

FRANCIS PICABIA AND THE PROBLEM OF NIHILISM

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## ABSTRACT

### FRANCIS PICABIA AND THE PROBLEM OF NIHILISM

by

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“Francis Picabia and the Problem of Nihilism” offers an interpretation of Francis Picabia based on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. Building on already established art-historical material, and on the tradition of Nietzschean interpretation in continental aesthetics, the dissertation offers a new reading of Picabia’s hugely variegated, apparently contradictory career. The central claim is that Picabia’s art was generated by the same problem that Nietzsche wrestled with in philosophy: *nihilism*, the devaluation of all transcendent values in modernity. The strategies Picabia developed to overcome nihilism often match those developed by Nietzsche. Each of the five chapters defines such a strategy and tracks the way it unfolded in Picabia’s oeuvre, analyzing specific paintings and texts formally and contextually by way of contemporary criticism and intellectual currents.

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## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation offers an interpretation of Francis Picabia based on the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. To be sure, it has already been well established that Picabia was an avid admirer of Nietzsche's writings. We know not only the broad rudiments of his obsession with Nietzsche but also many specific details, including the extent to which the artist copied phrases directly from the philosopher in his own writings. Furthermore, there has been an explosion of interest in Picabia over the last decade, and all the phases of his extraordinarily varied career have received attention. Why then, another interpretation of Picabia, and one grounded in what appears to be a well-documented aspect of his practice?

It is the argument of this dissertation that Picabia's fundamental achievement, as well as the logic that organized his practice from beginning to end, has not yet been understood, or for the most part even recognized. To bring this logic to light, I call upon Nietzsche and the history of Nietzschean ideas. The aim is not to present an orthodox Nietzschean reading of Picabia but rather to utilize Nietzsche, and interpretations derived by later thinkers (mainly Paul de Man, Gilles Deleuze, and Martin Heidegger) from Nietzsche, as a way of bringing what I believe to be the genuine character of Picabia's art to light. Before continuing, though, it is first necessary to consider the compelling strangeness of Picabia's life and career.

François Marie Martinez-Picabia y Davanne was born in Paris to a Spanish father (himself born in Cuba) and French mother on 22 January 1879. Both sides of Picabia's family were wealthy. Picabia's paternal grandfather, Juan Martínez Picabia, had amassed

a fortune in Cuba from sugar plantations and then invested the money in Spanish railroads.<sup>1</sup> The family was cultured as well as moneyed: Picabia's maternal uncle Maurice Davanne was the curator of the Saint-Geneviève library and had been a member of the jury for the Parisian Universal Expositions in 1867, 1878, and 1900.<sup>2</sup> The artist's maternal grandfather was an amateur photographer and a prominent member of the Société française de photographie; later, Picabia would recall many conversations in which his grandfather had told him that photography would one day render painting obsolete. The artist's mother died of tuberculosis in 1886; a year later, his maternal grandmother died, leaving only men in the house.

Picabia showed a talent for painting and drawing from an early age. He won his first drawing prize at the age of ten, and, beginning in 1897, studied at the private academy of the painter Fernand Cormon. In 1899, Picabia began exhibiting at the annual Salon de la Société des Artistes française. Four years later he also began exhibiting at the Salon des Indépendants and, in 1905, at the prestigious Galerie Hausmann. The paintings from this period are accomplished, but in an entirely conventional Impressionist mode [Figs. 1 and 2].

In 1908, Picabia became suddenly dissatisfied with his life and art. In September of that year he met the musician Gabrielle Buffet. The couple married in January 1909 and shortly thereafter Picabia quit the Galerie Hausmann. Buffet was seven years' Picabia's senior. She had trained under Vincent d'Indy and alongside Edgar Varèse at the Schola cantorum in Paris. Picabia had had no knowledge of nor interest in advanced music until he met Buffet; but music, and the idea of painting as music, meaning

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Lluïsa Borrás, *Picabia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

abstraction, became his main artistic focus until 1915—so much so that Picabia would later claim that he had invented the term “abstractionist” to describe himself.<sup>3</sup>

By 1911, Picabia had developed close friendships with the poet Guillaume Apollinaire and Marcel Duchamp, and exhibited more adventurous, now basically Fauve, paintings with the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne and at the Salon des Indépendants. In 1912, with paintings like *Danses à la source* [Fig. 3], *La Source*, and *Procession à Seville* [Fig. 4], exhibited at the Salon d’automne and the Salon de la section d’or (which he also helped organize and finance), Picabia emerged as a major proponent of abstract or “pure” painting in France. This tendency was termed Orphism by Apollinaire, after the mythical Greek poet and musician. In *Danses à la source* an amorous couple is assembled from Cubist planes, and merge into the background; the artist deploys occasional (and not terribly imaginative) uses of Cezannesque *passage* alongside the brittle, almost crystal-like facets. There are echoes of Analytic Cubism as well in the lack of coloristic complexities, as the picture is composed only in shades of red, ranging from an auburn verging on black through all manner of cooler and warmer reds and oranges with pinks and white highlights.

Four of Picabia’s abstractions were exhibited in New York at the Armory show in 1913: *Danses à la source*; *La Procession à Séville*; *Paris*; and *Souvenir de Grimaldi, Italie*. In anticipation of the exhibition, Picabia and Buffet sailed to the United States. There, he and Buffet befriended Alfred Stieglitz and mingled in his circle. Picabia was heralded as a champion of pure painting in New York and, in dozens of interviews and

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Da Capo, 1971), 43.

statements, he attempted to clarify the nature of his new, abstract art. One such example is found in the catalog published for his exhibition at Steiglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession (17 March – 5 April 1913).

We can make ourselves better understood by comparing [painting] 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 be 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 abstract reality of form and color in itself*.<sup>4</sup>

His style also developed rapidly. This can be seen in the watercolors and gouaches he exhibited at the exhibition at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. In these works, careful clusters of delicate abstracted forms are arranged against broad colored planes, without the cumbersome inherited Analytic Cubist scaffolding of the 1912 paintings. For the first time, Picabia deployed a range of biomorphic forms, as in the curving, sac-like central images in *Danseuse étoile sur un transatlantique* [Fig. 5] In *New York*, [Fig. 6], Picabia translated the energy of the modern metropolis by way of a dynamic diagonal vector, on both sides of which are an increasingly varied arrangement of abstract colors and forms. This central diagonal is probably indicative of Picabia's awareness of the Futurist line of force. Also during this first trip to New York, Picabia introduced mechanical imagery into his oeuvre, as demonstrated by *Mechanical*

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<sup>4</sup> *Picabia Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Little Galleries of the Photo Secession, 1913). Emphasis is mine. See also Arnauld Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture sans aura* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 93.

*Expression Seen through Our Own Mechanical Expression* [Fig. 7] which he did not, however, exhibit.

Many of these formal and biomorphic innovations were further developed upon his return to Paris. The large-scale oils *Udnie* [Fig. 8] and *Edtaonisl* [Fig. 9], both displayed at the 1913 Salon d'automne, sum up, with obvious exuberance, what Picabia had learned. He had, by this point, moved well past his earlier Cubism and was now in command of his own pictorial idiom, at once high key and declarative but at the same time dream-like and suggestive, with a great diversity of planar complication and coloristic brio. Picabia also began to deploy explicitly enigmatic titles. *Edtaonisl* derived from “*etoile*” (star) and “*danser*” (dancer), which he wrote on the surface of these large abstractions. *Udnie* has never been decoded. In 1913, he also frequently culled phrases from the *Petit Larousse* dictionary and used them as titles, written directly with a paintbrush on the surface of the pictures. Unlike the titles of the paintings shown at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession, which were descriptive, these were increasingly allusive and unrelated to the subject—if indeed there remained a subject—of the pictures. Picabia continued to develop all these strands through 1914, leading up to the great last painting of his pre-war career, *Je Revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie* [Fig. 10] in which one sees, at the center of an Orphic abstraction, the interaction of what looks like a mechanical piston with a blossoming pink, flower-like form.

Picabia was drafted at the outbreak of the First World War but was able to secure a post as the chauffeur to a general. Then, in November 1915, Picabia's father (who had been a cavalry officer) procured a mission for his son buying sugar for the army in Cuba. The artist took advantage of this and, in dereliction of duty, returned to New York,

arriving in June 1915 to reunite with Steiglitz. Duchamp was in New York at this time as well. Picabia maintained his previous friendships but also moved in the circle around the wealthy and erudite collector Walter Arensberg, who included Man Ray, Mina Loy, Charles Demuth, John Crotti, and Katherine Dreier. He shifted away from abstraction and began, instead, to create paintings and works on paper based on appropriated mechanical imagery, usually rendered in the bland style of technical illustration or scientific drawing. These images mark the start of New York Dada and have been aptly called mechanomorphs. They were first published in the pages of Steiglitz's new journal *291*, beginning with the enigmatic *Fille née sans mère* in *291* (June 1915) [Fig. 11].<sup>5</sup> In the next issue of *291*, 5-6 (July-August) 1915, Picabia published a group of five celebrated portrait drawings: *Ici, c'est ici Steiglitz*; *Les Saint des saints*; *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*; *De Zayas! De Zayas!*; *Voilà Haviland* [Figs. 12-16]. These were still more "mechanical," lacking even the vestigial biomorphism and elegant draftsmanship of *Fille née sans mère*. Each is also explicitly a portrait. Picabia continued to make use of combined image and text and frequently complicated clusters of references and puns. In *De Zayas! De Zayas!*, for example, there are allusions, by way of a phrase from the *Larousse*, to Ovid's exile (and therefore to the artist's own displacement in New York). The words combine with an arrangement of mechanical relays, derived from a diagram of an electronic system, linked by black and red lines and threads and including a corset linked to a spark plug, two automobile headlights, and a hand crank. Moreover, the subjects of these first mechanomorphs are often explicitly

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<sup>5</sup> *291*, no. 4 (June 1915): 2. The phrase recurs in Picabia's paintings of 1916-17 and was used by the artist as the title for an important book of drawings and poems: Picabia, *Poèmes et dessins de la Fille née sans mere* (Lausanne: Imprimeries réunies, 1918).

gendered, and in the years to come, Picabia continued to suggest analogies between sexual and mechanical interaction, whether in the fashion of *Voilà Elle* [Fig. 17], published in the November 1915 issue of *291*, with its phallic pistol figures and target female “object,” or in the drawings of 1918, which show absurd, dysfunctional, and often sexualized interactions of machine parts. For example, *Les Îles Marquises* [Fig. 18] includes a faucet marked “penis” and, at the end of a pair of wires, or heads, a platform on which it is written, “the female egg waits.”

By 1916, following his exhibition at the Modern Gallery in New York, and after being treated for neurasthenia, Picabia moved with Buffet to Barcelona. There he commenced publication of his first journal, *391*, in homage to Stieglitz’s *291*. Picabia published *391* intermittently until 1924. It was in *391* that he made his debut, in 1917, as a poet. A poetry book, *Cinquante-deux miroirs (Fifty-Two Mirrors)*, published in Barcelona in October 1917, followed these first published efforts. In 1918, again suffering from depression and anxiety, Picabia moved to Switzerland in order to undergo treatment with a well-known doctor in Lausanne.

Throughout 1918, poetry was Picabia’s main creative effort, and he published six volumes of poetry, including *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mère (Poems and Drawings of the Daughter Born Without a Mother)*; *L’Athlète des pompes funèbres (The Mortician’s Athlete)*; *Râteliers platoniques (Platonic False Teeth)*; *Pensées sans langage (Thoughts without Language)*; and *Poésie Ron-Ron (Purring Poetry)*. Picabia’s poetry is notable for its seeming disregard of any conventional poetic effect. The artist took numerous liberties with syntax and signification (in *Unique Eunuque*, published in 1920, some of the sentences run backwards), and his untitled poem in *391* (published in Zurich

in February 1919) is among the first automatic works, predating Breton and Soupault's *Les Champs Magnétiques*.<sup>6</sup> In the drawings of *Poems and Drawings of the Daughter Born without a Mother*, Picabia combined words and images, much as he had in the 1915 mechanomorphic portrait drawings. It is tempting to compare such conjunction of visual and verbal effects with those of Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, which likewise explore the visual possibilities of writing; it should be noted, though, that Picabia's writings are much more radical, if less lyrical, and that Picabia thought his friend's poems to be rather old-fashioned.<sup>7</sup>

After 1919, Picabia's poetic output diminished, and he instead published aphorisms and short polemical sallies (in prose) in numerous journals throughout the 1920s, including *Littérature*, *391*, an illustrated supplement to *391* called *Pilhaou-Thibaou*, *Cannibale*, *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and *Comœdia*. He did not again take up poetry with any dedication until the outbreak of the Second World War, when he wrote *Poems of Dingalari* and *Thalassa in the Desert*, followed in 1947 by *Explorations* and in 1950 by *Chi-Lo-Sa*.

In 1918, while in Switzerland, Picabia began corresponding with the Romanian poet and founder of Zurich Dada, Tristan Tzara. A close friendship and artistic alliance developed. Picabia and Tzara met in person in Zurich in early 1919 and spent three weeks together working on the eighth issue of *391*. Shortly thereafter, Picabia returned, after nearly five peripatetic years, to Paris, moving into the house of his younger lover, Germaine Everling, on the Rue Emile-Augier. In the first week of January 1920, he

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<sup>6</sup> Picabia, no title, *391*, no. 8 (Feb. 1919): 2; and *Unique Eunuque*, Au Sans Pareil (Paris), 20 February 1920.

<sup>7</sup> Marc Lowenthal, Translator's Introduction to *I Am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose and Provocation*, by Francis Picabia (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010), 11.

received the admiring Andre Breton as a guest.<sup>8</sup> Tzara arrived at Everling's a few weeks later. With the uniting of these three figures, the stage was set for Dada in Paris.

Along with Breton and Tzara, Picabia was the leader of Parisian Dada. He was active and influential as a painter, author, organizer, journal publisher and the host of a lively and diverse salon at Everling's home. It should be noted, though, that he never participated in the events onstage. For example, it was Breton, not Picabia, who wore the sandwich board [Fig. 86] Picabia designed for the Dada Festival of 26 May 1920.

Picabia, alone among the Dadaists, submitted paintings to the large Parisian exhibitions and salons. In 1919, he showed four paintings at the Salon d'automne: (*L'Enfant carburateur* [Fig. 19], *Vénus heliotrope*, *Serpentins* [Fig. 20], and *Horloge*) and two in a large group exhibition at the Cirque d'Hiver (*Muscles brilliants* and *Parade amoureuse* [Fig. 21]). These paintings show the continued development of the mechanomorphic style. In his Modern Gallery exhibit in New York in 1916, Picabia had exhibited paintings with simplified compositions, in which a scrupulously rendered mechanical form or arrangement floated on a flat background. He also began incorporating metallic paints and collage elements as early as 1915, as in *Très rare tableau sur la terre* [Fig. 22]. These qualities are all evident in all the paintings shown in Paris in 1919, the only distinction being a shift in emphasis from single mechanical objects toward more complex and convoluted mechanical relays and interactions, as in *L'Enfant carburateur*.

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<sup>8</sup> Breton had been aware of Tzara's and Picabia's activities and reputations. He had already included Picabia in a survey of the results, published in *Littérature*, no. 12 (February 1920): 2. See Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, trans. Sharmilla Ganguly, rev. and expanded by Anne Sanouillet (Cambridge, MA: The MIT press, 2009), 309-314.

In 1921, he submitted *Les Yeux chauds* and *L'Œil cacodylate* [Fig. 24] to the Salon d'automne. A huge scandal erupted. It was rumored that Picabia's submission was literally explosive and a danger to the audience. Then the painter Kees Van Dongen publicly attacked Picabia, further exacerbating the public outcry.<sup>9</sup> *Les Yeux chauds* was later painted over by Picabia, but from surviving photographs one can see that it was copied from a diagram of an airplane turbine; on it Picabia thanks the Salon d'automne and its president, Frantz Jourdain, who had insisted that the Dadaists be given space at the exhibit.<sup>10</sup> *L'Œil cacodylate* was made earlier that year while Picabia was suffering from an eye infection and features the signatures, doodles, and occasional collaged photographs and postcards of many of those who visited him as he recovered: Duchamp, Tzara, Cocteau, Metzinger, Buffet, Isadora Duncan, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and many others. There is a large cartoon eye in the lower right, and the title ("L'Œil cacodylate") is stenciled prominently at the top. On the lower left is Picabia's stylized signature, with a collaged photograph of his head, smiling, between his first and last name.

On account of these two paintings, and the scandal they caused, Picabia issued one of his most revealing and important statements:

*Le Matin* took great pride in showing on their front page my painting from the Salon d'automne, *The Hot Eyes*, printing a diagram below it of an air-turbine brake published in a scientific journal from 1920. "So Picabia invented nothing: he copies!" I'm afraid so, he copies an engineer's working diagram instead of copying apples!

Copying apples, anyone can understand that; copying a turbine: that's stupid. In my opinion, what is even stupider is that *The Hot Eyes*, which was inadmissible yesterday, now becomes, through the fact that it represents a convention, a painting that is perfectly intelligible to everyone.

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<sup>9</sup> William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life, and Times* (Princeton University Press, 1979), 168.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

The painter makes a choice, then imitates his choice, whose deformation constitutes Art; why not simply sign this choice instead of monkeying about in front of it?<sup>11</sup>

This assertion can be placed productively alongside those found in *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*, the short philosophical novel that Picabia wrote in Paris in 1920. The book has been described by Sanouillet as “the most important Dadaist document of that period” and “an essay on Dadaist ‘philosophy’: an uncommon essay, no doubt, and a disconcerting one, but largely intelligible and overflowing with original ideas on art, literature and life.”<sup>12</sup> Despite its great variety of images and anecdotes, as well as Picabia’s at first befuddling use of paradox and chiasmic reversals, *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère* is consistent and provides insights into the meaning of his practice. Picabia again and again dismisses everything as mere convention: nothing has any genuine purpose or meaning, since these cannot exist. Importantly, the artist does not see this situation as in any way alterable; instead of dreaming of alternatives, of an ideal or even better world, he insists that the only salvation to be found is in sensual gratification in the present. It is inane, he insists, to imagine otherwise:

The thoughts of the heart, the thoughts of the soul, the thoughts of the mind are just so many automatic chemical reactions; the current that drives them comes from you, from the sun, or from the Great Bear; the Great Bear recites, the sun recites, and we recite our digestions and indigestions. Your thoughts, dear lady readers, be they antireason or antitruth, are just so many conventions about an absolute, which is also nothing but a convention.

The sun is setting upon us and we carry it around so we can grow strong. Big mistake! Captentier [the boxer] is no stronger than a two-year old child, space and time have the same duration, a woman—fat, thin, old,

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<sup>11</sup> Picabia, “L’Œil cacodylate,” *Comœdia* (23 November 1921): 1, in *Francis Picabia: Écrits Critiques*, compiled by Carol Boulbès, (Paris: Mémoire du livre, 2005), 91.

<sup>12</sup> Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, 157.

or young—they're all the same. You seek imaginary landings in the continual movement of resting places—what madness!<sup>13</sup>

What follows is one of Picabia's most justly celebrated passages:

Don't work, don't love, don't read, think of me; I have found the new laughter that grants you freedom. Live for your pleasure. There is nothing to understand, nothing, nothing, nothing but the value that you yourself will give to everything.<sup>14</sup>

Picabia also had two one-man exhibitions during the Parisian Dada period, both in 1920: the first, at the Sans Pareil bookstore in April, the second in December, at a bookstore run by the Russian Jacques Povolozsky.<sup>15</sup> To this second exhibition Picabia invited a good deal of Parisian society, much of it hostile (or ostensibly hostile) to Dada. Jean Cocteau, whom most of the Dadaists except Picabia detested, led a jazz band, and Tzara read his *Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love* from a stage.<sup>16</sup> The exhibition itself consisted of fifty-three paintings and drawings from all phases of Picabia's career, going back to his Impressionist phase. In addition, there were upscale, but conventional, paintings of Spanish women, which Picabia had been making since his youth.<sup>17</sup> The decision to exhibit them alongside his most "advanced" modernist or Dadaist efforts is indicative both of a burgeoning importance of figuration in the painter's practice and, perhaps more saliently, of his increasingly bald-faced stylistic promiscuity, on which much of his current fame, and legend, rightly rests.

Despite the indisputable centrality of his position in the movement, though, Picabia was always somewhat exceptional among the Dadaists in Paris. Unlike in New

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<sup>13</sup> Picabia, *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*, (Paris: Au Sans Pareil: 1920), 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, 122, 165.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>17</sup> *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris, 2003), 222.

York, Dada in Paris was almost entirely a literary (and performance-based) phenomenon, and Picabia was, until the arrival of Max Ernst, still primarily a painter, and the only Dadaist in Paris whose orientation was not mainly literary. He was also quite a bit older than almost all the other members of the movement, and had already established a significant reputation, which he drew upon, before the war. Since he had been a member of the Salon d'automne for nearly two decades, he was able to show there without having to go through the jury, for example.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, he was part of Parisian high society, and did not drift far, socially speaking, from this station, despite occupying center-Dadaist-stage. He cultivated relationships with influential members of the press, hosting them at the salon at Everling's house; he threw glittering parties, including the Cacodylate New Year's Eve Party in 1921, and often flaunted his wealth, buying new cars even during the austerity of the postwar environment.<sup>19</sup>

It is thus hard to know how seriously to take Picabia's Dadaist fervor, and it is perhaps not entirely surprising that in 1921, in the middle of the second Parisian Dada season, Picabia made a sudden and acrimonious split with the movement. The impetus, it seems, was the Barrès Trial, organized by Breton and held on 13 May 1921, with Breton playing the role of president and various Dadaists in roles ranging from prosecutor to witnesses. The event was staged in front of an audience who included numerous journalists. Picabia had been opposed, but attended nevertheless. It was to be his last appearance at a Dada event. Following the calling of Benjamin Péret as the "Unknown Soldier" as a witness, a group of patriots in the audience sang "La Marseillaise" and stormed the stage. At this point, Picabia exited. He then immediately wrote an article that

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<sup>18</sup> Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, 587, n. 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 83, 219, 287; See also, Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 130.

was published shortly thereafter in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, venting his disgust with the direction that Dada had begun to take with Breton at the helm.<sup>20</sup> This was the first of many such published assaults on his erstwhile allies.

And yet Picabia did not sever his relationship with Breton, and in all the acrimony surrounding Breton's ill-fated Congress of Paris in 1922, Picabia in large part supported Breton against Tzara, and contributed numerous drawings, in a linear, figurative style for the covers of Breton's journal, *Littérature* [Figs. 46-48]. Moreover, when Picabia was invited, in November 1922, to exhibit his recent work in José Dalmau's Barcelona's gallery, he invited Breton to accompany him and deliver a lecture on French poetry and art. At Dalmau, Picabia again mixed incompatible styles. On the one hand, he showed abstractions which represent a late and more abstracted variation of the mechanomorph, evoking and diagramming of forces of various kinds, be it illumination (*Lampe* [Fig. 25]) magnetism (*Magnéto* and *Magnéto anglaise* [Fig. 26], hydraulics (*Presse hydraulique*) winding *Bobinage*, digging, (*Décaveuse* [Fig. 27]), strength (*Chambre Forte*), and flight (*Aviation* [Fig. 28]). Along with these, though, he mixed a number of traditionally rendered, "Spanish" watercolors—mostly women in traditional Spanish costume but also at least one Toreador [Fig. 29].

Throughout 1922 and 1923, Picabia continued to explore both figuration and abstraction simultaneously. In *Optophone* I and II (note that *Optophone* II is painted over) [Figs. 30 and 31], *Volucelle* I and II [Fig. 32], *Chariot* [Fig. 33] and *Conversation*, male and female nudes float against striking backgrounds of black and white stripes or

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<sup>20</sup> Picabia, "Francis Picabia et Dada," *L'Esprit nouveau*, no. 9 (June 1921): 1059-1060.

concentric circles.<sup>21</sup> The hermetic *Volucelle II*, which was exhibited at the Société des Artistes indépendants in 1923, features colored circles (each circle a different color) against a rhythm of vertical stripes, with every circle marked with between zero and seven much smaller hollow black circles such that the painting offers a complex interplay of coloristic and numerical progressions (1 yellow, 2 orange, 3 green, 4 purple, 5 blue, 6 black, 7 red).<sup>22</sup> To the Parisian salons, though, Picabia submitted scabrous large-scale figure paintings like *La Nuit espagnole*, *La Feuille de vigne* (painted over *Les Yeux chauds*), and *Dresseur d'animaux* [Figs. 34-36]. These are executed in ripolin, an industrial paint, rather than oil, and in a graphic style: flat, with bold outlines filled in with fields of un-modulated color, as if they were posters, or made to be reproduced. In *La Feuille de vigne* the silhouette of a nude man, wearing a Pinocchio mask, perches on a ball at the horizon; there are multiple puns both in the title (the painting *is* a fig leaf as it covers over the scandalous *Les Yeux chauds*) and in the phrase *dessin français*, which puns on Picabia's first name. *La Nuit espagnole* is a study in binaries: a black male silhouette against a white surface contrasted to another silhouette of a white female against a black surface; the (black) man punctured with what appears to be white bullet holes; the (white) woman by black ones; the man active, an aggressor, reaching across the central divide toward the woman's face; the woman passive, covered with enticing colored concentric targets. Similar sadism marks *Dresseur d'animaux*, with its masked animal trainer brandishing a whip above various dogs; an owl is perched, mysteriously, below his outstretched arm.

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<sup>21</sup> "Optophone" refers to a machine concocted by the Dadaist Raoul Hausman for converting colors into sounds. See Carol Boulbés, *Picabia, le saint masque* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1998), 62.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. The green circle is marked only (instead) by the artist's signature.

In 1924, Picabia created the ballet *Relâche* for the Ballets suédois and, with filmmaker René Clair, the film *Entr'acte* (*Intermission*), which was screened at the intermission of the ballet. He inherited this project from the poet Blaise Cendrars, who had moved suddenly to Brazil.<sup>23</sup> Media attention from the time indicates that the audience and wider public thought of it as Dadaist; Picabia himself insisted that the ballet and film were what he called Instantantist—a reference to a new movement he had devised in 1924, to which he was briefly the only adherent.

*Relâche* showcases many of the themes and structures that had occupied Picabia for years. The costumes for the ballet, as well as Picabia's set design, with its 370 headlights were based on a reiteration of circles [Figs 37-38]. The same interest is indicated in the "Dance of Revolving Doors," which Picabia had imagined as a literal turning around a revolving door placed onstage. The headlights also restate his longstanding interest in light and solar metaphors and effects. The ballet was structured mainly by reversals of all kinds: the lights lit the audience instead of the dancers. Edith Bonsdorff, the lead female dancer, idly smoked a cigarette while the music played and danced only when it stopped, and so on. The second half of *Relâche* reversed the first, as if running in reverse, and included many additional reversals as well: whereas in the first act Bonsdorff had stripped down to her tights, for instance, in the second, she entered wearing *only* tights, and proceeded to get dressed.

*Entr'acte* was also structured as a circle, and like *Relâche* provides a compendium of many of Picabia's key concerns, which include not only circular structures, reversibility (like *Relâche*, *Entr'acte* features reversal of gender), but also, in the second

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<sup>23</sup> For a description of the genesis of *Relâche*, see Germain Everling, *L'anneau de Saturne* (Paris: Fayard, 1970), 153-154.

half, an explicit (if burlesque) meditation on temporality and the possibility of eternal life, or at least an eternal present. The dancer Börlin, who was shot and killed by Picabia at the end of the film's first half, is brought back to life following a long, madcap, and constantly accelerating race of Parisians of all kinds (cyclers, a legless man, airplanes, *bateaux mouches*) through their city.

In January 1925, Picabia and Germaine Everling moved from Paris to a villa in Mougins, which he named the Château de Mai. Around that time, he made a group of witty collages using high-key colored paint and everyday items as stand-ins for images: matches for a woman's hair; feathers for trees; straw iron spirals for flowers [Figs. 39 and 40]. He also painted in a succession of figurative styles, beginning with the garish *Monsters*. These incorporate images from Picabia's new life in the Midi (bathers, and fashionable couples going gambling and dancing) and are painted in brusque fashion and with high-key colors, often using an almost idiotic repetition of certain simplified pictorial elements, such as dots, which often cover the figures, or wavy lines in the sky. See, for example, *Première rencontre* [Fig. 41], with its undulating background bands of black on white and its totemic exuberance in the noses, eyes, and mouths of the stylish couple. Many of Picabia's figures in these years have exaggerated and garishly multiplied sense organs, as in the many eyes, nostrils, and lips in *Les Tropiques (Souvenir du Juan-les-Pins)* [Fig. 42], as well as frequent probing phallic (Pinocchio) noses (*Première rencontre*). These repeated eyes have been traced to images in Catalan Romanesque frescoes.<sup>24</sup> The energy of the figures often ripples through the background and the environment; houses and sailboats appear *in* and around them. In *Première rencontre*, the

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<sup>24</sup> See Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 225; and, Sarah Wilson, *Francis Picabia: Accommodations of Desire* (New York: Kent Fine Art, 1989), 9.

outline of the figures' heads ripples out and up in energetic waves; in *Mardi Gras (Le baiser)* [Fig. 43], the proliferation of multi-colored dots, which appears to have begun just below their kiss, expands to cover couple and world alike. In *Le baigneuse* [Fig. 44] the bather rises up from the sea, as if taking to flight, his (or her) limbs made of the same quivering, fluid lines and crosshatches and dots and circles as the sky, sun, and sea.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the *Monsters* quote from art-historical sources. See, for example, *Les trois Grâces* [Fig. 45], which deploys the traditional, albeit corrupted, or at the very least aggressively inelegant, image of the three graces, or the figures quoted from Durer's engraving *Nemesis in Hôtel ancien*.<sup>26</sup>

By 1928, Picabia had shifted toward what are called the *Transparencies*, working chiefly by layering outlined figurative images one atop the other, as in a palimpsest. It is hard to point to a single date or moment when this technique was discovered; rather, the style seems to have come together from a number of Picabia's techniques in the first half of the 1920s. He had begun painting over his own canvases and it is reasonable to assume that he noticed the range of intriguing effects produced by the overlaid mixture of two apparently unrelated groups of images and then devoted himself to exploring its potential in oil and watercolor paintings. He had also been working in an Ingriste (or mock-Ingriste) figurative style of drawing since the early 1920s, as can be seen in the drawings he made for the covers of *Littérature* [46-48] and in a watercolor of 1924, *Couple Au bord de la mer*, which already makes use of the palimpsest technique.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin Heidegger: "By means of the three key images (sun, horizon, and sea), which are for thinking presumably something quite other than images, the three questions elucidate what is meant by the event of the killing of God;" See, "The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 102.

<sup>26</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 225.

The *Transparencies*, especially the watercolors, are among the most haunting and delicate images of Picabia's career [Figs. 49-53]. His usual pictorial assertiveness and bluster (i.e., the tendency toward bold, simplified compositions and striking graphic effects) is, to a large extent, muted and there is a dream-like quality in many of these paintings as well as a sense of sorcery and nostalgia, which was, at the time, linked by some critics to opium and the occult.<sup>27</sup> The *Transparencies* are also marked by heavy use of art historical quotation. Picabia borrowed not only from the Catalan Romanesque but also from Piero, Botticelli, and Hellenistic sculpture; he often used images from the National Museum in Naples.<sup>28</sup>

The *Transparencies* were first exhibited at Chez Fabre in Cannes and at the Galerie Théophile Briant in Paris in 1928, and then again at Briant's in 1929. This last exhibition impressed the gallerist, Léonce Rosenberg, whom Picabia, the Dadaist, had often ridiculed. Rosenberg took on Picabia as an artist and commissioned a group of paintings for his home.<sup>29</sup> Picabia's first exhibition at Rosenberg's in December 1930 consisted mainly of *Transparencies* and figurative paintings from the mid-1920s. The artist also displayed paintings from all the previous phases of his career, including a youthful landscape, the early abstract *Procession à Séville*, *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*, the mechanomorphic *Très rare tableau sur la terre*, the Dadaist *Prenez Garde à la peinture*, the watercolor *Lampe*, and *Optophone*.<sup>30</sup> Many of these works were borrowed from private collections.<sup>31</sup> Much as he had in 1920 as a Dadaist, Picabia still

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<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *Francis Picabia*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 232, n. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 233; For the list of paintings shown see Borrás, *Picabia*, 345.

<sup>30</sup> See Borrás, *Picabia*, 346.

<sup>31</sup> For example, those of Mmes Breton, Leger, and Doucet.

took pleasure in mixing styles that might otherwise appear contradictory, and did not disown any of his earlier efforts.

The 1930s are probably the weakest period of Picabia's career. His work bounced for a decade between figuration and abstraction. The abstractions of the late 1930s are tepid; the figurative works too often bland or obnoxious without either the acerbic charm of the *Monsters* or the delicacy of the best *Transparencies*. Some of the pictures have an anecdotal interest, as in the absurd portrait of Picabia's friend Gertrude Stein, whom he had met in 1913 but only genuinely befriended in 1931. And there are occasional minor achievements, as in the concise and graceful *Composition abstraite*.

Picabia was in Switzerland at the outbreak of the Second World War. He was depressed by the war, as indicated by his mournful *Poems of Dingalari*.<sup>32</sup> He returned to France and married his longtime mistress, Olga Molher, the Swiss-German former governess of his children whom he had fallen in love with after moving to Mougins. Mohler was in danger of being expelled from France, and the couple moved at least three times before settling in Golfe-Juan in 1943. Late in 1940, though, Picabia fell in love with the much younger Suzanne Romain, and his depression lifted. In April 1941, he exhibited four new figurative paintings, *Le Juif Errant* [Fig. 54] *Les Réfugiés*, *Montparnasse*, and *Pierrot pendu* [Fig. 55] at the Galerie Serguy in Cannes. In 1942 and 1943 he suddenly put forth a series of simply painted, absurdly regressive female nudes [Figs. 56-58], often with lesbian overtones, and with occasional reiterations of one of his favorite subjects, the Edenic ur-couple (as in *Printemps* and *Portrait d'un Couple* [Figs.

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<sup>32</sup> For example: "Since September 1939 / the suns seem to have set / everything has grown suspect / everything has grown older..." *Poèmes de Dingalari* (Alès: Pierre-André Benoit, 1955).

59-60]). Virtually every figure in these now very influential paintings was copied, as art historian Sara Cochran discovered, from pornographic magazines.<sup>33</sup>

In 1944, after France was liberated from German occupation, Picabia was suspected of collaboration.<sup>34</sup> He had behaved recklessly during the Occupation, as described by Buffet:

He remained voluntarily unconscious of what was going on in the world and, throwing caution to the winds, defied by his words and actions, both the force of collaboration and the Resistance, effecting this tour de force of being sought after by one and pursued by the other. So it was that he made a display of being a fierce racist when personal animosities were at stake. Yet he didn't hesitate to set up a joint vest-pocket exhibition of paintings and sculpture with the Jewish sculptor Sima at Cannes in 1942.<sup>35</sup>

He had also penned an encomium to Pétain, published in *L'Opinion* in 1941, and, his wife Olga was Swiss-German, adding to the suspicion.<sup>36</sup> His new friends Henri Goetz and Christin Boumeester, urged him to leave for Paris, but Picabia did not heed them and was detained and questioned. Soon after he had been detained, he suffered a stroke which probably spared him from further questioning or even potential charges, which were never leveled.

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<sup>33</sup> See Sara Cochran, "Needing the Sun: Francis Picabia and the Riviera, 1925-1949," Ph.D. diss. (London: Courtauld Institute, 2004); Sara Cochran, "Francis Picabia's Painting during the Second World War and His Use of Photography," in *Francis Picabia: The Late Works 1933-1953*, ed. Zdenek Felix (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1998), 17-22; and Sara Cochran, "La Parade amoureuse: Picabia, la guerre et la culture populaire," in *Francis Picabia, les Nus et la méthode*, exh. cat. (Grenoble: Musée de Grenoble, 1998), 20-24.

<sup>34</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 259; See also Yves-Alain Bois, "Picabia, de Dada à Pétain," *Macula* no. 1 (1976): 24-31; published in English as Yves-Alain Bois, "Francis Picabia: From Dada to Pétain," trans. Thomas Repensek, *October* 30 (Autumn 1984): 120-27; and, Jean-Michel Foray, "Devant ma fenêtre il ya une maison de fous," in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 104-106.

<sup>35</sup> Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraites* (Geneva: P. Cailler, 1957), 42.

<sup>36</sup> He had married her in order to keep her legally in France. *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 444.

At the start of 1945 Picabia returned to Paris. Goetz and Boumeester visited Picabia's studio every Sunday, bringing with them young artists, including Soulages, Mathieu, Atlan, Ubac, and Hartung, all of whom had exhibited with Picabia. Much of his output in these last years were densely textured paintings frequently based on masks and totems, with pictographic vaginal and phallic motifs, such as *Egoïsme* [Fig. 61], *Ça m'est égal* [Fig. 62] *Maintenant et autrefois* and *Génération ascendante*.<sup>37</sup> There are also recapitulations of favorite themes in Picabia's late work. *Bal Nègre*, for instance, reiterates the dance which Picabia had frequently used as the basis for his Orphic abstractions. But in many senses these small late works are very private and largely inscrutable works. Picabia, it seems, was aware of his fading powers and approaching death. The last years of his life were not easy. His health was ruined and he was beset by financial problems. These became catastrophic when his only remaining resource, a set of jewels he had stored in a safe, were stolen in 1949, leaving him impoverished.

That same year, Picabia exhibited for the first time a new series of works, heavily textured, almost monochromatic abstract panels, each marked with any number of small painted circles [Fig. 63]. Often they were painted on top of earlier paintings, whose remains sometimes show through as textured ribbing. As with much of Picabia's late work, these paintings recapitulate lifelong interests—in this case the circle—which had dominated his art and thought in so many ways, since at least 1915.

In 1951 Picabia suffered a hemorrhage and was hospitalized for three weeks. Toward the end of that year, he made his last painting, *La Terre est ronde* [Fig. 64]. The figure, derived from a Catalan Romanesque angel of the apocalypse, has a simple green

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<sup>37</sup> Sexual imagery is prominent as well in the drawings and letters he sent to Christine Boumeester.

circle for a head and is surrounded by loops of white paint. The angel appears to be turning; the bluish-white Earth below is round; there are green and yellow circles below and white circles in the sky above. In this last painting, Picabia again circles back to the turning of the circle, the circling which he understood his life, and art, to have been inscribed all along.

Scholars have long been challenged by Picabia's long and varied career, with its bewildering stylistic variety, apparent incoherence, and seemingly willful contradictions. Until the middle of the 1970s, art historians mainly regarded his post-1925 work as unimportant, or even scandalously bad. Typical of this dismissal is a passage by William S. Rubin from 1968: "With these superimpositions of crudely executed realistic images [the *Transparencies*] Picabia passed out of serious consideration as a painter."<sup>38</sup> Note that the dismissal of "late" Picabia was hardly limited to a North American or even Anglophone context: Yve-Alain Bois's 1975 monograph, for example, simply stops with Picabia's move to Mougins in 1925.<sup>39</sup>

This situation changed in the middle and, especially, later 1970s, when Picabia's post-1925 figurative works became increasingly in vogue. There are two main reasons for this. One was the landmark 1976 Paris retrospective on Picabia at the Centre Pompidou that considered the post-1925 period as well; the other was the publication, in 1979, of William Camfield's pioneering monograph, which also considered all of the artist's output, emphasizing the importance of his entire oeuvre. A second, substantial monograph by Maria Lluïsa Borràs appeared in Spanish and French in 1985. Throughout the 1980s "late" Picabia was exhibited with increasing frequency, including a 1983

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<sup>38</sup> William Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Abrams, 1968), 27.

<sup>39</sup> Yves-Alain Bois, *Francis Picabia* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975).

exhibition at Mary Boone-Michael Werner Gallery in New York. In 2002, another Parisian retrospective, “Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal” was held at the Musée d’Art moderne de la ville de Paris. By this time, Picabia was in fashion, from start to finish as the subtitle of the 2002 retrospective, “Singular Ideal.” Thanks to such efforts, Picabia’s works have become increasingly available, making it possible to appreciate the various phases of his career. Additionally, the past fifteen years have witnessed two fine studies in French that have also considered the whole of Picabia’s career: *Picabia: le saint masque* (1998) by Carole Boulbès and *Francis Picabia: La peinture sans aura* (2002) by Arnauld Pierre.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, with Marc Lowenthal’s 2007 translation of Picabia’s writings, *I am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, Provocation*, Picabia’s literary efforts have also recently garnered scholarly attention.

The second factor in the recuperation of late or post-Dada Picabia, and perhaps the more crucial one, was the advent of postmodernism at the end of the 1970s. Compared to neo-Expressionist painting, Picabia’s later paintings began to look not merely relevant but, in fact, powerfully prescient. Many of the techniques that Picabia had invented, or at least innovated, in the 1920s and after were picked up on by painters at the end of the 1970s. For instance, the palimpsest technique of the *Transparencies* was deployed by star painters of the early 1980s like Keifer, Polke, and Schnabel. Picabia’s play with bad taste also began to seem current, especially his mixing of high-art with kitsch sources and styles, often within the same canvas, and without hierarchical distinctions as well as his habit of exhibiting divergent bodies of work in the same exhibition. Increasingly, it seemed plausible to consider that Picabia had been

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<sup>40</sup> Pierre, *Picabia*.

intentionally playing with bad taste in his later works. William Camfield described two recuperative tendencies at their origins: on the one hand, the idea of “bad” (figurative) painting as a kind of permanent Dada, a never-ending transgression of the law, and, on the other hand, Picabia’s late work as prefiguration of the Pop Art fascination with the reign of the *ersatz*, as per the insightful early appreciation of later Picabia by Lawrence Alloway.<sup>41</sup>

If the figurative work of the 1920s, especially the *Transparencies*, was relevant to the taste of the early 1980s, Picabia’s wartime nudes were lionized by a wave of young painters in the 1990s, who heralded them as models of how to paint the figure in a way that was current rather than nostalgic. Again, the key is that they were received as ironic and not merely regressive, thus offering a relevant alternative in figurative painting to modernist abstraction and conceptual skepticism. By the turn of the millennium, Picabia had been broadly canonized as *the* old master of bad painting. This role as was formalized by the 2002 exhibition at the Centre Pompidou “*Dear Painter, paint me...*”: *Painting the Figure since Late Picabia*, which placed Picabia at the head of a tradition whose members included John Currin, Sigmar Polke, Elizabeth Peyton, and Martin Kippenberger. For the exhibition, curator Sabine Folie offered a typical description of the “postmodern” Picabia:

Picabia contaminated several generations of painters with [his] declarations of dilettantism and pluralism. He expressed his philosophy of spurning “talent,” taste and seriousness in his series of *Transparencies*—drawings and paintings that are layered on top of the other, like photographic fades, that he started in 1933. These *Transparencies* hedonistically run the gamut of art history without regard to hierarchy or preference, except for the recurring subject matter of female nudes and amorous couples. The real high point of what became associated with

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<sup>41</sup> Lawrence Alloway, “London Letter,” *Art International* III, no. 9 (1959): 24.

Picabia's flirtation with kitsch and eclecticism came in the early 1940s, in his paintings of nudes after original images found in pornographic and fashion magazines. Painted with extreme amateurishness, the composition of these nudes was often deformed; Picabia made frivolous additions and omissions to his source photographs. To borrow from Martin Kippenberger, these nudes would have probably been called a "joke."<sup>42</sup>

Interestingly, though, many of the earlier assumptions about Picabia, and, in particular, his valorization as an "anti"-artist, a figure who refused to play by the rules (even those of the avant-garde, and those he himself created), remained in place, although their value was inverted. Picabia had been dismissed by modernists because he constantly changed styles, was in poor taste and more fashionable than rigorous as well as a flamboyant mountebank. He was then celebrated by postmodernists because he constantly changed styles, was in poor taste and more fashionable than rigorous as well as a flamboyant mountebank. With this inversion of values, the very qualities that had ruined Picabia's reputation now serve as its foundation, as per Carol Boulbès:

Parody and irony need not exclude authenticity and purity. Nor are they unique to something post[-modern]. They are simply vital modes of expression based in a critical and self-reflexive approach that has been around for centuries.<sup>43</sup>

The differences between the modernist image of Picabia and the postmodern one are obviously salient; it is important, however, that despite these differences, or reversals, most of the underlying assumptions remained the same.

