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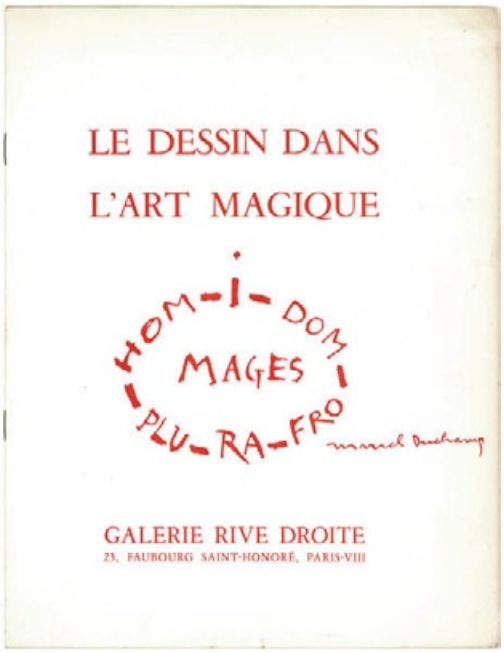
Between *images* and *fromages*: Lyotard on Painting's Critical Force

Abstract:
In this essay I want to focus on Jean-François Lyotard's interpretation of Marcel Duchamp's "The Large Glass" which I confront with Duchamp's idea of *pictorial nominalism*. I invoke the main thesis from Lyotard's important essay "Freud selon Cézanne," to draw a line between Lyotard's analysis of artistic experience of space in Cézanne's work and the topological conceptuality traced by Lyotard in spatial relations within Duchamp's "The Large Glass." I want to show that the concept of "transformation" that is introduced in Lyotard's interpretation of Duchamp's works, operates within certain spatial analysis which lays the foundations for philosophical analysis *in situ*, or, as Lyotard writes, "topological politics." For Lyotard this is the exact context to proceed the meditation of transformational potential hidden within the idea of presentation and representation of the space that becomes visible when one starts to notice incongruences as well as congruences.

Keywords:
Lyotard, Duchamp, discourse, figurative, figural, painting

You have to blind the eye that thinks it sees something; you have to make a painting of blindness that plunges the sufficiency of the eye into rout; you have to "make a sick picture."[1]



The cover of the catalogue of exhibition *Drawing in Magical Art*, curated by André Breton in 1958, which was designed by Marcel Duchamp, shows us mysterious and indeed "magical" alliances between things as different as "images" (*images*) and "cheeses" (*fromages*), but also "tributes" (*hommages*), "damages" (*dommages*), "feathers" (*plumages*) and "branches" (*ramages*). What does it take for "image" and "cheese" to meet with each other? The answer is simple: they can meet in the plastic image, the very picture you are looking at. But they also meet in the picture that represents cheese and in the word "cheese," or "fromage," or even in "Käse," or in the Polish "ser," if one remembers that the lines that create shapes of letters also possess certain plastic value. Such plastic value must be put aside if the written word is to be read, rather than looked at. But, we must admit that when we read, we are still looking at words, but looking differently, and such difference introduces a gap between the text and the picture. A line may manifest spatial features displayed on a body of its support made suddenly present in its materiality, or it may refer, as a sign, to something absent and immaterial – a meaning it evokes.

The plasticity of letters I have in mind here would resemble the idea introduced by Catherine Malabou with reference to the "transformational masks" described by Claude Lévi-Strauss:

> By showing the transformational relations that structure any face (opening and closing onto other faces) rather than disguising a face, the masks reveal the secret connection between *formal unity* and *articulation*, between the *completeness of form* and the *possibility of its dislocation*.… In his ethnographic research, patient consideration of the enigma of transformational masks led Lévi-Strauss to the discovery that the articulation of two sides of a face, or between faces, is in fact a dividing line between two different ways of representing a single face. The articulation of the face thus refers to another invisible articulation, the articulation between what Lévi-Strauss calls the plastic and the graphic components of the mask.… The plastic component of the mask designates everything that refers to the face and body to its referent; the graphic component offers ornament or decoration (painting or tattoo) on the same face or body. These two modes of representation symbolize the doubling of actor and part, individual and social character. Interestingly, when "graphic" and "plastic" are articulated in this way, they no longer amount to autonomous entities and are instead able to exchange their respective modes of signification…

1) Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp / Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod, ed. Herman Parret (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008), 107.

