Duchamp with Lacan through Žižek

Duchamp's Legacy

As we approach both the fiftieth anniversary of *Marcel Duchamp*'s death and the centenary of his most famous "readymade" it would appear that not a lot more can be said about the man and his work. And yet, most scholars would agree that, since Duchamp's passing and the subsequent emergence of the enigmatic *Étant Donnés,* the reception of his *oeuvre* has become highly problematized. As Benjamin Buchloh notes in one of the most recent publications directly addressing this issue, the "near total silence" which has surrounded *Étant Donnés* attests to the fact that Duchamp's *oeuvre* has "fallen short of its actual historical potential." [(1)]

In an effort to break this silence and move beyond the impasse in question, many scholars have taken *Étant Donnés* as a point of departure for the reassessment of the Duchampian project. Through the peephole, this re-reading has involved an assessment of the erotic dimension of Duchamp's work, primarily on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Some of the most important research in this area has been undertaken by two of the most prominent scholars in the field, Thierry de Duve and Rosalind Krauss. Krauss, for her part, was one of the first to explore the precise connections between Lacan and Duchamp when, in a chapter entitled "Notes on the Index" from her seminal 1986 work *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths,* she uses Lacanian theory to unlock the mysteries of the *Large Glass*. First, she develops Lacan's notion of the "mirror stage": how the "child's self-identification through his double" allows for the movement from "a global undifferentiated sense of himself towards a distinct, integrated notion of selfhood." [(2)] She then uses this

concept to read the *Large Glass* as a ‘‘split self-portrait” which – through the emphasis placed on certain syllables in the title *La MARiée mise à nu par ses CELibataires, même* – displays a “self-projected as double.”[3]

This analysis is extended further in her 1994 work, *The Optical Unconscious*, where she again differs to Lacan – through reference, this time, to his “L schema” apparatus – in order to put forward an “alternative” reading of modernism.[4] Indeed, it is not difficult to recognize the Lacanian co-ordinates which frame Krauss’s thesis regarding *Etant Donnés*: that, at the peephole, “vision is demonstrably hooked up to the mechanism of desire” so that the viewer as voyeur becomes a “carnal being trapped in the searchlight of the Other’s gaze […] a self that exists on the level of all other objects of the world.”[5] It is ultimately by recourse to Lacanian theory that she can argue that, in the Duchampian field, “nothing […] breaks the circuit of the gaze’s connection to its object or interrupts the satisfaction of its desire.”[6]

In his 1991 work *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp’s Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, Thierry de Duve calls for a parallel approach to the relationship between psychoanalysis and art history – what he terms a “heuristic parallelism” [7] – which uses Lacanian theory to read the work of art in terms of dream analysis. First, he examines how the development of Lacan’s conceptual apparatus takes place through a close reading of Freud’s approach to dream analysis. From this theoretical standpoint, de Duve then interrogates Duchamp’s *oeuvre* using the Freudian method, arguing that Duchamp discovered “a truth that has long been familiar to psychoanalysis,” namely, that “the practice of painting has something to do with sublimation.” [8] Like Krauss, de Duve does not attempt to hide the fact that his analysis of Duchamp is supported by Lacan’s conceptual apparatus, declaring that

Duchamp's "definition of the Real was strictly that of Lacan." [9]

One can conclude, then, that Krauss and de Duve's respective readings of Duchamp's work are governed by a common grounding in Lacan's conceptual apparatus. However, it should be remembered that, as with the history of *psychoanalytic* studies of art, there is also a long and well-established tradition of *psychoanalytic* interventions into the Duchampian field, of which Krauss and de Duve's Lacanian stances are simply the most recent examples. As Paola Magi has recently noted, the range of perspectives which make use of psychoanalysis in assessing Duchamp's work is wide and varied: from Lebel's brief intimations on the possible connection between the clinical setting and the *Large Glass*, to Schwartz's thorough examination of the l*Ibid*inal forces at work in Duchamp's *oeuvre* , to the different interpretations put forward by Ulf Linde, Maurizio Calvesi, and Octavio Paz.[10]

A surprising omission from this list is the name of Jean Francois Lyotard, whose 1977 work *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, written at a pivotal moment during the rediscovery of Duchamp's work in France, paved the way for all subsequent appraisals of Duchampian eroticism.[11]Of course, one should also make reference to the many rigorous interpretations of Duchamp's work offered by Lacanians themselves: for example, Jean Copjec's suggestion that Duchamp may have in some way understood the aesthetic object as a form of sublimation;[12]or Badiou's recent claim that the *psychoanalytic* aspect of Duchamp's work is "another story" which "is probably the contradictory destiny of the most important part of modern art." [13]

What, in my view, separates Krauss and de Duve from other scholars in the field is the extent to which they have applied Lacanian theory to Duchamp's work; they have, I would argue,

gone the furthest in integrating Lacan's conceptual model into the field of Duchamp Studies, as an established methodological tool. The necessary predominance of this specific Lacanian line of enquiry was given an increased level of credibility in 1987 when, to mark the one hundredth anniversary of Duchamp's birth, the Philadelphia Museum of Art reissued the Bulletin that had been devoted to *Étant Donnés* in 1969. It was this publication which, by foregrounding the connection between Duchamp's final work and a series of preparatory etchings produced in 1968 entitled *The Lovers*, caused the Lacanian connotations in *Étant Donnés* to reverberate. It was firstly deemed to be highly significant that one of the sketches was taken directly from Gustave Courbet's 1861 painting *Woman with White Stocking*. Even more important, however, was the fact that another seemed to directly indicate the influence of Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde* – a painting which, at the time Duchamp was working on the etchings, was in the possession of none other than Lacan himself. The significance of this curious set of circumstances was again underlined as recently as 2009 when, in the catalogue released to mark the fortieth anniversary of the *Étant Donnés* installation in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the precise nature of the link between Duchamp, Courbet, and Lacan was further clarified. According to Michael Taylor, Duchamp most likely saw *L'Origine du Monde* in late September 1958, "when he and his wife were invited to dine with the Lacans at their apartment at 3 rue de Lille in Paris." [(14)] Thierry Savatier goes as far as to suggest that Lacan deeply admired Duchamp and that it was therefore "inconceivable that he would not have brought the painting to Paris for this important rendez-vous".[(15)]

While this new evidence adds weight to de Duve and Krauss's Lacanian interventions, I would argue that it also brings to light a number of important questions which remain unanswered by Duchamp scholars. The first point worth noting is how the relationship between *The Lovers* and *Étant Donnés*, while

strengthening the validity of a *psychoanalytic* reading, also brings into focus the specific dilemma which art historians faced when the preparatory sketches were first discovered; namely, the fact that the direct, unambiguous reference to Courbet fundamentally undermines all the criteria according to which Duchamp's work had for so long been judged and evaluated. How, as Calvin Tomkins asks, can we account for the fact that Duchamp was explicitly claiming as an influence over his last major work an artist who he had previously criticized "for setting art on its exclusively 'retinal' course'," the very attitude against which he was seen as reacting?[(16)]Krauss's answer to this question appears insufficient since, by insisting on the distinction between the eroticism of Duchamp's later works and the earlier "cerebral Duchamp" who rejected "the world of material sensations" in favour of "the world of ideas," she simply holds in place the very categories which the Courbet/Lacan question forces us to re-examine. [(17)]

