil, lead wire and foil, dust, and varnish on glass (two parts), 107 x 67"
Philadelphia Museum of Art. Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier

literally transparent) as well as the most abstruse. We see *through* them more than we see them. The viewer becomes part of the view. We can walk around the *Glass*, behind and before it, scrutinizing the minutiae of its extraordinary inventions: the lead wires, the captured dust, the layers of paint and metal foil. Yet though we can see all of it, it is as Duchamp often remarked, "not intended to be looked at"⁶ (but to be looked through and beyond). *Étant Donnés* . . . is only to be looked at. Duchamp has deliberately kept the viewer from penetrating behind the scene to examine details of its obviously meticulous construction.

The new piece is a complex assemblage of materials and techniques, lit from within by hidden lights and complete with a small electric motor. Some of the elements—the nude figure, the landscape—were clearly made by hand with great care, while the twigs were gathered on excursions into the countryside around New York and the bricks for the inner wall were collected from demolition sites near Duchamp's studio. The old wooden door is part of one that once



3. *Étant donné le gaz d'éclairage et la chute d'eau*. 1948–49
Pencil on vellum over gesso, and velvet. on cardboard, 20 x 12"
Collection Mme Maria Martins, Rio de Janeiro



4. *The Bec Auer*. 1968
Etching, 13 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

opened onto a sunny street in a small Spanish town, and was chosen by Duchamp one summer in the early 1960s. We will never have more than tantalizing glimpses into the genesis of *Etant Donnés* . . . in the mid 1940s, and the gradual evolution to its present form. The work was almost entirely executed in New York, in the Fourteenth Street studio, until it was moved around 1965 to another small room in a commercial building on Eleventh Street. The final move came in February of this year when it was brought to Philadelphia.

The piece is dated 1946–66, which are presumably the dates of Duchamp's work on the elements of the full-scale construction. A preliminary drawing for the figure, dated to 1944, is in the collection of Mme Maria Martins in Rio de Janeiro.⁷ Mme Martins also owns the most important known work that directly relates to *Etant Donnés* . . . , a small but elaborate study for the nude (fig. 3), modeled in gesso and covered with vellum. This study, which comes very close in pose and treatment to the figure in the finished work, is signed and dated 1948–49 and accompanied by directions for lighting it and for repairing it if damaged. Mme Martins lent the work to Richard Hamilton's 1966 exhibition in London of *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*,⁸ where it served as a most discrete hint at the existence of the yet unknown assemblage, which now has fully justified the prophetic "almost" of the exhibition's title. It should also be noted here that the fourth of the nine etchings by Duchamp on the theme of "The Lovers" (fig. 4), published in Arturo Schwarz's impressive volumes on *The Large Glass*,⁹ makes direct use of the nude figure from *Etant Donnés* . . . (a quiet touch of humor, since the original model for the 1968 etching was still Duchamp's well-kept secret).

Despite the fact that the figure appears to have been the first element of the assemblage to be elaborately worked out, the conception of the whole (probably

somewhat modified as Duchamp went along by his use of chance ideas and his experiments with diverse materials) must have been clear in Duchamp's mind from the first. The figure is carefully designed to be seen as flattened and fore-shortened by the perspective from a fixed eye-level viewpoint; the distant landscape background and the immediate foreground of the door through which one looks are integral parts of the illusion.

Duchamp's method of work on *Etant Donnés* . . . must have been much like his extended preoccupation with *The Large Glass*, on which he worked so long, as he told Pierre Cabanne, that it became "l'expression d'une sorte de vie intérieure."¹⁰ Duchamp's subtitle for *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* was "a 'delay in glass' as you would say a 'poem in prose' or a spittoon in silver."¹¹ *Etant Donnés* . . . might be described as a delay in mixed media. Both pieces were something he worked on intermittently, when he felt like it, following a very specific plan he had previously devised for himself. His remark to James Johnson Sweeney in 1955 about *The Large Glass* is quite emphatic about this:

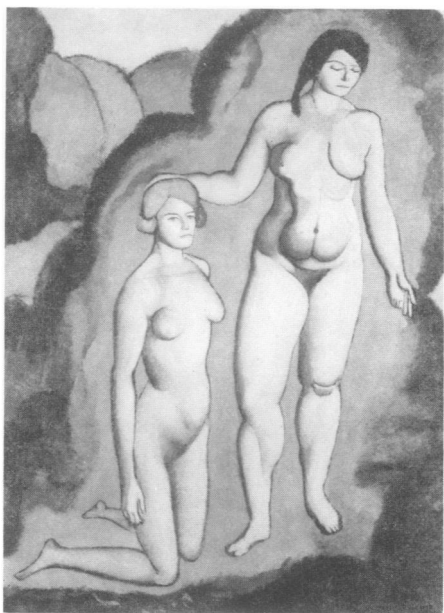
All the glass was imagined and was drawn in 1913 and 1914, on paper. It was based on a perspective view, meaning complete control of the placement of things. It couldn't be haphazard or changed afterwards. It had to go through according to plan, so to speak.¹²

The same "complete control of the placement of things" must have operated in the execution of *Etant Donnés*. . . .

In conversation with Cabanne, during the course of a series of interviews in 1966, Duchamp reiterated earlier statements that his alleged "decision" to stop artistic production had been in no way final,¹³ coming as close as he ever did to an oblique reference to another major work: "Si j'avais une idée qui me passe par la tête, comme le Verre, je le ferais sûrement."¹⁴ He went on to speculate on what it might be and how he might go about it in a fashion that may illuminate the genesis of *Etant Donnés* . . . twenty years earlier:

Je ne peux pas faire un tableau, ou un papier, ou une sculpture. Je ne peux absolument pas. Il faudrait que je réfléchisse deux ou trois mois avant de me décider à faire quelque chose qui ait une signification. Cela ne pourrait pas être seulement une impression, un plaisir. Il faudrait qu'il y ait une direction, un sens. C'est la seule chose qui me guiderait. Il faudrait que je le trouve, ce sens, avant de commencer.¹⁵

In the case of *The Large Glass*, the direction Duchamp's eight years of work was to follow was set out among the mass of notes written on stray scraps of paper between 1912 and 1920 that are now mostly assembled in the *Box of 1914*, the *Green Box* of 1934, and *A l'Infinitif* (sometimes called *The White Box*) of 1966.¹⁶ These same rich sources of ideas and imagery also furnish the clues and set up the ground rules for *Etant Donnés* . . . , completed more than forty years after the notes were written. There is no "box" of notes to accompany this new Duchamp, only a strictly practical instruction manual on how to install it.



5. *The Bush*. 1910–11
Oil on canvas, 50 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 36 $\frac{1}{8}$ "
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

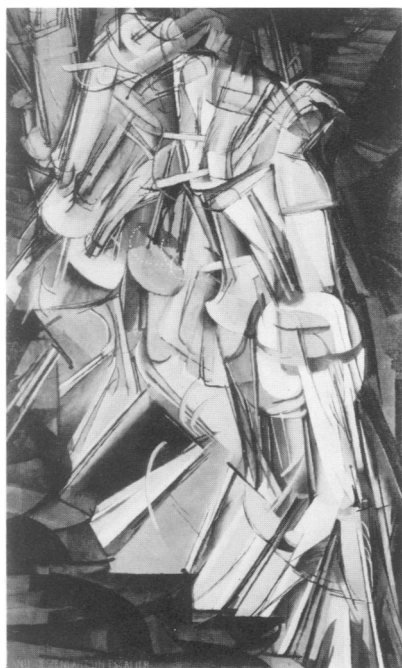


6. *Portrait (Dulcinea)*. 1911
Oil on canvas, 57 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ "
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

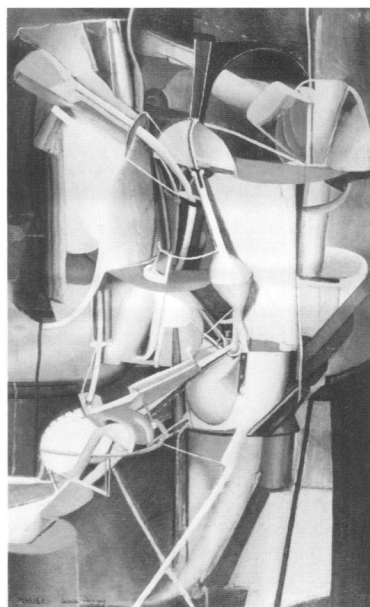
It will take years for this new (though decades old) and rather recalcitrant work, in which Duchamp has again contradicted himself as thoroughly as possible, to reveal its full relationship to the rest of his oeuvre, let alone to the art of his contemporaries. At present one can only begin to seek out its origins, propose comparisons, and explore possible areas of meaning.

One path that can now be traced in his work in the light of *Etant Donnés* . . . moves from the realistic, stolid nudes of the 1910-11 paintings (fig. 5) to the rapidly dissolving forms of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* (fig. 7), through the fleshy mechanomorphic beings of *The Virgin*¹⁹ and *The Bride* (fig. 8) to the highly schematized images of the *Glass*—and then, in an extraordinary shift of means, to the real, solid, and specific nude form in this last, major assemblage. The airy schematizations of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, which once seemed the very end of the possible exploration of this theme, now appear as a great midway point on a trajectory that curves back upon itself (although not in any sense returning to its starting point).

When baffled by the enigmatic machinery of *The Large Glass*, our recourse is to the several boxes of notes which Duchamp preserved and had reproduced in facsimile form with as much loving care and expenditure of time as he gave to



7. *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. 1912
Oil on canvas, 58 x 35"
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection



8. *The Bride*. 1912
Oil on canvas, 35 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

many of his visual productions. Not only the *Glass*, but the Readymades are there, in those scribbled sheets and precise diagrams, together with random ideas for projects yet unrealized (a sculpture of sounds, painting or sculpture to be wound up like a reel of film, "electricity at large"); ideas struck like sparks from Duchamp's inventive mind as he thought about major themes that preoccupied him. The assembled notes are a masterwork in themselves, as important as any of Duchamp's realized visual projects, perhaps more so since the latter take their cues from the notes.

Given the multidimensional nature of all of Duchamp's work, the many layers of meaning and media suggested by the notes, and the broad hint of the title of the new assemblage, which is taken directly from an important passage in the *Green Box*, we should expect to find enough material in the boxes to reconstruct the thematic context and even the physical nature of *Etant Donnés*. . . . Duchamp's was an intellectual economy of means: not just one but two major works find their origin in his thoughts of 1912–20, and who is to say that there is not a third, or yet a fourth masterpiece which will remain hidden in the notes forever.

When Duchamp laid down his brushes and his glass palette after putting the finishing touches on *The Bride* in the autumn of 1912, he had reached a crisis in

his career. Bored with the very practice of wielding a brush and deeply dissatisfied with painting as the only means to "make" something, he not only decided to stop being a painter in the conventional sense but set his mind to work on the whole problem of the artist's engagement with the real world. Rejecting established approaches to art as well as the contemporary modes of the Cubists and Futurists, and suspicious of the very concept of "reality" which his colleagues still attempted to explore (in however radical a way), he began to construct his own alternative version of reality: a mythic, pseudoscientific system which brought the tools of chance, humor, and ironic indifference into play.

This system, elaborately factoring apparent reality, has no complete explication provided by its author. Duchamp said he intended to expand his *Green Box* into a volume on the scale of a Sears, Roebuck catalogue, but he never did.²⁰ What remains are exquisite fragments of what never was a closed conceptual framework, but rather, like *The Large Glass*, definitely unfinished, to be continually completed by the whims of chance. The propositions of Duchamp's system are intrinsically anything but absolute: density oscillates, metals are "neighboring," color is "provisional," and exact measurements are determined by the chance fall of a length of thread.

In this capricious meta-reality, there are myriad aspects to any given element. Like the fluctuating appearances of "the Wilson-Lincoln system (i.e. like the portraits which seen from the left show Wilson seen from the right show Lincoln—),"²¹ which Duchamp adopted, everything can be read at least two ways at once. If there is a law informing the whole, it is Paradox, the resonance of apparently contradicting alternatives. (When is a door not a door? When it's a Duchamp.)

The major themes explored in these notes for a personal physics lend themselves unwillingly to enumeration, for they so interlock that to mention one is to partially include, or worse, to distort another. The great mythic theme of the elemental encounter between female and male, Bride and Bachelors, is inseparable from a series of speculations on the relationship of mind and matter. *The Large Glass* and *Etant Donnés* . . . would appear to be alternative modes for combining these themes, and both attest to Duchamp's incredible ability to manipulate matter with great patience and direct simplicity until it corresponds with poetic aptness to the most complex grouping of ideas.

What fascinated Duchamp was what our five senses could *not* tell us about any perceived object. The recurring themes are the intangibles: perspective and the projection of an invisible fourth or *n* dimension, "the apparition of an appearance," the light from within, and the mysterious generative forces playing beneath the surface—water, gas, electricity, and as their human corollary, desire.

Duchamp's version of perspective was directly operative in the conception and the making of both *The Large Glass* and *Etant Donnés*. . . . Since, as he noted, every three-dimensional object throws a two-dimensional shadow, then everything one sees in the "real" world is, or might be, only the perceived projection of another object in a fourth-dimensional world. ("Any form is the perspective of

another form according to a certain vanishing point at a certain distance.")²² If the images in *The Large Glass* are the projections by perspective onto a two-dimensional plane of some invisible three-dimensional beings (which are in their turn the projections of yet another set of dimensions, etc.), *Etant Donnés . . .* may similarly be the three-dimensional tableau produced by a projected four-dimensional configuration. Perhaps the *Glass* and *Etant Donnés . . .* are the projections of the same invisible configuration onto two different dimensional systems.

To be more concrete: each work depends for its total visual effect on a specific perspectival system. In the lower half of the *Glass*, every element is plotted out toward its own vanishing point; the vanishing point of the entire construction is just at the two bars of glass which constitute, with typical Duchampian multivalence, "the Bride's Clothes," "the Wilson-Lincoln system," and "the horizon." The Bride floats above, in the sky as it were. In *Etant Donnés . . .*, perspective again determined the precise overall layout of the assemblage, this time in a contiguous arrangement of forms within a three-dimensional space. And here the nude is not above the "horizon" line, but down in the foreground, while the vanishing point locates itself in the distant landscape.

An alternative convention to perspective, as explaining the layers of perceived and unperceived reality, is Duchamp's concept of "apparition and appearance."²³ Any given object has a superficial "appearance" which bears only incidental resemblance to its "apparition," as a "chocolate object" only superficially (and very temporarily) resembles the mold it was made in. Perhaps the relationship of *The Large Glass* to *Etant Donnés . . .* is that one is the apparition, or even the "negative apparition" of the other—"negative" being used by Duchamp in the sense of a photographic negative (two dimensions) or a mold (three dimensions). Intrinsic to Duchamp's concept of "apparition" is the quality of "native colors" and "interior lighting," a kind of luminous dye inherent in the very molecules of a substance.

