

Thierry de Duve

Pictorial Nominalism

On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade

Translated by Dana Polan with the author
Foreword by John Rajchman



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Pictorial Nominalism

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Foreword

John Rajchman

The Two Abandonments

Pictorial Nominalism is the first book of a young Belgian philosopher, critic, and historian of art, Thierry de Duve. It marks the emergence of a fresh critical intelligence, and it can be read in several ways. It offers a new, detailed, and extensive reexamination of the oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp. It advances a general view about how the basic categories of pictorial practice—of its objects, its materials, its ways of making things, its forms of subjectivity—are constituted and change, a general view that points to a new aesthetic. It also participates in a project of current interest: the use of elements of “poststructuralist” thought in a revised history of modernism. Among contemporary French-language art historians or critics, de Duve is perhaps the one to take most seriously to task the work of Clement Greenberg, which has been so influential in American discussions of modernist painting. Indeed, the book might be read as an elaborate response to Greenberg.

The ambitions and the art-historical novelties of the book make it a conceptually and methodologically complex one. And yet, at first glance, it is quite straightforward. It is the study of a singular event—the event encapsulated by a note Duchamp wrote to himself in October 1912 upon returning to Paris from a somewhat disappointing sojourn in Munich, where he had painted what de Duve takes as a key work in his oeuvre *The Passage of the Virgin to the Bride*. “Marcel,” wrote Duchamp, “no more painting; go get a job.”

With this event de Duve associates the invention of the first instances of what

was soon to be baptized with the English neologism “the readymade,” as well as the notes that would go into the unfinished work, the *Large Glass*, a pictorial object, yet not an easel painting. It is the readymade for which Duchamp is best known: bicycle wheel, shovel, comb, urinal, those manufactured objects selected, titled, signed, and exhibited by an artist that have received so many differing retrospective interpretations. Duchamp was asking with these objects whether it was possible to make a work that was yet not a work of art. Since then we have, perhaps not unanimously, and under different descriptions, come to accept, to see, to keep, and to show them as works of art. De Duve proposes a particular reading of this complex acceptance.

The basic analytic concept under which he proposes to place this event of the readymade is a somewhat unusual one — “the abandonment of painting.” His argument is that, despite its physical appearance, the readymade belongs to the history of painting (and not, for example, of sculpture). Though not itself a picture, of course, the readymade would be an object-signifier registering a singular moment in which the practice of painting would become “impossible” and would have to be abandoned.

The significance of this view might be seen in contrast to the preeminent place assigned to painting, and to abstract painting in particular, in the conception of modernism of which Greenberg was a great exponent. Greenberg thought modernism would lie in the attempt of the various kinds of art to seek out and show the constituent elements, or the languages, intrinsic to them. In this process, painting — in particular, abstract painting — would occupy an exemplary place. For if in modernism all the arts try to purify themselves, “pure painting” (i.e., abstraction) would most purely express that process. That is why, according to Greenberg, abstraction would stand for art itself, or art-as-such, and why the pictorial avant-garde would take the lead in the culture of modernism.

De Duve observes that Duchamp’s invention of the readymade, regarded as the flipside of his abandonment of painting, occurs in the same years as the turn to abstraction, or the abandonment of figuration, and he proposes that we now read the two abandonments in relation to each other. He does not see two separate events, or two distinct kinds of avant-garde, as did Greenberg,¹ and later, in another way, Peter Bürger. Rather he takes the two abandonments together as part of a larger event; from this he derives another account of the “birth of abstraction,” and so of the very idea of art discovering its intrinsic languages — the idea of modernism.

This other history of abstraction is bound up with the larger ambitions of the book. It is a book written in the late 1970s, when the category of the postmodern started to inflate the theory and practice of the pictorial arts, a situation de Duve characterizes as one of an “eclecticism and mannerism” (he does not say “pluralism”), which is a symptom of a “reshuffling of the theoretical cards.” Perhaps de Duve’s sense of this situation might be put in this way: what in those

years we ourselves were abandoning, or what was leaving us abandoned or lost, was not the possibility of painting, of art, of aesthetics, or even of abstraction. Rather we were abandoning a particular *idea* of art, its place in society, its connection to politics, the forms of critical thought and judgment it demands of us—the idea that took abstract painting as the great metaphor for art-as-such. To abandon an idea of art is to open the possibility of another. We must understand the loss of this idea as an event that is happening to us, much as we should now see Duchamp's invention of the readymade as an event that was happening to painting in this time. Accordingly we must now reexamine the emergence of the readymade in the history of pictorial practice in such a manner as to retrace its lines of descent into our own "eclecticism and mannerism," into our own "reshuffling of the theoretical cards." "To extract the strategic resonance of that abandonment which Duchamp himself called 'a sort of pictorial nominalism' requires in turn that we abandon the modernist horizon of aesthetic questioning."²

It is, I think, the hermeneutic reverberations and interconnections between these two abandonments, Duchamp's and our own, that supply the tension of de Duve's singular identification with Duchamp. Perhaps at bottom to interpret an oeuvre is to seek to break with the identificatory hold it has over one.

In this reading, I think, one might isolate the production of a basic concept that though not stated as such, runs throughout the book and helps to draw together its various strategies of analysis. It is a particular concept of *event*. Duchamp would be an artist of an event, the concept of which might provide us with a new and nominalist aesthetic of judgment. For, as de Duve uses the term, to "abandon" something is not just to discard it. It is to register the moment of its loss or "impossibility" within a work in such a way as to open up, or call for, another history. The invention of the readymade would be an event of this sort.

According to de Duve, this kind of event was involved in the series of "abandonments" that punctuate the history of the pictorial avant-garde: the instituted requirement to constantly invent significant pictorial novelties that would retrospectively reinterpret what pictorial practice had been. It would fall to Duchamp to expose the nominalist character of the creation of such pictorial events. In his particular relation to the events of the avant-garde would reside the "temporality peculiar to Duchamp" already to be found in the painting *The Bride* of 1912. This peculiar relation would show why Duchamp never had the "fantasy of the tabula rasa," or the certitude of an origin or a radical beginning, as with the futurists, most constructivists, and certain Dadaists. It would explain why Duchamp was never either a utopian or a distopian.

But de Duve also uses this conception of event in the "biographical" part of his study and in his contention that "where it is strong aesthetically, where it is fertile historically, the work of art is always of a self-analytic order." For the "truth" of this self-analysis would derive from a response to those events that

disrupt one's sense of identity in one's work and expose the conditions that had made it seem self-evident.

It is thus through a conception of the readymade as a particular kind of event that de Duve attempts to impose on Duchamp's abandonment of painting both a social-historical and psychoanalytic interpretation. That abandonment is described historically as a nodal point of symbolic "revelation" of a general crisis in pictorial practice in industrial society, and it is described psychoanalytically as an eroticization of the loss of an object in which we invest ourselves through mourning, mania, or melancholia.

Eventualizing the History of Modernism

The book is structured by a loose biographical plot leading up to the moment when we see Duchamp's abandonment of painting and invention of the ready-made. It is the story of Duchamp's self-invention as an artist, or rather as what he called an "anartist": his desire to become, and to secure recognition as, a painter would come to a point where to be a painter and to abandon painting would paradoxically be thought to require each other.

The episodes in this story are inserted into a short, revised history of the pictorial avant-garde, of which de Duve offers compact new aperçus and a general theory. Duchamp's self-invention as an "anartist" would constantly occupy a "transversal" position with respect to the avant-garde—a sort of erotic-ironic assimilation that betrays what it adopts and that assumes a coherence after the fact with the invention of the readymade, with which Duchamp was in fact to secure recognition.

The aperçus of the avant-garde—short portraits of blocks of conflicting thought and practice—match with the two cities of Duchamp's itinerary (before New York): Paris and Munich. To each city correspond a particular tradition and a particular conception of the avant-garde itself, of technology and craft, and of color. Together they comprise instances of de Duve's general picture of the avant-garde—what I will call the problematization of pictorial practice through successive and overlapping abandonments. De Duve's strategy is to analyze the moment of Duchamp's abandonment of painting as an event that serves to "reveal" this problematization in a way that "resonates" throughout its history.

De Duve proposes to regard the history of what we have come to call modernist painting as a history through which the self-evidence or the common sense of those categories that had permitted one to identify something as a painting were successively exposed—as though painting were a bride stripped bare. "The abandonment of chiaroscuro by Edouard Manet, of linear perspective by Cézanne, of Euclidean space by the Cubists, of figuration by the first Abstractionists, down to the figure/ground by how many generations of allover or monochrome painters" served to question what one took to be a painting. This ques-

tioning was institutionalized in the peculiar practice of exhibiting new objects that would constantly raise the question: are they paintings? To the social organization of the avant-garde group with its "frantic production of theories, manifestos, pedagogical programs and philosophical constructions" corresponded a practice of exhibition open to the public "without jury or prize," which turned the question of what it is to classify a given thing as a painting into a tumultuous social drama. It was through this practice that there emerged the avant-garde conception of the "historicity" of the new painting: of what it means to invent or originate a pictorial novelty, in short, of the pictorial event.

The conception of such events, and of their relation to tradition and academicism, was not, however, of a piece. The two cities of Duchamp's self-invention, Paris and Munich, conceived of avant-garde events in two different ways. In Munich the Parisian conception of a strict line of development leading from Realism to Impressionism to Cézannism to Cubism was broken up. The products of those apparently successive "abandonments" of painting were received and assimilated in a different order, and according to a different model: the "secession model." The Parisian avant-garde had worked on a "refusal model," where it fell to the Academy to determine the criteria of identification of a painting and to the avant-garde to refuse them. The great battle of personalities, styles, and ideologies of the institution of refusal carried with it a conception of the pictorial event as a radical or revolutionary break with tradition, eventually inducing the "fantasy of the tabula rasa."

By contrast, the Munich or secession model supposed neither a total or radical break with tradition nor the monolithic character of academicism. In this model the avant-garde assumed the right to say what a painting is when it judged the academic definition to be too rigid or limiting. The novelties of the avant-garde were not seen as a radical refusal, but as a "secession" that expanded the territory by resituating the place of the old and now merely academic tradition within it.

By de Duve's account, it was in Munich that Duchamp was attempting to work out his own "passage" through Cubism, and, in effect, in this passage he adopted a version of the secession model. But what he came to abandon, the event that occurred in his work, was the abandonment of painting itself as a *métier* ("Marcel, no more painting; go get a job"). Thus, the impossibility of continuing to paint assumed the form of an appeal to the "secession" from painting to another idea of art that would resituate what painting had been. Duchamp's abandonment was for de Duve an attempt "to give painting a new meaning by acknowledging what has happened to it," by "relating it to the very conditions that make it objectively useless and subjectively impossible to pursue."³

In his account of this "revelation" de Duve reveals his own conception of *sources* of the problematization of pictorial practice characteristic of the avant-garde. Those sources would lie in industrialization and in the new conceptions of

the division of labor, the new materials, the new means of pictorial production and reproduction it carried with it. It was they that would make painting seem "objectively useless."

It is here that the thesis that connects the readymade to the abandonment of painting acquires historical depth. In introducing mundane industrial objects into the "space" of constant pictorial redefinition invented by the avant-garde, Duchamp would be revealing something about the industrial sources of that space. The readymade would do this in a number of different ways.

One way to which de Duve devotes some attention concerns that reconceptualization of the division of labor, or of the social categories of making things, involved by the supplanting of craft by mass production. In France, he argues, the "arts-and-crafts" tradition in the style of William Morris, or of the German *Kunstgewerbe*, was poorly represented. A strong division between beaux arts and métiers prevailed, which goes back to the division introduced in the *Encyclopédie* between *sciences*, *arts*, and *métiers*. The scientist, the artist, and the artisan were formed in three separate pedagogical institutions: learning by observation, learning by example, and learning by demonstration. From this institutional segregation derived a series of "commonsense" distinctions between art as example and concept and art as technique or procedures of the hand, distinctions that later would be "problematized" in the avant-garde discussions of the beauty of technology or the symbolic unity of form and function.⁴

By contrast, in Germany and Central Europe there flourished a rich tradition of decorative or applied crafts, of *Kunstgewerbe*. From that tradition derived conflicting conceptual tendencies that were to find one resolution in architectural avant-garde: the Bauhaus attempt to endow the technological work of economic necessity with the older values of disinterested artistic genius. In replacing the artisan, the engineer would adopt the traditional value of the artist. Thus, remarks de Duve, while Gropius declared that "architecture is the finality of all creative activity," he surrounded himself almost exclusively with painters. The functionalist program was a way of resolving this "contraction"; it invented the figure of the *Gestalter* of a new order and a great pedagogical program to educate the masses to a new sort of "plastic literacy." The difficulty was that the famous unity of form and function remained a symbolic one and had other results than the ones that this utopian resolution of the crisis of artist and engineer had envisaged.

De Duve retrospectively reads the readymade as a "revelation" of this crisis. Duchamp connected the beauty of technological or industrial products with the end or abandonment of painting, rather than combining the two in the figure of a functionalist *Gestalter*. For the readymade was an industrial product endowed with the symbolic value of art in virtue of its mere selection and quite independently of its ergonomic function. What it thus revealed was the historical irresolution, and not the utopian resolution, of technique and art or of form and func-

tion. Duchamp was not a utopian; he did not dream of a new plastic order. What he invented was not a new art for the masses, but an art of the advent of the abandonment of pure art (which painting had preeminently been) in the new mass society.

In tracing connections of this sort between industrialization and the problematization of painting, and in presenting the readymade as a revelation of them, de Duve comes to a central question in the revisionist history of modernism: the place of avant-garde thought in the society in which it occurred.

De Duve presents industrialization as a central and complex source of the conceptual problematizations of pictorial practice: the suspension of its "common sense," and of the "world" constructed around it, in which artist, collectors, critics and so on, could play their parts. And yet the thinking, the inventions, the judgments of the pictorial avant-garde were not simply "determined" by industrialization. De Duve is not an industrial determinist, utopian or distopian, and he is at pains to show that Duchamp was not, either. The nostalgia for craft is part of what he wants to analyze and to show that Duchamp revealed: a crisis in the very conception of technique, *métier*, production, in the self-evident categories through which the practice of painting had been carried on.

Thus de Duve holds that it does not just *follow* from industrialization that pictorial practice would assume the dramatic new forms that it did, and it is not the case that industrialization *in fact* led to an end to painting. Industrialization is not related to the inventions of the avant-garde as a mechanical cause, something one might express by a "covering law."

It was not an expressive cause, something the occurrence of which would be explained by the way it expressed the disunity of society as a whole. Rather it was the source of a singular and nonrepeatable historical invention, which not only survived the context that brought it on, but which helped to retroactively reinterpret what that context was. Industrialization introduced into pictorial practice the necessity of inventing new concepts or ways of thinking by exposing the old ones as nonessential and limiting. Thus it introduced the practice of what, in a phrase he takes from Duchamp, de Duve calls "a sort of pictorial nominalism."

As de Duve elaborates it, pictorial nominalism may be said to be the view that the kind of thing we call a picture or a painting is not given by an essential nature. From this it does not follow that the concept of painting derives from "defining institutions"; that, according to de Duve, would be circular. Rather there emerge at various times and places particular "ideas of art" that make it possible to routinely identify particular things as pictures or paintings. The ideas in turn depend on "procedures" that are "formal and conventional, aesthetic and ideological, linguistic and institutional, economic and political" in nature and that thus derive from various sources. Together these procedures make for the common sense of pictorial practice; they are what permit it to proceed in an unproblematic manner. But they are also open to "events" that alter them, and de Duve's pictorial nom-

inalism is a historical nominalism. It was just such an event that industrialization introduced into painting. It exposed that what had been taken for granted as essential to the practice of painting was in fact only one way of naming or conceiving of it and its possibilities.

De Duve's thesis is that the readymade was a sort of nodal point in the abandonment of the common sense of pictorial practice, with its exhibiting institutions and its industrial sources. As such it would be, in one sense of Lyotard's title, a "*transformateur Du Champ*," something that transformed the "field of possibilities" in which paintings could be made. It would mark the possibility of another history in the history of pictorial practice; it would supply the crucial moment or crossroads at which one must invent a new "idea of art," since it is no longer possible to continue with the old one.⁵ It would reveal that the fact that painting was "'not happening,' which avant-garde art accounts for through an active destruction of tradition, is a potential, a supply of future possibility. It means not only 'not happening anymore,' but also 'not happening yet.'"⁶

To study an event of this sort is to attempt to reconstitute the complex procedures that composed it, or the complex "lines of fracture" it introduced. In this one discovers a tacit historiographical precept of de Duve's style of analysis. Rather than trying to historicize the events of pictorial practice by showing how they were socially necessitated, one would, in reinterpreting them, seek to open up, or to "eventalize," the ways we have come to conceive of that history. One would not explain those events by showing why they *had* to occur; one would "complexify" them by tracing a field of "resonance" of what they exposed or revealed. In this manner one would seek to articulate the distance that is always increasing from those events in which we nevertheless find the origins of our own thought and practice.

Abstraction

How did our obsession with "flatness" emerge? In de Duve's revised history, it comes from the general crisis, of which the readymade was the revelation. Painting was dying as craft or *métier*; it was reborn through the invention of an essentializing, self-idealizing idea: the idea of a pure pictorial language. One would show that a colored surface could be meaningful in itself. As a painting, it would distinguish itself from mere decoration and industrial design through the possession of an artistic "subject matter" in the absence of any figural or iconographic "content." That in virtue of which it could have this subject matter was the pictorial language. The idea of a pure language of color and form is found in all the early abstractionists, for example, in Mondrian's attempt to establish the universal value of his vertical-horizontal symbolism or his triad of primary colors. The idea is already set out in 1911 by Kandinsky in his book *On the Spiritual in Art*.

In reconstructing Duchamp's relation to the invention of this idea de Duve makes a number of different points. He argues that Duchamp's famous retinal/conceptual distinction was not the same one that was a commonplace of Cubism and that is to be found in Gleizes and Metzinger. It was not exactly a matter of abandoning a retinal art in favor of a conceptual art, as Joseph Kosuth would argue against Greenberg in 1969.⁷ It was not so much abstract or pure painting that was "retinal"; the *idea* of it was. Abstraction was painting placed under a particular idea of art, which presupposed what the retina was supposed to grasp. In the invention of the readymade another idea was involved: another way of thinking of the whole field of vision and technique, or the visual and the technological. In this rethinking de Duve isolates the central question of *color*, which had been suppressed in at least the more dogmatic geometrical side of Cubism.

Concerning color, Duchamp had different ideas from those of Kandinsky. Kandinsky told of a primordial language of colors and forms; one might select a particular shade from the variety of colors and place it on the canvas in such a manner as to reach directly into the depths of the soul. For Kandinsky thought color was in itself a spiritual, a *geistig* thing, a "strange being" that could burst forth from the brush.

By contrast, Duchamp thought one painted not with *colors* but with *paints*—with those "manufactured objects called paints." The tube of paint was a ready-made, he said; thus the act of selecting from paints to make colored surface was in principle no different from the artistic selection of those other manufactured objects, the readymades. For this reason, Duchamp admired Seurat as a colorist: his "pointillism" was like a machine operating by effecting in steps a series of choices from a standardized table of colors rather than through the craft or the hand.

De Duve argues that the contrast between Kandinsky's "spiritual" and Seurat's "mechanical" view of painting with colors derives from two distinct and opposing traditions in thinking about color. Kandinsky's views derive from Goethe and a long tradition kept alive in Germany and Central Europe. Delaunay's turn to abstraction comes from a second and French tradition that goes back to Chevreul's research on simultaneous contrast of 1839, which was to influence Delacroix and later Signac. Cubism reacted against it, but it was revived by Delaunay and Kupka. The distinction between the two traditions shows that differing ideas of color went into the turn to abstraction, and, in particular, it exposes a connection, already explicit in Delaunay, between abstraction and the craft or *métier* through which paintings are made.⁸

When Duchamp said "I wanted to get away from *la patte* and all that retinal painting," he was therefore supposing that the use of colored paints in making a painting was made possible only through an acceptance of particular ideas on the part of the *métier*. He wanted to question and get away from the acceptance of those ideas. In short, he had a "nominalist" view of color in painting that con-

trasted with Kandinsky's "essentialist" view of a new pictorial order arising out of its fundamental spirituality. In this respect he "resonated" with the path to abstraction taken by Malevitch and Mondrian. For there the concern was to attenuate the contribution of craft in making a painting; Malevitch's *Black Square* required no savoir faire at all.

Along with Russian constructivism, the invention of the readymade thus reveals another way of conceiving of the abandonment of figuration than the one rooted in the acceptance of the idea of a pure pictorial language. In making that idea the central one, Greenberg overlooked Malevitch and of course, reviled Duchamp. For de Duve this is a symptom of a blindness in his general theory. Greenberg tried to ground the "abandonments" through which the craft of painting sought to reinvent itself in the nature of the painting as a physical object; he called on the physical characteristics of the canvas to provide the criterion to distinguish painting from nonpainting. But this physicalism is in fact a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*, for the blank canvas *is* a readymade, and one that can be acquired in any art supply shop. In effect, de Duve proposes to reinterpret what Greenberg called the "reduction of painting to its essential conventions" as the series of abandonments in the craft of painting brought on by industrialization. One importance of Duchamp in this revised history is to help reveal the nominalist character of the use of color and thus to complexify the history of the paths to abstraction.

Anartistic Identity

It is not exactly Duchamp's "biography" that de Duve studies; it is his self-constitution as an artist. The invention of the readymade was an event that revealed a sort of impasse in the history of our relations with those things we call paintings. But it was also an event in Duchamp's own relation to himself in his work. His abandonment of painting left *him* abandoned as a painter. The readymade would emerge at just the moment when being a painter and abandoning painting would have seemed to require each other. It would thus raise the question of who he was in his work.

To describe the event of this question in his oeuvre, de Duve adopts a fresh nominalist assumption. Instead of starting with received conceptions of the artist such as the Romantic genius or cultural hero and reading the oeuvre in terms of them, de Duve suspends those conceptions and asks how, historically, there emerge the particular practices that secure the sort of relation an artist can have to himself in his work. It is not therefore that an oeuvre expresses or reflects an artist's life, for the concept "the life of an artist" is not given but constructed. Among other things, an artist's oeuvre is a particular way he provides for himself a "symbolic identity," a socially recognizable self-relation. He must find a particular way of "investing" himself, or "abandoning" himself, in his work, and

his work is thus a manner of conducting his life. The events in Duchamp's life to which de Duve draws attention, or to which he is drawn—his refusals, his travels, his diplomas, his relations with his artistic family—are accordingly read in terms of the problem of the particular forms of his self-investment in his work as a painter.

De Duve advances a general hypothesis to the effect that "the work of art is self-analytic." This does not mean that a work expresses a truth about the artist understood independently of it and its social determinations. "The self-analytic hypothesis . . . does not totally dismiss the determinations that surround the work of art, but it privileges the creative breakthrough, the 'moment' of significant novelty, in which it locates the function of truth of the work." These moments reveal something about the determinations of the work. "For a large part, the function of truth of an art is to say the real conditions of its exercise." To say "the work of art is self-analytic" is thus to say that it consists in the crises it goes through, that it is punctuated by moments of breakthrough or "revelation," which require that one question one's conception of who one is or how one has invested oneself in it. It is to say that a work is constituted through those events that arrest the self-evidence of one's identity and that open other possibilities that retroactively reinterpret it.

There is then no "idea of art," no ensemble of procedures that allow for the identification of paintings, which does not specify a particular way of being-a-painter, a more or less tactic way of becoming who one is and may be as a painter. An idea of art carries with it a form of "symbolic identity" that allows one to be recognized as a painter, and by reference to which one imagines or envisages oneself and others. This symbolic identity is a social product of sorts; the concepts through which a person can identify himself in his practice are the same concepts that hold together the common sense, the tacit "pact" of the practice.

It is with these assumptions in mind that de Duve analyzes the identity of the avant-garde painter. The abandonments, the questioning, the problematizations of the avant-garde instituted a way of being or becoming a painter. From the crisis in painting there emerged the necessity to become recognized through a practice that at the same time refused or questioned the received categories or recognition. One *had* to constantly place new sorts of objects before a nonspecialized or non-academic public. This obligation was not a practical norm; it did not tell one what or how to paint. Rather the invention of the new objects constituted a demand for recognition of oneself as a painter precisely in the absence of agreed criteria as to what painting is. It is this demand placed on a nonacademic public in the absence of agreed criteria that would be what Duchamp was referring to when he said that it is the viewers who make the work.

It is in this context that de Duve introduces Lacanian categories. There is the "symbolic" means of self-recognition that confronts one as though a Law. There is the "imaginary order" of those ways of envisaging oneself and others in re-

sponse to this necessity or demand. And finally there is "the real": what is impossible in this demand or task, the impasse from which it arises and to which it constantly returns, the point of abandonment and event, of breakdown and creative breakthrough.

In employing these categories de Duve does not consider himself to be offering a psychoanalysis of Duchamp's life through his work. He uses the categories to characterize the way Duchamp invested himself in his work, his desire and his demand for symbolic recognition through it, and the events that disrupted that desire and made it seem impossible. The moment of his abandonment of painting marked Duchamp's sense of the historical impasse of the *métier* in industrial society. But is also required an abandonment of his desire to seek recognition as an *avant-garde* painter. As such it involved a peculiar sort of eroticization of his relation to his own work. In this manner de Duve comes to the question that Lacan, in his reading of Freud, formulated in terms of "sublimation": the question of the displacement of one's identity onto who one is in and through one's work. De Duve is interested in Duchamp's "extraordinary and enigmatic concern for painting," as though it were only through painting that Duchamp could respond to the necessity of becoming who he was. It is that concern that his abandonment disrupted and displaced.

Impossible Professions

De Duve starts his book with a metadiscussion about the use of psychoanalytic theory in art history and aesthetics. In his continuing reflections on Duchamp after writing the book, de Duve has much less use for this theory.

Basically, psychoanalysis provides de Duve with a very general analogy, which he pursues in various ways throughout his study. He uses it to read the figures of bachelor, bride, and virgin, which recur in Duchamp's titles, without referring to their representative contents, as sexual allegories of Duchamp's relation to himself in his work, his sense of its impossibilities, its ironies, and its eroticisms.

One might read the analogy as establishing a certain "resonance" between psychoanalysis and the pictorial *avant-garde*. Its dates—and not only its dates—would of course make this possible. With Lacan, one is after all dealing with Picasso's doctor, a man who administered shock treatment of Dora Maar, who frequented surrealist groups and wrote for *Minotaure*. Eluard thought that the woman about whom Lacan wrote his thesis in psychiatry was engaged in *poésie involontaire*. Lacan even alludes to Duchamp in the telling context of the place of psychoanalysis in the events of 1968, the year of Duchamp's death.⁹

De Duve refers to the famous inaugural dream of the *Interpretation of Dreams*, the dream of giving an injection to Irma, and to Lacan's reading of it. One sort of "resonance" with Duchamp concerns Freud's desire, as revealed

through his interpretation of his own dream (and thus through his self-analysis), to secure recognition for himself as a psychiatrist at the very moment he took the practice of psychiatry to be, in his own phrase, an "impossible profession." One might thus read de Duve's "homology" as a comparison between two impossible professions: psychoanalysis and painting. Freud would have sought to be a sort of "apsychiatrist," as Duchamp sought to be an "anartist." Lacan made much of Freud's dictum that psychoanalysis sets an impossible task. And perhaps one might find a sort of structural parallel between the history of avant-garde groups and the history of psychoanalytic ones, following both Lacan and Freud, with their founding-father figures, their patterns of splits and crises surrounding doctrinal disputes, their relentless search for symbolic social and scientific recognition in a society in which, at the same time, they sought to expose the repressed sources of such recognition, indeed of the necessary "discontent" in any human grouping.¹⁰

In its application to Duchamp, de Duve's homology follows a line of sexuality that runs throughout this work, and the titles he gave to it, and helps to characterize its "transversal" relation to the geometry of Cubism and the spirituality of abstraction. Central to this line are the figures of virgin, bride, and bachelor, as well as the later invention of the figure of Rose Sélavy, famously photographed as Duchamp in drag, with whom Duchamp collaborated (one work declares that it is copyrighted by Rose). The basic scheme is roughly this: the masculine figures would stand for Duchamp's desire and his demand to be recognized as a painter; the feminine figures for the impossibility of doing so, or of the inaccessibility of the object Painting. In this way, what Lacan called "the impossible" in sexual relations and the impossibility of painting are related to each other. The impossibility of making a painting, and investing oneself in it as a painter, would match with the basic impossibility of the sexual relation, in oneself and with others.

De Duve's analogy thus allows him to describe Duchamp's own eroticization of himself in his works in response to the enigmatic object Painting in terms of the general psychoanalytic or Lacanian account of a subject's relation to himself (or his image of himself) in response to the constitutive loss or "abandonment" of the Object of his desire. Painting would figure in Duchamp's work as an object *a*. Thus the famous theme of the "death of painting" can be read in terms of the no less famous Freudian account of death: the mania, the depression, the bereavement for the loss of the object, and the investment of oneself that follows from the attempt to find it again and so to keep it alive. Duchamp's punning redefinition of genius, of what it is to make or create or originate a work, *l'impossibilité du fer*, would be the mark of this loss, this abandonment, this death in his work, and his relation to it. In this way Duchamp's abandonment of painting is placed under a psychoanalytic description: the fear that something was dying, the hope that it might yet live again. The event of the readymade would be the mo-

ment of the breakdown and breakthrough of this self-abandonment: the moment of revelation and self-analysis.

In short, de Duve's analogy supplies a psychoanalytic vocabulary to characterize the "abandonment" in Duchamp's abandonment of painting and thus of his "extraordinary and enigmatic concern" for it. It is just this vocabulary that Lacan himself used when he came to explicate the Freudian conception of sublimation.

By "sublimation" Freud referred to a diversion of the aims or objects of our basically perverse and partial drives, which, in contrast with the repression constitutive of neurotic symptoms, gains a social acceptance or approbation. The question for Lacan is the enigmatic nature of the social value attributed to such deviated versions of someone's particular partial objects. How is it that a social value could originate from an idiosyncratic, perverse, asocial desire? It is a sort of "value" that is independent from, though always connected with, the social institutions of patronage or market: the value objects have for us inasmuch as we are embodied subjects of desire, inasmuch as we are talking sexual beings.

We have a sort of love affair with the things we call art. We "overestimate" them. We take them as peculiar parts of our bodily selves that always seem other than ourselves, as things in which we die and live again and that occasion in us alternating feelings of dejection and omnipotence. They become objects of envy, despair, and exhilaration, and we treat the tradition with which they confront us as a "symbolic debt," or in terms of an "anxiety of influence." In short we treat them as though they maintained within them that which we have lost. Sublimation, says Lacan, is the elevation of an object to the dignity of *das Ding*.¹¹

Sublimation is then the capacity a work has to sustain within it a relation to those peculiar bodily objects we can never represent to ourselves without losing ourselves. In the case of painting, such, according to Lacan, would be the singular position of the gaze as object *a*. But Duchamp's *impossibilité du fer*, acknowledgment of an impossibility of painting that would open the chance of another idea of art, would also belong to this order. As distinct from just giving painting up, Duchamp would have "sublimated" its loss in his work and in his relation to his work. This is what would explain his "extraordinary and enigmatic concern for painting" at the very moment of his invention of the ready-made, the moment of revelation of his abandonment. It is this sublimation of the "death" of painting that would give his work its peculiar *humor*.

Duchamp's Laugh

In the notes to the *Large Glass*, Duchamp anticipated (anticipated *demanding* of his viewers) that the work would be the occasion of an immense hilarity that might withstand the most serious scrutiny. Abandoning painting was apparently an event fraught with great laughter.

De Duve refers to this hilarity as a kind of irony, even finding a pun on "iron" in *l'impossibilité du fer*. And, in general, there is something faintly comical, if not ironical, in the ingenious ways de Duve devises to extend the humor of *cal-embour* and wordplay, typical of the period and much to Duchamp's liking, into his own allegorical readings of his works and their titles.

Duchamp's humor might be analyzed in terms of the homology de Duve establishes between sexual and painter identity, or the way Duchamp maintained in his work the impossibility of work by maintaining in himself the impossibility of sexual identity: it is a humor that says that at bottom sexual identity is just as laughable (and laughable in the same way—just as "ready-made") as artistic identity. Indeed there is something humorous about identity itself. The "constitution of the subject" is inherently comical, since it derives from a fundamental impossibility. Duchamp's humor would be the humor of our attempts to ever remain the same.

It is a sort of humor that requires what Duchamp called "precision"—just the right amount of "vulgarity." It must expose the incongruities in those practices through which identity is secured. In her discussion of Duchampian hilarity, Molly Nesbit draws attention to the early cartoons: in them there already is, in a sexually charged context, the wit of incongruities¹²—or of what Lyotard calls "incommensurabilities,"¹³ the incommensurabilities of word and image, the retinal and the conceptual, the artist and the viewer, the commensuration of which would render pictorial practice unproblematic or self-evident. One must hold together these elements of a now "dying" pictorial common sense in a sort of "suspended animation." As such they would constitute a vast art-historical joke.

This *jeu*, this play with the incommensurabilities of painting, this art of divesting one's investment in it, this game with objects, with words, and with oneself, would be a way of putting into play the loss of the possibility of painting and of opening its practice to other possibilities, other histories. It would be a way of maintaining, or keeping present in one's work, what one is in the process of losing, unlike the "mania" that would deny it or the "melancholia" that would incorporate it. It would comprise a way of responding to the advent of the abandonment of painting different from the famous heroism of the artist before those "anxious objects" that would be his works. That is why it could serve as an antidote to the great spiritualizing enthusiasm for pure art, with the exhilaration Kandinsky associated with the capacity of a colored surface to express through correspondence the movements of the soul. What was required was the precision of injecting the right touch of industrial vulgarity into such *geistig* pieties of painting.

In its sublimatory function, this "indispensable vulgarity," this "hilarity," would point to a source of "value" in painting different from, and perhaps prior to, the values of quality, taste, and beautiful form of appearance: the value of incommensurability. It is the value in the wit that moves from those "value judg-

ments” that assert “this is beautiful” to those that ask “is this a painting?”—the values of a “sort of pictorial nominalism.” Duchamp’s hilarity would be a sort of nominalist humor, a laugh at the expense of categorial identity.

A Nominalist Aesthetic

In October of 1912, returning to Paris from Munich, Duchamp thus wrote to himself “Marcel, no more painting; go get a job.” De Duve’s complex study of this little episode brings us to the point where a problematization of pictorial practice brought on by industrialization gives rise to the eroticized wit of the incongruities of identity. At this point—which is the point of the invention of the readymade as an event—two general questions are raised and connected to each other: the historical question of “originality,” or what it is to originate, create, or invent something, and the psychoanalytic question of “sublimation,” or how we invest ourselves as embodied subjects of desire in those works we originate, create, or invent. It is these questions that the hilarity of inserting mundane manufactured objects into the space opened up by the pictorial avant-garde would, at least retrospectively, address to us.

It is these same questions, which, I think, de Duve would introduce into our own “abandonment of the modernist horizon of aesthetic questioning,” of which the mannerism, the baroque eclecticism, of our “postmodern condition” would be the symptom. In an earlier essay de Duve isolates what he takes to be the “central aporia of postmodernism.”¹⁴ We have only been able to conceive of what we call the postmodern through the historicist or avant-garde categories of modernism. The more one conceived of it as a radical break or rupture, the more one fell back on the very system of ideas from which it was supposed to break.

But the postmodern need not be conceived as yet another modernist rupture. We may think of it, in a Duchampian manner, as an event we still do not know how to name but that causes us to rethink and to put into play what has led to it, as distinct from “refusing” the past or declaring it dead. The postmodern is not an end to pictorial originality, but the arrival of another conception of it. It is the arrival of a new kind of aesthetic questioning.

Perhaps we are in the process of losing the romantic image of the genius-hero in our conception of what it is to respond to a crisis in our practices and to invent or originate something new. Abandoning the modernist idea of a pictorial essence would expose our incredible investment of ourselves in the idea of art-as-such. In response to the problematizations of our practices and ourselves in our practices, we are no longer capable of searching for this sort of spirituality. We *can* no longer make the utopian assumption of a purity of expression that would offer the horizon of a new order, either technological or antitechnological. For us, the necessity to originate something—to create or to invent—is not that of a new order

that would arise out of the demise of our old one and in which the ideality of art and the creativity of man would at last coincide with each other.

It is rather those moments of "impossibility" that disrupt our practices, and the ideological and institutional self-evidence through which they proceed, that seem to have come to compel our inventions, to compel them with a necessity that while it does not prescribe what we should do, cannot be avoided: those moments that offer the "chance" of our inventions. Perhaps the source of our originality has come to lie with those events that expose the history of our practices to other possibilities: the events of the "not," in Duchamp's formula "a work which is not a work of art." In any case, it is in our relation to such events, to what is happening to us no longer and not yet, that we might find a new kind of aesthetic questioning. For this "not" shows that a work is always more than an object combined with an ideality given to the critical capture of a subject. It shows that it is a fragile and contingent unity of disparate elements, in which we come to invest ourselves and that is brought together for a moment by those materially rooted "ideas" that allow us to classify things by their aesthetic names.

Nominalism is the doctrine that only individual or disparate things exist and that our classifications of them are only contingent and changeable inventions. Pictorial nominalism is the view that the "ideas" that allow us at a time and place to classify things pictorial are open to problematizing events and are not fixed by an essential nature. The aesthetic of such nominalism is the aesthetic that opens these ideas to our judgment. It is an aesthetic not of taste or beautiful appearance (or of the antiaesthetic or the tasteless), but of the invention of new sensibilities, new concepts, new techniques and ideas of technique in response to those incommensurabilities that question our practices and that eventualize our relation to them.

This sort of aesthetic questioning offers a form of critical intelligence to the art historian. The critical art historian would not suppose, or seek to supply, an idea of the true nature of art, its genres and its forms of subjectivity, so as to understand that history or show what that history reveals. Rather he would look in that history for the way such ideas have been constructed and the way they have been exposed to other histories by problematizing events. In this manner he would help to formulate what is happening to us in our own situation; he would help to characterize that from which we are in the process of distancing ourselves. And it is in terms of just this sort of aesthetic questioning that we might understand the obsessive love, the compulsive fascination, with which this new book invests those now even beautiful relics of a moment in the history of our relation to what we call "art," when the very idea of making a painting could be the occasion of an immense hilarity.

Chapter 1

Art and Psychoanalysis, Again?

*I would say that analytic literature constitutes in a certain way
a ready-made delirium.*

Jacques Lacan

Time and again since Freud, art has been examined as symptom, phantasm, or dream. Whether it is a question of going from a manifest content to a hidden one in order to uncover the autobiographical secret that the work is hiding or a question of producing the work of condensation, displacement, or figuration as a visual equivalent of dream-work, everyone today would agree that the work of art is to be treated, as Freud treated the dream, as a sacred text. That a work of art should be readable—or unreadable—as if it were a text is by now generally admitted. That it should, moreover, be read as a sacred text is perhaps something that still awaits a paradoxically profane interpretation. Something is revealed in a work of art, but it is not so much what the author sacrifices to the language that makes it into a text nor the symptomatic truth that the manifest level of the work hides but, rather, what the movement from hidden to manifest reveals of its own conditions of emergence.

Toward a Heuristic Parallelism

Here, at least, is a working hypothesis, rooted neither in applied psychoanalysis nor in psychoanalytic aesthetics but, rather—because it is best to make clear one's point of view—in the work of an art historian. Since art history cannot avoid choosing its interpretations, the question is the following: of what use can psychoanalytic interpretation be in the constitution of a historical “narrative” *récit* of art? In turn, the time at which the question is being asked must be made explicit: that time is today. This implies that one has some familiarity with the

Freudian text and its successive avatars in the various aesthetic theories inspired by psychoanalysis, and that one is aware of benefiting from a certain "breaching" (frayage) of the Freudian text that, through the added advantages of historical distance and the renewed readings of Freud that have arisen out of this distance—the main one here being Lacan's—allows one to realize that the relationship between art and psychoanalysis today has changed from what it was, let us say, twenty years ago.¹ For example, at the end of a little essay dated 1969 and responding to a request to present the "Principal Contemporary Trends in the Psychoanalytic Study of Artistic and Literary Expression," Jean-François Lyotard sums up these trends by saying that they make up a series that moves, in six stages, from "a reading of art as an expression of compulsions (of the author or of the subject)—that is, as a symptom"—to "a reflection centered on the truth-function of literature and art and on the role that the space in which the works operate can play in the very constitution of psychoanalysis."²

Although this series sums up the principal contemporary trends in the psychoanalytic study of art, the succession of the trends that Lyotard presents suggests a diachrony and even a progress. Indeed, the names linked to the various stages (in order, Schneider, Kris, Klein, Ehrenzweig, Kaufmann, Green) indicate *grosso modo* the same progressive ordering as Lyotard's own order of preference. Moreover, his own essays in the field were at the time situated directly within the last-mentioned trends.³

We can suppose that all the authors to whom Lyotard refers drew on works from the Freudian corpus. Even if they did not all go to the same texts, there are certain central works, at least—such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, as well as the essays on art—that are unavoidable for all the post-Freudian aestheticians. It seems, then, that mere historical distance, which can only increase, confers on the Freudian corpus in its relation to art a sort of breaching power, out of which new and sharper interpretations of this relation will arise. Of course, this historical distance is not inert; it is active and inhabited by all the rumors of history. In the psychoanalytic field it is characterized by the progressive falling away of resistances, by the complexification and diversification of psychoanalytic knowledge, and, more recently, by a criticism that, from all directions, takes psychoanalysis as its target. In the field of art an analogous breaching, brought about by the chronology of artistic avant-gardes and informed especially by contemporary issues, is giving a new sense to the pictorial adventure initiated by the pioneers of modernity—Manet and Cézanne, to name the principal figures.

Twenty years separate us from Lyotard's essay, and the breaching of Freud's work has not reached its end. Nor has that of Cézanne's work. Modernism in painting has not stopped being interpreted and reinterpreted by painting itself. Two distances, two "delays," as Duchamp would say, inform each other. What is the nature of this "information"? What use can we make today of the relation

of psychoanalysis to art? Which of these two corpuses should interpret the other? Like Freud himself, should we interpret a "DaVinci after Freud" or, inversely, as Lyotard does, a "Freud according to Cézanne"? Will the art of any period be equally open, one day, to one sort of theoretical treatment, assuming that we could fully infer such a theory from the Freudian doctrine? Or, on the contrary, will we soon say that any aesthetics based on Freud is fully disqualified, surpassed by an artistic practice that is more "modern" than it?

To put the problem this way is to ask what role ideology plays in art and in psychoanalysis and to imagine that ideology varies in an inverse relation to the truth-function of art and analysis. In such a perspective we would have no choice but to alternate between a symptomatic reading of art grounded on the ideology/theory of Freud and a symptomatic reading of Freud grounded on the ideological displacements to which art (among other practices) testifies.⁴

For whoever speaks as an art historian such a dialectic entails an indecisive and even highly troubling epistemology. The theoretical status of psychoanalysis as a method runs the risk of seeing itself compromised forever. Out of the repeating alternation of interpreting corpus and interpreted corpus results nothing but an interminable and not necessarily productive work of reciprocal deconstruction.

But what else can be done? It is significant that the only works of plastic art analyzed by Freud—the *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* by Leonardo and Michelangelo's *Moses*—are contemporaneous with the birth of a pictorial and epistemological order completely vested in Representation—an order undergoing, at the moment Freud was writing, a profound crisis, and to the deconstruction of which Freud himself contributed. What justifies the symptomatic reading that Freud makes of these works, going from a manifest representation to a hidden representation (phantasm, childhood memory, and the like), is the fact that these works partake in an epistemology of Representation itself made all the more significant by the fact that it is found in these works in a still inchoate form and thus a formally generative state.

It is no less significant that this type of symptomatic reading, based at least implicitly on relationships of representation, fails systematically when applied to modern art—not just with so-called abstract art, which dissuades even the remarking of manifest representational elements, but also with certain so-called figurative practices (Pop Art, or Hyperrealism, for example) in view of which it would be mistaken to assume that there is something latent "behind" the surface of the representation. The only domain of modern art that seems open to a symptomatic reading—and this is why it so often attracts psychoanalysts—is orthodox Surrealism.

But this is deceptive: since Surrealism most often derived from a more or less mechanical application of Freudian doctrine to painting, it is not surprising to see symptomatic readings work here with apparent efficacy. Such readings interpret

themselves backward, finding in the work of art a procedure of pictorial production that actually proceeded from this very reading. In fact, the symptomatic reading is incapable of producing any knowledge whatsoever for art history as soon as it is applied to a work of art that, rather than proceeding from it, renders it obsolete—in other words, to any work over which the theory of representation still organizing Freud's thought no longer has any hold. This does not at all disqualify the Freudian text in its relation to art, since what we can learn from it today is not—or is no longer—of an ideological nature. It is useless to comment endlessly upon the breaking up or the closure of "the ideology of representation." Let us be logical: if the symptomatic reading fails when faced with works of art subsequent to Freud, it is not in turning it against Freud that we will get out of this circle. Freud's failure—but also his success vis-à-vis Leonardo or Michelangelo—suggests something completely different: that the rethinking of the question of the relation between art and psychoanalysis today needs to confront Freudian theory with art that is its contemporary, and not with any other. The relation is one of heuristic parallelism, not ideological contradiction.

Another, looser connection can be made instead: rather than interpreting "DaVinci according to Freud" or "Freud according to Cézanne," one can start with a modest parallelism. Lyotard had perceived in Cézanne a position of desire analogous to that *from* which Freud was speaking but completely different from those positions *of* which Freud was speaking. Today one can move from analogy to explicit comparison. Art and psychoanalysis are subjective as well as interpretive practices that, as such, imply both "desiring positions" and their theorization. Their unfolding in time produces knowledge: this is the sense of the breaching mentioned above. To start from loose connections is from now on to find parallels between the chronologies of art and psychoanalysis and to count on their mutual implication. If a theoretical "truth" comes out of this implication, it cannot be definitive but is always part of an unfinished breaching; furthermore, it will probably take on different forms for the theorist of art and the theorist of psychoanalysis. What is important is thus not to accept this "truth" that promises sooner or later to become "ideology," but to remain attentive to the "truth-function" that is at work in the two fields and between them: a truth revealed by artworks in a field defined as psychoanalytic and a truth revealed by analysis in a field defined as aesthetic. We will consider what each reveals of its own conditions of emergence: on the one hand, the conditions for the transformation of the practice and conception of art and, on the other, the conditions for a theoretical progress in the understanding of the unconscious.

But our method will remain that of a simple parallelism: it will be up to the truth-function to cross the two parallel series. As for the series, they will be chronological (although not necessarily in synchrony with each other) and will rest on the strong points in the history of modern art, on the one hand, and on the strong points in the elaboration of psychoanalytic theory, on the other.

In turn, this will bring about a certain "reversal" of habit. It is common practice to apply the conceptual and theoretical apparatus of psychoanalysis—to some extent certainly deformed by its interpreter—to an artwork (or to a body of works or to a school or style) and to reconstitute from it the life concerns of an individual or collective subject, the artist, or the "age." The call for parallelism between the two chronologies that is being made here is of a different sort. It is not at all a question of suggesting that to the "progress" of Freud's thought there corresponds an "evolution" of modern art. But it is clear that as soon as one tries to confront psychoanalytic theory with the art contemporary to it, the theory ceases to be that monolithic body that—however contradictory we recognize this to be at an ideological or even scientific level—we commonly sum up with the name *psychoanalysis*. The theory must also be envisaged in its diachrony, as the progressive elaboration of a body of knowledge and as the search for truth which it was for Freud.

Thus, it is a matter of coupling two apparently incommensurable historicities. On the one hand is the history of art as it issues through a great number of individuals who brush against one another and who succeed one another, and as it operates through a small number of key works that have been decisive in a modernity structured by the historical notion of the avant-garde. On the other hand is the history of the elaboration of psychoanalytic theory, as it is identical (at least in its first phase) with the biography of a single man, Freud, and as it is periodically replenished in a few fundamental intuitions that are really so many obstacles and sites of refashioning.

Of course, there is nothing innocent in linking these two historicities: to choose the strong moments from art history—that is, its significant works—is to choose on the basis of contingent judgments that later history has made and that are impossible to ignore. And to choose the strong moments in the elaboration of psychoanalysis by Freud can not be done in ignorance of current interpretations of Freudian doctrine. Here, once again, we encounter two forms of breaching and the need to declare as explicitly as possible the place and time from which we are speaking. This being said, it is presupposed that these two historicities run neither in synchrony nor in rhythm with each other. No fixed focus is thus required in order to draw a parallel between them: it might well be that one has to be seen in slow motion while the other is seen speeded up. Each is subject to blockages and breachings, to "primitive scenes" and to "delayed effects"⁵ that form a history that is neither progress nor evolution. And each one has something to do with the particular nontemporality of the unconscious. The drawing of parallels between the strong moments in modern art and the strong moments of the Freudian itinerary thus has nothing to do with any sort of bi-univocal correspondence. The strong moments of art history may be spread over a fairly long period or, by contrast, condensed in a single artwork or group of works. Those that mark

the elaboration of psychoanalysis all owe their emergence and their force to the fact that they come out of Freud's self-analysis.

Where, in fact, can one look to find the most relevant locus for a heuristic parallelism between art and the elaboration of psychoanalysis each in its own truth? Can such a parallel be grounded in any certitude that it will yield knowledge there? Art and psychoanalysis, it would seem, share a specific field of legitimation that Kant had already noted with respect to art and that, with Freud, infiltrated the practice of "science." This field of legitimation is not the one with which epistemology of science is concerned: rules of internal coherence and of external reference do not suffice to validate artistic or psychoanalytic statements. Despite Freud's desire for scientificity, his main contribution to knowledge may well be that he drew knowledge from a certain family of statements (such as free association or dream narrative) that do not obey any *a priori* criteria specifying "well-formed expression" but, nevertheless, produce and reveal such criteria *a posteriori* and through self-application. Thus, an utterance from a dream is "well formed," or acceptable to the theory, if it follows the "rules" of condensation and displacement, rules that were in fact inferred from the analysis of dreams itself. The form-generating work of an artist is of the same order; it does not obey preexisting rules, yet it is not without rules. It institutes them in the very movement by which it questions them.

Moreover, psychoanalytic statements, in contrast to scientific statements, cannot be legitimated by the existence of an external referent, whether empirical or experimental, that could serve as a proof of the statement. The object of psychoanalysis—whether we call it desire or something else—is inaccessible by definition and unattributable to any reality. Yet only in relation to it are the patient's statements as heard by the analyst pertinent. This object can only be extracted from the very experience of the subject or from that particular intersubjectivity called transference. Here again, artistic experimentation is of the same order: its "reality" is subjective and transferenceal and is only produced through that reflective operation that is aesthetic judgment.

With respect to both coherence and reference, it is this self-referential dimension—which is analytical in the Freudian sense or critical in the Kantian sense—that, as I see it, grounds the parallelism that I will attempt to stake out here. It is this also that allows one to say, if only clumsily, that Freud invented psychoanalysis as much as he discovered it and that, due to the singularity of the object of his research, the libidinal investments of his work are those of a creator. Reciprocally, the same self-referentiality allows one to say, just as clumsily, that authentic artists perform something akin to self-analysis in their work and that the history of art performs its own self-analysis, rebounding from one artist to another and from one work to another. Thus, the locus of the parallelism between art and psychoanalysis is not Freud's aesthetic writings or even those major theoretical formulations in which he presents the successive steps of analytic knowl-

edge and its applications. This "locus" is rather an insistence running throughout Freud's most creative texts and a practice that leaves its mark on them. It is Freud's self-analysis.

Art and Dream: Duchamp and Freud

It is common practice to compare the work of art to a dream. Here, I will try to extend this comparison to a specific case to see whether something of their respective truth-functions may be revealed: on the side of art, a group of works making up Marcel Duchamp's "Munich period" and, on the side of the dream, one of Freud's dreams. Why this point-by-point comparison? Why not analyze this or that work by Duchamp as if it were a dream (a dream in general) by projecting into the analysis everything that Freud taught us about dreams in general? Because, when art historians ask another discipline—one in which they have no claim to competence—to provide a methodology, let alone a bit of theory that is still in the process of being developed, they should not automatically assume that this discipline will be of use in art history or that this theory will be correct outside the limits of its own history. They are matching up two historicities. Artworks are not raw facts lending themselves to a reading grid that benefits in the stability of an accomplished theory. Artworks are facts already interpreted and ceaselessly reinterpreted by their specific history, facts that offer themselves as a field of experience for a theory that a succession of critical probings has also submitted, and still submits, to periodic reinterpretations. For art historians, the method of parallelism that I am attempting here has the great advantage over applied psychoanalysis of not presupposing any *a priori* adherence to Freudian doctrine; it has the symmetrical advantage over psychoanalytic aesthetics of not burdening itself with any equally *a priori* critical suspicion. The method that I propose here has fully broken with an attitude of reciprocal deconstruction that characterizes the second-to-last moment of the double breaching of art and psychoanalysis, as narrated in Lyotard's 1969 essay. If my method produces any results, they should remain valid even if a later breaching of the Freudian corpus carries the relation of art to psychoanalysis to yet unsuspected shores, and even if one day psychoanalysis may have to be rejected as mythological or prescientific.

Of course, as "parallel" as my reading will be, I cannot help applying to Duchamp Freudian concepts (or others, Lacanian in particular) considered operative concepts. This means only that they have become effective enough today to allow such an exercise; it does not mean that we have to adhere to them forever and always. But if this exercise attracted me, it was for its heuristic values. What I hope to gain out of this is not an objectifiable knowledge, at any rate no more objectifiable than those interpretations that treat Duchamp in terms of alchemy (Ulf Linde, Arturo Schwarz, Maurizio Calvesi), the tarot (Nicolas Calas), the cabala (Jack Burnham), or Rousselian paragrammatism (Eliane Formentelli,

André Gervais).⁶ What I hope to gain is of an epistemological order, something like a partial archaeology of an *episteme* specific to a place (the Occident) and a time (our century).⁷ In this respect, the greatest difficulty arises from the fact that here the "archaeologist" is still a member of the cultural formation that he is trying to describe. My precautions vis-à-vis psychoanalysis must be understood as precautions vis-à-vis this difficulty only: psychoanalysis does not intervene here as "science" nor as *Zeitgeist*, but because of the considerable place it occupies de facto in our cultural formation, a formation or an *episteme* whose historical contingency is already apparent.

The alchemical and cabalistic readings of Duchamp are mystifying, since, quite obviously, their interpretive systems derive from an archaic mode of knowledge, not only one that existed prior to the interpreted system but also one that uses the interpreted system as if it were the blots in an inkblot test. The same is true for certain pseudoclinical psychoanalytic readings of Duchamp such as Schwarz's or Held's.⁸ Their problem is not just that they conduct their analyses in the absence of the subject, since Freud himself did that. Above all, what is wrong is that this sort of psychoanalysis is historically anterior—and epistemologically inferior—to the analyzed artwork. Duchamp's acute practice finds itself decoded there through symbolist grids infinitely looser than itself and therefore without any relevance. No countertests are possible for such interpretations. Nor are any possible for the interminable free plays of the signifier that Formentelli and, especially, Gervais see functioning as the driving force of Duchamp's practice. There is nothing to retain from such studies in terms of "scientific truth," which must always be open to counterproof and remain falsifiable. Yet these studies, in contrast to cabalistic or alchemical ones, teach us a great deal about the truth-function that Duchamp's work, when read this way, brings to light. They behave vis-à-vis Duchamp's text in the same way that Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* relates to his *Impressions of Africa* or *Locus Solus*. We will never know if these readings are correct: in contrast to Roussel, it is not Duchamp who wrote Gervais's book. But the latter's disseminative reading—which in more than one place approaches a Rousselian = Duchampian delirium—makes it more than plausible that there is such an anagrammatic mechanism in operation in Duchamp's work. The quantity of intertextual interferences within Duchamp's work—of which Gervais gives highly convincing demonstrations—makes it probable that there is such a mechanism. But, above all, what really gives this probability its pertinence is the external resonance that the Duchampian mechanism, read this way, takes on with other textual, artistic, or theoretical practices. First of all, a resonance between practices that are more or less contemporaneous: Duchamp in Roussel, or Roussel in Joyce, or Duchamp in Joyce, and so on. Next, a resonance between theory and practice, with all the delays of breaching: Duchamp in the semiology of dissemination, for example. And behind these artistic and theoretical resonances one hears the voice of Lacan, who, more than

anyone else, authorized this sort of reading and established it, epistemologically if not scientifically.

This is what interests me here. One will soon see the important place I reserve for Lacan in the exercise in parallelism that follows. At this point I would simply like to say why I feel that Gervais's interpretive "delirium" is relevant and productive whereas Calvesi's and Burnham's are sterile and gratuitous. Gervais and Duchamp come out of a single *episteme* (in Foucault's sense), one that is implicit—that is, subterraneously creative—in the case of Duchamp, and explicit—that is, self-conscious—in the work of Gervais.

It is history that judges the relevance of an interpretation, history as epistemology or epistemology as history, however one wants to put it. I mean by this that there is no excuse for wanting to interpret a creative practice—that is to say, a practice that is transforming its *episteme*—by means of a grid whose underlying epistemology has not undergone a similar transformation. To give a Duchampian example, what can it mean to want to go back to the "deepest causes" of Duchamp's creativity, with the artist being considered as the author of his choices, while dealing with an "author" who resolutely introduced indeterminism into the realm of art, an "author" who reveals himself to be strictly contemporaneous with the *episteme* of De Vries, Correns, and Tschermak when they discovered genetic mutation, of Heisenberg when he formulated the uncertainty principle, of Freud when he designated the lapsus as the site of the intrusion of the unconscious? That means that one condemns oneself to never understanding anything. This is why an effort like Gervais's has an epistemological value even when it does not provide any objectifiable result and even though it appears at first sight as a fictional delirium as "projective" as those of Calvesi or Burnham. These latter writers are in the position of someone who would want to interpret the uncertainty principle by Aristotelian causality or the Einsteinian cosmos by Laplace's nebula. Gervais, who never stops situating Duchamp in terms of Duchamp, also situates Duchamp in an *episteme* that we have learned to recognize as our own and that he shows—and in this lies the efficacy of his reading—to have already been that of Duchamp. In this *episteme* of Witz and of the signifier, Freud, via Lacan, above all others, will occupy a central place.

It is this epistemological community that justifies the parallel of art and dream that I will attempt to draw. We can well see that this does not necessitate any adherence to psychoanalytic doctrine, whether Freudian or Lacanian, on my part. Duchamp and Freud have already been shown by Gervais to be epistemologically intertranslatable, and this is more than enough for me to begin. To proceed otherwise would be presumptuous in any case, especially if one remembers the little chart of the breaching of the Freudian corpus presented by Lyotard that I mentioned above. The authors whom Lyotard cites are psychoanalysts, and we have seen how quickly their conceptions of the relationship between art and psychoanalysis have aged. A fortiori, I, who am not of their number and who speak as

an art historian, must guard against all theoretical conviction in this domain; since I am not equipped to evaluate psychoanalytic knowledge from within, such a conviction could come only from an act of faith, which would be intellectually unpardonable.

That said, this epistemological community, which justifies the parallel that I attempt to draw, justifies no more than that parallel. To examine the artwork as a dream or to study this or that artwork as one would a dream would be already to have faith in the theory beyond its use as a method. To compare this or that corpus of artworks and this or that dream, term for term, is to allow oneself the freedom to exploit the method for all it can yield and to use the theory only as a sort of catalyst. When the "chemical reaction" has been completed, the catalyst remains unaltered, its job done.

This has two immediate consequences: It matters that the dream that we are going to compare term for term to Duchamp's Munich experience is a dream of Freud's. My dream or yours has no heuristic significance in this parallelism that concerns, on both sides, the truth-function that art and dream exercise in a shared *episteme*. Only Freud's dreams—and, moreover, only those that he took the trouble to interpret—have such a significance. And it matters that it is a particular dream of Freud's—the dream of Irma's injection, the dream of dreams, as Lacan says, whose heuristic significance for Freud's research and whose strategic place in Freud's self-analysis no longer need to be proved.

Thus, we will compare art and dream, this art and this dream: the works Duchamp made in Munich in the summer of 1912 and the dream of Irma's injection, dreamed by Freud on the night of 23 July 1895 and analyzed in *Die Traumdeutung* in Chapter 2.⁹

Our reading of this dream is mediated three times over. A first time by Freud, who gives us not the dream itself, of course, but a narrative of the dream, the only material that an interpretation of dreams has ever been based on. A second time by the interpretation of the narrative that Freud gives in Chapter 2 and that he refers to elsewhere in order to draw theoretical lessons from it (as, for example, in Chapter 4, when he wants to demonstrate the process of condensation). And a third time by the commentary that Lacan—painting himself at the end of a breaching that he sees as a return to Freud—gives of the dream, a commentary that is found under the title of "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma" in Volume 2 of the *Séminaire*.¹⁰

Actually, it is this last mediation, received at a fifth moment (since the first moment was the night of the dream itself), that will be decisive for our own analysis, since it reinterprets the theoretical import of the preceding mediations in terms of our historical moment (or almost our moment, since Lacan's text will soon be thirty-five years old).

"It is not a question of performing an exegesis where Freud himself broke things off," says Lacan, "but of dealing, for our part, with the whole of the

dream and its interpretation. Here, we are in a much different position than that of Freud."¹¹

As for us, we are in a different position than that of Freud and Lacan both spatially (I am speaking as an art historian) and temporally (we are reading Lacan's commentary thirty-five years after it was written.)

Narratives

Before beginning the narrative of a dream and then proceeding with analysis, Freud generally provides a preliminary narrative tracing the immediate biographical context that could have furnished the source material for certain manifest elements of the dream.¹² In the same way, a "preliminary narrative" of Duchamp's Munich activity seems necessary. In fact, it is very difficult when one compares artistic practice to a dream to decide where the "preliminary narrative" ends and where the "narrative of the dream" begins. I announced that my comparison would center on Duchamp's Munich period. The choice of this period was not necessitated by the methodology of parallelism but by the period's strategic position in Duchamp's life and art and, beyond that, in the destiny of modernism in painting. This choice allows the freedom to view the material in question from a variable distance. Thus, just as we will have to take into account all of Duchamp's "cubist" period, we will also have to isolate, in the Munich period, the key painting that sums it up: *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*. This is why I am not insistent upon establishing a rigid distinction between the "preliminary narrative" and the "narrative of the dream." If one wanted to be puristic in a term-by-term comparison, one would have to recognize that we have access to neither. Should the "preliminary narrative" be composed exclusively of extrapictorial events? If the answer is yes, how can we grasp them, knowing quite well that it is imprudent to trust biographies that have been constructed by persons other than the artist? As for the works, are they *mutatis mutandis* "dreams," "narratives" (of the dreams), or "narratives" that have already been interpreted? It is impossible to settle these questions, either theoretically or methodologically. But we can opt for a pragmatic attitude that would be reasonably elicited by the anticipated results. When Freud gives us the preliminary narrative of a dream, he does so with an eye on both the dream whose narrative will follow and on its coming interpretation. The preliminary narrative is a piece of autobiography already selected by the material of the dream.

Now Duchamp also gave us similar pieces of autobiography selected by his work: these are the interviews and the commentaries that he provided "apropos of myself."¹³ We will make great use of these, although this will not stop us from looking at other sources—particularly, and especially, the artworks. Because, if it is difficult to imagine that a dream could interpret another dream (although the possibility cannot be ruled out), a work of art, in contrast, always interprets at

least one other work, whether by the same artist or not. This is what makes art history into a self-interpretive history. Consequently, I will not maintain a sharp distinction between the "preliminary narrative" and the "narrative of the dream." But I will begin by reconstituting, under the heading "Narratives," a short factual and interpretive "artistic biography," already selected by the parallelism that I will attempt to draw between *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* and the dream of Irma's injection.

Though Duchamp took up painting as a very young man (he was fifteen when he did his first oil in 1902), it was not until 1911, when he confronted Cubism, that the problem of becoming a painter overtook him. Up to then he had undergone the influence of Impressionism and Fauvism, like everyone else, and without giving it any more attention than he had given to caricature or even to playing billiards. In 1910, three years behind the Cubists themselves, he came up against Cézanne and paid him a tribute whose significance would show in the works only later, when Duchamp had finally traversed Cubism within a year, from 1911 to 1912. This tribute was the portrait of his father, a true but naive homage to Cézanne, and the portrait of his brothers represented in the company of their wives, entitled *The Chess Game*.

At the beginning of 1911 Duchamp began a painting entitled *Sonata*, in which he portrayed the female side of the Duchamp family: his mother; his youngest sisters, Yvonne and Magdeleine; and in the foreground, Suzanne, his favorite sister, who was two years younger than he. Suzanne married the pharmacist Charles Desmarest on 24 August 1911, and, soon after, Duchamp reworked *Sonata* in a style and with a color scheme that for the first time in his career were clearly Cubist. *Sonata* is thus a pivotal work whose specific place in Duchamp's "family romance" also makes it a turning point in his career as a painter. This is all the more striking when one considers Duchamp's "cubist" period: it is completely a family affair, which in one way or another must have had something to do with the imaginary place that the young artist assigned himself between his father, a notary public of the provinces, and his mother, an amateur painter and the daughter of a painter, and also between his older brothers, who were both cubist artists enjoying the first bursts of fame, and his younger sisters, especially Suzanne, who was closest to him in age and who would become a painter herself.

It is by means of four paintings tackling the female figure that Duchamp initiated himself into Cubism in September 1911: *Sonata*, *Dulcinea*, *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters*, and *Apropos of Young Sister*. Apart from *Dulcinea*, which takes as its subject a passing woman met in the street and probably desired, the three other paintings take up the mother and the sisters who are "torn in tatters" in the cubist manner, although there is no sign of the concern for spatial analysis found in Braque or Picasso and there are none of the theoretical pretensions so dear to Gleizes and Metzinger. For an artist to have entered Cubism sideways, by way of the female figure rather than through still-life or landscape

painting, was a unique case, incidentally, clearly indicating that something was at stake that was cubist only in appearance.

Between October and December 1911 Duchamp concerned himself with his brothers, whom he painted as chess players as he had in *The Chess Game* in 1910. Preceded by five studies in charcoal, ink, and watercolor, the two paintings, *The Chess Players* and, especially, *Portrait of Chess Players*, give evidence of an avoidance strategy that is simultaneously clumsy and perverse vis-à-vis the cubist rules of the game. It is as if Duchamp sincerely tried out Cubism but an involuntary malice turned him away from the objectival plasticity advocated by orthodox Cubism. Painted under the greenish light of a gas lamp in order to obtain "an easy way of getting a lowering of tones, a *grisaille*," *Portrait of Chess Players* seems to cite, already ready-made and not without irony, a Cubism strangely detached from the painter.¹⁴

Painted in December 1911, *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 1* and *Sad Young Man on a Train*, as well as *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, are cubist self-portraits. If nothing is further from the spirit of Cubism than self-portraiture, Duchamp's self-portraits do not, on the other hand, have anything in common with the introspective attitude that animates the self-portraits of Cézanne or Van Gogh. Emphasizing that with *Sad Young Man* he had introduced the idea of movement into Cubism, Duchamp made of this movement—which he called "elementary parallelism" and for which he was inspired by Marey's chronophotographs—a technique of subjective distancing that is as incompatible with introspection as it is foreign to cubist (or futurist) objectification. "First there is the idea of the movement of the train, and then that of the sad young man who is in a corridor and who is moving about; thus, there are *two* parallel movements corresponding to each other."¹⁵ In order to read this painting as a self-portrait we must take account of a doubling of Duchamp's personality that is quite different from a specular and introspective confrontation. There is first of all this young painter, sad perhaps for having had to jump on the moving cubist train, who moves parallel to and inside this avant-garde movement (the story does not tell us if he moves with the motion of the train or against it). Second, there is another Duchamp who does a portrait of the relative movement of the first Duchamp and whom we must well imagine on an embankment or on the platform, outside the train, as its unmoving observer. In orthodox Cubism the painter imaginarily moves his point of view all around the object, and he works at this displacement. There is no work of displacement in *Sad Young Man*: the movement of the young painter embarking on the cubist train is both the object and subject of the painting and is given ready-made, as if in the past participle, to this very painter, a little older perhaps, an observer of and commentator on the cubist movement that had carried him away. It is as if Duchamp were trying to give of himself an anticipated retrospective portrait: he will have been a Cubist; thus, he is already no longer a Cubist.

