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Source: *Grey Room*, Summer, 2002, No. 8 (Summer, 2002), pp. 6-37

Published by: The MIT Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1262606>

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Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement

T.J. DEMOS

This seeking for my home . . . was my affliction. . . . Where is—my home? I ask and seek and have sought for it; I have not found it.

—Walter Benjamin in exile, quoting Nietzsche, 1939¹

I have gone home . . . affectionately Marcel.

—Marcel Duchamp in exile, 1940²

On May 16, 1940, when it was clear that the Nazi advance on Paris was immanent, Marcel Duchamp escaped the city by train. He and his companion, Mary Reynolds, traveled south to the small sea-side town of Arcachon, near Bordeaux, joining his sister Suzanne and her husband Jean Crotti. The German penetration of the Maginot Line along the upper border of France had initiated a mass exodus from the northern regions of the country, including Paris. The following month Duchamp witnessed the continual circulation of German troops and fleeing refugees. “Many refugees from Belgium and the North have left and the Germans who come here are here ‘to rest’ (4 days by parcels of 4,000 at a time),” he explained to the Arensbergs, his American friends and patrons. And in a letter to Beatrice Wood: “[I]t is very difficult for us to move about at the moment. But that will not last.”³ Although finding himself in the area classified as the occupied zone, Duchamp stayed in Arcachon, attempting to resume normal life.

Throughout the period of his displacement beginning in 1940, Duchamp worked on *La Boîte-en-valise*, his “box in a suitcase.” The box contained a collection of sixty-nine reproductions of his own past artwork, which, begun in 1935, would be serialized in an edition of more than 300, twenty of which were placed in leather valises. “My whole life’s work fits into one suitcase,” Duchamp would explain.⁴ By 1941, after completing the majority of reproductions, living conditions had worsened and Duchamp decided to leave France. But first he had to transport materials for his *Boîte* from occupied Paris to the unoccupied south of France, where he could ship them off to New York. In the spring of 1941 he made three trips between Paris and Sanary-sur-Mer (near Marseilles),

Marcel Duchamp. *La Boîte-en-valise*, 1941. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.



where he had returned “home” (so he claimed) to the house of his sister, Yvonne. Disguised as a cheese merchant in order to cross through Nazi checkpoints and their travel restrictions, he shuttled a large suitcase containing material for the *Boîte*, whose portable structure seems to have anticipated such displacement.⁵ After obtaining the necessary and extensive paperwork for emigration to the United States (Vichy exit papers, a valid passport, U.S. visa, transit visas for any country passed through on the way), he finally sailed for New York on May 14, 1942.

Walter Benjamin also escaped Paris in May 1940, after clearing out his apartment, packing up a suitcase, and having Georges Bataille hide his notes for his study of the nineteenth-century Parisian arcades, the *Passagenwerk*, in the Bibliothèque Nationale for safekeeping.⁶ He had been living in Paris as a refugee since 1933, when, endangered as a Jew, he escaped Germany after the Nazi seizure of power. By 1940 he was used to staying in hotels, traveling between Paris and Ibiza, and making summer jaunts to Denmark to visit Bertolt Brecht. In May, joining five to six million other people, desperate Belgians and French fleeing from the Nazi advance, Benjamin left Paris and traveled to Marseilles. An emergency visa awaited him, which Max Horkheimer had arranged through the U.S. consulate. But Benjamin had failed to obtain the other necessary transit papers. So, as the famous story goes, he decided to make the desperate crossing of the mountainous southern French border with a group of refugees to enter Spain illegally. He did this only to discover that, with unexpected changes in emigration law, he lacked the proper papers and was to be sent back to the Gestapo in occupied France. Unwilling to accept such a fate, he tragically committed suicide with an overdose of morphine. Ironically, his traveling companions were allowed to enter Spain the following day.

Benjamin’s possessions, handed over to the court in Figueras at the time, were described as follows: “a leather briefcase like businessmen use, a man’s watch, a pipe, six photographs, an X-ray picture, glasses, various letters, magazines, and a few other papers whose content is unknown, and also some money.”⁷ These “few other papers” later went missing, and their identification is only speculation. Could it have been a draft of his “On the Concept of History” (soon to be “Theses on the Philosophy of History”), which he had been working on since 1940? Or perhaps “A Berlin Chronicle,” later adapted into “Berlin Childhood around 1900” and published posthumously, but under preparation since 1933? History—considered philosophically and personally—had been a continual subject for him since his exile began. If the “Theses” meditates on the tragic destruction of the historical past, then the “Berlin Chronicle” returns to Benjamin’s own historical recollection of his childhood, both to register and to limit the disori-

entations of exile. He confessed that the “Chronicle” was motivated by his own homesickness: “I hope these images at least make readers feel how much this writer has been deprived of the security that surrounded him in childhood.”⁸

Suitcases for Traveling

We are thus faced with a striking historical correspondence between Duchamp’s suitcase, obsessively filled with reproductions of his whole life’s work, and Benjamin’s suitcase, containing complex meditations on history and homesickness, both located within the peripatetic conditions of exile. The twin stories of Benjamin’s living out of a suitcase and Duchamp’s working out of one situate the qualities of mobility, compactness, fragmentation, miniaturization, and the impulses toward nostalgic collection and portable containment—what could be called the aesthetics of the suitcase—within the conditions of geopolitical displacement as they were experienced during the Second World War. The homelessness of Duchamp and that of Benjamin were, however, far from equal. Rather, the correspondence mixes the tragic and the farcical: the story of Benjamin’s desperate attempt to escape the clutches of the Nazis as a German-Jew reads in stark contrast to Duchamp’s repeated and even playful masquerades at Nazi borders. Displacement, for Duchamp, could be a desired and productive condition: “The artist should be alone. . . . Everyone for himself, as in a shipwreck.”⁹ For Benjamin, more refugee than castaway, it was a traumatic, involuntary sentence with deathly threats. In exile he was “a man at home between the jaws of a crocodile which he holds apart with iron struts.”¹⁰ Still, the stories are illuminating in that they open up the *Boîte-en-valise* to a specific historical field that has otherwise been ignored. How might a portable museum satisfy a refugee? Why collect all of one’s work in the midst of displacement? How does Duchamp’s suitcase represent a model for a post-national avant-garde? How might the condition of geopolitical dislocation relate to the material, institutional, and technological displacements of modernism and modernity, on which the *Boîte* also reflects?

Living in exile at the same time, Theodor Adorno was amazingly perspicacious about its conflicts, and he begins to offer a way to answer some of these questions. For him, exile’s paradoxical status was measured in one’s impossible but necessary relation to spaces and possessions. If Adorno argued that the “house is past,” then this was for two reasons: first, fascist expropriation had transformed the house into the barracks of the concentration camp or into bombed rubble, which represented the effects of a condemnable essentialist urge to occupy the house and obliterate all difference within it; and second, the house had become inscribed within unacceptable property relations, like the factory

or prefabricated domestic architecture, which signaled the expanding powers of capitalist homogenization.¹¹ At the same time, however, the dislocated needed a place to live. Adorno was at a loss: “The nostalgia for independent existence, defunct in any case, is sent packing.”¹² It is my contention that Duchamp’s suitcase occupies just this paradoxical position, revealing the impossible desires for the home in a period of homelessness, for objects when possessions have been lost, and for an independent existence in an era of institutional determination, fascist domination, and exile’s desperation.

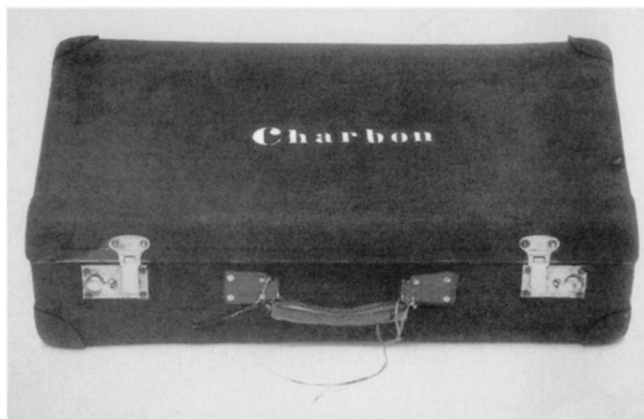
Exile, I would argue, is not external to the *Boîte-en-valise*, like some surrounding “context,” whether circumstantial or reflected; rather, it is internal to its structure. The *Boîte* engages exile in order to examine its terms, to unfold its desires and anxieties, even to overcome its insecurity.¹³ While Duchamp commenced the project before his displacement in 1940 (though he had lived as a kind of displaced person for the majority of his adult life), the suitcase became one solution to negotiate geopolitical homelessness.¹⁴ For the suitcase’s central concerns of collection, reproduction, and portable storage address the needs of exile, defined by the loss of possessions, homesickness, and unending mobility. Further, the suitcase offers the means to combat the fragmenting effects of exile through the reconstruction of a kind of portable home, just as it works to alleviate loss through the assembly of photographic reproductions. In this sense it is appropriate that the paradigms of the *museum* and *photography* are keys to the *Boîte-en-valise*’s structure, for they open precisely onto the liminality and contradictions of displacement. In them we encounter the twin engines of *decontextualization* even while both provide the very means of *recontextualization*. Within the *Boîte-en-valise* the terms of geopolitical displacement are mediated by, and negotiated through, the structural conflicts of the museological and the photographic, a complicated logic that needs to be unpacked.

The promise of the *Boîte-en-valise*, if it responds to Adorno’s concerns, lies in its articulation of a new kind of subjectivity between the encroaching forces of fascist essentialism and capitalist deterritorialization. And it elaborates a new kind of complex artistic structure capable of critically addressing the complicated and interrelated developments of modernist, institutional, and geopolitical dislocation, which we are still struggling with today.

