



The Persistence of Masks

SURREALISM
AND THE
ETHNOGRAPHY
OF THE
SUBJECT

Joyce
Suechun
Cheng

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Surrealisms: The International Society
for the Study of Surrealism Book Series

Jonathan P. Eburne, Series Editor

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Dédicace

To my parents, Nelson and Angela Cheng

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No contact with savage Indian tribes has ever daunted me more than the morning I spent [at the Sainte Anne Hospital in Paris] with an old lady swathed in woollies, who compared herself to a rotten herring encased in a block of ice: she appeared intact, she said, but was threatened with disintegration, if her protective envelope should happen to melt.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (1955)

A barbarian, seeing five masks and five costumes prepared for just one ballet dancer, asked who would perform the other characters. Learning that one dancer was to play them all, he concluded that “there must be several souls in a single body.”

—Antoine Coypel, “On the Aesthetic of the Painter” (1721)

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Preface

According to accounts by her contemporaries, the Ethiopian healer Malkam Ayyahou was prone to such acts of folly in her youth when possessed by the genies known as *zars*: running away from home, climbing and jumping off trees, singing military songs in the midst of Gondar's ancient ruins. By the time she met the surrealist-turned-ethnographer Michel Leiris in 1932, when she entered the history of surrealism as a preeminent subject of its ethnography, the now elderly Malkam Ayyahou had become a deft priestess. No longer at the mercy of her genies, the *zarine* now incarnated them like masks according to her own wishes and the needs of her community. Her *zars* had remained and might have even increased in number, but they had become *raisonnables*.

If scholarly disciplines might be likened to genies, then the author of this book can be said to be simultaneously possessed by art history, literary criticism, anthropology, and critical theory. In a profession where disciplinary legibility and field-specific expertise remain crucial to success, my inability to think in a single discipline has sometimes felt like a form of madness. With time, I came to see the disciplines vying for my scholarly commitment as siblings, who despite occasional rivalry can also compensate for one another's shortcomings due to their common descent from history and philosophy. This perspective has helped me understand how, without using writing as mnemonic aid, luminaries like Malkam Ayyahou could retain knowledge of hundreds of *zars* by conceiving them as descending from two "houses." It has also led me to think of surrealism increasingly not as a body of knowledge that I need to or can master, but as a taming device for my unruly mind.

I hope this book can be of some encouragement to scholars and students who might be similarly prone to what Claude Lévi-Strauss calls "wild thought" (*la pensée sauvage*). For some of us, the practical challenges of navigating the methods of different disciplines are further complexified by the multiple positionalities and identities we assume in our nonscholarly lives. In the course of writing this book, I came to believe that this multiplicity itself is not madness. For the surrealists and adept practitioners of possession, madness is forcing the subject to be *one*. Finding ways to let our multiple genies live is not requisite for having an academic career, but it is for living a creative and reasonable life.



FIGURE 1.1. Claude Cahun, *Untitled (Hands)*, 1939. Gelatin silver print, 24.5 x 19.1 cm. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

Introduction

Surrealism, Ethnography, and the Subject as Mask

The poet and photographer Claude Cahun is the maker of an exquisite image that illustrates the surrealist conception of subjectivity perhaps better than no other. (Figure I.1) Taken most likely around 1939, the photograph shows four overlapping hands, marked as those of women by the polished nails and two decorative rings. Two of the hands are pale skinned and visibly attached to wrists and arms, belonging most likely to a white woman left out of the frame. A third, smoother left hand with darker skin (possibly that of a manikin) is shown sandwiched between them; last, a fourth miniature hand is worn on the tip of the white left hand's little finger like an improbable thimble. Presuming the hidden presence of human beings, the hands in this photograph serve as their surrogates while multiplying them numerically. If one person can become *two* hands and in turn *ten* fingers, *one* finger can also potentially grow *five* more like a propagating plant, as the artist suggests with the tiny hand-mask that effectively turns the pinkie into a wrist.

A major figure of 1930s surrealism and the paramount masquerade artist with a well-developed background in theater, Cahun here suggests that hands—ordinarily conceived as unalienable parts of the physical self—can also become masks. According to the imaginary presented in her photograph, the mask refers to any apparatus that simultaneously conceals and reveals, appearing in the self's place while extending and transfiguring it. It is an *other* that the self is ready to adopt like an ornament or prosthetic (for instance the rings and the artificial hands in the photograph), but it is also a part of the self that can be released in order to reach, touch, and become an *other* (the racially different black and white hands lie on top of one another as if belonging to the same person). The mask, in short, may be conceived as “that one (celui-là),” as Cahun writes on the back of one print of this photograph, referring to a departing self of which she has already relinquished possession: “self beyond recognition, who ventures farther toward metamorphosis, advances in the night” (“Celui-là, méconnaissable moi qui s'aventure plus loin vers la métamorphose, progresse dans la nuit”).¹

The mask is the figure by which interwar surrealism represented and theorized the subject or subjects, which can be adopted or released by the self but are in no way equivalent to it—this is the principal argument of my book on the thematic level. On the level of method, my claim will be that the various participants and associates of the surrealist avant-garde, in order to inquire into the vicissitudes of subjects, together adopted a multifaceted approach that may be characterized broadly as *ethnographic*. Instead of an abstract,

philosophical inquiry, what I call heuristically surrealism's "ethnography of the subject" entails empirical observation and analysis of a wide range of human behaviors and artifacts (texts, images, objects), even natural phenomena, which the surrealists considered concrete evidence or "documents." In the four chapters that follow, my goal is to describe this project as simultaneously aesthetic and intellectual, prompting poets, critics, visual artists, psychiatrists, and ethnologists in the surrealist milieu to converse with an intensity unimaginable today. Specifically, their activities and conversations converged around how language and aesthetic form make manifest non-sovereign but nevertheless effective modes of subjectivity. The figure of the mask in its various forms (hand, hat, veil, ornament, etc.) meanwhile makes it possible to imagine these alternative subjectivities as more phenomenal than essential, more contingent and transitory—what the poet André Breton calls "soluble"—than fixed and sovereign. Despite their marginalization under the conditions of Western modernity, I will try to show how, from the surrealist perspective, masks-qua-subjects are more expansive and universal than what is narrowly circumscribed by "the bourgeois philosophical conception of man as endowed with absolute moral liberty and with responsibility appropriate to the individual."²

In the history of the twentieth-century avant-gardes, surrealism is distinctive for being a movement in poetry and the visual arts as well as in culture and consciousness. During its formative period of the 1920s and 1930s, the surrealist movement developed not only aesthetic strategies but also particular approaches to analyzing subjectivity (as manifested in the unconscious, dream, sexuality, madness), social phenomena (e.g., crime, suicide, labor), forms of domination (notably imperialism, colonialism, and totalitarianism), and the relationship between humans and nature. The fact that none of these topics can be addressed by a single discipline or area of knowledge is the reason for the surrealists' consistent engagement with the materials and methods of the human and natural sciences, such as ethnology, sociology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and zoology. Taking for granted this concomitance of surrealism's aesthetics and what might be called its philosophical anthropology, I propose furthermore to see the movement's activities as having always implied an ethnographic dimension, which includes yet goes beyond the purview of what is commonly referred to as "ethnographic surrealism."

In a pioneering essay, the anthropologist James Clifford coined the term *ethnographic surrealism* in order to name the confluence of a surrealist aesthetic sensibility and aspects of professional ethnology in France during the interwar period, exemplified in particular by the eclectic review *Documents* (1929–30). Edited by the philosopher and historian Georges Bataille, *Documents* purported to be a scientific journal of ethnology, archaeology, and history yet simultaneously served as a platform for a group of surrealists defecting from Breton's core group. This double function resulted in what Clifford describes as a "subversive cultural criticism" and a "perverse collection" in print, which juxtaposes incongruous objects in ways that recall the surrealist collage more than the ethnographic museum's classificatory methods or the art museum's

aestheticizing tactics.³ For Clifford, “surrealism coupled with ethnography” or alternatively ethnography “combined with” or “cut with” surrealism designates this “radical question of norms” on both aesthetic and scientific fronts, which productively destabilizes the disciplinary foundations of art history and anthropology.⁴

The intellectual significance of ethnographic surrealism has proven to be enduring. Its cognate, which Clifford calls *surrealist ethnography*, modeled on the surrealist-turned-ethnographer Michel Leiris’s semiautobiographical, semiethnographic *Phantom Africa* (1934), has prompted self-critical anthropologists to reflect on the literary or rhetorical character of ethnography as a practice of “writing culture.”⁵ In literary studies, ethnographic surrealism converged with, and to some extent contributed to, the renewed interest in *Documents* and its eccentric editor in the 1980s and 1990s, attested by several French- and English-language editions of Bataille’s writings and the reprint of his legendary journal.⁶ For art historians, ethnographic surrealism has notably enlarged the field of research on “modernist primitivism,” prompting the latter to move beyond the question of artistic influence (for example, which African, Amerindian, or Oceanic objects specifically influenced the work of a given European artist) to consider the broader epistemological shifts that resulted from the artistic avant-garde’s encounter with cultural objects classified as ethnographic.⁷

Yet for legitimate reasons, critics have also found fault with the generic and rhetorical character of Clifford’s concept. For Jean Jamin, ethnographic surrealism is at best a “retrospective illusion” due to the incommensurability between interwar ethnology’s positivist foundation and surrealism’s poetical method, not least the two’s antithetical politics in regard to French colonialism.⁸ Seeing ethnographic surrealism as a postmodernist distortion of the historical movement, Michael Richardson worries that it reduces surrealism to the gratuitous, “relativistic” use of collage and argues that “any specifically ‘surrealist’ contribution to anthropology must lie elsewhere.”⁹ Finally, seeing Leiris’s surrealist ethnography as inaugurating the contemporary paradigm of “the artist as ethnographer,” Hal Foster considers that he and other surrealists in the *Documents* circle “explored cultural otherness, but only in part to indulge in a ritual of self-othering.”¹⁰ For Foster, the ethnographic turn of artists and critics from surrealism to the contemporary era is a practice in the “othering of the self” on the part of the “Western white subject,” which paradoxically “also buttresses the self through romantic opposition, conserves the self through dialectical appropriation, extends the self through surrealist exploration, prolongs the self through poststructuralist troubling, and so on.”¹¹

“The justified criticism of the historical vagueness of the category of ‘ethnographic surrealism’ and its instrumentalization for a postmodern critique of representation” does not, however, detract from Clifford’s contribution, as Irene Albers suggests recently.¹² I would furthermore point out that, concerned either with Clifford’s ahistoricism (Jamin, Richardson) or the ethical ambiguity of ethnographic surrealism (Foster suspects it to be neoprimitivist), this early generation of criticism has nevertheless left the

latter's parameters unquestioned, assuming more or less with Clifford that the ethnographic dimension of surrealism is to be identified primarily with the activities of the *Documents* surrealists around Bataille (sometimes referred to as "dissident" surrealists). Yet another productive way of critiquing ethnographic surrealism would have been to question whether the terrain that the term had begun to name was effectively limited to the activities of the *Documents* circle, and whether it could be extended to other facets of the surrealist movement that did not necessarily entail the direct participation of professional ethnologists and anthropologists. If Walter Benjamin saw the surrealists as practitioners of an "anthropological materialism" in their search for "profane illuminations" in the real, subsequent commentators like Michel Beaujour and Michael Sheringham have not failed to note that Breton, Aragon, and their friends approached the urban environment of Paris much like a protoethnological "set of fields," therefore anticipating the anthropologist Marc Augé's urban ethnography.¹³ For Natalya Lusty, not only the surrealists' wanderings in the city but also their activities at the Central Bureau of Surrealist Investigations, notably the documentation of dream narratives, had an unquestionably ethnographic dimension.¹⁴ Effie Rentzou's and James Leo Cahill's considerations of "zoological surrealism" furthermore suggest that the scope of ethnographic surrealism might be expanded to include a "non-anthropocentric ethnography" of creaturely life.¹⁵

In his recent work on the literary careers of French anthropologists, Vincent Debaene attributes the expansiveness of ethnography in the French context to its "speculative origins" in literature.¹⁶ For Debaene, it is because professional anthropology in France never fully renounced its literary beginnings that anthropologists would frequently follow their scientific monograph with a second "literary supplement" (for example Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*), which tends to be well received; what ethnographic surrealism or "surrealist ethnography" seeks to describe, namely, professional anthropology's literary or aesthetic turn, is therefore a regular occurrence rather than "marginal outbursts of subjectivity in a world of objectivist anthropology."¹⁷ More relevant for my purpose, Debaene shows that the literary tradition from which French anthropology and human sciences sought to liberate themselves has historically enjoyed a *scientific* prestige (historians and sociologists might thus read the novels of Balzac and Proust as authoritative accounts of nineteenth-century urbanization and social life).¹⁸ This tradition, says Debaene, "refuses to be just another of the fine arts and begins from the premise that everything contributing to the knowledge of mankind falls under its auspices"; by the time it converged with professional ethnology in the interwar period, it *already* possessed "a certain degree of theoretical development" and "involved a project that is not only aesthetic, but also intellectual, one that implicates the order of thought itself."¹⁹ In other words, Debaene implies that interwar surrealism—the apogee of this literary and aesthetic tradition with a strong philosophical and anthropological orientation—would have undertaken parascientific investigations that qualify as a "lay" or "latent" ethnography long before some of its members

collaborated with professional ethnologists.²⁰ Instead of the anomalous tendency of the defecting surrealists around *Documents*, therefore, the ethnographic or paraethnographic impulse ought to be considered constitutive of the identity of the movement from its very beginnings.

In my expansive conception of “ethnography,” the term refers not to a practice specific to the professional discipline of ethnology (the more common term in interwar France) or its equivalent (social and cultural anthropology in the Anglophone world), but more broadly to the rigorous documentation and description of mostly, but not exclusively, human phenomena, however unusual, marginal, and apparently inexplicable. While this practice is commonly applied by anthropologists to the study of perceivably remote societies and cultures, it is in no way limited to anthropology. Lévi-Strauss notes for instance that empirical sociology of complex societies (as opposed to social philosophy) is essentially “a branch of ethnography,” which he defines as “the observation and analysis of human groups considered as individual entities . . . recording as accurately as possible the respective modes of life of various groups.”²¹ Meanwhile, the psychiatric clinic in early twentieth-century France was a paraethnographic environment to the extent that he could see his early work with the psychologist Georges Dumas and regular meetings with patients at the hospital Sainte-Anne as preparatory training for his fieldwork amid the Amazonian societies of Brazil.²² This institutional proximity between medicine and anthropology warrants a consideration of surrealism’s lay ethnography as having begun on the European continent, specifically in the wartime clinic where Breton and Louis Aragon, similarly trained and serving as psychiatric interns, encountered their first “subjects.”

More specifically, one might locate the inaugural moment for surrealism’s ethnography of the subject to 1916, the year its founding poet Breton vowed from the neuropsychiatric ward of Saint-Dizier in northern France to “not listen anymore to the temptation to write a verse” in order to become a professional psychiatrist.²³ While idealizing medicine as the means to “become something other than an amateur,” however, the twenty-year-old poet was also expressing ambivalence about the limitations of the clinical approach to subjectivity.²⁴ By means of a short text entitled “Subject,” he implicitly critiques the medical establishment’s normative observation and treatment of patients as passive, clinical subjects, choosing instead to adopt the first-person perspective of one of his patients, “a mad man who didn’t believe in the war.”²⁵ In so doing, Breton transforms the patient into an active, moral subject, whose subjectivity (intentionality and meaning-making capacities) demands recognition despite his illness. By having the man address the orchestrators of the war in the second person, Breton underlines the internal logic of his delusions, which despite their discrepancy with reality still merit an emic consideration: “The purpose of your maneuvers escapes me. . . . I am nothing in the grand scheme of your stage directions. You claim it’s war, while official notices and train announcements take their places to further the illusion.”²⁶

In view of the subsequent development of surrealism, the young poet and

psychiatrist-in-training's early consideration of his "subject" as endowed with a subjectivity that merits an interpretation beyond medical diagnosis can be said to have initiated a shift to a paraethnographic mode of analysis. (In Breton's text, the patient, who had been a brave soldier on the battlefield, defends himself to the medical establishment as not sane but "civilized," suggesting that the doctors saw him in ways similar to how early twentieth-century ethnologists would consider a "savage."²⁷) This is all the more so as Breton and his friends never returned to literature and art as autonomous activities, despite publishing "Subject" ultimately in the literary journal *Nord-Sud*. Believing with the nonconformist dandy Jacques Vaché—another of Breton's influential wartime acquaintances—that "art is idiocy," Breton, Aragon, and Philippe Soupault in the period of demobilization founded a protosurrealist review, which they sarcastically titled *Littérature* (1919–23).²⁸ Concurrently, around 1920–21, the same group with Paul Éluard participated in Dada, the nihilistic, anti-art movement brought to Paris from Zurich by the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara. When the *Littérature* group finally broke with Dada in 1922 and began refashioning themselves as surrealists, language and visual forms took center stage once more in the group's activities as the means for exploring "psychic automatism," Breton's term for a state of complete freedom for the unconscious. Yet, surrealism's most important review of the 1920s, *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924–29), was modeled on the austere format of scientific journals, and made abundant use of dream narratives, correspondences, survey results, news reports, social and psychological analyses, and ethnological and archaeological findings. As early as in 1929, the nonaesthetic character of materials of this type would strike Benjamin, who observed that "the writings of this circle are not literature but something else—demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature."²⁹

Since Benjamin, surrealism's reach beyond the aesthetic for materials with a raw, unprocessed veracity has been regularly remarked upon. Lévi-Strauss, intrigued by the surrealist consideration of the work of art as a "document" of the "absolutely spontaneous activity of the mind," pushed Breton to elaborate on this point when the two met as refugees on board the ship *Capitaine Paul-Lemerle* in March 1941.³⁰ For scholars and commentators on surrealism and photography such as Dawn Adès, the surrealist penchant for documentation is one reason for the overwhelming welcome the movement lent to the medium of photography, professional as well as amateur; Ian Walker goes as far as extending Clifford's ethnographic surrealism to a "documentary surrealism" or "surrealist documentary," whose purview would include metropolitan Europe.³¹ But if surrealism's "poetics of the document" (the recent term of Alison James) has been widely recognized, what has received fewer commentaries is the particular status of the surrealist document, specifically its epistemological uncertainty.³² In his preface to the 1963 edition of *Nadja*, Breton claims to adopt the impartial mode of medical observation in this text in order to describe his own psychological states and the young woman Nadja's erratic behavior and speech: "The same as the abundant photographic

illustration aims to eliminate all description [in the text] . . . the tone adopted by the story is modeled on that of medical observation, especially neuropsychiatry. The latter tends to document all that could result from examination and questioning, and reports them without the least affectation or concern with style.”³³ But despite Breton’s aspiration to objectivity, the medical authority of his text is compromised by the absence of the clinic and the intersubjectivity of an amorous relationship, which occurred in the liminal space of the streets of Paris as a paraethnographic field. (Nadja’s commitment to a psychiatric ward, which reimposes the clinical framework, effectively ends the story). Questioning Breton’s success in simulating the medical doctor, Beaujour compares the story rather to “the narration of an ethnological expedition toward the interior of a singularly disquieting town, a haunted Paris that unveils little by little its sorceries, admits its periodic ritual human sacrifices, proffers its possessed and its mirages, which the camera has been able to capture and present to us *as if we were there*.”³⁴

On the one hand, following Beaujour’s account of *Nadja*, it might be said that the ethnographic moment in surrealism results from the undoing of the clinical parameters, leaving what otherwise would be medical observations to become anthropological materials or fieldnotes. Apart from Breton’s “Subject,” another example of this transformation is the surrealists’ reinterpretation of hysteria, the discredited nineteenth-century pseudo-illness that they removed from the clinical context of the Salpêtrière hospital in order to declare it “a supreme means of expression” with a socially subversive character.³⁵ On the other hand, it must be equally recognized that, even when far away from the modern clinic, the neuropsychiatric approach to subjectivity never stops haunting surrealism’s ethnography, be it lay or professional. For instance, Leiris, whose turn toward the “magnificent science” of ethnology in 1929 echoes Breton’s unrealized psychiatric turn in 1916, went on to write “a ‘protosurrealist’ journal secretly haunted by the model of Breton’s *Nadja*,” as Debaene would characterize *Phantom Africa*.³⁶ Moreover, his account of Ethiopian *zar* and concurrently Benjamin Péret’s semiprofessional documentation of Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* both foreground an aesthetic practice with a strong medicotherapeutic function, namely, possession.

