The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp

Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture

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Preface

My main aims in writing this book have been to understand Marcel Duchamp's career in a way that makes it more coherent, unified, and, I hope, more broadly meaningful than existing treatments allow, and through Duchamp to clarify certain features of the avant-garde and of modern cultural history more generally. What makes it possible to pursue these goals at the same time is Duchamp's exemplary participation in certain large questions that have been central both to modern experience and to modernist movements. These questions cluster around the relations between personality and impersonality, between the heightened experience of

individuality and the intensified sense of anonymity that artists, like the rest of us, experience and need to confront under modern conditions. My discussion often returns to these topics, but while pursuing them I have also sought to make Duchamp accessible to those who know little or nothing about him, and in this spirit the prologue begins by setting forth some of the main elements of his career and reputation before going on to outline the kind of approach I have tried to take with him. Readers who are acquainted with Duchamp, and especially with existing treatments of his life and work, will be aware that my views are often at odds with existing ones. However, I have seldom conducted arguments with other writers in

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the text; those who care about such things will know to look for them mostly in the notes.

One—
Fame:
A Prologue

Marcel Duchamp never shied away from fame, but when it first came he had it thrust upon him. Or rather, fame thrust itself on his name, for he himself was an ocean away. The place was New York, the time 1913, when four of his paintings were exhibited in the so-called Armory Show (officially The International Exhibition of Modern Art), organized by a group of American artists to seek a wider audience for the avant-garde. The show included work by nearly three hundred painters and sculptors, among whom it is easy to list most of the giants of modern art. Many attracted notice, and some sold well, but Duchamp was the person on whom the light of public attention fell most intensely. The reason had partly to do with how his pictures looked, but also with the title he gave one of them: *Nude Descending a Staircase* . The suggestion that an unclothed body might be shown not in some classical pose but engaged in an everyday activity excited people's curiosity.

What viewers saw once they stood before the picture shocked some and puzzled or disappointed others. Finding a human form in Duchamp's *Nude* (Plate 1) is not hard if we think the title tells us to look for one, but without the name the subject might be many other things. Inspired partly by multiple-exposure photographs, the painting

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shows a body in a succession of diagonally descending positions, but the figure's motion has the effect of blurring or dissolving most of its organic features, which appear only as a series of lines, planes, and volumes. A determined spectator can make out head, shoulders, torso, hips, and legs, but geometrically abstracted, so that the body sometimes seems covered despite the titular nudity: a short round skirt over the hips? a straight one stretched out by the moving legs? We seem to glimpse a kind of puppetlike wooden doll—or is it a person in armor, its head invisible inside a helmet? There is little to satisfy the expectation, called up by the title's appeal to centuries of art history, that the nude is a recognizable—in most people's expectation female—human being.

Visitors to the Armory Show were fascinated by the picture; newspaper accounts reported that a crowd always surrounded it, making a good view hard to get. Few people found the work attractive or pleasing in an ordinary

way; most who came were drawn by the mystery of how the title was related to the image. Some hastened to solve that puzzle in their own way, replacing Duchamp's label with names of their own. Punning viewers rechristened it "Food Descending a Staircase" or "The Rude ..." (the second title graced a cartoon of commuters hastening down subway stairs during rush hour), while more adventuresome ones saw in it "a lot of disused golf clubs and bags," "an assortment of half-made leather saddles," "an elevated railroad stairway in ruins after an earthquake," an "orderly heap of broken violins," or—the description that seems to have made people laugh the most —"an explosion in a shingle factory." It might not be amiss for Americans (and others) unhappy about the way taste has been manipulated by art hucksters since the days of the Armory Show to remember the rough bravery of these exhibition-goers of 1913, quick to seize the chance to talk back.

But Duchamp was not merely jibed at; he was celebrated too, and made famous. That all four of his pictures were sold, for prices that seem quaint now but were generous at the time ($324 for the *Nude*), is not the main testimony to this, although it should not be forgotten either.**[1]** His success encouraged him to come to New York in 1915, where he met patrons and sponsors whose support would help sustain

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him for the rest of his life, above all Walter Arensberg (whose collection of Duchamp's works forms the nucleus of the large group now on display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art). Soon after he arrived, interviews and articles about him appeared in papers in New York and Boston (where the Armory Show traveled after closing in New York), causing him to recall later on, "When I arrived in New York, I realized that I wasn't a stranger at all." Wherever he went people perked up: "Oh! Are you the one who did that painting?" He was treated with curiosity, sometimes with bemusement or suspicion, but also with respect.**[2]**

Duchamp's reception in New York changed his life. Until that moment he had appeared as an aspiring young painter like many another, and a pretty obscure one at that. He had exhibited some pictures in Paris and been referred to in a small book, *On Cubism* , by two painterfriends, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger; in 1913 the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire mentioned him as a promising youngster, but one who still had fairly little to his credit. His stature was not increased when he withdrew the *Nude* from the Paris Salon des Indépendants in March of 1912 because it displeased the authors of *On Cubism* , who were the show's organizers, and the picture attracted little notice when it was shown in Barcelona a few months afterward or, finally, in Paris in October.

Which of Duchamp's later activities he would have carried out in the same

way without his trip to America it is not possible to say. But it was in New York that he would labor over-and never complete-the other work whose title, along with the *Nude* , has passed into the general lexicon of modern culture, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*)-also known as the Large Glass, from the material on which it was painted and from its size, over nine feet tall and almost six feet wide. There too he would coin the term "readymade" to describe the ordinary, often machinemade objects he began to offer as his work, taking over the word-always in English-from the American clothing industry, and sending the most notorious of them, an ordinary porcelain urinal, mounted on its side and dubbed *Fountain* , to an art exhibit in 1917. It was following his early stays in New York as well that Duchamp's persona took on the

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feature which many of his admirers found the most mysterious and alluring of all, that of the artist who had the courage and originality to abandon art making for what seemed a life of calm indifference enlivened by one great passion only—chess.

The fame that struck Duchamp in 1913 would have much to do with this remarkable career. Already it was fame of a peculiar—and a peculiarly revealing—kind. In his early days in America he sometimes thought that only his picture was famous, whereas he as a person had disappeared behind it, "obscured ... squashed by the *Nude* ."**[3]** And yet people were aware that the painting had a maker, and that Duchamp was he. What he meant was that those who knew him as the painter of *Nude Descending a Staircase* often knew nothing else about him, nothing of his origins or his personal history, his aims as an artist, or his plans for the future. He was not so much hidden by his work as depersonalized by it, suffused in a glow that was an aura of incomprehension. To put it another way, what made Duchamp feel that anonymity was the paradoxical price of the fame bestowed on him in 1913 was not exactly that he had been obscured by his picture, but that artist and picture together had been taken up into the public's collective representation of "modern art."

What did modern art mean to those for whom a disembodied "Duchamp" was its symbol? We already know one answer, the vague sexual suggestiveness conveyed by his title. For centuries, Western painting had given special attention to the nude—most often female—body, raising nudity out of the sphere of sensuality and into that of the ideal through the body's power to stand for formal perfection. But the erotic component had sometimes peeked out through the veil of highmindedness, as we can see in a picture like Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* , shown in 1863, the same year as a more famous nude, Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (Figs. 1, 2). Manet, a master of irony, exploited the ambiguity between the exalted nude and the more questionable naked female to dramatize the widening gap between the

traditional forms of painting and the conditions of modern life. By the 1890s modernists like the Viennese Gustav Klimt were playing games with the old iconography that made nudity a generalized figure of unadorned truth, *Nuda veritas* ; by emphasizing previously tabu bodily features such as

Figure 1.
Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus* (1863)
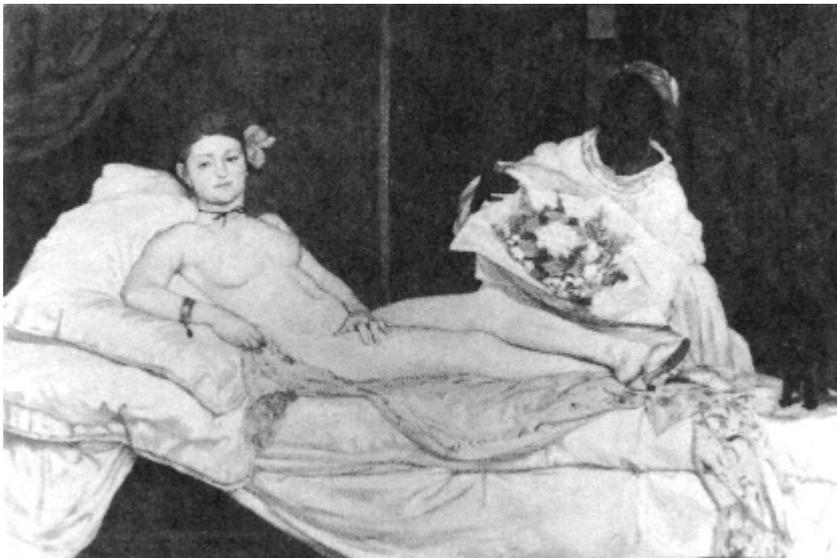

Figure 2.
Edouard Manet, *Olympia* (1863)

pubic hair, Klimt called attention to the explicitly sexual truths previously hidden by the adornments of artistic tradition, causing a recent historian to dub one of his images *Vera nuditas* .**[4]** Duchamp's *Nude* was bound to evoke ambiguities of this sort for those who came to peer at it, whether or not they knew any specifics of modern art's transactions with nudity, for the public looked upon artists' special access to nude bodies with a complex of jealousy and suspicion, locating it in a field of equivocation. To critics of the Armory Show, even techniques that dematerialized the body so that it seemed to have little to do with sexuality showed that modern artists were bearers of immorality and decadence.**[5]**

This play between sublimation and erotic liberation bordered on a second feature of what Duchamp and his picture symbolized in 1913: modern art's aggressive rejection of traditional aesthetic goals and expectations. To introduce the art that had declared its independence from tradition was what the Armory Show was all about. The American public felt the impact of aesthetic revolution with a vengeance, because the exhibition confronted it at a single blow with the series of movements and styles that had appeared one by one in Europe over the past half-century: impressionism, postimpressionism, symbolism, fauvism, cubism. (No genuinely futurist work was shown, although the term was often applied in the press, perhaps because some early publicity had mentioned the movement; dada and surrealism were still to come.) Duchamp's canvas, showing the influence of both cubism and futurism (but in a peculiar and personal way), was not as distant from the realistic representation that popular taste looked for as some other entries in the show, but the very uncertainty about whether it was meant to depict something identifiable or not called up the opposition between representation and its abandonment that had been developing little by little since the time of the impressionists and that continued to create some tense relations between artists and the public in the years before World War I. According to Clement Greenberg, what made the *Nude* scandalous was that, more than other entries, it "gave people enough clues to permit them to watch themselves being startled by the 'new.'"**[6]** It was this tension that the public moved in to identify and relieve by proposing new titles for the picture. Several of these, notably

the popular "an explosion in a shingle factory," managed to convey both the sense of disruption, even violence, that the new aesthetic bore, and the links modern art was trying to establish with ordinary objects of everyday life and use. Duchamp would soon deepen and exploit these quotidian connections through his "readymades."

The association the public made between the picture and an explosion or (as another proposed title had it) an earthquake suggests something else about the modernism for which Duchamp stood: it seemed to be possessed of a free-floating contestatory energy whose precise targets and objectives were

hard to pin down. Many members of the public associated the new art with political radicalism, anarchist and revolutionary, decrying it as an attack on the morality and stability of established social life. Others, however, were more troubled by the possibility that they were being made the butt of some elaborate practical joke, a fear that helped to inspire the substitute titles as a way of talking back. The latter of these reactions may have been especially free in the United States, where tradition had less power than in Europe to protect high culture from the skepticism of practical people, but in fact satire and laughter had been a mutual response of European artists and the public to each other for over half a century. Faced with the aggressive realism of Courbet in the 1850s and the bold experiments of the impressionists in the next decades, French newspaper cartoonists had responded to what seemed the self-importance and pretension of the new painting with irreverent pastiches (of Manet, for instance: see Fig. 3). Artists for their part had long enjoyed playing jokes on unsuspecting bourgeois, developing an elaborate practice of pretense and foolery summed up in the French term *blague* . Already in the 1860s the brothers Jules and Edmond de Goncourt, novelists and critics, had claimed to see in *blague* the spirit of those modern artists whose work was partly inspired by a taste for novelty and a disdain for respectable people. The image of Duchamp the practical joker and clown is one he would later cultivate with gusto himself, and it has appealed to many of his admirers, for whom his greatest achievement was to recast the figure of the artist as above all a subverter of the old pieties of art.

But in 1913 the fear that Duchamp was merely practicing *blague* was mixed with the different worry that he possessed some genuine entry

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Figure 3.
"Cham," *La Naissance du petit ébéniste* (1865)

into a world beyond the ordinary, an access denied to nonartists. The coexistence of these two attitudes in many members of the public, despite the tension between them, has been a main—even a defining—feature of modern art. Its roots may go very deep, all the way back to primitive associations between image making and magic, but in its modern form the mixture of suspicion and reverence directed toward artists began to arise with the romantic replacement of tradition by the power of individual genius. Once art came to be identified with overturning shared and inherited expectations (as was often the case already in romanticism), then the gap of mutual incomprehension between the worlds of art makers and their audience could not help but widen, and within this gap the task of drawing the boundaries between genuine discovery and mere pretense can never be easy. The dilemma was deepened during the nineteenth century, as one movement after another was first greeted with rejection by a public formed on expectations rooted in earlier works and styles, then accepted as a new incarnation of the spirit of aesthetic innovation.[7] In Duchamp's public of 1913, only a few people can be clearly identified as believing that his work possessed some new and as yet not generally understandable aesthetic

power—namely, those who bought the pictures. But between them and the opposite group who refused to take the new art seriously there was a large middle ground, and it was precisely there that the two attitudes of hostile suspicion and anxious respect flowed in and out of each other. Both are evident, as we shall see, in the questions posed to Duchamp at the time by newspaper interviewers.[8]

Duchamp's fame, then, was a compound of these elements: the ambiguous relationship between art, sex, and morality; the modernist rejection of tradition; the perception that modern art was the bearer of an undefined but radical energy, as able to issue in joking as in some serious challenge; and the sense that nonetheless art promised access to a world of heightened perception or deeper understanding. Each of these features had some sort of relationship to his picture, but what allowed *Nude Descending a Staircase* to fuse them into a symbolic representation of modern art was its quasi-opacity, the sense it gave off of being about something that could never be wholly perceived. Here arose the aura of incomprehension that spread itself around the picture and its maker, helping to turn Duchamp into the abstraction of himself that made him feel he had somehow disappeared behind his work.

This sense that the picture's meaning hovered just out of reach of ordinary people allowed its maker to represent those things about modern art that were least concrete, most difficult to seize upon, hardest to define, and for those reasons possessed of a kind of uncontainable power. His relationship to his audience was not determined by the particular content of his work, nor by his abilities as a draftsman or colorist, nor by his exemplification of

some particular style. His persona dwelt within the realm Max Weber defined as the charismatic, where authority relies neither on tradition nor on any quality that can be confined inside clear rational boundaries, but operates by virtue of a mysterious ability to infuse the colorless everyday world with energies from unexplored regions of social life or from the depths of the self.

Fame invested Duchamp with a power on which he would draw deftly and effectively in the years that followed. His ability to make the most of what had happened in 1913 was a sign that the consecration the American public bestowed on him had been no mistake: his status as an exemplar of what was most arresting and challenging in mod-

ernism would expand and deepen in the years that followed. And yet the reasons why Duchamp was such an appropriate symbol for the avant-garde contain an important paradox: what qualified him for the role was precisely his distance from those he was taken to represent. Modernism was a movement, or at least a complex of related movements, and much of the character of impressionism, symbolism, fauvism, cubism, and surrealism derived from the willingness of those who participated in them to be part of a group, to work within a sphere in which individual artistic identities developed through interaction with some common set of ideas and practices.

To Duchamp, such close cooperation was as alien as living on the moon. He had tried it with the group around Gleizes and Metzinger off and on between 1910 and 1912, but the attempt collapsed when those same friends let it be known that they did not want *Nude Descending a Staircase* in their exhibition, because it did not fit their program. He responded by drawing away into a largely solitary life, and by coincidence the Armory Show took place just at the moment when he was beginning work on the Large Glass, the project that marked his departure from traditional painting. As he pursued his new path, the features of his personality that had always marked him as a loner and an outsider, detached above all from those who seemed closest to him, would become more prominent. Nothing testifies to this evolution better than the life he would make for himself during the long periods he spent in America, comfortable in a situation that cut him off from his European roots in a way that would have been unimaginable for a Picasso, a Kandinsky, or a Breton.

Perhaps the fact that the Armory Show brought together works from so many different modernist schools encouraged its audience to focus on a figure who represented none of them very well. For whatever reason, the Americans who lifted Duchamp out of obscurity had chosen a person who—as his subsequent career would demonstrate—cared more about his personal independence than he did about art itself. Beneath the succession of avant-garde movements there had always lurked an impulse of radical

individualism, and no one represented it better than Marcel Duchamp; what more appropriate quality for a Yankee audience to seize on? Of all vanguard figures, only Duchamp pro-

duced as a major work a picture—*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* —whose meanings were so private and yet so intricately developed that it required an elaborate set of notes to give others any entry into its enclosed world. Who but Duchamp could dramatize his separation from others by representing himself at a dada exhibition by empty spaces on the walls? As he later agreed, he was in some way predestined for America: there his growing distance from the ordinary ways of being an artist found a counterpart in the tension the general public felt between itself and many elements of traditional culture; there even his incomprehensibility represented an individualism, and a distance from the inherited modes of artistic practice, that audiences could associate with their own proudest values. For decades Duchamp would remain far better known in America than in Europe.[9] Yet the meaning of his career cannot be separated from its European roots: living simultaneously in two worlds helped him to set free what we may call the spirit of the avant-garde as such, unleashed from the specific aesthetic programs advanced by separate movements like cubism, futurism, or surrealism, and turning the power of imagination against the very boundaries of life itself.

The aura of fame that Duchamp enjoys nowadays is brighter and more intense than the *succès de scandale* of the Armory Show, fed by the whole unprecedented course of his career and by the inspiration that many radical art movements since the 1960s have found in it. He has become a kind of mythic presence in modern culture, a hero whose story we tell and retell for the sake of its exemplary lessons. The readymades stand as a challenge to the long-cherished assumptions that art is a special kind of activity, properly set apart from the rest of life, and that artworks are expressions of individual vision or feeling. The later gesture of seeming to abandon making or exhibiting any kind of objects appears at once to exalt the freedom of the artist to follow imagination wherever it leads and to question the very right or need for art to survive at all. Duchamp opened the floodgates to a sea of questions about art's nature and meaning, questions whose range and depth he expanded by mixing his challenges to visual conventions with experiments in remaking language, and with arguments that the audience,

not the artist, determines the meaning and value of art objects. There may not be many people today who prefer his work to that of, say, Picasso or Matisse—nor should there be—but no vanguard figure invites us to confront basic questions about the meaning of modern culture more insistently than he.

For these reasons, there is much at stake in how we understand Duchamp's life and work. He has been offered as a witness to the condition of art under developed capitalism, claimed as a representative of alchemical spiritualism, cited as a revelation of the deep void of meaninglessness from which culture seeks vainly to shield us, derided as an empty pretender, or savored as a wily, wise, and up-to-date court fool.**[10]** Many accounts of his career agree in presenting it as the distillation of a bigger story, one whose moral is not just the end of traditional painting, but the end of art as we have known it in the West, and especially the end of the artist as a being who filters experience through a temperament especially able to add a new vision to our stock of ways to experience and make sense out of the world. Duchamp is said not only to have undermined the goal of seeking meaning through artistic activity, but also to have dissolved his own subjectivity as an artist, subverting the coherence of his personality by floating through life freely and without direction, taking each moment as it came and bobbing along on a sea of accident and chance. This image of him was cherished by later figures such as John Cage, who sought new ways to remove self-expression from artistic practice, and it helped inspire the various "anti-art" movements that have flourished since the 1960s.**[11]**

Despite the credit often given to this picture of Duchamp as an exemplary man without qualities, and the reassurance it has provided for many who declare themselves his heirs, I think it hides more than it reveals, about both the person and the work. In opposition to it, the pages that follow aim first of all to show that his career forms a coherent whole: his mature work consists of objects and gestures behind whose appearance of random disconnectedness there stand a small number of identifiable and interrelated ideas and impulses, linked to a set of personal themes that persisted throughout his life. Far from being the product of a dissolved subjectivity, the objects and activities that defined Duchamp as a person and as an artist —including the readymades

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and his "abandonment" of art—fit together like the pieces of a puzzle, combining to reproduce the pattern of his own peculiar and eccentric, but intriguing and quintessentially modern relationship to the world.

If this be so, then what should we make of Duchamp's many apparent assertions to the contrary, his rejection of consistency, taste, and habit, his celebration of personal instability? Those claims are pieces of the puzzle too,

whose place in it can be clarified by locating Duchamp within a particular current of modern culture—powerfully present in the avant-garde, but also operative outside it—where the apparent abandonment of personal, subjective coherence serves to give the self greater purity and a more exalted claim to independence. The point is not so paradoxical as it may seem. By seeking to substitute fluidity for fixity, chance and accident for taste and habit, Duchamp was aiming, like some of his modernist forebears and companions, to dissolve one particular kind of personal identity, the kind most ordinary people seek when they—we—take as starting points the socially and culturally given elements of collective life that every individual finds at her or his entry into the world. Such identities may be more or less original or meaningful or satisfying, but people attain them by reworking and synthesizing the materials—opinions, beliefs, activities, practices—that society and culture provide. The task is not easy because such social and cultural materials are heterogeneous and often contradictory—increasingly so as cultures grow more differentiated and complex-and they impose limits on what any person can become. To renounce personal identity as a project is to cast off the burden of reconciling contradictions that membership in complex cultures imposes on individuals, opening the way to a lighter, more elemental kind of selfhood, freed of the particular opinions and practices of a given culture, and able—at least in imagination—to transcend the limits that any and every culture imposes on its members.

Many vanguard claims to dissolve or dismantle individual subjectivity thus turn out to be directed not against personal identity and coherence, but against the form of subjectivity that accepts limits shared with others as the conditions of self-formation; in its place they project the image of a different kind of self or subject, free of common limitations and cleansed of all the internalized residues that social and

cultural experience deposit within ordinary persons. In the name of dissolving the self—often the "bourgeois" self—they actually seek to live outside of culture. Because this form of selfhood has been aspired to with some frequency in modernist—and "postmodernist"—projects, Duchamp offers a vantage point from which to understand currents and impulses whose importance extends well beyond his career. Hoping to deepen that understanding, we give attention below to some figures who belong to this broader context and who reveal its main features, among them Arthur Rimbaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry. We also look more closely at the more obscure and eccentric figure of Raymond Roussel, whom Duchamp hailed as a predecessor, and who also exercised great fascination on the surrealists. The themes that linked Duchamp to all these people are the terms "desire, liberation, and the self" set out in the subtitle: the deeper meanings of Duchamp's career must be sought in searching out, behind the claims he made for the dissolution of selfhood, just what kind of personal existence he aspired to, and what place it occupies in the history of modern culture.

What has been said so far already tells that the picture of Duchamp given below will be one that tries to order his life around a core of psychological coherence, but readers will find an account that is only mildly and partially psychobiographical. One reason is that the evidence available about both his childhood and his behavior as an adult imposes fairly strict limits on how far such a view can be worked out. Another is the need, already mentioned, to grasp his career in relation to historical currents and conditions that reached far beyond him. The themes in his work that reflected patterns in his life had powerful resonance outside because they echoed motifs and concerns already present in earlier modernist movements and in the historical experience out of which they arose; and at a critical moment—his passage to America—Duchamp's self-understanding and the meaning he attributed to his own activities were radically altered by the new situation, and the new audience, he found there. His own later declarations about the power of the public to determine the value, and perhaps even the meaning, of artworks faithfully mirrored that experience.

It may be objected that such an approach is not "Duchampian" in

that it attributes to him just the sort of social rootedness and personal coherence from which he claimed to have set himself free.[12] Perhaps, but he sometimes acknowledged the shakiness of those claims, and the account of him offered here will prove to be just as true to his overall sense of himself—more true, I hope to show—as are the opposite views put forward by most of his followers and interpreters. Moreover, we need such a view of Duchamp especially now, when many of the claims made by avant-garde figures about themselves ring ever more hollow; increasingly we understand that the avant-garde belongs to our culture, the culture of modernity, and never more wholly and loyally than in its claims to be in revolt against it, to be its destroyer and grave digger, for modern Western culture is the first to be nurtured and thrive on opposition and negation. (This does not mean that it will necessarily survive such attacks forever.)

If we are to grasp the relationship between modern life and the culture it has spawned, we need to view figures like Duchamp in ways that reveal how actions and practices that appeared destructive, even revolutionary, in their first light actually drew on and preserved the basic elements out of which modernity was—and is—constructed; we need to understand the avant-garde's rootedness in the culture it challenged without being either taken in or put off by its exalted and sometimes truculent advertisements for itself. This is what I hope the more humanistic and in some ways more old-fashioned approach to Duchamp offered here may help to provide.

Readers should perhaps be warned at this point that the author of the book they have in hand is not trained in art history. I think my perspective as a

student of modern culture more generally is appropriate to a figure whose relationship to painting was usually distant and ambiguous, who insisted on his closeness to literature and philosophy, and whose importance lies in the larger questions he was able to put in play by not doing what his identity as an artist led people to expect. All the same, I have not held back from trying to make sense of the pictures.

Two—
Subjective Spaces

The Trajectory That Landed Duchamp in America in 1915 had its origin in the provincial French bourgeoisie. His father was a Norman notary, a profession that offered considerable opportunities for enrichment in late nineteenth-century France, and the family lived comfortably while the elder Duchamp accumulated a tidy fortune. Six children survived (another died in infancy), spaced in three groups of two: the elder brothers Gaston and Raymond born in 1875 and 1876, Marcel and his sister Suzanne more than ten years later in 1887 and 1889, and two younger sisters, Yvonne and Magdeleine, in 1895 and 1898. Marcel had strong ties with his two brothers and especially with his sister Suzanne, his childhood playmate and confidante; for several years the two were the only children in the house, and the younger sisters came too late to be close companions for them.

Like other French bourgeois families, the Duchamps moved easily between seeking comfort and seeking culture. Mme Duchamp's father first made himself rich as a shipping agent before devoting himself to painting and engraving, leaving behind a body of artwork that was highly valued at home. The family read and played chess together, and music provided another activity in common. All four of the older children became artists. For Marcel and Suzanne the choice seems to have

been wholly unproblematic, with neither seriously considering any other kind of life. It is less clear whether any difficulties beset Gaston and Raymond, who embarked first on careers in law and medicine. When Gaston began to work as a painter and engraver, he changed his name to Jacques Villon, and in turning to sculpture, Raymond too assumed a new name, drawing on both the family's and his brother's to become Raymond Duchamp-Villon. The reasons for these changes remain obscure, but the fifteenth-century wandering poet, François Villon, was a hero to many in Montmartre, and

paying this homage to him also seems to have been a way to resolve the felt incompatibility between the family's respectability and the sometimes immodest and risqué publications in which Gaston's early work appeared.**[1]** If the name changes were responses to parental unhappiness about sons who might have been doctors or lawyers becoming artists, any bad feelings were soon overcome:Marcel remembered no resistance to his choice, and the elder Duchamp gave sustained and regular support to all his artist offspring until his death in 1925, sending them money when needed, and for fairness' sake carefully subtracting each one's advances from his or her share in the inheritance.

Marcel Duchamp's entry into artistic life thus had little in common with the classic stories of rebellion and rejection exemplified by avantgarde figures like Rimbaud or Alfred Jarry. In later life he would display an unworried ability to take life as it came, his calm, unruffled self-confidence contrasting sharply with the need to prove oneself by dominating others so evident, for instance, in a figure like André Breton (whose mother decried his abandoning a medical career as a worse calamity than if he had been killed in the war). Duchamp never seemed to need the reassurance that came from belonging to a group, separating easily from his cubist friends in 1912 and keeping at a discreet distance from his admirers in dada and surrealism. In contrast to their noisy and self-conscious challenges, he seemed able to do unprecedented things with a quiet and natural equanimity, making established expectations and conventions fall away without seeming to invest much energy in the act of opposing them.

But the other side of this balance was an uninvolved, neutral quality; many who knew him would comment on his large capacity for distance

and indifference, and these attributes too appear to have been rooted in his family. Duchamp *père* was an expansive and warmhearted man, loved by his sons and daughters; it seems natural to associate Marcel's qualities of balance and ease with him. But the mother was cooler and more reserved, at least toward the older children. Once he was grown, Duchamp did not speak affectionately about her, and he may have felt neglected as a boy, especially after the third pair of children arrived. Robert Lebel, who interviewed Duchamp at length for the admiring study he published in 1959, wrote: "Of his mother Duchamp today remembers above all her placidity, even her indifference, which seems rather to have hurt him, until it became a goal for him in turn to attain."**[2]** We cannot say what sort of inner history lurks behind this rather offhand account of emotional pain and delayed identification: how did Duchamp feel the hurt? how did he respond to it? by what path did he arrive at the solution of making his mother's indifference part of his own character? We shall see that his sexual behavior as an adult led some who knew him to suspect he may have experienced some deeper psychic injury as a child, leaving him emotionally "deadened." The puzzle of

his feelings would be one component of the aura of mystery that later came to surround him.

Whether intentionally or not, Duchamp provided graphic testimony to the differences between his parents, in the one portrait of each that survives. The picture of his father (Fig. 4), done in a style that suggests the influence of Cézanne (as Duchamp later acknowledged), shows him comfortably seated in a chair, attired like the respectable bourgeois he was, but free of the stiffness sometimes found in middle-class life. His physical presence is large but contained, and his eyes look directly out at us, alert and interested yet with no suggestion of challenge. The French have a phrase for the way Duchamp *père* appears here: he is *bien dans sa peau* , at home inside the skin that both protects him from the world and puts him in touch with it. The portrait is at once closely observed and affectionate, conveying both the subject's personality and the artist's comfort in his presence.

Compared with the portrait of his father, the surviving image of his mother suggests a much more complex set of feelings. The picture,
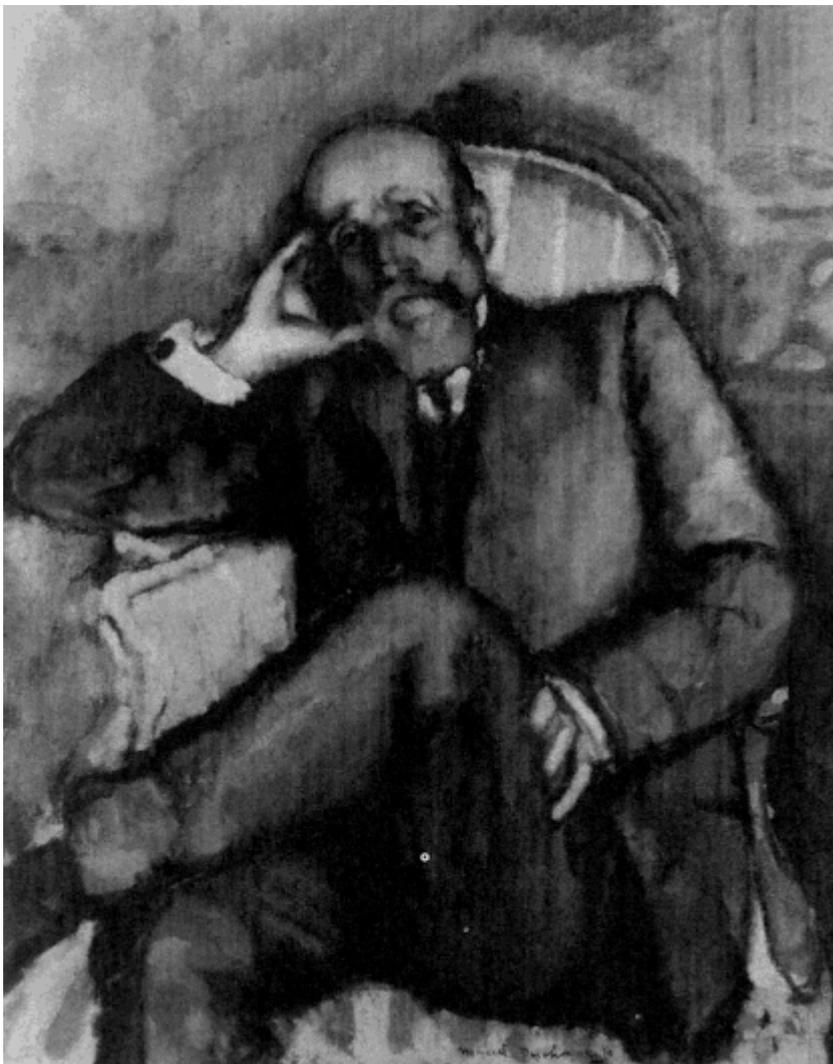

Figure 4.
Duchamp, *The Artist's Father* (1910)

Sonata (Fig. 5), was done a year later, in a style that has moved on from Cézanne and the fauves toward cubism, and it shows Mme Duchamp with her three daughters. Suzanne sits in the foreground, reading, while Yvonne and Magdeleine play their instruments, apparently to the mother who listens behind them; she seems to preside over a calm and harmonious family scene. But we know from more than one source that Mme Duchamp had become deaf by the time the picture was painted.**[3]** A deaf mother "listening" to her children's music may be displaying goodwill, but she lacks an important quality necessary to enter into their world; painting a deaf person in a musical scene cannot avoid calling attention to her separateness. One might be tempted to attribute the flat, unfocused quality of her eyes and the angular linearity of her face to cubist geometricization, were it not for the much more integrated and humane portraits of Suzanne reading and Yvonne playing the piano. Mme Duchamp here appears both within her family and distanced from it. It seems impossible to say whether Duchamp was treating her with indifference, hostility, or regret, but perhaps it was some combination of these attitudes that helped to create the irony and detachment so marked in him later on.

Duchamp's images of his parents have brought us into his early work as an artist. He began painting while a teenage student, producing local scenes and landscapes, along with portraits of family members and friends. In 1904, having finished the lycée in the Norman capital, Rouen, he joined his brothers in Paris, living with Gaston (Jacques Villon) in Montmartre and enrolling in a well-known art school, the Académie Julian, for a year. But he gave little attention to being a student and lived an idle life that he later called bohemian (a description to which we shall return); most of his artistic energies were invested in drawings and cartoons for satirical papers. From the start, he showed a natural penchant for broad, sometimes ribald humor that fit well with the spirit of sheets like *Le Rire* and *Le Courrier français* , and his later devotion to puns was already evident: one drawing-called "Woman Cab-Driver" showed an empty taxi parked in front of a hotel, implying that the driver had taken her client inside; another, "Dimanches" ("Sundays"), made a sexual joke out of what seemed to be a quiet weekend scene of a man pushing a baby carriage alongside his visibly

Figure 5.
Duchamp, *Sonata* (1911)

pregnant wife, by playing on the slang connotation of "manches" (literally handles or sleeves) as erections; appeals to "horns" and "tails" marked other work of this period.**[4]**

Few Duchamp paintings survive from the time between 1905 and 1910, but in that year he suddenly began a period of more intense work, which lasted until the summer of 1912. During these two years he passed rapidly from one style to another, as the two images of his parents show, successively trying out techniques observed from Cézanne, Matisse, the fauves, and the cubists. The quickness of this movement between styles has often been noticed, but it has helped to obscure some thematic continuities that link

together much of this early work. One recurring motif was the opposition between the human connectedness promised by the portrait of his father and the contrasting condition of separation depicted in *Sonata* .

That picture's ironic revelation of detachment and isolation beneath the appearance of people present to each other also makes an appearance in a family scene from the previous year, *The Chess Game* (Fig. 6). Shown at the Salon d'Automne in 1910, the picture gained Duchamp the right—which he never exercised—to exhibit there in future without submitting his work to the jury. Years later he described the picture blandly by saying, "In front of my two brothers playing chess you see my two sisters-in-law having tea," and despite the stylistic differences, this moment of family life has an air of calm resembling *Sonata* . But the chess picture is no more a scene of simple harmony than is the musical one.

To start with, in neither of them does any person look directly at any other or at us; no face-to-face human communication takes place. In *Sonata* the separation seems especially marked between Mme Duchamp and Suzanne, each relegated to a separate plane and engaged in no common pursuit. Presumably the two musician sisters meet somewhere within the music they share; but it is not clear whether Yvonne looks up from the keyboard to seek out her sister or simply to stare into space, and Duchamp underlines the ambiguity by turning Magdeleine away from her partner, a situation that the diamond-shaped quadrilateral of the composition offered an easy opportunity to reverse. A similar

Figure 6.
Duchamp, *The Chess Game* (1910)

mix of relations appears in *The Chess Game* , where the two women at tea both seem absorbed in some inner contemplation, present at the same scene but absent to each other. By contrast, we assume that the two brothers share the mental world of the chessboard at which they both stare intently; but chess is a game where play often depends on each opponent seeing the situation in a way closed to the other, and Duchamp would later value chess precisely for the opportunity it provided to withdraw from ordinary social life. It attracted him above all because it had "no social purpose," and because those who became involved in it lived in a cloudy, blinkered world of their own.**[5]** Of course we cannot know that he was already responding to chess in this way in 1910, but evidence suggests that at least some elements of his later views were present to him then.

In 1911 he did a series of studies and sketches for another picture of

his brothers playing chess, and the first of these (Fig. 7) shows how distance resides inside the close connection between chess players. The two brothers stare directly toward each others' eyes, but their line of sight is broken by the opaque forms of chess pieces, and solid lines drawn into rectangles enclose each one in a separate frame. In the completed *Portrait of Chess Players* (Fig. 8), the separation between the brothers is emphasized by the strikingly different formal languages—both nominally cubist—in which each is represented: the figure on the right as an assemblage of curvilinear, tubelike forms that create a rounded image of considerable depth, the one on the left by flat, intersecting patches of geometricized, mostly two-dimensional surface. The chess pieces between their heads create a field over which each competes to gain some kind of power from within (in some of the other preparatory sketches the pieces appear inside the heads of the players). Later, in the Large Glass, Duchamp would employ a more developed contrast between images of different dimensionality, to indicate the impossibility of physical communication between the bride and the bachelors.

Although the moment when he would "abandon" art for chess was still years in the future, it seems that Duchamp already saw links between the two activities. His brothers who modeled as chess players were also his models as artists, and *The Chess Game* carefully develops the parallel between chess pieces, whose potential relations are made actual by the combinations players discover for them and the elements an artist manipulates by arranging them in a pictorial composition. The picture calls up a number of different possible relations between the people in it. Each of the male-female couples seems joined but in different ways: the pair on the left quite closely, by the vertical line of their heads and the curvilinear flow that runs down the

front of the man's body and along the upturned side of the woman's; the couple on the right more loosely, by the horizontal line of their heads and the way their bodies correspond to the pair across from them. But the scene suggests diagonal connections too, between the two light-colored figures at the extremes of the picture space (their eyes on the same level) and the more dark-hued ones, whose volume occupies the upper and lower parts of the canvas's center (his line of vision potentially
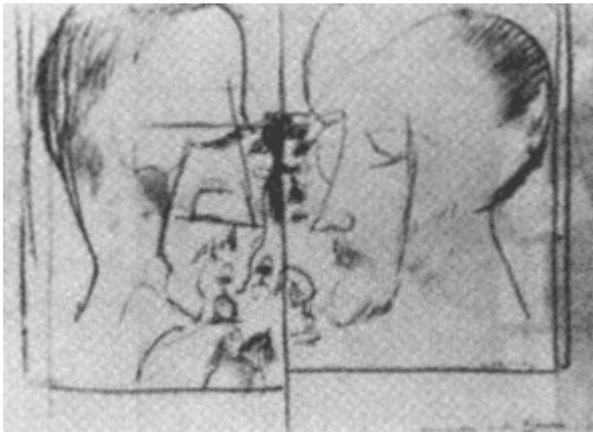
Figure 7.
Duchamp, study for *Portrait of Chess Players* (1911)

Figure 8.
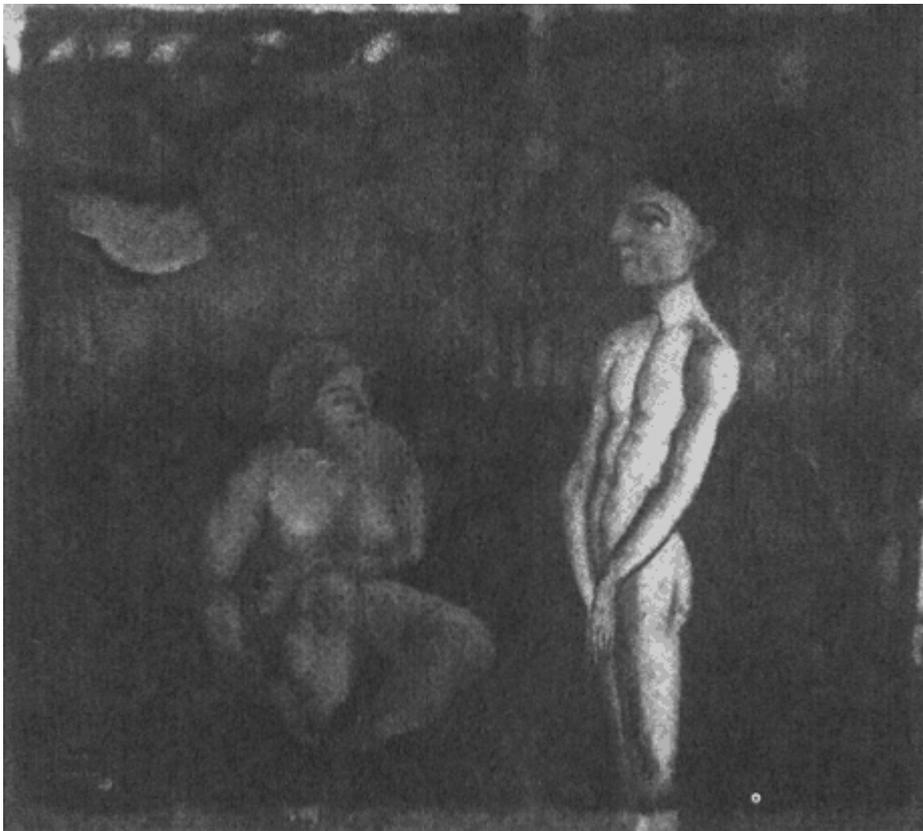Duchamp, *Portrait of Chess Players* (1911)

Figure 9.
Duchamp, *Paradise* (1910)

extending through the chess board to her). These possible recombinations are at once emphasized and undercut by the common absorption of the men in the competition of the game and of the women in their more passive states of reverie: what will the winners prize be? Like the chess player, the artist can envision possibilities other than those apparent on the surface, but none of them would establish the kind of stable communication and harmony that *Sonata* appears to depict before we become aware of its ironic undercurrents.

These same issues of human connectedness and detachment appear in early pictures that move outside the sphere of Duchamp's family life. One of these bore the title *Paradise* , and showed two figures, one male and one female, who stand and sit in a grassy, wooded setting (Fig. 9). The male figure's gesture of hiding his sex tells us what mo-

Figure 10.
Duchamp, *Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel* (1910)

ment we have happened upon: the one that follows on the loss of the couple's original innocence. The mien of the two figures confirms this; their unmeeting eyes and blank, anxious faces suggesting disillusionment and separation. The model for the male figure was a friend, Dr. Dumouchel. Duchamp had done a portrait of Dumouchel a year earlier (Fig. 10), in which commentators have properly seen an early example of Duchamp's fascination for the mysterious powers of modern science, both in the puzzling illumination around the upper part of the body and in the strange glow that seems at once to emanate from the hand and penetrate it, suggesting both a spiritual aura and a kind of x-ray.**[6]** More relevant to *Paradise* is the contrast between the alert, expectant quality of Dumouchel's face in the portrait and the very different mood he conveys in the garden scene. The poignancy and power

of the latter picture reside in the contrast between its Edenic title and the other state of being into which its subjects have already been exiled: although still physically within the garden, mentally they inhabit the desert of expulsion. The primal human harmony with nature and bodily existence that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the fall has been broken, throwing male

and female into separate worlds of anxiety and regret. *Paradise* calls up the same contrast between possible connectedness and actual separation present in both *Sonata* and *The Chess Game* , now taken out of the family circle and generalized by reference to the Biblical story.

We view a seemingly less disillusioned evocation of a primal garden of delights in a picture done a few months later, *Young Man and Girl in Spring* (Plate 2). Unlike the figures in *Paradise* , this couple experience no need to hide their sexual parts, which they exhibit with a childlike mixture of innocent clarity and chaste vagueness. Their common activity may be some dance (if the season is spring it is unlikely they can be gathering fruit); whatever it is, it seems to draw attention away from their sexuality. In contrast to the heavy materiality of the figures in *Paradise* , the couple here are light and graceful; the vague and filmy atmosphere evokes the sort of inner poetic landscape, nuanced, musical, allusive, and incapable of direct statement, that Duchamp admired in the aesthetic of Stéphane Mallarmé the great symbolist poet, while the globe in the center and the figures in and just below it seem to locate the scene in the mythological world of constructed and protected symbols.

Everything combines to suggest that the moment depicted here is one before the loss of innocence dramatized in *Paradise* has taken place. But the young people's ability to remain in this state seems tied to the circumstance that, in contrast to all the figures encountered in Duchamp's other early pictures, they have no faces, as if to say that only those who possess no recognizable identity can inhabit such a paradise of harmony and hopefulness. We shall see later how important the project of maintaining personal fluidity and avoiding fixity would become in Duchamp's claim to have achieved a special kind of freedom; here unrecognizability appears as the quality that gives entry to the realm of

springlike accord from which the inhabitants of much of his other early work seem to be excluded.

In 1913, some two years after he painted *Paradise* and *Young Man and Girl in Spring* , Duchamp set down a meditation that provides strong support for the readings of these pictures just offered, and through them for the existence in his mind of the themes we have tried to identify in the family scenes. He included the text in the third of the collections of notes for the Large Glass, the *White Box* (also called *À l'infinitif*), published in 1966, so that it also serves to tie this early work to his major project, helping to make clear what it was about the relations between the bride and the bachelors that he found so engrossing. The note has a special place in Duchamp's writings because it is the only substantial one in all those he either published or left behind (the latter were brought out after his death by his stepson,

Paul Matisse) that speaks directly and in a general way about his own feelings rather than addressing some possible or actual feature of his work.**[7]** The note's explicit subject, looking into shop windows, may seem far from the concerns of Duchamp's pictures, but in France before World War I there was much discussion about how modern commerce sought to harness the powers of desire and fantasy for the lowly purpose of selling goods. Merchandise displays of all types—department stores, international expositions, and the salons of individual products like automobiles—all enveloped things in search of buyers in an aura of exoticism and sexual suggestion.

The shop window, Duchamp wrote, was "proof of the existence of the outside world." The way in which this proof was established, and what he meant by it, appeared through the following set of reflections.

> When one undergoes the interrogation of shop windows, one also pronounces one's own sentence. In fact, one's choice is "round trip." From the demand of shop windows, from the inevitable response to shop windows, the fixation of choice is determined [*se conclut l'arrêt du choix*]. No obstinacy, ad absurdum, of hiding the coition through a glass pane with one or many objects of the shop window.

> The penalty consists in cutting the pane and in gnawing at your thumbs [*s'en mordre les pouces*] as soon as possession is consummated. Q.E.D.**[8]**

Duchamp's English translators render *s'en mordre les pouces* as "feeling regret," but the affect dramatized by the action is more painful than that. The sentence pronounced on oneself in the first sentence is the "round trip" of the second: drawn outward into the world of desired objects by seeing them displayed, we will be sent back into ourselves once the possibility opened up by desire and choice has narrowed to fixation on certain ones. Until that moment desiring carries us outward toward a still-imagined state, promising an expanded and altered form of existence; but once satisfaction occurs, we have only the particular things chosen, and we return, frustrated and chagrined, to the previous boundaries of the self. It is this state of disappointment that provides the proof of the outside world referred to at the start: Q.E.D.

In this text the passage between hopeful desire and disappointed possession that window-gazing calls up in Duchamp's mind takes the place of the contrast between anticipation and disillusionment evoked by *Young Man and Girl in Spring* and *Paradise* . But the note casts a darker light on the difference between the two states, because it makes chagrin and regret the proof that we live in a world external to ourselves; these somber affects

arise not from something specific to sexuality or from any correctable defect in the way we choose objects, but from the necessity for finding the means of satisfaction in the world outside the self. To experience the external world in this way is to know that what may promise to be sources of sustenance or pleasure within it are traps; survival and growth require radical strategies for avoiding these dangers.

The note also suggests where Duchamp's preoccupation with human communication and separateness would lead him. His window-gazer communicates in fantasy with the objects behind the pane: that is what the "coition" named in the text is about. This kind of communication is satisfying while the kind that comes with actual physical contact is not, because only the first allows the self to set the terms of its relations

with objects; this is the possibility open to the two figures in *Young Man and Girl in Spring* , and forever closed to those in *Paradise* . One who holds such a view of human relations is unlikely to seek the direct contact with others and the world suggested in Duchamp *père* 's portrait, but will find reason to identify with the state of noncommunication that seems puzzling and perhaps uncomfortable in *Sonata* and *The Chess Game* . Perhaps this movement from experiencing personal distance as a source of discomfort to discovering a kind of freedom in it is one thing Duchamp had in mind when he told Robert Lebel about being first pained by his mother's indifference, before adopting that quality as a goal of his own.

Duchamp's early pictures offer a few more clues to what may have made these issues important to him and how he would develop them; some of the dues have to do with sex. Although sexuality seems unrelated to the barriers that divide human beings in *Sonata* and is only subtly implied in *The Chess Game* , the place of sex is clear in the two pictures of paradise and loss. Did Duchamp feel that sex was responsible for some expulsion from a personal Eden where the external world was not a source of disillusionment? The available evidence doesn't allow for a definite answer to this question, but it provides some interesting material for speculation, letting us at least explore a few possibilities.

One of these is that Duchamp's lost paradise was the childhood time before Yvonne (and soon Magdeleine) usurped his mother's attention in his eighth year, testifying to her continuing sexual activity and widening her distance from him. Hostility to his younger sisters seems evident in two pictures of them. One, *Apropos of Little Sister* (Fig. 11), shows Magdeleine sitting in a pose that has usually been taken to represent her reading or working. But Alice Marquis suggests that the object on which Magdeleine sits is not a chair, but a toilet, and that probably Duchamp here shows his little sister defecating. Surprising as it may appear at first, such a reading of the picture

seems confirmed by the potlike white object capped with a colored seat on which little sister's bottom rests, and it makes sense of the otherwise puzzling inscription Duchamp wrote on the back: "Une Étude de femme / Merde" ("Study of a Woman / Shit"). The result is to make the picture an

Figure 11.
Duchamp, *Apropos of Little Sister* (1911)

illustration of the classic Freudian complaint directed by older siblings against their younger rivals: "All he/she's good for is to make...."**[9]**

A different kind of hostility, this time directed toward both younger sisters, surfaces in his joint portrait of them, *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters* (Fig. 12). Certainly the picture was inspired by cubist techniques of cutting up objects and presenting them simultaneously from different points of view, as Duchamp later affirmed when he said that here "I, so to speak, tore up their profiles and placed 'them at random on the canvas."**[10]** But Duchamp made no similar portraits of anyone else in the period when he was experimenting with cubist methods, and the French word in the title, *déchiquitées* , literally means "ripped up" or "shredded." He later pointed to this picture as his first introduction of humor into his paintings; if so we need to remember that humor, notably between siblings, can often be aggressive.

A second way in which Duchamp may have felt expelled from an earlier paradise is that his own sexual awakening in adolescence somehow spoiled

the innocent and free interplay he enjoyed with his favorite

Figure 12.
Duchamp, *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters* (1911)

sister, Suzanne. *Young Man and Girl in Spring* was painted at the time of her wedding in 1911 and is inscribed "To You my dear Suzanne Marcel"; it may well convey a sense of how Duchamp saw their relations in childhood. The picture, and the sexuality it seems to invoke, has provoked much speculation, most boldly developed by the Italian art critic, collector, and gallery owner Arturo Schwarz. Schwarz believes that Duchamp's closeness to his sister brought them into a relationship where the possibility and fantasy of incest loomed; his relationship with her was a central experience in his life, engendering the quest for a reunion of sundered male and female principles as a central theme in his work. The same critic has argued that Duchamp sought this reunification by way of ideas and images drawn from the ancient science of alchemy, whose literature often symbolized the recovery of nature's lost, original unity as the incestual union of brother and sister. Alchemy sought to restore humanity to the powers it possessed before its fall into the material world that confines individuals and objects in separation from each other; of these powers, the famous ability to transmute base

metals into gold was only one exemplary instance. It is this mystical marriage, the ritual of humanity's return to its lost harmony and dominion, that Schwarz asks us to see in *Young Man and Girl in Spring* .**[11]**

Certainly *Young Man and Girl in Spring* is a kind of tribute to sexuality's undefinable power. The dedication to Suzanne seems to draw the relations between brother and sister into a scene that is suffused with sexual suggestion, childlike and innocent but erotically charged all the same. The sexual aura of the picture is heightened by the curious intersection of the hillocklike shapes on which the young people stand, causing the earth to appear in the guise of female thighs, out of whose bodily interior the background seems to rise. And, in a more aggressive double entendre, the young man's midsection is painted in a way to make us suddenly aware that the thin, dark, and slightly curved cylindrical shape that rises from his groin may not be the line of his belly, but an erect penis.

To what do these sexual allusions refer? Given the fact that Duchamp sent the picture to Suzanne at the time of her wedding, some people have read the scene as an evocation of her married future rather than the siblings' shared past. Perhaps, but the public imagination of one relationship can easily be a screen behind which hovers the fantasy of another, a possibility heightened here by the facelessness of the figures and the overall mood of ambiguity. The uncertainty Duchamp created by painting the picture in the way he did and then sending it to Suzanne is compounded by the background figures. Several commentators have tried to associate them with the future progeny of the couple, a reading that allows Schwarz to propose the figure in the globe as Mercurius, in alchemical theory the offspring of the incestuous brother-sister pair, while those who contest this see the children of Suzanne and her husband.**[12]** But probably the whole attempt to read these images so explicitly is misguided; within the globe there appears to be more than one figure (hence not Mercurius), perhaps combined in a kind of dance, and below it on the hillside the number of bodies resting in some way on the ground is similarly difficult to count. My guess—for that is what much commentary on such a picture must remain—is that Duchamp here included images that can be read either as other celebrants of spring or as intimations of some other place or time, un-

specifiability being one of their defining features.**[13]** The background serves to underline what it is about the scene that makes spring a season of poetry and hope, namely, that the outcome or result of the powerful natural forces which then begin to develop still remains in the future, free of the disillusionment that *Paradise* —followed by the note on shop windows— depicts as the consequence of fulfilled desire.

Little as we can know about Duchamp's real or fantasized relations with

Suzanne, it seems at least possible that memories of some earlier state of unity with her had a share in bringing forth the images of separation, disillusionment, and yearning for some other state of being that recur throughout his work.**[14]** As for the alchemical symbolism, Schwarz is able to cite traditional images that seem to appear in Duchamp's picture, but they are too common and general to support the argument: circles, certain colors, the simple juxtaposition of male and female figures. Mystical ideas of various sorts were talked about in the groups Duchamp frequented in Montmartre before World War I, and he may have been drawn to them, but he seems to have been speaking straightforwardly when he said, in response to Schwarz's readings, "If I have ever practiced alchemy, it was in the only way it can be done now, that is to say, without knowing it." His willingness to accede even that far to Schwarz's claims needs to be set next to the comment he once made about various attempts to inject other people's preoccupations into his work: "Let the little birds do pee-pee."**[15]** Trying to read Duchamp's pictures in the light of alchemical traditions means turning them into sites for a kind of interpretive treasure hunt, where we continually go after hidden secrets. There is much more to be learned about him from the inside, by pursuing the themes that emerge not just from *Young Man and Girl in Spring* , but also from *Paradise, Sonata, The Chess Game* , and the note on shop windows as links between his work and his own inner life.

One thing seems undeniable: *Young Man and Girl in Spring* demonstrates Duchamp's impulse to clothe the meanings of his pictures in mystery. Already mystery itself was assuming a central place in his work, especially where sexuality comes on the scene, and he was finding new ways to surround himself with its aura. In 1910-11 he did two paintings, in each of which two nude women engage in some sort of
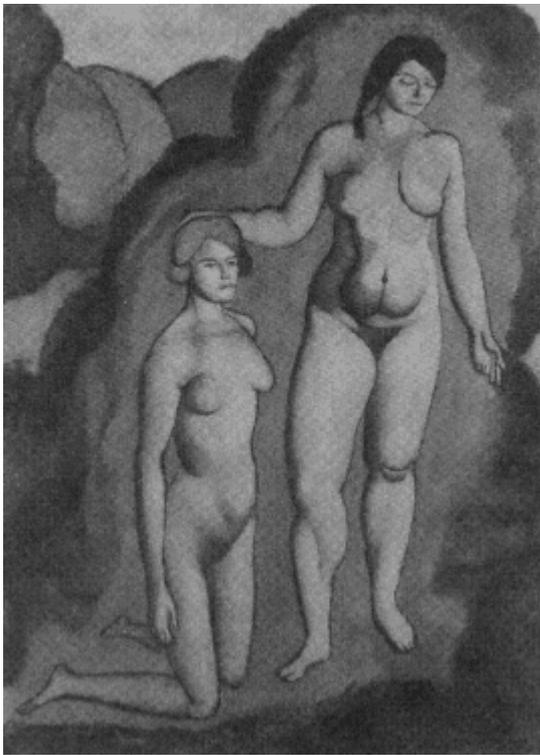
Figure 13.
Duchamp, *The Bush* (1910-11)

ritual-like activity with each other. One was called *The Bush* , the other *Baptism* (Figs. 13, 14). Duchamp later called attention to the first work's title, saying that it marked the beginning of a practice to which he would often recur, of attaching "nondescriptive" titles to his work. The purpose of such titles, he wrote, was to give his pictures a way to exist outside the visual experience they provided, to "introduce some anecdote without being 'anecdotal'"; the painting did not illustrate a definite theme, but the title created "the possibility to invent a theme for it, *afterwards* ."**[16]**

Titles would assume great importance in Duchamp's later work, but it is hard to see how calling the first picture *The Bush* could introduce any anecdote. The two women, visible within a plantlike enclosure, seem engaged in an action; perhaps the gesture of the standing figure is a way of presenting the second, who kneels beside her, to an unknown audience. The title, if anything, seems to draw attention away
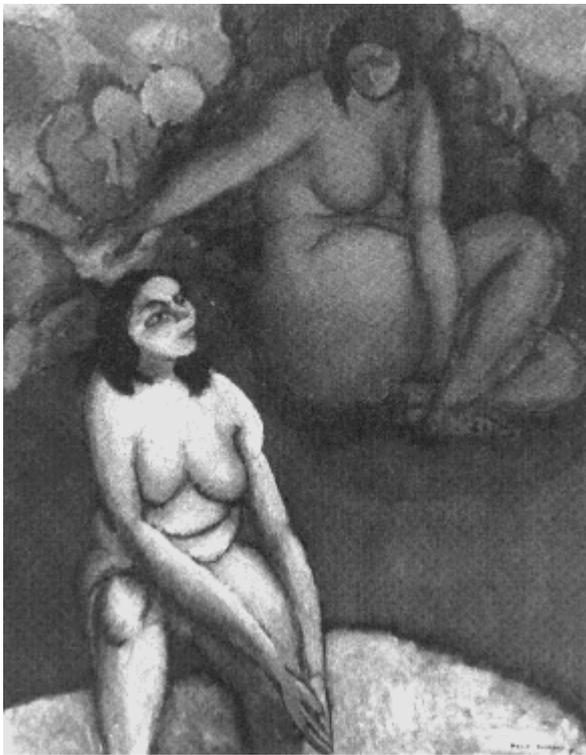
Figure 14.
Duchamp, *Baptism (Two Seated Figures)* (1911)

from this action, making viewers suspect that the painting's meaning—if it has one—can be known only to the artist who named it for the setting instead of the action. Giving such a name to the painting casts a veil of mystery between the artist's intention and the viewer's desire to be let in on it, placing the artist, like his subjects, inside an enclosed space of which we are unaccountably afforded a momentary cutaway view.

The uncertainties created by the second title are different. Here the action involved may well be a baptism, but how, and in what sense? Is the higher-up woman about to baptize the lower-down one? Why should she do this? Is the light-colored indentation on the edge of which the second one sits a pool of water, so that she may be about to immerse herself? These may seem overly literal questions, but it is Duchamp's titles that call them forth, giving a promise of literal meaning that stands in tension with the pictures' refusal to provide it; as viewers

we remain suspended between picture and title, our desire to enter the world where the artist seems to invite us forever unsatisfied. This use of titles contrasts with that in *Paradise* , where naming the scene is precisely what makes its meaning available to us; where Duchamp shared his irony with us in the earlier picture, here he begins to use it to separate his world from ours.

Duchamp created a similar mystery for his audience in a series of drawings from the same year, which he called *Mediocrity, Eternal Siesta* , and *Once More to This Star* . All three titles come from poems by Jules Laforgue, a short-lived and rebellious late symbolist poet and critic who championed the impressionists and Baudelaire in the 1890s. Laforgue's poetry was passionate and pessimistic, antic but preoccupied with death, in love with language's ability to give the world a new face but sometimes invaded by a cynical bravado: in the dialogue of "Once More to This Star" the sun exchanges insults with the earthlings it threatens to warm no longer, over which of them will appear more impotent once the old and waning star has died. Like its two counterparts, the drawing to which Duchamp gave this title (Fig. 15) bears no visible relation to the poem, unless one is expected to read the disembodied head hovering over the stairs as the sun, around which earthlings ascend and descend. Or is the figure on the right looking out a barred window addressing the sun? (The "to" in Laforgue's title was a preposition of address, not of physical movement.) We are suspended between title and image in much the same way as in *The Bush* , and most commentators find the drawing significant only in that its apparently unclothed moving figures anticipate the theme of *Nude Descending a Staircase* (a connection Duchamp several times suggested himself). Like the other images to which he attached "nondescriptive" titles, this drawing simultaneously evokes and obscures its subject, putting us in the presence of an artist whose appearance of speaking directly to us only ends up emphasizing his residence in some invisible, private space.

Choosing titles as he did offered Duchamp a new way to explore and perhaps enjoy the isolation that his other early work depicts; in these works he begins to operate as an artist within the closed-off spaces created by the very failure of communication the other pictures seem sometimes merely to describe and sometimes to lament. We can see

Figure 15.
Duchamp, *Once More to This Star* (1911)

Duchamp drawing positively on his own isolation in a different way in another picture of 1911, a portrait he called *Dulcinea* (Fig. 16). Its subject, as he later reported, was a woman he did not know but whom he sometimes saw walking in the Paris suburb Neuilly, near where he lived and worked at the time. The simultaneous presentation of a series of different perspectives on the same object reflects cubist practice, but by showing the woman as if walking through a series of positions, the painter has introduced the study of movement into cubism, perhaps influenced (although he later minimized the connection) by the early experiments of the Italian futurists.

