

**Manuel Vella Rago\***

## **The Aesthetics of Facts**

### Abstract

This article proposes a ‘reconfiguration of aesthetics’ through an interpretation of Duchamp’s readymades. The reconfigured aesthetics results in the emergence of the readymades as the common objects that they are; it is an aesthetics driven by objectivity and which encounters facts, rather than things. Facts are non-neutral and value-laden arrangements of things. Hence, the article proposes what it calls ‘the aesthetics of facts’.

### Keywords

Aesthetics, Duchamp, Readymades, Objectivity, Ayn Rand

### **Introduction**

Through an engagement with Marcel Duchamp’s readymades and his writings on art, I propose a reconfiguration of aesthetics that redefines and disrupts the roles and relationships amongst taste, emotions, and enjoyment. I shall argue that the reconfiguration would present us with the “aesthetics of facts.”

The essay will proceed by arguing for the following:

1. a conceptual reconfiguration of (the meaning) aesthetics;
2. an investigation of the mood (or the attunement) that responds and corresponds to the reconfigured aesthetics;
3. the kind of “thing” that the reconfigured aesthetics encounters.

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\* American University of Malta (AUM)  
Email: manuel.vella@aum.edu.mt

I shall accomplish (1) by analyzing Marcel Duchamp's statements on the "retinal" nature of traditional art and adopting his urge to determine art differently. In (2), I shall outline the mood that accompanies and attunes one to "what" it is that a reconfigured aesthetic would be open and sensitive. I argue that (3) a reconfigured aesthetics along these lines is driven by a commitment to objectivity, and it encounters facts rather than things.

## 1. Reconfiguring Aesthetics

Immanuel Kant rehabilitated the term "aesthetics" (Kant 1965, 66) by returning to the Greek meaning of the term, which refers to "perception" and "the senses." Kant attempted to distance this term from the meaning it had acquired in the circles of the "criticisms of taste," for instance, by Alexander Baumgarten (ibidem, 66-67). However, the term's primary association with matters of taste is still constitutive of both the common and the specialized usages of it, especially in the English-speaking world. "The aesthetic" is virtually synonymous with the attractive and the appealing, the sensational, the pleasant, and the enjoyable. The widespread meaning of "aesthetic" therefore refers to the senses, and it does so because it signals that which pleases them relatively effortlessly.

I shall propose and proceed to a reconfiguration of the "aesthetic" that heeds the term's full and complex meaning. In the history of the term's meaning, somewhat surprisingly, one finds reference to "perception by the mind."<sup>1</sup> This reference's meaning is not clear to us at this stage, and this is itself evidence that the mind has been ousted out entirely from the meaning of aesthetics. For the most part, this also means that the mind or the intellect has been left out of modern and contemporary reflections on art's nature because aesthetics is still very often considered synonymous with the "philosophy of art."

My initial and naïve suspicions that there may be more to aesthetics than meets the eye, as it were, have been triggered by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). So, I revert to Duchamp's readymades and writings on art to explore

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<sup>1</sup> 1798, from German *Ästhetisch* (mid-18c.) or French *esthétique* (which is from the German), ultimately from the Greek *aisthetikos* "of or for perception by the senses, perceptive," of things, "perceptible," from *aisthanesthai* "to perceive (by the senses or by the mind), to feel," from PIE *\*awis-dh-yo-*, from root *\*au-* "to perceive." Online Etymological Dictionary, entry for 'aesthetic', <https://www.etymonline.com/word/aesthetic> [accessed: 25.10.2020].

and explain the meaning of an “intellectual” understanding of aesthetics, and therefore of art.<sup>2</sup> My choice to stick with readymades—not the “aided readymades” or the “reciprocal readymades” (Duchamp 1966, 142), but the simple readymades, and to focus on the *Fountain*—is twofold, namely: that the readymades are artworks whose essential double characteristic is an indifference *to* taste and the indifference *of* taste; and that, consequently, as artworks they challenge the “retinal” conception (or tendency) in art. I aim to show how the readymade artworks reject the aesthetic paradigm of art as driven by judgments of taste and enjoyment and accomplish a “reconfiguration of aesthetics” by urging a perception by the mind (Lippard 1971).