What sensitizes us to these issues is certainly our current world of increased globalization, postnationalism, digital deracination, and nomadic drift, though all are fraught with contradic-

Below: Marcel Broodthaers.
Valise Charbon, 1966.

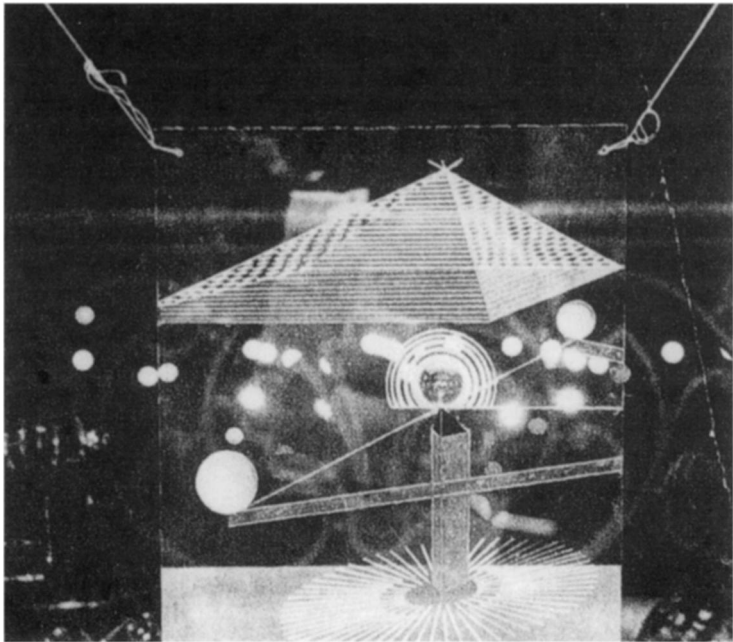
Opposite: Marcel Duchamp.
To Be Looked At (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour, 1918 (installed in Buenos Aires, 1919). © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.



tions and simultaneous reinstatements of national power, geographic privilege, and exclusionary identities, and are haunted by desperate backlashes against it.¹⁵ The “portable museum” of the *Boîte-en-valise* certainly reflects on the new terms of reproduction, institutionalization, and deterritorialization of object and artist alike, which continue to confront us today. Furthermore, the ongoing concerns with certain models of “institutional critique” point to the very productive legacy of the *Boîte*, one that connects with the work of Marcel Broodthaers, Michael Asher, Hans Haacke, and Louise Lawler, among others, which has variously analyzed the functions of institutions partly through internalizing their decontextualizing logic or by revealing their spaces and discursive networks. Broodthaers’s own suitcases, for example—like the packing crates and postcard reproductions of his “museum fictions”—owes much to Duchamp in their decoding of the art object as little more than the reified shell of a complicated institutional act of physical displacement, recontextualization, and revaluation. But the potential ahistorical instrumentalization of the *Boîte* that occurs when it is adopted as a model for such practices closes Duchamp’s suitcase prematurely, as it overlooks the specific conditions of nationalism, war, and exile in which it was produced.

Similarly, looking backwards, the dislocation of the avant-garde during World War II invokes the antinationalism and self-imposed exile of artists during World War I. The turn to mobile elements in Duchamp’s suitcase recalls the work of earlier expatriate Dadaists (such as Duchamp himself, Picabia, and those in the Zurich context) who opposed nationalism politically and aesthetically, even if not always so programmatically. In Duchamp’s case the nomadic qualities emphasized by the *Boîte-en-valise* replay those that defined his own work during his first flight from nationalism in Europe

and America during the teens.¹⁶ Moving to Argentina in 1918, he brought with him what he called his “Sculptures for Traveling”: the *Small Glass* (*To Be Looked At . . . with One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour*) and an untitled sculpture composed of fragments of rubber shower caps glued back together and strung in space, which could be continually rearranged. Both announced a new sensitivity toward contextual determination and continual reinstallation—the *Small Glass*



through its transparent surface, always revealing a new background; and the rubber sculpture through its variable arrangements contingent upon the physical circumstances of its exterior support. Integrating their shifting sites into their very forms, they anticipated continual reorientations and new locations. While this logic of displacement had been initiated by the readymade just a few years earlier, its circulatory possibilities were now extended to the circumstances of a mobile expatriotism.

However, while both avant-gardes around 1916 and 1942 experienced displacement and often embraced positions of antinational political identity within its framework—most overt in the Zurich Dada context and then in the later exile of Surrealist artists and (post-)Dada artists like John Heartfield and Kurt Schwitters—it was not until the *Boîte-en-valise* that the complexity of what could be called a “homeless aesthetic” was so systematically conceptualized and subjected to sustained investigation (far exceeding Duchamp’s earlier nomadic objects). Here, Duchamp’s *Boîte* stands in contrast to the two dominant artistic paradigms of avant-garde displacement during World War II: the Surrealist model of a psychic homelessness (transmogrifying into the automatism of Abstract Expressionism) and the Bauhaus ideal of an architectural and abstraction-based internationalism. While the Surrealist position failed due to the escapism of its psychic regressions, refusing to acknowledge the institutional determination of its artistic context or the political withdrawal of its art, the Bauhaus was discredited as a free-floating, apolitical style (evident in its availability to communist patrons, the Nazis, and, when these were refused, to U.S. corporate interests).¹⁷

Surrealist artists did, however, attempt to move from the analysis of the psychic uncanny (read through Freud’s *unheimlich*, or unhomely) to geopolitical homelessness. Max Ernst, for example, who lived as a displaced German in France and later in the United States, allegorized such displacement through collage. In an isolated image from his series *La femme 100 têtes* (The Hundred Headless Woman) of 1929, decontextualized fragments from old illustrated magazines recombine to form an image of a harried man, grasped at and menaced by other fragmented limbs, running with a suitcase carrying an amputated arm. In this case, uncanny elements run continuously with the disorientation of geographical displacement. And, we encounter meditations on the displaced conditions of subjectivity in later works such as Ernst’s *Les milles-apatrides* (The Stateless Thousands) of 1939, with its uprooted compass needles that find themselves lost in a barren environment; or again in the mangled and lost newspaper figure of Hans Arp’s *Maimed and Stateless*, of

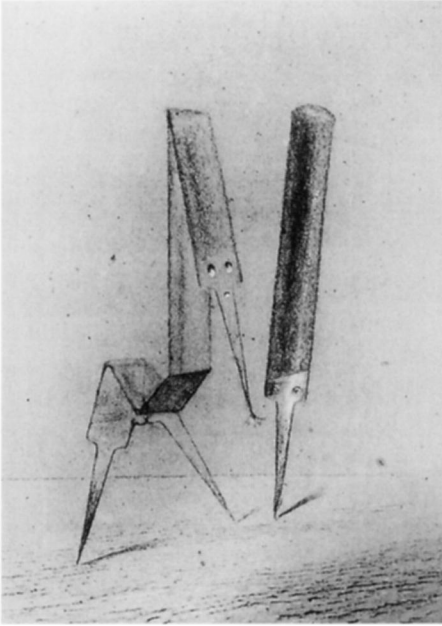
Below: Max Ernst. *Défais ton sac, mon brave*, from *La Femme 100 têtes*, 1929.

Opposite, top: Max Ernst. *Les milles-apatrides*, 1939.

Opposite, bottom: Hans Arp. *Maimed and Stateless*, 1939.



the same year. But while these works thematized geopolitical displacement, they paradoxically relied on pictorial models emphasizing the *centering* effects of traditional composition, secure viewing points, and orienting perspectival constructions. While they share in the dialectics of homelessness, precariously balancing between revealing the conditions of displacement and shoring up its disorienting effects, their reliance on traditional (Surrealist) pictorial strategies limited their analyses; for none interrogated the deeper links between geopolitical displacement and the artistic construct stratified by the dislocations of institutionalization, reproduction, and distribution found in Duchamp's project.¹⁸ Duchamp's model is provocative just where these other models fall silent: at the point where geopolitical displacement is imbricated with the developing terms of late modernist dislocations.

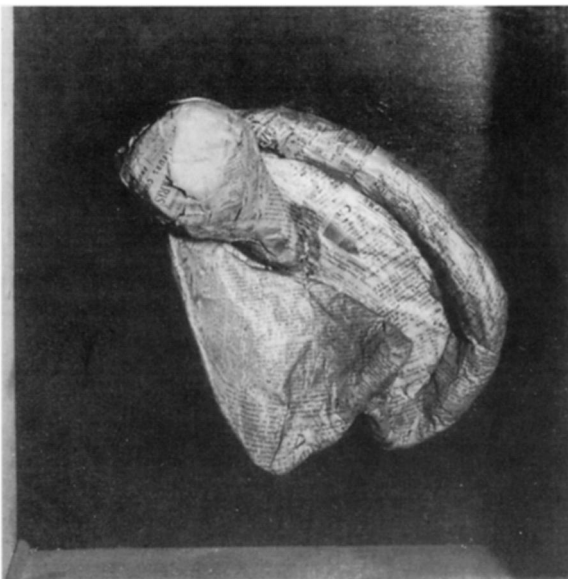


Modernist Homelessness

It was on March 5, 1935, that Duchamp had the “new idea” of producing “an album of approximately all the things I produced.”¹⁹ He explained,

[H]ere, again, a new form of expression was involved. Instead of painting something new, my aim was to reproduce the paintings and the objects that I like and collect them in a space as small as possible. I did not know how to go about it. I first thought of a book but I did not like the idea. Then it occurred to me that it could be a box in which all my works would be collected and mounted like in a small museum, a portable museum so to speak.²⁰

