RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne
Canadian Art Review

RACAR
Revue d'art canadienne | Canadian Art Review

Etant donnés: Rrose/Duchamp in a Mirror

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Volume 22, Number 1-2, 1995

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072516ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1072516ar

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Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (print)
1918-4778 (digital)

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Cite this article

Daubner, E. (1995). *Etant donnés*: Rrose/Duchamp in a Mirror. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, *22*(1-2), 87–96. https://doi.org/10.7202/1072516ar

Article abstract

L'oeuvre provocante de Marcel Duchamp intitulée, *Etant donnés : 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-1966, construite en secret pendant les vingt dernières années de sa vie, est l'objet de cet article. Cette oeuvre, selon l'auteure, a été conçue pour être vue *in situ*, non seulement pour produire un effet de choc mais aussi pour embrouiller le spectateur. Transformé(e) en voyeur, le spectateur se sent gêné(e) devant ce corps de femme exhibitionniste exposé dans un musée. L'auteure décrit cette expérience de gêne comme un « trébuchet » (aussi le titre d'une autre oeuvre) de l'artiste. Elle raconte comment, une fois libéré de ce piège, on peut voir cette oeuvre comme un jeu de miroir, un jeu spéculaire joué entre deux partenaires, Marcel Duchamp (en guise d'homme rationnel) et son *alter ego*, Rrose Sélavy (en guise de corps de femme subversif). Elle explique comment ce jeu spéculaire est basé sur les principes cartesiens, et se joue surtout entre « corps » et « esprit ».

L'auteure finit par démontrer que cette oeuvre (ou jeu) n'est qu'une représentation de Marcel Duchamp, en tant qu'homme, qui regarde sa réflection inversée (de femme) dans un miroir. Il s'agit donc de la représentation d'un androgyne, Rrose/Duchamp. Une discussion des problèmes de l'androgynité amène l'auteure à réaliser que ce jeu de miroir révèle un aveuglement de la part de l'artiste; un aveuglement qui, par contre, apporte des élaircissements importants sur la question de l'identité, et surtout sur le problème de l'articulation de la différence entre le moi et l'autre.

Etant donnés: Rrose/Duchamp in a Mirror

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Résumé

L'oeuvre provocante de Marcel Duchamp intitulée, *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-1966, construite en secret pendant les vingt dernières années de sa vie, est l'objet de cet article. Cette oeuvre, selon l'auteure, a été conçue pour être vue *in situ*, non seulement pour produire un effet de choc mais aussi pour embrouiller le spectateur. Transformé(e) en voyeur, le spectateur se sent gêné(e) devant ce corps de femme exhibitionniste exposé dans un musée. L'auteure décrit cette expérience de gêne comme un «trébuchet» (aussi le titre d'une autre oeuvre) de l'artiste. Elle raconte comment, une fois libéré de ce piège, on peut voir cette oeuvre comme un jeu de miroir, un jeu spéculaire joué entre deux partenaires, Marcel Duchamp (en guise d'homme rationnel) et son *alter ego*, Rrose Sélavy (en guise de corps de femme subversif). Elle explique comment ce jeu spéculaire est basé sur les principes cartesiens, et se joue surtout entre «corps» et «esprit».

L'auteure finit par démontrer que cette oeuvre (ou jeu) n'est qu'une représentation de Marcel Duchamp, en tant qu'homme, qui regarde sa réflection inversée (de femme) dans un miroir. Il s'agit donc de la représentation d'un androgyne, Rrose/Duchamp. Une discussion des problèmes de l'androgynité amène l'auteure à réaliser que ce jeu de miroir révèle un aveuglement de la part de l'artiste; un aveuglement qui, par contre, apporte des élaircissements importants sur la question de l'identité, et surtout sur le problème de l'articulation de la différence entre le moi et l'autre.

Although Marcel Duchamp's secretly constructed installation, commonly called *Etant donnés*,[1] was completed in 1966, it has only come into being, so to speak, in the last decade or so. Such a delay in recognition (at least by a larger public) of what is indisputably a major Duchampian work was due, no doubt, to a strategic move on the part of the artist. Prior to his death in 1968, Duchamp left strict directives for what would be the posthumous reconstruction of *Etant donnés* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art: he stipulated that this work receive no press or hype and that no photograph be permitted of the interior tableau for a period of fifteen years.[2] This strange demand enveloped the work in an aura of invisibility and presented the viewer with the possibility of simply stumbling upon it. Or, more precisely, becoming entrapped by it!

Indeed, walking, for the first time, through the "Duchamp room" in the Philadelphia Museum of Art[3] and inadvertently coming across *Etant donnés*, without the prior benefit (or drawback) of a descriptive text and photographic documentation, is truly a singular experience.

Now, standing here, again, at the entrance of the small chamber where this enigmatic work is housed, I gaze at another viewer looking at it, and I think back and recollect my own first impressions....

I note that this is quite an unremarkable room, empty except for a door that is situated on a wall not immediately seen from the entrance. It is a wooden door, dilapidated, weathered by time, perhaps an old barn door. It is set in an arched frame of recycled bricks (fig. 1). Such a quaint object strikes me as totally out of place here; it does not conform to my idea of the "Duchampian" oeuvre. I read the identificatory label: *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*). An odd, cryptic title.

