

# Between Music and the Machine: Francis Picabia and the End of Abstraction

Ce qui est extraordinaire, c'est que malgré leurs audaces, l'un et l'autre souffraient d'un mal qu'il leur était difficile

de préciser : une sorte de nostalgie de la forme objective, le regret du motif et de toutes les formules classiques dont ils s'étaient peu à peu détachés.

– Gabrielle Buffet

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Figure 1 & Figure 2

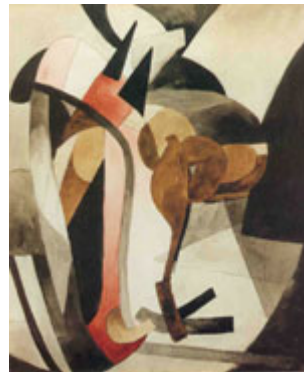
Left: Francis Picabia, *Dances at the Spring I*, 1912

Right: Francis Picabia, *Procession in Seville*, 1912

In January 1913, just two months after their trip to the Jura mountains with Guillaume Apollinaire and Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and his wife, Gabrielle Buffet, boarded an ocean-liner for New York. They arrived just three days after the opening of the Armory Show, where Picabia showed *Paris, Memory of Grimaldi, Dances at the Spring (Fig. 1)*, and *Procession in Seville (Fig. 2)*. (1) More clearly cubist in technique and less radically at odds with perceived notions of modern painting than the work that drew the bulk of the critics' ire, Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, Picabia's

three paintings nonetheless received considerable attention in the press, some of which was quite positive. (2)

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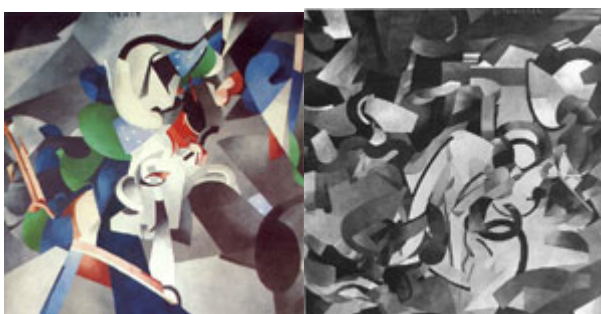


Left: Figure 3 -Francis Picabia,*New York*, 1913

Right: Figure 4 -Francis Picabia,*Negro Song I*, 1913

Almost immediately upon his arrival in New York, Picabia was introduced to a small group of artists interested in the European avant-garde, including Mabel Dodge, Alfred Stieglitz, Marius de Zayas, and Paul Haviland. In March, Picabia had his first one-man show at Stieglitz's gallery where he presented a collection of freshly completed drawings and watercolors (Fig. 3,4), works he described as abstractions, pure paintings having no longer any relation to perceived reality. As he described his works in a text written expressly for the exhibit: "In my paintings, the public is not to look for a 'photographic' recollection of a visual impression or sensation, but to look at them as simply an attempt to express the purest part of the abstract reality of form and color in itself." (3)

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Left: Figure 5

Picabia, *Udnie*, 1913

Right: Figure 6

Picabia, *Edtaonisl*, 1913

In April, he and his wife returned to Paris, where he immediately began work on translating these small watercolors into large, ambitious paintings, designed, in all likelihood, as grand salon-pieces, manifesto-works of his commitment to abstraction (a word, claimed Duchamp, “that he invented” (4) ). At the Salon d’Automne, Picabia presented two of these works, *Udnie* (Fig. 5) and *Edtaonisl* (Fig. 6), both of which stand about nine feet on each side, with their perplexing titles.

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Figure 7

Picabia, *I see again in memory my dear Udnie*, 1914

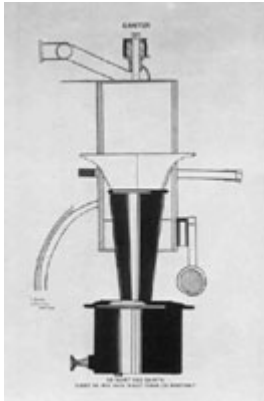
printed in block letters at the top. Both are dominated by interlocking curved forms suggesting something organic, as if the painting itself was in the process of growing: *Udnie* expanding outward from the center, *Edtaonisl* stretching upward from the bottom (“a rhythm of impulse,” as he was to refer to it (5) ). Picabia had described them in a letter to Stieglitz as “a purer painting of a dimension having no title, each painting hav[ing] a name in rapport with the pictorial expression, [an] appropriate name absolutely created for it.” (6) Throughout 1913 and into 1914, Picabia continued with his

practice of “pure painting” as Apollinaire referred to it. But, sometime in mid-1914, Picabia painted *I see again in memory my dear Udnie* (*Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*) (Fig. 7), a work that, in its incorporation of vaguely machinal elements with an otherwise abstract composition, prefigured a radical shift that was about to take place in the painter’s work.

In early 1915, Picabia and his wife returned to New York, where he took up again with the Stieglitz group, itself experiencing a shift toward a more explicit embrace of modernity and its technological inventions. Along with de Zayas, Picabia began work on a new magazine, *291* (named after the address of Stieglitz’s gallery). As part of a celebratory, inaugural gesture, Picabia prepared a series of mechanical portraits. He represented Stieglitz as a camera (Fig. 8); Haviland as an electric lamp; de Zayas as a complex arrangement of a woman’s corset attached to a spark plug which was itself attached to an engine (Fig. 9); Agnes Meyer (a collector and close friend of de Zayas) as a spark plug. Picabia represented himself as a composite horn-cylinder-spark plug (Fig. 10) (appropriate for a man who was to own some 120 cars during the course of his life (7)).

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- Figure 8
- Figure 9
- Figure 10
- Francis Picabia, *Here, This is Stieglitz / Faith and Love*, cover of *291*, July-August 1915
- Francis Picabia, *De Zayas! De Zayas!*, *291*, July-August 1915
- Francis Picabia, *The Saint of Saints / This is a portrait about me*, *291*, July-August 1915

In the following months, Picabia transformed these mechanical portraits into larger paintings, referred to by most scholars as “mechanomorphs.” Unlike the earlier portraits, these works were more elusive, less concerned with the accurate depiction of real machine parts, than in manipulating the formal properties of various fragments of largely unrecognizable machines. In transforming the modest portraits of *291* into

large-scale paintings on board, Picabia was reenacting the process used in his earlier transformation of the small New York watercolors into the enormous abstractions painted upon his return to Paris.

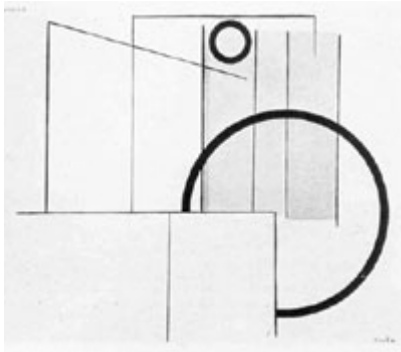
It is impossible to overlook the transformation that took place in such a brief span of time. In early 1914, Picabia was fully committed to exploring the language and ambition of abstract painting; in early 1915 Picabia had turned himself completely around. In adopting the machine and its metaphorical potential, he had returned to the language of representation, to the depiction of things in the world. He had abandoned almost every trace of the concerns—in terms of both form and content—that guided him just a year before. Where the works from 1913/1914 were abstract, organic, painterly, rich with coloristic complexities, and suggestive of interiorized, subjective states of mind, the works from 1915 were largely monochromatic, linear, inorganic, and clearly derived from and reflective of real-world objects.

Almost every scholar to have approached this shift has endeavored to highlight its radicality. The break was total and unequivocal, self-evidently so. Michel Sanouillet summed it up most succinctly when he described Picabia as having “turned his back” (8) on modernist painting, abandoning its procedures and promises in favor of a poetics of modernity—one evidently influenced by the example set by Duchamp. As de Zayas was to put it with reference to Picabia’s Spanish origin: “He is the only one who has done as did Cortez. He has burned his ship behind him.” (9)

And yet to follow the painter’s work beyond 1913 is to recognize that the break was in fact far from absolute. For one, Picabia never really gave up his commitment to abstraction. Works like *Fantasy* (Fig. 11) and *Music is like Painting* (Fig. 12), both of which were painted at the same time as the mechanomorphs, attest to Picabia’s persistent commitment to the procedures and ambitions of abstraction. And

there is no doubt that this was a commitment that would erupt here and there throughout the late teens and into the early twenties (*Lausanne Abstract*, 1918 (Fig. 13); *Streamers*, 1919 (Fig. 14); *Coils*, 1922 (Fig. 15)), and although the twenties and thirties were dominated by a variety of figurative works, abstraction would appear again in the forties (*Painting of a Better Future*, 1945 (Fig. 16) ; *Playing Card*, 1949 (Fig. 17) ). And this is to say that even at first glance, Picabia's case is quite *unlike* that of Duchamp. Abstraction, that "word he invented," would remain throughout Picabia's life a palpable presence, inflecting almost all of his work, even, if not especially, the mechanomorphs.

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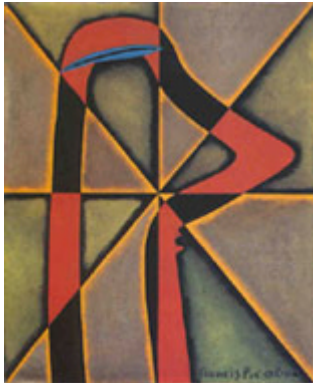
- Figure 11
- Figure 12
- Figure 13
- Figure 14
  
- Francis Picabia, *Fantasy*, 291, December 1915
- Francis Picabia, *Music Is Like Painting*, 1915
- Francis Picabia, *Lausanne Abstract*, 1918
- Francis Picabia, *Streamers II*, 1919

click images to enlarge





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- Figure 15
- Figure 16
- Figure 17
  
- Francis Picabia, *Coils*, 1921-22
- Francis Picabia, *Painting of a Better Future*, 1945
- Francis Picabia, *The Cowardice of Subtle Barbarism*, 1949

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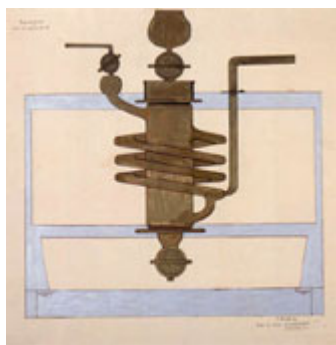


Figure 18  
Francis Picabia, *Paroxysm of Sorrow*, 1915

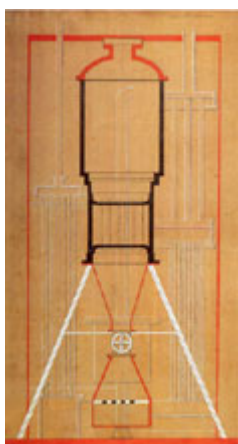


Figure 19  
Francis Picabia, *Machine Without a Name*, 1915

This should be obvious, given the way in which all of the New York mechanomorphs retain, even reinforce, a modernist commitment to the integrity of the picture plane (its flatness and boundedness), as well as in the way in which the bulk of the mechanomorphs, like the earlier abstractions, resist interpretation as real-world objects. In *Paroxysm of Sorrow* (*Paroxyme (sic) de la douleur*) (1915) (Fig. 18), for example, the uniform application of paint, the nesting of rectangular forms (the largest of which coincides with the outer limit of the canvas), as well as the work's aggressive frontality and symmetry suggest a continued dialog with the language of abstraction, in particular with the shallow space, central organization, and largely symmetrical, well-framed composition of *Udnie*. And this is no less true of *A Machine Without a Name* (Fig. 19) where the flatness of the picture plane is asserted

unequivocally, not by virtue of an unmodulated application of paint and the web of vertical and horizontal lines. Indeed, its title seems to demand that we understand the painting as thematizing the a-signifying ambition of abstract painting.

Perhaps, then, we ought to consider not only de Zayas' account of Picabia (the Cortez of the avant-garde), but also that of Buffet. For as she understood it, her husband's work, from 1907 on, was on some level engaged with the discourse of the "painterly." (10) Indeed, it was this above all that in her mind distinguished the work of Picabia from that of Duchamp. So if we are to take Buffet seriously—and even the most cursory glance at Picabia's work suggests that we would not be wrong to do so—then we ought to consider the possibility that the mechanomorphs, coming as they did on the heels of an extended investigation of the possibilities of abstraction, were themselves still invested in, or responding in some manner to the promise of modernist painting—the promise, as Picabia described it, of "expressing the purest part of the abstract reality." (11)

## The Music of Painting

I am working at the moment on a very large painting which concentrates several of my studies exhibited at 291—I am thinking moreover of a painting, a purer painting of a dimension having no title, each painting will have a name in rapport with the pictorial expression, [an] appropriate name absolutely created for it... Excuse the brevity of my letter. I am a little fatigued and tormented by my new evolution. (12)

Picabia had just returned to Paris when he scrawled this note on a postcard-size sheet of paper and sent it to Stieglitz. Following up on the implications of his New York watercolors, he began work on the large oil-paintings, *Udnie* and *Edtaonisl*, both of which were later shown at the Salon d'Automne. (13) It has since been demonstrated that both titles, although

apparently nonsense words, were the result of a series of selections, contraction and reorganization, such that the word “Udnie” was derived from “Uni-dimensionnel” and “Edtaonisl” from “Étirole danseuse.” (14) What remained was a pair of words that relinquished their once-signifying logic for the sake of pure sound, freed from the communicative function of language. (15) As titles to abstract paintings, they do indeed serve as “names in rapport with the pictorial expression,” and as such lend support to the viewer’s inclination to consider the painting not as a representation of something, but as itself a something—that we are not looking at a picture of *Udnie*, but *Udnie* itself.