Nude No. 2 consecrates a rupture of which Duchamp is not really the author but that will come to him, as might be expected, from those who conduct the cubist train. This rupture does not take place in the *style* of the painting, whose handling and color scheme remain cubist. It is a gap between style and name, between the cubist *appearance* of the canvas and the *apparition* of its title, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, which is inscribed in capital letters on the front side of the painting.¹⁶ It is this gap that the hanging committee for the cubist room of the Salon des Indépendants could not tolerate in 1912 when it refused to let *Nude* show there: "Before it was shown at the Armory Show in New York in 1913, I had sent it to the Paris Independants in February 1912, but my fellow Cubists did not like it *and asked me to, at least, change the title.*"¹⁷ It is also this gap, locus of an anticipated theoretical schism, that Duchamp will reflect later by referring it to itself and that he will call "*a kind of pictorial nominalism.*"

In Neuilly, between March and May 1912, a series of four drawings prepare the way for the painting *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (*Le roi et la reine entourés de nus vites*), which reunites, as chess pieces, the male and female figures by which Duchamp had entered into Cubism. Here, he has not completely turned the page on Cubism, but the symbolist thematics and the handling of these works indicate that Cubism is being quoted, so to speak, with an aloofness marked by the combination of an encrypted iconography and an incongruous title. It is now up to the spectator to interpret the image, which the title fixes for just a fleeting moment. Unrecognizable as such, the king and queen are named, flanking an ectoplasm that is floating in the center of the painting and that, therefore, one can only identify with the swift nudes. The image is at once written and spoken: the figures that the title announces are shown disseminated by the cubist handling. But neither the image nor the names in the title are stabilized around a common referent. The word *vites*, an adjectivized adverb that will in due time be echoed by a certain *même*, an adjective become adverb, signals that image and name have lost their references in entering a poetic dimension that refers the effects of language to its own laws. In short, it is the law of Cubism, its "retinal" legality, as well as its familial overdetermination, that Duchamp declares he wants to move beyond as quickly as possible. The drawing *The King and Queen Traversed by Nudes at High Speed*, in which the lines, far from giving body to space as occurs with Picasso, inscribe themselves as the evanescent trace of a velocity that the title designates as the subject of the work, also seems to refer to Cubism itself, quickly traversed, like a technique that allows one to turn the nude, both as genre and as libidinal investment, into something like raw matter; "a nude at high speed" (*un nu en vitesse*), as you would say "a poem in prose" (*un poème en prose*) or "a spittoon in silver" (*un crachoir en argent*) or "a delay in glass" (*un retard en verre*).¹⁸

On 18 June 1912 Duchamp took the train for Munich, from which he would return on 10 October with two drawings, one embellished with watercolor and

the other with a wash, entitled *Virgin No. 2* and *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*; two paintings entitled *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* and *Bride*; and a wash entitled *Airplane* (the drawing *Virgin No. 1* had been sent from Munich for the Salon d'Automne, which had opened on 1 October). The reasons for his sudden departure for Munich will always remain a mystery, as has his everyday life in the Bavarian capital. One thing is certain: the group of artworks that he realized there—the last ones from his “cubist” period—constitute a turning point in his career as a painter as well as in his personal life. On returning from Paris he told himself: “Marcel, no more painting; go get a job.”¹⁹ Indeed, his first abandonment of painting dates from his return from Munich. But the motto was quickly denied: “I looked for a job in order to get enough time to paint for myself.”²⁰

To paint for oneself, to paint *apropos of oneself*: does this mean ceasing to paint? “My stay in Munich was the scene of my complete liberation,” Duchamp also said about himself.²¹ A liberation from what? We know what would come out of the stay in Munich: not only the iconography of the *Bride* but also the soon-to-be-completed project for the *Large Glass* and simultaneously, in the wave of *Musical Erratum* and *Standard Stoppages*, some random rendezvous with ready-made objects of art. But what was abandoned, what did Duchamp leave behind him in seeming to abandon painting or, in any case, cubist painting? Was it the social ambition to realize himself as a painter within a historical avant-garde that was still in transit through Cubism? Was it painting itself? Was it only the craft of the painter, the act of doing being replaced by an activity that was more conceptual than artisanal? Or was it simply the “sad young man,” abandoned to himself on the returning train? The Munich “liberation” certainly had therapeutic virtues for the man as well as the painter. Even more, it had the self-analytic meaning of a revelation that yields a gap, registers it, and from then on works on this very gap. Out of Munich will result a “little game between I and me,” at once personal therapy and artistic strategy taking as subject matter the gap between “the man who suffers” and “the mind which creates.” The strange grammatical *mise en abyme* in a note from the *1914 Box* gives us an idea of this little game: “Given that . . . ; if I suppose I’m suffering a lot . . .”²²

In short, a passage, a ritual “mirrorial return” from Narcissus to Narcissus, when he gives himself, as the subject and the object of painting, the passage of an artist’s life on earth. *Sonata* had introduced Duchamp to the rites of the cubist avant-garde. Just as ritually, *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* would pull him out of that avant-garde.

The six Munich works, especially *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, will constitute the “dream narrative” that, in our heuristic parallelism, we will compare term for term with Freud’s dream of Irma’s injection. Why *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*? Here, it is not a question of trying to justify a method “theoretically” but, rather, of trying to justify its application to a partic-

ular case. Of course, it is still a delicate matter to speak about applying a method that has never been proved, that will probably be used only once, that implies a critical reflection on its own historical contingency, and that will eventually be validated only with regard to the results it will have provided outside its own field. I must recall the point of view of this book, declare its stakes, and not hide its ruses. Its point of view—the time and space in which it constitutes itself as a “narrative”—is that of an art historian. That means that it asks of a moment of our cultural past a question of interpretation or reinterpretation that might be able to organize or reorganize a group of facts into a coherent narrative. This also means that at no moment can this point of view ignore that it is a point of view—in other words, that art historians are themselves in history and have the right to reinterpret the past only insofar as they assume the duty to speak to the present (to those present). Indeed, it is the demands of today—those, among others, of which the word “postmodernism,” which is heard everywhere, is a symptom—that direct the art historian to give his attention to the year 1912 and to that which played a crucial role for modernism in art in that year. This is the year when, in relative independence of one another, many painters switched, or prepared to switch, to abstraction. This is the year when the Cubism of Braque and Picasso emerged from its so-called hermetic phase, the year when *papiers collés* introduced a heterogeneous element into painting that would upset its relation to sculpture and to art in general, the year when Cubism had its institutional triumph in the Salon des Indépendants and when the book by Gleizes and Metzinger, *Du cubisme*, the first theorization but also the first academization of the movement, appeared. This is also the year when futurist proselytizing burst on the scene and when, probably for the first time (even though in a certain way Courbet and Manet had represented a sort of underground strategic precedent), an avant-garde movement erected a certain idea of the avant-garde, constituted by the denial of the past and a look to the future, into a conscious and explicit aesthetic ideology. Finally, 1912 is the year when a certain Marcel Duchamp, whose extraordinary reputation among modernists and “postmodernists” alike no one could then have predicted, abandoned painting.

It is the interpretation of this abandonment that is at stake in this book. The abandonment has two sides, both personal for Duchamp's life as well as historical in general. The first is *abandonment* proper, the meaning of this word, and the whole range of its subjective coloring. To understand what *to paint no more* means, we have to understand not only what *to paint* means but also what *to have painted* implies. We cannot speak innocently of abandonment without claiming to possess a general and theoretical definition of what is abandoned. Such a claim is vain, however, not only because, obviously, the craft of the painter has changed throughout history but also because, at any given moment of this history, this craft has been its own definition incarnated in the concrete and subjective practice of those who have exercised it. It is a fact that the “abandonment”

of painting by the individual, Duchamp, has had a considerable historical resonance and that this completely personal avatar of his career has been invested, more than once, with an interpretation that gives it a general import. It has been seen as the announcement or the recording of the death of painting or as its deliberate assassination; it has also often been seen as the confirmation of Hegel's prediction of the end of art. These interpretations are still very much with us, now that the art world seems split into two camps: those who, under the banner of the transavant-garde, of Neoexpressionism or of Postmodernism, herald the triumphant return of painting, and those who, sometimes under the same banner of Postmodernism (but endowed with an entirely different meaning), sometimes out of faithfulness to the modernism of the historical avant-gardes, definitively proclaim that painting is obsolete. Yet these interpretations hinder the understanding of the history of modernism as a whole, an understanding that should set itself the task, among others, of accounting for the vitality of painting on the part of its best contemporary practitioners, while acknowledging as a historical fact the death sentence lowered upon the painter's trade. Thus, there is a need to reinterpret the "abandonment" of painting by the individual, Marcel Duchamp, but this cannot be done should we fail to examine what, consciously or unconsciously, the fact of being or feeling himself a painter meant for him.

For in abandoning painting, Duchamp apparently threw away his identity as a painter in favor of his identity as an artist, an antiartist, or, as he himself said, an *anartist*. Now, seen in the light of his later fame, it is obvious that his reputation as anartist was essentially won for him by his readymades. The "invention" of the readymade is the other side of the abandonment of painting, whose interpretation is equally at stake in this book. But we will be dealing relatively little here with the readymade itself, with the plurality of objects that Duchamp baptized as such, and with the various readings we might want to produce of this particular name, in the singular: the readymade. Its archaeology should be established in the first place. As much as, if not more than, the *Large Glass*, with which, moreover, it bears a quasi-compensatory relation, the readymade was an offspring of the abandonment of painting, which broke a filial line, but also, paradoxically, picked up its heritage. It was even the act by which the abandonment of painting was recorded and without which this abandonment would have been no more than a cessation of activity that history would never have bothered to register. The readymade is thus an act, in the sense of an action: indeed, it acted and still acts on the history of art. But it is equally, we might say, a notarized act that acknowledged receipt of the history that preceded it and that was the history of painting. If there was a "death of painting," the readymade was the codicil at the bottom of its last will and testament. Whoever says "testament" also means heritage, transmission, the passing of powers, and the passage of tradition to the living. The history of painting is not ended with its "death," and painting is not

dead because of the arrival of the readymade: painting dies and lives anew with each transmission.

The ruse of this book should make itself transparent. Its real object is tradition, that particular tradition that has been called modern art, modernity, or modernism, which has all the appearances of an antitradition and which is to be "photographed" in the privileged instant when it reveals what it transmits: a name, the name *painting*. This revelation can be recognized in two faces, or two phases. The "abandonment" of painting is the passage by which its name is detached from the specific craft that legitimated it. The "invention" of the readymade is the transition by which the name *painting*, having lost its specific legitimacy, nonetheless connects with the generic name *art*. This passage and this transition are not the work of a single man but of a whole culture that the work of this man reveals to itself and that it reveals in the first place by naming them. *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* is the title that Duchamp would give in August 1912 to the painting that a month later would precipitate his decision to abandon painting. *Transition* is the title of a magazine on the cover of which, twenty-five years later, Duchamp would present the photographic reproduction of one of his readymades, the *Comb* of 1916, whose name seals the act that *The Passage* accomplished. This book, in turn, will try to interpret the historical resonance of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, recorded from the point of view of a culture that is still resonating with the consequences of the Duchampian transition. The more vast the book's objective, the more singular must be its object. The more general its stake, the more tailored to the specific case the investigation must be. The more exemplary the destiny of an individual, the more attentive our analysis must be to what is unique about this example. It is the paradox of art that each work, in its uniqueness, claims to be universal, and it is the reciprocal paradox of art historians that, when they "apply" a theory or a research method, they must trim its generality to the singularity of the case they apply it to. Since it is a fact that the destiny of modern art passed, in August 1912 in Munich, through the *Triebchicksal* (instincts and their vicissitudes) of an individual—if not through the aesthetic destiny of a single painting—it is impossible not to call out to psychoanalytic theory and method, since it remains today both the most general discourse on subjectivity and the most powerful means for penetrating a singular subjectivity. In the same way that "elementary parallelism" was the ruse by which Duchamp introduced himself to Cubism without being a Cubist, the heuristic parallel between art and psychoanalysis, between Duchamp and Freud, between two "dream narratives," will be the ruse by which the most general issues will be extracted from an individual case, interpreted, and given back to the individual.

Chapter 2

Passages

“To facilitate for you the passage from this schema of the psychical apparatus to that which is implied in the subsequent development of Freud’s thought—notably, that aspect of his thought that centers on the theory of narcissism—I will propose a little game to you today.”¹

With these words Lacan introduces his commentary on the dream of Irma’s injection. The passage that is in question goes from the schema of the psychic apparatus described in Chapter 7 of the *Traumdeutung* to that “little game” between the ideal ego and the ego-ideal that underlies Freud’s *Zur Einführung des Narzissmus*. It goes, in other words, from one theoretical representation to another, but it also goes from one strong moment to another in Freud’s life, in his life as the inventor of psychoanalysis. Two moments when, as far as the object and subject of his work are concerned (the dream in 1900, narcissism in 1914), Freud cannot help closely listening to himself, lying in wait for what his own unconscious, whose surfacings he registers in the course of his self-analysis, can tell him about the unconscious in general.

The passage at stake for Duchamp in Munich teaches something similar and parallel. Here is a young artist, highly eclectic up to now, who “marries” into the family of painters by entering into Cubism in August 1911. A year later it is these “nuptials” that he paints, with the title *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, at the very moment when he, as painter, desires himself a bachelor. And once this passage has been accomplished and the *Bride* has been painted, he abandons painting. From the two *Virgins* of July to the *Bride* of August, the passage that has been undertaken has the same inventive force and perhaps the

same self-analytic quality as Freud's passage between 1900 and 1914. What this passage teaches has similar conditions and analogous consequences. As its condition: that the artist, removed from the normative pressures of the art milieu, place himself under the dictates of his most extreme subjectivity. As its consequences: that something has been revealed to him that concerns painting in general and that, for his subsequent history, will make painting seem impossible, useless, yet possible nonetheless.

Wunsch aus München

At this point the dream of Irma's injection allows us to begin the parallelism with the Munich episode in Duchamp's art. The chapter in which Freud proceeds to the analysis of this dream concludes with a discovery that will be central to dream interpretation: "*When the work of interpretation has been completed, we perceive that a dream is the fulfillment of a wish.*"²

What desire is at work in the dream of Irma? Freud's desire to be found innocent of the failure of his therapy for Irma. Following the argument of the "damaged kettle," he sees himself freed of the responsibility for Irma's illness since (1) it is her fault if she does not accept the solution that Freud presents to her; (2) moreover, she has symptoms that have nothing to do with a psychic etiology; and (3) finally, it is Otto who is guilty, since he gave her an injection with a dirty hypodermic.³

Let us transpose this. It is undeniable that the activity of painting is for the painter the imaginary (i.e., image-producing) accomplishment of a desire. Let us leave aside for the moment, as Freud did at this stage of the *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the question of whether it suffices that this desire be conscious. In the same way that Freud consciously (or preconsciously) desires to attribute the failure of Irma's cure to a third party (this is his constant concern while awake, as the preliminary narrative tells us), so can a young and ambitious artist nourish the conscious or preconscious desire not to be responsible for the failure of his painting.

It is in a double historical context that we have to situate Duchamp's practice during the year 1911–12 and in this same context that we have to note a failure: the avant-garde and Cubism.

By "avant-garde" I mean the necessity that painting historically encountered, probably since Courbet and Baudelaire, to innovate in order to be significant. As for Cubism, in 1911–12 it was the mandatory path for the avant-garde. Impressionism had long since faded into an academic exercise that the advanced painters reproached for its lack of structure and its superficial decorative effects. The Nabis and even the Fauves were already undergoing similar reproaches. As for Symbolism (except perhaps for that of Gauguin), it had always been more a literary than a pictorial movement, and an avant-garde sensibility had never crys-

tallized around it. Only Italian Futurism disputed Cubism's monopoly over the avant-garde. But it has been proved that unlike Cubism, Futurism exerted no pressures on Duchamp. Marinetti's manifesto had appeared in *Le Figaro* in February 1909, but Duchamp always declared that in this period he did not concern himself with such things.⁴ His interest in Futurism was aroused only by Balla's *Dog on a Leash*, which appeared, it seems, in the first futurist exposition in Paris from 5 to 24 February 1912 at Bernheim-Jeune.⁵ If this fact is correct, Duchamp would have seen *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* before proposing *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* to the Salon des Indépendants but, in any case, after having painted it. It is thus beyond doubt that there was never any futurist influence on Duchamp. And yet the fact of his having noticed that the Futurists were moving in a direction parallel to his own could well have encouraged his strategic ambition and given him that feeling of urgency that led him to place so many hopes in the exhibition of *Nude* at the Salon des Indépendants. Hopes that were first cruelly disappointed, as we know, but that were formidably compensated later on, since the absence of the painting at the Indépendants, roundly censored by the avant-garde itself, made the work more well known than its presence might have. It seems to me that Duchamp very quickly understood this, and that it is most appropriate to situate his work from 1911 to 1912 in terms simultaneously of painterliness and strategy, in the doubly pressing context of the avant-garde and of Cubism.

Portrait of Chess Players, *Sad Young Man*, and *Nude No. 2*, however distanced they are from cubist practice, still signify a demand in the psychical economy of Duchamp's ambition: that of being fully recognized as an avant-garde painter by those very people who monopolize the concept, namely, the Cubists. We cannot be too skeptical of the image of a casual and dilettantish Duchamp, as popularized in legend. Quite the contrary, we must imagine him as a young man who, after having dabbled in painting—and in caricature, like his brother Gaston—because of a family penchant, we might say, and after having superficially participated in the Julian Academy from 1904 to 1905, decided to follow the path of his brothers and embrace the career of the artist. A career that began with a failure—quite harmless, and rather flattering when seen from a distance, yet still felt harshly like a failure since in 1905 Marcel failed to pass the entrance exam for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.⁶ It is not an exaggeration to suppose that this failure—whose delayed effect was the refusal of the *Nude* by the Indépendants—would act like a light "initial trauma," quickly "forgotten" but nonetheless sufficient to keep alive a worry about his identity as a painter and to establish his determination to become a painter, no matter what, as if by revenge. It is these two factors—a failure that must be wiped out and a worry about being recognized in his identity as a painter—that made him avoid any overly direct confrontation with Braque and Picasso, preferring instead the easier company of Metzinger or Princet, the "mathematician" of Cubism.

We must note the contradiction here: the cubist avant-garde, the one that in 1911 really made history, was above all Picasso and, secondly, Braque. Gris did not join them until 1912, when he exhibited his *Hommage à Picasso* at the Indépendants, and he would only begin to matter for the avant-garde when, after having exhibited at the Section d'Or, he signed an exclusive contract with Kahnweiler and from then on, like Picasso and Braque, ceased exhibiting his art in public. It is this avant-garde that was putting pressure on Duchamp and he recognized this, acknowledging that it was at Kahnweiler's gallery that Cubism gripped him.⁷ Yet he did not frequent Braque, Picasso, or Delaunay and rarely saw Léger. He went instead to Gleizes's Tuesday gatherings in Courbevoie and to those on Sundays at his brothers' where the "Puteaux group" met—these painters of lesser importance who, conscious that they were not the pioneers of the movement, set out precisely to build a "movement" by way of theories and by force of ideological cohesion.⁸ This manner of "hanging out with the gang" seems so unlike Duchamp that it is worth noting. It is only explicable if we admit that Duchamp—less rebellious and more ambitious than he would have seemed to be—unconsciously attributed the meaning of a demand to his "cubist" production of 1911–12. A demand addressed, as we will see, to the group into which his brothers were in a position to introduce him without his having to prove himself beforehand, addressed together with the group to the more or less institutionalized world of contemporary art, and addressed more ambitiously to the history of painting incarnated in the pioneering Cubism of Braque and Picasso.

This would thus be the subjective position of Duchamp in the double context of the avant-garde and of Cubism: he was ambitious and enough of a painter to know that a real avant-garde painter could innovate significantly only if he succeeded in imposing a new "definition" of painting on the sensibility of his epoch, but also only if he showed that he had assimilated history by transgressing it. And he was lucid enough about himself to know that he would never be this sort of painter—that he would never be Picasso. From 1902 to 1910 he had evolved, with a curious mixture of distant mimicry and technical industriousness but, above all, with very little invention, in all the styles that seemed avant-garde, successively painting in the manner of the Impressionists, of Cézanne, of Matisse, but without ever stopping at those pictorial problems that, at some point, must obstruct the path of a young painter.

For a painter seeking admission into Cubism, these pictorial problems were not merely a matter of choice. They were the problems confronted by Picasso in *Les Femmes d'Alger* and by Braque in *Baigneuse* in 1908, problems they had started to work on systematically, the former at the Rue-des-Bois and the latter at Estaque. Illusionism had to be taken up again after the old codes of perspective had been abandoned. The reduction of painterliness to the flatness of the canvas—à la Maurice Denis—had petered out. It became necessary to reaffirm that the inherent contradiction of the art of painting lay in the necessity of show-

ing three dimensions on a surface that contained only two dimensions. But one could no longer simply trust the old linear or atmospheric perspective, any more than one could trust color alone to structure both space and the object. No one in 1911 could ignore that both the duty of the third dimension and the ban on perspective had been posed by Cézanne. Neither Seurat nor Gauguin had succeeded as Cézanne had in placing the history of painting—and, consequently, the whole of the *avant-garde* in its function of insuring historical continuity—in confrontation with this essential contradiction. And no one better than Cézanne “resolved” this contradiction in a way that was as significantly contradictory: this famous space, both hollow and bulging, that the brush stroke, “the colored plane,” and the object engender around themselves. Cubism was an interpretation of Cézanne, an obligatory reworking of the pictorial problems invested by Cézanne’s painting with the force of law.

While for all the Cubists, from Braque to Metzinger, but also for Matisse as well as for Derain or Vlaminck, Cézanne incarnated at a decisive moment of their evolution the “law of the father,” Duchamp circumvented Cézanne and so avoided having to transgress significantly—that is, to interpret through painting—the new Cézannian “legitimate construction.” When he tells Pierre Cabanne, who is interviewing him about his discovery of Cézanne, “No, not Cézanne,” this readiness to answer with a negative rings out like a denial.⁹ With an evident eclecticism, Duchamp chose during his apprenticeship to follow occasional “fathers” whose law he after all denied, thereby preventing his painting from being legitimated by the historical movement of the *avant-garde*, this new path whose “primitive” Cézanne had declared himself to be. When he entered into Cubism, it was already too late for him: the sad young man had jumped on a train—or a bandwagon—already in motion; Cubism could no longer be invented in 1911. If it was too late for invention, the path of imitation quickly seemed sterile to him. At the moment when Cubism—which was getting a great deal of attention at the Salon des Indépendants in 1911—was increasingly staking its claim as the mandatory path of modernity, Duchamp felt a new urgency, and his ambition prevented him from continuing to paint as a nonchalant student of the cubist manner, as he had done with Impressionism or Fauvism. As for embracing the movement—the ideology of the movement—this was not in Duchamp’s character. If need be, there were enough good examples around him of the academic vanity of that second generation of Cubists who were painting more to justify history than to make it: Gleizes, Metzinger, and even Duchamp’s own brothers. All their theorizing babble quickly dissuaded Duchamp from adhering to cubist doctrine.

One exit, indeed one escape remained: he had to traverse Cubism, “swift.” But this is easier said than done or, in any case, it is easier for us to argue this now with our historical distance, since we know that finally the only fruitful *avant-gardes* in 1912–13 were those that traversed Cubism without pausing

there—Mondrian, Malevich, and, in certain ways, Braque and Picasso, themselves with *papiers collés*—than it must have been for Duchamp, faced as he was with the obligation both to be and not to remain cubist, without knowing where to go. It is in these contradictions that Duchamp's "cubist" practice takes on the meaning of a demand, a desire, a wish: a demand for recognition by the avant-garde within that very avant-garde, a desire to catch up with history and travel the path that he had missed, the one that should have led him to Cubism via Cézanne, and a wish, *Wunsch*, to be freed of the charge of having missed the cubist train, found innocent of having taken a shortcut through an obligatory trajectory.

Freud's dream accomplished his desire to be found innocent of his failure with Irma; Duchamp's painting, in this period, would accomplish his desire to be absolved of his failure in relation to the history of art. Immediately after the affront that was inflicted on him by his comrades in the avant-garde, Duchamp took his distance from the group, retreated to Neuilly, and began to take failure (*l'échec*)—the checks of chess—as the theme for a "high-speed" traversal. The accomplishment in images of the desire to bypass the cubist movement "en vitesse" replaces its earlier decomposition with the "elementary parallelism" that had been rejected together with the *Nude*. And soon, as if to invert the demand, to make himself be desired, and "to regulate the regrets from one 'deferee' to another," Duchamp left for Munich, where he would be away from the group and from all competition, so that he could give free rein to the pictorial accomplishment of his wish.

Strategies

Lacan notes that Freud "still thought at this moment that, when the unconscious meaning of the fundamental conflict of the neurosis would be discovered, one would only have to propose it to the subject who would accept it or not."¹⁰ Let us paraphrase: Duchamp still thought at this moment that when the productive meaning of a pictorial rupture (Cubism's oedipal conflict with Cézanne) was brought into the light of day, one would only have to propose it to the History of painting (incarnated in the avant-garde of the moment), which would accept it or not. This paraphrase is possible only under three conditions:

1. Duchamp must have had a precocious awareness of the cubist impasse. Even though he had tried himself to avoid the oedipal conflict with Cézanne, he must very quickly have come to realize that the cubist resolution of the conflict avoided coming to grips with the real importance of Cézanne that concerned, as we will see, the subjective status of painters in their painting more than the status of the painted object. When Duchamp declares that he wants to introduce "gray matter" into painting, we must not try to understand this as a mark of intellectualism or, even less, of rationalism. Quite the contrary, it was the orthodox Cubists—as they repeated often enough—who wants to restore an intelligible

and rational order to the chromatic chaos of Impressionism. And when Duchamp imputes to Courbet the dire responsibility for having pushed the entire history of painting toward the fostering of mere retinal titillation, his judgment is certainly unfair to Courbet, but it is an exact interpretation of the cubist impasse: Cubism had been and remained a realism, something that Cézanne's painting no longer was. Duchamp's critique of retinal painting was a critique of realism and not of the visualness of painting; his invocation of gray matter was a call to the epistemological function of painting and not at all a plea for a painting with literary, symbolic, or intellectual subjects, even when borrowed from a fourth-dimensional mythology. These last two points enable us to understand his admiration for Matisse, which is otherwise inexplicable.

2. Duchamp's "cubist" painting is a painting of commentary. He began with a commentary on the subject (in the iconological sense of the word), as in *Apropos of Young Sister*; then he proceeded with a commentary on style (in the ironic sense of a category in art history), as in *Portrait of Chess Players*; and he finally produced a commentary on the subject (in a psychological sense this time— "the suffering self") by this very subject (the painter-subject, "the creative mind") as in *Sad Young Man on a Train*, *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, and his entire Munich output. In this order, these three modes of engaging in pictorial commentary allowed Duchamp to rearticulate the problem of self-reference in painting: yes, modern art comments on its own history, art on art or art about art, but it also comments on the history of the artist: *apropos of myself*. These two commentaries are really only one: this is the condition of significant art. From this derives the slide in Duchamp from one enunciative position to another, the slide that allowed him early on to realize that even if his painting had cubist appearances, he was not a Cubist. Moreover, he was already proposing to art history, "which will accept it or not," an interpretation-citation of Cubism that must reveal its underlying productive conflict and the false resolution that the movement was giving to this conflict.

3. It was with *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* that Duchamp wanted to propose to the contemporary history of art—that is, to the cubist avant-garde that specifically incarnated this history—his noncubist solution to the cubist impasse. Or, more exactly, it was with the submission of this painting to the Indépendants that the cubist establishment was put into the position of having to accept his "solution" or not. As we know, the establishment did not accept it. An unaccepted demand, a defeated desire, a wish ruined by the reality principle that was the history of art as an institution, but a wish that his subsequent autobiographical practice (painting for oneself and about oneself) will nonetheless fulfill.

The dream is strategic: in order to be heard and to accomplish its needs in the imagination, desire must engage in ruses with the psychical censor and with the resistances of the subject. When one's name is Freud and one is in the middle of inventing psychoanalysis, one will have bizarre and strategic dreams. One will

dream, for example, that the cure that fails in actual reality will succeed, or if it does not succeed, this is only for extraneous reasons that do not really challenge the theory, or if the theory must be challenged, this challenge will by the same token reveal its solution, suddenly and inescapably, as in a formula. Such is the lured strategy of the damaged kettle, in which desire triumphs over all objections. And yet this strategy succeeds beyond all lure, since it ends up revealing, in the theoretical realm, its own deceptive truth, its truth as desire and as strategy. There is this same strategy of the damaged kettle in Duchamp: I am going to cure Painting of its cubist "illness" by showing that I have already understood the meaning of the unconscious conflict that is working it over but that it itself does not understand. Painting will accept my solution. It does not accept it. Never mind, my failure is really its failure: (1) It is not my fault if I was not able to create the art of my time; I was too young and too inexperienced. (2) Anyway, I can participate in and master this art at least as well as you can; I can paint like a Cubist. (3) Finally, do not be deceived; I am no longer a Cubist, I am already way beyond Cubism. Taken separately, each of these explanations would serve as an excuse for the failure of his painting; taken together, they are incoherent. And yet, in this failure where the ambition for success takes on all the ruses of an inconsistent strategy, something is revealed that would take a while to be expressed, but that already found itself inscribed, as a sort of formula lacking in meaning, in the rejection of *Nude* by the Indépendants.

To understand this revelation, we have to look again at the concept of the avant-garde. I defined it above in terms of the necessity that modern painting feels to innovate in order to be significant. We must add to this that innovation, as a part of modernity, is far from being a mere epiphenomenon. It is not an empty, tautological corollary of invention or of artistic creation. It is a necessity, the paradoxically conservative condition for a pictorial tradition that the modern world—industrialization in general and that of the craft of painting in particular—is menacing from all sides. This means that the notion of artistic quality, which previously had been linked to technical mastery, to talent, and to relatively unchanging notions of style, now finds itself irrevocably connected to the notion of innovation. Of course, this phenomenon is not entirely new, and the history of art is punctuated with stylistic ruptures that were revealed after the fact to be synonymous with talent and quality. What was new, since the second half of the nineteenth century, was the inevitable, obligatory, and accelerated character of innovation, to the point where it became a quasi criterion in the judgment of the connoisseurs of modern painting.

Whoever says "innovation" means surprise, astonishment, transgression of current taste. Consequently, a pictorial innovation is significant only if it finds itself rejected, at least a bit, by those institutions that dictate taste. (Of course, the reverse is not necessarily true: not every rejected innovation is significant.) The cultural field of the nineteenth century is full of institutions of this sort, whose

explicit social function was to publicly administer the taste of the period; among them were art criticism and the Salons. And the history of the avant-garde, even when it is described as a stylistic history, could not avoid also being an institutional history: the history of pictorial taste, the history of painting as a progression of significant transgressions of this taste, and the history of the “ideological apparatuses” that administer taste form a single history. This is why the history of painting since the mid-nineteenth century conflates with that of the avant-garde: the military connotations of the word clearly betray that facing every pictorial innovation, every new quality, there is a stronghold to be invested. To speak of the history of painting in terms of the avant-garde is thus to recognize that modern painting, not only in its margins or in its sociological context but also in its very heart—the “painterliness” of painting—is strategic.

This owes nothing to conscious calculation, as if painters gave themselves the goal of being “avant-gardist” and drafted battle plans in order to conquer, through painting, the bastions of academicism or of the official Salon. Rather, it is because, if they innovated, the Salon would refuse them, and if they innovated significantly, they would have done more than conquer the Salon: they would have conquered the Museum. This is the historical law of modern painting, the particular form of the historicity of the avant-garde: it functions inevitably according to this retroactive verdict. A scandal is necessary to legitimate aesthetic innovation. There are a million examples in all the artistic domains. In literature, the rejection of *Les Fleurs du mal* and the trial of *Madame Bovary*, both in 1857, are still famous; in painting, the Salon des Refusés remains the perfect symbol of this paradoxical process of legitimation. But it was more than a symbol; it also accelerated the process. The Salon des Refusés had Napoleon III as its patron. Here is a rejection that has become institutionalized, officially recognized, albeit involuntarily, as an integral part of a process of legitimation. The two stages of the dialectic implode: first the rejection of innovation and then its recognition; these two moments become synchronous. Rather than succeeding each other in time, they become juxtaposed in space: on the one side, the official Salon, behind the times, and on the other side, the Salon des Refusés, ahead of the times. Logically, this means that whatever strategic pictorial innovation the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* contained addressed itself equally to both Salons: it is one and the same strategy that “desires” the refusal of the official Salon and participation in the Salon des Refusés. In other words, it amounts to the same whether the avant-garde artist aspires to the recognition of his peers or to a rejection by his elders.

The Salon des Refusés made the first logical demonstration of this. And, chronologically, it initiated a new possibility, that of the avant-garde institution. This new possibility materialized in 1884 with the creation of the Salon des Indépendants. The avant-garde institution became the anteroom of the institution at large, a waiting room that allowed official culture not so much to exclude but to

delay acceptance. This summary of the situation is admittedly rough, but although we might add detail to it, the general picture will remain unchanged. If history speeds up, as happened in 1912, the institutional waiting rooms will line up one after the other: when the Salon des Indépendants was no longer enough, the Salon d'Automne (1903) was created. If history becomes richer (culturally and economically), the series of institutions multiplies in competition with each other: there will be several parallel avant-gardes. If history stagnates or becomes poorer, as is happening today, the choices contract, and one sees the official museums rush in to "recuperate" ruptures that have not yet even taken place. Avant-garde artists and academic artists, avant-garde merchants and traditional merchants, avant-garde institutions and traditional institutions, all the protagonists play a role in this bundle of perspectives. At the vanishing point, there is the Louvre for everyone: consecration, immortality, recognition once and for all by art history itself as a frozen institution. Ever since it appeared, the museum, whether large or small, has been the vanishing point of the desire to paint, whether painters admit it or not. This is true for ambitious painters as well as for modest ones, for vain painters on whom an ephemeral academic success has heaped honors as well as for those audacious artists who bypass the most avant-gardist of institutions and who, as a result, condemn themselves to speak only to a more or less distant posterity. This was true for Duchamp.

In his painting, as in all avant-garde painting, innovation was strategic, and its strategy desired the museum—let us use this name to refer to that sort of imaginary and anticipated parity with the masters that must have been filling up the head of a young, ambitious artist. And this strategy, like that of the dream, must engage in ruses with censors and resistances, which in this case were institutional. Yet as we have seen, the Duchampian strategy was of a "damaged kettle" sort. Not only did it fail in reality—the ambition of which *Nude* was a bearer found itself thwarted—but it also failed in the Imaginary (in the image, in painting), as is evident as soon as one undertakes its critical interpretation. As a pictorial *Wunsch*, Duchamp's "cubist" period is a symptom, the symptom of his failure: he would never be Picasso.

In interpreting the dream of Irma's injection, Freud did not stop at the symptoms he discovered in himself. The self-analysis does not stop with the feeling of guilt that accompanies the failure; rather, the self-analysis begins at this point. And if Freud constantly returns to this dream as if it contained the encrypted formula for all dreams, it is because, in his defeat, he draws out of the doubt and anxiety that his interpretation reveals to him a certitude of an entirely different sort: this dream is theoretical; the entire theory of dreams is in it. The strategy of the damaged kettle finally pays off, not for Freud the dreamer but for Freud the theorist. So too for Duchamp: he does not give up and stop painting after the failure of *Nude* at the Indépendants. Rather he begins to work over the symptomatic value of his failure, interpreting through his painting—which is still

"cubist"—his wish to traverse Cubism like a "swift nude." He has experienced something of which he is not immediately aware but to which he will immediately return in Neuilly, as if he had an inkling that his pictorial strategy, no matter how much it is of the "damaged kettle" kind, has been/will soon be paying off on a "theoretical" plane—I prefer to say "epistemological," that plane of "gray matter" on which he precisely situates the stakes of his painting. As it was for Freud, this experience contains a still encrypted formula that will be revealed to him only after Munich but that we, from our position, can already decode.

It has to do with the strategic link that the avant-garde unconsciously establishes between failure, innovation, and surprise. This is a quite simple point, one well known since Manet; all one has to do is reread what art criticism was saying at the time. Every significant pictorial innovation is a failure according to prior pictorial criteria and an anticipated success according to criteria that this innovation itself will establish. But what happens when prior criteria and those that result from artistic innovation coexist? The question is important, since this was the very sort of situation that the Salon des Refusés instituted: the historicity that is specific to the avant-garde was spread spatially over competitive and synchronous institutions, some of which were advanced, some of which were behind the times. Specifically, in 1912, the situation was the following: first, there was the reactionary and backward brand of art criticism, the Salon, the Beaux-Arts, and the bourgeois marketplace of painting; second, there was Vauxcelles, the well-mannered modernist art criticism, the tendency that began to take "Postimpressionism" seriously, the Salon des Indépendants, Ambroise Vollard; and third, there was Cubism, the Cubism of the pioneers from the Bateau-Lavoir, and the Cubism of Puteaux, already a mere follower; there were Apollinaire and Salmon, the hard-fought battle for a room in the Indépendants in 1911, and the triumphant scandal there in 1912; there was Kahnweiler. This was the context that welcomed or did not welcome Duchamp's strategy; these were the three faces of art history, whether it was incarnated in obviously reactionary institutions, in well-meaning modernist ones, or in resolutely avant-garde ones.

To whom did Duchamp address himself when he proposed to the history of painting, "which accepts or does not accept," his noncubist solution to the cubist impasse? To all three institutions, in fact. He was probably not aware of this; he was simply seized by the contradictions of his times. Nonetheless, when examined from the viewpoint of the addressee of the pictorial wish, namely, the three authorities to which the desire to paint addressed its demand for recognition, the strategy of the "damaged kettle" suddenly loses its incoherence and reveals its extraordinary efficacy "with all kinds of delays."

(1) "It is not my fault if I haven't been able to create the art of my time: I was too young and too inexperienced." Here is a demand addressed to the academic institution, asking for its indulgence: hasn't the young Duchamp proved that he knows how to be an Impressionist, a Cézannean, a conscientious disciple of

Matisse? As for nonchalance, it bears the combined charms of youth and bohemianism—qualities that had become perfectly academic by 1912. (2) “Anyway, I can participate in and master this art at least as well as you can: I can paint like a Cubist.” Here is a demand addressed to the cubist institution, which was quite certainly already an institution, as Duchamp’s entourage bears out. This is the Puteaux group, the would-be theorists like Gleizes and Metzinger, and his brothers, as well. They were still in revolt against the academic institution, and the storms that they caused at the Indépendants could still seem powerful. But they would soon form the new establishment, when the Section d’Or, whose creation was the initiative of Jacques Villon, would confer on Cubism the respectable dignity of a classicism of sorts. (3) “Finally, do not be deceived: I am no longer a Cubist, I am already way beyond Cubism.” This demand is the only one that is specifically addressed to that imaginary and symbolic interlocutor that Lacan calls the great Other, that addressee who was still unnameable but whom Duchamp, with great judiciousness, would eventually name “posterity,” “the onlookers who make the painting,” and the like. An unacceptable demand, and one that indeed was not accepted at the start, but a demand that was more than satisfied, as we know when we substitute *delay* for *painting*, as Duchamp advises.¹¹ A delay, moreover, that was not very long but that only gradually revealed its value as delay: rejected by the Indépendants in March, *Nude* was exhibited precisely a month later in Barcelona, where it did not even raise an eyebrow. We find it again in October, after Munich, in the Section d’Or where, I imagine, his friends, and his brothers in particular, were only too happy to make amends and to reintegrate this “postcubist” painting into the new academy. The painting delay would finally release all its effects in 1913 at the Armory Show in New York, where the scandal it caused would intervene, quite explicitly this time, in the process of its legitimation at the same time as it paved the way for a certain as yet totally unexpected *Fountain*.

Woman, Metaphor of Painting

In Munich, far from his brothers and confrères, three women came to monopolize Duchamp’s attention again: a virgin, a bride, and a third caught in the “infra-thin” passage of her becoming-woman.

Is it certain that they only monopolized the attention of Duchamp-the-painter? The most Duchampian explanation of his departure for Munich could well be that he went there because of a woman. This is not impossible. In any case, it is a tempting scenario that can lead to interesting speculation: he did not succeed with this woman or she refused him, and Duchamp, who was also leaving Paris to escape from artistic failure, experienced the no-less-unpleasant failures of romance. He had no other recourse, since he was in Munich and since he knew no one, than to plunge into painting. And it is because of this that erotic themes

enter his work and never leave: the theme of the woman as object of an unattainable desire, despised and idealized at the same time: the "hanged woman, apotheosis of virginity"; the theme of the onanistic bachelor, caught by "the litanies of the Chariot" and by the rotations of the "Chocolate Grinder": "one only has: for female the public urinal and one lives by it";¹² the theme of the impossible encounter, of the sex act that will fail if it succeeds—"bite one's fingers as soon as possession is consummated"¹³—but that will succeed if it fails, through a "mirrorical return" that projects it into the fourth dimension. And so on. There is no need to speculate any longer on a fictive and risky scenario in order to understand that Duchamp was learning from experience—in Munich or previously, but probably in Munich—a truth that has long been familiar to psychoanalysis: the practice of painting has something to do with sublimation; what it invests in can be named, for the male heterosexual painter, a desire for the woman; somewhere in the painter's economy of desire there is a woman to paint or a woman who has been painted. It is useless to believe in this scenario or to invent other ones that would "explain" the trip to Munich, since this truth of the psychoanalytic vulgate is already explicit in the Munich works. From the repetition of the desired woman's image in *Dulcinea* or the tearing apart of his sisters' bodies in *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters* to the skinning and stripping bare of the *Bride* in Munich, we move from a painter who paints because he is sublimating to a painter who knows that he has to sublimate in order to paint.

This, it seems to me, is the first discovery that Duchamp made in Munich, and it is visible and readable in his works. Undoubtedly, it would not have taken place without being provoked by an important biographical event—like the one that the above-mentioned scenario outlines. But we do not need to look in a hypothetical biography for something that the works amply demonstrate: in Munich, they establish a reversible equation of woman = painting, an equation that was probably unconsciously at work from Duchamp's very beginnings and that surfaced to his consciousness in the four paintings representing women through which he entered Cubism, but that now became an energy = principle, a motor-force that he exploited quite consciously.

The orthodox psychoanalytic approach has accustomed us to the idea that painting can be a metaphor of woman, but it generally imagines the metaphor as a one-way process. Since the painting supports the transfer of a sublimated libido whose "primary" object is woman, the task of the aesthetician-analyst is often limited to the old adage, "Cherchez la femme."¹⁴ Nothing prevents us from applying this approach to Duchamp's Munich production, and it has long been an attractive iconographic exercise, analogous to Freud's (or Pfister's) with the vulture in the *Virgin and Saint Anne*. But we have to admit that such detective work yields only tautological results since the woman is so obvious in Duchamp's artworks, openly announced in their titles: *Virgin*, *Bride Stripped Bare*, and so on. Nothing is gained from working one's way from the manifest content to the latent

content when the latter is as manifest as the former. And yet we read *Virgin* but do not recognize a virgin in the design; we read *Bride* but no bride is visible in the painting. Thus, the title, which apparently manifests the latent sense of the drawing or the painting, refers in fact to neither of these representations. Its real referent is the operation of encrypting itself. The title expresses the latent term and the manifest term on equal footing, and it proclaims that the visible painting itself lies between the two, as the result of a work, a transformation. We can read this work as going in either of two directions. If we choose the direction woman → painting, we will undoubtedly be emphasizing the sublimation, the disguising—"mechanism of modesty, mechanical modesty"¹⁵—that covers over the erotic theme. If we choose the direction woman ← painting, we can better see the work of condensation, displacement, and, especially, figuration (or defiguration) that will have transformed Duchamp's latent erotic thoughts into manifest pictorial thought.

This is to say that an important part of the "psychoanalysis" of the painting is conducted by the painting itself; more precisely, it is explicit in the gap between the image and its title. The work of the detective-analyst in search of latent contents has already been performed. The analyst who wants to go further must give up speaking as analyst. Either the analyst becomes a biographer and tries to discover who the woman is that Duchamp is sublimating into a painting or, as in our imaginary scenario, tries to discover the event in the life of the "suffering" man that could have provoked the "creative spirit" to work in such a way on its own sublimation. There is indeed much biographical work still to be done in order to have a better understanding of Duchamp's work, but this is not a job for psychoanalysts. Or the analyst must become an aesthetician and an art historian and look into Duchamp's actual production for the nonencrypted or diversely encrypted iconographic sources from which this or that drawing or painting is derived. This is what has been done, for example, by John Golding, who derives *Virgin No. 2* from *Apropos of Young Sister* and connects *Bride* to a caricature from 1909, *Mid-Lent*.¹⁶ Such an investigation also discovers a latent underneath the "manifest." But this is no longer the investigation of a psychoanalyst.

The titles of the Munich works thus establish an equation painting = woman that short-circuits the will to interpret the visible image in terms of a hidden representation, but it also forces one to investigate the very meanings given to the equal sign. This is so because the work of transformation, whose result is the painting, lies entirely in this sign. Later, in the *Green Box* and then in the *White Box*, Duchamp himself would specify some of the rules of the transformation that allow the equation of the woman as object of desire with the woman who is painted, the woman as *Bride*. This is the case, for example, with all of Duchamp's notes about perspective and the fourth dimension, which are supposed to "explain" (if taken with a grain of salt) that "my Bride is a two-dimensional

representation of a three-dimensional Bride who also would be a four-dimensional projection on a three-dimensional world of the Bride."¹⁷

But in August 1912 he had not yet reached this point, and it would be premature—and probably futile, in any case—to look for the meaning of the equal sign in the ensemble of rules of transformation that move a latent *Bride*, hidden somewhere in the fourth dimension, to the state of a manifest *Bride*, painted within the two dimensions of the canvas. It is only too obvious that Duchamp never put such rules (supposing that they could even exist for a mathematician) into practice but that he speculated—in Munich but probably some time before Munich—on the fourth dimension as a pictorial strategy. He was not alone in this, as we know, since the fourth dimension was one of the favorite themes of discussion of the Puteaux group. But when he quit the group and went to Munich, he made a different and completely personal use of it, a use that was specifically strategic inasmuch as strategy is on the order of a wish, a desire, and a demand and insofar as it concerns this other transformation of which the transformation of the woman into a painting is a counterpart: the transformation of the “suffering man” into the “creative mind.” This is why, when we note that three women captured Duchamp’s attention in Munich, just as three women had captured it exactly one year earlier just after Suzanne’s wedding, we can be certain that they captured the attention of the man as well as the painter, the painter as well as the man.

After the failure of his demand to the Salon des Indépendants, after the imaginary fulfillment of his desire to go beyond Cubism as quickly as possible, Duchamp took refuge and retrenched in a pictorial celibacy. He renounced the nameable addressees of his earlier strategic demand and began to practice a separation from them as his new strategy: far from the academic milieu of Paris, from the desired honors of the Salon; far from the Puteaux group, from the hoped-for recognition of the cubist establishment; and above all far from Picasso and beyond, from Cézanne, far from “the law of the father.” A bachelor, alone with his painting, Duchamp now painted the object of his desire, and it is from this object that he now awaited an answer to his demands: he painted the woman.

What could she reply on the level of wishes, since this woman—imaginary, merely imaged—refused to give herself to his desire and left him a bachelor? Undoubtedly, she told him that “olfactory masturbation” (which is what Duchamp called the manual craft of painting) is as good as literal masturbation and that there is a certain gratification, maybe even a superior gratification, in sublimating his desire in the act of painting. This applies to the imaginary realm of the wish, the imaginary realm of the fulfillment of desire. But beyond this, something attains the realm of truth, of that half-said truth, as Lacan would say. Duchamp now understands that his ambition to be a painter—which up to then he had not confronted with its underlying law—has this price: he must sublimate in order to paint and must know that he is sublimating. The counterpart of the bach-

eloir's impossibility of touching the woman in the three dimensions of earthly life is not so much the imaginary accomplishment of this desire in the fiction of the fourth dimension as the quite earthly (although embarking on the Imaginary, nonetheless) possibility of becoming the painter that he wants to be.

In order to become a painter he must paint, desire, sublimate, and work over his desire, imagine and work over his imagination. When one is no longer sublimating "spontaneously," without thinking about it but instead is entering consciously into a "sublimating position" and engaging consciously with the fire and pain of desire in order to uncover the energy to paint, there must come a moment, I imagine, when painting ceases to be the primary thing and when what one desires to express through painting is no longer the imaginary accomplishment of desire but the very truth-function that breaks through this sublimative practice. There must come a moment when the effect (painting) turns back on its cause (to desire) and reveals in reverse, in revulsion, this subjective causality.

What is literally staggering in every accomplished work of art comes undoubtedly from this revelation-revulsion. It is this that communicates much of the work's truth-function. But in Duchamp's case—and, as we will see, it was in Munich and in several stages that this happened—this revelation by far overflowed the personal adventure of the artist and what affects us in this adventure. For a period that we are still in but whose end is becoming evident, this revelation was able to provoke a considerable cultural upheaval around the status—the specificity—of painting and of art in general.

We still have some way to go till we can see where, and through what ambiguity of feelings toward painting—this "olfactory masturbation"—all of this bursts out. But at this point, we can well note the initial certainty that Duchamp derived from his Munich experience. What happened on the side of the painted object (of the object of desire) had its corollary on the side of the painter-subject (of the desiring subject): a wedding at a remove, through looking and not touching, or something that is more celibate and even more distanced, a defloration that takes place in the "infra-thin" or in the fourth dimension, there where no touching is possible, not even that of the gaze. In short, to the becoming-woman announced in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* corresponds the desire of Duchamp to become a painter. A becoming-painter for a becoming-woman, which will in due time be echoed, as if by "subsidized symmetry," by a becoming-woman for a becoming-artist: Rose Sélavy in 1920.¹⁸

From now on, and in the name of this effect that folds back onto its cause, we will assume the word *painting* every time that Duchamp says *woman*. If sublimation refers to the desire for the woman as the source of painting, then *known* sublimation re-addresses to painting a worked-over desire for the woman. The equation painting = woman is reversible, and the space of this metaphor is isotropic.¹⁹

From the Virgin to the Bride

So, in Munich, three women mobilized the desire of Duchamp-the-painter—three women, each of whom was a metaphor for painting.

Virgin: the virgin canvas, the point of departure for the painter and the initial site in which his desire and his anguish are invested. How to become a painter, how to begin the painting? This was a crucial question for Duchamp, much more important than the completion of the painting. The *Large Glass, Definitively Unfinished* shows Duchamp's lack of anxiety over the final decision, which, in contrast, was the major decision for all the "retinal" painters and, especially, for the American Abstract Expressionists. All art that comes from expression naturally privileges suspension, the achievement of inachievement, because it is in this pictorial moment that the artist tries to immobilize the spectators and to hold them within the fascination of an expressiveness that sums up the artist's "inner self." Duchamp, who did not believe in expression or in the distinction of interior and exterior (the *Glass* is transparent), knew that the final decision is relatively irrelevant: in any case, it is the onlooker who finishes the painting. In contrast, the initial decision was a moment of high importance, especially if one were convinced, like Duchamp, that the colors of the painting derive above all else from the painter's "gray matter." To worry about the ways to start a painting is to pose a double general question about a singular case. The first concerns the identity of the object that one is trying to construct: where does painting start, what is its raw matter? The second (but it is really the same question) concerns the identity of the painting subject: what is the first gesture a painter makes, and where and when does the painting begin to validate its creator's ambition to be a painter?

The drawings *Virgin No. 1* and *Virgin No. 2* provide some sort of answer to these questions. First of all, these are drawings, the first in pencil and the second embellished with watercolors. They thus provide a completely conventional answer: the painter's craft begins with drawing and then is extended by the addition of color. But it is not brought to fruition in Duchamp's case: there will be no end painting with the name *Virgin*. And there will not be a virgin painting: Duchamp's inquiry into the fundamental components of painting is not the same as that in which Malevich would engage three years later with the *White Square*, even if it is of the same order. Hence this paradox: from the first stroke of the pencil, the two pieces of paper entitled *Virgin* are obviously no longer virginal. Therefore, they do not become any less virginal with the *n*th pencil mark than they did with the first. The second *Virgin*, left unfinished at a later stage in the process of painting, is not less virginal than the first, since it has the same name. And both are no less virginal than a piece of blank paper, no more virginal than a finished painting. It is as though the title of these works set out to demonstrate the inanity of the issue of completion, the inanity, indeed, of the idea of pictorial

process. Of course, the violation of the virgin canvas upholds the becoming-painter of the painter, but where and when does this happen? Each stroke is a demand, and the painting responds, but this response is only the echo of the demand sent back to a painter who remains celibate in front of a canvas that, facing him, insists on continuing to declare itself a virgin. At the end of the pictorial process, there can be no satisfaction. Neither the first mark that breaks up the unity of the blank page nor the last mark that signs it and names it can fulfill such a narcissistic desire. There is no ending to the pictorial process, no point in time where Duchamp could declare himself satisfied (with himself, with his painting). For that to happen, he would have to have been a born painter, like Picasso, or even like Renoir.

But then, what would be the point of painting, if one had received one's identity as a painter from birth? What is the use of beginning to paint, if one's becoming-painter is not at stake? To begin would, in that case, be the same as always beginning again, repeating oneself without knowing it, "stupid as a painter." In a way, Duchamp prohibited his "ideal ego" (the painter that he dreamt of becoming) from seeking to coincide with his "ego ideals" (those born painters who might at one moment or another serve for him as identificatory models). He bore a narcissistic wound that must have seemed more important to him than its cure: to become a painter ought to happen in a single stroke, or it would not be worth the effort. It has nothing to do with apprenticeship, artisanal craft, or everyday pleasure, all the things Duchamp humorously summarized under "the smell of turpentine."²⁰ One can engage in olfactory masturbation until the end of one's days without necessarily becoming a painter: the canvas remains virginal, and the painter remains celibate.

Bride: the title of the painting—one of Duchamp's most accomplished works—is a past participle (*Mariée*). From the virginal space that preexists the act of painting, we have jumped to a realm where the painting process is conjugated in the past. *Mariée*, or *m'art y est* (my art is here), as Ulf Linde suggests,²¹ or *Mar(cel) y est* (Marcel is there). The becoming-painter has been accomplished, the dream realized; the author's identity now lies secure in his espousal with painting. But only on one condition, one stipulated, in fact, by *Virgin*: *Mar y est* only if *Cel n'y est pas* (Cel is not there); the painter's identity in the painting will no longer be in doubt if and only if the narcissistic wound has not been healed, if and only if the painter also stands outside the painting, a bachelor among bachelors, "an oculist witness" among the crowd of onlookers who will make the painting "with all kinds of delays." *Bride* is the first work that presents so evidently that temporality so specific to Duchamp, that chesslike temporality of mate and checkmate: the painter, anxious to gain the certainty that he has indeed become the painter that he had the desire and the ambition to become, must still consent to postpone the recognition of others. If the painting is conjugated in the past participle, the becoming-painting must, in order to have been accom-

plished in one stroke, be conjugated in the future perfect. It is the temporal law of the avant-garde, as we have seen, that stipulates that aesthetic recognition must function only according to a retroactive judgment. To acquiesce to this law by anticipating it is thus the only possible pictorial strategy available to anyone not born a painter—and Duchamp understood this in Munich. With that established, the rest—pictorial process on the side of the object, becoming-painter on the side of the subject—is now a matter of conscious repetitions aimed at prospectively displacing the retrospective viewpoints that spectators might have on the painter's production. Espousing painting while simultaneously remaining its celibate witness, Duchamp also anticipates himself as the child of his oeuvre.²²

After *Bride*, Duchamp would never again make a painting whose design would start from scratch, virgin, as it were. Duchamp is neither Cézanne nor Renoir. He reproached Renoir for redoing the same nude each morning while deceiving himself about its difference: when one is born a painter, one paints because of an "olfactory need" and one unconsciously engages in repetition. As for Cézanne, whose law he was still trying to flee, he had nothing to reproach him for and much to envy him for: Cézanne was not a born painter, either; he had to become one and become one again with each painting, with "each fleeting minute of the world" that he wanted to capture, "forgetting everything that had appeared before us." But Duchamp did not want to become Cézanne, nor could he become Cézanne. In Munich, he situated himself in relation to Cézanne through an ambiguous competition that we will have to clarify eventually. But Duchamp had already decided that the Cézannean path was closed to him. As for Renoir's path, that of pictorial habit, he knew for some time already that he did not want any part of it, and he probably openly despised it.²³ His own path would be that of retroactive displacement, a certain mechanical figure built up of subtle reworkings, of reproduction, and of calculated repetition. The pattern of the *Bride* from Munich would be transferred, unchanged, onto the *Glass*; it would be photographically reproduced for the *Box in a Valise*, and it would be repeated once more, printed mechanically, in the engraving of 1965.

The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride can be understood in two ways: In erotic terms the title refers to a defloration, to the initial sexual act and to its translation into painting, the becoming-painting of the virgin canvas. In terms of the chronology of the works, the title says that the painting actualizes the transition between the two drawings entitled *Virgin* and the painting entitled *Bride*. That means that the aesthetic destiny of this painting is inseparable from the autobiographical destiny of its author, in that it is irreversible.

The personal destiny of an individual, especially when it proceeds to lay itself down in writing along the way (which is what *autobiography* means), does not only have irreversibility as its temporal figure: one of the lessons of psychoanalysis is that a life can also "advance" by regressions and delayed actions. But irreversibility, the years that pass, growing old, are the basic and inescapable

conditions with which all other temporal figures must contend. For Duchamp-the-painter, this irreversibility was particularly weighty, not because of that sense of urgency that usually comes only with older age, but because of the aesthetic context in which Duchamp played out his becoming-painter.

This context was the avant-garde, by which I mean the awareness that all ambitious modern painters have of an aesthetic irreversibility putting pressure from within on their practice. It is a given, since Courbet, at least—and this is the elementary meaning of modernism—that aesthetic judgment is no longer separable, whether *de jure* or *de facto*, from its historical inscription. In 1912, there was no painter (not even Matisse) destined to play a significant role in the history of modern art who was not extremely aware of this necessity for aesthetic innovation. The Futurists would make an ideology out of this, confusing the specific irreversibility of art with a lyrical—and dubious, by the way—notion of technological progress. Soon, Dada itself would be able to mark its radical opposition to Futurism only by simultaneously refusing any projection into the future and any return to the past, entertaining instead the fantasy—itself at once aesthetic and historical—that it could put an end to the history of art. And when art historians came to gather under a single term all the avant-gardes that came out of Cubism—Futurism, Constructivism, Suprematism, Simultaneism, Orphism, Neoplasticism, Dadaism, Unism, and so on—they coined a tautological term: the “historical avant-gardes.” As for Cubism, which in August 1912 was still the immediate context for Duchamp, it already proved to be a movement of transition, an aesthetic passageway in which the history of modernism found itself in transit. Only the theorists like Gleizes and Metzinger, whose influence Duchamp was trying to flee by going into isolation in Munich, attempted to bring the movement to a standstill. Picasso and Braque had just invented the *papiers collés* (*Nature morte à la chaise cannée* dates from the beginning of that year) that would have a noncubist posterity in Tatlin’s *Counterreliefs*, or Schwitters’ *Merz* collages, among others. Mondrian, who had arrived in Paris in January, was in the process of going beyond Cubism, a process that, while forcing him to go back to the lessons of Cézanne, would quickly lead him to an entirely different practice. Finally, Malevich, who, far from Paris, only learned about Cubism quite late, would also be gripped by such a sense of urgency that he would not only move very quickly to Cubo-Futurism and to Alogical Cubism, but would also date as coming from 1911 certain “cubist” paintings that, in fact, really dated from 1913.

The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride declares in the clearest possible way the feeling of irreversibility that gripped Duchamp’s practice in August 1912. Duchamp was aware that if his becoming-painter was to have some historical resonance, it had to forbid retreat. The move beyond Cubism reached its point of no return here: the painter that Duchamp wanted to become would have to find his

identity ahead of himself, like the “headlight child,” this “comet which would have its tail in front.”

The Passage

If we look at the interaction of title, iconographic theme, and plastic handling of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, while also keeping track of its chronological position between *Virgin* and *Bride*, we will become aware of a series of interconnected temporal figures that merit attention. The position of the painting in the chronology of the works suggests a becoming-painter oriented by the awareness of a personal destiny linked to the aesthetic and historical irreversibility of the avant-gardes. Here, we can usefully make a comparison to the *Sad Young Man on a Train*, which shows a shape of time very different from the one that Duchamp would be working on nine months later. We have seen that Duchamp doubled himself in the earlier work. First of all, there was the movement of the (cubist) train inside of which the young man, sad perhaps because of having had to jump the running train, moved parallel (though perhaps in the opposite direction) to the train's motion, that is, to the flow of time. Duchamp represented himself there as a young painter who had boarded the cubist train, but he left us in confusion as to the direction of his own movement: perhaps it should be added to the train's, as if to bypass Cubism's own momentum; perhaps it should be subtracted, as if the sad young man was driven by a nostalgic desire to return, as Jean Clair argues, to the perspectival tradition and so be free of the dominant movement of his epoch. But we have also seen that if Duchamp could portray himself in the guise of a young cubist painter driven by such an ambiguous desire, this was so because he simultaneously imagined himself observing the whole scene from a fixed point of view on the embankment or on the station platform. This Duchamp is imaginary, supported by the phantasm of a subject of enunciation capable of situating himself outside history and able to comment on historical relativities from an absolute point of view, that of the “oculist witness.”

The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride abandons the phantasm of this doubling. Duchamp realized that one cannot escape history and that if the painting had to enact a passage in his life as well as in the history of painting, the painter ought to invest himself in it completely. The imaginary position of the “oculist witness” is not abandoned, but it is no longer conceived of as a fixed observation point; it is anticipated as a later moment in the history of painting, the moment when the onlookers will make the painting—that is, “will make up the delay” (“use delay instead of painting”). *The Passage*, whose title already refers to the *Bride* that is still waiting to be painted, anticipates the later work, already imagines painting conjugated in the past participle, and foresees the retroactive verdict of posterity. This is the second temporal figure of this painting, the same as in

Bride, and it suggests that the history of art is not irreversible: it authorizes a sort of "regression," a return *about* and not a return *to*. In vain would the young painter have walked backward on the cubist train. He would have in any case been swept up by history, treated like a backward painter and, so, like a failure. There is no rule against preferring the good old system of perspective, even amidst the cubist chaos, but to do so as if the system's validity had remained unchallenged is the fastest way to doom. The *Large Glass* and the notes for the *White Box* would later explicitly show what happens to the (regressive) desire for perspective when it is hit by interdictions (in other words, when the Subject—point of view, vanishing point—is no longer fixed, but is swept up by the movement of history). Contrary to Jean Clair's view on these matters, Duchamp did not find sustenance in the perspective system, but reexamined it through and through.²⁴

The title already calls in the *Bride* but it still names the *Virgin*. And in a re-worked form, the iconography of the painting maintains the whole of Duchamp's pictorial past, which it makes explicit reference to. Without question, it derives from the two *Virgins* and, beyond them, as John Golding points out, from *Apropos of Young Sister*, which seems itself to engage, from a distance, in a "cubist" commentary on *Portrait of Yvonne Duchamp* from 1909. With certain ellipses and with a great deal of metamorphosis, it is the whole line of "painted women" that *The Passage* allows us to retrace, along the desiring trajectory of the man and the pictorial trajectory of the painter. Here we have a third temporal figure, one out of which *Virgin* came and which has its own lessons to teach us. The subjective question, "Where does painting begin?" is always already being asked, even when its answer is not yet available. Ever since his first faltering attempts, the first manifestations of his desire to paint, the painter has asked it of himself. Even if one was not born a painter, it is futile to want to assign a birthdate to the decision to become one, just as it is futile to assign to some pictorial "element"—such as the virgin canvas—the reductive status of an absolute beginning. One cannot escape the recurrence of some "primal scene" that starts the painter off on the rails of an irreversible becoming-painter. It is not the completion of the painting that he has before him, but, quite the contrary, its beginnings; it is not the virginity of an initial decision that he has behind him but, quite the contrary, the weight of an entire history in which he is born and that will condition his entire journey.

This shows how far Duchamp was not only from Futurism but also from the whole spirit of the age in which virtually all the historical avant-gardes were participating. Duchamp did not entertain the phantasm of the tabula rasa. Unlike the Futurists, the majority of the Constructivists, and certain Dadaists, he did not believe that modern art was a radical beginning. He did not believe that one history ended with the destruction of the perspective system and that another one, as absolutely new and without memory, came into existence with Manet and

Cézanne. While it is marching on, painting drags its tradition along and prolongs that tradition, in spite of some artists' most violent denials. In other words, even before a person makes the "decision" to become a painter, that "decision" is shaped, rendered specific, possible or impossible, fertile or sterile, by the historical conditions in which it is taking place. Duchamp, who must have had a sharp awareness of the conditions—personal as well as historical—that were handicapping his becoming-painter, would develop out of his Munich period a series of artistic strategies that would increasingly and more explicitly take these very conditions—conditions of impossibility or, better yet, conditions of indecidability—for the object of his own aesthetic and life—"decisions": to become a painter/to cease to paint, to play the artist/to produce "antiart," to shut up/to let others speak about oneself, and so on. These strategies would always refer the pictorial product to its conditions of production, art movements to the history that orients them, the cubist train in which the sad young man is moving to the "laziness of railway tracks between the passage of two trains."²⁵

Between *Virgin* and *Bride*, there then comes the passage itself, the fourth and most mysterious of the temporal figures put into operation by the painting. One does not move from virginity to nonvirginity through a continuous and additive process, but rather by a brusque change of states. One loses one's virginity only once; one becomes a painter in one stroke; the whole of painting is established with one's initial choice. *The Passage* proceeds out of a punctual temporality, an instantaneous leap, an "extrarapid exposition." This is the "shape of time"—which is actually nontemporal, since it is reduced to a single point—that the title of the painting refers to in its typography: *LE PASSAGE* in capital letters, *de la vierge à la mariée* in small ones. Witness how the thematic subject matter of the canvas—its signified—is sustained by and referred to the emergence of the subject in the Lacanian sense, the *I* as signifier. The small *i* to be added to *verge* (penis) to produce *vierge* (virgin) signals the irruption of this other, capital *I* that, as Jean Suquet says, "we might as well get from the Greeks. Let us pay homage to the phallus. What better key could open up a fairy tale whose heroes are a Bride and her bachelors?"²⁶

Literally outside of time, the irruption of the phallus would return with a metronomic regularity, as a sort of punctuation, in Duchamp's work: the apostrophe of *Tu m'*, the comma in the *Large Glass*, the colon in *Etant donnés*; all these are so many repetitions of an initiating passage that was spelled out in August 1912. Between the virgin to be painted and the bride who has been painted, there is the same barring of the signifier as there is between *virgo* and *virga*, the same move into the infra-thin or into the fourth dimension, the same "tridimensional 'cut' [which] only lets itself be passed, depassed (trespassed?) by a passer"²⁷ who is capable of an *instantaneous traversal*.²⁸

This phallic passer to which Suquet refers—and whose inscription in the absent figure of the "tender of gravity" he admirably deciphered—this "passer

into painting" is himself invisible, not painted. "Never do you see me there where I see you," Lacan declares.²⁹ When *Tu m'* gives a final apostrophe to retinal painting, this will be to throw a bottle brush into the eyes of the spectators, to make them "rinse their eyes" once and for all. In the interim, Duchamp, this passer, will have passed from painting to something else; he will have dried his eyes on a ready-made bottle rack, a fully made object that will allow him to pass beyond his regrets as a young painter who had just discovered that one cannot pass on to painting except by giving up depicting oneself in the painting. When the comma makes its appearance in the *Large Glass*, it will cut off *de même les célibataires* (even the bachelors and/or the bachelors from "even"). It promises further cutting (it has "'cuttage' in reserve"), but it also wants to be the "sign of the accordance": is the "oculist witness" the doctor or the patient? The sad young man will have discovered that the painter is not the first spectator for his self-portrait; the advent of his proper name will be diffracted by the "Wilson-Lincoln effect" that performs an irremediable cutting of his name: MAR at the top, CEL at the bottom. And when, as the death of the painter approaches, *Etant donnés* brings down the bride and lays her in the bushes, it is as if it also took the colon in the title, rotated it, and drilled it at eye level for the deceiving pleasure of its posthumous spectators: only we can see, through the horizontal peepholes pierced in a Spanish door, this spreadeagled bride give birth to her son, Marcel Duchamp.

The whole of painting's fate is expressed with the initial decision, like an oracle, in the title of *The Passage*, which marks, with the letter *i*, the surge of the Symbolic as such, the unnameable naming of the scopic drive addressed to the Other. Get rid of the *i* in *vierge* and you have *verge*: the lacking signifier is the phallus, the signifier of lack. But this virgin is nothing more than a woman to be painted; get rid of the *i* in *peindre* and you get *pendre* [to hang]; she is a woman to be hanged. And indeed, this is how she will be named, on the other side of the forbidden bar³⁰: having becoming a woman painted, in the past participle, the *Bride* will now be called "*le pendu femelle*" (*hanged female*).

But naming, the naming of and in the painting, is not everything. *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* does not have only a title; it is a painting. Here, a fifth temporal, or actually intemporal, figure shows up: the punctuality of the passage dilates, and it is as if the making of the painting were suspended, unconjugated as it were, *à l'infinitif*, in the infinitive mode. Even if, empirically speaking, it takes time to paint, this act of painting now has—theoretically and emotionally—the splendid nontemporality of the unconscious, of the dream.³¹ If the *Bride* is the most "finished" of Duchamp's paintings, *The Passage* is aesthetically the best—not only because of the mysterious iconography that succeeds in maintaining constant ambiguity between abstraction and figuration, as if Duchamp, definitively abandoning the analysis of the object so dear to the Cubists, was already trying to show the "figuration of a possible" as such, but also

because of the painting's surface qualities (perceptible only in the original work), which show a certain delicacy and a certain suppleness of execution that make *The Passage* the only one of Duchamp's "cubist" works really able to bear comparison with the contemporary production of Picasso or Braque. If we compare it with *Nude no. 2*, thus far the most successful work from this period, we notice that a real change in pictorial sensibility has taken place. *Nude* is an admirable bit of painting when viewed at a distance, but viewed close up, it shows the great incertitude with which Duchamp negotiated—or failed to negotiate—chromatic passages. *Nude* still works because it is a linear painting whose spatiality is made up of contrasts between relatively discontinuous values and is articulated around black and light ochre lines that redeem an interplay of rather laborious strokes. *The Passage*, in contrast, is infinitely more "painterly," and this only gives its title more resonance: there are indeed chromatic *passages*, more than just lines disseminated on a surface, that engender compressions and expansions of space. In this canvas, there is a sureness of the hand that we cannot find anywhere else in Duchamp and that has led Robert Lebel to say that here "Duchamp reached the climax of his pictorial power."³²

Pictorially, *The Passage* demonstrates that the becoming-painter could indeed be accomplished all at once, played out on a single canvas that, from the first stroke to the space of the whole work, from the encrypted imagery to the explicit title, accomplished the rite of passage of the young man to his identity as an adult painter. We will never know what degree of attention, of care, of investment, of love for painting this passage demanded of Duchamp. But we have the pictorial result of this passage, and it shows a perfect isomorphism between what the title says, the latent and manifest iconography that is its reference, and the overall plastic effect.³³ This isomorphism is infinitely important for what it tells us about Duchamp's desire and about its accomplishment, which is not merely imaginary. Duchamp's feelings for painting were very ambiguous or, better yet, ambivalent: he loved it/he detested it. He was enough of a painter that his eye was his privileged organ, the gaze his favorite "object *a*," but he was not enough of a painter for his hand to passively follow the dictates of his gaze. His appreciation of the painting of others was sharp, and his judgments were well founded (as the catalog for the Société Anonyme demonstrates, despite some indulgences, always recognizable as such); his appreciation of his own work was lucid enough for him to know that he was not born a painter. He had a sharp perception of the historicity of modern painting, and he knew that painterly qualities are not a matter of taste but of strategies that displace taste; but he also knew that these strategies, if they were to be historically significant, nonetheless had to be neither voluntary nor manipulable. He was not unaware of the cathartic, hedonistic, and therapeutic value of art for himself and for others, but he had the intuition that its truth was more on the side of desire than of pleasure. He was aware that his century was engaged in the search for a pure visuality that would be a sort of essence of

painting, but he refused to believe that pictorial thought could be invested entirely at the level of the retina. He liked the *cosa mentale* of painting, but he knew that the mental must be incarnated in the visible if it is not to run the risk of becoming literary or philosophic and thereby cease to be painting. Finally, he must have thought the word *art* no longer really matched the word *painting*, that an artist was not the same as a painter, but that his personal destiny and his "family romance" left him no other choice than to become an artist by becoming a painter.