Given the two suggestive ideas of a colored mold and light from within, a passage in the notes for *The Large Glass* which might have read as an aside takes on sudden significance as an alternative proposal to the transparent mode of the *Glass*:

**The whole picture
seems to be in papier maché
because the whole of this representation
is the sketch (like a mould) for a
reality which would be possible by slightly
distending the laws of physics
and chemistry**

18
Préface

1

Etant donnés 1^o la chute d'eau
2^o le gaz d'éclairage,

on ^{déterminera} nous déterminerons les conditions,
du Repos instantané (ou apparence allégorique)
d'une succession [d'un ensemble] de faits divers
semblant se nécessiter l'un l'autre
par des lois, pour isoler le signe
de ^{la} concordance entre, d'une part,
ce Repos (capable de ^{toutes les} excentricités ^(?) innombrables)
et, d'autre ~~part~~, un choix de Possibilités
légitimées par ces lois et aussi les
occasionnant.

Par repos instantané = faire cesser
l'expression extrarapide

On déterminera les conditions de [la] meilleure
exposition en Repos extrarapide [de la
pose extrarapide (= apparence allégorique)
d'un ensemble etc]

Some forty years after this note was written, Duchamp in effect carried out the project of a "papier maché" representation in *Étant Donnés*. . . . The fascination with molds and molding, which was the theme of several *Green Box* jottings and led to a complex sequence of ideas collected under the heading "Apparition and Appearance" in *A l'Infinifif*, operated only on an important conceptual level in the *Glass* and its studies: the Nine Malic Moulds, who lend their forms temporarily to the illuminating gas before its circuitous journey toward the Bride. The allegorical view of human forms as the molds for invisible aspirations (gas) takes on a quite literal manifestation in Duchamp's approach to his later work. A whole group of little molded objects from his hand, which appeared during the fifties, are intimately connected to the exquisitely modeled and molded form of the nude figure in *Étant Donnés*. . . .

If the themes of perspective and molding are alternative devices to depict Duchamp's "slightly distended" reality, the elemental powers that endow his world with life are the famous water and gas. The title of the new piece is of course the starting proposition of one of the most crucial notes in the *Green Box* (fig. 9). In George Heard Hamilton's and Richard Hamilton's invaluable translation,²⁴ the note reads:

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
the
of 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

(Facing page)

9. Facsimile note from the *Green Box*, 1934

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

The waterfall and the illuminating gas are the operative forces for the eccentric machinery of *The Large Glass*, but neither is visibly represented on its transparent surface. When Duchamp was asked by Jean Schuster whether the *Glass* was a sketch for a "mobile construction," he replied: "Not at all. It is like the hood of an automobile. That which covers the motor."²⁵ The *Glass* is a static diagram of machine parts animated by invisible motion; the motion is indicated only in the narrative of the notes. The Glider, or Chariot (the sliding mechanism in front of the Malic Moulds on the *Glass*), is described as "hiding in its bosom the landscape of the water mill." The water mill is there, motionless; the landscape is to be imagined. We are also told in a note accompanied by a little sketch that the waterfall has a precise trajectory: "A sort of waterspout coming from a distance in a half circle over the malic moulds"—but it was never traced onto the *Glass*. In *Étant Donnés . . .*, the machinery has become invisible, but the waterfall and its landscape have materialized. And the illuminating gas, whose complex adventures we imagine but do not witness in the *Glass*, is no longer broken up into "a thousand spangles" or reduced to an aimless liquid scattering ("What a drip") but now burns steadily in the little lamp held aloft by . . . is it the Bride Stripped Bare, even?

Not as explicit as water and gas, but equally present in Duchamp's "amusing physics" is the invisible current of electricity. The potential connection between Bride and Bachelors is an "electrical stripping" with all sorts of eccentric fixtures: the "desire-magneto," the "motor with quite feeble cylinders." The failure to connect is a short circuit. The same current runs quite literally through Duchamp's rotating optical machines of 1920 and 1925, and the *Rotoreliefs* of 1935. An early note in the *Box of 1914* proposes: "L'électricité en large. Seule utilisation possible de l'électricité 'dans les arts.' " Duchamp's metaphor to describe the encounter between the spectator and a work of art is that of a "spark" which "gives birth to something, like electricity."²⁶

In *Étant Donnés . . .*, for the first time, Duchamp combined the practical use of lights and a motor with allegorical references to important power sources in his mythic system. The relation of the motor (now literally operating behind the scenes) to the "hood" which hides it (the entire assemblage) becomes quite direct, and therefore somehow quite as enigmatic as all the imaginary mechanisms of *The Large Glass*.

III

"Eros c'est la vie."

Within the laws of Duchamp's ironic physics, eroticism emerges as the great cohesive force lending its disruptive yet essential dynamism to the entire system. The power which should start the halting machinery of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* may be described as water and gas, but it is also desire ("love gasoline"). Robert Lebel has suggested that for Duchamp the invisible fourth dimension, which projects its image into the world we see, is eroticism itself. Duchamp remarked in an interview with George Heard Hamilton and Richard Hamilton:

Eroticism is close to life, closer than philosophy or anything like it; it's an animal thing that has many facets and is pleasing to use, as you would use a tube of paint, to inject into your production, so to speak.²⁷

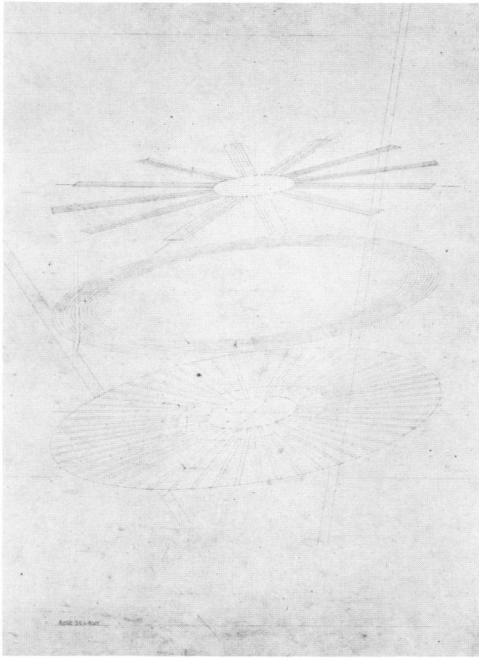
And he told Pierre Cabanne in 1966 that eroticism had been a way to avoid other "isms" in his work, because it permitted him to reveal things, not necessarily erotic in themselves, that remained hidden and unspoken but understood by everyone.²⁸

The last twenty years of Duchamp's career were characterized by a far more overt and explicit use of erotic images than the period of his preoccupation with the *Glass*, when most of the sexual references were highly arcane with only occasional forays into explicit puns (*L.H.O.O.Q.*,²⁹ *Fresh Widow*, and the sayings of Rose Sélavy). The 1944 drawing and 1948–49 study of the figure for *Étant Donnés* . . . are the first literal treatments of a nude (if one excepts the borrowed nude of *In the Manner of Delvaux*, 1942)³⁰ since 1912. Apollinaire's sweeping statement, "the fact is not without importance—that Duchamp is the only painter of the modern school who today (autumn, 1912) concerns himself with the nude,"³¹ seems at first a hopeless generalization, since most of the Cubist circle had not, in fact, abandoned the nude. But the poet had with his usual haphazard stroke of genius penetrated to the fundamental preoccupation of the young Duchamp, who had moved rapidly from the earthy women of his early paintings to the humorous multiple *Portrait* of 1911 (in which a lady is presented in successive stages of nudity; fig. 6) and on to the complex series on the theme, "Passage from the Virgin to the Bride." As Duchamp's exploration of sexual themes became more elaborate and specific during 1912, the images he devised became increasingly abstract. When he started work on *The Large Glass*, eroticism went underground into the notes, to provide "une sorte de climat érotique,"³² and only blossomed again visibly in 1946 when Duchamp began his second excursion into the realm of "The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even."

In *The Large Glass*, the erotic content of the imagery is purely in the mind (or in the *Box*)—that is to say, when looking at the *Glass* the uninitiated viewer is left completely in the dark as to its narrative meaning. The erotic content of *Étant Donnés* . . . is immediately apparent, while the interplay of the same metaphysical and human issues raised in the *Glass* is invisible but implicit.

The web of cross-references between *The Large Glass* and *Étant Donnés* . . . is not simply woven with the major thematic concerns of the *Green Box* notes, but incorporates threads linking some of the most specific descriptive details of the erotic narrative. As the Bride appears in the notes, for example, she is a being with several attributes not literally rendered on the surface of the *Glass*. In particular, she is an "arbor-type," the blossoming of whose desire (which we do see as the white cloudlike form at the top of the *Glass*) is born on "boughs frosted in nickel and platinum" (which we do not see). She seems to participate in her own invisible, perhaps allegorical, landscape which echoes the equally invisible landscape of the water mill accompanying the Bachelors below.

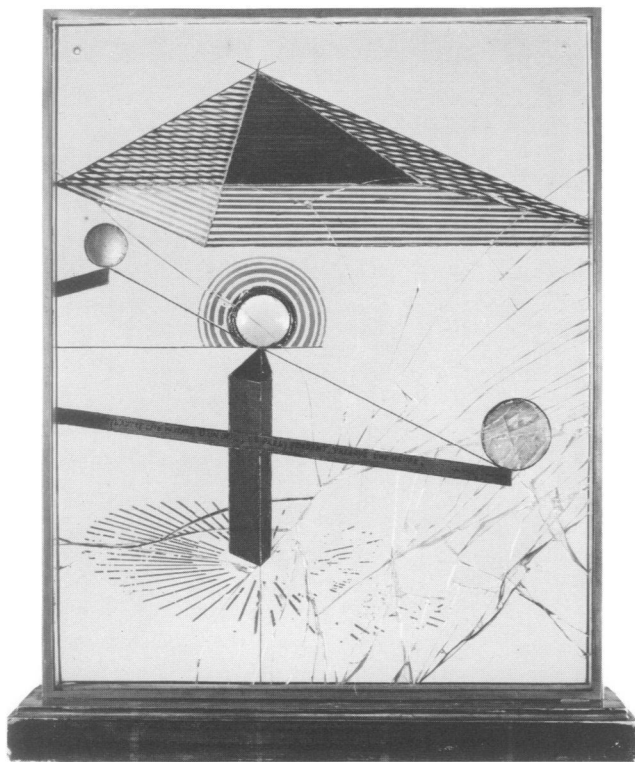
Duchamp's expressed distaste for "background" painting, filling in the canvas around the figures, was one of many motives for his adoption of glass as a



10. *Oculist Witnesses*. 1920
Stylus on carbon paper, 20 x 15"
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

medium,³³ and he dispensed with literal scenery for *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* since he could simply posit its existence in his notes. *Etant Donnés* . . . reveals a drastic shift from this approach, since not only is the archetypal background landscape obviously the product of meticulous and time-consuming work on his part, but the materials used in the assemblage make literal references to elements which seemed purely imaginary in the notes: the frosted boughs of the Bride, who now lies on a mass of twigs; and the "brick base" of the Bachelor Machine, echoed in the inner brick wall and the outer brick doorway of *Etant Donnés*. . . .

One section of *The Large Glass* has perhaps undergone the most direct and witty transformation in the *mise-en-scène* of *Etant Donnés*. . . . The delicate, silvered patterns on the *Glass*, just below the "horizon," which represent the Oculist Witnesses (fig. 10) observing the stripping of the Bride, now become ourselves—stooping or stretching to peer through the holes in the old wooden door. As in *To be looked at with one eye, close to, for almost an hour* (fig. 11), the small glass study of 1918 in which a magnifying glass is glued onto the pane, in effect, Duchamp requires the viewer to become a *voyeur*. To look at *To be looked at* . . . , or, more pointedly, to look at *Etant Donnés* . . . is to catch oneself in the posture of a Peeping Tom. It is Duchamp's ironic and brilliant achievement in this new work to have transferred the responsibility for whatever erotic interpretation it provokes from the impartial facts of the assemblage itself to the eye of the beholder.



11. *To be looked at with one eye, close to, for almost an hour.* 1918
Oil paint, lead, paper, magnifying lens, etc. on glass (broken), 20 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ "
Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

Duchamp once remarked that "a work of art is dependent on the explosion made by the onlooker."³⁴ He was fascinated by the interaction of viewer and view, and considered it of equal importance with the struggle of the artist to make his material take on the form of his idea. Duchamp's own productions prepare for the encounter with the onlooker in a variety of ways. Sometimes the spectator is left totally on his own with an enigmatic work seeming to require no response at all: the *Bottle Rack*, "une chose qui l'on regarde même pas, mais dont on sait qu'il existe, qu'on regarde *en tournante la tête*."³⁵ In other instances he is challenged to make specific discoveries such as the surprising weight of the marble sugar cubes in *Why Not Sneeze?* or the pleasant motion of the *Bicycle Wheel*.³⁶ *The Large Glass* leaves the viewer completely free and then imprisons him in the view.

Of all Duchamp's work, *Etant Donnés . . .* controls the action of the viewer most strictly, and makes the encounter between viewer and view an intrinsic part of the content of the piece. The assemblage is what we make of it, as Oculist Witnesses and *voyeurs*; much of what it means is how we react. ("Ce sont les REGARDEURS qui font les tableaux.")³⁷

A paradoxical correlation between increased literalness of presentation and increased difficulty of interpretation is characteristic of Duchamp's radical achievement in *Etant Donnés*. . . . We can be sure that the great erotic epic of frustrated desire which unfolds behind the *Glass* has much bearing on the new assemblage, but the physical literalism of the visual facts presented—bricks and twigs, the nude woman with her realistically modeled flesh and real blonde hair—frustrates our own tendency to allegorize. Yet the assemblage is not in any sense "readymade." It is painstakingly fabricated from materials which are made to look like an approximation of the real thing, but which retain a sense of artificiality. Even the reality of the twigs and bricks is subtly contradicted by their most deliberate placement in the total picture. The scene of *Etant Donnés* . . . is as far from reality as the wire and painted images of the *Glass*. But the new work achieves its effect by the radical assumption, surely part of the same attitude that fathered the Readymades, that physical facts are fundamentally as enigmatic as the most abstruse ideas.

It is inevitable to speculate that the nude figure lying spread-eagled among the twigs of *Etant Donnés* . . . is the Bride Stripped Bare, seen by Duchamp "with another set of senses." The Bachelors have vanished, but surely not without a trace, since she holds in her hand the little glass gas lamp—taken as a "malic mould"—with its gas performing its proper function as it burns with a steady, upright flame. In this new perspective on the eternal juxtaposition between male and female, Bride and Bachelors, the Bride no longer floats elusively above the horizon but lies down securely among the branches of her landscape, with even the little lamp held just below the sky line. The Bachelors' waterfall has in turn retreated to the background, where it splashes and flows into a misty pool. (In the notes, the "splash" of liquefied gas "ends the series of bachelor operations" before the gas finally rises toward the Bride).