I shall proceed to articulate how readymades manage this task.

Duchamp states that readymades are practically deprived of any aesthetic appeal. They are not objects of taste (Duchamp 1966, 141). Readymades are things or stuff that do not arouse aesthetic reactions (of enjoyment or otherwise) in the person encountering them. They are neither beautiful nor ugly, neither attractive nor repulsive. They are not interesting. Their most essential characteristic is, in fact, “indifference” or a “complete anaesthesia” (Duchamp 1966, 141), and Duchamp claims that only very few things manage to emanate such indifference.<sup>3</sup> Oddly, then, these things are exceptional. Hence the necessity to produce them (i.e., to present them) as artworks, exhibits in an *artworld*<sup>4</sup> because of their originality.

Duchamp knew well, however, that in the artworld environment, there is hardly any space for readymades to be adequately seen and acknowledged as the exceptional—though mundane—objects that they are. It is easy, and the default practice, for a spectator to inscribe even these taste-indifferent things into the usual interplay of aesthetic considerations. Remember, for instance, that the *Fountain* was—after being basically rejected by the Société des Artistes Indépendants in 1917—very much appreciated for its aesthetic qualities. Many had seen it as a beautiful Madonna—calling it the Madonna

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<sup>2</sup> I discuss the artistic nature of readymades in M. Vella Rago (2015, 91-106), where I also indicate a possible continuation between these works and “the Large Glass.”

<sup>3</sup> I inform the reader that I shall not be going into political, or otherwise, interpretations of the meaning of “indifference” as one finds, for instance, in Moira Roth’s “The Aesthetic of Indifference.” Interesting and illuminating as Roth’s analyses are, I disagree with her interpretation of the relation between the “political setting” she gives and the reaction to it of artists like Duchamp, Cage, Cunningham, etc. (see M. Roth 1998, 33-48).

<sup>4</sup> I use this term in the manner of Arthur Danto. See, for instance, A. Danto 1964, 571-584.

of the toilet—or a seated Buddha; many could see in it the beauty and purity of its whiteness and appreciate its perfectly smooth, curved surfaces.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Duchamp himself teases the spectators and makes them forget about what is in front of them by naming the exhibit, such as the urinal, with interesting or interest-arousing titles like the “Fountain.” The titles nudge the spectator towards speculative indulgence about the exhibit’s nature. So, they look away from the object (Duchamp 1966, 141). Duchamp’s decision to do so is, I believe, to signal the readymades’ challenge to the spectator, the artworld, and to make it more challenging at the same time. The “challenge” consists of seeing the thing for what it is—without falling prey to the temptations and the habits of the artworld, especially those enshrined in the games of taste.

My conviction that this is what Duchamp wants his readymades to accomplish finds its roots in Duchamp’s writings. Specifically, the confirmation happens when Duchamp discusses the work-spectator osmosis through which, according to him, the spectator contributes to the event of art by “refining” the artist’s primary intention. There Duchamp introduces the personal art co-efficient which “is an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed” (Duchamp 1957, 139); hence, a numeric measure of the presence of the original intentions of the artist in the “refined” work of art (Duchamp 1957, 139). Duchamp’s postulation of this strange numeric measure fully justifies the interpretation of the readymades presented here because Duchamp’s writings are arguably the best and most specific indication of his artistic intention.<sup>6</sup>

It then becomes vital to ask afresh: What is the spectator supposed to do when confronted with a readymade object in a traditional, artworld context such as a museum, an exhibition hall, or a prestigious curatorship? How are they to “refine” the work of art? What is Duchamp requesting from the spectator if they are not to confront the readymade with a judgment of taste and adequately fulfill their role in the work-spectator osmosis?

