

# THE JACKDAW

# WHO DID IT?



# NOT DUCHAMP!

# A CONCEPTUAL INCONVENIENCE

Former museum director Julian Spalding and academic Glyn Thompson published an important article in *The Art Newspaper* in November 2014 (available online at the paper's website and also in a longer version on the *Scottish Review of Books* website) proposing that the object we know as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, the urinal, was in fact the work of someone else: dadaist artist and poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.



The original *Fountain* was famously lost. In 1999 the Tate bought a 1964 copy for \$500,000: it is one of 16 replicas made between 1951 and 1964. In 2004 'art experts' declared *Fountain* the most influential work of art of the 20th century.

Spalding and Thompson have asked for *Fountain* to be reattributed to its true author. What follows is a correspondence between the authors and Sir Nicholas Serota, director of the Tate Gallery.

An exhibition, 'A Lady's not a Gent's', about the history of *Fountain* will take place at Summerhall, 1 Summerhall, during the Edinburgh Festival from August 5th to October 5th.

[www.summerhall.co.uk](http://www.summerhall.co.uk)

**November 10th, 2014**

**Dear Nick,**

**A call to reattribute Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain***

We write following our argument made in the November issue of *The Art Newspaper*, and amplified in a review of Calvin Tomkins's *Duchamp* in *The Scottish Review of Books* and in the article *The Barrenness of the Baroness* which is available on line at [Academie.edu](http://Academie.edu).

We believe that Duchamp's early statement about the origin of the urinal is true, not his later account, which your museum upholds, which has to be a falsehood because it was impossible.

A museum's job is to tell its visitors the truth. We are therefore writing to ask you to re-attribute your copy of *Fountain*, making it clear that it is based on an original by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven which was dishonestly appropriated by Duchamp who also changed its meaning.

We look forward to your urgent correction of this most significant public misapprehension.

**January 7th, 2015**

**Dear Julian,**

I am sorry not to have responded earlier to your letter and to the article in *The Art Newspaper* concerning the attribution of the urinal to Marcel Duchamp. We have reviewed your article and have consulted a number of Duchamp specialists. As a result we see no reason to change the present attribution to Duchamp. Duchamp was always scrupulous in recognising the identity of collaborators, while he also took a strong interest in the work of a number of artists who were women. We therefore maintain our attribution, as given originally by Duchamp and Schwarz at the time of the creation of the edition in 1964.

**January 20th, 2015**

**Dear Nick,**

Thank you for your reply to our request. Regrettably, we found this illogical and confusing. We are therefore writing to ask you to clarify your response and make the reasoning behind it transparent, as befits a public institution.

This is a matter of great public concern – we would not be bothering you with it otherwise – because a change in the authorship and meaning of the urinal will have a profound impact on public understanding of modern art, on public expenditure on modern art and on the policy of Tate in particular.

Research has now proved beyond all reasonable doubt that Duchamp was telling the truth in the letter he wrote to his sister on April 11th 1917 that he didn't create the urinal, and was lying in the account he gave forty years later to Schwarz. Tate has to explain why it has decided to dismiss Duchamp's early statement but sustain his later fiction, especially since this account has been demonstrated by William Camfield to be impossible. It is illogical for Tate to sustain a lie, and reprehensible, for museums have to be guardians of truth.

Your letter includes the sentence 'Duchamp was always scrupulous in recognizing the identity of collaborators, while he also took a strong interest in the work of a number of artists who were women.' It is not clear why you have included this statement. If you are implying that there might be a case for suggesting that Duchamp collaborated with Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven on the urinal, though there is no evidence for this and it was contrary to Duchamp's practice at that time, then that admission would itself necessitate a reattribution. We are bewildered by your use of the phrase 'always scrupulous'. How does this relate to the contradictory accounts that Duchamp gave of the origin of the urinal, both of which can't be true?

You mention that you 'have consulted a number of Duchamp specialists' before reaching your conclusion. Since this is a matter of public concern and they have been advising a public institution, this

consultation must be in the public domain. We would, therefore, be grateful if you would supply us with a list of these specialists and a summary of the cases they have made. We are certain that we have answered all the questions in this complex matter – or we would not have bothered you with our request – and believe that you are duty bound to consider our responses to their arguments.

You apologise for not responding earlier to our letter. This delay was understandable because the issue we've raised is momentous and requires careful consideration. We anticipate, however, a rapid response to our request for clarification because we are only asking you to make transparent deliberations that have already taken place.

PS. We trust that your reply to only one correspondent was an oversight and not a slight against a scholar who has contributed so greatly to Duchamp research in recent years and whose work has been represented in your library since 2009.

**February 16th, 2015**

**Dear Julian and Mr Thompson,**

Thank you for your response to my initial reply to your suggestion that we should reattribute Duchamp's *Fountain*. I think it may be useful to return to first principles. It seems clear that there is a contradiction between the evidence of the letter that Duchamp sent to his sister on 11 April 1917, and the subsequent attribution of *Fountain* to him. As we all know, scholarship is littered with such contradictions that prove to be fascinating to unravel in the light of the available evidence, and it is often the case that quite different conclusions can be reached, especially if that evidence is patchy.

As we all recognise, the evidence has been sifted a number of times since the letter was published by Francis Nauman (sic) in 1982. William Camfield's study of the specific work suggested, on the basis of the submission address, that Louise Norton might have been involved, while Irene Gammel, in her 2002 monograph on Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, ultimately remained circumspect about the Baroness's involvement. She acknowledged that 'while final evidence is missing, a great deal of circumstantial evidence suggests that if a female friend was involved in the conception of *Fountain*, the Baroness was probably that friend.' Given Gammel's thorough research in these matters, her circumspection still seems appropriate. The additional proposition, formulated in Glyn Thompson's thesis of 2008, of the linguistic associations of 'R. Mutt' and the circumstances of the American entry into the war against Germany, enlarges on the circumstantial evidence. They are intriguing but speculative and, though forcefully argued, do not appear conclusive.

Notable in the balance, but not directly addressed, should be the photograph (attributed to Roche and dateable to the months after the Independents) of the urinal suspended in Duchamp's studio, Steiglitz's (sic) mention of the work around the time he also photographed it, as well as the absence of any archival evidence from von Freytag-Loringhoven. The photograph is discussed in the thesis though von Freytag-Loringhoven's response, if any, to the work's presence in Duchamp's studio among his other readymades is not known. At around this time Steiglitz (sic) mentioned to O'Keeffe that the piece was submitted by 'a young woman (probably at Duchamp's instigation)'. The gender of the person submitting the work can reasonably be taken to have been intended (whatever the outcome) to heighten the anticipated scandal: a young woman's engagement with a urinal being less utilitarian than a man's.

The absence of any claim by von Freytag-Loringhoven in the





her correspondence, held in a number of different archives, does not seem to be answered completely by the implication that Duchamp had somehow been able to edit her papers after her death. Again, it would seem likely that she would have laid claim to the work in her correspondence with the editors of *The Little Review* but this does not appear to have been the case. Indeed, in discussing Duchamp's art she specifically associated 'plumbing fixtures' with him, a comment that has particular weight in the circumstances under discussion.

None of this resolves the issue of the apparent contradiction between the mention in the 1917 letter and the attribution of the *Fountain* to Duchamp which, from the evidence of the Roche photograph, would appear to have happened almost immediately after the Independents. Nevertheless, the questions raised here can not simply be swept aside.

Beyond 1917, a contention that the history of conceptual art is undermined by the reattribution of *Fountain* is difficult to sustain. Whatever one's conclusions about such an interesting and neglected figure as von Freytag-Loringhoven, the article in *The Blindman* famously records how 'R. Mutt' took 'an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for the object.' Whoever 'R. Mutt' was, this publicly articulated the premise for conceptual practices. These had already been identified in Duchamp's choosing other readymades, both before and after 1917, but is here made explicit in a way that is unaffected by the authorship of the *Fountain* itself. Whatever the legacy of conceptual art, or assessments of its worth as a practice, the reattribution or not of *Fountain* does not change the fact either of its existence or that one of its roots lay in Duchamp's activities one hundred years ago.

- c Matthew Gale, Head of Displays, Tate Modern  
Helen Beeckmans, Head of Communications  
Jennifer Mundy, Head of Collection Research  
Achim Borchardt-Hume, Head of Exhibitions, Tate Modern

ensuing months and years also seems very notable, especially as her exposure in *The Little Review* soon after the Independents was considerable and this would have been her moment to capitalise upon what notoriety might have been gained there. Furthermore, the absence in the literature on von Freytag-Loringhoven of any mention in

March 12th, 2015

Dear Nick,

Thank you for your reply to our second letter of 20th January. We were merely asking you to be transparent about your reasoning, but you have given us several new and different explanations, which are even more deeply flawed and contradictory than your first response. But at least you have now admitted, for the first time since it was discovered in 1982, that Duchamp's letter of 1917, stating that a woman submitted the urinal to the Independents exhibition, contradicts his later assertions on which your policies and public information have been and still are founded.

We enclose our detailed critique of your second case for sustaining Duchamp's later fiction, enumerating the myriad mistaken assumptions and misinformation on which it is based, but, for your convenience, we include here a summary of our main points, in the

**And for the same reason, if you do re-label the urinal, you also have to resign as Director of Tate. This isn't a marginal error on your part but the central pillar on which your whole curatorial and acquisition policy is founded. The forensic evidence for this reattribution was known before your appointment and all the research confirming it has been undertaken during your exceptionally extended term of office, and yet Tate has turned a blind eye to all these facts, until our repeated prompting. Under your leadership, Tate has been negligent of scholarship, deceived the public about the history and meaning of conceptual art, invested millions of pounds of public money on useless objects that are not art and, by acquiring a copy of the urinal in 1999, spent \$500,000 on a fake.**

order in which these issues are dealt with in your letter.

Having just read Duchamp's letter, Francis Naumann's elaborate conjecture in 1982 reflects his own position at that time, not Duchamp's in 1917 (**Note 1**). Louise Norton's involvement in the submission of the urinal was not a possibility, as you maintain, but, crucially, a fact (**Note 2**). Stieglitz's letter to O'Keefe in 1917 doesn't contradict but confirms the substantive contents of Duchamp's letter to his sister written thirteen days before (**Note 3**).

The circumstantial nature of the evidence that Irene Gammel examines applies equally to all claims that Duchamp submitted the urinal. You are wrong to assert that Gammel was hesitant about attributing the urinal to Elsa. She thought the evidence for this was overwhelming (**Note 4**). The Roche photographs of Duchamp's studio do not prove that this was the same urinal, nor was it Duchamp's intention to exhibit it or any of his 'readymades' as works of art, so they are not relevant to Elsa's urinal which was, as

Duchamp himself stated at the time, submitted to the exhibition as a 'sculpture', which is substantively different (**Note 5**).

Furthermore, the absence of any attempt by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven to 'capitalise' (as you so pejoratively put it) on the urinal reveals an embarrassingly trivialising conception of her remarkable and profound creative personality. The absence of any attempt by Elsa to claim the urinal strengthens rather than diminishes the case that she was indeed its author (**Note 6**). Your omission of any reference to Duchamp's claim to have bought the urinal from J.L. Mott is sensible since this was proved to be a falsehood by Camfield and Varnedoe in 1990, though you continue to maintain this fiction in your public information (**Note 7**).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, we totally disagree with you



that the re-attribution of the urinal to Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven does not fundamentally change the history and significance of Conceptual Art. The Independents Exhibition in 1917 gave painters and sculptors the freedom to choose which works they showed. This was not the same thing at all as giving artists the carte blanche to define what was or was not art. The urinal only became the fountainhead of Conceptual Art through a profound misunderstanding: firstly it was a sculpture and, secondly, it was never exhibited (Note 8). This crucial misinterpretation of history has led Tate to spend millions of pounds of public money acquiring and promoting worthless objects that the public has, rightly, never considered to be art.

We are therefore writing to ask you, once again, to re-attribute your urinal to Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and restore its meaning. Unless you can prove that all the evidence we have presented and examined contains errors or that the arguments constructed from its analysis are unconvincing and that Duchamp was, for some unaccountable and extraordinary reason, lying to his sister in 1917, you have no other honourable course but to re-attribute the urinal because your public has the right to believe what they read on the labels in your museum.

And for the same reason, if you do re-label the urinal, you also have to resign as Director of Tate. This isn't a marginal error on your part but the central pillar on which your whole curatorial and acquisition policy is founded. The forensic evidence for this reattribution was known before your appointment and all the research confirming it has been undertaken during your exceptionally extended term of office, and yet Tate has turned a blind eye to all these facts, until our repeated prompting. Under your leadership, Tate has been negligent of scholarship, deceived the public about the history and meaning of conceptual art, invested millions of pounds of public money on useless objects that are not art and, by acquiring a copy of the urinal in 1999, spent \$500,000 on a fake.

## Detailed critique of Sir Nicholas Serota's letter of February 16th, 2015

### Note 1

The letter to which you refer was that which was first published by Francis Naumann, in *Affectueusement, Marcel: Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti*, The Archives of American Art Journal, Vol. 22, No. 4, in 1982-83. Note 20 of that article makes it clear that by adhering to the orthodox position, Naumann, whilst championing Duchamp's words elsewhere, was as a consequence incapable of committing the heresy of imagining that Duchamp could not have been responsible for the submission of the urinal, for to do so at that stage of his career would have amounted to committing professional suicide. Unaware that Duchamp had given up the production of art in 1912, and seduced by a Dada persona bestowed on him in the 1950s by the Neo-Dadaists, Naumann's conviction prompts him to assert as fact that "Duchamp had originally intended this work to be submitted by a woman", the purpose of which was to "present an open challenge to the very principles of the organisation he had helped to establish" (page 8). No evidence supports these assertions.

In the first case, Naumann was not in a position to know what Duchamp's original intentions were, not least because Duchamp himself confirmed that he harboured none when he wrote to his sister in 1917 that he had not submitted the urinal, which Naumann ignored in the very act of formulating his assertion. And there is no evidence supporting Naumann's second assertion of Duchamp's a priori presumption of hypocrisy in the intentions of the Independents. Indoctrinated by the construction of Duchamp as Dadaist iconoclast,

which had been focussed for a new generation of young American artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg by Harriett and Sidney Janis in 1945, in *View*, Naumann was seduced into sublimating the Independents' rejection of the urinal, which provoked Duchamp's resignation, into an a priori presumption of their hypocrisy. However, since the Independents' show of April 1917 was the first mounted by the Society, this organisation had enjoyed no opportunity to demonstrate any sentiment other than those enshrined in its rules, which Duchamp, as an extremely enthusiastic member, supported wholeheartedly. It had been Duchamp's status, as a living link to the French Independents of thirty years before, upon which the Society had modelled itself, that had authenticated the Independents' adoption of the 'no jury, no prizes' rule. Duchamp's actions speak for themselves – his unquestionable support of the ideals of the Society was demonstrated not only in his heroic hanging of the exhibition of some 2,105 works in three days over the Easter weekend, but also his subsequent resignation on principle when the rules that he espoused were violated by the urinal's rejection.



However, Naumann takes Duchamp's resignation as proof of an assumed intention to expose his friends' presumed hypocrisy through a malicious stratagem. The fact that he gets this causal link in the wrong chronological order does not appear to disturb Naumann's tranquility. But there are no grounds for the presumption of Duchamp's intention: 'hypocrisy' could not have been presumed until manifested in the rejection that, allegedly, for Duchamp, betrayed it. Effect does not come before cause, as Naumann allowed himself to believe. And it is important to note here that Duchamp did not resign until after the single most important individual in Duchamp's life in New York had done so. This was Walter Conrad Arensberg, upon whose largesse Duchamp's comfortable lifestyle depended, in one form or another until Arensberg's death in the 1950s. Naumann's speculation is then no more than a fancy conjured from the fiction that Duchamp had to have been responsible for formulating and executing a malicious trick on hypocritical friends before any manifestation of their assumed mendacity provided him with grounds for suspecting it: where is the record of the Independents' mendacity before the exhibition – in the rules in which one searches for it in vain?

The success of Duchamp's presumed stratagem requires his anticipation of a rump of the Independents' directors being on hand on April 9 to break their rule and judge a submission. But since the judgement of works submitted was against the rules, no such committee was or would be constituted to discharge that function. Since the closing date for submissions had been March 28, no requirement would exist after that date for the formulation of a temporary committee, whose existence was anyway forbidden in the rules. It was pure chance that the individuals named in the accounts examined by Camfield were in attendance at the Grand Central Palace the day the urinal arrived. According to the theoretical grounding of Conceptual Art, which we discuss below, acceptance – and consequent exhibition – of the urinal was essential to the validation of the institutional endorsement of its identity as a readymade work of art. But Duchamp's stratagem, we are told, had been designed to ensure the urinal's rejection, for its acceptance would not have betrayed any hypocrisy. So why did his maecenas Arensberg argue for that acceptance? The answer is that, like Duchamp, the rule that he believed in, and was signed up to, had been broken, as his reported testimony confirms. If the hypocrisy imagined by Naumann's sophistry existed anywhere, it was not so much in the rules that Duchamp and the Independents espoused, as in their breaking of them with their rejection. Duchamp, as the director who had been charged with formulating the rules and hanging the exhibition, knew full well that no works would be exhibited unless the submitting artist had joined the



society and paid their dues, and that the work had been submitted by the March deadline. Mutt's submission failed on all counts.

Naumann's necessary causal link, which runs chronologically contrary to the events his analysis purports to explain, is a tautological self-fulfilling prophecy, much like the syllogistic sleight of hand whereby

a replica of Mutt's urinal of 1950, plus the fifteen others that followed, attributed to Duchamp, received its aesthetic legitimacy from its conflation with Mutt's original, also attributed to Duchamp. But since Duchamp was not the author of Mutt's original, any replica of it must as a consequence seek its aesthetic legitimacy elsewhere. Had the replica of 1950, attributed to Duchamp, not been signed R Mutt, there would not be a problem. But it was. And had this urinal, signed R Mutt, been described as a replica of that which, as Duchamp knew in 1950, had been submitted by one of his female friends, there would not be a problem. But it hadn't. A logical consequence of Naumann's hypothesis is that a greater hypocrisy resided in Duchamp's membership of a society he is required to have despised than the assumption of hypocrisy that Naumann presumes he harboured against that same society. But the evidence confirming Duchamp's sentiments lies in his recorded behaviour, rather than any presumed but unsubstantiated intentions, and contradicts absolutely Naumann's syllogistic wire-drawing.

Naumann's following statement – "It is curious that at this time he does not even acknowledge to his sister that the entry was actually his own" – is predicated on a similar wishful thinking, and this from a scholar who had just enjoyed the unique and extraordinary privilege of reading, perhaps for the first time since Suzanne resealed an envelope in 1917, Duchamp's own words which totally contradicted his interpretation of them. Wishful thinking is defined as the formation of *beliefs* and the making of decisions according to what might be pleasing to imagine, instead of by appealing to *evidence, rationality, or reality*. Naumann's misconceived *reductio ad absurdum* now conjures the self-fulfilling prophesy that "Apparently, Duchamp kept his identity a closely-guarded secret until later in the month", an event which history does not otherwise record, but which for Naumann must have occurred due to lack of evidence that it didn't; for Naumann the proof of his claim apparently lies in the publication of *Blind Man 2*, but this neither serves as nor contains evidence that Duchamp was responsible for the submission of Mutt's urinal. So, since Naumann prefaces his speculation with an adverb expressing, at best, uncertainty, we are then at liberty to retort, with equal certainty, 'apparently not'.

