Preface

When we mobilise fictions to validate the present, an inevitable compromise emerges from perpetually drifting truths, half-truths and untruths. They are as recognisable in the macro-founding of histories and empires and world orders as they are in the micro-founding of booklifters and jewel thieves and *blagueurs*. In this regard, Arthur Cravan has been casually – and is too easily – distorted and presented as what he patently was not, and the historical recovery in the study that follows is first designed to temper the distortions that, by the currency they achieve, prove intoxicating in the discourses of Dada anarchy and Surrealist suicide. Responding soberly is not always easy, and might not infrequently demand the rigour of critical discipline beyond the immediate – laterally, for instance, from Deleuze to Nietzsche and into philosophical contexts that allow for potentially infinite potentialities – in working towards a present-day currency for Cravan. If cultural and art-historical studies will hold that the poet-boxer applies with any relevance to contemporary concern, then what will be processed in this book intends to demonstrate precisely why Cravan might thus be held; his cultural platforms consistently revise familiar mappings and scenes so frequently unobserved precisely because they are familiar. The schoolboy visit I remember (*amarcord*) to Tossa de Mar in 1983, for instance, has accrued a radically transformed significance today against the destination that long ago lured exiles in Barcelona to its medieval turrets and blue water; the rude and indiscriminate tone I adopted as *directeur* of the low-grade illustrated review *Y Sgrïw Rataf* during its 1986–87 season makes a little more sense for me today when catalogued against *Maintenant* during *la belle époque*; the simultanist dazzle beaches and *bacalhau* of Vila do Conde in my frustrated summer of 1994 are now resolvedly calm; and leafing through an autumn pall across Upholland many years later, in 2015, I recognised names carved on

the heavy stones. Today, on eternal returns to New York, Barcelona and Paris, streets are recognisably familiar but their hues render and reconfigure: downtown from the Chelsea Hotel's half-term bridal suite in 1999, the disorienting circuit of the Woolworth meant I was unable to tell if I was walking around it or if it was walking around me; when I was ejected from the Monumental in 2000, as bulls echoed through cooling colonnades behind the *noucentista* exterior and giant Mudéjar eggs, I jostled with the ghosts of five thousand equally cheated *barcelonés*; and through the grieving summer of 2001 in Montparnasse, of stricken pathos at the Fontaine de l'Observatoire, I was revived at La Closerie des Lilas, where Cravan once poetically beat up the whole place.

This book recovers one Arthur Cravan. There are certainly other Cravans to recover, but the book is tasked with one descriptive recovery. The writing of the main text between London (October 2013) and Amsterdam (October 2014) reanimates the Cravan that I first encountered in July 1993 as the original nihilist hero in the market town of Lampeter, Ceredigion. That version was subsequently soundtracked with John Cale singing 'Myfanwy', the nonconformist piano of my father Arwyn on velvet Sunday mornings and then two decades of beards and long hair by the Super Furry Animals. The arrest of 1993 was in the company of *legendistas* Sofia Areias and Salette Macieira, precipitating the start of a scholarly search for Cravan the following year at the International Dada Archive at the University of Iowa. There, in the snowbound Midwest, I took far more than I could return from remarkable and stimulating exchanges with Curt Germundson, Stephen C. Foster, Timothy Shipe, Ruedi Kuenzli and Stephen E. Perkins; the country was young and had God on its side. Those exchanges continued in the immediately subsequent years, and still continue now, to inform my thoughts on art and anti-art, on avant-gardism and Dada, on performativity and Cravan, and all of their interstitial linkages. The postgraduate study that followed at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory at Cardiff University during the later 1990s aligned to continental philosophy, actively to structure aspects of what I then considered to be among the most challenging manifestations of art in the twentieth century. Through babbling brooks with my Cardiff peers Alex Dalgleish, Jai-Jin Choi, Britta Schuessler, Adam Woodruff and Struan Sinclair – everything breathed – and of the dazzling faculty members Catherine Belsey, Laurent Milesi, Christopher Norris, Diane Elam and Duncan Large, I found means to assemble proto-structures for my scattered Cravan ephemera. And what finally worked its way from ephemera into the thesis titled 'Poetry, Boxing and Revolution'

owed *sans pareil* to joyous exchange with the greats, Martin Ignatius Gaughan and Jean-Jacques Lecercle.