While Picabia’s note to Stieglitz is clipped and somewhat vague, it must have been comprehensible to the photographer if only because of his familiarity with the long and quite detailed account that Picabia gave to Stieglitz during his exhibition of abstract watercolors. (16) Picabia’s central argument sets out on common territory, articulating a pictorial practice aimed, like much of modernist painting at large, at communicating one’s “deepest contact... with nature,” a task for which traditional illusionistic techniques are clearly inadequate:

For example, when we look at a tree we are conscious not only of its outside appearance but also of some of its properties, its qualities and its evolution. Our feelings before this tree are the result of this knowledge, acquired by experience through analysis; hence the complexity of this feeling cannot be expressed simply by objective and mechanical representation.

In this, Picabia is merely recapitulating arguments set out in support of cubist painting, in particular the Puteaux cubism of Gleizes and Metzinger, with whom Picabia was close in the years leading up to his first trip to New York. As the two put it in *Du Cubisme*, the task of the cubist painter is to “depart

from superficial reality” so as to capture the “profound reality... concealed in the most commonplace objects.” (17) We could well imagine that Picabia would continue in this vein, arguing for a painting of the reality beyond appearance, the painting of a more profound reality than the one we see with our eyes alone. And yet Picabia shifts gears at this point, without warning or justification, from the representation of nature to the representation of inner consciousness:

The resulting manifestations of this state of mind, which increasingly approaches abstraction, cannot themselves be anything but abstraction. They separate themselves from the sensorial pleasure which man may derive from man or nature (Impressionism) to enter the domain of the pure joy of the idea, of consciousness.

And this, we find, is a necessary slippage, because what Picabia really wants to get at is the way in which painting can follow the example of music so as to abandon the task of representation altogether. In sliding from nature to consciousness, Picabia moves one step closer to the painting of form and color alone:

We can make ourselves better understood by comparing it to music. If we grasp without difficulty the meaning and the logic of a musical work, it is because this work is based on the laws of harmony and composition of which we have either the acquired or the inherited knowledge. The new form of painting puzzles the public only because it does not find in it the old objectivity and does not grasp the new objectivity. The laws of this new convention have as yet hardly been formulated, but they will become gradually more defined just as musical laws have become more defined and they will very rapidly become as understandable as were the objective representations of nature. Therefore, in my paintings, the public is not to look for a “photographic” recollection of a visual impression or sensation, but to look at them as simply an attempt to express the purest part of the abstract reality of form and color in itself. (18)

I have moved rather slowly through this text because it serves to illuminate, especially in its slippages and distortions, the means by which Picabia came to understand his break with the cubist logic—still representational at bottom—for the sake of a painting that would justify itself by virtue of its commitment to “form and color in itself.” (19)

Of course, the justification of advanced painting by way of an analogy to music was in no way unique at that moment. But what was unique was the specific nature of his appeal, one that derived in large measure from the example set by his wife, herself a student of advanced musical discourse, both in France and Germany.

When Buffet first met Picabia in the winter of 1908, she was on holiday from her musical studies in Berlin. Having completed her studies under Vincent d’Indy at the Schola Cantorum she went to Germany where she met up with fellow student, Edgar Varèse. For Buffet, as for Varèse, the most significant musical influence at that time was the work of the pianist, composer, and theorist Ferruccio Busoni. (20) In fact, the two were so committed to Busoni’s ambitions that they went so far as to build some of the new musical instruments that Busoni had proposed as a way out of traditional tonality. (21) But it was Busoni’s theoretical work rather than his inventions that had the greatest impact on Buffet. (22) Through Busoni, Buffet developed a highly sophisticated account of the state of avant-garde music, an account that was in turn passed on to Picabia. (23)

Busoni published *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music*, his most ambitious attempt to reconsider the structure and aims of advanced music, in 1907. (24) At stake here was the attempt to draw music as close as possible to “nature herself.” Not to represent nature, but to *be* nature. In this, Busoni imagined a kind of musical composition that would live and grow as any natural organism—music as a body of sorts, self-organizing and self-contained, a music guided by “natural necessity,”

following “its own proper mode of growth.” (25)

What made Busoni’s *Sketch* so radical was the way in which it articulated an alternative to what was at the time the two dominant models of musical composition, so-called “absolute” and “program” music. Absolute music, as it was commonly understood at the time, was based upon the manipulation of the tonal, harmonic, and architectonic conventions of musical composition as they had developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Program music, by contrast, was explicitly representational and concerned the use of musical form to suggest events, things, feelings, etc. Its place was in the theater, as it was used to underscore the actions performed by players on the stage. Busoni considered both forms equally impoverished: program music for its utter triviality, its reduction of the lofty art of music to the level of simple imitation—the sounds of thunder, the march of a military regiment, the plaintive cry of the dying heroine (26) ; absolute music for its uncritical acceptance of the given conventions, its inconsequential formalism. (27) Both program and absolute music were hopelessly conventional, and as such of no use to the composer with ambitions of a music of nature at its most profound.

It was with this insistence upon the elimination of convention that Busoni faced the problem around which the entire essay turns: insofar as music is to avoid falling into complete “formlessness,” (28) it must establish for itself a certain self-generated system within which to coordinate itself. On the other hand, to perpetuate such a system beyond a single instance is to fall back on convention—a new convention, of course, but a convention just the same. Busoni’s attention to the problems of conventionalization went so far as to include the very act of notation, for as he saw it: “the instant the pen seizes it, the idea loses its original form. The very intention to write down the idea, compels a choice of measure and key.” (29) And it is from this recognition of the

inescapably conventional nature of all music, even music at its most self-consciously anti-conventional, that Busoni was drawn to conclude his essay with a long quotation from Hugo von Hoffmannsthal:

I felt... that the book I shall write will be neither in English nor in Latin; and this for the one reason... namely, that the language in which it may be given to me, not only to write, but also to think, will not be Latin, or English, or Italian, or Spanish, but a language not even one of whose words I know, a language in which dumb things speak to me, and in which, it may be, I shall at last have to respond in my grave to an Unknown Judge. (30)

Hoffmannsthal's remark serves to underscore what may be the most radical proposition in Busoni's text (a proposition that would have to wait until 1952 for its performative realization (31)): if it is the case that music draws closer to nature the more completely it abandons the given conventions of musicality, and insofar as this movement pushes the work of art toward the conditions of non-communication (of a language that even the author cannot understand), then one would have to admit that even the brief moment of silence that separates the performance of one movement from the next is "*in itself music.*" (32) What Busoni is left with is therefore a music divided in two: on the one hand, the fullness of a sound that eludes the comprehension of the composer himself, and on the other, the total evacuation of all sound. And this is to say that the insistent pursuit of a non-conventional, fully organic and self-generating work of art leads, at its limit, to either the utterly formless or the entirely vacant.

I  
See Again in Memory...

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Figure 20  
Francis Picabia, Amorphism  
Manifesto, 1913

Some time in May of 1913, Picabia sent Stieglitz an essay entitled “Vers l’Amorphism,” recently published in *Les Hommes du jour*. (Fig. 20) Stieglitz published the essay, as well as the accompanying manifesto of the new school of amorphism (“Manifeste de l’école amorphiste”) in its original language and format in the June issue of *Camera Work*. Of all the texts associated with Picabia’s work, this may well be the most difficult to explain. (33)

First of all, the essay and the manifesto, although themselves unsigned, were followed, in the original French version, by an afterward signed by Victor Méric, a figure well-known to have been hostile to almost every form of avant-garde production. (34) Indeed, the magazine itself, *Les Hommes du jour*, was among the most critical of modernist painting. (35) Immediately the question arises: are we reading a sincere manifesto of the new school of amorphism, or are we reading a parody, a joke at the expense of painters like Picabia for whom the question of pictorial form was at the center of their concerns. The latter seems most likely, especially, since both Picabia’s and Braque’s names are misspelled “Picaba” and “Bracque,” as Jeffrey Weiss has pointed out. In a text otherwise without typographical errors, such misspellings were in all likelihood intentional. But this is just one small indication that something is awry here, and our suspicion should begin with

the very first sentence: "L'heure est grave, très grave." Already we begin to suspect the opposite, perhaps one "grave" is convincing, but two should put us on alert. And as Weiss has convincingly demonstrated, the entire text, from beginning to end, is suffused with similar parodic excesses. At one point the author asserts that "the patient research, impassioned attempts and audacious trials of intrepid innovators... are at last going to lead us to... the single and multiple formula that will contain the entire visible and sentimental universe" while the manifesto itself begins: "War on Form! Form, that's our enemy! That is our program." What stands out most prominently in this text is its absurdly hyperbolic tone, the way in which its argument is stitched together as a patchwork quilt of avant-garded clichés.

The most incontrovertibly parodic element here—and one that (most shockingly) has gone without comment in the various literature devoted to Picabia's work (36) —is not to be found in the text itself, but rather in the two illustrations that accompany the manifesto. They claim to be two examples of "l'œuvre géniale" of a painter by the name of Popaul Picador, one of which is titled *Femme au bain*, the other *La Mer*. What the reader is looking at, however, is nothing more than a pair of empty rectangles. The caption beneath *Femme au bain* reads: "Look for the woman, they say. What a mistake! Through the opposition of tints and the diffusion of the lights, the woman is not visible to the naked eye." No less absurd is the caption beneath *La Mer*: "At first glance you see nothing. Press on. With time you will see that the water reaches up to your lips. This is amorphism." (37) (While it is tempting, at least at first, to consider these as the first true monochromes in the history of modernism, beating Rodchenko by more than five years, the manifest contradiction between the blankness of rectangle and the caption's reference to color combinations makes it impossible to take seriously.)

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Figure 21  
Francis Picabia, *Star Dancer  
on an Ocean Liner*, 1913

What then to make of the fact that Picabia sent this to Stieglitz without any additional commentary to signal it as a parody? Could it be that Picabia set out to dupe his American friend? Could it be that Picabia was himself duped? This possibility, although at first seemingly unlikely, becomes all the more complex when we consider that the essay was sent together with a group of other essays and clippings, all of which, in contrast to this one, support Picabia's work with the utmost sincerity. In addition, the manifesto was prefaced by a reproduction of one of Picabia's most accomplished watercolors (Fig. 21). Add to that the fact that the amorphism manifesto was published in *Camera Work* alongside two essays in support of Picabia's newest abstractions—one by Buffet, the other by Maurice Aisen, a friend of Stieglitz's living in New York. In both, Picabia's work is presented as an heir to that of Cézanne, at once the result of the association of painting with music and the manifestation of what Aisen labeled "a plasticity of truth." Indeed, all indications are that Stieglitz, at least, read the manifesto without any sense of its irony. Likewise, the notion that Picabia set out to undermine his own manifestly sincere effort at what he at that very moment referred to as "pure painting" seems equally unlikely.

And yet it seems no less unlikely that Picabia, at least, would have been unaware of the conservative slant of *Les Hommes du jour* or Méric's well-known hostility to modernism. As Weiss points out, the very word "amorphe" was at the time an adjective commonly used by critics to express their disdain for the way in which avant-garde painting distorted natural forms. (38) Of course, the clearest sign of the essay's intent to ridicule is surely Popaul Picador's *géniale* rectangles.

We are left, then, with an unanswerable question: was this a joke perpetrated by Picabia, or a joke perpetrated *on* Picabia? Weiss, quite reasonably, insists that without further evidence it is impossible to parse the sincere from the parodic. And as his real concern is the problem of blague in general, Weiss stops here, at the moment of undecidability. For Weiss, the amorphism manifesto serves above all as an example of the way in which parody had so buried itself within the discourse of French painting around 1912 that even in retrospect it is impossible to disentangle the genuine from the fake.

But to turn our attention to Picabia in particular, to consider the manifesto in light of Picabia's contemporaneous practices, one is drawn to a different conclusion. To consider them in relation to Busoni's paradox in particular suggests that what we are looking at here is not a parody, not something that mocks from the outside the painter's otherwise sincere commitments, but rather a tension *immanent* to the paintings themselves. For if it is the case that the search for a fully organic, non-conventional language of musical composition threatens to end up as either incomprehensible if not entirely silent, then the analogous search in the realm of painting may well be threatened by the same paradox. This is to say that the amorphous manifesto, rather than the sign of hoax, is perhaps better understood as the sign of undecidability within the very practice of abstraction itself—at least that of abstraction as Picabia was practicing it in 1913.

Admittedly, we have little to go on here. Between mid-1913, when Picabia scrawled his anxious note to Stieglitz, and the painter's subsequent comments to the New York press in early 1915, Picabia left only one tiny remark to help us out. And yet, as is clear from works like *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie* and all the mechanomorphic paintings that were to follow, something radically new erupted out of Picabia's abstractions, something that very quickly drew these early commitments to a close.