In short, there must have been in the thoughts of Duchamp in Munich an intense questioning with innumerable ramifications—personal, familial, historical, aesthetic, and cultural—all of them condensed around a single point of undecidability: painting as discourse/painting as craft. On the one hand, painting as thought, philosophical imagination, truth, and language; on the other hand, painting as *ars*, skill, labor, manipulation, presence, and thing. Or as he would put it: on the one hand, gray matter; on the other hand, olfactory masturbation. The sort of miracle that *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* represents is that it stays, so to speak, poised on this point of undecidability, immobile and in suspense, and that it decides in both directions: the painting does what it says and says what it does. It effects a passage, an opening, between title and image, a breakthrough that is that of the Symbolic as such, insofar as the signifier that surges up there does not yet belong to the order of constituted language and yet is not absorbed either by the Apollonian, imaginary, pleasure of the aesthetic gaze. Nonetheless, this passage takes place before our eyes, aesthetically and plastically: in the nontemporal infinitive mode, it makes itself into an image and a spatial result. It is here that it bears its "truth-function."

This passage had to be effected, once and for all, so that the pictorial wish that had gripped Duchamp since *Sonata* had initiated him into the avant-garde of his time could be at once fulfilled and turned back on itself and bring into the light of day the enigma of its formulation. After this, becoming a painter would no longer be a problem for Duchamp, but an enigma: *given (étant donnés)* (1) the painter and (2) the painting, what were the conditions of such a sudden loss of innocence?

And the Passer

There is perhaps some truth in the hypothesis of Arturo Schwarz, who sees the origin of the Bride/bachelors problematic in a repressed incestuous desire on the part of Duchamp for his sister Suzanne.³⁴ A "truth" that is rather superficial, since it is in the surface qualities of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* that this truth is confirmed and not at all in Duchamp's "family romance." Was he or was he not driven by an incestuous desire for his sister Suzanne? The question is intensely indiscreet if one looks for its answer in the "lived reality" of the

painter. It is scarcely more licit if one looks for a trace of this "childhood infamy" (*une nymphe amie d'enfance*) in the biographical indications that show up here and there in the work. It is true that *Young Man and Girl in Spring* represents a sort of erotic utopia, that it is dedicated "To you my dear Suzanne," and that Marcel offered it to his sister as a wedding gift on 24 August 1911. It is not impossible that the idea for the *Sad Young Man on a Train* came to him on the train that, at the end of 1911, took him to Rouen for a visit with his sister and her pharmacist husband. It is more than likely that the readymade entitled *Pharmacy*, conceived in January 1914 on the train to Rouen (once again) was the symmetrical echo of *Sad Young Man* and "celebrated" Suzanne's imminent divorce. And it is certain that in 1919, Duchamp sent her from Buenos Aires the *Unhappy Readymade* on the occasion of her remarriage with Jean Crotti. But all of this proves nothing except perhaps that Duchamp had a particular affection for Suzanne and that she, two years younger than Marcel, must have been his accomplice and his confidante at that age when adolescents are discovering the facts of life. But there is nothing, empirically and especially methodologically, that allows us to draw from these few biographical symptoms the conclusion that an incest taboo against which Duchamp would have really had to fight is the red thread uniting his work.

And yet Suzanne did matter for Duchamp. She even mattered in a crucial way, at the moment of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, for Duchamp, a passer to painting. *Passeur/Pas soeur!* (not the sister). If I am permitted this play on words that Duchamp himself never made, I would see in it the formula, a perfectly unconscious one, for the metaphorical leap painting/woman, insofar as it is the subject who jumps the bar there, this subject whose pictorial activity leads him to achieve a painting that, in one stroke, says what it does and does what it says.

In unraveling the "preliminary narrative," we saw that at the moment of entering into Cubism—that is, in making his professional entrance into the pictorial avant-garde of his time—Duchamp engaged in a strong investment in the female figure. He painted *Sonata*, *Dulcinea*, *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters*, and *Apropos of Little Sister*, in that order.

Sonata presents the female side of the family. The men are absent: neither the father, of whom Duchamp had made a very Cézannean portrait in 1910 (and this would be the only one that he did), nor the brothers, whom Duchamp had portrayed in the same year in *The Chess Game*, are to be seen in this painting.

I want to concentrate for a moment on this absence of men and on their presence, in contrast, in these last two paintings. Pictorially speaking, *Portrait of the Artist's Father* is not a good painting: the style is rather tired, and the rough surface carries many traces of retouching. If it is true that Duchamp tried his hand at Cézannism in this work, the attempt was a failure. The background floats and is spatially ambiguous, and the figure is ringed by a thick, black band, a technique

that Cézanne had been able to dispense with much earlier. Nonetheless, the face of the father, serenely leaning on his right hand, is rather successful, painted with a firmness and an expression of benevolent authority that confers the entirety of the painting with an incontestable iconographic (if not pictorial) presence. If it is also true, as Jean Clair suggests, that this iconography was inspired by Cézanne's *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*,³⁵ we can interpret this painting as an intersection of paternal identifications.

I hope that it will not seem that I am going too much in the direction of a doubtful "psychoanalysis of the author" in noting this fact; it is actually quite logical that such identifications would show up in the work that a boy of twenty-three years engaged in the first time that he dared confront, in painting, the problem of his father's resemblance. What is most important is to note the associative chains by which the paternal figure is overdetermined. First of all, there is the real father and everything that we know about him: this provincial notary public who was liberal enough not to be opposed to the idea that Marcel would become a painter and share the bohemian life of his brothers. In providing a positive portrait of his father, Duchamp is thanking him, in a way. In any case, the painting bears no traces of an oedipal conflict that would deal with the recognition of the son-painter by the father. Next—and this is important in its own right—there is the "pictorial father" who shows up, not in the subject matter, but in the style of the painting. It is most likely not by chance that Duchamp painted his father at the moment when he became aware of the historical importance of Cézanne. Cézanne, who would be a symbolic father in painting for the whole cubist generation and beyond, would also be for Duchamp the veritable paternal force whose law he would now have to confront and to whom, laboriously, he addresses a first demand for recognition. Finally, but less important, there is the "iconographic father" who appears implicitly in the posing of the model with legs crossed: Ambroise Vollard, art dealer, the representative of artistic recognition as an institution, the "foster father."

This first portrait of the father was also the only one. One can well imagine—although, once again, it is necessary to be prudent—that this complex of paternal identifications that formed a knot around the pictorial authority of Cézanne, the familial authority of the real father, and the institutional and financial authority of the art world thus underwent some sort of repression. If this were the case, we should be able to find, in the immediate aftermath of the work, some sort of return of the repressed that would signal a displacement of the paternal figure. Indeed, this seems to me to happen with *The Chess Game* from August 1910, following associative chains that condense the same signifiers of identification: familial, pictorial, institutional. In the background, we see the two older brothers, Gaston and Raymond, well suited to serve as paternal substitutes. Moreover, they are both artists and are already enjoying a certain renown. Finally, one of them, Raymond, has recently been occupying an institutional position, since he

has just been named vice-president of the Salon d'Automne. They are thus well placed in the Imaginary of the young Marcel to provide him with a recognition that the true symbolic father, Cézanne, would certainly have refused him. Reciprocally, by their closeness as older brothers and by their quality as cubist artists, they well incarnate the Cézannean obstacle. Let us add to this the fact that if Marcel was spared an oedipal conflict with his real father, it was pretty much their doing. They were the ones in the family who opened the way: it was not without reticence that the notary public Duchamp saw his first son embrace an artistic career, followed by the second son; when it came to the third, he must have admitted that it was family destiny and not tried to stop him. But what might be even more determining is that the older brothers brought—by proxy—Marcel's revolt to a symbolic point that he himself would therefore not need to act on: the rejection of the name of the father. Gaston did this in a radical way, since he became Jacques Villon, and Raymond became Duchamp-Villon, not without compromises, since he admitted the double filiation of his father and of his brother. At the beginning of his artistic career, Marcel would have found his name-of-the-father transgressed from the start, broken in a sort of ready-made way, thus *virginal* again, available for a reinvestment to which later on the *Agricultural Machine* (Duchamp = "of the field") of the *Large Glass* would give all its resonance.

Now, the painting of the brothers is one of the few, along with *Portrait of the Artist's Father*, to demonstrate a direct Cézannean influence, at least in the treatment of figures. The background is virtually treated as a flatness, the figures detaching themselves from the surrounding greenery like vignettes. When we think of the subtlety with which Cézanne dialecticized space and figure, we can easily come to think that this painting, even more than the preceding one, shows a complete inability to interpret Cézanne correctly—unless Duchamp, in filling space with a monochromatic expanse of greenery, had already renounced following the Cézannean model and was trying to do no more than cite Cézanne, especially in the figures of the two brothers—who are depicted as chess players yet are painted in the same poses as Cézanne's famous *Card Players*. These players come in pairs: two brothers for a single father, facing each other around the very game in which Marcel will become a master: the chess game, the game of defeat.³⁶ They open up an iconographic trail that is easy to follow, and that will lead, in August 1912 in Munich, to the *bachelors*, a new avatar of the ego-images of Duchamp, his imaginary identifications with the symbolic father-painter. In December 1911, the *Portrait of Chess Players* begins to multiply the portrait of the two brothers and to expand on chess players through their "mise en abyme." In May 1912, in *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, the players will explicitly become chess pieces, and one of them will be feminized. Finally, in August 1912, *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* will rename as bachelors the now doubled paternal image inscribed on either side of the bride; they borrow

their iconographic form from *The King and Queen*, and thus from *The Chess Players*, and thus from the two older brothers of *The Chess Game* in 1910.

Let us come back to that painting, then. The two brothers, onto whom is displaced the repressed image of the ideal father, are in the background of the painting. It is coming from the background that the return of the repressed will take place, the very same background in which Duchamp reveals himself, more than anywhere else, to be incapable of rivaling Cézanne. The foreground, meanwhile, is occupied by the women. Engrossed in their leisure activities, the two groups are superbly unconcerned with each other, each grouped around a table: the masculine table of the chess game—the field of painting—and the feminine tea table—an eminently Cézannean pictorial object, a painting by itself. The two women are not just any two women. They are the wives of Gaston and Raymond: they are *brides*.

Can we feel authorized to see in the organization of this *Chess Game*, which seems nothing more than anecdotal, the mark of a new displacement? Here again we have to be prudent, but I think that the answer is yes. Between 1909 and the end of 1912, the iconographic series of “man” (father, brothers, chess players, bachelors) and of “woman” (mother, sisters, virgin, bride) intersect so rarely that each intersection may be said to be crucial. *The Chess Game*, *Paradise*, *Young Man and Girl in Spring*, *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, and *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors* are the only works from this period that show men and women together.³⁷ Each of these intersections represents a “symptom-solution” to the problem or the conflict that we can understand, since Freud at least, as the fundamental human conflict and that we can consequently give a name to by borrowing from the most commonplace psychoanalytic literature: Oedipus complex, castration, sexual difference. Nothing is more banal than to find these in Duchamp just as we can in everyone: they don’t make of Duchamp a neurotic, nor an artist, for that matter. Let us put neurosis to one side and concentrate on art: we already know that the series *man* substitutes for the *painter* and that it passes through all the successive identificatory images by which Duchamp constitutes the unstable identity of his *pictorial self*; and we also know that the series *woman* substitutes for *painting*. Certainly *Paradise*—painted at the same moment that he begins *Sonata*—is a poor work, closer to the “symptom” than to the “solution.” It represents Dr. Dumouchel nude, hiding his sexual parts with his hands from the apparently eager glances of a nude, crouching woman. There is no need to insist on the desire to be desired that is invested in this painting, or on the castration anxiety that it demonstrates. It seems to me more interesting to note that this painting will be turned around twice, front to back and top to bottom, when, a year and a half later, Duchamp paints *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* on its back side.³⁸ This should already indicate to the spectator who would have the curiosity to pass “to the other side

of the glass" that a major reversal has occurred that gives a new complexity to the locating of the "man who suffers" behind the "mind which creates."

The five works in which the masculine series and the feminine series intersect are, I believe, sufficiently charged and sufficiently rare in the work of this moment to give each one a special worth as a statement of the manner in which Duchamp imagines the solution to his marriage with painting. And this solution implies the resolution of a typical sort of oedipal conflict. Bluntly put: kill the father (Cézanne), marry the mother (painting as it will be after Cézanne).

If there is an "incest taboo" somewhere at work in Duchamp, it can only be here. It is not impossible that it moved, through metonymic contiguity, alongside Marcel's adolescent desire for his younger sister, but let us leave that out of the question here. What matters is the metaphorical leap that brings it to the pictorial destiny of the artist. Only here is this taboo significant. It implies for the moment a symbolic father, Cézanne, who bars the young Marcel from access to an imaginary mother, painting, by seeming to offer him—in the pressing context of the avant-gardes of the period—no other path by which to realize himself as a painter than that of undergoing, and then assimilating, Cézanne's influence by transgressing it. If this chain of associations is correct, one can slide from the paternal series to the maternal series by nothing more than synecdoche, substituting the author for the work; "Cézanne" for the "painting" to which Duchamp aspires. The metaphorical leap woman/painting by which the subject jumps the bar (of incest) has not yet happened.

It is not enough to localize this leap at the point of intersection between the masculine series and the feminine one, since the two series slide into each other through a process of displacement; it is this displacement, I believe, that took place in *The Chess Game*. The gaze moves without interruption from the group of brothers in the rear to the group of wives in the foreground, as if it glided effortlessly from the horizontal and Albertian surface of the chessboard to the Cézannean surface of the tablecloth of the second table, pulled parallel to the picture plane as in Cézanne's still lifes. The background itself, smeared with a green that generates so little space, helps this contiguity. Cézanne, the repressed name-of-the-pictorial-father who is making a return in the figure of the brothers, can now, but at the cost of a significant misrecognition, move to the foreground of the painting, carried by a signifying chain that it is no longer enough to call feminine but that must now be specified as maternal. In Duchamp's signifying economy, this maternal chain is that of the spouses, the *brides*. By metonymy, it substitutes itself for the chain of paternal identifications that had first been displaced from *Portrait of the Artist's Father* to the portrait of the two brothers in *The Chess Game*. And the mother/brides now find themselves unconsciously invested with the same paternal authority: it is these women who, from this point on, will be the depositories of the Cézanne-law and who will incarnate a pictorial interdiction that is to be transgressed but an interdiction that, as such, remains

totally misunderstood. If it is true that the Oedipus complex's censure vis-à-vis Cézanne organizes a displacement in Duchamp from the paternal function to the figure of the mother, the consequence of this is that the incest taboo—if there is this taboo—must take on a very special aspect: logically, the maternal figure will be a condensation of both the “father to kill” and the “mother to marry.” Indeed, this seems well confirmed by an aphorism from 1922: “An incesticide must sleep with his mother before killing her.”³⁹

Nonetheless, Schwarz's hypothesis, as we well know, deals not with the incest of filiation but with the incest of consanguinity. It is the sister and not the mother who would be struck with interdiction. We thus have to reach one last displacement, one last transfer of authority along the feminine series, a passing of power from the mother to the daughters, to the sisters. And, to verify this, we go back to *Sonata*.

Sonata was begun in January of 1911 and finished in September. Once again, the scene was familial and ritualistic: family music on the occasion of the family holiday par excellence of the Duchamps: New Year's. Mme. Duchamp dominates the scene, Yvonne is at the piano, Magdeleine is playing the violin, and Suzanne, pensive and somewhat distracted, is thinking. The character of the mother immediately strikes us, not only because of the dominating, authoritative, and protective position that she occupies in the composition, but especially because of the hardness of her features. Nowhere else in the painting—and certainly not in the faces of the sisters—does Duchamp use the black stroke as he does in the face of his mother. It is even highly astonishing to realize that he could be satisfied with such a pictorial brutality in a painting that was generally so delicate and that had been so worked over. There must have been here some incapacity to do otherwise, and this incapacity must have nothing to do with technical competence. During his whole life, Duchamp provided only one image of his mother and here it is, just as he gave us only one portrait of his father, in 1910. But whereas the father showed a serene and quite successfully painted face, the face of the mother in *Sonata* betrays a torment that is not hers but that of her painter-son. Duchamp avoids confronting the problem of resemblance in the portrait of his mother's face, whereas he had not hesitated to tackle resemblance head on when he painted his father's face. One might answer that the “cubist” handling of the painting—a premiere for Duchamp—might have had something to do with this. And in fact, if Cubism intervenes in the reworking of this painting, sometime between January and September, it is perhaps already as an evasion. But that does not free us from seeing that the “Cubism” that handles the face of the sisters—and especially of Suzanne, who is the least *tattered*—is not of the same sort as that which figures/disfigures the face of the mother. Even with the utmost prudence, we cannot fail to see that Duchamp gives us here a pictorial lapsus that carries the marks of an obvious conflict of ambivalence.

The oedipal conflict that should have been inscribed in *The Portrait of the Artist's Father* has been displaced onto the portrait of the mother, who from now on will be the bearer of the legitimacy of the Cézannean tradition. Like Gaston and Raymond, Mme. Duchamp was well placed in a double lineage, both familial and pictorial, to be predisposed toward this role: daughter of the painter and etcher Emile Frédéric Nicolle (and note the feminine patronym of the maternal grandfather), Lucie Duchamp, who had "a nice crayon stroke inherited from her father," took up drawing, it would seem, during the spring of 1909 in Veules, working together with her son Marcel.⁴⁰ Her own portrait in *Sonata* is not without resemblance to Cézanne's *Woman with a Coffee Pot*. We find in both the same aggressiveness and the same misogyny, and we are reminded of the sessions of sadistic posing that Cézanne imposed on his wife, her face trapped between two boards so that she would not move anymore than an apple.

Duchamp spared his sisters the sadistic treatment that he inflicted on his mother. And yet, it would be the sisters—Suzanne excepted—who would soon be submitted to a "cubist dislocation" with *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters*. From *Sonata* to this latter painting, a new displacement took place, one that authorizes this tattering. First of all, it is possible that Cubism served here as a sort of alibi: under the shelter of this new style that he has adopted, Duchamp can give free rein to his pictorial sadism. It is as if the censorship, caught up with the Cézannean name-of-the-father, loosens up to release an aggressivity directed against Cézanne, but an authorized aggressivity, since it makes use of a style that does not hide its debt to Cézanne. It is with a single move that Duchamp enters into Cubism and seeks to escape it—or, as we might put it, that he approaches and misrecognizes the truth-function that was at work in his ambivalent relationship with Cézanne. Yet this misrecognition has a structure: it camouflages on the iconographic level an initiation that took place at an unconscious pictorial level. As was revealed in our "preliminary narrative," it is curious that Duchamp was initiated into Cubism by means of four paintings of women. This investment in the feminine figure was so little a part of cubist orthodoxy that it must betray other subjective interests, whose significance in the desiring economy of Duchamp-the-painter is now beginning to become apparent.

Sonata was thus begun in January 1911 and touched up in September. It would be interesting to know the role of Cubism in this touching up: at what degree of completion was the painting when Cubism began to mix in with it? A spectrographic analysis could no doubt help us answer such a question, but in its absence we can only speculate and note that before September, Duchamp's work did not show the slightest trace of Cubism. This lets us imagine that in January he was not yet thinking about Cubism and that the unfinished *Sonata* should be seen as part of his symbolist preoccupations of the moment, such as they appear in *Paradise*, *Baptism*, and *The Bush*, all of which were done around the start of the year in 1911. Now, *Baptism* and *The Bush* represent a ritual initiation scene between

women, a sort of pact that is linking an older woman to a young girl. Evoking birth, the title *Baptism* underlines, moreover, the mother-daughter link, so that the two women easily find their place in the signifying chains, respectively, of the *bride* or the *mother* and of the *virgin* or the *sister*.

How can we interpret this pact? Ethnologists have told us again and again that the prohibition of incest had two forms: a negative one, which focused on the mother and prohibited a violation of the chain of filiation, and a positive one, which focused on the sister and imposed exchange and exogamy.⁴¹ It follows from this that the transgression of the prohibition of incest would also have two forms: marrying the mother or not giving the sister in marriage.

The Bush perhaps betrays the following wish: to establish such a link between the women of a same lineage that exogamy becomes impossible. The mysterious pact linking the two women in *The Bush* and in *Baptism* would be something like a promise made by the youngest to the oldest never to leave the family, never to get married, to remain a *virgin*. For the sake of making the story palatable, we might go so far as to suggest that Duchamp unconsciously engaged in the following "reasoning": I want to marry the mother—that is, painting, or, more precisely, Cézannean painting; to become the painter that I desire to be and for whom Cézanne provides the model, I must assimilate Cézanne and transgress him, and produce a pictorial novelty that must be significant with regard to his painting. But that is impossible for me; the heritage is too heavy to bear; the paternal model is too powerful. As soon as I touch the mother in painting, as I am taking the risk of doing in *Sonata*, I am paralyzed. If at least this interdiction could be expressed in an attenuated and anodyne form, and if at least its transgression could pass unnoticed and would not bear any menace, I would be saved and I could satisfy my desire without fear. The solution is that I must keep my sister for myself. Without going beyond the prohibition of maternal incest, I will nevertheless transgress the positive consequence, the obligation of exogamy. But what is true for my sister is also true for me: if she must remain a *virgin*, I must remain a *bachelor*. Quick, I need to paint this imaginary solution by giving it the form of a symbolic pact. Under the protection of *The Bush* and of *Baptism*, I am once again authorized to paint, to give free rein to my desire to be Cézanne without having to brush up against his law. I only have one thing to fear: not a punishment from my mother or my father, but the possibility that my sister will get married. The pact would be broken, and my imaginary solution would no longer work. I would have to start all over again.

In this obviously invented form, this unconscious "reasoning" nonetheless finds some support in the pictorial and biographical reality of the moment. Let us look for a moment at *Young Man and Girl in Spring*, painted in the first months of 1911—that is, after *The Bush*, *Baptism*, and the unfinished version of *Sonata*, and before the intervention of Cubism into this latter work—and offered as a wedding gift to Suzanne on 24 August. All the evidence suggests that, here

again, this painting serves as the fulfillment of a wish: that the young man and the girl—the bachelor and his virgin sister—not be disunited, that an exogamous marriage not break the pact, or, at least, that the marriage not count! *Young Man and Girl in Spring* has the value of a denial. Painted when Suzanne was already engaged and under the threat of her imminent marriage, it disavows the existence of the brother-in-law by inscribing Marcel into the painting as the go-between for the marriage: if I cannot avoid my sister's getting married, let me at least make sure that I am the one who has wanted this marriage! It is the structure of the painting and, in particular, the presence of the strange circular motif in the center that argues for this interpretation. Critics have seen all sorts of symbolism—especially alchemical—here, but some have also seen a glass ball. Schwarz reads it as a mercurial still, while Calvesi sees in it a reminiscence of Bosch's *Garden of Delights*.⁴² If I were to play the game of references, I would see its source in Van Eyck. If it is true that *Young Man and Girl in Spring* at once anticipatively commemorates and wards off a marriage, it would not be surprising to find that it was inspired more or less by the most famous painting of this genre, *The Wedding of the Arnolfinis*. Here, just as in Duchamp's painting, we see husband and wife standing on either side of a bulging mirror that reflects the whole scene, including the painter himself (accompanied by an unidentified figure that is probably female).

When it comes to painting, it is the painter who presides over the wedding ceremony, whether in Van Eyck or in Duchamp. I would not dare try to identify the figure (or figures) that we can sense in the "mirror" (or the "Kodak lens"?) of the center. But I would go so far as to suggest that here Duchamp the painter portrays himself as the go-between in the dreaded wedding of his sister-in-painting with his rival and alter ego, Charles Desmarest. Perhaps this Desmarest, who could be read as "D. Mar.," Duchamp Marcel, carries a supplementary disavowal, another alibi that aided Marcel in accepting Suzanne's wedding: her marriage would not count if the brother-in-law was named D. Mar., since then the beloved sister would not be leaving the family.

From denial to denial, from imaginary solution to imaginary solution, it was not possible, after all, for Duchamp to have prevented the reality principle from reminding him of its presence much longer: the wedding took place on 24 August and, as a last wish, last demand, Marcel offered the painting to Suzanne.⁴³ The fragile equilibrium of his defenses against his Oedipus complex vis-à-vis Cézanne broke and was as quickly reconstituted in a new form: this would be the entrance into Cubism, the retouching up of *Sonata*, the sadistic vengeance on Yvonne and Magdeleine, and, finally, the distanced relief of *Apropos of Young Sister*.

We can begin to understand why Duchamp's Cubism was so uncubist; why his "Cubism" was an alibi that allowed a shelter in which Duchamp could perpetrate the "murder" of the Cézannean father with all the benediction of a painting

movement that claimed continuity with the master; why his feelings for Cubism were ambivalent to such a degree that he simultaneously desired to become a Cubist and to cease to be one; and why his initiation into Cubism necessarily passed through the tattering of his sisters.

It remains to be understood why he spares Suzanne; this is not very mysterious, provided that we understand Schwarz's hypothesis against Schwarz's own understanding of it. I took the risk, in the preceding pages, of a perilous exercise that might bear too much resemblance to a doubtful "psychoanalysis of the author." And I led up to 24 August 1911, to the wedding of Suzanne, in which, like Schwarz, I saw an "important event that triggered in him a blossoming of his own personality and a sharp acceleration of his individuation process."⁴⁴

In starting the "preliminary narrative" with this same event, I was saying the same thing. It was necessary to concentrate, even if only for a short time, on the individuation of the "man who suffers" in order to better understand that of the "mind which creates," even if it is understood that only the latter will interest the aesthete and the art historian. But this process of individuation should be granted no more reality in the life of the "man who suffers" than in the pictorial adventure of the "mind which creates." The one and the other are both on the level of the Imaginary. And it is in the Imaginary—in the series of images that the painter produces and in the correlative series of identifications that is projected there—that this process of individuation is constituted. That it should enlist father, mother, brothers, and sisters is not at all surprising. The important thing is not that a dubious "psychoanalysis" enlists them in turn, since it hands back to the resonance of the "mind which creates" everything that it took from the work and life of the "man who suffers," but that, in the final account, it allows us to see something of the pictorial destiny of an artist who would change the course of history. And the most important thing now will be to not remain stuck at the level of this Imaginary but to pass from there to the Symbolic. I insist that this is not just an operation of the theorist reading things after the fact; it is an operation engaged in by Duchamp himself. Despite all appearances, I am not engaging in applied psychoanalysis but am pursuing the parallelism of two truth-functions. The one that revealed a certain destiny of painting in our century passed through both *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* and the lived, irreversible becoming-painter of a man who wondered and searched for himself. It was in this canvas that the prohibition of incest—*pas soeur!*—took on its sense for the passer. It was here that there took place what I referred to earlier as the metaphorical leap between woman and painting. This does not mean that painting had not been for Marcel, from the moment of childhood, no doubt, a metaphor for woman, nor that woman had not, from adolescence certainly, been a metaphor for painting. This does mean that we have to wait for *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* to see this reversible metaphor cease being reabsorbed in

the Imaginary and come to impose a new sense on the historical irreversibility of the avant-gardes.

At the level of the personal Imaginary, this process remains a lure, which is the very definition of individuation. There wanders Duchamp's ego: from the father to the brothers, from the brothers to the brides and to the mother, and from the mother to the sisters, until this ego comes up trembling before the name of Suzanne in August 1911 and "decides" to start the circuit over again: from the sisters in tatters to the multiplied chess-playing brothers, from the sad young man to the king and queen, until the ego stops in August 1912 and trembles again, at the threshold of a *passage* where it is dismembered and faints. Exit the ego; up surges the "I," which has nothing to do with any sort of individuation. To become a painter was not to become oneself: not to be identified or to cease to be identified with Cézanne or with anyone else but, rather, to let the subject pass, even if for only a brief moment, through the incestuous bar of a lacking *i* and to metaphorize a *woman to be hanged* into a *painted woman* or to metamorphose a *woman to be painted* into a *hanged female*.

It is thus necessary to wait for Munich to find the symbolic surging up in its truth-function. But we are not at that point yet, and we have not yet understood why, a year before Munich, Duchamp spared Suzanne while he fragmented Yvonne and Magdeleine. In other words, we have not yet reached the grain of truth that there is in Schwarz's hypothesis, albeit read against Schwarz. Here, the theorist must go ahead of Duchamp a bit and make the surging up of the Symbolic—the *pas soeur!*—in *The Passage* retroact onto the stake of his imaginary identifications while he was painting *Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters* and *Apropos of Young Sister*. Duchamp did not spare Suzanne because he desired her or because he was in love with her "in real life." Duchamp spared her because a repressed signifier led him through the complication of his imaginary identifications to move closer and closer to the "law of the father," which he must misconstrue at all costs. Who would be surprised to learn that this signifier was the name-of-the-father, not *Duchamp*, the name graciously left to him by his brothers, but the name of his historical and pictorial father, *Cézanne*. *Cézanne/Suzanne*, of course! It is the excessive proximity of the two names that rendered Suzanne untouchable. She was Marcel's preferred model, but only for sketches, studies, preliminary outlines—in short, for a painting in its *virgin* state. To paint Suzanne would be to marry her and take an intolerable chance: the chance that all the protections that censorship had mobilized around the name of Cézanne by displacing it through the familial syntagms would fall apart, and that, at the very moment where the circuit of the Imaginary closed onto itself, the Symbolic would come to make an undesirable entrance on the scene and bring the man becoming a painter back to the order of its law.

Duchamp would confront this irruption of the Symbolic in August 1912 in Munich, when the transgressor would transgress the *pas soeur!* In August 1911,

in Rouen, when Suzanne actually passed *from virgin to bride*, Duchamp was not yet ready for this confrontation; at the most, he was prepared to paint *Apropos of Young Sister*. For one more year, she would remain a virgin in the painting, until Marcel would decide to paint *apropos of myself*.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Interlude

We have arrived at a point where the heuristic parallel between Duchamp's Munich painting and Freud's injection dream takes on the surprising aspect of a fortuitous analogy, and of the most direct sort. But what is not fortuitous, and what justifies our moving from analogy to direct parallelism, is the certainty that, from one field to another, an equivalent "truth-function" has been at work.

In turn, this equivalence derives from a preliminary presupposition: namely, that where it is aesthetically strongest and where it is most historically fruitful, the work of art is self-analytic.

Only renewed acquaintance with aesthetic experience allows for such a presupposition, which it is virtually impossible to convert into a scientific certitude. This is why I must admit that it functions as an a priori postulate, since it is a hypothesis that underlies the whole of this study and therefore cannot be rejected from within this study. Is this to give credit to psychoanalytic theory beyond mere method (something that I refused to do earlier when I introduced the whole problem)? Is this to go beyond the limits of a heuristic parallel and to assert uncritically that psychoanalysis is pertinent to the artistic field? I do not believe so. On the one hand, a study like this would be quite impossible without an initial prejudice, on my part, in favor of psychoanalysis, and I would be highly naive, in taking precautions vis-à-vis applied psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic aesthetics, if I really believed that I could maintain an attitude of absolute neutrality, free of all approval or criticism, vis-à-vis psychoanalytic doctrine. But my favorable prejudice may express no more than the contingencies of our history and the ways in which they represent, in truth and in error, the *episteme* of our epoch.

Even if today we are beginning to see the historical limits of the Freudian science, it is an epistemological fact that our epoch still thinks and speaks with Freudian concepts. What will come of this science can be judged only by those who work within it and refer to their own clinical experience. As for myself, I can do no more than declare my allegiance to the epistemological apparatus of our time, which psychoanalysis and its vocabulary, concepts, and mode of thinking have infiltrated from all sides.

On the other hand, the presupposition that the work of art is self-analytic justifiably belongs to what I called the "breaching" of the Freudian corpus. Freud never adhered to this presupposition, at least not clearly, and for some good reasons: where his writings on art are most promising for aesthetics (and in such cases they are usually also most promising for psychoanalysis itself), they are so as part of the theoretical unconscious of Freud, if one can put it that way. This presupposition is a motive—or a *motif*—that Freud does not fully grasp and that he thus cannot fully thematize, but that pushes him continually to examine the artwork as a way of elaborating his theories or, more simply, of testing them. In contrast, when Freud engages in "applied psychoanalysis," or in a didactic exposition in which he illustrates his discoveries by means of works of art—as in the unfortunate text on "The Poet and His Relation to Daydreaming," where he argues the equivalence of the work of art and of the phantasm and presents the reductive hypothesis of the "incitement premium"—the full engagement with art is absent. Also absent—and this is significant—is the emotion that gives resonance to his most heuristic texts, in other words, those that his own self-analysis inspires.

As the Freudian moment, or even the immediate post-Freudian moment of theoretical elaboration, moved away from us with the passing of time, the hypothesis of the artwork as self-analysis became readable, quite naturally, as one outcome of the reception history of Freud's work. For that to happen, it was necessary that his self-analysis lose the aura that kept it enigmatic and productive to the extent of finding a prolongation in the work of his successors; it was necessary that it become a historical object in its own right. It is not up to aestheticians or art historians to judge the validity of this historical object, the "scientificity" of psychoanalysis, its "philosophical truth," or the extent to which it contains an "ideological" component. To venture into such criticism would itself be ideological. It is the job of art historians—since they are free in their thinking, but not in the conditions of their thinking, which are circumscribed, as for everyone, by the *episteme* of which they are part—to judge which, among all possible hypotheses or postulates, are those that in relation to analytic doctrine and its *de facto* place in the *episteme* are the most productive for their own field of knowledge.

Because I am not trying to be original, the kind of thought that inspires my study does not examine the transhistorical validity of analytic knowledge. It bases itself on a virtually philological fact: from one strong step to the next in the

theoretical production of psychoanalysis (to name only the most crucial ones, "Project for a Scientific Psychology," *Die Traumdeutung*, "On Narcissism," *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *The Ego and the Id*, *Inhibition: Symptom and Angst*), we see discontinuities, reworkings, and speculative advances in Freud's work that can best be explained by something other than a desire on his part for a compatibility between a particular theoretical formulation and new or more complex facts that the theory must work to integrate. They can be explained only in terms of the continual reference of Freud to his self-analysis, a reference that he must have felt all the more authorized to exploit, given that transference was gaining an increasing conceptual importance in his practice as well as in his theory.

Whatever the future of the specifically scientific gains of psychoanalysis, it is a fact today that psychoanalysis owes the essential aspects of its dynamism and of its internal development to the privileged place that Freud granted, without thematizing it too much, to his self-analysis.

The parallel with the epistemological function of the work of art is striking. We do not ask the work of art to provide us with verifiable knowledge, as we do with a work of science. It is undeniable, however, that it contributes something to knowledge. Where can this something come from, and what is the field in which it deploys its efficiency? Partisans of an essentialist conception of art can all easily agree, I suppose, with the postulate of self-analysis. In this they see the proof that great artists reveal in their work a truth concerning the essence of art, always linked with the essence of Man, that is to say, with the hypostasis of an eternal humanity that the work of art never ceases to reveal. And certainly, for many people today, Man is defined in light of Freud. But this is obviously not the approach I take in this study: in my view, that which the work of art contributes to knowledge does not come from "Man" and does not refer to "Man" as if this were intemporal: that sort of knowledge offered by the work of art is as fully historical as is Man according to Freud. In this sense, it is part of the epistemological framework but sometimes goes beyond it, not because it transcends the historical state of thought to move toward an Absolute, but because it works for its transformation. That certain works stay in force or seem to stay in force (they become "classics," which implies that they participate in a becoming) has to do with the fact that history is not only action but also memory: as with any memory, it is vulnerable to lacunae and so bears a virtually unlimited potential for reactualization.

The adherents of an epiphenomenal conception of art—for example, Marxist aestheticians, for whom art has its place in the superstructure, a place that is always determined, even if in the last instance, by the economy—are rarely open to the postulate of self-analysis, either simply smirking about it, or relegating the fact and all of its consequences to the category of ideology. For them, either self-analysis does not really exist, and the work of art has no truth-function and of-

fers, at worst, nothing but soothing ornament or, at best, an expression of the class interests and conflicts that constitute social reality; or self-analysis exists, but in the way that illusions exist—as nothing more than a historically determined avatar of the bourgeois ideology of art. Obviously, such a conception will also not be promoted here: incurably deterministic, it cannot accept that, in the work of art, the self-analytic moment is also the creative moment. If it allows that artists believe that they are engaging in something like a self-analysis in their work, its determinism prohibits it from imagining that a “truth-effect,” which would not be contained in its original premises, could arise out of art.

An analogous determinism, incidentally, mars many of the aesthetic analyses conducted within the framework of applied psychoanalysis. All too often, they make of artists the simple toy of their unconscious, conceived of as an ultimate hidden causality that irrevocably pushes their work in one direction or another. If artistic production can seem to be explained by such an approach, artistic creation can find no place within this explicative system.

The self-analysis hypothesis, for its part, does not totally deny the determinations that surround the work of art, but it privileges the creative breakthrough, the “moment” of significant newness in which it locates the truth-function of the artwork. This is so because, first of all, it does not understand the word *determine* in the Jansenist manner of those who reduce the work of art to the effect of historical or biographical causalities. For the self-analysis hypothesis, the creative work is neither ideological nor symptomatic, and its “determinations” are not causes but, as the word indicates, delimitations, the fully affirmative specification of its a priori field of possibilities. It is only in relation to such a field that the work of art connects up to those rare moments that are the only really creative ones, those moments when the work revulses subjective causality—the pulsional destiny, to speak like Szondi as much as like Freud—of its author and reveals itself to him or her as well as to us. This “revelation” has nothing to do with a gain in consciousness; it is the manner by which the artwork—sometimes in spite of what the artist consciously knows or wants—takes upon itself the conditions (which are historical and personal *and* specifically aesthetic) of its becoming and to which the artist acquiesces, most frequently, after the fact. It is not incorrect to say, in the manner of phenomenological aesthetics, that the work of art is intentional, but it is an intentionality that only takes its meaning from a retroactive flash: that’s what it was!

This punctual event of revelation/revulsion is certainly the “site” or the “moment” (and these two expressions are equally inadequate) at which the truth-function of the artwork operates, and it is through it that the work of art contributes something new to knowledge. And this knowledge is effectively a recognition (that’s what it was!) but of a sort that neither the determinism of the Marxist aestheticians nor the platonic metaphysics of the essentialist aestheticians is capable of accounting for, since it has nothing to do with reminiscence or

avowal. What the artist (or the spectator) “recognizes” in the artwork is precisely its radical newness, that which makes it new right to the core. Moreover, this knowledge-recognition can just as well remain a misrecognition, as we saw with Duchamp, who even in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* continued to misconstrue the ambivalent connection to Cézanne/Suzanne that was revealed and revulsed there.

We see that the truth-function of art does not consist of bringing a truth or a content of knowledge to the point of its thematization; but, quite differently, that it brings itself to the point of a nomination, where that which it names is nothing other than its naming function. We can now understand why the hypothesis of art as self-analysis had so much resonance in relation to the Lacanian theory of the Symbolic, as we already saw with *The Passage* and as we will analyze more extensively later. The hypothesis, quite simply, is congruent with a certain contemporary state of the breaching of Freud represented by Lacan.

But it does not come from this breaching. It seems to me today that it comes from the fact of being the best, if not the only, hypothesis for linking truth and creation. The sort of knowledge that art provides is practical, in that it produces artifacts that are added to the productions of human labor and that provide a signifying function there. But it is not reduced to this productive and accumulative aspect that art shares with technique. Nor is it reduced to philosophical knowledge, which is speculative and, in any case, conceptual, something that art never is, even when it bears the title “conceptual art.” Finally, the knowledge that art provides is without connection to scientific knowledge, even to that knowledge in what we call the human sciences, since the necessity for proof is foreign to art. Artistic knowledge is, above all else, imaginative, or imagining, or imaging; in short, it emerges out of what Lacan calls the Imaginary. But at this level, it is of the same order as the fantasy, the dream, or the daydream; it engenders fictions that certainly have their own stimulating function for culture but that by their very nature are freed of the tests of reality. The Imaginary can account for creation, but by itself it can never reach that which links truth and creation—because truth must be concerned with something, a Real, even if it is only the desire that people have for truth. It is only in and through the Symbolic—and in the artist, the Symbolic is always the utterance of an unforeseen sign—that the Imaginary provides the conditions for its communicational emergence and that the image or the dream that the artwork concretizes in a produced artifact “speaks” at the cost of endless misunderstanding.

Let us take up the question again: this something that the artwork contributes to knowledge, where does it come from, and where does it display its efficiency? To answer that it comes from the self-analysis in which artists engage in their work does not have much meaning. This self-analysis is only the condition by which artistic knowledge sees the light of day. To answer that it comes, by means of the self-analysis, from the “depths of the unconscious” is scarcely more sat-

isfying: this answer would lead us to give substance to the unconscious and see it as a reservoir of hidden meaning, the source or the cause of a knowledge of the self that is unaware of itself. To answer that this something is nothing other than the work of the unconscious raises a whole number of subsidiary problems (for example, that of knowing if we have to give priority in art to the "freedom" of the primary processes or, on the contrary, to the "connections" of the secondary processes), but above all else it leaves unanswered the question, "Where does it come from?"

It is here that we have to examine, as a possible model, Freud's self-analysis, the only powerful historical example of a self-analysis that was productive of knowledge. And we have to begin by noting those aspects that place the self-referential knowledge of the Freudian approach in complete contrast to Wundt's introspection. When Freud writes to his friend Fliess that he has found his tyrant, and that the tyrant's name is psychology, it is clear that his tyrant does not order him, as happened with Wundt in his *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, to found an objective science of the subject. Ready to engage in the writing of the "Project for a Scientific Psychology," with all that this text implies about any hope of linking psychology to neurophysiology, Freud already knows—since he has already published the *Studies on Hysteria* with Breuer—that the psychological tyrant was imposed on him by his clinical experience. And the two ambitions that are devouring him—these are the very words he uses in this letter to Fliess—are "to examine what shape the theory of mental functioning takes if one introduces quantitative considerations, a sort of economics of nerve force; and, second, to peel off from psychopathology, a gain for normal psychology."¹

Wundt could have agreed with the first ambition but never with the second one. For him, the very admission of this sort of theoretical continuity between the normal and the pathological would, by itself, have been enough to invalidate the supposed objectivity of introspection: in such conditions, how could one ensure that the observation of the self by the self would not lead to a theory that was itself pathological? And yet, this sort of continuity was the necessary premise for the very possibility of a self-analysis by anyone who had the ambition "to examine what shape the theory of mental functioning takes": healthy subjects have something of the pathological in them—something of the abnormal, the anomalous—and this pathological "something" knows more about mental functioning than healthy subjects—for example, the subjects of theory—know about themselves. This was the primary intuition that founded the very possibility of self-analysis and even rendered it necessary. Self-analysis is, if one wants to put it this way, a form of introspection, but one without any reflexive illusion or illusion of transparency. The genius of Freud was that he let himself be guided systematically, not only in his clinical observations but also in his observations of himself, by his own resistances. Given this, what did he discover? The fact of resistance. Just as, with the dream of Irma's injection, when the interpretation

reveals to him that the dream has uncovered a wish of his daytime activities as therapist and theorist, what is the primary lesson that he draws from this? That a dream is the fulfillment of a desire.²

We could endlessly multiply the examples where Freud extracts a positive knowledge from each point of obscurity—of which he notes in himself, as in his patients, that it opposes a momentarily irreducible opacity to the clinical and theoretical interpretation—a positive knowledge, which is as follows: this opacity is significant in itself, independently of whatever it is hiding. Of course, Freud's work does not stop here: a signifying obstacle always serves for him as a clue that indicates a further path to follow. But even when he has embarked on this path, the clue continues nonetheless to remind him of its function as an indication. This is the very singular self-referential force of the Freudian approach. Lacan has shown how closely related it is to Cartesian doubt.³ Everything—the illusions of the senses, a misleading God, dreams—can make me doubt everything, except the fact that I am doubting. And *by virtue of the fact that I doubt, I am sure that I think; by virtue of thinking, I am*, to use the reformulation that Lacan has provided of the Cartesian *cogito*. “In a precisely similar way, Freud, when he doubts—for they are *his* dreams, and it is he who, at the outset, doubts—is assured that a thought is there, which is unconscious, which means that it reveals itself as absent. As soon as he comes to deal with others, it is to this place that he summons the *I think* through which the subject will reveal himself. In short, he is sure that this thought is there alone with all its *I am*, if I may put it like this, provided, and this is the leap, someone thinks in his place.”⁴ Here the analogy stops, and “the dissymmetry between Freud and Descartes is revealed.” For the moment, we will draw from this a conclusion that is quite close to Lacan's: the subject that is revealed in its missing place in the Freudian *cogito*, and that is the same as the one that the self-referential scansion of the self-analysis shows emerging in all the intensity of its “truth-function,” is not itself a subject of truth, but a subject of certitude.

Although there is no question here of applying the model of Freudian self-analysis to artistic self-analysis, we should note how a conclusion of the first model is perfectly applicable to the second. The famous example of “Cézanne's doubt”—to use Merleau-Ponty's apt phrase—comes to mind. Ceaselessly, Cézanne doubted his own perception (in the specific sense of a being-in-the-world entirely focused on the act of looking), and ceaselessly this doubt gave him the certitude that his canvases reveal to us. The point is not to declare that Cézanne's “vision” was *true*: since painting has never been the simple transposition of a vision, Cézanne's perception is neither more nor less true *in painting* than was the perspectival coding in painting before Cézanne. But his perception is certain, certain and necessary, certain of the legitimacy of the doubt that this “vision,” this painting, necessitated. It was only at the end of his life and after he had been doubting for so long (“Will I ever reach an end that I have so long

looked for and so long pursued?") that Cézanne sent to Emile Mâle a famous phrase: "I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you." It is the subject of certitude that pronounces this phrase, and it speaks of truth. Certitude and truth connect to each other in that region where the self-referentiality of pictorial practice, which is also a practice of one's life, becomes a revulsion-revelation: "Although it is *certain* that a man's life does not explain his work, it is equally *certain* that the two are connected. The *truth* is that this work to be done required this life."⁵

Once again, where does it come from, this something that the work of art contributes to knowledge, this radically new "that's what it was!"? From itself. It is *sui generis*. This does not at all mean that it has no cause—in the life of the artist, for example—but that it has no other "origin" than the pivot around which subjective causality is revulsed and by means of which artistic self-referentiality reveals itself to be a self-analysis. "Well," Lacan says, "it is at this point that I am trying to make you see by approximation that the Freudian unconscious is situated at this point where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong."⁶

It is only a figure of speech to "situate" the unconscious at this point of a "something wrong," and it will only be a figure of speech for me—but one that has its own importance, since it avoids giving substance to the unconscious—to situate in the same place the "origin" of this something that the work of art contributes to knowledge. To go from there to the level of aesthetic theory, we must understand that saying the work of art is self-analytic is also nothing other than a figure of speech and that it in no way implies that I am endorsing the mythology that the artist engages in a sort of cure without the aid of an analyst. The two orders of experience are equivalent *at this point only*. At the same time, this figure of speech explains why the heuristic parallelism that I continue to maintain does not import analytic doctrine into the field of aesthetics in any improper way: the very point where Lacan "situates" the unconscious is the point where my parallels touch, is their vanishing point.

The second part of the question remains: where does this something that the work of art brings to the order of knowledge display its efficiency? Here, the parallels clearly separate, and we come back to a region that, even if subjective, is only that of the aesthetician or the art historian. But the specific sort of aesthetic problem posed here nevertheless owes much to that which the postulate of the artwork as self-analysis allows. Because it is still a question of understanding artistic creation in contrast to artistic production—in short, justifying on a theoretical level that which every artist and art lover knows is the most precious quality of art: its indeterminacy.

Let us begin by rejoicing in the fact that the thesis of the "something wrong" lets the aesthetician get rid of all those aesthetic theories in which interpreting means attaching an effect to its cause or to its causes. Whether these theories are

inspired by Freud—the work of art being the “effect” with a cause of a biographical sort—or by Marx—in this case, the cause is infrastructural—or whether they combine these two models, these aesthetic theories, as I have already said, are incurably deterministic: the fact of creation is simply ignored, and the concept itself is effaced. It is enough to note the fate, for the Freudians as well as for the Marxists, of overdetermination, to note that it functions magically, rushed in to fill up with a single word a gap that, as aestheticians, they cannot really prevent themselves from recognizing and admitting. What a difference there is with Freud’s use of the notion of overdetermination (which is nonetheless deterministic in its own particular way, as is any good scientific approach), a use that locates the “navel of the dream”—a nice image of the “something wrong” or of the dream’s vanishing point—right in the very spot of its maximal overdetermination.

Let us now ask this: if the work of art establishes its own certitude and its own truth-function, “at that point where, between cause and that which it affects, there is always something wrong,” what allows it to constitute a knowledge beyond the seemingly impossible geometry of this solipsistic point? What allows its self-referentiality to be fruitful and not fall back onto the most limiting of tautologies? Or, to refer to the Lacanian theory of the Symbolic, what allows a signifier with no other signification than its own quality of being a signifier, or a nomination that names no more than its naming function, to grip us for more than a moment without boring us? The answer is not that this punctual upsurging of revelation fascinates us in itself. Neither the byzantine taste of a certain conceptual art for tautology and self-referentiality nor the equally byzantine tendency of certain epigones of Lacan to want to make the signifier into a substance of sorts will convince me that knowledge can emerge from such a hypnotic fascination. The answer must be of a completely different kind; it will be a quite simple one if we make use of all the theoretical consequences of our preceding discussion. The artwork’s self-referential pointing is not self-contained; it leads us, without our even realizing it, into a process of interpretation that we may well misconstrue if we theorize it as a causal link, since, in fact, it has nothing to do with cause or effect.⁷

The type of knowledge that the work of art encourages—and this is true both of the simple amateur who is not looking for a thematizable knowledge and a fortiori of the aesthetician-art historian who is looking for it—leaps by the same token before cause and beyond effect: before cause, since it moves toward the conditions behind cause, and beyond effect, since it moves toward its facticity, its very existence. A condition is less than a cause, a fact more than an effect. A condition does not determine an order of consequences; it delimits a field of possibilities. It does not force anything to happen; it does not permit everything; but it specifies what will be permitted, or, better yet, it will have specified what it permitted. The connections of the work of art to its “context,” to everything—

whether economic, social, ideological, personal—that puts pressure on the freedom of the artist, are evidently forces of this sort: they are not the connections of an effect to its causes but of a fact to its conditions. In conceiving of them in this way, we can easily understand the reality of artistic creation without in the least mythifying the freedom of the creator. Even better, we can reconcile the aesthete and the art historian: the former, who actually makes it a profession to be an amateur, no longer has to defend the historical irreducibility of aesthetic emotion and judgment (the supposed intemporality of the work of art) against the tendency of the latter to explain, by means of the movements and necessities of history, a work or a style whose coherence would seem to exist outside the control of the artist. Thus reconciled, the aesthete will remain open to innovation (without which, in modern art at least, there would be no aesthetic experience) and the art historian will be able to deal with significant innovation. The historian will deal with the work of art (which is overdetermined, if we understand this term to mean that when it comes into existence, *this* work is totally individualized—individualized in a way that the most deconstructive reading cannot undo) and connect it to its historical, social, ideological, stylistic, or personal conditions. A work is all the more significant historically when it leads a greater number of its own conditions of emergence—and the least obvious ones—to resonate. This is the knowledge that the work of art offers: the resonance of the conditions that permitted it and that one has to register and then interpret. This is also the efficacy of the work of art, its claim over the Real, no matter what the Marxists believe: in giving resonance to the historical conditions of its emergence, the work of art can sometimes change them.

Chapter 4

Revelations

It is now the moment to undertake an explicit point-by-point comparison of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* to the injection dream. With this work, which registers a passage that is accomplished in painting, Duchamp ceases to dream his becoming-painter. How does this painting show that pictorial practice, in its truth-function, has passed beyond the fulfillment of desire and reached that point of revulsion/revelation where it can merit the name “self-analysis”? This is our question. The field in which this practice is carried out is one in which, following from what I just argued on a theoretical level, artistic acts are pondered and their conditions resonate. For the moment, this field is still that of the cubist aesthetic in its connections to Cézanne. Finally, the question demands a methodology. This methodology is still that of heuristic parallel between art and dream, this art and this dream. Let us begin.

The Two Acmes

Lacan sees the injection dream organized around two culminations, two summits or two acmes, as he puts it. Here they are in Freud's text:

1. “She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish gray scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modeled on the turbinal bones of the nose.”

2. “. . . an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls . . . propionic acid

. . . trimethylamine (and I saw before me the formula for this printed in heavy type).’’¹

These two scenes have a revelatory quality with, as Lacan says, a strong resemblance to the image of *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*. He comments on them in this way:

1. “There is a terrible discovery here, that of the flesh that one never sees, the bottom of things, the reverse of the face, of the visage, secretions *par excellence*, the flesh out of which everything emerges from the very depths of mystery. . . . There is thus the agonizing apparition of an image that sums up what we can call the revelation of the Real in what is least penetrable in the Real, a Real without any possible mediation, the ultimate Real, an essential object that is no longer an object but this thing in the face of which all words stop and all categories fail, the object of anguish *par excellence*.’’

2. “Like an oracle, the formula gives no specific response to anything. But the very manner in which it is declared—its hermetic, enigmatic quality—is actually the response to the question of the meaning of the dream. We can compare it to the Islamic formula, There is no other God than God. There is no other word, no other solution to your problem, than the word. . . . There is no other word in the dream than the very nature of the Symbolic.’’²

From one scene to the other, Freud, who is interpreting his dream, goes from the revelation of the Real to that of the Symbolic, straddling the protean form of the Imaginary. The ensemble participates in this revulsion/revelation that we can recognize, after Freud and after Lacan, as a decisive “self-analytic moment”: “We do not need any more information about his self-analysis insofar as he makes many allusions to it in his letters to Fliess. He is living an agonizing situation with the feeling of making a dangerous discovery. The very meaning of the dream of Irma’s injection refers to the intensity of this experience. This dream includes this experience as one of its levels. This dream of Freud’s is, as dream, integrated into the movement of his discovery.’’³

Whether by coincidence or not, it so happens that Lacan’s commentary interprets word for word the experience of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*. It has been said repeatedly that *The Passage* is the strangest and most disturbing of Duchamp’s paintings from this period (and maybe of his whole career), the most *unheimlich* (uncanny) one. Like Irma’s throat in the dream, it shows a misshapen flesh, a broken-up figuration, a scarred body, the limits of an unnameable Real in the face of which words abdicate their power. But these words take force again—and this is the second acme of the dream, as of *The Passage*—at the point where the Symbolic surges up as such: “At the point where the hydra loses its heads, a voice that is no longer anything but *the voice of no one* makes the formula for the trimethylamine surge up, as the final word for what this is all about, the word for everything. And this word says nothing but that it is a word.’’⁴

With Duchamp, not even a word: a signifier, a division line, a slash. We have seen it surge up at the point of indecidability where the painting to be done is already the painting as said, this point of passage where the subject who "is no longer anything but the voice of no one" leaps over the division line and poses it at the same time as a distinctive trait: virgin/bride, *vierge/verge*, *peindre/prendre*, *passeur/pas soeur!*, Cézanne/Suzanne, so many approximate means of pointing through the words that circumscribe them to the trait that distinguishes them.

But, in the dream as in the painting, the Real and the Symbolic are not everything. There remains the role of the Imaginary, the role of the figurative. At the start of the dream is a crowd, "numerous guests," from which Freud immediately takes Irma aside. At the start of Duchamp's career, a group that is composed no less of "guests" who are no less familiar to him: the figures and styles out of which, after several detours, Duchamp will step to the side with the figure of painting which, like Irma for Freud, will be the object of his attentions: Cubism. It is nothing other, for Duchamp, than the authorization to tackle Cézanne only on the condition of sparing Suzanne. Duchamp, who does not engage in Cubism by invention, like Picasso, or by doctrine, like Gleizes and Metzinger, participates in it, from *The Chess Players* on, with a skeptical and ironic attitude that will lead him in the most contradictory way to propose to the cubist milieu a "non-cubist solution to the cubist impasse," *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*. Vis-à-vis those who represent cubist painting in the Parisian milieu, Duchamp has the same feeling of "healer" as Freud has vis-à-vis Irma: after the failure of *Nude* at the Indépendants, he can reproach them for "not yet having accepted his solution."

Moreover this "solution" has the same semantic ambiguity in Duchamp's pictorial practice as in Freud's dream. In the dream, the Lösung that Irma refuses already evokes the chemical solution with a trimethylamine base that Otto injected her with, the same solution that Freud will think of—a formula—as the theoretical solution to the enigma of the dream. To this will be added the olfactory connotations of the trimethylamine, which will evoke for Freud other solutions to the theory of sexuality, such as that of Fliess, his friend and rival. An analogous triple semantic network will organize the Duchampian "solution": therapeutic, chemical, theoretical. It covers everything that goes from painting as "olfactory masturbation" to painting as "pictorial nominalism." Its trajectory demands important clarifications that I will provide later.

Interpreting the figure of Irma, Freud notices that she is inscribed in a series of substitutions: his friend who would make a better patient, a governess who hides her dentures, Freud's own wife, a deceased woman named Matilda, and finally Freud's older daughter, "this Matilda substituting for the other one." And, faced with this substitutive series that he feels has not been pushed far enough, Freud abruptly stops, cuts short his anxiety, selects three women at random, and adds in a footnote, "If I had pursued my comparison between the three women, it would

have taken me far afield.”⁵ Lacan, once again, refers both the text and the footnote to their vanishing point of meaning, such as Freud theorized later on in “The Theme of the Three Caskets”: “The last term is death, quite simply.”⁶ The three caskets, the three women, the three sisters—we have seen how this substitutive series functioned for Duchamp: Suzanne, Yvonne, and Magdeleine, the mother, the sisters-in-law, the virgins and the brides, the maiden and the hanged woman, and at the *navel*, Suzanne/Cézanne, the decisive slash of the choice: to be born a painter or not to be a painter any longer. Unless the last term, here too, is “death, quite simply.” Let us emphasize that the choice was fixed in some way: what could it mean to be born a painter if painting was already dead? Again a crucial question that I will examine later, doing no more at this point than noting that it was in Munich, at the moment when this question emerged, that Duchamp’s painting would reach for the first time a nightmare vision, the “ultimate Real.”

Immediately after the first culmination of the dream, says Lacan, Freud “calls out for the consensus of his peers.”⁷ There quickly comes another group of figures, this time a masculine one: Dr. M., the medical compatriots, Otto and Leopold, and soon, brought by association, the whole of the medical school, the associates that Freud will pursue as far as Egypt for the sole pleasure of ridiculing them and getting revenge on them. There also come Inspector Bräsig and his friend Karl, Fliess, Freud himself, his older brother Philip, to whom Lacan adds the other brother, Emmanuel. “These characters are all significant insofar as they are the characters of identification in which the formation of the ego resides.” Here we see appear the series of selves, “the interference of subjects,” a “spectral decomposition of the function of the ego,” which is “obviously an imaginary decomposition.”⁸

We have also seen this second substitutive series function in Duchamp all along what Schwarz calls his “process of individuation.” It aligns the father Duchamp with the “father Cézanne,” the older brothers Gaston and Raymond and with them the whole cubist group, *The Chess Players* and the *King, Nude Descending a Staircase*, and *Sad Young Man*—in short, the crowd of bachelors. And we have seen it play exactly the same role as the “male” crowd in Freud’s “imaginary spectral decomposition,” this decomposition brought about by the elementary parallelism of *Sad Young Man* and *Nude No. 2* and that leads, with *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, to the same dismemberment, the same fading of the self, and the same surging up of the *I* as in the eruption of the symbol for nitrogen [*azote*] in the formula for the trimethylamine.

This symbol, AZ, as Lacan liked to write it, in order to evoke “the alpha and omega of the thing,” designates the Duchampian *I* at the point where it no longer bases itself in the sort of individuation that takes over the fathers and the brothers and the whole desired community of medical doctors and painters but now points to the “voice of no one,” expressing what Duchamp later will call “prime

words.” How can we not see in this chemical formula NCH_3 the same multiplication by three and by three times three as that which in the *nine malic molds* of the *Large Glass* will explode the imaginary *person* of Duchamp into nine symbolic *personae*? And can we not see that this “Eros’s Matrix,” which is also called “the cemetery of uniforms and liveries,” refers by the same token to the “alpha and omega of the thing,” to birth and death, to Eros and Thanatos?

But we have to pull away from the fascination of this double point of escape and not abandon the strict parallelism. Now that we have presented the network of parallels that, by referring the Munich painting to Irma’s dream, allowed us to put into relief, on the one hand, a self-analytic revulsion in two stages, a revelation of the Real and a revelation of the Symbolic, and, on the other hand, an articulation of the Imaginary in the two series of feminine and masculine figures that are each fleeing toward a mysterious vanishing point where it is simultaneously a question of life and death, of being born a painter and of painting’s death, it is time to link the questions that this parallelism raises to the specific field where they can produce knowledge, before cause and beyond effect.

Duchamp in Cubism

In August 1912, the field of artistic conditions in which *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* resonated was still and above all else Cubism. More generally, it was the manner in which Cubism imagined itself in this particular moment of its history: that is, the very moment when it had achieved the maturity of a style and was beginning to break apart. It was not so much the cubist works that formed the context out of which *The Passage* emerged and differentiated itself as the manner in which the works were interpreted at this specific moment by the protagonists of the movement, primarily painters and art critics. It is in this context, which one can call “the immediate horizon of expectations” or the “initial reception” of Cubism,⁹ that we can situate *The Passage* in order to see how the double revelation of the Real and the Symbolic that it enacts resonates with its own conditions of emergence.

Braque and Picasso, as we know, were happy to paint and showed only contempt for theories. Assured of the support of Kahnweiler, they abstained from any overt pronouncements and avoided getting compromised in the promotion of the new “ism” that they had encouraged in spite of themselves. In contrast, Gleizes and Metzinger were often verbose with explications. Republished in 1911–12, their book, *Du cubisme*, was announced in March and then in October and finally appeared in December 1912.

From the start, the authors present an argument that can seem the leitmotif of all the criticism of the period: Cubism is a realism. This thesis leads immediately to a privileging of a historical line that will serve as the dominant reference point for the immediate reception of Cubism: “In order to judge the importance of

Cubism we have to go back to Gustave Courbet."¹⁰ At the same time, this historical line implies a theoretical paradigm—that of painting as vision—by means of which cubist realism would mark itself off from the realisms that had preceded it. It was in this way that people criticized Impressionism and Neoimpressionism for remaining the prisoner of naturalism. A first equation was established, which considerably simplified history but which, in turn, situated the cubist project in a complex and contradictory perspective. It assimilated naturalism or, to use the terminology of Gleizes and Metzinger, "superficial realism," with what Duchamp, in complete agreement with other members of his milieu, would call "retinal painting." In fact, we should note that Duchamp demonstrated no originality in marking himself off from "retinal painting," since it was Gleizes and Metzinger, the most orthodox of the Cubists, who had accused Courbet of having "accepted everything that his retina communicated to him, without intellectual control."¹¹ In turn, however, this accusation left Cubism with a contradictory project, since it demanded, on the one hand, a realism—in other words, a "retinal" tradition that went back to Courbet—but on the other hand, it also demanded that the judgment of the retina be submitted to "intellectual control." Gleizes and Metzinger "resolved" the contradiction by positing a new, decisive signpost in their historical narrative, Cézanne, to whom they attributed the opening up of the possibility of a dualism: "The realist inclination divides itself into superficial realism and profound realism. The former belongs to the Impressionists, the latter to Cézanne."¹² What did this profound Cézannean realism consist of? The authors had a great deal of difficulty in explaining it other than by restating the same contradiction of the "retinal" and the "intellectual," as a contradiction running through the work of Cézanne, which the name of Cézanne would from now on signal as a historical given: his work "proves irrefutably that painting is not—or is no longer—the art of imitating an object by lines and colors, but of giving a plastic consciousness to our instincts. He who understands Cézanne will have a presentiment of Cubism."¹³

This last phrase is a pivotal one that would forever mark cubist theory with an incantatory, mythical origin, a "presentiment" issuing out of an "understanding" of Cézanne. Why mythical? It is not that Gleizes and Metzinger misunderstood Cézanne. After all, when they presented the idea of a pictorial space in opposition to illusionist space, they were describing well enough what Cézanne was up to. It is rather that they had not really grasped Cézanne's enigma and that it was not possible to paint and to theorize the enigma at the same time. Indeed, Cézanne's painting generated Cubism, which interpreted it in the act of painting. It would not have been able at the same time to produce a theory that would render the importance of Cézanne in words. Even with Gleizes and Metzinger, who, being more theorists than painters, provided a painting that ultimately was illustrative of their writings, a hiatus remains between the presentiment that serves as

a prospective motor-force for pictorial practice and the understanding that serves as a retrospective discourse whose goal is to justify it.

In the years with which we are concerned, the name Cézanne signifies this hiatus. Like the "profound realism" attributed to him, it is only invoked rather than interpreted. This is why the theme of Cubism as a profound realism was chanted in unison by all the critics without the term ever really being explained. Michel Puy spoke of "objective truth," Olivier-Hourcade of "sensible truth," Alexandre Mercereau of "absolute truth in opposition to apparent reality." No matter how much one substituted "truth" for "reality," these were no more than words bypassing any interpretation of the contradiction that the period felt—or sensed—to be pertinent: either painting, obeying more the act of looking than the thing looked at, would degrade into the complacency of "impression" or "sensation," give up all realism, render the surface of the painting autonomous, and wallow in the decorative; or it would remain under the control of nature, with the risk of remaining confined to the more or less "photographic" reproduction of lines and color, and renounce being anything but a mechanical transcription of the visible with no autonomy. How could one encourage painting to accomplish one or the other of these options without reducing them? How could one declare that the historical task of Cubism was to render them, if not reconcilable, at least indissociable in their very contradiction? It was in these terms, and others that revolved around the same theme, that Cubism "received" its own enigma in 1912.

What this "reception" did not perceive—for want, perhaps, of that sort of phenomenology of vision that elsewhere in the same period was in the process of being theorized (Husserl) but that would be applied only much later to Cézanne and to the painting that followed (as in Merleau-Ponty)—was that the "retinal" is invested in a similar way in the two sides of the alternative and that it is useless to assimilate "sensation" and "imitation" only to oppose them to a true "plastic consciousness." From where did it draw its truth as painting if not from the act of looking *and* from a new conception of it, forcing one to think in new terms of the connections between the looking subject and the object looked at?

Quickly, because of the lack of interpretation, the dualism between "superficial realism" (impressionist) and "profound realism" (Cézannean and cubist) found itself collapsed onto a simpler dualism. Apollinaire gave the "canonic" formula for this: "Cubism is the art of painting new structures out of elements borrowed not from the reality of sight, but from the reality of insight (*réalité de conception*)."¹⁴ The expression soon found widespread acceptance, since we can find it, with slight modification, in the writings of André Salmon, Maurice Raynal, and others. Fernand Léger would soon fix it in attributing to Cézanne the moment "that the two great concepts of painting—*visual realism* and *realism of conception*—meet, the first completing its trajectory, which includes all the old

painting down to the Impressionists, and the second—realism of conception—beginning with them.”¹⁵

This acceptance of Cubism as a “realism of conception” is all the more significant in that its reception at the end of the spring of 1912 already contained the seeds of an imminent schism. Some figures would pull it in the direction of realism—that is, a certain faithfulness to the represented object—and the others in the direction of conception—that is, “pure painting,” abstraction. It was on 11 October (the day after the opening of the Salon de la Section d’Or and the day that Duchamp came back from Munich) that Apollinaire gave his famous lecture, “L’Ecartèlement du cubisme” (The Quartering of Cubism), in which he distinguished, in a fairly fanciful way, we must say, four tendencies: scientific, physical, orphic, and instinctive Cubism. His preference would go to Orphism, which he would officially baptize in January 1913 and in which he would see a decisive transition toward “pure painting.”