The present work bears little if any similarity to the dissertation that closed a studied twentieth century. In its immediate wake, my consolidated positions on Cravan were presented as conference papers that sought (unsuccessfully, I now think) to process the poet-boxer theoretically, and to apply what might emerge from such processing to a broader and more contemporary discussion on performativity and actionism. Papers were presented to conferences in Paris at the Mona Bismark Foundation ('Americans in Paris, Paris in Americans', July 2001), and at Sheffield University ('Sporting Cultures: Hispanic and European Perspectives', January 2002), for example, both occasions allowing me deliberately to address the art-historical instance of Cravan directly, ahead of publishing the chapter 'Nonbattles and Counterthoughts: Arthur Cravan takes Manhattan' for the volume *Dada New York: New World for Old* (2003) in the series 'Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada' (1996–2005). That chapter exercised all the flaws of juvenilia, sadly without the excuse of youth. The more coherent and complete text on Cravan, however, developed through the Eastern Mediterranean University literature and humanities conference in Famagusta, Cyprus ('Inscriptions in the Sand', June 2003), finally to be published as the chapter 'To Be or Not To Be ... Arthur Cravan: Subject, Surface and Difference' in the volume *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-Garde* (2006). After this, however, Cravan receded, yielding in the hiatus to a revived theoretical engagement with Dada via international conference papers and key meetings at Cardiff University (notably 'Ethics and Politics: The Work of Alain Badiou' in May 2002 and 'Schizoanalysis and Visual Culture' in June 2010), already accounted for in the monograph *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance* (2014).

Still, Cravan's recession was not a disappearance, as he populated a smoky popular ether – from the musical underlay of Pascale Comelade ('Arthur Cravan was a Flor Fina') to the visual overlays of Renaud Perrin's meticulous *dessins-gravures*; from the cushioned comfort of Judit Canela's 'Arthur Cravan vs The World' to New York's *Maintenant* journal of contemporary Dada works; from the *midicouture* of the Arthur Cravan Boxing Club to the *nouvelle figuration* of Eduardo Arroyo; from the Canadian presses of L'Oie de Cravan to *die unheimliche Rückkehr* in Berlin; from Kat Georges's one of three somebodies to Jack Manini's BD *Histoire complète* – and Cravan came very close to home on more than one occasion. I reviewed an exhibition of experimental filmwork titled 'After Cravan' by the artist

Ian Giles in Newtown, Powys, for instance, in 2009; the review article, titled ‘Yr Anvarwol Arthur Cravan’, mediated the artist’s auto-destruction as he boated out to sea. I was minded by my fellow conference speaker Willard Bohn, at Queen Mary University of London (‘Back to the Futurists: Avant-Gardes 1909–2009’ (July 2009)), to chase butterflies with the poet-boxer. Publication of the poetry of the great medieval troubadour Dafydd ap Gwilym in the beautiful volume *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym* (2010) reproduced on its cover a detail from a painting dated 1992 but attributed to the enigmatic name Édouard Archinard. And when Captain Haddock marched blindly into a lamp post at Geneva airport in 2011, among the items in his possession that fluttered to the floor was a copy of *Maintenant*. It was not until January 2013, however, that Cravan properly re-entered my thoughts when Martin Williams of Lliswerry made contact for a BBC Radio 4 programme about the poet-boxer. In response, prompted into giving Cravan serious consideration again, I was reacquainted with material that had lain dormant during a period of rising philosophical stakes, and set about revising my coordinates in an article that would eventually become the introductory chapter to this book. It was an article with which I intended to outline the complications of any approach to Cravan that must first work its way through the sparseness of evidence and the obfuscation of legend – only for its object again to be set aside and overtaken by the prioritising of other Dada projects. Then, in October 2013, publication of volume 53 of *La règle du jeu* was a revelation. Having long since resigned myself to the likelihood that what little I believed was contained in the Cravan archive had been exhaustively worked, reworked and overworked, I had not countenanced the possibility that there might exist material yet to be drawn into public contention. I was looking in completely the wrong direction when Bertrand Lacarelle (in the issue of *La nouvelle revue française* entitled ‘Salut à Arthur Cravan’, 2008, and *Arthur Cravan, précipité*, 2010) and Bastiaan van der Velden (in *Kicker, Schüler, Sängerknabe: Arthur Cravan 1900 bis 1902 in St Gallen*, 2011) made truly impressive strides. And realising that Cravan was far from exhausted, I commenced the enthused writing year of 2013–14.

