initial analysis

At the outset it might be useful to state that *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even,* also known as *The Large Glass* (1915-23), by Marcel Duchamp, is an exceptional work of art that has provided a precedent for a large range of subsequent art productions and practices. It is also exceptional in that descriptive analysis of the work is awkward; what it looks like, what can be seen and then identified and further more put together as a summary, is not all that is needed to comprehend the work. The work requires an apparatus that includes the notes and allusions eventually intended by Duchamp as part of the process of comprehension, and in effect as part of the work. Duchamp's notes were published as *The Green Box* in 1934.[1] In all these regards the work resembles poetry. The best commentators on the work have understood this. The meaning of *The Large Glass* cannot be exact and it makes a demand on the viewer to consider and reconsider. The initial analysis I provide here starts with looking at the work. I have followed this on my *edublogs* site with commentaries from some salient observers and concluded with the beginnings of a very detailed attention given to the work by Linda Dalrymple Henderson. It will become clear that viewing *The Large Glass* is not a straight-forward process and indeed it is a process that can take some ingenuity. It can also become clear that the work does reward attention and like much poetry can provide an uplifting experience.

Allen Fisher, 4.11.19

[1] *The Green Box* has now been made available online at the Tate: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-the-bride-stripped-bare-by-her-bachelors-even-the-green-box-t07744

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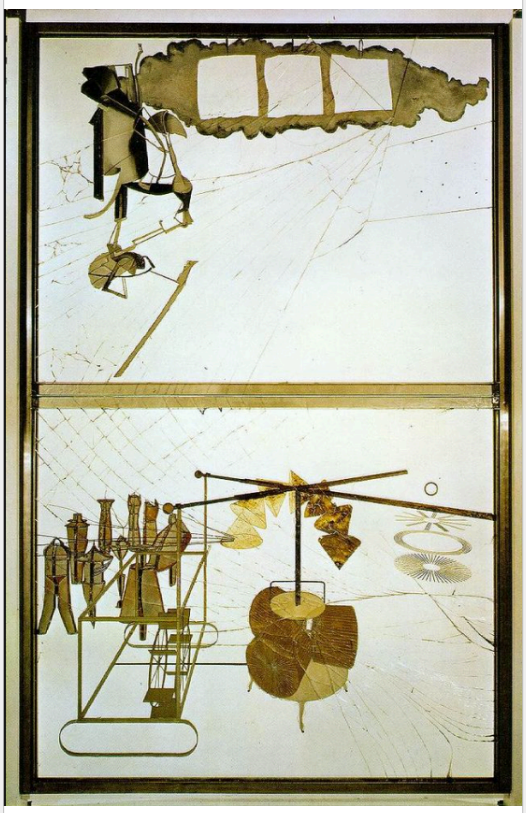
Marcel Duchamp, ***The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*** **aka *The Large Glass,*** 1915-23, oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire, and dust on two glass panels, 278 x 176 cm (109 x 69”)	initial analysis *The Large Glass* was factured over a period of eight years. The glasses were broken in 1926 en route from an exhibition in Brooklyn. The work was repaired by Duchamp over a period of ten years.	The work has been factured on glass in two sections with metal frames. The images have been painted and leaded into the glass. In one area on the right lower section the images have been sand-blasted into the glass. Both sections have large areas of shattered damage producing arrays of cracks.
At a mundane level, looking at the upper section, the viewer can identify a cloud shape overlaid with three white cloth-like rectangles. To the left of the cloud shape fragmented shapes appear to hang almost to the midway horizon. To the right just beneath the cloud-shape area a set of small holes. Duchamp names the top section of the work ‘Bride Machine’. The cloud-like section he labels ‘cinematic blossoming’, ‘halo of the bride’ and ‘milky way’. The shapes to the left and below the cloud-shape he names ‘bride’, ‘arbor-type’, ‘steam engine’, ‘skeleton’, ‘pendu femelle’ [‘hanged female’ presumably from Tarot cards] and ‘virgin’. He names the holes to the right ‘shots’ and ‘pulls’. In his *Green Box* he identifies other parts of the upper section that do not appear on *The Large Glass.* In the lower section on the right are a set of four circular shapes in perspective, two of which resemble wheels. They have been sand-blasted into the glass. Notes taken from three publications issued by *The Philadelphia Museum* appear on my *edublogs* site.	There are extended descriptions of the different methods for the facture of parts of *The Large Glass.* One of the features of this facture is how the placements and positional determinations of images were arrived at using procedures of organised chance and geometry.  The work is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and is part of an extensive collection of work by Duchamp.	In the central part of the lower section an arrangement of three drums on a circular platform with a disc resting on the drums and with a central pivot or spindle rising from the centre. At the top of the spindle two rods horizontally placed at right angles to each other. Behind this a cascade of cones, each of similar size or the same size. To the left a skeleton of an elongated cube fixed upon two extended oval feet. Inside the cube is a wheel of the kind powered by flowing water. Two rods connect the cube to the horizontal rods above the spindle. The cube overlaps a group of nine shapes. Each shape has a similar configuration and each is apparently different, they resemble taylors’ dummies. Duchamp names the lower section of the work ‘Bachelor Machine’. He identifies the central image as a ‘chocolate machine’ and a ‘chocolate grinder’. The cascade of cones he names ‘parasols’, ‘drainage slopes’ and ‘sieves’. The sand-blasted images on the right are named ‘oculist charts’ and ‘oculist witnesses’. On the left Duchamp names the area ‘cemetery of uniforms and liveries’, ‘malic moulds’ and ‘Eros’ matrix’. He provides a list of the nine moulds as Priest, Department-store delivery boy, Gendarme, Cuirassler, Policeman, Undertaker, Flunkey, Busboy and Station-master. To their right he labels the cube form ‘chariot’, ‘sleigh’, ‘slide’, and ‘glider’. He provides labels for parts of the lower section which do not appear on the *The Large Glass.*

