

Cyborgs, Women and New York Dada

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Who is she, where is she, what is she — this “modern woman” that people are always talking about? Is there any such creature? Does she look any different looks or talk any different words or think any different thoughts from the late Cleopatra or Mary Queen of Scots or Mrs Browning? Some people think the women are the cause of modernism whatever that is. But then, some people think woman is to blame for everything they don’t like or don’t understand. *Cherchez la femme* is man-made advice, of course. (*New York Evening Sun*, 1917)

This 1917 article on the poet and painter Mina Loy stages a search for a “modern woman,” a woman intimately associated with modernism (“whatever that is”). The article thus poses and reflects a central articulation between two elements—women and modernism—that were crucial to the work of a range of New York Dadaists at the time. The term New York Dada is a retrospective appellation emerging from Zurich Dada and 1920’s popular press reflections on New York modernism; it suggests a more coherent movement than was understood by those living and working in this moment and place. The many individuals participating in or on the margins of New York Dada included French expatriates such as Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, Americans such as Alfred Steiglitz and Man Ray and many women as well as men. The brief moment of New York Dada (from 1915 to 1921)¹ responded principally to the technological sublime of early twentieth-century American culture and its urban landscape, and resulted in some particularly striking representations of the intersections between modernism, technology and women. As this article goes on to argue, the mechanomorphic portraits of New York Dada and their negotiations of gender sit in a tradition that stretches from the late-nineteenth century to the technosphere we presently inhabit. The cyborgs of New York Dada are representations that expand the boundaries of imaginings of the human, but they manifest less a radical break with representations of the human form than an ongoing examination of gender in an increasingly technologized

world. Whether these representations offer a fearful or joyous response to the implications for gender relations and the place of women in a technological culture is the central issue explored in the following pages.

The “modern woman” in the *New York Evening Sun* and in New York Dada is a continued negotiation of the “New Woman” figure that so obsessed the popular imagination (and popular press) of the fin-de-siècle. In the New Woman a variety of concerns and/or features of modernity were articulated; she came to embody the dangerous masculinized eroticism of women engaging freely in the public realm, fears about a collapse of individualism and a corresponding threat to masculinity, anxieties about a nation of consumers rather than producers, and the potential feminization of culture in a technological, mass-produced age. At the core of the figure of the New Woman was an important link between new femininity and new technology. As much recent work in Victorian studies has demonstrated, the connections between women and technology are not the product of the twentieth century. What Andreas Huyssen describes as the “woman, nature, machine . . . mesh of significations” (70) can certainly be discovered in the nineteenth century, from Ada Lovelace’s involvement with Charles Babbage’s “Analytical Engine” to Harriet Martineau’s accounts of women in manufacturing which praise the enhancement of the female body achieved through a fusion of the organic and the machinic.² With the emergence of the New Woman as a cultural icon or stereotype of contemporaneity and female figure of novelty and innovation for the last decades of the nineteenth century, the articulation of women and machines became more pronounced. Her projection and representation in journalism, cartoons, fiction and plays in the Anglo-American world involved her association not only with masculine habits of dress and behaviour but also specifically with new technologies: bicycles, typewriters and Kodak cameras. But the crucial role of the bicycle in the image of the New Woman, for example, was not without its complexities: as Sarah Wintle points out, in both popular romantic fiction and New Woman novels cycling represented a problematic liberation for women where “physical independence and freedom [may be] at the cost of either regression to a kind of pre-sexual state or of difficult male-female relations” (72).

The popular version of the New Woman in America was the Gibson Girl, the creation of the cartoonist Charles Dana Gibson. The Gibson Girl was, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s words, “braver, stronger, more healthful and skilful and able and free, more human in all ways” than the average American woman, and she was often pictured with a bicycle (part VIII, 53). The visibility of the New Woman or Gibson Girl cyclist, in her divided skirt, can be connected to another increasingly visible fin-de-siècle technological woman, the typist. Morag Shiach details how, from the first commercially produced machine in 1867 (designed by Christopher Scholes), the typewriter

was seen as having special significance for women (115). The female typist was imagined and represented within ongoing discourses about women's independence, their sexuality, and their relationship to technology; from Conan Doyle's story "A Case Of Identity" (1891) onwards, fin-de-siècle fiction expressed an "uncertainty about the typewriter as a technology of emancipation" (122). Debates about the New Woman and her connection to the hopes and fears of a technological modernity extend into the twentieth century and have a particular resonance in the iconoclastic practices of New York Dada. Thus, it is not incidental that two of Duchamp's iconographic "readymades," *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and *Traveller's Folding Item* (1916), deploy those mass-produced technologies closely associated with the New Woman. In both cases Duchamp interrogates the anthropomorphic gendering and eroticizing of technology: *Bicycle Wheel*, a wheel inverted and mounted on a wooden stool, approximates a human form in which the mobility of the bicycle becomes the (fixed) circularity of the head and torso, while *Traveller's Folding Item* presents an Underwood typewriter dust cover, the skirt-like covering of an absent technological form.

