

Periodical Pugilism: Dada Masculinity From the Boxing Ring to the Avant-garde Magazine

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Denouncing surrealism as a cheap imitation of Dada and comparing the movement's founder to a second-rate magician, Francis Picabia devotes most of 391's nineteenth and final issue to landing a few parting jabs on his friend-turned-rival André Breton. This belligerent attitude perhaps explains why Picabia slyly inserted a boxer onto his journal's cover (fig. 1), where a profile of French heavyweight Georges Carpentier has been substituted for that of Marcel Duchamp. After all, as Ruth Hemus remarks, "the war of words between Dada and surrealism had transferred from the pages of pamphlets to a physical fight" once before, with Breton and Tristan Tzara's supporters trading punches at the infamous "Soirée cœur à barbe" (201). Meanwhile, Roger Conover observes that the poet-boxer Arthur Cravan's self-published journal *Maintenant* "has come to be regarded as the most important forerunner of 391," even if, according to Conover, "Cravan simply saw it as a warm-up for public brawls and sparring sessions in the gymnasium" ("Arthur Cravan" 30).

Carpentier and Duchamp also happened to bear an unmistakable likeness to each other, meaning that by crossing out Carpentier's signature, Picabia could easily pass the boxer off as the artist, ironically retitling the portrait as his *Rose Sélavoy par Picabia* in honor of Duchamp's feminine alter ego. As Duchamp recounts in his interviews with Pierre Cabanne, his uncanny resemblance to Carpentier provided a perfect opportunity for such Dada mischief: "Another time, Picabia did a cover for 391 with the portrait of Georges Carpentier, the boxer; he and I were as much alike as two drops of water, which is why it was amusing. It was a composite portrait of Georges Carpentier and me" (qtd. in *Works, Writings and Interviews* 148). This was not the first time Picabia made this sort of roguish swap in the pages of his journal either. Four years earlier, when he had been unable to get hold of Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* in time to publish it in 391's twelfth issue, Picabia had famously copied Duchamp's "original" readymade by drawing a mustache on another postcard of the *Mona Lisa* and calling it a *Tableau Dada par Marcel Duchamp*.

Of course, motivated by more than just editorial deadlines, Picabia's forgery of Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* would in fact prove a paradigmatic Dada gesture, an imitation of an imitation that furthered the challenge to traditional notions of

artistic agency, identity, and authenticity already raised by Duchamp's initial vandalization of Leonardo's masterpiece. It is curious, then, that while Picabia's counterfeit *Tableau Dada par Marcel Duchamp* has received considerable scholarly attention, his faked portrait of Duchamp's Sélavy has been largely ignored by critics, who have rarely delved beyond Duchamp's explanation that the piece was a serendipitous Dada prank.¹ Instead, in the few instances where Picabia's substitution of Carpentier for Duchamp has been addressed in scholarship, it has been largely met with confusion. Robert Lebel's *Sur Marcel Duchamp*, for instance, mistakenly identifies this image as "une photographie de Duchamp sous les traits de Carpentier" 'a photograph of Duchamp in the guise of Carpentier' (181).² Later studies correctly recognize the image as a disguised Carpentier, but other errors have nonetheless persisted.

Still more remarkable is that even the most authoritative account of this cover's creation, provided by Michel Sanouillet's critical edition of *391*, also makes a crucial error about this portrait's origins. According to Sanouillet, Picabia created his *Rose Sélavy par Picabia* from an autographed sketch he had drawn of Carpentier when the boxer visited him at his home in 1923 (166). However, my research has found that this portrait did not begin with a hand-drawn sketch at all, but rather with a photographic postcard (fig. 2) manufactured by the Armand Noyer company in Paris. Looking closely at the Carpentier/Sélavy portrait on *391*'s cover, one can even make out the company's logo just behind Picabia's bold proclamations about his newly founded artistic movement, *L'Instantanéisme* (fig. 3). Having already copied Duchamp's readymade gesture of vandalizing a postcard in order to forge his own version of *L.H.O.O.Q.*, Picabia thereby deployed the same technique to produce a portrait of Duchamp himself, extending what Anne Umland calls Picabia's use of "reproduction, replication and outright plagiarism" to challenge normative concepts of "heroic individuality and creativity" from the Mona Lisa, the most famous product of Leonardo's visionary talent, to the heavyweight champion, the early twentieth century's archetype of the heroic individual male (14).

In what follows, I take the rediscovery of this postcard as an invitation to more thoroughly consider the presence of boxing and boxers in Dada magazines.

¹ Picabia's imitation of Duchamp's gesture is almost invariably mentioned in studies of *L.H.O.O.Q.* See, for example, Judovitz (1-56), Baker (95-158), and Rongier.

² Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.



Figure 1: Francis Picabia, 391, no. 19. Oct. 1924, cover. International Dada Archive, Special Collections and Archives, University of Iowa Libraries.

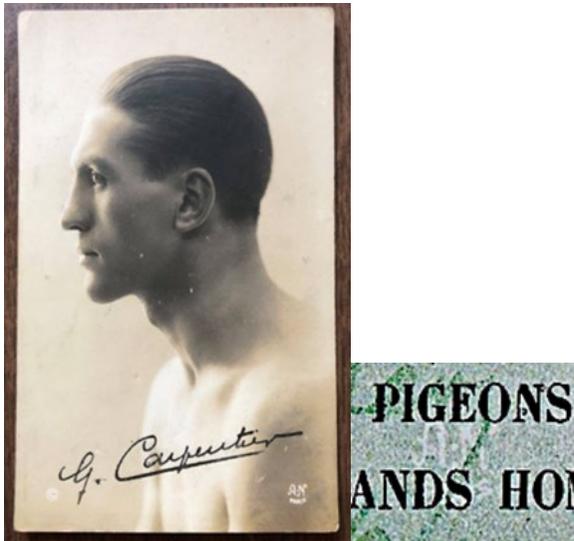


Figure 2 (left): Postcard of Georges Carpentier produced by the Armand Noyer Company. Number 8 of 12. (1921). Author's collection.

Figure 3 (right): Close up of Armand Noyer logo as it appears on the cover of 391, no. 19.

As Emily Hage has convincingly demonstrated, Dada journals deliberately positioned themselves both within and against other periodical genres, with publications like Duchamp and Man Ray's *New York Dada* drawing upon the conventions of women's commercial magazines to critique commodity culture and interrogate perceived divisions between print genres and gender roles (175-77). I intend to show how Dada magazines drew upon the decidedly male oriented world of boxing and boxing media towards similar ends. True to what Felix Pollak calls the "pugnacious and ebullient" spirit of the modernist magazine, boxing was a recurring theme in avant-garde journals, where it served as a ready metaphor for male modernist bravado and the avant-garde's combative stance (103). Yet if Picabia adopts this pugilistic periodical style as he attacks his surrealist rivals in 391's final issue, Dada publications also looked to the boxing ring as a productive arena for critiquing these "tough guy" attitudes which, as Paul Sheehan describes, had emerged as "the dominant strain of masculine modernism" (16). By tracing the presence of prizefighters in Dada magazines from Carpentier's appearance on 391's final cover back to Cravan's early appearances in the sports pages, I show how this ambivalent engagement with the figure of the boxer reveals a composite portrait, not just of Carpentier and Duchamp, but of the multiple faces of what scholars have called Dada's "laddish," "equivocal," or "neurasthenic" male subjectivity, which rejects macho heroics in favor of a performative and instable, but nonetheless combative mode of male artistic identity.³

Readymade Heavyweights: Carpentier vs. Duchamp

Picabia's insertion of Carpentier's portrait on 391's final cover would hardly be the first time that a prizefighter appeared in an avant-garde journal. If Picabia chose the heavyweight as the face of 391's final issue, Blaise Cendrars had, ten years earlier, gone as far as to list a boxer as a member of his editorial board while trying to relaunch his journal *Les hommes nouveaux* in 1913:

Ohé les jeunes.

Il n'y a donc plus de mecs?

Il faut une équipe

.....

Il nous faut un médecin, un homme adroit de ses mains, un bourreau,
un pétomane, un homme de lettres, un flic et un musicien.

³ I borrow these terms from Hopkins's *Dada's Boys*, and Amelia Jones's "Equivocal Masculinity" and *Irrational Modernism*, respectively.

Nous avons déjà un poète et un boxeur.

Hey young people

So, there aren't any more guys out there?

We need a team

.....

We need a doctor, a man who is good with his hands, an executioner, a flatulist, a man of letters, a cop and a musician

We already have a poet and a boxer.⁴

The boxer Cendrars had in mind was likely his friend Cravan, who had already published his first issue of *Maintenant* in April of 1912. Ultimately, this second issue of *Les hommes nouveaux* never materialized, either because Cendrars left for the frontlines of World War I or perhaps because a fistfight between Cravan and Cendrars's close friend Robert Delaunay created a rift in the two poets' collaborative relationship. Nevertheless, other modernist magazines would follow Cendrars's lead, looking to boxing's modern and masculine appeal as a means to set their publications apart from traditional artistic and literary journals.