If we choose to interrogate this interpretative aporia a little further, we begin to see that its roots lie in the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the *Large Glass* and *Étant Donnés*, the two diametrically opposed centre-pieces of Duchamp's visual output. For almost fifty years, scholars have struggled to adequately explain what is at stake in the overlapping dimensions of openness and closure which penetrate each work: one is a blatantly figurative installation which remains fixed at a limited viewpoint; the other is a frustratingly inaccessible form whose opacity is counteracted by its transparency, the simple fact that the viewer is free to walk around it. This obvious feature was identified by Anne d'Harnoncourt as early as 1969, a year after Duchamp's death, in what was the first critical appraisal of the work; and yet, to this day, several issues raised by d'Harnoncourt's initial response remain unresolved. For example, her description of *Étant Donnés* as "the alter ego of The *Large Glass*" raises a very important question for Duchamp scholars: if we are to

understand Étants Donnés as a “mise-en-scène” of the *Large Glass*’s implicit “erotic content,” then how do we account for the role of the viewer-come-voyeur positioned in the space mapped by the “*Glass*”? If the allegorical content of the “*Glass*” is rendered visible in Étants Donnés – so that the “Bride” can be seen lying on a mass of twigs and the “brick base” of the “Bachelor” machine is “echoed in the inner brick wall and the outer brick doorway” – then what is the precise “allegorical” role of the viewer located at the peephole? [18]

What this apparent dichotomy leads us to is the fundamental impenetrability of the *Large Glass* itself. As Tomkins has noted, there is no getting away from the fact that, for almost one hundred years, nobody has come to fully understand the work. The reality is that, despite the transparency of its support, the forms in the *Large Glass* remain opaque: although each element has a name, it is impossible *to move* beyond the work’s purely formal qualities – its status as a *Large Glass* – and identify specific motifs. The “conceptual” interpretation which appears to overcome this obstacle is here undermined by Duchamp’s insistence that the *Large Glass* has “no theoretical substratum,” that “fundamentally, there are very few ideas.” [19]If, as has been generally accepted, the *Glass*’s “anti-retinal” status marks it as a work of “conceptual art” then why does Duchamp continuously emphasize the importance of its formal dimension: the various “technical problems” concerning the support, the colour, the “rehabilitation of perspective” based on “dimensions,” etc.? [20]On the whole, such efforts to account for the dilemma the work presents have been undone by their own acute cynicism: despite openly dismissing as naive those readings which attempt to unlock the mysteries of the *Glass*, scholars continue their own efforts to excavate the secrets the work contains. The fact remains that, in the face of assertions that meaning is impossible to decipher, the *Large Glass*’s impossible status continues to exert a fascinating hold.

The basic premise of this paper – and the central argument in my doctoral thesis, *Marcel Duchamp: Resolving the Word/Image Problematic, Afterthought* – is that this set of obstacles persists because the dominant Lacanian interventions into the Duchampian field remain limited in their theoretical scope. The reason for this, I claim, is that such readings rely heavily on what Slavoj Žižek has called "the distorted picture of Lacan as belonging to the field of 'post-structuralism'."[21]Thus, my hypothesis is that, in order to answer the above questions and build on Krauss and de Duve's work, one must continue their Lacanian analysis of Duchamp's *oeuvre* from a *Žižekian perspective*. That is to say, in order to account for the fundamental lacuna in Duchamp scholarship and properly address the problematic nature of his reception, one must revisit the 1958 encounter between Lacan and Duchamp on rue de Lille with *Žižek as a companion*.

It is worth noting here the significance of recent remarks made by Hal Foster on the subject of Duchamp's legacy. In an essay entitled "What's Neo About the Neo Avant Garde" Foster appears to be one of the first scholars to advocate the need for a specific Žižekian reading of Duchamp as part of a broader *psychoanalytic* understanding of the avant-garde tradition. Through a critique of Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, he examines the paradoxical nature of the avant-garde's reception and offers a precise description of Žižek's revised interpretation of Lacan when he affirms the importance of "rigourous" re-readings which take the form of a "radical" return. The problem with this approach, I claim, is that it does not perform the particular reading it calls for: by narrowing his focus to an analysis of the neo avant-garde Foster overlooks what precisely is at stake in Žižek's "return" to Lacan. In doing so, he obscures the precise "symptomatic" nature of the avant-garde tradition in general and Duchamp's "readymade" in particular.[22]

In order to address this limitation I will engage in a

Žižekian reading of Duchamp that accounts for the revolutionary nature of Žižek's re-reading of Lacan. The aim, in short, is to bring together Duchamp with Lacan via Žižek: to re-habilitate the *psychoanalytic* core of Duchamp's work by re-examining it through the prism of Žižek's revised interpretation of Lacanian theory: namely, his attempt to articulate how Lacanian theory, rather than belonging to the tradition of post-structuralist thought, represents a "radical break" with this tradition and as such should be viewed as one of the most "radical contemporary versions of the Enlightenment." [(23)]

At the same time, this revised Lacanian reading of Duchamp sets the scene for an important encounter, over the Lacanian threshold, between Duchamp and Žižek. Not only does Žižek allow Duchamp's work to become readable in a new and interesting way, his conceptual apparatus also re-coordinates the parameters of the Duchampian field, redefining them for the concerns of visual culture in the twenty-first century. In short, Duchamp's work begins to operate as a crucial iconological tool in a re-defined critique of ideology; a matrix enabling us to locate contemporary ideological phenomena operating on the visual (aesthetic-iconological) plane. This may have important implications for avant-garde scholarship in particular and the discipline of art history as a whole: a reading of Duchamp (via Žižek) on the basis of Lacanian theory opens up a radical revision of the historical avant-garde in which an alternative understanding of modern art becomes possible. One is thus directly responding to Alain Badiou's assertion on the urgency of telling "another story" about the work of Duchamp in order to re-engage with "the most important part of modern art."[(24)]What this "other story" both entails and engenders is a re-habilitation of art history to its *psychoanalytic* foundations and, ultimately, the emergence of a new mode of disciplinary exchange which moves beyond the "parallel" approach offered by Thierry de Duve. [(25)]

With regard to the broader implications of these claims, the current paper should be viewed as the first step in contributing to a paradigmatic shift in the field of Duchampian scholarship, an effort to bring about what Žižek has defined as a Copernican revolution: instead of seeking to overcome the persistent obstacles which Duchamp's work continues to present by "adding complications and changing minor premises".[26]within the terms of the established interpretative framework, I am calling for a fundamental change in the foundations of this basic framework itself, a new paradigm of Duchamp studies which fully recognizes the revolutionary kernel of his work. [27] Through Žižek, Duchamp's *oeuvre* will be opened up to a Lacanian-Hegelian heritage where – against the standard "post-structuralist," "postmodern" ("conceptual") reading of his work – he is located in a lineage of rationalism alongside figures such as Kant, Hegel, Freud, and Marx. It is only in this way that the deafening silence surrounding the man and his work can be shattered so that, to the sound of broken *Glass*, the emancipatory potential of his project can become fully realized.

Two sides of a Coke ad: The Duchampian title and the Lacanian signifier.

When searching for a place to begin such a radical re-*think*ing of Duchamp's project it helps to consider Duchamp's own point of departure, the genesis of his major work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. "It's not the bride itself," he famously declared, "it's a concept of a bride that I had to put on the canvas one way or another, *but it was more important that I should have thought of it in words, in terms of words, before I actually drew it.*"[28] With this statement, Duchamp reminds us that the *Large Glass*'s impenetrability is rooted firmly in a distinct and original use of language: the indecipherable nature of the allegory the *Glass* is said to represent, namely, the story of "The Bride Stripped Bare by

Her Bachelors." Although acknowledged as the tale of an erotic encounter, the extremely cryptic nature of the hand-written notes through which the story itself is told ensures that a clear reading is always blocked. Thus, given that a full understanding of the visual dimension of Duchamp's work is not complete without unlocking the meaning of these notes – or, more specifically, by identifying their precise signifying logic, what Charles Cramer has loosely defined as a particular Duchampian "syntax" – it is here that the focal point of this paper resides. [29]

Our analysis of the visual dimension of Duchamp's *oeuvre* will therefore begin by focusing on the system of language that supports it. Adding an increased theoretical rigour to Cramer's analysis, my basic thesis is that the notes are the most complex and extreme form of what Žižek terms the "poetic act of naming," an elaborate system of *metaqua signifier*associations rooted in a fundamental *psychoanalytic* understanding of language. In what remains of this paper, I will argue that, in his use of words, Duchamp literally follows the basic rule of psychoanalysis to the letter *(à la lettre)*In Žižekian terms, he grounds "the irreducible gap between the enunciated content and the act of enunciation that is proper to human speech." [30]
Or, to Duchamp's own words, he gives palpable presence to the "art-coefficient," the "gap […] between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed." [31]

