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**Mouvement Perpetuél:
Between Figuration and Representation in the Work of Francis Picabia**

A Thesis Presented

by

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Abstract of the Thesis

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As an individual whose artistic practice is as enigmatic as his character, the work of Francis Picabia tends to resist conventional notions of the historical avant-garde. Picabia had been clear in his assertion that the fundamental function of art is to represent life, and that one should not only perceive the particularities of the lived life, but to utilize them as a primary productive force – to embrace that “perpetual evolution of life” that both constructs human experience and engenders imaginative creation. This sentiment underscores Picabia’s engagement with the elusive relationship held between the notions of figuration and representation, an engagement that is seen to be a driving force for his practice and an integral aspect of much of his work. As such, the work of Picabia might effectively be interpreted according to the writings of Henri Bergson, and particularly regarding the philosopher’s notion of *Durée (Duration)*. This work thus seeks to resituate the work and writings of Picabia against established readings of his oeuvre, against the traditional theorizations of the historical avant-garde, and according to the functionality of the creative act in relation to the reception of Henri Bergson amongst the Parisian avant-garde during the interwar period.

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Chapter 1: Aesthetic Embodiment – Between Figuration and Representation

...there is only one thing that can really attract us, and that is the perpetual evolution of life. If one wants to have something to say, one must begin by living...¹

– Francis Picabia, *Le Mouvement accéléré*, 1924

As an individual whose artistic practice is as enigmatic as his character, the work of Francis Picabia (1879-1953) tends to resist conventional notions of the historical avant-garde. This is particularly evident upon examining the work created immediately following his public dissociation with the Dada movement in 1921, a moment in his artistic development that in certain ways reflects those stylistic ambiguities that often characterize the production of art during the interwar period as a whole. This ambiguous character is not bound to the works of his post-Dada phase alone, however, and much of his oeuvre remains similarly perplexing according to its broader art historical context. This open-endedness persists despite the tendency to compartmentalize certain aspects of his work, and to generalize an isolated selection of pieces as representative of larger strains of avant-garde practice. This tendency is perhaps best exemplified by the sentiments surrounding Picabia's schematic illustrations, a series of object-portraits and mechanomorphic drawings that are typically seen as a significant moment in the emergence of what has come to be called the machine-aesthetic. These images are typified by works such as *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* (*Portrait of a Young American Girl in the State of Nudity*) and *Voilà elle* (*Here she is*), both created during a brief stay in New York in 1915 (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). Picabia's first trip to New York is often summarized according to the production of such works, with particular emphasis placed upon the creation of the so-called object-portraits. These portraits depict meticulously rendered mechanical objects that are given symbolic meaning through suggestive inscription. Placed upon an unmarked background, the de-contextualized objects underscore their own starkness and call attention to a reductive composition that is stylistically reminiscent of commercial illustration. The utilitarian natures of these objects are unclear, however, and the identification of their sources is disrupted through the simultaneous act of dislocation and conceptual re-purposing. The accompanying texts have likewise forgone their categorical functions, and in their place Picabia has inscribed cryptic phrases that relay figurative imagery at the expense of practical description. This is generally undertaken through the guise of portraiture, yet this is according to an abstract and disembodied form wherein the body is replaced by the machine, and expression is silenced within the schematic void.

Accordingly, these works are often understood as representations of the ostensible decline of subjective experience in a de-humanized world, a condition exemplified

¹ As quoted in Maria Borrás, *Picabia*, New York: Rizzoli, 1985. 242.

through their conflation of human and machine form.² The object-portraits and *mechanomorphs* are indeed intelligible according to this now common interpretation of the machine aesthetic, and this is to some degree corroborated by the pervasive appearance of commercial machines amongst the middleclass during the first decades of the twentieth century.³ These machines have been seen as extensions of the human body-form, and represent the corporeal incorporation of modern devices such as the telephone and automobile. Although this positions Picabia's object-portraits as symptomatic of an overarching degeneration of the human form, this intelligibility is neither determinate of any singular work nor the series as a whole – thus the relationship between the concept of the machine aesthetic and the images that embody it must be addressed, particularly in the case of Picabia's schematic illustrations, a body of work that facilitates discourse on his continual engagement with the natures of figuration and representation.

For as much as *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* represents the degeneration of human form into machine – the young girl transformed into a sparkplug, her body subsumed by the modern technologies that have infiltrated her daily life – it may nevertheless be read in an alternative manner. For embedded within this lament of degeneration is a desire for perfection, a teleological narrative concerned with the perfection of human form (as well as its representation). This concern for the purely human is often implicit within the interpretation of the machine aesthetic as degenerative in nature. Nonetheless it is possible to reconsider such works through other means, and to reevaluate them such that the bodily incorporation of the machine can be seen as fundamentally regenerative. This would necessitate an evolutionary process not bound to the restrictions of teleological imperatives or evolutionary perfection, but rather a process of adaptation and revitalization, a *creative evolution* in the manner of Henri Bergson. Such an interpretation has already been carried out by Matthew Biro, who has characterized certain realizations of the machine aesthetic as a re-imagining of the potentiality of the body-form.⁴ The changing nature of the human form thus becomes a positive aspect of the machine aesthetic in this sense, and is no longer bound to the notion of de-humanization, but rather a specific preoccupation with the bodily and the terms of its representation. That is, in other words, to say that the differentiation between human and non-human forms may not entirely determine the aesthetic terms of figuration – representations of the body are no longer bound to the anatomy of the human figure. As such, the discussion of an exercise in figuration necessitates a reconsideration of the formal limits of figural representation itself, effectively destabilizing given conceptions of what the practice entails.

An engagement with polystylism is a consistent characteristic of Picabia's artistic practice, and a quick survey of his oeuvre does little to inform the viewer of his intentions.⁵ This may at times leave the viewer with an impression of self-contradiction,

² Such a conflation also accounts for what Biro has termed the Dada cyborg, or the re-imagining of human identity through the machine aesthetic. See Briony Fer, David Batchelor, Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. 39.

³ William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 78.

⁴ Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 1-2.

⁵ This further interesting insofar as Picabia has very clear roots in Impressionist practice and pre-war modernist abstraction, most clearly seen in his active role in the Puteaux school.

and with the feeling that Picabia has exposed himself as an opportunist appealing to commercial interest or otherwise a fool whose true naiveté has become clearer in hindsight.⁶ An impression is rarely certain, however, and it is worthwhile to reconsider the contradictions in his work as complications in understanding his practice. It is admittedly difficult to make sense of the wide range of aesthetic vocabularies utilized by this artist, and the attempt to tease out the relations between his various methods is undoubtedly a formidable task. Considering this, it is significant that Picabia had been so taken by a return to figural representation – a decision that had been met with ridicule at the time and that to this day is often overlooked.⁷

The decline of Picabia's interest in the *mechanomorph* was initially met by an engagement with the caricature. This is shown in a self-portrait entitled *Francis par Picabia*, a casually executed and naturalistic contour drawing created in 1920 (Fig. 3). Similar to his schematic illustration, the work is largely unmarked, and is comprised of a loose outline of the artist's upper body, his head turned in profile and the title of the work scrawled on his chest. The work exudes a quaintness not found in the mechanomorphs, something personal and unquestioningly emotional. This was a particularly active year in the history of Parisian Dada, and this image shows an abrupt change in Picabia's practice when compared to his machinic abstractions. As one of the earliest examples of Picabia's return to figuration, it would be difficult to discuss this work outside of its relation to the notion of the *retour à l'ordre*, a widespread anti-modernist sentiment that had been sweeping through other (primarily non-Dada) art circles in the city at this moment.⁸ Picabia's sudden enthusiasm for figurative representation after the *mechanomorph* is admittedly odd, as society had not become any less modern, or any less industrial, or any less mechanistic – yet nevertheless we see reflections of the *return to order* within this *return to figuration*, a movement whose true significance becomes clearer when seen as a *return to the body*. The work of Picabia presents a challenge in this sense, but his work can ultimately be understood as taking part in an investigation into the changing conceptions of artistic practice during the interwar period, particularly according to his engagement with the bodily and the creative act.⁹

This challenge has been addressed by George Baker, whose recent work has done much to support the re-evaluation of Picabia – not only in relation to Dada but also in regards to the history of modernist practice as a whole.¹⁰ Although the notion of figuration is an underlying theme that runs throughout Baker's text – indeed at times becoming the focus of his attention – it nevertheless remains a tangential aspect of a larger project, and often serves as a path toward other intentions. Such is the case of his rigorous use of economic theory, an approach that attempts to explain this return to

⁶ Perhaps it is appropriate to assume that he might have fancied himself a fool in any case.

⁷ This return to figuration is often contextualized according to a rejection of pre-war abstraction, a widespread phenomenon during the interwar period, and Picabia is sometimes seen as one of the worst offenders.

⁸ Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993. 341.

⁹ Perhaps it isn't appropriate to refer to this as an investigation, as it is unclear that Picabia would have been so invested in this type of intellectual conversation - what else could it be? This is an investigation that seems to have been unintentional (if not symptomatic).

¹⁰ The importance of this re-evaluation is difficult to overstate, and future scholarship is much needed to further illuminate the work of this continually elusive artist. See George Baker, *The Artwork Caught by its Tail*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007.

pictorial representation according to a critique of capital. The argument is based upon the writings of Jean-Joseph Goux, and particularly his critique of the system of the general equivalent, a set of relations wherein all signs are given meaning according to a universal referent (best exemplified by units of currency and the gold standard). Goux suggests that the stability of this system was increasingly undermined in modernity, and that the general equivalent, once a universal standard, was reduced to a bankrupt symbol, in turn becoming a set of relations based upon an unstable system of uninsured and meaningless signs.¹¹ Baker's interpretation is ultimately founded upon the assertion that Picabia's re-engagement with figuration functions according to an appropriation of Duchamp's readymade strategy – the selection of pre-existing signs whose terms are emptied and reconfigured according to their aestheticization.¹² He contextualizes the significance of this strategy within the economic disparity described by Goux, suggesting that Picabia seized upon the ambivalent nature of such 'empty tokens' specifically in order to expose and critique the impending invasion of capital within the artistic practice.¹³ This is an engaging argument that underscores the ambiguous (and often opaque) relationship between Picabia and Duchamp. Nevertheless, this approach remains somewhat restricted – anaesthetized, and, in a sense, mechanistic, bound to a meticulously crafted theoretical structure.

Accordingly, the author directs his attention to *Francis Picabia (Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia)*, an ink drawing from 1920 whose relatively unmarked surface is emblazoned with a double signature (Fig. 4). The name of the artist effectively becomes the content of the work itself, allowing the image to be read according to an understanding of the readymade as a devaluation of the signature-as-sign. This in turn is characterized as the creation of an "empty token" whose efficacy as a meaningful signifier is fundamentally disrupted – the semiotic (de)structuring of Picabia's signature.¹⁴ This is an act of doubling that Baker reads as an obfuscation of what Baudrillard would call its "differential value," resulting in a semiotic feedback loop through which the image's representational structure is challenged and the signature-as-general-equivalent is damaged.¹⁵ In fact, the self-referential and circuitous structure of this work is similar to that of an unlikely counterpart from this same year – the aforementioned *Francis par Picabia*. Whereas the latter entails the placement of a signature upon a self-portrait, the former entails the placement of the signature upon itself. When viewed in dialogue with each other, these works call attention to this hidden relationship between representation and figuration, succeeding to expose the ambiguity that moves between them in practice. Yet, the discussion is unfortunately left open-ended, and the extent to which Baker is interested in pursuing this problem beyond the destruction of the sign is unclear. For Baker, this act of destruction seems to justify the practice in and of itself, insofar as it is a critique of capital, and the persistence of semiotic disruption is characterized as a distinctive program of the Picabian readymade (as well as a fundamental aspect of Dadaist practice as a whole). Interestingly, the

¹¹ Baker, 111.

¹² Ibid., 117.

¹³ Ibid., 137.

¹⁴ Ibid., 141.

¹⁵ Indeed one of the most striking aspects of this work is its ability to show the qualitative differences that exist between Picabia's signatures, a characteristic that undermines the sign's status as a general equivalent.

author's boldest engagement with this reading of figuration is found within the text's 'epilogue', an experimental codex written in a loosely-constructed and aphoristic form. This section shows a deeper engagement with figuration than the main body of the text, and the author refers to the emergence of works such as *Francis par Picabia* as an "irruption... of a return to figuration in Picabia's art during the core years of the Dada movement," ultimately moving on to posit the following questions: "Can we talk of a return to figuration when it comes to Picabia? Weren't the mechanomorphs already "figurative"? Is a photograph figurative? And why does figuration always "return"? To whom is it coming back?"¹⁶

Can we talk of figuration when it comes to Picabia? The question seems simple enough, but again we are challenged by his mechanomorphs and must account for the relative abruptness with which we see their decline at the emergence of figuration and the body-form.¹⁷ As shown, Baker attempts to do this through a discussion of the readymade strategy as a critique of the unstable and intrusive nature of capital during the first half of the twentieth century, a gesture that ultimately relegates the body-form (when present) to semiotic disruption alone, effectively discarding its creative potentiality as an 'empty token' to be re-configured into something once again meaningful. This is particularly the case when considering works like *Francis par Picabia*, whose chronology overlaps the continuation of the schematic illustrations and mechanomorphs, images of abstracted car parts and electrical devices. This relation is further complicated when we consider other works from this same year – works that show Picabia's engagement with increasingly extreme explorations of the medium of drawing. Although one could see this polystylism as circumstantial, as a transitional moment that every artist experiences at some moment in the development of their practice, it is more constructive to compare the aims of each tendency in an attempt to unearth a meaningful relationship between them, and to bring forth an implicit relationship that is otherwise obfuscated by the difference in stylistic vocabulary.