As Bernard Vere has shown, the vorticist magazine *BLAST* (1914-1915) not only cultivated a quarrelsome tone, it also listed several boxers amongst those whom the vorticists wished to "BLESS," exempting them from their call to "BLAST SPORT" because the prizefighter, unlike the gentleman cricketer, represented the type of modern "hard man" they hoped to emulate. Further still, Vere details how *BLAST*'s iconic typography may have taken its cue from boxing posters and promotional sports leaflets, this visual similarity to sports media helping advertise the magazine's position outside of the artistic establishment ("BLAST SPORT?" 360-62). In New York, Robert Coady would go a step further, offering round-by-round boxing reports alongside his coverage of modern art in his little magazine *The Soil* (1916-1917). Jay Bochner and Judith Zilczer observe that Coady sought to draw upon mass-culture entertainments like boxing as the basis for an American artistic tradition distinct from Europe's feminized and overly intellectual high-culture (Bochner 59-61; Zilczer 37-38). Coady's treatise on "American Art" thus promotes the "ball field, the stadium and the ring" as homegrown alternatives for American artists tired of a staid Old-World academy or dizzied by the

⁴ This text survived as an unpublished draft of the journal's second issue, now held in the Cendrars archive at the Bibliothèque nationale suisse. Extract cited in Miriam Cendrars 320.

everchanging affectations of what Coady called European “ismism” (54-55). Characteristic of the combative arena of avant-garde publishing, Coady also brought what the poet and sportswriter Robert Alden Sanborn called a “boxer-sluggo” mentality to his criticism of rival artistic editors, with Alfred Stieglitz, editor of *391*’s predecessor *291*, being one of his favorite targets (Sanborn 179; North 62).

Finally, the inter-war period would see Alfred Flechtheim of Germany offer his own blend of boxing journalism and modernist art in his illustrated monthly *Der Querschnitt* (1921-1936) which found widespread popularity during the Weimar period, printing articles on Cézanne and Picasso next to exposés on boxers like Carpentier and the German Max Schmeling. According to Erika Esau, this mass-culture coverage helped define *Der Querschnitt* as an American style *Magazin* rather than a traditional *Zeitschrift* art journal, but Flechtheim also considered it his “duty . . . to promote boxing in German artistic circles as has long been the case elsewhere.



Figure 4: Photograph of George Grosz (left) preparing to box with John Heartfield (right) at a gathering in Berlin (c. 1924). Heartfield Archive Online.

In Paris, Braque, Derain, Dufy, Matisse, Picasso and Rodin are all enthusiastic boxing fans" (Esau 872; Flechtheim 222).⁵ Flechtheim's call did not fall on deaf ears, as, according to David Bathrick, many Weimar artists would take to the ring, finding that boxing offered "a Darwinian license to revalorize and reassert the male ego in the age of collectivization" (123). Chief among these German boxing fans was the Berlin Dada group, whose "savage fighter, boxer and hater," George Grosz, both read and contributed to Flechtheim's magazine (Richter 102). The testosterone-heavy atmosphere of the Berlin Dada group is captured by a 1924 photograph from the John Heartfield archive, which pictures Heartfield preparing to spar with Grosz while Weimar cultural figures like theater director Erwin Piscator and publisher Wieland Herzfelde look on (fig. 4).

Yet while Flechtheim saw French artists as being at the fore of embracing the virtues of boxing's "Männersport" 'manly sport,' works like Picabia's *Rose Sélavy* show that the Dada group which coalesced around Duchamp and Picabia, first in New York and then in Paris, took a decidedly more ambiguous view of the boxer's virile displays. This is likely to be expected. Picabia and Duchamp's ambivalence towards dominant modes of masculine identity — closely tied with their rejection of traditional notions of artistic authority — has been the subject of intense inquiry by scholars such as Giovanna Zapperi, Caroline A. Jones and, perhaps most extensively, Amelia Jones, who contextualizes New York Dada within the period of the First World War to argue that the group's experimental works were conditioned by these non-combatant men's "equivocal masculinity . . . compromised by its distance from European ideals of proper, patriotic, heroic male behavior" ("Equivocal Masculinity" 164). Hopkins's *Dada's Boys* similarly highlights the divide between the men of Paris Dada and their German contemporaries, positing Duchamp as the paradoxical father of a self-conscious and ironic approach to male identity favoring "laddish" schoolboy humor over macho seriousness (*Dada's Boys* 10). As such, while boxing had its place in New York/Paris Dada gatherings and polemical texts — inspiring lines such as Tzara's "Punch yourself in the face and drop dead" ("Monsieur AA" 28) — this combative streak existed in tension with the group's rejection of the manly ideals which Flechtheim prized in the sport. Elements of male self-performance, homosexuality, and queer homosociality that remain latent within Berlin Dada's muscular embrace of boxing are thus rendered manifest in the work of the New York/Paris group.⁶ As Joyce Carol Oates writes in her indispensable essay on the sport,

⁵ Translation of Flechtheim's "Ist der Boxsport roh" 'Is Boxing Crude?' cited in Boddy 96.

⁶ The notable exception to Dada's macho Berlin strain would be Hannah Höch, whose photomontages frequently featured images of boxers. Höch's monumental *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919) includes an image of Carpentier's face, grafted alongside the head of George Grosz atop the body of a ballerina — an androgynous assemblage that offers intriguing points of comparison to

boxing's "mimicry of erotic love" has long been an unspoken element of the sport's which dates back to the Greek *palestra*, and Erik Jensen observes that prizefighting's close connection the carnivalesque atmosphere of the vaudeville theater during the early twentieth century made the ring an important venue for staging shifting gender and sexual norms (Oates 30; Jensen 54).⁷

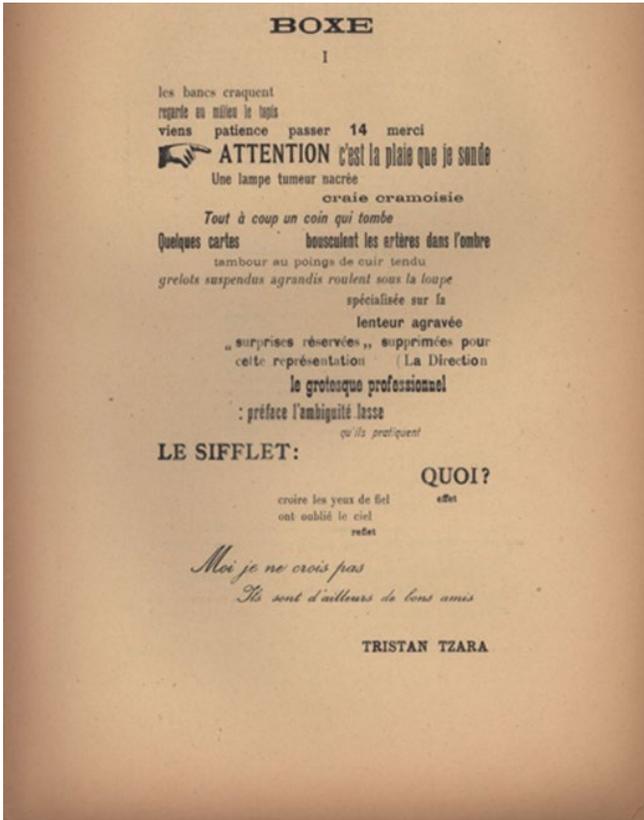


Figure 5: Tristan Tzara, "BOXE," *SIC*, no. 42-43, Mar.-Apr. 1919, p. 325. International Dada Archive, Special Collections and Archives, University of Iowa Libraries.

Picabia's *Rose Sélavy*. For a reading of Höch's use of boxing imagery, see Maud Lavin (185-204).

⁷ One might also think of Charlie Chaplin flirting with his adversary before taking the ring in *City Lights* (1931) or of Joan Miró, whose memoirs recount his early experiences with the sport as follows: "With Hemingway, I did some boxing in an American club. It was rather comical, since I didn't come up any higher than his belly button. There was a real ring, and all around in the stands, a crowd of homosexuals" (Miró 104, emphasis added).



Figure 6: Heading for the boxing section of *L'auto*, 23 August 1919. Gallica.