But the movement depicted is not merely physical: as the woman

Figure 16.
Duchamp, *Dulcinea* (1911)

moves across the picture plane she leaves her clothed state behind and emerges nude, like a butterfly from a cocoon. Duchamp had done a number of nudes before, but the special importance of this one lies in its being the first appearance of the theme that would occupy him so much later on, that of a female form in the process of being stripped bare by a male imagination, a "bachelor." Here the stripping is performed not by anonymous unmarried men, but by Duchamp himself, his interest in the unclothed female form justified on traditional artistic grounds (perhaps also in terms of contemporary theory that saw cubist experiments with form as a search for the truth beneath appearances), but aroused also by his male curiosity about a young woman with whom he had no social connection: he later recalled that he did not know her name. In terms of the note on shop

windows, Duchamp's relations with his subject in *Dulcinea* are still protected by the intactness of the transparent barrier that separates them; the picture records a fantasy created in his gazer's mind by the experience of proximity to a woman with whom he did not enter into any actual communication, and the persistence of idealization that results is acknowledged by naming the woman as the beloved of Don Quixote, the hero whose every interaction with the world took place under the sway of his unrestrainable imagination.

What was Duchamp like in the years he was painting these pictures? Only one account of his personality and behavior at this time seems to survive, but it describes a young man with whom the concerns we have found in his early works fit very well. It was written some years later by Gabrielle Buffet, the wife of Francis Picabia, both of whom Duchamp met in 1911.

> Though very much detached from the conventions of his epoch, he had not yet found his mode of expression, and this gave him a kind of disgust with work and an ineptitude for life. Under an appearance of almost romantic timidity, he possessed an exacting dialectical mind, in love with philosophical speculations and absolute conclusions.... Duchamp enclosed himself in the solitude of his studio at Neuilly, keeping in touch with only a few friends, among whom we were numbered. Sometimes he "took a trip" to his room

> and vanished for two weeks from the circle of his friends; this was a time of escape into himself, in the course of which the "sad young man on a train" [Buffet here refers to the title of a picture to which we will come shortly] was transmuted into a captivating, impressive incarnation of Lucifer....**[17]**

Buffet's image of a still unformed young man, mysterious and perhaps bearing a promise of menace but visibly shy and with an impulse for isolation, suggests that the interest in people confined or thrown back into their private worlds, and the impulse to exploit that situation himself, both of which recur in his early pictures, reflected features that could be observed in Duchamp's personality. The young painter who sought periodically to "escape into himself" was the same who would later be celebrated for taking art in just the contrary direction, separating it from private feeling and individual self-expression. Before we can look at the way Duchamp united these two contrary motions, we need to see how his passage between them would resonate with some widely shared features and dilemmas of modern art and culture.

The fantasy stripping of a woman observed from a distance in *Dulcinea* records an experience of a kind often explored by Duchamp's modernist forebears, one to which attention has recently been called by Robert Herbert in his remarkable study of French impressionism. Whereas earlier treatments of the same subject tended to focus primarily on the technical innovations of the impressionist painters, Herbert emphasizes those features of their project that mark it as a response to the conditions of modern urban life. The subjects chosen by the impressionists reflected the new public and private spaces, the transformed social relations and novel forms of leisure that emerged as Paris became a modern metropolis; within all these what the new painting often captured was the striking complex of physical closeness and psychological distance that inhabitants of great cities experience every day.**[18]**

Consider Manet's affecting picture of 1873, *The Railroad* (Fig. 17). We see a young woman next to a child, both placed against a fence through whose bars can be glimpsed a scene largely obscured by the

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Figure 17.
Edouard Manet, *The Railroad* (also known as *Gare Saint-Lazare* ; 1873)

smoke puffed out from locomotives arriving at or leaving from the Gare Saint-Lazare; the woman faces us, while the child turns away to observe the trains. For us the viewers, as Herbert points out, "It is the encounter of one stranger with others, one of those chance meetings that mark the modern city. We do not know if the woman is the mother, the sister, or the baby-sitter of the young girl. They are merely placed side by side, and the lack of any apparent bond between them reinforces the idea that we have simply

happened upon them." The young woman, her reading apparently interrupted by our passing, looks up with a neutral expression, making us "recognize ourselves as that characteristic city dweller, the unknown passer-by." Nothing regulates what we think of her, or she of us.[19]

A similar relationship is evoked by Gustave Caillebotte's *The Man at the Window* (Fig. 18), showing the painter's brother gazing out from a third-floor room onto a Parisian intersection. The relative emptiness and flat light of the picture free it from distracting details, so that
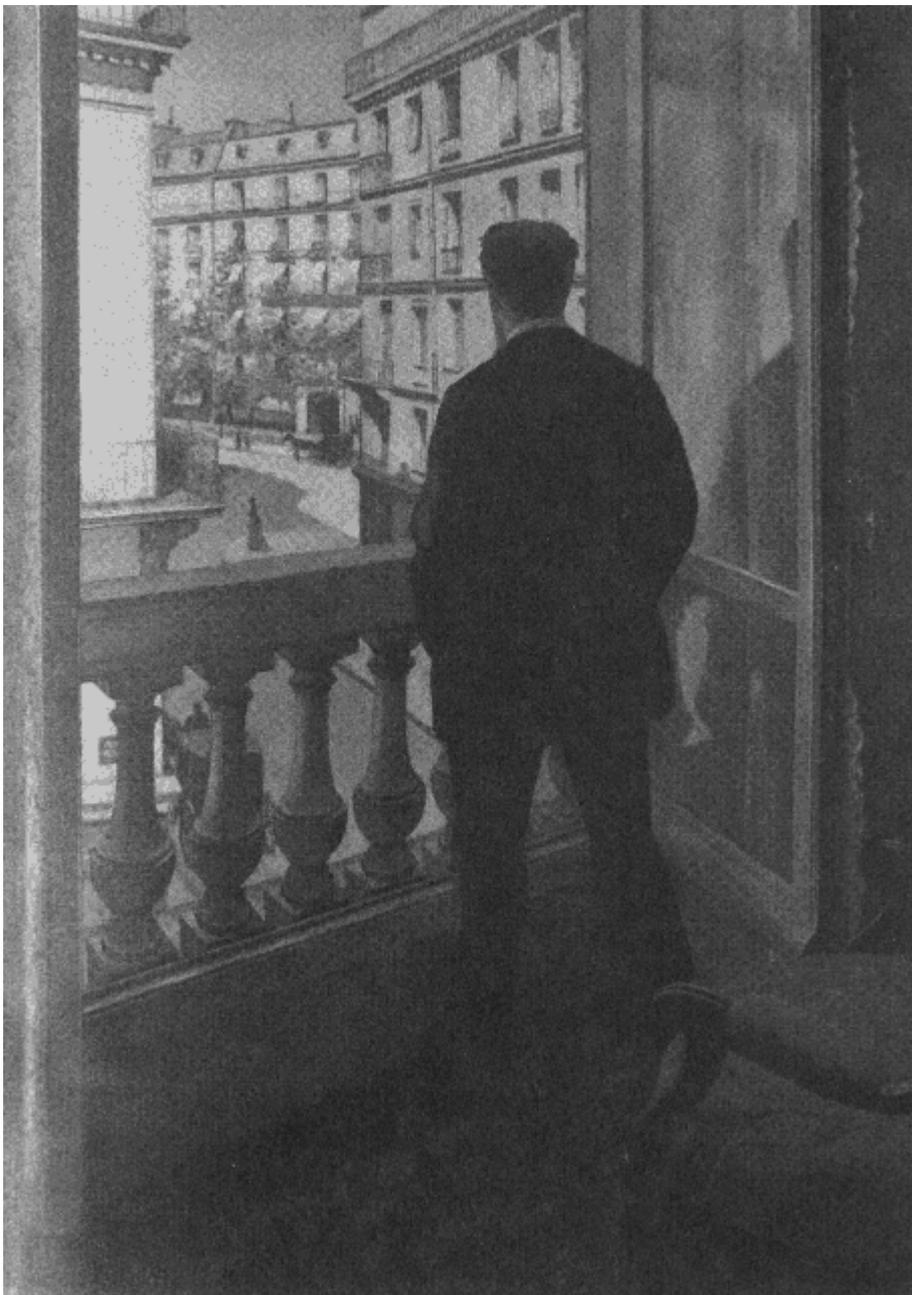
Figure 18.
Gustave Caillebotte, *The Man at the Window* (1876)

the woman on the sidewalk assumes a larger importance than her size might imply. The quietness of the scene emphasizes its inner, psychological import, and the woman's smallness and distance (to quote Herbert again) "make her curiously vulnerable, like some insect captured by the artist's perspective lens," giving her a quality of "fragile aloneness." We cannot rule out the possibility that the man knows the woman (or perhaps that he has seen her before from his window), but the situation pictured is one in which no direct link between them exists to rein in his thoughts about her. That the world of the modern city seems flat, objectified and anonymous, only makes it more freely available as a receptacle for the observer's imagination or fantasy. As a contemporary writer noted, "What a wonderful thing observation is, and what a fortunate man an observer is! For him boredom is a word empty of meaning; nothing dull, nothing dead to his eyes! He animates everything he sees." But because such animation depended on the observer's inner state, it was subject to the uncertain currents of the psychic interior, the vagaries of mood, and it might not cast the world in a happy light; projecting personal affect onto a rose, the observer might discover "a worm lurking in its calyx."[20]

The poet Charles Baudelaire evoked the same power of imagination, set free for modern city dwellers by the experience of noticing some particular feature of a person one did not know. The symbol of such relationships, combining visibility and distance, he found in the closed window through which he had glimpsed an unknown woman.

> Out of her face, her dress and her gestures, out of practically nothing at all, I have made up this woman's story, or rather legend, and sometimes I tell it to myself and weep....
>
> Perhaps you will say "Are you sure that your story is the real one?" But what does it matter what reality is outside myself, so long as it has helped me to live, to feel that I am and what I am?[21]

Baudelaire explicitly affirms what visual images can only imply: that what he called "our more abstract modern life" both demands and allows that individuals cut off from traditional relations feed their per-

sonal growth on the products of their subjective imaginations. They become themselves through interaction with others, but fantasy fuels their interchanges as much or more than any real contact, and what gives depth and richness to the personal worlds of individuals also makes them more

separate from one another. The positive possibilities such a form of life brings are bound up with its dangers; the same modern features that encourage the imagination to soar also heighten the allure of escape into fantasy, and threaten to plunge the psyche into the abyss Baudelaire named "spleen."

Art was just as powerfully altered by these experiences as was life. Impressionism, as the originally pejorative label that gave the group its name reminds us, was among other things an attempt to capture fleeting and subjective experience. When Émile Zola sought to defend Manet and Cézanne from critical and public attacks in the 1860s, he upheld the need for innovation—as opposed to academic orthodoxy—in painting by asserting that all good art saw reality through the screen of an individual temperament. A genuine artist expanded the range of human responses by providing "a new and personal translation of nature." But Zola later came to worry that the licensing of such personal reactions would cut artists off both from their audiences and from reality outside the self. Starting from the otherwise accurate observation that the colors of objects changed with different conditions of light and atmosphere, the painter who stood for the problematic consequences of impressionism in Zola's novel *The Masterpiece* (*L'Oeuvre*) fell into the belief that "things have no fixed color," from which he ended up "overthrowing all the accepted habits of the eye and producing purple flesh-tints and tricolor skies." As a rebel against the obligation to submit his imagination to public judgment, such a person steered perilously close to losing contact with reality, convinced that originality meant substituting his private visions for the external world others perceived. A critic in the 1870s wrote similarly that he feared some of the impressionists might dive so deeply into their personal perceptions that nature would become for them "nothing but a pretext for reveries," rendering their imagination "impotent to formulate anything but personal, subjective fantasies."[22] Some of the possibilities he meant to elicit can be seen even in so attentive and closely observed a picture as Claude
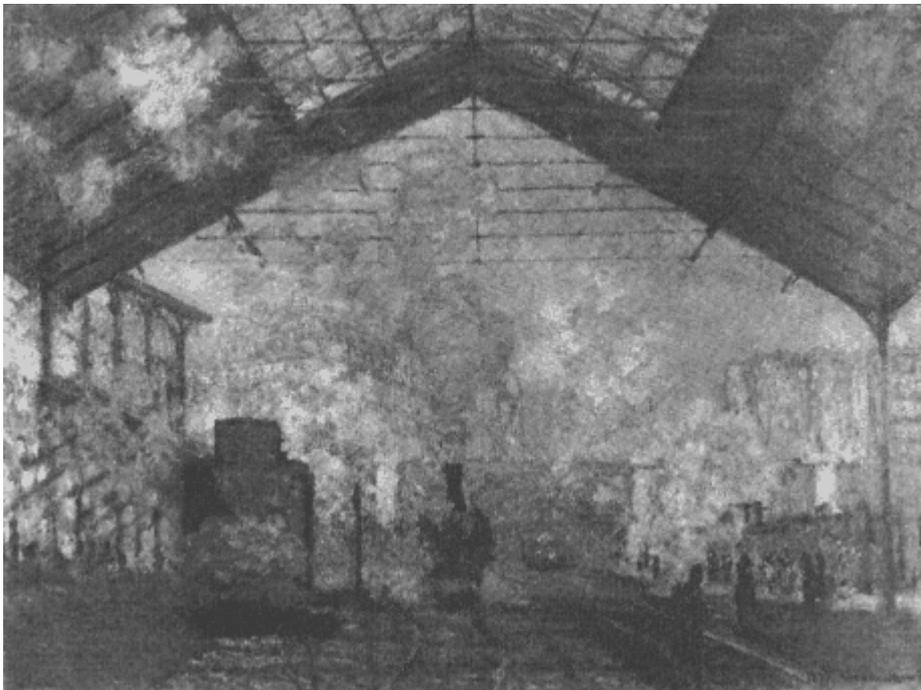
Figure 19.
Claude Monet, *The Gare Saint-Lazare* (1873)

Monet's interior of the *Gare Saint-Lazare* of 1877 (Fig. 19), where a quintessentially modern subject becomes at once a piece of direct reportage and an inner landscape of vaguely suggestive shapes and shifting, murky colors.

Impressionism thus embodied what was already becoming a defining tension of modernism, between rendering the often depersonalized experiences of modern life in a direct, neutral way and taking those experiences as a license to explore symbolic equivalents for inner mental states. We commonly associate realism or naturalism with the first of these poles and romanticism or symbolism with the second, but our vocabulary of styles and movements has no term that captures the attempt of many modernist figures to encompass both simultaneously, to put subjectivity and objectivity into a mutually nourishing relationship and cultivate their reciprocal dependence. This is what the paintings we have just considered were trying to do. Like much contemporary literature, impressionism both took on an obligation to treat

aspects of social life excluded by earlier, more academic practices and made the act of creation an occasion for exploring the inner life of the observer. Such a combination of greater openness to exterior experience and deepened insertion in the psychic depths is what gives so much power to some of the best work of Manet, Monet, or Cézanne, as well as to modernists in other genres or styles, such as Baudelaire or Picasso.

But the recognition that the interior realm could be deepened and expanded by an encounter with objects outside the self led some artists and writers to seek the fullness of subjectivity in what was most foreign to it. These more radical figures pushed the cultivation of inner experience beneath the level where reality and a particular temperament mutually nourished each other, to a point where individuality itself gave way to the impersonality of objective conditions. Here a path was opened that would lead some vanguard figures, Duchamp among them, to stretch aesthetic subjectivity to its limits, while simultaneously seeking ways to deny their own personalities any role in producing it. Some of the main points of entry to this path were mapped out in the theory and practice of literary symbolism.

Beginning with Mallarmé, symbolist aesthetics looked on the external world of objects as a storehouse of figures that could be employed to evoke inner experience, yet it often avoided the identification of this inwardness with the subjectivity of individuals. Mallarmé wrote that to create a symbol was "to evoke an object little by little, in order to show a state of mind or a mood [*état d'âme*], or, conversely, to select an object and to extricate a mood from it, by means of a series of decodings." Emerging from a gradual descent into the interior of objects, the poet gave voice to "the image flying out of reveries inspired by them."**[23]** But it would not do for these dreamlike states of mind to be merely the private reactions of particular, limited individuals. Quite the contrary, the poet who created symbols in this sense had to undergo a discipline that transmuted his individual nature into an instrument of the universal. As he put himself through this regimen during the 1860s, Mallarmé wrote to a friend that he felt himself becoming *impersonnel* , "no longer the Stéphane you have known-but an aptitude which the spiritual universe possesses to see itself and develop itself, by way of that which was once me."**[24]**

Mallarmé's greatness as a poet makes us take seriously in him what would be narcissistic delusion in most others, but his own understanding of his art did not entrust poetic universality to individual talent. Poets possessed an instrument to free them from the limits of personal existence, namely, poetic language; in writing, the poet "cedes the initiative to the words," finding in the world that comes to life under his pen features he could not have discovered by himself, as objects, forms, and patterns take on shapes determined by purely linguistic relationships, the connections and allusions of sound, rhythm, rhyme, and verbal interplay. Such a world, mixing the familiar with the strange, has some of the mysterious allure of dreams, filled with objects we know well but whose relations to us and among themselves forever surprise us. These qualities are witness to the outside power that speaks through the mouth of the poet, transforming the world as no mere individual could.**[25]**

If this program sounds somewhat mysterious to us, it struck many people in

Mallarmé's time the same way. His poetry and that of his followers often seemed incomprehensible to outsiders, and it is typical of the movement that it was organized around a small circle of initiates, a *céacle* . Regarding the truth about life as a mystery hidden behind the surface of everyday events and their language, the symbolists seldom apologized when others complained that their writing was difficult or inaccessible. They believed that one purpose of poetry was to cleanse language of the impurities that attach themselves to words in everyday usage; people accustomed to ordinary speech were bound to be puzzled by the writing that restored the link between words and a higher truth. Mallarmé sometimes resisted the idea that his language was obscure in itself, saying that he became obscure only "if people are misled and think they are opening the pages of a newspaper."[26] But he carefully cultivated the linguistic innovations that made his work impenetrable to many readers, and other participants in the movement saw the question of symbolist obscurity differently. The critic Rémy de Gourmont, for instance, while recognizing that symbolist writing aspired to a level of universal significance where it could speak to humanity in general, found the reason for its difficulty in the radical individuality of its visions. Symbols in Mallarmé's sense—images that

evoked moods or psychic states—took their rise in the interior of individual minds and were bound to be colored by the peculiar conditions that obtained in each personal interior; giving individuals the freedom to express their separate visions produced a kind of delicious chaos. "Personal art—and it is the only art—is always more or less incomprehensible."[27]

One of the best visual equivalents of this aesthetic was the work of a painter and engraver whom Duchamp admired (and who also had a great success at the Armory Show, without experiencing the skepticism and back talk that greeted Duchamp), Odilon Redon. Beginning his career in the 1860s, Redon was still active before World War I, but by then he had turned away from the mysterious, disquieting subjects of his early engravings and lithographs to produce the harmonious and sometimes sentimental flower pictures that made him a popular artist. When he was first becoming known, however, it was images like the haunting *Melancholy* (Fig. 20) that brought him to public attention. During the 1880s he was closely associated with symbolist poets and critics, who saw his work as a visual counterpart to contemporary literary tendencies, as he himself suggested by illustrating texts dear to them from authors like Flaubert and Edgar Allan Poe. To his literary admirers, the strangeness and mystery of Redons work testified to the intensity of his search for "new, precise and gripping means of expression" able to represent those regions where the far depths of individual experience merged with the necessity of its own dissolution.[28]

Redon accepted these interpretations of his work for many years, both by giving literary titles to his drawings and engravings and by agreeing to the

readings poets and critics offered of them. Later he would do a considerable about-face, declaring that the critics who first sponsored him had distorted his work by weighing it down with their own interests and concerns: far from being inspired by philosophical or literary ideas, his images, he now said, had their birth in the anxiety he felt when faced by blank paper and the need to fill it up, and his encounter with his materials contributed much more to the anxious tone of his pictures than any outside influence. It seems impossible to say which of these accounts of what made Redons early images so puzzling and mysterious ought to be preferred—perhaps they are not

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Figure 20.
Odilon Redon, *Melancholy* (1876)

so mutually contradictory as some critics have thought—but the coexistence of hermetic literature and personal anxiety as sources of these qualities was one feature of his work that Duchamp's would share, most evidently in his references to Jules Laforgue.

Just how alive these issues still were in the time of cubism can be seen in the attempt by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger to provide a theoretical rationale for that movement's practice in their pamphlet of 1912, *On Cubism* . With them we reach Duchamp's own milieu, for Gleizes and Metzinger were members of the circle of artists that included all three Duchamp brothers

and that often met to discuss aesthetic questions at Gaston and Raymond's house in Puteaux.**[29]**

Although they insisted on cubism's originality, Gleizes and Metzinger were well aware of its continuities with earlier modernist projects.

Despite its differences with impressionism, cubism too was an art of subjectivity: "As many images of the object as eyes to contemplate it, as many images of essence as minds to understand it." Every artist begins by discerning in nature some form that presents "a certain intensity of analogy with his pre-existing idea," and then "endeavors to enclose the quality of this form (the unmeasurable sum of the affinities perceived between the visible manifestation and the tendency of the mind) in a symbol likely to affect others." The plane of a picture organizes sensual stimuli and thought into a pattern that reflects an individual artistic personality: "This plane reflects the personality back upon the understanding of the spectator, and thus pictorial space is defined: a sensitive passage between two subjective spaces."**[30]**

For Gleizes and Metzinger this passage was not intended to be an easy one; quite the contrary, only a painting that confronted its viewers with some difficulty was able to lead the mind "little by little, toward the imaginative depths where burns the light of organization.... The picture which only surrenders itself slowly seems always to wait until we interrogate it, as though it reserved an infinity of replies to an infinity of questions." But the virtues of difficulty turned sour if it became permanent unintelligibility; only artists devoid of real creative power would be tempted to trumpet their distance from common taste and expectations by engaging in "fanciful occultism" or an "attempt to fabricate puzzles."**[31]**

It seems impossible to decide whether Gleizes and Metzinger had Duchamp in mind in issuing this warning; some of his early pictures were favorably cited in *On Cubism* , and its authors would still be his friends when they met in New York during 1915; but they were also the ones who rejected *Nude Descending a Staircase* a few months after the book appeared. Duchamp's attraction for turning his pictures into puzzles was already evident in *The Bush* and *Baptism* , and Apollinaire, writing at nearly the same time as Gleizes and Metzinger, noted that by giving his pictures "an extremely intellectual title" that seems to oppose their concrete content, Duchamp "goes the limit, and is not afraid of being criticized as esoteric or unintelligible."**[32]** Later on, many of his admirers would try to search out occult meanings in his work.

We need to remember, however, that even Gleizes and Metzinger

did not blame the temptation to make mystery a virtue in itself on individual failings only: it arose directly out of the condition that cubist artists shared with earlier modernists, the necessity of operating from within a private space of subjectivity. To abandon the attempt to effect "a sensitive passage between two subjective spaces" might therefore be a way to reveal some possibilities within modernist aesthetic practice—and by extension within the more "abstract" social relations that give rise to it—which moderates like the authors of *On Cubism* preferred to wish away.

For Duchamp the existence of such a passage had been problematic from the start, and his early pictures already show him beginning to explore the consequences of accepting, even celebrating, its absence. His path was leading him toward a question that Gleizes and Metzinger preferred not to confront: what would art become at the point where modernist subjectivity was pushed to its limits, stretching the bridge between artist and beholder until it broke?

Three—
Motions and Mysteries

Powerful as the Heritage of symbolism was in the first years of the twentieth century, the atmosphere in which Duchamp began his career was equally affected by the currents and events that made people sense the approach of a new era on the eve of the First World War. In the years around 1905, as historians have often noted, the pace of life seemed to quicken. A series of diplomatic crises in North Africa and the Balkans made the long-gathering tensions among the European powers more visible, foreshadowing the conflict to come. The 1905 revolution in Russia dramatized the possibility that powerful governments might be vulnerable to change from below, making conservatives shiver and encouraging the left to raise its voices. In France, the stability that the Third Republic had seemed to gain from its triumph in the Dreyfus Affair was put in question by critics on all sides, including disaffected groups of youth. Novelty and challenge also began to multiply in the aesthetic sphere: 1905 saw the appearance of the painters called wild beasts—*fauves* —for their unheard-of colors and distorted shapes; in 1907 Pablo Picasso began to show to his friends a strange and powerful picture called *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* ; and the next year the manifesto of the Italian futurists appeared in a Paris news-

paper, proclaiming an aesthetic of speed, adventure, industrial power, and violence—events that threw the windows open to a skyful of unpredictable futures. Let this small list suffice; once the war came, all hell would break loose in the world of culture, too.

One of the ways in which historical moments differ most from one another is in the sense of possibility they project, sometimes making it seem that people can do very little to alter the world they inhabit, sometimes encouraging the belief that nothing can stand against them. Consider the succession of moods since the midpoint of the twentieth century: the sense of stability that marked the late 1950s (when theorists and pundits spoke about "the end of ideology"); the totally altered climate of radical expectations that made the late 1960s and early 1970s so dizzying; and the sense of being up against a heavy, immovable world, too ridden with problems to allow for solutions, that arrived with the end of the 1980s, despite—in part because of—the momentary euphoria that marked the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The dozen or so years after 1905 made up one of those moments when the world was changing so rapidly, and seemed so malleable, that we need to forgive those who lived then for sometimes attributing great power and importance to projects or actions that may seem to us now ill-advised, misconceived, or trivial.

Duchamp, who later described himself in the period before the war as driven by "an extraordinary curiosity," was bound to be caught up in the excitement. The burst of painterly activity he produced in the years 1910-12 seems to have owed something to the energy he acquired through participation in ideas and projects shared by others-cubists and futurists-in the artistic circles of Montmartre. But that energy was partly generated by the tension between his already powerful personal preoccupations and the concerns that animated those around him. Duchamp took up their ideas and interests in his own manner, and in retrospect his separateness seems to stand out more starkly the more he seems to be taking part in some shared project. The lines of force he followed at first seemed to direct him toward themes and questions defined by others, but it was not long before his understanding of the day's issues collided with theirs. The result was to confirm and

deepen his independence, which now began to turn into the characteristic detachment and distance that would mark his career for the rest of his life.

Not surprisingly, one of the ideas that seemed richest and most fertile in the decade before World War I was the idea of motion itself. To speak about motion was to speak about the modern world of cities, industry, and science, with its automobiles, airplanes, radio waves and x-rays, theories of relativity and accelerated sense of change, but it was also to speak about the world human beings carried inside them, the vital and fluid world of the mind. Thinking about mental life in this way had many roots, but in these years one of the most influential was the writing and teaching of the philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson believed that the self, in its depths (*le moi profond*) , was a scene of constant energy and movement, where time took the form of a forward flow with great creative power, a rush of energy to which he later gave the name *élan vital* . People could not experience these psychic depths all the time; they also had to live in the outside world of material objects and physical forces, which they learned to analyze and manipulate by dividing up everything, themselves included, into separate and discrete little spaces, like a piece of graph paper. At certain special, creative moments, however, the inner energy of the deep self overflowed into the external world, like music rising out of the bounded lines and spaces of the staff. In such moments the world took on some new form, as in a work of artistic genius or in the exemplary life of a great moral reformer, and Bergson's attention to such transforming events made his philosophy appeal both to traditionalists interested in upholding the independent power of the soul or spirit and to radicals in search of human powers capable of bringing about fundamental change.

Bergson's ideas were widely discussed before the war, in literary and artistic circles and in avant-garde journals, such as the series of short-lived papers —*Les Soirées de Paris and Montjoie!* —animated by the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire. Apollinaire brought together a Mallarméan fascination for the inner, creative workings of the mind with a modernist openness to the new world of technology and science. In his circles the various connotations of motion—urban, technologi-

cal, temporal, and spiritual—were brought together in the term "simultaneism," the name for a literary and artistic program that sought to represent all at once a series of separate but interrelated states of being.**[1]**

The goal of simultaneism was partly to depict modern experience, partly to express the inner powers of the mind, and by means of both to transform art and perhaps life as well. It was especially the Italian futurists who hoped to change the world in this way, but the futurists launched their program in Paris, and many French artists exchanged ideas with them. The futurists were also concerned to depict inner experience, their *stati d'animo* translating Mallarmé's *états d'âme* . André Warnod, who frequented some of the same circles as Duchamp in Montmartre, contributed illustrations to the Futurist Manifesto of Painting published in Paris in 1910, one of which

showed a horse whose motion was suggested by a plethora of legs, and another that bore the title "The Gulf to the Center of the Earth (The Power of Energy to Break Down Stabilized Concepts of Form)."[2] One artist who was intensely drawn to these notions was Duchamp's brother, the sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon. A dozen years older than Marcel, Raymond was already recognized as an artist of great promise by 1910 (Marcel once called him "the genius of the family"), when he did a statue of a horse in motion that was much remarked. Its attempt to depict motion as a constant flow, in a way that explodes the limits of conventional form, seems to have been explicitly Bergsonian in inspiration.

It was in this atmosphere that Duchamp undertook, at the end of 1911, a series of paintings that had motion as their specific subject, beginning with *Sad Young Man on a Train* (Fig. 21) and *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Plate 1). Despite the apparent unrelatedness of the titles, these two pictures (or to be accurate three, since there were two versions of the *Nude*) are variations on the same subject: a body represented simultaneously in a series of close and interlocked positions in order to create a kind of simulacrum of motion. The theme recalls *Dulcinea* , with the separate versions of the figure telescoped much more closely together and its elements treated more abstractly. The sense of movement came from "some twenty different static positions

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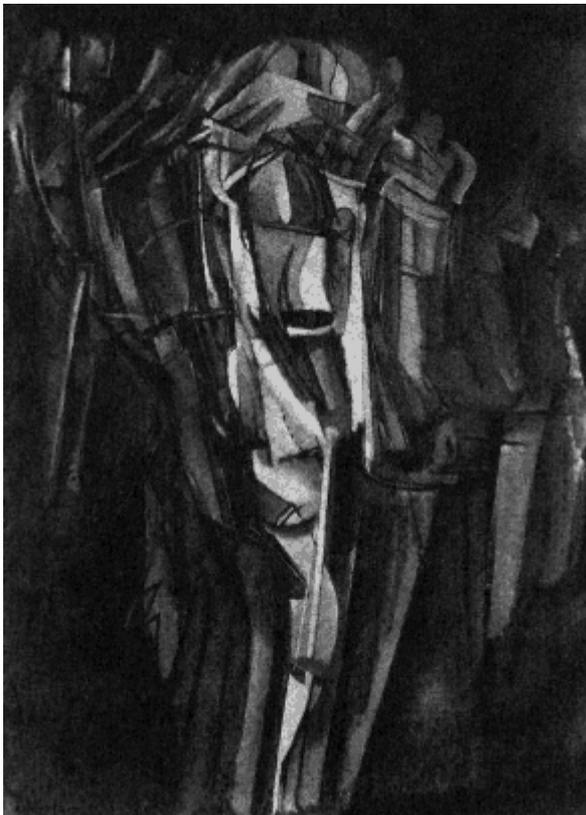
Figure 21.

in the successive action of descending," as Duchamp later put it.**[3]** One external source often suggested for these images (and acknowledged by Duchamp) was the multiple-exposure photographs of bodies in motion done some decades before by Etienne-Jules Marey, who had invented new photographic instruments in order to give "an analytical representation of movement in series in its elementary phases," in some cases creating abstract images by highlighting certain parts of the body and shading out others. By Duchamp's time further advances had been made in these techniques, and his brother Raymond, while a medical student, had worked with a physician who devised a camera able to capture up to a dozen consecutive movements on a single sheet of film.**[4]**

However up-to-date the technology to which Duchamp's images appealed, they were also representations of states of mind, most often his own. He acknowledged this later on, describing his purpose in the years

1910-12 as "turning inward, rather than toward externals."**[5]***Sad Young Man on a Train* was explicitly autobiographical, showing Duchamp himself (he later said his pipe was there as an identifying feature) on a trip he made from Paris to Rouen in the fall of 1911 to attend a family gathering. Even while acknowledging this, Duchamp in 1966 seemed to deny that the "sadness" of the figure was personal, explaining that the picture's intent was to explore the effect on the body of two parallel movements, that of the train and that of the young man moving in a corridor; the "sadness" was merely a bit of word play, introduced into the title for the sake of the alliteration between train and *triste* in French. But in saying this he was conveniently forgetting certain things. The original title for the picture was to have been "Pauvre Jeune Homme M.," taken like some earlier ones from Jules Laforgue, but with an obvious reference to himself ("Poor Young M."). Further, as others have noted, the family reunion Duchamp was on his way to attend was his first following the marriage of Suzanne to a pharmacist, an event that may have caused Marcel pain, and which turned out badly, the couple divorcing in 1914. If nostalgia for his childhood harmony with Suzanne was one source of the images of separation that recur in his early pictures, then the moment of her marriage may have made him indeed sad.

Sadness may not be the only psychic state at issue here. *Triste* can mean morally suspect as well, and the picture offers good reason to be read in that sense. It has been pointed out before that sexuality makes a rude appearance in it; the cylindrical shape with a conical tip that juts down about a third of the way up the lightly colored figure in the center of the picture space seems difficult not to read as a penis, and it appears to possess a series of more abstract but straighter phallic echoes along a line to the

viewer's right. If so, then one motion the *jeune homme triste* may be engaged in is masturbation; *triste* may thus bear a more critical meaning, or refer to a sadness that is post-orgasmic.**[6]** In that case, the melancholy of this picture would be of a kind that recalls the disillusionment of *Paradise* , making *Sad Young Man on a Train* echo the themes of sexual innocence remembered and lost that are so prominent in that picture and in *Young Man and Girl in Spring* , and it would add a perhaps not surprising gloss to *Dulcinea* , masturbation fantasies being

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among the most powerful states of mind in which males imagine the unclothing of females. Hints of masturbation would recur in Duchamp's notes for *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* , and in some later images as well.

Given the recurring upsurge of male fantasy as a theme in Duchamp's work, one is almost tempted to ask whether *Nude Descending a Staircase* might be the masturbation fantasy that the *Sad Young Man on a Train* is having. The two pictures were surely a pair, and such a reading could be fitted with the suggestion sometimes offered that the *Nude* recalled some powerful memory, perhaps an incestuous fantasy about his recently married sister Suzanne.**[7]** To be sure, a like proposal can never be more than speculation; other imagined relations between the two works might be equally plausible, for instance that the *Nude* is an allegory of self-revelation in places where it was not supposed to occur, thus mirroring the sexual exposure of the earlier picture. But these speculations are worth voicing because they remind us that Duchamp's practice asks for just this kind of response: both his images themselves and the play between them and his titles at once arouse and frustrate a desire for some explicit, literal interpretation. As in *Baptism* and *The Bush* , more seems implied by the actions represented than we are able to comprehend, making us suspect that something significant is happening while never quite letting us in on what it is. This manner of inviting his viewers into a space where they cannot see dearly is one of the things to which visitors at the Armory Show responded, and it makes Duchamp's use of cubist techniques contrast with what was being done at the same time by Picasso and Braque.

Both *Sad Young Man on a Train* and *Nude Descending a Staircase* testify to the way Duchamp's involvement in contemporary cultural themes exhibits at the same time his personal separateness and detachment. The first canvas depicts a person whose isolation is intensified by being suspended between one place and another, so that the uncertain position of his body matches the divided state of his consciousness; perhaps the movement of the train was a kind of allegory of the accelerated pace of cultural change so strongly reflected in Duchamp's rapid shift from style to style, making the picture an account of what it felt like to try to find one's place while inhabiting a world already in motion

along its own track. *Nude Descending a Staircase* exhibits the result of these different motions, for its techniques placed Duchamp in an ambivalent relationship to both cubism and futurism. The flatness of the colors and the interpenetration of transparent planes tie the picture to cubism, but its attempt to represent movement links it with futurist notions and experiments that the cubists were just then rejecting, on the grounds that putting actual motion in a picture made it represent merely a succession of separate physical states in ordinary time, whereas simultaneity comprised, more profoundly, the coexistence of a number of separate ideas or mental experiences in a single instant.

A few months earlier Duchamp had exhibited just this ambivalent relationship to cubism when he responded to his brother Raymond's request for a picture to decorate his kitchen by providing a cardboard painting of a coffee mill (Fig. 22). Raymond also asked several of his cubist friends to help in decorating the kitchen, so that Duchamp's contribution was bound to be seen against the background of cubist orthodoxy. In such a setting it can only appear as a parody of cubist practice, as John Golding has remarked; it honors cubism in showing the coffee mill from different points of view, but it does so in a flat-footed and utilitarian way, and by depicting the handle in a series of different positions—though all from the same perspective—it already confuses cubist simukaneity with futurist succession.**[8]** Yet Duchamp was outside futurism too: neither his personality nor the subjects of his pictures provided any entry for the futurist program of cultural transformation through confrontation, adventure, and violence.

When the cubist organizers of the 1912 Salon des Indépendants asked him to withdraw the *Nude* from the exhibition, he did so without making any protest, but he later admitted that the experience "gave me a turn," and it contributed to his decision to flee Paris for Munich for two months during the following summer. His chief contact there seems to have been a minor artist —Duchamp referred to him as a "cow painter"—he had met in Paris in 1910, Max Bergmann, whose friends were mostly cartoonists. Although Duchamp bought a copy of Vassily Kandinsky's just-published manifesto of abstraction, *On the Spiritual in Art* , during the summer, he seems to have had no contact with the now-famous Munich figures gathered around the *Blaue*
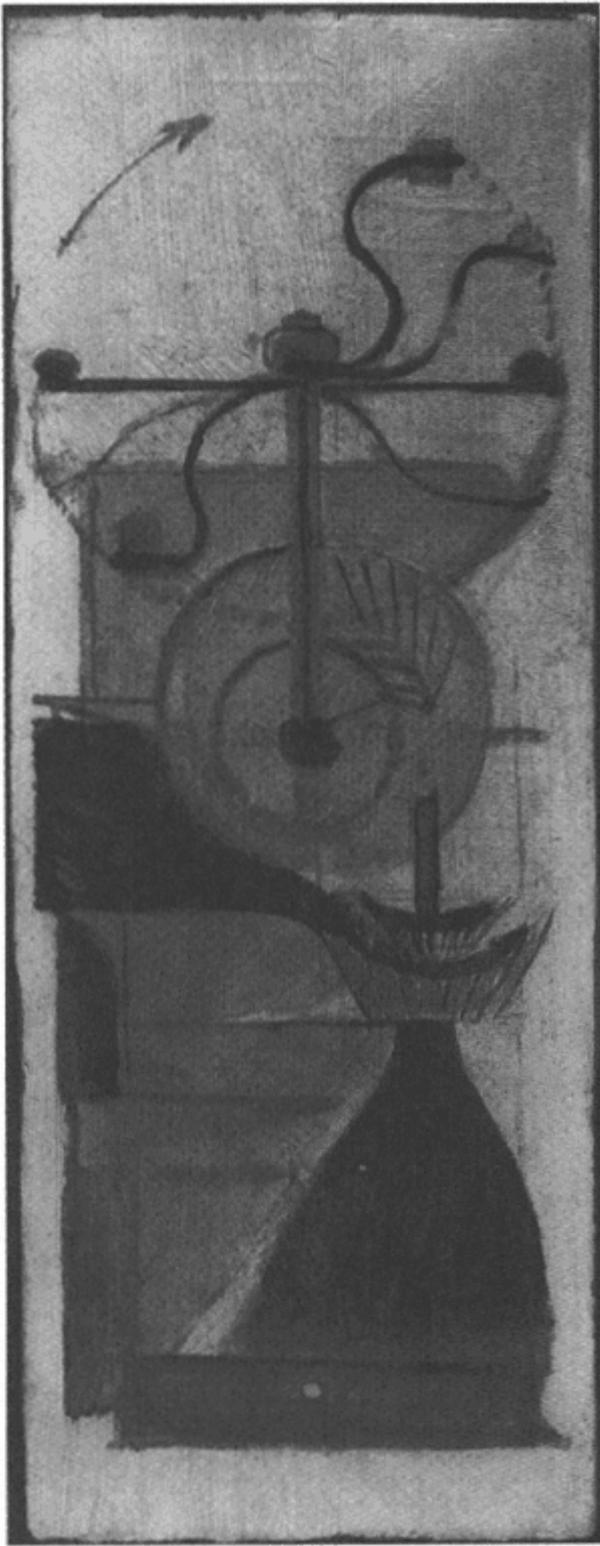
Figure 22.
Duchamp, *Coffee Mill* (1911)

Reiter ; in a later interview he claimed that while there "I never spoke to a soul." He would return to Paris with a project—the Large Glass—that gave a new meaning and quality to the need for separation and independence to

which this conduct testified.**[9]**

The pictures Duchamp did during the summer and fall of 1912, in Paris and then in Munich, were the last completed while he was still trying to establish himself in the world of vanguard painting. In Paris he did two drawings, followed by a watercolor and an oil painting, in which the themes of nudity and motion continued to be prominent, joined now to another earlier interest, chess. All the titles contrast something solid or fixed with something in motion: *Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift* (Fig. 23), followed by *The King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes* [*nus vites*] (Fig. 24), *The King and Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed* [*nus en vitesse*], and *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (Fig. 25). The first, the drawing of *Two Nudes* , is the only work in this series that contains discernible bodily forms; the nudes in the others have all been resolved into interlocking structures of flat and curved solids and plane surfaces, while the king and queen offer only analytically decomposed references to their already stylized models.

The "swift" or "high speed" nudes are the best illustrations we have of what Duchamp later meant when he said that "the basis for my own work during the years just before coming to America in 1915 was a desire to break up forms—to 'decompose' them much along the lines the cubists had done. But I wanted to go further—much further—in fact in quite another direction altogether."**[10]** This was not a claim for complete originality, and in a general way what Duchamp was doing here still shared the futurist goal André Warnod had identified two years earlier in the title quoted above: "The Gulf to the Center of the Earth (The Power of Energy to Break Down Stabilized Concepts of Form)." But Duchamp's works no longer seek to render motion in the futurist manner by juxtaposing figures in succession; instead they present what one critic describes as "more abstract structures that keep the eye in constant motion."**[11]**

Duchamp's description of his work as going "further" than cubism makes it clear that these are highly self-conscious attempts to enter into

Figure 23.
Duchamp, *Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift* (1912)

the artistic situation of the moment; in fact, on one level they seem to be allegories of that situation, where stable forms confront the forces determined to dissolve them. Both the nude and chess evoke art's traditional devotion to order and composition, the nude because it had served for centuries as the subject through which art pursued its search for formal perfection beneath the lineaments of the real, and chess because it is a world enclosed by formal rules that both incite and limit the imagination of new forms of symbolic interaction. The title *Two Nudes: One Strong and One Swift* suggests the contrast between an art devoted to stable form and one devoted to movement; in the pieces that follow, the nudes represent motion while king and queen become the emblems of stability—appropriately enough, since chess, unlike the art world Duchamp inhabited, was a game whose rules never changed. By making nudes the bearers of fluidity and change against stable form, Duchamp may already have been designating sexuality as the source of the energy that undermined fixity, pointing forward to his later assumption of a second identity as Rrose Sélavy (*Eros, c'est la vie*). On some level he may also have associated their energy with the
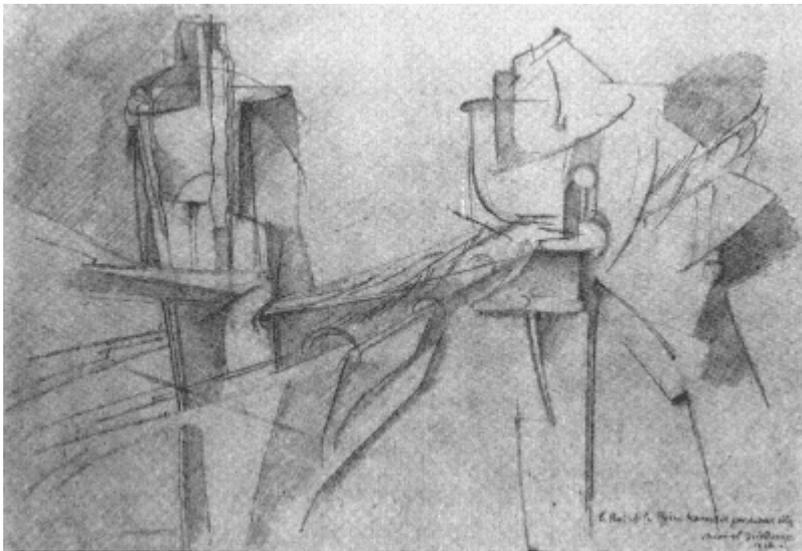
Figure 24
Duchamp, *The King and Queen Traversed by Swift Nudes* (1912)

Figure 25
Duchamp, *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (1912)

modern power of machines, as seems to be suggested by the visual and thematic similarities with two drawings from about the same time inspired by airplanes and automobiles. Both nudity and internal combustion might serve as metaphors for the usually hidden energy of the Bergsonian deep self, here released against the rigid and confining spatial forms of convention

and everyday life. Whatever the precise modes of energy Duchamp associated with "swift nudes," these pictures are at once attempts to depict forms breaking up and allegories of contemporary art as the agent of formal dissolution, able to "traverse" (the word may also mean "run through," as with a sword) and "surround" the symbols of traditional aesthetic stability. Duchamp's own rapid passage from style to style made him in a way the most "swift nude" of all; certainly he identified with the impulses to do away with stable forms of existence let loose in these pictures, all the more so in the aftermath of his rejection by the cubists.

What makes these images at once mysterious and powerful is that they simultaneously evoke external, physical action and inner, psychic states. Virginia Spate describes them as "non-figurative works which play on figural associations to express ambiguous subjective experience." She rightly points out that, despite their distance from the forms of ordinary perception, these images are not genuinely abstract: echoes of recognizable objects remain, and—in contrast to contemporary pieces by Picabia, Kupka, or Kandinsky—so does a familiar sense of space and weight: the picture plane never declares its independence from the coordinates of direction and gravity that organize our usual, three-dimensional existence. Looking at Duchamp's king and queen pictures we have the sense that we see "something," but we cannot be certain what it is; the effect is like looking on some inner landscape.[12]

Duchamp's penchant for using mysterious kinds of motion to call up inner states is still more evident in the first work he did in Munich. A drawing, it bore a title that, slightly altered, would remain with him all his life: *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* (Fig. 26). Here feelings—anger and aggression—are directly, even naively portrayed: "bachelors" on each side attack the "bride" in the center with arrow-and rod-like protuberances that reach toward her in some places, actually touching her in others; their form may have been inspired by some
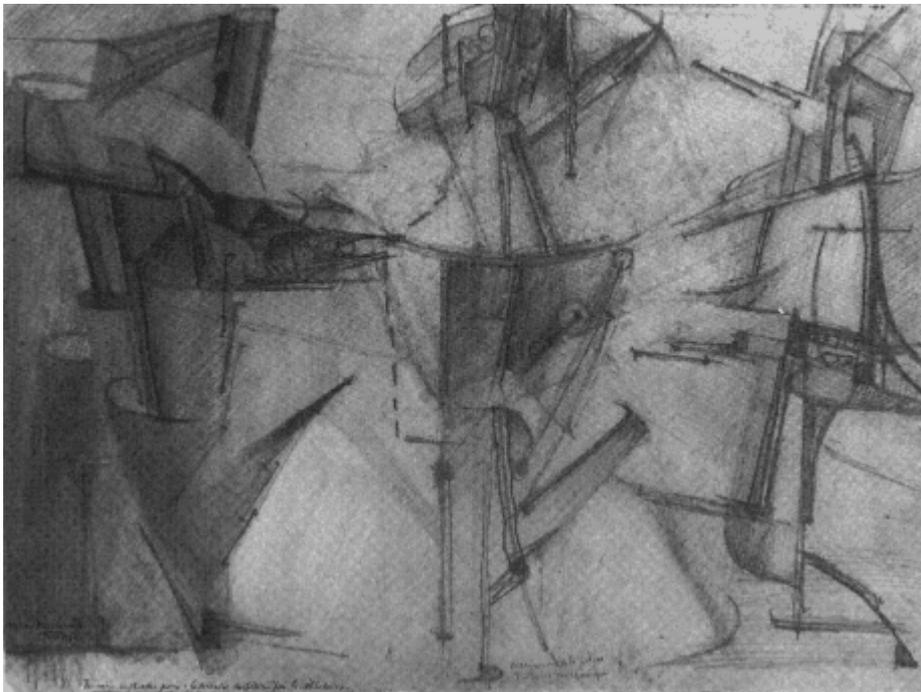
Figure 26.
Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* (1912)

of Marey's multiple-exposure photographs of fencers.**[13]** But who is the bride and who the bachelors in this picture? We do not know how Duchamp chose his title, but once before he had orchestrated the stripping of a female, in *Dulcinea* . There it was on one level art, on another male fantasy, that brought the female form out of its clothing; are the bachelors in the Munich *Bride Stripped Bare* also artists? Are they images of those who controlled the Salon des Indépendants, whose hostility had recently been directed against him? Or might they be projections of the suppressed anger Duchamp himself felt toward the world that dressed itself up in the purity of art?

Whether or not these are exactly the right questions, and whatever may be the best answers to them, it seems that Duchamp's two months in Munich found him in a heightened emotional state. While there he had a rather remarkable dream, which he still remembered years afterward. Returning one night from a beer hall where, as he later reported, he had drunk too much, Duchamp dreamt that the bride who was then

emerging as a major subject of his painting had become "an enormous beetle-like insect which tortured him atrociously with its elytra" (the hardened forewings that serve the bug as protection). Robert Lebel, who reported that Duchamp still recalled the dream in 1959, associated it with one of his later puns: "An *incesticide* must sleep with his mother before he kills her; bed bugs are indispensable."**[14]** Had Duchamp himself made the

association, then the temptation to link the various brides of his pictures with his family—perhaps with the mother whose indifference pained him as a child—might be irresistible; as things stand I think we can only say that the mood in which he went to Munich was one that brought him face to face with some deep and usually buried feelings, and that it was in this context that the theme of relations between a bride and bachelors took form in his mind. By retaining the title of that picture at the center of his preoccupations for many years afterward, he kept the memory of that emotional moment alive.

From his later perspective the trip to Munich would appear as the occasion of "my complete liberation." Although that claim surely exaggerated the break he made, it is clear that in Munich Duchamp ceased to do work whose themes linked him to the cubists and through them to the larger cultural atmosphere of the day. He abandoned his two major subjects of the previous months: linear motion, as he had sought to represent it in *Nude Descending a Staircase* and *Sad Young Man on a Train* , and the dissolution of formal structures, as evoked in the various mixtures of nudes with kings and queens. These were all concerns of the sort he would later associate with "retinal" painting, the art that sought to communicate through the eye, not the mind.**[15]** By the time he left he had conceived the basic lines of the radically different project that would occupy him for many years afterwards, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* .

The work he did in Munich gave only glimmerings of that picture's intricate intellectual content, but it already revealed the ways in which its visual vocabulary would be novel: no longer derived from an attempt to represent his own version of an aesthetic project shared with others, his new work would employ a set of symbols whose meaning he determined wholly by himself; they would function, in other words,

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as a private language. Duchamp later acknowledged this turn, declaring in a 1946 interview that after the imbroglio about *Nude Descending a Staircase* , "I came to feel an artist might use anything—a dot, a line, the most conventional or unconventional symbol—to say what he wanted to say."**[16]** If a dot or a line can be employed to bear a determinate meaning, not by virtue of a relationship to an established set of symbolic conventions, but simply as a marker chosen to convey something an individual intends at a given moment, then the signs significance depends wholly on a private choice.

No such willful and arbitrary relationship between sign and meaning obtains in the Munich drawing *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* ; all the figures in it have anthropomorphic features, the bride's body apparently protected by a sort of skirt, and the bachelor rods implying either arms or weapons or phallic arousal (or all those things at once). As long as Duchamp

was using pictures to express recognizable states of feeling, he could not employ signs that were wholly under his own conscious control. By purging his images of direct affect, while at the same time distancing himself from the subjects he had taken on while still trying to work in the orbit of cubism, Duchamp found a position of detachment that allowed him to evolve a much cooler and more intellectualistic—yet at the same time more deeply personal—way of being an artist.

These new features are all clear in the seemingly affectless, more mechanical, yet more mysterious pictures he now produced. No one seeing the two drawings titled *Virgin* or the paintings *Bride* and *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (Figs. 27-29 and Plate 3) for the first time could guess that they represent virginity or bridehood, and one might think that the titles were not seriously meant, if Duchamp had not set down highly elaborate meditations on the bride in preparation for using elements of the same image in the top panel of the Large Glass. However little an assemblage of rods, tubes, disks, containers, and other items difficult to name—Duchamp later called it a "juxtaposition of mechanical elements and visceral forms"—may suggest a bride to us, it would henceforth mean precisely that and nothing else to him. The strangeness of the image helped preserve Duchamp's emotional
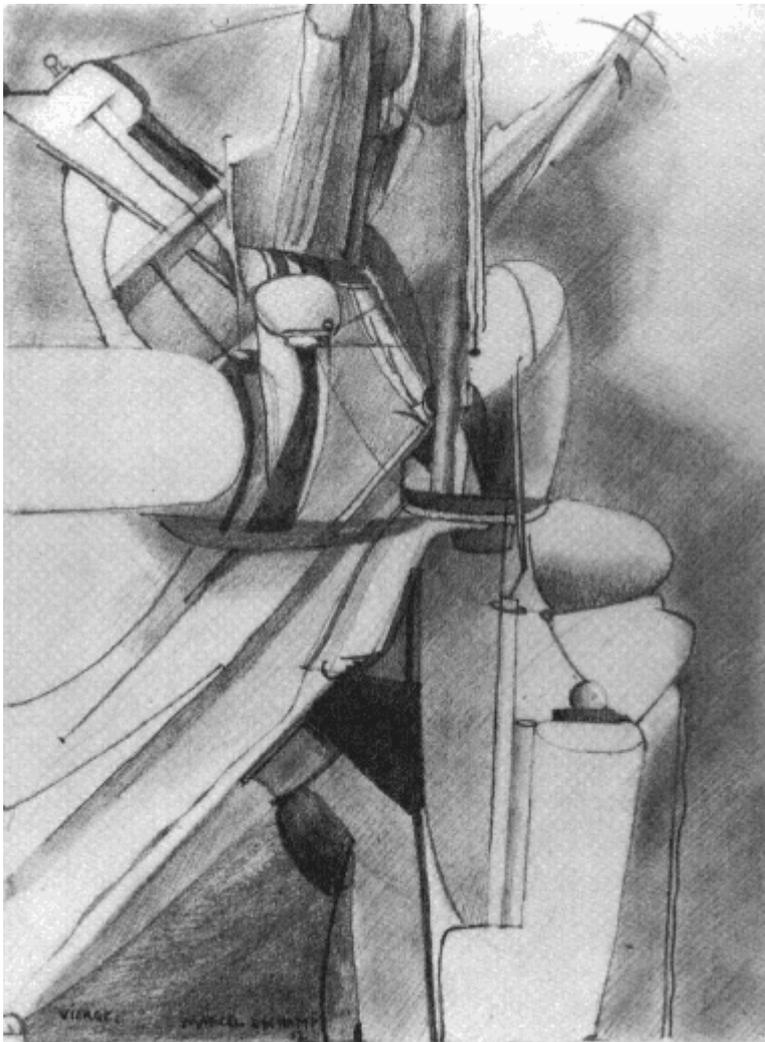
Figure 27.
Duchamp, *Virgin* , I (1912)

distance from the subject it portrayed, but it seems likely that it was the curiously insect-like form the bride now assumed that inspired the dream in which it came to torture him.

Like the pictures of the previous months, these were not genuine abstractions, for the picture space retains the gravitational coordinates—the upness and downness—of our ordinary experience in space; the figures Duchamp put there share enough qualities with objects we might recognize that they seem to inhabit our own world, however
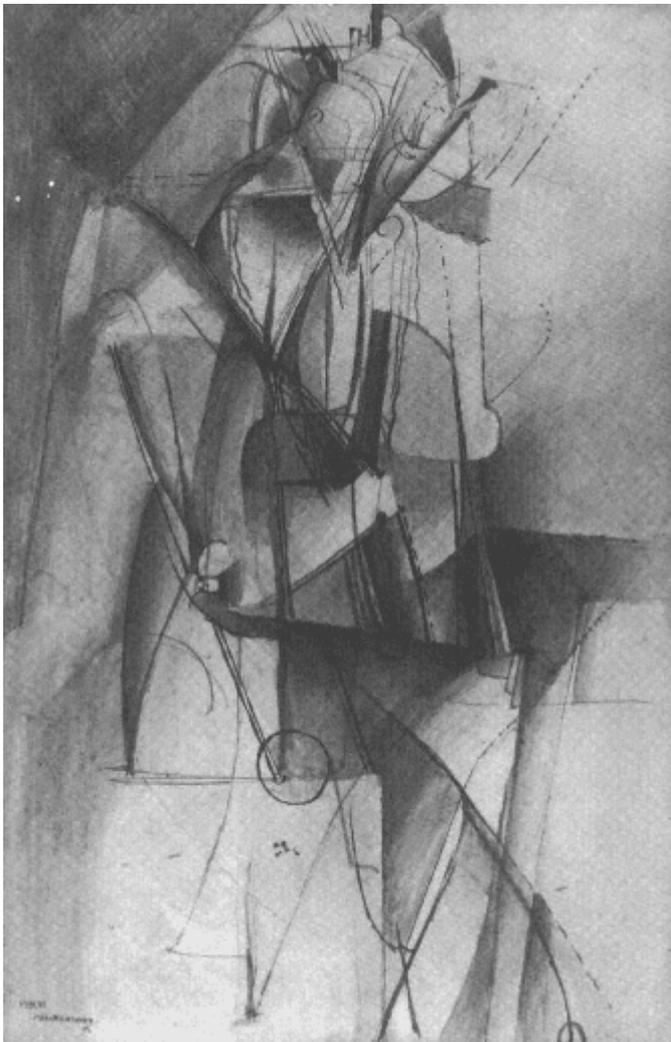
Figure 28.
Duchamp, *Virgin* , II (1912)

much their unfamiliarity makes them appear as arrivals from some other universe. The resulting sense of enigma is especially prominent in *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* : planes shift their positions as they establish relations with the different elements that border them, and what seem to be openings into a space behind the picture plane from one perspective turn out to be flat surfaces or coverings from another.**[17]** Duchamp has found yet another way to clothe his pictures in mystery.

Taking a "juxtaposition of mechanical and visceral forms" to signify
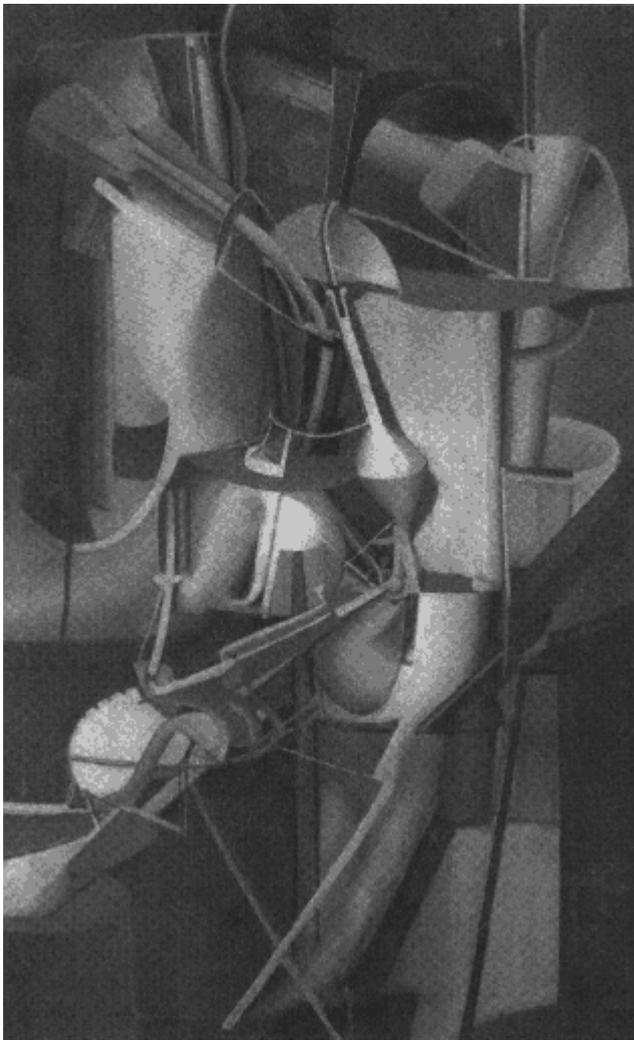
Figure 29.
Duchamp, *The Bride* (1912)

a bride dissolves traditional romantic notions in an ironic mix of mechanism and gutsiness, and in some ways Duchamp here seems closer to the cartoons from his days as an art student than to most of the painting he had done since. But it seems clear that almost from the start he was also looking to his puzzling new images to express complex and precise ideas. What did it mean to speak about *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* ? Unlike most such questions about Duchamp's earlier work, this one can be answered pretty definitely, from the notes for the

Large Glass. These make clear that the passage in question is not the one we might first suppose: the reference is not to sexual initiation. A loss of virginity is expected to take place in a passage to womanhood or wifehood; the passage *to* bridehood is only the precondition for this second transformation. Strictly speaking, bridehood lasts only as long as the wedding day; consummation marks its end. A bride is, as Duchamp put it,

an "apotheosis of virginity," the last and highest phase of the form of being she is about to give up.