If the ethnographic impulse is constitutive of the surrealist enterprise since its clinical beginnings, as I am suggesting, the question arises as to its object or objects. What exactly is being documented by an “ethnographic” (Clifford) or “documentary” (Walker) surrealism? For Clifford, Hollier, and others, the lay ethnography of the *Documents* circle is best described as a subversive method without objects, which debunks classificatory systems in favor of an “entropology” (Hollier). By contrast, the various antiliterary productions of the core group of surrealists around Breton sought to document something more concrete, though hardly more classifiable; surrealist writings, says Benjamin, “are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms.”³⁷ Recently, Debaene postulates that anthropology and literature in France “came together in the interwar period around the question of the relationship between the document and subjectivity.”³⁸ Along

a similar vein, I will argue that surrealism's lay ethnography, conceived as a set of activities and analytical modes common to Breton's and Bataille's circles, documented marginalized manifestations of subjectivity in service of a theory of the subject as phenomenal rather than essential, and for this reason more akin to masks than to selves.

As attested by Cahun's evocative photograph, the mask can be a physical object (an ornament, face covering, headdress, or costume) or a part of the body; at an even more general level, the mask in this book will be conceived as a mode of appearance for the subject that deploys textual or formal-material means in order to constitute a contingent identity. Returning to Breton's "Subject," one observes that the author can be seen as either lending his own voice to the mad soldier or appropriating the latter's voice in a maneuver that Elsa Adamowicz has analyzed as textual masquerade. In their early collection of automatic texts, *Magnetic Fields*, Breton and Soupault exemplify this practice by adopting the voice or mask of the hermit crab, who is itself a masker who "colonizes empty shells, often after having devoured the mollusc inside, hosting in its turn other marine creatures."³⁹ A closer reading of "Subject" shows how this complex structure of the infinite masks is already present in this early text, since the madman enacted by Breton conceives of himself as acting out a persona, specifically that of a brave soldier in a war that he believes to be a massive theater. Convinced that the corpses, bandages, and blood are props, and that the mobilized soldiers and their loved ones are actors, the madman decides to defy the staged conspiracy by *out-performing* it. Instead of being "nothing in the grand scheme" like the "bit players" who "act out their simulated farewells," he would be the war hero: "Exploring the so-called kill zone, I make a game of showing up the deception for what it is. . . . 'Volunteer for all dangerous missions,' in the words of my citation, I practically give away the spectacle of my exemplary bravery."⁴⁰ Following Breton's reading of his patient's action as performance, I will claim in this book that the mask is what enables the recognition of subjects or processes of subjectivization in unlikely places: in madness, in practices of possession, in nonhuman objects. And just as Adamowicz underlines the continuity between surrealism's textual masquerade and its use of collage as a visual-plastic method, my approach to the mask will be broadly intermedial, encompassing related figures and tropes such as the veil, the hat, cosmetics, the skin when reimagined against the naturalist nude, and the head when defaced to become a skull, what Leiris calls the *caput mortuum*.

In my reading, these figures commonly interrogate the limit between the human and the nonhuman and more specifically Western humanism's narrow equation of the subject with the sovereign self, but without necessarily deferring to a violent antihumanism whose most recognizable face in surrealism is the figure of the headless *acéphale*, the emblematic figure for Bataille's eponymous journal from 1936 to 1939. For art theorists and critics seeking to undermine an idealizing, formalist modernism, the image of the headless man is to be read in the same transgressive terms as Bataille's concept of

the formless; both are violently antfigurative and serve to negate the modernist ideologies of opticality, instantaneity, sublimation, and autonomy as formulated by Yve-Alain Bois.⁴¹ The *acéphale*, more specifically, represents for Rosalind Krauss “a transgressive thought of the human” that “opens onto the experience of man’s verticality—his elevation in both its biological and moral significance—as a negation: a development toward the primitive, an ascendance downward.”⁴² In this critical, what some might call postmodernist, reading, the *acéphale* is the means by which a transgressive surrealism assaults the sovereign human subject by means of debasement. To the extent that surrealism is concerned with “experiences” (Benjamin), those of this debased subject as theorized by Bataille and an affiliated figure like Roger Caillois would be found on the spectrum of pathological depersonalization from schizophrenia to death, from “psychotic yielding” and “subjective detumescence” to castration and decapitation.⁴³

As remarked by Foster, this Bataille-centric reading has served to make surrealism into “an agonistic modernism within official modernism” and “a retroactive point of reference for postmodernist art” or “a critical postmodernism.”⁴⁴ But for historians of surrealism, this privileging of the Bataillean or “dissident” surrealist perspective consists of a vast simplification if not a “surgical revision” of the movement, whose complexity cannot be reduced to the dichotomy between anti-idealist Bataille and idealist Breton (the latter mapped onto the image of a hegemonic modernism somewhat facilely).⁴⁵ If Steven Harris recalls how the circles led by both leading figures were equally concerned with the project of “de-sublimation” of art, Richardson’s translations of Bataille’s postwar writings serve to reveal the relative insignificance of the Breton–Bataille polemic circa 1929–30 in light of their prompt and eager reconciliation starting from the mid-1930s.⁴⁶ For the purpose of this book, the ahistoricism of a Bataille-centric surrealism is less concerning than its overwhelmingly masculinist ethos, resulting from the critics’ overidentification with what the anthropologist Rosalind C. Morris has described as Bataille’s and the defecting surrealists’ “hyperbolic phallicism.”⁴⁷ Exemplifying this tendency is Krauss’s often-quoted characterization of Bataille’s variety of primitivism as “hard,” as opposed to the “soft” or aestheticizing primitivism of other interwar Parisian critics like Christian Zervos and Paul Guillaume; likewise, she and Bois also insist on associating the Bataillean formless with “detumescence” and castration rather than with the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva’s “abjection,” which as an expressive mode would have conjured up “this undifferentiable maternal lining—a kind of feminine sublime albeit composed of the infinite unspeakableness of bodily disgust.”⁴⁸ From this perspective, one is compelled to agree with Foster—who has been more attentive to the issue of gender than other theorists of postmodernized surrealism—that “white heterosexual masculinity” remains in the central position even when sabotaged by a radical regression: either an ontogenetic infantilism that fantasizes a return to the mother’s womb, or a phylogenetic atavism that dreams of precivilizational, cannibalistic savagery.⁴⁹

In both cases, the feminine and the primitive, with which the masculinist and civilized subject identifies in its “ritual of self-othering,” remain in the position of the other.⁵⁰

But there can and ought to be a more nuanced account of surrealism’s critique of the subject that does not presume the centrality of “white heterosexual masculinity” and, consequently, would not automatically equate its undoing with castration and regression. My contention in this book is that a more holistic consideration of surrealism as inclusive of Bataille, Breton, and other voices in the movement and cultural milieu would open more possibilities for the subject and subjects than the antipodes of positive and negative virilities. For example, as suggested by the punning title of Max Ernst’s 1929 collage-novel, *La Femme 100 têtes*, far from being synonymous with castration, the condition of being headless (“sans tête”) can be reimagined from the feminine position as opening the subject up to multiplicity in the form of a hundred heads (“100 têtes”).⁵¹ Between the vertical man as subject and *acéphale* as antisubject, I want to suggest, lies a wide range of nonsovereign subjectivities emblemized by surrealism’s various images of the feminine, which may be seen, borrowing Benjamin’s expression for the child’s view of the material world, as its “arsenal of masks.”⁵²

The identification with the phallic, to be fair, is likely not the sole reason for critical theory’s prioritization of the *acéphale* over the mask; the latter’s marginalization has deeper roots in the history of culture and ideas. A brief survey of the historical anthropology of the mask attests to its gradual eradication in the Western world by the process of modernization, which culminated in the eventual identification of subjectivity with the face. Vilified in the Middle Ages, the mask was considered by church authorities to be the equivalent of the devil or *larvae*, a broad term referring to demons, ghosts, or spirits capable of possessing humans.⁵³ Consequently, notes Cesare Poppi, “the action of wearing masks has come to be associated with being either ‘enchanted’ by a spectre or—which is worse—possessed by the very demon the mask represents.”⁵⁴ In the early modern period, the Christian suspicion of the mask was secularized; instead of the devil, the mask now signified mendacity and class privilege. As art historians Joseph Koerner and Hubert Damisch have shown, a chasm therefore widened between the dishonest “alphabet of masks”—which academically codified facial expressions became when they lost their authority—and the revelatory “epiphany of the face” as found in the paintings of Rembrandt.⁵⁵ But if “the carnival is dead,” as Jean Starobinski laments, the ones to deal its death blow were not only the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century moralists but also the Enlightenment philosophes, whose humanist project consisted in “unmasking: showing what man [*l’homme*], society and nature are once we free them from conventions, superstitions that serve the sole interest of the powerful and the privileged.”⁵⁶ This process of unmasking came at a cost, however: Melissa Hyde has shown how the Enlightenment critics’ polemic against the cosmetic aesthetic of the Rococo style ended by attributing artifice pejoratively not only to the decadent nobility but also to women, in great part due to their sig-

nificant representation among the patrons.⁵⁷ Though the mask returned with the Romantics in the form of the grotesque, it never recovered the positive, carnivalesque function that Mikhail Bakhtin believes it still had in medieval folk culture. The Romantic mask remains thoroughly modern in that it “hides something, keeps a secret, deceives”; “a terrible vacuum, a nothingness lurks behind it.”⁵⁸

By the turn of the century, the Western devalorization of the mask can be assumed to have completed its course. As the philosopher Georg Simmel affirms in his essay on “The Aesthetic Significance of the Face” (1901), the naked human face is now the only possible aesthetic vehicle for making visible a modern, psychologized subjectivity; mirroring the mind’s unity, it predominates in European art as the “symbol” or “geometric locus . . . of the inner personality, to the degree that it is perceptible.”⁵⁹ Following the catastrophe of World War I, this affirmation of the face played a role in the neohumanist recuperation of figuration, a tendency in European interwar art largely complicit with the reactionary cultural propaganda known as *rappel à l’ordre*.⁶⁰ If the surrealists’ figuration and theorization of the mask present an affront to this reactionary neohumanism, it is noteworthy that even a radical nonconformist like Bataille could counteract the “reassuring stability” of the open face only by resurrecting the Romantic mask’s demonic associations. In an unpublished text from 1934, he conflates the mask with the skull, and demonic possession with death, all of which represent for him “man [*l’homme*] pushed into the possession of this chaos that is his annihilation and his decay, man possessed by a demon, incarnating nature’s intention to cause him to die and rot.”⁶¹ His gothic antihumanism therefore subverts the value attached to good face versus the bad mask while leaving the dichotomy intact, indicating how difficult it is to think the mask or masks beyond Christian and secular-humanist biases, as nonsovereign modalities of a *critical* subject instead of an antisubject.

Two texts from the interwar period, nevertheless, provide clues about how this intellectual impasse might be overcome. In his 1938 lecture, “A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person, the Notion of Self,” the ethnologist Marcel Mauss shows how recent is the notion of the self by comparison to the older one of *persona* or *per/sonare*, “meaning the mask through which (per) resounds the voice (of the actor).”⁶² Though the self has always existed as linguistic and psychological fact, says Mauss, a historical-anthropological perspective makes clear that the persona or mask has been historically the more pervasive and socially significant conception of the person: “a whole immense group of societies have arrived at the notion of ‘role’ (*personnage*), of the role played by the individual in sacred dramas.”⁶³ Before the advent of the Christian “moral person” and the Enlightenment’s metaphysical, psychological self, ancient peoples like the “Samnites, Etruscans and Latins” all “lived in an environment . . . of personae, masks and names”; meanwhile, comparable worldviews are found in the complex naming practices of contemporary India, China, and many North Amerindian societies.⁶⁴ (As examples, one individual may be given multiple names to indicate social status, relationship

to others, and stage of life; names can survive the death of individuals and be used to personify inanimate objects.)

If Mauss's social anthropology serves to provincialize the self in relation to the universal mask-persona, Joan Riviere shows how the latter has nevertheless survived in the modern bourgeois West in the social performance of gender. In her seminal essay from 1929, "Womanliness as Masquerade," the psychoanalyst argues that the ostensible, exaggerated display of feminine traits allows intellectually ambitious women to partake in male-dominated professions without being perceived as threatening. But against the common equation of masquerade with inauthenticity, Riviere insists that "whether radical or superficial, they [genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'] are the same thing."⁶⁵ A closer reading of this influential text suggests two ways in which she avoids the trap of vilifying the mask. First, the mask is not inauthentic if serving the function of protection, as in the "dreams of people putting masks on their faces in order to avert disaster" reported by Riviere's female patient.⁶⁶ Second, in Riviere's dialectical conception, a mask that conceals is also one that reveals: the mask of "womanliness" serves "to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it" but also to show the woman's innocence, "much as a thief will *turn out his pockets* and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods."⁶⁷

Both Riviere and Mauss make it possible to see masks as the subject's modalities of appearance rather than its annihilation; their texts also suggest that the primitive and the feminine—concepts of difference that have meaning only in relation to the supposed norm of a bourgeois masculinist subject—were the primary means through which nonconformist interwar thinkers accessed this more capacious conception of the subject-qua-mask. In the case of the surrealists, the rhetorical identification with the primitive and the feminine coincided historically with the movement's internationalization and inclusion of intellectuals from the colonies, and with the increasing recognition of women participants as artists in their own right rather than lovers and companions of the male members. These two facets of an expansive surrealism, documented by decades of surrealism scholarship, attest broadly to an indirect but real link between symbolic and social representation. For instance, Breton's inclusive but male-led group maintained a mythology of the woman that presented contradictory stereotypes at variance with the individual personalities of real women; yet the predominance of the feminine image (to the point of becoming the very face of automatism, surrealism's central concept, as pointed out by Katharine Conley) also created a mixed-gender ethos for the movement that eventually proved enabling for women surrealists.⁶⁸ Similarly, the surrealists' often romanticizing valorization of non-European cultures—from the collection and exhibition of Oceanic and Amerindian objects to the publication of the openly anti-Eurocentric map of "The World in the Time of the Surrealists"—consisted in first steps in the creation of a worldwide surrealism-at-large with the participation of

“surrealists black, brown and beige,” as attested most recently by the exhibition *Surrealism Beyond Borders*.⁶⁹

If “one cannot imagine surrealism without [the] presence [of women and people of color],” as Michael Stone-Richards remarks, my contention is that this inclusivity differs from the cosmopolitan diversity of globalizing European empires (e.g., the multiracial “greater France” that the surrealists virulently protested) in that the surrealists reposition the primitive and the feminine as the *universal* paradigm for subjectivity.⁷⁰ In surrealism’s ethnography of the subject, I will show in the following chapters, both the primitive and the feminine radically expand beyond their common meaning in the course of becoming universal: the primitive becomes synonymous with poetic reason or integrated thought, and the feminine comes to designate a subjectivity with noncastrative access to jouissance, which the artist Salvador Dalí calls “ecstasy.” In the meantime, it is the bourgeois masculine subject that gradually recedes into the position of the *particular*, provincialized as one *removable* mask among many others. Around 1932–33, the Martinican intellectuals led by René Ménélik affirmed this conceptual possibility when allying with the surrealists and disidentifying themselves from the Black bourgeoisie of their birth—the same class that the psychiatrist and philosopher Franz Fanon would criticize two decades later for wearing their colonizers’ “White masks.”⁷¹ For the signatories of the legendary manifesto “Legitimate Defense,” the momentary adoption of a surrealist mask would prove productive for the eventual construction of an international Black identity; their gesture also recognized their Parisian peers as having similarly renounced *their* White-bourgeois mask by virtue of adopting intransigent positions against colonialism and the tyranny of reason.⁷² From the perspective of a feminine subject-position, by contrast, what is enabling is not the removal but the adoption of the phallic as a mask, as exemplified by the appropriation of men’s accessories by urban women’s fashion (analyzed by Tristan Tzara) and the adoption of virile comportments by female practitioners of possession (documented by Leiris). But insofar as this performative assumption of *manliness as masquerade* (to borrow from Riviere) remains circumstantial and nonsovereign, it serves to expose the nondialectical phallicism of totalitarianism, whose rise in various European states in the 1930s the surrealists undertook to analyze independently of the perceived failure of their political engagement. The surrealist subject-qua-mask, I will maintain throughout the book, empowers as much as it critiques power.

The primary agenda of *The Persistence of Masks* is to broaden the purview of ethnographic surrealism to a more general investigation of marginalized forms of subjectivity, which the surrealists discovered to be manifesting through language and formal-material means that may be analogized to masks, veils, hats, and ornaments. But the book also contains several subsidiary agendas, and each of which requires cross-disciplinary approaches: to overcome the Breton–Bataille opposition in much of surrealism scholarship, to articulate the link between surrealism’s primitivist aesthetic theories and

its anticolonial politics, to theorize the feminine as a nonsovereign yet socially effective paradigm for the subject, and to address surrealism's response to the paradoxical predicaments of dehumanization and anthropocentrism under technocratic industrial capitalism. If the book can be faulted at times for its density and its not always straightforward argumentation, may its readers see these inadequacies at least in part as reflecting the difficulty of the task at hand: to make surrealism productive for critical theory without reducing the complexity and nuances of the historical materials. This task puts me in the company of other surrealism scholars seeking similarly to account for the movement's critical legacy beyond the dichotomy between history and theory, two intellectual enterprises whose differences in method I nevertheless want to see as productive.⁷³ It is not uncommon to see historians of surrealism (Richardson, Spector, Harris, etc.), informed by archival research and close reading of primary sources, reproach the so-called theorists for what the former perceive as reductive descriptions of the movement (ethnographic surrealism, "hard primitivism," etc.). Yet this critique does not overcome the reality that, for surrealism to remain a living intellectual tradition with contemporary relevance, one needs theoretical concepts and frameworks that inevitably generalize from the particulars. In the organization of my chapters, the readers may therefore identify a prioritization of theoretical issues; the first three chapters, however, still reflect a rough chronology due to their considerable discussions of materials from four successive interwar surrealist reviews, respectively *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924–29), *Documents* (1929–30), *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930–33), and *Minotaure* (1933–39).