This is not necessarily to suggest that *Etant Donnés* . . . represents a sequel in time or in narrative to the events (or frustration of events) adumbrated in *The Large Glass*, but to propose that it is an alternative vision of the same elements, an alternative vision not without the fundamental ambiguities established in the *Green Box*. Duchamp's notes offer not one but several possible relationships between his erotic protagonists: at times the Bride and her Bachelors appear to be equally immobilized by frustration, but then the Bride seems to blossom on her own while "the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself," and yet again it is not absolutely certain that the electric stripping did not (will not?) take place after all. In *The Large Glass*, the ill-fated, even tragic, nature of the operations depicted seems undeniable, particularly in the light of the varied and brilliant analyses by a succession of writers, beginning with conclusions reached by Breton in his pioneering essay of 1934, "Lighthouse of the Bride."³⁸ Of all the elements in the erotic machinery of *The Large Glass*, the Bachelors appear to be the most hapless, with the Litany of the Chariot droning about them ("Slow life. Vicious circle. Onanism. . . ."). Their disappearance from *Etant Donnés* . . . could be taken to intimate a more hopeful mood. On the other hand, if the Bachelors have been literally shown the door, and are left (with us) to peer at the Bride from the other side of a wood and brick barrier far more substantial than the

slender glass bars that separated the two halves of *The Large Glass*, their frustration and her isolation are more drastic than ever.

However, "Given," as Duchamp reminds us once again, "1. the waterfall, 2. the illuminating gas," both now operating smoothly in contrast to the "jerky," spasmodic motions of the first Bachelor Machine, there may be some justification for detecting a faint air of affirmation in the new tableau. The sensuality in the figure of the new Bride is neither ironic nor "timid" (as she is characterized in one note), but perhaps calls for the adjective "blossoming." The very fact of *Etant Donnés* . . . having been finished, in contrast to the intrinsic incompleteness of the *Glass*, suggests a kind of satisfaction. There may be, in short, a quality about this new piece which, if it does not contradict one of Breton's brilliant statements about Duchamp, proves to extend it to its logical extreme: "Never has a more profound originality appeared more clearly to derive from a being charged with a more determined intention of negation."³⁹ What Duchamp has negated at the last, perhaps, is the negative spirit that seemed to inform the thought behind (but not the painstaking labor on) *The Large Glass*.

IV

"A succession of a group of various facts seeming to necessitate each other under certain laws. . . ."

The limited number of things Duchamp made constitutes an oeuvre of such concentration and density that it reads not only forward in time with the chronological progression of his career, but backward and even sideward (to the written notes and puns). There are foreshadowings of aspects of *Etant Donnés* . . . in objects which appeared forty years earlier, and the new piece causes aspects of other objects which formerly appeared incidental to their nature to emerge as signs of a central preoccupation.

Take the little calendar print of a winter landscape, to which Duchamp added two dots (one red, one green) just above the horizon and his signature at the bottom and called *Pharmacy* (fig. 12). This early Readymade of January, 1914, has curious affinities to the photographic quality of the landscape of *Etant Donnés* . . . with its tall tree trunks rising above a watery foreground and its appearance of rather lonely desertedness. One might have supposed that the landscape element in *Pharmacy* meant little to Duchamp, just a handy vehicle for a pun, but nothing in Duchamp's work is "just" what it seems. The idea for the Readymade came out of the experience of riding a train between Rouen and Paris, and seeing two lights off on the horizon. He found the print later, after some hunting through the shops. Duchamp considered *Pharmacy* worth a note to himself (in *A l'Infinifif*): "Do not forget the painting of Dumouchel."⁴⁰ The connection between the Readymade and the wintry boughs of the Bride's invisible landscape in the *Green Box* has been pointed out by Ulf Linde,⁴¹ and both of these landscapes in turn have their parallel in *Etant Donnés*. . . .

There is also another excursion into landscapism which Duchamp made while he was very much preoccupied with his major piece and working on it in secret:



12. *Pharmacy*. 1914
Corrected Readymade (commercial print
with two dots of color added), 10 x 7"
Collection William N. Copley, New York

Moonlight on the Bay at Basswood of 1953 (fig. 13). It must have been done just around the time of intense concern for the background of *Etant Donnés*. . . . The correspondence between the specific elements of trees against the sky, with a sheet of quiet water below, is so close in both landscapes that the relationship of the drawing to the large work almost assumes the intimacy of a study. The delicate shading of the drawing itself evokes the poetry of a moonlit night on the water without the humorous approach of *Pharmacy*, although the two yellow touches indicating the moon and its reflection are a visual echo of the green and red additions to the Readymade. It is worth noting that *Moonlight on the Bay at Basswood* was drawn partly from life, from a boat on the water, and partly from a photomural of the same shore line hanging in a friend's house.

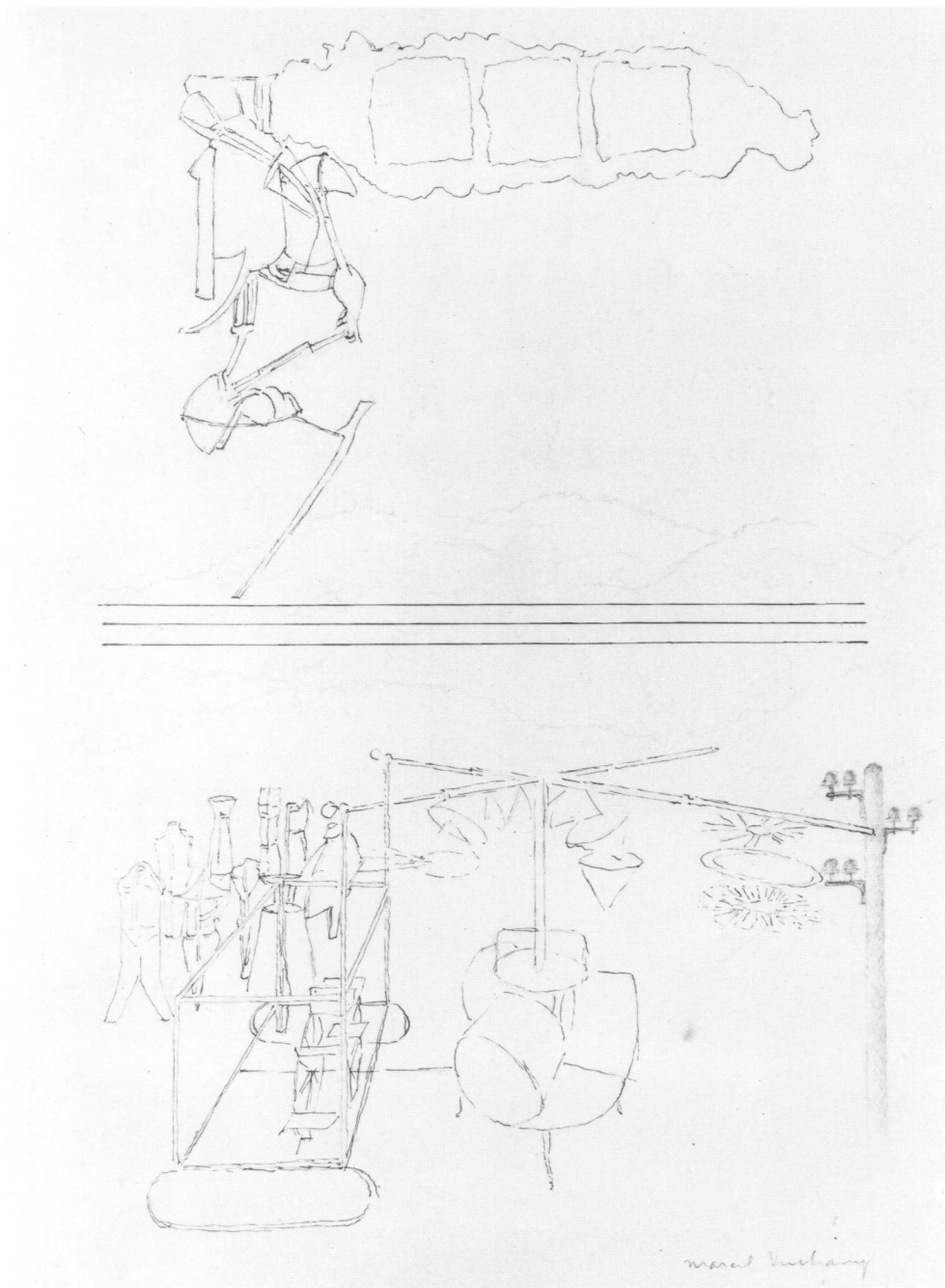
Another "landscape" Duchamp produced recently (in 1959) forms a tantalizing link between *The Large Glass* and *Etant Donnés*. . . . The punning title, *Col's Alités*, is amplified by a startling inscription: "Projet pour le modèle 1959 de 'La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même.'" The drawing (fig. 14) is more



13. *Moonlight on the Bay at Basswood*. 1953
 Ink, pencil, crayon, talcum powder, and
 chocolate on blotting paper, 10 x 7"
 Collection Frank Brookes Hubachek, Sr., Chicago

startling still. Duchamp has drawn a background for his *Glass!* The basic elements of the *Glass*, including three parallel lines across the middle representing the Bride's Clothes, are drawn in ink, and behind them, apparently lightly sketched in pencil, rise the irregular rolling forms of a hilly landscape. To the right, just tangent to one blade of the Scissors atop the Chocolate Grinder, Duchamp has added an electrical pole, the common variety that punctuates the countryside everywhere, complete with glass insulating knobs and wires disappearing in the distance.

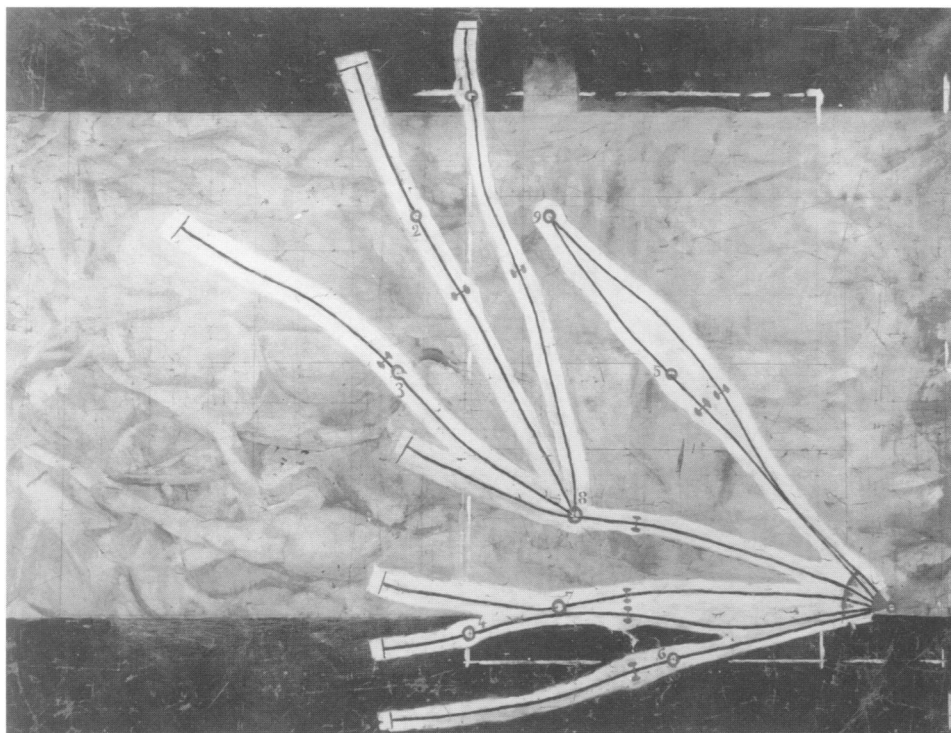
This is not the first time that Duchamp has deliberately contrived the superimposition of elements from separate major works, and provided an obvious invitation to cross-reference. *Col's Alités* has an extraordinarily important precedent in the *Network of Stoppages* of 1914, in which Duchamp used his large unfinished painting of 1911 entitled *Spring* (an allegorical scene of a man and woman in a landscape) as the background for the half-scale preparatory drawing for *The Large Glass*, and then added the plan view for the capillary tubes of the Malic



14. *Cols Alités*. 1959
 Ink and pencil on paper, 12½ x 9⅞"
 Collection Robert Lebel, Paris



15. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*
Photographed as set up at the residence of Miss Katherine S. Dreier, Milford, Connecticut



16. *Network of Stoppages*. 1914
Pencil and oil on canvas (three superimposed compositions), 58 x 78"
The Mary Sisler Collection, New York

Moulds on top of that.⁴² The *Network of Stoppages* (fig. 16) suggests that the erotic narrative of *The Large Glass* once had a landscape background and recognizable human figures; *Cols Alités* indicates that a new landscape is being created for it. Duchamp has given us these two chances literally to penetrate the layers of meaning behind and beyond the *Glass*: we can look back into its possible origins and forward into its future extension in *Etant Donnés*. . . .

For it is impossible not to take the view of undulating hills and the explicit electrical pole, with the title pun to "Causalités," as a broad hint at the assemblage that was gradually nearing completion in the Fourteenth Street studio. The pole with its wires reads in retrospect as a direct reference to the "electricity at large" which now performs a practical function in the new tableau. *Cols Alités* may have been more of a punning reference to work in progress than a real project like the *Network of Stoppages*, but it certainly establishes the most specific visual connection between the *Glass* and *Etant Donnés* . . . yet to emerge. It confirms one's guess that the tableau is to be seen, quite literally, "through the Looking Glass."

The theme of looking glasses and open windows, and its apparent converse, the closed door, is a much more obvious Duchampian preoccupation than the

landscapes, which seem to have been usually related to his more private experience. *Étant Donnés* . . . is the culmination of a series of works that explore the nature of windows and doors, open and shut, transparent and opaque. In a rather long note dating from 1913, recently published in *A l'Infinitif*,⁴³ Duchamp ponders the nature of shop windows in a fashion that throws an intense light on his window and door constructions and on *Étant Donnés* . . . in particular:

The question of shop windows.:

To undergo the interrogation of shop windows.:

The exigency of the shop window.:

The shop window proof of the existence of the outside world.:

When one undergoes the examination of the shop window, one also pronounces one's own sentence. In fact, one's choice is "round trip." From the demands of the shop windows, from the inevitable response to shop windows, my choice is determined. No obstinacy, ad absurdum, of hiding the coition through a glass pane with one or many objects of the shop window. The penalty consists in cutting the pane and in feeling regret as soon as possession is consummated. Q.E.D.

Neuilly, 1913

Duchamp's first window is his greatest: *The Large Glass* is less a picture than it is a vast window on the constant flux of life around it. Conversely, the images etched and glued onto its surface can be imagined as projections of objects in an admittedly extraordinary shop-window case behind it. Given a shifting environment of passers-by, with their attendant hopes, fears, and desires, the *Glass* continually reconstitutes a brilliant synthesis of the "outside world" and the inside world of the imagination.