The limits to which Picabia had pushed his practice at this moment can be seen within works such as *La Sainte-Vierge (The Blessed Virgin)* and *Jeune fille (Young Girl)* (Fig. 5, Fig. 6), two pieces once again created in the increasingly significant year of 1920. While these images clearly represent diverging approaches to an engagement with the representation of formlessness, both are fundamentally concerned with exploring the nature of non-reproducibility.¹⁸ The former achieves this through its bombastic use of the ink stain, an inherently formless mark that underscores the idiosyncratically performative nature of drawing. The latter simply denies pictorial representation altogether through an act of negation, whereby the picture plane has been literally excised from itself, leaving a circular hole in the center of the image by way of the cut. In fact, the *Jeune fille* was reproduced in the first and only issue of the journal *Proverbe* this same year, its excision now exposing the material world so often concealed by the picture plane. Indeed, the hole produced by the cut is in this reproduction circumscribed by the phrase "*bracelet de la*

¹⁶ Baker, 341.

¹⁷ It seems that the uneasiness of this transition is in part due to the use of figuration in fascism, and the relation of this to avant-garde practice as discussed by Mark Antliff. See Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

¹⁸ This is perhaps couched within a critique of other post-Cubist modes of representation popular at the time, most notably that of Purism and the mathematically-based painting of Le Corbusier.

vie,” an inclusion that speaks toward the sense of re-embodiment afforded to its viewing subject. It is obvious that these works go far beyond the pictorial meandering often found within stylistic transitioning. Thus to approach the wide variety of stylistic vocabularies utilized at this moment – whether representational or otherwise (and it is unclear what ‘representation’ means in either case) – we must avoid approaching these works as merely steps within a sequential notion of artistic development, and should attempt to consider theme within this supposed return to figuration.

By 1920 it is evident that Picabia had moved beyond such transitioning, a development that reached its apex in 1913 during his first trip to New York. The trip was spurred by an invitation to exhibit three paintings at the infamous Armory show, the first comprehensive exhibition of modernist artwork to be shown in the United States. The works Picabia had shown at this exhibition were amongst the most scandalous of the season, and were overshadowed only by those of Marcel Duchamp and Henri Matisse.¹⁹ The paintings were created just one year before the exhibition, and characterize the nature of the work prior to his experiences in New York. They show a particular penchant for lyrical abstraction, underscoring his association with the Puteaux group of painters, and can be easily placed within a particular trajectory of the Parisian avant-garde that established a synthesis of Orphism and Cubism. This often surmounted to an attempt to render visceral experience through non-representational methods, drawing upon a deep engagement with synaesthetic practices (a theme that often emerges throughout Picabia’s oeuvre). The style of his work from this period is exemplified in a large painting titled *Udnie (jeune fille americaine; danse)*, an energetic work from 1913. As the title suggests, the work seeks to represent the movements of a young girl enthralled in the movements of her dance (Fig. 7). A swirling mass of gray, blue, green and umber, this work draws upon both the dynamic compositional strategies of Futurism as well as the musicality of the Orphist painterly gesture, situating Picabia’s work within two practices that are (to varying degrees) concerned with bodily experience.

As William Camfield notes, Picabia returned to a Parisian scene taken by a permeating “concern for simultaneism [sic] in contemporary art and life,” ultimately marking a general movement toward the abandonment of what Apollinaire had called “pure painting,” in turn establishing an artistic practice directly engaged with the energetic dynamism of a modernized and machinic life.²⁰ Indeed, this concern may also be seen in a work like *Udnie*, whose *in-between* character calls attention to an engagement with lyricism that was met unexpectedly with a revised conception of abstraction itself:

A certain melody by Mendelssohn is entitled “The Marriage of the Bees,” let the gods be my witness, nothing in this admirable music ever brought to mind a hornet... Then, for a painting, why not accept a sign which does not evoke accepted conventions? *Udnie* is [not] the portrait of a young girl... as we commonly [conceive of it]. [*Udnie*] is a [memory] of America, evocations from there which, subtly opposed like musical

¹⁹ William Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979. 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

harmonies, become representative of an idea, of a nostalgia, of a fugitive impression.²¹

Thus despite a continuation of his Puteaux style after his return to Paris – resulting in the creation of several important works (including *Udnie*) – it is apparent that Picabia’s dedication to a purely lyrical mode of abstract painting had begun to wane as he began to develop an interest in more self-referential endeavors, ultimately leading to his now infamous machinic style. This interest in the “simultaneism of contemporary art and life” represents for Picabia a reconfiguration of the representational structure of abstraction itself, whereby the Romantic notions of spiritual essence that informed much of his earlier work are effectively replaced by references to deeply personal experiences, a gesture that serves to re-engage his practice with the immediate realities of the lived life and replaces the *universal* with the *individual*.

This transition had been gradual, however, and whereas a painting such as *Udnie* primarily sought to transpose varying states of being into the domain of aesthetics – visually capturing the dynamism of the movements of a young girl in dance, as well as the artist’s own memories of life in New York, both through generally non-representational means – its comparison to earlier works clearly reveal a burgeoning interest in hard-edged and metallic forms. After this, subsequent works began to incorporate machinic imagery in ways that were more immediately recognizable, and, in a sense, increasingly representational. Such is the case of *Voilà la femme (Here is Woman)* from 1915, a moderately sized mixed media painting that shows the incorporation of machinic imagery within his established mode of lyrical abstraction (Fig. 8). It is clear in this work, however, that the machinic imagery has not yet overpowered the painterly gesture, and thus the lyrical quality of Picabia’s earlier work is more or less retained. Although the machinic is thoroughly embedded within the evocative and painterly gesture, this is an embeddedness that is exhibited through the effervescent character of the background in addition to the delicate modeling of the mechanism itself – a dynamic solidness handled in a style that, in a sense, recalls the tubular compositions of Leger.²²

The work retains the expressivity found in earlier paintings despite its machinic quality, clearly illustrating the discreet ways in which Picabia began to approach the incorporation of this new style into his practice (particularly when contrasted with the brash quality of his object-portraits). Within this work one can begin to perceive an attempt to establish a relation between the machinic and the painterly in a manner such that neither aspect overcomes the other, resulting in a synthesis of the machinic and the expressive that coexist harmoniously. Yet, this interest in the machinic is often seen to culminate in the purely mechanical object-portraits, such as *Portrait d’une jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité*, a group of works that more clearly emphasizes the underlying tendency of this new direction to depict a state of *being-with-machine* with ever increasing clarity. What can be seen within this movement, however, is an engagement with the notion of representation in the wake of Picabia’s re-engagement with lived experience, the diminishment of lyrical abstraction at the rise of literalist representation, and ultimately a re-configuration of the terms of figuration itself. Indeed,

²¹ As quoted in Camfield, 60.

²² Leger was also known to affiliate with the Puteaux group.

Camfield was quite correct in his assertion that such a work – perhaps like Picabia’s practice as a whole – ultimately represents “the synthesis of time and space... [and] of inner experiences and exterior events.”²³

It is interesting that, more often than not, the object-portraits of 1915 include the location of their creation in addition to the year, occasionally giving the exact day. For instance, *Portrait d’une jeune fille...* includes the inscription: F. Picabia, 3 Juillet, 1913, New York; *Ici, c’est ici Stieglitz* includes: F. Picabia, 1915, New York; *Le Saint des saints*: F. Picabia, Juillet, New York; *De Zayas! De Zayas!*: F. Picabia, 1915, New York; *Portrait Max Jacob*: 8 Decembre, 1915, Francis Picabia; and so on.²⁴ The inclusion of such seemingly banal information can become an integral aspect of these works, particularly when one considers the functionality of the text-image as it is exhibited through the titles and accompanying descriptions. Considering how text constructs our experience of these works, perhaps functioning much like Duchamp’s readymade, in addition to the fact that the pictorial sources for the mechanisms are often found to be commercial magazines and schematic diagrams – items that are used within daily life, and images that are dispersed throughout and taken from popular culture – there is something within these works that is irrevocably bound to lived experience. This is a condition that serves to purge them of the lofty and poetic ideals that characterized Picabia’s Puteaux paintings. This undermines the typical characterization of these works as being mechanically reproduced – and thus *reproducible* themselves – and their inimitability is amplified when considering the explicit engagement with non-reproducibility exhibited in works like *La Saint-Vierge* and *Jeune fille*. It is worth noting that these images were created through the act of tracing, a meticulous process that requires the intimate presence of the artist. This is significant insofar as it means that these works necessarily retain the gesture, the personal, and the individual mark, reduced as it may be, and ultimately stand to document the reality of Picabia’s presence at the moment of their production. Indeed, Baker notes as much when he states that, for Picabia, such reproductions “never remained simply [bound to] a mechanical process; it was conceived instead, as both machinic and bodily, both technical and corporeal.”²⁵ Perhaps the most explicit example of this condition of corporeality, however, of Picabia’s presentness, is found within *La Saint-Vierge*. While this work most ostensibly points to the past action of the artist, the end result of a process, it is nevertheless an exercise in formlessness that extends well beyond its historicity. For such a work not only exhibits the result of Picabia’s decision to pour the ink onto a piece of paper, but it also forces the viewer to re-imagine the action taking place within their own mind – this is a performative action that exists not for Picabia alone, but for the viewing subject as well.

Baker contends that it could be beneficial to art historians to approach such a work as fundamentally “meaningless” in nature, thinking of the stain as an “operation” whereby its meaning (if it has one) is constructed primarily according to its inimitability rather than its iconography. For what is engaging within this work is not its placement within the tradition of Christian iconography, but rather its refusal to participate in such

²³ Camfield, 62.

²⁴ Indeed many of these images came to grace the cover of Picabia’s personal journal *391*. In this case the date of publishing replaces the date of the illustration, although the first edition did include the inscription of “Barcelone 1917” in the manner of the images referenced above.

²⁵ Baker, 69.

any fixed system at all. Its existence as a signifier is disrupted in this sense, and its functionality is revealed to be a critique of form in and of itself. Nonetheless, perhaps we can approach it according to other terms. Instead we must consider the ability of the image to stir something within the mind of its viewing subject – taking it as an experiential operation.²⁶ Indeed, it is difficult to characterize this work as gestural in nature, and even more difficult to call it a drawing at all, as Baker notes, specifically because it is “divorced from the hand of the artist” and “purged of any traces of what we might call ‘style’.”²⁷ Yet, the work is nevertheless signed by Picabia, albeit done mechanically, and it is also titled, and, further, it is cropped – an action that reveals that the artist may have had more control than we believed at first glance. This is an action that entails the participation of a witness, no matter how diminished his presence might have actually been. This is not, as we might care to see it, a purely historical image – a document exhibited in an ethnological museum (perhaps in the sense of Bataille, wherein it no longer retains its use-value, analogous to a scrap of parchment you might find on the street, or on the floor of a printer’s workshop). The image ultimately claims its *vitality* through the viewer’s ability to reconstruct the events that preceded its creation. This intelligibility is more evident within a counterpart entitled *La Sainte-Vierge II* (1920), a variation in which Picabia further emphasizes his presence as witness-creator through having forgone both cropping and moveable type (Fig. 9).

The formlessness of these images is immediately recognizable to our senses, to our memory, and the viewer engages these works according to their own participation in its retroactive production – the imaginative reconstitution of its creation that necessarily takes place within our minds at the moment we perceive them. In this sense, one might characterize the stain as a sort of readymade, positioning the work even further into collusion with Duchamp’s conceptualism. Such a reading would be enlightened by Dalia Judovitz’s discussion on the functionality of the readymade as an “operation on vision and discourse.”²⁸ This is a characteristic that is afforded to us precisely through its “meaninglessness,” and underscores a condition of aesthetic experience that is often not readily available within more conventional practices, which, by way of stylistic composition, tend to obfuscate the simple, meaningless, and material creation of the works in and of themselves.²⁹ The splatter of ink is an image whose formlessness precludes its ability to be representational of anything other than itself – as an operation, a qualitative event. Nonetheless, this in turn allows the viewer to *form an image of themselves*, whereby they identify with the artist and empathize with the creation of the work. In this sense, it is its formlessness that ultimately allows the image to function as a catalyst for re-embodiment for its viewing subject, and, as such, effectively enters into dialogue with the very terms of representation it ostensibly works against: figuration. Such work is informed by an underlying interest in anti-rationalism on the part of Picabia, who, as shown within his allusion to Mendelssohn, was quite aware that the work of art was no longer bound to verisimilitude, to allegorical meaning, to

²⁶ See Dalia Judovitz, “Anemic Vision in Duchamp: Cinema as Readymade,” *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf. E. Kuenzli, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

²⁷ Baker, 40.

²⁸ Ludovitz, 48.

²⁹ Perhaps the reference to “traditional practices” needs further explanation, as by this time many of the pre-war avant-garde movements, and especially Cubism, had become somewhat formulaic. Even formalist abstraction can preclude the sense of immediacy strived for by Picabia within his experimental drawings.

symbolization, or even to form, and was now able to operate outside of any fixed signification altogether, immersed in the perpetual evolution of life itself. These works ultimately speak to Picabia's tenuous relation to Cubism, which, beginning with his association with the Puteaux group, becomes an important filter through which to view both variations of *La Saint-Vierge* as well as *Jeune fille*.³⁰

This is evident regarding the rise of the Purist movement within Paris at this moment, which, founded by Le Corbusier (Charles Édouard Jeanneret) and Amédée Ozenfant in 1920, represented the epitome of post-war rationalization within the arts. A manifesto published in their co-authored journal *L'Esprit Nouveau (The New Spirit)*, elucidated their view on the state of the arts during the interwar period, and particularly regarding the turn of post-war Cubism toward total rationalization:

Logic, born of human constants and without which nothing is human, is an instrument of control and, for he who is inventive, a guide towards discovery; it corrects and controls the sometimes capricious march of intuition and permits one to go ahead with certainty... A work of art should induce the sensation of mathematical order, and the means of inducing this mathematical order should be sought among universal means.³¹

Indeed, the Purist movement, as well the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, was an extensive and meticulous exercise in intellectual thought, adequately representing the ubiquitous *retour à l'ordre* that often characterizes artistic production during this period. For the authors of this text – which, as David Batchelor points out, mentions the term ‘order’ no less than seven times – the aesthetics of Purism offered “an art which is perhaps severe,” but is “nevertheless one that addresses itself to the elevated faculties of [the] mind.”³² That is to say, of course, that this movement “[addressed] itself” to the rationalizing tendencies of the human intellect through its rigorous use of formal aesthetic theory, a statement which, as Batchelor notes, explicitly contrasted the nature of what they referred to as “those arts whose only ambition is to please the senses.”³³ It is evident that such a statement is most ostensibly positioned against the re-emergence of naturalist and regionalist tendencies in French painting at this time, exemplified by the quaint and rustic paintings of an artist like André Dunoyer de Segonzac, which quite clearly opposed the “mathematical order” and “universal means” propagated by Jeanneret and Ozenfant.³⁴ It is possible that such a statement also includes the amorphous and experiential practices of Parisian Dada, however, whose famed ‘great season’ was well under way at this moment.

