

Marcel Duchamp and J. L. Austin: Readymades and Performative Utterances

Patrick Hutchings

Introduction

If one wants to call the art of Marcel Duchamp ‘performative utterance art’ – and I do – it is useful to see how Austinian it is.¹ Or how not Austinian. J. L. Austin had performatives uttered within the bounds of well-known institutions, buying or selling bicycles: ‘Done, shake!’; or getting married, ‘I do’, ‘I do’. Duchamp had no such institutions within which to utter performatives.² Of course new institutions can spring up to counter old ones. There was the Paris *Salon*, founded in the eighteenth century, and the *Salon des Refusés*, founded by Napoléon III in 1863 in the same building as the *Salon*. Last time I was in the Musée d’Orsay the winners – the *Refusés* – were on one long wall, and the losers – the academic painters – on the other one. There were, of course, some in-between works: These paintings were so ambiguous in 1863 that some artists could not decide which *Salon* to send their works to. Auguste Renoir was welcome in both, as was Gustave Courbet.

Duchamp had no such salons within which to utter his performatives. The Austinian question would be: ‘Given what well known rules?’. There is no clear answer. This is interesting; Duchamp got away with performative utterances, nevertheless. Practice came, in this case, before its philosophical justification/ ‘justifications’. The readymades of Duchamp invite a snippet from Kant: In the *Critique of Judgement*,³ he writes:

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¹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975).

² In the old sense of ‘forge and utter’? Note: this usage takes ‘forge’ – *i.e.*, simply ‘make’, into the realm of ‘faking’. A clever printer can ‘forge’ a banknote, and his associates can ‘utter’ them, try to pass them to merchants as the real thing. Writing about Duchamp one needs – but cannot find – a less odious phrase.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), p. 181. Italics added.

... another genius – one who [is aroused] to a sense of his own originality in putting freedom from the constraint of rules so into force in his art, *that for art itself a new rule is won.*

We might then, following Kant, call Duchamp a genius. Or, if you hate him: a lucky chancer. Either way, Duchamp is not going away. He invented his own, new, ‘*salon*’. Even.

As everyone knows – although I remind my reader – there are two strains in Duchamp’s *oeuvre*: (1) performative utterance, the artifying of the banal such as bottle racks, or a snow shovel; and (2) loads of sex. This latter is – arguably – neurotic. Neurotic and coded. Viewers of Duchamp’s body of work may be: fascinated by it, or find it much ado about nothing new. Having visited the Arensberg donation⁴ in the Art Museum in Philadelphia I feel that I have done my duty. It was not a life-changing aesthetic experience, however. There is a famous question which Duchamp himself put: ‘Can one make works which are not works of “art”?’⁵ Well, it depends!

Marcel Duchamp’s readymades,⁶ *Fountain* as urinal, urinal as *Fountain*, and down through the catalogue, are performative utterance pieces of art. Duchamp found: Duchamp performatively uttered. This in the verbal sense of ‘uttered’, or in the older sense of the ‘uttering’ as in ‘forging and uttering’, setting something up in the public arena. Someone utters, and x, thus, becomes art. This process which Duchamp initiated can break two ways. Either (1) You have to have earned the right to declare x a piece of art by first painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* and so becoming a Magus. Or, (2) Duchamp has freed art from becoming the handiwork of NN and so anyone can by performative utterance, or by putting a physical object into the ‘sacred space’ of an art institution of any sort, make x a work of art. Now, (1) is fairly clear: the constraining conditions of ‘I name/utter x as a work of art’ are obvious enough. As for (2) one may be in two minds. Or even three.

(2.1) The Duchampian move of liberation may be trivialized if anyone – just anyone – can utter ‘x is art’ and so do the magical thing. For example an art student with a thin portfolio for hir exam may offer a

⁴ See Robert M. Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernisms, 1885-1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 403, 443.

⁵ Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (eds), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo, 1989), p. 74.

⁶ *Readymades*: for the origin of his term, see Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp: With an Appreciation by Jasper Johns*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo, 1979), p. 47. On Jasper Johns’ debt to Duchamp, see Hal Foster, ‘Which red is the real red?’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 43, no. 23 (2021), pp. 31-33.

common shop-bought plastic bucket as part of his work as a student. This looks as though it won't really do.

(2.2) An artist already of some standing may, for example, exhibit an assemblage of house bricks in the Tate Gallery, and attract favourable critical attention. Who does the magic here? The artist by successfully getting his work/'work' into the Tate? Or the Tate by accepting it? Or both? We feel that some constraining conditions of performative utterance (in both senses of 'utterance') can be found here. One's intuition on this may be clear enough. The spelling out, the codifying of the conditions might be trickier. Or: since this sort of thing now is current in the art-world, it may have become well-known and so ratified. You may either run a philosophical seminar on this: Or you may just take it as read.

(2.3) You may take Duchamp's ready-mades as the germ of Conceptual Art. Then you may find philosophical arguments for or against Conceptual Art. Into all *that* one is not going here.

Duchamp Duchamped? Or followed *en hommage*?

The nicest piece of Duchamperie that I have seen is by Ai Weiwei, in an exhibition current at the National Gallery of Victoria in February of 2016, which featured Ai Weiwei and Andy Warhol. The Ai Weiwei piece was a common wire coat hanger so cleverly manipulated as to form an at once recognizable profile of Marcel Duchamp's head. The hook of the coat hanger became a question mark growing out of the top of the skull. Duchampian wit out Duchamped? Unfortunately, this readymade re-made was a work of such skill and dexterity that it dis-qualified itself as a classic readymade.⁷

In a 2016 copy of *The New Yorker* there is an account of the hundredth anniversary of the *readymade* at MoMA. The Duchamp expert Thierry de Duve gave as his opinion that the message of the readymade had been misunderstood: "It was decoded to mean that when anything can be art, anybody can be an artist," he explained, "But it's the other way around, when anybody can be an artist *then* anything can be art."⁸ He added, "I have learned

⁷ Pontus Hultén, Jennifer Gouch-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, *Marcel Duchamp: Work* (Milan: Bompiani, 1993). Exhibition Catalogue, *Marcel Duchamp*, Palazzo Grassi, San Samuele 3321, Venice, April-July 1993.