Consider, for instance, Tzara's "BOXE," published in the March-April 1919 issue of Pierre Albert-Birot's *SIC* (fig. 5). Like *BLAST*, Tzara's "BOXE" takes its typographic cues from sports media, as its title, inspired by the pages of the sports daily *L'auto* (fig. 6) signals that this collage poem might be read as a boxing report. This reading is largely borne out by the body of the text where images reminiscent of a prizefight are evoked through short, "punchy" phrases: "les bancs craquent" 'the benches crack,' "regarde au milieu le tapis" 'look at the center the canvas,' "Attention c'est la plaie que je sonde" 'Attention it is the wound that I probe,' "tout à coup un coin qui tombe" 'suddenly a corner falls,' "tambour au poings de cuir tendu" 'fist drum of taught leather.' Though less informative than Coady's or Flechtheim's boxing reporting, the language captures the experience of a boxing match through what Elza Adamowicz calls "pugilistic blows to the reader's sense of poetic decorum" (65). However, the final line of Tzara's poem — written in a delicate cursive hand which clashes with the block lettering which precedes it and possessing a level of grammatic fluidity absent from much of the text — rises above this fracas to call this macho conflict into question: "Moi je ne crois pas / Ils sont d'ailleurs de bons amis" 'Me I don't buy it / They are moreover good friends.' As Roland Barthes observes, unlike its theatrical cousin, catch wrestling, boxing does not require its audience to suspend its disbelief in the name of spectacle, as it instead presents the spectator with an unscripted and scientific "demonstration of excellence" (13). The question of whether two boxers truly want to hurt each other or whether they are in fact "good friends" should therefore by a non-issue, superseded by the sport's basic assumption that fighting to prove one's worth is the natural condition of man and of men in particular. As a result, the statement of incredulity which concludes Tzara's text not only calls the authenticity of the boxing match into doubt, it also points towards the performative nature of masculinity itself.

To wit, by abandoning the bold lettering used in *BLAST* and countless other combative modernist journals, the final lines of "BOXE" also cast doubt on the sincerity of these typographical "blows," suggesting, perhaps, that the pugnacious attitude which characterized avant-garde print culture is itself an act. Indeed, although "BOXE" gives the appearance of a collage created in accordance with the randomizing method Tzara described in his "To make a Dadaist poem": "Take a newspaper. Take some scissors. Choose from this paper an article you want to make your poem. . . . The poem will resemble you" ("Dada Manifesto" 39), this ripped-from-the-headlines look is also a front. Proofs and letters from the Carlton Lake archives show that Tzara gave Albert-Birot, the same typographer behind Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, meticulous instructions about how "BOXE" should be printed, indicating the size and font that should be used for each line of

the poem. Just like the boxers of his text, Tzara thereby participates in a deliberately crafted simulation of reality. To that end, if Tzara's recipe for creating a Dada poem purports to have some connection to the real, piecing together a representation of the poet drawn directly from the daily news, his "BOXE" instead suggests that Dada identity is a matter of self-performance.

Hinting that the manly Carpentier could just as easily play the role of the feminine Sélavy while simultaneously disguising itself as a sort of mock-manifesto for the parodic and appropriately short-lived "Instantanéisme" movement, 391's final cover similarly turns to the boxer as a means to critique the performative polemics of the modernist magazine. However, Carpentier was not just any boxer. Having received both the *croix de guerre* and the *médaille militaire* for his service as a pilot during the First World War before then becoming the first Frenchman to claim a world boxing title, Carpentier was an icon of French national pride and military valor during the interwar period. Not surprisingly, this made him one of Dada's favorite objects of ridicule. Listing the boxer alongside establishment figures like Ernest Renan and Maréchal Foch in the seventh issue of *Dada*, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes responds to Carpentier with a shrug: "Qu'est-ce que c'est Carpentier, Renan, Foch? Connais pas" 'What is Carpentier, Renan, Foch? I don't know.' Meanwhile, Pierre de Massot mocks the boxer in the eighteenth issue of 391, writing that Carpentier and his fellow champion boxer Eugène Criqui are not heavyweights (poids lourds) or even flyweights (poids plumes) but rather "des petits poids à la française" 'French peaweights.'

Picabia would laugh at the heavyweight's alleged strength too, declaring in his *Jesus-Christ Rastaquouère* that Carpentier was no more powerful than a two-year-old child (227). Beyond these offhand insults however, Picabia also detailed his contempt for Carpentier's celebrity in an article entitled "Bonheur morale et bonheur physique," dated from the morning before the Frenchman's 2 July 1921 match against American heavyweight Jack Dempsey and published in the Belgian avant-garde magazine *Ça ira*. Lamenting that Carpentier and Dempsey were hailed by the public with more enthusiasm than a genius engineer, renowned artist, or a doctor who would save humanity from a terrible epidemic, Picabia argues that the excitement surrounding this fight is motivated by an all-too-familiar nationalist fervor, as the two boxers' respective fans have come to see their match "non seulement la lutte de deux hommes mais encore et plus la lutte de deux races! Toujours le même stupide instinct!" 'not only as a struggle between two men, but once again and moreover, as a struggle between two races! Always the same stupid instinct!' (99). Outraged by this celebration of national conflict on the heels of the First World War, Picabia asks:

Merde! pourquoi ne soutenez-vous pas autant, français et américains, ceux qui d'une façon plus obscure contribuent au bonheur de chacun par leurs inventions et découvertes? Par exemple, celui qui assurerait actuellement la suppression de toutes les frontières n'aiderait-il pas à une évolution vers ce bonheur physique et moral de l'univers?

Shit! why, France and America, do you not show the same support for those who, in more obscure ways, contribute to everyone's well-being through their inventions and discoveries? For example, wouldn't he who would today assure the removal of all borders contribute to the evolution of physical and moral well-being in the universe?

Picabia thus exhorts an end to national boundaries as an alternative to patriotic contests for supremacy, be they waged in the ring or on the battlefield.

The Armand Noyer postcard used for his 391 cover was actually the eighth card in a twelve-part series promoting the "Fight of the Century" between Carpentier and Dempsey that Picabia criticizes in *Ça ira*. Perhaps then, Picabia intended to reappropriate this piece of nationalist fanfare and rededicate it to an artist more deserving of celebration; his transformation of the boxer and soldier Carpentier into Duchamp's *Rose Sélavy* pointed towards an alternative to the pitfalls of nationalism and militarist masculinity. An object destined to travel and cross borders, the Carpentier postcard might thus be understood as an allusion to Duchamp's itinerant existence and antinationalism — what Duchamp, in a 1961 interview with Georges Charbonnier, called the "spirit of expatriation" that trumped his "totally French fabrication" (qtd. in *Work and Life* 367). Indeed, likening himself to a product of French manufacturing, Duchamp's description of his origins almost seems to allude to the Noyer postcard, the back of which is stamped "Fabrication Française." Years before Carpentier crossed the Atlantic to battle Dempsey for the heavyweight title, his lookalike, Duchamp, had arrived in America first, not to fight, but to flee the war in which Carpentier and millions of others were engaged. It was, of course, during this New York exile that Duchamp "invented" his most infamous readymade, signing the name "R. Mutt" on the side of a urinal and submitting his *Fountain* to the 1917 Society of Independent Artist's exhibition in a gesture which tested the exhibition's claim that, for a nominal fee, any piece would be accepted into the show. More than an affront to artistic decorum however, Amelia Jones argues that in the context of World War I, this overturned urinal — an inherently masculine and industrially produced apparatus — pinpoints the "collapse of nationalistic concepts of (masculine) honor and myths of European superiority and the progress of European culture" engendered by the war, its "dark empty piss hole" marking the castrating destruction that technological warfare had wrought on the heroic and idealized notion of combat that once stood at the "center of masculinity and national identity" ("Equivocal Masculinity" 167, 181).

It is hardly surprising, then, that Duchamp's readymade was ill-received by the likes of Ashcan painter George Bellows — a specialist of boxing scenes and public supporter of American intervention in World War I — who decried *Fountain* as indecent while serving on the board for the Independent's exhibition.

According to Beatrice Wood, the mere sight of *Fountain* sent Bellows into fits of pugilistic rage, inciting him to shout at Duchamp's benefactor and fellow board member Walter Arensberg, "his body on a menacing slant, his fists doubled, striking at the air in anger" (29). Hopkins reasons that Bellows took offense not only at the vulgar connotations of the urinal, but also at the readymade gesture itself, Duchamp's flippant take on artistic creation standing at odds with the masculine technical mastery Bellows displayed in his submission to the exhibition, the monumental boxing painting *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909) (*Dada's Boys* 19-20). As it happens, Duchamp had given his own representation of a boxing match in 1913, sketching out his "Combat de boxe" 'Boxing Match' in one of his early studies for *The Large Glass* (fig. 7). If Bellows abhorred the anti-aesthetics of Duchamp's *Fountain*, he likely would not have approved of Duchamp's take on the prizefight either.