The spectator is urged not to dismiss the object. They are urged to see it for what it is.

And what exactly would it be, what would the *Fountain* be?

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, remember the famous photograph of the *Fountain* by Alfred Stieglitz (1917), and the cropped versions of it, where the photographer uses chiaroscuro and other means and techniques to present the urinal in figurative idioms.

<sup>6</sup> With Alain Badiou, I believe that Duchamp’s writings on art “accompany the object... like a users’ manual.” See Badiou 2020.

We know very well what it is: it is a urinal. Furthermore, the *Fountain* is a readymade because it exists in the world before the artist selects it and (produces, i.e., puts it forward and) exhibits it as a work of art. So, familiarity is undoubtedly an essential feature in the artist's choice of the object and an essential part of the object (and the exhibit).

These objects have a history and a life. These objects are co-inhabitants in our praxis of living. Indeed, these objects' identity is bestowed onto them by their place in our everyday life. Without this "place or role" in human life, they are (perhaps little more than) nothing at all. Paradoxically it is, in fact, the familiarity that robs them of the possibility to manifest themselves. They are lost in our use of them. These are things that we have stopped seeing because we have consistently overlooked them.

Therefore, the challenge is fully formulated as follows. The spectator knows that they have nothing else to say or add when seeing them as the objects they are. Ideally, therefore, the spectator does precisely that; they stop.

If this process takes place successfully, the result would be a cleansing of the eye and a cleansing of the mind (Sweeney 1946, 141). It would result in the emergence of an intellectually open spectator because the spectator would have looked and seen, stopped, and moved on. The spectator would have managed to resist the temptations of the artworld. In Duchamp's terms, this means that the spectator would have resisted the "retinal" tendencies that have defined the nature of the artwork and the spectator's role for a long time.

Duchamp's term "retinal" indicates the sense of sight, but it reduces it to vision's physical occurrence. "Retinal" addresses the brute fact of the sense of sight as devoid of intellectual engagement. As an adjective used for art, "retinal" describes an attitude driven by brutally sensuous or realistic aesthetics (Cabanne 1971).

To clarify and substantiate my understanding of Duchamp's claim on the "retinal" nature of art, I revert to a 1921 text by Roger Fry titled "the Baroque." In this text, Fry does not mention "retinal," and he is reviewing an essential book by Heinrich Wölfflin in which the latter provides compelling insight into what has happened to art since the Baroque era. The author states that the Baroque signals a significant reconfiguration of what art presents and represents. In a nutshell, he argues that while the masters of the High Renaissance aimed at portraying onto a canvas, for example, a reality which they knew and understood (holistically and scientifically, as it were), in the Baroque, we detect the progressive visual (reduction and) interpreta-

tion of the arts and the reality that they represent. Baroque artists interpreted reality through their visual access to it rather than through their intellectual knowledge of it; they refined their efficiency to portray reality on a canvas in the case of painting or onto marble in the case of sculpture. The author describes Bernini's "Ecstasy of St. Teresa" as a clear example of this and argues that the drapery lacks tactile presence, and as in a painting, it is defined by the interplay of light and shade of *chiaroscuro* that structures its dramatic and dynamic unfolding (Fry 1921, 147).

I am not arguing that Duchamp's term, the "retinal," is influenced by Wöllflin or Fry, that Duchamp's conscious characterization of art as "retinal" reaches back historically to (and specifically) the Baroque rather than the realism of Courbet (Cabanne 1971). I suggest instead that through Fry's essay, we can understand "the retinal" better because we see that in the movement that signals and defines the emergence of modern art proper, namely Impressionism, we encounter the complete crystallization of the visual reduction and interpretation of art (and of reality). With Impressionism, vision is both the necessary and sufficient condition to make sense of the work of art.

Fry's reference enables us to see that Impressionism's path is potentially older than Duchamp himself suspected. We can trace it back to the Baroque. This history is critical because, since Impressionism is an (or perhaps "the") art movement which Duchamp's readymades oppose directly (Sweeney 1946), we can then propose new boundaries to the art which Duchamp describes as "retinal," and consequently gain more in-depth insight into the potential extent of the revolution that his art has provoked.