⁸ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996). Learned, contentious: but Kant emerges unharmed. See also, Calvin Tomkins, *Ahead of the Game: Four Versions of the Avant-garde* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), which discusses John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Jean Tinguely, and Robert Rauschenberg (this was first published

to look on Duchamp as the messenger of a sea change in art. He switched us away from the Beaux-Arts model.” This would be well worth discussing; but not here.

Two earlier essays on Marcel Duchamp by the present author have been published in *Literature & Aesthetics*. In ‘Window Shopping with Kant and Marcel Duchamp’ (2010), I discuss Duchamp’s virtual eroticization of attention; such as to make one’s window shopping a – terminal – *coitus* with a blue and silver necktie through the plate glass of a shop window. The principle of difference – and common sense – render the eroticization of all attention absurd. Duchamp’s erotic erotics should have no purchase: But they *do*.⁹

Plumbing Duchamp with a worn Freudian Lead Line: The Sexy Stuff

The analysis of the works of Duchamp is beyond the fringes of analytic philosophy. Properly to understand the Magus one would need at least to dabble in psychology or psychoanalysis. *En philosophe* one might say that Duchamp speaks a private language, and this could end us up in modifying Wittgenstein’s dismissal of private languages. Literary critics sometimes have to deal with poets’ ‘private languages’. Sigmund Freud’s patients’ revelations on the couch were ‘texts’, as ravelled as William Blake’s. Carl Jung’s theory of archetypes makes analysis easier. We all speak the psychic Esperanto of the Collective Unconscious. The best that one can do with Duchamp’s ‘sexy’ works is to try on them what one can remember of Freud on fetishes. Or, if you are a Lacanian, apply him.

‘Manifold Naughtinesses’: The Epistle of St James (AV)

Duchamp’s *Fountain* – and other naughty works – shocked: As they were intended to. What happens when the shock wears off, as by now it has? Must we let a fine arts student enlarge a thin portfolio with a plastic bucket, or a pair of worn knickers?¹⁰ Or are we entitled to say, ‘B-o-r-i-n-g, boring’? If

as *The Bride and the Bachelors* [London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1965]); and Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997).

⁹ See Patrick Hutchings, ‘The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: Cut Flowers or *les fleurs du imal?*’, *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 10 (2000), pp. 31-50; Patrick Hutchings, ‘Window Shopping with Kant and Marcel Duchamp’, *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2010), pp. 25-45.

¹⁰ There is something like a precedent for this in Duchamp. Tracey Emin’s Turner Prize entry in 1999 was Duchampian in her own way. See Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University

someone can do another readymade which catches our attention, ‘Wow!’: Then there is an *École Duchamp*, a new – if virtual – *Salon*. As with any other salon we can make judgements about the salon itself, or works made between its – virtual – walls. This may seem a flat and obvious conclusion. However, it may be all that can be said, at least for now. As one would expect, Duchamp knew about fetishes:

... these [Congolese] fetishes were essentially religious. It is we who have given the name “art” to religious things; the word itself does not exist among primitives. We have invented it in thinking about ourselves, our own satisfaction. We created it for our sole and unique use; thus it’s a little like masturbation.

When not playing with about-to-be-readymades, Duchamp, in an idiom of my youth, “played with himself.”w

‘Disease is the punishment of outraged nature’

Enter Onan. In Ecke Bonk’s ‘Inventory’ of Duchamp’s *The Portable Museum*,¹¹ one finds this:

XII Maria

Signature: *Pour Maria ce no. XII de vingt boîtes-en-valise contenant chacune 69 items et un original et par Marcel Duchamp*, New York 6 April 1946.

Original: *Paysage fautif*, 1946, Seminal fluid on Astralon backed with black satin, 21X 17cm / 8.3 x 6.4 in. signed, MD 1946, Collection Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo.

Research to establish the nature of the essence used to make *Paysage fautif* (*Wayward Landscape*) was carried out by the FBI Laboratory in Houston, Texas ... the results kindly made available for the present publication.

A colourful reproduction of *Paysage fautif* is on the right-hand leaf of the text above. What Maria – an ex-mistress of Duchamp – made of this so personal gift I do not know. There may be an answer somewhere in the vast literature on Duchamp, but I have not come across it.

of California Press, 1995), p. 197. See also: Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: the Portable Museum*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

¹¹ Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 282-283.

The Stuff and Ambiguous Erotics of Duchamp

In ‘The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: Cut Flowers or *les fleurs du mal*?’ much of my argument turned on the a-teleological in Duchamp: the purpose of something – a readymade – was perverted. The strongest example was *trébuchet*/trap: A wall-rack of wood with four hooks on which to hang coats or hats was nailed to the floor, making it a tripper-upper, and against the nature of the object. In recent discussion of same-sex marriage certain conservatives have argued that these unions would be un-natural: against Nature. On this question I am a left wing liberal.¹² However in respect of Duchamp I am an Aristotelian: everything has its *telos*, which Duchamp steals away. Duchamp’s feminine persona as Rose Sélavy don’t disturb me: but the floored coatrack does.¹³ Why? Because the coatrack’s reversal subverts its teleology, while anomalies of gender occur in Nature.