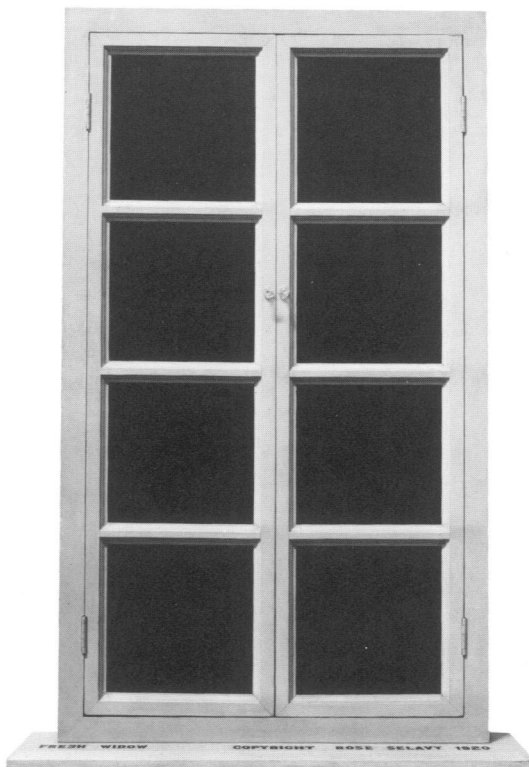
Other windows of Duchamp's devising explore the double nature of a window as inviting view and invisible obstacle. *Fresh Widow* of 1920 (fig. 17) and *The Brawl at Austerlitz* of 1921 (fig. 18) turn the proposition upside down by frustrating any expected view with a visible obstacle: black leather panes and the white sweep of the glazier. Duchamp had these curious window-doors made to his design by cabinetmakers, complete with hinges and knobs and therefore the expectation of opening. *Fresh Widow*, which looks most closed, does open on the blank air behind it, belying its midnight aspect. The freshly replaced windowpanes of *The Brawl at Austerlitz* are carefully detailed on both sides but they do not open. Both of these objects are models in miniature of window possibilities, but succeed in looking more like doors.

The door that Duchamp had fitted in a corner of his 11 rue Larrey studio in 1927 was full scale, and operated so as to be simultaneously open onto one room and shut onto another as the artist moved about his apartment, providing a nice aside on André Breton's remark that for Duchamp, "the question of art and life, as well as any other question capable of dividing us at the present moment, does not arise."⁴⁴ This art-and-life ambiguity could not be truer of the door in *Étant Donnés* . . . , a real-life old Spanish country door, set in an arch of real bricks.

If *The Large Glass* is Duchamp's most important window, *Étant Donnés* . . . surely includes his most paradoxical door. It was not a Readymade, nor constructed

(Right)
 17. *Fresh Widow*. 1920
 Miniature French window
 (wood frame and eight panes
 of glass covered with leather)
 30½ x 17⅝"
 Museum of Modern Art, New York
 Katherine S. Dreier Bequest

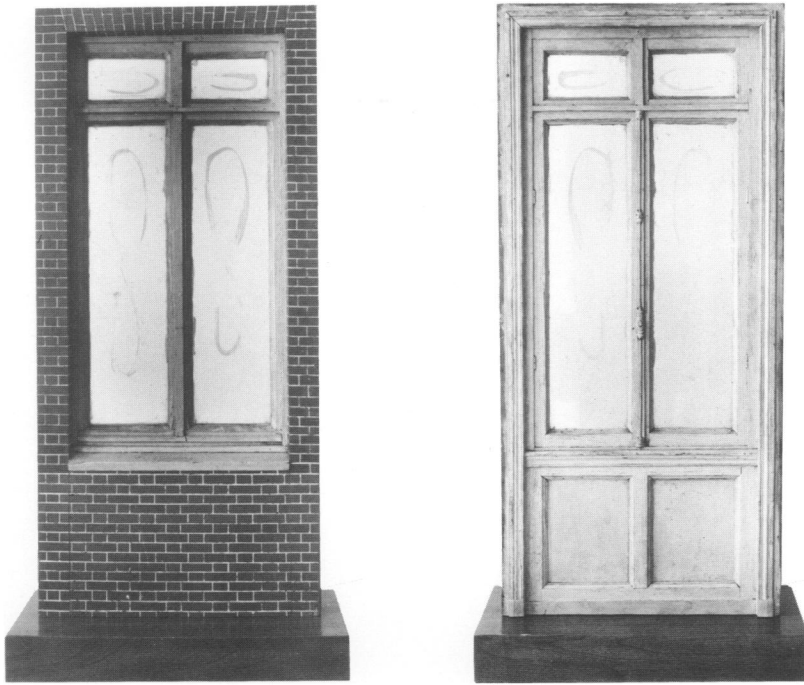
(Facing page)
 18. *The Brawl at Austerlitz*
 (front and back view)
 1921
 Model of a window
 (oil, wood, and glass), 25 x 11"
 Collection William N. Copley
 New York



to order like the miniature window-door models, but searched for and "ready-found" in Spain. It used to open, in its old life as a Spanish door, but it cannot open now. It is closed, but one can see through it, so it is more of a window than a door. *Fresh Widow* and *The Brawl at Austerlitz* provide obstacles where we expect a view; *Etant Donnés* . . . provides an unexpected view in the center of an obstacle.

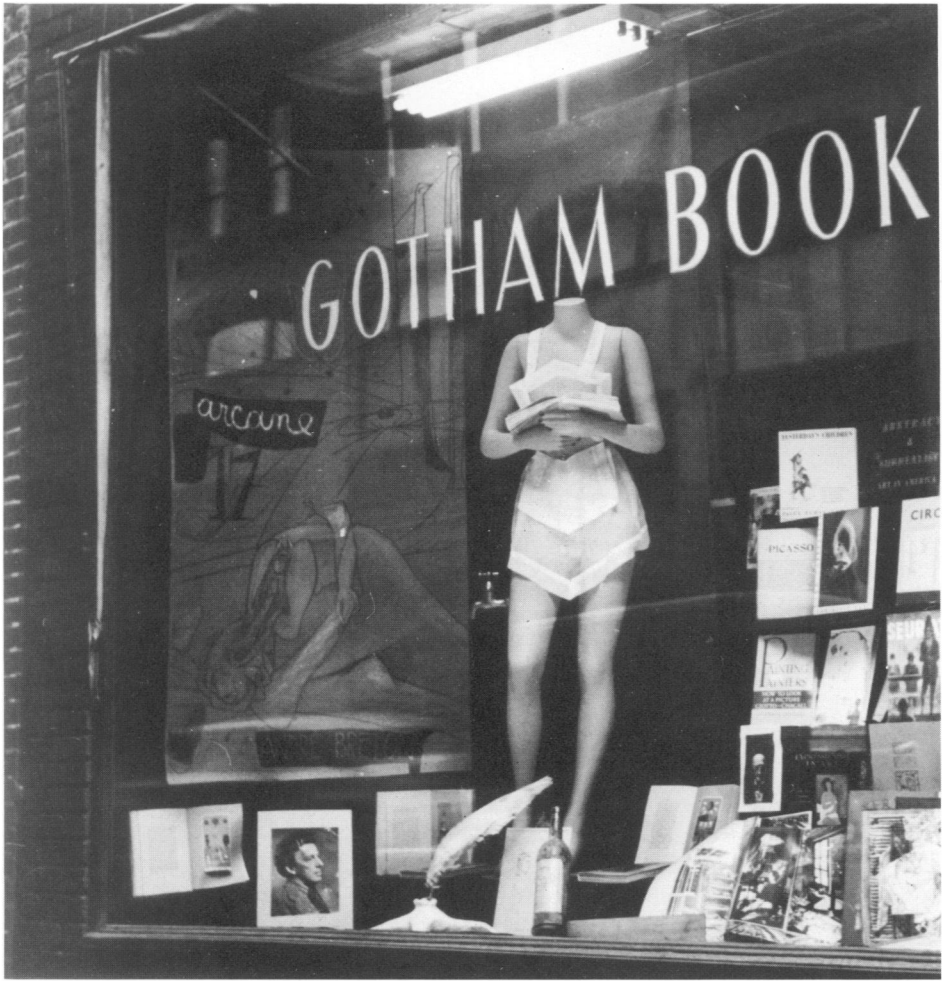
Of all Duchamp's doors and windows, the new work comes closest to the 1913 passage on the shop window, and to several notes following it in *A l'Infinifit* that discuss placement of objects on a table in a showcase: "Inconvenience—narrowness—reduction of a space, i.e. way of being able to experiment in 3 dim. as one operates on planes in plane geometry."

It is surely not irrelevant to mention that it was in 1945, just before he began his twenty years of work on this tableau-assemblage, that Duchamp designed two actual shop windows in New York for Surrealist publications of André Breton. The window for *Arcane 17* (fig. 19), which caused a scandal with the League of Women, included a headless mannequin wearing only an apron, with a faucet affixed to her right thigh. *Etant Donnés* . . . is an extraordinary extension of the idea of a shop window, with all the attendant "inconvenience—narrowness—reduction of space" that challenged Duchamp's endless ingenuity and the careful arrangement of the nude and her bed of twigs on a raised surface just below eye level. The viewer may interrogate the contents of the "shop window" so provided, but it is equally certain, as Duchamp knew, that he must undergo interrogation himself.



Related to his preoccupation with windows and doors is Duchamp's exploration of optical illusions and tricks of vision. In *A l'Infinif* he suggests "a whole series of things to be looked at with a single eye (left or right)," of which series only *To be looked at* . . . of 1918 ever materialized. But the same year saw a curious double drawing entitled *Hand Stereoscopy* (fig. 20), with the same pyramidal shape drawn in perspective on two identical photographs. An abortive attempt to produce a stereoscopic movie, filmed with two cameras, followed in 1920, and Duchamp continued to experiment with the effects of perspective and double vision in his elaborate machines and the simpler *Rotoreliefs* of 1935. The relevance of stereoscopic vision to *Etant Donnés* . . . is clear: the whole assemblage creates the effect of a diorama with its sharp distinctions between foreground (the hole in the brick wall), middleground (the nude on her layer of twigs), and background landscape. Stereoscopy is an effect that must have delighted Duchamp in permitting him to get even farther away from painting: the visual elements of *Etant Donnés* . . . appear to operate in deep space, as the eye continually moves from foreground to background in a vain effort to establish actual distances. Nor is *Etant Donnés* . . . Duchamp's final word on the subject, for just last summer he was working on a stereoscopic drawing,⁴⁵ and the day before he died had been delighted to find in a Paris shop he remembered from long ago several sets of the little "3-D" spectacles (red and green!) that he needed as viewers for his drawings.

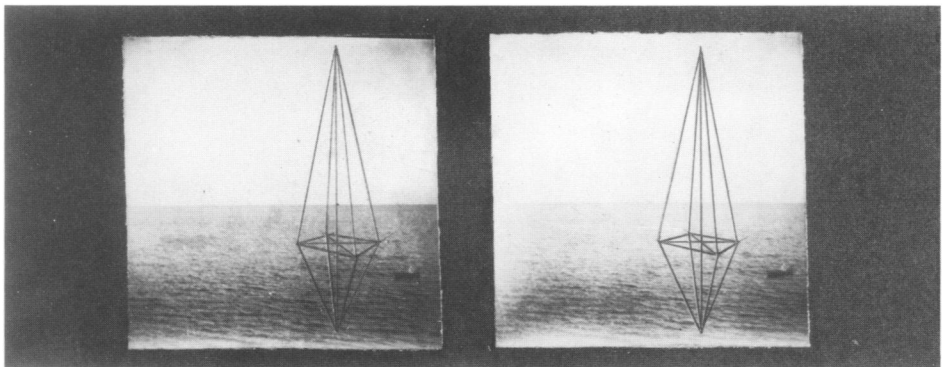
What must be one of the very earliest indications of Duchamp's persistent interest in the specific group of phenomena (which include water, gas, electricity, desire) that recur in various guises throughout his oeuvre, is a little charcoal drawing (fig. 21) which he came across not long ago, going through some old



19. Window display for André Breton's *Arcane* 17, 1945, Gotham Book Mart, New York

20. *Hand Stereoscopy*. 1918

Corrected Readymade (two photographs with pencil added), each $2\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ "
 Museum of Modern Art, New York. Katherine S. Dreier Bequest



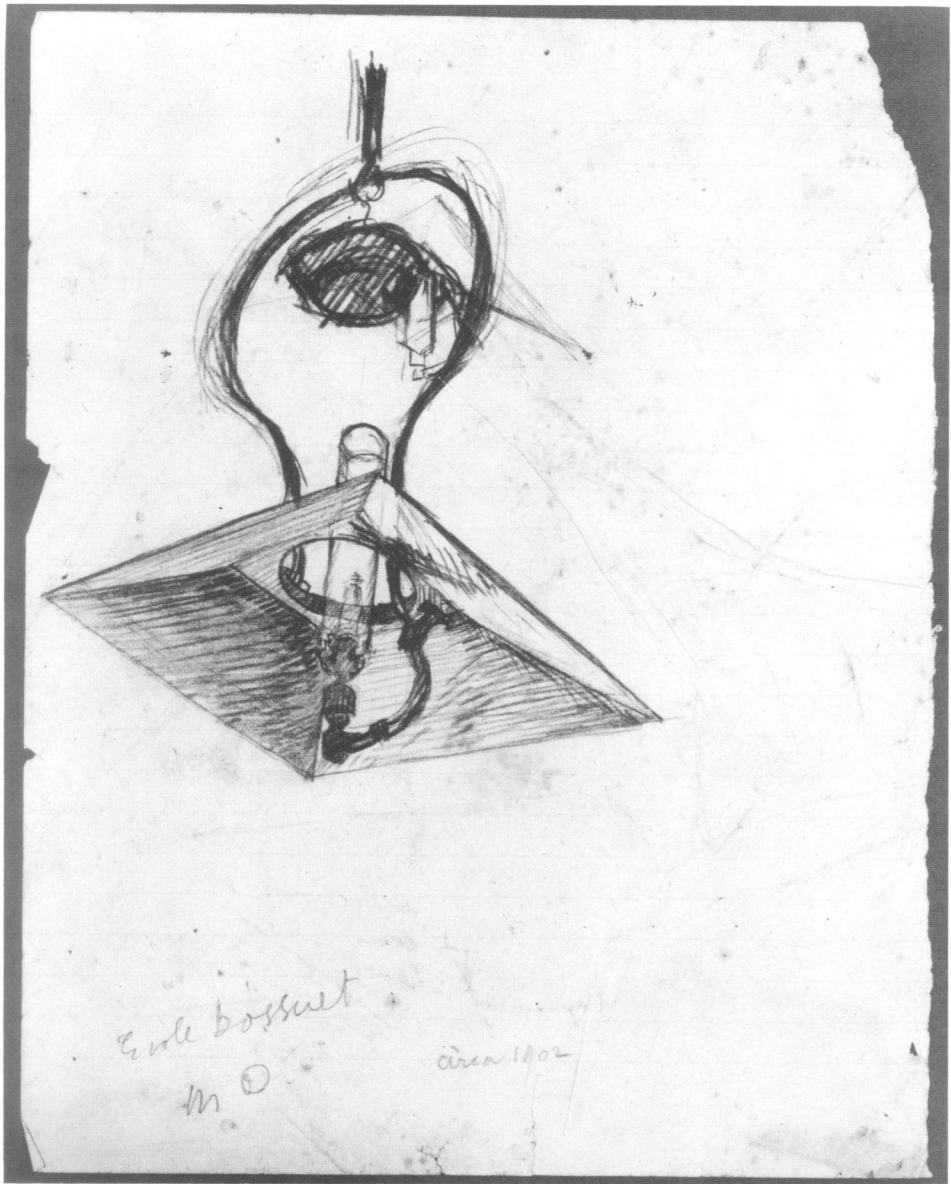
papers in Paris. It was done about 1902, during his school days at the Ecole Bossuet in Rouen.⁴⁶ Sketched in careful detail is the fixture of a hanging gas lamp, perhaps one that hung over his school desk, which the youthful Duchamp drew with the same fascination he showed with the chocolate machine, grinding away in a confectioner's shop window in a Rouen street. The little gas lamp has come a long way, the drawing forgotten but the image carefully preserved in Duchamp's mental list of things to be remembered, until it appeared in a different guise clasped firmly in the hand of a reclining nude in *Etant Donnés*: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage.