The "rationalized logic" of art histories of the avant-garde, which Amelia Jones takes to task in her *Irrational Modernism* (108), has projected a specific image of the male artists of New York Dada. Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and the substantial group of American artists and writers they interacted with and influenced are cast in the role of heroic challengers to the sentimentalized culture of the bourgeoisie, as radical critics of the institution of art and art-making, and as profoundly subversive in their destruction of the boundaries separating art from life.³ But New York Dada cannot be so easily rationalized: despite its non-European location and its key figures being non-combatants, it was a response to the destruction of the Great War, a destruction of symbol, order and gendered identity as much as anything. Amelia Jones convincingly argues for the importance of World War I for New York Dada, highlighting the "pressures on artistic subjectivity [. . .] stemming from the war" that were negotiated in New York in the 1910s (*Irrational* 40). She points particularly to the New York Dada articulations of an "equivocal masculinity, one compromised by its distance from European ideals of proper, patriotic, heroic male behaviour, hugely inflated by propaganda during the war" (40). Jones's argument builds on earlier feminist criticism in which dominant understandings of New York Dada as the first American avant-garde, heroically struggling with the encroaching mass of industrial capitalism, have been revised to redress the elision of Dada's fundamental negotiations and presentations of gender equivocality.⁴ The New York Dada we can now read and explore is one that fully confronted the early twentieth-century world as a place of technological innovation, industrial rationalization, mass consumerism, challenges to individualism and, crucially, disturbances to traditional gender

identities.

New York Dada emerged in response, particularly, to the hyper-modernity of the man-made New York environment, with its bridges, factories, electric lights and skyscrapers. Soon after his arrival in New York in July 1915, Duchamp suggested using the Woolworth Building—the tallest building in the world when it was built in 1913—as a ready-made (Adcock 75). In addition to its patently technological Manhattan skyline, New York was also the location for some of Thomas Edison’s important innovations, such as the opening of the Pearl Street Station of the Edison Electric Light Company in 1882 (Edison himself was based at Menlo Park, West Orange, New Jersey). In its uniquely American context, distinguishing it from European dada manifestations which were more markedly politicized by proximity to the Great War and its aftermath in Europe, New York Dada engaged with a new identity that found its expression in the technological and scientific advances of the USA. A key feature of this engagement was the way that a particular concern for and interest in the female form was translated, in the objects and artifacts of New York Dada, into mechanized desire-machines that negotiated the effects of technological modernity on both the masculine and feminine subject.

The two currents that intersected in New York Dada—technology and the modern woman—both posed central challenges to established ideas of human subjectivity and the role of the individual in the world. The interaction between man and machine became the crucial issue relating to the machine’s roles in modern culture, and the image of the “human motor” emerged as a fundamental metaphor for the techno-industrial era. Such a metaphor involved a vision in which “the working body was but an exemplar of that universal process by which energy was converted into mechanical work, a variant of the great engines and dynamos spawned by the industrial age” (Rabinbach 1). Dada interest in technology, in the machine-age so very apparent in the landscape and life of New York, connects with this elevation of the machine to the status of a governing paradigm for modern culture. Barbara Zabel, for example, describes how “the displacement of God by the machine became a defining attribute of New York Dada” (“The Machine” 281). So in the art and texts to emerge from New York Dada the displacement of a divine hierarchy, the image of the human motor, and a concern to disrupt boundaries between the natural and the artificial coalesce into experiments with mecanomorphic portraits in which the potentials and pitfalls of—and in—mechanical being are extensively negotiated.

Duchamp’s famous *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) is an early form of mechanomorphic portrait showing simultaneously the successive movements of a cubistic figure down a staircase. The human form is represented as what Zabel describes as “a kind of Dada automaton—both a humanized machine and a mechanized human—thereby acknowledging how profoundly human beings have been affected by the omnipresence of

the machine” (281). The *Nude*, which Duchamp had been encouraged to withdraw from the Salon des Indépendents, was subsequently exhibited at the 1913 New York Armory Show; it received much press coverage, most of it ridiculing the piece even as visitors queued for thirty to forty minutes to view it. The visual similarities between Duchamp’s canvas and the human figures in motion photographed in Eadweard Muybridge’s 1884-5 study of *Animal Locomotion* are important in extrapolating its mechanical properties: Muybridge’s work, through the intervention of a technological photographic device, reveals aspects of motion that would otherwise be invisible. Thus the technological device can be read as actually producing this particular human in motion, a mechanized figure emerging from the union of the technological and the human that is reproduced, but not essentially altered, in Duchamp’s rendition of a moving nude.

Duchamp’s *Nude* also calls attention to the foregrounding of a traditional subject for art, the female nude, in New York Dada (one of the things that was so shocking to the contemporary audience of this piece). His redrawing of the nude is contiguous with, and can be connected to, the shifting contours of gender difference in the era of the New Woman and so underscores the importance of new, modern women for his colleagues and contemporaries. The particular figure of the *jeune fille américaine*—an active, agile, athletic young woman such as Anne Oakley or Mary Pickford—was indeed important to the dadaist impulse long before Duchamp and Picabia actually came to America. She was “the personification of the new century [. . .] many artists and writers linked their own sense of radical liberation from tradition with that of the young American girl” (Zabel, “The Machine” 282).

The *américaine* was not just a symbol or image, though; real radical and liberated women frequented avant-garde New York sites such as Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 gallery or the Arensbergs’s apartment. The painter and poet Juliette Roche whose *Demi Cercle* interrogated the New York avant-garde in radical visual-poetic form, the poet and artist Mina Loy, who was a key contributor to the dada little magazine *The Blind Man*, the artist Beatrice Wood whose canvas (a nude torso with nailed-on soap bar) *Un peut d’eau dans du savon* was a major draw at the 1917 New York Independents Exhibition, and the artist, writer, and model Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, who embodied dada in her performative presence, were all active participants in the New York avant-garde rather than passive muses.⁵ Indeed women’s existence as actual producers of texts, images and objects was centrally important to the dadaist challenge to traditional representations of femininity.⁶ It was as much the tangible presence and activities of these liberated women as discourses about the New Woman, or symbols of modern American femininity, that produced dada explorations of a new feminine archetype that radically defied traditional constructions of femi-

ninity. The images and texts produced by Duchamp, Picabia, Man Ray and others articulate a nascent machine aesthetic: in these texts and images an unnatural woman is explored through representations of what might usefully be termed a cyborg feminine.