Alongside the recuperation of Picabia on a stylistic level came a revival from a theoretical perspective. On one level, Picabia was imagined increasingly as a parodist, or as an artist whose highly appropriative practice looked much like those of the postmodern

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<sup>42</sup> Sabine Folie, "Meta-Trash," in "*Dear Painter, paint me. . .*": *Painting the Figure since Late Picabia*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2002), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Carol Boulbès, *Picabia: Le Saint masqué* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1998), 31.

art of the early 1980s. More specifically, though—and in concert with the theoretical trends that developed in the 1980s—Picabia came to be seen through a specifically Benjaminian lens: the significance of much of his work, and especially his later figurative work, was defined by way of the Benjaminian relationship between (auratic) painting and mass reproduction, especially photography. And just as it has become conventional wisdom to view Picabia as a parodist, it has likewise been assumed that much of his figurative work deals with the relationship between painting and photography. Mention in this regard must be made of Sara Cochran who discovered many of the sources of Picabia's wartime nudes in pornographic magazines like *Paris Sex Appeal* and *Paris Magazine*.<sup>44</sup> Cochran's interpretations of the pictures posits the now-familiar notions of incipient postmodernism, parody, and refusal to obey avant-garde strictures; also, based on her discoveries, she brought the relationship between painting and photography to the fore as a major issue for the interpretation of Picabia. It is in this vein that one finds arguments such as this one put forth by the curator Alison Gingeras:

Beginning with Francis Picabia's late nudes from the early 1940s, the question of painting as a filter of mass media's impact on both individual and collective sense of identity has emerged as a key preoccupation of the artists in the exhibition.<sup>45</sup>

The most explicit and rigorous Benjaminian account, though, is Pierre's 2002 monograph *Picabia: La peinture sans aura*. Pierre argues that Picabia's entire career is based on his early apprehension regarding the threat of photography to painting. He points to Picabia's childhood relationship with his photographer uncle, Maurice Davanne, who warned his nephew that painting was inevitably doomed. Pierre understands Picabia

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Sara Cochran, "La Parade amoureuse," 20-24.

<sup>45</sup> Folie, "Meta-Trash," 12.

as attempting to “save” painting. This began with his effort to forge an abstract art: a mode of pictorial expression beyond the rote, mechanical power of photography. As Picabia supposedly retorted to his photographer uncle: “You can photograph a landscape but not the forms I have in my head.”<sup>46</sup> But, failing in this early effort, argues Pierre, Picabia reversed his position in 1915 and sought instead to “destroy” painting—to hasten its inevitable destruction at the hands of photography by debasing it and exposing it to everything that threatened it: the mechanical, the kitsch, the low, the false, and so on. Pierre sees the remainder of Picabia’s career as alternating between efforts to save and destroy painting; with this view the *Transparencies*, for example, were another post-Orphic attempt at “re-enchantment.” For Pierre, the apparently binary nature of Picabia is explained by way of the unifying Benjaminian paradigm, which necessitated, as if dialectically, a lifelong oscillation between messianic and annihilating extremes, between the perpetuation of painting and, alternately, the hastening of its destruction.

Whether one understands Picabia in terms of Benjamin or as proto-pop, permanent Dada, inventor of the “bad” painter or a prescient postmodernist, the notion of Picabia’s figuration as a form of parody has become canonical. The *value* of this parodic practice, however, continues to be debated. Just as there are two schools of thought about the return to painting in the 1980s, or, more exactly, a critical and complicit (i.e. “hard” and “soft”) version of postmodernism, so too, there are two schools of thought regarding Picabia’s post-1925 work, and often, Picabia *tout court*. There are those, as mentioned, who see in these figurative works not only stylistic bravado but also a critical capacity. On the other side of the debate are critics who dismiss parody as insufficiently critical.

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<sup>46</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 4.

Such is the argument of Benjamin Buchloh. Picabia, he argues, was always primarily a parodist, but this inscribed him more deeply into the ideological mesh of the capitalist ruling class rather than freeing him (or his audience) from it; all his practice does is grant him and his audience a kind of morbid, defensive smugness, itself indicative of ruin:

We see succeeding sets of parodistic appropriations in the various phases of his [Picabia's] oeuvre: the carbon copy icons of his mechanical period, and the contour fixations of art historical reference in his "transparency" series of the mid-1920s (when he traced and trailed the authoritarian tendencies of the *retour à l'ordre* Neoclassicism), followed by his mimetic rendition of pornographic imagery from cinematic or product propaganda sources all through the 1930s and into the 1940s. By that point, Picabia's production had been overtaken by a compulsive return to representation, the reduction of the visual construct and of perceptual apprehension to isolated scopic acts of identifying and repeating outlined preconfigurations. This regressive process corresponded to the fascist violation of political life, in which Picabia participated as an artist (and ultimately as a political subject).<sup>47</sup>

Buchloh sees Picabia as a parodist from (almost the) beginning of his career until its end, and is suspicious of all of it. More frequently, though, Picabia's critics (while employing Buchloh's terms) reinstate the old modernist dichotomy between the "good," rigorous, abstractionist and Dadaist early Picabia and the "bad," regressive, post-1925 one. Frequently Picabia is described by way of a fall-from-grace or return-to-order narrative, in which, after breaking with Dada, he slid into a reactionary mode, culminating in his confused but odious behavior during the Second World War. The most important example of this argument is Yve-Alain Bois's incisive polemical article "Picabia, de Dada à Pétain," published in English in 1984 after first appearing in French

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<sup>47</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Parody and Appropriation in Picabia, Pop, and Polke," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000), 361-363.

in 1976.<sup>48</sup> Picabia, writes Bois, was, in the end, guilty of a “highly criminal” indifference, which is “first and foremost, reactionary, whether one knows it or not, and can serve to justify the most reprehensible actions in addition to the worst kind of art.”<sup>49</sup>

A very similar framework is deployed by George Baker, who, in his recent book *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris*, condemns Picabia’s post-1925 work and prioritizes only a single moment—Paris Dada—as genuinely revolutionary. Baker’s argument is based on the work of Jean-Joseph Goux, who extended Marx’s critique of exchange to include the exchange of subjects, the exchange of objects of desire, and the exchange of subjects. Each of these systems is governed by a law, or standard, called a general equivalent, that serves the role of gold for currency value: the Law of the Father for subjects, the Phallus for objects of desire, and the rule of Language for signs. According to Baker, Picabia sought to disrupt the law of these general equivalents, to “lay waste” to the general equivalent, which guarantees the orderly or even submissive exchange of signs, subjects, money, and desire (but only briefly, as a Dadaist and during the *époque floue* in Paris until 1924 and the formation of surrealism):

. . . my reading of Paris Dada proceeds by tracing the inception of a shifting set of strategies that could, first, potentially rupture a given symbolic economy, a mad attempt to seize directly upon the “general equivalents” that Goux allows us to perceive as ruling these economies themselves (Father, Phallus, Language, Money). And, as a corollary to this drive, later chapters then attempts to imagine a different set of Dada strategies, more “optimistic” or utopic perhaps, that do not simply rupture a hegemonic symbolic order, but attempt to create alternate symbolic economies on the other side of this order’s dissolution, or to release quite

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<sup>48</sup> Bois, “Francis Picabia.”

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

“ancient” or repressed ones, loosening forgotten forms of symbolic exchange.<sup>50</sup>

For Baker, Picabia was only revolutionary for those few years around 1920 in Paris; after that, he views Picabia as having regressed into parody and reaction, and re-embracing, however sardonically, the very figure of the law-giving father that he had previously sought to destroy: “Law and Order return.”<sup>51</sup> Again, one sees two of the earliest, most basic, and rarely challenged assumptions about Picabia reinstated in even the most recent, most theoretically advanced and ostensibly adventurous interpretations of the artist: first, that his value is based, in some fashion, on the strength of his *opposition* to prevailing practice or ideas, so that he is hailed as an “anti”-artist; and, second, that he was most effectively an anti-artist before 1925, after which his work regressed either into irrelevance or a sadomasochistic embrace of the ruling order. The second assumption is common although by no means universal in the Picabia literature, as I have indicated; the first is basically unanimous, as even champions of the late Picabia base their applause on the critical and purposefully defiant aspects of his practice.

In what follows, I depart from these assumptions in order to offer an atypical interpretation of Picabia, based on a different set of principles derived from the evidence of Picabia’s own art and life, and in conjunction with the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. I begin with the basic concern shared by artist and philosopher—what might have once been called a fundamental metaphysical principle. This principle dictates the development, or possible development, of Picabia’s practice. It is my contention that

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<sup>50</sup> George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 385; Lowenthal also sees Picabia as reactionary and as having declined after Dada. See “Translator’s Introduction,” 2-3.

because Nietzsche and Picabia shared this fundamental premise, the trajectories they followed—one in art, the other in philosophy—often present illuminating correspondences, or structural correlations. Therefore, the Nietzschean lens is apt for an investigation into how Picabia’s art genuinely operated—and what makes it significant.

The fundamental principle Picabia shared with Nietzsche is nihilism. The term refers to the total absence of any values or stable higher meanings. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche offered a succinct and scrupulous definition of the term. From this point on it is this definition that we will refer to: “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; ‘why?’ finds no answer.”<sup>52</sup>

It was the experience of nihilism that formed the foundation of Picabia’s career. Despite the exultant tone of some of his work, and his image as a millionaire playboy and *bon vivant*, Picabia was haunted throughout his life by the terrible experience, and ongoing crisis, of nihilism. Alongside his boldness and flamboyance one must recall his depressions, which led him on multiple occasions to seek treatments. As Camfield has noted, the artist remembered his despair going back to his early childhood:

Most tales of Picabia’s youth stress a boy spoiled beyond measure, with irrepressible energy and imagination, a facility for art and a reputation at the lycée for feats of strength and precocious experiences with the nightlife of Paris. Almost overlooked among accounts of his audacious conduct is one story of a toy scale with which he weighed the light and shadow falling on his windowsill. He never forgot that in that childhood

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<sup>52</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 9. The term was also used by Virginia Spate to characterize the artist: “Picabia was drawn to destroy that which he created and found meaningful (as is revealed very strikingly in the biographies by two of his three wives); it seems, therefore, that the roots of his nihilism lay deep in his personality and in his strange and lonely childhood, and that it was not cynicism but a personal anguish which caused him to abandon his non-figurative art.” See Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910-1914* (Oxford University Press, 1979), 278.

experiment darkness was heavier than light—and throughout his life there was within Picabia's intense élan an underlying, profoundly pessimistic and tragic view of life.<sup>53</sup>

Picabia's joys and exultations were in large part masks, or rather they were moments of pleasure that he claimed, like personal trophies, from an overwhelming tide of meaninglessness, in which he felt himself to be drowning.

Consider a sample of the artist's statements. In these one can begin to make out the fundamental metaphysical position from which all his works, however varied, derive; a position that the various phases his career revolve around and to which they return. I draw attention first to the artist's insistence that nothing has any truth; all truths, or meanings, are contingent, relative, and subjective: "The *Venus de Milo*? Very pretty; Jesus Christ? him too; Dreyfusard? Antidreyfusard? Charming!"<sup>54</sup>. And "No body of work, be it a painting, literature, or music, is a superior creation; all these works are the same."<sup>55</sup> Also: "Dear friends, Life has no stations, Life does not admire, Life does not criticize, Life does not own your stupid little scales on whose pans you put a name, then another, in order to know the weight of genius!"<sup>56</sup>

Talent does not really exist, masterpieces are just documents, truth is just a pivot of the scales. Everything is boring, isn't it? The falling leaves are boring, growing leaves are boring, warmth is boring, cold is boring. Clocks that don't ring are boring, those that do ring are boring. To have a telephone is boring, to not have a telephone is boring. People who die are boring, as are those who don't.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 4. The source he refers to is Francis Picabia, "Jusqu'à un certain point," *Comœdia* (16 April 1922): 1, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 123; Also, Spate, *Orphism*, 278.

<sup>54</sup> Picabia, "Jours creux," *Orbes*, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1928): 29-33, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 408.

<sup>55</sup> Picabia, 251.

<sup>56</sup> Picabia, "Jours creux," 408.

<sup>57</sup> Picabia, "M. Picabia se sépare des Dadas," *Comœdia* (11 May 1921): 2, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 82.

Often one finds Picabia defining truth as simply a kind of energetic flare-up, neither necessary nor necessarily desirable:

The thoughts of the heart, the thoughts of the soul, the thoughts of the mind are just so many automatic chemical reactions; the current that drives them comes from you, from the sun, or from the Great Bear; the Great Bear recites, the sun recites, and we recite our digestions and indegestions. Your thoughts, dear lady readers, be they antireason or antitruth, are just so many conventions about an absolute, which is also nothing but a convention.

The sun is setting upon us and we carry it around so we can grow strong. Big mistake! Captentier [the boxer] is no stronger than a two-year old child, space and time have the same duration, a woman—fat, thin, old, or young—they're all the same. You seek imaginary landings in the continual movement of resting places—what madness!<sup>58</sup>

It is crucial to note that nihilism was *not* historical for Picabia but rather ontological. Nihilism did not befall modern humanity; it was not something that had occurred in recent or even ancient history. It was, rather, the consequence of what might be termed the primacy of becoming: the tendency of all things, including truth, to change, without reason and in ways that are eternally beyond comprehension and control. Picabia never once refers to any historical event that caused this. He never harked back to a stable pre-modern world in which nihilism was held at bay. The past for him was always absolutely gone, and without content. Nor did he have any interest in the future, which he dismissed as equally empty—a fantasy mirror image of a vanished past. He was therefore neither conservative (in the sense of wanting to live on borrowed light from the past) nor progressive. There was no point in trying to keep society, nor the world, from changing, however disastrously, since the world was, in essence, nothing *but* change. The only

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<sup>58</sup> Picabia, *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*, 16-17.

feature of Picabia's universe that was not ceaselessly in flux was the ceaseless flux: thus the inevitability of nihilism. Nietzsche expressed similar views:

And do you know what "the world" is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself: as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expense or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by "nothingness" as a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be "empty" here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally, as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my *Dionysian* world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my "beyond good and evil," without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will towards itself—do you want a *name* for this world?<sup>59</sup>

My interpretation of Picabia follows from the premise of nihilism in general as well as from the specific clarification of nihilism as a super-historical or ontological condition. The premise of nihilism forces us to ask about the relevance of a Benjaminian framework to an interpretation of Picabia. It is not that such a framework is necessarily incorrect. It is, rather, a matter of degree. There is, in Picabia's practice, an effort at salvation, and I agree with Pierre that Picabia sought to save painting from ruin. I do not think, however, that he sought mainly to save painting, nor that the danger for him was limited to mass reproduction of various kinds. It was a fight against a nihilism that, by

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<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 549-550.

definition, rendered *everything* meaningless, not only painting. Much of Picabia's efforts took place in painting, of course, since he was a painter. But he was a poet, writer, filmmaker, choreographer, and, in his own way, a kind of theorist. The evidence of all this militates against the idea of locating the meaning of his practice within a Benjaminian frame. It should be noted as well that in his writings nihilism (and related themes as discussed below) recur constantly; on the other hand, one finds only very infrequent indications of any concern with photography or the status of the auratic object. Therefore, Picabia's efforts to save painting are best inscribed within a wider theoretical circle: as the most salient thrust of his effort to save *himself* from a world without meaning.

Secondly, and more crucially, the premise of nihilism necessitates that one asks about the assumption—and it is deeply entrenched—of Picabia's primarily oppositional status and motives. What, given the profound meaninglessness of everything, would Picabia have been driven to oppose? Why would he have wished to tear down idols he knew not only to be false but non-existent? Picabia was *not*, I will argue, the anti-artist of legend and art-historical assumption. He did not understand the world as one of meanings (or laws) that were limiting and oppressive and needing to be challenged, but rather as a process of endless unfathomable energetic metamorphosis. His problem was, therefore, the opposite: how to create meaning and values out of the formless, mutable, ever-transforming—and therefore ultimately incomprehensible—processes of energetic apparition and exchange that he saw as the only tangible reality? how to forge values and even truths out of his passing sensations, and sensation in general? and, how to *justify* existence—and existing?

When Picabia was critical, it was of those who pretended that their values, or the meanings they assigned to things, were somehow anything but arbitrary—and of those who lived either for the future or the past. But even these criticisms, as we will see, were at best a secondary aspect of his practice, the core of which was an attempt at affirmation. Picabia’s aim was to live joyously in a world without meaning, to give himself to that world—to make himself commensurate to the process of becoming, and therefore somehow worthy of all and any fates and events. He gives an indication of this in *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*:

Don’t work, don’t love, don’t read, think of me; I have found the new laughter that grants you freedom. Live for your pleasure. There is nothing to understand, nothing, nothing, nothing but the value that you yourself will give to everything.<sup>60</sup>

Values had to be forged in the present and from the substance of *this* world, since it was only this world that ever was and ever would be. Picabia makes the point by adapting a passage from Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* as the epigram for his poem, published in 1917, “Idea Gilded by Gold”:

No! No! Three times no!  
Leave heaven and its hackneyed song!  
We don’t want to go to heaven.  
The kingdom of earth must be ours.<sup>61</sup>

A comparison with Nietzsche helps clarify Picabia’s point. Here, the philosopher describes the task of affirmation as *amor fati*, or love of fate, regardless of what it brings:

Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the other side of this—to a Dionysian affirmation of the

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<sup>60</sup> Picabia, *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Picabia, *Cinquante-deux miroirs* (Barcelona: Oliva de Vilanova, October 1917), in *I Am a Beautiful Monster*, trans. Marc Lowenthal, 51.

world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection—it wants the eternal circulation:—the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*.<sup>62</sup>

It is worth quoting as well a key passage from *The Gay Science*—a book with which Picabia was obsessed. Nietzsche makes the same point in more exultant fashion:

I'm still alive; I still think: I must still be alive because I still have to think. *Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum*. Today everyone allows himself to express his dearest wish and thoughts: so I, too, want to say what I wish from myself today and what thought first crossed my heart—*Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*: bb bpl., 4bwhat thought shall be the reason, warrant, and sweetness of the rest of my life! I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them—thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not want to accuse even the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer!<sup>63</sup>

How was this task attempted, however? What did it mean, at the level of practice, to discover ways of justifying existence? The chapters that follow here attempt to give concrete answers to this question. Each is predicated upon an analogy (or sometimes several) between Nietzsche's philosophy and Picabia's art—or, put differently, in each case Nietzsche will be called upon to clarify the way in which Picabia sought to overcome nihilism. The chapters are arranged in roughly chronological order.

The first chapter will consider the temptation of tautology, or self-presence, in Picabia's Orphic phase. The world, as we have said, for Picabia, had no significant meaning. It did, however, have *presence*, which could neither be described nor explained but only experienced. Like the early Nietzsche (the Nietzsche of the second *Untimely*

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<sup>62</sup> Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, 536.

<sup>63</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 157.

*Meditation*) Picabia often referred to this simply as “life.”<sup>64</sup> Picabia also sometimes relied on tautological formulations, because there is no word or system that is even remotely equivalent to the experience of reality: it (the world) is what is; it is equivalent only to itself. And in the second half of the nineteenth century and through the beginning of the twentieth, one of the most conventional ways to imagine this unimaginable, intangible reality was by way of music—to conceive of the world as a musical phenomenon.<sup>65</sup> Music, unlike literature or painting, did not describe or represent a pre-existing reality: it was, like the world itself, self-justifying, and thus provided a model of a universe that was without external models. Music was also the model of a new art: closer to the ground or essence of being or experience, in that it *was* experience and not a representation of anything else.

The first chapter will position Orphism as Picabia’s first attempt to overcome nihilism: To create an art that, like the universe, was to be valued only for itself and only on its own terms (not in imitation of an ideal). This meant abstraction: painting that was justified only as painting, not by mimesis. The question then arises: Why did Picabia abandon this position? Why, that is, did the musical model fail? To assess this, I will call upon Paul de Man’s analysis of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*.<sup>66</sup> It will be argued that the deconstructive process that de Man locates in Nietzsche’s early musical-messianic text is at work in Picabia’s Orphism as well. I will pay particular attention to Picabia’s habit of writing all sorts of literary references on the surfaces of his “abstract” works.

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<sup>64</sup> See Picabia, “Jours creux,” 408.

<sup>65</sup> See Peter Vergo, *The Music of Painting: Music, Modernism, and the Visual Arts from the Romantics to John Cage* (London: Phaidon, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale, 1979), 79-118.

This practice was extremely unusual for a champion of abstract painting. Why, if Picabia was so eager to forge a non-referential painting, did he increase the literary allusions as his work became more abstract? Why, when trying to free painting from reference, did he make his abstract painting so strangely referential? It will be argued that the process that occurred in the years before the First World War in Picabia's painting was a genuinely deconstructive one, parallel to the one that occurred in Nietzsche's early work: the attempt to generate an art that was fully self-contained, or tautological, in fact demonstrated the impossibility of such an ambition. This process did not, however, lead to a newly enlightened "critical" perch, but instead reinstated the nihilistic tendency of all meanings to vanish, to become relative or reversible, that had generated the musical model in the first place.

Picabia did not abandon his effort to overcome nihilism, however. Rather, the failure of the musical model necessitated a refinement of theory and technique—a process in many ways analogous to that undergone by Nietzsche after *The Birth of Tragedy*. In the second chapter, I focus on some of these shifts in orientation. The chapter brings together two axes: on the one hand, this refinement of method, as well as one of Picabia's major theses, which we will call the *primacy of desire*. Both find important parallels in Nietzsche's writings. The refinement of method is indicated by the prominence as of 1915 of the machine in Picabia's practice. How are the machine, and the mechanical, to be understood in Picabia? I will consider the interpretations that have been put forth thus far, many of which read the machine as a sarcastic reaction to the First World War. I will instead contend that the machine is indicative of a crucial theoretical insight on the part of Picabia—an insight that was clarified by Agnes Ernst Meyer in the

first issue of *291* in an essay called, “Why Versus How.” Meyer discusses the need for what she calls “scientific” criticism, to which, she insists, *291* will resolutely devote itself: “*What do you mean by scientific criticism?*” I can give the clearest answer to this question by turning to pure science for an illustration. When a scientist asserts that  $H_2O = \text{water}$ . He means that a certain quantity of hydrogen and a certain quantity of oxygen will produce water. He knows HOW water can be made, he does not know WHY. He knows moreover that he cannot know WHY.”<sup>67</sup>

Meyer’s concrete and empirical formula can also be stated as a shift from the question “What does it mean?” in favor of “How does it work?”. Not: painting is, or should be, like music but rather: *how* is seeing related to sound? We will therefore consider all the ways in which Picabia’s mechanomorphic phase indicates a shift toward concrete, empirical procedures, in which Picabia only ever asked how painting, or art, worked, while jettisoning the pursuit of what it might *mean* (or even the earlier idea that meaning is tautological). The chapter will begin by focusing on the early mechanomorphs, especially those published in *291*, and continue through Paris Dada to the Dalmau exhibition in 1922, in which painting was specifically figured as a variety of mechanical–scientific forces, such as magnetism, flight, illumination, and so forth.

The second half of the chapter will introduce the theme of desire in Picabia’s practice and relate it to Nietzsche. Picabia’s valorization of desire, especially at the expense of reason (no ruse of reason can ever tame or lessen the flow of desire), is roughly analogous to Nietzsche’s. Desire, especially configurations of amorous heterosexual couples, form one of the major iconographic axes in Picabia’s career,

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<sup>67</sup> Agnes Ernst Meyer, “How Versus Why,” *291*, no. 1 (March 1915): 3.

beginning in 1911 and continuing till his death. The focus here is on the period (1915-1919) when Picabia's notions of desire were crossed with the machine. This conjunction of desire and the machine produced the desiring-machine, as per Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipe*. Many of the quirks and paradoxes of Picabia's mechanomorphs are, in fact, indicative of their status as desiring-machines. I will consider the ways in which Picabia's desiring-machines, like those of *Anti-Oedipe*, work by breaking and will examine the significance of Picabia showing them plugging into one another. I analyze their positions vis-à-vis the law, or Oedipus, and the inevitable multiplicity of sexual identities that result.

In the final section of this chapter, I will ask why desire and the machine, which Picabia linked so rigorously and fruitfully in the years before he returned to Paris, apparently detached. I will suggest that by 1920 Picabia had so thoroughly metabolized what he had learned that his practice *as a whole* took on the function of a desiring-machine, with style understood as the basic material, in art, of the endless elemental flow of desire.

The third chapter will take up the question of temporality in Picabia's practice—one of the areas in which Nietzsche and Picabia are most profoundly analogous. Both based their early work on memory and recollection: personal memories for Picabia in Orphism and historical rebirth for Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. But both abandoned this reliance on memory soon thereafter and sought to sever almost any relationship to the past as well as anticipation of the future, and came instead to emphasize the importance, or presence, of the present. I will trace the development of this strand in Picabia's early Dada phases and then examine what will be called *techniques of the present*: the means

by which the artist sought to siphon energy and attention away from the past and the future. These techniques include active forgetting; painting over finished works (sometimes destroying the previous work completely, other times leaving traces of the previous work behind); speed; purposeful misdating; and the importance of chiasmic reversibility, not as a crisis or cancellation of meaning, but as a technique.

In the second half of this chapter, I examine the nature of “the present.” Of what does it consist? This question informs a close reading of *Relâche*, and *Entr’acte*, which Picabia claimed were Instantanist—that short-lived, one-man movement whose major document is the cover illustration of the final issue of *391*. A close reading of that work will demonstrate that Instantanism was not merely polemical and absurd, as has so often been claimed, but a literal and systematic assertion of Picabia’s temporal strategies and their consequences. I also explore the operation of the many images and techniques in *Relâche* and *Entr’acte*, concluding with the importance, again, of circles, and especially, the sun which was at the heart of the many circles that make up the film and ballet. The sun—the circle of the sun, which for Picabia so often figured for Picabia as the figure of presence, the content, or *presence*, of the present.

The fourth chapter will consider the task of affirmation, with particularly attention to the problem (and paradox) of negation: What role, if any, do critique and opposition play in an affirmative practice? How, if Picabia’s practice was predicated on affirmation, is one to make sense of Picabia’s reputation as an anti-artist? And how, more generally, does affirmation concretely operate, given that negation cannot ever wholly disappear? Nietzsche considered his analysis of this problem—the clarification of the relationship between affirmation and negation—to be one of his major accomplishments: “It is my

good fortune that after two millennia of error and confusion I have rediscovered the way that leads to a Yes and a No.” I will consider the ways the same ambition—the attempt to develop a yes and a no, and then to move beyond the no—operated for Picabia. The focus will fall on the two periods when this proved most difficult: first, his break with Dada in 1921, combined with the years leading to his break with Paris altogether in 1925; and, second, the wartime nudes. In the first case, I compare Picabia’s Nietzschean premises and practices to the Hegelian ones of Breton and Max Ernst, which were based almost entirely on dialectical opposition and teleology, meaning the advance, by way of dialectical opposition, toward a more perfect future. To develop the point, I compare Picabia’s figurative works of 1923 to works by Ernst and to Picabia’s *Monsters* paintings of 1925 and 1926, in order to reveal the extent of what was at stake for Picabia, as well as the pressures and paradoxes he sought to avoid.

The second half of the chapter will consider Picabia’s wartime nudes and especially the ethical problems of Yes-saying. Again, we will begin with Picabia’s metaphysical presuppositions. The world is a monster of becoming, and will always only be thus. One cannot then dream of any alternative, because there are none; one must accept and affirm reality as it is: monstrous, mutable—and above all *whole*; one must say Yes to all of reality, even its horror, because it cannot be avoided nor improved. One must strive to become worthy of *all* events. I will argue that in the wartime nudes, and in Picabia’s strange, contradictory behavior from 1939 until Liberation, one sees a variety of incompatible efforts to express *amor fati* in the face of catastrophe. I will consider Picabia’s depression at the outbreak of war, and then the contradictory strategies and attitudes he attempted in order to affirm the world even then: active forgetting; his

attempt to affirm at least some aspects of the disaster (i.e., his strange encomium to Pétain); and the construction, in painting, of an amorous escapist Eden. The wartime nudes will be positioned as evidence of the uneasy interaction of these techniques.

In the fifth and concluding chapter, I consider the function of repetition in Picabia's practice, specifically by way of Nietzsche's great model of repetition, the eternal return. Nietzsche himself, and many of his interpreters, saw in the eternal return a supreme metaphysical statement in which was contained the solution to the problem of nihilism. Might an analogous principle have operated in Picabia's practice? To assess this, I will first ask about the relationship of Picabia to his sources. Picabia is, in many ways, the least original of any major avant-garde artist: he invented, or appears to have invented, *nothing*; everything he did was copied from somewhere else. His painted images were almost always found images, such as the scientific diagrams from the French scientific journal *La Science et la Vie*, Belle Epoque and other postcards, paintings in the western canon, pornographic magazines, and photos taken by his friends. His titles came from the *Larousse*, and, in the second half of the 1920s, from word-games derived from the letters names of birds and butterflies.<sup>68</sup> And, as Pierre has demonstrated, Picabia's early Impressionist paintings had been copied, often in the most obvious fashion, with little alteration, from other paintings or even postcards. In fact, his first act as an artist—his origin myth so to speak—was not to invent, but to copy: as a child, he remade the paintings on his father's walls, and replaced the originals with the copies.<sup>69</sup> He imitated the styles of various artists: Ingres (and Picasso-as-Ingres) for *La Nuit Espagnole*, *Dresseur d'Animaux*, *La Feuille de vigne* [Figs. 34-36] as well as the

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<sup>68</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 234, n. 19.

<sup>69</sup> See Pierre, *Picabia*, 13-14, for the different versions of this story.

“Spanish” women at Dalmau and line drawings of the *époque floue* [Figs. 46-48, for example]; Picasso “proper” for the multiple and rotated eyes of *Les Seins* [Fig. 65]; de Chirico for *Rocking Chair*, and for the wistful return to a classical past in the *Transparencies*. The mechanomorphic phase, broadly considered to include the Dalmau exhibition in 1922 and the subsequent *Optophone* and *Volucelle* pictures, corresponds exactly to the years in which Duchamp was at work on his great mechanomorph, *The Large Glass*, 1915-1923. It has often rightly been said that Picabia’s mechanomorph style is itself a readymade, taken entirely from Duchamp—a whole phase of his career copied from his friend. Even Picabia’s first act of stylistic appropriation was itself appropriated. His 1917 portrait of Max Goth [Fig. 66] is Ingriste, or more accurately, an appropriation of Picasso’s Ingriste appropriations, a repetition of a repetition—so that even this strategy, like all of Picabia’s strategies, was borrowed. Not even Picabia’s unoriginality was original. “If a work of another translates my dreams,” the artist insisted, “then his work is mine.”<sup>70</sup> And we will see that this is most particularly the case when it came to his plagiarism of Nietzsche.

How are we to understand Picabia’s tendency toward plagiarism and appropriation? Why was it that he seemed to feel that repetition made something more authentic, rather than less? This cannot be equated, I will argue, with most current models of appropriation, as Picabia did not usually draw attention to his sources (his audiences at the time rarely recognized them), did not care when they were discovered, and also frequently copied his friends and those he most admired. I will argue that appropriation is better understood as an aspect of Picabia’s intuition, similar to Nietzsche’s to that the

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<sup>70</sup> Picabia, as cited in *Francis Picabia*, eds. Jean-Hubert Martin and Hélène Seckel, exh. cat. (Paris: Center National d’Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, 1976).

present, in order to *be* present, or even to be at all, would have to repeat. I develop this point by looking at some of the most celebrated interpretations of the eternal return. I will then consider how the idea of the eternal return draws together many of the facets, from the preponderance of circles to *amor fati* and the problem of affirmation, that had occupied Picabia all along. How did repetition develop, inevitably, as a consequence of Picabia's profound nihilism, and as a consequence of the assumption that there could be no better world, but only this one, as it is? How did repetition allow that world, however monstrous, to be affirmed and even celebrated—ecstatically?

It is to be hoped that the questions with which we began—why another interpretation of Picabia? why a Nietzschean one?—have in large part been answered. And yet one important issue remains: It has already been well established that Picabia was influenced by and even obsessed with Nietzsche. Scholars point out Picabia's passing interest in Nietzsche in his youth, and the fact that he claimed, falsely, to have met the philosopher during his trip to Switzerland in 1899.<sup>71</sup> One assumes that Nietzsche would have been discussed in the pre-war circles in which Picabia sometimes associated: the Puteaux Cubists, for instance, or the Cubist painters associated with the Salon de la section d'or. Apollinaire called on *The Birth of Tragedy* in *Les peintres cubistes*. Camfield draws attention to the fact that in New York in 1913, Picabia's interest in Nietzsche was likely rekindled by Benjamin de Casseres, a staff writer for the *New York Herald* and avid Nietzschean associated with Steiglitz and *291*.<sup>72</sup> According to Germaine Everling, Picabia and Andre Breton discussed Nietzsche on 4 January 1920, when they

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<sup>71</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

first met.<sup>73</sup> And there is evidence to suggest that even in his own time Picabia was associated with Nietzsche. Consider, for example, a letter of 1922 from Jacques-Émile Blanche to Breton in which he asks: “But what will he think of it, in the back of his mind, Picabia, our current Nietzsche, how will his goyasciencia express itself?”<sup>74</sup>

Granted, Picabia never mentioned the philosopher by name in any of his poems or myriad statements on life and art. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that Picabia was a serious reader of Nietzsche—or of anyone or anything, for that matter—at least not in the conventional sense.<sup>75</sup> The only one of Nietzsche’s books Picabia is documented to have read is *The Gay Science*, and it seems more accurate to say he made frequent *use* of it, as a tool not a text, much as he had with the *Larousse* dictionary, copying phrases and claiming them as his own. Sometimes he altered the phrases he copied; often he did not. Picabia used Nietzsche in this way intermittently beginning in at least 1917 when for the February 391 cover, he wrote: “Look ahead, don’t look behind / we are unreasonable / when we always want to know the reasons,” which he appropriated from *Zarathustra*.<sup>76</sup>

It was in the last years of his life, however, that Picabia plagiarized Nietzsche much more extensively, copying from *The Gay Science*. This was first pointed out by Maria Lluïsa Borràs in a 1976 talk, “Les Derniers Collages de Francis Picabia,” which,

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<sup>73</sup> Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, 95.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Jacques-Émile Blanche to André Breton, 5 December 1922, cited in Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, 463.

<sup>75</sup> See Lowenthal, “Translator’s Introduction,” 7. Picabia owned copies of Nietzsche’s *The Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. See *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 457. His copy of *Gay Science* is at the Picabia archive in Paris and shows markings, although no notes, in certain passages.

<sup>76</sup> “Regarde au loin, ne regarde pas en arrière / on déraisonne / quand on veut toujours connaître les raisons” 391, no. 2 (10 Feb. 1917): cover.

though not published, was cited by Camfield in his monograph: “Señora Borràs has also presented a paper at the Grand Palais which indicates that Picabia drew directly from some of Nietzsche’s publications for occasional passages in his poems and letters to Henri Goetz and Christine Boumeester.”<sup>77</sup> Citing Goetz, Camfield also draws attention to the fact that, at the end of his life Picabia could not distinguish between his own writings and Nietzsche’s: “Henri Goetz once showed Picabia a page of unidentified aphorisms which included several by Picabia himself. Picabia consistently preferred his own aphorism, but he did not recognize them and guessed that they must have been written by Nietzsche.”<sup>78</sup> More recently, in an essay published in the catalog for the 2003 retrospective, Carol Boulbès took up the matter of Picabia’s plagiarism of Nietzsche, especially his use of Nietzsche’s poems (the “Songs of Prince Vogelfrei”) from the appendix to the *The Gay Science*, in his letters to his lover Suzanne Romaine. She argues that in order to continually delight his mistress, Picabia adapted Nietzsche’s poems in a variety of tones and styles, ranging from parody to seduction.<sup>79</sup> And thanks to Marc Lowenthal we know details of many more of Picabia’s late poetic appropriations of Nietzsche.

It would seem then that the Nietzschean aspects of Picabia’s practice have been rather well examined. But in fact the opposite is true. The thesis we put forth here, and the specific topics we examine, has never been fully examined. This is because influence

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<sup>77</sup> Borràs, “Les Derniers Collages de Francis Picabia, 1945-1951,” Colloque Francis Picabia, Paris, Grand Palais, Feb. 28 1976.

<sup>78</sup> Camfield interview with Henri Goetz and Christine Boumeester, Paris, 20 August 1962, as cited in Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 269.

<sup>79</sup> Carole Boulbès, “Oui, monsieur, vous êtes poète, l’oiseau pic,” in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 109, and Boulbès, *Lettres d’amour de Francis Picabia à Suzanne Romaine* (Paris: Jean Michel Place, 2003).

alone can in no way account for the pattern in question. The measure of Picabia's Nietzscheanism can only be given if one shifts away from the question of influence and instead assumes shared principles, or a shared metaphysical crisis, dictate an analogous trajectory and related set of concerns, resulting in similar techniques.

Some examples to clarify the point: Picabia was, at some level, aware of *The Birth of Tragedy* during his Orphic phase. He would have probably known that Apollinaire had referenced it in *Les peintres cubistes*, and he himself appears to have alluded to it, or at least made use of its imagery, in a long statement published in the *New York American* on 30 March 1913.<sup>80</sup> But can it be said that Picabia was so influenced by *The Birth of Tragedy* to abandon his first career, to fall in love with a musician, and to understand music as the only possible model of a world without models? Perhaps. But is it to then be imagined that Picabia was influenced by Nietzsche to the point that he would abandon this musical ideal—and abandon it in much the same fashion as the philosopher had, with analogous ambivalence and the same fierce ridicule? Even if Picabia *had* read and studied *The Birth of Tragedy*—and that seems unlikely—could that have convinced him to introduce a technically very scrupulous and deconstructive “Apollonian” element into his abstractions in order to undermine his stated goals in the same way that Nietzsche's rhetoric and rigor undermined, or rather deconstructed, *The Birth of Tragedy*? This is to imagine that Picabia had somehow analyzed not only *The Birth of Tragedy* but also Nietzsche's notebooks, using techniques that were only developed by Paul de Man some decades after his own death.

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<sup>80</sup> Picabia, “How New York Looks to Me,” *New York American* (30 March 1913), 11. For Apollinaire's discussion of Nietzsche, see *Les Peintres cubistes: Méditations Esthétiques* (Paris: Eugène Figuière, 1913), repr., Paris: Berg International, 1986), 22.

A second example: As we have mentioned, both Nietzsche and Picabia in their early musical phases relied on recollection. Both jettisoned this, in similar, though not exactly identical, ways in favor of a valorization of the present. Picabia *could*, in theory, have read Nietzsche's texts on temporality in the order in which they were written, and studied the development of Nietzsche's theories on temporality, and sought, somehow—over the course of fifteen years—to develop in the same direction, at much the same pace, making analogous errors and decisions along the way. But rather than assume fanatical and conscious mimicry over the course of decades and at the most meticulous and personal levels, I would argue that the parallel course of development instead attests to a shared set of assumptions, understood in much the same fashion and pursued with similar rigor by artist and philosopher. This produced a similar trajectory, and a related set of tactics and symbols.

The matter of influence is further complicated by the fact that Nietzsche is no way self-evident. His writings are variegated, highly literary, often poetic and ironic, and available to a wide range of interpretations, to say the least. There are literally dozens of “Nietzsches,” and even if one were to imagine that Picabia's Nietzschean aesthetic was mainly the product of influence, the question remains: *Which* Nietzsche? By what aspects of his oeuvre was Picabia influenced? In many cases, Picabia's practice demonstrates Nietzschean principles that had not yet been developed by philosophers. Many of the most exact analogies between Picabia and Nietzsche are only available to us by way of Nietzsche's later interpreters. In some cases Picabia extended Nietzschean formulations along lines that had not yet been worked out in philosophy and arrived, as an artist and in art, at insights that would only be later formulated in philosophy. Thus, while the

interpretation in Chapter II could be called Deleuzian, I would prefer to still think of it as Nietzschean, in the sense that Picabia worked out a Nietzschean problem in a manner very similar to that of Deleuze—one of Nietzsche’s greatest heirs and most gifted interpreters—albeit some years later.

Having said this, I have limited the interpretations of Nietzsche to those that seem to best match Picabia’s particular practice, and do not attempt to further interpret this aspect of Picabia. Even within a self-imposed Nietzschean framework, there are any number of paths that I choose to ignore, since they are removed from Picabia’s art. For instance, a feminist reading of Picabia could have been developed by way of Luce Irigaray’s reading of Nietzsche (*Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*); a “technological” interpretation suggested by Heidegger’s essay, “The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead”; and an understanding of Picabia as the simultaneous acolyte and victim of power in a world without morality, derived from the chapter on Nietzsche and Sade in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.<sup>81</sup> The aim of this dissertation, however, is simply to clarify and define Picabia’s aesthetic, not to further interpret it.

It should be mentioned, in this vein, that the Picabia I present here is closest, on a variety of levels, to the Nietzsche of Deleuze: a Vitalist, addict of forces and energetic interactions, and a priest of becoming who therefore made himself into a mechanic of desire. This is not indicative of my own methodological predispositions or agenda, and in no sense did I set out to do a Deleuzian reading of Picabia, any more than I had wanted to use a deconstructive or Heideggerian approach. The goal is to clarify Picabia’s practice

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<sup>81</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Heidegger, “The Word of Nietzsche”; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002).

using the most effective theoretical resources—to best explain how this artist operated and what he accomplished.

I have indicated what it is that the dissertation aims to accomplish, and I have tried to indicate why this might be valuable to the specific field of Picabia interpretation. It might also be hoped that the dissertation makes a contribution from the other (philosophical) side to the field of aesthetics, by answering the question: “What did a Nietzschean aesthetic look like, at a specific point in the historical avant-garde?” And more broadly: “Why might such a specialized dissertation—even if doubly specialized, meaning interdisciplinary—matter to the field of art history more generally?” I offer two short answers in conclusion. First, the concerns that Picabia shared with Nietzsche were hardly theirs alone and it is hoped that what follows might shed light, if indirectly, on other artists as well. Second, there is the matter of method, which I have attempted to clarify above: not the application of a thinker *to* an artist, nor, conversely, the illustration of an *a priori* philosophical contention with examples from art, but rather the tracking down, in the histories of art and thought, of analogies and parallel configurations. In what follows, it is only the conjunction of Nietzsche and Picabia that is developed, but this is just one of many such constellations.

CHAPTER I  
REVERSABILITY

On the surface, the initial avant-garde phase of Picabia's career in Paris in the few years before World War I, presents little interpretive complication.<sup>82</sup> Picabia had jettisoned his career as a painter of Impressionist-type landscapes in 1909, just after meeting, and then marrying, the musician (and theorist) of new music, Gabrielle Buffet.<sup>83</sup> He then quickly moved into a leadership position in the Parisian avant-garde and emerged, by 1912, as an important and controversial abstract painter, as well as an outspoken champion for abstraction. From 1912 until 1914, he made a significant contribution to the development of abstraction in both Paris and New York, and achieved a good deal of notoriety and success. The artist's very close friend Marcel Duchamp, for example, later recalled that Picabia had been obsessed with abstraction in those years, even to the point of claiming to have invented the word: "Picabia was above all an 'abstractionist,' a word he had invented. . . . He thought about nothing else."<sup>84</sup> And In 1915, however, upon his return to New York, he shifted away from this conventionally modernist achievement in abstraction and instead pursued a mechanomorphic style, based mainly on the inspiration of the machine.

Picabia's career, or phase, as a champion of abstraction, can be divided into a number of chronological phases. First, there is the transition, beginning in 1909, from his

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<sup>82</sup> For an overview, see the discussion of this period in Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 69-112.

<sup>83</sup> For Buffet's background and perspectives, see Gabrielle Buffet, *Rencontres avec Picabia, Apollinaire, Cravan, Duchamp, Arp, Calder* (Paris: Belfond, 1977).

<sup>84</sup> Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 43.

conventional career as a society Impressionist toward a leadership position in the avant-garde—the prologue to abstraction. Picabia was involved with new tendencies in painting at this point, and exhibited with the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne.<sup>85</sup> The Société had been founded in Rouen by Pierre Dumont in 1909, replacing Les XXX, which Dumont had founded in 1907. Les XXX had been established in emulation of the Belgian symbolist group Les XX (as indicated by its title) and although it was committed to a diversity of styles, it featured a number of prominent Fauve painters, including Matisse and Vlaminck.<sup>86</sup> Not surprisingly, Picabia's work until 1911 was mainly Fauvist. Works of 1909, like the attractive but not terribly innovative *Le torrent (La Creuse)*, demonstrate Picabia's newfound interest and exploration of complementary color relationships, as had been developed by Monet, Seurat, Signac and the Fauves. The Société was also committed to a theory of correspondence between the arts. Music played a key role in this theory—and would play an even more prominent role in the development of Picabia's abstraction. In 1909, the Société had already featured musical programming, including Debussy and d'Indy (Buffet had been a student at d'Indy's *Schola cantorum*). It was also through Dumont, in all probability, that Picabia met Marcel Duchamp, who became a lifelong friend and artistic ally.

In 1911, Picabia also exhibited the Fauvist *Adam et Ève* [Fig. 67] at the second exhibition of the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne and *Printemps* at the Salon des Indépendants.<sup>87</sup> The latter painting, although still essentially Fauvist, was shown in the

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<sup>85</sup> Picabia joined the organization in 1910. See Pierre, *Picabia*, 76.

