

Constructing Life

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Marcel Duchamp, *Etant*

donnés: 1^o la chute d'eau / 2^o le gaz d'éclairage, 1946-66

First you have to get far enough back from everything. How ridiculous to let any taboos linger. Having smashed the king of all taboos we looked around to see if anyone else had smashed through as well. Not exactly. Not yet. But had our old friend also sought to defy death? Had he constructed an architectural surround to return to? If “after all death is always only for others,” should not the ironic artist, first off, busy himself with a tomb for himself?!? Revitalizing tombs are Mallarmé’s specialty. His “Tomb of Baudelaire” serves as point of departure, framing context, and signaling scaffolding for Marcel Duchamp’s heroic but limited, for being local and self-contained, effort to fit himself a tomb. His “Etant Donnés, involving, it would now appear, a returning to this world, might better bear the title “Encore Etant Donnés” or “To Return To.*”

*Title of a critical essay on Etant Donne by Madeline Gins and Arakawa

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Madeline Gins

Etant Pris

D. drinks M. drinking B.—drinks-toasts.

Muddy ruby-filled brew.

Pubis, liquid, illuminating gas.

Eternal afternoons— of cities without night.

Symbols that gaze back at

Forests of gazing-back symbols—

Dried foliage—

The bec Auer and its predecessor the bec papillon—
or the butterfly or bat's wing burner

The wick's desire . . . to be put . . . inserted.

M. Gins

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Madeline Gins



Marcel Duchamp, *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*, 1921

**Being Taken—Having Taken It To Be
by S. Mallarmé or R. Sélavy**

Nature is a temple
Whose living pillars
Release confused words
Perfumes, colors, sounds
Are everywhere *let loose*
All over the place

Humans pass there
Traversing forests of symbols
Which observe *them* with
A gaze akin to a familiar regard

M. Gins

[Note: Italized words that come up from the last stanza of Baudelaire's poem, **Correspondances**, to invade its first stanza plus all those that exceed the usual bounds of translation.]

[Click here for video \(QT 0.5MB\)](#)



Madeline Gins

“The Tomb of Charles Baudelaire”

The buried temple divulges from its sepulchral mouth
Sewerage: mud and rubies
Abominably an Anubis
The whole of its muzzle aflame with wild ferocious baying

Or that [as] the [most] recent gas twists the squinty wick,
A sweeper away, one knows, of infamies undergone,
It ignites a haggard immortal pubis
Whose flight moves up and off according to movements
Within and off out from the gas street lamp.

What dried-out foliage in “les cités sans soir”
Votive, could bless like her, she, in her settling down again
Vainly against the marble vainly of Baudelaire

In the veil that wraps her around, absent with shivers,
Always to breathe
This, she, his Shade
Even if it be a tutelary poison
from which...of which...we perish.

by Stéphane Mallarmé
first translated by Roger Fry
adjusted and retranslated by Madeline Gins

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M. Gins

Telescopic/Paralll Malic Moulds
by Rose Sélavy

Charles Baudelaire 1821-1867

Arthur Rimbaud 1854-1891

Henri Poincaré 1854-1912

Stéphane Mallarmé 1871-1898

Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968

M. Gins

Poincaré's Infra-thin

A.

Because

we cannot

a curve

without width

and must a straight line

under the form of
a rectilinear band
having breadth.

But well know these lines have no width.

Have them be narrower and narrower
thus to approach the limit;

so we do in a certain measure,

but we shall never attain this limit.

Always picture these two narrow bands,

one straight, one curved,

in a position such that

they encroach slightly one upon the other
without crossing.

A hand made of paper

and a hand made of gentle breeze

were made to shake hands

so that zeroing in on

the as-always oversized

triggering-zero might keep narrow. . . .

B. [tangent at infra-thin]

A high-tension non-wire

The tension needed to hold the image of a line.

The width of this line shall not exceed the posited non-width.

The tension needed to hold the thought-the breaking into thinking—
of a line.

The-tension-needed-to-hold-the-image-of-a-line's width, non-width,
or near-non-width.

The-tension-needed-to-hold-the-thought-of-a-line.

T-T-T . . . te te te te te

A cross-sectional slice, a shaving, a would-shaving of
...tentativeness...

M.Gins

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