Addendum: Duchamp’s and Stieglitz’s Urinal, Eugenics, Ocular Syphilis, & Alexander Graham Bell.

Two floating eyes of an omniscient spectator.

Mirrorical writing referencing Leonardo Da Vinci.

Circle of eyes recalling a rotary dial candlestick phone and Duchamp’s Coney Island trick mirror photo, both entail a circle of ten eyes.

Figure 1. Page from The BlindMan, No. 2 showing urinal photographed by Alfred Stieglitz.
Figure 2. Derivative graphics from The Blind Man, No. 2, copyright by Tim Nowakowski, illustrating the circle of 10 ‘eyes’ bleeding through from the other side of the page, composing in effect a simulation of a candlestick rotary dial phone.

Figure 3.  Figure 4. Unknown photographer, 5-way portrait of Duchamp.

Duchamp having a Spiritualist seance with himself(s), the foreground figure showing the back of his head anticipating the back turned head in Tonsure as well as the Apple-bowl Billiard style smoking pipe. This vaguely compares to the cluster of bachelors in the LG.
Divining the presence of eugenics within Marcel Duchamp/Alfred Stieglitz’s Fountain, The BlindMan, No.2, and Rongwrong, reveals some problems in Duchampian scholarship. Traveling from England via a stay with Mable Dodge in Florence, writer/poet/painter of lampshades Mina Loy, well represented in both Blind Man editions, wrote works which led critics of British literature to characterize her as the eugenics madonna or ‘race mother’. (See this author’s Marcel Duchamp: Eugenics, Race Suicide, dénatalité, State Selective Breeding, Mina Loy, R. Mutt, Roosevelt Mutt and Rongwrong Mutt). Duchamp’s ‘race suicide’ comment here and mandatory government-sponsored natalism suggested in the McBride article, mentioned previously, perplexingly yields no such discourse on race degeneracy among scholars of Duchamp. Loy’s commentary on love portrayed in the Songs to Johannes, as well as her unpublished Feminist Manifesto of 1914 reiterates much of the American eugenic feminism program to engineer breeding with properly certified (fitter, or Loy’s word ‘intelligent’) participants, such as the Nietzschean supermen Futurists, Marinetti and Pampini, with whom she had affairs. It has been claimed earlier that Loy most likely wrote the Letter from a Mother in the BM2 whose two ‘gifted children’ exhibited in the Independents Exhibition (not really), and who has ‘done her duty towards the race’, a letter that leaves no doubt about its New Woman positive eugenics. The question here then is why has Duchamp, with definite strains of eugenic discourse all over NYC in 1917, been omitted, or selectively excused, from the eugenic discourse?

Eugenics, the science of good breeding, was hard to miss. It is worth reiterating that the most saliently eugenic book was published in NYC in 1916, Madison Grant’s The Passing of the Great Race which glorified the Nordic race at the expense of the lesser Alpine and Blah races. Adolph Hitler later wrote a letter of gratitude to Grant and used passages from his book in his speeches. More prominently, the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) was founded with Carnegie foundation money in Harbor Springs out on Long Island by Charles Davenport, the most active eugenicist in America. Was the elsewhere cited eugenic ‘race suicide’ of Teddy Roosevelt’s speeches the tip of an iceberg with Duchamp? Grant and Roosevelt worked together on the national conservation movement. Moreover to zoom out to a broader view, one can speculate whether or not Duchamp favored both negative and positive eugenics. Stieglitz definitely later exhibits signs of this discourse with his famous gelding photo; prominent 291 member Marius de Zayas also embraced thoroughbred/gelding language in critiquing the impotent status of Modernism in America. Alexander Bell, discussed here, was a very visible member of the American Breeders Association and wrote eugenic articles for its magazine. The progressive New Women of Village Bohemia and other feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman advanced utopian socialist theories of race betterment.

In addition to the distinctive eugenic feature of ‘race suicide’ quoted in Duchamp’s Henry McBride article of 1915, Duchamp also said,

The American woman is the most intelligent woman in the world today-the only one that always knows what she wants, and therefore always gets it. Hasn’t she proved it by making her husband in his role of slave-banker look almost ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world? Not only has she intelligence but a wonderful beauty of line is hers possessed by no other woman of any race at the present time.

And this wonderful intelligence, which makes the society of her equally brilliant sisters
of sufficient interest to her without necessarily insisting on the male element protruding in her life, is helping the tendency of the world today to completely equalize the sexes, and the constant battle between them in which we have wasted our best energies in the past will cease.

This will not by any means produce race suicide (emphasis mine), for the woman of this state of the far future will be called upon to bear children at a due time, just as a man is called upon to pay taxes, all responsibility for her offspring being taken from her.

As things stand today this would be a heavy toll to pay under citizenship, but assuredly a time will come when science will have achieved that death in childbirth be unknown.