Certainly not restricted to the negotiation of postnationalism or exile, the *Boîte* is a complicated project that unfolds in various directions.²¹ Most productive so far has been the reading that sees it addressing the institutionalization of avant-garde art, as it came to be officially validated, categorized historically and stylistically, and consequently domesticated and reproduced by collectors, art galleries, and museums.²² Though not limited to a single example or date, this process of institutionalization was evident by 1936 (and certainly earlier). Duchamp encountered the institutional acculturation of the readymade, if we wanted to cite a single instance, when his bottlerack readymade was displayed in a traditional exhibition vitrine in the *Exposition surréaliste*



d'objets at *La Galerie Charles Ratton* in Paris, a show that predates the more radical Surrealist experimentations with display techniques. Once scandalously rejecting traditional categories of the original art object, artistic identity based on craftsmanship, and the role of the museum as a supposed neutral space of exhibition (as with the 1917 scandal of the *Fountain*), the readymade now sat as a seemingly rare, historical, and valuable *sculpture* in the institution's generalizing subjection of heterogeneous objects to a homogenizing exhibition space.²³

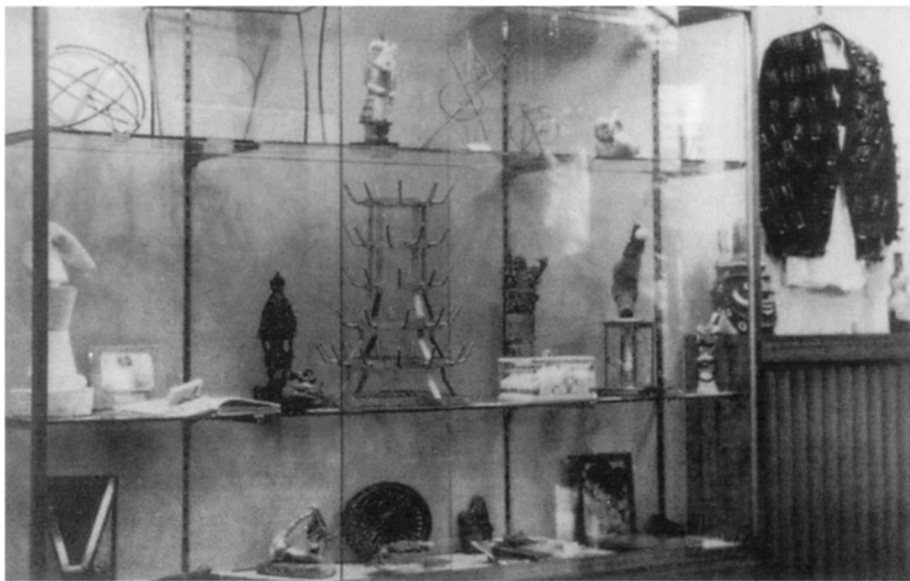
The *Boîte-en-valise* internalizes this very system, self-administering the institutional forces on Duchamp's own works of art. Its reproductions reveal the effects, as they come already displayed, labeled, and classified—placed within the museum's didactic discourse. The *Boîte* has its own case for transport. Its miniaturized reproductions, reduced for easy mobility, already anticipate museum postcards. This shift from readymade to acculturated object is perfectly illustrated in the difference between the 1917 *Fountain* and the *Boîte*'s miniaturized, finely crafted but serialized, vertically reoriented reproduction of it.²⁴ The *Boîte*, mimicking the museum, transforms the *readymade* into *sculpture* and then into a *reproduction*, internalizing the institutional fate of avant-garde art. The “portable museum” thus functions as a machine of acculturation, in effect a museum as readymade, which subjects objects to a fairly standardized ideological and commercial co-optation that transposes them according to a new set of physical, contextual, and reproduced coordinates.²⁵

The *Boîte*, however, coincided with a reformulation of the museum that is historically specific. It was conceptualized just at the time when André Malraux, after reading Benjamin's seminal article on art and mechanical reproduction, was contemplating the possible use of photography by the museum.²⁶ Beginning in 1936, Malraux began to consider pushing the museum from a geographically determined collection of *original* objects, traditionally

Below: *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* at *La Galerie Charles Ratton*, Paris, 1936.

Opposite, top: Marcel Duchamp. *Fountain* in *La Boîte-en-valise*. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

Opposite, bottom: André Malraux with photographic plates for *Le Musée Imaginaire*.



organized by national schools (as in the *Louvre*), to a virtual space of endlessly cross-referenced reproductions within a free-floating book. This new model would be a postarchitectural museum “without walls,” and as it reproduced art objects, it would uproot them from their historical or national ground and reorganize them along purely stylistic lines.²⁷ Reproductions encouraged the ahistorical, formalist comparison and grouping of objects from the most disparate geographical and temporal contexts, and such comparisons are frequent throughout Malraux’s text.²⁸ Further, artistic identity would be subsumed into a metaphysics of style, as the real motors of art history, for Malraux, were not artists, but “those imaginary super-artists we call styles” who express the “spirit” of their respective ages.²⁹ Malraux’s “Musée imaginaire” only explains what his museum performs: the disconnection of the object from all aspects of its historical context and the subsequent subsuming of the object’s meaning by its formal identity. The *Boîte-en-valise* shares with Malraux, if not its desubjectivizing stylistic hypostatization, its system of miniaturized reproductions, decontextualized and dehistoricized from any ground beyond the monographic tracing of Duchamp’s own artistic trajectory.

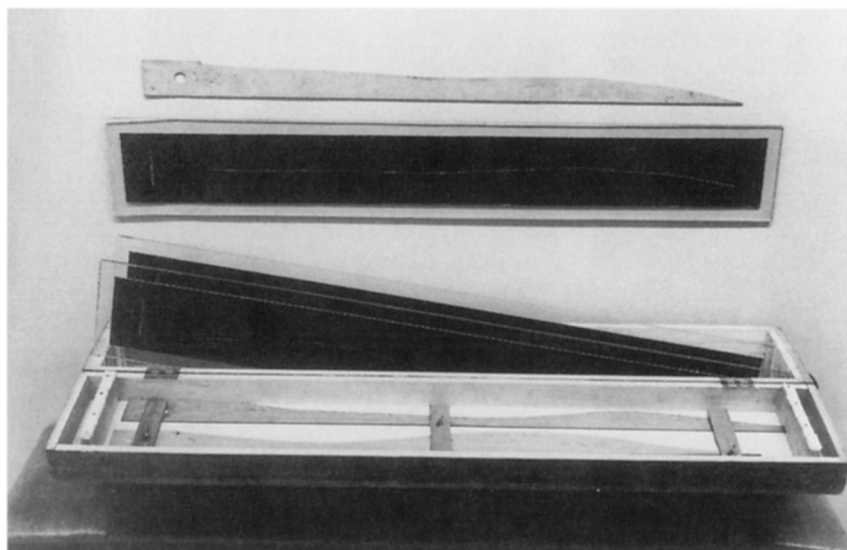
These developments parallel what Rosalind Krauss has termed “modernist homelessness”—meaning the historically specific movement of art objects toward a heightened deracinated condition that is met with increasingly malleable areas of display space. As the modernist object moved toward abstraction, severing ties to historical specificity, iconographical references, and national fields that would otherwise variously “ground” it, it simultaneously approached the formal conditions of mobility. This is exemplified,

for Krauss, in both abstraction and the readymades of the 1910s. She argues, for example, that Brancusi’s work turns nomadic at the moment when it internalizes the base within its sculptural format. “Through its fetishization of the base,” Krauss explains, “the sculpture reaches downward to absorb the pedestal into itself and away from actual place; and through the representation of its own materials or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy.” Sculpture thus enters “the space of what could be called its negative condition—a kind of site-



lessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place. Which is to say one enters modernism.”³⁰ This sitelessness, in turn, characterizes the smooth space of the modern museum, with its galleries divided by mobile display partitions according to the free plan.³¹ And this underlying structural logic—despite the stylistic diversity of the objects that it groups together—also explains the earlier experimental containers of Duchamp, like the croquet box of *Three Standard Stoppages* of 1913, just as it describes the mobile elements, free-floating flat-file reproductions, and portable containment of the *Boîte-en-valise*.

Malraux also signals the moment when the museum, paralleling the deracinating logic of modernism, merges with the post-war developments of liberal humanism and advanced capitalism. This reveals the radical difference between the positions of Malraux and Benjamin. For Benjamin, photography is revolutionary because it cancels the art object’s auratic originality, consequently producing a distracted viewer that encourages a critical distance from the image. The political urgency of such an independent viewer is clear in the age of fascism’s “aestheticization of politics.” Malraux ignores such shifts in production as well as photography’s radicalized system of address. Rather, he views the import of photography as a new technology of *distribution*.³² For him, reproduction promotes a significant widening of public access to works of art, whether they be paintings or readymades, and such an eventuality forms the basis of his humanist understanding of reproductive technology. In this sense the reconfigured museum as “imaginary” offered new nonterritorial possibilities for collective solidarity and experience. It looks ahead to a postnational, universal, and humanist condition. “In the movement which brings works of art and knowledge toward a greater and greater number of men,” Malraux explained, “we intend to maintain or recreate, not permanent and particular values, but . . . humanist values. Humanist because universalist. Because, myth for myth, we want neither Germany nor Germania, neither Italian nor Roman, but man.”³³



Against Malraux's belief in the redemption of technology and the art institution through the democratic distribution of reproductions, and against its implications regarding a new metaphysics of subjectivity (Malraux's new postnational "man"), others such as Adorno and Horkheimer saw the probability of increased means of domination: "the 'culture industry' demonstrates the regression of enlightenment to ideology. . . . Here enlightenment consists above all in the calculation of effectiveness and of the techniques of production and distribution."³⁴ It is precisely against these models of the humanist negation of difference and the culture industry's homogenization of identity, both instanced by Malraux, that we should reconsider Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*.