> Masks thus reveal the interchangeability or conversion relation between plastic and graphic, image and sign, body and inscription.[2]

Such interchangeability between figurative and semiotic systems, the one that "shows" and the one that "tells," lies at the heart of the philosophical interpretation of Duchamp's *oeuvre* proposed by Jean-François Lyotard. In Lyotard's view, the transforming power of artistic gesture opens a new field of possibilities in which pictures can be produced.[3] Hence, the French title of Lyotard's book on Duchamp, *Transformateurs Duchamp*, can be also read as *Transformateurs Du CHAMP*, that is: "transformers of the (artistic) field." According to John Rajchman, in Lyotard's interpretation, "Duchamp transforms the field not by rejecting pure 'opticality' in favor of purely 'conceptual' contents, but rather by exposing 'inconmmensurabillities' to shake up the notion of seeing supposed by the very idea of 'opticality' and its ties to good form, introducing into it a time of delay."[4]

First I want to focus on Duchamp's idea of *pictorial nominalism,* that will allow to elaborate the question of relation between the idea and the "plastic," then I will shortly invoke the main thesis from Lyotard's important essay "Freud selon Cézanne,"[5] to draw a line between Lyotard's analysis of artistic experience of space in Cézanne's work and the topological conceptuality traced by Lyotard in spatial relations within Duchamp's "The Large Glass" (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*), and his interpretation of subject-object relations within the framework of a picture.

Pictorial Nominalism

"Pictorial nominalism" (*nominalisme pictural*) is a term coined by Marcel Duchamp that appears for the first time in his notes from 1914 published later as a *White Box* to accompany his work "The Bride Stripped by Her Bachelors, Even." A note simply says: "A kind of pictorial nominalism (Check)."[6] Another note is more elaborate. It reads, for example, that "literal nominalism" assumes "no generic specific distinction between words," "no physical adaptation of concrete words," "no conceptual value of abstract words," and no "musical value." In consequence, Duchamp claims that word is "only readable by eye and little by little takes on a form of plastic significance; it is a sensorial reality, a plastic truth with the same title as a line, as a group of lines."[7] Such "plastic being of a word," to use another Duchampian phrase, opens a zero degree of language and points to the realm where language (what is made of readable consonants and vowels) and non-language (what has been deprived of any intentional meaning) meet. Or rather collide…

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2) Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 2–3, https://doi.org/10.7312/mala14524.

3) When writing about "pictures" I refer to various plastic or graphic modes of representation (both figurative and non-figurative). One should remember that the family of images is very numerous and that it includes also optical, perceptual, mental and verbal images. See also W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Is an Image?" *New Literary History* 15, no. 3 (Spring, 1984): 505, https://doi.org/10.2307/468718.

4) John Rajchman, "Jean-François Lyotard's Underground Aesthetics," *October* 86 (Fall 1998), https://doi.org/10.2307/779104, 7. On Lyotard's analysis of Duchamp's visuality as psychophysiological rather than conceptual structure see Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA, London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 113–137.

5) Jean-François Lyotard, "Freud selon Cézanne" in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), 71–89.

6) Michael Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson eds., *Salt Seller: The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1975), 78.

7) Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan (Oxford, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1991), 126. See also Marcel Duchamp, *Notes* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008), 115.