Fortunately, this one tiny remark—offered to the press on the occasion of *Udnie's* and *Edtaonisl's* presentation at the Salon d'Automne—is, if only glancingly, revealing of the painter's shifting attention. In December of 1913, *Le Matin* printed a brief three-paragraph article in which Picabia was asked to say a few words to his uncomprehending public. He began, not surprisingly, with a reference to music: "There is a song by Mendelssohn entitled: *The Marriage of Bees*... [but] I don't hear a single hornet. In other words, it is not a question of imitation...And yet we accept, without question, by tradition, its title. So why not accept, in a painting, a title that is not evoked by the lines themselves?" All this is familiar territory for Picabia, introduced to the painter over a year before and developed both in New York and Paris. But what follows is something quite different, something inflected less by the notion of purity, of the pictorial fullness of "lines themselves":

*Udnie* is no more the portrait of a young girl than *Edtaonisl* is the image of a priest, such as we normally conceive of them. They are memories [souvenirs] of America, evocations of it, subtly arranged in the manner of a musical composition; they represent an idea, a nostalgia, of a fleeting impression. (39)

Memories, nostalgia, a fleeting impression—these are metaphors that turn not on the notion of purity or fullness, but rather on loss, absence, and metaphors that suggest a *troubled*

relation to the act of representation. What's particularly telling in this statement is the way in which the appeal to a pure painting, a painting having only itself as its subject, rubs up against a very different appeal, one suggestive of a certain melancholy. Alongside the triumphant declaration of a painting at last liberated from the conventions of representation, free to explore the immanent properties of painting in itself, we find the indication of a peculiar sort of doubt, of the sense that perhaps these paintings speak less of the fullness of the "in itself" than they do of some kind of imminent emptiness.

If this admittedly unique text can be said to characterize Picabia's consideration of his work at the end of 1913, if it is not to be understood as a distortion for the sake of the press (and without further textual evidence, this cannot be discounted), then we would have to consider the possibility that Picabia began to see his own work within a distinctly different context. This is all the more significant in that this reorientation is applied not to new work, but to work already completed, work fashioned out of what seemed to be a well-developed, quite justifiable conception of what modernist painting ought to consider as its rightful domain.

It was as if, in a delayed fashion, the negative lesson of Busoni's ambition had begun to eat away from the inside Picabia's confidence in the promise of pictorial autonomy. It was as if the undecidability at the heart of amorphism manifesto was working to undermine the authority of his triumphant aesthetic of "form and color in itself." It was as if these two were now serving as a prognostic of the logical, internally generated demise of abstraction, its unwitting conclusion in the form of the blank canvas. Under such conditions, it is not unreasonable to imagine an attempt to recuperate this loss by turning the process of loss into its thematization. In this way, the *experience* of demise can be compensated for by its *representation*.

click to enlarge



Figure 22  
Francis Picabia, *Little Udnie*, 1913-14

I say this rather speculatively because Picabia would continue to develop his system of abstraction through the end of 1913 and into the early part of 1914, during which time he was painting some of his most convincing works, all of which, in fact, are best understood within the painter's earlier conception of painting as an autonomous, organic body. Indeed, a work like *Little Udnie* (Fig. 22) seems only to extend the sort of planar reduction and chromatic uniformity announced in the first version. Here one is left with a radically flattened space, coordinated around a movement from the lower left to the upper right, in a manner that takes *Udnie's* compressed space to a new extreme. It is difficult, when looking at *Little Udnie*, to imagine any slackening of attention, any threat to the painter's conviction.

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When de Zayas traveled to Paris in the Summer of 1914, he kept Stieglitz informed of his various whereabouts. In a letter from May 22, he expressed a certain reservation regarding Picabia's recent work, describing it as "more simple and direct but still complicated and arbitrary." (40) But just one month later, by the end of June, de Zayas seems to have found three new paintings that interested him, works which he described to Stieglitz as having "forgot[ten] matter to express only, maybe the memory of something that has

happened.” (41) I would like to underscore the comma that falls between “only” and “maybe,” for it seems to me that this comma is like a kind of pivot or fulcrum around which turns the distinction between the notion of abstraction-as-plenitude and its opposite, abstraction-as-loss. “only, maybe”: de Zayas’ hesitancy seems to me telling, another sign, of sorts, of the ambivalence detected in Picabia’s December 1913 statement to the press. Before the comma, at the moment of “only,” one could still imagine abstraction functioning within the system of “form and color itself” of ‘, only color, painting at its most advanced stage of refinement. After the comma, the moment of “maybe,” one’s grasp of this promised plenitude starts to drain away, threatens to become at best “a memory.” In retrospect, de Zayas’ assessment of Picabia’s most recent work as functioning within the logic of memory, of an experience that is no longer immediately accessible, reflects back on his earlier assessment that Picabia’s work was, although more simple and direct, nonetheless “complicated and arbitrary.” It was as if de Zayas, in a month’s time, reconceived the terms of his own system of evaluation. That which, from one perspective, appears complicated and arbitrary, which is to say, without a structure, lacking a plan, comes to seem from another angle to be a reflection on the very conditions of absence. Where the former interprets the work as having failed to make good on its promise of autonomy, the latter interprets the work as *thematizing* this failure, as, in a sense, giving form to the experience of lost form.

In his June letter to Stieglitz, de Zayas singles out one of the three works in particular—one that, out of concern that it will not fit through the door of Stieglitz’s gallery, he notes to be about two-and-a-half meters high. Although de Zayas does not refer to the work by name, only one of the three fits this description. While both *It’s About Me* and *Comical Marriage* are two meters on each side, *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie* [Fig. 7] is two meters wide and almost exactly two-and-a-half meters high. This fact, and the consideration of the painting



within the context of “memory” suggest that de Zayas was considering Picabia’s new paintings through the lens of the title of this one work, the largest of the three. Here the question of memory, of recollection, the theme introduced by Picabia in December of the year before, seems finally to have made its explicit appearance.

*I See in Memory my Dear Udnie* would seem to mark a backward step, a kind of reclamatory project in which the absent referent of the earlier abstracts is at once regained and reconstructed. Not only is the space not nearly as flat, but the imposition of a central form negates the all-over quality that so clearly determines the structure of the works from just a few months before. Brightly lit in the center of the canvas sits a conglomeration of overlapping and interlocking shapes—quasi-organic, quasi-machinal, shapes that in their color and tone, distinguish themselves from the uniformly brown and grey space surrounding them. This central form is itself supported by what looks to be a ledge that runs from left to right along the bottom of the painting. The ledge alone gives the painting a sense of illusion entirely absent in the previous works. And the fact that the shapes coalesce into a few discrete units suggests again that out of the flat space of the earlier abstractions, solid forms are in the process of reconstruction. With the aid of a few well-chosen formal devices, Picabia had managed to reconceive the painting-as-body of the earlier works into a new kind of painting *of* bodies.

[click to enlarge](#)

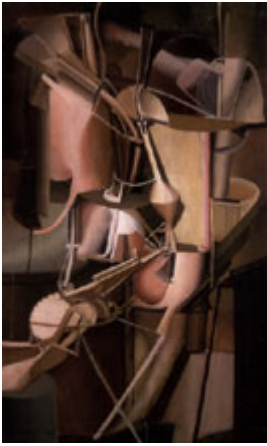


Figure 23  
Marcel Duchamp,  
*The Bride*, 1912

This new kind of painting bears striking resemblance to a work of which Picabia had been in possession for some two years. Duchamp had given Picabia his earliest mechanomorphic painting, *The Bride* (Fig. 23), in late 1912, probably around the time of their trip to Jura. As in *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie*, the figural construction in Duchamp's *Bride* is set off coloristically from the darker and more monochromatic background. Perhaps the only significant difference between the two (besides the question of scale, itself establishing a crucial experiential difference) is that the individual forms in Picabia's work are far less modeled than those of Duchamp, where the central forms are clearly distinguished from the flat and unmodulated background space. Nonetheless, in both cases, the main figural motifs are conceived in the manner of organic-machinic hybrids. (42)

*The Bride* was one of two key works Duchamp painted in Berlin between July and August 1912, the other being *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*. Duchamp himself considered it one of his most crucial paintings, wherein he turned from his earlier interest in "kinetic painting," (still evident in *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*) toward what he referred to as, "my concept of a bride expressed by the juxtaposition of mechanical elements and visceral forms." (43) In addition, *The Bride* marked a crucial moment in Duchamp's oeuvre, for it coincided with the

initiation of his work on *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*.

As Duchamp himself notes, it was no coincidence that *The Bride* was painted just a few months after having seen Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*. (44) Roussel's collection of absurd events, ridiculous inventions and silly machines, included among others a bizarre "painting machine" demonstrated by one Louise Montalescot. It is not hard to imagine that Duchamp, in his "constant battle to make an exact and complete break" (45) with the aims and procedures of traditional painting, would have found in Montalescot's machine a congenial reference point for his work on *The Bride*. (46)

This cannot be said for Picabia. He saw the same performance Duchamp did. Evidently, however, his commitment to cubism and abstraction prevented him from making immediate use of Roussel's model. Nor did the presence of *The Bride* in Picabia's studio make much of an impact in the two years between 1912 and 1914. And yet, out of the blue, in one painting from the middle of 1914, Picabia turns to Duchamp's example, an example that had been staring at him for two full years. Scholars have made nothing of this strange delay on Picabia's part, a delay all the more puzzling in that it erupts, nearly complete in a single work to stand against two years of labor devoted to a practice that, in Duchamp's mind at least, stood at the opposite end of his own endeavors. "Abstraction," recalls Duchamp, was in the years 1912-13, "[Picabia's] hobbyhorse... He thought about nothing else. I left it very quickly." (47)

I want to insist upon this distinction articulated by Duchamp, along with the importance of Picabia's "delayed" reception of his friend's work, in order to get closer to an understanding of what occurred in mid-1914, of that which drew de Zayas' perplexed attention and his stuttered "only, maybe." But I also want to supplement these anecdotes with another, this

time from Picabia's wife. As she recalled her husband's disposition in those years, and its relation to those of his closest friends, Buffet offered an assessment that inflects the sense behind the remarks of Duchamp and de Zayas in a peculiar manner. Speaking at first about Apollinaire's strange attachment to the very aesthetic practices against which the poet's own work would seem to have militated, (48) she then realizes that her husband, too, exhibited this same peculiar ambivalence. "What is extraordinary," noted Buffet, "is that, despite their audacity, both suffered from a discomfort they found hard to locate. It was a certain nostalgia for objective forms, a regret over the motif and all the traditional formulas from which they, bit by bit, separated themselves. This break with certain mental habits and inclinations often led them to doubt themselves." (49)

Given the sudden appearance in Picabia's work of Duchamp's mechanomorphic example, it is not too much to suggest that this shift would have been accompanied with a certain "nostalgia" or "doubt" as Buffet put it. And given the peculiar title of Picabia's first mechanomorphic work and the importance the painter placed on his titles, (50) one would be justified in locating in *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie* a certain ambivalence, if not at the center, than at least on the margin. (51)

And it is literally on the margin, along the lower left edge of the painting that we read, in clear, legible block-type, the phrase "Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie." As with *Udnie* and *Edtaonisl*, Picabia used a hidden technique in constructing the title. But where the first two were based upon the painter's own invented phrases (Unidimensionnel, Étiole danseuse), the later work begins with a pre-given expression—a kind of ready-made title. *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*, was drawn (with slight, but significant modification) from the so-called "Pink Pages" of the *Petit Larousse* dictionary. These literally pink pages

(still present in the most recent editions of the dictionary) provide an annotated list of famous quotations, most of which are drawn from Latin sources. The phrase "Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie," was derived from Virgil's *Aeneid*, from a passage in which Antor, in Italy, recalls his distant homeland, to which he, as a dying man, will never return: "Mourant, il revoit en souvenir sa chère Argos" (*Dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos*). (52) In adjusting this phrase, Picabia made just three small alterations. He 1.) eliminated the word "mourant", 2.) turned the original third person ("il") into the first person ("je"), and 3.) changed "Argos" to "Udnie."

If we assume that Picabia chose this phrase knowingly, then we ought to consider the connotations of the painter's substitutions. With Picabia (je) in place of Antor (il) and Udnie in place of Argos we find the painter recalling not simply any memory, but specifically a memory of something forever lost. Antor, on the edge of death, will never see his home again; it is only through memory that he can return. Analogously, for Picabia, it is *only* in memory that he is able to see Udnie. And this is to say that the sense of loss is evoked in two different fashions: first, through the *literal meaning* of the phrase, in the experience of seeing a love-object in one's memory and not in person; and second, through the very use of Latin, we sense a certain nostalgia in the act of citation itself, for here the dead language is evoked, in parallel fashion, as that which can only be held in memory. In the title "je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie," meaning and method intersect, each magnifying the loss implicit in the other. Where the words "Udnie" and "Edtaonisl" point to a purified realm in which language is continually reinvented, where each word is unique, "Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie" suggests a realm wherein language falls into disuse, where we find ourselves speaking through the words of the departed.

Given the indicators present in the title, the sense of recollection of that which is both dear and departed, I believe we are justified in reading aspects of the painting itself as inflected by the kind of “nostalgia” Buffet spoke of. The first to consider is the palette. In contrast to the aggressively multicolored abstractions of the months before, Picabia has returned to the muted greys and browns of his earlier cubist work. Here and there we find a few strokes of grey lavender, brief moments of color that could suggest a kind of dim recollection of the bright purple tones that dominated the original *Udnie*. The overall brownish hue of the canvas could be taken to suggest a newspaper faded with age, the once topical stories now a distant recollection. This is, of course, speculative, but it may well have been the case that Picabia’s adoption of the palette used by Duchamp in *The Bride* was meant to suggest, perhaps, that one was looking into a pictorial system (that of cubist representation) that was now, in 1914, somewhat like the Latin language itself, outmoded, no longer accessible to the present. Perhaps this can even be said of the practice of abstraction itself, a practice that Picabia experienced, at least for a few moments, as not simply paradoxical, but indeed impossible, its ambition ending up in the blank canvases of Popaul Picador.