Yet we must note a curious fact: in “The Quartering of Cubism,” Apollinaire included under the rubric of “orphic Cubism” not only Delaunay, which is obvious, but also the “light in Picasso’s paintings” (and only the light) and, even more astonishing, Fernand Léger, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp.¹⁶ It is as if the poet/art critic, who has been so often reproached for his lack of critical rigor, had here one of those inexplicable intuitions (analogous to the one that would make him say that it might have been reserved to Marcel Duchamp to “reconcile art and the people”) that seem rather incoherent at first but that turn out to be pertinent when read in a theoretical context other than their own. To associate Duchamp (and Picabia) with the painter of simultaneous contrasts would seem fairly absurd. And yet each painter shared with the others the fact that they were all in the process of leaving Cubism and that one of the determining elements in their passage to something else—to Simultaneism, for Delaunay, and to the *Large Glass* and the readymades, for Duchamp—was the reflection on a new status, simultaneously postimpressionist and postcubist, of color. This surprising analogy still remains to be elucidated, and I will do so later.

If we look at what Duchamp said about “retinal painting,” about “gray matter,” the expression “as stupid as a painter,” and so on, we would think—as almost everyone has until now—that we had before us the image of someone who must somewhat despise painting or who, in any case, must believe that the noble goal that Leonardo established in defining painting as a *cosa mentale* had been more than corrupted by the reduction—since the time of Courbet—of the painter to the eye and of the eye to the photographic plate. Yet whether one decides the argument for or against Duchamp, such an image would be deceptive. In opposing the visual to the conceptual, the retinal to gray matter, Duchamp was only adopting for his own use something that in 1912 was no more than a cliché of the immediate context of Cubism. It is true that he repeated this cliché, for example, in later interviews, far beyond the moment of Cubism, and that the con-

stancy of his recourse to the paradigm visual/conceptual can give the impression that he was the author of the paradigm and that his work really gets explained by it. But it is necessary to realize here that, for once, what Duchamp says corresponds very poorly with what he does. I hope that I have sufficiently shown that all of Duchamp's "cubist" production can be understood only in reference to an ardently desired becoming-painter. It would be to simplify the facts outrageously under these conditions to believe that his "abandonment" of painting—which came immediately after Munich—could be explained by a radical and sudden opting for the conceptual to the detriment of the visual. Another interpretation, a more precise one, is required.

We have to begin by supposing that Duchamp was more open than he was willing to admit to the theories of Gleizes and Metzinger. Unless, obviously, the reverse were true. *Du cubisme* is a work that no doubt owed a considerable part of the ideas that it defended to the discussions of the Puteaux group, and, as is well known, Duchamp frequented this group assiduously. As to the degree to which he took an active part in it, as to the degree to which he gave some ideas of his own to his colleagues, as to the degree to which he really felt their influence—all this remains a matter of conjecture. Was he aware of what separated him from the group or was he led unconsciously to make a completely different use of its theoretical apparatus? Nothing in his declarations allows us to decide the question. Here we have to leave the literal declarations that Duchamp left us to return to what he literally did. If it is true that Duchamp had a precocious awareness of the cubist impasse, his work must show this. Indeed, as we have seen continuously, the whole of his "cubist" production shows a series of separations vis-à-vis the cubist norm as it was practiced and theorized by the Puteaux group. And these separations were crystallized around two "scenes" of explicit disagreement: the refusal of *Nude* by the Indépendants and his departure for Munich. Ultimately, one thing, pictorially speaking, is certain from the evidence of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*: this painting, like the previous works that it manages to interpret, does not give the slightest bit of credence to that theory that defines (cubist) painting as a realism of conception. It does not articulate the least bit of interest in the opposition of the visual and the conceptual. The painting says what it does and does what it says; it is a thought of the image as much as an image of thought. It is superb visually and conceptually. It does much more than "give a plastic consciousness to our instinct"; it reveals and revolutes the "plastic unconscious" of which it is the offshoot.

In other words, this painting is its own theory and its own theorist. It does not matter if the painter subscribed—perhaps paying mere lip service—to the contemporary ideologies that brought to its pinnacle the "realism of conception." The painting *knows* that what is wrong in the interpretation of Cubism by itself is not the emphasis put rightly or wrongly on conception but rather its noncritical attachment to the concept of realism that it invokes and does not interpret.

The Real

After Cézanne, any realist project could only be a project of restoration, and this was so for a paradoxical reason: namely, that the declared project of Cézanne was itself a project of restoration. Cézanne had never wanted to be the revolutionary in painting that history made of him. "To redo Poussin from nature" was his declared ambition: to restore classicism but in historical conditions that rendered it impossible. We can well see what this "from nature" borrowed from the "motif" painting of the Impressionists, from Pissarro, from open-air painting, and, as an ultimate source, from Courbet. If "realism" means "retinal painting," Cézanne was as realist as Courbet, admiring in the latter the absolute fidelity of the painter's hand to the registrations of his retina and despising, in contrast, the Barbizon school for its "rhetoric of the landscape," its arrangement, its "machination of the canvas." "To redo Poussin," in contrast, simultaneously aimed at and supported his own desire for classicism. Cézanne's famous doubt was aimed at the legitimacy of classical representation, to which he addressed a continual suspicion: the old perspectival order was no longer working, its supposed naturalness was only a machination. On what bases could it be rebuilt? Cézanne's genius was to have gone to the extreme consequences of his doubt; to understand that the most absolute fidelity of the retina to the object was worth nothing if the object did not generate its surrounding space, without reliance on the learned conventions of linear perspective; and to grasp by means of painting what was theoretical in such a program: nothing less than the founding of a new epistemology of the subject. This subject, which classical philosophy had defined as a pure *res cogitans* outside time and space and which the corresponding pictorial theory had situated at the apex of the visual pyramid as a master of the visible, had now to be given body and thrust into the immanent depth of the world in order to be posited at the surface of the painting, immanent to its very figures and its very space. Painting would cease to present the visible as a spectacle offered to a viewer situated outside it; it would now make the act of seeing itself visible for a viewer-viewed caught up in a chiasmus within the folds of the visible.¹⁷

The following has often been stated in many ways, and the point it makes is true: the Cézannean moment in the history of painting was a pivotal moment, both a foundation of things to come and a recapitulation of what had gone on before. It has been interpreted especially as a *tabula rasa*, an injunction of originality, the starting signal for a pictorial modernity that, increasingly, would reduce both the subject and object of the painting to the signifying surface of the work. But, with some further distance, we can also interpret it as the last viable attempt to maintain the surface of the work as a signifying depth, there where the phenomenal depth of the world intersected with the psychological depth of the perceiving subject.¹⁸ In order to maintain that which was systematic in classical representation, Cézanne examined the essential solidarity of the world and of the

subject. Although this solidarity could no longer be ruled by the conventions that offered up the world as a measurable space to the gaze of a subject who would carry on like a sovereign eye, it was still essential, for anyone who wanted to “redo Poussin,” that the reconstitution of the world be accompanied by a maintenance of the subject. It is because Cézanne’s desire was fundamentally conservative that his doubts had the innovational consequences that we well know. It was important to him to give a new foundation to classical order, and this pushed him to seek to give a new legitimacy to the solidarity of the seen world and of the seeing subject, even if that meant a complete rethinking of the world and the subject. At each moment of painting, Cézanne had to come to grips with two questions that for him were inseparable: What is the world, if my very vision, modeled by that of my artistic predecessors, is no longer certain of its own reality? And who am I, if my image in the mirror vacillates, unsure of its own objectivity? It is with the same insistence that he examined the self-portrait, the apple, or the mountain. Subjectivity of the figure, objectivity of the thing, legitimacy of space had to be born out of a single questioning and had to show up on the canvas as the result of a single process. The restoration of a classical order, even if it had nothing in common with Poussin’s, demanded this unity.

Two points can be drawn from this brief analysis of the Cézannean achievement. The first is that it is no longer possible to define it as being in continuity with the realist project. This project dealt with the “Real” by installing it as a referent in the world. Courbet’s “Real” was an existing visible to which the painting referred. The Cézannean “Real” was nothing other than the surface of the canvas. It could no longer be found *in* the world as a referential object, since the world itself, with everything it involved of objects and of space itself, was problematized and subjectivized through and through. Thus, if Cubism wanted to be a realism, this could only be because it had not understood the lessons of Cézanne.

The second consequence is that the Cézannean moment, both foundational and restorative, was an eminently theoretical moment for the history of modern painting, but as such it was also eminently unstable. At the intersection of a pictorial order that existed no longer and another one whose “primitive” Cézanne declared himself to be, his painting imposed on his successors a historical irreversibility from which the painting itself, being at a historical hinge, could still free itself. Cézanne completed Poussin in all senses of the term: he accomplished his work, terminated it, killed Poussin. After him, the unity of the world and of the subject could no longer be desired by painters except in a sort of formal regression, an unexamined adhesion to the order of Representation of which Cézanne had produced the residual image. Modernity picked up Cézanne’s heritage in the form of an alternative: either I actively destroy the object, the figure, and all the realism that goes along with it, in order to preserve that which remains of my subjective integrity—here I have no other choice than to destroy the rep-

resented real, but at least in destroying it I make myself master of it—or I agree to sacrifice my subjective unity and allow the plural significance of my self-image to appear, but to the benefit of an unalterable pseudo-object, the self-sufficient epiphany of a world that excludes me.

Of these two paths opened by Cézanne's double question, the second is assuredly the most "contemporary." It is that of Pollock's allover and Barnett Newman's *Onement* and certainly that of Minimal Art, Pop, or Hyperrealism. It is not accidental that in the 1950s and 1960s it encouraged the reception of Duchamp's work as an alternative to the historical avant-gardes that explicitly followed Cézanne. The first path was that of Cubism and postcubist abstraction. In demanding realism and, in particular, a realism of conception, orthodox Cubism did not so much try to represent the object as it was, as certain historians have naively argued, as to ensure that the subject would stay as he was, a master of his perceptual field and sure of his own identity. The active destruction of the phenomenal world, promoted as the analysis of the object, was the price that had to be paid for this fantasy. Picasso and Braque themselves gave to this the best of their energies in their so-called hermetic Cubism phase. Others, ideologues more than painters or theorists, wanted to give Cubism philosophical respectability. Others yet, like Kahnweiler, thought that they could find in the "synthetic" phase that came after the destruction of the object a return to a newly legitimated classicism. This did not lack consistency: with the cohesion of the subject having been saved in extremis, the cohesion of the object could now be reconstituted. This restoration could well give the illusion of a true faithfulness to Cézanne and could reinitiate the fantasy of an authentically modern classicism. But we know now that it was historically regressive, as is proved by the evolution of Derain at the end of Cubism and by Picasso's neoclassical period in the 1920s. Although Cubism produced many individual masterpieces, its global historical importance was that it was, for those who left it in time, an art of transition.

Did Duchamp know this in August 1912? The question remains unanswered, a useless question perhaps, since his work shows an awareness of what Cubism was all about. His "cubist" work was never concerned with an analysis—whether visual or conceptual—of the object. His practice of tattering was always directed toward subjects: his sister, his brothers, his own self—subjects that, as we have noted, all played a metaphorical role in the imaginary constitution of his individuality as a painter. Neither his mother nor his father, nor his brothers and sisters, nor, a fortiori, his sister Suzanne were, for the painter, in the position of a referent in the world. Duchamp's "Real" was not the Real of the realists. Nor was it that of Cézanne; it was not the appearance of the world in the autonomy of the painting. Still less was it that "regulative tracing" that neo-Cézanneans like André Lhote charged with mediating the imaginary connection of the viewer and the viewed at the surface of the work. Duchamp's Real surged up where all regulation ceased. His definition of the Real was strictly that of Lacan: the Real is

the impossible, the last barrier before which the desired cohesion of the self dissolves away, the other side of the face or the mirror, the vision of horror and anxiety that the Imaginary fails to unify and that the Symbolic has not yet been able to name.

This Real is not a "reality": it is neither an ensemble of things designated in their raw existence nor a nature, nor a world or a horizon inhabited by the subject. It is without stability, without permanence, without memory, and without a name. It is not visual, since perceptive activity or passivity cannot find a point of reference there; Gestalt psychologists would say that one cannot apply to it the principle of constancy. Nor is it conceptual, because it does not even have a name, something that would be necessary for the formation of a concept. One cannot describe such a Real, except by making reference to mythological approximations, such as chaos—the chaosmos—of Genesis, the hurly-burly before the separation of the earth and the waters, before the naming of species and before the presence of humankind.

If there is no description, neither is there the experience of such a Real, except perhaps for the psychotic. But there can be the apparition and the revelation of this Real; this is what Lacan said in regard to the first acme of Irma's injection dream, and this applies just as well to the apparition that surges up in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, that same "apparition" that Duchamp would take so much care later to distinguish from "appearance." The painting, it is true, presents an appearance, just as the narrative of the dream by Freud certainly ended up by naming the unnameable. Only interpretation—for the dream, that sort of interpretation to the second degree that Lacan picks up from Freud—allows a designation of that nameless revelation of the Real that Freud calls "the turbinial bones of the nose" or "whitish gray scabs." What gets this interpretation going is anxiety, the signal of anxiety that the account of the dream and its interpretation by Freud betrays. For Duchamp, we do not have at our disposal such signals of anxiety attested to in his biography, nor do we have later paintings that would refer to *The Passage* and reinterpret it. We have only some relatively unprovable clues such as the nightmare that his biographers tell us about¹⁹ or, maybe more relevant, the very title of the painting that refers to the major anxiety of first sexual relations—*impossible relations*, since they took place in the fourth dimension and united bachelors to a virgin/bride, a real experience, in other words, if the Real is the impossible. It is thus permissible to see in the appearance of this work "the apparition that is the mold for it."

To what degree does this apparition of the Real that Duchamp's "cubist" period accomplishes radically reinterpret the impasse of Cubism? And how does it make Duchamp the true theoretical inheritor of Cézanne? In what way does it "resolve" his oedipal conflict vis-à-vis the "father" of Cubism? Instead of managing, taming, Cézanne's lesson, as the orthodox Cubists did, Duchamp assumes the Cézannean contradiction full force and pushes it to the limits of impossibility.

1. Cézanne completed Poussin; he produced the ultimate version of a classical theory of painting insofar as it supposes the natural link of the subject and the world. But he could do so only through great violence toward Poussin, in the explicit recognition of the ruins of classical Representation and in the maintenance of the contradictions: the subject and the world *together* on the condition that these are no longer the classical subject or the classical world, but the world as a horizon and the subject as the being-in-the-world of modern phenomenology.

2. The Cubists dealt with the Cézannean contradiction in the form of an alternative of which they explored only one branch: to safeguard or reconstitute the self-presence and the unity of the classical subject, at the price of an active breaking up of the world of objects. Hence, the fundamental misreading that made them take Cézanne for a "profound realist" and take themselves for "conceptual realists."

3. Duchamp went a step further than Cézanne, understanding that after Cézanne no classicism could be built on the ruins of classical Representation. This contradiction could no longer be kept alive, and the Cubists were only giving it an artificial survival—this is the very definition of academicism—when they broke the Cézannean contradiction in two. The true theoretical inheritance of Cézanne demanded a new "murder of the father" in painting: since Cézanne had had to kill Poussin in order to follow him, to follow Cézanne meant killing him in turn. That meant not abandoning Cézanne's lesson, the contradictory conjunction of the world and of the subject, but rather producing this conjunction in a negative way, converting the last of the possibles into the first of the impossibles: neither the world nor the subject.

Since *Sad Young Man*, at least, but maybe even since *Sonata*, Duchamp followed simultaneously the two paths of the alternative delegated by Cézanne. We know why: while the Cubists increasingly reduced the range of their subjects to the single genre of the still life—after 1910–11, landscapes and nudes disappeared from their work; the portrait was treated as a still life; and the self-portrait, the genre particularly invested in by Cézanne, was totally excluded—Duchamp painted, in the period that concerns us, only the figures of his familial entourage, and himself above all others. The series of masculine figures marks in the movement of his desire (to become a painter) a succession of eminently frustrating identificatory images. Undoubtedly, the artist found an imaginary unity in each of the paintings constituting a stasis on the path of desire. But from one stasis to another, this "unity" dissolved. Far from leading to the individuation of the painter, as Schwarz argues, the series culminated in *The Passage* with a scene of complete dismemberment of the self. Moreover, within each painting, the "elementary parallelism" taken from the chronophotographs of Marey did not cease to split the desired identification, which only operated, as Lacan says, in a "succession of instantaneous experiences."

The series of feminine figures, working as a metaphor of painting—that is, a metaphor for the desired object and for the world (in the Cézannean sense)—was to a large degree the site of a “transference neurosis” by which the painter hoped to be born into painting. Not less than the masculine series did this series escape from the Duchampian interpretation of the cubist dislocation. But we have to distinguish this dislocation from the other: it was of the order of “tattering” and not of “elementary parallelism.” It came out of a destructive force that aimed at the world and its objects, as if the accession of the painter to his identity necessitated the assassination of painting. And it led, in *The Passage* again, to the same point as the first: to a violation, to the tattering of the desired body by the impossible *dead* time of the fourth dimension, to the woman-become-a-woman and painting-become-painting in the very “moment” when it reveals itself as dead painting. This point, this first acme of the painting, is that which we identified as the apparition of the Real. There is no longer any imaginary oscillation, no more coming and going between the “if it is you, I am not” and the “if it is I, it is you who are not,” as Lacan says,²⁰ the two poles of the alternative in which the Cubists inherited the Cézannean contradiction and of which they explored only the second pole. Duchamp, who engaged in both options, pushed them to the point of the Real, where the Cézannean synthesis revealed its own impossibility. He did not choose the self against the world, which was the cubist “solution” and which would soon be, for the most part, the “solution” of early abstract art. Nor did he choose the world against the self, a “solution” that would see the light of day in the history of art only after the Second World War, when social changes would push subjects toward an increasing schizophrenization and when the “revolutionary” optimism of abstract art had dried up. And of course, he could no longer choose the Cézannean option, the contradictory maintenance of the world and the self. The historical conditions for this were no longer present: classical painting could not be assassinated two times over. He had no choice but to take the only option open to him, that of dead painting: neither the world, nor the self. It was here, with the Imaginary abolished, and the apparition of the Real, that the Symbolic entered onto the scene.

The Symbolic

Between *Virgin* and *Bride*, the Symbolic inter-venes, “a passer capable of an instantaneous traversal” (Suquet). The Symbolic operates a passage, both a division line to cross and the very crossing of this line, a change in the state of painting when the painter violates it and the arrival of the subject-painter who is born out of this change of states. We have seen this surge up with regard to the missing *i* that makes a woman to be painted into a hanged woman (*peindre/pendre*) and that spells out as: *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, at the bottom left of the painting.

Reduced to this moment of upsurging, the revelation of the Symbolic is exactly of the same order as that which Lacan sees surging up in the formula of trimethylamine: "There is no other word, no other solution to your problem, than the word." Similarly, this upsurging of the signifier that is revealed to Duchamp in *The Passage* says nothing but that it surges up. A solipsistic tautology that, barely pointing the way, asks for a speech (*parole*) that would deploy it and a language (*langue*) that would legitimate it. This could be the speech of sexuality and the language of the paternal law, provided that we concentrate on their resonance for art history more than for personal history. Because it is in art history that this signifier accedes to itself, when the biography of the person authorizes the painter finally to assume it as the retroactive upsurging of his name-of-the-father: Duchamp in the field of painting.²¹ Immediately, this name resonates; beyond its pointing function, it causes a *passage*, because we can read it only in light of its antecedents and its consequences. It comes to us already interpreted by the life and works of the artist as well as by the comments and the art that they gave rise to. It is to us that Duchamp addressed *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, just as it is to us that Freud addressed Irma's injection dream. *Onlookers make the painting* just as much as the painter does, but they do so *with all kinds of delays*.

This simple address to posterity, this breaking of presence, is in its own way a critique of Cubism and a pertinent theoretical engagement with Cézanne. It implies that no modern painters who have the ambition of following the example of Cézanne in founding a "new language" will succeed if they do not realize that they are putting their ambition in the hands of their successors. Modern painting has its tradition ahead of itself; this is the theoretical dimension of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* insofar as this passage is irreversible. In this respect, it is literally the formula of an "after-Cézanne," the formula of this very historical irreversibility that Cézanne imposed on his successors. In trying to "redo Poussin from nature," Cézanne wanted to maintain the classical pictorial axiom, which was the interchangeability of the painter and the spectators. But for the Albertian point of view that, in theory at least, both the painter and the spectators can occupy successively, Cézanne substituted two beings-in-the-world instead, interchangeable with regard to a common horizon. If a certain spatial homogeneity could still be maintained, the ideal temporal reversibility that was the corollary of the theory of the visual pyramid was now lost. The time of the spectator was no longer that of the painter. Between the "vision" of the spectator—whom Cézanne asked to act in the presence of the painting as Cézanne himself had acted in the presence of nature—and his own vision, there has come an irreversible time that is precisely the vector of this demand and, at the same time, of its historical function. Cézanne demanded of the painters after him, who would be nourished by his "vision of the world," that they change their vision by changing painting. The orthodox Cubists did not really understand that: their painting

was affected by the irreversible force that their own historical situation as post-Cézannean painters imposed on them, but they did not theorize this irreversibility. They opened the era of the "historical avant-gardes," but in their regressive fidelity to Cézannean classicism, they revealed themselves incapable of taking into account what that meant theoretically.

It was this theoretical accounting that Duchamp accomplished in Munich in two canvases and two drawings. *Virgin* asked the double question of the becoming-painter and the becoming-painting for someone who, having been born after Cézanne, was not a born painter. *Bride* answered the question by conjugating painting in the past tense and the becoming-painter in the future tense, supporting and predicating the retroactive verdict that is the temporal law of the avant-gardes. And *The Passage* played on this double question in a single gesture, connecting the destiny of the painter to the irreversibility of history and to the retroactive judgment of posterity, undoing the destiny of painting to the point where the making of the painting demonstrates a Real without duration and the painting as said makes the Symbolic surge up in its autonomy.

The slash in Cézanne/Suzanne was crossed by *The Passage*, which was also a theoretical passage. Playing on the very words that organize the passage for Duchamp, we can describe this as a passage from the *c'est* (it is) to the *su* (known), the passage from an ontology to an epistemology, from painting as being to painting as knowing, but also from painting in a present indicative to painting in a past participle.

It is in the dimension of indication and presence, of pure monstration,²² of the Husserlian *Vorstellung*, that Cézanne tried to found a new ontology of painting, one that the modernist or formalist project would really open up, an ontology characterized by the persistent search for a pictorial specificity understood as the irreducible being of painting.

The Duchampian dimension of a "known painting" clears the path for another theoretical reflection that refuses to specify the being of painting. What is this dimension? First of all, what would *known* painting be? In what way can one say that the surging up of the Symbolic leads to a knowledge and, moreover, to a knowledge that is virtually immediate, completed from the start, and that presents itself with a quality of revelation that one could call *ready-made*? It is not a question, at this level, of some sort of thematization, and it is not a question of constructing a corpus of knowledge on the basis of nothing more than the upsurging of the Symbolic as such. Rather, it is a question of the sudden eruption of the Other, of the place and function of the Other, in the definition and specific status of painting. In other words, what was revealed to Duchamp was the eruption of language in that field of pictorial specificity that Cézanne had wanted to reduce to a being of pure designation freed, as the phenomenologists would say, of all "thetic" qualities. This eruption is that of language as such, of the symbolic function in all its generality and not, as with the first abstractionists, the

intuition of a new and foundational pictorial language. This latter notion of language could only be metaphorical, even when it demonstrated a violent desire to free itself of language in a restrictive, linguistic sense and to found the specificity of a pictorial language on that which, paradoxically, would make painting stop speaking. Such as it is revealed in the passage of the slash in Cézanne/Suzanne, the eruption of language is general and not specific, especially if one understands specificity to mean the fantasy of a pictorial being whose own speech is made up of silence. But it is specific and not general as soon as one considers the psychological field of the becoming-painter and the concrete site of the painting in which it is operating and outside of which the emergence of the Symbolic only concerns the "man who suffers" and not the "mind which creates."

What *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* reveals is this: painting is already named, in the past tense, at the moment when the painter in the process of becoming accedes to his desire. There exists a word with which to talk of the imaginary and real work of all the painters of the world, no matter what they are doing, and this word is *painting*. Whether it was Cézannean, fauvist, or cubist, the work of Duchamp-the-painter established a place of its own within something that resulted from a pact signed by others, and this something had as its name *painting*. This name was there well before Duchamp began to paint, and it would still be there when his work was completed.

It is in this sense that I was able to suggest earlier that it was necessary to wait for *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* to see the metaphorical leap woman/painting. Until then, woman was the metaphor of painting and vice versa; it is undeniable that language circulated in this dialectic. But it was not recognized as such by Duchamp. The reciprocity of *woman* and *painting* engaged only Duchamp's Imaginary, his desire to become father-painter as well as to conquer the woman-painting. With *The Passage*, we are at the junction of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, a point where the slash (woman/painting) of an eminently symbolic rite of passage separates that which the hyphen as unifying mark (woman-painter) maintained in an imaginary contiguity: in the moment when, at the level of the theme of the painting, the woman is made a woman, the painting is made a painting at the level of its making and its speaking. And Duchamp, who is not a born painter, is born into his name as a painter.

This birth has nothing to do with a maturation, a mastery, or the end of an apprenticeship; it has everything to do with a recognition. What, after Lacan, we call the "access to the Symbolic," is not of the order of the acquisition of language, of the progressive mastery that the child gains over his mother tongue. It is of the order of the recognition of the symbol as a symbol and not of the symbol as it serves to manipulate things or to call out to others. One "accedes to the Symbolic" when a word ceases to say this or that but "says nothing but that it is a word."

Since here this word is *painting*, this is how we will refer to the recognition of the Symbolic by Duchamp. What *painting* means covers an infinite realm. It can mean Cézanne's "little sensations" or his "Poussin from nature." But for Poussin it meant "*l'histoire et le tableau*," for Alberti "*una piu grassa Minerva*," and for Leonardo "*cosa mentale*." For the Cubists, it will refer to "conceptual realism," but for Courbet realism was retinal. For the classicists, *painting* means subject matter, be it a nude woman or a battle horse, but this is what it no longer means for Maurice Denis, for whom it means a surface covered with colors. There is no agreement about the meaning of "*painting*," and yet "*painting*" would not exist—either as word or as thing—if there were not some agreement about the word. *Painting* names all paintings and every form of painting; the expression is autonymous in the manner of examples that pose as concepts.

There is thus a pact around the word *painting*. If the name exists and if it must last, this is because there has been and there will be an agreement about it. To name is to form a pact, and there must be several people to sign and seal a pact. *I* and *you* will sign the treaty at the expense of *him* or *her*, and it is as part of this triangulation that the Other is convoked, at any one of the three summits. It does not matter for the moment if the sender is the painter and the addressee is the viewer and the referent is the painting. It could be Michelangelo and Julius II arguing about the Sistine Chapel, but what proves that Julius is the real addressee of Michelangelo? It could be two painters agreeing about the work of a third or, like Poussin and Caravaggio, two painters, one of whom is alive and one of whom is dead, disputing the respective priority of Nature and Theory. What is their common referent? Can we really say that they have a single referent, since everything separates them—time, craft, style, thought? And yet they carry on a dialogue, and it is certainly painting that they are talking about. Nothing says, moreover, that the painter is necessarily the addressor of the pact: if we agree in calling the pigmented forms that cover the walls of Lascaux or Altamira "*painting*," this owes more to the work of Abbé Breuil, who restored them, than to the prehistoric people who painted them. However unreliable the pact by which paintings, time and again, were named, the existence of the name proves the existence of the pact. It is this that the eruption of the Symbolic revealed to Duchamp in making him the subject of this certitude.

This certitude does not come at just any time to just anyone. It came to someone who was profoundly engaged in that new and determining aesthetic and historical process, going on since the middle of the nineteenth century, that we call the avant-garde. And it came at a particular and crucial moment of this process: on a general level, the post-Cézannean moment, and on a personal level, several months after the rejection of *Nude Descending a Staircase* by the Salon des Indépendants. This is to say that it is inscribed in the sharpened feeling of a triple irreversibility. Since Courbet, no doubt, the notion of aesthetic quality was indissociably connected to that of innovation; for the avant-garde, a work was sig-

nificant only if it broke with former criteria for quality. Since Cézanne, the viewer found himself in an asymmetrical situation in relation to the painter, and the viewer's perceptive responsibility was actively solicited for what it could give to the meaning of the painting; painters after Cézanne could innovate significantly only if they took into account the "moment" of the viewer. And the rejection of *Nude* by the Indépendants taught Duchamp about the significative nature of his own anticipations: since the social recognition of his becoming-painter was deferred, his identity as a painter in his own eyes still awaited him. But this feeling of triple irreversibility was quickly to find itself accompanied by an apparently inverse certitude. One cannot go back in time—this would be the first law of the avant-garde; I would say that it concerns artistic evolution. But there is a second law, which concerns artistic historicity and which stipulates that it is retrospectively that evolution makes history. Artistic innovation will take on the sense of a new quality only when it has been evaluated a posteriori by means of the very criteria that it has instituted. The perception of viewers of Cézanne—if these viewers are painters themselves—will prove relevant only after these viewers have produced a new elaboration of their perception in their own work. And the scandal of *Nude*, its reception in Barcelona, at the Section d'Or, and soon at the Armory Show, will prove after the fact the degree to which its rejection by the Indépendants had legitimated its later success.

Now these mixed temporal figures call in, in various ways, the question of the pact—that is, the question of the consensus that would be formed or not formed around a particular aesthetic judgment. One of these ways was precisely the nominative and binary form taken by those verdicts through which the pictorial productions of the avant-garde were accepted or excluded during the course of their history—a form for which the Salon des Refusés was the institutional paradigm, as we have seen. As institutional as they were, these verdicts were no less the expression of an aesthetic judgment. Mallarmé seems to have been the first to consciously become aware of this and to derive several important consequences from it, notably, the necessity to abandon to the masses the responsibility to establish or not establish a consensus in matters of pictorial taste. When, in the Salon of 1874, Manet, once again, found two of the four paintings that he submitted rejected by the jury, Mallarmé sprang to his defense in an article in which he said, "The jury has nothing other to say but this is a painting, or that is not a painting."²³ Thus, from this point on, the aesthetic judgment of the jury was shaped in the binary form of acceptance or refusal and explicitly pronounced itself as a nomination. If it is true that the aesthetic history of modern painting was equally an institutional history and that the innovations that were offered to pictorial taste cannot be separated from the strategies that imposed them, it is then necessary to see what extraordinary consequences the reformulation of aesthetic judgment as nominative judgment could have had for the very notion of painting. Instead of producing an evaluation, a judgment that has only the choice between

“This is a painting” and “That is not a painting” can now do nothing more than declare the membership or the nonmembership of the painted object in a purely nominal category. Instead of the works and artists being arranged in a hierarchy where we would find, at the very bottom of the list, modest craftsmanship and, at the top, the work of genius, every work by every artist finds itself up against a judgment that includes or excludes it totally. And instead of the notion of painting, despite its whole evolution, continuing to refer to a craft, the definition of which is governed by a certain *a priori* consensus within which there is room for the beautiful and the less beautiful, the new and the old, and so on, it is now a name cut off from the craft that it designates, a name that now has all the appearances of a logical category defined in extension by what it includes and, especially, by what it excludes.

Whoever possesses concretely and politically the power to include and exclude possesses, at the same time, the conceptual mastery of the notion of painting. It would be a simplification of things to localize the bearers of this mastery uniquely on the side of instituted power, the conservators of the museum or the members of the juries, for example. Looking at the history of the *avant-gardes*, through the numerous scandals, conflicts, or strategies that were the motor-force behind them, it would seem, rather, that the power of the artists, or at least of those whose names have been retained by the movement of history, were of no less importance than the institutions that were in place. The reason for this is perhaps that the more the institutionalization of the concept of painting required heavier powers, the more it weakened itself. An institution that would possess an absolute power to decree what is and what is not painting would find itself faced by the impossibility of accepting a new and unexpected work into its ranks without upsetting the whole range of its definitions of painting. An institution whose aesthetic judgment was expressed according to the modalities of the beautiful and the less beautiful and that gave a place within the craft of the painter to diverse hierarchizations would obviously not face this sort of problem. But with this structural change in the art institution, painters found themselves granted, for better or for worse, an unbelievable power, to such a degree that one began to examine each singular work in relation to the totality of definitions of painting, with all that this implies of a claim to the universal. Much more than an effect, this was the major source of the numerous scandals around painting that shook the nineteenth century, just as it was the source of the extraordinary theoretical—or, if one prefers, ideological or conceptual—responsibility with which painters found themselves saddled from this moment on. Modernism can be defined as the assumption by the painters of this responsibility. From the outside, it was demanded of them that they paint their theory of painting, and it was this challenge, inside their work, that they rushed to meet by making each specific work the mute example of a definition of painting in general. At the basis of the reductionism that took over modern painting and that “led,” from 1913 on, to

Malevich's *Black Square*, there was an intense theoretical drive. It is as if, one by one, all the conventions that ruled over classical painting had been critiqued, deconstructed, or abandoned to the point that a universal and essential "theory" of painting could be read in the remaining conventions.²⁴

Since it was as much aesthetic as theoretical, this reductionist movement of modernism was nonetheless the history of a strategy that was employed to provoke, to deceive, and, finally, to displace the aesthetic expectations constituting, at any given moment, the nature of pictorial taste. Yet what was at stake in modernism was neither taste nor theory; it was the name. It is around the name of painting that the conflicts between avant-garde and tradition, between successive and sometimes contemporaneous avant-gardes, were organized; it was this name that was the practical or pragmatic stake of "modernist painting." At each moment, a jury—whether institutionalized or not—was brought, by the provocations of the painters, to the necessity of saying "This is a painting" or "That is not a painting." But, in fact, this was only a feedback effect, because it was not through their own initiative that modern painters had to make themselves into provocateurs or strategists or theorists. If they had to do so, it is because they themselves were forced by the binary institutional structure that had been in place, in France at least, in the artistic milieu since Courbet. They were forced to propose in their painting a complete pictorial theory, for with each painting submitted to aesthetic appraisal, the name of painting found itself convoked or reconvoked without nuances.

Duchamp, as we know, always bridled at playing the modernist game of pictorial reduction. He was never tempted by abstraction and never engaged, except (as we will see) with a great deal of irony, in the theoretical and pedagogical path of a Kandinsky, a Mondrian, or a Klee when they tried to formulate a universal pictorial language reduced to its essential "elements." Moreover, Duchamp always showed himself to be in opposition to any pictorial practice and theory that made taste, whether good or bad, or conventional or provocative, into the motor-force of a strategy. His choice would be to try to escape taste and to practice a "beauty of indifference," a strategy impossible to implement fully but for which the readymade nevertheless provided the theory. In 1912, at the moment when he abandoned painting and cubist taste, Duchamp did not yet know that the readymade would soon be the counterpart of this abandonment. In order for him to believe that he could break away from taste, it would still be necessary for him to make use of the mechanical techniques adopted in the *Chocolate Grinder*.²⁵ And he was much too implicated in the aesthetic investigations of his time to have already understood that through the theoretical drive that had seized him, along with his friends Gleizes and Metzinger, it was really the name of painting much more than the concept of painting that was at stake in artistic practice. But he must have been aware, consciously or unconsciously, of a sort of generalized emptying out of the concept of painting. Whatever the justifications that different

figures—artists, critics, jury members, for example—gave for their aesthetic judgments, these judgments always appeared as an ultimate verdict that had the form of yes or no and that, in turn, gave form and body to the conception that they had of painting. So much so that painting ended up having no other value—in the Saussurean sense, as well as in the qualitative sense, of the word—than this operation of judgment itself. At this moment the concept of painting, which seemed to be the issue at stake in the conflicts and strategies and the object aimed at in the search for consensus, was ready to be nothing more than an empty name. And aesthetic consensus, as mythic as it had always been, revealed itself to be nothing more than the elementary pact that put a seal on the name.

This name—painting—must now be treated in light of the triple irreversibility and triple retroaction—or feedback—of which Duchamp had a sharpened awareness, insofar as he was engaged very lucidly in the historical process of the *avant-garde*.

The first irreversibility: In modernity, aesthetic quality has an intrinsic connection with the need for artistic innovation. Whether they want this or not, innovative artists provoke a rupturing of the pact. The first “effect” of the stylistic novelty by which they can break off from tradition is to force their rejection by the public: the name no longer applies; their work is said to fall outside the domain of painting—that is, outside its name, whatever the conception that the public has of painting.

The first feedback: after the fact, the innovative work is evaluated in light of its own anticriteria, which thus become new criteria that come to embody a reworked concept of art that can now include the innovative work. This is the return of the name, the reestablishment of the pact, whether sooner or later. This pact is one that reconciles the viewers among themselves and with the work of art as their focus. It is necessarily retrospective. It allows a work that was previously scandalous to end up being considered a “classic.”

The second irreversibility: Cézanne’s work marks a pivotal point, starting from which the perceptive responsibility of the viewer will be actively solicited by the work of art. Cézanne’s doubt before the world communicates with a doubt in the spectator before a work of Cézanne’s. Is this doubt in which Cézanne invests his gaze perceptive in essence? Is it not nominal, rather? The perceptual anticriteria of Cézanne (for example, the vanishing point, which becomes “in spite of its terrible effect, the point the closest to our eye”) force the spectators to doubt their own perceptual habits, so that they will take on the responsibility of renewing or not renewing the pact. It is the viewer—here, the individual viewer—who assigns the name.

The second feedback: if this viewer happens to be a painter, the task is slightly different. The name *painting*, now identified, as if it were a concept, with the painting of Cézanne, must be interpreted and worked on by the artists; they must depart significantly from Cézanne and so break the pact in their own way. But

this break is absolutely not of the same order as the outcry “This is not painting!” uttered by the public, even an amateur public. Because it implies a recognition and not a denial, the break constitutes a pact in its own right, and this becomes the form by which the avant-garde paradoxically preserves tradition by destroying it. This dialectic pact links the painters among themselves above and beyond the passage of time, but it makes them agree only as to the name *painting* and not to the aesthetic conceptions, styles, or ideologies that could fill out this name. The artists are always in rivalry among themselves but still united by a responsibility of which they are all aware: that of having to reinitiate the history of painting while guarding its name.

The third irreversibility: Duchamp saw his *Nude Descending a Staircase* rejected at the Salon des Indépendants by his brothers and his colleagues. He realized by means of this failure that the healthy emulation that reigns in a group of painter friends can transform itself into an implacable rivalry as soon as an institutionalization comes into play—in other words, as soon as his rivals are forced to pronounce publicly the name of painting in relation to his own work. He discovered, moreover, that this rejected nomination must precisely come to comfort him in his ambition to be a painter, insofar as he could accept that his becoming-painter was still before him. The approbation of the Other was necessary for the constitution of a pictorial *me* that would have more strength than that of a simple imaginary phantasm, but it was also necessary that this approbation be deferred; otherwise, nothing would prove that it really had anything to do with a truly significant innovation. It was in confusion and misunderstanding that Duchamp engaged in such a “reasoning” after the Indépendants. All the same, it was the irreversibility of his becoming-painter (the fact that he had his birth before him and not behind him) that set him to work on *Swift Nudes*, and it was the same irreversibility of which *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* would take stock.

The third feedback: *Nude* was shown in April in Barcelona, where it passed virtually unnoticed, then at the Section d’Or, which opened on the first of October, the very day that Duchamp came back from Munich. The rehabilitation was now official: the very people who had refused to the *Nude* the name *painting* in March now restored it with great ceremony in October.²⁶ But the return of the name occurred with a *delay*, as it should, and Duchamp must have smiled, since he had known this was going to happen, or, at least, his painting knew it. In Munich, it had been named, explicitly, in the past tense.

Here is Duchamp posited in a triple irreversibility and a triple feedback, the first of which formulated the two most general laws of the avant-garde from the moment that this aesthetic and historical phenomenon came into existence; the second specified the modalities of operation for those specific sorts of viewers that the painters constituted in this particular moment (which was the first moment of post-Cézanneanism)—that is, the moment of Cubism; and the third pro-

vided the singular and contingent expression that was revealed by this irreversibility and feedback to Duchamp, most probably in Munich.

These three irreversibilites and these three feedbacks related to the name of painting and to the temporal form of the pact that was drawn up in regard to it. We have not finished analyzing them, the third one especially. This one was singular to Duchamp, since it was through the confused perception but nonetheless sharp feeling he had of it that the two others were revealed to him—the first in its generality, the second in its specificity.

But, before getting to that, I must note that the two temporal laws of the avant-garde, which I called above the law of its evolution and the law of its historicity, are not so simple. Describing them as I have up to now, I have no doubt helped undo the determinist model of art history as “progress” by introducing an incessant reference to a feedback, but still I have not abandoned the idea of linear history; it would simply have to have a cycloid form, rather than the form of a straight line. From this comes a first corrective to our analysis: the artistic field must be traversed in all directions by all sorts of cycloids of this sort, and I wish to apologize in advance for not being able to follow them all. The one I am emphasizing—let us call it the Courbet-Manet-Cézanne-Cubism-Duchamp cycloid—seemed to me, in fact, to be privileged by my object of study. It was not the only one to have been significant for Duchamp, as we will see later. Whatever the case, if we have to imagine a network of cycloids shooting off in all directions—that is, involving diverse significations, ideologies, biases—it is still true that they all work in the same direction finally: that, quite simply, of the forward movement of time itself. It is this fundamental irreversibility, especially, that upheld the very notion of the avant-garde. Above all else, this irreversibility is irreducible.

With these provisos aside, we must bring yet another correction to this model of the cycloid, one coming from a phenomenon that we have already noted: the coexistence in the artistic field, since the end of the nineteenth century, of backward and advanced institutions. The Salon des Refusés, in its opposition to the official Salon, inaugurated the possibility of an institutional history of art—in other words, a history of its name—that would advance with variable speeds despite an overall irreversibility. From this came those local implosions of artistic evolution and history that one could note with increased frequency in Paris, especially at the end of the nineteenth century. After all, Bouguereau was a contemporary of Cézanne, and we cannot ignore him completely. What was the force of such implosions on institutional aesthetic judgment (or on private judgment—the situation is simply much clearer in the case of institutions) now that we know that it boils down to a pure nomination?

While the official Salon was signing a pact of “painting” around Cabanel or Flandrin and excluding Manet, the Salon des Refusés was doing exactly the opposite. The two Salons, obviously, make up a single system, as if two separate

moments of a single cycloid determined each other in a synchrony, or as if two distinct yet complementary pacts named painting, one with the eponym of Flan-drin, the other with that of Manet. Yet, in a culture that has taken to expressing qualitative judgments as a nominative judgment, the pact that is drawn up around a work of art and that calls it a painting is nothing other than the consensus to which aesthetic judgment aspires or, at least, its ideal horizon of objectification as forced by an act of power. As the two primary antagonistic institutions, the official Salon and the Salon des Refusés, made up a single system and thus were accomplices in spite of themselves, a paradoxical consensus was created between them on the basis of disagreement. It is this paradox that explains yet another series of interlinked paradoxes: the fact, for example, that a backward institution never really excludes the art that it refuses to include; it gains time by discharging onto a more audacious institution the responsibility of having to pronounce an aesthetically risky judgment. Or, to take another example, the fact that it is one and the same thing for an avant-garde artist to want the acceptance of the Refusés and the refusal of the official Salon. These are two sides of a single strategy.

From this comes the need to introduce something else into our analysis, but something that we already know: Duchamp's strategy in the period of *Nude* was that of the "damaged kettle." It has all the appearances of incoherence, as if Duchamp were actively looking for the rejection of *Nude* at the Indépendants at the same time as he was hoping for its recognition. The answer is that he was confusing the addressees of his demand. From the academic critic, he was asking for his official working papers: he was demanding that they recognize that he had followed—via Pissarro, Cézanne, and Matisse—the apprenticeship that would then allow a painter some personal audacities. From the Cubists, he asked that they recognize him as one of their own and that they give him a "diploma" in cubist skill. From the history of painting, incarnated in an Other that would reveal itself much later to be posterity itself, he asked for an anticipated parity with those masters whom he did not dare confront directly: Picasso and, above all else, Cézanne. Yet, this strategy of the "damaged kettle" loses all its incoherence as soon as we realize that the Salon des Indépendants, with its internal struggles and all the ambiguity of its wanting to institutionalize the avant-garde in real time, represented one of those implosive instances—as both an official Salon and a Salon de Refusés—wherein a number of histories of art at varying speeds bang up against one other. In wanting to address himself simultaneously to three histories with different speeds, Duchamp could not help appearing to all three as a provocateur.

This is enough to make us grasp the deeply strategic impulse behind the provocation with which so many critics have credited Duchamp without really asking what this means. We must never imagine that an authentic artist—Duchamp no more than Manet—ever engages in provocation for the sake of provocation. The greatest wrong was done to the theory of modern art by those naive critics who

went into systematic ecstasy in front of each of the audacities of "antiart." Without realizing it, they joined with the most philistine approaches, agreeing to mechanically invert the indignation of the "bourgeois" into an equally unexamined enthusiasm. There are no artists worthy of the name who do not desire that a consensus be reached about their work. I said earlier that the desire to paint had the Louvre as its final goal: that means that this desire aimed for consensus and, if possible, for a "universal" one. But, of course, as we are only too aware in our historical moment, art after Duchamp saw a whole series of artists who had understood that an attitude of systematic provocation might be the best way to get to the Louvre. We must not be too hasty to project this dated mechanism of artistic ambition back onto the moment of *Nude Descending a Staircase* or even of the first readymades. And even for art after Duchamp, it will some day be necessary to find criteria enabling us to distinguish provocation as an arrivist strategy and provocation as a significant action, one that, ever since the avant-garde has existed, produces a novelty that is itself significant in relation to a tradition.

For the moment, we must try to understand how, in the very passage from a before-Duchamp to an after-Duchamp, provocation could have become a significant tactic in a history of painting that everyone designates as an intrinsically strategic history. To understand this, I will refer to the only criterion that, in my view, establishes the difference between an authentic artist and a faker. However strategic, innovation and provocation are never totally deliberate in true artists; they come from a largely involuntary adhesion of painters to artistic "values" that they are not yet aware of as values. Whether artists follow their talent or their genius, their intuition or their drives, their unconscious—however we put it—they are obeying an injunction whose origins or force they do not control but that orders them to transgress the taste in fashion, not because it is the taste in fashion but because it is in the recognition of their radical innovation that painters can find their certitude as painters. From this point on, provocation must be understood literally, as pro-vocation: it is an anticipated demand.

A demand for what, if not for the name *art* or *painting*? The more an act of the artist appears provocative, an "antiart," the more it is clear that it has the meaning—violent and sometimes tragic—of a demand for recognition. And as this recognition takes the form of a nominal attribution more than that of a judgment of value, the artist provocateur calls out for the nomination of his work. Who will give it to him? Viewers, of course, and always in an a posteriori fashion: in short, posterity, no matter how close this posterity is. This explains to us why it is appropriate to speak of provocation—and in certain cases (the really interesting ones) of significant provocation—as an artistic strategy only for a certain period of history, the very one that is dominated by the phenomenon of the avant-garde. In fact, the conditions for the possibility of provocation as significant strategy are those that are specified by the two temporal laws of the avant-garde, evolution and historicity, irreversibility and feedback. The anticipated de-

mand for the name *painting* or for the name *art* has a meaning only in a culture that is caught up in irreversible time and that constitutes itself as a culture by a retroactive movement.

But there is more. Provocation takes on an explicit tactical sense in artistic strategy only when this culture becomes pretty much transparent to itself and when its two temporal laws become manifest to it. This transparency is achieved with the synchronic apparition of artistic institutions, some of which are backward and some of which are advanced. In such a case, the indigation that the new work provokes in the former already signifies a quasi recognition by the latter, by virtue of a structural arrangement of the modern artistic landscape. And the nominal pact that the provocative work demands resembles a Janus: it offers the appearance of consensus on one face and the appearance of discord on the other.

This paradox is profound, difficult, and of considerable importance for artistic theory and practice. How can aesthetic judgment be validated simultaneously in both a horizon of consensus and one of disagreement? The fact that we can refer to a historical explanation of the paradox takes away nothing of its paradoxical nature, such as it is lived in the intimacy of aesthetic experience by artists and viewers and also as it must be understood by aesthetic theory.²⁷ The coexistence of artistic institutions that assimilate the history of art at variable speeds explains the paradox historically. This last point is also explained sociologically, since it is not the same social groups that form a consensus on an academic work and on an avant-garde one. Patterns of consensus thus form, between which disagreement reigns. It remains no less apparent that aesthetic judgment in all its social extension, aspires by the same token to both consensus and disagreement. For the society and the period of history that generated the phenomenon of the avant-garde, it is in the "nature" of aesthetic judgment to be simultaneously a demand for consensus and a demand for disagreement. But this simultaneity—and it is certainly not accidental that, in 1912, it led certain artists like Delaunay to desire it as a new pictorial "ism"—escapes any sort of empirical locating. Once it takes on the form of "This is painting," the aesthetic judgment demanded by the provocative work is a pact without temporal anchoring. It is uttered in the present tense even though the present is the only temporality that is radically denied to it, since it breaks the pact in relation to what painting was and reestablishes it in relation to what painting will be. Between the two, painting has no being; there is only a passage, the *infra-thin* space of pure nomination.

If we could remain at this point of passage, we would well understand that, from Duchamp on, to be born a painter simultaneously means to declare the death of painting. The "accession to the Symbolic," the primordial nomination of painting that was revealed to Duchamp in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* is like the slash in a foundational *fort/da* game. Duchamp picked a card, as I said above—the card of dead painting. How could he do this except in the man-

ner of the child with the spool, who accepts the absence of his mother by granting it the squared power of the Symbol?

Language exists, painting is always already named: this is the situation into which the painter is born. The pact is a preamble; a certain consensus, in which he does not participate, reigns over the word *painting*. *Painting* can name only a painting in the past, already dead, with not even enough energy to arouse disagreement. How can the painter be born into his name of *painter*? First of all, he must destroy painting, break the pact and expulse the name, provoke disagreement. This provocation is nothing other than an appeal to the return of the name and the anticipation of a new consensus, the production of a painting that lives only by means of the reprieve that it gives itself in anticipating its own death. The readymades would soon take stock of this truth when Duchamp, having returned from Munich, said to himself: "Marcel, no more painting; go get a job." But it was already in Munich that this truth reached out and announced all its implications, when the intense aesthetic experience of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* would culminate in a temporal formula encrypted in the name of the painting, and out of which the Symbolic would reveal itself as such.

Chapter 5

Resonances

In leaving Paris for Munich, Duchamp fled the cubist group and changed his context, since he plunged himself into a milieu that seemed dominated by Expressionism.

This change of context has largely been ignored by both art historians and Duchamp's biographers. There are several good reasons for this, and others that are not so good. Biographical clues concerning Duchamp's stay in Munich are extremely meager: not only do we know nothing about the reasons for his departure, but we know just as little about the reasons that led him to choose Munich rather than Vienna, Prague, or Berlin, which he visited on his return trip. We know little more about what he did to keep busy in Munich. From a photo and correspondence with Apollinaire, we know that he went to a photographer named Hoffmann, at 35 Schellingstrasse, to have his photograph taken, and, from a postcard to Jacques Bon, we know that he occasionally went to Munich beer halls. That is pretty much all we know. Beyond the two paintings and the four drawings that we have, Duchamp's activities in Munich are a matter of pure conjecture. In any case, given the absence of witnesses, it seems that he was very solitary during the whole of his stay in the Bavarian capital and that he had no significant contact with the artistic milieu of Munich.

This is the first reason for the prudent silence of historians and biographers on the significance of the Munich episode. There is another reason, one that is no less important: nothing in Duchamp's work or behavior allows us to link him with the German Expressionism that was flourishing in Munich precisely in 1912, when the Blaue Reiter took up the work of the Brücke in Dresden. It is obvious

that there was not the slightest affinity between Duchamp and Expressionism; that he not only did not have the temperament of the Expressionists, but also, unlike them, he was not an artist "of temperament"; that he had no religious feeling, no taste for social revolt, no faith in the symbolism of nature, no identification with a Great Force, no sense of participation in the expression of a communal *Zeitgeist*, whether Germanic or not. In short, Duchamp cannot be suspected of having been influenced by German Expressionism, and this is an entirely justifiable reason for art historians' lack of interest in a close examination of his stay in Munich.

However, the concept of influence by no means explains everything that "works" on an artist, and the traditional methods of art history give influence an exaggerated importance when they imagine, as if it were a general law, that the evolution of an artist is best described as a dialectic made up exclusively of influences and ruptures. There are means other than influence through which the artist may be permeated by a context and may draw from it some consequences that will manifest in the artwork itself. We have seen that his stay in Munich provided the occasion for a decisive turn in Duchamp's life and work, a turn whose sense, although still obscure to him, was revealed to him during the physical and intellectual experience he lived through in painting *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*. We could hypothesize that this experience was born out of a great need for solitude and owed nothing to the Munich context. But we could believe just as well that the opposite is the case. A young man of twenty-five does not leave on a trip in order to enclose himself in an ivory tower, but rather in order to discover the world. Whatever the secret reasons for his departure and for his choice of Munich, it was undoubtedly with an aroused and lively curiosity that Duchamp entered that city. It is probable that there was no personal encounter with the artistic milieu of Munich. No doubt he was still too uncertain of himself to risk meetings that might threaten his desire for recognition. But we can imagine that, like the artist-*flâneur* in Baudelaire, he visited the town from top to bottom, that he savored the half-bourgeois, half-bohemian atmosphere of Schwabing, and that he did not miss a single one of those expositions that demonstrated the complicated vitality of this capital of the arts so different from Paris, so curiously divided between its *mittel-Europa* traditions and the advanced avant-gardes inspired by work in Russia and, especially, in France. This is a hypothesis that is at least as plausible as the need for solitude; it is also compatible with what we know of Duchamp. It thus demands attention, even with some necessary precautions.

First of all, I am not trying to establish the slightest biographical fact; that would demand an on-site archival investigation, which, even if necessary, does not form part of my project. But on the other hand, I am not setting out to build an interpretation of the work that would be based on conjectures about what Duchamp could have done or seen in Munich. Such an argument would be too

vulnerable to eventual disproofs arising out of subsequent investigations. But I will try to describe succinctly the state of those questions and artistic practices that Duchamp would have found on his arrival in Munich. I will do this without assuming any particular sort of influence but, rather, by considering these "questions and artistic practices" as a field of resonance that welcomes or rejects the new artist, that could intensify or minimize the intuitions that ran through him in Munich, and that obviously could find their own resonance in the work only after Munich.

In Munich, the experience of painting, and especially of painting *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, led Duchamp to the threshold of a revelation that, borrowing from Lacan, I referred to earlier as a "*revelation of the Symbolic*": painting is named, always already named, even before the artist, impelled by his desire to become a painter, puts his brush to the canvas; his historical task, in a culture circumscribed in time and space by the phenomenon of the avant-garde, is to break the pact that gives painting its name and to anticipate a new pact that will be renewed later in a new situation; the destiny of the artist to whom this is revealed will be linked to the death of painting insofar as this death, always already announced, is the paradoxical historical condition for the survival of painting, the reprieve that comes from its name being unpronounceable for a while.

A few months after the Munich trip, it was the "invention" of the ready-made that would confirm this revelation. Duchamp abandoned painting for the first time, or, to be more precise, he abandoned painting as a making and seeing, as an artisanal pleasure, an "olfactory masturbation." But he did not abandon the paradoxical contract that tied him to the history of painting; rather, he reduced the act of painting to nothing more than the enunciation of this contract itself: to name the death of painting and its survival all at once, to name the broken pact and the new pact that, since Manet at least, were part of the rhythm of the destiny of an avant-garde painter, and, by a supplementary turn of the screw, to name the name. To pass from "olfactory masturbation" to "a sort of pictorial nominalism" would be the second passage that built on the passage from the *virgin* to the *bride* and of which *Bicycle Wheel* would take account in 1913, although Duchamp would not yet be aware of this, since he would not use the word *ready-made* until two years later.

Here we cannot treat "the nature of the questions and artistic practices" in Munich in 1912 in all its complexity, its origins, its nuances. To consider it as a field of resonance, we must have an idea of what is resonating there. The ready-made provides us with this idea in two ways: that of the fully constructed utilitarian or commercial object, which is the challenging, nonart side of the ready-made; and that of color, of the enunciation of color, which is its artistic side and its particular link to painting and its history. The first aspect is easily understood and can itself be divided into two sides: utilitarian, as opposed to contemplative, and ready-made, as opposed to artisanal. The second aspect, which will be de-

veloped later, needs some justification. We can find this justification in several interviews with Duchamp in which, in relation to the readymades but also in relation to some of the "cubist" paintings like the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, he explains how in his view the words, the names, and the titles of his works must work to "add color to the object."

The Munich in which Duchamp entrenched himself in July and August 1912 is not the whole of the Munich art world but a field of possible resonances that would be specified after the fact, that is, after having found a particular resonance in Duchamp's later practice. It was both more and less than the choir of Expressionist voices that could be heard in the entourage of the Blaue Reiter. It was everything that, in the summer of 1912, was perceivable in one way or another about the stakes introducing themselves into the practice of painting in the name of utility, on the one hand, and craft on the other, and then, also, of color.

A complementary hypothesis is encouraged by our investigatory project: the artistic milieu of Munich was in itself sufficiently different from that of Paris for the "state of questions and practices" to manifest itself differently in the two cities. In particular, the reception of Postimpressionism and Cubism was not the same; the institutional history of the avant-gardes did not look the same; the problematic of color as treated by the Blaue Reiter belonged to an intersection of traditions that had no parallel in Paris; the institutional ground covered by the name "art" was not divided according to the French paradigm of the Beaux-Arts and instead followed a very different organizing principle, which would give an entirely different status than in France to the decorative arts and to the *Kunstgewerbe*. My hypothesis is that this constellation of differences between Paris and Munich was in itself capable both of displacing the questions that Duchamp posed to himself about his practice and of leading to new questions, even if he was not yet aware of them. It is this constellation of differences that we must now briefly describe.

Munich in 1912

The painter Hans von Marées, representing with Böcklin, Feuerbach, and Klinger a current of Italianizing and "Romantic idealist" painting that had its roots in Friedrich, Runge, and the Nazarenes, was not really "discovered" in Munich until 1908, almost thirty years after his death, when his works were exhibited at the Sezession at the same time as those of Hodler and Munch. There is an interesting lag here that is a first demonstration of the fact that the relations between the avant-garde and academicism were not ruled in Germany, and in Munich in particular, by the same sharp oppositions as were those in Paris between official and independent art. Marées, like Böcklin, but also like Bouguereau in France, was part of Cézanne's generation.¹ But if Bouguereau and Cézanne could stand, at the end of the nineteenth century, for symbols rallying

academicism and avant-garde respectively, this sort of institutional opposition was much more blurred in Germany and gave rise to various amalgams that retrospectively may seem quite strange. Thus, for example, Paul Fechter, the first critic to have come up with a full theory of Expressionism, was still associating the spirit of Marées with the premises of the new art of the Brücke as late as 1914. The conjoining of Marées and Munch in the Sezession in 1908 finds some justification therein; in any case, it does not seem to have had anything to do with that "implosive coexistence" of the advanced and backward artistic institutions that made up the French artistic milieu.

In 1912, Marées had been long dead, but Franz von Stuck, a disciple of Böcklin and a former professor of Kandinsky and Klee, still ruled as a distant master over the Munich milieu. He was still exhibiting at the Sezession those allegorical or mythological paintings that had made his reputation at the beginning of the century, and even though he was beginning to be violently challenged by the avant-garde, his conservatism still weighed heavily on Munich's art life, and his influence was great in the Sezession and in "moderate" art journals like *Die Kunst*.

Moreover, the word "Sezession" itself is a good symptomatic indication of the un-Parisian way in which the institutional conflicts inherent in the history of modern art were settled in Austria and in Germany. Paris functioned by means of rejection, whereas Munich, Berlin, and Vienna worked by means of schism. From the time of the Salon des Refusés, which, here again, has paradigmatic value, the conflict between the Parisian avant-garde and Parisian academicism was settled from on high in a way that could not help being political and that had its starting point in a gesture of exclusion coming from the established authorities, the Academy or the Society of French Artists. It was in this way that, again and again, the avant-garde was led to situate itself in relation to the rejections that it came up against and was required to begin from a position (however momentary) of exteriority. In Vienna, Munich, and Berlin, in contrast, the initiative seemed to come no less frequently from the artists themselves, who, feeling more advanced than, but out of power in, the artistic institutions, moved ahead by seceding. Thus, it was from inside the art institution that the avant-garde was defined and, as such, through a movement of retreat.²

Depending on whether the dynamic of the avant-garde follows the paradigm of rejection or that of secession, the name of art will not be the object of identical strategies, and the connection to tradition will be completely different. In rejection, the institution of authority will take over the right to decide the legitimate contours of art and will accuse the avant-garde of seeking to break them. The consequence is the creation of a counterinstitution that forms a new pact around the new painting and that pushes the official institution to question the name of art and to expand the concept of art. The idea of the avant-garde is thus based on the evident rupture of tradition, not because the artists wanted rupture but be-

cause rupture was forced onto them, giving them no other possible strategy than to claim it as a proof of modernity and as the basis of a tradition to come. In secession, in contrast, the avant-garde makes some conflict (which can be a rejection, although this is not obligatory) serve as a pretext in order to quit the official institution and declare that the pact drawn around the concept of art has become too rigid. It is thus the avant-garde that makes the first move and takes it upon itself to remodel the name of art by impoverishing the adversary's conception. Academicism, far from representing the law and order against which the avant-garde poses itself as a transgressive force, is that which remains of previous avant-gardes when they have run out of their scissional energy. In this situation, the avant-garde has no need to call for a rupturing of a tradition that no one really accuses it of engaging in anyway. Rather, the avant-garde accuses academicism of being only a dead tradition, while it conserves the power of presenting itself as the authentic and energetic inheritor of this very tradition.

It has often been noted that the art of central Europe, at the beginning of this century, seemed to evolve along lines that were infinitely more supple than in Paris, infinitely more tangled and intersecting, much less under the irreversible pressure of a privileged historical movement. Not that conflicts—attacks against modern art and “revolutionary” manifestos, which on either side, hardened positions—were lacking. But one of the reasons for the fluidity of positions is no doubt related to the phenomenon that I am describing here: a historical dynamics that followed the paradigm of secession more than that of rejection. This created a climate that could not be the same for Munich as for Paris, a climate that was no less made up of ideological struggles between artistic factions but that brought about amalgams that the much more “geometrical” French attitude would have resisted. The Viennese and Munich avant-gardes were not forced to define themselves, block against block, in relation to a monolithic academicism or on the basis of a radical break. The avant-gardes certainly did define themselves as the irreversible movement of history, but they always did so in relation to what had gone before and, to a large degree, according to traditions that they sought to declare as part of their heritage.

The paradigm of secession was omnipresent in German artistic life at the beginning of the century, and not only in the art movements that took that name. First of all, in 1892, there was the Sezession in Munich around Fritz von Uhde and, in the same year, that in Berlin around Liebermann. But the two movements, which bore the same name, were not at all ideologically homogenous: Uhde was a religious painter poised between symbolism and Leibl's naturalism; together with Corinth and Slevogt, Liebermann was one of the rare German impressionists. In 1897, Klimt founded and directed the Viennese Sezession, and in this case, it was Art Nouveau that served as the ideological basis for the movement. In 1910, the Berlin Sezession split to give birth to the Neue Sezession, which included Nolde, Pechstein, Kirchner, and Schmidt-Rottluff—in other words,

most of the artists of the Brücke, to whom the name Expressionist had not yet been applied. In 1912, there was a Sezession in Cologne, but the word had lost its forceful reference to a schism and now designated only a group of conventional artists who wanted to give themselves the allure of modernity. During this period, the Munich Sezession had rapidly become academicized.³

Here, we should note a second lag that shows that the Munich avant-gardes did not in any way undergo the pressures of a history oriented, as in Paris, by the trajectory of Realism-Impressionism-Cézanneanism-Cubism. Quite the contrary, they greeted these movements—in those cases, indeed, where they did in fact greet them—in a curious chronological disorder, with emphases that were quite different from Paris, and amalgamated them in quite distinct ways.⁴ At the beginning of the century, the Sezession, which had been more or less based on naturalism, gave a growing place to Art Nouveau, which had been promoted since 1896 by the journal *Jugend*. The naturalism of Menzel and Leibl, the only tenuous connection of German art with French realism, had degenerated into the rural mysticism of the group Die Scholle. And Impressionism had more and more difficulties in getting itself accepted: Corinth and Slevogt left Munich for Berlin in 1900 and 1901. With Liebermann, they engaged in Impressionism thirty years after their Parisian counterparts. This lag may explain the strange reception of Impressionism in Munich as an art that was too modern for the Academy, the Kunstverein, and even the Sezession and that was considered already outdated by Kandinsky, who in *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* saw nothing more in it than naturalism and positivism. However, *Über das Geistige* appeared only in 1912. Before this, Kandinsky had already created in 1901 and dissolved in 1904 the Phalanx group, which proposed to reunite the young artists and give them a chance to exhibit. If we can judge by the French painters whom this group with such a militant name showed as examples to the young Munich artists, we will see that the Phalanx did not escape from the contradictions coming out of a short-circuited reception of Impressionism. The seventh exposition (1903) had presented Monet and Pissarro, and the tenth (1904) had shown Neoimpressionist work, notably that of Signac, Laprade, and Van Rysselberghe; but, in a move that is incomprehensible to us, it had also given a place to Flandrin! Undoubtedly, this was a way for Kandinsky to compensate by means of an “inspired” and symbolic painting for what he must have judged to be excessively materialistic in Neoimpressionism.

If Impressionism was so poorly welcomed, both by academicism and by the avant-garde, we cannot say, however, that the importance of Cézanne was completely ignored. But with a remarkable constancy, the name of Cézanne came to be associated by the Germans with those of Gauguin and Van Gogh and the whole then amalgamated with Munch. The Sezession of 1904 and the Kunstverein of Munich exhibited the first three together; the Brücke specifically claimed Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Munch as its own; and the whole of the insti-

tution of criticism spoke of this quadruple association as if it were the most natural of groupings. We can see proof of this in the fact that the Sonderbund of 1912—an important exhibition of the avant-garde that took place during the summer in Cologne and that Duchamp probably visited on his return trip—identified itself completely within a lineage of Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, and Munch, these “masters from which the new movement has emerged.”⁵

All of this obviously indicates that Germany understood the work of Cézanne in a manner completely different from that of France, as a step toward Expressionism, not toward Cubism. If we make an exception of Feininger, who came later and who, moreover, remained an American, there were no German Cubists. As for the French Cubists, they were misunderstood or ignored or assimilated into the Expressionists. The Berlin Sezession in 1911 had exhibited eleven French artists in a separate room with the title “Expressionisten”. Among them were the Fauves (but not Matisse), but also Braque, Picasso, and Herbin (with protocubist works, it is true). At the fifth exposition of the *Sturm* in August 1912, Walden had presented six French artists, including Braque, Herbin, and Marie Laurencin, under the title “Französische Expressionisten”. In any case, before the publication in 1914 of Fechter’s book *Der Expressionismus*, which limited the use of the term to the Brücke and the Blaue Reiter, the word Expressionism was used by virtually everyone to refer ambiguously to a whole international current that “was opposed to Impressionism.”⁶ For Klee himself, Cubism in this period was “a specific branch of Expressionism.”⁷

In Munich, Kandinsky was the first to give a place to the Cubists. Faithful to the dynamics of secession, Kandinsky and Jawlensky left the Kunstverein in 1909 to found the Neue Künstlervereinigung, which would experience a similar secession two years later when Kandinsky quit with all of those who would soon after create with him the Blaue Reiter. Yet the Vereinigung, which exhibited cubist canvases of Braque and Picasso in 1910, included two French members, Le Fauconnier and Pierre Girieud.⁸ This was virtually the only cubist presence in Munich around 1910; once again, it was assimilated into the current that would become the Blaue Reiter and not at all presented as the autonomous avant-garde that it was in France.

What other marks of a French presence could Duchamp have been able to notice in wandering through the art milieu of Munich in 1912? Since the start of the year, the Neue Pinakothek had housed the Tschudi donation, a prestigious collection of modern French art assembled by the dynamic Hugo von Tschudi, recently deceased, who had been director of the National Museum of Berlin and then of Munich. From Courbet to Matisse, the Tschudi collection presented the whole history of Impressionism and, for the recent movement, emphasized the Neoimpressionism of Luce and Signac, into which it assimilated Matisse.⁹ We can consider this as the only antidote to the bad welcome given to Impressionism in Munich, but it also involved a short-circuiting of its own: although it had not

yet been assimilated by the academic milieu and had already been rejected by the Blaue Reiter, the Impressionism of the Tschudi collection already presented itself as museum art. Moreover, if it presented, like all museum art, a certain reading of history, this was not oriented toward Cubism but toward Divisionism and Fauvism—in other words, toward that art and those theories of color in which Franz Marc and Kandinsky, who came from a different tradition, saw a strong encouragement for their own particular practice.

Here in broad outline is “the state of the questions and the artistic practices” that presided over the birth of the Blaue Reiter and that Duchamp encountered soon after settling in Munich. Of course, it did not present itself to Duchamp with that sort of synthetic clarity that we can achieve only in hindsight. But it did present itself as a climate, something out of focus and untheorizable but also stimulating for artistic intuition. It seems to me that a young artist who had left for the first time the milieu in which he originally began to fashion his craft must have been extremely sensitive to such a climate or at least to those forces in the climate that differentiated it from his original climate. It is thus not pushing things to imagine that Duchamp took something from this new climate, by osmosis we might say, and that what he took from it would have been a series of authorizations.