<sup>86</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 21, especially n. 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Adam et Ève* announces one of the major themes of the remainder of Picabia's career: the amorous (or at least potentially amorous) heterosexual couple, and by implication, sexual desire.

now-famous salle 41, the first public exhibit of Cubism, in which were displayed the paintings of Fernand Léger, Robert Delaunay, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. Picabia also exhibited two pictures (*Jardin* and *Sur la Plage*) in the 1911 Salon d'automne.<sup>88</sup> It was, however, his association with the Cubists in the Indépendants that suggested a third exhibition that Picabia organized under the auspices of the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne. The exhibition was called "Fauves et cubists" and was held at a gallery on the Rue Tronchet in Paris. Quite possibly he also helped fund the exhibition, as he would future exhibitions, including the 1912 Salon de la section d'or. Picabia contributed three paintings: two called *Jardin* and *Les Cygnes* [Fig. 68].<sup>89</sup>

Picabia was seen by 1911 as an aggressive innovator and a champion of new tendencies, mainly abstraction, in art. Even critics unfavorably disposed to Picabia's paintings, for example André Salmon, were forced to admit that Picabia "plays an important role in the young groups."<sup>90</sup> It should also be noted that the correspondence between painting and music, upon which Picabia would base his claim to abstraction, was already in the air by 1911, and had already even been applied to Picabia's work. One critic called Picabia's two paintings entitled *Jardin* at the exhibition of the Société on the Rue Tronchet "superbly ordered gardens which give a sensation akin to a musical emotion."<sup>91</sup> But Picabia himself as yet wrote nothing and made no recorded statements about art, unlike many with whom he associated. His prominence, which was registered by his friends and enemies both, was a matter of his wealth and extensive social network,

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<sup>88</sup> Borrás, *Picabia*, 102, n. 20.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>90</sup> André Salmon, *La Jeune Peinture française* (Paris: Société des Trente, 1912), 82-83.

<sup>91</sup> Anon., "Exposition de peinture," *Le Journal* (22 November 1911): 3, as cited in Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 25, n. 16.

both of which had already helped, as we have seen, in securing exhibition opportunities for adventurous, forward-looking painters.

A change occurred in 1912, when Picabia suddenly adapted a Cubist idiom and quickly advanced away from a diffuse and attractive late-Symbolist and Fauvist practice toward a more up-to-date and rigorous mode of abstraction. He introduced interlocking planes and Cezannesque *passage* in works like *Tarentelle* and *Port de Naples*, which he exhibited at the third salon of the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne in Rouen. These paintings were called Cubist, both by Apollinaire and, mockingly, by those ill-disposed to such adventures.<sup>92</sup>

In 1912, Picabia and Apollinaire, recent friends, grew closer, spending most nights together drinking and smoking opium and driving around in one of Picabia's many automobiles.<sup>93</sup> It was prominently with Gleizes—along with Apollinaire and Dumont, Jacques Villon, as well as Duchamp and the Puteaux Cubists—that Picabia hatched the idea of a large exhibit displaying the new tendencies in painting.<sup>94</sup> This was the Salon de la Section d'Or, held from 10 to 30 October 1912 at La Boétie gallery, made possible, again, by Picabia's money and social network. The exhibition has gone down in the literature as the primary manifestation of “public” or salon Cubism. Picabia exhibited twelve paintings at the Salon de la Section d'Or, including *Procession à Séville* [Fig. 4], *Danses a la source II* [Fig. 3], and the lovely *Figure Triste* [Fig. 69] alongside earlier

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<sup>92</sup> Apollinaire, *Chroniques d'art*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 281. For sample negative reviews, see Pierre, *Picabia*, 79.

<sup>93</sup> See Picabia, “Guillaume Apollinaire,” *L'Esprit nouveau*, no. 26 (October 1924), as cited in *Picabia: Écrits*, 396-399; Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 30-31; Katia Samaltanos, *Apollinaire: Catalyst for Primitivism, Picabia, and Duchamp* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 71-72.

<sup>94</sup> For details related to Gleizes, see Borrás, *Picabia*, 104, n. 54; For Villon and the naming of the Salon de la section d'or, see Pierre, *Picabia*, 81.

paintings going back to 1909. It was as if he wanted to demonstrate, in public, the course of his development toward Cubist-influenced abstraction.

At a lecture at the Salon de la section d'or, Apollinaire introduced the term “Orphism,” after the Greek poet-musician Orpheus, to characterize the new abstract painting of Picabia, Fernand Leger, Robert Delaunay and Marcel Duchamp.<sup>95</sup>

During the same month of October, Picabia also exhibited *La Source* [Fig. 70] and *Danses a la source I* at the Salon d'automne. These paintings show how quickly Picabia had moved beyond the Fauve-Symbolist approach of 1911. Both are constructed with faceted, interlocking planes; both reduce coloristic complication in favor of tonal variation. *Danses a la source I* portrays two interlocking figures, built of such crystalline facets that merge, more or less, with the similarly constructed background. In *La Source* the distinction between the figures, the foreground, and the background is further elided in favor of an increasingly variegated mesh of frequently curving planes, making the ostensible theme virtually illegible.

The equation of abstract painting with music, or more exactly, the justification of abstract painting by way of analogy with music—which, as we have seen, was present to some degree with Picabia from 1909—emerged fully, however, in 1912, and not only in regard to Picabia, but more generally in avant-garde circles. *Danses à la source I* hung next to František Kupka's *Amorpha, fugue à deux couleurs*. The Czech painter had already made himself explicit about his commitment to musical abstraction in painting (as indicated by the reference to baroque musical composition in the title), and these were the terms in which Picabia's new art was seen (at least by those interested, to whatever

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<sup>95</sup> See Spate, *Orphism*, 1.

extent, in new modes of painting). In April 1912, for example, in *Les Hommes du jour*, Dumont wrote of Picabia's quest for a mode of painting that would be experienced as music: "Along with the cubists, Mr. Francis Picabia wants to communicate a new artistic emotion which expresses itself by the harmonies of colors and the search for well-ordered forms, a sensation akin to those of a musical recital."<sup>96</sup> Similar arguments were put forth by Max Goth.<sup>97</sup> A related musical model was deployed as well by Apollinaire, even before he became close to Picabia in the summer of 1912. In "Du sujet dans la peinture moderne," the lead article in the February 1912 issue of *Les Soirées de Paris*, the poet considered the new tendencies in painting and asserted that the new abstract art, which was only in its infancy and not yet as abstract as it would like to be, was have the same relationship to painting as music is to literature; it will "be a kind of pure painting just as music is a kind of pure literature."<sup>98</sup> In July, Picabia, Buffet, and Apollinaire took a short trip to England; on their way back, according to Buffet, Apollinaire and Picabia discussed over dinner the possibility of a totally abstract art (Picabia was more enthusiastic about it than Apollinaire).<sup>99</sup> Even so, Picabia made no public nor official statements about his art.

In February 1913, Picabia exhibited four works (*Procession à Seville*, *Danses à la source*, *Souvenir de Grimaldi* and *Paris* [Fig. 71]) at the International Exhibition of Modern Art, known as the Armory Show. On account of this exhibition he and Buffet

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<sup>96</sup> Pierre Dumont, "Les arts: Les Indépendants: Part 3," *Les Hommes du jour* (20 April 1912): "M. Francis Picabia veut, parallèlement aux cubistes, nous communiquer une émotion artistique nouvelle en s'exprimant par des harmonies de couleurs et des recherches des formes ordonnées, sensation en quelque sorte proche parente de celle qui nous vient d'une audition musicale."

<sup>97</sup> Max Goth, *Les Hommes du jour* (26 October 1912), as cited in Pierre, *Picabia*, 86.

<sup>98</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, "Du sujet dans la peinture moderne," *Les Soirées de Paris*, no. 1 (Feb 1912):1-4, as cited in Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 27. See also, Borrás, *Picabia*, 90, n. 30.

<sup>99</sup> Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraites* (Geneva: P. Cailler, 1957), 54-57.

traveled to New York a month before the show. It was in New York that Picabia began to publicly discuss his works as well as his theory of art in musical terms for the first time. Picabia was the only European avant-gardist to have made the journey to New York, and was thus the subject of numerous interviews; moreover, after Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*, it was Picabia's paintings that provoked the greatest scandal, further fueling the press's interest—which the artist was happy to gratify.<sup>100</sup> He publicly claimed to work in the manner of a musician, as indicated by his testimony to *The New American* newspaper: "I absorb these impressions [of New York]. I am in no hurry to put them on canvas. I let them remain in my brain, and when the spirit of creation is at flood-tide, I improvise my pictures as a musician improvises music."<sup>101</sup> And he made public the sentiments that according to, for instance, Buffet, he had already formulated to himself and shared in conversation with his friends: that, like music, painting was to be abstract, a law unto itself. Consider, for example, the statement Picabia gave to Stieglitz in support of his 1913 exhibition at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession:

We can make ourselves better understood by comparing [painting] 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 be 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

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<sup>100</sup> For the impact of Picabia's painting and theory on New York artists in 1913, see Jan Thompson, "Picabia and His Influence on American Art, 1913-17," *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 14-17 and Howard Risatti, "Music and the Development of Abstraction in America: The Decade Surrounding the Armory Show," *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 10-12.

<sup>101</sup> Picabia, "How New York Looks to Me," *New York American* (30 March 1913): 11.

of a visual impression or sensation, but to look at them as simply an attempt to express the *purest part of abstract reality of form and color in itself*.<sup>102</sup>

He made the same contention in a March 9<sup>th</sup> interview to the New York Tribune, in which, speaking of music as a model for what he termed absolute painting, he asked if the musician needed to “attempt a literal reproduction of the landscape scene, of its details in form and color? No; he expresses it in sound waves... And as there are absolute sound waves, so there are absolute waves of color and form.”<sup>103</sup> In an interview with Hutchins Hapgood of *The New York Globe*, Picabia reiterated the point. Art was like music because both sought pure expression, to express only themselves, with lyrics (for a musician) or mimesis (for a painter) an undesirable hindrance. Words, specifically, were a vestige to be discarded: “Art resembles music in some important respects. To a musician the words are obstacles to musical expression.”<sup>104</sup>

In her recollections, Buffet attested not only to Picabia’s commitment to a new, self-contained, non-referential mode of painting but again links that painting to music; it was because of her training as a musician, she said, that she was sympathetic to Picabia’s abstraction:

The problems of musical composition became for me a constant source of amazement and reflection. Consequently, I was well prepared to hear Picabia speak of revolutionary transformations in pictorial vision, and to accept the hypothesis of a painting endowed with a life of its own, exploiting the visual field solely for the sake of an arbitrary and poetic organization of forms and colors, free from the contingent need to

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<sup>102</sup>*Picabia Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Little Galleries of the Photo Secession, 1913). Emphasis is mine.

<sup>103</sup> Picabia, “A Post-Cubist’s Impressions of New York,” *New York Tribune* (9 March 1913): Part II, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Picabia, interview with Hutchins Hapgood, “A Paris Painter,” *New York Globe and Commercial Adviser* (20 February 1913), as cited in Risatti, 10.

represent or transpose the forms of nature as we are accustomed to see them.<sup>105</sup>

Most American critics were, however—and like their Parisian counterparts—simply shocked by what Picabia exhibited and tended, therefore, toward ridicule.<sup>106</sup> But there were a number who found reason to take Picabia seriously; they frequently deployed musical analogies. For example, the perceptive Charles Caffin, who admitted that Picabia's work was bewildering, observed:

[Picabia] is the reverse of Matisse. While the motive of both is abstract expression, the latter's method involves a simplification that strips away as much as possible of the details of objective appearance. Picabia, on the other hand, emulating the musicians as he manipulates the notes of the octaves, starts with a few forms, colored according to the key of the impression he wishes to create and combines and recombines these in a variety of relations until he has produced a harmonic composition in which one discovers that the theme of his subject has been built.<sup>107</sup>

Picabia was thrilled by the energy of New York and his art developed rapidly there. The changes can be seen in the gouaches and watercolors he exhibited from 17 March to 5 April at his new friend Alfred Steiglitz's Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. *New York* and *La Ville de New York aperçue à travers le corps* [Figs. 6 and 72] take the American metropolis as their inspiration and theme. In both, Picabia almost totally abandoned the language of canted, interlocking crystalline Cubist facets that he had derived from Picasso and Braque's development of Cezannesque *passage*. Instead, he constructs both of his works by means of a variety of forms, ranging from wobbly cubes and colored oblongs to linear elements; and, in the latter picture, he included small,

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<sup>105</sup> Buffet, "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp," in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, Robert Motherwell, ed. second edition, (Cambridge: Wittenborn, 1951), 255.

<sup>106</sup> See Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 44.

<sup>107</sup> Charles Caffin, "The International—Yes—But Matisse and Picabia?" *New York American* (3 March 1913): 8.

isolated hatchmarks and occasional wriggling, linear elements. Both pictures indicate also a knowledge of Futurism, as they feature prominent diagonals. *New York* is important, as well, for its coloristic suaveness; freed from the Cubist scaffolding, Picabia was able to paint not only tonally, as in *Danses à la source*, but also to play purple-grey patches against the dominant florid pinks, yellows and reds. Such coloristic richness would be developed increasingly in the works of the next two years.

At the Photo-Secession, Picabia also exhibited three works that, again, took dance as their theme: *Danseuse étoile sur un transatlantique* [Fig. 5], *Danseuse étoile et son école de danse*, and the now-vanished *Répétition d'une danse*. On the journey to New York, Picabia had been entranced by the seductive Polish dancer, Stasia Napierkowska and had seen her scandalous performances at the Palace on Broadway.<sup>108</sup> *Danseuse étoile et son école de danse* [Fig. 73] is constructed from the Cubist facets of 1912, although there is greater movement and fluency in their arrangements. *Danseuse étoile sur un transatlantique* however, which is primarily black, white and grey (with some red rectangles toward the top), introduces a range of soft, curving biomorphic forms into Picabia's formal vocabulary: these would be deployed in many of the subsequent, and final, Orphic paintings.

Upon his return to Paris, Picabia deployed many of the techniques he had developed in New York in two new large-scale oil paintings, both exhibited at the 1913 Salon d'automne: *Udnie* [Fig. 8] and *Edtaonisl* [Fig. 9]. The works of 1913 and early 1914 represent the summit of Picabia's abstract phase: they are large-scale, confident, sumptuous, and assertive assays in abstraction, as innovative and convincing as virtually

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<sup>108</sup> See Pierre, *Picabia*, 97-98.

any abstract painting made anywhere in the world in the years before the First World War. Virtually all mimetic vestiges or scaffolding, as well as any unprocessed debt to other styles (Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism), have been subsumed into weaves and conglomerations of curving, interlocking forms, including shaded Cubist planes, wriggles and tense swirling half-crescents and arcs, as well as larger, softer, seemingly heavier biomorphic blobs of the pictures shown at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession. These forms are aligned on great diagonal axes from lower left toward upper right; these are the same axes that Picabia had introduced in *New York* and *La Ville de New York aperçue à travers le corps*. *Edtaonisl* especially offers a coloristic sumptuousness and variety, as its forms are painted in bold reds, yellows, purples and blues, like a great vitalist tapestry through which are threaded, in counterpoint, a lesser number of purely tonal elements.

In the following year, Picabia continued to develop this Orphic language in a variety of ways, both in oil paintings and in gouache and watercolor. In many of these smaller gouaches and watercolors, Picabia showed himself to be sensitive to the particular properties of that medium, creating delicate effects of shading and wash. And yet, by the middle of 1914, Picabia's interest in Orphic abstraction dissipated. The last large-scale Orphic abstraction, *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie* [Fig. 10] introduces mechanical elements as sexual metaphors: an obviously phallic, piston-like form punctures or enters a brightly colored, pink and peach arrangement of what look like flower petals.<sup>109</sup> Already the mechanomorphic style can be seen, emerging from

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<sup>109</sup> This work was exhibited from 12-26 January 1915, along with the rest of Picabia's final abstractions, at the Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession in New York in an

Orphism, at the moment of its highest, most sustained and confident achievement. When the artist returned to New York six months later, he abandoned Orphism, and instead, began a series of paintings and drawings based on the mechanical elements that had first appeared in his work in 1913. This mechanical style has, conventionally, been seen as the very antithesis of pre-war abstraction and the origins of Dada.<sup>110</sup>

Why did Picabia abandon abstraction? How is his change of style to be understood or explained in light of our premise, the attempt to overcome nihilism? And what consequences can be drawn from Picabia's Orphic phase, as well as the shift away from modernist abstraction?

The main point of abstraction for Picabia was that it was, unlike mimetic painting, self-justifying: a mode of art, which, like music, would seek authority and value only in itself, in the interaction of its own energies and forms, and not in the name of an exterior model or ideal. It was a way at arriving at the pure essential core of existence and, therefore, of overcoming nihilism, or meaninglessness. The musical analogy, which, as we have seen, was put forth on a variety of levels, was designed to support the possibility of a more powerful, more meaningful, more truthful art—true to itself. This is the conventionally modernist trajectory, quest, or formulation. As per, for example, Clement Greenberg:

Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miro, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse and Cézanne derive their chief inspiration from the medium they

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exhibition entitled "Picabia Exhibition," organized by Marius de Zayas. See *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 434.

<sup>110</sup> For an analysis of the end of Picabia's Orphism, see Roger Rothman, "Between Music and the Machine: Francis Picabia and the End of Abstraction," *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal*, no. 4, [http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue\\_4/articles/rothman/rothman1.html](http://www.toutfait.com/issues/volume2/issue_4/articles/rothman/rothman1.html) (visited 1 Aug 2011).

work in. The excitement of their art seems to lie most of all in its pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc., to the exclusion of whatever is not necessarily implicated in these factors. The attention of poets like Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, Éluard, Pound, Hart Crane, Stevens, even Rilke and Yeats, appears to be centered on the effort to create poetry and on the "moments" themselves of poetic conversion, rather than on experience to be converted into poetry. Of course, this cannot exclude other preoccupations in their work, for poetry must deal with words, and words must communicate. Certain poets, such as Mallarmé and Valéry are more radical in this respect than others -- leaving aside those poets who have tried to compose poetry in pure sound alone.<sup>111</sup>

And because this quest for autonomy (and the related self-justifying, tautological, authority and authenticity) is conventional, it can be described as part of a wider pattern, in particular, by way of binary oppositions.

In the left column are the values associated by Picabia and those close to him with Orphic abstraction; in the right column are secondary values that Picabia sought to de-emphasize, and overcome.

presence	re-presentation
essence	appearance
origin	imitation
cause	effect
inside	outside
proper meaning	metaphor; figuration
truth	illusion
purity	impurity

Nothing that we have examined thus far contradicts a reading of Orphism as an attempt to align painting, by way of music, with the first set of values. But I have sidelined an oft-mentioned, but never fully investigated, quirk of Picabia's abstraction: his incorporation of writing. Strangely, and in total contradiction to his goals and to

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<sup>111</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* VI, no. 5 (Fall 1939): 34-49, as cited in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 532.

everything he claimed on behalf of painting in those years, Picabia began to include words on the surface of his pictures. He began this practice in 1912, at the very moment that he achieved what he claimed to have sought from abstraction—that is, pictorial autonomy and freedom from mimesis or narrative reference.

The first examples of this practice are *Port de Naples* and *Tarentelle* (both 1912; both exhibited at the third salon of the Société Normande de Peinture Moderne in Rouen).<sup>112</sup> These titles can, however, be explained. Picabia was new to abstraction and still tethered his paintings to a recollection, a sensation, or to representational motifs. The titles aid the viewer to better approach what would have otherwise been—and to most observers in fact *were*—difficult, bewildering images.

Picabia continued to add these simple titles, which describe the subject of the painting, as he assimilated Cubism and developed an abstract pictorial language throughout 1912. Titles are written on almost all the paintings he exhibited that year, including *Figure Triste* [Fig. 69], *Paris* [Fig. 71], *Procession à Seville* [Fig. 4], *La Source* [Fig. 70], and *Danses à la source* [Fig. 3]. Such descriptive titles continue throughout 1913, referring the otherwise increasingly abstract imagery to its source: consider as examples *New York* and references to the sensations or desires that had inspired the picture, like *Catch as Catch Can* [Fig. 74] (inspired by a wrestling match), *Danseuse étoile sur un transatlantique* and *Danseuse étoile et son école de danse*, both of which recall the dancer Napierkowska, whose rehearsals Picabia had enjoyed watching in New York—and one can make out, especially in the second picture, the organization of forms that might have derived from the graceful, energetic movement of the dancers. *Chanson*

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<sup>112</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 29.

*nègre*, printed at the top left of both versions of this painting, refers the viewer to the source of each painting's inspiration; additionally, since this is a musical reference, it reiterates the musical foundations of abstract painting. *La Ville de New York aperçue à travers le corps* [Fig. 72], the title of which is written at the top of the image, also presents no particular problem, as it not only specifies the subject but also the artist's means of apprehension and response—allowing, perhaps, or inviting, greater appreciation of the painter's psychological depth and pictorial acuity. Because we know that in this painting Picabia was responding to the energy and dazzle of the modern metropolis, one can—thanks to the title—understand why, he deploys suddenly a dramatic, perhaps Futurist-inspired diagonal; one can, perhaps, better interpret the jangle of smaller scattered elements as aspects of the artist's overwhelmed, dazzled senses, unable to coolly process the rambunctious bustle of the modern metropolis.

In New York in 1913, however, Picabia began, for the first time, to split the title off from the subject, so that the textual element does not merely lead the viewer into the otherwise perhaps forbidding (abstract) picture but, on the contrary, turns him or her *away* from the image, in hermetic, riddling fashion. The first indication of this strange development is the crucial *Mechanical Expression seen through Our Own Mechanical Expression* [Fig. 7]. The titular phrase tells us very little about the supposed subject of the painting. In fact, it makes very little sense, grammatically or otherwise, as a subject or description: it seems rather more like a word-game, or a pleasing poetic fragment that delights because of its absurd doubling. Moreover, Picabia further complicates the matter by adding Napierkowska's name to the picture, just below the drawing presumably derived from the image of a Crookes tube. In this instance, the verbal elements

significantly alter the process of interpretation. They do not merely clarify the pictorial innovations—they do not merely lead the viewer toward the purely pictorial realm—but instead, create a relay of verbal references and possibilities, which intersect and disrupt the visual ones. This is a much less pure or “musical” abstraction, since one cannot in any way imagine appreciating it only on pictorial terms.

Additionally, the artist misspelled Napierkowska’s name, omitting the first A. This could, of course, have been an accident; there is every reason to believe the painting, for all its importance, to have been a hasty, offhand image. Even if it was a mistake, however, it is one that Picabia was aware of, whether at the time of production or shortly thereafter, because he then continued to play games with the individual letters of words on the surfaces of his purportedly pure paintings. Proof of this is found in the large-scale paintings shown at the Salon d’automne, *Edtaonisl* and *Udnie* [Figs. 8 and 9]. The titles are written at the top of these two paintings, both of which are significantly more abstract than anything previously painted by Picabia. What might these strange words mean? The question has been the subject of much speculation. It was the painter Philip Pearlstein who in 1955 first decoded “Edtaonisl” to be a portmanteau word: it conjoins, letter-by-letter, the words “étoile” (star) and “danse” (dance), minus the final letter in both cases.<sup>113</sup> This refers again, one assumes, to the star dancer, Napierkowska.

In the salon catalogue, Picabia entered longer titles: *Edtaonisl (ecclésiastique)* and *Udnie (jeune fille américaine; danse)*.<sup>114</sup> The inclusion of the word “ecclésiastique” adds

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<sup>113</sup> Philip Pearlstein, “The Symbolic Language of Francis Picabia,” *Arts* XXX (Jan 1956): 37-43. See also, Pearlstein, “The Paintings of Francis Picabia,” master’s thesis, New York: Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1955.

<sup>114</sup> *Edtaonisl (ecclésiastique)* is no. 1675 and *Udnie (jeune fille américaine; danse)* is no. 1676.

to the painting the amusing—at least to Picabia—figure of a Dominican priest who had, despite himself, and furtively, watched the arousing performances of the star dancer. Importantly, though, no one at the time would have known this, because they would not have known how to read, or rather decode, “*Edtaonisl*.”

“*Udnie*” has proved more difficult to decode, and given rise to varied speculation. Pearlstein suggested that it refers to nudity (perhaps to the nudity of the young girl specified in the salon catalogue, or again to the nudity, real or desired, of Napierkowska).<sup>115</sup> Picabia claimed that the title had no relationship to any image of a young woman; the subject was simply the source of inspiration for an abstract, musical composition:

*Udnie* is no more the portrait of a young girl than *Edtaonisl* is the image of a priest. . . . They are memories of America, evocations of it, subtly arranged in the manner of a musical composition.<sup>116</sup>

He nevertheless claimed, three decades after the fact, that “*Udnie*” meant “uni-dimensional;” Picabia told Henri Goetz that all the talk about the fourth dimension and pseudo-mathematical formulations in circles (the Puteaux cubists) in which Picabia sometimes moved made him want to do something one-dimensional.<sup>117</sup> It is unclear how seriously one should take this later claim. Virginia Spate speculated that Picabia might

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<sup>115</sup> See also Buffet, *Aires abstraites*, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Picabia as cited in anon. interview, “Ne riez pas, c’est de la peinture et ça représente une jeune américaine,” *Le Matin* (1 Dec 1913): 1.

<sup>117</sup> Goetz and Boumeester interviewed by Camfield, Paris, 20 June 1968, as cited in Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 62 n. 14. For discussion of the fourth-dimensional fad in artistic circles in pre-war Paris, see Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton University Press, 1983); and Henderson, “Francis Picabia, Radiometers, and X-Rays in 1913,” *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (Mar. 1989): 114-123.

have had Isadora Duncan (with whom he probably had an affair) in mind.<sup>118</sup> Pierre more recently suggested that it is an anagram of Jean d'Udine, the pseudonym of the music theorist and critic, Albert Cozanet, who championed synaesthesia, the precise correlation of sounds and colors, and the shared purity of the new music and painting.<sup>119</sup> In lieu of new evidence, however, the word remains a mystery—and, by extension, the painting as well, to some extent.

With *Edtaonisl* and *Udnie*, it could no longer be said that Picabia's titles were simply aids to understanding the abstract pictorial compositions. If anything, the hermetic and portmanteau titles have the opposite effect, pulling attention away from the pictorial aspects in favor of verbal and textual ones. One has to ask why Picabia went to the trouble of introducing such complications—and just at the moment when he had achieved his desired mastery of an abstract pictorial language. Note that *Edtaonisl* and *Udnie* were not experiments like *Mechanical Expression seen through Our Own Mecahnical Expression* but were major, large-scale manifestos incorporating everything Picabia had learned and had hoped for some years to achieve. Why did he introduce a contradictory verbal and referential element then, and in public?

The literary and allusive aspects of Picabia's Orphic practice increased greatly after *Edtaonisl* and *Udnie*. For one thing, Picabia began using titles to refer not only—and however obliquely, as we have seen—to the subject of the painting, but also to refer to earlier paintings: to create, that is, a web of literary references between individual pictures. Consider for example *Catch as Catch Can* [Fig. 74]. The painting was inspired by the site of a Chinese wrestler whom Picabia noticed while dining with Buffet and

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<sup>118</sup> Spate, *Orphism*, 381-82.

<sup>119</sup> Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 102-03.

Apollinaire. Entranced, they followed him to a match of catch-as-catch-can.<sup>120</sup> Picabia made a sketch of the wrestlers (a conventional figurative drawing) and later, the larger abstraction. On the surface of the abstraction, at the top, as in *Edtaonisl* and *Udnie* and so many of his previous abstractions, he added the painting's title; at the bottom though, he added, in the same block letters, the title of an earlier painting, *Edtaonisl* and the date, 1913. It could be argued that the wrestling match suggested to Picabia another kind of "wrestling," which he recalled or desired with the dancer. Philip Pearlstein suggested that "*Edtaonisl*" came to refer not only to Napierkowska, or even to dancers, but to any sort of lead performer. In this case it was the wrestler, whose impact, as Camfield suggests, "was as devastating in its own way as the performance of Napierkowska."<sup>121</sup> It might be imagined that Picabia was positioning himself, as a painter, as a kind of performer like the Chinese wrestler; and Napierkowska, as a figure of energetic dazzle and abundance, whose art was to be understood in sensual terms. In no case, however, would anyone have known how to read "*Edtaonisl*" as anything but the name of another Picabia painting; what would have mainly registered would have been a reference, in Picabia's painting, to another painting—and therefore the introduction of a second-level or meta-pictorial relationship, which cannot easily be explained. Most crucially, any of the above interpretations take place on the literary rather than pictorial plane, which is in contradiction to Picabia's professed obsession with the development of abstraction.

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<sup>120</sup> For Picabia and Apollinaire's shared ongoing interests in sports and sporting culture, see Adrian Hicken, *Apollinaire, Cubism, and Orphism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988), 124-27.

<sup>121</sup> Camfield, *Francia Picabia*, 63.

Recall Duchamp: “Picabia was above all an ‘abstractionist,’ a word he had invented. . . . He thought about nothing else.”<sup>122</sup>

In late 1913 or early 1914, Picabia introduced a much more radical literary complication into his “pure” painting: He began to use Latin phrases from the *Larousse* dictionary as his titles. These were, without fail, written on the surfaces of his abstractions. Camfield describes the effect of these phrases: “In these paintings there is a more provocative gap between the verbal, ideational properties of the title and the visual, material properties of the painting.”<sup>123</sup> This is stating the case rather mildly. The very idea of introducing literary allusions onto the surfaces of the pictures completely contradicts the dream of abstract autonomy that Picabia claimed to have been his motivation in the first place.

The phrase “*Udnie*,” for example, whose meaning remains mysterious, re-appears in at least two later works, including the magisterial, *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie* [Fig. 10]. This title forces a viewer into an allusive chase with a permanently elusive quarry, as one does not ever know what or whom the artist is seeing again in his memory, and why. The phrase was, typically, an adaptation of the Larousse quotation of Virgil’s Aenied. Antor, the companion of Hercules, dying, laments that he will never again see his home of Argos: “Mourant, il revoit en souvenir sa chère Argos” (*Dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos*). Camfield argues that the title refers to the artist’s memory of his erotic encounter with Napierkowska in 1913—physical pleasure which is now available only as a tantalizing recollection.<sup>124</sup> Roger Rothman suggests in his 2002

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<sup>122</sup> Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 43.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>124</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 69.

article, “Between Music and the Machine: Francis Picabia and the End of Abstraction,” that “*Udnie*” here refers to earlier paintings with that title (*Udnie* and *Petit Udnie*) rather than nude bodies or other dimensions. Both interpretations are convincing. The key fact, for our purposes, is that neither one is verifiable; and, more crucially, any interpretation takes place mainly by way of *verbal* allusions and references (titles referring to titles), rather than the purely plastic realm of self-justifying pictorial autonomy that Picabia claimed to be asserting.

Consider *Moi aussi, j’ai vécu en Amérique* [Fig. 75]. The phrase is taken from “Et in Arcadia Ego,” which is defined in the *Larousse* as “Et moi aussi, j’ai vécu en Arcadie,” followed by a reference to Poussin’s *Arcadian Shepherds* and an explanation of the phrase as referring to the ephemeral nature of happiness and regret at having lost it. All this *could* be explained: Picabia compares his return from New York to the mythical discovery of the passage of time in Arcadia; the phrase not only has biographical meaning but—perhaps—allows this particular abstraction to be understood as a mournful meditation on the passing of all things, and, specifically, to the passing of Picabia’s time in New York. It could also, in theory, and by way of the allusion to Poussin, suggest that abstraction is, like the storied Classicism of the French seventeenth century, an ordered and rigorous affair, and thus deserving of the same sort of scrutiny and even applause. But all this takes place on a purely verbal level, and by way of a chain of textual references. To offer such interpretations, one has to contradict Picabia’s goal, which was to create pictorial works that were, for the first time in the history of art, *non-referential* and *self-contained*.

Also in 1913, Picabia began to increasingly consider the visual possibilities of writing. *Ad libitum, au choix; à la volonté* [Fig. 76] combines two phrases, both taken from the *Larousse*. Each title is, however, written in a different script. For “*Ad libitum*” Picabia used a mixture of capital and lowercase cursive letters instead of the more typical block capitals of the “*Au choix; à la volonté*” below. Similar juxtapositions of block capitals and cursive are seen in *Chose admirable à voir* [Fig. 77]. The painting’s title is written in small, neat capital letters at the upper right, to the left of which the artist has scrawled an extended dedication in flowing script: “En souvenir très affectueux à Jeanne Lecomte du Nouÿ Francis Picabia.”(with fond memory to Jeanne Lecomte du Nouÿ Francis Picabia) If in those years Picabia’s great friend Apollinaire was discovering, as had Mallarmé previously, the pictorial aspects of the poem, Picabia, it seems, was marking the converse trajectory, and discovering the verbal and poetic aspects of his pictorial practice, increasingly utilizing the surface of the canvas like a piece of paper upon which words are written. There are indications that Apollinaire saw Picabia’s paintings this way. A example occurs in a 1915 article in *Les Soirées de Paris* in which he refers to Picabia’s *poèmes peints*, or painted poems.<sup>125</sup>

Or might it be said that there is really no problem at all—that the titles and phrases are simply indications of Picabia’s environment; an indication of his tendency to pick up on what his friends were working on and incorporate them into his own practice? To clarify: There is nothing mysterious or paradoxical about the literary aspects of Picabia’s Orphism from an historical standpoint, nor as a problem in the history of style. It is *only* a paradox in light of Picabia’s dedication to the development of a purely

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<sup>125</sup> Apollinaire, “Simultanisme-Librettisme,” *Les Soirées de Paris* (15 June 1914): 322-25.

pictorial, non-referential art, with which all the evidence suggests he was obsessed. I again cite Duchamp: “Picabia was above all an ‘abstractionist,’ a word he had invented. . . . He thought about nothing else.”<sup>126</sup> And yet, the strange but inexorable increase of literary complication in the “abstract” paintings themselves—like a parallel or intertwined but contradictory path—tell a different story.

Perhaps Picabia’s subsequent fame as a Dadaist has overshadowed, or made it hard to take seriously, his dedication to abstraction. In any case, the practice of writing on paintings, to say nothing of writing multiple hermetic and allusive phrases on paintings, is, it must be again insisted, extremely unusual for any early champion of abstraction. No major abstract artist in these first pioneering years of abstraction added titles on the surface of his (or, rarely, her) pictures, save Picabia. For obvious reasons, many were at pains to suppress literary references, or any references, as a kind of distraction from pure painting altogether, and often shifted, like Kupka, toward musical, numerical, or purely descriptive titles. Take, as a contrast, the purely musical title of Kupka’s *Amorpha, fugue à deux couleurs*, which hung next to Picabia’s *Danses à la source I* at the 1912 Salon d’automne.<sup>127</sup> Recall that Picabia, in his New York *Globe* interview, had made much the same point: ““Art resembles music in some important respects. To a musician the words

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<sup>126</sup> Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 43.

<sup>127</sup> Parisian painters, for various reasons, had different relationships to abstraction than their central and eastern European counterparts. The former were always more figurative, for example, and were rarely as puritanical nor extreme in their commitment. Even so, there is nothing comparable to Picabia among any of his French peers. Robert Delaunay makes for an instructive contrast: the allusions in his paintings are to “modern” subjects (the aviator Bleriot, for example, or the Eiffel Tower) that reinforce the “modern” style of abstraction. Or consider Sonia Delaunay’s *Prismes électriques* (1914), which features a small section of multi-colored text (itself suggestive of a biplane in flight in a prismatic sky): These phrases allude directly to Cendrars, whose poetry served as a precedent and analogue for her painting; they situate and reinforce the proposed meaning of the painting rather than disrupt or contradict it.

are obstacles to musical expression.”<sup>128</sup> It is also worth noting that Picabia, who had been exhibiting for almost a decade before he turned to abstraction, had never previously written on the surface of his paintings: The technique that contradicted pure painting was developed only in conjunction with it. Moreover, as we have seen, the literary elements of Picabia’s practice were not crutches which he needed in order to propel himself into abstraction and then jettisoned; rather, they developed alongside abstraction, increasing in depth, complication, and virtuosity even as the paintings became increasingly abstract. It is as if the quest for pure painting cast, of itself, a second, contradictory trajectory, and that as the former, stated goal gained in efficacy and intensity, the literary shadow deepened and lengthened.

One need only consider the historiography of Picabia’s Orphism to see the extent to which verbal references have competed with and, in general, trumped pictorial concerns. Scholars *do* acknowledge and describe the paintings’ formal qualities (color, rhythm, scale and form). But the meanings of the pictures have mostly been sought by way of the hermetic titles. It is these literary elements rather than the pictorial that have inspired protracted analysis and debate. A cynic could argue that this is indicative of textual biases on the part of certain scholars, or of the difficulty in using words to write about visual properties—but it is to be recalled that the first analysis of Picabia’s Orphic titles (and there is no stand-alone analysis of the pictorial aspects of these same paintings) was offered, not by an historian, but by the painter, Philip Pearlstein.

One of the overt consequences of Orphism was, for Picabia, quite literally, literature: He shifted away from abstraction in 1915, and completely abandoned his claim

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<sup>128</sup> Hapgood as cited in Risatti, 10.

to develop a pure form of painting, but continued to write phrases on the surfaces of his paintings, doing so with virtually all his works until the mid-1920s. In fact by 1915, he was paying even more attention to the coordination (or purposeful mis-alignment) of image in text, as indicated by a later statement in *291*: “In my work the subjective expression is the title, the painting the object.”<sup>129</sup> He also began to write poetry in 1914. It is hardly exaggerated to say, then, that the consequence of Picabia’s efforts to develop a purely pictorial art—an attempt, according to the artist, “to express the *purest part of abstract reality of form and color in itself*”—was his shift toward a fundamentally literary and referential one.<sup>130</sup>

To attempt to make sense of the contradiction at the heart of Picabia’s modernist phase, I want now to offer an analogy with Nietzsche, whose early career presents an analogous pattern and problem. The first phase of Nietzsche’s mature career, was, like that of Picabia, based on an attempt to create a new art justified by way of music. The work in question for Nietzsche is *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, published in 1872, when the philosopher was twenty-eight years old. The correlation between this text and Picabia’s Orphism is obscured, perhaps, by a difference in tone: on the one hand, the urbane, typically Parisian elegance and self-assurance of Orphism; on the other, the often delirious bombast of Nietzsche’s early prose. The philosopher more commonly associated with Orphism in the literature is Henri Bergson—never Nietzsche; Bergson is appropriate to the notion of recollection in Picabia’s earliest abstractions.<sup>131</sup> But Picabia, and many of those around him, would have almost undoubtedly been aware

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<sup>129</sup> Picabia, “We Live in a World,” *291*, no. 12 (Feb. 1916): 3.

<sup>130</sup> *Picabia Exhibition*, exh. cat. (New York: Little Galleries of the Photo Secession, 1913). My italics.

<sup>131</sup> See Spate, *Orphism*, 330.

of *The Birth of Tragedy*, and inspired by it.<sup>132</sup> It would have provided for them, like so many others, a powerful argument for the development of non-mimetic, self-referential (tautological) modes of art. The subsequent statement, which Picabia gave to *The New York American* in 1913, calls on *The Birth of Tragedy* overtly; it must be considered either as a conscious allusion on the part of Picabia or at least an indication of his awareness, firsthand or through word of mouth, of that famous text:

We moderns, if so you think of us, express the spirit of the modern time, the twentieth century. And we express it on canvas the way the great composers express it in their music. In music we feel the tragedy of life, we hear the roll of drums calling to battle, we feel every human emotion. We feel these emotions, we do not need to see them visualized before us. An opera presentation which visualizes for us the thought which was in the creator's mind is not the highest expression of music. The older schools of art which visualize every detail for us, are to painting what opera is to music.<sup>133</sup>

Notable is the fact that the “tragic” and Hellenic imagery and rhetoric, which clearly evoke *The Birth of Tragedy*, do not, in fact, match with the themes of Orphism, which is self-consciously modern, without even a remote reference to Hellenic tragedy. Also noteworthy is the dismissal of opera in favor of “pure” music (and, by analogy, painting).

More significant than these lines of influence, however, are the structural correlations and parallel trajectories, or developments, of the musical model for artist and philosopher alike. Nietzsche, like Picabia, was explicit about music being the highest art form. The parallels are also striking at a biographical level. Like Picabia, Nietzsche abandoned an earlier, successful but more conventional career as a philologist to stake his reputation on a daring, even messianic, embrace of the musical model. He defined, or

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<sup>132</sup> For background, see Christopher Forth, *Zarathustra in Paris: The Nietzsche Vogue in France, 1891-1918* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 2001).

<sup>133</sup> Picabia, “How New York Looks,” 11.

rather emblemized, what music stood for by means of a dismembered Hellenic god, Dionysus—much as Picabia allowed himself, through Apollinaire, to have his musical model emblemized by another mythical Hellenic figure, Orpheus. Nietzsche, like Picabia, had relied in large part on a close personal relationship with a musician (in Nietzsche's case, Richard Wagner), as Picabia did with Buffet. Most crucially, Nietzsche then abandoned this first effort, and reversed his position, and began to savagely ridicule this earlier enthusiasm, and began developing ironic, critical, and aphoristic modes instead of the fevered quest for totality, authenticity, and transcendence that characterized *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche vehemently rejected his first work (which had, like Orphism for Picabia, brought him notoriety and fame). Here, for instance, is Nietzsche's preface, "Attempt at Self-Criticism" to the 1886 version of *The Birth of Tragedy*:

To say it once again: today I find [*The Birth of Tragedy*] an impossible book—badly written, clumsy and embarrassing, its images frenzied and confused, sentimental, in some places saccharine-sweet to the point of effeminacy, uneven in pace, lacking any desire for logical purity, so sure of its convictions that it is above any need for proof, and even suspicious of the *propriety* of proof, a book for initiates, 'music' for those who have been baptized in the name of music and who are related from the first by their common and rare experiences in art, a shibboleth for first cousins in artibus—an arrogant and fanatical book.<sup>134</sup>

Nietzsche also specifically rejected Wagner, whom he had formerly championed (*The Birth of Tragedy* had been dedicated to Wagner and openly hailed him as a savior of art and nation). For example:

One pays dearly for having been a follower of Wagner. What has Wagner-worship made out of spirit? Does Wagner liberate the spirit? To him belong that ambiguity and equivocation and all other qualities which can convince the uncertain without making them conscious of why they have been convinced. In this sense Wagner is a seducer on a grand scale. There

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<sup>134</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy from Out of the Spirit of Music*, ed. Michael Tanner, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), 5.

is nothing exhausted, nothing effete, nothing dangerous to life, nothing that slanders the world in the realm of spirit, which has not secretly found shelter in his art, he conceals the blackest obscurantism in the luminous orbs of the ideal. He flatters every nihilistic (Buddhistic) instinct and togs it out in music; he flatters every form of Christianity, every religious expression of decadence.<sup>135</sup>

One finds, then, that much the same pattern is in place: Nietzsche, like Picabia, began his mature career with a quest for the same goal” overcoming nihilism by way of music, the self-justifying art, and then shifted away from that goal, despite having put forth a major achievement in its name. In the case of Nietzsche, however, this ambivalence, or rather the question of the position of *The Birth of Tragedy* in relationship to his subsequent (ironic) texts has already been the subject of sustained investigation from a variety of angles. I will focus here on just one of these interpretations: that of Paul de Man in *Allegories of Reading*.<sup>136</sup> As de Man’s argument is somewhat technical—and as it is precisely in the more technical aspects of his essay that we will find that which we are looking for—it will be necessary to rehearse the argument in some detail.

The pairing of Apollo and Dionysus in Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* has become a great cliché of cultural history. Apollo represents the Classical: an art of elegance, clarity, reason and, importantly, mastery over its own means and forms. Dionysus, on the hand, stands for excess, the irrational, the orgiastic, and expressive frenzy. This binary reading is not necessarily inaccurate, and it has often served to illuminate the twin poles of artistic imagination. It is certainly an important artifact of cultural history. But it is also rather misleading. The point of the book, as Nietzsche stated over and over again, was to valorize Dionysus *over* Apollo, and at Apollo’s

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<sup>135</sup> Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966), 638.

<sup>136</sup> De Man, *Allegories*.

expense. The famous binary that pairs Dionysus with Apollo does much to obscure the fact that Apollo himself appears in *The Birth of Tragedy* merely as an occasional and generally inconsistent straw man, and then vanishes entirely. Dionysus, by contrast, dominates *The Birth of Tragedy*. The argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* is not about equal, nor even legitimate though disproportionate, values but is a sermon on the *absolute* priority of Dionysus over Apollo on every level.

In the first column are the values Nietzsche associates with Dionysus; in the second, those figured by Apollo.