Though the cyborg has become a recognizable feature in the film, literature and popular culture of the past few decades, the earliest images and representations of cyborgs in science fiction literature appeared long before the terms “cyborg” and “cybernetics” were invented in the mid-twentieth century. The term “cybernetics” has its origin in the Greek *kubernetes* meaning “pilot or steersman” and was coined by Norbert Wiener and his colleagues to refer to their work on information systems in Boston in 1946. Wiener’s model of the role of the feedback mechanism in thinking led to his conception of a thinking machine or human machine, as outlined in 1948 in *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. The term “cyborg” was first used by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline during their experiments on mice and the environmental conditions of space travel at Rockland State Hospital New York in 1960; they applied the term, a conflation of cybernetics and organism, to an early bio-engineered mouse, an experiment intended to lead the way to a perfectly adapted human astronaut. But the cyborg’s significance goes beyond that of an experimental postulation or a science fiction figure. Contemporary explorations of cyborg identity (from *Blade Runner* to the *Terminator* films to *The Matrix*) actually effect an ontological disruption between the “real” and the “artificial,” opening up debate about what it is to be “human.” In current conjectures about the posthuman the cyborg plays a crucial role; for N. Katherine Hayles “the human as concept has been succeeded by its evolutionary heir. . . . the cyborg, a hybrid species . . . *constructed*, a technological object that confounds the dichotomy between natural and unnatural, made and born” (157). Scott Bukatman stresses that the posthuman body “is no longer simply the repository of the soul . . . the refiguration of the body posits a constant redefinition of the subject through the multiple superimposition of biotechnological apparatuses” (98), while Jean Baudrillard proposes that “[t]he growing cerebrality of machines must logically be expected to occasion a technological purification of bodies” (34).

Cyberfeminist examinations of the intersections of gender and technology celebrate the cyborg as a contradictory creature that threatens a masculinist or phallogocentric conception of organic wholeness and technological perfection.⁷ The idea of the cyborg enables the blurring of categories of self and other, human and animal, natural and artificial, offering feminisms a way out of the rigid essentialist-constructivist opposition. The foundational text for cyberfeminism, Donna Haraway’s “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” constructs a figure “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity” (151). The cyborg has no origin or “other seductions

to organic wholeness" (150); its transgression of the boundaries between animal-human-machine make it, for Haraway, an ironic figure of hope and liberation, offering "a slightly perverse shift of perspective" which "might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically-mediated societies" (154). It is not a search for a new single form or language that Haraway announces, but a mobile intervention into the powerful narratives of technology:

It is not just that science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction, as well as a matrix of complex dominations. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualism in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream, not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. It is an imagination of a feminist speaking in tongues to strike fear into the circuits of the super-savers of the new right. It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories. (181)

Writing later, in the context of virtual reality experiments and the increasing expansion of digital technologies and the World Wide Web, Rosi Braidotti argues for "Cyberfeminism with a Difference," offering Dolly Parton, Elizabeth Taylor and Jane Fonda as the pantheon of postmodern, cyborg femininity. She highlights how the "body in question here is far from a biological essence: it is a crossroad of intensive forces; it is a surface of inscriptions of social codes" (Braidotti, "Cyberfeminism" np). The body is not an essentially sexed unit, but a coding of forces and potentials that can be mechanically reconfigured and transcribed. But as Braidotti warns, and her postmodern cyborg-fem icons exemplify, "the alleged triumph of high-technologies is not matched by a leap of the human imagination to create new images and representations" (ibid). The contemporary Korean artist Lee Bul, creator of a *Monsters and Cyborgs* series of sculptures, similarly cautions that "while notions of femininity may appear to be changing with the advent of new technologies and new ideas and theories arising from those technologies . . . certain representations simply reinforce and continue traditional discourses about what constitutes femininity and images of femininity."⁸

What both Haraway and Braidotti offer is an alternative to feminist "technophobia," a key facet of modern ecofeminism from Mary Daly onwards. As Carol Stable points out, "in the humanities, as in popular culture, feminist approaches to technoscience have been profoundly informed by technophobia, or an anti-modern attitude that rejects the present in favor of a temporally distant (i.e. non-existent) and holistic natural world" (4).

Cyberfeminism offers an alternative also to the technological sublime that appears to possess many creative and theoretical explorations of the implications of advances in digital technology, nanotechnology and bioengineering (Stabile's term for this is "technomania"). Current debates about the post-human can appear predominantly apolitical (or even anti-feminist), with the notion of posthumanity often articulated in terms of a transcendence of "meat" to a realm of "data" in which gender (i.e. femininity) is left behind in the body in favor of a streamlined or "virtual" identity: Hans Moravec's vision in *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988), for example, includes the complete uploading of a "self" into a computer; William Gibson, among others, offers creative realizations of this vision in his cyberpunk novels, while early issues of *Mondo 2000*, the groundbreaking cyberpunk journal, present a laddish celebration of "jacking" in and beyond the meat-realm of the body.⁹ All this seems to repeat rather than transform in any fundamental way some of the problematic aspects of bodily fragmentation and erasure in postmodernism.

