

“Fountain” avant la Lettre

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ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris.
Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*,
1917 (Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz).

In his as yet unpublished article “Duchamp’s New Leap,” on Duchamp’s *Given*, the *infrathin* and the readymades, Juan José Gurrola draws our attention to the following quotation in Norbert Elias’ *The Civilizing Process* of 1939 which we thought too amusing not to share with our readers. The quote is taken from a letter written by Madame du Deffand to Madame de Choiseul in 1768:

“I should like to tell you, Dear grandmother, as I told the Grand Abbé, how great was my surprise when a large bag from you was brought to me at my bed yesterday morning. I hasten to open it, put in my hand and find some green peas...and then a vase...that I quickly pull out: it is a chamber pot. But of such beauty and magnificence, that my people say in unison that it ought to be used as a sauce boat. The chamber pot was on display the whole of yesterday evening and was admired by everyone. The peas...till not one was left.”

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Chamber Pot, ca. 1750

("Je voudrais, chère grand'mamam, venir peindre, ainsi qu'au grand qu'au grand-abbé, qu'elle fut ma surprise, quand hier matin on m'apporte, sur mon lit, un grand sac de votre part. Je me hâte de l'ouvrir, j'y fourre la main, j'y trouve des petits pois...et puis un vase...je le tire bien vite: c'est un pot de chambre. Mais d'une beauté, d'une magnificence telles, que mes gens tout d'une voix disent qu'il en fallait faire un saucière. Le pot de chambre a été en représentation hier toute la soirée et fit l'admiration de tout le monde. Les pois...furent mangés sans qu'il en restât un seul.")

See Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process* (Urizen: New York, 1978), pages 133-134, 279. The letter serves as an example for 'changes in attitude toward the natural functions.'