In a discussion of Walter Benjamin’s famous “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility”, Andreas Huyssen writes:

In the context of social and cultural theory Benjamin conceptualized what Marcel Duchamp had already shown in 1919 in *L.H.O.O.Q*. By iconoclastically altering a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* and ... by exhibiting a mass-produced urinal as a fountain sculpture, Duchamp succeeded in destroying what Benjamin called the traditional art work’s aura, that aura of authenticity and uniqueness that constituted the work’s distance from life and that required contemplation and immersion on the part of the spectator.1

Duchamp against auratic art? Against the unique art object? He certainly professed to be. But almost a century after Duchamp made *Fountain* and *L.H.O.O.Q*, these ready-mades are enshrined in the Philadelphia Museum of Art in a room of their own, where pilgrims from around the world may be found in quiet contemplation of the artist’s bold and unique conception. Indeed, the countless photographic reproductions, far from diminishing the aura of these originals, most of them not “originals” at all but Duchamp’s own later copies, seem only to have enhanced it. Duchamp’s ready-mades now

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command sky-high prices, and when I recently applied for permission to reproduce these and related images in a scholarly book on Modernism, I was charged more than $200 apiece.

Chronologically, Duchamp was, of course, an artist of the Modernist era, *Fountain* dating from 1917. As a Modernist, he was part of a larger movement that is now undergoing an astonishing revival. Duchamp exhibitions, conferences, websites, books, and articles are a boom industry. But so is the High Modernism ostensibly deconstructed in his experimental art. Consider the following events of 2003-2004 alone:

1. The Library of America published Ezra Pound’s *Poems and Translations*, a volume of nearly 1400 pages that does not include the poet’s central work, *The Cantos*, presumably because it will get a volume of its own. Its editor, Richard Sieburth, has also just brought out a superb annotated edition of *The Pisan Cantos* for New Directions. No longer, evidently, will a *Selected Cantos* do; the *Pisans*, it is assumed, must and will be read whole in courses as well as by Pound readers at large.


3. The second volume of R. N. Foster’s magisterial biography of W. B. Yeats was published by Oxford, receiving many reviews like the following by John Banville in the *New York Review of Books*: “*W. B. Yeats: A Life* is a great and important work, a triumph of scholarship, thought, and empathy such as one would hardly have thought possible in this age of disillusion. It is an achievement wholly of a scale with its heroic subject.”

4. Gertrude Stein’s writings, long considered too eccentric and incomprehensible to discuss in detail, are the subject of Ulla Dydo’s

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2 The Duchamp websites are especially remarkable, for example, *Tout-Fait*, which contains scholarly essays of unusually high caliber, archival material, illustrations, and so on.