Of the many statements Duchamp makes on the subject of language, one of the more curious was offered in the recently published "afternoon interviews" with Calvin Tomkins. Discussing how a painting comes to acquire a mystical aura, he explains that "an object is an object, a three-dimensional form, but words are taken and repeated."[32] Duchamp then elaborates on his point by drawing on an example from the world of advertising: "Like publicity. All along it's the same

thing, “Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola.” After a while magic appears around Coca-cola […] maybe in fifty years, if nobody speaks of Coca-Cola again, it will disappear.” [33] It is with this strange analogy that one begins to notice an interesting overlap between Duchamp and Žižek. The first point worth noting is how, with these comments, Duchamp returns to a point made in an earlier interview undertaken fifty years after the rejection and subsequent celebration of his *Nude Descending a Staircase*. In conversation with Francis Steegmuller, he declared that, if the painting’s “infamy” has lasted fifty years, then “there’s more to it than just the scandal.” When pressed to elaborate (“what else is there?”) he responds as follows: “There’s It” – *“It?”* – “It. Whatever has no name.” [34] Further contextualization of this point can be found in his assertion that the “Nude” scandal was ultimately rooted in a basic misunderstanding on the part of his colleagues (and brothers) in the Puteaux group of *the painting’s title*. In another statement focusing on the central issue in question, Duchamp explains that “they thought it was too much of a literary title, in a bad sense—in a caricatural way.” [35] It is the same misunderstanding, he maintains, which contributed to the subsequent scandal the work provoked at the New York *Armory Show* in 1913: “what contributed to the interest provoked by that canvas was its title.”[36] In short, one can conclude that, by referring to a Coke ad in order to demonstrate the general function of language in sustaining the aura surrounding the work of art, Duchamp is effectively highlighting the specific role of the title in his own work.

The crucial point is that, in one of those unique intellectual analogies which have become the hallmark of his *Writings*, Žižek also uses an advertisement for Coca-cola to elucidate his own particular theoretical understanding of language. In doing so, his analysis displays a striking overlap with Duchamp’s comments: from his Lacanian perspective, the “magic” described by Duchamp is articulated as an effect of the act of

naming whereby the "'spirit of America' (the cluster of features supposed to express it)" is "condensed in Coke as its signifier, its signifying representative." Furthermore, Duchamp's specific reference to the "it" which persists in the "Nude" – the "whatever has no name" – is formulated by Žižek as the "impersonal it" or surplus-X of the commodity-form, that "unattainable something" which is "in Coke more than Coke." [(37)]

The Coke ad can therefore be viewed as the point at which an encounter between Žižek and Duchamp might be said to take place: for Duchamp, the ad demonstrates the particular status of titles in his work and the more general function of language in relation to the work of art; for Žižek, it is used to exemplify the Lacanian logic of the signifier and show how it diverges radically from post-structuralist theory. It is through the coke ad, then, that it becomes possible to undertake a new reading of Duchamp's titles on the basis of Žižek's re-reading of Lacan's conceptualization of language. Conversely, by further exploring the implications of this overlap one engages in a *psychoanalytic* reading of Duchamp's *oeuvre* which functions, at the same time, as a Duchampian *reading of psychoanalysis*. In other words, it might be argued from a uniquely *psychoanalytic* viewpoint that Duchamp's work provokes a new understanding of the signifier, a shift from a post-structuralist to a Lacanian notion which, by opening up the radical break Žižek speaks of, ultimately contributes to a re-evaluation of Lacanian theory.

The Lacanian signifier and the Žižekian name

How, then, might we draw out the Lacanian connotations suggested by this curious parallel between Duchamp and Žižek? In this section, my aim is to sketch the theoretical background to Žižek's "Coca-Cola remarks" in order to specify where his reading of Lacan diverges from post-structuralist theorists such as Krauss and de Duve. In turn, I will use this

distinctly *Žižekian perspective* to offer a new way of understanding Duchamp's use of titles. The elucidation of Žižek's theoretical apparatus will thus be followed by a close, formal analysis of Duchamp's work. [38]

The central argument being put forward is that Žižek's Coca-Cola reference, by demonstrating the *psychoanalytic* logic of language, allows us to re-read Duchamp's work in terms of what Žižek terms "the dogmatic stupidity" of the signifier. Žižek's basic point is that, as a signifying structure, the advertising image is not constituted as a field of representation – it does not come to represent the "spirit of America" – until it is supplemented by the label "Coke." It must be remembered that, as a name, the label "Coke" has no meaning; it is fundamental empty, its function is purely structural: as such, it acts as what Žižek calls a "reflexive marker" [39] or unifying feature: a registered trademark which, by supplementing the advertising image, constitutes it as a totality. It is this operation – referred to by Lacan as a "quilting" process – which allows the interplay between visual-verbal elements to generate the ad's central message.

This occurs when the empty label "Coke" acquires the status of a sign: that is, it comes to explicate the meaning generated by the advertisement. The shift from empty name to sign takes place through a simple inversion whereby "coke" comes to designate the field it supplements; that is to say, the question "What does 'Coke' mean?" is given an answer: "Coke is ['the Spirit of America']." The process is complete when the sign "Coke" becomes a signifier, a stand-alone label with its own significance: when "Coke" takes the place of the advertising image by functioning as a *metaqua signifier*replacement for its central message. In other words, the sentence "Coke is ['the spirit of America']" simply shifts to "this object—a *Glass* bottle or red tin can—is 'the spirit of America' [because it is a bottle/can of Coke]."

The crucial point worth emphasizing is that, as a signifier, the label "Coke" does not represent or bring to mind the concept created by the ad: despite its apparent wealth of significance – its status as a signifier – it remains an empty name or trademark which, through a *metaqua signifier*operation, simply stands in for the concept it is seen to "represent"; in this sense, the ad should simply be understood as the "missing representation"[40].whose place is held by the label inscribed on the tin can or *Glass* bottle. It is this shift in perspective which allows us to grasp Žižek's basic argument: the signifier does not designate an object from a distance (or, the label "Coke" does not point to the contents of the *Glass* bottle or tin can); rather, it is inscribed into the object, onto its surface, as the empty name holding the place of the *missing representation* (the advertisement).

This is what Žižek means by the "dogmatic stupidity" of the signifier: the fact that a name is no more than a tautological, performative element which, rather than calling to mind a particular signified-idea, represents its lack. What conceals the signifier's "stupidity" is a fundamental formal inversion, a reversal in causality, through which the object-referent is misrecognized as containing the signified content designated by its name: the red can or *Glass* bottle is believed to contain a set of particular properties *because it is a can or bottle of Coke*; in short, the object is viewed as the physical embodiment of the "spirit of America". This is what Lacan termed the retroactive production of meaning: the way the *missing representation* – the advertising image and all the significance it carries – magically "stays behind" in the object as its "immanent essence,"[41] as the impersonal "it," that magical aura which cannot be named because it is merely an effect of naming. [42]

It is the "dogmatic stupidity of the signifier," Žižek maintains, that is overlooked in the post-structuralist

conception of language. In Žižek's reading, the post-structuralist perspective makes two basic theoretical claims. The first assertion is that "the relation of the subject to the world of objects is mediated through language" and, consequently, the objective world is no more than the "imaginary effect-illusion of the signifier's play" which must therefore be abandoned to the "infinite self-interpretive play of language."[43] This "self-referential" conceptualization of language, Žizek argues, is based on a clearly defined theory of the signifier: that language is "the place of auto-reflexive movement" in which metonymy is given "logical predominance" over metaphor.[44] Thus, in the post-structuralist reading, the signifying chain functions, at its most fundamental level, as a "decentered network of plural processes" in which meaning is constantly sliding along the signifying chain. [45]

According to Žižek, it is on the basis of this particular understanding of language that Derrida criticizes Lacan for giving primacy to metaphor over metonymy. For Derrida, Lacan localizes the central lack in the signifying chain in a single (Master) element thereby stemming the differential flow which corrupts the closed nature of the signifying field. For Žižek, this critique betrays a misunderstanding of the notion of Lacan's notion of the signifier: how, for Lacan, the signifier does not represent a lack but incarnates – takes the place of – a lack. Žižek's point is that such an understanding of the signifying process, by giving primacy to the metonymical relations between signifier, misreads the distinctly *metaqua signifier*status of the signifier as defined by Lacan. It is for this reason that Žižek insists on the distinction between the post-structuralist understanding of the signifier and the *psychoanalytic* version put forward by Lacan. While the Derrida's conceptualization of language remains rooted in the Saussurean tradition, Lacan's represents a radical break with this tradition: it inverts the fundamental principles of

Saussure's semiotics by submitting them to a Freudian reading.