DIONYSUS	APOLLO
presence	representation
essence	appearance
origin	imitation
cause	effect
inside	outside
proper meaning	metaphor; figuration
truth	illusion
pure (self-sufficient)	impure

The purpose of *The Birth of Tragedy*, then, is to realign art (and therefore life) with the first Dionysian set of values, which are authentic and allied to music, and seem to promise a way out of the torture of meaninglessness.

The stylistic or artistic values discussed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* derive from these philosophical binaries, and are added to the table below.

DIONYSUS	APOLLO
tragedy	irony
music	literature; painting
Wagner	Florentine opera
Euripides	Sophocles; Aeschylus

Nietzsche positions Apollonian forms as degraded, impure and inauthentic imitations of Dionysian origins. He often expresses the matter using familial structures: Dionysus and

Apollo are not brothers, he says. Rather, Dionysus is the father and Apollo his son. Music is the essence and source that literature and the plastic arts can only mimic or adorn: “Trying to illustrate a poem by means of music . . . what an upside-down world! A procedure that strikes me as if a son wanted to sire his father!”<sup>137</sup> And:

Let us people the air with fantasies of a Raphael and watch, as he did, Saint Cecilia listening ecstatically to the choirs of angels. Not a sound emanates from this world apparently lost in music. Indeed, if we imagine that, by some miracle, these harmonies suddenly became audible, Cecilia, Paulus, and Magdalena, even the Heavenly choir, would suddenly disappear into nothing. We would at once stop being Raphael and, as on this painting the worldly instruments lie shattered on the floor, our painter’s vision, defeated by a higher power, would pale away and vanish like a shadow.<sup>138</sup>

De Man points out that this prioritization of music is in no way limited to Nietzsche, or even to Wagner and Pater and the early pioneers of abstract painting in Europe. It is a basic trajectory in the history in a philosophy that so often demeaned writing in favor of the presence, or *sound*, of the spoken word (the voice). Here de Man places the founding gesture of *The Birth of Tragedy* into a much broader (deconstructive) history of Western metaphysics:

Everything . . . stems indeed from the dispossession of the word in favor of music. The property rights over truth that belong, by philosophical authority, to the power of language as statement, are transferred to the power of language as voice and melody. Jacques Derrida has identified this gesture, which he calls “logocentric,” as the perennial movement of all metaphysical speculation and has traced some of its versions in Plato, Hegel, Rousseau, Heidegger, Saussure, and others. Far from weakening the grounding of philosophy in ontology and in a metaphysics of presence, the transfer that favors the voice over writing, art over science, poetry over prose, music over literature, nature over culture, symbolical over conceptual language (the chain of polarities could be extended at length and could also be put in less naïve terminology), serves in fact to

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

strengthen the ontological center (theocentric, melocentric, logocentric) and to refine the claim that truth can be made present to man.<sup>139</sup>

It would seem that the remainder of Nietzsche's career was a rejection of this first gesture toward wholeness, authenticity, purity and the development of a more critical, ironic stance (roughly like the supposed shift from abstraction to Dada).

But *The Birth of Tragedy* is not as simple as first seems—nor, perhaps, as Nietzsche would have wanted it to seem. The complication for de Man develops as one begins to consider not only *what* the text says but also *how* it goes about saying it. *The Birth of Tragedy*, claims de Man, is by Nietzsche's own standards an exceedingly Apollonian text. In order to insist on the priority of Dionysus, to argue for a tragic, essential, primal art that does not rely on rhetorical tricks nor surface dazzle for its effects, Nietzsche knowingly deploys all manner of Apollonian rhetorical tricks and surface effects. "*The Birth of Tragedy*," says de Man, "is indeed a discourse, a harangue that combines the seductive power of a genetic narrative with the rhetorical complicity of a sermon."<sup>140</sup> Even more problematically, Nietzsche structures *The Birth of Tragedy* in precisely the fashion of those Apollonian texts he most despises—those that are so inherently meaningless that they are forced to appeal to an external, extra-textual authority. One of Nietzsche's key complaints in *The Birth of Tragedy* is that in Euripides and his modern un-Dionysian equivalents (Lessing, Florentine opera, etc.) self-justifying unity and wholeness of action is lacking: The story has, therefore, to be vouched for at

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 88. This is much the same model that Apollinaire stumbled upon when he argued that the new abstract painting would be to painting in general what music was to literature: its pure, essential form (voice). "On peut bien dire de l'art de Picabia qu'il voudrait être à la peinture ancienne ce que la musique est à la littérature, mais on ne peut dire qu'il soit de la musique." Apollinaire, *Les Peintres cubistes*, 80.

<sup>140</sup> De Man, *Allegories*, 93.

the beginning by a prologue and at the end by the appearance of a god (*deus ex machina*). Without the intervention of these external authorities, the work itself is completely powerless. Nietzsche, pleading for a self-justifying art, of course excoriates this reliance upon external divinities or revelation: Power and meaning must, he insists, be generated by the work itself. In order to make this argument, though, Nietzsche relies on just such a “divine” presence or *deus ex machina* as Richard Wagner, who appears in the prologue and then again in the book’s third act, like an intervening god. De Man explains:

The prologue, an invocation to Richard Wagner, names the epiphany, and vouches for the truth of the narrative, because Nietzsche “communicated [with Wagner] as if he were present and could therefore write down things worthy only of his presence...” The resolution of the narrative hinges on the rebirth of this same spirit as the *deus ex machina*, Wagner, reappearing on the scene to reverse the decadence of art and lead the essay to its triumphant conclusion. To the extent that it represents the history of tragedy as the narrative of a sequential event framed by the appearance and reappearance of the same incarnate spirit, *The Birth of Tragedy*, as text, resembles a Florentine opera or a *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* and not a Sophoclean tragedy or a Wagnerian opera. It is therefore open to criticism directed against these art forms. An intra-textual structure within the larger structure of the complete text undermines the authority of the voice that asserts the reliability of the representational pattern on which the text is based. And it weakens the figure precisely at the points that establish its genetic consistency: by weakening the authority of the power that sustains, by its presence, the unity between the beginning and the end.<sup>141</sup>

Not only does Nietzsche rely upon an external authority to justify his argument, but he turns to that authority at exactly the two points—the beginning and end—that the hated Euripides did.

*The Birth of Tragedy* functions not, then, as a Dionysian text but rather an Apollonian one, according to its own logic; Nietzsche cannot, despite his claims,

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 96.

surrender the need for an external authority to justify his argument for an art that supposedly needs no such justifications.

Why is Apollo, or a re-presentation—as opposed to a self-presence—necessary, if this is precisely what needs to be banished? Nietzsche toys with a variety of not wholly consistent possibilities. Mostly, however, he attempts to salvage the argument by the means of what can be called a proto-existential approach: Apollo is necessary because Dionysus himself, experienced directly, is unbearable. Only an offstage deity, or Wagner, can deal directly with reality; the rest of us can only manage to survive its representation.

As de Man describes:

All readers of *The Birth of Tragedy* know by means of what ruse the destructiveness of unmediated truth is avoided: instead of being directly experienced it is represented. We are rescued by the essential theatricality of art [Apollo]. “Only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* is existence and the world forever *justified*”: the famous quotation, twice repeated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, should not be taken too serenely, for it is an indictment of existence rather than a panegyric of art. It accounts, however, for the protective nature of the Apollonian moment.<sup>142</sup>

But if Dionysus is himself unreachable without the protective aegis or bridging aspect of Apollo, as Nietzsche is forced to contend, then again the main argument, which is to argue for the *singular* power and position of Dionysus, is again contradicted. What ends up happening is, paradoxically, a rather rigorous proof of the inescapable necessity for Apollo.

*The Birth of Tragedy* operates, then, on two contradictory levels. Or, as De Man says, it acquires two incompatible narrators.<sup>143</sup> On the explicit, metalinguistic level, it argues that Dionysus is the father (origin, presence and revelation) and that Apollo can

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 98.

only be his son, and secondary—an illusion (masks, representations, etc.) But in the process of making this argument, the text itself appears, however unhappily or accidentally, to discover the opposite: the necessity of Apollo, without whom there is no possible perception of Dionysian truth. They are brothers after all—there cannot be one without the other.

This discovery, which contradicts Nietzsche's stated intention and position, is not as value-neutral nor incidental as might first seem. These two gods, like the two incompatible narrators, cancel each other's claims to truth, thereby cancelling the possibility of truth entirely. Apollo leads to Dionysus and Dionysus to Apollo, endlessly. Truth is Dionysus, but Dionysus is utterly inaccessible without Apollo, or falsehood. In what sense can Dionysus therefore be primary, or self-sufficient, or true? One is tempted, then, to reverse positions and insist that there cannot be any authentic truth but only phantoms, metaphors, and signs. And this would argue for an ironic and critical mode of art and thought. But if one claims that everything is, at origin, unoriginal and that all truths are, in essence, false, then one has again abolished the notions of truth, origin, and essence (and so on), and even statements about the impossibility of truth become impossible. One is led back, ironically, to the tragic essence of Dionysus, and one becomes Hamlet-like, frozen, a fly in a nihilistic amber. What *The Birth of Tragedy* generates, then, is a model of reversibility: The two columns of values with which we began are shown to be endlessly interchangeable, forming a cross-shaped pattern or chiasmus, in which everything can be turned into its opposite.

Granted, Nietzsche does not, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, make this claim directly. He did, however, admit to exactly this problem in his notes and preparatory outlines for

*The Birth of Tragedy*. For example—and in direct contrast to what he argues in *The Birth of Tragedy* itself—in his notes for the book he admits that Apollo and Dionysus are *both* merely rhetorical devices. Here is de Man’s discussion of these important notes:

We are told, in these fragments, that the valorization of Dionysus as the primary source of truth is a tactical necessity rather than a substantial affirmation. Nietzsche’s auditors have to be spoken to in Dionysian terms because, unlike the Greeks, they are unable to understand the Apollonian language of figure and appearance. . . . Nietzsche writes: “The epic fable of the ancients represented the Dionysian in images. For us, it is the Dionysian that represents (symbolizes) the image. In Antiquity, the Dionysian was explained by the image. Now it is the image that is explained by the Dionysus. We have therefore an exactly reversed relationship. . . . For them, the world of representation was clear; for us, it is the Dionysian world that we understand.” It follows that the entire system of valorization at work in *The Birth of Tragedy* can be reversed at will.<sup>144</sup>

The point of Nietzsche’s enterprise, like Picabia’s, was to overcome nihilism—that is, to find or create meaning and value in a meaningless world. The first, “musical” effort to do this—to seize upon the experience of reality directly, to jettison representation in favor of pure unmediated presence, however, only made the matter substantially worse. It demonstrated, with implacable logic, that reality could not be seized upon directly; the attempt to overcome nihilism by banishing reference, representation, appearance, illusions, irony and imitation instead results in re-instating that very nihilism, albeit in more rigorous and therefore unbearable, terms. Nietzsche’s quest for truth-in-itself—alloyed, present and pure—instead *proved* that there was no such thing as truth. One finds this formulated rather explicitly in another note from the

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 117.

time of *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Truth kills, indeed kills itself (insofar that it realizes its own foundation in error).”<sup>145</sup>

The pattern traced by de Man in *The Birth of Tragedy* is, it should be clear, analogous to the one we have located in Picabia’s Orphism (or rather located by way of de Man’s reading of Nietzsche’s first text). In both cases, the author/painter insists on one goal, with apparent rigor and zeal. The work itself, however, introduces a contradictory element that undermines, and even cancels, the stated goal. The correlation is in fact even more specific, as Nietzsche and Picabia insisted on the same goal (self-justifying art) using the same model (music) and contradicted it with the same elements: a reference to, and reliance upon, external authority and information, manifested in both cases as *literature*.

Orphism, like *The Birth of Tragedy*, acquires two incompatible narrators. And, as with *The Birth of Tragedy*, what results is a chiasmic pattern by which opposite values are shown to be exchangeable—and therefore in the end meaningless. One can interpret Picabia’s abstractions by way of his own stated ambitions and behavior only if one willfully excludes the constant textual interruption and countermanding of those goals. If, conversely, one insists on paying attention to the titles, then it becomes difficult to take Picabia’s goals seriously at all. The notion that painting could, like music, be non-referential, begins to seem not like a goal but almost, bizarrely (or like Dada) as a *target*; the artist using text to unravel abstraction even as he claimed to be creating it. The problem or paradox was noted by Roger Rothman vis-à-vis *Edtaonisl* and *Udnie*:

If we are to insist that our understanding of the original referent is crucial to the work then we are, in effect, admitting that the painting is a

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<sup>145</sup> Nietzsche as cited in De Man, *Allegories*, 115.

kind of inside joke (*Udnie* = attractive dancer; *Edtaonisl* = priest-friend of the painter), making it difficult to defend our interest in the paintings at all.<sup>146</sup>

And in *The Popular Culture of Modern Art*, Jeffrey Weiss draws attention to a mysterious and presumably parodic article, published anonymously but most probably by Picabia, in the magazine *Les Hommes du Jour* in May 1913. The article, called “L’Evolution de L’Art: Vers l’Amorphisme,” foresees a new movement in art, without either color or form, to be called Amorphism.<sup>147</sup> What Weiss says about the contradiction raised by this presumed joke of an article can apply to Picabia’s Orphism more generally: “Amorphism’s mock-seriousness and Picabia’s lofty description of post-Cubist [Orphic] abstraction are irreconcilable, except that they are nearly identical... We might even speculate that Picabia’s “serious” statements are a deliberate send-up of period artspeak.”<sup>148</sup> Not coincidentally, these formulations, or paradoxes, suggest that Picabia’s Orphism, is, upon examination, like what de Man claimed about the *The Birth of Tragedy*: “an extended rhetorical fiction devoid of any authority.”<sup>149</sup>

Orphism thus failed to offer a solution to the problem of nihilism. If anything, it made things worse: It had made of Picabia’s instincts a sustained demonstration, in art, and proved that there was no such thing as, or at least no direct access to, truth. One could not, it was demonstrated, rip off or tear through the many Apollonian masks and find anything authentic underneath. More exactly: One tore off those masks to find that

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<sup>146</sup> Rothman, “Between Music and the Machine,” 2, n. 15.

<sup>147</sup> Anon., “L’Evolution de L’Art: Vers l’Amorphisme,” *Les Hommes du Jour*, no. 276 (3 May 1913): 10.

<sup>148</sup> Jeffrey Weiss, *The Popular Culture of Modern Art: Picasso, Duchamp, and Avant-Gardism* (Yale University Press, 1994), 88. Weiss discusses here the anonymous *Les Hommes du Jour* manifesto on pp. 85-89. See also, Pierre, *Picabia*, 116-120.

<sup>149</sup> De Man, *Allegories*, 101.

Dionysus was himself a mask for Apollo, and vice versa—forever. It is tempting, therefore, to see in Orphism the first rigorous iteration of an inescapable nihilism, the first pulsing of a dark or aporetic star, which Picabia’s practice would, in various ways, reiterate: always oscillating, even within the same work, from a positive to negative pole, putting forth a doubled, contradictory assertion which in the end results in chiasmus, a stalemate, and the cancellation of a stable claim to truth.

Consider, in this light, *La musique est comme la peinture I* [Fig. 78], whose title asks the viewer to consider it as a comment on Orphism and the musical model in general. It is tempting, since Picabia abandoned Orphism, and along with it the analogy “music is like painting,” to assume that the title is ironic: a sardonic dismissal of his earlier modernist dream of wholeness and autonomy and direct experience of reality. But since the comparison of painting to music was designed to justify abstraction, specifically, and since *La musique est comme la peinture* is, essentially, abstract, could it also not be read as a re-iteration, rather than a dismissal, of that Orphic ideal? After all, Picabia *did* remain primarily a painter, and often an abstract painter, and this was neither the first nor the last time after 1914 that he would draw analogies between painting and music, or image and sound. The point is that both these contradictory readings are inherent in the painting, just as they are in *The Birth of Tragedy* and throughout Orphism; they exist side by side, each one cancelling the other’s claim to truth. Recall Nietzsche’s “Truth kills, indeed kills itself (insofar that it realizes its own foundation in error).”<sup>150</sup> In the 1917 drawing *Paroles*, Picabia wrote an analogous phrase: “La vérité ressemble à la

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<sup>150</sup> Nietzsche as cited in De Man, *Allegories*, 115.

mort” (Truth resembles death). To embroider a phrase from de Man: Picabia’s abstraction turns out to be an endless reflection on its own destruction by representation.

Picabia’s goal, which was to overcome nihilism, was not, however, abandoned with Orphism—or ever. What the failure of the musical ideal did do was to dictate a profound shift in Picabia’s theoretical orientation. This shift is the subject of the next chapter. There is yet another way to interpret *La musique est comme la peinture*, as the upcoming discussion reveals.

CHAPTER II  
DESIRING-MACHINES

This chapter offers an interpretation of Picabia's mechanomorphic style that in various ways dominated Picabia's practice from 1915 until 1923. The rudiments of the style—or rather its basic grammar and major themes—had all been established clearly, however, in New York in 1915. It is here that one turns in order to begin an analysis or interpretation of the whole.

The key element of the mecahnomorphic style is the machine, or rather mechanical imagery; all the stylistic changes derive from the iconographic and, as I will argue, the theoretical basis of the machine. The secondary element is desire, which will be considered later in the chapter. Although Picabia had incorporated mechanical elements in his work as of 1913, it was only upon his return to New York in 1915 that the machine became the dominant factor in his work, eclipsing abstraction and the analogies between painting and music. A good indication of the shift can be seen with *Mechanical Expression seen through Our Own Mechanical Expression* [Fig. 7].<sup>151</sup> Crucially, Picabia had chosen not to exhibit this prescient and predominantly mechanical work until after 1915 with the ripening of his mechanomorphic style. Although somewhat exaggerated, the following 1915 statement gives the gist of Picabia's shift from abstraction to mecahnomorph:

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<sup>151</sup> See Henderson, "Francis Picabia, Radiometers, and X-Rays," 112-114; and Willard Bohn, "Picabia's 'Mechanical Expression' and the Demise of the Object," *The Art Bulletin* 67, no. 4 (Dec. 1985): 673-677.

This visit to America . . . has brought about a complete revolution in my methods of work. . . . Almost immediately upon coming to America it flashed upon me that the genius of the modern world is in machinery, and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression.<sup>152</sup>

The machine is not, however, self-evident. What is its specific meaning, or function, in Picabia's practice? Rather than pursue the argument along stylistic lines, I would like, instead, to consider the mechanomorphic style specifically in relation to the fundamental motive of Picabia's entire practice—the attempt to overcome nihilism. The mechanomorph was the product of this, Picabia's basic principle, just as abstraction had been previously; moreover, the mechanomorph incorporated, and reacted to, the consequence, or “failure,” of Orphism, the topic of the previous chapter. Orphism, Picabia had learned, remained too much in thrall to an ideal—and was thus vulnerable, like all ideals, to deconstruction and a fall into meaninglessness, or nihilism. Granted, the Orphic ideal had been tautological—i.e. art, like life, was to be embraced on its own terms—and had not perhaps *seemed* idealizing, but it had shown to be ideal nevertheless. It was, one might say, the last ideal that Picabia had to go through before abandoning idealism altogether.

The first way to understand the shift in Picabia's alignment in 1915 is as a shift from the question “why?” to the question “how?” In his first musical effort, Picabia had still sought to answer why, albeit in an extreme fashion (by resorting to tautology). Question: *Why* is this beautiful? Answer: It is beautiful *on its own* terms; it is beautiful based on the intrinsic self-justifying qualities of beauty. But Orphism had demonstrated that nihilism could never be overcome directly: the question “why?” would never be

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<sup>152</sup> Picabia in anon. interview, “French Artists Spur on an American Art,” *New York Tribune* (24 October 1915): part IV, 2.

answerable. Thus in 1915, Picabia stopped asking why. From this point on, the only form of Picabia's inquiry is the empirical question "how?" Not the idealist: "Why is this painting beautiful?" But rather the empirical: "How does this painting work?"

There is some intriguing anecdotal evidence to support this argument. In the first issue of *291*, Agnes Ernst Meyer, a member of the Stieglitz circle whose portrait Picabia had made a few months later, wrote an essay about just this shift, called "Why Versus How." Meyer discussed the need for what she calls "scientific" criticism, to which, she insists, *291* will resolutely devote itself:

*"What do you mean by scientific criticism?"* I can give the clearest answer to this question by turning to pure science for an illustration. When a scientist asserts that H<sub>2</sub>O = water. He means that a certain quantity of hydrogen and a certain quantity of oxygen will produce water. He knows HOW water can be made, he does not know WHY. He knows moreover that he cannot know WHY.<sup>153</sup>

In a similar vein, in 1919, Picabia answered Breton and Soupault's questionnaire in *Littérature* by sidestepping the why-form of the question, "Why do you write?" by responding, "I don't really know and I hope never to know."<sup>154</sup>

This same empirical or objective re-orientation is evident, roughly speaking, in Nietzsche as well. Suffice it to say that Nietzsche, although alternately brooding and rambunctious, was also—and declared himself as such—the most obstinately, insistently realistic of thinkers. He attacked the empirical sciences of his own day not because of their deadening objectivity, but because they were not nearly objective enough. They failed to question their own foundations (the foundation of truth in error, for example). For instance in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "What did that god who counseled 'Know

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<sup>153</sup> Meyer, "How Versus Why," 3.

<sup>154</sup> Picabia, "Réponse à l'enquête," *Littérature*, no. 12 (February 1920): 20.

yourself!’ really mean? Was it perhaps: ‘Stop letting anything matter to you! Become objective!’”<sup>155</sup>

Picabia’s newfound empirical approach could also be characterized, after Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche in the *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, as Sophistic (in contrast to the Platonic mode of abstraction and transcendent idealism). The Sophist can be characterized, according to Deleuze, by a pointing finger: Instead of seeking abstract definitions, he only ever selects concrete cases. The (Platonic) question “What is . . . ?” thus becomes “Which one is . . . ?” The transcendent ideal of, for instance, the beautiful (“What is beauty?”) is replaced by specific examples (“Which one is beautiful?”). I cite Deleuze’s discussion of the Sophist in relation to Nietzsche’s *The Wander and his Shadow*:

The sophist Hippias... thought that the question “which one?” was the best kind of question, the most suitable one for determining essence. For it does not refer, as Socrates believed, to discrete examples, but to the continuity of concrete objects taken in their becoming, to the becoming-beautiful of all the objects citable or cited as examples. Asking which one is beautiful, which one is just and not what beauty is, what justice is, was therefore the result of a worked out method, implying an original conception of essence and a whole sophistic art that was opposed to the dialectic. An empirical and pluralist art.<sup>156</sup>

The figure, for Picabia, for this newfound concrete-empirical (Sophistic) orientation was the machine. The machine is the empirical method and the emblem, or image, of that method. Its preeminence, beginning in 1915, in Picabia’s practice is

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<sup>155</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, eds. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 60. The god in question is Apollo.

<sup>156</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 76.

indicative (and this is always the case with Picabia) of an intense theoretical re-alignment: the new non-idealist soil from which the mechanomorph grows.

Consider the five *291* portraits published in the July and August 1915 issues: *Ici, c'est ici Steiglitz*; *Les Saint des saints*; *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*; *De Zayas! De Zayas!*; *Voilà Haviland* [Figs. 12-16].<sup>157</sup>

For one thing, they are *portraits*. This is the first time that Picabia ever made portraits.<sup>158</sup> Why, all of a sudden, did he consider portraiture as relevant? This is itself indicative of interest in specific cases (“which one?”) instead of abstract ideals. Notice also the sudden emergence in these *291* portraits of all sorts of new devices that emphasize specifics. He deploys, for example, for the first time the declarative “*voilà*” (here is; thus) in *Voilà Haviland* (as well as the 1915 watercolor *Voilà la femme*). The term “*voilà*” is not taken from the *Larousse*, nor is it allusive; rather it emphasizes the presentation of *this* specific image or example. Similar emphasis on specific cases is seen in the doubled *ici* of *Ici, c'est ici steiglitz: here, here, is Steiglitz*. Picabia also specifies the subjects of *Le Saint des saints* and *De Zayas! De Zayas!* with the complementary, but contrasting, phrases “*c'est de moi qu'il s'agit dans ce portrait*” (in *Le Saint des saints*)

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<sup>157</sup> *291*, nos. 5-6 (July and August 1915): front cover, 2, 4-5, back cover. For an overview of these works, see William Rozaitis, “The Joke at the Heart of Things: Francis Picabia’s Machine Drawings and the Little Magazine *291*,” *American Art* 8, nos. 3-4 (Summer-Autumn, 1994): 42-59. For an exacting account of the probable mechanical sources, see Maria Caudill Dennison, “Automobile Parts and Accessories in Picabia’s Machinist Works of 1915-17,” *The Burlington Magazine* 143, no. 1178 (May 2001): 276-83.

<sup>158</sup> For the influence of Marius de Zayas’s caricature-portraits on Picabia, see Bohn, “The Abstract Language of Marius de Zayas,” *The Art Bulletin* 62, no. 3 (September 1980): 434-52; Craig R. Bailey, “The Art of Marius de Zayas,” *Arts Magazine* (September 1978): 136-44; and, Antonio Saborit, “Marius de Zayas: Transatlantic Visionary of Modern Art,” in Deborah Cullen, ed., *Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis* (Yale University Press, 2009), 86-101.

versus “c’est de *toi* qu’il s’agit” (in *De Zayas! De Zayas!*).<sup>159</sup> Like portraiture in general, none of these devices derives from Orphism. Only with his sudden interest in concrete specific cases—and *only* concrete specific cases—did they appear in Picabia’s practice.

Each of the five portrait figures is, of course, imagined as a machine, or as a kind of mechanical arrangement. This is indicative of the shift from the idealist question “why?” to the mechanical question “how?” More exactly: “How does it work?” Even more exactly: “How does *this* person work?” To which the answer is given in the form of various machines: Steiglitz, the photographer, works like a camera. Agnes Ernst Meyer like a spark plug: she “sparked” the Steiglitz circle with energy and financial support.<sup>160</sup> Picabia, aware of his brash, noisy, confident presence, portrays himself as a klaxon car horn. The equation between person and machine allows Picabia to ask how each person works, and to then play games with that structure, to devise increasingly witty complications.

The same shift is further clarified by a consideration of music in these 291 portraits. As we have said, the equation between painting and music did not disappear in 1915, even though the machine replaced abstraction. What happens, instead, is that the musical ideal is reconfigured in empirical terms. It is conceived of scientifically—which is to say simply as *sound* and *sight*, and without any reference to an ideal. Not: Painting *is*, or *should* be, like music. Rather: How is sight related to sound? There is no right nor

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<sup>159</sup> See Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 19.

<sup>160</sup> William Innes Homer was the first to propose that the “jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité” was in fact Agnes Ernst Meyer. He explains “l’état de nudité” as speaking to Picabia’s interest (borrowed from de Zayas) in psychological exactness; William Innes Homer, “Picabia’s *Jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité* and Her Friends.” *The Art Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (Mar. 1975): 110-115; For more on Meyer, see Douglas K.S. Hyland, “Agnes Ernst Meyer, Patron of American Modernism,” *American Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1980): 64-81.

wrong answer to this new empirical question—only various local configurations and correspondences.

Consider the self-portrait, *Les Saint des saints*. We know that it is a self-portrait because just under the titular phrase, “Le Saint des saints” is written “c’est de moi qu’il s’agit dans ce portrait,” (this portrait is about me) specifying that the portrait is about its maker. Picabia imagines himself as a car horn: a machine for making sound. It has been suggested that the klaxon, being a loud but keenly expressive and unforgettable sound, would have appealed to Picabia, who was similarly self-assertive.<sup>161</sup> And Picabia always had an affinity for automobiles (he owned over a hundred of them). At the same time, though, a pun in the drawing’s title, *Les Saint des saints*, indicates that Picabia is not only a sound-maker but also an image-maker, as “*des saints*” and “*dessin*” sound identical in French: Picabia is not only the saint of saints but the saint of drawing. Since *Les Saint des saints* is in fact a drawing, it makes an equation between visual art and sound: drawing, and *this* drawing in particular, are like sound in that they are present an assertive, jarring blast announcing the presence of a new, active, mobile force, or set of forces. This is a much more specific, and descriptively exact comparison than the previous, more vague idealizing “painting should be like music.” There is no longer any ideal, no more lofty goal; there is nothing to indicate that drawing, or this draughtsman, *should* be like a car horn. It is simply an observation, an answer to the question, “How does (Picabia) work?” The surrender of the universal allows for much greater tangible precision.

Consider *Voilà Haviland*. The main image is a lamp, which is to say, a machine for generating light. It is thus a figure of the visual arts. But there is an allusion to hearing

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<sup>161</sup> Rozaitas, “The Joke at the Heart,” 49.

as well as to sight. The lamp is unplugged, and the shape of the heavy black cord is that of an ear. The drawing thus proposes a simple, almost hieroglyphic conjunction of lamp and ear, or an organ of hearing and the medium of sight (light). Again, the equation between painting and music is transposed into scientific registers: light and sound. And again, the equation is rather more specific than merely “sight and sound.” For one thing, the lamp is a machine for *generating* light; the ear an organ for *receiving* it. Light, and thus vision and visual art, are marked as generative and mechanical; music as organic and receptive. This can be transposed into gender terms: light (visual art) is expansive and male; music receptive, natural, and female.

This correspondence of light and sound itself corresponds to Haviland, the subject of the portrait (*Voilà Haviland*); Haviland is equated to poetry (“La poésie est comme lui”). The viewer is left to consider how Haviland, the poet, works. Is he like the lamp or the ear? Or like the relationship between them? And how, then, does poetry work? Is it a kind of new light? A permanence of sound? Again, there is no ideal (poetry *should* be . . . ) but rather a complex of analogies drawn between specific objects and images, suggestive of how this friend, the poet, and therefore poetry, might work, in *this* specific case.

A final example: In *De Zayas! De Zayas!*, the most complicated of the five 291 portraits—as it concerns not only de Zayas but also Picabia himself—one finds, again, the conjunction of light and sound. The drawing includes, not only a corset, a spark plug, and a hand crank, but also two automobile headlights (at the center and left toward the

bottom) and two bells (at the lower left and right corners).<sup>162</sup> Again, the conjunction of painting and music has been reiterated in a merely empirical or scientific key: as sight (headlights) and sound (bells). And, as before, one is able to speculate on the *how* of the subject, in this case the Marius de Zayas works. More specifically, one finds numerous indications as to how de Zayas's friendship with Picabia works. It could be argued, in fact, that this is—alone among the five 291 portraits—a *double* portrait, of de Zayas and Picabia, or rather a portrait of a relationship.

De Zayas was the only member of the Stieglitz circle to have associated with Picabia in pre-war Paris. One finds the exclamation of de Zayas's name, therefore, just above the red area that indicates a body of water. The double exclamation, "De Zayas! De Zayas!" refers to a body of water, as it was adapted from the *Larousse* for the Greek exclamation *Thalassa! Thalassa!* (*The sea! the sea!*), uttered by Xenophon's weary retreating soldiers upon first seeing the seashore at Pont-Euxin.<sup>163</sup> De Zayas's (doubled) name is above, or behind, the red water while the "Je" of the explanatory phrase "Je suis venu sur les rivages du Pont-Euxin," (I came to the shores of Pont-Euxin) which one assumes to refer to Picabia, is below, or *across*, the sea. This again emphasizes the transatlantic nature of the relationship. Also, *De Zayas! De Zayas!* makes direct reference to Picabia's self-portrait, as the phrase "J'ai vu et c'est de toi qu'il s'agit dans ce portrait" (I saw and this portrait is about you) finds its corollary in the "C'est de moi qu'il s'agit dans ce portrait" (this portrait is about me) of *Le Saint des Saints*. The attention to doubling and pairing in the work (beginning, most obviously, with its doubled title)

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<sup>162</sup> The identification of the object at the upper right as a hand crank is Camfield's. *Francis Picabia*, 84. Dennison contends instead that it is a steering wheel seen from the side in "Automobile Parts and Accessories," 277-78.

<sup>163</sup> Jean-Hubert Martin and Hélène Seckel, eds. *Francis Picabia*, 47.

suggests that it is about a pair of friends—a diagram of a relationship and not an individual.

For all the complications of the *291* portraits—their availability to multiple interpretations—the deconstructive tension of Orphism has vanished. There is no longer any goal, any ideal; there is nothing therefore to fall short of, nor to contradict. It was because of this theoretical reorientation that so many elements of Orphism were maintained in 1915, and often dexterously developed.<sup>164</sup> Even abstraction was not abandoned, as indicated by *Fantaisie* [Fig. 79] and *La Musique est comme la peinture* [Fig. 78] and the many Dalmau abstractions of 1921 and 1922 [Fig. 25-28], especially the *Optophone* paintings [Figs. 30 and 31], named after a machine devised by German Dadaist Raoul Hausmann for converting color to sound.<sup>165</sup> Only the *ideal* of abstraction disappeared.

Consider *La Musique est comme la peinture*, first seen at the end of the previous chapter.<sup>166</sup> Although there is some question about the dating of the work, with its multiple versions, we know that it was first exhibited at the First Annual Exhibition of the Society

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<sup>164</sup> Consider the textual elements. In Orphism, the titles are simply written, for the most part, in black letters on the surface. In the mecahnomorphics, though, Picabia uses multiple types and styles, and considers the different scales and weights and styles of letters, and various positions of the text: as part of a mechanical device (as if etched onto a spark-plug), sometimes pointing to it or wrapping around it, sometimes serving politely as the title in the corner or bottom of the image.

<sup>165</sup> In the lower left corner of *Fantaisie* is the phrase, “*L’Homme créa dieu à son image.*” This is a famous Nietzschean theme: it is not god who created man; rather, god is an abstraction invented, for better or (usually) worse, by man. The phrase is a succinct indication of a world without ideal, or rather a world in which truth, values, and ideals do not inherently exist (and are not guaranteed by anything higher or divine) but must instead always be invented. This is the re-iteration of the motivation for abstraction, not its rejoinder.

<sup>166</sup> For a discussion relating to the multiple versions of the painting, see Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 101, n. 19.

of Independent Artists in New York in April 1917, well after Picabia's shift from Orphism to mechanomorphism. The fanning rays of rainbow colors are based on a pre-war diagram of alpha, beta and gamma particles reacting to a magnetic field. On the top left, the artist has written the title. As long as one reads this title in the literal (and implicitly idealizing manner; that is, painting *should* be like music) one is forced to ask a question with no answer—or rather two contradictory answers. Does Picabia mean what he says? Or is he being ironic, and mocking the musical model of abstraction? As indicated in the last chapter, there is evidence for both readings, which cancel each other out, leaving behind only the knowledge that one cannot ever know what the picture says, or means. But if one shifts, as I argue Picabia shifted, from the idealizing mode to the empirical one, and approaches the painting in the mechanical (or mechanomorphic) manner, then what remains is the concrete (mechanical) question: “*How* is painting like music?” One is no longer lured into the deconstructive whirligig or chiasmus. Instead there are only specific concrete configurations that work in different, but not necessarily opposed, manners that produce different results without engendering an overall crisis of meaning. In this case, for example, the correspondence of painting and music is defined by the rainbow fanning of chromatic bands as a relationship primarily of *color*.

Since the machine was a theoretical construct as much as an iconographic element, Picabia was able to develop and refine his mechanical-empirical approach with and often also without the use of literal, direct mechanical imagery. Moreover, the question “How does it work?” was applied not only to the subjects *in* Picabia's works, but to the works themselves. In other words: how does this picture work? And eventually: How does *art* work? That is: Picabia began to consider painting as a kind of machine—an

arrangement and exchange of forces. Like so many of the key points about the mechanomorphic style, one sees this already in 1915. Consider the sudden emergence, or predominance, for example, of titles that simply state the function of each painting; describing one of the ways it exists, and for what purpose: *Très rare tableau sur la terre* [Fig. 80] is a very rare canvas; 1915 *Cette chose est faite pour perpétuer mon souvenir* [Fig. 81] does perpetuate the artist's memory. The titular phrase *Machine sans nom* can refer to the painting itself as much as to the image in the painting. It was also in 1915 that Picabia began suddenly and boldly introducing what might be called "special effects" into paintings: collage in *Très rare tableau sur le terre*; and gold and silver metallic paint in, for instance, *Révérance* [Fig. 82] and, again, *Très rare tableau sur le terre*. All this should be framed by way of the question, "How does painting work?" How, in other words, does this painting-machine impact the viewer? Picabia therefore also began experimenting with all sorts of radical compositional devices, especially radical simplifications of figure-ground (in contrast to the sumptuous weave of the faceted Orphic surface), resulting in an altogether more immediate, more striking, effect.

By 1917, Picabia understood "machine" more broadly to mean *any* arrangement of forces, whether mechanical, organic, magnetic, aeronautic, subatomic and so on. A good example of this is, again, *La Musique est comme la peinture*, the source of which is not a machine but a diagram of subatomic particles, or what can best be called energies, or forces. Many of the 1922 Dalmau paintings, which are named for specific mechanical forces, continue to demonstrate this line of development: *Lampe*, *Magnéto*, *Presse hydraulique*, *Magnéto anglaise*, *Résonateur*, *Radio-concerts*, *Bobinage* (winding), *Chambre Forte*, *Aviation*, etc.

After his return to Paris in 1919, Picabia sometimes also extended his question “How does painting work?” to “What form does the relationship take between painting and the beholder?” Sometimes Picabia’s answer was: confrontation. *Prenez garde à la peinture* [Fig. 83] claims to be wet, and therefore harmful, while at the same time warning the audience. *Portrait à l’huile de ricin! M’amenez-y* [Fig. 84] purports to be poisonous. *Chapeau de paille?* [Fig. 85], on which is written “M..... pour celui qui le regarde” (presumably “Shit for whoever looks at this”) invites the viewer to engage with the painting by completing the phrase; to do this, however, is to find oneself insulted.<sup>167</sup> The sandwich board Picabia devised for Breton to wear [Fig. 86] while he declaimed Picabia’s Cannibal Manifesto at the Dada soirée at the Maison de l’Œuvre in Paris on 27 March 1920 made the poet into a giant target; not only did the manifesto (and therefore Breton attack the audience), so did the inscription around the target: “IN ORDER TO LOVE / SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO / HAVE SEEN IT OR HEARD IT / FOR A LONG TIME YOU BUNCH OF IDIOTS.”<sup>168</sup> The sandwich board is thus a machine for the exchange of hostilities between the artist (or his surrogate, Breton) to the audience, and, by way of the target, back again.

But Picabia was hardly always antagonistic as a leader of Dada in Paris: in general, he refused to take sides, and worked instead to avoid boredom and despair. Already by 1920 the artist appears to delight in a multitude of contradictory attitudes, socially, pictorially, ideologically. There is, however, no “meaning” behind this multiplicity—no true purpose behind the many masks—except Picabia’s refusal to look

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<sup>167</sup> Picabia, letter published in *Comœdia* (19 January 1922): 3. Picabia claimed that “M” stands for “*merci*.”

<sup>168</sup> For a description of the event, see Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, 118-120.

for such meanings. He had ceased his search for an ideal and instead become “mechanomorphic.” What something (art, person, ideology, etc.) ultimately “meant” was not relevant because it was unknowable. Instead of seeking its meaning, Picabia aimed instead to play with its function, to inquire how it worked, to know what sort of forces it contained and organized or channeled, and in what manner—but never for what reason. And by asking how something worked, he answered, or rendered moot, the question of what it, or anything, might ultimately mean.

Thus far, I have examined that the machine in Picabia’s practice served as the image and emblem of a “mechanical” or “objective” (Sophistic) re-orientation, in which the unanswerable idealist question “*Why?*” was exchanged for the “mechanical” question “*How?*” I want now to continue to develop the analysis by focusing on the “sexed” aspect of these mecahnomorphic images, and specifically, on the way desire was linked, for Picabia, to the machine. The aim is to relate this iconographic conjunction to the theoretical configuration of the desiring-machine, put forth by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Anti-Œdipe* (1972).<sup>169</sup> I will also aim to draw out the consequences of this logic—that of the desiring-machine—for Picabia’s later career, especially his now widely celebrated stylistic promiscuity, which I will argue is a consequence of the theoretical amalgamation of desire and the machine first articulated in the mechanomorphic style.

Since the argument that follows is based not only on Nietzsche but on Deleuze Guattari, some explanation is in order. First, Deleuze is not unrelated to Nietzsche but rather one of his greatest philosophical inheritors. He not only wrote one of the major landmarks in post-war European Nietzsche studies, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), but

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<sup>169</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin, 1977).

described himself as a Nietzschean, and referred to Nietzsche as the source for his own contentions on innumerable occasions.<sup>170</sup> Further, Nietzsche served as the centerpiece of his own philosophical enterprise, *Difference and Repetition*, which ends, not coincidentally, with a triumphant evocation of Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return. Deleuze took concepts first suggested by Nietzsche and attempted to expand upon them. The concept of the desiring-machine, while certainly not Nietzsche's, is, like so many of Deleuze's ideas, certainly a *Nietzschean* concept. It takes as its starting point Nietzsche's insistence on the prioritization of sensual experience over intellectual abstraction, and moreover, Nietzsche's insistence that reason was fundamentally only an aspect, or ornament, of desire, and was thus determined *by* desire, which it could never overcome.

An example from Nietzsche:

The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of objective, ideal, purely spiritual goes frighteningly far—and I have asked myself often enough, whether, on a grand scale, philosophy has been no more than an interpretation and a *misunderstanding of the body*. Behind the highest value judgments that have hitherto guided the history of thought are concealed misunderstandings of the physical constitution—of individuals or classes or even whole races. . . . I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of the term—to summon the courage at last to push my suspicion to the limit and risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all 'truth' but rather something else.<sup>171</sup>

And: "The degree and type of a person's sexuality reaches up into the furthestmost peaks of their spirit."<sup>172</sup> And: "All credibility, good conscience, and evidence of truth first come from the senses."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 1962.

<sup>171</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff, poems trans. Adrian del Caro (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>172</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 60.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

What Deleuze then did, in collaboration with Guattari, was develop the idea by asking, as Nietzsche might have: “How does desire work?” “What are its formulations, patterns, and consequences?” The construction used by Deleuze and Guattari for this investigation is the desiring-machine.

As indicated in the introduction, the goal of this dissertation is to offer a Nietzschean interpretation of Picabia. This entails not only tracing the literal lines of influence, but examining the overlap between philosophy and aesthetics, between patterns in Nietzschean thought and their articulations in Picabia’s practice as an artist. I turn to Deleuze and Guattari because their development of Nietzschean contentions as philosophers matches Picabia’s development of those same contentions in art. What follows is not, despite the apparent shift in philosophical source material, merely an excursus. It is rather a development of the points made in the first half of this chapter, and an attempt to flesh out more concretely the substance of Picabia’s practice.

As with the machine, desire did not suddenly erupt in Picabia’s practice in 1915. He first put forth in 1911 one of its key formulations, the ur-couple (it recurs throughout Picabia’s career), with the otherwise unremarkable Fauve-Symbolist, *Adam et Ève* [Fig. 67]. The majority of Picabia’s Orphic abstractions were based on the presupposition of desire, and contained sexual implications: the theme of the dance, for example, and especially the arousing dance of Napierkowska (her New York show was so titillating that it was forced to close); recollections of wrestling matches and the physical (rather than intellectual) apprehension of New York; the inclusion of loving male-female couples. But it was only in 1915, after the heyday of abstraction, that desire took legible center-stage, alongside the machine, in Picabia’s work.

The first-ever mechanomorph, *Fille née sans mère*, is gendered—that is, a woman, often sexualized, is linked to the machine—as are many subsequent works, including her “descendants”: *Portrait d’une jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité* [Fig. 14] the painted *Fille née sans mère* [Fig. 87], and *Jeune fille* [Fig. 23].<sup>174</sup> Many of the mechanomorphs, such as *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*, treat the interactions of amorous males and females in mechanical terms, building on *De Zayas! De Zayas!* which features a corseted tailor’s dummy at the upper left, attached by two threads (from hemline and breast) to the mechanical system. The phrase “*J’ai vu*,” taken from Julius Cesar’s *veni, vidi, vici*, appears at upper right. The seductive dummy, dressed for sex, is thus attached to a “conquering” male.<sup>175</sup>

*Voilà Elle* [Fig. 17], published alongside De Zayas’s *Femme*, pairs a phallic pistol in the foreground with a female target. *Prostitution universelle* [Fig. 88] attaches, by way of two wires, a drill-like “male” on a tall thin stand, to a somewhat insectoid female below, marked “*sexe féminin idéologique*” and herself carrying an envelope-like (womb?) “*sac de voyage*.”<sup>176</sup> The drawing *Les Îles Marquises* [Fig. 18] presents a related configuration, less severe stylistically but even more clearly “sexed,” with a spigot marked “penis” and, nearby, the waiting female (“*l’œuf female attend*”). Similar configurations can be found in many of the eighteen drawings of *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mere*, including, most obviously, *Machine des idées actuelles dans l’amour*, *Cantharides*, *Nécessaire* and *Egoïste*. Although less clearly divided into male and female

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<sup>174</sup> Note that the crucial and prescient *Mechanical Expression Seen through our Own Mechanical Expression* made the same equation of sexual woman with machine, pairing the dancer Stacia Napierkowska with a Crookes radiometer.