Duchamp's readymades do not stimulate the spectator's appetite. They are the antidote to the "retinal" predicament. Duchamp urges the spectator to endure the presence of dis-tasteful objects. The experience is cathartic. It generates a new space for the re-emergence of full-bodied objects because an object proper is not a thing that gives way; it is not a sight or a ghost that one can easily overlook or see-through. A proper object objects (as in rebels), as it were, and challenges us.<sup>7</sup> An object is hard. It offers resistance and demands attention. On such an object (henceforth written "ob-ject"), we stumble because it is a fact.

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<sup>7</sup> "Object: [...] to present, oppose, cast in the way of," from *ob* "in front of, towards, against" (see *ob-*) + *iacere* "to throw." Online Etymological Dictionary, entry for "object," <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=object> [accessed: 25.10.2020].

## 2. Courageously Attuned

There are two statements in the preceding section which we need to discuss and develop. The first consideration is that an object's presentation is a challenge. We need to understand what kind of challenge it is and how to prepare for it. The second statement is the claim that the object's presence is a fact. We shall deal with the former in this section and the latter in the next one.

The readymades, interpreted through Duchamp's writings on art, necessitate an active spectator because the spectator is an integral part of the work of art. However, I seem to be asking for a relatively toned-down activity on the spectator's part. In fact, I have been mainly urging spectators not to overwhelm the readymade with their judgments of taste. I seem to demand a certain amount of passivity from the spectator. However, this cannot be the case because one does not advise anyone to face a challenge passively and expect that person to withstand the challenge successfully. What this reading is requesting of the spectator is therefore surely not passivity, but it is also not noisy and frantic activity.

The readymades require the spectators to attune themselves to the readymades as artworks suitably. For the encounter with the readymades to occur correctly, we could say the spectator must "be in the mood" for their encounter.

"To be in the mood" is "to be attuned." I borrow this term, i.e., *attuned*, and consequently *attunement*, from John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson's English translation of Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. They identify *attunement* as a better translation of the German *Gestimmtheit* than "mood" because the latter is too heavily associated with emotions, internal agitations, and affectations (Heidegger 2003, H134; 2003, 172, translators' footnote 3). "Mood" tends to make us look inwardly, whereas Heidegger intends to make us look at our outside-ness. Indeed, Heidegger claims that different "attitudes" to the world lead to different categorizations and/or understandings of the world. Specific "moods" highlight different aspects of human experience. Different moods *attune* and open us to aspects of the phenomenal world that would otherwise be inaccessible to us without that mood.

Therefore, the readymades ask the spectator to attune themselves to be open-minded and withstand the challenge—which the readymade's presentation itself poses—properly.

Why, however, would a readymade present the spectator with a “challenge”? As already stated, the spectator would most of the time not see the object presented as the object which it is (i.e., the ordinary object) but instead uses it as an excuse to revert to something else, which ultimately results in ignoring the object *per se*.<sup>8</sup> The challenge that we signal as essential to a reconfiguration of aesthetics is refraining from dismissing the object. The proper attunement for the presentation of the readymades is, therefore, that which allows them to shine forth as the objects which they are.

My claim is that the spectator is asked to be “courageous.” Thus, the proper attunement for the readymades’ spectator is “courage.”

The reason for the choice of “courage” as the required attunement is admittedly not self-evident because it is not as if these objects are dangerous and the spectator needs to protect themselves from them or fight them off. Indeed, they are not, and they should not. The meaning of the term “courage,” which is most familiar to us, i.e., that “valor, quality of mind which enables one to meet danger and trouble without fear,” comes from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> It certainly seems like we have since become accustomed to opposing courage to cowardice, associating it with fear, and understanding courage as the mark of the tenacious who can confront and defeat an external and threatening danger.