Let us remember that nominalism assumes that only individual, concrete objects exist and that the common properties are not grounded in any supra-individual properties or relations that would exist independently of what is singular. In other words, universals are not more real than the particulars which, as some people believe, participate in them. All the abstractions are just names and the matter of linguistic convention. General terms do not name anything different than the names we give to particular objects that are subsumed under them. As Martin Jay shows, quoting Hans Blumenberg, with a document from 1277 concerning the question of the relation between God and the world, "the interest in rationality and human intelligibility of creation cedes priority to the speculative fascination exerted by the theological predicates of absolute power and freedom."[8] In other words, Ockham's celebrated razor has also cut away the idea of any kind of law that could bind God's omnipotence and prevent Him from miraculously interrupting the natural order. From this it follows that humankind is also able to construct, rather than find, the rightful order on Earth. For the problem of artistic creation this had huge consequences because for the first time the idea of artistic freedom, unconstrained by any kind of preexisting form, shyly appeared. Scholastic integrity, clarity and proportion of the object suddenly evaporated as the aesthetic norm and, as Umberto Eco writes, "all that remains is the intuition of particulars, a knowledge of existent objects whose visible proportions are analyzed empirically… As for artistic inspiration, this consists in an idea of the individual object which the artist wants to construct, and not of its universal form."[9]

Amongst the various forms of contemporary nominalism in aesthetics we can find Nelson Goodman's theory. Goodman indicates five symptoms of the aesthetic, that is, five features of non-linguistic systems of symbolization that are characteristic of plastic arts: syntactic density, semantic density, relative repleteness, exemplification, multiple and complex reference.[10] In contrast with Goodman's radical conventionalism, which carefully separates and differentiates linguistic and pictorial systems, Duchamp's "pictorial nominalism" is a means to trace, in the sphere of language, a place where discourse and figure intertwine. Duchamp stresses here the lack of the referential function of the word. Word is deprived of meaning-intention; "the dictionary, linguistics, phonology, and aesthetics can all be abolished," writes Thierry de Duve.[11] What remains is not a linguistic sign but a proper name. It does not describe the characteristics of a person or subsume him or her under a concept, but rigidly designates him or her as a unique entity.[12] Nominalism, taken *literally*, as Duchamp wants it, presents the word as a self-referential representation: "grouping of several words … is *independent of the interpretation*

8) Martin Jay, "Magical Nominalism: Photography and the Re-enchantement of the World," *Culture, Theory & Critique* 50, no. 2–3 (2009): 166–167, https://doi.org/10.1080/14735780903240117. See also Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), 145–180.

9) Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 89; quoted in Jay, "Magical Nominalism," 169.

10) As Goodman describes these symptoms: "(I) syntactic density, where the finest differences in certain respects constitute a difference between symbols – for example, an ungraduated mercury thermometer as contrasted with an electronic digital-read-out instrument; (2) semantic density, where symbols are provided for things distinguished by the finest differences in certain respects – for example, not only the ungraduated thermometer again but also ordinary English, though it is not syntactically dense; (3) relative repleteness, where comparatively many aspects of a symbol are significant – for example, a single-line drawing of a mountain by Hokusai where every feature of shape, line, thickness, etc. counts, in contrast with perhaps the same line as a chart of daily stockmarket averages, where all that counts is the height of the line above the base; (4) exemplification, where a symbol, whether or not it denotes, symbolizes by serving as a sample of properties it literally or metaphorically possesses; and finally (5) multiple and complex reference, where a symbol performs several integrated and interacting referential functions, some direct and some mediated through other symbols." Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hackett Publishing Company, 2013), 67–68. See also Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art* (New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), 252–255.

11) De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 127.

12) See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

i.e. that: (*cheek, amyl, phaedra*.)"[13] To sum up what has been said: "pictorial nominalism" stresses a particular or a singular name and operates as a kind of subversive *détournement*, stopping the process of reference and showing, as Duns Scotus would say, *haecceitas*: the "thisness" of an object or a "thingness," a factuality of what is and has always been there, in the world. This view can be interpreted in terms of radical conventionalism: there are no singular objects that could be grasped cognitively. To gain knowledge or have meaningful experience is to create certain conventions according to which one can operate. On the other hand, viewing matters "from the inside" of any kind of representational system, for example a linguistic system, shows that words are "pictures" that cannot be read. In other words, they cannot be translated as usual into a different symbolic code because there is no "different code" apart from the language itself. This radical, inherent incongruity of representational systems becomes the object of analysis for Jean-François Lyotard. In *Discourse, Figure* Lyotard points out that discursive signification – the very fact that the word signifies something, refers to a certain meaning – is intrinsically disrupted by a plastic (that is "figurative") order. The order that is made visible by art:

> The position of art is a refutation of the position of discourse. The position of art indicates a function of the figure, which is not signified – a function around and even in the figure. This position indicates that the symbol's transcendence is the figure, that is, a spatial manifestation that linguistic space cannot incorporate without being shaken, an exteriority it cannot interiorize as signification. Art stands in alterity as plasticity and desire, a curved expanse against invariability and reason, diacritical space. Art covets the figure, and "beauty" is figural, unbound, rhythmic. The true symbol gives rise to thought, but not before lending itself to "sight"…. Must one therefore keep silent in order to bring it to light? But the silence of the beautiful, of perception – a silence that precedes speech, an innermost silence – is impossible: there is simply no way to go to the other side of discourse. Only from within language can one get to and enter the figure. One can get to the figure by making clear that every discourse possesses its counterpart, the object of which it speaks, which is over there, like what it designates in a horizon: sight on the edge of discourse. And one can get in the figure without leaving language behind because the figure is embedded in it. One only has to allow oneself to slip into the well of discourse to find the eye lodged at its core, an eye of discourse in the sense that at the center of the cyclone lies an eye of calm. The figure is both without and within.[14]

Duchamp's operation according to which one can *literally* treat words as pictures can be understood as the strive to grasp "the sight on the edge of discourse," that is the figure, which, according to Lyotard, is both outside the discourse (as something to which discourse refers) and inside it (as spatiality of signs, their visibility). The title of the Lyotard's book should be read beginning with the comma that separates and links the discourse and the figure. What we are dealing with here is a disruption of the chronological, and perhaps logical, order of linguistic and plastic events. One does not go before the other. Usually we assume that signs lose their material density when the gravity of the letter gives way to the lightness of meaning, when they refer to linguistic sense. Plasticity, figurativity, on the other hand, introduces material density and semantic indeterminacy. Lyotard tries to show that such mutual exclusion should be confronted with the notion of

13) De Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, 126. See also Duchamp, *Notes*, 115.

14) Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek, Mary Lydon (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 7.

"figural" which lies outside of any system of representation, both discursive and figurative.[15] The matter of artistic investigation is to make "figure" manifest itself within the picture, to show how it operates inside of any kind of representational system. This was the purpose not only of Duchamp's experiments, but also the purpose of Paul Cézanne's much earlier search.

What Has Cézanne Got *to Paint* about Freud?

Lyotard's essay, published in 1971 and devoted to the Cézannian interpretation of Freud (not to a Freudian analysis of Cézanne!), expresses a few general ideas that will also appear in the philosophical interpretation of Duchamp. Here, Lyotard proposes a paradoxical painterly interpretation of psychoanalytical discourse. The surface of Cezanne's painting ceases to serve as a transparent window of *representation* based on the principle of depicting a three-dimensional world on the plane. For Cézanne, the painting aims at *presentation*, on canvas, of the analogue of the space of the unconscious. The work of art "de-realizes reality," as Lyotard puts it, and is no longer devoted to the realization of unconscious desire in the unreal sphere of phantasy.[16] Rather, the work of art makes visible what the previous representational paradigm has rejected as not "readable": a line, a plane, colors. Cézanne becomes the first painter who did not want to realize unconscious desire, but to grasp it and to explore its mechanisms. What is crucial here for Lyotard is Cézanne's inability to render the object and its surroundings according to the principles of classical linear perspective. Let us remember this as Ervin Panofsky defines it:

> Exact perspectival construction is a systematic abstraction from the structure of … psycho--physiological space. For it is not only effect of perspectival construction, but indeed its intended purpose, to realize in the representation of space precisely that homogeneity and boundlessness foreign to the direct experience of space. In a sense perspective transforms psycho-physiological space into mathematical space.[17]

