Marcel Duchamp. "A Window Onto Something Else." Interview by Pierre Cabanne. In Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp. Da Capo Press, 1987.

2. A Window onto Something Else

PIERRE CABANNE: The curious, but hardly revolutionary, young painter that you were in 1911 must have regarded with interest the step you had just taken. One thing that strikes me about your two works of that year, the "Portrait, or Dulcinea," and the "Sonata," is the appearance of simultaneity.

MARCEL DUCHAMP: It was probably my interpretation of Cubism at that moment. There was also my ignorance of perspective and of the normal placing of figures. The repetition of the same person four or five times, nude, dressed, and in the shape of a bouquet in "Dulcinea," was primarily intended, at that time, to "detheorize" Cubism in order to give it a freer interpretation.

CABANNE: If I mentioned simultaneity, it's because Delaunay painted "The Window on the Town," #3, at that time, which was the first appearance of the simultaneous contrasts that he developed later.

DUCHAMP: I knew Delaunay by name, not more. But be careful, because simultaneity is not movement, or at least not movement as I understand it. Simultaneity is a technique for construction, color construction. Delaunay's "Eiffel Tower" is, in short, a dislocation of the Eiffel Tower, one that could fall. No one was bothering very much with the idea of movement, not even the Futurists. In the first place, they were in Italy, and they weren't very well known.

CABANNE: The Futurist Manifesto had appeared in the *Figaro* of February 20, 1910—hadn't you read it?

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DUCHAMP: At the time I didn't go in for such things. And Italy was a long way away. Moreover, the word "Futurism" hardly appealed to me. I don't know how it happened but, after "Dulcinea," I felt the need to do still another small canvas, called "Yvonne and Madeleine Torn Up in Tatters." In this case, it's more tearing than it is movement. This tearing was fundamentally an interpretation of Cubist dislocation.

CABANNE: So there is, on one hand, the Cubist decomposition, and on the other, simultaneity, which is not at all Cubist?

DUCHAMP: No, it isn't Cubist. Picasso and Braque never went in for it. I must have seen Delaunay's "The Windows" in 1911, at the Salon des Indépendants, where I believe the "Eiffel Tower" also was. That "Eiffel Tower" must have moved me, since Apollinaire said in his book on Cubism that I was influenced by Braque, and by Delaunay. Great! When one goes to see people, one is influenced even if one doesn't think about it!

CABANNE: Sometimes the influence comes out later.

DUCHAMP: Yes, forty years later! Movement, or rather the successive images of the body in movement, appeared in my paintings only two or three months later, in October 1911, when I was thinking about doing the "Sad Young Man on a Train."

First, there's the idea of the movement of the train, and then that of the sad young man who is in a corridor and who is moving about; thus there are two parallel movements corresponding to each other. Then, there is the distortion of the young man—I had called this elementary parallelism. It was a formal decomposition; that is, linear elements following each other like parallels and distorting the object. The object is completely stretched out, as if elastic. The lines follow each other in parallels, while changing subtly to form the movement, or the form of the young man in question. I also used this procedure in the "Nude Descending a Staircase."

The "Sad Young Man on a Train"[1] already showed my intention of introducing humor into painting, or, in any case, the humor of word play: *triste*, train. I think Apollinaire called the picture "Melancholy in a Train." The young man is sad because there is a train that comes afterward. "Tr" is very important.

CABANNE: The "Sad Young Man" was finished in December 1911; meanwhile you had tried illustrating a few poems by Jules Laforgue. I suppose on your own initiative. . . .

DUCHAMP: Yes, it was amusing to try that. I liked Laforgue very much.

[1] The title in French is "Jeune homme triste dans un train." [Ed.]

I wasn't very, very literary at the time. I read a little, especially Mallarmé. I liked Laforgue a lot, and I like him even more now, although his public stock has gone way down. What especially interested me was the humor of his *Moralités Légendaires.*

CABANNE: Perhaps a certain resemblance to your own fate: a bourgeois family, a traditional development. And then, adventure. . . .

DUCHAMP: No, not at all. How about the families of other painters of the time? My father was a notary; so was Cocteau's. The same social level. I'm not acquainted with Laforgue's life. I knew that he had been to Berlin. That didn't interest me enormously. But the prose poems in *Moralités Légendaires*, which were as poetic as his poems, had really interested me very much. It was like an exit from Symbolism.

CABANNE: Did you do many illustrations for Laforgue?

DUCHAMP: About ten. I don't even know where they are. I think Breton has one of them, called "Mediocrity." There was also a "Nude Ascending a Staircase," from which came the idea for the painting I did a few months after. . . .

CABANNE: Is it the one called "Again to This Star"?

DUCHAMP: Yes, that's it. In the painting, I represented the "Nude" in the process of descending—it was more pictorial, more majestic.

CABANNE: How did that painting originate?

DUCHAMP: In the nude itself. To do a nude different from the classic reclining or standing nude, and to put it in motion. There was something funny there, but it wasn't at all funny when I did it. Movement appeared like an argument to make me decide to do it.

In the "Nude Descending a Staircase," I wanted to create a static image of movement: movement is an abstraction, a deduction articulated within the painting, without our knowing if a real person is or isn't descending an equally real staircase. Fundamentally, movement is in the eye of the spectator, who incorporates it into the painting.

CABANNE: Apollinaire wrote that you were the only painter of the modern school who concerns himself today—it was the autumn of 1912—with the nude.

DUCHAMP: You know, he wrote whatever came into his head. Anyway, I like what he did very much, because it didn't have the formalism of certain critics.

CABANNE: You declared to Katherine Dreier that, when the vision of the "Nude Descending a Staircase" came to you, you understood that it "was breaking the chains of naturalism forever. . . ."