One cannot help but notice that Duchamp’s commentary lands on some of the time period’s major eugenic feminist territory, aside from race suicide. One must consider his wish to ‘completely equalize the sexes’ in terms of the women’s push to vote was still some five years away in America and even more so in France. Of course too, this intelligent woman and her ‘equally brilliant sisters’ seems to be a reference to the patrician women in whose circles Duchamp partied, possibly Florine Stettheimer, Mabel Dodge, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (who paid over thirty thousand in today’s dollars for the Independents Exhibition), Katherine Dreier, and so on. Included as well, Duchamp might have been the New Women of Village Bohemia such as Mina Loy, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, or the women of the private Heterodoxy Club, to be discussed shortly. Duchamp also notes a theme common to eugenic feminism, namely that a woman can bear fitter babies but not have to be bound by being a mother, though her essentialist state as a breeder is held intact and seems to imply mandates from a totalitarian regime, whether male or female or as Charlotte Perkins Gilman would frame it, androcentric vs. gynaecocentric authority. It can be assumed that those called upon at a due time are white.

Reading the opening to Louise Norton’s defense of the R. Mutt submission to the Independents Exhibition in the BM2, titled “Buddha of the Bathroom”, through the lens of eugenics reveals some interesting findings. Norton playfully discharges notions of race and Darwinian evolution, from which Francis Galton’s eugenics arose. Along with the ‘monkey race’, a simian reference that parallels the discounting of Asian culture or ‘the yellow race’, namely the urinal in Duchamp’s Fountain that negatively associates a sacred Buddha with a pissing vessel. And, again in Norton’s Buddha text, the Chinese ancestral worship is paired against ‘we who worship Progress, Speed and Efficiency are like a little dog chasing after his own wagging tail that has dazzled him.” Earlier Norton referenced Dante’s characters whose heads are mounted backwards and thus move forward while looking backwards. The ‘yellow race’ falls behind the worshipers of Progress and Speed, which is an obvious signaling of Futurism, not to mention the ironical backward looking to the Old World author Montaigne. I have pointed out that the urinal is a semi-skilled manufactured machine and can be construed as a parody of Futurism, as opposed to the automobile or airplane. Marinetti’s Futurist slogan, that “We will glorify war – the world’s only hygiene …” ‘hygiene’ usually taken to reference eugenics in terms of war kills off the unfit, leaving behind the strong. Not all eugenicists agreed with this, maintaining that
the war also eliminates much of the fitter types, leaving the unfit to breed. Norton’s use of the term ‘black-a-moor’ can be construed as code for southern Italians, who were at the time causing alarm in NYC with their increasing immigration into the wards of Manhattan, especially the South Village and the LES, as well as Brooklyn. Futurists who are like ‘a little dog chasing after his own wagging tail that has dazzled him.’, almost seems a prefiguration of Duchamp’s two feists in Rongwrong who sniff each other’s tail. R. Mutt then might be usefully thought of as a southern Italian plumber of tainted mixed blood, a mongrel, in addition to the Roosevelt Mutt discussed in the main article here.

The Richard Mutt Case, thought of as the work of Duchamp, details the rejected object from the Independents Exhibition saying that “Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.” This directly contradicts Beatrice Wood’s account which has George Bellows, then later Rockwell Kent, arguing with board member Walter Arensberg about the urinal’s aesthetic merits, after which a vote was taken by an ad hoc committee. Contradictions are not unusual here and makes one wonder if Duchamp’s account to his sister in Paris of the urinal being tendered by a female friend is bogus, like his later claim to have given up art for chess. This author has claimed elsewhere that Duchamp’s story of acquiring the urinal in light of Manhattan’s fear of war espionage and saboteurs (pencil or cigar bombs), sanitation codes, other named stores for sanitary pottery, and territorial anti-immigrant plumber’s unions is very doubtful. Moreover, scholars today conclude the 3 Standard Stoppages did not go down the way Duchamp claimed.

Duchamp also reiterates in the Henry McBride “The Nude Descending a Staircase Man surveys us” article, a positive eugenics favorite, namely ‘wonderful intelligence’, a hallmark of positive eugenics being the duty of fitter types to reproduce ‘at a due time’ with likewise equals, thus eliminating race degeneracy or mongrelization of the race. As mentioned, this paper interprets R. Mutt to be a naming of a bogus degenerate individual, a naif ignorant about art, and Rongwrong to be an example, of a literal mongrelization parody of Teddy Roosevelt’s feists, one of which was also named Mutt, possibly a parody, of southern Italian immigrants ‘breeding’. The women of the far future who will be called upon to bear children parallels the feminism of the era in such writers as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whom we will cite later, presented in her novels Moving the Mountain (1911), Herland (1915), With Her in Our Land (1916). Gilman too, presents a government sponsored socialist utopia that encourages interbreeding of the fittest, with daycare provisions provided, matching Duchamp’s ‘all responsibility for her offspring being taken from her’ which most likely stems from the puericulture discourse that characterized French eugenics.
and its worry about France’s declined birth rate and high infant mortality rates.