William Camfield suggests that *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie* should be interpreted as a pictorial recollection of Picabia’s encounter with an alluring, enticing dancer that he met aboard the ocean-liner he and his wife took to New York in 1913. In this way, suggests Camfield, “the forms themselves—cream-colored “female” parts and rubbery, probing “male” elements—suggest... the erotic character of those experiences.” (53) And yet there is, I think, another equally justifiable interpretation, one that takes *Udnie* to be the name of a *painting* rather than a person. The painter’s earlier insistence to Stieglitz that the titles be understood as linguistic complements to the paintings themselves suggests, in fact, that the title here points not to an earlier

experience aboard the ship to New York, but rather the experience in front of a painting by the name of *Udnie*. In this reading, Udnie is not a person and her attributes, but *apractice* and *its promise*. In this reading, what is lost is the original promise of abstraction, the promise of purity, of the plenitude of painting understood as a body, complete and coordinated in itself. In this reading, *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie* marks the painter's attempt to figure the loss of this original promise, to thematize the condition of painting in the age of the machine, at the moment in which the organic is threatened, if not altogether overtaken, by the technological. In this reading, the erotics of the mechanomorphic image are as much a menace as an enticement.

And if such a reading is warranted, as I think it is—not only by the intersecting implications of Picabia's earlier commitment to the promise of abstraction, as well as by the perceptions of de Zayas and Buffet, but also by the latent content of the title and the pictorial logic drawn from Duchamp's example—then we will have to consider the possibility that Picabia's mechanomorphic turn at the end of 1914 was accompanied by a considerable ambivalence, an ambivalence registered on the surface of *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie* in the form of a peculiar nostalgia for a lost (or abandoned) plenitude.

Where Duchamp's early commitment to the analytical, technical and technological, prepared him to receive the implications of the machinic with the swiftness manifest on the surface of *The Bride*, Picabia's early commitment to abstraction held such a reception at a distance. Where the machine entered Duchamp's work in an almost natural fashion, with little resistance, it seems to have entered Picabia's more violently, from outside, without the preparatory context in which Duchamp was to receive it. And if this is correct, then we should not be surprised to find Picabia's subsequent embrace of the world of the machine to be inflected, at times, with a sense of longing

for that which it has displaced. And this is to say that the mechanomorphs should be understood not only within the context of a triumphant embrace of the new world of the machine, but also within that of the painter's troubled, and ultimately failed, relation to abstraction. In some sense, then, the machine was as much a compensation, a substitute, for that which existed only "in memory."

## Painting the Machine

Picabia was called up for service soon after the war broke out in August. With the aid of Buffet's connections, he was able to find a relatively secure post as a general's chauffeur. Soon thereafter Picabia's father, on the staff of the Cuban embassy, arranged to have his son assigned to the task of negotiating shipments of sugar from Cuba to France. On their way to meet this mission, Picabia and his wife stopped off in New York. They arrived in June of 1915 and managed to postpone the trip to Cuba until some time in the late fall. In the meantime, Picabia resumed contact with de Zayas, Haviland and others around Stieglitz and his gallery. Almost immediately, he began collaborating on the group's newest project, the magazine *291*, a large-format magazine, aggressively avant-gardist in design, far more experimental than that of Stieglitz's rather sober *Camera Work*.

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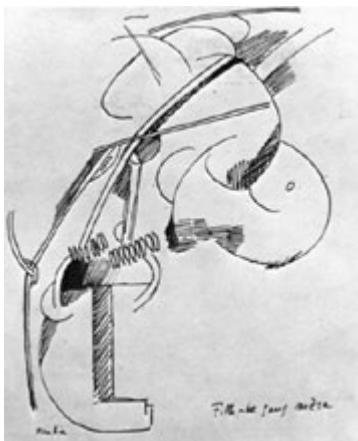


Figure 24



Picabia, Girl

Born without a Mother

291, June 1915

One of the first of Picabia's contributions to 291 was a small ink drawing (hand-tinted in the deluxe edition) entitled *Daughter Born without a Mother (Fille née sans mère)* (Fig. 24). With its schematic depiction of a coiled spring alongside a collection of floral forms, the drawing recalls *I See Again in Memory my Dear Udnie*, a work he had probably "seen again" in New York for the first time since de Zayas took it with him in September the year before. (54)

In its more clearly mechanical appearance, the drawing also suggests that his renewed contact with Duchamp (who arrived in New York around the same time) may have encouraged Picabia to harden his earlier organo-mechanic hybrid into something more obviously machine-like. In Duchamp's studio, Picabia must have seen not only Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder* (Fig. 25), but also the two glass works, the *9 Malic Moulds* (Fig. 26) and the semicircular *Glider* (Fig. 27), as well as the newly purchased glass plates that were to be used for the construction of *The Large Glass*. He must also have seen at least a few of Duchamp's readymades (the recent coinage of the term probably made the works all the more enticing). In other words, Picabia must have confronted, in one small space, almost the entire range of Duchamp's new, unequivocal rejection of modernist painting.

click images to enlarge



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▪



▪

- Figure 25
- Figure 26
- Figure 27
  
- Marcel Duchamp,  
*Chocolate Grinder*, 1914
- Marcel Duchamp,  
*9 Malic Moulds*, 1914-15
- Marcel Duchamp,  
*Glider*, 1913-15

[click to enlarge](#)



Figure 28  
Marius De Zayas,  
*Abstract Portrait of Picabia*,  
reproduced in Camera Work,  
vol. 46, Oct. 1914

It is no surprise then to find that Picabia's first major project consisted of a series of mechanical portraits, each of which was drawn with the precision used by Duchamp in his various glass works. In this, he was perhaps also drawn in by de Zayas' so-called "absolute portraits," one of which, a portrait of Picabia himself, was published in *Camera Work* in October of 1914 (Fig. 28). The drawing consists of a cascade of repeating curves, each of which appears as if they were made with the aid of a ruler. Included alongside this abstract design is a pair of mathematical formulas (" $a+b$ "; " $a+b+c$ "). De Zayas' suggestion that his sitters are best captured without reference to their superficial appearance, is entirely in keeping with Picabia's subsequent mechanical portraits, one of which depicts de Zayas as a bizarre contraption made of an engine attached to a spark plug, itself connected to a woman's corset [fig. 9]—just the sort of diagrammatic (55) representations that Duchamp was preparing for the *Large Glass*.

click to enlarge



Figure 29  
Francis Picabia, *Behold  
the Woman*, 1915

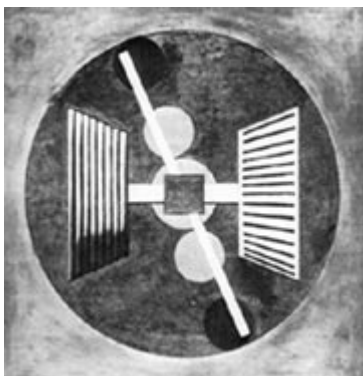
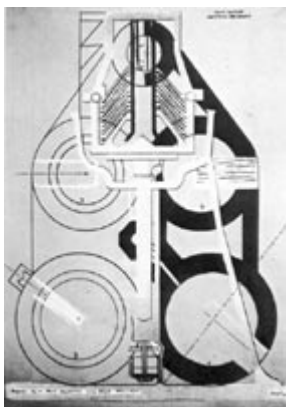
Although the machines Picabia used were more emphatically modern than Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder*, his commitment to a similarly dry technique, drawn from the example of mechanical drawing, points toward a practice almost entirely at odds with well-worked brushstrokes and rich color combinations of his earlier abstractions. Perhaps the best example of this more modernized chocolate grinder is Picabia's *Voilà la Femme* (Fig. 29), a small watercolor of what appears to be a fragment of a piston. With its suggestion of a mechanically repeated back-and-forth motion, the image operates within the very same kind of sexual metaphors that Duchamp was to make so central to his *Large Glass*. (56)

In other words, early in 1915, Picabia seemed poised to follow Duchamp in breaking altogether with the practice of painting (and all its attendant values and promises). An observer of Picabia's labors in the Modern Gallery, the offices of 291, might well have imagined that the painter had given up all the concerns that guided him up to that point.

And yet almost immediately after preparing the mechanical portraits for 291, Picabia began to paint again, working with oil, gouache, and, in some cases metallic paint, on board. Over the course of the summer and fall of 1915, Picabia painted six works of almost equal size, each measuring around three to four feet on either side. (57) *A Little Solitude in*

*the Middle of Suns (Petite solitude au milieu des soleils)* (Fig. 30), *Reverence (Révérance)* (Fig. 31), *Paroxysm of Sorrow (Paroxysme de la douleur)* [fig. 18], *Machine without a Name (Machine san nom)* [fig. 19], *This Thing is Made to Perpetuate My Memory (Cette chose est faite pour perpétuer mon souvenir)* (Fig. 32), and *Very Rare Painting on Earth (Très rare tableau sur la terre)* (Fig. 33) were shown together in February of 1916 along with 10 other works, including a number of smaller watercolors and drawings from the same period, (such as *Voilà Elle* and *This Machine Laughingly Castigates Manners*) as well as three abstract paintings from 1913-14 (*Catch-as-Catch-Can* (Fig. 34); *Comic Force*; *Horrible Sorrow*).

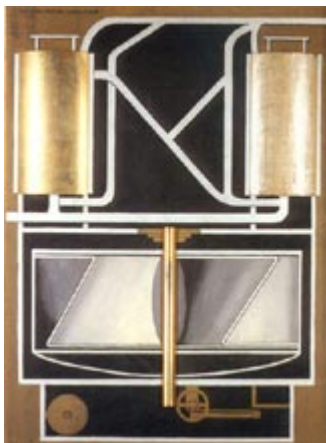
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- Figure 30
- Figure 31
- Figure 32
  
- Francis Picabia, *A Little Solitude in the Middle of Suns*, 1915
- Francis Picabia, *Reverence*, 1915
- Francis Picabia, *This Thing Is Made To Perpetuate My Memory*, 1915

click images to enlarge





- Figure 33
- Figure 34
- Francis Picabia  
Very Rare Painting on  
Earth, 1915
- Francis Picabia,  
*Catch-As-Catch-Can*, 1913

Despite the immediate question posed by the fact that these six mechanomorphs were shown alongside three abstract paintings from the year before, scholars have been all but unanimous in their depiction of 1915 as the year in which Picabia made an absolute break with his previous concerns. (58) Implicit here is the consideration of Picabia as having followed a course parallel to that of Duchamp. (59) The explanation for this shift, when it is offered, typically turns on the outbreak of the war, (60) the confrontation with New York City's technological marvels, (61) the appeal to the idea that Picabia was a man with a "compulsive need for change." (62)

And yet a number of things suggest that something more complex is at work here. For one, there is Buffet's insistence that Picabia, "was never able to suppress his pictorial vision. He remained a painter even in his most aggressive works." (63) Buffet's observation is all the more relevant here in that she used it to distinguish her husband's work from that of Duchamp

for whom the abandonment of painting was a necessary logical step in his aesthetic of “destruction,” as she put it. Indeed, it is somewhat surprising that Buffet has been the only one to make note of this most obvious distinction between these two artists—artists who have been called “Dada’s Castor and Pollux, its yin and yang.” (64) Buffet’s understanding of her husband deserves attention, not only because it enables an entry into the possibility of distinguishing between Picabia’s work and that of Duchamp, but also, and more importantly, because it provides the first indication of the ways in which the works from 1915 draw much of their conviction from the particularities of their dialog with that which seems, on the surface, to have been so definitively abandoned. Her observation points toward a more complex understanding of the ways in which the mechanomorphs draw from and respond to the ambitions, promises—and failures—of abstract painting.

Alongside Buffet’s observation one needs to consider two, clearly abstract works from Picabia’s time in New York: *Fantasy (Fantaisie)* (Fig. 11) and *Music is Like Painting (La Musique est comme la peinture)* (fig.12). The former, now lost, was reproduced in the December 1915-January 1916 issue of 291 and later exhibited by de Zayas in February 1916 along with two mechanomorphs and two abstractions from 1914; the latter was first seen in a group exhibition at The Society of Independent Artists in 1917, along with the 1913 abstraction, *Physical Culture*.

click to enlarge

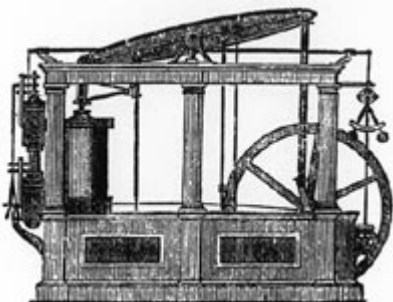


Figure 35



Illustration of a beam  
steam engine, mid-19th century

Camfield has demonstrated that both abstractions, like the various mechanomorphs of the period, derived originally from illustrations of modern technology. (65) *Fantasy*, for example, was drawn from an illustration of a nineteenth-century steam engine (Fig. 35). Here we find the furnace, wheel and supporting architecture transformed into a composition of ruled lines (with one exception vertical and horizontal) and a small, precisely rendered circle and a much larger arc. Comparing the final drawing to the original illustration reveals a series of strategic eliminations and reorientations: the furnace to the left has been removed, leaving only the supporting beam in front, rendered as a single, thin line. The wheel remains intact, in the form of a thick arc, but the oblong structure that joins it to the furnace has been transformed into a circle. In addition, Picabia has rotated the dark, rectangular form at the bottom of the machine clockwise ninety degrees, so that it forms a vertical rectangle behind the large arc. These alterations, as well as the extreme degree of abstraction, make it clear that the particularities of original illustration were not meant to factor into the viewer's interpretation of the work. Unlike the various mechanical portraits published in 291 just six months earlier—works whose interpretation demands a correlation between the final drawing and the original illustration—*Fantasy* calls for a reading more in keeping with that of Picabia's abstractions from two years before.