This inability of Cézanne to transform bodily experience is paradoxically exploited; it becomes the source of a new painterly experience in which the presence of the body is not expunged yet becomes visible – but not readable – through the distortions it introduces into the space of the painting. The work of Cézanne does not imitate the visible but renders visible, to quote famous formula coined by Paul Klee and used by Merleau-Ponty.[18] But there is an important difference with respect to the phenomenological approach proposed by Merleau-Ponty. For the author of "Eye and Mind," there is a certain congruence between the senses and certain aspects of Being. In other words, there is a reciprocity or an expressive co-naturality (*conaturalité*) that legitimizes the mutual interdependence of discourse and bodily experience, which at some point begins to resemble a similar correspondence projected by Kandinsky between the word and the color. For Lyotard, as for Duchamp, such assumptions go too far.

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15) As Geofffrey Bennington writes: " the figural involves the incursion of visual or perceptual space into the space of discourse… But the figural can also disrupt the visual or perceptual space too, and demonstrating this is a vital move in the deconstructive project of *Discourse, figure*." See Geoffrey Bennington, *Lyotard. Writing the Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 70. See also Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard: Art and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1991), 3–39.

16) Lyotard, "Freud selon Cézanne," 75.

17) Ervin Panofsky, *Perspective as a Symbolic Form*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 30–31.

18) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James. M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 183.

The idea of a co-naturality of the consciousness and the world is something that is projected on the original disruption, the distance that separates discourse and figure, viewer and view. Here, the primordial is "incongruence," "inconsistence." For Lyotard, the phenomenological task is contradictory since it aims at "designation in language of a prelogical signified in being" and that is why "it is forever unachieved precisely because it is turned back from Being to meaning, by way of intentional analysis; thus, truth is becoming and not simply 'actual evidence'."[19] In other words, one cannot assume that there is a common ground for linguistic expression and sensuous experience. "Finally one doesn't paint to speak, but to remain quiet,"[20] writes Lyotard. There is no pre-linguistic criterion of meaning, and Cézanne makes visible not the interconnection of the lived body and the flesh of the world, but goes far beyond and works according to the "principle of dispersion" (*principe de la dispersion*). "The painting," writes Lyotard in his essay on Freud and Cézanne, "is what enables us to approach, as far as it is possible to transcendental activity, provided that it is true that this activity works rather as the force of separation than of synthesis."[21] The deconstruction of reality presented in the painting transforms it into the "critical libidinal force." What it shows, as for example in the series of depictions of Saint Victory Mountain, is radically impenetrable because it does not hide anything. That is, it does not pose the principle of its organization outside itself, in a some kind of model of imitation or a system of rules. It is just there, as the "event," as the late Lyotard would say, without depth, without any meaning, without anything underneath, just like a name – a name that has become a picture.

This "energetic" order that Lyotard calls "libidinal" constitutes a unique modality in which a painting is given as the absolute object, without any reference and outside of any referential relation, and as such gives rise to ungraspable but perceivable polymorphy.[22] Later, in the article entitled "Something Like Communication Without Communication," Lyotard names this kind of modality by introducing the term *passibilité*. He writes there: "Passibility as the possibility of experiencing *(pathos)* presupposes a donation. If we are in a state of passibility, it's that something is happening to us, and when this passibility has a fundamental status, the donation itself is something fundamental, originary. What happens to us is not at all something we have first controlled, programmed, grasped by a concept [*Begriff*]."[23]

Duchamp's Bride

I would like to suggest that this Lyotardian analysis of painting's critical force shows that the transforming powers introduced by Duchamp's "machines," presented in "The Large Glass" (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*), belong to the same order as Cézanne's visual analysis of his *petits sensations* (little sensations). Without even touching the very dense and complicated symbolism of "the bride and her bachelors," I would like now to show that the concept of "transformation" that is introduced in Lyotard's interpretation of Duchamp's works operates within a certain spatial analysis which lays the foundations for philosophical analysis *in situ*,

19) Jean-François Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, trans. Brian Beakley (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 71.

20) Lyotard, "Freud selon Cézanne," 86.

21) Ibid.