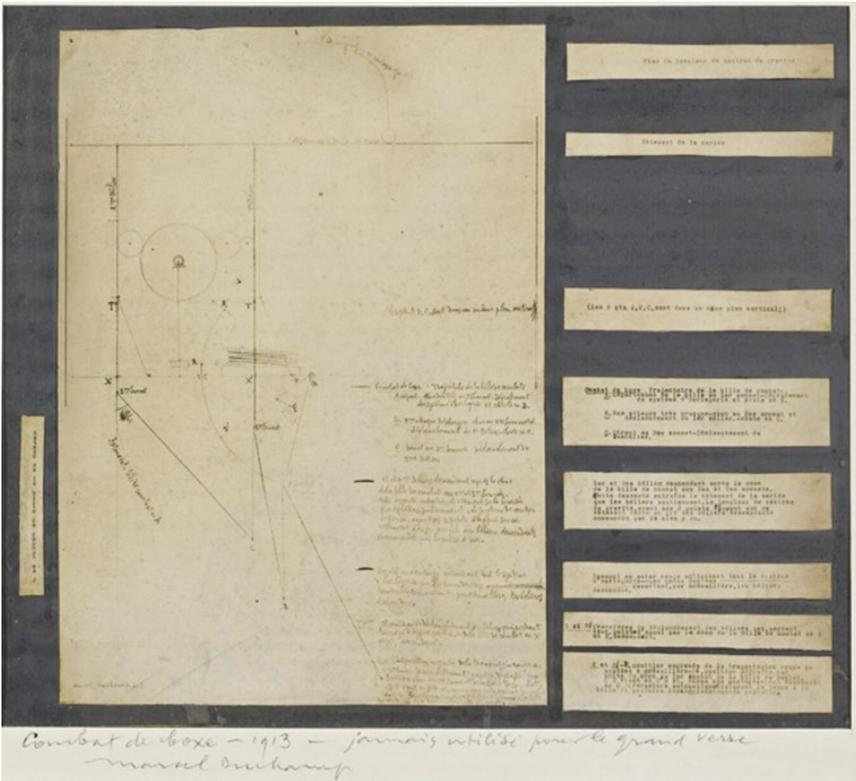


Figure 7: Marcel Duchamp, "Combat de boxe" 'Boxing Match,' (1916). Graphite, colored pencils, and typing ink on ten strips of buff-colored wove paper adhered to brown paper, 42 x 31 cm. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp.

A cryptic diagram for the function of one of his “bachelor machines,” Duchamp’s “Boxing Match” substitutes abstract geometric parts for the flesh and muscle of the boxer. The notes which accompany this sketch, written once by hand and again by typewriter, similarly describe an impersonal and mechanical contest wherein a “bille de combat” ‘combat marble’ is battered around like a pinball by two “béliers[s]” ‘battering ram[s],’ stripping the bride of her clothes through an unwieldy process that would have been jerky rather than smooth (Tomkins 10).

Like his *Fountain*, Duchamp’s “Boxing Match” thus replaces notions of heroic combat with technological dysfunction. Moreover, if this mechanism was meant to be inserted in the middle of *The Large Glass*, where it would foster a disjointed interaction between the bride in the top pane of glass and her aggressive bachelors at the bottom, its ultimate omission from the piece — which Duchamp abandoned in 1923, declaring it “definitively unfinished” (Tomkins 250) — prevents this meeting. Recalling the unspoken queer dimension of the boxing gym, Duchamp’s boxers are left to their own, potentially homoerotic, devices as the insurmountable divide between them and the bride reiterates the void which Jones identifies at the center of World War I-era myths about gendered subjectivity (“Equivocal Masculinity” 196). Meanwhile, beyond these similarities between Duchamp’s “Boxing Match” and his readymade, Kasia Boddy remarks that Duchamp also identified this sketch as a significant part of his attempt to move away from “personal style” and “retinal painting” (247). As Duchamp put it in 1956 interview with James Sweeney:

Now this is the *Boxing Match*. As you see, the drawing is completely geometrical or mechanical because that was the period when I changed completely from splashing paint on the canvas to an absolutely precise coordinate drawing, with no relation to any handiwork. (qtd. in *Works, Writings and Interviews* 131)

Whereas Bellows sought to capture the prizefighter’s muscular exploits through his own deft displays on the canvas, Duchamp’s own encounter with the sport was instead integral to what Zapperi describes as his decision to renounce “the virility of the painter” and the “phallic mastery” of the brushstroke (298, 300). It was perhaps in further repudiation of this traditional mode of masculine artistic authority that Duchamp would also publish this rough sketch of his “Boxing Match” in Man Ray’s one-off magazine *TNT* (1919). For artists like Bellows who envisioned themselves as warriors, fighting to capture modern life through their craft, the publication of such an unfinished draft might seem an admission of defeat, a failure to execute one’s vision, but it was precisely this heroic notion of artistic achievement that Duchamp sought to abandon.

It thus appears all the more fitting that Picabia should turn the readymade technique towards Carpentier’s postcard, paying homage to Duchamp while also reiterating the readymade’s critique of nationalist masculine identity and adapting it to a post-war context. As Oates observes, boxing is “a celebration of the lost

religion of masculinity, all the more trenchant for its being lost" (72). This was especially true in the years after World War I, when the sport offered a nostalgic image of a male-warrior-identity that had been otherwise lost to the gears of modernity, whence the sport's appeal to artists like Bellows or Grosz, but also to state efforts, in France as elsewhere, to restore people's faith in the strength and virtues of manhood. Carpentier, with his classical good looks and impressive war record, found himself at the center of this campaign, playing the hero not only in the ring, but also on screen where he starred in three feature films during the early 1920s. As Christopher Townsend describes, "with the promotion of 'heroes' such as Carpentier, 'war culture' had effectively, and permanently, penetrated mass culture, and that culture was structured from now on by the same ideological and technological relations of the individual to the masses that had caused and maintained the war" (293). The Carpentier postcard reflects this transition well, as the mass-industrial forces which stripped away the agency of the foot soldier, reducing him to a "passive sufferer of the will of material" (Leed 152), are now put in the service of disseminating an image of the heavyweight champion, the heroic individual combatant *par excellence*. Picabia's appropriation of this commercial postcard for his readymade points towards this reversal, highlighting what Jones calls the "devastating and ironic separation" between rhetoric about male agency and the objectifying forces of modernity in much the same way that, with a simple signature, Duchamp's urinal calls into question the divide between "noble" artistic creation and base industrial production ("Equivocal Masculinity" 167). In fact, this postcard responds to *Fountain's* "R. Mutt" with a signature of its own, as, before Picabia crossed it out, Carpentier's portrait was adorned with a reproduction of the boxer's autograph, complete with a copyright symbol (©). If *Fountain* questioned male artistic agency by asking whether an artist's signature was all it took to transform an industrial object into an artwork, this postcard would thus seem to suggest that not even the artist's signature is beyond the reach of mass production. Picabia even appears to prove as much, imitating Duchamp's trademark readymade gesture to create his *Rose Sélavy* just as he had done when making his copy of *L.H.O.O.Q.*

Ironically, it is just this sort of imitation that Picabia condemns as he lambasts the surrealists in this issue of 391, claiming that "[l]es œuvres de Messieurs Breton et, comment dites-vous? Philippe Coupeaux [Philippe Soupault], je crois, sont une pauvre imitation de Dada" "The works of Messieurs Breton and, what was it again, Philippe Coupeaux, I believe, are a poor imitation of Dada" ("Opinions et portraits") while disparaging Breton as a fame-hungry actor.⁸ Weighing in on Breton's dispute with Yvon Goll over the rights to the term "surréalisme," first coined by Guillaume Apollinaire, Picabia further decries Breton's movement as a

⁸ A "coupeau" is a type of plant, usually considered a weed, whose seeds stick to clothing and animal fur. By changing Soupault's name to "Coupeaux," Picabia is insulting Breton's partner as a pest and a hanger-on.

sort of Dada knock-off, adding: “Le surréalisme d’Yvan Goll [sic] se rapporte au cubisme, celui de Breton c’est tout simplement Dada travesti en ballon réclame pour Breton et Cie” ‘Yvon Goll’s surrealism resembles cubism, and Breton’s is merely Dada dressed up as an advertising balloon for Breton and Co.’ (“Opinions et portraits”). This insult further recalls the Carpentier postcard, as Picabia appears to ironically counter Breton’s surrealist “advertising balloon” by including his own bit of promotional media on 391’s cover. Rebranding 391 as the “Journal de l’Instantanéisme,”



Figure 8: Postcards numbers 7 and 12 from the Armand Noyer series (1921).
Author’s collection.



Figure 9: Arthur Sapeck (né Eugène Bataille), *La Joconde fumant une pipe*.
Illustration for Ernest Coquelin’s book *Le Rire* (Paris: Paul Ollendorf, 1887).
Gallica.

Picabia almost seems eager to throw his hat into the ring with Breton and Goll in his own bid for avant-garde supremacy, his publication figuring as a new competitor to Goll's journal, *Surréalisme*, also launched in October 1924, and to Breton's *La révolution surréaliste*, whose first issue would come out in December of the same year. Instead, this ephemeral "Instantanéiste" movement turned out to be something of a feint, a parody of the manifesto, the avant-garde journal and the organization of artistic collectives timed to coincide with Breton's formal launch of his surrealist movement.

Picabia's use of the verb "travestir," which not only means to dress-up but also to cross-dress, in his criticism of Breton's surrealism returns our attention to Picabia's decision to rechristen Carpentier's postcard as a portrait of Duchamp's *Sélavy* drag persona. As we have seen, Duchamp's readymades frequently upend, however cynically, the gendered identities of their given objects, be it through the addition of facial hair to the *Mona Lisa* in *L.H.O.O.Q.* or the feminine forms which scholars like Jones and Hopkins, among others, have observed in his *Fountain*. This postcard of the manly boxer would lend itself to a similar reversal, but curiously, the femininity of Picabia's *Rose Sélavy* appears strictly limited to the work's title, as rather than adding lipstick or Sélavy's fur boa to Carpentier's portrait, Picabia instead creates a likeness of the male Duchamp, complete with the artist's famous tobacco pipe. Noting Carpentier's reputation as a "gentleman" of the ring, Hopkins thereby concludes that this "*Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* [sic]" reflects Picabia's interpretation of "Duchamp's essentially dandyish masculinity" (20, 23).