The series of Munich pictures appears to record Duchamp's own process of clarifying these ideas. The first of the two "Virgins" (Fig. 27) still recalls the representations of juxtaposed motion and stability present in the images of chess pieces and "swift nudes" (note the flowing form on the left side), but any indication of physical movement seems to have disappeared from the second (Fig. 28); this suggests that Duchamp was still experimenting with the relationship between sexuality and motion in the first *Virgin* before concluding, in the second, that virginity was a stable, immobile condition. Movement of a sort takes place, however, at the moment a virgin becomes a bride, no longer the physical motion he had been experimenting with before, but a change of state, at once inwardly felt and symbolically proclaimed. The last two pictures represent just such an evolution: the elements of the *Bride* (Fig. 29) can be seen emerging in the image of the *Passage* , but the second state finds them clarified and highlighted. Bridehood's ability to condense out and purify elements already present in the state of virginity seems to be called up by the forms in the picture that have led some viewers to compare it with an apparatus for distillation.**[18]**

The Passage from Virgin to Bride has inspired some quite exalted critical claims. The surrealist painter Matta Echaurren declared that in this picture Duchamp "attacked a whole new problem in art, and solved it—to paint the moment of change, change itself."**[19]** Robert Lebel calls it "Duchamp's masterpiece as a painter," proclaiming that it "surpasses even on the aesthetic level, the lordly Braques and Picassos" that are its neighbors in New York's Museum of Modern Art; like William Rubin, I think this latter claim is exaggerated, maybe even meaningless.**[20]** All the same, the picture is remarkable within Duchamp's work, especially for the clear and direct correspondence between its visual features and

the conceptual relationship evoked in the title. By depicting *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* as an assemblage of forms that appear to us now as representations of surface and now as depth, now as flat coverings and now as openings into space, Duchamp emphasizes the human ability to choose a particular point of view and thereby give a certain interpretive shape to things we encounter in the world. This is just what we do when we regard the same person as a virgin one day and a bride the next; physically she has experienced no change, but she and those around her conceive and view her differently. By choosing the relationship between virginity and bridehood as his subject, rather than sexual experience as such, Duchamp was shifting his focus from something that occurs in the physical world—linear motion, or sensual experience—to the way we impose form and meaning on experience and the things around us.**[21]**

That Duchamp sought to construct images able to embody such abstract but conceptually precise relationships helps define the nature—and the uniqueness—of the project he was about to undertake. Employing a set of private symbols to tell a story about intellectual relationships would make the Large Glass unlike any other contemporary work. None would resemble it visually, neither cubist and futurist constructions that broke down objects and scenes into parts or aspects in order to reassemble them in new ways, nor abstract works in the strict sense, composed out of pure elements of color and shape. No other modernist work would need to be accompanied by written notes explaining (not always as dearly as viewers and readers might wish) the meaning and relationship of its various parts, like the three "boxes" Duchamp would publish in the years to come. Only Duchamp acted on the belief he reported later, that an artist "might use anything ... to say what he wanted to say," seeking to express ideas formed in his mind by way of a private code of invented symbols.

The turning Duchamp's path took in Munich distanced him from the public world of cubism and avant-garde activity where he had tried to operate before, but it developed naturally out of the personal relationship to art-making-visible in his earlier career. Just as the bride was the apotheosis of virginity, so was the private symbolic world into which

Duchamp now entered the last and most developed stage of the separation and detachment that had long been both a theme in his work and a condition fostered through it. His journey to Munich was a more intense instance of those trips into his studio and himself that Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia described him as taking, and it raised the long-standing tensions between expression and incomprehensibility in his work, and in modern art as a whole, to a higher pitch.

Duchamp was encouraged to move in this direction in Munich by an encounter that occurred two months before he left Paris, his introduction to the work and the strange, mysterious figure of Raymond Roussel. Together with Francis and Gaby Picabia and Apollinaire, he attended a performance of Roussel's play *Impressions of Africa* in May of 1912. Roussel was relatively unknown at the time, and has remained obscure outside his native France, but the production of his play (actually a novel adapted for the theater) that spring marked the beginning of the curious romance between Roussel and the avant-garde. Roussel deserves more than passing attention here, first because he casts an unexpected and often misunderstood light on the world Duchamp inhabited before the war, and second because the complex and unusual relationship that linked Roussel's work to his life helps us to see a similar pattern in Duchamp's career.

Duchamp seems to have been immediately and powerfully drawn to what he later called Roussel's "delirium of imagination," and in 1946 went so far as to declare that "it was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* . From his *Impressions d'Afrique* I got the general approach.... Roussel showed me the way." The two never met, but Duchamp observed Roussel with considerable interest on the one occasion when they were together as players at a chess tournament, in the 1930s; he came to know something of the details of the older man's life and—rather untypically—read a book about him. On the surface the two were markedly different, Roussel retaining the straight-laced and buttoned-up mien of his upper-bourgeois origins to the end, in contrast to the increasingly relaxed (perhaps Americanized) exterior sported by

Duchamp; but at a deeper level the two shared many features, as if their separate, intricate personalities were strings of different colors and lengths, but tuned so that they vibrated in sympathy.**[22]**

Two extreme views arose among those who attended Roussel's plays: to some he was an eccentric, maybe even crazy literary pretender who could subject the public to his senseless follies because he was rich enough to pay to put them on; others saw him as an original and independent genius whose unbridled imagination opened up totally new spaces of creativity, in André Breton's words "the greatest hypnotizer of modern times." Everyone knew or suspected that some hidden set of meanings lay behind the unprecedented objects and happenings staged in *Impressions of Africa* , among them an earthworm who played a guitar and a statue, bearing a strange Greek inscription, that rolled along on rails made out of calves' lungs. Some people guessed at the secrets lurking behind these strange apparitions, but Roussel's explanation of the riddle only appeared after his death, in a book written a few years before, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres (How I Wrote Some of My Books)* .

Here the author explained that his literary work was structured by a highly elaborate set of word plays and verbal games that he called his "procedure" or "process" (*procédé*). The technique took several forms, but the simplest began with two words or brief phrases, close in sound and spelling but distant in meaning, such as *billard* , a billiard table, and *pillard* , a pirate or plunderer. Roussel constructed two sentences, identical save that the substitution of the second word for the first changed the meaning of the whole and of all the parts. "Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard" meant "the white letters [written with chalk] on the sides of the old billiard table," but when "pillard" took its place in the sentence then it could be read as "the white man's letters [written to give news to his correspondents] about the old plunderer's gangs." Roussel's early story "Parmi les noirs" ("Among the Black People") began with the first of these sentences and ended with the second; between came a tale whose only

purpose was to weave together threads that made it possible to pass from a situation described by the first sentence to one where the second could be spoken.

More elaborate forms of the process lay behind Roussel's other

works. The verbal transformations could begin from a line of poetry, such as the one from Victor Hugo that underlay a section of *Impressions of Africa* . Hugo wrote: "O revers! ô leçon!—Quand l'enfant de cet homme / Eut reçu pour hochet la couronne de Rome," meaning that it had been a misfortune worth remembering when the Roman crown had been passed on as a bauble or toy. Roussel altered the second line to the aurally similar "Ursule brochet lac Houronne drome," from which derived the sequence in his book which brought together—strange assemblage—a woman called Ursula, a pike, a lake, Huron Indians, and a racecourse (hippodrome). Still more complex and unexpected were the products that Roussel extracted from the French practice of using one noun to modify another by joining them together with the preposition *à* ; when both words were played on, quite bizarre combinations resulted. *Duel à accolade* , a combat fought for praise, became a Greek verb tense indicated by a typographical sign; *mou à raille* , a cowardly student bound to be subjected to taunting by others, became a lung in the shape of a rail; and *baleine à ilôt* , a small island, became a Spartan slave (helot) made out of corset stays (*baleines* are also whalebone ribs). These three grammatical inventions generated the statue of a slave, constructed out of corset stays, bearing a mysterious Greek inscription and moved along on calf-lung rails, that surprised, outraged, or charmed spectators at the staging of *Impressions of Africa* .**[23]**

Roussel turned language into a kind of machine able to crank out unheard-of objects and images; machines of other sorts appeared in his work too: for instance, the last scene of *Impressions of Africa* presents one able to paint pictures, and the later work *Locus Solus* tells of an even more remarkable device, a kind of construction crane that produces mosaic illustrations for stories, using as its sole material human teeth and employing for motive power changes in wind and temperature, which its inventor could predict with total and unerring precision.**[24]**

Roussel thus shared two enthusiasms with the avant-garde of his day, one for the powers of language and one for the capacities of technology. Dada and surrealist figures like Picabia and Breton championed him as a pioneer and kindred spirit, an explorer of purely imaginary worlds as distant from traditional art and literature as from everyday life, and

more recently Michel Foucault has echoed their enthusiasm, finding in Roussel's deformations of language and experience an ancestor of his own search for the ways linguistic practices structure and enclose the fields of our knowledge and perception. Recent critics, too, offer Roussel as an early avatar of the subversion of meaning and the dissolution of authorship in art that they also find in Duchamp, an agent in the discrediting of such presumably outmoded aesthetic categories as context, creativity, and synthetic imagination—in short, a witness to the demise of the human subject.[25]

In fact, however, Roussel's similarities to his vanguard admirers were mostly on the surface; what lay beneath was a much more traditional person and writer, albeit one whose eccentricities made the rest hard to see. Born into a wealthy and well-connected upper-bourgeois family—the sort of people who move through Proust's novels—Roussel retained all his life the ordinary, even banal cultural tastes and limited horizons that dominated his milieu. His favorite writer, to whom he dedicated a kind of cult, was Jules Verne, and his other literary and artistic interests were of a piece, directed toward adventure stories, cape-and-sword novels, popularized science and science fiction, children's literature, and old operettas. One of the first writers to appreciate his work—and the one who encouraged him to turn *Impressions of Africa* into a theater piece—was Edmond Rostand, the creator of *Cyrano de Bergerac* . The writers to whom his vanguard friends thought he bore a resemblance—Jarry, Rimbaud—were ones he probably never read, nor does he seem ever to have grasped what dada or surrealism were about. All his life Roussel aspired to popular fame, and to the official recognition conferred by membership in the French Academy and the *légion d'honneur* .[26]

The potential in French bourgeois life to reach beyond money and material comfort, represented in Duchamp's family by the artistic activity of his maternal grandfather, was present in Roussel's case in the form of aristocratic fantasies and personal eccentricity. His sister married into a family of descendants of the Bonapartes, acquiring the title Princess of Muscovy; some of his other relatives also bore titles inherited from the Napoleonic nobility, studding his life with personal but imaginary references to distant places and a past of adventure and glory.

His father, a fabulously rich *agent de change* , was an alcoholic who died suddenly after gulping down too much champagne, and his mother was known as an original and an eccentric, famous for her extravagant purchases and for her voyage to India, where she declared herself satisfied as soon as she set eyes on the country's shore, turning back without ever taking the trouble to debark.

Roussel declared that his childhood in this setting had been deliciously happy, but he grew up full of fears and obsessions, refusing to hear of his friends' visits to the dentist and possessed by a phobia of dirt so intense that he could hardly bear clothes that had been worn and washed; he wore his high collars only once, his shirts but a few times, allowed his suits, overcoats, hats, and suspenders a life of fifteen wearings and his ties three. On the days he was dressed entirely in new things he described himself as walking on eggs. He had a fear of doing anything in an untried way and a deep anxiety that the things and places he had known as a child were being devalued as they came to be available to everyone. In the period before his literary activities ate up most of his fortune he lived luxuriously and by himself, his servants including an excellent chef who prepared meals for him alone. Between the wars he went traveling in a large and luxurious trailer—nine meters long—that he had specially constructed so that he would not have to sleep in hotels; such "recreational vehicles" did not exist at the time, and Roussel's was written up in automotive magazines.

Some of the secretive and self-protected quality of his life had to do with his homosexuality. Although known to many, his sexual orientation was obscured behind the façade of an official mistress with whom he often appeared in public but who was in reality the mistress of a family friend; the latter needed to appear to abandon her at the time of his marriage, so the arrangement Roussel made at that moment simultaneously cast a veil over two unavowable realities. With this official mistress, Charlotte Du Frène, he developed a genuine friendship, but his amorous encounters appear to have been casual and passing, with men who did not belong to his own set. He followed his father into alcoholism, for which he underwent many unsuccessful cures; he also regularly took drugs, and his death while on a trip to Palermo in 1933 (accompanied by Du Frène) was drug-related. It remains unclear

whether he committed suicide with an overdose or accidentally took too much in the hope of provoking an ecstatic state.[27]

Many of these personal features (and much of his writing too, as we shall see) were tied up with a psychological crisis he experienced at the age of nineteen, in 1897. Roussel recounted this crisis in *How I Wrote Some of My Books* ; in addition he told some of its details to Pierre Janet, one of France's most distinguished psychiatrists, under whose care he placed himself several times in the years after Wodd War I. Janet included the case history in a book, *From Agony to Ecstasy* , where Roussel appeared under the pseudonym "Martial," the name he gave to the hero of his book and play *Locus Solus* , and Roussel reproduced Janet's pages as one of the appendices to *How I Wrote Some of My Books* (the others were early stories and poems, and an account of a new mate he invented in chess). The crisis developed out of the consuming ambition Roussel felt after he turned from

music, his first interest, to writing, and determined to produce a great work in verse before the age of twenty. The work was to be long, and he wrote "so to say night and day for months at a time," experiencing no fatigue but only a powerful enthusiasm, fed by the conviction that he was the equal of Dante and Shakespeare, and feeling what Victor Hugo felt at seventy or Napoleon at the height of his power: "I felt glory."

By this, Roussel did not mean that he thought he deserved glory, or that he needed or desired it: "This glory was a fact, something ascertained, a sensation, I had glory." His writing paper was surrounded by a radiance, so that he had to close the curtains in his room "for fear that the smallest fissure would have allowed the luminous rays that came out of my pen to get outside, since I wanted to raise the screen all at once and light up the world." The illumination he would bring did not have to be created; it already existed in him, and "I lived more at that moment than in my whole existence." When the book appeared to universal indifference, and the author walked the streets without anyone turning to gaze at him, he was plunged into a deep depression, accompanied by fantasies of persecution and a rash that erupted over his whole body. Janet compared Roussel's state of mind during his exalted period to a religious ecstasy, and he reported that his patient himself regarded the rest of his life as an attempt to recover the "spiritual

sunshine" (*soleil morale*) of those days: "I would give all the years of life that remain to me if I could relive that glory for one instant."**[28]**

Roussel described the years following his crisis as prudent and colorless by comparison, empty of exaltation, but still devoted to the search for ways to realize his sense of himself; he had little success, however, and there were moments when his frustration made him "roll on the ground in crises of rage." He began to find satisfaction only as he reached thirty, in the works where he discovered and employed the *procédé* . The reason he felt it to be the answer to his quest seems to be that by making himself the creator of otherwise unheard-of objects and experiences, freed from the conditions of common life and rooted only in his own verbal inventiveness, he recovered something of the sense of bearing within himself a source of illumination for a world that awaited his coming. Through his *procédé* Roussel created a series of literary spaces each of which could be described by his title *Locus Solus* : at once a solitary place of withdrawal, and a space within which his sun-like radiance could illumine a world.

In a poem written a few years before his crisis he described his own mind in terms so exalted that he later had to claim he was referring not to himself but to Victor Hugo:

Sur la terre que je domine,
Je vois ce feu continuel
Qui seul et sans frère, illumine
Partout l'univers actuel.

His mind, in other words, was the continual, solitary fire that lit up the universe from within the earth where he ruled. This was just the situation he would recreate in *Locus Solus* , whose self-referential hero Martial (the conquering warrior) dominates the park-like enclosure where he shows visitors a series of wonders, all derived—need we say?—from puns and word games. Of these, the ultimate triumph is a kind of theater, where the relatives of dead people come to see their dear departed as if alive, seemingly revivified by the action of a powerful substance, *résurrectine* , put in contact with a miraculous metal, *vitalium* .

Roussel assures his readers that the illusion was perfect, extending to eye movements, breathing, speaking, and walking, but the key point was that each of the cadavers subjected to this treatment would continually act out some crucial and defining moment in the dead person's life, so that Martial-Roussel's power was precisely to do for others what he wanted to do for himself, let them relive the most meaningful experience of their existence. Referring to the various puns offered to gloss his title by not-too-friendly critics—Loufocus Solus, Cocus Solus, Blocus Solus—Roussel accepted one as relevant and revealing: Logicus Solus; it declared that his work followed the private logic of his life.

Despite appearances, and contrary to what some interpreters have tried to see in him, Roussel's writing has nothing to do with the project of displacing creativity from human imagination to language or to machines. His project was always to display his personal power of invention, which he expected his audience to perceive in his unprecedented objects and devices and which he revealed, for posterity's sake and just in case people had not cottoned on, in *How I Wrote Some of My Books* . Martial's machines, of which the theater of resurrection and the construction crane that used wind-currents to make mosaics out of human teeth were only the most striking, were displays of his inventiveness, just as Roussel's books were of his, and the same is true of the painting-machine fashioned by Louise Montalescot in *Impressions of Africa* . All these devices were fully in the spirit of Jules Verne, recalling the *Nautilus* , the wonderful submarine of *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* , making their creators the successors to Verne's Captain Nemo, and all were expected to bear witness to the power of human understanding and imagination, even though no real explanation for how they worked could be supplied. The intense pleasure Roussel took in his inventions helped him to relive the ecstatic sense of personal power he felt at nineteen; he loved watching his own works on the stage, and his state of mind at seeing them must have resembled the one he attributed to Louise Montalescot when she

saw that her painting-machine actually worked, savoring the murmur of admiration that rose up around her and sighing with satisfaction at her own success.**[29]**

Neither his fascination for the imaginative potential hidden in lan-

guage nor his wonder in the face of modern science's powers to do miraculous things lessened Roussel's confidence in the creative power of his own mind or softened his intense focus on his own personal experience. His works were devoted to all these things at once. The same book in which he explained the mysteries of the *procédé* contained his and Janet's accounts of his mental crisis, the keys to understanding that his writings were just as much inspired by personal obsessions as they were structured by an apparently mechanical technique of literary invention. In fact, however, the procedure was not mechanical; many of the word plays came to Roussel from his favorite reading, the Bescherel dictionary, but nothing compelled his choices among the many opportunities he found there, and Philippe Kerbellec has shown that a great many of Roussel's word plays can be located along a single chain of related nouns that extends from the original billiard table of "Parmi les noirs." The term *procédé* itself derives from a special kind of billiard cue, *queue à procédé* , furnished with a leather tip and used for getting out of especially tough spots, and Roussel's other works contain a whole series of images—stems, roots, tails, water-jets—that recall the billiard cue's shape, in addition to their often obscure linguistic links.**[30]** Behind this chain of symbols it is hard not to suspect the existence of a set of references Roussel never avowed, to sexuality. *Queue* means "tail," the French word having all the same resonances as the English, and the connection of the *procédé* to a phallic image takes on additional resonance when one remembers that the *bandes* so central to his early story are also erections. Is it possible that behind Roussel's fascination with shifting words and things away from one common and expected set of references and relations to a second, ordinarily hidden one, in the process demonstrating the triumph of imagination over material reality, there lurked his homosexual awareness that similar possibilities inhered in that great signifier, the penis?

How much of this Duchamp may have grasped or intuited when he saw *Impressions of Africa* in the spring of 1912 it is impossible to say, but he had plenty of time to reflect on what he had seen and to read Roussel, which he certainly did afterward. The many similarities between them, both as artists and as human beings, help to make Duchamp's career stand out in greater relief. Of these, the first is their shared at-

traction for an art that was mysterious and hermetic; both produced works that were less "sensitive passages between two subjective spaces" than attempts to fascinate an audience with the display of objects and images that promised new meaning while remaining secret and enclosed. Duchamp probably saw right away that he and Roussel were kindred spirits in this regard, and it seems likely that he also recognized their shared fascination with language, especially those aspects of it that make possible a playful recreation of the world in some unexpected guise or key. Whether this awareness preceded or followed his understanding that behind Roussel's work there lay a complex of personal involvements and obsessions is harder to say, but at some point Roussel's example seems to have encouraged or reassured him toward encoding a series of private meanings and motifs in his own work. This would seem to be one manner in which "Roussel showed me the way" toward the Large Glass, and—as I shall try to show below— toward the readymades too. The need to let his audience in on more of the game than the works revealed, which Roussel met in *How I Wrote Some of My Books* , would be answered somewhat differently by Duchamp in the publication of his notes for the Large Glass, and in still another way in the great surprise of his final posthumous work, *Given* .

Roussel showed how the recourse to language games and mechanical imagery, which some interpreters have taken to signify the demise of personal subjectivity in art, actually allowed his works to become the scene for developing and acting out a series of highly personal themes and preoccupations. Whether he was aware of it or not, his procedure served to disguise both what these obsessions were and how powerfully they moved him, casting them in a mold of seeming exteriority and objectivity. Much of the aura of mystery and incomprehensibility that surrounds his novels and plays arises from the way these two opposing currents, personal and impersonal, flow together in his work, each serving at once to highlight and to obscure elements of the other. Few who saw or read his work could know what to make of the strangely altered worlds that emerged at that point of intersection, but for Roussel himself the result was a source of ecstatic pleasure, because it remade the objects of everyday life into reflectors of his own psychic needs and obsessions.

Duchamp would proceed along precisely parallel paths. Already in Munich he had found a way to preserve a moment of heightened affect, recorded in the drawing *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* , in a style that seemed to dissolve passion in the blank and impersonal imagery of the machine. All his later techniques for seemingly excluding his own personality from his works would, like Roussel's, offer much hidden scope for enshrining his inner preoccupations within them. Discovering ways to mirror his mind's contents in things that seemed chosen out of pure indifference would allow him to

achieve what we would later call "constant euphoria," the joyful state of inhabiting his own "locus solus," where the ordinary characteristics of the objects that surrounded him disappeared in the blinding illumination of his imagination.

Four—
Desire, Delay, and the Fourth Dimension:
The Large Glass

When Duchamp Returned to Paris from Munich in the late summer of 1912, he did not go back to his old life. During the months that followed he drew away from the cubist circle around Gleizes and Metzinger, took a job as a librarian in the Latin Quarter, and exchanged the studio in Neuilly, where he had been close to his brothers' house in Puteaux, for one in Paris. He had a single—but very large—artistic project on his mind, the one that would occupy him off and on for over ten years, and which we know as the Large Glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (Plate 4).

Significant as this moment was, we need to resist the temptation to think that Duchamp already had his later, radical departures in mind. He yielded to this temptation himself later on when he claimed that Munich had been "the scene of my total liberation," making it seem as if the readymades and perhaps even the later abandonment of art were already on his agenda in the fall of 1912; clearly, for reasons we will come to soon enough, they were not. Unusual as the Large Glass would be, it was still a picture, and his first idea was to make it, as one note said, on "a long canvas upright." The turn to glass came during 1913, and with it the first experiment in painting on glass, the *Glider Containing a Water-Mill in Neighboring Metals* (Fig. 30), which pictured a made-up device—probably inspired in part by Roussel's machines—

that would take its place in the bachelor imagery. One reason for going to work in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Genevieve was that the job's light duties gave the chance to read about geometry and perspective, subjects that now took on new importance for him. At the end of 1913 he drew his first full-scale study for the project, on the wall of the studio he had rented in the Rue Saint-Hippolyte, by which time many of the notes he would later publish had already been written down.**[1]**

Unprecedented as this work would be, it grew directly out of the ideas he had first explored in a more traditional painterly way in Munich; at the same time, it returned to themes and concerns that had preoccupied him earlier. The conceptual germ of the Large Glass was the relationship of virginity to bridehood he had begun to focus on in Germany and which allowed him to replace his interest in linear movement through space with attention to a kind of motion that was purely formal and intellectual. But physical motion had always appeared in Duchamp's work partly as an evocation of inner experience, his own feelings of disillusionment, desire, or sadness, and the anonymous energy of the Bergsonian deep self; to abandon physical motion as he did in Munich was on one level simply to accord his concern for interior life the independence he had already allowed it in some of his previous work. In *Dulcinea* he had recorded his fantasy of unclothing a female body, superimposed on its movement through a succession of physical positions; and earlier, in *Paradise* , he had depicted a form of purely psychic motion by showing figures who were already inwardly banished from the garden of innocence where their bodies still remained. The Large Glass would revive the motif of "stripping" from *Dulcinea* , but the motion in it would be more like that in *Paradise* , a fluid or unstable state of consciousness, a purely mental or psychic movement occurring in a frozen moment of time. One other feature of Duchamp's early work would reappear and blossom forth here too: his irony, now become so prominent that it wove a thick veil of uncertainty around the picture's intentions and his own in making it.

The irony is bound to make its impact first, its layering so deep that some have thought it reaches unalloyed to the work's core, and in a way, as we shall see, it does. It begins with the title, invoking an unexplained cast of characters (who are a bride's bachelors?) and concluding with the nonsensical *même* , "even," calculated to send the mind off on
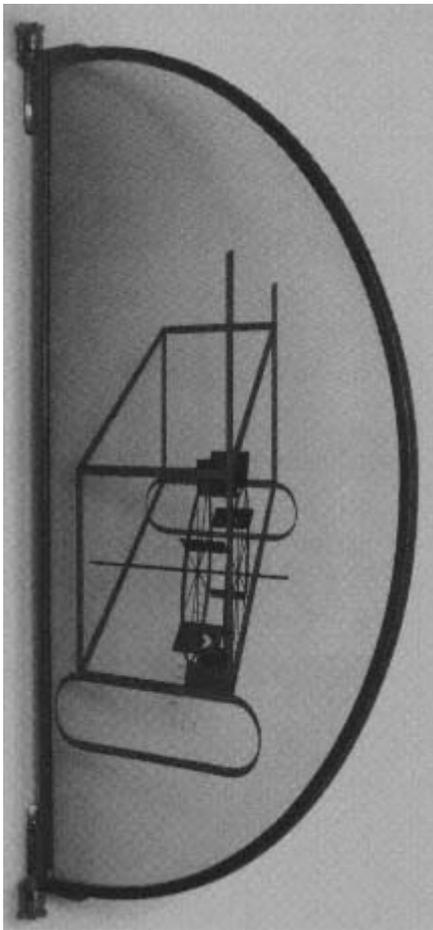
Figure 30.
Duchamp, *Glider Containing a
Water-Mill in Neighboring Metals*
(1913-15)

a path to nowhere. The puzzle continues with the unprecedented collection of symbols that populate the picture space, raising to a higher level Duchamp's old tactic of drawing us in and keeping us at bay by holding the promise of meaning forever just out of reach. The restless attack on the public's expectations continues in the notes, their goal of letting people know what the work was about undermined by publishing them episodically and in the same fragmentary form, on odd-shaped and variously acquired bits of paper (some on restaurant or hotel stationery), on which he had originally written them down, and even more by their sometimes impenetrable mix of lyrical effusion and playful nonsense, serious metaphysical speculation and pseudo-science, yearning for transcendent experience and unshaken disillusionment.

They include many crossed-out passages (Duchamp no longer means what they say), along with references to forms he did not include and ideas he merely played with or subsequently abandoned.

The notes are just as important to the work as the visual images. Duchamp several times said that his original intention had been to publish notes and picture together, allowing viewers to move back and forth between them in the way readers use a mail-order catalogue. Moreover, many people in Duchamp's lifetime experienced the work first through the notes, since the picture's only public showing before World War II took place in Brooklyn in 1926 (he had decided to leave it permanently unfinished three years earlier). When it was being sent back to Katherine Dreier, Duchamp's friend and patron who had agreed to buy it in 1921 (the original owner-to-be, Walter Arensberg, having moved to California, too far away to ship the delicate glass), the two plates broke, a misfortune no one knew about for some years because they remained crated up. Duchamp, who had by then developed a thorough commitment to chance and accident, giving his life over to unpredictability and developing a whole series of works to sound the theme, declared himself delighted; all the same, he spent a month during 1936 repairing the picture so that it could be exhibited again. Two years previously he had tried to preserve it for the public in another way, by publishing a large collection of notes in *The Green Box* of 1934. In the same year André Breton used the notes to write the first essay that brought the picture to the attention of a wider public-even though he had not seen it.[2]

Irony takes many forms in Duchamp's notes. The bride is referred to sometimes as an apotheosis of virginity and sometimes as a *pendu femelle* , a hung or suspended female body, now as characterized by "splendid vibrations" and now as a mechanical object, a motor or barometer. The proportions of the bachelor section were worked out with painstaking precision, and yet the objects only pretend to work in a mechanical way; at one point their motion is supposed to be powered by the fall of brandy bottles, or lead weights shaped like brandy bottles. (It was in this section, however, that Duchamp wrote at one point "much too far-fetched," not the only sign that many of the notes merely play with possible themes or ideas, so that one should not try to find significance in all of them.) The bachelor glider or chariot sings

"litanies" as it moves, which include "slow life, vicious circle, onanism ... cheap construction ... eccentrics"—a kind of music for the loneliness of provincial life. How expansive and yet sour—at once serious and nonsensical —Duchamp's imagination could be in his notes appears for instance in some ideas about the components of the "wasp" or "sex cylinder" that was the center of the bride.

> The pulse needle in addition to its vibratory movement is mounted on a wandering leash. It has the liberty of caged animals.... This pulse needle will thus promenade in balance the sex cylinder which spits at the drum the dew which is to nourish the vessels of the filament paste and at the same time imparts to the Pendu its swinging in relation to the 4 cardinal points.[3]

Overall, as one heading declared, it was to be *un tableau hilarant* , not exactly "a hilarious picture," as the phrase has usually been translated, but one that could provoke a state of beatific—but also silly—satisfaction, like the happiness of a drunk.

In all this there is much of Roussel, with his "delirium of imagination." One note, not directly connected to the bride and the bachelors, was titled *Erratum Musicale* (*Musical Printer's Error*), recalling Roussel's African "Impressions"—in French a pun on printings—and taking the form of a three-part canonic song, to be sung by Marcel and his sisters Yvonne and Magdeleine, with a text composed of—Roussel's favorite reading—a series of dictionary definitions, here of the verb "to print." (The text read: "To make an imprint mark with lines a figure on a surface impress a seal on wax.") The result showed that Duchamp understood the place of verbal play in Roussel's disorienting scenes, and that he too could use language to create strange worlds by following out verbal links on their own.

On his return to Paris from Munich in 1912 Duchamp took an automobile trip with Apollinaire, Picabia, and the latter's wife Gabrielle Buffet (the same companions with whom he had gone to see *Impressions of Africa* the previous spring) to her native village in the French Jura; along the way he wrote some notes for a pictorial project inspired by automobile travel. Here the car was "the machine with 5 hearts, the pure child of nickel and platinum," but it was also "the headlight

child," *l'nfant phare* , its beam preceding it along the road like a comet with its tail in front (and perhaps calling up the idea of an opening flourish, *en fanfare*). I admit I do not know what Duchamp meant by associating the road with "the chief of the five nudes" (*5 nus* , however, reads also as "nude breasts" in French), but the image allowed Duchamp to move back and forth between lyricism and nonsense. First he wrote: "The Jura-Paris road, having to be infinite only humanly, will lose none of its character of infinity in finding a termination at one end in the chief of the 5 nudes, at the other in the headlight child"; but the next paragraph took it back: the road was only indefinite, not infinite, and while it would begin in "the chief of the 5 nudes," it would not "end in the headlight child." The picture that was somehow to contain these images was equally mysterious, using wood as a primary material, although Duchamp also spoke of the "size of the canvas."[4]

Being more extended and more developed, the notes for the Large Glass provide both more passages that are opaque or indecipherable and more elements of stable description. The latter include the strange but finally identifiable objects that people the picture space. The bride's section, the top half, holds two main elements, the bride herself on the left (the image taken whole as a section or cutout from the painting of the same subject done in

Munich) and her "halo," also referred to as the "milky way," across the top center. The three nearly square openings in the halo reproduce images Duchamp obtained by photographing pieces of gauze hung in front of an open window, allowing them to be blown and stretched by the breeze; thus they bear the name "draft pistons," the first of several testimonies to the role assigned to chance in the Glass. A second appears in the eight small marks or dots visible below the milky way on the right-hand side of the top section; their locations were obtained by shooting matchsticks dipped in paint out of a toy pistol (the ninth is less easily seen, inside the milky way).

The bachelor imagery is more complicated. In the middle sits an object Duchamp called a chocolate grinder, its three circular drums atop a table resting on "Louis XV legs" and attached by a rod to a scissors-like mechanism above. He said that the grinder was like one he knew from his days as a lycée student in Rouen; actually it seems that the device Duchamp remembered, representing it with techniques of mechanical drawing, was a mixer, used to refine and flatten the rather

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rough paste of chocolate and sugar produced by other, perhaps less picturesque grinding machines.**[5]** Duchamp seems to have been drawn by the combination of the machine's phallic imagery and its relation to chocolate, with its suggestion of sweet physical satisfaction; but in the notes he cast the sexual reference in an onanistic mode, through what he called an "adage of spontaneity: the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself."

To the left is the glider or sled or chariot (Duchamp used all three terms), enclosing a waterwheel in its center. Water was imagined to fall on the wheel, but this did not cause the glider to move, since it was powered by the bottle-shaped weights; instead, wheel and waterfall were somehow associated with a landscape planned for the glider's interior, but which makes no appearance in the Glass. Above the glider are nine shapes that Duchamp referred to variously as "malic molds" or "uniforms and liveries," each representing a particular male occupation: priest, delivery boy, gendarme, cuirassier, policeman, undertaker, flunky, busboy, stationmaster. As several writers have pointed out, these molds seem to have been inspired by mail-order catalogue illustrations of male clothing and costumes, which may also account for the odd assemblage of jobs and functions.**[6]** They are connected by rods (whose shapes followed those Duchamp obtained by dropping meter-long threads from a one-meter height, producing what he called "standard stoppages"; we will come to these in chapter 6) to seven sieves or parasols suspended over the chocolate grinder. In the imaginary operation of the bachelor machine, the molds would fill with "illuminating gas," apparently a mode of male sexual energy; the gas expanded when it heard the "litanies of the chariot," rising out of the molds and losing the individualized shapes imparted by them, then moving as "spangles" through the rods to the sieves or parasols; here it was converted into liquid form

and, Duchamp went on, experienced "dizziness" and spatial disorientation, before falling along a corkscrew-like trajectory into the bottom right of the bachelor space, where it would end in a kind of orgasmic splash.

Above the region of that splash, in the upper right section of the bachelor space, are three circular constructions that seem to float in air, surmounted by a smaller circle. The larger shapes were taken from charts used to test vision and thus bore the name *témoins oculistes* or

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"oculist witnesses." The smaller circle was a magnifying glass. All were associated both with the splashes below and with visual effects planned—but never put in place—for the space above them, a boxing match and something called the "Wilson-Lincoln effect," an optical illusion that showed alternately as one president or the other (recalling the visual ambiguities of *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*).

More details about the Glass's various parts and workings could be provided (and have been by others), but they would only underscore the point that these are games with an extremely elaborate but never fully specified set of rules, where precision and uncertainty combine to produce a world whose fluid energy never quite coalesces into stable forms.**[7]** As the consciousness behind it all, Duchamp seems at once to appear and to fade from view, projecting his thoughts and intentions toward a space where they might become visible, then remembering that imagination retains more freedom if it remains unrealized. Despite all its irony, however, the Large Glass was not just a big joke. At one point Duchamp distinguished between an irony of negation and one of affirmation, differing only in the form of laughter proper to each.**[8]** The Glass seems to contain both forms: for all the recurrence of seeming nonsense and contradiction, certain ideas are clearly enough developed to project the outlines of a coherent story, one that uses irony and seriousness at once to nourish and to exclude each other. In *The Green Box* of 1934 these ideas all appear together in a series of consecutive pages devoted to the conceptual elements that rule the picture.

When these elements are combined they yield a paradox that simultaneously justifies and undermines the irony that so infuses the project. The key to the Large Glass is that the stripping referred to in the title does not take place, at least not in the ordinary world of physical experience we usually regard as "real." Instead, the titular nudity exists wholly in the spheres of desire and fantasy, while the actual bride, if we may speak about an imaginary figure in this way, remains distant from the bachelors and untouched by them. On one level they are merely figures in her imagination, and the whole play of fantasy and invention echoes Roussel's "Impressions" of an Africa he had never seen.

The nonoccurrence of the action described draws the many ironies of the work's symbolic inventory into the void of meaning created by the final adverb of the title, and Duchamp announced the absence at the

heart of his work by giving it a subtitle, provided at the very start of *The Green Box* : "Delay in Glass." A delay is a space of time in which something expected to happen does not occur, a moment stretched out while a promised arrival keeps us waiting. The subtitle was followed by a "Preface," in which the sexual energies figured by the "waterfall" and the "illuminating gas" (neither of which were visible in the picture) were said to produce an "instantaneous state of Rest." The Glass's subject was thus a moment removed from time like the earlier "passage from virgin to bride," an instant of imaginative transformation in which no physical action takes place. Duchamp links the imagined nudity of the bride in the Large Glass to the virgin purity distilled by the notion of such a passage when he names the condition her stripping brings about: "an apotheosis of virginity."

The import of such purity should not be confused with any religious celebration of virginity. In Duchamp's world the desire that religion urges us to direct toward higher things finds its satisfaction in itself. The second time he wrote the phrase "apotheosis of virginity," Duchamp glossed it by adding "i.e. ignorant desire, blank desire," that is, desire unrelated to any definable external object, desire fulfilled in its present state of desiring. To this desire was added "a touch of malice," presumably against those external objects that might claim to know better than the bride what she wants. That her desire would not become dependent on them was indicated by calling her "this virgin who has reached the goal of her desire" and "this virgin who has attained her desire"—a desire already fulfilled within her virgin state of bridehood.**[9]**

The word Duchamp repeatedly uses in his notes to describe what happens when the bride reaches "the goal of her desire" is "blossoming" (*épanouissement*), the condition figured by the halo that is "the sum of her splendid vibrations." A halo and vibrations require some kind of energy to feed them, and Duchamp certainly made sexuality its generator, or rather, sexuality drawn into the magnetic field of idealization, for where else does bridehood exist? The precise source of the bride's halo appears in the most concise summary of the program for the Large Glass, which describes the picture as "an inventory of the elements of this blossoming, elements of the sexual life imagined by

her the bride-desiring." Hence it is the bride's imagination that engenders her halo, and on one level the whole action of the painting takes place inside her head, making the picture an image of her world of ideas and visions, where even the bachelors (whether they exist apart from her imagination of them or not) are only personae in her drama of self-presentation; she orders them—communicating "electrically" across the space that separates them—to carry out, in their heads, a stripping that draws them into her imagination of sexual life. This would seem to be one reason why the bachelors are plural: plurality is not the form of male existence that can put an end to virginity—once one man has initiated a virgin into womanhood others can no longer do it—but only the form that exalts it as the focus of multiple and unfulfillable desires.[10]

But even the bride's imagination does not fully control the nudity of the picture. As she draws the bachelors into her world, her unclothing becomes a matter of multiple representations and appearances, the complex product of separate but interacting fantasies. The bachelors—whether in the form imagined by the bride or as separate beings—envision her nudity in one way, she in another; it is just this difference between their mental vision and hers that projects her nudity into a space that neither she nor they can fully define, an imaginary space between two irreconcilable ways of representing it.

> In this blossoming, the bride reveals herself nude in 2 appearances: the first, that of the stripping by the bachelors. the second appearance that voluntary-imaginative one of the bride. On the coupling of these 2 appearances of pure virginity—on their collision, depends the whole blossoming, the upper part and crown of the picture.[11]

To say that the two modes by which "the bride reveals herself nude" were "2 appearances of pure virginity" meant that they were two separate ways that virgin nudity was envisioned or imagined: a male way that submits female bodies to male fantasy, and a female one that directs the play of desire so that the unclothed virgin body stands as the sign of its own apotheosis. Visually Duchamp associated the first with

"clockwork movement ... gearwheels, cogs, etc.... the throbbing jerk of the minute hand," whereas the second "should be the refined development of the arbor type. It is born as boughs on this arbor type."[12] From this contrast derives the curiously conventional difference between male and female imagery in the picture, the bride lithe, shapely, and freely swinging in her suspension, the bachelors bulky, mechanical, and noisily active. The coupling of such visions of femininity and sexuality was also a "collision," a smash-up that leaves the trains of desire still struggling to get back on the track toward their destinations.

In such a schema, bride and bachelors sought each other across a divide they could never quite bridge. Duchamp arranged the male and female realms so that they remained without contact, by inserting a "cooler" between the picture's two halves. But this cooler also expressed "the fact that the bride, instead of being an asensual icicle, warmly rejects (not chastely) the bachelors' brusque offer": she wants what they do, but in her own way, at once needing and denying their way of desiring her nudity, as a condition of her blossoming. Duchamp even referred to her "motor," activated by love gasoline (*essence d'amour* , as Paul Matisse points out, means something more than that) and the sparks of desire, as showing "that the bride does not refuse this stripping by the bachelors, even accepts it, since she goes so far as to help towards complete nudity by developing in a sparkling fashion her intense desire for the orgasm."[13] At this point it was possible to think about the bride's blossoming as coming not just out of the "collision" between the bachelors' desire and the bride's, but also as a "conciliation" that was "unanalyzable by logic" and issued in "the blossoming without causal distinction." But even when directed toward orgasm, the bride's desire remains unsatisfiable within the conditions of the picture; one note referred to her blossoming as "the image of a motor car climbing a slope in low gear. The car wants more and more to reach the top, and while slowly accelerating, as if exhausted by hope, the motor of the car turns over faster and faster, until it roars triumphantly." The "triumph" is of desire intensified by the exhausting hope of a fulfillment that remains out of reach.[14]

The notion of delay that located the Glass's action in a moment that never arrived also described the picture's relationship to representation

and meaning. Duchamp said he used the term as "a way of succeeding in thinking that the thing in question is no longer a picture"-that it was not a visual representation of some situation outside it, but a selfcontained and self-referential space. The various forms of irony with which the project was surrounded, keeping the meaning promised by the title, the symbolism, and the notes just beyond the grasp of us the viewers, was another form of delay, making the picture itself an icon of perpetually forestalled communication. Years later, in declaring how much pleasure looking at the Glass still gave him, Duchamp referred to it as "un amas d'idées," a heap or mass or—perhaps the closest translation—hoard of ideas, gathered up and preserved against despoliation.[15]

Among the ideas Duchamp treasured in this way were those given voice in the note on shop windows, where the truth that the world we inhabit is external to ourselves is proved by the disillusionment that comes when we attempt to satisfy desire with the objects life offers. The personae of the Large Glass remain forever in the condition of the window-gazer, whose state of being is expanded and animated by desire without ever experiencing

the regret and disillusionment that follow from material possession—here even from seeing with physical senses. They never have to complete the "round trip" that is the penalty of breaking the glass. By creating a permanent state of delay within which the action described by the title cannot occur, the Large Glass suspends the relations between its male and female characters within a metaphysical space much like the one implied by *Young Man and Girl in Spring* ; what does not take place in the Glass is what has already befallen the inhabitants of *Paradise* , the physical experience that spoils the imagined unity which precedes it and throws people back into their separate worlds of regret.

Behind the continuity of these themes in Duchamp's work there stood some persistent and recognizable features of his personality, seen in Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia's description of him as repeatedly withdrawing into his own world, as well as the traits of indifference and reserve that Robert Lebel underlined, associating them with those same qualities in his mother. Given that the Large Glass took shape in Duchamp's mind at a moment when he had withdrawn from the Paris art world

and that he continued to keep his distance from it afterward, conceiving the relations between the bride and the bachelors, and dedicating himself to representing those relations, marks an important moment—perhaps the culminating one—in the process by which Duchamp was absorbing and internalizing the qualities of distance and separation that as a boy had troubled him in his mother. In his notes he speaks about the "beauty of indifference."

At the same time that these themes link the Large Glass to elements that seem to have been developing in its maker's consciousness since childhood, their meaning is also illuminated by their ties to some earlier modernists. Duchamp was by no means the first vanguard figure to cultivate eroticism more for the sake of fantasy than for the flesh. A particularly significant predecessor was Charles Baudelaire, whose descriptions of the relationship between urban isolation and heightened poetic imagination have already helped us place Duchamp in the context of developing modernism. Many people in Baudelaire's time and since have taken his poetry as shockingly explicit in its evocation of sexual experience, but close readers have noted how far such understandings are from what the verses actually say. For all his devotion to the details of ordinary experience, Baudelaire was a poet of inner states; when he describes the nudity of his beloved in "Jewels" ("Les Bijoux"), or the smells and textures of her hair in "Locks" ("La Chevelure"), sensual experiences are invoked for their power to expand and dissolve the personality of the poet, for the ability of desire to stoke the fires of imagination, never as an anticipation of satisfactions that are sensual in an ordinary way.

"Locks" begins by evoking the "ecstatic fleece that ripples to your nape / and reeks of negligence in every curl," but instead of leading the poet toward other female body parts, the woman's hair takes him on a distant journey: "As other souls set sail to music, mine, / O my love! embarks on your redolent hair." The voyage leads to a place where (as Martin Turnell observes) the woman has totally vanished from the scene, to be replaced by "a harbor where my soul can slake its thirst / for color, sound and smell." When at the end the poet asks to "braid rubies, ropes of pearls to bind / you indissolubly to my desire," the woman to whom he seeks to tie himself eternally has become "the oasis where I dream, the gourd / from which I gulp the wine of memory."**[16]**

Such eroticism draws from the vocabulary of sexual realism only to subvert it, riding the power of sexual impulse past its ordinary bodily goals toward regions where memory and fantasy create an imagined world of permanent ecstasy. Nothing would have horrified Baudelaire more than to think that his poetry might be associated with the satisfaction of physical need. As Walter Benjamin understood, the love Baudelaire called up in his poetry is best described as having been "spared, rather than denied fulfillment."**[17]**

Duchamp seems never to have spoken of Baudelaire as a source for his own projects, but many ties link the two figures. The title of the Large Glass may echo that of Baudelaire's intimate journal *Mon Coeur mis à nu* (usually translated as *My Heart Laid Bare*). Interest in the poet was reviving in the decades before the Great War, and Duchamp's brother Raymond sculpted a portrait of him in 1911 (it can now be seen in the Philadelphia Museum). Another participant in the Baudelaire revival was Jules Laforgue, whose titles Duchamp attached to several of his drawings, and who wrote a well-known encomium that Duchamp may have read. After discussing the urban subjects Baudelaire injected into his work, Laforgue concluded:

> He was the first to break with the public.—The poets addressed themselves to the public—human repertoire—but he was the first to say to himself:
>
> "Poetry will be something for the initiated.
>
> "I am damned on account of the public.—Good.—The public is not admitted."**[18]**

Both the theme of unfulfillable desire and the separation between Duchamp and his audience are further developed in a topic discussed at great length in the notes, and usually with very little of the irony that surrounds other questions: the fourth dimension. Duchamp's speculations about fourth-dimensionality (contained mostly in the *White Box* , published in 1966) are well known and have been closely studied, but their relationship to the other

themes of his project is not always recognized. To him as to the writers on whom he drew, the fourth dimension had little to do with the considerations that made it important at

roughly the same time within relativity theory; it was not concerned about time, but about space and representation.**[19]**

Duchamp approached the topic of the fourth dimension by way of what is usually called—the idea is less mysterious than it may sound at first—"*n*-dimensionality." Starting from a figure of any given number of dimensions, *n*, one can progress by ordinary, commonsense operations to one that has *n* + 1 dimensions. Thus, in geometry a single point has zero dimensions, but any two points define a line, which has one dimension; any two lines or any line rotated around one of its points creates a plane, a two-dimensional figure; any two planes, or any plane figure rotated on one of its edges, creates a volume, a three-dimensional space or object. If we extend the same thinking beyond the world we know, then it appears that a three-dimensional figure, similarly rotated through one of its plane sides ought to produce a four-dimensional continuum. Physically we can't experience this fourth dimension, but in the mind it seems to bear the same relationship to the world we do experience that familiar elements of that world bear to each other. We understand what it means to progress from one dimension to two, and from two to three: why stop there? Our way of thinking about experience seems to demand that we presume the fourth dimension as a possibility, albeit one into which we can never enter.**[20]**

Such thinking became particularly intriguing at a moment when Western art was abandoning its traditional devotion to two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional spaces, and seeking to explore visual equivalents of ideas that lay outside experience; the fourth dimension was a common theme in cubist theory. Among the possible lines of speculation that arose at the time, Duchamp focused at the start on two. The first lay in the suggestion that, if two-dimensional images could stand for a world of three dimensions, why shouldn't three-dimensional objects be representations of things existing in a world of four dimensions? In this perspective, solid beings might be conceived as the projections into our world of forms that possessed a higher mode of existence. The second line began with the observation that in a three-dimensional world a two-dimensional plane had to be conceived as having no thickness, yet an actual picture plane does have thickness, because it is covered with material paint. Were it possible to make a

picture that somehow declared its own absence of thickness, then it could mirror the fourth dimension in the other direction, so to speak. It would realize a possibility suggested by certain characteristics of our world but which remains outside our ordinary experience.

Both these speculations contributed to the project for the Large Glass. Duchamp referred to an actual two-dimensional plane that approached the theoretical state of having no thickness as being "ultrathin" (*inframince*). One reason for undertaking a painting on glass was that it offered a way to make a picture plane from which the thickness of the paint was absent, simply by looking at the image from the unpainted side. "Painting on glass— seen from the unpainted side—gives an ultrathin."**[21]** Images that appear on such an ultrathin surface create a reference to the fourth dimension, because any three-dimensional object, seen from a four-dimensional vantage point, also approaches the state of having no thickness. Just as we three-dimensional creatures can pass instantaneously through any purely two-dimensional plane, so would four-dimensional beings pass instantaneously through three-dimensional space; both become "ultrathin" from the point of view of a world that has one more dimension than they possess. Duchamp in an early note referred to painting on glass as a "three-dimensional physical medium in a 4-dimensional perspective," that is, a three-dimensional medium that has lost its thickness.**[22]**

Thus, to paint on glass was to create a reference to a world to which our usual experience cannot be a guide. Duchamp created the same reference in a second way, by conceiving the bride as a three-dimensional representation of a four-dimensional being, and the image we see of her as "the two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional bride who would herself be the projection of a four-dimensional bride in the three-dimensional world."**[23]** This may seem very mysterious, since for us as viewers the bride-forms cannot refer to four-dimensional objects in the way that traditional pictures refer to three-dimensional ones. But that is just the point: the fourth dimension cannot be approached by three-dimensional senses. The bride's reference to a world we cannot experience is what gives positive meaning to the puzzling and unrecognizable forms through which she appears to us. In one note Duchamp observed that the forms of the bride

no longer have any relationship to measurability as we know it in the three-dimensional world. The principal forms of the bachelor machine are mensurable, but in the bride the principal forms "are *more or less large or small*, have no longer, in relation to their destination a mensurability." A bit later he began to develop a distinction between an object's "appearance," as it presents itself to our ordinary senses, and something more mysterious he called an "apparition," produced by a colored form and a "mass of light elements." This is one of the most playful and obscure passages in

Duchamp's notes (much of it concerns chocolate), but the notion of an "apparition" is another way to think about the bride as a visitor from a realm that remains beyond the bounds of our ordinary experience, a kind of ghostly arrival from the world of the fourth dimension.**[24]**

However any of us may regard these ideas—as interesting, curious, or perverse—their importance for the Large Glass lies in their relevance to the story of desire without fulfillment that is told there. Duchamp's program of representing an event, the bride's stripping, that takes place only in imagination is carried out by way of the notion that the female figure in the picture is a four-dimensional being: there is no way that the three-dimensional bachelors can have any physical purchase on a four-dimensional bride. In Duchamp's terms they are ultrathin in relation to her, lacking the dimension that imparts solidity in her world. The dimensional relations in the picture are a metaphor for the nature of the relations of desire that exist between its personae: the desire of the bachelors for the bride is like the desire of three-dimensional creatures for an experience of the fourth dimension that our minds can conceive but our bodies never touch. It is the desire for another kind of existence, which imagination engenders in us.

Although the idea of the fourth dimension refers by definition to a sphere beyond experience, Duchamp sought ways to provide some kind of visual intimation of it. The notes contain a long series of meditations about this, involving plays of interreflecting mirrors and attempts to imagine what a four-dimensional perspective would be like, based on parallels with the difference between two and three-dimensional perception. He even considered that color might be used as an analogy to experience beyond the third dimension, because color, like perspective, "cannot be tested by touch."**[25]** Most of these specula-

tions are simply thoughts Duchamp was trying to develop as he wrote them down, and either remain incomplete or become too convoluted for us to try to deal with them here. But certain of Duchamp's notions about how the fourth dimension might be intimated are simpler, some even rather homey; for instance:

> 2 "similar" objects i.e. of different dimensions but one being the replica of the other (like 2 deck chairs, one large and one doll size) could be used to establish a *4-dim'l* perspective—not by placing them in relative positions with respect to each other in space³ [Duchamp's way of writing three-dimensional space] but simply by considering the optical illusions produced by the difference in their dimensions.**[26]**

Although Duchamp seems never to have made such a construction, he did

make a picture that took up the suggestion in a more abstract, geometrical way. Less than twenty by sixteen inches in size, it was made on glass (mostly during the time he spent in Buenos Aires during 1918) and was called *To Be Looked at [from the Other Side of the Glass] with One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour* (Fig. 31). Here the two spheres joined by a line that makes a tangent to the circle in the middle—actually a magnifying glass—recall the differently sized objects of the note, while the pyramid at the top is constructed so as to create as much uncertainty as possible about where plane surfaces end and volumes begin. One of the oculist charts appears in the lower section, indicating that their role in the Large Glass was to point beyond visibility too. Shown as in the photo reproduced here (the glass has since cracked, so that the work itself no longer gives quite the same effect), the picture seems to provide a passage from the ordinary space where it hangs into a different, more mysterious universe.

The instruction in the title is not just a joke or provocation, but tells the viewer how to induce the sense of disorientation, even dizziness, that seeking to enter the fourth dimension from our more limited world is bound to bring. Duchamp referred to this disorientation when he noted that in a four-dimensional continuum "verticals and horizontals lose their 'fundamental' meaning" (i.e., their ability to orient us in space), just as a two-dimensional being "does not know whether the
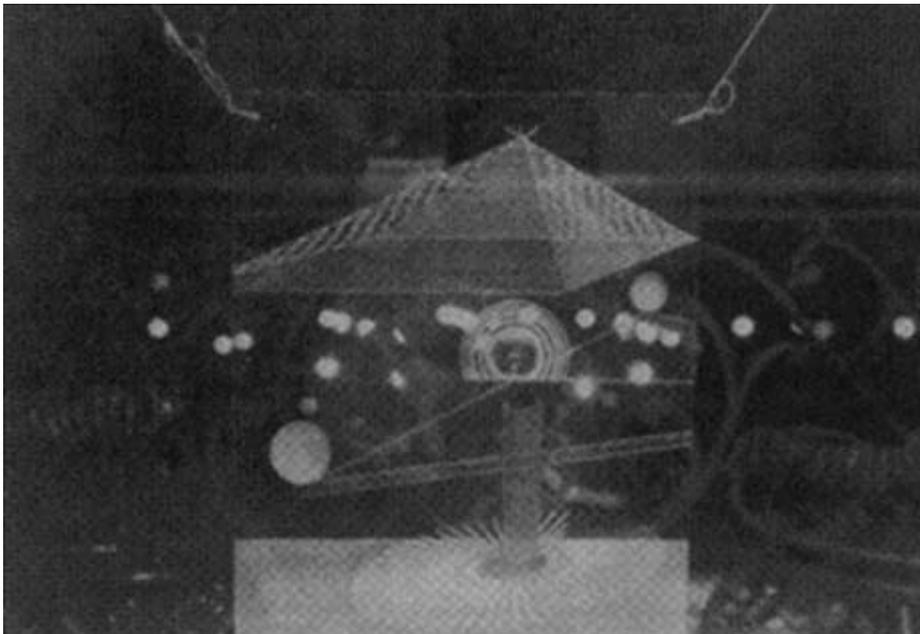
Figure 31.
Duchamp, *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close To,*
for Almost an Hour (1918)

plane supporting him is horizontal or vertical"; and he tried to evoke the same state in another way when he spoke about losing the possibility of identifying or recognizing "*2 similar objects* —2 colors, 2 laces, 2 hats, 2 forms whatsoever," through no longer being able to transfer the memory imprint from one to another.**[27]** For us ordinary folk, trying to think about the fourth dimension makes our heads spin, just what following the instructions for *To Be Looked at ... for Almost an Hour* would induce. The analogy to erotic experience was made explicit in regard to the "gas spangles" that arose from the malic molds; as they heard the litanies of the chariot, they would experience "dizziness" and "loss of awareness of position," becoming merely a "scattered suspension" or vapor as they moved through the rods and sieves.**[28]**

Whether Duchamp hoped viewers might experience any similar sensation in looking at the Large Glass is less certain, but there is reason to suspect he did. To elicit such a feeling seems to have been one reason for the carefully developed contrast between the three-dimensionality

of the bachelor space and the insistent flatness of the bride's domain. The bachelor objects are represented in a precise perspective that allows the viewer to think of them as arrayed behind the picture, the chocolate grinder and glider on the floor, and the malic molds, sieves, and oculist witnesses floating in air. We must be standing in front of the glass to see them where they are.**[29]** But the bridal forms are pure two-dimensional drawings (albeit of objects that have depth and volume), so that we could just as well be seeing them from above. The possibility is implied that we are in two positions at once, standing before the Glass and above it, as if the two halves of the picture were joined by an invisible hinge. Although such a hinge is difficult to imagine in the picture's present state, enclosed in a solid and stable frame, that difficulty arises mostly from the repairs made after the plates broke in 1926; in their original form the two halves were not rigidly held in place. Now, the idea of a hinge was one Duchamp developed extensively in thinking about the fourth dimension, at one point underlining the observation that "*A 4-dim'l finite continuum is generated by a finite 3-dim'l continuum rotating (here the word loses its physical meaning —see further on) about a 2-dim'l hinge* ." He continued the thought inside the parenthesis by explaining that "rotate" had to lose its physical meaning because the actual rotation of a three-dimensional volume would simply produce another three-dimensional volume. To conceive the fourth dimension required imagining a two-dimensional surface that simultaneously rotated on a hinge and remained immobile.**[30]** This is exactly what the top half of the Glass would do, were we to find ourselves somehow both before the picture and above it. If we see the Glass as Duchamp imagined we might, we experience our own location as simultaneously in two places at once, as if no longer fixed inside ordinary three-dimensional space; such disorientation draws us toward the fourth dimension.

Duchamp's fourth dimension is a kind of utopia of aesthetic existence, where imagination never has to give way to the conditions and limits of real life. It stands as a conceptual and possibly a visual equivalent for the experience of living perpetually in the realm of aroused desire that Walter Benjamin described as "spared rather than denied fulfillment." In this sense four-dimensionality brings us close to the

declaration Duchamp made—quite without irony—in a later interview, that the value of art lay in its being the only activity which allowed human beings to go "beyond the animal state, because art is an outlet toward regions which are not ruled by time and space."[31] In contrast to the challenges Duchamp would later raise against traditional ideas of art, and particularly against its claim to occupy a sphere independent of ordinary life, the Large Glass strongly links art with transcendence and with freedom from material existence.

One of the ways in which the Large Glass retains these links is through its permanent state of incompleteness. In 1923, after over ten years of planning and often meticulous and laborious work on the project, Duchamp declared the work to be "definitively unfinished." Many reasons contributed to the decision, including the technical difficulties he found in working on glass and the weariness that came from the thing's having dragged on so long, but leaving the work incomplete harmonized so well with his program for it that it is hard not to suspect he had the possibility in his mind from the start. Not finishing the Glass was one more way for it to be a "delay," leaving the expectations it aroused unfulfilled. It remained permanently suspended in time, like its subject, a condition it would have to renounce the moment it descended from potentiality to actualization. Unfinished, it remains always just beyond our grasp; completed, it would be subject to the same disillusionment that Duchamp attributed to possession in his note on shop windows.

That these considerations were in his mind—if not from the start, at least later on—is one of the things suggested by the fact that Duchamp did in a way "finish" the Large Glass—but not within that picture itself. Instead he did another work that showed what the story of the bride and the bachelors would come to if it were removed from the fourth dimension of unfulfilled desire and placed instead within our world of ordinary objects: this was the effect of the construction he produced in secret during the last twenty years of his life, leaving it to confound those who believed he had ceased to work as an artist. Although we will need to skip forward several decades in order to speak about it, looking at Duchamp's last work tells us that its chief purpose was to give greater relief to the subject of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* .

Figure 32.
Duchamp, *Given: 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas* ,
Exterior View

Duchamp called the thing *Given* (*Étants Donnés*), or more fully *Given: 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas* (Fig. 32 and Plate 5). He worked on it between 1946 and 1966, storing it in a New York commercial building when it was finished, and leaving behind a box of instructions on how to install it in the Philadelphia Museum, which by then housed the basic collection of his work donated by the Arensbergs and the Large Glass's owner, Katherine Dreier. *Given* is a construction contained within a space closed off by a heavy wooden door, fixed and unmovable, but pierced by two eye-level holes that allow viewers to gaze into a lit interior. There we see, through a broken brick wall, the sculpted figure of a totally nude woman, her legs open to reveal her sexual parts and the small, dark opening into her body, wholly exposed by the lack of any pubic hair. Her face is obscured behind the wall, but the blond hair of her head covers her neck above the left shoulder. Her right arm is invisible, while the left one holds up a lit gas lamp (seemingly unnecessary, given the blue daylight of the sky). She lies in a field of twigs and brambles with leaves visible among them, while in the

background we see trees, a stream, and in the distance an illuminated waterfall that seems to feed it. The work has been variously read and

interpreted, but one of the most genuine and direct reactions was voiced by Duchamp's longtime friend and admirer, the Italian painter Gianfranco Baruchello. Perhaps the right word to convey Baruchello's response is "wounded." Baruchello read Duchamp's career as an inspiration to move constantly beyond the world we know and to imagine alternatives, and he found it incomprehensible that such an artist should have ended by making this heavy, prosaic, altogether realistic and finally depressing thing, the only one of his works that contains direct images of nature and the earth.**[32]** Baruchello's response captures the mood of *Given* , and he is right to associate it with "a profound sense of disappointment." But as others have recognized, Duchamp would hardly have devoted so much effort to such a work had he not regarded it as saying something essential about what he had been trying to accomplish in his life. What is its message?