Haraway, Braidotti, and other cyberfeminists are also writing against the obverse association of women and machines, where the female cyborg is just another incarnation of the monstrous feminine (such as the ship's computer "mother" in *Alien* who surfaces in a new form as the monstrous "queen" alien in *Aliens*), or a hyper-sexual, ultra-violent killing-fucking machine (as in some Japanese *manga* and *anime*). In contrast to a vision of digital transcendence (of meat) the cyborg feminine as phallic mother threatens the domination and engulfment of Man. This contemporary creation of monstrous female cyborgs recapitulates earlier alignments of threatening women with the machine. In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), for example, "the machine vamp [the android Maria] embodies the unity of an active and destructive female sexuality and the destructive potential of technology" (Huyssen 77). The burning of the android at the end of the narrative is key to Andreas Huyssen's reading of the film. He argues that "the expressionist fear of technology and male perceptions of a threatening female sexuality [are] both exorcised and reaffirmed by this metaphoric witch burning" (81). The textual production of an android Maria, which can embody the dual fears of technology and femininity and then be destroyed, is an attempt to control and ameliorate the potential of both technology and liberated femininity to emasculate and de-individuate modern man. Such images ultimately articulate a fear of the machinic woman, enhanced and liberated by the technologies of modernity, as an excessive and uncontrollable force.

German Expressionism does not mark the beginning of attempts to control, contain or reject femininity through the machine; French writers from the fin-de-siècle also explore the mechanical alternative to messy and inconvenient Woman. In his *Future Eve* (1880) Villiers de L'Isle-Adam

presents a fictional “Edison” who creates, for the benefit of his love-lorn friend Lord Ewald, a female android (“Hadalay”) who will present none of the complications of a real woman—Ewald’s beloved is beautiful but sadly lacking in the charms, intelligence, and accomplishments that would really satisfy him. Despite being a perfect, alternative version of a woman (if limited by the recording cylinders which constitute all her conversation) Hadalay, like Lang’s android Maria, is destroyed at the end of the text, suggesting an equivalent unease about the woman-machine nexus. *Against Nature* (1884) presents a similar, and more straightforward, maneuver of replacing the unsatisfactorily natural with artificial perfection. Joris-Karl Huysmans’s protagonist Des Essientes, whose jewel-encrusted tortoise dies from the weight of its ornamentation and who sees Nature as infinitely limited by her “monotony” and “banality,” proposes that “[no where] in this world [does there] exist a being conceived in the joys of fornication and born of the birth pangs of a womb, of which the model and type is more dazzling or more splendid than those of the two locomotives now in service on the railroad of Northern France (20). Des Essientes goes on to sexualize the “adorable blonde” Crampton engine “with a shrill voice, a long slender body encased in a gleaming brass corset” “stiffening her muscles of steel and breaking into a sweat that streams down her warm flanks” and the Engerth engine, “an enormous, gloomy brunette with a hoarse, harsh voice and thick-set hips squeezed into armour-plating of cast iron” (20-21). Such texts exemplify how French Decadent writers sought to replace the “messiness” of femininity with a more streamlined (and controllable) model.

New York Dada negotiations of gender in mechanomorphic portraits thus exhibit connections to both the concerns and representations of an earlier era and those of our own techno-age. In Man Ray’s 1918 photographs *Homme* (Man) and *Femme* (Woman), *Homme* is an eggbeater and *Femme* two photographer’s light reflectors attached to a glass plate with six clothes pegs fastened to it which trail thin curly strands of thread. The photographs reveal a confusion of genders: *Homme* (entitled *Femme* in one print) may be pendulously phallic, but it is constructed from domestic technology;¹⁰ similarly, *Femme* blurs femininity in its phallic presentation of the domestic clothes-peg and the otherwise womb-like curves of the concave reflectors. Both pieces emerge in a milieu in which the association of women with domestic and reproductive functions had been visibly broken by the “unnatural” women who frequented the varied spaces of New York.

The dada artist Francis Picabia most obsessively negotiates the unnatural New Women of New York in a range of feminine mecanomorphic images. In a 1915 *New York Tribune* article “French Artists Spur on an American Art,” he claims that “immediately upon coming to America it flashed on me that the genius of the modern world is machinery . . . Machinery the soul of human life”(2). Picabia’s 1915 drawing *Fille née sans*

mère (Girl born without a mother) [Figure 1] presents a peculiar blend of machinery and the organic with the rounded shapes (buttocks, breasts, eyes?) hardly attached to a set of sketchy springs and gears. “She” actually seems to be a non-functioning organic-techno fusion. Picabia’s project in this *Fille* can be linked with both an American heritage and a French Decadent one: Picabia’s mechanistic drawing removes the “girl-machine” from the realm of normal procreative processes reproducing her through the frameworks of American industrialism. “She” is thus produced free from her/the mother and is made instantly available for the production of erotic pleasure like Villiers’s *Future Eve* or even Des Essientes’s trains in *Against Nature*.