It is true that, nicknamed the "Orchid Man" for the flower-patterned robes he wore into the ring, Carpentier was known as something of a dandy. In fact, the tenth postcard from the 1921 Armand Noyer series actually pictures the boxer in a dapper suit similar to the one Picabia sketches onto his own portrait of the boxer. The apparent interchangeability between Carpentier the boxer and Carpentier the gentleman in the Noyer postcards even seems to anticipate Picabia's transformation of the manly heavyweight into the androgynous Duchamp, as the twelve Noyer postcards represent Carpentier's masculine identity as a range of outfits, postures, and fighting stances, all signed with the same mechanical signature, ready to be swapped out at a moment's notice (fig. 8). But if Carpentier was celebrated for his ability to seamlessly transition from macho boxer to elegant dandy, as Amelia Jones observes, the self-performative and sartorial strategies which permit such a transformation are themselves typically thought of as inherently feminine. In this way, Picabia's choice to name his readymade after the drag queen Sélavy not only points to the way the glamor style portraits of the Noyer postcards feminize Carpentier, it also highlights how both Carpentier and Duchamp, as Jones puts it, "negotiate masculinity from a position of femininity," relying on feminine artifice to construct even their most masculine guises ("Clothes Make the Man" 19). Perhaps then, Picabia's incongruous title is meant to suggest that rather than a mislabeled Duchamp or Carpentier, we could in fact

be looking at a portrait of Sélavy in masculine drag.⁹ After all, before Picabia crossed out Carpentier's autograph for his readymade, Sélavy had already declared herself to be Duchamp's true identity by signing her own 1920 portrait, taken by Man Ray, with the inscription "Lovingly, Rose Sélavy alias Marcel Duchamp." As Jones observes, it is precisely by enacting this sort of divided subjectivity that Duchamp's Sélavy destabilizes fixed notions of artistic agency (*Postmodernism* 146-90). The split between Picabia's visual representation of the male Carpentier/Duchamp duo and his textual label *Rose Sélavy* reiterates this exact sort of undecidability in terms of the portrait's subject. Meanwhile, imitating the readymade gesture in order to create a portrait of the readymade's originator, Picabia would seem to suggest that the authorship of *Rose Sélavy par Picabia* is itself split between Picabia and Duchamp just as it was in the creation of Picabia's *Tableau Dada par Marcel Duchamp*, the parallel syntax between the two pieces' titles reinforcing this indeterminate lineage.

Finally, having examined the correspondence between *Rose Sélavy* and Picabia's forgery of *L.H.O.O.Q.*, it is possible that Picabia's addition of a smoking pipe to Carpentier's portrait alludes not only to Duchamp, but also to the Incohérent artist Arthur Sapeck (né Eugène Bataille), whose *Mona Lisa fumant la pipe* preceded Duchamp's vandalized *Joconde* by nearly 30 years (fig. 9). Pointing towards this readymade *avant la lettre* by way of Duchamp's trademark accessory, Picabia thereby seems to suggest that even Duchamp's iconoclastic works and identity are, like the postcard itself, imitations of an ever-absent original. It would seem, then, that rather than championing Duchamp and himself as the true proprietors of the Dada brand, Picabia instead rejects the idea that Dada possesses a single, authentic origin, renouncing his authority over the movement as he prepares to yield his place at the fore of the artistic scene to Breton and his surrealist upstarts.

"To be or not to be...American": Arthur Cravan's Prizefighting Fashions

As a symbol of the territorial struggles for dominance that Picabia is abandoning — "Always the same stupid instinct!" — Carpentier thus represents the antithesis of a Dada spirit which, instead of prolonging its reign over the avant-garde, would rather disappear than risk stagnating. As Picabia puts it on 391's cover: "LE SEUL MOUVEMENT, C'EST LE MOUVEMENT PERPERTUEL" "THE ONLY

⁹ Picabia's portrait of Carpentier as Sélavy begs comparison to Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore's iconic "I am in training, don't kiss me" portraits of 1928, which picture the queer surrealist Cahun posing in a pair of boxing trunks. A full comparison of Duchamp and Cahun's androgynous pugilistic guises is beyond the scope of this article, but a thorough analysis of Cahun and Moore collective queering of the boxing ring may be found in my article "Queering Modernism's Masculine Arena."

MOVEMENT IS PERPETUAL MOTION.’ Intrinsic to this critique, however, is the fact that Carpentier and Duchamp do in fact bear more than a superficial resemblance, as the patriotic boxer and antinationalist artist ultimately perform their respective masculine identities through a common method. In this way, *Rose Sélavy* resembles both a composite portrait and something like a photographic negative, wherein Carpentier’s likeness to Duchamp illustrates the difference between the boxer’s macho heroics and Duchamp’s androgyny while simultaneously questioning this very divide, the result being a portrait of Dada which changes from instant to instant.

In this vein, while Carpentier provides a ready foil to Duchamp, the physical resemblances and philosophic differences between these two men perhaps obscure the presence of another, the poet-boxer Arthur Cravan, whose heavyweight presence looms large over 391’s final issue. Indeed, focusing his analysis on the film *Entr’acte*, whose premiere during the intermission of the “Ballet instantanéiste” *Relâche* is announced on the back cover of 391’s final issue, Christopher Townsend has already proposed one possible connection between Cravan and Carpentier’s appearance on the journal’s cover. Reading *Entr’acte* as a critique of France’s post-war *rappel à l’ordre* and the glorification of fallen soldiers in French commercial cinema, Townsend argues that the white leather boxing gloves of the film’s opening scene are an allusion to Arthur Cravan, whose pacifist convictions and “courage to refuse the annihilating demands of the state” were greatly admired by Picabia (288). Carpentier’s appearance on the cover of Picabia’s journal might thus be understood in relation to Cravan as well as Duchamp, as this final issue of 391 functions as a sort of “movie magazine” for Picabia and René Clair’s anti-war cinema. In fact, if Picabia juxtaposed the patriotic Carpentier to the nomadic Duchamp, Cravan, whom Guy Debord described as a “deserter of seventeen nations” (1362), was also a man in favor of removing all borders, and having fled the war to Barcelona and New York with Picabia before continuing through Canada and Mexico where he disappeared under mysterious circumstances on his way to Buenos Aires, Cravan was likely the better traveled of the two.

Picabia expressed his admiration for Cravan’s draft-dodging odyssey in his *Jésus-Christ Rastaquouère* where, referencing Cravan’s tactic of disguising himself as an American infantryman in order to gain entry into Canada and escape conscription in the United States, Picabia compares the boxer to the war veteran and victim Apollinaire, writing:

To dupe = Guillaume Apollinaire

I much prefer Arthur Cravan who toured the world during the war, perpetually obliged to change his nationality in order to escape from human stupidity. Arthur Cravan disguised himself as a soldier in order to not be a soldier; he did as all our friends do who disguise themselves as honest men in order to not be honest men.

AS FOR ME, I DISGUISE MYSELF AS A MAN IN ORDER TO BE
NOTHING (241)

Constantly dissimulating his identity in order to escape the war, Cravan appears to embody the permanent motion and revolution which Picabia proposes as an alternative to nationalist conflicts, and the boxer's tactic of disguising himself as a soldier in order to desert the war provides a welcome alternative to the political regime changes which Picabia disdained for simply turning soldiers into generals and vice-versa. That said, by comparing Cravan's impersonation of a soldier to his own masculine disguise, Picabia further ties Cravan's pacifist convictions to the poet-boxer's performative approach to male identity — an aspect of Cravan's life and work whose impact on Dada remains largely overlooked.

Cravan's penchant for dissimulation dates from well before the war, to his first published work, a satirical article entitled "To be or not to be...American," which ran on the front page of the 10 July 1909 edition of *L'écho des sports* under Cravan's birth name, Fabian Lloyd. Despite appearing in the sports pages, Cravan's article is more concerned with fashion than the muscular heroics of the stadium, as Cravan advises his readers that, in Paris, the English style "d'une culotte et d'une casquette" 'breeches and a cap' is out, while the American look of "des habits deux fois trop grands" 'clothes two sizes too large' and a "un melon à travers" 'bowler hat worn at a tilt' is in. According to Cravan, this obsession with all things American began with the cakewalk and the Wright brothers, but the true trendsetters of this new style are the American prizefighters who have recently come to the city: "lorsque arrivèrent les boxeurs yankees, Joe Jeannette et Willie Lewis, entre autres, le délire fut à son comble pour se servir d'un cliché. Paris les idolâtra à bon droit. Ils eurent les fleurs, les simulacres, les encensoirs" 'when the yankee boxers arrived, Joe Jeannette and Willie Lewis, among others, the frenzy, if I may speak in clichés, reached a fever pitch. Paris rightly worshipped them with flowers, idols and incense' (122).

