

she didn't want to collide with anybody."⁸³ Since colliding with someone at one's rear end is a very strange idea, one begins to imagine a sodomistic dimension to this particular electrical machine, attached to the Baroness's backside as it was. While Picabia and Man Ray made works that illustrated their own defused, failed electrical charge, and Duchamp transferred the little electrical heat he had into the thwarted circuits of his sex diagrams, the Baroness was like Duchamp's bride (a "new motor" who dramatically and open-endedly generates creative potency) but a more assertive, less "timid," and resolutely nonvirginal version.

PLUMBING: RATIONALIZING BODILY FUNCTIONS

Let no cultivated reader despise these details (lavatories, sinks, sewers, and manholes). There is no truer sign of civilization and culture than good sanitation. It goes with refined senses and orderly habits. A good drain implies as much as a beautiful statue.

— J. C. Stobart, 1911

If I can eat I can eliminate—it is logic—it is why I eat! My machinery is built that way. Yours also—though you do not like to think of—mention it—because you are not aristocrat.

. . . Why should I—proud engineer—be ashamed of my machinery . . . ?

— Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1920⁸⁴

Aesthetics and plumbing are intimately connected, as classical historian J. C. Stobart makes clear in his pronouncement regarding good sanitation, and as the Baroness suggests throughout her lived Dada. They are connected, in fact, through their joint rationalizing functions. Both channel the flux of impurity to cleanse and sublimate that which must not see the light of day in a civilized society.⁸⁵

The second and final issue of the avant-garde journal *The Blind Man*, published in 1917 by Duchamp, his French friend and colleague the writer Henri-Pierre Roché, and the young American artist Beatrice Wood, is devoted to expressions of support for *Fountain*, which had been summarily removed from the supposedly "open" (unjuried) Society of Independent Artists exhibition; as such it is not surprising that the issue contains several references to scatological functions. Louise Norton opens the issue with a salvo on the "Richard Mutt Case," calling the work "Buddha of the Bathroom" and noting infamously, in answer to the charge that *Fountain* was only "a plain piece of plumbing," that, as for plumbing, "that is absurd. The only works of art Amer-

ica has given are her plumbing and her bridges." The piece, she notes, was removed from the exhibition because it was "irrevocably associated in [the organizers'] . . . atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort."⁸⁶

Picabia extends the scatology of Dada in his contribution to *The Blind Man*, casting aspersions in his poem "Medusa" on "artists of speech / who have only one hole for mouth and anus" (while also describing his tongue as "a road of snow," perhaps a reference to the cocaine use which is to catapult him forward in his artistic search ("I am looking for a Sun").⁸⁷ Holes that spew idiocies and excrement, holes that can be penetrated, holes that ingest cocaine and booze, holes (as with *Fountain* and *God*) that no longer funnel the fluids they are meant to channel away in order to cleanse the human body and its spaces of their excremental dimensions (as in the quotation opening this section, "good sanitation . . . goes with refined senses and orderly habits"). Something smells fishy here.

If America only has plumbing and bridges to offer, aesthetically speaking, then *Fountain* and *God* are, indeed, the ultimate in American art. And, as suggested earlier, *God* marks the thwarted masculinism of the American Taylorist/Fordist system. *Fountain*? The male fixation with pissing his insecurities onto others. The Baroness, as was her wont, described it best: Duchamp "came to *this country*—protected—carried by fame—to use its plumbing fixtures—mechanical comforts."⁸⁸ In this light, *Fountain* could be seen as a device to channel the flow of Duchamp's old-world piss (mirroring, as if in reverse, the photograph of Duchamp in an unnamed bathroom from around 1916–17 [see fig. 2.8]: off guard, "pissed" with liquor, he sits fully dressed, slumped on the "porcelain goddess," perhaps after "praying" to her in a purging of his system through the flux of vomit).⁸⁹