In early 20th Century America, eugenics presented the science of good breeding of fittest people that precluded undesirables from reproducing, leaving mate selection to science rather than irrational love. Eugenic science was legitimized by discourses known as Biometrics, Lamarckian acquired characteristics, and the invocation of rediscovered Mendelian laws of heredity. How this scientized natalism played out in America involved the inauguration of fitter family/baby contests, and also involved the debate of whether or not individuals should be tested for fitness before marriage, which in practical terms meant testing for feeble mindedness, imbecility and primarily sexual diseases, which were called social diseases, in particular, syphilis. While religious types sought to use eugenics to control women’s bodies, (especially prostitutes), eugenic feminists, similar to Social Darwinists, sought to restrict men, whom they viewed as the unchecked transmitters of disease and incapable of good breeding due to their irrational sexual impulses. Mina Loy’s work presents such a view. Most of the doctors, to the degree they knew how to check for syphilis, were cast into the unwanted examination role that quickly bogged down into issues of civil liberty and outright cost of each exam to acquire a marriage license. The serious import of this disease, syphilis, existed since penicillin was not discovered until the 1940’s and the only ‘magic bullet’ against the infection was the arsenic drug Salvarsan, a drug whose administering was terribly flawed and which was ineffective for victims in the third stage of syphilis. The eugenic discourse also became a pathological screening test for America’s phobia against diseases, and not the eugenic ideal of the transmission of good genes and ‘germ plasm’ for breeding a fit race as Francis Galton, or Charles Davenport envisioned. The fear of disease was not unwarranted since one of the outcomes from contracting syphilis after the first two stages of gestation was brain damage, possible death, and blindness, or ocular syphilis.

This last is of interest here since blindness is at the center of the BlindMan issues. Scholars assumed this pointed to Freud and his famous use of Sophocles’ Oedipus, who blinded himself upon discovering he unknowingly killed his father and sexed his mother. However, the role of Freud in Duchamp, especially for 1917, the year of his attempts at little magazines, flounders somewhat. Scholars on Duchamp have always assumed that blindness somehow pointed to Freud by virtue of its title, though no one has ever problematized why the name BlindMan or Blind Man occurred. Amelia Jones in Irrational Modernism inadvertently supplies a source that the Euro avant-garde players of NYC led lives of castrated males due to the loss of masculinity with their war defections, hence they were pseudo females. One can easily see how this prefigures Rose Sélavy. Duchamp may have intended blindman as an apposite for R. Mutt. Edward Steichen’s 1917 photo of Duchamp stationed near a set of Venetian blinds adds a window element, forecasting Rose Sélavy’s Fresh Widow, which has blind window panes. We do know that Duchamp included a close reference with his Occulist Witness in the Large Glass and a photograph exists of Duchamp’s studio with an ophthalmologist chart mounted on the wall behind his optical rotary machine. Yet, the eugenic pragmatics mentioned above sheds light on another potential connotation of the Blind Man, possibly the pseudo R. Mutt, namely, that he was blind because of either bad genes at birth, an accident, or the contraction of syphilis. NYC’s institution of comfort stations in the first two decades of the 20th Century stemmed from a phobia
of a family of transmitted diseases: diphtheria, tuberculosis, typhoid fever and sexual diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea. By 1910, Manhattan and Brooklyn together had funded and erected fifteen comfort stations (public bathrooms), along with railroad/subway landings and bars. As we shall see shortly, with a phallic candle stick phone reference hidden in plain view in the photograph of Fountain and the vulvic disposition of the urinal’s positioning, we can insinuate that Duchamp may have alluded to the notion that the female to whom the porcelain genitals belong may be a call girl, prostitutes being demonized as a primary source of hereditary/acquired degenerate diseases like syphilis. For now, in future attempts, it will be shown that the vulva of Fountain belongs to a particular well known nude, possibly an immigrant as well.

Extending the association of syphilis to Duchamp, it seems more than plausible that Duchamp may have thought he had contracted the deadly disease, or perhaps Picabia, and possibly Stieglitz. This would jive with Duchampian scholarship’s painting him as a ‘ladies’ man. This recalls the story that Picasso thought the directly carved African masks he introduced in Les Demoiselles d’Avignon were death masks. He painted these onto the images of the alleged prostitutes of the brothel he visited since he feared he had contracted syphilis. Manet died from complications due to the tertiary stage of syphilis (gangrene) while Gauguin had the pox also. Van Gogh may have suffered the same. “Pig Cupid … among wild oats sewn in mucous-membrane.”, as Mina Loy abrasively wrote in Songs to Joannes (1915 & 1917). The duck/rabbit motif (established in another article) consists of a shadow, essentially a black rabbit like the Black Stork, a popular 1917 film about a syphilitic baby to be discussed shortly, encoding any sexual connotation as possibly deathly. One must remember that the iconic Cupid figure from Greco-Roman mythology was often depicted with a blindfold suggesting The Blind Man might connote Venus’s offspring Cupid and love is blind.