The works of these two painters are clearly aligned within a lineage of pre-war Cubism, exhibiting a preoccupation with non-normative and synthesized perspectives, flatness of the pictorial plane, and the analytic dissection of objects, typically arranged in still-lives, whose intelligibility is generally delayed according to processes of compositional elongation and fragmentation. The Purist aesthetic differentiates itself, however, in its tendency to avoid the integration of objects, instead clearly delineating

³⁰ Baker, 41-43.

³¹ Fer, Batchelor, and Wood, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, 20.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ The painters thought of such work as decorative in nature.

each form in its own self-containment. This is often accompanied by an attempt to both suggest depth and situate forms as they rest in space, a technique that establishes perceptual tension when seen to coexist with an engagement with severe frontality. The compositions are highly schematized, serving as pictorial manifestations of the mathematical and geometrical theories discussed by the artists in their manifesto. Indeed, the painters included reproductions of their work within *L'Esprit Nouveau* in order to exercise the interrelation of these projects, at times overlaying geometrical diagrams upon the images to reveal their underlying universal order.³⁵ Art could be thought of according to evolutionary terms for Jeanneret and Ozenfant, whereby the creation of form was accompanied by a movement toward simplicity, and novel forms were brought forth through the purging of extraneous and decorative accoutrements. If we see this evolutionary movement as undertaken by the artists in order to approach an ideal state of being, utilizing rationalist methods to reveal what they called “the Essential,” then perhaps we can, in turn, approach *La Saint-Vierge* as an outright refusal to participate in such a movement at all and the formlessness of this image thus becomes a critique of hyper-rational methods of representation.³⁶ From this perspective we might then approach *Jeune fille*, on the other hand, as the culmination of such teleological movement, wherein the desire for simplicity ultimately facilitates the work’s self-decimation. We are shown that the result of this sort of reductive movement is the eventual annihilation of form altogether.

One can position these images as a critique of modernist teleological practice, tracing the theme of the ‘jeune fille’ amongst a number of works by Picabia and finding its origin within a Cubist-style portrait of the same title from 1912.³⁷ Baker contends that to miss the pictorial history of the theme of the *jeune fille* would be to miss the primary target of Picabia’s assault:

To miss this would be to miss the way in which the entire series had been a response, indeed an attack, on Cubism itself. Dada has been perpetually described as a project of “anti-art,” but to understand it in the context of 1920 is to acknowledge the specificity of its attack, not simply on art in general, but on Cubist modernism in particular.³⁸

Thus the continual representation of the figure of the *jeune fille*, in this sense, surmounts to an ongoing engagement with a critique of conventional subjects of representation in modernist practice, an iconographic tradition with which the *jeune fille* had generally been associated.³⁹ This was particularly evident within the history of Cubism, and the incessant recycling of images became an explicit point of criticism for Picabia: “They have cubed the paintings of primitives, cubed African sculptures, cubed violins, cubed guitars, cubed illustrated newspapers, cubed shit and the profiles of young girls, now they will have to cube money!”⁴⁰ Although the conventionalization of Cubism that Picabia described in this sense reached its most extreme realization within the theoretical

³⁵ Fer, Batchelor, and Wood, 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

³⁷ Baker, 71.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

aesthetics of Purism, the target of this particular attack was actually the Section d'Or group of painters, a school who, similar to the Purists, were concerned with the organizational principles of geometry. The criticisms that Picabia launched at this group were primarily based upon the belief that they had brought Cubism to a point of unsalvageable banality, succeeding to turn a once energetic avant-garde practice into a decorative and sterile product of the market economy.⁴¹ It is worth noting that Picabia's scathing remarks were actually included in the twelfth issue of his journal *391*, which, as we will come to see, had been a primary outlet for him to broadcast criticism. This particular issue was published around the same moment that both *La Saint-Vierge* and *Jeune fille* were created, ultimately establishing a dialogue between the images and his critique of Cubism that is unmistakable.

This critique is complicated, however, by the fact that two of the most visible figures within the Section d'Or group, Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes, were actually individuals with whom Picabia had associated during his Puteaux period. And although the nature of their practice at this moment was informed by the rationalizing nature of formal geometry – the name of the group, of course, referring to the golden ratio – they had just eight years earlier ardently worked under the auspices of anti-rationalism. Indeed, Baker is satisfied in approaching this critique of Cubism according to the logic of form alone, wherein Picabia's engagement with formlessness ultimately confronts Cubism in order to operate outside of modernist teleological narrative. It is important, however, to consider the implications that arise within such a refusal, particularly in regard to the notion of anti-rationalism, which, as has been made clear, was a primary force behind much of Picabia's work at this time. Although the superficial aims of Cubism compliment the philosophy of Bergson, the movement had in fact been an exceedingly intellectualized in practice, despite its purported use of anti-rationalist methodology. Although these predilections are especially evident in the work of the movement's post-war practitioners – perhaps most ostensibly within the Purist aesthetic theory propagated by Jeanneret – it is nevertheless worthwhile to discuss the nature of an earlier conception of the movement. It is particularly important to assess the conception of the movement in the terms of Jean Metzinger and Albert Gleizes, two pre-war practitioners whose theoretical framework contextualized Cubism within subjective experience, and discussed their work to be an attempt to “capture the whole self within the work of art.”⁴² This was a sentiment that ultimately became the groundwork for their co-authored article *Du Cubisme* (1911), a text that served to explicate the theoretical and aesthetic underpinnings of this particular faction of the Cubist movement. In order to approach Picabia's strenuous relation to Cubism it is thus necessary to address the nature of the movement both before and after the war – particularly when considering Picabia's involvement with the Puteaux group of painters, a suburban offshoot of Cubism with which both Metzinger and Gleizes associated.⁴³ While *Du Cubisme* was primarily written in order to characterize the work of its authors, the manifesto of Metzinger and Gleizes

⁴¹ Baker, 75.

⁴² Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993. 45.

⁴³ In addition to Picabia, Metzinger, and Gleizes, the group also included Marcel Duchamp, Juan Gris, Fernand Leger, Robert Delaunay, and Frantisek Kukpa, and stood as an alternative faction to the Parisian school established by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso.

had also served to implicate the Orpho-Cubist abstractions of Picabia, and to appropriately discuss the latter it is necessary to review the former.

The work of those associated with the Puteaux group follows a lineage clearly stemming from the Parisian avant-garde conceived by Picasso and Braque, but instead showing a synthesis of the simultaneity of Cubism with the expressivity of Orphism. This work can be described as an attempt to capture the essence of artistic individuality, and was fueled by a desire to revitalize artistic practice through the infusion of the domain of aesthetics with the dynamism of subjective experience. A primary concern for such painters was the freedom of expression and the valorization of the individual, both of which being driving themes throughout *Du Cubisme*. As discussed by Mark Antliff, the metaphysical framework for this text had been primarily concerned with the preservation of the self through free acts of artistic creation, an effort depending much upon Bergsonian notions of qualitative time and space.⁴⁴ Although Bergsonian philosophy was quite popular during the first decades of the twentieth century, the influence of his writings upon modern aesthetics is a subject that has been left relatively untouched by art historians. Bergson is often treated as a “marginal figure on the cultural landscape” within art history, despite the dominating presence of his philosophy within many other areas of society – a cultural phenomenon at the time known as *Bergsonism*.⁴⁵ This is particularly evident in the anti-rationalist writings of Georg Sorel, an anarcho-syndicalist who became a leading political figure in Paris during the decades before the war, and whose Bergsonian-influenced views on class struggle and violence strike a resonance with the transformative rhetoric later espoused by the Futurists.⁴⁶ The political implications of this notion of anti-rationalism is central to the prevalence of Bergsonism at this moment, particularly through its opposition to the Cartesian-based nationalism of Charles Maurras, a conservative writer and ideological founder of the Action française who positioned the development of Cubism according to notions of national heritage and neo-Classical ideals.⁴⁷

For Antliff, a discussion of pre-war Cubism cannot be understood outside of this political context, as the prevalence of Bergsonism was central to the self-positioning of the movement on the part of figures like Metzinger and Gleizes. This is particularly evident in their reactionary stance against the conservative interpretation of their work from the likes of someone like Charles Maurras, whose interpretation, Antliff suggests, served as an impetus behind the alignment of the Puteaux group with Bergsonian anti-rationalism.⁴⁸ Indeed, Maurras had publically condemned Bergsonian philosophy for its dependence on the writings of Nietzsche, in turn asserting that its internationalism precluded its ability to partake in the program of French heritage propagated by the Action française.⁴⁹ Thus the self-positioning of the Cubists within the anti-rationality of Bergsonism served to ostensibly dissociate themselves from the conservative politics of the monarchy, and therefore freed them from the Cartesian-based and neo-Classical aesthetic lineage upheld by the likes of Maurras. This most ostensibly resulted in the

⁴⁴ Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

rejection of rationalized aesthetic processes, such as Albertian perspective and the logical use of modeling, and shedding objective realism for subjective abstraction.

Antliff begins his discussion of Cubist aesthetics with an anecdote from Jacques Emile Blanche, a painter working in Paris during the first decades of the century who was commissioned to produce a portrait of Bergson in 1911. As we have seen, the relationship between the Cubists and Bergson has been ambiguous, if not altogether one-sided, but it was during a modeling session for this portrait that the philosopher began to question the painter about the work of the Cubists, underscoring the fact that he was aware of the theoretical painters who championed his anti-rationalist philosophy as the source for their work.⁵⁰ Although the skeptical Blanche attempted to steer the conversation away from this topic, apparently believing the work of the Cubists do be incompatible with an intuitionist notion of art, the philosopher is nevertheless known to have held significant interest in the work of this new school of painters. This interest came to its culmination at his tentative agreement to pen the preface to one of their exhibitions, albeit fixed on the condition that he “was definitely won over by their ideals.”⁵¹ Needless to say, it is clear that he had not, in fact, been “won over by their ideals,” as we have seen that contrary to this he was actually quite critical of the methodologies employed within the movement, which were put forth most clearly in the interpretation of Bergsonian philosophy utilized by Metzinger and Gleizes. As we have seen, it is held for Bergson that creation is unable to follow analysis, and thus the prevalence of analytical methodologies in Cubist practice necessarily precludes such work from actually embodying the sort of expression that their creators sought to harness.

Despite the criticisms of Bergson, who asserted that Cubism was not a viable realization of his philosophy in that it placed too much emphasis on analysis, thereby foregoing its capacity for expression under the weight of the intellect, Antliff suggests that a close reading of *Du Cubisme* ultimately reveals that the methods of Cubism may in certain regards be reconcilable with the aims of Bergsonian philosophy. This assertion is most explicitly grounded upon an interpretation of the treatment of space in Cubism whereby the fractured and illogical rendering of form is a result of the synthesis of a multitude of viewpoints, effectively representing the artist’s experience of perceiving the form over a lengthened period of time. The artist in this sense attempts to represent their unique subjective experience, the multitude of viewpoints representing the dynamism of psychological time – or, in the terminology of Bergson, representing the heterogeneous flow of *Durée (Duration)* itself.⁵² As much is said by Metzinger and Gleizes themselves when they assert that “moving around an object to seize from it several successive appearances [allows the artist to] reconstitute it in time.”⁵³

This interest in reconstitution is of particular importance, as in this context it is essentially playing into the language of an anti-rational critique of homogenized time.⁵⁴ Whereas Bergson contends that heterogeneous time remains in contact with *Durée*, and is

⁵⁰ Antliff, 39.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 40.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ This anti-rational critique of time is also taken up by proto-Fascists like Georg Sorel, who utilized this argument to speak against capitalism and the compartmentalization of time as commodity. This is further couched within the rhetoric of cultural and spiritual regeneration. See Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

thus immersed within the folds of truly subjective experience, the intellectualizing processes involved in homogenized time effectively strip away the vitality of lived experience, resulting in one that has been generalized, compartmentalized and thus distorted under the demands of societal intelligibility. The use of pictorial fragmentation in the work of Metzinger and Gleizes can be read according to these terms, particularly as a critique of traditional forms of representation that, aligned with homogeneous time, remain inadequate in capturing the true nature of their subject. This fragmentation may then be seen as an attempt to retrieve those psychological aspects that are typically lost in purely mimetic portraiture, which, in this sense, is seen to isolate a representation of the individual within a singular and idealized position, eschewing the idiosyncratic nature of the person as they are actually experienced.⁵⁵

Indeed Metzinger and Gleizes presuppose that the artist is particularly attuned to the perception of such *Durée*, and use this as a way to distinguish their form of Cubism as a truly vanguard movement.⁵⁶ This in part reflects Bergson's privileging of artists according to their heightened capacity for both perceiving and invoking genuine experiences of *Durée*, and, in a sense, establishes a sort of cultural hierarchy whereby artists are unique in their ability to establish new pictorial forms.⁵⁷ Metzinger and Gleizes further explicate their methods of conceiving novel and psychologically affective pictorial forms by situating their practice within sense-perception, and embedding within their work a permeating sense of embodied presentness: "To establish pictorial space we must have recourse to tactile and motor sensations, indeed to all our faculties. It is our whole personality which, contracting or expanding, transforms the plane of the picture... The art which ceases to be a fixation of our personality (unmeasurable, in which nothing is ever repeated), fails to do what we expect of it."⁵⁸ Through recourse to an aesthetics of embodied presentness these artists seek to bypass the constraints of artistic tradition – and, accordingly, the aesthetics of Maurrassian neo-Classicism – arriving at an avant-garde practice that indeed strives to become a "fixation of [their] personalit[ies]."⁵⁹ Indeed Antliff notes that such recourse effectively reconfigures the terms of spatial perception, a gesture that demands that "space is no longer an absolute category of experience... [but must be] relative to our sensory faculties." Thus the intention of these painters to "represent the whole self" is fixed upon a condition of perceptual embodiment, and the unique phenomenological experience of forms according to lived experience, resulting in a "spatial construction [that] is the product of the interrelation of consciousness and feeling."⁶⁰

This sentiment finds its bearings in Bergson's distinction of qualitative and quantitative experience, the former emerging through intuition and the latter produced by the intellect, two conditions of human experience discussed in the text *Creative Evolution*

⁵⁵ Antliff notes that art historian Christopher Gray has interpreted this use of perspectival simultaneity according to a Kantian notion of perceiving the form in-and-of-itself, a gesture that effectively inverts the notion of anti-rationalism into hyper-rationalism.