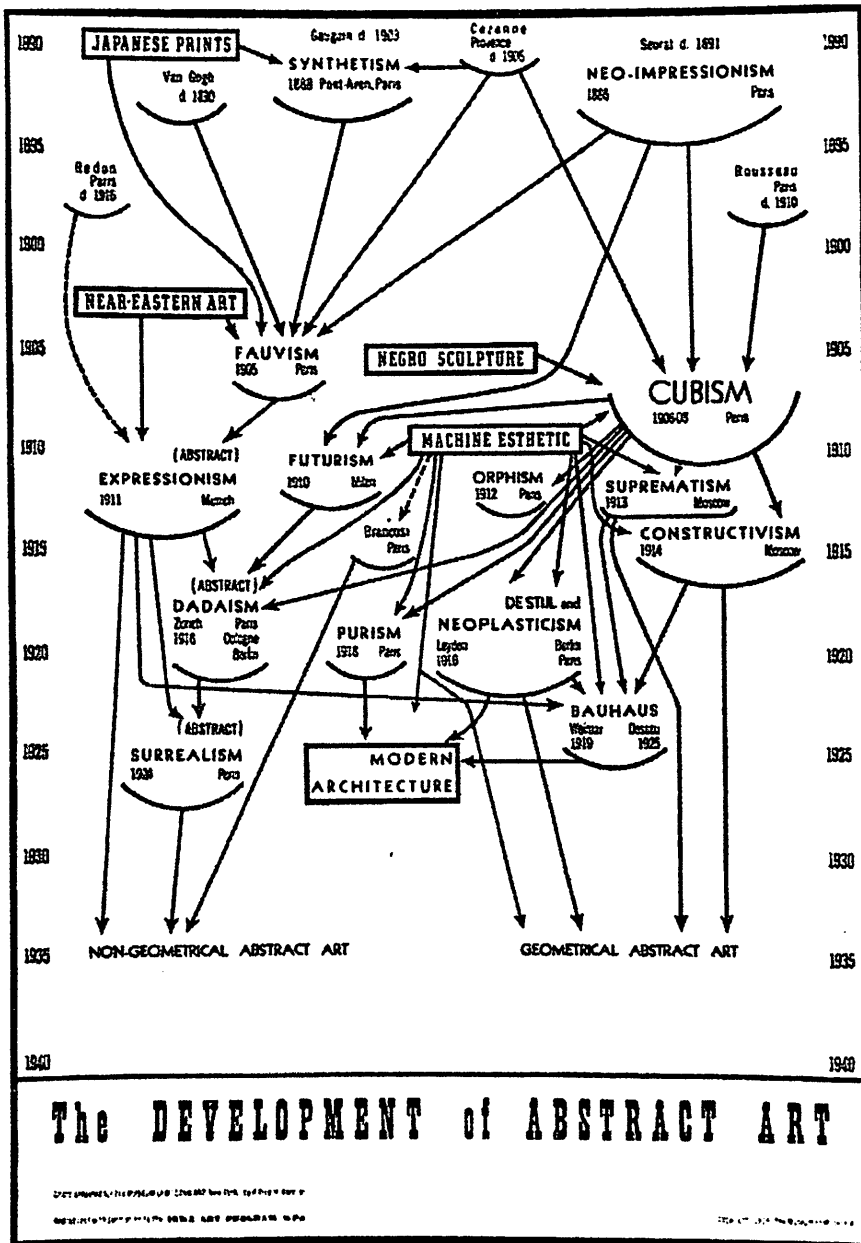
Too, while it could be viewed as an indicator of the homoerotic social interactions afforded by public urinals (I am told that men who piss next to each other in such spaces inevitably enjoy surreptitiously gazing at and/or comparing the size of their penises), *Fountain* has generally been read as art historian Paul Franklin has noted, in terms of heterosexual signifiers of gender difference.⁹⁰ Something, again, is fishy here. Too much is being telescoped into a single set of convenient meanings (New York Dada → male-constructed machine works // machine works → readymades // readymades → [in spite of homoerotic connotations] hetero-virile, masculine origins of radical avant-garde practice // and, ultimately, Duchamp → the origin of postmodernism). Where's the irrationality, the stench, the flux in this picture? Where are all the women and queers—the Baroness, Charles Demuth, Arthur Cravan (heterosexual in his liaisons but decidedly queer in his lived Dada), etc.?