Chapter 1, "Figuring the Subject in Surrealism: The Veil, the Mask, the Fetish," reconsiders the well-known polemic between Breton and Bataille circa 1929–30 as being concerned primarily with competing representations of nonsovereign subjectivities. By comparing the surrealist iconography of the veil and the death mask to that of skulls and mutilated parts in *Documents*, I reveal the tension between the core group's feminine-identified, "soluble" subject and the Bataillean program of "formless," whose phallocentrism reflects in its fixation on the phenomenon of *thing-ification*. In this moment of schism but also broadening of the movement, I show how Leiris, of all the *Documents* surrealists, most effectively assimilates Breton's and Bataille's influences, producing thereby an anthropological aesthetics of masquerade as well as a theory of the negative, nontotalizing fetish.

Chapter 2, "Surrealism's Primitive Reason: Magic, Alteration, Coevalness," addresses the ambivalent relationship between ethnology and surrealist art theory circa 1930, focusing on the notion of magic. Synonymous with a poetic method that circumvents technique and the artistic personality, magic, I argue, is the universal paradigm of art for the surrealists and their anti-colonial allies seeking to provincialize, if not pathologize, the European bourgeois form of civilization. Putting the surrealists' art theory and artistic practice in dialogue with the ethnologically inflected art writings of Bataille and his collaborator Carl Einstein in *Documents*, I suggest that at stake in

these critics' and artists' borrowing of ethnological concepts and materials is the theorization of a "coevalness" (the term of Johannes Fabian) between the so-called primitive and the civilized in the moral-political realm, and between the mechanical and the natural in the aesthetic realm.⁷⁴ The chapter therefore ends by considering the figure of the autonomous hand in surrealist art and publications as a dislocated subject straddling the mechanical and the natural, and functionally equivalent to a mask that can be inhabited and dissociated from the self.

In chapter 3, "*Minotaure* as the Ethnography of the Subject: Automatism, Femininity, Heterogeneity," I take the most prominent surrealist publication of the 1930s as the site of convergence for multiple aspects of surrealism's unofficial ethnography, whose most pressing agenda in the mid-1930s was the revision of automatism. I show how the paraethnographic consideration of the phenomenon of style in mediumistic writings and art, Art Nouveau architecture, and women's fashion made it possible for a mature surrealism to theorize the automatic subject as paradoxically passive and active, experiential and performative, feminine and open to hermaphroditism. I argue that the surrealists appealed to this feminine-identified subjectivity in order to critique the "psychological structure of fascism" as well as the castration complex that overtook a masculinist interwar intelligentsia.

The last and fourth chapter, "The Surrealists as Ethnographers: Possession, Aesthetics, Subjectivity," is anomalous for its departure from the Paris-based cultural milieu of surrealism and its focus on Péret's and Leiris's semiprofessional and professional ethnography in Brazil and Ethiopia in 1930–32. Instead of ethnographic surrealism or surrealist ethnography, I consider Péret's texts on Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* and Leiris's studies of northern Ethiopian *zar* as extensions of surrealism's ethnography of the subject. While both surrealists-turned-ethnographers see the practice of possession as empowering individuals from politically and economically disenfranchised groups, I contend that Leiris's consideration of *zar* as masquerade specifically makes it possible to recognize its predominantly female participants as subjects in disguise.

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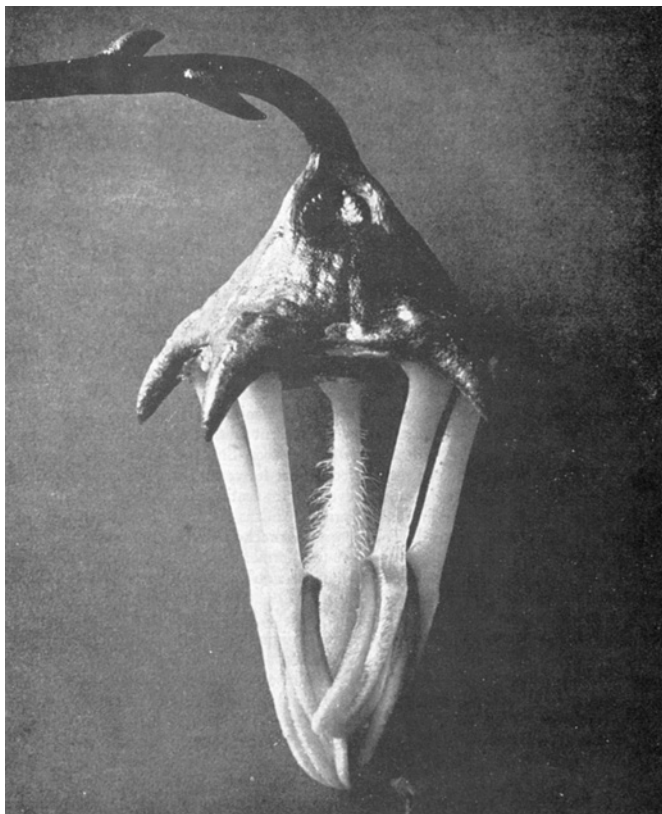
Figuring the Subject in Surrealism

The Veil, the Mask, the Fetish

In most writings on the history of surrealism, it is more or less accepted that the movement founded by André Breton and his friends reached its maturity but also a moment of crisis around the year 1929. This was the last year of running for their inaugural review, *La Révolution surréaliste*, and also the year of the so-called Bar du Château reunion in March, where an intransigent Breton, to the ire of many in the group, sought to cross-examine each member on the question of collective action by means of a group survey. Alienated by Breton's authority, many discontented surrealists began to gravitate in this period toward the eccentric philosopher and historian Georges Bataille, forming what is often considered a dissident branch of surrealism around his review *Documents: Doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie*. From this moment on, it becomes possible to speak of two surrealisms: that of Breton on the one hand, which subscribes to an aesthetic of incongruity inherited from Comte de Lautréamont, Arthur Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Pierre Reverdy, and that of Bataille on the other, which mobilizes the base and the ignoble as the means of undermining all ideal form. This antagonistic view of surrealism as split between an aestheticizing or "idealist" Breton and an "anti-idealist" Bataille is nevertheless overly schematic, given the brevity of the 1929–30 polemic, the reconciliation between two figures shortly after, and Bataille's generous evaluation of surrealism in his postwar writings.¹ In this chapter, I will suggest that the gradual convergence of the two seemingly antithetical surrealisms predates the reconciliation from the mid-1930s and on, and, paradoxically, can be observed already in the very moment of mutual hostility. In short, the seemingly violent polemic—much of which was personally rather than intellectually motivated—between Breton and Bataille in 1929 actually drew the latter into the intellectual orbit of surrealism. Moreover, the defecting surrealists' contributions to *Documents*—notwithstanding their authors' symbolic crucifixion of Breton in the incendiary pamphlet "A Corpse" (1930)—attest to concerted efforts to synthesize the aesthetic sensibilities and values of surrealism's two *maîtres*.²

A revealing example of this rapprochement can be found in an exchange in 1929 between Breton and Bataille concerning beauty and ideal form. Embittered by the recent defection of several surrealists (Robert Desnos, Michel Leiris, Georges Limbour, André Masson, and Roger Vitrac) and their congregation around Bataille, Breton devotes a substantial portion of the "Second

FIGURE 1.1. Karl Blossfeldt, *Campanula vidalii*, magnified six times, 1929. Inscription: "The petals of the flower had been torn off." *Documents* 1, no. 3 (1929): 161. Copyright Karl Blossfeldt Archiv / Ann and Jürgen Wilde / Cologne, Germany / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.



Manifesto of Surrealism" (1929) to mocking the de-idealizing aesthetic of his new rival. For Breton, Bataille's sensibility is exemplified by the latter's recent essay, "The Language of Flowers" in *Documents*, which praises the German artist Karl Blossfeldt's magnified botanical photographs for showing that "even the most beautiful flowers are spoiled in their centers by hairy sexual organs. Thus the interior of a rose does not at all correspond to its exterior beauty; if one tears off all of the corolla's petals, all that remains is a rather sordid tuft"³ (Figure 1.1). Attesting to Bataille's "wish only to consider in the world that which is vilest, most discouraging, and most corrupted," this passage furthermore conjures up for Breton the image of a fictional striptease where the dancing woman ends up being stripped of her skin:

[A]ll [Bataille] does is make me smile as I recall Alphonse Allais's tale in which a sultan has so exhausted the subjects of amusement that, despairing of seeing him grow bored, his grand Vizier can think of nothing better to do than to bring him a very beautiful damsel who begins to dance, at first completely covered with veils, for him alone. She is so beautiful that the sultan orders her to drop one of her veils each time she stops dancing. No sooner is she naked than the sultan signals idly for her to be stripped: they quickly flay her alive. It is none the less true that the rose,

stripped of its petals, remains the rose, and moreover, in the story above, the dancing girl goes on dancing.⁴

On the one hand, Breton objects to Bataille's sensibility, not least the latter's "delirious misuse of adjectives: befouled, senile, rank, sordid, lewd, doddering . . . words . . . through which his delight is most lyrically expressed."⁵ On the other hand, in his effort to outdo Bataille's decorticated flower with an even more macabre example of how beauty might be de-idealized and disfigured, Breton is compelled to mimetically participate in his opponent's logic. His dismissive response to Bataille thus serves as a form of reluctant engagement, which ultimately shortens the distance between the two figures but also between the two mutually hostile groups they momentarily led.

This exchange documented in the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (1929) has an additional significance for the purpose of this book: It is an example of the productiveness of this polemical moment for generating a rich iconography of the nonsovereign subject, consisting largely of veils and masks. If, throughout the 1920s, Breton and his visual artist friends had deployed the veil and the mask in order to represent the mutability and indeterminacy of the subject, these negative figures underwent a disconcerting reimagination as *things* thanks to Bataille, who drew on the ethnographic and archaeological materials featured abundantly in *Documents* as support for his theoretical program of "formless" (*informe*) and base materialism. It is in the context of this transformation of surrealist aesthetic that I situate the writings of Leiris, former contributor to *La Révolution surréaliste* who became Bataille's most important collaborator in *Documents*. As I will argue below, Leiris's contributions to *Documents* not only synthesize Breton's and Bataille's respective influences, but also outline an anthropological aesthetics and a surrealist theory of the negative fetish.

The Veil and the Mask: From the Invisible Object to the Mutable Subject

Despite his sharp tone, Breton makes clear in "Second Manifesto" that he recognizes Bataille as his intellectual equal and therefore his appropriate replacement for the defecting surrealists ("one could not leave surrealism without falling in with Mr. Bataille, since the disgust with rigor can only translate into a new submission to rigor").⁶ Moreover, his evocation of Allais's striptease specifically connects Bataille's de-idealizing operation to one of the most enduring themes of surrealism, namely, the perpetually undressing woman as an allegory of desire. Throughout the 1920s, this prominent figure in surrealist poetics had illustrated the elusiveness and unattainability of the object of desire in relation to the desiring subject, as exemplified by the prototype of Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (also known by its format as *Large Glass*). A work familiar to the surrealists since 1922, this antipainting depicts the paradox of an unconsummable sexual act in the form of an irrational machine.⁷ Notably, both the "bride" in the

upper glass panel (designated as “Milky Way”) and the nine desiring “bachelors” in the lower panel are shown as incomplete from a figurative perspective: the bride is skeletal and insect-like, whereas the bachelors, identified as village men, are no more than empty “molds.” (Duchamp in this period was rejecting mimetic representation as found commonly in “retinal” painting.) Just like the Orientalist striptease evoked by Breton, the action of stripping here is endless. Notwithstanding the bachelors’ efforts, represented by the mechanical actions of pumping, grinding, shooting and igniting, they never manage to unveil the bride, who remains safely ensconced beyond the “horizon” (the juncture between the two panels) that serves as her invisible garment.⁸ Per the artist’s alternative title for this work, *A Delay in Glass*, the endless operation of stripping bare or *making nude* (*mise à nu*) means that nudity itself, what would have signified the bride’s possession by the groom, is indefinitely postponed and available only negatively as absence.

The feminine figure, however, is not always required for the thematization of the perpetually veiled object of desire. In two early photographs by Duchamp’s close friend Man Ray, reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* respectively in 1924 and 1926, the veil alone suffices in conjuring up the image of the object as negative presence. In *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (1920), a thick army blanket and strings are draped over objects whose identities can only be guessed by their irregular contour (Figure 1.2). The title invites the viewer to imagine an erotic encounter along the lines of “the chance meeting



FIGURE 1.2. Man Ray, *The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse*, 1920. *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 1 (December 1, 1924): 1. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

on an operating table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella” (Ducasse/Comte de Lautréamont’s formula for the beautiful that the surrealists appropriated). Presumably, equally strange bodies would be found beneath the cover, interacting as body parts and possibly in sadistic ways due to the association of strings with the act of binding. With *Moving Sculpture* (1920), the negativity at stake is not that of concealment but of virtuality (Figure 1.3). A visual example of “surrealist ghostliness,” the photograph shows white linens on the clothesline billowing in the wind and creating the appearance of phantom-like figures.⁹ In the absence of veiled objects, the veil itself is what creates the absent figure by means of movement, which may be conceived of as a dance.

These works by Duchamp and Man Ray are instructive for contextualizing Breton’s rhetorical response to Bataille in 1929. Despite being disfigured, says Breton, the “rose . . . remains a rose” just as the dancing girl in Allais’s story “keeps dancing” even after being flayed, suggesting that, like Duchamp’s bride, she never quite ends up naked no matter how many layers the sultan removes from her body. This imperviousness may be conceived magically, as would be appropriate in a fairy tale: the dancer is wearing an infinite number of veils; the removal of one only reveals another beneath, hence the continuation of the striptease. Alternatively, the latter may be conceived aesthetically as referring to dance as a method for producing *form*, for which the veil serves the metaphor; the dancer’s ultimate veil is not her skin but the dance form itself whose virtuality cannot be stripped. If the veiling effect of dance is well



FIGURE 1.3. Man Ray, *Moving Sculpture*, 1920. Cover photograph for *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 6 (March 1, 1926). Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

known in dance criticism, the literary critic Roland Barthes would remark specifically on this phenomenon in a 1957 essay on the professional striptease, which the surrealists expectedly read with interest.¹⁰ In a way that recalls Breton's remark on Allais's dancer, Barthes argues that the fact of dance makes nudity—the purported destination of this performance—impossible, since the highly rehearsed movements of the professional stripper constitute “a cosmetic,” which “hides nudity, and smothers the spectacle under a glaze of superfluous yet essential gestures. . . . Thus we see the professionals of striptease wrap themselves in the miraculous ease which constantly clothes them, makes them remote. . . . [T]heir science clothes them like a garment.”¹¹

On the one hand, Breton's claim that “the girl keeps dancing” is a preemptive defense less of beauty than of form, which he rightly identifies as Bataille's target (I will return to this in the next section). On the other hand, the remark betrays Breton's identification with the veiled feminine figure as the object of desire, a major theme in his *Soluble Fish* (1924). Published in the same year as the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, this prototypical surrealist text features a narrator who, like Allais's sultan or Duchamp's bachelors, is frustrated in his pursuit of an unobtainable object. The latter is represented by the figure of the veiled woman in fragment 22, who disappears the moment the narrator takes possession of her veil: “I grabb[ed] one corner of the veil that I had put my foot on, and this brought into my hands the whole of her coat. . . . The fact remains that once she had freed herself of her outer garment, she had disappeared immediately.”¹² But unlike the sultan or the bachelors, the narrator's loss of this already doubly obscured object (clad in mourning in the night) is compensated by the acquisition of the veil as a trophy. Finding it to be endowed with a surplus of sensorial qualities both visual (its inside is the color of skin) and olfactory (perfumed), aural (it produces music and the woman's laugh and sigh) and tactile (warm, undulating like a river), the narrator subsequently places the veil on his bed to inhabit like a blanket; he thus fuses with the fetish, effectively taking the place of the vanished woman. The result of this fusion, as suggested by fragment 30, is cross-gender travesty: here, the male narrator finds himself in the position of the veiled dancer, commanded by a “central furnace with blue eyes” to “dance more naked than you are [*plus nu que tu n'es*].”¹³ In this case, stripping also functions as a metaphor for the freeing of the unconscious; told by the furnace that “it is time to sleep,” the narrator is now predisposed to “drop those veils that still enfold you and give your hand to the pure seasons that you rouse in your dreams.”¹⁴

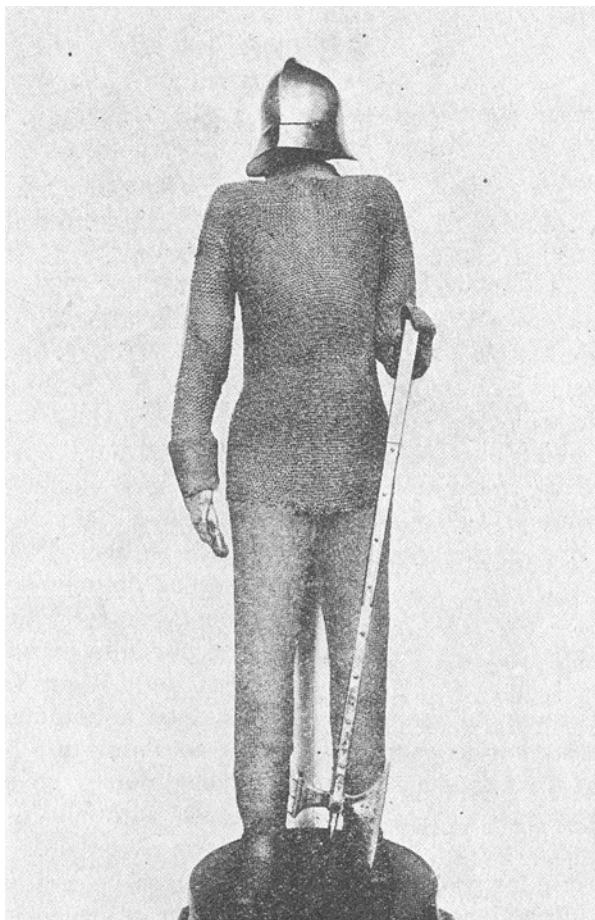
In her psychoanalytic reading of Breton's *Soluble Fish*, Julia Kristeva underlines the author's “logic of the total identification with the feminine,” noting that the figure of the fish in the title, a metaphorical “penis-pen” for the male writer, is made soluble as a testament to his will to “escape vigilant virility, the hardness of consciousness, and the rigidity of the will.”¹⁵ “I am soluble,” says the psychoanalyst and critic in Breton's place, “because I aspire to the feminine.”¹⁶ According to Kristeva, the veil obtained from the mysterious woman in fragment 22 represents the fantasy of regression, recalling

the archaic memory of the hymen or the mother's skin, the "maternal envelope" against which the infant forms its "early identities" as "epidermal 'I'" (*moi-peau*).¹⁷ Though desired by the masculine subject, this feminine identification nevertheless threatens him with "dispossession of identity"; for Kristeva, this is the reason for the appearance of the figure of the mask as a protective device.¹⁸ To guard himself against "the state of depersonalization and that of the uncanny," this "shattering" of the self (*pulvérisation du moi*) by the other sex, the subject has recourse to travesty, which overcomes sexual difference by allowing for the possibility of being "neither one nor the other" or "le hors sexe."¹⁹ It is in this sense that the "assimilation of the feminine leads to the mask, to something more ludic" like the playfulness of automatic writing.²⁰ Having in mind specifically the mask of the white wolf that the narrator dons in fragment 32, Kristeva suggests that, though "heartbroken" (*crève-cœur*) by the nonpossession of his beloved, the narrator of *Soluble Fish* does not commit suicide; he becomes "an imp who doesn't throw himself out of the window but comes forward in a mask."²¹ The self does not have to be killed, in short, if it has the possibility of becoming *other*.