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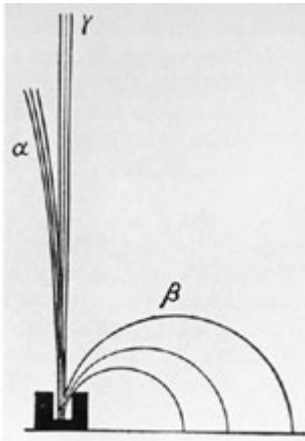


Figure 36  
Illustration of the effect  
of a magnetic field on  
alpha, beta and gamma  
particles, ca. 1905

*Music is Like Painting* makes the same case all the more explicitly, especially in light of its title. Here, as Camfield again points out, the painting was drawn from a scientific illustration of the effects of a magnetic field on alpha, beta and gamma particles (**Fig. 36**). Translated from a black-and-white diagram into a multi-colored watercolor, the painting serves as a clear demonstration of Picabia's continued commitment to the ideals of a musically inspired abstraction. (**66**)

Yet another indicator of Picabia's continued relation to the fundamental themes and ambitions of abstract painting is found in the February 1916 issue of *291*, the last of the nine issues of the magazine. In it is a statement by Picabia that in fact reads as if it had been written during his first stay in New York. Its distinction between the world of "appearance" and that of "absolute reality," along with his critique of "conventions" fit fully within the context of statements made to the New York press three years before. The same is true for Picabia's insistence on the "absolutely pure medium of form," the notion of "the abstract idea," as well as the distinction between the "objectivity" of the painting and the "subjectivity" of the painter's "will." (**67**) Scholars have

never addressed these recollections of 1913, and in so doing, have overlooked yet another link between the mechanomorphs and the earlier abstractions. Whether or not it was written in 1913 or 1915, the fact that it was printed in *291* in February of 1916 indicates its relevance at that moment—the very same moment as the mechanomorphs themselves appeared in public for the first time (at the Modern Gallery, January 5- January 25, 1916).

Picabia's statement, alongside both Buffet's comment and the two works, *Fantasy* and *Music is Like Painting*, suggest that abstraction hovers alongside all of Picabia's work of this period. They suggest, in fact, that Picabia understood his mechanomorphs as in some sense *in dialog with* the ideals and practices of abstract painting. And that dialog, as it appears in the context of Picabia's works and statements, turns on the relation between the promise of *modernism* and *modernity*—between the promised unity, autonomy and plenitude of abstraction and the fragmentation, dehumanization and artificiality of the machine.

Soon after Picabia arrived in New York, he, Duchamp, Crotti and Gleizes were interviewed for an article on the influence of French artists on the New York art scene. In it, Picabia offered his opinion of the modern machinic world, of which New York was for him a prime example: **(68)**

Almost immediately upon coming to America it flashed on me that the genius of the modern world is machinery, and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression...I have been profoundly impressed by the vast mechanical development in America. The machine has become more than a mere adjunct of human life. It is really a part of human life—perhaps its very soul.

It is a perplexing statement—more perplexing than it has been taken to be—and as such deserves considerable attention. To begin with, it needs to be seen in relation to a

contemporaneous statement in the pages of 291. The September-October issue was only three pages and included only one image, Stieglitz's famous declaration of photographic objectivity, *The Steerage*. The photo was sandwiched between a pair of short texts, both of which were published in English and French so as to draw the attention of as many European artists as possible. One was written by de Zayas, the other by Haviland. Haviland's text reads, in full:

We are living in the age of the machine. Man made the machine in his own image. She has limbs which act; lungs which breathe; a heart which beats; a nervous system through which runs electricity. The phonograph is the image of his voice; the camera the image of his eye. The machine is his "daughter born without a mother." That is why he loves her. He has made the machine superior to himself. That is why he admires her. Having made her superior to himself, he endows the superior beings which he conceives in his poetry and in his plastique with the qualities of machines. After making the machine in his own image he has made his human ideal machinomorph. But the machine is yet at a dependent stage. Man gave her every qualification except thought. She submits to his will but he must direct her activities. Without him she remains a wonderful being, but without aim or anatomy. Through their mating they complete one another. She brings forth according to his conceptions.

Photography is one of the fine fruits of this union.

The photographic print is one element of this new trinity: man, the creator, with thought and will; the machine, mother-action; and their product, the work accomplished.

As Picabia used the phrase "daughter born without a mother" as the caption to his drawing from the June issue of 291, scholars have been drawn to interpret the painter's

perspective on the implications of the machine with that of Haviland. (69) On the surface, the two statements resemble one another quite nicely: in both we find not only a consideration of the machine as a fundamental part of modernity, but also the necessity of incorporating this fundamental part of modernity into artistic practice, as well as the association of the machine to the human body, its parts, its functions. Yet to treat the two as analogous, as like-minded in their perception of these considerations of the status of the machine, is to overlook the significant differences of inflection, differences that turn on the particular manner by which the human and the machine were understood to relate to each other. In Haviland's case, the machine is that which "submits to [man's] will." It is "dependent... without aim or anatomy." Exemplified by the camera—Stieglitz's camera in particular—the thoughtless machine is put to use by "man, the creator" so as to give birth to the modern work of art.

Picabia's comments suggest something quite different, indeed almost entirely opposed to those of Haviland. For to suggest, as Picabia does, that the machine is man's "soul" is not to place the machine at man's service, but very much to the contrary, to place the machine *inside* man, to replace the creativity of human "will" with the mindlessly repetitive back-and-forth of the piston. Indeed, on closer inspection, Haviland's view is precisely that which Picabia rejects—which is to say, the understanding of the machine as an "adjunct" to human life, servant to man's will. Of course, it would be putting too much pressure on this one, likely hyperbolic, media-savvy comment by Picabia to insist that it be used to divide these two perspectives with absolute conviction. Still, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Picabia and Haviland hold very different, if not altogether opposed, interpretations of the man-machine nexus. To look at Picabia's six mechanomorphs of 1915 is to find, again and again, this suspicion confirmed.

The work that exemplifies this most obviously is *A Little Solitude in the Middle of Suns*. As Camfield demonstrates, the basic format was likely drawn from an illustration of an automobile engine, of the sort that included labeled arrows that point to different sub-parts of the machine. (70) The final painting is coordinated around five circular units, each of which is labeled, in a manner likely drawn from the example of Duchamp's *9 Malic Moulds*. (71) Here, however, we are looking not at nine "men" but five "suns": "Soleil ecclésiastique"; "Soleil interne de lycée"; "Soleil maître supérieur"; "Soleil officier artiste." The manifestly parodic element of these labels, as well as the indication that the machinic diagram should be related to the stars in a galaxy suggests that we are far indeed from Haviland's sincere and fully confident embrace of the machine's vast potential.

According to Jean Hubert Martin, Duchamp's presence can be felt in a number of the mechanomorphs, in the form of much less literal borrowings than we find in *A Little Solitude in the Middle of Suns*. For example, Martin sees *Reverence* as a variation on the *Chocolate Grinder*, Duchamp's object echoed in the pair of striated forms joined by a thin horizontal rectangle. (72) While this may perhaps be the case, what seems more relevant here is the manifest difference between their treatments of the machine. For one, Picabia's insistence upon respecting the two-dimensions of the picture plane suggests that he, unlike Duchamp, was unwilling to give up this most crucial and distinctive component of modernist painting. Indeed, it was expressly *against* the modernist commitment to the integrity of the flat space of the canvas that Duchamp "rehabilitated," as he put it, the system of scientific perspective. (73)

No less significant than Picabia's insistence upon maintaining the flat space of the picture-plane is the fact that his chocolate grinder—if it is a chocolate grinder at all—has been so fully transformed that it no longer leads the viewer in any

direct fashion toward the original illustration from which the painting was drawn. (In fact, a critic at the time insisted that the painting depicted "the chief parts of an aeroplane." (74) ) Very much *unlike* Duchamp's chocolate grinder, Picabia's *Reverence* demands to be seen as existing in a suspended state between representation and abstraction, a state that works to frustrate the location of the now absent referent. As such, the painting speaks not so much of the machinic as *through* the machinic; it is not so much a painting of an absent machine, but a machine of absence. Which is to say it is a painting that manufactures loss—the myriad, unflappable attempts to find the hidden referent is perhaps the most poignant demonstration of its very effectiveness.

I want to stress this experience of loss, of absence and its attendant frustrations, because it is an experience that in different ways inflects not only *Reverence*, but almost all the mechanomorphs of the period. Indeed, in *Machine without a Name*, one is drawn to this experience straight away, in the title itself. (75) No less explicit is the painting itself, in which the machine depicted is the most skeletal of the group. For one, the diagrammatically rendered machine is drawn in outline alone, with no solid core, pictorially without substance. And the outline itself is deprived of any consistency by virtue of its division into lines of red, black and white. Even as an outline, the parts don't hold together. What remains is thus little more than an indication of a machine; it depicts what is almost, but not yet, a machine—not yet substantial enough to fully deserve to be called a machine; it does not yet deserve its own name.

*Paroxysm of Sorrow* evokes this experience of loss in a slightly different manner. Here the experience is not one of insubstantiality, but of incompleteness. Duchamp's counter-example is again of use, for unlike the *Chocolate Grinder*, where the machine is represented as whole, fully functional, here we find only a detached, isolated, and therefore non-

functional fragment. And it is in this context that the *douleur* of the title begins to resonate with a certain clarity. (76)

Alongside the loss of referentiality implicit in *Reverence*, the loss of substance in *Machine without a Name*, and the loss of integrity, completeness and functionality in *Paroxysm of Sorrow*, the mechanomorphs speak of yet another: the loss of the past, the sense in which the modernist embrace of the *new* is forced to confront its dialectical other, the *loss of the old*—the production, within the fashion-structure of modernity, of the outmoded. This third instantiation of loss appears in fact at the crossing of two works, at the intersection of the phrase written in an arc along the outer circle of *Reverence* and the title phrase of *This Thing is Made to Perpetuate my Memory*, written, again in block-type, along the top of the painting. The former reads: “Objet qui ne fait pas l'éloge du temps passé”; the latter: “Cette chose est faite pour perpétuer mon souvenir.” Together, the two work to undermine each other, to embrace and at the same time resist the anamnesis of modernity, the former in triumphalist terms, in support of the instantaneity of the present, the latter in melancholic terms, with reference to that which such instantaneity abandons. With regard to the latter painting, the implicit nostalgia is all the more relevant as the four, record-like shapes, joined together by four connecting tubes suggest an experience of cacophonous sound, uninterpretable noises. The subtitle, “Il tournent... vous avez des oreilles et vous n'entendrez pas,” makes explicit the implication of lost reception, of that which goes unheard.

In a sense then, these works function as peculiar icons of modernity. For the properties of these works intersect in many places the formal properties of the religious icon: not only in the process of morphological simplification, coloristic separation, as well as the insistent flatness, frontality, and symmetry, but also, and perhaps most suggestively, in the use of metallic pigments. (77) They are icons of the



fragmentation, dislocation, dehumanization and anamnesis that, by the early teens, were manifesting themselves more clearly than they had to Baudelaire some fifty years before. Indeed, they have about them something of the quality of the allegorical as Benjamin defined it, for they operate at the intersection of a semiosis of absence, a fixation on the fragment, and the melancholic gaze. Such a reading, although speculative, is all the more resonant by virtue of their having developed out of an extended commitment to abstraction, to the promise of unity, plenitude and instantaneity—all attributes of the symbolic. (78) Torn between abstraction and the machine, between the fullness of the symbol and the fragmentation of the allegory, Picabia's mechanomorphs thematize a tension peculiar to the rupture of 1912, to the end of "the long nineteenth century."

None of the mechanomorphs thematizes this condition more fully than *Very Rare Painting on Earth*, the largest of the six major mechanomorphs, and the only one to include three-dimensional protrusions—two large, symmetrically placed cylinders on the upper half, one thin cylinder between and below. The title, "Très rare tableau sur la terre," is, like the other mechanomorphs, derived from a phrase in the pink pages of the Larousse: "rare oiseau sur la terre," a translation of Juvenal's "rara avis in terris," (*Satires*, VI, 165). We should pause over the uniqueness of the transposition here. Whereas other mechanomorphs involve the replacement of the original word with a word that refers to the *object* depicted in the painting ("voilà *Elle*," from "voilà l'homme"; "*machine* sans nom," from "la foule sans nom"; "*objet* qui ne fait pas l'éloge du temps passé," from "celui qui fait l'éloge du temps passé"), here the original is replaced by a word that refers to the *painting itself*. It is not a very rare *machine*, but a very rare *painting*. And insofar as it is the only mechanomorph that bulges off the surface, perhaps it is indeed a rare painting. But more important than its claim of rarity is the fact that what is at stake here, at least from the point of

view of the title, is the painting's status as a painting—not as a depiction of something, but as a thing in itself.

*Very Rare Painting on Earth* has always struck me as the most awkward, even grotesque, of the mechanomorphs. The cylindrical protrusions are unconvincingly integrated into the flat space of the canvas, in particular the thin rod at the bottom, which, unlike the two at the top, has not been sliced down the middle; it sits on the surface of the painting as if it had been slapped on at the last minute. Although there is a suggestion that the rod is connected to the system of pipes beneath it (through the use of a similarly colored metallic pigment), at the bottom it extends beyond the lower pipe-structure and remains entirely detached to the otherwise interconnected system of tubing around it. It's also strangely top-heavy. The two gold-painted half-cylinders push so far off the surface that the painting seems on the edge of falling off the wall. And given Picabia's frequent references to eroticized encounters between man and machine, it is not too much to see in this work the suggestion of two enormous testicles and a long hard penis, replete with a tangle of seminiferous tubules—a suggestion that only adds to the work's parodic quality.