22) In other words, this is the case in which "the figural" takes place of "figurative As Andrew Benjamin explains: "The term 'figurative' indicates the possibility of deriving the pictorial object from its 'real' model by a continual translation. The trace on the figurative tableau is a non-arbitrary trace. Figurativity is therefore a property relative to the relation of the plastic object with that which it represents. Figurativity disappears if the tableau no longer has the function of representing. If, that is, it is itself the object." See Andrew Benjamin, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 16, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203981450.

23) Jean-François Lyotard, "Something Like Communication without Communication," in *The Inhuman. Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennigton and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 110–111.

or as Lyotard writes "topological politics."[24] For Lyotard, this is the exact context in which to begin a meditation on the transformational potential hidden within the idea of a presentation and representation of space that becomes visible when one starts to notice incongruences as well as congruences. Moreover, when topology – a study of the properties that are preserved through deformations, twistings, and stretchings of objects, or what Lyotard describes as a "sort of reasoning about sizes that forbids itself the hypothesis (the facility) of their commensurability"[25] – becomes as important as topography, a study of surface shape.

The space of democratic society is homogeneous, claims Lyotard. This feature constitutes the background for the equality of all citizens, and each one of them is superimposable on another – their social places, their "roles," even if not in practice then at least in theory, are interchangeable. This allows political space to be represented in topographical system; we can look at the political just as we look at a surface where all the points are inscribed in a grid. As Lyotard puts it:

> But the discovery of incongruences and inconmmensurabillities, if one brings it back from the space of the geometrist to that of the citizen, obliges us to reconsider the most unconscious axioms of political thought and practice. If the citizens are not indiscernible, if they are, for instance, both symmetrical in relation to a point (the center, which is the law) and nevertheless non-superimposable on one another … then your representation of political space is very embarrassed.[26]

Duchamp's fascination with the non-Euclidean geometry of Henri Poincaré has been analyzed in various contexts.[27] What is crucial for the sake of this argumentation is to point out the connection with the idea of pictorial nominalism in its non-conventionalist interpretation. If the word can be treated like a picture and if it gains a "plastic significance,"[28] then the whole representational system which is based on the assumption that pictures can be read, that they can and should be translated into discursive or semantic categories, collapses. Just as it is in the case of Cézanne's interpretation of Freud: "eventually one does not paint in order to speak, but to fall silent."[29] Picture is transformed according to the internal laws of connectedness, continuity, and boundary. It also transforms the representational system, making apparent its inherent inconmmensurabillities, showing that categorization or a grammar is not "natural" but is projected to divide what is originally undivided, just as it is in the case of the visible spectrum range and the names of the colors. What is crucial for Duchamp, and likewise for Lyotard, in this process of pictorial transformation is the expression or the production of what is absolutely singular: "a single idea" (Duchamp), or an invention of singularities (Lyotard).[30] It proves that "space is humoristic,"[31] precisely because it enables the production of non-recognizable beings: objects that are not cognizable by the virtue of being translatable into a certain linguistic order – but "misrecognizable" inventions, or "events," of space and matter.

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24) Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, 69.

25) Ibid., 67.

26) Ibid., 69.

27) Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2013); Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the "Large Glass" and Related Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also Hans Belting, *Looking through Duchamp's Door: Art and Perspective in the Work of Duchamp, Sugimoto, Jeff Wall*, trans. Steven Lindberg (Köln: Verlag der Buchland Walther König, 2009), 45–48.

28) Duchamp, *Notes*, 115.

29) Lyotard, "Freud selon Cézanne," 86.

30) Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, 97.

31) Ibid., 147.