<sup>175</sup> In the *Larousse*: “Je suis venu, j’ai vu, j’ai vaincu.”

<sup>176</sup> See Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 106; Borrás, *Picabia*, 177.

sections, or machines, *Parade amoureuse* (1917), also treats the themes of sexual love and desire.

A good deal scholarly attention has already been given to this sexual aspect of the mechanomorphic style. Scholars have traced many possible sources, including Remy de Gourmont's (*Physique de l'amour*), who described intercourse as "mechanical and mathematical," as well as Marcel Duchamp, to whom Picabia's mechanomorphic style owes much.<sup>177</sup> The recurring conjunction of female sexuality and the mechanical has been seen as an image of a new, particularly American conjunction of modernity and sexuality, of physical overheating combined with a lack of individuality.<sup>178</sup> Because the machines portrayed by Picabia are often broken (the lamp in *Voilà Haviland*, for example, is unplugged; the bellows of the camera in *Ici, c'est ici Steiglitz* do not work) the mechanomorphs have been seen as sarcastic attacks on the traditional (or organic) ideal of love, emblems of a kind of morbid futility.<sup>179</sup> Special mention should be made of Caroline A. Jones's essay, "The Sex of the Machine: Mechanomorphic Art, New Women, and Francis Picabia's Neurasthenic Cure."<sup>180</sup> Jones brought together a number of discourses in cultural history, including the anxiety about so-called "new women" (active, urban, seeking to vote and to control her own financial and reproductive destiny)

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<sup>177</sup> See for example, Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 106; Pepe Karmel, "Francis Picabia, 1915: The Sex of a New Machine," in Sarah Greenough, ed., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Steiglitz and his New York Galleries* (Boston, Bulfinch, 2001), 216; and, Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 150.

<sup>178</sup> "For all her passion and energy, the viewer cannot make contact with [the *jeune fille*]; she is, after all, a mechanical object. The young American girl runs both hot and cold; she is flirtatious and fickle, irresistible but unattainable." Rozaitis, "The Joke at the Heart," 57.

<sup>179</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 106.

<sup>180</sup> Caroline Jones, "The Sex of the Machine: Mechanomorphic Art, New Women, and Francis Picabia's Neurasthenic Cure," in *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, eds. Caroline Jones and Peter Galison (London: Routledge, 1998), 145-180.

that had first manifested with intensity at the fin-de-siècle and the problem of neurasthenia (a condition characterized by fatigue, nervousness, and depression) for which Picabia sought treatment in New York and Switzerland. Such fears and desires manifested, in her estimation, in mechanomorphs like *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*, which she situates at the intersection of a complex weave of sexual identities:

Surely the spark plug is a phallic woman (which is to say a metaphoric hermaphrodite). Yet she is rendered quite explicitly unthreatening by her very “nudity” and controllability—by our recognition that she stands naked of the larger apparatus that controls her sparking, and by our knowledge that she is identical to the tens of thousands like her in combustion engines throughout the United States. Although spark plugs could be found in any combustion engine, perhaps their strongest association was (and is) with the automobile, itself personified increasingly among the French as “*L'Américaine*,” in an age when “Fordism” was perceived as one of the United States’s most powerful exports to Europe (and the inspiration behind the Taylorized dancing of the interchangeable “Tiller Girls”). The sparky American *fille* is “like an angel” in her stripped-down functionalism and clean lines; Picabia’s vision of the plug’s erotic potential is suggested by his statement that he chose the spark plug for his girl because she was a “kindler of flame.” Like the flirtatious light bulb that would appear two years later, this *jeune fille* presents the amalgamation of technology, America, and the new woman that saturated Picabia’s imagery at the time.<sup>181</sup>

Does the intertwining of desire and the machine have any more specific relation, though, to Picabia’s metaphysical principle, the overcoming of nihilism? More precisely: Is there anything to be made of the fact that desire emerged alongside, and in conjunction with, the machine in Picabia’s practice? Did one suggest the other? To answer to these questions, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari.

*Anti-Œdipe* develops Nietzsche’s contention about the primacy of desire, first by imagining desire as an ever-present eternal flow. This is an important initial contention:

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<sup>181</sup> Jones, “The Sex of the Machine,” 160.

The machine does not create energy, matter, nor desire, all of which are already always present as the essential fabric of the universe. Rather, the machine organizes, configures and divides them. This is described in a key passage from *Anti-Œdipe*:

In what respect are the desiring-machines really machines, in anything more than a metaphorical sense? A machine may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks. These breaks should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. Each machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow (*hyle*) that it cuts into. It functions like a ham-slicing machine, removing portions from the associative flow: the anus and the flow of shit it cuts off, for instance; the mouth that cuts off not only the flow of milk but also the flow of air and sound; the penis that interrupts not only the flow of urine but also the flow of sperm. Each associative flow must be seen as an ideal thing, an endless flux.<sup>182</sup>

From this initial thesis, or model, Deleuze and Guattari draw out a number of implications, many of which shed light on Picabia's mechanomorphs: One: *Desiring-machines connect to other desiring-machines*. Desire is whole and primal in itself; it is not, as in a Freudian model, predicated on a lack that requires satisfaction. Desire is always already present; it is in an eternal unstoppable flow. Milk, as an example, is one aspect of this flow. The subject, or desiring-machine, organizes such a flow by sectioning and dividing it. The best way to understand a subject, or individual, is by analyzing the particular local arrangement of desires that at this moment define her. Practically: to which desiring-machine is this one at present attached? The authors of *Anti-Œdipe* insist that desiring-machines are *always*, by definition, attached to other desiring-machines:

One machine is always coupled with another. The productive synthesis, the production of production, is inherently connective in nature: “and . . .” “and then . . .” This is because there is always a flow-producing machine, and another machine connected to it that interrupts or draws off part of this flow (the breast—the mouth). And because the first machine is in turn

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<sup>182</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 36.

connected to another whose flow it interrupts or partially drains off, the binary series is linear in every direction.<sup>183</sup>

It is not so much the subject that has desires (for this or that, which he or she lacks); rather, desire, which is pre-existing and all-creative, creates subjects (male, female, etc.) in the first place. “I” do not have desires: Desire “has” me. Subjects are places, formations where a certain arrangement of desires configures or manifests itself. The best way to understand a subject, or individual, is by analyzing the particular local arrangement of desires that at this moment define her.

This notion of constant attachment and re-attachment points to a key aspect of Picabia’s mechanomorphic universe: There are virtually no self-contained mechanomorphs. Every image is predicated on the attachment of a desiring-machine to another desiring-machine. There are many obvious cases, as in *Les Îles Marquises* and *Prostitution universelle*, that depict these complicated mechanical interactions and arrangements. More importantly, though, a general study of the mechanomorphs indicates that Picabia was simply unable, or uninterested, in presenting a single functioning machine. Instead, he only paints and draws the relationships, or attachments, of machines to machines. This is indicative of philosophical-aesthetic logic: there is no other explanation for it, and it is not true of Duchamp or Man Ray or Kafka, but *only* of Picabia.

In the many cases when the artist presents isolated or single machines—i.e. “individual” desiring-machines—what is, in fact, on offer are parts of larger assemblages, and machines that are clearly designed to interact with other machines. The spark plug of *Portrait d’une jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité*, for example, is part of an

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 5.

automobile (presumably); only when plugged into another machine does it (she) “spark.” One of Picabia’s favorite motifs from 1915 until about 1918 is the gear, as in *Le Fiancé* [Fig. 89] and *Vertu* and *Machine tournez vite* [Fig. 90]; again, this is not a self-sufficient machine but only a part of a greater mechanical assemblage. Picabia often goes out of his way to indicate that a machine or machine-part attaches to another machine. It becomes almost like a tick, once one notices it; it is as if the artist could not accept as valid an isolated machine. He shows the cord (i.e. attachment) of the lamp in *Voilà Haviland*, for example. Picabia added two parts from an automobile (a break lever and gearshift) to the camera of *Ici, c’est ici Steiglitz*. Instead of a single camera, or even a broken camera, there is a mechanical assemblage. Often the artist explicitly indicates tubes and wires as points of attachment. See, in this regard, the tubes at the upper right and left of *Paroxysme de la douleur* [Fig. 91] as well as those toward the bottom left in *Fille née sans mère* (the painting) [Fig. 87]. In the latter painting he extends the machine beyond the edge of the canvas, suggesting that it belongs to a much larger assemblage. The same strategy of extension to and beyond the edge of the canvas is evident as well in *Voilà la fille née sans mère*. In *Le Fiancé* [Fig. 89], he added an image of a single gear at the lower left and schematic indications of where it might attach to another gear or system of gears.

Another implication drawn from Deleuze and Guattari relates to the workings of the desiring-machines. Two: *Desiring-machines work by breaking*. Thus far, I have left to the side one of the better-known aspects of the mechanomorphs, and one that seems to invalidate this argument: many of Picabia’s mechanomorphs do *not* work. To return, again, to the 291 portraits: Stieglitz-the-camera is broken; Haviland-the-lamp (of poetry)

is unplugged. And often the mechanomorphs seem purposefully ridiculous: Instead of the smooth mechanical possibilities of the new-machine world, Picabia gives us overly elaborate and even silly contraptions, as in the electrical diagram wired to the corset in *De Zayas! De Zayas!*.

The concept of the desiring machine allows one to make sense of this—to see that there is, in fact, no contradiction. Rather, this notion explains—and it appears that Picabia intuited this—that desiring-machines *must* break in order to work. The Newtonian (or enlightenment) machine-universe works by working properly, even perfectly, and experiences breakdown as a catastrophe (just as truth works by being true, and experiences error or falsehoods as failure and absence). But in Picabia’s universe, which corresponds here to the one modeled in *Anti-Œdipe*, the flow of desire is primal and ever-present. Objects exist only in order to allow for the expression of desire, and the arrangement of this flow (and subjects are defined only as the loci and intersections of specific desires); fundamentally, desire only truly desires desire: it is tautological, like music (to which it is so often linked), self-justifying, circular and self-creating, like the universe. Nietzsche wrote: “In the end, we love our desires and not the thing desired.”<sup>184</sup> This insistence on the primary, productive nature of desire that produces everything—even its own absence and interruption—sounds throughout *Anti-Œdipe* like a refrain:

For the real truth of the matter—the glaring, sober truth that resides in delirium—is that there is no such thing as relatively independent spheres or circuits: production is immediately consumption and a recording process without any sort of mediation, and the recording process and consumption directly determine production, though they do so within the production process itself. Hence everything is production: *production of productions*, of actions and of passions; *productions of recording processes*, of distributions and of co-ordinates that serve as points of

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<sup>184</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 73.

reference; *productions of consumptions*, of sensual pleasure, of anxieties, and of pain. Everything is production.<sup>185</sup>

And since desire produces its own absence, consumption and interruption, it follows that desiring-machines work also *by* breaking—or rather that breakdown and failure are forms of primal production: “Desiring-machines only work when they break down, and by continually breaking down.”<sup>186</sup> The authors of *Anti-Œdipe* are again clearly following the example of Nietzsche, who was among the first to maintain that truth and error, like good and evil, are not opposites, but rather varieties of intensity and position, thus both productive operations, albeit of different kinds. Breaks and failures are themselves *produced*, just as error is part-and-parcel of truth: all are productive.

Consider *Voilà Haviland*. The lamp that presumably represents the poet, is unplugged; it does not work.<sup>187</sup> On the one hand, this is indicative of the specificity, discussed previously, of Picabia’s mode of portraiture. By showing that lamp unplugged, he is indicating that the portable lamp can be moved away from the wall. Camfield noted: “Even the selection of a portable lamp seems deliberate, for Haviland was preparing to leave for Europe and therefore about to become a mobile or ‘portable’ light.”<sup>188</sup> Of course, the lamp being unplugged can be interpreted as satire: Picabia joking at Haviland’s expense. Such a reading is based, though, on the idea that a working lamp produces light while an unplugged lamp, of course, does not: the plugged-in “good” machine versus the unplugged, functionless “bad” one. But this is not the structure of Picabia’s universe. In Picabia’s universe, *everything* is productive—to a greater and

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<sup>185</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 4.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>187</sup> Rozaitis, “The Joke at the Heart,” 55.

<sup>188</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 82-83.

lesser degree, yes, and of different effects, but nevertheless productive. One way to think about this is to consider darkness not as merely the absence of light but rather as its own entity, produced and substantive like light. Picabia, has, however, articulated the idea with greater exactness, and theoretical panache. Recall that the unplugged cord makes the shape of an ear: If the lamp were plugged in there would be no ear, and therefore nothing to hear, and no relationship between light and sound. The fact that the lamp cannot produce light is literally indicative of the power to hear; *everything* in the image is produced, and productive.

Consider *Voilà Elle*. It appears at first glance that the masculine pistol is aimed to hit the feminine target above. This is certainly a legitimate reading. Notice, however, that the pistol is not, unlike the pipes to the left and behind, shown in perspective: If reduced to a diagram, the phallic pistol will hit the target, but if considered as a picture with recessive space, which it must be, then it appears that the pistol will instead fire straight up and not back in space and therefore miss the target. There is reason to doubt the accuracy, which is to say, the effectiveness, of this phallic pistol. Since Picabia could have certainly placed the pistol in more correct perspective recession had he wished, this mismatch must be considered a significant facet of the picture's logic. In so doing, the artist emphasizes the arrangement of desire, rather than either its pleasing masculine satisfaction or, conversely (and as per Duchamp's bachelor machines / *Large Glass*, its permanent frustration. Emphasis is shifted away from the desires of a specific subject toward the underlying, interlocking arrangement of desire, which, to begin, forms, or arranges subjects.

A similar line of thought runs through Picabia's writings, especially in his Dada and post-Dada phases: frequently, he applauds failure and cowardice—not as a corrective nor polemical assault on law, order and tradition, but nonchalantly, as a given, and for their own sake. They, too, are productive, and produced by desire; they are not indications of absence or emptiness. For example, consider an aphorism from *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, the one-time illustrated supplement to *391*: “It’s really only nonentities who have genius in their lifetime.”<sup>189</sup> And, from *J.-C. Rastaquouère*: “All the painters who appear in our museums are failures at painting; the only people ever talked about are failures; the world is divided into two categories of people: failures and those unknown.”<sup>190</sup> And, again from *J.-C. Rastaquouère*: “The greatest pleasure is to cheat, cheat, cheat, always cheat. So cheat, but don’t hide it! Cheat to lose, never to win, because he who wins loses himself.”<sup>191</sup>

The third implication drawn from Deleuze and Guattari relates to logic. Three: *Picabia uses additive, rather than binary, logic*. The logic of the desiring-machines, according to *Anti-Œdipe*, is not either/or: it is not binary. Rather, it is additive, and productive of cumulative *differences*. Not: A versus B, but rather A *and* B (*and* C . . . and so on). This point, which will be examined again in Chapter IV, is, again, a Nietzschean derivation, as it was Nietzsche who so adamantly insisted that binary logic was not immutable but an error of limited perspective. For example:

The fundamental belief of metaphysicians [Nietzsche is opposed to them here] is the *belief in the opposition of values*. . . . But we can doubt, first, whether opposites even exist and, second, whether the popular valuations and value oppositions that have earned the metaphysicians seal of

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<sup>189</sup> Picabia, *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, illustrated supplement to *391*, no. 15 (10 July 1921): 7.

<sup>190</sup> Picabia, *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*, 34,

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

approval might not only be foreground appraisals. Perhaps they are merely provisional perspectives, perhaps they are not even viewed head-on; perhaps they are even viewed from below, like a frog-perspective, to borrow an expression that painters will recognize. Whatever value might be attributed to truth, truthfulness, and selflessness, it could be possible that appearance, the will to deception, and craven self-interest should be accorded a higher and more fundamental value for all life. It could even be possible that whatever gives value to those good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same. Perhaps!<sup>192</sup>

If the Nietzschean non-binary logic, clarified in *Anti-Œdipe* as an *additive* one (a process in which identities are always added, multiplied, and combined), does in fact apply to Picabia's mecahnomorphs, one could expect to find few rigid binaries in his mecahnomorphs (male/female; active/passive; penetrating/penetrated, etc.) but rather, a tendency toward additive, multiplying sexual identities such as "male *and* female," and "active and passive and male." And, despite the initial impression of sexual distinction, this is precisely what we *do* find in Picabia's mechanomorphs. As Jones has noted, Picabia's "sexed machines might be hermaphroditic, homoerotic, or functionally female—sometimes at different moments, sometimes all at once."<sup>193</sup> Consider Jones's description of *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*, mentioned above, which is at once obviously phallic and yet also a female nude: male and female, hard and soft. One finds an additional example at the origin of the mechanomorphic style with *Fille née sans mère*: The invocation of a motherless daughter presumes (or at least implies) a man who is capable, woman-like, of bearing life. In *Ici, c'est ici Steiglitz*, Stieglitz-the-camera is rendered impotent (the bellows are broken) and passive (the brake is on and the gear is in neutral), but at the same time (as comparison with the source

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<sup>192</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 6.

<sup>193</sup> Jones, "The Sex of the Machine," 146.

image of a Kodak vest-pocket camera indicates) the scissors-hinges supporting the lens plate have been doubled in length, suggesting phallic extension, or aggrandizement. Further examples of fluid and multiple sexual identities are found in the drawings (especially the titles) *Mâle* and *Hermaphrodisme* from *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mère* as well as the 1920 painting *Le Lierre unique eunuque*.<sup>194</sup>

Corroborating evidence of such multiple sexual identities is provided by Picabia the poet. In “Haricots d’Espagne,” probably written in 1918, Picabia imagines himself as the bride of the sun, whose penis is wrapped around his neck. In the later “Francis Merci!” (1923), he wrote: “We should get to know everyone, except ourselves; we shouldn’t even know what sex we belong to; I’ve stopped bothering to know whether I am male or female, nor do I hold men in higher esteem than women.”<sup>195</sup>

None of which denies the primarily heterosexual orientation of Picabia’s practice. My desire is not to downplay the many traditional gender codes and aspects of masculine prerogative that do obviously occur throughout the mechanomorphic phase. It is rather the opposite: A heterosexual man of Picabia’s type on numerous occasions arrived at formulations of sexual multiplicity and this is indicative of his commitment not to any program of sexual liberation or identity politics but the development of a theoretical logic to which he was committed; because this logic was predicated on the primacy of desire, it suggested an inevitable sexual polymorphism.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Borrás, *Picabia*, 220, and Jones, “Sex of the Machine,” 167-170.

<sup>195</sup> Picabia, “Francis Merci!,” *Littérature*, no. 8 (1 January 1923): 16, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 380.

<sup>196</sup> These are the *only* such sexual multiplications in the whole of Picabia’s career with the exception of some occasional androgyny in the *Transparencies*. But androgyny is an elegant attenuation of sexual identity, not a multiplication.

Did Picabia's commitment to the logics traced thus far in this chapter end in 1923, with the phasing out of the mecahnomorphic style? So it would at first seem. The machine disappears from Picabia's practice after the Dalmau exhibit in November 1922, and desire remains only as a theme, treated in various figurative styles.

There is another way to look at the end of the mechanomorphic style, though—or rather there is one very important way in which the logic of the desiring-machine inflected Picabia's subsequent practice. To see this, though, one need look not at individual works but at the breaks *between* the works, or the whole style: to consider Picabia's tendency to cut, or jump, from style to style, and force together seemingly unrelated styles and attitudes.

For all the rigor and verve of Picabia's practice from 1915-23, the artist was nevertheless only illustrating desire; he was making images, diagrams and maps of desiring-machines, without yet making actual desiring-machines. He had begun, however, as we have seen, to consider painting as a kind of machine, as a system of breaks, interruptions and orchestrations of an ever-present flow of energy. It is hardly a stretch to think of *Danse de saint guy* [Fig. 92] as a kind of machine, as Picabia himself insisted (he called it a machine for looking at sunsets).<sup>197</sup> But *Danse de saint guy*, although perhaps a painting-machine or image-machine, cannot really be called a desiring-machine.

What would it have meant to take the insight further, and instead of making illustrations or representations or maps or diagrams of desiring-machines, considering

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<sup>197</sup> Or so he wrote, perhaps mockingly, to Paul Signac, then president of the Société des Indépendants, with whom he was publicly feuding. Picabia, "À monsieur Paul Signac, président de la Société des Indépendants," *Comœdia* (23 January 1922): 3, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 112.

paintings themselves *to be* desiring-machines, and not merely images *of* desiring-machines? It is not a matter of images of desire (although these occur frequently in Picabia's practice) but a logic, or structure, of an aesthetic practice. The fundamental thesis that girds the idea of the desiring-machine is, to repeat, the primacy and endlessness of the flow of matter, energy and desire. These flows are not created by desiring-machines but are organized, dissected and interrupted. Organization, interruption and juxtaposition, in fact, constitute the salient actions of the desiring-machines. Consider again one of the key definitions in *Anti-Œdipe* of the desiring-machine:

In what respect are the desiring-machines really machines, in anything more than a metaphorical sense? A machine may be defined as a system of interruptions or breaks. These breaks should in no way be considered as a separation from reality; rather, they operate along lines that vary according to whatever aspect of them we are considering. Each machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow (*hylè*) that it cuts into. It functions like a ham-slicing machine, removing portions from the associative flow: the anus and the flow of shit it cuts off, for instance; the mouth that cuts off not only the flow of milk but also the flow of air and sound; the penis that interrupts not only the flow of urine but also the flow of sperm. Each associative flow must be seen as an ideal thing, an endless flux.<sup>198</sup>

Desire is always already there: an ideal flow, an endless flux. What the desiring-machine *does* do is organize desire by breaking or interrupting the flow. These breaks are therefore not mere absences but productive organizing principles. A passage on Proust from *Anti-Œdipe* gives some more concrete indications of how this process, which incorporates failure and interruption, works:

In the literary machine that Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* constitutes, we are struck by the fact that all the parts are produced as asymmetrical sections, paths that suddenly come to an end, hermetically sealed boxes,

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<sup>198</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 36.

noncommunicating vessels, watertight compartments, in which there are gaps even between things that are contiguous, gaps that are affirmations, pieces of a puzzle belonging not to any one puzzle but to many, pieces assembled by forcing them into a certain place where they may or may not belong, their unmatched edges violently bent out of shape, forcibly made to fit together, to interlock, with a number of pieces always left over.<sup>199</sup>

In the years before the First World War, Picabia had been almost a monomaniac, obsessed only with abstraction.<sup>200</sup> And yet, by 1923, at Dalmau, he was mixing abstraction and figuration in the most brazen, even absurd, ways. He did this in individual paintings (i.e. *Lampe*) and also by displaying, alongside the very modern and abstract mechanomorphic abstractions, a range of traditionally painted “Spanish” women, purposefully juxtaposing incompatible styles and emphasizing the productive nature of such unmatched edges and unexpected interruptions.

One finds, then, a parallel course of development, having to do not with what Picabia painted but with how he moved from painting to painting and style to style. Alongside his insight into the philosophical-pictorial logic of the mechanomorphic paintings, he learned as well to develop and apply that logic to himself: to become “mechanomorphic.” More precisely, he had realized that his whole practice (and not merely individual images) could be organized according to the logic of the desiring-machine: with cuts and breaks in the flow of primal energy-matter, meaning brazen, artful, aggressive jumps from style to style, and attitude to attitude. How to understand that flow (*hylè*) in the case of a painter? The answer for Picabia was *style*. Each of his many styles, or pictorial approaches, functioned as a pre-existing flow. The interruption of these flows, like Proust’s paths that suddenly come to an end, created (productive)

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<sup>199</sup> *Anti-Œdipe*, 43.

<sup>200</sup> Duchamp as cited in Cabanne, 43.

gaps, as per *Anti-Œdipe*. By 1923, Picabia made himself, that is, into a kind of desiring-machine, creating systems of breaks and juxtapositions in what he understood as various pre-existing flows of artistic energy and possibility. The interruption and juxtaposition of these stylistic flows had as much meaning and are in their own way as productive, as the works themselves (it is from which this mis-matching and interruption that the whole “postmodern” Picabia, discussed in the introduction, derives).

In pre-war Paris, Picabia had claimed to be concerned with the development and display of a single style: abstraction. In his exhibitions of 1912 through 1914, he only displayed his most recent, most “advanced” abstract paintings. It was only in January 1916 that the first mixture, or interruption, occurred at the Modern Gallery, where Orphic abstractions hung alongside mechanomorphic portrait drawings and paintings.<sup>201</sup> It is hard to say whether this was accidental or not. The show had been planned earlier by De Zayas, and Picabia’s style was changing rapidly. One would not want to make too much of it one way or another. In his next major exhibition, at Au Sans Pareil in April 1920, he, in fact, showed almost only mechanomorphs and related Dada works.<sup>202</sup> At the Galerie Povolozky in December 1920, however, and then again at the Galerie Dalpayrat in February 1921, he began exhibiting all together pre-Orphic works from his first, conventional, abandoned career along with Orphic works, mechanomorphs traditionally painted portraits and Spanish-style figurative works.<sup>203</sup> Then, at the Galeries Dalmau in Barcelona in November 1922, he combined his newest abstractions with Spanish figurative paintings [Fig. 29]: The effect is not of chaos nor distraction but a purposeful

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<sup>201</sup> Borrás, *Picabia*, 159.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 214, 215.

crossing of two otherwise un-related stylistic lines, or flows. And for the first time he makes statements indicating that he was absolutely conscious of this, as in, for instance, this passage from a 1923 interview: “I think there needs to be a variety for all tastes. There are those who don’t like machines: I offer them Spanish scenes. If they don’t like Spanish scenes, I’ll make them French ones.”<sup>204</sup>

This logic of stylistic combination and interruption characterizes the rest of Picabia’s career. These many jumps from style to style, as well as purposeful contradiction, interruption and juxtaposition, are not simply a celebration of multiplicity or a bland refusal of any sort of modernist orthodoxy (such orthodoxies never interested Picabia, and neither did their rejection) but were the result, or application of, the logic of desiring-machines. The desiring-machine did not disappear in 1923: Rather, they had been metabolized, or digested, by their creator, who no longer made images of desiring-machines, but instead built his practice in their image, and according to their logic of breaks and flows.

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<sup>204</sup> “Ce sont surtout des Espagnoles, me dit-il. Je trouve qu’il en faut pour tous les goûts. Il y a des gens qui n’aiment pas les machines: je leur propose des Espagnoles. S’ils n’aiment pas les Espagnoles, je leur ferai des Françaises.” Picabia, Interview with Roger Vitrac, *Journal de peuple*, 9 June 1923, as cited in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 223.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PRESENT

“Behold this gateway, dwarf!” I went on: “It has two aspects. Two paths come together here: no one has ever reached their end.

“This long lane behind us: it goes on for an eternity. And this long lane ahead of us: that is another eternity.

“They are in opposition to one another, these paths; they abut on one another: and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it: “Instant.”

—*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “Of the Vision and the Riddle”<sup>205</sup>

This chapter considers the notion of time in Picabia’s practice; specifically, his valorization of what will be called a “pure” present at the expense of the past and future. This temporal understanding is a major feature of Picabia’s aesthetic, and closely corresponds to Nietzsche’s thoughts on the subject.

For Picabia, in his maturity, only the present was real: Only at *this* instant is the world, or life and existence truly present, or available to be experienced. The past is a phantom; the future, a corresponding ghost-like mirror image of the past. Only the present is real. Holding onto something past, or working to restore it, was, in Picabia’s eyes, sheer idiocy, a basic misunderstanding of the essence of reality. Striving toward a future goal was equally pointless, as the future, by definition, never arrives.<sup>206</sup> Time, for Picabia, was not an arrow (the past advancing into the future) but rather a circle, or a series of circles, with everything revolving around and returning to the present. Or—and

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<sup>205</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One*, trans. and with an intro by R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1961), 178.

<sup>206</sup> See Gianni Vattimo, *Dialogue with Nietzsche*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 1-23.

this is the same configuration, or rather its perfection or realization—time is abolished entirely in favor of an eternal present, meaning an infinity of *presence*.

It took Picabia time, however, to realize all this. It took even more time for him to develop a set of techniques to correspond to his realization. Orphism had been based, conspicuously, on the artist's memories. Most of Picabia's works before 1915 recalled something or someone the artist had seen, or experienced. In some cases the act of recollection is fairly obvious: the dancer Napierkowska; a priest spying on the attractive practicing Napierkowska; a wrestling match; New York and so on. In other cases, the specific recollection is disputed. *Danses à la Source I*, for example, was said by Apollinaire to have been inspired by a trip to Naples. Buffet, however, claims that she and Picabia had never been to Naples and that the image was inspired by a shepherdess dancing by a stream that Picabia had seen during their 1909 honeymoon in Spain.<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, as Camfield correctly points out, "the discrepancy of these claims is less important than the fact that Picabia was working from his memory of events rather than from models."<sup>208</sup>

The artist also, on numerous occasions himself, stressed the importance of memory in his pre-war statements about abstraction. For example, in 1913:

*Udnie* is no more the portrait of a young girl than *Edtaonisl* is the image of a prelate, such as we commonly conceive them. They are memories of America, evocations from there which, subtly opposed like musical harmonies, become representative of an idea, of a nostalgia, of a fugitive impression.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 32, n. 36.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>209</sup> Picabia quoted in anon. interview, "Ne riez pas, c'est de la peinture et ça représente une jeune américaine," *Le Matin* (1 Dec 1913): 1.

It should be recalled as well that this basis in recollection was highlighted, or restated, in the title of the artist's last true Orphic painting, *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie*. The phrase has suggested various interpretations, but regardless of what it is that the artist claims to be remembering, the title foregrounds the importance of memory, and can therefore be seen as a kind of emblematic summation of Orphism, whose motifs were generated by recollection. The phrase "je revois en souvenir" could be added as a prefix to the given title or subject of virtually any of Picabia's pre-war abstractions.<sup>210</sup>

Analogously, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, which I have already argued corresponds structurally to Orphism, was based on an act of recollection: not various personal memories, as with Picabia, but a single act of *historical* recollection—the rebirth of the tragic spirit of pre-Classical Greek drama. Nietzsche almost immediately seized on this retrospective aspect of his first effort to overcome nihilism and sought correctives. The earliest evidence for this is the second of his four *Untimely Meditations*, "On The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," published two years after *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this text, Nietzsche, a philologist who had just argued, and in extravagant fashion, for a rebirth of a Greek tragic spirit, instead put forth the notion that historical awareness was not necessarily valuable but, on the contrary, paralyzing, for society and individuals both:

Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming: like a true pupil of Heraclitus, he would in the end hardly dare to raise his finger. Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. A man who wanted to feel historically

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<sup>210</sup> See Rothman, "Between Music and the Machine, 2, n. 15.

through and through would be like one forcibly deprived of sleep, or like an animal that had to live only by rumination and ever repeated rumination. Thus: it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates, but it is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting. Or, to express my theme even more simply: *there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture.*<sup>211</sup>

In the later *Genealogy*, Nietzsche extended his point and argued that memory is the product of cruelty: “Perhaps indeed there was nothing more fearful and uncanny in the whole prehistory of man than his *memnothechnics*: If something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in: only that which never ceases to *hurt* stays in the memory.”<sup>212</sup> He also at this later stage saw forgetfulness not merely as an absence of memory (i.e., something passive) but rather as an active creative capacity; a potent inventive *technique*:

Forgetting is no mere *vis inertiae* as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression. . . . To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness; a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness, to make room for new things, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for regulation, foresight, premeditation (for our organism is an oligarchy)—that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no pride, no *present*, without forgetfulness.<sup>213</sup>

Alongside these psychological and historical lines of investigation, there is also, in Nietzsche, a closely related metaphysical one, which takes the form of a rejection of

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<sup>211</sup> Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62.

<sup>212</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 61.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

linear time, as well as the (Hegelian) idea of historical progression or advancement. For Hegel, modernity was the culmination of history, and reason its flower; Nietzsche, leaning on Schopenhauer and the pre-Socratics, however, contested the idea that history advanced at all—let alone toward any sort of utopia, even a materialist one. There has been infinite time, he argued, or at least billions of years: if history was advancing toward something, how is it possible that it hasn't gotten there yet? The problem was put forth, like the critique of historical consciousness, almost immediately after *The Birth of Tragedy*, in the 1873 essay, "On Truth and Lies in the Extramoral Sense." Here is the famous, if withering, opening:

In some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of "world history"—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die.

One might invent such a fable and still not have illustrated sufficiently how wretched, how shadowy and flighty, how aimless and arbitrary, the human intellect appears in nature. There have been eternities when it did not exist; and when it is done for again, nothing will have happened.<sup>214</sup>

In *The Gay Science*, the first edition of which was published in 1882, Nietzsche moved beyond a mere critique—albeit devastating—of linear time and historical teleology to instead put forth a circular model of time, in which every instant repeats an infinite number of times. This he called the eternal return. The idea was introduced as a riddle, and exhortation. Here is the first introduction—the “discovery”—of the eternal return in the penultimate paragraph in Book Four of *The Gay Science*; the next, and

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<sup>214</sup> Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in the Extramoral Sense," in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), 79.

(originally) final, paragraph was then repeated at the start of Nietzsche's next book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*:

*The heaviest weight*—What if some day a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and in sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!” Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, “Do you want this again and innumerable times again?” would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight [burden]. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 194. The next passage, which originally concluded this book, is the first passage in *Zarathustra* (and Zarathustra is the teacher of the eternal return): “*Incipit tragoedia*.—When Zarathustra was thirty years old, he left his homeland and Lake Urmi and went into the mountains. There he enjoyed his spirit and solitude, and did not tire of that for ten years. But at last his heart changed—and one morning he arose with rosy dawn, stepped before the sun, and spoke to it thus: ‘You great heavenly body! What would your happiness be if you did not have those for whom you shine! For ten years you have climbed up to my cave; without me, my eagle, and my snake, you would become tired of your light and of this road; but we awaited you every morning, relieved you of your overabundance, and blessed you for it. Behold, I am sick of my wisdom, like a bee that has collected too much honey; I need outstretched hands; I would like to give away and distribute until the wise among humans once again enjoy their folly and the poor once again their riches. For that I must step into the depths, as you do in the evening when you go behind the sea and bring light even to the underworld, you over-rich heavenly body! Like you I must go under, as it is called by the human beings to whom I want to descend. So bless me then, you calm eye that can look without envy upon all-too-great happiness! Bless the cup that wants to overflow in order that the water may flow golden from it and everywhere carry the reflection of bliss! Behold, this cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again.’ This began Zarathustra’s going under.”

I will return in the final chapter to Nietzsche's idea of eternal return. For now, what needs be stressed as it relates to Picabia is mainly the shift from a linear model of time (an arrow) in favor of a circular one, in which the past and present are like rings—decorative, fantastical—turning around and away and then back into the permanence of the present.

Only a year after the end of Orphism, Picabia, like Nietzsche, began to shift away from memory toward the present—toward what might best be termed, after Nietzsche's Second Meditation, the valorization, without encumbrance, of *life*, meaning energy, in the present. For one thing, after 1914, Picabia no longer indicated that any of his works were based on recollection; instead of recalling an image or experience, he describes a situation, or the way something or someone functions, using mechanical imagery and metaphor. He no longer mentioned memory in any of his statements. Also, he began to include phrases in the mechanomorphic paintings that specifically refute the importance of memory. At the bottom of the large golden circle in *Révérance* [Fig. 82], for example, he wrote, "objet qui ne fait pas l'éloge du temps passé." (object that does not praise the past). By 1919, when temporality had become a major concern for the artist, he added more frequent verbal refutations of past and future to paintings. One image of interconnected concentric is called *Souvenir du rien* (memory of nothing), written near the top of the picture. The phrase, "*M'amenez-y*," used in the title of another 1919 painting [Fig. 84], is a pun on amnesia (amnésie); at the right of *L'enfant carburateur* [Fig. 19] is written, "détruire le future."<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism*, 189, n. 39.

Like Nietzsche, Picabia began, concurrently, to intuit a circular model of time. This manifested, firstly, and rather obviously, as a sudden profusion, beginning in 1915 and continuing until 1924, of drawn and painted circles. Note that there had been *no* circular compositions or motifs either in Orphism or in his pre-Orphic works.<sup>217</sup> But the majority of the mechanomorphs—and especially the paintings—are based on circular forms, circular compositions, and circular interactions of various kinds. Consider, for example, from only 1915, *Révérance*, a large circle frames an arrangement of five smaller circles and two parallel panels in perspective; the four large dark concentric circles and bright smaller (solar) central circle dominating *Cette chose est faite pour perpétuer mon souvenir* [Fig. 81]; the five circles of *Petite solitude au milieu des soleils* [Fig. 93]; the large interrupted and complete small circle of *Fantaisie* [Fig. 79]; the two gold-painted wooden half-cylinders in *Très rare tableau sur la terre* [Fig. 80]; and so on. Importantly, it is not only the circle as static two-dimensional compositional device that emerges in 1915: Picabia also emphasizes the turning of circles, and attempts to imagine movement *as* a circle. Consider the spiral of piping in *Paroxysme de la douleur* [Fig. 91], for example, or the three turning mechanisms, including a steering wheel, in *De Zayas! De Zayas!* as well as *Portrait de Marie Laurencin, Four in Hand*.

Virtually every subsequent mechanomorph, up to the Dalmau and Optophone paintings, are composed using circles. When Picabia depicts isolated machine-parts, they are often parts designed to turn: the propeller of *Âne* [Fig. 94]; the gear of *Le Fiancé* [Fig. 89] and *Vertu* (and the gears of *Machine tournez vite* [Fig. 90]); the roulette wheel on the cover of the fourth issue of *391*. One sees, again, that Picabia does not think of the circle

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<sup>217</sup> Except *Mechanical Expression*, which in so many ways, forecasted the direction of Picabia's practice.

primarily, or merely, as a static pictorial form, but as a literal turning in the world, or of the world, and that he stresses the way it works—that is, *turns*. This is corroborated by the evidence of Picabia’s writings, which likewise, evinces a pronounced interest in turning motifs. An example from *J.-C. Rastaquouère*: “Over there, to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west, the birds turn in circles to draw the sun in the wind.”<sup>218</sup>

Granted, all these circles, however preponderant, are hardly proof of the development of a temporal obsession: They are merely allegories of the shape of time, merely illustrative. What would it have meant not only to illustrate time’s circle, but to align oneself with it—to unburden oneself of the wasteful fantasies of past and future? As I argued in the previous chapter, and as I contend throughout this dissertation, Picabia was, despite his surface flamboyance, a rather practical—even desperately practical—artist, and sought to develop a concrete set of techniques based on his metaphysical insights and intuitions.

The key year in this process was 1919 with the shift from an illustrative mode to the development of a set of concrete techniques. A good indication of Picabia’s effort to apply, as practice, what he had already intuited, can be seen in *Réveil matin*, made in Zurich in 1919 [Fig. 95]. Picabia had come to Zurich to meet Tristan Tzara. According to Arp, they pulled apart an alarm clock together; Picabia then inked the gears and pressed them against the page, creating the diagrammatic pattern of dark circles.<sup>219</sup> The (somewhat) collaborative nature of the process, or perhaps more broadly, the excitement

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<sup>218</sup> Picabia, *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*, 60. Note the solar element in this image.

<sup>219</sup> Buffet as cited in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 203. Baker considers *Réveil matin* as indicating a shift from the early mechanomorphic phase to what he calls the “destroyed diagram.” Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 29. See also, David Joselit, “Dada’s Diagrams” in *The Dada Seminars*, eds. Leah Dickerman and Matthew S. Witkovsky (Washington, D.C.: The National Gallery of Art; New York: D.A.P., 2005), 221-39.

of the new friendship, is attested to by Tzara's decision to publish the work on the title page of his journal *Dada* [Fig. 96].<sup>220</sup>

An alarm clock is a machine for making sound. By dismantling it and pressing the inked gears to the paper, Picabia turns the sound-machine into an image. This is a rather concrete—and in this case, indexical—reiteration of the correlation between music and painting, or sound and sight. An alarm clock is also, however, a machine for marking time. Time, or a device for marking time, then, is turned into a circle. For the first time in Picabia's work, the circular motif and the temporal inclination are literally linked.<sup>221</sup>

Consider also the book of poems *Poésie ron-ron*, published in 1919 in Lausanne. The title, *Poésie ron-ron*, is a pun, as the pronunciation of “*ron*” in French is the same as “*rond*” (round). Picabia's dedication at the end of the volume is also intriguing: “This poetry has no beginning nor end; imagine that there's no cover and that it is bound with copper rings.”<sup>222</sup> As in the ink drawing *Réveil matin*, the circle is linked here to time, and more specifically, in this case, to infinity, which for Picabia meant the (eternal) present.

*Poésie ron-ron* is the first instance of Picabia's use of the word “Dada” (probably picked up from Tzara), suggesting that Picabia from the start associated Dada with the development of a set of temporal techniques. Temporality becomes a major element in Picabia's writings beginning in about 1919: first the emergence of temporal motifs in his poetry, (specifically the valorization of the present), and then the same points made in aphorisms and essays throughout and, especially, just after Paris Dada. The poem “Unique Eunuque” offers numerous temporal evocations, beginning with the opening line

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<sup>220</sup> *Dada*, nos. 4/5 (15 May 1919): title page.

<sup>221</sup> See also the 1919 painting *Horloge*.

<sup>222</sup> Picabia, *Poésie ron-ron* (Lausanne, 1919), as cited in Lowenthal, 146.

“Let us try the present time” as well as the typical “The future doesn’t exist although I’m doing better.”<sup>223</sup> From *Jésus-Christ rastaquouère*: “You’re happy? Imagine that there is no tomorrow, life is today and today doesn’t exist.”<sup>224</sup> And, from the poem “Colin-Maillard,” published in Breton’s *Littérature*: “The future is a monotonous instrument.”<sup>225</sup> At the same time, one finds Picabia imagining ever more poetic, ever more fantastical dreams of mechanical circles and turning machines. “I would like to find an engineer,” he wrote in 1921, “who would be able to realize my latest invention . . . [which] consists of circles around the Earth, circles that would remain fixed through a centripetal attraction; palaces would be built on these circles which would spin round and round.”<sup>226</sup> And: “Only men possessing a rotary movement within them can attract other men.”<sup>227</sup>

How, if at all, did this continue to develop pictorially? For one thing, his painting began to look *faster*—meaning that it was executed quicker or designed to give the effect of speedy, sketch-like execution. Until his return to Paris in 1919, Picabia’s visual work had been relatively meticulous and precisely executed, regardless of style. Whether the dazzling chromatic weave of *Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie* or the dry scrupulous detailing of the mechanomorphs, the emphasis had been on the presentation of the image, never the process. But some of the paintings from 1919 (there are very few, as Picabia worked mainly as a poet then), as, for instance, *Serpentins* [Fig. 20] exhibited at the Salon d’automne that year, demonstrate a much looser, much *faster* approach, with a sketchy painted line, loose patches of brushy silver paint against gold, and an obvious

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<sup>223</sup> Picabia, *Unique Eunuque*, (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1920), 19, 31.

<sup>224</sup> Picabia, *J.-C. Rastaquouère*, 56.

<sup>225</sup> Picabia, “Colin-Maillard,” in *Littérature*, nos. 11-12 (15 October 1923): 22.

<sup>226</sup> Picabia, “Fumigations,” *The Little Review* (Autumn 1921): 12-14, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 351.

<sup>227</sup> Picabia, “Pensées et souvenirs,” in *Littérature*, no. 4 (September 1922): 13.

lack of finish (the paint is not carried to the edge of the canvas). All this is in contrast to the relatively careful, uniform finish of previous mechanomorphs. Similar looseness and lack of finish characterizes the *M'amenez-y*, for example.

Due to an inevitable delay in perception, one always experiences the world at a slight delay; one is always falling, automatically, into the past. The only way to overcome this delay, and the terrible intrinsic elusiveness of the present—or even to *imagine* that one might overcome it, to experience the feeling or fantasy of its overcoming—is by way of speed; speed allows one to arrive in the present. The point was made by Mikhail Bakhtin apropos of Dostoyevsky: “Dynamics and speed . . . represent not only the triumph of time, but also the triumph over time, for speed is the single means for overcoming time in time.”<sup>228</sup> Picabia put it rather more colloquially:

I am a bad European the way I am a bad American, the way I am a bad painter, a bad writer, a bad husband, but . . . I drive automobiles very well! I would so like to paint the way I drive an automobile, 130 kilometers an hour without running over anyone—in Paris, of course.<sup>229</sup>

And in *391*, he wrote: “The only way to have a following is to run faster than the others.”<sup>230</sup>

Picabia had already evoked speed verbally in 1917 with *Machine tournez vite*. The quicker application of paint, the loosening of the careful composition and construction (meaning less planning; the structure is put in with one go), and the absence of careful details in paintings like *M'amenez-y* and *Serpentins* make this a pictorial technique. It was a literal effort on Picabia's part to bring his art and life into the present. Many of the best-known Dada paintings of 1921 explicitly develop this interest in speed.