A closer examination of the composition reveals other oddities. While the two gold-painted protrusions at the top give this section of the work an obviously aggressive quality, the unmodulated black space between them appears as a vacant field, a view into an indefinite space behind the machine. Two hulking cylinders are supported by nothing more substantial than the thin white tubes between them. This contradictory juxtaposition of solids and hollows—the play of literal mass and depicted vacancy—only adds to the more obviously awkward elements and, in the end, gives one the sensation of a machine divided against itself. No less disjointed are the structures at the very bottom of the painting: the pair of wheel-like forms and their attendant system of shafts and tubes. The

gold-colored wheel (or is it a bell?) appears homeless, crammed as it is in the far left corner. Indeed, it seems as if it were placed there only to fill the space—a compositional decision at the expense of representational consistency. And the same seems to be the case with the right-angled form on the far right. While it works to fill the space, it is unconvincingly integrated into the differently colored tubing that meets it. (79)

But perhaps the most systematic attempt to dismantle the conventions of pictorial representation appears in the wide grey rectangular form that lies beneath the centrally placed gold rod. This, the only section modeled in three dimensions appears no less flat than the unmodeled space around it. In part this is caused by the white lines that zigzag across the modeled form, thereby flattening it. But it is also caused by the entirely arbitrary application of light and dark that undermines any sense of a cogent light-source. The one form that could be expected to provide a convincing representation of three-dimensionality ends up negating itself. What is most strange about this work is the way in which the formal devices—culled from the language of abstraction—and the forms of modernity—culled from the language of the machine—work only to undermine each other. As such, the work seems to thematize the failure of modernism in the face of modernity. The work seems to suggest that painting, if it is to continue, if it is not to migrate to glass or find itself replaced by the readymade commodity object, would have to take place within the context of irony, of the internally contradictory, the vulgar, the silly, the absurd. It is as if the only way to regain the promised plenitude of modernist painting was to paste a pair of huge blocks on the surface. For, as the black gap between the two cylinders suggests, such plenitude was no longer possible. That this experience of impossibility should be thematized as absurd, if not grotesque, suggests a certain frustration, if not melancholy—a sign, perhaps, of the strange ambivalence detected by Buffet.

## Notes

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1. The Armory show opened on February 17, 1913. Details of Picabia's life are drawn from William Camfield, Francis Picabia (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and Maria Lluïsa Borràs, Picabia (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985).

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2. Borràs records a number of these articles in Picabia, p. 98.

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3. Picabia, "Preface to the Exhibition at the Little Gallery," 291 (March 17, 1913); reprinted in Borràs, Picabia, p. 109-110.

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4. Duchamp, in Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues With Duchamp, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo, 1971) 43.

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5. Picabia, quoted in an article by Henry Tyrell in World Magazine (February 9, 1913); reprinted in Borràs, Picabia, p. 106.

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6. Picabia, letter to Stieglitz. Stieglitz/O'Keefe File (New Haven: Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University). For the complete citation, see below.

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7. For a concise description of these five portraits, see Francis Naumann, New York Dada, 1915-23 (New York: Harry Abrams, 1994) 60-61. Of the five, three include the name of the person represented (de Zayas, Stieglitz, Haviland). The fourth, Picabia's self-portrait, includes the phrase, "C'est de moi qu'il s'agit dans ce portrait." The fifth drawing, titled *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine*

*dans l'état de nudité*, was proposed by William Innes Homer to be a portrait of Agnes Meyer (See: William Innes Homer, "Picabia's *Jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* and Her Friends," Art Bulletin LVII.1 (March 1975): 110-15.

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8. Michel Sanouillet, Dada à Paris (Paris: Flammarion, 1965/1993) 28. Pontus Hulten described the mechanomorphs as having "inaugurated an absolutely new pictorial practice, having nothing to do with the brilliant lyricism of the pre-war period." ("Ils inaugurent une recherche plastique absolument neuve et n'ont plus rien du brillant lyrisme d'avant-guerre.") Francis Picabia, exhibition catalog (Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976) 7. Jean Hubert Martin argues that Picabia's mechanomorphs are staked upon the desire "to create a completely new endeavor, without any reference to the past." ("de créer une œuvre totalement neuve, sans aucune référence au passé.") Francis Picabia (1976) 45. The analyses of Camfield, Borràs, and Naumann implicitly concur, and their account of the transition is based upon a consideration of the outbreak of the war, the influence of Duchamp, the shock of New York City and the sudden ubiquity of the machine. The problem with such accounts (as with all accounts that focus entirely on the exterior factors involved in an artist's change of direction) is that it neglects to address the relationship between the exterior factors and those interior, immanent to the artist's production.

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9. In full: "He is the only one who has done as did Cortez. He has burned his ship behind him. He does not protect himself with any shield. He has married America like a man who is not afraid of consequences. He has obtained results." De Zayas, 291 (July-August, 1915). The one significant exception to this consideration of the mechanomorphs comes in the work of Camfield, for whom both the abstractions of 1913/1914 and the mechanomorphs of 1915 should

be understood within the context of psychological representations, visual metaphors for the human condition. Such a suggestion does offer a means of drawing the two periods nearer to one another. However, it only applies to a very limited number of works from each period, and more importantly, forces one to accept the idea that the abstractions are in fact representations—representations of inner, psychological states. (Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979) 77).

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10. “Picabia, lui, ne réussira pas à supprimer sa vision picturale; il ne réussira pas à supprimer sa vision picturale; il restera plastique même dans ses réalisations les plus agressives.” Buffet, in Rencontres (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1977) 249. Buffet used this observation to distinguish Picabia’s mechanomorphs from those of Duchamp. Buffet’s distinction has been marginalized, if not entirely overlooked, in the literature on Picabia, and yet it is clearly among the most perceptive. Picabia’s persistent fixation on the painterly, a fixation entirely opposed to that of Duchamp, and one that extended well beyond the painter’s works from the early teens, demands consideration. In part, this essay is devoted to unraveling the implications of Buffet’s understanding of her husband’s work.

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< 11. In an interview in 1913, Picabia defended his abstractions as having finally made good on modernism’s promise of an art at last free, self-generated and self-referential. (The New York Times (February 16, 1913), reprinted in Borràs, Picabia, p. 107). Elsewhere Picabia described his abstractions as having given form to “the fullness of [our] new consciousness of nature.” Picabia, (“Preface to the Exhibition at the Little Gallery,” 291 (March 17, 1913), reprinted in Borràs, Picabia, pp. 109-110). This was a sentiment reiterated by Buffet who described the work as aiming for “a unity, a wholeness,” one that, “pierce[s] below

the surface... to [the] essence.” (Buffet, “Modern Art and the Public,” Camera Work (June 1913) 12.)

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12. Translated by Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979) 59. The letter is conserved in the Stieglitz/O’Keefe File, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University. The original French reads: “Je travaille pour le moment à un très grand tableau qui concentre plusieurs de mes études exposées au 291—je pense davantage à une peinture plus pure, peinture à une dimension n’ayant plus de titre, chaque tableau aura pour nom un rapport avec l’expression picturale, nom propre absolument créé pour lui... Excusez la brièveté de ma lettre, je suis un peu fatigué et tourmenté par ma nouvelle évolution.”

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13. Apollinaire was one of the few critics to have found anything positive about them (“I find them very important. And the ridicule changes nothing.” (Apollinaire, Apollinaire on Art, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Da Capo, 1972) 329). Both *Udnie* and *Edtaonisl* were later reproduced in color in Apollinaire’s review, Les soirées de Paris (March 15, 1914). They were in fact the only two color reproductions in any of the pages of Les soirées de Paris—perhaps a sign of their importance to Apollinaire (then again, Picabia’s financial support to the magazine likely paid a part). In addition to these two works, the issue included four black-and-white reproductions: *Star Dancer on a Transatlantic*, *Catch as Catch Can*, *Negro Song*, *Physical Culture*. This issue also included Buffet’s essay on new music.

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14. Philip Pearlstein was among the first to attempt to decode Picabia’s titles: “The Paintings of Francis Picabia,” Master of Arts Thesis, New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, February, 1955. “The Symbolic Language of Francis Picabia,” Arts XXX (January 1956): 37-43. The title *Edtaonisl* is produced by interlacing the letters of the two

words “étoile” and “danse” while dropping off the final “e” in both words. Pearlstein suggested that *Udnie* was derived from “nudité,” but it is far more compelling to accept Picabia’s retrospective claim that the title was derived from “uni-dimensionnel” (“Interview with Henri Goetz and Christine Boumeester,” (Paris, June 20, 1968), cited in Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979) 62, n. 14). Picabia was in all likelihood introduced to such linguistic manipulations from Apollinaire and Duchamp (see Camfield, p. 61). Apollinaire liked to play a game he called “POF,” which he described in *Mercure de France* (November 16, 1917). The game consists in taking a name and making each one of its letters the initial of a word and forming a sentence out of these words (P.O.F. stood for *Parti Ouvrier Français*).

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15. Naumann (New York Dada, p. 57) associates *Udnie* with the Russian dancer, Napierkowska, whom the two had encountered on the ship from Paris to New York. According to Camfield (Francis Picabia (1979), p. 1, n. 12) the initial subject of *Edtaonisl* (subtitled *ecclésiastique*) was a Dominican priest. Nonetheless, and perhaps this bears repeating since it has received so little attention in the scholarship on Picabia’s abstractions, what matters in our understanding of these works as *paintings*—and not as materials through which we can locate biographical data—is our experience in front of them. Here it is unquestionably the case that the words atop the canvas are non-referential, as abstract as the painting itself. If we are to insist that our understanding of the original referent is crucial to the work, than we are, in effect, admitting that the painting is a kind of inside joke (*Udnie* = attractive dancer; *Edtaonisl* = priest-friend of the painter), and if so, it becomes difficult to defend our interest in the paintings at all. Shown at the Salon d’Automne, these paintings were designed to be understood within their given context, one in which Picabia could hardly have imagined that the contemporary viewer would



locate a meaningful source for the words *Udnie* and *Edtaonisl*. And this is to say that, when considering the work in relation to its reception by the intended audience, the original source of these words is entirely irrelevant. They appear as nonsense words and deserve to be read that way.

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16. This statement is printed in full in Borràs, Picabia, pp. 109-110.

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17. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, Du Cubisme (written before the *Section d'Or* exhibition in October 1912). Re-edition by Éditions Présence, 1980, p. 39.

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18. This marks the end of Picabia's statement, after which is appended an extract from Plato's "Philebus" in which Socrates says, "What I am saying is not, indeed, directly obvious. I must therefore try to make it clear. For I will endeavor to speak of the beauty of figures, not as the majority of people understand them, whether these figures be living or painted, but as reason proclaims. I allude to the straight line and to the circle, and to the plumb-line and the angle-rule, if you understand me. For these, I say, are beautiful in themselves, and instill a certain pleasure, which has nothing in common with the pleasure one derives from scratching. And there are colors which are beautiful and pleasing thanks to this same quality." The reference to the pleasure of scratching makes sense in context; Socrates is distinguishing between varieties of pleasure, of which the bodily pleasure of scratching an itch is one. Mark Cheetham refers to this passage by Plato in his book, The Rhetoric of Purity (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991). On p. 153, n. 2, he refers to a number of scholars' work which have focused on this passage and its relation to the rise of abstract painting, in particular Linda Henderson's The Forth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Painting

(Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). She notes (pp. 310 ff.; p. 215 n. 173) that Picabia in all likelihood got this passage from Stieglitz. In How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York, ed. Francis Naumann (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) 21), de Zayas notes Stieglitz's interest in this passage by Plato, and suggests that Stieglitz became aware of it around 1910.

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19. The idea that abstraction would in fact be the logical consequence of the urge to a more profound realism is sufficiently paradoxical to deserve closer attention. It remains, in my estimation, one of the most perplexing aspects of early abstraction. For the notion of abstract painting as the expression of a most profound *realism* applies not only to Picabia, but also to the bulk of the early abstractionists. Here I can only offer some examples—comments by Mondrian, Malevich, and Kandinsky—as a means of pointing toward what surely demands more concerted attention. Malevich, for example, defined suprematism as “non-objective representation” (Kasimir Malevich, “Suprematism,” translated in The Non-Objective World, trans. Howard Dearstyne (Chicago: Theobald, 1959) 61-65). Similarly, Mondrian, in 1919 spoke of his abstractions as “a pure representation of the human mind,” “representations of relations alone,” “represent[at]ions of actual aesthetic relationships,” “represent[at]ions of balanced relations,” and “pure reflections of life in its deepest sense.” (Piet Mondrian, “Natural Reality and Abstract Reality,” first published in De Stijl I (Amsterdam, 1919), in Piet Mondrian, The New Art -The New Life, trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (New York: Da Capo, 1993) 82-123). Kandinsky summed it up most succinctly: “Realism = Abstraction; Abstraction = Realism.” (Wassily Kandinsky, “On the Question of Form,” first published in Der Blaue Reiter (Munich: R. Piper, 1912), in Wassily Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art, eds. Kenneth Lindsay, Peter Vergo (New York: Da Capo, 1994) 235-257). Statements like these suggest that

the rise of abstraction was born out of the very paradox expressed by Picabia: on the one hand, the urge to more fully represent reality, as it really is, and on the other hand, and fundamentally opposed to the former, to free painting from the necessity of representation altogether.