It is this precise theoretical error which, I claim, Krauss and de Duve fall victim to in their "Lacanian" interrogations of Duchamp. While both *think*ers claim to use the Lacanian notion of the signifier to examine Duchamp's *Writings*, it is clear that their analysis is based on a post-structuralist mis-reading of Lacan. Krauss, by equating the Lacanian signifier with Jakobson's concept of the "shifter," over-simplifies Lacan's radical Freudian interpretation of linguistic theory. The result is a distinctly Derridean reading of Lacan in which Duchamp's notes are seen to display a "strategy of infecting language itself with a confusion in the way that words denote their referents"; in line with the self-referential conception of language, she argues that the notes "upset the balance of meaning" through an "outrageous formalism" which, by causing confusion, grounds the logic of the shifter such that "form begins to erode the certainty of content." [(46)]

De Duve, as I have noted, examines Lacan's theory of the signifier through a close reading of Freud's dream analysis in order to argue that, in his titles, Duchamp's "definition of the Real was strictly that of Lacan." [(47)]The problem is that this thesis is rooted in what Žižek calls "a fundamental theoretical error" regarding the analysis of dreams. In mapping the structure of a dream onto a work of art de Duve overlooks Freud's basic point: that the "essential constitution of the dream"[(48)] is not its "latent content" but the mechanism of displacement and condensation which transforms this content into "the form of the dream." As a consequence, his analysis obscures the *psychoanalytic* dimension of Lacan's theory of the signifier, as it is articulated by Žižek, thereby overlooking what is at stake in Duchamp's titles.

On the whole, it would appear that de Duve's particular

understanding of the Lacanian signifier is governed by the very formal inversion which, according to Lacan, conceals its true workings. For example, from the assertion that the word assumes its fundamental form "when the signifier has no other signification than its own being as a signifier" [49] we can see that the basic (Saussurean) notion of the signifier is retained; in other words, de Duve's reflexive recognition of the signifier's status *qua signifier* (that the signifier *signifies itself*) is supported by the assumption that the signifier is a material representative of a signified-idea (that it signifies). Beneath his claim that language is reduced to a basic "zero-degree" level of "nothingness," to "the realm of non-language," when "words ought to 'forget' that they have referents,"[50] it is not hard to detect the central tenant of post-structuralist theory: the notion that language is a self-reflexive system, that "there is no pure-object language." [51]

One might even go as far as to argue that, beyond Krauss and de Duve, it is the Derridean rather than Lacanian understanding of language that has served as the dominant interpretative framework through which Duchamp's *Writings* have been received. Indeed, is it not the post-structuralist conceptualization of language which, to date, has framed our understanding of the notes in Duchamp's "Green Box"? In accordance with the theoretical principles described above, it has been widely acknowledged that the notes have a "cryptic, absurd" dimension which is rooted in the fact that they are "unanalyzable by logic." It is assumed that the notes are "simply impossible to fathom," that they have "no meaning whatsoever" and are simply examples of Duchamp's humorous word-play, his ironic poeticism.[52] What all of this ultimately bears witness to is the fundamental contradiction which penetrates the current state of Duchamp scholarship. To paraphrase Žižek's words, this (post-structuralist) insistence on a type of ironic poeticism is ultimately *affected*: that is,

the whole effort to reinforce the idea that Duchamp's *Writings* are "caught in a decentered network of plural processes," the constant attempts "to evade the theoretical form," mask a fundamental fact: that at the root of what is being said "there is a clearly defined theoretical position which can be articulated without difficulty."[53]

The Duchampian title and the Žižekian name

How might Duchamp's homology between the Coke and the "Nude" acquire new meaning against this theoretical background? To put the question another way, how does the overlap between Žižek and Duchamp allow us to read the Duchampian title on the basis of the Lacanian signifier? In order to closely examine the status of the title in the "Nude" – a task I have undertaken in more detail elsewhere[54] – it is perhaps best to focus on the 1911 painting which served as its preparatory work: *Sad Young Man on a Train (Jeune homme triste dans un train)*. The most striking aspect of this painting – a detail, it must be said, which is all too often overlooked by art historians – is the fact that "the sad young man" mentioned in the title is nowhere to be seen in the image in question. Duchamp's reduction of the visual motif to a precise configuration of points, lines and planes ensures that the viewer inevitably struggles desperately to identify any recognizable content. He himself underlined this point when he said that "the object is completely stretched out, as if elastic" [55] so that, in the painting, "there isn't much of the young man, there isn't much of the sadness, there isn't much of anything in that painting except […] a repetition of schematic lines." [56]

What Duchamp achieves in this painting, I claim, is the dissolution of the illusion which conceals the true workings of the title, its true status as a (Lacanian) signifier: namely, the perspectival error according to which the title's

representational content is (mis-)perceived as being inherent to the object (the painting). The effect of such an operation manifests itself, I would argue, in the very acute feeling of discomfort which accompanies the viewing of the work: the way the viewer, standing perplexed before an explicitly opaque surface, is forced to ask in vein: "Where is the man indicated in the title?"[57] Indeed, is it not this very simple yet direct question which lies at the root of the art historical debate surrounding "Sad Young Man," the continued attempts to decipher the work's title and subject matter? What the question "where is the man on the train?" reveals is a basic misconception regarding the title's actual function and status. In other words, the assertion made in the catalogue entry for the work, that the title expands upon "the simple description of the figure for (or of) a nude, by also designating it – as if with a subtitle – 'Jeune homme triste dans un train'," [58] is made on the assumption that the title has the status of a sign; that it somehow points to (or designates) the content of the painting from an objective distance.

Could it be possible to argue, then, that many Duchamp scholars have, to date, made the same error as Duchamp's colleagues in the Puteaux group? Just as the hanging committee misunderstood the title's "literary" status, so too have scholars missed the basic fact that the "subtitle" *Sad Young Man on a Train* is not a sign at a distance from the painting but a sentence ["sad-young-man-on-a-train" or "JEUNE-HOMME-TRISTE-DANS-UN-TRAIN"] inscribed onto the surface of the picture? This alternative reading is given weight when we consider Duchamp's decision to directly paint the name of the work in block capitals, a procedure he goes on to repeat with the "Nude" ("NU-DESCENDANT-UN-ESCALIER") and all his subsequent works thereafter. The most explicit example of this is, of course, the sentence which Duchamp literally inscribed in black paint on the back of the lower panel of the *Large*

Glass: *LA MARIÉE MISE À NU PAR/SES CÉLEBITAIRES, MÊME/Marcel Duchamp/1915-1923/inachevé*. Through this explicit act of inscription Duchamp is doing much more than simply emphasizing the title's role in the painting; he is foregrounding the fact that the title functions not as a sign (in the Saussurean sense) but as a type of signifying structure, a verbal inscription which is part of the picture, on the same level as the visual inscriptions. This might well have been what was meant by his insistence that "I always gave an important role to the title, which I added and treated like an invisible colour." [(59)] This is also why it is Žižek who appears to offer the most precise description of the Duchampian title when he writes:

In this case the relation between the picture and its title is not the usual one whereby the title corresponds simply to what is depicted […] Here the title is, so to speak, on the same surface. It is part of the same continuity as the picture itself. Its distance from the picture is strictly internal, marking an incision into the picture. [(60)]

The basic point is that, in Duchamp's titles, we encounter the Žižekian re-conceptualization of Lacan's master signifier in its purest form.[(61)] Given that the title ["sad-young-man-on-a-train," "JEUNE-HOMME-TRISTE-DANS-UN-TRAIN"] cannot be said to designate or represent the motif in question, one can logically conclude that the man on the train is the central absence around which the picture is constructed: the motif is, in Žižekian terms, the *missing representation* for which the title is a *metaqua signifier*substitute. The title is only part of the painting in so far as it fills the central hole in the painting. It should therefore be understood not as a sign but as a signifying structure – an inscription – which holds the place of that which is lacking; namely, the scene whose exclusion is the condition which constitutes the painting as a field of representation. Duchamp even suggests as much when,

in response to the question “is the man you?”, he admits that “of course the sad young man on the train is myself.” However, he immediately qualifies this statement by referring not to the painting but to “the occasion of a train trip I took from Paris to see my family in Rouen […] in October 1911” when the idea of the painting came to him.[62] He is here referring to the actual scene – the *missing representation* – which is nowhere to be seen in the work; the scene is significant because it marks the important point in Duchamp’s development: when he came upon “the idea of using the movement as one of the elements” of a painting. [63] It is in this way that the title of the work functions as a master signifier *par excellence*: it does not call to mind or represent the idea of the sad young man; rather, it is inscribed into the field as the element which holds the place of that which is lacking. It is the reflexive marker which constitutes the painting as a totality (as a field of representation) by holding the place of a central void.

The “Lacanian” logic of Duchamp’s titles becomes even more evident when we consider the rapid development of his work before and during his stay in Munich. During this period, his titles clearly take on an even more explicit *metaqua signifier*status: “Two Nudes, One Strong and One Swift,” “The King and the Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed,” “The King and the Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes,” “The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes,” “Virgin No. 1,” “Virgin No. 2,” “The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride.” In this series of works, the effect produced in “Sad Young Man” is driven to its extreme limit: the fact that the motifs are nowhere to be seen merely emphasizes the workings of the title, its status as what might be (retroactively) termed a Lacanian signifier. The procedure finds its most acute formulation in Duchamp’s final work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*: it is only when we recognize that the name “Bride” clearly does not point to any identifiable object

in the picture ("Where is the 'Bride' designated by the title?") our attachment to the "painting's" content is disrupted and our attention is drawn to the title itself, to the act of inscription as a signifying operation. It becomes immediately clear that the word "Bride," rather than pointing to the opaque forms in the picture, functions instead as the element holding the place of a missing representation, the central emptiness around which the picture is constructed.

The problem, however, is that this Žižekian (Lacanian) dimension of Duchamp's work remains obscured by the fact that the current misunderstanding of the precise role and status of Duchamp's titles is supported by a fundamental error in perspective. The viewer continues to see the title *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* as a sign designating the *Large Glass*, despite the fact that Duchamp constantly drew a division between the two.[64] Due to an excessive investment in the work's representational content, a belief that the signified-content produced by the workings of the title somehow persists as the intrinsic or immutable essence of the object, the true logic of the title is obscured. It is this excessive movement beyond the purely phenomenal qualities of the *Large Glass*, which accounts for the work's magical aura, the power of fascination which, to this day, it continues to exert. By aesthetically fetishizing the object, we miss Duchamp's basic point that "afterward there is no mystery – it's a pure logical conclusion." [65]

Once again, de Duve appears to fall into this trap when, in reflexively acknowledging the role of the title, he reveals the underlying assumption supporting his argument that, rather than taking the place of what is clearly absent from the painting, the title represents a certain signified-idea. What comes to the fore in his insistence that "the woman is so obvious in Duchamp's works, openly announced in their titles: Virgin, Bride, Stripped Bare, and so on" is, I maintain, a fundamentally post-structuralist conceptualization of language

which is completely opposed to the Lacanian position he purports to adopt. Despite claiming to read Duchamp's work on the basis of Lacan's notion of the signifier, it is clear that de Duve, to use Žižek's terminology, still finds reason to retain the mask of the Saussurean sign: he sees content as that which is "announced" by the title; the title designates a "real referent"; it "expresses" and "proclaims" its signified.[66]

It could be argued that Duchamp, in his efforts to foreground the status and role of his titles, was actively taking this perspectival error into account in advance. Indeed, if we focus on the evolution of the visual plane of his work, we can see how he may have been attempting to break the viewer's excessive attachment to the object-referent (the painting): his progressive reduction of the image to no more than compositional arrangement of lines on a flat, opaque surface, is aimed at reinforcing an obstacle blocking the viewer's engagement with representational content. However, it is also important to note how the increased distortion of the motif in Duchamp's work runs directly parallel to an increased emphasis on the literary (metaphorical) nature of his titles. By reducing the motif to a set of opaque forms forming part of a specific point-to-point configuration, Duchamp breaks the viewer's misplaced investment in the painting's content; the crucial point is that he does so in order to underline the fact that the painting is a fundamentally symbolic mechanism. By staging a distortion in the field of visual representation – an obstacle between the viewer-subject and the painting-object – he draws attention to the signifying structure which supports the field itself: how, in effect, it is the workings of the title which provoke the viewer's frantic search for an identifiable motif. It is only when we read the sentence "sad-young-man-on-a-train" that we attempt *to move* beyond the opacity of the work's appearance towards what Erwin Panofksy called the world of "artistic motifs." [67]

The development of Duchamp's style could thus be viewed as a repeated effort to reinforce this effect by reducing the operation to its fundamental structure: "reduce, reduce, reduce was my thought – but at the same time my aim was turning inward, rather than toward externals."[68] The point of culmination is, of course, the *Large Glass* where the effect is driven to its most extreme point: "And later, following this view, I came to feel that an artist might use anything – a dot, a line, the most conventional or unconventional symbol– to say what he wanted to say. The "Nude," in this way, was a direct step to the *Large Glass*." [69] In front of the *Glass* we are left with no option but to subtract all excessive investment in the object's representational content, all fascination with the work's magical "it." In doing so, we make the crucial step toward "regions more verbal": we shift our perspective away from the object and towards the symbolic ("conceptual") inscription that supports the visual ("retinal") field.

Such a perspectival shift allows for a radical definition of Duchamp's notion of "movement." Consider, for instance, his strange insistence that, in "Sad Young Man," there are "two parallel movements corresponding to each other": "first, there is idea of the movement of the train, and then that of the sad young man." [70] The question which must be asked is this: why, if Duchamp is referring to the painting's representational content, does he say that the movement of the train comes before that of the man when, normally, the identification of the motif ("man") would logically come before that of the idea ("train")? It is only by subtracting our fascination with the painting's content – by giving up all attempts to identify the "man" and the "train" – that the answer becomes evident: the only conditions under which the movement of the "train" can come before that of the "man" is if Duchamp, rather than referring to the object-motif, is actually speaking about the effects of signification created by the title, the fact that,

in the chain of signifiers [“sad-young-man-on-a-train”], “train” is the last element.