Geopolitical Homelessness

Modernist homelessness, however, only goes so far in comprehending the *Boîte-en-valise*, and this is where the historical coincidence of the suitcase stories of Duchamp and Benjamin becomes suggestive. The parallel, which dramatizes the relation of the *Boîte* to exile, repositions the suitcase within the field of *geopolitical homelessness*.³⁵ The suitcase, here, responds to the transitory existence of the exiled subject or refugee—an experience that doubles the deterritorializing pressures of institutionalization and photography. This redefinition of homelessness suggests why it was only in 1941, in the state of his forced displacement, that Duchamp first conceived of placing the *Boîte* in a leather suitcase, thus initiating the "deluxe" version of *La Boîte-en-valise*.³⁶ Only then was the box of reproductions fully equipped for the exigencies of travel, as a suitcase for a mobile refugee. It is thus necessary to reconsider the *Boîte-en-valise* at the point where its structural examination of institutional acculturation becomes overdetermined with Duchamp's exile.

The value of Benjamin's model is that it articulates the connection between *modernist homelessness* and *geopolitical homelessness*, the way that each is concretized through the other. If exile entered into Benjamin's writing, then it was inscribed in the aesthetic structure of modernism, which his work also advanced. It was in fact through the principles of montage and allegory, which Benjamin had considered at length, that he negotiated his own displacement. Like Adorno's theorization of exile, Benjamin's writing in exile, specifically "A Berlin Chronicle," was defined by its status between contradictory requirements: it responded to homesickness by collecting images that stood in for the lost past or forbidden land, but it resisted compensatory and nostalgic temptations that would regressively reconstruct the home. Ultimately, Benjamin's "Berlin Chronicle" confirms Adorno's realizations: "For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live." Yet this home, stored in Benjamin's suitcase, was illusory:

Marcel Duchamp. *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

The demand that one harden oneself against self-pity implies the technical necessity to counter any slackening of intellectual tension with the utmost alertness, and to eliminate anything that has begun to encrust the work or to drift along idly, which may at an earlier stage have served, as gossip, to generate the warm atmosphere conducive to growth, but is now left behind, flat and stale. In the end, the writer is not allowed to live in his writing.³⁷

“A Berlin Chronicle” tells the tale of Benjamin’s memories of a “lived Berlin” lost to him in exile. Throughout the text he desired to “evoke the most important memories of one’s life.”³⁸ But, if the “Chronicle” is shot through with the signs of homesickness, it was never nationalist; it yearned not for Germany, not even the prefascist country, but rather for the recollection of his earliest experiences now forbidden to him.³⁹ Giving in to homesickness was a precarious danger, wherein he risked an overwhelming nostalgia that would reify the past. Benjamin resisted such temptations because it was the very nostalgia for the home, particularly the home-as-nation, expressed through a problematic historicism, that was driving fascism. “One reason why Fascism has a chance,” Benjamin noted, “is that in the name of progress it is treated as a historical norm.”⁴⁰ In response it was necessary to contest fascist absorption in an auratic past, in effect to uproot that past by placing it in a constitutive relation to the present, so that fascism could no longer be treated as the ineluctable result of historical progression. Even in his last desperate months, Benjamin believed that “to bring about a real state of emergency” and “improve our position in the struggle against Fascism” it was necessary to obtain a new “conception of history.”⁴¹

Against historicist views of memory that would see it as an already completed experience waiting to be recovered by recollection, Benjamin defined memory as something fluid and contingent upon its materialization according to desires and needs in the present. In returning to his childhood while in exile, he attempted to satisfy homesickness but in a controlled and limited way: “the feeling of homesickness was not about to overtake my mind. I attempted to limit it by becoming conscious of the irremediable loss of the past.”⁴² While he describes memory as a “boundless horizon opening in my imagination,” he reminds himself that “this vista would indeed be delusive if it did not make visible *the medium* in which alone such images take form . . . the present in which the writer lives is *this medium*.”⁴³ His homesick writings would thus be *homeopathic*: “Just as the vaccine should not overtake the healthy body, the feeling of homesickness was not about to overtake my mind.”⁴⁴ And his “new conception of history” was advanced through the self-

reflexive terms continuous with modernist representation.

Benjamin's historiography merged the logics of modernism and exile, both opposing fascist homeliness. He considered photography and film, his favored visual mediums, as postauratic precisely because their images are no longer *rooted* to any site. There exist neither original object nor cultic context to mystically absorb the viewer. Reproductions are *homeless* representations. They are political in that they contest the fascist auraticization characterized by paranoid sitedness and carried out through an ideological return to the "blood and soil" of a territorialized identity. Benjamin's modernism was marked by transitoriness. The tropes of exile float throughout his writings. He explained reproduction as radically without a place: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."⁴⁵ He also viewed this placelessness in terms of subjectivity: the filmed subject was homeless too, and "'feels as if in *exile*. . . . With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice . . . in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence.'"⁴⁶

The aesthetics of modernist exile, then, offered a way to satisfy homesickness by shoring up identity through a memorial project and to challenge fascist historicism by resisting its essentialism through a homeless aesthetic. Within his "Berlin Chronicle" this logic is personalized: Benjamin, the exiled subject, records his homesick memories as dislocated montage, as continual particularization: "He who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside."⁴⁷ By derealizing the object of memory through the segmentation of its reproduction, Benjamin both satisfied and restricted homesickness. This points once again to the complex and contradictory demands of Benjamin's strategy. Returning to childhood memories protected against the total dissolution of identity in exile, just as it preserved the self against the desubjectivization operative in modernism's logic of deracination. But Benjamin also relied on these same decontextualizing strategies of modernism and homelessness to avoid the regressive model of an essentialist fascist identity and its historicism. It was his turn to a flexible model of homeopathy, where the disease is used against itself, that allowed Benjamin to negotiate these double binds.

Fetishistic Reproduction

With Duchamp reproducing objects from his past and Benjamin narrating his, it is apparent that displacement leads to a crisis in

memory.⁴⁸ Isolation from a familiar site causes a rupture from history and memory, which in turn exacerbates the fragmentary experience of dislocation. Memory is troubled by the loss of secure lived space and consequently fetishized through an increasingly homesick relation to the past. It is engaged in order to restore some sense of security and identity within an essentially disorienting condition. *La Boîte-en-valise* certainly served the needs of homesick memory through the obsessive collecting of objects reproduced from Duchamp's past. Duchamp himself explained how returning to his early work represented "a wonderful vacation in my past life . . . [a] vacation in past time instead of a new area."⁴⁹ Yet a number of problems unfold from here: How successful can a memorial project be that is based in photographic reproduction, which many take to be more fetishistic than mnemonic? To what degree is Duchamp's homesickness reflexive, like Benjamin's, avoiding a facile escapism or unproblematic compensation but also resisting the total dissolution of identity in exile or its obliteration in the internalization of institutionalized forces of decontextualization and desubjectivization?

Like Benjamin's retrospective writing, Duchamp's reproduction of past work engenders a meditation on past relationships, personal and familial activities, formal investigations, and dialogic exchanges with other artistic formations and aesthetic models, but they all hover around Duchamp's own past experiences and work. This ends up producing a subject effect, a solidification of an authorial identity through the representations of family and home and the collection of past styles and objects. A number of reproductions from the *Boîte* specifically represent very personal experiences, especially the early paintings that picture family members and friends at Duchamp's childhood home in Blainville, France. These include pieces like *Sonata*, *Dr. Dumouchel*, *The Chess Game*, *Apropos of Little Sister*, *Bateau-Lavoir*, and *Portrait of Chauvel* and *Church at Blainville*, all from 1910–1911. *Portrait of the Artist's Father* of 1910, intimate and psychologically introspective, is exemplary. It shows Eugène Duchamp, who had died earlier in 1925, gazing out into the viewer's eyes. But it is clear that he is looking not at any anonymous viewer but at his son, and the intimacy of the visual connection between painter and father, reaffirmed by the compassion of the gaze and the centering composition, is clear. This would surely "warm up" Duchamp's memory, as he would say, and return him to the security of his own past. In fact, he claimed that it offered "a typical illustration of my cult of Cézanne mixed up with filial love."⁵⁰ Painted in a pre-Cubist style still attached to traditional referential claims and expressive content, works like this one could easily become nostalgic in 1940 (both in terms of their intimate subjects as well as their outmoded styles—a confusion registered in Duchamp's "filial love" divided

Marcel Duchamp. *Portrait of the Artist's Father*, 1910. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

between his father *and* Cézanne, a subject *and* style both lost). As personally meaningful, the reproductions in the suitcase may have formed a family album, satisfying the homesickness of a displaced person. In this sense the *Boîte* collected objects around which identity could be constructed through traditional identificatory modes based on family structures and regional geographical affiliations.

Photography's very structure, in fact, encourages this drive. The photograph is uniquely situated to stand in for its referent because the two are connected by an indexical link. For Roland Barthes,

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here. . . . A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.⁵¹

The photograph is corporeal, physically linking reproduction to referent. This connection, then, offers the closest proximity possible to the object lost to displacement. It is thus unsurprising that photography would be among the items in a displaced person's suitcase (as they were in Benjamin's as well).

However, the mediated condition of Duchamp's reproductions also works against such a close connection between viewer and referent. If the reproductions served the homesick desire to replace a lost object, then this lost object must itself be understood as already split between two referents: the original object (e.g., *the painting*

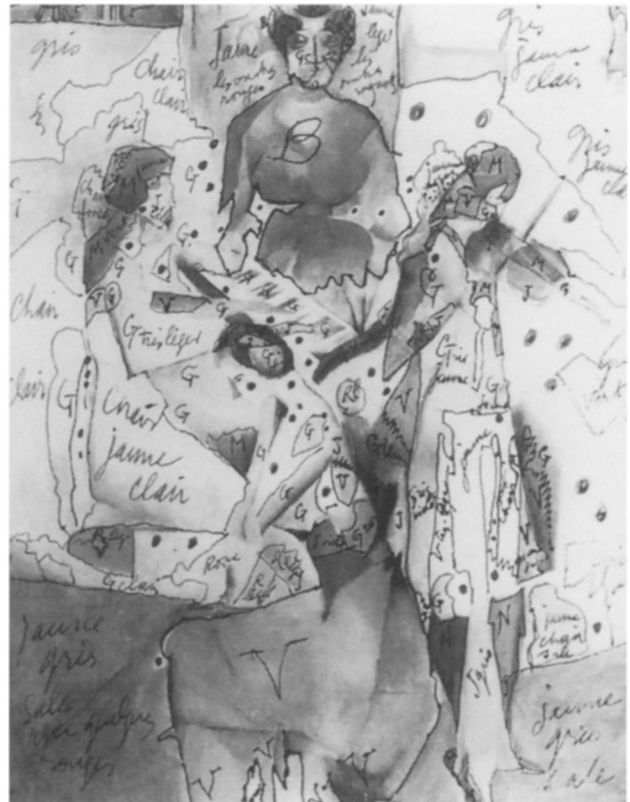
of Duchamp's father) and its own referent (Duchamp's father). Any ultimate referent is located within a complicated chain of reproductions, progressing through painted and photographic mediations before becoming available to the *Boîte's* archive. Like Benjamin's memory, the object of Duchamp's also loses itself in the *medium* of its reproduction. And the medium of reproduction is photography, whose structure is defined not only by homeless decontextualization (according to Benjamin), but also by the fetishistic denial of loss. This is pointed out by Siegfried Kracauer, who famously noted that "What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it all the more."⁵² We can see that the reproductions of



Duchamp's suitcase were similarly situated: they responded to the loss of artwork through its museological distribution; but reproduced, it is only lost again through its hypermediated condition. What results is an obsessive circle of replication, a fetishistic multiplication without end, evident in the *Boîte* project as a whole, which, in its totality, amounts to an edition of nearly 300 boxes with more than 22,000 reproductions in all. But the point is that the *Boîte-en-valise* was poised both to satisfy memory as well as to announce the cyclical pursuit of its impossible reconstitution. Homeopathically, it gives in to homesickness and the reconstitution of the self but then reveals these to be effects of reproduction.

While the fetishistic desire to replace the lost object is apparent in the photographic condition of the *Boîte's* reproductions, a desire that drove Duchamp to return to all of his original objects to study them for reproduction, it is also evident in their artisanal quality.⁵³ For the coloring of the reproductions Duchamp employed the *pochoir* technique, an anachronistic, cottage-industry procedure, which required the time-consuming hand-coloring of each first print by the use of stencils.⁵⁴ The notes for *Sonata* were typical, where color notations carefully fill in the different areas of the reproduction. Against the procedural depersonalization of the reproductions through the process of their coloration, due to the use of stencils, Duchamp's artisanal fixation on the surface unfolds to yet another level of fetishistic desire, where reproductions are endowed with the auratic traces of originals. This is especially true of the first proofs, the so-called *coloriages originaux*, which served as prototypes for further reproductions.⁵⁵ In this regard the contents of the *Boîte* collapse the Benjaminian opposition between reproduction and auratic original. Indeed, Benjamin himself noted their strange attraction in his diary in late spring of 1937 in a unique reference to the *Boîte*: "Saw Duchamp this morning, same café on Blvd. St. Germain. . . . Showed me his painting: *Nu descendant un escalier* in a reduced format, colored by hand *en pochoir*. breathtakingly beautiful. maybe mention."⁵⁶

The hand-coloring not only blurs distinctions between originality and reproduction, which Benjamin seems to indicate, but as such it further exaggerates the fetishistic basis of photography that seeks to overcome the loss of original



objects through their reproduced substitution.⁵⁷ In other words, the coloration also acts to deny—even if impossibly—the reality of photographic reproduction and decontextualization as such—which, after all, had sundered Duchamp’s *oeuvre*—in favor of the presentation of seemingly original handmade objects. If photography displaces the original, then hand-coloring paradoxically restores a sense of aura. But rather than *either* original *or* reproduction, the condition of the *Boîte-en-valise* exists as an intermedium of liminality between painting and photography. Through this material homelessness it explores the very relay between the two, a relay put to task in the negotiation of the same dialectics of displacement and replacement that defines the project at large. This logic, then, parallels Benjamin’s own elaboration of memory and homelessness through a writing that is neither regressively auratic (homely) nor completely decontextualized (unhomely), but somewhere (lost?) in the double-negative space between the two.

Collecting

We would be right to ask why Duchamp—the very exemplar of avant-garde nomadism, of nonnational, individualistic mobility and the creator of the readymade, the paradigmatic artistic model of displacement—would concern himself with the *monographic* organization of his works of art in a single collection?⁵⁸ Why go to such lengths to contain all his life’s work in a *single suitcase*? Rather than viewing his newfound obsession for auto-collection simply as a “melancholic” capitulation to the realities of institutional acculturation,⁵⁹ or as an inexplicable backlash against the structural paradigm of displacement that organizes his earlier work, it makes sense to read the practice of collection as a further response to the historical conditions of geopolitical dislocation. The fact that Duchamp’s own homelessness was at its most intense level during the construction of *La Boîte-en-valise* encourages us to read it as an answer both to the dislocation of his artwork, as well as to his own displacement. Indeed, the two appear to be inextricably intertwined. The fantasy of the “corpus” of his work, reassembled through “handmade” photographs and “housed” in the suitcase, became a way to limit homesickness and subjective dissolution in a manner that is similar to Benjamin’s collection of childhood memories. Like Benjamin, a threatened dispersion of the homeless subject was checked by a vicarious reconstitution of the self through the process of collection and containment.

What reveals the subjective investment in the *Boîte-en-valise* is not only its photographic condition, but its obsessive collecting. This is first indicated by Duchamp’s conspicuous comments about collecting, which responded to the feared dispersal and loss of his work outside of his own collection. For instance, he once compared the dissemination of his objects to the parcelization of his

own body: "Exhibiting one thing here and another there feels like amputating a finger or a leg each time."⁶⁰ The apprehension that accompanied his work's exhibition indicates not only a fear of the dislocation of his objects, but a fear that is transformed into a physical menace to his own body, indicating an identification between his sense of physical self and the perceived body of his artistic corpus. Correspondingly, witnessing his work reassembled in a retrospective suggested visions of a bodily reparation, where the corpus of his work/body was reunited. About his own retrospective at the Tate Gallery in 1966, he observed:

When your memory's warmed up, you see better. You go through it chronologically; the man's really dead, with his life behind him. It's a little like that, except I'm not dying! Each thing brought up a memory. . . . It was simply being laid bare, kindly, with no bruises, no regrets. It's quite agreeable.⁶¹

What was at stake in such identifications, and how might the obsessive collecting of the *Boîte-en-valise* relate to such fears and desires?

Benjamin, who thought of his "Berlin Chronicle" as a kind of "collection," argued in his *Arcades Project* that collecting responds precisely to the anxiety of dispersion, and moreover that at its most regressive intensity it betrays a nostalgic desire for the home.⁶² The collection represents an "abridged universe," "a nest," that serves a "biological function" in protecting against the fragmentation of the outside world: "Perhaps the most deeply hidden motive of the person who collects can be described this way: he takes up the struggle against dispersion. The great collector, at origin, is affected by the confusion and the scattering of things in the world."⁶³ The *space* of the collection may also become regressive: the collector's "boîte" represents "the originary form of all habitation" and the desire for it indicates "the human being's reflex to return to the maternal breast."⁶⁴ Collecting, Benjamin realized, is not only about the assembly of things but compensates for the fragmentation of the collector himself; its "biological function" is the autocircumscription of the collector. The collection, then, neutralizes the "sitelessness" of decontextualization, even while the act of collection motors the very cycle of displacement in the first place.⁶⁵

In terms of Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, what specifically countered the anxiety over displacement is the monographic organizational principle that it obeys. "I wanted the *whole body of work* to stay together," says Duchamp, emphasizing his wish to conserve the totality of his *corpus*.⁶⁶ While the monograph represents an institutionally ordered organizational system seemingly devoid of choice or personalization (one places everything in it, obviating any decisions based on personal preference), it is also the model

that guides Duchamp's identification. This identification, equating body and corpus, is driven by two monographic effects: one that secures a sense of the totality of its structure; and another that concretizes Duchamp's authorial identity. Both act to shore up authorial identity through the fetishization of the collection. If the fetish's fundamental function is to replace the lost object (as in Freud's classic definition of the fetish as supplement to the perceived castration of the mother), then this ultimately relates to the reparation of the fragmented or "amputated" body. This definition closely approximates Duchamp's identification with the corpus of his collection, where personhood is physicalized and concretized through relations to reproduced objects and their monographic assembly in a circumscribed space. If, for Duchamp, there is a correlation between the artistic corpus and physical self, then the *Boîte's* collection fends off threats of dispersion, intensified in Duchamp's own displacement, by reconstructing it both materially and psychically. The *Boîte's* fetishism is certainly multiple: it replaces the object lost to the market and institution; it reunifies the psychically fragmented self of the artist; and it restores the lost home of the displaced person.⁶⁷

The monographic collection, in addition, determines the space of the suitcase. While the *Boîte's* miniaturization has been read as a duplication of the effects of commodification,⁶⁸ it is also the necessary condition for the containment of Duchamp's corpus of work within the single space of a portable suitcase. In other words, miniaturization effectively allows the corpus to be perceptible as a single, complete, portable body. This offers a momentary resolution to Duchamp's anxiety over the fragmentation of his collection. Moreover, miniaturization is what connects the totalization of Duchamp's oeuvre (as an undivided body) to its nostalgic function; for if the placement of Duchamp's corpus within a single suitcase entails its miniaturization, then this material condensation signals the very form of nostalgia. According to phenomenological studies of space and scale, the miniature object leads back to a space redolent of childhood and the home through its intimate, private relation to the beholder. Miniature scale, in other words, indicates psychic investment and mnemonic structure.⁶⁹

Consequently, the *Boîte-en-valise* is divided between its depersonalized institutional condition and its monographic identity, which is subjectively reparative.⁷⁰ It cannot, in other words, simply be collapsed into an antisubjective, institutional double.⁷¹ Duchamp's is thus not a facile repetition of Malraux's museum. Seeing it as such would fail to explain how the monographic logic, retrospection, and fetishistic replication became engaged within Duchamp's own physical dislocation and homesickness. Additionally, the monographic system clarifies the suitcase's refusal of the complete decontextualization that occurs in Malraux's

postmonographic museum, which abandons any sense of subjective cohesion or artistic identity. The monographic, then, shores up authorial identity against its fragmentation, meaning the dislocation of the object in the market or institution and the geopolitical displacement of exiled subjectivity.⁷² The *Boîte-en-valise* also refuses the internationalist aim of Malraux's project. As geographically situated, the traditional museum (and the reactionary fascist one) was integrally related to the definition of its collection as national.⁷³ Malraux responds with the rupture of any geographical mooring, and the unbounded museum without walls becomes the "site" of an internationalized or, more appropriately, postnational collection. But Duchamp counters both models: he avoids the complete desubjectivization continuous with internationalism (or today's globalization), and he refuses the regressive essentialism and yearning for wholeness of national identity. Where, then, does he end up?

The Homeless Body

Duchamp ends up in a space divided by the paradoxes of homelessness, according to Adorno, and answered with a homeopathic logic of homesickness, similar to Benjamin's. Indeed, Benjamin supplies a solution to Adorno's aporias, where the homeopathic vaccine revalues mortifying contradictions and advances them to other ends. Its strategy runs continuous with what Benjamin had earlier theorized as the "antinomies of the allegorical," where objects are transformed within new framing conditions, or even merged into the setting, but in order to thereby gain a new purchase on life: "If the object becomes allegorical under the gaze of melancholy, if melancholy causes life to flow out of it and it remains behind dead, but eternally secure, then it is exposed to the allegorist, it is unconditionally in his power."⁷⁴ What Duchamp shares with Adorno is a complex and paradoxical articulation of the dialectics of (post)modern subjectivity (and its objects and institutions), located within a double-negative bind that requires a homeless identity but one resistant to total deracination. There, one desires to be at home, but cannot. One attempts to contain oneself against dispersal, but ultimately this too is impossible. What he shares with Benjamin is an allegorical investigation into the mutually constitutive terms of modernist and geopolitical homelessness, which is met with a homeopathic retention of subjectivity (and a model of the home, albeit mobile) that resists both total regression and absolute dissolution.

These strategies are further revealed by two anomalous pieces that Duchamp later added to two suitcases in 1946: the *Paysage fautif*, or "dirty/faulty" landscape, and an untitled figural representation. The *Paysage fautif* was created with seminal fluid, preserved on Astralon backed with black satin. The second work was made

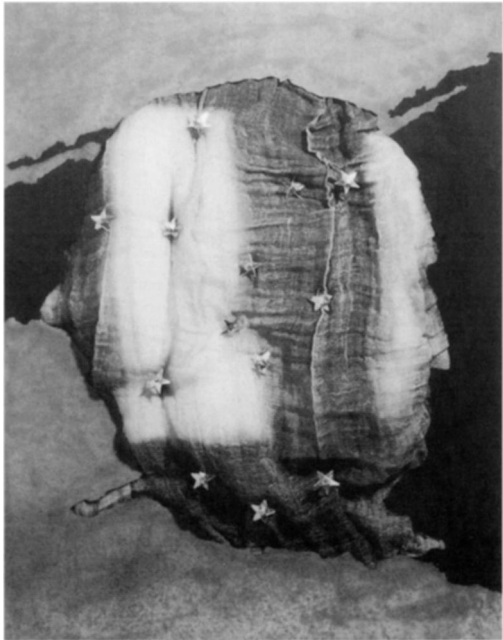
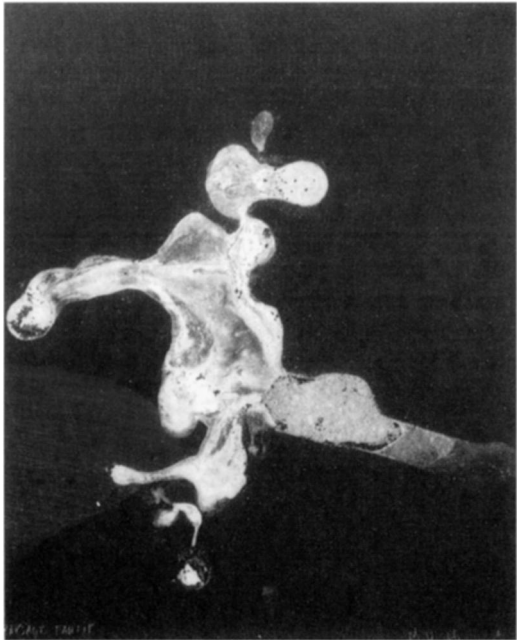
Opposite, left: Marcel Duchamp. *Paysage fautif*, 1946. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

Opposite, right: Marcel Duchamp. *Genre Allegory*, 1943. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

out of clumps of dark brown head hair, lighter brown hair, and reddish pubic hair, each taped to a Plexiglas support and positioned to correspond to the appropriate areas on a barely penciled bodily outline.

These works complete the doubling of Duchamp we've already witnessed in other aspects of the *Boîte-en-valise*, where the handmade photographs and the monographic organization fetishized a lost *corpus* and object of identification. Here too we witness the urge to contain the body—now its actual bodily substances—in that corpus. It is also evident that these tactile part-objects answer the fetishistic desires of the handmade photographs, as they are literally made out of Duchamp's own bodily substances, not just extending out indexically from reproduced artistic substitutions. The "umbilical cord," in Barthes' words, between artist and object is physicalized. *La Boîte-en-valise*, then, offers a body constituted by its leather skin, its complicated system of joints, interior organs and fluids, and its photographic collection that acts as a memory bank and reconstructed corpus. With *La Boîte-en-valise* signed "*of or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy*," this identificatory blur between author and object is clarified.

But if these bodily traces of Duchamp add to the construction of the *Boîte-en-valise* as a doubled body, the cathected object of homeless dispersion, then they equally reveal its profound division. They show the ultimate sign of the body's physical fragmentation—across suitcases, through mediums, between institutions, and in reproduction. It appears, however, that the allegorical project of Duchamp was not only to acknowledge the condition of dispersion, even at times to enjoy it onanistically. It was also to internalize its institutionally derived causes and effects precisely in order to gain purchase on the retention of some degree of identity, physical existence, and memory in a period when all were



threatened. If this represents a homeopathic internalization of the functions of the institution, then it is limited: Duchamp's is not simply an institution but a suitcase for an independent traveler that transgresses the traditional terms of nationalist obedience, gendered orders, and homely existences. If the procedures of institutionalization collected and documented even the most intimate interior elements of the body, such as semen, then this does not stop Duchamp/Rose Sélavy from perversely gaining enjoyment out of it, indeed even self-administering it to himself, and of remodeling a sense of self in the very process.

This is not, however, without precedence. As a reconstituted corpus, the valise offers a historically updated version of the *Large Glass*, an earlier "self-portrait" of MarCel, divided between female and male halves, the spaces of the MARIée and the CÉLibataires, as Duchamp noted. Here he configured identity as enmeshed in the historically specific circumstances of ready-made aesthetic conditions, the ineluctable development of photographic structures, and the new linguistic order of the indexical sign, which historicizes the avant-garde's position in modernity at the early twentieth century.⁷⁵ In many ways its figuration is also a disfiguration, like the later *Boîte* project. For the *Large Glass* reconstructs identity through the schematization and consequent division of psychosexual functions. It straddles the mediums of painting and photography and cross-wires their representational structures of iconic and indexical signs. And identity is further subjected to scientific objectification, reproduction, and commercialization in the notes of the *Green Box*. MarCel, disarticulated and reconstructed, was thus already submitted to various uprooting conditions of modern life.⁷⁶ Nevertheless he found in them more than the unavoidable cage of objectification and control, but also the potential of an identity formation (including his adopted alter ego, Rose Sélavy) freed from traditional limitations and controls and built out of those very forces of deracination. But Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* moves beyond that of the *Large Glass*, subjecting this earlier formulation to its own institutional acculturation and geopolitical displacement as it reproduces and collects the *Large Glass* in its very suitcase. In so doing, *La Boîte-en-valise* responds to the emerging conditions of institutionalization that the avant-garde encountered around 1940.

As a nomadic disarticulation of the body, *La Boîte-en-valise* offers a modeling of identity that, needless to say, explodes in the face of fascism. The nationalist body, as we know, imagines itself nostalgically as whole, illusionistically unified.⁷⁷ Duchamp's construction offers an antidote, which negates the homogeneity, nostalgia, illusory unity, and idealism of both traditional and nationalist subjecthood. But if the *Boîte* accomplishes this through a critical instantiation of a "nomadic" body, it does so not only to

acknowledge the impossibility of an essentialized, national identity; it also reveals that its condition of deterritorialization is not necessarily or simply liberatory, but caught up in the effects of institutionalization and reproduction that it both analyzes, mimics, and resists.⁷⁸ But there are remaining dangers to such a position. If the *Boîte-en-valise* internalizes an institutional logic to fashion a homeless identity, antithetical to fascism's regressive illusions of an organic and grounded identity and reflexively critical of the culture industry's totalized desubjectivization, is this position not all too slippery and capable of collapse in the very equation of the underlying structure shared by capitalism and fascism, as established by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*? Again, we can only return to Benjamin and the hope that such a position will nevertheless expose its dead object to the potential powers of allegory.