The first thing we see is the door. Duchamp found it in a little village in Spain where he went on vacations, and there exists a photograph of his wife, whom he married in 1954, standing there beside it. Because it was a found object, it has been called a readymade, and perhaps in a way it was. But we shall see that most readymades were manufactured objects, and that Duchamp valued them for not being the direct product of any human hand. The door was certainly handmade by someone, and in contrast to any Duchampian readymade it is old, evocative, seasoned, quaint—all adjectives that associate it with art in an ordinary, banal, even vulgar way. This is the kind of art that closes off possibilities instead of opening them up, and it is just such a closure that the door of *Given* effects. The door also makes a contrast with another door, one he made years earlier for his Paris apartment. That one swung on its hinges in such a way that when it blocked the entrance to one room it opened up access to another, and many people saw it as a way of defying the commonsense of the French proverb, "a door must be either open or shut" (Fig. 33). No such entry for uncertainty here: the door is definitively, unalterably closed. Placed in proximity to the Large Glass it makes another statement of opposition: for it is opaque where the Glass is transparent, and where it is pierced it imposes a single,
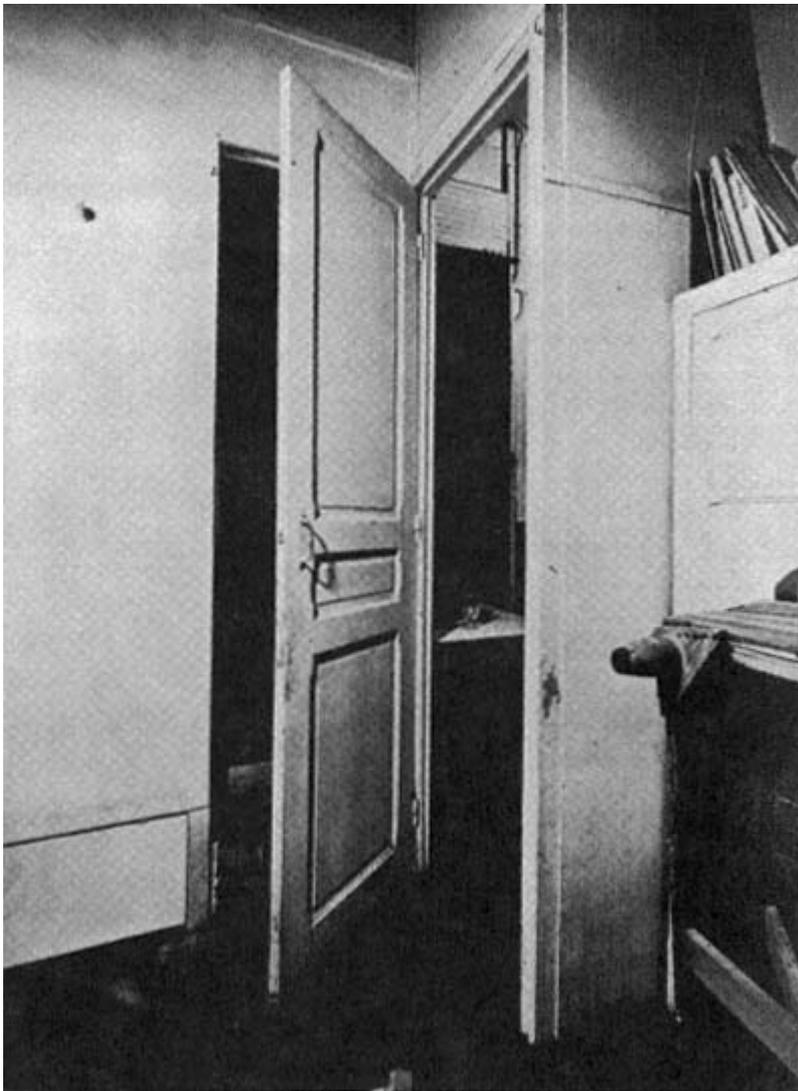
Figure 33.
Duchamp, *Door, II rue Larrey* (1927)

unalterable perspective for looking at what lies behind it, in contrast to the Glass, which allows us to walk around and see through it from all sides.**[33]**

Whereas everything in the Glass is open, here everything is closed off and shut up. The work has no more access to unrealized possibilities than the dead artist who left it for us, a point Duchamp explicitly

underlined by assuring that no one would know about his last work until he had departed from life. Yes, he is saying to us, I can make you a finished version of the Large Glass—but I will have to be dead to do it. When the breath of desire no longer lifts me into the world of unrealized aspirations, then the elements of my picture will return to the dead world of time and space, where we can examine them as they would be in a state that belongs

wholly to the here and now.

And that is where we find them, beginning with the ones named in the title. The waterfall and illuminating gas that remained wholly imaginary in the Large Glass are here given direct physical form, the gas as a lamp well-known in France before World War I (Duchamp himself had done a sketch of one then) but which had entered into the realm of romantic nostalgia by the 1960s, the water become wholly familiar as a tackily lit bit of scenery (brighter on the spot than in the reproductions), in fact one that Duchamp himself had photographed—in Switzerland, no less.**[34]** Both have migrated from the realm of fantasy into the world of tourism and artsiness where Duchamp found the wooden door.

Everything in *Given* belongs to the world of *données* , of things already determined, data. The landscape depicted here may be in some way the one Duchamp spoke about in the notes for the Glass, and which was to be located inside the glider, in the region of the water-wheel. There, however, it remained a mental image arising within the bachelors' erotic fantasy, which was in turn part of the bride's imagination, "an inventory of the elements of ... the sexual life imagined by her the bride-desiring." Here nothing is left to desire or to imagine, not the landscape and above all not the sexuality of the woman, whose lack of pubic hair creates as explicitly physical and—my own view, but one that many viewers share—brutal a representation of sexuality as possible. The Large Glass's suspension of femininity in a space beyond experience has given way to a body whose heavy three-dimensionality is the counterpart of the unrelievedly material kind of sexuality it proclaims. Even the viewer has here become materialized, identified as a *voyeur* —Duchamp used the word in his notes—by the necessity of gazing through the eyeholes at the nude figure in the public space of the museum; the contrast with the spectator of the Glass, drawn toward

Figure 34.
Gustave Courbet, *L'Origine du monde* (1866)

the mysterious space of the fourth dimension by the "hinge" construction that makes the top panel simultaneously a vertical and a horizontal plane, is complete.

To deplore all this—as Baruchello did—because it weakens Duchamp's vocation of questioning the limits of reality is to miss the point, however, for *Given* is precisely an account of what art becomes when erotic energies, preserved as engines of fantasy within the delay of the Large Glass, turn from imagination to ordinary life. Duchamp made clear how negatively he regarded such images by linking the nude figure in *Given* to an artist whose role in the history of painting he often deplored, Gustave Courbet. It was with Courbet, the apostle of realism, that Duchamp located the triumph of what he called retinal art, the art dedicated to the exploration of immediate, visual experience. *Given* is an illustration of just what retinal art is, and the reference to Courbet is explicit. The prone figure recalls some of Courbet's aggressively realistic nudes (see Fig. 34), and lest we miss the point, Duchamp did a series of etchings of nudes in the mid-1960s (when no one

Figure 35.
Duchamp, *Selected Details after Courbet* (1968)

could yet be aware of their reference to *Given*), their sexual parts prominently exposed. One was called *Selected Details after Courbet,* another *Le Bec Auer,* for the kind of gas lamp that appears in the left hand of its female subject, just as it does in *Given* (Figs. 35, 36). Here we see the woman and a presumed partner relaxing as in the aftermath of a sexual encounter, the moment which can never occur in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* . Everything adds up to let us know
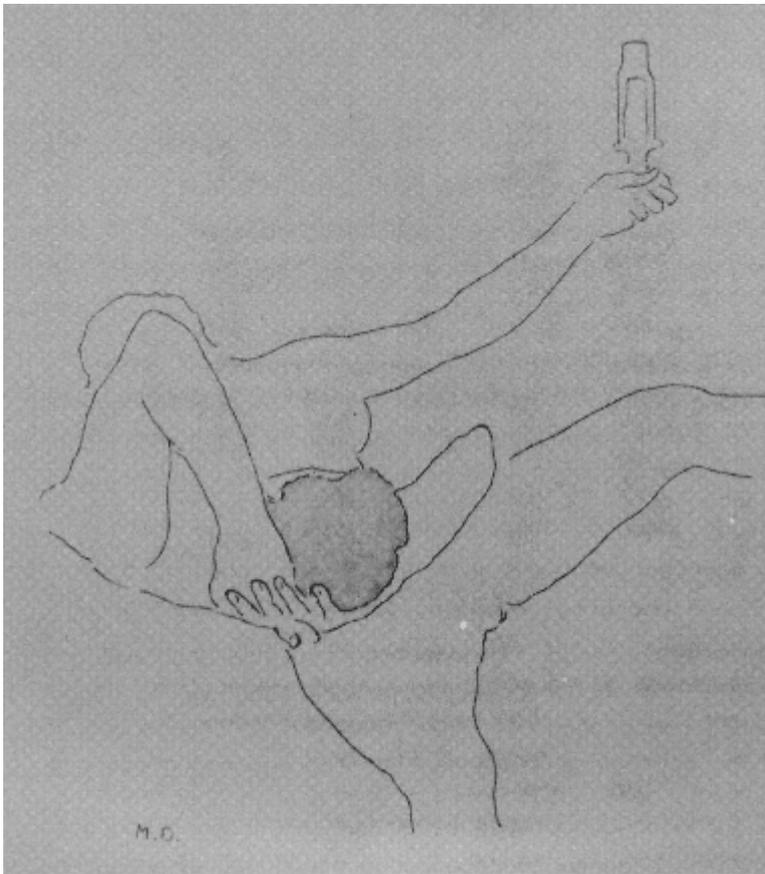
Figure 36.
Duchamp, *Le Bec Auer* (1968)

that the work Duchamp produced over twenty years but kept hidden while he lived is his account of just what he thought art should not be; it is the world of the Large Glass destroyed by being finished off, the ending he refused to provide all through his life, the work that could come from his hand only once he was dead.

I think this is the point of view from which to consider one aspect of *Given* not mentioned so far, the seemingly aggressive and hostile treatment to which the female figure has been subjected. Duchamp's relations with women could be complex and mysterious enough (as we shall see later on) that elements of suppressed anger and frustration may be at play behind this maimed and defenseless image. One might even

imagine that he here took his revenge on the bride for the torture she committed on him in his dream of 1912. But if there was misogynistic aggression in *Given,* it was simultaneously something else. What has been mistreated here is the aspiration to live "beyond time and space" that was Duchamp's own in the Large Glass; the violence done here is done against Duchamp himself in female form, not by him against femininity. By the time

he began work on *Given* he had made public display of a female side to his own personality in his alter ego Rrose Sélavy; his way of being male did not require denying the feminine in himself. Whatever hostility to femininity *Given* may contain resides within Duchamp's larger theme: desire's ability to lift human beings, male or female, into the realm of imagination turns to disillusionment once they settle for mere physical possession.

To let people know that *Given* was a comment on the Large Glass, that it was a typically enigmatic and Duchampian way of telling, through a veil of irony, what his earlier work was about, Duchamp did not stop at arranging for its installation near the Glass in the Philadelphia Museum. He also published, in 1966, the year he finished work on *Given* (he was two years away from death), the third and last collection of his notes, the so-called *White Box* (also known as *Á l'infinitif*). In it he included both the note on shop windows and the speculations about four-dimensionality, materials without which the reading of the Glass developed here would lack essential elements and clues. These notes make the *White Box* a kind of Duchampian *How I Wrote Some of My Books* , a revelation at once theoretical and personal. One reason why so many interpretations remain so distant from what we can now know to have been in his mind is that no attempt to understand his work before 1966 could make use of them. Similar difficulties have hindered the understanding of Duchamp's other famous activities, his readymades and the series of objects associated with them. We must now see how the reading of the Large Glass proposed here helps to put them, too, in a different light.

Five—
Private Worlds Made Public:
The Readymades

The Large Glass and *Given* were Duchamp's most elaborate and considered projects, but what made the broadest impact and gave him the most lasting notoriety—greater even than the *succès de scandale* of the Armory Show—were the "readymades": ordinary objects of everyday use, some slightly altered and others not, displayed in a setting that promoted them to the status of art. Today the readymades stand as Duchamp's signatory challenge to artistic tradition, his irreparable violation of the sacred precinct where art had reposed in sovereign independence from the rest of life, and to which were admitted only those rare or unique objects that exceptionally endowed creators had infused with special qualities of vision, imagination, or skill.

Audiences had long been surprised and disconcerted by modernist and vanguard innovations, but whether in impressionism, fauvism, or cubism, these had been undertaken for some aesthetic purpose, to expand art's

subject matter, extend its expressive range, or heighten its perceptual power. Duchamp's readymades mounted their challenge from outside the recognized sphere of artistic practice; their novelty consisted precisely in breaching the boundary between art and non-art, relegating that distinction to the same fragile status of the "merely conventional" to which earlier modernists had consigned classicism or re-

alism. With the readymades, vanguard practice entered a new territory, one that the critic Clement Greenberg has called "avantgard*ism* ," the now familiar form of activity in which "the shocking, scandalizing, startling, the mystifying and confounding, became embraced as ends in themselves and no longer regretted as initial side-effects of artistic newness that would wear off with familiarity." We still live with the consequences of this challenge, which has made us recognize "that any thing that can be experienced esthetically can also be experienced as *art* .... The notion of art, put to the strictest test of experience, proves to mean not skillful making (as the ancients defined it), but an act of mental distancing—an act that can be performed even without the help of sense perception. Any and everything can be subjected to such distancing, and thereby converted into something that takes effect as art."**[1]**

Duchamp understood well enough that to offer objects like bicycle wheels, bottle racks, combs, or urinals as artworks was to break down the assumed boundaries of the aesthetic realm, but the reasons he often gave for turning to readymades stressed a different motivation: the readymades were a defense against personal fixity. Because the various objects did not look alike, had different visual qualities and features, he could "produce" a series of them without repeating himself, without developing any defined personal style or taste; and taste, he declared, was merely a habit, "the repetition of something already accepted," a mark or stamp that identified some particular, recognizable individual. Readymades were therefore a way to preserve an undefined, fluid existence, in contrast to that of the conventional artist, whose presence in a series of works could be recognized by known elements of style. To assure that the readymades fulfilled this task, it was necessary that his choice of individual items be based on "visual indifference": no element of personal preference could be allowed to enter into it. One way Duchamp sought to enforce this condition was by committing himself to designate some object as a readymade at a predetermined future moment when (presumably) he did not know where he would be or what would be available. The result would be "like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but *at such and such an hour* . It is a kind

of rendezvous." What he sought to avoid, he said, was responsibility; he would leave behind works, but he was not their maker.[2]

Duchamp's notion that the absence of habit was an important condition of freedom was another of his ties to Jules Laforgue. In a posthumously published fragment, Laforgue wrote that "the idea of liberty would be to live *without any habits* . Oh, what a dream! What a dream! It's enough to drive you crazy! a whole existence without a single act being generated or influenced by habit. Every act an *act in itself* ."[3] Laforgue's dream of an existence free of fixity developed out of the impersonal poetics of Mallarmé, whose writing Duchamp admired and whose allusive, fluid, musical style is echoed in *Young Man and Girl in Spring* , where the indeterminate freedom of the two figures is signaled by their having no faces. Early in his artistic career Duchamp's personal fluidity and lack of fixity appear as a kind of natural impulse, expressed in his rapid passage from one style of painting to another. In 1915 (around the time when the notion of readymades was occurring to him) he told a New York reporter that his methods were constantly changing and that his most recent work was "utterly unlike anything that preceded it"; he sought no definitive form of expression, and "in the midst of each epoch I fully realize that a new epoch will dawn."[4]

By the time Duchamp offered this self-description, however, the period in his life to which it applied was past. In 1912 he committed himself to long years of devotion to a single work, the Large Glass. The stable identity this gave him was partly undercut by the Glass's quality as a "delay" that kept him, like its subject, in perpetual suspension, and partly by his inability or refusal to finish it. All the same, his earlier way of embodying fluidity was gone, and what had formerly appeared as a spontaneous impulse to be always moving on now became self-conscious and in need of different forms of support. Late in his life, Duchamp told an interviewer: "I force myself to contradict myself so as to avoid conforming to my own taste."[5] That he was seeking new ways to avoid leaving a personal imprint on his work after 1912 is suggested by his use of mechanical drawing for several images in the Glass, the glider, chocolate grinder, and oculist witnesses; such drawing, he later explained, "upholds no taste, since it is outside pictorial conven-

tion." It was one way in which he sought visual form for what he called the "beauty of indifference."[6]

It was during his years of work on the Large Glass that Duchamp also adopted a more radical strategy for undermining the stability and coherence of his own identity: his assumption of a second and female persona as Rrose Sélavy. We shall meet Rrose more at length later on, but her ties to the goal of breaking the link between personality and artistic style are announced in one of the projects Duchamp attributed to her: it was to sign some well-

known pictures with the name of an unknown artist or one known to work in a contrasting style, or to sign unknown pictures with a name that called up an easily recognizable but quite opposed visual language. "*The difference between the 'treatment' and the name which the 'experts' don't expect—is the authentic work* of Rrose Sélavy and foils imitations."**[7]**

Duchamp's notion that readymades provided a defense against any formed and stable identity has not been used as a basis for understanding them as often as accounts, like Greenberg's, that emphasize the way they elevate shock, scandal, and mystification to ends in themselves. However, we need to give close attention to both purposes. Duchamp valued these objects at least as much for the effect they could have on his own person and persona as for their impact on the larger world of artistic practice, and only by tracing their roots in his personal universe of preoccupations can we grasp how they came to be part of his repertoire and how they migrated into the realm of public art.

Most commentators are content to regard all Duchamp's readymades as forming a single group, inspired by the same aims and goals. Such a view makes understanding the readymades impossible, because it blots out the features of them that only become visible by tracing their evolution. Duchamp himself pointed the way to recovering these features, when he reminded interviewers that his first interest in ordinary objects was not directed by the concerns he later brought to them, and that the term "readymade" did not exist until 1915, two years after he began to acquire (and in some cases to alter) objects that would later be named with it. These readymades *avant la lettre* were the bicycle wheel he mounted on a wooden stool in 1913, the reproduction of a banal

landscape to which he added red and green dots, giving it the name *Pharmacy* in January of 1914, and the metal rack for drying bottles he purchased and put in his studio later in the same year.

Speaking about them to Pierre Cabanne in 1966, Duchamp insisted that these early objects were not intended as provocations, and that he did not start out by thinking of them as "art." They were mere "distractions," things he bought or did for no particular reason-at least none that he was able or willing to recall by then. The first part of this account, that the objects were not intended to be provocative or to take the place of "art," seems confirmed by the circumstances in which Duchamp turned to them, but we cannot accept the claim that his attraction was casual and unmotivated. His failure to remember the source of his interest veiled the objects' links to a set of intensely personal concerns and interests, whose role in bringing forth

readymades contradicts his later view of them as inspired by indifference.

To understand what drew Duchamp to his early objects we must call up one feature of his personality that has concerned us only a little so far, namely his powerful—at times it seems nearly uncontrollable—fascination with puns. He punned happily in some of the cartoons he did for satirical papers while still a student, for instance in the conversation in "Flirt" (1907), where a piano's ability to give an aural impression of ocean waves is attributed to its being a *piano aqueux* , turning the French term for a grand piano (*piano à queue* , "with a tail") into "watery piano." Later he would take pleasure in playful and complicated sentences, some dizzying and more or less untranslatable like "esquivons les ecchymoses des Esquimaux aux mots exquis," some singingly sexual like "Faut-il mettre la moelle de l'épée dans le poil de l'aimée?" (cleverly rendered by Elmer Peterson as "Should you put the hilt of the foil in the quilt of the goil?"), some simple and silly, such as "moustiques domestiques demistock" (half-stock domestic mosquitoes); and there were dozens of others. One of the best known was the phonetic sentence he wrote beneath his altered version of the Mona Lisa (to which we will return later), *L.H.O.O.Q.* ("elle a chaud au cul," "she has a hot ass"); but this was only one of many similar games: *L.M.A.P.* (either: "elle est ma p[épée]," "she is my broad"; or "elle aime à p[omper]," "she likes to suck"), *L.H.I.E.O.P.I.* ("elle a chié au pays,"

"she shat in the country"). According to Gianfranco Baruchello, Duchamp kept a box under his bed "full of pages and pages" of such things.**[8]**

A person so open to games like these is one for whom the world is, as Baudelaire put it, a "forest of symbols," a constant invitation to decode hidden relationships beneath the apparent inertness of sounds and objects. The Large Glass has its share of puns: the first syllables of *mar* iée and *cél* ibataires combine to produce his own name; the nonsensical adverb that concludes the title slyly proclaims that the bride loves him, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* [*m'aime*]; the "oculist witnesses" carry a voyeuristic sexual innuendo, oculiste = au culiste, repeated in the business card of Rrose Sélavy (herself a pun, "éros c'est la vie"), which offered "precision oculism" (*L.H.O.O.Q.* contains nearly the same word play). In the notes, the Large Glass was described as a "machine agricole," or farm machine, which in French suggests the equivalent "machine du champ," field machine or Duchampian machine. (The phrase may also have echoed the title of a Laforgue poem, "Comice agricole," or "Country Fair.") Strangely, no evidence seems to exist that Duchamp was aware of the pun that linked the Large Glass with his turn to ordinary objects: a bride stripped bare is a ready maid. But it seems impossible that he did not know.

The all-pervasive presence of puns in Duchamp's world of imagination shows

that his was a mind that constantly slid back and forth between one potential meaning of a sign and another, giving birth to multiple significations where conventional expectations did not suggest any. His later insistence that the readymades were based on "indifference" has kept interpreters from seeing how such plays of meaning linked them to things he cared greatly about. Admittedly, the evidence for the readings that follow depends on inference, and some people may decide to remain unconvinced, particularly those who cherish Duchamp as an icon of meaninglessness or a witness to the irrelevance of any artist's or author's intentions. But of the three objects he later described as "distractions," one is a simple visual pun, and the others call up major themes in the Large Glass and in the personal evolution that led him to it, through the kinds of idea and word play he loved so much. Later on we will see that opening ourselves up to the same playful presence of meaningful connections where convention seems to ex-

Figure 37.
Duchamp, *Pharmacy* (1914)

clude them will reveal a hitherto unsuspected but closely woven network of linkages joining many of Duchamp's other objects.

The simple visual pun was the proto-readymade called *Pharmacy* , produced by altering a coloring-book landscape bought in an art supply store (Fig. 37). The landscape contained two lights in the background, which could be

colored in; by making one red and one green, and then labeling the scene, Duchamp created a play between them and the tubes of red and green liquid that are the universal sign of French apothecary shops. But behind this gesture lay a personal story: in 1911 Duchamp's favorite sister, Suzanne, had married a pharmacist, a marriage that was breaking up just at the moment when Duchamp executed his "distraction," in the half-light of a train taking him to visit his family in Normandy. (It was an earlier visit, soon after the wedding, that had helped inspire the image of himself as a *Sad Young Man on a Train* .) Associating Suzanne's failed marriage partner with the banality

of the coloring-book landscape was a not-too-subtle act of aggression against him.**[9]**

Pharmacy shows that Duchamp's turn to ordinary objects gave scope to his penchant for puns in visual form, adding weight to the evidence that points to similar links between sign and meaning in the other proto-readymades. The first of these, the bicycle wheel, was not really a readymade at all, since its everyday state is to be mounted on a bicycle frame, and even if Duchamp found one by itself in a shop, he still had to take the trouble of attaching it to a stool in order to make it serve his purpose (Fig. 38). The basic lineaments of that purpose seem hard to overlook. No idea was more important in his work than the idea of motion; in 1913, when he put the wheel in his studio, Duchamp had recently abandoned the interest in linear motion and the "dissolution of form" evidenced in *Sad Young Man on a Train, Nude Descending a Staircase* , and the various images of "speedy" or "swift" nudes, in favor of a type of movement that remains suspended in a space it never traverses—a "delay." The Large Glass contained (since we are in 1913 we should say was to contain) two objects whose action of turning on an axis while going nowhere is echoed by the mounted wheel—the chocolate grinder and the waterwheel. The bicycle wheel, altered so that its circular movement no longer produced linear progression, precisely captured Duchamp's shift of interest from the first form of motion to the second, a reminder of the turn his career had taken and of the Glass that was now his major project. In addition, mounting the wheel—*roue* —on a stool—*sel* — created an eminently Rousselian tribute to the writer whose "delirium of imagination" he found so remarkable.**[10]**

That Duchamp understood his appropriation of the bicycle wheel in just this way, as enclosing the attempt to achieve linear motion within an imagined, interior space, is suggested by a drawing he did in 1914, *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun* (*Avoir l'apprenti dans le soleil* , Fig. 39). It shows a cyclist, mounted on a bicycle and bent over as if putting effort into pedaling, but the bicycle rides on a string that is quickly declared to be a mere drawn line, not a possible high wire, because it stretches between the fourth line of one musical staff and the space above another, its bottom end beginning in

a loop and its top one suspended in space. Duchamp locates the subject of his drawing in

Figure 38.
Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel* (1913)
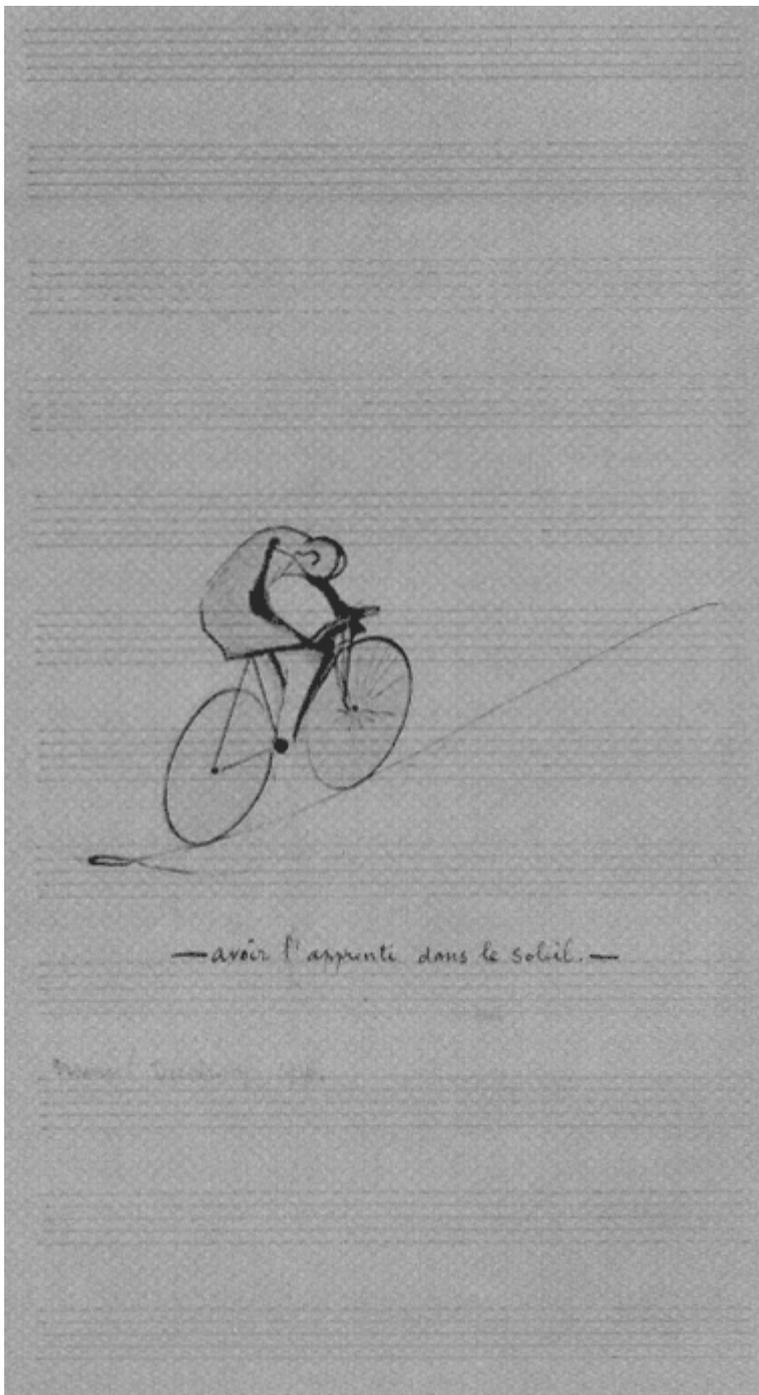
Figure 39.
Duchamp, *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun* (1914)
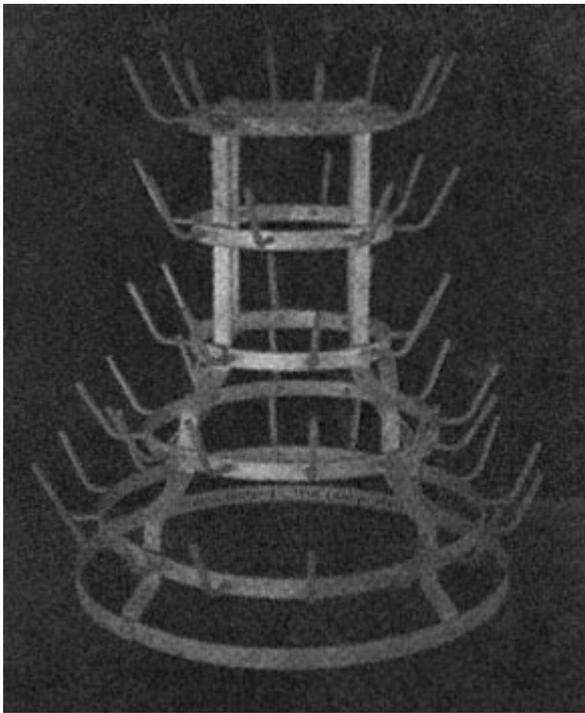
Figure 40.
Duchamp, *Bottle Rack* (1961 reproduction of lost original, 1914)

a region beyond physical experience like that of the Large Glass by giving it a nonsense title, foreshadowing the inscriptions later attached to the readymades, and the cyclist's appearance of straining to climb a slope whose top remains beyond reach echoes the image of the bride as a motorcar that "roars triumphantly" at the moment when it is "exhausted by hope." Putting the drawing on music paper recalls the symbolist celebration of music as the exemplary art of interiority, the quality Walter Pater had in mind when he famously declared that "All art aspires to the condition of music." Duchamp's drawing puts the bicyclist—and by implication the mounted wheel as well—inside that condition, the transformation of physical motion into inwardness that he called delay.

Just as closely linked to the bride and the bachelors was the third of the early or proto-readymades, the bottle rack (Fig. 40). Its symbolism is so direct and apparent that one might hesitate to think Duchamp had it in mind, if we did not know how readily he pounced on such sexual associations: the rack asks to be completed by having wet bottles

hung on its prongs, a desire that can only be characterized as obviously, laughably Freudian. (Its form also recalls the phallic appurtenances of the first drawing Duchamp named with the figures of bride and bachelors, the one done in Munich [Fig. 26].) Not surprisingly, this interpretation of the rack was proposed by Arturo Schwarz (whose fondness for Freudian readings

of everything has been, to put it kindly, exemplary) while Duchamp was still alive, and according to Schwarz Duchamp accepted it. That he did is another strike against the claim that the readymades were chosen out of indifference, but Schwarz was unable to see how neatly the rack echoes the major themes of the Large Glass, because in his eyes everything Duchamp did had to be brought back to the incestual fantasies about Suzanne. What makes the rack resonate so perfectly with the Glass is the absence of the bottles for which the prongs call out (nothing easier than to provide some), so that the female counterpart to the symbolic male anatomy exists only by being imagined; male and female await each other in fantasy, while being denied—or spared—physical contact. As in the Large Glass the male realm is that of ordinary time and space (its symbolic equivalent resting firmly on the ground) while, above it, the female one beckons out of the immaterial world of the imagination, casting the relations between them into a region of perpetual delay. We shall see that very similar combinations of male/female reference would animate two of his more famous readymades, the urinal labeled *Fountain* and the altered Mona Lisa.[11]

Neither in turning the landscape print into *Pharmacy* nor in placing the bicycle wheel and bottle rack in his studio was Duchamp acting out of indifference. He was instead appropriating found objects as signs of his own preoccupations, projecting his inner cosmos of associations onto things encountered in everyday life. He converted the objects into elements of a private symbolic language, counterparts of the symbols that he was planning for the Large Glass, and equally illustrative of the notion to which he later said he was moving around 1912, that. "an artist might use anything—a dot, a line, the most conventional or unconventional symbol—to say what he wanted to say." Duchamp's turn to ordinary items of use did not begin with the bicycle wheel and the bottle rack, but with the catalogue pictures of uniforms and the choco-
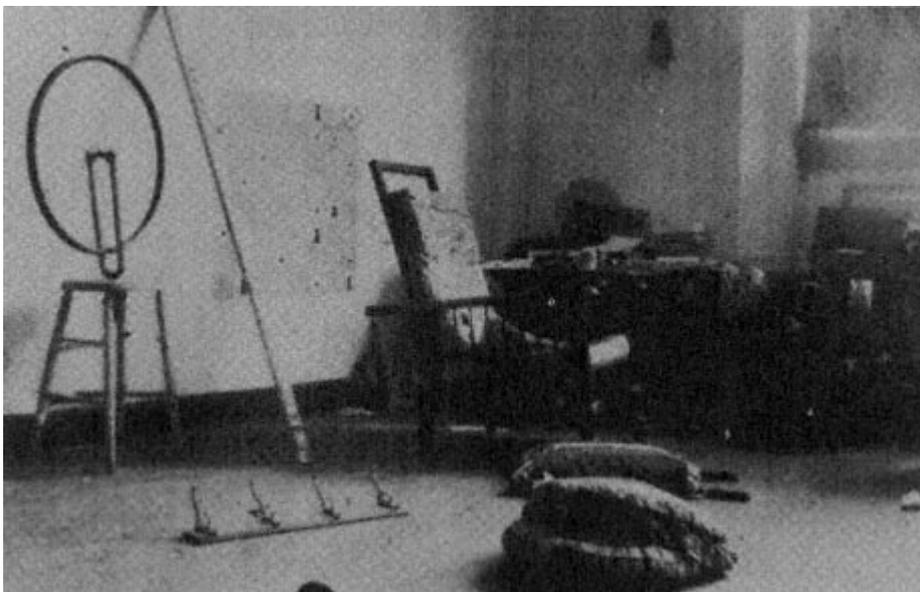
Figure 41.
Photo of Duchamp's studio in New York, c. 1917-18

late grinder; for the wheel and the rack to stand for definite ideas made them function like the malic molds, which symbolized the social identities that erotic arousal dissolved into pure maleness, and the grinder, which stood for male autoeroticism. The difference was that they were not intended to be publicly shown, and so spoke their metaphorical message to Duchamp alone.

Even after he began to employ the term "readymade" in 1915 and to choose some objects on the later basis of indifference, Duchamp continued to use them to populate his private universe. Visitors to his studio in New York were struck by the way he had filled it with what seemed to them mysterious objects; in 1917 Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia described him there, inhabiting what she called "a kind of Capernaum, surrounded by chosen objects"; a contemporary photo shows something of what she meant (see Fig. 41). She could perceive only disorder in the collection (that is what a "Capernaum" means) because Duchamp alone knew the private language in which his objects spoke to him.[12]

To make visual images into symbols for ideas, as opposed to the pic-

torial conventions that made them stand for things in the world, was part of the turn Duchamp's activities were taking after his return from Munich, his rejection of what he would later call "retinal art." In 1913 he wrote in a note: "Can one make works which are not works of 'art?' "[13] We cannot come upon this question now without seeing its relevance to the departures Duchamp would make in the years to come, but in reading it we need to remember that he had not yet established readymades as a category nor begun to think of ordinary objects as alternatives to paintings. In the context of what he was doing in 1913, the question meant something closer to what he intended in calling the Large Glass a "delay," that is, a work that was not a "picture" in the sense of a set of images representing things outside itself, but a network of symbols that remained within its own complex universe of ideas. The projects Duchamp imagined as responses to this question were similarly conceived to evoke mental contents instead of representing objects: one was the proposal we took note of earlier, in which two identical but differently sized objects (deck chairs were the homey example) could provoke optical illusions suggestive of the fourth dimension.

Whether these early objects contained some inherent potential to enter the sphere of "art," even without Duchamp being conscious of it, we need not try to decide here. There is no doubt, however, about what it was that actually transformed them into art objects: it was Duchamp's trip to

America. That he found a word for the readymades there was only part of what happened. Equally important was the reception he and his pictures were given, and the new ways of relating to the public this created.

Duchamp's American fame, as we noted at the start, was both explosive and paradoxical, plucking him out of obscurity while veiling his particular features, causing him, as he later put it, to disappear behind his picture. Such a way of appearing in public without recognizable features was precisely what the later Duchamp would seek, the very artistic persona he cultivated through the turn to readymades.**[14]** But the commotion over Duchamp at the Armory Show had the additional feature that it made him a celebrity by virtue of the very mystery and uncertainty radiating from his work; he became the representative of

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modern art because the puzzle about what was being represented in *Nude Descending a Staircase* encouraged viewers to associate the picture's diffuse, vaguely sexual energy with the avant-garde's rejection of tradition, its ambiguous, contestatory spirit, and its vague promise of entry into realms of perception beyond the everyday.

Duchamp's status as the representative vanguard artist gave him a kind of abstract, charismatic power, cut loose from the particular content or meaning of his work, allowing him to move his audience not just in spite of his incomprehensibility but because of it. When his American viewers professed to find in the *Nude* such objects as "Food Descending a Staircase," "disused golf clubs and bags," "half-made leather saddles," "an elevated railroad stairway in ruins after an earthquake," a "heap of broken violins," or "an explosion in a shingle factory," they were joining him in the project of injecting humor into art, and extending his challenge to traditional notions of what art was and was not. Had derision been the only response to Duchamp at the Armory Show, the implication of this back talk would have been to resist such transformation, but his actual reception instead signaled that in America there was an audience in its own way as ready as he to contest existing ideas about art by expanding its precincts toward objects and experiences excluded before.**[15]**

In his early responses to America he nearly said as much. From the first he praised the young country to his hosts, describing it in his first interview as the only place where, given the baleful atmosphere of wartime Europe, there were people "yearning, searching, trying to find something."**[16]** Although he tried to explain the mistake viewers made in looking for a real figure in the *Nude* —the picture represented no object but "an abstraction of movement"—he did not think the public unable to respond to the larger goal of the new art, declaring at one point, "I think it is more the execution than the spirit which is misunderstood and not comprehended." He put forth that

expression of confidence in America during a joint interview with Albert Gleizes, Francis Picabia, and Jean Crotti, all of whom described America as a fertile ground for the development of vanguard art. In the interview, the most fully worked-out account of this harmony came from Marius de Zayas, a Mexican-born caricaturist and critic who lived in New

York, worked with the photographer and gallery owner Alfred Stieglitz, and visited Paris in 1910 to learn about recent currents in modernism. De Zayas's comments on America deserve to be quoted at length; if they do not exactly represent Duchamp's own sentiments, they convey ideas that were being expressed in his presence, and whose general import he approved.

> In all times art has been the synthesis of the beliefs of peoples. In America this synthesis is an impossibility because all beliefs exist here together. One lives here in the present, in a continuous struggle to adapt one's self to the milieu. There are innumerable social groups which work to obtain general laws. But no one observes them. Each individual remains isolated, struggling for his own physical and intellectual existence. In the United States there is no general sentiment in any sphere of thought. America has the same complex mentality as the modern artist; the same eternal sequence of emotions and sensibility to surroundings; the same continual need of expressing itself in the present and for the present, with joy in action, and with indifference to "arriving." For it is in action that America, like the modern artist, finds joy.

Such a view of modern art, sacrificing the specifically aesthetic goals of fauves or cubists to the broad project of freeing art from all general standards, thereby making it primarily an active response to present conditions and a form of expression cut loose from traditional aesthetic means and goals, seems almost a prophecy of what many of Duchamp's later admirers—along with some of his critics—would find exemplary in his career. Duchamp himself on this occasion agreed enough with De Zayas to argue that vanguard artists were all working toward a shared goal, each one in a particular, individual way, concluding that "Art is all a matter of personality."**[17]**

Duchamp spoke about his own personality on this occasion in terms of constant change in style and manner, declaring (as we noted above), "In the midst of each epoch I fully realize that a new epoch will dawn." He did not associate this fluidity with the readymades, as he later would, but in the atmosphere that surrounded the French artists trans-

planted to New York, a move like the one that would lead him to offer ordinary objects as art seemed just around the corner. In fact Duchamp was not the only person to make it; at the time he chose a snow shovel as the first designated readymade, Duchamp was sharing a studio on lower Broadway with Jean Crotti, a young Swiss artist who would later marry his sister Suzanne, released from her tie to the pharmacist. Interviewing the two together early in 1916, a reporter for *The Evening World* noted that Duchamp was already well known for the *Nude* , "the sensation of the Armory Exhibition three years ago." But it was Crotti who had most to say about two objects given a prominent place in the shared studio: a pair of muddy rubber galoshes, which he was quoted as declaring "much more interesting and decorative than a pretty woman, considered from the point of view of art," and a "huge, shiny shovel suspended from the ceiling," over which he exclaimed: "As an artist I consider that shovel the most beautiful object I have ever seen." The beauty of women appealed to him as a man, but it had nothing to do with what he was seeking as an artist. Along with the work of the two young Europeans, these opinions caused the writer to say that the gallery show where both would soon be exhibiting would be a kind of "world championship" of "the eccentric and the new in art."

That it was Crotti and not Duchamp who had most to say about these objects—one of which, the pair of galoshes, perhaps deserves a place it has never received in the history of the readymades—is only one remarkable feature of their joint interview. Equally revealing about the situation in which Duchamp's readymades became public art is the mix of shock and matter-of-fact acceptance with which the journalist reported on his encounter with the two artists, so outlandish in their views that nothing they did or said deserved surprise. Crotti had serious reasons for valuing ordinary objects: they underscored art's distance from nature and from sentiment, its search for the imperceptible lineaments of pure form. But his words also make clear that he understood the shock value of his ideas, which were bound to leave his hearers gaping in uncertainty about whether he meant what he said or not. Was he pointing to some profound truth or laughing behind people's backs? It was this ambiguity that made irony the medium through which Duchamp and his friends were bound to relate to their audience,

especially in America. Duchamp had been no stranger to irony before, as we have already seen at length, but it was in New York that irony first became a defining feature of his relation to the public, drawn to him precisely in response to the uncertainty of his intentions. Being in America encouraged Duchamp to give greater scope to this side of his personality: was he a figure of mystery or of *blague* ? Was he pretending when he seemed to be serious or when he appeared to be joking?

Once the atmosphere surrounding Duchamp and his friends in New York is recalled, it is not hard to see how it encouraged him to look differently on the objects which had so far born only a private symbolism and spoken to him alone. Thinking about them as "art" was just the sort of action—comic and yet mysteriously serious—that his American hosts expected of him. It may be that an additional encouragement to take this turn came from the circumstance that, in the midst of all his celebrity, he had no new work to offer. In contrast to what he would later say, he did not attribute this to having made some major decision against painting at the time of his trip to Munich; he merely declared that putting the manner of the *Nude* and the king and queen pictures behind him showed his penchant for constant movement and his lack of attachment to any single style. Nor did he speak about the Large Glass as a project that drew his energies away from more traditional painting; he accounted for the fact that "I have not painted a single picture since coming over" to America by saying that the active and interesting life he was leading in New York made him "very happy.... Perhaps rather too happy."**[18]**

This was the context within which he wrote in mid-January 1916 to his sister Suzanne, telling her that he had bought some objects and treated them as readymade by signing them and giving them English inscriptions; one was the snow shovel (whether it was the same one that Crotti would speak about in the April interview seems impossible to say), which he labeled—Duchamp's first public attempt to speak nonsense in English—*In Advance of the Broken Arm* (Fig. 42), and a second, unspecified (and now unknown, since it has disappeared), titled *Emergency in Favor of Twice* . (Although it is tempting to ask whether it might have been the pair of galoshes, the answer seems at best doubtful, since the inscription might too easily appear to have a literal con-
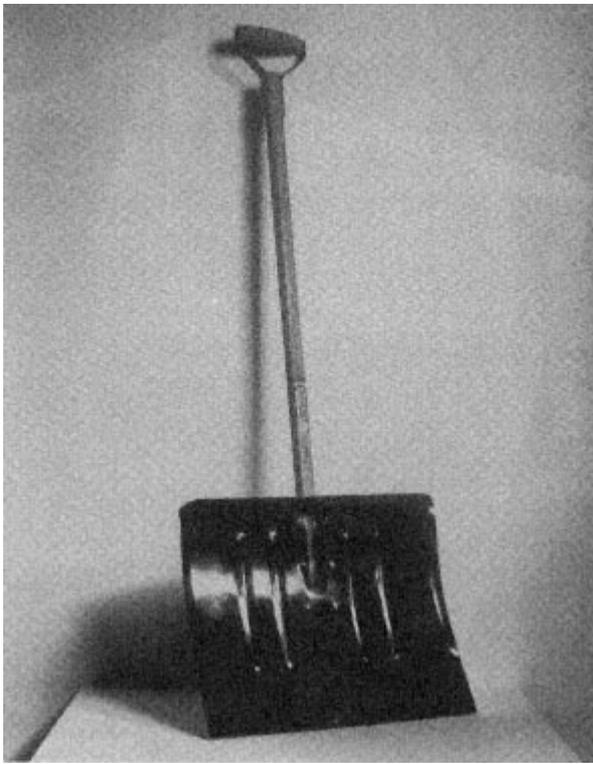
Figure 42.
Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1916)

nection with them.) Reminding her of the bicycle wheel and the bottle rack that had been in his studio—by then cleaned out, so that unbeknownst to him the objects were already lost—he proposed to treat the rack as a readymade "from a distance," asking Suzanne to write an inscription inside its bottom ring and sign it for him.**[19]**

At this point the category of readymades clearly existed, but it seems not to have been as capacious as it later became. Although he mentioned the wheel to Suzanne, Duchamp did not propose to include it with the other objects, perhaps because, having been altered by mounting on a stool, it had not been taken up like an item of ready-to-wear clothing from a shop; nor was there any reference to *Pharmacy* . Could it be that the reason Duchamp soon thought up the idea of "assisted readymades" was in order to make room for these objects? Of the things he would designate in the months to come, one was altered in a manner analogous to the wheel, the ball of string mounted between two brass plates joined together by long screws (an unknown object

was placed inside the string, which made a sound when the assemblage was shaken, hence the title *With Hidden Noise* [Fig. 43]), while the other paralleled *Pharmacy* , an advertisement for Sapolin paints punningly transformed into *Apolinère Enameled* (Fig. 44). In addition, two unaltered

readymades joined the group at this time, one a comb, apparently chosen following the recipe in his notes for planning to designate a readymade at a given future time, and the other an Underwood typewriter cover, perhaps from the typewriter Duchamp himself seems to have acquired at the same time (something more will be said about it in the next chapter). His notes also contain the proposal—never acted on—to "find an inscription for the Woolworth Building as a readymade."

Nothing survives to tell us what Duchamp had in mind in assembling this series of "works," but it seems that neither his later notion of the genre as a liberation from habit nor his later sense that they were part of a campaign against art was in play, the first because Duchamp already regarded himself as a person in constant motion between styles without having to rely on the readymades, and the second because none of them had the provocative edge the genre would acquire a few months later when the famous urinal was submitted to an exhibition. Duchamp's early comments on New York stressed the qualities that made it hospitable to advanced art, and Crotti's enthusiasm for the galoshes and the snow shovel, expressed in Duchamp's presence, was premised on the ability of such objects to represent what set art off from nature, not on a rejection of aesthetic values. That Duchamp first experienced the readymades as continuous with his artistic preoccupations at the time, and not as a way of turning against art, is made still more likely by the linguistic link between the term and the forever ready maid of the Large Glass; nothing would have been more in character than for him to have been initially attracted to the English word when he first encountered it by the punning reference it recreated to the project on which he had recently begun to work, so that applying the term to the objects he had previously assembled located them in an imaginary realm of echoes and allusions to the drama of eternalized desire, of whose existence only he was then aware.

At the same time, the turn to readymades gave Duchamp a way to

Figure 43.
Duchamp, *With Hidden Noise* (1916)

Figure 44.
Duchamp, *Apolinère Enameled* (1916-17)

be active artistically at a time when he had no other "works" to offer to a curious and interested public, one whose response to him suggested it would accept whatever he did as "art." The group for whom they were intended seems to have been limited to just this public; most were quickly acquired

by the Arensbergs for their private collection (according to one story the shovel was brought to their apartment immediately on being inscribed, where it was received with amusement that must have been tempered by the awe in which Arensberg clearly held Duchamp), and only the typewriter cover seems to have been displayed in a gallery, where it attracted little notice.**[20]**

What happened next forever changed the status of Duchamp's readymades, putting all of them in a different light. This was the gesture of sending an ordinary porcelain urinal, mounted on its side, signed "R. Mutt" ("R" for *richard* , French for moneybags, and "Mutt" from the comic-strip companion of "Jeff") and titled *Fountain* , to the exhibition organized by a group calling itself the Society of Independent Artists. Although Duchamp's urinal is usually taken to be one of his most outrageous and aggressive acts of "anti-art," his decision to display it looks a bit different when put in context. The manner of organizing the show was almost enough in itself to provoke some such challenge; artists were placed alphabetically within it, and its motto was "no jury, no prizes." Submitting the urinal seems to have been more a way to test the bona fides of the organizing committee—would they really take anything?—than an affront to the public; in the atmosphere we have been discussing, some viewers might well have enjoyed likening the urinal to other works whose claim to being art they doubted (one critic called the show "democracy run riot"), a comparison unknown artists desirous of being taken seriously would not have welcomed. The committee (Duchamp was a member, but the others, perhaps suspecting who lurked behind "R. Mutt," did not consult him) acknowledged its own principles sufficiently not to reject the urinal officially, placing it behind a partition where it seems nobody saw it.**[21]**

The incident recalled Duchamp's contretemps with the Salon des Indépendants five years earlier; in both cases his work pitted him more against his fellow artists than against the public. Now, however, Duchamp was prepared to exploit the incident instead of fleeing. Writing

to his sister he said that he had resigned from the committee, but that what had happened would be "a scandal of some value in New York."**[22]** Together with his friends Louise Norton, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood, all members of the Arensberg circle and all, like Arensberg himself, in on the ploy from the start, Duchamp now set out to cultivate the scandal, publicizing the incident and getting it written up in newspapers. In fact, in the letter recounting the story to his sister (before whom he had no reason to dissemble) Duchamp said that the urinal had been sent in not by him but by "one of my female friends." Without diminishing Duchamp's central role in giving the readymades a new life at this moment, we need to recognize that others were also involved; the gesture in fact grew out of the whole atmosphere that surrounded the avant-garde in general and Duchamp, as its

exemplary representative, in particular in New York just before America's entry into the war.**[23]**

For all that, *Fountain* resembled the earlier objects Duchamp had picked out in that it too was able to stand as a symbol of his own artistic—and personal—preoccupations. Like the bottle rack, although with a different rhetoric, it called up the imaginary relations between male and female personae that existed in his conception of the Large Glass. The urinal functioned as a "male" object in its ordinary use, but its shapely, curvilinear form suggests elements of a female body, especially when turned to place its narrow lip upward, as in the photo Duchamp had Alfred Stieglitz do of it (Fig. 45). This was recognized at the time, for instance by Carl Van Vechten, a journalist and critic tied to the Arensberg circle, who wrote to Gertrude Stein that "the photographs make it look like anything from a Madonna to a Buddha."**[24]**

Extracted from its context and turned so that it cannot be used as intended, the urinal has become a female presence forever removed from the male action that would bring it into the world of ordinary experience, a representation of "delay" in the sense of the Large Glass and a kind of female counterpart of the bottle rack. In Duchamp's *Box of 1914* , the first and briefest installment in the serial publication of his notes, there appears the enigmatic declaration: "—one only has: for *female* the public urinal [*pissotière*] and one lives by it."**[25]** None of Duchamp's sybilline utterances have remained more impenetrable than
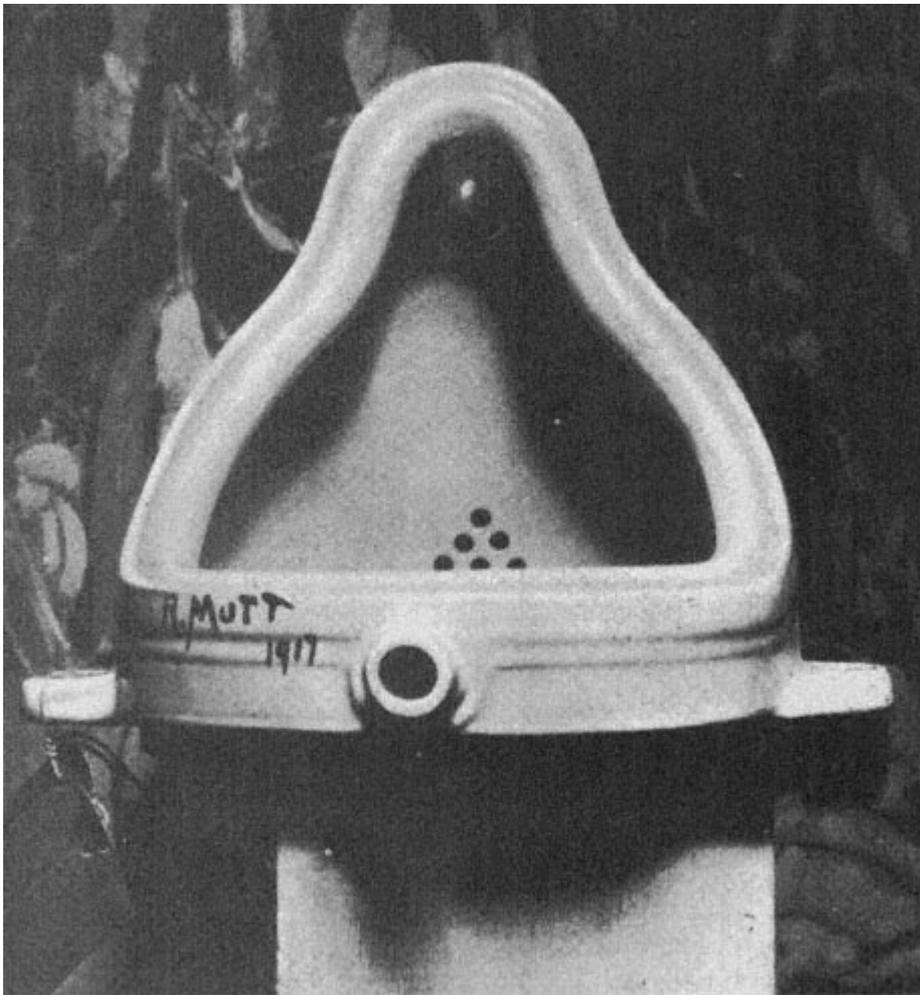
Figure 45.
Alfred Stieglitz's photo of *Fountain* (1917)

this one, but it begins to make sense if read as a thought about a possible female object to correspond to the male bottle rack, which he took into his life at roughly the time he wrote this note. Whether that reading is on the mark or not, it is clear that Duchamp had the urinal in his mind several years before 1917, at a time when the category of readymades did not yet exist, and when the objects that would later be included in it still remained within a private universe of symbols.

Tied in this way to his inner world, *Fountain* also entered the field

of irony where Duchamp met his public. At the time, several claims were made for it that recall Crotti's enthusiasm for the galoshes and the snow shovel, both in their content and in their ambiguous seriousness. Beatrice Wood reported that Walter Arensberg tried to convince another member of the organizing committee that the work should be shown by arguing that "a lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose; therefore a

man clearly has made an aesthetic contribution.... Mr. Mutt has taken an ordinary object, placed it so that its useful significance disappears, and thus has created a new approach to the subject."[26] Louise Norton published an article called "Buddha of the Bathroom" in *The Blind Man* , a short-lived journal put out by Duchamp and his friends. Against the complaints of indecency, she proclaimed the readymade's "chaste simplicity of line and color," noting that some had compared it to a Buddha, others to women's legs in paintings by Cézanne; she justified the second comparison by proposing a visual pun wholly in Duchamp's spirit: "have they not, those ladies, in their long, round nudity always recalled to your mind the calm curves of decadent plumbers' porcelain?" *Fountain* , she insisted, was "not made by a plumber but by the force of an imagination."

But faced with the question "Is he serious or is he joking?" Norton's reply was: "Perhaps he is both! Is it not possible?" Given the contradiction between modern society's celebration of progress and change and its backward-looking yearning for stability, she went on, was it surprising that artists responded with *blague* ? The best equivalent she could offer for the work's combination of outlandish parody and serious seeking after pure form was the ironical word of the symbolist critic Rémy de Gourmont: "perhaps."[27] Norton did not add that it was Gourmont who said of the personal art rooted in the interior of individuals—for him and his symbolist colleagues the only true art—that such work was always "more or less incomprehensible."

Some portion of *Fountain* 's complex of private resonance and public ambiguity reappears in the other of Duchamp's great challenges to artistic convention, the altered Mona Lisa. Taking a postcard reproduction of Leonardo's portrait, Duchamp added a moustache and beard,
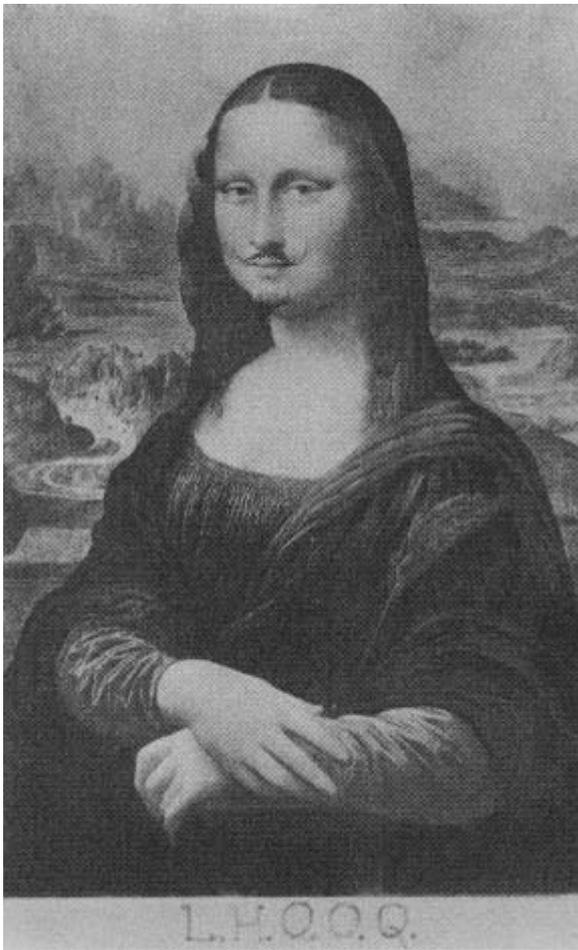
Figure 46.
Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919)

writing underneath the now-famous legend *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Fig. 46). The scandal of treating so revered a masterpiece so disrespectfully has made it difficult to see in Duchamp's gesture anything more than a piece of dada iconoclasm, and at times he described it this way himself. But here too the work's ability to outrage viewers hides its complex reference to Duchamp's inner world. Taken together, his two additions to Leonardo's picture—the legend and the facial hair—make her a representation of a desiring woman who produces on her own body the symbols of the male whose desire corresponds to hers. Like the bride of the Large Glass, she has become a female figure who remains fully clothed while imagining her own stripping, her desire blossoming out

of her in such a way that it causes her to project an image of the generalized partner who remains forever just out of her reach; meanwhile the Mona Lisa we see is only a reduced projection of the other, real one, who remains serene and pure, the apotheosis of feminine mystery, in another "dimension," a place where the bachelor Duchamp cannot touch her.

Duchamp had no hostile feelings toward Leonardo; quite the contrary, the Renaissance master represented the more intellectual and conceptual kind of painting he preferred over the "retinal art" of nineteenth-century realist schools. As he recalled later on, he did not display his altered Mona Lisa in any exhibit: "I drew a moustache and a beard, that's all. I didn't show it anywhere." André Breton may have known about it, but it came to public light only when Francis Picabia saw it as Duchamp, in Paris during 1919, was about to pack it in his bag to go back to New York. Picabia then published a version of it in the dada magazine, *391* .**[28]** We will never know exactly what Duchamp's intentions for making the piece public were, but for some time at least it existed as a private object, an emblem of his own preoccupations; like other readymades, it migrated later from this personal realm to the public space where its import necessarily altered.

It seems, moreover, that in Duchamp's own mind his revised Mona Lisa never lost its reference to the mental universe of the Large Glass. The evidence for this is that later on, at the time he was working on *Given* , he did another version of the Mona Lisa readymade, transforming it in a way precisely parallel to the "completion" of the Large Glass provided by his posthumous work. The second Mona Lisa, done in 1965, consisted of a playing-card photo of Leonardo's painting, bearing the same five letters below it, but without the facial hair. Underneath he wrote *rasée* , shaven (Fig. 47). No one at the time could understand the reference to the still unknown figure of *Given* that surfaces as soon as the two works are juxtaposed. The female depicted there was hairless too, a condition that, like the Mona Lisa's, deprived her sexuality of the veil of mystery and ambiguity it had worn before. What remained was a classic woman, degraded by a treatment that made her sexual nature manifest in the crudest possible way. The second Mona Lisa retains the label that proclaims her desire, but she has lost the ability to make her
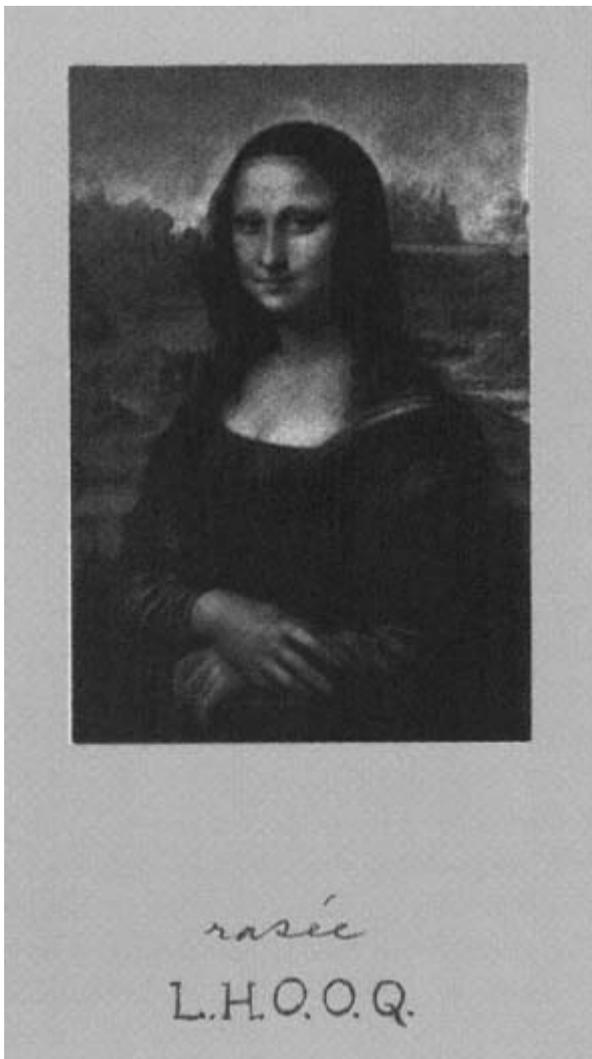
Figure 47.
Duchamp, *L.H.O.O.Q., Shaven* (1965)

person the place where the symbols of the partner she does not have blossom forth; so has the female figure in *Given* lost the power to project the bachelor imagery of the Large Glass, the male symbols that were necessary figures in the fantasy theater of the bride's self-imagination as an apotheosis of virginity, "elements of this blossoming, the sexual life imagined by her the bride-desiring." Both have passed from being doubly gendered to having only a single sexual identity, and each thus returns to the world of ordinary bodies, her desire reduced to the purely prosaic and material level where its representation takes

the form of a rude joke. Only the importance the Mona Lisa readymade bore in the economy of Duchamp's private universe of meanings explains the necessity for redoing it in this way.