However, the courage demanded by the readymades is summoned by someone who recognizes a danger within, namely the tendency to overlook the things that one encounters, rather than seeing and minding them. I am referring to a deeper resonance of the word “courage,” which also comes from the history of its meaning, but dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, namely: “‘heart (as the seat of emotions),’ hence ‘spirit, temperament, state or frame of mind.’”<sup>10</sup> The mind, that which wills and thinks, the intellect, is also that which feels; but it is not only that which feels. So, to apply the colloquial meaning of “state of mind” here, which is synonymous with “emotion” or “mood,” would miss the necessary and most important point that the faculty of “minding,” i.e., caring, pertains to the mind. Caring is what drives attentiveness and focus. It is what directs our sight and our attention. Therefore, the heart is not merely the seat of emotions but also the core of our faculty of minding and caring. To care is, first and foremost, to see.

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<sup>8</sup> To get a glimpse of what I mean, see Figgis 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, entry for “courage”, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=courage> [accessed: 25.10.2020.]. My emphasis.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

Thus, “courage” claims us in our most profound nature, i.e., our ability to see, which is not exhausted by our sense of vision, the retina’s work. The corresponding danger would be losing sight of our human nature’s full dignity, which happens when the “heart” is understood solely as the seat of emotions. We bear the high cost of forgetting that at the heart of our nature is the mind, the ground of our faculties of *i n s i g h t* and understanding.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that in the original meaning of “courage,” we find the same diad that we found in “aesthetics,” namely “emotions” and “the mind,” engaged in yet another original embrace. *Aesthesis*, or perception, is mindful, in the same way, or to the same extent that the mind (the core) is emotional, and vice versa.

“Courage” signifies the human being’s heart—our spirit’s center or core, and our state of mind. Courage is the attunement proper of those who face reality with the temperament appropriate for understanding. Therefore, it is courage that describes the attitude of those who can encounter the ready-mades and see them.

### 3. The Ob-ject is a Fact

What is a fact?

In common and everyday language, a “fact” is something real, as opposed to something that results from (subjective) interpretation or imagination. The word’s history goes back to Latin and refers to “things done,” i.e., past and accomplished.

Additionally, I highlight a Wittgensteinian meaning of the term “fact” as the existence of an arrangement of things. This meaning comes from Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, more specifically, from points 1.1, 2, and 2.01:

- 1.1. The world is the totality of facts, not of things.
2. What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.
- 2.01. A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of [...] (things).

(Wittgenstein 2006)

Wittgenstein’s use of the term corroborates the ordinary meaning according to which a fact is real and not the outcome of some (subjective) interpretation, but it also provides us with the added insight that a fact involves an arrangement (of things).

So, how is an ob-ject a fact? Is an object not a thing? The second question's answer is "no." An object is a (set of) "state of affairs," hence an arrangement of things (rather than a thing). To understand why this is significant here, let me first recapitulate these reflections' outcomes so far. We know that the object, i.e., the readymade, is produced and presented to us as a work of art. We, the spectators, are asked to attune ourselves properly to this production, which means summoning the courage to face it in a way that claims our full human capacity to see. We are asked to re-learn to see by being invited to participate in an event where a new aesthetics holds sway, which addresses and stimulates the mind. The source of the stimulus is the artistic production of an ordinary and readymade object. The imperative is to refrain from dismissing the object in terms of matters of taste. If we manage and succeed, what we see would be the object itself. Only at that stage would the thing, or the "object," be transformed into an "ob-ject" proper, i.e., something tangible and real, something with which to reckon. Only when that is the case does it proudly manifest itself and confront us, then we do get to the r e a l ob-ject itself. Then, it is a fact.

But contemporary postmodern trends in philosophy have cautioned us against speaking of or referring to the "object itself." Because: who determines what the object is in itself? Is anyone's definition of the object better than anyone else's or for different people at different historical times? Moreover, what about the object's self-awareness? What would it say that it is itself?