1. Cézanne was not really unknown but he was “misinterpreted” by German art. Cézanne himself vehemently rejected the association of his name with those of Gauguin and Van Gogh, as is shown by his declarations to Emile Bernard, who was interested in all three.¹⁰ As for the Cubists, who saw themselves as the true inheritors of Cézanne, they were not accepted in the Munich art world any more than Cézanne was. As much as the history of the French avant-gardes passes through Cézanne and Cézanneanism, that of the German avant-gardes follows other paths that have nothing to do with the Cézanne-obstacle. Facing this obstacle, a veritable name-of-the-father, Duchamp may have felt that his time in Munich, which he later called “the occasion of my complete liberation,” was a formidable relief: another history of painting was possible, one that did not have to ceaselessly struggle with Cézanne. The need to repress and sublimate his oedipal conflict with the master from Aix could perhaps be partially assuaged. The censorship that had guided the displacements of his desire to become a painter along the associative chain woman-painter could now relax its vigilance, and the repressed signifier, Suzanne/Cézanne, could return, leading to the revelation we have already mentioned. We will never know if it really happened this way. All we can say is that the much less forceful reception of Cézanne by the Munich milieu might have created the favorable conditions for such a biographical occurrence. Having at our disposal a pictorial fact—*The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*—and its interpretation as I have developed it thus far, we can connect it to this aspect of the Munich scene and argue that there was a resonance.

2. The Munich reception of Impressionism and Cubism reinforces this argument. One of the few things that Duchamp shared with Kandinsky was the reaction to Impressionism, which both of them condemned, the former as "retinal," the other as "naturalist." But whereas in Paris such a judgment, which was that of Gleizes and Metzinger, would have led the Cubists to defend a conceptual realism and not a visual one, in Munich it led Kandinsky to give up absolutely on any idea of realism. Similarly, the Parisian cubist reaction to Impressionism would have as a corollary the abandonment of color, which was judged too decorative or not conceptual enough. In Munich, the reverse was the case: Kandinsky and Marc freed color precisely because its autonomy vis-à-vis the represented object seemed to them to be the best guarantee of a new conception of painting, liberated from the retinal. It is true that they referred to a whole theoretical tradition that was not that of Impressionism and that would lead them to the idea of a language of the emotions and of an expressive code of colors that were both absent from French painting. This was also a set of favorable conditions for Duchamp. During the year that preceded his stay in Munich, he dissociated himself from Cubism at the same time as he initiated himself into it. Cubism thus remained his point of reference, despite his desire to pass beyond it "at high speed." Neither Delaunay nor Kupka, both of whom were nonetheless working under his very eyes to escape from Cubism by means of color, seemed to have gained his attention and even less to have influenced him. It was in Munich that he encountered color, in a climate that was not feeling the authority of Cubism and did not engage in Cubism's repression of color. Here again, we should see nothing more than an authorization, and certainly not an influence. Duchamp would not become a colorist. Nonetheless, a very specific examination and experimentation with color would lead to the idea of "pictorial nominalism" as the intersection of two theoretical traditions that were resonating, each in the other.

3. The dynamics of secession meant that the Munich avant-gardes did not experience the same cases of mutual confrontation with academicism as occurred on the Parisian scene. Munich thus did not experience those misunderstandings that led to a notion of the avant-garde as *tabula rasa*. In Paris, the artist-innovator saw himself first of all as someone who had been refused, accused of nonart. From this came conflicts of personalities, of styles, and of ideologies always cast in institutional conflicts, since it was always the institutionalized concept of art that confronted its contrary. Later, when the avant-garde's provocation was accepted and reintegrated into the category of art, it still carried within it the connotations of "nonart" that resulted from its rejection. Thus was created the misleading image of a history of art that "advanced" only by integrating a rapidly changing succession of negations of itself, as if changing a tradition meant the same as effacing memory, as if the only guarantee of the future was to make a *tabula rasa* of the past. The dynamics of secession would not lead to this illusion of the *tabula rasa*. It gave an essential place to provocation, as we have defined it

above as a call for recognition. But insofar as the artists had the initiative for secession rather than the institutions having the initiative for rejection, provocation appeared much less as means of assassinating tradition than of splitting off from a tradition that was already dead. For painters, the other name of a dead tradition is "museum art." As such, it deserves all their respect, does not arouse any anger, and remains open to new pictorial interpretations. For these avant-gardes of secession, the technical and aesthetic rupture with tradition was not and did not appear as the motor-force of modernity.

I noted above that Duchamp did not entertain the fantasy of a *tabula rasa*. Nor did Manet or Cézanne, for that matter: the former never stopped linking his art to tradition, and the latter kept working at "redoing Poussin." Artists started espousing the ideology of the *tabula rasa* attributed to them only from the moment of Futurism and Dadaism on. We well know Duchamp's disdain for Futurism and his reluctance to see himself assimilated into Dada. He never wanted to burn down the museums, as did Marinetti, or to break completely with art, as did the Cabaret Voltaire. His "Dadaism" was never made up of social condemnations of art, but only of personal secessions.¹¹ He never wanted to engage in a *tabula rasa* of tradition, nor did he believe that it was possible to do so; never did he want to break with art in order to efface the memory of it. In Munich, in any case, he got down to work and did not feel the need to produce a pictorial innovation that would gain its heroic modernity from its rejection of the past or from the past's rejection of it. Lebel has noted that the execution of his Munich paintings "seems to have [been] taken right from the old masters."¹² Maybe we have to understand that the Munich climate, less avant-gardist and less dogmatic than that of Paris, had something to do with this execution. More at ease in the milieu of these avant-gardes that did not deny their past but separated themselves from it in order to better claim it for themselves when they felt that it had lost its vitality, Duchamp was able without shame to give himself over to a pictorial practice that was connected through the notion of craft to a tradition that he chose for himself. Whether or not this is the "explanation" for his sudden return to the techniques of the old masters, it was one of the conditions that authorized it and gave it his particular field of resonance.

4. In fact, it seems that immediately after Munich, Duchamp passed from a Parisian strategy to a Munich one. He had just finished his masterpiece (in the older sense that this word had in the trade guild tradition of art), his analysis of the passage to a pictorial craft. And what did he do then? He stopped painting; he withdrew from the scene; he engaged in a secession. It is obvious that the "abandonment of painting" was a strategy. If Duchamp had really abandoned the craft of the painter for something completely different, like the job of librarian, we would say nothing more about him, and nothing would force us today to still ask the question of the meaning of this "abandonment." If we still have to ask it, this is because its meaning is most immediately that of a strategy, one that is inherent

in painting. It was not different in principle from the one that led Manet to abandon chiaroscuro, or Cézanne to abandon linear perspective. It was not different in principle from the abandonment of figuration, which around 1912 was the separate strategy of painters as diverse as Kupka, Mondrian, Delaunay, Picabia, Kandinsky and Malevich. But Duchamp's was not a strategy that responded to rejection by rejection. It was not a provocation that claimed a negative pictorial innovation that the artist demanded be accepted as meaningful. The provocation lay elsewhere, in splitting and secession. In abandoning painting, Duchamp was referring everything that this name designated to a dead tradition. He relegated the totality of the pictorial tradition to the museum, including the contemporary avant-gardes and even his own recently completed work—*The Passage*, which had been the means for his becoming-painter, and *The Bride*, which was already conjugating this becoming in the past tense.

There is still a great deal to say about Duchamp's "abandonment" of painting. For the moment, we will only note that in Munich he found the favorable conditions and maybe even the model for an artistic strategy that functioned along the lines of secession and that would take on its full provocative sense once it had been imported into Paris, an artistic milieu that functioned along the lines of rejection. Reciprocally, we will note that the complex network of conditions sustaining the art practice in Munich resonated under the blow of this abandonment and gave off a particular sound to which the rest of the analysis will now be attuned.

Marcel Duchamp, Art Worker

To the rejection of *Nude Descending a Staircase* by the Indépendants in 1912, Duchamp responded with the secession that followed Munich, in which he gave himself the motto, "Marcel, no more painting; go get a job." Thus, the abandonment seemed to conclude a series of defeats that had begun in 1905 with his failing the entrance exam to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. But the amusing logic of the "subsidized symmetry" that seems to have organized all of Duchamp's life means that this abandonment also concluded a series of successes that had also begun in 1905 with precisely a secession, a separation.¹³

Shortly after his rejection by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Duchamp, who was trying to get out of the recently instituted obligatory two-year military service, learned that a year's dispensation would be granted to anyone who enlisted, provided that he was a lawyer, doctor, or art worker (*ouvrier d'art*). Having neither the time nor the desire to embark on paths that his brothers had abandoned, he got a job as an apprentice engraver in a print shop in Rouen. He conscientiously applied himself to learning the trade by printing the engravings of his grandfather, Emile Nicolle, and after great success, he was given his certificate as an *ouvrier d'art*.

This was the only diploma he would ever receive and the only institutional success in his early years. In retrospect, it seems as worthless as the failure in the competition of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts was insignificant. But the two events, only one or two months apart, were "symmetrically subsidized," as if the fundamental anxiety of becoming a painter had been compensated for early on by the assurance that he would be a good technician. But in Munich, it was through a particularly minute investment in the pictorial technique that he would accomplish his becoming-painter, and it was through a perfectly mastered craft and two superbly realized paintings that the uselessness of continuing to paint would be revealed to him.

We can well imagine the "irony of affirmation" with which Duchamp, at the end of his life, claimed the title of art worker. But in the period when his greatest desire was to be recognized as a painter, we can be sure that he got no glory from it. In the Paris of the years around 1910, nothing would have been more contrary to the title of artist than that of art worker. Art had to be a form of thought, not a manner of execution. Thus, we should not imagine that Duchamp was the only person to despise the "stupidity" of painters, nor that he was the only one to disapprove of "retinal painting." All the avant-garde painters shared this desire to be recognized for their pictorial thought rather than for their manual craft. While the avant-garde abandoned the skills of the hand to the *pompiers* and other academic painters, the prestige demanded from painting was quite naturally displaced onto an activity more emotional and conceptual than manual. And a good part of the ideological ambition of the new painters was to free themselves of the status of artisans and, in particular, to avoid any confusion of their work with that of the decorative arts. The more they moved toward "pure" painting and toward abstraction, the greater was the danger of this confusion, and thus all the greater was the insistence on getting rid of the utilitarian and artisanal values associated with the decorative arts.

Only at the end of the war was there a reversal of these tendencies in France; only then entered into the work of certain painters like Delaunay or Léger the desire—a frequently contradictory one, moreover—to see the rise of a "pure" art that would simultaneously be a "useful" art integrated into everyday life. It would even take until Le Corbusier, *l'Esprit nouveau*, and the Salon des Arts Décoratifs of 1925 for such a desire to gain a certain prestige in France and for a functionalist aesthetics to make an inroad, although a tentative one.

At this time, the functionalist movement had already had a long history in Germany, one that would no doubt not be without implication for the "invention" of the readymade.

Two interwoven traditions must be taken into account. The first, which was in fact the newer of the two, was that of a functionalism *stricto sensu*. It is not my goal here to lay out the whole of its history, but I will note some of the signposts that mark the path to be followed by the new idea of an industrial aesthetics.

From the Viennese Sezession to the Bauhaus, this path passed through the Wiener Werkstätte, Olbrich, Hoffmann, Adolf Loos, the Deutsche Werkstätte founded in 1906 by Bruno Paul, the Werkbund founded in 1907 under the encouragement of Muthesius, the first efforts in industrial design undertaken by Peter Behrens for AEG in 1907–1908, and so on. For the most part, it was mixed up with the history of architecture in the period, but it went well beyond that history since it transferred the “pure,” “disinterested” artistic responsibility of the autonomous artists to a new figure invested with all the ambitions of the Gesamtkunstwerk, the *Gestalter*, the “conceiver of forms.” Without going into detail, let us note two things: the functionalist aesthetic was not merely a “mechanical” avatar of the applied arts; rather, it was the carrier of an ambition of cultural creation that was at least as strong as that of the pictorial avant-gardes and that was, moreover, tightly linked to them. We can see a remarkable index of this in the fact that Gropius, who declared in the first phrase of the Bauhaus manifesto that “architecture is the goal of all creative activity,” surrounded himself almost exclusively with painters when he founded the school.¹⁴ On the other hand, the nodal and most controversial point of the functionalist ideology was the abandonment of artisanal values in favor of industrial values, the substitution of an aesthetics of standardization for an aesthetics of the “hand crafted.” This did not happen overnight. In the Bauhaus manifesto, Gropius still wanted architects, sculptors, and painters to go back to craftsmanship.¹⁵ From 1914 on, however, Muthesius announced his opposition to Van de Velde within the Werkbund, responding to the call for a “universal meaning” contained within standardization against the attachment of Van de Velde to a “great reservoir of creativity” represented for him by an artisanal approach to art.¹⁶

It is not difficult, in retrospect, to see the extent to which the “invention” of the readymade was tied up by subsidized symmetry, once again, to a functionalist aesthetic. This aesthetic tried to dissolve the autonomy and the specificity of art into a general practice of the environment that, paradoxically, it invested with all the values of purity and disinterestedness that had been attached to the name of art. Conversely, the readymade attached the name of art to a banal object of the environment that had not been conceived according to a functionalist aesthetic and, pulling it out of its usual usage, brusquely conferred on it the uselessness and the disinterestedness of “pure” art. Functionalism fostered respect for materials, emphasized clarity in production processes, and exalted utility, all seen as aesthetic values that were immanent in usage and that did not call for the institutional value attached to the name of art. The readymade equally emphasized material, production processes, and utility, but as a means to isolate the institutional value of the name of art to the detriment of all aesthetic value and all use values, both now losing their point and purpose. Finally, functionalism transferred to the mode of industrial production all the investments of taste and skill that had been carried, up until then, by stylistic tradition and the manual craft of

the artisan. The readymade offered itself as an industrial object without connection to artisanal tradition and that cut short any appreciation of skill and any recognition of taste, whether good or bad.

This game of symmetries and reciprocities well inscribed the gesture represented by the readymade in the heart of a problematic of the period, which was of considerable importance for modern art and architecture. But obviously the readymade did not intervene in this problematic. It found a paradoxical resonance there, but it did not take part in it. It designated this problematic in its totality and with all its ideological variations as its own conditioning field, but it was not itself reinscribed within this field. The readymade engaged in a secession. Duchamp was not the artist-artisan of the industrial culture that Gropius had dreamed of forming; nor was he the inspired designer of a mechanical production that was to become the true art of the century, since it had kept everything of art—its talent, its work, its ambition, its culture—everything except its name. Of the very requisites of functionalism, Duchamp kept nothing of art but its name. His readymade was a “reciprocal functionalism.” Through subsidized symmetry, the functionalist object revealed itself to be a “reciprocal readymade,” a work of art to which one denies this name in order to use it as a utensil.¹⁷ Read in terms of the social, not to mention socialist, ambitions of functionalism and in terms of its failures in the subsequent history of modern architecture, this reciprocity gives its tone of enigmatic truth to the famous prediction of Apollinaire, which we must cite in its entirety: “This technique can produce works of a strength so far undreamed of. It may even play a social role. Just as a picture by Cimabue was paraded through the streets, so too has our century seen Blériot’s airplane laden with humanity, with long lasting efforts, with necessary art, escorted in glory to the Arts-et-Métiers. Perhaps it will be the task of an artist as detached from aesthetic preoccupations and as intent on the energetic as Marcel Duchamp to reconcile art and the people.”¹⁸

This phrase was written in the fall of 1912. Duchamp, who was just back from Munich, had not yet “invented” the readymade and did not know that soon a urinal named *Fountain*, like the Cimabue or Blériot’s airplane, would be triumphantly paraded by Arensberg “as though it were a marble Aphrodite.”¹⁹ But he went between 26 October and 10 November to the Salon de la locomotion aérienne and, to Léger and Brancusi, who were accompanying him, he offered this verdict: “Painting’s washed up. Who’ll do anything better than that propeller? Tell me, can you do that?”²⁰ He was thus sensitive, like Sullivan, like Muthesius, like all the pioneers of functionalism, and like Le Corbusier later, to the immanent and involuntary beauty of the modern machine adapted to its function. In contrast to them, he did not reinvest this sensitivity in a voluntarist aesthetics based on the machine. He was content to make a declaration—“Painting’s washed up”—which designated, ready-made, Blériot’s airplane and propeller, and soon the bridges and plumbing fixtures of the New World, as the only things

worthy of supplanting painting under the title of art. In Munich, he had done a drawing entitled *Airplane*, a drawing that was completely heterogeneous to the problematic of the *Virgin* and the *Bride*. Could it be that it was inspired by what was already being said, in the climate of the Werkbund, about functionalism? Reciprocally, could it have "subsidized" in advance the verdict that, at the moment of abandonment, he delivered in front of the propeller? There are not and never will be answers in terms of cause and effect to such questions. At the most, they offer their own conditional approach: Munich in 1912 offered an excellent field of resonance for a revelation of the Symbolic that isolated the name of art precisely there where the social function of the artist in an industrial society found itself tied to the question of the survival of artisanal practice within art.

To understand this, we have to deal with the second tradition—chronologically the first—that was interwoven with the history of functionalism and out of which functionalism *stricto sensu* partially came. I am referring to the *Kunstgewerbe*. The word and the practice have no equivalents in France. "Art craftsmanship," "applied arts," and "decorative arts" are approximate and partial translations. Less inaccurate would be "arts and crafts" (*arts et métiers*), but for complicated reasons, some of which are institutional, the expression does not really work in French. It works in English, since the German practice of the *Kunstgewerbe* and its promotion by ad hoc institutions, the *Kunstgewerbeschulen*, came directly out of the English Arts and Crafts movement.²¹ Why didn't France experience a movement comparable to this Arts and Crafts movement? Why didn't it know how to give birth to a talent like William Morris? Why didn't a Viollet-le-Duc, who was certainly more modern in his reading of the "Gothic Golden Age" than was the English Gothic Revival itself, lead to as many progressive interpretations of his doctrine as did Ruskin, for example, or, after him, Morris or Ashbee? Why in France didn't artisanal art develop in competition with the pictorial avant-gardes and with as much ambition as they had? Why were a Clément-Janin or a Paul Boncour able to proclaim, in 1912, "Decorative art no longer exists in France"?²²

Of all the explanations that overdetermine the answers to these questions, there is one that seems to me to be particularly pertinent for the case of Duchamp, because it deals with the manner in which the institutions divided up the name of art in the social realm. The French expression *arts et métiers* does not at all have the same sense as its literal translation in English, "arts and crafts." This is because the phrase was already being used for something else, and this had been true since the time of the *Encyclopaedia*. Diderot and d'Alembert's great project of classification had divided up human practices into sciences, arts, and crafts. When the Convention wanted to turn into law its "dictionnaire raisonné," it was virtually with a single act that the division underwent a triple institutionalization: 1793 witnessed the creation of the Museum of Natural History, the opening of the great Gallery of the Louvre, and the establish-

ment of the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers. A triple classification, a triple pedagogy—on one side, the domain of empirical and experimental knowledge, which thought of itself as a science of nature: to teach by observation. On another side, the public representation of Representation itself at its best: to teach by example. On a third side, finally, the concrete exposition of the active power of man the technician, the artisan, the manufacturer: to teach by demonstration. It seems to me that this tripartition, which resulted from a virtually unique decision, had a paradigmatic value and that it oriented the “museo-polemic” history of French art toward paths that were much more sharply drawn than elsewhere, paths that for a long time handicapped any hybridization of domains. The binary form that aesthetic judgment adopted and that we have seen crystallize around the Salon des Refusés could well have been an indirect consequence of this.

In any case, the Louvre and the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers split up the name of art around a division that is not surprising in the West—the division that distinguishes ends and means, final cause and efficient cause: on the one hand, art as thought, model, example; on the other hand, art as technique, process, sleight of hand. Technicity, artisanal skill, and everything in the artist that alluded to the worker, even if to a worker of art, found itself inscribed in the French social system, in its institutions and in its ideologies, in a site other than that designated for art “properly speaking.” It was for this latter art that the appellation “Beaux-Arts” (Fine Arts) and the support of its institutions were reserved: the museums of fine arts, the Academy of Fine Arts, the schools of fine arts. In France before 1914, these three forms, which were part of a single “ideological state apparatus,” were in an open crisis, but they nonetheless continued to impose on practitioners of all stripes their exclusional dictates and to categorically reject the artists of the avant-gardes. As a symptomatic example, we can note the “subsidized symmetry” of defeat and success: having failed the entrance competition for the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Duchamp brilliantly succeeded in his exam as an art worker.

During this time, in Germany, the *Kunstgewerbeschulen* (craft schools) were in full bloom. They were simultaneously open to two completely contradictory currents of ideas, but ones that were correlates of each other, two currents that in the 1920s would still dramatize the whole history of the Bauhaus and would set the tone of its internal struggles. On the one hand, they were open to the trend of functionalist ideas.²³ The values of personal expression, in which art workers could still, at their modest level, invest their skill, were losing ground before the collective semantics that functionalism found in the immanent aesthetic of the machine. Artisans became intellectualized, and for them this was a social elevation: they became conceivers more than makers, equals of engineers more than of workers. But this elevation took place to the detriment of the “human” and individualist values that had been part of their production before division of labor

had set in. In moving closer to the engineer, the artisan moved away from the artist.

On the other hand, this tendency engendered a reverse tendency with which it maintained an inherent conflict. In moving away from the artist at the level of making, of craftsmanship, the artisan moved closer to the artist at the level of creation, of authorship. The evolution of the *Kunstgewerbeschulen* shows that the arts were equally open to this tendency. Destined at the start to train workers of art who were skilled but had little originality, they gave an increasingly large place to research on new forms and demanded more and more personal initiative from their students. This was true to such a degree that in 1912, a critic, observing this evolution and calling on Friess, Derain, Matisse, Braque, Picasso, and, from the German side, Melzer, Pechstein, Kirchner, Heckel, and Schmidt-Rottluff, was able to declare that the *Kunstgewerbeschulen* provided perhaps a better preparation for contemporary painting than the academies.²⁴ Subsequent history would reproduce this clash of tendencies with a remarkable consistency. Throughout the length of their common modernist history, architects, even painters, and especially designers, vehemently denied that they were artists at the same time that they demanded for themselves the highest prerogatives of art: to create something new, to found a new language, to build a new culture, to anchor the social contract in a judgment of taste generalized to the whole of the constructed environment. From coffee spoons to urbanism and landscaping, the *Gestaltung* would diffuse through the whole of society artistic attitudes and requirements, even as the specific trade and identity of the artist would have to disappear. This was the contradictory ideological program that was found with slight variations in each twist of the functionalist project. The many "abandonments" of painting other than Duchamp's—Rodchenko's, for example—carry the marks of this. From congress to congress, the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) repeated this process until it exploded under the force of its internal contradictions. From the 1920s on, the conflicts of Gropius and Hannes Meyer in the Bauhaus or of the Suprematists and the Productivists in the Vhutemas had aggravated all the incompatibilities of the functionalist program.

This is to say that in 1912, whoever came as a stranger to the milieu of the *Kunstgewerbe* would have quickly perceived the nodal points of a contradiction that, viewed from within, must have seemed mired in the confusion of a day-to-day polemic. It is as if Duchamp, who was this stranger, had put his finger on a naked fact, which was not dialectizable no matter how much effort was exerted in trying to resolve the contradiction. On the one hand, the artisan and also the artisan-painter were condemned to economic decline by the industrialization of handicraft and to cultural marginalization by the pressing needs of an industrial culture. On the other hand, industry could not claim a cultural dimension without some kind of consciousness registering its raw creativity in continuity with tra-

dition. The functionalist "resolution," from Morris to Gropius and beyond, was the history of an acceptance—slow and reticent at the start, and then triumphant afterward—of the death of the artisan and, with it, of painting. But nourished by the illusion of the *tabula rasa*, it was also the fantasy of a transfer of power from the former artist-artisan to the new conceiver-projector, the fantasy of an integral and virtually instantaneous transfer of all the acquisitions of an old but now defunct tradition to a new culture yet devoid of any tradition. To dissolve the former specificity of the trades into the ideological generality of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that did not dare to speak its name of *Kunst* demanded a consciousness that knew that there was a transfer of power where the layperson saw only death and murder; it demanded a memory that, in the void of everything that the new art refused to take from the past, knew how to read dignity and respect for a tradition that had now been abolished.

The pioneers of functionalism wanted to embody this consciousness and this memory; they also dreamed of communicating them to the masses without delay. They all were thus essentially pedagogues—pedagogues pushing most urgently toward a sort of artistic alphabetization of the people. But they aspired to act on the social, and thus on the Real, and never stopped denying the level of the Symbolic wherein their work was situated. In promoting the idea that "form follows function" and that function is utilitary, ergonomic, "real," they denied their own intervention, suggesting that form is an automatic consequence of function. Here was their error, their ideology, the mark of their Imaginary. Yet their entire practice shows something else than what they imagined: that a form that was adjusted to its function was nothing other than the very symbol of this adjustment. In denying this on the theoretical level, they had eschewed the possibility of an alphabetization, a real acculturation. Because, if the social goal of functionalism was the creation of a culture, it would have been necessary for it to recognize, in order to give itself some chance of success, that its inscription in the Real was nothing other than the Symbolic: consciousness, memory, the spatiality of the social body and the temporality of history. In not understanding that creation can create a culture only through the movements of time, "with all sorts of delays," and by the retroactive movement of a Symbolic recognition, they failed.

The flip side of this defeat is the success of the readymade. It is as if Duchamp, who had certainly not tried to resolve the contradictions of the *Kunstgewerbe* or of functionalism, had found their blind spot. The readymade reveals precisely what functionalism denied, the function of the name. Duchamp chooses an industrial product, displaces it, puts it to another purpose, whereby it loses all its utilitarian value, as well as all ergonomic adjustment of its form to its function, but, by the same token, gains a function as pure Symbol. And this symbol credits a tradition that it acknowledges as dead with the anticipated value of a culture that strives to become. The readymade does not belong to artisanal tradition; it does not aim at any reconciliation of the artisan and the artist, of the one

who makes and the one who creates. And since it does not belong to this tradition, it states this fact; it is the symbol of this not-belonging, the reworded sign of the death of the artisan. On the other hand, the readymade belongs to industry, but it does not aim at the reconciliation of the artist-artisan and the designer-engineer, either. No artist made the object with his hands and no designer conceived it. A worker must indeed have made it, and an engineer must have conceived it, but there is nothing in that that could give it a pretense to a culture other than a merely technicist one. However, since the readymade belongs to industry, it declares its belonging; it is the symbol of this belonging, the recording sign of industrial culture.

Duchamp, I repeat, never entertained the fantasy of the *tabula rasa*. There is no reason to assume that he imagined incarnating the consciousness and the memory of a faded tradition, or to think that the readymade signifies the passing of power from the painter that he was to the designer that he would become. He readily discharged consciousness and memory on the spectators "who make the paintings." It was up to posterity to say if the urinal belonged to culture; he himself could not care less. But he reserved for himself the naked symbolic function, the speech act that would name art. The name mattered to him, the pact that would unite the spectators of the future around some object, an object that added nothing to the constructed environment and did not improve on it but, quite the contrary, pulled away from it, bearing no other function than that of a pure signifier, the pact itself.

Duchamp had no awareness of any of this during his stay in Munich. Not only would the readymade come later, but it would only be recognized, named as a readymade, later still. However, why must we imagine that the readymade results from an act of consciousness when everything demonstrates that it "results" from a symbolic breakthrough and that it embodies as such the emergence of the signifier? Yet the signifier is "dumb," like the painter. Even though it is the name as name, it does not even have a name. Intelligence comes only after the fact from what the name reveals when we interpret its resonance. According to the chosen resonator, we are either in the clinical field, that of "the man who suffers," or in the aesthetic and historical field of the "mind which creates." It is this latter option that I have chosen to render intelligible as much as possible, since it is here that the signifier-Duchamp reveals itself to be "intelligent." Here, the signifier takes a name, and this name is art, painting. But there also remains the name of the name, the name in its autonymy: an art of art, painting of painting. What Duchamp brought to culture was of this order, intelligible only to those onlookers who, later on, would make the paintings. That we cannot see anything of this in his work in Munich, that we can even be sure that the idea of a critique of the impasse of the *Kunstgewerben* never gripped him, does not prove a thing. It is still a question, since we know nothing of Duchamp's activities in Munich,

of reconstituting a milieu, a climate, that we can recognize a posteriori as a good resonator.

Again, not to get lost in things, we have to rely on history as a field of possibilities. The evolution of the *Kunstgewerbeschulen* is a historical fact. In 1912, they pushed their students toward both "pure" art and a practice of *Gestaltung* that was disconnected from the name of art, toward both the identity—Romantic at the core—of the free artist, disinterested and individualistic, and the "technocratic" identity of a designer well integrated into economic necessities. I see Duchamp at the intersection of these two contradictory forces, as someone who, coming from elsewhere, would have perceived the interweaving of the strands. It remains to be shown that Munich offered him the possibility of this "perception." We cannot in all certainty imagine that Duchamp visited one of the *Kunstgewerbeschulen*; the probability of this is really too slight. But there is a very strong chance that he became aware of the *Kunstgewerbe* in some other fashion. From May to October 1912, Munich was the site of a gigantic "industrial exposition." Or should we say an exhibition of "industrial art"? Of "artisanal production"? Or "manufacturing"? In any case, it was called the *Gewerbeschau*—a name that subtracts from the name of the *Kunstgewerbe* the name of art—and distributed through several pavilions an unbelievable quantity of manufactured objects, some of which—pottery, enamels, glassware—came from an art-handicraft, whereas others—furniture, clothing, appliances—were industrial in origin. The structure of the exposition was that of a commercial fair: large halls divided into stands in rows, festoons and garlands decorating the platforms, objects arranged in displays of all sorts. The exposition was, in fact, a commercial fair, in the tradition of the *Jahrmarkt*, but a *Jahrmarkt* exclusively devoted to Bavarian industries. One could even order things there and make purchases.

It is particularly interesting that this Bayrische Gewerbeschau had a great effect on the history of the *Kunstgewerbe*. It was the first time, to such a degree at least, that the artisans of diverse trades and the entrepreneurs of all the art trades could appear together before the public with a dual purpose: to show off the quality, artistic as well as technical, of their products and to ensure their commercial promotion. We find here a desire completely similar to the Werkbund's to spread standards of quality widely by integrating artisans into new circuits of distribution to the greater benefit of the culture but also of the industry of the country.²⁵ This desire was congruent with the evolution of the *Kunstgewerbeschulen* and it was marked by the same ambiguities, even making them public. The press, and in particular the art press, was not mistaken in giving a large play to the exposition and the controversies that it aroused. Overall, the press was very favorable to the *Gewerbeschau*, and the virtually unanimous argument on which it based its judgment merits some attention. The argument has three steps. First step: astonishment, worry, fear in realizing that artisans of art, who until then had benefited from an aura of artistic preciousness, could now present themselves in the vulgar

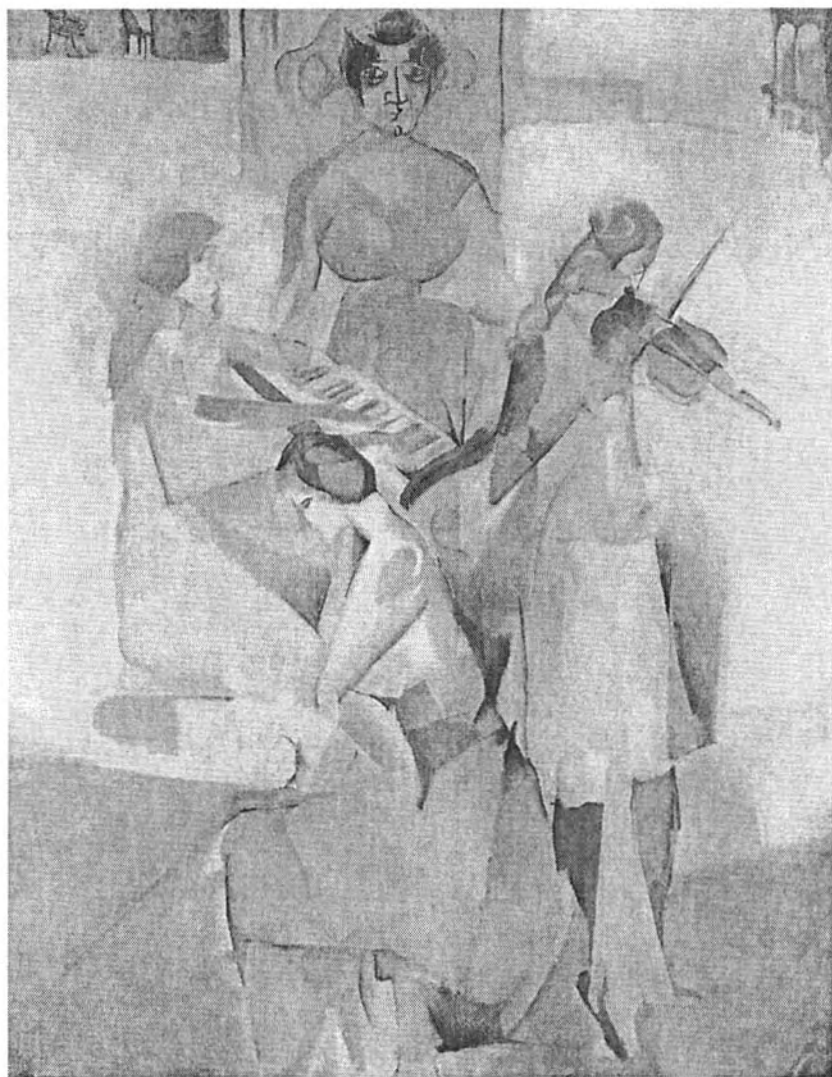
and mercantile setting of a commercial fair. Second step: hesitation and indecision; one recognizes that this is the price that one will have to pay if one wants these artisans to survive economically, and one connects the “vulgarity” of the event to the popular tradition of the *Jahrmarkt*, which, after all, is a form of culture in its own right.²⁶ Third step: relief at finding a standard for the judgment of artistic quality without which no claim to the status of art could be upheld; an equivalent relief at seeing that a “disastrous decline in taste” could be avoided; it is noted that, even if the exposition is a market, it is nonetheless not an open market ruled solely by the interplay of supply and demand, but a juried, selective market.²⁷

Here then is the artistic institution faced with economic and cultural conditions that it had not anticipated or that it had protected itself against until now; here it is forced to accept the eventuality of an art for the masses. Once the moment of confusion has passed, the artistic institution accepts this new mass art, but with one curious condition: that a principle of selection rules over its diffusion. It should be noted that none of the articles that discuss the *Gewerbeschau* mentions the names of the members of the selection jury, none examines its competence or judges its taste or questions the basis on which it makes its decisions. Everyone declares satisfaction with the simple fact of selection, as if good taste will be guaranteed and the danger of *kitsch* avoided by the simple condition that mass art be filtered through an act of judgment, no matter how arbitrary that judgment is. It seems, then, that we can derive from the *Gewerbeschau* and its commentaries the outlines of a paradoxical law that none of the actors of the period would have admitted as such, but that nonetheless works as its latent justification: the artistic component in artisanal or industrial culture is designated by a principle of choice. One can believe that it results from the skill of the artisans, from their formal creativity, or from their capacity to think about form in agreement with function; consequently, one can believe that the choice is motivated. But it is not the motivation of choice that grounds artistic character; rather, it is the principle of choice that assigns this character, isolates it, and gives it existence—in short, that names it.

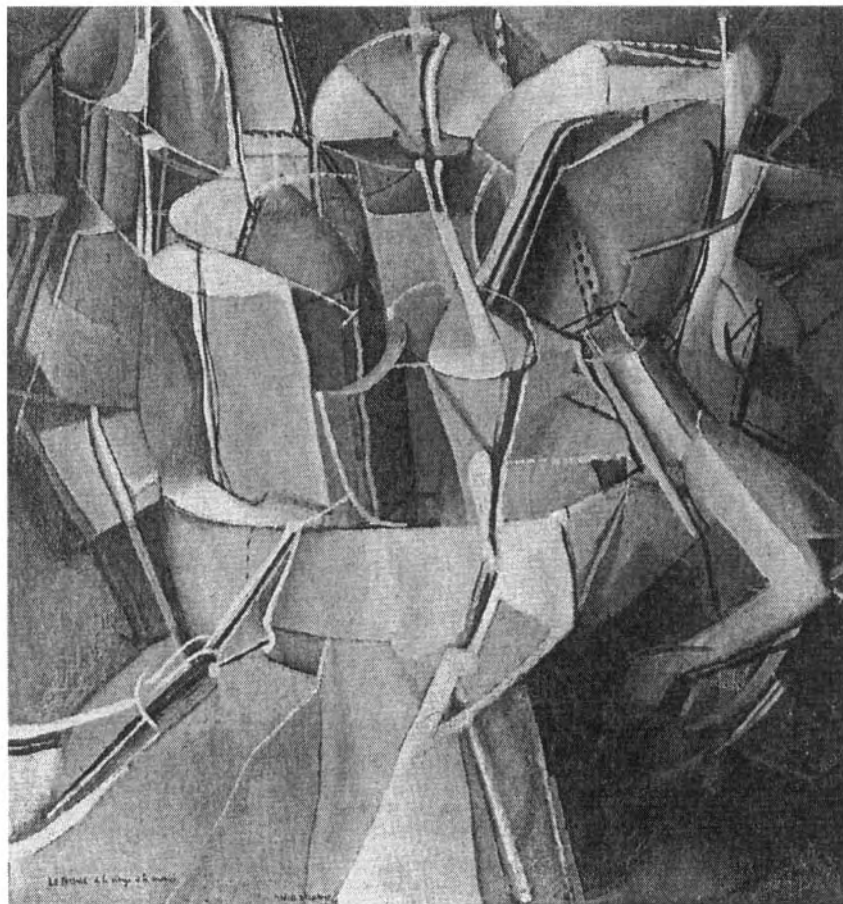
This law is the same one that presides over the readymade and that the readymade reveals with an interplay of “subsidized symmetries,” once again. Duchamp never tried to build a mass art; quite the contrary. He showed what the conditions were for the survival of “pure” art in a mass society, and, out of this demonstration, he built his oeuvre. Where the Munich art institution declared itself ready to admit as art the mass display of utilitarian objects, provided that this mass be screened in advance, Duchamp declared as artistic any utilitarian object, provided that an arbitrary choice had already pulled it out of the initial display where it, and others, had been massively presented. Thus, the Bazar de l’Hôtel-de-Ville where, two years later, Duchamp would choose his bottle rack, reveals itself as the “reciprocal” corollary of the *Gewerbeschau* that he visited,

or did not visit, but whose reverberations he could not have helped noticing during his stay in Munich in 1912.

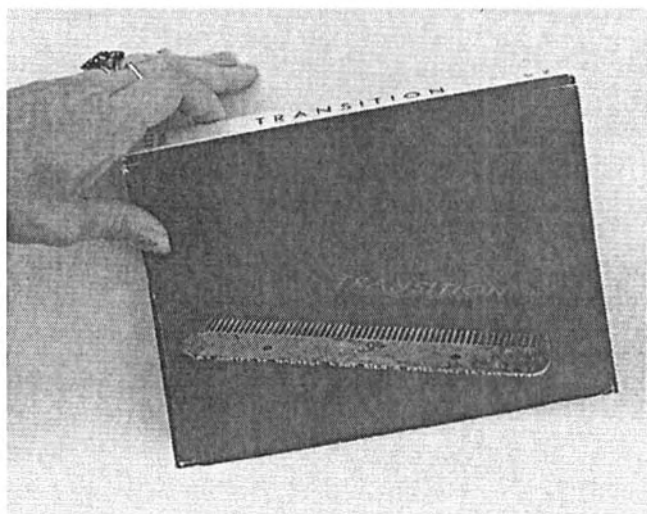
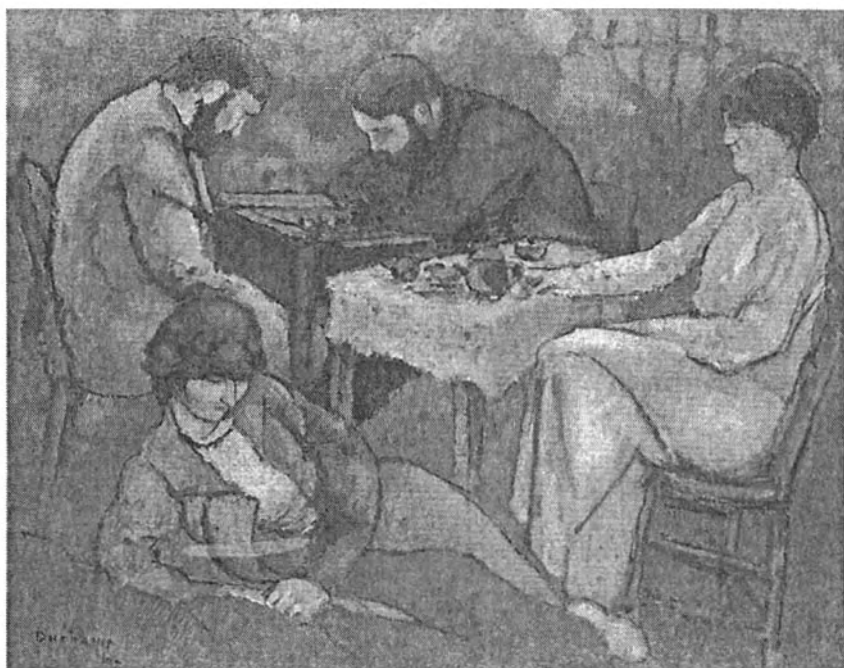
Once again, we can note that "the state of questions and artistic practices" that offered itself to Duchamp as a sort of climate, at the moment when the *ouvrier d'art* took his revenge on the student excluded from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, resonated under the force of a later event that was named the *readymade* and that presents itself to us as a strategic secession having all the appearances of an abandonment of his craft. What was this "abandonment," which was not an abandonment of craft in general but only that of painting in particular?



The Sonata. 1911. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. Photo by the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



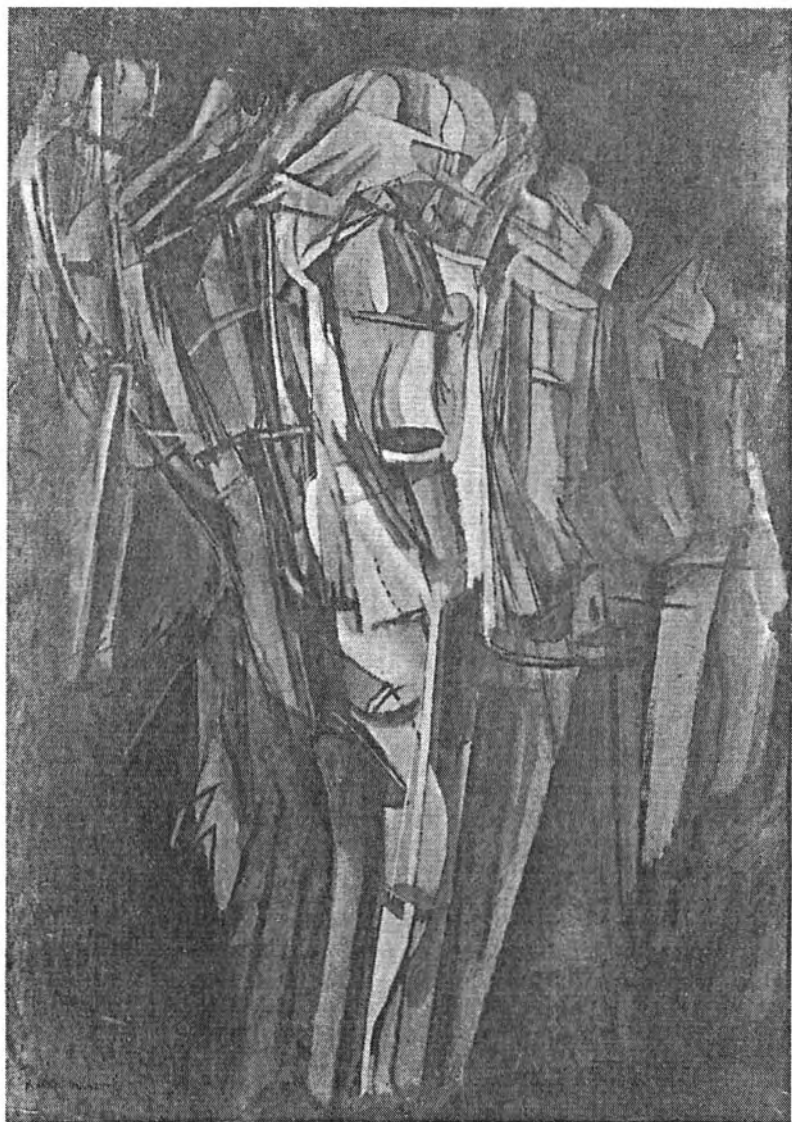
Passage from the Virgin to the Bride.
Munich, 1912 (July-August). Collection,
the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Top: *The Chess Game*. 1910. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. Photo by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Bottom: *Transition no. 26, couverture*. New York, 1937. Collection of Benjamin H.D., Buchloh, New York. Photo by Louise Lawler.

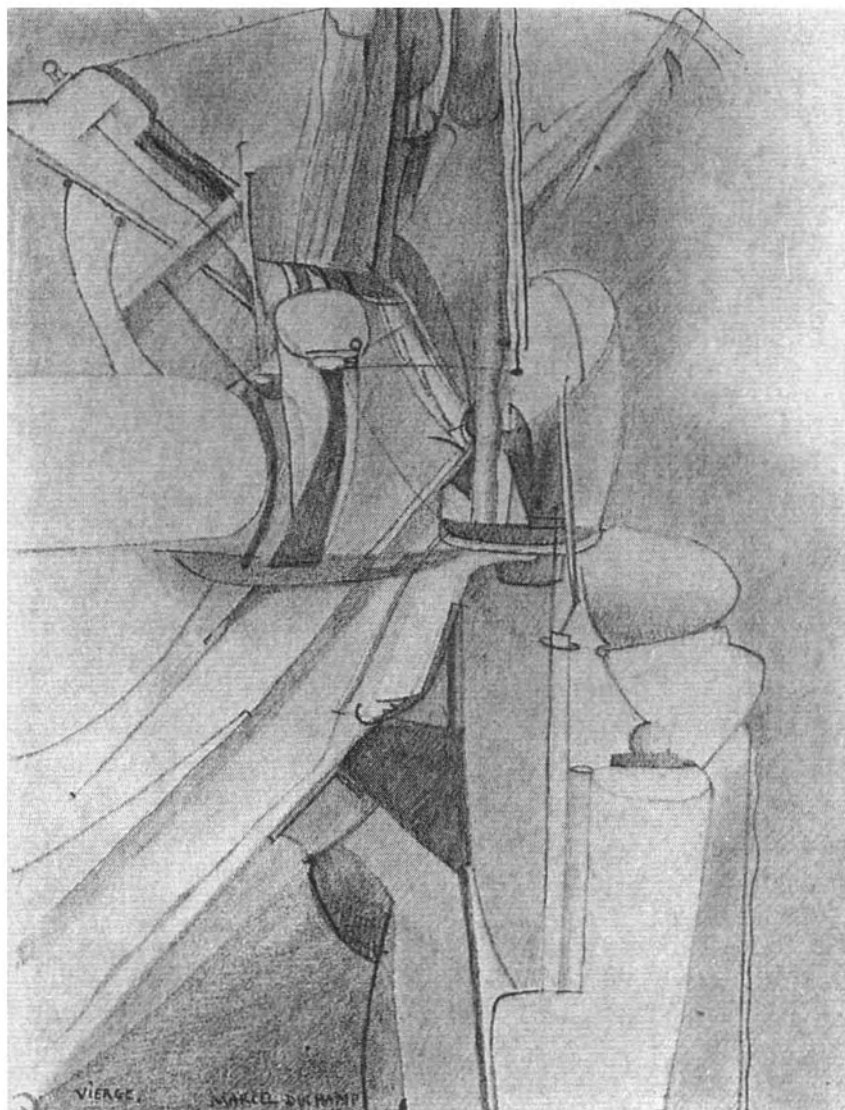
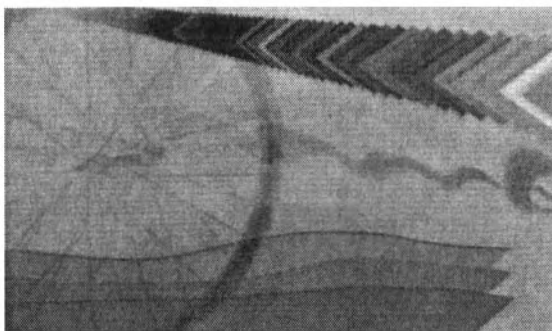


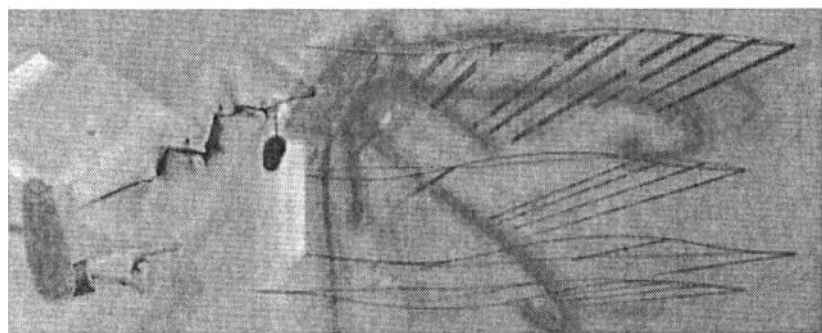
***Portrait of Chess Players. 1911.
Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise
and Walter Arensberg Collection. Photo by
the Philadelphia Museum of Art.***



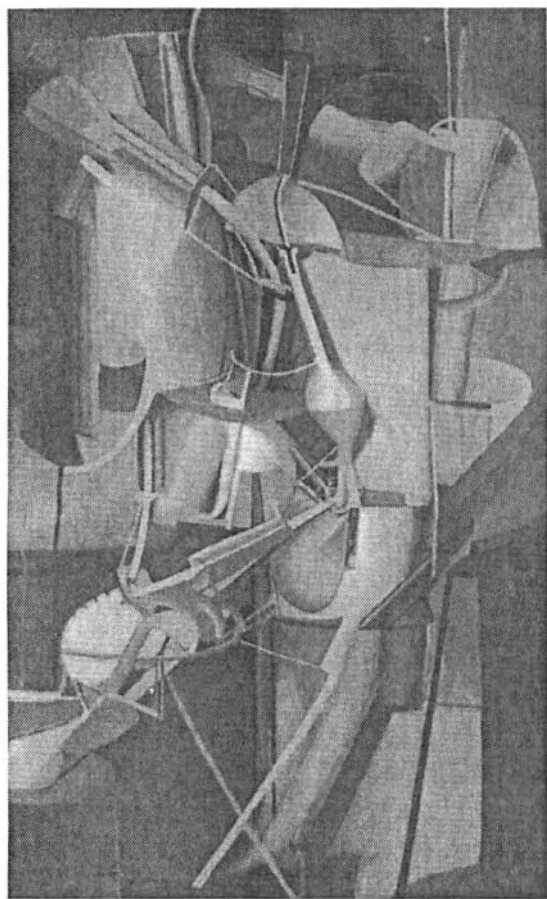
Nude (Study), Sad Young Man on a Train.
1911-1912. Peggy Guggenheim Collection,
Venice (The Solomon R. Guggenheim
Foundation). Photo by Mirko Lion.

Below: *Virgin, Vierge No. 1*. 1912.
Philadelphia Museum of Art: A. E.
Gallatin Collection. Photo by the
Philadelphia Museum of Art.

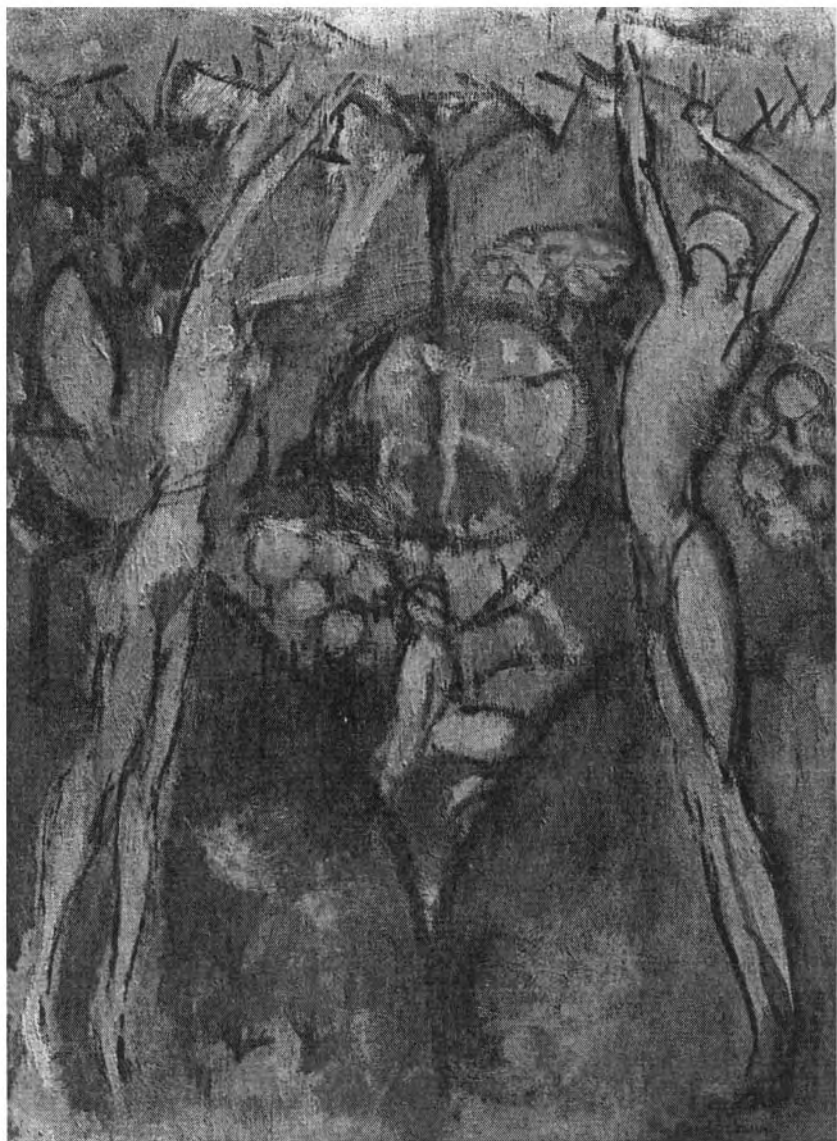




Above: *Tu m'.* 1918. Yale University Art Gallery: Gift from the estate of Katherine S. Dreier. Photo by Joseph Szaszai, Yale University Art Gallery.



Left: *The Bride.* 1912. Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. Photo by the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Jeune homme et jeune fille dans le Printemps. 1911. Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection, Milan. Photo by S.A.D.E. (Surrealism and Dada, Even) Archives, Milan.

Chapter 6

Color and Its Name

In the summer of 1912, the great figure among the Munich painters was Kandinsky. The *Blaue Reiter*, which he had founded at the end of 1911 with Franz Marc, was already having its third exhibition, and his book, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, was in its second edition and would soon go into a third. *Der Sturm* had published an excerpt from it in April, and the *Blaue Reiter Almanach*, which appeared in May, had brought out three texts by him, including the very important *Über die Formfrage*. Nothing suggests that Duchamp met Kandinsky, who was his elder by twenty years. The two men would undoubtedly have had little to say to each other, given how much they were opposed from every point of view. But it is likely that Duchamp saw his paintings in Munich or Berlin, and it is not impossible that he read, or tried to read, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. An annotated copy of the second edition of the book has been found in Jacques Villon's library. According to certain sources, the annotations are in Duchamp's handwriting and consist of attempts to translate certain sections. According to others, they are in the handwriting of his brother Raymond. In any case, the date of the edition helps defend the hypothesis that it was Duchamp who bought the book in Munich during that summer.¹

“These Strange Beings Which One Calls Colors”

We can be sure that Kandinsky had no influence on Duchamp. It is for entirely different reasons that a linking of the two men must be attempted. Both engaged in a reflection, in many ways opposed yet symmetrical, on the connection of

color to its name. Duchamp never thematized or theorized this reflection, which we can imagine remained largely "unconscious." But as we will see, he registered its emergence and acted on it. This emergence, once again, was of the order of a revelation of the Symbolic, and the conclusions that he drew from it would play a central role in the "abandonment" of painting and the genesis of the readymade. In contrast, Kandinsky made many comments on the naming of colors, showing that the question of the name was an important issue in the abandonment of figuration and the genesis of "pure" painting. These comments have many sources, notably some symbolist ones, but one of them merits a specific examination, since it refers us to the *Kunstgewerbe* in its connections to painting. It was, in fact, in the milieu of the decorative arts, since the beginning of the century, that the idea of abstraction had been promoted as the "essential domain of the ornamentalist" and that the absolute autonomy of color had started to be claimed as an expressive language detached from all forms of naturalism. At the beginning of Chapter 6 of *Über das Geistige*, entitled "Formen- und Farbensprache," Kandinsky cited an article by Karl Scheffler, who had, it seems, a profound influence on him.² In this article, Scheffler based his argument on the fact, as he put it, that "each sensitive man calmly develops his own color symbolism, which is much more than an arbitrary game," in order to motivate a sort of language and even a linguistics of color similar to the correspondences of the Symbolists and, in particular, Rimbaud's sonnet "Vowels."³ With the bases of this language established, he called for a pictorial use of color as an abstract and independent entity that the arts had yet to discover and learn how to exploit. This discovery and this exploitation are likely, he asserted, to happen most readily in the context of the decorative arts, rather than in the pure pictorial tradition.

Yet, although Kandinsky searched from 1904 on for a "language of color" that would later authorize him to switch to abstraction, he would never situate himself within the decorative arts.⁴ The fact that the German tradition maintained connections between the *Kunstgewerbe* and painting undoubtedly allowed Kandinsky to take inspiration from the reflections of a Scheffler but without ever falling into the same confusion of genres. In spite of its symbolic value, in spite of a "certain inner life," as he put it, ornamental art can only provoke "an emotion that is not strong enough to go beyond the domain of the nerves." It is in order to avoid the confusion of painting with ornamental art that, in *Über das Geistige*, Kandinsky still delayed the passage to pure abstraction that haunts the whole book.⁵ What would soon authorize this passage was the principle of inner necessity, which Kandinsky would define in several places as the "purposeful touching of the human soul."⁶

We thus have to imagine, if we want to follow in the text the argumentation of a step that the painter would take only after the book was finished, that the theoretical possibility of a true language and a true grammar of colors on which

abstraction will base itself, in order to be something other than a simple ornamental art, will contain in itself its own "inner necessity."

It is here that the Word will play its role in a paragraph that invokes—and this is undoubtedly not by chance—Maeterlinck: "Words are inner sounds. This inner sound arises partly—perhaps principally—from the object for which the word serves as a name. But when the object itself is not seen, but only its name is heard, an abstract conception arises in the mind of the listener, a dematerialized object that at once conjures up a vibration in the 'heart.' . . . Eventually, manifold repetition of a word . . . makes it lose its external sense as a name. In this way, even the sense of the word as an abstract indication of the object is forgotten, and only the pure sound of the word remains. We may also, perhaps unconsciously, hear this 'pure' sound at the same time as we perceive the real, or subsequently, the abstract object. In the latter case, however, this pure sound comes to the fore and exercises a direct influence on the soul."⁷

The word can thus "exercise a direct influence on the soul" and consequently justify itself by means of its own "inner necessity" on the condition, on the one hand, "that it forms an abstract representation" ("only its name is heard") and on the further condition, on the other hand, that the "abstract indication" disappears and that "only the pure sound of the word remains." This paragraph—which is linked in a fairly convoluted way to the contradictory historical task that painting, on the verge of becoming abstract, inherited from Symbolism, that is, on the one hand, the reductive tendency that searches in Mallarméan purism for a way to define the specificity of each art by means of its own signifiers and, on the other hand, the syncretic tendency that leads one to construct within a theory of correspondences, as in the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an emotional trans-specificity that reunites the arts in a single ambition—this paragraph authorizes the word, and specifically the name of color (as elsewhere—and this is frequently the case with Kandinsky—the musical element) to serve as an inverted metaphor founding the possibility of a pictorial language whose specificity will nonetheless be irreducible to words and names. "The word red. . . . This red, which one does not see materially but imagines in the abstract, awakens . . . a certain precise, and yet imprecise, representation having a purely internal, psychological sound."⁸

For Kandinsky, "the word *red*, . . . which one does not see materially" can be the inductor of its own inner sound. But the formal—and sensible—conditions of a language are still lacking: "If, however, this red has to be rendered in material form (as in painting), then it must (1) have a particular shade chosen from the infinite range of different possible shades of red, being thus, so to speak, subjectively characterized; and (2) be limited in its extension upon the surface of the canvas, limited by other colors."⁹

Kandinsky here defines the paradigmatic conditions (a red chosen out of an infinite scale) and the syntagmatic ones (the delimitation of red by the other col-

ors on the canvas) of a colored language. Here, then, is presented the elementary lexicon of painting considered as a language, a lexicon to which it is still necessary to add a syntax (this will later be the task of *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*). However, that painting from now on will be a language—or, at this stage, a lexicon at the very least—does not make of it a work of art, which, for Kandinsky, is a being: “The true work of art rises ‘from out of the artist.’ Once released from him, it assumes its own independent life, takes on a personality, and becomes a self-sufficient, spiritually breathing subject that also leads a real material life: it is a *being*.”¹⁰

Without this “organic” ontology, abstract painting would simply be a colored thing, a decorative thing that can speak the language of forms and colors but that is not a work of art. The naming of color, which is perhaps the inaugural decree for painting, does not exhaust its specificity: “With time, every tone can very probably find its own material expression even in words, but there will always remain something extra that cannot be exhausted by words, and yet is not merely an elaborate accident of the particular tone, but its very essential.”¹¹

Even when it is adequately named, color exceeds the word. It is a remainder or a supplement without a name, a “something extra” that forms its “essential element” and that forms painting’s essential being. It is paradoxically because the painter resists it that the word can be the pivot of a foundational inverted metaphor of its own specificity. When one tries to establish the elements of a language, even a mute one like painting, one bumps up against the model of language as such. But when it is a question of ensuring that the essence of this language is unspeakable, it becomes necessary to expel the model when it has finished its job. For the model to have a truth under such conditions, and for the metaphor to be more than an analogical and reversible image, it is necessary that a secret link, irreducible to the linguistic nature of either pictorial language or language proper, tie up the one to the other. It is necessary that they have a common, ineffable being. It is this being that Kandinsky calls “inner sound.” It is at the heart of words as well as the heart of colors; it is this being that authorizes the passage from words to colors and founds the respective specificity of painting and poetry in their necessary transspecificity.

Such a being reveals itself to painters in the intimacy of their aesthetic experience, which can be poetic or pictorial, verbal or visual. In *Rückblicke (Reminiscences)*, Kandinsky relates his memories, more or less embellished and mythified, of several aesthetic experiences that he judges retrospectively to have been crucial and that he endows with all the inner necessity required to have justified his passage to abstraction. One of these experiences, when he was working on the sketch for *Composition VI*, whose theme was the Deluge, was having renounced expressing the deluge itself and having obeyed the expression, the “inner resonance,” of the word *deluge* instead.¹² Another experience, better known, is the abstract *Unheimlichkeit* (uncanniness) that he felt one night in

Munich in front of one of his paintings, leaning on its side against a wall, whose "content was incomprehensible" but that was "indescribably beautiful."¹³ Another, finally, is a memory, dated from adolescence, which deals with the being and name of color and which Kandinsky describes with a fervent lyricism that gives it the value of a true revelation: "As a thirteen- or fourteen-year-old boy, I gradually saved up enough money to buy myself a paintbox containing oil paints. I can still feel today the sensation I experienced then—or, to put it better, the experience I underwent then—of the paints emerging from the tube. One squeeze of the fingers, and out came these strange beings, one after the other, which one calls colors—exultant, solemn, brooding, dreamy, self-absorbed, deeply serious, with roguish exuberance, with a sigh of release, with a deep sound of mourning, with defiant power and resistance, with submissive suppleness and devotion, with obstinate self-control, with sensitive, precarious balance. Living an independent life of their own, with all the necessary qualities for further, autonomous existence, prepared to make way readily, in an instant, for new combinations, to mingle with one another and create an infinite succession of new worlds."¹⁴

This sentence is pivotal in more than one way. By its position in the book, it acts as a hinge in time allowing two other memories to fold onto one another. The first, an archaic one, is the childhood memory with which the text of *Rückblicke* opens and that gives to the title all the phantasmatic weight of a "primal scene": "The first colors to make a powerful impression on me were light juicy green, white, carmine red, black, and yellow ochre. These memories go as far back as the age of three."¹⁵ The second is the completely conscious and painful memory of his years of apprenticeship in Munich, when, having become a member of Stuck's studio, he had to give up his "colorist" extravagances and apply himself to an arid discipline in black and white, until the moment when color took its revenge and the "wall around art" broke and the "great period of the spiritual" was revealed to him.¹⁶

The psychoanalytic dimension of *Rückblicke* is all too evident. The whole text is an anamnesis that demands analysis, an imaginary retrospection on the trajectory of painting, which throws a symptomatic light on the imaginary nature of the revelation of the Spiritual with which the painful memory of the years of apprenticeship ends. For example, this memory, in showing the submission of the young Kandinsky to the academic laws of design, but also the mute resistance that the colorist he is opposes to them when he paints at home, this memory folds itself onto the archaic happiness of the primal scene and unleashes its delayed destiny. The pivot of this linkage of an adult memory to a childhood memory lies in the memory of the paintbox, dating from adolescence. And the pivot of this pivot, the subject of the long lyrical sentence that describes it, is precisely the welding of color to its name, via its being, or to its being, via its name: "these strange beings which one calls colors."¹⁷

In seeing the color come out of the tube, Kandinsky witnessed the birth of a being that language, with all its limitations, could name color and that poetry could surround with all those epithets that would make it a work of art, even before the start of any actual pictorial activity. But the name of color could refer to nothing but the metaphor of its being, which was also its metaphorical being, its "inner sound."

The issue at stake in the relationship between color and its name in Kandinsky goes far beyond his specific case, since it was nothing less than the production of a foundational ideologeme, not only in Kandinsky's painting but also in the whole of abstract painting. It is what infused into the various definitions of painting—whether technical, historical, or aesthetic—a philosophical ambition, and even a metaphysical one, that abstract painting never left behind for fear of being consigned to the ranks of decorative art or of never "going beyond the domain of the nerves," of confusing the visibility—in Fiedler's sense—of "retinal painting" with the titillations of Op Art. It was also what presided over the modernist project: to locate the specificity of painting in its irreducible being and to base subsequent developments of pictorial language on an elementary metaphor that would speak of art's essence. Not all the pioneers of abstract painting theorized this ideologeme as Kandinsky did. Among those who did, certain figures (like Malevich) gave it other "solutions." This is not the place to give an inventory of these solutions. Kandinsky's choice was not only exemplary in itself; it was also called in by the dominant position of the Russian painter over "the state of questions and artistic practices" in Munich in 1912, and by the possibility—even if it is contested—that had Duchamp reading and annotating *The Spiritual in Art* while he stayed in Munich.

In any case, Kandinsky could imagine a pictorial language freed of all referential obligations only by basing his semiotic project on an ontological dimension. The possibility of "pure" or "absolute" painting begins in the revelation of its "essentially metaphorical" character. This means that there is no language that does not begin with an inaugural metaphor, but also that there is no metaphor that is not linguistic in essence. Color, which with form—and before it—is the semiotic *element* of the painter, manifests an essential solidarity with the word that names it. If we were forced to admit that the being—the visual being, that is—of color ceased to communicate with its name, this would be the end of pictorial language; the abandonment of figuration and the passage to abstraction would say nothing, and one could just as well abandon painting.

In regard to the crucial issue of the connection of color to its name, the sort of inverse symmetry between Duchamp and Kandinsky should now be obvious. I stated above that *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* was also a theoretical passage that, in playing on the metaphorical transgression that was enacted on the barred signifier Cézanne/Suzanne, we can explain as the passage from *c'est* (it is) to *su* (known), the passage from an ontology to an epistemology. This might

seem to be pushing things a bit too much, insofar as one can never totally relinquish ontology. But what is clear is that Duchamp's ontology is like Lacan's, in the realm of the *parlêtre* (the "speaking being" but also "by the letter"). In the climate of the period, with its intersection of a Parisian tradition and a Munich tradition that encouraged him to leave Cubism and authorized him to do so by means of color, Duchamp came up against a revelation that was not different from Kandinsky's: that of the essentially metaphorical nature of painting. The difference is that for Duchamp this revelation was of the order of the Symbolic and that for Kandinsky it was of the order of the Imaginary. "Discovering" that the being of painting is the being of metaphor, Kandinsky derived from this the authorization to extend the metaphor, to imagine a whole pictorial language that would propagate this unique "discovery" through a contiguity that would make use of Goethe's *Color Theory*, of symbolist correspondences, of color psychology. We cannot deny the extraordinary liberty that he, and the other pioneers of abstraction, were able to get from this. But we can note, with our historical distance, that this formidable effusion of a pictorial Imaginary would fail in its claims to the Symbolic. For Kandinsky, Klee, and Itten wanted also to be the pedagogues of the pictorial languages that they were imagining. And we have to recognize that, despite their ingenious attempts to construct a grammar of the plastic arts, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, Klee's *Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch*, or Itten's classes at the Bauhaus did not go any further in the realm of the Symbolic than mechanistic formulas, such as "yellow triangle, red square, blue circle." And we also have to realize that the social ambitions of which these pedagogues were the first proponents would fail to an even greater extent: the "universal language" of abstract art did not succeed in "reconciling art and the people." These reasons might well explain their failure.

Faced with the same "discovery" as Kandinsky—that of the essentially metaphoric quality of painting—Duchamp gave it a supplementary turn of the screw that turned it back on itself. If metaphor is the being of painting, what, in painting, is the being of metaphor? Its name as painting. If the name transmits the being of color, what is the being of the name of color? Its name, once again. The revelation of the Symbolic comes when the "word does not say anything except that it is a word"—when the signifier has no other signification than its own being as a signifier, when naming names only its naming function.