It is hardly surprising that the boxer should be the standard bearer for this fashion craze. As Boddy observes, if "American" served as shorthand for all things "urban" and "modern" in Europe, "boxing" was synonymous with all three (226). Fortunately, according to Cravan, becoming "American" is simple, for as Cravan has it: "Aujourd'hui, tout le monde est américain. Il faut être américain, ou tout au moins le paraître, ce qui est exactement la même chose." 'today, everyone is American. One must be American, or at least look it, which is exactly the same thing' (121). One need not fight a single round to imitate the "yankee boxer" either: "La casquette à visière inouïe est seulement tolérable pour les boxeurs ou ceux qui veulent passer pour tels, ce qui est exactement la même chose." 'Caps with outrageous bills are only recommended for boxers, or those who wish to pass as such, which is exactly the same thing' (124). In accordance with Hopkins's assertion that for Paris Dada "maleness is not to be taken as self-evident" but is

rather “both held up for questioning and performatively self-indulged in” (*Dada’s Boys* 11), Cravan portrays the American’s machismo as a matter of pose and artifice. As such, the right outfit — the baggy clothes and the bowler hat — and a few rude behaviors — cursing, spitting, never saying thank you, etc. — are all one needs in order to enjoy the status of the intimidating “American American”:

C’est qu’être américain comporte bon nombre de prérogatives. Tout d’abord l’Amérique est une des nations qui protègent le mieux leurs sujets à l’étranger. Puis, l’Américain est craint, il sait boxer ; ou du moins on le croit. . . . De plus, quand chacun doit porter l’étiquette d’une profession, à moins d’être hors-la-loi; quand l’un est honorablement menuisier, l’autre poète naturaliste, d’aucuns journalistes, cambrioleurs, peintres ou stayers, lui, l’Américain, est américain, sans plus. A ce titre, tous les salons lui sont ouverts. Reconnaissant en lui un Américain, personne ne songera à quoi il peut bien s’occuper. (122)

Being American comes with a number of advantages. First of all, America is one of the countries that best protects its subjects abroad. On top of that, the American knows how to box; or at least one believes he does. . . . What’s more, at a time when everyone must be labelled by their profession, lest one break the law; when one man is a joiner, another a naturalist poet and others journalists, burglars, painters and runners, he, the American, is American, nothing more. By this right, every salon is open to him. Recognizing him as an American, no one will question what he is doing there.

Though Paris’s obsession with American culture was not limited to the world of art, by putting the “American” in the context of a salon filled with poets, painters, and journalists, Cravan appears to focus his critique on the city’s cultural elite, for whom American imports like prizefighting were increasingly *à la mode*. Indeed, if we have already examined the boxer’s popularity in avant-garde magazines, some six months before Cravan penned his “To be or not to be...American,” F. T. Marinetti had been among the first to extol the value of macho aggression, urban modernity, and the glory of “the punching fist” in his “Manifesto of Futurism,” published in *Le Figaro* on 20 February 1909 (13).

As Martin Puchner observes, Marinetti’s manifesto form quickly became a fashion craze in its own right, leading to a veritable “explosion” of art manifestos which was widely satirized in the popular press (109). Compelling readers to become, or at least look like, virile and modern “Americans,” Cravan’s article might be understood as just such a satire of avant-garde manifestos which expounded the absolute supremacy and necessity of their respective movements, the ironic equivalence which Cravan draws between being and appearance pointing to the performative posturing behind this aggressive rhetoric. Much like

the cover of Picabia's "Journal de l'Instantanéisme," Cravan's "To be or not to be...American" thereby disguises itself as an antagonistic avant-garde manifesto only to mock the genre's polemical mode, its appearance on the front page of *L'écho des sports* further aping Marinetti's original effort to break the boundaries of the artistic journal and publish his manifesto on page one of *Le Figaro*.

At the same time however, if Cravan's contention that being and appearance are one and the same holds true, then by masquerading as an art manifesto in order to mock the manifesto form, Cravan's "To be or not to be...American," by its own definition, inevitably becomes one. With this in mind, it is striking to note that, within the context of Cravan's career, the self-consciously performative strategy he outlines in his "American" proved prophetic to his success as both a boxer and an artist where, as Dafydd Jones describes, "assuming pose" would emerge as the central tactic in Cravan's "avant-gardist exploitation of cultural situations" (201). Beginning with Cravan's pugilistic record, Cravan's assertion that there is no difference between a boxer and someone who looks the part is confirmed by a series of reports in the Paris sports papers, which recount how Cravan won the French Amateur championship "sans avoir boxé" 'without having boxed,' as several of his potential opponents were apparently too intimidated with the hulking Cravan, who, at two meters tall and weighing nearly one hundred kilograms, looked the part of a heavyweight titleholder well before he actually became one.¹⁰ The newly crowned champion was then able to parlay his dubious boxing credentials in order to gain his first access to Paris's art scene, joining a group of American prizefighters that would spar in the studio of painter Kees Van Dongen. According to Carolyn Burke, these informal matches gave Cravan, "this tall handsome 'American,'" an opportunity to prove that he was a "'manly' man uncorrupted by the civilizing efforts of effeminate culture" (262), but given Cravan's own definition of the "American," it seems likely that Cravan viewed this sparring circle as a theatrical stage upon where he could spread his reputation by playing the part of the modern virile male.

Still, if Cravan impressed the onlookers at Van Dongen's studio, contrary to what he writes in his "American," playing the part of the rugged boxer did not grant him access to "every salon." He thus developed a strategy for bringing his pugilistic act directly to the public, peddling his self-published review *Maintenant* from a grocer's wheelbarrow that he would park outside of cultural events like the *Salon des Indépendants*. This rather conspicuous guerilla sales tactic — likely inspired by newspaper vendors who would station themselves at the entrance to other public gatherings such as sporting events (see Martin 300) — paired well with *Maintenant's* provocative style of art criticism, which frequently blurred the lines between the art gallery and the boxing ring. Indeed, if Cravan had recommended in his "To be or not to be...American" that the pugnacious

¹⁰ "Les championnats amateurs 1910," *La boxe et les boxeurs*, no. 16, 23 March 1910. Cited in Cravan, *Œuvres* 192.

American should “Crachez dans les salons” ‘Spit in the salons’ (123), in his review of *L’Exposition des Indépendants* Cravan did just that, spewing insults at nearly every artist on display and declaring them to be ugly, talentless losers.

Picabia’s attacks on the surrealists in 391’s final issue share in this combative spirit, leading one to wonder if his “Journal de l’Instantanéisme” might not be an oblique allusion to Cravan’s *Maintenant* whose title means “right now.” Further still, just as Picabia’s attacks on Breton turn out to be something of a bluff, Cravan also makes it clear that his display of modernist aggression in his review of the *Indépendants* is a matter of performance:

C’est bien simple: si j’écris c’est pour faire enrager mes confrères; pour faire parler de moi et tenter de me faire un nom. Avec un nom on réussit avec les femmes et dans les affaires. Si j’avais la gloire de Paul Bourget je me montrerais tous les soirs en cache-sexe dans une revue de music-hall et je vous garantis que je ferais recette.

It’s quite simple: if I write it is to enrage my peers; to get people talking about me and to try and make a name for myself. That’s how one succeeds with women and in business. If I had the renown of Paul Bourget I would perform in a figleaf every night in a music-hall show and I guarantee it would be a hit. (68)

It would appear, then, that much like Van Dongen’s studio, *Maintenant* provided not only a ring where he could spar with his contemporaries, but also a stage where he could cultivate his poet-boxer act, the modernist magazine providing what Suzanne Churchill, in her analysis of the mock-avant-garde journal *Spectra*, calls an “essential venue for modernist identity performances” where “modern selves were made — and fabricated” (24, 38). Further still, claiming that he will gladly trade his boxing gloves for a revealing “cache-sexe” once he has become a success, Cravan again suggests that, whether one’s goal is to *épater les bourgeois* or to please the public, artistic identity is a matter of performance, his potential transformation from pugilist to cabaret dancer recalling, perhaps, Duchamp’s creation of his drag persona.