Carlos Basualdo writes, 'Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* is a work of art to be looked both at and through. Although Duchamp called the *Glass* 'a hilarious picture', he took it seriously enough to devote eight years to its intricate execution. As a twenty-seven-year-old newcomer to New York, in 1915 he began to work on this masterpiece, having first conceived of it three years earlier while sojourning in Munich. Each element of the *Glass* is the result of meticulous studies, calculations, and experiments. Accordingly, Duchamp prepared a voluminous body of notes that address the narrative described by the work's full title. In 1934 he published ninety-four of these notes in *The Green Box*, which suggest possible readings of the imagery of the *Glass*, and document in painstaking detail the complex interactions and erotic tension between the enigmatic bride in the upper panel and her nine uniformed bachelors below.

'In 1923 Duchamp stopped working on the *Glass*, stating that it was 'definitively unfinished'. A few years later, while in transit following an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926–27, the two panels were shattered. Ten years would pass before Duchamp repaired the glass fragments, laboriously securing them between new panes and housing the fabrication in an aluminium frame. Satisfied with the result and the appearance of the eerily symmetrical cracks in the upper and lower sections of the work, he declared it finished. Occupying the space in the Museum chosen by the artist a half-century ago, *The Large Glass* has become the subject of extensive scholarship, and the object of pilgrimages for countless visitors drawn to its witty, intelligent, and vastly liberating redefinition of what a work of art can be.'[2]

Anne d'Harnoncourt writes, 'Surely one of the most enigmatic works of art in any museum, *The Large Glass* dominates a gallery devoted to Marcel Duchamp's work from the exact location in which he placed it in 1954. Painstakingly executed on two planes of glass with unconventional materials such as lead foil, fuse wire, and dust, the appearance of the *Glass* is the result of an extraordinary combination of chance procedures, carefully plotted perspective studies, and laborious craftsmanship. As for its metaphysical aspect, Duchamp's voluminous preparatory notes, published in 1934, reveal that his 'hilarious picture' is intended to diagram the erratic progress of an encounter between the 'Bride,' in the upper panel, and her nine 'Bachelors' gathered timidly below amidst a wealth of mysterious mechanical apparatus. Exhibited only once (in 1926 at the Brooklyn Museum) before it was accidentally broken and laboriously repaired by the artist the *Glass* joined the Museum's collection in 1953 …' [3]

A considerable amount of poetic detail can be found in *THE BRIDGE STRIPPED BARE BY HER BACHELORS, EVEN.* This publication is a typographic version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box,* translated by George Heard Hamilton, 1960.[4] Richard Hamilton reconstructed *The Large Glass in* 1965–6, partly remade in 1985, for the Tate collection, London.

Subsequent analysis

As I note in the introduction, it will become clear that viewing *The Large Glass* is not a straight-forward process and indeed it is a process that can take some ingenuity. It can also become clear that the work does reward attention and like much poetry can provide an uplifting experience.

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[2] *The Philadelphia Museum of Art Handbook,* 2014, pp. 340-341,

[3] *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections,* 1995, p. 316.

[4] *THE BRIDGE STRIPPED BARE BY HER BACHELORS, EVEN,* a typographic version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp's *Green Box,* translated by George Heard Hamilton, 1960. Edition Hansjörg Mayer, Stuttgart, London and Reykjavik, published a reprint in 1976.

The introduction to a 1999 essay by Linda Dalrymple Henderson notes, '*The Large Glass* is a humorous allegory of sexual quest cast in scientific/technological language: a four-dimensional, bio-mechanical Bride hangs in the upper half of the *Glass* ever beyond the reach of the mechanical Bachelors, who are confined to the three-dimensional, gravity-bound realm below.'[5] Duchamp has 'used visual and verbal metonymy to encode his scientific content and usually layered one meaning over another in individual components of the *Glass*.'[6] '…the main connections to science and technology are made through the Bride's identity as an automobile, the metamorphosis of a mysterious Illuminating Gas into a liquid Splash, the suggestion of mechanics in the activities of the Chariot. Glider propelled by a falling Weight.'[7]

There is also an association between Duchamp and the stained glass dedicated to the Virgin at Chartres Cathedral. This association comes to the fore in the light of Henry Adams 'The Dynamo and the Virgin', a chapter in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1900).[8]