From such a revelation, no liberation from the Imaginary can be expected. The certitude of the Symbolic prevents the metaphor from slipping away. Finally born into painting, Duchamp immediately prevents himself from engaging in it. Where, for Kandinsky, the work of the painter lets the word accede to the realm of being, the Duchampian "abandonment" of painting brings out, in the realm of the *parlêtre*, the word as word. To Kandinsky's "red which one does not see materially" corresponds Duchamp's "colors that one talks about"—"I mean the difference between speaking about red and looking at red."¹⁸ And to the idealist

efflorescence of abstract painting, Duchamp responded with the ironic asceticism of pictorial nominalism.

“Colors That One Talks About”

A note from the *White Box*, dated 1914 on the back, simply says, “A kind of *pictorial Nominalism* (Check).”¹⁹

To attempt to check what Duchamp meant by “pictorial nominalism” is not a simple affair, since, with one thing leading to another, it is the whole collection of his notes on language, and in particular the notes on “prime words,” that we will have to examine closely. The note that I have just cited is the only one, among the notes published during Duchamp’s lifetime, to mention nominalism. But the posthumous collection of *Notes*, whose publication in fascimile we owe to Paul Matisse, brings another note to our attention, also dated 1914 and seeming to well initiate this check for which Duchamp announced his hopes in the first note:

“*Nominalism* [literal] = No more generic specific numeric distinction between words (tables is not the plural of table, ate has nothing in common with eat). No more physical adaptation of concrete words; no more conceptual value of abstract words. The word also loses its musical value. It is only readable (due to being made up of consonants and vowels), it is readable by eye and little by little takes on a form of plastic significance; it is a sensorial reality a plastic truth with the same title as a line, as a group of lines.

This *plastic* being of the word (by literal nominalism) differs from the *plastic being* of any form whatever (2 drawn lines) in that the grouping of several words without significance, reduced to literal nominalism, is *independent of the interpretation* i.e. that: (*cheek, amyl, phaedra*) for example has no plastic value in the sense of: these 3 words drawn by X are different from the same 3 words drawn by Y.—These same 3 words have no musical value i.e. do not draw their group significance from their order nor from the sound of their letters.—One can thus *speak* them or *write* them in any order; at each reproduction, the reproducer *presents* (like at each musical audition of the same work) once again, without interpretation, the group of words and *finally* no longer expresses a work of art (poem, painting, or music).”²⁰

The nominalism that Duchamp is referring to—and here we are not far from Kandinsky—has a great deal to do with the essential metaphor by which the word reaches “plastic being” or, conversely, with the metaphoric essence of this “form of plastic significance” that the word has achieved. But this nominalism is literal: it turns back on metaphor and takes things literally. It is not, as with Kandinsky, a question of forms and colors that are destined to become the morphemes of a future plastic language, morphemes that one can metaphorically call words, the words of a language that one can also only metaphorically call a language, since words exist, with their “inner sound,” naming such things as “tri-

angle" or "red." Duchamp's words are words, real words of language as such, which gain a "plastic being" that "differs from the plastic being of any form whatever" since, obviously, these words remain words.

"This word does not say anything except that it is a word." I have called on this formula of Lacan's to "explain" the emergence of the signifier as such. Obviously, it does not really explain this emergence; at most, it illustrates it, because the question undergoes a displacement here: what does it mean to say that a word does not say anything except that it is a word? That it jumps by itself to the realm of metalanguage? That it becomes entirely reflexive? I can think only of the word *word* to fulfill these conditions. But Duchamp intends any word, the word in general, *cheek*, *amyl*, *phaedra*, for example, or *tables* or *eat*. He thus intends to specify those conditions that in his eyes allow the word to remain in its zero degree, force it into the realm of nonlanguage and, since it is a question here of plastic language, into nonart, and reduce to nothingness its speaking intentions.²¹

"No more generic specific numeric distinction between words." The plural form ought to "forget" that it derives from the singular; the feminine, from the masculine; the past tense, from the infinitive; all declensions and conjugations ought to be abolished and, along with them, all grammar; and each word ought to be alone.

"No more physical adaptation of concrete words; no more conceptual value of abstract words. The word also loses its musical value." Words ought to "forget" that they have referents, that they give birth to concepts, that they are made up of a phonic substance, so that the dictionary, linguistics, phonology, and aesthetics can all be abolished.

Thus, the word "takes on a form of plastic significance"; it becomes "readable by eye," "a sensorial reality," and even "a plastic truth."

At this level of things, one could well believe that the plastician has discovered *lettrisme* and that the word, thought of as a set of lines, will begin to play a purely graphic role in the composition of the painting, a role that is only slightly more abstract than the word *Journal* cut up in all possible ways by Picasso in his cubist still lifes. Yet Duchamp quickly emphasizes that "this plastic being of the word differs from the plastic being of any form whatever" and that we must therefore not confuse literal nominalism with the graphic effects of *lettrisme*.

What is the difference? "The grouping of several words without significance, reduced to literal nominalism, is *independent of the interpretation*." The passage that follows is fairly obscure but it does indicate, I think, that we have to understand the word *interpretation* in the same sense that it has in music—that of a particular execution of a work. Thus, the sequence *cheek*, *amyl*, *phaedra*, for example, would not be different if drawn by X rather than by Y. And the drawer of the word would not be its author (whereas graphic designers could be said to be the authors of words that they draw, if they invest them with their own partic-

ular aesthetics) but, at most, its executor: "at each reproduction, the reproducer *presents* (like at each musical audition of the same work) once again, without interpretation, the group of words, and *finally* no longer expresses a work of art."

Duchamp, who seemed to be working toward making something that would "finally no longer express a work of art," was actually trying to make a work of art that finally would no longer express anything. For this something obviously had the ambition to be recognized as a work of art, otherwise Duchamp's effort would have no sense. If Duchamp declared this ambition here with great explicitness, it is because he was already aware of the nominalist dialectic that drives the history of the avant-gardes. He knew that the task of ambitious artists is to break the pact that seals the name of art and to anticipate the moment when history will renew this pact on the basis of their own work. It is not for nothing that the "unfinished" note (lacking a closing of the parenthesis) "ends" with a provocation—that is, with an anticipated call to the subject's recognition. This unfinished quality can well show us the extent to which provocation is linked with the Imaginary, with the production of the subject as a subject of desire in anticipation of future name and fame. It is, in Duchamp's own words, through a *delayed* nomination granted by the spectators of the future that the note which begins with "literal nominalism" achieves its "nonending" in advance. But for the moment, it is the very notion of beginnings that is in question in this note, those beginnings that another note will call "Conditions of a language: The search for '*prime words*' ('divisible' only by themselves and by unity)." ²²

What voice will enounce the result or the residue of all these reductions that go into making up literal nominalism? What is the subject—a provoking one—of the utterance of the word as a plastic being? It is the "voice of no one," as Lacan says, a voice that "makes the formula for the trimethylamine surge up, as the final word for what this is all about, the word for everything."

Last word, first word: the prime word. We can smile—since it can only be a matter of pure coincidence—at the way in which *amyl*, *cheek*, *phaedra* (which surge up as a sort of *Mene*, *Tekel*, *Upharsin*) lead for Duchamp to an associative series similar to the one trimethylamine leads to for Freud. ²³ Above all else, the three words detach themselves with the same enigmatic clarity as the formula takes to detach itself from the dream. They arrive as an example, but an example that comes from nowhere, an exemplary lapsus indicating in the site of literal nominalism the emergence of the Symbolic as such.

In the beginning was language. Whether it was drawn by X or by Y, spoken or written in this or that order, it preexists the arrival of specific speaking subjects. "Sound of this language is it speakable? No." ²⁴ With implacable irony, Duchamp reveals the naiveté of all the dreams of the plasticians who, like Kandinsky or like the functionalists, imagined themselves to be the founders of a language at the same time that they wanted their work to speak directly, without

delay. It is not the constituted subject who can found a language, even a pictorial one, but language that founds the subject, even if he is a painter. Like all the great artists of his generation, Duchamp had the desire for a foundational language. But he was perhaps the only one to whom it was revealed that the "foundational act" was not in a subject who would be the producer of a new and specific language, but in language itself, immemorial and general, as it produces the subject; that this "act" did not have as its condition a *me* centered on a feeling of "inner necessity," but did have as its consequence an *I* that would leap into existence out of the "ground" of anonymous language; that this "act" was of the order of the *wo es war, soll ich werden* by which the "voice of no one" opens up the possibility of saying *I* or, in other words, the possibility of simultaneous destruction and creation.

Duchamp did not entertain the fantasy of the *tabula rasa*—but do I need to repeat this? If literal nominalism reduced language to nothingness and seemed to destroy even the elementary social contract that constitutes it, this was not to establish the imaginary conditions of an *ex nihilo* creation. Quite the contrary. At the end of a reduction that cuts short all the imaginary unravelings of speech, the note in question shows in the realm of language the exact same revelation as *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* does in the pictorial realm. And this revelation is a double one: of the Real and of the Symbolic, with any sort of Imaginary abolished. The Real is sameness. The Real is not this *terra incognita* beyond language, which all those people who dream of the *tabula rasa* postulate so that they can build on it the bases of a new language. The Real is in language as well, insofar as language is already given in the absence of the subject, insofar as signs, words, numbers are all made to come back to the same place, like the shadow of the needle on a sundial, which functions whether or not one has a rendezvous with it planned.²⁵ The Real of language is reproduced with each repetition of the same, with each execution, or, as Duchamp says, each "musical audition of the same work." The Real doesn't have a history; it is eternal. For the Real, time does not count.²⁶

But let enter into the cycle of repetitions of the same someone for whom time counts and who counts time, and we have the emergence of the Symbolic.²⁷ The sameness of the Real becomes the Real itself—that is, it becomes impossible. As soon as an enunciator or an auditor, or "reproducer," as Duchamp puts it, enters into the picture, an *I* is born for whom creation, in contrast, is possible, since in the circuit of the same with which he has his rendezvous, it is he who changes.²⁸

Thus, a double revelation is glimpsed from literal nominalism. In the beginning was the word; in the beginning was the name or the letter, or the name taken to the letter. Names of things that are eternally in the past participle, always already made: *Pulled at Four Pins*, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, *With Hidden Noise*, *Apolinère Enameled*, *Wanted*, *Signed Sign*, *Rasée L.H.O.O.Q.* Names of oneself, signatures also in the past tense: "*Mar y est*" ("*Mar is there*") in

Mariée, "Wanted" in the string of pseudonyms and ready-made names that sign the sign (*Signed sign*).²⁹ The name-of-the-father, finally, still in the past participle: "ready-made things like even his own mother and father."³⁰ From the name of the thing to the name-of-the-father, the same readymade things pass and pass again on the circuit of the Real; an eternal circuit, since there is no question here of the origin of language; words, like numbers, have always been "prime"—"Fathers and signposts" (*Pères et repères*).³¹ But let a subject find himself (*s'y repère*) on the same circuit of the Real in having pronounced or heard pronounced his own name, even with the "voice of no one," and then it becomes necessary to declare in an entirely new way, "In the beginning was the word." It would have to be declared with the radical meaning of a simultaneous destruction and creation, a simultaneous demand for consensus and disagreement, a demand for recognition addressed to the "father" at the same time that one asks for his murder. In short, we have to see in it the symbolic meaning of provocation. It "ends" in its suspension of the subject of desire, but it "begins" with the surging up of the Other in the instance of the subject. This beginning has all the oedipal connotations that one could expect from a demand for recognition that reduces the father's heritage to nothingness: "It is nothing to do what your father did. It is nothing to be another Cézanne."³² But at the same time, this reduction and this destruction imply nothing of the fantasy of the tabula rasa. The artist does not start from scratch, but from a ready-made tradition, from a paternal heritage that is dead, but not nonexistent: "Man can never expect to start from scratch; he must start from ready-made things like even his own mother and father."

If the readymade really does sign the birth certificate of a certain avant-garde at the same time as it signs the death warrant for painting, it does not do so on a blank page: there is neither an erasure of heritage nor a foundational language. The "tradition of the new"—to use Rosenberg's phrase—is not born out of a murder of civilization or out of the barbarism of the language founders. It is born out of a secession that relegates to the museum the totality of a pictorial tradition that it makes no sense to redo, a tradition in the past participle. It is born out of a provocation that, vibrating with desire and irony, anticipates the moment when the "voice of no one" will be heard resonating in a new tradition that will pass for antipainting and that will be recognized in a future perfect. And it is born from a passage that is conjugated in the infinitive, in the eternal return of the Real, or that is not conjugated at all, an instantaneous leap into the fourth dimension, the flash of the Symbolic. A passage from one name to another, from the name of painting to the name of art, at the articulation of which "prime words" constitute a "hinge picture."³³

They are not "prime" in the sense of an unheard-of novelty—elements of a language of the future, in the manner of Kandinsky's blue circle, red square, and yellow triangle—nor are they "prime" in the sense of the origin or the archetype—in the manner of Mondrian's vertical and horizontal; they are "prime" in

the manner of numbers, because they are "divisible only by themselves and by unity." Words that would not have a largest common denominator or a smallest common multiple, words that would stand alone, each for itself, incommensurable, words that could be repeated, "even" and "*à coups trop tirés*."³⁴

It was in the quest for these "prime" words that Duchamp saw the conditions for a language. Was it a pictorial language? Like Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, and so many others, did he have the desire to found on the basis of the being of the word—a being that Saussure, in the same period as these painters and in a similar manner, perceived as constituted through opposition—the metaphorical essence of painting understood as a language whose purest specificity was to be able to pass beyond language? No, if we simply note that after Munich, he ceased painting or almost ceased painting, and that, in any case, the readymades were not "painted things." Yes, if we remember that the being of the word to which literal nominalism must lead is a plastic being. Yes, if we accept relegating the artisanal side of painting in its entirety to the museum, and if we are convinced that it is never craft that makes a painter, but judgment, the painter's own at the moment of painting and the viewer's at the moment of seeing. Yes, if we accept that this judgment, whatever its motivation, always leads to the attribution of a name: this is painting, or this is not painting. Nothing, then, prevents us from realizing that it was not so much Duchamp who invented pictorial nominalism as the whole history of painting—the history of the aesthetic judgments that name it painting—which had already been nominalist for almost a century. The "invention" of the readymade did nothing more than take stock of this.

Hence, for example, those projects for nominal readymades, the artistic act confining itself to making an inventory of preexisting words: "Buy a dictionary and cross out the words to be crossed out. Sign: revised and corrected."³⁵ Or: "Look through a dictionary and scratch out all the 'undesirable' words. Perhaps add a few—sometimes replace the scratched out words with another. Use this dictionary for the written part of the glass."³⁶ Or yet again, another project that seems "symmetrically subsidized" by the program of literal nominalism: "Take a Larousse dict. and copy all the so-called 'abstract' words, i.e., those which have no concrete reference. Compose a schematic sign designating each of these words (this sign can be compared with the standard stops). These signs must be thought of as the letters of the new alphabet."³⁷

It is difficult to consider this note (of which I have quoted only the first part) as a project for painting. It is found in the *Green Box*, and even though we must accept the *Green Box* as a work of art—and of the plastic arts, not the literary ones—it is difficult to see in it a work of painting. And yet the note, which ends with the sentence "This alphabet very probably is only suitable for the description of this picture," certainly refers to a painting but to a "written" painting. It probably refers to *Tu m'*, a work that is not only the last canvas painted by

Duchamp (1918) but also a discourse on painting expressed in painting, a discourse that is very elaborated, encrypted, ironic, and vengeful, an application of "illuministic Scribism in painting (A plastic for plastic retaliation)."³⁸ The note "[Literal] nominalism" carries the striking trace—*Mene, tekel, upharsin*—of this "illuministic scribism" written in fiery letters by the voice of no one. And this "scribism," which is "in the painting," means literally that the nominalist who has given himself the program of ceasing to paint does not cease for all that to be a painter. His nominalism is literal; it is also pictorial. As soon as it is a question of putting it into practice, it necessitates a theory.

For example, a theory of the subject of utterance or, if one prefers, a theory of the "site" in which the nominalist subject-painter is produced. Naturally, this site is a difference, preferably an "infra-thin" one:

"Theory

10 words found by opening the dictionary at random

by A

by B

These 2 sets of 10 words have the same difference of 'personality' as if the 10 words had been written by A and by B with an intention. Or else, it matters little, there would be cases where this 'personality' may disappear in A and B. That is the best case and the most difficult."³⁹

Next, a theory of the lexicon or of the alphabet is required: a dictionary . . . "that 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."⁴⁰

A theory of grammar reveals itself to be equally necessary, a syntax of the abstract relations that reestablish an "ideal continuity" between signs that are now "freed" and reduced by literal nominalism to their solipsistic splendor: "a sort of grammar, no longer requiring a pedagogical sentence construction. But, apart from the differences of languages, and the 'figures of speech' peculiar to each language—weighs and measures some *abstractions of substantives, of negatives*, of relations of subject to verb, etc., by means of standard signs. (Representing these new relations: conjugations, declensions, plural and singular, adjectivation inexpressible by the *concrete alphabetic* forms of languages living now and to come.)."⁴¹

To the lexical and syntactical dimensions, theory must still add pragmatic and semantic dimensions in the form of a logic. Duchamp's logic excludes the excluded-third:

"*Principle of contradiction*. Research on its meaning and its definition (scholastic, Greek)—Through grammatical simplification, one ordinarily understands principle of contradiction to mean, exactly: principle of *non* contradiction. From the Principle of Contradiction, defined only by these 3 words: i.e., *Co-under-*

standing of Opposites [abstract], abrogate all sanctions establishing the *proof of this* in relation to its abstract opposite *that*."⁴²

Finally, the theory will not be complete if it does not take into account the connection of the new language to existing languages. It is necessary that it be translatable into known languages, but translatable in one direction only, its emancipation demanding that it remain "inexpressible by the concrete alphabetic forms of languages living now and to come":

"Dictionary

—of a language in which each word would be translated into French (or other) by several words, when necessary by a whole sentence.

—of 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. . . .

—Sound of this language, is it speakable? No."⁴³

From a theory of the subject to a theory of translation, passing through a theory of lexicon, a theory of grammar, and a theory of logic, those notes of Duchamp that deal with his projects for "dictionaries" indeed resemble, quite maliciously, the foundations of a language. They appear in a joyous disorder in the white and green *Boxes*, and the order that I give them here has no particular priority. Thus arranged, they nonetheless indicate what would be for Duchamp the fiction of a language that could be made "*possible by slightly distending the laws*" of linguistics. Yet this language is not speakable. Writeable, yes, "seeable," no doubt, but not visible, no more visible than speakable.⁴⁴ We are at the extreme opposite of Klee's "render things visible," the extreme opposite of the foundational ambitions of the pioneers of modernism and abstraction. Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich each wanted in his own manner to lay the cornerstone of a new language that they hoped would be universal, effectively non-speakable since it would be mute by nature, and yet speaking to everyone since the "rendering things visible," which it gave itself as a goal, meant that it would make the visual speak, and speak in the language of pure painting. There is nothing like this in Duchamp. His "conditions for a language" rely on "ironism" and even "talionism" and gave to pictorial nominalism a sarcastic and vengeful air. Three more "isms" to be added to the already lengthy list of pictorial avant-gardes, a list from which the time for a secession had come with Cubism at the end of 1912. If Duchamp, who was a painter, played at being the founder of a language, this occurred no doubt in relation to a problematic of the period that we cannot ignore. But, given how much his notes are filled with irony, we must also be aware that he was playing, that he was acting, and that he knew that the language whose loose laws he was establishing was a fictive language.

Yet this game was serious and Duchamp played it seriously; it was not an optional game but one required by history in a moment when many painters took upon themselves the novel task of making color speak outside of any reference to

representation; it is a game that had its starting point in an intuition quite close to that of the first abstractionists, Kandinsky especially, and in a revelation that was nothing other than that of the metaphorical essence of painting. The difference, and it is a major one, comes from an asymmetrical reciprocity: where Kandinsky “discovered” that the painter’s signifier was the being of color, Duchamp “discovered” that the being—in particular, the plastic being—of the word was a signifier. At the pivot of a semiotic ontology of pure painting and a pictorial epistemology of the *parlêtre*, there was color, color and its name.

Let us go back to the “theory” of grammar of Duchamp when he was playing language founder: “‘Grammar’—i.e. How to connect the elementary signs (like words), then the *groups* of signs one to the other; what *will become of the ideas* of action or of being (verbs), of modulation (adverbs)—etc.’”⁴⁵ And let us see how another note answers the question: “(utilize colors—in order to differentiate what would correspond in this [literature] to the substantive, verb, adverb declensions, conjugations, etc.).”⁴⁶

At first glance, the “grammarian” seems to know the task that awaits him if he wants to transform painting into a sort of [literature].⁴⁷ Not to make color speak in its immanence à la Kandinsky, but to establish a code of colors that would make each hue correspond to a particular grammatical relation. Armed with such a code, the viewer would become a reader, and the pictorial discourse of *Tu m’*—since this is the painting that the note refers to—could be decoded. But this “grammar” soon shows its irony, which is triple in form: the code, as Duchamp himself admitted, “is only suitable for the description of this picture.” So much effort needed to found the universality of a language, in order to use it only once! Moreover, the code is never presented anywhere. Duchamp did not leave us a note fully explaining his project for a “grammar.” If it is true that *Tu m’* is a discourse coded in painting, the [literature] that is needed to decode it is forever lacking. The key to the painting is in the painting, but the painting is locked up. Each color of which, in the left-hand side of *Tu m’*, samples are lined up in an infinite perspective perhaps encodes one of the grammatical relations by means of which the right-hand side composes “sentences” that present themselves as mysterious multicolored ribbons, attached to the *Standard Stoppages*, which “must be thought of as the letters of the new alphabet.” But it is more than likely that these sentences are those very ones that, when decoded, allow us to know which example of color corresponds to which grammatical relationship. It is thus literally, and even in an attachment to the instance of the letter, that we give up trying to read the discourse of the painting. Painting is not to be read. And color does not speak, since it is, as for Kandinsky, short of or in excess of the language that names it, short of or in excess of the “grammar” that it, in turn, is supposed to name. But, in contrast to Kandinsky’s case, this deficiency or this excess is not its essential quality. Color, mute yet visible, does not situate itself in the original or archlinguistic dimension of pure designation, as the very

being of sense and meaning, sensible but as yet meaningless, attributed to it by the phenomenological tradition and by those painters who adhere to it. It is words that are primary, or "prime." Color has no being that it could share with its name, since as soon as it is designated, it is named. If it is necessary that an entire "sentence" of the right part of *Tu m'* names a single grammatical relation that a specific sample of the left part designates, it is necessary, in turn, to use all the relations designated on the left to read a single "sentence" on the right. The circuit of seeing and saying is interminable and begins nowhere, especially not in the act of primitive designation by a subject who is still *infans*.

As we know, the arbitrariness of the names for colors is the favorite example of linguists who want to show the primacy of language (*langue*) over speech (*parole*), of the system over the syntagm.⁴⁸ The color spectrum is continuous, and it is language that cuts it up. It is neither in nature nor in our eye that orange ceases to be orange and becomes red, nor in the speaking subjects who, faced with such a sample of color, decide its name. It is in the language that gave them the choice of words. If the English language had not placed orange between yellow and red, how are we to know that the perception of it would not have been different? If there is a link between color and its name, this link could only be that of language in its totality, the law in its implacable preexistence. Hence the possibility of short-circuiting the interminable circuit of seeing and saying: that which names the orange and specifies its experience in perception are the yellow and the red that frame it. And what names this red if not the orange and the purple that, on its right and its left, delimit its perception? In short, the name of a color is never anything but the result of a segmenting made by other colors, and so on. In this process in which words segment words, the name of a color risks losing its designated referent, even though it vouches for that to which it corresponds. To red corresponds crimson, vermilion, and many others. The name of a color is the name of a name, along the lines of the nominalist paradox of infinite regression illustrated in *Tu m'* by the perspectival arrangement of the color samples. The question that remains is that of its vanishing point and of what this point avoids. Either it is imaginary and it avoids the Symbolic, and we then have Kandinsky's "solution," or it is symbolic and it avoids the Imaginary and we have "Duchamp's 'solution.'" "

"In this," he says, "*perspective resembles color* which like it cannot be tested by touch."⁴⁹ It establishes the ground of painting, that imaginary infinity where parallels touch and where colors—an atmospheric *sfumato*—slip away. The question is whether we stop there, as with the indefinite backgrounds of Kandinsky on which forms, the only carriers of symbols, float around, or whether we acknowledge that it is at the very surface of this ground, as in Alberti's grids, that the symbolic function constitutes itself, from which space unfolds and color presents its successive names.

For the task is to build images, after all, to be a painter in spite of everything. Even if it constituted a considerable point of rupture in the life of Duchamp-the-painter, as in the whole tradition of painting, the *Large Glass* was nonetheless a "painted object." We should not be surprised that among the notes accompanying the *Glass*—notes that, among other things, work to establish a far from simple theory of color — some of them (which are significantly useless, since the *Glass*, in its final form, will be transparent) concern its ground or background. "The background or factitious atmosphere could be done in graphite."⁵⁰ There is no question of illusionism, no question of satisfying the imaginary, of letting the eye wander around in the delights of atmospheric perspective. Avowedly factitious, the background—"use of screen"—fills its symbolic function from the start in the constitution of the figure: "To obtain 'exactitude'—dye canvas black (or make black by other means) before painting, so that a line ruled with a point into the thickness of paint while it is still half wet will show up black and will underline."⁵¹

"Prepare a background as exactly as possible." After the background, "prepared as exactly as possible," the *value of substance* is the second symbolic function that the notes for the *Large Glass* assign to color: "This background must disappear under the *value* (colored) of the *substance* of each part."⁵²

"As in architects' drawings or diagrams with color wash, need of a color key: *substantive meaning* of each color used."⁵³ The following note specifies this *substantive meaning*: "Determine thus each substance by its color composition—(White 1, black 1/2, vermilion 1/4, etc.). Except for certain substances . . . the others will have I. a *name* (on it, on in or other ending?) II. a *chemical composition* (blend) which will be that of the color blend. III. a visual appearance (1°. colored and 2°. different molecular *composition*—hardness, porosity, etc.) for each substance which will be designated by schematic and conventional notation (without evoking, however, the different parallel lines of architects). IV. Properties."⁵⁴

Of all the parameters of color, the name comes first. Then comes the chemical composition, which, moreover, has more to do with nomenclature than with actual experimentation, and only after this comes the visual appearance of the work. And it, too, is named, "designated by schematic and conventional notations." Finally come properties, unspecified, of which we might ask if they are anything other than those that the text has just enumerated. In any case, they are given. If the establishment of the color of the background refers, and in a negative way, to the problematic of the virgin canvas ("dye canvas black *before painting*"), the determination of the colors of the substances answers, in the manner of *Bride*, that the properties of color are conjugated in the past participle as a preliminary list that one can choose from. To paint—that is, to pass from the *virgin* to the *bride*—is to choose, and to choose I. a name, II. a chemical composition, III. a visual appearance, and IV. properties.

But to paint is also to obey the injunctions of color, to be chosen by color, to undergo a succession of aesthetic choices that are fully involuntary and passive. Duchamp was not unaware of the fact that for true painters' colors have an autonomy that their own choices must obey and that, as soon as they leave the tube, colors are granted those qualities that are "necessary for further, autonomous existence" so well loved by Kandinsky. But for someone who was not Kandinsky and who felt himself to be a painter only out of "vengefulness," this autonomous existence could be acknowledged only with all the irony of a *mise-en-scène* that would mimic the passivity of aesthetic experience and mock the fundamentally olfactory tropism of true painters.

"In the greenhouse—[On a glass plate, colors seen transparently]. Mixture of flowers of color i.e. each color still in its optical state: *Perfumes* (?) of reds, of blues, of greens or of grays heightened towards yellow blue red or of weaker maroons (the whole in scales)."⁵⁵ This olfactory and optical practice, which the painter addresses to the taste of the viewer and which is called painting, consists of imprisoning color, of taking a vengeance on its autonomy: "These perfumes with physiological rebound can be neglected and extracted in an imprisonment for the fruit."⁵⁶ On the condition, though—and this is demanded by the vengefulness—that the viewer be deprived of all enjoyment (*jouissance*): "Only, the fruit still has to avoid being eaten. It's this dryness of '*nuts and raisins*' that you get in the ripe imputrescent colors (rarefied colors)."⁵⁷

These are the vengeful connotations that painting evokes when the viewer conjugates it in the past participle and that colors evoke when they achieve the state of "ripe imputrescent colors" and, by the same token, become rarified. Colors achieve this state at the end of a process in which the painter remains in a state of complete inactivity and in which the only agents are the movement of time and the weightiness of things. As we know, the "raising of colors" was realized in the "seven sieves" of the *Large Glass* under the title "raising of dust." "To raise dust on Dust Glasses . . . allow dust to fall on this part a dust of 3 or 4 months and wipe well around it in such a way that this dust will be a kind of color. . . . To be mentioned the quality of *the other side of the dust* either as the name of the metal or otherwise."⁵⁸

Thus, color is a fruit whose aesthetic consumption can be deferred indefinitely, since it is only the fruit of a delay, "a delay in glass," but a delay that is finite. Its process of production, which ironically mimics the passivity inherent in the aesthetic decisions of the painter, also mimics in advance and by metonymy the "quality of the other side of the dust" that the viewers will recognize when the dust of time has done its job and the Glass has gained the imputrescent rarity of a museum piece. The passivity of aesthetic production, the quality by which viewers will judge it, and the delay that connects painters to their posterity—it is color that is the vehicle for all of this, color and its name, the "name of the metal or otherwise." Color is a name that is simultaneously in advance and lagging

behind, named with anticipation by the painter and with retrospection by the viewers, a past participle caught up in a future perfect. At the moment of recognition, the color has already dried, dried with this "dryness of nuts and raisins," that it will gain only in that place of antiseptic death that is the museum. And yet this color of the cemetery (of the uniforms and liveries) is a "Provisional color = The malic forms. They are provisionally painted with red lead *while waiting* for each one to receive its color, like croquet mallets."⁵⁹ Like the *Glass*, the colors, which are simultaneously provisional and rarefied, name a "definitive in-completion" within the field of dead painting.

However, the symbolic functions that the notes of the *Boxes* assign to color do not stop at the level of an anticipated death. As we have seen, it is with a single motion that the surging up of the Symbolic refers to the "alpha and omega of the thing," to Eros and Thanatos, to "being born a painter" and to "the death of painting." After the color of the background and the color of the substance, a special place must be given to what Duchamp calls "native colors."

Let us refer, in the note that determined for each material I. a name, II. a chemical composition, and so on, to a passage that was left out when first quoted: "Except for certain substances (like chocolate, the water[fall] etc. which have a physical equivalent (that should be approximated as closely as possible without atmospherization); except for these substances, the others will all have"⁶⁰ Since the waterfall was finally not represented in the *Glass* (unless glass itself is its "physical equivalent"), it is up to the chocolate to make an "exception to the 'colors of the substance'":

"Given an object in chocolate.

1st. its appearance = retinal impression (and other sensory consequences)

2nd. its apparition.

The *mould* of a chocolate object is the *negative apparition* . . . determined by the source of light becoming in the *apparent* object lighted mass (*native colors*. = apparition in negative of the *apparent* colors of the substance of the objects)."⁶¹

"The native colors are not colors (in the sense of blue, red etc. reflections of lighting X coming from the outside)—They are luminous sources producing active colors—i.e. a surface of native-chocolate color will be composed of a sort of chocolate phosphorescence completing the molded apparition of this chocolate object."⁶²

The apparent color that the painter, if he wants to paint, cannot avoid producing must refer the viewers of the *Large Glass*, if they take the time to read its instructions, to the "mold" of its "apparition." This is an invisible "color source," an "inner lighting," a molecular "native phosphorescence" of the substance, independent of all the contingencies of ambient lighting. The texts carry a residue of idealism in this notion of the "apparition in native colors" and perhaps even a nostalgia for an ontological grounding of painting, the desire that

color have an essence that would be irreducible to its conditions of production, perception, and naming. Whereas the other substances have I. a name and II. a chemical composition, chocolate, which is certainly the substance par excellence of bachelor desire, possesses a "physical dye" that Duchamp would declare later to be a "molecular essence . . . as opposed to chemical dye."⁶³ Of course, this essence of the color is not of a perceptual order, as it was for Kandinsky. The ontological temptation does not take its refuge in phenomenology. But it is certainly there in the notes and suffuses their writing. It was undoubtedly a residue of the symbolist influence of Odilon Redon with his predilection for the halo, for aura: "The emanating object is an apparition." But it was probably also the offshoot of an inner conflict that concerned the abandonment of painting. In the *Large Glass*, as in the works that prepared its way, most especially the two *Chocolate Grinders* with which these notes on native colors are certainly contemporaneous, Duchamp had already discovered (no doubt by reading treatises on perspective in the Sainte-Geneviève library) the ironic means of taking a distance from both the perspectival tradition and the new modernist tradition that, all around him, had undertaken to deconstruct the former. He made sure, in this respect, that he would not be "stupid like a painter," while commenting in his painting on the fulfilled death of the first tradition and the anticipated death of the second. But color posed other problems for him: how could one paint in order to say that one had given up painting? How could one avoid putting colors on a surface and making them appear there, or, since this really could not be avoided, how could one show that the visible hid the "seeable"?

Another note, probably written a bit before those which we have already discussed (since it talked about "natural color" and the expression of "native color" had not been coined yet) is paradigmatic of this impasse. It shows that Duchamp felt the need to excuse himself from still having to give a pictorial appearance to a color that he wanted to be only an apparition—that is, the fact of appearance without the appearance itself. "There are no colors in the *coloration of a surface* sense each part is in its natural color (and even more: the apparent tone is only the transcoloration of this part considered *luminous on its own* [see special note])—Thus, the *tone* of each part finds its *excuse* in the signification, in the *matierals* [*sic*] end of that part (the only exception is the 9 molds which are painted, lead-oxidized)."⁶⁴

Duchamp, who did write "matierals," had not yet made the distinction between the colors of substance (material) (like the "emancipated metals" of the *Glider*) and the native colors of certain substances like water or chocolate. Not only was he trying to excuse himself for having to make use of appearance, but in creating this neologism, he was granting himself a diploma in materialism that would make up for what was necessarily idealist in the need to recognize an essence of painting. This enables us to suppose that at the precise moment when he was composing these notes (probably at the beginning of 1914), he had not yet

experienced the nominalist delayed action of the *Passage* in Munich. The revelation of the Symbolic was still unrecognized, inaccessible to any sort of thematization, and he had not yet found the argument that would render useless the postulate of an enlightening essence lodged in the most intimate core of pictorial material. But he had a presentiment of this new argument, and it was in the *Grinder* that he was able to register this uselessness: "In the grinder, everything that one can call '*the useless*' of the grinder must be the brushing stroke over some spots that the bachelor secretly maintains."⁶⁵

At this precise moment, the bachelor who was caught up in the double paradox of painting something that radically deviated from the appearance of a painting (the *Large Glass*) and of ceasing radically to paint without ceasing nonetheless to be a painter (the readymades), this bachelor was a closet painter. He "ground his chocolate himself" in secret. His ontology was still essentialist, and he still failed to jump to the register of the "*parlêtre*." This would happen soon in another note for *The White Box*, a note that begins by stating a retroactive program—to go back to something that had been forgotten—and that one can almost certainly date from 1914—contemporaneous, that is, with the two notes on nominalism:

"Find the papers about colors considered in the sense of coloring light sources and not differentiations within a uniform light (sunlight, artificial light, etc.)

Come back to: supposing several colors—light sources (of that order) exposed at the same time, the optical relationship of these different coloring sources is no longer of the same order as a comparison of a red spot with a blue spot in sunlight. *There is a certain inopticity, a certain cold consideration, these colorings affecting only imaginary eyes* in this exposure. (The colors that one talks about. A little like the passage of a present participle to a past one."⁶⁶

We could not do better than Duchamp here in registering the force of the Symbolic, the coldly calculated separation from the Imaginary, and the passage that this implies. It is no longer just a passage, as in Munich, from the implicit to the explicit, from an operative metonymy to an unrecognized metaphor; it is this passage but now grasped consciously, bearing an awareness of its temporal regime: the passage from a present to a past participle. This passage consecrates and registers the "abandonment" of painting and the arrival of pictorial nominalism. Speaking in 1965 of the colors "that one talks about," Duchamp is completely aware of naming a difference, that very leap into the Symbolic that forms the metaphorical essence of painting: "I mean the difference between speaking about red and looking at red."⁶⁷

We have now come full circle. From Kandinsky to Duchamp, from these "strange beings which one calls colors" to the "colors that one talks about," the enormous and minimal distance that separates two practices of painting and two theories of color has just been traveled. A close reading of the texts was necessary for this. These texts are all written after the revelation in Munich. The note

on dust breeding probably dates from the year of its realization, 1920; the notes on language were written in New York some time between 1915 and 1916 (or most likely around 1918), during the gestation period of *Tu m'*, and the notes about colors—background color, color of substance, and native color—extend from the beginning of 1913, when Duchamp was still planning to put *Bride* on canvas, and February 1914, the date of *Chocolate Grinder No. 2*. The two notes on pictorial and literal nominalism are also dated, without ambiguity, from 1914.

This was also the year of the first true readymade, *Bottle Rack*. We should not hesitate to see in it the first application of pictorial nominalism. Let us remember that *Bottle Rack* carried a sentence inscribed on its bottom, a sentence that was lost with the original object. For Duchamp, this sentence had the symbolic function, invisible, to be sure, if one does not know the code to it, of adding color to the object.⁶⁸ If the title, the name of the object, is a supplementary color, the entitling of it is undeniably the act of a painter, and the nominalism that understands color literally is a pictorial nominalism. *Bottle Rack*, the first realization of a project of inscribing a readymade, actualized this in 1914. But it had already been anticipated by *Nude Descending a Staircase*, whose title, we should remember, was so intolerable to his cubist colleagues. It was in relation to *Nude* that Duchamp told Katharine Kuh that he had “already predicted the use of words as a means of adding color or, shall we say, as a means of adding to the number of colors in a work.”⁶⁹ Such a title, even though it seems to refer to the subject of the work, does not play a descriptive role, as it did in the majority of the Cubists’ paintings.⁷⁰ What Apollinaire said about cubist titles in a 1912 article entitled “On the Subject in Painting” applies much better to Duchamp: “Many new painters limit themselves to pictures which have no real subjects. And the titles which we find in the catalogues are like proper names, which designate men without characterizing them.”⁷¹ A title like Picasso’s *Ma jolie* characterizes a subject-referent that is outside of the work,—his new companion, Eva, about whom he had told Kahnweiler, “I love her very much, and I will write this on my paintings.” *Nude Descending a Staircase* also refers to the subject of the work, but this subject is not an exterior referent but the work itself, whose title is the name appended to the bottom of the canvas, as if it were a tag. *Nude Descending a Staircase*, like *Ma jolie*, is not a “title we find in the catalogues” because we also find it “written on the painting.”

However, Picasso uses the title as a calligram: eliminating it would modify the whole plastic space of the painting. Removing the title from *Nude* would leave the work intact. The title’s intervention occurs not in the pictorial statement of the work but in the act of utterance, a nominalist act that adds an invisible color to the painted subject. With *Chocolate Grinder*, this invisible color leaves the space of the painting to show up on its surface in the shape of a tag, an explicit and real sticker this time: “A commercial formula,” it names with a maximum of clarity the abandonment of painting that occurs when color becomes a name and the

name becomes a color, all of this being a consequence of the fact, as we still have yet to see fully, that the bachelor no longer grinds his chocolate himself. Between the *Nude* and the *Grinder*, *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, whose title is also appended to the work, operates a passage in more than one sense. It displays the symbolic access of the painter to a pictorial nominalism, although it does not yet fully register this access. This registering would occur two years later in the *Grinder* and, even more so, in the *Bottle Rack*. Meanwhile, *The Passage* says what it does and does what it says, and it shows us that which in pictorial nominalism is of the order of literal nominalism. It is painted, and painted even with a considerable love for the craft of painting, by an artisan who seems far from having renounced the work of the eye and the hand in favor of the calculated utterance of color and its name. Yet it is from the Munich period that come the first lists of colors analogous to those that would later accompany the fabrication of the *Large Glass*.⁷² These lists are work notes that are not surprising coming from an industrious, cerebral painter who was not enough of a born painter to attack his canvas directly, with "natural flair." For Duchamp, "olfactory masturbation" already made use of "litanies." And yet what is surprising is that he kept these notes and brought them back from Munich at a time when the idea of the *Boxes* had certainly not yet begun to take root in his mind. If the name inscribed in the painting was already destined to add a color to it, it certainly seems, reciprocally, that the colors inscribed outside the painting were listed in order to add its name to it.

This name—"prime" word or last word of color—was "painting." In Munich, coming out of Cubism, which it took him a year to traverse, Duchamp—like all language founders who, at the same moment, created the basis for an abstract plastic alphabet—began to work on the conditions of a language.

Kandinsky, Delaunay, Kupka, Mondrian emerged out of the cubist dislocation with the certainty that a new hieroglyphic language had just been born and that painting had a brand new future ahead. The painter would become the semiotician of a future culture. In contrast, Duchamp sensed that he could not be anything but the nominalist of a past culture. The alphabet that he had founded was destined "to translate the *progressive* distortion of the conventional hieroglyphic phenomenon into its nominalization which then only expresses a single [dead] idea."⁷³

Chapter 7

The Readymade and Abstraction

It was in Munich that Duchamp encountered color. Let us be clear about this: he did not discover a specific attraction to color there. If there was such an attraction, it had come much earlier, at the moment when he discovered Matisse and when his palette was somewhat tempted by the exuberance of Fauvism. But this exuberance was all around him in Munich in its German manifestations: the *Blaue Reiter* did not influence Duchamp, but it did displace him from one horizon of expectation to another.

In the cubist Paris of 1911–12, and particularly in the Puteaux group, which Duchamp frequented, the problematic of color was virtually absent, repressed by the immediate reception of Cubism. Concerned with promoting the conceptual realism that it saw as underlying the formal practice of Cubism, the Puteaux painters could not conceive of color as anything other than materialized light in the service of the deconstruction-reconstruction of the represented object. This was a new version of *chiaroscuro*. Any attempt to give the axis of hues priority over the axis of values was perceived in such a context as a step backward, and a fortiori, any attempt to render color autonomous and pure was considered as decorative or superficial—that is, as “impressionistic.”

Nonetheless, at least two painters in Paris were actively concerned at that time with escaping from Cubism by means of color: Delaunay and Kupka. Their historical importance is far from negligible, especially when we realize that both were among the “inventors” of abstraction, the “language founders.” Duchamp always said that during that period he scarcely knew Delaunay and did not have much contact with him.¹ So be it.

Kupka and the Question of Pure Color

But Kupka was at least occasionally a participant in the discussions of the Puteaux group, and he was an intimate friend of Duchamp's brothers. After arriving from Vienna in 1896, he moved in 1901 to the rue de Caulaincourt in Montmartre, near Jacques Villon (and thereby near Duchamp, who lived there with his brother in 1904 and 1905), and followed him in 1906 to the rue Lemaître in Puteaux, to be joined soon after by Raymond Duchamp-Villon. It is thus impossible to imagine that Duchamp could have avoided all contact with Kupka. As for recreating what might have been the reciprocal lines of "influence" between the two painters, this is a complex question, but probably an irrelevant one. In any case, it seems that the two men had the same interest in movement and Marey's chronophotographs and, more important, a similar attitude, neither cubist nor futurist, vis-à-vis the representation of movement.²

But for Kupka, the study of movement was most often associated with that of color, and in such a way as to show a virtually scientific investment in theories of color. This interest was totally absent from the "cubist" work of Duchamp. The series of the *Woman Picking Flowers* in 1909–10 and then the series of *Planes by Colors* in 1910–11 associate the formal decomposition of the figured movement with the spectral decomposition of the range of color to suggest a static deployment of duration inspired by Bergson. In the same year, Kupka, who referred indiscriminately to Herschel, Helmholtz, and Charles Blanc, came under the influence of the Neoimpressionism of Cross and Signac, whose book, *D'Eugène Delacroix au Néo-impressionisme*, he obtained in the 1911 edition. In his *Manuscript I* he wrote, "We who have the conquests of the Impressionists behind us, we enlarge their pointillism into planes by colors; we know very well that light is not in black and white but in color, according to the more or less scientific theory of complementarity."³

The *Newton Disks*, which gave their name to a series of works in 1911–12, would furnish the scientific paradigm for this new treatment of color. It implied an additive conception of color, a conception familiar to physicists, who deal with light and wavelengths, but as such alien to the subtractive conception of painters, who mix their pigments. In deploying the color spectrum on the surface of the canvas, Kupka invited the consciousness of the spectator to invest discontinuous space with a continuous duration, as a sort of metaphorical equivalent of a movement that, in the case of the real Newton disks, would produce optically the synthesis of white light. Kupka had found these disks in Ogden Rood's book to which Delaunay and Signac also refer.⁴ Entering into Kupka's work in 1911–12—in other words, the precise period when Duchamp was traversing Cubism—this importation of the physics of color into painting deserves our attention. It is not so much the scientific connotations of this borrowing that we should look at, but rather the probable fact that without it Kupka would not have

felt himself authorized to pass on to abstraction and "pure painting." Here again, the question of language was at stake, as this question was being posed by a whole generation of artists. To abandon figuration completely would mean not only to abandon all referential "objectivity" but also to deprive oneself of all possible application, whether descriptive or narrative, of language to painting. One could demand the absolute subjective freedom of the artist and avoid falling into the arbitrariness of ornamental art only if one made sure that the work spoke of itself when it could no longer "be spoken." We have seen how, in Kandinsky, the word, and especially the name of color, provided one of the foundational elements that authorized the painter in his passage to abstraction. Kupka, who shared with Kandinsky a large part of his culture, his sources, and its options (central Europe, Symbolism, the analogy of painting and music, for example) differed from him precisely in this scientific borrowing, a borrowing that is all the more interesting for us in that it signals how Kupka's practice at the moment of his passage to abstraction was a transitory moment of theoretical interference.

It was as if two traditions of color, two families of apprehension, two theories—simplifying, we can call one symbolist and "subjective," and the other scientific and "objective"—came to mingle in this moment of his practice. Kupka had a great cultural knowledge of the issues of color, thanks to this master in Jaromer, Alois Studnicka, who made his students read, from an ornamental angle, the *Farbenlehren* (color theories) of Bezold, Schreiber, and Adams. Behind these *Farbenlehren* stood the model of the genre, Goethe's *Farbenlehre*, which Kupka was certainly not unaware of. Furthermore, he had been strongly influenced by Brucke's psychology of colors and by the works of Anděl on polychromatic ornament.⁵

All of this constituted a cultural baggage that belonged to a symbolist and psychological tradition that it is relevant to note, as we did for Kandinsky, was more widespread at the end of the nineteenth century in central Europe in the milieu of the *Kunstgewerbe* than in the academies of painting. We should remember that Kandinsky had been influenced by an article by Karl Scheffler that had appeared in 1901 in which the author anticipated the development of abstract painting within the decorative arts. In the same way, Kupka who was a friend of the Viennese critic Arthur Roessler, could not have avoided being receptive to the ideas of his friend, who published an important article in *Ver Sacrum* in 1903 defending the same arguments as Scheffler.⁶ The title of this article, *Das abstrakte Ornament mit gleichzeitiger Verwendung simultaner Farbenkontraste* (Abstract ornamentation with the simultaneous use of simultaneous color contrast), shows the degree to which the Viennese ornamental milieu, or Roessler in any case, was already open to scientific approaches to color and was aware of simultaneous contrast such as it had been defined by Chevreul and by Rood.

There was enough here to push Kupka, in turn, to open himself up to a tradition of color that, in its scientific bases, its ideological presuppositions, and its

stylistic consequences, was fully heterogeneous with the German tradition. This was a tradition that started with Chevreul's study, published in 1839 and reprinted in 1889, passed through Seurat, Divisionism and its theorization by Signac, and led in 1912 to Delaunay's Simultaneism.

Scientifically speaking, Chevreul's work is a theory of color perception, not a physical theory like Newton's or Young's or a physiological theory like Helmholtz's. It is rather psychological, in Fechner's sense, in that it treats sensations in their relations to stimuli and organizes these relations in a differential fashion around a basic law, that of simultaneous contrasts.⁷ It is thus the exact opposite of Goethe's *Color Theory*, which is psychological in a very different way—subjectivist and even antiscientific, since Goethe's principal goal was to prove that Newton was wrong in taking color to be an objective property of light.⁸

Of course, Goethe did not have at his disposal the distinction between stimulus and sensation and could not have foreseen a psychology of perception that would be both autonomous and yet compatible with physical facts. On the other hand, he recognized the existence of simultaneous contrast, but he subordinated it to successive contrast (manifested by the afterimage of the complementary color) because the latter proved irrefutably (or so he believed) that colors "belonged to the subject, to the eye itself."⁹ This led Goethe, through a method analogous to the one that symbolism would later pick up and expand, to impute this subjective principle of contrast to the chemical material itself, in the form of an opposition between acid and alkaline, and also to impute to it all sorts of natural and immanent properties, psychological, aesthetic, symbolic, and even moral and mystical ones. We can thus find in Goethe the major ideological roots, at least as far as a theory of color is concerned, of the Prague, Vienna, and Munich symbolism of which Kupka and Kandinsky were the direct inheritors.

This is not to say that the French tradition inaugurated by Chevreul was free of ideologies. Infinitely more rigorous than Goethe in the scientific realm, Chevreul nonetheless directed his attentions, even more than Goethe, to the aesthetic realm. His aesthetic was an aesthetic of representation, of imitation, and of retinal realism. It is understandable that it would be accepted by French painters in the heyday of positivism, with one consequence being the somewhat dogmatic theorization of Divisionism that Signac provided. Whereas the response of the Germans to Goethe, who wanted to subjectivize even the basic chemical material, came to reinforce an expressionist ideology of art and the generalized subjectivization of nature that it implied, the response of the French to Chevreul, who objectified everything, including the aesthetic decisions of the painter, gave substance to an impressionist, or neoimpressionist, ideology of art and what it implied of a latent or manifest positivism. In Seurat, who did not live long enough to go beyond his own limits, the positivist influence was especially present in his rigid respect for a representational order. In Signac, who did not

have the excuse of dying young, it was omnipresent, encouraged by his militant enthusiasm for an art "governed by tradition and science."¹⁰

With some inevitable simplification, then, we can oppose two traditions of color, term for term. The first, which predominated in central Europe, had its origin in Goethe's *Color Theory*: its ideology was symbolist, psychologizing, and subjectivist; and its stylistic consequences bloomed in Expressionism from Munch to Franz Marc. The second tradition, which is essentially French, has its origin in Chevreul's study: its ideology is positivist, technologizing, and objectivist; and its stylistic consequences burst onto the scene in two moments between which Cézanne and Cubism will represent a sort of eclipse—Seurat's and Signac's Divisionism and Delaunay's Simultaneism. But in opposing the two traditions, I do not mean to suggest that they could not coexist or influence each other, or even mix with each other. After all, Viennese Symbolism was not totally ignorant of the science of color as in Helmholtz or even Chevreul, and in Paris literary Symbolism got along quite well with a pictorial positivism, as is shown by the kinds of people with whom Signac was friendly. But the amalgamation of the two traditions is one thing, and their theoretical interference is quite another. I call "theoretical interference" the contact that occurs between two traditions at the very point where they disappear as independent sources to produce a new cultural fact. And it seems to me that this contact took place for Kupka at the moment when he "invented" his own version of abstraction: his two paintings, *Amorpha*, *Fugue in Two Colors*, and *Amorpha*, *Hot Chromatic*, which he exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1912, continued to be informed by the ornamental symbolism in which he had been raised. They also integrated the perceptual objectivity that the *Newton Disks* had demonstrated, but they were not reducible to either of these two sources. The new problem that they treated, and to which this theoretical interference precisely allowed a practical solution, was once again the problem of color as a language, the condition of legitimacy for the passage to abstract painting.

As always, it is a question of pinpointing the "essential metaphor" on which was founded the language of pure painting. In 1912, the symbolist theory of correspondences was used up. Not only had it become too commonplace, but it revealed itself to be infinitely too loose for the needs of the "language founders." It allowed all sorts of translations—A is black for Rimbaud but white for Scheffler—and rendered them all insignificant beyond a purely private idiolect without communicative force. It certainly lacked an anchor that would stop the too subjective—and literary—shifting of the symbols and would bind them to nature: to their nature as symbols but also to the symbol of their nature. The painter, who had just deposed nature from its position as represented referent, now had to reintroduce it into the position of signifier. This basic signifier, this essential metaphor, was once again that of color—no longer, as in the Kandin-

skian solution, the articulation of its being and its name, but now a concept, the concept of pure color.

But what is pure color? If pure color must become the element of language that painting would speak, what, to begin, would authorize the painter to speak of pure color as such? What could cause the expression "pure red" or "pure blue" to establish an intelligible link between the painting and its audience, whereas "pure brown" would seem absurd? It is obviously at this point that Chevreul made his contribution.

The reception of his work at the particular historical moment when the problem of abstraction was being posed for a whole generation of painters has nothing to do with the way he was received by Seurat and Signac. Presiding over Divisionism, there was an aesthetics of harmony that could not have been any more classical, as well as the typically positivist faith that "harmony is guaranteed by the systematic application of the laws that govern color."¹¹ The principle of the divided stroke and the interdiction at mixing colors, whether on the canvas or on the palette, were themselves consequences of this "systematic application," as if the "laws that governed color" ceased to be observable and practicable as soon as the painter moved away from the simplest chromatic circle where Chevreul had demonstrated them. Beyond this mechanical observation of the "laws" of colors, the divisionist reception of Chevreul was also conditioned by the immediate precedent of Impressionism. If the concept of pure color had made an appearance there, this was a consequence of Impressionism's habit of heightening tone, in opposition to the academic application of "dirty" colors and of the famous "pipe juice." The idea of a language of painting, whose signifying elements would be, on the formal side, the stroke, and, on the color side, the pure color itself, was perhaps latent in Divisionism, but it was not yet an explicit concern, since language was still free to show up in the painting via the description of the represented referent. Of course, it was with the emergence of abstraction that it became an explicit concern, one that was particularly pressing. Chevreul's theories, eclipsed for a while for the very reason that it was embraced by the positivists, soon made their return in the work of Kupka, and especially Delaunay, and the concept of pure color became the cornerstone of a linguistic or semiotic conception of painting.

In fact, with the historical distance that we have today, and with our habit of understanding painting in semiotic terms, it is easy to see the degree to which Chevreul's theory was "Saussurean" before its time and brought into the light of day the formal conditions for a "linguistic" treatment of color. In the same way that Saussure considered language as the correlative section of two amorphous masses, one made up of "acoustic images," the other of "mental images," Chevreul similarly considered the color spectrum as the correlative section of a continuum of physiological sensations and psychological perceptions. In the same way that Saussure left it to the future phonetics and phonology to determine

what degree of articulatory preparation the signifier had to undergo in order to cease to be a physical sound and become an acoustic image, Chevreul similarly left to the physicists and the physiologists, on the one hand, and the experimental or Gestalt psychologists, on the other, the task of determining with precision the relation of the stimulus to sensation. In the same way that Saussure saw difference, and even opposition, as the principle for the construction of any sign, Chevreul similarly saw contrast at the base of all perceptions of color. In the same way that Saussure gave priority to language (*langue*) over speech (*parole*) and synchrony over diachrony, Chevreul similarly emphasized the system of the chromatic circle over its individual usages and gave a greater theoretical weight to simultaneous contrast than to successive contrast. In the same way that Saussure asked his reader to bring to mind the absent terms of the paradigm that established the meaning and value of the present term, Chevreul similarly reminded the painter that to put a color on the canvas was also to call out for its absent complement. We could thus multiply the parallels that, *mutatis mutandis*, help explain the renewed interest in Chevreul at a moment when the question of an immanent language of painting became acute for a generation of painters who were basing their abstract audacities on the concept of pure color. We should not conclude that with Chevreul color had effectively become a language. But we can argue that Saussurean linguistics, no doubt unknown to all the painters of that generation, can provide us, who are aware of it in our time, with the instrument for an epistemological decoding of the concerns that at that time were presiding over the birth of abstract painting.

And, after this detour, we are brought back to the point at which Kandinsky had left us: pure color is a name, or, rather, the essential articulation of a sensation and a name. Pure color is a color that deserves its name unequivocally, one that finds itself in relation to its neighbors and opposites in the color wheel, in the same way as its name finds itself in relation to the name of its neighbors and opposites in language. Chevreul himself, very logically, was convinced of this, since he followed his first study on "the law of simultaneous contrast" with a second entitled *An Exposition of a Means of Defining and Naming Colors through a Precise and Experimental Method*.¹²

We can thus see that Chevreul was everything except a nominalist, in contrast to Duchamp, who we have yet to show was a nominalist in relation both to the problem of pure color and to the complex tradition that engendered this problem. Chevreul was not a nominalist, since it never seems to have occurred to him to fold back the name on itself to the point where it no longer means anything except that it is a name. But if he was not a nominalist, he was not a symbolist, either. Neither did the idea so important to Goethe, and picked up by Kandinsky, that color can "immediately be associated with the emotions of the mind" have any appeal for him.¹³ He limited himself to offering to painters the mechanics of the perceptive functioning of color. Aesthetically speaking, he could not have

imagined, in his period, that these mechanics could serve any purpose other than "faithfully imitating the model." However, the historical feedback that reinterpreted these mechanics, at a remove from their initial positivist reading, did precisely that: it expelled the model and did away with imitation in the name of pure color. Color was no longer an expressive symbol, as in Kandinsky's remembrance, where it spilled out of the tube already rich with all its emotional power and all its symbolic connotations. The concept of pure color was another historical version of the essential metaphor that founded the legitimacy of abstraction. But its being did not partake in the symbolist idea of its natural correspondence to the movements of the soul. Chevreul's being of pure color was the same as Saussure's oppositional being of the sign. It takes at least a pair of complementaries to conceptually define a single pure color: red presupposes cyan, green presupposes magenta, exactly in the same way that a certain quarter of the chromatic circle presupposes its facing quarter. It is a property of the system, a "question of structure."¹⁴

With Chevreul, or more precisely with his renewed reception, pure color operated an "access to the Symbolic." Obviously, this does not mean that from this point on it could be legitimately considered as the elementary sign of a new pictorial language. Its being was made up of opposition, as was the sign for Saussure. This was not a real fact but an epistemological condition that, historically, made possible the imagining of an autonomous pictorial language. Abstract painting, Kupka's among others, gave this imagining free rein from this point. Once the symbolic moment that decided its legitimacy had passed, it entered completely into the Imaginary and quickly lost—as is all too evident in the case of Kupka—its historical fruitfulness.

The passage to abstraction had, nevertheless, for Kupka as for many others, the necessary meaning of an "access to the Symbolic"; this passage and this access can be seen in a group of works that show a point of theoretical interference and spread out through 1911–12, in a chronology that was strictly parallel to Duchamp's transit through Cubism and in a space that was in Cubism's neighborhood, in a studio next to that of his brothers.

The important question is not that of the currents of influence that could have been operating in one direction or the other between Kupka and Duchamp or that of what the two could have had in common. The question is not even the biographical one of verifying the extent, the frequency, the depth of their personal interactions from day to day. Certainly, as is well known, Kupka was a manic-depressive, and his frequent depressions, especially in this particular year, led him to avoid contact with other artists. But he lived next to Jacques Villon, and he was at least an occasional participant in the reunions of the Puteaux group. As for Duchamp, it is also well known that he was not particularly seeking out the company of other artists, especially those who were older than he. But it is unlikely that he would not have had the curiosity, at least once, to go to see Kupka's

studio. The question had to be explored in terms other than those of biography or influence. It had to be asked in terms of the issues at stake in the practice of a whole series of painters, even independently of one another, in this crucial year in the history of modernism.

It seems to me very difficult to believe that Duchamp—who in September 1911 launched himself with great seriousness, and with all the ambiguities of which we are well aware, into the traversal of Cubism that would lead him a year later to “abandon” painting—could have done so in ignorance of the question of abstraction and the considerable issues at stake in notions of “foundational language,” “pure painting,” or “pure color.” Biographical, and even stylistic, facts are not enough to offer us proof, one way or the other. We know these facts, and they tell us that in 1911–12, Duchamp did not seem to be marked in the least by the questions that, right next door, were obsessing Kupka or, a little further away, Delaunay. The issue of “pure painting,” the foundation of a pictorial language—none of this seemed to interest him. And, of course, nothing in his oeuvre shows that he ever tried abstract painting. But we also have some other facts: his name as a painter barely conquered, the abandonment of painting, its replacement by pictorial nominalism, the many notes on the conditions of a language that show, at the very least, that his whole attitude is intelligible only as a function of the questions that were being posed to painting at this particular moment of its history. It is the very resonance of the work that encourages the interpretation that is proposed here: if the abandonment of painting was strategic (a point about which there can be no doubt), this strategy was not different in principle from the abandonment of chiaroscuro by Manet, of perspective by Cézanne, of figuration by Malevich. And so we can more than plausibly say that the question of abstraction was operative in his work, even if his work does not show anything of the abstract.

But there is more. It was in Munich, as we have seen, that the conflicts internal to his becoming-painter came undone, that he painted his best painting, and that he began the train of thought that would soon lead him to abandon painting. And it was in Paris, before Munich, that he rubbed elbows with Kupka without befriending him and that he avoided the issues of pure color with which Kupka's painting was so concerned. It is possible to imagine that it was the displacement from Paris to Munich that allowed him to be reminded of these issues. They had not been completely ignored before: rather they had been repressed by the cubist orthodoxy that formed the immediate context in which Duchamp had to look for a way to give meaning to his own escape from Cubism. Kupka's color, like Delaunay's, was not really visible to the circle around Gleizes and Metzinger. Kupka, who had never been a Cubist, was isolated in spite of his being a neighbor to the Duchamp brothers. Did he participate in the Salon de la Section d'Or? The question is still being debated. In any case, the two *Amorphas* that he exhibited at the Salon d'Automne were so very poorly received, even by Apolli-

naire, that we can suspect that some sort of xenophobia was going on. The very same Apollinaire would wake up from his blindness to color only much later in the year 1912, and his visible enthusiasm for Delaunay's Orphism only overcompensates for his delayed interest in color.

Meanwhile, in Munich, color was showing up in all the artworks, and Duchamp—who felt himself liberated in Munich from the pressures of Cézanne, authorized in a “secessionist” pictorial strategy, and encouraged in the ironic practice of “arts and crafts”—could not have avoided seeing the return of the color that Paris was repressing.

The issue of pure color did not have time to manifest itself in Duchamp's work in the form of an explicit influence. Repressed in Paris, it probably came to the surface of his consciousness in Munich, but it served to give impetus (through one of those remarkable shortcuts that we still have to study) to the ready-made rather than to abstraction, to the abandonment of painting rather than to that of figuration. But what is even more remarkable is that the ready-made, which, as we will see, took a stand on the question of pure color, did this in such a way that it directed the question precisely to the same point of theoretical interference that had presented itself momentarily to Kupka: the point where Chevreul, reread against the background of symbolism rather than positivism, had made the question lead to an “access to the Symbolic.” We should not be surprised at finding that Duchamp, in a strategy now becoming familiar to us, would have turned this “access to the Symbolic” back onto himself, onto the nominalist point where it caused a revulsion/revelation.

Delaunay and the Question of Craft

However, if it is not in terms of influence but in terms of issues and stakes that we have to examine the connections of Duchamp to Kupka, the same thing is true for his connections to Delaunay, whose reputation in Munich was increasing. We should not let the fact that Duchamp did not associate with him prevent us from analyzing the underlying questions that they had in common.¹⁵

Much more so than Kupka, Delaunay, who had also passed to abstraction between 1911 and 1913, wanted to give a theoretical dimension to his pictorial practice. And again more explicitly than in the case of Kupka, this theory—Simultaneism—based itself on Chevreul: “Simultaneism. Simultaneousness of color, simultaneous contrasts and all uneven measures issuing out of color, conform to their expression in their representative movement. This is the only reality to create a picture.”¹⁶ It was in the series of *Windows*, dating from the spring of 1912, that Delaunay, who, in contrast to Kupka, participated in the cubist venture, began to free himself of Cubism and start his own transition toward abstraction. “Designation: the *Windows* as a title is still a reminiscence of concrete reality, but from the perspective of the means of expression one can only glimpse a

new form of expression. They are windows open upon a new reality. This new reality is nothing less than the ABC of expressive methods that derive from the physical elements of color creating new form."¹⁷

We can find here again, and still in relation to the issue of pure color, an "access to the Symbolic": "the ABC of expressive methods that derive from the physical elements of color." The *First Disk* of 1912, in its geometrical structure, its flattened technique, and especially in its circular format, which prevents any sort of spatial reading in terms of figure/ground relationships, assuredly represents the radical expression of this ABC. It clearly stakes the claim to a foundational language and bursts out violently as something without real precedent in Delaunay's work (even if *Landscape with Disk* from 1906–1907 already showed a divisionist interest in Chevreul, it possesses a cosmic symbolism that is totally absent from the *First Disk*) and, moreover, without a real follow-up either. *Circular Forms*, *Sun No. 1*, *Sun*, *Moon* and so on, which follow the *First Disk*, re-established in their titles and especially in their cubist spatiality a "representation of nature, a memory" that the *First Disk* refused to evoke. For a brief moment, Delaunay entered into the problematic of the "language founders."

His practice did not succeed in keeping him in this problematic, but his theoretical ambition undoubtedly pushed him toward it. Most curious—and maybe this is the explanation for his failure—was his unbending attachment to the notion of craft. "Let it be clearly understood that we remain within the realm of form—of craft—and abstain from philosophizing about it."¹⁸ This was an admirable prudence on the part of a practitioner who wanted to avoid falling into the theorizing habits of Gleizes and Metzinger. But this practitioner, who founded a new "ism" and knew the extent to which he was investing it with a theoretical ambition, was in fact confusing craft and practice. The "new reality" of painting, which he based on simultaneous contrast and "uneven measures," was endlessly and almost obsessively equated by him with a "new craft of simultaneity." More than anything else, Delaunay seemed to fear that the abandonment of figuration would be confused with an abandonment of the technical complexities of painting. He worked ceaselessly in his texts to prove that Impressionism and Seurat and Cézanne, who had "been involved for a time in destroying the old craft of painting," had no historical function other than to "give birth to a more profound inquiry" into a "color that is more . . . absolute," a "self-sufficient color." And this inquiry was an "inquiry into technique."¹⁹ His own taste for monumental painting, which had majestically shown itself a little before *First Disk* in *The City of Paris* and a little after in *The Cardiff Team*, prevented him from perceiving the theoretical and epistemological leap that he had just made. Delaunay had a nostalgia for "grand painting." *The City of Paris* has evocations of Puvis de Chavannes, and *The Cardiff Team* evocations of the Douanier Rousseau, "What a good worker."²⁰ Between the two, the inspiration that led him to paint the *First Disk* remained a moment of surprise that was without epis-

temological consequences. "Once surprise has gone, craft alone . . ." could justify for him the possibility of painting as a language of pure color,²¹ "because *inspiration and craft* are intimately joined and their proportions always correct."²²

The case of Delaunay sheds some light on the sort of mistake that had other versions in Kandinsky and Kupka. For Kandinsky, the rise of abstract painting revealed itself to be founded on the experience of inner necessity—a revelation of the Imaginary, which authorized him to follow through on metaphor and to project the language of pure painting in an ideal and phantasmatic world detached, despite all his pedagogical efforts, from any sort of symbolic function in real society. For Kupka, this same rise of abstraction, which signaled to him a site of theoretical interference, could not be maintained, and it failed in fully registering all the consequences of abstraction. After his *Vertical Planes* of 1912–13, which still had the radicality of an "access to the Symbolic," Kupka returned to his cosmic and theosophical symbolism, and his painting, which ceased to have resonance for the epistemology of his time, would soon have no meaning other than a decorative one.

Malevich and the Question of Abandonment

These two cases are very instructive when we set out to understand—by contrast—the source of the historical fruitfulness of those painters who were able to give a durable epistemological meaning to the emergence of abstraction. Of course, I am thinking of Malevich and Mondrian. It is not so much that these painters had a more "correct" or more "modern" or more "materialist" theory of painting. Obviously, Suprematism owed much to the foggy mysticism of Ouspensky, and Mondrian owed as much to theosophy as did Kupka, if not more. We have to understand the displacement that all this idealism underwent in their work itself—how it was utilized, even without their knowing it, as an ideological lever for decisions that really came to them from elsewhere, from their extreme sensitivity to the historical issues of painting. And these issues, which were also theoretical, had to do with craft: Delaunay had not been wrong on this point. But what he had not understood, and what Malevich and Mondrian had understood in the same historical moment, was that craft and the abandonment of craft are one and the same thing: that the successive abandonments that had made up the history of modernism up to then—that of chiaroscuro by Manet, that of perspective by Cézanne, that of figuration by themselves—were not a sort of healthy starting from scratch that would precede the construction of a new craft, but were this craft itself; that the painting of the avant-garde affirmed new values where it seemed to deny old values; and that this affirmation, this construction, had no need of any justification other than the apparent destruction of tradition. For this destruction was only apparent: what was abandoned was abandoned because it

was already dead, assassinated not by the painters but by historical, social, economic, technological conditions that, since the rise of industrialization, had made painting an impossible craft.

In this sense, Malevich and Mondrian—like Duchamp—did not entertain the phantasm of the *tabula rasa*. Nor did they entertain that of a return to classicism (although Malevich did, later) that, even in Delaunay, can always be seen as a symptom of pictorial regression. They knew that the grand painting of the twentieth century could only be that which rejected “grand painting,” and that the “new craft” consisted in avoiding like the plague anything that connoted “craft.” From this came the mechanical, “clumsy” technique, voluntarily deprived of all virtuosity, of the works of Malevich and Mondrian. And from this, despite all the formal dissimilarities, came the profound affinity of these painters with Marcel Duchamp.