These questions arise because one senses danger associated with ascribing a (definite) value and, therefore, with the process of evaluation. These are problematic because who is to measure and evaluate "what" something is, especially what it is "in itself" once and for all, as it were? What counts as a "good" definition of something, what method, and whose practice?

I believe that Duchamp's readymades offer a clear and neutralizing reply to these questions. In fact, rather than a reply, Duchamp offers a philosophically sound dismissal of these concerns.

The dismissal is rooted in the artistic process, driven by a quest for objectivity, i.e., the quest for the proper discovery of the object. The resulting insight is that one properly discovers the object in its full "objectivity," as it were, only when the object becomes an ob-ject proper, i.e., when it is seen to have the capacity to rebel and confront us. The ob-ject has us in view, as it were. And this can only happen through or as the outcome of a genuine artwork-spectator osmosis (Tomkins 1965; Duchamp 1987).

The quest or the path is therefore primary and original. The artistic process does not start with the object because that would necessarily imply reckoning with a vicarious abstraction of the object, i.e., one that exists as abstracted away from its relation with the spectator and one, therefore, which the latter can easily dismiss or disregard. Instead, the process ends with the object, or arrives at it. The object is what we strive for, the struggle is for objectivity, and the latter is the outcome of osmosis. There is no object proper before or without osmosis.

Thus, if or when we reverse the order of the relation between object and objectivity, we endanger the subsistence of the object because we assume that there is an object without osmosis, that we need to get to it first if we are to be “objective.” This relationship is indeed what we assume that “objectivity” means, namely, access to the thing without the interference of the subject. Hence, objectivity would be the opposite of subjectivity, and you get it when you get less of us, i.e., the subjects.<sup>11</sup> The main problem with this understanding of objectivity is that it rests on the belief that there exists an idealized object, an object seen through an access to it that is devoid of subjectivity. Such an idealized object is easily overlooked. Duchamp’s readymades remind us that “objects” are objects precisely because or when they are properly encountered by a subject, i.e., the spectator.

If someone were to regard this notion of “objectivity” as counterintuitive—since it places the thing too much at the mercy of the spectator or the subject—then I suspect that what would satisfy their urge for “objectivity” would be some special access to the “intrinsic” properties of the thing, access to its most profound nature. I am here adopting Ayn Rand’s meaning of the “intrinsic.” In fact, to explain my position, I now turn to Ayn Rand’s writings because I believe she offers a beautiful and summative exposition of the nature of traditional theories of value.

In her essay “What is Capitalism?” Rand outlines three kinds of evaluation or theories of value: the subjective, the objective, and the intrinsic.

Of a thing, one can say that it has intrinsic value; that its value does not depend on the agent of evaluation, the specific context, or historical situatedness. Although attractive, the problem with this concept of value, Rand says, is that at one point, someone will have to claim that they have access to the deepest intricacies of a thing and that they can understand, elicit, reveal, speak and share the “intrinsic” value of the thing. Usually, Rand claims, those who proclaim to access this value would do that to their advantage and only

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<sup>11</sup> For a description and a history of these notions of objectivity, see Daston & Galison (1992), pp. 81-128.

because of illegitimate leverage that the rest of society would grant them, the leverage of extraordinary insight and exclusive access to truth. Charismatic people and leaders are usually those who claim such powers, and we all know very well what the dangers are when this is the case.

The subjectivist theory of value claims that value is always the result of a specific perspective on something. There is no real value in the thing itself. Value (its worth) is a specific agent's certification in a specific context and specific historical situatedness. This claim means that all value is related to a viewpoint and is therefore perspectival; no gods-eye-view exists, which would determine the "definite" and "absolute" value of anything.

Whereas "[t]he objective theory holds that *the good is an aspect of reality in relation to man*—that it must be discovered, not invented, by man" (Rand 1967, 14).