Artist and writer Margaret Morgan has most usefully summed up what is at stake in the New York Dadaists' obsession with plumbing (which itself connotes the architectonics of the passage of fluids in bodies as well as in buildings: "something wrong with my plumbing," at least for women, can be colloquial for having problems with one's reproductive or urinary pathways). It is all about flow and its containment, once again. Morgan's own practice takes off from two particular art historical points: that of *Fountain* (and, more recently, of *God*); and that of Alfred Barr's famous art historical diagram of modern "movements" (admittedly bad pun intended), published on the front cover of the catalogue for the show he organized at the Museum of Modern Art in 1936, "Cubism and Abstract Art" (fig. 3.14).

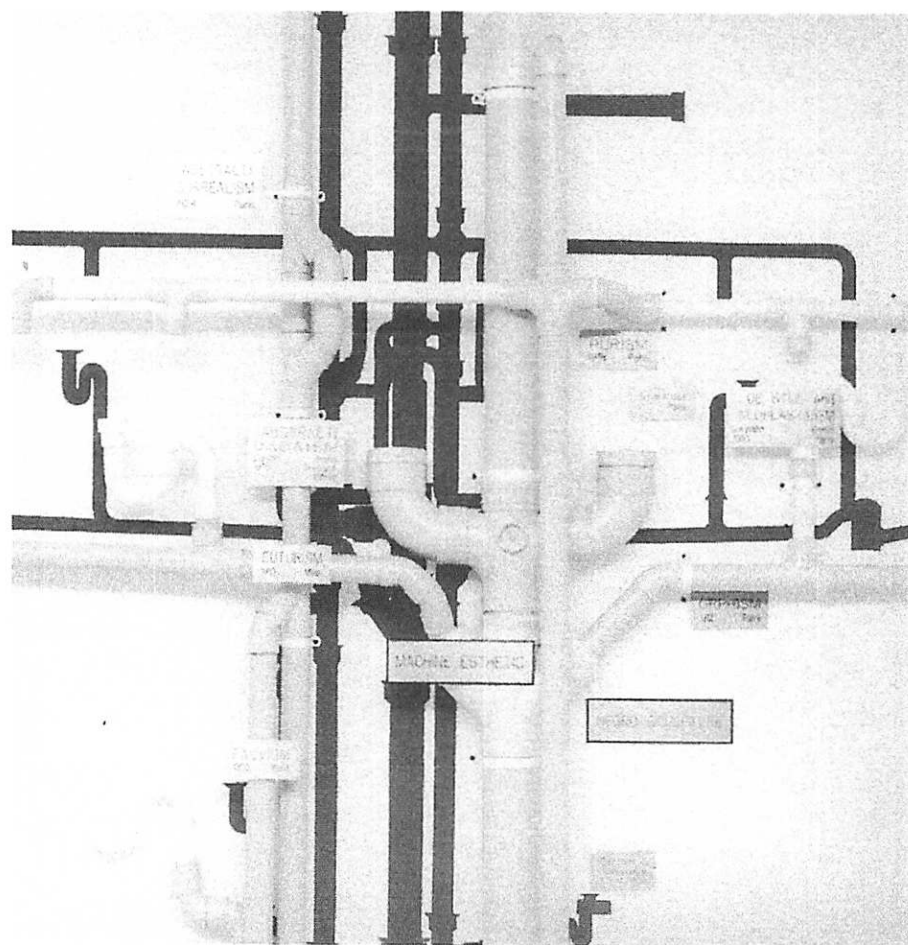
Barr's diagram is a flow chart that progresses downward, from 1890 ("Japanese prints," "Synthetism," "Cézanne," and "Neo-impressionism") at the top to 1935 ("Non-Geometrical Abstract Art" and "Geometrical Abstract Art") at the bottom. Inadvertently, as Morgan points out, Barr's chart channels the excremental flow that threatens to pollute the perfection of art historical "progress" by regulating "movements" through a system that resembles nothing so much as a plumbing diagram.⁹¹