The National Body

In New York in 1943 Duchamp made a portrait of George Washington. Constructed out of gauze soaked with iodine, the image unites the profile of the first American president with the geographical border of the United States. But it also suggests a wounded body where its material resembles bloody bandages and where its several gold stars are seen to be brutally attached with long nails. Further, a series of oppositions tear its surface between collectivity and individuality, between national symbols (of the flag, the nation, the president) and their metonymic dispersion (as part objects). The sordidness of the portrait, not surprisingly rejected by *Vogue* magazine, which commissioned it in the first place, is that it pierces the boundaries of national identity and dissolves its subject and community. It suggests the violence hidden behind the homogenization and essentialism of national identity. There the desire for collective unity turns into a symptom of bloody fragmentation. We can vaguely recognize its logic from the *Boîte-en-valise*.

Notes

Many thanks to Rosalind Krauss for discussions that led to the development of this essay, to Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Susan Laxton, and Terri Weissman for critical readings, and to the editors of *Grey Room*, particularly Branden Joseph, for their incisive editorial suggestions.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, used by Walter Benjamin as an epigraph for “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1939), in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20.

2. Postcard to Walter Arensberg, dated 30 September 1940, from Sanary, France, in *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk (Ghent: Ludion Press, 2000), 224.

3. Cited under 16 and 17 July 1940, in “Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy,” in *Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*, ed. Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

4. Cited in Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp, the Box in a valise: de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy: Inventory of an Edition*, trans. David Britt (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 174. Bonk offers the most extensive documentation of the complicated construction of the project.

5. “I thought of a scheme,” Duchamp later recalled. “I had a friend, Gustave Candel, who was a wholesale cheese merchant in Les Halles, and I asked him if he could commission me to go and buy cheese for him in the unoccupied sector. He gave me a letter, which I took to the German authorities, and with that letter and a bribe of twelve hundred francs I got from a secretary that famous little card, called an *Ausweis*, which allowed me to travel by train from Paris to Marseilles. I thought I had to be very careful and buy cheese, and probably give an account of my expenses when I crossed the border between two zones, but the Germans never asked me any questions.” Interview by Calvin Tomkins, in Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Holt, 1996), 323–324. Duchamp then brought the materials to Grenoble where they were shipped as “household effects” to New York with Peggy Guggenheim’s art collection.

6. See Momme Brodersen, *Walter Benjamin: A Biography*, trans. Malcolm Green and Ingrida Ligers (New York: Verso, 1996), from which many of these biographical details are taken.

7. Cited in Brodersen, 260.

8. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972–1989), 385; cited in Rainer Rochlitz, *The Disenchantment of Art*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (New York: Guilford, 1996), 181.

9. Duchamp, interview by Jean-Marie Drot, 1963, cited in Tomkins, 93.

10. Cited in Susan Buck-Morss, *Origin of Negative Dialectics* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1977), 155.

11. This is articulated in section 18 of Adorno’s *Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1991). Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1993), also challenges both the homogenization of the culture industry (the loss of specificity and difference in identity) and the regressive essentialism of fascism, which for its authors represented the double bind facing modern subjectivity.

12. Adorno, 38–39.

13. It is thus not coincidental that Edward Said reproduces (but does not discuss) the *Boîte-en-valise* in his own examination of exile, where he writes: “The

exile . . . exists in the median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half involvements and half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another.” “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals,” *Grand Street* 47: 114. See also his “Reflections on Exile,” *Granta* 13 (Autumn 1984): 159–172.

14. Robert Lebel was the first to suggest this when he noted that “one year before the war Duchamp foresaw that he must pack his bags in as small a space as possible.” Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 54. Yet, taking into account the relation of the valise to developments in reproduction, commodification, and the art institution—developments that relate to, but also exceed, issues of nationalism and homelessness—I would resist the suggestion of a limiting causal connection between the war and the valise that Lebel implies.

15. See, for example, Homi Bhabha, who returns to Benjamin in order to theorize current postnational conditions and hybrid identity, in his title essay in *Nations and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990). Among the growing literature on globalization that informs my argument, see Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); and the interview with Chantal Mouffe, “Every Form of Art Has a Political Dimension,” *Grey Room* 02 (Winter 2001): 98–125.

16. Duchamp explained to Cabanne: “Yes, I left for a neutral country. You know, since 1917 America had been in the war, and I had left France basically for lack of militarism. For lack of patriotism, if you wish . . . I had fallen into American patriotism, which certainly was worse.” Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo, 1971), 59.

17. For a reading of the psychic homelessness of the Surrealists read through Freud’s uncanny, see Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). Adorno criticizes a regressive Surrealism, rendered obsolete by world war, in “Looking back on Surrealism,” in *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon, 1967). For a history of the Bauhaus in Nazi Germany, see Stephanie Barron, ed., *Exiles and Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1997). I investigate Duchamp’s critical relation to a regressive Surrealism in “Duchamp’s Labyrinth: *First Papers of Surrealism*, 1942,” *October*, 97 (Summer 2001): 91–119.

18. It is here that Duchamp’s project prepares the ground for the postwar neo-avant-garde, which would train its analytic sights on just these developments. Also, this explains why Frankfurt School theorizations, which focus on such developments as institutionalization and reproduction, become so appropriate for discussions of the *Boîte-en-valise*.

19. Duchamp, writing to Katherine Dreier, cited in Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp*, 147.

20. Cited in James Sweeney, “A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp,” in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 136.

21. Duchamp, typically, refused to answer when asked what was the “idea” behind the *Boîte-en-valise*. When asked by Alain Jouffroy in 1961, “What was your intention behind the *Boîte-en-valise*?” Duchamp avoided the rather simplistic suggestion that there could be a single “intention” behind the complex work: “I don’t really know, as a matter of fact . . . it was all done without any very clear idea in mind.” Alain Jouffroy, *Une Révolution du regard: À propos de quelques peintres et sculptures contemporaine* (Paris: Galimard, 1964), 119.

22. On its relation to institutional acculturation, see Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers," in *Museums by Artists*, ed. A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983). On its relation to commodification and reproduction, see David Joselit, *Infinite Regress* (New York: MIT Press, 1998).

23. The "original" *Fountain* too, displayed in 1917 and then immediately lost, offers another story of acculturation, as it only came to be known through its institutional and discursive reproduction. On this history, see William Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp Fountain* (Houston: Menil Foundation, 1989).

24. As Bonk documents in *Marcel Duchamp*, Duchamp constructed a small papier-mâché prototype, from which a Parisian craftsman made tiny white porcelain urinals for the *Boîte*.

25. Rosalind Krauss first suggested that the *Boîte-en-valise* formulated the museum as readymade in a discussion reprinted in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 305: "I think that if there's anything ready-made operating in the *Box-in-a-Valise* (and this at a very conceptual level), it has to do with the box projecting a bizarre way of thinking about a museum as an institution that is itself ready-made."

26. Malraux read Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" when it was translated into French by Pierre Klossowski in the May 1936 issue of *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. He refers to it in "Sur l'héritage culturel" (1936), a presentation delivered in London in 1936 to the Association of Writers for the Defense of Culture. It is reprinted in André Malraux, *La Politique, La Culture*, ed. Janine Mossuz-Lavau (Paris: Gallimard, 1996). German museum director Alexander Dorner was also investigating the relation between originals and reproductions at the time; for example, in his *Original and Facsimile* exhibition in 1929 and in articles where he proposed museum exhibitions of photographic reproductions of works of art. See Joan Ockman's discussion in "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way Beyond Art," in *Autonomy and Ideology: Positioning an Avant-Garde in America*, ed. R.E. Somol (New York: Monacelli, 1997), esp. 94.

27. This is discussed by Rosalind Krauss in "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg et al. (New York: Routledge, 1996). Also see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). For a critique of Malraux's ahistorical tendencies, see E.H. Gombrich, "André Malraux and the Crisis of Expressionism," in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* (1963; reprint, London: Phaidon, 1994), 78: "There is no evidence that Malraux has done a day's consecutive reading in a library or that he has even tried to hunt up a new fact."

28. For instance, Malraux compares one photograph of a sculpture of an angel's head from thirteenth-century Rheims Cathedral to another of a sculpture of a Buddha's head from fourth-century Gandhara. See Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 160–161.

29. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, 46.

30. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 280. Also see Rosalind Krauss, "Forms of Readymade: Duchamp and Brancusi," in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977).

31. See Krauss, "Postmodernism's Museum without Walls."

32. As Malraux explained: "Today we find that if the masses do not go to the art, the inevitability of technology makes it so that art goes to the masses." Malraux, "Sur l'héritage culturel," 135.

33. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, 139. After the war this desire, however, was redirected toward a national patrimony. As the new Minister of Information for de Gaulle's reconstructionist government, Malraux proposed a plan to distribute "culture" to the general population by reproducing one hundred masterpieces of French painting and displaying them in French schools. Such a project reveals a belief in the reparative potential of culture and technology after their total failure during the catastrophic war years, a belief in the positive power of (French) enlightenment advanced through technological innovation. See Curtis Cate, *André Malraux: A Biography* (New York: Fromm, 1997), 357ff.

34. Adorno and Horkheimer, xvi.

35. Geopolitical and modernist homelessness, while interconnected, can't be collapsed, I think, without a consequent loss of historical complexity. Such a move would fail, for instance, to comprehend how modernism and its structures of displacement can also be adopted by nationalist causes, as with the case of Italian Futurism.

36. See Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp*, 20. When asked by an interviewer, "Why a suitcase? It is obviously ready to be carried off somewhere," Duchamp equivocated: "What would you consider the proper solution?" Cited in Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp*, 172. Clearly, the "deluxe" version is also a mimicry of an advertisement model of artificial value.

37. Adorno, 87.

38. Walter Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 16. See Shoshana Felman, "Benjamin's Silence," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 201–235, which expands on Benjamin's notion of history as developed in the "Berlin Chronicle," "The Storyteller," and "Theses on the Philosophy of History."

