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“Women’ in Dada: Elsa, Rrose, and Charlie”

From Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998): 142-172

In his 1918 Dada manifesto, Tristan Tzara stated the sources of “Dadaist Disgust”: “Morality is an injection of chocolate into the veins of all men....I proclaim the opposition of all cosmic faculties to [sentimentality,] this gonorrhoea of a putrid sun issued from the factories of philosophical thought.... Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is Dada.”¹ The dadaists were antagonistic toward what they perceived as the loss of European cultural vitality (through the “putrid sun” of sentimentality in prewar art and thought) and the hypocritical bourgeois morality and family values that had supported the nationalism culminating in World War I.² Conversely, in Hugo Ball's words, Dada “drives toward the indwelling, all-connecting life nerve,” reconnecting art with the class and national conflicts informing life in the world.³ Dada thus performed itself as radically challenging the apoliticism of European modernism as well as the debased, sentimentalized culture of the bourgeoisie through the destruction of the boundaries separating the aesthetic from life itself. But Dada has paradoxically been historicized and institutionalized as “art,” even while it has also been privileged for its attempt to explode the nineteenth-century romanticism of Charles Baudelaire's “art for art's sake.”⁴

Moving against the grain of most art historical accounts of Dada, which tend to focus on and fetishize the objects produced by those associated with Dada,⁵ I explore here what I call the *performativity* of Dada: its opening up of artistic production to the vicissitudes of reception such that the process of making meaning is itself marked as a political—and, specifically, gendered—act. I suggest that it was in New York that Dada, before it knew itself as such, challenged bourgeois morality in the most aggressive way through the opening of art to the erotic exchange of interpretation, in particular via the sexualization or eroticization of the subjects and objects of art. Per Marcel Duchamp's well-known pun, “eros, that's life,”⁶ the New York Dadaists—in particular Duchamp himself—eroticized “everyday life”; they charged the art-making and viewing processes with an eroticism that necessarily exposed the invested and thus politicized aspects of meaning and value production, including those relating to the determination of artistic subjectivity itself.⁷ This erotic politicization, enacted most powerfully through dramatic self-performances, worked in explosive antagonism to the veiled bourgeois moralism, utopian formalism, and romantic sentimentalism that (as Tzara noted) had reigned previously in the European art world.

The New York Dada artists who enacted the sexualization of “everyday life” through performances of themselves signaled the dislocation of the subject during a period of devastating international war. Furthermore, these enactments marked the incursion not only of war but commodity culture into bourgeois life in the Western world at the beginning of the twentieth century. They sexualized and particularized the subject of the artist, performing themselves into the forbidden realms of “sentimental” femininity, feminized masculinity, and queer sexuality. The most radical Dada act, I argue through these performative self-enactments, is the queering and/or feminizing of the conventionally masculinized, heterosexualized, and generally veiled figure of the artist.

In particular, I interpret here the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's bizarre, sexually ambiguous self-performances in the streets of New York and Duchamp's masquerade as

a woman, "Rose Sélavy," in the well-known series of photographs by Man Ray⁸ as dramatic performances of Dada. Charles Demuth's images of non-heterosexualized male desire mark another point of resistance to the more conventional, institutionalized notion of Dada (via its objects) as a critique of bourgeois institutions.⁹ As such, I argue that these artists' confusion of gender and overt sexualizations of the artist/viewer relationship challenged post-Enlightenment subjectivity and aesthetics far more pointedly than did dadaist paintings and drawings, which only partially addressed the divisions that privileged art as separate from life in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century romantic imagination.

Woman/machine

Having recently arrived in the U.S., going AWOL from his French Army assignment, Picabia reconnected with like-minded Marius de Zayas, a Mexican-American caricature artist, poet, and impresario whom Picabia had met in Paris. De Zayas's Modern Gallery opened with a show of works by Picasso, Braque, Stieglitz, as well as a group of paintings and mechanical drawings by Picabia. One of these, *Viola Elle*, was also reproduced alongside de Zayas's own mechanical negotiation of the feminine, *Femme!*, in the avant-garde journal 291.¹⁰

Francis Picabia, *Violá Elle*, 1915

Here she is, an incomplete tubular machine: "she" is simply the HOLE of the target, whose reaction to the shot wad of fire from the gun initiates her own continual penetration.

Marius de Zayas, *Femme!*, 1915

A Woman! comprising a man's anxious desires. Her sassy arm proclaims its debt to its male author—"I see ... how she loves to be a straight line traced by a mechanical hand"; she is, naturally, "harebrained" (her "cerebral atrophy" a function of her brute physicality), and her dadaism is articulated through male desire: she "exists only in the exaggeration of her jouissances [orgasmic pleasures] and in the consciousness of possession.... I see her only in pleasure."¹¹

Woman/machine: for the Euro-Mexican avant-garde imagination, the signifier of Americanized industrialization and commodity culture, with its terrifying (emasculating?) mechanization of sex.