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<sup>228</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 29.

<sup>229</sup> Picabia, “Fumigations,” 351.

<sup>230</sup> Picabia, “391,” *391*, no. 17 (June 1924): back cover.

Consider *L'Œil cacodylate* [Fig. 24], *La Veuve Joyeuse* [Fig. 97] *Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia* [Fig. 98], and *La Sainte Vierge* (I and II) [Fig. 99]. These celebrated paintings are, at first glance, all rather different in subject and technique. *L'Œil cacodylate*, exhibited along with *Les Yeux chauds* at the 1921 Salon d'automne, is a large-format work, over 4 feet high, covered with signatures, doodles and occasional photographs, all provided by Picabia's friends, who visited him as he recovered from an eye infection. The smaller *Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia*, essentially a signed signature, puts similar questions about authorship into play: Is the work of art essentially an authorial flourish, this piece seems to ask, an act of choosing and signing (or pointing to), rather than the end result of labor and craft? *La Veuve Joyeuse* was submitted to the 1922 Salon des Indépendants, but rejected. It is composed mainly of a photograph of Picabia at the wheel of one of his cars; below the photograph is a crude drawing by Picabia of the photograph. The photograph and drawing are each labeled by medium ("photographie" and "dessin"). At the top is the title in block letters and at the bottom, also in block letters, is the artist's name and the date. The ink stains of *La Sainte Vierge*, which have been compared to seminal splatters and the blood of a deflowered virgin, continue Picabia's ongoing exploration of desire and sexuality.<sup>231</sup>

*La Sainte Vierge*, *La Veuve Joyeuse*, *L'Œil cacodylate* and *Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia* propose a wide range of issues, including questions of authorship, multiplicity of sexual identities, the relationship of drawing and painting to photography, a dialogue with Duchamp, and more. And yet each of these paintings is also defined, or

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<sup>231</sup> See David Hopkins, *Dada's Boys* (Yale University Press, 2007), 15-41; and Elizabeth Legge, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Virgin: Francis Picabia's *La Sainte Vierge*." *Word & Image* 12, no. 2 (April-June 1996): 218-242.

more exactly, determined by speed. By about 1921, it appears that Picabia had developed the desire to speed up his process and in so doing brought it into the present. He therefore no longer planned his works, but instead executed them more hastily, eliding the time between conception and completion, and thus squeezing the experience of making art into the present. He proposed a new concept of painting: The picture was a space, or situation, in which time could be compressed and speed could be deployed.

*La Sainte Vierge* is paradigmatic, since its execution is about being as fast as possible; there is no setup, composition nor planning, only the instantaneous splatter. It is also, again, and like *Réveil matin*, more concrete, or tangible than the desiring-machines, which often pictured desire as a flow: here the picture is, literally, that flow, both bloody and seminal.<sup>232</sup> It should be noted, in this vein, that Picabia's use of signatures—his and his friends—is likewise related to the effort to increase the speed of execution, as the signature is, again, among the fastest of drawn gestures (and also repetitive, which will be discussed in the next chapter). And the appearance of the photograph in *La Veuve Joyeuse*—such photographic elements being exceedingly rare for Picabia—suddenly makes sense: photography is the fastest mode of image making. The image is formed the instant light strikes the plate, despite the longer process of getting that image to appear. Not coincidentally, Picabia chose a photograph of himself at the wheel of a car. Driving was for him a matter of speed, and a metaphor for (or model of) painting; the automobile being, simply, a machine for greatly increasing one's speed. Notice as well that the drawing is not badly drawn so much as it is drawn *quickly*, with inexact, shorthand indications for eye sockets, nostrils and fingers (he appears not even to have had time to

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<sup>232</sup> Compare to Duchamp's semen-stained painting, *Paysage fautif* (1946).

raise the brush at the bridge of the nose). Crucially, this is an *effect*: Picabia could have drawn with much greater precision had he wished. Either he had been working so fast the drawing turned out to be sloppy, or he drew in a way that emphasized, through imprecision, the importance of speed. Either way, the emphasis is on speed: drawing racing (like a fast car) against the instantaneousness of photography. Finally, note the double indications of joy, with Picabia's grin and the title: Speed is by definition celebratory; it leads to the present, which, as Picabia would make abundantly clear a few years later, is eternal.

In these paintings, which are determined procedurally by speed, there are no circles. The circle is a temporal model; speed, a technique. In many of the paintings of the same period that are not so hastily executed, the circle is usually retained as the dominant pictorial structure. An example is *Les Yeux chauds*, whose forms were derived from a diagram for the governor of an airplane turbine. And circles continue to appear frequently in most of Picabia's painting (that is, with the exception of the figurative "Spanish" pictures) until the end of 1924, and the culmination of the explicitly temporal phase of his practice.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Most of the Dalmau paintings are circular in some way. See, for example, *Décaveuse*, and the explicitly solar central orb (the circle as the sun) of *Magnéto anglaise*, or the interaction of three black-and-white circular units (the lowest of which combines seven varied rings with eight linked white orbs) above a ghost-like central column of six softly colored gouache spheres in *Sphinx*. *Astrolabe* is nothing *but* circles of various kinds. *Volucelle II* features eight colored circles, seven of which are marked—numbered—by smaller hollow black circles. Many of Picabia's post-Dada circles are concentric, meaning targets. For the poster or invitation for his Dalmau exhibit, the artist interspersed the letters of his name between the rings of concentric circles; at the center was the date. *Optophone I* and *II* played female nudes against striking concentric rings of light and dark. In *Lampe cristal*, a thin dark thread seems to float from out of the dark center of central circle, itself encircled by many concentric colored rings. One finds these motifs even transplanted into the Ingriste (or faux-Ingriste, or poster-like) figurative paintings of

The corollary of speed of execution is speed of transmission, or effect—and this is what characterizes Picabia's painting from 1922 until 1924—especially the *Optophone* and *Volucelle* groups, including *Chariot* and *Conversation*. These paintings all have an extraordinarily immediate visual impact, more so than any other paintings of Picabia's career. It is as if the artist wanted them to be perceived, or received, as quickly as possibly, even instantaneously, and not necessarily over a long period of time. He achieved this by the use of decisive optical contrasts: the concentric lights and darks, the alternating light and dark bands; also, he sometimes plays up the contrast of figurative or colored elements in the foreground against a vague or black-and-white background, creating a *coup d'oeil*: a striking increase in visual immediacy.

Compression in time expresses itself also as compression in space. One thinks of time as something that unfolds from past through present into the future; since space cannot be experienced instantaneously but only in (and over) time, this temporal unfolding creates space, or at least allows for its revelation: that the foreground, object, and background of the Albertian picture can therefore be imagined as a temporal structure. For Picabia, however, time did not develop in this fashion; it did not develop at all, as only the present was real. Because he wants his pictures to strike the viewer all at once and not to unfold either in time or space, Picabia's paintings increasingly have no *depth*, and often no *signifying* depth. Everything happens all at once and right now and *here*. *La Sainte Vierge*, which registers as an instant, an explosion, is again paradigmatic, as is *Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia*. There is rarely any background in Picabia's paintings from 1920-24; everything presses increasingly toward the surface, and figure-

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1922: In *La Nuit espagnole*, for example, red, pink, and yellow rings mark the female nude.

ground contrasts, although sometimes dramatic, are significantly compressed. The Dalmau paintings are much flatter, for example, than the Orphic abstractions, with their post-Cubist weave of interlocking facets. Picabia's flatness, or rather compression, should not, however, be confused with modernist or Greenbergian flatness. It has nothing at all to do with pictorial autonomy or medium self-sufficiency: Rather, it is the side effect, or outcome, however intuitive, of a temporal model and technique.

Related to the theme of speed are the tropes of mobility and protean, quicksilver transformation, which Picabia began to actively valorize, especially in his writings, starting in about 1920. "Our heads are round to allow our thoughts to change direction."<sup>234</sup> And: "It's a kind of bird, quote rare and hard to get to know, because it never settles anywhere; the female lays its eggs very high in the air and the babies are hatched before they've had time to reach the ground; they fly constantly, unaware of rest, and the flapping of their wings is like the beating of our hearts: to stop means dying."<sup>235</sup> One begins to find an occasional but strongly articulated nomad fantasy (with camels, and evocations of the desert), as well as an evocation of ocean voyages. In "Fumigations," published in *The Little Review*, he links the nomad fantasy (whose metonym is the camel) with the oceangoing one: "But we have to be content with the terrestrial outskirts and go camel racing in the desert. I must here restore the camel's good name: this animal has never given anyone seasickness—"<sup>236</sup> Consider, for example, the opening of *Jesus Christ Rastaquouère*: "I took a trip on the most beautiful ship ever

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<sup>234</sup> Picabia, *La Pomme de pins* (25 February 1922), in *I Am a Beautiful Monster*, trans. Marc Lowenthal, 283.

<sup>235</sup> *Jésus-Christ Rastaquouère*, 33.

<sup>236</sup> Picabia, "Fumigations," 350.

built; the strange thing was that the passengers and crew on this ocean liner were on horseback!”<sup>237</sup> The camel will return, as we will see, in *Entr’acte*.

*Dresseur d’animaux* [Fig. 36] introduces another temporal gambit: It is purposefully misdated. Although painted in 1923, it is clearly marked 5 Juillet 1937 at the lower left. This is perplexing until one realizes that linear time, and therefore cumulative, progressive calendar years, were according to Picabia, a fantasy. Time is rather circular; dates are therefore fictions, or masks, that one can try on and move around for one’s pleasure.

Alongside these developments, Picabia began to deploy what I call, after Nietzsche, “active forgetting.” This technique corresponds nearly exactly to Nietzsche’s writings on the topic. It is easiest to spot active forgetting first in Picabia’s writings. For example:

We seek only the pleasure of expressing ourselves, but we give the sketches we make, the words we string together, a symbolic meaning . . . which lasts only as long as the very moment we are utilizing it. What’s more, once the work is finished and this convention is gone from my mind, it is unintelligible to me, and it doesn’t even interest me anymore. It is of the past.”<sup>238</sup>

And: “Life has only one form: forgetting.”<sup>239</sup> “What I like is inventing, imagining, creating a new man out of myself at every moment, then forgetting him, forgetting everything. We should secrete a special eraser, rubbing out our works and any memory of them as we go along.”<sup>240</sup> “The future is a monotonous instrument.”<sup>241</sup> “Idiots think that

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<sup>237</sup> *Jesus Christ Rastaquouère*, 11.

<sup>238</sup> Picabia, “Déclaration de F.P.,” in Marcel Boulanger “Le dadaïsme n’est qu’une farce inconsistante,” *L’Action française* (14 February 1920): 2, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 65. See also chap VI of *Jésus-Christ Rastauouère*.

<sup>239</sup> Picabia, no title, *Cannibale*, no. 1 (25 April 1925): 17.

<sup>240</sup> “Picabia, “Francis Merci!,” *Littérature*, no. 8 (Paris, 1 Jan. 1923): 16.

memory is part of knowledge and life.”<sup>242</sup> And here is corroboration from Picabia’s lover Germain Everling: “He has no memories. He ‘forgets in order to be reborn.’”<sup>243</sup>

How did active forgetting inflect Picabia’s painting? For one thing, it contributes to his incredible stylistic diversity. Since he avoided attachment to his past, he was more available to respond at once to whatever it was that interested him at each particular moment. As he himself had insisted in *L’Action Française* in February 1920, he seemed to forget about a work as soon as he had finished with it.<sup>244</sup> He also became, as a consequence of his valorization of the present, completely unattached to the idea of a painting being a finished object. What mattered to him was the momentary pleasure or interest of painting it (or perhaps the pleasure the viewer received)—when this moment past, it was of almost no interest to him anymore. This is why, in a 1926 interview, when asked which of his own paintings he preferred, he insisted that he liked all of them, because each had given him the appearance *for an instant* that it was his favorite.<sup>245</sup>

Beginning in 1921, Picabia began painting over completed paintings—and not merely unsuccessful or unfinished ones.<sup>246</sup> The first painting to be thus “forgotten” was *Les Yeux Chaud*, which had caused a scandal at the 1921 Salon d’Automne. Picabia covered *Les Yeux Chaud* with the sarcastic *La Feuille de vigne* [Fig. 35]. This title refers, like some of Picabia’s literal (or what we called, in the last chapter, empirical, or

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<sup>241</sup> Picabia, “Colin-Maillard,” 22.

<sup>242</sup> Picabia, 391, no. 19 (October 1924): 3.

<sup>243</sup> Germaine Everling, “Francis Picabia vu d’en haut,” unpublished statement cited in Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 249.

<sup>244</sup> Picabia, “Déclaration de F.P.,” 65.

<sup>245</sup> Picabia, “Réponses à Georges Herbiet,” *La Volonté* (4 March 1926): 1, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 223.

<sup>246</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 189.

mechanical) titles from 1915, to how the painting works: it covers over, like a fig leaf, an unacceptable vulgarity.<sup>247</sup>

Picabia continued to paint over canvases at various stages in his career, often incorporating elements of the original into the newer work.<sup>248</sup> *Optophone II* [Fig. 31], originally from 1921-22 was repainted in 1924-26. As Carol Boulbès has noted, Picabia's overpainting focused on the hands and feet of the three original, swirling nudes. He repainted the 1924-25 portrait of Poincaré [Fig. 100] (the mathematician had collected Picabia's Impressionist paintings) at least twice, first adding collage combs and then, in a later revision, adding hands and the outline of a woman's face.<sup>249</sup> There are also numerous paintings on which he later added spots and, during the Occupation, flowers. See, for example, *Sans Titre (Fleurs sur figure de femme) (Figure et fleurs)* (1935/1943) [Fig. 101]. In all these cases, Picabia left much of the original intact: he did not, as with *Les Yeux chauds*, obliterate them, but instead *transformed* what had, after all, existed for him only at the moment of its creation—and was thus available for continued, potentially ceaseless re-transformation. Also *circa* 1946, Picabia added a skull, a group of floating phalluses, and similar hieroglyphs to the 1935 *Portrait d'un docteur*. Intriguingly, he left the original date (1935) showing, brushing off the idea of any time but the present. In many of his later paintings (after 1945), Picabia painted over earlier works. See as examples *Le Masque et le Miroir (Solitude du diable)* and *Le Rêve de Suzanne* (1949). In

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<sup>247</sup> Again, the painting tends to hit the viewer rather suddenly. It is, like the *Optophone* and *Volucelle* abstractions of 1922, boldly composed, in a graphic style, in only black silhouettes on white ground, with no middle tones or tonal transitions.

<sup>248</sup> See Gérard Audinet, "Picabia et la re-peinture," in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 92-96.

<sup>249</sup> Audinet points out the second revision could very well have been prompted by the death of Poincaré on 15 October 1935. *Ibid*, 93.

fact, the textured build-up of the late *Points* group indicates that these had probably been painted on top of previous works.<sup>250</sup>

Finally, mention must be made of what is perhaps the most consequential, but at the same time, easily missed temporal deduction (and technique) developed as of about 1919: *reversibility*. It is—again—easiest to first identify reversibility in Picabia’s writings, as a literary device. In *Unique Eunuque* for example, Picabia for the first time reversed some of the syntax, such that some of the sentences run backwards. For example, he wrote, “War the during why that’s / Possible as away far as stayed I”).<sup>251</sup> In “Slack Days,” published in *Orbes* in 1928, he writes: “Enemies can only become friends and vice versa.”<sup>252</sup> Also: “All Jews became Catholics and all Catholics Jews.”<sup>253</sup> And “death signifies life just as much as life signifies death.”<sup>254</sup>

Consider as well the already-cited comparison between painting and driving from *The Little Review*.<sup>255</sup> I quote the passage in full below. Notice that Picabia follows his self-assessment with its mirror image (the good European who is a bad driver), then offers a potential reversal of his own mirrored figures, followed by the image of a car driving forward and in reverse at the same time. Finally, he just speeds off:

I am a bad European the way I am a bad American, the way I am a bad painter, a bad writer, a bad husband, but . . . I drive automobiles very well!  
I would so like to paint the way I drive an automobile, 130 kilometers an

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<sup>250</sup> Poverty or feebleness offer other possibilities as to why he may have re-used canvases in his later years. Picabia’s financial situation was precarious in his last years. Personal communication with Beverly Calté, Paris, 15 October 2008.

<sup>251</sup> Picabia, *Unique Eunuque* 34. “Guerre la pendant que cela pour est’c / Possible loin plus le reste suis je. . .” See also, Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 104.

<sup>252</sup> Picabia, “Jours creux,” 411.

<sup>253</sup> Picabia, no title, *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, illustrated supplement to 391 no. 15 (10 July 1921): 4.

<sup>254</sup> *Jesus Christ Rastaquouère*, 64.

<sup>255</sup> Picabia, “Fumigations,” 351.

hour without running over anyone—in Paris, of course. Anyway, my friend the good European is a good writer, a good draughtsman, a good poet, but he doesn't know how to drive an automobile. Perhaps I don't either! It would be very amusing to drive an automobile in two directions, one forward, one backward, especially if the car were painted pink and black. Enough, this is getting old.

This technique of reversal requires some clarification because it is not at all the same chiasmus or pattern of exchange that was discussed in the first chapter. In the earlier case, a binary is established: One set of values is prioritized but then shown to have depended upon what it excluded, or denigrated. The deconstructive process destroys, or at least substantially debases, the prioritized set of values's claim to priority and authenticity, and renders the binary unusable. In this later (Dadaist) case, neither side is ever prioritized. And there is no subsequent deconstruction or loss of value. Thus the binary functions wholly differently. On one level, reversibility can be seen as a consequence of the earlier failure: Since all values, all truths, can be exchanged for their opposites, why not make a game, a dance, of that exchange? Why not make that process or reversal into a kind of value in itself—or at least grant it some energy and authority? Reversibility, though, developed in Picabia's practice at the same time, and alongside, the focus on temporality traced thus far. One suspects that it was deployed by Picabia so nonchalantly, and often jubilantly, in those years because it corresponded—and thus at the same time, verified—the structure of time, in which past and future were, likewise, reversible—both long, empty lines flowing from opposite sides into the present, which is eternal.

Picabia broke with Dada in May 1921. The reasons for this break, and the ensuing complications, are numerous. But, put very briefly, Picabia had always had—and for good reason—an ambivalent, if frequently intense, relationship with the younger,

somewhat adoring Breton, whose entire approach to art and life was contrary to Picabia. Breton was absolutely Hegelian in his thinking. He tended to construct relationships by way of negation and opposition, whereas Picabia felt that opposites (positive and negative, good and bad, right and wrong, and so forth) were only two sides of the same meaningless fantastical coin, and thus not to be taken seriously; rather, they should be exchanged, endlessly, and played with in order to affirm a grander whole. This structure will be analyzed in greater depth in the next chapter. At present, what I would like to focus on is the role Picabia's understanding of temporality played in his break with Dada.

Breton thought of Dada—and this is in keeping with his insistence on historical advance, the avant-garde arrow flying toward a more desirable future—as *preparatory*. In proper Hegelian fashion, he saw Dada as a period of fecund negation, which, because of its chaotic spirit and (ultimately undesirable) rambunctiousness, would clear a path for something more perfect to come—something that would incorporate Dada while at the same time transcend it. Even in the summer of 1920, after only the first Parisian Dada season, Breton was already considering the movement that he was leading from a rather cool distance, analyzing it as if from a far-off mountaintop for the literary establishment's *La Nouvelle Revue française*. As a good Hegelian, he already saw Dada as a seed that would someday blossom—but no more (or less) than the seed:

It is most of all our differences that bind [the Dadaists] together. Our common exception to the artistic or moral rule gives us only an ephemeral satisfaction. We are well aware that over and above this, an irrepressible personal imagination, more “dada” than the movement, will have free reign. J.-E. Blanche made this clear when he wrote: “Dada will survive only by ceasing to be.”<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> André Breton, “Pour Dada,” *La Nouvelle Revue française*, no. 83 (1 August 1920): 208-215, as cited in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951), 202.

Breton repeated this same sentiment in a lecture he gave in Barcelona in conjunction with Picabia's exhibition at the Galerie Dalmau; again, he posited Dada as a stage in an historical advancement:

To consider successively cubism, futurism, and Dada is to follow the flight of an idea which is now at a certain height and awaits only a new impulse to continue to describe the curve assigned to it.<sup>257</sup>

Picabia, however, in no way conceived of Dada as part of a progressive historical continuum: for him, all such teleologies were sheer idiocy. Dada was not, for Picabia, a preparation for something to come; rather, it was an attempt to seize the present, and *only* the present, more so than with any of his previous stages. In the statements Picabia gave to explain his break with Dada, he laments that the movement had lasted too long and that it had become overly occupied with plans for the future. Neither interested Picabia. In the opening of "M. Picabia se sépere des Dadas," published in *Comœdia* on 11 May 1921, he wrote:

You know as well as I do that our existence is brief in regards to the speculation one can draw from an invention; we've been on earth since the day before yesterday and we'll die tomorrow! Cubism was born one morning in order to die that same evening, and then Dada appeared, which turned out to be just as ephemeral; the evolution continues, some person will find the name of the new casket for an already departed spirit, and so on and so forth.<sup>258</sup>

Instead of making plans, Picabia dreamed of becoming mobile, nomadic:

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<sup>257</sup> André Breton, "Caractères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe," lecture at the Ateneo, Barcelona, 17 November 1922, on the occasion of Picabia's exhibition at the Galeries Dalmau, 18 November-8 December 1922. Cited in Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 177.

<sup>258</sup> Picabia, "M. Picabia se sépere des Dadas," *Comœdia* (11 May 1921): 2, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 80. Also: "You see, the more I live, the more I want to live; not live in the sense of duration, but in the sense of pleasure." Picabia, "Marahunana," *Comœdia* (21 Dec, 1921): 1, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 93.

You have to be a nomad, go through ideas the way you go through countries and cities, eat parakeets and hummingbirds, swallow living marmosets, suck the blood of giraffes, feed off the feet of panther! You have to sleep with seagulls, dance with a boa, make love with heliotropes, and wash your feet in vermilion!

You have to camouflage church interiors as transatlantic liners and transatlantic liners as cream puffs, make statues come out of the sea and recite verses at passing liners, go for a walk completely naked just to put on a tuxedo back home; you have to hear confessors' confessions, never again see the people you know, in short, never put the same woman in your bed, unless it's to have a mistress who cheats on you every day with a new lover!<sup>259</sup>

Despite Picabia's break with Dada in 1921, he remained intermittently allied with Breton until 1924, even to the point of supporting him and his ill-fated Congress of Paris ("International Congress for the Determination of the Directions and Defense of the Modern Spirit") against Tzara in 1922 when Breton had savaged Tzara in the tract, *La Pomme de pins* and made cover drawings and submitted poems to Breton's *Littérature*.<sup>260</sup> By May 1924, however, as Breton began to formalize what was to soon become Surrealism, Picabia broke finally and acrimoniously with him and his new movement.<sup>261</sup> He then concocted his own movement, called Instantanéisme, or Instantanism, as an antidote to Surrealism. Scholars have never taken Instantanéisme very seriously, though. Most assume that Picabia was being ridiculous or merely provocative, lashing out at Breton out of jealousy or spite and little else.<sup>262</sup> But Picabia had very good reasons, philosophically speaking, for rejecting Surrealism. Not accidentally, his riposte to the

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<sup>259</sup> Picabia, "M. Picabia se sépere des Dadas," 81.

<sup>260</sup> For the cover drawings for *Littérature*, see *Francis Picabia: Dessins pour Littérature*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie 1900-2000, 2007).

<sup>261</sup> See Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 205.

<sup>262</sup> See Baker, for example, who admits some seriousness but writes, nevertheless, that "the proclamation of the new movement of Instantanism was evidently parodic." *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 304.

new movement brought into focus the difference between the new movement and Picabia's own understanding of time (between Hegelian and Nietzschean temporalities).

The cover of the October 1924 issue of *391* (its final issue) presents the manifesto of Instantanéisme [Fig. 102].<sup>263</sup> It also re-defines *391* as the journal of Instantanéisme. On top of a photo of the pipe-smoking boxer Georges Carpentier (who looks like Marcel Duchamp) are numerous statements about Instantanéisme and its protagonist, the Instantantist. As most of these images and assertions (scorn of past and future; belief only in the present; importance of mobility, wings; etc.) should by now be familiar, I will not belabor the matter. Two points are however, in need of development: First, at the top of the page Picabia has written, as if as a title, “Dadaisme, Instantanéisme”—equating the two. It is well-known that Picabia—and not only Picabia—was, in the years after the breakup of Paris Dada, eager to assert his view of what the movement had been. Instantanéisme was clearly part of this fight for possession of Dada's corpse. What is particularly relevant, though, is that Picabia asserted his claim to Dada as an argument about temporality—suggesting, as I have been arguing, that Dada had in many ways been about this for him from the start.

Second, I want to consider the various “ethical” assertions, or deductions, in this manifesto:

- The Instantantist is an exceptional being  
cynical and indecent
- Instantanéisme believes only in life
- Instantanéisme does not want great men
- Instantanéisme wants liberty for all
- Instantanéisme is for those with something to say

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<sup>263</sup> *391*, no. 19 (October 1924): front cover.

These seem at first fairly random, if not purposefully contradictory (and therefore merely polemical). But they are all related, especially when considered as a group, to Nietzsche's arguments in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life."<sup>264</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Picabia had read this essay, or had considered it when devising Instantanéisme, but the correspondences are striking, and help to further clarify the movement. One notices, first off, Picabia's use here of the term "life," which is, again, the term that Nietzsche took up in the second *Untimely Meditation* (as indicated by its title): Life is that fundamental essence, or presence, that could never quite be controlled nor even described; it occurs, and can be experienced, only in the present. "Great men" are to be understood as monuments, as that which is ossified and automatically irrelevant (as Dada had become by 1921); to become great might allow for one to be understood, memorialized, or even celebrated, but this comes only at the cost of paralysis, the end of motion and transformation, which is death. This is why, as Picabia wrote, respectable audiences were only able to take Dada seriously after it had died.<sup>265</sup> But since anyone can attempt to forget the past and ignore the future—to live in and for the present—the Instantantist is eager and willing for anyone to join him.

The moment of Instantanéisme was that of the ballet *Relâche* and the film *Entr'acte*.<sup>266</sup> It is with these collaborations that Picabia's temporal model was given its

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<sup>264</sup> Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, 59-123.

<sup>265</sup> Picabia, "M. Picabia se sépere des Dadas," 81.

<sup>266</sup> *Relax* and *Intermission*; *Entr'acte* was screened at the intermission of *Relâche*. For discussions of the ballet and film, see Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 289-337; and Noël Carroll, "Entr'acte, Paris, and Dada" in *Interpreting the Moving Image*. (Cambridge University Press, 1998), chap. 2; Christopher Townsend, "The Art I Love Is the Art of Cowards: Francis Picabia and René Clair's Entr'acte and the Politics of Death and

most sustained and exact demonstration. Picabia himself insisted that both were Instantantist. But since scholars have not taken the movement seriously, they have not followed the artist's lead in this case, and approached *Relâche* and *Entr'acte* from numerous angles, except the one specified by their creator.

*Relâche* was set to open on 27 November 1924 after two other works by the Ballet Suédois, *La Création du monde* and *Skating Rink*. The principal dancer and choreographer, Jean Börlin, fell ill, however, and the ballet opened on 4 December. Picabia promoted the ballet with articles in *Comœdia* and *Le Siècle*, as well as an interview with the wealthy Swedish art collector and creator of the Rolf de Maré, the creator of the Ballet Suédois<sup>267</sup> The article in *Comœdia* was called “Instantanéisme,” and in it one finds a systematic recapitulation of virtually all the techniques we have thus far described.<sup>268</sup> The text opens, for example, with a dancing reversal:

Bankers are artists and artists are bankers; grocers are writers, writers are grocers; the cinema is theater, the theater is cinema; doctors are patients, patients are doctors.

Shortly thereafter he issues a call to active forgetting:

In my opinion, we have to forget what was done yesterday, our behinds can contemplate the respectable past on their own!”<sup>269</sup>

In the next paragraph Picabia describes the cinema as an airplane “looping the loop”—or turning, like so many of his mechanomorphs, in a circle.<sup>270</sup> In the *Le Siècle* article there is

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Remembrance in France after World War One.” *Science as Culture* 18, no. 3 (September 2009): 281-96.

<sup>267</sup> Picabia, “Instantanéisme,” *Comœdia* (21 November 1924): 4, as cited in *Picabia: Écrits*, 203-205; Picabia, “Pourquoi j’ai écrit *Relâche*,” *Le Siècle* (27 November 1924): 4, as cited in *Picabia: Écrits*, 533-536; and “À propos de *Relâche* ballet instantanéiste,” interview with Rolf de Maré, *Comœdia* (27 November 1924): 4, as cited in *Picabia: Écrits*, 536-537.

<sup>268</sup> Picabia, “Instantanéisme,” 203.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

a typically Picabian combination of sensual pleasure, and intensity or *life*, with the present: “[*Relâche*] is perpetual movement, life, it is the minute of happiness we all seek; it is light, richness, luxury, love far from prudish conventions.”<sup>271</sup> The same points are repeated in the ballet’s program:

*Relâche* is life, life as I love it; life without tomorrow, the life of today, everything for today, nothing for yesterday, nothing for tomorrow. . . . *Relâche* is the happiness of instants without reflection; why reflect, why have a convention of beauty or joy? . . . *Relâche* advises you to be livers, for life will always be longer in the school of pleasure than in the school of morality, in the school of art, in the religious school, in the school of worldly conventions.<sup>272</sup>

Also, and importantly, Picabia had written the scenario for the ballet as fast as possible and in public, at a meal with friends—making a show, that is, of the importance of speed.<sup>273</sup>

The ballet is structured as a circle; a great process of reversal, within which Picabia orchestrated all sorts of smaller circles and reversals of all kinds. His stage design consisted of 370 metal disks, each lit with a light at the center [Fig. 38]. These were turned on and off throughout the performance. As Baker has noted, a process of reversal is at work, as Picabia lit the audience instead of the stage.<sup>274</sup> After the intermission, signs were suspended from these disks, and mirrors further blinded the audience. The costumes [Fig. 37] were all based on circles; some sketches show black costumes with white dots, others white with black dots. Again circles; again simple visual inversions.

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>271</sup> Picabia, “Pourquoi j’ai écrit *Relâche*,” 534.

<sup>272</sup> Picabia, “Programme de *Relâche*,” *La Danse* (November 1924), in *Picabia: Écrits*, 541-42.

<sup>273</sup> See Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 443, n. 32.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 295.

The ballet began with an inversion of roles and positions: Edith Bonsdorff, the principle female dancer, walked onto the stage from the audience. Second reversal: as the orchestra played, she sat on stage and smoked a cigarette, and only danced when the music stopped. Jean Börlin, the principal male dancer, then rolled himself onstage in a wheelchair. More circles; more reversals of roles—the best dancer cannot use his legs. Still more circles: The suddenly ambulatory Börlin joined Bonsdorff in the “Dance of Revolving Doors,” which Picabia had said should take place as a literal turning around a revolving door placed onstage. Nine male dancers who had until this point been seated in the audience then joined Bonsdorff on stage; while they danced together; a fireman stood at the side of the stage, chain-smoking (as Baker notes, another reversal of function) and pouring water back and forth between two buckets.

The second act reversed the first. The male dancers were the first onstage. Picabia had wanted Bonsdorff to be raised to the rafters at the end of act one and lowered from them at this point in act two; since this proved technically unfeasible she was carried in instead on a stretcher. Whereas in the first act, Bonsdorff had stripped down to her tights, in the second, she entered wearing *only* tights, and proceeded to get dressed, even as the male dancers stripped down to their tights, and then danced in a circle around her. Another wheeled device was introduced: the male dancers returned to their seats in the audience and Bonsdorff collected their discarded clothing in a wheelbarrow; and then returned to her seat. The performance concluded when, after the descent of the curtain, another ballerina danced and mimed the words to a song called “La queue du chien.”<sup>275</sup> Finally, in yet another reversal of roles, instead of flowers being given to the female lead

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<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 443, n. 39.

at the end of the ballet, a female dancer walked into the audience and placed a wreath of orange blossoms (another circle) on Picabia's friend in the audience, the singer Marthe Chenal.

In the intermission, at the center of the circle (cf. *M'amenez-y*) the point around which everything turns, or crosses over, the film *Entr'acte* (*Intermission*) was screened within the great wheel of *Relâche* are the many smaller circles and reversals of *Entr'acte*, which is itself structured as a circle, tuning around the turning sun. Like the ballet, the film is divided in two. Virtually every shot in the first half is either of a circular object, a reversal of a previous shot, or the capture of a circular, turning motion. The film begins with a cannon (a cylinder atop two circles) wheeling itself onto a Parisian rooftop, where after moving forward and then reversing a few times, it turns twice in a circle, before coming to rest with its circular barrel facing the audience, forming a concentric circle with the circular frame of the shot (like the *Optophone* paintings). Satie and Picabia jump—literally, but in slow motion—into the scene [Fig. 103].<sup>276</sup> They load the cannon and then the jump away, in a reverse of the earlier shot.

The cannon is fired. Another catalog of circles and reversals follows. There is a reversal of heaven and earth with a variety of upside-down shots of Parisian rooftops [Fig. 104]. Then blow-up dolls whose heads inflate and deflate; a ballerina turning in a circle, seen from below; traffic turning in a slow circle around Place de la Concorde; lights in and out of focus, so that the small circles diminish and grow. A match is superimposed over a head of hair; it turns in a circle before multiplying into dozens of matches. Famously, Man Ray and Duchamp play chess on a rooftop. Traffic again circles

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<sup>276</sup> Note that they do not appear to know what to do, or how to use the cannon.

Place de la Concorde. The ballerina returns: after being shot only from below [Fig. 105], leaping and pirouetting, her sex reverses briefly, as she is revealed (from above) as a bearded male [Fig. 106]. Then an upside-down shot of eyes, then a face, and the introduction of Börlin, who takes aim at an egg balanced aloft on a jet of water. As Mimi White has noted, Börlin is introduced in the reverse of cinematic convention: first the shot of the egg, then a close up of the gun, then a shot of the person holding the gun, and finally the establishing shot (which should normally have come first).<sup>277</sup> Then a reversal of life and death: instead of destroying the egg, Börlin's shot produces a bird, which then perches on his hat. Finally, the hunter becomes the hunted: Picabia appears on the rooftop; a ring of concentric circles appears on Börlin, who is shot and killed by the artist. Then a circular shot of the sun against a black sky, shrinking down to nothing: at the exact center of all the concentric circles of *Relâche* and *Entr'acte* there is the sun.

The first half of *Entr'acte* ended with the sun shrinking and darkness filling the screen; the second began as the white disk of the sun expands, covering the screen in brightness. The reversal began: Instead of life leading to death, death is turned around and made into (eternal) life. Mourners gather for Börlin's funeral procession. A camel pulls his hearse: Picabia had an affinity, as a writer, for camels, as they represent nomadism, and the perpetual movement of the Instantanist.<sup>278</sup> They are a rare exotic element in his practice.

The mourners jump, like Picabia and Satie at the start of the film, in slow-motion behind the hearse as it begins to move. Unlike the earlier slow-motion, however, which

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<sup>277</sup> Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 315.

<sup>278</sup> Picabia, "Fumigations," 350.

lasted for only an instant, here it is drawn out for two minutes, conveying an overall sense of terrible sluggishness, linked obviously to death, and mourning.

The camel-drawn hearse turns round a replica of the Eiffel Tower. Then the carriage breaks loose and everything begins to accelerate. The mourners run faster [Fig. 107] to keep up with the speeding runaway hearse (now shot from behind, so that the circle of the wreath is prominent). They are joined by all manner of Parisians: cyclers, a legless man, airplanes and *bateaux mouches*. The camera moves faster and faster, eventually careening up and down (and, in another reversal of heaven and earth, upside down) on the tracks of a roller coaster. By the end there is on screen an almost incoherent blur, legible only as speed—speeding, as it were, into the present, whose relationship to *life* is about to be made very clear indeed.

The coffin falls into a field. It is surrounded with mourners. Börlin, alive and well, pops up from the coffin. The reborn smiling Börlin is equipped now with a magic wand which he waves at each of the mourners, as each winks out of existence. He then points it at himself and disappears. The word “Fin” appears in black against a white background, but immediately a tear appears and Börlin rips through the page, revealing Parisian rooftops behind him. He falls to the floor and is kicked in the head. The film is then literally reversed, and Börlin flies backwards into the “Fin” which reappears as the page/screen repairs itself.

Speed has led to resurrection. The film began with slow-motion, as did the funeral in the second half. The entire process leading to rebirth was a process also of speeding up, using the possibilities of the new medium of film, beginning with slowness, which is less-than-life, and speeding in the second half into the present. One can hardly ask for a

more literal demonstration of the idea that the present, in which life is *lived*, is alone real, and at the same time everlasting.

*Entr'acte*, then, is a circle placed at the center of the likewise circular *Relâche*. Circles abound on every level, as they had for Picabia since 1915. At the center of this great circle is the sun. Also—or rather on another level—the principle experience of *Relâche*, one imagines, or at least the most sensually overwhelming one, would have been the light pouring from the 370 metal disks, each of which functions as a little “sun.” *Relâche* is by no means the first time Picabia posited the circle as the sun: He had done so in *Lampe*, for example. He had always been a fairly “solar” painter, even before Orphism. Light, and therefore solar metaphors, had always been dominant in Picabia’s paintings; he used color mainly to generate light, unlike Matisse, Monet or Signac, who, with their awareness of complementary relationships and color temperature (neither play much role in any phase of Picabia’s work), created light mainly through the organization of color. The ballet does, however, offer a rather more developed, more explicit version of this solar tendency, with its central solar circle (of life) and radiating rings of solar metaphors and mechanics. Just after the premiere of *Relâche*, Picabia quit Paris for Mougins. He explained this move by saying, “I had need of the sun.”<sup>279</sup>

But the sun is not only a circle, nor only a source of light. It is also a model of repetition, rising and crossing the sky each day. In the great solar circles of *Relâche* and *Entr'acte* are intimations of the eternal return.

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<sup>279</sup> Picabia, “Réponses à Georges Herbiet,” 223. See also the solar invocation at the close of “Marahunana,” 93.

CHAPTER IV  
AFFIRMATION

“I separated from Dada because I believe in happiness . . .”<sup>280</sup>

The fundamental goal of Picabia’s practice was affirmation: to find a way of saying yes to the world as it was, of accepting and delighting in it.<sup>281</sup> To say this is to depart, fundamentally, from scholarly convention. As discussed in the Introduction, Picabia is esteemed, above all, as an *anti*-artist, an oppositional figure whose value has been measured—as if dialectically—by the intensity and ferocity with which he contested existing values, or said no. This oppositional character in various ways underlies the competing and contradictory images of Picabia. It also forms the foundation of virtually every salient art-historical argument that has been made about him.

This chapter makes the case that Picabia was a fundamentally affirmative artist; a yes-sayer and above all a seeker after pleasure and delight. I will first try to give a summary indication of the tenor of Picabia’s practice, and his lifestyle, making use of broad patterns and some key statements. I will then offer a close reading of certain pictures from the *Monster* and *Transparencies* phases in the middle and later 1920s. The point will be developed by way of a contrast with the oppositional (and Hegelian) logic of Max Ernst’s 1933 collage novel *Une Semaine de Bonté*. I will then seek to clarify the fault lines in Picabia’s affirmative practice, drawing upon the relevant passages and

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<sup>280</sup> Picabia, “Francis Picabia et Dada,” in *Picabia: Écrits*, 338.

<sup>281</sup> See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 521: “At the same time I grasped that my instinct went into the opposite direction from Schopenhauer’s: toward a *justification of life*, even at its most terrible, ambiguous, and mendacious.”

related theoretical fault lines in Nietzsche's writings. The goal will be to clarify the role of negation, critique, and dissent in a fundamentally affirmative practice (whether in philosophy or art). Finally, as a coda, I will interpret the notorious nudes painted by Picabia during the Nazi occupation of France in light of the issues examined throughout the chapter.

There are passages in Picabia's writings that indicate his tendency to be a yes-sayer, such as the following aphorism from the October 1922 edition of *Littérature*, clearly adapted from a passage in *The Gay Science* (discussed later in this chapter): "For a man to stop being interesting, it is enough not to look at him."<sup>282</sup> Or consider this key and already-cited moment in *J.-C. Rastaquouère*:

Don't work, don't love, don't read, think of me; I have found the new laughter that grants you freedom. Live for your pleasure. There is nothing to understand, nothing, nothing, nothing but the value that you yourself will give to everything.<sup>283</sup>

In Picabia's case, most important is the overall character of his practice; it is in his art, above all, that one looks to see whatever it was he considered as his affirmative efforts or orientations.

For the most part, Picabia painted only what he liked and what interested him. Even his Orphic abstractions, as we have seen, referred to sensual recollections of Spain and New York; often, desirable women and sexual intercourse. And as in art, so in life: Picabia came from a wealthy and well-connected family and lived lavishly and indulgently, before and after the First World War, pursuing his pleasures however it suited him, from mistresses, to opium, expensive cars [Fig. 108] and yachts. He appeared

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<sup>282</sup> Picabia, "Untitled," *Littérature*, no. 5 (1 October 1922): 10.

<sup>283</sup> Picabia, *J.-C. Rastaquouère*, 18.

in a car onstage at the curtain of *Relâche* wearing a fur coat and covered in jewels. Picabia's friends, even during the heyday of Dada, always included important members of Parisian society (the world into which he had been born). He resided in lavish and ornately decorated homes in Paris and in 1925 had built a sprawling Mediterranean villa, called the Château de Mai, in Mougins. He amused himself in the early 1930s by organizing lavish galas at the casinos in Cannes.<sup>284</sup> When in 1928 he was accused of being a rich, spoiled playboy, he answered in the article, "Jours creux," published in *Orbes*: "They say: 'He does nothing, he lives the high life!' Well, all the better!"<sup>285</sup> This is but one of many such comments. In another article, entitled, "Marahunana," he made the same point: "You see, the more I live, the more I want to live; not in the sense of duration, but in the sense of pleasure."<sup>286</sup>

The prioritization of pleasure on Picabia's part recalls Nietzsche's dismissal in *The Genealogy of Morals* of the Kantian notion of disinterested aesthetic appreciation in favor of Stendhal's equation of art with the potential for happiness:

Kant thought he was honoring art when among the predicates of beauty he emphasized and gave prominence to those that establish the honor of knowledge: impersonality and universality. This is not the place to inquire whether this was essentially a mistake; all I wish to underline is that Kant, like all philosophers, instead of envisaging the aesthetic problem from the point of view of the artist (the creator), considered art and the beautiful purely from that of the "spectator," and unconsciously introduced the "spectator" into the concept of the "beautiful". . . . "That is beautiful," said Kant, "which gives us pleasure without interest." Without interest! Compare with this definition one framed by a genuine "spectator"

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<sup>284</sup> These are discussed by Sarah Cochran in "Roi d'un jour, fou pour toujours: les fêtes cannibales de Francis Picabia," in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 84-87. For a list of the themed galas organized, thrown, and designed by Picabia, see *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 310-14.

<sup>285</sup> Picabia, "Jours creux," 411.

<sup>286</sup> Picabia, "Marahunana," 93.

and artist, Stendhal, who once called the beautiful: *une promesse de bonheur* [a promise of happiness]. At any rate he *rejected* and repudiated the one point about the aesthetic condition which Kant had stressed: *le désintéressement*. Who is right, Kant or Stendhal?<sup>287</sup>

Even at the height of his Parisian Dada (or rather just after his split with the movement), Picabia was perceived not as a critical or revolutionary but as indulgent and spoiled, as per Paul Signac, who as the president of the Société des Artistes Indépendants, authorized the rejection of Picabia's three entries to the 1922 Salon des Indépendants (*La Veuve joyeuse*, *Chapeau de paille?*, and *Danse de Saint-Guy*): "Isn't it something scandalous to see more than 300 francs of canvas wasted like that, when so many artists have unheard of difficulties to live?"<sup>288</sup>

Picabia opposed convention (and morality) because it bored him, but he opposed them in the service of his own pleasure and self-interest, never in the name of a broader social or political goal. There is no reason to believe that he worked for anything other than his own amusement. If egotistical pursuit of self-expression entailed offending people, so be it—but Picabia never named any goal beyond his pleasure in the present. And he had a horror of any sort of political motivation:

Poor carton-mâché revolutionaries, if you absolutely must overthrow something, overthrow yourselves and go to sleep with life!

She couldn't care less about Republics and those poor in spirit who want to serve Society. Society, especially good society—what a fraud!<sup>289</sup>

His political comments, what few there are, tended, likewise, toward amusement; he dismissed the political realm as tedious, but on occasion admitted that the only thing

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<sup>287</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, 103-104.