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20. Buffet and Varèse were part of a small group of young musicians and composers who aimed to put Busoni's theoretical formulations into practice. They even went so far as to build instruments like the dynamophone that would produce sounds outside the conventional tonal system of western music. Later in life, Varèse reiterated the importance of Busoni to his work. See his comments in Varèse, "The Liberation of Sound," and Gunther Schuller, "Conversations with Varèse," in Music in the Western World, eds. Piero Weiss, Richard Taruskin (New York: Simon Schuster, 1984) 518-522. Here, for example, is Varèse on the problem of form in new music: "As for form, Busoni once wrote: 'Is it not singular to demand of a composer originality in all things and to forbid it as regards form? No wonder that if he is original he is accused of formlessness.' The misunderstanding has come from thinking of form as a point of departure, a pattern to be followed, a mold to be filled. Form is a result—the result of a process. Each of my works discovered its own form." In a later conversation, Varèse added: "The essential touchstone for me was Busoni's prophetic book, Sketch for a New Aesthetic of Music. This predicts precisely what is happening today in music—that is, if you pass over the whole dodecaphonic development, which in my view represents a sort of hardening of the arteries." (Music in the Western World, pp. 519, 521).

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21. Buffet refers to such machines in her 1914 essay on modern music: "Grâce à des bruiteurs mécaniques et perfectionnés, une reconstitution objective de la vie sonore deviendrait possible. Nous découvririons la forme des sons en dehors de la convention musical..." Buffet, "Musique

d'aujourd'hui," reprinted by Slatkin, in the multi-volume reprinting of Les soirées de Paris, vol. II (Geneva: Slatkin reprints, 1971) 181-183.

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22. In her introduction to Buffet's various writings on art, Borràs notes Busoni's importance to Buffet. (Borràs, "Une Jeune Femme appelée Gabrielle Buffet," introduction to Buffet's collection of essays, Rencontres (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1977) 13-23). Borràs' analysis, rich as it is in biographical information, nonetheless treats both Busoni's and Buffet's work in a more or less cursory manner, and as a result, overlooks what I consider below to be the crucial complexities at work in their organic model of musical composition. I have yet to come across any scholarly consideration of the chain of influence that leads from Busoni to Buffet to Picabia, a chain I consider fundamental to an understanding of the painter's conception of the stakes involved in the development of abstract painting.

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23. She was, for example, attentive not only to the similarities between music and painting, but the differences as well: "We cannot completely appreciate musical form without an initiation into the arbitrary laws of composition and harmony... The entire objectivity of sound had to be created, a convention of the musical language to be organized. The deepest meaning of a musical composition will escape, in part, the comprehension of those listeners who are not educated in music, or who have not, at least, the heredity of a long education." By contrast, she claims that with regard to painting: The abstract idea in pure line and pure color is conveyed to our understanding more directly... Pure line and color have a definite and particular meaning in themselves which the normal development of our sense perceptions permits us to appreciate without effort. Everyone has in himself the comprehension of the straight line and the curve, of the colors blue and red. Everyone can seize the relations that

exist between two lines and two colors and the different impression that ensues from different relations of these same lines and colors. (Buffet, "Modern Art and the Public," Camera Work, special number (after the double issue, 42-43), (June 1913, pp. 11-14): 13). This privileged place accorded to painting—whether, in the end, justified or not—was for Buffet the result of a profound consideration of the formal conditions of advanced musical composition. She was unique among early theorists of music and painting in that she comprehended the role of conventions in the construction of even "absolute" music.

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24. For the still standard biographical account see: Edward Dent, Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). For a more recent account of Busoni's life and work, see: Antony Beaumont, Busoni the Composer (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).

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25. Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 81. One of Busoni's central concerns was the limitation imposed by the conventional system of the octave: "We have divided the octave into twelve equidistant degrees, because we had to manage somehow, and have constructed our instruments in such a way that we can never get in above or below or between them. Keyboard instruments, in particular, have so thoroughly schooled our ears that we are no longer capable of hearing anything else—incapable of hearing except through this impure medium. Yet Nature created an *infinite gradation—infinite!*" (p. 89). In an effort to draw closer to the infinite gradation of natural sound, Busoni endorses an expansion of the given system: "I have made an attempt to exhaust the possibilities of the arrangement of degrees within the seven-tone scale; and succeeded, by raising and lowering the intervals, in establishing one hundred and thirteen different scales... One cannot estimate at a glance what wealth of melodic and harmonic expression would thus be opened up to the hearing..."

With this presentation, the unity of all keys may be considered as finally pronounced and justified. A kaleidoscopic blending and interchanging of twelve semitones within the three-mirror tube of Taste, Emotion, and Intention—the essential feature of the harmony of today.” (Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, pp. 92-93). For an account of Busoni’s expanded scales see Daniel Raessler, “The ‘113’ Scales of Ferruccio Busoni,” The Music Review (Feb. 1982): 51-56.

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26. Here is a characteristic passage: “How primitive this art must remain!... [Its] means of expression are few and trivial, covering but a very small section of musical art. Begin with the most self-evident of all, the ebasement of Tone to Noise in imitating the sounds of Nature—the rolling of thunder, the roar of forests, the cries of animals; then those somewhat less evident, symbolic—imitations of visual impression, like the lightening-flash, springing movements, the flight of birds; again, those intelligible only through the mediation of the reflective brain, such as the trumpet-call as a warlike symbol, the shawm to betoken ruralism, march-rhythm to signify measured strides, the chorale as a vehicle for religious feeling... These are auxiliaries, of which good use can be made upon a broad canvas, but which, taken by themselves, are no more to be called music than wax figures may pass for monuments.” (Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 82)

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27. “Absolute Music! What the lawgivers mean by this is perhaps remotest of all from the Absolute in music. ‘Absolute music’ is a form-play without poetic program, in which the form is intended to have the leading part. But Form, in itself, is the opposite pole of absolute music, on which was bestowed the divine prerogative of buoyancy, of freedom from the limitations of matter... Per contra, ‘absolute music’ is something very sober, which reminds one of music-desks in

orderly rows, of the relation of Tonic to Dominant, of Developments and Codas...This sort of music ought rather to be called the 'architectonic,' or 'symmetric,' or 'sectional,' and derives from the circumstance that certain composers poured their spirit and their emotion into just this mould as lying nearest them or their time. Our lawmakers have identified the spirit and emotion, the individuality of these composers and their time, with 'symmetric' music, and finally, being powerless to recreate either the spirit, or the emotion, or the time, have retained the Form as a symbol, and made it into a fetish, a religion." (Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, pp. 78-79)

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28. Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 79.

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29. Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 85. We will have occasion to address the consequences of an even more extreme conception of the act of notation in Valéry, for whom the poetic process is an unavoidably artificial act that militates against the sort of unmediated self-expression implicit in Breton's notion of automatic writing. "A la moindre rature," wrote Valéry, "le principe d'inspiration totale est ruiné." (Littérature, (Paris: Gallimard, 1930) 30).

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30. Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 102. Hoffmannsthal's paradox of a language unknown to the author himself is echoed throughout Busoni's text, at one point citing a letter sent to him by Buffet's teacher at the Schola Cantorum, in which d'Indy makes reference to "an ideal that one can never attain, but which we may be able to approach." (Busoni leaves the French text in its original, and quotes only a fragment of the sentence: "...laissant de côté les contingences et les petites choses de la vie pour regarder constamment vers un idéal qu'on ne pourra jamais atteindre,

mais dont il est permis de se rapprocher.” (Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 97, n. 1) Given that Buffet had been d’Indy’s student and that he had gone so far as to write for her a letter of introduction to Busoni—a letter she used upon her arrival in Berlin—it would be highly unlikely that she would not have taken note of it.

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31. John Cage performed his famous silent piece, 4 minutes and 33 seconds, in 1952.

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32. Italics his. Busoni, Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music, p. 89.

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33. The text as it appeared in Camera Work is reproduced without comment in the catalog to the Picabia exhibition at the Grand Palais, Francis Picabia (1976), p. 68. However, it does not appear in Picabia’s collected essays, Écrits.

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34. Borràs (Picabia, p. 112) provides a detailed analysis of this text and provides crucial information regarding Méric’s aesthetic position. Remarkably, her analysis does not lead her to question the sincerity of the essay.

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35. Jeffrey Weiss has provided the most extensive unpacking of this text. Jeffrey Weiss, The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp and Avant-Gardism (New Haven: Yale University Press 1994) 85-89. He points out the flaws in Borràs’ attempt to read the essay as a sincere expression of avant-garde enthusiasm.

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36. The only exception, Weiss’ account, comes in what is really a three page appendix to a chapter devoted to



Duchamp.

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37. In French the passages read: “Cherchez la femme, dira-t-on. Quelle erreur! Par l’opposition destints et la diffusion de la lumière, la femme n’est-elle pas visible à l’œil nu, et quels barbares pourraient réclamer sérieusement que le peintres s’exerce inutilement à esquisser un visage, des seins et des jambes?”

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38. Weiss, p. 87.

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39. Picabia, in “Ne riez pas, c’est de la peinture et ça représente une jeune américaine,” Le Matin(December 1, 1913) 1; reprinted in Picabia, Écrits I, p. 26.

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40. De Zayas, letter to Stieglitz, May 22, 1914, Stieglitz/O’Keefe Archive (Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University); Reprinted in De Zayas, How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York, pp. 169-170.

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41. De Zayas, letter to Stieglitz, June 30, 1914, Stieglitz/O’Keefe Archive (Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University); Reprinted in De Zayas, How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York, pp. 180-181.

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42. Camfield distinguishes the two by arguing that Picabia’s “forms tend to be more emphatic, the space less ambiguous, the sexuality more evident.” (Francis Picabia, 1979, p. 69).

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43. Marcel Duchamp, notes for a slide lecture, “Apropos of Myself” (1964), cited in: Marcel Duchamp, eds. Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of

Modern Art, 1973) 263.

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44. The first performance of *Impressions d'Afrique* opened on September 30, 1911, but was suspended after a week because of the death of Roussel's mother. The play re-opened at the Théâtre Antoine on May 11, 1912. A selection of critical responses to Roussel's play appears in Raymond Roussel: Life, Death and Works (London: Atlas Press, 1987). Calvin Tomkins provides a chronology of Roussel's performances and suggests that Duchamp likely saw the play in the second or third week in June (Calvin Tomkins, Duchamp: A Biography (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1996, p. 90). Duchamp expresses his amazement at the performance in his conversations with Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues with Duchamp, pp. 33-34.

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45. Duchamp to Cabanne, Dialogues with Duchamp, p. 38.

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46. In a letter from 1946 to Marcel Jean, Duchamp notes: "It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even...* From his *Impressions d'Afrique* I got the general approach. This play of his which I saw with Apollinaire helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once that I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way." (cited in Tomkins, Duchamp, p. 91).

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47. Speaking of his work in 1912-13, Duchamp contrasts his interests with those of Picabia: "Picabia was above all an 'Abstractionist,' a word he had invented. It was his hobbyhorse. We didn't talk much about it. He thought about nothing else. I left it very quickly." (Dialogues with

Duchamp, p. 43).

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48. This astonished Duchamp as well. As he put it to Cabanne, Apollinaire was “still living like [a] writer of the Symbolist period, around 1880, that is.” (Dialogues with Duchamp, p. 24).

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49. “Ce qui est extraordinaire, c’est que malgré leurs audaces, l’un et l’autre souffraient d’un mal qu’il leur était difficile de préciser : une sorte de nostalgie de la forme objective, le regret du motif et de toutes les formules classique dont ils s’étaient peu à peu détachés. Cette rupture avec certaines habitudes et inclinaisons de leur esprit les mettait souvent dans le doute d’eux-mêmes.” (Gabrielle Buffet, “Guillaume Apollinaire,” in Rencontres (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1977) 66).

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50. This is clear from his 1913 letter to Stieglitz, where he spoke about “a purer painting of a dimension having no title, each painting hav[ing] a name in rapport with the pictorial expression, [an] appropriate name absolutely created for it.”

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51. Carole Boulbès (Francis Picabia: Le Saint Masqué (Jean Michele Place, 1998)), interprets the bulk of Picabia’s mature work with a similar tension: “l’univers esthétique de Picabia semble foncièrement *double*. C’est une sorte de *double monde* qui oscille entre le refus et l’acceptation de l’illusion de l’art, entre l’ennui et la jouissance, entre la mort et la vie.” (p. 138). Boulbès concerns herself with Picabia’s work after 1915, and does not address the question, central to this study here, of the relation between abstraction and the mechanomorphs, the question, as I see it, that is determinative of the painter’s

subsequent ambivalence, his *double monde*.

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52. The entry in the Larousse includes the following brief explanation of this phrase: "Expression dont Virgile (Enéide X, 782) sert pour rendre plus touchante la douleur d'un jeune guerrier, Antor, qui avait suivi Enée en Italie, et meurt loin de patrie, tué par Mézence." Various titles drawn from the "Pink Pages" are collected with the original entries in Francis Picabia (Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976) 47-49. Picabia began using phrases from these pages some time in 1913 and he continued to make use of them into 1915. The phrase "Fille née sans mère," for example, is derived from a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* ("Prolem sine matre creatam"), while the title "très rare tableau sur la terre" is taken from one of Juvenal's *Satires* ("rara avis in terris"). The use of the pink pages is evident in many other works of this period, including for example, the title to a work from 1914, *Impétuosité Française*, which comes from the Italian expression "Furia francese," used by Machiavelli, and from a 1915 mechanical portrait of *Marius de Zayas*, which contains near the top, the phrase "C'est de toi qu'il s'agit," a phrase which is taken, with a slight modification, from Horace ("De te fabula narratur"). Jean Hubert Martin was the first to have recognized the source material for these titles. (Francis Picabia (Grand Palais, 1976) 47-49) It seems that Picabia was given this idea from Apollinaire, who enjoyed referring to these pages. See Katia Samaltanos, Apollinaire: Catalyst for Primitivism, Picabia, and Duchamp (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984) 71-72.

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53. Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979) 69.

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54. See letter from de Zayas to Stieglitz, September 13, 1914, transcribed in Marius de Zayas, How, When, and Why Modern Art Came to New York, ed. Francis Naumann

(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) 185. Scholars have often noted the obvious similarity between these two works (Camfield, Francis Picabia, p. 80; Naumann, New York Dada, pp. 59-60), yet it has not been suggested that the painter's interest in reconsidering his earlier work was probably inspired by his renewed contact with it. This work provides one (of the more obvious) links between the painter's abstract works and his subsequent mechanomorphs. I think Camfield is mistaken when he claims that this 1915 drawing "suggests what little transition exists between the psychological studies of 1913-1914 and the machinist drawings of 1915. It does resemble somewhat *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*, but a clearer suggestion of rods and springs introduces the machine element which Picabia himself claimed for 1915." (Camfield, Francis Picabia, p. 80) Indeed, his very acknowledgement of a resemblance suggests the contrary. But, as I argue below, this particular connection is but the most superficial, and in the end, one of the least significant.

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55. Although beyond the scope of this study, the question of the "diagrammatic"—a term Duchamp himself uses to describe his alternative to the cubist/abstractionist model (Cabanne, Dialogues with Duchamp, p. 31)—deserves attention as one of the significant, yet entirely overlooked, alternatives to the cubist/ abstractionist model proposed by Picabia in 1913-14.

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56. The same is true for the more complex drawing reproduced in 291 (November 1915), *Voilà Elle*, where a target is attached, through a pair of strings, to a gun that itself points back to the target. The masturbatory implications of this drawing have been commented upon by a number of scholars, likewise suggesting its parallel to the erotics of Duchamp's contemporaneous work. (New York Dada, p. 62; Borràs, Picabia, 158; Camfield, Francis Picabia, p. 70),

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57. Of the six known mechanomorphs, all but one (*A Little Solitude in the Middle of Suns*) are extant.

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58. As mentioned above, Sanouillet considers Picabia's mechanomorphs as the sign that the painter had "turned his back" on his earlier preoccupations. Pontus Hulten refers to the mechanomorphs as having "inaugurated an absolutely new pictorial practice, having nothing to do with the brilliant lyricism of the pre-war period." In a similar vein, Jean Hubert Martin characterized the mechanomorphs as staked upon the desire "to create a completely new endeavor, without any reference to the past." (Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, 1965/1993) 28; Pontus Hulten, *Picabia Catalog*, 1979, p. 7; Jean Hubert Martin, *Francis Picabia*, exhibition catalog (Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976) 45). The one exception is that of William Camfield, for whom these works, despite their manifest differences on the level of iconography, nonetheless "attest to continuities of aim and content. Instead of developing a vocabulary of abstract forms and colors [as a means of representing the inner, subjective experiences of the painter], Picabia now sought machine equivalents or symbols to comment on man and human situations, much as the ancient Greeks and Romans had developed personifications of gods, virtues, vices, war and peace." (Camfield, *Francis Picabia* (1979), pp. 77-78.) Still, Camfield maintains that beyond this one exception, there exists no other significant connection between the abstractions of 1913-14 and the mechanomorphs of 1915.

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59. Perhaps this is a good place to enumerate some of the more prominent examples of the ways in which the relationship between Picabia and Duchamp has been dealt with in the literature. The common interest in man-machine hybrids has been much commented upon (Borràs, *Francis Picabia:*

Máquinas y Españolas, exhibition catalog (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1996) 170; Camfield, Máquinas y Españolas, p. 175); The mutual influence of figures like Roussel, Jarry and Pawlowski has also been cited by Borràs (Picabia , p. 153) and Camfield (Francis Picabia, 1979, p. 79); In addition, for Camfield, one of the crucial similarities involves their mutual interest in the “intellectual” aspect of art (Francis Picabia, 1979, p. 85); Ulf Linde considers alchemy to be a source of mutual inspiration (Francis Picabia, Grand Palais, p. 24), while Martin has focused on their mutual interests in word games (Francis Picabia, Grand Palais, p. 24). Regarding the accounts of their differences, Copely argues for dividing the two along the lines of the cerebral (Duchamp) and the corporeal (Picabia) (Francis Picabia, Grand Palais, p. 15) while Martin distinguishes between the worldly Picabia and the provincial Duchamp (Francis Picabia, Grand Palais, p. 46). Camfield has distinguished between Duchamp’s attraction to the labor-intensive work of the *Large Glass* as opposed to Picabia’s often improvisational compositions (Máquinas y Españolas, p.175), as well as the more fundamental distinction between the ways in which sexuality is represented in their work—as preposterous in the case of Duchamp, as frustrating in the case of Camfield. (Francis Picabia, 1979, p. 70). In sum, none of the accounts address the distinction that I take to be fundamental: namely the difference between Duchamp’s abandonment of modernist painting (and therefore its attendant aims and values) and Picabia’s continued, if ambivalent, attachment to it.

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60. See Virginia Spate, Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910-1914 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979). It should be said that one of the more remarkable aspects of the perspective on the war in 1915 (and one that surely deserves attention) was that, for Duchamp at least, the foremost thing on his mind seems to have been not the human devastation of the war, but rather the emptiness

of the cafés. Although one may well be tempted to interpret Duchamp's machinic turn as part of a reflection of the war's introduction of technologically advanced methods of human destruction, contemporaneous comments present a more naïve, if not utterly self-absorbed consideration of the effects of the war. In an interview from 1915, Duchamp makes only passing reference to the violence of the war; his main concern was the sense of boredom he felt with the entire city talking about nothing else but what was going on at the front: The Quartier Latin is a gloomy endroit these days. The old gay life is all vanished. The ateliers are dismally shut. Art has gone dusty. You know, at the outbreak of the war, all Latin Quarter cafés closed up at 8 o'clock in the evening. When I abandoned Paris last spring, the hour had been advanced to 10:30. But it is a very different life from the happy, stimulating life one used to encounter. Paris is like a deserted mansion. Her lights are out. One's friends are all away at the front. Or else they have been already killed. I came over here, not because I couldn't paint at home, but because I hadn't anyone to talk with. It was frightfully lonely. I am excused from service on account of my heart. So I roamed about all alone. Everywhere the talk turned upon war. Nothing but war was talked from morning until night. In such an atmosphere, especially for one who holds war to be an abomination, it may readily be conceived existence was heavy and dull. From a psychological standpoint I find the spectacle of war very impressive. The instinct which sends men marching out to cut down other men is an instinct worthy of careful scrutiny. What an absurd thing such a conception of patriotism is! Fundamentally, all people are alike. Personally, I must say I admire the attitude of combating invasion with folded arms. Could that but become the universal attitude, how simple the intercourse of nations would be." (Duchamp, in "French Artists Spur on an American Art," New York Tribune, Sunday, October 24, 1915, section IV: 2, 3).



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61. See, for example, Naumann, New York Dada, p. 60.

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62. Christopher Green, "Cubism and the Possibility of Abstract Art," in Towards a New Art:Essays on the Background to Abstract Art, 1910-20 (London: The Tate Gallery, 1980) 164.

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63. "Picabia... ne réussira pas à supprimer sa vision picturale; il restera plastique même dans ses réalisations les plus agressives." Buffet, "A propos de l'anti-peinture," Rencontres, p. 249.

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64. William Copely, "Du lièvre et de la tortue et principalement du lièvre," Francis Picabia, exhibition catalog (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976) 14.

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65. The illustration used in preparing *Fantasy* appears in Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979), no page number. The illustration used in preparing *Music is Like Painting* is illustrated both in Camfield's 1979 text as well as in his essay for the 1970 exhibition catalog of Picabia's work at the Guggenheim Museum. William Camfield, Francis Picabia (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1970) 102.

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66. Picabia must have taken this work—and by implication, its manifest declaration of a continued adherence to his pre-1915 aesthetic ambitions—quite seriously, as he was to remake the painting five years later for a 1920 booklet on his work. Marie de La Hire, Francis Picabia (Paris, 1920). Camfield dates this painting to some time between 1913 and 1917, when it first appeared in exhibition. He considers the work's direct recollection of Picabia's pre-1915 understanding

of painting as like music to suggest that it may have been painted as early as 1913. Yet Camfield's own convincing demonstration of its derivation from a scientific, technological illustration—a procedure not used by Picabia before his arrival in New York in mid-1915—places the work to the same time as *Fantasy*, a work whose date is secured by its reproduction in *291*. Camfield's unwillingness to imagine that Picabia would have maintained some of his most fundamental pre-1915 commitments during his period in New York prevents him from recognizing that which is far more likely: Picabia never did abandon his earlier commitments, at least not in the definitive manner that Camfield—and others—have insisted. For Camfield's assessment of this work see Francis Picabia (1970) 102; Borràs suggests that the work was painted during Picabia's subsequent stay in Barcelona between mid-1916 and mid-1917, when he returned to New York for the third and final time. She offers no evidence to support this claim. (Borràs, Picabia, p. 175); The fact that the work was shown at an exhibition that opened just four days after his arrival in New York, suggests that it was most likely painted the year before, during his second trip to New York. But even if Borràs is correct, this does not undermine my claim that Picabia's commitment to abstraction worked alongside his interest in the mechanomorphs. Indeed, if the painting had been done some time between mid-1916 and mid-1917, this would only confirm the notion that Picabia's fixation on abstraction remained, now two years after his apparent abandonment.

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67. Still other indicators include Picabia's reference to "the metaphysical and invisible world," the "invisible symbol of the painter," as well as the notion of a "sublime and superior language." *291* (February 1916), no page number (printed on the final page of the magazine).

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68. Anonymous author, "French Artists Spur on an American Art," New York Tribune (October 24, 1915), section

IV: 2, 3. It is also the one source cited in the defense of the claim that Picabia's 1915 works mark an absolute break. "Francis Picabia, for example," notes the unnamed reporter, "admits to having put all former things behind him and to having grasped the genius of American machinery as the new medium through which his art may be expressed." I believe this remark is best treated as an exaggeration/misrepresentation by an artist who, understandably, was drawn at the moment to focus on the manifest differences rather than the less obvious yet underlying continuities.

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69. See, for example, Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979) 80; Borràs, Picabia, p. 156; Naumann, New York Dada, p. 61. In this reading, Picabia's interest in "la fille née sans mère" is a sign that Picabia perceived himself like God: just as God created man, so man created the machine. The machine is therefore "the daughter born without a mother," the daughter born by man alone. In other words, Picabia's turn to the machine is part of a larger affirmation of the powers of creation, powers which run alongside those of modern production, likewise affirmed as the manifestation of God-on-earth. (See Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979), pp. 81 n. 30; 82; 138; Francis Picabia: Máquinas y Españolas, exhibition catalog (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1996) 174, 176.

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70. Camfield, Francis Picabia (1979), figures section for chapter six, no page number.

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71. Duchamp labels his *Nine Malic Moulds*: "Cuirassier", "Gendarme", "Larbin", "Livreur", "Chasseur", "Prêtre", "Croquemort", "Police-man", "Chef de Gare".

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72. Jean-Hubert Martin, "Ses tableaux sont peints," Francis Picabia (1976), p. 45.

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73. Duchamp, in Cabanne, Dialogues with Duchamp, p. 38. Duchamp's use of glass as an alternative to canvas was driven by the same agenda, and given the obvious eccentricity of this medium, it is impossible that Picabia would not have asked him about his reasons for using it. He would have heard straight away that the glass was among a number of devices for doing away with the values and implications of modernist painting.

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74. Unnamed reviewer, "Picabia's Puzzles," The Christian Science Monitor (January 29, 1916).

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75. For Picabia, the titles are absolutely crucial to the understanding of his work. They are that which "the painting... is the pantomime." (Statement in *291*, no. 12 (February 1916), no page number).

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76. Attempts have been made to locate the source for this machine part, in one case suggesting that it was drawn from a diagram for an electric vibrator—hence "paroxysm," a word used at the time as a euphemism for orgasm. See Naumann, New York Dada, p. 64.

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77. Transposing an argument made by Arturo Schwarz with regard to the role of alchemy in Duchamp's work (see, for example, "The Alchemist Stripped Bare in the Bachelor, Even," in Marcel Duchamp, eds. d'Harnoncourt and McShine, pp. 81-98). Ulf Linde suggests that Picabia's use of metallic pigments may be seen as a similar reference to alchemy. Ulf Linde, "Picabia," in Francis Picabia, exhibition catalog (Grand Palais, 1976) 24. With only the analogy to Duchamp to support it, Linde's suggestion is even more suspect than Schwarz's.

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78. Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), especially pp. 159-189; 223-226.

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79. In addition, the lower apparatus of wheel and shaft, while more credibly machine-like, nonetheless appears as if its components are in fact attached only internally, thereby preventing the wheel from spinning and shafts from cranking back-and-forth.

**Fig. 23**

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**Figs. 25-27**

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