⁵⁶ Antliff, 42.

⁵⁷ Ultimately this is the sort of hierarchical positioning that Picabia had criticized in his ultimate dismissal of modernist aesthetics, particularly in its tendency toward embracing teleological narratives, underscoring his initial reticence toward Cubist theory during his association with the Puteaux group.

⁵⁸ Antliff, 43.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

(1907). Indeed it is held that quantitative time, homogeneous and intellectualized in nature, is unable to truly express lived experience.⁶¹ Qualitative time, on the other hand, heterogeneous and intuitive in nature, thus becomes the condition directly related to the flow of *Durée*. Accordingly it is the latter that becomes central to the interests of Metzinger and Gleizes, whose endeavor to “represent the whole self” must necessarily be anti-rational in character in order to speak to the unique personality of the artist. Thus the artists are primarily engaged with embracing what Bergson called the free act, a moment of genuinely creative action that evades the binding and generalizing tendencies of the intellect: “The outward manifestation of this inner state will be [the] free act... it will express the whole of the self.”⁶² It is through such action alone that *Durée* may be felt at all, but this feeling may then nevertheless only be invoked, as it is unable to be faithfully preserved in plastic and quantifiable form – i.e., in painting. As Antliff notes, “by transcending the intellect’s passive... view of the self, one experiences the self in the process of self-creating [and] free activity.”⁶³ Indeed, Bergson contends that “ideas which [are received] ready-made” are unable to speak toward such a sensation, and “float on the surface [of the mind] like dead leaves on the water of a pond.”⁶⁴

How such a sentiment might be utilized by artists working in pictorial form is problematic for reasons that should be obvious, however, namely that attempts to capture and represent an image of *Durée* is more or less a futile prospect according to Bergson. Further, the attempt to receive an adequate impression of *Durée* through “ready-made” strategies is similarly ill-fated. Nevertheless, Antliff contends that the use of qualitative space in Cubism – a characteristic that is at first glance antithetical to Bergson’s anti-spatial project – is justified according to the philosopher’s notion of *extensity*, a psychological condition whereby an individual can effectively de-spatialize their experience of space by disallowing typical Cartesian organizing principles – i.e., Euclidian space – instead embracing qualitative succession of material form.⁶⁵ Such a process then allows the artist to re-connect to this inner-self through pictorial means, that is, experienced partly through the faculty of vision. Indeed Metzinger and Gleizes held such an opinion of experiencing material form when they stated that “all plastic qualities guarantee a built-in emotion,” an assertion that, as has been shown, relates to Bergson’s notion of qualitative extensity – the experience of space according to non-Euclidean terms.⁶⁶

Every expressive medium... is the end of a process whereby the inner, manifold self becomes spatialized through self-representation. Such externalization typically is manifested through a transition from a highly emotive and alogical state to a non-emotive and rational state of mind. Thus it becomes evident that all forms of self-representation would seem self-defeating. Nonetheless there are degrees of spatialization... and Gleizes and Metzinger drew upon Bergson’s notion of qualitative

⁶¹ Antliff, 44.

⁶² Ibid., 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 46.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 47. Also see Bergson, “Time and Free Will,” *Key Writings*, Ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, New York: Continuum, 2002.

⁶⁶ Antliff, 48.

extensity to arrive at a notion of plastic space closely allied to the profound self. This qualitative treatment of space accounts for the seemingly arbitrary scale employed in Cubist works: we should read such spatial disjunctions as the plastic equivalent to durational being.⁶⁷

Although this serves well to characterize the Bergsonian interests of Metzinger or Gleizes through explicating their utilization of qualitative extensity, whereby space is subjectively felt instead of rationally calculated, this nevertheless remains somewhat of a formalist argument for Antliff, in that philosophy is not considered beyond the stylistic fashioning of plastic form – the production of paintings whose “spatial disjunctions [function] as the plastic equivalent to durational being.” As we have seen, such duration is only able to be invoked – not preserved – and Antliff must account for how the medium of painting achieves this. Although Metzinger and Gleizes described the nature of pictorial space as a “sensitive passage between two subjective spaces,” asserting that “this plane reflects the personality back upon the understanding of the spectator,” the reflection in this sense is often hidden, remaining anonymous and undifferentiated for the work’s viewing subject – how might the artist’s qualitative experience of the painted subject be transmitted through the work to its viewer? Antliff recognizes this problem and contends that “if an intuition is to be suggested, the art work itself must induce an alogical state of mind in the beholder.”⁶⁸ He justifies this through a passage of Bergson from “Introduction to Metaphysics” that states that although “no image will replace the intuition of the duration, but many different images, taken from quite different order of things, will be able, through the convergence of their action, to direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on.”⁶⁹ Antliff contends that the cubist’s pictorial fragmentation forces us to re-configure the abstracted figure, thus forcing an active (and not passive) experience of the work on part of the viewer whereby they empathize with the artist’s durational perspective of the form as it was once perceived.⁷⁰

Antliff closes his discussion of Cubism in this context with an assertion that “[such] paintings are true because the artist is true to himself, [and] not to some external reality.”⁷¹ Although this sentiment is an apt ending to a meticulous discussion of the work of Metzinger and Gleizes, the argument does not withstand close inspection. It has been shown that such an argument may be reduced to a rather formalist approach, ultimately serving to justify the stylistic use of pictorial fragmentation in these works. This is contingent upon Bergson’s notion of the free or creative act, an action that is both immersed in qualitative experience and manifested in material form – what Bergson calls its actualization – remnants of which may be discerned within a work of art, in turn calling forth the viewer’s intuitive awareness of durational being. The capacity for intuition is dependent upon its evocation, however, and for works of art to act upon the viewing subject in such a manner, their creators must, as Antliff suggested, be true to themselves, and must not forgo their own intuition under the influence of their intellectual faculties. Indeed, Antliff notes that “Cubist imagery... emerges out of the

⁶⁷ Antliff, 48.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 61

durational flux of consciousness.”⁷² This may be true – and perhaps it is the case that all artists are necessarily immersed in such a psychological state to some degree – but this condition does not guarantee the triggering of a similar psychological state within the viewer, as Metzinger and Gleizes claimed.⁷³ This issue is particularly important in that such an action, the evocation of durational being, remains the underlying purpose of artistic creation for Bergson: “What is the aim of art if not to show us, in nature and in the mind, outside of us and within us, things which did not explicitly strike our sense and our consciousness?”⁷⁴

The attempt to embody the “unmeasurable [sic] duration in which nothing is repeated”⁷⁵ – primarily through the rejection of scientific processes such as linear perspective – ultimately surmounted in the creation of an artistic movement whose works can be characterized according to a shared and calculated aesthetic: the perceptually fractured and compositionally monochromatic representation of the figure or still life seen in a state of dynamic movement. The “duration in which nothing is repeated” has thus fallen under the weight of teleology and group-directives – such as exhibited in the analytical and theoretical text *Du Cubisme* – and the artist’s reliance upon aesthetic theory becomes irreconcilable with the creative act as an expression of artistic freedom, thus diminishing the degree to which durational awareness may be evoked within the viewing subject.⁷⁶ In this sense the endeavors of the artists to represent the heterogeneous flow of duration can be seen as the mere symbolization of it as such, creating only fixed representations that convey a concept at the expense of invoking intuition. Bergson had actually read another essay by Metzinger, a text entitled “Cubisme et tradition,” in November 1911, but his interpretation of the text was not particularly benevolent. He found the claims in the text to be suspect in nature and criticized the author for being too theoretical: “I regret that I have not seen the works of these painters... What is common today is that theory precedes creation.”⁷⁷ Indeed Bergson criticized the movement for its dependence on self-analysis, exemplified by Metzinger and Gleizes, a characteristic that he believed to preclude them from performing their practice intuitively. In other words, the viability of their practice was disrupted due to intellectual predilection, and their search for genuinely creative action was hindered by an underlying determinism (i.e., aesthetic theory). As Antliff points out, the work of Metzinger and Gleizes moved within a trajectory from analysis to creation, whereas for Bergson true expression may be attained through intuitive action alone: “From intuition one can pass on to analysis, but not from analysis to intuition.”⁷⁸ This reading of Cubism is summarized well by Antliff – whose attempt to salvage the Bergsonian intentions of Metzinger and Gleizes does not

⁷² Antliff, 53.

⁷³ In actuality, Bergson contended that the most intense experiences of durational being occur not within the individual, but rather when the individual experiences durational being in concert with others. See Bergson, “Morality, Obligation and the Open Soul,” *Key Writings*, Ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey, New York: Continuum, 2002 .

⁷⁴ Antliff, 58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁶ According to Bergson’s discussion of qualitative extensity there are degrees to which material form may induce a state of durational awareness, and even though the works of Metzinger and Gleizes remain limited in their capacity there are certain aspects of experiencing material form itself – e.g., the painting in and of itself – that remain connected to durational life, albeit extremely diminished.

⁷⁷ Antliff, 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

hold together under the philosophy itself – when he states that for Bergson such a movement was “yet another example of the invasion of intellectual modes of thought into a field conducive to intuition alone.”⁷⁹

Although Picabia’s *Jeune fille* is a critique of Cubism, it does not function as such through the formalist grounds explicated by Baker, who, like Antliff, succeeds in avoiding the functionality of the creative act. Indeed, formal concerns were of little concern to Picabia in this sense, as is seen in his tendency to traverse both medium and style, so this is a critique that seems to function according to other terms. If the *Jeune fille* is a critique of Cubism, then it is one that is concerned with the metaphysical claims of Metzinger and Gleizes, namely in that they believed their work succeeded to “represent the whole self.”⁸⁰ It is likely that Picabia had known about *Du Cubisme* as well as its Bergsonian influences, and it seems that he would have been sympathetic toward their aims. Yet, his reticence toward such aesthetic theory is evident within his works surrounding 1920, whose Fauvist and Futurist roots seem to overpower their relation to Cubism.⁸¹ It seems that this distancing is primarily related to his engagement with the bodily and the operational, and particularly the degree to which it contrasted the modes of representation embraced by Metzinger and Gleizes. That is to say, in other words, that this critique is primarily related to divergent understandings of the terms that constitute figuration. The problem is not that Metzinger and Gleizes were attempting to represent qualitative space, as Antliff’s argument suggests, but rather that they represented space according to stylistic tendencies that were, in a sense, pre-conceived and, in the context of Bergson’s critique of rationalism, mechanistic in character. Considering this, it is particularly interesting that *La Sainte-Vierge II* emphasizes its formlessness by resisting confinement to the pictorial plane. The trajectory of the splattered ink is shown to exceed beyond the edges of the paper, immersing the work within a larger spatialized context. This is likewise afforded by the inversion of its horizontal creation through its vertical display, a conceptual re-positioning that allows the viewer to experience the image in a novel way. This condition is exaggerated when considering the image as an operation, as the viewer must then re-conceptualize the performative process beyond normative modes of perception. The work becomes sculptural in this sense, disallowing its pictorial form to distract the viewing subject from their immediate surroundings. This interest in spatialization may be conceived of as a form of figuration, whereby the terms of representation have been reconfigured according to the affordance of aesthetic embodiment. It has been shown that the viewing subject may form an image of themselves within the image of the splattered ink, a re-imagining of the image as an experiential operation. It would seem, additionally, that these works simultaneously redirect the viewer’s gaze away from themselves, ultimately underscoring a tendency toward a program of self-decimation. This tendency can be thought of as a refusal to be extracted from lived experience. This is most apparent within the reproduction of *Jeune fille* in *Proverbe*, as its sculptural quality becomes more affective according to the form of the journal, a method of exhibition that is inherently tangible in nature.

⁷⁹ Antliff, 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ This is despite the philosophical faction that Metzinger and Gleizes had propagated within the Puteaux group.

It is important to realize that Picabia's *Jeune fille* has an undisclosed counterpart: Duchamp's *To Be Looked at (From the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*, or, *The Small Glass*, a small work completed just two years earlier (Fig. 10). Itself existing in relation to the notorious *The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even*, or, *The Large Glass*, this mixed-media work functions most ostensibly according to a discourse on vision. The piece is transparent, consisting of material suspended between two glass panels, and was conceived to be seen in relation to *The Large Glass* – the two works interpenetrate each other, in a sense, and their transparency ultimately amplifies the degree to which they demand the viewer to acknowledge their site of exhibition. Although these works lend themselves to intense iconographical interpretation, it is important to take as our primary consideration their inherently operational nature. Indeed, the most engaging aspect of *The Small Glass* is the inclusion of two camera lenses in its panels, a characteristic that highlights its discursive engagement with vision. As the title indicates, the work is performative in nature, requiring the viewer to manipulate their body for an extended period of time. One might find it difficult to follow the directions entirely, however, as the work is physically demanding. This work positions the viewer within viscerally exhaustive situation, if it is followed directly, and, much like Picabia's *La Saint-Vierge* and *Jeune fille*, forcibly re-embodies the viewing subject. Indeed, it has been suggested that a primary objective of the work is the “re-evaluation of optical experience,” a condition whereby the viewer is made aware of their uniquely qualitative presentness.⁸² It is known that Picabia had been familiar with this work, and, as Camfield notes that Duchamp had brought it with him to Paris in the winter months of 1919.⁸³ If we consider the fundamentally cinematic aspects of both *Jeune fille* and *The Small Glass*, it is obvious that they exist in dialogue with each other, particularly regarding the notions of viewership, presentness, and embodiment. Moreover, it has been suggested by Jindrich Chaloupecký and Paul Wilson that its counterpart, *The Large Glass*, was directly related to a late-night automobile journey that the two had taken together.⁸⁴ A shared memory, aestheticized, much like the manner in which Picabia had described his work after departing from New York: “Udnie is [not] the portrait of a young girl... [Udnie] is a [memory]... evocations from there which, subtly opposed like musical harmonies, become representative of an idea, of a nostalgia, of a fugitive impression.”⁸⁵ Indeed, much like *The Small Glass*, Picabia's *Jeune fille* leaves one with one such “fugitive impression,” an impression of lived experience, and an impression of a deeply qualitative intuition of the perpetual evolution of life itself.