The Large Glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, on the other hand, is stuffy and so ambiguous as to cash out as a fetish. It has the claustrophobic look of Victorian pornography, and is either: ugly in an out-of-date way; or a masterpiece. Or a unique vision. Frankly, I would prefer a *pompier* nude. We have a fine one in Melbourne, *Chloë* by Jules-Joseph Lefebvre: this is not in the National Gallery of Victoria, but in a pub, Young & Jackson’s.¹⁴ Duchamp’s *Bride* is a totally abstract, mechanical-looking icon, and her bachelors derive from a fusty Victorian/Edwardian clothier’s catalogue, garments tediously old fashioned, and not very well-drawn. An un-erotic erotic icon. The *Bride* is a chocolate grinder – ‘The bachelor grinds his own chocolate’¹⁵ – the bachelors are semi-abstract figures derived from

¹² Patrick FitzGerald Hutchings, ‘The Tyranny of Taxonomy: Sexuality and Anomaly’, *Sophia*, vol. 57, no. 3 (2018), pp. 521-532

¹³ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p. 65.

¹⁴ *Chloë* is in Young & Jackson’s Hotel, opposite William Butterworth’s splendid Anglican Cathedral, St Paul’s. The reasons for its not being in the NGV are historical. I like *Chloë* because she does not pose as a Classical goddess, but remains an artist’s model. And she has no regard for ‘the male gaze’; she stands assertively, elegantly. She looks to our right, at something beyond the picture frame. Lefebvre is there – of course – and we are not, as far as she is concerned. A surgeon, Fitzgerald, bought the *Chloë* painting at the Centennial Exhibition, in Melbourne in 1888. He was, I was told, related to my late mother’s branch of the clan. The painting was once offered to the National Gallery of Victoria but was rejected on the grounds that ‘The Gallery is open on Sundays’.

¹⁵ José María Faerna, *Duchamp*, trans. Alberto Curotto (New York: Cameo/Abrams, 1996). ‘The bachelor grinds his own chocolate’ is ‘an oblique reference to masturbation’, p. 26. For *broyeuse*, see p. 27. This book images are captioned in detail, to tell readers how the objects depicted fit into Duchamp’s private mythology.

a – *démodé* – clothier’s catalogue. Having seen the *Bride* in Philadelphia one has done one’s duty, but that is it.

It is difficult to ascribe aesthetic value to this historical object, even if one extends ‘aesthetic’ ever so far. The whole array reminds the viewer of those second-hand shops in the antipodes which sell ‘collectables’, called in the United States of America ‘bygones’. *The Bride...* is a bygone. José María Faerna notes that “Duchamp had...seen [the chocolate grinder] in the window of a pastry shop in Rouen,” which provokes the question ‘Did the bachelor have a kitchen-sized one?’ Duchamp may be seen as the intrepid frogman who planted a limpet-bomb to the underwater portion of the Noah’s Ark hitherto called ‘Art’. The ship sustained damage, but still sails on. Art now carries, bearing as negotiable cargo crates of Duchamperie, along with all sorts of – very much other – things.

Hiroshi Sugimoto

My wife and I own the catalogue of Hiroshi Sugimoto’s 2020 Tokyo exhibition¹⁶ which we missed because of Covid-19. Sugimoto is perhaps Japan’s leading photographer; he is also an architect whose Enoura Observatory we aimed to visit, and a serious student of optics. He writes:

... Duchamp wanted to refer to the [*Large Glass*] using “‘delay’ instead of picture or painting”. He described it as “a delay in glass, as you would say a poem in prose or a spittoon in silver”. I can understand anyone who having read this much loses the will to read any further. That is how I felt, when I first read these passages a long time ago. All his notes are like this: gnomic, absurd, self-mocking. His descriptions of the bride: The bride is basically a motor... The bride runs on love gasoline (a secretion of the bride’s sexual glands)... The bride accepts this stripping by the bachelors, since she supplies the love gasoline to the sparks of the electrical stripping; moreover, she furthers her complete nudity by adding to the first focus of sparks (electrical stripping) the second focus of the desire magnet”. ... Although these notes are something that serious people should simply refuse to take seriously, they have a mysterious, almost magical ability to stimulate the imagination to an extraordinary degree, and I ended up falling into the trap set by Duchamp. [*Un trébuchet encore!*]

Concerning taste, argument is pointless. Conversations on taste may well be beyond conclusion: Sugimoto’s “falling into the trap” suffices. *The Large*

¹⁶ Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Post Vitam* (Tokyo: Heibonsha Ltd., 2020). The work contains important essays by the artist translated into English. See ‘Making *The Large Glass* My Own’, p. 192 for a plate of Sugimoto’s replica of *The Large Glass*.

Glass was bequeathed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and now represents the holiest of holy places for Duchampian pilgrims. I went there out of a lively curiosity. I left without having a revelation. The text continues:

... four replicas of [The Large Glass] were made. Two of these are in Stockholm's Moderna Museet; one, a reconstruction by Richard Hamilton, is in the collection of the Tate, London; and the last one is in the Koma Museum of the University of Tokyo. The Japanese replica was made after Takiguchi Shūzō, the poet who introduced Surrealism to Japan, secured permission from Duchamp. ... I decided to create a replica of his extremely well-made replica: a small-glass version of *The Large Glass*. Faithful to Duchamp of the readymade, my replica is itself a readymade, while the image reprinted in this catalogue will be yet another readymade item. As the works proliferates in this way, the credibility of the original grows.

With reproduction the object becomes well-known, but does it become more credible? Furthermore do replications of *The Large Glass* count as 'readymades' – as snow shovels do – or not? A readymade is some everyday, banal, mass-produced object made ART by the performative utterance by the Magus. *The Large Glass* is a handmade work of art. Throughout writings on Duchamp the topical logic of 'readymade' gets batted, this way and that.