And as recently as 1958, another memory of early days in Paris was nominated to the status of a Readymade for the cover of the deluxe edition of Robert Lebel's monograph on Duchamp: the blue enameled plaque bearing the legend in white letters, "EAU & GAZ A TOUS LES ETAGES" (fig. 22), which was sported by the newest apartment houses in the first decades of the century. The ubiquitous elements of water and gas are as essential to the aesthetic power supply of *Etant Donnés* . . . as they were to the comfort and efficiency of a Paris apartment.

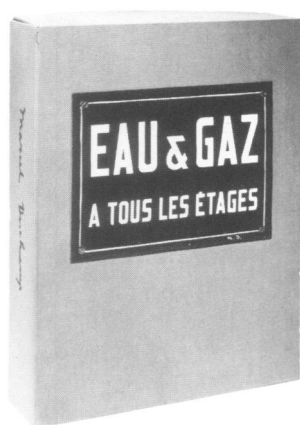
In addition to its foreshadowings in earlier works from Duchamp's hand, and the great system of cross-references that operates between it and *The Large Glass*, *Etant Donnés* . . . has generated an attendant flock of objects which relate intimately to the specific processes by which Duchamp fabricated the large assemblage through the years. *The Large Glass* dominates a cluster of smaller objects and studies, many of them in glass (the *Glider*, *Nine Malic Moulds*, *To be looked at* . . .). The direct relation of these objects to the final work was clear from their inception. In the case of *Etant Donnés* . . ., its satellites became visible before we could see their focal point. Perhaps the first foreshadowing object to appear, although not a study for the tableau, was the Readymade foam-rubber breast mounted on black velvet that graced the catalogue cover of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* of 1947 (fig. 23). With its inscription, "Prière de toucher," this object announces a new approach to the use of tangible materials and fragments of the human body that could not seem farther removed from the transparent schema of the *Glass*.

The next object to emerge was the elaborate study in vellum stretched over gesso, surrounded again by velvet, for the figure in *Etant Donnés* . . . (see above, p. 11). The study is very close to the final work, delicately colored and modeled, with the important exceptions of the wave of blonde hair and the arm holding the lamp, which are not yet suggested. Then in swift succession come the three erotic objects of the early fifties: *Objet-dard* (fig. 26), which has the random look of part of a mold for something else; *Female Fig Leaf* (fig. 24), which almost suggests a cast from an impression of the *Etant Donnés* . . . nude herself; and *Wedge of Chastity* (fig. 25), inscribed "Pour Teeny 16. Jan. 1954" (as a wedding gift to his wife), but executed earlier, providing a witty synthesis of the first two.

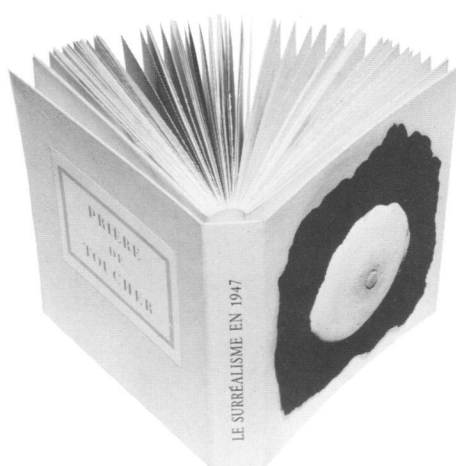
These plaster objects are in no sense Readymades, although they now exist in replica editions, too. They are carefully made and finished sculptures that look like molds or casts, but were not taken from life. Duchamp's fascination with the metaphysical possibilities of molding and casting was first expressed in the early



21. *Le Bec de Gaz*. c. 1902
Charcoal on paper, 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Collection Mme Marcel Duchamp, New York



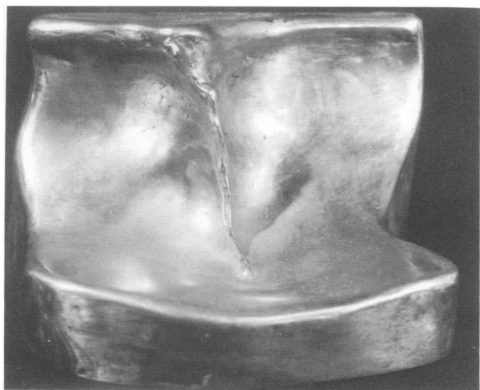
22. *Eau et Gaz à tous les étages*. 1958
Ready-made enameled plaque, 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 5 $\frac{7}{8}$ "
Collection Mme Marcel Duchamp, New York



23. *Prière de Toucher*. 1947
Foam-rubber Ready-made on velvet
Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc., New York

notes (see above, p. 17); some thirty years later he got down to work with the technique itself, but we can be sure the metaphysical angle was still on his mind. Two other cast-plaster pieces were executed in Cadaqués during the summer of 1959, when he was preoccupied with making the nude for *Étant Donnés . . . : Torture-Morte*, the sole of a foot with applied flies; and *With My Tongue in My Cheek* (fig. 27), a self-portrait sculpture-drawing in which a cast of Duchamp's cheek and jaw is superimposed on a penciled profile. There is something disquieting about all of these molded objects, including their masterpiece, the nude figure of *Étant Donnés*. . . The paradox of an impression taken from life, captured in a lifeless material, works to create a form of realism that seems highly artificial, so intimately related to the real thing and yet so remote.

Despite the crucial differences between *The Large Glass* with its satellites and the group of plaster objects accompanying *Étant Donnés* . . . , Duchamp in one important sense was achieving with different means the same end: the suppression of the artist's hand. Not the hand itself, for Duchamp's is at work everywhere (gluing wire onto glass, carefully brushing dust onto the Sieves, or arranging twigs and supplementing the photographic base of the landscape with careful touches of paint), but the "artist," in terms of traditional painting and sculpture, has been eliminated. Duchamp is simply busy "making" something, carrying out his own precise instructions. In a curious way, the plaster molds and casts are as little like sculpture as the wire outlines on the *Glass* are like painting. A cast is not created directly out of pure material but is made from something else, and even if Duchamp made the mold for the cast himself, he contrived to have it look as if perhaps he hadn't.



24. *Female Fig Leaf*. 1951
Galvanized plaster, 3 x 5 x 5"
Collection Mme Marcel Duchamp, New York



25. *Wedge of Chastity*. 1951–52 (inscribed in 1954)
Galvanized plaster and dental plastic, 3 x 4"
Collection Mme Marcel Duchamp, New York

V

"Can one make a work which is not a work of 'art'?"

"'Art' etymologically means 'to make,' according to some dictionaries at least. And to make, not necessarily to make by hand, but to make. So everybody is making, not only artists."

Marcel Duchamp, the imperturbable master of meta-irony and paradox, the metaphysician who stretched the laws of physics, is a familiar twentieth-century figure. So is Duchamp the chess player and "respirateur," sitting relaxed in the corner of an apparently empty studio, smoking a pipe and answering the questions of yet one more interviewer. But Duchamp the meticulous craftsman, the "benevolent technician," as Marcel Jean called him,⁴⁷ is a vaguer notion if in fact it exists at all extensively. We are misled by his joking remarks on his own laziness, by his apparent inactivity over periods of years. As a man whose finest work was his use of time, he spent exactly as much time and work on making any object he wanted to make as that object required: for a Readymade, perhaps an hour of thought and then, a week later, a few seconds for a signature; for *The Large Glass*, eight years; for *Etant Donnés* . . . , twenty. And from all accounts, like those of Man Ray and other friends and colleagues who enjoyed the rare privilege of actually seeing Duchamp at work, he took the execution of an idea as seriously (or humorously) as its conception. In a recent conversation with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp made modest reference to himself as "une sorte d'artisan," and remarked later, with more than a touch of irony considering that he had just finished two decades of work on *Etant Donnés* . . . :

Cela m'amuse de faire des choses à la main. Je m'en méfie, parce qu'il y a le danger de la "patte" qui revient, mais comme je n'applique pas cela à faire des oeuvres d'art ça peut aller.⁴⁸

26. *Objet-dard*. 1951
Galvanized plaster, with inlaid metal rib, 3 x 8 x 4"
Collection Mme Marcel Duchamp, New York



Duchamp's fascination with materials and media was surely as deep and persistent as his fascination with ideas, and the two are inseparable in his work, as Harriet and Sidney Janis pointed out in their essay of 1945.⁴⁹ As early as 1911, when Duchamp was still very much a painter, he decided to execute the *Portrait of Chess Players* entirely by greenish gaslight, in order to see what would happen to his colors.⁵⁰ In Munich a year later, just before he was to abjure painting as a profession forever, we find him making elaborate notes on color and technical effects obtainable with various paints. Paint as a symbol of the "artist" was anathema; as a tool it was fascinating.

With his 1913–14 studies for *The Large Glass* (*Three Standard Stoppages* and *Chocolate Grinder No. 2*),⁵¹ Duchamp inaugurated a quiet one-man revolution in the use of materials to "make" art, whose reverberations grow ever greater. One early group of notes to himself suggests experimenting with tooth paste, Brilliantine, cold cream, "soap (shaving)," and "soapy water + strong tea."⁵² Duchamp applied shaving soap to his own face (to give him a lathered beard and a pair of horns) for the photograph on his *Monte Carlo Bonds* of 1924, and in 1953 he used talcum powder and chocolate in *Moonlight on the Bay at Basswood*. With no attendant commotion, Duchamp began and continued to use a motley assortment of materials beyond anything the Futurists had demanded in their wildest manifestos. As John Cage put it, "The rest of them were artists: Duchamp collects dust."⁵³

There is nothing aimless about Duchamp's choice of a specific material, although it may be triggered by a chance encounter. Chance, for Duchamp, is another material in itself, like wood, paint, or glass, to be employed as a tool. To gain a desired effect he may search for one thing (say, plate glass) and in the course of the search hit upon something else (lead foil, used to back glass for mirrors) that he immediately accepts as relevant. Richard Hamilton's account of his own painstaking work on a replica of *The Large Glass* illuminates these little known aspects of Duchamp's method and shows Duchamp working from a precon-

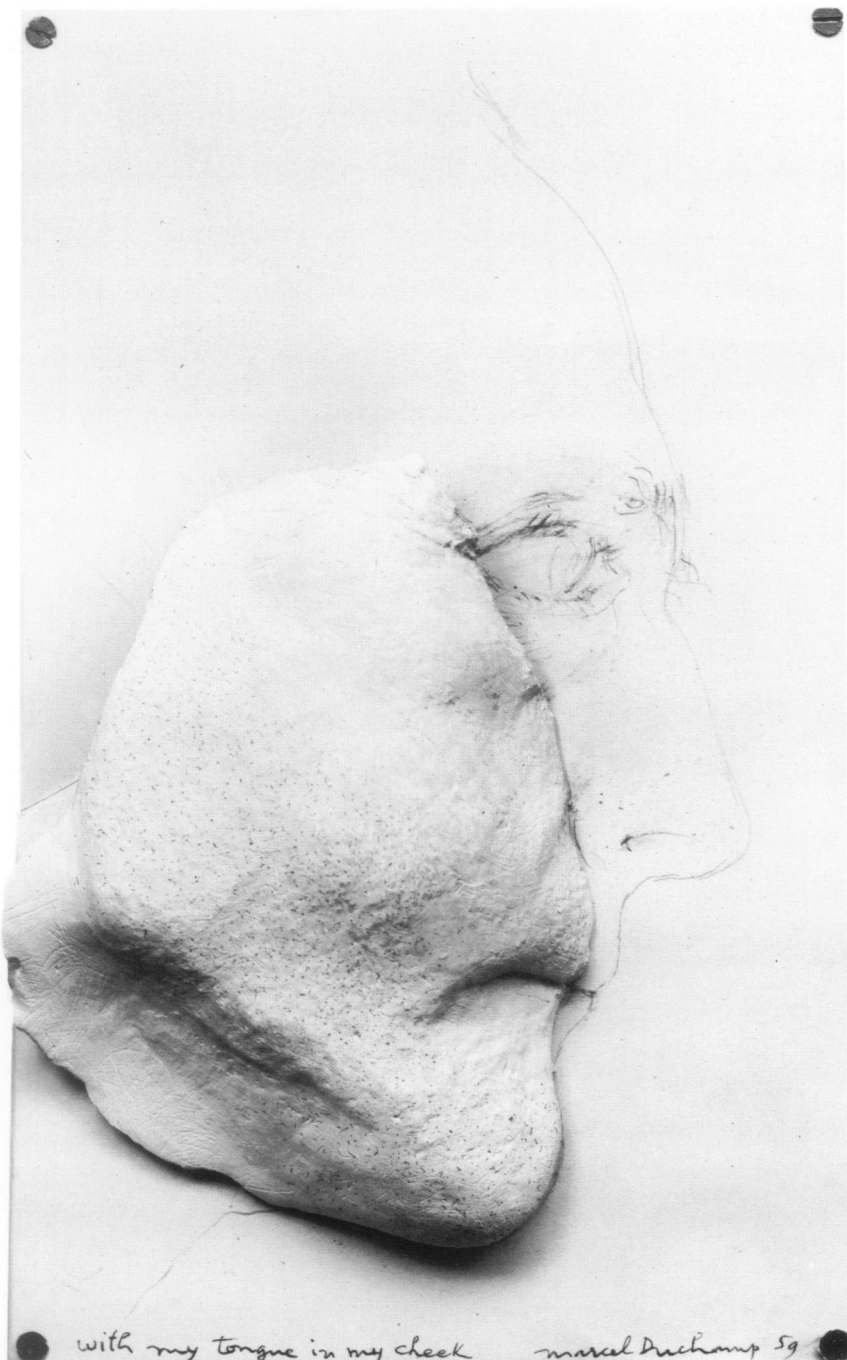
ceived plan but finding the way to execute it as he goes along.⁵⁴ Duchamp himself refers to "de petits problèmes techniques avec les éléments que j'emploie; comme le verre, etc. Tout cela me forçait à élaborer."⁵⁵

The amount of labor involved in any project never seems to have deterred Duchamp: "Tools that are no good require more skill."⁵⁶ Man Ray reports that in order to develop fifty feet of stereoscopic film that he had taken at Duchamp's behest, Duchamp calmly proceeded to hammer four hundred nails in radiating lines from the center of a plywood disc to serve as a homemade rack.⁵⁷ He expended exquisite care on the construction of his rotating optical machines, and when the first one broke down dramatically, rebuilt it "with the patience and obstinacy of a spider reweaving its web."⁵⁸ One can think of numerous such projects: the repairing of *The Large Glass*, shattered into hundreds of pieces; searching for identical papers and inks to reproduce the *Green Box* notes in facsimile, and then tearing the exact shapes of each paper scrap around zinc patterns after the originals (for an edition of three hundred!).

The twenty years of work, on and off whenever the spirit moved him, to assemble *Etant Donnés* . . . exactly the way he wanted it, were simply an extension of what Man Ray called "his usual meticulous manner," which Duchamp applied to whatever interested him. There must have been the same inventive interaction between the conception of the piece and its execution. Like the common household fuse wire used in *The Large Glass*, here are twigs gathered in the country near New York, bricks picked up at a demolition site around the corner, a little gas fixture carefully saved for a long time—all these familiar materials chosen because they fit the purpose, perhaps altering the total effect of the assemblage slightly as they were introduced.

The life-size scale of *Etant Donnés* . . . puts it on the level of an environment although it does not surround the viewer. It should remind us, however, that some of Duchamp's most fantastic forays into the use of materials were done for huge exhibition areas: the ceiling hung with twelve hundred coal sacks over a floor covered with dead leaves and a real lily pond ringed with reeds and ferns for the *Paris Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* of 1938; the gallery wound about with yards and yards of string for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition of 1942 in New York. Having already created environments which literally overhung and ensnared the spectator, Duchamp in his last work seems less radical, but is perhaps more so. The viewer is left standing outside the door. He can only peer into another world, an environment carefully fabricated of materials real enough in themselves but transformed by their juxtaposition and their remoteness from any possible verification by touch into sheer illusion.

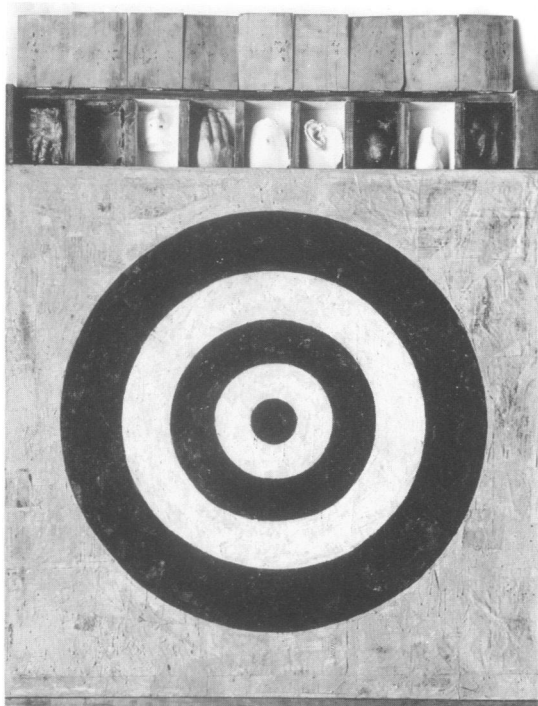
One of Duchamp's greatest triumphs in *Etant Donnés* . . . is that one cannot imagine him at work on it. The completed illusion negates the process that went into its creation, and the nude with her lamp and the ceaseless waterfall seem to have always existed there behind the old rustic door. Duchamp wanted to return art to its etymological source in the verb "to make," but, perhaps in spite of himself, what he "made" has the inevitability we instinctively recognize as art. As Duchamp admitted in 1961,⁵⁹ "I'm nothing else but an artist, I'm sure, and delighted to be."



27. *With My Tongue in My Cheek*. 1959
Pencil and plaster on paper and wood, 10 x 6 x 2"
Collection Robert Lebel, Paris



28. Robert Rauschenberg. *Interview*. 1955
Mixed-media construction, 66 x 49"
Collection Count Panza di Biumo, Milan
(Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York)



29. Jasper Johns. *Large Target Construction*. 1955
Encaustic and collage on canvas with plaster casts
51 x 44 x 3½"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York
(Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York)

Postscript

"First of all let us observe that the situation of Marcel Duchamp in relation to the contemporary movement is unique in that the most recent groupings invoke the authority of his name, although it is impossible to say up to what point he has ever given them his consent, and although we see him turning with perfect freedom away from the complex of ideas whose originality was in large part due to him, before it took the systematic turn that alienates certain others as well. Can it be that Marcel Duchamp arrives more quickly than anyone else at the *critical point* of an idea?"

André Breton, 1922

"And then there is that one-man movement, Marcel Duchamp . . . a movement for each person and open to everybody."

Willem de Kooning, 1951

Few will deny Marcel Duchamp his unsought position as *éminence grise* to the modern art world—in New York, Paris, even Tokyo—for the last decade of his life, a decade which he himself passed in increasing peace and quiet, far removed from any direct participation in the art scene and yet in touch. It is a familiar paradox that the power of his influence became increasingly pervasive in direct proportion to the decrease of his visible artistic (anartistic) activity. The Second World War, which wrought drastic changes in so many spheres of twentieth-century life, proves to have been the period of demarcation between two distinct phases of Duchamp's impact on other artists.

Before the war lies Duchamp's period of public practice as artist and entrepreneur; after the war he settled into serene obscurity, executing the odd magazine cover, helping with an occasional exhibition, signing an edition of his Ready-mades, but decidedly on the side lines of the artistic activity exploding around him. And he had used the interim years of the war itself to assemble and preserve his existing oeuvre in a typically ingenious fashion: with methodical patience he had packed his portable *Boîtes-en-Valise* with reproductions and miniature replicas of his work, and spirited them out of Paris. The year 1945 saw the publication of the special issue of *View* devoted to Duchamp, including a translation of Breton's essay on *The Large Glass*, and by 1949, Duchamp had unearthed thirty of his paintings, drawings, and objects for the collection of his old friends the Arensbergs, which was then shown for the first time at the Art Institute of Chicago.

It is as if Duchamp had made a particular effort to make his earlier work and his commentary on it available (although only to those who made an equal effort to seek it out and study it) before going "underground." Then, during the same postwar period while the impact of his earlier activity was making itself felt in a delayed but widespread reaction among the younger generation of artists, he discretely withdrew to preoccupy himself with another work (*Étant Donnés . . .*), a work which foreshadows and parallels developments in the art of the late fifties and sixties with uncanny relevance. Duchamp's exquisite sense of timing seems to have informed his whole career, despite his occasional protest that "nothing was intentional."⁶⁰

Duchamp's early influence was confined to a small circle of close friends and colleagues, each of whom retained a distinct artistic personality while acknowledging the supreme independence and therefore the leadership of Duchamp's ideas. As early as 1912–13, the radical bent of the author of *Nude Descending a Staircase* was obvious to his fellow artists as well as infuriating to the public. The *succès de scandale* which the *Nude* enjoyed in the Armory Show in New York is perhaps less suggestive than the unwillingness of Duchamp's Cubist colleagues in Paris (the avant-garde, after all) to include it in the 1912 Salon des Indépendants. Although the *Nude* looks relatively tame (and beautifully painted) to the spectator of 1969, the devastating irony and humor of the imminent Readymade approach to art must have been somehow perceptible in her jerky descent, enough to arouse the Cubists' worst suspicions.

By the time he was embarked on the project for the *Glass*, Duchamp was operating in a remote area far out in front of his contemporaries, a region where he was and always remained alone. His associates who felt the force of his ideas most directly were first of all, Francis Picabia, and later, after Duchamp's arrival in the United States, Man Ray. Although their visual impact is very individual and their sources several, such paintings as Picabia's *I See Again in Memory My Dear Udnie* of 1913–14 and Man Ray's *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows* of 1916 pay direct homage to the work of Duchamp.⁶¹ Likewise, Picabia's symbolic machines of 1915–23 and Man Ray's own brand of rather sardonic Readymades are highly personal expressions of preoccupations similar to their friend's.

Aside from his effect on the work of his immediate circle, which also included his sister Suzanne and her husband Jean Crotti, Duchamp had a visible influence on his American contemporaries who encountered him in New York, particularly at the lively salons of Louise and Walter Arensberg: John Covert, Joseph Stella, Charles Sheeler, and Morton Schamberg, among others. Duchamp's intellectual engagement with the American scene began with the proverbial "explosion in a shingle factory" of the Armory Show of 1913, two years before he even arrived here in person, and he achieved and maintained a celebrity in this country which he did not enjoy in Europe until recently.

His contact with the European avant-garde during the early years was never broken, however, but was sustained by sporadic visits to Paris, letters and telegrams exchanged with Dada and Surrealist leaders, and his occasional, crucial contribution to an international artistic event. The manifestations of Dada, during its core period of 1913–21, and Surrealism, similarly defined as 1922–38, are unimaginable without Duchamp's idiosyncratic brand of participation. His entry submitted for exhibition might be a scandalous object (*Fountain* of 1917) or a cryptic telegram of refusal. He would execute an incredible scheme for transforming a vast exhibition space (the cavernous environment of 1938) and vanish just before the opening. How he managed to retain his strict privacy and yet later prove to have been in the thick of things, defies analysis. Breton (upon whose thought Duchamp's influence was certainly essential) was the first to recognize and describe his colleague's independent but pivotal role in the pre-war movements, which consisted in Duchamp's doing exactly what he wanted

at the time he chose to do it, while the actions of the other participants, seen in retrospect, revealed the significance of his.

The great *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* of 1938 marked the end of the era of Surrealism as a coherent European force. The 1942 Surrealist exhibition was in New York, and although it gathered together many of the same artists, it had a new, distinctly American orientation. Appropriately, Duchamp master-minded the installation of both, a fact which suggests the part he was to play, however indirectly, in the postwar shift of the main center of artistic innovation away from Paris to the United States.

With Duchamp's retirement from even his own minimal version of involvement in prewar movements, the old rumor that he had given up art for chess became legend, and he found himself to be the amused subject of an increasingly widespread myth. In the contemporary art world, the issues he raised decades ago have come to be recognized as persistently controversial, whether the response be admiration or profound mistrust. Duchamp's emanations affected artists who had never met him, and possibly never seen any of his work. His life (his stance in relation to art and life), more than that of any other great germinal figure of the century—Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, with whom he ranks in the sheer force and extent of impact upon recent artists and their audience—has become the focus of as much study and veneration as his work.

The great postwar wave of artistic activity in this country and abroad can be viewed (at the obvious risk of oversimplification) as diverging into two great streams. The most coherent stream of activity, evolving through expressionist and abstract traditions, continues today in work based on essentially formalist concerns, work which eschews the use of visual metaphor and resists the incorporation into "art" of anything from the realm of "non-art." In a second stream, quite apart from this formalist aesthetic, there have appeared a number of wildly divergent manifestations concerned with a conceptual and referential basis for art (and particularly, with its relation to "non-art"). These activities have been grouped under such curious headings as Neo Dada, The New Realism, Object Art, Pop Art, Assemblage, Environments, Happenings, Concept and Process Art, and so forth. It is of course this obstreperous lot of "the most recent groupings" (to extend Breton's remark of 1922) that invoke the authority of Duchamp's example. Within a fantastic array of materials (junk heaps to laser beams), media which include manuscript and printed literature, music, and film, and a broad spectrum of approaches to the process of making art, Duchamp has emerged as a major historical source of unity behind the apparent heterogeneity of these movements.⁶²

Here one can only sketch a rough chart of the progressively expanding front of Duchamp-related activity on the part of individual artists over the past twenty years, since movement labels inadequately describe the extraordinary diversity of work they produced. Duchamp made it clear: "Art doesn't interest me. Artists interest me."⁶³

During the war and the years immediately following, the Surrealist paintings of Matta, such as *The Bachelors Twenty Years Afterwards* of 1942, and the object-

assemblages of Joseph Cornell revealed two typically dissimilar aspects of Duchamp's influence. From the mid fifties on, his impact on the avant-garde in this country found important expression in the art of such key figures as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, and in the music and aesthetic reflections of John Cage. And by the end of the decade (the 1959 publication of Robert Lebel's major monograph must be more than coincidence here), the numbers of artists in various parts of the world actively engaged with aspects of Duchamp's work were growing with incredible rapidity. The New Realists (Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, Arman, Martial Raysse, and Daniel Spoerri among others) and Jean-Jacques Lebel in France, Richard Hamilton in England, Arakawa in Japan, Öyvind Fahlström in Sweden all introduce Duchampian issues in their work, although each in a highly personal way. In this country the list is hopelessly long and varied: Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Allan Kaprow, and Robert Whitman working in the mixed fields of Pop Art, Assemblage, and Happenings; Edward Kienholz and George Segal in Assemblage and multi-media environment; Ray Johnson and George Brecht combining literary (manuscript notes and letters) and visual devices; Andy Warhol, a problematic figure at the center of Pop Art, working in painting, sculpture, and film. To suggest some of the most recent currents in the Duchampian stream, one might mention the work of such younger artists as Bruce Nauman and Walter de Maria, whose apparently limitless range of materials and techniques and complex manipulation of environment continue to expand.

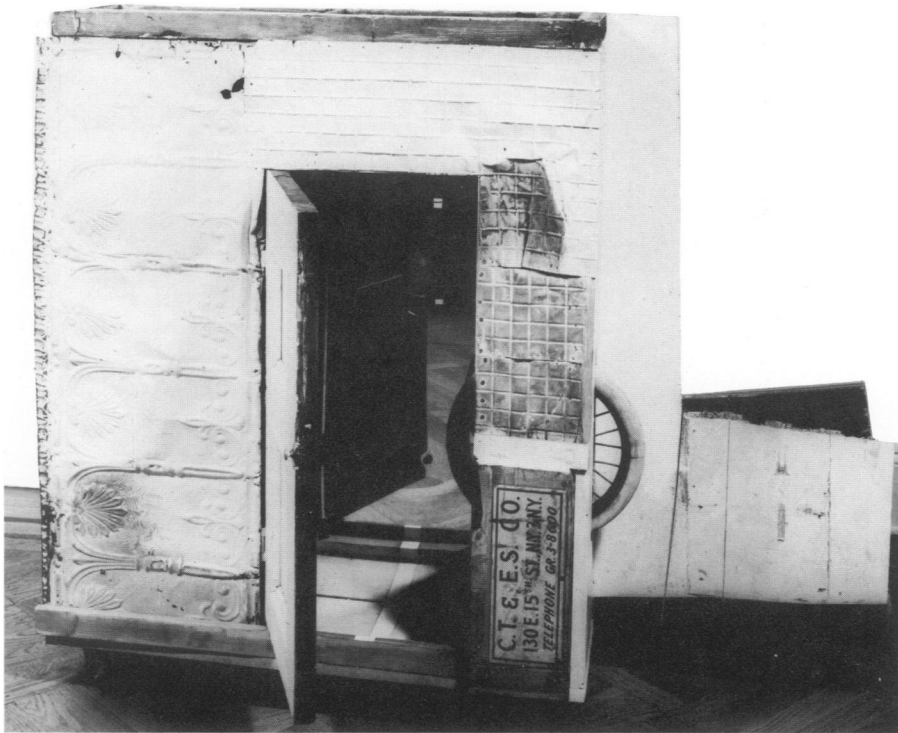
The work of these men and many others variously reflects not one but many facets of Duchamp's artistic activity: his employment of visual metaphor and punning, his creation of a personal ideatic or referential system within which his actual art objects are situated, as well as his use of unconventional materials and methods for making those objects. Possibly the most far-reaching emanations have originated in Duchamp's stance as an artist (anartist): his unique position of independence, his concern to maintain a state of permanent revolution within his own oeuvre, and his way of continually extending and challenging any convention as to what is or can be art.