It is sometimes said that Picabia was an artist who managed to stick out amongst many of his contemporaries. He was likewise known for his biting criticism and sardonic wit, and would publically throw verbal attacks toward those whom he deemed fit for assault – often regardless of his disposition toward them or their work, both friend and foe. The direction of his vitriol could go toward those with whom he collaborated just as easily as those who he despised, and it intensified greatly for those who had the

⁸² Jindrich Chaloupecký and Paul Wilson, “Marcel Duchamp: A Re-Evaluation,” *Artibus et Historiae*. Vol. 6, No. 11, 1985. 130.

⁸³ Camfield, 127.

⁸⁴ Chaloupecký and Wilson, 130.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

misfortune of falling somewhere between.⁸⁶ It is clear that for Picabia such distinctions could rarely be taken as a given, and this ambivalence toward categorization likewise bleeds into his artistic practice. Although he was ostensibly working within the lineage of the historical avant-garde – those modernist artists whose resistance to traditional practices served to liberate artistic production from the constraints of academic or capitalist production – he nevertheless had a tendency to distance himself from those whom he kept closest to him. Such distancing occurred in both the realm of aesthetics as well as kinship, and often devolved into personal attacks and disparaging remarks regarding in-authenticity and perceived intellectualism. This embracement of the anti-intellectual is a recurring concern for Picabia, and many of his critiques attempted to expose the defendant's predilections toward the faculties of the human mind, and for continuing an artistic practice that he saw to be no longer viable (indeed if it ever had been).

This sentiment is problematic when considering Picabia's deep admiration for the art and character of Marcel Duchamp, however, whose espousal of a non-retinal art is often understood to be the impetus for what has been called the 'conceptual turn' in artistic production during the twentieth century. As we have seen, the close relationship between these two figures is clear, and the influences of one are intertwined throughout the work of the other. This is exhibited within *Jeune fille* and *The Small Glass*, two works that, in a sense, utilize the backdrop of the everyday as a primary function, employing the readymade strategy according to fundamentally experiential and cinematic terms. Duchamp's conception of the readymade is often understood to be inexorably connected to the faculties of the mind, its aesthetic intelligible according to those very faculties toward which Picabia had so often shown disdain. This is a practice toward which Picabia would seem to hold great criticism, yet for all intents and purposes this was simply not the case. The two artists knew the work of one another very well and they had often shared ideas. They had responded to each other's ideas through their own work, incorporating and appropriating the forms and strategies of one another such that their oeuvres interlock in an almost impenetrable manner.

This is a characteristic that often leaves one with the feeling of perceiving the fragmented remains of an inside joke, and does well to underscore the (often laborious) necessity of utilizing one to understand the other. This further calls attention to the increasingly apparent desire for an artistic practice that is constantly changing, continually regenerating and reinvigorating itself according to the needs of the artist. Although the many ways in which these two artists were in dialogue with one another have been recently elucidated – with particular focus on the unstable semiotic nature inherent to the readymade – the differences between the notions of conceptualism and intellectualism remain unclear. This relationship is an integral aspect to understanding the nature of Picabia's artistic practice, and it is a necessary step through which one must go in order to truly understand the arguments put forth by his generally crass public statements. How may we account for this notion of conceptualism according to Picabia's criticisms? How is this related to or differentiated from the intellect? What is it about the intellect that Picabia has shown such reticence toward? How is this played out within Picabia's own practice? It is at this point that Picabia's practice truly begins to stand out

⁸⁶ This was the case for Andre Breton, whose relation to Picabia became increasingly strained after the latter's ultimate defection from the Dada movement.

amongst others in relation to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, which now becomes integral to understanding the primary concerns of this project: the functionality of the creative act and the ways in which it is embodied by Picabia's various aesthetic strategies – both *experimental* and *experiential*.

Chapter 2: The Creative Act as Defense of Duration

Picabia had been clear in his assertion that the fundamental function of art is to represent life, and that one should not only perceive the particularities of the lived life but should utilize them as a primary productive force – to embrace that “perpetual evolution of life” that both constructs human experience and engenders imaginative creation.⁸⁷ As we have seen, such a statement underscores Picabia’s engagement with the relationship between the notions of figuration and representation, an engagement that is seen to be an integral aspect of much of his work. This concern was not limited to Picabia alone, however, and it became a similar concern for other artists working in Paris during the interwar period. Many of these practices have come to be seen as falling under the ubiquitous notion of the *retour à l’ordre* – the movement of countless artists away from the abstraction of their pre-war practices and toward more traditional modes of production and representation, including a widespread return to figural representation. The practices that contrast those of Picabia most obviously come from artists such as Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) and Amedee Ozenfant, two painters whose mutual founding of the Purist movement was an attempt to revitalize Cubism through the use of rationalist theory and an engagement with neo-Platonist spirituality.⁸⁸ While an engagement with the notions of figuration and representation according to these terms may diverge in method from Picabia’s, they both nevertheless represent to some degree a common interest in the re-invigoration of artistic production after the war, and particularly as this relates to the return of the human form. In certain ways this notion of re-invigoration may be thought of according to the concept of regeneration, a cultural phenomenon that manifested itself in a variety of ways during the interwar period – i.e., nationalism, spiritual purity, perfection of the body, psychological stability – a concept that is particularly evident in the case of both politics and aesthetics.

The phenomenon of regeneration has been discussed extensively by Roger Griffin, who suggests that the prevalence of this notion can be attributed in part to the rise of fascist politics. This is an assertion that is partly grounded within an understanding of the phenomenon as it relates to the concept of palingenesis – mythical rebirth.⁸⁹ The notion of rebirth had become somewhat of a trope after the end of the war, both within political rhetoric as well as the realm of aesthetics and artistic production. Mark Antliff has likewise re-contextualized the nature of modernist practice according to this notion, and the author utilizes the historical framework provided by Griffin to discuss the relation of modernist artistic practice to the rhetoric of fascist politics.⁹⁰ Although these two cultural institutions have typically been seen to be in irreconcilable opposition – the former associated with the politics of the left and the latter with those of the right – an investigation of the underlying influences of each exposes a relationship that is

⁸⁷ Maria Borrás, *Picabia*, New York: Rizzoli, 1985. 242.

⁸⁸ Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

unexpectedly ambivalent if not complimentary. According to Antliff, the often hidden commonality that exists between them is a shared engagement with anti-rationalist philosophy, and particularly a lineage that leads from Friedrich Nietzsche to Bergson, whose alternative philosophy was as influential in politics as it was for aesthetics.⁹¹ While his contributions to the former have been well-documented – specifically within the Anarcho-Syndicalist politics of Georg Sorel – it has not been until recent years that the influence of Bergsonian thought upon the latter has been thoroughly examined.⁹² As such, several of his writings will serve as a philosophical grounding for much of this second chapter. Perhaps the most obvious question to ask at this point concerns the nature of the relationship between the art of Picabia and the philosophy of Bergson. What exactly is to be gained through establishing a dialogue between these two figures? Indeed one must avoid the entrapments of a purely historical mode of analysis, as it is not especially difficult to ascertain the general influence of Bergsonian philosophy upon various cultural practices during the early twentieth century.

This is particularly true when speaking of the arts, and even more so to those artists associated with the Parisian avant-garde. These are artists that often embody the most obvious influence of the philosopher's influence upon artistic production, an effect perhaps due primarily to geographic contiguity. As mentioned, the first decades of the twentieth century were marked by an interest in Bergsonism, his works having become extremely popular amongst both professional and amateur audiences.⁹³ Considering this, it is not particularly difficult to find the influence of his writings manifested in a variety of cultural spheres – within the writings of social theorists and artists alike. What is it then about Picabia's practice that allows it to stand out amongst the rest? How may we differentiate it from an exceedingly large group of figures co-opting Bergsonian philosophy to propagate or justify their own endeavors? What might allow the philosophy of Bergson to be somehow *more* applicable to the work of Picabia over most other artists working at this moment? As he is often described as a progenitor of *life philosophy*, a consideration of Bergson in the context of Picabia seems requisite, yet any substantial relation between these two individuals has been more or less untouched.⁹⁴ Bergson's engagement with a re-examination of the complexity of life – as well as the reclamation of the experiences of our immersion in it – resonates powerfully with the philosophically-toned writings of Picabia. It is known that the writings of Bergson were quite popular at this time in both Paris as well as New York, two places in which Picabia had been working in the years both preceding and following the first world war, so the possibility that the artist would have been familiar with the philosopher's ideas – that is, to some extent, whether directly or indirectly – is likely. As discussed, it is known that the artistic circles with which Picabia associated were quite aware of Bergsonian philosophy, both in Europe as well as the United States, and that Picabia was familiar with his writings is hardly a stretch to imagine.⁹⁵ It is also clear that Picabia had been reading the writings of

⁹¹ Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism*, 7.

⁹² Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 6.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁴ William Camfield briefly mentions this relation in regards to a publication by Tristan Tzara that indoctrinated Bergson as an honorary (and unwilling) member of the Dada movement. Bergson's influence upon the Parisian avant-garde is typically left to his influence on Cubism. See William Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979, 136.

⁹⁵ Camfield, 53.

Nietzsche, often referencing them directly within his prose and poetry.⁹⁶ Unfortunately Picabia did not make any explicit references to the former in the same manner that he had done with latter. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two persist and the use of one to understand the other remains worthwhile.

As put forth in *Creative Evolution*, a fundamental concern of Bergson is the expression of freedom, and particularly as it is exhibited through genuinely creative action. For Bergson, such creation is manifested at the insertion of *Durée* (*Duration*) into materiality, a process that he associates with his notion of *élan vital*, described as a “current of life” that propels the creation of new forms through its resistance to the power of the human intellect.⁹⁷ The intellect is thus shown to be a faculty that primarily serves to secure a representation of “the relations of external things among themselves,” or, in other words, a faculty with which “to think matter.”⁹⁸ Bergson contends that humans tend to generalize the experiences of life according to this “logic of solids,” and, despite its usefulness in maintaining societal values, the human intellect is ultimately insufficient in representing the true character of life. The faculty of the intellect thus tends toward homogeneity and stasis, and as such is not a faculty capable of perceiving or exhibiting the dynamism which characterizes the truly heterogeneous flow of *Durée*, an all-encompassing universal memory of evolutionary creation. As Bergson states, “[*Durée*] means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new.”⁹⁹ Thus *élan vital* takes its action in differentiation and in the creation of new lines of divergence. This process is thus one of division: “[*élan vital*] is always a case of a virtuality in the process of being actualized, a simplicity in the process of differentiating, a totality in the process of dividing up.”¹⁰⁰

This act of division, however, is not an act of negation, but must rather actualize itself through the creation of wholly “positive acts.”¹⁰¹ This notion is embedded within a critique of mechanistic processes, ultimately relating to a Darwinist theory of evolution wherein an action is taken from a range of established possibilities, a process of division that necessarily demands the elimination of other possibilities. Action is neutralized within a mechanistic structure wherein all movement is both predetermined and enacted through negation. To stand against this one must then embrace a notion of differentiation that is fundamentally generative in nature, described by Bergson as genuinely creative form of movement. To return to the criticisms of Picabia, it then seems clear that those artistic practices that are over-intellectualized are thus unable to partake in such generative movement.¹⁰² As such, they are fundamentally unable to represent or speak toward neither the flow of *Durée* nor an authentic experience of life, and their capacity for expression is necessarily silenced. Those artists who had bound themselves to teleological narratives had succeeded only to hinder their creative faculty, and had compromised its vitality at the influence of their intellect. Such artists could thus not truly “represent life” in the manner that Picabia had advocated. At the same time, however, it is also understood that we may not fully transcend the constraints of our intellect. While

⁹⁶ Picabia, 214.

⁹⁷ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 11.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰² This similarly applies to those practices that adhere to modernist teleology.

it is fundamentally through the power of our mind that we may perceive such divergences at all, there nevertheless remains an obligation to resist its hold on our experience of life.

The functionality of the creative act appears to take precedence as an underlying interest for both Picabia and Bergson – in the philosopher’s engagement with freedom (as exhibited through the power of choice) as well as the artist’s distrust of teleological narratives in artistic practice (as exhibited through the ability of art to “represent life”). The artist’s intimate involvement with Dada during its formative years is particularly telling of this sentiment. Instrumental to the development of the movement, a disenchanted Picabia embraced the nebulous practices of Dada as his own, finding a sort of liberation in its open-endedness.¹⁰³ As a movement that stood against the restrictive and essentializing nature of bourgeois culture, and particularly against its success in the institutionalization of art, it would seem that the artist’s attraction to Dada may have fundamentally been informed by his concern for both subjective experience as well as social interaction, an interest that is embodied by several projects within the artist’s oeuvre. Having worked with several of the movement’s progenitors in Zurich, New York and Paris, it is clear that Picabia stands as a key figure in the solidification of Dada as a truly international artistic movement (as well as a symbol of its ultimate decimation). The work of Picabia during this period may serve to illuminate the changing nature of artistic practice at this moment, and may help in further illuminating his engagement with figuration and the return to the body as discussed in the previous chapter. This is perhaps most salient within his excursion into collaborative and multi-disciplinary projects.