The original operation Duchamp performed on the Mona Lisa in 1919, giving a male identity to a female figure, probably helped to inspire the opposite turn he gave to his own person a year later, when he reinvented himself as Rrose Sélavy. The two dually gendered figures share several features. The photographs of himself as Rrose, suitably dressed and made up, which he had Man Ray do in 1920 and 1921, have something of the same enigmatic quality that is classically associated with Leonardo's picture, and it would not be hard to say of someone whose name is *éros, c'est la vie* that *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Fig. 48). In a sense, Duchamp at this point turned himself into a readymade, and one whose ability to stand for the sexual relations portrayed in the Large Glass was equal to that of the others. Like his work, he now became a dual figure, male in one guise and female in the other, his identity as a person of one sex completed in his mind by the imagination of a partner who was his own mental projection of erotic desire idealized. Such desire remained forever unfulfillable: because Rrose was the eros that corresponded to life itself, she would never betray her lovers by granting them possession, with the consequences of regret and disillusionment we know from the picture *Paradise* and the note on shop windows. By becoming Rrose, Duchamp turned himself into a representation of the perpetuation of desire that cast the sexuality of the Large Glass into the fourth dimension; she was the link between the fluidity of identity he sought in the readymades —not least by becoming one himself—and the "delay" that preserved the bride and the bachelors from the fate made plain in *Given* .

That there was such a direct relationship between Duchamp's readymades and his pictures was one of the points he made in his last painting on canvas, the work called *Tu m'* , done for his friend and patron Katherine Dreier in 1918 (Plate 6). We can leave the enigma of the title aside until we come to Duchamp's experiments with language in the next chapter (where we will also take up the assemblage he called *Three Standard Stoppages* , the image of which is outlined in the bottom left corner of *Tu m'*). The long, thin composition, proportioned so that it

Figure 48.
Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy* (1921)

would fit on a wall above Dreier's bookcase, makes room for a varied collection of Duchamp's objects and interests. Two readymades are represented by shadow images, the bicycle wheel at the left and, on the right, a hat rack, chosen in New York in 1916, perhaps because both its shape and the absence of the hats for which it waits recall the lost bottle rack. A corkscrew, never publicly announced as a readymade but full of sexual innuendo (Duchamp used the image of a corkscrew to describe the trajectory of the liquefied illuminating gas as it fell toward its orgasmic splash in the Large Glass), and perhaps intended to suggest that his imagination still had surprises in store, occupies the center, beneath a row of matboards, recalling those on which his notes were mounted in the *Box of 1914* , and receding into an indefinite distance (there would be more to come). The canvas contains a trompe-l'oeil tear that is "repaired" with actual

safety pins, setting up a confusing play of relations between "reality" and "representation." A real bottle brush sticks out from the surface toward us the viewers, at once threatening to poke us in the eye if we get too close and echoing, along with the corkscrew, Duchamp's earlier appeal to absent bottles. A realistic hand, done on the canvas by a professional sign-painter, points rightward toward a puzzling construction of threads and bars, divided into sections painted in the colors of the spectrum and enclosed within rows of circular wire rings.

I think that the sign-painter's hand is there to point us toward Duchamp's answer to the questions many had about his strange objects: what did they all mean? what did he intend by occupying himself with them? The answer echoes the metaphor for artistic transcendence he developed in the Large Glass: the fourth dimension. In *Tu m'* we have one more attempt to represent the fourth dimension visually; the space on the picture's right side is one where our ability to tell a two-dimensional plane from a three-dimensional volume dissolves. The shadow of the hat rack falls on a surface that is at the same time a space; the threads attached to the far edges of the white rectangle move in a plane that is just as close to us as those that come from the near edges, without giving any visual explanation of how they get there; the wire circles around the bars follow a plane that bends from being perpen-

dicular to the bars to being parallel to them; and the edges of the bars are located at one point in space according to the depth defined by the red threads, while they are simultaneously somewhere else according to the depth indicated by the green ones. It is all a kind of visual joke, but how else to represent the conceptual game of the fourth dimension? The sign-painter's hand in *Tu m'* points in the direction of that "outlet toward regions not ruled by time and space" that art makes us seek and desire and of whose unreality we need always to be reminded, lest by forgetting we confuse it with the world we know and cause it to collapse in disillusionment and banality like the deathly prison of *Given* . As a painting of his readymades, *Tu m'* brings Duchamp's disparate activities together, while it seems to proclaim, in an accent tinged by America, a peculiarly Duchampian and avant-garde version of the ancient truth that art is a form of play: the only way to be serious about art is by not being serious about it, the only way to keep it alive is to keep it always under attack.

The moment when the readymades became art objects, leaving his private realm of symbols to enter that of public display, marked a crucial turn in Duchamp's career. Despite the hints of aggressivity one finds in his work before, it was only now that the "sad young man on a train" took on features

that would make people associate him with great cultural rebels such as Arthur Rimbaud and Alfred Jarry. Like them he seemed to throw aside the older image of the artist as a person specially able to give a new and personal shape to common, shared experiences, in favor of a vocation to undermine certainties, celebrate instability, and burst open the boundaries of aesthetic activity.

And yet Duchamp remained strangely unlike his predecessors in the art of contestation, free of the desperation that underlay Rimbaud's methodical experiments in visionary self-degradation and of the double-edged violence that Jarry turned at once against the world and against himself. Duchamp's mood of quiet irony, always bordering on indifference, would keep him coolly apart from those—dadas and surrealists—who sought to fire up the engines of artistic rebellion at the end of World War I, and it cast a veil of uncertainty over his most radical gestures, always leaving open the possibility that his real targets were

not what they seemed. The urinal was so effective a challenge to the sacred precincts of art precisely because its claim to embody formal perfection referred to real features of its shape and material, and the gesture of sending it to an exhibit that touted its openness to all comers was a challenge just as much to those who paraded their rejection of tradition as to those who dug in their heels to uphold it.[29] It bears repeating that Duchamp's irony was Janus-faced, undermining its own appearance of pure playfulness with the same mockery that laughed at art's traditional claims to gravity and importance, announcing the rebirth of the artist in the same formulas that declared the death of art. Duchamp found pleasure and amusement in the public scandals that grew out of the readymades, but he remained a deeply private person, often finding ways to withdraw from view, always maintaining his conviction that what was valuable in art had to emerge from the interior of a personality, and seeking new ways to protect his own private spaces against corruption by the world outside.

Six—
Words and Windows

Few Commonplace Ideas displeased Duchamp as much as the old French saying *bête comme un peintre* , "stupid as a painter." He denounced it in several interviews, speaking up instead for a view that made thinking, even

metaphysical speculation, central to what artists did. The kinship he felt between art and intellect fed his hostility to what he called "retinal" painting, with its appeal to visuality as sensual experience; almost from the start his work had a verbal side, beginning with captions and dialogues in the cartoons he published while a student and continuing by way of the titles and literary references that gave an extra dimension to pictures like *Paradise, Baptism, Dulcinea* , and *Once More to This Star* . His fascination with puns helped to expand this literary bent toward a general preoccupation with the nature of language itself, and the notes for the Large Glass include proposals for constructing new languages appropriate to the mental world of relations between the bride and her bachelors; to these projects he added a series of works that used words rather than visual images as basic components.

Duchamp's desire to remake language tied him to numerous other modernist and avant-garde figures. Mallarmé developed a highly original and idiosyncratic style and syntax, employing veiled allusions, al-

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tered meanings, prepositions exchanged for one another, suppressed verbs (especially the verb to be, which he regarded as without concrete content), subjects displaced to the end of sentences, circumlocutions, and archaic or invented words. These experiments were inspired by the conviction that a language cleansed of the confusions of ordinary experience, and restored to the purity of its own internal relations, could liberate the ideal forms of things. Although not a private language—its elements were still those of ordinary French, and readers willing to put in the necessary effort could penetrate most of its mysteries—Mallarmé's speech was puzzling enough to be one source of Rémy de Gourmont's equation of personal art with incomprehensibility; it was a language of interiority whose virtues inhered in the purity of its own structure, unblemished by the compromises imposed when words take on obligations to the objects of ordinary, shared experience.

Duchamp admired Mallarmé, but he seems to have been still more drawn to Jules Laforgue. Laforgue shared Mallarmé's conviction that existing language was corrupted by its interchanges with everyday reality, but he felt the effects more personally, as a wound to his own selfhood. To his mind, the individual who seeks to express what is unique about his or her own person necessarily finds the way blocked by linguistic conventions, caught up in verbal commonplaces that turn the search for authenticity into a helpless repetition of hollow and inappropriate gestures. The moments when one seeks to express the deepest and most personal feelings—love above all— are precisely the ones that call forth the most banal, used-up, impersonal phrases, those that fill popular songs and cheap novels. The person who becomes aware of his dependence on such expressions despairs of ever escaping the trite verbal leftovers of other lives and finding any authentic

core of existence; the self that seeks its own wholeness finds itself divided among the various characters that the available modes of speech allow it to assume, much in the way that the energy of Duchamp's bachelors must be stuffed into one or another of the malic molds. Feeling that even the words of his own heart belonged to others, Laforgue came to look upon his attempts at self-expression with the same cold detachment with which one regards the mechanical speaking of some automaton; at times he seemed to regard silence as the only path to

authenticity. These ideas and feelings made him part of the tendency in literary modernism that turned writing inward on itself, away both from the romantic belief that creative activity expressed an essential and personal way of being and from the realist project of mirroring the external world.**[1]**

Because Duchamp—along with other vanguard figures—clearly shared many of these views, we need to look for a moment at some of the assumptions that lay behind them. Given that our language comes to us from others, that our most passionate sentiments have been expressed before, and that we often take on roles for which prior models exist, does it follow that persons can never achieve a selfhood that is properly and authentically their own? Not only does answering yes to this question deny genuine self-existence to all the great originals who have illuminated—and often disrupted—human history, it amounts to equating individuality with a pure, unalloyed independence that only a being alone in the world could acquire. In art and literature, the realms Laforgue cared most about, creative figures have always attained authentic individuality by starting off from cultural elements taken over from those around them; originality does not require starting from nothing, but giving new shape to what one finds in place in the present and inherits from the past.**[2]**

In some moods, at least, Laforgue understood this perfectly well. Although genuinely drawn to the kind of narcissistic purity much of his work invokes, he saw that the notion of such an existence was itself dependent on preexisting models and that to desire it was to choose one of the many alternative character types put on offer by the culture into which—as a man and as a writer—he had been born. He was fascinated by the stage figures of Pierrot and Hamlet, both of whom cultivate an unobtainable ideal of personal purity while self-consciously moving back and forth between the various roles that situations require them to assume. These were Laforgue's models, both in the strength of their inner conflicts and in the power of their ironic detachment. When he portrayed every admixture of otherness as a wound to personal authenticity, therefore, he knew that he was setting up an impossible ideal, deserving of the same skeptical treatment he meted out to those who thought they could express pure love and devotion in the

stock phrases of popular lyrics. Thus he undermined his critique of ordinary selfhood and returned his literary activity to the very world from which much of his writing seeks escape, the world where individuals share elements of their identity with others. All the same, the critique remained a central theme in his work, keeping alive a fantasy vision of narcissistic purity that his awareness of its unreality could never still.

In an interview with the art historian and curator William Seitz in 1963, Duchamp described his own philosophical—he preferred the term "metaphysical"—point of view as one that doubted everything. Truth and being itself were the main targets of this skepticism, and the reason people believed in ideas that correspond to nothing real was that language deceived them. Speaking about language seemed to ruffle Duchamp's usually calm demeanor, leading the interviewer to italicize some of what he said. "Words such as truth, art, veracity, or anything are stupid in themselves. Of course, it's difficult to formulate, so I insist that *every word I am telling you now is stupid and wrong* ." Puzzled, perhaps, Seitz asked: "Could it be otherwise? Can you conceive of finding words which would be appropriate?" To which Duchamp:

> No. Because words are the tools of "to be"—of expression. They are completely built on the fact that you "are," and in order to express it you have built a little alphabet and you make your words from it. So it's a vicious circle. I mean it's completely idiotic. I mean the language is a great enemy, in the first place. The language and thinking in words are the great enemies of man, if man exists. And even if he doesn't exist....

At this point the interviewer changed the subject.**[3]**

Although some of what Duchamp was saying here remains obscure, his general drift seems dear enough. Language falsities the world by imposing certain predetermined categories on our attempts to comprehend and describe it; this falsification takes place not only in "big" words like "truth" and "art," but in every way of speaking about the world that makes us attribute being to the things we encounter in it.

What alternative there might be to the language that expresses being Duchamp did not say, but he seemed to imply that it would involve a more fluid and skeptical relationship to experience—one in which language would

support our uncertainty about whether man exists or not, and whether we "are" or not. In an earlier interview Duchamp described his way of thinking about things with the upsetting analogy, "I want to grasp things with the mind the way the penis is grasped by the vagina."**[4]** Since under normal conditions the penis is grasped only very loosely by the vagina, in a way that allows it to slip back and forth, one thing to which this metaphor may have pointed was just the sort of unstable connection between concepts and things that the rejection of "to be" might set up.

When Duchamp told Seitz that he had no hope for replacing existing language with language that would be appropriate to his fluid and skeptical view of the world, he seems to have forgotten that he had once imagined ways to do just that. Among its notes for the Large Glass, the *Green Box* contains a project, probably dating from around 1914, for a language that "very probably is only suitable for the description of this picture." That language would be composed solely of "prime words," defined as "'divisible' only by themselves and by unity," that is, words that cannot be resolved into any other, simpler ones. To obtain such words Duchamp proposed to copy from a standard French dictionary (the Larousse) "all the so-called 'abstract' words, i.e. those which have no concrete reference." Having assembled such a vocabulary, the next step was to "compose a schematic sign designating each of these words," and these signs would be "thought of as the letters of the new alphabet." He then wrote that "A grouping of several signs will determine ...," but he left the sentence unfinished: as assemblages of elemental signs resembling letters, such groupings would correspond to words in languages like French or English, but as combinations of abstract concepts they would be more like phrases or sentences. Within the language there would be "ideal continuity," that is, "each grouping will be connected to the other groupings by a *strict meaning* ," and with this vocabulary one could express things that current languages, based on "*concrete alphabetic* forms," could not, namely, "some *abstractions* of *substantives, of negatives, of relations of* relations of subject to verb etc."**[5]**

Plate 1. Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase* , No. 2 (1912)
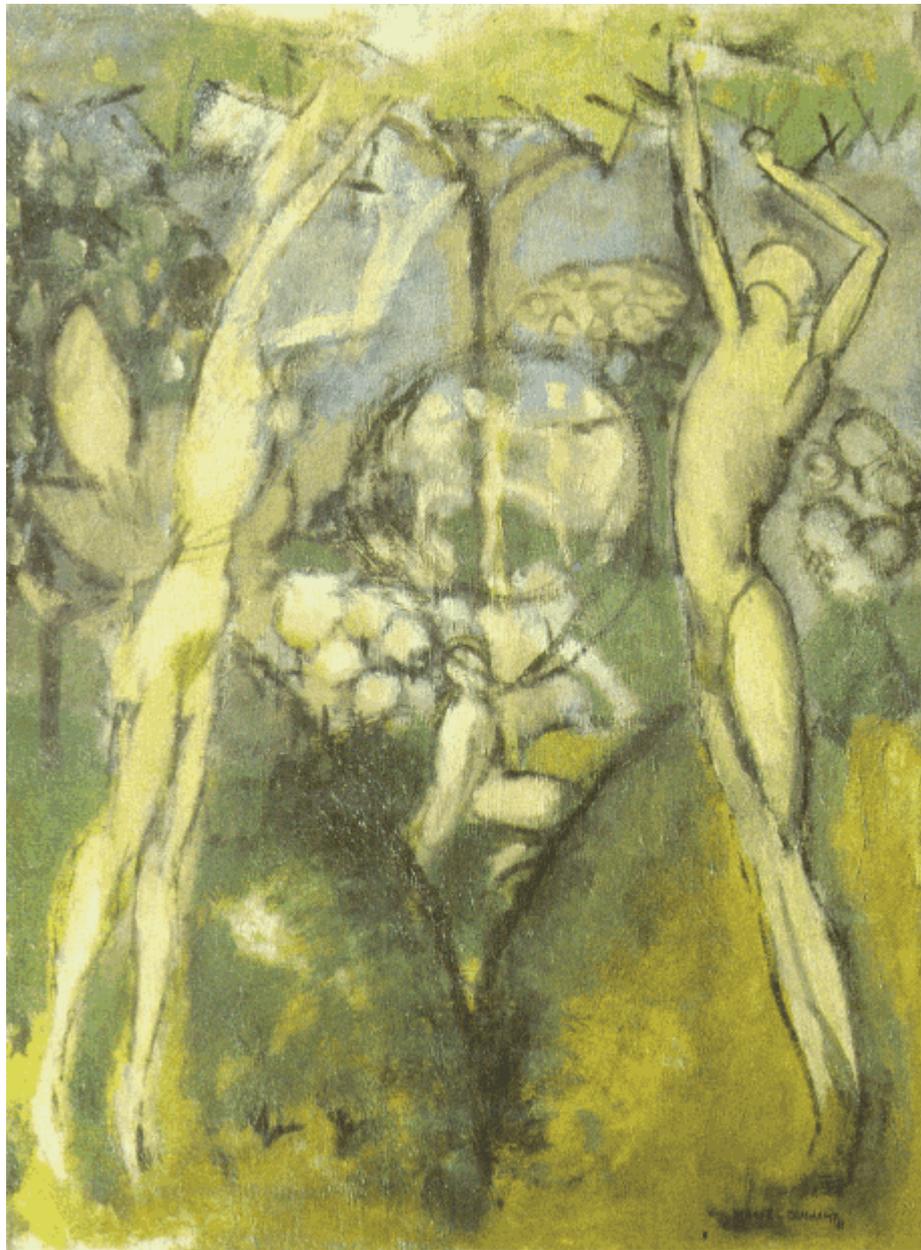
Plate 2. Duchamp, *Young Man and Girl in Spring* (1911)

Plate 3. Duchamp, *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* (1912)

Plate 4. Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*
(The Large Glass) (1915-23)
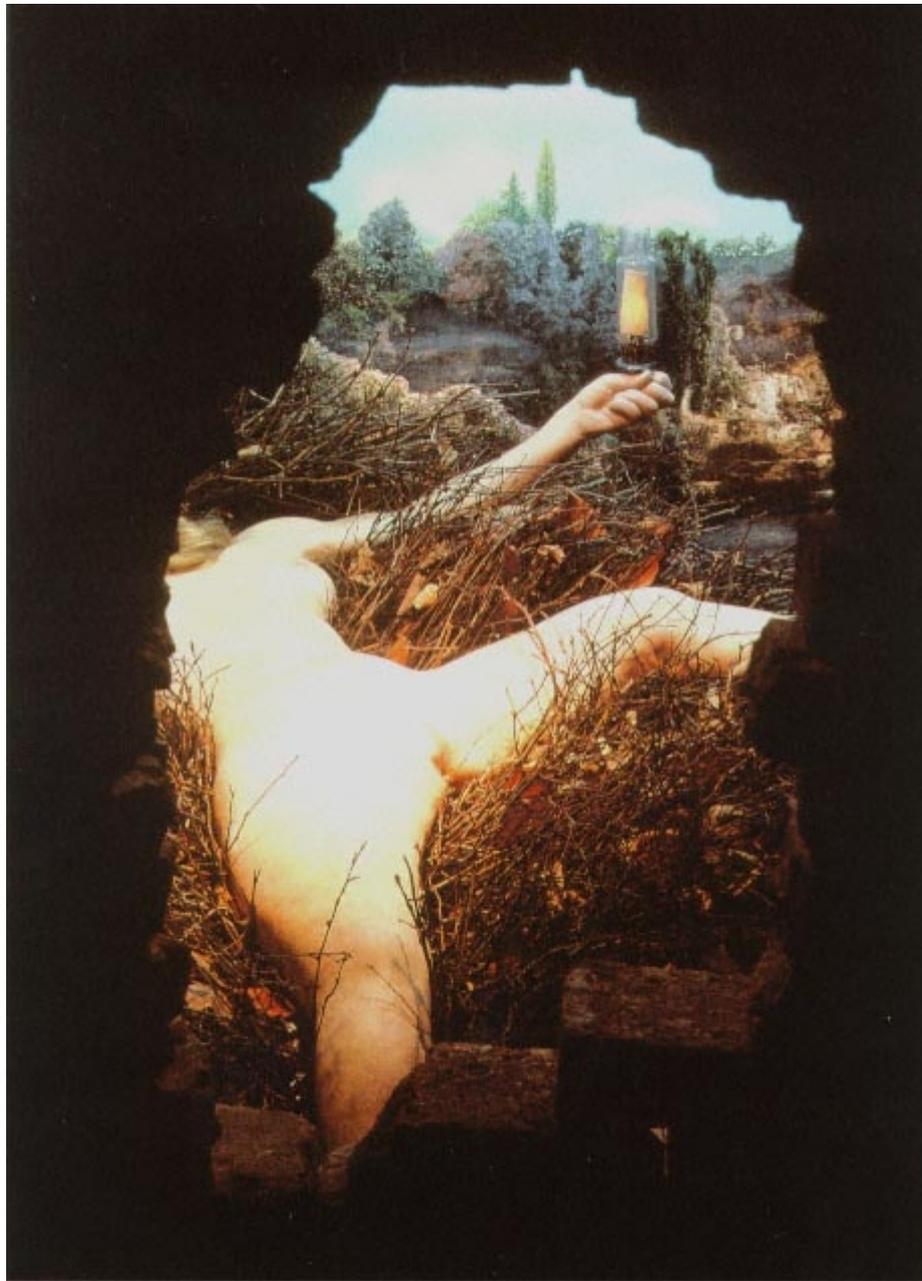
Plate 5. Duchamp, *Given: 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas* (1946-66),
Interior View

Plate 6. Duchamp, *Tu m'* (1918)
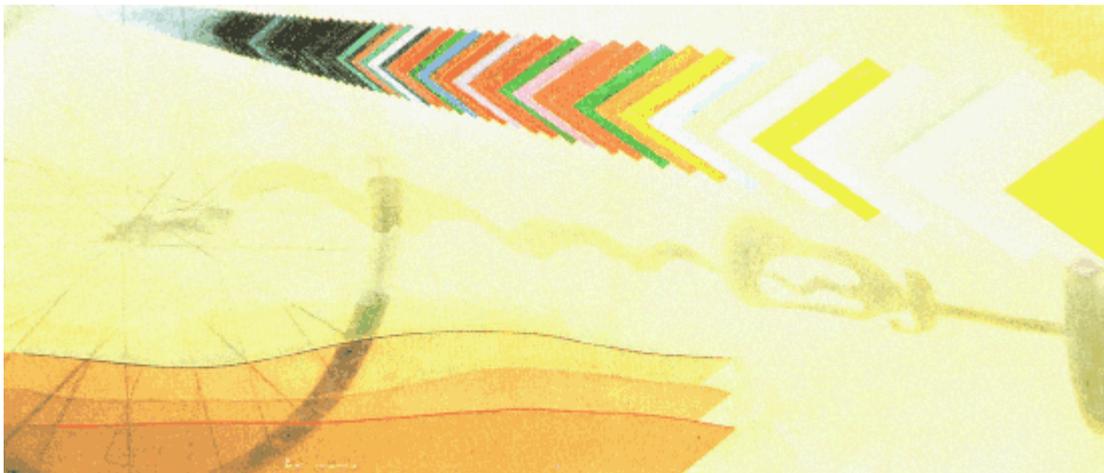
— 153 —

Obscure as much of this note remains, it is clear that what Duchamp had in mind was a language that would have reference not to concrete objects in the world—that is the point of its restriction to "prime words" that are purely abstract—but only to defined conceptual relationships; by combining these prime words, it could refer to other, still more abstract combinations of such relationships: virginity, bridehood, desire, and delay, for instance. It was an appropriate language for the Large Glass because, like the picture, it turned away from the traditional use of signs to represent concrete objects and experiences, instead calling up an immaterial fourth dimension beyond experience where only imagination could be at home.

The *White Box* , published in 1966, contains some closely related linguistic speculations. One proposed a dictionary "of a language in which each word would be translated into French (or other [languages]) by several words, when necessary by a whole sentence," much like the groupings of schematic signs proposed in the *Green Box* . Duchamp went on to specify that this would be "a language which one could translate *in its elements* into known languages but which would not reciprocally express the translation of French words (or other), or of French or *other* sentences"; its alphabet would be "a few elementary signs, like a dot, a line, a circle, etc." In other words, this would be a language whose basic elements were chosen in the same way Duchamp later said an artist could choose signs—"anything, a dot, a line, the most conventional or unconventional symbol"—to stand for what he wanted to say; these would correspond to the letters or ideographs of other languages, but the words and sentences formed out of them would have no equivalents in any other tongue. This, then, was the language of a sphere of experience to which it alone gave access, a hermetic world sealed off from contact with any other.**[6]**

A third proposal took the following form:

With films, taken close up, of parts of very large objects, obtain photographic records which no longer look like photographs of something. With these semi-microscopics constitute a dictionary of which each film would be the representation of a group of words in a sentence or separated so that this film would assume a new significance or rather that the concentration on this film of the sentences

or words chosen would give a form of meaning to this film and that, once learned, this relation between film and meaning translated into words would be "striking" and would serve as a basis for a kind of writing which no longer has an alphabet or words but signs (films) already freed from the "baby talk" of all ordinary languages.

—Find a means of filing these films so that one could refer to them as in a dictionary.**[7]**

Such a language would be a kind of hieroglyphic or pictographic script whose signs, enlarged pictures of tiny portions of objects, would convey the mysterious mixture of familiarity and strangeness that marks Duchamp's images of the virgin and the bride; each one would stand for some specific idea or thing (just as the bicycle wheel and the bottle rack did before they were designated as readymades) but—at least to begin with—only he would know what that reference was. Duchamp might write in such a language, but only those willing to learn it as he invented it (whether that was one use to which the "dictionary" could be put he did not say) would be able to "read" such writing; it was less a medium of communication than—to recall his later description of the Large Glass—"un amas d'idées," a private hoard of ideas.

These three languages, one eliminating reference to concrete objects in the world, one giving expression only to its own universe, inaccessible to other tongues, and one composed of symbols whose meaning Duchamp established by himself, all have in common the elimination of language's ordinary role as the medium through which human beings establish relations with one another, communicating their personal feelings and ideas, on the one hand, and their perceptions of the external world, on the other. Only the third is strictly a private language (although, like the symbolic universe of the Large Glass, accessible to others who are given enough information); the second, like some of Duchamp's pictures, offered the appearance of comprehensibility but without the possibility of achieving it; and the first was devised as a medium to express relations too abstract to be accessible by any existing language—a kind of algebra of the fourth dimension.

Duchamp pursued his experiments with remaking language in some works, made up of words rather than visual images, but titled and presented like pictures. He was not the first to treat words as pictographic elements; one predecessor was his onetime friend Guillaume Apollinaire, who produced a series of "calligrammes" before World War I, verbal pictures created by arranging the words of poems in patterns that seek to give a schematic impression of the objects they describe. But Duchamp's aim was the opposite of Apollinaire's: not to find an extra way to make language refer to the world outside it, but to subvert the process of linguistic representation and enclose language inside a space where it made no connection with external objects. He had already experimented with ways to break the link between language and the world in the inscriptions he gave to the first named readymades, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* for the snow shovel and *Emergency in Favor of Twice* for the unidentified object chosen at the same time. The operation he performed on language in these titles paralleled his treatment of the objects themselves, disrupting their ordinary relationship to the world by appropriating them for his private realm of symbols. In other inscriptions, notably that for *With Hidden Noise* (Fig. 43), where the unidentified object inside the ball of string stood for just this enclosure of the sign within a space cut off from things outside it, Duchamp raised the linguistic barrier higher by leaving letters out of the words; asked to reconstitute them, the reader discovered that the completed words made no more sense than the fragments.

In the verbal works themselves—one in English, one in French—Duchamp pursued the same involution on a more extended scale, by putting nouns or adjectives together with verbs or adverbs in combinations that short-circuited the link between signifier and signified. The first, called *The* , had the additional feature that it replaced the English definite article with a star every time it appeared, doubtless an act of revenge on the little word that gives native speakers of French so much trouble, while simultaneously obscuring the designation of concrete objects (Fig. 49). The second, in French, bore the title *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916* , and consisted of four postcards taped together so that the typewritten message begun on the first apparently continued through the other three (Fig. 50). Both consist of groupings

The

If you come into ✶ linen, your time is thirsty because ✶ ink saw some wood intelligent enough to get giddiness from a sister. However, even it should be smilable to shut ✶ hair whose ✶ water writes always in plural, they have avoided ✶ frequency, mother in law; ✶ powder will take a chance; and ✶ road could try. But after somebody brought any multiplication as soon as ✶ stamp was out, a great many cords refused to go through. Around ✶ wire's people, who will be able to sweeten ✶ rug, that is to say why must every patents look for a wife? Pushing four dangers near ✶ listening-place, ✶ vacation had not dug absolutely nor this likeness has eaten.

remplacer chaque ✶ par le mot: the

Figure 49.
Duchamp, *The* (1915)
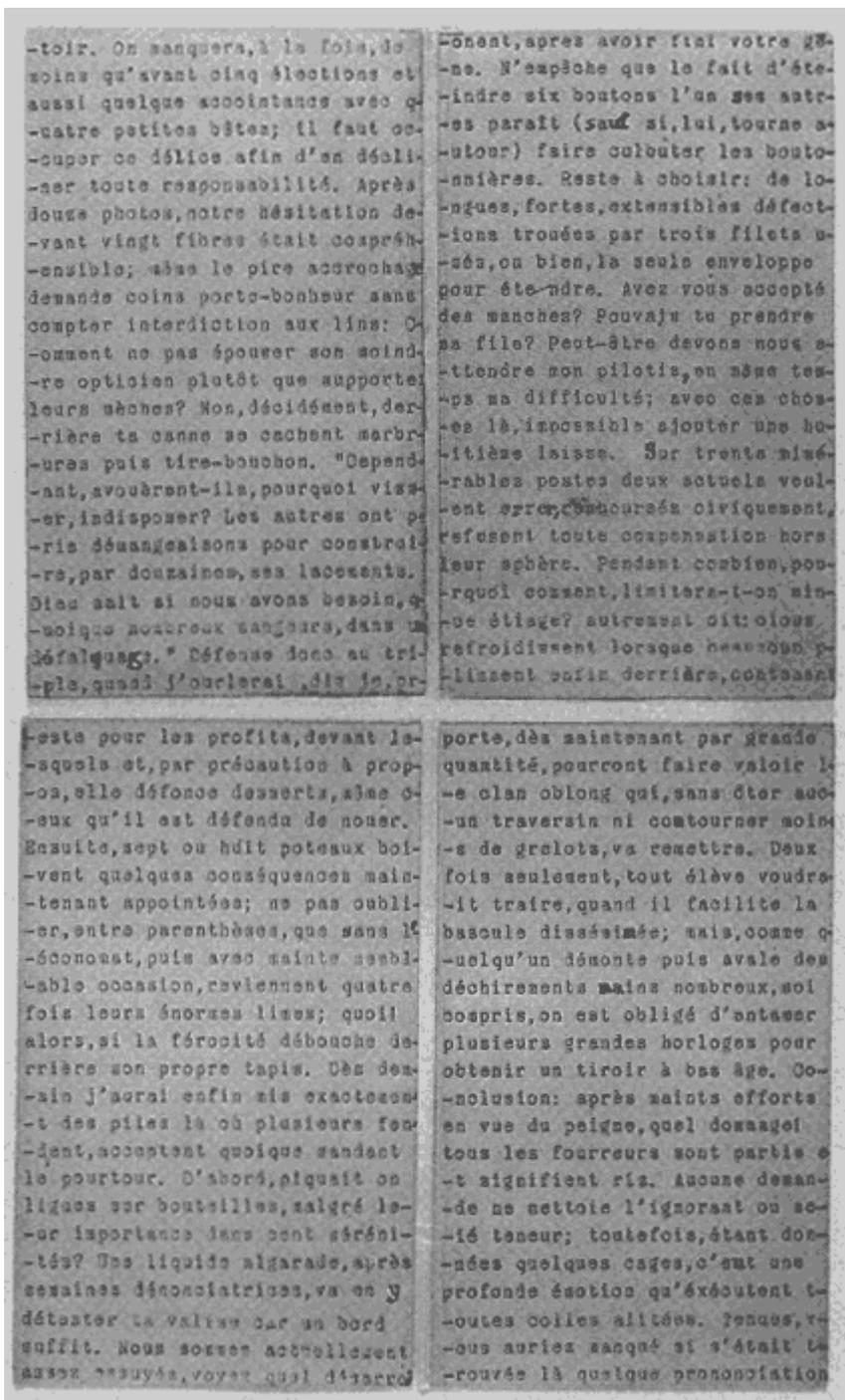
Figure 50.
Duchamp, *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916* (1916)

of words that have the form of ordinary sentences, but which constantly interrupt the production of meaning in which they seem at first to engage, so that the rendezvous of language and meaning never takes place. We can give the flavor of both the English and the French text by quoting the first and last sentence of *The* :

If you come into

★

linen, your time is thirsty because

★

ink saw some wood intelligent enough to get giddiness from a sister.... Pushing four dangers near

★

listening-place,

★

vacation had not dug absolutely nor this likeness has eaten.

Duchamp later explained that he composed *Rendezvous* by first writing ordinary sentences, then altering and substituting elements so as to cut off all the links between words and objects; the task was not easy, because meaning kept creeping back in, but he finally ended up with combinations that made the text "read without any echo of the physical world."**[8]**

Whether he quite succeeded in doing this may be a matter of disagreement, but by acknowledging it as his purpose Duchamp made clear the tie between these works and the linguistic experiments proposed in his various notes. Both aim to confine the production of language inside a space where either reference to objects or communication with others is blocked, aspirations for which he found an apt metaphor by designating as a readymade the black, opaque cover that created a protected enclosure for the Underwood typewriter on which he seems to have written *Rendezvous* (Fig. 51). Similar screens between language and objects are set up by the final *même* that casts the relations between the bride and the bachelors into its space beyond physical existence and by the title *Tu m* ', a gesture of communication that never completes the passage to meaning, leaving the relationship between the speaker and the person spoken to, which the phrase seems about to call up, hanging in midair. (To respond to this title in the way most writers about Duchamp do, by suggesting ways to complete it, misses its real point.)

Like these titles, the texts *The* and *Rendezvous of Sunday, Febru-*

Figure 51.
Duchamp, *Traveler's Folding Item* (1916)

ary 16, 1916 , are jokes, of course, and funny ones, too, but the humor is akin to the hostility toward language Duchamp later expressed in his interview with William Seitz, and the texts are attempts to use language in ways that undermine the assumption that the world has a stable manner of "being" which he railed against in the interview. Unlike the readymades, these texts are not affronts to the special world of "art" whose hallowed precincts are breached by *Fountain* , but they have in common with readymades the purpose of subverting the procedures and practices that lead people to believe in the possibility of a fixed and stable relationship to experience; they speak of a world where expectations are constantly upset and where individuals would be unable to acquire definite habits or a consistent style. On one level, the assault against art was only a way to pursue these broader and more "metaphysical" goals.

Since the 1960s, similar goals have been furthered and developed by a movement in philosophy and literary criticism that sometimes seems to breathe Duchamp's spirit, the current of "deconstruction" identified especially with Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. A central aim of

deconstructive criticism is to discover everywhere in the operations of language the subversion of stable meaning and fixed reference that Duchamp toiled to produce through his linguistic works and experiments. For the deconstructionists, the task of the critic is to show that language itself works to undermine stability, defeating our misguided efforts to make it the

bearer of assigned meanings and thus give clarity and definition to experience. The best examples of deconstruction at work—often carried out in a region of irony where Duchamp would have felt very much at home— aim precisely to detach us from the expectation that texts put us in the presence of clear meanings, by showing how the relationship between verbal signs and the things or ideas they signify is constantly "deferred" by the resurgence of fluid and metaphorical relations between the signs themselves, the slippery "dissemination" of meaning along a chain of signifiers over which language-users seek vainly to gain control. Escape from the assumption that we live in a world of stable meanings brings liberation from the metaphysical treadmill of Western culture, which has for so long subjected people to the fruitless and punishing pursuit of "the true" and "the good."[9]

The closeness of all this to Duchamp's linguistic works and experiments can perhaps be best illustrated—certainly most amusingly—by a fictitious lecture on the futility of seeking definite interpretations for literary texts that the writer and critic David Lodge placed in the mouth of his character Morris Zapp, an American avatar of deconstruction, in his novel *Small World* . Reading a literary text, Zapp explains, is like watching a striptease, because both keep the object of desire just out of view and reach. As with the dance, the text makes us believe that we will finally arrive at the bare truth, the "real" meaning, but both hold our attention because they succeed in always keeping what we long for behind one more veil than we had expected. The text's constant promise and refusal to strip itself bare before us is what gives us pleasure in reading it: because it never allows itself to be possessed, we never cease to desire it. "Veil after veil, garment after garment, is removed, but it is the *delay* in the stripping that makes it exciting ... no sooner has one secret been revealed than we lose interest in it and crave another."[10] Morris Zapp's lecture is true to Derrida's love of irony, of playfulness

and especially word play, and the latter's writing, as one admirer puts it, "mimes the *movement* of desire rather than its fulfillment."[11]

Because the spirit of deconstruction resembles Duchamp's at so many points, it is not surprising that several critics have thought it the most appropriate way to respond to him, indeed the sole way to interpret him that remains true to his own temper.[12] Readers will understand that such is not the viewpoint of the book they now have in hand. Perhaps the project being pursued here, the attempt to give a clear account of the intentions and ideas behind Duchamp's various works and particularly of the deeper and common set of impulses linking his whole career together, is condemned from the start to just the sort of frustration Morris Zapp analyzed so tellingly in his lecture: of course there will be other readings, and still others, and indeed the striptease will never end. But perhaps Zapp forgets that the experience people seek in a striptease may not be reducible to any single,

ultimate object of desire, and that those who attend to the dance get to see quite a lot all the same. Duchamp admitted that the attempt to squeeze meaning out of language in *The* and *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916* , cost him a great deal of effort, and Derrida and other deconstructive critics often expend as much or more, despite their claim that language, in its depths, is on their side. I admit that I believe that language can and often does describe the world outside itself and us clearly and stably enough for our purposes, despite the traps we need to learn to recognize and avoid to make it do so, and that human beings are indeed "beings," possessed of enough stability to invest their diverse and changing activities with meanings that are sufficiently coherent and interesting to justify our trying to say what they are. But the deeper reason for not joining in the deconstructionist attempt to make "delay" and "deferral" the principles of reading Duchamp's career or anyone else's is that there seems to me little reason to believe either that the verb "to be," or the commonsense notion that human beings inhabit a world stable enough to be named by our ordinary words and concepts, are as oppressive as Duchamp and Derrida believe them to be, or that subverting language could offer liberation of the sort they claim. Some of the grounds for this view have already been suggested, in connection
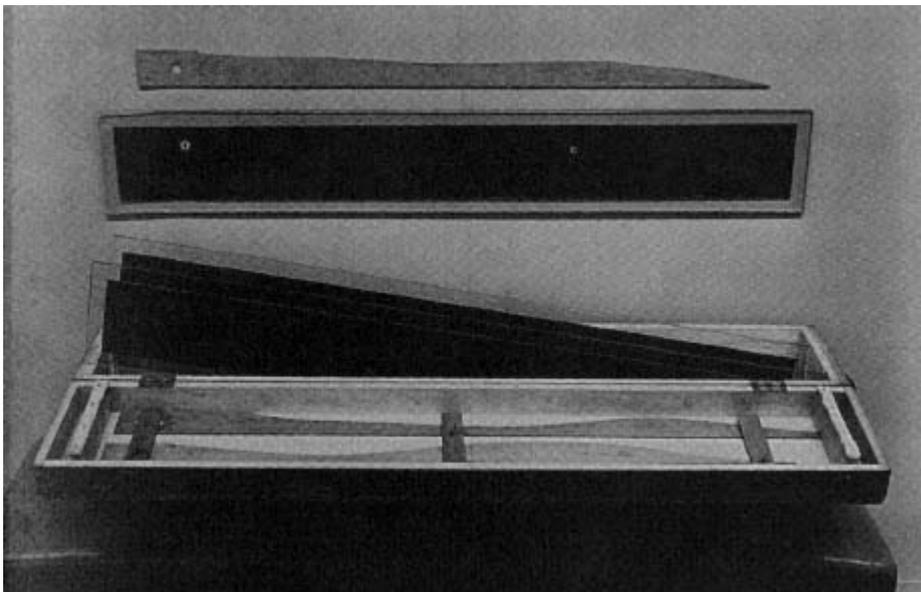
Figure 52.
Duchamp, *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913-14)

with Jules Laforgue's anxieties about the relations between speech and personal authenticity; others will appear later on. For now we need to return to the place Duchamp's experiments with language occupied in his work.

Understanding that place requires that we see the connections between Duchamp's linguistic projects and a number of works and objects from the 1910s and 1920s that are not usually associated with them. Several of these were also linked to his fascination with chance, the earliest being a project first proposed in a note of 1913 and carried out during the next year. Called *Three Standard Stoppages* , it consisted of a boxed assemblage containing three curved threads glued to painted canvas strips, together with three strips of wood, straight on one side and shaped to match the curves of the threads on the other (Fig. 52). Duchamp liked to refer to the result as "canned chance," and gave the following account of how he made it:

> Each strip shows a curved line made of sewing thread, one meter long, after it had been dropped from a height of I meter, without

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Figure 53.
Duchamp, *Dust Breeding* (1920; photograph by Man Ray)

> controlling the distortion of the thread during the fall. The shape thus obtained was fixed onto the canvas by drops of varnish.... Three rulers ... reproduce the three different shapes obtained by the fall of the thread and can be used to trace those shapes with a pencil on paper.
>
> This experiment was made in 1913 to imprison and preserve forms obtained through chance, through my chance. At the same time, the unit of length, one meter, was changed from a straight line to a curved line without actually losing its identity [as] the meter ...**[13]**

Duchamp similarly celebrated chance by having Man Ray photograph

patterns of dust that settled on the Large Glass during several months in 1921 when it lay face down in his apartment, calling the result *Dust Breeding* (*Élevage de poussière* , Fig. 53). Later he worked part of this experiment into the Glass itself by varnishing over the dust adhering to the shapes of the malic molds, thus adding color to them. In 1924 he sold some friends shares to finance a system for playing roulette at Monte Carlo, issuing certificates with a picture of himself as a kind of
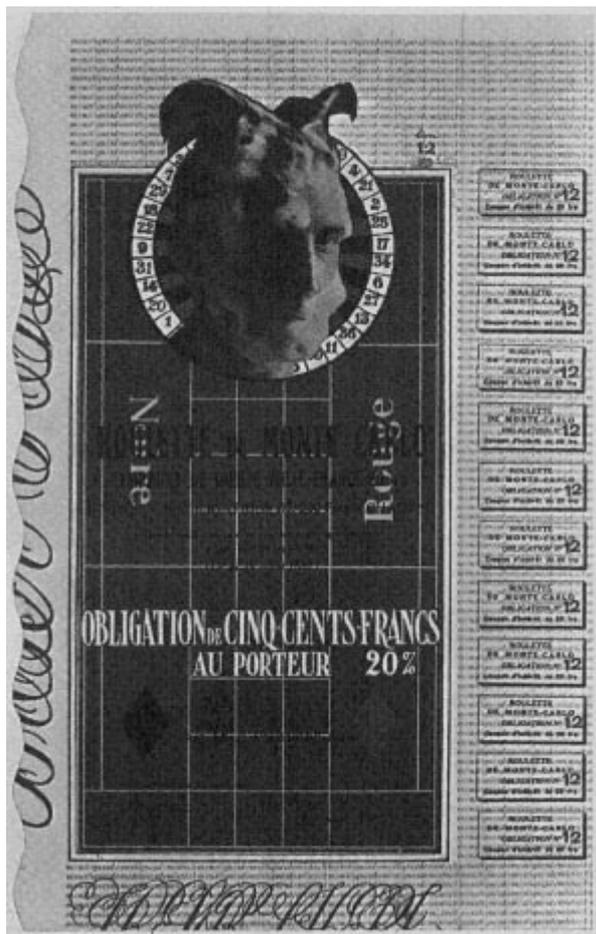
Figure 54.
Duchamp, *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924)

devil, with a beard made of shaving cream and his hair molded into horns atop his head (Fig. 54).

Although each of these appeals to chance had some features of its own, all were linked to the desire he described in one interview as wanting "to strain the laws of physics just a little." That formula was one of several acknowledgments Duchamp made of his sympathy with the ironic science Alfred Jarry invented around the turn of the century and christened "'pataphysics." Jarry's 'pataphysics was defined as the science of the

particular rather than of the general, where exceptions ruled in place of laws. Duchamp injected Jarry's kind of science into the Large Glass when he described the glider as "emancipated horizon-

tally" from gravity, so that it could slide without friction, and attributed "oscillating density" to the brandy bottles whose fall imparted motion to the glider. The principles of 'pataphysics effect the revenge of individual spontaneity against the norms other sciences erect to restrain it, and Jarry was inspired to proclaim it because he was drawn at once to the symbolist cultivation of interiority and the anarchist revolt against external constraint. The result was an intensely radicalized individualism whose implications were well expressed in Rémy de Gourmont's declaration: "One individual is one world, a hundred individuals make a hundred worlds, each as legitimate as the others."[14]

The standard stoppages operate in just this spirit, depriving the meter, and by implication all standard units of measure, of the quality that makes them a way for different individuals to develop a common account of the world, namely, universal applicability. This task was accomplished once the number of alternative meters had been extended to three, because in Duchamp's mind three served as a kind of intimation of infinity: to do three stoppages was to imply that there could be an infinite number of others.[15] The parallel to his experiments in language was exact: both destabilize media that provide shared systems of interaction with the physical world, fragmenting them into an illimitable number of incommensurable ways to assess and order experience. He recognized this by proposing to use the standard stops as elements for the schematic language of "prime words" proposed in the *Green Box* , but the link is perhaps closer to the other imagined language, which would have allowed for the exchange of elements with others, but not for mutual translation of words or sentences. In this connection it is important to remember that Duchamp saw the stoppages as linked to him personally: they represented "chance ... my chance," the record of a personal moment of liberation from universal norms.

A somewhat similar, albeit less explicitly personal, escape from necessity was figured in what Duchamp called the *Unhappy Readymade* , a device he constructed at a distance by having his sister Suzanne and her husband Jean Crotti hang a geometry book from the balcony of their Paris apartment, passing a string along the inside of the spine so that the pages were open and exposed. The wind was to blow through the book, tearing out pages— hence problems or proofs—as it liked;

in this way the universal logic of three-dimensional geometry was to be disassembled piece by piece. It cannot have been an accident that Duchamp specified a geometry book for this work, because he conceived it in Buenos Aires in 1919, while he was using geometrical figures to stand for escape into the fourth dimension in the small glass, *To Be Looked at ... for Almost an Hour* . Like the stoppages, the *Unhappy Readymade* enlisted chance in the project of withdrawing from the world of predictable, shared experience.

Duchamp provided a different image of such withdrawal in another mysterious work, *Fresh Widow* , done in New York in 1920. It consists of a small model of a French window, constructed by a carpenter, but containing flat pieces of black leather in place of the eight panes of glass (Fig. 55). An ordinary window is a an object that establishes a permeable boundary through which people can experience the world, separating inside from outside in a way that permits both perception and psychological projection to pass through (consider Gustave Caillebotte's painting *The Man at the Window* , discussed above). By replacing the glass with opaque leather, Duchamp eliminated the transparency that allows this interchange to proceed, turning what had been a medium of interaction into a barrier that reminds us by its very obstruction of the communication it allowed before. This was precisely what he did with language in *The* and *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916* .

Like the bicycle wheel and the bottle rack, *Fresh Widow* was a visual pun on his own preoccupations—in this case, his interest in making media of communication opaque where they had once seemed transparent—and the visual pun fit together with the verbal one in the work's title: a recently widowed woman is a person who has been deprived of an important relationship that ties her to the external world, throwing her back into the darkened space of her own thoughts and feelings; a window whose panes no longer allow light or affect to pass through is an apt metaphor for her condition. Duchamp, however, did not consider that condition to be one of loss only; in the Large Glass the absence of physical contact between bride and bachelors is what guarantees the permanent independence of imagination from the
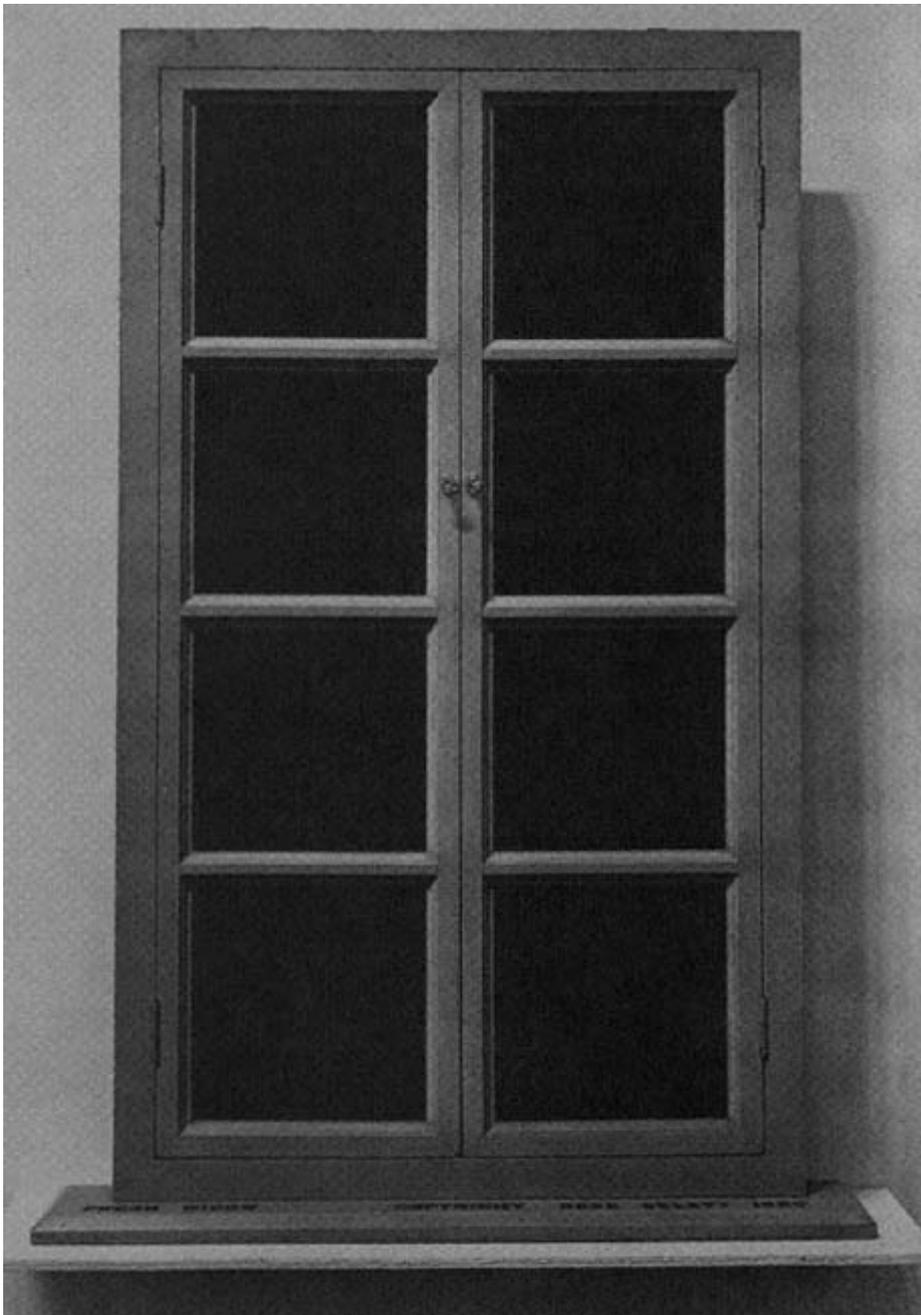
Figure 55.
Duchamp, *Fresh Widow* (1920)

narrow confines of material existence. *Fresh Widow* was a glass altered so that the disillusionment that, in the note on shop windows, followed breaking the pane had no chance to occur. The work was therefore fittingly signed with the name Rrose Sélavy, the partner who, as the eros that is life, never grants her lovers actual possession, keeping their desire fresh too. In this light, the proclaimed "freshness" of the widow derives from her inaccessibility to the new partner for which she is constantly "ready"; as long as she remains separated from the world by the opaque panes that symbolize her state, she exists as an instance of the condition where, to use

again Walter Benjamin's phrase about Baudelaire, lovers are spared rather than denied fulfillment.

A similar play of ideas surrounds an apparently unrelated object, a glass ampoule Duchamp bought in Paris in 1919, asking a pharmacist to empty it of its original contents and reseal it, so that it contained 50 cc. of Paris air, hence the title *Air de Paris* (Fig. 56). (He gave it as a present to the Arensbergs.) This glass is transparent, but what it holds of interest is both within an interior space and invisible; we can continue to maintain it in the state that makes us desire it—that is, maintain the air in its Parisian purity— only as long as we do not yield to the temptation to experience it physically. The air in the ampoule thus occupies exactly the position of the objects described in the note on shop windows, making the work a miniature distillation of the complex play between imagination and perpetuated desire that occurs in the Large Glass.

Although most students of Duchamp's work prefer to regard these and other objects as meaningless and arbitrary gestures, significant only for what they contribute to the assault on the traditions of art, I think the themes that can be discerned in the ones we have just examined resound through a much larger range of his activities. When Katherine Dreier's sister Dorothea asked him to make something for her, he responded, in 1921, with what is probably the oddest of his constructions, which he inscribed *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (spelling the name, for no known reason, with only one "r") (Fig. 57). It is a bird cage, filled with what look to be lumps of sugar but which are actually cubes of marble (a reminder that making the construction required considerable effort), so that the cage, when lifted, surprises the
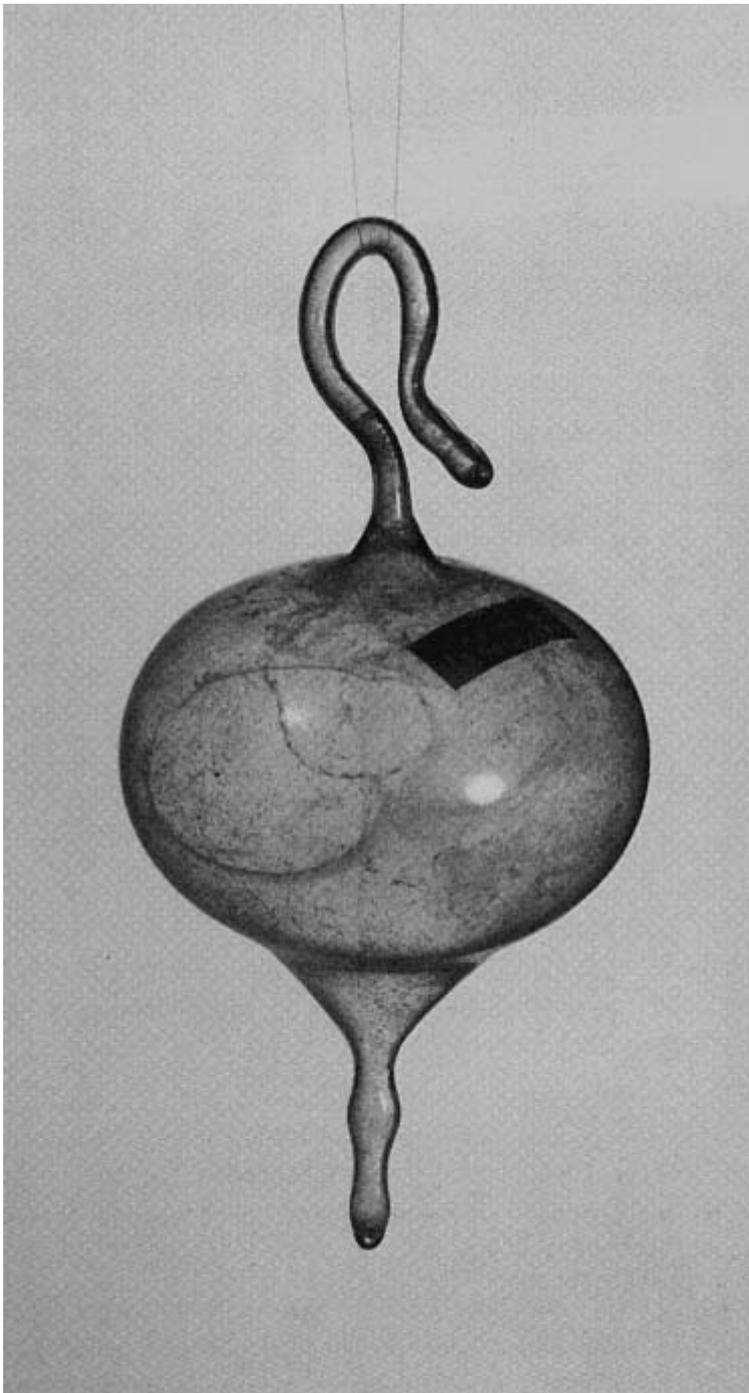
Figure 56.
Duchamp, *Air de Paris (50cc. of Paris Air)* (1919)
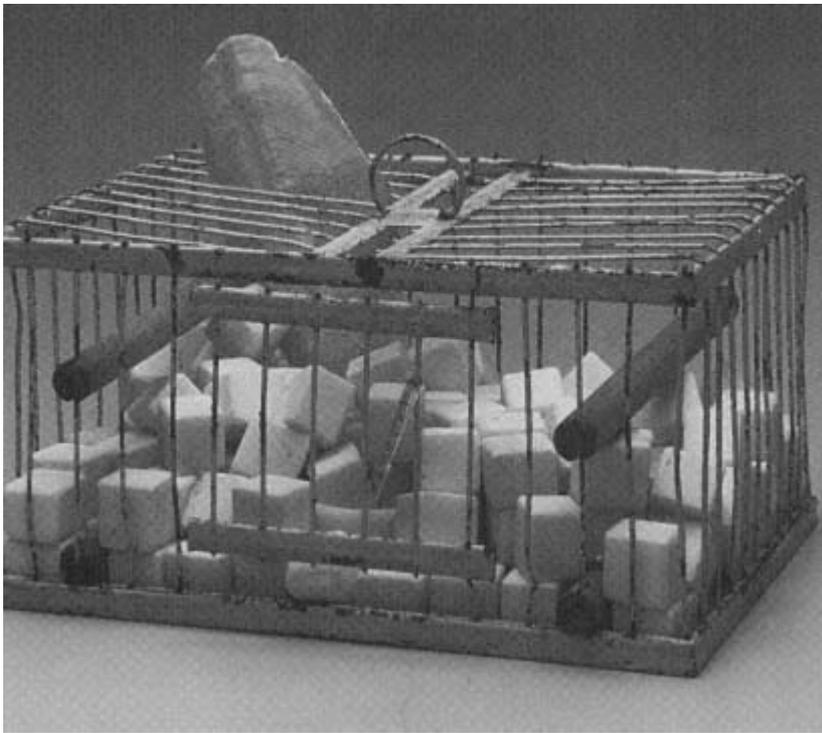
Figure 57.
Duchamp, *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (1921)

handler with its weight. Inside there is also a cuttlefish bone and a thermometer.

What should restrain our impulse to conclude at once that this is a mere piece of silliness is that the title is an actual sentence, not a nonsensical phrase like *In Advance of the Broken Arm* . It refers clearly to something which is not happening: R[r]ose is not sneezing. Her state is graphically figured by the way the tide is attached to the bottom of the cage in paper-tape letters that place each word on a separate line instead of making them one continuous sentence; the result is to make us read each word independently in a way that suggests the jerky, stop-and-start rhythm we all know from feeling the approach of a sneeze that does not arrive.**[16]** What the title calls up, then, is a state of "delay," and in regard to an action that, because it begins in a feeling of stimulation or arousal, has often been likened to sexual climax; that it is *éros,*

c'est la vie herself who is not sneezing establishes the connection clearly enough.

What makes the object appropriate to the title is that it provides an image of confinement, a metaphor for the inner space from which the sneeze cannot escape. Were it to come it would provide release, the lightness and

satisfaction we are made to expect by seeing the sugar cubes, but which the heaviness we experience by trying to lift them frustrates. The implied answer to the question is that R[r]ose prefers the state of permanent anticipation that is not sneezing to the release of tension the small explosion would bring: because eros is desire, delay is the only state in which it survives undiminished.

The other elements of *Why Not Sneeze?* are certainly playful, but they are not without meaning. Since the marble cubes surprise the cage's recipient by their weight, the thermometer warns those who believe in universal systems of measurement that they will seek to apply them where their categories are out of place, reiterating the 'pataphysical point of the standard stoppages. The cuttlefish bone is the sign of Duchamp's ironic presence: like the fish, he hides behind the liquid substances—ink or paint—he squirts at us (or perhaps at Dorothea Dreier, who may have hoped to catch him by commissioning a work).

The bird cage, the ampoule, and the window with blackened panes are all images of confinement, of impeded motion; the same theme sounds in some of Duchamp's other objects. One was a *Sculpture for Traveling* he constructed in 1918 and took with him to Buenos Aires. It consisted, as he later explained, of "pieces of rubber shower caps, which I cut up and glued together and which had no special shape. At the end of each piece there were strings that one attached to the four corners of the room. Then, when one came in the room, one couldn't walk around, because of the strings!"**[17]** That such a "sculpture" should be intended for taking on trips is understandable enough, given its lightness and portability. But as Duchamp explained, its real purpose was to interfere with walking, so that it was as much a sculpture against movement as for traveling. In its own way it imposed immobility on gestures expected to produce linear motion, just the result achieved by mounting the bicycle wheel on its stool and by setting the cyclist of *To*
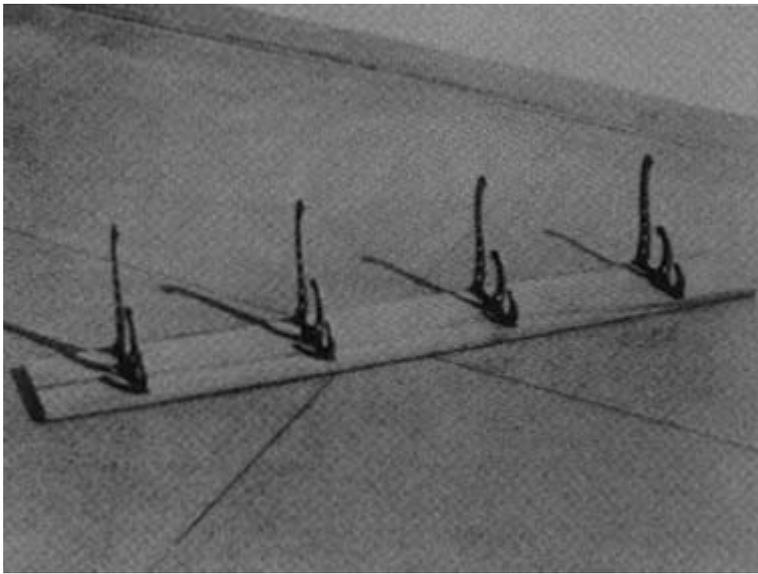
Figure 58.
Duchamp, *Trap* (1917)

Have the Apprentice in the Sun on a line between two staves on a sheet of music paper. The same theme received another expression in the clothing rack Duchamp nailed to the floor of his New York studio in 1917, calling it *Trap* (*Trébuchet* , Fig. 58; as a verb the French word means to stumble or trip). Not only did this object impede linear motion in the same way as the *Sculpture for Traveling* ; by echoing (like the hat rack included in *Tu m'*) the phallic shapes of the bottle rack and declaring—since it stayed on the floor— that the soft, concave objects for which its hard, extended rods called out would never be attached to it, it merged the bicycle wheel's imagery of motion preserved and impeded with the bottle rack's symbolization of the forever absent feminine counterpart to masculine desire.