One might argue against this that Malevich and Mondrian never abandoned painting in the way that Duchamp did. This is true both intuitively and empirically. From an epistemological point of view, however, they abandoned painting as much as Duchamp did not abandon it. If it is true that, to a large degree, the truth-function of a work of art is to declare its real conditions of existence, Duchamp’s readymade speaks of the conditions for the survival of painting in a society that renders its craft impossible as much as Malevich’s *Black Square* speaks of the impossibility of painting in a society that continues to valorize this craft ideologically. The know-how that *Black Square* demanded of its author is nil. This kind of craftsmanship is within the reach of anyone, and there obviously lies not only its provocational value but also its force of epistemological affirmation. This force is the same as that of the readymade but with a symmetrical twist: the readymade addressed itself to the historical conditions, principally the technological ones, of painting as dead painting. Being no longer painting, it declared negatively that painting could survive its own death only by recognizing the cause of it. And it declared this cause positively by being an industrial object: industrialization, which had assassinated all the crafts, had assassinated the craft of painting as well. *Black Square* addressed itself to the ideological consequences of the same assassination. It declared positively—by insisting on still being a painting—that its practice was alive because it no longer wanted to be artisanal, while it jettisoned those ideological effects that had been attached to artisanal practice. And it declared these effects negatively in being “handmade”: craft, which had succumbed to the force of industry, was evidenced by its absence.

Granted that the epistemological leap was the same but with a twist, granted that Duchamp and Malevich both got rid of craft in order to say that painting was dead or that it was living only insofar as it was not a craft, one would still fail to see the consequences of this leap were one to say that the *Black Square* was still a painting whereas the readymade no longer was. The strategy of the readymade was indeed of the same order as the successive abandonments that made up the

history of pictorial modernism from Manet to Malevich. Contrary to appearances, it did not push the "logic" of abandonment a notch farther—a notch too far, some might say—where tradition would have been broken forever. Appearances suggest that *Black Square* is still a painting and the readymade is no longer. But it is a lure to draw the line between what is still painting and what no longer is, as being that between a "painted thing" and a thing.

This lure is the very one underlying the formalist reading of modernism, for which Clement Greenberg remains the most eminent advocate. Greenberg violently rejected Duchamp and did his best to avoid situating Malevich within his particular conception of the history of modernism, which he saw as culminating in "American-type painting" and in the flat illusionism of Olitski.²³ But, almost in spite of himself, he could not avoid registering the epistemological consequences of their real place in the history of painting. For example, contrary to other critics, he perceived that craft and the abandonment of craft were one and the same thing. He based himself on Pollock or Newman rather than on Malevich, but he always perceived that the border line between what is still painting and what is no longer is a dialectical one that is always being displaced in history. In 1863, for example, a border line was drawn between Ingres and Manet, and in 1947 one was drawn between Pollock and Picasso. Painters themselves displaced it by calling for the public's retrospective approval of significant pictorial innovations that, at first glance, always present themselves as a renunciation of the craft and conventions of painting. But Greenberg thought that this deconstruction had an end point, which is its involuntary tropism, and that modern painters got rid of the "expendable conventions" of painting only in order to uncover an irreducible remainder consisting of its essential conventions. He thus found himself inevitably drawn to fetishizing the formal characteristics of paintings, and even of the unpainted canvas, as if they held the ultimate power to trace the limit between that which deserves the name *painting* and that which no longer does. Since, in a pinch, these formal characteristics no longer depended on craft, they had to take refuge in the empirical conventions of easel painting, in the very fact of being a flat and delimited piece of canvas stretched on a frame: "By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture: thus, a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily as a *successful* one."²⁴

In taking things to the point of absurdity, Greenberg's arguments show the impasse to which an ontological conception of the specificity of painting must lead. Concerned to show that "modernist painting" only deconstructs the historical conventions of painting one by one, in order to better anchor it to its irreducible being, his arguments end up localizing this being on the formal and technical

qualities of an unpainted canvas, a readymade bought in an art supply store! Why stop there, and why not accept calling Duchamp's urinal a painting? Or else, why not stop earlier, and refuse to call Malevich's *Black Square*, Rodchenko's monochromes, or Strzemieski's Unism paintings? In fact, this is what Greenberg did, without admitting it. His blindness in regard to Duchamp is matched only by his blindness vis-à-vis Russian Constructivism, not to mention Polish Constructivism, which he completely ignored. Even in considering only American painting, for which he became the spokesman, how can we otherwise explain his dislike for the seven white panels of Rauschenberg's *White Painting* (1951), his silence in the face of Reinhardt's "black period," his ignorance of Agnes Martin's "grids," his hesitation in front of Stella's black paintings? Each time that a painter took literally his definition of the "essential conventions of painting," Greenberg refused to follow him or her. He had good reason for this, since to do so would have caused him either to have to announce the death of painting himself or to revise his entire theory and opt, as I have done following Duchamp, for nominalism against essentialism.²⁵

Greenberg's blindness in regard to the readymade thus lies in his obstinate attachment to defining the specificity of painting ontologically and his inability to consider it from a nominalist perspective. Yet what is at stake on the border line between a readymade canvas and a readymade that is not a canvas is nothing other than the *name* of painting. Of course, Greenberg knew that it was not an a priori logical category that historically decides the specificity of painting and that it is not by means of a fixed concept that one can decide to attribute the name of painting to a particular object. It is a value judgment that makes the decision, an aesthetic judgment whose a posteriori effect is to shrink or enlarge the extension of the concept of painting and so establish the historical status of its specificity. Much more than other critics, Greenberg was aware of this. What he called the irreducibility of pictorial art, he understood as the result of a historical process that was made up completely of a succession of aesthetic judgments. This is why he stopped at the threshold of an ultimate judgment: "a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily as a *successful* one." In fact, it was not necessary to wait for this final judgment or for the historical moment when the necessary and sufficient conventions of the canvas had been reduced to its shape and flatness: with each new aesthetic judgment, it was the name that was in question. Since Manet and Mallarmé, "the jury had nothing else to do but say, 'This is a painting' or 'This is not a painting.'" Well before Duchamp and Malevich, the institutional history of modern painting had cast aesthetic judgment in the enunciative form of a naming procedure.

History, after Duchamp, has judged that the readymade belongs to art; it has given it this generic name. Retrospectively, can we also say that the readymade belongs to "painting"? Without seeming absurd, can we also contend that it deserves this specific name? To answer no by arguing that it was not made by an

artist, that it shows no trace of craft—neither the “old craft of painting” that Seurat and Cézanne had destroyed nor the “new craft” that Delaunay wished for—is to decide that *Black Square*, which shows no more craft than Duchamp’s urinal, does not deserve to be called a painting, either. To answer no by arguing that nothing allows one to connect the readymade to pictorial tradition and specifically to the tradition of “modernist painting,” under the pretext that it obeys none of the “essential conventions” of the canvas, albeit those of the canvas yet to be painted, is to declare oneself ready to assign to painting Malevich’s *Black Square* but not Duchamp’s urinal. The two decisions are untenable. To refuse the status of painting to Malevich’s *Black Square* would amount to removing from the history of modern art its most significant part, the one that stemmed from Malevich or from parallel movements: Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Moholy-Nagy, the whole of Constructivism, Mondrian, Pollock, Newman, Stella, all as critical of craft in their own way as Malevich. To draw a line between a readymade canvas and a readymade that is not a canvas would amount to reifying conventions that have nothing essential about them but that are those of easel painting since the Renaissance. Not only would this deny any existence to the numerous painters who work on loose canvases or on other materials, but retrospectively it would also lead to denying that the Greeks ever painted, under the pretext that they worked on vases or on shields that did not respect the “essential convention” of flatness.

Must we then decide that yes, the readymade must be called a painting? We could try this by arguing that the fact that it was not made by an artist radicalizes an abandonment of craft that gives a new historical and aesthetic pertinence to the “new pictorial craft.” From Manet to Malevich, the abandonment of craft constitutes the craft, and nowhere do painters affirm themselves more as painters than in that which they negate. One could add that it is the deconstruction of pictorial conventions that makes up the tradition of modernism, that this deconstruction also proceeds by abandonment, and that in leaving behind the convention of the canvas and the stretcher, the readymade affirms in the most radical fashion its place in tradition. But all this would quickly lead to an untenable paradox: the readymade urinal would be more purely a “painting” than the readymade canvas, and Duchamp would be more of a painter than Malevich. At a pinch, the only thing that would merit the name of painting would be that which, more radically than anything else in the world, would have abandoned all appearances and all conventions of painting. But then, the name of painting would be synonymous with dead painting; it would no longer be anything but the nominal trace of a craft, of a collection of conventions, of a tradition that had been definitively erased from history. In this case, why keep the name?

The paradox is that if the readymade were to be named a painting, this name would no longer designate anything but the exhaustion of its own naming. There would no longer be painting; there would only be art. And this decision would

also be untenable, because it would eliminate from the history of modernism everything that still respected any of the conventions of a painting, because it would abusively identify the strategy of abandonment, which was only one aspect of modernist deconstruction, with the whole of deconstructive strategy; and because it would ultimately give final credit to the phantasm of the *tabula rasa* and would assimilate the modern impossibility of painting to the absolute loss of its past memory. Concretely, it would lead to the belief that after Malevich and Duchamp, especially after Duchamp, not only could one no longer be an artist except by being a nonpainter or an antipainter, but also one would have to forget that there had been painting before. One can find this belief expressed in the idea that after abstraction, no return to figuration would be permitted; that after the monochrome, all return to pictorial spatiality was forbidden; that after conceptual art, the very practice of painting was a regression. It draws no difference between the return to the past conventions of craft and a return that would deal *with* these conventions; it understands the first temporal law of the avant-garde, that of irreversibility, but not the second, that of feedback. Many *artists* would still be able to find a place in this antimodernist history, but the most important *painters* after Duchamp, like Richter or Ryman, would be relegated to the dustbin of history in the name of an amnesiac avant-gardism.

Infra-Thin

Thus, the readymade ought to be called a painting/the readymade cannot be called a painting. One cannot get out of this contradiction by saying that it is both “painting” and “something else” or that it is neither “painting” nor “something else.” The readymade does not put the concept of painting in contradiction with itself; it renders the act of naming the painting undecidable.²⁶

This act is an aesthetic decision that the readymade provokes in the viewer, one that is symmetrical with the aesthetic decision that provoked Duchamp to name the readymade. And one and the other are undecidable, as if the “painting” and “nonpainting” options of the decision were twisted together in a sort of Möbius strip, and as if the “decider” were caught in a double bind with no way out. The judgment either slides from one option to the other without discontinuity or gets caught in the infra-thin traversal of this double-edged choice.²⁷

In Duchamp’s thought and vocabulary, there is a profound affinity between the infra-thin and aesthetic judgment. The choice of a readymade is a judgment expressed in the “total absence of good or bad taste.”²⁸ It is no longer a judgment of taste, but—in a new sense that Duchamp does not so much create as record or reveal—it is an aesthetic judgment, and not a utilitarian, moral, or ideological one. It is only in this sense that it is summoned to judge the “beauty of indifference” and calls for an undecidable nomination.²⁹ It is itself not a name. It summons the name, provokes the coming of the name at the same time that it rejects

it, and results in a Januslike pact simultaneously validating it in the perspective of consensus and in the perspective of disagreement. It is the act of naming, and the act of naming cannot be a name itself. Undecidable, aesthetic judgment is a speech-act suspended between two statements: "this is painting/this is not painting." Between the two, aesthetic judgment is an infra-thin passage and an indifferent difference, something that does not have a name, and even less a concept. Aesthetic decision is an experience that escapes all conceptual comprehension. "One can only give examples of it" is what Duchamp said about the infra-thin in response to Denis de Rougemont, who asked him for a conceptual definition of it.³⁰

Here are some examples: "When the tobacco smoke smells also of the mouth which exhales it, the 2 odors marry by infra thin." "The warmth of a seat (which has just been left) is infra-thin." "Velvet trousers—their whistling sound (in walking) by brushing of the 2 legs is an infra thin separation signaled by sound." "Infra-thin separation between the *detonation* noise of a gun (very close) and the *apparition* of the bullet hole in the target." And so on.³¹

All these examples refer to sensory experiences that the readers are left to imagine or, if they so wish, to experiment with. But these experiences also work to isolate a difference that is not sensorial and to which sensation can only refer.³² This difference is double: a "fullness" that prevents passage and an "emptiness" that invites it; "infrathin *separation*—better than screen, because it indicates interval (taken in one sense) and screen (taken in another sense)—separation has the 2 senses male and female."³³

The infra-thin separation is working at its maximum when it distinguishes the same from the same, when it is an indifferent difference, or a differential identity: "The difference (dimensional) between 2 mass-produced objects [from the same mold] is an infra thin when the maximum (?) precision is obtained."³⁴ And it becomes aesthetic judgment when it calls in a single motion for consensus and disagreement: "The exchange between what one puts on view [the whole setting up to put on view (all areas)] and the glacial regard of the public (which sees and forgets immediately). Very often this exchange has the value of an infra thin separation (meaning that the more a thing is admired and looked at, the less there is an inf. t. sep)."³⁵

Finally, the meaning of this aesthetic judgment that calls out simultaneously for yes and no is nothing other than the arrow of time and the reaction that makes it feed back on itself, the interval that makes the haste of the artist and the delay of the viewers simultaneous to each other: "Subway gates—the people who go through at the very last moment infra thin → The convention of the arrow sign produces an infra thin reaction on the sense of displacement agreed to."³⁶

But, above all else, aesthetic judgment, aesthetic naming, is not a name itself: "infrathin (adj.) not noun—never use a substantive."³⁷

The infra-thin cannot be a name if it is the interval between two names, like the transition from the name of painting to the name of art, for example. The infra-thin cannot be a name if it is a decision suspended between two contrary decisions, one that cannot decide without immediately canceling itself. It can be a name neither for the viewer, summoned to decide "with all kinds of delays," nor for the author who provokes this decision by anticipation. "I'm not a man of decisions. I didn't decide to stop painting, or working with glass or doing readymades."³⁸ "In art I came finally to the point where I wished to make no more decisions, decisions of an artistic order, so to speak."³⁹

It is in vain that we, the viewers who do not know how to decide if the readymade must be named a painting, would expect their author to decide for us. Aesthetic judgment is as undecidable for the author as for the viewer. It is not the result of a decision, an intention, a project. Nor is it the result of an indecision, a failure of intentions, an uncertainty about the project. But it is definitely the infra-thin effect of an interval, of a difference and a lack: "Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap which represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intention; this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work. In other words, the personal 'art coefficient' is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed."⁴⁰

It is with an extreme lucidity, an almost clinical precision, that Duchamp marks the missing link that constitutes the creative act and situates it in the infra-thin difference between what was decided on but does not make its way into the work, and what makes its way into the work but was not decided on. Although the onlookers might "make the painting," they will not be able to restore the missing link. They will eventually repeat it, or substitute a new link for it, incorporating the work into their own chain of desire. Eventually, they will make a decision. "The readymade is not painting!" This will probably be their decision, one guided by common sense—expected sense, that is. Viewers who expect painting to satisfy their desire—their desire to see, their desire for the beautiful, their desire for craft, for example—can only be frustrated by the readymade and decide against it. Viewers who expect painting to at once cut off and reinstate desire, who expect the unexpected, knowing that "vision," "beauty," and "craft" are suspect values, can open themselves to the opposite decision. For them, the missing link is the essential one; for them, it is essential that a link is missing. This is the very condition for an "access to the Symbolic," the very condition for a possible nomination. They will thus decide to call the readymade a painting. But they had better watch out; this is the last time that they will be authorized to do so. Because what they have just named is already dead painting, the death of painting. It is our responsibility to decide; it is up to us the viewers who "make the delay." And this is a serious decision, since it connects our judg-

ments, well beyond Duchamp, to everything that makes up our history and that we call modernism. We call ourselves postmodernists, that is the new fashion, but we do not know what we are really saying. This *post*—is it a link or a break with our immediate past? Is it the last version of the fantasy of the *tabula rasa*, in which case we would be modernists *since* we no longer want to be? Or is it the feedback that reinterprets it, in which case we are no longer in modernism *since* we claim it as our tradition? This is our historical issue. It is no longer that of abstraction or that of “foundational language,” because we no longer believe very much in language founders. But it is certainly that of the judgment that we make about them. It remains undecidable.

One bit of luck is that among the language founders, there were several who did not really believe language founders themselves. In 1913, Malevich was one of these, and Duchamp was one all of his life. If the readymade posited the “conditions of a language,” it quickly worked to leave these conditions unsatisfied. In contrast, the quest for “prime words,” even if it indicated “a sharp desire to remove from our inventions all meanings alien to themselves as if to radically deprive them of the possibility of becoming a language,”⁴¹ never prevented viewers from expanding them into an endless text. It may convey nothing but their desire; it may also spell out the truth. Perhaps. And only for a determined amount of time. But only if things remain undecided, only if we realize that in the undecidability of the readymade as of today lies its historical potential and that it grants painting, which it names and does not name, an open-ended reprieve.

Does the readymade “belong to painting”? The question has no meaning. It no longer has any meaning if painting died with modernism, and it has no meaning yet if postmodern painting has not yet been born. For the moment, that is, the moment of a delay, a retardation, an “opening up” that extends from 1913 to the present, the readymade has no name. It is the bar between two names, an undecidable signifier and the signifier of an undecidability, a double-edged thing like a lapsus, a failed act, a *Trébuchet*.

Among the collection of things that Duchamp baptized as readymades, there is one that is more significant than the others, especially if one notes the stuttering fashion in which it seeks the name of painting. It is dated with precision and indifference and carries a phrase that is, we should note, a supplementary color, in this case white. It is a *comb* (*peigne*) similar to those with which the Cubists used to paint fake wood; it is, Duchamp insists, an iron comb (*en fer*). Inscribed in 1916, it returns in 1937 on the cover of an avant-garde journal entitled *Transition*. The name of the journal is situated so that it appears to lie on the same perspectival plane as the comb. Directly underneath it, a light difference in the color of the background suggests a sort of rip or gap. Of what transition—a gaping one—is this comb the signifier if not the one that its name literally spells out in the viewing of the thing. “I ought to paint!” (*que je peigne!*) has supplanted

“I paint” (*je peins*). Such is the readymade’s nominalist way of naming as a possible painting a thing that it is impossible to name a painting.

Chapter 8

Transitions

And indeed the pure colors do not even have special commonly used names, that's how unimportant they are to us.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

In 1945, in response to Denis de Rougemont's question, "What is genius?" Marcel gave this answer: "*L'impossibilité du fer*." And he added, "Another pun, of course."¹ Punning on *fer* (iron) and *faire* (to make, to do), Duchamp deliberately left his answer in this state of undecidability, perhaps suggesting that an iron readymade such as the *Comb*—whose title is itself a pun on the feeling that the particular making called painting has become impossible—be read as the only possible manifestation of genius when the making has to be abandoned.

On the one side of the bar of undecidability, there is the "impossibility of the making" and on the other the "figuration of a possible."² From the one to the other, the readymade operates a passage and a transition, "partition" and "interval," male and female in a chiasma. For what is at stake is still the conquest of the woman/painting, although by "subsidized symmetry."

The becoming-woman of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride* was answered by the becoming-painter of Marcel Duchamp. With the undecidable signifier Cézanne/Suzanne as a pivot, the name *painting*, together with that of the painter, was the issue. But *The Passage*, which went from a virgin canvas to a painting in the past participle, decided its passage in both directions, saying what it does, and doing what it says, accomplishing the desire of the "*pas soeur!*" and naming the passer. In "reciprocal" contrast, the transition that goes from painting in the past participle toward the virgin readymade does not decide in any direction. With the androgynous signature of the ex-painter as a pivot, it maintains the becoming nonpainting in a metastable state. Marcel Duchamp, painter, signs the impossibility of painting while Rose Sélavy, artist, depicts (*dépeint*) art's

possibility. Unless what happens is really that the *anartist* Marcel Duchamp designates the possibility of painting while the nonpainter Rose Sélavy paints the impossibility of art. Unless Rose paints the signed sign while Marcel apes (*singe*) the hanged woman (*pendu femelle*). “Another pun, of course.”

In the paradoxical games of subsidized symmetry, the gender of the words gets mixed up with the gender of the people, the future is exchanged for abandonment, affirmation denies itself, and negation affirms itself. Let us stop this turnstile: “The *arrhe* of painting is feminine in gender.”³ The transsexual identity of Mar/Cel plays on the undecidability of a missing link revealing itself as a supplementary signifier (the second “r” in Rose as well as in *arrhe*): Rose was cheeky enough to have pocketed the funds from which Sélavy drew a quite singular art.⁴ “The sign of ratio which separated them remains (*sign of the accordance* or rather of . . . look for it).”⁵

Let us leave this sign aside, since we know where to look for it. “In the Greeks, no doubt,” says Suquet, who calls it a phallus. Or in Lacan, I would say, since it can be found there readymade and still in Greek.

The Lacanian formula of the subject:

$$\frac{S}{s'} \cdot \frac{s'}{x} \longrightarrow S \left(\frac{1}{s} \right)$$

was written in 1913 by Duchamp as:

$$\frac{\text{arrhe}}{\text{art}} = \frac{\text{merdre}}{\text{merde}}$$

Duchamp did not know that he was writing Lacan’s formula, of course. His own formula was not theoretical. Stupid as a painter, he did nothing but follow the missing link of his own creativity. He followed it, he looked for it, but he also abandoned it, certain that his own creations would make it surge up in its very lacking like the “sign of the accordance” that governs the “personal art coefficient” of the “*arrhetist*-painter” that Duchamp/Sélavy undecides to become.

From a passage to a transition, the trajectory of our heuristic parallel reaches its incomplete ending. The Lacanian paradigm is isomorphic to the Duchampian formula. The first can continue to be used to interpret the second—interminably, it seems. One by one, the objects, the aphorisms, the sayings of Duchamp find there the confirmation of their enigma. And the second can continue to call out to the first with a perfect circularity, and form with it an impeccable bachelor machine. It is thus time to abandon them to their parallel trajectories. Because, for this historian of art, the heuristic parallel between art and dream has given all that it had to give; it has allowed us to find what there was to look for, it has demonstrated all its operational virtues. Once again, the truth that it offers, if there is a truth, is not necessarily that of psychoanalysis or of art. It is only that self-

referential truth of their respective truth-functions, running parallel along the same flow of time. This time flow is that of two breachings that marked a shared *episteme*. With Lacan, the work begun by Freud reaches a point of its breaching where the theory of the subject is reformulated as the rhetoric of subjection to the signifier. With Duchamp, as interpreted by literal nominalism, the work of painting begun by Cézanne and the pioneers of modernism reaches a point of breaching where the practice of the subject-artist is reformulated in a similar way.

Nothing suggests here that we are dealing with a completed theory or practice. The subject according to Lacan is not more "true" than the subject according to Descartes. But it is more pertinent, today, for epistemology as history or history as epistemology, as you wish. Similarly, painting and the impossibility of painting according to Duchamp are not more "true" than painting according to Cézanne. But just as Cézannean space finds its pertinent interpretation in the subject-body of phenomenology, so does the authorial practice of Duchamp find its pertinent interpretation in the Lacanian paradigm of the subject. This is the only truly theoretical consequence of a heuristic parallel that, for the historian of art, could be engaged in only as a methodological borrowing and nothing more. It concerns only one aspect of his practice as an art historian—that which deals with the theory of the author that he made his own. Because if the historian of art wants to do more than historiography, he must also be an aesthetician. And if he wants to construct an aesthetics, he must necessarily include a theory of authorship as well as one of spectatorship—in short, a theory of the subjective dimension of art practice.

The ideal would be to derive such a theory from the works themselves, or at least those that the art historian and his period judge to be significant. These works are the site at which the individual subject-artist is produced. But they are also the site at which, through this individual production, society both sets in motion and represents the technologies of production of the subject that it activates in all social practices. One of the truth-functions of the fertile artwork, and one aspect of its historical pertinence, is probably both to set these technologies in motion and, at the same time, to represent them, in this specific movement of self-reference that characterizes the work but that is also a movement of hetero-reference. Because in aiming at itself, the fertile work also aims outside of itself, and the most singular artist also speaks for everyone. What he says about the manner in which he produces himself as an artist-subject is there in the work. But it is not there theoretically, or only as a sort of latent theory that requires outside help to emerge. The historian of art can find this help in the existing theories that the epistemological context to which he belongs puts at his disposal. He is not a judge of these theories in their own specific field, since he is not a practitioner of them, and he is limited in his choices and no doubt incompetent (as in my case) vis-à-vis the work of specialists in the theories. But the risk that he takes in declaring modestly his incompetence is greater than the risk he takes in borrowing

from the theory that seems to have the most resonance with the work he is studying and that puts the most pressure on the state of his own discipline. As a historian of art, he cannot do without an aesthetics and, thus, without a theory of authorship. The danger is that he simply borrows this theory, without reflecting on it, from the mere habits of his trade. It seems that for many art historians, the author is only a signature, a seal of authenticity, a "me" that is always coherent and transparent to itself and that evolves according to precise patterns of influence, rupture, maturity. Even when, as in the best of cases, this schema works reflectively, it too often does so to borrow "innocently" from philosophical or psychological theories of the subject that are prior to the work to which one is applying them: for example, the romantic subject in search of identity, or the artist as a self-expression or even, more recently, the unconscious or psychological drives as a spontaneous, creative force.

Yet, in modernism in any case, there is a theoretical specificity immanent in works of art that cannot avoid leading to questioning the epistemological stability of the theoretical tools that are applied to them. This constant concern is the watermark of the present book. It is that which led me to opt for heuristic parallelism, a method that ideally would allow me to borrow without taking over and, in this particular situation, to take from Freudian and Lacanian theory of the subject operative concepts that seemed intuitively to be the most likely to grasp the truth-function that the subject practice of the artist Duchamp demonstrates.

Here, this heuristic parallelism meets its open-ended end—not in regard to an ultimate truth but to a contingent pertinence: today, the Duchampian formula of authorship is isomorphic to the Lacanian paradigm of the subject. In order to indicate this, it was necessary to let two parallel breachings lead to their vanishing point, with an emphasis on their respective movements of self-interpretation. Here, art was compared to the dream, this art to this dream, on the basis of the eminently heuristic role that Freud's dreams played in his self-analysis. And this comparison proved efficient, since it allowed us to find in Duchamp's art an equivalent function of revulsion/revelation that was itself self-analytic. Nothing prevents us from taking this comparison and examining it anew, further studying artistic self-reference in reference to the analytic field; conversely, nothing prevents us from picking up Freud and Lacan and examining them anew, and studying the significance of the dream (the *Traum-Deutung*) in reference to the aesthetic field. These are exercises that go beyond the limits of parallelism and that reestablish a practice of mutual deconstruction. They have their own value and their own legitimacy, but I think they become sterile for the art historian as soon as a certain translatability, a certain transparency of the parallel fields, is achieved, as soon as the art being examined reveals itself to be isomorphic to the theory that examines it, in that the art anticipates the theory and displays an explicit, though enigmatic, "knowledge" of it.⁶ It is thus necessary to stop the pro-

cess at the moment when the opening of the work, its delay, produces its theoretical revulsion/revelation.

Duchamp, speaking to Pierre Cabanne in 1966, said, "Delay in glass (*retard en verre*). I like that very much. Backward, that means something."⁷ Why not a stopped dream (*rêve en arrêt*)?

There is a theoretical palindrome that the art historian inherits in order to read in both ways: from the "impossibility of the making" to the "figuration of a possible," and vice versa. Birth and death are always simultaneously at stake, oscillating around a pivot that is nothing other than the formation of the subject itself. "Madam, I'm Adam," says a well-known English palindrome, in which the first man on earth addresses the *bride*, the mother who is absent. This could be the formula behind *Paradise*, the first symptom-canvas in which Duchamp imagines himself accomplishing his nuptials with painting. Painted on the back-side of *Paradise*, *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* shows the rebounding of the palindrome. "Madam, I'm Adam": the text would remain the same if it were not for a reversal, the difference being that around the pivot of the *I*, the flux of time gets reversed; the irreversible haste of the swift nudes to traverse the avant-garde of the period is substituted for the Adamic fantasy of a return to origins.

A new sort of reversal, a new sort of "vengeance," shows up in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*. Irreversibility is now a given, and it is no longer the flux of time that is inverted but its historical meaning for the subject. Am I becoming, have I become a painter? Can I avoid marrying painting, dead painting? Let us stop this turnstile: crossing the bar does not happen in time. After the *Passage*, art making will no longer be a question of marriage or, consequently of divorce, but only of bachelorhood: to paint and to cease to paint are one and the same thing; the figuration of a possible is nothing other than the impossibility of the making (*fer*) read in reverse.

"The Impossibility of the Iron (*fer*)"

How to understand this in its historical resonance? What connection is there with the history of modern painting? And what connection is there with its real social conditions? We have to go back to *Comb*. It is a comb in iron (*fer*), and thus a comb in the making (*faire*). Thanks to the substitution of real iron for impossible making, *Comb* is an object of art. "The word art, etymologically speaking, means making; quite simply 'making.' 'Making with,' if you wish, and so perhaps 'making with the hands.' So, art is everything that is made with the hands, and generally by an individual."⁸

Thus is presented the major premise of a syllogism, and now here is the minor premise, drawn from the same interview: "What is making? Making something is choosing a tube of blue, a tube of red, and putting some of it on the palette, and

always choosing the quality of the blue, the quality of the red, and always choosing the place to put it on the canvas, it is always choosing."

It is up to us to draw the conclusion from this: if art is making, and if making is choosing, then art is choosing. Such is the conclusion at the level of maximal generality, where Duchamp posited the first premise of the syllogism. "Art is everything that is made with the hands." But the second premise brings about a reasoning at a level of particularity quite strange with regard to this "everything." "Making *something* is choosing a tube of blue, a tube of red." It is as though this "something" could only be a picture, and as though art making could not extend beyond the specific field of painting. And it is in this specific field that the reasoning follows through to its singular conclusion, the choice of the readymade: "So, in order to choose, one can use tubes of paints, one can use brushes, but one can also use a ready-made thing, something that has been made either mechanically or by the hands of someone else and that you appropriate since it is you who choose it. Choice is the main thing, even in normal painting."⁹

There is no doubt about it: the readymade is pictorial in origin. It surges up from the field of "normal" painting—the maternal field that is worked (as by an "agricultural machine") by the name-of-the-father—as a sort of generic offspring (art is making, art is choosing) of this specific parentage (making is choosing a tube of blue). What the metaphor of the *comb in the making* represses under its bar of undecidability is precisely the object of a possible/impossible choice: a tube of blue, a tube of red. Notwithstanding the passages and the transitions of Duchamp as artist and/or painter, it is precisely painting—in the subjunctive—that remains the object of his desire for art, and the tube of paint that is the paradigmatic signifier that slides under the bar of all these "dart objects" (*objets-dards*).

Of course, Duchamp never actualized this ready-made tube of paint, either because censorship had forbidden it to him, or because he very consciously organized this censorship for the benefit of those viewers who would "make the paintings." In 1916, he chose a comb less than two weeks after having been chosen, one lapsus after another, by the words of a text entitled *Rendezvous of 6 February 1916*, in which, notably, there was this "conclusion: after many efforts toward the comb, what a pity."¹⁰

We can well suppose that in 1916 these combs were the "upholstery tacks" (*points de capiton*—a phrase from Lacan) for an unconscious signifying chain. But this chain was certainly no longer unconscious at the end of his life, when in several interviews he gave "little explanations" of the readymade that are absolutely luminous:

To Katherine Kuh in May 1961: "Let's say you use a tube of paint; you didn't make it. You bought it and used it as a readymade. Even if you mix two vermilion together, it's still a mixing of two readymades. So man can never expect to

start from scratch; he must start from ready-made things like even his own mother and father."¹¹

At the symposium on the Art of Assemblage in October 1961: "Since the tubes of paint used by the artist are manufactured and ready-made products, we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are 'readymades aided' and also works of assemblage."¹²

To Francis Roberts in October 1963: "A readymade is a work of art without an artist to make it, if I may simplify the definition. A tube of paint that an artist uses is not made by the artist. It is made by the manufacturer that makes paints. So the painter really is making a readymade when he paints with a manufactured object that is called paints. So that is the explanation."¹³

In these three citations, to which we should add the interview with Charbonnier cited above, which also dates from 1961, the tube of paint is the recurrent example that is supposed to "explain" the genesis of the readymade. It hides its exemplary truth all the better in that it declares it literally under the guise of an ingenuous didacticism. One might be tempted to look between these lines for a more "profound" explanation of the readymade, when it is enough to simply read the lines. Everything is there, from the reference to the mother-(tube of)painting and the readymade name-of-the-father to the declaration of the social cause of the readymade as dead painting: industrialization, with its concomitant absence of the artist as an author-owner of his choices. Elsewhere, even eroticism—which we know Duchamp ironically planned to make into a new artistic "ism"—is exemplified at the hand of the tube of paint: "Eroticism is close to life, closer than philosophy or anything like it; it's an animal thing that has many facets, and is pleasing to use, as you would use a tube of paint, to inject into your production, so to speak."¹⁴

The tube of paint is the missing historical link that connects the readymade to pictorial tradition. Duchamp's argument is limpid: in choosing a ready-made object, I haven't really broken with painting, since all painters do the same thing when they pick their tubes of paint. To this initial choice they generally add others that constitute their art making: "choosing the quality of the blue, the quality of the red, and always choosing the place to put it on the canvas, it is always choosing," until the artist judges that the work is done. Conclusion: "all the paintings in the world are readymades aided."

What about the symmetrical conclusion? We have to read the palindrome in both directions: all my readymades are paintings. I, who do not feel compelled to finish a work, I prefer to leave this ultimate choice to the viewer and satisfy myself with my initial choice. Once the tube of paint has been chosen, it is up to the onlooker to make the work, up to posterity to finish my readymades, which are potential paintings, *possible* paintings.

“The Figuration of a Possible”

“The possible is an *infra thin*—The possibility of several tubes of paint becoming a Seurat is the concrete ‘*explanation*’ of the possible as *infra thin*.”¹⁵ Here is a new “*explanation*.” The note is undated, but there is no doubt that it long predates the “*little explanations*” that Duchamp gave of the readymade at the beginning of the 1960s.¹⁶ But the explanation—or “*explicitation*,” one might more appropriately say—is still the same: the ready-made tube of paint is a possible painting.

And it is in this possibility, left to its indetermination, that one can find the potentiality of an aesthetic judgment suspended between two adverse nominations: painting/nonpainting. This tube of paint is not yet a painting, and this readymade is no longer one. It is up to the viewer to make them, thus to choose them, thus to name them. It is impossible to do this other than in the subjunctive: a comb is certainly not a painting! There remains an undecidable judgment in the *infra-thin* membrane between two names.

But why Seurat? Why does the *explicitation* take a detour and why does it not say “the possibility of several tubes of paint becoming a Duchamp?” A deliberate wish to mix up the cards? Or a work of censorship? In the latter case, the displaced name is undoubtedly the name-of-the-father, and Seurat is to “*soeur*” what Cézanne is to Suzanne: “Among the Impressionists, Seurat interests me more than Cézanne.”¹⁷ “The only man in the past whom I really respected was Seurat, who made his big paintings like a carpenter, like an artisan.”¹⁸ “The greatest scientific spirit of the nineteenth century, greater in that sense than Cézanne, is Seurat, who died at the age of thirty-two.”¹⁹

That, in Duchamp’s *Imaginary*, Seurat chased Cézanne from his position as symbolic father, is something we can admit only if we see that Seurat was not so optional or inoffensive a father as Redon might have been. His historical role in the *avant-garde* was a real one and of almost as much importance as Cézanne’s. It was perhaps his status as a dead father—I mean as someone who died young without having had the time to produce an *oeuvre* that would constitute an obstacle to subsequent artists—that allowed him to serve in such a displacement. This is in the text: Seurat is perhaps more important than Cézanne because he had the elegance to die at thirty-two and not stand in my way. What is also in the text, and indicates an importance that goes well beyond an imaginary substitution, is the contradiction of the following assertions: (1) Seurat was a scientific spirit, the greatest of his century, and (2) Seurat was a carpenter, an artisan. One finds, reunited in the same man, the traditional division between, on the one hand, art as theoretical thought, as “*gray matter*,” and, on the other hand, art as humble work of the hand, “the stupidity of the painter.” We have to put in context the statement in which Duchamp speaks of Seurat as an artisan. It intervenes in the

middle of a justification of the abandonment of painting "from Munich on," a justification that includes a condemnation of "*la patte*" (the paw). And just after the quoted phrase, there is this: "He didn't let his hand interfere with his mind. Anyway, from 1912 on, I decided to stop being a painter in the professional sense."²⁰ It is as if the decision to abandon painting "in the professional sense," in the sense of craft, came as a direct consequence of Seurat's lesson: his mind and his hands worked independently of each other. His hand only executed a project, in ignorance of the brain that was doing all the programming.

I said earlier that in modernity, craft and the abandonment of craft are one and the same thing. But we have to add nuances to this point, noting whether this abandonment consists of deconstructing and finding the premises of "a new craft" in the very ruins of what one has deconstructed, or if it consists of reproducing as such the formal results of the old craft while explicitly "de-cathecting" them. Cézanne engaged in the first strategy, Seurat in the second. Seurat's mind—eye and brain—"functioned" like a camera that was reproducing the perspectival order, while his hand, tied to the canvas, was encoding the inscription of light in the manner of a digitalized photographic plate. In this sense, he was no less aware than Cézanne of the failure of Representation, but he did not deconstruct it; he de-cathected it and was content to reproduce it as a sort of dead entity. Already a strategy of the readymade. As for the surface of the work, it was reinvested with an explicitly theoretical dimension. This "theory" was a positivist semiotics, the constitution of a digitalized code of the visible, the statement of the atomic constituents of the light-image and its reconstitution in the eye of the spectator.

Seurat, as we noted above, had not yet entered into the problematic of the language founders, if we define the latter as being interested in justifying pure painting at the level of the signifier and not of the signal. But he prepared the way for this problematic and posits himself in the history of modern painting as the founder of a code, at the very least. The important thing is the division that resulted from this: "He didn't let his hand interfere with his mind." A division that was accepted and even desired by Seurat, without the obsession for dialectical reconciliation that we constantly find in Cézanne ("to rejoin the wandering hands of nature"). Cézanne worked in the misery of division, Seurat in the bliss (*jouissance*) of division. This was so, we might say, since his painting understood the social cause of such a division: the craft of the painter is traversed by the division of labor. The eyes and the brain are the masters, and the hand is the worker, the slave or machine. There is certainly some positivism in this attitude. But there is also, in the realm of painting, a remarkable explicitation of the conditions of impossibility of painting as a craft, the impossibility of "the making."

There is Signac speaking on behalf of Seurat as well as on behalf of Divisionism at large: "The hand has little importance: only the brain and the eye of the painter have a role to play."²¹ Signac invokes the authority of Delacroix and

Ruskin in this respect. Delacroix had said: "What has to be avoided is the devilish convenience of the brush." And Ruskin had said: "I have a profound repugnance for everything that resembles manual skill."²² To which Duchamp provides an echoing comment: "You see, I was already disgusted with my hands. I just wanted things to get to the surface on the canvas by themselves, from my subconscious if possible."²³ And to Francis Roberts: "My hand became my enemy in 1912. I wanted to get away from the palette."²⁴ Disgusted, and angry, and "vengeful" toward the hand: we cannot keep track of all the instances when Duchamp declared, as he did to Otto Hahn, that he wanted to "demonetize the idea of the hand."²⁵

From this, as had already happened with Seurat, came an absolute and non-dialecticized division: On the one hand the readymades, and on the other the *Large Glass*. On the one hand an impossible making that paradoxically referred to a potential painting and on the other hand a fastidious work of the artisan, of the "carpenter" who would make a painting that was no longer "retinal." Even the *Large Glass* reproduces the same division: coming "from the unconscious, if possible," this project was finished to all intents and purposes in 1913. But from 1915 to 1923, Duchamp would reproduce it like a copyist: "It was not an original work, it was copying an idea, execution, technical execution, like a pianist executes a piece of music that he has not composed. The same thing with that glass; it was a mere execution of an idea."²⁶

The performer is not the composer, and the "author" of the *Large Glass* is an explicitly divided subject. Now, the "author" of the readymade pushes this division to its point of revulsion/revelation. He no longer acts—even "subconsciously"—like someone who had an idea and now performs it in the most mechanical way possible, to such a degree that he is happy to designate a readymade object. He reveals that the function of authorship in painting, "even in normal painting," is precisely that which situates the subject—as unconscious—at the very bar of his undecidable decision. At each moment, the activity of the painter refers to choices that chose him, to choices that, if they want to be significant, must transgress current taste involuntarily. Duchamp, who pushed the strategy of choice to its maximal undecidability, where taste makes way for "beauty of indifference," also reveals that the "impossibility of the making" is the impossibility of the choosing. And it is because the function of authorship is there, "even in normal painting," that the readymade paradoxically embodies a possible painting.

The Bachelor Grinds His Chocolate Himself

Not just any painting, however: Seurat. The condition of the "possibility of several tubes of paint becoming a Seurat" is precisely the impossibility of the making that Seurat had already recognized by separating his brain from his hand, and

by reducing the manual work of the painter to a consecution of discrete choices, starting with "several tubes of paint." It is here, as I said above, that Duchamp brought the question of pure color exactly to the point of theoretical interference that had also momentarily surged up for Kupka. The divisionist theory, which made the surface of the canvas the site at which was invested a positivist semiotics—or a signaletics—of color, came directly, as we know, from Chevreul. It would "accede to the Symbolic" when it was received by a context that was no longer positivist but that would, even if only for a brief moment, take the question of pure color away from its other sources—symbolist ones—and would offer it as the essential metaphor allowing the foundation of abstraction as a language.

To emphasize this point, I referred to the quasi-Saussurean form that the concept of color assumed in the work of Chevreul. But there is another definition of pure color, much simpler, bluntly empirical and fairly positivist: pure color is color such as it is in the tube, such as it was prepared by the manufacturer, and such that its definition lies in a nomenclature that has nothing theoretical or structural about it but comes simply from its name on the label.

Here the readymade makes explicit what Seurat left implicit. "The impossibility of the making," which paradoxically authorizes "the possibility of several tubes of paint becoming a Seurat," draws its conclusions from the same technological, and hence social and historical, situation, the existence of colors in tubes. In other words: the bachelor no longer grinds his chocolate himself.

It is useless to try to respond philologically to the question of the abandonment of painting. When did Duchamp stop painting? In 1912, after Munich? In 1914, after the *Chocolate Grinder*? In 1918, after *Tu m'*? In 1923, after the (in-)completion of the *Large Glass*? Or never? Or many times, with each passage and transition, as, for example, when he abandoned his youthful eclecticism and confronted Cubism, or when he abandoned Cubism in the same moment he penetrated it? Where does painting end? We have to reverse the question as Duchamp did with *Virgin*: where does painting begin, with what concrete activity does this specific craft that one calls painting begin?

A certain nostalgia permeates Duchamp's response, the very same nostalgia that made him dream of "native colors": *The bachelor grinds his chocolate himself*. There are several possible readings of this famous "adage of spontaneity," with a reference to onanism being the most common. These readings will not be contradicted if, in remembering the equation of pictorial craft with "olfactory masturbation," we translate this nostalgia as: the painter, the true painter, grinds his colors himself.

As we know, the classic treatises on painting included a mass of technical advice, tricks and hints, pragmatic directions to aid in pictorial manual craft.²⁷ It is not with talent, originality, imitation, composition, or perspective that the art of painting begins, but with a humble preparatory work: how to smooth out a canvas and tack it to its stretcher, how to gesso the canvas, and above all, how to mix

one's colors. Thus, Cennino Cennini: "Start by grinding color by color: take a porphyry slab, not too polished, half an arm long on each side. Take another porphyry stone to hold in hand, flat underneath, in the shape of a bowl, and smaller, so that the hand can grip it firmly and steer it here and there as it wishes. Pour your oil on the color and grind it for about half an hour, an hour, as long as you want, for if you ground it a whole year long the color would only become better and better."²⁸

Certainly, there are onanistic and bachelor connotations of a "repeated, enduring refrain" in this text. In any case, it shows the importance granted by the classic treatises to this preliminary operation in the art of painting that we too often tend to find secondary. More startling is that even modern treatises written after industrialization still remain attached to this tradition, as though they could not admit that painters renounce it. Thus, Max Doerner begins his chapter on oil technique with this sentence: "It is recommended that the painter grind his own colors."²⁹

Duchamp made the *Large Glass* in the manner of a conscientious but stupid artisan, spending an unbelievable amount of time doing the most mechanical of tasks, like the scraping of the *Oculist Witnesses*. But he also thought of the *Glass* as the ironic staging of this craft and its stupidity, as if he had wanted, on the one hand, to reduce the work of the painter to the primary operation (in all senses of the word *primary*) of color grinding and, on the other hand, to liberate painting as pure "gray matter" and *cosa mentale*, in the greatest possible split between hand and brain.

Among its other layers of meaning, the "bachelor machine" also represents the artisan-painter at work in the very conditions that have made his craft useless.³⁰ The main piece of this representation is obviously the *Chocolate Grinder*. It represents the painter insofar as he grinds his colors himself, and/or the painter insofar as he is replaced by a color-grinding machine. To the right of the *Grinder*, the "illuminating gas" that has become liquid—the desire to paint become a color—follows the "slopes" until it splashes as the scopic drive of the *Oculist Witnesses*. Above the *Grinder*, the passage into the sieves completes the grinding by making the colors undergo the effects of the "*tritulators and liquefiers*," which can lead us to believe that the sieves represent a sort of pigment factory. But to the left of the *Grinder*, it is through the *Capillary Tubes*—in other words, "combed" tubes!—that the gas comes from the *Nine Malic Molds*, which are also referred to as "tubes of erotic concentration."³¹ In the manner of a "possible Seurat," the molds appear like "several tubes of paint," hollow and "provisionally painted with red lead while waiting for each one to receive its own color."³² The grinding of the "chocolate color" might indeed have been useless, since the *Matrix of Eros* is already called *The Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*—since, in other words, at the origin of the pleasure of painting, we already find the readymade tube of paint and its consequence, dead painting.

The readymade isolates the bar of undecidability where the painting is simultaneously called possible/impossible. Its strategy is of the order of a signifying marking that rises up implacably in the aftermath of the revelation of Munich: it is impossible to want painting to be anything other than the exclamation of its name in the past participle, its name as dead painting. The strategy of the *Large Glass*, whose "project" is also elaborated in the aftermath of Munich, is entirely other. It works around the bar and accomplishes the mourning of painting, not so much as possible/impossible, but as useless.

Step by step, and with an eye on the inaccessible painted bride, up there in the top part of the *Glass*, the Bachelor machine hyper-cathects the painting process as a whole and especially its preliminary "native" condition, the grinding of color. This mourning process does not deny the death of painting, but it helps grasp what in the desire for the dead (painting) partakes of the melancholic. From this comes the numerous fantasies of perpetual movement that put into action the rotations of the *Grinder*, the coming and going of the *Glider*, the noria of the *Benedictine Bottles*. The mourning process is an endless painstaking labor, like the labor of Benedictine monks. In the same way that their labor was rendered suddenly useless by Gutenberg's invention, so too did Niepce's invention render painting useless, unless the painter now labors only on the mourning of painting.³³ Along with photography, the production of colors in tubes is the most immediate consequence of industrialization for the work of painters. The *Large Glass* appropriates photography with enthusiasm as much as with anxiety: the "extrarapid exposition" (better translated, "extra-quick exposure") is the photographic side of the ready-made rendezvous with the "sign of the accordance." But it also reappropriates the tube of paint and, with each useless turn of the *Grinder*, mourns the intolerable fact that the bachelor no longer grinds his chocolate himself.

The notes for the *Large Glass* distinguish three functions of color: background color, the colors of substances, and native color. Yet all three are referred to the "useless of the grinder," and thus to the uselessness of their being ground.

1. Background color: "To obtain an 'exactitude,' dye canvas black before painting." The first gesture of the painter in front of the virgin canvas finds an already prepared surface, so black becomes a color as virginal as white. Unviolated by the painter, it is already ground and mixed, as we see if we make use of a *Witz* that plays on English-French bilingualism: *couleur de fond* = ground color = *couleur broyée*. But we must note that before being painted, the canvas is dyed black. Dyeing (*la teinture*) precedes painting (*la peinture*), a priority that is inverted through subsidized symmetry in New York in 1922, when Duchamp, on the verge of abandoning the *Glass* to its definitive incompleteness, opens up a dyeworks.³⁴

2. The colors of substances: "Need of a *color key*." A code analogous to the label on the tube: all the colors of substances "will have I. a name II. a chem-

ical composition III. a visual appearance and IV. properties." Since painting means to choose, it seems that everything starts with the choice of the name on the tube. But the color of a substance is not pure color, the color that comes pouring out of the tube when its name is called. "Zinc white" or "cobalt blue" does not declare the color of zinc or of cobalt. "Either as the name of the metal or otherwise," a color will find its name only at the end of a reversal that goes back to the beginnings of its process of fabrication: "For the final colors, make up all the colors of the picture before using them and *put them up in tubes with labels* (for being able to correct, retouch, etc.)."³⁵ The color of substances is not that which came out of the tube but, quite the contrary, that which goes back into it, "neglected and extracted in an imprisonment for the fruit."

3. Native color. The melancholy of the bachelor who grinds his chocolate himself and puts it into the tube amounts to an ontological nostalgia, a desire for the apparition of a "surface of native chocolate." How could one mourn for the artisan-painter without mulling over the advice of Cennino Cennini: "If you ground it a whole year long, the color would only become better and better"? How could one mock the newborn pure color of the early abstractionists without at least feeling nostalgia for its essence, a molecular essence preferably, ground down to the molecules themselves? But it is no use: having "definitively left unfinished" the mourning for painting, the painter will no longer touch his brush. But he will play around with chocolate "with all kinds of delays," ready-made this time. On 21 August 1953, Duchamp constructs the "ideal landscape," which, according to a note from 1913 was supposed to be the background for the *Grinder*. This late work is *Moonlight on the Bay at Basswood*, a work made without the traditional instruments or pigments of the painter, but one of whose colors, ground by the bachelor himself, is precisely chocolate.

Background colors, the colors of substances, native colors, are all referred to in terms of their grinding and its uselessness. All three would like to turn the history of painting back as far as Cennino Cennini and the activity of painting back as far as the native innocence of a society untouched by the division of labor. *Madam, I'm Adam*: the wish is addressed to the *Bride*, who is asked to declare that she has remained a virgin. But let us not forget to read the palindrome in both directions. The perpetual movement goes back in time only if it also "condescends" to go forward in time: the virgin canvas of the *Standard Stoppages* is already dyed, the virgin is already a *hanged woman*, and so on. And the painter does not remain her bachelor, even, unless he "secretly maintains some spots" in order to work on mourning them. The whole bachelor machine is a machine designed to mourn the disappearance of this native condition of painting. One of the two entrenchments of the painter's culture in nature (the other being the act of looking at the *motif*—this disappeared with photography) was lost with the disappearance of this practical knowledge, which consists of mix-

ing, in correct proportions, oil and earth, metal or crushed stone. The painter no longer grinds his colors himself; he buys them *ready-made*.

The *Large Glass* does not hide this fact or its cause, industrialization. But it works at detaching painting from Adamic nostalgia by hyper-cathecting the mechanical substitutes for this practice of grinding, which it is now condemned to give up forever.

Tradition and Industry

In Munich, Duchamp was simultaneously far from and close to the "abandonment" of painting. He knew quite well that in front of his virgin canvas, the painter begins his work with "several tubes of paint" in his hand. He even noticed the brand name, Behrendt, and used only that brand. He had no inkling yet that it would return one day in the disguised name of the *Chocolate Grinder*, like a "commercial slogan" stuck on the bottom of a painting whose effective yet unconscious function is to accomplish the mourning for painting when the painter "no longer grinds his chocolate" himself.

But *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, with its particular way of doing what it says and saying what it does, already embodies the same paradox. Behrendt is the brand name of the painting's colors, the industrial name that gives a sort of paternity to all the colors of substances and other colors that Duchamp would list on pages that he would hold onto, as if he already knew that they would soon be part of painting named, of pictorial nominalism. And for *The Passage*, he would indeed grind his chocolate himself. Let us refer to Lebel's commentary: "His scrupulous study of paints and their properties led him to select the German Behrendt brand, which he used exclusively. He had also given up brushes in order to model the paint with his fingers as if it were sculpture, to give it more cohesion. His paint surface is so thick and glossy that he seems to have taken it right from the old masters."³⁶

Such a preoccupation with pictorial technique, and even more with that of the "old masters," does not show up anywhere else in the work of Duchamp, either before or after Munich. The *Large Glass* shows a technical concern for detail that is sometimes obsessional, but it makes use of a heterogeneous *bricolage* that has little to do with traditional painting. *The Passage* and *Bride* were the only paintings where, for want of grinding his color in the literal sense, he kneaded it and applied it with his fingers. Symbolically, it is all of the same order. The question at least deserves to be asked: what could have incited this unique experience?

We have to refer to what was said previously about the climate of Munich: it acted on Duchamp like a series of authorizations, such as turning away from Cézanne, opening up to pure color, and realizing to what degree a secessionist strategy permitted, more than did rejection, the possibility of innovating without having to believe that the link with tradition had been broken.

Should we go so far as to believe, in the name of this last authorization as much as in the name of the craftsmanship to which *The Passage* gives witness, that Duchamp spent his time, in the summer of 1912, in the traditionalist Munich milieu even though, as far as we know, he avoided the avant-garde? Nothing allows us to entertain such a belief. On this point, biographical accounts are also mute. But once again we find ourselves faced with coincidences that give to his work in Munich additional resonance.

In 1912, Max Doerner, a painter and a technician of painting, whose recommendations to painters to grind their colors themselves I cited above, began to be a visible figure in the milieu of the Academy. He was still far from publishing the work by which he would confirm his authority in matters of pictorial technique: *Malmaterial und seine Verwendung im Bilde*, which appeared in 1921. But he had been named *Dozent* to the Royal Academy of Bavaria in 1911, and from 1910 to 1913, he was president of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung rationeller Malverfahren* (German Society for the Promotion of Rational Pictorial Procedures), in which he had participated for many years. At the beginning of the winter semester in 1912, he began to give a series of public lectures every Saturday, from ten to noon, in the Academy.³⁷ These lectures, which had as their theme pictorial technique and a vigorous defense of traditional craft, were accompanied by practical demonstrations of a childish quality that would have amused Duchamp. But Duchamp certainly did not attend, since he had already left Munich. Moreover, Doerner was completely cut off from the avant-garde and rather hostile to modern painting. His interest was in Marées and Böcklin, whom he had met in Italy in his youth. Even Stuck seemed eccentric to him.

We must thus completely drop any speculation on the possibility of a meeting between Duchamp and Doerner, and take care a fortiori to avoid imagining any sort of influence of the latter on the return to the "old masters" that *The Passage* and *Bride* display. But the presence on the Munich art scene of a figure like Doerner and everything that he represented indicates a *Zeitgeist* concern that paradoxically resonates in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, as the first move toward the "abandonment" of painting, and thus the first step toward the transition to the readymade.

What was the *raison-d'être* for a society like the *Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung rationeller Malverfahren*?³⁸ There were multiple reasons, but they were always connected to the necessity of adapting the craft of the painter to the new industrial conditions in which it found itself. With industrialization, "the bachelor no longer ground his chocolate himself," and the painter lost all control over the manufacture of his pigments.³⁹ They were no longer prepared in the studio but in the lab and the factory. The artists were no longer the possessors of a particular technical knowledge that they had always considered as not only part of their craft but as part of their art; and it was the chemist and engineer who had dispossessed them of this knowledge. Not only was a division of labor introduced

here, but also a new mercantilism. The workshop recipes that painters, since the Van Eyck brothers, had protected jealously from the curiosity of their colleagues and passed on only to their best pupils were now on the public market, objects of a competition that no longer involved artists on the aesthetic plane, but rather paint manufacturers on the economic plane. Pictorial technique, which, even for Reynolds, had been in itself a bearer of tradition, lost its esoteric character and became know-how that was part science, part merchandise, and whose success was connected to technological progress and profit.

In these conditions, the Gesellschaft responded to clear-cut needs. It served first of all as an intermediary between the painters and the manufacturers, whom it put in contact with each other through reunions, conferences, and a journal, the *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei*. It was founded at the initiative of a group of painters, and its first goal was to defend the interests and needs of painters vis-à-vis the manufacturers. In turn, it offered to the technicians and the scientists who represented production a platform where they could present technological advancements in their domain and offer them for critical discussion. But this was then an attempt to put the manufacturers under surveillance and to allow the painters to keep an eye on the technical novelties that the market offered them. From now on, painters were consumers for a chemical industry, and the Gesellschaft assumed the ambiguous function of a society of consumers. Underlying this, there was a regret for a golden age in which the painters had been their own providers. But now they had to face up to a triple phenomenon. Economically, it was no longer defensible for painters to "grind their chocolate themselves," and though it was still recommended—for example by Doerner as late as 1921 in his book—almost all painters abandoned this ancient practice in order to run to the ready-made tubes that industry put at their disposal. Technically, one could regret the loss of an empirical knowledge that centuries of experience had accumulated, but it was a losing battle to fight against the potential for research that industry was capable of investing in the fabrication of a product. Finally, culturally, it became apparent that the production of paint in tubes threatened to overturn the mode of transmission of the painting tradition, which had previously been based, with consequences for its aesthetic legitimacy, above all, on a necessary dependence of the apprentice on the master, from whom the apprentice received not only the education of his eye and his hand, but also studio secrets that warranted his initiation.

I have to expand on this last point, since it reveals the degree to which the motivations of the Gesellschaft, and of Doerner in particular, took root in a nostalgia for the artisanal past of painting. The most fundamental thing that industrialization had suppressed was the contract of initiation that linked the master to the apprentice. The education of the painter no longer happened by means of the ritual transmission of a technical knowledge, which the masters alone possessed and which consequently forced the apprentices to remain attached to them until

the end of their initiation. The transmission of studio secrets was a gift that the elders gave to the young only if they judged the latter worthy of it; thus, it had the symbolic value of a true rite of passage. The thorough knowledge of the technical qualities of pigment had to make the painting last; it also had to make tradition itself last. This would no longer be the case now that the availability of the tube of paint rendered this knowledge exoteric, now that painters could try to enter into the craft independently of one another, now that tradition itself could no longer hope to last, but would take on the seasonal rhythm of industry.

How could one compensate for this state of things? By defending academic instruction, first of all, an instruction that would as much as possible reconstitute in a public institution those connections of master to apprentice that had previously taken place in the private studio. Next, by using the Academy as a platform where a master would address a discourse on painting technique to the public. This is what Doerner did: already president of the Gesellschaft since 1910, he became *Dozent* at the Academy in 1911 and began a series of public lectures in 1912. We might well wonder who could have been interested in these lectures, which were highly technical. From all the evidence, it seems that Doerner was engaged in a fantasy: that of bringing back to the fold of technical tradition the dispersed community of painters and, since it could no longer be ignored that the furnishing of materials to the artist constituted an open market, that of re-founding, in a magisterial discourse presented with a maximum of publicity, the traditional contract of initiation that had linked the master to the apprentice in the private space of the studio. From this came the open didacticism that Doerner's lectures evinced but that was also apparent in the majority of articles by the *Technische Mitteilungen*, as if it were a question of inculcating artists with the sense of their historical responsibility at the same time as obliging the manufacturers to recognize that they, too, bore a moral responsibility in the transmission of tradition.

This last aspect represents what we must call the progressive side of the Gesellschaft. Since the painters were no longer objectively the producers of their pigments and since their customary empirical knowledge had been lost just as objectively, it seemed all the more necessary to go all the way and work to introduce the most rigorous scientific control into the industrial fabrication of paints. From this came a second objective of the Gesellschaft, its most evident objective: to put pressure on industry so that it would give as much respect as possible to the need of painters and would act in their interests as a conscientious and honest supplier. Keim and Doerner spared no effort in forcing the manufacturers to produce only unalterable, chemically pure pigments with a name that would give efficient information about the content of the tube. The goal, never realized, interestingly enough, of this constant vigilance was to protect painters against the mercantile abuses of certain manufacturers, who either filled the tubes with an inert component that diminished the covering power of the pig-

ment, appropriated traditional names like cobalt blue or chrome yellow for colors that resembled them but that were not made from these substances, or pushed onto the market new products that had been insufficiently tested and that faded or cracked after a bit of time. The case of the infamous "bituminous" colors, new to the epoch, is still well known. Doerner noted in his book that in 1907, the conflict between the manufacturers and artists, who were disappointed in the lack of quality in the bitumen, was so intense that the affair went to trial, without a satisfactory conclusion to the quarrel ever really being found.⁴⁰

This defense of quality was absolutely in line with that of the Werkbund. For the Werkbund, *Qualität* was much more than a rallying cry encouraging technological emulation and the commercial competitiveness of German industry. The goal was a moral rearmament of the cultural responsibility of industry vis-à-vis the "German people," or even the "German soul." For the Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Förderung rationeller Malverfahren, the goal was the safeguarding of the technical, aesthetic, and moral quality of the painting tradition that Dürer and Grünewald had established and that was threatening to fall into decadence under the combined attacks of a disrespectful avant-garde and an irresponsible industry. The only point of divergence between the Gesellschaft and the Werkbund came from the fact that the first necessarily defended the survival of an artisanal tradition, whereas the second had already moved its desire for quality in the direction of an industrial aesthetic.

In November 1911 the Werkbund had organized a large *Farbenkonferenz* in Würzburg, where the most debated question, one quite in line with its ideology, was that of standardization.⁴¹ The goal of the conference was to achieve the establishment of a normalized "color chart," in which each hue would receive an unequivocal designation. A normalized color is above all else a "pure" color and a "well-named" color.⁴² It is also a reproducible color. Industry must treat color perception in an objective and fully transmissible fashion—that is, independent of its subjective variability and a fortiori of those psychological connotations that for a Goethe or a Kandinsky constituted its essence. Chevreul and Rood, as they were received by the artists, were seen as working for this objective goal. Once again, we discover the contradictory combination of art and industry that constituted the space of functionalist thought and the concrete field of action of the Werkbund, and this was also the field of resonance that, from the moment of Duchamp's trip to Munich, prepared the historical path for the coming of the readymade.

If it did not have such a degree of irony, the Duchampian list of the attributes of "the colors of substances" could have been drawn up by the *Farbenkonferenz* in Würzburg and in the exact same order: (1) a name, (2) a chemical composition, (3) a visual appearance, and (4) properties. That the name had to correspond to chemical composition explains all of the action in defense of consumers undertaken by the Gesellschaft. A pure color is a tube of paint with an honest

label that tells painters that they can have confidence in a "chocolate grinder" of which they are no longer the masters. From this point on, the practical knowledge that painters have lost since the time they ceased to "grind their chocolate themselves" can be advantageously retrieved, provided that they master the art of nomenclature. It almost seems as if they have need of no other sort of knowledge or talent. From the time of Chevreul, the name of color had been thought to automatically designate its place in the chromatic circle in relation to its complement and all its gradations. To go from this to the transformation of the circle into a readymade harmony requires only a single step, which a certain Karl Schnebel would take at the *Farbenkonferenz*. With unintended humor, he proposed an apparatus of his own creation, pompously named "Schnebel's colorimeter," which automatically provided the complete range of harmonics for any particular hue.⁴³

Along with Schnebel's colorimeter, one could observe demonstrations of "Kallab's patented color analyzer" and "Dr. Arons's chromoscope."⁴⁴ This last object, which seems a little more serious, allowed one, by means of prisms, quartz plates, and an interplay of polarizing filters, to index any color sample with a pair of univocal figures and to transmit it at a distance, "for example, by a telegraphic cable," so that it could be reproduced even by a person who had never seen it. One is immediately reminded of the famous "telephone painting" of Moholy-Nagy, which is clearly related to the strategy of the readymade and represents one of the most radical statements that was ever made by a painter about the conditions of possibility/impossibility of painting in "the age of mechanical reproduction." And we are reminded as much of Duchamp, for whom "the readymade was a thing that one doesn't even look at"⁴⁵ and for whom "III. visual appearance" was a thing that one did not look at either, since it would be "designated by schematic and conventional notation."

The question of the name of color was certainly central for the *Farbenkonferenz*, and it was the aesthetic and historical implications of this question to which Duchamp gave resonance with his strategy of pictorial nominalism. In the wake of the conference, the *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei* published an article that, here again, is not lacking in involuntary Duchampian irony. Entitled "The Nomination of Color Hues," this article begins by admitting—so fanciful are color names—the impossibility of representing a color from the reading or the hearing of its name. The chosen examples are quite funny; one can see in them the "uniforms and liveries" of the *Large Glass*: the author speaks ironically of the "marshal brown" that a decree of the Berlin chief of police has imposed as the official color of that city's police cars, and wonders what color sensation such a name might evoke for a non-Berliner. Elsewhere he mocks the police officers who, according to a study apparently done in all seriousness, could not correctly identify "policeman blue." The end of the article is even more amusing. Discussing a system—this time the work of a certain O. Prase—that allows one to name without any mistake eighty thousand nuances of color, the article ends with

a lyric flight of poetry destined to show everything that the "artist-creator" could gain from such a system: "What a marvelous interplay of colors is shown by the evening sky—for instance, right after sunset, when it inspires in the painter the desire to fix this atmosphere through his art. Alas, too often, nightfall and the rapid fading of the view bring his endeavor to a premature conclusion. How nice it would be in such a case to be able, by means of a few signs rapidly thrown down even under unfavorable light and with an abbreviated notation, to fix the perception of this colored ambience, in order to put it in colors later under better lighting and without being hustled by the lack of time."⁴⁶ One can well imagine the triumphant conclusion: thanks to Mr. Prase's system, the painter—an unconscious emulator of Duchamp and, like him, a stenographer of color—would be able to recall all of the freshness of his first impressions."

We have here a candid example of the sort of aberration to which the combination of positivism and conservatism in artistic matters could lead. The attitude of the writer of the article, like that of Doerner and the Gesellschaft, amounted to the following: they adapt to industrialization's technical and economic consequences for the craft of the painter, in order to all the more blindly reject its aesthetic and ideological consequences. These people always start by holding on, in good faith, to the "noble" positions of tradition, and they always end without irony, by accepting that painters unconsciously mechanize their work, provided they can keep up appearances and leave traditional aesthetics apparently unharmed. Here is a painter who accepts the fact that he "no longer grinds his chocolate himself." With this first unrecognized concession to the industrial adversary, all other concessions follow. Believing, no doubt, that he can put technological progress to the service of pictorial tradition, he will end up behaving in front of the sunset (already such a cliché) as if he were a recording machine indexing each brushstroke with a coded number. Returning to his studio, he will try to reconstitute an *effect* of the sunset by means of a traditional technique that completely denies the process of production that has taken place. (One would have to turn to Andy Warhol's *Paint by number* canvases to savor all the irony of Prase's aesthetics.) Either this painter knows what he is doing but hides it from others. And in such a case, he is but a cynical manufacturer of kitsch, or he hides it from himself, as in the apologue of Prase, and we enter into academicism. He believes that he is following and defending a tradition, when he has actually just let it die under the attack of a mechanization that overtook him without his being aware of the consequences.

In the presence of such a farce, Seurat's attitude takes on all its value, and the admiration that Duchamp offered him gains all its interpretive force. One by one, all the ideological positions of Divisionism become clear: (1) Pleinairism: to morally assume the anachronistic character of the artisan is to seek control over a homogenous production process that protects itself from the division of labor. Nature is still the ideological referent of painting; it is thus necessary to impose

on the practice that is trying to represent it all the constraints that result from on-site production. The artisan shows industry (specifically, photography) that it can do what industry does, and do it even better. (2) The impressionist palette: to assume aesthetically the fact that the painter no longer grinds his colors himself is to adopt the pure colors that come out of the tube ready-made and to organize them according to a standardized logic that refers the seven colors of the prism to their real conditions of production. The naturalist referent is always working as a justification (there is no black in nature), but it is with the technical and social referent that the impressionist painter is in direct and explicit competition, like an artisan who accepts industry as the establishing condition for his work and declares this acceptance. (3) The divisionist craft: to assume technically the economic condemnation of the artisan is to industrialize the body of the painter at work. Not only is color no longer ground in the studio, but it is no longer mixed on the palette nor even on the canvas. One renounces a naturalizing effect in order to better emphasize a process that mimics the process of industry: working in steps—by way of discrete choices—has replaced the preindustrial continuity of making. And the division of labor is explicitly acknowledged in the demand made to the viewers to achieve the blending of the colors on their retinas. The result is a synthesis, and it is here that the artisan-painter supports the competition with industry in a realm that, to play on words, belongs to both of them: the realm of *artifice*, of the synthetic. The naturalist referent is still there, but the responsibility of establishing it has now been split between the painter and the viewer, in the course of a process of production that alienates neither the former nor the latter.

Except for the naturalist referent, nothing of that which made up the old tradition has been kept. But the whole of tradition has been transmitted down the line. The extreme importance of this apparently trifling fact—"The bachelor no longer grinds his chocolate himself"—was clarified most explicitly by Seurat, whereas for Doerner it constituted a mere symptom of his inability to cope with the consequences of industrialization. The older practice of grinding colors had certainly been the privileged site of a major initiation rite by which the painting tradition passed from the master to the apprentice. But that was no longer the case. To changed conditions corresponded changed consequences: tradition would be transmitted by other means, which would, morally speaking, appear as decadence; stylistically speaking, as abandonment; and institutionally speaking, as revolt and rejection. Seurat did, after all, what the painter in the farce mentioned above did: he indexed each stroke with a precoded figure. But he did it on location and with his brushes in his hand. He did not use a system that would offer him the benefits of industry, like a *costruzione d'aiuto* put in the service of an effect that reproduced tradition. He made himself into this system and assumed all its risks. By the same token, he did not reproduce tradition; he produced it changed and transmitted this change. To whom?