39. Benjamin's homesick recollections, for instance, include his participation in the radical and antinationalist leftist group *Die Aktion*, which struggled to "smash the state" and "abolish the family," as he explains in "A Berlin Chronicle," 19–20.

40. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 257.

41. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257. For Shoshana Felman, "In Benjamin's own view, history—a line of catastrophe—is not a movement toward progress but a movement toward (what Benjamin calls enigmatically) redemption. Redemption—what historical struggles (and political revolutions) are about—should be understood as both materialist (Marxist, political, interhistorical) and theological (suprahistorical, transcendent). Redemption is discontinuity, disruption. It names the constant need to catch up with the hidden reality of history that always remains a debt to the oppressed, a debt to the dead of history, a claim the past has on the present. Redemption is the allegory of a future state of freedom, justice, happiness, and recovery of meaning." Felman, 211.

42. Cited in Rochlitz, 181.

43. Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," 10 (emphasis added).

44. Cited in Rochlitz, 181.

45. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, 220. Also see Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography" (1931), in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), where, for instance, Benjamin discusses Atget's photographs as "swept clean like a house which has not yet found its new tenant," and Surrealist photography as establishing "a healthy alienation between environment and man" (210).

46. Benjamin (quoting Pirandello), "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," 229.
47. Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," 6.
48. As Edward Said observes, "almost by definition exile and memory go together." Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000), xxxv. Also see Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
49. Marcel Duchamp, letter to Katherine Dreier, cited in Tomkins, 308.
50. Marcel Duchamp, "Notes for a Lecture, 1964," cited in Anne D'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 243.
51. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Noonday, 1981), 80–81.
52. Siegfried Kracauer, "Photography," trans. Thomas Levin, *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Spring 1993): 433. Originally published in 1927, the essay was reissued by Kracauer in *The Mass Ornament* in 1963. Kracauer's discussion of fetishism was also informed by his own displacement. As a German Jewish refugee he was forced to leave Germany in 1933, living in exile for the rest of his life, in Paris until 1941 and then in New York until 1966. And he was aware of photography's special relation to homesickness. In an autobiographical novel, *Georg*, which he wrote in 1934 during his exile in Paris, the main character remembers his grandmother, just as Kracauer recalls his own grandmother through a photograph in his essay on photography. He discusses this photograph of his grandmother, who, pictured as a younger woman, is at odds with how he remembers her: "Likeness has ceased to be any help." Nevertheless, Kracauer explains that the photograph offers "a reminder of . . . corporal reality," and thus draws out memory-images, even if ultimately they are deeply dissatisfactory (429).
53. In order to finish the black-and-white reproductions (most often photographed by hired professionals), Duchamp visited the originals, distributed across the United States and France, and made detailed notations on their color. He then used these notations to color the actual reproductions back in France. In 1936 he sailed to New York to see Katherine Dreier's collection, then traveled to Hollywood to consult the Arensbergs' holdings, and then to Cleveland to examine *Nude Descending a Staircase*, where it was temporarily on loan. Here, we witness the geographical dispersal of the self through travel, which doubles the institutional dissemination of objects, even while that travel is motivated by an impulse to reunite the work (and the self) in the *Boîte* project.
54. Duchamp explained that "The time required for obtaining a satisfactory first print is about a month for a highly skilled craftsman. An average of 30 colours is required for each plate. . . . [It takes] seven or eight weeks to apply 30 colours by hand through stencils." Cited in Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp*, 153.
55. Duchamp placed one of these "first proofs," "originals" as he called them, in each of the twenty deluxe *Boîtes-en-valise*. He even submitted three of these "reproductions" as independent works to the *International Exhibition of Surrealism*, at André Breton's behest, in Mexico in 1940.
56. The diary is located in the Walter Benjamin Archive, Institute für Sozialforschung, Goethe Universität, Frankfurt; cited in Ecke Bonk, "Delay Included," in *Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp . . . in Resonance* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Cantz, 1998), 102.
57. Benjamin views the early stages of nineteenth-century photography as maintaining an auratic quality, where practitioners "saw their task in simulating that aura through all the arts of retouching . . . through which bad painters

took their revenge on photography." See Benjamin, "Short History of Photography," 206–207. Roland Barthes, too, reads the coloring of photographs as fetishistic: "For me, color is an artifice, a cosmetic (like the kind used to paint corpses)." In other words, it restores the illusion of life to a dead body. See Barthes, 81.

58. Also relevant is Duchamp's desire to have all his work collected in a single museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

59. As Buchloh views it in "Museum Fictions."

60. From the televised interview with Sweeney; cited in Ecke Bonk, "Marcel Duchamp," in *The Museum as Muse*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 52.

61. Cabanne, 92–93. At the time of his 1963 retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum, what "warmed up" Duchamp's memories were not only specific works but also their arrangement. The *50cc of Paris Air*, *Traveler's Folding Item*, and *Fountain* were displayed in the exact same way that the *Boîte* had displayed their miniature replications.

62. He explains that the "Chronicle's" mnemonic images are "like precious fragments . . . in a collector's gallery." Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle," 26.

63. Benjamin, "Konvolut H: The Collector," *The Arcades Project*, 211 (translation modified).

64. Benjamin, "Konvolut I: The Interior, The Trace," *The Arcades Project*, 220.

65. This logic has been explored recently by Jacques Derrida, who observes that even while it decontextualizes, the collection or archive (which derives from the Greek word *arkheion*, meaning house or domicile) evinces "an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement." Although it is a mnemonic apparatus, the archive is constituted by the very inevitability of mnemonic loss: it "will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory." The very death of memory, in other words, is formative of archival desire. The point is that the collection organizes itself around the mutually informing conflict between memory and loss and between decontextualization and relocation, which is the structural paradox of homesickness, articulated by Benjamin and explored in Duchamp's suitcase. See Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 91, and 10–11.

66. Cabanne, 74.

67. But more than claiming priority for one over the other, is it not more interesting to suspend each and consider how they all interconnect?

68. See Buchloh, "Museum Fictions," 47. Walter Benjamin explores how in the collection "the work of art" is "shrunk to a commodity," in "Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1993), 251.

69. For Bachelard, "the tiny things we imagine simply take us back to childhood, to familiarity with toys and the reality of toys." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 149. Susan Stewart suggests that miniaturization is a formal quality of memory, that "the miniature typifies the structure of memory." Miniaturized representation appears to signify temporal duration: "there may be an actual phenomenological correlation between the experience of scale and the experience of duration." In other words, objects reduced in scale appear to recede in time. Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 66 and 171.

70. In this sense I am following Foucault's advice to open up the "author-function" to investigation: "But the subject should not be entirely abandoned.

It should be reconsidered, not to restore the theme of an originating subject, but to seize its functions, its intervention in discourse, and its system of dependencies. . . . [W]e should ask: under what conditions and through what forms does an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; what rules does it follow in each type of discourse?" Foucault, "What Is an Author," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell, 1977), 137–138.

71. My reading develops Buchloh's: "The strategy of assembling a work from quotations [present in *La Boîte-en-Valise*] seems to sign over the individual producer's acts of decision and choice, self-determination and material transformation in social interaction to a totality of inescapable predicaments: those of discourse, those of the conditions of reception, those of the social institution within which the production and reception are historically contained." See Buchloh, "Museum Fictions," 48. While I agree with this view, it overlooks the relation between the monographic and the subjective binding that the *Boîte* also explores.

72. This is a major difference between Duchamp's archive and that of Gerhard Richter, who was himself displaced twice: first after the collapse of fascist Germany and then upon leaving the East German state to come to the West in the early 1960s. The heterogeneity of archival sources in his *Atlas* project (the complete opposite of the monographic), which never served the needs of a mobile refugee, is of an entirely different order than Duchamp's. Nevertheless, with Richter we also witness the relation between national displacement, memory crisis, and fetishistic collection. See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive," *October* 88 (Spring 1999): 117–145; and Buchloh, *Gerhard Richter: Painting after the Subject of History* (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1994).

73. Carol Duncan argues that in the museum the visitor "encounters . . . the state itself, embodied in the very form of the museum." See her *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 26. Also see Andrew McClellan, "Nationalism and the Origins of the Museum in France," in *The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology*, ed. Gwendolyn Wright (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996).

74. See Walter Benjamin, "Allegory and Trauerspiel," in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985), 183–184. Further: If "In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting," then it is later up to the critical "reader" to decipher its sediments (see 177–178 and 184–185).

75. Rosalind Krauss elaborates on the *Large Glass*'s function as a self-portrait of "Marcel," in "Notes on the Index, Part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 192–209, and further reads this work as a traumatic loss of representational conventions that could otherwise figure a visually cohesive organic identity.

76. Indeed, it was motivated by Duchamp's attending, in 1911, a performance of Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*, a fantastic tale of European circus performers and scientists, who, shipwrecked in Africa, create a series of mechanical spectacles for bewildered audiences. In one sense the tale is an allegory of modern identity's exile in a new world of technological developments and geography's shifting conditions, which Duchamp took to heart.

77. For elaborations of fascist subjectivity, see the discussions of Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Hal Foster, "Armor Fou," *October* 56 (Spring 1991): 65–97.

78. The *Boîte-en-valise* refuses the optimism of the nomadic that is enlisted strategically against fascism and statism by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,

even while it (sometimes) shares its structure: "Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows . . . flowing hair, a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit, or urine that is produced by partial objects and constantly cut off by other partial objects, which in turn produces other flows, interrupted by other partial objects. Every object presupposes the continuity of a flow, the fragmentation of the object." While these authors wanted to let loose the nomadic to dissolve the solidifications of psychoanalysis and capitalism, for Duchamp, conversely, institutional co-optation and reification was not so easily overcome. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 5–6.