The eroticizing thrust of New York Dada arose in relation to a number of interrelated forces. In New York, Dada was largely a French importation, inspired primarily by the enigmatic erotic/aesthetic energies of Duchamp and the bluntly sexual mechanomorphic imagery of the French/Spanish/ Cuban expatriate Picabia. Along with the French artist Jean Crotti, and Arthur Cravan, an English pugilist/writer/magazine impresario (and supposed nephew of Oscar Wilde), these artists left an increasingly barren Parisian art scene and a Europe torn asunder by war to come to the "New World." All of these relatively flamboyant artists were exoticized/eroticized in the eyes of the more puritanical and conservative members of the American art scene. Escaping World War I, the male immigrant artists generally saw New York City as a site of renewal for their artistic (or, as the case may be, anti-artistic) impulses: "If only America would realize," Duchamp opined, "that the art of Europe is finished—dead, and that America is the country of the art of the future."¹²

Europe was perceived as a wasteland, both in terms of its literal devastation and in terms of the very attitudes of nationalism that had led to war-attitudes that many artists perceived in terms of an anti individualism damaging to artistic creation. In Europe, stated French émigré painter Albert Gleizes in 1915, the "individual is being crushed, or welded into a vast instrument to be swayed by the despots who control all destiny there today."¹³ The United States, conversely, was at least initially fantasized as the fresh, newly acculturated land of individualism, where the creative impulses of the artist would presumably be nurtured or left alone rather than stifled, compared to the sentimentalized, feminized, and bourgeoisified cultural scene in Europe.¹⁴

Gleizes's observations mask a more specific set of concerns: clearly, World War I traumatized European masculinity in particular (a masculinity already weakened by the mushrooming bureaucracy of the increasingly alienating capitalist regime). As Klaus Theweleit has suggested in *Male Fantasies*, his brilliant study of fascist masculinity, the very nationalism endemic to the war and its aftermath (including the rise of fascism in Germany) was itself a masculinizing reaction against the perceived "feminization" of culture by the commodification of everyday life. Masculinity during this period took its armored, militaristic shape in opposition to the threatening flows of capitalism, themselves metaphorized through the bodies of Jews, women, and communists.¹⁵

As I have argued at length elsewhere in relation to Rose Sélavy, during this period commodity culture itself became associated with femininity. Women were the primary consumers in an expanding market economy during World War I. Female bodies became the purveyors of commercial value in increasingly ubiquitous print advertisements, such that broad anxieties about the collapse of individualism and the corresponding threat to masculinity were often articulated by male artists and by popular culture in relation to the gender-ambiguous figure of the "New Woman" or *garçonne* (girl/boy).¹⁶ The dangerous, even masculinized eroticism of the New Woman marked the collapse of the boundaries between male and female—and those separating the "separate spheres" that had kept "proper" women out of the public arena in nineteenth-century Europe.¹⁷

In the case of New York Dada, artists such as Picabia and Man Ray articulated their antagonism toward bourgeois culture largely in terms of mechanical tropes that encoded the anxieties of this threatened masculinity in relation to American industrial capitalism. This encoding had a particular resonance in terms of gender: while critics could claim a masculinizing function for the shift of culture from a decadent, depleted Europe to the "virile" site of American culture (one critic remarked that "This shifting of field from Europe to America implies a ceaseless alertness which proves art virile and assertive"¹⁸), Picabia and Man Ray articulated the forms of the Americanized machine as explicitly feminine.¹⁹ The feminized machine imagery of these two artists might be interpreted, per Theweleit's formulation, in relation to the masculinity desire to contain the threatening flow of femininity and the de-individualizing tendency of machine-driven commodity culture (even within a culture that was supposed to nurture masculine individualism).²⁰

The New Woman bore the attributes of both women (she was, after all, anatomically female) and men (she was threateningly independent, sexually in charge, even—perhaps—a lesbian, and so doubly dangerous to the heterosexual masculine matrix of sexual difference). The Americanized New Woman, mapped onto the feminized machine image, figured the threat of industrial capitalism and the bourgeoisification of culture to Western masculinity.²¹ It is only

with Duchamp that the machine enacts a two-way, bi-gendered flow, mapping gender as an effect of social processes rather than their predeterminate foundation.

Phallic Woman

*Man Ray (1890-1976), American-born son of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, finally finding a niche for himself as avant-garde artist (moving from New Jersey, where he had consorted with a motley group of anarchists and artists, to New York), immediately becomes attached to the glamorous Europeans Duchamp and Picabia. Like them he's supported somewhat by Alfred Stieglitz and staunchly by Katherine Dreier: two older Americans of German background and temperament who take pleasure in the shenanigans of these young male proto-dadaists.*²²

Man Ray, Catherine Barometer, 1920

*An almost-woman-sized construction consisting of a metal tube attached to a color chart on top of a washboard, nestled on a base of steel wool and labeled "SHAKE WELL BEFORE USING, Catherine Barometer. " The rod promises to measure the wetness of the air (dryer today.?) against the range of colors, associated more closely with aesthetic than meteorological pursuits. The older woman patron, an artist as well and certainly a "New Woman " of sorts, is reduced to signifiers of domestic labor, steel wool standing in for her pubic region, which inappropriately-and terrifyingly-sprouts an industrial-strength metal phallus. As phallic woman, this barometric measure of Catherine (deliberately misspelled?) measures also the artist's anxiety about being a "kept Man [Ray], "dependent on his wealthy and somewhat imperious (if also, Man Ray would suggest, somewhat aesthetically clueless) backer.*²³

Performative Gender/Machinic Subjectivity

*Duchamp (1887-1968), the sexy (to U.S. eyes), slender, Frenchified avant-gardist was famous via his *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912; shown at the Armory Show in 1913) before he ever hit these shores in 1915.²⁴ Seemingly beloved by all, he produced effect both through his work and, at least as important, through his presence in New York (intermittently from 1915 to his death in 1968): "The life of Duchamp more than that of any other artist makes up part of his oeuvre."²⁵ Duchamp's subjectivity is gendered but performative, dislocated, yet still fully authorial; it is moving toward the loosened, decentralized machinic subjectivity ("processual and singularizing") of the postmedia, postmodern age.²⁶*

Marcel Duchamp, Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even), 1915-1923

Huge mechanized "portrait" of the impossibility of consummation, the breakdown of conventional hierarchized gender relations and hetero-sexual erotic exchange. The Bride, puffed up, waiting, exhaling her wistful, milky cloud above the strict horizon line dividing her definitively from the bachelors (this line is also the clothes stripped off in the haste to consummate). Aided by the chugging wheel of the gliding water mill/ chariot, and the flaccid mechanics of the coffee grinder,

the bachelors stand, sadly, in "uniforms and liveries" (hackneyed ex-soldiers hoping to cop a feel or a look), spewing impotent and "illuminating" love gas through the sieves. The gas dazzles downward into liquid ("splash!") then upward through the oculist witnesses, who look on, oculae providing a transfer point for the now intertwined subject/object relations of the Mariée and the Celibataires (the two sides of the self as well as of the self/other dyad).

Through its performative, proto-machinic enactment of gendered subjectivities, Duchamp's Large Glass explores rather than represses the ambivalence that structures the engagements and clanking "flows" of industrial/erotic energies, an ambivalence that threatens always to rupture their clear path to "production" (which utopically seeks to replace the mess of procreation).²⁷ While Duchamp thus maps without congealing capitalism's dangerous freeing of libidinal flows and gender boundaries, Man Ray and Picabia rather faithfully trace and reify the anxious lines of a projected female body/machine-as-container-of-the-uncontrollable-flowsof-commodity-culture: the iron-bodied "Catherine" with her impotent phallus defuses the "feminization" of culture during the Victorian era and subsequent periods²⁸; Picabia's mechanical "girl born without a mother" images both replace women's role in procreation with a model of god-like creation and ensure that the "girl" will be around for the whims of the remaining world of men.²⁹

Woman/Commodity

Man Ray's dadaist objects are violently ambivalent on a conceptual/ideological level (if also aesthetically rather clumsy); tellingly, they conflate gender politics and the complex politics of commodity culture.

Man Ray, New York or Export Commodity, 1920

Metal ball bearings in glass olive jar. Domestic container filled with hard, unguiving metal spheres (paradoxically, these little turgid balls grease the machinery, making it flow; here, they clog the orifice of the phallic jar). Stuffed jar/olives, pistons thrusting in and out-New York itself as a commodity (feminized) to be exported as so much cultural "stuff" to reinvigorate the European spirit.

Man Ray, Homme (also known as Femme) 1918

Open, penetrable cage of thin metal whose purpose-beating eggs (chicken ova, unfertilized) -is domestic. Yet, hanging downward from its gears and handle, it is sac-like (doubled. two sacs) and vaguely phallic. Man Ray couldn't decide on its "gender."

How radical are these objects and pictures that pretend to destroy the aesthetic and its bourgeois pretensions?—to join art irrevocably to life itself? Displayed and honored as objects of visual and contemplative pleasures (connoisseur's delights) the objects inform New York Dada, a "movement" constructed more or less retrospectively by European dadaists and their followers (including museum personnel and art historians)—a movement that itself becomes a greased wheel in the machine of art history and its institutions. Perhaps the best lesson, taught by the *maitre* Duchamp, is that in fact there is no way out of the circuits of desire that commodity culture puts into play. The modernist subject is irrevocably destabilized by the very mechanics of

capitalism that were engineered precisely to support and sustain its Cartesian dream of centered intentionality. In view of this state of affairs, Duchamp apparently decided to celebrate the very “feminization” of subjectivity—its opening to gendered and sexualized flows—that patriarchy fears as a consequence of the commodification of everyday life.

Duchamp, in fact, served as a desired object for many of the artists now termed New York dadaists. In the United States, as a seemingly sophisticated French artist with his finger on the pulse of the Parisian avant-garde, Duchamp—in his own quiet way—I triumphed. Both as an object of artistic/spectatorial/art historical desire and as a performer of (from an American point of view) an unconventional “masculinity,” Duchamp challenged the structures of the art world so profoundly that, by the early 1960s and beyond, he was taken increasingly frequently as the heroic (if coy and not typically masculine) “origin” of postmodern art in the United States.³⁰

Through his very life-as-art and art-as-life, Duchamp demonstrated art-making and art interpretation to be components in a circuit of erotically invested desires, with meaning itself contingent on the sexually inflected exchange between the subjects and objects of art. While it was Freud who remarked that the struggle for meaning between subjects/objects is necessarily an “erotic” exchange (“we [know] none but sexual objects”³¹), it was Duchamp who extrapolated this in terms of the process by which art comes to have meaning. As he stated in his well-known speech of 1957, “The Creative Act”: “[T]he phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art ... is comparable to a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of an esthetic osmosis.”³²

Man/ Woman/”Eros”

Duchamp portrays himself in a complex array of gendered and obliquely eroticized subjectivities, the most famous of which is fixed is the group of photographs taken by Man Ray, soon thereafter to join the discursive field Duchamp labeled “Rose Sélavy.”

Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, *Rose Sélavy* and cover of *New York Dada* (c. 1920-1921)

*Duchamp's performance as a bourgeois female (New Woman? garçonne?), object of male/female desires, flamboyantly transgresses masculine fears of the incursion of femininity. Pictured on the (imaginary) commercial product, “Belle Haleine” (beautiful breath) perfume and, in turn, on the premiere issue of *New York Dada*, she gives value (through her celebrity appeal) to both “products. “She is also multiply fetishized: photographic image as fetish; woman-as-image as fetish; woman-as-commodity as fetish; perfume and magazine as commodity fetishes; Duchamp/author as fetish; *New York Dada* as art historical fetish. An endless exchange of values of the most mutable kind.³³ The art-making/ viewing system is itself marked as an economically and erotically based system of exchange. We are made subjects of, drawn into, Duchamp's engendering play of himself as subject and object of art.³⁴*

Along with Rose, Elsa (the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, 1874-1927)—a quintessential New Woman who was fiercely independent of her bourgeois German family, and masculine in her lack of “feminine” shame and her writerly and performative self-confidence—unhinged the European masculinity that sought to confirm itself elsewhere.³⁵ Having moved to

the United States just before the war, trailing after her lost love (ex-husband Felix Greve), settling in New York around 1913, Elsa (*née* Ploetz) married the Baron Leopold von Freytag-Loringhoven, who gave her not much more than her impressive name (captured by the French while attempting to return to Germany to fight in the war, he killed himself in prison camp). All-too-fully financially independent (a true Germanic *garçonne* and extremely poverty-stricken), the Baroness began to make a meager living through the *pose*—as an artist's model—and through shoplifting.

The Baroness, a maverick writer with a wicked crush on Duchamp, performed herself in dramatically unglued personifications: she moved throughout the city with shaved and painted scalp, wearing headdresses made of bird cages and wastepaper baskets, celluloid curtain rings as bracelets, assorted tea balls attached to her bust, spoons on her hat, a taillight for a bustle.³⁶ The Baroness's fixation on Duchamp (“Marcel is the man I want”³⁷) marks her perception of their compatibility as artistic transgressors: both performed Dada in the deepest way. Rather than represent Dada concepts—such as the eroticized woman-as-machine of Man Ray's and Picabia's numerous works—the Baroness lived them, and it is thus not incidental that in 1922 she was identified as the embodiment of Dada itself: “the first American dada ... she is the only one living anywhere who dresses dada, loves dada, lives dada.”³⁸

Given the Baroness's perhaps too total identification with the anti-aesthetic, boundary-breaking nonsense of Dada, it is perhaps grotesquely fitting that, while Picabia, Man Ray, Jean Crotti, and others went on to more or less successful careers making objects (with Duchamp reserving himself for posterity³⁹), the Baroness self-destructed, dying at the early age of fifty-three after returning to Europe in the 1920s and living in abject poverty for several years. Performing herself across boundaries—as penniless woman-for-sale, New Woman-artist, mannish lover-of-Duchamp, outlandishly androgynous streetwalker, a proud feminist dependent on male support⁴⁰—she became increasingly unbounded and ultimately “disappeared,” a victim of, in her words, “my true honest love nature-and my unfitness to deal with the world - unprotected.”⁴¹

Too Strictly “Sex”

An artist and writer too, the Baroness took the ultimate risk of riding the almost invisible line between subject and object, woman as artist and woman as object (body as commodity). “I was too strictly ‘sex’” the Baroness wrote in her stunning (if schizophrenic) autobiography.⁴² The line finally disappeared when she returned to Europe and died, probably from insanity- or depression-induced suicide.

Man Ray, Baroness, 1920

She is mannish, hatted, grim expression looking off as if to say, “What do I owe you now?” Her feminine brooch fights with the masculine hat and houndstooth jacket—who's to say which will win out, if either?

Letter from Man Ray to Tristan Tzara showing a photograph of the Baroness, 1922

The anatomically female body bared shamelessly, crotch shaved, arms defiantly splayed for maximal viewing effect, legs strongly planted and firm. Here, she's Man's letter “A” of “l’Amerique,” the garçonne who seems American (because of

her scary independence?) even though she's not. The Baroness's body (her performed self) signifies Americanness/Dada/the stripping bare of the bride of capitalism.

Baroness, God, c. 1917 (in a photograph by Morton Schamberg)⁴³

The penis/phallus, ultimate signifier for the transcendent ruler of all, is contorted into a pretzel of plumbing (the site, after all, through which passes the detritus of the basest of human functions). Brilliantly turning the tables on the woman-as-machine trope, the piece insists on the link between industrialism and masculinity (yet there's that sensuous, feminine curve to these pipes ...).⁴⁴

As Francis Naumann has discovered, the Baroness made a plaster cast of a penis that she used to shock all the "old maids" she met.⁴⁵ One could argue that this fake penis signaled the Baroness's adoption of phallic attributes (as New Woman), but also that it exposed the penis as phallus, as a transportable rather than a fixed, biologically determined guarantor of phallic privilege.⁴⁶ It was for this transgression as well, perhaps, that the Baroness, who violently transgressed conventional notions of Euro-American femininity, had to disappear: for, even within Dada itself, such a blatant, parodic symbolization of the continuing (if threatened) privilege of the male artist could not be allowed. It was imperative that the New Woman, per Picabia or Man Ray, be contained within the anxiety-reducing mechanomorphic forms of the machine image, not parading freely through the streets wielding a phallus clearly detached from its conventional role as guarantor of male privilege.

The Baroness's performative (rather than biological) penis/phallus, along with Duchamp's erotically invested *garçonne*-esque *Rose* (eros, in the feminine, as commodity) were, I am suggesting, the ultimate weapons against the bourgeois norms that Dada in general thought of itself as radically antagonizing. This is so even though (or perhaps precisely because) these performances surface and exaggerate the commodified, feminized subject rather than repress the de-masculinizing effects of modern life on the conventional, iron-clad figure of the artist (itself an exaggerated version of the mythical, Cartesian, modernist subject).

There were, however, other penises that were equally disturbing to the anxious masculinity seeking to assert its borders during this period, confirming that this masculinity took its shape not only through its othering of femininity but also through its opposition to the homosexual. Penises not erected in the direction of heterosexual penetration deeply challenged the assumptions embedded in conceptions of artistic creation.

Charles Demuth (1883-1935) dressed the part of a dandy-aesthete and admired Oscar Wilde and des Esseintes, the aesthetically saturated and hedonistic hero of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *A rebours*; at the same time, frequenting nightclubs with the always congenial party-goer Duchamp, Demuth was deeply connected to the dadaists and other avant-gardists practicing in New York in the teens and twenties. Providing a link between the nineteenth-century decadents and the erotically inclined, but generally heterosexist and often patriarchal New York dadaists, Demuth played out his sexual desires in tender, erotic watercolors, which have been largely (and strategically) erased from historical accounts of New York Dada.⁴⁷

Queer Subjectivities

Two "misfits" linked in perversion: Elsa, a slightly crazed German immigrant, flaunting her ambiguous yet voracious sexuality and her anomalous subjectivity

(as woman-model-artist/writer); and Charlie, a homosexual man forced by art history into the heterosexualizing/heterosexist male model of the modernist artist, presenting objects that inscribe sexualities profoundly disruptive to the structures of art production and reception that were left undisturbed by the women/machines of Picabia and Man Ray.

Charles Demuth, Turkish Bath, c. 1915

A narrative, illustrative version of forbidden contortions of the heterosexual matrix of "proper" sexual difference. The image (with its febrile line and puckered paper patches of scrumptious flesh) is gloriously steeped in male-to-male desires. Playing on the long tradition (a la fngres) of the exotic female/Other presented in titillating, lesbianized contexts for heterosexual, European, male viewing pleasure, Charlie-like Elsa, like Rose-turns the bourgeois morality that continues to plague much of Dada ass-backward.

Finally, then, the merging of art and life is at least momentarily achieved-through a polymorphous eroticization that has been remarked upon but largely downplayed in art historical accounts of the period.

There are at least two interesting lessons to be learned from an investigation of the sexualized explorations of the "women" of New York Dada: first, that art history resists accommodating the most extreme (and, notably, least commodifiable) examples of the avant-garde into its normalizing narratives; second, artists who *performed* rather than *illustrated* the sexualization (feminization/homosexualization) of modern subjectivity in capitalism pose more intense challenges. Taking the examples provided by the mutability of Elsa, with her transportable penis/phallus, Marcel/Rose's "femininity," and Charlie's homoerotic opening of the male body to male desire, we might begin to rethink how these most extreme sexualizations of the artistic subject have permeated contemporary artistic practice-and what this influence means in terms of the historical linkages between the global disruptions and explosive incursions of capitalism during the teens and twenties and those of the 1960s and beyond.

NOTES

This is a revised version of "Eros, That's Life, or The Baroness' Penis" from the exhibition catalogue *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996), reprinted here with permission. I am grateful to Naomi Sawelson-Gorse for her generous research assistance on this project.

1. Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918"; rpt. in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford and Cambridge, U.K.: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 252-253.
2. These sentiments were particularly strong among the German dadaists. As German dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck argued, the war revealed German Expressionism to be a "large-scale swindle" mobilized on the part of Germany to legitimate its nationalist war-mongering policies leading up to the war: "art (including culture, spirit, athletic club) ... is a large-scale swindle. And this ... most especially in Germany, where the most absurd idolatry of all sorts of divinities is beaten into the child in order that the grown man and taxpayer should automatically fall on his knees when, in the interest of the state or some smaller gang of thieves, he receives the order to worship some 'great spirit.' I maintain again and again: the whole spirit business is a vulgar utilitarian swindle. In this war the Germans ... strove to justify themselves at home and abroad with Goethe and Schiller. Culture can be designated solemnly and with complete naivety as the national spirit become [sic] form, but also it can be characterized as a compensatory phenomenon, an obeisance to an invisible judge, as veronal for the conscience." Huelsenbeck, "En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism [1920]," trans. Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2d ed., 1989), p. 43.

3. Hugo Ball, "Dada Fragments [1916-1917]," trans. Eugene Jolas, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 54.

4. This has been substantiated by its subsequent institutionalization in text books and museums, beginning with Alfred Barr's 1936 exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, at New York's Museum of Modern Art, and including Motherwell's excellent anthology cited above (n. 2), which first appeared in 1951. More recent contributions include Francis M. Naumann's comprehensive *New York Dada, 1915-23* (New York: Abrams, 1994), and the 1996 exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, *Making Mischief Dada Invades New York*.

5. The exception to this focus on the objects produced by Dada is in performance studies or history of performance art, where Dada is now conventionally discussed as one of the origins of performance art. See, for example, RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Abrams, rev. ed., 1988); *Dada Performance*, ed. Mel Gordon (New York: PAJ, 1987); and Annabelle Henkin Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore, MD, and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). The latter two sources focus exclusively on European Dada. It is important to note that these histories are marginalized by mainstream histories of art in general because performance is not generally considered in surveys of modern art. I am interested in a broader notion of performativity that goes beyond the official, theatrical performances of Dada.

6. From the self-adopted feminine name, Rose Sélavy. I discuss Rose Sélavy at length in my book *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See especially chapter 5, "The Ambivalence of Rose SOavy and the (Male) Artist as 'Only the Mother of the Work.'"

7. This emphasis on the investments of interpretation radically challenges the traditional, loosely Kantian, connoisseurial basis of art historical value judgments. In Kantian terms, interpreters of aesthetic value must remain disinterested in relation to their objects. I expand on this activation of spectatorial desire in relation to body art in my book, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming). Much of this argument, including that relating to the complex dynamic of masculinization of the modernist artist, is taken from this book.

8. While Francis Naumann argues that these photographs of Duchamp should not be labeled "Rose Sélavy," since, strictly speaking, they were completed before Duchamp adopted this particularly modified version of "Rose," I feel it ultimately makes more sense to label them as such since "Rose" replaced "Rose" in Duchamp's conceptualization of this figure as early as 1921. See Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 228, n. 59. All of Duchamp's subsequent articulations of Rose Sélavy after this point (in writings and other pieces) thus recontextualize the photographs. Furthermore, at least one of the best known versions of the photographs was given to Samuel S. White in 1924 and signed by Duchamp, "lovingly Rose Sélavy, alias Marcel Duchamp" (this photograph is now in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art).

9. While Demuth is tangential to New York Dada as it is generally defined, his works, especially his non-homoerotic pieces, have been discussed in accounts of Dada's history; see, for example, Naumann, *New York Dada*. It is thus notable that these particular images have not found a place in histories of New York Dada. Another person who would figure interestingly in such a discussion is Arthur Cravan, whose hyper-masculinity (as a boxer) inflected his compulsive self-display in gender-specific ways. On Cravan, see Roger Conover, "Mina Loy's 'Colossus': Arthur Cravan Undressed," in *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker & Owens, 1986), pp. 102-119.

10. 291, no. 9 (November 1915): 2-3.

11. *Ibid.*: 2 (author's translation).

12. Marcel Duchamp, qtd. in "The Nude-Descending-a-Staircase Man Surveys Us," *New York Tribune*, 12 September 1915, sec. 4, p. 2. Or, as Picabia put it, "The war has killed the art of the Continent utterly" (qtd. in "French Artists Spur on an American Art," *New York Tribune*, 24 October 1915, sec. 4, pp. 2-3; rpt. in *New York Dada*, p. 131).

13. Albert Gleizes, qtd. in "French Artists Spur on an American Art," in *New York Dada*, p. 130. Gleizes, who was far more conservative aesthetically than either Duchamp or Picabia, had come to the United States during the war.

14. The limitations of such a dream were made manifest in American culture after World War II, when the discourse of individualism was mobilized to aggrandize white, male artists in the service of state interests. See Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," and Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Frascina (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 107-123, and 125-133, respectively; and Andrew Perchuk, "Pollock and Postwar Masculinity," in *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1995), pp. 31-42.

15. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols., trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 and 1989).
16. See my chapter “Rose Sélavy in Context: The New Woman, The Advertisement, and the Photographed Woman as Fetishized Commodity,” in *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 160-173.
17. Prostitutes were the only women who roamed the streets unescorted or purveyed their own “business” activities outside the home.
18. Words of the anonymous author of “French Artists Spur on an American Art,” in *New York Dada*, p. 129. Paradoxically, the European artist-immigrants to New York touted the United States—which was beginning to emerge as the world center of industrial capitalism—as more nurturing of a masculinized individualism. Thus, Picabia perspicaciously observed that American culture epitomized the next stage of industrialism, far beyond the lingering archaisms of European culture. In Picabia’s words, American culture inspired him to see that “the genius of the modern world is machinery. . . . It is really a part of human life —perhaps the very soul” (*ibid.*, p. 131).
19. This point and much of the following section is indebted to Caroline Jones’s excellent article, “The Sex of the Machine: Mechanized Bodies in Early Modernism,” unpub. ms., 1995. For different, less critical views of dadaist machine imagery, see Willard Bohn, “Picabia’s ‘Mechanical Expression’ and the Demise of the Object,” *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 1985): 673-677; and John I. H. Baur, “The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America,” *Magazine of Art* 44, no. 6 (October 1951): 233-237.
20. I do not by any means wish to imply that Picabia and Man Ray were fascists. Rather, per Theweleit, I want to point out the broad applicability of this model of anxiety vis-a-vis feminine flow to Western bourgeois masculinity during World War I and the period immediately following. The case is further complicated in that Man Ray was an American; however, he yearned from the early teens onward to fit into the European avant-garde (as introduced to him through Stieglitz’s efforts and through art classes). Also, it is clear that masculinity held a similarly anxious place in American culture, although the Europeans may not have viewed it that way.
21. This threat is made clear by a French journalist’s account from 1925: “The innocent young thing ... of yesterday ... has given way to the *garçonne* of today. . . . Add to this sports, movies, dancing, cars, the unhealthy need to be always on the move—this entire Americanization of old Europe, and you will have the secret to the complete upheaval of people and things.” See M. Numa Sadoul, writing in *Progres Civique*, 13 June 1925, p. 840, qtd. in Jones, “The Sex of the Machine,” pp. 21-22. Duchamp put a more positive spin on this dynamic, commenting in a 1915 interview that “The American woman is the most intelligent woman in the world today—the only one that always knows what she wants, and therefore always gets it” (“The Nude-Descending-a-Staircase Man”).
22. On Man Ray, see Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988); Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray. American Artist* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1988); and Perpetual Motif *The Art of Man Ray* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, 1988). On Katherine Dreier’s relationship to New York Dada, see Ruth L. Bohan, “Katherine Sophie Dreier and New York Dada,” *Arts Magazine* 51, no. 9 (May 1977):97-101.
23. For this reading of Catherine Barometer I am indebted to Caroline Jones, “The Sex of the Machine,” pp. 18-20. See also Nancy Ring’s study of Dreier’s role as a patron in her “New York Dada and the Crisis of Masculinity: Man Ray, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp in the United States, 1913-1921” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1991).
24. As one writer put it, “two years before his arrival in New York, America discovered Marcel Duchamp. When he came, at last in 1915, a pre-fabricated fame awaited him” (Robert Allerton Parker, “America Discovers Marcel,” *View* 5, no. 1 [March 1945]: 32).
25. Pontus Hulten, “Preface,” in Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont, *Plan pour écrire une vie de Marcel Duchamp* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, 1977), p. 9 (author’s translation).
26. Felix Guattari, “Regimes, Pathways, Subjects,” trans. Brian Massumi, in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), pp. 29, 36. From this point of view, it is certainly no accident that in his signature novel of cyber-punk fiction, *Neuromancer*, William Gibson includes a description of the ‘Net “cowboy’ Case’s encounter (through the eyes of a woman he is “riding” via “simstim”) with Duchamp’s Large Class. It is also no accident that this encounter involves a woman seeing as a man (a man who sees through a woman’s eyes, limited in what he can see through her physical movements): Case “stared, through Molly’s incurious eyes, at a shattered, dust-stenciled sheet of glass, a thing labeled ... ‘La mariee mise a nu parses celibataires, meme.’ She’d reached out and touch this, her artificial nails clicking against the Lexan sandwich protecting the broken glass” (*Neuromancer* [New York: Ace, 1984], p. 207). At the same time, the Large Glass is clearly an object of some nostalgia for Gibson, who places it within the labyrinthine, technologized yet nostalgically material aristocratic family estate of Straylight.

27. Guattari ("Regimes, Pathways, Subjects," pp. 26-29) outlines the rationalization of labor power a la Taylor as a key element of capitalist production, linked to the instrumentalization of human organs and faculties and the fetishization of profit.
28. On this Victorian-era feminization of culture, specifically in the American context, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Anchor, 1988).
29. See Picabia's 1916-1918 gouache painting *Girl Born without a Mother* and his 1918 book of drawings and poems, *Poemes et dessins de la fille nee sans mere* (rpt. Paris: Allia, 1992). Note especially the drawings *Polygamie* (p. 19) with its "vagin printanier" (vernal vagina); *Egoiste* (p. 23) with its "Americaines" (New Women?) and "femmes paysages" (female landscapes); and *Hermaphrodisme* (p. 67) with its visible sperm, oviduct, and sexual apparatus.
30. Duchamp's desirability is confirmed not only through the obsessive references to his work and persona in art historical accounts of contemporary art but also through his appeal to other artists, including many women. He was the subject/object of numerous portraits by female artist admirers, including several by the Baroness and Florine Stettheimer, notably the latter's elaborate play on the mutable engendering of Marcel/Rose, an abstract portrait by Dreier, and a number of drawings by Beatrice Wood.
31. Sigmund Freud, "The Dynamics of Transference [1912]," trans. Joan Riviere, in *Therapy and Technique*, ed. Phillip Rieff (New York: Collier, 1963), p. 112.
32. Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1989), p. 139.
33. For a more extensive discussion of this dynamic of fetishization, which derives from the work of Abigail Solomon-Godeau, see *Postmodernism and the EnGendering of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 164-168.
34. The continuing significance of Duchamp's self-engendering gesture for what we now call postmodernism is abundantly clear. See, for example, Andy Warhol's *For Rose Sélavy and Belle Haleine* (1973), in which, wearing a showman's striped jacket and a huge Afro wig, this decidedly queer artist sits on bleachers surrounded by a bevy of showgirls (or are they "men" in drag?). For an illustration of this photograph, see Marcel Duchamp, ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), p. 227.
35. Born in Northern Germany in 1874, the Baroness ran away from home at the age of eighteen to live on her own. See her autobiography in *Baroness Elsa*, ed. Paul I. Hjartarson and Douglas O. Spettigue (Ottawa, Ontario: Oberon, 1992).
36. These descriptions are drawn from Robert Reiss, "My Baroness': Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven," in *New York Dada*, p. 86; Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 169; and the editors' introduction in *Baroness Elsa*, pp. 9-10.
37. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, qtd. in Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 172.
38. Jane Heap, "Dada," *Little Review* (Spring 1922): 46.
39. Duchamp slowed his production of art drastically after the Dada period. This "silence" increased his mystique for the American art world.
40. In her autobiography, the Baroness writes, "[M]y feminine pride demanded of me to find a lover to provide for me" (*Baroness Elsa*, p. 53).
41. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 104. The other side of the Baroness's story, at least as she tells it, is her immersion in her sexual relations with men (her endless tales of, in her words, her "unsatiated sexhunger" [p. 188]). The entire autobiography is a series of sexual exploits that avoid constructing her as Other or victim only through their tone of passionate self-aggrandizement and sexual insatiableness ("I was ever conscious of my quality, even before my lover," she writes [p. 51]).
43. The attribution of this piece has been debated. I accept here Francis Naumann's typically thorough attribution of the piece to the Baroness, with Schamberg responsible for the well-known photograph of it.
44. God has its counterpart in Duchamp's 1917 *Fountain*, which presents the obverse to the Baroness's impossibly looped yet still rigid phallus—a urinal shaped like a womb, ready to embrace the "piss" ejaculate of every male passerby, yet, turned sideways, unable to drain it away.
45. Naumann, *New York Dada*, p. 173.
46. On the phallus as transferable attribute, see Judith Butler's chapter, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 57-91.
47. Demuth's homoerotic watercolors have been analyzed to some extent in relation to his career. See Barbara Haskell, *Charles Demuth* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1987); and Jonathan Weinberg's important book, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, and the First*

American Avant-Garde (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1993). Much of my description of Demuth derives from Weinberg's account. However, as I noted earlier, texts on New York Dada, even when they include Demuth (who might be said to be marginal to the movement), do not tend to discuss his homosexual erotica.

On Demuth's affinity to *des Esseintes*, see Kermit Champa, "Charlie Was Like That," *Artforum* 12, no. 6 (March 1974): 54-59. It should be noted that Weinberg (*ibid.*, pp. 48-50) is critical of Champa for using such tropes of decadence to align Demuth simultaneously with homosexuality and late nineteenth-century decadence as a deviant. I am foregrounding these particular aspects of Demuth's persona precisely to highlight the way they position him relative to the artists who are more often celebrated as Dada artists. While I would, unlike Weinberg, insist on retaining Demuth's "deviance" (for his work and persona have clearly created problems for those art historians eager to read Dada as part of a heroic, and implicitly, heterosexualized, masculine avant-garde), I am obviously looking at this "deviance" in a positive rather than negative light.