It is worthwhile to consider a case study in the history of the artist’s personal attacks, the tumultuous relationship with Andre Breton. Breton had been a close friend prior to the dissolution of the Dada, having worked with Picabia on a number of projects and accompanying him on numerous leisurely trips around continental Europe. Their relationship began to wane, however, at the subsequent founding of Surrealism, a movement that would at first glance seem to be an unlikely candidate for the sort of denigration typically saved for the likes of a hyper-rationalist movement such as Purism. As founder of the Surrealist movement, it is rare that Breton is depicted as anything other than an ardent anti-rationalist – a characteristic of the historical avant-garde elucidated at the opening pages of this chapter – Picabia is nevertheless quick to dismiss the viability of his work while involved with this burgeoning movement. First published in 1917, the journal titled *391* was both financed and edited by Picabia alone, and had often served as a platform from which the artist could engage in public dialogue.¹⁰⁴ The content of the journal had been relatively interdisciplinary in nature, and had published poetry, prose, short essays, printed reproductions of illustrations, paintings and sculptures, as well as musical scores. The journal also served as an outlet for the artist to voice his musings on art and life, an aspect which had often led to antagonistic letters – particularly while speaking of personal relationships. It was within the final issue of the journal in 1924, for example, that Picabia had announced the renunciation of his affiliation with the Dada movement, effectively severing kinship amongst several of its most active figures.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰³ Baker, 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps it is necessary to note that such a journal would have generally had a limited amount of public interest, however, and that there would have been significant overlap between its audience and its participants.

¹⁰⁵ Borrás, 241-242.

role of the journal was of particular significance in the deterioration of the artist's relationship with Andre Breton. Breton's interest in exploring the human psyche and the aesthetic possibilities of pure automatism – arguably an interest in isolation – was solidified in his writing of the Surrealist manifesto this same year. The final volume of *391* contained particularly harsh statements toward those artists who Picabia believed to have abandoned the Dada movement for Surrealism, and singled out Breton in particular: “André Breton ... is an arriviste... he has nothing to say; having no sensitivity, never having lived, this artist is the type of petit bourgeois who loves little collections of paintings.”¹⁰⁶ A very critical assessment of Breton's personal character, the assertion that this former friend might have “nothing to say” calls attention to Picabia's continual interest in the experiences of the lived life, again exhibiting a sentiment closely related to Bergsonian philosophy. Aside from his critique of Breton as an individual, however, it appears that Picabia is also quite critical of Surrealism as a whole.

Picabia had chosen to rename the journal in its final volume, establishing it as the *Journal de l'Instantaneisme*, or the *Journal of Instantism*. In a sense, the change of title may have been somewhat of a mockery of Breton for having put forth Surrealism as the next phase of Dada, which by 1924 had indeed lost much of its initial political vigor. The Surrealist manifesto had (to some extent) signaled the transfiguration of Dada into more reclusive territories – particularly in the utilization of methodologies that occlude the individual from social reality, such as sleep deprivation and the consumption of narcotics – and Picabia had likewise taken it upon himself to further ‘transfigure’ Dada into something of his own accord. Explicating the supposed death of Dada throughout this issue – from the change of the journal's title to an attack on fellow “ex-Dadaists” – the artist had attempted to supplant the movement with the establishment of another.¹⁰⁷ Most ostensibly, however, the founding of Instantism appears to have been a satirical gesture aimed at the rise of Surrealism, and particularly at its failure to recognize the fallacy of isolation. There is nevertheless profound significance in its critique of the establishment of artistic movements. It seems clear that Picabia had recognized that one might reveal ideology even in a movement like Surrealism, despite its attempt to completely disengage with social reality – a sentiment reminiscent of Bergson's assertion that one can not completely be detached from either one's intellectual faculty or one's society.¹⁰⁸ While this critique of the intellect served as the basis of Picabia's reticence toward many modernist projects, this is not to imply that Dada is without conceptual thought. The significance of Dada is found within the recognition that one cannot eschew intellect completely, but that one must strive to diminish the influence of the intellect upon our experience of the lived life, thus preserving the vitalism of *Durée*.

According to Picabia, those artists who had placed boundaries upon their practice were often misguided and largely misinformed. Their practices were assumed only to uphold the beliefs of those groups that they chose to represent as a collective, sacrificing the nuance of subjective experience to universal terms – namely modernist teleology and

¹⁰⁶Chris Joseph. “After 391: Picabia's Early Multimedia Experiments.” *391.org*. 14 Feb. 2008. Web. 1 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.chrisjoseph.org/after391/index.htm>>.

¹⁰⁷Baker, 303.

¹⁰⁸See Henri Bergson. *Key Writings*. Ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey. New York: Continuum, 2002. 299.

the supersession of a previous avant-garde movement.¹⁰⁹ It may be said that the primary creative forces of such artists had been informed by the teleological underpinnings that defined the group as a whole, resulting in a type of artistic practice that Picabia would criticize as non-viable, or, in Bergsonian terms, non-vital.¹¹⁰ For example, those artists working under the auspices of movements such as Cubism – and perhaps under ‘Modernism’ in general – had necessarily delimited their practices according to certain restraints, to normative values of style and theory. In this sense, they had compromised the very agency that their projects had been working toward in the first place. The criticisms placed against painters like Jeanneret and Ozenfant are relatively easy to understand within the context of Picabia’s anti-intellectual stance, particularly as his interest in Cubism had never reached the point that it had with others associated with it in the earlier years surrounding his involvement with the Section d’Or and Puteaux groups, whose theoretical underpinnings he would not have found attractive.

Cubism in this sense had thus never really been a viable option for Picabia, which is even reflected in his tendency to lean toward the Fauvist roots of his painting at this time, often downplaying those remaining indications of Cubist aesthetic theory. As mentioned, it is clear that Bergson had similar suspicions of Cubism, once criticizing an explication of the movement’s anti-rational goals as “very interesting... as theory.”¹¹¹ Within this reaction it is clear to see the condemnation of theoretical practices, an attitude that plays a key role in understanding Bergsonian notions of the creative act. For in this argument one can infer that the work of art, as a moment of genuinely creative action, can never be a viable form of expression when approached through theoretical means. For Bergson this is because such practices operate according to a set of artificial criteria whereby all possible outcomes are in a sense predetermined, a quality that undermines their claim to be a truly qualitative and experiential action.¹¹² As these projects have ostensibly broken from the conventions and traditions of institutional art, such groups have come to characterize the nature of avant-garde practice during the early twentieth century. The writings of Picabia nevertheless show that he regarded the character of many of these movements as somewhat institutionalized in and of themselves – that is, according to their own occlusion – having tacitly established what might be called a bureaucracy of the avant-garde.¹¹³ Having misguidedly prescribed to what he thought to be the mythic nature of modernism – i.e., teleology, palingenesis, regeneration – he thought the anti-rational banners of such artists (and artistic movements) were undermined by what might be called the non-viability of their work.¹¹⁴

This non-viability is a condemnation of those forms of artistic production that operate as a “sort of clique or club,” to quote Picabia, referring to movements such as Cubism or Surrealism.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the belief that the first decades of the twentieth century were somehow “more modern” than any other period, and, further, that each of these

¹⁰⁹ Borrás, 241-242.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 3.

¹¹² This nevertheless may extend to a critique of Dada practice as well and is not exclusive to Cubism or similarly theoretical practices, as even indeterminate actions can be contrived. This is partly why Picabia often finds himself in disagreement with his friends (and perhaps his own practice).

¹¹³ Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

groups saw their own practices as the “next step” within this trajectory, was a fallacy to Picabia.¹¹⁶ Such is the wariness he held toward modernist teleology, the self-destructive movement that had so often undermined the liberating intentions of these practices. That is not to say that modernity itself did not exist, or that Picabia had succeeded in abstaining from its influences. On the contrary, it is clear that Picabia was very much engaged with the notion of modernity: an engagement made explicit within the machinic imagery that clearly informed his object-portraits and mechanomorphic drawings, as well as his various experiments with film. This anti-modernist sentiment simply attempts to undermine the mythical function of modernist teleology, and is perhaps once again illuminated by Griffin’s notion of palingenesis – a mythical rebirth enacted by the continual sublation and propulsion of modernist aesthetic practice into greater and more superior territories. Yet, this is an unfounded rebirth insofar as such movement can arise through truly creative action alone, according to Bergson, ultimately placing the teleological movement of modernist practice within a mechanized system of pre-determined outcomes (i.e., the movement toward pictorial flatness). The work of Picabia, on the other hand, could be seen as an attempt to achieve a becoming of life itself, a sense of becoming in its most immediate and individuated sense – a becoming that denies the fulfillment of teleological narrative and mechanistic movement.

Perhaps this is why Picabia had maintained the assertion that art must “represent life.”¹¹⁷ At the same time, however, one must avoid those obstacles that may compromise genuinely creative acts, such as abiding to group objectives or codified aesthetic practices – tendencies that Picabia associated with what he perceived were the misguided actions of many of his contemporaries. At a certain level it seems quite clear that such actions reveal an underlying tendency toward both intellectualization and theoreticization. What is important for Picabia – as well as Bergson – is that these tendencies ultimately indicate the obfuscation of lived experience, the result of which being an artistic practice that increasingly loses its capacity for genuine expression. Such a practice thus risks crystallization, becoming determinate in character, irrevocably stale, and, in a rather Bergsonian sense, painfully non-viable as an attempt to fully engage the heterogeneous flow of *Durée*.¹¹⁸ The reticence toward such tendencies is exhibited by Picabia quite clearly, and it seems that the writings of Bergson serve as an appropriate platform from which one might further illuminate the artist’s continually elusive body of work, which consists of illustration, painting, sculpture, poetry and prose, dance, theater, music and film. As mentioned, however, such distinctions rarely hold their place, and what we are given is a multifaceted practice that relies heavily upon both collaboration as well as multi-disciplinary projects, often at the disregard for medium specificity.¹¹⁹

The culmination of Picabia’s interdisciplinary interests during the first half of the 1920s may be seen as the realization of the playfully titled *Relâche*, a collaborative and multimedia-based ballet that was both produced and performed in 1924. The title of this work can be roughly be translated as “Rest,” or “Break,” a colloquialism amongst the theater-going public of the time that had commonly been found posted on theater doors to

¹¹⁶ Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, 235.

¹¹⁷ Borrás, 216.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Something to keep in mind, however, is that Picabia never ceased to consider himself a painter, and maintained working within this medium throughout his career.

denote the cancellation of a performance.¹²⁰ As such, the translation of the title is significant to an adequate understanding of the work. While the title of this ballet could be understood according to typical strategies of Dadaist inversion – which it nevertheless remains to be – it attains a greater complexity through its general character of open-endedness, what Baker calls the *in-between*, a condition that permeates throughout the work as well as much of Picabia’s oeuvre.¹²¹ Considering Picabia’s thoughts on the function of the work of art – and likewise considering Bergsonian notions of the creative act – it would do well to approach this sense of the *in-between* as an exemplification of the work’s own transitory state of becoming, a state of continual presentness forced upon the viewer through a variety of experimental and experiential tactics (much like his *Jeune fille* and other excursions into conceptual drawing). Perhaps the most explicit example of the *in-between* within this work is the inclusion of *Entr’acte*, a short film scripted by Picabia and directed by the young filmmaker Rene Clair. The film is about twenty minutes in length and was originally projected onto the stage during the intermission. The placement of the film at this point in the production is a rather performative gesture, as the title of the film can be roughly translated as “Between the Acts.” The positioning of the film at the intermission thus forces the piece to perform its own title, and in turn re-embodies the work in its spatial and temporal reality. This re-embodiment underscores both the physicality of film itself as well the viewer’s aesthetic experience, calling attention to the tangible reality of film as artistic medium in addition to the unique sense of presentness involved in its consumption on part of the viewer. Effectively signifying the closing of one act while preparing the viewer for the commencement of the second, the projected work thus occupied a space that was quite literally in-between, and stands as mode of re-embodiment and the forceful recognition of the viewer’s sense of immediate presentness. The utilization of durational media and film-based technology in *Relache* can thus be seen as an attempt to conceive of new forms of creative practice, and particularly those that afford alternative conceptions of subjective experience.

While Matthew Biro’s conception of the Dada cyborg was utilized in the first chapter to re-contextualize Picabia’s mechanomorphic drawings and object-portraits, it can similarly serve as a point of reference in approaching the use of technology in a reading of Picabia’s ballet. The reevaluation of the machine aesthetic wherein attention is placed upon its regenerative nature is a fundamental concern for Biro, and, accordingly, he has suggested that the creation of the Dada cyborg allowed for an alternative conception of human identity within an increasingly technological age. This was achieved through the incorporation of the machinic through the construction of potential adaptations of the body-form, and was effectively an aesthetic project that attempted to establish novel conceptions of subjective experience, effectively renegotiating the terms of figuration.¹²² Perhaps it is possible to re-approach *Relache* and *Entr’acte* in relation to Picabia’s interest in interdisciplinary, collaborative and synaesthetic practices, with a particular investigation of the utilization of experimental methods as a step toward the construction of an adaptive space that – like the Dada cyborg – may act as a site upon which to experiment with the creation of “new modes of (interior and exterior)

¹²⁰ Borrás, 216.

¹²¹ Ibid., 305.