What eventually assembled of new textual and visual matter for the present schizo-biography found itself coursing multiplicities. The accessibility of dense francophone, anglophone and otherphone journalistic sources introduced essential dispassionate primary commentaries with which to assemble more complete readings. In acknowledgement of these sources, I have retained in the transcriptions for this book their not infrequent and unchecked vagaries, with the exception of

1 Captain Haddock at Geneva airport, 2011.

the most common anglophone inconsistency, the misspelling (due to mispronunciation) of Cravan as ‘Craven’ (there was actually a contemporary ‘Arthur Craven’ in circulation: ‘Arthur Scott Craven’, stage name of the early twentieth-century actor and writer Arthur Keedwell Harvey-James). I have revised ‘Craven’ consistently throughout to ‘Cravan’ (with the single exception, naturally, of Beatrice Wood’s watercolour). Other vagaries are retained – from the ugly corruption ‘Gruhan’ to the erroneous forename ‘Frank’ (widely bandied among boxers at the start of the twentieth century, whose proper forenames were frequently lost or deemed unpronounceable), to the confusion of such composites as ‘Lloyd Napier’ – all of which are woven into the fabric of fictions. Except where otherwise acknowledged, translations into English are my own; I have retained the important vagary of ‘grandson to the Chancellor of the Queen of England’ as part of the Cravan myth, allowing for discussion of its origin in mistranslation creditable directly to Cravan himself. And the specific and deliberate intervention made with regard to the primary commentaries, I should note, has been chronological realignment and, where necessary, resequencing in the

light of newly researched sources presenting consistently reliable revisions (specifically around the years 1904–7).

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And so to close, the extension of thought proposes that Cravan comes into being by the process of observing. My contention is and will be that Cravan 'occurs' in discrete quantities (I concede this undeclared allusion to the *Kopenhagener Geist*); through headwinds, tailwinds and crosswinds beyond Merthyr Mawr towards Traeth yr Afon, swathes for thought emerge admitting discontinuity and probability before causality. I now yield to the discontinuities and probabilities from which I perpetually gain in the poetry, prose, painting and provocation of Henry Maas, Gareth Rees, Elza Adamowicz, Siân Chapman, Robert John Gwilliam, Martin Ignatius Gaughan, Meirion Pennar, Michael Crowther

and Alun Ceri Jones, each of whom has, I think, been blissfully unaware (even *in absentia*) of their part in *The fictions of Arthur Cravan*. Finally, there is nothing that remains without the permanent revolution and the always changing presences out of which we make memory. So, in continued nought within thought, *mae'r diolch mwyaf i bedair iâr fach fy haf*: my mother Margaret, to whom I dedicate this book; my daughters Lleucu and Gwen, whose logic of sense destroys my philosophy of nonsense; and, devotedly, Denise, *ym mreuder cain ei chalon fach*.

Dafydd W. Jones, October 2018