In addition to the use of the key term ‘race suicide’, as mentioned Duchamp also touches on another hallmark of what can be called eugenic feminism. “for the woman of this state of the far future will be called upon to bear children at a due time, just as a man is called upon to pay taxes, all responsibility for her offspring being taken from her.” (Dating for this quote is problematic, probably September 1915 ). Duchamp does not specify if the state also chooses the fittest mate, something at odds with the readymade gang of bachelors in the LG. This parallels eugenic feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman program to make the female the selector of breeding, not the Cupid prone male. In her utopian novel, Moving the Mountain, state mandates appointed the fittest mothers as caretakers, as in day care, freeing other women to focus more upon careers or guiding their slave banker husbands in raising fitter children. Duchamp could have witnessed one of her presentations at the bi-weekly Heterodoxy Club, of which she was a member, held in secret at Poly’s Restaurant on MacDougal street in the heart of Village Bohemia. Margaret Sanger, Helen Keller, and Emma Goldman also gave presentations there, though not as members. In France, this was encouraged since the state deemed many women either too incompetent to raise children (France’s pre-war infant mortality alarmed many as much as France’s low fertility rates, in general), or, the state wanted women back in the industrial work force, especially important during the war. Thus, Duchamp hints in a commonplace kind of way at the state sponsored discourse of natalism or the puericulture
of the prominent French obstetrician Adolphe Pinard, also president of France's first eugenic society. Details such as who is chosen to bear children and by whom (males or females) are left open, though venereal disease examinations for a marriage would eliminate some with possible sterilization. This eugenic episteme then provides an interesting way to read the Large Glass. The Bride can be said to be a model of eugenic fitness (qua scientific machine fitness) surveiving possible candidates for fertilization, floating above the gaggle of malic molds like the goddess in Bouguereau’s Birth of Venus, academic painting being one operative that may have still occupied Duchamp’s thinking, like Futurism. The field of glass in which she is embedded being a substitute for the water or sea upon which she emerges, autochthonously, or, an orthochromatic negative plate.

Eugenics the science of race improvement was a popular zeitgeist in the early 20th Century. (See Figure 6). Prominent society figures, conservative and progressive, such as Teddy Roosevelt, Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, Alexander Graham Bell (discussed below), Margaret Sanger, Emma Goldman all subscribed to the ideology of race suicide. The ‘race’ in race suicide of course referring to the Anglo-Saxon/Teutonic race of Nordic superiority. The early silent era film The Black Stork (1917) suggests guidelines for population improvement with euthanasia, where a supposedly syphilitic baby is allowed to die out of fear it would grow into a monster. Madison Grant published in 1916 in NYC The Passing of the Great Race: Or, The Racial Basis of European History, which argued for Nordic superiority, scientific racism, and a eugenics program. The quote of Duchamp talking about ‘race suicide’ and biological engineering, not to mention R. Mutt (mongrelization of the race ) and the cover of RongWrong (dog breeding) clearly shows he was fluent with the eugenic zeitgeist, though Duchampian scholars cluelessly or purposely ignore this. Again, Mina Loy presents a strong eugenic figure in the Blind Man No. 2, with the anonymous Letter from a Mother most surely written by her “a woman who has done her duty towards the race …” Havelock Ellis, whose Sexual Inversion is often cited in relation to Duchamp’s cross dressing, believed in the reproductive restrictions imposed upon the unfit or feeble minded, though he desired individual education, not forced government eugenics, as Duchamp’s race suicide comment implies. With the preponderance of eugenic writings in the context of the early 20th Century, it is bewildering how Duchamp remains the immune genius figure, detached from all ideologies and bleached of any eugenic associations.

One feature of the Duchamp/Stieglitz photo reprinted in the Blind Man, No. 2 of the urinal titled Fountain never critiqued by scholars is the text and line drawings bleeding through from the Carlton Brown semi-calligraphic poem printed on the verso side of the Fountain page.( Figures 1 & 2.) The actual photo does not have any such text/graphics. In his letters written to Georgia O’Keeffe, (My Faraway One), Stieglitz discusses the request by Duchamp & Co. to photograph the urinal. Stieglitz writes that the image was to be a frontispiece for the BM 2 edition. This was abandoned. The editors may have found it impossible to position the Carlton Brown calligram so that it could show through, which may have been Duchamp’s desire to match the photo-collage transgressions of Fountain’s photo, cited elsewhere, with textual/graphic transgressions. The hand writing seen in the cavity of the urinal appears backwards, making a good case for a reference to Leonardo da Vinci’s mirror writing.
Additionally, a pair of eyes at the apex of the urinal exist, as well as a circle of eyes, counting the spud conduit as another 'eye'. Possibly a joke on retinal art? (See Figures 1, 2, 3, 4). Duchamp most likely is responsible for this, if not Carlton Brown, knowing most viewers, and scholars, would gloss over the see through presence as 'grey matter'. If the image of Fountain had been used as a frontispiece, as Stieglitz was told, then it would have been difficult to position the Carlton poem to bleed through given the front cover and the subsequent ad for the artist's fundraising ball. This change of plans would have been a post-shoot decision on the part of Duchamp & Co. In a future publication, it will be revealed what the snooping upper set of eyes 'see', and who the eyes represent.