¹²² Biro, 1.

awareness” – or, in other words, establishing new modes of experiencing the flow of *Durée* through the bodily and the notion of re-embodiment.¹²³

The production of *Relache* began with a short film projection, which, although often considered a fragmented section of *Entr’acte*, actually served as an audio-visual overture to the ballet, having characterized the tone of the events which were to follow it.¹²⁴ The opening scene depicts a cannon rolling back and forth upon the rooftop of a Parisian building. Without the aid of human intervention, the cannon moved about the rooftop aimlessly, animated by its own accord. The scene is set to the sound of a bombastic orchestra that plays a score composed by Erik Satie, the weapon encircling itself several times before coming to rest, standing at attention while facing the direction of the audience. At this moment we see two men enter the frame on either side of the screen, jumping into the shot in slow motion – a trick of the cinema that undermines the exaggerated and physically demanding movements the men are actually performing. The characters are now easily identified as Picabia and Satie, who continue to bounce about the cannon excitedly, mimicking its earlier movements. The two men appear to be confused, however, and quickly begin to argue over how to load artillery into the weapon. They eventually succeed in their task and resume their child-like dancing as they leap out of frame, again shown in reverse in the same manner that they had been introduced. Our view is now focused on the barrel of the cannon, and its ammunition is slowly projected toward the audience, fulfilling the intentions of the two men who are now nowhere to be seen.¹²⁵

It is known that the rooftop setting is in fact the same roof of the theater that the ballet had been performed. This is a playful gesture that cleverly embodies this notion of the *in-between* its conflation of filmic and embodied space. This at once addresses both the nature of photographic reproduction as well as the limitations of human perception, a recurring theme throughout both the ballet as well as the film. Technological reproduction is utilized in an adaptive manner, allowing the alteration of human perception such that it collapses spatial perception. This is achieved for the viewing subject through their simultaneous perception of two incongruous views of the same space – an awareness of both an exterior and interior perception of the theater.¹²⁶ In this sense, the film affords the percipient the ability to reconsider their experience of the space, overturning the stability of quantitative reality and emphasizing qualitative difference. The incorporation of technology into the body-form, in this sense, is an act that reflects the nature of Picabia’s earlier engagement with machinic imagery, and in turn invoking Biro’s notion of the Dada cyborg as well as the notion of regeneration. This is done in the film on a much more visceral level, however, wherein the work engages directly with the bodily presentness of the viewer.

¹²³ Biro, 1.

¹²⁴ Though they are often viewed in conjunction with one another, the introductory film was originally separated from the rest of *Entracte* and functioned as somewhat of a filmic overture.

¹²⁵ This scene contains allusions to two works within popular cinema from earlier decades, notably *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), both of which seem to have informed the stylistic construction of the final frames of the introductory section in which Picabia and Satie appear to assault the audience.

¹²⁶ This is often an argument in support of a Bergsonian reading of Cubism, though the medium of film operates differently than paint.

The ballet itself began with one of its lead dancers entering onto the stage while smoking a cigarette. Engaged in a game with the orchestra, she could dance only when there was no music being played (a rule which all of the other dancers were subsequently bound to as well). The hundreds of metallic discs that lined the back wall of the stage mirrored the shimmering sequence that comprised her outfit. She was shortly joined by Jean Boerlin, a popular and critically acclaimed dancer of the time, who ironically entered the stage while sitting in a wheelchair – a gesture that (much like the orchestral game) rendered his training as a conventional dancer useless. The ballet contained many similar absurdities, confronting the audience through the inversion of conventions and expectations. Picabia exploited the reflective nature of the metallic discs along the back wall, which were also fixed with bright lights, which were at several points during the performance were positioned such that the otherwise passive spectators were illuminated, and, most likely, blinded.¹²⁷ Such confrontations attempted to disrupt the audience's preconceptions about the nature of performance insofar as their involvement as passive spectators were challenged. What one sees in this sort of agitation is again the utilization of new modes of artistic production, technology, experiential operations, aiding in the reconceptualization of subjective experience. Considering this, it is of note that Boerlin also plays the primary character in *Entr'acte*. Unlike his character on the stage, however, helplessly confined to the stilted movements of the wheelchair, his placement in the film shows that his body has been returned to its full capability – the dancer's inability to walk upright has been re-instated and his body regenerated, revitalized. Picabia had spoken about his intentions for the film, having stated that it should both “give [the viewer] a sense of vertigo [as well as] orient itself toward the spontaneity of invention.”¹²⁸ Thus the artist's use of experimental film can be seen an affective force through which the stability of the viewer's preconceptions are challenged, particularly in that a novel form of subjective experience might be afforded to them through a strategy of forced re-embodiment, a strategy similarly employed in the figuratively cinematic work *Jeune Fille* from four years earlier, wherein the pictorial plane had been cut away in order to expose the intuitive movements of the viewer's lived experience. Indeed, as shown this drawing was conceived in relation to Duchamp's *The Small Glass*, further contextualizing the works within a notion of the cinematic.

Much like the ballet that the film at once bifurcates and is embedded within, *Entr'acte* can be divided into two sections. Running at about twenty minutes, the film begins with a largely non-narrative montage of ambiguously-related imagery. Exploiting the capabilities of the filmic medium, the first section primarily concerns itself with experimental technique and employs significant amounts of studio editing. Though the use of urban imagery is a recurring theme throughout much of the film, it is particularly evident during the first half. These images are often abstracted, however, and are manipulated such that multiple instances of buildings, streets and automobiles dizzily overlap each other, often deteriorating into unrecognizable washes of modulated grey and black. The rapidity of this editing is somewhat gestural in nature, and succeeds to invoke the sensation of vertigo, fully exploring the potentiality of the filmic medium in allowing

¹²⁷ Baker, 299.

¹²⁸ Chris Joseph. “After 391: Picabia's Early Multimedia Experiments.” *391.org*. 14 Feb. 2008. Web. 1 May 2010. <<http://www.chrisjoseph.org/after391/index.htm>>.

the construction of realities that are otherwise impossible to achieve without the affordances of the cinematic environment.

One such scene depicts a young man who is plays a boardwalk game during a festival, the objective of which is to shoot a floating ostrich egg with a rifle. The man's attempts are to no avail, however, as the egg replicates and overlaps itself ten times over through filmic manipulation. This temporarily bewilders the shooter, who continues with difficulty in his attempt to grasp the target within the aim of his rifle. After several failed attempts, the shooter is vindicated and fulfills in his objective in hitting the mark. The shooter suffers an untimely death, however, as he is shot and killed by the hand of none other than Picabia. The fate of the shooter is thus the realization of the threat against audience at the opening of the ballet, and in this sense the viewer may identify with the character. The film depicts the various stages of the man's funeral, and the narrative-based portion of the film begins. A mysterious source of wind blows gusts up the dresses of women as they exit what appears to be a church, walking toward a camel-pulled coffin from which food hangs inexplicably. The items are quite unabashedly consumed by a particularly bored man, who seems to have lost any interest in the funeral procession itself. The scene is intensified as the coffin detaches itself – much like the wandering cannon – and propels downhill, speeding through the curvaceous corridors that weave through the urban streets of Paris. As the coffin traverses the city we are shown chaotic and abstracted views of other vehicles, of a roller-coaster, and of the surrounding landscapes, similar in style to the highly edited shots at the opening of the film. Upon reaching the city limits the wagon purges itself of the coffin, forcefully launching the packaged corpse of our young shooter toward the bottom of a steep hill. Upon opening the coffin lid, the funeral attendants are shocked to see that the man has been resurrected in the form of a magician who causes each person to disappear into thin air by way of his wand. After each person is disappears, the young man positions the wand over his own head and slowly vanishes before our eyes. The film ends with a parodic convention of vaudeville and popular cinema, and the word '*Fin*' appears on the screen. The young man makes an unexpected appearance, however, as he emphatically bursts through the center of the screen only to be kicked in the head by (one might presume) Picabia, and is forcefully thrust back into the screen through a rapid reversal of the film strip, a gesture that emphasizes a refusal of finality.¹²⁹

Picabia had once described his work as a “hammock that gently sways,” a somewhat paradoxical yet enticingly poetic statement through which the artist emphasizes the malleability of his practice.¹³⁰ Similar to the woven structure that assumes the shape of whatever body is set upon it, this malleability ultimately allows Picabia to sacrifice himself more fully to this endeavor to represent life. Accordingly, this allowed his practice to take whatever form was most accommodating to the particularities of the situation, effectively avoiding the constraints or influences of teleological or aesthetic predilection. Perhaps this sentiment is emphasized by the selection of illustrative works discussed in the preceding chapter, a variety of excursions into the medium of drawing wherein the aesthetic processes were arrived at in an ultimately organic manner. The construction of form in these works had been derived from the nature of their content, in

¹²⁹ This gesture underscores the Bergsonian notion of creative evolution as a dismissal of finality.

¹³⁰ Picabia, 214.

turn standing against the constraints of stylistic obligation.¹³¹ Indeed, Picabia had also stated that his practice “drink[s] from the double and divine source of Love and Beauty.”¹³² What exactly is meant by “double and divine source” is unclear, and his reference to love and beauty (both capitalized) is equally perplexing, not to mention their implication as sources of divinity. It is nevertheless made rather clear that Picabia is reticent to ascribe the label of beauty to works of art, calling into question the term’s validity through the belief that it in fact represents nothing but visual convention. He also speculates as to the supposed nature of art itself, often describing it as both bureaucratic and hierarchical, ultimately likening its structure to that of Catholicism.¹³³

It is clear that such descriptive terms such are strained to characterize the objects that are meant to embody them, and the true nature of art is unable to be experienced through such an intellectualized and linguistic manner: “You don’t understand what we’re doing, do you. Well, dear Friends, we understand it even less than you do... Do you think that God knew English and French?”¹³⁴ The presumption that God might not be capable of understanding both English and French speaks toward Picabia’s distrust of language, a critique that often manifests itself through wordplay and double entendres. This sentiment incidentally shows itself most ostensibly within the *lautgedichte* (*sound poetry*) of fellow Dadaists Hugo Ball and Raoul Hausmann – the *lautgedichte* exemplified new forms of pictorial and performative work which attempted to move beyond the limitations of language through the utilization of nonsensical vocables.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, it seems likely that the *critique of language* put forth by Picabia’s statement might find its strongest grounding within a *critique of intellect*. As English and French are indeed divergent manifestations of a systematized form of communication, they may ultimately be regarded primarily as constructions of the human intellect – so it seems clear that while Picabia speaks of God’s inability to possess a complete understanding of language, he is also suggesting that this inability might well be an indication that God is likewise a construction of human intellect. In this sense one may better contextualize Picabia’s assertion that he “doesn’t believe in Art” any more than he believes in God, for the institution of Art is likewise predicated upon its own fiction and cannot adhere to such conditions of universality. Thus he is critical of language in its tendency to generalize human experience, which he suggests is exemplified in the assumption that something such as art can indeed be beautiful, a belief which (according to Picabia) presupposes that art may actually exist at all. Although what Picabia means when he states ‘art’ is unclear, it is obvious that he is critical of the popular and historical conceptions of what such a practice entails. This practice entails the utilization of tradition and convention as vehicles through which one might attain or create something

¹³¹ Form is not determined by stylistic obligation but rather through the nature of the content itself.

¹³² Picabia, 216.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ These sound poems exemplified new forms of pictorial and performative work that attempted to move beyond the limitations of language through the utilization of nonsensical vocal utterances. This experimentation with the unstable nature of linguistic structure had often come to preoccupy much of Picabia’s work, particularly through evocative titles. This technique amplifies the unique aural qualities inherent to the human voice, highlighting characteristics that might otherwise be unable to be perceived due to the way humans interpret speech. This is a practice that seeks to liberate the sounds of the voice from the rationalizing constraints that bind them to linguistic structures.

‘beautiful’ (a sentiment that helps come to terms with the jarring natures of *Relache* and *Entr’acte*). Central to this understanding is that one could then sell such an object for monetary gain, resulting in the institutionalization of artistic practice within the market economy, and the creation of a product to be bought and sold (and replicated). This is clearly evident in his engagement with Dadaist practice as well as his assertion that he indeed “doesn’t believe in art.”¹³⁶

Published in the increasingly significant year of 1920, a text entitled “*Philosophical Dada*” elucidated several of the artist’s thoughts on the nature of Dada explicitly, as well as an implicit description of the functionality of the creative act, serving as a salient point of reference between the writings of Picabia and Bergson. The work is, in a sense, an anti-manifesto, and, incidentally, had been dedicated to Breton (whose relationship with Picabia was amicable at the time). The work was but one of twenty additional manifestos on the burgeoning movement, a gesture which, in true Dada form, subverts the primary objective of the singular manifesto through its inclusion of multiple texts. Absurd and contradictory in nature, the collection of manifestos highlights the movement’s resistance to homogenization, as well as its disinterest in group ideology (something to which Bergson had likewise held skepticism).¹³⁷ An excerpt from Picabia’s inclusion reads:

Dada’s philosophy is sad and cheerful, indulgent and broad. Venetian crystalware, jewelry, valves, bibliophiles, journeys, poetic novels, bars, mental illnesses, Louis XIII, dilettantism, the latest operetta, the radiant star, the peasant, a glass of beer, draining little by little. A new specimen of dew: that’s DADA’s physiognomy!¹³⁸

This excerpt is particularly interesting in that one might perceive the artist’s engagement with the instability of human emotion, and, perhaps, with the ability of art to reconcile sadness and cheerfulness, two emotions which tend to bifurcate under the weight of intellect despite the enduring fluidity shared between them in *Durée*.¹³⁹ It is also worth noting that this is the only statement to exceed one line in length, suggesting that it holds particular significance to the artist, and that the text underscores Picabia’s with human perception. This is particularly evident in the reference to one’s experience of a glass of beer “draining little by little.” Incidentally, this point is illuminated by Bergson as well in a brief discussion on the experience of a cube of sugar melting into a glass of water.¹⁴⁰ It is obvious that one must wait for the sugar to melt, but our perception of the elapsing of time in this situation is not entirely clear upon immediate reflection.

It would seem that we experience the event within the succession of equidistant instants of mathematical time (*t*), but it is also apparent that such time is a construction of human intellect, an idea explicated at length by Bergson throughout much of his writing. Considering this, it is apparent that we actually understand this event through our experience of *lived time*, through its quality rather than its quantity, or, in other words,

¹³⁶ Picabia, 216.

¹³⁷ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 37-39.

¹³⁸ Picabia. 214-215.