Since one special characteristic of Duchamp's influence is that it continually provokes the new, even those objects and events consciously inspired by his example are more independent than derivative. Oldenburg's soft typewriter may have a distant ancestor in Duchamp's *Traveller's Folding Item*,⁶⁴ Robert Morris's receipts for invisible art may extend the proposition of the *Cheque Tzanck*,⁶⁵ Cage's methods of musical composition may have foreshadowings in Duchamp's chancy physics, but these relationships underline the continual newness of Duchamp without subtracting any of that quality from the work of his admirers. Knowledge of his oeuvre and, where that has been the case, contact with Duchamp himself, seem to function as a kind of moral support, a benevolent though not uncritical license for the artist to go ahead and do exactly what he wants. An intimate assimilation of his ideas has often been contained in a form that appears (and is) visually removed from any object Duchamp ever produced, say Tinguely's fantastic machines or Richard Hamilton's collages. It is all the more paradoxical and appropriate that the last major assemblage he made (all unknown to the art world around him) should happen to have considerable actual

resemblance to work by other artists done over the same years, and that the closest resemblance may in fact be borne by the work of artists who had the least direct contact with Duchamp himself.

Given the sudden appearance of *Etant Donnés . . .* as an unexperienced Duchampian manifestation of the years 1946–66 and the complex system of cross-reference and resonance already operating between Duchamp's known career and developments in contemporary art during those years, it will take time for all the significant correspondences between this unknown tableau-assemblage and specific pieces by other artists to suggest themselves; a few that seem particularly striking are mentioned here.

In the postwar generation of avant-garde artists in America, Rauschenberg and Johns have been among the most profoundly involved with Duchampian pre-occupations, and in recent years, came to be quite closely associated with Duchamp himself in New York. Their mentor's introduction of the ordinary object into art and his engagement of the spectator in difficult dialogue have been subsumed into their manifestly painterly concerns, and used to expand their medium rather than to negate it. Neither Rauschenberg nor Johns has to date produced (nor seems likely to) a tableau-assemblage that corresponds to *Etant*



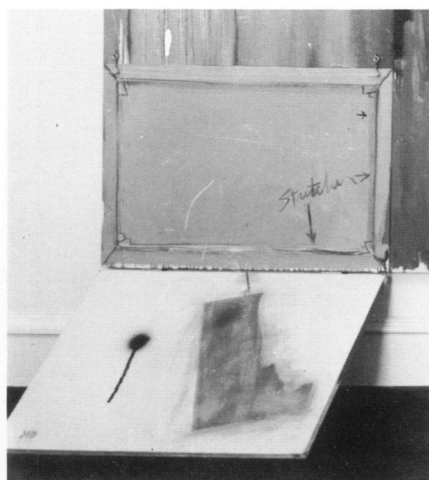
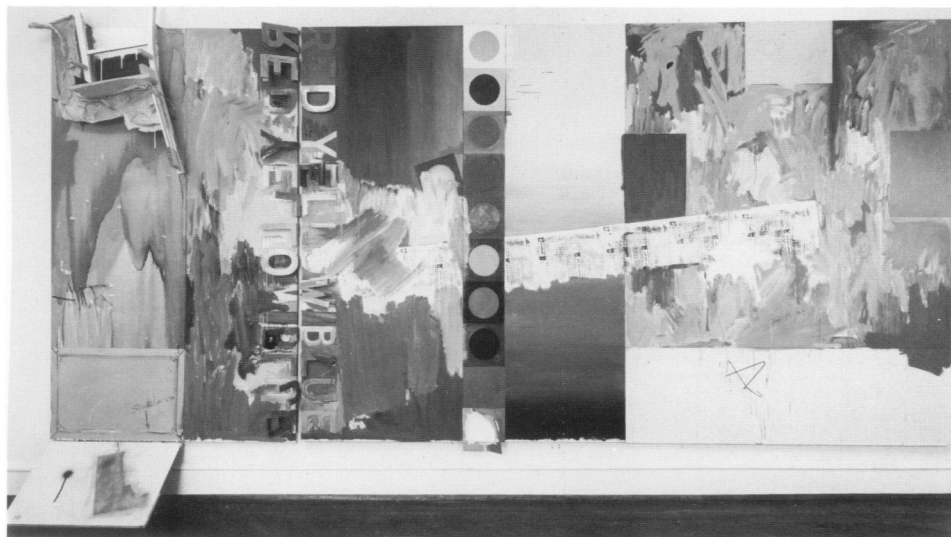
30. Robert Rauschenberg. *Untitled construction*. 1962
Mixed media, 50 x 40 x 16"
(Courtesy Dwan Gallery, New York)

Donnés . . . in overall format, but major works of both men make use of fragments of the real world on a scale and with an intent that parallel Duchamp's approach to his assemblage.

Both artists have made combine-paintings (Rauschenberg's term) and assemblages in which Duchampian doors and hinged sections play a crucial role—involving the spectator in the process of opening and shutting to create one view and conceal another, or presenting him with a door (or the imprint of one as in Johns' *Studio* of 1964) which is immovable. Rauschenberg's *Interview* of 1955 (fig. 28) is a closet full of fragments of reality setting up a narrative on either side of a swinging door which, Duchamp-like, can be open and shut at the same time. An untitled work of 1962, which bears closer relation to *Etant Donnés* . . . , is a large boxlike assemblage (fig. 30), like a shack with a door set in its roughly covered facade. One opens the door to confront oneself peering back from the surface of a mirror; the spectator is inveigled into contributing an essential part of the work of art. The Duchampian reference is clinched by a small heavy-tired bicycle wheel which passes through one wall of the construction; part of it is visible from the outside while the rest may be seen only when the door is opened.

In Johns' work, links with the new assemblage are more difficult to describe, partly because Johns has imbued his paintings with much of the resolutely hermetic quality that informs Duchamp's objects. The row of painted plaster casts of human-body parts, each within its little hinged box, above the target in his 1955 *Large Target Construction* (fig. 29) is one of the earliest uses of literal fragments of humanity in a highly enigmatic way. In *According to What* of 1964 (fig. 31), Johns took the cast of a human leg, painted and finished it with exquisite literalism, set it firmly on part of a real chair, and affixed it, upside down and hollow-side out, to the upper-left-hand corner of his painting. The use of a full-size fragment of a human body (which forces an intense awareness of the paradoxical interplay between the real and the artificial) seems as startling in the context of Johns' work as *Etant Donnés* . . . in the context of Duchamp's. While *According to What* looks nothing at all like *Etant Donnés* . . . , it uses a surprising number of similar techniques (also explored in an accompanying group of studies and satellite works) to spread complex juxtapositions of Johns' ideas about making art, and about the relation of art to life, across a painterly field. The spectator is confronted and even, considering the size of the painting (88 by 191¾ inches) and the subtlety of detail to be examined, surrounded by an interplay of abstruse references and concrete objects that makes a fascinating parallel to Duchamp's assemblage. Moreover, *According to What* is strewn with specific Duchampian allusions, ranging from the color scale (shades of *Tu m'*) to the little "hinge-picture" in the lower-left-hand corner onto which Duchamp's own elegant profile has been transferred from his torn-paper *Self Portrait* of 1963.⁶⁶

Both Johns and Rauschenberg remain primarily focused on the process of painting during their exploration of assemblage (even Rauschenberg's fantastic stuffed goat in *Monogram* of 1955–59 was somehow affectionately manipulated into being as much part of a painting as anything else). Other artists whose work comes to mind in connection with *Etant Donnés* . . . tend to be practitioners of mixed media whose natural area of operations is three-dimensional. For example,



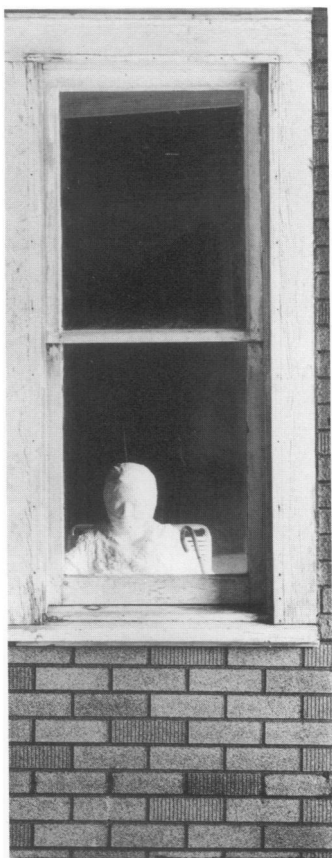
31. Jasper Johns. *According to What* (entire work and details), 1964
 Oil on canvas with objects, 88 x 191 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
 Collection Edwin Janss, Los Angeles
 (Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery, New York)

the format of Robert Whitman's work during the early sixties has a certain correspondence to aspects of Duchamp's assemblage. Whitman constructed a series of life-size tableaux out of real objects and furnishings (a dressing-room ensemble, a shower stall) and then added human inhabitants by using some surface in the tableau (the dressing-table mirror) as a rear-projection screen for a continuous color-film sequence. In an untitled work of 1963–64, the spectator is confronted by the wood-paneled wall of a house into which is set a mullioned sash window.⁶⁷ Through the window one sees into the depths of a green wooded landscape (again, by film projection). After a while a woman in a black dress comes into view and passes back and forth in front of the window, in and out of sight, and as she moves past in a self-absorbed and matter-of-fact manner, she proceeds by slow stages to undress. On a literal level (the facade, the view), the parallel to *Etant Donnés* . . . is startling. Moreover, Whitman's use of a film sequence as an integral part of a solid construction extends the inventive introduction of new media into conventional art forms at which Duchamp was a past master.

The history of tableau-assemblage on a human scale, and in particular of those which incorporate life-size parts of the human body or whole figures, is a subject for more prolonged discussion than is possible here. Suffice it to say that as conceived in 1946, the idea of an elaborate life-size construction permanently built into an enclosed room, which could only be viewed from a single spot determined by the artist, was extraordinarily radical. Likewise, the use of real, found materials like bricks, twigs, and a large weatherworn door to represent themselves was not part of how artists went about producing permanent works of art until the mid fifties. (Schwitters' *Merzbau*, begun by 1920, is and will always remain the exception which upsets this and other rules.) Dolls and shop-window mannequins had been favorite Surrealist paraphernalia in the thirties,⁶⁸ culminating with the Paris exhibition of 1938, which included Dali's *Rainy Taxi* (inhabited by two dummies and large, live snails) and a row of mannequins decked out by each of the participating artists, the latter apparently being Duchamp's idea.⁶⁹ But casts or molds taken from the living subject, which bear a far more ambiguous relation to reality than the mannequin's parody, only began to appear in the fifties, several years after Duchamp had begun work on the lifelike nude figure for *Etant Donnés* . . . and just as he was producing related plaster objects, like *Objet-dard* and *Female Fig Leaf*.

The two artists who have surely carried the full-scale inhabited assemblage to its farthest limits to date are George Segal and Edward Kienholz, who have had less benefit of direct and prolonged contact with Duchamp than Johns and Rauschenberg, and virtually no contact with each other.

George Segal had been making full-scale figures since 1958, but in 1961 he took his first cast from a human body, and at the same time began to show his figures as part of an environment. On the West Coast, Edward Kienholz was doing horrific things to mannequins and dolls (or parts thereof) by 1959 and made his first large tableau (his own word), *Roxy's*, in 1961. By 1964 he was using cast-plaster figures for the tableaux which were becoming increasingly elaborate. (In this cursive chronology it is worth mentioning that Yves Klein was making



32. George Segal. *Old Woman at a Window*. 1965
Plaster, chrome, wood, glass, and board, 96 x 36 x 48"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Hirsh, Beverly Hills
(Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery, New York)



33. George Segal. *Couple on a Bed*. 1965
Plaster and metal, 47 x 81 x 50"
The Art Institute of Chicago
(Courtesy Sidney Janis Gallery, New York)

portraits of his friends in 1962 by casting them in plaster and affixing the painted casts to a canvas background.)

Not surprisingly, Duchamp expressed interest in both Segal and Kienholz, although he did not know them well. He inscribed the catalogue of Segal's 1965 show at the Sidney Janis Gallery with the remark: "With Segal it's not a question of the found object, it's the chosen object." The relation of Segal's and Kienholz's preoccupations to his own, secret tableau must have intrigued him in spite of their obvious differences.

Segal's placid, solid ghosts inhabit surroundings which are carefully fabricated to reconstruct, with attention to mundane detail, real, known environments. One can walk around the figures, or catch glimpses of their frozen attitudes through the frame of an open door or window (fig. 32). The correspondence between a work like *Couple on a Bed* of 1965 (fig. 33; now permanently installed in a room in the Art Institute of Chicago) and *Etant Donnés . . .* is on the level of their visual and emotional impact on the spectator (and in their use of similar techniques), rather than in any complicated conceptual system. One's reaction to encountering the very real, yet lifeless, people gathered in Segal's scenes includes a strong impression of their intense privacy and isolation in this counter-reality, two qualities very relevant to the scene behind Duchamp's door.

34. Edward Kienholz. *The State Hospital* (facade). 1964–66
Mixed-media tableau, 8 x 12 x 10'
Collection of the artist



The forced encounter with life-size unmistakable replicas of ourselves in equally unmistakably "real" settings is the raw material for aesthetic experience shared by Segal and Kienholz, but Segal deals simply and directly with the poetry of the encounter, while Kienholz turns it into a complicated and nightmarish confrontation of the viewer with hidden, hideous aspects of his own experience. Kienholz's *modus operandi* includes detailed plans for himself and elaborate announcements to the public explicating existing tableaux and proposing other possibilities which he calls "Concept Tableaux."