Kristeva's analysis makes it possible to see the mask as the transformation of the masculine subject when *surviving* rather than renouncing its feminine identification. In the final scene in *Soluble Fish* that she evokes, the wolf mask not only turns the author into an animal-headed jester, but it also multiplies him by means of presumably identical posters on which his image appears: "The walls of Paris . . . had been covered by posters showing a man masked as a white wolf, holding in his left the rein of freedom: this man was myself."²² In his contemporaneous essay, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality" (1924), Breton represents this multiplicity as a series of "sparkling suits of armor" in a castle. If one approximates the author's self ("one of these suits of armor seems almost my size"), others represent fictional characters of the author's creation, which turn out to be masks that the self can inhabit. From this Breton concludes that writing is nothing other than an "eternal theater," where, "to play another's role, but even to dictate that role, we would need to mask ourselves in its semblance."²³ Rigid and associated with warfare, the suit of armor conceived as a mask reintroduces the "vigilant virility" and "hardness of consciousness" that the soluble subject seeks to shed; like the image of the mail shirt in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, it is masculinity in the form of an outdated artifact, a revenant from the Middle Ages (Figure 1.4).²⁴

But toward the second half of the 1920s, this distinction between the veil and the mask would blur increasingly in surrealist poetics and arts as both figures also gradually shed their symbolic gender. On the cover of the second issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, a hollow and flimsy scarecrow presents a masculine version of the veiled woman (Figure 1.5). Shortly after, hybrids of the veil and the mask would appear worn by men, for instance in René Magritte's *The Lovers* (1928) and Man Ray's *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* (1929). The former, adopted by the Belgian parasurrealist review *Variétés* as the cover for its January 15, 1929 issue, shows a man and a woman embracing,

FIGURE 1.4. "Unidentified photograph and photographer."
La Révolution surréaliste no. 3
 (April 15, 1925): 1.



whose heads are each enveloped by a white veil. Masklike due to its coverage of the head only, this veil alludes to the suicide of the artist's mother by drowning and the garment wrapped around her head when she was found. Reimagined, however, the same veil also points to the unknown future where the two lovers' new identities would be unveiled. Likewise, Man Ray's film suggests that a future dictated by chance holds the key to the mystery of the characters' identities. To decide whether to travel, two men in translucent veil-like masks (played by Man Ray himself and the photographer Jacques-André Boiffard) cast dice in a Parisian bistro; arriving at a seemingly empty chateau, they find themselves in the company of two similarly veiled women, with whom they engage in another game of dice the next morning (Figure 1.6). Lying on their bellies with legs dangling in the air, the two bachelors and their female doubles resemble children at play. If the oversized dice serve to diminish them optically, the objects also gesture toward a future that is augmented now that the characters have become little boys and girls.

In both Magritte's *Lovers* and Man Ray's *Mystères*, the veil-mask worn by men and women serves to reduce sexual difference, underscoring instead the indeterminacy of identity that results from reciprocal identification. The



FIGURE 1.5. Unidentified photograph on the cover of *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 2 (January 15, 1925).

latter dynamic effectively occurs in Breton's *Nadja* (1928), where the two lovers' identities continuously metamorphose in the course of their relationship. Notably, the quality of liquid solubility, attributed to the feminine figure in *Soluble Fish*, is equally assigned to the male narrator, who self-identifies as an aimlessly wandering ghost from the outset: "Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt.' . . . Such a word means much more than it says, makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part, evidently referring to what I must have ceased to be in order to be *who* I am."²⁵ Eventually, the narrator's question in regard to his own veiled identity would be answered by his encounter with the enigmatic woman Nadja; in her eyes or hand-drawn portraits, he takes on a number of animal guises, shown with upturned hair "as though sucked up by a high wind—like long flames" that extend into an eagle's belly, or alternatively as a "monster with gleaming eyes . . . caught in a kind of eagle-head vase."²⁶ In the meantime, instead of Breton, it is Nadja who participates in the travesty that Kristeva characterizes as masculine in *Soluble Fish*. According to Breton, seeing herself as the medieval water-spirit Melusine, she goes as far as to "transfer this resemblance to real life, insisting that her hairdresser spare



FIGURE 1.6. Man Ray, *Les Mystères du Château du Dé*, 1929. Film 35 mm in black and white. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

no efforts to arrange her hair in five distinct strands in order to leave a star over her forehead. The strands must be coiled besides, to make ram's horns in front of her ears, the spiral of such horns also being one of the motifs she most frequently related to herself."²⁷ A chimera combining the features of two disparate animals (fish and ram), Nadja's Melusine mask also outfits the nominally feminine figure of the mermaid with phallic forms (horns, hair-strands standing for five points of the star).

Many more examples can be given of the fusion between the mask and the veil, and of their interchangeability between the genders in the surrealist arts of the 1920s, but the paramount one attesting to these ambiguities is by far the recurrent death mask. Inspired by Ernst Benckard's *Das ewige Antlitz* (1926), a history of death masks that includes a large number of plates showing those of notable individuals, Breton and Paul Éluard had these cast of themselves in 1929–30, most likely by the artist René Iché (Figure 1.7).²⁸ Though rigid, the death mask incorporates the veil's negativity and specifically its temporal character due to being cast from an imprint. In an unpublished text from this period, "Le masque du jour," Breton effectively compares Iché's masks to natural fossils, applauding the sculptor for uncovering "the secret of these precautions taken by nature to preserve for us certain vegetal or animal organisms of ancient epochs—a fern leaf, a shell, a small crustacean

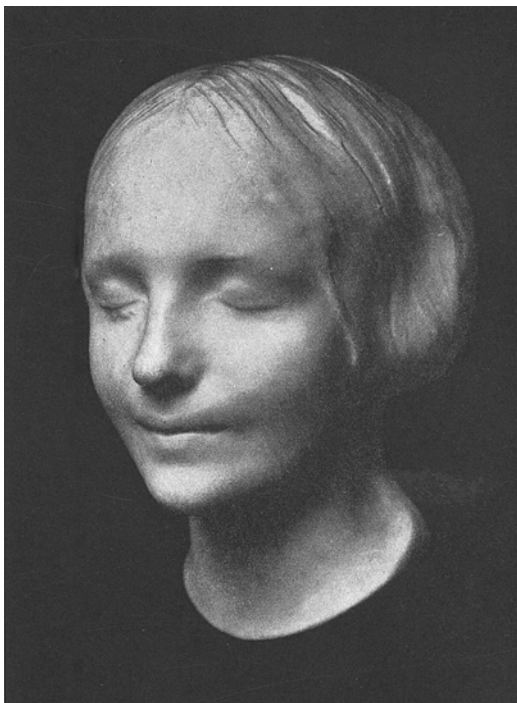


FIGURE 1.7. René Iché (previously attributed to Paul Haman), mask of Paul Éluard, c. 1930. Plaster, 30 cm. René Iché Estate. Image source: www.andrébreton.fr.

with marvelously spared antennas.”²⁹ But unlike the natural fossil or even the typical death mask, the masks of the surrealists are documents of the living; Marguerite Bonnet therefore sees the title of Breton’s essay as “play[ing] on the opposition between this mask of the living and the mortuary mask, that of the definitive night.”³⁰ Moreover, the “masque du jour” could also be understood as “mask of the day” (as in menu of the day), which like a journal or photograph captures the present as a *state* before it becomes the past. What the surrealist death mask captures is therefore not the image of the dead but that of the newly expired self, “what I must have ceased to be to be who I am” (Breton). Whereas the veil gestures toward the future (the moment of unveiling), the death mask gestures toward the past; both undermine the present by depriving it of *presence*. It is worth noting that, among all the death masks featured in Benkard’s book, the one that impacted Breton and Éluard more than others effectively displays the quality of being veiled: that of an unidentified young woman who supposedly drowned herself in the Seine, known as *L’Inconnue de la Seine* (Figure 1.8). Later determined to be a studio product, this mask was a cult object for early twentieth-century European artistic and literary circles due to its lifelike appearance: the model looks more asleep than dead.³¹ In the photograph, the wet hair clinging closely to the model’s head uncannily recalls textile; with her eyes closed, the young woman’s smile also invites association with the coy, expectant face of the bride about to be unveiled.

It has not escaped notice that the surrealists’ use of the death mask is strongly linked to another common practice of theirs in this period, that of

FIGURE 1.8. *L'Inconnue de la Seine*.
Ernst Benkard, *Das ewige Antlitz*,
1926, plate 112.



taking photographic portraits of themselves in the photo booth with their eyes closed.³² Unlike the souvenir photographs that the same group had taken at the fairgrounds in their youth, the entirely mechanical photo booth portraits are produced without a human photographer. By closing their eyes, the surrealists further reduced human presence, ensuring that the photographic subjects are photo-cast in the only state that they themselves could not perceive in real time, not even with the help of a mirror. In the last issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, sixteen of these photographic death masks are seen surrounding Magritte's painting *Hidden Woman* like a picture frame, in a photomontage that simultaneously thematizes the tropes of endless unveiling and the veil-mask³³ (Figure 1.9). If the scenario of multiple men facing an idealized feminine image recalls Duchamp's *Large Glass*, it also reiterates an earlier photomontage in the fifth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1925, showing the assassin Germaine Berton surrounded by photo portraits of the surrealists and their icons (including Sigmund Freud). Going by the inscription of the earlier work, "Woman is the being who projects the greatest shadow or the greatest light in our dreams," one might interpret the men in Magritte's photomontage as sleeping and dreaming; but given the work's own inscription, they are more appropriately seen as blind and therefore unable to "see the [woman] hidden in the forest." Ironically, as Magritte intends with this intersemiotic joke, the viewer *does* see the woman, since the word "femme" expected in the inscription "Je ne vois pas la . . . cachée dans la forêt" is replaced by the image of a generic female nude.³⁴ But for the blind bachelors, the nudity that Magritte unveils for the viewer is out of reach like



FIGURE 1.9. René Magritte, photomontage with the portraits of sixteen surrealists around the painting, *Je ne vois pas la femme cachée dans la forêt* [I do not see the woman hidden in the forest], 1929. *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 12 (December 15, 1929): 73. Copyright 2024 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

the virginity of Duchamp's bride; the former remains hidden in the forest just as the latter stays suspended in the Milky Way.

Could Breton have had Magritte's photomontage in mind when sneering at Bataille's decortication of the flower and comparing it to Allais's sadistic striptease? The conjecture is not implausible because the polemical "Second Manifesto" and the photomontage appeared in the same, last issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* from December 15, 1929. Like the bored sultan in Allais's tale (standing in for Bataille in Breton's analogy), the surrealist men in the photomontage fantasize about stripping the female figure. But whereas the sultan acts out his fantasy on the body of the female dancer, Magritte shows the surrealist men as passive; in the metaphorical sense represented by the surrealist death mask, they are even dead, appearing as mere imprints of their former selves. In relation to this surrealist iconography of male passivity, Breton's riposte to Bataille reads simultaneously as underlining the active character of the female dancer. "The dancing girl keeps dancing" because she cannot be possessed by the bachelors, but also because what she stands for—aesthetic form conceived in relation to virtuality and movement—is ultimately indestructible.

Undress, Dissect, Thing-ify: Formless against Negativity

Breton's vestimentary metaphor (striptease) for describing Bataille's de-idealizing aesthetic turns out not very far off the mark, since Bataille evidently sees his intellectual project in similar terms. In "The Language of Flowers," he takes the beautiful exterior of the flower as a metaphor for appearance in general, whose conformation to "the human ideal" serves to mask the real; "most flowers are badly developed and are barely distinguishable from foliage; some of them are even unpleasant, if not hideous."³⁵ To undermine the idealizing character of symbolic form, Bataille proposes to *undress* the flower, so to speak, exposing its unsightly pistil and stamens that alone merit being the symbol of love due to their reproductive functions. In a short text published shortly after in the last issue of *Documents* in 1929, "Formless" (*informe*), Bataille extends the same logic to philosophy, by which he means all thinking that deploys concepts and words, which "has no other goal: to provide a frock coat for what is, a mathematical frock coat."³⁶ To remove this dishonest artifact, Bataille applies a violent enterprise that he calls "formless," using a seemingly adjectival word that he wants to turn instead into an action:

A dictionary would begin from the point at which it no longer rendered the meanings of words but rather their tasks [*besognes*]. Thus *formless* is not only an adjective with a given meaning, generally requiring that each thing take on a form, but a term that serves to downgrade [*déclasser*]. That which it designates has no claim in any sense, and is always trampled upon like a spider or an earthworm. Indeed, for academics to be happy the universe would have to take on form. The whole of philosophy has no other goal: to provide a frock coat for what is, a mathematical frock coat. To declare, on the contrary, that the universe resembles nothing [*ressemble à rien*], and is simply *formless* [*informe*], is tantamount to saying the universe is something like a spider or spittle.³⁷

Published as an entry for *Documents*' regular feature *Critical Dictionary*, "formless" is here virtually identified with the latter's mission, as Bataille makes clear in the first sentence: to undermine the ordinary definitions of specific words and concepts as well as the very activity of meaning-making. Words in *Critical Dictionary*, including "formless," will not as much *mean* as they act and perform tasks. Yet Bataille's characterization of the term "formless" does not mitigate the ambiguity in its common dictionary definition. If, in the French, *informe* denotes what is shapeless or disfigured while connoting the grotesque and the debased (hence endowed with a social character), Bataille introduces an additional ambiguity by making "formless" resemble "nothing" but also "something like a spider or spittle."

Bataille's equivocalness has made it difficult for his commentators to determine the proper relationship between "formless" and antification, leading

to several critical controversies. Objecting to Jean Paulhan's liberally taxonomic use of the term *art informel* to describe the work of postwar painters like Camille Bryen, Jean Fautrier, Wols, and Jean Dubuffet, Hubert Damisch is probably the first to remind readers that Bataille's "formless" designates not an entity but an activity; therefore, it "does not have its place in a history of forms, in a history of works [*oeuvres*], except as an instance of subterranean labor [*travail*], of a nonsensical activity, which cannot be exposed to the light of day."³⁸ Following Damisch, and seeking to theorize contemporary art through the lens of the formless, Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss similarly criticize Georges Didi-Huberman for not sufficiently distinguishing "formless" from deformation in his reading of Bataille's concept.³⁹ For the organizers of the *Formless* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in 1996, by equating "formless" with a "dialectization of form" that ultimately privileges the ignoble and the abject (e.g., spider), Didi-Huberman neutralizes the operational character of the concept and obscures Bataille's "nondialectical materialism," which cannot be assimilated into even formless forms (e.g., spittle).⁴⁰ It was in this moment, when critics split into those who want "formless" to be a task and those who equate it with dissemblance, that the philosopher and psychoanalyst Pierre Fédida offered a nuanced account of "formless" as a movement with a privileged relationship not to figuration but *figurability*. Following Barthes's early reading of Bataille's *Critical Dictionary* as seeking to turn "knowledge words" into "value words," which are "sensuous, subtle, amorous words, denoting seductions or repulsions," Fédida suggests seeing "formless" as a peculiar kind of value-word (*aspectual vocable*) that also designates unidirectional movement of decreasing legibility.⁴¹ "Spider" and "spittle" would therefore designate not figures but stages on this descent: "*Spider* or *spittle* becomes the mode of legibility of the visual of each noun plunging down the interior slope of its retrogression: it is this becoming legible of the word undergoing its own crushing force until it becomes its *thingliness* [*état de chose*]."⁴² For Fédida, Frances Tustin's clinical study of autism makes it possible to connect this *thing-ification* of language and loss of legibility to autistic children's tactile approach to objects as surfaces and "subjective forms" without identity or hierarchy (though not necessarily abject), as attested by their activities of "stroking, brushing, rubbing, smearing, and even by drawing and painting on smooth surfaces."⁴³

Assuming the validity of Fédida's reading, one recalls that the first to have recognized "formless" as a movement or process with a temporal character is no other than Breton, who compared Bataille's approach to a dance before the word "formless" even appeared in print. For this reason, however hostile Bataille might have been toward Breton and his friends in 1929–30, surrealist poetics and its application in the visual arts remain the most important context for making sense of his work in *Documents*, not least because *Critical Dictionary*—the review's most programmatic component where ethnographic objects and facts are turned into rhetorical weapons—directly responded to its precedent in *La Révolution surréaliste*, namely *Glossary* (*Glossaire*) edited by Leiris. To see what is at stake in Bataille's operation of thing-ification and

how it impacts the surrealist figure of the veil and the mask, one must therefore begin with a close look at both dictionaries, both of which proclaim to restore materiality to language by subjecting words to a vivisection.

Noting the affinity between *Critical Dictionary* in *Documents* and *Glossary* in *La Révolution surréaliste*, Denis Hollier suggests that the adoption of this format optimizes the dissection of language, since “the dictionary is already, in itself, a form of discourse that implies a prior sectioning of the field of reference.”⁴⁴ As Leiris writes in the preamble of *Glossary*: “In dissecting the words that we love, with concern for neither etymology nor accepted meaning, we discover their most hidden virtues and the secret ramifications that propagate across all language, channeled by the associations of sounds, of forms and of ideas.”⁴⁵ In Leiris’s case, the words are typically broken down by syllables, which are then rearranged and supplied with additional elements to create a new, more poetic meaning. For instance, by reordering the syllables “glo” and “saire” in *Glossaire*, one obtains the basic elements to create the sentence “I Lock My Footnotes There” (*J’y serre mes gloses*). Given the metaphor of dissection, *Glossary* expectedly includes many words designating anatomical parts: “thighs” (*cuisses*) become “sharpness of naked and smooth scissors” (*acuité des sciseaux nus, lisses*); “entrails” (*entrailles*) are “cave of the body and its thicket” (*l’ancre du corps, et ses broussailles*); “mouth” (*bouche*) the “root of taste, pathway for words and the kiss” (*souche du goût, chemin des mots et du baiser*); and “shoulders” (*épaules*) the “poles of disappeared wings” (*pôles des ailes disparues*).⁴⁶ In some cases, the repetition of the same vowel sounds can produce corporeal images: the “ui” sound in “cuisses” and “acuités” make thighs/scissors feel sharp; the “ou” sound in “broussailles,” “bouche,” and “souche” recalls the depth of the mouth and the belly where entrails are to be found. Importantly, however, the connection between the sound and the image can also be arbitrary. For instance, the lexical “os” (bone) can sound like an interjection expressing surprise: “Oh, is it?” (*Oh! est-ce?*), and the interjection “ô” can turn into the image of “the mouth rounding to receive the communion” (*la bouche s’arrondit pour l’hostie*).⁴⁷ In some cases, the homonym can generate an entirely gratuitous new meaning: *soleil* might sound like *seul oeil*, but the connection between their respective referents—“sun” and “single eye”—is purely gratuitous.⁴⁸

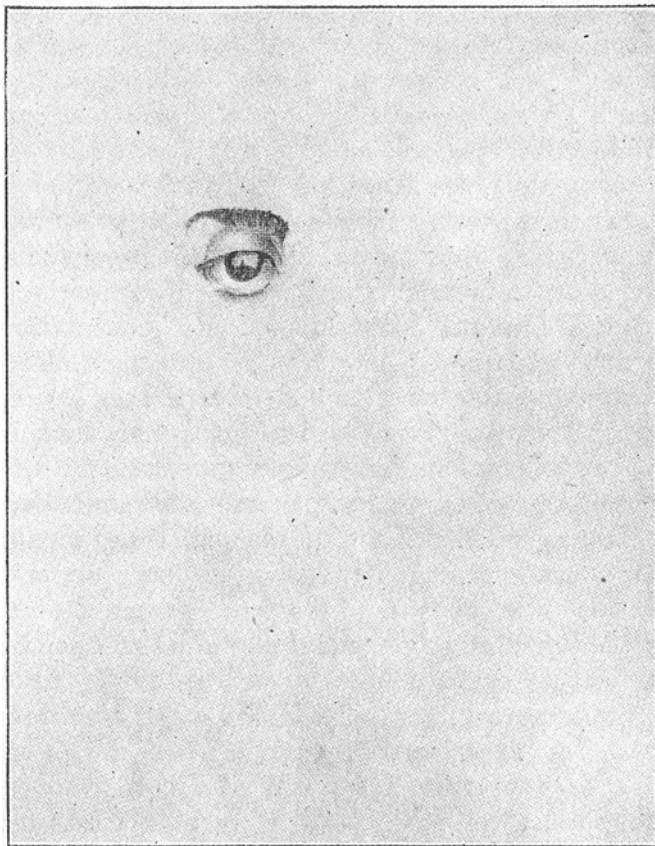
Bataille’s *Critical Dictionary*, however, aspires to a more radical form of materiality. As Hollier remarks, the surrealist *Glossary* “makes the signifier [word] constantly overflow onto the signified [definition] so that what appears in the place appointed for meaning remains completely stuck in the materiality of the word to be defined.”⁴⁹ By contrast, *Critical Dictionary* does not settle for a materiality that would be limited to the word, namely, the sensuous shape and sound of the letter and vocable; instead, it reaches for a “base materialism” that differs from the “senile idealism” of a scientific materialism, consisting instead in “the direct interpretation, excluding all idealism, of raw phenomena.”⁵⁰ Whereas scientific materialism amounts to the hierarchization of “dead matter,” as Bataille writes in the entry “Materialism” for *Critical Dictionary*, his base materialism operates by the opposite

principle, informed by the ancient Gnostics, who considered raw matter as entropic, de-idealizing, and “an *active* principle having its own eternal autonomous existence as darkness . . . and as evil.”⁵¹ To expose this phenomenal world unprocessed (“raw”) by forms and concepts, *Critical Dictionary* does not take words themselves as the support for its operation, as in the language game of *Glossary*, but rather words as analogized to forms and bodies. In Hollier’s words, *Critical Dictionary* is “an analytical and anatomical discourse” that “makes use of the form [of the dictionary] itself for ‘anatomical’ ends: so that it would no longer be merely the result of a prior dissection, but, more precisely, a dissecting tool.”⁵² Consequently, whereas the poetic cuisine of *Glossary* cuts up ordinary words and recombines the parts to create new dishes, as it were, *Critical Dictionary* wants to go further back to the “Slaughterhouse” (“Abattoir” is one of its entries) where words are brought down (*abattus*) in the sense of butchered like animals.

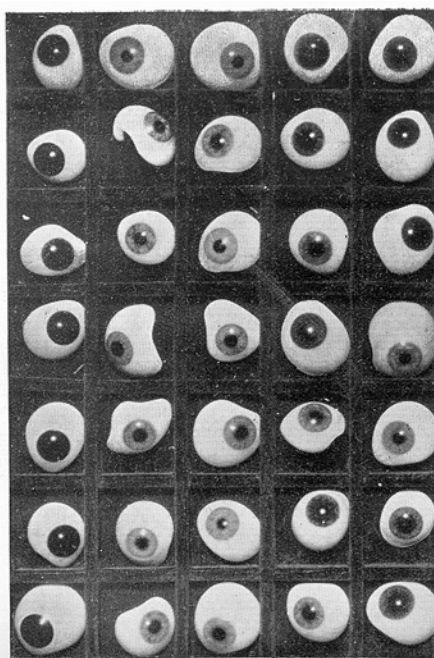
Philosophically, Bataille’s “formless” promotes entropy, yet from the point of view of poetic device, its result is paradoxically more restrictive. As Barthes underlines in his influential essay on Bataille’s pornographic novel *The History of the Eye* (1928), its author uses metaphors in a way distinct from the “law of the surrealist image” adopted by Breton from the poet Pierre Reverdy, whose criterion is that “the more distance and accurate the relations of two realities, the stronger the image.”⁵³ By contrast, the poetic device preferred by Bataille is the metonym, a particular kind of metaphor that depends on substitution and the nonarbitrary contiguity between two realities or terms; it is “much more concerted; it is neither a wild image nor even a free image, for the coincidence of its terms is not aleatory, and the syntagm is limited by a constraint.”⁵⁴ It is easy to see this difference in the various treatment of the eye as a recurrent theme in surrealist publications and in *Documents*. For instance, one recognizes an example of the surrealist image in Georges Bessière’s drawing of Marcel Proust’s single eye, floating like the Cheshire Cat’s grin in the sky in the absence of the face and the body (Figure 1.10). Like Leiris’s word play with “soleil/seul oeil” in *Glossary*, the eye is linked to the sun or a celestial body entirely by accident (sound or position in the picture) instead of a natural or causal relationship. Another example can be found in a montage in *Variétés*, which juxtaposes Ewald Hoinkis’s glass bottles photographed from above with Herbert Bayer’s photograph of a box holding thirty-five individual glass eyes (Figure 1.11). Although neither photographer was formally associated with surrealism, the juxtaposition deploys the device favored by Breton and his friends, which forces the confrontation between two entirely unrelated images that have in common only the fact of being made of glass (indicated by the captions) and presenting repeated circular shapes.

By comparison, the treatment of the same motif in *Documents* reflects a far stronger connection to the theme of enucleation, which Bataille presents as an anthropological fact. In his contribution to the coauthored “Eye” entry for *Critical Dictionary*, he cites various cultural attitudes toward the eye as an object of fear; a Westerner never eats an animal without having its eyes removed; the criminal’s nightmare is to be pursued by a million eyes as in

FIGURE I.IO. Georges Bessière, *Marcel Proust*. *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 2 (January 15, 1925): 25.



Verres
Photo de Ewald Hoinkis



Yeux de verre
Photo de Herbert Bayer

FIGURE I.II. *Variétés* 2, no. 5 (September 15, 1929): after 358. (Left: Ewald Hoinkis, *Bottles*; right: Herbert Bayer, *Glass Eyes*.) Copyright the Estate of Ewald Hoinkis; Copyright 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

FIGURE 1.12. Eyes and hair of a doll. *Documents* 2, no. 6 (1930): 368.



FIGURE 1.13. Doll head. Terra cotta, Brazil. *Documents* 2, no. 6 (1930); 369.



J. J. Grandville's illustrations; the cutting of a woman's eye by a razor in Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* provokes intensely uncanny feelings. (Bataille does not mention the image of a line of clouds cutting across the moon, which precedes the enucleation scene and creates a prototypical surrealist image.) Last, by means of an anecdote about the criminal Eugène Crampon, who allegedly removed his own glass eye before being executed by the guillotine, Bataille connects enucleation with decapitation.⁵⁵ Per the "anatomical" operation of the formless and the constraints of the metonym as analyzed by Barthes, then, the eye is invariably tethered to the matrix of the body whose presence is never far. In the sixth issue of *Documents* in 1930, illustrating the ethnologist Marcel Griaule's entry "Toy" in *Critical Dictionary*, a series of anonymous photographs bring the body even closer to this metonymic eye: a pair of doll's eyes on a bed of black hair, facing two eyeless and hairless Brazilian terra cotta heads on the other page (Figures 1.12, 1.13). The page layout presumes a montage principle, yet the connection between the two sets of images is by no means "wild" (Barthes) like the gratuitous encounter between the eye and the sun, or the eye and the glass bottles. Whereas the "wild" image brings together dissimilar objects, Bataille's objects appear dissimilar but are in fact contiguous. Not only are the eyes, hair, and heads anatomical parts deriving from a presumed body, the montage emphasizes this contiguity by creating a "concerted" illusion that the doll's eyes and hair had been extracted from the terra cotta figures, which now resemble skulls.

In the November 1929 issue of *Documents*, a two-page montage (a format frequently used by the photo-essays in *Variétés*) exemplifies how Bataille defies the gratuity of the surrealist image using the contiguity of the metonym. Showing two of Eli Lotar's photographs of the slaughterhouse of Villette on the left and two stills from Jean Painlevé's oceanographic film, *Crabes et crevettes* (1929) on the right, the two sets of images illustrate Bataille's and Jacques Baron's entries for *Critical Dictionary*, "Slaughterhouse" and "Crustaceans" (Figure 1.14). But Baron's text also reveals a protosurrealist source for the choice of images, namely, the fable by the symbolist writer Alfred Jarry, "The Lobster and the Can of Corned Beef Worn on a Necklace by the Dr. Faustroll."⁵⁶ Bataille does not comment on the wildness of this aleatory image, yet his text "Slaughterhouse" implicitly objects to its condition of possibility, namely, distance, exemplified by bourgeois modernity's hypocritical segregation of the slaughterhouse, "cursed and quarantined like a plague-ridden ship."⁵⁷ As if reflecting Bataille's desire for integration (he cites the Hindu temple as an example of how animal slaughter, when conceived as sacrifice, can be integrated into a place of worship), the photomontage thus seeks to reduce the distance between the industrial meat product and the marine arthropod. Though seeming to deploy opposing photographic techniques (aerial long shot versus closeup), both sets of images visually butcher the animals in question: Lotar shows cows being slaughtered in order to be turned into beef, whereas Painlevé's shots respectively crop the shrimp's head from its body and expose the crab's interlocking organs. There is moreover an aqueous quality to both sets of images that would have looked "soluble" had it not

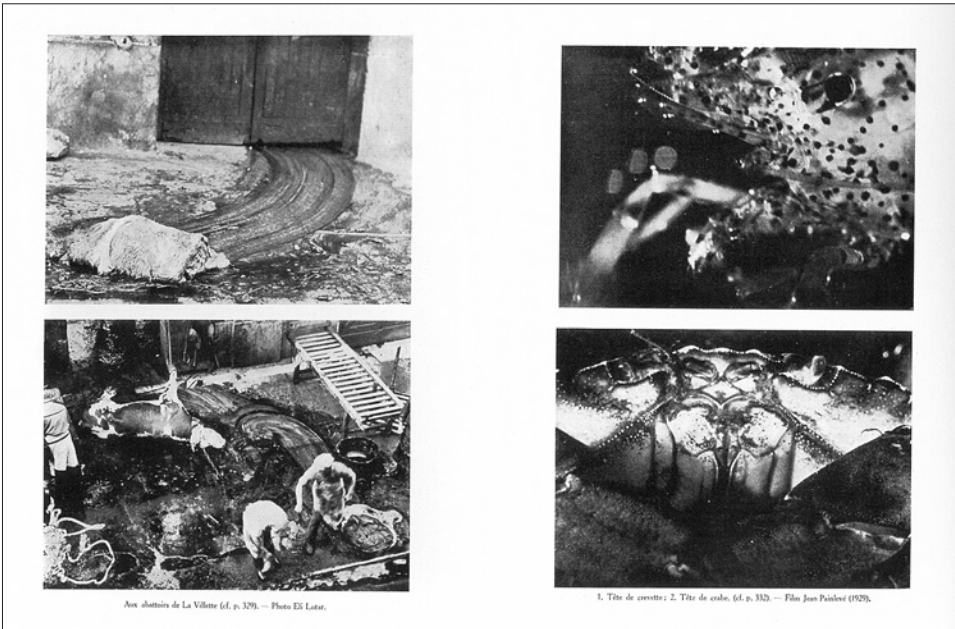


FIGURE 1.14. Photo-essay in *Documents* 1, no. 6 (1929): 330–31. (Left: Eli Lotar, *At the Slaughterhouse of La Villette* (cf. p. 329). — Photo Eli Lotar. Right: Jean Painlevé, 1. Head of shrimp, 2. Head of crab, 1929.) Copyright Archives Jean Painlevé / Les Documents cinématographiques, Paris.

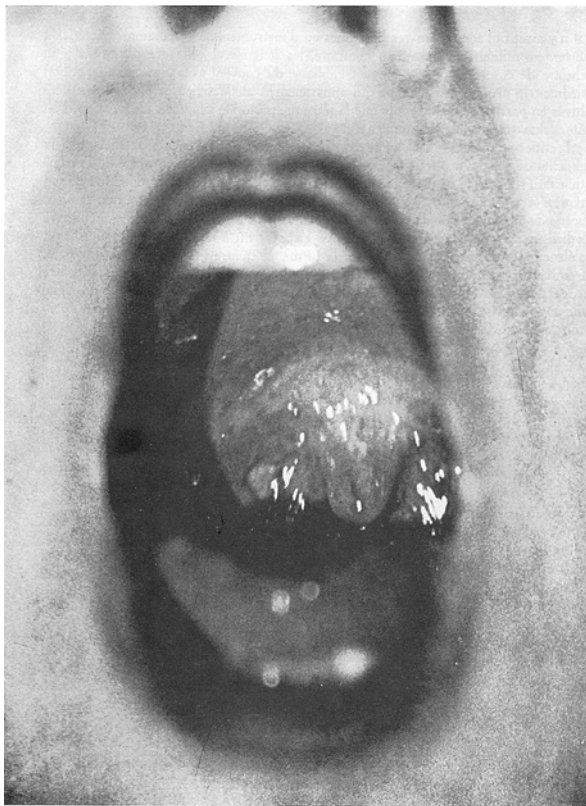
been for the effect of thickness; the blood marking the trace of the carcass looks almost painterly such that it recalls pigment, while the seawater looks gelatinous as a result of the blurry filmic images. This viscosity common to the two sets of images thus dissolves the distinction between solid and liquid, mammal and crustacean, the dead and the living. Operating by means of slaughter but also liquefaction, “formless” now results in a “general contagion of qualities and actions,” to borrow the words of Barthes when characterizing the eroticism of *The History of the Eye*; here, the consanguinity of materials and substances overcomes the incongruity of the surrealist image: “the world becomes disturbed, its properties are no longer divided; to flow, to sob, to urinate, to ejaculate—these form a vacillating meaning.”⁵⁸

In addition to defying the gratuitous surrealist image with the contiguous metonym, the Bataillean formless also undermines the negativity central to mainline surrealist poetics, turning all forms of absence into positive *things*. Exemplified by the *Variétés* montage, where the globular glass eyes are juxtaposed with the equally circular orifices of the glass bottles, this surrealist play with negative and positive forms is equally present in Robert Desnos’s contribution to the “Eye” entry of *Critical Dictionary*, in which the defecting surrealist enumerates words and idioms that utilize the “image of the eye”: for example, those that conceive of the eye as “a cavity, a hole” such as the eyelet (*oeillet*), or the opening and closing movement of the wink (*oeillade*).⁵⁹ This dialectic, however, is distinctly missing from Griaule’s part for the same entry, entitled “Evil Eye,” which evokes ethnographic facts to support a phallic

reading of the eye as an aggressive thing. Calling attention to common expressions such as “piercing eyes” or “eyes like pistols,” Griaule ends by citing an apotropaic use of a bony fish skeleton as amulet in East Africa as evidence that “the phallus . . . plays a considerable role in preventing the evil eye.”⁶⁰

If, in the same text, Griaule also compares the eye to a kind of mouth (for instance, the expression “to devour with one’s eyes”), it is important to note that, in the Bataillean universe, the mouth is far from being the receptive orifice that Leiris had seen in the letter “ô,” which receives the communion wafer in a para-erotic gesture. Associated with taste, speech, and affection in Leiris’s *Glossary*, “mouth” (*bouche*) is redefined by Bataille’s entry in *Critical Dictionary* as debased and dehumanized instead, comparable to “the prow of animals” and “the superior or anterior extremity of the body, the orifice of profound physical impulse.”⁶¹ This animality of the mouth is effectively reinforced by Boiffard’s close-up photograph of a gaping mouth with the face and the body cropped out (Figure 1.15). For Hollier, this image depicts a negative organ that “is not an organ in the fullest sense of the term, but rather a cavity—a hole . . . already an opening up of the organism.”⁶² But a closer look suggests that this cavity is also turned inside out, so that the mouth’s typically hidden parts—saliva, teeth, tongue—protrude as things. At stake is therefore not only a visual vivisection that cuts the mouth out of the body,

FIGURE 1.15. J.-A. Boiffard, “Mouth,” *Document 2*, no. 5 (1930): 298.



... la terreur et la souffrance atroce font de la bouche l'organe des cris déchirants (p. 299). — Photo J. A. Boiffard.

but also an obscene, exhibitionist unveiling that exposes not a female figure per the surrealist imaginary (notwithstanding the painted lips of a presumably female model) but a phallic *member*.

In one of Bataille's most important essays for *Documents*, "The Big Toe," the theme of unveiling comes again to the fore as the author considers various cultural taboos that maintain the concealment of the foot. On the one hand, the foot is outlawed for being filthy, base, and repulsive; the Chinese consider it "incorrect and immoral in general to look at the feet of women"; the Turks "even go to bed in stockings" to avoid showing theirs; and the modern Europeans consider indecent "the simple fact of allowing the shod foot to be seen, jutting out from under a skirt."⁶³ On the other hand, this obsession with the "modest feet" (*pieds pudiques*) turns this repulsive part into a fetish, a metonym for the seductive body; as evidence, Bataille cites the legend of the Count of Villamediana, who committed arson for the sole pleasure of rescuing Queen Elizabeth and caressing her feet. Considering Bataille's anthropological evidence, Barthes in "Outcomes of the Text" (1972)—one of the earliest commentaries on Bataille's *Documents*-related activities—suggests that the big toe constitutes an invitation to "rethink *nudity*" and specifically its ideological function: "As it happens, for us *the nude* is a plastic value, or even erotico-plastic; in other words, *the nude* is always in a position of *figuration* (this is the very example of striptease); closely linked to the ideology of representation, *the nude* is the figure par excellence, the figure of the figure."⁶⁴ This ideology of the figure is what Boiffard presumably undoes in his photographs for Bataille's essay, which executes the same task of "formless" as the anatomical entries in *Critical Dictionary*. Showing the single big toes of various unnamed individuals, the photographs reveal the tabooed part while magnifying its unattractive details such as wrinkles, grains of the nail, even strands of hair (Figure 1.16). If Boiffard uses the same device as "The Mouth" to crop out the rest of the foot and the body, the major difference here is that the toe, having been unveiled per Bataille's text, now takes up the position of the nude while also breaking down its "ideology" (Barthes). Photographed with the nail side down, the toe here loses the possibility of having a pseudo-face; its joints having been made to disappear, it also lacks articulation or shapeliness (what the French might call *taille*). In accordance with Bataille's formulation of "formless," it resembles at once "nothing" and *thingliness* itself; for Barthes, this thing more specifically embodies the seductive-repulsive effect of the *aggrandized dwarf*:

Orteil is the French word for toe, any of them; it derives from *articulus*, little member or limb; i.e., *das Kleines*, the little thing, the infantile phallus. In the expression *le gros orteil* (the big toe), the significance is reinforced: on the one hand, *gros* is repulsive in a way that *grand* is not; and on the other, the diminutive (*articulus*) can also be repulsive (dwarfism is disconcerting): the toe is seductive-repulsive; fascinating as a contradiction: that of the tumescent and miniaturized phallus.⁶⁵

FIGURE 1.16. J.-A. Boiffard, "Big Toe: female, 24 years old." *Documents* 1, no. 6 (1929): 301.



GROS ORTEL. SUJET FEMININ. 24 ANS. — PHOTO. J.-A. BOIFFARD.

In surrealist poetic, the negative striptease is what critiques the ideology of the figure, but Bataille's "formless," at the cost of phallicism, goes farther by making thing-ification the destiny of this critique. The impact of this intervention on the surrealist themes of the veil and the mask is predictable: the intractable and potentially infinite surface of the veil transforms into a thing, like the cowhide rolled up as a package on the ground in Lotar's slaughterhouse; the mask of travesty and of absence in turn becomes the decapitated head or the skull.

This thing-ification of the mask is the subject of Bataille's visually stunning photomontage of ethnographic heads and skulls in the sixth issue of *Documents* from 1930, whose rhetorical character far exceeds its ostensible function as illustration for Ralph von Koenigswald's article on ritual preservation of skulls in Melanesia and parts of South America, "Têtes et crânes" (Figure 1.17).⁶⁶ Counteracting the surrealists' feminine-identified mask of travesty, Bataille presents the decapitated head of the virile male, exemplified by the image of the biblical general from Cranach the Elder's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (the cut-out itself, one might note, enacts the decapitation a second time).⁶⁷ To overcome the negativity of the surrealist death mask, imagined by Breton and his friends as fossils of the living, Bataille presents what he presumably perceives as its more real, material, and *perverse* antitheses (from a Western metropolitan perspective), namely, the Jivaro and Mundrucu Indians' preserved skulls refitted in skin and the New Caledonians' bone-mask made of clay and skull fragments. Whereas the surrealist mask serves to save the subject from self-dissolution and suicide (Kristeva) and incorporates the future-oriented temporality of the veil, the Bataillean mask or skull is the physical remains of the already dead (the following page shows the photograph of an ossuary in Hallstadt, Austria), with no possibility of dialecticization. Somewhat later, in a short and posthumous text entitled "Le masque" (1934), Bataille explicitly opposes this mask of death to

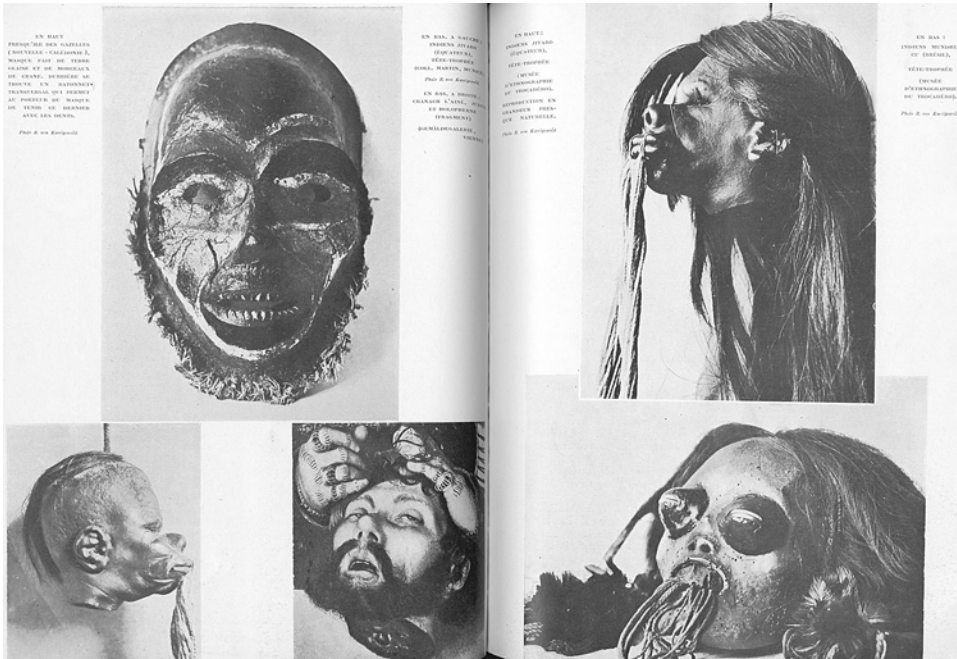


FIGURE 1.17. *Documents* 2, no. 6 (1930): 356–57.

the living face, “the reassuring stability of the established order on the bright surface of the ground between men.”⁶⁸ In contradistinction to the clarity of the face, his mask is “chaos becoming flesh,” by which Bataille does not mean the mutability of the soluble surrealist subject, but rather “the threat of sudden changes, unforeseen and intolerable like death,” leading to the irreversible material decay of the *caput mortuum* (dead head).⁶⁹

Making effective rhetorical use of ethnographic materials, Bataille’s photo-montage subverts the scientific agenda of professional ethnology in service of his dissident version of surrealism, but not without a cost: the cultural context of the anthropological objects being thus rhetoricized, a large number of which have non-European origins, is often suppressed or distorted. In his later recollection, Leiris indicates that this subsumption of ethnographic materials into Bataille’s program was effectively the heart of the *Documents* project. “Under Bataille’s direction,” what would otherwise be “mere objects of study” became “irritating, incongruous, even troubling,” creating “a strange amalgam whose composition included many elements that were nonsensical, if only because of their proximity to certain texts that continued to reflect a most austere scientific approach.”⁷⁰ Paying generous tribute to Bataille and his former *Documents* colleagues, Leiris here glosses over his own contributions to the review, which attest to consistent efforts in resolving the tension between Bataille’s radically anticultural primitivism and the ethnologists’ contextualizing presentation of conspicuously culturalized artifacts and practices. It is therefore in Leiris’s *Documents* texts, I will show in the next section, that one finds the outline of an anthropological aesthetics

that considerably broadens the definition of what might be considered aesthetic form, and one that also incorporates the influences of both Breton and Bataille.

Mask, Skin, Fetish: Leiris's Anthropological Aesthetics

If, as Jean Jamin has pointed out, the circumstantial convergence between one aspect of surrealism and professional ethnology in this period does not overcome the incommensurability between the two enterprises, Leiris's contribution to the coauthored entry "Métamorphose" (Metamorphosis) for *Critical Dictionary* can be read in terms of an effort to resolve this tension. While all three authors—Bataille, Leiris, Griaule—thematize animal transformation in their portions of the entry, Bataille's "Animaux sauvages" (Wild animals) and Griaule's "Jeux abyssins" (Abyssinian games) are the most conspicuously different. For Bataille, metamorphosis is equated with the return of a repressed animal instinct, "a violent need" that compels a Western bourgeois man "in an apartment" to get on all fours and "eat dog food" in front of company.⁷¹ By contrast, in the examples provided by Griaule, metamorphosis is a cultural practice that belongs to what Mauss (one-time contributor to *Documents*) calls "techniques of the body."⁷² In the photographs taken by the ethnologist, an Ethiopian man demonstrates how to mimic a hyena or a guinea fowl by artfully manipulating the same piece of linen cloth, which can be worn as a headdress and twisted to resemble the hyena's ears, or alternatively as a full-body costume with a stick beneath, held between two hands to resemble the fowl's pecking beak (Figure 1.18).⁷³ Between Bataille's fantasy of uncivilized

FIGURE 1.18. Abyssinian game of animal mimicry (guinea fowl) photographed by Marcel Griaule. *Documents* 1, no. 6 (1929): 333.



animality and Griaule's documentation of animal mimicry as techniques, one finds Leiris's contribution "Hors de soi" (Out of oneself), which considers metamorphosis as both a drive and an art. On the one hand, Leiris concedes with Bataille that the need of human beings to "get out of their skin" and "turn into one of the various objects surrounding them: table, chair, animal, tree trunk, a sheet of paper" may occur by means of an "explosive and violent paroxysm."⁷⁴ On the other hand, he also reveals his affinity with Griaule's culturalist perspective by referencing props and techniques of disguise: "material ingredients" or "magical artifices that would make it possible to really achieve this metamorphosis, even if for a brief moment."⁷⁵

Apart from bridging the agendas of Bataillean surrealism and ethnology, another form of synthesis is at work in Leiris's *Documents* texts. As the review's second most important contributor (with a total of thirty-four texts, including entries of *Critical Dictionary* and reviews, outnumbering the twenty-three by the nominal coeditor Carl Einstein and second only to Bataille's thirty-seven), Leiris was nevertheless a former surrealist profoundly indebted to Breton; consequently, he was well positioned to reconcile the two leading figures' sensibilities and approaches by means of an intermediary surrealism that locates the subject between psychic solubility and physical metamorphosis. This synthesis may be seen as prefigured by a minor but revealing biographical anecdote: Around 1924–25, when Leiris had just joined the surrealist movement while maintaining his friendship with Bataille, he was in the habit of "powder[ing] his face completely, using something as white as talc," as an older Bataille would recall.⁷⁶ In his autobiographical book of essays, *Manhood* (1939), Leiris explains his own eccentric practice as prompted in part by frequent razor burns, in part by the need to solidify a fragile adolescent psyche:

I had got into the habit of powdering my face (and this since I was fifteen), as if I were trying to conceal it under a mask and afford my person an impassivity like that of plaster. This corresponded to a symbolic attempt at mineralization, a defense-reaction against my inner weakness and the collapse by which I felt myself threatened; I longed for some kind of armor, seeking to achieve in my eternal *persona* the same idea of stiffness and rigidity which I pursued poetically.⁷⁷

For the adolescent boy suffering on the one hand from skin problems (a banal version of Bataille's "chaos becoming flesh") and on the other hand from the "shattering" (*pulvérisation*) of the self that Kristeva identifies in Breton's *Soluble Fish*, the talc mask effectively creates a face-shield that restores virility physically and psychically. Some might even see this device as "autoethnographic" *evidence* for the therapeutic effectiveness of the mask, which the adult Leiris in his capacity as professional ethnographer will again witness in the Ethiopian practice of possession (see chapter 4). At the same time, talc's powdery texture remains materially analogous to psychic pulverization;

porous and liquid-like, the mask it forms functions like a second skin or *sur-face*, recalling Bataille's aesthetic of contiguity but also the surrealists' veil-like death mask.

Leiris, to be sure, is not the only *Documents* surrealist seeking to synthesize surrealism and Bataille vis-à-vis the figure of the mask. In his prose poem "Aeschylus, Carnival and the Civilized" (1930), Georges Limbour vacillates between the Bataillean and surrealist concepts of the mask, creating virtually a surrealist image by emphasizing their incongruity. In the papier-mâché carnival masks hanging in the window of a grocery shop, a little girl recognizes "faces of bleeding meat [that] defied the foul and florid metamorphoses of death" and on which "flies wandered about busy laying their eggs"; these are "boiled scabs" that represent "death masks of the neighborhood's elders . . . disinfected, embalmed, and unscrewed from their petrified windpipes."⁷⁸ But while this introduction reflects the "lyricism" of corruption that Breton recognizes as Bataillean, the poetic register of the text changes abruptly to one of surrealist enchantment when the narrator tries on one of the masks following the little girl's example: "suddenly, the quite singular heat . . . filled my head with a thousand and one memories, and gave me the impression of entering a room in which I had once lived, close to me ever since, and in which I rediscovered the perfume of painted flowers that I had once inhaled every morning."⁷⁹ This disconcerting switch from the base to the marvelous, from the foul to the aromatic, and from the aging to the infantile at the beginning of Limbour's text eventually leads to another set of contrast at the end, that between the tragic masks of the ancient Greeks and the modern gas masks used in World War I. Under Bataille's macabre influence (the montage of masks and heads would appear shortly after), both sets of objects end up representing death for Limbour. The tragic mask is the face when caught in "the supreme spasm of the passions," "descended into the hell of its expression . . . stranded like a ship in frozen ice, and which, even in sleep retains its appalling, twisted torment."⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the gas masks—"pigheads that all look alike"—are not protective gear but chemical weapons; emitting not aromas but toxins, they are the very antithesis of the little girl's enchanted carnival mask: "[T]hey sting the eyes and strangle the throat; they draw tears and fits of coughing . . . they emit terrible vapors next to which the sulphurous emanations of certain quarters of hell are no more troublesome than the flame of a kitchen match."⁸¹

In Limbour's *Documents* essay, the transformation of the enchanted carnival mask of childhood into a Bataillean death mask or more precisely *killing* mask operates figuratively, hence the not wholly successful representation thereof by Boiffard's comic photographs of a bourgeois man wearing a fair-ground mask.⁸² By contrast, in Leiris's "The 'Caput Mortuum' or the Alchemist's Wife," a real artifact—the American traveler and occultist William B. Seabrook's leather mask—much more effectively *perverts* the surrealist death mask on the level of plasticity (Figure 1.19).⁸³ If Limbour imagines the gas mask as suffocating, Leiris's text rather states and elaborates on the similarly asphyxiating function of this sadomasochist prop as a fact, emphasizing not



FIGURE 1.19. Leather mask invented and photographed by W. B. Seabrook. *Documents* 2, no. 8 (1930): 24.

only the suffering of the one suffocated but the “satanic joy” of her partner, seeing that “she is suffering under the leather, that she is upset and mortified (which must satisfy our desire for power and our fundamental cruelty), her head—the sign of her individuality and intelligence—is mocked and denied.”⁸⁴ In contradistinction to the veil and the mask in surrealist art, a device that typically represents desire and the reciprocal identification of the (male) lover with (female) beloved, Seabrook’s mask exaggerates the differential between a hypervirile subject who is excited by domination and a radically subdued object.

Whereas the idealized feminine figure in surrealist art is loosely veiled (Duchamp’s *Bride and Breton’s* veiled widow) and “hidden” (Man Ray’s *Enigma*, Magritte’s *Hidden Woman*), the woman here is not only obscured but also entrapped by the bracing grip of a tightened veil, as it were, and no longer intractable but becoming a *thing*. Evoking the obscure alchemical term *caput mortuum*, meaning inactive or “dead” precipitates, Leiris notes that the philosopher Hegel had used this term in his *Logic* as a metaphor for what goes beyond the limit of representation or “the *thing-in-itself*,” which

Hegel characterizes as “abstract,” “empty” and “the *negative* of representation.”⁸⁵ Having in mind no doubt the enormous significance of Hegel’s dialectic for Breton, Leiris now reappropriates this term in relation to Bataille’s thing-ification; the negative work of abstraction is not idealist anymore but refers to the physical fact of making the woman “no longer a matter of a specific person, but of a woman in general,” “unrecognizable, more schematic,” “at once more veracious and more ungraspable . . . a sort of obscure *thing in itself*.”⁸⁶ The *thing* here is proximate to the skull (*caput mortuum* means literally “dead head”), but insofar as it also takes the place of the foot (Leiris points out that leather is “a material from which boots and whips are made”), it is also the phantom image of the big toe and therefore the phallic nude, whose body under taut leather “impresses itself with an increased intensity” in a way that recalls tumescence.⁸⁷ Finally, Seabrook’s mask provides Leiris with the opportunity to reinterpret the surrealist concept of love through the lens of Bataillean animality. The erotic phenomenon here is no longer the projective identification of subjects typically found in surrealist imaginary, but a “natural and bestial process” that annihilates the very possibility of recognizing subjectivity in the object of desire: “Love thus reduced . . . to a natural and bestial process by the fact that the brain is symbolically obliterated due to this mask”; “thanks to this instrument, this woman between our hands is now simply nature itself, molded by blind laws, without soul or personality.”⁸⁸

Identifying himself provisionally with Bataille’s radical antihumanism, Leiris in his meditation on Seabrook’s sadomasochist mask runs the risk of the abjection of the other, which, though rarely remarked on by art theorists and historians, has not escaped the notice of scholars concerned with the ethics of transgression and limit-experience in Bataillean thought.⁸⁹ Yet it is worth pointing out that, apart from Seabrook’s mask, Leiris also mentions other objects and practices in “The ‘Caput Mortuum’ or the Alchemist’s Wife” in ways that continue his earlier discussion of metamorphosis as corporeal technique:

From the simplest finery, the taste in dress or for uniforms, to totemic disguises or tattoos and paintings, by way of theatre costumes and masks, carnival fancy dress, clowns’ rags, women’s make-up and the penitent’s cagoule . . . barely having become conscious of its skin, [humanity] most urgently needed to change it, throwing itself head first into an exciting metamorphosis which allowed it to free itself from its narrow limits as it dreamt of another skin.⁹⁰

Pivoting now away from Bataille and toward an anthropological consideration of aesthetic and expressive practices, Leiris assimilates costumes and cosmetics into the category of the mask, suggesting that they commonly reflect the human need for a second, artificial skin beyond the biological one as the means to transform the body and the psyche. In another of his *Documents* essays, “Man and His Insides” (1930), he more explicitly counteracts

the naturalism implied in Bataille's thought, extolling instead "the primitive who has his body tattooed with signs," "a person whose skin becomes an arsenal of cicatrices, swellings, scarifications, burns," and the user of "modern cosmetics [such as] rouges, powders, dyes, perfumes," who defies the body's natural decay by "replac[ing] the face . . . by a kind of mask that is fixed and separate from time, as attractive as the most gracious of all statues but as sacrosanct as an idol."⁹¹

Seeing the biological skin less as an organ than as aesthetic surface or support, Leiris furthermore characterizes it as porous and therefore continuous with the interior of the body. Commenting on the illustrations for the physician Amé Bourdon's *Nouvelles tables anatomiques* (1678) in "Man and His Insides," Leiris notes that the male model is displaying parts of the body, "holding either a head under his arm or an ear between his thumb and index finger"⁹² (Figure 1.20). But whereas this masculine body is identified with body *parts* that can be dismembered in an anatomical dissection, the body of his female counterpart is structured in terms of *layers* that can be

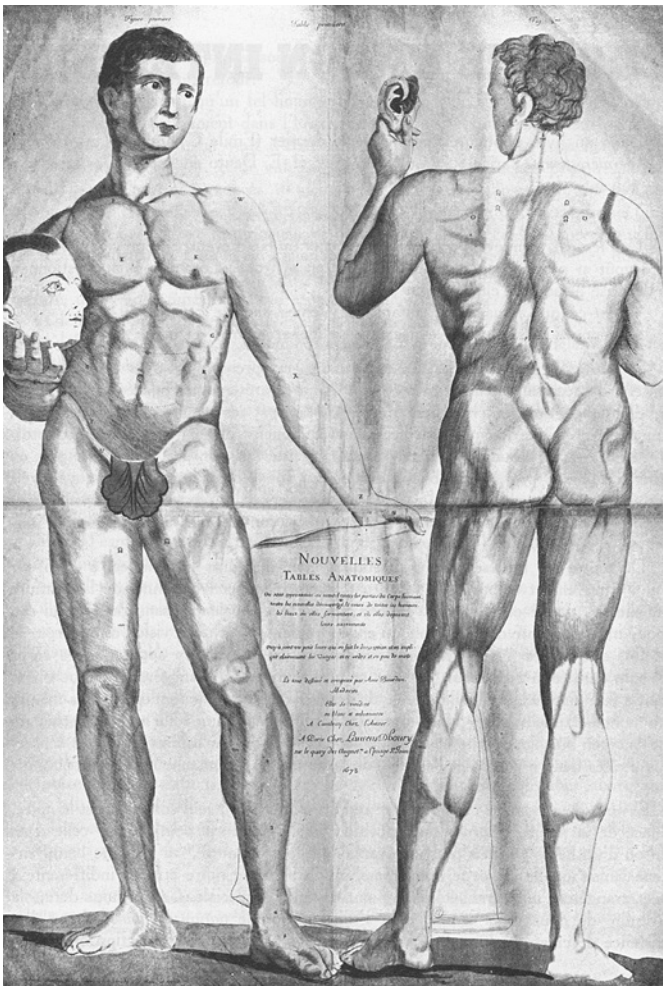


FIGURE 1.20. Amé Bourdon, *Nouvelles tables anatomiques*, 1678. *Documents* 2, no. 5 (1930): 262.

successively stripped (Figure 1.21). Evidently more fascinated by this image of transparency than that of dissection, Leiris describes this quasi-mythic,

half-flayed woman standing before half a nervous system, her head open like a Minerva, her hair tumbling down, while an abundant circulation of vapors flows between her mouth and feet and a multitude of drops of sweat beads almost the entire surface of her naked skin, barely distinct from the tears that spring from her eyes.⁹³

It probably needs no mention that, in the context of surrealism in 1929–30, this female model in Bourdon's book of anatomy can only serve as the double image of the flayed but still dancing girl in Allais's tale, which Breton had used against Bataille in the vitriolic passage of the *Second Manifesto*. It would be probably going too far to see Leiris as taking sides on this debate (his friendship with Bataille and his indebtedness to Breton were equally significant), yet his text reveals an unmistakable affinity with Breton's notion of an infinite aesthetic form impervious to the violent action of the "formless." With his emphasis on the woman's body as emitting vapors, sweat, and tears, Leiris conjures up a physiological image of surrealist solubility whose intractability would have resisted any dissection. Breathing and permeable, the skin of this liquid woman is the very antithesis of Seabrook's suffocating leather mask; its millions of invisible ducts also differ from the single orifice represented by Boiffard's mouth, letting the inside out not through the protrusion of a phallic member (the tongue) but by the discrete transpiration of "a multitude of drops." The inside and outside are therefore *communicating* for Leiris, as consistent with his Bretonian conception of aesthetic form as extending even beneath the skin to the "nasty things" inside the body.⁹⁴ If he concedes with Bataille that bodily parts and organs can be chaotic matter, as attested by his epigraph of a woman fainting at the sight of animal organs at the butcher's stall, he ultimately attributes this base conception of the body to a puritanism: "Only puritans . . . see the body as nothing more than crude matter [*matière grossière*], a contemptible magma of viscera, and not the mysterious theater in which all exchanges take place . . . between what is inside and what is outside."⁹⁵ Instead of butchering form, the figurative flaying of this model serves to reveal *more forms* in the body's intricate organs, which perform vital functions but are also aesthetically *performative*. If not quite dancing like Allais's stripper, the body's insides still contain the "most intimate mystery, along with its secret places and the subterranean reactions for which it is the theater, accompanied . . . by everything that confers on it the magical value of a scaled-down universe."⁹⁶

As will be seen in the last chapter, Leiris would soon encounter a real example of this aestheticized, performative viscera in the context of sacrificial ceremonies related to the Ethiopian possession cult *zar*. But in advance of his departure to Africa in 1931, his *Documents* writings had already established an anthropological-aesthetic approach to cultural forms as responsive

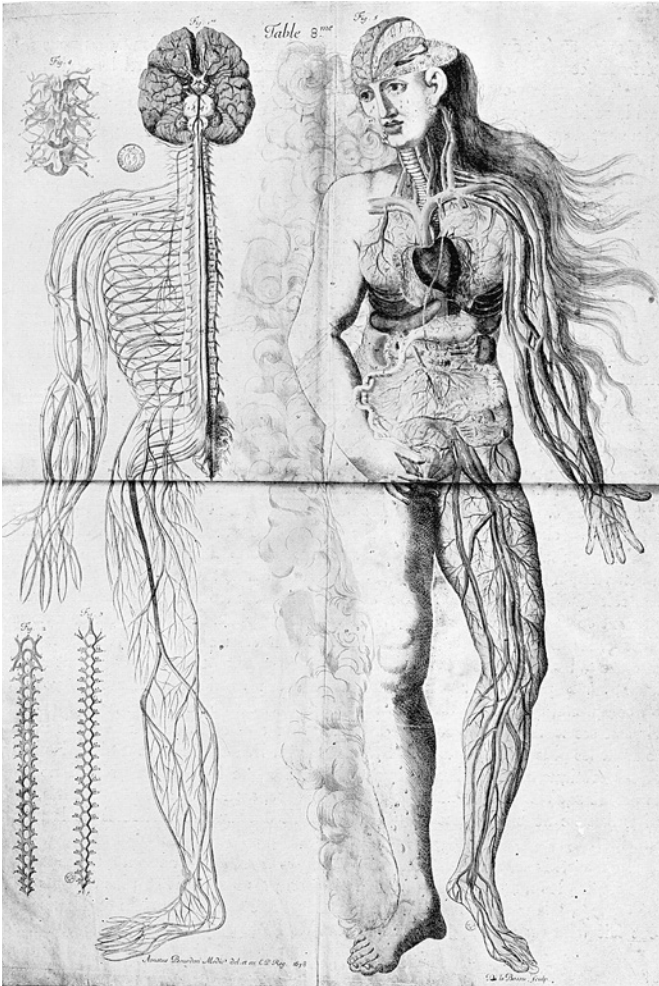


FIGURE 1.21. Amé Bourdon, *Nouvelles tables anatomiques*, 1678. *Documents* 2, no. 5 (1930): 263.

to psychic needs, resulting in the transformation of European-made art into “fetishes” coextensive with less rarefied objects and practices. As Jack J. Spector has suggested, the interwar surrealists’ rhetorical use of the concept of fetish served in great part as a critique of commodity fetishism, specifically “the fetish-character of art in a bourgeois society . . . absorbed into the marketplace of appreciated modern art.”⁹⁷ But the same discourse must also be read in terms of a generalization of the ethnographic framework to European culture, as attested by the frequent inclusion of European “fetishes” in *Documents* as well as in the concurrent review *Variétés*. Based in Brussels, the latter regularly featured “popular curiosities” that primitivize the so-called Western culture by means of its vernacular objects: paperweights, snow globes (including one made by Man Ray), Passion bottles, decorated breads, carnival and theatrical masks, marionettes, storefront mannequins, outsider art (e.g., the postman Ferdinand Cheval’s Ideal Palace), and asylum art (e.g., from the collection of the German psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn). The special issue devoted to “Surrealism in 1929” even features a photo-essay entitled

“Fetishes,” which juxtaposes an eighteenth-century European automaton with a Northwest Coast Amerindian totem in order to make this imprecise term—historically projected upon African objects that early modern European traders found illegible—applicable to a wide range of European objects taken out of their cultural contexts.⁹⁸ As *Variétés*’ rival, *Documents* features similar objects but more programmatically, favoring in particular the photographic closeup that accentuates the objects’ sensuous surface: for instance, the metallic luminosity of the Golden Madonna of Essen (Germany) and the aqueous figures in the Passion bottles from Liesse (northern France).⁹⁹

In this interwar context, then, Leiris’s *Documents* essay on the sculptor Alberto Giacometti represents “a striking conception of the sculptural object seen within a proto-ethnographic framework,” as noted by Julia Kelly.¹⁰⁰ Likely informed by Einstein’s “ethnological study” of the painter André Masson in an earlier issue (no. 2, 1929), Leiris must also have in mind the paradoxical effect of arrested liquid emanated by the Christian fetishes.¹⁰¹ Reading the Passion bottle in Bataille’s terms, Didi-Huberman has described its figures as “formless and grotesque aggregates,” yet the same objects can also be read as *hardened* solubility, a modification of Breton’s aqueous imaginary that Leiris identifies in Giacometti’s *Man and Woman*, *Reclining Woman*, *Three Figures Outdoors*, and *Gazing Head*.¹⁰² Considering these recent works by the sculptor, Leiris sees them as responding to an affective, “true fetishism” distinct from the commodity fetishism promoted by capitalism; instead, they represent “our love for ourselves, projected out from within and bearing a solid carapace that traps it between the limits of a precise thing and situates it . . . in the vast unknown room we call space.”¹⁰³ No longer the collective object of taboo that cannot satisfy the individual subject without transgression (Bataille’s foot or toe), the fetish conceived by Leiris is back to being the desiring subject’s self projected psychically onto an external object. This fetish therefore has less affinity with Bataille’s partial bodies than with the multisensorial veil in *Soluble Fish* and other vestimentary objects, which in Breton’s words respond to “human fetishism,” motivating one “to try on the white helmet, to caress the fur bonnet.”¹⁰⁴ While the “solid carapace” seems to belong with the armor and the helmet in the category of the rigid mask, Leiris undermines its phallicism by emphasizing the open or negative forms found in Giacometti’s sculptures, which are either “hollow like spatulas or hollowed out fruits” or “pierced” so that “the air moves through them,” “a mobile latticework placed between inside and out, sieves gnawed by the wind.”¹⁰⁵ The carapace of the fetish, in short, turns out to be as porous as the talc mask or the transpiring skin; what is more, its apparent solidity is contingent and modeled specifically on powdery substances, or solids with a liquid quality. Leiris thus compares Giacometti’s figures to “creatures we love . . . moulded in the fleeting and acid-less [*sans aigreur*] salt of the snow, the dust that comes from the fingernails as they are being polished—impalpable ashes a lover would keep like a relic—the marvelous salt so many ancient seekers thought they could gather from the earth’s womb.”¹⁰⁶

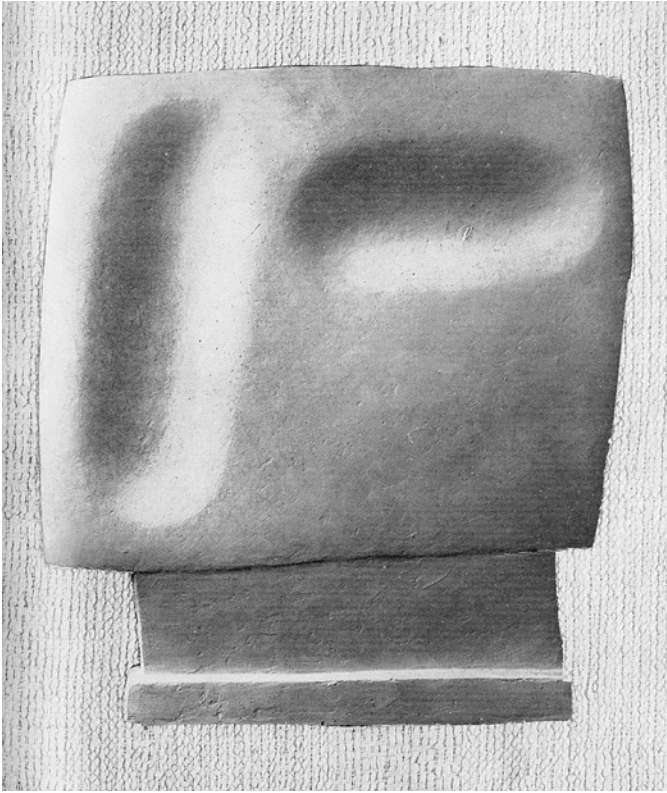


FIGURE 1.22. Giacometti, *Gazing Head*, 1928. *Documents* 1, no. 4 (1929): 211. Copyright Succession Alberto Giacometti / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY 2024.

While dust and ashes are associated with mortality and death, snow and salt are more neutral natural substances that have in common the fact of being easily soluble. This solubility underlies the melancholy in some of Giacometti's objects; for example, *Gazing Head* materializes affective fetishism through what Leiris describes as a process of "petrification" but ultimately remains negative in its failure to entrap its gradually dissolving object, an imperfect square recalling a block of ice melting to become a blade¹⁰⁷ (Figure 1.22). With the eyes and the nose disappearing into two shallow oval indentations, the anthropomorphic face loses its orientation; not only is the viewer unable to catch its gaze, it is as if the viewer's gaze itself, like warm hands, is causing the icy object to melt by contact. But if this negativity provokes anxiety on the part of the viewer, the unexpectedly exalted tone with which Leiris ends his essay suggests that the fetish's imminent dissolution simultaneously makes possible its reassimilation into the natural world; the body of the beloved therefore does not as much disappear as it persists in another form. Per Leiris's conception of metamorphosis as the passage between gas and liquid, liquid and solid, the lost fetish in turn becomes

the saltiness of waves and stars . . . then the salt of tears, tears of laughter, despair or madness, gentle and vaguely malicious tears, grotesque tears, or heavy tears full of the salt of bones and frozen

carcasses, always drops of water, falling tirelessly, sometimes drilling a dazzling well into the silent rock of existence, concrete drops of water like the salt which will always inflame our hunger, sea salt, bitter salt, the salt of cracking phalanx bones, the salt of teeth, the salt of sweat, the salt of looks.¹⁰⁸

Salt, as the invariable term in this passage, is depicted as passing easily between liquid and solid states. Inorganic yet present in organic matter, it is the link between animal bodies (bones, carcasses, teeth, tears, sweat) and natural elements (waves, stars, sea, rock), connecting them in an operation that recalls Bataillean contiguity but without its transgressive dimension; different entities here exchange properties not due to the chaos of the slaughterhouse but thanks to their physical interconnectedness in the natural world and their predisposition to the poetics of metamorphosis as the change of state. Finally, with the image of erosion (“drops of water, falling tirelessly” end by “drilling” into a “silent rock”), Leiris suggests that the soft and feminine-identified liquid can in fact overpower, even penetrate the hard and phallic solid; with time, touching can end up *altering*.

Leiris's text on Giacometti thus not only exemplifies the ethnological turn of surrealist art criticism at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s; it also anticipates theoretical issues of major concern for 1930s surrealism, such as the revision of automatism that takes the natural world as one of its paradigms, and the reconceptualization of passivity as a covert form of agency. In the next chapter, I will address in greater detail how the concepts of interwar ethnology impacted surrealist art theory in the early 1930s to varying degrees, both in the circles of Breton and of Bataille. In this period when Leiris was discovering his new path as a professional ethnographer under the fraught conditions of colonialism, it would be up to the Paris-based surrealists and their allies to align surrealism's aesthetic project with the movement's anticolonial activism, specifically vis-à-vis a “primitive reason” that defies the modern denigration of noninstrumental, poetic thought.

Surrealism's Primitive Reason

Magic, Alteration, Coevalness

For its significant inclusion of ethnographic and archaeological materials as well as contributions by researchers in these areas, Georges Bataille's *Documents* remains the most well-documented example of the historical intersection between surrealism and the professional discipline of ethnology. Beyond the parameters of this important review, the impact of ethnology on the movement's aesthetic and theoretical output was more diffused, more difficult to trace, yet no less significant. In the interwar period, the surrealists around André Breton indeed kept professional ethnology at arms' length, publicly rejecting its prominent representative Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in a prescriptive reading list in 1931 for mainly political reasons: The prolific author's various books on the "prelogism" of Indigenous populations had come to be instrumentalized as justification for French colonialization of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.¹ Yet as Jean-Claude Blachère has shown, several surrealists (for instance Michel Leiris and Philippe Soupault) were readers of Lévy-Bruhl before this necessary renunciation.² Many of the surrealists' interwar interlocutors (for example, René Daumal and Jean Paulhan) had more than passive interest in debates in contemporary ethnology, as will be seen below. However mistrustful Breton and some of his friends might be of the positivist sciences, they could not avoid reading texts in anthropology and comparative religion due to their interest in Oceanic and Amerindian art as well as anthropological phenomena such as alchemy, magic, and myth.³ It is easier to document Breton's engagement with ethnology in the wartime and postwar period, beginning with the important friendship he forged with Claude Lévi-Strauss while in exile in the United States in the early 1940s.⁴ In 1953, Breton accepted to write a historical anthropology of "magical art" as a volume in Marcel Brion's five-volume series, *Formes de l'art*, with the help of Gérard Legrand. The resulting work, *L'Art magique* (1957), contains not only copious references to ethnological and sociological texts but also a survey soliciting learned opinions about the contemporary relevance of magic, whose respondents include ethnologists and other intellectuals informed by an ethnographic perspective.⁵

A late work by Breton, *L'Art magique* falls outside of the interwar period with which this book is primarily concerned, yet the ethnologists' responses to Breton's survey deserve a brief commentary for revealing the persistently ambivalent relationship between a discipline focused on the systematic study

of cultures and surrealism as a movement in the arts. Of the five questions in Breton's survey, the last three are of a somewhat personal nature whereas the first two pertain to the relationship between art and magic, specifically (1) whether art as the "magic of fiction" may be said to take the place of the "fiction of magic" in modern society, and (2) whether magic may be said to stem from human desires left unsatisfied by science and religion. Tellingly, the ethnologists and like-minded respondents (including former surrealists-at-large like Bataille and Roger Caillois) overwhelmingly answered the first question in the negative, being in virtual agreement that a rigorous definition of magic as operational rather than cognitive (Lévi-Strauss), collective rather than subjective and individual (Viviana Pâques, Éveline Lot-Falck), efficacious rather than fictional for the practitioner (Jean Guiart, Robert Jaulin, Bataille, Caillois) would necessarily oppose it to the modern notion of art. On one level, these negative responses seem to confirm the illusoriness of a possible rapprochement between the surrealist and the ethnological perspective, as Jean Jamin had warned.⁶ On another level, it is worth noting that, in their eagerness to distinguish magic from art, the ethnologists were responding to a narrow definition of the latter as fiction, as advanced by Jérôme-Antoine Rony in the book Breton cites, *La Magie* (1950). There are thus reasons to suspect that their answers might have been different had Breton appealed to a surrealist definition of art as modeled on *poetry*, which, as even Lévi-Strauss would recognize, consists not in make-believe but the manifestation of unconscious ideas, and the objectification of the subjective.⁷

If magic is an area where surrealism and ethnology presented intellectual affinities already in the interwar period, I will argue in this chapter that this concept served not only as a theme in surrealist art and writings, as has been well documented, but also as the shorthand for a creative method that forgoes the originality of the individual artist.⁸ Considering texts by Breton and Louis Aragon in light of ethnologists Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert's functionalist theory of magic, I will highlight these authors' common understanding of magic as surpassing and dispensing with technique in the realm of making. The surrealists' magical paradigm for art making was nevertheless a provocative one: A close reading of an exchange between Aragon and the critic Carl Einstein in 1930 shows that it encountered resistance even in the period's avant-garde circle, known for undergoing an "ethnological turn." The latter tendency, which consists in making ethnological theories productive for aesthetics, is for Klaus Kiefer characteristic of Einstein's art critical writings for Bataille's *Documents*; it is also shared by the surrealists.⁹ I will thus put the surrealist theory of art-as-magic in dialogue with the primitivisms of Einstein and of Bataille, which, though rhetorically alike, ultimately engage contemporary ethnology for divergent agendas.