¹³⁹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

through the perception of *Durée* – time *experienced* as opposed to time *conceptualized*.¹⁴¹ On the other hand, perhaps it is useful to say that, rather, we cannot *understand* it at all – we *live* it. The similarities between the melting of a cube of sugar and the draining of a glass of beer are striking, and, as has been shown, both attempt to situate the experience of life outside of the constraints of the intellect. That the artist would liken such an image to his artistic practice is quite evocative, and suggests the unique ability of Dada to act as a vehicle through which to ascertain such particularities. Thus there is a sense of temporality associated with artistic practice, and it appears to be a temporality within which the artist is necessarily immersed. Artistic practice appears to be caught within the flux of *Durée*. Additionally, imagining the work of Dada artists as “new specimen[s] of dew” clearly establishes a relationship between artistic practice and evolutionary theory, as well as the blurring of boundaries between otherwise disparate fields (perhaps further exhibited by the artist’s affinity held toward collaborative and interdisciplinary works such as *Relache*).

Regarding the notion of perception of *Durée*, and particularly that of *qualitative* perception and *quantitative* perception, Bergson gives many examples - one of which is the structure of a musical phrase. If one considers that a musical phrase is comprised of a unified series of distinct yet simultaneous tones (a melody), then one might imagine our perception of its unity as fractured if any particular note were to linger beyond our expectation. Bergson suggests one would perceive this fragmentation not within its *quantitative* unity (the length of the note according to length itself) but rather within its *qualitative* unity (the intuitive experience of a disrupted musical phrase).¹⁴² Again what is at work here is the difference between the perception of time (the length of the note) and that of *Durée* (its musicality).¹⁴³ *Durée* is thus the successive or aggregative shifting of states of consciousness. Bergson also maintains that our successive states exhibit an unceasing movement rather than a series of segmented sections. If any one state ceased to transform itself, its *Durée* would cease to flow. Considering visual perception, Bergson speaks about the impossibility of viewing matter in the same way from one instance to the next, as our memory of the past continually informs our perception of the present.¹⁴⁴ Thus our mental states continually swell with the *Durée* that is accumulated, and this swelling will increase in intensity according to an increase in the complexity of internal states. This is particularly evident with emotions, the most complex of psychic states. Bergson asserts that our ability to reflect upon our emotions comes as a result of a complex nervous system which allows for delay between a stimulus and our response to it, fostering “an interval between excitation and reaction.”¹⁴⁵ Accordingly, it is within this interval that emotions may ultimately come forth as a true expression of creation.¹⁴⁶

It is evident that Picabia may have been aware of this notion as well, perhaps shown in the prevalence of provocation within much of his work, and particularly in the establishment of Instantism in relation to Surrealism. Perhaps the founding of Instantism could be interpreted according to the ability of provocation to elicit emotional response

¹⁴¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 3.

¹⁴² Bergson. *Key Writings*. 56-59.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴⁴ Bergson. *Creative Evolution*. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Deleuze., 107.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

from its recipient, and perhaps this emotional response could in some sense destabilize the subject's intellectual faculty. As we have seen, it might be the case that Surrealism may indeed have had grounding in some sort of ideology, perhaps despite an attempt otherwise, and, considering this, such an ideology (as a construction of intellect) might itself exhibit vulnerability to provocation. This would have been particularly evident in the case of Picabia and Breton, whose close relationship had ended in public turmoil. And perhaps this lessening of the intellect is found within the absurdity that is generally prevalent amongst Dada artists, exemplified in the propagation of anti-Artistic practice. Further, perhaps this most saliently embodied within the interest of Picabia in provocation as an aesthetic tactic – such a notion might well serve his critique of the intellectual knot that he had perceived to bind the creative practices of his contemporaries. Intellectual knowledge may indeed give one an adequate impression of “the relations of external things among themselves,” but it is nevertheless inadequate in understanding that “perpetual evolution of life” with which both Picabia and Bergson were engaged.

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Appendix

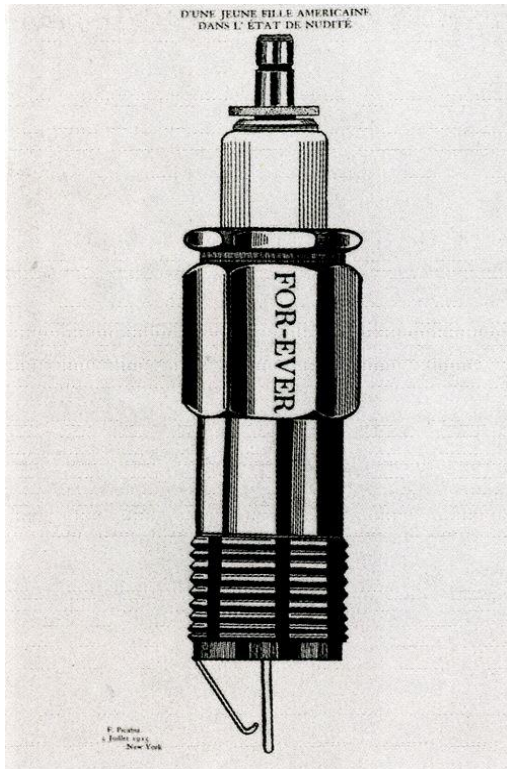


Fig. 1 – Francis Picabia, *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité*, 1915 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



Fig. 2 – Francis Picabia, *Voilà elle*, 1915 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

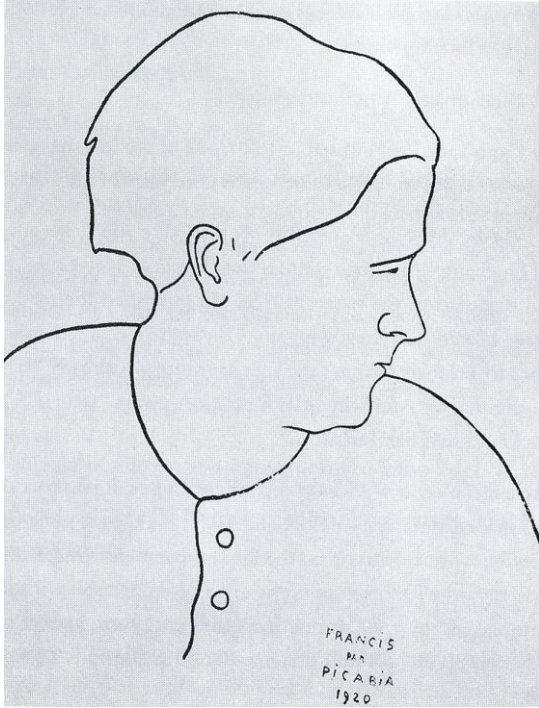


Fig. 3 – Francis Picabia, *Francis par Picabia*, 1920 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

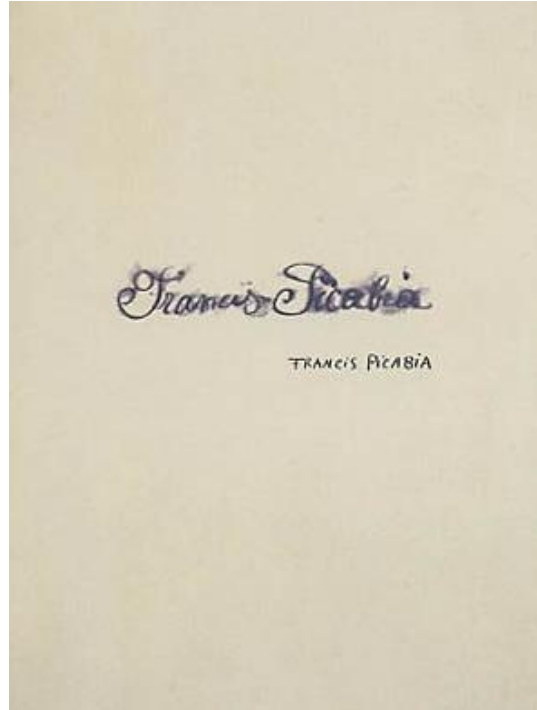


Fig. 4 – Francis Picabia, *Francis Picabia (Francis Picabia par Francis Picabia)*, 1920 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

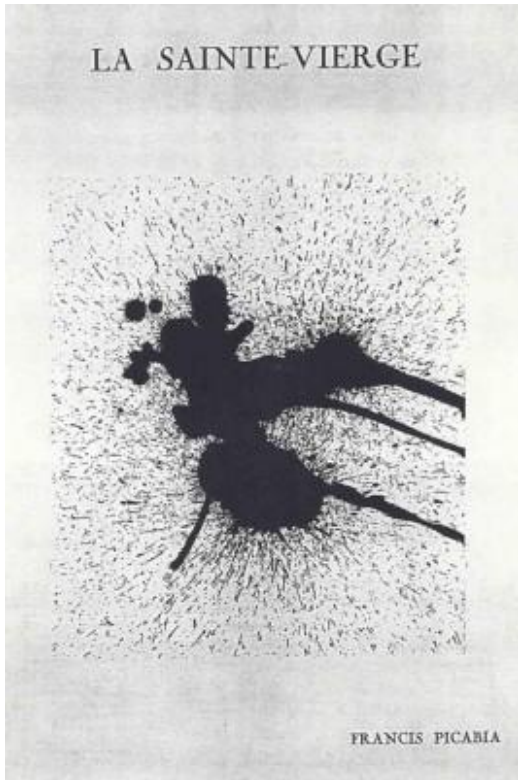


Fig. 5 – Francis Picabia, *La Sainte-Vierge* (*The Blessed Virgin*), 1920 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

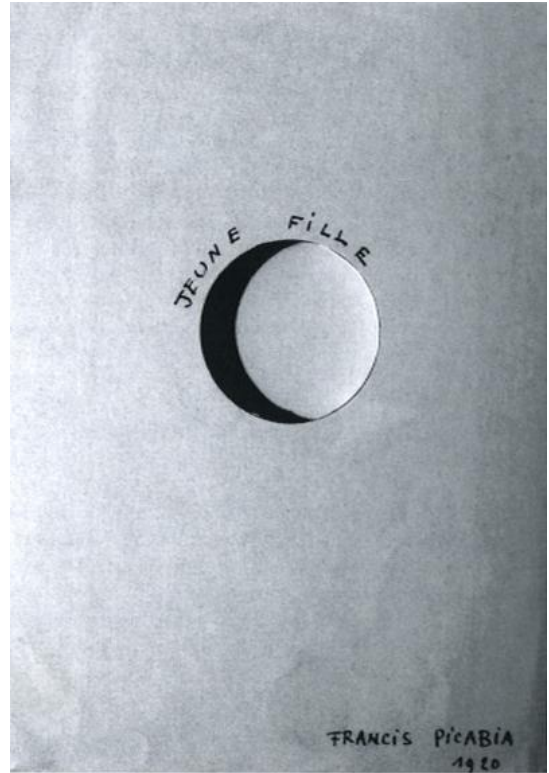


Fig. 6 – Francis Picabia, *Jeune fille* (*Young Girl*), 1920 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



Fig. 7 – Francis Picabia, *Udnie (jeune fille américaine; danse)*, 1912 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



Fig. 8 – Francis Picabia, *Voila la femme* (*Here is woman*), 1915 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

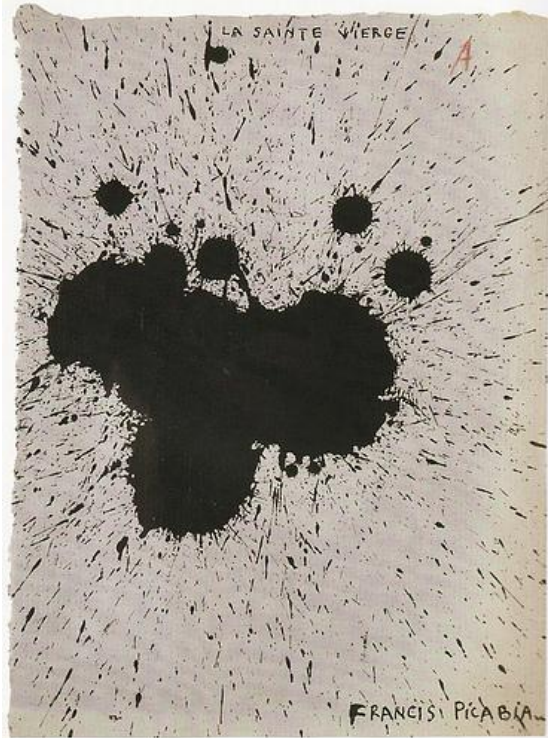


Fig. 9 – Francis Picabia, *La Saint-Vierge II*, 1920 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

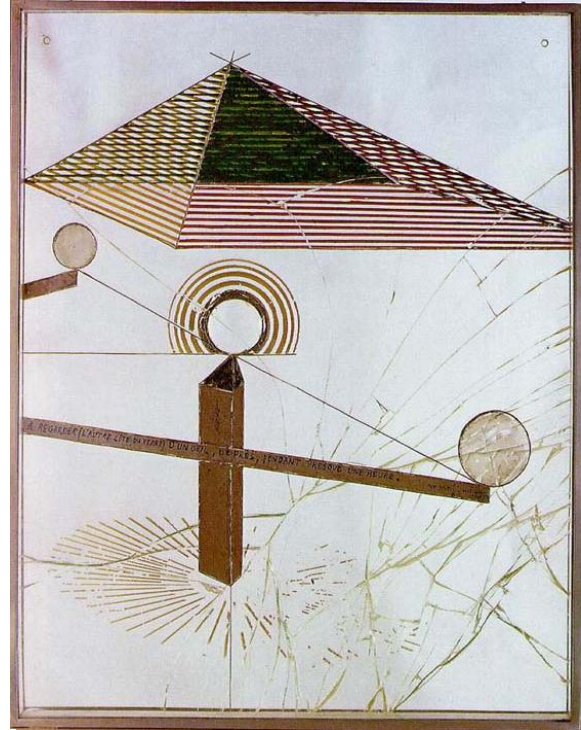


Fig. 10 – Marcel Duchamp, *To Be Looked at (From the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*, 1918 © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris