

Within the art-historical scholarship dedicated to *Given*, Marcel Duchamp's enigmatic and shocking late work created in secrecy during the last twenty years of his life, a single interpretation prevails. According to this view, the piece internalizes and subverts classical perspective, which has organized visual representation for centuries – since the Renaissance and easily withstanding attacks by modernism. The emergence of its system in the fifteenth century joined several related developments, including the construction of humanist subjectivity, the conceptualization of vision as monocular, the mastery of the visual field as static and geometrically structured, and the correlation of visual agency and masculinity.¹ Perception was cause and consequence of modern understandings of social reality.

1 See Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, trans. C. Wood, New York: Zone Books, 1991; and Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. J. Goodman, London: MIT, 1994.

Given subverts perspective by laying bare its system, according to which the illusion of space is generated through a pyramidal visual field extending from a single viewing point. Spatial recession appears through an intricate grid of transversal and orthogonal lines, one effect of which is the unification of vanishing and viewing points. This convergence of vision and its object explains why perspectival constructions – such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, 1498 – always produce an effect of depth despite the observer's viewing point. *Given*, which rehearses many of the devices of perspective, makes a mockery of perspective – so goes the interpretation – by proposing an identity of viewing point (the door's viewing holes) and vanishing point (the female figure's displayed vagina) such that *Con, celui qui voit*, as Jean-François Lyotard says: 'He who looks is a cunt'.²

2 Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod, Venice, CA: Lapis, 1990.

Rosalind Krauss explains why. That *Given* is situated in a museum abets this subversion, because the piece transgresses the codes of the museum's traditionally revered site as the location of civilization, timeless beauty, and idealism.³ Within that location the installation *exposes* sexism, rather than *practices* it, by shaming the hypothetical viewer who finds himself discovered by other museum visitors stooped over, gazing through the peep holes lasciviously, enjoying a spectacle of sexist violence. Duchamp's project, argues Krauss, deconstructs this voyeuristic scenario reflexively, rather than participates in it sadistically. She thereby saves *Given* from its dismissal as yet another offensive avant-garde 'transgression' based upon an act of female objectification.

3 See Rosalind Krauss, Chapter Three, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge: MIT, 1993.

The problem with these interpretations is a technical one. *Given* simply does

not obey the one-point perspective that, according to these authors, it mimics and critically disassembles. There is not one 'viewing point', but two in *Given's* doorway, corresponding to the position of the viewer's two eyes. The installation's basis in *binocular* visuality is the starting point for Penelope Haralambidou's thesis, which retraces the effects of its visual construction, investigating its ramifications for drawing, vision, and architecture. Not that this specification invalidates those earlier views – Lyotard's contention that viewer and object unite in uncanny identity holds its attraction; Krauss's argument that Duchamp reflexively dismantles the gendered coding of vision still makes sense – rather, it adds a fascinating complication that is in fact faithful to the particular layout of *Given*.

The turn toward binocular sight forms part of a larger transformation in the conceptualization of vision that occurred in Europe during the nineteenth century, which moved from the camera obscura to the stereoscope as the central technology that served as conceptual model for understandings of perception. As mapped historically by Jonathan Crary, this transformation was no minor development in optical science; rather, it identifies a shift in paradigms 'where philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic discourses overlap with mechanical techniques, institutional requirements, and socioeconomic forces'.⁴ Moving beyond considerations of vision as monocular, stable and autonomous, a faithful copy of exterior reality, as in the camera obscura's model, the stereoscope – where the spatial identity between perception's illusion and the image's stimuli was severed by the machine's binocular system of mirrors – encouraged a new understanding of vision as active process, proposing a cognitive operation that is subjective, contingent, and constructive.

Haralambidou's architectural models and hand-based and computerized drawings unfold *Given's* effects of binocular looking, continuing Duchamp's own speculative, experimental, and idiosyncratic investigations into stereoscopic vision and what he called 'precision optics'. Her reconstructions show the multiplication of lines of sight, materialized through the use of strings in space or modeled imaginatively through an expanded field of drawing, suggesting a world that, seen doubly – that is, from two slightly different viewing points – is always in conflict with itself. Therein is the 'blossoming' (*épanouissement*) of possibility of which Duchamp spoke – intimating the idea of expansion, development, flowering, transformation, explosion – similar to the stereoscope's production of an illusion of three-dimensional spatial expansion within the mind of the viewer.⁵

Haralambidou's research ultimately compliments Lyotard's conviction that Duchamp's practice generates 'a politics of incommensurables', where vision becomes an active process of what he terms 'transformation'.⁶ This space of politics is not at all homogeneous, founded on Euclidean geometry and an idea of democratic equality that rests upon the equivalence of all citizens, like identical units in a mathematical system. Conversely, Duchamp's 'politics of incommensurables', as shown in Haralambidou's work, erupts in a place where

4 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, London: MIT, 1990, p. 8.

5 The term 'blossoming' recurs in Duchamp's *Notes* to the *Large Glass*, and is also employed in Esprit Jouffret's *Elementary Treatise on the Geometry of Four Dimensions*, 1903, which Duchamp knew at the time.

6 Lyotard, pp. 27 and 36.

7 Cf. Lyotard, p. 79: 'Not only does uniformity disappear, but so does identity'.

8 Duchamp uses the term 'becoming' in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, New York: Da Capo, 1973, p. 72.

9 Duchamp speaks of 'the possible' in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 73. For a further reading of Duchamp's earlier work, see my essay, 'Sculptures for Traveling' in *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, London: MIT, 2007.

10 Crary, p. 24.

11 On multiplicity, see Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p. 38.

equivalence gives way to *multiplicity*, where each differentiation becomes a singularity, where identification itself is subverted and the stability of systems – from social formations to architectural spaces – can no longer be assumed.⁷ Indeed Duchamp's politics signal a space where the reified 'identities' of classic genders lie defeated, overwhelmed by a new expansion of potentialities that flower from a perverted, promiscuous metaphoric of sexuality in which 'male' and 'female' are rendered indeterminate, flexible, transposable.

What would an architecture of incommensurables be like? The idea suggests a space of 'becoming', where materiality always holds within itself the virtual possibilities of its visual transformation that extend beyond any notion of a static material reality.⁸ Duchamp himself experimented with the notion of 'becoming' in earlier projects, such as his *Sculpture for Traveling*, 1918, in which he strung up a series of cut-up bathing caps in the middle of his apartment, which would change shape every time it was moved. The experimental construction created a space of 'the possible', a nomadic architecture of continually generative and transformative forces, a terrain of metamorphosis, if not exactly a stereoscopic space.⁹ Haralambidou's modelings propose something similar: They also suggest an architecture of the possible, ultimately one of virtuality where 'sensations and stimuli have no reference to a spatial location'.¹⁰ Unexpectedly, this conception, which follows from the example of the Wheatstone stereoscope (see Crary's analysis), is not one realized in the spaces of computerized imagery or digital projection, which are tied to flat screens, their spatial illusions produced through single-point perspective. Rather, Haralambidou proposes a stereoscopic architecture of blossoming, where architecture becomes a cognitive act, its structures radically contingent upon transformative visual processes. Rather than an architecture of functionality, or one taking place on paper alone, hers suggests a spatial construction transparent to its generative possibilities and to the transformative aspects of its virtual identities. A multimedia space of inquiry, always shifting across durations of time, it is the space of perspective's 'other', which breaches the picture plane, allowing sight lines to multiply endlessly and identities to metamorphose in the act of viewing.¹¹ Try looking at *Given* with two eyes...