Returning to the cross-dressed boxer of Picabia’s *Rose Sélavy*, we thus find that even if Cravan did not share Duchamp’s physical resemblance to Carpentier, a certain inverted symmetry nevertheless exists between the two boxers. Shortly following the publication of his review of *L’Exposition des Indépendants* in the fourth issue of *Maintenant*, the outbreak of the First World War would lead Cravan to flee Paris to Barcelona, where he would produce the journal’s final issue in 1915. But this was not the end of his pugilistic performances. In 1916, Cravan famously organized a prizefight between himself and the legendary Jack Johnson, the world’s first Black heavyweight champion, using his earnings from the match to finance his passage to America and put further distance between himself and the

conflict engulfing the European continent. Whereas Picabia lamented the nationalist passions surrounding Carpentier's bout with Dempsey, Cravan's own match against an American champion was thus fought towards pacifist ends. Moreover, Cravan's fight with Johnson was promoted as exactly the sort of "struggle between two races" which Picabia decried, with Spanish papers publicizing the event as a showdown between "el campeón del mundo, Jack Johnson, Negro" 'The World Champion, Jack Johnson, Black' and "el campeón europeo, Arthur Cravan, Blanco" 'The European Champion, Arthur Cravan, White' even though neither boxer held any such title at the time.¹¹ These false titles were necessary, however, because Cravan was entirely out of his depth against Johnson, and indeed, though accounts of the match vary, most observers agree that this fight must have been staged, with Cravan and Johnson, who had previously met in Paris, agreeing to pull their punches and give the crowd a good show.¹² As such, while Cravan's match against Johnson may have been promoted as exactly the sort of chauvinist conflict which Picabia despised, their faked prizefight actually shared more in common with the theatrical performance and homosocial collaboration hinted at in Tzara's "Boxe." The same performative tactics which Cravan employed to mock the macho posturing of the avant-garde thus facilitated his flight from the war. This is perhaps not coincidental, as according to Cravan's future wife, Mina Loy, Cravan viewed the artistic scene and the battlefield in a similar light, his motto being: "'On ne me fait pas marcher moi!" 'They can't pull anything over on me!'; "Je ne marche pas pour leur art moderne. Je ne marche pas pour la grande guerre!" 'I don't march for their modern art. I don't march for the Great War!' (qtd. in Conover, "Mina Loy's *Colossus*" 112).¹³

Furthering this irony, the European title which Cravan claimed to hold when promoting his match with Johnson was actually held by none other than Carpentier at the time, meaning that, in a sense, Cravan had disguised himself as the patriotic Carpentier in order to escape the war. It would seem fitting, then, that Picabia should allude to Cravan by inserting Carpentier onto 391's final cover before effectively deserting the Paris art scene himself, his decision to disguise the manly Carpentier in Duchamp's dandy dress and to rename the portrait after Sélavy serving as an ironic reversal of Cravan's pugilistic guise. What is more, Picabia actually highlights Cravan's talent for staging his masculinity through "sartorially determined codes of selfhood" (A. Jones, "Clothes Make the Man" 18) in 391's very first issue. Announcing Cravan's impending arrival in America after his fight with Johnson, Picabia writes:

¹¹ Cited from a poster for Cravan and Johnson's match reproduced in Borràs 151.

¹² For a recent analysis of Cravan's match with Johnson which summarizes some of these various accounts and examines the theatrical dimension of the fight, see Vere, *Sport and modernism* 46-62.

¹³ This is according to Loy's unpublished manuscript of a novel about her life with Cravan entitled *Colossus*.

Arthur Cravan a lui aussi, pris le transatlantique. Il donnera des conférences. Sera-t-il vêtu en homme du monde ou en cow-boy? Au moment du départ il s'inclinait pour la seconde tenue et se proposait de faire une impressionnante entrée sur scène: à cheval et tirant dans les lustres trois coups de revolver.

Arthur Cravan has also started his transatlantic voyage. He will be giving lectures. Will he be dressed as a man of the world or as a cowboy? At the time of his departure he had opted for the latter and planned to make an impressive entrance on stage: on horseback and shooting the lights out with a pistol. ("Odeurs de partout")

Cravan's debut in New York was spectacular, but it was not so much the boxer's extravagant outfit which garnered attention as it was his lack thereof. Aware of Cravan's penchant for scandal, Picabia and Duchamp organized for the boxer to lecture on "The Independent Artists of France and America" at Grand Central Palace where the 1917 Independent Artists Exhibition was being held. Cravan did not disappoint, his conference turning into a drunken striptease when according to *The New York Sun*, the sight of a painting of a beautiful woman spurred Cravan into "emulating Eve's idea of how to dress in the middle of July" ("Independents Get Unexpected Thrill").¹⁴ This effort to imitate the feminine muse then quickly shifted back to a more masculine bodily display as Cravan demonstrated his boxing skills against the security guards who stepped in before the boxer could remove his shirt. As Sanouillet recounts, the boxer's behavior mystified most of the audience, largely comprised of the most prominent women of New York high society, but those in the New York Dada circle found it a smashing success (68). According to Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Duchamp, whose *Fountain* laid hidden behind a partition during Cravan's attempted striptease, declared it a "wonderful lecture," and Walter Arensberg promptly bailed Cravan out of jail (16).¹⁵

Ultimately, however, Cravan would present himself as a "man of the world" in the fourth issue of Coady's *The Soil*, where he was interviewed about his match against Johnson. While the boxing-obsessed Coady was most interested in Cravan's pugilistic expertise, asking him about Johnson's fighting stance and his opinion of the Black heavyweight, the portrait Cravan chose to accompany his interview on the match does not find him in the ring, but rather in an elegantly-appointed drawing room, caressing a pair of Siamese cats while sporting a three-piece suit with matching polka-dotted socks and tie (fig. 10). As Vere observes, this decidedly unmacho image upends the reader's expectations about Cravan, and its

¹⁴ The article is unsigned but was likely written by Henry McBride who was a supporter of Cravan's work and helped to promote him in New York.

¹⁵ As with his fight with Johnson, there is some question as to the authenticity of Cravan's fight with Grand Central security and his subsequent arrest. It is possible these "guards" were actually friends of Arensberg and Picabia who may have orchestrated the entire event.

effect is made all the more jarring when, a few pages later, Cravan is pictured in the ring with Johnson, the doe-eyed gentleman transformed into a bare-chested ruffian (*Sport and Modernism* 58). As in the Noyer series of Carpentier postcards, masculine identity is thereby again shown to be a question of interchangeable poses and sartorial codes. Cravan's adoption of this effete dandy posture in the photograph would prove sufficiently convincing that when Loy first saw this portrait, she was surprised to find that this supposed tough guy, said to be ready to "assault a building if it stood in its way," instead had "a certain sleekness of feature that gave him the air of a homosexual" who "deals in values of luxury" (Conover, "Mina Loy's *Colossus*" 104).



Arthur Cravan

Figure 10: Portrait of Cravan preceding the article "Arthur Cravan vs. Jack Johnson" in *The Soil*, no. 4, Apr. 1917, p. 160. JSTOR Early Journal Content.

This was perhaps the portrait's intended effect, as the dandyish dress which Cravan adopts in this portrait may be intended as an allusion to Cravan's uncle, the homosexual icon Oscar Wilde. As a matter of fact, outside of Cravan's interview with Coady about his match against Johnson, the majority of *The Soil's* fourth issue is devoted to English translations of texts about Wilde that Cravan had initially published in *Maintenant*. This decision was likely calculated, to some extent, as a means for Cravan to jumpstart his career in America by drawing upon his uncle's fame, but the interchangeability of Cravan's Wildean and pugilistic guises in these portraits also points towards a family resemblance between the performative strategy which Cravan outlines in his "To be or not to be...American" and Wilde's meticulously crafted public image, Cravan's winking assertion that being and appearance are "exactly the same thing" echoing Wilde's famous quip that "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances" (Wilde 21). The key difference, of course, is that while Wilde scandalized his Victorian public by playing the role of the effeminate aesthete, Cravan's own provocative persona relied on his adoption of a tough-guy swagger that, quite paradoxically, had risen to popularity among the avant-garde in reaction to the very sort of "feminized" and "decadent" model of artistic manhood with which Wilde became synonymous (Felski 92). Indeed, while the avant-garde frequently styled itself and has often been regarded as a radical reaction against nineteenth-century aestheticism, this lineage between Wilde and Cravan, like the resemblance between Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* and Sapeck's *Mona Lisa*, speaks to Paris Dada's long emergence from Symbolist traditions of *blague*, *fumisme*, and *mystification*.¹⁶ Wilde, who was first perceived in France as an "individu au sexe inconnu, au langage cabotin, aux récits blagueurs" 'individual of unknown sex, speaking like a ham actor, telling joking tales' (Goncourt 255) thus appears as something of a forerunner to French Dada's humorous cabotinage in the serious and manly arena of modern art.¹⁷

Fully grasping the irony of Cravan posing as Wilde beside his account of his prizefight with Johnson would likely require delving further into Wilde's history and the scandal that drove Cravan's parents out of England to Lausanne. For if the juxtaposition between the swish gentility of the Cravan-as-Wilde portrait which precedes his interview with Coady and the brute muscle of the Cravan-in-the-ring photograph which follows is already jarring, the contrast between these two

¹⁶ Doug Singsen has recently argued that accounting for the *blague* tradition allows for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between Symbolism and the avant-garde established in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*.