Among others, to Duchamp, who changed it, in turn, and imprinted on the pictorial tradition an additional turn of the spiral. No, the history of art does not end in farce; it is transmitted by an "irony of affirmation" that shows the farce of farce, but that also actualizes the truth-function of Seurat. (1) *Pleinairism revisited*: to assume morally the anachronism of the artisan is to take some distance from both the studio and the motif and to get rid of the naturalist referent. The art object takes on an industrial "air," which says that the artist remains an ideological artisan all the more since he is obviously no longer a technical artisan. Choice individualizes the object and exempts it symbolically from being the product of a division of labor. (2) *The impressionist palette revisited*: to aesthetically assume the fact that the painter no longer grinds his colors himself is to explicitly refer the chosen object, a tube of paint, a urinal, a comb, to its conditions of production. The naturalist referent is abandoned, and it is industrial production in its entirety, a new "nature" of modern man, that comes to take its place. (3) *The divisionist craft revisited*: to assume technically the economic condemnation of the artisan is to push Seurat's equation, making = choosing, to the point that its ultimate consequence is to bring out its starting condition: the artisan no longer works. With the naturalist referent left behind, the viewers will still have their role in the division of labor. They will still be asked to "make the painting" but through an analysis on the part of their "gray matter" and not through a retinal synthesis.

The path from divisionism to the readymade takes on its historical meaning from its having been traveled back and forth, like the palindrome that makes the "figuration of a possible" the reverse of the "impossibility of the making." And the meaning of its meaning is that it is addressed to us.

In its historical moment, the readymade was the site of a knot tying up the questions that ran through the epoch: the question of pictorial strategy as an abandonment, at the moment when there were numerous painters for whom the time had come to abandon the naturalist referent; the question of the return of color—that very same color that Cubism had repressed—when Chevreul was reread on the basis of symbolism more than positivism, and the issue of pure color emerged as the possible conceptual foundation for an autonomous language; the question of abstraction, when figure painting was relinquished and the issue of subject matter became an enigma, surging up as an essential metaphor for the subject in the painting; and finally, the question of the name of painting when aesthetic judgment, bumping up against the undecidable, showed itself to be carrying the amazing historical responsibility of naming its specific being.

In our historical moment, the knot is coming undone, and the readymade, as a sheer signifier, this "word that says nothing but that it is a word," reveals itself to be an "interpretant" filled with all the historical meanings of the field of conditions in which the fact of its existence resonates.

Damaged Kettle

Attached to the delay that it took to deploy its significance, this interpretant has received a number of names, among which are *Fountain*, *Trap*, or *Comb*. Undecidable names, suspended between art and painting, for example, names of undecidability itself. To interpret them did not mean fixing their meaning, but rather going upstream and downstream through all of the possible/impossible conditions of their naming. Up to now, I went only upstream, and, indeed, this had to be done first, since before making the readymade resonate in the historical and contemporary avant-gardes, it was necessary to get rid of avant-gardism, this “infantile malady” of modernism. Before asking what is the historical pertinence of today’s art, what it owes to Duchamp, and in what way, we had to put back to back the traditionalist opinion, for which “avant-garde” means nothing but college-level jokes and absurd forms of decadence, and the avant-gardist opinion, for which it means *tabula rasa*, spontaneous generation or novelty at all costs. And since, for both the former and the latter, Duchamp’s art was seized as one of the major sources, if not *the* major source, of the contemporary situation, it was necessary to specify with great precision his responsibility in this situation and its exact nature.

No individual artist—Duchamp no more than any other—can be held responsible for the historical conditions in which he is born. In the broadest sense, it is industrialization and, in a stricter sense, the specific effects of industrialization on the traditional practice of painters—that is, the invention of photography and the mechanical production of colors—that are “responsible” for a state of affairs that has been in force for 150 years: painting is an impossible craft.

Nor can any individual artist be held responsible for the extent of his influence. It is only misleading and overly causal to imagine that everything happens as a series of influences among artists cut off from the world. In fact, what an artist makes resonates or not in the set of conditions in which he makes it. In turn, it is this set of conditions that, if he has touched the right cord, enters into resonance under the impulse of what he has made. That is the artist’s responsibility for the future, and it is here that the limits of what he transmits to those who want to be artists after him show up. This field of resonance is interpreted by these artists in turn, and they will treat it as the changed conditions for their own practice. They will do so, pertinently or not, by exposing their works to interpretations that will come to them from their own future.

But if the historical resonance of artistic conditions is the site of responsibility for artists in regard to the future, it is also the site of their responsibility in regard to the past. The conditions that resonate from the impact of their activity were obviously there prior to that activity. They were made up, to a large degree, of that which earlier artists had made resonate in the social and historical Real. This

is why the product of their creation is an interpretant; it records the resonance of a resonance and transmits a reinterpretable past to the future.

It is one thing to reinterpret the past as an artist, creating oneself. It is something else to reinterpret the past as an art historian and this necessitates an ethic. No more than artists are art historians free of—or responsible for—the conditions into which they land. If they judge that the art of their time is mediocre or decadent, they are free to get another job; they are not free to condemn the present in the name of the past. History is perhaps not a progress, but it is irreversible, and not to recognize this is to fall prey to all sorts of regressions. Their own responsibility is thus to keep their eyes open to everything that artists are doing all around them. This familiarity is necessary, just as it is necessary that it be periodically called into doubt. For acquaintance with art is the site wherein judgement intervenes, as much as possible, “in the total absence of good and bad taste,” and it is also the site where art historians must spot and locate the major “art-interpretants” coming from the past, which are in turn reinterpreted by their contemporaries.

The case of the readymade was not difficult to spot. For more than thirty-five years, what has been most significant in modern art has worked at the interpretation of the readymade’s resonance, sometimes through compulsive repetition, sometimes through violent denial, but also sometimes through a meaningful rethinking of it, and, in any case, always through a recognition (even if only an implicit one).

It is not possible to continue to believe that all of this was nothing but an enormous blunder and still engage in art history. Nor can one continue to believe that a new culture could have sprung up there, fully constituted and fully armed, on a *tabula rasa*. Revolutions of all sorts have failed to keep their promises. The first theoretical task of the historian of contemporary art must thus be to restore the major interpretants of this history to their historical continuity. From this came the precedence of the upstream over the downstream and my desire to demonstrate that the readymade, far from being a gratuitous and accessory fantasy in the art of Duchamp, was his principal contribution to contemporary art, since above all else, it reinterpreted the past with such a pertinence that it endowed it with a new resonance. From this came the emphasis I put on the link with tradition and on a “progressive” rehabilitation of this word. From this, finally, came the concentration on a point of personal *passage* in the life and work of Duchamp, because it signaled a point of transition where what remains at stake is one of the major cultural issues of what we have come to call, too quickly perhaps, our postindustrial society: is the art of our time—with its multiple epithets, “New Realism,” “Pop,” “Op,” “Cinetic,” “Minimalist,” “Poor,” “Conceptual,” “Body,” “Narrative,” “Video,” “Performance,” neo-this or retro-that, or even, as the latest avatar, “transavant-garde”—is all of this art a prelude to its complete absorption into the leisure industry, the media, and a generalized

kitsch, or does it bear a comparison with Uccello, Rubens, or Manet? Does it carry expectations as high as the art of such masters, does it really transmit a tradition that has not been destroyed but significantly transformed in having to cope with the very conditions of its impossibility?

It is obvious that we cannot answer such a question by arguing on the basis of general declarations of faith. If we are able to make any decisions, this can occur only case by case in the confrontation with specific works. The proliferation of labels does not amount to a single judgment. But such a proliferation is the symptom of a highly curious situation for which Duchamp has been held responsible, whereas in reality he merely revealed it: with each aesthetic judgment, it was the name that was in question. The judgment "This is beautiful" had subtly taken on the enunciative form "This is painting," and from then on the painting tradition found itself redirected on the modernist path of an unrelenting quest for specificity. In folding the name back on itself, Duchamp shows us this pictorial nominalism, which does not belong to him alone but rather to the history to which he himself belongs. We should never stop wondering at the fact that it was in the plastic arts alone, and not in music or literature, for example, that an incredible number of "isms" proliferated—"isms" that hid the names of painting and sculpture all the better to monopolize them. And we should marvel even more at the subsequent replacement of the "isms" with a new way of naming art movements, when the general word *art*, flanked by some qualifying adjective, began to substitute for the words *painting* or *sculpture* to such a degree that for most of us, today, the word *art* has ceased to refer to the totality of the fine arts and has come rather to be identified, even though this does not clarify anything, with the expression *plastic arts*.

It is as if at a certain moment in history, the specificity of painting reached the limits of its "essential conditions" stripped bare and, from this point on, the aesthetic judgment "This is painting" could no longer be uttered. Then two clans appeared, composed of artists as well as art critics.

The first clan—made up of traditionalists even when they are modernist—is that of the pure and steadfast defenders of a notion of specificity. They will go so far as to endorse the monochrome, and eventually even the ready-made canvas, but they will insist on positing a normative limit somewhere on what deserves the name *painting*. In their attempt to circumscribe the history of *art*, they will be led sooner or later to a fetishistic fixation on the name *painting*, accompanied usually by a fixation on the notion of *craft*, as we saw not so long ago with that current, symptomatic in the compulsive doubling of its name, known as "painting-painting" (*peinture-peinture*). The members of this clan generally claim a historicity of the medium that is itself specific and that is dominated by the paternal figure of Cézanne.

The second clan—most often composed of avant-gardists—appears today as a sort of flight into the future. Faced with an object that it is impossible to call

painting, the members of this group try to avoid a specific judgment while valorizing the unclassifiable artistic quality that is being recognized in the object. So one comes to name an object *art* while attaching to it an epithet that tries to re-specify it, and that one fetishizes for a while, before dropping it to go on to another. An enormous historical misunderstanding on the responsibility of this substitution of the name of art for the name of painting has led this clan to claim Duchamp as one of its own.

It was urgent for us to get rid of this misunderstanding. There are not two histories of modern art, one that inscribes itself completely in the filiation of the father-Cézanne and that does not refuse to belong to the history of painting, and the other that inscribes itself completely in the denial of paternity by the bachelor-Duchamp and that believes that it is reinventing a completely new art in the denying of pictorial specificity. There is only a single history of modern art, and the task of historians is to capture it. They will not be able to do so by running to a preemptory judgment that eliminates one of the two currents to the benefit of the other, because they would then also be eliminating half of the facts that it is their duty to interpret. They are thus forced to be theorists and to produce an overall framework that accepts the two currents, shows their compatibility, allows within each of them singular value judgments, and restores the whole to the resonance of one and the same history.

The reader should no longer be surprised that priority went to the interpretation of *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*, for this work is the nexus in which the two histories of modern art are articulated, the bar where the abandonment of painting by Duchamp reveals itself to belong to the same history as that which Cézanne dominated. Yet this *Passage*, interpreted in light of its immediate delayed action, the readymade, made the name of painting pass into the name of art and transmits to us, to us the viewers "who make the painting," the theoretical responsibility of establishing an undecidable pact.

If we have to establish it around an *iron comb* that runs on the impossibility of painting and that Duchamp transmitted to us, who then will undo this pact? For how long will painting, which survives as the "impossibility of the making/the iron," be able to maintain itself as a "the figuration of a possible"? As long, no doubt, as its provocation lasts. As long as the demand of the name remains unanswered, as long as pictorial nominalism, like Ockham's razor, keeps some "cuttage in reserve," as long as we have not decided to call "dead painting" all of the art that was born in Duchamp's wake.

Wishful thinking?⁴⁷ Certainly. Artistic strategies are always of the order of a "damaged kettle," as Duchamp, at the height of a glory that *The Passage* had made the original demand for, was well aware:

"You know that you are one of the most famous artists in the world . . ."

"I know no such thing. For one thing, *les petites gens*—the grocers—don't know my name, the way most of them have heard of Dali and Picasso and even

Matisse. For another thing, if one is famous, I think it must be impossible to know it. Being famous is like being dead: I don't suppose the dead know they're dead. And thirdly, if I *were* famous I couldn't be very proud of it: it would be a clownish sort of fame, dating back to the sensation caused by the *Nude Descending*. Though, of course, I suppose that if that kind of infamy lasts fifty years, then there's more to it than just the scandal."

"What else is there?"

"There's *It*."

"*It*?"

"*It*. Whatever has no name."⁴⁸

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Notes

Foreword

1. Clement Greenberg, "Counter Avant-Garde," *Art International* 15 (May 1971): 16-19. Michael Fried reformulated the thesis of the two avant-gardes in distinguishing "presentness" from a "theatricality," for which he says "postmodernism" is just a new name. See "How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark," *Critical Inquiry* 9 (September 1982): 217-34.

2. Dust jacket of *Nominalisme pictural*.

3. De Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint," *Artforum*, May 1986.

4. See Molly Nesbit, "The Language of Industry," *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, Thierry de Duve, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

5. See Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote," *The New Historicism*, H. Arnam Veenser, ed. (London: Routledge, 1989).

6. De Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint."

7. De Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, Serge Guilbaut, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 244-310.

8. The role of theories of vision in the work of Duchamp is discussed by Rosalind Krauss in "The Blink of an Eye," *The States of "Theory,"* David Carroll, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). Krauss makes use of Jonathan Crary's study of historical changes in the conception of vision in the scientific literature of the nineteenth century. See *October* 45 (Summer 1988). One may also note that, since Whorf and Sapir, color vision has been a central case for contemporary debates about language and cognition. Thus in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, the linguist George Lakoff presents the case that color vision is embodied vision. His collaborator, Mark Johnson, applies this view via Arnheim to Kandinsky; for Johnson the view that colors are spiritual beings becomes the view that colors are the focal points of metaphorical projections of body schemata (*The Body in the Mind*). In this discussion the realm of the "cognitive" takes over from the more "symbolist" tradition to which de Duve refers. A historical nominalist might then inquire how the embodied cognitive subject of vision has come to be conceived and "constructed" in this new science—for example,

what the body must be conceived to be for it to yield regular results in cognitive achievement tests. A differing account of embodied vision (which also has roots in Helmholtz) derives from the psychoanalytic sources Krauss introduces into her reading of Duchamp. Seeing paintings would not be a merely "cognitive" matter. The body would be involved in other more eroticized ways, in terms of the gaze in relation to which one forms one's bodily self-image or ego and gives oneself to be seen.

9. Lacan, "Impromptu at Vincennes," *October* 40 (Spring 1987): 18.

10. In "Spéculer—sur 'Freud,'" *La Carte postale* (1980), Jacques Derrida also discusses Freud's self-analysis as a sort of event in his work. He connects this event with the "speculative" character of Freud's thought, with its rhythm of interruptions that initiate new starts. Freud's oeuvre, he argues, is "autobiographical" in a sense that requires us to conceive of autobiography altogether differently, *tout autrement*: not as in psychobiography, where the work is reduced to a mere "empirical subjectivity," and not as in formalism, where the question of subjectivity is eliminated altogether in the consideration of the work. The "Freud" of Derrida's title is thus not the empirical person Freud; it is rather Freud's signature, his idiom, his singular performance and it is to be discovered through a particular sort of reading—the "abyssal" sort, which reapplies to what someone writes the "scene of writing" it. In this manner Derrida tries to interconnect Freud's speculations on the death drive and the nature of those speculations as a kind of questioning that would constantly interrupt his work in its fits and starts. The *autos* in Freud's "autoanalysis" or "autobiography" would constantly be tied up in his work with a response to something "altogether other" (*tout autre*) that necessitates a self-questioning. Freud would constitute himself through his speculations only by trying to "de-constitute" himself through them. This process of questioning and thinking would be prior to Freud's own self-conception as the founder or father of a new science and would indicate something unanalyzed that recurs in the history of the psychoanalytic movement that he thereby founded. In a similar vein, Samuel Weber, in *The Legend of Freud* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), tries to reread Freud in a way that might change or "disturb" our institutionalized relation to "Freud." Like de Duve, Weber is also drawn to the Irma dream. In particular he refers to what, in its interpretation, Freud called "the navel of the dream," or "the place where it straddles the unknown." Thus Weber might agree with de Duve that the self-analytic moment says something about the real conditions of the exercise of a work. The navel might be said to mark the speculative place of the event in Freud's conception of his own self-interpretation (it turns out to be the place where the series of feminine figures is involved in the formation of his dream-wish).

11. For Lacan's views on sublimation, see *L'Éthique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), 105–96; and in reference to the "radical principle of the function" of painting, see *The Four Fundamental Concepts* (New York: Norton, 1978), 110–14.

12. Nesbit, "The Language of Industry."

13. Jean-François Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp* (Paris: Galilée, 1977). Published in English as *Duchamp's Trans/Formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice, Calif.: Lapis Press, 1989).

14. De Duve, "Marthe Wéry: La Peinture de près et de loin," in *Essais Datés* (Paris: La Différence, 1987), 227–30.

Chapter 1. Art and Psychoanalysis, Again?

1. Editor's note: The French *frayage* has been translated as "breaching" on the basis of the following translator's note in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 329, no. 2: "Breaching is the translation we have adopted for the German word *Bahnung*. *Bahnung* is derived from *Bahn*, road, and literally means pathbreaking. Derrida's translation of *Bahnung* is *frayage*, which has an idiomatic connection to pathbreaking in the expression, *se frayer un chemin*. 'Breaching' is clumsy, but it is crucial to maintain the sense of the *force* that breaks open a pathway, and the *space* opened by this force; thus, 'breaching' must be understood here as a shorthand for these meanings."

2. Jean-François Lyotard, "Principales tendances actuelle de l'étude psychanalytique des expressions artistiques et littéraires," 1969, in *Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (Paris: Editions 10/18, 1973), 53–77.

3. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971); "Freud selon Cézanne" and "La peinture comme dispositif libidinal," in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Editions 10/18, 1973), 71–94; 237–80.

4. See Sarah Kofman, *L'Enfance de l'art* (Paris: Payot, 1970).

5. Translator's note: The French reads "des effets d'après-coup," which is the standard French translation of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*.

6. Ulf Linde, *Marcel Duchamp* (Stockholm: Buren Gallery, 1963); Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Abrams, 1970); Maurizio Calvesi, *Duchamp invisible* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1975); Nicolas Calas, "The Large Glass," *Art in America* 57, no. 4 (1969): 34–35; Jack Burnham, "Unveiling the Consort," *Artforum* 9, no. 7 (March 1971), no. 8 (April 1971): 55–60; Eliane Formentelli, "Cantique-Duchamp ou la théorie du moteur invisible," in *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy* (Paris: Editions 10/18, 1979); André Gervais, "SignED sign MD AUTOGRAPHIQUE PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST EN RYMES," first part in *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy* and second part in *Parachute*, no. 11 (1978); André Gervais, *La Raie alitée d'effets* (Montreal: HMH, Collection Brèches, 1984). For a critique of alchemical, cabalistic, and other similar readings of Duchamp, see Jean Clair, "La Fortune critique de Marcel Duchamp," *Revue de l'art* 34 (1976).

7. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

8. René Held, "Marcel Duchamp: L'imposteur malgré lui ou le grand canular et la surréalité," in *L'Oeil du psychanalyste* (Paris: Payot, 1973), 218–55.

9. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 180–99. (For other references to the dream of Irma's injection, see the index to the major dreams, p. 819.)

10. Jacques Lacan, "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma," in *Le Séminaire, Livre 2, Le Moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), 177–204.

11. *Ibid.*, 183.

12. To facilitate a better understanding of all that follows, here is the transcript of the dream of Irma's injection such as Freud presents it: "A large hall—numerous guests, whom we were receiving.—Among them was Irma. I at once took her on one side, as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: 'If you still get pains, it's really only your fault.' She replied: 'If you only knew what pains I've got now in my throat and stomach and abdomen—it's choking me.'—I was alarmed and looked at her. She looked pale and puffy. I thought to myself that after all I must be missing some organic trouble. I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance, like women with artificial dentures. I thought to myself that there was really no need for her to do that.—She then opened her mouth properly and on the right I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish gray scabs upon some remarkable curly structures which were evidently modeled on the turbinal bones of the nose.—I at once called in Dr. M., and he repeated the examination and confirmed it. . . . Dr. M. looked quite different from usual; he was very pale, he walked with a limp and his chin was clean-shaven. . . . My friend Otto was now standing beside her as well, and my friend Leopold was percussing through her bodice and saying: 'She has a dull area low down on the left.' He also indicated that a portion of the skin on the left shoulder was infiltrated. (I noticed this, just as he did, in spite of her dress.) . . . M. said: 'There's no doubt it's an infection, but no matter; dysentery will supervene and the toxin will be eliminated.' . . . We were directly aware, too, of the origin of the infection. Not long before, when she was feeling unwell, my friend Otto had given her an injection of a preparation of propyl, propyls . . . propionic acid . . . trimethylamine (and I saw before me the

formula for this printed in heavy type). . . . Injections of that sort ought not to be made so thoughtlessly. . . . And probably the syringe had not been clean." Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 182.

13. The lecture that he gave on 24 November 1964 in St. Louis, precisely entitled "Apropos of Myself," is the canonic example. He showed twenty-eight slides of works done between 1902 and 1924, accompanying each with a short commentary. Those short notes were first published by Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine in their catalogue of the *Marcel Duchamp* retrospective (Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), set in small capitals but with no mention of their origin (233–97).

14. Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 27 (hereafter abbreviated as PC).

15. PC, 29.

16. I borrow the contrast between *appearance* and *apparition* from Duchamp, who played on the French words *apparence* and *apparition* in a way that is virtually untranslatable in English. The word *appearance* means both "outer look" and "the fact of appearing"; in French, the latter meaning of *appearance* goes to *apparition*, which, however, can also mean a "ghostlike vision," as in English. Like Duchamp in his notes on *Apparence et apparition*, I am calling on the double entendre that *apparition* has in French. What was striking about *Nude Descending a Staircase* was the uncanny combination of a cubist look and a very uncubist title, whose appearance on the canvas added to its uncanniness. See Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds. *Salt Seller, The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 84ff.

17. "Apropos of Myself," d'Harnoncourt and McShine, *Marcel Duchamp*, 257–58 (emphasis added).

18. "Use 'delay' instead of picture or painting . . . a delay in glass, as you would say a poem in prose or a spittoon in silver." Marcel Duchamp, "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 26.

19. Interview with J. J. Sweeney, 1956, in *Salt Seller*, 133.

20. Ibid.

21. "Apropos of Myself," d'Harnoncourt and McShine, *Marcel Duchamp*, 263.

22. *Salt Seller*, 23. As for the gap between the "man who suffers" and the "mind which creates," Duchamp took this expression from T. S. Eliot and quoted it in a talk entitled "The Creative Act," presented in Houston in April 1957. *Salt Seller*, 138.

Chapter 2. Passages

1. Lacan, "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma," 178.

2. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 198–99.

3. "The whole plea—for the dream was nothing else—reminded me vividly of the defenses put forward by the man who was charged by one of his neighbors with having given him back a borrowed kettle in a damaged condition. The defendant asserted first, that he had given it back undamaged; secondly, that the kettle had a hole in it when he borrowed it; and thirdly, that he had never borrowed a kettle from his neighbor at all." Ibid., 197.

4. PC, 29; also see *Salt Seller*, 124.

5. The presence of Balla's painting in this exposition has been challenged. See John Golding, *Cubism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), 164; and Pierre Cabanne, *L'Épopée du cubisme* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1963), 174. It is possible that Duchamp was confusing his remembrances and that he had seen the painting a little later in Berlin or Munich, where the exposition visited after Paris.

6. PC, 21.

7. PC, 25.

8. Gleizes: "It was at this moment, October 1910, that we discovered one another seriously, including Robert Delaunay . . . and that we realized what we had in common. The interest in forming a group, of frequenting one another, of exchanging ideas, seemed imperative." Cited by Golding,

Cubism, 24. Again, Gleizes on the Salon des Indépendants of 1911: "Metzinger, Le Fauconnier, De-launay, Léger, and I had decided to show at the next Salon des Indépendants but . . . that we should show up as a group, everyone was agreed." *Ibid.*, 23.

9. PC, 22. In the context of this response, Duchamp acknowledges his debt to Matisse and Manet. So much lucidity about the historical importance of these painters prevents us from imagining that Duchamp was not aware of the Cézanne-obstacle, especially in a context as Cézannean as Cubism was: "I've always felt this need to escape myself" (PC, 31)—of escaping from Cézanne in particular. In regard to *The Chess Players* from 1910, Cabanne said: "Your *Chess Players* are highly influenced by Cézanne's *Card Players*." Duchamp responded: "Yes, but I already wanted to get out of that." (PC, 27). Short-circuiting the passage that I am analyzing here, Hubert Damisch makes the following comments: "How can we not recognize in this the operation that he was fully engaged in—not so much that of dealing the cards differently but of changing the rules of the game, if not, more simply, changing the game altogether, and beginning by substituting for card players chess players, with all the consequences that this would entail?" Hubert Damisch, "La Défense Duchamp" in *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, 66.

10. Lacan, "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma," 180.

11. "Employer 'retard' au lieu de table au ou peinture": "use 'delay' instead of picture or painting." "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 26.

12. "The 1914 Box," in *Salt Seller*, 23.

13. "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 74 (translation modified).

14. Am I exaggerating? Or is it the aesthetician playing at being an analyst who is the real exaggerator? "The painted woman (everyday language always uses this expression to refer to a prostitute) is the prostitute, the woman who looks for men, the bad woman, the bad mother. . . . Thus did Matisse paint and color his wife with 'these colors that arouse the sensual being of men.' Or more precisely, taking his wife as a model, he didn't paint his wife, but *his bad wife*, the mother who gave herself to his father, the bad mother, the prostitute." Marcelin Pleynt, "Le Système de Matisse," in *L'Enseignement de la peinture* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 64–65. And didn't the master himself give the paradigmatic example of this? "We interpret the fantasy as one of being suckled by his mother, and we find his mother replaced by a vulture." Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci*, in *Standard Works*, vol. 11 (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 87–88.

15. "Mécanisme de la pudeur, Pudeur mécanique," such is the comment—or is it a subtitle?—scribed by Duchamp on the drawing, *La mariée mise à nu par les célibataires, done in Munich*.

16. John Golding, *Duchamp: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 38, 44.

17. Interview with George Hamilton and Richard Hamilton, quoted in Schwarz, *Complete Works*, 23.

18. The concept of *symétrie commanditée* is introduced by Duchamp in relation to a geometrical report "at a remove" from the position of the "malic molds" onto the "seven sieves" ("Green Box," 49). Its translation as "subsidized symmetry" is clumsy. "Commissioned symmetry" would be better because it would convey some of the analogy with *commander* that is connoted by *commanditer*; but still, it would fail to convey the extremely subtle intertwining of geometric, economic, and temporal connotations of Duchamp's *symétrie commanditée*. The verb *commanditer* means to finance an enterprise that has the legal status of limited partnership (*société en commandite*). Such a firm, as the *Robert* explains, is an organization formed by two sorts of members: those held collectively responsible for the social debts of the firm (they are the "*commandités*") and those held responsible within the limits of their contribution (they are the "*commanditaires*," or limited, or silent partners). From this we can derive at least two connotations: the "subsidized" symmetry has something to do with debt; its realm is thus economic, and its "axis of symmetry" is situated in time and not in space. We will note later the extent to which the work and life of Duchamp obey this principle

of "subsidized" symmetry. Duchamp was often the "subsidizer" or a commissioner of a delayed action that would come to him, symmetrically, from his own future. The fact that in this economic symmetry of "subsidized" and "subsidizer" woman intervenes—from Munich on—is suggested by this play on words (which also has military connotations): "*J'offre et l'allemande*" (Translator's note: Joffre was the head of the French forces against the Germans (*les Allemands*) in the First World War.) The pun of course plays on *l'offre et la demande* (supply and demand). See Marcel Duchamp, *Notes* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), note 252.

19. See Jacqueline Chénieux, "L'Erotisme chez Marcel Duchamp et Georges Bataille," *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, 193–221.

20. "The idea of the artist repeating himself is, for me, a form of masturbation. It is quite natural after all; it is an olfactory masturbation, if I can call it that. In other words, each morning, on waking up, a painter needs beyond his breakfast a sniff of the smell of turpentine. And he goes to his studio because he needs this smell of turpentine—or, if not turpentine, some oil paint, but whatever the case may be, it is clearly an olfactory need. It is the need, day after day, to begin the day with a form of solitary pleasure, a pleasure that is almost masturbatory, you see." Unpublished radio interview with Georges Charbonnier, Radio-Télévision Française, January 1961.

21. Ulf Linde, "L'Esotérique," in *Abécédaire* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 74.

22. *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 3* (1916), which is a life-size photographic reproduction—a conscious repetition and not an unconscious one—of *No. 2*, is signed "Marcel Duchamp (son)." This is the only execution of the following project: "Sign all the glasses: property of Marcel Duchamp son." Duchamp, *Notes*, note 76.

23. As Duchamp put it, in the aforementioned interview with Georges Charbonnier, "Besides, the question of repetition that led Renoir to produce so many nudes up to the end of his life—it was first of all a need, a need based on habit. He had the habit of painting with great seriousness every day, and he could not stop himself, you see. It would have been a catastrophe if someone tried to stop him from painting."

24. My disagreement with Jean Clair is intense, especially when he says that "Marcel Duchamp, breaking off from the whole evolution of the painting of his time, which, from Manet to the monochromatic works of Matisse, was tending to repudiate the teachings of perspective, its conceptual practices, and its phantasmatic investments, *returned to this tradition* as if it were the only one capable of giving back to art the intelligence that it had lost and of making art practice into the repeated test of the mechanisms of fascination." Jean Clair, "Duchamp, Léonard, la tradition maniériste," in *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, 141 (emphasis added). Of course, I am not contesting the extreme importance of perspective in Duchamp's theoretical reflections. Nor (since Duchamp attests to this himself in *Salt Seller* 86) am I contesting the fact that he fed his reflection on perspective with the scholarly readings in which he engaged when he was a librarian at the Sainte Geneviève library. But we must render unto Clair what belongs to Clair, and unto Duchamp what belongs to Duchamp. The interesting and numerous formal analogies that Clair notes ("Marcel Duchamp et la tradition des perspectiveurs," in *Abécédaire*, 124–59) between certain works of Duchamp and the research of perspectivalists like Nicéron, Maignan, Du Breuil, Viator, Bosse, Le Clerc, or Kircher, are not only not enough to establish that this research was an uncontested source for Duchamp but, above all else, even if it was a source, this obscures more than explains the question of what perspective meant for Duchamp. Although Clair's efforts clear the way for a more rigorous analysis, the question still remains of elucidating the degree to which Duchamp's borrowings from perspective might represent a reworking of that tradition and not a return to it. Feeling the urge to repatriate Duchamp, not only in France but in his (Clair's) personal taste, which is strongly traditional, Clair very systematically avoids inscribing Duchamp in the pictorial tradition of his time, preferring the tradition of the perspectivalists or the more literary and anecdotal tradition of the mythology of the fourth dimension (Pawlowski) to the modernist context (Manet, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso), whose pressure, in contrast, I am trying to reestablish.

25. *Salt Seller*, 113.

26. Jean Suquet, "Section d'Or," in *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, 243.

27. Translator's note: The French word is *passeur*, (ferryman). Charon conveying the souls of the dead across the river Styx is a *passeur*. Thus the word has the specific connotation of a forbidden or impossible crossing of borders; the passer is someone who transgresses frontiers, a point that will be important in de Duve's analysis.

28. Jean Suquet, *Le Guéridon et la virgule* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1976), 67. For *virgo/virga*, see Suquet, *Miroir de la mariée* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 216. Suquet's reading is all the more admirable since he did not have available that posthumous note in which Duchamp mentions under the title, *Punctuation*, "the analysis mark" and the "small and the large comma." Duchamp, *Notes*, note 77.

29. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 84.

30. Author's note: The bar in question is Lacan's "barre du signifiant," for which I have adopted three different translations. "Bar" and "barring," which are used here, adequately convey the connotations of obstacle and prohibition. But what is lost is the idea of a mathematical and/or typographical sign (as in "barre de fraction," fraction line), essential in Lacan. Which is why, depending on context, I have sometimes (see chapter 4) used "division line" and sometimes "slash."

31. See Jonathan Crary, "Marcel Duchamp's *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*," *Art Magazine*, 51, no. 5 (January 1977): 98.

32. Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, trans. George Heard (New York: Paragraphic Books, 1959), 14.

33. See the fine phenomenological analysis of this painting by Lawrence D. Steefel, Jr., "Dimension and Development in *The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride*," *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, J. Masheck, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 90–106.

34. Schwarz's argument concerning the incestuous connection of Marcel to Suzanne shows up on pages 80–98 of his *Complete Works*. As for Hervé Fisher's argument, according to which Duchamp actually committed incest with Suzanne and was discovered by their mother, there is no foundation for such an idea. See Fisher, *L'Histoire de l'art est terminée* (Paris: Balland, 1981), 19–28.

35. "1909 and 1910 were years that were marked for Duchamp by the discovery of Cézanne, whose instruction shows up here, particularly reminiscent of the *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*." *Catalogue* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 30.

36. Translator's note: This is an untranslatable pun—*le jeu d'échecs, le jeu de l'échec*.

37. In counting only the oil works, the iconographic series *man* has twelve works, and the iconographic series *woman* has nineteen. During the same period, Duchamp would paint only two landscapes and a single "still life" (*The Coffee Grinder*). If we include the drafts, sketches, watercolors, wash drawings, and so on, the balance tips even more toward the feminine series: twenty-eight drawings of women (most of them nude), in contrast to thirteen drawings of men (and one "still life": *Airplane*). To be exact, the paintings in which the two series intersect (that is, in which men and women are represented together) are four in number, to which we have to add six sketches and drawings, including *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors*.

38. "Let us also not forget that there is literally 'the other side of Paradise.' The 'swift nudes,' doubtless the issue of original sin, complete the allusion to the 'family circle.' An 'Oedipean' painting if ever there were one." Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, 13.

39. *Salt Seller*, 105.

40. J. J. Gough-Cooper and J. Caumont, *Chronologie* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977), 50.

41. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, and Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961); and Luc de Heusch, *Es-*

sais sur le symbolisme de l'inceste royal en Afrique (Brussels: U.L.B., Institut de Sociologie Solvay, 1959), 13–15.

42. Schwarz, *Complete Works*, 93; and Calvesi, *Duchamp invisible*, figure 90.

43. As is so often the case with Duchamp, this episode of the wedding gift would repeat itself “by subsidized symmetry.” When Suzanne, having divorced Desmares in 1914, married the painter Jean Crotti in 1919, Duchamp sent her from Buenos Aires the *Unhappy Readymade*: it consisted of the instruction to suspend “in space” (on the balcony) a book of spatial geometry in order that time and weather conditions would lead to its “tattering,” as Marcel had previously done with Yvonne and Magdeleine. For a new marriage, a new gift, charged with the same marks, although now ironic, of disavowal. The subsidized symmetries are numerous: the painter Duchamp had made *Young Man and Girl in Spring* with his own hands and had addressed it to his sister, bearer, as a woman and as a virgin, of the metaphor-painting (we will soon see precisely which). The same Duchamp, “non-painter,” now sent the project for a ready-made object, which we can read as an extremely disguised self-portrait (the “inspector of space”), to his sister-painter (and wife of a painter!), with the instructions that she install it herself (something she would do far beyond the instructions, since, not content with installing the book on the balcony, she made a painted version of it, *Marcel's Unhappy Readymade*). Once again, everything seems to suggest that exogamous marriage was tolerable only on the condition that Marcel would be the go-between who has arranged it. The subsidized symmetry consists here in Duchamp's promulgating himself as metaphor-painting (and thus as an object of desire) for the woman-painter on whom he imposed the work. But, above all else, what gives all its “irony of affirmation” to this symmetry is the fact that before sending a gift from Buenos Aires to Suzanne (who was marrying Crotti), Duchamp went to Buenos Aires in the company of the former wife of Crotti, Yvonne Chastel. And that after this episode, when Duchamp went back to Paris at the end of June or the beginning of July 1921, it was at Chastel's (and maybe with her) that he would live—the same apartment, rue de La Condamine, on the balcony of which Suzanne had suspended the *Unhappy Readymade*. Although we do not know what the relationship of Duchamp and Chastel really was, we can say that here the symmetry of exogamous exchanges had a perfect and ironic closure: I grant a sister to a colleague in exchange for a bride that he grants to me. And just as Desmares had in his name the suggestion of D. Mar., Chastel had in her first name a suggestion of the sister (Yvonne for Suzanne), and in her last name a suggestion of the virgin (Chastel: *chaste elle*—a chaste she).

44. Schwarz, *Complete Works*, 89. I cite this not without irony, of course, since I understand the “blossoming of his own personality” and especially, the “individuation process” in a way exactly opposite from that of Schwarz, who, not by chance, looks for a definition of individuation in Jung.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Interlude

1. Letter of 25 May 1925 in Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, trans. and ed., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1904* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 129.

2. It might seem hasty to suppose that in his own resistances, Freud discovered the fact of resistance or that in the dream of Irma's injection, he discovered above all else that a dream is the fulfillment of a desire. Alexander Grinstein has even been able to show in his *Sigmund Freud's Dreams* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1968) that the thesis of the dream as the fulfillment of a desire was prior to the dream of Irma's injection: but this does not take anything essential away from the argument that I am trying to make here; the priority in question is not necessarily a chronological one, but rather that of an *emphasis* that is constantly present in the attention that Freud directs toward psychic activity.

3. Jacques Lacan, “On the Subject of Certainty,” in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 35–37.

4. *Ibid.*, 36.

5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert Dreyfus and Patricia Dreyfus (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 20 (emphasis added.)

6. Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Unconscious and Ours," in *Four Fundamental Concepts*, 98.

7. I mean *cause* here in the simple deterministic sense, of course, and not in Lacan's sense, which understands cause according to a principle of indetermination that paradoxically—to play on Heisenbergian notions—is also a principle of certainty.

Chapter 4. Revelations

1. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 182.

2. Lacan, "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma," 186, 196, 190, 191.

3. *Ibid.*, 194.

4. *Ibid.*, 202.

5. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 186, n. 2.

6. Lacan, "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma," 189.

7. *Ibid.*, 196.

8. *Ibid.*, 188; 192; 197.

9. Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

10. André Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Du cubisme* (Paris: Compagnie française des arts graphiques, 1947), 34. Apollinaire shares the same opinion: "Courbet is the father of the new painters." Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1962), 18.

11. Gleizes and Metzinger, *Du cubisme*, 34. The reproach they direct against the Impressionists is identical: "Here, even more than in Courbet, the retina predominates over the brain."

12. *Ibid.*, 35.

13. *Ibid.*, 39.

14. "Le cubisme," *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux*, 10 October 1912, cited in the foreword to Apollinaire, *Les Peintres cubistes* (Paris: Hermann, 1980), 23.

15. "Les Origines de la peinture et sa valeur représentative," *Montjoie!* 8, 29 May 1913, reprinted in *Cubism*, Edward Fry, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966), 123.

16. Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, 18.

17. I am paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty intentionally, since he certainly provided philosophy with a theory of the subject closest to that which Cézannean space offered in painting. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966).

18. "It hasn't yet been discovered that nature is more a depth than a surface. Because, listen to this closely, we can modify, ornament, or dress up a surface, but we cannot touch up depth without touching up truth." Cézanne to Gasquet in *Conversations avec Cézanne* (Paris: Macula, 1978), 115.

19. "The night when Marcel drank too much: his return to his hotel room—the *Bride*, still unfinished, facing his bed, changes in a nightmare into an enormous beetle that tortures him with its wings." Gough-Cooper and Caumont, *Chronologies*, 66.

20. "Every imaginary relationship is produced in a sort of you or me between the subject and the object. That is, if it is you, I am not. If it is I, it is you who are not. It is here that the symbolic element intervenes." Lacan, "Le Rêve de l'injection d'Irma," 201.

21. Translator's note: "*Duchamp du champ de la peinture*."

22. Translator's note: This term, bearing a resemblance to demonstration and coming also from *montrer* (to show), is gaining currency in new critical theory as a way of indicating a process of spectacle and display. The term is carefully examined in André Gaudreault, *Récit sculptural, récit*

théâtral, récit filmique: prolégomènes à une théorie narratologique du cinéma (doctoral thesis, Université de Paris III, 1983).

23. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Le Jury de peinture pour 1874 et Manet," quoted in George Heard Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics* (New York: Norton, 1969), 185 (translation slightly modified).

24. See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook IV*, 1961, repr. in *The New Art, a Critical Anthology*, Gregory Battcock, ed. (New York: Dutton, 1973), 66–77.

25. See "Interview with J. J. Sweeney," 1956, in *Salt Seller*, 130.

26. The name they restored to the *Nude* was in fact *cubist painting*, which amounted to the same thing in this particular context: "At the risk of condemning all modern painting, we must declare as most legitimate Cubism, which extends modern painting, and we must see in it the only possible contemporary conception of pictorial art. In other words, in the present moment Cubism is the very definition of painting." Gleizes and Metzinger, *Du cubisme*, 39.

27. There is something I really understood only after this book had been completed: the solution to this paradox is found in the *Critique of Judgment*, which it might be appropriate to reread today substituting the word *art* everywhere Kant speaks of beauty. With some changes that result from this substitution, the solution would be the same as that which Kant gives to the antinomy of aesthetic judgment. See my book, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

Chapter 5. Resonances

1. Marées was born in 1837 and Cézanne in 1839. Böcklin (1827–1901) and Bouguereau (1825–1905) were their elders, but they lived long enough for us to be able to consider their careers as parallel to that of Cézanne, who died in 1906.

2. To be historically correct, we must admit that the diverse secessions sometimes found their origin in an act of rejection. But, on the one hand, these rejections did not have the categorical quality of the Salon des Refusés, and, on the other hand, they were not represented by the excluded artists as a position of exteriority that they could use to affirm themselves as an authentic, because excluded, avant-garde. Thus, for example, the Berlin Sezession was born when the Union of Berlin Painters, directed by Werner, invited Munch to exhibit and then changed its mind and closed the exhibition after two days. More than Munch's exclusion, it was the indecision of the union that was the pretext for a new grouping of artists that, indicatively, was not formed around Munch, the rejected artist, but rather around Max Liebermann. See Jean-Michel Palmier, *L'Expressionisme et les arts*, vol. 2 (Paris: Payot, 1980), 140. Similarly, in Berlin again, the Neue Sezession came into existence when "the old guard" displayed, like a call-to-arms, *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* by Manet (painted in 1867!) while rejecting the work of twenty-seven young artists. Here again, it was not so much the rejection of these artists that provoked the scission, but the symbol of such an outdated avant-garde flaunted by the Sezession. See Bernard S. Myers, *Les Expressionistes allemands, une génération en révolte* (Paris: Les Productions de Paris, 1967), 37. In the attitude of the protagonists, the international secessionist movement bears comparison with the French phenomenon of the Refusés as a different, though parallel, strategy. Hevesi, the chosen chronicler of the Viennese Sezession, compared the movement to an "antisalon that would naturally have all the qualities of a Salon des Refusés." Quoted in Hans-Ulrich Simon, *Sezessionismus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), 47. Finally, according to Germain Bazin, it was in France that the word *secession* was used for the first time to designate the schism of an artistic movement: in 1890, a series of artists grouped around Meissonnier and Puvis de Chavannes left the Society of French Artists to found the National Society of the Beaux Arts. But in 1890, neither Puvis nor Meissonnier could be considered part of an avant-garde. It thus seems that, in France, the paradigm of secession did not have the same force as rejection did. See Myers, *Les Expressionistes allemands*, 45.

3. For a detailed description of the dynamics of secession in Munich, Vienna, and Berlin, see Simon, *Sezessionismus*, 45–46.

4. The critic Julius Meier Graefe recognized these lags: "I knew Bonnard before Manet, Manet before Delacroix. This state of confusion explains many of the errors that my generation committed later on." Quoted in J. P. Bouillon's introduction to the French translation of Kandinsky's *Reminiscences* (Paris: Herman, 1974), 22.

5. So says the (anonymous) chronicler of the "Kleine Kunst-Nachrichten," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* (August 1912), 347-48.

6. See Donald E. Gordon, "On the Origin of the Word *Expressionism*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966), 368-85.

7. Paul Klee, "Die Ausstellung des modernen Bundes im Kunsthaus Zürich," *Die Alpen* 6 (1912), quoted by Palmier, *L'Expressionisme et les arts*, 168.

8. It was the same Girieud, so much in view at the Salon d'Automne in 1912 and so forgotten since, that Duchamp remembered so well in his interviews with Pierre Cabanne, PC, 23.

9. See H. Uhde-Bernays, "Die Tschudispense," *Kunst und Künstler* (May 1912), 379-88; and W. Bayersdorfer, "Die Tschudispense," *Kunstchronik* (27 June 1912), columns 481-85. See also the homage to Tschudi by Franz Marc in the almanac of the *Blaue Reiter*, *Der Blaue Reiter, Dokumentarische Neuauflage von Klaus Lankheit* (Munich: Piper, 1979), 21-24.

10. "You are intelligent enough to know what has to be done, and you will find yourself quickly turning your back on Gauguins and Gogs [sic]." Letter to Emile Bernard (15 April 1904) in *Conversations avec Cézanne*, 27.

11. "'So you want to destroy art for the whole of mankind?' 'No,' replied Marcel calmly but firmly, 'Only for myself.'" Simon Watson Taylor, "Readymade," *Art and Artists* 1, no. 4 (1966): 46.

12. Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, 15.

13. "Against compulsory military service: a 'deferment' 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." *Salt Seller*, 23.

14. Hans Wingler, *The Bauhaus* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 31. Gropius's first collaborators in 1919 were the painters Feininger and Itten and the sculptor Gerhard Marcks. Then in 1920 came Klee, Muche, and Schlemmer, who were all painters; in 1921 Lothar Schreyer, who was a man of the theater; and in 1922 Kandinsky and in 1923 Moholy-Nagy, also painters. It was only in 1927, with the arrival of Hannes Meyer, that the first architect appeared in the professional team.

15. "Architects, sculptors, painters, we all must return to the crafts." *Ibid.*, 31.

16. *Ibid.*, 19.

17. "Reciprocal readymade = use a Rembrandt as an ironing board." *Salt Seller*, 32.

18. Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, 37. Translation modified.

19. Schwarz, *The Complete Works*, 466.

20. *Salt Seller*, 160.

21. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 12; 136, note 33.

22. See Clément-Janin, *Le Déclin et la renaissance des industries d'art et de l'art décoratif en France*, brochure published by the author in Paris in 1912; and Wilhelm Michel, "Die Krise im Französischen Kunstgewerbe," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 30 (July 1912): 295-308.

23. See Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 18.

24. W. Niemeyer, "Von Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Kunstgewerbeschule," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 30 (June 1912): 173-88. See especially 178.

25. The word *Qualität* was the key word of the Werkbund propaganda for the cultural, and even artistic, renovation of German industry. By *Qualität*, the Werkbund meant "not only excellent durable work and the use of flawless, genuine materials, but also the attainment of an organic whole

rendered *sachlich*, noble, and, if you will, artistic by such means." Quoted in Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, 17.

26. "Exhibitions are today what fairs were in earlier times. The Bavarian trade show highlighted and displayed this fairlike quality as much as possible, while adapting to modern needs." G. Von Pechman, "Wege, Ziele, Hindernisse," *Die Kunst (Dekorative Kunst)* 15 (11 August 1912): 489; this was a special issue devoted to the *Gewerbeschau*.

27. "Thus, in a certain sense, it was a juried market." Kuno Mittenzweg, "Die Bayrische Gewerbeschau in München," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 30 (August 1912), 326.

Chapter 6. Color and Its Name

1. The first edition appeared in January of 1912, the second in April, and the third in the fall of the same year. In a footnote to his presentation to the Duchamp Colloquium in Cerisy, John Dee thanks Jean Clair for having given him the information that "a copy of *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* by Kandinsky, bought in Munich in 1912, has been found in his library, covered with annotations and accompanied by an attempt to translate it into French." "Ce façonnement symétrique," in *Duchamp, Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, 395, n. 132. The source of this information is probably the interview given by Duchamp to William Camfield in *La Section d'Or* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1961), 28, n. 24. This information is challenged by Mrs. Teeny Duchamp, who says that she found the book in Jacques Villon's library and that she believes the handwriting to be that of Raymond. Mr. Pontus Hulten is the current possessor of the book. I was unfortunately not able to look at it.

2. Karl Scheffler, "Notizen über die Farbe," *Dekorative Kunst* 4, no. 5 (February 1901): 183–86, in Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art," in *Complete Writings on Art* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), 157.

3. Rimbaud: "A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue." Scheffler: "For example, I experience vowels as colors. A is white for me, e gray, i burning red, o green, u dark blue, and in this manner, the various languages of people differ for me almost as colors." *Ibid.*, 187, cited in Peg Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich: The Formative Jugendstil Years* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 205, n. 31. Much more than the divergences in the subjective game of correspondences (except for i, which both agree in seeing as red), the difference between Scheffler and the poet seems to me to lie in the almost imperceptible slide from individual symbolism ("I experience") to a collective symbolism ("the languages of people"). Such a slide, which seems to open up to linguistic universals without ever leaving the realm of the subjective, must have pleased Kandinsky, who was skeptical about a color code that would claim scientific objectivity, but who was also desirous of founding a basis within universal human psychology for the communicational value of his own colored language.

4. See the letters from Kandinsky to Gabrielle Münter on 14, 17, and 25 April 1904, quoted in Weiss, *Kandinsky in Munich*, 205.

5. Kandinsky, "On the Spiritual in Art," 196–99.

6. *Ibid.*, 160, 165.

7. *Ibid.*, 147.

8. *Ibid.*, 162.

9. *Ibid.*, 163.

10. *Ibid.*, 210.

11. *Ibid.*, 191.

12. Wassily Kandinsky, "Reminiscences," in *Complete Writings*, 385.

13. *Ibid.*, 369.

14. *Ibid.*, 371–72.

15. *Ibid.*, 357.

16. *Ibid.*, 376–77.

17. In his introduction to the French edition of *Rückblicke*, Jean-Paul Bouillon gives an excellent semiotic analysis of this sentence. It is with great insight that he places it at the center of *Reminiscences* and sees in it “an exemplary, symbolic import” and with equal insight that he describes it as the very metaphor of an experience (*Erlebnis*) by means of which is revealed the “essentially metaphorical character of ‘pure’ or ‘absolute’ painting.” Moreover, Bouillon has quite accurately seen that the phrase “these strange beings which one calls colors” is the very element wherein “metaphor is inverted in order to underline the strict limits of the designations of language.” See Kandinsky, *Regards sur le passé* (Paris: Hermann, 1974), 56–63.

18. Marcel Duchamp, “White Box” (and 1965 commentary), in *Salt Seller*, 83.

19. *Ibid.*, 78.

20. Duchamp, *Notes* (notes 185 and 186). (The notion in question is spread across two pages.) In the same book, note 251, which seems clearly to be a later note and which presents itself as a sort of checklist for the *Large Glass*, will return to the notion of literal nominalism, since it begins by these words: “1—Redo literal nominalism. 2 apparition and appearance.” (I have retained Duchamp’s idiosyncratic punctuation throughout all quoted notes.)

21. “Reduce, reduce, reduce was my thought,” *Salt Seller*, 124.

22. Marcel Duchamp, “Green Box,” in *Salt Seller*, 31.

23. “The smell of fusel oil (amyl . . .) evidently stirred up in my mind a recollection of the whole series—propyl, methyl, and so on—and this accounted for the propyl preparation in my dream.” Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 192–93.

24. Marcel Duchamp, “White Box,” 77.

25. “The meaning that man has always given to the Real is the following: it is something that one always finds in the same place, whether one has been there or not.” Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, Livre 2, 342.

26. “= in each fraction of duration (?) all future and antecedent fractions are reproduced—All these past and future fractions thus coexist in a present which is really no longer what one usually calls the instant present, but a sort of present of multiple extensions—See Nietzsche’s eternal Return, neurasthenic form of a repetition in succession to infinity.” Duchamp, *Notes*, note 135, first part.

27. “The Clock in profile, with the clock full face, allowing one to obtain an entire perspective of duration going from the time recorded and cut up by astronomical methods to a state where the profile is a section and introduces other dimensions of duration Review.” *Ibid.*, second part.

28. “Specifications for ‘Readymades’ . . . The important thing then is just this matter of timing, this snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at such and such an hour. It is a kind of rendez-vous.” Duchamp, *Green Box*, in *Salt Seller*, 32.

29. “The proper name, no doubt about it, is a past participle.” Gervais, *La Raie alitée d’effects*, 21.

30. Interview with Katharine Kuh, *The Artist’s Voice Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 90.

31. “Since my father’s death, I feel myself lacking in signposts. Fathers and signposts . . . I no longer seem to be able to accept responsibility.” Interview, 3 August 1945, with Denis de Rougemont, “Marcel Duchamp, mine de rien,” *Preuves*, 204 (February 1968): 44. (Duchamp’s father died on 3 February 1925.)

32. Interview with Francis Roberts, “I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics,” *Art News* 67, no. 8 (December 1968): 64.

33. “Peut-être faire un tableau de charnière.” (“Perhaps make a hinge picture”), “Green Box,” in *Salt Seller*, 27.

34. “Inceste ou passion de famille, à coups trop tirés” was an inscription spiraling on one of the disks in *Anemic Cinema*. “A coups trop tirés” is translated in *Salt Seller* as “Ball too often” (108).

An explanation is added for the pun: "A *couteaux tirés* means to be at daggers drawn, while the slang expression for having a lay is *tirer un coup*."

35. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 77.

36. *Ibid.*, 78.

37. Duchamp, "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 31.

38. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 78.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. Duchamp, "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 32.

42. *Notes*, note 185. (This note, only partially quoted here, constitutes the first part of a text of which the note "[Literal] Nominalism" constitutes the second part.)

43. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 77.

44. The neologism *voyable* (seeable) is introduced in relation to the nine shots in the *Large Glass*. It is translated as "visible" in *Salt Seller* (35), which fails to convey the neologism. Between the "writeable" ('illuministic scribism') and the "speakable," there is the same connection of possibility/impossibility as between the "seeable" and the "visible."

45. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 77.

46. Duchamp, "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 31–32.

47. We must note that Duchamp puts the word *literature* in square brackets, a procedure that, in his handwriting, is often equivalent for him to quotation marks in indicating doubt or irony. A connection could perhaps be made with the word [literal] in [literal] *Nominalism*, all of which suggests that what interests Duchamp-the-grammarian is the "instance of the letter" in painting and not a more or less willful turn toward literary painting.

48. Thus, for example, to show that the continuous color spectrum is not cut up according to the same paradigms in different languages, Hjelmslev compares the languages of modern Europe with Kymric, in which, for example, the word *glas* covers all of our blue, a part of our gray, and a part of our green; the word *llwyd* covers all of our brown and a part of our gray; and the word *gwyrd* only designates certain of our greens. See Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

49. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 87.

50. *Ibid.*, 80.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, 79.

53. *Ibid.*, 80.

54. *Ibid.*, 79.

55. Duchamp, "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 70.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, 53.

59. *Ibid.*, 70

60. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 79.

61. Duchamp, "Green Box," in *Salt Seller*, 70.

62. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 85.

63. Commentary from 1965 offered as a reference note on "physical dye." "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 86. In the same note from 1965, Duchamp comments on the "apparition in native colors": "the color that is in the molecules."

64. Duchamp, *Notes*, note 136. In the typographical transcription of the note, Paul Matisse thought it necessary to correct what he took to be a *lapsus calami* on the part of Duchamp: he transcribed "matériels" instead of "matériels." But Duchamp's writing, which separates the letters and indicates a slowing down of the writing, leaves no doubt about the deliberate nature of this dyslexia.

65. Ibid., note 118. See also note 115.

66. Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 83 (translation slightly modified).

67. Ibid., n. 1.

68. "That day I bought a bottle rack at the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville, and I brought it home, and that was the first readymade. And what also interested me was to give it with this choice, a sort of flag or a color that didn't come from a tube. I got this color by inscribing on the readymade a sentence that was also supposed to have a poetic essence and no ordinary meaning, instead a play on words, stuff like that. I no longer remember what it was, I no longer remember, since this readymade has been lost." Interview with Charbonnier, 1961.

69. *The Artist's Voice*, 83.

70. "As far as possible from a descriptive title, in fact a suppression of the very concept of the 'title,'" Duchamp wrote to Serge Stauffer (in a letter of 19 August 1959) in regard to *Avoir l'apprenti dans le Soleil*, a work that could well stand as a thematic link between *Nude Descending a Staircase* and the readymade entitled *Bicycle Wheel*.

71. Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, 11–12.

72. See Duchamp, "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 82.

73. Duchamp, *Notes*, note 164.

Chapter 7. The Readymade and Abstraction

1. "I knew Delaunay by name, not more," PC, 28.

2. See Margit Rowell, "Kupka, Duchamp and Marey," *Studio International* 189, no. 973 (January-February 1975): 48–51; Jindřich Chaloupecký, "Nothing but an Artist," *ibid.*, 32–33.

3. Quoted in Margit Rowell, *František Kupka* (New York: Solomon Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), 130.

4. Ogden N. Rood, *Modern Chromatics with Application to Art and Industry* (New York: Appleton, 1879).

5. See Meda Mladek, "Central European Influences," in Rowell, *František Kupka*, 17, 19.

6. See Martha Nanni, "Frank Kupka et le symbolisme viennois," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 5 (1980): 380.

7. "All the phenomenon I have observed seem to me to depend on a very simple law, which, taken in its most general signification, may be expressed in these terms: in the case where the eye sees at the same time two contiguous colors, they will appear as dissimilar as possible both in their optical composition and in the height of their tone." Eugène Chevreul, *The Principles of Harmony and Contrast of Color* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1967), 50.

8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Color Theory* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1974), sections 25–26.

9. Ibid., section 1.

10. Paul Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au Néo-impressionisme* (Paris: Hermann, 1978), 104.

11. Ibid., 128.

12. *Exposé d'un moyen de définir et de nommer les couleurs d'après une méthode précise et expérimentale*, Thesis of the Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Paris 1912.

13. See Goethe, *Color Theory*, section 758.

14. Kupka had understood this: "The question of structure: only by this can a color appear cold or hot." Cited by Nanni, "Frank Kupka," 386.

15. "I must have seen Delaunay's *Windows* in 1911 [actually in 1912] at the Salon des Indépendants, where I believe the *Eiffel Tower* also was. That *Eiffel Tower* must have moved me, since Apollinaire said in his book on Cubism that I was influenced by Braque and Delaunay. Great! When one goes to see people, one is influenced even if one doesn't think about it." PC, 29.

16. Robert Delaunay, cited in Arthur A. Cohen, ed., *The New Art of Color: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 75.

17. *Ibid.*, 16.

18. *Ibid.*, 60.

19. *Ibid.*, 60.

20. *Ibid.*, 122. ("Quel bon ouvrier," says the French text.)

21. Pierre Francastel, ed., *Du cubisme à l'art abstrait* (Paris: Bibliothèque générale de l'Ecole pratique des hautes études, 1957), 79. This is a collection of documents published for the first time and followed by a catalog of the work of Robert Delaunay, compiled by Guy Habasque.

22. *New Art of Color*, 58.

23. As far as I know, Greenberg made only a very few references to Malevich—for example, in *American-Type Painting*, where he places him with Mondrian within "geometrical abstraction" in order to accuse *White Square on White* of being only a "symptom of experimental exuberance" and nothing more. See Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 221, 225. As for Greenberg's attacks on Duchamp, we can find the argument in the following two texts: "Seminar Six," *Arts Magazine* 50 (June 1976): 90–93; and "Counter Avant-Garde," *Art International* 15, no. 5 (May 1971): 16–19.

24. Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International* 6, no. 8 (1962), 30.

25. Of course, I intend the word *nominalism* in its Duchampian sense and not in the philosophical sense established since the time of Abelard and Ockham. But it might some day be necessary to ask whether these various nominalisms do not in fact all deal with the same problem, that of universals, while at the same time asking if there is not a fundamental difference: whereas for the medieval thinkers, names are signs, generally speaking, the words *art* or *painting* as they appear in the nominalism of Duchamp are always *proper* names. (See my *Kant after Duchamp*, chapter 1, "Art Was a Proper Name.")

26. It also renders undecidable the act of naming art: "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?" "White Box," in *Salt Seller*, 74. But this naming of art is not the same as the naming of painting. It bears other conditions of utterance and other historical consequences, which cannot be the object of the present study, concerned as it is with treating the transition from the name of painting to the name of art.

27. "Hollow paper (infra-thin space and yet without there being 2 sheets)." Duchamp, *Notes*, note 17.

28. "Apropos of 'Readymades'," *Salt Seller*, 141.

29. "I took the thing out of the earth and onto the planet of aesthetics," Duchamp told Harriet and Sidney Janis in regard to the readymade (unpublished interview, 1953).

30. De Rougemont, "Marcel Duchamp, mine de rien," 45.

31. Duchamp, *Notes*, notes 11, 4, 9, 12. (Almost all of the notes from 1 to 46 in this work concern the infra-thin, which Duchamp sometimes hyphenates and sometimes doesn't, and occasionally writes as one word.)

32. "Isolation of the infra-thin! How to isolate" *Ibid.*, note 29.

33. *Ibid.*, note 9.

34. *Ibid.*, note 18.

35. *Ibid.*, note 10.

36. *Ibid.*, note 9.

37. *Ibid.*, note 5.

38. Interview with Francis Steegmuller, "Duchamp: Fifty Years Later," *Show* 3, no. 2 (February 1963): 29.

39. Roberts, "I Propose to Strain," 63.

40. Duchamp, "The Creative Act," *Salt Seller*, 139.

41. Michel Leiris, "Arts et métiers de Marcel Duchamp," *Fontaine* 54 (Spring 1946): 118.

Chapter 8. Transitions

1. De Rougemont, "Duchamp, mine de rien," 45.

2. "The figuration of a possible (not as the opposite of impossible, nor as related to probable nor as subordinated to likely.)

the *possible* is only a *physical* "caustic" [vitriol type] burning up all aesthetics or callistics."

This comes from a note written in 1913 and not published in the *Boxes*. *Salt Seller*, 73.

3. "Arrhe is to art as shitte is to shit.

—	=	—
art		shit

grammatically, the *arrhe* of painting is feminine in gender." Marcel Duchamp, "1914 Box," *Salt Seller*, 24.

4. Translator's note: This sentence involves a series of puns revolving around *manquer d'air* (to be cheeky), *encaisser les arrhes* (to pocket deposited funds), and *art*.

5. *Salt Seller*, 28

6. This enigmatic "knowledge" has often been noted, for example by Octavio Paz: "Duchamp knows that it is insane." See "The Castle of Purity," in *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare* (New York: Seaver Books, 1978), 12; similarly, for Hubert Damisch, "And if this play of the unconscious was a deliberate play? If Duchamp was only miming the play of the unconscious, if this was his real ruse?" See Damisch, "La défense Duchamp," 115.

7. PC, 90 (translation slightly modified).

8. Interview with Charbonnier, 1961. And, to Roberts: "Art, etymologically speaking, means to 'make.' Everybody is making, not only artists, and maybe in coming centuries there will be the making without the noticing." Roberts, "I Propose to Strain," 62.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 février 1916 à 1 h. 3/4 après-midi*, text typed on four postcards, 1916. The French reads: "Conclusion: après maints efforts en une du peigne, quel dommage!"

11. *The Artist's Voice*, 90.

12. "Apropos of Readymades," presentation to the colloquium organized by William C. Seitz on 19 October 1961 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in connection with the exposition "The Art of Assemblage." See *Salt Seller*, 142.

13. Roberts, "I Propose to Strain," 47.

14. Georges H. Hamilton and Richard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks," unpublished BBC interview, 1959. Quoted in Schwarz, *Complete Works*, 80. On eroticism as artistic "ism," see PC, 88.

15. *Notes*, note 1.

16. The oldest known date of a text about the infra-thin is 29 July 1937. Duchamp, *Notes*, note 35.

17. PC, 93.

18. Quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 24.

19. "A Complete Reversal of Art Opinions by Marcel Duchamp, Iconoclast," *Art and Decoration*, September 1915, reprinted in *Studio International* 189, 973 (January-February, 1975): 29.

20. Quoted in Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, 24–25.

21. Signac, *D'Eugène Delacroix au Néo-impressionisme*, 46.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Interview with Harriet Janis and Sidney Janis, 1953—to which this phrase of Frank Stella's provides an echo, one that shows the resonance in the "after-Duchamp" of the double problematic of pure painting and industrial painting that Seurat immediately established. "I wanted to get the paint

out of the can and onto the canvas . . . I tried to keep the paint as good as it was in the can." Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Art News* 65, no. 5 (September 1966): 56.

24. Roberts, "I Propose to Strain," 46.

25. Interview in 1966 with Otto Hahn, "Marcel Duchamp," *VH 101*, no. 3 (Autumn 1970): 59.

26. Interview with Harriet Janis and Sidney Janis, 1953.

27. According to a note published by Paul Matisse, Duchamp did not disdain such tricks and hints, even if it was clear in his period that such things no longer had their place in the dignity of a treatise on painting. Here is the reference: "Desaint. studio things, 2000 formulae, Juliot and Coquet, publ., Dourdan (S. and O.)." Duchamp, *Notes*, 126.

28. Cennini, *Il libro dell'arte*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), p. 21. Written ca. 1400. See also Xavier de Langlais, *La Technique de la peinture à l'huile* (Paris: Flammarion, 1959), 332–33. As for the definition of the mixing of colors, de Langlais notes that it involves a labor that is more complex than it might seem at first glance: "Before studying the question of color mixing properly speaking, it is perhaps not useless to specify the sense of the word *grinding* [*broyage*]. With a certain amount of laxity, the term *grinding* refers for painters (or the manufacturers of color) not only to the act of crushing dried colors and reducing them to powder, but also to that of amalgamating them by means of an adhesive or a binder to make a sort of paste." *Ibid.*, 323.

29. Max Doerner, *Malmaterial und seine Verwendung im Bilde*, 1921. I am citing from the English translation, *The Materials of the Artist* (London: Granada Publishing, 1973–77), 143. The analogy with Duchamp does not stop here. A little later Doerner continues: "For grinding a color one needs a grinding slab . . . Slightly roughened glass plates are preferable, likewise roughened glass runners." This can be related to the question that Pierre Cabanne directs to Duchamp in regard to the *Large Glass*: "How did the idea of using glass come to you?" Duchamp: "Through color. When I had painted, I used a big, thick glass as a palette and, seeing the colors from the other side, I understood there was something interesting from the point of view of pictorial technique." PC, 41.

30. Here, we must refer back to note 118 of the *Notes*: "In the grinder, everything that one can call 'the useless' of the grinder must be the brushing stroke over some spots that the bachelor secretly maintains."

31. Duchamp, *Notes*, note 112.

32. *Salt Seller*, 70.

33. For an interpretation of the readymade as a delayed action of the invention of photography, see my article, "A propos du readymade," *Parachute*, no. 7 (Spring 1977): 19–22.

34. In 1922, Duchamp opened with Léon Hartl a commercial (industrial?) dyeworks that closed six months later. In January or February 1923, at the moment when he "decides" to leave the *Large Glass* incomplete, the delayed action happens, in *Wanted*: "Operated bucket shop in New York . . ." ("Bucket shop" indicates a dyeworks but also "an office of corrupt brokers." André Gervais comments: "A dyeing business is a dying business." Gervais, *La Raie alitée d'effets*, 165.)

35. Duchamp, *Notes*, note 80.

36. Lebel, *Sur Marcel Duchamp*, 14–15.

37. For a presentation of the goal and content of these lectures by the author himself, see Max Doerner, "Einiges über die Ausgestaltung von Vorträgen über Maltechnik und Malmaterialienkunde für Kunststudierende," *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei* 29, no. 18 (15 March 1913): 165–67.

38. Founded in 1884 by Adolf Wilhelm Keim, Franz von Lenbach, and Max von Pettenkofer, the Gesellschaft published an official journal, entitled *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei*, in which Doerner published many articles.

39. It was around 1840 that industrially produced tubes of oil paint appeared on the marketplace. The invention of the metal tube for the specific purpose of preserving color goes back a little further, however, since tubes of tin or copper had already been used in England at the end of the eighteenth century for the preservation of watercolors. The American painter John Rand, turned paint manufacturer, was the first to produce oil paints in tin tubes.

40. Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist*, 91.

41. "Eine Farbenkonferenz des Deutschen Werkbundes betr. Herstellung einer vollständigen und billigen Farbenkarte," *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei* 28, no. 12 (15 December 1911).

42. "All colors should be pure and free from adulterations, and their names should not be used for other pigments and their substitutes." Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist*, 94.

43. "Even people with no especially well-developed sense of color will now easily be able to detect color combinations of the most subtle aesthetic delightfulness with this apparatus." "Ein Apparat zur Selbsttätigen Harmonisierung und zum messen von Farbentönen," *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei* 28, no. 14 (15 January 1912): 128.

44. "Kallabs patentierter Farbenanalysator," *Technische Mitteilungen für Malerei* 28, no. 13 (1 January 1912): 116–19; "Das Aronssche Chromoskop." Ibid., no. 15 (1 February 1912): 138–39.

45. Alain Jouffroy, "Conversations avec Marcel Duchamp," in *Une Révolution du regard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 119.

46. "Die Benennung der Farbentöne," *Technische Mitteilung für Malerei*, 28, no. 20 (15 April 1912): 184.

47. Translator's note: In English in the original.

48. Steegmuller, "Duchamp: Fifty Years Later," 29.

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