We would point out that Naumann's assertion that "Apparently, Duchamp kept his identity a closely-guarded secret until later in the month", contradicts the earlier assertion that Duchamp's alleged submission presented "an open challenge to the very principles of the organisation he had helped to establish". (The Editorial of *Blind Man 2* is of course attributed there not to Duchamp but to P. B. T., which stand for Henri-Pierre Roché, Beatrice Wood and Totor, Roché's sobriquet for Duchamp, constructing him as an epigone of Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, when he wasn't calling him Victor). In fact, as the sources examined by Camfield prove, no one suspected or accused Duchamp of being responsible for an act that according to himself he neither admitted nor claimed or denied responsibility for. Whilst absence of evidence isn't evidence of absence, neither is it proof of presence. No such admission by Duchamp was forthcoming later in the month, simply because Duchamp had no secret to closely guard.

Naumann's inability to accept Duchamp's testimony perfectly encapsulates the contradiction you cite, since this is predicated on a retrospective deduction conveniently, but falsely, induced to possess the status of a priori datum: Naumann's conditioning insisted on his adherence to the default position that Duchamp was the author of Mutt's gesture which for him then proved that Duchamp, on this sole

occasion, must have been lying to his sister. The veracity of no other statement by Duchamp to his sister has been called into question – save this one.

## Note 2

William Camfield notes that the submission address of the urinal was deduced from the telephone number – of Louis Norton – cited in a letter sent by Charles Demuth to Henry McBride in the first week after the opening of the Independents. But confirmation of this was not possible until after 1973 (see below). Here Demuth identifies the submitting artist as "one of our friends", a description that could of course cover a multitude of sinners. In this letter Demuth advises McBride that if he wants further information he can contact Marcel Duchamp on 4225 Columbus, Arensberg's phone number at the address where Duchamp was residing, or Richard Mutt at 9225 Schuyler, which was Louise Norton's phone number. It is of course a touch pedestrian to point out that these are not one and the same, and if Duchamp had been the *éminence grise* behind Mutt, why would Demuth imagine that McBride might have need of Louise Norton's phone number? The Demuth letter was donated to Yale University Library, as part of the Henry McBride papers, in 1973, which means that its contents were not known until five years after Duchamp's death. Therefore, they could make no contribution to the fabrication of the already securely embedded orthodox account until that date: not that they did thereafter.

The illegibility of the label appearing in the Stieglitz photograph printed in *Blind Man 2* was not resolved until 1989, when the submission address was confirmed as being Louise Norton's: as Camfield remarks in note no. 16 of *Duchamp's Fountain: Aesthetic Object, Icon or Anti-Art* (1991) the full-size contact print of the photograph was discovered by Ecke Bonk:

**An original print of Alfred Stieglitz's photograph was discovered by Ecke Bonk and reproduced in his *Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy* (New York. Rizzoli, 1989). 205.**

The conclusions to be drawn from this are that the urinal had not been submitted bearing the title *Fountain*, that the attached label had, however, borne the name Richard, which does not appear on the urinal itself, and that the urinal was despatched to the Grand Central Palace from Louise Norton's address.

Arensberg's address, where Duchamp was lodging, does not appear against his name in the Independent's catalogue because, although a director of the society and guarantor of the exhibition, Arensberg was not a participating member. This of course disqualified him from judging works of art – because he wasn't an artist, to whom Independents like himself had delegated the choice of art, a principle upon which Arensberg had predicated his consequently disqualified defence of the urinal. The hypnotic attraction of Naumann's Pygmalion complex would argue at this point that the main target in Duchamp's sights was therefore the doubly hypocritical Arensberg himself, but that puts the forensic cat among Naumann's hermeneutic pigeons. But fortunately for both, since Duchamp had not submitted the urinal, he cannot be accused of accusing his maecenas of hypocrisy, which he wasn't.

The title *Fountain* would be added during the photo-session at 291, since it first appears in public accompanying the photograph in *Blind Man 2*. (For which see the second edition of *Jemandem ein R Mutt's Zeugnis Ausstellen, Monsieur Goldfinch*, Glyn Thompson, Wild Pansy Press, 2015. You will be aware that a copy of the first edition is held in the Tate Modern library). Further, you fail to note that the handwriting on the label attached to the urinal in Stieglitz' photograph is not that of Duchamp. Neither is the printing on the urinal itself. Since this evidence did not come to light until 1989, once again the information

it contained also played no part in the construction, or any subsequent revision, of the orthodox master narrative to which Naumann, and yourself, continue to adhere.

### Note 3

The Stieglitz letter to O’Keeffe of 23 April 1917 confirms the substantive contents of Duchamp’s letter to his sister of twelve days before. We need look no further than Duchamp for the source of Stieglitz’ observations, since they had met in between, on the thirteenth, on the occasion of the photographing of the urinal. It is of course significant that the contents of Stieglitz’s letter also did not see the light of scholarly day until, by second-hand report, in 1953, but not in the original wording until 2006. The implications for our argument are too obvious to require repetition here, but it is a matter to which we shall periodically return, since it cuts to the heart of the ‘contradiction’.

In note 24 of his paper of 1991, Camfield appears to urge caution over an over-enthusiastic embrace of the reliability of Beatrice Wood’s testimony apropos the history of the urinal, a strategy confirmed to Glyn Thompson by the doyen of American philologist’s, and close friend of Wood in the last twenty years of her life, the eminent John Algeo.

Camfield’s note reads as follows:

**Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself*, 20-30. Beatrice Wood is the only eyewitness to this event who has published an informative account of the argument between Bellows and Arensberg. She has, in fact, contributed several accounts, published and un-published, which vary in some details but remain consistent in the essentials. The earliest version known to this author appears in Wood’s letter to Louise Arensberg on 10 August 1949 in the Beatrice Wood Papers. Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., roll no. 1236, frames 989-90. A similar version, transformed into a dialogue between Bellows and Arensberg, was sent to this author in June 1962. Another version, substituting Rockwell Kent for George Bellows was published by Francis Naumann. “I Shock Myself: Excerpts from the Autobiography of Beatrice Wood,” *Arts* 51 (May 1977), 134-39.**

Duchamp’s letter of 11 April 1917 opens with the rhetorical observation that he was recounting an event that was nothing to write home about – “*impossible d’écrire*”: this private letter from America was not an artistic manifesto. And as we have known since 2006, Duchamp’s matter of fact observation to his sister that he was not responsible for submitting the urinal (which could not have been a readymade), was confirmed in another letter whose contents were also denied critical appreciation in the period in which Duchamp’s aesthetic identity was being manufactured, since its existence also remained unsuspected until its appearance, five years after the epiphany of Duchamp’s letter, in 1987, at Nova Scotia College of Art. This is the Stieglitz letter discussed here. Having had no discernable impact on the stately progress of the Duchamp master narrative since its discovery, the letter appears to have first received attention from Camfield in time for the publication in 1991 of the paper he presented at Nova Scotia College of Art in 1987:

**Stieglitz himself corroborated the reference to a Buddha figure in a contemporary letter in which he remarked that *Fountain* had fine lines, that he had photographed it in front of a Marsden Hartley painting, and that his photograph suggested a Buddha form. (39)**

**Note 39. Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O’Keeffe, Archives of Georgia O’Keeffe, The Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Restrictions on these archives, recently placed at Yale, preclude access to this letter.**

Owing, however, to the forthcoming publication of this letter in the Selected Correspondence of Georgia O’Keeffe, Sarah Greenough and Juan Hamilton graciously informed me of some of its contents and authorised a brief paraphrase. I am grateful to be able to indicate some of its points in this important document. Stieglitz was also led to think that the urinal had been submitted by a young woman, probably at the instigation of Duchamp.



The letter from Alfred Stieglitz to Georgia O’Keeffe, dated 23 April 1917, is included in the papers that O’Keeffe donated to Yale University Library. The batch that contained it was not transferred until 1953, its contents not made available to general scholarship until 2006. Until then, this private letter had remained in its recipient’s possession. The letter is the third of two other authoritative items of evidence, of who actually did what in 1917, composed at the time. That it corroborates Duchamp’s observation to his sister that he had not been responsible for the submission of the urinal, but that, rather, a female friend had, confirms that authority. Further, Stieglitz’ failure, cited by Camfield, to identify what he describes as a “young lady” (who he quite understandably assumed might be Beatrice Wood: Duchamp described a “female friend” to Suzanne), his lack of certainty over Duchamp’s assumed role in the affair, and Camfield’s intimation that Stieglitz’s understanding was received second or third hand, do not appear to recommend Stieglitz as a witness privy to the actual events of 9 April 1917 that he describes; Stieglitz’s letter even reports that the urinal had arrived with a pedestal, an observation suggesting more a fertility of imagination than forensic rectitude.

The introduction to the Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archive at the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library states the following:

**After Alfred Stieglitz’s death in 1946, Georgia O’Keeffe sought to collect in New York all of his personal and professional correspondence and papers, clipping files, scrapbooks, photographs, publications, exhibition-related material, and other documentary evidence of his life. In 1948, her friend Carl Van Vechten suggested to O’Keeffe that she place the Stieglitz archive at the Yale University Library, where it would join other important Modernist writers’ and artists’ papers in the Yale Collection of American Literature. O’Keeffe visited New Haven in April 1949 and subsequently made arrangements to give the collection, with the intention that her papers would follow after her death. The Alfred Stieglitz Papers were transferred to Yale between 1949 and 1953, and were supplemented through gifts and purchases from various parties from 1953 to 1980. O’Keeffe’s Papers were a bequest from the Georgia O’Keeffe Foundation in 1992, following several earlier gifts of material directly from O’Keeffe. The Stieglitz Family Papers were the gift of Flora Stieglitz Strauss and Sue Davidson Lowe.**

And in *Georgia O’Keeffe, A Private Friendship, Part II, Walking the Albiqui and Ghost Ranch Land* (Sunstone Press, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2009). Nancy Hopkins Reilly puts some human flesh on the bones of the previous utilitarian account:

**In cataloguing the material, which consisted of the items Stieglitz had kept for more than eight decades of his life, Georgia employed [Dorothy] Norman through 1949 and Bry from 1949 until completion. The material donated to YCAL eventually numbered two hundred and fifty six**





boxes and one hundred sixty eight linear feet of correspondence to and from Stieglitz from 1881-1946. Its arrival at Yale was in shipments between 1949 and 1953 from Bry, who worked with Georgia in New York and Mexico. Certain portions of the archive containing Stieglitz's personal letters remained sealed for a period of time.

The last remaining section, opened in March 2006, contained the massive collection of correspondence between Stieglitz and Georgia – an all-encompassing history of their relationship. [note 4] (223)

Reilly notes that when O'Keeffe discovered that Bry had read the correspondence, she was livid.

Francis Naumann clearly benefitted from knowledge of the precise wording of the letter as a result of its final release in 2006. In his (revised) essay titled *Fountain*, published as chapter seven in *The Recurrent Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (2012), Naumann quotes from the letter directly:

**When Stieglitz took his photograph of Fountain, there can be no question that he did not know that Duchamp was its author, although he did realize that the artist was behind the whole episode. On April 23, 1917 (about a week after he had taken the picture), Stieglitz wrote to Georgia O'Keeffe saying "a young Woman (probably at Duchamp's instigation) sent a large porcelain Urinal on a pedestal to the Independent[s]." He then goes on to describe the photograph he had taken: "The 'Urinal' photograph is really quite a wonder – Everyone who has seen it thinks it beautiful – And it's true – it is. You'd like it. It has an oriental look about it – a cross between a Buddha and a Veiled Woman – And the Hartley background is great."**

We should note that Naumann's confident assertion that Duchamp was the author, that Stieglitz was unaware of this, and that Duchamp was behind the episode enjoys no authority save that of the wreckage of the master narrative to which Naumann continued to cling, as would Calvin Tomkins in 2014. For when Naumann published the first account of Duchamp's letters in 1982 he had already studiously declined to embrace the implications of the knotty little problem raised by Duchamp's admission that he was not the author of a urinal which had in fact been submitted by his female friend.

So a fully comprehensive understanding of the significance of Duchamp's testimony to his sister depended on the availability of the contents of the letter he wrote to her in April 1917. But it depended on more than that, on the inscription on the label which can be read on a full-size print of Stieglitz' photograph of the urinal which did not become available until 1989. The plate from which this photograph was printed has never turned up. But it was only in 1989, seven years before Tomkin's biography of Duchamp was first published, that the details written on the label could be divined and their full import acknowledged, since the writing to be seen in the copy of the photograph appearing in *Blind Man 2*, the only forensically admissible evidence up to that date, was barely legible. Camfield's note 21 informs us that a heavily cropped version of the same photograph, suspiciously missing the bottom part bearing the image of the label, had turned up in the Arensberg Collection in 1950, on the occasion of its transfer to the Philadelphia Museum.

We would note here in passing that, as we have demonstrated elsewhere, the title *Fountain* emerged from Stieglitz's photographing the urinal before Marsden Hartley's painting *Warriors*, for which see *Jemandem ein R Mutt Zeugnis Austellen, Monsieur Goldfinch: The Madonna of the Goldfinch* (First edition 2008, second edition 2015).

## Note 4

The circumstantial status of the evidence that Gammel examines that you now cite applies equally to evidence supporting any claim for the attribution of Mutt's gesture to Duchamp, which we have elsewhere demonstrated can equally be brought to bear on the furtherance of Elsa's claim. The fact is that the letter written by Duchamp himself, in his own hand, on 11 April 1917, to his sister Suzanne, was one of only three contemporary items of primary evidence qualifying as forensically admissible to any consideration of any claim to authorship of the urinal, and it proves unequivocally that it was not he but a female friend who was the author of a urinal – unless of course one is prepared to call Duchamp a liar, an accusation requiring evidence which has yet to emerge. The contents of none of these letters informed either the construction, or any subsequent revision, of the orthodox account.

We would further suggest that your statement that Irene Gammel "ultimately remained circumspect about the Baroness's involvement" does not represent the much stronger position that Gammel actually took, but clearly her reticence to reattribute the urinal solely to Elsa was informed by the recognition that to do so would be to commit professional suicide in the field of art history, as Camfield was made to appreciate at the Nova Scotia College of Art colloquium of 1987, and upon which Naumann had clearly ruminated in 1982. Of course Gammel was not aware of our linguistic analysis, to which you refer elsewhere.

## Note 5

As we know, Roché's photographs of Duchamp's 33 West 67th Street studio, showing a urinal suspended from the ceiling, were taken long after April 1917, and are no more proof that the urinal hanging there was the same as that submitted to the Independents as they are proof of the submission of the snow shovel, bicycle wheel, trestles, hat racks, steamer chair, lighting fixtures, planks of wood, chests of drawers and cushions in the same room to the same exhibition, which of course did not occur: Duchamp didn't exhibit his readymades in art exhibitions or galleries, or as art, or anything else, anywhere else. (As Hector Obalk demonstrated in 2000, the exhibition at the Montross Gallery between the 3rd and 29th of April, 1916, doesn't count). That replicas of the readymades began to be exhibited from 1936 is not the same thing at all.

The date of these photographs was established in the following evidence. Duchamp wrote to Jean Crotti in 1918, slightly before he embarked for Buenos Aires, describing *Sculpture for Travelling* that he had then recently completed for Katherine Drier. This dates the Roché photographs of the shadows of the readymades to the summer of 1918, by which date *Tu m'* had also been completed for the same patron. It is clear from these examples that the shadow of the corkscrew in one of the photographs registers as a prominent motif in the painting completed at the same time, a coincidence not normally noted in Duchamp criticism. As you will be aware, it has proved impossible to identify the precise model of the urinal hanging from Duchamp's ceiling, or its source, or to relate this item to the urinal which Stieglitz photographed on 13 April 1917. Not only can it not be assumed that they are one and the same item, but the existence of a urinal in Duchamp's studio after in 1918 is not proof that he submitted one to the Independents before 9 April 1917, since there is no necessary connection that can be assumed between the two – except of course for enthusiasts for the products of Naumann's Pygmalion complex: Hume's notion of causation argues that Duchamp's suspension of a urinal from his ceiling in 1918 does not require him to have submitted one to the Independents the previous year.

Unfortunately your statement that "the attribution of the *Fountain* to Duchamp which, from the evidence of the Roché photograph, would appear to have happened almost immediately after the Independents"



is misconstrued: of course, as you will know, there was not one photograph, but a number. There is no evidence that the *Fountain* was attributed to Duchamp at this time, let alone “soon after” (depending on what you mean) the Independents: since *Blind Man 2* neither represents nor contains such evidence, we would appreciate your identification of alternative sources that might support your proposition. The dating of Roché’s photographs, which we discussed on page 3, is confirmed by the fact that they are contemporary with those of the shadows of the Readymades appearing in the 1977 Paris retrospective exhibition catalogue (Centre Pompidou catalogue, 1977, items 115 and 116), and dated 1918. As you will be aware, the *Ephemerides* (Duchamp, M and Hulton, P (ed), *Marcel Duchamp and Ephemerides on or about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy*, 1887-1966, Thames and Hudson, London, 1993.) dates Roché’s photo-session at Monday 3 June 1918.

### Note 6

You observe that “von Freytag-Loringhoven’s response, if any, to the work’s presence amongst his other readymades is not known”: we assume that the ‘work’ to which you refer is either the urinal submitted to the Independents or that hanging in Duchamp’s studio in 1918. This observation is of course predicated on the assumption that von Freytag-Loringhoven had been in a position to observe this latter phenomenon. But by the time von Freytag-Loringhoven, having just returned from her Philadelphia sojourn of some eleven months, had taken up residence in an unheated loft on 14th Street, in January 1918, Duchamp had since October 1916 been ensconced in the studio adjoining the Arensberg apartment on 67th Street, access to which was restricted to his closest associates, a privilege that Elsa did not automatically enjoy. By the time she returned to New York in January 1918, the Richard Mutt ‘affair’ was long forgotten. In fact, as you will be aware, the only public comment on *The Richard Mutt Case* published in the eighteen years between 5 May 1917 and the publication of Andre Breton’s *Phare de la Mariée* essay in *Le Minotaure* in 1935-36 occurs in Apollinaire’s article *Le cas de Richard Mutt* in the *Mercure de France* in the summer of 1918, fifteen war-torn months after the Independents’ exhibition had closed.

Gammel has documented Elsa’s congenital habit of quickly moving on to the next ephemeral project, as her casual abandonment of *God* in Philadelphia demonstrates. Since Gammel has demonstrated comprehensively the contingent ephemeral nature of Elsa’s productions, there is no reason to believe that she gave the urinal launched at the Independents any more of a second thought than she gave anything else she made. For the proposition, that von Freytag-Loringhoven would have enjoyed easy access to Duchamp’s studio and thereby be in a position to reflect on the presence of a urinal amongst Duchamp’s readymades, to be potentially fruitful requires a form of documentation the absence of which renders it pure speculation.

In the period in question, Elsa was increasingly preoccupied with milieu around *The Little Review*, not the Arensberg salon. But quite why she might have been expected to “lay claim to her work in correspondence with Heap and Anderson” is not immediately apparent to us, since there is only one letter in the Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Papers in the archives of The University of Maryland to either Anderson or Heap, and it does not discuss any works of art. Of course, since Elsa was out of New York between February 1917 and January 1918, she cannot have been closely involved with *The Little Review* “soon after the Independents”. And during the period between January 1918 and Duchamp’s translocation to Buenos Aires, Gammel’s account suggests that Elsa’s output was largely manifested in poetry, which appeared increasingly in the pioneering avant-garde ‘Little’ from the summer of 1918 onwards. Thus we should not expect to find much correspondence between Elsa and Heap or Anderson before the spring of 1918, as we don’t. Of course, the lack of observations on Duchamp’s art in Elsa’s literary output are no more conspicuous than her lack of observations on the work of any number

of other artists. And of course in a press interview of late 1915, Duchamp himself had cited American plumbing and civil engineering as the sole art the New World had created, but we find no representations of them in his output, so his observation does not prove that eighteen months later he would submit a urinal to the Independents.



The reference to Duchamp taking the opportunity to ‘edit’ Elsa’s papers is to be found in Gammel, who notes that in 1957 Djuna Barnes asked Duchamp to prepare the remnants of Elsa’s literary estate, of which she was executor, for submission to an American University archive, so if there had been any evidence that she had submitted the urinal, he might have removed it.

### Note 7

We note your sensible omission from the analysis of any citation of Duchamp’s alleged apocryphal visit to J L Mott. For clarification of our understanding of the bearing of this subject on the matter in hand, we suggest that you consult Thompson’s *Postscript to ‘Jemandem ein R Mutt’s zeugnis ausstellen, Monsieur Goldfinch’: Richard Armutt’s rijcke-armoeda?* posted for your convenience, in anticipation of this correspondence, on Academia.edu. There you will also discover the rationale behind Duchamp’s linking of a urinal, a moneybags and poverty, and why Jeff didn’t make it, in a parabolic rigmarole of 1964, and not before.

### Note 8

Your statement that “the apparent contradiction between the mention in the 1917 letter and the attribution of the *Fountain* to Duchamp [...] would appear to have happened almost immediately after the Independents” appears to be predicated on two fallacies: one, that the contents of Duchamp’s letter to Suzanne of April 1917 were known at the that time, which they weren’t – that had to wait until 1982; and two, the attribution of *Fountain* to Duchamp occurred soon after the Independents, which it didn’t: that had to wait until 1935. The appending of the title *Fountain* to the urinal was first marked in public with the publication of *Blind Man 2*, on 5 May 1917: we know from Stieglitz’s full-size contact print that the urinal did not arrive at the Grand Central Palace bearing the title *Fountain*. Thus it transpires that your observation that “Whoever R Mutt was, this publicity articulated the premise for conceptual practices” displays a perfect example of the contradiction at the heart of the orthodox narrative. However, in order to accurately represent the facts, it should read as follows: “Whoever R Mutt was, the editorial of *Blind Man 2* has been interpreted as articulating the premise for conceptual practices”.

En passant, it is strange how little attention is paid by partisans of the orthodoxy to the fact that Conceptual Art did not appear until approximately fifty years after 1917. It is also strange that Arensberg, whose defence of the urinal on 9 April 1917 is generally assumed to be the source of this “premise”, and under whose aegis the iconic readymades were conceived and designated, disposed of all but one of them, including what we have been encouraged to believe he recognised as the most important work of art of the twentieth century – a urinal. But this is only strange for anyone who has not read Duchamp’s letter to Suzanne of 15 January 1916, or Camfield’s papers on the subject.

Thompson has examined this subject in some detail in the paper titled *How we received the ‘readymade’: Andre Breton’s ready-made ready made and Marcel Duchamp’s Readymade*. This was posted some time ago on Academia.edu, along with a number of other papers relevant to our discussion, in anticipation of our current correspondence. The consequence of the assumption that the editorial



of *Blind Man 2* is understood to articulate “the premise for conceptual practices” is perhaps best illustrated by Peter Burger’s construction published in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Suhrkamp, 1974, Page 51. (And see also *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. Jonathon Vickery, Diarmuid Costello, Berg, 2007.)

**When Duchamp signs mass-produced objects ... and sends them to art exhibits, he negates the category of individual production. The signature is inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. Duchamp’s provocation through the ready-mades not only unmasked the art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work. It radically questions the very principle of art and bourgeois society, according to which the individual is considered the creator of a work of art. By inserting the mass-produced into the art context, a gesture legitimated to the signature of the author, Duchamp negates the category of individual creation, undermining the bourgeois conception of genius.**

Unfortunately, the fact that Duchamp did not send his signed mass-produced objects to ‘art exhibits’ completely destroys Burger’s argument: none of the iconic readymades appearing in Roché’s photographs were ever exhibited, meaning that Duchamp did not negate the category of individual production, that the signature was not inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product because all claims to individual creativity were to be mocked, or that Duchamp’s provocation through the ready-mades unmasked the art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work, or that the readymade radically questioned the very principle of art and bourgeois society, according to which the individual is considered the creator of a work of art, or that by inserting the mass-produced into the art context, a gesture legitimated to the signature of the author. And, therefore, Duchamp did not negate the category of individual creation, or undermine the bourgeois conception of genius, for the simple reason that he was not, according to himself, the author of Mutt’s gesture, and it cannot follow that whoever else submitted the urinal did so for the purposes assumed by Burger, et al. This means that all Burger’s claims for the significance of the readymade are invalid.

The “publicity” that you identify as articulating the “premise for conceptual practices”, presumably, the editorial of *Blind Man 2: The Richard Mutt Case*, reads as follows:

**Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. HE CHOSE IT. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that subject.**

We note that this statement, by the editors, and not attributed by them to Arensberg, does not contain the word ‘ready-made’. Nonetheless, it advances two other concepts underpinning the “premise for conceptual practices” which manifest themselves in the theoretical grounding of Conceptual Art, from the 1960s – the choice of the artist in the making of art, and the belief that a change of context creates a new thought for an object that as a consequence becomes art. These principles are commonly believed to have been enshrined in the rule of the Independents. As we shall see, they were not. They appear later, in the editorial of *Blind Man 2*.

The centrality of the artist’s choice to the post-war construction of Conceptual Art is popularly believed to have been endorsed by the rules of the Society of Independent Artists. In his defence of the urinal on 9 April 1917, recorded by Beatrice Wood, Arensberg invokes the

principle allegedly espoused by the Independents:

**“This is ... what the whole exhibit is about, an opportunity to allow the artist to send in anything he chooses, for the artist to decide what is art, not someone else”.**

On 5 May 1917 an epitome of that assertion appeared in the editorial of *Blind Man 2*. But since neither Roché nor Duchamp were present when the merits of the urinal were debated, Wood was the only one of the three editors of *Blind Man 2* qualified to compose the editorial.

In fact, in recommending that objects from the real world could be appreciated as works of art, Arensberg was doing little more for domestic artefacts than Robert Coady had been doing for American machinery, plumbing and bridges between the pages of his magazine *The Soil* since the previous December, the difference between their aesthetics being that Coady celebrated a uniquely American art exhibited in the fabric of the modern American city. The fact that in July 1917 Coady failed to mention the urinal in his criticism of the Independents’ show, in his article “The Indeps” (*The Soil* 1, 5: 202–205), would appear to confirm that by then the Richard Mutt affair, such as it had been, was well and truly dead.

In actual fact, Arensberg was not quoting the Independents directly, since the words ‘choice’, ‘chose’ and ‘decide’ are entirely absent from what would today be called the ‘mission statement’ constituting the Foreword of the catalogue. What it does say is that “whatever they send will be hung”, and that the rules permit “a member to exhibit whatever he wishes on the payment of nominal dues”. The submitting artist had to be a member in order to have anything exhibited. Since Mutt had not paid his dues he was not a member and so not permitted to exhibit anything, a point ignored by both Arensberg and partisans of the orthodox account. Perhaps the entry label attached to the urinal had persuaded Arensberg that Mutt’s entry was legitimate.

What the Foreword does make clear is that what had been delegated to the artist was not the definition of art but the choice of which examples of their own work they might wish to submit. So since Arensberg’s observation, quoted above, was a misrepresentation of the rule of the Society of Independent Artists, it cannot be invoked as endorsing a construction of Conceptual Art whose legitimacy is predicated on the choice of the artist. The institutional endorsement for that must be sought elsewhere, and it cannot be found in the rejection of the urinal by those same Independents, for the offending item was never exhibited. Had they accepted, all could be well. But they didn’t.

The following quotations from the Foreword clarify the conception of the artist underpinning the Independents’ understanding and intentions: “the conditions of the art world”, “established art societies”, “the ranks of artists who are already more or less known”, “the various directions American art is taking” and “whatever artists of all schools send in will be hung”. The Independents’ use of the verb to hang seems significant: sculptures were not ‘hung’, then or now. Readymades are of course a different proposition: but they weren’t art. And of course, even if we give Arensberg the benefit of the doubt that he had really believed that his interpretation of the rule was acceptable, it was not Duchamp who had submitted the offending article to which he applied it.

An augmentation and clarification of the Independents’ understanding is to be found in *Blind Man 1*, which was produced by Duchamp and his friends, including Henri-Pierre Roché, the editor, who as co-editor of the second and last issue facilitated the transmission of the values espoused in the first issue to the second. *Blind Man 1*, issued on 10 April 1917 which was, like the second issue, funded by Arensberg, who later expressed disappointment at the low circulation of the two issues. Published on the day of the opening of the exhibition, one day after the urinal was rejected, the introduction celebrates the 1884 Paris Independents who were cited as exemplar in the Foreword of the exhibition catalogue. Thus it is not surprising to

find a direct quotation from the Foreword of the exhibition catalogue, reiterating the Society's fundamental principles, in the introductory section of *Blind Man 1*. This also is hardly surprising since the producers of *Blind Man 1* and *Blind Man 2* were either members who submitted works, like Francis Picabia, Charles Demuth, Mina Loy and Wood (et al), or their close associates, like Duchamp, also a member, and Roché, who was not.

Together the exhibition catalogue and *Blind Man 1* define clearly what kind of art the Independents expected to be submitted. This was painting, and the statistics concerning the final entries confirmed their assumptions. Only five sculptures appeared in the show of 2,105 exhibits, submitted by 1,354 members, which didn't include Mutt or Elsa. These were by Gertrude Boyle (no. 157, *Subconscious self*, and no. 158, *Wm. Keith, painter*), Raymond Duchamp-Villon (no. 108, *Torse*, and no. 109, *Architectural*) and Hans Kownatski (no. 71, *Mediation*). The rest were paintings: it was paintings that had been invited, and 2,100 paintings, including 94 latecomers appearing in the Supplementary List, were what they got.

The following selections from *Blind Man 1* confirm what the society had anticipated. No references to any other kind of art, or type of exhibit, have been omitted:

- IV. New York will rush to see what its children are **painting**.
- VI. (Referencing the works of Henri Rousseau) "As a boy I could not take my eyes away from his 'ridiculous' **pictures**."
- VII. The French Independents have made of Paris the world market for modern **paintings**.
- IX. Many of New York's **picture dealers** gave applause to the Indeps.
- X. The Blind Man will be the link between the **pictures** and the public – and even between the **painters** themselves.
- XII. He (the Blind Man) will give the chance to leaders of any 'school' to 'explain'.
- XIII. (What will be) the highest price for a single **picture**: the numbers of **pictures** sold?
- XV. To learn to "see" the new **painting** is easy. In Paris the Blind Man has seen people go to **exhibitions of advanced art (even cubist or futurist)**...
- XVI. Among the "**new**" **artists** (as well as among the "old") there are a great many who might as well never have **Painted** at all".
- XVII. The Blind Man knows an **artist** who made a good income **painting pictures** in the "old" ways [...] "**Cubism**", said he, "is at least an open door in the black wall of academicism".
- XVIII. A **painter** shows you a **picture** ... even if a **painter** works passionately ... I am making **experiments** which may, perhaps bring nothing for many years.
- XIX. There are fine collections in New York, there are people who understand **modern and ancient painting** ...

This picture is reinforced in Beatrice Wood's statement, *Why I Come to the Independents*, on page six: Wood observes "I am hoping to see many *portraits* of beautiful young girls ... many gorgeous *pictures* ... someone enraptured before a certain soft *bronze* ... the *painter* for me is the man who says "Damn" but goes ahead. Wood was also clearly the author of the next entry titled *The Work of a Picture Hanger*: she followed this with *The Dream of a Picture Hanger*, in which the somnambulant authoress, walking in the Independents and looking at the *pictures*, jumped into one, and saw herself portrayed as "a piece of soap with nails in my back stuck on a canvas". This evokes one of two works submitted by Wood herself, titled *Un peu d'eau dans un du Savon* (No. 111): the other was *Nuit Blanche* (No. 112). *Un peu d'eau* constituted a *drawing* of a female nude whose modesty had been preserved by a bar of soap strategically attached to the drawing.

Legend has it that Duchamp was responsible for this addition. This would appear to be the stimulus for Stieglitz's speculation that Wood had been the "young lady" who he imagined might have submitted the urinal under Duchamp's presumed guidance. But Stieglitz fails to account for why it would have been sent from Louise Norton's address, which is clearly visible in his photograph. The only genre to which Wood's drawing could subscribe, according to the conventions of the day, is cubist collage, a classification that could not include Elsa's urinal, a free standing object. Free standing sculpture, such as *Torse* by Duchamp's brother, was, however, perfectly acceptable.

Elsa would have been in no position to obtain an entry label to attach to the urinal, not merely because she was in Philadelphia, and stony broke, but also because the submission date had passed some weeks before. But Louise was. No doubt there were unused labels left over still in the possession of the Independent's officers. Maybe Duchamp himself supplied her, since he would have had access to them but, not submitting himself, had no need of any. But Louise didn't have to take the risk of alerting the Independents to the imminent arrival of Elsa's squib: as we have discussed elsewhere, Elsa clearly sought an anonymity that we know both Duchamp himself and Louise honoured to the end of her days, for somewhat different reasons, one suspects.

All members of the Independents were permitted to submit two items, and so were provided with two labels. But not everybody submitted two works; the catalogue tells us that a small percentage submitted only one: Constantin Brancusi and Jacques Villon, for example, and Man Ray and Joseph Stella could have provided her with a spare. But she more probably got one from an even closer, and perhaps less garrulous and more trusted, friend, one who, like Louise, would contribute to the only two issues of *The Blind Man*: whilst Louise wrote the longest essay in *Blind Man 2*, her good friend Mina Loy had contributed to *Blind Man 1*. And Mina too had only submitted one work. This means of course that Elsa did not even have to pay the entrance fee; at least neither her name, or that of Louise, appears in the membership list in the catalogue.

Dreier's review of the show in *American Art News* of 28 April 1917 both extolls the principles of the Independents and confirms the relative triviality of what seven days later would, in *Blind Man 2*, be dubbed the Richard Mutt case, in that she declines to discuss Mutt's submission, or Marcel Duchamp. Her single discussion of works of art, clearly based on the actual events in which the latter did participate, reinforced what we note elsewhere:

**The instant a picture expresses something unusual, it creates a diversity of opinion; especially if the technique which is chosen is original and aside from the usual methods employed. It takes more thought, more adjustment than the average jury can possibly give in time, as they are generally forced to choose from several thousand pictures only a few hundred to hang, and this all within a day or two.**

In his review of the Independents' exhibition, titled 'America's First Art Salon', published in *American Art News*, vol 15, no 27 (April 14, 1917), page 2, James B Townsend also fails to report the rejection of a urinal. Given all that we have been told, this would appear peculiar in the light of the closing statement of his fifth paragraph, entitled 'The Modernists Well Represented', which reads:

**Cheek by jowl with the work of the Academicians and Associates hangs that of Matisse, Picabia, Picasso, Ducamp-Villon [Townsend's misspelling], Signac, and other**







advanced foreigners, and such of their followers and fellows as Stella, Max Weber, Samuel Halpert, Marsden Hartley, Rockwell Kent, John Marin, Alfred Maurer, Walter Pach, Morton L Schamberg, Joan Sloan, Carl Springhorn, Alfred Stieglitz, Clara Tice, Villon, Walkowitz, and the Zorachs – representatives of the various

movements and divisions of the 'Modernists,' the 'New Art,' the 'Cubists,' 'Futurists,' 'Neo-Impressionists,' etc., etc.. But while there is enough and to spare of these latter day manifestations there are few sensational productions, few freakish arrangements, no panels built up with wire and glass, no 'Nudes Descending Staircases.' In short no such array as that of the never-to-be-forgotten 'Armory Show.'

And as in Katherine Dreier's review, in his second paragraph Townsend notes the pictures placed according to alphabetical order without "any reference to harmony of tone or colour or subject – and the sculpture as it were 'thrown in'", without acknowledgment of Duchamp's responsibility for the implementation of what the Independents had considered to be a more democratic hanging scheme. Marcel's suggestion that they just hang them all in alphabetical order of the artists' surnames appears to have been eminently practical.

In considering the above we should bear in mind that the Duchamp who had given up the production of art in 1912 had already been designating everyday objects as readymades, which were not works of art, from 1916. And it would seem reasonable to surmise that if Duchamp had harboured the intentions we have been led to believe he did, in order to guarantee acceptance of the urinal, he might have thought it prudent in order to guarantee success, to rehearse in the pages of *Blind Man 1* the argument subsequently articulated by Arensberg in Wood's report examined by Camfield: and it might have helped to get the damn thing to the Grand Central Palace by the submission date. But of course Duchamp could only rehearse the argument after the urinal had been rejected.

As we know, Breton's definition of the readymade, that privileges the artist's choice and bequeaths it to the post-war conception of conceptual art, was formulated in ignorance of Duchamp's definition, which has no role for it, since his conception of the readymade did not construct it as a work of art. For Duchamp, the choice of the object to be designated a readymade was a matter of aesthetic indifference, placing it beyond the purview of art. That was the point.

It would seem, therefore, that in 1935 Breton did not take into account the contents of the catalogue of the Independent's exhibition or *Blind Man 1*. As Thompson discusses in *How we received the readymade*, at the time of his formulation of his definition of the readymade, first discussed in *The Swanee Review* (vol. XLI, no. 3, July-September 1933), Breton's conception of the surrealist object, into whose typology Breton was to install all of Duchamp's works, conceived by himself as readymades of one sort or another, was unequivocally grounded in the transmutation of pre-existing objects by poetic vision, coincidentally making Duchamp himself Breton's quintessential ready made surrealist object. "Poetic vision" does not appear in Duchamp's conception and definition of the readymade.

It had been Duchamp's proto-Dada credentials that had qualified him for Breton's attempt to recruit him to the Surrealist cause, along with more obvious candidates such as Max Ernst, Giorgio de Chirico and Picasso, and even Paolo Uccello, by virtue of their unwitting manifestation of the surrealist spirit *avant la lettre*. And Breton's valedictory address to the readymade which appeared in 1964, entitled 'Against the Liquidators', perpetuates the concept, introduced in *Phare de la Mariée*, of the defining essence of the work of art known as a readymade as residing essentially in the choice of the artist. Clearly, little had changed since 1922, when Breton's concept of the readymade

first appeared in embryo, without being named as such, in the text titled 'Marcel Duchamp' printed in the fifth issue of *Littérature*:

**But is not the personality of choice, the independence of which Duchamp, for example, by signing a manufactured object was one of the first to proclaim, the most tyrannical of all?**

That the *Blind Man 2* editorial is a not a verbatim reportage of Arensberg's defence of Mutt's urinal, but a précis, is demonstrated by Camfield's account which draws on Beatrice Wood's "later recollections". These appeared in the autobiography *I Shock Myself*, which was not published until 1985, although extracts had already been published by Francis Naumann by 1974. This means that the editors' précis of Arensberg's defence of the 9th could not be interrogated for its own veracity until six years after Duchamp had died in 1968. Wood's retrospective account makes it clear, 68 years after the events that it describes had occurred, that the editors' précis was misleading, and not merely by omission.

What we learn is that instead of articulating an argument for the readymade of popular understanding, it is clear that Arensberg considered the urinal, which neither he nor the editors describe as a readymade, to be a work of art worthy of the same disinterested aesthetic contemplation as, for example, Praxiteles' *Hermes*, rather than the embodiment of the idea that anything can be a work of art: for Arensberg a work of art can be made of anything, which is not the same thing at all. But every time Arensberg appears to evoke Kant's theory of the Beauty of Aesthetic Ideas he defaults for proof into his theory of the Idea of Aesthetic Beauty, an antinomy Kant himself never reconciled.

For Arensberg, Mutt's urinal must be exhibited for a number of reasons: firstly, because an artist had submitted it, and that he had paid his six-dollar fee. Unfortunately Arensberg was wrong, and Mutt should have been automatically disqualified. And secondly, Arensberg argued that Mutt's urinal must be shown because it was a work of art, firstly because an artist had selected (i.e. 'chosen') it, and secondly because it was an object of beauty displaying "striking, sweeping lines", and according to Arensberg beauty was in the eye of a beholder who was Mr Mutt the artist. As we know, formal beauty is not a necessary prerequisite of the readymade of the popular imagination that it was for a work of art in 1917: far from it.

Arensberg also argued that the urinal must be accepted because Mr Mutt had "taken an ordinary object, placed it so that it's useful significance disappears, and thus was created a new approach to the object". Unfortunately the "new approach" revealed a very old attribute – the formal beauty of classical sculpture observable in all those beautiful curves, just like the legs of Cézanne's bathers that Louise Norton extolls in 'The Buddha of the Bathroom', in *Blind Man 2*. As Arensberg argued: "A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man clearly has made an aesthetic contribution." Of course the later addition of the 'title' *Fountain* to the object merely replaced one functional identity – urinal – with another – fountain: no change there then, Walter, (not that you were to know on 9 April 1917, since the title didn't arrive until the 13th).

The mechanism by which what you identify as a "premise for conceptual practices" became inscribed in the orthodox narrative, functioned as follows. Fourteen months after the death of the Richard Mutt affair, Apollinaire reviewed this hot news in the June 1918 edition of the *Mercure de France*. But at no point in his essay does Apollinaire cast doubt on the existence of Mr Mutt, or suggest that Duchamp was the *éminence grise* behind him, or even mention Duchamp's name. No doubt Suzanne had disclosed to Apollinaire the contents of Marcel's letter of April 1917, which would have confirmed what he could have read in *Blind Man 2*; we know that Roché had sent him a copy of the first issue immediately after it had been published. After all, as a nurse in the Red Cross, Suzanne would have been concerned with the welfare

of this close friend of her brother who had sustained a wound in 1916 whilst serving his adopted country, whilst that brother had been partying in New York. Since she worked at a hospital for blind children near the Invalides, she was in easy daily reach of Apollinaire's address and favourite watering holes.

So after a gap of eighteen years during which art galleries did not fill up with conceptual art, of a ready-made variety or not, André Breton, clearly basing his definition of the ready-made on the editors' précis of Arensberg's defence from *Blind Man 2*, published his definition in *Phare de la Mariée*. At the time Mutt's urinal was being rejected 18 years before, the 21-year-old Breton was working in a psychiatric hospital in Nantes. Breton's 1935 definition reads "*objets manufacturés promus à la dignité d'art par le choix de l'artiste*". This is normally translated as 'manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of art through the choice of the artist'. This definition was altered for inclusion in Breton and Paul Eluard's *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* of 1938, in which it reads:

**Ready made: Object usuel promus à la dignité d'un objet d'art par le simple choix de l'artiste. <<Ready made réciproque: se servir d'un Rembrandt comme une planche à repasser.>> (M.D.)**

Here Breton has broadened his definition by substituting the word 'manufactured' for 'everyday', in order that his concept of the ready-made might sit more easily in his typology of surrealist objects. The Independents' key concept of the choice of the artist (which was to contribute to the construction of the Bretonian ready-made as work of art) is preserved here. But a problem is created, for a critical tradition which predicates its authority on the assumption that Duchamp had submitted a ready-made to the Independents in the form of Mutt's urinal, by the contents of another letter whose existence never saw the light of day until 1982, knowledge of which, therefore, also did not inform the fabrication of the orthodox narrative which purports to account for the events to which this letter bears witness.

This letter, of 15 January 1916, in Duchamp's own hand, to that same sister, states unequivocally that the new genre of object that he has just formulated, naming the snow shovel titled *In Advance of the broken Arm* as the first example, the ready-made, has nothing whatever to do with art. This is confirmed by his impeccable grammar. In the letter, Duchamp asks his sister to go to his rue Saint-Hippolyte studio, where she will find a bottle rack and bicycle wheel (not, note, a bicycle wheel mounted, in its forks, upside down on a stool, just a bicycle wheel – not *the* Bicycle Wheel). She is to take this bottle rack, that Duchamp had bought – as a ready-made sculpture (*sculpture toute faite*) – at the bazaar of the Hotel de la Ville, in 1913, and turn it into a ready-made at a 'distance': (here Duchamp uses an English neologism). In this process, the adjective that predicates on the substantive 'sculpture' in the first case, *tout fait*, (changing its gender), turns into the substantive 'Ready-made' in the second: the French and English vocabulary Duchamp uses confirm this. Duchamp assures his artist sister, who must not worry her head about trying to understand, that, unlike a ready-made sculpture, a substantive ready-made is not a work of art, and so cannot be judged as such. Had there been no difference between the genres of art and the ready-made, Duchamp would not have differentiated them grammatically as he did. There is nothing in what Duchamp says about elevating an everyday object to the dignity of art.

Since the contents of this letter were not known until 1982, they cannot have informed Breton's definition of the ready-made, since this is diametrically opposed to it: hence the problem for a critical tradition that predicates its authority on the assumption that Duchamp had submitted a ready-made to the Independents in the form of Mutt's ready-made/urinal derived from Breton's definition. Since Duchamp did not submit the urinal it could not have been a ready-made, a fact which is confirmed by his description of Mutt's urinal as a sculpture in his letter of 1917. Mutt's urinal was also disqualified of the status of a ready-made by virtue of the fact that only Duchamp designated objects

as readymades in 1917. But they were not art, and Elsa's urinal was. Hadn't Arensberg said so?

This means that the iconic bicycle wheel was not an iconic Duchampian ready-made, since it was an assemblage. However, it would qualify as a ready-made if subjected to the erroneous Bretonian definition. The problem here, of course, is that this definition takes its authority from Duchamp's assumed submission of Mutt's urinal to the Independents. The fact that he didn't destroys the validity of your proposition concerning the "premise for conceptual practices", since it has now lost its endorsement, and must seek another.

Dreier states in a letter to William Glackens of 26 April 1917 that it had been at his suggestion, at the "last meeting" (of the Independents' directors), that she had "made the motion, seconded by Mr Covert, that we invite Marcel Duchamp to lecture one afternoon in the free hall, on his 'Readymades' and have Richard Mutt bring the discarded object and explain the theory of art and why it had a legitimate place in an Art Exhibit." This, Dreier felt, would "force Richard Mutt to show whether he was sincere or did it out of bravado".

Dreier was concerned that, in signing the urinal as he had, Mutt had brought the sincerity of the Independents into disrepute, since it was bound to have invoked in the minds of the public the drôle buffoonery of the cartoon characters, Mutt and Jeff, who as representatives of the popular arts were beneath the dignity of Dreier's, and by implications, the Independents', refined sensibilities. This would appear to be the seed from which would grow Naumann's hypothesis that the urinal had been submitted in order to expose the hypocrisy of the society. But, given the privacy of his readymades, Dreier's suggestion might also have encouraged Duchamp's resignation. (Partisans of the orthodox account have yet to explain why, if Mutt's name functioned in Duchamp's presumed theoretical discourse, Jeff's, which appears nowhere on the urinal, did not. We have suggested above where the answer to this conundrum might be found). For Dreier, who was unaware that Stieglitz had photographed the urinal eleven days before, Duchamp's readymades were examples of good design: as such, they hardly served as premise for what was to become Conceptual Art.

Enthusiasts for the view that Arensberg's defence of the urinal, as epitomised by the editors of *Blind Man 2*, provides the "premise for conceptual practice" would appear to be unaware of the following. In a work of Conceptual Art it is only the embodied idea that might perhaps be considered beautiful, whereas the form of its expression most definitely is not: there is no place for aesthetic beauty in the form of a work of Conceptual Art. In contradistinction, Arensberg's defence, as reported by Beatrice Wood, argued that the choice of the artist had liberated the possibility of the contemplation of a beautiful form from the interference of thoughts of the unsavoury nature of the urinal's utilitarian function. As the man had said, "with the dignity of a don addressing men at Harvard":

**A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man has clearly made an aesthetic contribution. Arensberg then qualified this view with the following. This is an artist's expression of beauty [...] it has striking, sweeping lines.**

Clearly, for Arensberg, the artist has not enjoyed the delegation to himself of the definition of art, since his qualification lies in his ability to express aesthetic beauty in the form of his work.

In other words, Arensberg's view is diametrically opposed to that characterising the theory underpinning Conceptual Art that you recommend. In invoking Kant's theory of the Beauty of Aesthetic Ideas, Arensberg had defaulted for proof into Kant's theory of The Idea of Aesthetic Beauty, the antinomy between which Kant never resolved:





the one does not follow from the other, or vice versa. Arensberg's interpretation of the rule of the Independents, which he invoked in that interpretation, effectively sublimated – either mistakenly or willfully – the delegation of the choice of which works an artist might choose to submit into the definition of art itself, a proposition entirely absent from the thinking, and

rules, of the Independents from which Arensberg falsely drew the endorsement of his interpretation. Of course Arensberg was free to say what he liked, but not to evoke the institutional endorsement of the Independents in so doing. But then he didn't benefit, as would Thierry de Duve, from the formulation in the 1960s of *Institutional Theory*, by Arthur Danto and George Dickie (for which see *Ahead of the Game*, by Glyn Thompson. Academia.edu). But in omitting any reference to this, the editors of *Blind Man 2* bequeathed Arensberg's interpretation to André Breton, and thence to the theorisation of Conceptual Art. Had that editing been deliberate, Marcel Duchamp, who knew full well that he had not submitted Mutt's urinal, rests doubly condemned.

We regret that space limits much discussion here of the fact that the 'contradiction' was then compounded by the conflation of the first replica of a readymade urinal attributed to Duchamp, exhibited by Sidney Janis in 1950, with Mutt's original. Understanding of the importance of this is, of course, critical to a full comprehension of the matter in hand. Suffice to note at this point that this matter has been addressed in *How We Received the Readymade*, and that it was Sidney and Harriett Janis who contributed to the fabrication of the orthodox narrative in their contribution to the March 1945 issue of *View* magazine, in which Breton's *Phare de la Mariée* text was also republished, as 'The Lighthouse of the Bride', verbatim, in English, bearing a single, unfortunate, error. In it, the word urinal was mistranslated as 'latrine'.

## Conclusion

Your implication that the authorship of the urinal has no bearing on its meaning, because Conceptual Art would have developed in the manner that it did regardless, is therefore invalid. What is at stake is more than the issue of a miscarriage of justice, and the impact that a re-attribution of the urinal to Elsa's corpus will have on the understanding of her aesthetic, which are reasons enough. (We note at this point that the re-attribution of *God* to Elsa, by Francis Naumann, was made on the basis of much flimsier circumstantial evidence than that which we present here – and now we know why). But what is also at stake is the very validity of the "premise for conceptual practice" that you cite, for since Duchamp was not the author of the Mutt urinal, the concept of the readymade which entered the master narrative is invalid. This means that the conceit that the work of art can be made from anything, and that the condition of art resides in the choice of the artist, are also invalid. And we have already noted the implications for Burger's construction of the readymade, and all that flowed from it.

To reiterate:

**The fact that Duchamp did not send his signed mass-produced objects to 'art exhibits' completely destroys Burger's argument: none of the iconic readymades appearing in Roché's photographs were ever exhibited, meaning that Duchamp did not negate the category of individual production, that the signature was not inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product because all claims to individual creativity were to be mocked, or that Duchamp's provocation through the ready-mades unmasked the art market, where the signature means more than the quality of the work, or that the readymade radically questioned the very principle of art and bourgeois society, according to**

**which the individual is considered the creator of a work of art, or that by inserting the mass-produced into the art context, a gesture legitimated by the signature of the author, Duchamp negates the category of individual creation, undermining the bourgeois conception of genius.**

**That being so, Duchamp did not negate the category of individual creation, or undermine the bourgeois conception of genius, for the simple reason that he was not, according to himself, the author of Mutt's gesture. And it cannot follow that whoever else submitted the urinal did so for the purposes assumed by Burger, et al. This means that all Burger's claims for the nature and significance of the readymade are invalid.**

**Blissfully unaware of this, Amelia Jones, writing in *Post-Modernism and the Engendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge University Press. 1994. PPs. 37-46), persists in recommending that Duchamp's readymade identifies a self-conscious intention to break down modernism's rigid separation of high art from popular culture, and to negate modernism's bourgeois claim for art's organic autonomy. But as the letter Duchamp wrote to his sister on 15 January 1916, proves, unfortunately it didn't.**

Had Duchamp's 1917 disclaimer been publically known in April of that year the history of 20th century art would have been completely different: and as for Duchamp, the recognition of the true nature of his actual conception of the readymade would have provoked a completely different understanding of his subsequent production, and his presence on the Pantheon.

The fundamental problem for the orthodox account that Tate Modern continues to advocate, having taken no cognisance of research contributing to our understanding since 2000, or much of that conducted before, appears to reside in the fact that until 1982 none but a Duchamp insider who had been there in 1917, and so knew, might be in a position to question the authority of the master. In 2000, this just left Beatrice Wood. But after 1982, the cosy fiction that the ancestral gesture of modernism must continue to be attributed to Duchamp collapsed. As we have seen, in 1982 Naumann, stumbling into a ready-made conundrum, declined the unique opportunity to be the first to break ranks and review the theory in the light of the new facts, as Camfield would attempt, valiantly, in 1987, only to be slapped down by the future great and good of the Duchamp critical industry, including Frances Naumann: they'd got their Duchamp, thank you very much, and didn't need another one. Instead, Naumann became the originator of a form of Duchamp scholarship still disinclined to let those same pesky little facts get in the way of the good story perpetuated by both Tate Modern and, for example, Calvin Tomkins, whose 'revised' biography of 2014 reprints, verbatim, the passage dealing with the matter of the urinal from the first edition of 1996. It seems significant that, just as Sophie Howarth's essay on the Tate Modern website refers to no works published after 1999, so the bibliography of Tomkins's 'revised' autobiography includes a mere three titles published during the eighteen years since 1996. This tells us that Tomkins either consulted little new research in the 'revision' of his tome, or that what he did consult failed to question the orthodox account he himself continued to champion. Ironically, to have done the opposite would have been grist to his banal mill. We would also note that you will be aware that the case for the re-attribution, to Elsa, was made in some detail in a document a copy of which is presently housed in the Tate Modern library, the second edition of which is about to be published.

We suggest, therefore, that Tate Modern might then be interested in the fact that the anniversary of the readymade will fall, not 11 April 2017, but on 15 January 2016, and that it cannot include a urinal either as its archetype or prototype – unless of course you're prepared to call Duchamp a liar. But you'll need to present some evidence.



**March 23rd, 2015**

**Dear Julian and Mr Thompson,**

**T**hank you for your letter of 12 March which I have seen on my return from a visit abroad.

I shall respond in due course, but it is clear that we are unlikely to reach common ground and may have to agree that different interpretations will necessarily continue to be promoted by different scholars, as is the case on many art historical issues.

c. Matthew Gale, Head of Displays, Tate Modern

**March 31st, 2015**

**Dear Nick,**

**A call to re-attribute Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain***

**T**hank you very much for your reply. We are delighted and relieved that you are at last seriously considering this issue, which has been in the public domain since 1982.

This cannot be a matter of scholastic interpretation because we are dealing here with contradictory statements made by the artist himself. Duchamp's two accounts of the origin of the urinal can't both be right. His second explanation has long been known to be a falsehood, not least because it was impossible. We are therefore sure that you will come round to accepting that Duchamp's original account was right, that Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven submitted the urinal as a sculpture (not a readymade) and as a consequence take on board the immense implications of this re-attribution.

**May 11th, 2015**

**Dear Nick,**

**A call to re-attribute Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain***

**W**e still await your promised reply to our letter of 12th March. We are confident that you will agree that Duchamp's 1916 statement about the origin of the urinal, being true, contradicts those long established as falsehoods, recommended much later, that the Tate continues to uphold. We would be grateful if you would give this matter your full and urgent attention, because your decision has profound implications for the policy of Tate and the public's understanding of modern art.

As you will be aware, we are mounting an exhibition about the true history of the urinal at Summerhall this August, during the Edinburgh Festival, by which time you will have enjoyed ample opportunity to consider the implications of a fact that, as you acknowledge, has been in the public domain since 1982. The views that you have generously shared with us, and the reasoning supporting them, will be included in this exhibition.

**May 29th, 2015**

**Dear Nick,**

**A call to re-attribute Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain***

**W**e write again in anticipation of your promised reply to our letter of 12th March. We are confident that you will agree that Duchamp's 1917 statement about the origin of the urinal was true and that this contradicts his later statements, which have long been established as falsehoods, though they are still upheld by Tate. We have supplied Tate's curatorial scholarship with all the historical evidence it needs to make a decision, and will supply additional information immediately if you consider any to be missing.

There is a time limit for your reply: the whole of the correspondence between us to date will be published in the July/August edition of *The Jackdaw*. The editor would like to include your final position on this matter, and would need this by mid-June. As you know, we are mounting an exhibition about the history of the urinal at Summerhall this August, and will definitely want to include your final reply, framed

as an exhibit. You wouldn't want, we're sure, Tate's curatorial scholarship to be represented by an empty frame!

The delay in your reply has been so extended that we have been obliged to send a letter about this issue to your chairman, informing him of the public implications of any indecision. The resolution of this issue has vital consequences for the whole of Tate's policy and the public's perception of art, not least because they have a right to be told the truth.



**May 29th, 2015**

**Dear Lord Browne,**

**Re: Tate's responsibility to tell the public the truth**

**W**e have had a long correspondence with Nick about the attribution of the urinal. We maintain that Duchamp was telling the truth when he wrote in 1917 that a woman 'made' it, and that his later assertion that he did, which Tate still upholds, was a falsehood, not least because scholars have long since proved his account to have been impossible. Nick has promised to reply to our last letter of 12th March, to determine Tate's position, but has still failed to do so.

We are writing to alert you and your board of the public implications of this lack of decision. *The Jackdaw* is printing our complete correspondence in their July/August edition, and ideally need Nick's final reply by mid-June. Summerhall are also mounting an exhibition about the true history of the urinal during the Edinburgh Festival, and wish to include Nick's resolution as an exhibit. We are sure that Tate would not want its curatorial scholarship to be represented by an empty frame.

This isn't a marginal art historical dispute but has immense implications for the whole history of conceptual art, for the public's understanding of modern art and, specifically, Tate's exhibition and collecting policy during the last quarter of a century (after Duchamp's 1917 letter came into the public domain in 1982) and, not least, it raises the issue of why Tate spent \$500,000 in 1999 on what our researches show to have been, by then, a known fake.

**May 26th, 2015**

**Dear Julian,**

**T**hank you for your letter of 11 May. I am sorry not to have responded earlier but Easter, considerable foreign travel and a need to consult with colleagues have prevented me from responding to the arguments that you have brought forward. I shall do so just as soon as I am able to gather the information required.

I note that you are planning to mount an exhibition about the history of the urinal at the Edinburgh Festival this summer. I note that you are planning to publish our correspondence and look forward to viewing the other evidence that you bring forward in the exhibition.

I shall be responding in due course.

**June 1st, 2015**

**Dear Nick,**

**A call to re-attribute Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain***

**W**e have just received your letter of 26th May. It crossed with ours to you of 29th May.

The exhibition will contain no more evidence than we have already shared with you in our extensive correspondence, so you do not need to wait to see it to make your decision. The only thing new in the exhibition will be Tate's scholarly response to all this evidence, which has, after all, been in the public domain for many years.

If you remain uncertain about some of the points we have made and need further information, we will be happy to provide this at once.



Otherwise, we can see no reason for any delay in your decision.

It is Tate's primary responsibility to tell the truth about the authorship of its collections, especially of a work of art that has been recently acquired, is central to its displays, crucial to its policies and to the whole development of Conceptualism and vital for the public's understanding of

modern art.

We look forward to receiving your promised, though now seriously delayed, reply to our letter of 12th March, preferably before *The Jackdaw* goes to press in mid June, but definitely well before the exhibition is mounted at the end of July.

**June 19th, 2015**

**From Sir Nicholas Serota**

**Dear Julian,**

**T**hank you for your recent letters. I should like to reiterate that we welcome fresh interpretations of works in the collection and take very seriously our role in contributing to scholarly debate and in conveying ideas to the public.

We have reviewed the correspondence we have had with you about Duchamp's *Fountain* carefully and have weighed up the arguments you have put forward. We continue to believe that there is no reason to reattribute the work. As you know Duchamp's letter to his sister has been in the public domain for over thirty years and has been carefully considered by scholars. The overwhelming view of the art historical community is that Duchamp's claim to authorship remains intact, even if not all aspects surrounding this lost work can now be known with absolute certainty.

We should also point out that what the Tate purchased in 1999 was an authenticated work by Duchamp. Regardless of your claims about the lost original of 1917, there is no question about the authorship of the purchased work. It would therefore be erroneous to describe it as a 'fake'.

I appreciate your passionate interest in this work, which over the years has been the subject of controversy and differing interpretations, and thank you for having raised the matter with us.

**June 22nd, 2015**

**From Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson**

**Dear Nick,**

**T**hank you for your long-awaited reply. If, as you say, you have now carefully considered this matter, you cannot simply announce that Duchamp was the author of the urinal in 1917 without giving your reasons. You have, above all, to account for two key facts that contradict your assertion:

1. Since scholars have proved that Duchamp was lying when he claimed in 1964 that he'd bought the urinal from Mott's, you have to say where you think he could possibly have bought this particular model.
2. Since Duchamp habitually told his sister the truth, you have to give a reasonable explanation of why he lied to her, in an aside in his letter of 1917, that a 'female friend' had submitted a urinal to an exhibition.

If you cannot satisfactorily account for these contrary facts, and the many others we have raised, your conclusion that Duchamp was the author of the urinal in 1917 has no basis in historical truth. It remains, merely, your arbitrary opinion. One expects unfounded views masquerading as eternal truths from threatened political dictators, not from the head of a scholarly public institution.

We have to add that we never claimed, as you state, that Tate's

1964 urinal is not by Duchamp. It is only Duchamp's claim that this was based on an original of his of 1917 (as all Tate literature asserts) that is fraudulent. The fact that you haven't understood our position raises the disturbing possibility that you haven't actually read our research at all. We now feel that we are being treated like two kids who have been told by an arrogant adult to stop bothering him and go and play elsewhere. We are not playing. This is a deadly serious matter, with immense implications for modern art and for your directorship of Tate, and it deserves to be treated with all due respect. Your public has the right to be told the truth.

We therefore formally request that you give the reasons for your decision and, in particular, address the two issues we have highlighted. Since this is merely a matter of you making transparent your reasoning to date, and does not involve you and your scholar curators in any further research, we justifiably expect an immediate response, not the three-month consideration time we have patiently endured till now.

**July 6th, 2015**

**From Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson**

**Dear Nick,**

**W**e still await a reply to our letter of 22nd June about this serious and highly significant matter.

We feel that you lay yourself open to the charge that it is intellectually dishonest of you to make an arbitrary decision about the attribution of the urinal without accounting for the following key facts that contradict your assertion:

1. Duchamp said he didn't do the urinal in 1917.
2. His much later claim that he did was a lie because it was impossible.

We therefore look forward to an immediate clarification of your reasons for discounting this evidence.

We are also concerned that this sense of intellectual dishonesty appears to extend to your organisation. You maintained in your last letter that Duchamp's assertion of April 1917 that he had not submitted the urinal to the Independents has been carefully considered by scholars for thirty years. But evidently not by you or any scholars at Tate. Your letters to us make it clear that you were ignorant of this assertion by Duchamp until we pointed it out to you, and none of Tate's website notices discussing *Fountain* (last updated in 2000) makes any mention of it. This contradicts your claim that you take very seriously your 'role in contributing to scholarly debate and in conveying ideas and information to the public'.

On a point of information, you told us in your last letter that the urinal has been subject to many different interpretations over the years. Apart from Duchamp's statement that he didn't do it and Irene Gammel's conclusion that it was made by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, we would be grateful if you would inform us of the specific examples of these different interpretations and explain how ours (whatever that is) fits into this otherwise dismissible category.

Your last letter also makes it clear that you were mistaken about what we are asking you to do. We had never stated that the 1964 replicas were not commissioned by Duchamp – his act of commissioning them sealed his lie of ownership of the original *Fountain*, to his own pecuniary advantage. So we think it appropriate to suggest a specific wording for the re-attribution of Duchamp's urinal which does take account of recent scholarship, as follows:

Artist: Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (1874-1927)

Title: Urinal

Date: 1917, incorrect replica 1964, commissioned by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), who wrongfully claimed its authorship and falsified its meaning.

Acquisition: Purchased with assistance from the Friends of the Tate Gallery 1999.

Reference: T07573

Since we are requesting you to be transparent about your reasoning

to date and are not asking you to undertake any new research, and since, as you assure us, scholars at Tate have been carefully considering this issue for thirty years, we feel it not unreasonable to expect a fulsome reply within the standard period of 10 days.

**July 6th, 2015**

**From Jennifer Mundy, Head of Collection Research at the Tate  
Dear Mr Spalding and Mr Thompson,**

Nick has asked me to respond to your recent letter dated June 24th, 2015.

Turning to your specific points, you write:

‘Since scholars have proved that Duchamp was lying when he claimed in 1964 that he’d bought the urinal from Mott’s. You have to say where you think he could possibly have bought this particular model.’

My understanding is that scholars have not proved that Duchamp was lying or misremembering with regard to where he acquired the urinal. The extant records of the J L Mott Iron Works Company are incomplete. Where he acquired the urinal, however, is perhaps not a key point as no-one doubts that *Fountain* existed.

You raise as a second point the issue of Duchamp’s letter:

‘Since Duchamp habitually told his sister the truth, you have to give a reasonable explanation of why he lied to her, in an aside in his letter of 1917, that a ‘female friend’ had submitted a urinal to an exhibition.’

In 1989 William Camfield set out possible explanations for this comment (Fountain, Houston 1989, p. 29). We know that Louise Norton was involved in the submission of the work as her details appear on the tag hanging from the piece, as photographed by Stieglitz. An obvious explanation of Duchamp’s words is that he was referring to her. He did not say that a female friend had made the artwork, merely that she had ‘sent’ it, which does seem to have been the case.

I hope these responses help clarify our position.

**July 13th, 2015**

**From Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson  
Dear Jennifer,**

Thank you for your letter of 6th July. It crossed with ours to Nick of 9th July, which we trust he has passed on to you.

We are delighted that you are now engaged in this debate. We are sensitive to the significant burden Nick has placed on your shoulders. Not only does the resolution of this issue have immense implications for the history and creation of art, but our discussion of it will also be conducted in public, in the spirit of modern, transparent government, for all our letters, as you know, will be printed in *The Jackdaw*.

By asking you to continue our correspondence, Nick has delegated to you the stewardship of Tate’s intellectual integrity. As Head of Collections Research this responsibility fits well with your duties. We look forward to your re-attribution of the urinal to Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven! It’s vital for the wellbeing of society that museums tell their public the truth.

Firstly, to deal with your surprising, throwaway assertion that it is perhaps ‘not a key point’ where Duchamp acquired the urinal.

According to Duchamp’s account in 1964 and 1966, the meaning of the urinal depends absolutely on its having been sourced from J L Mott’s because without Mott there is no ‘pun’ on Mutt. Simple logic argues that you can’t get rid of Mott and retain Mutt. To get rid of Mott is to reject Duchamp’s 1964 and 1966 account, as a consequence of which his whole story unravels, and the Tate’s account, predicated on it, collapses.

This casual remark matches Nick’s earlier contention in this correspondence that it did not matter who submitted the urinal because the intention would have been the same whoever submitted it. Until now we were under the impression that the arbitrary distortion of truth, predicated on irrefutable fact, by a state institution, to suit its own convenience, was an Orwellian fiction, and we have to say we expected better from the Head of Collections Research!

Neither you, nor we, nor Nick are at liberty to believe Duchamp when it suits them, or to disbelieve him on a whim, without any shred of actual evidence supporting it – and to call this scholarship.

Duchamp’s two contradictory accounts of the origin on the urinal can’t both be true. When you have rejected Duchamp’s later story as a fiction, the only authoritative statement to which you can turn is contained in Duchamp’s letter to his sister of 1917, which states plainly, in his own handwriting, that it was not he who submitted the urinal to the Independents. In that case he couldn’t have acquired the urinal from J L Mott’s Iron Works on the corner of 5th and 17th, because he had no need to do so.

This fact explains the problem scholars (Camfield, Shearer, Varnedoe and Obalk) have long accepted that the urinal in the Stieglitz photograph is not identical with any sold by Mott. You argue that the records of this company are incomplete, but you need to explain what evidence you have for asserting this. For Duchamp to have bought the urinal from Mott’s showroom would have meant that Mott sold one that was not in their catalogue and therefore not made by them. The fact that they did not was continually stressed in Mott’s publicity, advertising and copy in their catalogues. We would therefore appreciate if you would provide us with any evidence you have that Mott ever sold any vitreous sanitary fixtures not of their own making.

To turn now to your second point, the identity of Duchamp’s ‘female friend’. William Camfield’s 1989 research has been superseded by Glyn’s account (published in 2008, a copy of which is in your library). This clarifies in detail the role that Louise Norton unquestionably played in the transport of the urinal to The Grand Central Palace in the first week of April 1917. This however does not make either Louise Norton or Duchamp the author of the gesture. You leave Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven out the equation all together, and we would be grateful to hear your reasons for dismissing Irene Gammel’s brilliant research, especially the relationship between the urinal and the sculpture *God*, which has recently been re-attributed to the Baroness.

We look forward to your response to all these points.

**August 3rd, 2015**

**From Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson  
Dear Jennifer,**

We aren’t writing to complain about the delay in your reply to our letter of 13th July, which must be explained by the holiday period, but to give you advanced information about Glyn Thompson’s new research, which will be published, along with our correspondence, in *The Jackdaw* in September.

The nub of this research is that J.L Mott’s was a showroom not a shop, and Duchamp couldn’t have bought any urinal there, as he claimed, not even one made by Mott, which the urinal in the Stieglitz photograph was definitely not. His 1964 account of the origin of the urinal must, therefore, be a falsehood, and we are writing to ask you to change Tate’s literature to acknowledge this fact. Glyn will gladly send you an advanced copy of his article, in confidence, if you give him your email address.

It would, of course, be a coup for Tate to be at the forefront of scholarly research! But if, for reasons we cannot imagine, you wish to question this research, we would certainly want to include your observations in the next edition of *The Jackdaw*, together, of course, with your responses to our letter of 13th July. The copy date for the *Jackdaw* magazine is 15th August.

*(On the following pages The Jackdaw publishes Glyn Thompson’s research into the origins of the urinal and in particular of its non-relation to J L Mott’s own sanitary fixtures. Ed)*





# HE LIED!

Presented with an easy choice between making a great deal of money for doing nothing and telling the truth, Duchamp voted for his pocket.

Glyn Thompson's meticulous research here proves that virtually everything Duchamp said in 1966 about *Fountain* was a calculated lie. This inconvenient truth, which many scholars refuse to acknowledge even in the face of compelling evidence, is that Duchamp stole the idea, and the work, from Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.

## Introduction: J L Mott's Fountains?

Section 1 of the J L Mott Iron Works Catalogue 'H', Fountains, Ground Basins and Basin Rims (1905), contains illustrations and details of 187 decorative fountains, luxuriating in such evocative titles as *Eagle and Serpent*, *The Fountain of the Bittern*, *Small Stork*, *Boy and Duck*, *Hornblower*, *Maid of the Mist* and *Ring Jet*, *Terrier Group*, *Gnome Rending Rock*, *Unfortunate Boot*, *Out of the Rain (?)*, *Vine Leaf and Scroll* and *Pan with Cupid and Arrow*.

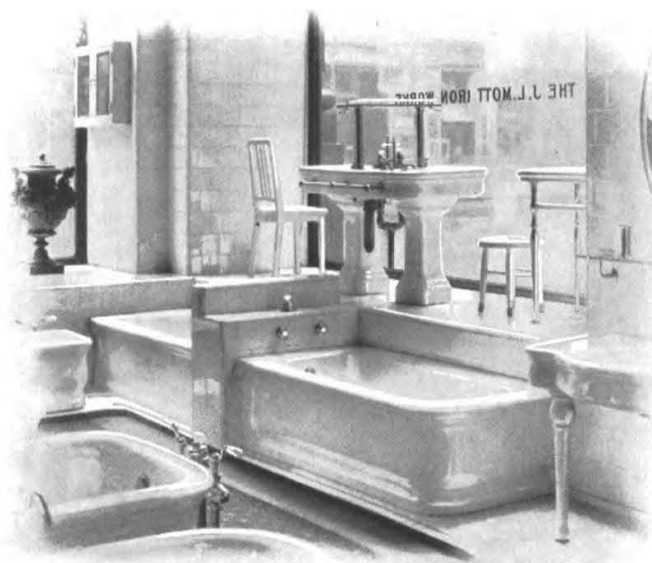
Their styles display the same Gilded Age Beaux Arts eclectic pastiche vocabulary as that of the buildings that also grace the city in which they were manufactured. But not one is either titled 'Fountain' or fabricated from solid imperial porcelain. For those, one must turn to J L Mott's Catalogue 'A' (1908), where one may encounter the *Erie*, *Shasta*, *Manitou*, *Potomac*, *Oneida*, *Champlain*, *Saguenay*, *Delaware*, *Crystal Stream*, *Purita*, *Dixon* and *Juniata* drinking fountains.

But whilst all these were fabricated from the same materials as were Mott's ceramic urinals, and in exactly the same way, not one is called 'Fountain'. That model, with that particular title, had to wait for the exercise of the imagination of a journalist who, refreshing himself at such a fountain, close by the Grand Central Palace, on Lexington, on April 9th, 1917, reported the first sighting of this elusive beast in the New York press. But it was not manufactured by the J L Mott Iron Works, whose plush showroom graced the corner of 5th Avenue and 17th Street, NYC, for there no one – not even Marcel Duchamp himself – could buy a urinal called 'Fountain', or anything else.

Despite what he said, Duchamp couldn't have bought a urinal at Mott's on 5th Avenue and 17th Street. Duchamp's account of how, shortly before April 9th, 1917, he walked into the J L Mott Iron Works showroom at 118-120 5th Avenue and 17th Street [Ills. 1 and 2], and bought a urinal, entered the orthodox version of the attribution to himself of Richard Mutt's submission of a urinal to the Independents by way of Arturo Schwarz, who, returning to the source in 1969, retold the foundation myth of conceptual art imparted to him in 1964. Schwarz's version of Duchamp's claim has never been exhaustively questioned. But as a result of the specific role that J L Mott's establishment on 5th Avenue typically played in the system of manufacture, distribution and marketing of sanitary plumbing fixtures, Duchamp's account was pure

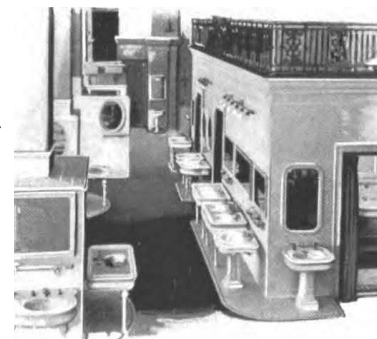


1. J L Mott's Showroom and Main Office at 118-120 5th Avenue and 17th Street, New York City, 1908.



fiction, not that Schwarz was in any position, or mood, to question it. For what Duchamp's account showed was his complete ignorance of the workings of a manufacturing and distribution system whose functioning in the real world, rather than his recollections in tranquillity, rendered what he claimed impossible.

As Mott's plumbing fixtures Catalogue 'A' (1908)



2. Two views of J L Mott's plumbing fixtures showroom on 5th Avenue.

makes abundantly clear, it would have been quite impossible for anybody, including Marcel Duchamp, to buy – there and then – a urinal, or anything else, at the address he cited, or for anybody, there and then, to sell him one. This is because this particular establishment comprised a set of showrooms the function of which was dedicated not to the immediate sale of the products of the firm, which would have totally negated its purpose and operation, but solely their display. As such, it neither contained any mechanism for the kind of across-the-counter retail sale that Duchamp described, nor any stock devoted to that end, as the descriptions in J L Mott's Catalogue 'A' clearly demonstrate.

The Frontispiece tells the reader that the building contained Show Rooms and the Main Office, with Branch Stores and Selling Agencies in twelve other major Cities in the US. To enlighten us further, the *Plumbers' Trade Journal, Steam and Hot Water Fitters' Review*, of January 1907, carried the following announcement:

#### NEW HOME OF THE MOTT IRON WORKS

**The new building of the J L Mott Iron Works, recently erected on the corner of 5th Avenue and 17th Street, New York, and into which they moved their executive offices on October last, is, and will continue to be, a standing monument of the enormous growth, expansion and success of this world-known manufacturing house.**

**This new building, the cut of which is shown herewith, is an eleven-story building, every floor of which is occupied by the Mott Iron Works. The first and second floors are devoted entirely to the exhibition of plumbing fixtures for private work. On the third floor plumbing fixtures for hospital, asylum and marine use. Sanitary work for use adapted in factories, schools, public comfort stations, etc., are shown in the basement. The executive offices and the export department are found on the fourth floor, and the financial, accounting and auditing apartments on the fifth floor; ornamental department on the sixth floor; steam and hot water heating department on the seventh floor; kitchen and laundry ranges, warm air furnaces, etc, on the eighth floor; the ninth and tenth floors are used for storage purposes and for experimental work. The eleventh floor, the top floor of the building, is occupied by the engineers and designers of the company, together with the photographic and catalogue departments.**

Such is the quality of the photograph of the building in Catalogue 'A' that, once enlarged, one can clearly see individual plumbing fixtures in the show windows running all along the ground floor fronting the street.

The above description, and the instructions in that catalogue, make it quite clear that there was no provision of any kind for retail sales, which was the case in every showroom of every sanitary plumbing fixture manufacturer at the time, since this is how the trade worked, universally, even for Marcel Duchamp. Mott's building contained no trade counter, hardware store, or plumber's merchants – not even a till – and it was not a department store, such as Wanamaker's, from whose bathroom department it was also impossible to stroll with a urinal under one's arm (not to mention the fifty city blocks back up to West 67th Street: a complete bathroom weighed upwards of 1,000 lbs). The only way for any individual to acquire a single plumbing fixture, such as a urinal, was to visit a master plumber's (what today is called in Great Britain a plumbing contractors or merchants) who might have one in stock. But Duchamp did not visit a master plumber's, or plumber's merchants, or dry goods or hardware store. On the contrary, he stated specifically, and unequivocally, that he had bought the urinal at J L Mott's at 5th Avenue and 17th, and nowhere else, and walked out with it: but this was impossible, and he can't change his story now, and neither can anyone else.

The function of the showroom in the chain of distribution of

plumbing fixtures, leading from the manufacturer to the plumber who would plumb them in, is clearly delineated in both the manufacturers' catalogues and the trade journals and magazines that address the quotidian concerns of practitioners of the plumbing trade the length and breadth of the country. The essential link in the chain between the manufacturer and the common or garden journeyman plumber was the jobber, the travelling salesman who represented the manufacturers, from whom – exclusively – the master plumber could order the items identified by the architect who specified them on behalf of the client, be they the private citizen building a house, or the Plaza Hotel, whose 600 bathrooms were supplied by Mott's. Large contracts were composed, and bids were invited for their execution from master plumbers and contractors who, at the practical end of the business also executed smaller contracts for municipal, commercial and industrial clients. The only way a plumber could get their hands on a urinal would be as a result of being employed by a master plumber who had secured such a contract, and urinals which, by and large, were last in the beauty parade of desirable plumbing fixtures, were invariably only installed in commercial and industrial contexts: that they were not installed in domestic settings as a matter of routine is born out by their absence from both the showrooms and the model bathrooms illustrated in the numbered trade catalogues that served as two dimensional substitutes for the showroom, supplied by companies such as Mott's to the agents who represented them, the jobbers and their own salesmen. Without a catalogue, neither could exercise their specific function in the chain of distribution.

The only image of a plumbing fixture manufacturer's showroom containing a urinal that I have discovered in a trade magazine of the period is located in Barcelona, displaying the products of the Standard Manufacturing Company, with which Duchamp was in fact acquainted, whether he was aware of the fact or not, as we shall see.

The purpose of the catalogue, a kind of two-dimensional portable showroom was to illustrate the manufacturer's wares, frame the clients' requirements, and guide their choices, and for ordering the desired fixtures from the manufacturer. These would then be delivered to the master plumber who had been awarded the contract for their installation. Sanitary fixture manufacturers' catalogues make it quite clear that no member of the public, such as an individual plumber, or avant-garde artist, could deal directly with the manufacturer. This was also the case in the mass production automobile industry, for the same reason, and according to the same marketing rationale and organisation by means of which vast numbers of industrially produced units, mass produced in centralised facilities, eventually reached an equal number of citizens dispersed across a vast country. The purpose was to ensure that the manufacturer could control sales and prices. Just as Duchamp could not have walked out of Mott's showroom with a urinal under his arm, neither could he have driven away an automobile from a dealership showroom. In both examples, the contents of the showroom served to demonstrate to an endless succession of potential customers the desirability of the manufacturer's product, which they could then order through their master plumber.

This system protected the interests of the master plumbers who enjoyed exclusive access to the products. Their power was enhanced by the fact that no individual journeyman plumber could take on a plumbing contract because they would not have had the manpower to execute it, did not carry the necessary insurance or licence, or possess the necessary premises, qualifications or practical resources to do so. If he attempted to, he would be shut down.

Mott's Catalogue 'A' (1908) clarifies how the showroom, from which Duchamp clearly could not have walked bearing a urinal, functioned:

**Our fixtures and equipment for factories, schools, hospitals, prisons, public comfort stations, railroad stations etc., is so thorough and complete, and so comprehensive, that we have found it necessary to issue separate catalogues for this class of work.**

**In view of the great importance of plumbing in the**



construction of the modern house it is surely most desirable that architects and those interested in building new or remodelling old houses should visit our showrooms at 5th Avenue and 17th Street, New York, where a most comprehensive display of sanitary fixtures, including eleven model bathrooms, may be seen, and from which ideas may be gathered and selections made. (Preface)

Apropos the factory in Trenton:

The shipping facilities are of the very best: the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Delaware & Raritan Canal intersecting the works.

The following illustrations of bathrooms are the outcome of many years' experience, both in the tiling and designing of the plumbing fixtures. Many of the rooms illustrated may be seen at our showrooms, Fifth Avenue, New York. [...] All brass goods are priced nickel-plated. They can also be furnished in polished or yellow brass, silver-plated brass, or Mott's crown white metal; prices on application.

#### (Bathrooms)

- Jabber** – Quote by wire lowest price and earliest date of shipment of-  
**Jaguar** – How soon can you ship- ?  
**Jar** – When will you ship full balance of order for-?  
**Jargon** – Please reply to our wire message on the relative to  
**Jewel** – Have you in stock-?  
**Jibe** – What is your order number- ?  
 (Code Words for telegraphic communication by clients with Main Office)  
**Lade** – We cannot duplicate your order at same price; additional costs will be-  
**Lapse** – The best discount we can quote is-  
**Latin** – We have none in stock; but can make and ship by  
**Laud** – Bill of lading (or shipping receipt) will be mailed- See letter.

The appearance of the above codes, necessarily reproduced in every sanitary ware manufacturers' catalogue, make plain that the manner in which the provision to, and acquisition by, the domestic customer, of sanitary fittings, could only occur through the intermediaries of architect, master plumber and jobber. It could never be direct. The Conditions, on the final page of the catalogue, describes a process in which the private individual could play no part.

**CATALOGUES AND PRICES** . Catalogue 'A' supersedes all previous issues by our Sanitary Department; consequently all previous prices are withdrawn and prices herein, as heretofore, subject to change without notice.

**RESPONSIBILITY REGARDING SHIPMENTS.** Our responsibility ceases as soon as the goods are delivered in good order and condition at a railroad station or dock, and a receipt taken for the same. If the carriers insist on our signing a release or other document having reference to their liability before they receive the goods, of course we must comply; that will not, however, affect the right of the party to whom they are consigned (who is deemed to be the real owner) to recover damages for any carelessness or negligence on the part of the carriers...

It might be noted here that perhaps it is no surprise that Duchamp fails to mention any collection of the urinal at a railroad station or dock or, inexplicably, carriers.

**PACKING AND ROUTES.** Definite instructions as to mode of packing, and by what route to ship, should be given with each order. When no special instructions are given, goods will be packed and shipped in manner we deem most suitable.

**POINT OF SHIPMENT.** All shipments are made from our works at Trenton, N.J.

**TERMS OF PAYMENT.** Our terms are Net Cash – no discount allowable for cash. In cases where credit is given we allow thirty days time, unless special terms have been mutually agreed upon. We invite new accounts, and grant credit on approved references, signed statements and other forms whereby payment is made secure.

Duchamp, unused to buying plumbing fixtures, was perhaps unaware that a client could only buy via account, or that 'Net cash' meant the amount of cash on hand claimed on financial statements after subtracting current liabilities. Net cash is typically an indicator of a company's cash flow position at the end of a reporting period. Duchamp is not known to have had reporting periods.

Advertisements in magazines addressing the master plumber reinforce this state of affairs. For example, the copy for an advert of a Mott 'Villard' Vitreous China Lavatory, from 1916, reads as follows:

Imagine this Mott lavatory in your show window! Made of Vitreous China – the recognised standard for service, durability and cleanliness in lavatories. Just think of it – a real vitreous china lavatory – at a price actually less than enamelled iron! Where is the woman who would not prefer a vitreous china "Villard" lavatory to a lavatory of enamelled iron?

And remember this: Mr Man may settle for the bill – but it's his wife you've really got to sell.

Sell her Mott's fixtures in vitreous china or solid porcelain, and you've made a friend for life. Not only will she "come back" herself – but she will probably steer some of her friends through your front door. There's no better booster than a "satisfied customer."

There's no doubt about it – a vitreous china "Villard" lavatory in your window will make business boom. May we tell you about our special offer for securing a showroom sample of the "Villard" lavatory? Write to us.

Clearly, a "Villard" lavatory was not much use to a master plumber if it was walking out of his showroom under the arm of a customer. And in an advertisement of July 18th, 1917, emphasising his privileged position, the master plumber was reminded of the following:

All the goods which we offer to the trade are made and assembled in the great plant here illustrated – and shipped direct to the trade.

The Master Plumbers of America can communicate and deal with us directly – an immense advantage in every way.

We realize that we best serve our own interests in serving the interests of our trade. Our showrooms throughout the country are but one way in which we render this service.

Plumbers are invited to visit these showrooms with their customers, whenever possible. Such a visit results in a customer's seeing more and very often buying more.

Plumbing trade magazines constantly carried manufacturers'



advertisements exhorting master plumbers to “make a point of seeing your jobber today”, that to “sell a prospect good fixtures it is almost absolutely necessary to have him see them – not an illustration, but the actual fixtures themselves. If you do not have the fixtures in your own showroom, take him to the nearest jobber or manufacturer’s own showroom”, that “your jobber will supply you as we sell no closets direct. Go to your jobber and ask for a detailed demonstration of the VOGEL No. 9”, and that you must “ask your jobber to show you this line”, and so on.

**What the foregoing demonstrates, in epitome, is that Duchamp’s account of his acquisition of a urinal from J L Mott’s showroom on 5th Avenue, and nowhere else, was utterly fanciful, since it was an option available to no one, including himself.**

**I**ronically, in the very month in which Duchamp did not walk into a plumbing fixtures showroom on 5th and 17th, April 1917, J L Mott’s placed an announcement in the plumbing press, informing its customers that, after having maintained a General Office in New York since 1828, “As a consequence of the development and steady increase of business, it has become necessary to transfer our General Offices to Trenton, N.J., thus enabling us to render better service to customers and to establish more direct relations between them and our factory”. With the exception of the Metropolitan District which embraced Greater New York, Long Island and Westchester County, all correspondence relative to orders, quotations, catalogues, etc, hereafter all correspondence should be addressed to Trenton. The Ornamental Iron, Boiler and Radiator, Tile and Export Departments were to remain at 120 5th Avenue. And should Duchamp have harboured any intentions to upgrade his bathroom, he would also have been relieved to learn that Mott’s “magnificent showrooms [...] will be maintained, and a cordial invitation is extended to visit them, likewise our other showrooms throughout the United States.”

This rude shattering of any intention that Duchamp might have entertained for buying a urinal at the corner of 5th and 17th was reinforced by a short notice, confirming Mott’s intentions, published four days after Duchamp had not witnessed the rejection of a urinal at the Independents, on page 490 of the April 15th, 1917, issue of *The Plumber’s Trade Journal, Steam and Hot water Fitters Review*. Under the heading GENERAL OFFICES OF THE J. L. MOTT IRON WORKS TRANSFERRED TO TRENTON, it read:

**The J.L. Mott Iron Works has recently transferred its general offices to Trenton where its manufacturing plant is located. This move is a direct consequence of the firm’s development and steady growth of late, and will enable it to establish more direct relations between its patrons and its factory. [...] The showroom at 120 Fifth Avenue will be continued and same will be the headquarters for enquiries and correspondence from the metropolitan district only.**

But there is no record of Duchamp ever having read the plumbing press during his New York sojourn.

And anyway, Duchamp said he hadn’t sent it.

That the organisation of the plumbing fixtures industry made it impossible for Duchamp to have bought a urinal from the J L Mott showroom should be sufficient to end the debate, but confirming the fact that it would have been impossible for Duchamp to behave as he claimed to have done to Schwarz are the contents of the letter that Duchamp wrote his sister Suzanne on April 11th, 1917. This we have discussed sufficiently elsewhere to obviate the need for the issues it raises to require rehearsal here (For which see Glyn Thompson, *Jemandem ein R Mutt’s Zeugnis Austellen, Monsieur Goldfinch*, Wild

Pansy Press, second edition 2015), save to observe that, following Francis Naumann (see Francis Naumann, *Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti, The Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1983). Partisans of the orthodox view, that continues to attribute Mutt’s urinal to Duchamp, either dismiss as an insoluble conundrum his clear testimony that not he, but a female friend, had submitted the urinal, or insist that he must have been lying. But the problem with that rejection of Duchamp’s testimony is that it is predicated on an account of the events of 1917 that was fabricated in complete ignorance of the facts described in Duchamp’s letter.

**H**ad Duchamp’s testimony been made known at the time, the history of art would be completely different. But apart from writing to his sister, who never breathed a word of the

letter’s contents to anyone, there is no evidence that Duchamp ever spoke of the matter to anyone else. In 1917, Duchamp neither claimed nor denied responsibility for the submission of the urinal, because nobody suspected or accused him of being responsible for it, and for good reason: he wasn’t. The only reason that Duchamp’s testimony was subsequently rejected is that, in 1982 when it first came to light, it contradicted a prevailing orthodoxy uninterested in allowing any irritating little facts to compromise the construction of Duchamp that the self-appointed custodians of Duchamp’s legacy were jealously guarding. As a result of the discovery of Duchamp’s testimony, that Naumann was the first to discredit, it was only in 1982 that the orthodox narrative could be objectively questioned. That it wasn’t was the consequence of an establishment protecting its own interests in the teeth of evidence – and the threat to the security of the master narrative that arose from it – that compromised it, and which continues to this day. And of course, to question the orthodoxy then, in 1982, was to commit professional hara-kiri, or join Herodotus among the Scythians. But of all the statements made by Duchamp in his many surviving letters, it is only the sincerity of his statement to Suzanne in April 1917 that has been challenged, without a shred of evidence to justify it.

However, the forgoing analysis, and what now follows, unequivocally support Duchamp’s testimony of April 1917 that not he, but a female friend, was responsible for the submission of Mutt’s

**In 1917, Duchamp neither claimed nor denied responsibility for the submission of the urinal, because nobody suspected or accused him of being responsible for it, and for good reason: he wasn’t. The only reason that Duchamp’s testimony was subsequently rejected is that, in 1982 when it first came to light, it contradicted a prevailing orthodoxy uninterested in allowing any irritating little facts to compromise the construction of Duchamp that the self-appointed custodians of Duchamp’s legacy were jealously guarding. As a result of the discovery of Duchamp’s testimony, that Naumann was the first to discredit, it was only in 1982 that the orthodox narrative could be objectively questioned. That it wasn’t was the consequence of an establishment protecting its own interests in the teeth of evidence – and the threat to the security of the master narrative that arose from it – that compromised it, and which continues to this day.**

urinal, confirming that he could not have bought it at J L Mott's on 5th Avenue, or anywhere else. Where it did come from is the subject of the next section.

And it wasn't what he said it was anyway.

The routine industry-wide system of marketing and distribution of ceramic sanitary ware that made it impossible for Duchamp to have done what in 1964 he claimed he had in 1917 concomitantly made it simplicity itself for Duchamp's female friend to obtain the urinal that was submitted to the Independents in 1917. That female friend was in Philadelphia. The earliest record, in print, of what has become known as the Richard Mutt affair, stated as a matter of fact that Philadelphia was where the urinal, and its author, one Richard Mutt, originated. This was published in the *New York Herald* on April 17th, 1917 (page 6), and read as follows:

#### HIS ART TOO CRUDE FOR INDEPENDENTS

##### **Mr Mutt Thought He Could Exhibit Almost Anything, But The Society Thought Differently.**

You may call him what you will, a conservative is a conservative still – and Marcel Duchamp knows it. Therefore, the painter of “Nude Descending a Staircase” fame has declared his independence from the Society of Independent Artists, and there is dissention in the ranks of the organisation that is holding at the Grand Central Palace the greatest exhibition of painting and sculpture in the history of the country.

It all grew out of the philosophy of J. C. Mutt of Philadelphia, hitherto little known in artistic circles. When Mr Mutt heard that payment of five dollars would permit him to send to the exhibition a work of art of any description or degree of excellence he might see fit he complied by shipping from the Quaker City a familiar object of bathroom furniture manufactured by a well-known firm of that town. By the same mail went a five-dollar bill.

Today Mr Mutt has his exhibit and his \$5; Mr Duchamp has a headache, and the Society of Independent Artists has the resignation of one of its directors and a bad disposition.

After a long battle that lasted up to the opening hour of the exhibition, Mr Mutt's defenders were voted down by a small margin. “The Fountain” as his entry was known, will never become an attraction – or detraction – of the impoverished galleries of the Grand Central Place, even if Mr Duchamp goes to the length of withdrawing his own entry, “Tulip Hysteria Co-ordinating” in retaliation. “The Fountain” said the majority “may be a very useful object in its own place, but its place is not an art exhibition – and it is, by no definition, a work of art”.

Since Mr Mutt had failed to complete the application process, and submit his \$6 along with his urinal, the only reason that the anonymous reporter could identify the location from which Mr Mutt and his urinal hailed would be as a result of knowledge gained from first hand or close experience. When the urinal arrived, three weeks after the submission deadline, at the Grand Central Palace, on April 9th, it was received, and rejected, by a group of directors of the organisation who for no particular reason just happened to be there. All the entries that had been correctly submitted were in the process of being hung by Duchamp. Such was the intimacy between members of the avant-garde community and the critics that it would have been quite routine for members of the latter to be present on the day before the opening, since they had to file their copy in time for publication as soon as possible, and the artists weren't going to stop them. In these circumstances it would have been very easy for the journalist to have inspected, or merely noticed, the shipping labels without which the urinal, in its crate, would not have been allowed to travel by rail from

Philadelphia to New York. Whilst the journalist's report contained some inaccuracies they were not sufficient to discredit the veracity of other details confirmed by other secondary sources at the time, such as Beatrice Wood's diary.

It was in fact as soon as the day after the urinal had been rejected that an earlier report in the same newspaper had discussed the exhibition, in much greater detail, terminating with a specific reference to the matter in hand, but not associating Mutt and his urinal with the Quaker City. However, other newspaper reports subsequently persisted in domiciling Mutt in Philadelphia, the last of which was published in the *Boston Globe*, on April 25th, after which the Richard Mutt Affair evaporated, its tranquillity undisturbed, with one brief interlude which had no effect on its visibility, until Duchamp started talking about it in 1964. The copy printed below, on April 10th, must have been filed no later than the afternoon before, when the contretemps had barely been concluded.

April 10th, 1917. p. 5

#### THREE MILES OF PICTURES AT INDEPENDENTS' ARTISTS SHOW

Two Thousand Six Hundred Exhibits, representing 1,300 Artists, are hung on Improvised Gallery Walls at The Grand Central Palace.

Huge, unusual, new, bad in spots, good in a few instances, but neither really shocking nor quite inspiring, the much talked about and long heralded exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists was opened at the Grand Central Palace last night with a reception and private view, attended largely by artists and patrons of art.

Superlatives are considered excusable in dealing with an event of this magnitude. Three miles of pictures have been hung on improvised gallery walls: 2,600 exhibits are being shown, representing 1,300 artists, who, in turn, are supposed to represent every school of art – classic, academic, cubist, futurist, post-impressionistic, vorticist and several schools too new to have been christened yet.

Two full regiments of spectators made the confusing rounds of the exhibition rooms, half of them taking the show too lightly, while the other half took it too seriously. Some agreed with Marcel Duchamp, of “The Nude Descending a Staircase” fame, that Louis M Eilshemius' “Supplication” was the best painting in the show, while others agreed among themselves that “Supplication” should have gone before a board of censorship before it went before the eyes of the public. Some did their best to be shocked by John Covert's “Temptation of Saint Anthony” while others admitted frankly that Mr. Covert's ultra-cubism was “over their heads” by several feet and an appreciable number of inches.

To greet the spectators there was a reception committee composed of Miss Katherine Dreier, Mrs. Henry Payne Whitney, Miss Elsie de Wolfe and Mrs. Rockwell Kent. Patronesses of the exhibition in addition to these four are Mmes. Borden, Harriman, James A. Burden, Bourke Cockran, Joseph H. Choate, Philip M. Ludig, Douglas Robinson, William Astor Olander, Payne Whitney, Otto H. Kahn and James Speyer. Mayor John Purroy Michael was expected to open the exhibition but was unable to be present.

The list of exhibitors is notable in many respects. Many of the names are familiar in New York. Thirty-seven States are represented. Some of the paintings come from abroad, where they were completed in the trenches by soldiers under shell fire. While the unknowns are undoubtedly in the majority, the sections including the Academicians and the painters of established fame who have lent their aid to the show is by no means a small one.

However, famed and unknown have been dealt with impartially, their contributions having been hung with reference only to the alphabet order of their names.

The exhibition will open to the public tomorrow. On Saturday, April 14, a tea room will be added. It will be under the direction of the National Special Said organisation. On the opening day, the Aviation Committee of the organisation, composed of Mrs Henry A. Wise Wood and Mrs William A. Bartlett, has arranged to have Miss Ruth Law lecture at half past four in the afternoon, while at half past eight Mr. Wood will talk on the needs of the nation's aviation service, followed by civil engineer Robert E. Peary, U.S.N., retired, at nine o'clock.

The exhibition will be open until May 6, but at no time will "The Fountain", submitted by Richard Mutt, be shown. "The Fountain", described by those who saw it as a painting of the realistic school, was excluded by a narrow margin of votes at a turbulent meeting of the directors of the society late yesterday afternoon. Explanations will be made to Mr. Mutt personally.

So from the very start – the very day after the rejection – the unidentified plumbing fixture was titled *Fountain*, not by Duchamp, but by an anonymous journalist whose name will forever be absent from the history of art, for no such title accompanied the urinal and its label. Any reader of the column would have quite reasonably assumed that a fountain described as a plumbing fixture was in all likelihood a ceramic drinking fountain, which all sanitary ware manufacturers produced, some of which were sufficiently close in form to resemble a urinal: as any drunk staggering home after closing time knows, a fountain will work perfectly well as a urinal; it's an easy mistake to make. Since the Grand Central Palace and the Grand Central Terminal next door both contained such public facilities, perhaps the reporter, dictating telephonically his copy back to the office to make the next issue, and briefly refreshing himself at the nearest fountain, subliminally conflated the two.

Duchamp was still hanging the show.

The two reports confirm that whilst the author of the notorious *Nude Descending a Staircase* was involved with the exhibition, and had resigned in protest at the Independents' breaking of their rule, no suspicion fell on him as the perpetrator, and to all intents and purposes, Mr Mutt was just another unknown but very real individual who, like the vast majority of others had who submitted works, would disappear as quickly as he came. In these reports, Duchamp is clearly distinguished from, not identified with, or even suspected as being, his less distinguished comrade in arms.

So within a week of Mutt's plumbing fixture called *Fountain* having been rejected, the origin of his urinal was located fairly and squarely in Philadelphia, and would continue to be so until the Richard Mutt affair fizzled out. As Duchamp had said to his sister, it didn't amount to much anyway: nothing to write home about; *impossible d'écrire*.

On that same April 11th the female friend to whom Duchamp attributed the submission of the urinal had been in Philadelphia for two months, and would not return to New York until the following January, 1918. We have discussed elsewhere and at length her prime qualification as perpetrator of Mutt's undignified gesture: readers not yet familiar with our arguments are encouraged to read *Jemandem ein R Mutt's Zeugnis Austellen, Monsieur Goldfinch* (Glyn Thompson, Wild Pansy Press, second edition, 2015) available online from the University of Leeds website. Once again, space prevents any further rehearsal of its content here.

It would have been the simplest thing in the world for the fiercely patriotic German Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, piqued into reacting to the decision, taken by both houses of Congress on April 2nd, to advise President Wilson to declare war on Germany on the 6th, Good Friday, to purchase a bog-standard urinal. This allowed seven days for the urinal to arrive at the Grand Central Palace on the 9th, Easter Monday. Transporting it from Philadelphia to New York would have taken no more than three hours. This is because it would have been

disarmingly simple for her to pop into the nearest master plumber's shop and buy the cheapest urinal available from the stock that master plumbers carried as a matter of routine. This would have cost her, anywhere in the US, either eight or ten dollars, depending on the size.

The item Elsa chose was a cheap, basic, bog-standard model, but one that could not have been procured from Mott's, since its formal attributes corresponded to no model produced or sold by Mott's at that time or at any other. And it could not have been carried in the Mott line because, like all manufacturers of vitreous ceramic plumbing fixtures, they had the purity of the brand to protect from contamination, as the partisan nature of their advertising copy declares: time and again in their publicity material, Mott reassured its customers that everything that they sold, they manufactured themselves.

The feature that immediately disqualifies the urinal photographed by Stieglitz from having been manufactured by Mott's is the triangle of drain holes visible in his photograph, which fact effectively ends the debate.

The other manufacturers based at Trenton, N.J., where J. L. Mott's manufacturing operation had been based since 1902, who all extolled the efficiency of their transport connections, distributed their wares not via a posh show room on Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C., but across New Jersey, Pennsylvania and the rest of the country through jobbers and master plumbers, whose showrooms and show windows were much more modest affairs than the eleven-storey temple of purity and emporium of desire on 5th and 17th.

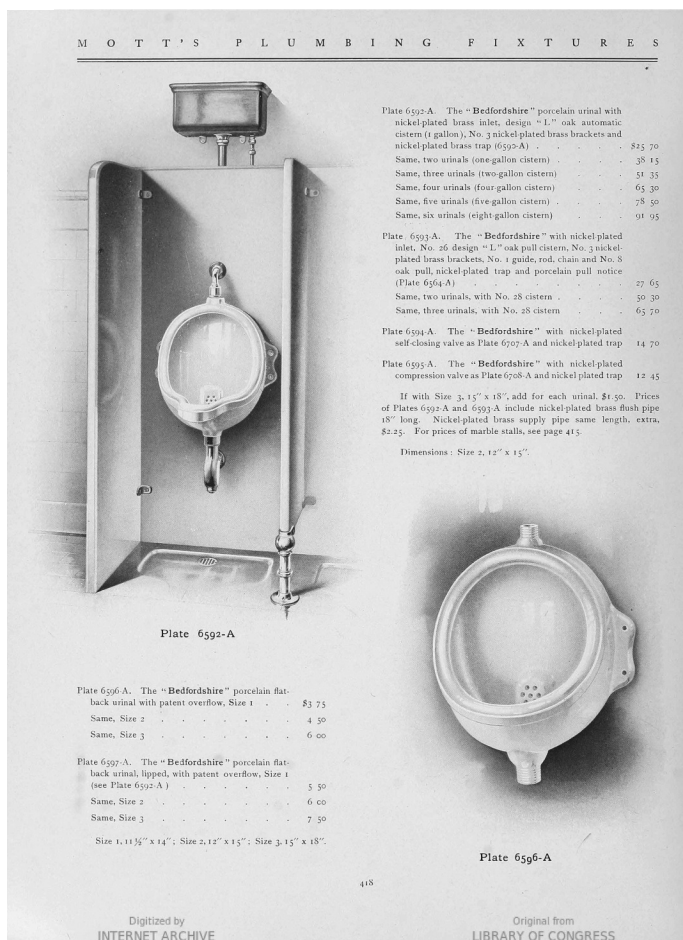
Coincidentally, whilst rummaging about in the plumber's yard looking for the cheapest urinal, for it was its functional identity that was crucial to her purpose, not its particular form, Elsa would, like as not, have stumbled across the odd plumbing trap or two, roughly hacked from wherever it had previously been installed, in a replacement of a broken urinal and its fittings, since most of these items saw heavy duty in public locations, such as comfort stations, hospitals, schools, factories and the like. That she found one is not in doubt, since it has come down to us as *God*, of that very year, 1917, a pendant to the urinal that she submitted to the Independents. This example would have been cheap enough – a few dimes or quarters – since, unlike the urinal photographed by Alfred Stieglitz, which is clearly unmarked and would have still been in its packing case when she bought it, where it would remain for the journey to New York, this plumbing trap was only good enough for the knackers yard (which is why it was in one), good enough, that is, for melting down for the lead, and maybe the reusable piping, otherwise it wouldn't have been there. If it had still been serviceable it would have still been attached to a fixture. This is why Elsa would have got it cheaply.

The plumbing trap had at some point had a globe check valve inserted into it. A mechanically simple device with one moving part, the purpose of the globe check valve was to prevent liquid from flowing back into the facility from which it has been discharged, such as a urinal. Since it carried human waste, over time the valve would rot and clog. Its use was commonplace in a trade obsessed with sanitation. This trap would not have been attached to a toilet, for they were supplied with much wider bore earthenware discharge pipes and traps. And neither would it have been attached to a bath or a sink, because



3. The urinal submitted to The Society of Independent Artists exhibition, New York, on April 9th, 1917 by Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven [alias R Mutt]. Photographed by Alfred Stieglitz on April 13th, 1917.





#### 4. Mott's 'Bedfordshire'...

they do not (normally) discharge high concentrations of human waste. Rather, it would have been attached to a urinal.

Elsa would have had little trouble transporting her urinal to the railroad station at Broad Street, still in its packing case, because master plumbers of any substance provided a horse-drawn or motorised delivery service: Ford marketed a model-T flatbed truck designed precisely for such a function. There would be no hauling a urinal up fifty city blocks for Elsa, just as there hadn't been for Duchamp.

How the urinal progressed from there, and on to the Grand Central Palace, we have examined in some detail elsewhere. What is not in doubt is the identity of the particular model that Elsa chose, and that Alfred Stieglitz would photograph: it was not manufactured by J L Mott's Iron Works. Proof of this, based on a comparison of this particular item with the formal attributes of all the urinals manufactured at the time by Motts, will be presented in a more comprehensive analysis shortly. There is no way that the urinal that Stieglitz photographed could have been manufactured by Motts.

But before we proceed we must clarify precisely what a flat back Bedfordshire urinal actually is. The flat back Bedfordshire is the funnel or shell shaped generic type of individual urinal, distinguished from the equally common stall urinal or trough urinal in all ways but function and material: all were usually installed in series. A Bedfordshire designed to attach to a flat wall is called a flat back, and the variant, identical in every other way except the obvious, and known as a corner urinal, is designed to be installed in corners. Both bear the same characteristic pattern of drain holes when produced by the same manufacturer. Most manufacturers made both flat backs and corners, using the same components where possible, especially the integral strainer, bearing the drain holes, located in base and internal false back of the urinal. The configuration of the drain holes are a reliable guide to the various brands and models, as we shall examine in a further

paper. Confusion arises because whilst all manufacturers made the generic Bedfordshire (and if any supplier that sold them supplied only one, this was it), some also used the name for their basic model: J L Mott and the Trenton Pottery were two such companies. Whilst manufacturing metal versions, Mott's had been importing ceramic Bedfordshire urinals from England since the 1870s, and, after acquiring the Trenton Fire Clay and Porcelain Company in 1902, began manufacturing their own. The Thomas Maddock Company had been manufacturing the same item since the 1870s. By 1917 both were manufacturing a range of Bedfordshire models with the same basic form, that might vary in detail, and which bore different names that distinguished one model from another.

A full comparison, not possible here, of the urinals appearing in the J. L. Mott Iron Works Plumbing Fixtures, catalogue-A, 1908, with the urinal photographed by Stieglitz, demonstrates that the latter could not have been manufactured or sold by Mott's.

Seven models of flat back "Bedfordshire" urinals are illustrated between pages 412 and 419 of J. L. Mott Iron Works' Plumbing Catalogue A, 1908. No other Mott catalogue carrying the full line of products appears to have survived, later ones, such as the Marine Department Plumbing Catalogue M (First Edition) 1918, that illustrate urinals showing a severely reduced range of models and types, in line with the practice of the entire industry, in this case, to four basic models, the U.S.N. type U-1, (Plate 1249-M), the unnamed type listed as Plate 1250-M, the "Preston" (1251-M), and the "Bedfordshire" (1252-M). None of these, being reduced, for cheapness of manufacture, to the most simple of designs, corresponds to any models in the 1908 Catalogue A. (Also illustrated is a "Bedfordshire" lipped flat corner urinal, which appears to be identical to the model at Plate 6598-A in the 1908 catalogue).

Perhaps Mott's issued no more comprehensive catalogues between 1908 and 1928, when the deeply indebted company was bought by the Lail Pottery Company of Louisville, Kentucky, its production streamlined, and its workforce decimated as a result. However, the issue of catalogues of more restricted ranges of products did continue, but as supplements to Catalogue A, such as the Marine Department Plumbing Catalogue M (First Edition) of 1918.

The models illustrated in Catalogue A are as follows: the "Purita" (Plate 6550-A); the "Newport" (Plate 6556-A); the "Metropolitan" (Plate 6550-A); the "Directo" (Plate 6564-A); the "Stevens" (Plate 6557-A); the "Panama" (Plate 6585-A), and the "Bedfordshire" (Plate 6592-A), see illustration 4. They are, of course, all generic, lipped, "Bedfordshire" flat backs.

All but two of these, the "Directo" (1212-H) and the "Newport" (209-H) are absent from the Mott's Hospital Fixtures Catalogue H published three years previously.

Those disqualified from being identical to the urinal photographed by Stieglitz, because their lugs are attached to the rim and base in different position are the "Purita," "Newport," "Metropolitan," "Directo," and "Stevens." The two remaining, the "Panama" and "Bedfordshire", are disqualified because their drain hole configurations do not correspond.

Since that leaves none, the urinal photographed by Stieglitz was not manufactured by the J. L. Mott Iron Works, and could not have been obtained from their showrooms on 5th and 17th, as Duchamp pointedly insisted.

#### No Mutt or Mott at The Atelier

A rare photograph, now in a private collection, (1916-17, gelatin silver print, collection Timothy Baum, New York) shows Duchamp apparently 'chilling out' in the bathroom at 33 West 67th Street. The building was called The Atelier, and was described in an advertisement as follows:

**The Atelier. Known to many architects as it contains the offices and studios of a number of well known architects and**

**artists, and recognised as being a most desirable building of men of this class.**

Designed by the associate architects Eustes Simonson and Pollard and Steinham (1903-05), and plumbed, not by 'Joe the Plumber' but Milton Schnaier Co, the plumbing fixtures were manufactured by The Standard Manufacturing Company. Moving there was a step up for Duchamp, who trans-located in October 1916 from the Lincoln Square Arcade Building, where the sanitary facilities that he and Elsa enjoyed were restricted to a sink, all their excretory functions being accommodated elsewhere. (See Owen Johnson, Owen Johnson Discovers a New Bohemia Here, *New York Times*, October 22nd, 1916, and Owen Johnson, *The Woman Gives: A Story of Regeneration*, Little, Brown and Co. 1916.)

A letter to the Editor of the *New York Times*, of September 16th, 1922, provides the following insight into his new arrangements in the period when he neither strolled into Motts on 5th Avenue nor bought a urinal there:

**The invasion of the New York artistic colonies by laymen and amateurs who pay high rentals and thus force the real artists to migrate to Brooklyn, the Bronx and the suburbs is a regrettable fact. Occasionally these laymen and amateurs are pleasure seekers of doubtful character, who misuse these studios, but is there a single apartment building in New York where these same people do not slip in from time to time, causing annoyance and disgust?**

**The fact that the League of American Artists objects to this unfortunate phase to the city renting population should not, because of unwarranted statements or certain real estate agents, place any special stigma upon studio buildings or artists.**

**That certain landlords and agents of badly conducted apartment and studio buildings favour immoral tenants does not militate against well-run studio buildings, and there are plenty of such in New York City.**

The letter was from J William Fosdick, who occupied a vast studio in the building.

The National Register of Historic Places: West 67th Street Artist's Colony Historic District report of 1985 describes The Atelier as being:

**... faced with brick laid in Flemish bond with random burned headers. The limestone base has a projecting vestibule with extremely ornate Gothic floral ornament that is enlivened by carved human heads, animals and birds. The top level resembles a romantic medieval castle gate and is detailed with Gothic pointed arches, panels, foliate bands, and corbels.**

Duchamp certainly knew on which side his bread was buttered: the report goes on to say, under the section headed Significance:

**The West 67th Street Artists' Colony Historic District is a small, architecturally significant enclave on the Upper West Side of New York City. The district, which is composed of eight contributing structures on West 67th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue, consists primarily of buildings erected for artists and those who wish to live in an artistic milieu. It is the only significant concentration of artists' studio apartments in Manhattan. Erected during the first decades of the twentieth century, (1901-1929), these buildings create a unit that is visually and historically separate from the rest of the neighbourhood. Six of the buildings were planned and financed by artists, and of these, five incorporate innovative two-storey studio spaces with large north windows.**

This Upper West Side "small, architecturally significant enclave

[...] separate from the rest of the neighbourhood" that seems to have been just the spot for Marcel would nourish a milieu that Elsa, newly returned from Philadelphia in January 1918, and ensconced in a filthy apartment on the Lower East Side, could never penetrate: there is in fact no more eloquent a symbol of the distance between Duchamp's social standing and that of Elsa than the difference between the Mott's urinal Duchamp did not buy and the urinal that Elsa did. But since it was not at The Atelier that Duchamp encountered Mott sanitary fittings, it is little wonder that he failed to recognise the manufacturer of the urinal that Elsa submitted to the Independents, later imagining that it was a Mott.

As we know, the first recorded reference that Duchamp made to the name 'Mott', either in print or by report, was in comments made to Otto Hahn in 1966, some 49 silent years after Richard Mutt had submitted his urinal to the Independents. Since no mention of the name Mott appears in any of the evidence recorded in April 1917, its contribution to the construction of the meaning of Duchamp's assumed submission of the urinal did not effectively begin until Schwarz published Duchamp's statement in 1969, although it had appeared in *L'Express* in the summer that it was uttered. In this putative *catalogue raisonné*, Schwarz also reported Duchamp's alleged account of how he had acquired the urinal in question. But Schwarz merely had Duchamp's word for this, and was neither in a position, nor – clearly – inclined, to doubt the master's word. As it transpired, it was only the re-emergence in 1982 of Duchamp's letter to his sister, of April 11th, 1917, that permitted Duchamp's 1964 account to be questioned (not that it was). And it had been as late as 1963 that Duchamp found himself in a position to imagine – mistakenly – that this letter had not survived. But in 1964 Schwarz found himself in the privileged position of being able to contemplate the marketing of the newly minted lost ancestor of a new kind of avant-garde art, so he thought, an opportunity he was not about to miss. The result was sixteen sets of replicas of Duchamp's 'readymades', including a urinal, to retail at \$20,000 each. Thus it would seem that Duchamp's fairy tale of wandering into J L Mott's Iron Works showroom on 5th Avenue that he spun to Hahn and his audience was fabricated in order to confirm the same fable that he had concocted two years before. In his account, Duchamp revealed to Schwarz that he had bought his urinal from the J L Mott Iron Works showroom at 118-120 5th Avenue. As he was clearly unaware, this would have been impossible.

Duchamp's contradictory hotchpotch published by Schwarz, whose clarity of meaning is compromised by his seemingly deliberate less-than-helpful interpolation "*The pseudonym adopted by Duchamp [i.e. R Mutt.] was meant to enforce the value of the choice*", both fails to square with the evidence informing the events described or make any logical sense in its own terms. The essential issue bearing on any attempt to understand the rationale behind Duchamp's explanation is, of course, how Duchamp's account informs what might have been the presumed intention behind his alleged submission of a urinal to an art exhibition, since the one must logically follow from the other. Duchamp's reasoning ran as follows:

**"Mutt comes from Mott Works, the name of a large sanitary equipment manufacturer.**

**"But Mott was too close so I altered it to Mutt, after the daily strip cartoon "Mutt and Jeff" which appeared at the time, and with which everyone was familiar.**

**"Thus from the start, there was an interplay of Mutt: a fat little funny man, and Jeff: a tall thin man**

**"... I wanted any old name.**

**"And I added Richard French slang for money bags. That's not a bad name for a pissotière. Get it? The opposite of poverty.**

**"But not even that much, just R Mutt,"**

(M.D., interviewed by Hahn, Bibl. 131, p.10)

**Schwarz: Duchamp has emphasised that the reason for this choice “sprang from the idea of making an experiment concerned with taste: chose the object which has the least chance of being liked. A urinal – very few people think there is anything wonderful about a urinal. The danger to be avoided lies in aesthetic delectation.”**

**(M.D. interviewed by Hahn, Bibl. 130. p. 22.)**

### Analysis

1. *Mutt comes from Mott Works, the name of a large sanitary equipment manufacturer.*

Duchamp was not speaking here about the circumstances in which he acquired the urinal, just the source of his pun “Mutt”, which he claimed was the name Mott.

2. *But Mott was too close so I altered it to Mutt, after the daily strip cartoon “Mutt and Jeff” which appeared at the time, and with which everyone was familiar.*

The question that immediately suggests itself is precisely what is the name J L Mott too close to that required its alteration to Mutt, and the omission of the ‘R’ in R Mutt makes no sense in this rationale, but is discussed in respect of another subject in a further statement. Neither explanation sensibly informs the Duchamp’s purported aim in submitting the urinal.

Duchamp’s statement makes it clear that the only thing that the name J L Mott could refer to in the context of his appending the signature ‘R Mutt’ was the identity of the manufacturer of a mundane sanitary fixture whose utilitarian identity would have been patently obvious had the signature never been appended, an identity wholly unaffected by Duchamp’s alleged gesture, since the rump of the Independents’ committee who rejected it were offended not by the name, R Mutt, but by the object, which would have no place in their art exhibition. More importantly, this confirms that adding the name was entirely redundant to Duchamp’s stated aim. It is for this reason that his subsequent rigmarole makes no coherent sense whatsoever, and the fact that his incoherent account is utterly contradictory is sufficient proof that Duchamp was not responsible for the urinal’s submission.

The logical conclusions to be drawn from his observation is that Duchamp expected his 1966 audience to believe that, firstly, appending the inscription ‘R Mutt’ to the urinal would have somehow obscured the sanitary function it brazenly declared and, secondly, to believe that the appending of the name R. Mutt to a urinal manufactured by J.L. Mott would in some miraculous way cause its functional character to evaporate. The fallacy of this latter claim lies in the fact that the declared purpose of the pun, to deflect the viewer’s attention away from the utilitarian identity of the urinal, had the opposite effect, reinforcing it by directing that attention to the urinal’s origin in sanitary plumbing.

Duchamp was also asking that same audience to believe that this slight pun would have worked in exactly the same way on his alleged American audience, of 1917, which was even more qualified to identify that origin. In order not to recognise a urinal as such would have required that audience to have never seen one before, and have no idea of its function, and to have spent their entire life in New York blind to the fact that they were surrounded by products of the J L Mott Iron Works, from man-hole covers, grates of drains, guttering and fall pipes, heating stoves, baths, toilets, hand-washing basins, cast iron gates and drinking fountains, water closets, baths, lavatories (sinks) and, yes, urinals. But in order for Duchamp’s audience to have perceived his gesture as “an experiment in taste” they would have needed to have found it offensive (see below), which would have required them to have been aware of what the function of the plumbing fixture was. In effect, Duchamp was asking his French audience to believe that his American audience of 1917 to have habitually walked or driven past the corner of 5th Avenue and 17th Street without once

noticing that, since October 1906, the main office and showrooms of the J L Motts Iron Works had been occupying every floor of a building sited on one of the most prominent and prestigious commercial sites in the city, none of whose showrooms and offices on all but three of the eleven floors were dedicated to the manufacture of anything: for this was not a factory; that was in Trenton.

3. *Thus from the start, there was an interplay of Mutt: a fat little funny man, and Jeff: a tall thin man...*

The names Jeff and Richard do not appear on the urinal photographed by Stieglitz. Whilst the interplay between Mutt and Jeff that Duchamp cites might be assumed to have informed interpretation of the urinal on April 9th, 1917 by any reader in New York of the sparse press coverage that briefly followed, the same knowledge cannot be assumed on the part of a French audience in 1964. But how an interplay between the fat, funny Mutt and the tall, thin Jeff either clarifies or elaborates a pun between Mutt and J L Mott Iron Works, and all that it was supposed to have meant, is not clear: it hardly serves as a punch-line to a joke, for example. And how this association then furthered Duchamp’s aim of the avoidance of the danger of aesthetic delectation does not logically arise from his reasoning, since Mutt and Jeff were neither celebrated aestheticians nor anaesthetists.

In citing the apparent universal familiarity of the cartoon strip “with which everyone was familiar”, which of course would exclude the 1966 audience, who hadn’t grown up in America breathing in this vintage *bande dessinée* with the air, Duchamp implies that the success of his gesture of inscribing an automatically offensive urinal R Mutt, and sending it to the Independents, depended on a revulsion in his audience (greater than that provoked by the object when unsigned) somehow being stimulated by an association, between it and the Mutt and Jeff characters, grounded in a shared provocation of anaesthesia. This was not a commonly celebrated reaction to the cartoon strip Mutt and Jeff: aesthetics just didn’t come into it.

Schwarz notes that Duchamp had also told Hahn that the reason for his choice “sprang from the idea of making an experiment concerned with taste: chose the object which has the least chance of being liked. A urinal – very few people think there is anything wonderful about a urinal. The danger to be avoided lies in aesthetic delectation.” But the logical conclusion to be drawn from Duchamp’s syllogistic reasoning is that only the readership of Mutt and Jeff was to be counted among the “very few people [who] think there is anything wonderful about a urinal.” Quite what the grounds were for this claim is not clear from his account, since each succeeding proposition is not resolved but merely succeeded by another – Mott Iron Works / Mutt and Jeff / Moneybags Richard / pissotières / poverty / taste – and not even very much of that, when it comes to it.

Further, Duchamp fails to explain how the presence, in his spoken discourse, of the name Richard, and the absence of the name ‘Jeff’, inform an alleged discourse articulated by his claimed gesture addressing the dangers of taste, articulated by the inscription of the urinal with the name R Mutt. But it would not appear that the average reader of Mutt and Jeff was prone to disregard the “danger to be avoided” that lay in “aesthetic delectation” as a consequence of doing so.

4. *I wanted any old name.*

If Duchamp’s aim had been as he suggested, then “any old name” could not satisfy that ambition, for by his own admission the name Richard was apparently chosen not for its common familiarity but for its unique ability to introduce into the discourse, through a multi-lingual pun, yet another theme, the contrast between poverty and wealth. That the achievement of this objective lay beyond the compass of ‘any old name’ is unequivocally demonstrated by Duchamp’s rationalisation of his choice of ‘Richard’, which follows:

5. *And I added Richard, French, slang for moneybags.*



The problem that now arises is that if Duchamp's previously elaborated rationale, recommended to his 1966 audience, aspired to credibility, it required on the part of his French audience familiarity with German and English. But what Duchamp did not explain to them was that R Mutt is a pun on the German *armut*, meaning poverty. Although the name Richard, did not appear on the urinal, and could only be discerned on the label attached to it in the Stieglitz photograph, published in *Blind Man 2* the day before the exhibition closed, it had of course participated in the discourse that had gone under the name of The Richard Mutt Affair in general Duchamp criticism.

Whilst, according to Duchamp, the reason why urinals might have something to do with the contrast between wealth and poverty appears to have been taken by him to the grave, readers of this text seeking clarification are recommended to consult *Jemandem ein R Mutt's Zeugnis Ausstellen, Monsieur Goldfinch* (Wild Pansy Press, 2008) and *'Jemandem ein R Mutt's Zeugnis Ausstellen, Monsieur Goldfinch': Richard Armut's rijckes-armoeda* (posted on Academia.edu). But the conclusion to be drawn from Duchamp's mixing French and German colloquialisms required a knowledge of both by his American audience in 1917, and of English and German by his French audience of 1966, neither of which can be assumed to have been guaranteed. That it could not be confidently assumed appears to confirm that in talking to Hahn and Schwarz as he did, Duchamp was just making things up as he went along, for the French slang for moneybags would appear to have nothing to do with either the German for poverty or pissotières whatsoever. The closest you can get is the name of a Roman emperor, Vespasian. But quite what this all has to do with the "danger to be avoided [that] lies in aesthetic delectation" is not immediately apparent.

As Duchamp pointedly observed to Hahn, these things have nothing to do with each other whatsoever, and "not even that much, just R Mutt".

So what provoked Duchamp's specious, syllogistic sophistry? The answer lies in the fact that the urinal was not submitted or exhibited by Duchamp, and Mrs Mutt's son's Christian name did not appear on it, or in the catalogue. **This suggests that the Duchamp who spoke to Hahn and Schwarz simply had no idea at all why the urinal that was the most important work of art of the 20th century had been inscribed with the name R Mutt. But in the circumstances of 1964, with his sister safely laid to rest and dollar signs revolving behind his eyeballs and those of Arturo Schwarz, who'd already instructed the manufacturers, Duchamp could hardly admit that he wasn't responsible for Mutt's urinal after all, and that he had no idea what the inscription 'R Mutt' actually meant. Happily for him, neither of his audiences was in a position to question the veracity of the parabolic rigmarole that now supported his claim to authorship of the most important work of art of the 20th century. They had to wait for 1982 before that could happen. Not that they bothered to then, as they haven't since.**

Since we have demonstrated that Duchamp could not have acquired the urinal from J L Mott's, and in the manner he claimed, then the rationale that he fabricated from the assertion, and thus the meaning he gives the urinal, collapses. Duchamp prefaced his statement with the premise that "Mutt comes from Mott works", and his subsequent elaboration is entirely predicated on this assertion. Therefore, the only reason for the inscription of the name 'Mutt' on the urinal is its function as a "pun" on the name Mott. But since the urinal could not have been purchased at J L Mott's, the inscription of the name Mutt loses its *raison d'être*, rendering it and everything that follows a meaningless fiction.

But as we suggest in *'Jemandem ein R Mutt's Zeugnis Ausstellen, Monsieur Goldfinch': Richard Armut's rijckes-armoeda*, there was a very good reason why Duchamp wouldn't explain the rationale behind the accounts that he gave to Hahn and Schwarz, which is not the same as the rationale behind the submission of Mutt's urinal.

But this still begs the question as to when Duchamp first linked

Mutt with Mott. The answer might lie in William Carlos Williams' *Autobiography*, published in 1951, the year after Duchamp exhibited the first of the replica urinals at the Sidney Janis Gallery, in New York.

Chapter 23, Painters and Parties (Part II: p. 134.) of *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams*, offers the following:

**There was at that time a great surge of interest in the arts in general before the First World War. New York was seething with it. Painting took the lead. It came to a head for us in the famous "Armory Show" of 1913. I went to it, and gaped along with the rest at a "picture" in which an electric light bulb kept going on and off; at Duchamp's sculpture (by "Mott and Co"), a magnificent cast-iron urinal, glistening of its white enamel. The story then current of this extraordinary and popular young man was that he walked daily into whatever store struck his fancy and purchased whatever pleased him – something new – something American. Whatever it might be, that was his "construction" for the day. The silly committee threw out the urinal, asses that they were. The "Nude Descending a Staircase" is too hackneyed for me to remember anything clearly about it now. But I do remember I laughed out loud when I first saw it, happily, with relief.**

Since many of Williams' 'facts' are plain wrong, circumspection is advised in considering the reliability of his memory, and so the reliability of his testimony: he was, after all, not an eyewitness to the event at the Independents to which he alludes. This is demonstrated by the fact that he could not have gaped at "Duchamp's magnificent cast-iron urinal at the Armory Show", since the urinal submitted to the Independents was not cast iron and did not appear in the Armory Show – unless we've all missed something. And of course, while Mott's showroom wasn't a store, all of Duchamp's readymades could have been bought at one. [It should be born in mind that, as we have explained elsewhere, for a number of reasons, deriving from Duchamp's own testimony, the urinal submitted to the Independents could not have been a readymade].

Williams' wife Flossie was recorded, at the time of his dictation, from memory, of his autobiography, advising that, due his failing health, her husband's memory was unreliable, and that it had been his habit of calling the Independents' show the Second Armory Show, mixing up the two. In *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964), Julio Marzán makes some useful observations on this matter (p. 38.):

**[But] in The Autobiography, which predates the interview with Heal, he had translated the significance of these two poems into strictly telling us that "The Wanderer" was its restructuring, Bill steers the discussion to what he claimed was the dominant concern in the writing of both poems, his central interest in the "line":**

**The Wanderer, featuring my grandmother, the river, the Paissac River, took its place – my first "long" poem, which in turn lead to Paterson. It was the "line" that was the key – a study in the line itself, which challenged me.**

Note his quotation marks around "line". They ostensibly give emphasis but in fact signal Williams' playing encoding games: the "line" refers both to the bloodline as well as the poetic line (see Chapter 5). This ambiguity, like the autobiographical omissions that help to characterize Bill, is an important cipher that illustrates how Williams "interknit" his personal wanderings into the language of his poetry, continuously translating his struggle into the structure of his work.

This includes the structure of *The Autobiography*, the life story of the poet Bill, which Williams restructured from details selected from the life of the man William Carlos. Factually unreliable, the autobiography is, by Williams' admission, an account of "feeling": "I decided if I was going to give an account of my feelings I wasn't going

to let people tell me what I feel" (WW85). But this flippant summary, diverting us from the idea of the scheme, bestows on his book the appearance of an improvisation. However fast and inaccurately written, as Williams tells Heal, *The Autobiography* must be read for its artful language and poetic devices. Names of people, places, and episodes have imagistic or symbolic value. Contradictions are blatantly left to stand at the expense of mundane truth, to be justified in the totality of the work, a contradictory style that reconciles otherwise irreconcilable particulars at an aesthetic level, a focussing of a cubist's eye on himself.

In its defence, this contradictory style also expressed Williams' spirit of independence [...] To succeed as a poet against the challenges of his "weather" called for extraordinary measures, and his exemplary determination was expressed in *The Autobiography* when he recalled having spent a bad night at a party at Arensberg's, when he complimented Marcel Duchamp, and felt condescended to:

**I realized then and there that there wasn't a possibility of my ever saying anything to anyone in that gang, from that moment to eternity – but that one of them, by God, would come to me and give me the same chance one day and that I should not fail to lay him cold – If I could. Watch and wait. Meanwhile, work.**

[...] In its own oblique way, then, *The Autobiography* also celebrates Bill's triumph against an array of obstacles – his biculturalism, his parents' doubts, and "that gang", be they the academics, the entrenched literary Europhiles, or the "catalogue" guardians – before whom he politically assumed amorphous transformations.

Marsden Hartley reflected on this shifting feature of Williams' personality. [...] Hartley's ability to detect this multiplicity in Williams parallels DeMuth's perception of a fragmented identity [...] Williams' multifarious appearance and dichotomous inner structure surely figured in DeMuth's making a cubist portrait of a friend.

That duplicitous deep structure can also be decoded from *The Autobiography*, which on the surface purports to be colloquial, although Fisher-Wirth believes that Williams' duplicity results from a genuine innocence:

**One thing is certain, though: the water flows much more deeply than Williams permits us to see in his Autobiography. The Autobiography is not a deliberate falsification; Williams' other writings show that innocence, as he portrays it here, was a quality he did possess. But *The Autobiography* is a one-sided self-portrait in which certain facets of Williams' experience are cleverly highlighted and others firmly suppressed. Both the highlighting and the suppressions serve to strengthen the theme of innocence, as becomes clear once one perceives that the things suppressed are eros and thanatos – those great desires that drive the psyche and consternate Americans – while the things highlighted are the public virtues derived from sublimation.**

So since the jury is still out, it is tempting to suggest that the first time that Duchamp encountered a urinal associated, via a pun, with the name of a manufacturer, Mott, was in 1951, when he could have read it in the autobiography of William Carlos Williams. There is no evidence to suggest that he made that connection before, and the most eloquent expression of an absence, in the rationale propelling Elsa's submission of the urinal, of any connection between Mutt and Mott, is the incoherence displayed in Duchamp's sophistic attempt to fabricate one.

What prompted Williams' conflation of Mott and a urinal is not known, but perhaps it was a manifestation of the same predilection for association that provoked the earlier conflation of a urinal and a drinking fountain by a journalist in 1917 – his "contradictory style that reconciles otherwise irreconcilable particulars at an aesthetic level." Quite simply, half recollected in tranquillity, from sometime in the

mists of the past – at least for William Carlos Williams – urinal plus Mutt equalled Mott. Hardly surprising, since he had, like every American male in Greater New York and the Metropolitan District, spent his entire life pissing into one example or another.

But it's strange that Duchamp didn't mention this to Hahn or Schwarz, in 1966: is it not?

## Conclusion

Because Duchamp's fairy tale of 1966 became established in the master narrative before his simple statement of fact of 1917 entered the public domain, in 1982, the Duchamp critical industry, ignorant of the conduct of the sanitary fixtures industry, persuaded itself that what would have been a simple commercial transaction, had it in fact occurred, had been an aesthetic gesture. But had both these statements entered public discourse at the time of their enunciation, we wouldn't be talking about them now, because Duchamp would never have fabricated his myth of 1966. André Breton would not have mentioned a urinal in *Phare de la Mariée* in 1935, no miniature urinals would have been included in the *Boîte en Valise*, from 1938, no replica urinals would have been exhibited by Sidney Janis, in 1950 and 1953, or Ulf Linde in 1963, and none would have been manufactured under Schwarz's guidance and Duchamp's approval in 1964.

Neither would we be talking about Conceptual Art, because that required Duchamp to have submitted a urinal to the Independents as an articulation of the premise of conceptual practise: unfortunately, he didn't.

The foregoing analysis presents certain problems to an orthodox narrative that places Marcel Duchamp in J L Mott's showrooms in April 1917. The long and the short of it is that since the authenticity of conceptual practice is ultimately predicated on Duchamp's manipulation of a certain urinal that he claimed to have purchased from J L Mott's showroom, and nowhere else, which has been revealed to be no more than wishful thinking, then conceptual practice must now seek its authenticity elsewhere. And since the ancestral archetype of conceptualism, that urinal, and that urinal alone, lately revealed as having feet of clay, has returned to the dust from whence it came, then the art practice predicated upon the myth that it embodies must now reconfigure its own bankrupted theoretical grounding.

The problems that the foregoing analysis presents are as follows:

Firstly, it makes an undeniable case for the de-attribution of Mutt's urinal from Duchamp's oeuvre.

Secondly, it requires that Mutt's gesture be re-attributed to Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and her role in the history of art to be radically reassessed, since in the act of losing its grandfather, modernism has gained a grandmother.

Thirdly, it requires a complete reassessment of the orthodox Duchamp narrative, and that of the tradition into which it has been interpolated.

Fourthly, it requires a complete revision of the current understanding of the articulation of the premise of conceptual practice.

And fifthly, it imposes an obligation on the stewards of the tired orthodoxy to acknowledge the urgent necessity to address the implications arising from the aforementioned requirements – all those museum directors, and curators, and 'gallerists', and university professors, and art critics, and art historians, and aestheticians, and cultural theorists: and not a plumber among 'em. This, surely, requires, at the very least, a change of labels.

## Postscript

The issues discussed here will be examined in greater detail in a publication in 2016. This will include a detailed analysis, of the critical evidence, particularly the urinals on display at Mott's showroom in 1917, which limitations of space, and the burden of the argument presented above, have inhibited.