To show how this production of singularities operates, we can now, very briefly, refer to the main theoretical scheme according to which the "The Large Glass" is constructed. It is composed of two large glass surfaces, one placed above the other, each of them presenting a different space or a region. The lower one depicts "Bachelors" represented in the form of nine "Malic Molds" – three-dimensional, perspectival shapes that resemble tailor's dummies or chess figures, mounted on a metal frame, a "Sleigh," that connected the quern-stone "Chocolate Grinder." However absurd it may look, it certainly depicts visual forms according to the traditional Western canon of linear perspective, with a vanishing point marked clearly in sketches and preparatory notes by the artist. It aims at simulating the third dimension on the two-dimensional surface. In this case, the surface is made of glass, which significantly complicates the whole operation because the beholder's eye is not "stopped" by the picture plane, but "pierces through it" and sees what normally should not be seen: what is behind the picture surface, in the real, physical space. Above this lower part, the second glass is placed that depicts the "Bride Domain." None of the shapes represented on this surface even slightly resemble anything identifiable: "Bride" is a strange assemblage of non-figurative forms contributing to *Pendu femelle*, literally "Female Hanged Body"; "Milky Way" is a smoke-like form with three irregular square holes in it – "Draught Pistons." All of this and many more shapes and processes occurring on the surface of the picture can be identified by the viewer according to a legend or a diagram provided by the artist in accompanying notes.

What is most interesting in this context is Duchamp's claim that these two parts, the one at the bottom and the one above, are *mirror reflections* – they are symmetrical in relation to a horizon line that divides and connects the two surfaces, but conspicuously are non-superimposable. There is no possible way to think about those two pictures as exactly overlapping each other. However, according to Duchamp, they are mirror reflections of one another, but – just as a left hand glove in relation to a right – they are not congruent with each other. They are "married," because they reflect each other, but they are also "celibate" – their incongruence is glaring.[32] Duchamp assumes that the picture in the higher part presenting "The Bride" is the reflection of the lower part, not in the three-dimensional but four-dimensional space. As Duchamp notes: "The continuum with *n* dimensions is essentially the mirror of the continuum with 3 dimensions."[33] The whole work is like a wide open folding mirror that reflects itself – that is, it presents two virtual images but no "real" model. When I am standing in front of mirror, there is one real, three-dimensional space cut by the plane surface of the mirror glass and one virtual space on the other side of "looking glass." Duchamp shows the situation when there are two virtual spaces divided by the plane that from our point of view looks like a horizon line. In other words, image is transforming itself into another image.

Traditional linear perspective transforms the three-dimensional, bi-ocular view according to the mathematical model that enables the re-production of the third dimension that is depth on a two-dimensional surface – a plane. Duchamp's model transforms this mechanism in order to point at an invisible fourth dimension via its two-dimensional representation in a three-dimensional space, where the painting is present. What we are dealing here with is the "transformation of the perspectivist transformation."[34] The idea of a fourth dimension is taken from works by, as mentioned earlier, Henri Poincaré and his *La valeur de la science* (1905) or popular science-fiction writer Gaston de Pawlowski, the author of *Voyage au pays de la quatrième dimension* (1912). Poincaré in his book on the value of science, observes that to divide the space a certain "cut" is needed, which is the surface. In turn, the surface can be divided by the line, and then finally the line is divided by the point. The question that Duchamp is trying two answer is: what is the nature of the space that is divided by the "cut"

32) Ibid., 93.

33) Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe. Ecrits*, eds. Michel Sanouillet, Elmer Peterson, (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 130.

34) Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, 73.

of our three-dimensional space? Most certainly, just like inhabitants of a two-dimensional world would not be able to perceive the third dimension – the depth, the fourth dimension, cannot be represented to our senses. It can only be thought of and seen, but not according to the linguistic model of representation which "translates" images into words. One has to create a different model of representation that would not refer to three-dimensional reality, but would refer "back to itself, that is, to nothing but representation as such."[35] Such a model, as we have seen, is provided by the "pictorial nominalism," the idea that words possess a kind of "pictorial value"; that they do not operate as the signs referring to something else, but can be treated as singularities (just like they are treated by certain poets, for example Stephane Mallarmé).

Artistic picture, on the other hand, gains a power to show, as Lyotard would say, an incongruence *in situ*. When we learn to see such picture, the singular event of visuality is made visible, showing that "there is a certain inopticity."[36] The critical power of painting would thus lie in its ability to grasp our attention and to show the singularity of an event "on the edge of discourse."

35) Belting, *Looking through Duchamp's Door*, 47.

36) Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe. Ecrits*, 118.

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