<sup>288</sup> Interview with Paul Signac, "Pourquoi M. Signac a refusé 2 toiles à M. Picabia," *Comœdia* (21 January 1922): 2.

<sup>289</sup> Picabia "Jours creux," 410.

that he gravitated toward was whatever seemed most aesthetic, energetic or amusing. He made this explicit in his so-called “Profession of Faith:”

Everything can be, or not be, a joke, isn't that so. Things only have the value one gives them. All the same, we shouldn't confuse force and fashion; force rises up, fashion stays small and petty, petty like Communism, therefore idiocy. Mussolini may be a dangerous madman, he may be disturbing, but he will always be more sympathetic to me than the effigy of a Lenin, sculpted in such a manner that men divide it up among themselves like the little lumps of sugar one gives to dogs!

I fabricated a soul for myself so that it would resemble no other, and in this way I avoid the distressing impression that I get from mass meetings, which they hold on holidays, for another ambition—also in the cellars where rats make their nests. . . . Poor revolutionaries, made in a series, they carry their advertising-labels like a flag; their kennels are too narrow for my wolf's soul.<sup>290</sup>

The point—to summarize—is that Picabia was rarely *opposed* to anything; and when he was, it was because it was getting in the way, however momentarily, of his own pleasure and satisfaction; combat, critique or opposition are never named as goals in and of themselves.

To see this more clearly, one turns to Picabia's paintings. I have already said that for the most part he painted only that which attracted and delighted him: especially poetic themes of love and desire. Speaking from a structural standpoint, it needs also be noted that there is no logic of opposition in his works (regardless of iconography); there are no structures in which opposites are paired, the one negating the other. Figures or elements are not opposed in Picabia paintings but are instead conjoined or juxtaposed such that their many specific *differences* are stressed, never their oppositions.

The point is best made by way of a comparison with a practice that *was* based on opposition (more broadly: a Hegelian practice). I will take as my example Max Ernst's

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<sup>290</sup> Picabia, “Une profession de foi de Picabia: Lumières froide,” *Le Journal des hibernants* (January 1927): 20-21, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 229-230.

1933 collage novel, *Une Semaine de Bonté*. *Une Semaine de Bonté*, which is structured first, by the great Hegelian insight that truth or identity is always and only a relationship (there are virtually no single figures in any of the almost 200 collages);<sup>291</sup> and then, second by the notion that relation means *negation*, and that *only* negation—that is, the opposition of A to not A creates the truth, which must be considered whole.

Virtually every collage in *Une Semaine de Bonté* therefore shows the interaction of multiple figures, beings, or creatures that are always predicated on opposition. In this world, identity exists only by way of negation; for someone or something to *be*, it must be opposed to someone or something else. Take, for example, the oft-reproduced *Oedipe 25* [Fig. 109]. Here are two creatures, clearly in conflict. The active figure is, of course, male. He is clothed and armed. His victim, a woman, is nude, and unarmed. He is vertical; she horizontal, and falling. His fist, to our right, is clenched; her palm open. She is turned away from us, and therefore blind (she cannot see us); her oppressor is, literally, eagle-eyed.

*Oedipe 25* presents a rather obvious case. And there are many such cases throughout *Une Semaine de Bonté*: collages in which the oppositions are obvious, and often commensurate with tradition (the domination of women by men, for example). But the structure need not be so literal, or so simple. Simple structures of opposition are complicated and multiplied throughout the collage novel, often unfolding on multiple levels and in various keys. Often there are also what might be called *intersecting* patterns of oppositions as well as re-iterations in format and scale, as in *L'eau 22* [Fig. 110]. In this example, a standing, conscious woman is opposed to a prostrate, unconscious one.

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<sup>291</sup> Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté ou les sept éléments capitaux* (Paris: Jeanne Bucher, 1933).

This pair is doubled by, or contrasted to, two floating heads in the foreground (one male, one female). Moreover, the play of opposition is often also formal, or spatial. Ernst often puts figures behind windows and in doorways, thus opposing interior to exterior (*L'eau* 22, *Oedipe* 16, *Coeur* 9, *L'Ile de Pâques* 2, etc.). He also composes along a vertical axis in order to mobilize distinctions of above/below (*Coeur* 44) and rising/falling. Sometimes he employs a staircase for this; occasionally he will instead set one of his figures to flight (*Oedipe* 15), or have another tossed from a height (*Oedipe* 14, *Lion* 6).

In *L'eau* 6 [Fig. 111] there are the familiar binaries male/female, active/passive, high/low, but the situation has been complicated by additional figures; the “male” element above is itself doubled, and another conflict is taking place, almost imperceptibly, in the foreground: a figure with a pistol has apparently shot a man, who falls into the water below the helpless, “hanged,” woman. In *Oedipe* 18, the dyad (bird-)man/woman is rhymed by the two doors in the background, and again rhymed by the room numbers on these doors; not by accident, each number is made of two figures, and is repeated twice on each door, like a little fugue played on the theme of binary logic.

Notice also how much stress is laid in *Une Semaine de Bonté* upon authority, dominance and subjugation (i.e., the power to negate the other, instead of the power, which Picabia sought, to affirm the self). One only becomes oneself in *Une Semaine* by mastering or being mastered by the other. Thus there is ubiquitous violence: A lion-headed man threatens a small, floating, almost-nude woman with an ax (*Lion* 3 [Fig. 112]); A standing man with a cat-head canes a prostrate woman with bared breasts (*Lion* 29 [Fig. 113]); A large man with the head of an Easter Island statue grabs a woman and covers her mouth (*L'Ile* 8); Two women fire pistols at each other in a dark forest, already

strewn with corpses (*Le Rire du Coq* 13); A man wrestles with two skeletons (*Rire* 9); A bird-headed gentleman finishes his opponent with a shot to the head (*Oedipe* 4).

Even in the absence of violence proper, there are all the marks of hierarchy and domination. A woman worships an orb (*L'eau* 27) amidst all the trussed and bound (usually female) figures.

By contrast, in his practice, Picabia seeks the affirmation of self, and those things agreeable to the self, rarely the domination or negation of the other such as in his statement: “One must be elevated by the love one bears in oneself, which is nothing other than the desire to love; to maintain it, one must believe in one’s own force.”<sup>292</sup> Violence and domination, which Ernst develops in so scrupulous and implacable a manner, are almost wholly absent from Picabia’s world—except in a few cases from 1920 through 1924, which we will, as we have said, temporarily leave to the side.

Compare Picabia’s *Mardi Gras* (*Le baiser*) [Fig. 43] to Ernst’s *Oedipe* 25. In both cases, there is a conjunction of male and female figures, and an effort at imaginative transformation. I have shown already that *Oedipe* 25 is structured rather rigorously based on negation. It unfolds a series of oppositions, in which each element finds its negative, or opposite. The emphasis and effect in *Mardi Gras* is entirely different. One cannot spot any developed oppositions in this painting (active/passive nor any other). If anything, such oppositions—even the obvious, expected ones, are elided, or dissolved into an energetic whole, a canvas-wide efflorescence. The male figure is slightly taller than the female. But is he more active? More dominant? Or vice versa? Both have the same monstrous (Picasso-like) eyes. Both have reached and wrapped around the other with

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<sup>292</sup> Picabia, “Picabia contre Dada ou le retour à la raison,” *Comœdia* (14 March 1927): 1, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 232.

their arms. They are painted with equal intensity and coloristic vigor. It is the woman's nose that protrudes in a slightly more pointed, more phallic fashion—but this hardly registers as an inversion, since there is so little hierarchy to invert. He, too, has a phallic, reddish nose. The effect overall is of many local differences, welded into an explosive energetic whole by the vigorous paint handling and the profusion of multicolored dots and flowers that seem to consume this couple and their world at the moment of their kiss.

Consider the extraordinarily energetic *Les Tropiques* [Fig. 42]. Again, there is an amorous couple; again, there are virtually no oppositions to speak of—neither iconographic nor formal. The effect is one of overall merging and melding: The figures blur together and into the background. The background palm trees and red-roofed, white houses, as well as the tree at the top of the image, surge toward the picture plane (this is reinforced by the red of the roofs), eliding the opposition between figure and ground. Picabia's logic is not "either/or," not "A versus not A"—rather it is *additive*. It wants always to *multiply* possibilities and configurations. Consider, in this vein, the multiplication of sense organs of both male and female in *Les Tropiques*. The woman, at the left, turned so that her face (or faces) is pressed to the picture plane. She has six eyes that glance both left and right; five nostrils piled vertically above three sets of paired horizontal nostrils; and two very rouged mouths. The man, in profile at the right, has one large eye (without lashes) and six much smaller eyes strung out like beads just above his nose, which is a Pinocchio-like pointed triangle. Like his lover, he has two very red sets of lips. Both have wild red, brown and ochre haircuts, and green jaw-lines. The garish—not-quite-forest—green runs from her turned cheek to his chin and jaw and up to his ear—uniting, instead of opposing, these lovers.

Where is there any possible opposition? In what sense, that is, can these figures, or any of the pictorial formulas that Picabia has deployed, be seen as negating each other? Three pairs of two eyes looking in two directions are in no way the opposite of one large eye and six smaller eyes. These are much better described simply as different configurations; specific arrangements and local manifestations of difference, which are, at the same time, welded by means of the expressive paint, the elision of deep space, and overall coloristic rhythm, into an energetic whole. *Difference* functions as a positive, creative force; a viewer notes all the relationships between male and female without being able to reduce or split them into identical opposites. Difference flows as a creative and endlessly re-creating energy between and through these figures, creating a world. The pictorial logic is indicative, or wedded to, a philosophical one—just as it is in Ernst's case.

Whereas the *Monsters* and couples of around 1925 are vulgar, explosive and bright, the subsequent *Transparencies* are languid and poetic, suffused with art-historical ghosts and gentle flickers of classical nostalgia. Despite these major stylistic differences, however, the aesthetic logic is the comparable: instead of defining identity by way of opposition, Picabia instead accumulates local, specific, impermanent differences, which stand in varied and often enigmatic relationship to each other. From a technical standpoint, the *Transparencies* are, in all likelihood, derived from Picabia's habit of painting over existing canvases. He probably noticed the potential for intriguing effects and so turned what had at first been a procedural incident or even accident into a full-blown style. Picabia would not, however, have developed this technique had it not matched, or suited, his fundamental metaphysical need. Simply because their many

images *are* transparent, the *Transparencies* are almost automatically incapable of posing oppositions. Spatial oppositions are obviously impossible, as all the elements quite literally show through each other. More generally, any potentially opposed identities overlap and merge, by virtue of being transparent.

Consider *Atrata* [Fig. 114] as an example. The effect is, again, additive: To the large central face at the top, looking up and to the left, is added a smaller face. Many hands are throughout the picture; palms and fingers make many different configurations by joining and touching each other in different ways and places. To all this are added grapes, a bird, goat and traces of other figures and animals. Nothing in this painting can be seen as opposed to anything else—not the two pairs of eyes near the top, not the bird and grapes below, nor the many hands in between.

The specifically additive aspect of Picabia's logic—"and . . . and . . . and . . ." instead of "either/or"—can be seen in some of the watercolor *Transparencies*, especially those that clearly began as single Spanish female figures, to which Picabia added all sorts of sometimes humorous, sometimes brassy, sometimes dream-like, delights. There is always a logic of multiplication—and it is sensual—at work.<sup>293</sup> In *Jeune fille au paradis* [Fig. 115], for example, the artist began with the fashionable woman at the center. He added, to her left, another short-haired Spanish women, this one borrowed, in all likelihood, from a Spanish Romanesque fresco. He added a second Romanesque woman

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<sup>293</sup> The same additive tendency is indicated in the way Picabia accumulated objects in his homes. Consider Camfield's description of the Château de Mai: "Large windows introduced the light of the south into ample interior rooms, cluttered, as was Picabia's custom, with a melange of silver, ceramics and model sailing ships, with collections of art, mounted butterflies, and French and Spanish furniture of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Both the château and its contents grew apace; every day Picabia appeared with a new object for the house or exotic plants for the gardens." *Francis Picabia*, 215. See also, Germaine Everling, *L'Anneau de Saturne*, 162-163.

at lower left, and a flower to the right. The multiplication of figures then blooms into a profusion of multiplying decorative motifs, including colored dots and repetitive, stylized vegetable motifs, that fill up the space, again eliding distinct individual identities. It is as if the idea of a single figure suggested, as if inevitably, the possibility of symbolic addition, a developing chain of varied symbols and signs.<sup>294</sup>

The logic I have sought thus far to clarify is in no way limited to the paintings of the second half of the 1920s. Rather, it characterizes most of what Picabia painted from beginning to end. It is operative throughout the mechanomorphic phase, as was indicated in the second chapter: A painting like *Machine tournez vite* [Fig. 90] pairs male and female, typically, but again, instead of opposition it is their interaction that is stressed, their similarity of shape and difference in scale. They are, like his amorous couples from the 1920s, neither identical nor opposite but are different members of the same sexual-mechanical species. Also note that there is very little violence, even metaphorical, in Picabia's practice—again, in distinct contrast to Ernst and Surrealism more generally.

The argument can be rephrased at this point in terms of the history of philosophy. Picabia, whose aesthetic was Nietzschean was, like Nietzsche, anti-Hegelian. His practice steers away, at all costs, from Hegelianism, meaning dialectics, or what Deleuze, in his book on Nietzsche, called sham oppositions:

The Hegelian dialectic is indeed a reflection on difference, but it inverts its image. For the affirmation of difference as such it substitutes the negation of that which differs; for the affirmation of self it substitutes the negation of the other, and for the affirmation of affirmation it substitutes the famous negation of the negation.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> The same logic is at work even (especially) in the many cases when Picabia offers single figures. See, for instance, the 1926 painting *Les Seins*.

<sup>295</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 196.

It should be noted as well that Hegelian thought is also absolutely teleological, and advances by way of opposition toward self-realization. From this standpoint, too, Picabia would have been opposed to its logic (as was Nietzsche).

If Picabia's philosophical and aesthetic logic tended, in accordance with his writings and lifestyle, and, as I have argued, toward affirmation in and of the present, how, then, are the moments of explicit opposition and negation in his practice to be understood? There *are* critical, "negative" elements in Picabia's practice—both verbal and pictorial. These are often personal attacks on specific, named targets. There are numerous aphorisms published by Picabia mocking other artists and figures in the art world, and then attacks on former Dadaists as well as caricatures of the Surrealists. The polemics began in 1919. In *391* of February 1919, Picabia recorded the following aphorism: I loathe/Cézanne's painting/it bores me."<sup>296</sup> But this is only a first indication of what would explode upon his return to Paris in March of that year, into a recurring polemical practice. One of the first objects of his attack was the Parisian art world, especially the critics and those who clung, in Picabia's eyes, to convention and tradition. In the next issue of *391*, he continued:

Journalists you are ill-fated owls  
Your filth accumulates  
Into ambitious scum  
On the breasts of big cities  
Swamps of men tombs  
And brothel exhibitions  
Virginity has no taste  
That's why you all have it.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Picabia, *391*, no. 8 (February 1919): 1.

<sup>297</sup> Picabia, "Tombeaux et bordels," *391*, no. 9 (November 1919): 4.

And quickly the attacks became personal. After André Gide critiqued Dada in the April 1920 issue of *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Picabia published the following aphorism in Paul Dermée's short-lived journal *Z*: "If you read André Gide aloud for ten minutes, your breath will stink."<sup>298</sup>

He took to attacking viewers of modern art as well, dismissing them as fools who were addicted to convention. He inscribed such a barb on the sandwich-board worn by Breton at the Dada soirée held at the Maison de l'Œuvre Theater on 27 March 1920.

IN ORDER TO LOVE  
SOMETHING YOU HAVE TO  
HAVE SEEN AND HEARD IT  
FOR A LONG TIME YOU BUNCH OF IDIOTS<sup>299</sup>

While wearing Picabia's target, Breton read aloud Picabia's "Manifeste cannibale Dada," (later published in *Dadaphone*), which expressed similar sentiments, leading to an assault on virtually everything conventionally esteemed:

DADA smells like nothing, it is nothing, nothing, nothing.  
It is like your hopes: nothing  
like your paradises: nothing  
like your idols: nothing  
like your politicians: nothing  
like your heroes: nothing  
like your artists: nothing  
like your religions: nothing

Hiss, yell, smash my face in, and then, and then? I will tell you again that you are all suckers. In three months my friends and I will be selling you our paintings for several francs.<sup>300</sup>

Although the polemics were mainly verbal, there are occasional visual examples as well, such as the well-known *Tableau Dada* (also known as *Natures Mortes*) [Fig.

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<sup>298</sup> Picabia, no title, *Z*, no. 2 (March 1920): 7.

<sup>299</sup> "POUR QUE VOUS AMIEZ / QUELQUE CHOSE IL FAUT / QUE VOUS L'AYEZ VU ET ENTENDU / DEPUIS LONGTEMPS TAS D'IDIOTS" ???

<sup>300</sup> Picabia, "Manifeste cannibale Dada," *Dadaphone*, no. 7 (March 1920): 3.

116]. The painting consisted of a stuffed monkey, with tail in hand, attached to a canvas, around which the which the names of Cézanne, Renoir, and Rembrandt and the phrase “natures mortes” (still lifes) was written.<sup>301</sup> The painting was paraded onstage at the Dada soirée held at the Maison de l’Œuvre soirée. It is a clear mockery of good taste and tradition. George Baker, who has analyzed this picture in detail, draws attention to the scatological element in the painting:

[The audience] would have seen the tail—indeed, this aspect of *Natures Mortes* cannot be missed, though I know of hardly a commentator who has since bothered to mention it. Perhaps some things are too obvious to be seen. Picabia’s monkey pulls its tail through its leg, grasping its generous length and ridiculously proffering it straight toward the viewer. And since this story of an artwork and its tail is a French story, such an action has a certain valence, attaining the status of a—typically Dadaist—visual pun. For the word in French for tail is queue. But la queue is also one of the many French slang terms for penis.<sup>302</sup>

It needs to be noted, though, that virtually all these “negative” works and writings all come from a single period of his career, namely Dada and just after (1920-1924). And this period can be even split: late 1919 until early 1921, when, as a Dadaist, Picabia experimented with negation; and, after his split with Dada, an attempt to distance himself from those same negative aspects of Dada—an effort which, paradoxically, entailed a good deal of polemical anger and negation. Apart from Dada and the immediate aftermath, there is virtually no indication of criticality or contestation on Picabia’s part, only varied attempts to forge exciting new visual languages and techniques.

As a Dadaist, Picabia quite obviously availed himself of negation. More exactly: It was at this point in his career—and only at this point—that Picabia availed himself of

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<sup>301</sup> The painting is lost and known now only through its illustration in *Cannibale*, no. 1 (April 1927).

<sup>302</sup> Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 102.

the “yes” and at the same time the “no,” and experimented with the full power of negation. This practice is analogous to Nietzsche’s efforts to define a proper role for negation in an affirmative practice. Nietzsche was explicit about the goal of affirmation. Since the world cannot be improved (or even fathomed), it must be accepted, and somehow made into an object of assent, or even exultation.

Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the other side of this—to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection—it wants the eternal circulation:—the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*.<sup>303</sup>

Often in his writings, though, Nietzsche claims not to have done away with negation, but rather to have clarified its proper relationship to affirmation.

It is my good fortune that after two millennia of error and confusion I have rediscovered the way that leads to a Yes and a No.  
I teach the No to all that makes weak—that exhausts.  
I teach the Yes to all that strengthens, that stores up strength, that justifies the feeling of strength.<sup>304</sup>

Such passages are indicative of a *selective* model: a choice as to what is to be affirmed rather than all-encompassing affirmation. But there are varieties even within the selective model. Oftentimes, Nietzsche assigns, as in the passage just cited, an assertive, vigorous role for negation—negation as a vital, indispensable portion of affirmation, a

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<sup>303</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 536. Similarly, Deleuze wrote: “Nietzsche does not do away with the concept of being. He proposes a new conception of being. Affirmation is being. Being is not the object of affirmation. . . . Affirmation is not the power of being, on the contrary. Affirmation itself is being, being is solely affirmation in all its power. . . .” Deleuze, *Nietzsche & Philosophy*, 186.

<sup>304</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 33.

method or selection. Consider as well the following: “negating *and destroying* are conditions of saying ‘Yes.’”<sup>305</sup>

And yet one also finds, on occasion, the idea that negation should remain purely passive, as it is not a creative force. This is suggested in *The Gay Science*:

*For the new year.* I’m still alive; I still think: I must still be alive because I still have to think. *Sum, ergo cogito: cogito, ergo sum.* Today everyone allows himself to express his dearest wish and thoughts: so I, too, want to say what I wish from myself today and what thought first crossed my heart—what thought shall be the reason, warrant, and sweetness of the rest of my life! I want to learn more and more how to see what is necessary in things as what is beautiful in them—thus I will be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati:* let that be my love from now on! I do not want to wage war against ugliness. I do not want to accuse; I do not want to accuse even the accusers. Let *looking away* be my only negation! And, all in all and on the whole: some day I want only to be a Yes-sayer!<sup>306</sup>

In practice, then, there are at least two models of the role of negation: the idea that one need not affirm everything, but that one only turns or looks away from whatever it is that is not worth affirming; and alternatively, the frequent insistence that negation, even although secondary, is a key aspect of any true affirmation. These might be called the weak and strong selective models.

As a Dadaist, Picabia deployed something analogous to Nietzsche’s “strong” selective model, in which negation played a potent, if preparatory, role. To clarify this practice, I want to consider Picabia’s polemics in light of one of Nietzsche’s more illuminating descriptions, from *Ecce Homo*, of his practice of negation:

My practice of war can be summed up in four propositions. First: I only attack causes that are victories; I may even wait until they become victorious.

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<sup>305</sup> Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, 328.

<sup>306</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 157.

Second: I only attack causes against which I would not find allies, so that I always stand alone—so that I compromise myself alone—I have never taken a step publicly that did not compromise me: that is *my* criterion of doing right.

Third: I never attack persons; I merely avail myself of the person as of a strong magnifying glass that allows one to make visible a general but creeping and elusive calamity. Thus I attacked David Strauss—more precisely, the success of a senile book with the “cultured” people in Germany: I caught this culture in the act.

Thus I attacked Wagner—more precisely, the falseness, the half-couth instincts of our “culture” which mistakes the subtle for the rich, and the late for the great.

Fourth: I only attack things when every personal quarrel is excluded, when any background of bad experiences is lacking. On the contrary, attack is in my case proof of good will, sometimes even of gratitude.<sup>307</sup>

The first proposition is obvious: if something has no power, energy nor efficacy, it is obviously not worth negating nor diminishing; it poses no problem, it has no power to stand in the way of, or diminish, *life*.

The second proposition describes Picabia’s behavior, or practice, aptly, as he himself was the most frequent object of his polemical practice. So was Dada, when he considered himself to be a Dadaist. Picabia’s attacks were meant to get rid of false values—and for Picabia, all values, by definition, were false—including, ultimately, his own. He did not belittle others in order to aggrandize himself but instead attacked all falsehood, knowing that there was nothing, essentially, *but* falsehood. This is why he so frequently referred to himself as a failure: not out of poor self-esteem (that was not his problem, to say the least) but because success was a matter of convention, and convention was, *as* convention, illusory. Likewise, knowledge was mere fiction: Since truth could not be known, the only true position, paradoxically, was to know nothing. Thus, the artist declared himself to be Francis Picabia, “who knows nothing, nothing, nothing,

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<sup>307</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 232.

nothing.”<sup>308</sup> And: “I know nothing and understand nothing.”<sup>309</sup> Therefore Picabia made it a sort of principle, even a point of public pride, to mercilessly mock himself. Consider his aphorism in *Dadaphone*: “Francis Picabia always attacks himself.”<sup>310</sup> Also: “What I love least in others is myself.”<sup>311</sup> Perhaps the most important example of this vicious self-deprecation is the pamphlet he distributed, as a kind of promotion, at the 1921 Salon d’automne, in which he called himself (in English) “Funny-Guy, insists he knows nothing, and characterizes himself an imbecile, a pickpocket, an idiotic Spanish professor, as well as delighting in reversals and contradictions, such as asserting that he is both rich and poor, not a painter and yet at the same time the “only complete artist.”

All these attacks on himself occurred only at the same period, from 1920 until 1924; they were no more intrinsic to Picabia’s personality and practice as was his tendency, in those same years, to deploy negation more generally. When negation faded from his practice, so, too, did self-deprecation.

Nietzsche’s third point—that he never in reality attacks persons but only principles—is also apt. Picabia, despite the appearance of all sorts of personal rancor (and there were many who detested him) was, upon examination, anything but personal, even when attacking someone directly. The main reason he derided someone was because they stood for a value that needed to be diminished or critiqued. Again, this is not to imagine that Picabia was somehow immune to pettiness or personal rivalry or rancor. It is, rather, to indicate that, like Nietzsche, he was not primarily interested in personal attacks, but

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<sup>308</sup> Picabia, “Manifeste dada,” 391, no. 12 (March 1920): 1.

<sup>309</sup> Picabia, survey response, *Le Gaulois* (29 October, 1921): 3.

<sup>310</sup> Picabia, no title, *Dadaphone*, no. 7 (March 1920): 7. Compare to Nietzsche’s “I have never taken a step publicly that did not compromise me: that is *my* criterion of doing right,” *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 232.

<sup>311</sup> “391,” 391, no. 17 (10 June 1924): 4.

instead utilized the person in order to state his dissatisfaction with something ossified and displeasing—to those forces that decreased, instead of enhanced, one’s experience of life. There have been many accounts of the ways in which Picabia’s personal entanglements—with Tzara, Ernst, Breton, etc.—led to his split from the Dada movement. Here, I would like to briefly approach the issue from the reverse perspective, and to note that personal animosity seemed, in Picabia’s case, to have always been spurred by a disagreement about values, and not the other way around. And as values were, for Picabia, rather mutable, so were animosities. It is for this reason that the targets of Picabia’s attacks so often later became his friends and collaborators (and vice versa). He mocked Satie in *Dadaphone 7*, but he collaborated with the composer on *Relâche* a few years later.<sup>312</sup> He repeatedly denigrated Léonce Rosenberg, a champion of Cubism (which Picabia of course dismissed as belonging to the past) but later allied with him when Rosenberg became the dealer for the *Transparencies*.

It should also be noted that he used people to celebrate or approve of things. He applauded and gave thanks, as well as attacked. He once thanked Frantz Jourdain, the president of the 1921 Salon d’automne, for his graciousness in displaying Dadaist works, with a prominent inscription on the surface of the now overpainted *Les Yeux chauds*. He used people as “strong magnifying glasses,” in a positive and negative fashion, as focusing tool or energetic emblem.

Ultimately, though, the strong selective model was not to Picabia’s taste. Negation—even if seen in service of affirmation—turned out to be too dangerous, and too easily transformed into a sort of oppositional worldview that Picabia despised.

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<sup>312</sup> See Picabia, no title, *Dadaphone*, no. 7 (March 1920): 7.

Ultimately, Picabia wanted to be a yes-sayer, and *only* a yes-sayer. This is why negation makes a relatively brief appearance in his practice. It is also one of the major reasons why he broke with Dada and detested Surrealism. We have considered the first (temporal) reason for this rupture in the previous chapter. The second reason was also stated rather explicitly by Picabia at the time: Dada was becoming, especially in Breton's hands, too oppositional. This was explained in Picabi's *Esprit Nouveau* article:

I parted from certain Dadas because I was feeling stifled among them, every day I was feeling sadder, I was getting terribly bored. I would have loved to live around Nero's circus; it is impossible for me to live around a "Certa" table, the scene of Dadaist conspiracies!<sup>313</sup>

"Certa table" refers to a café where the Dadaist's gathered, and, more exactly, to the wallet incident of 25 April 1921. The Dadists had found a waiter's wallet and then took opposing sides as to whether to return it or not. Such debates about right versus wrong disgusted Picabia. Of this he wrote, "Now Dada has a court, lawyers, soon probably policemen and a M. Deibler: it will become like Lenin's antimilitarism which, in order to do away with a general, turns him into a simple soldier and vice versa."<sup>314</sup>

It was the idea of a court, or a world of binary oppositions (guilt versus innocence) that disgusted Picabia. And that was what Dada was becoming under the guidance of Breton. Picabia made the same point regarding the opening event of the season, a Breton-led tour of the church of Saint Julien le Pauvre in Paris. Picabia distanced himself from the event. Notice that in his statement he does not prefer one side to another, but laments the need and desire to take sides at all:

*As we wanted to get some clarifications on the Dadas' visit to the church of Saint Julien le Pauvre, we telephoned M. Francis Picabia.*

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<sup>313</sup> Picabia, "Francis Picabia et Dada," 337.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 338.

As I've been sick for six weeks, he replied, I've had no hand in the organization of this event. All I hope is that it presents nothing political, clerical, or *anticlerical* [my italics] in character, because I will always abstain from participating in any event of that sort, as I consider Dada to be an individual having nothing to do with beliefs, whatever they may be.<sup>315</sup>

The final break with Breton did not come until 1924, but it is already clear in 1921 (and even earlier) that the philosophical positions of these two figures were incompatible: On the one hand was Picabia, the Nietzschean, on the other, Breton, the arch-Hegelian.

More alarming even than the direction of the Parisian avant-garde under Breton was the fact that negation had begun to inflect, or rather infect, Picabia's painting. Even during the heyday of Paris Dada, or in the early phase (1919) just after his return to Paris in which he might have had higher hopes for the movement, Picabia produced very few purely polemical paintings—and these, like the *Natures Mortes*, were usually part of performances or festivals, not salon submissions or independently exhibited works. In 1922, however, perhaps because of his fight against Dada, opposition and negation appeared for the first time as salient structures in his paintings, namely the salon submissions of 1922 *La Nuit Espagnole* [Fig. 34] and 1923 *Dresseur d'Animaux* [Fig. 36].

*La Nuit Espagnole* is one of Picabia's more famous paintings. It is, however, an indication of the outer limits of his oeuvre in its Hegelian way of defining identity through opposition as in Ernst, and which on almost all other occasions Picabia strove to avoid. As in *Une Semaine de Bonté*, everything in this painting exists by virtue of its opposition to something else. A man on the left is in black against a white ground; a woman on the right, in white against a black ground. The man is clothed; the woman,

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<sup>315</sup> "Les Dadas visitent Paris," *Comœdia* (April 14 1921): 2, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 79-80.

nude. The man is active, crossing the line that divides one from the other. The woman, as object, is passive; she does not have use of her arms. Her body is marked with brightly colored, obviously sexual targets and by smaller black holes that are reversed on the other, “male,” side. The formal division into two halves as well as black and white reinforces the structure, or subject, which is opposition. Picabia’s style, it is clear, derived from his theoretical orientations, and not the other way around. Notice also that the protagonists have become hard, clearly delineated, ossified; He no longer stresses overall configuration but looks to individual subjects. More exactly: Picabia intuited that such a subject is the product of this particular Hegelian configuration of conflict and opposition.

*Dresseur d’Animaux* is about the means of negating, which is to say the establishment of hierarchy by means of violence. The animal trainer is a muscular nude male with clenched fist and a brandished whip. His nose—or perhaps he is wearing a mask—is lewdly exaggerated. So explicit an image of dominance is extremely unusual for Picabia, and finds echo only in some of the mocking and even sadistic drawings of 1924, a few of which target Surrealism and its literary idols.

One way to understand Picabia’s need to distance himself from the Parisian avant-garde, and, in particular Surrealism and Breton, is his need to distance himself from these oppositional and negative elements in his own practice. By abandoning Paris, he was able to abandon them as well, and instead commence a painted assertion, or affirmation, OR celebration, of energy and desire. Affirmation for Picabia meant the power to affirm the self, not the power to negate the other. Therefore there was nothing to wield over another,

nor anything for which to prostrate oneself. As he summarized: “Happiness for me is to command no one and not to be commanded.”<sup>316</sup>

It is one thing to experiment with selective models of negation; another to do away with—or dream of doing away with—negation altogether. And yet this was clearly Picabia’s tendency and desire—and it often seems to be Nietzsche’s as well. Does *amor fati* mean saying yes to *everything*? It sometimes appears so:

Did you ever say Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you said Yes to *all* woe as well. All things are chained and entwined together, all things are in love;

if you wanted one moment twice, if ever you said: “You please me, happiness, instant, moment!” then you wanted *everything* to return!

you wanted everything anew, everything eternal, everything chained, entwined together, everything in love, O that is how you *loved* the world,

you everlasting men, loved it eternally and for all time: and you say even to woe: “Go, but return!” *For all joy wants—eternity!*<sup>317</sup>

In practice, then, there are at not only two selective models (active and passive) but also the idea that one must affirm everything, including the worst aspects of existence. This can be thought of as a total mystical affirmation, as a crossing over to a world beyond negation.

I would like, as a coda, to comment upon the so-called wartime nudes, painted by Picabia in the south of France in the early 1940s during the Nazi Occupation. Thus far I have sought to clarify the motivation for and pattern of Picabia’s practice by comparing it to Nietzsche’s search for an affirmative philosophy, a means of accepting and celebrating one’s fate. This quest was mainly personal. Politics mattered very little to Picabia. The system, or pattern, that has been under investigation here is an aesthetic one not a

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<sup>316</sup> Picabia, no title, *391* no. 6 (July 1917): 4.

<sup>317</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, 331-32.

political one.<sup>318</sup> And yet, like anything, this pursuit, or proposition had, under extreme circumstances, to have, political and ethical implications as well, even if only by implication. The wartime nudes allow these implications and entanglements to be seen most clearly; they make it clear that Picabia's approach can also sometimes best be described as decadent, since it prided itself on forgetting ethics, morality, and politics *tout court* and imagining everything as energetic, Dionysian play. Ethical commitment of any kind therefore transmutes in Picabia's practice into purely aesthetic fuel, or possibility. The greater the ethical commitment avoided (transmuted), the more overt the decadence of the aesthetic.

Picabia was in Switzerland in 1939 when the Second World War broke out. This depressed him terribly, as indicated by the *Poems of Dingalari*, which is filled with sadness, despair, and trepidation.<sup>319</sup> The following is only the first of many mournful passages:

I hear the word war uttered  
the ground is soft  
I feel like I've fallen  
and it won't be possible to stand back up  
I am so distraught  
I banged into the exit door  
but when it opens  
it will be too late  
I am worn out  
my head gently collapses  
what a horrible thing  
there are still cigarettes  
but my lighter has stopped working  
and every match in the world is about to be drenched in tears.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Aesthetic here is to be understood mainly in its etymological sense, as *aisthitikos*, or cognition achieved through the senses.

<sup>319</sup> Picabia, *Poèmes de Dingalari* (Alès: Pierre-André Benoit, 1955).

<sup>320</sup> Picabia, *Poèmes de Dingalari*, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 581.

Picabia moved back to the Côte d’azur in 1940. There, having fallen in love with the much younger Suzanne Romain, his depression lifted. And it appears—this was the argument of Yve-Alain Bois—that during the Occupation he remained *indifferent* to the catastrophe and horror around him; that is, following his initial despair, he taught himself to simply look elsewhere, or forget the world, which had become nightmarish.<sup>321</sup> He attempted to *actively forget* what was going on around him, as indicated in a letter to Gertrude Stein:

My painting is more and more the image of my life, but a life that does not want and cannot see the world’s cupidity and monstrousness. Everything that was moral in art is dead. Luckily, this is the only favor that this cataclysm that surrounds us has given us.<sup>322</sup>

And yet, if Picabia wanted only to forget (recall that life, according to Picabia, had only one form: forgetting), if he really was indifferent, how is one to explain the encomium, titled “Youth,” that he penned for *L’Opinion de Cannes* in 1941 in praise of Pétain and the Pétainist vision?:

The country that will undoubtedly emerge from the horrible materialism that has been overrunning everything for years will be France, it seems to me, because in this country there is no longer any room for the young, true youth, life, finally, for those who believe, live, and think without having to stretch out on the couch of commercial and political ambition.

I could speak at still greater length on how to stay young, although I hope I have already made myself understood.

Marshal Petain is a young man, younger than all our deputies or ministers, for those poor creatures, for the most part, were no more than

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<sup>321</sup> Bois accuses Picabia of a “highly criminal” indifference, which, he writes, is “first and foremost, reactionary, whether one knows it or not, and can serve to justify the most reprehensible actions in addition to the worst kind of art.” “From Dada to Pétain,” trans Thomas Repensek, *October* 30 (Fall 1984): 124.

<sup>322</sup> Picabia, letter to Gertrude Stein, summer 1942, as cited in Boulbès, *Picabia*, 116.

ignoble egotists, malefactors, who have easily exploited a country like France, which only asks to believe, to love, and to live in freedom.<sup>323</sup>

And although this article is an isolated example, those close to the artist indicate that he did not quietly, naïvely disappear. Rather, he sought an active engagement with both sides of the conflict; this, despite his supposed absolute horror of the political. Gabrielle Buffet describes this complexity:

He remained voluntarily unconscious of what was going on in the world and, throwing caution to the winds, defied by his words and actions, both the force of collaboration and the Resistance, effecting this tour de force of being sought after by one and pursued by the other. So it was that he made a display of being a fierce racist when personal animosities were at stake. Yet he didn't hesitate to set up a joint vest-pocket exhibition of paintings and sculpture with the Jewish sculptor Sima at Cannes in 1942.<sup>324</sup>

What one sees, in this contradictory behavior, are the various ways in which Picabia attempted to remain a yes-sayer, even in the midst of catastrophe; the uneasy interaction of the various models of affirmation, whose relationship, or efficacy, neither he nor Nietzsche ever fully resolved. On the one hand, he wants to only “look away” from the horror; on the other hand, he tried to find in it aspects worth celebrating. He toggles between the Nietzschean models with which I began this chapter: actively seeking something to embrace and affirm while turning away and forgetting.

The interaction of these models inflects, or even determines, the famous paintings made in those years. The paintings he made in 1940-41, are, like the *Poems of Dingalari*,

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<sup>323</sup> Picabia, “Jeunesse,” *L'Opinion de Cannes* (1 March 1941), in *Picabia: Écrits*, 240. Jean-Michel Foray suggests that this statement was not primarily political, but that the aged Picabia, who had recently fallen in love and begun an affair with Suzanne Romain was celebrating his newfound love, her literal youth, and the youth of his desire. See “Devant ma fenêtre il ya une maison des fous,” in *Francis Picabia: Singulier idéal*, 104-106.

<sup>324</sup> Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraites*, 42.

indicative of depression and mourning. Consider the plaintive *Le Juif errant* [Fig. 54] or the atypical morbidity of *Pierrot Pendu* [Fig. 55] and *Les réfugiés*. These were exhibited at the Galerie Serguy in Cannes. Gertrude Stein (who was supportive of Pétain) wrote the preface to the catalog. It was in 1942, and mainly at an exhibition at the Galerie Pasteur in Algeria, that Picabia focused increasingly on female nudes, almost all of which were copied from pornographic magazines.

The nudes reassert one of Picabia's favorite themes: desire. The paintings posit an escapist pornographic Eden; a private universe of sensual delight. And yet, the effort to build that world, to wall it off from the nightmare of history and Occupation inflects these works, which are not so effortlessly decadent as they first appear—or rather as they would like to appear. Picabia's favorite theme, desire, is transmuted, or infected, by everything the artist sought at the same time to forget, or hold at bay, and refuse to oppose.

Escape for Picabia does not mean flight to some faraway land. Exoticism is contrary to his sensibility. He worked almost only with what was at hand. Therefore he shuts himself up in a sealed fantasy interior. The majority of the wartime pictures are, therefore, set in sealed interiors. These interiors rarely have windows and the walls are often very dark. In one of the few exceptions, *Femmes au bull-dog* [Fig. 58], the possibility of deep space is cancelled by an X-pattern window grill. Outside it is wintry and lifeless, with dead branches contrasting the lively red flowers of the interior. Picabia has again drifted into binary opposition. Inside: life, or the satisfaction of desire; outside: nothingness, death. In *Femme à la fenêtre* [Fig. 117] the window reveals nothing, save, perhaps, a few tiny stars, so that the exterior is figured as a wall of darkness, a void.

In a related fashion, there is often a pronounced tilt of the space toward the surface, and no deep space, even in outdoor scenes; again, the world at large, which cannot at present be affirmed, is shunted off, and kept at bay. Consider *Les baigneuses* [Fig. 118] and *Nu assise* [Fig. 119]. Comparing the latter to its photographic source [Fig. 120] demonstrates that Picabia specifically added in the sharply-uptilted seaside, which presses toward the surface, even as he so typically sliced off the foreground, pushing the spectator closer to the female object of desire.<sup>325</sup> In paintings like *Nu assise* and also *Cinq femmes*, Picabia places the horizon above the picture. The background rises up like a cliff, compressing the surface, creating the effect of a closed, sealed space, even if technically outdoors.<sup>326</sup>

In this sealed space—not the overflowing eternal present, but rather a tight shelter, pressed in by catastrophe on all sides—Picabia constructs yet another fantasy of desire, and images, which, per Nietzsche’s famous citation of Stendhal, defines art as *the promise of happiness*—or in this case, many promises, imagined, simply, as enjoyable female nudes. In part, Picabia followed the method he had always followed, seizing upon an affirmative aspect of his situation—he was in love with a much younger woman—and intensifying it, so that “young woman” is multiplied to become so many young women, sometimes apparently engaged in lesbian lovemaking. And yet, these women are not the women of the 1920s—let alone the desiring-machines from New York. They are, despite themselves, and perhaps despite their creator, the products of power—of the power of negation, specifically, with the attendant need for opposition and domination that characterizes Picabia’s wartime nudes through and through, and marks even the means of

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<sup>325</sup> Felix, *Francis Picabia*, 86-87.

<sup>326</sup> For the source images, see *Francis Picabia, les Nus et la méthode*.

escape. Picabia's women at this point are, simply, objects of delectation. They have none of the assertive energetic power that typified both the men and the women of the paintings in the 1920s. One of the more obvious indications of this is that the women in these paintings do not meet the beholder's gaze. Their faces are often turned away from the beholder; their eyes almost always cast down or closed. *Cinq femmes* [Fig. 121] is typical, in that there are five nudes, not one of whom even remotely looks out at the viewer. Contrast this general sightlessness, and thus powerlessness, or at least passivity, to the women in so many of the *Monsters* in the 1920s, whose powers of perception were often ludicrously multiplied and exaggerated, creating a dream of energetic intensity and sensual abundance: *Les seins* [Fig. 65], for instance.

The situation of Man is hardly much better: if Woman is generally sightless, naked, and the passive object of power, man in this configuration incarnates negation. He is "free" only to dominate and use the other, never to affirm his own self. Of course, Man is absent from so many of these pictures, and this is itself an indication of how much Picabia had been forced (or forced himself) away from the idea of desire as a fluid interlocking, configuration of different forces. Here, man is the voyeur, woman the (desired) object; the roles are inflexible, like statues, not like the flowing and flexible dream of desire that had been articulated decades earlier over the course of multiple decades in so many stylistic guises.

The power of affirmation, according to Picabia, is the power to affirm the self, never the power to negate the Other. And yet this negative aspect of power—the power to negate, to dominate and command—again makes its appearance in Picabia's practice, as if forced into by the concrete nightmare that had invaded and then controlled France.

Power understood in this light is hard, blank, empty and always in need of (helpless) subjects to adore it. *L'adoration du veau d'or* [Fig. 122] makes very clear that power understood as negation is, literally, idolatrous, and in need of adoring sacrificial masses. Not only does it dominate and command, but it twists those around it—twisting and warping them so that they come to venerate negation, to internalize its logic and prostrate themselves before it. This is further demonstrated in at least three other paintings from the same period. In *Femme au serpent* [Fig. 123], Man figures literally as the serpent, superimposed blackly on the face of the woman who lovingly caresses it; in the mirror, the serpent is reflected as a black mask with red lips and white, pupil-less eyes. In *Femme à la sculpture grecque noire et blanche* [Fig. 124], the Greek head is the object, neither of ridicule nor energetic transformation but of worship and imitation. The female nude not only takes up the submissive and traditional pose of odalisque self-display (with arms raised), but is turned demurely away from the viewer, head bowed and eyes closed. By contrast, the statue, or the past, is wide-eyed, staring, frontal; a figure of cold, inhuman command. The same point is made again, perhaps more obviously, in *Femme à l'idole* [Fig. 125]. Here, the woman is not nude but dressed for seduction in garters and high heels; she offers herself to a large African statue. Like the nude in *Femme à la sculpture grecque*, she cannot see the viewer; she offers herself, essentially, to viewer and statue alike. As of 1939, power is, literally, a fetish or idol, cold and empty, but worshipped increasingly in proportion to its emptiness.<sup>327</sup>

Of course, there are occasional “edenic” paintings, or moments, as in, for instance, *Printemps* and *Portrait d'un couple* [Figs. 59 and 60]. These are indications of

what affirmation looked like at this moment for Picabia. Here, man and women play together instead of dominating and being dominated. Yet these paintings—for all their strange charm—are curiously bland and bleached, and are too defensive to be wholly convincing images of paradise. They are rather, and like the wartime nudes as a whole, decadent, meaning that in them tragedy is not merely held at bay but rather converted into the fuel for private pleasure. Their accomplishment in the realm of aesthetics is assured not in spite of the disaster of history but precisely because of it. The pleasure in these paintings is that of the debauched Roman emperor Nero, who Picabia openly admired, whose fiddling is remembered only because of the catastrophe against which it seems piquant and cruel.<sup>328</sup> Decadence can, of course, be very attractive—as an aesthetic phenomenon. As an ethical, moral, or political matter, on the other hand, it is, by definition, very hard to defend.