Kienholz's *The State Hospital* of 1964-66 (fig. 34) is eerily relevant here with its forbidding facade, in which only a small grill in the center of a padlocked door permits the devastating view of the interior. *The State Hospital* is accompanied by a small box, also covered by a grill, through which one peers at Kienholz's plans and sketches for the assemblage, which are fastened to a clipboard hanging at the back of the box. This object, simply called *Drawing for "The State Hospital"* (fig. 35), is one of the most striking recent parallels to the *Green Box*. Kienholz's careful concoction of the room behind his hospital door—the sick old man and his identical image of himself sharing a seamy double-decker bed—has an aggressive purpose of shaking the viewer's complacency that is far more overt than Duchamp's, and much more involved with the condition of contemporary society. But the shock of encounter achieved by both artists is fundamental to their aim. It is worth noting that Kienholz is one of the few artists working today whose work continues to emit a shock in the most profound sense of the word, while Duchamp's remarks on the value of shock in art have become proverbial.⁷⁰

On the occasion of the emergence of Duchamp's last major work, from its prolonged obscurity in his studio into full view (as always, on Duchamp's terms) in a public museum, it has seemed appropriate to close these reflections on its newness with a consideration of its relation to new ideas and forms in the work of other, younger artists. Duchamp played an unusual double role in the art of this century: he was an artist who worked alone, a law unto himself, consistently imposing the severest standards upon his own work; but he was also a staunch and active supporter of artists whose work, often remote in origin or feeling from his, interested him. He never wanted to apply his own rules to others: "I don't want to destroy art for anyone else, but for myself, that's all."⁷¹ He was, for example, one of the first passionate admirers of Brancusi's sculpture, and he expressed "enormous" interest in a painter as unabashedly "retinal" as Matisse. Despite his reticence and deceptive air of serene indifference, he proves in retrospect to have gone to an amazing amount of trouble to organize exhibitions, participate in juries, and even write the succinct entries for over thirty artists in the catalogue of the *Société Anonyme*.⁷² Duchamp was intimately involved in the formation of two of the most important collections of early twentieth-century art, for Katherine Dreier and Louise and Walter Arensberg, and his quiet convictions and connoisseur's eye influenced not so much the "taste" as the understanding of other important collectors and dealers—through them he has surely affected the sensibility of the increasingly wide audience for recent art.



35. Edward Kienholz. *Drawing for "The State Hospital."* 1966
Mixed media (clipboard with drawings, wood, and metal)
23¼ x 17½ x 4½"
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Newman, New York

In 1946, Duchamp's view of the contemporary scene was gloomy: "There is no spirit of revolt—no new ideas appearing among the younger artists."⁷³ He compared the new publicity for art and the expanding numbers of artists unfavorably with the revolutionary camaraderie among the small, prewar groups who were attacking established artistic conventions, but without much public reaction except when they deliberately provoked it. By the 1960s, Duchamp's view had somewhat altered. He expressed a liking for several recent tendencies, and was heard to comment favorably on the new, positive quality in the work of the young avant-garde, as contrasted to the necessarily negative spirit of the Dadaists and their sympathizers which he had called "very serviceable as a purgative."⁷⁴ Although he deplored the frenzy of artistic activity all around him since the war, taking particular exception to its commercial aspect, he never lost a keen interest in individual artists or his desire to get rid of even his own minimal mental "baggage" of taste or past opinions when he looked at their work: "When an unknown artist brings me something *new*, I all but burst with gratitude."⁷⁵

Notes

¹"Souvenirs of Marcel Duchamp," in Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (rev. ed.; New York: Paragraphic Books, 1967), p. 87. This monograph (1st ed., 1959) is the major general work on Duchamp and includes essays by Roché and André Breton as well as a catalogue raisonné. The 1967 edition includes a considerable number of important addenda.

²Quoted in Michel Sanouillet, "Dans l'atelier de Marcel Duchamp," *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (Paris), no. 1424 (December 16, 1954), p. 5.

³Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 68–69.

⁴Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors* (New York: The Viking Press, 1965), p. 61.

⁵See John Canaday, "Whither Art," *The New York Times*, Sunday, March 26, 1961, X, p. 15. (A review of a panel discussion entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?" held at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art on March 20, 1961.)

⁶Quoted in Sanouillet, p. 5. (Authors' translation.)

⁷This drawing is no. 186 in Robert Lebel's catalogue raisonné, p. 175. Simply described as "NUDE, 1944 (New York)," it has not been seen by the authors at the time of writing.

⁸The exhibition was mounted by the Arts Council of Great Britain and shown at the Tate Gallery.

⁹Arturo Schwarz, *The Large Glass and Related Works* (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1968), vol. II. These nine etchings are the result of Duchamp's recent interest in a literal treatment of the human figure, but the figures are mostly humorous borrowings from the Old Masters (Rodin, Courbet, Cranach, and Ingres) or recent advertisements. Duchamp used his sources (including his own sculptured figure from *Étant Donnés* . . .) as Readymades to be rectified or assisted with details that emphasize their erotic aspect or with references to his own earlier work. (Etching VI is a literal rendering of *The Bride Stripped Bare*.)

¹⁰Quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Editions Pierre Belfond, 1967), p. 23.

¹¹Part of a *Green Box* note. This and all excerpts from the *Green Box* are taken from the superb typographical translation by Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (London: Percy Lund, Humphreys, 1960; unpaginated). Any note not otherwise identified is from this source.

¹²Quoted in "Marcel Duchamp" [an interview by James Johnson Sweeney], in *Wisdom: Conversations with the Elder Wise Men of Our Day*, ed. James Nelson (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1958), p. 93.

¹³See, for example, Duchamp's remarks in an interview by William C. Seitz, "What's Happened to Art?" *Vogue* (New York), February 15, 1963, p. 113. Duchamp answers Seitz's question as to his decision not to paint: "It was not a decision in the first place. It never was a decision. I can paint tomorrow if I wish."

¹⁴Quoted in Cabanne, p. 202.

¹⁵Quoted in Cabanne, pp. 203–4. "I can't do a painting, or a drawing, or a sculpture. I absolutely can't. I'd have to think for two or three months before deciding to do something which would have significance. It couldn't be simply an impression, an amusement. It would have to have a direction, a sense. That's the only thing that would guide me. I'd have to find it, this sense, before I started." English version from the forthcoming (Spring 1970) translation, *Autobiographical Conversations* by Marcel Duchamp with Pierre Cabanne (New York: The Viking Press).

¹⁶The originals of the seventeen items in the *Box of 1914* are part of the Arensberg Archive in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (Only one of three photographic editions of it is known to exist.) The *Green Box* was issued in Paris in 1934, in an edition of 320. *A l'Infinitif* was published in New York in 1966 by Cordier & Ekstrom, Inc., in an edition of 150, and the original notes are preserved in the Mary Sisler Collection.

¹⁷Quoted in *Wisdom*, p. 94.

¹⁸This object is no. 224 in the addenda to Lebel's catalogue, pl. 122.

¹⁹Two drawings for *The Virgin* (both July, 1912) are in the Philadelphia Museum (Lebel catalogue, nos. 95 and 96, pls. 58 and 59). *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* (July–August, 1912) is in the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Lebel catalogue, no. 97, pl. 61).

²⁰See Duchamp's remarks to Katherine Kuh in an interview published in *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 81–82. Duchamp's French equivalent for the Sears, Roebuck catalogue as an ideal form for his notes on the *Glass* was "un catalogue, genre Armes et Cycles de Saint-Etienne" (Alain Jouffroy, *Une Révolution du Regard* [Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1964], p. 115).

²¹Part of a *Green Box* note.

²²Part of a *Green Box* note.

²³Apparition and appearance are the subject of notes in both the *Green Box* and *A l'Infinitif*. For a penetrating discussion of this problematic theme, and many other intricacies of Duchamp's meta-reality, see Richard Hamilton, "Duchamp," *Art International* (Lugano), vol. VII, no. 10 (January 1964), pp. 22–28.

²⁴This and the extract above reproduced after the typographic version with the kind permission of the translators.

²⁵Quoted in Jean Schuster, "Marcel Duchamp, vite," *Le Surréalisme, même* (Paris), no. 2 (Spring 1957), p. 144. (Authors' translation.)

²⁶Quoted in Tomkins, p. 18.

²⁷Quoted in Schwarz, vol. II, p. 4.

²⁸See Cabanne, pp. 166–67.

²⁹*L.H.O.O.Q.* is the inscription on Duchamp's rectified Readymade of 1919 (Lebel catalogue, no. 141, pl. 90), in which he added a mustache and beard to a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*. The original is in the Mary Sisler Collection.

³⁰This collage is owned by the Galleria Schwarz, Milan (Lebel catalogue, no. 179, pl. 112).

³¹Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, trans. Lionel Abel (2nd ed. rev.; New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1949), p. 47.

³²Quoted in Cabanne, p. 166.

³³See Francis Roberts's 1963 interview with Duchamp, "I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics," *Art News* (New York), vol. LXVII, no. 8 (December 1968), p. 46.

³⁴Quoted in Dore Ashton, "An Interview with Marcel Duchamp," *Studio International* (London), vol. CLXXI, no. 878 (June 1966), p. 245.

³⁵Quoted in Jouffroy, p. 119.

³⁶*Why Not Sneeze?* is an assisted Readymade of 1921 in the Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art (Lebel catalogue, no. 150, pl. 98). The *Bicycle Wheel* of 1913 was the first Readymade; the original is now lost (Lebel catalogue, no. 110, pl. 85).

³⁷Duchamp, quoted in Schuster, p. 144.

³⁸Reference is to André Breton, "Phare de la Mariée," first published in *Minotaure* (Paris), no. 6 (Winter 1935), pp. 45–49, and most readily available in translation in Lebel, pp. 88–94. The series of more recent important exegeses includes those by Robert Lebel, Ulf Linde, Arturo Schwarz, and Lawrence D. Steefel, Jr.

³⁹In Lebel, p. 89.

⁴⁰*Pharmacy* was in the collection of Duchamp's friend, Dr. Dumouchel, in Paris.

⁴¹"MARIée CELibataire," in Walter Hopps, Ulf Linde, and Arturo Schwarz, *Marcel Duchamp: Ready-mades, etc. (1913–1964)* (Milan: Galleria Schwarz, 1964), p. 56.

⁴²An oil study for *Spring*, also of 1911, in the Mary Sisler Collection (Lebel catalogue, no. 68, pl. 85) gives a clear idea of what the finished picture would have been.

⁴³This and all other notes from *A l'Infinitif* are taken from the translation by Cleve Gray (in collaboration with Duchamp) that accompanies the Cordier & Ekstrom edition.

⁴⁴In "Marcel Duchamp" (1922), reprinted in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1967), p. 211. The original door is now in the Mary Sisler Collection (Lebel catalogue, no. 164, pl. 106).

⁴⁵The drawing is of a *maquette* Duchamp had made for a fireplace and chimney to be built into the Duchamps' house in Cadaqués.

⁴⁶This drawing is no. 46 in Lebel's catalogue raisonné, but has never before been reproduced.

⁴⁷*The History of Surrealist Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 281.

⁴⁸Quoted in Cabanne, p. 202. "It's fun to do things by hand. I'm suspicious, because there's the danger of the "hand" which comes back, but since I'm not doing works of art, it's fine." (From the forthcoming translation, *Autobiographical Conversations*.)

⁴⁹"Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist," reprinted in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 308.

⁵⁰See Cabanne, p. 41.

⁵¹*Chocolate Grinder No. 2* (February, 1914) is in the Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art (Lebel catalogue, no. 117, pl. 69). The *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913–14) were part of Katherine Dreier's bequest to the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Lebel catalogue, no. 105, pls. 67 and 67a).

⁵²These and the notes on paint referred to above are from *A l'Infinitif*.

⁵³"26 Statements Re Duchamp," in *A Year From Monday* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 70.

⁵⁴See Mario Amaya's interview with Richard Hamilton, "Son of the Bride Stripped Bare," *Art and Artists* (London), vol. I, no. 4 (July 1966), pp. 22–26.

⁵⁵Quoted in Cabanne, p. 66. "Mostly, it's little technical problems with the elements that I use, like glass, etc. They force me to elaborate." (From the forthcoming translation, *Autobiographical Conversations*.)

⁵⁶Quoted in Cage, *A Year From Monday*, p. 71.

⁵⁷See Man Ray, p. 100.

⁵⁸Man Ray, p. 69.

⁵⁹Quoted in an interview by Richard Hamilton for the British Broadcasting Corporation, September 27, 1961.

⁶⁰Quoted in an interview by Otto Hahn, "Passport No. G255300," *Art and Artists* (London), vol. I, no. 4 (July 1966), p. 10.

⁶¹Both paintings are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

⁶²Duchamp's influence on recent art has begun to be much analyzed. For two general discussions of this influence, see Jouffroy, chapter VI, and Barbara Rose, "The Value of Didactic Art," *Artforum* (New York), vol. V, no. 8 (April 1967), pp. 32–36. For an illuminating study of Duchamp's relation to one artist, see Max Kosloff, "Johns and Duchamp," *Art International* (Lugano), vol. VIII, no. 2 (March 20, 1964), pp. 42–45.

⁶³Quoted in the interview by Seitz, *Vogue*, p. 129.

⁶⁴*Traveller's Folding Item* of 1917 (original lost) was a Readymade Underwood typewriter cover (Lebel catalogue, no. 133).

⁶⁵*Cheque Tzanck* of 1917 (Lebel catalogue, no. 142, pl. 89) is a hand-fabricated check made out to Duchamp's dentist in payment of a bill, and is now in the Mary Sisler Collection.

⁶⁶The *Self Portrait in Profile* is a torn-paper silhouette that Duchamp made, using a metal template, for the deluxe edition of Lebel's monograph.

⁶⁷This construction was shown at the exhibition of *Seven New Artists* at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, May 5–29, 1964.

⁶⁸One thinks immediately of Hans Bellmer's extraordinary *Poupée* of the mid 1930s: a life-size handmade mannequin which could be taken apart and reassembled to produce a fantastic jumble of papier-maché and plaster limbs. Bellmer's preoccupation with dolls and mannequins persisted throughout his career.

⁶⁹For an extended description of this exhibition and photographs of the extraordinary installations, see Marcel Jean, pp. 281–85.

⁷⁰"A painting that doesn't shock isn't worth painting." Quoted by Roché, in Lebel, p. 85.

⁷¹A remark made by Duchamp during the symposium for the exhibition, *The Art of Assemblage*, held at the Museum of Modern Art, October 19, 1961. The symposium was chaired by William C. Seitz.

⁷²*Collection of the Société Anonyme: Museum of Modern Art 1920* (New Haven: Associates in Fine Arts at Yale University, 1950).

⁷³Quoted in the interview, "Marcel Duchamp," in "Eleven Europeans in America," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* (New York), vol. XIII, nos. 4–5 (1946), p. 19.

⁷⁴In "Eleven Europeans in America," p. 20.

⁷⁵Quoted by Roché, in Lebel, p. 85.

The words of Marcel Duchamp introducing each section are from the following sources:

II Harriet and Sidney Janis, p. 307.
Tomkins, p. 17.

III Inscription on the cover of Schwarz, *The Large Glass*, vol. II.

IV Excerpt from "Preface" note in the *Green Box*.

V *A l'Infinitif*.

Hamilton, British Broadcasting Corporation interview.

The statement by André Breton introducing the Postscript is from his essay, "Marcel Duchamp," in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 209. De Kooning's remark is quoted from "What Abstract Art Means to Me," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* (New York), vol. XVIII, no. 3 (Spring 1951), p. 7.