From our Lacanian-Žižekian viewpoint, it is the “movement” triggered by the title – the viewer’s movement beyond the surface of the painting, his efforts to overcome the obstacle posed by the image of a figure broken into a series of converging lines – which concerns Duchamp. In other words, he is not referring to the movement of the man or the train *but that of the viewer*: he or she who falls into the trap (illusion) of reaching beyond the work’s physical appearance in an attempt to grasp some identifiable motif. It can thus be argued that the title generates the viewer’s movement beyond the realm of the painting’s purely formal co-ordinates, *a frantic search for “movement” in the painting*. [(71)]

Based on this revised understanding of Duchamp’s notion of “movement,” one might argue that his work gives physical form to the what Lacan termed the retroactive production of meaning: the way the signified (the meaning created by the title) “stays behind” in the object (the painting) because it is produced retroactively, created “après-coup”; that is, when the chain of (signifying) elements in the title has been supplemented, supported, and “quilted” by the intervention of an empty name. This operation becomes explicit if we focus closely on the precise working of the title in “Sad Young Man”. Note how it is only with the last word in the title (train) that the relations *between the words* which precede it become fixed, and meaning is retroactively produced. “Train,” in other words, plays the role of the pure signifier: the reflexive marker which supplements and unifies the series [“sad-young-man-on-a”] chain thereby constituting it as a field within which metonymical relations between words begin to operate. In other words, it is only with the last word that the relations *between the words* in the chain are fixed and meaning is created; it is only with the last word that the “movement” of the viewer on the visual plane is generated.

Duchamp himself suggests as much with the curious remark that "the young man is sad because there is a train that comes *afterward.*" [72] The choice of the term "afterward" draws our attention to the fact that the word "train" comes after the series "sad-young-man." This, in turn, underlines the position of the word "train" within the chain of signifiers and emphasizes the fact that meaning is produced after the sentence is unified by the last element. Similarly, in the *Large Glass* it is clear that meaning is produced retroactively; that is, when one reaches the end of the sentence. This is why it is Lacan who offers a perfect description of the work's title through what he called "the diachronic function of this button tie" at the level of the sentence: "insofar as a sentence closes the signification with its last term, each term being anticipated in the construction by the other terms and, inversely, sealing their meaning by its retroactive effect." [73] In short, it is the last term – the addition of the adverb "même" – which seals the sentence and totalizes the chain which precedes it by grounding the metonymical relations *between the words* in the chain. As with the word "train," "même" functions as a Lacanian signifier *par excellence*, the purest form of the "the dogmatic stupidity proper to the signifier as such."[74] As Duchamp explains:

Words interested me; and the bringing together of words to which I added a comma and "even," an adverb which makes no sense, since it relates to nothing in the picture or title. Thus it was an adverb in the most beautiful demonstration of adverbness. It has no meaning. This "antisense" interested me a lot on the poetic level, from the point of view of the sentence….In English, too, "even" is an absolute adverb; it has no sense. All the more possibility of stripping bare. It's a "non-sense." [75]

It is important here to note Duchamp's insistence that *Sad Young Man on a Train* "already showed my intention of

introducing humour into painting, or, in any case, the humour of word play: triste, train…'Tr' is very important."[76]

In Žižekian terms, the "tr" is the crucial feature which grounds the empty, self-reflexive nature of the title, the status of the title as a pure signifier. This operation reaches its most extreme point when the "tr" of train is replaced by the word "même" and the performative, tautological dimension of the signifier, is exposed. This effort to openly stage the performative (metaphorical) and, ultimately, tautological dimension of language also gives new meaning to what Duchamp refers to as the "literary" use of the title, or the poetic use of words: "titles in general interest me a lot […] at the time, I was becoming literary. Words interested me […]."[77] However, he maintains that, while his work might be called "literary," his use of words is "not entirely literary": it was "much deeper than literary" because "it's using words, but then everything that uses words is not necessarily literary, as you know." [78] Duchamp was referring here to "the poetic aspect" of the words, the way in which the common assumption that a word simply pointed to an object was fundamentally challenged: "I wanted to give 'delay' a poetic sense that I couldn't even explain. It was to avoid saying 'a *Glass* painting,' 'a *Glass* drawing,' 'a thing drawn on *Glass*,' you understand?"[79] For Duchamp, "poetic words" are the opposite of words which have an "essential concept"; they are, he explains, "words distorted by their sense" [80] which create "an explosion in the meaning of certain words" so that "they have a greater value than their meaning in the dictionary."[81] What this explosion ultimately calls attention to is "the intellectual side of things," to the symbolic-conceptual dimension of the object, to "regions more verbal." [82]

It is at this point that the full weight of the parallel between Lacan and Duchamp is felt. What is significant is the

way Duchamp's statements on poetry have very close resonances with Lacan's and Žižek's claim that the poetic act of naming ultimately displays what can, retroactively, be termed a *psychoanalytic* understanding of language: an attempt to name the "unnameable X" in the object through "tautological pseudo-explanations"[83] which themselves ground the tautological nature of the naming process itself. Indeed, is it not a "certain systematic and deliberate use of the signifier as such"[84] that becomes apparent in Duchamp's series of puns? By reducing language to the zero-level of a tautology, does a pun not openly stage the "poetic" dimension of language, the dogmatic stupidity of the signifier?

While the answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this paper it is worth repeating that, for Lacan, the act of staging the logic of the signifier finds its purest form in the poetic act of naming. This is his point in Seminar VII when he discusses the importance of the technique adopted in the phenomenon of courtly love within the context of the *psychoanalytic* process. It is thus significant that Duchamp consistently relates his approach to the use of titles to the poetic tradition: "it was the poetic aspect of the words that I like […] it was really poetic, in the most Mallarméan sense of the word, so to speak." [85] The Duchampian notion of "humour" – as with the term "movement" – can thus be fundamentally redefined along Lacanian lines. Directly echoing Lacan's description of the "amusing side" of courtly love – which "has perhaps no other cause than the semantic confusion produced' by the use of metaphor" [86] – Duchamp continuously refers to his use of titles in terms of humour: it was, he notes, "amusing to try."[87]

The crucial concluding point is that, while the encounter between Duchamp and Lacan in front of Courbet's L'Origine du monde remains the only corroborating evidence to support the direct influence of Lacan over Duchamp and vice versa, the

fact remains that Lacan developed his theory of the signifier through an analysis of the very source from which Duchamp's radical use of titles emerged – that is, a particular poetic understanding of language that can, after the fact, be understood through a *psychoanalytic* lens. From this departure point Duchamp's *oeuvre* and Lacan's theoretical apparatus open themselves up to the possibility of radical transformation whereby, to cite the mediator of the message, both *think*ers "may simultaneously redeem themselves, shedding their old skins and emerging in a new unexpected shape."[88]

Notes

Footnote Return 1. Benjamin Buchloh, introduction to *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 4

Footnote Return 2. Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 197.

Footnote Return 3. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 202.

Footnote Return 4. Krauss leaves the reader with little doubt as to the extent of her debt to Lacan when, in the opening chapter of *The Optical Unconscious*, she outlines the specifics of her theoretical position. Her argument begins with the thesis that modernism is a fundamentally visual field in which the "the fundamentals of perception," the opposition between figure/ground and not-figure/not-ground, are constantly maintained *(Ibid*., 14). To demonstrate this point she maps the topology of modernism onto the structuralist graph developed

by the Klein Group and asks: how does one trace an "alternative history, one that had developed against the grain of modernist opticality" *(Ibid., 20),* one that rose out of modernism to "defy its logic"? *(Ibid*., 21). The task Krauss sets herself, in other words, is to trace an opposing trend in modernism, one which instead of being "contained by the terms of visual perception" *(Ibid*., 14) functions as a "statement of this containment" *(Ibid*., 15). What Krauss attempts to identify is a shift in which the opposition figure/ground is both preserved and cancelled, an inversion in the fundamentals of perception which unveils "the structure of the visual field as such" *(Ibid*., 15), what she calls "vision as a form of cognition" *(Ibid*., 16). In order to map the logic of this counterhistory, Krauss locates what she sees as its practical and theoretical poles: it is Duchamp's decision to give up work on the *Large Glass*, she ventures, which indicates a possible starting point; and it is Lacanian psychoanalysis which marks a conceptual foundation. She writes: "The theorists of this refusal were Bataille and Breton, Caillois and Leiris, *with in the background, Freud*. And in the foreground, Dali linked through one arm and Caillois through the other, there was Lacan. *Lacan, it struck me, provided the key to this refusal, a way of giving it a name*" *(Ibid*., 22; my emphasis).

Footnote Return 5. *Ibid*., 112.

Footnote Return 6. *Ibid*., 112. Krauss's arrives at this statement by way of supplementing the semiotic graph used by the "structuralists" with Lacan's L schema: a model which shows the subject "as an effect of the unconscious" *(Ibid*., 23). This move allows Krauss to map the figure/ground axis in the visual logic of modernism onto Lacan's conceptual categories (the ego, the object, the subject and the Other) thus providing theoretical justification for the counterhistory which frames her analysis of Duchamp's late work. It is

Lacan's shema, she writes, which "displays the diagnol, mirroring relationships" lacking from the structuralist graph, the co-ordinates which "map the way the ego identifies with its object." There is, she definitively declares, "no mistaking it" *(Ibid*., 23).

Footnote Return 7. Thierry De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 4.

Footnote Return 8. De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 31. In the book's opening chapter, which is entitled 'Art and Psychoanalysis, Again?' and is framed by a quotation from Lacan, de Duve presents an overview of the long tradition in *psychoanalytic* readings of art and asks: "of what use can *psychoanalytic* interpretation be in the constitution of a historical 'narrative' récit of art?" His response, much like that of Krauss, is clear and definite: "the time at which the question is being asked must be explicit: that time is today" *(Ibid*., 1). He is equally unambiguous when he explains that his attempt to bring the two "incommensurable historicites" *(Ibid*., 5) of art and psychoanalysis into a parallel relation – a method which, he claims, is unlike "applied psychoanalysis" and "*psychoanalytic* aesthetics" in that it neither presupposes a strict adherence to Freudian doctrine nor burdens itself "with any equally a priori critical suspicion" *(Ibid*., 7) – is made on the basis of a simple hypothesis: that the "truth-function that Duchamp's work […] brings to light" *resonates* with the fundamental premises of Lacanian theory. He writes: "*And behind these artistic and theoretical resonances one hears the voice of Lacan*, who, more than anyone, authorized this sort of reading and established it, epistemologically. *This is what interests me here. One will soon see the important place I reserve for Lacan in the exercise of parallelism that follows" (Ibid*., 8-9; my

emphasis).

Footnote Return 9. De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 78-9. He arrives at this analysis through his heuristic parallelism: an "explicit point-by-point comparison" *(Ibid*., 67) between Duchamp's Munich painting *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* and Freud's famous "injection dream". The crucial point worth emphasizing here is that this comparison relies on Lacan's specific reading of the dream in question, such that de Duve's interpretation of Duchamp's work is ultimately vectored through the lens of Lacan's conceptual categories, the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary *(Ibid*., 69).

Footnote Return 10. Paola Magi, *Treasure Hunt with Marcel Duchamp* (Milan: Edizioni Archivio Dedalus, 2011), 11.

Footnote Return 11. Indeed, it is to Lyotard's topological analysis of the specular "dispositif" at work in *Étant Donnés* that Krauss refers in her own Lacanian reading of the work. Similarly, de Duve cites Lyotard's 1969 essay on the "Principal Trends in the *psychoanalytic* Study of Artistic and Literary Expression" as the most recent moment of "breaching" in the history of post-Freudian aesthetics, to which de Duve responds by asking "what use can we make today of the relation of psychoanalysis to art?" Situating his own contribution within this tradition and in relation to Lyotard's work he writes: "the method that I propose here has bully broken with an attitude of reciprocal deconstruction that characterizes the second-to-last moment of the double breaching of art and psychoanalysis, as narrated in Lyotard's 1969 essay. If my method produces any results, they should remain valued even if a later breaching of the Freudian corpus carries the relation of art to psychoanalysis to yet unsuspected shores." De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 2-3, 7.

Footnote Return 12. Joan Copjec, editorial for “Aesthetics & Sublimation”, *Unbr(a): A Journal of the Unconscious* 1 (1999): 4.

Footnote Return 13. Alain Badiou, “Some Remarks Concerning *Marcel Duchamp*,” *The Symptom* 9, (2008)

Footnote Return 14. *Marcel Duchamp*: *Étant Donnés*, ed. Michael R. Taylor (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2009), 112.

Footnote Return 15. Thierry Savatier, *L’Origine du monde: Histoire d’un tableau de Gustave Courbet* (Paris: Bartillat, 2006), in Taylor (ed.), *Marcel Duchamp*, 127.

Footnote Return 16. Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1996), 460

Footnote Return 17. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 108.

Footnote Return 18. Anne d’Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, “*Etant Donnés*: 1. La chute d’eau; 2. Le gaze d’éclairage: Reflections on a New Work by *Marcel Duchamp*,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 64, nos. 299-300 (April-September 1969): 6-41.

Footnote Return 19. *Marcel Duchamp*, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (London: Da Capo Press, 1979), 25.

Footnote Return 20. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 38.

Footnote Return 21. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), xxx.

Footnote Return 22. Hal Foster, “What’s New About the Neo Avant Garde,” *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table,*, ed. Martha Buskirk and Mignon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 5-32. For a full elaboration of this thesis see Robert Kilroy, *Marcel Duchamp: Resolving the Word/Image Problematic, Afterthought,* unpublished doctoral thesis, Department of French, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, Trinity College Dublin, 2014.

Footnote Return 23. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, xxx.

Footnote Return 24. Badiou, “Some Remarks Concerning *Marcel Duchamp*,” 2008.

Footnote Return 25. For a full elaboration of this point see Robert Kilroy, “Re-Framing the Real: Duchamp’s Readymade as a Lacanian Object,” in Preservation, Radicalism and the Avant-Garde Canon, ed. Rebecca Ferreboeuf, Fiona Noble, and Tara Plunkett (London: Palgrave Macmillon, 2016), 133-152. See also Robert Kilroy, “Facebook: The Central Place of the Lacanian Clinic,” *Lacunae: APPI International Journal for Lacanian Psychoanalysis* Vol. 3, no. 11 (2015): 1–22.

Footnote Return 26. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, vii.

Footnote Return 27. This assertion is based on the following statement made by Žižek in the updated preface to his seminal 1989 work *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: “When a discipline is in crisis, attempts are made to change or supplement its theses within the terms of its basic framework – a procedure one might call ‘Ptolemization’ […] But the true ‘Copernican’ revolution takes place when, instead of just adding complications and changing minor premises, the basic framework

itself undergoes a transformation […] the question to ask is always: is this truly a Copernican revolution, or merely a Ptolemization of the old paradigm?" Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, vii.

Footnote Return 28. *Marcel Duchamp* in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "*Marcel Duchamp* Speaks," BBC – Third Program (series: Art, Anti-Art, ca. October 1959); issued as an audio tape by William Furlong (ed.), *Audio Arts Magazine*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (1976). For full audio see http://www.tate.org.uk/audio-arts/volume-2/number-4.

Footnote Return 29. Charles Cramer, "Duchamp from Syntax to Bride: Sa Langue dans sa Joue," *Word & Image* 13, no. 3 (July-September 1997): 279-303.

Footnote Return 30. Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), 18.

Footnote Return 31. *Marcel Duchamp*, "The Creative Act," *Writings* of *Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michael Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 139.

Footnote Return 32. Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (New York: Badlands Unlimited, 2013), 62.

Footnote Return 33. *Ibid*., 62.

Footnote Return 34. *Marcel Duchamp* in Francis Steegmuller, "Duchamp: Fifty Years Later," Show 3, no. 1 (February 1963): 2,. in Thierry De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*: On *Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991),

191.

Footnote Return 35. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 83.

Footnote Return 36. *Ibid*., 44.

Footnote Return 37. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 106.