Rand's objectivism claims that the "objective" value results from an engagement between a person and reality. Value is real, and thus, a fact; it is indicative of a process of negotiation (involving humanity and reality), the record of an agreement. Value is thus a state-of-affairs, an agreed and satisfactory arrangement. It is in the very essence of an objective value that it is rooted in the encounter with reality, which is defined as that which persists and resists our beliefs about it or, in Philip K. Dick's famous words, "[...] that which continues to exist even when you don't believe in it" (Dick 1985). Objective value, therefore, does not shy away from seeing and speaking things as they are and "[it] does not permit context dropping, [...] it does not permit the separation of 'value' from 'purpose,' of the good from beneficiaries, and of man's actions from reason" (Rand 1967, 14-15).

Without necessarily fully subscribing to Rand's objectivism, I suggest that the readymades are emblematic calls to avoid conflating "objectivity" with the absolute determination of the intrinsic value of things and, therefore, to remember that objectivity includes the process of evaluation. Objectivity is not subjective because it involves the work/input of the subject/spectator.

In the readymades, we see that their presence is real, i.e., something to reckon with, and the context of their discovery is that of the artworld. They exhibit a synthesis of value and purpose, goods and beneficiaries. Because, lest we forget, these things are objects of everyday life, common and useful things that we know and value since we use them and need them. What the readymades show is our ability (or inability) to acknowledge that the nature of objectivity is an activity. This transaction involves us in the acts of reckoning with the real, discovering it, and engaging in the process of evaluation. The result is a fact, namely an arrangement of things—a state-of-affairs—and it manifests the emergence of the "ob-ject with value."

The objective theory of value is the only moral theory incompatible with rule by force. [...] If one knows that the good is *objective*—*i.e.*, determined by the nature of reality, but to be discovered by man's mind—one knows that an attempt to achieve the good by physical force is a monstrous contradiction which negates morality at its root by destroying man's capacity to recognize the good, *i.e.*, his capacity to value (Rand 1967, 15).

Without the capacity to value, we lose the capacity to recognize the good. To recognize and value the good is an essential capacity of our human nature, of our mind. Hence the need to summon the necessary courage to be able to live up to our human nature.

The readymades demand of us that we judge them because they have long been the victims of oversight. Not seeing them, *i.e.*, not judging them, evidently does not amount to granting them their freedom and their identity. Instead, oversight results in the opposite: rejecting their right to declare their presence, demand our attention, and gain it. We should be able to recognize them as the things that they are and name them accordingly. The readymades seize us and our prejudices and put them to "good" use. In the case of these objects, we are right (*i.e.*, it is proper) not to be neutral and to name these things by their name, to admit that "that is what they are" and nothing else. The latter is not (automatically) dismissive and/or derogatory. It is neither of these terms if judgment follows from seeing and recognizing properly. It would be dismissive and derogatory only if judgment falls short of mindful seeing and caring.

The spectator is invited to a truthful reckoning with the object. Here "truthful" is to be read in a Heideggerian manner, *i.e.*, as disclosive and revelatory. The work-spectator relation or osmosis that Duchamp's readymades demand and deserve is revelatory and judgemental, driven by a truthful exposition of "the good" description of the object as a fact, an arrangement, and a state of affairs. In the case of the readymades, it is also easy and accessible; they thus serve as excellent occasions for a newfound (intellectual and artistic) honesty.

## Conclusion

I have pointed out that Duchamp's readymades challenge the "retinal" description of the artwork. I have then argued that this challenge's outcome is a reconfiguration of aesthetics whereby the latter, whose meaning had long been confined to the senses and their satisfaction, is determined by a unique "perception by the mind." I have then shown that the reconfigured aesthetics

necessitates an active spectator who needs to be appropriately attuned to the artwork so that work-spectator osmosis can occur. Such osmosis would result in the spectator's seeing these objects afresh. I have finally identified courage as a necessary attunement. The spectator summons courage to see that these objects come with a value and that the latter is a fact.

I aimed to outline, albeit sketchily, the primary and necessary conceptual configuration for what I am advancing as "the aesthetics of facts."

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