Traveling is the activity where one most often encounters such "delays," which may be the reason it appears in a number of Duchamp's objects. The typewriter cover was called *Traveler's Folding Item* (*Pliant de voyage*), and the theme appears again in *The Brawl at Austerlitz* (*La Bagarre d'Austerlitz*) . This title collapsed the name of the well-known Paris railroad station, the Gare d'Austerlitz, with that of the battle where Napoleon defeated the Austrians. The play on words interfered
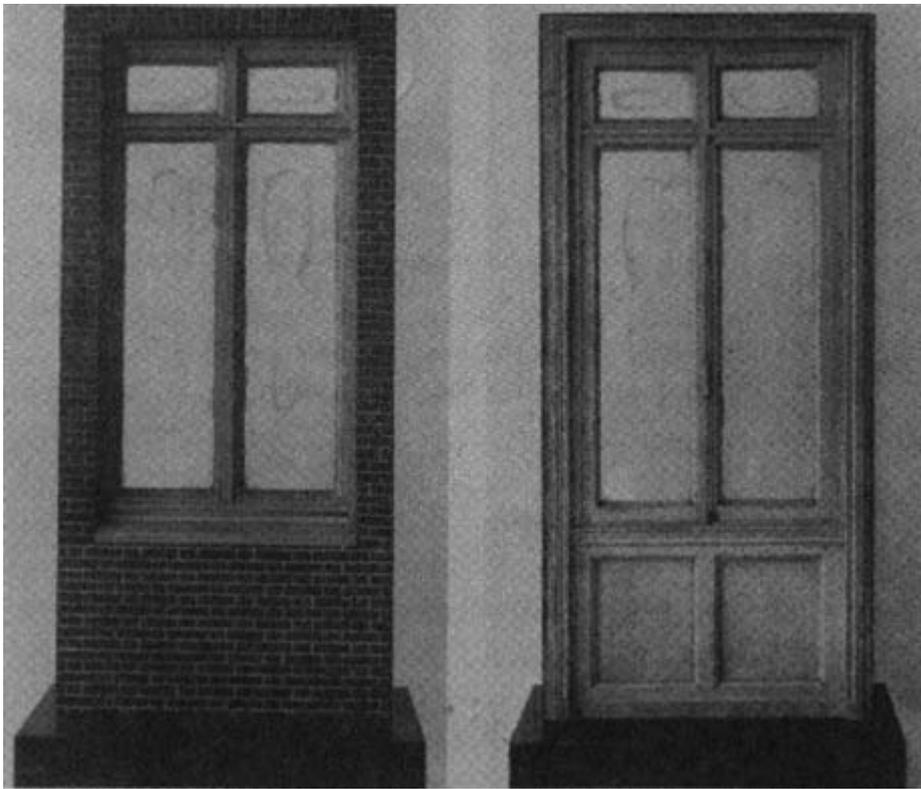
Figure 59.
Duchamp, *The Brawl at Austerlitz (La Bagarre d'Austerlitz)* (1921)

with the passage from sound to meaning much in the way that having a brawl at a railroad station might delay departure. The object itself was a window (Fig. 59), making a link to *Fresh Widow* that Duchamp seems to have thought about repeating in a kind of chain of related images, as he said in an interview: "I used the idea of the window to take a point of departure, as ... I used a brush, or I used a form, a specific form of expression, the way oil paint is, a very specific term, specific conception. See, in other words, I could have made twenty windows with a different idea in each one, the windows being called 'my windows' the way you say 'my etchings.'"**[18]** To have thought about windows in this way is to say that the question of passage—allowed and impeded—between interior and exterior spaces was one to which Duchamp returned over and over again. Every one of these objects calls

up the same blocked movement between inner and outer realms that Duchamp labored to establish in his linguistic experiments and works.

Duchamp pursued his fascination with language in a state that prevents it from referring to the external world in one final way, by inscribing some of his favorite puns in spiral patterns on rotating disks. The disks contained language, but when spun they reduced the words to a physical blur. Among

the verbal groupings chosen were "Esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis," "Bains de gros thé pour grains de beauté sans trop de bengué," "Avez-vous déjà mis la moëlle de l'épée dans le poêle de l'aimée?" and "L'aspirant habite javel et moi j'avais l'habite en spirale" (Fig. 60). All were puns that curved language back on itself, disrupting its contact with the world. In addition to the language disks, Duchamp during the 1920s made a variety of flat and half-spherical disks with various sorts of circular patterns, some of which he attached to a motor (Fig. 61). When spun, these disks produced a blurred pattern too, and one of them bore on its edge the inscription "Rrose Sélavy et moi esquivons les ecchymoses des esquimaux aux mots exquis," declaring that the two sorts of disks were closely related in his mind: the optical images disrupted the relations between vision and the world in the same way that the verbal ones made language opaque.

In 1926 he made (with two collaborators) a seven-minute film, *Anemic Cinema* (the title can almost be read backwards), in which eight verbal disks alternate with eight optical ones. The dizziness produced by both was heightened in the film by the rapidity with which the disks succeeded each other, and the pulsing, thrusting quality of the moving images was a reminder that this was the same condition Duchamp associated at once with erotic experience and with the fourth dimension in the notes for the Large Glass. In turning on themselves, all the disks returned to the themes of Duchamp's other work.

Admittedly, the readings just offered of Duchamp's various objects and constructions rely on a certain amount of intuition, even speculation, and it may be that some readers will find one or another of them doubtful or inconclusive. I do not mean to claim certainty for them all, but I would argue that, taken as a whole, they give strong support to
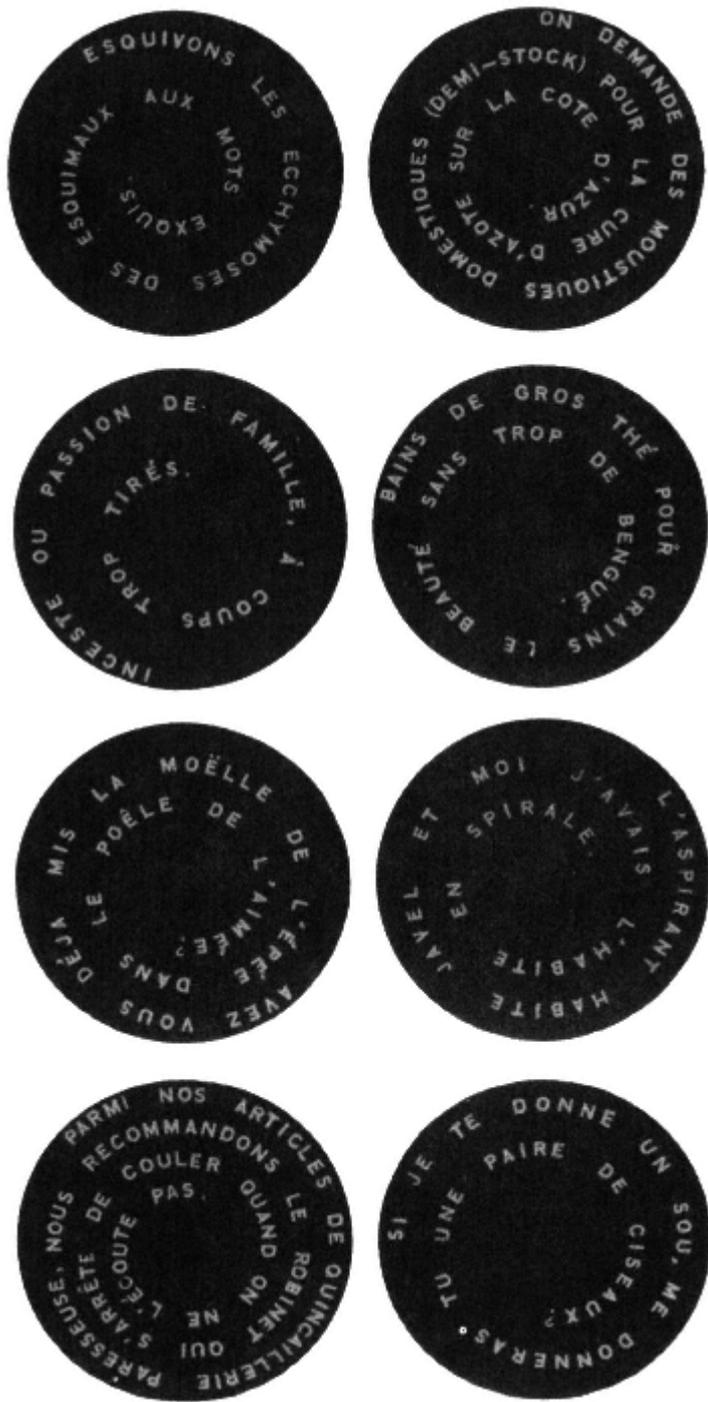
Figure 60.
Duchamp, *Disks Inscribed with Puns* (used in *Anemic Cinema,* 1926)
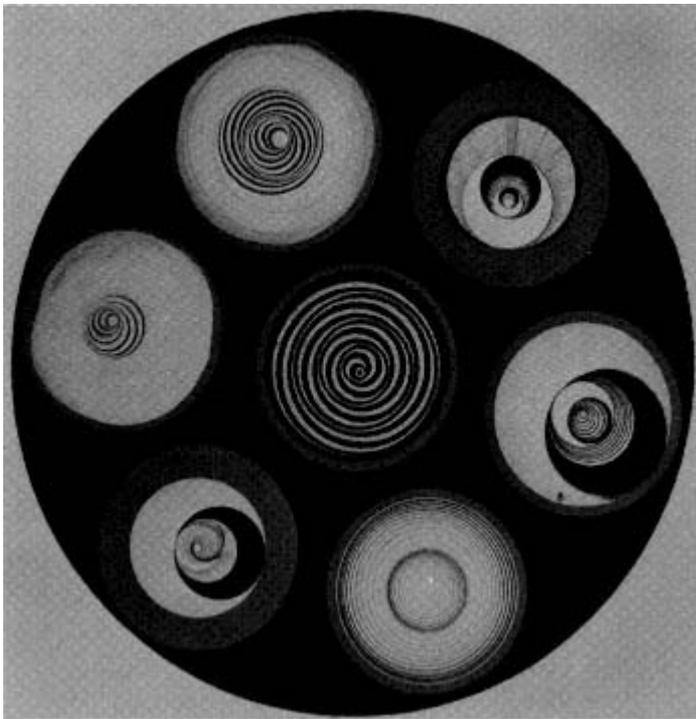
Figure 61.
Duchamp, *Disks Bearing Spirals* (1923)

the likelihood that Duchamp's objects were linked together in his mind by their common reference to a coherent and interconnected set of themes, the same issues of isolation, noncommunication, perpetuated desire, and liberated fantasy that we have seen evolving throughout his career and to which he gave fully developed expression in the exchanges between the bride and the bachelors. The apparently random and meaningless quality of these works has the same relation to the irony of the Large Glass that their inner thematic coherence has to its intricate play of conceptual relations. To have provided such a deeply linked body of work, its meaning veiled by irony and the appearance of random meaninglessness, was Duchamp's way to demonstrate how far he was from being *bête comme un peintre* .

In making these works, the perpetrator of *Fountain* was also continuing to chip away at the walls that enclosed art in a separate world of aes-

thetic purity, reclaiming that space as part of ordinary life. But why did he want to do this, and what should we take it all to mean? Two related answers have usually been given, both important, but neither, I think, quite appropriate to him. One speaks about reestablishing the tie between art and craftsmanship that had been severed by the romantic exaltation of the artist

as some special kind of being; the other focuses on challenging the authority to define what is and is not art, which modern society vests in institutions like museums, galleries, critics, and exhibition committees.

Duchamp sometimes spoke in favor of considering artists to be ordinary people, involved like many others in the work of making things. He told Pierre Cabanne that he was suspicious of claims that attributed some unique power of creation to the artist.

> He's a man like any other. It's his job to do certain things, but the businessman does certain things also, you understand? On the other hand, the word "art" interests me very much. If it comes from Sanskrit, as I've heard, it signifies "making." Now everyone makes something, and those who make things on a canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly, they were called craftsmen, a term I prefer. We're all craftsmen, in civilian or military or artistic life. When Rubens, or someone else, needed blue, he had to ask his guild for so many grams, and they discussed the question, to find out if he could have fifty, or sixty grams or more.[19]

It would follow from this that many more people are artists than ordinary use of the term suggests, just as a great many people once engaged in some kind of craft or handicraft. Adding in this way to the population of "artists" parallels expanding the range of objects that fall within the category of "art."

Yet Duchamp's participation in such a project was more limited than this avowal suggests. Other similar statements can be found in his writings and interviews, but they are easily outnumbered by attempts to identify art with ideas, metaphysical conceptions, the world of mind and imagination. He often decried ways of doing or valuing art that

emphasized sensual qualities, seeking escape from the "retinal" notions that made both realism and impressionism arts of visual experience and declaring his distance from the "olfactory" artists who found pleasure, as he did not, in the smell of paint. In 1960 he even gave a talk about why artists should have a college education (the event was part of Hofstra College's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration), arguing that they need to develop "the deeper faculties of the individual, the self-analysis and the knowledge of our spiritual heritage" through higher education.[20] Where craft-like images enter into his work—for instance, in the elements of the Large Glass produced by mechanical drawing—they are there to further the highly personal project of avoiding identification with a recognizable style, a goal they serve as much by the way they contrast with other, neighboring parts of the work as by any presumption of impersonality in the techniques

themselves. A good illustration is the pointing hand in *Tu m'* : painted by a professional sign-painter, it works to heighten the overall sense of mystery conveyed by the picture, drawing attention to a world that has no communication with the ordinary realm from which the hand, like most of the other objects represented on the canvas (mostly by images of their shadows), comes.

When Duchamp expressed some sort of solidarity with craftsmanship, he echoed a venerable tradition that criticized art's separation from ordinary life, but without really sharing its goals. From the middle of the nineteenth century, artists and critics such as John Ruskin and William Morris in England, with their followers elsewhere, had bewailed the baneful effects of establishing art in a sphere of its own; for them such a division was part of the industrial reconfiguration of social life, consigning everyday experience to soulless ugliness. In their hands—especially in those of the socialist Morris—breaking down the barrier between art and craft meant putting pleasure back into work and beauty back into objects of use, restoring dignity to workers and raising them out of the subhuman condition imposed by the narrow and heartless regime of wage-labor. Duchamp may seem to be appealing to these projects when he calls the artist a "maker," but in fact he remained distant from them. Readymades were fit to serve the purposes he assigned to them just as they were, and his using them led to

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no questioning of the conditions of modern industry, which he neither celebrated nor deplored.

In fact, as Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik have argued, modern industry and commerce had long been preparing, in their way, the conditions within which everyday objects were finding entry into the world of art. The rapid displacement of products from one setting to another undermined the assumption that certain kinds of things belonged only in certain contexts, and a whole variety of practices intended to attract buyers by emphasizing the aesthetic qualities of commodities had set up associations between industrial products and art. Shopfronts, department-store windows, fairs or expositions of furniture, automobiles, and electrical goods, and the whole range of advertising techniques developed since the middle of the nineteenth century were all occasions when claims for the aesthetic qualities of commercial objects were advanced, either explicitly or implicitly. The readymades played on these associations, partly in jest, but in part seriously too, extending the connections between display art and his own projects that Duchamp first recognized when he used the image of the shop window to meditate on the relations of desire and satisfaction that recurred in his work. The notion that art belonged to a realm "above" ordinary life owed much to traditional hierarchies once operative in society and culture, but which the upheavals of industrialization and democratization had already done much to weaken during the century before Duchamp's birth. The invention of

readymades as a category of substitute art objects was, like many radical acts, an extension of changes already taking place, and its effectiveness lay partly in the way it drew conclusions from an existing situation that others had not thought to seize on, but whose force and appropriateness could be recognized once the deed was done.[21]

Similar considerations operate in regard to the way Duchamp's gestures worked to undermine the art world's structures of legitimation and authority. *Fountain* created a scandal, of course, just as Duchamp and his friends intended, but the proportions of the challenge contract when we remember that the exhibition to which it was submitted was set up to accept all comers; sending in the urinal was more a way of making the organizers face up to the full implications of their own

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commitment to total artistic freedom than an attempt to champion innovation against tradition, and had the thing been widely seen it would probably have struck at least some viewers as an apt commentary on how far the exhibition's commitment to democracy had already stretched the limits of "art."

Neither Duchamp nor his coconspirators consistently denied the existence of genuine critical judgment or aesthetic standards. By 1917 his friend and patron Walter Arensberg was already embarked on building up a significant collection of modernist paintings, and he constantly relied on Duchamp for advice and judgment about what to purchase. Henri-Pierre Roché, with whom Duchamp began a lifelong friendship when the two met in New York in 1915, was by then operating as an agent and artistic adviser, counting among his contacts John Quinn, one of the most prominent American art dealers in the period before World War I and a major organizer of the Armory Show. In 1920 Duchamp would join with his friends Katherine Dreier and Man Ray to establish an organization they playfully named Société Anonyme, Inc. ("the corporation, incorporated"), dedicated to publicizing, exhibiting, and collecting modern art; over the years Duchamp served the group in many ways, eventually writing a series of savvy and generous catalogue entries about more than thirty artists in its collection. Throughout his life he would number collectors and curators among his friends, and at his death he left careful instructions about installing *Given* in the Philadelphia Museum, where Arensberg had arranged for most of his major works to be put on long-term display.[22]

The idea of the readymades, however, was only partly related to changes in the relationship between ordinary objects and art, or to an ongoing expansion of the category of what could be thought of as art. Duchamp's interest in everyday things had a much more personal side, one related to a comment he made to Pierre Cabanne: "I like living, breathing better than

working.... Each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral. It's a kind of constant euphoria."**[23]** Where did this euphoria arise? Duchamp pointed to the answer when he spoke in another interview about the pleasure he took in puns, saying he found them stimulating "both because of their actual sound and because of unexpected meanings at-

tached to the interrelationships of disparate words. For me this is an infinite field of joy, and it's always right at hand."**[24]** Duchamp treated objects in the same way he operated on words, making both of them peculiarly his by withdrawing them from ordinary use and fastening on features that could link them metaphorically to his own preoccupations. Ordinary objects, too, were right at hand, and dealing with them as he did made the world into an instrument for stimulating the organs of fantasy, just the relationship he pointed to when he said that he wanted to "grasp things with the mind the way the penis is grasped by the vagina"—a way that leaves logical reflection behind, that allows for constant slippage back and forth, and that produces a form of "knowledge" of which joy and euphoria are the accompaniments.

Duchamp's commerce with ordinary objects, and its meaning for modern culture, is illuminated by some observations made by Erich Heller in a classic, but no longer always remembered, essay. Heller examines the consequences for modern art of our culture's ever more complete loss of faith in the ancient cosmic assumption that human beings and the world they inhabit form part of a coherent spiritual whole, the belief that once allowed material objects in the world—the human body above all—to be regarded as vehicles of ideal meaning. In such a world, the world of Greek sculpture celebrated by writers such as J. J. Winckelmann and Friedrich Schiller, people could ascend to the heights of transcendence by following the lineaments of real life. But once that ladder collapsed, then the impulse to find meaning in the world was turned back on itself and forced to conduct its search for significance in the now-lonely spaces of the psyche, "in the pure inwardness of human subjectivity." This rise and fall has not taken place only once, and we might suggest that at least glimmers of the old faith returned in some of the forms Duchamp called "retinal," the realist and impressionist styles that found satisfaction in a renewed attempt to render directly the experience of a world that, in its wholeness, again promised to be (as Hegel would have said) "adequate to Spirit." Is this not why impressionist painting has become the classic art of modernity, why so many viewers continue to find satisfaction and nourishment in it?

Duchamp, however, found little sustenance in an art that rested on

such a relationship to the world. Heller describes the consequences of the loss of this relationship:

> The classical artist did not have either to invent or carefully to choose the reality that was to receive the baptism of his spirit: it was there.... He moved in a world of, as Hegel puts it, "preconceived objectivities." ... But as the classical marriage between the true mind of the Spirit and the true mind of the sensuously real dissolved, the affairs of the spirit of art became ever more promiscuous and licentious; or, to speak more kindly of it, the artist became ever freer and more and more "creative." He found himself loose, and often at a loss, among the seemingly infinite potentialities of his choice. Anything, and ever more "anything," be it madonna or courtesan, saint or pagan, beast or thing, invited his fair attention, turning him into the Don Juan of the creative spirit

To find the reason for this promiscuity, Heller draws on T. S. Eliot, who named the symbols modern artists employ "objective correlatives," particularized equivalents for inner states, whose power over the imagination grows in response to the impossibility of finding life as a whole to be meaningful. Why do fragmentary and apparently random memories and images—for Eliot they were "the song of one bird, the leap of one fish ... the scent of one flower, an old woman on a German mountain path"—acquire the power to speak to us of things we cannot identify or express? Because they stand not just for particular moments of past life, but for the aspiration to experience transcendence as an instant of unbounded unity with the world, an aspiration that turns back on itself in feeling because it cannot find a resting place outside the self; such images "come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer." Quoting a line from Hofmannsthal, Heller reads it to say that "he who is without a home in external reality will entrust himself to any wave of inwardness to take him anywhere."**[25]**

Heller's formula calls up the paradoxical condition of the person who feels his homelessness as a matter of great comfort because it has taught him to experience the world as an endless series of opportunities for escape. Such a figure was Baudelaire, whose links to Duchamp we have

noted before; one of Baudelaire's most characteristic poetic refrains declared his departure to "anywhere out of this world." When Jules Laforgue celebrated Baudelaire at the turn of the century he emphasized the older writer's exemplary discovery of the poetic possibilities hidden in everyday objects and experiences, many of them long kept at bay by the border

guards of literary and artistic life because they were said to inhabit the realms of evil and immorality. Baudelaire acknowledged that horrors lurked in these depths, but he also found some of his most exotic flowers there, objects and situations where it was sometimes possible to experience what he called in one prose poem "an infinity of pleasure in a single moment."[26] Duchamp took Baudelaire several steps further, creating an art whose language and materials receded into deeper recesses of privacy, finding joy in puns and tricks of language that turned objects into solvents of their own stability, and euphoria through inscribing the breath of his spirit in the "nowhere" that allowed the imagination to attach itself to objects on terms that were wholly its own.

Speaking to himself with radically simplified means of expression, Duchamp resembled a portrait of Mallarmé penned by the disabused symbolist poet Adolph Retté: "He dreams of a poem summed up in a strophe, of a strophe condensed in a line, of a line compressed in a word—that he would repeat to infinity and whose melody, appreciated only by himself, plunges him into inexpressible ecstasy."[27] In the face of all those who have seen in Duchamp the figure who cut whatever ties remained between the avant-garde and romanticism, severing art from its old matrix of personal feeling with the surgical knife of his irony, we must say that it is just the opposite: far from banishing inner experience, Duchamp's was an art of the most radical inwardness, turning the window of language into an opaque curtain behind which fantasy could shelter and accepting commerce with objects only to project the contents of his psyche onto them. Like Raymond Roussel, who built unheard-of worlds out of seemingly meaningless linguistic connections in order to illumine them with the penetrating—and highly eccentric—rays of his imagination, Duchamp was nowhere so personally present in his work as at those places from which all traces of personality seem to have been effaced.

Seven—
Loving and Working

DUCHAMP'S STRATEGIES for undermining his own personal coherence, employing self-contradiction as a weapon against consistency and celebrating chance as a solvent of predictability, have encouraged some critics to regard his life as irrelevant to his work. And yet his campaign to bring art back into the sphere of everyday existence suggests just the opposite, that his way of living was an essential part of his career as an artist. How closely was Duchamp's work tied to his life? Having found some persistent preoccupations in the work, we can approach this question by seeing whether they correspond to themes in his life, beginning with a subject to which his work constantly returns, sexuality. It is not an easy topic to explore, because much of Duchamp's adult sexual history remains

obscure and mysterious, and the materials for piecing it together are both fragmentary and suspect, sometimes intentionally veiled or limited by reticence and discretion, and sometimes colored by the desire of his friends to idealize one or another side of his personality. All the same, Duchamp's life as a lover seems to follow certain patterns, formed out of a curious combination of erotic excitement on the one side and indifference or even renunciation on the other.

Of his romantic connections, one of the best documented and most intriguing is his relationship with Beatrice Wood, the spirited and at-

tractive young actress and aspiring artist (she became a well-known ceramicist) he met during his first months in New York. From a wealthy and cultured family, Wood had lived in Paris just before the war; in America she appeared in French plays, and her ability to speak French was an important tie to Duchamp at a time when he still had rather little English. (Although he had begun to learn the language while accompanying his sister Yvonne to England in 1913, he arrived in New York able to speak only halting sentences.) She later gave a number of different accounts of their liaison, but we will follow the most complete, since it is also the one whose details best match what we learn from others who knew her and Duchamp at the time.**[1]**

Their first encounter took place when both were visiting the composer Edgard Varèse, in hospital on account of a broken leg. Duchamp's presence immediately overwhelmed her, first because of his "extraordinary" face and his "luminous" personality, then because of the powerful wave of attention he directed toward her, talking about her interests, encouraging her to draw, and almost immediately addressing her with the familiar *tu* . "At that moment we were lovers."**[2]**

Except that they were not lovers, certainly not then, and possibly never. Most accounts of Duchamp's life assume that a physical relationship followed, and Wood herself said as much, but just what she meant remains murky and uncertain. Following that first meeting the two were often together, Wood visiting his studio and feigning a greater interest in drawing than she felt, "as an excuse to be near him." She went out in his company, and he introduced her with pride at the Arensbergs, giving an impression that may have deceived some: "Though we acted like lovers from the moment we met, the act itself did not occur for quite some time. It was not necessary."

Instead, Wood began an affair—her first—with Duchamp's new friend, the diplomat and art dealer (he later became better known as a novelist) Henri-Pierre Roché; this did not stop her from dreaming about Duchamp or telling

Roché about her state of mind, which did not displease him, "for he too loved Marcel." The three commenced what she called a relationship *à trois* , meaning that they met regularly in cafés, studios, salons, and galleries; all had a part in submitting the urinal dubbed *Fountain* to the 1917 Independents show and in publi-

cizing the episode afterward. Before long, however, Roché began to find interest in other women, leaving Wood "crushed"; he departed on a visit to Paris "and, like tides moving towards the moon, Marcel and I became closer." But tides never reach the moon; what about Wood and Duchamp? Her words are again both clear and confusing: "A physical relationship was inevitable. But he still continued to utter the same words [ones he first used about the objects she saw in his studio], a phrase that he would repeat time and time again, 'Cela n'a pas d'importance.'"

Does Wood mean that the "inevitable" physical relationship in fact occurred or not? Here is her summary comment on Duchamp's personality:

> There is a wonderful Indian saying that the eyes cannot see until they are incapable of tears. Marcel's saying that "nothing has importance" somehow reflects the same idea. It was as if he had gone through all the trials of the flesh and left that behind. With his grave perception, did he realize that, in the long space of time, nothing really mattered? He had the objectivity of a guru. His mind touched stillness, beholding the unity of life. Yet with this understanding went a certain deadness. Many have observed it. The upper part of his face was alive, the lower part lifeless. It was as if he suffered an unspeakable trauma in his youth.**[3]**

If Duchamp had "gone through all the trials of the flesh and left that behind," then in what did his intimacy with Wood consist? Is she saying that intimacy with him did not require physical fulfillment, since "nothing really mattered"? At the very least, her account depicts a Duchamp whose way of being a lover was strangely uninvolved. In a later interview Wood repeated her declaration that the two "became intimate" after her affair with Roché ended, but she made it harder to take the words in the usual sense: his personality was enchanting, but—lowering her hand from the bridge of her nose—"he was dead from here down. I wondered if he had had a childhood shock."**[4]**

Given what else we know about Duchamp's amorous life, it seems likely enough that he and Wood did have some sort of physical rela-

tionship; yet in some way it must have involved the "deadness" to which she repeatedly refers, and perhaps we ought not wholly exclude the possibility that her descriptions of the two as lovers should all be taken in the sense she gave the phrase when she used it about the strong current of feeling generated by their first encounter. What makes her account so striking is the way it links together the two modes of erotic life that often recur in his work, one an intense, even pressured flow of sexual feeling and desire, the second a cool, distant recursion of sexuality into a space of delay. Whatever may have actually happened between Duchamp and Beatrice Wood, something in their erotic relationship throve on the deferral of its physical outcome, consisting rather in the erotic charge that drew two people together across a distance that they may never have entirely traversed.

Duchamp seems to have had similar relations with other women in New York. Ettie Stettheimer was one of three sisters whom Duchamp met in the Arensberg circle, members of a wealthy banking family and hostesses of a salon on West Seventy-sixth Street that its devotees liked to compare to famous European gatherings—certainly the sisters' models. Ettie was the most intellectual of the three, with a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Freiburg (she wrote her dissertation on William James); Florine was a painter who received some critical approval but never any commercial success, while Carrie, the most domestic, oversaw the house and raised money for charities. (An outgrowth of her charitable work was the remarkable dollhouse on which she worked for several years, and which can still be seen in the Museum of the City of New York, decorated with miniatures of modernist paintings given by her artist friends, including a tiny version of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* provided by Duchamp.)**[5]**

Although friendly with all three sisters, Duchamp was closest to Ettie, and some who knew them thought a full-blown romance, perhaps even marriage, was in the air. Such a possibility seems to lurk in the account Ettie gave of their friendship in her second novel, *Love Days* , published in 1923 (but mostly written two years earlier), where Duchamp appeared—as he knew very well himself—under the pseudonym "Pierre Delaire," a French artist characterized by his rejection of convention and his love of chance and adventure. "Pierre" is a fasci-

nating companion by dint of the wit and energy he invests in friendship, but the intimacy this seems to promise for Ettie's alter ego in the novel never arrives, leaving her puzzled by his surprising absence of emotionality, "his strange tendency—strange in so positive a personality—to be neutral in relationships, so to say." She too found that Duchamp generated an erotic excitement that promised something more than it delivered.**[6]** A young

woman whom we know only as Hazel seems to have had a comparable experience with Duchamp. According to Man Ray, who thought the story worth recording in his autobiography, she played the piano in the Pepper Pot, a Greenwich Village restaurant much frequented by artists, and when Duchamp was there she "could not take her eyes off" him; but he passed his time playing chess. "She asked whether I knew Duchamp well; he was such a strange man, had responded to her advances at first, was very affectionate, but had long periods of indifference."[7] Perhaps Duchamp was simply not very much attracted to Hazel, but Man Ray may have included her story because he recognized—without saying so—its connections with other things he remembered about his friend.

Of these the most striking concerns Duchamp's first marriage, which took place in June of 1927, in Paris, and ended effectively by the following October, although the divorce did not take place until January of 1928. His wife was Lydie Sarrazin-Levassor, a young woman of good bourgeois family (enriched by the automobile industry), somehow connected to Francis Picabia, and Duchamp later said that the marriage had been "half made" by the latter, adding that "we were married the way one is usually married, but it didn't take, because I saw that marriage was as boring as anything."[8]

Many of Duchamp's friends were surprised, even shocked by the news of his marriage, first because it was carried out with all the traditional trappings, civil ceremony one day, church wedding with attendants and formal clothes the next (Man Ray, who agreed to take pictures at the wedding, later described the bride as sailing along like a white cloud and Duchamp "looking spare and gaunt beside her"), lavish reception and presents; and second because Lydie's charms were not easily visible—"Rubenesque" was one polite way to speak about her appearance (Carrie Stettheimer just called her "very fat"). Duchamp

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himself described her in a letter to Katherine Dreier as "not especially beautiful nor attractive," but added that she "seems to have rather a mind which might understand how I can stand marriage." And he concluded: "Whether I am making a mistake or not is of little importance as I don't think anything can stop me from changing altogether in a very short time if necessary."[9]

Indeed the time was short. The couple lived in Paris for two months, crowded into Duchamp's small studio in the Rue Larrey. Whether the absence of a honeymoon was due to lack of funds (the income settled on Lydie by her family was rather modest) or to Duchamp's involvement in chess is not clear, but things seemed to go more or less smoothly at first, with Duchamp describing marriage in one letter as "a charming experience so far." But he added that it had not changed his life "in any way," and when

a separate apartment was found for Lydie it was clear that Duchamp had no intention of sharing it with her.**[10]** In mid-August the two left together on a trip to Mougins, in the south of France, near Nice, where Duchamp was scheduled to play in a chess tournament. Here the story took the following turn, according to Man Ray:

> I had it from Picabia afterwards that things did not run too smoothly. After dinner, Duchamp would take the bus to Nice to play at a chess circle and return late with Lydie lying awake waiting for him. Even so, he did not go to bed immediately, but set up the chess pieces to study the position of a game he had been playing. First thing in the morning when he arose, he went to the chessboard to make a move he had thought out during the night. But the piece could not be moved—during the night Lydie had arisen and glued down all the pieces. When they returned to Paris, Duchamp told me that there was no change in his way of living; he kept his studio and slept there, while Lydie stayed with her family until they could find a suitable apartment.... A few months later Duchamp and Lydie divorced, and he returned to the States.**[11]**

Of course, we don't really know that the story is true, but no one seems ever to have denied it; nor does it tell us much about the couple's physi-

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cal relations in the first weeks of the marriage, which may have been perfectly ordinary. However that may be, Duchamp's marriage shares with some of his other attachments an unusually well-developed ability to combine erotic expectations with elaborate barriers to their fulfillment.

Some of the evidence we have suggests that the strong current of sexual interest and desire often visible in Duchamp's life flowed in fairly ordinary ways, without being diverted toward distancing or renunciation. He told Pierre Cabanne that as a young man his attitude toward women had been "exceedingly normal," and he explained his insistence on remaining single for most of his life by adding that "One can have all the women one wants. One isn't obliged to marry them." Man Ray told of sitting with his old friend on a Spanish beach in 1961, gazing at bikini-clad young women and thinking "of the naked women we have held in our arms."**[12]** When he went to Buenos Aires in 1918 he took with him Yvonne Crotti, the recently divorced wife of his friend and about-to-be brother-in-law Jean Crotti, he also appears to have lived with her in Paris during 1921. In addition, it seems—if Jacques Caumont and Jennifer Gough-Cooper are right—that Duchamp had a daughter with a woman who posed for one of the figures in the early picture *The Bush* , Jeanne Serre. Born in 1911, the child, named Yvonne, was accepted by Serre's husband; she eventually became a painter, and seems to have been told that Duchamp was her father only late in her life; he may have known about her existence for longer, and-accompanied by his second

wife, who is reported to have seen a likeness between them-visited her in Paris in 1966. Finally, according to one report, another of Duchamp's mistresses, Yvonne Fressingeas, arranged for him to spend an orgiastic night together with her and two other young women—all three awaiting him, nude and tipsy, on his arrival at her room after midnight—in July 1924.**[13]**

Yet none of these stories or incidents speaks very clearly about the nature of Duchamp's sexuality, and some of them may veil the presence of something less easy to avow alongside the erotic intensity. He made his claim to have been "exceedingly normal" in response to Cabanne's question about whether the fact that he had been known as "the bachelor" in his mid-twenties (I do not know where Cabanne got this report)

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meant he harbored a dislike of women; as for the claim that "one can have all the women one wants," there would seem to be a bit of bravado in it: taken literally it might refer better to "having" women in the way that the bachelors "had" the bride or Duchamp "had" the woman in *Dulcinea* than to actual sex. Duchamp may have held naked women in his arms and still had relations with them that partook of the "deadness" about which Beatrice Wood spoke. Exactly what his relations with Yvonne Crotti were in 1918 or later I do not know, but she left the Argentine capital several months before he did, unbearably bored by the city's social life and apparently finding no compensation for it in her relations with Duchamp—who, it should be added, failed to mention her departure in his letters to the Arensbergs, which speak mostly about his mounting passion for and involvement in chess, the game whose role in the brief story of his first marriage we have already encountered.**[14]**

Certainly the existence of the daughter—whether Duchamp was really the father or Jeanne Serre only thought so—seems to prove Duchamp capable of paternity, but by itself it does not tell us anything about the sexuality involved in conceiving the baby. Jeanne Serre's child was born in 1911, so that the time between conception and birth corresponded precisely with the months when Duchamp did the pictures *Paradise* and *Young Man and Girl in Spring* , with their evocations of the disappointment that comes with sexual fulfillment and of the pleasures of erotic excitement still tinged with innocence and uncertainty. As for the orgy in 1924, it may well have taken place, but we know about it from Henri-Pierre Roché, who also engineered it and hurried the next morning to interview Yvonne Fressingeas about how it had come off, so that he could write about it in the diary on which he later drew for his novels.**[15]** His interest in Duchamp's sexuality needs a word to itself.

Roché, the friend who became Beatrice Wood's lover when Duchamp would not, was fascinated by Duchamp's relations with women and wrote about

them twice, first in a brief memoir that appeared in 1953 (it was later included in the book Robert Lebel published about Duchamp in 1959), and then in some scenes from a projected novel, never completed, but the manuscript of which was issued after his

death in 1977. (Another novel, *Jules and Jim* , written before the one about Duchamp and published in 1953, was made into a well-known film by François Truffaut.) Roché himself was a larger-than-life lover of women, tender and involved but also voracious and incapable of fidelity, making his journals and notebooks, part of which Truffaut helped see through the press, read like a kind of amorous adventure story. His affection for Duchamp—as Beatrice Wood reported—was profound, and he often presented his friend in a heroic light; in his memoir he recalled that during his first years in New York the artist "could have had his choice of heiresses, but he preferred to play chess and live on the proceeds of the exclusive French lessons he gave for two dollars an hour." Although Roché probably intended only to highlight Marcel's bachelor independence, the examples of Hazel and Lydie suggest that Duchamp's preference for chess could sometimes be an alternative to something more—or less—than marriage.

Later in the same memoir, Roché added: "Some day someone will have to write a romantic essay on the subject of 'Marcel Duchamp and Women.' Judging by the adjectives he employed in his notes for the Bride Motor, he must relish them. He lets none into his confidence, but he does spoil them systematically with his fantasies."[16] It is an exceedingly odd comment: given the presence in Roché's diaries of incidents like the orgy in July 1924, why should he need to offer the notes to the Large Glass as evidence for Duchamp's love of women? And the last phrases suggest that Roché understood both the distance at which Duchamp kept women and the importance of fantasy in his relations with them. In his account of Duchamp's night with the three women he quotes his friend as saying, "There were moments when I didn't know where I was, when all three were occupied with me at the same time"—as if what Roché sought to arrange was an experience of disorientation that would mirror Duchamp's image of the single bride receiving the attention of the multiple bachelors. Roché's larger-than-life view of his friend is suggested by the title he gave to the novel he never finished about him, *Victor* , the name he invented on their very first evening together (he then punningly altered it to "Totor"). One day in 1924, while Duchamp was in Brussels on a chess trip, Roché interviewed both Yvonne Fressingeas (whose lover he also seems to

have been) and another woman with whom Duchamp was involved so that he could write about their feelings for Marcel in his journal. It is not impossible that he colored or enlarged Duchamp's image even in his diaries, perhaps projecting onto him some of his own more direct and uncomplicated sexual feelings.**[17]**

Duchamp had two long-term relationships with women, his liaison with Mary Reynolds that began in the 1920s (she was the second woman Roché interviewed in 1924) and lasted off and on until her death in 1950, and his second marriage, which lasted from 1954 to the end of his life. Reynolds was a remarkable figure among the American expatriates who lived in Paris between the wars. Striking and serene (as Roché described her), she was a former dancer who became an art collector and patron as well as a notable bookbinder; she was also adventurous and courageous, and remained in France to become part of the French resistance against the Germans during World War II. Her liaison with Duchamp seems to have begun in the spring of 1924, but for some time things did not go smoothly. Although the two were often together, Duchamp seems at one point to have demanded that their relationship remain secret, even to the point of forbidding her to speak to him at the Café du Dôme, where both went in the evenings. Roché reported that she was hurt by Duchamp's insistence on continuing to see what she described as "very common" women, and that she believed him to be incapable of loving. At least once during the early stages Duchamp seems to have wanted to break off the affair, and later—apparently around the time when Duchamp's first marriage was nearing its end—Man Ray described Reynolds as made so desperate by her relations with Duchamp that she was driven to drink.**[18]**

According to Roché's account in his unfinished novel, *Victor* , what made things so painful for her was Duchamp's desire to be her lover while rejecting any sort of fidelity—not just refusing it himself, but encouraging her to be unfaithful too. In addition, Marcel seemed to want to keep the relationship from becoming stable and predictable; although there were times when they lived together for months on end, Roché quotes her as saying that Duchamp preferred the periods when he only slept at her house once or twice a week. As time went by some kind of equilibrium set in; the two mingled their books and often va-

cationed together; all the same, Duchamp's desire to retain a measure of uncertainty remained. As he summarized the connection in his interview with Pierre Cabanne, "I went to see her often. But I had my hotel room. It was a true liaison, over many, many years, and very agreeable, but we weren't glued together in the 'married' sense of the word."**[19]** Even if its physical side was more or less ordinary, however, or sometimes so, the affair was one in which desire was aroused and managed in such a way that it was often denied a stable resting place. Duchamp's comment that the two were

"never glued together in the 'married' sense," while seeming to describe only some sort of independence, might even mean—particularly in the mouth of someone so sensitive to the literal meaning of words—that it was the physical side of their connection with each other that was somehow uncertain or incomplete.

In 1954, at the age of sixty-seven, Duchamp took as his second wife Alexina Sattler—called Teeney—a widow whose first husband had been Pierre Matisse, a New York gallery owner and son of the famous painter. The marriage seems to have been calm and happy. Duchamp had good relations with his wife's three grown children, and one of them, Paul Matisse, became involved with his work, editing the surviving notes for the Large Glass that Duchamp had not included in any of his three published "boxes."[20]

In his interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp explained his willingness to marry at this late stage on the grounds that his wife was too old to have more children (she was forty-seven), the outcome he had sought to avoid by not marrying before. The implication was that the couple could have sex without worrying about offspring, but something more mysterious is suggested by the gift Duchamp gave his wife when they married in January 1954. It was a small sculpture (just over two inches high), called *Chastity Wedge* (*Coin de chasteté; Chastity Corner* is another possible rendering), consisting of two interlocked pieces of plastic, one in the shape of a wedge, its edge inserted so that it fills up the slit-like opening of the other, a rounded block of material of a flesh-like color and texture (Fig. 62). The title confirms that the space stopped up by the wedge is the opening of the female genitalia, making it impossible for anything else to find entry there; later Duchamp re-

Figure 62.
Duchamp, *Chastity Wedge* (1954)

ported that the couple kept it displayed on a table and that, when they traveled, "we usually take it with us, like a wedding ring."**[21]** Certainly it suggests a preoccupation with sex, but somehow blocked rather than freely engaged in; whatever else, it is hard to read it as the emblem of a couple with an ordinary sex life.

In the years before he made *Chastity Wedge* , Duchamp produced two other "erotic" objects, and they too seem to derive fascination from sexual uncertainty. One, *Objet dard* (the title combining in pun *Dart Object* and *Objet d'art*) is certainly phallic, but the penis it offers is limp (Fig. 63); we might read it as invoking the same post-coital condition that seems to be called up by the drawing *Le Bec Auer* , but by itself the state it represents could be impotence just as well as satisfaction, suggesting even an inability to distinguish between the two. More complicated is *Female Fig Leaf* (Fig. 64), apparently produced by using the prone figure of *Given* as a mold. The resulting plaster object is certainly a reference to female anatomy, but is the protruding lip the reverse of

Figure 63.
Duchamp, *Objet dard* (1951)
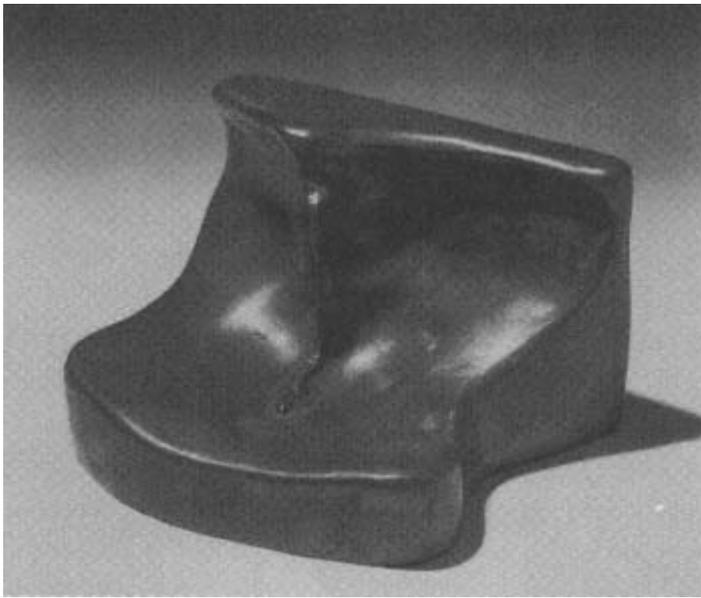
Figure 64.
Duchamp, *Female Fig Leaf* (1950)

the vaginal slit, or a clitoris? Here fascination with sexual anatomy seems inseparable from the need to cover it with uncertainty and mystery.

These objects recall the strange—some would say shocking—picture he made around 1946 for a woman with whom he had some sort of relationship during and after World War II, Maria Martins. The wife of a Brazilian diplomat and herself a sculptor who moved in surrealist circles in New York, Maria Martins may have been the first model for the nude figure in the interior of *Given* . The picture Duchamp made for her in 1946 was an abstract landscape of sorts, or as its title, *Paysage fautif* , translates, a faulty or offending landscape. The title seems to hint at what analysis confirmed only at the end of the 1980s, that the viscous material fixed to the picture surface vaguely suggesting a kind of natural scene is seminal fluid, doubtless Duchamp's own. One might see the work as intended above all to poke fun at art, and especially at those who give it some kind of sacred status. But the picture is also, like many others, a kind of self-portrait, the readymade image of Duchamp as a lover of sorts, but a lover who makes his link to the woman on his mind, and creates an image of himself to send her, through masturbation.**[22]**

Despite the occasional flamboyance and intensity of Duchamp's sexual life, the pieces of evidence we have about it leave an impression of strange uncertainty, even of mystery, a result which must have pleased him. In 1921, writing to his sister and brother-in-law Suzanne and Jean Crotti to say that he would not participate in a dada show they were helping to organize, he explained: "You know very well that I have nothing to show—and that to

me the word show sounds like the word marry."**[23]***Exposer* does sound close to *épouser* in French, but the pun did not stop at the apparently intended implication that not showing work in public preserved his independence in the same way as bachelorhood; behind it lurked the possible admission that—at least at this still relatively young stage—he feared marriage as an exposure (*exposer* means that too) of something that his life of privacy and independence kept hidden. What might it have been?

Several possibilities deserve to be considered, even if we finally discard them. One is that Duchamp sometimes—or in some circum-

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stances—experienced physical impotence, a condition that would correspond to the "deadness" Beatrice Wood spoke about, while also casting a certain light on the strange symbolism of *Chastity Wedge, Objet dard* , and *Paysage fautif* . The hypothesis of impotence need not be abandoned simply because Duchamp once fathered a child (if indeed he did); the case of men impotent in some situations or with some kinds of partners, but capable of normal sexual functioning at other times, is far from rare, and Freud even wrote an essay about the subject in 1912.**[24]** In Freud's view, such people suffer from psychic conflicts that require them to seek sexual satisfaction from women they cannot love in a fully emotional way, thus often from prostitutes or women like the "very common" ones with whom Mary Reynolds complained about having to share Duchamp, or from people like Yvonne Fressingeas (nominally a typist but probably some sort of prostitute) and her two friends, whom Roché may well have paid for their participation in the 1924 orgy. If Duchamp did sometimes experience impotence, however, there is little to suggest that the condition ever troubled him or made him unhappy; on the contrary, his repeated assurance that "cela n'a pas d'importance" and Beatrice Wood's image of his guru-like calm testify to the contented indifference with which he apparently faced sexual life. It seems unlikely, moreover, that an impotent person who valued his own mental powers would have spoken about grasping things with the mind "in the same way the penis is grasped by the vagina."

A second possibility is that Duchamp was secretly bisexual, or even a homosexual who sometimes tried to deny his attraction to men by seeking relationships—at least some of which were in the end unsatisfying—with women. This suggestion might find support in his assumed identity as Rrose Sélavy and the occasions it afforded him to dress and be photographed in female clothing. At a surrealist exhibition in Paris in 1938 where each of the exhibitors was represented by a mannequin, Duchamp chose to place his own jacket and shirt on a female figure naked from the belly down. (A light bulb in her breast pocket completed the outfit.) Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia spoke about his way of fabricating a personality "disengaged from the normal contingencies of human life" together with "his attitude of abdicating everything, even himself," as "part of the attraction he exerted on men and

women

alike."**[25]** When Ettie Stettheimer wrote to Alfred Stieglitz about Duchamp's first marriage, she declared, in the midst of her disappointment, that she was "somewhat relieved nevertheless and that will tell you a little how I feel about him," to which Stieglitz replied: "At any rate it's a woman he married."**[26]** If one were trying to build up a case that Duchamp felt discomfort and hostility toward women as sexual beings, the hairless and prone figure of *Given* , on which he worked in secret for two decades, might be offered in evidence (although I have tried to suggest the limits to such a reading above), and *Chastity Wedge* , too. As for the large presence occupied by female bodies in his work, he would not be the first artist or writer to hide homosexual passions behind descriptions of ostensibly heterosexual involvements-one need think no further than Marcel Proust and "Albertine." No clues point to the identity of any possible male lovers, but Duchamp spent much time in chess clubs, out of sight of those who knew about his artistic life, and it is conceivable that he found sexual partners there. Yet if Duchamp was a closeted gay, the secret was very well kept; the few hints cited above—if they even count as such—seem the only intimations that this may have been the key to the mystery. Other well-known French cultural figures of the time who were homosexual thought it necessary to cast a veil over their orientation for propriety's sake, but they could not avoid, nor were they harmed by, having a certain number of people know the truth, as the examples of both Proust and Roussel attest.

Both these hypotheses come up against the additional objection that each would be hard pressed to account for the central place Duchamp's work gives to disillusionment as a consequence of sexual possession, and its celebration of desire without fulfillment. An impotent male would seem more likely to experience sexuality as frustrating at the moment he attempts to engage in intercourse than to regret satisfaction itself. A secret homosexual may face the problem of not desiring the objects others expect him to, but this would not account for the feelings described in the note on shop windows, where there is no reason to regard the items displayed as gendered. It might be suggested that disapproval and repression had buried Duchamp's real sexual impulses so deeply that he could not recognize them himself, but could a person

whose psychic economy was structured around keeping homosexual feelings out of consciousness have turned himself into Rrose Sélavy?

A third possibility is the one Beatrice Wood suspected: that he may have "suffered an unspeakable trauma in his youth." Perhaps his bland confession to Robert Lebel, that he had been hurt by his mother's indifference before he learned to develop a similar protective façade himself, veiled a more painful experience, to which he did not want to allude publicly or which he could not even wholly remember, although some residue of it may have surfaced in the 1912 dream of the bride turned into a great beetle and torturing him. Some practicing psychotherapists with whom I have discussed Duchamp's career suggest that if we combine the retreat into indifference and "deadness" reported by Beatrice Wood with the sense of female sexuality that *Given* conveys—invested with mixed elements of suffering and threat and imposed on the viewer as a moment of surprise and shock—the compound points to some sort of Freudian "primal scene," a traumatic infantile experience of sexuality either inflicted by some older person or observed and misperceived as violence.[27] That such an event may have occurred is certainly possible, but what makes it doubtful, in addition to the lack of any biographical evidence to support it, is that it would seem to point to a Duchamp more psychically troubled than most of the evidence of his life suggests. However unnerved by his sexual conduct some of his women friends may have been, for him his intimate relationships seem to have been sources of pleasure; nor did he ever seem to have difficulty in forming warm friendships with both men and women.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint one other possibility can be suggested, and it returns us to the question of his relations with his sister Suzanne. It seems that one source of uncertain sexual identity in adults is having identified closely with a person of the other sex in childhood, a situation that arises with some regularity in the case of boy-girl twins, and a number of psychoanalytic writers report that a similar tendency to sexual confusion occurs as well in siblings near in age who were raised together in a twin-like configuration. Marcel and Suzanne, playmates and confidantes, and separated from the other siblings, seem to fit this pattern (as, by the way, does Raymond Roussel, also a person whose sexuality was not ordinary, and one in whom Duchamp found

much sympathetic fascination).[28] Some residue of such an early and powerful identification with femininity might help to understand why Duchamp was drawn to the identity of Rrose Sélavy and why he could envision a doubly gendered Mona Lisa blossoming out of her desire. It would seem to fit the central themes of his work with less trouble than either impotence or homosexuality. Combined in some way with the indifference he remembered in his mother, it might be made to account for the conjunction of a ready flow of erotic energy and a deferral of satisfaction and commitment that characterized many of his relations with women, and the reflection of this complex in his work.

But this remains just a hypothesis. Even if it could be pronounced true, we would still be hard put to distinguish between the ways that such childhood experiences may have continued to control and limit Duchamp's thinking and behavior and the ways that they became material for his conscious imaginative elaborations. The only thing it seems possible to say with certainty about Duchamp's sexuality is that the erotic themes that recur in his work do seem to reflect visible patterns in his life. The realm of sexuality provides good reason to reject the claims sometimes made about him, that his art was impersonal and unconnected to his own feelings, impulses, or preferences. As other writers on Duchamp have also suggested, the Large Glass was in some way a self-portrait, labeled as such by the reference to his own name in the first syllables of *mariée* and *célibataires* ; in another place he referred to it (even while denying that his art was one of self-expression) as "a little game between 'I' and 'me.'"[29] As an image of himself, the Glass portrayed more than one thing; on one level it was a picture of his deep ambivalence about communication, his desire to be at once present to others and absent from them. But this same two-sidedness is exactly what we find in the form of sexuality that combines an intense flow of erotic feeling with one or another form of withdrawal or "delay." Duchamp's resistance to permanent attachments was rooted more deeply than he made it seem by equating it with preference for a life free of responsibility; it arose out of the more radical need to give positive meaning to a pattern that recurred in many areas of his life. Finding pleasure in detachment was the general and underlying project that also found specific and visible expression in his attempts to undermine

habit, taste, and personal style, and in the trajectory that led through the readymades to the abandonment of painting.

Duchamp did his final painting on canvas, *Tu m* ', in 1918 (the last previous one was finished in 1912), and stopped working on the Large Glass five years later. Afterward he gave many explanations for why he no longer made pictures, sometimes teasingly hinting at the surprise he would deliver with *Given* by denying that he ever took a specific decision to stop, and insisting that nothing would prevent him from going back to work if ever he felt the urge.[30] But he often admitted that his interest in painting had never been wholehearted and that he seldom felt altogether comfortable doing it. In 1957 he recalled that he had felt "disgusted with the cuisine of painting" even as a student, adding that even though he did it "diligently and with pleasure" for a number of years, his underlying urge was never great and he found the work itself slow and sometimes painful. "I never had the enthusiasm of the professional painter; with me it was the *idea* that counted more."[31]

By privileging "the idea" in this way, Duchamp seems to have meant two things: first, that his paintings were inspired by ideas, like the philosophical notions or speculations connected with the Large Glass; and second, that what interested him was the idea of being a painter rather than the actuality of making pictures. In the first regard, he once explained his turn away from making visual images on the grounds that he preferred to keep his ideas inside his head: "I have not stopped painting. Every picture has to exist in the mind before it is put on canvas, and it always loses something when it is turned into paint. I prefer to see my pictures without that muddying."[32] In the second he recalled that his reasons for becoming a painter were like those of many other young people in search of a kind of life that avoided taking on ordinary responsibilities: "One is a painter because one wants so-called freedom. One doesn't want to go to the office every morning."[33] Each of these ways of preferring the idea of painting to the execution deserves to be considered on its own. We will look into the first in this chapter, and the second in the next.

One way to see what the first means is to compare Duchamp's words with something his contemporary, the poet Paul Valéry, said about po-

etry: "The greatness of poets is to grasp with their words things that they could only weakly glimpse in their minds."[34] Valéry was profoundly a man of ideas, at least as much so as Duchamp, but he had a different notion of how mental contents were related to artistic expression. In his view art was a mode of thinking, and the material means an artist used—words for a poet, colors and shapes for a painter—were media through which the mind could achieve forms of understanding unattainable without them. Duchamp recognized that aspect of painting too—at least he seemed to for a time—when he sought to explore ideas about motion and "the dissolution of form" in some of his early works. But his later notion that the ideas a painter puts into his work already exist full-blown in the mind, so that giving them painted form amounts to "muddying" them, takes away from art whatever special powers it possesses to grasp experience in ways different from some kind of inner and immediate intuition. Assigning ideas wholly to an enclosed, immaterial space implies that human thought gains nothing from the forms into which it is cast by the various material means—words, images, sounds— that give to each art form its particular way of encountering the world.

Valéry—to stay with him for a moment—was equally aware that giving material expression to ideas had another side, one that threatened to corrupt or pervert them. He knew that language was conventional and replete with the survivals of discredited or discarded ways of thinking, and he often spoke about it in the same terms of anxiety and suspicion employed by Jules Laforgue. To these dangers he added the deeper peril that a writer, in the act of setting down thoughts, is likely to be turned aside from pursuing inner truth, whether knowingly or not, by the need to consider how

a potential audience may react. So deeply troubled was Valéry by the fear that he would "lose his soul" by writing, sacrificing his intellectual liberty and purity to worries about what others might think, that he left his early verse unpublished and stopped producing any for a number of years, becoming one of Duchamp's predecessors in the self-conscious abandonment of art.

Valéry found a way out of this crisis; it led through the recognition that the unalloyed purity of self he sought to preserve from being corrupted by language was at best an ideal, at worst an illusion, rooted in

the ability consciousness possesses to objectify every element of experience and thus to imagine its own independence of everything outside the mind. Any person who actually seeks to live at such a distance ends up in a void, cut off from life itself; the only escape is a return to the external world of ordinary existence, and to the language that is imprinted with it. Every person, and especially every writer, was thus a complex mixture of two selves, one "pure" in its ability to conceive itself apart from the conditions of its own life, able to call even its own personality into the court of consciousness and to condemn it, the other finite and particular, attached to everything that makes a given person what he or she actually is—and can only exist by being—in real life. The dilemma of being human, and of trying to be an artist, lay in the Janus-faced recognition that these two ways of being were deeply at odds and yet each needed the other, each remained incomplete without the other. The core of creative activity was a neverending dialectic of self-making, in contrast to Mallarmé's search for a perfect work that would dissolve the mere individuality of its author; what made works of art meaningful was their witness to some person's momentary struggle, successful in the best cases, to effect a mutually nourishing encounter between the internal and external facets of experience and selfhood.**[35]**

Duchamp's words and actions testify to a different sense of self, with a different orientation to the world. According to the note on shop windows, to yield to the temptation to find satisfaction in the objects that beckon from the other side of the glass is to fall into disillusionment, and the drama of desire perpetuated in the theater of the Large Glass enacts an image of a self that grows and expands only when nurtured by the contents of its own imagination. The notion that ideas are merely "muddled" by the attempt to give them material form in paint describes the process of art making in a precisely parallel way, equally positing that the self can be free only as long as it avoids attachment to outside objects and that it can find sustenance only in the images of them it carries within. Duchamp's stance was like the one ruling Valéry's mind at the time he abandoned writing for the public, but whereas Valéry criticized and then altered his original desire for purity and dis-

tance, Duchamp made this desire more and more the principle of his life and the content of his work.

In this perspective, Duchamp's readymades take on a different set of meanings from the ones usually attached to them. An object removed from its context of use may be shifted to an environment where its aesthetic qualities gain independence and relief, but a prior displacement operates first, allowing the person who seizes on it in this way to employ it as an instrument for achieving distance from the world in place of involvement in it. Duchamp began his assemblage of objects—not yet seen by him as "art" but already fulfilling this other, more primary function—at the time he was withdrawing from artistic activity and social life, following his return from Munich. By collecting them in his studio, Duchamp made his bicycle wheel and bottle rack first of all signs of his ability to appropriate objects without being subjected to the conditions their ordinary use imposed—on travel or exercise in the one case, on obtaining wine or cider in the other. The objects might provoke ideas or desires, but these remained within Duchamp's closed mental world.

As art objects, too—once they entered into that status—Duchamp's readymades were able to satisfy his need for giving immediate, intuitive expression to his ideas without the "muddying" he feared the act of painting would bring. Making a representation of something, whether verbal or visual, can often be a difficult and drawn-out process, requiring erasures, revisions, abandonments, startings-over—as Duchamp said of his own painterly practice during the years when he was still occupied with it. With a readymade, by contrast, the artist achieves a relationship of complete mastery and possession all at once, absorbing an object into a universe of consciousness without ever experiencing the resistance of the material world. The use Duchamp made of his bicycle wheel and bottle rack transformed them instantaneously into metaphorical signifiers. With such means, the artist's power to represent his ideas becomes immediate and unrestricted.

Although this way of understanding Duchamp's readymades has usually been hidden by the standard images of him as the great rebel against art and dissolver of personal coherence, a somewhat similar

view was proposed in 1965 by three artists in search of a radical escape from the Western humanist tradition, which, they believed, devalued nature

in order to justify subjecting it to human order and control. Duchamp, they found, offered no support to their project of giving dignity and independence back to the nonhuman world, because just where he had seemed to undermine the premises of humanism he had in fact strengthened them.

> Marcel Duchamp's brusk rupture with oil painting was, in reality, accompanied by no reversal of perspective. The move from the cubist object, entirely constructed by the constitutive act of the painter, to the manufactured object merely touched from a distance by a signature, entails no transcendence of the traditionally demiurgic notion of the "creative act." How could [Louis] Aragon have seen in this attack on pictorial practice and the idea of the person as a maker "the indictment that puts the personality on trial?" If one wants art to cease being an individual matter, it is better to work without signing than to sign without working. How can people not have understood that to prefer the personality that chooses over the personality that makes things is just to take another step in the exaltation of the omnipotence and ideality of the creative act? It is the final arrival at a magical liberty, at absolute subjectivism: whatever the thing, its meaning is only what man gives to it.**[36]**

The writers of this comment recognized the power Duchamp was claiming over objects by making them readymades, even without being aware that in turning to them he drew them into a private universe of symbolic meanings. They also understood that behind Duchamp's claim to have devoted his career to destabilizing his personality, countering the pull of taste and habit with an aesthetic of indifference and avoiding the trap of fixed identity by his various strategies of selfcontradiction, there lurked an uncompromising exaltation of the self. All Duchamp's modes of seemingly undermining his own coherence as a consciousness were actually ways to assure his detachment from things that might draw him into conditions or relations he could not

control; they freed him to live wholly in the world his imagination projected.

The universally accepted image of Duchamp as the hero of anti-art also takes on some different features when placed in this light. From the time he created the category of readymades in New York, and especially after the scandal of *Fountain* , Duchamp was often viewed, and often presented himself, as a destroyer of traditional artistic practice. But as we have seen, this was not Duchamp's original intention when he took over his first objects as "distractions." By giving the readymades new public status as weapons in the war against art, Duchamp cast a veil over their original role as elements in a private universe of meaning. Becoming the knight-errant of anti-art masked him against recognition as the person who had given totally free

reign to the subjectivist impulse to enclose art in the unenterable space of its maker's consciousness, the possibility Gleizes and Metzinger had identified and warned against in *On Cubism* .

One celebrated aspect of Duchamp's career suggests he continued to value the retreat into privacy at least as much as the public challenge that grew out of it: from the mid-1920s he devoted much of the time others expected him to give to art making to playing chess. The image of Duchamp as the artist who abandoned art for chess added to his mystery and fascination, and many people have speculated about why he did it. No full answer can be given, and we ought not to underestimate the simple circumstance that he was really quite good at it, competing on the French international chess team for a number of years, gaining reputation as a player, and even writing a book and for a while a regular newspaper column about the game. Moreover, chess had long been one of his passions, shared by other members of his family and serving as one of his artistic subjects almost from the start. His early pictures show that the links between chess and art he described in later comments and interviews had been present to his mind in some way all along.

But for the young Duchamp to play chess was not the same as for the painter of *Nude Descending a Staircase* or the instigator of *Fountain* to devote himself to it. Chess was a pursuit that could never issue in

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the kind of public confrontation for which Duchamp was famous by 1920; like vanguard art, it appears to outsiders as an enclosed, private realm, peopled by enthusiasts who alone understand its intricate mysteries, but unlike the art world it contains no potential to make public scandal. Duchamp did not flee scandal, any more than fame, but he had not really set out seeking it either. After his return from Munich he had withdrawn into a more private life, employed as a librarian and contemplating a project—the Large Glass—that could be expected to keep him out of sight and in his studio for a long time. The news of his success at the Armory Show had drawn him out of this quietude, and it is not hard to see the turn to chess as a kind of reentry into it, even as another of those periodic journeys into some more private and protected space that Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia had noted in him before the war. Duchamp's aggressions were impossible without his withdrawals, as the birth of *Given* would demonstrate for the last time.

In addition, chess had a recurring relationship to Duchamp's strange amorous history, playing a role in the fiasco of his first marriage, and recognized by both Man Ray and Henri-Pierre Roché as his way of avoiding involvement with women whose desires he aroused. As an alternative to making both art and love, chess filled the space in Duchamp's life left vacant

by his equation of *épouser* with *exposer* , providing a way to interact with other people and to manipulate symbols while shielding him from both kinds of self-revelation. During the intense flurry of painterly activity leading up to his trip to Munich, Duchamp had used chess as a way to approach questions about the outside world, constructing a meditation on various forms of human relationships in *The Chess Game* of 1910 and using chess symbols as elements for exploring the dissolution of form in the "king and queen" pictures of 1912. Later, however, chess became one of his ways to substitute purely mental forms and images for actual objects of experience, as he wrote to Louise and Walter Arensberg in 1919: "I feel altogether ready to become the chess maniac—everything around me takes the form of the knight or the queen, and the outside world has no other interest for me than its transposition into winning or losing positions." Chess, in other words, drew Duchamp so powerfully because it was a way to

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Figure 65.
Julian Wasser, photograph of Marcel Duchamp and Eve Babitz playing chess at the
Pasadena Art Museum (1963)

live in a universe where symbolic equivalents replaced objects instead of referring to them. Explaining his fascination for the game to Pierre Cabanne, he insisted that in it "there is no social purpose. That alone is important." He liked living among chess players because they "are completely cloudy, completely blind, wearing blinkers. Madmen of a certain quality, the way the artist is supposed to be, and isn't in general."**[37]**

These comments provide the perspective from which to understand why he was so charmed in 1963 when one of the organizers of the first major

retrospective of his work, at the Pasadena Art Museum, staged a picture of him, fully clothed, playing chess with a totally nude woman. In the photograph (Fig. 65), Duchamp points toward the woman with two fingers of one hand, but his eyes are firmly fixed on the chessboard before him. She may arouse desire in him, but his interest in her has been displaced onto the elements of the game, and her presence only serves to underline his cloudy and blinkered absorption in its separate

universe. To make the point more clear, they sit before a reproduction of the Large Glass, icon of the power of perpetuated but unfulfilled desire.**[38]**

Certain features of chess make it an excellent stand-in for Duchamp's own aesthetic attitudes and ideas. Chess pieces are symbols for social identities—king, queen, bishop, knight, pawns—which the players manipulate in ways that resemble the assemblage of words into sentences in a language. But the appearance of reference to a world outside the chessboard is false, each piece possessing powers that may vaguely echo those of its worldly counterpart but which in fact belong only to the marked-off space of interaction defined by the board and the rules; hence the language of chess possesses from the start the character of apparent reference transformed into self-reflection that Duchamp sought to give to verbal language in *The* and *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916* . Moreover, in French the word *échecs* contains the associated connotation of "checks" that appears in the game but is absent from its English name, hence it creates a pun on "failures" or "restraints," exactly the conditions Duchamp sought to impose on ordinary linguistic reference by his language games (and whose sexual counterpart he depicted in *Chastity Wedge*). Chess pieces resemble a language whose journey to signification is perpetually "checked," a symbolic system perfectly enclosed in the space Duchamp called "delay."

In 1932 Duchamp wrote a brief book about chess, collaborating with a rather well-known expert, Vitaly Halberstadt. As one with a very elementary knowledge of the game, I have not tried to read this book, but it deals with a rare and obscure problem of the endgame that arises in certain configurations where only the two kings and a few blocked pawns remain. In this situation, a winning strategy requires that one king choose its moves with respect to the colors of the squares occupied by the other. According to one expert player who knew Duchamp, the reasons for this necessity are quite mysterious, so that the solution proposed in the book establishes a "relationship between squares that have no apparent connection," a kind of telepathy between the squares. Such a description is bound to call up echoes of the strange communication between the bride and the bachelors; moreover, one of the things that gave Duchamp pleasure in explaining this (along with the

conviction of having solved a difficult and obscure problem) was that "even the chess champions don't read the book, since the problem it poses really only comes up once in a lifetime."[39] Issuing the book, in other words, was a way of simultaneously entering the public realm and remaining in an obscure place where no one would notice him, fulfilling his sense of chess as a place where one lived with ideas that meant nothing to anyone else.

In 1952 he spoke about chess to the annual banquet of the New York State Chess Association, giving an account with multiple echoes of his own practices. A chess game "looks very much like a pen-and-ink drawing, with the difference, however, that the chess player paints with black and white forms already prepared instead of inventing forms as does the artist"—hence it was an art of readymades. Although the design formed by the pieces seems to have "no visual aesthetic value," the reason it appears to lack beauty is only that its form "is closer to beauty in poetry; the chess pieces are the block alphabet which shapes thoughts; and these thoughts, although making a visual design on the chessboard, express their beauty *abstractly* , like a poem." This meant that the aesthetics of chess had its source in "imagination, inventiveness," which the players use in putting pieces into what each hopes will be a winning combination; but there is "a real *visual* pleasure" in the "beautifully elaborated combinations and conceptions" that a series of moves turns into "an ideographic story." Hence Duchamp could condude "that every chess player experiences a mixture of two aesthetic pleasures, first the abstract image akin to the poetic idea in writing, second the sensuous pleasure of the ideographic execution of that image on the chessboard." Chess, then, was a visual art with intellectual and literary roots, the images acquiring beauty through their association with ideas rather than by virtue of their formal qualities; the sensuous pleasure comes from being able to see ideas in visual form, resembling the enjoyment he said he found in contemplating his Glass, when he described it as an *amas d'idées* . For Duchamp, playing chess was one more way to paint a portrait of himself as man and artist.[40]

These, however, are Duchamp's views, and the light in which they make chess appear is not the only one in which to consider it. Looking at chess from a different perspective one might notice first of all that

unlike art—at least modern art—it is a realm where the rules never change; despite all the imagination and inventiveness players may bring to bear on it, the game retains its classic stability, providing an enduring framework of interaction.[41] The only way to demonstrate originality is by agreeing to remain within the rules, and success depends on the agility and imagination with which a player who accepts the limitations of existing social roles—as

defined by the moves allowed to the individual pieces—can still discover new possibilities in their combination. (Such originality was just what Jules Laforgue refused to acknowledge when he denied that people could attain genuine selfhood as long as they had to assume roles others had played before them.) Nor can the conception behind a winning game remain hidden once it has achieved victory; what is on one player's mind may be obscure to the other one for a while, but in the end each has a chance to read the other's moves as a revelation of his thinking and strategy. In this light chess takes on the features of a much more traditional notion of art than Duchamp's, and of a more integrated and conventional model of social life.

How much Duchamp may also have been drawn to this second way of experiencing chess we can never be certain. Some aspects of it—notably the formal stability and permanence—seem to have been in his mind in 1912, if, as suggested above, he was using the king and queen to stand for durable and unchanging forms against the forces of decomposition represented by "swift" or "high speed" nudes. It may be that on some level Duchamp's later turn to chess revived this appreciation of its formal stability, as a respite from the spirit of boundless fluidity he helped to introduce into the art world, and that he valued the clarity that the game finally established between two minds, all the more because his work set up so many barriers to communication. But there is no way to know for sure, and such attitudes would have brought him toward an orientation of which one finds few signs elsewhere in his life. Even if the turn to chess in some way signaled a desire for stability and communication, his own comments about the game indicate that he saw it above all as a continuation of the same determination to inhabit a purified and hermetic mental world that was dramatized in the Large Glass and enacted in the turn to readymades. What the other, non-Duchampian view of chess points to are similarly non-

Duchampian views of art and life, ones which recognize that the acceptance of limitations is the condition for playing any social game and which posit communication and interaction as the final aims of aesthetic activity. These alternatives remain, as Duchamp always knew they would, the stable backdrop that makes his rebellions visible; without them his escapes and challenges would lose their meaning.

Eight—
The Self as Other

When duchamp spoke about preferring "the idea" of art to its actuality, he had in mind not just the priority of mental contents to the works that embodied them, but also a certain image of what it meant to be an artist, one that emphasized Freedom From responsibility and an alternative to ordinary social roles. Since early in the nineteenth century a colorful name had been attached to those who proclaimed themselves artists in order to live in this way: bohemians. The image of bohemian life, *la vie de bohème* , drew on the traditional figure of the gypsy, tied down by no permanent social attachment and always ready to move on; as developed and worked out first by French writers in the 1830s and 1840s, being bohemian meant living in a way that remained beyond the reach of bourgeois society's daily demands, but also unsullied by its corruptions, under the sign of art. Bohemians who declared themselves artists for the sake of living the life rather than doing the work were not merely frivolous or irresponsible— although their critics saw them that way—but they were at one with Duchamp in valuing the idea of being an artist more than the actuality of it. Some bohemians imposed a stoic denial on themselves for the sake of purity, while others sought escape from the moral rigors of bourgeois society in a life of constant readiness for sensual experience, finding excitement and

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adventure in surviving on ever-renewed expedients and living without plans or commitments, *au jour le jour* , taking each day, indeed each moment, as it came.**[1]**

Several times Duchamp explicitly associated his way of being an artist with bohemia. When he told Pierre Cabanne that to be a painter in the circles he inhabited before World War I was to desire "so-called freedom" and a way to avoid having "to go to the office every morning," he prefaced the description by saying that "things were sort of bohemian in Montmartre." He referred to his life in New York during and after World War I as *la vie de bohème* too, on the ground that he lived without any regular income, often finding himself short of money, but helped along by camaraderie and the general cheapness of things. In answer to Cabanne's very first question, about what in his life satisfied him most, he replied that it was having been able to get by without working for a living, buoyed up by luck and by his early recognition "that it wasn't necessary to encumber one's life with too much weight, with too many things to do, with what is called a wife, children, a country house, an automobile." The lightness and ease of his life derived also from his never having felt "a pressing need to express myself.... to draw morning, noon and night": he was just as free of the compulsion to work as an artist as he was of bourgeois encumbrances. Even deciding to get a job as a librarian in 1912, since it was a way of cutting ties with artists who took movements

and programs more seriously than he, was no turn to responsibility, but "a sort of excuse for not being obliged to show up socially." The preference for breathing over working that helped turn his life into a "constant euphoria" derived from the attribute that "deep down I'm enormously lazy."**[2]**

Even where Duchamp did not point out the links himself, many features of his career had clear precedents in the history of bohemia. Henri-Pierre Roché's appreciative judgment of him, that "his finest work is his use of time," echoed (knowingly or not) the central claim that Henry Murger, the classic chronicler of *la vie de bohème* and the original of Puccini's Rodolfo, made for bohemians as artists of daily life: "Their everyday existence is a work of genius." Duchamp's celebration of chance and accident as solvents of certainty and fixity re-

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called the formula penned by one of bohemia's sharpest early critics, Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly: devoid of any permanent links to values or purposes outside himself, the bohemian writer "lives intellectually by the random occurrence of his thought, his feelings, or his dreams."**[3]** One way to understand better why Duchamp's activities have resonated so powerfully may be to consider his turn from working to simple living and breathing as a kind of crystallization—a concentrated and exemplary expression—of what bohemianism has meant in the larger history of modern culture.

A chief reason for bohemia's significance (as I tried to show in an earlier book) lies in its having created a space to enact and confront certain crucial dilemmas about modern society that more traditional ways of being an artist did not directly address. The social life that emerged out of the French and industrial revolutions has been organized around the claim to liberate individuals, their talents and powers, from the restrictions of unexamined tradition and inherited privilege and authority. Earlier in Europe (and in most other parts of the world) units of social membership were collective—clans, orders, guilds, estates, corporate groups—and individuals were expected to fit the models and exist within the limits assigned to their official and preestablished social identities. In contrast, the French Revolutions slogan of "careers open to talents" and the individualist principles associated with it encouraged each person to find his own way of being a member of society, dedicating his abilities at once to self-development and to the expansion of society's productive energies and capacities. The reality was never up to the theory, to be sure, applying almost exclusively to males—as the gendered pronoun in the previous sentence recognizes—and among them only to those who controlled sufficient resources to gain access to some training or education. But those limitations had operated within earlier modes of establishing social relationships and identities, too, so that the contrasts with what now came to be called the Old Regime were no less significant for preserving them.

The moral dilemmas imposed by the new social forms arose out of quarrels and uncertainties about the benefits and injuries of individual liberation and about how far it ought to go. As critics were quick to

point out, eliminating traditional restraints on individuals and doing away with older forms of communal solidarity opened the way toward a society ruled by unbridled egotism and selfishness. If the new order's potential for greater equality and expanded productivity was to be realized, then new forms of responsibility and new modes of community would have to be worked out, compatible with a high degree of individual independence. How to accomplish this, indeed whether it was even possible at all, were questions that resounded in every corner of modern life, and still do; many of the attempts to deal with them required the invention of new social institutions and the transformation of inherited ones. But the issues entered into personal lives as well as into collective practices: individuals needed to discover whether—and if so how—they might accomplish their own liberation and realize their potential without falling wholly into pure self-centeredness. Bohemian life acquired its prominence in large part from its ability to frame and highlight these dilemmas, serving as a kind of social theater where individualism's tensions and contradictions were acted out.

Almost from the beginning, artists and writers with a commitment to traditional art making found themselves in a tense relationship with bohemia, sometimes acknowledging its closeness to their own lives and modes of work, but also finding perils in it. The most articulate of these critics was the greatest poet to experience bohemia extensively from the inside, whose figure we have already recognized behind several of Duchamp's key features, Baudelaire. Often a denizen of bohemian locales and a friend of those like Murger and Champfleury who helped define and popularize the life lived within them, Baudelaire acknowledged that the bohemian cultivation of immediate, direct experience—including the sensory expansion provided by alcohol and drugs—was one essential side of modern aesthetic practice, helping the artist to develop heightened powers of vision and perception; in this mood he celebrated bohemianism as "the cult of multiplied sensation." But Baudelaire feared that the same modern concentration on expanding individual experience posed a threat to poetry and painting, because it encouraged people to equate being an artist with living a "free" life outside the bounds of respectability, thus devaluing the discipline and hard work that making real poems or pictures demanded. Locating

their art in their life gave bohemians the privilege of presenting whatever came into their heads, spontaneously and without reflection, as literature: "From their absolute confidence in genius and inspiration they derive the right not to submit themselves to any training. They do not know that genius (if indeed one can name the indefinable seed of the great man in this way) must, like the apprentice acrobat, risk breaking his bones a thousand times in private before dancing for the public; that inspiration, in a word, is only the reward of daily practice."**[4]**

Baudelaire's ambivalence toward bohemia was so passionate and deep because one part of him recognized that modern artists had to nurture their imaginations in ways their predecessors had not, while another fought to stave off the collapse of the distinction between art and life that this recognition threatened. He accepted every form of sensory stimulation—drink, drugs, or sexual arousal—as a way to feed the poet's creative fires, because modern artists had to seek visions inside themselves, now that the old appeals to religious beliefs, cosmic order, or classical perfection were losing their power to give meaning to life. Other modernist figures joined him in the attempt to substitute materials and images drawn out of "lower" and "deeper" areas of society and the self—what he called "flowers of evil"—for the traditional orientation toward "higher" realms of value. But that displacement raised the possibility that art would be so powerfully drawn downward into these formerly devalued regions that it would lose all identity of its own, mirroring in reverse those medieval theories and practices that assimilated poetry or painting to the goals and purposes of "higher," that is, religious, truth. It was to fend off such dangers that Baudelaire insisted on the boundary between living in a way that liberated the imagination and actually producing poems or pictures; drugs and drink could fire up the mind, but woe to the writer or painter who confused the passive visions they inspired with the much more controlled and practiced images that constituted genuine art. Some of Baudelaire's followers would abandon these cautions, however, carrying his pursuit of imaginative release through sensory expansion in a more radical direction.

Among these, the most remarkable was Arthur Rimbaud. As a poet Rimbaud owed much to Baudelaire and admired him, continuing the

older writer's search for a poetic universe of visionary experience. But he thought Baudelaire's commitment to this project was incomplete, blocked by his residual and small-minded attachment to traditional poetic form, which imposed limits on his attempts to release himself from ordinary modes of sensory perception. Rimbaud sought to break though those limits, as he explained in a famous pair of letters written in the spring of 1871 (but published only much later, on the eve of World War I). Here the modernist recourse to modes of sensory expansion associated with bohemia burst through the bounds Baudelaire sought to set for it. Rimbaud reported to one

of his former teachers that "I'm degrading myself as much as possible now. Why? I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a *seer* [*voyant*] .... To arrive at the unknown through the derangement of *all the senses* , that's the point." Elaborating his aim in the second letter, he explained that "the poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense and methodical *disordering* of *all his senses* ." This *dérèglement* (we might render it also as unsettling or disintegration) was carried out through "all the forms of love, suffering, and madness," an experience of "all the poisons" (Rimbaud employed alcohol and drugs, and in another letter he used the word *encrapuler* , debauch); it was an "ineffable torture" that required all the faith and all the superhuman force the poet could muster, and it made him great all at once in his sickness, his criminality, his damnedness, and his knowledge.

The visionary who was to emerge from this baptism of delirium was no mere scribbler of verses; his vocation was to renew life. A new Promethean "thief of fire," the poet would give humanity access to visions and powers unknown before, revitalizing life with things previously regarded as monstrous or impossible. Everything would grow new under the sun of his imagination; even love would be reinvented. Whereas the great poets of antiquity had merely "given rhythm to action," the new poetry would be ahead of life, *en avant* , "truly *a multiplier of progress!* " In Rimbaud's project the bohemian identification of art with a life of self-exploration and moral experimentation turned into the avant-garde attempt to revolutionize human existence by infusing it with powers of unbounded imagination.**[5]**

But Rimbaud did not escape Baudelaire's fear that such an aesthetic

stance would mean the end of art: so heavy were the demands he placed on poetry that they broke his life in two. All his verse was written in a few brief years, ending in his early twenties, after which he abandoned literature for a very different career, where writing had no part, working as a trader and commercial agent in Cyprus and North Africa. For our purposes it does not matter which of two contending accounts of how this came about is correct: whether he passed from a phase of strong faith in the visionary project of the 1871 letters to one of disillusionment, or whether his consciousness was divided all along between the two alternatives of belief and doubt. One way or another, he came to recognize that the world created by so unconditionally liberated an imagination was one that not even a poet could inhabit: "I habituated myself to simple hallucination: I very sincerely saw a mosque where there was a factory, a school of drummers made up of angels, carriages on the roads of heaven," and "I ended up considering the disorder of my mind sacred." As Yves Bonnefoy reminds us, even the great early poem, "The Drunken Boat" ("Le Bateau ivre"), "like so many of Rimbaud's poems, ends as the victory of lucidity over an initial swell of hope," and the last collection, *Les Illuminations* , full as it is of images that

promise pure beauty, joy, and love, concludes with the jarring announcement of "Solde" (the title of one poem), the end-of-season sale where unrealized ambitions are disposed of at much reduced prices.**[6]**

The transactions of Baudelaire and Rimbaud with bohemia offer reference points for understanding what Duchamp's ties to bohemian life mean in his career. When he described his own early way of being a painter as linked to bohemianism he certainly intended to say that his eventual turn away from producing objects was already prefigured in his original manner of getting involved in making them. But beneath this there lurked a different recognition, that his identity as an "antiartist" involved an impulse to invest the resources of art in a remaking of life. As he put it in one interview, "Painting was a tool. A bridge to take me somewhere else. Where, I don't know. I wouldn't know because it would be so revolutionary in essence that it couldn't be formulated."**[7]** But in other contexts Duchamp did formulate his destination, figuring it as the fourth dimension in the Large Glass, and describing it to Pierre Cabanne as living in a "constant euphoria,"

his personal version of Baudelairean intoxication or Rimbauldian *dérèglement* .

Between Duchamp's pursuit of euphoria and Rimbaud's search for visionary transformation there are many differences, in the means employed and the range of the results sought after, but both aspired to inhabit a world beyond time and space, where ordinary sense experience could not be a guide, and to which both sought access through the power of fantasy, aroused by constant and disorienting sensual stimulation; what made both end up by abandoning the life of making objects was their common attempt to employ these means in the service of a freedom so unencumbered by material limits that it could only be finally obtained by withdrawal from the actual activity— poetry or painting—that first appeared to give entry to it. Duchamp's calm indifference toward painting and his contentment with living life as it came actually brought him closer to the spirit of ordinary bohemians than Rimbaud, with his passion for poetic enlightenment, could ever be. Duchamp's career showed that Baudelaire had been more prescient than he knew when he feared that the qualities and activities he valued and cherished under the name of art could not survive the power of attraction that drew modern artists into the bohemian theater of the self.

The modern ambivalence about individuality, its benefits and harms, which gave prominence to bohemia, appeared over and over again in Duchamp's life and work. His attempts to distance himself from any cult of the individual took many forms, of which one was his denial that artists were self-

conscious creators who embodied their own intentions in their work. In a talk about "The Creative Act," given in 1957, he described the artist as acting "like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing." As such a medium, the artist was not in possession of "consciousness on the aesthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it." It was not artists who determined whether their products had any significant value, but the audience or public, who therefore played an essential role in bringing artwork to realization: "the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpret-

ing its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." It was not just that the spectator had the last word; the viewer's intervention was necessary because the artist, in doing a work, passed from intention to realization by way of a struggle that involved "efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions," at least some of which remained outside his consciousness. Thus there arose a "difference between intention and realization" of which the artist could not be fully aware, and which Duchamp dubbed the "personal 'art coefficient,'" describing it as "like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed." It was in this space between intention and expression that the audience did its necessary work.**[8]**

These notions are not easy to interpret, making us suspect that Duchamp would not have minded to have his readers discover a gap between intention and realization in the words he used to talk about it. Although seemingly aimed at putting art on an equal plane with the public, the talk begins by ascribing a special and exalted position to the artist, as a person who speaks from "beyond time and space," just the language Duchamp used in a television interview a year earlier (and which we quoted in connection with the Large Glass) when he asserted that "art is the only form of activity in which man as man shows himself to be a true individual" and "capable of going beyond the animal state."**[9]** why the artist cannot remain in the beyond but must "seek his way out to a clearing" is not evident, but the image seems to suggest that he desires to find a way back to ordinary life, as if the region "beyond time and space" were uninhabitable. Whether the "mediumistic being" of "The Creative Act" is the same artist who appears as a "true individual" in the interview is also unclear; as a medium he seems to be the bearer of a power or intention that comes from outside himself, yet the notion of the "personal 'art coefficient'" involves precisely the idea that the artist begins with an intention of his own, which the process of making objects renders unrealizable. By listing "deciphering and interpreting" among the audience's tasks, Duchamp seems to suggest that part of what beholders do is to recover a portion of the unexpressed intention.

Some of these uncertainties arise because Duchamp shifted back and

forth between emphasizing the spectators' role in attaching a judgment of quality to a work and considering their part in deciding about its meaning. He was much more consistent and adamant about the first point than about the second, often insisting that artistic reputations lay wholly or mostly in the hands of the public, whose judgments in this regard could be irrational or arbitrary. Once when his brother-in-law, Jean Crotti, asked for an opinion about his work, Duchamp surprised him by sending back the following diatribe:

> Artists of all times are like the gamblers of Monte Carlo, and this *blind* lottery allows some to succeed and ruins others. In my opinion neither the winners nor the losers are worth worrying about. It's a good personal *deal* for the winner and a bad one for the loser.... There is no exterior sign that explains why a Fra Angelico and a Leonardo are equally recognized.... Artists who during their lifetime have known how to make their shoddy goods appreciated are excellent travelling salesmen, but nothing guarantees the immortality of their work. And even posterity is a real bitch who cheats some, reinstates others (El Greco), and is also free to change its mind every 50 years.

Duchamp went on to suggest that Crotti's own judgment about his work—and by extension that of any artist—was fogged up by the presence in his mind of "principles or anti-principles" that caused him to see it in relation to the goals of some style or school, in this case "the 'School of Paris,' that fine joke that has lasted for 60 years (the students award the prizes to themselves, *in money*)." No such principles restrained the audience's attribution of value.**[10]**

At moments in this letter Duchamp seems to suggest that artists are just as much in the fog about their work's meaning as about its value: "There does not exist a painter who knows himself or knows what he is doing." But this is not the major thrust, and Duchamp seems to have some second thoughts toward the end, when he allows that every work possesses an "original fragrance," a perfume that belongs uniquely and essentially to it, and which we might expect to be what beholders try to sniff out when they interpret it, were it not that "like all fragrances

it evaporates very quickly," leaving a dried nut to be cracked by the pincers of art history. However quickly it evaporates, the original fragrance of a work is something independent of the public's arbitrary judgment; even if we take

over Duchamp's views and assimilate this *parfum original* to what he called the "personal 'art coefficient'" of a work, making a picture's aura radiate from the gap between its maker's intention and what the conditions of producing it allowed him to realize, the spectators do not have so free a hand in determining a work's meaning or content as they do in attaching a value to it.

All these opinions come from relatively late in Duchamp's life, and we learn something about their place in his thinking by noticing that as a young man he seemed to hold other ideas. In his early days in New York he did not hesitate to say what his own work was about, taking the trouble to explain to his American spectators that his paintings "do not represent concrete material things, but abstract movement," and even rather flatfootedly describing his glass painting of the glider that would later be part of the Large Glass (Fig. 30) as "an irony on the feats of the modern engineer." He also spoke more positively about the relationship between vanguard work and its audience, saying that in the public's attitude "it is more the execution than the spirit which is misunderstood and not comprehended." To be sure, he easily gave expression to common avant-garde ideas, such as "pioneers must always expect to be misunderstood," and "it is a matter of great indifference to me what criticism is printed in the papers and the magazines. I am simply working out my own ideas in my own way." But he assumed that some of the audience would grasp what he was about, and to those who did not but wanted to he recommended that they "study all the paintings of the genre you can. It is only through constant observation that the plan becomes clear."**[11]** Such a counsel assumed that artists had plans and that viewers could understand them.

Even though Duchamp gave vent to these ideas in New York, they were ones he brought with him from France; his perspective did not yet reflect the impact of his own experience in America. The notion that the audience possessed total power over artistic reputations and that their judgments bore little relationship to any understanding of a work's content, represent what had happened to him at the Armory

Show very well. Once he had absorbed the lesson, there was more modesty than cynicism in his remark to Crotti that "artists who during their lifetime have known how to make their shoddy goods appreciated are excellent travelling salesmen, but nothing guarantees the immortality of their work." To the degree that his image of the artist as a "mediumistic being" denied that the maker of a work had a privileged position in regard to knowing its meaning, as opposed to its value, his experience in America contributed to that view, too: first, because it reflected the plethora of alternative readings his audience gave *Nude Descending a Staircase* by proposing their alternative titles for it; and second, because the path to the full-blown notion of readymades passed through the region of irony where no one quite knew

whether the aesthetic claims advanced on behalf of galoshes, shovels, and urinals were seriously meant or not.

Duchamp's own experience as an artist thus contained some moments when he was clearly aware of his own intentions, and others when he may not have known for sure what they were, or even whether he had any. Despite what he sometimes said, however, and what some of his admirers like to hear him saying, he never ceased to insist that what really counts in creative activity was the personality of the artist. As early as a 1915 interview he declared that "art is all a matter of personality." Later he added, "There is no art, there are only artists," and "Art doesn't interest me. Artists interest me." When an interviewer asked, "Are you saying that the true history of art is the history of individual men? Of individual artists?" Duchamp replied, "Yes, *uniquement* . That's the only thing that counts." And again, to conclude the same interview: "And your most powerful interest is not in art, but in great human beings." To which: "Exactly, that's right." The total dependence of art on the personality of artists was another reason he offered for having ceased to make pictures. "The individual, man as a man, man as a brain, if you like, interests me more than what he makes, because I've noticed that most artists only repeat themselves. This is necessary, however, you can't always be inventive. Only they have that old habit which inclines them to do one painting a month, for example.... They believe they owe society the monthly or yearly painting."**[12]**

How can we understand Duchamp's alternations between denouncing individual coherence and stable identity and affirming the importance of artistic personality? Let us put the question in context by returning for a moment to the comparison with Arthur Rimbaud we pursued in regard to Duchamp's links to bohemianism. Rimbaud famously proclaimed, in the same letters where he declared his aspiration to become a seer, that the self was not the agent of its own acts. Justifying his self-destructive pursuit of sensory derangement or disorganization, he explained, "It is wrong to say: I think. One should say: I am thought.... I is an other [*Je est un autre*]. So much the worse for the wood that discovers it's a violin, and to hell with the heedless who cavil about something they know nothing about!" By making the first person singular *je* behave as if it were a third-person pronoun, Rimbaud infused the self with radical otherness, making subjective consciousness merely the thought of some external power to which the poet looked for his transformation into a *voyant* , able to see into regions dosed to ordinary folk. Although Rimbaud never made clear just what he thought this power could be, and scholars disagree about whether he was thinking in the terms of Eastern mysticism or giving a special turn to traditional notions of inspiration, he clearly meant to reject any equation of poetry with the imaginative capacity of a single person. Such had been the great error of the romantics, who had betrayed their own aspirations to make poetry visionary by mistakenly locating the springs of creativity within individuals: "If the old fools had not hit upon the false significance of the Ego only, we should not

now have to sweep away these millions of skeletons who, since time immemorial, have been accumulating the products of those one-eyed intellects proclaiming themselves to be authors." In place of what he called "subjective poetry," which equated the content of a poetic work with "the idea sung and understood by the singer," Rimbaud favored "objective poetry," infused by "the unknown" that beckoned somewhere beyond the self.[13]

Duchamp's image of the artist as a "mediumistic being" echoed Rimbaud's vision of the creative self as other. By the time the former put forth his ideas in the talks and interviews we have quoted, the campaign to strip individual consciousness of its claims to creativity had been

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joined by dadaists and surrealists, and it would later reach a kind of climax in the structuralist and poststructuralist proclamation of the "death of the author" or—in more philosophically loaded terms—the demise of the human subject. There is much at stake therefore in how we understand what this revolt against individuality meant.

One often-heard view is that the alternative to the romantic subjectivism that glorifies the individual ego is some form of communal membership, a recognition that persons owe many of "their" powers to the groups in which their consciousness takes form. Some readers of Rimbaud have seen him in this light, noting for instance his hostility to the bourgeois life and culture of his day and his sympathy with the revolutionary Paris Commune of 1871, whose repression at just the moment he was formulating his visionary project seemed to demonstrate the inhumanity of modern individualist society and politics. But such a communalist reading of Duchamp's transactions with individuality would be difficult to imagine, and it does not take much effort to see that it cannot be sustained for Rimbaud either.[14]

The reason is that the limitations from which Rimbaud sought to liberate himself would have been just as oppressive to him had they been those of a society that privileged collective values over individual ones. Indeed, in many ways French society and culture of his time did just that, notably in its educational system (through which the young Rimbaud had very recently passed), whose methods and techniques aimed to form students in the mold of classical texts, presented as universally valid models of thought and expression. When Rimbaud rejected the individualism of his day and that of the romantics, he was not setting himself against a form of "abstract" individuality that presumed to be independent of socially shared norms and expectations, but precisely against the assumption that whatever form of personal coherence individuals achieve has to be nurtured on the materials society and culture provide. By submitting himself to sensory disorganization Rimbaud was seeking to purge his person of just those materials, and the

self wholly infused by otherness that was to result from this discipline paradoxically presented an appearance of radical wholeness, never to be attained by people who try to fuse the heterogeneous materials of real social life into some sort of personal identity. What op-

pressed him about the form of individuality he found around him was not its claim to independence but its impurity, and the limits, both physical and cultural, that such a hybrid nature imposed; to a Rimbaud such a set of limits, as Yves Bonnefoy puts it, "resides within reality like an abstraction, like a *fait accompli* . Its moments and its doings have the immobility of death. And the other part of human possibility, even if condemned, appears beyond as a light."**[15]** What Rimbaud sought in the name of liberation from individuality was actually something more pressured and desperate, freedom from the material limits of the body and of culture. His example suggests— and many of his heirs confirm—that the modernist (and "postmodernist") theme of the "death of the subject" only takes the form of a retreat from individualism in order to institute a much more radical claim for personal liberation.**[16]**

Duchamp's movement back and forth between seeking to remove any traces of stability and coherence from his own persona and proclaiming the centrality of personality in art followed a similar pattern. The stable personality from which he sought escape was one to which the conditions of social life and the limitations it imposed on personal formation all adhered, so that to dissolve it was to find passage into a realm where such limitations found no purchase, precisely the region of the fourth dimension figured in the Large Glass. Like Rimbaud, Duchamp was highly conscious of the power external conditions exercised over individuals. He often spoke about how historical surroundings affected artistic practice, and one of the points to which he returned was the way that changes in society and culture during his own lifetime had squeezed the available space for creative originality almost to the disappearing point. The expansion of the public, the ballooning market for art, the commercialization of culture, the acceptance of the avant-garde, and the general expensiveness of life all meant that the old heroism of bohemian rebellion still possible between the two world wars was no longer alive after midcentury, making it practically impossible to launch a genuinely original vision into the world. Thinking about these considerations in one interview led Duchamp to attribute so much weight to social circumstances that individual genius appeared powerless against them, making it "wholly fortuitous" whether a new voice would be heard or not.

And yet he used the very same occasion to affirm just the opposite position, concluding that a powerful individual would triumph all the same, for his powers would rise up out of the depths of the personal interior, where the leveling influence of external conditions could not reach.

> It probably could be overcome by a man—one man. Not by a group of men, not by a school, even. In other words, I am putting up a man again; an individual; a demigod who, if he is not crushed by the opposition that he will have, will come out of it and conquer a position above that complete levelling by the great mass of the public. We don't know the qualities he must have, even, because they are the completely subjective qualities that come from the very far, inner self.**[17]**

On a less exalted level this was the claim Duchamp made for himself in one interview, saying: "I wanted to use my possibility to be an individual, and I suppose I have, no?"**[18]**

Where Duchamp's understanding of individuality led, and what he thought it meant to achieve independence from outside conditions by calling up "subjective qualities ... from the very far, inner self," can be seen in the works he called his *Boîtes en valise* , or boxes in a suitcase (Fig. 66), a project that occupied him off and on during the last thirty years of his life. The boxes were small, portable collections that gathered together nearly all the work he had done by 1935, the year when he began to plan and make them; working fairly steadily through 1940, he assembled sixty-nine miniature replicas, photos, and color reproductions, making this his major activity during the last period when he maintained continuous residence in France. Twenty boxes were produced in a deluxe, leather-covered format, each of which contained one "original reproduction" hand-colored by Duchamp (technically, only these specially produced boxes were *en valise* , the others being simply *boîtes*), and the plan called for up to three hundred ordinary ones, which were still being produced at the artist's death in 1968.

The assemblage was small enough to be easily carried around, about sixteen by fifteen inches in length and width and four inches deep in
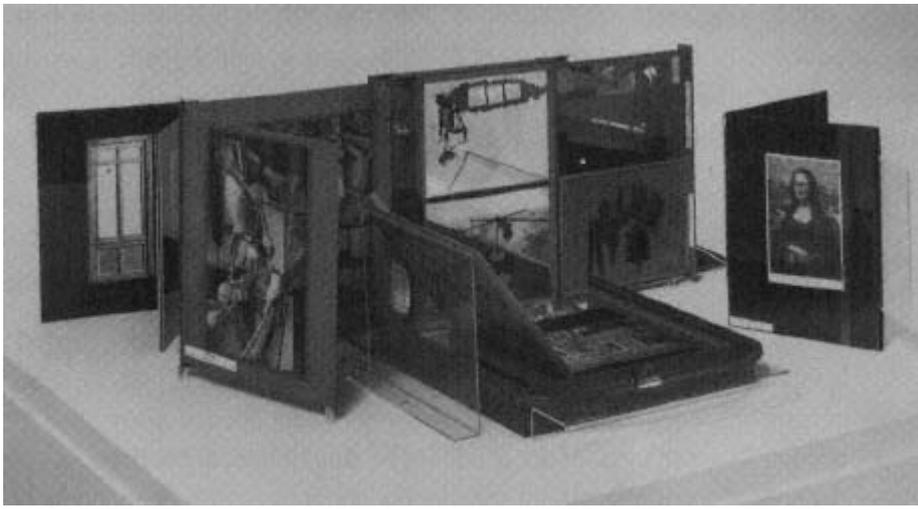
Figure 66.
Duchamp, *Boîte en valise* (1935-41)

the deluxe edition. Each deluxe box carried its hand-colored original reproduction inside the top, and in all the boxes the first unfolding of the interior structure brought a reproduction of the Large Glass into the upright plane of the lid, flanked on the left by replicas of *Air de Paris, Pliant de voyage* (the Underwood typewriter cover), and *Fountain* on the viewer's left; visible on top of the horizontal pile was *Sonata* , with *Three Standard Stoppages* in the space at the left of the case's bottom section. Further unfoldings made the other sixty-odd items visible.**[19]**

On one level, the boxes were a tribute to Duchamp's insertion in the world of material reality, in that all were intended to be sold. Here we must take a moment to note that Duchamp's reputation as a great rebel against the world of official art, with its exhibitions, dealers, and museums, has often produced the false impression that he refused to have any truck with the commercial aspects of being an artist. Nothing could be further from the truth. The son of a good bourgeois father—who, it should be remembered, cheerfully supported his children's artistic careers—Duchamp used his own commercial instincts many times in the art world. The strategy of having both deluxe and standard editions of the *Boîtes* was one he used a year earlier in bringing out the

Green Box of notes for the Large Glass, and for years before he had been involved in commercial transactions with pictures. During his stay in Buenos Aires in 1918 he devoted considerable effort to trying to set up an exhibition and sale of cubist paintings, hoping to educate the public by providing copies of books and journals about cubism, and specifying in letters to his friends that he wanted to include only work that was for sale. The project never came off, but in 1926 he organized an auction of eighty works by Picabia in

Paris, signing the advertising flyers as his alter ego Rrose Sélavy. In the same year he borrowed money to attempt to exhibit and sell (in partnership with his friend Henri-Pierre Roché) fifteen Brancusi sculptures in New York. The plan was held up by the refusal of American customs inspectors to agree to admit the pieces duty-free as art, a contretemps that soon had Duchamp the anti-artist woundedly defending Brancusi's status: "To say that the sculpture of Brancusi is not art is like saying an egg is not an egg." During his long friendship with Walter Arensberg he kept track of market conditions while helping his patron to acquire not just most of his own works but thirty-five pieces by other artists; in 1932 alone these included three Picassos, a Léger, a Roger de la Fresnaye, and an early de Chirico. In 1935 he appears to have harbored the hope that he would be able to sell reproductions of his roto-reliefs in Macy's, but the department store seems never to have bought more than one, on approval.[20]

The *Boîtes* , then, were a commercial enterprise, and their resemblance to a commercial traveler's sample case recalls his comment to Jean Crotti about artists who can make "their shoddy goods" appreciated during their lifetimes being "excellent travelling salesmen." Putting so many works and objects inside such a casing called attention to the question of how they were all related to one another. On the surface they appeared as a series of disparate, meaningless gestures, linked by no recognizable continuities of style, taste, or theme. In documenting Duchamp's rejection of the traditions of art, they simultaneously seemed to fulfill the desire Jules Laforgue expressed when he yearned for a life unconstrained by habit: "Oh, what a dream! What a dream! It's enough to drive you crazy! a whole existence without a single act being generated or influenced by habit. Every act an *act in itself* ."[21]

Each work and readymade would indeed appear as an "act in itself," were we to take them as the products of a "mediumistic being" inspired by indifference.

But once we become aware of the thematic links that join Duchamp's works and objects together, then the boxes take on a totally different aspect. Enclosing his work in this way underlined its quality of constituting a private world, independent of place and able to retain its character through all kinds of movements from one locale to another, just as Duchamp had learned to transport himself whole from France to America and back again. Of course, many other artists and works have made that journey, but no one else thought to assemble the bulk of his work as a portable enclosure like his.[22] The symbolic self-sufficiency of the boxes recalls the involuted structure of his various language-games, turning or folding symbols back on themselves, along with the opaque French window that prevents the promised passage from an interior space to an external one. The boxes highlight the importance of self-referentiality as a major theme in

Duchamp's work, effected by the punning connection between the ready maid of the Large Glass and the readymades removed from the conditions of their worldly existence, by the links between the Large Glass, the altered Mona Lisa, and Duchamp's own self-representation as Rrose Sélavy, by the collection of references to his own objects and interests that populated *Tu m '*, and even by the Large Glass itself, which Pierre Cabanne described—with Duchamp's hearty approval—as "the successive sum of your experiments for eight years."**[23]**

Like pieces of an elaborate puzzle, the works and objects demand that we disregard the apparent disparity of their stylistic surfaces and enter into the consciousness that brought them together, until we grasp the hidden set of preoccupations that link them in that other mind. Here the elements of Duchamp's private language speak to one another like a kind of giant pun, engaging in a play of mutual stimulation, each with the others, and lest we miss the point it is driven home—with the same combination of subtlety and crudeness found so often in his work—by the number of objects planned for the deluxe editions: 69. (After 1966 a dozen other items were added, but this did not alter the original boxes.) The cipher effected a not surprising variation on his

ambition to "grasp things with the mind in the way the penis is grasped by the vagina."

In the *Boîtes* Duchamp wrapped himself in the freedom of his isolation, where the self that is purified of the residues of ordinary life achieves a radical wholeness like that Rimbaud sought in his more desperate program of sensory derangement, here achieved along the path of calm detachment that set Duchamp apart from so many of his vanguard comrades. Gathering his objects about him, he took up residence in his own kind of Rousselian *locus solus* , an enclosure beyond time and space whose contents were all illuminated by the intricate logic of his imagination. The *Boîtes* were the most complete of Duchamp's self-portraits, the picture of how he had sought to dedicate desire to the liberation of fantasy, his peculiar and yet exemplary way of affirming the power of the creative individual within the fluid and stimulating, unstable and dizzying world of modern culture.

Nine—
Conclusion:
Art and Its Freedoms

One of the pleasures of writing about Duchamp is telling people you're doing it. True, some only respond by scratching their heads and trying to dig up what they remember about the Armory Show and a picture of a nude-doing-something-or-other. But others come to attention, radiating a sense that the subject means something to them or ought to, even if they can't quite tell what it is, and occasionally someone will be able to say just how Duchamp has touched his or her life. A writer whom I don't know very well was the most striking of these, flooded with the remembrance of seeing *Three Standard Stoppages* for the first time: "He had the courage to do that! It was a great inspiration to me. It still is."

Many people to whom Duchamp has been important are ones who find that he opens up new spaces of freedom for them, making it possible to do things that were out of reach before. The acquaintance I just quoted shared this view with Gianfranco Baruchello, the Italian artist who, readers may remember, felt betrayed by *Given* because it alone among Duchamp's works seemed to enclose the imagination in a world of natural limitations, rescinding the invitation to explore ever-new regions proffered by all his other work. At the time Baruchello first began to hear about Duchamp from friends he was (like many vanguard art-

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ists) deeply engaged in radical politics, which made him resist the suggestion that so apolitical a predecessor might have something important to teach him. But he found that no other figure, politically committed or not, could impart the liberating energy Duchamp did. "There's nothing at all that I can feel Picasso has given me some miraculous authorization to do, and Duchamp on the other hand gives me authorization to pretend that I myself am Duchamp."[1]

Baruchello's reaction to Duchamp in turn echoes one André Breton set down as early as 1922. At a time when Breton was growing disillusioned with the antics of the dada movement in which he had become involved a few years earlier, but had not yet formulated the program of infusing dream life into reality that he would call surrealism in 1924, he proposed Duchamp as a rallying point for those who sought a kind of freedom that would not betray itself by investing its hopes in some defined and circumscribed style or formula. Breton invoked the signs of Duchamp's detachment from every program and movement—his ambiguous relationship to cubism and futurism, his willingness to entrust himself to accident and chance, and his gesture of refusing to participate in a dada show a year earlier, sending the

dismissive telegram *Pode bal* (punningly *peau de bal* , "balls to you")—as an inspiration to "be suspicious of all materializations whatsoever." Breton especially admired Duchamp's gesture of letting the toss of a coin decide whether he would remain in Paris or leave the next day for America; by calling on chance to overrule his own preference he made sure that no notion already formed inside his mind would control his life, thus undercutting the apparent exaltation of his own power of choice that might seem to be implied by the act of making a readymade into a work merely by calling it one.

What made these features of Duchamp's person so exemplary in Breton's eyes was their relevance to what he perceived as the historical dilemma of the avant-garde. The goal of vanguard movements was liberation, but this aim had been repeatedly missed because the participants allowed their energy and imagination to be frozen in the mold of some definite style or program. Hence, the battle that had to be joined was "the struggle to liberate the modern consciousness from that terrible fixation mania which we never cease to denounce," and which

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had nurtured "the famous intellectual crab-apple tree which in half a century has borne the fruits called symbolism, cubism, futurism, dadaism." To fell that tree was to give free rein to the energies hitherto harnessed to particular programs and movements, so that the world would experience the full force of imaginative freedom: such was the vision Duchamp's example inspired.**[2]**

Breton's image of Duchamp as pointing the way to a goal that modernist movements had shared but failed to achieve highlights qualities that other admirers have also seen in him. But it represents at best one way to think about the avant-garde and its history, a way whose limits are signaled along with its power by Duchamp's and Bretons shared devaluation of style. For Duchamp style was merely habit, a way of continuing to do things in the way one had done them before; for Breton the avant-garde undermined its own promise of liberation precisely by producing a series of movements identifiable (at least in part) by recognizable stylistic features. The latter's objection to such movements was not that they prevented artists from expressing personal ideas or visions, for he knew perfectly well that talented people had succeeded in doing just that within each of modern art's successive styles. His point was rather that working within a definite style was in principle incompatible with the goal he set for vanguard practice, namely the ceaseless undermining of every fixed condition of human life.

As a way to put this view of style in perspective, let us contrast it with something that a rather more flexible surrealist, the poet and critic Paul Eluard, wrote about Picasso. The comparison helps to distinguish between

two different notions of freedom, each of which corresponds to a particular idea of avant-garde art. Eluard described Picasso as someone who had successfully traveled the difficult "path from the subject to the object." By this he meant that Picasso had started out, like many others, with what was simply a personal attitude or way of feeling about things—Eluard called it "a certain dose of sympathy or antipathy"—but out of that attitude he had fashioned forms that gave others a new way to see the world. People who set out from such intensely subjective starting points begin by envisaging the objects around them in simple and arbitrary metaphors, direct translations of their inner preoccupa-

tions. "They take a glass for an abyss or a trap, fire for a jewel, the moon for a woman, a bottle for a weapon, a painting for a window." Those who view the world in this way—Eluard listed them as "animals, savages, the mad, and poets"—are alternately empowered and disarmed by their ability to see one thing in another, liberated from subjection to the way things are, but also shut out from reality by the raw force of their imagination. Because this kind of freedom is so problematic, most people end up by trying to banish its traces from their lives.

But a few poetic beings are capable of mining what is precious in this vein of imagination, drawing on it to enrich the common stock of experience by "propagating their individuality," that is, working up their private and sometimes arbitrary perceptions so that they open a new dimension of experience for others. This was what Picasso achieved. His pictures are full of "fetishes and cabalistic signs," highly personal images—of women or guitars or bottles—that viewers are likely to see as mere distortions at first; but by dint of genius and application he had infused them with the power to give others entry into some of the novel forms of experience they had first revealed to him. The result was "a poetic reason," a language of images that employed private feelings to construct a vision of the world others could share despite and even because of its idiosyncratic features.[3]

Although Eluard did not quite say so, what he described in this account was Picasso's development of a style. In this light, a style is a visual synthesis of a subjectivity with the objects that confront it, a way of representing a highly personal encounter with the world so that others can participate in it without losing their bearings. The objects we see in Picasso's pictures retain enough recognizable features to identify them as what they are in the world we share with him, but they are also marked by their passage through his consciousness: they exist in a sphere intermediate between subjective and objective experience, becoming what the British psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott calls "transitional objects," things human beings use to mediate the distance between inner and outer worlds.[4]

By depicting things in this way, an artist like Picasso shows his inner concerns and obsessions for what they are, powerful psychic forces that

make the world appear in a new light, but only at the price of distorting it. Others are able to enter into such a vision because it both shows objects in recognizable ways and preserves the marks of its personal origins, thus acknowledging that the perspective it offers makes no claim to be universal; it stands as a supplement to other ways of seeing, not a substitute for them. By describing Picasso in these terms, Eluard put himself close to what Gleizes and Metzinger had in mind when they defined the cubist picture plane as "a sensitive passage between two subjective spaces."

Duchamp was not always opposed to this passage, for he had sought a way to effect it in the period before he made the Large Glass his major project, in pictures like *Nude Descending a Staircase, Sad Young Man on a Train* , and the various combinations of kings and queens with "swift" or "high speed" nudes. The images in these works bear strange qualities and features that make them difficult to identify, but with attention viewers can approach the ideas and intentions that inspired them, all the more so because Duchamp reworked and developed the themes in a series of related pictures. They were still "transitional objects," inhabiting a space midway between Duchamp's subjectivity and the world he shared with others, as he recognized when he recommended to Americans in an early interview that they study as many examples of the new painting as they could: "It is only through constant observation that the plan becomes clear."[5]

By the time Duchamp made that recommendation, however, he had already abandoned the kind of painting to which it referred. The images and symbols in the Large Glass, like the readymades, no longer inhabit a transitional space; instead they renounce the need for transition, some by offering viewers no way to identify them (like the bride herself and the milky way), others by magically remaining wholly what they are in the world while simultaneously entering totally into Duchamp's private universe (the case with both visible and invisible elements of the bachelor realm, as with the readymades themselves). In these works Duchamp was no longer trying to examine and refine his own subjectivity through an encounter with the world; rather, he had begun to fashion symbols and appropriate objects to fit the architecture of an already-structured private universe, finding the freedom to do this

by abandoning the attempt to develop common ground with others. Art thus became "a bridge to take me somewhere else," to a place no one else could inhabit "because it would be so revolutionary in essence that it couldn't be formulated."[6] In the Large Glass that undefinable place was represented by the notion of the fourth dimension, the world of pure fluidity; to enter it meant "*to lose the possibility of recognizing 2 similar objects* —2 colors, 2 laces, 2 hats, 2 forms whatsoever to reach the Impossibility of sufficient *visual* memory, to transfer from one like object to another the *memory* imprint."[7] Here "constant observation" was rendered impossible, and style was reduced to mere habit because any stable, continuous way of encountering things was by definition mired in material fixity.

In a way this comparison between Duchamp's idea of style and Eluard's merely returns us to some familiar points: that Duchamp intended to abandon painting, that he preferred the purity of ideas in his mind to the "muddying" they underwent on canvas, that he wanted to use art for a purpose beyond itself. But it should now be apparent that the freedom he sought through his various activities, and that others have valued in him, was not the only kind that being an artist makes available. Using Eluard's account of Picasso to stand for the other kind—it is not necessary that we think Picasso actually fits this sketch of him, but only that it describe one way of being an artist—we can say that its difference from Duchamp's stems from its different relationship to the world outside the self.

Duchamp's pure freedom requires that the inner play of fantasy meet the world of material things wholly on the former's terms: it is lost when one breaks the shop window and discovers that the objects which beckon there only yield to possession by imposing the actuality of their limitations on desire's infinite wish. Such freedom cannot be experienced through direct interaction with the world, but only at a remove, in the Large Glass's perpetual delay, the chessboard's abstraction from social relationships, or the protected enclosure of the *Boîtes en valise* . Such spaces are worlds in themselves, into which objects enter only as symbols, so that the ideas they stand for encounter no material, mundane resistances, but echo endlessly off each other in a kind of constant interior reverberation.

The other kind of freedom, less pure but also less isolated, is fulfilled not in self-reference but in representation, the power to see the world in some independent way. Being able to give the world a personal shape does not liberate anyone from the conditions of living in it, but it testifies to an individual's ability to discover possible ways to think and act that had not been visible before; each style sets up a particular mode of interaction with the external world, giving to it an order it does not possess in itself. The novel forms such action produces may be peculiar to one person, but just for that reason they imply the possibility that other subjects may possess the same power of perceptual and expressive innovation as the first. Because

each new representation makes room in this way for the possible emergence of others, all must appeal to the independent existence of a world outside the self as their common reference point; free representation acknowledges its partial dependence on things outside because it finds its freedom in interacting with them.

Although one might try to argue that one of these kinds of freedom is more "genuine" or "authentic" (perhaps Duchamp's and Breton's kind) or more "practical" or "real" (probably the second, less radical kind) than the other, let us set that question aside for a moment. Not every human concern about freedom requires that we try to decide what definition of it can muster the best arguments, or even whether any notion of it can survive the challenge of determinism. It is also important to understand what kinds of experiences people have in mind when they speak about freedom in a particular way, and to what needs different conceptions of it respond. We are justified in thinking that Picasso's innovations have something genuine to do with freedom because so many people have experienced them as exemplifying it, and because they had a strong liberating impact on painting and on culture more generally; and yet Baruchello appears to put his finger on something important when he says that only Duchamp, and not Picasso, freed him up in a different way, somehow authorizing him to be a totally different person.

What Baruchello meant can be clarified by recalling the distinctions two thinkers we referred to earlier, Bergson and Valéry, made between the ordinary self and what they called respectively the "deep" or "pure" self. To adopt Valéry's way of thinking for a moment, the "pure" self is

that part of the person that is able to retreat into the space of pure reflection and look out on all the conditions of its own life with detachment and even hostility, regarding them as mere accidental combinations with no bearing on the nature of consciousness, which is equally at home—and equally a stranger—in any time, place, body, or personality. Although Valéry, for the reasons recounted above, came to regard the temptation to try to become such a self as illusory and dangerous, he continued to value it as one side of human existence, a spur to develop imaginative and personal freedom that he sought to draw on and to guard against at the same time.

Those like Baruchello who experience Duchamp as the source of an authorization to liberate themselves from all the limitations of ordinary life seem to be invoking something that lies close to this notion of a deep or pure self. This does not mean that everyone who reacts to Duchamp in this way is appealing to the same thing, for there may be many depths at the bottom of the self and more than one way to gain access to them. Valéry's idea that the "pure self" refers to a consciousness able to objectify all the conditions under which it comes to exist and thus declare its independence

of them all, might itself be broken down into different sorts of experiences. For instance, we may distance ourselves from the conditions of our lives at moments when social or cultural instability Causes the values we share with others to lose their binding power, or when some kind of personal crisis puts our previously internalized standards and expectations in question. We may come upon a self not usually visible at moments when desires or impulses we normally keep under wraps break out and find their way into our thoughts or actions—a kind of Freudian deep self. Or, we may find a deep self in a different sense at moments when some dilemma or problem that seemed insurmountable suddenly yields to a rush of inspiration: here we are closer to Bergson's deep self. These—and one could add others—are all separate, sometimes related and sometimes contrasting notions of what it means to speak of a self that dwells somewhere apart from or below the ordinary plane of existence. What they share is a sense of selfhood that is more fluid, less beholden to external determinations, more open to unconsidered possibilities, than the selves most of us know in our everyday lives.

Different as these experiences may be, the likelihood of encountering them, or the need to draw upon them, whether separately or in some combination, is increased by living in the modern world, with its rapid changes, its undermining of beliefs and assumptions, and the largescale, anonymous, and impersonal forms of social interaction it brings into existence, especially in cities. This is the situation we called up at the start, when we examined the separate but connected responses to it of the impressionists, Baudelaire, the symbolists, and the cubists. All sought to comprehend and face up to the modern experience of isolation in the midst of social interaction, which throws the self back on its own resources or pressures it to discover new ones. In earlier cultures encounters with such ordinarily inaccessible powers were often felt as mystical moments, contacts with forces so powerful that they could only be understood as coming from somewhere beyond individuals, usually from some sacred or transcendent realm. We moderns are more likely to locate such powers within the psyche.

As a way to invoke the relations between such a form of selfhood and the world, readymades possess an important advantage over traditional art objects. The latter are records of an interaction between a single person (or, in special cases like workshop paintings, of a few closely related ones) and the outside world, and they usually bear the marks of the individual or at least the stylistic school that produced them. They may even be a kind of record of a personal struggle—increasingly so in modern times—to find an intelligible shape or meaning in experience. They belong to the self that forms its being within the world. Readymades bear no such marks. Their very name declares their indifference toward the personality or special features of the persons who acquire and use them, who on their side may know nothing about how the objects came to be. Hence they possess a kind of double accessibility, available to anyone and open to the whims of

imagination. The act that transforms them into art begins and ends in a moment of recognition, whose ease preserves it from the tensions of traditional art making; thus, such modern products are more permeable to individual symbolic intentions than are traditional objects. This may seem paradoxical, given that things made by machine industry are in a way pure products of social relations, often bearing no visible imprint of person-

ality, but it is just this anonymity that delivers such objects over to the play of private fantasy: industrial products are open to any metaphorical import our preoccupations prompt us to project onto them, because their general availability and absence of ornament denude them of signs that attach them to any other recognizable signifying intention.

And yet, once their aesthetic potential has been recognized, readymades need not be restricted to manufactured objects. The person who is able to employ "anything ... the most conventional or unconventional symbol" to stand for a mental content can put any relatively simple object to such use; as a metaphor, the machined circle of the bicycle wheel possesses no advantages over the hand-blown glass ampoule or the carpentered French window. The thread of thematic continuity that runs between Duchamp's readymades and links them to such other objects as the *Three Standard Stoppages* easily passes through the boundary between industrial objects and handmade ones.**[8]** Modernity provided the occasion for inventing or discovering a language of the deep self; what any one of us tries to say in it will depend on who that person is.

Duchamp certainly located the region from which artists drew their creative powers in the depths of the self, but he also aspired to a different and seemingly opposite kind of selfhood, one that was characterized by lightness and dispersal rather than by depth. Similar images of a weightless, floating self have been put forth by other modernist figures who shared some of Duchamp's goals and attitudes. But these two apparently opposed alternatives to ordinary selfhood often lie closer together than the contrasting descriptions of them may suggest. To see how deepening and dispersal may resemble each other or feed on each other, let us look for a moment at a well-known Duchamp enthusiast who spoke the language of self-diffusion, John Cage. Considering him will also let us end with some questions about Duchamp's legacy.

Like Duchamp, Cage sought to liberate new forms of creative energy by dissolving fixed forms of identity. Against the traditional association of art with a kind of making that actively seeks to impose form on experience, he championed a passive acceptance of what-comes-when-it-comes, a unity

with the fleeting and the momentary, "that love

which comes from a sense of at-oneness with whatever." He sought escape from every fixed determination through the cultivation of chance, turning to techniques of Eastern mysticism like the I Ching. Cage's typical ideas (which, like Duchamp's, were closely assembled around a compact core), along with the often eccentric forms he found to express them, are well-suggested in this paragraph from a lecture he gave at the Juilliard School of Music in 1952.

> When a composer feels a re-sponsibility to make, rather than accept, he e-liminates from the area of possibility all those events that do not suggest the at that point in time vogue of profundity, for he takes himself seriously, wishes to be considered great, and he thereby diminishes his love and in-creases his fear and concern about what people will think. There are many serious problems confronting such an indi-vidual, but at any moment destruction may come suddenly and then what happens is fresher. How different this form sense is from that which is bound up with memory, themes and secondary themes, their struggle, their development, the climax, the recapitulation, which is the belief that one may own one's own home, but actually, unlike the snail, we carry our homes within us which enables us to fly, or to stay, to enjoy each.