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<sup>328</sup> Picabia, “Le Pilhaou-Thibaou,” in *Picabia: Écrits*, 349.

CHAPTER V  
THE ETERNAL RETURN

This final chapter considers Picabia's relationship to his sources in light of Nietzsche's self-professed greatest thought—the eternal return—which proposes a solution, at least on a metaphysical level, to the problem of nihilism.

It has been well established that Picabia made use of a huge number of sources of all kinds. The images in his works are all usually appropriated; moreover, he frequently “borrowed” in a more brazen and less conventionally acceptable, manner, often approaching outright plagiarism—or simply plagiarizing outright. From Picabia appropriated images to an astonishing degree; virtually every work of his (excepting drawn portraits) is based on a source image, or combination of source images. Many of these have been traced, like of the appropriations from the *Larousse*. It is not my intention here to attempt a full accounting here of Picabia's sources, as much of that work has been done by Picabia scholars already. Suffice to say that Picabia's practice is appropriative to a degree that has no equal in the historical avant-garde; that it was not even genuinely noticed, let alone matched, until the 1980s. It is rather the task of this chapter to attempt an assessment of the character, and the meaning of Picabia's massive, unprecedented, appropriative practice—and to do so in light of his fundamental metaphysical proposition.

Crucially, Picabia's appropriative and plagiaristic practices were in place *before* his move into the avant-garde in 1909. In fact, they define his origin myth and his self-creation as an artist. Picabia recalled that his first act as an artist, in his childhood, was to

copy a painting on the wall of his father's home. "When I was young I copied my father's paintings. I sold the originals and replaced them with the copies. No one noticed. I discovered a profession."<sup>329</sup> This origin story, or myth, is illuminating because it stresses the importance he placed on repetition as opposed to invention from the very start.

Picabia's subsequent Impressionist-style paintings (1904-1909) sold well and were often praised by critics for their sincere renderings of the motif.<sup>330</sup> Most derived, however, from other works of art. Arnauld Pierre demonstrated this in *La Peinture sans aura*.<sup>331</sup> Sometimes Picabia's "truthful" rendering of a landscape was, in fact, copied from previous Impressionist paintings, as in the case of his 1904, *L'Église de Moret*, which derives from Sisley's *L'Église de Moret au soleil*. Often Picabia used postcards, reproducing the compositions as he found them, as in *Le Pont de Villeneuve-sur-Yonne*, *Les Bords de Loing*, and *Montigny*, or, again in *L'Église de Moret*, as an aid in order to fill in the area of the painting that could not be copied from the Sisley painting. Pierre draws attention as well to Picabia's self-appropriation: *Bords du Loing, effet de soleil* is, in essence, a reproduction of the artist's own *Soleil d'avril*, painted five years earlier. Picabia was known best, at this point, as a scrupulous late-Impressionist painter, who supposedly demonstrated great accuracy and verve in capturing effects of light. In fact he captured nothing of the sort, and instead, reproduced the effects found in other works of

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<sup>329</sup> Picabia, interview with Roger Vitrac, *Le Journal du Peuple* (9 June 1923): 3, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 175. "J'ai copié, étant jeune, les tableaux de mon père. J'ai vendu les tableaux originaux et les ai remplacés par les copies. Personne ne s'en étant aperçu, je me suis découvert une vocation." For discussion of this origin tale, and some variations in later versions of its retelling, see Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 13-14.

<sup>330</sup> See for instance, Édouard André, "Exposition F. Picabia," *Le Petit Journal* (2 February 1907), as cited in Pierre, *Picabia*, 37: "Picabia ne transcrit sur la toile que l'émotion éprouvée au contact de la réalité."

<sup>331</sup> Pierre, *Picabia*, 25-67, and, especially, 55-59.

art, which clients and critics were happy to imagine as authentic Impressionist-type painting.

In his Orphic phase, from 1912 until 1914, Picabia did not rely on already-existing images to nearly the same extent, as his aim was to transform his memories and sensations into purely pictorial experiences. By 1913, however, appropriation had re-emerged even in this ostensibly “pure” mode of painting by way of his many appropriations from the *Larousse* dictionary, which the artist used for virtually all his titles and wrote onto the surface of his paintings.

The mechanomorphic phase is based almost entirely upon appropriated mechanical imagery, including advertising, mechanical and scientific diagrams and illustrations. Sources have been located for virtually every mechanomorphic painting and drawing. To name only some images that have already been considered in previous chapters: *Fantaisie* [Fig. 79] is based on a 19<sup>th</sup> century drawing of a beam steam engine.<sup>332</sup> The fan-like bands of color of *La musique est comme la peinture* [Fig. 78] are taken from a 1905 illustration of the effect of a magnetic field on alpha, beta, and gamma particles.<sup>333</sup> From 1918 through 1922, the majority of mechanomorphs (and therefore a large part of Picabia’s production) were based on images found in the popular science magazine, *La Science et la Vie*. This includes all the drawings of *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mère* as well as the Dalmau abstractions.<sup>334</sup> Even the non-mechanical

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<sup>332</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 81.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid*, 101.

<sup>334</sup> See Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 140.

elements were almost invariably appropriated: the formation of circles in *Volucelle* I and II [Fig. 32] were probably based, for example, on charts of constellations.<sup>335</sup>

Special mention must be made of Picabia's extended appropriation of Ingres's imagery and technique as, again, Arnauld Pierre has convincingly demonstrated.<sup>336</sup> Picabia began helping himself to Ingres's imagery well before he moved into the avant-garde; all his early (1902) images of Spanish women derive, rather obviously, from paintings by Ingres [Fig. 126a].<sup>337</sup> He continued using Ingriste images of women for his own Spanish images, at least through the 1920s [Fig. 126b]. The pose of the silhouetted male nude *La feuille de vigne* [Fig. 35] echoes that of Oedipus in Ingres's 1808 painting of Oedipus and the Sphinx [Fig. 127].

The compositions of the *Monsters* of the middle 1920s were usually derived from contemporary postcards of stylish couples: See, as examples, *Jeunes mariés* and *Après la pluie* [Fig. 128]. The interaction of couples in both cases follows the example of the postcards, sometimes belle époque, and at other times, contemporary. The somewhat de Chirico-esque *Rocking Chair* takes its central figure, or at least her body and chair, from a postcard of 1904.<sup>338</sup> *Les trois grâces* [Fig. 45] repeats the composition by Rubens's *The Three Graces* [Fig. 129], down to the positions of the graces's interlocking arms—although it at the same time simplifies and exaggerates the figures, and replaces the baroque allegorical emblems in Rubens's background with brusquely painted stripes,

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<sup>335</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 192-93. See also Boulbès, *Picabia: Le Saint Masqué*, 65. Baker points out that the astrological readings can relate as well to Duchamp's the Bride's *Large Glass*, as the Bride's half of that work was referred to by its creator as "The Milky Way." *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 262.

<sup>336</sup> Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 170-186.

<sup>337</sup> Pierre, "Picabia contre le retour à l'ordre," in *Picabia: Les nus et la méthode*, 9.

<sup>338</sup> See Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 214-215.

zigzags, wavy lines, crosshatching, and dots. Likewise, the single standing figure in Picabia's *Faune* is appropriated from Titian's *Venus and Adonis* (1553). Citations from Durer and Michelangelo are also evident throughout the *Monsters*.<sup>339</sup>

In the summer of 1927, Picabia took a trip to Barcelona and was impressed by Catalan Romanesque frescoes.<sup>340</sup> He returned to Spain to continue looking at such images and then began quoting from them in such paintings of his as *Fille au Paradis*. In some cases, he simply added Catalan Romanesque appropriations to already existing works, as in the head of the seven-eyed apocalyptic lamb from San Clemente de Tahull [Fig. 130], which appears on top of previous images in *Barcelona* [Fig. 131].

The *Transparencies* of the middle and late 1920s continued to develop this practice of art-historical appropriation. In fact, as Camfield has pointed out, virtually every element in each of the *Transparencies* is appropriated:

Picabia's imagery, impenetrably personal and inventive at first glance, was in fact extensively dependant on models in past art which can be identified because he worked in 1929 much as he had done in 1915 with machine portraits. That is to say, he appropriated existing images, modified them slightly, and then combined those eclectic sources in a novel personal, manner. With little exaggeration it might be said that Picabia did not "create" any of the images in the transparencies; instead his creation was comparable to that of a collagist.<sup>341</sup>

Sources are wide-ranging but, as Camfield notes, are drawn mainly from the Greco-Roman tradition and Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting and include works by such artists as Botticelli, Bartolommo Schedoni, Guido Reni, and Annibale Carracci. To offer only a few specific examples: The male figure at the left of *Villica-Caja* is from Reni's *Nessus and Dejanira*; the female to the right from a Roman fresco of Venus at

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>340</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 225.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 234.

Pompeii.<sup>342</sup> *Briseis* features a head and hand from Botticelli, as well as the image of the Greek sculpture *Dying Niobid*.<sup>343</sup> *Untitled Drawing after the Doryphorus* pairs a kneeling female with a drawing of the re-vivified canonical Athenian statue, who has been given a bad haircut and holds a flower. The couple in *Adam and Eve* are copied from a Roman copy of the Greek *Orestes and Electra* (a witty transposition from mythological to Biblical couple). By 1930, it was Piero della Francesca from whom Picabia quoted most frequently, as indicated by, for example, *Noctuelles*, whose main male head is taken from Piero's *The Meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, and *Aello* [Fig. 49], whose central figures are lifted from Piero's *Baptism of Christ* [Fig. 132].<sup>344</sup>

Additional appropriative layering in the *Transparencies* is provided by the titles: Many allude to Classical mythology, although the relationship between title and the accumulation of transparent images is, in fact, rarely evident. This recalls some of the allusive and hermetic titles of Orphism (*Udnie; Edtaonisl*) and the mechanomorphs (for example, *Petit solitude au milieu des soleils*). In fact Picabia again used anagrammatic titles, as he had in 1913, for some the *Transparencies*. According to Olga Mohler, governess of Picabia's son, Lorenzo, as well as Picabia's mistress in the later 1920s, Picabia combined letters from the names of butterflies and flowers for these titles (for instance *Atrata*).<sup>345</sup>

The next great appropriative wave came with the wartime nudes, all of which were based on images of nude women in 1930s pornographic magazines, such as *Paris Magazine*, *Paris Sex Appeal*, and *Mon Paris*. Sometimes Picabia combined multiple

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 235, n. 22.

<sup>344</sup> Pierre, *Picabia: La Peinture*, 219, 224-25.

<sup>345</sup> Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, 234, n. 19.

nudes from various sources into a single, additive composition of his own, as in, for example, *Baigneuses, femmes nues au bord de la mer* [Fig. 133].<sup>346</sup> As was his habit, he often took the images as he found them simply copying the nude, or he would make occasional changes to lighting and cropping, and change minor details, such as removing jewelry.

But even all this does not give the full appropriative nature of Picabia's practice, because he appropriated whole styles as well as images, trying them on like so many masks. He did not, for example, only appropriate Ingres's imagery, but the whole Ingriste style with its emphasis in linear elegance and purity. Ingres has often been said to serve as the model for Picabia's sudden "dry" linear works, both drawings and paintings, from 1922-24, including *La feuille de vigne, Dresseur d'animaux*, as well as the Ingres-like line drawings of the same period, such as those made for the covers of *Littérature* [Figs. 46-48]. This wholesale appropriation of Ingres, this *becoming-Ingres* (to embroider Deleuze), was perhaps heralded by the cover of *391* on which Picabia reproduced a letter from Ingres asking for the hand of a young Italian woman in marriage [Fig. 134].<sup>347</sup> The artist "claims" the letter for himself by adding his first name, Francis—and in the letter's script—to Ingres's surname, so that the signature reads "Francis Ingres."

Even these appropriations of Ingres were themselves *already* appropriations, however—specifically of Picasso's turn to an Ingriste style of drawing in 1914. This is made clear by Picabia in his 1915 portrait drawing of Max Goth [Fig. 66], which alludes not to Ingres directly, but to Picasso's 1914 appropriation of the French Neoclassical

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<sup>346</sup> *Picabia: Les nus et la méthode*, 48-49. Note that the "method" in question for the exhibition was the appropriation of images from pornographic magazines.

<sup>347</sup> *391*, no. 14 (November 1920): cover.

master for his portrait drawings [Fig. 135].<sup>348</sup> The Ingriste mask is therefore already doubled, from the start an appropriation and not a “stable” or venerated original. Rather, Picabia employed a second-level appropriation of appropriation, or a performance of someone else’s performance.

The case of Ingres is fairly typical for Picabia: Often when he began to appropriate someone’s images, he took on their style, their attitudes, and the *tone* of their work. This can be seen in the shift to Piero della Francesca as a source for images in the later *Transparencies* of around 1930. Not only does Picabia repeat source imagery from the artist, but he also adopts a more Piero-like character in these later *Transparencies*: calmer and slightly cooler, with more solidity and volume in the still transparent, as well as in the more clearly defined figures (in contrast to the busier, more visceral and orgiastic *Transparencies* of the previous year.)

Perhaps Picabia’s most famous borrowing is from Duchamp for the *entire* mechanomorphic style. Although there had been mechanical elements in certain Orphic works, it was only after Picabia’s return to New York in 1915 and after Duchamp had begun work on *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The Large Glass*) that Picabia jettisoned abstraction and switched to a wholly mechanomorphic mode. Again, it is not a matter only of iconography but rather the very possibility of the mechanomorph as a legitimate style or artistic mode. Picabia’s 1913 *Mechanical Expression Seen through Our Own Mechanical Expression* was, essentially, a mechanomorph, but he had not exhibited it. Only with the precedent of Duchamp did Picabia suddenly devote himself to the mechanomorph. It is as if Duchamp’s work in that direction authorized or

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<sup>348</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 113.

inspired Picabia, who would have been otherwise uninterested, or unable. It has also often been noted, and should be remarked upon here, that Picabia's mechanomorphic phase lasted, with variations and interruptions, from 1915-1923, and that these are the exact years in which Duchamp was working (or claimed to in some way be working) on the *Large Glass*. When he stopped, or rather declared the work complete, Picabia stopped making mechanomorphs as well. Moreover, there are numerous themes and elements in the mechanomorphs that are specifically Duchampian. Among these is the idea of transparency, which derives from the *Large Glass*, and which Picabia referenced in numerous mechanomorphic works. The 1915 drawing, *Gabrielle Buffet. Elle corrige les moeurs en riant* [Fig. 136], for example, shows a large plane of glass divided into top and lower half, just as with Duchamp's work.<sup>349</sup> An even more compelling similarity is suggested by the fact that Picabia's name/signature appears at the lower right and Buffet's at the top right, such that Picabia's "glass," is, like Duchamp's; divided into a female top and male bottom. *Danse de Saint-Guy* [Fig. 92] again takes up the notion of transparency. This was stressed by some of Picabia's comments about the work, including the idea that it was to function as a machine, or looking-glass, for viewing sunsets.<sup>350</sup> Also like Duchamp, Picabia later insisted that his work was to be hung in the center of a gallery, not along the ceiling, and was to be looked *through*.<sup>351</sup>

Picabia even appropriated what appears to have been his singular contribution to the Duchampian mecahnomorph, the portrait: This came from Marius De Zayas, who had

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<sup>349</sup> Baker, *Artwork Caught by the Tail*, 233.

<sup>350</sup> Picabia, "À monsieur Paul Signac, président de la Société des Indépendants," *Comœdia* (23 January 1922): 3, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 112.

<sup>351</sup> Picabia reworked *Danse de Saint-Guy* circa 1949, rearranging the cords and also retitling it *Tabac-Rat*. See Georges Charbonnier, *Le Monologue du peintre* (Paris: René Julliard 1959), 136.

spent time with Picabia in Paris in 1913. Inspired by a soul-catcher from Pukapuka at the British Museum, De Zayas had developed a mode of psychological caricature that did not exaggerate the facial or physical features of the subject in a mimetic way, but rather offered pictorial equations and diagrams, intended as psychological rather than visual portraits.<sup>352</sup> Picabia and de Zayas were close friends, and it is likely that, as Willard Bohn has argued, de Zayas's caricatures served as an important precedent for Picabia's *291* portraits in 1915.

The more one looks, the more porous and unoriginal Picabia seems: an artist who intuited whatever it was those close to him were doing and started doing it himself; an artist who, for all his fabulous stylistic variety and apparent inventiveness, appears to have attached no value to the idea of originality and to have, in fact, invented very little. Consider some further examples: The title of Picabia's journal, *391*, was taken from Steiglitz's *291*. When Picabia learned of Ernst's Dadaist collages, he responded by making an image, printed first in *391* and then expanded into a Christmas greeting, in Ernst's style [Fig. 137].<sup>353</sup> He professed admiration for Picasso who was his sometimes neighbor on the Cote d'azur. One finds, in fact, various Picassoid quotes and elements appearing, generally untransformed, in some of the *Monsters*, as in *Les Seins*. And, just as he had appropriated Duchamp for his mechanomorphic phase, he developed his late

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<sup>352</sup> See Bohn, "The Abstract Language," 434-52.

<sup>353</sup> The original image was a photo of Picabia on which the artist had written "VIVE PAPA / FRANCIS / LE RATÉ." Published in *391*, no. 14 (November 1920): 6. The follow-up collage, *Tableau Rastadada*, adds women's legs, one head, and high-heeled shoes around Picabia, who wears a hat and smokes a pipe. The photo of Picabia's face is also scraped away in places and the word "PAPA" is crossed out. Added among other words is "CHRISTMAS" on a woman's leg and "À ARP ET À MAX ERNST," suggesting that the work served as a Christmas present or card. *Tableau Rastadada* is a most unusual image for Picabia, a rare photomontage, and with its sexual (foot) – and commodity- fetishism.

abstract style, after 1945, in large part from the works of younger abstract artists in Paris, including Hans Hartung and Pierre Soulages, to whom he gave personal support, despite his age and infirmity, and with whom he exhibited.<sup>354</sup>

Perhaps the ultimate case of appropriation, actually outright plagiarism, is Picabia's use of phrases and sayings from Nietzsche, which he inserted into poems and letters (to Christine Boumeester) as if they were his own. This practice has been discussed in the introduction. Picabia's translator, Marc Lowenthal, has traced a huge number of Picabia's phrases, especially in his late poems, to their sources in Nietzsche, usually *The Gay Science*. Lowenthal admits that these Nietzschean appropriations are hard to make sense of or defend aesthetically. He confesses that they do not fit the appropriative model, since the artist just copied a block of text from Nietzsche and put it into a letter as if he had written it himself. He calls these plagiarisms the "most ticklish aspect" of Picabia's writings. I argue that Picabia's plagiaristic relationship to Nietzsche's texts was not a mere quirk, but rather the purest type of distillation of the artist's total reliance on frequently untransformed source material, which one finds at the core of nearly every phase of his art.

If Picabia had once been seen as a mostly unoriginal (and therefore minor) artist, he has, since the 1980s, been cast as an appropriation artist *avant le letter* who borrowed

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<sup>354</sup> Citing a conversation he had on 21 April 1966 with Pierre Soulages, William Camfield writes, "Soulages recalls with fervor that Picabia, even when old and ailing, attended his exhibitions, introduced him to artists and critics and gave him moral courage to continue painting when almost no one liked his work." *Francis Picabia*, 260. In April 1948, Picabia wrote the preface, "Explications antimystiques," for the exhibition HWPSMTB, the title of which derived from the initials of the exhibiting painters names (Hartung, Wols, Picabia, Stahly, Mathieu, Tapié, Bryen).<sup>354</sup> "Explications antimystiques" restates many of the Nietzschean themes examined in this dissertation. See *Picabia: Écrits*, 484.

images and styles in order to mock and expose them, by way of parodic repetition and the use of harsh irony. In so doing, he stripped these images, and the values they stood for, of any claims to grandeur and authority. Buchloh described the template with succinctness in 1982:

We see succeeding sets of parodistic appropriations in the various phases of his [Picabia's] oeuvre: the carbon copy icons of his mechanical period, and the contour fixations of art historical reference in his "transparency" series of the mid-1920s (when he traced and trailed the authoritarian tendencies of the *retour à l'ordre* Neoclassicism), followed by his mimetic rendition of pornographic imagery from cinematic or product propaganda sources all through the 1930s and into the 1940s.<sup>355</sup>

It should be noted that this model is Benjaminian, based roughly on the theory of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and related texts like *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.<sup>356</sup> Often Picabia scholars cite Benjamin explicitly. Pierre, for example, casts Picabia's career as an oscillation between the two Benjaminian poles: on the one hand, attempt to re-establish painting as a unique, authentic, auratic, singular object and experience (this was, according to Pierre, the motivation for Orphism); on the other hand, an effort to destroy painting's last absurd claim to aura and authenticity by subjecting it, or infecting it, with photography and mass reproduction of all kinds (this for Pierre characterizes Dada).

The point here is not to rehearse the various arguments in detail, but to clarify the shared underlying logic that defines the nature of Picabia's appropriation as critical, attacking, and sardonic—in other words, as a form of *negation*. The bland form of the argument would have Picabia be a parodist; the theoretically developed form contends

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<sup>355</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Parody and Appropriation in Picabia, Pop, and Polke," in *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry*.

<sup>356</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977).

that Picabia's paintings are allegorical in the Benjaminian sense. Picabia's defenders claim that the artist was not a ruined modernist painter, as per the modernist formulation, but rather a painter *of* the ruins (of originality), whose return to figuration was meant, in ironic fashion, to mark the liquidation of the very tradition, and values, it doubled. Picabia's detractors, on the other hand, condemn the figurative works as *mere* parodies, arguing that they are insufficiently critical, a form of false or easy critique that is, in truth, to quote Buchloh, "secretly complicit" with the powers or traditions it purports to mock. But in both cases the interpretation is founded upon the same logic, in which repetition serves as a critical or negating mode. And in both cases the anti-art nature of Picabia's practice is assumed, or rather maintained.

But do Picabia's works really fit this mold? No doubt *some* of them do. These cases mainly occur, however, through 1924 during the Dada and post-Dada periods. And there is no doubt that a mocking, parodic spirit characterized Picabia, the Dadaist, and to some extent in general. But this spirit was directed first at the audience, and eventually at himself; there is very little evidence that it was directed at his source material. Instead, assumption has reigned: Because Picabia is famous as a Dadaist, and because Dada is said to be mocking and critical, a critical and mocking spirit has been applied to Picabia in lieu of what the evidence warrants.

Consider the following points: First, for an appropriative practice to operate properly *as* an appropriative practice, the appropriation—whether iconographic or stylistic—needs, at some level, to be specified and recognized by the audience. In the absence of a recognizable relationship between the appropriative work and the appropriated source the signifying operation obviously has no effect. This holds true for

both “critical” and “conservative” appropriative modes in the early 1980s, typified, for instance, by the “Pictures” artists on the one hand, and the Neo-Expressionist painters on the other. A Sherrie Levine re-photograph of a Walker Evans original puts into question the notion of originality (that is, stakes its own claim to significance) only if it is recognized that the Sherrie Levine *is* in fact an appropriation of Evans.

There are occasional cases in which Picabia’s appropriations would have been legible to his audience (at times, a circle of friends and, at others, a much wider salon-going public), and in which the meaning of the work was clearly designed by Picabia to be legible by way of the reference. The appropriation of Ingres’s letter, for example, was obviously designed to be read in this way. Similarly, the reference to classical iconography and composition is clearly designed to be legible in *Les trois Grâces*. In the great majority of cases, though, Picabia did not draw attention to the fact that the painting in question made significant use of an appropriated source though virtually all of them did. Audiences, therefore, rarely had any knowledge that what they were seeing was actually an appropriation, and therefore rarely responded to the works *as* appropriations. It is for this reason that the majority of Picabia’s sources have only been discovered much later—in some cases very recently.

Second, when attention was, on occasion, drawn to the appropriative nature of Picabia’s practice—that is, when it was pointed out, creating scandal—the artist himself appeared entirely disinterested in the matter. He neither defended himself against charges of plagiarism nor did he insist that he was deploying an appropriative, referential mode (that the meaning of the work was to be sought in the relationship to the appropriated image). Rather, and intriguingly, he seemed nonplussed. Copying, Picabia said, as if with

a shrug, is what art is in any case, and in all cases: why the fuss, then? Picabia published a statement to this effect in *Comœdia* after it had been demonstrated that *Les Yeux chauds* [Fig. 23], exhibited at the 1921 Salon d'automne, was based in large part on an illustration in a scientific journal.

*Le Matin* took great pride in showing on their front page my painting from the Salon d'automne, *The Hot Eyes*, printing a diagram below it of an air-turbine brake published in a scientific journal from 1920. "So Picabia invented nothing: he copies!" I'm afraid so, he copies an engineer's working diagram instead of copying apples!

Copying apples, anyone can understand that; copying a turbine: that's stupid. In my opinion, what is even stupider is that *The Hot Eyes*, which was inadmissible yesterday, now becomes, through the fact that it represents a convention, a painting that is perfectly intelligible to everyone.

The painter makes a choice, then imitates his choice, whose deformation constitutes Art; why not simply sign this choice instead of monkeying about in front of it?<sup>357</sup>

This statement points to two important aspects of Picabia's appropriative maneuvers in general: First, its offhand quality suggest that he considered his plagiarism and imitation to be natural, or givens, and in no way inferior to invention and originality (since everything is a copy). Second, the value-neutral relationship of Picabia to his sources: There are cases, as discussed above, in which his appropriations are clearly parodic, or critical, but he did not assign value judgements to the great majority of them. Rather, they are simply useful tools. Picabia, for the most part, appropriates *pragmatically*, not parodically, nor in Benjaminian fashion. His use of the *Larousse* dictionary is typical.

Another point: Having said this, it should be noted that Picabia often appropriates images that he likes, and was attracted too, and that repetition was often a sign of appreciation and homage. I stress this point because, given the canonical nature of the

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<sup>357</sup> Picabia, "L'Œil cacodylate," 2, in *Picabia: Écrits*, 90-91.

parodic-Benjaminian model, it has been mainly overlooked. There are, in fact, more instances of homage and outright plagiarism than there are of parody—more instances, that is, when repetition seems to be a compliment rather than a critique. Consider, for example, Picabia’s use of Catalan Romanesque sources in 1927 and 1928. He first saw these while on holiday in Barcelona, and was so enthusiastic about them that he arranged a return trip to Spain shortly thereafter in order to see more of them. Are we to then read his quotations, when they appear in the *Transparencies* and related works, as somehow critical—or rather simply indicative of an interest and attraction? Consider the case of Picabia’s journal *391*. The title is a repetition of Steiglitz’s *291*, which Picabia admired and with which he was involved. Picabia went on to use the title *491* for his catalog published and with his March 1949 exhibition at the Galerie René Drouin; the subtitle, “50 ans de plaisir,” (“50 years of pleasure”), makes it hard to imagine that this was parodic. Rather, it seems that Picabia admired the intent of the original journal and by appropriating its title he demonstrated his appreciation of it, and hoped to perpetuate its spirit.<sup>358</sup> In 1952, he published a set of five lithographs under the title, *591*.<sup>359</sup> It appears that the playful, approving spirit involved in the repetition of the three-digit title derived from Steiglitz was recognized by those close to the aged Picabia, as in 1959, Pierre-André Benoit (his publisher after 1945), published an homage to Picabia, title *691*.<sup>360</sup>

Of course, the most salient case—the one that proves that appropriation, or repetition, was at least as much an act of approval and appreciation as of parody and critique—is Picabia’s relationship to Nietzsche’s texts. As I have mentioned throughout

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<sup>358</sup> *491, 50 ans de plaisir* (Paris, Galerie René Drouin, 4 March 1949).

<sup>359</sup> Picabia, *591* (Alès: Pierre André Benoit, 1952).

<sup>360</sup> *691*, plates by Arp, Duchamp, Picabia, and Tzara. Texts by Clément Pansaers and Francis Picabia (Alès: Pierre André Benoit, 1959).

this study, Picabia often helped himself to phrases from Nietzsche, particularly those from *The Gay Science*, which he used much as he did the *Larousse*, as a sort of philosophical pattern-book, filled with readymade references and motifs. This practice, which occurred occasionally throughout Picabia's writings, became a near-obsession in the last years of his life, in which he essentially simply plagiarized Nietzsche's writings, not only for his own poems and prose but also—and perhaps more scandalously—in his letters to Boumeester. Again, Picabia made no mention of this practice: Boumeester would, one presumes, have imagined that these were in fact *his* phrases. And he adored Nietzsche, so it is hard to argue that this was somehow a parody or critique of the philosopher. It is rather the best indication that Picabia saw appropriation to some extent as a mode of approval and *assent*: by repeating the work of another, one claimed it for oneself, and validated, rather than critiqued, its contentions. This *affirmative* aspect of appropriation has of yet received hardly any scholarly notice. One might be tempted to write it off as mere plagiarism, an indication of Picabia's fading powers in his last years—but, as I have endeavored to show, he always tended toward plagiarism, always felt comfortable in helping himself to whatever was around him, without anxiety or shame. And he was, himself, aware of this tendency, as evidenced in his previously cited statement regarding *Les Yeux chauds*. I add to this his even more incisive description: "If a work of another translates my dreams, his work is mine."<sup>361</sup>

To summarize: I do not think that either parody or a Benjaminian framework can do anything more for an analysis of Picabia than accounting for *some* of his appropriations, for a single (and largely overestimated) strand in what was a much more

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<sup>361</sup> Quote by Picabia in Martin and Seckel, eds., *Francis Picabia*, 97.

complex and variegated pattern of appropriation, plagiarism and repetition. Might there be another model, or theory, then, that better takes into account the whole, and which brings into focus what might be called the “pragmatic” and “affirmative” strands? Might, that is, Picabia’s almost total disavowal of what passes for originality at a procedural level, be seen as among the most important—and in fact original—aspect of his practice?

Near the center of Nietzsche’s writings, one finds the philosopher’s self-professed greatest thought, or fundamental metaphysical proposition, that of the eternal return. According to the philosopher, the thought of eternal return occurred to him, as if in a vision, in 1881 at Sils-Maria in Switzerland, as he later recalled:

I shall now relate the history of *Zarathustra*. The basic conception of the work, *the thought of eternal return*, the highest formula of affirmation that can ever be achieved, originates in the month of August in 1881. It is jotted on a page signed with the phrase “6000 feet beyond humanity and time.” On the day I wrote it I had gone walking in the woods by the lake of Silvaplana. By a mightily towering pyramidal boulder not far from Surlei I stopped. The thought came to me then.<sup>362</sup>

The first written and published formulation of the eternal return is found in the famous riddling exhortation passage near the end of the fourth book of *The Gay Science*, published in 1882. I have already cited this passage in the third chapter in reference to temporality, but it is worth recalling in full again:

*The heaviest weight*—What if some day a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: “This life as you live it and have lived it you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and in sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!” Would you not throw yourself down and gnash

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<sup>362</sup> Nietzsche as cited in Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 12.

your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: “You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine.” If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, “Do you want this again and innumerable times again?” would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight [burden]. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life too long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?<sup>363</sup>

In this first formulation the eternal return is hypothetical; it is a sort of existential riddle, or burden. Could you live such that you would will everything, however tragic, that occurs in your life, to occur again, infinitely? And as an exhortation, or riddle, it proposes a mode of affirmation—for *amor fati*, the love of fate; a formula for saying yes to all existence; a challenge to be lived. I will call this the “affirmative-existential” aspect of the eternal return.

But Nietzsche also understood eternal return also as a metaphysical proposition: a factual, verifiable conclusion about the structure of time and existence. He had considered studying physics in order to prove that eternal return was scientifically, as well as philosophically, irrefutable. Everything was going to occur an infinite number of times regardless of how one felt about it. This metaphysical reading of the revelation of Sils-Maria occupied a central place in Nietzsche’s thoughts, and especially, in his plans for a comprehensive masterwork (unfinished; the notes were collected and published as *The Will to Power*).

The metaphysical version of the eternal return present a solution to the problem of the absence of being in the world of becoming. The crisis of nihilism, as discussed in the introduction, derives from the priority of becoming, from the ceaselessness of change and

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<sup>363</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 194.

transformation of all things, values, and truths. Because of this absolute priority of becoming and the endlessness transformation, nothing has any permanent value, or being: nothing, in the end, *is*, as everything forever transforms, or becomes.

In the notes published in the posthumous *The Will to Power*, in which Nietzsche again insisted that “knowledge [is] itself impossible within Becoming,” and further, “To stamp Becoming with the character of Being—that is the supreme *will to power*. . . . That *everything recurs* is the closest *approximation of a world of Becoming to one of Being: peak of the meditation.*”<sup>364</sup> By recurring infinitely, each meaningless moment of universal becoming, each nihilistic unit of infinite chaos, is given the quality of being, that is, permanence and presence (an eternal present).

In Chapter III, I introduced the eternal present, which I argue is the central idea in both Nietzsche’s writings and Picabia’s practice. Of what exactly is the present made, though, other than the mere fact of time passing? Of what did its *presence* consist? The substance of each instant is given, or rather guaranteed, by the eternal return; it is repetition, or eternal recurrence, that gives *being* to each moment. Repetition overcomes nihilism from within: not in reference to a faraway ideal or vanished corroding god, not by pretending that the world is anything other than meaningless chaos, but by making every instant of that chaos an eternity, and thus the object of affirmation.

Let us return to Picabia. The problem is to account for the pragmatic and affirmative aspects of appropriation in his practice. First is the pragmatic aspect, which is best related to the metaphysical interpretation of eternal recurrence. Picabia intuited, as per Nietzsche’s formulation, that repetition made something *more* real, not less; more

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<sup>364</sup> Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, 201.

authentic and original and present, never less. Repetition claimed something as a value in the first place, as if it was rescuing it, even for an instant, from the annihilating flux. This is true, as we will see, for the original *and* that which is repeated. It was in the nature of everything to occur, in life and therefore in art. Picabia, therefore, always based his works upon existing images of earlier images or ideas, regardless of the style or attitude he sought to express in each particular case (and in regards to the appropriated source material). He saw nothing strange nor problematic in this because repetition was in true accordance to what he understood as the fundamental and natural structure of reality.

I am not suggesting this model was necessarily conscious on Picabia's part, or intellectually, discursively developed. The artist was no doubt aware of the idea of eternal recurrence, and sometimes "borrowed" Nietzsche's writings on the topic, as well as the images (the spider, for instance) associated with it. But one should not infer from this that he consciously deployed eternal recurrence as a model for an appropriative practice. Rather, what is being argued for is an instinct; this instinct, which is analogous to Nietzsche's greatest thought, was not present in Picabia's practice as a conscious model, but it does give a good indication as to the *character* of Picabia's practice, and specifically, the radically appropriative nature of that practice.

This is why Picabia's only sustained imaginative act is to stop imagining anything extrinsic to his life, or the world, as it is, but then to intensify, through repetition, this life, or whatever it is that is close at hand. There is therefore almost no exoticism in Picabia's practice.<sup>365</sup> Typically, when he copied an image of a nude from a photograph with

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<sup>365</sup> The infrequent exotic or oriental touches in his writing, such as the camel, desert, and nomad, are, as discussed in Chapter III, emblems of speed, which was related to the eternal present.

*chinoiserie* in the background, he edited out the *chinoiserie*. This can be seen by comparing *Femme au châle vert* [Fig. 138a] to its source in *Paris Sex Appeal* magazine [Fig. 138b].<sup>366</sup> He never searches outside of himself and his circle. Nor does he ever do any research, or sift through far-flung choices. He never imagines another world outside of this one, nor does he ask why anything happens. He only works in close proximity to a source of energy, or stylistic configuration (it is the same thing) which he takes as a given.

Because repetition suggested, at both the metaphysical and affirmative-existential level, a solution to the crisis of nihilism, it was also understood by Picabia as a mode of assent, and associated, as previously discussed, with what he admired and to what he was attracted. Again, what we are locating is a *tendency* on Picabia's part, not a consciously developed theoretical model: If the artist liked something, or was attracted to it, he assented to it by repeating it in his own practice. There are a few moments, though, when Picabia seemed to have realized that repetition was a form, in fact the highest form, of affirmation, and to have offered specific demonstrations—to have made the affirmative, and, especially the creative nature of repetition palpable as the subject for some of his most celebrated works. These instances are found in 1920 and 1921, when, as is discussed in Chapter III, temporality was at the forefront of Picabia's practice. The eternal return is a temporal deduction, and only operates if one exchanges a linear, teleological temporal model for a circular, pulsing, repetitive present, as Picabia had done, or aimed to do. In that chapter, I argue that *L'Œil cacodylate* [Fig. 24], *La Veuve joyeuse* [Fig. 97], and *Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia* [Fig. 98], indicate Picabia's

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<sup>366</sup> Picabia, *Les nus et la méthode*, 34-35.

interest in techniques of the present (primarily speed). Here I will add that each is also a model of repetition, or more exactly generated, explicitly, by repetition. It was not by accident that Picabia focused at this key point on signatures, because the signature is, by its nature, the affirmation, by repetition, of an identity, or proper name; a signature is not only the hastiest, but also the most repetitive of gestures.<sup>367</sup> *La Veuve Joyeuse*, on the other hand, presents the repetition of a photograph in drawing. The painting is, at the most basic level (even before any analysis of iconography or style), an act of simple repetition. For Picabia, we have said, repetition did not mark a fall from a point of origin or authenticity, on the contrary, it made whatever it was that was repeated more real, more present. It rescues the repeated object or idea from meaninglessness, from disappearance into the eternal flux of becoming. It stamps being onto becoming. Thus repetition is associated in these pictures with satisfaction or even exultation. Picabia, behind the wheel of his car, is grinning; the eponymous widow is, according to the title, joyful, the large signature quivers with energy and mobility (it is in no way melancholic or frozen). The discovery and deployment of repetition as an engine for art is, at the same time, the discovery of joy and delight.

To further draw out the ways in which repetition served as a means of affirmation, and specifically the affirmation of *difference*, I would like to draw again upon Deleuze—

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<sup>367</sup> Derrida made the point in regards to Joyce's *Ulysses*: "In a plane, if you write out your name on the identity card which you hand in on arrival in Tokyo, you have not yet signed. You sign when the gesture with which, in a certain place, preferably at the end of the card or the book, you inscribe your name again, takes on the sense of *yes*, this is my name, I certify this, and *yes, yes*, I will be able to attest to this again. I will remember later, I promise, that it is really I who signed. A signature is always a *yes, yes*, the synthetic performative of a promise and a memory conditioning every commitment." "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," in *Act of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 279.

and Deleuze was never closer to Nietzsche, never so obviously his heir, than with his interpretation of eternal recurrence, which he developed into a full-fledged philosophy of difference. The core of Deleuze's project, as formulated in *Difference and Repetition*, was the development of Nietzsche's call for a non-Platonic mode of thought, in which concepts would no longer be measured in relation to an abstract image or ideal.<sup>368</sup> Deleuze pursued this possibility with two intertwining axes.

First, and based largely on Nietzsche, Deleuze reconsidered repetition such that it was not tethered to the logic of the Same. In a series of repetitions, argued Deleuze, each repetition is not identical; simply by virtue of taking place in different times and in a different place in the series, they articulate differences, and not merely in a negative or incidental way. The repetition, argued Deleuze, is therefore not the mere, degraded, lesser or "fallen," version of a pure, authentic original. Rather, the process of repetition, by drawing the difference between each repeated version of a series, creates the original (in retrospect), and never the other way around.<sup>369</sup>

Instead of a mournful logic, or a critical one, in which repetition longs for or critiques a point of origin, Deleuze deploys a generative model, in which repetition becomes creative, and eternally re-creative. Moreover, because each version in a series is necessarily different from its predecessor, repetition serves as the engine of difference, as that which creates difference as a living, active, vital, creative force, and not mere emptiness (negation). Deleuze lamented that difference had not, in his view, been

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<sup>368</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994 [1968]).

<sup>369</sup> "With respect to this power, repetition interiorizes and thereby reverses itself: as Péguy says, it is not Federation Day which commemorates or represents the fall of the Bastille, but the fall of the Bastille which celebrates or repeats in advance all the Federation Days; or Monet's first water lily which repeats all the others." Ibid, 1.

considered as anything but a gap, or void, between two versions made in the image of the (Platonic) Same. “Difference,” he writes, “is not and cannot be thought in itself, so long as it is subject to requirements of representation.”<sup>370</sup> By representation, Deleuze means identity defined by way of resemblance to a model—to an abstract and perfected Platonic image or idea. In such a view, difference is merely emptiness between two versions of the model, or ideal, a kind of leftover, not a productive force of its own.

How, asks Deleuze, does difference manifest itself, *as* difference, and not mere emptiness (negation)? What is its force, and how does it operate? The answer for him is, again, repetition: Each repetition affirms the difference between the elements in a series; or, conversely, difference is what produces the process of repetition. The discovery of difference, which Deleuze defined as his philosophical task (to “rescue difference from its maledictory state”<sup>371</sup>) was made possible by Nietzsche’s eternal return. In Deleuze’s hands, eternal return is not the blind recurrence of the same, but the articulation of difference: a pulsing productive machine. What repeats, argues Deleuze, is not what is identical but rather the *difference* between each version of whatever it is that repeats. Repetition is thus the engine for the production of difference, and differences.

Repetition, which is a circular, instead of a linear, model of time, thus presents an alternative to the Hegelian notion of opposition, and instead imagines, or even perhaps invents, as Picabia attempted in art, the possibility of difference as a fluid, active, generative, *living* force, freed from the binding power of negation and freed at the same

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<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>371</sup> “To rescue difference from its maledictory state seems, therefore, to be the project of the philosophy of difference.” Ibid, 29.

time from the Hegelian advance of history, by means of opposition, toward some sort of illusory self-consummation (in which all differences have been forever subsumed).

Which is the “original” signature in *Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia*, for example? The large central signature is, one assumes, the “image,” which is then signed in the corner. But this central image, or content, is itself the repetition of Picabia’s signature in general, such as the one below. Therefore the presumed original is itself already a repetition—that of the signature in the corner below. There is no original, then, with any claim to authenticity, but rather a series of repetitions: This allows the difference between each version of the signature—like the differences between the male and female figures in the *Monsters*—to come actively to presence: differences in scale, differences between block letters and curving script, between writing in all capitals and using capitals and lowercase letters, between “clean” script and painterly writing with blurs and stains. Neither is better; neither is affirmed at the expense of the other; rather, by way of repetition, the differences between them are affirmed *as* differences, as active, creative flows not merely as empty space between origin and (degraded) imitation. This is the model for Picabia’s art, and life, in general: Not the search for (unavailable) original truth (this would have made him conservative) nor the fight against tradition (this would have made him a revolutionary), but rather the affirmation of specific local differences by way repetition, without thought to the problem of origin or aura. As with signatures and images, so, for Picabia, with the persona, the self: there is no true self whose lesser, subsequent versions are repeated as signatures (and whose value lies in closeness or faith, as replicas, to that origin); Rather, it is the process of signing over and

over again, the process of repetition, that authorizes, distributes and thus creates, life and art from beginning to end.

To bolster his argument, Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* analyzed the riddles in *Zarathustra*, beginning with Zarathustra's chiding of the dwarf, then analyzing Zarathustra's convalescence, and finally Zarathustra's silence, or un-ripeness:

The highest test is to understand the eternal return as a selective thought, and repetition in the eternal return as selective being. Time must be understood and lived out of joint, and seen as a straight line which mercilessly eliminates those who embark upon it, who come upon the scene and only repeat once and for all. The selection occurs between two repetitions: those who repeat negatively and those who repeat identically will be eliminated. They repeat only once. . . . The Negative does not return. The Identical does not return. The Same and the Similar, the Analogous and the Opposed, do not return. Only affirmation returns—in other words the Different, the Dissimilar. Nothing which denies the eternal return returns, neither the default nor the equal, only the excessive returns: how much distress before one extracts joy from such a selective affirmation?<sup>372</sup>

There could be no better description of the character of Picabia's practice from beginning to end: Repetition is never for him the servant of either sameness nor opposition, but a machine for the generation of difference, the production of excess and intensity, and intensification *as* affirmation, which for this artist was the truest and only delight.

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid, 298-299.

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