As Sugimoto describes the 'workings' of the chocolate-grinder as an internal combustion motor one wonders if Duchamp had fallen more deeply in love with his first automobile than with his first serious girlfriend.¹⁷ In the first Sugimoto quotation he refers to "the spark of the electric strippings." Wiring is fixable: and why did he not use Francis Picabia's well-known sparkplug? All this said, one pauses: If as distinguished man as Sugimoto – from an old and elegant culture – sees *The Large Glass* as worthy of such attention, might a mere Antipodean get it wrong? The making of yet another replica of the work is an affirmation of its worth. Or is it yet another – laborious – performative? If there can be no argument about taste, are all aesthetic assertions – mere – performatives? This will not do in ethics,¹⁸ but will it do in aesthetics? One rather hopes not: 'I like this' can be utterly banal, perhaps, whosoever says it.

In an unpaginated edition of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* a handbook for the construction of *The Large Glass*, the

¹⁷ Or, as Crunden suggests, his sister. Crunden, *American Salons*, p. 433.

¹⁸ See Patrick Hutchings 'What does "Good" tell me?' *Ethics*, vol. 76, no. 1 (1965), pp. 47-52.

word ‘onanism’ occurs.¹⁹ For Onan and what he did which he ought not to have done, and what he left undone which he ought to have done see Genesis 38. We shall find him – or his doing and his leaving undone – below.

The Heroine of an Erotic Novel who Cannot Read the *Bride*

There is an elegantly written erotic novel of 2003, *The Bride Stripped Bare* by Anonymous,²⁰ in which the adulterous heroine sees, but cannot read, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. ‘He’ is a person of no consequence to our purposes here. He is the heroine’s feisty lover that is all we need to know:

He wants to drive; you let him.

He’s like a child with a toy, he’s never owned a car. He takes you to his favourite space, the Rothko room in the Tate Modern, and after it you drag him to the Body section – come on, just a look! – and there’s a Duchamp painting on glass and he watches your intrigue as you stand in front of the work: it’s so odd you can’t make it out.

What, you ask, to his stare, go away, stop it, you laugh.

Well, do you know what it’s about?

Nope. And he walks away, laughing, his hand raised in abandon.²¹

The couple are in the Tate where there is a replica of *The Large Glass* by Richard Hamilton. Unless one already knows a lot about Duchamp the replica is unreadable.

The heroine of *The Bride Stripped Bare* would strip unblushingly,²² judging by what she gets up to in the rest of the novel. The point is, here, that she cannot see what Richard Hamilton’s replica of Duchamp’s *Glass* is about. This is because the work is coded, and – if one does a little layperson’s Freud – it is a fetish if only in the ‘one step back’ aesthetic mode. Sexual

¹⁹ Richard Hamilton, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even: A typographic version by Richard Hamilton of MARCEL DUCHAMP’S Green Box* (Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1976), p. 41.

²⁰ Anonymous, *The Bride Stripped Bare* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003). The author, Nikki Gemmill, was outed by a journalist. The novel is erotic, not pornographic. Since the novel’s title is borrowed from – part of – the name of Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, we may infer that the reference to, ‘a Duchamp painting on glass’ is to that work as replicated by Richard Hamilton. The original is very fragile – the glass is shattered – and it is in The Philadelphia Museum of Art’s permanent collection of Duchamp’s pieces.

²¹ Anonymous, *The Bride Stripped Bare*, p. 147.

²² Anonymous is not a confessional author. The happenings are copied from the computer of a now missing daughter. For those interested in International Common English the word ‘intrigue’ in ‘he watches your *intrigue*’ is an Australian usage. To the novel itself I would give a very favourable review: on the heroine’s married life it is tender, and insightful.

affect has been transferred to a totally in-human construction, ugly and arbitrary. To borrow from Anonymous' novel, 'it smells of confinement and secret things'.²³ With this aesthetic judgement I would agree. This would fit *The Large Glass*, though the heroine does not say this of the – to her – unreadable Duchamp fetish/ masterpiece.

Duchamp himself had got bored with *The Large Glass*,²⁴ so others might, too. He became interested again after the glass was accidentally shattered. He reassembled it, laboriously, and announced that the breaking of the glass was now part of the work.

Onan

God smote Onan dead, because he had two strikes against him: Onan spilled his seed on the ground 'which he ought not to have done'; and 'when he went into his brother's wife' – the brother being dead – 'he spilled [the seed] on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his, brother'. When he ought to have done, what he was called to do, he left it undone.²⁵ Like Duchamp I was brought up a Catholic, and a pre-Vatican II one at that. We were told at school not to spill our seed. Nothing was said about my obligation to impregnate the widow of a dead brother: that piece of Jewish law was not ever mentioned. In those days Catholics did not read the Old Testament, only Protestants did. Testosterone-filled Protestant teenagers had a, Jesuitical, way out. They were without dead brothers' widows, so that bit of Jewish law did not apply to them.

Onan (1) 'spilled his seed' and, (2) did not impregnate his late brother's widow and, so, did not 'increase Israel'. If 1 was sinful because of 2, then 1, on other occasions, would not be sinful. If the Vicar, School Chaplain or other religious professional said that 1 was in itself sinful, then some teleological-style argument would be needed to demonstrate that 1 was wrong – the biblical account *not*, being clear on the difference between the wrongnesses of 1 and 2. Any Protestant cleric could run up a teleology-loaded case on the badness of 1, along the lines already laid down by Catholic clerics. Catholics of Duchamp's era, and of mine, were instructed in the matter endlessly. Swapping notes with Protestant boys, we found that their 'way out' by way of casuistry did not work. All this may seem to the reader

²³ Anonymous, *The Bride Stripped Bare*, p. 63.

²⁴ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p. 65.

²⁵ Genesis 38:8-10.

in 2021 or 2022 tedious stuff. However, it is the – essential – backstory to the shockingness of Duchamp's *Paysage fautif*.

