"What is Composition . . . ?" After Duchamp (Notes Toward a General Teleintertext)

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1. By all means, let's start with Duchamp (as all twentieth century composition already does, consciously or not). Particularly, as this is in part a story of seemingly failed writing, writing which doesn't win prizes, let's start with some of Duchamp's failures. I can think of three right off: First, coming home in a taxi, March 1912, with a painting that was supposed to . . . well, not win prizes, of course. It couldn't have. It was his "Nude Descending a Staircase," and the show where it was to be exhibited was in Paris at the Société des Artistes Indépendants. The slogan of this salon, open to anyone, was *ni récompense ni jury*, so there were no prizes to win, no panels to award them. But even if there had been, Duchamp was out of the running before the show began. A 1953 catalogue from the Musée d'Art Moderne refers to the story: "1912. March-April. Paris. 28th Salon des Indépendants. Gleizes, Le Fauconnier, Léger, Metzinger and Archipenko, members of the hanging committee, turn it into a great demonstration of cubism" (Lebel 10). Duchamp's "Nude" was a sort of culmination; he'd taken cubism as far as it interested him. He was at the time moving out of, away from, that particular school of painting; it implied a technology, an aesthetic, a certain problem-set and certain materials, with which he'd grown bored. The show's hanging committee must have thought . . . a cubist nude? This is a joke, non? And one they certainly didn't want played on their *great demonstration.* So Gliezes convinces Duchamp's brothers to get him to withdraw it. He does, and riding home in the cab, with this amazing work next to him, he feels some bitterness, surely, but vindication, as well, knowing he succeeded in almost animating Cubism, turning his canvas into a machine. "Just the same," he smiles, "it moves" (Lebel 9). Then there was the Big Show of 1917, the American counterpart to the Indépendants. Another show which was supposedly open to anyone, but another show which refused one of Duchamp's works—this one, the urinal called "Fountain." That non-prize-winning piece, taken to Stieglitz's studio,

photographed (inscribed on glass), and then mysteriously disappearing—its photographic representation alone is enough to ensure its central place in twentieth-century art history. And finally, the later Duchamp, the one who has since left behind the stylistic nostalgia of painting's cult of technique (its mystic craftsmanship) to pursue the mechanical processes of "precision oculism," there at a French trade fair in the 1930s, trying to sell even one of his "Rotoreliefs", those fascinating revolving spirals, made for a kind of optical massage, to transport perception to another place. But his project fails. Roché recalls the scene with a certain smug glee:

> None of the visitors, hot on the trail of the useful, could be diverted long enough to stop [at Duchamp's booth]. A glance was sufficient to see that between the garbage compressing machine and the incinerators on the left, and the instant vegetable chopper on the right, this gadget of his simply wasn't useful.
>
> When I went up to him, Duchamp smiled and said, "Error, one hundred per cent. At least, it's clear."
>
> These "Rotoreliefs" have since become collectors' items. (84-85)

Ah, that Marcel. Even in chronicling his failures, we simply chart his success. But yet each failing must have been felt acutely. "Given that . . . ; if I suppose I'm suffering a lot." (*Salt Seller* 23). Failure intense enough, for instance, to necessitate inscribing a lament in the "Glass." Lebel reminds us of a note to that effect scrawled in "The Green Box", concerning the disillusioned litanies of the glider: "Slow life. Vicious circle. Onanism. Horizontal. Return trips on the buffer. The trash of life. Cheap construction. Tin, ropes, wire. Eccentric wooden pulleys. Monotonous fly-wheel. Beer professor.' All these terms express a single one: *ÉCHECS*, which Duchamp, with his instinct for inner meanings, seems in some way to have made his motto" (67).

Échecs, we are reminded, is the French term for "checks" and "failures," as well as "chess." For Duchamp, chess was "like constructing a mechanism . . . by which you win or lose" (*Salt Seller* 136). So *chess*, as *failure/success*, both in accordance, delayed, in check. Motto, indeed.

Like many, I'm interested in Duchamp. I'm interested, for example, in failures that really aren't, in works barred from gaining the prize which end up changing the world. Brief, personal jottings that become a litany for posterity; the apparently impoverished composition that proves a rich text. I'm interested in Duchamp the way I'm interested in certain writing, writing done by anyone-whoever: useless, failed, nothing-writing by some nobody that turns out to be really something. I'm interested in what Duchamp reveals about our era, the Modernist era, specifically in the way Modernism is institutionalized in our culture. And, in the way Duchamp, almost from the start, offered an alternative Modernism, one that constantly put in *check* forms, materials, and contexts. I would like in this writing, then, to use Duchamp as a way to wonder about the particular hold Modernism has in my field, the field of composition. I want to do this through an *allegorical appearance* of my field's story with

another field's similar story—the story of art after Duchamp, the story of how alternative technologies can change fundamental compositional questions. To represent Modernism in our field, I'll draw heavily on an article by David Bartholomae, "What is Composition and Why Do We Teach It?"—an article that exists as his attempt at the field's self-definition. I choose Bartholomae because I feel he manifests some of the most committed thinking about students and writing in our literature, but thinking which nevertheless results in the persistence of a very specific compositional program. The limitations of that program I find not so surprising, given that Modernism is all about limits, but—and this is my central point—they may be limits we no longer want to define our composition. Increasingly, we have different compositional means available: new tools for the mechanical reproduction of texts and an on-going electronic salon in which to circulate them. Materially, Modernism delimits choice, fixed as it is on a certain work with certain materials; Duchamp didn't:

> [I]f you can find other methods for self-expression, you have to profit from them. It's what happens in all the arts. In music, the new electronic instruments are a sign of the public's changing attitude toward art. . . . Artists are offered new media, new colors, new forms of lighting; the modern world moves in and takes over, even in painting. It forces things to change naturally, normally. (Cabanne 93)

Painting was simply "a means of expression, not an end in itself" (*Salt Seller* 127). Modernist Composition, I would argue, seeks to define its ends in terms of narrowly-conceived means (or better, conceives of its means according to limited ends), despite the modern world's take-over.

2. In "What is Composition?" Bartholomae defines the enterprise as "a set of problems" located, mostly institutionally, around notions of "language change," specifically as those notions affect the "writing produced by writers who were said to be unprepared" (11). Bartholomae, here as elsewhere in his writings, structures his analysis of this set of problems around a few student papers—in this case, two essays from Pittsburgh student writing competitions and a travel-narrative, written in Bartholomae's introductory composition course, concerning a trip to St. Croix the writer took as member of a religious youth-group. The problem-set Bartholomae theorizes through these papers concerns his general project, using textual artifacts to articulate "the sources and uses of writing, particularly writing in schooling, where schooling demands/enables the intersection of tradition and the individual talent" (12). Bartholomae focuses first on a prize-winning essay, an academic account of Pittsburgh's steel industry, which he considers "too good, too finished, too seamless, too professional" (13); he wants to open up the "official disciplinary history" to "other possible narratives" (13), suggesting this essay reads as if it were "assemble[d] . . . according to a master plan" (14). Seeming, then, to dismiss "official" composition—which would only ask of a student's revision that it "make [the writing] even more perfectly what it already is" (14), and presenting himself as a teacher who would allow a student to fracture open the text,

making it "less finished and less professional" (14)—Bartholomae ultimately disappoints, championing no more than a personally-preferred version of official composition: one whose patina may be more transgressive, more outlaw, but is still charged with academic cachet. Analogically, Bartholomae would see "official" writing instruction as preparing student-artists for their juried show by having them dutifully perfect quaint, realistic sketches of traditional subject matter (in this case, simplistic renderings of St. Croix's local color); he offers instead revision as a series of treatments—a different master plan—that will complicate the sketch into a more daring work, a proto-Picasso, say. This new program nonetheless maintains the traditional compositional space—the space on the page where the work is done, the space on the wall where it is hung and judged—a space where the writer graduates from dilletante to artist, "the space where the writer needs to come forward to *write* rather than *recite* the text that wants to be written" (14, emphasis mine). Despite his distinction between those two verbs, in both scenarios the composition stands prior to the writer, as known, as already-written in all but the actual writing. The St. Croix paper, then, is student-writing-degree-zero, which needs a hipper make-over, a re-modeling around a better style—that of Mary Louise Pratt's travel narratives. The preferred prose being politically more acute, a variety of cultural-studies heuristics (like "Whose interests are served?" [27]) are brought to bear on the naive narrative in order to enhance it. The juried competition is not questioned, merely the taste operative among current judges, i.e., the way "we give awards to papers we do not believe in and . . . turn away from papers we do, papers most often clumsy and awkward but, as we say to each other, ambitious, interesting" (16). The language is still the connoisseur's, now claiming vanguard status. Bartholomae can maintain a distinction between himself and most composition (with its "same old routine" [16]), but outside of his specific compositional space, in the space of composition-in-general—where Bartholomae is compared to, say, William Burroughs—such distinctions become moot.

So, we first must speak of prized composition. For Duchamp, art was to be rid of privilege. "No jury, no prizes," became the slogan of the American Independents, as well, of which Duchamp was a founding member. The rules for their Society stated "Any artist, whether a citizen of the United States or any foreign country, may become a member of the Society upon filing an application therefor, paying the initiation fee and the annual dues of a member, and exhibiting at the exhibition in the year that he joins" (de Duve "Given" 190). Any artists today who want their work displayed now have an electronic exhibition-site. Though the initiation fee and the annual dues may be different, in many respects the Internet is the contemporary version of the Society of Independent Artists, a virtual museum-without-walls, a public salon open to anyone. But the academy, now as then, stands all too unaffected by the techno-democratization of the cultural space for composition. No jury, no prizes? Composition is all about prized writing, about what makes writing

good; its scene, as shown in "What is Composition," always originates in a juried competition. Any artist eligible? Clearly not, for Bartholomae's theory works a very specialized field, *our field*, "writing in schooling," particularly that flashpoint, "the point of negotiation between a cultural field and an unauthorized writer" (12). There is no utopic dissembling about, say, Beuys' dream, that "fundamental thesis: every human being is an artist" (qtd. de Duve *Kant* 284). Some artists will simply not be hung, and art, for institutionalized composition, is defined by exhibition-value. But Bartholomae's description of the juried scene delineates the hollow folly of judging in the academy:

> Another prize-winning essay in a university contest, an essay on "Fern Hill," was the unanimous first choice by every judge except the one from the English department, for whom the piece was the worst example of a student reproducing a "masterful" reading (that is, reproducing a reading whose skill and finish mocked the discipline and its values).... The rest of us loved the lab report the chemistry professor said was just mechanical, uninspired. The rest of us loved the case study of the underground economy of a Mexican village that the sociologist said was mostly cliché and suffering from the worst excesses of ethnography. (15-16)

Such moments of disciplinary slapstick don't ironize the notion of juried writing for Bartholomae; rather, they cause him, in true Modernist fashion, to dig in his heels in insistence on the need for more discussion "on the fundamental problems of professional writing, writing that negotiates the disciplines, their limits and possibilities" (16), in the presumed belief that with enough dialogue we can give awards to papers we *do* believe in. This is composition, then, under the sign *limited possibilities.*

3. "Composition ... is concerned with how and why one might work with the space on the page.... [T]he form of composition I am willing to teach would direct the revision of the essay as an exercise in criticism ... I would want students not only to question the force of the text but also the way the text positions them in relationship to a history of writing" (Bartholomae 21). Such an attempt at defining the genre—finding, in this case, what is unique to composition (as opposed, say, to literature or theory, not to mention writing-in-general); doing so in terms of self-criticism or self-definition—is the Modernist enterprise. Greenberg outlines Modernism in the arts after Kant:

> What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in each particular art. Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this, each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure. (68)

The specificity of Bartholomae's composition, its "historic concern for the space on the page and what it might mean to do work there and not somewhere

else" (18), is the specificity of Modernism as seen by Greenberg in his notes on Modernist painting:

> Flatness alone was unique and exclusive to that art. The enclosing shape of the support was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theater; color was a norm or means shared with sculpture as well as with the theater. Flatness, two-dimensionality, was the only condition painting shared with no other art, and so Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else. (69)

Both projects involve a certain kind of work—*flatness* in one scene, *fundamental problems in professional writing, writing that negotiates the disciplines in the other*—with a certain kind of materials—stretched canvases and tubes of paint, or the texts upon which "writing in schooling" is written. And both projects are subsumed by a reflexive criticism. For Greenberg, "The essence of Modern lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself—not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence" (67). For Bartholomae, the "goal is to call the discourse into question, to undo it in some fundamental way" (14), "an act of criticism that would enable a writer to interrogate his or her own text in relationship to the problems of writing and the problems of disciplinary knowledge" (17), not in order to subvert the discipline but to entrench it more firmly, determining "the way the text positions them in relationship to a history of writing" (21).

4. What Duchamp offers is Modernism-in-general: self-definitions when the definitions are endless, disciplinary critique as anti-discipline, and composition as a catalogue of the ideas that grow from such work. Duchamp wanted to evolve a new language, a new aesthetics, a new physics, dissolving the conventions that would inhibit such a realization. He wanted new words, "'*prime words*' ('divisible' only by themselves and by unity)" (*Salt Seller* 31). His new discourse would *utilize colors*; it would be a *pictorial Nominalism*, conflating the verbal with the visual. For how else could *new relations* be expressed? Surely not by the *concrete alphabetic forms of languages*. His entire ouevre reads like a hypertext; almost as soon as you go into any depth in one section, you are linked to another, each with its own further-referential content. The "Green Box," for example, exists as the information stacks for the "Glass"; click on various parts of the bride- or bachelors-panel to access the awaiting text: "To reduce the "Glass" to as succinct an illustration as possible of all the ideas in the "Green Box", which then would be a sort of catalogue of those ideas. The "Glass" is not to be looked at for itself, but only as a function of the catalogue I never made" (Lebel 67). Indeed, the "Glass" can never been seen by itself: "it is no more visible in broad daylight than a restaurant window encrusted with advertisements, through which we see figures moving within . . . it is inscribed, as it were, like the other image of a double exposure" (Lebel 68). Composition as already-inscribed, double-exposed; catalogue the tracings and call it a text. He tells Cabanne:

> For the "Box" of 1913-1914, it's different. I didn't have the idea of a box as much as just notes. I thought I could collect, in an album like the Saint-Etienne catalogue [a sort of French Sears, Roebuck], some calculations, some reflexions, without relating them. Sometimes they're on torn pieces of paper. (42)

If this is academic writing, it's writing outside the bounds of classroom composition, writing as found palimpsest: course-notes, say, over-written with an ambiguous personal message, or a barely-decipherable to-do list scrawled on the back of a parking ticket—extracurricular assignments gathered from the grounds of the Campus of Interzone University. Writing already ruptured, torn, pre-inscribed; but catalogue it all and a life emerges. It's much like Burroughs's, who describes his text as if it were an html catalogue made for cutting, clicking: "You can cut into *Naked Lunch* at any intersection point. . . . *Naked Lunch* is a blueprint, a How-To book" (224). E-conferencing, web-writing, email—all the false starts and lost strands—they all amount to an inscription, *a kind of rendezvous*, a meeting-site of various texts and people; an encounter, set up and waiting. The Duchampian notion of form is hypertextual: "the fact that any form is the perspective of another form according to a certain *vanishing point* and a certain *distance*" (*Salt Seller* 45). All writing is seen as punctuated periodically with "click here." It's writer as viewer, remote in hand, clicking, cruising, blending all televisual texts into one default program; all discrete works become subsumed in the composite-text, *bits and pieces put together to present a semblance of a whole.* Lebel offers an ideological overview, explaining Duchamp's grammatology of the permanently destabilized text:

> he takes the offense against logical reality. Duchamp's attitude is always characterized by his refusal to submit to the principles of trite realism. . . . By imposing laws imbued with humor to laws supposedly serious he indirectly casts doubt upon the absolute value of the latter. He makes them seem approximations, so that the arbitrary aspects of the system risk becoming obvious. . . . Evidently he finds it intolerable to put up with a world established once and for all. (29)

It's writing as surf-fiction: you never enter the same text twice. Bartholomae and Greenberg operate from a nostalgic perspective when boundaries and genres existed. But boundaries dissolve in the Panorama of the Interzone: "The Composite City where all human potentials are spread out in a vast silent market. . . . A place where the unknown past and the emergent future meet in a vibrating soundless hum" (Burroughs 106, 109).

5. Some math might be helpful here. De Duve shows the usefulness of Duchamp's *algebraic comparison*, as presented in "The Green Box". It's the ratio *a/b*, where *a* is the exposition and *b* the possibilities. The example Duchamp had given previously, in "The 1914 Box", was the equation

arrhe	=	*shitte*
art		shit

Duchamp is clear on the point that the ratio doesn't yield a "solution": "the ratio *a/b* is in no way given by a number *c* [such that] *a/b* = *c* but by the sign (-)" (*Salt Seller* 28). Duchamp calls this sign the *sign of the accordance* (*Salt Seller* 28), by which all terms vibrate together in an endless troping of infinite possibility, subsumed in the mechanical hum of *arrhe*. The ratio *a/b*, then, acts as a form of heuristicizing, allegorizing, delaying. We can see the value of Duchamp's algebra for our own field. The way Richard Rodriguez reads Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* becomes, for Bartholomae and Petrosky, a standard, "a way of reading we like to encourage in our students" (3). Rodriguez's exposition, of all the possibilities inherent in Hoggart's material, becomes a measure, the criteria the jury can use in awarding prizes. As such, it's a way we encourage of all possible student ways. We can do the mathematics of accordance on that:

Rodriguez = *a way of reading we like*
Hoggart students' ways of reading

The specificity and limitations at work in our field become apparent in such a ratio. It is this certain reading of a certain text that becomes, specifically, the way of reading we like—a specificity Bartholomae acknowledges in "What is Composition?": "I see composition as a professional commitment to do a certain kind of work with a certain set of materials" (22).

Rodriguez = *a certain kind of work*
Hoggart a certain set of materials

In many fields, the generic has subsumed the specific. In music, for example, various genres or periods have evolved (after Cage) into "sound" as a generic practice. Theater, music, dance, film, and visual art are often blurred into "performance." But composition resists being subsumed by notions like "text" or "document." We insist on the academic as a distinction (and the various disciplines as further delineations); we don't make the passage to art-ness, to beyond-academic-writing-ness. What Duchamp did, for example, with the readymade (urinal or bottlerack chosen, purchased, and exposed as one's sculpture) was to legitimate a wholly unique situation: "you can now be an artist without being either a painter, or a sculptor, or a composer, or a writer, or an architect—an artist at large. . . . Duchamp liberated subsequent artists from the constraints of a particular art—or skill" (de Duve *Kant* 154). One can now be a compositionist-at-large; one needs only skills-in-general, a kind of meta-aesthetic. And yet the best theorists in our field—like Bartholomae—continue to try and determine those now-dissolved constraints on "art in a raw state—*à l'état brut*—bad, good or indifferent" (*Salt Seller* 139).

I've tried, in the shower of discourse available through electronic media, to dissolve the specific parameters of my own course's composition-logic. I've used more easily available materials and ways of reading those materials. My first attempt to seriously interrupt that logic was simple substitution: making Malcolm X's autobiography stand for the "history of writing," choosing what I felt were varied readings of it (Reverend Cleage's, Penn Warren's, Joe Wood's,

reviews of the book from 1965 media—even sound-bites from *Emerge* magazine of anyone-whoever's reading of Malcolm, recorded for the 1990 anniversary issue), as well as letting students choose their share of materials. My rationale was to expand the classroom materially, allowing students a more immediate entrée into the cultural flow of words and ideas. I didn't want to prize any one manner of academic reading/writing, and I certainly wanted to restore material like Malcolm's book to a place of dignity in the institution (where it had been degraded for years). I used a fluxus of readings on Malcolm to show students they could position their own reading of him somewhere, anywhere. The form of that reading became more generic: within a system of citational prose, strong material could come from anyplace-wherever—an email message, a news clipping, an academic journal, or an online chat. When an e-message has (at least) as much force as a formal essay, then *Emerge* magazine's person-on-the-street sound-bites became representative of any useful reading of Malcolm. My new equation became

Emerge sound-bites = *a way of reading*
Malcolm X students' ways of reading

Am I happy with this? Yes and no. It does what I thought it would, but I want to go further, away from the specificity of Malcolm. I don't want to replace one canonical text with a new one (no matter how canonical I think Malcolm should be in our culture). So lately my students have been reading an almost-anything-whatever like gangsta rap, along with a range of cultural responses to the material (from the media, the academy, Web-sites, and fellow-students), then writing their own. I'm happier with the new equation:

a reading of gangsta rap = *a way of reading*
gangsta rap students' ways of reading

This has proven a more democratic equivalency, allowing a broader range of the possible. Gangsta is anti-traditional, anti-canonical; its force is sheer negation. Of course the truly dissolved, wide-open flow would be

any reading
any subject whatever

Plugging that back into the original equation seems worthwhile, in order to set up a sign of accordance between the Bartholomae & Petrosky standard and the anything-whatever; to spin-blur Rodriguez/Hoggart on the *Rotative Demisphère,* until they blend into the white noise of generic text:

Rodriguez = *any reading*
Hoggart any subject whatever

The technology, of course, allows for no other logic—anything that comes across the screen is neutralized in the electronic hum of information. We are in a post-exchange-value-apocalypse in which the only value is use-value. Duchamp chose a bicycle wheel for his first readymade, not because it was beautiful (or rare or difficult) but because it was commonplace, easily available: if it were lost, it could be replaced "like a hundred thousand others" (Lebel 35). He understood the necessity for de-valuing materiality in the new

art, affording anartism to everyone. With composition now defined in terms of choosing rather than fabricating, all material is equal; it's whatever catches the eye. "We will sample from anything we need. We will rip-off your mother if she has something we find appropriate for our compost-heap creations" (Amerika). Material is chosen not because it's a privileged text, a "difficult" masterpiece from the "history of writing," but because it's around, on hand. It's whatever stands out from the endlessly-shifting screen before one. Could we, then, substitute "gangsta rap" for "Hoggart" in our initial ratio? Gangsta rap is consumed by so many of my students; it's a fairly cheap, easily available addiction: "I am a consumer," pop critic Danyel Smith says of her gangsta jones, "chomping away at the brothers as they perform some rare times with a Nat Turner gleam in their eyes" (20). We'd then have the ratio

Rodriguez
gangsta rap

which exists, of course, on the Internet, in a piece by Rodriguez called "Ganstas." Is his way of reading gangsta equal to his way of reading of Hoggart? Is it (still) a way of reading we'd like to encourage? What reading (now) would we not want to encourage?

And what about substituting the top term in our equation, the exposition? What about anyone-whoever's reading of gangsta rap? Could that be a way of reading we'd like to encourage? Could anyone-whoever's reading of gangsta be equal to Rodriguez's? Take, for instance, this print-out of some Net stuff a student found, which is no more than a series of hip-hop definitions. It's from an anonymous writer's Website, which contains, among other things, a host of gangsta-terms some other unknown writers forwarded to the site. I'm not sure where it's from, exactly, or whose it is, because the print-out is incomplete, ruptured—my student just enclosed several printed pages from the larger site as a source he used in one of his writings—but I link it into my own site here, as greedily as Danyel Smith, cause some of the definitions are pretty slick:

> *sexual chocolate*—a dark boldheaded nigga with a proper ass car and some tight ass gear
> *Medusa*—a fly bitch who'll make yo dick turn to stone (kistenma)
>
> *rims*—wheels for yo sweet ass ride
> *regulate*—to creep on some sorry ass fool (see creep . . .) (fhurst)
>
> *money*—scrilla, scratch, mail
> *bad*—bootsie, janky
> *good*—saucy (crystalt)
>
> *baller*—a player wit ends in a benz (Ifunderburg)
> *ballin*—I have game (79D9407A62)
> *P*—Pimpish, the same as tight, slick, dope (Berry)

> *bammer*—busted and disgusted like half the definitions up on here (mold7316)

All the writers on this list are doing, when they post their definitions, is *inscribing*—cataloguing words, ideas, material that might become useful for the next writer. This is Cage's discursive project: "to find a way of writing which comes from ideas, is not about them, but which produces them" (X *x*). Or Amerika's, in which writing becomes a therapeutic cure for Information Sickness, "a highly-potent, creatively filtered tonic of (yes) textual residue spilled from the depths of our spiritual unconscious." It's the writer (to use Kroker's term) as possessed individual. Writing is now conceived of as drive-by criticism, rap slang; it's the *infra-thin* possibility of gangsta definitions appearing as a Rodriguez. With all writing leveled in the Interzone, every genre blurred into one, the textu(r)ality of all prose is in an accordance, best described by Wallace, when he traces the passage in contemporary fiction:

> the text becomes less a novel than a piece of witty erudite extremely high-quality prose television. Velocity and vividness—the wow—replace the literary hmm of actual development. People flicker in and out; events are garishly there and then gone and never referred to. . . [It's a prose that's] both amazing and forgettable, wonderful and oddly hollow . . . hilarious, upsetting, sophisticated, and extremely shallow. (192)

Is a writer who posted to the gangsta list able to "interrogate his or her own text in relationship to the problems of writing and the problems of disciplinary knowledge" (17)? I think so, but I wouldn't actually pose the question; the writer'd probably think I was a *busta brown* ("a fool that hangs around and isn't even wanted" [4jcf4]). Is the writing strong, forceful, able to bring about new knowledge? Of course, and Rodriguez thinks so, too: while he does rep after rep in his "sissy gym . . . the blond pagan house of abs and pecs," where he and his ilk "read the *Wall Street Journal*, [and] lose a few pounds on the StairMaster," he listens to the gangsta rap that blasts on the gym's sound system, realizing the "high moral distancing" that goes on around gangsta rap among the middle- and upper-classes, how they "consign the gangsta to subhumanity." But he also knows the sheer force of raw gangsta, its ability to foster growth and change, to survive in the Interzone; he knows, if his fellow middle- and upper-class gym rats don't, "why we use the music of violence to build up our skinny arms." Those gangsta lexicographers above used their sound-bite spaces to write about the only thing the contemporary writer can—what is already inscribed on their screens at any given moment; they're dubbers, remixers, electronically inscribing and re/circulating inter-texts of the rap reality that fills their inner glass, seeing no use in imposing conventional criteria on *l'état brut.* As Amerika reads it, it's Avant-Pop, "one step further" from Postmodernism:

> The main tenet of Postmodernism was: I, whoever that is, will put together these bits of data and form a Text while you, whoever that is, will produce your

> own meaning based off what you bring to the Text. . . . The main tenet that will evolve for the Avant-Pop movement is: I, whoever that is, am always intersecting with data created by the Collective You, whoever that is, and by interacting with and supplementing the Collective You, will find meaning.

The heavy, intentional consciousness of Modernist composition is replaced by Avant-Pop's permanent state of mental preoccupation: readymade data is "something one doesn't even look at, or something one looks at while turning one's head" (Duchamp, qtd. de Duve "Echoes" 82); it's regarded as something momentarily seen (or, for the gangsta lexicographer, heard). Of course, even gangsta sound-bite writing is an easy textual call when judged against other possible texts-as-data-intersections. 'Cause what if the composition were non-verbal, or only slightly verbal—a graphics- and sound-heavy Website, perhaps? Or just barely written by the student—a catalogue of links, say? Not only, perhaps, are we no longer teaching words used in a special way—"writing [that] reflects on the fundamental problems of professional writing, writing that negotiates the disciplines, their limits and possibilities" (16)—we're not even sure about words themselves any more. Nesbit refers to the "Glass" as "linguistic but wordless . . . cinema with the lights up . . . a language move that makes language stop" ("Her Words"). *Language transparent*, the other image on double-exposed glass.

6. Buying a urinal from an iron-works, affixing a name to it, and submitting it as one's work is the art of the readymade. Not so much a found art as a chosen one. But there remains an aesthetic, a judgment-quality, that makes such art the legitimate subject of pedagogy and scholarship. Material is chosen from a vaster field than the disciplined one—a generic one, where all parameters dissolve, opening onto a flat, breathtaking landscape: "Regard it as something seen momentarily, as though from a window while traveling. If across Kansas, then, of course, Kansas" (Cage *Silence* 110). Cage's glass-inscribed road-trip through Kansas becomes the primal scene of Avant-Pop composition. Only those who don't listen to the silence think it's silent; only those who don't see the glass think it's clear. (Duchamp: "The 'blank' force of Dada was very salutary. It told you 'don't forget you are not quite so blank as you think you are'" [*Salt Seller* 125]). Only those who don't choose to read the anything-whatever, the document, feel there's no critical project there. What would it mean to have a document *pose* as composition, to have the everyday pose as a "difficult text"? This validates not only the readymade composition (to which only a new use or perception has been brought), but its textual concomitants, however ruptured—composition as the "Green Box", the "1914 Box"; writing as notes from a work/life in progress, under the reign of the anything-whatever. De Duve traces the movement from Courbet through Duchamp: "from the represented anything-whatever to the anything-whatever plain and simple . . . the devaluation of the precious, the finished, the noble . . . the correlative rise of new egalitarian values—or anti-values" (*Kant* 328). The cult of fabrication is gone. The

artist (or *arrhetist*), then, becomes "a technician of the absence of technique" (330). (In an interview in 1963, Duchamp called the readymade "a work of art without an artist to make it" [Roberts 47]). All other technical-aesthetic conventions are stripped bare as readymade writing, in the fact of its appearance as art, concedes everything except its status as writing. This locates aesthetics away from the traditional-criteria-based 'this is beautiful,' to the traditional-criteria-free 'this is art.' According to the new exhibition-value, a work, the writing, is exhibited in order to be judged as art, nothing more; all other conventions are seen through, transparent as a restaurant window. Duchamp himself termed the readymade *inscribed*; de Duve reads that as meaning "able to be written into the register of those things onto which the statement 'this is [writing]' is affixed" (*Kant* 394). Composition remains entrenched, preferring to universalize its maxims of taste and beauty. But the only beauty left in the post-beautiful Interzone is *the beauty of indifference* (*Salt Seller* 30). The choice of the readymade is *based on a reaction of visual indifference, a total absence of good or bad taste* (*Salt Seller* 141). For Donald Judd, there was only one important criteria: "a work needs only to be interesting." It was not a matter of taste, but simply "historical knowledge . . . some intellectual curiosity . . . some strategic desire" (de Duve *Kant* 238). Can it simply be enough to say, as Johns did of Duchamp, that *what composition is* is "a field where language, thought and vision act upon one another" (Cabanne 109)? Can it be enough for our art that it have *arrhe*? Enough for our writing that it have *writte*? Can we allow a composition that is definitively unfinished, an "indecisive reunion . . . with all kinds of delays" (*Salt Seller* 26, 32), deferring this need for writing as a revision toward a *certain* style, toward a *certain* end? Ends (unless they're *ends in a benz*) can bore: "No end is in view in this fragment of a new perspective. 'In the end you lose interest, so I didn't feel the necessity to finish it'" (Cabanne 109).

The tendency in our field is still on making rather than choosing. So Bartholomae urges a course "that investigates the problems of writing at the point of production," in which students practice "the ability to produce a critical reading" (28), but what he offers is nostalgia, a course in art appreciation, "the point of the course was to teach students how and why they might work with difficult texts" (26). *Difficult texts*, of course, means our canon, our hit-parade. The course's program becomes a *great demonstration* of the grand style, learning to paint like the masters, tracing their brushstrokes, "asking students to translate their sentences into and out of a style that might loosely be called 'Pratt-like'" (26). The reason Duchamp broke with painting was the cloying nature of such nostalgia. *La patte* was the name given to the cultish presence of the painter's hand in the work; to avoid that cramped space of virtuosity, Duchamp moved from a technique of overdetermined practices to one of mechanical processes:

> the "Glass" wasn't a painting; there was lots of lead, a lot of other things. It was far from the traditional idea of the painter, with his brush, his palette, his turpentine,

> an idea which had already disappeared from my life. . . . the old masters, the old things. . . . All that disgusted me. (Cabanne 67)

Bartholomae cites a passage from Bové, which sounds very much like Duchamp, very negation-as-first-light. Bové urges a "negative" criticism, one that would "destroy the local discursive and institutional formations of the 'regime of truth,' . . . aimed at necessary conditions," but a negation that has a "'positive' content; it must carry out its destruction with newly produced knowledge" (18). This could be Duchamp's ironism of affirmation. But too often Bartholomae's negation is aimed only at students or at institutional composition not in his style. He has no hate for anything in his own composition; it's a restricted destruction, an anti-*certain*-production-strategy. His production-site remains canonical, the classroom walls full of reproductions of certified masterpieces. His production, termed revision, implies taking the student ready-made—in this case an essay on St. Croix, brought in under the institutional sign "irredeemably corrupt or trivial" (26), multiplied by the sign of the clone ("The St. Croix narrative can stand for all of the narratives the students wrote" [27])—and re-working it, running it through a series of self-reflexive heuristics that seem like a New (Old) Tagmemics:

> to ask questions of the discourse as a discourse: What is its history? Whose interests are served? What does the scene of the plantation mean? What does it mean in terms of the history of St. Croix? What does it mean that it is offered as background and color? Why don't the people of St. Croix get to speak? How might one not write a missionary narrative and yet still tell the story of a missionary trip to St. Croix? (27)

It means, he realizes, getting clumsier writing from students, a crude rendering that will seem "less skillful or less finished or less masterful than the original" (28), but one that is en route to more closely approximating the certain set of materials, one that is closer to replicating a travel narrative à la Pratt, "Pratt's argument and her way of reading" (28). Duchamp might have defined *genius* as the "impossibility of the iron" (*impossibilité du fer/faire*), but the iron is quite possible here—it just needs refining, purifying, forging into the prized fetish. This takes composition back to the Greek, pre-mechanical age of reproduction as Benjamin describes it: "founding and stamping" (218). Such a desire for re-production vitiates Bartholomae's critique of "official" composition: "You say you hate it? *You want to recreate it*!" (R.E.M.). The exigency becomes a crudely-copied masterpiece: blurred, like a fuzzy, ill-lit photo of the Mona Lisa (the ur-text) taken with a pin-hole camera. Why try to take a perfect picture of a masterpiece (unless you're a conceptual artist, like Louise Lawler, and you want to use it materially)? Better to just paint a mustache and goatee on it.

Composition, it appears, exists to turn *l'art brut* of the student's ready-made into a form that will produce not the cool-site *wow* but the *literary hmm*. The focus here is training the student to develop a high-quality

hand-made reproduction of Pratt, one with disciplinary exchange-value cachet. The nostalgia is, perhaps, understandable: there were primal, formative moments when certain texts spoke to us with authority, and we want our students to try and reproduce that power. Composition, then, strives to combine cult value and exchange-/exhibition-value. But trying to maintain the aura in repro-writing is a doomed project. The Composite City cares nothing for aura, authenticity, or authority; in the Interzone, art's "social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage" (Benjamin 221). Of course the St. Croix paper can stand for any (*faux* Pratt-like) narrative: they're all aura-less, the space of the writing deserted, to use Benjamin's metaphor (226), like a crime scene. Interzone writing in the virtual community of Composite City has only use-value, consumption-value: "Value will depend more on the ability of the different groups of artist-associates to develop a reputation for delivering easily accessible hits of the Special Information Tonic to the informationally-sick correspondent wherever he or she may be" (Amerika). In this ratio, readers = "addicts of drugs not yet synthesized," writer = "Fats" Terminal, trafficker in the ultimate controlled substance, "flesh of the giant aquatic black centipede . . . overpoweringly delicious and nauseating so that the eaters eat and vomit and eat again until they fall exhausted" (Burroughs 53, 55). It's the drug-use-value of writing; *a pimpish composition, dope.* "Anyone could scratch your surface now, it's so amphetamine" (R. E. M.). It's futile to hype the values of contemplation on the informationally-sick. The Interzone's discursive field is the wow of distraction, not the *literary hmm* of contemplation. Whatever contemplation there is amounts to the *pensées* of the possessed individual.

Just as the concept of juried writing is never displaced by Bartholomae, neither is the compositional genre that will decide the prize—it's the travel narrative, but a specific, authentic, highly-determined version of it. He simply substitutes one already-wrote text, the St. Croix narrative, with another, Pratt's. A more interesting substitution might prove replacing the already-written with, say, a *wrotten written* (*"morceaux moisis"*), like, for example, the following travel narrative, William Burroughs's non-entry in Bartholomae's contest; not a Contact Zone piece, but some Special Information Tonic from the Interzone, entitled "Atrophied Preface":

> Why all this waste paper getting The People from one place to another? Perhaps to spare The Reader stress of sudden space shifts and keep him Gentle? And so a ticket is bought, a taxi called, a plane boarded. We are allowed a glimpse into the warm peach-lined cave as She (the airline hostess, of course) leans over us to murmur of chewing gum, dramamine, even nembutal.
>
> "Talk paregoric, Sweet Thing, and I will hear." (218)

Contemporary composition insists on the literary aesthetic of the Contact Zone, but electronic writing operates in the anti-aesthetic of the Interzone,

where "'content' is what the media-conglomerates deliver into one's home via the TV screen and form is the ability to level out or flatten the meaning of all things" (Olsen & Amerika). Burroughs wouldn't dream of translating Pratt, he's actually closer to the St. Croix writer-as-recorder: "There is only one thing a writer can write about: what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing. . . . I am a recording instrument. . . . I do not presume to impose 'story' 'plot' 'continuity'" (221). Limning what is in front of one's senses, tracing what is there on the screen—the writer of the intertext underscores every line with *This is now, this is here, this is me, this is what I wanted you to see* (R.E.M.). The web captures, in glass, this historical moment—the death of the craft of writing and its rebirth as idea (de Duve *Kant* 186). The progressive self-definition of the academy accelerated at an historical juncture much like today. As art-at-large was granted a kind of public credibility by the growth of salons, the academy, fearful that it could no longer control access to the profession, retreated into over-specification, hyper-pedantry. The Web, then, is the New Independents' Salon, Malraux's Museum-Without-Walls—built on the shards of the now-fractal Palace of Modernism. Beuys' dream has come true, everyone can now be curated. Benjamin saw this neutralization or democratization of expertise as one of the implications of mechanical reproduction. Film technology, for example (particularly newsreels and documentaries for Benjamin—though witness Bresson's casts of anyone-whoevers), allowed anyone to be a movie star. The same held true for print technologies:

> For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers. This changed toward the end of the last century. With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific, professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers—at first, occasional ones. It began with the daily press opening to its readers space for "letters to the editor." And today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere. . . . Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. (231-232)

Cinema in the Interzone is a crime-scene haunted by the death of traditional auratic "presence." All films are now read as documentaries; all cinema is *anémic cinéma* (*Salt Seller* 115) (and the anagram in general remains one of the few traditional textual strategies still meaningful). A new given, then:

any person = *any reader*
movie star published writer/expert

People read their world through the glass in front of them and inscribe their interaction. Not exactly meaning their work for the marketplace, as eighteenth century painters did, writers of the electronic intertext still gear their art toward public consumption, data-interaction, supplementation: "email your comments!" website after website implores. The means of production are in the hands of the consumers; through a *mirrorical return* (*Salt Seller* 65), the

specialized knowledge of the academy becomes again increasingly beside-the-point for the now on-going teleintertextual salon. New composing technologies mean the media may not have had time to be practiced, perfected, conventionalized, ritualized. What aesthetic remains lies in capturing, choosing, from *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*, the hurried snapshot of life on the run, not a stylized drawing. "*The important thing then is just* this matter of timing, this snapshot effect" (*Salt Seller* 32).

The readymade narrative, done by anyone-whoever, cannot stay delayed in glass for Modernist composition. Any stretch of found footage is not eligible for Best Documentary. Even though Bartholomae tries to distance himself from the kind of writing as revision taught by "the process movement"—where

> the primary goal was the efficient production of text . . . [in which] revision was primarily addition and subtraction—adding vivid details, for example, and taking out redundancies. The result (or the goal) was to perfect, and by extension, preserve the discourse. (27)

—his goal remains an efficient discourse-production, a perfection and preservation; only now it's Mary Louise Pratt's discourse. There remains this *progression* (even as he tries to distance himself from "the legacy of the liberal tradition in composition" [15]), a process-ion away from the St. Croix narrative—a text which is heart-felt but doesn't articulate the preferred politics of a certain reading—to a better one, in which "a writer would have to ask about and think about, say, the history of North American relations with St. Croix" (27). What Bartholomae doesn't do is *delay* that progression towards the certain style—to see if the canvas is not quite so blank as we think it is, to see if Modernism could take the blank canvas as its ultimate work, the flattest canvas ever. Call it the contact zone of the arts, the point where conception, *anart, arrhe*, meets aura, Modernism, art. Without a delay, a self-negation, a *SUR/cen/SURE*, a meta-irony, the on-going narrative of the discourse's tradition/production is never interrupted; the knowledge-engine never stops. Composition never explores the *possible*, just possible versions of the preferred. The desire of Duchamp's Bride was inscribed as "ignorant . . . blank . . . (with a touch of malice)" (*Salt Seller* 39). But we will define that blank canvas and know it, colonize it (ignoring the touch of malice, not even realizing the *canvas* is really a *glass*). "Knowledge, like the image, was built up in consecutive layers that would reenact the progress made by modernity" (Nesbit "The Language" 355). We care not for words but for knowledge, which we tirelessly pursue: "The question for the writing teacher, then," says Bartholomae, as he races through page after page, never stopping to dwell, "is 'What next?'" (26). The grand irony at the end of his article is his caveat that the compositionist must "be willing to pay attention to common things" (28). Sure, in order to determine what needs to be rarefied, Prattified. Duchamp located "the great trouble with art in this country" in just such an uninterrupted unfolding of tradition, in just such a perfection of a certain way of reading:

> there is no spirit of revolt—no new ideas appearing among the younger artists. They are following along the paths beaten out by their predecessors, trying to do better what their predecessors have already done. In art there is no such thing as perfection. And a creative lull occurs always when artists of a period are satisfied to pick up a predecessor's work where he dropped it and attempt to continue what he was doing. When on the other hand you pick up something from an earlier period and adapt it to your own work an approach can be creative. The result is not new; but it is new insomuch as it is a different approach. (*Salt Seller* 123)

Going back to our algebraic comparisons, the logic for the readymade writings from the Campus of Interzone University is inescapable. Bartholomae's math posits a given:

St. Croix narrative
all student narratives

But under the vibrating hum of Composite City, where *form is the ability to level out or flatten the meaning of all things*, we can set it equal to any reading, on any subject whatever,

St. Croix narrative = *any reading*
all student narratives any subject

That given, we remember, was the same one used for Rodriguez's reading of Hoggart, which allows our final ratio:

Rodriguez = *St. Croix narrative*
Hoggart all student narratives

The vast silent market of the Interzone effects its neutralization. That final algebraic comparison doesn't imply a movement having been made from a student writer to a master writer, a looking-backward; rather both expositions are delayed in a stasis field, in accordance. They both *appear* as writing. As for the bottom terms, materially now anything is possible. As exposition, Rodriguez is any writing whatsoever: like all narratives, sometimes prize-winning, occasionally appearing as *irredeemably corrupt or trivial.* And Hoggart—as possibility—is any readymade data with which a writer interacts. All that would count Rodriguez as prize-worthy now (or Hoggart or Pratt or the "Fern Hill" essay) is taste because, after Benjamin, the technology of mechanical reproduction means anyone-whoever can become a published expert. It is Bartholomae's attempt to otherwise determine this that rings so hollow.

7. Composition after Duchamp is idea-generative, not product-oriented. As data-interaction, its only directive: Take whatever data is recorded (call them, perhaps, these 'having become') and from them make a tracing. If three-dimensional objects give off a two-dimensional shadow, writing is now conceived of as a three-dimensional shadow of a fourth-dimensional process of becoming. As Roché said of Duchamp, "His finest work is his use of time" (Lebel 87). The intertext, moving over time, means writing reconceived of as the teleintertext. Gervais uses the phrase *restricted teleintertext* to capture Duchamp's hypertextual strategies:

> His almost systematic way of exposing at least two locations, two languages, or two sexes through pictorial and literary texts could be called the restricted teleintertext of his oeuvre: "inter" because it makes use of at least two texts; "restricted" because these texts were written by the same person; and "tele" because they are often several decades apart. (Gervais 399)

But instead of a restricted economy of the intertext, we'll have a general one, a world-wide economy-without-walls. Can we allow a writing that might be cracked, unfinished, but that circulates some interesting ideas? It doesn't have to be powerfully or rigorously conceptual (as some find Pratt): "please note that there doesn't have to be a lot of the conceptual for me to like something" (Cabanne 77). Just a touch will do: a drop or two of *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, a small whiff of *Air de Paris* (*Sérum physiologique*), some marble sugar cubes (one lump or two?)—just an easily accessible hit. Bartholomae fetishizes a conceptual ("a certain kind of intellectual project—one that requires me to think out critical problems of language, knowledge, and culture" 24) that's materially limited—imagine a student in his class, say, handing in a urinal as travel documentary (did Mary Louise Pratt do translatable urinals?). Under Duchamp, anyone can be a conceptual artist. The materials are readymade, common-place, easily available. What's involved is finding a new conceptual use: taking a hat rack, for example, putting it on the floor, and calling it *Trébuchet* (*Trap*) is not *materially* difficult. It simply involves picking something up from an earlier period and giving it a new function, a new thought for that object, adapting it to your own work. It's the use-value (rather than the exhibition-value) of fetishism, an unforeseen-use-value:

> it is not for walking that the fetishist 'uses' the shoe. For him it has a use-value that begins, paradoxically, . . . at the very moment it stops working, when it no longer serves locomotion. It is the use-value of a shoe out of service. (Hollier 140)

The hat rack, then, is not a "difficult text" as Bartholomae means it (the "Glass" is, but not in the way he means). It's rooted in the everyday in a way Modernism's program can never be. Rauschenberg, reflecting on his very Duchampian happening "Map Room II" (1965), interrogates the notion of a text(ual material) that's difficult to get; he begins at the Modernist point of limits and possibilities but inflects that setting differently:

> I began that piece by getting some materials to work with—again we have that business of limitations and possibilities. I just got a bunch of tires, not because I'm crazy about tires but because they are so available around here in New York, even on the street. I could be back here in fifteen minutes with five tires. If I were working in Europe, that wouldn't be the material. Very often people ask me about certain repeated images in both my painting and theatre. Now I may be fooling myself, but I think it can be traced to their availability. Take the umbrella . . . After any rainy day, it is hard to walk by a garbage can that doesn't have a broken umbrella in it, and they are quite interesting. I found some

> springs around the corner. I was just putting stuff together—that's the way I work—to see what I could get out of it. I don't start off with any preconceived notion about content of the piece. If there is any thinking, it is more along the line of something happening which suggests something else. If I'm lucky, then the piece builds its own integrity. . . . You just mess around. The springs, for example, made an interesting noise, so I decided to amplify that. . . . [The tires] can be walked in, they can be rolled in, you can roll over them, you can crawl through them. All these things are perfectly obvious. Perhaps tires even have uses that you haven't seen before. What I'm trying to avoid is the academic way of making a dance of theme and variation. I'm interested in exploring all the possibilities inherent in any particular object. (Kostelanetz 83-84)

The most easily available material now is not umbrellas or tires, but electronic information. The institution suspects the commonplace, the ready-made, the anything-whatever, the any-narrative-at-all: transparent trash, like those gangsta definitions, you can just lift right off the Net—aren't there those who consider them "irredeemably corrupt or trivial"? But there are ideas there—*just the same, they move.*

Bartholomae's project uses "student writing as a starting point"; it exists "in relation to academic or high culture" (24). Ultimately, the Modernist focus—in composition as in art—is institutional rather than conceptual. The institution is the aegis under which the project is carried out. Knowledge of the historical apparatus is a prerequisite in order to work within the discipline, learning the style and thinking which result in a Morris Louis or a Louise Pratt. Duchamp's conceptual has nothing to do with the institutional; of what use can be the institution's material reification? Asked in 1966 by Cabanne, "Do you go to museums?" Duchamp replied,

> Almost never. I haven't been to the Louvre for twenty years. It doesn't interest me, because I have these doubts about the value of the judgments which decided that all these pictures should be presented to the Louvre, instead of others which weren't even considered, and which might have been there. So fundamentally we content ourselves with the opinion which says that there exists a fleeting infatuation, a style based on momentary taste; this momentary taste disappears, and, despite everything, certain things still remain. (Cabanne 71)

Our fleeting infatuations are fixed in our field's galleries—more corporate collections, actually, than actual museums, as the works there are the obvious choices (only the already-legitimated are deemed worthy of the well-endowed walls of our semi-corporate academies). *Ways of Reading*, then, is composition's Paine-Webber collection. But there are other panes, other Web-bers. Electronic writing—the gangsta-sample, say—is the kind of raw, indifferent beauty that the profession never institutionalizes (because the larger academic audience has such specific, refined tastes). Duchamp explained the difference between reified institutional history and lived aesthetic pleasure, a use-value

aesthetics rather than the museum's exchange-value. His explanation points to what's missing in the institutionally canonized texts that form our field's defining narrative:

> After forty or fifty years a picture dies, because its freshness disappears. . . . There's a huge difference between a Monet today, which is black as anything, and a Monet sixty or eighty years ago, when it was brilliant, when it was made. Now it has entered into history. . . .
>
> The history of art is something very different from aesthetics. For me, the history of art is what remains of an epoch in a museum, but it's not necessarily the best of that epoch, and fundamentally it's probably even the expression of the mediocrity of the epoch, because the beautiful things have disappeared—the public didn't want to keep them. (67)

"That was then, but now that is gone; it's past" (R.E.M.). Composition's Modernism revels in the trappings of history—but in their exhibition-value, not their use-value (Punks, for example, were interested in history's use-value; they collaged their looks out of a pastiche of various eras' styles). Why Duchamp's influence persists has much to do with the actual works, but it's probably equally the result of the heuristic-value of his aesthetics, the conceptual grammar or logic generated through all the texts—made, chosen, written and spoken (as well as interacted with)—that "Duchamp" names.

The negation/affirmation Bartholomae desires from Bové is displayed wonderfully in Duchamp, whose *prémiere lumiere* shines in his palindromic print as "NON." The force of his negation was the *physical "caustic" [vitriol type]* called "Possible" which he pursued through practically every compositional project, a caustic whose strength could dissolve notions of image and text, *burning up all aesthetics and callistics* (*Salt Seller* 73). Jasper Johns testifies that "his persistent attempts to destroy frames of reference altered our thinking, established new units of thought, 'a new thought for that object'" (Cabanne 110). Comparably, the Bartholomae/Greenberg negation/affirmation seeks simply to stabilize: it negates other art and artistic strategies in order to refine a unique definition of composition in a specific field. And they would refine desire, as well. Modernism needs a desire-d reading; there is an erotic force at the heart of these compositionists, a repetitive dynamic designed to lead to pleasure. With Greenberg, it's the smell of linseed oil, the almost palpable feel of the stretched canvas's flatness, a flatness his gaze could get lost in ("The flatness toward which modernist painting orients itself can never be an utter flatness. The heightened sensitivity of the picture plane may not permit sculptural illusion, or *trompe-l'oeil*, but it does and must permit optical illusion" [73]); with Bartholomae, it is the tracing, the iteration of the style and content of difficult texts ("I confess I admire those dense sentences" ["Inventing" 159]); for Duchamp, it's the steady hum of the precision optics—disks, palindromic/anagrammatic word-play, glass stared into for about an hour. Each strategy locates an incarnated desire; a kind of conceptualist *frottage* of the fleshy gray matter to

produce the expected pleasure. But Duchamp allows eroticism's universality to subsume his project, making it a new "ism" to replace other "Literary schools [like] Symbolism, Romanticism" (Cabanne 88). Bartholomae/Greenberg could never allow eroticism to replace their critical, material practice, a practice specified by the frame: "how and why one might work with the space on the page" (Bartholomae 21); "the limiting conditions with which a marked-up surface must comply in order to be experienced as a picture" (Greenberg 73). Anything else is dismissed as inappropriate or irrelevant to their focus: "We move the furniture in the classroom, collaborate on electronic networks, take turns being the boss, but we do not change writing" (16); "for the sake of its own autonomy painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture" (Greenberg 70). We know what the institution's last word on desire-charged e-writing is; witness Bartholomae's article on electronic conferencing, in which any benefits it has (benefits seen not socially but institutionally, students "beginning with more familiar forms of language and seeing how they might be put to use in an academic setting . . . a transfer of this mode to written work that was officially 'writing'" [242, 252]) are underscored by the final caveat, "a threat to academic values" (262). There is moving furniture, e-chatter, sculpture, even—then there is composition, whose institutional value is now seen as potentially threatened by new practices.

Bartholomae's St. Croix writer has written something—a potentially useful memoir of a time when a writer learned something about him/herself and others, perhaps; a narrative, a document(ary) of sorts—but it's not composition. It's like a drawing on the walls of Lascaux when compared by Greenberg with an Abstract Expressionist canvas; one is simply image, the other can be called a picture. Pre-Modernist texts suffer from being composed in ignorance of the governing conventions of the genre:

> The Paleolithic painter or engraver could disregard the norm of the frame and treat the surface in both a literally and a virtually sculptural way because he made images rather than pictures, and worked on a support whose limits could be disregarded because . . . nature gave them to the artist in an unmanageable way. But the making of pictures, as against images in the flat, means the deliberate choice and creation of limits. This deliberateness is what Modernism harps on. (76)

Bataille, of course, is a different sort of art critic from Greenberg. His response to the Lascaux "images" helps distinguish Modernism as an historical "ism" or literary school, one which compares a to b and gets solution c (*deliberate choice of limits*); as opposed to eroticism, which subsumes distinctions between a and b (*picture and image*) under the more general sign: "But Upper Paleolith man, *Homo sapiens*, is now known to us through signs that move us not only in their exceptional beauty (his paintings are often marvelous). These signs affect us more through the fact that they bring us abundant evidence of his erotic life" (31). Bartholomae and Greenberg prefer expensive fetishes; they limit their erotic *plaisir du texte* to exclusive, privileged materials. In their

Modernism, the certain aesthetic judgment which distinguishes between a picture and a successful one had to be preserved. Their space for composition was that infra-thin line between writing and good writing, words and knowledge; it was a very special, *definitive* space in which the artist could work. Bartholomae: "the space on the page . . . do[ing] work there and not somewhere else" (18). Greenberg: it "would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure . . . to fit drawing and design more explicitly to the rectangular shape of the canvas" (68, 69). Duchamp abandoned that definitive space, the traditional forms, limits, concerns, and materials. He went totally off the page, out of that space, allowing thought to dictate its own laws, the resultant *becoming* being anything-whatever: "Take. these 'having become' and from them make a tracing" (*Salt Seller* 33). He's interested in the appearance mainly to trace the apparition (the fact of appearing, the status as art): "In general, the picture is the apparition of an appearance" (*Salt Seller* 30). The answer is not a solution (not "what makes writing *good*"), but a sign (what makes *writing*). Bartholomae's *given* is a solution, "write like Pratt," not a sign. Such composition busies itself with the failings of a tracing's not having become (as it would have had it be); instead of tracing a becoming, he urges students to re-trace a became. So, although he insists on "the comparison of Stephen Toulmin and a freshman" (17)—a promising equivalence, that:

Stephen Toulmin
freshman

—its purpose is not so ideas can become a delayed sign, but rather to find a solution, *c*, to an item in composition's problem-set. His given yields a solution enabling us to use Bové's critique of Toulmin on our students, in order to get Pratt-text from them: we can now tell them, in so many words, "Next time, don't be so careless about interrogating your intellectual function within the regime of truth" (17). Composition as a set of problems for which we articulate solutions? Duchamp: "There is no solution because there is no problem" (Roché 85). Bartholomae's distinction—between himself and the "same old routine" of composition—is Greenberg's distinction between picture and image. The St. Croix narrative might stand for all student narratives, but it's clearly not a travel narrative in the Pratt style. Until it's subjected to the text-production strategies of cultural criticism, it remains unfortunately a "missionary narrative" (27). Bartholomae claims the same vanguard status for his aesthetic as Greenberg; but when the truly avant-garde art showed up—say, Frank Stella or Andy Warhol or, yes, Duchamp—Modernist Painting squirmed. It was for Greenberg what it is for Bartholomae, a question of a limited artistic context—the way the space is framed. The "cultural . . . social" context-in-general was not the specific, aesthetic determinant of Modernism:

> All art depends in one way or another on context, but there's a great difference between an aesthetic and a non-aesthetic context. . . . From the start

> avant-gardist art resorted extensively to effects depending on an extra-aesthetic context. Duchamp's first Readymades, his bicycle wheel, his bottlerack, and later on his urinal, were not new at all in configuration; they startled when first seen only because they were presented in a fine art context, which is a purely cultural and social, not an aesthetic or artistic context. (Greenberg, qtd. in de Duve *Kant* 270)

8. Duchamp saw the problem with Modernist, criteria-based taste: "one stores up in oneself such a language of tastes, good or bad, that when one looks at something, if that something isn't an echo of yourself, then you do not even look at it" (Cabanne 94). Krauss, too, reads the desire-occluded retrojection which overlays the supposedly discerning clarity of Modernism's projective vision; for her, the blank canvas/page/screen is already filled by one's own viewing apparati, "already organized, already saturated by the lattice through which perspective will map the coordinates of external space" (54). The eye, the brain, are fleshy as well as neural, body as well as mind; hence, "the gaze is experienced as being saturated from the very start . . . the perspective projection is not felt as a transparency opening onto a world but as a skin, fleshlike, dense, and strangely separable from the object it fixates" (54). "The body exerts its demands," Krauss continues, furthering Duchamp's notion of how taste becomes constructed, intrusive: "The eye accommodates those demands by routinizing vision, by achieving a glance that can determine in an instant the purpose to which each object can be put. It's not a look that 'sees,' it's a look that sorts" (141). Greenberg, then, doesn't see Frank Stella, he sorts out non-flat art; Bartholomae doesn't see the St. Croix paper, he sorts out non-Pratt art. Duchamp pursued any avenue, as long as it contained a hint of the conceptual. Asked what sort of art he might make if he were still making art, Duchamp answered generically, conceptually: "something which would have significance. . . . It would have to have a direction, a sense. That's the only thing that would guide me" (Cabanne 106). Art that, just the same, moved. "Make a painting of *frequency*," is the note he jots to himself (and us) in 1914. That's the trouble with composition, it doesn't move, its timing is lousy. There is past and present in composition, but no future. The readymade was "a kind of rendezvous" (*Salt Seller* 32). Composition's gaze on student writing directs backward, towards the already-written, towards Pratt. The time-frame, then, is nostalgia—for aura, for presence; the perspective is retrojective. Without future, without frequency, composition is not three, it is simply two—the number of the double, the copy, the clone. This bars its move to the post-beautiful: "beauty is always the result of a resemblance" (Hollier 145). Writing becomes re-issue, founding and stamping, re-casting; like Arturo Schwartz, creating his new (highly-prized) sets of Duchamp's by-then lost or discarded readymades. Imagine—re-creating the readymade . . . composition as revising material into the alreadymade! "What is taste for you?" Cabanne asks. Duchamp's answer: "A habit. The repetition of something already accepted. If

you start something over several times, it becomes taste. Good or bad, it's the same thing, it's still taste" (Cabanne 48). Duchamp wanted art that moved—which is what drew him to chess: "it is like designing something," he said, "or constructing a mechanism of some kind by which you win or lose. . . the thing itself is very, very plastic" (*Salt Seller* 136).

This paper, then, is a plea for composition to be seen as writing-at-large, a delay in the glass we now inscribe as our writing medium. Let our default setting be the *document, rich text format*—such word processing terms, like *text file*, illustrate technology's ability to neutralize the ideological accrual of discursive genres. (*One may become a member* of the Teleintertexual Indeps *upon filing . . .*) The *document* differs from the compositional project envisioned by Bartholomae in the way use-value differs from exchange-value. "Fresh Widow and Why Not Sneeze" (1920) marked the point at which, according to Lebel, Duchamp "reached the limit of the unesthetic, the useless, and the unjustifiable" (47). As Roché noted, Duchamp's "gadget . . . wasn't useful." Of course not: the non-productive value of writing is its use-value, its inexchangeability. "Use-value cannot outlast use" (Hollier 136), it's only realized in consumption, in being used (up): *talk paregoric, Sweet Thing, and I will listen.* Duchamp, like Bataille's sun, is a permanent expenditure; his gadget is a word-engine that never stops running. The "Glass" was *not to be looked at for itself* (exhibition-value), *but only as a function* (use-value). Composition is mainly about preserving form at the expense of function, or limiting writing to an endlessly simulated exchange-function—dipping back into the same River Pratt each time, coming back with the same prized treasure. It's museumification, exchange-value as exhibition-value: "The same diversion that defines the market holds for the museum as well: objects enter it only once abstracted from the context of their use-value" (Hollier 136). Composition stalls on that distinction, "the opposition which dictates that one *uses* a tool and *looks* at a painting" (Hollier 137, emphasis mine). It's the difference between the way a Lascaux ritual-image was used vs. a PICTURE. Kosuth on Duchamp: "With the unassisted Ready-made, art changed its focus from the form of the language to what was being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function" (80). Bartholomae errs in taking his favorite painting to St. Croix in order to teach composition, "the thing out of place is never the real thing" (Hollier 138). Cult-value, Benjamin warns, is lost in exhibition-value. Pratt becomes the transposed fetish, losing all use-value; it "no longer works as a fetish: it has been discarded and framed to be put on the market; it has been degraded to become a commodity. It is no longer used but collected" (Hollier 147). The modern museum's curatorial strategy involves not time but location; it's "the Museum of Ethnography . . . exotic, remote in space" (Hollier 151n). The Museum of the Contact Zone, not the Interzone's Museum-Without-Walls, endlessly exhibiting its impermanent collection of readymades (*what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*), done by the Society of Teleintertextual

Independents. Writing there is consumed on the spot, clicked through—a non-gallery tour, with no time for the literary hmm, just a quick series of wows; the tour itself becoming a kind of chance-inflected auto-performance art, a happening fashioned from easily-available, already-inscribed materials.

9. Bartholomae and I have different projects. He wants to entrench, I want to dissolve. He wants the specific, I want the generic. He teaches making, I prefer choosing. He'd like a writer to write like Mary Louise Pratt, I want writers who write like anyone-whoever. He's concerned with how one works with the space on the page, but I work on glass, already-inscribed glass behind which I can see the world pass by. He starts with the readymade and moves to the retrograde. I would start and stop with the readymade—delaying it, there on the screen, in glass, "capable of all the innumerable eccentricities" (*Salt Seller* 27). If he would just delay them rather than solve them, I could agree with Bartholomae on all of his givens: the travel narrative, for example, can stand for all writing; just as Benjamin let the film documentary stand for all art in the era of the mechanical composition. Whether prize-winning essay or rap slang, it's all a document-record, in *writte*, of a journey taken, field-notes from on the road. But I confess I learn more from those saucy travelogues that return from cool sites with new ideas (*some stuff from the bay*, say), rather than watching some janky slides from a trip I've taken a hundred times, stock scenes accompanied by an already-written political exegesis. I want an aesthetic judgment, of course; but I want to judge a student's art as art, not as "critical practice" (17). Actually, I would prefer to judge it as erotic practice. Duchamp's eroticism has infinite use-value in a post-disciplinary composition. The disciplines, the professions, lie buried in the "Glass", in the Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries; but the *oculist charts* give those disciplinary bachelors another chance, so the 9 *malic moulds*—called by Duchamp "Priest, Department-store delivery boy, Gendarme, Cuirassier, Policeman, Undertaker, Flunkey, Busboy, Station-master" (*Salt Seller* 21); or named by "Me Craig Harrison Cincinnati Ohio Baby" as "G-DOGG HOE PIMP PLAYA WIGGER SKATER HUSTLER MAC TAGGER" (DOUGLAS_KOLLER)—finally have a chance to become ballers, to get some game, to replace their academic craft with mechanical precision, enabling their cemetery to become *eros's matrix*. Composition as I see it has now become a delay in glass, all writing is screen-writing. There is the artifact, which has been written about in notes, which refer to other artifacts, which contain ideas worked over previously or written about to friends, etc.—the whole text double-exposed by images and sound-bites. "Nude Descending a Staircase", that explosion in a shingle factory, represents composition as photochronography, each segment an exploded detail, "a ready-made continuously in motion . . . a sort of perpetual motion like that of a solar clock" (Lebel 68). It's writing become real-timed, e-conferenced and—mailed, a continuously updated home-page with running discussion list; links keep recurring, moved through back and forth, refolding back on themselves, a *kind of rendezvous* awaits the

reader, a *mirrorical return.* A bunch of "having becomes" that together form a tracing, a locale.

All I demand of writing is that it have *writte*; that it expose itself, announce itself, appear as writing. Writing stripped bare. Writing that wows me, dazzles me, that announces, "you're coming onto something so fast, so numb, that you can't even feel" (R.E.M.). Writing from a vast, universal field, Cage's Kansas prairie (or is it Burroughs's?), where language, thought, and vision act upon one another; panoramic writing, filled with all sorts of wonderful, seemingly useless treasures. The text I write becomes an interaction with those other texts, picking and choosing what's useful, building my own restricted teleintertext. The "What is Composition?" of teleintertextual writing can be pulled anywhere off the glass. At the end of that gangsta list is a call for more definitions which reads like a new textual strategy (but an old one, actually—it reads like a note from "The Green Box"):

> *Send me mail to include a new definition. . . . Make something up.*
> *Please write Definitions in HTML Format. You can include links, pictures, or whatever else you want. All I am going to do is cut and paste.*

And so, the *mirrorical return* to the concept of the *assisted readymade.* The Interzone is here, now, but I know I won't live there forever; just like I know electronic writing as now practiced will lose its charm (Duchamp writes to Stieglitz: "You know exactly how I feel about photography. I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable" [*Salt Seller* 165]). Until then, sampling, linking, glass, wires, photo-transfer, sound-scan—these are the materials of composition-in-general, the teleintertext; composition as I know it and love it: as blueprint, How-To Book, a sort of catalogue or "a sort of letter-box" (*Salt Seller* 38), *just putting stuff together—that's the way I work—to see what I could get out of it; very very plastic.* Writing full of new definitions, double-exposures, writing across all curriculums, *kicks in all genres* (Cabanne 82). *Return trips on the buffer. The trash of life. Cheap construction. Tin, ropes, wire.* Amazing and forgettable, wonderful and oddly hollow; new adventures in hi-fi. Writing I strive to inscribe in my own thoroughly-mediated academic glass. Writing I love, yes, as much as a fetishist loves a shoe, as much as some people love (this is Duchamp's term, right? the bachelors' grinder? or was it Rrose's, maybe?) *sexual chocolate.*