

The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: Cut Flowers or *les fleurs du mal*?

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... and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
Isaiah 11:6

I

INTRODUCTION

The readymades of Marcel Duchamp are cut flowers.¹ They are, furthermore, Kantian cut flowers, deracinated in a teleological sense even while blooming in the garden. In the famous passage in the *The Critique of Judgement* where he sets out his seminal distinction between *free* and *adherent* beauty, Kant writes:

Flowers are free beauties of nature. Hardly any one but a botanist knows the true nature of a flower, and even he, while recognizing in the flower the reproductive organ of the plant, pays no attention to this natural end when using his taste to judge of its beauty. Hence no perfection of any kind – no internal finality, as something to which the arrangement of the manifold is related – underlies this judgement. Many birds (the parrot, the humming-bird, the bird of paradise), and a number of crustacea, are self-subsisting beauties which are not appurtenant to any object defined with respect to its end, but please freely and on their own account. So designs *à la grecque*, foliage for framework or on wall-papers, &c., have no intrinsic meaning; they represent nothing – no Object under a definite concept – and are free beauties . . .²

We take flowers as free beauties only by prescinding from any botany that we may know, and considering them just as occasions for the free play of the cognitive faculties. We go not with the flow of immanent teleology, but with the

'freedom' of the flowers sundered by us from their own purpose, a purpose which they themselves do not know.

Three problems present themselves at once: (1) free of its final cause, what sense does an object's formal cause, now, make? How is it more, not less, worthy of regard? (2) How can the now-aesthetic object be the intensional object of the 'free play of the cognitive faculties'? And (3) – which is really prior to the other two – how does Kant's 'free play of the cognitive faculties' play over aesthetic or aestheticized objects anyhow? Kant gives too little by way of account of 'free play'. Taking away one of the aesthetic object's four causes he gives the cognitive faculties their freedom by the very cancelling of the final cause of the aesthetic object; but what is the new freedom used for? On what is it exercised? Kant writes elsewhere in the *Critique of Judgement* that 'without at all derogating from the teleological principle' we may even see Nature herself, 'originating in free activity aesthetically final forms'.³

To be aesthetic is – for Kant – to be de-natured, cut off from final causality. This cutting-off is itself only contestably the 'object' of interest in the now aestheticized object: we are left to specify further what is the 'object' of interest in the de-natured object. Kant sometimes seems to suggest that it is the freedom itself of the freed object which is the 'object' of free play of the cognitive faculties. But one is not sure that he is right about this. And too many tricks seem to be being played with the notion of 'free[dom]'. And, adrift from an intensional object, the 'free play of the cognitive faculties' looks oddly solipsistic.

De-naturing

Marcel Duchamp's snow shovel and his bottle rack shorn of their utility in a cabinet of readymades are only a shade removed from the rose in the vase or the rose-crystal among the *bric à brac*, the one lost to botany the other lost to geology, but as denatured, now the objects of taste.⁴ With the *pulchritude* of Kant's flowers there is no problem – and that is the problem. The beauty of flowers, and their being objects

of taste, *go without saying*. The first readymade did not enjoy the (as it were) *a priori* aesthetic privilege of a flower, even though by having its immanent teleology suspended, it *eo ipso* became aesthetic. What was pretty about a readymade? Or, failing prettiness, what was interesting? The mere fact of de-naturation hardly seems interesting, nor does it give us much indication of what it would be that the – new – interest could lie in. Flowers are too easy an example. Duchamp's readymades were too enigmatic and so threatening, at least initially, even to seem to be like flowers. In what did the positive-after-the-de-naturing-negative consist?

Denaturing as the aesthetic squared?

Before we come to a consideration of the interesting in the denatured aesthetic object, we must look at Kant's big logical machine which grinds away final causes, leaving only formal ones. Kant, in the distinction between *pulchritudo adhaerens* and *pulchritudo vaga*, seems to be squaring aesthetic distance. Ordinary aesthetic distance is defined by the observer's suspending any desire to consume the object (in any sense of 'consume') and being content merely to rest in contemplation of it. This notion of aesthetic distance is perhaps already in place in St Thomas Aquinas's remark 'Things are called beautiful which give delight on being seen': *id quod visum placet* where the *visum* cuts off any concupiscence with respect to the object in question.⁵ Kant seems to want to go further: he comes close to cutting off not just *our* interest in the aesthetic object's work-a-day purpose or utility, but the *object's own* immanent teleology, as such.

It is almost as if Kant wanted to make the object as *disinterested* as is the observer. The trouble with saying that without qualification is that insentient objects, not being able to be interested, can't be disinterested either. That allowed, one will then repeat, 'It is almost as if Kant wanted to make the, aesthetic, object as disinterested with respect to its own teleology as is the, aesthetic, observer'. One characterizes Duchamp's readymades as de-natured; a recent book on him refers, *à propos* the readymade, to 'the anesthetized object'.⁶ This phrase at once evokes the fancy of objects' being aware

of their own ends, and instantly stuns them into insensibility. The phrase derives from Duchamp himself, which makes it doubly telling. This denatured/anesthetized aesthetic is a *squared* aesthetic: purest of the pure it would seem. As Duchamp put it – in another context – ‘strictness of a Hugenot sort’ obtains here.⁷ Perhaps the squared aesthetic is too pure, and something odd will come of it? We shall see, in due course.

St Thomas Aquinas wrote, in the very *id quod visum placet* passage:

The good and the beautiful are the same in substance, for they are established on a single real form; but they are different in meaning, for the good answers to appetite and acts like a final cause, while the beautiful answers to knowledge and acts like a formal cause. Things are called beautiful which give delight on being seen.⁸

With its distinction between formal and final cause, this does not by any means go as far as Kant does, though one might defend Kant by saying that his account is very like Aquinas’s one. One might; but the celebrated distinction *pulchritudo adhaerens* versus *pulchritudo vaga* seems to go beyond Aquinas, in the direction of something which we have characterized as the aesthetic squared. The trouble is that a formal cause divorced from the final cause which it ‘realizes’, hangs free, and in a puzzling way. It is all right when one is contemplating cut flowers, but it is not the cutness of them that one finds engaging.

In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia of Socrates*, Socrates gives an account of the good-and-beautiful in terms of what Aristotelians would later call: The nexus between final and formal causes.⁹ For Socrates, as Xenophon reports him, the question ‘Is *x* good?’ can be answered only by saying what *x* is *good for*. Socrates is not interested in any *x* which is ‘good for nothing’. So much so that when Aristippus asks ‘Can a dung basket then be a beautiful thing?’, the reply is: ‘Yes by Jupiter, and a golden shield may be an ugly thing if the one is beautifully formed for its particular uses, and the other is ill

formed'. Good/beauty for Socrates is not so much *ad-herens* as *in-herens*. Shown a snow shovel, Socrates might not see its beauty, not seeing what it is good for. But not attending to the point of it would be for Kant the very condition of the snow shovel's being taken as a free beauty. Taking away its utility was to be for Duchamp an *art-ing* of the object. In one place Duchamp asks 'Can one make works of art which are not works of "art"?'¹⁰ What he did with the readymades was make works of *art* (whatever 'art' may turn out to mean) out of useful artifacts: he 'arted' them by suspending their usefulness. If they were sentient, they would feel as much *en vacance* as are the cognitive faculties freely playing over them (whatever that may turn out to be).

The present section of the paper may usefully (so, not *beautifully*?) conclude, by way of summary, with the late Professor W. K. Wimsatt's terse characterization of Kant on beauty:

Kant's idea of beauty was severe; it related (so far as human making was concerned) almost exclusively to the formal, decorative, and abstract: to Greek designs, foliation on wallpaper, arabesques (things which 'mean nothing in themselves'), music without words. The 'charms' of direct sensuous pleasure might fuse with beauty, and beauty *might* be combined with perfect natural forms and purposive human artifacts (the good, the ideal), but in neither of these cases was beauty pure. Beauty allied to the good was not 'free beauty' (*pulchritudo vaga*) but dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The two might help *us* by being together, but strictly speaking neither helped the other. It is worth noting that here was a system which conceived Homer and Shakespeare as less aesthetically pure than wallpaper.¹¹

Like most of us, Wimsatt would rather read *Hamlet* than watch the wallpaper.

II

DUCHAMP'S READYMADES: HOW DOES HE MAKE THEM AND WHAT DOES HE MAKE OF THEM?

How Duchamp does what he does presents no problem: but problems arise when how he does it is taken to provide an account-without-remainder for what it is that he does.

How?

Duchamp makes his first ready-made (whichever one was first) by performative utterance. 'Let this be "art"!'¹² And he was able to do this because he was, after the scandalous success of *Nude Descending a Staircase, 2*, at the New York Armory Show, 1913, a Magus.¹³ Duchamp – though *Nude 2* is no mean painting – was not a great painter. He is not to be compared with Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse. He himself knew that to become a major figure he would need to be a non-retinal artist.¹⁴ And he seems to have thought that retinal art was, anyhow, *over*. Retinal art was not *over*. Nevertheless, as Duchamp said – *à propos* a work less revolutionary than any ready-made – 'Without knowing it, I had opened a window to something else'.¹⁵ What this something else was must occupy our attention for a while.

What?

Once one ready-made has been aesthetically made-ready and (in some sense of 'art') made *art*, one has a one-off sensation. On the first occasion this theatrical sensation is interesting in itself. The initial buzz may even be kept up, may be kept coming, by a Magus such as Duchamp. Duchamp's life is his real work of art, with works – ready-mades made-ready from time to time – being both a function of and a feeding-up of his celebrity. All that Warhol was later to do with celebrity, Duchamp with his enigmatic presence, his notable absences, and his feigned retirement from art, had already done. Everywhere in contemporary art Duchamp is there first. Even the chess – an absence from 'work' – is a model for the *oeuvre*. The self-containment and

self-sufficiency of chess are very much to the Duchampian point.

But, after Duchamp, where can the interest of ready-mades lie? What he did first no one else can now do first. Where may the positive interest of the (negatively) de-natured objects lie? Five suggestions – which do not exhaust the field:

(a) *The whole world of aesthetic objects is the point of these objects?*

Jerrold Seigel in his book *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp* draws attention to Duchamp's desire 'to remake language'.¹⁶ Like Mallarmé and Laforgue, Duchamp suspected that we are already locked into a natural/social language – one that is almost but not quite unable to communicate our authentic experiences. Duchamp's construction of, as it were, a Free Play Ground of aesthetic objects – a structuralist enclave of internal relations and internal cross-references (rather like chess) before the structuralists came along to map it – is motivated by the anxiety about language which was around in early modernism. The notion of a Free Play Ground catches, too, the spirit of Duchamp's own: 'It is always the idea of "amusement" which causes me to do things'.¹⁷

Saul Bellow reads James Joyce's notion of epiphany as 'a manifestation that summarizes or expresses a whole universe of meanings'.¹⁸ and one might treat any one Duchamp object as 'epiphanizing' in this sense, and say of it that 'it consummates the all-pervading theme of hermetic anarchy'. De-natured object *x* stands for all-and-any-thing, perhaps, in that closed universe of discourse which de-natured objects establish for themselves. In his *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* Pierre Cabanne records this exchange:

Cabanne: Chess is the ideal work of art?
Duchamp: That could be.¹⁹

It both was, and was not, for Duchamp.

(b) *The readymade as Kantian pulchritudo vaga?*

Fountain is perhaps the most notorious readymade, and its complicated (willfully mystified?) history is part of its fame: in effect, part of *it*. A urinal facetiously signed 'R Mutt, 1917' was sent in to, and rejected by, the New York Independents show of 1917; was photographed by Alfred Stieglitz; was subsequently lost; and notably was bought/not-bought by Walter Arensberg (it is not in the Arensberg Collection in Philadelphia). It has been – if imperfectly – replicated and now rests, virtual if not literal, in the Arturo Schwarz collection in Milan.²⁰

The de-natured urinal, left unplumbed, turned so that its vertical is now its horizontal axis, performatively – if abortively – uttered as 'art!', becomes . . . what? In Calvin Tomkins's book *Duchamp: a Biography* there is an account of the rejection of *Fountain* which contains two interesting – but quite different – observations by Arensberg.²¹ The first observation is absolutely Kantian, the second – putatively – Duchampian. Putatively, but we shall see.

Firstly, defending *Fountain* against George Bellows, Arensberg said, 'A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man [Mutt/ Duchamp] has clearly made an aesthetic contribution'.²² Well, function de-natured, an aesthetic object has been made: this by definition in the Kant-Duchamp system. The material question remains: has a lovely form indeed been revealed? Unfortunately, the urinal is not as engaging as a flower; it is about as amusing as wallpaper. To call it 'the Bhudda in the bathroom' as Louise Norton did cuts very little aesthetic ice, though Tomkins seems to think it does.²³ The interest of the work lies elsewhere. Where this elsewhere is we shall suggest at the end of this paper. Duchamp would not have agreed with his patron's defence of *Fountain* as the revelation of a hidden or overlooked beauty. He himself said: 'You have to approach something' – some candidate for Ready-Madehood – 'with an *indifference*, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of a readymade is always based on visual *indifference*'.²⁴

Secondly, Arensberg's putatively Duchampian (as opposed to his Kantian) move is in another remark to Bellows: 'This is what the whole [Independents] exhibit is about; an opportunity to allow the artist to send in anything he chooses, *for the artist to decide what is art, not someone else*'.²⁵ Whatever Walter Arensberg meant to mean here, it remains the case that art, art by decision, art by performative utterance, has to contain an interest for the free-playing-cognitive faculties over and above the striking decision/utterance itself. One felt this quite strongly at the recent Melbourne Biennale *Signs of Life*, 1999. Many works were striking as the works they were. Others – and one spares feelings and controversy by not giving examples – were Duchamp-yet-again. *Duchamp encore* does not entail an encore.

Duchampian – or any other – de-naturing does not inexorably produce a beauty out of a utility: nor any other thing of interest, above and beyond beauty. As one might expect, Duchamp would be no more pleased by Arensberg's second line than with the first. In the Duchamp-Cabanne *Dialogues* we find:

Cabanne: How did you come to choose a mass-produced object, a 'ready-made' to make a work of art?

Duchamp: Please note that I didn't want to make a work of art out of it²⁶

The question then remains: if not art, *what*?

Duchamp sets a puzzle: he, as *indifferent* ('the readymade was just a distraction. I didn't have any special reason to do it'²⁷), takes an *indifferent* object, and of a ready-made-artisan-object makes a *meta-artisan-object*. He does this by his power as a Magus.

But what is it that the already-artisan-made-object is now made into? We might insist, despite Duchamp, that what the already-made-made-Ready-Made *is*, is art (note, we need here honorific capitals). It is 'art' at least in the sense that Ready-Mades (and their more recent clones) exist as objects in the art-world, rather than in the hardware-world or the bygone-

world. As Magus, Duchamp – to borrow a word from him – ‘consecrates’ an artificer-made-ready-made and so makes it a Ready-Made.²⁸ What is it now ‘Ready’ for? What is the upshot of the ‘consecration’? Duchamp said to Cabanne, à propos *Bottle Rack* and *Snow-Shovel*: ‘The word “ready-made” thrust itself on me. It seemed perfect for these things which were not works of art ... and to which no art terms applied. This is why I was tempted to *make them*’.²⁹ Quite so, but make them what? The first making already done by artificers, all that Duchamp could – subsequently – make was: *a difference*? What began in (double) *indifference* ends with a *difference*. We must try to see what this difference is.

(c) *De-naturing making-ready readymades as de-and-re-naturing, de-and-re-contextualising, de-and-re-perspectivizing.*

The window which Duchamp opened is one of newly-putting-into-perspective, newly-contextualizing, and even of re-naturing-the-de-natured. These are the new rules/misrules which he gave to art. Arensberg thought in effect that the urinal could carry off its aesthetic status as easily as a flower could. It cannot. And it would be to miss the positive side of Duchamp to restrict him to the Kantian free beauty move, for all that it is – in a way – his basic one, at least when he is in his readymade mode. Postmodern and some Modern aesthetic lies outside and beyond ‘beauties’, and within ‘new looks’, ‘new looks at’, the ironizing of old looks, and ironizing old looks-at, and so on. This hardly needs to be instanced or argued at the turn of the twenty first century. But I shall take the oddest of the three cases in my heading: *re-naturing-the-de-natured*. In de-naturing the snow shovel and making the (feeble) joke about it, ‘In advance of the broken arm’ – that is, snow shovelling will prove ineffective, useless/aesthetic – Duchamp has found a new use for the shovel. It is good for a joke. Socrates laughs.

(d) *Get a cause!*

Re-naturing denatured snow shovels, bottle-drying-racks, and urinals as jokes or bare spectacles moves them into

another final-causation. They become, not themselves, but themselves-as-something-else. Metaphors. They stay in one place, but still move over. And get a new meaning/ point, with this moving-over-on-the-spot.

The vast exhibition in Verona in 1997, *Dadaismo/Dadaismi da Duchamp a Warhol, 300 capolavori* displaced many objects and re-situated them.³⁰ They 'got a cause', often a political rather than (just) a final cause. The denatured thing may be politicized, and this may (and equally may not) illustrate that, un-de-natured, the thing was already full of the political. This discourse and the rhetoric of it are by now well-known. They owe a lot to Duchamp, and I kept looking around for him in Verona. What Duchamp did was: open windows on de/recontextualizing, re-arranging the view, and so on. He had some success, but success for his successors is a possibility only.

(e) If de-naturing makes x an object of taste, do different de-naturings taste different?

This question was sparked for me by seeing Joan Brossa's work in the Spanish Pavilion of the Venice Biennale 1997.³¹ Much of it was Duchampian: but it had a different tingle on the tongue. A piece called *Nupcial*, half a handcuff joined to a necklace to make the full set, might have amused Duchamp. But Brossa has his own flavour. *Conte* – a typewriter typing incoherently on a clutch of multi-colour paper streamers – and *Poema objecte* – a large white envelope, unmarked except for 'A' and the heart of the Ace of Hearts in its top left corner – remind one that de-natureds can contingently be poems, as they are (by definition) aesthetic objects. And no two poems read the same. And not all tastes taste the same: Duchamp, tart French apple flavour; Brossa, Spanish oranges.

This set of considerations (a) to (e) fills in only some possibilities of positive aesthetic interest which may supervene on the de-naturing of artifacts. Mere routine Duchamperie often stops at de-naturing, and does not realize its obligation: *to go on from there . . .*

III

DENATURING AND PERVERSITY: IS KANTIAN PURITY TOO PURE FOR ITS OWN GOOD? OR, HOW HARD CAN 'HUGENOT STRICTNESS' FALL?

The 'old' aesthetic was a function of our giving up ordinary desire for *x* in favour of contemplation of it. The Kantian squared aesthetic seems to turn on the aesthetic object's giving up its own immanent teleology – at least the 'purest' case, *pulchritudo vaga*, requires this. But is *so* pure *too* pure? 'The corruption of the best produces the worst', as St Augustine ominously says.

The new-point-giving joke about *Fountain* is that a receptacle for body waste becomes – conceptually, if not as to plumbing – a *source*. This is, perhaps, only a schoolboy joke. But, curiously, it is the quite innocent-seeming *Trébuchet* which moves from de-naturing to the perversion of a nature. In all writings about Duchamp one comes up against references to onanism, and the very metaphor of metaphors behind the Chocolate Grinder, itself the object at the very centre of *The Large Glass*, is *Trébuchet/ Trap*.³² *Trébuchet* looks reassuringly banal. It is a ready-made coat-hat-scarf hanger of four three-pronged metal hooks fixed to a wooden board, the whole arrangement being intended to be mounted on the wall, for the hanging up of coats, and so on. Duchamp screwed one to the floor of his room, so it became a *Trébuchet*, a *Tripper-Upper*. It is not just a move in chess (as a *trébuchet* is) but a *lowdown up-holder bringing down a householder*. 'Arrange the Fall in your own flat': you too can be Adam and Eve, as in an early performance piece.³³

That is, we have here a use of the coat-hanger not just *apart from* its teleology, but *against* the coat-hanger's nature.³⁴ A 'superfluity of naughtinesses' in metaphor, if not in fact.³⁵ Duchamp was raised a Catholic and he would have been taught that the sin of Onan, who spilled his seed on the ground so as to avoid giving children to his brother's widow, was not just a sin against the Chosen People and its increase,

but a sin *because of* the perversion/'perversion' of the sexual act itself.

It is difficult, with Onan in mind, not to read together *Trébuchet* and a key entry in *The Green Box* and add the two together for a meaning-total. The entry explains the main form in *The Bride stripped Bare by her Bachelors Even* – that is, the Chocolate Grinder. The entry runs: 'Adage / [[Principle]] of [Spontaneity] (which explains the gyratory m₁ of the grinder without other help) The bachelor grinds his chocolate himself'.³⁶ Libido moves everything, as Freud had lately observed; so, 'the gyratory movement'. But the issue of the movement is not, as the plurality of bachelors might suggest, orgiastic but fairly clearly Onanistic. 'He grinds his chocolate himself'. The dirty jokes which lie only half concealed at the heart of so many of Duchamp's works turn on the trope of *Trébuchet*. The de-natured is often more than negatively denatured, rather it is willfully perverted/ 'perverted'. Kant's aesthetic squared, by cutting off considerations of immanent teleology, seems to have opened a crack through which actual perversion of teleology has come in. A paradox for Kantian aesthetics – and one he could hardly have foreseen. Is Duchamp the serpent in Kant's Garden of Innocence?

IV

CONCLUSIONS

Etant donnés/Being given

Duchamp's posthumous masterpiece *Etant donnés* ends the celebrity-oeuvre with a nude, as *Nude Descending* had begun it with one.³⁷ Only the last nude, almost as confrontational as Courbet's *The Origin of the World*, deliberately does not name itself: *Being given, 1. the waterfall, 2. the illuminating gas*, is the (deadpan) full title. And waterfalls and gas are well known parts of the Duchampian Great Free Play Ground's only half-innocent furniture. What is unnamed in the title of *Etant donnés* the viewer has a window opened on to: two eyeholes in a stout door through which only one person at a time may look. Only one view may be

taken. Licence – *The Origin of the World* – and constraint, the straitened view, meet here. One is being compelled to Duchamp's pseudo-gynæcological point of view: one bridles. And of course the atmosphere of the whole installation is . . . curious. It feels like the summation of a complex and sustained sexual obsession, which it expresses – though it seems not to resolve it. *Etant donnés* may call into question aesthetic distance – *Even* – and the whole aesthetic-of-distance. But, equally, it makes one feel that one could do with quite a lot of distance here.

Whether *Etant donnés* is intended as a Duchampian 'Ironism of affirmation' one is not sure. Duchamp writes in *The Green Box*, enigmatically, 'Irony of affirmation: differences from negative ironism dependent solely on Laughter.'³⁸ One does not laugh at *Etant donnés*, one does not find it in any usual sense beautiful. It's *kitsch*. One feels obscurely embarrassed. Perhaps this is because the laugh is on one.

On the other hand, perhaps not. After visiting *Etant donnés* one sees the thrust of Duchamp's own note in *The Box of 1914 on Fountain*: 'One only has: for *female* the public urinal and one *lives* by it'.³⁹ I find that very nasty. Tomkins finds this text the real point of *Fountain*. A smoking room rather than a schoolboy joke then.

But there is more.

Paysage fautif/Faulty Landscape

More to the point of the logic of the trope of de-naturing and perverting than *The Bride*, even, or *Trébuchet*, is *Paysage fautif*. This blobby work which Duchamp sent in a Portable Museum to his sometime mistress Maria Martins is illustrated, full page, in colour, in Bonk's book-edition of the *valise*. Under *media* one reads: 'Seminal fluid on Astralon backed with black satin, 12 x 17 cm: signed MD 1946'. There is, as well, the note: 'Research to establish the nature of the essence used to make *Paysage fautif* was carried out by the FBI Laboratory in Houston, Texas'.⁴⁰ The ironically-coy grinder

and *trébuchet* metaphors become, under FBI scrutiny, limp fact.

* * *

My colleague Dr Tom Gibbons has sent me a paper by Professor John F Moffit in *Studies in Hermeticism* demonstrating that *Etant donnés* is an alchemical work.⁴¹ And well it may be. But into all that, with its mystical marriages and so forth, I am not competent to go. This present paper must rest on two, mere logical, points which have been raised, if not perhaps rendered totally perpicuous. The first point is that the readymade is the example, *par excellence*, of Kant's de-natured free beauty; and while its freedom is obvious, its 'beauty' remains problematic. Not that the problems are insoluble, but they are tricky. That the beauty of flowers is no problem only sharpens the problem of those 'beauties' which do not *go without saying*. The second point is that the suspension of teleology may lead, curiously, into the perversion/'perversion' of it. This second point is uttered as a contribution to the logical grammar of Duchamp's jokes. *Trébuchet* is an object lesson, here. So bland, so deeply naughty.

Of course if, as our epigraph reads, 'the lion shall eat straw like the ox', then de-and-re-naturing may not be odd and suspect at all, but millennial and truly Utopian.

A dying fall

Where Kant would stand on *pulchritudo vaga*, after Duchamp, is problematic. By *turning* the aesthetic-squared of *pulchritudo vaga*, Duchamp subverts the old fashioned aesthetic distance of, for example, *id quod visum*, and makes the aesthetic object positively sexy. This solves, at a stroke, the problem of the intensionality of the free aesthetic object in respect of the free play of the faculties. Sex is always about; sex is always interesting; sex-objects are always interesting; sex has a way of overcoming indifference. Sex will, always, do it 'without other help', as *The Green Box* puts it. Indeed, that 'sex is always interesting', like 'flowers are beautiful', *goes without saying*.

But sex, as Duchamp writes of his Bride, is 'ignorant desire, blank desire'. And this all-embracing desire – now the intension of all so-called aesthetic intentions – is expressed by Duchamp 'with a touch of malice'.⁴² Well might it be maliciously put. Firstly, turn on *pulchritudo vaga* has, in effect, subverted the old aesthetic distance and, secondly, the new 'aesthetic' needs no intensional objects of the traditional sort. 'Blank desire' could not tell one of them from another. 'Blank desire' is polymorphous – indeed it is polymorphously perverse.

Such an aesthetic – one of blank desire – would be itself pointless. Would it be pointless-and-pretty like a-flower-to-be-admired? Or just *pointless*? It would be pointless insofar as no aesthetic case would differ from any other aesthetic case, nor would the aesthetic differ from that free-floating libido from which cultures have generally sought to extricate it. The perverse and pointless is not, by that mere token, admirable. Duchamp falls over his own *Tripper-Upper*, which proves to be as banal on the floor as on the wall.

To put it shortly: Kant's wallpaper is replaced by a whole inventory of fetishes.⁴³ Art becomes, to cite Duchamp himself, 'a little like masturbation.'⁴⁴ And if Kant's 'free play of the cognitive faculties' looked, as we said at the beginning, oddly solipsistic, Duchamp's turn on such a solipsism is (to use again the old booksellers' term) decidedly 'curious'.

In the context of all this, one recalls Duchamp's remark that his art practice 'is really a way to bring out into the daylight things that are constantly hidden ... because of social rules'.⁴⁵ Of these things-revealed Duchamp says, ignoring Arensberg's suggestion that they are hidden or overlooked beauties, '*Eroticism* was a theme, even an "ism" which was at the basis' of much of his work.⁴⁶ Eroticism was then the basis of the obscure Ready-Mades made of the already-made objects of everyday life. Perhaps we should read Ready-Mades as like dream-symbols, or as something between fetishes and dream-symbols – those nocturnal things which reveal, always by metaphor, desires which even when we are

asleep the Censor censors, and which, when awake, we may admit, if still only indirectly, in the always-already-ambiguous space of the art-gallery.

The odd thing is that the logic of all this begins in an extreme of Kantian purity, and in the (unconscious) sexuality of flowers, and in our willed unconsciousness of it.

NOTES

- 1 Any Duchamp work mentioned in the text may be usefully looked up in *Marcel Duchamp*, a combined catalogue of Duchamp items in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art (which houses the important Arensberg Collection). The book is edited by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989). Duchamp's accounts of works are constantly cited.
- 2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), § 16 (beginning), p.72.
- 3 *Critique of Judgement*, §58, p.219 (End of 349, side number).
- 4 Cabinet of Readymades, see Janis Mink, *Duchamp* (Cologne: Taschen, 1995), photograph on p.53. The cover of the Taschen book shows (in replica) *Fountain*, with *Eggoutoir/Bottle Rack* facing p.53.
- 5 St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* Ia.V.4 ad I.
- 6 'The Anesthetized Object' is a chapter heading in *Duchamp*, The Great Modern Masters Series, ed. José María Faerna, trans. from the Spanish by Alberto Curotto (New York: Cameo/Abrams, 1995), p.34.
- 7 From *The Green Box/The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, a typographic version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box*, trans. George Heard Hamilton (Stuttgart, London, Reykjavik: Hansjörg Mayer, and New York: Japp Rietman, 1976); unpaginated, but *ad hoc* page numbers will be given in these notes.
- 8 *Summa Theologica* Ia.V.4 ad I.
- 9 Xenophon's *Memorabilia of Socrates*, ch. VIII, trans. J. S. Watson in Everyman edition, *Socratic Discourses*, pp.94-6.
- 10 *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973; 1989), p.74.

- 'Speculations': 'Can one make works which are not works of "art"?'
- 11 William K. Wimsatt Jr and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: a History* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1957), p.372.
 - 12 'Performative Utterance', by J. L. Austin in *Ifs and Cans* (Oxford: OUP, 1956).
 - 13 *Nude Descending a Staircase, 2*, see Calvin Tomkins, *The World of Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968* (Nederland: Time-Life, 1966), pp. 34; 40ff. It is interesting to note that *Nude 2* was not just a scandal to New York newspaper cartoonists, but in the art world too. On this, see Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo, 1971), p.31. It is clear from the conversation that the synergy of the two scandals set Duchamp on his new, solitary way.
 - 14 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.43.
 - 15 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.31. The work at issue here was the dullish coffee grinder which Duchamp had painted for his brother's kitchen. The only interesting feature is a curved direction-arrow such as one finds in diagrams. The displacement of the retinal begins? The mind rather than the eye follows the curve.
 - 16 Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation and the Self in Modern Culture* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1995), pp.149-50.
 - 17 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.47.
 - 18 Saul Bellow, *It All Adds Up* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1994), p.32.
 - 19 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.19.
 - 20 Duchamp said that Arensberg had first bought *Fountain* and then lost it. *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.55.
 - 21 Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), pp.181-2.
 - 22 *Duchamp: A Biography*, p.182.
 - 23 *Duchamp: A Biography*, p.186. See also the conclusion of the present paper.
 - 24 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.48 (italics added).
 - 25 *Duchamp: A Biography*, p.182 (italics added).
 - 26 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.47.
 - 27 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.47.

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- 28 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 40; 75.
- 29 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.48 (italics added).
- 30 *Dadaismo/Dadaismi da Duchamp a Warhol*; the exhibition was curated by Giorgio Cortenova (catalogue, Milano: Electra, 1997).
- 31 Catalogue, *Joan Brossa: Carmen Calvo*, España en la Bienal de Venecia (Madrid: Ministerio de Ausontas Exteriores, 1997).
- 32 For onanism in Duchamp, see *The Green Box*, p.41 on *Sleigh/Glider*; Seigel, *The Private Worlds*, pp. 184; 197; 205.; *Duchamp: A Biography*, pp. 85; 99; 125; 127; 354; 391. The best photograph of *Trébuchet* is in Gloria Moure's *Marcel Duchamp* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa S.A., 1988), plate 88. In the illustration in the Taschen volume the hat-rack is in free fall/Fall.
- 33 On Duchamp and Bronja Perlmutter as Adam and Eve, see *Duchamp: A Biography*, p.26, for photograph. Duchamp and a young Russian woman, Bronja, played Adam and Eve in Picabia's and Sartie's *Rêlache: 4*, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.68. Duchamp liked 'happenings', *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.99.
- 34 On the argument from the logical to the moral in 'against nature' cases, a vast mass of writing exists. But for an insider's view, see Graham Greene, *Monsignor Quixote* (London: Bodley Head, 1982), pp.71ff and 141ff.
- 35 General Epistle of James I: 21 (AV).
- 36 *The Green Box*, pp. 45-6.
- 37 A photograph of *Etant donnés* is available in most recent books on Duchamp and documentation on the work vast. I draw attention to Amelia Jones, 'A sexualized reading of *Etant donnés* and the conditions of viewing', in *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp.198ff.
- 38 *The Green Box*, p.82.
- 39 Calvin Tomkins quoting the *Box of 1914*, *Duchamp: A Biography*, p.186. Tomkins seems to regard this text as defining *Fountain*. *Etant donnés* too? Intertexts, ever.
- 40 Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: the Portable Museum, the Making of the Boîte-en-valise de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy, Inventory of an Edition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989); for *Paysage faitif*, see pp. 282-3.

- 41 John F Moffit, 'Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donnés*: How Walter Arensberg Explained Its Alchemical Iconography', *Studies in Hermeticism: Cauda Pavonis* 15:2 (Fall, 1996).
- 42 *The Green Box*, p.13 (just below the two sketches in the margin).
- 43 Duchamp sees primitive fetishes as religious: given that he had no high opinion of religion, he might as well have settled for the Freudian sense. See *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.100.
- 44 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.100.
- 45 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.88.
- 46 *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, p.88. Duchamp in a calculated jest makes the 'ism' of eroticism the analogue of the 'isms' of Impressionism, Surrealism, etc. This – aesthetic? – reduction makes one think that he would be not too much displeased by the present paper. One has played in Duchamp's own Free Play Ground.