The Catholic, different, but cognate, attitude to marital sex – no condoms, no Pill – involves too much special pleading: the condom and the pill are interventions different in type. The argument against contraception began as an *uber*-mechanical, Aristotelian-one-and-one-only *telos*-toting argument, latterly modified to 1.5, but still less than convincing. Aristotle's four causes rest on an artefactual model.²⁶ X is made like any artefact for one – or a very limited range of – functions. This works in natural history: but does it suffice to work as a model for human sexuality? Freud spread the erotic too far. 'A cigar is *sometimes* only a cigar': the Aristotelian shape of argument may not spread it far enough. I'll give up finding Duchamp's 'tripper upper' – *le trébuchet* – perverse only when Aristotelian 'functionalism' can be shown to be sufficient. Most lay Catholics ignore the ban on condoms and 'the pill'. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson wrote about the "no condom, no pill" stance slouching towards infallibility.²⁷ He was too polite to use Yeats' memorable word.

Nude Descending Staircase II

This is the painting which made Duchamp a Magus. As a Magus he could create his own rules – *ex nihilo* – under which his illocutionary pronouncements were valid. He could launch performative-utterance art, and could anoint a readymade at will. *Nude Descending a Staircase* remains, for my taste, his best work however. Born too long before the 'swinging sixties', Woodstock, and *Hair* – as indeed was Duchamp – I find his sexy works, as noted above, fusty: an old nude from *Lilliput* or *London Life* found in the attic (both these magazines are defunct).

Nude Descending a Staircase is not readable as any kind of nude. But the work is a very interesting attempt to achieve on canvas the motion photographs of Etienne-Jules Marey or Eadweard Muybridge. In Janis Mink's *Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968: Art as Anti-Art*,²⁸ there is a page on

²⁶ See Armand Marie Leroy, *The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 86.

²⁷ Geoffrey Robinson, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* (Melbourne: Garret Publishing, 2007). Reviewed by Patrick FitzGerald Hutchings in *Sophia*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2008), pp. 231-239. There is also a 'Postscript' to the review in a later *Sophia*.

²⁸ Janis Mink, *Marcel Duchamp, 1887-1968: Art as Anti-Art* (Köln: Taschen, 1995), pp. 26-27.

Nude Descending, and a *Life Magazine* photograph of a – nattily dressed – Duchamp descending a staircase. What sent Duchamp off in other directions was, likely, that the Italian Futurists were mining the same vein. Duchamp did not like ‘isms’, especially other peoples’ ones – “I have always felt this need to escape myself” – and no doubt other peoples’ art games. Anti-Art looked attractive.²⁹ The trouble is that after a founder comes a school, an ‘ism’. So, too, with Duchamp. Duchamp somehow fascinated: his *école* generally occasions pure *ennui*.

Old Masters, *pompier*-nudes – especially when like Lefebvre’s *Chloë* they do not pretend to be Classical goddesses – and so on are well within the culture of ‘art’. I, along with the hard-nosed critic Donald Judd,³⁰ have a soft spot for Mel Ramos’ Pop Art nudes. Their style is *pompier-Playboy-Pop*. Judd writes of Ramos’ *Chiquita-banana*: “Ramos is one of the original apiogenetic *Pop* artists ... I like the coy mellifluous lass standing in a half-peeled Chiquita banana.”³¹

Like *Chloë* by the *pompier* Lefebvre, *Chiquita*³² is plain – commonplace – erotic. I’d call it, ‘Male Teenager’s dream girl, unzipped by her Dreamer’. The pinup girl in a banana is a sex joke *en clair*. There is no

²⁹ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p. 31.

³⁰ Donald Judd, *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (New York: Judd Foundation, 1975).

³¹ Judd, *Donald Judd*, p. 159. Judd has one only paragraph on Duchamp, March 1965, from *Arts Magazine*: “Marcel Duchamp and/or Rose Sélavy: Rose Sélavy is all right, but I don’t know about Duchamp. Johns is quoted in the catalogue quoting a New Yorker cartoon – ‘OK, so he invented fire – but what did he do after that?’ Duchamp invented several fires but unfortunately didn’t bother with them. He hasn’t been entirely quiet but he has done very little since 1923. The work Duchamp does have [in this exhibition] is of course highly interesting, but it’s a mistake not to have developed it. His work and his historical importance are different things. It’s to other people’s credit to have developed his or related ideas. Good beginnings are fairly abundant; they aren’t enough; the developed thing counts. Neither Duchamp’s retirement nor his role as conservator of his own work is so admirable. This show isn’t of all his work. It’s the Mary Sissler Collection...” (Judd, *Donald Judd*, p. 166). Judd’s *Complete Writings 1959-1975* do not, of course, have anything on *Étant[s] donnés*, Duchamp’s posthumous work. Duchamp’s historical position is – of course – as the founder of an *école* which fortunately/un-fortunately, goes on and on and on. Shall it burn the houses of art right down?

³² Robert Rosenblum (ed.), *Mel Ramos: Pop Art Images* (Köln: Taschen, 1994), p. 55. Ramos’ images will of course date: the models are wearing retro bikinis, one can see where suntan has left its mark, and where not. In 2021-2022 you can see more young woman and much less swimwear fabric now on any Australian beach. I lived in California for a short time in the 1970s. By then I was a little too old to interest the surf-girls, or the swimwear models, although they interested me, still.

need to decode this ‘fetish’, she is just an almost bare female in a phallic symbol. Not agreeable to feminists, but Ramos is as shameless as are his images.