More than anything, Barr's chart represents in an exaggerated fashion the art historical version of industrial rationalization: each movement (as it were) must move smoothly and effortlessly (via arrows) to the next; all of the flow of creative progress (with the inevitable racist connotations such as "Negro sculpture" and "Near-Eastern Art" contributing to the heroic European and United States-based movements such as "Expressionism") is neatly choreographed—rationalized—into one seamless logic of cultural (read: Western male) progress. Barr's phantasmagorical charting of non-European art types (with the cultures of entire continents, and across millennia, conflated) functions to channel the irrational and unknowable culture of the "other" into the logic of the "self-same."⁹²

Morgan intervenes in this logic through her room-sized installations *Too Much Leverage Is Dangerous: Modernism and Plumbing* (1994) and *Out of Order* (1997), where actual PVC plumbing tubes (PVC being the postmodern version, as it were, of the heavy-duty metal tubing of *God*) are arranged against the wall to comprise an "aesthetic" flow, labeled (in the case of *Out of Order*) with terms taken from Barr's chart (fig. 3.15). The configuration of the piping mimics both Barr's chart and actual plumbing diagrams from sources such as *The Plumber's Journal*, where intricate maps (looking like abstract drawings) outline the ideal placement of plumbing structures inside building walls.⁹³ The (homoerotic?) flow of aesthetic progress from (male) artist to (male) artist, from European/American movement to European/American move-



3.14 Alfred Barr, "The Development of Abstract Art," from *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936).



3.15 Margaret Morgan, *Out of Order*, 1997; detail of installation of white PVC with metal plaques, dimensions variable, plumbing system 14 × 14 ft. Collection of the artist.

ment, is exposed as just so much rationalized shit flowing through the highly overdetermined “plumbing” systems of modernist discourse and institutions.⁹⁴

Morgan applies her acute critical eye to God in her essay “A Box, a Pipe, and a Piece of Plumbing,” where she notes that the tubing is actually a plumbing trap—a curve (or in this case twist) in a pipe which traps liquid to form a seal so that neither gas nor fluid can escape from behind or below. The “trapping” function of plumbing (of aesthetic discourses and institutions) is linked to its channeling one: nothing unseemly must escape to pollute the perfume of rationalized modernism. The rationalizing logic of the flowchart or grid is directly linked by Terry Smith to Taylorism/Fordism with their attempt to impose “a two-dimensional flowchart onto the three-dimensional actuality of men.”⁹⁵ What Barr, Taylor, and Ford refused to see was that, as Gramsci pointed out, such efforts to rationalize always extrude elements of irrationality (in the case of plumbing, shit and piss; or, in the realm of aesthetics, elements such as Barr’s dangling label “Negro sculpture” or the visible penises in Demuth’s paintings of naked men in public baths).⁹⁶

As Morgan notes, the Baroness “challenged all notions of propriety, taste, juridical law, and *good sense*.”⁹⁷ The Baroness, in effect, openly performed the embarrassing sexual and/or scatological bodily functions that both artistic modernism and urban industrial modernity strove to suppress or contain. Most notoriously, she once carried a plaster penis through the streets of New York, blatantly exposing the continuing phallicism of the avant-garde and, by extension, the misogyny and sexism in the culture at large.⁹⁸ The Baroness openly paraded in public what works such as Constantin Brancusi’s 1916 sculpture *Princess X* (a veritable bronze penis parading as an abstract portrait of Princess Bonaparte) labored to veil through aesthetic, formalist abstraction.⁹⁹

The Baroness’s phallic display paralleled Demuth’s exposure of the explicit phallicism of Brancusi’s famous piece in his 1930 watercolor *Distinguished Air* (fig. 3.16).¹⁰⁰ Here, two men (one a sailor) embrace openly in a gallery, framed on their left by a bourgeois couple and, to their right, by a high society woman in a risqué red evening gown (with fan tellingly poised over her genitals); four of the five figures look up at a sculpture that looks exactly like a pink, fleshy version of Brancusi’s piece—exactly, in other words, like a white man’s penis (is the woman in red protecting her femininity from the unwanted thrust of this huge male organ—of the pretensions of modernist avant-gardism?). The fifth figure—the bourgeois man—stares down at the side (or perhaps at the ass) of the gay sailor.