¹⁷ These impressions of Wilde, among the first in French literary circles, were recorded in the diary of Edmond de Goncourt in 1883. The same entry details one of Wilde's "récits blagueurs" 'joke stories' in which Wilde, back from his own tour of the United States, claimed that Texas playhouses regularly hired actual criminals to play villains on stage. For an insightful reading of Duchamp's use of humor see Goodyear.

images becomes all the more striking when one considers that the man who sent Wilde to prison on charges of sodomy and gross indecency, John Sholto Douglas, the father of Wilde's lover Alfred Douglas, is better known in boxing circles as the Marquess of Queensberry, the man behind the Queensberry rules of 1865 which govern the sport of boxing to this day. This enmity between Wilde and Queensberry is scarcely mentioned in the scholarly literature on Cravan, whose habit of introducing himself as "the nephew of Oscar Wilde" when entering the ring is typically presented as but another of his many eccentricities.¹⁸ However, Cravan's desire to represent his uncle in Queensberry's ring appears to pinpoint what Amelia Jones, in her analysis of these photographs from *The Soil*, calls Cravan's "neurasthenic" compulsion to play the roles of both effeminate poet and manly boxer, his efforts to "radically recombine two seemingly incompatible formations of masculine subjectivity in one body" amounting to what Jones deems Cravan's own sort of "queerness" (*Irrational Modernism* 157). In this way, Jones argues, Cravan exposes the contradictions of modern life without trying to make sense of them, thereby revealing the trauma wrought on the individual by the rationalizing and categorizing forces of industrial capitalism while also refusing to conform to a masculinist model of the cerebral artistic genius which is itself hostile to the contingencies of the human subject.¹⁹

To that end, while Cravan would flee America shortly after this issue of *The Soil* was published, we might observe how his use of the boxing ring in order to stage his "queer" and divided masculine identity lived on in one final Dada magazine. As Hage and Hopkins have both shown, Duchamp and Man Ray's *New York Dada* plays upon the divide between "feminine" commodity culture and "masculine" high culture, the contents of this one-off journal functioning together as what Hage describes as a sort of periodical readymade of women's commercial publications like *Vanity Fair* (Hage 176; Hopkins "Selling Dada"). In this respect, the unsigned article "Pug Debs make Society Bow" stands as something of an outlier, as in addition to spoofing the fashionable parties advertised in the New York society pages, the article also parodies the masculine world of prizefighting reporting, announcing an upcoming match between "a beautiful pair of rough-eared debutantes" to be fought at Madison Square Garden in a "renaissance period" ring, with velvet ropes "hung like portieres" ("Pug Debs").

¹⁸ In fact, the only literature on Cravan which highlights the Queensberry-Wilde conflict is not found in literary or art-history scholarship but in a blog post by Robert Ecksel, editor in chief of Boxing.com. The fact that Ecksel, who usually reports on current boxing news, is such a perceptive reader of literary history seems telling given the other connections between boxing journalism and Dada discussed here.

¹⁹ Jones outlines this argument about "irrational modernism" in relation to the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven but extends it to Cravan as well. See *Irrational Modernism* (especially 10-27).

This absurd clash of gender roles and journalistic genres seems to parody Gotham's high-society women, whose talent for hiding "masculine" aggressive tendencies behind their apparent elegance and refinement is likened to a pair of suede boxing gloves loaded with concrete. Yet as Hage reminds us, *New York Dada's* critique of modern gender norms cuts both ways, the journal's biting, often misogynistic satire of women's magazines working to ironize the avant-garde's own reaction against the supposedly feminizing effects of commodity culture by showing that these same feminizing and commodifying conventions also existed within the realm of the avant-garde and the avant-garde journal (190). As such, the fact that the pugilistic debutantes in question are actually two male artists, Marsden Hartley and Joseph Stella, who had recently become associated with Dada, might be understood as a parody of male modernist swagger, their chic ring attire — bejeweled boxing boots and tights made by "Tweebleham of London, purveyor to the Queen" ("Pug Debs") — recalling Cravan's "To be or not to be...American" and his insinuation that the affection of virile aggression is simply *de rigueur* in the avant-garde. In fact, both Hartley and Stella had reportedly been trained for this "grand socking cotillon" by Mina Loy, who as Cravan's widow and one of the New York art scene's most fashionable women, was ideally suited to serve as governess and boxing coach for this pugilistic coming-out party which adapts the "queerness" of her late husband's flawed performance of modernist masculinity into a sort of drag show prizefight.

Composite Portraits: Duchamp and Cravan

Throughout his life and his various manifestations in avant-garde magazines, Cravan thus presented his own composite portrait of masculine subjectivity, the split between his identities as Wildean wit and macho heavyweight anticipating the divide between Duchamp and his lookalike Carpentier and his tactic of staging his instable male identity through sartorial artifice corresponding to Duchamp's creation of his feminine alter-ego. It might be argued, then, that Cravan's portrait is somehow hidden in Picabia's *Rose Sélavy*, and indeed, if we have seen how Picabia's appropriation of Carpentier's postcard fits within the history of the readymade, according to no less of an authority than Blaise Cendrars, Cravan had his own part to play in the invention of Dada's most famous readymade works:

To recount Arthur Cravan's life in New York would be to write the history of the foundation of dadaism, but I am not going to write about that now, and nor, up to the present time, has that flashy adventurer, the apostle of art for art's sake, Francis Picabia, written a word about it; in New York, Picabia saw Cravan every day and, inspired by his example, had the great moral courage to provide Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa, who was too surprised to protest, with a pair of mustaches like Kaiser Wilhelm II's; nor has anything been written as yet by the inventive Marcel Duchamp (and what did this malicious Parisian do in New York?

He taught love, that game of chess!) who also saw Cravan every day in New York and who, submitting to his influence, had the great moral courage to provide the chamber pots on sale in a bazaar with the following guarantee: "I declare that this household article is an authentic work of art!" and underwrite this declaration with a facsimile of his signature, in a form only the initiated understood: *Rose Sélavy*. (202-03)

Herein lies the rub, for while Cendrars contends that Cravan's exploits were crucial to the history of the readymade, as per his usual, Cendrars pays little attention to the factual accuracy of his account. As Amelia Jones observes, it is precisely because Cravan has been incorporated into scholarly discourse through these sorts of mythical anecdotes that his radical approach to artistic identity and gendered subjectivity has rarely been properly acknowledged (*Irrational Modernism* 175). Intriguingly, Jones therefore posits the irrational "lived Dada" of Cravan in opposition to the cerebral and emotionally detached Duchamp, whose conceptual genius, in the concrete form of the readymade, has been celebrated in art-historical discourse as the true origin point of Dada at the expense of the ephemeral and bodily experimentations of artists like Cravan. Indeed, when asked by Pierre Cabanne about Cravan's sudden disappearance, Duchamp himself hardly seems sorry to have seen him go: "Cabanne: He was never seen again? Duchamp: Never. He was a funny type. I didn't like him very much, nor he me" (qtd in *Works, Writings and Interviews* 135).

Further still, in a fascinating turn of events, Duchamp would join Mina Loy in filing for Cravan's death certificate, submitting a notarized letter to the New York County clerk's office which read as follows:

I, the undersigned Henri Robert Marcel Duchamp, Artist, thereby affirm that I knew about Fabian Lloyd whose disappearance, in 1918, caused a flutter in the Art World. We expected a great deal of his poems the manuscript of which was lost with him.

I knew him well and only death could be the cause of his disappearance.

New York March 2nd, 1946

Henri Robert Marcel Duchamp (qtd. in Borràs 372)

In many respects, this letter metaphorically foreshadows the dynamic described by Jones: by signing off on Cravan's death certificate, Duchamp helps put an official end to Cravan's messy and embodied "lived Dada" with the same gesture, the signature, that would come symbolize the rationalizing and desubjectifying model of male avant-garde practice associate with Duchamp's conceptual genius. (See *Irrational Modernism* 13-27). Indeed, it is almost as if, by Duchamp's hand, Cravan is reduced to the status of a readymade object.

On the other hand, even as Duchamp is party to what Jones, citing Michel Foucault, describes as "history's destruction of the body" (31), Duchamp's

insistence upon the loss of Cravan's manuscripts signals that the boxer's oeuvre, like Duchamp's *Large Glass*, has been left definitively unfinished. In this way, some part of Cravan seems to resist the jurisdiction of this document and of Duchamp's signature, as he, like the artist-boxer in Picabia's *Rose Sélavy*, retains an element of undecidability. Returning to how Picabia's cover for the final issue of *391* plays upon both the figure of the boxer and the artist's signature in order to critique traditional notions of masculine artistic authority, rather than emphasizing what separates Cravan and Duchamp, it thus seems more appropriate to view them as two aspects of Dada's own irreducible identity — one which, like Carpentier in the Armand Noyer series, took a variety of successive poses and guises. By way of conclusion then, I draw upon George Baker, whose own analysis of Picabia's "Instantanéisme" reminds us that the French "instantané" translates not only as "instantaneous" but also as an instantaneous photograph, a "snapshot" (304). As indeed, Picabia's *Rose Sélavy* appropriates Carpentier's postcard in order to provide a snapshot Paris Dada's fleeting and unstable identity; a group portrait divided between Picabia, Duchamp, and Cravan among others, which captures Dada's shifting stances within the avant-garde. As such, the misrecognitions and mistaken identities that have occurred in the study of *391*'s final cover might appear to be more of a feature than a flaw, as rather than an arena for reasserting male identity or Dada supremacy, for the men of Paris Dada, the boxing ring proved a stage where the boundaries separating the masculine from the feminine and one male ego from another could be played with and scrutinized.

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