Footnote Return 38. I have elsewhere discussed how this particular aspect of Žižekian theory relates to Duchamp's work in "*The Sublime Object* of Iconology: Duchampian Appellation as Žižekian Interpellation," *Seachange: Art, Communication, Technology, International Online Journal* (Montreal: McGill University, 2016). I argue that a Žižekian reading of Duchamp's titles allows us to rethink Duchamp's *oeuvre* as a radical form of ideology critique. For the purposes of this paper, however, my intention is to elaborate a Lacanian/Žižekian reading of Duchamp's titles in more detail, by examining them outside their broader relation to the ideological parameters of the aesthetic field. In the bibliography I have included some works by Žižek which, although not directly cited, are included because they are germane to my brother arguments concerning Duchamp's project. It is in *The Fragile Absolute* or *Why is the Christian Legacy worth fighting for?* (London: Verso, 2008), for example, that Žižek makes direct reference to Duchamp in the context of a distinctly Lacanian reading of the avant-garde tradition. It is the curious nature of his assessment of Duchamp – the fact that he overlooks what, according to his own theoretical framework, he should have been able to see – which I take as a departure point for my re-reading of Duchamp. It is in this way that my Žižekian reading of Duchamp functions primarily as a Duchampian reading of Žižek, an interrogation – via the Duchampian lens – of the aesthetic-iconological foundations of

Lacanian thought, the very co-ordinates lacking from Zizek's apparatus. A substantial elaboration of this argument is the subject of my forthcoming book entitled *Duchamp with Zizek: Towards a Word/Image Parallax.*

Footnote Return 39. Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (London: Continuum, 2006), 186.

Footnote Return 40. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 178.

Footnote Return 41. *Ibid*., 113.

Footnote Return 42. *Ibid*., 113. For a full elaboration of how, through Duchamp, the act of naming functions as a critique of the ideological structure of the aesthetic field see Kilroy, "*The Sublime Object* of Iconology" (2016).

Footnote Return 43. *Ibid*., 177.

Footnote Return 44. *Ibid*., 177, 172.

Footnote Return 45. *Ibid*., 174, 172.

Footnote Return 46. Krauss, *Modernist Myths,* 200.

Footnote Return 47. De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 78-9.

Footnote Return 48. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 5.

Footnote Return 49. De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 125. While beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth noting here how

this inherent limitation in de Duve's reading of Lacan comes to manifest itself as an obvious contradiction in his 'parallel' approach: the fact that his efforts to escape the ideological pitfalls of the *psychoanalytic* position – its status as "an indecisive and even highly troubling epistemology" *(Ibid*., 3) – are undermined by the indecisive and highly troubling nature of the parallel method itself. De Duve maintains his approach affords him a critical distance towards the ideological tendencies inherent in a *psychoanalytic* study of art: "To put the problem this way is to ask what role ideology plays in art and in psychoanalysis and to imagine that ideology varies in an inverse relation to the truth function of art and analysis" (De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 3). In other words, the "heuristic parallelism" provides a model which ensures that one remains "attentive to the truth-function that is at work in the two fields" *(Ibid*., 4). However, the very admission that "of course, as 'parallel' as my reading will be, I cannot help applying to Duchamp Freudian concepts (or others, Lacanian in particular)" *(Ibid*., 7) testifies to an obvious discrepancy between theory and practice, between what he claims to be doing and what he is *actually doing*. In the face of all rigorous attempts to avoid *psychoanalytic* essentialism, there is no getting away from the fact that he falls into the very position he seeks to escape. What this contradiction ultimately underlines is the significance of Žižek's thesis regarding ideology, arrived at on the basis of his re-reading of Lacanian theory: that ideology functions not at the level of concepts (what people *think* they are doing) but in the form – or "socio-synthetic dimension" – of their activity (what they are *actually doing*). One might argue it is this paradox – what Žižek terms the "enlightened false consciousness" of postmodern scepticism – which governs the current paradigm in Duchamp Studies: that is to say, despite all efforts on the part of scholars to take into account "the distance between the ideological mask and the reality," at the level of what one is doing one "still finds reason to retain the mask." Žižek, *The Sublime Object*,

173-4, 15, 26, 28.

Footnote Return 50. *Ibid*., 127.

Footnote Return 51. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 177.

Footnote Return 52. See Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, 6, 4, 3.

Footnote Return 53. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 173-174.

Footnote Return 54. Here I will provide a more nuanced version of the analysis of the "Nude" which appears in "*The Sublime Object* of Iconology" by focusing on the work that precedes it, *Sad Young Man on a Train* (1911).

Footnote Return 55. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 29.

Footnote Return 56. Duchamp in Tomkins, Duchamp, 76.

Footnote Return 57. I can claim to have had personal experience of this phenomenon when, as an intern at the museum where Duchamp's painting is held, I was repeatedly asked the same question by perplexed visitors: "where is the man on the train?" This question serves as the departure point in the aforementioned paper, "*The Sublime Object* of Iconology," when it is discussed in relation to a curious joke made by Žižek in which he demonstrates the Lacanian logic of the signifier through reference to a viewer's experience of a painting in a gallery.

Footnote Return 58. Angelica Zander Rudenstine, *Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation* (New

York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985).

Footnote Return 59. Tomkins, Duchamp, 51.

Footnote Return 60. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 179.

Footnote Return 61. This thesis is expanded in Kilroy, "*The Sublime Object* of Iconology" where it serves as the basis for a re-reading of Duchamp's readymade in terms of Žižek's revised notion of ideology.

Footnote Return 62. Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp*, 76.

Footnote Return 63. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 130.

Footnote Return 64. Is this not his aim when splitting the work into visual and verbal poles? He writes: "I wanted the album to go with the '*Glass*,' and to be consulted when seeing the '*Glass*', as I see it, it must not be 'looked at' in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book, and see the two together. The conjunction of the two things entirely removes the retinal aspect that I don't like. It is very logical." Duchamp, *Dialogues*., 42-3. By continuously grounding the text-image disjunction Duchamp calls attention to the fact that the visual ("retinal") is governed by a symbolic ("conceptual") structure, a point which is further underlined by the distinctive way he chooses to name each work: The *Large Glass* and *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*.

Footnote Return 65. Duchamp in Tomkins Duchamp, 211.

Footnote Return 66. De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 31-32.

Footnote Return 67. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1972), 5.

Footnote Return 68. Duchamp, *Writings*, 124-5.

Footnote Return 69. Duchamp, *Writings*, 124-5.

Footnote Return 70. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 29.

Footnote Return 71. This the central claim in "*The Sublime Object* of Iconology": that the "Nude" can be understood as the point where this movement becomes eroticized, when the frantic search for content becomes sexualized through the transformation of the motif from man to female object. Thus, when de Duve asserts that, with Duchamp's Munich works, "erotic themes enter his work and never leave," he misses the basic point that the themes in question are not "in the work" but are an effect of the title; thus, one could say that the eroticism in question is present at the very level of *de Duve's own activity*: his own (mis-)recognition of erotic themes; his own movement beyond the opaque surface of the painting to the realm of representational content. See de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 31.

Footnote Return 72. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 29.

Footnote Return 73. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: Norton & Company, 2006), 682.

Footnote Return 74. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 103.

Footnote Return 75. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 40.

Footnote Return 76. *Ibid*., 29.

Footnote Return 77. *Ibid*., 40.

Footnote Return 78. Duchamp with Hamilton, *Audio Arts Magazine*. Op. cit. note 28 above.

Footnote Return 79. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 40.

Footnote Return 80. *Ibid*., 88-9.

Footnote Return 81. *Ibid*., 16.

Footnote Return 82. Duchamp, *Writings*, 141.

Footnote Return 83. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Then Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso. 2012), 943.

Footnote Return 84. Jacques Lacan, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York and London: Norton & Company), 148.

Footnote Return 85. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 40.

Footnote Return 86. Lacan, Seminar VII, 150.

Footnote Return 87. Duchamp, *Dialogues*, 29.

Footnote Return 88. Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, viii.

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