For now, the focus is upon the circle of eyes showing through the spud rim. (Figure 2). In previous articles on Fountain, this writer raises the topic of airplane technology, in terms of the camo effect of Hartley's background painting and the partial shadows inside the urinal's interior, which resemble the wagon wheel effect of early cinema seen in vintage footage of propellers. Here, the claim is, the circle of eyes could be referencing the rotary dial of a candle stick telephone, the telephone being one of the other major innovations, or machines, that changed the industrial world, along with the airplane, the automobile, the submarine, wireless radio, etc. and to a lesser degree camouflage. The circle of eyes will be repeated in Duchamp's Coney Island trick photograph (Figure 4), which in effect has ten eyes in circle formation. If we allow the recycling of the urinal as a candle stick phone simulation, then one could also allow the spud, turned at odds to the rest of the porcelain object, to be like the mouth piece of the vintage phones, in addition to being another finger hole for dialing, an obvious phallus/coital reference, and a token reminder of Duchamp's apple bowl pipe. Equally, the triangular drain holes in the cavity of the urinal can be perceived as the holes in the phone's speaker. Duchamp's later bronze, titled Drain, replicates this idea in circular formation, a sound drain if you will. The concept of a circular turning exists in Duchamp’s other work such as the Coffee Grinder, the Chocolate Grinder, the Bicycle Wheel, Rotary Demi-spheres, etc. and has been implied by the partial propeller in the urinal's cavity related to the wagon wheel effect. The simulation of a rotary dial further enhances this circling motion. Rotary engines were still being used in airplanes up to 1918. Scholars have been perplexed by the prominent placement of a then obscure detail from Duchamp's Large Glass on the front cover of the BM2, the image of the Chocolate Grinder, which was not in the Armory Show nor the Society of Independent Artists Exhibition at the Grand Palace. This attempt claims the connection exists in the circular motion reference of the grinder, otherwise, why is it there? The chiaroscuro lighting of the Fountain photograph could be said to parallel the Caravaggio-esque lighting of the first Chocolate Grinder. My claim here reenforces my idea that Duchamp had more on his mind than shaming the alleged democratic principles of the Independent Artists Exhibition, otherwise why reference circular motion?

The candle stick phone has some interesting features related to Duchamp. These mass produced phones were made from Bakelite, a phenol-formaldehyde based plastic discovered by Leo Baekeland in NYC in 1907, a thermo setting polymer instantly recognized for its molding ability and heat resistance. He had been successful in the manufacture of a desirable photographic paper, Velox, which we know Stieglitz used among other papers. The jewelry found in the later Rrose photos, most likely the mass consumption type marketed to consumer class
women, the dental plastic found in the Wedge of Chastity, and the tip and bowl of Duchamp’s apple bowl pipes, rendered a stodgy status by the popularity of cigarettes with the troops overseas, all were Bakelite. The cast mold ability and heat resistance made Bakelite perfect for insulating the heat from the wires of the phone, not to mention the heat from burning tobacco or opiated hash. One must remember that the urinal is a cast molded product also, at least the smaller sizes were. The iconography of the candle stick phone also includes a painting by a member of Duchamp’s circle of friends, Morton Schamberg, titled Telephone (1916), painted in a synthetic cubist style. His Philadelphia friend, Charles Scheeler, also made photographs of telephones a little later. Duchamp referenced ‘téléphoniquement’ in his assessment of the use of new military communication technology at the War’s onset and the famous Jura-Paris road trip, La Tour du Jura, Duchamp’s recasting of Rimbaud’s La Bateau Ivre. Moreover, one of several contributions made to both BlindMan editions by Mina Loy, O Marcel!, reads like a transcript of a chatty phone conversation, with lots of sudden narrative shifts and jarring exclamations, as if she had downed a number of the ‘perfections’ she mentions. (Perfections were a type of popular pink or rose tinted champagne.) If one allows that the circle of eyes refers to a rotary dial, with the urinal’s spud vaguely mimicking the mouth piece of a candle stick phone (not to mention a phallic camera lens), then this metonym or syntagm, calls into play the telephone system, well established in America by 1917, and, of course, the dominant system was the Bell system, founded by Alexander Graham Bell. The urinal also parallels a phone in the sense a urinal’s water carries away the ‘message’, as does electricity. Alexander Graham Bell would be interesting invocation in light of the eugenics discourse exposed here. He was a believer in eugenics, the science of good breeding, with a particular interest, ironically enough, in the well being of the deaf. He was a member of the Breeder’s Association, having experimented with sheep genetics, wrote articles for the various eugenic periodicals, and was active in the Eugenics Record Office founded and operated in Harbor Springs, NY by Charles Davenport, a major advocate of eugenics in America, his 1911 Heredity in Relation to Eugenics actually counted as a text book at the university level. The hierarchy of the Breeder’s Association firmly believed human stock could be improved the same way thoroughbred horses were, providing lots of material for satirical writers. Mina Loy’s race motherhood embraced this type of choosing by the female. Bell’s belief was not in the American negative eugenics of a Margaret Sanger, Charles Davenport, Havelock Ellis or an Emma Goldman, either through birth control or sterilization, instead, he opted for the encouragement of good stock reproducing with undesirables, defectives or the unfit as a means to race betterment, though he did discourage deaf people from mating with other deaf people, meaning undesirables should not intermarry with undesirables. Graham himself married a deaf person, his mother was deaf, and his father worked in the elocution of speech particularly aimed at the deaf, calling it Visible Speech. Alexander Bell advocated for the deaf being mainstreamed into society via the learning of oral cues, such as lip reading or oralism, and discouraged the use of sign language, or signing, labeled as manualism. The benefits and liabilities of each approach is still debated today. Bell was also seriously involved in aeronautics, experimenting with elaborate kite contraptions and proceeding then to heavier than air machines, collaborating with
Glenn Curtiss, a major American airplane manufacturer. Lastly, Bell’s interest in transmitting sound through light (the photophone) and general interest in electromagnetic phenomena would have interested Duchamp. The rotary dial suggested in Fountain, referencing a telephone, adds an auditory dimension not usually associated with Fountain, though in the context of Alexander Bell and the Blind Man, suggests a spectator who is deaf, dumb, and blind, as in the caricature of Alfred Freuh on the cover of the first Blind Man. Critics have sometimes associated the name R. Mutt, with ‘mute’, as in the German mute, or mother, or an ancient mythical Egyptian deity. If one accepts the image of Fountain as an analogue for a rotary dial candlestick phone, then we can also assume, to the degree the urinal stands for a vulva of a woman, it represents a call girl, a term initiated by the new sonic technology. Duchamp and prostitutes have never been a topic for scholarship, and no scholar has considered that Fountain might be the name of a prostitute. It is worth pointing out that the Village Bohemia section in South Village visibly contained tenement brothels, clandestinely allowed by the police. A Gentleman’s Directory on prostitution, a ‘sportsmen’s guide’, in the parlance of the day, circulated, rating the various establishments of the South Village. Not surprisingly, the then current corporate logo for the Bell Telephone system physically shares curvilinear features with the urinal. See Figure 5.