DUCHAMP: Yes. That was what one said in 1945. I was explaining that,

when you wanted to show an airplane in flight, you didn't paint a still life. The movement of form in time inevitably ushered us into geometry and mathematics. It's the same as when you build a machine. . . .

CABANNE: The moment you finished the "Nude Descending a Staircase," you did the "Coffee Grinder," which anticipates the mechanical drawings.

DUCHAMP: That is more important to me. The origins are simple. My brother had a kitchen in his little house in Puteaux, and he had the idea of decorating it with pictures by his buddies. He asked Gleizes, Metzinger, La Fresnaye, and, I think, Léger, to do some little paintings of the same size, like a sort of frieze. He asked me too, and I did a coffee grinder which I made to explode; the coffee is tumbling down beside it; the gear wheels are above, and the knob is seen simultaneously at several points in its circuit, with an arrow to indicate movement. Without knowing it, I had opened a window onto something else.

That arrow was an innovation that pleased me a lot—the diagrammatic aspect was interesting from an aesthetic point of view.

CABANNE: It had no symbolic significance?

DUCHAMP: None at all. Unless that which consists in introducing slightly new methods into painting. It was a sort of loophole. You know, I've always felt this need to escape myself. . . .

CABANNE: What did the painters you knew think of these experiments?

DUCHAMP: Not much.

CABANNE: Did they consider you a painter?

DUCHAMP: For my brothers, there was no question. They didn't even discuss it. Besides, we didn't talk about those things very much. . . .

You remember that the "Nude Descending a Staircase" had been refused by the Indépendants in 1912. Gleizes was back of that. The picture had caused such a scandal that before the opening he instructed my brothers to ask me to withdraw the painting. So you see . . .

CABANNE: Did that gesture count among the reasons that pushed you to adopt an antiartistic attitude later?

DUCHAMP: It helped liberate me completely from the past, in the personal sense of the word. I said, "All right, since it's like that, there's no question of joining a group—I'm going to count on no one but myself, alone."

A little later, the "Nude" was shown at the Dalmau Gallery, in Barcelona. I didn't go down there, but I read an article in which the painting was mentioned as a kind of special case, the case of the "Nude Descending a Staircase," but it didn't cause a stir.

CABANNE: It was the first time you had upset the established order of things. I wonder if the quiet, even prudent man that you were until then hadn't been a little "upset" in turn by a meeting which had occurred some time earlier, your meeting Picabia.

DUCHAMP: I met him in October of 1911, at the Salon d'Automne, where he had submitted a large "machine," some bathers. Pierre Dumont, whose life was to become so tragic, was there. He introduced us and our friendship began right there. Afterward I saw a lot of Picabia, until his death.

CABANNE: I think the Duchamp-Picabia meeting largely determined the break that you were in the process of making with the conventional forms you were using before.

DUCHAMP: Yes, because Picabia had an amazing spirit.

CABANNE: He was a sort of awakener. . . .

DUCHAMP: A negator. With him it was always, "Yes, but . . ." and "No, but . . ." Whatever you said, he contradicted. It was his game. Perhaps he wasn't even aware of it. Obviously he had had to defend himself a little.

CABANNE: I have the impression that Picabia made you understand that the people you knew, at Puteaux, were "professional" painters, living that "artistic life" which, at the time, you already didn't like, and which Picabia detested.[8]

DUCHAMP: Probably. He had entry into a world I knew nothing of. In 1911–1912, he went to smoke opium almost every night. It was a rare thing, even then.

CABANNE: He revealed to you a new idea of the artist.

DUCHAMP: Of men in general, a social milieu I knew nothing about, being a notary's son! Even if I never smoked opium with him. I knew that he drank enormously too. It was something completely new, in a milieu which was that of neither the Rotonde nor the Dôme.[9]

Obviously, it opened up new horizons for me. And, because I was ready to welcome everything, I learned a lot from it. . . .

CABANNE: Because fundamentally Jacques Villon and Duchamp-Villon were "set" in painting, as Gleizes was. . . .

DUCHAMP: Yes, they had been for ten years. They always needed to explain their least "gestures," in the usual sense of the word.

CABANNE: Socially, aesthetically, sentimentally, the meeting with Picabia was for you the end of something, and the appearance of a new attitude.

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[8] Picabia had a considerable private income. [Ed.]
[9] The Bohemian cafés. [Ed.]

DUCHAMP: It all coincided.

CABANNE: I have noticed in your paintings of 1910–1912 a kind of restlessness when it comes to women. They are always disjointed or torn in pieces. Wasn't that revenge for an unhappy love affair? I'm letting myself say things . . .

DUCHAMP: No, not at all! "Dulcinea" is a woman I met on the Avenue de Neuilly, whom I saw from time to time going to lunch, but to whom I never spoke. It wasn't even a matter of being able to speak to her. She walked her dog, and she lived in the neighborhood, that's all. I didn't even know her name. No, there was no ill-feeling. . . .

CABANNE: At twenty-five, you were already known as "the bachelor." You had a well-known antifeminist attitude.

DUCHAMP: No, antimarriage, but not antifeminist. On the contrary, I was exceedingly normal. In effect, I had antisocial ideas.

CABANNE: Anticonjugal?

DUCHAMP: Yes, anti all that. There was a budgetary question that came into it, and a very logical bit of reasoning: I had to choose painting, or something else. To be a man of art, or to marry, have children, a country house. . . .

CABANNE: What did you live on? Your pictures?

DUCHAMP: Simple. My father helped me. He helped us all his life.

CABANNE: But he withheld from your inheritance the amounts he had advanced.