Cage here rejects the traditional figure of the creative "indi-vidual" who seeks to give music a coherent structure, exemplified by sonata form with its narrative development and interaction of diverse themes. Such composition provides a model for personal integration, self-consciously achieved and woven out of material somehow carried along through life. In Cage's view, the person who pursues such an identity is limited not only by commitment to established notions of form, but also by attachment to historically specific ways of thinking—"the at that point in time vogue of profundity"—and to the social self-awareness that gives him over (Valéry was troubled by the same worry) to concerns about what others think. The "destruction" that may overtake such a being at any moment—and which Cage sought to encourage, like Duchamp, by substituting chance for conscious will—saves him from these limits, turning him into a "fresher" figure, aware that

(as he puts it a moment later) "our poetry now is the realization that we possess nothing. Anything therefore is a delight (since we do not possess it)

and thus need not fear its loss."**[9]**

The Duchampian echoes in all this will be clear enough to anyone who has read this far, but so too should be the underlying appeal that goes out not against the self but toward a purer, less externally compromised self. Like the *moi* Rimbaud sought to decompose, the "individual" for whose destruction Cage yearns is divided, split into pieces by virtue of his or her attachments to outside things; by contrast, the "fresher" form of existence that replaces such "indi-viduality" achieves an inner unity and consistency, unsuspected at first. Were we to take an equal interest in every passing sound and image, then we would avoid the fragmentation that results from relatively permanent links to certain particular outside objects, and we would no longer need to seek reunification of the sort represented by the sonata's narrative of statement, development, and recapitulation; we could live ecstatically in a state of constant openness to the fleeting incitements of passing things. What we would learn in this state, however, is that "unlike the snail, we carry our homes within us which enables us to fly, or to stay, to enjoy each." By recognizing that his way of taking pleasure in the world depended on such an inner habitation, Cage acknowledged that the self-diffusion to which he appealed presupposed a persisting core of sameness, a self-referential inwardness that can be moved about like a kind of *boîte en valise* . Each momentary object becomes in turn the screen on which to encounter a project that never varies, a project well evoked by Erich Heller's gloss on Hofmannsthal, quoted above: "He who is without a home in external reality will entrust himself to any wave of inwardness to take him anywhere."

Cage's twofold affirmation, of oneness with everything in the universe and yet of possessing nothing, of living everywhere in the world and yet being at home only within the self, points to the contradiction that typically overtakes any attempt to assimilate one's being to some deep self. The result is to enter a state that is simultaneously totally full and totally empty, at once transparent and opaque, able to draw the world into the self but at the price of divesting all things of their substantiality. Here one lives with a feeling of extreme power that merges into total

impotence, just the duality Valéry experienced when he simultaneously acknowledged the magnetic pull of the *moi pure* and recognized the attraction of such purity as a danger to his very life.

Duchamp never explicitly recognized that danger, and one might be tempted to argue that in certain ways he succumbed to it. One form of absorption in pure interiority that Valéry, like many others, feared was madness, the inability to distinguish between the mind's imaginings and the world outside. When I spoke about the reactions one gets to writing about Duchamp I did

not mention this one, though I have encountered it often enough: "But wasn't he crazy?" The question is not irrelevant, and it occurred during his lifetime even to some who looked on him with love and awe.[10] Projects of radical liberation in modern culture have often acknowledged their willingness to draw on energies commonly feared or repressed as insane; the surrealists were particularly straightforward and open in their celebration of madness, and more recently Michel Foucault, not always recognized as the heir of surrealism he was in this regard, sought to support his claim that modern rationality is essentially repressive by locating its act of birth in the establishment of asylums to segregate and confine those whose unrestrained inner freedom society could not tolerate.[11]

Duchamp was not above flirting with madness, as his celebration of dizziness and disorientation, his exaltation of incoherence, even his appreciation of chess players all witness. But by the measure that counts most, he was solidly, unquestionably sane. Much as he cherished the "euphoria" of inhabiting a private space of fantasy, he never mistook it for the public world of actual existence, not even when he projected his ideas and notions onto objects appropriated from that world. The line he drew between the two is what makes the Large Glass and *Given* appear wholly unrelated: their intimate thematic continuities exist only on the level of ideas, whereas visually nothing in either makes any reference to the other, the two female figures residing in virtually different universes. In Duchamp's mind, the fourth dimension retained its power to represent a realm worth preserving from the ordinary one precisely because it remained beyond the limits of our experience. When he said he looked to painting to take him "somewhere else," he

projected an imagined and very personal journey; his irony protected him from believing that anyone else could be brought along.

Not all his admirers have respected the boundary between private fantasy and shared reality with as much care. In order to understand the difference between him and some of them, we turn briefly to a question postponed until now, the issue of Duchamp and politics. On one level there is little to say about it. In the years around World War I Duchamp could not help being drawn into some of the pervasive political issues of the day, but if some of his views encouraged activist dadaists and surrealists to regard him as a kindred spirit, the fundamental apoliticism he would later openly avow was already visible below the surface. A New York newspaper reporter in 1915 quoted him expressing admiration for "the attitude of combating invasion with folded arms. Could that become the universal attitude, how simple the intercourse of nations would be!" And the *Box of 1914* contained the following proposal "against compulsory military service":

A "deferment" [*éloignement* literally means distancing or sending

away] of each limb, of the heart and the other anatomical parts; each soldier being already unable to put his uniform on again, his heart feeding *telephonically* , a deferred arm, etc. *Then* , no more feeding; each "*deferee* " isolating himself. Finally, a Regulation of regrets from one "*deferee* " to another.**[12]**

However much one may share or admire the pacifist convictions behind this wacky vision, its imagination of a politics of resistance through bodily dismemberment hovers between irony and insanity in the way of many later dada fantasies; it is premised on a form of freedom that has no commerce with material existence.

But Duchamp himself implicitly recognized this by keeping far away from politics for the rest of his life; one attraction of New York for him was that it put him out of reach of the demands to line up with one or another political grouping to which he would have had to respond in France; even during the periods he spent in his native land he seldom took part in group projects, and when he did he had a way of disap-

pearing just before the opening of some public activity in whose planning he had a part.**[13]** In one later interview he refused the label "revolutionary artist," saying that the notion of a revolutionary spirit had no validity and even the word revolutionary itself "doesn't mean a thing."**[14]**

By separating himself in this way from the attempt to attach his career to a project of political transformation, Duchamp acknowledged that the freedom he sought belonged to the realm of pure inwardness, recognizing—correctly, I would argue—that any attempt to extend it to the material world must confuse a kind of freedom that can only exist within the imagination with one that it makes sense to seek in the world outside the self. The liberation experienced by an individual in moments of breaking free from the contingencies of his or her formation can never be established in society as a whole because society is precisely the complex of limited and determined conditions within which individuals live. To be sure, modern societies have known moments when such collective liberation has seemed to beckon, moments of revolutionary exaltation, like those of the 1790s, of 1848, the years before and after World War I (to which we referred earlier), the late 1960s. Important as these times have been in opening up possibilities for social change and reconstruction, all have brought in their train negative, even tragic consequences, more than a few of which stem from the illusion that society can generalize and institutionalize the freedom from external restrictions that individuals may experience at moments of contact with some form of deep self.

It is exactly that illusion that some who see themselves as Duchamp's heirs

retain, when they seek to invest his legacy in a politics of cultural disruption. Their goals are well represented by the philosopher of postmodernism Jean-François Lyotard, who proposes to treat Duchamp's work as a storehouse of "materials, tools and weapons for a politics of incommensurables." Lyotard thinks that the Western humanist attempt to base liberty and equality on universal rights is actually a form of oppression, because it gives too little recognition to forms of difference—between races, sexes, cultures, age groups—and that Duchamp's many modes of denial that the world possesses an order capable of sustaining a stable, rational relationship between things can serve as a constant incitement to rediscover the heterogeneity and un-

containable fluidity that lies beneath our neverending attempts to order experience. Thus Duchamp's objects and images become icons of the permanent revolution of postmodernity.**[15]**

This is not the place to argue out the relationship between human universality and difference as foundations for freedom, but the regularity with which successive movements have had to confront the question suggests that in some way both are required: the politics of difference, pursued by itself, dissolves into the alternatives of claiming superiority or accepting marginality, just as the politics of universality, when it does not recognize difference, can mask and help legitimize attempts by limited groups to claim general validity for their sometimes narrow values and interests. But the issue about trying to give a political slant to Duchamp's career is not really difference—it is only made to seem such by the common "postmodernist" project of displacing older forms of radicalism onto late-twentieth-century movements like feminism, gay liberation, and multiculturalism. The real question is whether one reads Duchamp's career in a way to justify and extend—rather than to contextualize and confine—the radical avant-garde project of undermining and subverting all stable boundaries and limits. Lyotard is far from being the only critic who proposes the first kind of reading; a good number of others, inspired by Derridean deconstruction, Foucauldian antihumanism, or Lacanian claims that every form of reason dissolves into the irrational impulses that lie somewhere beneath it, offer us a Duchamp who is a revelation of some fluid and inchoate substrate of human life and consciousness, an uncontainable energy that promises continual disruption. Thus one recent writer concludes her discussion of Duchamp by invoking "the experience of an archaic, infantilized desire ... creating, if ever so fleetingly, a space of resistance to rationalization," and another ends his book with the answer Duchamp gave to Pierre Cabanne's question about what, beyond scandal, he might have wished for in the fame generated by *Nude Descending a Staircase: "It* . Whatever has no name."**[16]**

There is no doubt that Duchamp himself sometimes appealed to such forms of experience. A certain parallel can be traced between Friedrich Nietzsche's

attempt, in the years just before Duchamp's birth, to project the future existence of a superhuman "overman," free to af-

firm every source of creative power within human nature because he has been purged of all the limits imposed by the claims of morality and truth, and Duchamp's appeal to a realm of pure imagination where desire and fantasy flow without constraint and to forms of language that offer no purchase for stable beliefs and values. In this way the boundless and uncontainable kind of freedom Duchamp sought bears some resemblance to the neo-Nietzschean visions of figures like Foucault and Derrida, not least—as noted above—in regard to their views about language.

But Duchamp was not Nietzsche; when he invoked the "beauty of indifference," he called up a mood into which the philosopher of the will to power never willingly fell, and would never have celebrated. Nietzsche offered himself as a charge of cultural dynamite, a force of creative destruction, while Duchamp relied on the much softer weapons of irony and detachment; his was a more personal and less insistent kind of liberation. Those who suppress the difference, seeking to erect Duchamp as a witness for the self-destructive destiny of modern culture as a whole, are in search of ways to project their personal desire for a politics of disruption (a desire that intensifies their sympathy for the forms of indeterminacy they find in Duchamp) onto some larger power outside themselves. That is one reason why they are so ready to welcome the various proposals, put forward by figures from Rimbaud and Mallarmé through the surrealists and Lacan, to dissolve the self and turn subjectivity into a medium through which some external power—language, history, the cosmic will, or the unconscious—speaks its supposedly universal message. When Michel Foucault, in a famous essay, proposed to treat the question "What does it matter who is speaking?" with a shrug of indifference, he specified the gain he sought from reconfiguring the field of cultural practice so that identifiable authors no longer remained central points of reference within it: the result would be to eliminate a major barrier to "the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction." Foucault meant that detaching texts and images from the particular persons who produce them serves to give "fiction" powers to alter our ideas and lives that are denied it when we recognize stories and pictures as the products of individual, often highly idiosyn-

cratic imaginations. He spoke of "the great peril, the great danger with which fiction threatens our world," meaning that most people feel endangered by

the possibility that things might be other than they are, and he claimed that our practice of attributing works to authors is the way we defend against this menace. It may be that many people share the fears to which Foucault pointed, but his vision of a world where imagination flows freely, unimpeded by the distinction between individual fantasy and socially tested views and claims, is just as madly utopian as the "bourgeois" view it targets can be closed-in and restricted. Indeed, Foucault admitted in the next paragraph that it would be "pure romanticism ... to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state," but he put the vision forward all the same, and he continued to look forward to a future in which the place of the author could become an empty space.**[17]**

The utopia Foucault glimpsed in the fantasy of a culture without authors is the same vision that lures those who, like Lyotard, propose to employ Duchamp as a tool or weapon for a politics of perpetual dissolution. Although I think Duchamp might well have wanted to resist that proposal (he certainly kept his distance from André Breton, who was already making it in his 1922 tribute to Duchamp), I admit that it takes much inspiration from those of his gestures and activities that sought to undermine or dissolve the boundaries between art and life. Perhaps, however, were he still around today, he might agree that the promise this vanguard goal once seemed to hold out owed much of its allure to the heightened expectations for radical change brought forth in excited moments like the period after 1905, and he might recognize how prescient were those who, like Baudelaire, resisted it even before it was openly advocated. As some recent critics have begun to argue, the consequences of merging art into life have not been what Breton and others hoped, leaving life untransformed but art much weakened by the absence of criteria to decide whether any given object belongs within its sphere and, of those objects that do, which are good. The sovereignty of the artist who claims the right to declare that art is whatever he or she designates has clashed with the equal authority of audiences to accept or reject what is offered them; the result is only a higher level of mutual suspicion and confusion. As the claim that dis-

solving the separate sphere of art would liberate energies capable of creating new forms of life loses what persuasive force it once bore, we realize more and more that art owes what power it has to enrich the rest of life to the very separation and independence against which many avant-garde projects were directed; what we gain by dissolving the boundaries between art and life turns out to be much less than what we risk losing.**[18]**

Like every exemplary career, Duchamp's revealed possibilities that others could not yet see in the historical moment they shared with him, possibilities he brought to light by seizing that moment from an intensely partial point of view and putting his highly personal stamp on it. His example testifies to the plurality of possible paths and directions opened up by modern life and

culture, not to any underlying necessity to which all must conform. Only within such limits does Duchamp's legacy remain vital and worth preserving. We should celebrate the courage and originality with which he explored those inner spaces to which the denizens of modernity have often felt the need to retreat, and which they must sometimes still inhabit, more often, perhaps, than they—we—would like. But we can find nurture in such spaces only if we remain aware of the dangers that lurk within them; liberating as they may be, it is best to bring our journeys into such private worlds to an end before too long-and likewise books about them.

Notes

One— Fame:A Prologue

1. Duchamp sold more pictures than anyone except Odilon Redon, but one reason was that his work had price tags that were relatively low compared with earlier and better-known artists such as Van Gogh, whose canvases could demand prices in the thousands of dollars. See Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York, 1988).

2. Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* , trans. Ron Padgett (London, 1979; New York, 1987), 45.

3. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 45.

4. See Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980), 217, 222.

5. See Brown, *Story of the Armory Show* , 163ff.

6. Clement Greenberg, "Counter-Avant-garde" (originally published in 1971 in *Art International*), in *Duchamp in Perspective* , ed. Joseph Masheck (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1975), 123.

7. On this point see in particular Leo Steinberg, "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York, 1972), 3-16.

8. In general, Milton Browns reading of the contemporary press fails to capture this state of mind, but see 180ff.

9. A point correctly emphasized by Dieter Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen* (Cologne, 1992).

10. For a convenient guide to interpretations of Duchamp, applied to his various works, see Jean Clair, with the collaboration of Ulf Linde et al., *Marcel Duchamp: Abécédaire. Approches critiques* (Paris, 1977), a volume published in connection with the 1977 retrospective at the Paris Musée National d'Art Moderne, and Clair's article, "La Fortune critique de Marcel Duchamp," *Revue de l'Art* 3 (1976): 92-100. More recently, a wide-ranging discussion of the way Duchamp has appeared in public and been interpreted has been provided by Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen* , who also gives a comprehensive account of Duchamp's career together with a pointed and helpful discussion of some of the interpretive claims and quarrels. For Duchamp as the bearer of a modern "myth of criticism," see Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare* , trans. Rachel Philips (New York, 1978); for a Lacanian and postmodernist view of Duchamp as both the artist of industrialism and witness to the end of painting, see Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade* (1984), trans. Dana Polan with the author (Minneapolis and Oxford, 1991); for various views of Duchamp in the light of alchemy or hermetic symbolism see Maurizio Calvesi, *Duchamp Invisibile: La Costruzione del Simbolo* (Rome, 1975), Jack Burnham, *Great Western Salt Works* (New York, 1974), and Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, 1969; a new, updated edition of this work is promised for 1995). There is a comprehensive and most helpful discussion of this whole current of criticism in Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen* , 238ff. Recent perspectives can be found in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* , ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1989), and *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* , ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1991). There is an extensive and useful bibliography in the volume edited by Kuenzli and Naumann, and another in Daniels.

11. See John Tancock, "The Influence of Marcel Duchamp," and the remarks of various artists and writers in "A Collective Portrait of Marcel Duchamp," both in *Marcel Duchamp* , ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (New York and Philadelphia, 1975, 1989), 158-78 and 179-229. On Duchamp's recent influence more generally, see also the catalogue edited by Alfred M. Fischer and Dieter Daniels of the 1988 Cologne exhibition, *Übrigens sterben immer die anderen: Marcel Duchamp und die Avantgarde seit 1950* . Another recent testimony to Duchamp's continuing influence can be found in the exhibition *After Duchamp* , held at the Gallery 1900-2000, Paris, in the spring of 1991 and partially repeated in 1994; see the catalogue, edited by Edouard Jaguer and Jean-Jacques Lebel (Paris, 1991).

12. For such an objection, certainly intended to encompass a reading of Duchamp's career like mine but directed at works with which in fact the present book has very little in common, see Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York, 1977; paper ed., 1981), 81. Krauss's claim that Duchamp's works themselves (she refers specifically to *Fountain*) destroy any "narrative matrix" within which interpreters may seek to place

them seems to me to accede to Duchamp's own strategies and stated intentions without ever considering the question of what lies behind them, or what we might learn by trying to answer it. I recognize of course that what to me appear to be important gains from discovering the coherence of Duchamp's career at a deeper level would seem to her, and to others who share her theoretical ground, to be a loss. I would add that despite my radical disagreement with Krauss's views about Duchamp, I often find her readings extremely interesting and stimulating, and it was hearing her speak about Duchamp many years ago that first piqued my interest in him.

For a more recent example of an attempt to present Duchamp in a way that mirrors his own professed love of incoherence, see *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life* , ed. Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont (Milan and Cambridge, Mass., 1993), the catalogue published for the exhibition of Duchamp's work held at Palazzo Grassi, Venice, in 1993. There, in a section called *Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rrose Sélavy, 1887-1968* , Gough-Cooper and Caumont have presented the results of their painstaking and devoted research into the details of Duchamp's life, carried out over decades, by arranging it under the days of the year, listing everything we know about what Duchamp did on the 19th of May in every year of his life, followed successively by the 20th, and so on, until all the days come round. Although I admit that I find this putatively ''Duchampian'' presentation of what is after all a considerable amount of serious work to be by turns sly, pretentious, and exasperating-a sign no doubt that the authors have succeeded in their purpose-I have made use of the information provided in this catalogue at various places below, citing it as *Ephemerides* , under the relevant day and year (since there are no page numbers).

Two— Subjective Spaces

1. See Pierre Cabanne, *The Brothers Duchamp* , trans. Helga Harrison and Dinah Harrison (New York and Boston, 1975), 10.

2. Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* , with chapters by Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, and H.-P. Roché, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York, 1959), 2; originally published in French as *Sur Marcel Duchamp* (Paris, 1959).

3. Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont refer to Mme. Duchamp's increasing deafness during the years 1908-9 in their *Plan pour écrire une vie de Marcel Duchamp* (Paris, 1977), 10; and Alice Goldfarb Marquis found confirmation in an interview with a family friend. See her book (on which I have also relied for other details) *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie. A Biography* (Troy, N.Y., 1981), 70.

4. For the slang connotation of "manches," see Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 59-60.

5. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 19.

6. See, for instance, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "X-Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp and the Cubists," *Art Journal* 47 (1988): 323-40; and Jean Clair, *Duchamp et la photographie* (Paris, 1977), 19-25.

7. The only other personal reference I have found is very brief, saying simply "Given that ...; if I suppose that I am suffering a lot" ("Étant donné que ...; si je suppose que je sols souffrant beaucoup"), *Duchamp du signe* , ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Paris, 1975, 1994), 36. *Duchamp du signe* is the expanded version of the original collection, *Marchand du sel* (Paris, 1958), which was published in English first as *Salt Seller* (New York, 1973) and later reprinted as *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* , ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, trans. Elmer Peterson (New York, 1989).

8. This note was not published in the *Green Box* of 1934, but later on in the *White Box* (*À l'infinitif*) of 1966; *Writings* , 74. I have altered the translation found there, using the original in *Duchamp du signe* , 105-6. "Interrogatoire" is not just an examination, but a judicial interrogation, and it is not enough to translate "se conclut l'arrêt du choix" as "my choice is determined." On advertising, fantasy, and the world of commerce and consumption in fin-desiècle France, see Rosalind Williams, *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982).

9. Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 71-72.

10. See the quote in the catalogue of Duchamp's work in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 251

11. Besides *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* , Schwarz's writings include *The Large Glass and Related Works* (Milan, 1967), and "The Alchemist Stripped Bare in the Bachelor, Even," in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 81-88. Schwarz, however, was not the first to suggest alchemical significance for this picture and for Duchamp's career more generally; on this whole subject see Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen* , 238ff.

12. See Francis M. Naumann, "Marcel Duchamp: A Reconciliation of Opposites," in Kuenzli and Naumann, eds., *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* , 24-25.

13. This quality of Duchamp's composition-as well as his theme-may recall the similar mix of foreground and background figures in Matisse's canvas of 1905-6 called *Joy of Life* (*Bonheur de vivre*), now in the Barnes Foundation.

14. Below, in chap. 7, in connection with the puzzle of Duchamp's mature sexuality, I discuss the possibility that the twinlike situation in which

Duchamp and his sister lived as young children may have left him with a confusion of sexual identity, an outcome suggested by a number of psychodynamic studies. Some of his best-known works and gestures-the Mona Lisa readymade, his invention of a second identity as Rrose Sélavy, in a way even the Large Glass itself-are based on combinations of male and female elements.

15. For the last quote, Gianfranco Baruchello and Henry Martin, *Why Duchamp? An Essay on Aesthetic Impact* (Kingston, N.Y., 1985), 14.

16. See the letter quoted in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 249.

17. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp," written 1949, and published in *The Dada Painters and Poets* , ed. Robert Motherwell (New York, 1951, 1967), 256.

18. Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society* (New Haven and London, 1988).

19. Ibid., 28.

20. Ibid., 19-20, quoting Victor Fournel, *Ce qu'on voit dans les rues de Paris* (Paris, 1858).

21. Charles Baudelaire, "Windows," in *Paris Spleen* , trans. Louise Varèse (New York, 1947), 77.

22. I have discussed Zola's changing attitudes toward the impressionists in *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1850-1930* (New York, 1986), 299-306.

23. Quoted by Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* (New York, 1977), 82, 85.

24. Mallarmé to Cazalis, May 14, 1867; cited in Guy Michaud, *Le Message poétique du symbolisme* (Paris, 1947), 168.

25. See especially "Crise de vers," in *Divagations* (Paris, 1943), 252: "L'oeuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poèe, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelie traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase."

26. Balakian, *Symbolist Movement* , 84.

27. Rémy de Gourmont, "Le Symbolisme," *La Revue blanche* , 1892, p. 323.

28. Emile Hennequin, quoted in Dario Gamboni, *La Plume et lepinceau: Odilon Redon et la littérature* (Paris, 1989), 64-65. I owe much of what is said here about Redon to Gamboni's excellent book. See also Sven Sandström, *Le Monde imaginaire d'Odilon Redon: Étude iconologique* (Lund, 1955).

29. There is a clear and convenient English translation of this pamphlet in *Modern Artists on Art: Ten Unabridged Essays* , ed. Robert L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), 2-18.

30. Cited from ibid., 13, 6, 8.

31. Ibid., 5, 14.

32. Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Meditations* , trans. Lionel Abel (New York, 1949), 47-48.

Three— Motions and Mysteries

1. On these matters see the informed and perceptive discussions in Virginia Spate, *Orhism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910-14* (Oxford, 1979). And for a sophisticated dissection of the various cultural and political possibilities inherent within Bergsonianism and realized in cultural movements, see Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton, 1993). Antliff makes clear the connections between the cubists around Gleizes and Metzinger and the cultural world of symbolism, adding an important dimension to the discussion of *On Cubism* given above. See also Fanette Roche-Pézard, *L'Aventure futuriste, 1909-16* (Rome, 1983). On Apollinaire's relationship to the various currents in symbolism see Michel Déaudin, *La Crise des valeurs symbolistes: Vingt ans de poésie française, 1885-1914* (Paris, 1960).

2. Spate, *Orphism* , 22. Picabia, who was close to Duchamp in these years, also spoke of having his work express "states of soul"; ibid., 331-32.

3. Duchamp, "Apropos of Myself," talk delivered at the St. Louis City Art Museum, November 24, 1964; cited in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 256.

4. On Marey, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor* (New York, 1990; paper ed., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1992), 105, 107; on Raymond's

teacher, Albert Londe, see Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 30.

5. Duchamp, "The Great Trouble with Art in This Century," an interview with James Johnson Sweeney, originally published in *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 13 (1946), and reprinted in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* , 124.

6. See Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 73, who cites Robert Coates for this suggestion.

7. Marquis suggests that *Sad Young Man on a Train* may be "his troubled reaction to a fantasy about his little sister, Suzanne"; ibid., 73.

8. See John Golding, *Marcel Duchamp: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (London and New York, 1972), 61. Most writers about Duchamp insist on seeing in this drawing the first intimation of Duchamp's later interest in machines; this seems to me at best doubtful, since his other work at this time was still involved with the themes of linear motion and formal dissolution; only later would machines enter into his artistic work, and for reasons that I will try to show were much more personal than most commentators are willing m recognize. Molly Nesbit points out, however, that the coffee mill echoes exercises in mechanical drawing that were taught in early twentieth-century French schools, a comparison that seems enlightening even though (for reasons that will appear clearly enough below) I cannot share her view that this connection means Duchamp was trying to assimilate art to the condition of industrial objects. See Molly Nesbit, "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model," *October* 37 (1986): 53-64.

9. For most of this information, see *Ephemerides* , June 6, 1968, June 21, 1912, and August 7, 1912.

10. Sweeney interview, *Writings* , 124.

11. Spate, *Orphism* , 32.

12. Ibid., 36.

13. See Golding, *Marcel Duchamp* , 41.

14. Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* , 73n.

15. It should be remembered, however, that Gleizes and Metzinger, in *On Cubism* , had also declared a departure from the retina; in addition, the theme of the "passage," which would soon surface in Duchamp's work, was also one they had developed.

16. Sweeney interview, *Writings* , 124.

17. Virginia Spate writes: "What appears as a ground plane can also be read as a plane in the process of becoming concave or as the convex interior of a sectional form"; *Orphism* , 317.

18. The suggestion of Lawrence D. Steefel Jr., "Marcel Duchamp and the Machine," in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 73.

19. Quoted by John Tancock in "The Influence of Marcel Duchamp," in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 164.

20. Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* , 14; William Rubin, "Reflexions on Marcel Duchamp," originally in *Art International* 4, no. 9 (December 1968), reprinted in Masheck, ed., *Duchamp in Perspective* , 41-52.

21. This paragraph owes much to the analysis provided by Lawrence D. Steefel Jr., "Dimensions and Development in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* ," in Masheck, ed., *Duchamp in Perspective* , esp. 91-95. I find it impossible to see certain things in the picture that Steefel finds there, however, and the argument about Duchamp's development made here does not go in quite the same direction as his.

22. See Sweeney interview, *Writings* , 126; Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 33-34 and 40-41.

23. See *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (Paris, 1935; facsimile ed., Paris, 1963, 1985), 15.

24. Readers who want to know what series of puns and verbal games lay behind these things can find them explained in *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* .

25. Michel Foucault, *Raymond Roussel* (Paris, 1963), published in English as *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* , trans. Charles Ruas (New York, 1986); there are some speculations on Foucault and Roussel in my article "Avoiding the Subject: A Foucaultian Itinerary," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51 (1990): 273-99. For Roussel, Duchamp, and antihumanism, see the discussion already referred to in Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* .

26. The best general source for Roussel's life is François Caradec, *Vie de Raymond Roussel* (Paris, 1972); there is much insightful commentary also in Raynet Heppenstall, *Raymond Roussel: A Critical Guide* (London, 1966). Much of interest, although often speculative, can be found in Philippe G. Kerbellec, *Comment lire Raymond Roussel: Cryptanalyse* (Paris, 1988), and

(equally learned and enlightening, but less speculative) in Gian Carlo Roscioni, *L'Arbitrio Letterario: Uno Studio su Raymond Roussel* (Turin, 1985). Michel Leiris's various and enlightening pieces on Roussel are collected in *Roussel l'ingénu* (Paris, 1987).

27. Much of this information comes from the one vanguard figure to whom Roussel was personally close, Michel Leiris, whom Roussel knew first as the son of Eugène Leiris, his family's financial agent and adviser. Most of the other information in these paragraphs comes from Caradec; the details about Roussel's clothes obsessions were furnished to Michel Leiris by Charlotte Du Frène. Most accounts of Roussel's life regard his death as a suicide, but I follow Caradec here too in concluding that death may not have been his intention.

28. *Comment j'ai écrit* , 127-32, reproducing Pierre Janet, *De l'angoisse à l'extase* (Paris, 1926), 1: 132-37. Roussel's own account of the same crisis appears earlier in *Comment j'ai écrit* , 28-30.

29. *Impressions d'Afrique* (Paris, 1910; reprint Paris, 1963), 158.

30. See Kerbellec, *Comment lire Raymond Roussel*

Four— Desire, Delay, and the Fourth Dimension:The Large Glass

1. The notes have been published in several versions. I cite them here either from *Duchamp du signe* or from *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* .

2. Breton's essay, "Phare de la ariée" ("Lighthouse of the Bride") was reprinted by Robert Lebel in *Marcel Duchamp* .

3. *Writings* , 45. The most obscure and difficult of the notes are those Duchamp did not publish himself, but that were published (and translated into English) after his death by Paul Matisse; see Marcel Duchamp, *Notes* , arr. and trans. Paul Matisse, with a preface by Anne d'Harnoncourt (Boston, 1983). I have been able to comment on only a few of these notes here.

4. *Writings* , 26-27. I owe the suggestion about *enfant phare* and *en fanfare* to Rose Vekony. There exists another version of the text (see *Notes* , ed. Paul Matisse, number 109) that speaks still more lyrically of the headlight as the "child god, rather like [*rappelant assez*] the primitives' Jesus." At one point in this note Duchamp said that this child-headlight-god would "have to be *radiant with glory* " (the phrase *rayonner de gloire* was circled in the manuscript), the very image of himself as creator that had occupied Roussel with such intensity in his youthful crisis. Since Duchamp in 1912 had no way to know about Roussel's use of this image, we have to regard its appearance

as a coincidence, or perhaps as a spontaneous witness to the shared impulses and qualities that bound the two figures together. This text is also reproduced in the catalogue of the 1993 Venice exhibition, *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life* , ed. Gough-Cooper and Caumont, 36.

5. Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont provide an illustration of the various machines as they were set up by the Rouen chocolate-maker; *Plan pour écrire une vie de Marcel Duchamp* , 77.

6. As pointed out by Michel Sanouillet, "Marcel Duchamp and the French Intellectual Tradition," in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 53; and by Adam Gopnik and Kirk Varnedoe in *High and Low: Popular Culture in Modern Art* (New York, 1990), 254-55. Duchamp, by the way, had done a series of drawings of male occupations in his early months in Paris, which may also be echoed in these costumes.

7. For more details, see for instance Jean Suquet, *Le Grand Verre rêvé* (Paris, 1991), or for English readers his article in de Duve, ed., *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp* . One of the most careful and sensible readers of Duchamp's notes is Craig E. Adcock; see *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass: An N-Dimensional Analysis* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983); he also contributed to the Halifax conference cited immediately above.

8. "L'ironisme d'affirmation: difféences avec l'ironisme négateur dépendant du Rire seulement," *Duchamp du signe* , 46.

9. See *Writings* , 39, 42, 44.

10. Ibid., 42.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 43.

13. Ibid., 39, 43.

14. Ibid., 43. This note is also reproduced in Gough-Cooper and Caumont, eds., *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life* , 37.

15. Interview with Michel Sanouillet, in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* , December 16, 1954, 5.

16. I quote from Charles Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal* , trans. Richard

Howard (Boston, 1982), 30-31. See the reading by Martin Turnell, *Baudelaire: A Study of His Poetry* (New York, 1972), 112ff.

17. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations* , trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), 170. For more on the romantic theme of unfulfilled desire, see Gerald N. Izenberg's discussion of Chateaubriand in *Impossible Individuality: Romanticism, Revolution, and the Origins of Modern Selfhood* (Princeton, N.J., 1992).

18. Jules Laforgue, *Mélanges posthumes* (1903), quoted by Martin Turnell, *Baudelaire* , 36-37.

19. See Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass* .

20. As a way of pointing to the limitations of conventional thinking, the idea of the fourth dimension had been employed earlier by Edwin A. Abbot in his book *Flatland* (1884). Here a sphere, seeking to make plane figures understand three-dimensional existence, receives the retort: How do you know there is no fourth dimension beyond the world you know? See the interesting discussion of this work, in connection with modern art as the reorientation of familiar models of experience, by Kirk Varnedoe in *A Fine Disregard* (New York, 1990), 250ff. It seems to me, however, that in Duchamp's case what Varnedoe describes as opening people's minds up to new possibilities has slipped over into the imagination of a world in which there are no limits to possibility. I would offer the dialectic between these two positions as a broader frame for the logic of modern cultural innovation, to which Varnedoe has contributed with great insight and imagination in his book.

21. Duchamp, *Notes and Projects for the Large Glass* , ed. Arturo Schwarz (New York, 1969), no. 15. This note, along with the whole topic of the "ultrathin," is discussed by Adcock, *Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass* , 79. I am not sure that the association of the ultrathin with the vanishing point is as crucial to Duchamp's project as is the use made of the purely two-dimensional picture plane.

22. Duchamp, *Notes and Projects* , 80.

23. Duchamp used this formula in speaking to George and Richard Hamilton; see Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* , 23.

24. *Writings* , 44, and 83-86.

25. Ibid., 86ff.

26. Ibid., 75.

27. Ibid., 90, 31.

28. Ibid., 50.

29. See Golding, *Marcel Duchamp* , 70, on this point.

30. Duchamp, *Writings* , 96-97.

31. Sweeney interview, *Writings* , 137.

32. Baruchello and Martin, *Why Duchamp?* 105ff.

33. These contrasts, along with others that will emerge in the course of discussion, seem to me to speak strongly against the interpretation recently suggested by Rosalind Krauss, which makes the bodily determination of perception and consciousness the central theme of Duchamp's work, an interpretation constructed by way of the assimilation of the Large Glass to *Given* , so that the former must accord with the spirit of the latter. See Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1993), 95-147.

34. Both photographs were published in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, *Étant donnés: 1. La Chute d'eau 2. Le Gaz d'éclairage. Reflections on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia, 1969, 1987), 59-60.

Five— Private Worlds Made Public:The Readymades

1. Greenberg, "Counter-Avant-Garde," in Masheck, ed., *Duchamp in Perspective* , 124, 128.

2. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 48; *Writings* , 32.

3. *Revue anarchiste* , 1893.

4. See the interview reprinted in *New York Dada* , ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York, 1986), 134.

5. *Writings* , 5.

6. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 48.

7. Quoted in Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass* , 24.

8. Baruchello and Martin, *Why Duchamp?* 71. Groups or collections of Duchamp's puns were published several times during the 1920S and 1930s, first in the dada periodical *391* in July 1921; in André Breton's magazine *Littéature* in 1922; in Pierre Massot's *The Wonderful Book: Reflections on Rrose Sélavy* (Paris 1924); and by Duchamp himself in *Rrose Sélavy, oculisme de précision, poils et coups de pied en tous genres* (Paris, 1937).

9. For Duchamp's account, see Cabanne, *Dialogues,* 47. *Pharmacie* may also have been partly inspired by some lines in Jules Laforgue's *Autres complaintes* , which read: "Et le pharmacien sur le blême trottoir, / Fait s'épandre les lacs des bocaux verts ou rouges / Phares lointains de ceux qui s'en iront ce soir." ("And the pharmacist spreads the lakes of his green or red globes on the pale sidewalk, distant lights for those who depart tonight.") I take the suggestion from *Ephemerides* , April 4, 1916.

10. The "roue/sel" pun is also suggested in *Ephemerides* , June 4, 1964. Duchamp's general fascination for circular motion at this time seems evident in the comment Fernand Léger remembered him making to Constantin Brancusi during a visit to an aviation show in Paris during October, 1912; standing before an airplane propellor Duchamp exclaimed: "Painting's washed up. Who'll do anything better than that propellor? Tell me, can you do that?" See Dora Vallier, "La Vie dans l'oeuvre de Fernand Léger," *Cahiers d'Art* 29 (1954): 140; cited by William A. Camfield, ''Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* : Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917," in Kuenzli and Naumann, eds., *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* , 81. There is some question whether Duchamp actually said this: Léger reported the incident only much later, Duchamp seems not to have remembered it, and some have doubted that it happened; see Jeffrey Steven Weiss, "The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp and Avant-Gardism" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1990, 363; and Schwarz, *Complete Works* , 595, for Duchamp's not remembering the incident. If he did say it, however, Duchamp was taking part in the contemporary enthusiasm for modern technology we have several times mentioned. In 1912 he did a drawing labeled "Airplane," in which an upwardsweeping line seems to suggest a takeoff, and another (discussed above in connection with the pictures of "swift nudes") of an automobile, placed upright between one male and one female figure. But Duchamp was never fully committed to a machine aesthetic; the mechanical objects in the lower part of the Large Glass are not machine-made, and the images in the upper part are not mechanical, while only a few of the readymades would be objects that proclaim a connection to machines or modern industry. If he responded enthusiastically to a propellor, the reasons probably had at least as much to do with its resemblance to the other wheel-like forms that fascinated him as with its mechanical modernity.

11. For Schwarz's reading see *Complete Works* , 449; he notices the absence of the bottles but can only see in it a reference to Duchamp's bachelorhood. The information that Duchamp accepted the reading was conveyed by Schwarz to William A. Camfield, who reports it in his article "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* ," 94 n. 60.

12. Buffet-Picabia, cited in Masheck, ed., *Duchamp in Perspective* , 48. Henri-Pierre Roché gives a similar account of a visit to Duchamp's studio in his novel about Duchamp, *Victor* (*Marcel Duchamp*), ed. Danielle Régnier-Bohler, with a preface and notes by Jean Clair (Paris, 1977).

13. *Writings* , 74.

14. As Pierre Cabanne recognized; see *Dialogues* , 45.

15. Alice Marquis shares this view, writing that, in addition to the members of the avant-garde themselves, there was in America a public for the assault on art, representative of "a uniquely American phenomenon: a sometimes articulate and often affluent mass who relished any assault on art as a high-falutin, pretentious cult. It was-and still is-a group whose no-nonsense approach to culture welcomed iconoclastic attacks on 'the precious and solemn and costly,' indeed the 'fragile aristocratic beauty' purveyed by American museums and critics"; *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 140.

16. "The Nude Descending a Staircase Man Surveys Us," interview with Duchamp in *New York Tribune* , September 12, 1915, sec. 4, p. 2. Since various accounts attest that Duchamp had very little English at this point, it seems likely that the interview was conducted in French, or that some bilingual person served as interpreter.

17. "French Artists Spur on an American Art," anonymous article in *New York Tribune* , Sunday, October 24, 1915, reprinted in Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada* : Crotti quoted 132, Duchamp 134.

18. Ibid., 133.

19. See the letter in " *Affectueusement, Marcel* : Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti," ed. Francis M. Naumann, *Archives of American Art Journal* 22, no. 4 (1982): 5. Duchamp's later claim that he had inscribed the rack when he bought it (Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 47), still often repeated, is shown to be false by this letter; whether in retrospect he genuinely thought he had made such an inscription or was only trying to give unity to the category *a posteriori* , it is not possible to say. We do not know what the inscription was to be, since he sent it in a later letter, which seems to have been lost.

20. For the story of the shovel, told by Juliet Roché, see Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York, 1991), 267. I think, however, that Watson too quickly assimilates the Duchamp-Arensberg circle to the later spirit of dada.

21. For an account of the exhibition, see ibid., 312ff.

22. See the letter in " *Affectueusement, Marcel* ," 8, but Naumann incorrectly translates *potin* as gossip. The original letters can be read in the Crotti papers in the microfilm collection of the Archives of America Art, New York.

23. For this general point, I recommend the account in Watson, *Strange Bed-fellows* .

24. Quoted by Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* ," 75.

25. *Writings* , 23.

26. Beatrice Wood, *I Shock Myself* (Ojai, Calif., 1985; reprint San Francisco, 1988), 229-30; quoted by Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* ," 70.

27. Louise Norton, "Buddha of the Bathroom," *The Blind Man* [2] , no. 2 (May 1917): 5-6. Given Norton's insistence on the ambiguity of the gesture and the connection to *blague* she and others suggested at the time, I cannot agree with William Camfield's attempt to take the aesthetic claims made for *Fountain* with complete seriousness. See Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* ," 64-94.

28. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 62-63.

29. For that reason, some critics interpret Duchamp's readymades as a revival of a formalist aesthetic; see Steven Goldsmith, "The Readymades of Marcel Duchamp: The Ambiguities of an Aesthetic Revolution," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 42, no. 2 (Winter 1983): 197-208, for an intelligent discussion of views put forward by Arthur Danto and George Dickie. That the objects can be used as examples in such debates is reasonable and appropriate enough, but the whole question seems to me to need reconsideration once the readymades are understood in light of the historical account given here.

Six— Words and Windows

1. This account is based largely on Elisabeth A. Howe, *Stages of Self: The Dramatic Monologues of Laforgue, Valéry and Mallarmé* (Athens, Ohio, 1990).

2. For an interesting and persuasive affirmation of this point-from someone who was at times identified with a different position-see Claude Lévi-Strauss, "A Belated Word about the Creative Child," in *The View from Afar* , trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (New York, 1985), 268-88. I discuss this essay and its place in Lévi-Strauss's views about individuality in "The Subjectivity of Structure: Individuality and Its Contradictions in Lévi-

Strauss," in *Rediscovering History: Culture, Politics, and the Psyche* , ed. Michael S. Roth (Stanford, 1994).

3. William Seitz, "What's Happened to Art: An Interview with Marcel Duchamp," *Vogue* , February 15, 1963.

4. Duchamp made the remark to Lawrence Steefel; it has, of course, been repeatedly cited, for instance by Alice Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 311.

5. *Writings* , 31-32.

6. Ibid., 77.

7. Ibid., 78. This may be an appropriate place to note that it was in relationship to this script that Duchamp employed the phrase "pictorial Nominalism," meaning by it that pictures would replace words, perhaps with the implication that these signs, unlike verbal ones, would not encourage people to believe in the real existence of abstract relations. Thierry de Duve has taken this phrase as the title of a book about Duchamp and erected it into a theory of avantgarde art based on the Lacanian notion that symbols cannot mediate our relationship to reality (that is, to the deep reality of the *ça* where we are inevitably divided from ourselves). Thus, Duchamp is supposed to have discovered that painting is impossible because it can create no generally meaningful relationship between the world and the human subject; in this situation every form of painting becomes simply an arbitrary claim to the name of painting, which it contests against every other one. This is not the place for a sustained critique of Duve's book, but among its problematic features are its positing of a wholly invented Oedipal relationship between Duchamp and Cézanne and its reading of the bride images as nonvirgins, in order to make them represent the canvas painted in opposition to the virginity of a blank canvas. See Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism* .

8. See the letter quoted in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 278-79.

9. See Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* , trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1982); also *Writing and Difference* , trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978).

10. David Lodge, *Small World: An Academic Romance* (New York, 1984, 1991), 31.

11. Barbara Johnson, "Introduction," in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* , trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981), xvi.

12. See for instance George H. Bauer, "Duchamp's Ubiquitous Puns," and Dalia Judovitz, "Rendezvous with Marcel Duchamp: *Given* ," both in Kuenzli and Naumann, eds., *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* ; and davidantin, "Duchamp and Language" and ''The Romantic Adventures of an Adversative Rotarian or Alreadymadesomuchoff," collated by Lucy R. Lippard, both in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* .

13. Duchamp gave this account in, "Apropos of Myself," cited in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 273.

14. I discuss Jarry and his relationship to these currents in *Bohemian Paris* , 310ff., where the sources of these quotations are cited.

15. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 48.

16. There is a photo of the bottom of the cage in Schwarz, *Complete Works* , 486.

17. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 59.

18. From an unpublished interview with Harriet Janis, quoted in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 295.

19. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 16.

20. The text is reproduced in *Ephemerides* , May 13, 1960.

21. See especially the chapters on words and on advertising in Varnedoe and Gopnik, *High and Low* . I made a somewhat similar point in the conclusion to *Bohemian Paris* .

22. More will be said below about Duchamp's role in Arensberg's collection. For the catalogue of the Société Anonyme see the entries in *Writings* , 143-59. Alice Marquis points out that the three witnesses at his naturalization as a United States citizen in 1955 were directors of museums: Alfred Barr of MOMA, James Thrall Soby of the Yale Univeristy Art Gallery, and James Johnson Sweeney of the Guggenheim; *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 311.

23. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 72.

24. Quoted in Katherine Kuh, *The Artist's Voice* (New York, 1962), 89.

25. Erich Heller, "The Artist's Journey into the Interior: A Hegelian Prophecy

and Its Fulfillment," in *The Artist's Journey into the Interior and Other Essays* (New York, 1965); most of the passages quoted occur between pages 134 and 136.

26. The poem is "The Bad Glazier," in *Paris Spleen* .

27. Cited by Richard D. Sonn in *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1989), 224. Readers familiar with debates about modernism will see that such a view goes directly against the attempt by Peter Bürger to portray the avant-garde as the contrary and enemy of symbolist interiority. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* , trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984).

Seven— Loving and Working

1. The account is called simply "Marcel," and it appears in the volume of essays collected on the occasion of the centennial of Duchamp's birth: *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* , ed. Rudolf Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (originally published as no. 16 of the journal *Dadal/Surrealism* [1987]). Here Wood states that it was Duchamp who introduced her to Henri-Pierre Roché, whereas in her autobiography, *I Shock Myself* , she places her meeting with Roché earlier than her encounter with Duchamp. Roché also makes Duchamp the source of his meeting with Wood in his contribution to Lebel's *Marcel Duchamp* ; see pp. 79-80, as well as later in his novel *Victor* , on which see below. The general account given in "Marcel" is also confirmed in the interview Wood gave to Alice G. Marquis, also cited below. Wood spoke again about her ties to Duchamp on a videotaped interview, *Special People: Beatrice Wood* , written, directed, and produced by Joel Parks (Pro Video News Service, c. 1991), but here the details are minimal.

2. "Marcel," 12.

3. Ibid., 16.

4. Interview with Alice G. Marquis, recounted in *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 151.

5. On the Stettheimers, see Watson, *Strange Bedfellows* , and Linda Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer, Rococo Subversive," chap. 5 of *Women, Art, and Power* (New York, 1988).

6. Henri Waste [Ettie Stettheimer], *Love Days* (New York, 1923), 116. For other references of interest, see 109 and 111.

7. Man Ray, *Self Portrait* , with an afterword by Juliet Man Ray, new ed.

(New York, 1988), 72.

8. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 76. In what way Picabia may have been behind the whole business remains obscure, but Gough-Cooper and Caumont imply at one point that Lydie's father wanted to marry her off because his wife made it a condition for giving him a divorce (*Ephemerides* , June 7, 1927); perhaps, knowing this, Picabia proposed Duchamp as the groom. But here as elsewhere Gough-Cooper and Caumont give no source for their information, so there is no way to know how trustworthy it may be.

9. *Ephemerides* , May 25 and May 27, 1927.

10. Ibid., June 24, 1927.

11. Man Ray, *Self Portrait* , 189-90.

12. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 33, 75; Man Ray, *Self Portrait* , 193.

13. See *Ephemerides* , July 31, 1924, for the night with the three young women, and for the daughter, the same under the dates June 23, 1966, April 16, 1910, and February 6, 1911. The Duchamps kept in touch with Yvonne and her husband afterward. See also the discussion in Francis M. Naumann, "The Bachelor's Quest," *Art in America* , September 1993, 81. I am grateful to Jack Flam for calling my attention to this review-article.

14. See the letters published by Francis M. Naumann in " *Affectueusement, Marcel* "; and those to the Arensbergs in Kuenzli and Naumann, eds., *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* , 203-27. Katherine Dreier spent several months in Buenos Aires at this time too, but nothing points to the possibility that she and Duchamp were ever lovers.

15. Although Caumont and Gough-Cooper do not speak about Roché's responsibility for the episode, their account (July 31, 1924) makes clear that he was behind it; Roché claims to have predicted correctly which of the three women Duchamp would turn to first, and he even knew that Duchamp's mistress Yvonne Fressingeas (whom Roché called Saintonge) was leaving Paris the next morning and went to look for her in the Gare d'Orléans.

16. H.-P. Roché, "Souvenirs of Marcel Duchamp," in Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* , 79 and 86. The original publication was in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* , June 1953, 79-87.

17. For the interview, *Ephemerides* , June 19, 1924; for the novel, Roché, *Victor (Marcel Duchamp)* . For Roché's own sexual life, see his *Carnets: Les Années Jules et Jim* , with an avant-propos by François Truffaut (Marseilles, 1990). The original manuscripts of these notebooks are now at the Ransom

Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, but I have not seen them. The suggestion sometimes made that features of Duchamp also appear in Roché's better-known work *Jules et Jim* seems to me mistaken.

18. *Ephemerides* , June 19, July 3, July 23, and August 15, 1924. Man Ray's comment is in the same passage from his autobiography cited in n.11.

19. For Duchamp's later comment, see Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 68. For the mingled books, see Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 241-44; with her typical good sense Marquis concludes that the relationship remained "characteristically ambiguous."

20. See Matisse's affectionate portrayal, "Some More Nonsense about Duchamp," *Art in America* 68 (April 1980): 76-83. His comments on Duchamp's language in his edition of Duchamp, *Notes* , are also very helpful.

21. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 88. It should be noted that Duchamp underwent an operation for an enlarged prostate in April of 1954. It seems to have gone very well, but in some cases such operations can affect sexual potency.

22. For information on Duchamp and Maria Martins, and on *Paysage fautif* , see Naumann, "The Bachelor's Quest," 77ff. The picture was included in the *Boîte en valise* Duchamp made for her; these suitcase-collections of his work will be discussed below.

23. See the letter in Naumann, " *Affectueusement, Marcel* ," 15.

24. Sigmund Freud, "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," trans. Joan Riviere, in Freud's *Collected Papers* (New York and London, 1959), 4: 203-16. In this essay, first published in 1912, Freud attributed impotence, especially in "men of a strongly libidinous nature" (some of whom were able to have erections both before and after the failed attempt to carry out the sexual act), to a failure to unite ''tender and affectionate" feelings with sexual ones. This failure arose in people who, Freud claimed, retained strong incestuous fantasies from childhood, to which their sexual feelings became attached in puberty, thus associating all sexual activity on the unconscious level with incest. I am grateful to Stephen Kern for reminding me about this paper, whose existence I had forgotten.

25. Buffet-Picabia's reminiscences in Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Poets and Painters* , 260.

26. *Ephemerides* , June 24 and 27, 1927.

27. Although I do not want to burden any of them with responsibility for

what I have written here, I wish to thank the members of the New York University Humanities Council Seminar in Psychoanalysis and the Humanities, who were kind enough to discuss some features of my work on Duchamp at a meeting in April 1993. I am particularly grateful to Leonard Barkin for organizing the session and to Jules Glenn for his suggestions and for the references cited in the next note.

28. See Mary Shopper, "Twinning Reaction in Nontwin Siblings," *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry* 13, no. 2 (1974): 300-318; Jules Glenn, "Opposite-Sex Twins," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 14, no. 4 (1966): 736-59; Jules Glenn and Sylvia Glenn, "The Psychology of Twins," in *Supplement of "Dynamics in Psychiatry": Papers Compiled in Honor of D.-T. Kouretas* (Basel and New York, 1968). For the example of Roussel, who was raised with his sister Germaine in circumstances that recall Duchamp's closeness to Suzanne, see *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* , 27-28, where Roussel notes that their older brother Georges was practically grown up during the time he and Germaine were children.

29. Interview with Katherine Kuh in *The Artist's Voice* , 83.

30. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 67; Seitz interview, 113.

31. From an interview in *The New Yorker* , April 6, 1957, 26.

32. A remark reported by Walter Pach in *Queer Thing, Painting* (New York, 1938), 155; also cited by Anne d'Harnoncourt in her introduction to d'Harnoncourt and McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* , 39. Duchamp said a rather similar thing in a 1968 interview: "Sometimes in the unfinished thing there is more warmth that you don't change or make any more perfect in the finished product"; Francis Roberts, "I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics Just a Little," interview with Duchamp in *Art News* 67, no. 8, (December 1968): 46.

33. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 25.

34. "Grandeur des poètes de saisir fortement avec leurs mots, ce qu'ils n'ont fait qu'entrevoir faiblement dans leur esprit." Paul Valéry, *Tel Quel* , in *Oeuvres* (Paris, 1957), 483.

35. On Valéry and his crisis see Suzanne Nash, *Paul Valéry's "Album de vers anciens": A Past Transfigured* (Princeton, 1983), and Christine M. Crow, *Paul Valéry: Consciousness and Nature* (Cambridge, Eng., 1972).

36. Gilles Aillaud, Eduardo Arroyo, and Antonio Recalcati, "Vivre et laisser mourir, ou la fin tragique de Marcel Duchamp," Statement for their joint exhibition at the Galerie Creuze, Paris, September 1965. Clipping in Crotti

Papers, Archives of American Art, New York. For Duchamp's reaction, see Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 102. Werner Hofmann argues just the opposite, that Duchamp's readymades allowed objects to have their own forms, since the artist no longer sought to impose formal unity on the world through composition; see "Duchamp and Emblematic Realism," in Masheck, ed., *Duchamp in Perspective* , 63. This is true in a way, but if I am right about the readymades, then such a view misses what is essential in Duchamp's relations to them.

37. The letter is printed and translated, together with Duchamp's other letters to the Arensbergs from this period, in Kuenzli and Naumann, eds., *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* , 218-19. I have, however, altered the translation, since *tout* cannot refer to "everybody." Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 19.

38. In fact, the photographer, Julian Wasser, took an extended series of photos of the game, but the one reproduced here-as it has been elsewhere-was Duchamp's own favorite. See Dickran Tashjian, "Nothing Left to Chance: Duchamp's First Retrospective," in *West Coast Duchamp* , ed. Bonnie Clearwater (Miami Beach, 1991), 71-76. The notion repeated in this article, however, that the Large Glass was a site of "sexual frustration" and unsuccessful love, misses the point.

39. Marcel Duchamp and Vitaly Halberstadt, *L'Opposition et les cases conjuguées sont reconciliées* (Paris, 1932); for Duchamp's comments on the book, see Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 77-78; for the "telepathic" communication between the squares, see the interview of François Le Lionnais by Ralph Rumney in *Studio International* , January-February 1975, 23-24.

40. The text of Duchamp's speech, given August 20, 1952, can be found in a typescript in the Crotti Papers in the microfilm collection of the Archives of American Art.

41. I am aware, of course, that ideas about strategy change, and with them even what the expertise of a given time regards as allowable or not. Such ideas were changing in the period after World War I (see Schwarz, *Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* , 58-59), but Duchamp's fascination with chess developed before these novelties had a chance to affect him. According to François Le Lionnais, who played a number of times with Duchamp, the latter's game was highly conventional, even conformist in its adherence to rules; there was nothing rebellious or anarchistic about it. See his comments in the interview cited in n. 39 above.

Eight— The Self as Other

1. draw here on my own earlier work, *Bohemian Paris* .

2. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 25, 58, 15, 41, 72.

3. For Roché, see Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* , 87; for Barbey, *Bohemian Paris* , 113.

4. *Bohemian Paris* , chap. 4; for these quotes, 118-19.

5. The letters are conveniently available in Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters* , trans, and ed. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago and London, 1966), 302.-10.

6. Yves Bonnefoy, *Rimbaud* , trans. Paul Schmidt (New York, 1973), 43, 127.

7. Seitz interview, 113.

8. Duchamp gave the talk, in English, at a meeting in Houston in April 1957. It was published in *Art News* 56, no. 4 (Summer 1957) and is reprinted in *Writings* , 138-40. For similar ideas see the comments reported by Calvin Tomkins in *The Bride and the Bachelors* (New York, 1965), 17-19.

9. Sweeney interview, *Writings* , 137.

10. The letter, dated August 17, 1952, was published (and translated) by Francis M. Naumann in *"Affectueusement, Marcel* ," 16-17. That it had quite an effect on the recipients is suggested by a later letter of Duchamp to his sister, responding to her request for a comment she could use in a catalogue entry with the suggestion that he would revise a bit "the famous letter I sent to Jean." The later letter, dated October 12, 1959, is in the Crotti Papers, Archives of American Art.

11. See the interviews in the *New York Tribune* , October 24, 1915 (reprinted in Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada* ; see 134 for the quote), and September 12, 1915.

12. Seitz interview, 113, 129-31; Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 98. Duchamp even took the same view about interpretations of his work, saying that they were "only interesting when you consider the man who wrote the interpretation, as always." *Dialogues* , 42. The idea that "most artists only repeat themselves" was of course a self-description.

13. Translation modified from Rimbaud, *Illuminations and Other Prose Poems* , trans. Louise Varèse (New York, 1946, 1957), xxvii.

14. For the most sophisticated attempt to take Rimbaud's social radicalism seriously as a central element in his writing, see Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis, 1988). I think, however, that more skeptical views about Rimbaud's politics capture the nature of his consciousness better. See Paul Gascar, *Rimbaud et la Commune* (Paris, 1971), and Charles Russell, *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism* (New York and Oxford, 1985).

15. Bonnefoy, *Rimbaud* , 136.

16. I have discussed these issues in several articles, viz.: "La Mort du sujet, origines d'un thème," *Le Débat* 58 (January-February 1990): 160-69; "The Human Subject as a Language-Effect," *History of European Ideas* 18, no. 4 (1994): 481-95; and "The Subjectivity of Structure."

17. Seitz interview, 130. For Duchamp's general views about the changes in the conditions of artistic production, see, in addition to this interview, Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 93ff, and the Sweeney interview, *Writings* , 123ff.

18. Interview with Dore Ashton, cited by Adock, *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass* , 19. There are similar ideas in the talk he gave at Hofstra College in May of 1960; see *Ephemerides* , May 13, 1960.

19. There is an exhaustive monograph on the boxes by Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: The Box in a Valise* , trans. David Britt (New York, 1989).

20. I take most of this information about Duchamp's commercial dealings from Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp: Eros C'est la Vie* , 244-57 and 259; for the Buenos Aires plans see the letters in Naumann, " *Affectueusement, Marcel* ." The correspondence between Duchamp and Arensberg where these transactions are discussed is in the Francis Bacon Library, Claremont, California, and Duchamp's letters to Katherine Dreier are in the Beinecke Library, Yale. There is also some information on this aspect of Duchamp's life in the Roché Papers at the Harry Ransome Humanities Research Center in the University of Texas, Austin. For an interesting general statement about the relationship of the avant-garde to galleries and the commercial art world, see Robert Jansen, "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art," *Art Journal* 47 (Winter 1988): 360-67. I have also discussed some general aspects of this question in *Bohemian Paris* .

21. *Revue anarchiste* , 1893.

22. I think Duchamp's project is easily distinguishable from the practice of earlier artists who provided images of their own work either as studio pictures or as backgrounds in other paintings; Courbet had nothing very similar in mind in his famous picture of his own studio. Since Duchamp,

other artists have assembled collections of their work in what one critic calls "self-managed retrospectives"; see Lois E. Nesbitt, "(Self-) Representation (The Artist as Collector and Exhibitor of his own Works)," *Arts Magazine* 64 (Summer 1990): 61-67. Nesbitt places Duchamp at the beginning of this phenomenon, but I think she takes his opposition to museums too seriously; in any case such opposition was not a major impulse behind the *Boîtes* .

23. Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 64.

Nine— Conclusion:Art and Its Freedoms

1. Baruchello and Martin, *Why Duchamp?* 84.

2. Breton's appreciation can conveniently be found in Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets* , 209-11; there is an abridged version in Marcel Jean, ed., *The Autobiography of Surrealism* (New York, 1980), 84-86. In the original French the crab-apple tree is a "manchineel tree," but the point is the same.

3. Paul Eluard, *À Pablo Picasso* (Geneva and Paris, 1944), 31-33.

4. D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London and New York, 1971).

5. *New York Tribune* , October 24, 1915; reprinted in Motherwell, ed., *New York Dada* , 134.

6. Seitz interview, 113.

7. *Writings* , 31.

8. For this reason, I cannot agree with those, like Molly Nesbit and Thierry de Duve, who find the chief significance of the readymades in their assimilation of art to the forms of modern industry. To make industrial capitalism into a Procrustean bed which all the phenomena of modern life must be stretched to fit is a bootless project, and it provides no purchase on most of the central features of Duchamp's-or any other innovative figure's-career. See Nesbit, "Ready-made Originals: The Duchamp Model," *October* 37 (1986): 53-64; and de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism* , especially chap. 5.

9. John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Conn., 1967), 105-6. In the long quote, I have not preserved Cage's spacing, which divides the text into four columns across the page, but allows some words to straddle two columns.

10. Henri-Pierre Roché reports it as Beatrice Wood's reaction to considering the Large Glass and the other objects in Duchamp's studio in *Victor* . In an interesting series of reflections, Annette Michelson compares Duchamp's mental universe to that of an autistic child; see her article, "'Anemic Cinema': Reflections on an Enigmatic Work," *Artforum* , October, 1973, 64-69.

11. I refer, of course, to *Histoire de la folie* (Paris, 1961); published in English in an abridged version as *Madness and Civilization* , trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1965).

12. For the interview, Kuenzli, ed., *New York Dada* , 134; for the proposal about bodily "deferment," *Writings* , 23.

13. See Cabanne, *Dialogues* , 80-82. For an interesting general account see Dawn Ades, "Duchamp, Dada and Surrealism," in the volume *Duchamp* (Barcelona, 1984), issued as the catalogue of the exhibition held in Barcelona in 1984.

14. Seitz interview, 113. There is a good bit of evidence in the entries in *Ephemerides* that Duchamp took a very negative view of the events of 1968 in Paris.

15. Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp* (Paris, 1977), 31. There is a much more outlandish invocation of Duchamp for similar purposes, based on Michel Carrouges's reading of the Large Glass, in Gilles Deleuze and Félix

16. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* , 142; Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism* , 191.

17. Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader* , ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, 1983), 118-19.

18. See Rainer Rochlitz, *Subversion et subvention: Art contemporain et argumentation esthétique* (Paris, 1994). The last point owes much to Jürgen Habermas; see "Modernity vs. Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3-14.

Illustration Credits

Plates
(following page 152)

1. Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase* , No. 2 (1912). Oil on canvas, 58×35". Philadelphia Museum of Art: Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. (c) 1995 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

2. Marcel Duchamp, *Young Man and Girl in Spring* (1911). Oil on canvas, 25 7/8×19 3/4". Collection of Arturo Schwarz, Milan. (c) 1995 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

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