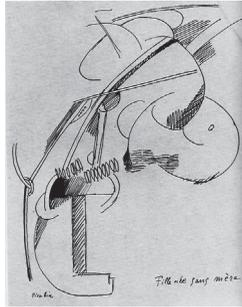


Figure 1: “*Fille née sans mère*.” Francis Picabia, 1915; pen and ink on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

The control of the machinic-feminine that is attempted in *Fille née sans mère* is more fully achieved in *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* from the same period (this was the July 5, 1915 cover of the journal *291*) [Figure 2]. In this Picabia has taken the functional representation of a spark-plug (repeating contemporary advertising for the Red Head Priming Plug) and offered it as a cyborg young American girl, with the straight lines reflecting the dress fashions of the time. The drawing clearly suggests the *jeune fille américaine* as the catalyst or spark for modernization; she is a mass-produced part, the heart of the Ford revolution, with the insignia “FOR-EVER” promising perpetual activity and satisfaction. But rather than liberating woman from reductive representations, Picabia’s young American girl is fixed as an image/object of/for mass consumption. A later piece by Picabia, *Americaine* (1917), a drawing of a light bulb with the words “Flirt” and “Divorce” on the glass bulb, presents an even clearer ambivalence about the modern American woman: the inspiration/enlightenment she may offer is tempered by her threats to the androcentric sexual status quo. The link to mass-production and consumption is unavoidable—like the spark-plug, the light bulb is a

cheap, modern technological object. There is an element of ambiguity to Picabia's mecanomorphic woman in *Fille née sans mère* that is eliminated from the other two, technically accurate, works. Caroline Jones reads the *Fille née sans mère* as a "hermaphroditic machine" that demonstrates the "absolute *unfixity* of the machinic phylum" (172). She also argues for the possibility of Picabia's close identification, during his neurasthenic cure, with the *Fille*, an identification which, as Amelia Jones elaborates, poses him, a non-combatant and neurasthenic, as un-manned. That the cyborg New Woman might be constructed and comprehended as a projection of masculine anxieties suggests further that the non-combatant male artists of New York Dada in their solipsistic reiterations of their uncertain (and uncertainly gendered) status crucially failed to acknowledge the positive potentials of the cyborg-feminine.

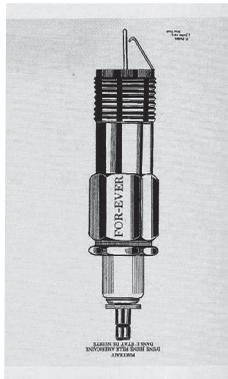


Figure 2: "Portrait d'une jeune fille americaine dans l'etat de nudité." Francis Picabia, July 5, 1915, cover of *291*. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

There seems to be absolutely no positive potential in the woman depicted in Francis Picabia's collaboration with the Mexican-born Marius de Zayas for the November 1915 issue of *291* [Figure 3]. Their double-page spread presents an explicit concern about the threat that modern Woman, released from "natural," traditional identifications and roles, could pose. Dickran Tashjian sees this as a "misogynist collaboration," a "diatribe against the alleged mindlessness of the New Woman" (45-46). De Zayas's visual poem "ELLE" and Picabia's "VOILÀ ELLE" both portray a modern woman fundamentally driven by her desires. In this her *jouissance* functions as the motorizing force in her unthinking existence. De Zayas presents a woman liberated by unmediated and uncontrolled consumption; but in grasping for it with her "main mécanique" hers is a "liberté dans l'ESCLAVAGE (2)."

She consumes sex, “LITTÉRATURE,” “OPIUM,” and fashion—the “ROUGE BLEU JAUNE” hat she wears—fully realizing the potential of contemporary consumer culture and sacrificing her intelligence (“LE SACRIFICE atropHie cér´BraLE”) in favor of a search for automatic gratification (2). The emptiness of the New Woman is further emphasized in Picabia’s mechanomorphic portrait “VOILÀ ELLE,” in which she is reduced to a visual/projecting machine with a central black mass/torso functioning as a wind-bag, driving a microscope on the lower left. The microscope lens focuses on “ELLE” who is revealed only through the name of her creator (Picabia), just as de Zayas’s “she” rests on his name, thus suggesting the artists’ need to control and contain the mechanical women they depict. This is highlighted by the ambiguously phallic aspects of both pieces, which negotiate the tension that arises from the forceful, straight lines of mechanical components; there is the suggestion of a gun in the centre of “VOILÀ ELLE” and de Zayas’s visual poem is structured around assertive central lines. The ever-present danger of the cyborg woman as phallic mother is both realized and contained by this double-page spread whose representation of the modern, mechanized woman remains always and only concerned with the threat she poses to masculinity.

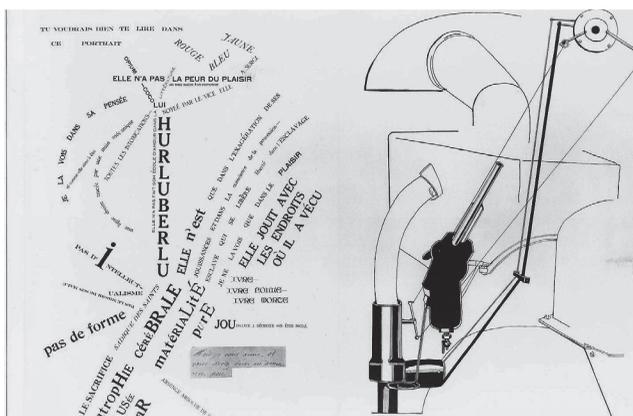


Figure 3: “ELLE,” Marius de Zayas, “VOILÀ ELLE,” Francis Picabia, double-page spread, November 1915 issue of 291. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