DUCHAMP: Yes, that's nice, isn't it? Advice to fathers! Villon, whom he helped a lot, got nothing, whereas my young sister, who had asked for nothing—she lived at home—received a lot. And there were six of us! That's very nice. People laugh when they're told about it. My father did it the way a notary would. Everything was written down. And he had warned us.

CABANNE: The "Sad Young Man in a Train," was that you?

DUCHAMP: Yes, it was autobiographical, a trip I took from Paris to Rouen, alone in a compartment. My pipe was there to identify me.

CABANNE: In 1911, the year you met Picabia, you were at the Théâtre Antoine with him, Apollinaire, and Gabrielle Buffet, Picabia's wife, for the performance of Raymond Roussel's *Impressions of Africa.*

DUCHAMP: It was tremendous. On the stage there was a model and a snake that moved slightly—it was absolutely the madness of the unexpected. I don't remember much of the text. One didn't really listen. It was striking. . . .

CABANNE: Was it the spectacle more than the language that struck you?

DUCHAMP: In effect, yes. Afterward, I read the text and could associate the two.

CABANNE: Perhaps the way Roussel challenged language corresponded to the way you were challenging painting.

DUCHAMP: If you say so! That's great!

CABANNE: Well, I won't insist.

DUCHAMP: Yes, I would insist. It's not for me to decide, but it would be very nice, because that man had done something which really had Rimbaud's revolutionary aspect to it, a secession. It was no longer a question of Symbolism or even of Mallarmé—Roussel knew nothing of all that. And then this amazing person, living shut up in himself in his caravan, the curtains drawn.

CABANNE: Did you know him?

DUCHAMP: I saw him once at the Régence, where he was playing chess, much later.

CABANNE: Chess must have brought you together.

DUCHAMP: The occasion didn't present itself. He seemed very "strait-laced," high collar, dressed in black, very, very Avenue du Bois. No exaggeration. Great simplicity, not at all gaudy. At the time, I had had contact with him through reading and through the theater, which was enough for me to think that I didn't need to become his close friend. What mattered was an attitude, more than an influence, to know how he had done all that, and why. . . . He had an extraordinary life. And he killed himself in the end.

CABANNE: Didn't films influence the "Nude Descending a Staircase?"

DUCHAMP: Yes, of course. That thing of Marey . . .

CABANNE: Chronophotography.

DUCHAMP: Yes. In one of Marey's books, I saw an illustration of how he indicated people who fence, or horses galloping, with a system of dots delineating the different movements. That's how he explained the idea of elementary parallelism. As a formula it seems very pretentious but it's amusing.

That's what gave me the idea for the execution of the "Nude Descending a Staircase." I used this method a little in the sketch, but especially in the final form of the picture. That must have happened between December and January 1912.

At the same time, I retained a lot of Cubism, at least in color harmony. From things I had seen at Braque's or Picasso's. But I was trying to apply a slightly different formula.

CABANNE: In this "Nude Descending a Staircase," didn't the use of chronophotography give you the idea, perhaps unconscious at first, of the mechanization of man as opposed to perceptible beauty?

DUCHAMP: Yes, evidently, that went with it. There is no flesh, only a simplified anatomy, the up and down, the head, the arms and legs. It was a sort of distortion other than that of Cubism. On the tearing in previous canvases, thought was only a slight influence. Also, there was no Futurism, since I didn't know the Futurists—which didn't keep Apollinaire from qualifying the "Sad Young Man" as the Futurist "state of soul." Remember the "states of soul" of Carra and Boccioni. I had never seen them; let's just say that it was a Cubist interpretation of a Futurist formula. . . .

The Futurists, for me, are urban Impressionists who make impressions of the city rather than of the countryside. Nevertheless I was influenced, as one always is, by these things, but I hoped to keep a note personal enough to do my own work.

The parallelism formula I mentioned also played its role in the picture which followed, "The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes," the execution of which excited me more than the "Nude Descending a Staircase," but it didn't have the same public repercussion. I don't know why.

CABANNE: Before, there had been "Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift," a pencil drawing dating from March 1912.

DUCHAMP: I've just been looking for it at Mr. Bomsel's, because I'm going to show it in London. He is a lawyer who bought it from me in 1930. This drawing was a first attempt at "The King and the Queen." It was the same idea, and it was done around June 1912, the painting having been done in July or August. Afterward, I left for Munich.

CABANNE: Is there a tie between "Nude Descending a Staircase" and "The King and Queen Crossed by Swift Nudes?"

DUCHAMP: Very little, but it was even so the same form of thought, if you like. Obviously the difference was in the introduction of the strong nude and the swift nude. Perhaps it was a bit Futurist, because by then I knew about the Futurists, and I changed it into a king and queen. There was the strong nude who was the king; as for the swift nudes, they were the trails which crisscross the painting, which have no anatomical detail, no more than before.

CABANNE: How did you pass from "The King and the Queen Crossed by Nudes at High Speed" to "The King and Queen Crossed by Swift Nudes?"

DUCHAMP: It was literary play. The word "swift"[4] had been used in sports;

[4] "Swift" has become the standard translation of Duchamp's French *vite;* but it is obvious from this passage that an alternative, "speedy," makes more Duchampian sense. [Ed.]

if a man was "swift," he ran well. This amused me. "Swift" is less involved with literature than "at high speed."

CABANNE: On the back of "The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes," you depicted "Adam and Eve in Paradise," in a very academic manner.

DUCHAMP: That's much earlier. That was made in 1910.

CABANNE: You voluntarily painted on the back of that canvas?

DUCHAMP: Yes, because I didn't have any others, and I wasn't enough of a technician to know that it would crack as it has. It's fantastic, it's turned into a puzzle, and people say it won't hold up much longer.

CABANNE: There are some remarkable restoring methods.

DUCHAMP: You'd have to put gouache in each crack, which can be done, but it's a hell of a job. . . . You know, it really looks like something that was made in 1450!

CABANNE: From the spring of 1912 to that of 1913, you knew a period of intense work. One notes a dozen essential works: "Two Nudes, One Strong and One Swift," "The King and the Queen Crossed by Nudes at High Speed" and "The King and the Queen Crossed by Swift Nudes," "The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes," "Virgin No. 1" and "Virgin No. 2," "The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride," the first study for "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors," the first researches for the "Bachelor Machine," the first mock-up of the "Large Glass," "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even," and finally, "Three Standard Stoppages," and the "Chocolate Grinder. . . ."

DUCHAMP: Ugh!

CABANNE: In the "Bachelor Machine," you again took up the idea of the "Coffee Grinder," but by abandoning the conventional forms, which you had respected in the beginning, for a personal system of measurement and spatial calculation, which was going to have more and more importance in your work.

DUCHAMP: That was the end of 1912, I think.

CABANNE: During July and August, you stayed in Munich, where you made the drawings for the "Virgin" and the "Passage from the Virgin to the Bride." Then when you returned, you and Picabia and Gabrielle Buffet drove to see her mother in the Juras.

DUCHAMP: The idea of the "Bride" preoccupied me. So I made a first drawing in pencil, "Virgin No. 1," then a second, "Virgin No. 2," touched up with wash and a little water-color. Then a canvas, and then I went on to the idea of the "Bride and the Bachelors." The drawings I made were still the same type as the "Nude Descending a Staircase,"

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and not at all like the one that followed after, with the measured things.

The "Chocolate Grinder" must date from January 1913. We were always going back to Rouen together for holidays. I saw this chocolate grinder in a chocolate shop in the rue des Carmes. So I must have made it when I came back, in January.

CABANNE: Was it made before the "Bachelor Machine"?

DUCHAMP: It was at the same time, since it suggests the same idea—the Bride had to appear there. I was collecting different ideas so I could put them together.

That first "Chocolate Grinder" is completely painted, whereas in the second version, not only is a thread glued with paint and varnish, but it's sewn into the canvas at each intersection. I moved from Neuilly in October 1913 and settled in Paris in a small studio in a new house on the rue Saint-Hippolyte. It was on the wall of this studio that I drew the final sketch of the measurements and exact placements of the "Chocolate Grinder," and a little later the first big drawing for "The Bride Stripped Bare," following the sketch that figures in the "Network of Stoppages" of the same period.

CABANNE: In which three compositions were superimposed; first, the enlarged replica of "Young Man and Young Girl in Spring," shown at the Salon d'Automne in 1911; then vertically, but on the other side, the layout of the "Large Glass" with the measurements; and then, horizontally, the "Network of Stoppages." . . . How do you explain your evolution toward the system of measurements in "The Bride" and the "Large Glass"?

DUCHAMP: I explain it with "The Coffee Grinder." It was there I began to think I could avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting, which is found even in Cubism and in my own "Nude Descending a Staircase."

I was able to get rid of tradition by this linear method, or this technical method, which finally detached me from elementary parallelism. That was finished. Fundamentally, I had a mania for change, like Picabia. One does something for six months, a year, and one goes on to something else. That's what Picabia did all his life.

CABANNE: It was then that Apollinaire's book *The Cubist Painters* appeared, in which there is this amazing sentence: "It will perhaps be reserved for an artist as disengaged from aesthetic preoccupations, as occupied with energy as Marcel Duchamp, to reconcile Art and the People."

DUCHAMP: I told you: he would say anything. Nothing could have given him the basis for writing such a sentence. Let's say that he sometimes

guessed what I was going to do, but "to reconcile Art and the People," what a joke! That's all Apollinaire! At the time, I wasn't very important in the group, so he said to himself, "I have to write a little about him, about his friendship with Picabia." He wrote whatever came to him. It was no doubt poetic, in his opinion, but neither truthful nor exactly analytical. Apollinaire had guts, he saw things, he imagined others which were very good, but that assertion is his, not mine.

CABANNE: Especially since, at that time, you hardly bothered with communication with the public.

DUCHAMP: I couldn't have cared less.

CABANNE: I have noted that, up until "The Bride," your research was expressed in representations, in illustrations of the duration of time. Beginning with "The Bride," one has the impression that dynamic movement has stopped. It's somewhat as if the means took the place of the function.

DUCHAMP: That's fair enough. I completely forgot the idea of movement, or even of recording movement in one way or another. That didn't interest me any more. It was finished. In "The Bride," in the "Glass," I tried constantly to find something which would not recall what had happened before. I have had an obsession about not using the same things. One has to be on guard because, despite oneself, one can become invaded by things of the past. Without wanting to, one puts in some detail. There, it was a constant battle to make an exact and complete break.

CABANNE: What is the cerebral genesis of the "Large Glass"?

DUCHAMP: I don't know. These things are often technical. As a ground, the glass interested me a lot, because of its transparency. That was already a lot. Then, color, which, when put on glass, is visible from the other side, and loses its chance to oxidize if you enclose it. The color stays pure-looking as long as physically possible. All that constituted technical matters, which had their importance.

In addition, perspective was very important. The "Large Glass" constitutes a rehabilitation of perspective, which had then been completely ignored and disparaged. For me, perspective became absolutely scientific.

CABANNE: It was no longer realistic perspective.

DUCHAMP: No. It's a mathematical, scientific perspective.

CABANNE: Was it based on calculations?

DUCHAMP: Yes, and on dimensions. These were the important elements. What I put inside was what, will you tell me? I was mixing story, anecdote (in the good sense of the word), with visual representation,

while giving less importance to visuality, to the visual element, than one generally gives in painting. Already I didn't want to be preoccupied with visual language. . . .

CABANNE: Retinal.

DUCHAMP: Consequently, retinal. Everything was becoming conceptual, that is, it depended on things other than the retina.

CABANNE: Nevertheless, one has the impression that technical problems came before the idea.

DUCHAMP: Often, yes. Fundamentally, there are very few ideas. Mostly, it's little technical problems with the elements that I use, like glass, etc. They force me to elaborate.

CABANNE: It's odd that you, who are taken for a purely cerebral painter, have always been preoccupied with technical problems.

DUCHAMP: Yes. You know, a painter is always a sort of craftsman.

CABANNE: More than technical problems, there are some scientific problems that you tackle, problems of relations, calculations.

DUCHAMP: All painting, beginning with Impressionism, is antiscientific, even Seurat. I was interested in introducing the precise and exact aspect of science, which hadn't often been done, or at least hadn't been talked about very much. It wasn't for love of science that I did this; on the contrary, it was rather in order to discredit it, mildly, lightly, unimportantly. But irony was present.

CABANNE: On this scientific side, you have considerable knowledge. . . .

DUCHAMP: Very little. I never was the scientific type.

CABANNE: So little? Your mathematical abilities are astonishing, especially since you didn't have a scientific upbringing.

DUCHAMP: No, not at all. What we were interested in at the time was the fourth dimension. In the "Green Box" there are heaps of notes on the fourth dimension.

Do you remember someone called, I think, Povolowski? He was a publisher, in the rue Bonaparte. I don't remember his name exactly. He had written some articles in a magazine popularizing the fourth dimension, to explain that there are flat beings who have only two dimensions, etc. It was very amusing, appearing at the same time as Cubism and Princet.

CABANNE: Princet was a fake mathematician—he too practiced irony. . . .

DUCHAMP: Exactly. We weren't mathematicians at all, but we really did believe in Princet. He gave the illusion of knowing a lot of things. Now, I think he was a high-school math teacher. Or in a public school.

In any case, at the time I had tried to read things by Povolowski, who explained measurements, straight lines, curves, etc. That was working

in my head while I worked, although I almost never put any calculations into the "Large Glass." Simply, I thought of the idea of a projection, of an invisible fourth dimension, something you couldn't see with your eyes.

Since I found that one could make a cast shadow from a three-dimensional thing, any object whatsoever—just as the projecting of the sun on the earth makes two dimensions—I thought that, by simple intellectual analogy, the fourth dimension could project an object of three dimensions, or, to put it another way, any three-dimensional object, which we see dispassionately, is a projection of something four-dimensional, something we're not familiar with.

It was a bit of a sophism, but still it was possible. "The Bride" in the "Large Glass" was based on this, as if it were the projection of a four-dimensional object.

CABANNE: You called "The Bride" a "delay in glass."

DUCHAMP: Yes. It was the poetic aspect of the words that I liked. I wanted to give "delay" a poetic sense that I couldn't even explain. It was to avoid saying, "a glass painting," "a glass drawing," "a thing drawn on glass," you understand? The word "delay" pleased me at that point, like a phrase one discovers. It was really poetic, in the most Mallarméan sense of the word, so to speak.

CABANNE: In "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even," what does the word "even" mean?

DUCHAMP: Titles in general interested me a lot. At that time, I was becoming literary. Words interested me; and the bringing together of words to which I added a comma and "even," an adverb which makes no sense, since it relates to nothing in the picture or title. Thus it was an adverb in the most beautiful demonstration of adverbness. It has no meaning.

This "antisense" interested me a lot on the poetic level, from the point of view of the sentence. Breton was very pleased by it, and for me this was a sort of consecration. In fact, when I did it, I had no idea of its value. In English, too,[5] "even" is an absolute adverb; it has no sense. All the more possibility of stripping bare. It's a "non-sense."

CABANNE: You seemed rather to have appreciated word play at that time.

DUCHAMP: I was interested, but very mildly. I didn't write.

CABANNE: Was it Roussel's influence?

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[5] The original word in French is *même*, but Duchamp lived in New York City for years, and one cannot help thinking of how often many people there end sentences with another senseless adverb, "yet." [Ed.]

DUCHAMP: Yes, surely, although all that hardly resembles Roussel. But he gave me the idea that I too could try something in the sense of which we were speaking; or rather antisense. I didn't even know anything about him, or how he had explained his writing method in a booklet. He tells how, starting with a sentence, he made a word game with kinds of parentheses. Jean Ferry's book, which is remarkable, taught me a lot about Roussel's technique. His word play had a hidden meaning, but not in the Mallarméan or Rimbaudian sense. It was an obscurity of another order.

CABANNE: Did you stop all artistic activity in order to devote yourself completely to the "Large Glass"?

DUCHAMP: Yes. Art was finished for me. Only the "Large Glass" interested me, and obviously there was no question of showing my early works. But I wanted to be free of any material obligation, so I began a career as a librarian, which was a sort of excuse for not being obliged to show up socially. From this point of view, it was really a very clean decision. I wasn't trying to make paintings, or to sell any. I had several years' work ahead of me.

CABANNE: You made five francs a day at the Sainte-Geneviève Library, didn't you?

DUCHAMP: Yes, because I was "kindly" doing it for nothing. For amusement, I also went to take courses at the School of Paleography and Librarianship.

CABANNE: You took that very seriously?

DUCHAMP: Because I thought it was going to last. I knew very well that I would never be able to pass the examination at the school, but I went there as a matter of form. It was a sort of grip on an intellectual position, against the manual servitude of the artist. At the same time, I was doing my calculations for the "Large Glass."

CABANNE: How did the idea of using glass come to you?

DUCHAMP: Through color. When I had painted, I used a big thick glass as a palette and, seeing the colors from the other side, I understood there was something interesting from the point of view of pictorial technique.

After a short while, paintings always get dirty, yellow, or old because of oxidation. Now, my own colors were completely protected, the glass being a means for keeping them both sufficiently pure and unchanged for rather a long time. I immediately applied this glass idea to "The Bride."

CABANNE: The glass has no other significance?

DUCHAMP: No, no, none at all. The glass, being transparent, was able to give its maximum effectiveness to the rigidity of perspective. It also

took away any idea of "the hand," of materials. I wanted to change, to have a new approach.

CABANNE: Several interpretations of the "Large Glass" have been given. What is yours?

DUCHAMP: I don't have any, because I made it without an idea. There were things that came along as I worked. The idea of the ensemble was purely and simply the execution, more than descriptions of each part in the manner of the catalogue of the "Arms of Saint-Etienne."[6] It was a renunciation of all aesthetics, in the ordinary sense of the word . . . not just another manifesto of new painting.

CABANNE: It's a sum of experiments?

DUCHAMP: A sum of experiments, yes, without the influence of the idea of creating another movement in painting, in the sense of Impressionism, Fauvism, etc., any kind of "ism."

CABANNE: What do you think of the different interpretations given by Breton, Michel Carrouges, or Lebel?

DUCHAMP: Each of them gives his particular note to his interpretation, which isn't necessarily true or false, which is interesting, but only interesting when you consider the man who wrote the interpretation, as always. The same thing goes for the people who have written about Impressionism. You believe one or you believe another, according to the one you feel closest to.

CABANNE: So, fundamentally, you're indifferent to what is written about you.

DUCHAMP: No, no, I'm interested.

CABANNE: You read it?

DUCHAMP: Certainly. But I forget.

CABANNE: The astonishing thing is that, for eight years, from 1915 to 1923, you succeeded in having so many irons in the fire the spirits, formation, and ends of which were completely opposed. Thus, the rigorous, progressive, and slow elaboration of the "Large Glass," the methodological concentration of the "Box," and the offhandedness of the first readymades. .

DUCHAMP: For the "Box" of 1913–1914, it's different. I didn't have the idea of a box as much as just notes. I thought I could collect, in an album like the Saint-Etienne catalogue, some calculations, some reflexions, without relating them. Sometimes they're on torn pieces of paper. . . . I wanted that album to go with the "Glass," and to be consulted when seeing the "Glass" because, as I see it, it must not be

[6] A sort of French "Sears, Roebuck." (Trans.)

"looked at" in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book, and see the two together. The conjunction of the two things entirely removes the retinal aspect that I don't like. It was very logical.

CABANNE: Where does your antiretinal attitude come from?

DUCHAMP: From too great an importance given to the retinal.[7] Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. If I had the chance to take an antiretinal attitude, it unfortunately hasn't changed much; our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far! In spite of the fact that Breton says he believes in judging from a Surrealist point of view, down deep he's still really interested in painting in the retinal sense. It's absolutely ridiculous. It has to change; it hasn't always been like this.

CABANNE: Your position was considered exemplary, but was hardly followed.

DUCHAMP: Why would you follow it? You can't make money with it.

CABANNE: You could have disciples.

DUCHAMP: No. It isn't a formula for a school of painting in which one follows a master. In my opinion, it was a more elevated position.

CABANNE: What did your friends think of it?

DUCHAMP: I spoke to very few people about it. Picabia was above all an "Abstractionist," a word he had invented. It was his hobbyhorse. We didn't talk much about it. He thought about nothing else. I left it very quickly.

CABANNE: You were never an Abstractionist?

DUCHAMP: Not in the real sense of the word. A canvas like "The Bride" is abstract, since there isn't any figuration. But it isn't abstract in the narrow sense of the word. It's visceral, so to speak.

When you see what the Abstractionists have done since 1940, it's worse than ever, optical. They're really up to their necks in the retina!

CABANNE: Was it in the name of your antiretinal attitude that you refused abstraction?

DUCHAMP: No. I rejected it first and then figured out why afterward.

CABANNE: How were you invited to the Armory Show?

DUCHAMP: By Walter Pach. He had come to France in 1910, and he had made friends with my brothers, through whom we met. Then in 1912,

[7] Duchamp uses the word "retinal" in the way that many people use "painterly"; note, a few sentences further on, his criticism of Breton. In other words, Duchamp objects to the sensuous appeal of painting. [Ed.]

when he was entrusted with the task of gathering paintings for that show, he saved a lot of room for the three of us. It was during the Cubist heyday. We had shown him what we had, and he left. He took four of my things: the "Nude Descending a Staircase," the "Young Man," the "Portrait of Chess Players," and "The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes."

Walter Pach had translated Elie Faure into English. He also wrote several very good books. The bad thing was that the poor fellow was a painter. His painting bore no resemblance to anything likable. It was undrinkable. But he was a charming man.

He came back in 1914. It was he who made me decide to go to the United States. War had been declared. We were sitting on a bench on the Avenue des Gobelins in October or November. It was a beautiful day. He said, "Why don't you come to America?" He explained to me that the "Nude Descending a Staircase" had been a success, that I had a possible place over there. That made up my mind—I would leave in six months. I had been discharged from the army, but I had to ask for permission.

CABANNE: Overnight you had become the man of the "Nude Descending a Staircase." Your four pictures had been sold and you were famous. Which contradicted your detachment. . . .

DUCHAMP: It came from so far away! I hadn't gone to the exhibition, I was still here in Paris. I simply received a letter saying that the four pictures were sold. But the success wasn't so important, because it was a local success. I didn't attach much importance to it. I was very happy about selling the "Nude" for two hundred and forty dollars. Two hundred and forty dollars made twelve hundred gold francs: the price I had asked.

What contributed to the interest provoked by that canvas was its title. One just doesn't do a nude woman coming down the stairs, that's ridiculous. It doesn't seem ridiculous now, because it's been talked about so much, but when it was new, it seemed scandalous. A nude should be respected.

It was also offensive on the religious, Puritan level, and all of this contributed to the repercussions of the picture. And then there were painters over there who were squarely opposed to it. That triggered a battle. I profited. That's all.

CABANNE: What do you, more than a half century away, think of that "Nude"?

DUCHAMP: I like it very much. It held up better than "The King and the Queen." Even in the old sense, the painterly sense. It's very involved,

very compact, and very well painted, with some substantial colors a German gave me. They've behaved very well, and that's very important.

CABANNE: Didn't this *succès de scandale* render you somewhat suspect in the eyes of French painters?

DUCHAMP: Yes, probably, but don't forget that they didn't know much about it. Back then, there weren't the kind of communications between Europe and America that we have today, and so no one talked about it, not even in the papers. There were tiny echoes here and there, but that's all. As far as the French were concerned, it went unnoticed.

I hadn't considered the importance this success could have in my life. When I arrived in New York, I realized that I wasn't a stranger at all.

CABANNE: You were a man predestined for America.

DUCHAMP: So to speak, yes.

CABANNE: And you stayed there.

DUCHAMP: It was like a second wind.

CABANNE: It's been said that you were the only painter to awaken an entire continent to a new art.

DUCHAMP: The continent couldn't have cared less! Our milieu was very restricted, even in the United States!

CABANNE: Did you think about what you represented at that period for Americans?

DUCHAMP: Not very much. The tiresome thing was that every time I met someone, they would say, "Oh! Are you the one who did that painting?" The funniest thing is that for at least thirty or forty years the painting was known, but I wasn't. Nobody knew my name. In the continental American sense of the word, "Duchamp" meant nothing. There was no connection between the painting and me.

CABANNE: No one connected the scandal and its author?

DUCHAMP: Not at all. They didn't care. When they met me they said, "Well, fine!" but there were only three or four who knew who I was, whereas everyone had seen the painting or reproductions, without knowing who had painted it. I really lived over there without being bothered by the painting's popularity, hiding behind it, obscured. I had been completely squashed by the "Nude."

CABANNE: Didn't that correspond perfectly to your idea of the artist?

DUCHAMP: I was enchanted. I never suffered from the situation, although I was troubled when I had to answer questions from journalists.

CABANNE: Like today?

DUCHAMP: Like today!

CABANNE: The buyer of the "Nude Descending a Staircase" owned a gallery in San Francisco, an F. C. Torrey. . . .

DUCHAMP: A shop for Chinese antiquities. He had come to see me in Paris before the war, and I gave him the little drawing after Laforgue, the "Nude Ascending a Staircase," which, furthermore, wasn't called that, but "Again to This Star." It represented a nude going up the stairs, and it is, you know, the original idea in reverse of the "Nude Descending." I had put a stupid date below, 1912, when it had been done in November of 1911, and I dedicated it to Torrey in 1913. When you compare the dates, you say, "that's impossible." An amusing mess.

For five years, Arensberg asked Torrey to sell him that drawing, and finally he did. I don't know how much it cost—that was a secret. I never asked him. Perhaps he wouldn't have told me. He must have paid through the nose at that time.

CABANNE: Two other canvases shown, "The King and the Queen" and "Portrait of Chess Players," were bought by a Chicago lawyer, A. J. Eddy.

DUCHAMP: He was a funny fellow too! He was the first man in Chicago to ride a bicycle, and the first to have his portrait painted by Whistler. That made his reputation![8] He had a very important law practice and a collection of paintings. He bought numerous Abstract paintings at the time, Picabias, too. He was a large fellow, with white hair. He wrote a book, *Cubism and Post-Impressionism*, which was published in 1914, and the first book to have discussed Cubism in the United States.

These people were very amusing because they were unexpected. They never mentioned buying a painting. Walter Pach served as the liaison.

CABANNE: The "Three Standard Stoppages" are made of three sheets of long, narrow glass, on which are glued strips of canvas that serve as the background for three pieces of thread. The whole thing is enclosed in a croquet box. You defined it as "canned chance."

DUCHAMP: The idea of "chance,"[9] which many people were thinking about at the time, struck me too. The intention consisted above all in forgetting the hand, since, fundamentally, even your hand is chance.

Pure chance interested me as a way of going against logical reality: to put something on a canvas, on a bit of paper, to associate the idea of a perpendicular thread a meter long falling from the height of one

[8] Actually, Eddy had written books on art, including an anecdotal account of Whistler (1904). [Ed.]

[9] Fr., "*hazard*." [Trans.]

meter onto a horizontal plane, making its own deformation. This amused me. It's always the idea of "amusement" which causes me to do things, and repeated three times. . . .

For me the number three is important, but simply from the numerical, not the esoteric, point of view: one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest. When you've come to the word three, you have three million—it's the same thing as three. I had decided that the things would be done three times to get what I wanted. My "Three Standard Stoppages" is produced by three separate experiments, and the form of each one is slightly different. I keep the line, and I have a deformed meter. It's a "canned meter," so to speak, canned chance; it's amusing to can chance.

CABANNE: How did you come to choose a mass-produced object, a "readymade," to make a work of art?

DUCHAMP: Please note that I didn't want to make a work of art out of it. The word "readymade" did not appear until 1915, when I went to the United States. It was an interesting word, but when I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a "readymade," or anything else. It was just a distraction. I didn't have any special reason to do it, or any intention of showing it, or describing anything. No, nothing like all that. . . .

CABANNE: But some provocation just the same. . . .

DUCHAMP: No, no. It's very simple. Look at the "Pharmacy." I did it on a train, in half-darkness, at dusk; I was on my way to Rouen in January 1914. There were two little lights in the background of the reproduction of a landscape. By making one red and one green, it resembled a pharmacy.[10] This was the kind of distraction I had in mind.

CABANNE: Is it canned chance, too?

DUCHAMP: Certainly.

I bought the reproduction of the landscape in an artist's supply store. I did only three "Pharmacies," but I don't know where they are. The original belonged to Man Ray.

In 1914, I did the "Bottle Rack." I just bought it, at the bazaar of the town hall. The idea of an inscription came as I was doing it. There was an inscription on the bottle rack which I forget. When I moved from the rue Saint-Hippolyte to leave for the United States, my sister and sister-in-law took everything out, threw it in the garbage, and said no more about it. It was in 1915, especially, in the United States, that

[10] French pharmacists always used to have jars of colored water (especially red and green) in their windows. [Trans.]

I did other objects with inscriptions, like the snow shovel, on which I wrote something in English. The word "readymade" thrust itself on me then. It seemed perfect for these things that weren't works of art, that weren't sketches, and to which no art terms applied. That's why I was tempted to make them.

CABANNE: What determined your choice of readymades?

DUCHAMP: That depended on the object. In general, I had to beware of its "look." It's very difficult to choose an object, because, at the end of fifteen days, you begin to like it or to hate it. You have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymades is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste.

CABANNE: What is taste for you?

DUCHAMP: A habit. The repetition of something already accepted. If you start something over several times, it becomes taste. Good or bad, it's the same thing, it's still taste.

CABANNE: What have you done to escape taste?

DUCHAMP: Mechanical drawing. It upholds no taste, since it is outside all pictorial convention.

CABANNE: You constantly defended yourself against the realization . . .

DUCHAMP: . . . of making a form in the aesthetic sense, of making a form or a color. And of repeating them.

CABANNE: It's an antinaturalist attitude, which you nonetheless exercised on natural objects.

DUCHAMP: Yes, but that's all the same to me; I'm not responsible. It was made, I wasn't the one who made it. There is a defense; I object to responsibility.

CABANNE: You continued elaborating the "Large Glass," with the "Three Malic Moulds." . . .

DUCHAMP: No, there were nine of them.

CABANNE: Right. But you started by making three. Almost at the same time as the "Three Standard Stoppages," and perhaps for the same reason.

DUCHAMP: No, at first I thought of eight and I thought, that's not a multiple of three. It didn't go with my idea of threes. I added one, which made nine. There were nine "Malic Moulds." How did they come? I did a drawing, in 1913, in which there were eight—the ninth wasn't yet there. It came six months later.

The idea is amusing because they are molds. And to mold what? Gas. That is, gas is introduced into the molds, where it takes the shape of the soldier, the department-store delivery boy, the cuirassier, the policeman,

the priest, the station master, etc., which are inscribed on my drawing. Each is built on a common horizontal plane, where lines intersect at the point of their sex.

All that helped me realize the glass entitled "Nine Malic Moulds," which was made in 1914–1915. The mold side is invisible. I always avoided doing something tangible, but with a mold it doesn't matter, because it's the inside I didn't want to show.

The "Nine Malic Moulds" were done in lead; they are not painted, they are each waiting to be given a color. I denied myself the use of color: lead is a color without being one. This is the kind of thing I was working on at that time.

CABANNE: You have compared the readymade to a sort of rendezvous.

DUCHAMP: Once, yes. At that time, I was preoccupied with the idea of doing a certain thing in advance, of declaring "at such and such an hour I'll do this. . . ." I never did it. I would have been embarrassed by it.

CABANNE: At the time when you arrived in America, in June 1915, how was New York?

DUCHAMP: It was different from Paris. A little bit provincial. There were many small French restaurants, small French hotels, which have disappeared. Everything changed in 1929 with the crash. Taxes were introduced. You couldn't do anything, as in France now, without being obliged to think about the taxes you must pay. And then there were the unions, etc. I saw a little of what America must have been in the nineteenth century.

CABANNE: Academism was triumphant in painting. . . .

DUCHAMP: Yes, the "French artists." Fundamentally. Furthermore, painters were coming to study at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, etc. Mr. Vanderbilt had come to Paris in 1900 to buy a Bouguereau for one hundred thousand dollars. He had also paid sixty thousand dollars for a Rosa Bonheur. Others had bought Meissonier, Henner, Sargent. It was "the grand style" of living.

CABANNE: Did the Armory Show change American opinion?

DUCHAMP: Surely. It changed the spirit in which artists worked, and, equally, woke people up to the idea of art in a country where there had been little interest before. Only a moneyed elite bought paintings from Europe. For the big collectors, there never was any question of buying an American painting. However, they had a flowering of painters, not only very interesting and very intelligent, but also very much in touch with what was happening in Paris. . . .

CABANNE: It's been said that you had arrived in the United States as a missionary of insolence.

DUCHAMP: I don't know who said that, but I agree! Still, I wasn't all that insolent, and my social life was very narrow. It was very quiet, you know, not at all aggressive or rebellious. We lived completely outside of social ideas or political movements.

CABANNE: Henri-Pierre Roché told me that you exercised a kind of fascination.

DUCHAMP: Oh, he was very nice. From the moment we met, he called me "Victor," and three hours later, "Totor." And that's what he called me the rest of his life. I don't think you can call that being fascinated.