In the foldout cover of the Taschen *Mel Ramos* paperback there is a full-frontal nude descending a staircase – an adolescent male fantasy – or a domestic happening in a Californian summer. This paperback has the usual learned ‘Introduction’ – one by Robert Rosenblum, entitled ‘How Venus came to California’ – is full of the usual art-history references, with illustrations of an Allen Jones, a de Kooning and the usual tedious Picabia of an outdated sparkplug, inscribed FOR-EVER, and titled, *Portrait d’ une jeune fille américaine dans l’ état de nudité* (1915). Instead of all these, old, French jokes, I would settle for Ramos’ Parody of Picabia, sparkplug + girl ‘dans l’état nudité, or his nude descending a staircase; banal as it is, there is no nonsense about it. And nothing new. Duchamp’s *Nude descending...* was not a recognizable nude, but the painting was interesting – and given its time – innovative. That it was a nude who did not even look like one was a poke in the eye for *les pompiers*. The only trace of a readymade in Ramos is the Ad Man’s *idea* of using a pretty girl to sell stuff. When I was a schoolboy, taking a girl to an ice cream shop, I was ungallant enough to regret that she was not as pretty as the pin-up on the shop’s advertisement poster. But she was real, not ink on paper. For a while I had a trophy girlfriend, reality outshone the image. As is proper – if not always to be expected.

‘Etant donnés’

In a contrived and surreal ‘landscape’ lit by a lantern this peep-show work reveals a fabric and pigskin but realistic ‘sculpture’ of – not quite ‘What the Butler Saw’ – but what the gynaecologist saw: not in the consulting room, but *en plein air*, by lamplight. The work is not really titillating, or if so in a stuffy way. I am not old enough to have seen the peepshows on British piers except in a London photographic museum. However, this culmination of Duchamp’s naughtinesses looks like the final statement of someone, obsessed to the point of neurosis. Which, I suppose, it is. For eroticism Duchamp is never as full blooded as is Gian Lorenzo Bernini (Rome, Villa Borghese). In his *Rape of Persephone* Bernini has Hades, holding the daughter of Demeter above his head, and where he grasps the girl’s buttock, Bernini reproduces, in hard marble, and most convincingly, the dents which the rapist’s fingers make in his victim’s skin and flesh. In his *Daphne pursued by Apollo* Bernini renders Daphne at the moment when she is

becoming a tree. Apollo's hand which would clutch her belly finds – already – only unyielding bark. Ovid's tales become real before our eyes, in baroque statues one of which seems to move one upward – although Hades is king of the Underworld – the other forward, as it in vain pursuit. The Baroque was not afraid of the erotic. *Etants donnés* has rather the cold feel of a forensic squad photograph.

Then there is Gustave Courbet's *Origin of the World* (1865),³³ hung in the Musée d'Orsay since 1995, explicit, frank, utterly realistic. And, of course, not ever a peep-show piece. The Turkish diplomat Khalil-Bey who commissioned it probably had to hang it in his dressing room. Now you may possibly be able to get a museum postcard of it. The Villa Borghese, in Rome, and the Musée d'Orsay in Paris beat the Arensberg Collection and Cassandra Foundation Philadelphia into a cocked hat. The Duchamp pieces one needs to have seen. One does not need to have found them attractive. Nor does one have to see their unattractiveness as interesting.

Etant Donnés is all too contrived. There is the distressed, antique door with its peepholes, which ensures that there is one and one only viewer at a time. This replaces the 'permeable' glass of shop windows which I made fun of in my article 'Window Shopping'. The gynaecologists' view of the doll – seen through the peepholes – is awkward. The doll looks at once uncomfortable and unconvincing, asprawl on a bed of prickly-looking twigs. Sex is universal, as is interest in it. Such as we get of it in this obviously laborious work may – or may not – shock. Either way there is too much staffage, the lamp, the toy waterfall. This belongs not with everyone's

³³ Patrick Bade, *Gustave Courbet* (Ho Chi Minh City: Parkstone Press, 1999). It is largely about *The Origin of the World* 1865 (Musée d'Orsay depuis, 1995). The book puts this work in the context of its time. Bade writes that even husbands might be ignorant about the pubic hair of their wives. In an episode of 'Belgravia' on television (2021) a member of the upper mercantile class goes into his own bedroom to undress and put on his nightshirt before re-joining his wife in her bed. The upper classes in England have a dressing room to which husbands are – sometimes – banished. In the same episode of 'Belgravia' a *roué* with his mistress in a bedroom of an inn seem to be less prudish. Nikki Gemmell refers to the well-known story about John Ruskin's marriage, later annulled, because his bride remained a virgin. All that Ruskin knew about the female body he had learned from art: art which left out the natural thing. See Gemmell, *The Bride Stripped Bare*, p. 168. Bade, *Gustave Courbet*, pp. 36-37, illustrates Thomas Couture's *A Little Bather* (1849), which suggests one of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's nude photographs of prepubescent girl children, now all destroyed. Such photographs were, then, thought to illustrate innocence: *autres tps autres mœurs*. See John Pudney, *Lewis Carroll and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) p. 168, 107, 103.

concern about sexuality, but with Duchamp's private mythology – in which nobody needs have any interest. Except Duchamp scholars, of course. Consult the plates in any recent book on Duchamp: 'The participation of the voyeur is an integral element of the work – without the reaction of the viewer, whose vision as well as understanding is restricted, the work remains incomplete.'³⁴

There you have it, *Etant donné / Given*. The work was completed in 1966 but was not seen by the public until after Duchamp's death in 1968. He left *Etant[s] donné[s]* as a posthumous scandalous success. Or failure. Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1865)³⁵ went on – very public – show in the Musée d'Orsay in 1995. Duchamp had a few, posthumous, years of visible naughtiness, but was – in my opinion – trumped by Courbet in 1995.

Of course, *Playboy* and *Hustler* and the musical *Hair* had made the secret very unsecret before 1995. In Denmark nude photos of females had always been so frank: Danish pin-ups were – by law or by custom – as forthright as Courbet. As a Frenchman Duchamp might have willingly yielded the palm to Courbet. I give it, provisionally, to a not very well known American, Mel Ramos. Why? Because of Duchamp's performative utterance precedent. To that we need to return. And with the disastrous consequences. I shall end this paper, with a small item from *The New Yorker*, and with a current Australian case which bears on the possible long-term results of performative utterance art, and on the suggestion that *The Green Box* and the *oeuvre* are a case of neurosis.

Is a Urinal a Statement? Or Performatives Performing?

Duchamp, by submitting a urinal/'Fountain' to the Armory Show in New York in 1913 made a *statement* that this object – signed 'R. Mutt' – was art. Austin would properly question the use of the word 'statement'; it's not his *use* – it's a shifted word, more like the one in, 'fashion statement', than the one in *How To Do Things With Words*. It is always a matter of having known institutional frameworks in which to utter performatively.

Nor can one specify the real-world enabling social (*etc*) conditions which rendered Duchamp's 'statement' possible. Art is full of the new (as well as the old revived) is possibly the best we can do: *Except, in the end Duchamp got away with it!* He provided the enabling conditions by prolepsis,

³⁴ Faerna, *Duchamp*, p. 58.

³⁵ *The Origin of the World* belonged for many years to Jacques Lacan See Bade, *Gustave Courbet*, p. 21.

or if you like, *in retrospect*.³⁶ Urinal/‘Fountain’ did not get exhibited in 1913: this has not prevented ‘replicas’ of it – or left-over plumbers’ supply shop items from the precise production-line series – becoming revered objects in Art Museums. Indeed, replicas of this ‘Fountain’ and of the numerous readymades sometimes need to be confected, because the producers of the objects anointed by Duchamp have moved on – in trade parlance – to ‘new and improved models’. Given all this, would Austin approve of my calling Duchamperie in art ‘performative utterance’? Possibly not. Or should he allow my borrowing of ‘performative utterance’, it would be with the wry expression, and the concessive shrug one remembers well. He would probably add John [*Other Minds*] Wisdom’s: ‘Well, if you must, say that, say it with a smile’.

Does Performative-Utterance Art produce Anti-Art? Or, does it Do Away with the Difference?

The trivial problem of whether an art student with a thin portfolio can be allowed to pad it with a plastic bucket, or whatever, bought at the supermarket, leads into a less trivial one. When I unpack a box from Aldi must I ask, ‘Is this in fact just the thing pictured on the cardboard, or is this artefact an *artefact*?’ Has a Magus ‘transformed’ the whole ‘special buys’ aisle of the shop? This is a rather trivial version of Duchamp’s performative utterance art pieces in Art Galleries: mere examples of the sort of thing Duchamp ‘ARTED’: Or, worse, mere facsimiles of things once in production, but now obsolete. On the other hand lots of ‘bygones’ were never fortunate enough to be touched by the Master. It looks as though ‘Art’ has become an empty concept – so forcing one to reverse the remark – that *Etants donnés* ought to be beside the Berninis in the Villa Borghese.

If Anyone can Art, can Destroying a Piece of Art be Art[ing]?

If anything, just anything, can be art, are things not intended to be art in danger of becoming ART? If so: what, then, is ART in danger of becoming? There is a disquieting item in a recent issue of *The New Yorker*, “Earlier this year, in Chelsea, an aspiring artist in his mid-twenties walked into Taglialatella Galleries and purchased a Banksy screen print, titled ‘Morons

³⁶ Hutchings, ‘The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp’, pp. 31-50.

(White)’ for ninety-five thousand dollars, using funds that he had raised from investors. Then he set it on fire. When questioned, the young man who styles himself Burnt Banksy laughed and replied, ‘Art is whatever you want it to be. Do I think I’m an *artist*? Yes and no. I don’t think it’s even remotely fair to compare me to someone like Banksy: I’m just trying to make a message.’”³⁷

‘Artist’ – which I have italicised – is *The New Yorker’s* editorial word, one about which Burnt Banksy himself is ambivalent. However, his “Art is whatever you want it to be” approach seems to ride on the back of performative-utterance art. Is Burnt Banksy’s performance performative-utterance art? Or is it mere performance? Whatever J. L. Austin might have said in answer to this question, the whole thing has the authentic Duchamp smack to it. Does “Art is whatever you want it to be” entail iconoclasm? Is iconoclasm a dialectical consequence of that Duchampian-flavoured *mot* ‘defining’ art? Burnt Banksy’s performance is jejune; further, his elders and betters have been there before him.³⁸ If performance-uttering art ends up behind these iconoclastic performances – by entailment, dialectic, or whatever – one knows why one is tired of Magus Duchamp. As the ‘Decadent’ poet wrote, ‘And I was desolate and sick of an old passion’. Further: This whole episode was about the hyper-hype about art whose audience and benefactors are the – very – undeserving hyper-rich: Consult the story.

As for Hiroshi Sugimoto’s discovering positive elements in readymades, and *The Large Glass*, all that one can say is; there can be no argument about taste because in aesthetics there seems to be total personal autonomy which there is not in ethics.³⁹ Aesthetics is, perhaps, no more than

³⁷ Adam Iscoe, ‘Ars Longa: Up in Smoke’, *The New Yorker*, 17 May, 2021, pp. 15-16.

³⁸ Regarding the destruction of artworks: Rauschenberg erased a de Kooning drawing; and Ai Weiwei photographed himself smashing a two-thousand-year-old urn. Seconds after the painting “Girl with Balloon” sold at auction for \$1.4 million, its creator, street artist Banksy, shredded the piece by remote control. Burnt Banksy looks like a plagiarist here? Before Banksy and his shredder, there were kinetic sculptures designed to self-destruct. Duchamperie may be behind all this, but probably there were other motives as well.