The upshot of these embedded references to the machine technologies of aviation and electronic communication, in light of the urinal itself being a machine addition to urban sanitation and disease phobia control of then NYC, and, as well, the Stieglitz photograph itself standing as a critique of photography, suggests that the urinal as a utilitarian object in 1916-17 was not accorded a fetish or sacred status, as the stand alone, Proto-Pop aura later editions of the urinal imply. Duchamp viewed the urinal as a clearing house image, an exclusively 2-d image, disassociated from its functionality, to which one could reassign other languages, such as the languages of sexuality, aviation technologies, filmic/photographic economies, eugenic discourses, not to mention polemics of aesthetic/curatorial dimensions. The urinal is a machine and if we compare it to Marinetti’s enthralment with the automobile, or even Duchamp’s airplane, we can see that this photo of a urinal, implied earlier, could be a parodic caricature of a machine. This complies with this author’s earlier assertion that the photo of the urinal can also be treated as a machine aesthetic portrait of Picabia in the manner of Marius De Zayas’s caricatures. Urinals were not consumer items like pedestal sinks or side-cladded alcove bath tubs. Instead, it appears the gravity flush (water fall) sanitary pottery was one novel, and, quotidian, technology among others, though of perceived important value in the fight against diseases. This possibly explains why the urinal was discarded or neglected or stolen soon afterwards from 291. It hung in Duchamp’s studio before the Independents Exhibition, constellated among a galaxy of other objects, illustrated by Henri Roché’s suite of photos, the same as the Hatrack and the snow shovel (In Advance of a Broken Arm). Air currents probably made each rotate around the axis of hanging string, like the Bicycle Wheel turning on its axle. Circular turning runs through Duchamp’s work, e.g., Anemic Cinema. One could argue Duchamp revised Cubism’s modus operandi. Instead of the artist moving around the object to gather information from multiple points of view, the object rotates for the viewer, like the rotary Bicycle Wheel. Duchamp joked often that he was lazy. As I have argued elsewhere, Cubist collage plays a significant role
in the photograph of Fountain. Duchamp seems to make Wittgenstein’s point, the meaning of a urinal is its use in the language, not intrinsic semiotic codes.

Ultimately, it seems Duchamp may have subscribed to a eugenic feminist aesthetic, which would explain his rebuke of Teddy Roosevelt’s panic with the popularization of the phrase ‘race suicide’. Duchamp probably perceived women in terms of a biological essentialism, but did not hold much to the traditional role of women as house-bound breeders and nurturing mothers, inscribed within the confines of eugenics of Charles Davenport or Francis Galton. This position seems to parallel the eugenic feminism of the likes of Charlotte Perkins Gilman with a French puerculture twist. It also frames RongWrong’s dogs or mutts (feists), ie. R. Mutt equals Roosevelt Mutt, as a parody of the perceived eugenic crisis. Nonetheless, it does seem Duchamp was versed in the statics and dynamics of eugenics. To what degree, this affects his work and position on the New Woman of Village Bohemia remains to be seen, but in 1917 it certainly seems to be in play with the Stieglitz photo of the urinal Fountain, blended in with Futurism.