What follows is an extract from Henderson's introduction to her 1998 book,
Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works.[9]

'Between 1915 and 1923 the young Frenchman Marcel Duchamp created the major work of his career, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même,* or *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, also known as the *Large Glass*. Housed today in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Duchamp's masterpiece completely transcended contemporary approaches to both technique and subject matter in painting. Composed of two panes of glass that stand over nine feet tall, the *Large Glass* incorporates such unorthodox materials as lead wire, lead foil, mirror silver, and dust, in addition to more conventional oil paint and varnish. Although his subject was ostensibly the relationship of the sexes, Duchamp presented his protagonists as bio-mechanical or purely mechanical creatures: a "Bride," in the upper panel, hovers over the "Bachelors" or "Bachelor Apparatus," below, among whose chief organs is a large "Chocolate Grinder."

'The complex iconography of the *Large Glass*, which bears idiosyncratic names and functions for each of its elements, can be fathomed only with reference to the multitude of notes Duchamp began to make in 1912, in preparation for the work. Duchamp published these notes in facsimile in three sets during his lifetime: the B*ox of 1914* (16 notes), the 1934 *Green Box* (94 documents, including 11 reproductions of works and 83 notes and drawings), and the 1966 *A l'infinitif* (79 notes). Over a decade after his death in 1968, a final group of 289 previously unknown notes was published in

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[5] Introduction yo 'The "Large Glass" Seen Anew: Reflections of Contemporary Science and Technology in Marcel Duchamp's "Hilarious Picture"' by Linda Dalrymple Henderson. *Leonardo,* vol. 32, no. 2, MIT Press, 1999, pp. 113-126.

[6] Henderson, *op. cit.* p. 113.

[7] Henderson *ibid.* p.113.

[8] Henry Adams. Chapter XXV 'The Dynamo and the Virgin' in *The Education of Henry Adams,* 1900. https://www.bartleby.com/159/25.html

[9] Linda Dalrymple Henderson. *Science and Technology in the* Large Glass *and Related Works,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998, xix.

1980 by the Centre Georges Pompidou under the title *Marcel Duchamp: Notes.*[10] Duchamp considered his notes an essential complement to the *Large Glass*, a logical stance for a painter who was determined, as he said, "to put painting once again at the service of the mind."[11] As he explained later, the notes, "somewhat like a Sears Roebuck catalogue," were "to accompany the glass and to be quite as important as the visual material."[12]

'As Andre Breton wrote in his 1935 essay on the *Large Glass*, "In this work it is impossible not to see at least the trophy of a fabulous hunt through virgin territory, at the frontiers of eroticism, of philosophical speculation, of the spirit of sporting competition, *of the most recent data of science*, of lyricism and of humour."[13] Indeed, Duchamp's notes reveal a witty, iconoclastic, and probing intellect at work in pursuit of what he termed – "a reality *which would be possible by slightly distending* the laws of physics and chemistry."[14] Yet, before the 1966 publication of *A l'infinitif* which included a large number of notes devoted to the subject of four-dimensional geometry, scholars had not attempted to deal in any depth with the nature of Duchamp's "Playful Physics," as he described it.' [15]

[My analysis of this work is still in progress in November 2019, AF.]

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[10] The *Box of 1914* contained photographs of notes mounted on board, and four such examples of the *Box* are known today. The *Green Box*, which is so named for the green suede of its case, was published under the title *La Mariée mis à nu parses célibataires, meme* in an edition of 320 numbered copies (Paris: Editions Rrose Sélavy, 1934). *A l'infinitif* (The White Box), trans. Marcel Duchamp and Cleve Gray (New York: Cordier & Ekstrom, 1966), was published in an edition of 150 numbered copies. The initial publication information on these boxes, which was included in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 2d rev. ed (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1970), pp. 584, 589, 604, is augmented in the new edition of Schwarz 's volume, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Delano Greenidge, 1997). Unlike the 1934 and 1966 boxes, which contained loose facsimiles of individual notes, *Marcel Duchamp: Notes*, ed. and trans. Paul Matisse (Paris: Centre National d' Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, 1980) appeared in book form, with colour photographic reproductions of the notes. This large format, deluxe edition (of one thousand numbered copies) was supplemented by the publication of a smaller, black-and-white version of the volume under the same title, ed. and trans. Paul Matisse (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983). See the list of abbreviations for the form of citations to Duchamp's notes used in the present volume.

[11] Duchamp, as quoted in James Johnson Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 13 (1946), 20.

[12] Duchamp, as quoted in Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 81-82.

[13] Andre Breton, *"Phare de La Mariée," Minotaure* 2 (Winter 1935), 46; trans. as "Lighthouse of the Bride," in Robert Lebel, Marcel Duchamp (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 90 (emphasis added).

[14] *The Green Box* or *La Mariée mise à nu parses célibataires, même.* Paris: Editions Rrose Selavy, 1934. Reprinted in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (Marchand du sel). Ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. Contains *Box of 1914*, *The Green Box*, and *A l'infinitif,* reprinted as *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp.* New York: Da Capo Press, 1989, p. 71.

[15] Ibid., p. 49.