In “ELLE / VOILÀ ELLE” the technological woman and the New Woman merge and emerge as figures liberated from a traditional conception of woman, but also as dangerous, unthinking machines that serve as metonymical representations of the mass-produced desires of a modern commodity economy. This manifests the fact that, for many artists of New York Dada, the disruption of boundaries in the modern technosphere also

produced anxieties about the uncontrollable flows of commodity culture projected into/onto the female body-machine. The modern becoming-woman, becoming-machine pushes at the restraints of heteronormativity and organic unity and so the artists' cyborg-feminine images attempt to capture and control her/it. Other artists, however, such as Marcel Duchamp, articulate a less fearful response to the circuits of desire that modernity puts into play, and illustrate a current in New York Dada that revels in boundaries transgressed and dualisms violated. Duchamp created his own cyborg identities through photographic representations and performances in which the technology of the camera produced identities which could be seen to celebrate and inhabit the "partiality, irony, intimacy and perversity" of the cyborg. The most well-known of these is Rose Sélavy, Duchamp cross-dressed and photographed by Man Ray (Man Ray, *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*, 1920-21).¹¹ What I wish to emphasise is the technological nature of the gender confusion that Duchamp enacts, one impossible to realize, as with Muybridge's photographs of human and animal movement, without the advanced visual technologies of the early twentieth century. Rose, an example of Duchamp's "aggressive dislocations of traditional categories of masculinity and femininity" (A. Jones, *Postmodern* 204), is also a negotiation of the association of women with commodities. "She" (Rose) is a self-conscious attempt to challenge the construction of women as both the irrational consumers of modernity and the sex-objects of modern masculine desires. So "Duchamp's gesture can be seen as an active parody of the definition of the feminine as the sexual, as commodity—the alignment that aimed precisely to shore up the boundaries of proper gender identity in the face of 'sexual anarchy,' the challenge posed to gender hierarchies by the New Woman" (A. Jones, *Postmodernism* 163).

Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (Large Glass)* (1915-23) also negotiates gender and sexuality in the machine-age, offering a bride-motor permanently separated from the bachelor-machines below her. This "huge mechanized 'portrait'" as Amelia Jones terms it consolidates and extends many of Duchamp's engagements elsewhere with machine culture, sexual exchange and gender relations (*Postmodern* 241). In *Large Glass* a department-store sized glass pane encloses the uselessly churning bachelor machines at the bottom, embodied in the empty rigid uniforms (the nine "malic molds") and chocolate grinder, and the stripping bride, a complicated motor-form exuding a flesh-coloured veil or "halo," hanging at the top: the bride's "clothes" separate the two halves of the glass.¹² *Large Glass* may be a love machine, as it has often been described, but it is crucially a non-productive machine, with no consummation or completion to the process it mechanizes. For Amelia Jones this means that it "explores rather than represses the ambivalences that structure the engagements and clanking 'flows' of industrial-erotic energies, an ambivalence that threatens always to rupture their clear path to 'production' (which utopically

seeks to replace the mess of procreation)” (241). *Large Glass* refuses the easy mechanization of heterosexual desire, and so complicates a simple replacement of the natural with the artificial or an elision of the feminine in an assertion of streamlined, mechanical eroticism. However, Duchamp’s bachelors and bride remain fixed and enclosed in their onanistic grindings, unable to escape their traditional gender roles: the bachelors’ uniforms display the restrictive definition of masculinity through specific activities (such as conducting war), while the elevated bride is trapped and weakened (Duchamp’s notes describe her “feeble cylinders”) in her virtuous stasis; she is a motor but also attached ineluctably to a fleshy veil. Duchamp’s cyborgs here complicate but do not break down the restrictions of gendered identity and sexual role; they demonstrate that technology has recast the functioning of femininity, has endangered the virility of masculinity by inserting it into a dehumanised industrial process, but has not liberated the individual from the binary codes of culture. As Zabel comments about dada machine portraiture in general, “while many portraits seem to erase gender by doing away with clearly recognizable human features, these portraits are nonetheless saturated with gender codes” (“Constructed” 42).

But there is a technological woman of New York Dada who has the destruction of binaries and dualisms in her sights, who fully encapsulates both the joy and the danger of the hybrid state of the cyborg. The Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (nee Else Plötz), German-born, a writer, artist, model, and performer, lived in New York from 1913 to April 1923.¹³ She wrote dada poems and made dada objects, but rather than merely representing dada concepts, the Baroness lived them, walking through New York with shaved and painted scalp, headdresses made of birdcages, wastepaper baskets or a coal-scuttle, celluloid curtain rings as bracelets, assorted tea-balls attached to her bust, spoons to her hat, and an electric taillight to her bustle. Her appropriation of the objects of consumer culture and mass production, her prosthetic enhancement of her form through such artifacts, the supplementing and transformation of her body through the technological detritus of the New York streets, mark out her distinctive response to her contemporary context as a ludic embodiment of the mechnomorphic acts of New York Dada. Her “lived body satirically engaged the male-centered machine fantasies by planting the technological and consumer items on her performing body, grafting them alongside organic matter, including gilded vegetables” (Gammel 196). As Irene Gammel goes on to argue, the Baroness’s “body is saturated with signifiers that cry out to be read as gender acts. Perhaps most catching was her tomato-can bra, brilliantly alluding to the 1913 invention of the bra in New York” (201). The re-figuring of women’s bodies with the release from corsets to the breast-specific support of a bra is, as the Baroness’s parody enacts, not a naturalization of the female form, but an alternative production of woman-as-commodity and one that sug-

gests the always already artificial or acculturated (machinic, technological, commodified) nature of the female form.¹⁴

The Baroness not only challenged the norms of femininity with her outrageous dress, but flouted the norms of art and literature, even the boundaries of avant-garde practice. She once walked the streets of New York with (what Djuna Barnes describes as) a “plaster cast of a penis [which she] showed to all the ‘old maids’ she came in contact with,” highlighting the prosthetic role of the penis-phallus (and its detachability from masculinity).¹⁵ Such denaturalizations of masculinity also occur in her poetry. “A Dozen Cocktails Please,” for example, recounts a fantastic assertion of a female sexual appetite that reduces the phallus to an object of consumption, an auxiliary device:

No spinsterlollypop for me—yes—we have
 No bananas I got lusting palate—I
 Always eat them
 They have dandy celluloid tubes—all sizes—
 Tinted diabolically like a baboon’s hind complexion.
 A Man’s a—
 Piffle! Will-o’-th’-wisp! What’s the dread
 Matter with the up-to-date-American-
 Home comforts? [. . .]
 There’s the vibrator———
 Coy flappertoy! I am adult citizen with
 Vote— [. . .]
 Psh! Any sissy poet has sufficient freezing
 Chemicals in his Freudian icechest to snuff all
 Cockiness. We’ll hire one¹⁶

The parodic phallic references here—lollypop, bananas, tubes—ridicule the Freudian assertions of phallic preeminence and penis envy, particularly as the “coy flappertoy” “vibrator” or “one” for “hire” are easily available. Elsewhere in her poetry, in “Subjoyride” (submitted to the *Little Review* in 1922) the Baroness presents a “Ready-to-wear-American Soul Poetry” in which the consumable, consumer products of a modern America, glimpsed as advertisements on a subway ride, confuse and blur the integrity of the (hu)man form and transform it into a sexualized, hungry surface:

[. . .] —Wrigley’s
 pinaud’s heels for the wise—Nothing so pepsodent-
 soothing—
 pussywillow—kept clean
 with Philadelphia Cream
 Cheese.
 They satisfy the man of largest mustard—no dosing—
 Just rub it on —¹⁷

In “Love Chemical Relationship” (published in the *Little Review* in 1918) the Baroness imagines a dialogue between herself and Marcel Duchamp in which she takes him to task for the “glassy” stasis of his reflections/representations of unconsummated mecanomorphic sexuality in his *Large Glass*, while “Tailend of Mistake: America” parodies the omnipotent pretensions of an American technological teleology. This poem highlights such a teleology’s contradictory but inevitable contiguity to a feminine (newly technologized) domestic realm: “In this rushing—crushing—exhilarating time of universal revel—alteration—by logic’s omnipotency “putting things to rights” house cleaning—”.¹⁸ The Baroness satirizes the aspirations of an American technology to “clean” up systems and functioning which are—from the Taylorist ordering of working practices to the architectural streamlining of cities—indistinct from the housewife’s daily tasks.

Both Gammel and Amelia Jones highlight the grotesque, bodily aspect of the Baroness’s interventions into New York Dada and American machine-age culture. Gammel writes that “her body [was] more unsettling than pleasing, more grotesque than erotic, more discomforting than reassuring” (204), while Jones argues that “with her leaky, smelly, grotesque body and flamboyant costumes cobbled together from urban detritus and stolen commodities [the Baroness] performed an irrational, antimasculinist, and radically queer subjectivity against the grain of New York’s abstracting spaces and phallic skyline” (*Irrational* 222). I would want to emphasize, however, the cyborg facets of the Baroness and her work, her co-option of the machinic and the artificial. In her use of commodity objects and the detritus of techno-modernity the Baroness envisages no re-emergence of a natural or feminine body and does not embody an utopian, carnivalesque Other to the American machine age. In producing the body as an assemblage of prosthetic components and denaturalizing identity into a processual interplay between artificially enhanced bodies and tools made organic she mockingly enacts and undermines the phallogocentric folly of discrete and original being that, despite all their equivocations, the men of New York Dada sought to reaffirm. The Baroness manufactures and plays with language, bodies, gender, sex, art, even God (see below); she is a desiring machine, mapping a line of flight out of the identities of man/woman, human/machine, natural/artificial, pointing to the processes, transitions, in-between zones and flows that are the (non)-origin of the cyborg.

Perhaps this is why Elsa is simply an anecdote in New York Dada, whereas Duchamp is the dada-daddy of contemporary avant-garde art, despite the fact that she produced “rectified readymades” (modified found objects) just as startling as Duchamp’s. Indeed, Gammel offers a convincing argument that Duchamp’s best known readymade, *Fountain*, the urinal signed “R. Mutt” that he submitted anonymously to the 1917 New York

Independents exhibition, was actually conceived and sent by the Baroness in Philadelphia to Duchamp in New York.¹⁹ It is very possible that the Baroness is the “*amies sous un pseudonyme masculin, Richard Mutt, avait envoyé une pissotière en porcelain comme sculpture*” of whom Duchamp writes to his sister Suzanne of in April 1917 (as long as this letter is not itself a Duchampian act of distancing.) But whether or not *Fountain* is a collaboration with the Baroness, a piece contemporaneous to it, *God*, originally attributed to Morton Schamberg (who photographed it) offers a more radical interrogation of masculinity, technology and art [Figure 4]. A dysfunctional piece of iron plumbing ripped from its context and mounted on a carpenter’s mitre box, *God* inverts high and low, transcendence and immanence as a piece of plumbing, the prosthetic extension of the modern body’s waste disposal system, is elevated to the status of a divine translation of the human. For artist Margaret Morgan “God is a construct and plumbing is god” in this object, which refuses the aestheticisation that has accrued to *Fountain*: “[e]ighty years after its emergence as a work of art it has not collapsed into the beautiful. It stubbornly remains an ungainly object” (65). *God* also restages the failures of the male/the phallus to channel the flows of modernity, and in its dysfunctionality, indeed in its ugliness and lack of appeal, *God* ultimately refuses the ironic-iconic status that *Fountain* has achieved.

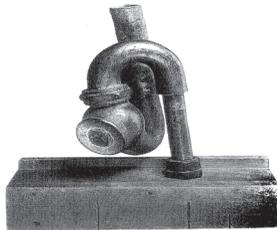


Figure 4: *God*. Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven [with Morton Livingston Schamberg], 1917; plumbing trap on a carpenter’s mitre box, 10 1/2in. The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

What the Baroness and her life/work reveal are the limits of the cyborg-feminine that her male contemporaries imagine and project. The majority of the machine-women of New York Dada are trapped within a dualistic system that condemns them to stasis and entropic mechanization. Some of the Baroness’s male contemporaries are primarily concerned with containing the potential presented by the machine-woman, using her as a vehicle for their fears about their own gendered identity in the modern technosphere. She thus comes to function, paradoxically, as a means of

reproducing an acceptable version of modern femininity rather than a challenge to the humanist and masculinist process of individuation. Even Duchamp retreats from wholesale capitulation to the techno-transformation of the subject and the subject of art. His art objects remain open to a process of aesthetization and naturalization into an organic narrative of rational critique of the institutions of art, while his mechanical bride remains frozen in a pose of un-becoming.²⁰ The fact that, unlike the men of New York Dada, the Baroness died in abject poverty in Europe in 1927 should not detract from the way that she, like the more recent feminist fabulists Angela Carter, Kathy Acker, Laurie Anderson, Cindy Sherman, resolutely inhabits the intensities of the cyborg-feminine, intensities that figure inter-relationality, irrationality, process rather than end result, the transient rather than the monumental, and enable us to think otherwise about what technology and technological culture can mean for the feminine subject.

Figures

1. Francis Picabia, *Fille née sans mere*, 1915. Pen and ink on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alfred Stieglitz Collection. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.
2. Francis Picabia, *Portrait d'une jeune fille americaine dans l'etat de nudité*, July 5, 1915. Cover of 291. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.
3. Marius de Zayas "ELLE", Francis Picabia "VOILÁ ELLE". Double-page Spread, November 1915 issue of 291. © 2002 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.
4. Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven [with Morton Livingston Schamberg], *God*, 1917. Plumbing trap on a carpenter's mitre box, 10 1/2in. The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Notes

1. 1915-1921 are the dates given by Rudolf Kuenzli in his "Introduction" in *New York Dada*.
2. See Ketabgian.
3. See for example Peter Bürger and Hal Foster.
4. See the essays in Sawleson-Gorse, for example.
5. For essays on all of these figures see Sawleson-Gorse.
6. See Goody.
7. The key texts of cyberfeminism are Haraway, Stone, Braidotti, and Plant. See also Wilding.
8. Lee Bul interviewed by Hans-Ulrich Obrist. <http://:artnode.se/artorbit/issue1/>
9. See Vivian Sobchack's attack on masculinist and technophilic celebra-

tions of data over meat.

10. It can thus be related to the grinding, onanistic bachelors of Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (Large Glass)* (1915-23); see my discussion below.

11. Francis Naumann has noted the relationship between these stills and Charlie Chaplin's cross-dressed performance in *A Woman* (1915); see "New York Dada" 25.

12. The terms "malic molds", "halo" and "clothes" all come from Duchamp's notes on the *Large Glass*, which are reprinted in Sanouillet and Peterson.

13. For full details of the Baroness's life, including her participation in New York Dada see Irene Gammel's excellent biography.

14. For a further discussion of the bra as a signifier of both the modern New York woman and the "uncorseted" experiments in literature and poetry see my "Dada's Daddy c.1917: Duchamp and the Art of Woman/women" (2000). It is not coincidental that Picabia's illustration "DE ZAYAS! DE ZAYAS!" in the July-August 1915 *291* poses a corset wired up to springs, levers cups.

15. Djuna Barnes, "Notes from Elsa", Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven Collection, Special Collections, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries, Series 1, Box 1.

16. "A Dozen Cocktails Please," unpublished poem, Series 3—Poems, Sub-series I English, Box 3, Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven Papers, College Park Libraries, University of Maryland.

17. "Subjoyride", unpublished poem, *Little Review* Papers, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

18. "Tailend of Mistake: America", unpublished poem, *Little Review* Papers, Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

19. For details see Gammel, 222-27.

20. Zabel's argument about the importance of the "primitive" in the Dada negotiation of technology, pointing to the visual similarities between *Fountain* and "certain black African masks" that influenced a range of modernist innovations in portraiture, further reinforces the alignment of *Fountain* with a coherent and naturalized (and colonialist) narrative of the modernist reinvigoration of Western art and art objects ("Constructed" 35).

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