At the risk of seeming trivial, one detail that might seem like a stretch in implicating Teddy Roosevelt with RongWrong and R. Mutt, in 1913 Roosevelt visited the International Armory exhibit where he viewed Duchamp’s notorious Nu Descendant. (The original French title leaves the Nu as a masculine noun.) Afterwards, on April 5 1913, Roosevelt wrote in The Outlook a mocking critique of the exhibit, singling out Duchamp’s painting for public shame, derisively slurring the painting’s title, saying ‘Take the picture which for some reason is called ‘A naked man going down stairs.’ Given how Duchamp may have ridiculed Belle da Costa Greene, the mixed race Pierpont Morgan librarian, in his Rose Selavy photo for the New York Dada Belle Heleine photo, to settle the score for Greene firing Duchamp from his library job, it seems a negative quid pro quo that Duchamp might also have wanted to settle a score with Teddy Roosevelt in RongWrong.

The Village Bohemia in which Duchamp trafficked is worth examining. Scholars have rarely given much attention to this milieu. We have numerous instances of Duchamp in Village affairs. He is shown in Demuth’s painting of the Golden Swan restaurant on 4th and 6th Avenue, went to Poly’s Restaurant on MacDougal (we have Beatrice Wood’s diary entry stating such), has been cited by others visiting the bar at the Beevoort Hotel on 5th Avenue, close to Mabel Dodge’s place, and was a participant in the January 1917 nocturnal takeover of the Washington Square triumphal arch, where Duchamp, members of The Masses magazine plus some Provincetown Players farcically declared the Free and Independent Republic of Washington Square. This informal group represents some of the social fabric of the ephemeral efflorescence that constituted Village Bohemia, before America’s declaration of war in April chilled such anarchistic spectacles. John Sloan, who made a sketch of the event, represented the part of the Village committed to real social action, such as protests for women’s suffrage and participating in worker’s strikes, Emma Goldman-like. The Provincetown players staged progressive theater productions that challenged conventions of sets, dialogue, acting while entertaining popular themes from Freud to eugenics (Eugene O’Neill later nicknamed Eugenic O’Neill). Duchamp, on the surface, played the role of the dilettantish French flaneur: getting drunk at the many masquerade balls, being photographed at Coney Island’s
fair of leisure, and promoting his anti-career by seemingly wiling away hours playing chess. Such is the received ‘patrician’ view of Village Bohemia in art history.

In reality, the Greenwich Village Duchamp experienced was an amalgam of patrician wealth and immigrant influx. In 1917, the year of the urinal’s appearance at the Independents Exhibition, the Greenwich Village Duchamp experienced centered around the Washington Square monument located at 4th and the end of 5th Avenue in Manhattan. To the north of 5th Avenue and west along Waverly Place, were established upper middle class houses, having running water, electricity, and telephone service. To the south existed what was then called the South Village, which went roughly from the monument down West Broadway to Canal. Little Italy was further east from Mulberry to the Bowery. From 1900 to 1920, the demographics of the South Village changed. At the turn of the century, the SV consisted of Irish immigrants and a substantial clustering of migrating blacks from the south, receiving the nickname Little Africa. Italian immigrants started arriving in waves of two to three thousand a year so that by 1920, census figures estimated the South Village’s Italian population to be roughly fifty thousand, with the black population moving further northwest to what became the Tenderloin. A significant portion of the area became factories for garment manufacturing with a substantial amount of the work being done in the home by Italian mothers. The side effect was the development of 10 story tenement buildings to house workers, though a significant part of the labor force came from Little Italy and the LES further east toward the East River. These tenements were horribly maintained affairs with one shared toilet per floor, poor ventilation and no light until housing codes changed. Building inspectors often were bribed to ignore violations, as were police to allow prostitution in the tenements, hence the Gentlemen’s Directory mentioned earlier. Some of the older buildings had no running water and out houses lined the backs of each lot. The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911, one block east of the Washington Square, where some 146 workers died due to inadequate fire exits and melted fire escapes, exposed the poor conditions of the workers. Worker’s strikes were common.

The plight of the local Italian workers became the cause célèbre of the socially committed Village Bohemia elite centered around The Call and The Masses magazines. Duchamp mobilized the frivolous, a-politically, free-spirited Bohemian lifestyle of the flaneur. Nonetheless, going back to the Italian surname Sirio on the Rongwrong match book cover, with its playing with fire warning, one may conjecture that despite the address of Brooklyn, N. Y., Duchamp’s perception of Italians probably evolved from his experience with the working class Italians of the South Village, especially with Polly’s Restaurant located in the heart of the South Village on MacDougal and later West Fourth. The Italian diaspora to Manhattan and Brooklyn consisted of mainly poor unskilled laborers, mostly males at first, who came from primarily Southern Italy, a mainly agriculture based economy in contrast to the more industrialized north of Marinetti and the Futurists. Some moved into the settlement houses sponsored by private patrons, others renting private rooms, while the majority moved into the tenement houses, which were being built higher and higher to the dissatisfaction of older established residents. Their primary occupation other than the usual bakeries, restaurants, butchers, etc. was working for the garment industry. It was this group which worried those with eugenic interests since these southern Italians fit the profile of the unfit, degenerate types causing the ‘mongrelization of the race’ with
their ‘breeding’ of large Catholic families. Teddy Roosevelt saw race degeneracy, or dysgenics, as a bipolar class discourse: white, upper class educated women (Anglo Saxons) blamed for shirking motherhood for education or work outside of the home, and, the unfit types, like the poor Italians, reproducing and tainting the white pool of germ plasm with their acquired (Lamarckian) characteristics of alcoholism, prostitution, gambling, etc. Margaret Sanger’s birth control drive, termed family limitations due to the Comstock laws, was aimed at an equally worrying ethnicity, Russian Jews of the LES and Brooklyn. Previously discussed, Louise Norton’s use of the term ‘black-a-moor’ (“a white woman gave birth to a “black-a-more”) in her R. Mutt defense may have been code for southern Italians. Immigrants passing through Ellis Island were processed with eugenic designation with photographs of new arrivals often written on with snapshot judgements like low level moron, high level moron, feeble-minded, etc., thus revealing the U. S. government’s eagerness to label those unfit in order to deport them back to their place of origin. The use of photography as an industrial/science authorized regime of surveillance became complicit with social control, both photography and eugenics licensing science as its badge of authority. The threat of the unfit ‘other’ was then used to implement immigration policy. Many of the classifications for defective immigrants most likely issued from the well-known taxonomies of the first eugenic science of Francis Galton, who published images known as composites, multiple exposures of a group of lets say criminals on a single glass negative, which Galton claimed revealed a type or class of criminal characteristics.

One other work which may have bearing on Duchamp’s eugenic horizon, the Dust Breeding (Man Ray, 1920) photo of allegedly dust settled upon a horizontally stored section of the Large Glass and the nude in Étant Donnés. The LG is repositioned 90 degrees the same as the urinal in Stieglitz’s photo of Fountain. Shots of Duchamp’s studio show the glass in two sections standing against the wall. Questions of why it was not covered and how so much material accumulated in just six months aside, it is worth pointing out the nature of the title Dust Breeding. Breeding of course was the nativist’s term for the alarming discourse regarding the birth rate of immigrants seen against the declining birth rate of the fabled white Anglo-Saxons (the Nordic, the Aryan). Dust, as dirt or the impure, if perceived as a metaphor for the large waves of immigrants coming into Duchamp’s Village Bohemia, not to mention the LES and Brooklyn, then Dust Breeding can be translated to mean Immigrant Breeding, if you will, which would mean the breeding of the unfit. So, the Bride performs her machined stripping for the unfit as well as the eugenically-installed Bachelors, while keeping the concept of dust recording the work of time and time accorded a color or tone, with the help of varnish, (Sieves of the lower section of the LG). One scholar has mentioned the possible reference of the photo simulating an example of aerial photography, one of the major new uses of photography during the war. One may also extend the metaphor that the LG acts as a photographic negative in the sense that the work stored dust the way a sensitized glass plate stores the light of an exposure. Like most of Duchamp’s pieces, Dust Breeding connotes many levels of meaning, one additional level being the idea that something that is worthless like old furniture, that just sits around and gathers dust, meaning, like other art, the LG is dysfunctional, dirty, impure or no longer in use, and thus brought to its state of
incompletion.

The exposure time of the Man Ray’s negative is also interesting and questionable. Hearsay accounts maintain that the glass plate was exposed for almost an hour, presumably with Man Ray stopping down the camera’s aperture considerably. The problem with that relates to the fact that any vibrations in the building from normal urban activity, especially trucks going by on the street, would slightly vibrate the film, slightly blurring the image. This is not the case. Perhaps the suggestion of an hour long exposure stems from Duchamp’s small study for the LG with a lens mounted in the glass support, titled To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour. The camera has been forced to watch the LG for one hour. As is the case in most of Duchamp’s work, no scholarship has examined the types of camera’s and lighting equipment used by Man Ray. There might be what is called reciprocity issues stemming from long exposures of low light proportional to the film characteristics. No information seems to exist on Man Ray’s photographic means has ever been attempted by art or photo historians.

Lastly, in the main article titled Marcel Duchamp: Eugenics, Race Suicide, dénatalité, State Selective Breeding, Mina Loy, R. Mutt, Roosevelt Mutt and Rongwrong Mutt the markings on the two dogs, whether feists or rat terriers, suggest one additional discourse, namely the role of camouflage, a topic raised in this author’s Marcel Duchamp/Alfred Stieglitz (Mutt and Jeff) Photograph an Impossible Urinal, Fountain (in a slapstick kind of way). If we compare the irregular markings on the Rongwrong mutts with photos of feists and rat terriers, we can see the actual dog’s markings tend to be larger and smoothly contoured. The markings on Duchamp’s dogs are smaller, spaced further apart, and more variated at the edges. This seems very close in spirit to the type of improvised camo found on WWI sniper ghillies and some airplanes. (Figures 6 & 7). The impetus to derive camouflage from sources in nature most likely stems from the influential Concealing-Coloration in the Animal Kingdom by Abbot Thayer (first published in 1906 and again in 1918).
Figure 7. Two WWI snipers in make shift ghillie suits.

Figure 8. 1917 LVG C.VI reconnaissance and artillery spotting German airplane with camouflage resembling that on Duchamp’s feists in Rongwrong.
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