³⁹ Immanuel Kant’s Categorical Imperative presents as the human subject’s self-rule, under the rubric of his acting only on that maxim that is *not* ‘logically self contradictory if willed universally’. However this presentation is false, as I have argued elsewhere. See Patrick Hutchings, *Kant on Absolute Value: A Critical Examination of Certain Key Notions in Kant’s ‘Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals’ and of His Ontology of Personal Value* (London: Routledge, 2020 [1972]), p.37 and Patrick Hutchings, “‘Is and Ought’ Yet Again”,

a history of taste set in a framework of History itself, and of the Philosophy of an Author's time. However, there are always revivals of sensibility. In the hyper-hyped art world of the obscenely rich, Banksy's *Girl with Balloon* half shredded by a mechanism in its frame as the auctioneer's hammer fell – at Sotheby's, London 2018 – sold at £1,042,000; it has recently been re-sold by Sotheby's in 2021, as *Love is in the bin*, at £18,582,000.⁴⁰ The news story contains – predictable – reference to Duchamp's *Fountain*. And the shredding of Banksy by Banksy is called by the auctioneers 'a global sensation', 'a cultural phenomenon'. The question is: if the shredded thing is worth more as it is *resold*, can this late capitalist game go further? Another bit of damage, a bit more serious cash? Go anywhere in central Florence and you will see the arms of the Medici on a number of – marvellous – buildings. Unlike the over-rich drones of late capitalism the future Dukes of Tuscany got their money's worth.

The Origin of the World, Etant donnés and Chiquita

We Irish have long memories; every ten years I recall my first irritation with Marcel Duchamp, and write an article on him expressing that, and account to myself for my having a shelf full of books on him. In this third – and last – article I am inclined to rank his rank erotics below those of Mel Ramos. Sheer bad temper? Very possibly. However, looking at a book on him I find Ramos' young women – so to put it – erotics for altar-boys. *Chiquita-Banana* is not entirely unpeeled, so she is out of the contest. Courbet's painting exposes exactly what even the, occasional mini-bikinis on our beaches keep private. Indeed, that is all that it depicts. Indecent? Well, can a natural fact be – naturally – so?

Having outlived my two psychiatrists, and having listened to their unsaid as carefully as they to my said, I am inclined to reckon that Catholics born into Catholic guilt, and to that Church's attitude to sexuality, anyone of us may flip into sexual neurosis. Perhaps I have an – untidy – green box. Kelly green? All I was being treated for was major depression: *même*. At the *école Duchamp* it may be time to cock a snook? Duchamp himself remains *un flâneur des trottoirs d'art*,⁴¹ carrying a neat little *case* or *valise* of portable obsessions. The analysis seems to be interminable.

in Peter Wong *et al* (eds), *Religions, Rights and Bioethics: For Max Charlesworth* (Cham: Springer, 2019), pp.155-173.

⁴⁰ See *The Age*, 16 October, 2021, p. 26.

⁴¹ See Hutchings, 'Window Shopping with Marcel Duchamp', pp. 25-45.

Conclusion: A Performance delayed, Or a Would-Be Performance Art Piece?

On Tuesday 21 September 2021, there was a piece titled ‘Arts body denies PM funds fear’ in *The Age* on page 3. It began:

Australia’s leading arts funding body has denied [that] a senior executive warned an artist who planned to *live-stream an attempted self-insemination* that “our Prime Minister is a religious man and could defund the Arts Council”. [Italic added.]

Duchamp’s chastity wedge⁴² would be trumped by a self-insemination performed on a media outlet – presumably with a turkey baster – as performative art. Does the Duchampian writ run as far as this? Or is it not recognised in Common Law? The young woman who proposes this performance: “... is suing the Australia Council claiming that it discriminated on gender, sexuality, marital and pregnancy grounds when it cancelled funding for the *Immaculate* project last year.” The young woman involved: “In court documents... alleged the ‘real reason’ the Australia Council withdrew support from the project was ‘because of the actual, perceived or feared reactions or actions of individuals...’ including Scott Morrison. The Prime Minister would, in Anglican terms, be low church, extremely so. There is more on this, which I leave out as mere politics and as tangential to the question: Is the project Duchampian? To this ‘yes’ seems the likely answer. The story continues: “... on the first day of ... [the] performance of *Immaculate*... the Council emailed [the young woman] saying it was suspending its support for the project, part of a previously approved grant.” The last paragraph of the story reads: “The Federal Court has ordered [the young woman] and the Council to undertake mediation.”

The crunch is:

... the Council could not be party to an act that could result in bringing new life into this world as part of an art project... the current and longer-term consequences for the child, the child’s parent and donor are inappropriate for a government entity to accept.

Here the ethics of child support, and ethics more generally, come slap-bang up against the *blague* – in the sense of ‘farce’⁴³ of Duchamp. Ethics are always open to dispute, and are concerned with serious matters: matters of more consequence than purely aesthetic ones. Whether the Mediation

⁴² See Faerna, *Duchamp*, pp. 54-55.

⁴³ See Paul Robert, *Le Micro-Robert: Dictionnaire du Français Primordial* (Paris: French & European Pubns, 1971).

Lawyer in the civil case allows Duchampian case history as adequate precedent, or not, one can merely speculate. In my – rather ‘square’ – opinion, Burnt Banksy’s incinerated artwork, shredded prints, and *Immaculate* – indicate that the joke is over.⁴⁴ Duchamp is now *a bore*. A possibly dangerous one. The green box, a museum in a carry-case, unpacks not wonders, but – Hiroshi Sugimoto aside – silliness; probably endlessly.

⁴⁴ See Henry Alford, ‘The Boards: The Naked Rebellion’, *The New Yorker*, September 6, 2021, pp. 61-67, about the inner tensions of the Torn Out Theatre cast production of Anne Carson’s *Antigonik*, a feminist *Antigone* presented in the nude. The show must go on. Or must it? If so, *The Bacchae* or *Lysistrata*, but never *Antigone*.