

Review of
David Hopkins, *Dada's Boys: Masculinity After Duchamp*
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Having written on Surrealism and Marcel Duchamp in a number of previous texts, including three previous books—*Dada and Surrealism* (2004) and *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (1998)—David Hopkins' significant knowledge of this area of art history is an asset to the difficult project that he sets out to accomplish: examining a self-conscious masculinity within the practices of male—and female—modern and postmodern artists. One of his major concerns, as stated on the second page of the introduction, is “to try to develop a less apologetic account of male identity.” And here is the problem: as a response to feminist approaches that highlight the (continuing) cultural disparity within discussions of female identity, discourses surrounding issues of male identity are viewed predominantly as misogynist if presented from a pro-male perspective, which Hopkins is arguably doing in this text. In general his book clearly acknowledges and even incorporates this argument into its examination of male identity. However, as he also makes clear at the end of the introduction, the significance of his project; one that serves as “one of the first available genealogies of post-Duchampian male inter-subjectivity in which maleness is not taken as self-evident but is both held up for question and performatively indulged in.” The juxtaposition between these two typically contradictory subject positions, masculinist vs. feminist, as a basis for examining male identificatory artistic representations, is a bold approach that makes this text historically challenging.

At the centre of this investigation is the figure of Duchamp, whose work, specifically that related to the female persona of Rose Sélavy, directly challenges the notion of gender as a category. In the first four chapters, which constitute part one of the book, Hopkins pairs Duchamp with a series of male contemporaries or

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counterparts: Francis Picabia, Man Ray, Max Ernst, and André Breton. In each of these respective chapters Hopkins focuses on lesser known works by these artists, a quality of the text that I found particularly gratifying, in that new material by prominent artists is given a thorough examination; this approach is continued in the second part of the book, although with less effectiveness, due primarily to the volume of individual artists covered. Focusing on “Duchamp’s Progeny,” part two of the book examines artists that Hopkins relates directly and indirectly to Duchamp and his work, specifically through the rubric of masculinity. This seemingly singular perspective is challenged by Hopkins’ diverse range of approaches to male identity as a subject position, such as homosexual and feminist engagements with the masculine—examples include Andy Warhol, Robert Gober, Sarah Lucas, and Sherrie Levine—as well as hyper-heterosexual artworks that can be seen as bordering on self-parody by Jeff Koons, Richard Prince, Jake and Dinos Chapman. In each case Duchamp functioned as a subtle or not so subtle sub-text to the discussion of the masculine within these various artworks, haunting each of the artists’ attempts to negotiate this culturally laden topic.

The concluding section of the final chapter in *Dada’s Boys* is dedicated primarily to Gober and Matthew Barney, although it is Hopkins’ discussion of Barney that is most engaging. Hopkins’ approach to Barney’s work, which he acknowledges is counter to the art theorists and historians connected to the magazine *October*, is again related to Duchamp’s work with gender differentiation, a topic that is central to Barney’s *Creemaster Cycle*. Barney is presented here as returning to a model of Surrealism, as well as to what Hopkins terms *Duchamp-as-Surrealism*, that is directly related to notions of esotericism, alchemy, and the like. Whether serious or parodist, Barney is imagined here as taking on a fundamentally Duchampian project: of the destabilization of the masculine subject through the challenging of gender as a cultural and political category.

Although this is not a typical gesture, I feel it is necessary to acknowledge my own position as a male writer; my response is therefore sympathetic to Hopkins’ cause, even while I remain skeptical throughout. Due to the dialectical nature of a Western cultural perspective that views the world in two opposing camps, when a person supports one thing she/he is automatically perceived as *not* supporting the perceived opposite side; to claim support of masculinity, therefore, is often inextricably seen as an opposition of femininity. Hopkins is careful not to perpetuate such an oppositional view. In this manner *Dada’s Boys* is an important statement in the current discourse around the masculine, presenting Duchamp as a key figure in the destabilization of male identity within current artistic interrogations of gender.