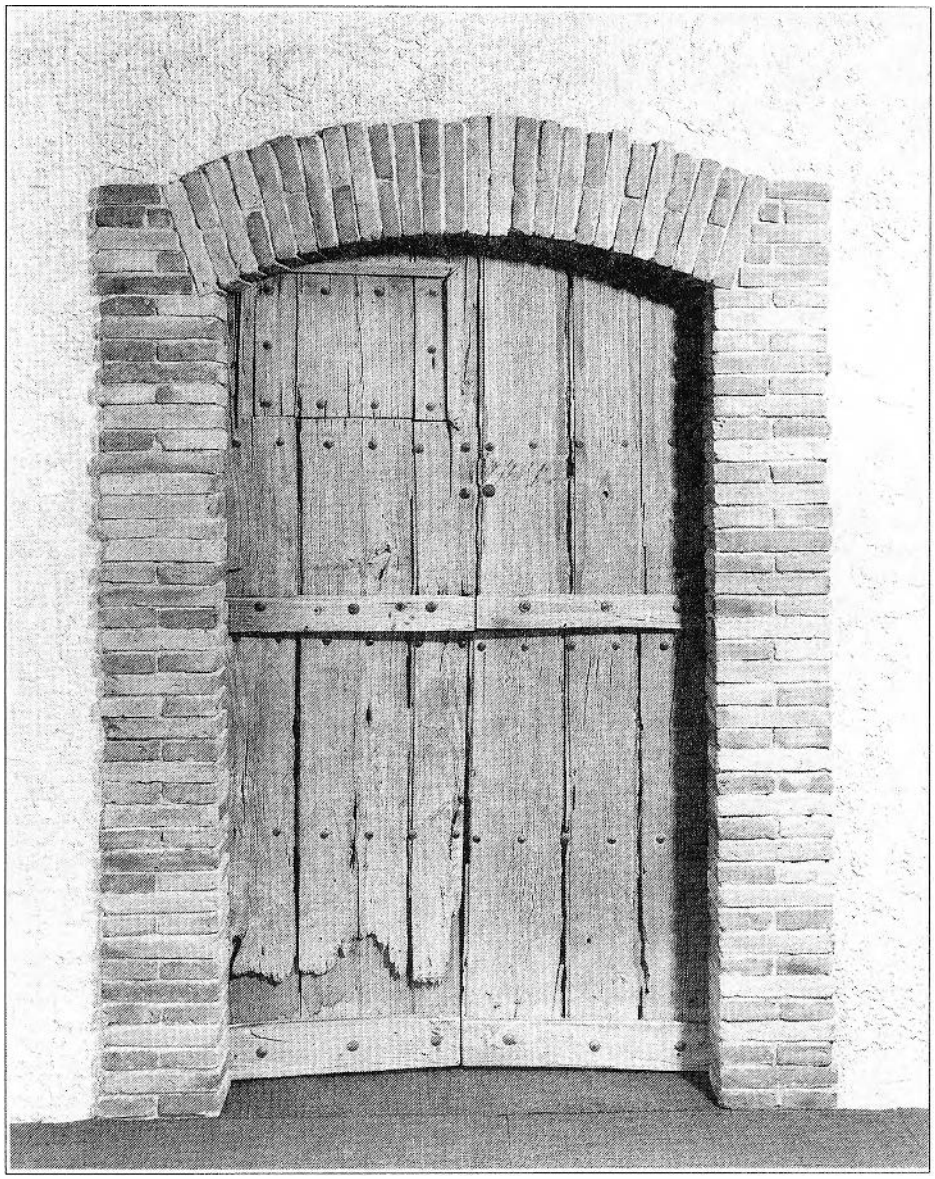
Approaching the door, I notice that it is sealed shut. Then, observing a patina around two apertures in the wooden planks, at eye level, I realize that I am meant to look through these openings. And so I do....! Instantly, in reflex action, I look away! Quickly glancing behind me, I am relieved to see that no one else is present in the room. No one has seen me staring through these peepholes![4] It is at this exact moment that I begin to sense Duchamp's presence here. He appears to be quietly laughing. Amused that someone, once again, has been caught and entrapped by the "look."[5]

Despite my discomfort, I am, none the less, drawn again to the scene behind this sealed door. Verifying that I am indeed alone within this hidden space, I take another longer look through the peepholes. In this way, for a few moments, I comply with the artist's game as I gaze at the near-pornographic scene before me.

I stare down upon the naked female figure who is lying there, altogether motionless, on a bed of dried twigs (fig. 2). I become increasingly disconcerted. I cannot help but acknowledge, in astonishment, that she has spread her legs wide exclusively for my eyes, that she is exposing her genitalia for my voyeuristic gaze.

Regaining my composure, I notice some other curious elements. I remark that the reclining naked figure is holding high a gas lamp. I realize that this illuminating light is phallic-shaped and that it is as much the focal point of the scene as the female vulva is. I also note that this enigmatic figure is not situated directly behind the door. Rather there is a dark space that creates a distinct gulf between the door

Figure 1. Marcel Duchamp, *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-66. View of door. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of the Cassandra Foundation. (Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art).



and the brightly lit chamber which houses her. In fact, this figure can only be seen thanks to an asymmetrical puncture in the brick facade of her enclosure. I also note that behind the immobile, almost corpse-like figure, there is a pastoral scene, a rather lush landscape with a waterfall. The waterfall appears to be flowing.

The title of this work now comes back to mind. I recall that Duchamp inscribed a waterfall and an illuminating gas (light) as the "given." I muse about possible meanings and begin to recognize that, here, there is definitely much more than meets the eye. I now comprehend that Duchamp has set me up as a voyeur and that my initial self-conscious reaction to the scene behind the door is somehow a trick, a means to lure me into his game. Into his trap.

I become uneasy again, troubled that this illuminated female figure, lying in a pastoral setting with a waterfall, is hidden away in this manner. I find it disturbing that she must forever remain contained in this enclosure, as if imprisoned in a cage. Or coffin. It is as if something vital has been held in check, restrained, suppressed. Deadened. I sense that something significant has been reduced to a cheap peep-show. But surely all this is intentional!

Indeed, if I think about this spectacle, this peep-show, I realize that, like the door itself, it is so evidently out of place here. Here, in the context of a museum. Then I recall Duchamp's other objects, those outrageous readymades he presented to us as art. Indeed, Duchamp was a master of decontextualization. He loved to displace objects, to move them out of their usual context into new foreign ones. If so, one could ask: is this naked female figure simply one more decontextualized object? Is she merely a representation of woman as that female object of male sexual fantasy and desire transposed from the popular to a "high" art setting? But surely this naked figure is not placed in this strange enclosure for the sole purpose of bringing a common peep-show into the context of a museum.

I keep wondering how this female figure is associated with the illuminating light, the waterfall and the natural setting. Even the old wooden door appears to announce something very different than a simple parody of the fetishized female and of voyeurism. Something quite meaningful, I feel. Indeed, does not this weather-worn door introduce something ancient? Like an old readymade idea? Yes, it is as if it discloses the fact that an age-old "given" lies beyond.

I begin to see that this figure represents the generic "woman" as she has been inscribed into our cultural constructs. If this is so, then can her enclosure (this seemingly hermetic chamber) represent the framing device that contains the category, "woman:" the frame which defines, by a

Figure 2. Marcel Duchamp, *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-66. View through the peepholes. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of the Cassandra Foundation. (Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art).

restrictive name or concept, heterogeneous female identities? But then, why the peep-show? Why must Duchamp entrap the viewer in this way? Why must he transform me into an unwilling voyeur?

If this installation, *Etant donnés*, is about givens, about inscriptions of woman, it is then most evidently also about looking, about vision. And I realize that it is precisely because of my uneasy stare, because of my consciously voyeuristic gaze that Duchamp prevents me from reading this work with rational detachment. Any cerebral activity on the part of the viewer is subverted by the power of this female figure. And this is, no doubt, the crux of the matter. At least the way I presently see it – now that I am released from its initial impact!

I have come to realize that one cannot approach this work by means of vision alone. In fact, I now see, from my present distanced vantage point, that *Etant donnés* is not what it first appears to be. I am presently able to discern its two-fold quality: how it appears to be one thing and its contrary at the same time. Yes, the more I think about it, the more I see the reclining female figure as an inversion of that other "given," the quintessential "rational" man. The generic man!

Now, if I distance myself even more, I can imagine myself standing behind Duchamp himself as *he* looks through the peepholes. I see him gazing at his own specular inversion; it is as if he is looking at his own inverted reflection in a mirror. Indeed, with this rational distance, I can recognize that the female figure in *Etant donnés* is actually a representation of Duchamp himself as his radical "other:" she is "the masculine sex *encore* (and *en corps*) parading in the mode of otherness."[6]

Duchamp was, in fact, fascinated with mirrors, with specularity. In his notes, he wrote about the manner in which the plane surface of a mirror creates a virtual reality.[7] He also wrote about a "mirrorical return" where a particular image seen from the left is perceived as one thing and from the right as another.[8] Much like the mirror itself which reflects a given at the same time as it inverts it. Even *The Large Glass*,[9] situated right outside this chamber, is conceived very much like a mirror or "hinge picture" as Duchamp called it.[10] Here numerous ideas or concepts can be viewed as specular inversions. Specular inversions that are, moreover, gendered.[11]

There is little doubt that, in *Etant donnés*, such mirroring also comes into play. Indeed, visualizing Duchamp looking through the peepholes at his own inverted self-reflection, it becomes apparent that *Etant donnés* is part of a much larger specular game: a game he played with readymade ideas, with epistemological constructs which

have attained the status of givens. Looking at *Etant donnés* in this way, I can begin to envisage two players participating in this game: a male one and a female one. These two players are positioned as mirror images, as inverted reflections of each other. The male player is Marcel Duchamp himself, and the female one is Rrose Sélavy, his *alter ego*.

Duchamp adopted the female persona of Rose Sélavy around 1917, and thereafter she even came to "own the copyright," so to speak, of various works such as *Fresh Widow* (1920).[12] It was shortly after this date that Rose added another "r" to her name, calling herself Rrose Sélavy – "Eros is life." The most well-known work under the name of Rrose is her *Anémic Cinéma*, a seven-minute film shot with a camera that carries her name. In this film, discs bearing spirals are rotated rapidly, creating suggestive erotic movements. Judging from this "sensual" film, as well as from her name, Rrose, it is evident that in contrast to the celebrated "cerebral" Marcel Duchamp, the persona Rrose Sélavy is cast as his radical opposite, that is as "body." Working forward from such works, it becomes clear that the specular game which operates in *Etant donnés* is played by Duchamp as rational man and Rrose as female body!

Now the problems of such essentialist categories have been pointed out by authors such as Judith Butler. Problems which, moreover, become apparent in this specular game. Indeed, although these two players have made some truly insightful moves in *Etant donnés*, I believe that their "mirroring" also contains a major blind spot: a blind spot that is, none the less, quite enlightening. So, taking to heart Paul de Man's observations that it is precisely in a writer's blindness that one encounters the greatest insights, I would like to reflect upon the game which is played between Rrose Sélavy and Marcel Duchamp.

Given this artist's notions of specularity, I would posit that the object of the game between Rrose and Duchamp is for each player to reflect *and* invert a particular concept or construct. The mind-body dualism, for example.

So, let us then visualize *Etant donnés* in our "mind's eye" and begin to watch the specular game played between Rrose and Duchamp. Such mental visioning is more than appropriate here because the game that one can see being played is one that takes as its givens certain principles of Cartesianism. René Descartes was, of course, the initiator of a rationally based vision and father of the mind-body dualism. For Descartes, clear mental vision and certainty of truth could only be attained by evacuating the uncertainties and confusion engendered by the body: that is, by recognizing and combatting shortcomings such as optical illusions, afterimages. The Cartesian mind must counter the failings and vagaries of the body; it must categorically avert all that is carnal. Once cleansed from the body (that is, once the mind has censored all that denies rational clarity), it can attain knowledge of objective truth. Martin Jay maintains that such decarnalized vision eradicates what St Augustine described as "ocular desire." He further argues that in failing "to recognize its corporeality, its intersubjectivity, its embeddedness in the flesh of the world" Cartesian perspectivalism establishes itself as a resolutely ocularcentric epistemology.[13]

Richard Rorty has described the Cartesian mind as a great mirror capable of reflecting truth: "For Descartes, it was a matter of turning the Eye of the Mind from the confused inner representations to the clear and distinct ones....Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself."[14]

If Martin Jay and Richard Rorty have effectively demonstrated the ocularcentrism and specularity implicit in Cartesianism, then feminists such as Susan Bordo and Luce Irigaray (to name just two) have interpreted Cartesian philosophy as being decidedly phallocentric precisely because it censors and denies the body: the body that has been inscribed into culture as a female principle. Bordo, for example, argues that Descartes' rational objectivism and yearning for certainty has been a "flight from the feminine:" a paradigmatic shift "from the organic female universe of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" to what she calls the "masculinization of thought."[15] Irigaray maintains that the Cartesian *cogito* sublimates, in effect, the maternal body: "The 'I' thinks, therefore, this thing, this body that is also nature, that is still the *mother*, becomes an extension at the 'I's disposal for analytical investigation, scientific projections, the regulated exercise of the imaginary, the utilitarian practice of technique."[16] Furthermore, Irigaray deconstructs the Cartesian "Mind as Mirror," for such a mirror continuously frustrates the desire to see one's own female experience in it. "I am seeking," she says, "in simplest terms, to be united with *an image in a mirror*."[17] For Luce Irigaray, it is only through the speculum that this can be done. This concave mirror distorts the rational, linear Cartesian kind of vision at the same time as it reveals the curves, complexities and incongruities that a boundless vision entails. Vision that includes the body. The senses.

Now whether one accepts such essentialist categories or not, I think that, with our own mind's eye, we can already begin to see the kind of specular game the two players, Rrose Sélavy and Marcel Duchamp, are playing: how they have positioned themselves respectively as mind and body. Rrose most definitely represents this inscription of "woman" as the body capable of subverting clear mental

vision. And importantly, Duchamp, as the male player, represents the radical "other" of this female principle, for he represents the rational mind, the mind that censors the body in order to attain objective truth. By keeping these gendered personae in mind, let us look especially at the way that they reflect *and* invert these essentialist categories.

As we know, the viewer's first encounter with the installation is by means of the old wooden door. Compelled to approach it, the viewer, safely situated in the hallowed halls of a rather palatial museum, feels no qualms about looking through the two peepholes. It is, after all, the viewer's role, in a museum, to look! But, as we have seen, it is precisely by the look, by the gaze, that Rrose entraps the viewer. As if in a cheap peep-show, the viewer is caught in the act of gazing at this spread-eagled nude.

In no way is this a representation of the female nude aesthetically contained by the controlling device of a frame. Rather, enclosed in this cage, and so exposing herself only to "his" eyes, (for Rrose addresses an expressly male viewer in this game) the female nude becomes a disruptive force, acting upon the viewer, catching him as if in an elicit act. The viewer, so framed, becomes the self-conscious viewer, suddenly aware of his role as a voyeur. Deprived of a secret gaze, in this context of a museum, the voyeur becomes very alert to his location in a very public setting, fearing that someone is gazing at him from behind. Rosalind Krauss has compared the viewer's experience of this work to that of the voyeur in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* who, while in the act of spying through a keyhole, suddenly finds himself being spied upon from behind.[18]

This second viewer, this second location behind the male voyeur gazing at the female nude in *Etant donnés*, is, as I see it, a crucial one. For it is precisely here, in the realm of the second viewer, that one can see the blind spot in the specular game and, therefore, the greatest insight. But this second location and this second viewer will come into play (and into our sightline) during the endgame.

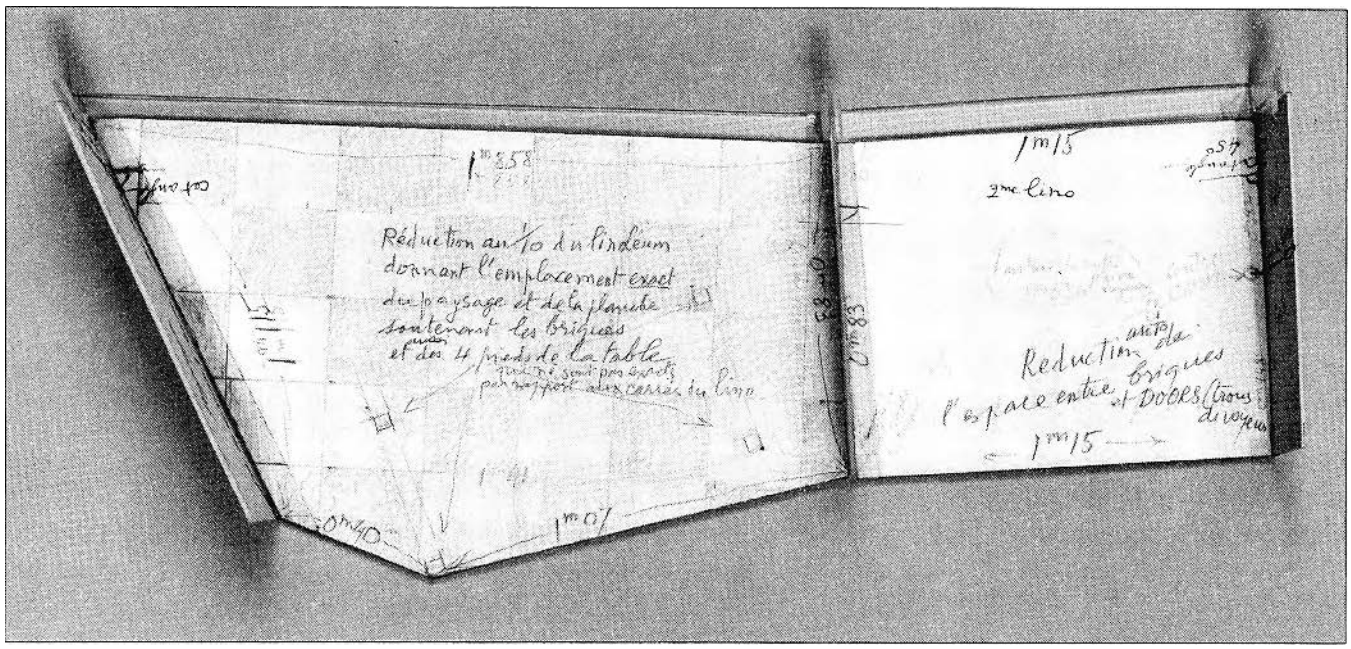
A first encounter with this work certainly tends to invalidate the view that this work reflects Cartesianism in any way. However, to be taken in by Rrose Sélavy's indecent exhibitionism is to be taken in by what is evidently a pastiche, explicitly a parody of the male gaze cast upon the reified woman. Showing herself, here, as faceless, as only body, is Rrose not presenting herself as the generic woman, that unitary category "woman," as it has been inscribed into our culture since ancient times? In her natural setting, does she not reflect those myriad inscriptions of woman as mother nature, as the maternal body, emphasized here by her birthing position and by one bare breast, a symbol of the nurturing mother?[19] Is Rrose not also presenting herself here as both the earthly and the celestial Venus as she has been presented in Western art: as both that enticing object of desire as well as the idealized woman, the reclining nude?[20] Does she not also personify the Lacanian vision of woman as the lack, as the castrated non-man, holding up high a phallic lamp as if in apotheosis, as if in tribute to the transcendental phallus or the Symbolic order of the Father?

By citing such inscriptions and by personifying the "body" in this way, is Rrose not exposing herself as the radical "other" of the Cartesian "mind"? And furthermore, by so entrapping the male viewer's gaze, is she not transforming that Cartesian objective mental image into a resolutely subjective and carnal one? The self-consciousness of the viewer's bodily location in front of this female figure inverts the objective distance required by the Cartesian mind-eye. Rrose, thus, transposes the Cartesian "male" mind into a body: into a body which itself has become the spectacle. At the very moment that the viewer gazes upon Rrose's naked figure, he himself is transformed into a self-conscious body. And it is, as body, that he himself is gazed upon by that putative second viewer behind him. Rrose, importantly, undermines the mind as mirror of an extended world. On the one hand, she parodies the separation between a distinct subject-viewer and object-viewed; on the other, she melts away this separation between subject-object by means of a carnalized vision which reinstates ocular desire.

So if Rrose Sélavy inverts the Cartesian mind into a body by means of the gaze, the male player of this specular game, Marcel Duchamp, reflects and inverts this carnal experience by censoring the gaze and by subjecting it to a rational order. That is to say, by means of the mind, the radical "other" of the body. For Descartes, it was, of course, only by purging the mind of the defects of the senses that absolute certainty of truth could be attained. Only by denying the physical body. And this is exactly what that other male player, Duchamp, does here.

As one can see in the two views of Duchamp's cardboard model of *Etant donnés* (fig. 3 and fig. 4), he has hidden the body, the female principle, in a rationally constructed cage. Indeed, the whole hermetic construction and the location of the woman's body in it were designed through precise mathematical calculations.[21] Duchamp here emulates Descartes, the inventor of analytic geometry, who believed mathematics to be the sole key to objective truth. Furthermore, Duchamp even based the viewer's sightline on Descartes' studies of optics: of binocular and monocular vision. Descartes deduced that the two images reflected on each retinal surface merge into a single image

Figure 3. Marcel Duchamp, Cardboard scale model of *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-66. View from above. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of the Cassandra Foundation. (Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art).



in the material substance of the pineal gland or the "mind-eye." This is the physical site of monocular transformation.[22] Duchamp designed this cage or enclosure as a trope for the actual lieu of vision. It is like the *res cogitans*, the material substance of the Eye of the Mind, or single inner eye. It is here where the view from the binocular peepholes merge into one.

It is also here where the vagaries of the body are regulated. In Cartesian fashion, Duchamp, by means of this rational construction, censors vision and restricts and contains the subversive power of Rrose's body. Indeed, it is this rationally constructed enclosure that serves to considerably reduce the female power to subvert the mind. Kept securely distinct and separate from the viewer (by means of the sealed door, as well as by a measured distance between the viewer space and the nude), the body can only disrupt for a short period.

Hence, Duchamp constructs both a structure for the subversive female principle and a cage which effectively disposes of the body, the mother, nature. A structure which even controls the flow of the waterfall.[23] By these rational means, Duchamp signals the Cartesian sublimation or displacement of the female principle by a male one. And it is clearly the illuminating light (enlightened reason?) which makes this all possible.

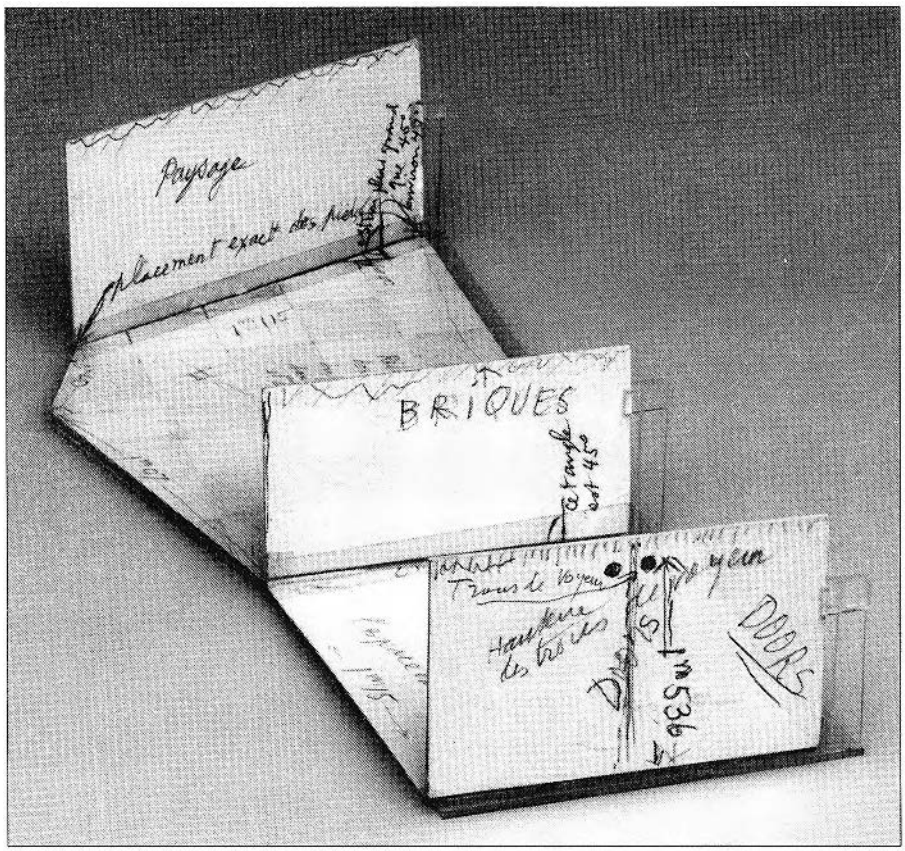
Embodied here by the (male) phallic lamp, the illuminating light/reason permits one to observe and inspect a reified mother nature. And as Duchamp, the male player, shows us, it is only by the illuminating gas, by this "enlightenment," that one can reify knowledge and construct an object of vision. He shows us how such an object fixes, freezes and stops the flow of bodily vision. How it sublimates and hides.

Duchamp, the male player of this specular game, has then effectively constructed *Etant donnés* as a rational structure, not only as a means to contain ocular desire and the subversive power of the female body but also to dispose of it, to sublimate and reify it into a male principle. In contrast, the female player plays the opposite role. Rrose Sélavy's strong bodily presence has the capacity to disrupt or throw into confusion the clear mental vision of that rational disembodied eye. Hence, Marcel Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy have here inscribed male-female principles as mind and body, and as principles that are forever distinct and oppositional. However, this is not where the two players end their gendered game. On the contrary.

From my vantage point as the second viewer at the entrance of the chamber, I see how Rrose/Duchamp also play at dissolving such essentialist categories by means of androgyny. Androgyny here meaning the (con)fusion of genders. And it is here, in their endgame as androgyne, that a blind spot comes into view.

Already in 1919, Duchamp's infamous rectified readymade, *L.H.O.O.Q.* introduced the notion of androgyny. Here, he transformed Leonardo da Vinci's famous female bride, the *Mona Lisa*, into a female/male representation by adding a moustache and a goatee. A convergence of genders. Conversely, in the 1920s, Duchamp was photographed in drag by Man Ray as *Rrose Sélavy* a number of

Figure 4. Marcel Duchamp, Cardboard scale model of *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage*, 1946-66. View from exterior. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of the Cassandra Foundation. (Photo: Philadelphia Museum of Art).



times. Here the male artist not only poses as his female persona but effectively merges the two genders. In 1938, a half-clad female mannequin, posing as Rrose Sélavy, masqueraded in male garb at the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in Paris.[24] As I see it, this kind of androgynous convergence of male-female genders also comes into play in *Etant donnés*.[25]

Observing Duchamp positioned as the viewer looking through the peepholes, I see him staring, as if in a mirror, at his own inverted self-reflection, at his *alter ego* Rrose Sélavy. It is interesting, here, to recall that Rrose Sélavy (alias Marcel Duchamp) signed a short essay in 1925, called *Men before a Mirror*.[26] In it, Rrose explains how man sees his face, his body, only through the eyes of a woman and how this representation of man is objectified and imprisoned in the mirror. Now, in *Etant donnés*, it is Rrose, as object of the gaze, who is imprisoned in Duchamp's mirror. The androgynous reflection which ensues is much like Duchamp's notion of the "mirrorical return." When one looks one way, one sees one image, Duchamp; when one looks the other way, one sees another, Rrose. Seen from one side, she is male; seen from the other, he is female. This is his/her body; this is his representation and/or hers. Marcel Duchamp/ Rrose Sélavy, one and the same. He/she, the androgyne.

From my location as the second viewer, I watch their specular endgame as androgyne. I see Rrose/Duchamp situated on either side of the mirror-peepholes, and I note how their male-female identities merge on the plane surface of the mirror. How they become one.

Now considering androgyny in this way, certain problematic issues begin to surface, issues that have been addressed by Judith Butler.[27] Indeed, as Butler affirms, androgyny is not a fusion of genders into a single "human" identity. Rather, the identity of the androgyne is neither male nor female, but is simultaneously either/or and neither/nor. A confusion of genders. Most importantly, as Butler points out, androgyny is a gender parody based on the fantasy of an original identity: based on identities which reaffirm cultural constructions of gender. In other words, identities founded on "givens," on readymade ideas. Indeed, the androgyne does not undermine essentialist categories. Rather, the androgynous masquerade reaffirms them.

Looking at the notion of androgyny from this perspective, one can note a blind spot in the specular game of Rrose/Duchamp. It soon becomes quite clear that these players' (con)fusions (as well as inversions) of male-female genres are really specular illusions that only reflect back *the artist's* vision of gender. A vision that is based on the unitary category "woman." On a readymade given. Just like his androgynous reflection in the plane surface of the mirror, his specular games are essentially parodies based on male inscriptions of a monolithic female identity. For even though Rrose Sélavy has been positioned as the female player in this game, Duchamp has, in effect, given her no real identity, no genuine subject position. Not even her own body! Rrose remains forever fixed in the mirror as Marcel Duchamp's self-reflection, parading "*encore* and (*en corps*)...in the mode of otherness."[28] Indeed, like all mirrors, this one also reveals that there is really *no one else* on the other side of the mirror's tain. Like all mirrors, this one reflects only he who looks into it – here, the artist Marcel Duchamp.

Positioned as he is in front of the mirror/peepholes, Duchamp can only remain blind to the perspective of the

second viewer watching him from behind. Situated beyond the range of this reflecting surface, the second viewer is not subject to the framing device of the mirror and, thus, can more clearly see how *Etant donnés* exposes the tautological premise inherent in all specular reflections. Importantly, from this location, the viewer not only escapes Duchamp's blind spot but can also gain an important insight.

The blindness and insight inherent in *Etant donnés*, I venture to say, is more readily visible to a female viewer. Though inevitably struck by the provocative pose of Rrose, the female viewer does not remain fixed in front of this mirror for long: she does not stand mesmerized by the specular and narcissistic image which is likely to look back at a male spectator. This is because the female viewer cannot see herself in the mirror which is *Etant donnés*. She sees there only a discursive construction of femininity. Looking through the peepholes in the old wooden door, it is evident that she can only see there an ancient male inscription of *man's* "other." Rrose as *his* specular reflection. Here Luce Irigaray's phrase comes back to mind: "I am seeking, in simplest terms, to be united with *an image in a mirror.*"[29]

Indeed, *Etant donnés* is not a mirror which includes a female self-reflection. Here, women have effectively been placed outside the mirror's frame: hence, decidedly positioned as the second viewer. Yet, in so situating the female viewer on the outside of the reflecting surface, Duchamp has, in fact, given her a privileged location. Since the female viewer is not cast as a subject looking at her own reflection through the peepholes, since she is simply represented and objectified as man's self-reflection, she has, in effect, escaped being "framed," trapped or blinded as the male viewer has. As a result, the female viewer is not so easily duped into believing that Rrose represents a genuine feminine identity, a subject, woman, women.

Standing like the Sartrean intruder, behind the male voyeur, the female viewer is better able to see the "whole" specular representation called *Etant donnés*. She can more readily perceive these gendered "givens" as a mirage, as an illusion, as a construction, as a repetition of so many readymade, man-made images of "woman." Woman as a monolithic category. Indeed, the female viewer is more apt to recognize Rrose as a quintessential representation of male discourse, as a monument or testament to male inscriptions of "woman" into popular culture as well as into the histories of art. She is more likely to view Rrose as a "specular" reflection of male discourses of rational man and female body: written by *his* imaginary. Thus, the female viewer can more readily identify Rrose as an essentially "spectral" image. But this is not where the greatest insight lies.

However, this greater, more significant insight can only come into view once the female viewer overcomes her own particular blind spot. Indeed, even from her privileged location outside the mirror's frame, the female viewer is still subject to the blindness caused by specularity and objectification. Standing, watching the male voyeur gazing through the peepholes, it is so easy for her to succumb to a similar pitfall of objectifying him as her "other" in her mirror. It is so tempting to read *Etant donnés* as a male inscription of woman that is fixed, stable, monolithic. Such a strong impulse for her to reify "man" in a further specular enterprise.

Indeed, inspecting *Etant donnés* from my position as the second viewer, I am strongly compelled to view Duchamp as the generic man and especially to cast this artist as *my* object of vision, and his oeuvre as another inscription of a readymade male discourse. Then I think back at this elaborate gendered construction. I reflect upon the gender parody and illusions implicit in this artist's specular game and, particularly, the blind spot. And slowly, with some effort, I refocus.

I try to re-vision the manner in which one objectifies one's "other" in one's mental mirror and the self-reflective tautology implicit in such specularity. I begin to contemplate ways and strategies which would permit me to escape this subject-object stronghold, and I slowly envisage a position where a subject no longer faces an object (that is, an object seen as the "other," and inevitably as one's specular reflection), but rather where one recognizes and acknowledges another subject, another subjectivity, another subjective discourse.

At the entrance of *Etant donnés*, I now gaze at that other viewer looking through the peepholes, and I discern the distinctive positions of Marcel Duchamp: I see him as avant-garde artist, as iconoclast, as writer, as player of specular games, as.... Looking at him in this way, I begin to lose sight of the age-old given, the male artist, the generic man, the universal subject. I see Duchamp's multiple personae, his fluid identities; I see his oeuvre as unique, singular, evoking a network of ever-changing discourses.

Notes

A version of this paper was presented at the 1994 Universities Art Association of Canada Conference at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in Halifax. I would like to thank Catherine MacKenzie and Olivier Asselin for their invaluable comments in preparing this article. My gratitude also to *Les Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche* (FCAR) for their support.

1 The full title of this work is *Etant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating*

Gas), 1946-66. Philadelphia Museum of Art. This is a mixed-media assemblage, approximately 242.5 cm. x 177.8 cm. x 124.5 cm. It includes: an old wooden door, bricks, velvet, wood, leather stretched over an armature of metal and other material, twigs, aluminium, iron, glass, plexiglass, linoleum, cotton, electric lamps, a gas lamp (Bec Auer type), motor, etc. Duchamp worked on this installation, in total secrecy, from 1946 to 1966, a period when all believed that he had given up art to play chess.

2 Shortly after his death, this installation was reconstructed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, thanks to the Cassandra Foundation, according to precise instructions left by the artist in a handwritten manual with photographs.

3 This museum contains the largest collection of Duchamp's works, including the Arensberg Collection as well as his two major works, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (*The Large Glass*), 1915-23 and *Etant donnés*.

4 This self-conscious reaction to *Etant donnés* has been noted by a number of authors. See, for example, Rosalind Krauss, "Where's Poppa?," *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1991) and Amelia Jones, "Re-placing Duchamp's Eroticism: 'Seeing' *Etant donnés* from a Feminist Perspective," in her *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, 1994).

5 The notion of entrapment is a recurring motif in Duchamp's oeuvre. One example is his readymade *Trébuchet* (*Trap*), 1917. Here the title alludes to a chess move with a pawn that "traps" the opponent's piece. It is also a French term for a cage that entraps small birds. Both these meanings, I suggest, come into play in *Etant donnés*.

6 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), 12. Butler here discusses Luce Irigaray's critique of the discursive construction of the body as a female principle.

7 Marcel Duchamp, "A l'infinitif," *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York, 1973), 98.

8 Duchamp, "The Green Box," *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 65.

9 Also entitled, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* and *The Delay in Glass*, 1915-23. Philadelphia Museum of Art. Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels (cracked), each mounted between two glass panels, with five glass strips, aluminium foil, and a wood and steel frame, 227.5 x 175.8 cm. Inscribed on reverse of lower panel (on the Chocolate Grinder) in black paint: La Mariée mise à nu par/ses célibataires, même/Marcel Duchamp/1915-1923/ – inachevé/ – cassé 1931/ – réparé 1936.

10 Duchamp, "The Green Box," *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 27.

11 For example, in the lower portion of *The Large Glass*, there is the subterranean world of the rational Bachelor Machine; in contrast, in the upper half, there is the ethereal world of the Bride's Domain. Male, female; separate and distinct, reflecting back their "other." Furthermore, in his notes for *The Large Glass* collected in "The Green Box," Duchamp makes several allusions to oppositional forces. He writes, for example, about the "Principle of subsidized symmetries," and how "...a point [in the lower part of the glass is] sent back mirrorically to the higher part of the glass...." See Duchamp, "The Green Box," *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 30, 65.

12 Another "window" work. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, 1953. This is a miniature French window, 7.5 cm. x 45 cm., with eight panes of glass covered with squares of polished leather. It is set on a wooden sill, 1.9 cm. x 53.3 cm. x 10.2 cm. Black paper tape letters applied across the window sill read, "FRESH WIDOW COPYRIGHT ROSE SÉLAVY 1920."

13 Ocular desire or the "erotic projection in vision" was, as Jay points out, condemned by St. Augustine. Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Force Fields* (New York and London, 1993), 117, 128.

14 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979), 159, 12.

15 Susan Bordo, "The Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, XI, no. 3 (Spring 1986), 441. See also her *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture* (New York, 1987).

16 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, 1985), 186.

17 Irigaray, *Speculum*, 189.

18 Krauss, "Where's Poppa?," *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 433-62.

19 Regarding the symbol of the single bare breast, see Margaret R. Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture," *The Female Body in Western Culture. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 193-208.

20 For an enlightening discussion of the female nude as both the earthly and the celestial Venus, see Lynda Nead, *Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London and New York, 1992).

21 Duchamp inserted this folded cardboard scale model into his manual of instruction for the assembly of *Etant donnés*, contained in a looseleaf binder. It illustrates the artist's precise calculations for the two chambers: the dark empty space that separates the viewer at the peepholes from the tableau, as well as the asymmetric room which houses the female figure.

22 In my view, Duchamp cites Cartesian studies of monocular and binocular vision in *Etant Donnés* by basing the viewer's sightline, apparent in the irregular ground plan and perspective schema (fig. 3 and fig. 4) on the drawings of Sebastien Le Clerc, evidently a Cartesian disciple. My observations are based on Jean Clair's study of Le Clerc's perspectival drawings, particularly those which reflect the visual distortions occasioned by the transformation from a binocular to a monocular view. Clair claims Duchamp would have seen Le Clerc's illustrations at the Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève while studying the perspectivalists.

See Jean Clair, "Marcel Duchamp et la tradition des perspecteurs," *Marcel Duchamp: Abécédaire: Approches critiques*, ed. Jean Clair (Paris, 1977), 124-59.

23 The waterfall appears to "flow" because of a motorized disc (perforated around its circumference) that rotates in front of a light, placed behind the transparent image of the waterfall. The play of light and shadow gives the illusion of movement, of flowing water.

24 For a description of Rrose Sélavy's presence at this exhibition, see Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, 78-79. Jones offers a very insightful view of Rrose-Duchamp as an indeterminately gendered artist. In this regard, see particularly Chapter 5, "The Ambivalence of Rrose Sélavy and (Male) Artist as 'Only the Mother of the Work'."

25 I have already argued that there is both a male and a female principle present in *Etant donnés*: that the naked female figure is countered by the phallic lamp and the "male" rationally constructed cage. Jean-François Lyotard has also noted that the nude figure itself is, in fact, half man (left side) and half woman (right side). See his *Les transformateurs Duchamp* (Paris, 1977), 18. However, I see the actual "(con)fusion" of gender from a different "specular" vantage point here.

26 Duchamp, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 188-89.

27 See Judith Butler, "Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse," *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York and London, 1990) and her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

28 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 12.

29 Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 189.