But for Breton, his friends, and their allies in the French-occupied territories, the ethnological turn functioned simultaneously as a moral-political stance. Specifically, their claim to the *universality* of magic as integrated thought rather than a retrogressive practice particular to the so-called irrational, "prelogical" cultures directly contested the narrative of progress that

justified European colonialism and imperialism. Reading surrealist aesthetic theory in light of the ethnologist Olivier Leroy's *Primitive Reason* (1927), a refutation of Lévy-Bruhl that began to circulate in the surrealist circle in the early 1930s, I will argue that the concept of magic as synonymous with poetry made it possible for the politically engaged surrealists to theorize a "coevalness" of the primitive and the so-called civilized, to borrow from Johannes Fabian's later formulation, and to relegate the so-called modern, bourgeois civilization to the position of the particular against a universal-primitive paradigm of art and poetry.¹⁰ If this project is enriched by the interventions of Bataille and Einstein, I will argue that it is the visual artists of the group, using methods similar to those documented by interwar ethnography, who ultimately overcome comparable dichotomies such as those between the transgressive and the disciplined, and the natural and the mechanical.

The Surrealists and the Ethnologists on Magic: From Demanualization to Universality

In 1930, the poet and writer Aragon helped to introduce a small exhibition of surrealist art at the Galerie Goemans in Paris by means of a landmark essay. Published in the eponymous exhibition catalogue, "Challenge to Painting" praises the recent work of Max Ernst, Hans Arp, Man Ray, Yves Tanguy, Joan Miró, Salvador Dalí, and René Magritte, whose common deployment of the method of collage for Aragon anticipates the imminent downfall of traditional painting. If Dada artists like Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp had set the precedent by signing common objects not of their own making (urinal, electric lamp, ink blot), the surrealists are now following suit, similarly appropriating readymade objects rather than making art from scratch: "All the painters who can be called surrealists have used collage."¹¹ Welcoming this development, Aragon sees it as inaugurating a new era where art making would no longer require the artist's hand:

One can imagine a time when the painters who no longer mix their own colors will find it infantile and unworthy to apply the paint themselves and will no longer consider the personal touch, which today still constitutes the value of their canvases, to possess anything more than the documentary interest of a manuscript or autograph. One can imagine a time when painters will no longer even have their color applied by others and will no longer draw. Collage offers us a foretaste of this time.¹²

On the surface, what Aragon articulates in "Challenge to Painting" is nothing other than what the Marxist art theorist John Roberts would describe as the "post-artisanal conditions" of art. In his analysis of this *demanualization* in art in relation to the general shift away from artisanal modes of production under industrial capitalism, Roberts ultimately refrains from reducing this phenomenon to that of deskilling in nonartistic or "productive labor," finding

it more accurate to speak of a shift toward "other skills than craft-based skills."¹³ That is, instead of disappearing altogether, "*artistic skills [now] find their application in the demonstration of conceptual acuity, not in the execution of forms of expressive mimeticism.*"¹⁴ In terms of specific practices or actions, "the measure of artistic competence shifts from the distribution of painterly marks to the positioning, arranging and conjunction of pre-given elements and prefabricated forms."¹⁵ In principle, Aragon would have been poised to theorize this "technical repositioning of art," given his sympathy for the constructivists and their demystifying celebration of the dissolution of the artist into the figure of the engineer or technician.¹⁶ (Though no constructivist works were shown in the Goemans exhibition, two photomontages respectively by El Lissitzky and Aleksandr Rodchenko were included in the exhibition catalogue, presumably to show their affinities with the surrealists.¹⁷) In effect, the surrealist poet's idealizing perception of the democratic character of collage would align his position with the constructivists' anti-bourgeois ethos. Whereas traditional, manual painting is a "luxury item" equivalent to a "jewel" that "flatters the man of taste who paid for it," the collage is "poor" and a reprieve from this "moneyed domestication"; because it requires no specialized "craft-based skills" (Roberts), says Aragon, it is "freely reproducible" and "everyone believes they can make their own."¹⁸

Yet apart from this recognition and celebration of the obsolescence of artisanry in painting, Aragon's text shows little interest in rethinking technique in more conceptual, postindustrial terms in the vein of Roberts' analysis. On the contrary, "Challenge to Painting" proclaims nothing less than the overthrow of technique altogether: "What is now maintained, is on the one hand, *the negation of technique*, as in collage, as well as of the 'technical personality'; the painter, if we can still call him that, is no longer bound to his canvas by a mysterious physical relationship analogous to procreation."¹⁹ But if the disappearance of technique promises to dispel the mystique of originality of the individual artist, Aragon sees this demystification as paradoxically enabling art's reenchantment. For the surrealist poet, the seemingly unskilled method of collage "recalls more the procedures of magic than those of painting"; as such it promises not only a more egalitarian but also more pagan approach to art making. Undoing bourgeois aestheticism, collage would also overcome the monotheistic prohibitions of idols, thereby "restoring [art's] true meaning to the ancient pictorial act . . . leading [the artist] back to magical practices, origin and justification of that plastic representation forbidden by many religions."²⁰ With the prophetic voice of the seer, the surrealist poet urges readers to "take note of the era to come" that would simultaneously be a return of a past thus far repressed by modernity: "This world is already splitting open . . . it's cracking . . . A lightning flash is smouldering beneath the bowler hats. Devilry really is in the air."²¹ Demanualized and antithetical to technique, in short, art would no longer be craft but witchcraft.

By equating the demise of the artist's hand in collage with magic rather than the postindustrial evolution of technique, Aragon reveals his ultimate alignment with a surrealist conception of poetry and art, which since the

onset of the movement had appealed to magic as a model, even if unsystematically. If, as I have noted above, this magical model for art is explicit in *L'Art magique*, it is worth noting several instances in the 1920s where Breton evokes the concept already as a shorthand for nonutilitarian, outwardly irrational practices and thoughts. In "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality" (1924), he laments the trivialization of poetry as "a practical joke . . . perhaps the most serious kind" in the technocratic modern West; under this condition, the poet is comparable to the street prankster asking passers-by for their names, or to the gentle magician he once encountered in the psychiatric ward of the Val-de-Grâce, where he and Aragon had served as medical interns during World War I. Implicitly contesting the modern conflation of magic with madness, Breton recalls that when alone with this mysterious patient, he "unfurled to my ever renewed surprise huge flags . . . which he pulled from who knows where. One night he even sent two doves flying out before my eyes, and for our next meeting he promised me rabbits."²² On other occasions, magic and specifically the practice of alchemy would serve as a rigorously impersonal method of poetic creation. In the early text "Words Without Wrinkles" (1922), Breton counteracts the expressivist model of poetry and its mythologization of the individual poet as creating ex nihilo by means of Arthur Rimbaud's "alchemy of the verb," which utilizes words as preexisting ingredients in a poetic recipe. Expressive poetry would thus be replaced by "a veritable chemistry that first and foremost had put its energies into disengaging the properties of these words . . . It was a matter (1) of considering the word in itself and (2) of examining as closely as possible the reactions words could have to each other."²³ In just a few years, Breton would extend the same alchemical model to nonverbal mediums in *Surrealism and Painting* (1928), the text commonly credited with officially incorporating the visual artists into the surrealist movement. This time, he cites not only Rimbaud but also Edgar Allan Poe's combinatorial strategy, whereby the imagination "chooses" to combine two things "hitherto uncombined," resulting in "a something that has nothing of the qualities of one of them, or even nothing of the qualities of either."²⁴

It is easy to see how Aragon's characterization of collage as akin to magic and witchcraft follows directly from Breton's alchemical conception of poetry; in fact, the author of "Challenge of Painting" acknowledges this lineage when noting that "writing is moving in the same direction" as an increasingly demanualizing art and that painters turning to collage are "truly beginning to use objects as words."²⁵ Moreover, by opposing collage's magic to painterly technique, Aragon here recalls Mauss and Hubert's functionalist distinction between these otherwise related domains. In *A General Theory of Magic*, a classic text familiar to interwar European intellectuals and especially those in the *Documents* circle, the two representatives of the French school of ethnology consider magic as a specific type of causality, as opposed to an anterior and inferior stage of intellectual and technical development. Deploying the Melanesian-Polynesian term *mana*, which "covers a host of ideas we would designate by phrases such as a sorcerer's power, the magical

quality of an object, a magical object, to be magical, to possess magical powers, to be under a spell, to act magically," they observe magic's frequent intertwinement with technique in Indigenous cultures.²⁶ Nevertheless, Mauss and Hubert distinguish the two based on the types of causality each entails. With technique, the cause and the effect are homogenous, making it repeatable and transmissible; an action's result, in other words, is understood to be produced by "a person's skill" such as "the co-ordination of action, tool and physical agent . . . [T]he javelin flies through the air because it is thrown and food is cooked by means of fire."²⁷ With magic, by contrast, the cause and the effect are heterogeneous and incommensurable; effectiveness is attributed to forces or agents *other* than technical actions. Thus, even if "an activity is both magical and technical at the same time" as is often the case in Indigenous medicine, it is still possible to identify "words, incantations, ritual and astrological observances" as the magical aspects. These constitute

a world of ideas which imbues ritual movements and gestures with a special kind of effectiveness, quite different from their mechanical effectiveness. It is not really believed that the [technical] gestures themselves bring about the result. *The effect derives from something else*, and usually this is not of the same order.²⁸

To be clear, Aragon does not cite ethnological sources in "Challenge to Painting," yet Breton would later defend the authors of *A General Theory of Magic* in *L'Art magique*. In response to Lévi-Strauss's introduction to Mauss's work, in which the former criticizes the concept of mana for its vagueness, Breton notes that Mauss himself was perfectly aware of this issue and that mana is no vaguer than what artists and poets commonly call inspiration: "Let us note that poets and artists would be equally at pains if they had to give a name to what by chance takes hold of them and exalts them, conferring the greatest and most incontestable range to their overtones. The word 'inspiration' likewise does not clearly define anything; we turn in a vicious circle because we cannot know what inspires."²⁹ Seeing magic and artistic creation as coeval phenomena, Breton proceeds to reject the sciences' prejudiced association of the former with archaism. He points out that magic, "the ensemble of human practices aiming at the imperial domination of forces of nature by the recourse to secret practices with a more or less irrational character," had been historically maligned by monotheistic religions.³⁰ Modern ethnology likewise relegates it to the "aberrant and remote practices limited to ethnic groups whose cognitive level remains inferior," and whose only interest is to help illuminate the human mind in its supposedly primitive state.³¹ But if considered from the point of view of poetry and the arts rather than that of scientific reason, Breton suggests, "a radically different conception emerges where all principle of surpassing the level of current consciousness . . . resides and cannot but reside in magic, in the sense of the traditional science of the secrets of nature."³² No longer an anomalous practice or state of mind, magic is instead the universal anthropological condition of all creative endeavors.

"All art would be magical at least in its genesis," writes Breton, implying that the title assigned by the publisher is redundant.³³

Breton's position in *L'Art magique* suggests in retrospect that the core surrealist group's apparent rejection of ethnology during the interwar period was not a wholesale one; instead, they were specifically targeting the discipline's "denial of coevalness" (Fabian) to European bourgeois societies and Indigenous cultures, represented notably by the influential work of Lévy-Bruhl. In the late 1920s, several intellectuals in the vicinity of the surrealist circle began to voice strong objections to this paramount figure's problematic exaggeration of the difference between the "civilized" and "primitive" mentalities. The writer and linguistic anthropologist Paulhan, who had mentored the surrealists in their Dada period, found no empirical basis in his own fieldwork in Madagascar for Lévy-Bruhl's thesis that "the primitives cannot, or can barely think abstractly."³⁴ In the essay, "Primitive Mentality and the Explorers' Illusions" (1925), Paulhan concludes that the European explorer or missionary had invented the fiction of a "civilized" abstraction diametrically opposed to "primitive" concreteness, "being convinced of the inferiority of Sami or Malagasy before all experience" and therefore "voluntarily gather[ing] whatever inept reflections that confirm his bias."³⁵ Three years later, the poet and editor of the parasurrealist review *Le Grand Jeu* (1927–32) Daumal likewise ridiculed Lévy-Bruhl on the same point, suggesting that the latter "sees an abyss between [the mind of a Damara] and his own" in the same way that "the carpenter could have taken me for a savage because I am ignorant of the elementary rules of his profession."³⁶

Apart from Paulhan and Daumal, a third source from the period likely informed the surrealists' rejection of Lévy-Bruhl: an essay from 1927 by the somewhat obscure ethnologist Leroy, entitled *La Raison primitive: Essai de réfutation de la théorie du prélogisme* (Primitive reason: Essay in refutation of the theory of prelogism). Disproving Lévy-Bruhl using the latter's own evidence, Leroy's unusually advanced text analyzes the myth of the primitive as an invention of European missionaries, scientists, and colonial administrators. According to Philippe Sabot, Leroy's demonstration of the perfectly rational character of Indigenous languages, practices, and knowledge systems anticipates Lévi-Strauss's *Wild Thought* (1962), which like *Primitive Reason* also sees Indigenous cultures as practicing a "science of the concrete."³⁷ But even more radically and some three decades in advance of the structuralist anthropologist, Leroy in *Primitive Reason* would contest European ethnologists' pervasive citations of concreteness in Indigenous languages (e.g., the natives of the Bismarck Archipelago use the word for crow, *kotkot*, to mean the color black) as a manifestation of "primitive mentality." Not only does the same phenomenon of "concept-image" persist in the technical language of European artisans, says Leroy, it can also be commonly observed in contemporary fashion where colors are no longer called blue, red, and green but "prune, cherry, salmon, shrimp, apricot, straw, ivory, tobacco, coral, jade, vanilla, copper, almond, etc."³⁸

While Breton cites Leroy only in his postwar writings, sufficient evidence

indicates that the surrealist group had already adopted his ideas in the 1930s. In a short essay from 1933, "Art primitif et art populaire," Tristan Tzara, who had recently become close to Breton's group, mentions Leroy's work as evidence for the obsolescence of Lévy-Bruhl: "To speak of 'primitive mentality' as Lévy-Bruhl does without considering the primitivist biases of the informants [the Western missionaries] is dangerous to say the least. G. Leroy [*sic*] had shown in his *Primitive Reason* that the choice made by Lévy-Bruhl in order to arrive at positivist conclusions no longer corresponds at all to the scientific requirements of our era."³⁹ According to Nancy Cunard, who edited a pro-Black anthology *Negro* (1934) containing several contributions by the surrealists, the latter were responsible for introducing her to the Africanist Raymond Michelet, whose substantial summary of Leroy's *Primitive Reason* appeared in the same work.⁴⁰ If the surrealists would have concurred with Leroy on the violent treatment of Indigenous peoples by European colonial authorities, they would have also agreed with his objection to "ethnological stratigraphy," the method that had led ethnologists to consider magic a primitive practice due to its prevalence in archaic cultures. Rejecting this facile equation of anteriority (the fact of being present at an earlier stage of human evolutionary history) with primitivity, Leroy finds that the prevalence of magic can be equally explained by the fact that "magical belief is natural to the human mind"; there is thus no reason to assume that "a living population with a very developed system of magic should be more primitive than another whose magical beliefs are at a latent stage."⁴¹ Furthermore, Leroy asks what would happen if magic were considered a human faculty with its own form of effectiveness and developmental history, flourishing when positively supported and atrophying when encountering magic-averse forces, like monotheistic religions or scientific positivism. "We will then see that the terms are reversed," writes Leroy:

Civilizations without magic will no longer be considered advanced but regressive, since they have lost what they used to possess in the beginning. By contrast, one would say that civilizations with developed magic had reaped the desirable fruit from the germ of original magic through their experience and their reflection. We would then justifiably consider them very "evolved."⁴²

Leroy's response to Lévy-Bruhl therefore consists in a reversal of the relationship between the particular and the general. For the former, all the terms evoked by the latter in order to construe the anomalous category of "primitive mentality" are in fact universal and human. What is more, if judged by the standard of a universal "primitive reason," the so-called advanced civilizations in which magic is rarefied and marginalized would appear underdeveloped, if not pathological.

In their political statements of the period between 1930 and 1931, the surrealists evoke a similar logic in order to counteract the false universalism promoted by the European imperialist ideology. In "Don't Visit the Colonial

Exhibition,” the group virulently denounced the 1931 Colonial Exhibition at the Bois de Vincennes in Paris as shameless advertisement for “the new and particularly repugnant idea of ‘Greater France,’” a bourgeois regime formed by the opportunistic alliance between the secular republic, the Catholic Church, and capitalist corporations.⁴³ To undermine the exhibition’s universalist rhetoric, the signatories of this legendary text call attention to its dependence on the exploitation of Asians and Africans, “people whose customs . . . may legitimately be considered less perverted than ours . . . who unlike us have retained an insight into the true goals of the *human* species as regards *human* knowledge, love, and happiness.”⁴⁴ This reframing of the cultures colonized by the Europeans as the true paradigm for universal humanity is concomitant with the displacement of the colonizers from the position of universality; according to the surrealists, the Europeans need to recognize “our quality of being *Whites*” instead of pretending to be the “colourless people . . . who speak of others as being coloured.”⁴⁵ In another tract responding to the destruction of Southeast Asian and Oceanic art in a fire at the Dutch East Indies pavilion, they again sought to provincialize Europe and its institutions by mourning the loss of “idols of the whole world,” by comparison to which “the fetishes of Catholic inspiration . . . have not the slightest interest, either from a scientific or artistic point of view.”⁴⁶ Seeing Catholic objects as no less primitive than those of Indigenous religions, the surrealists ultimately find the latter greater from the point of view of human cultural patrimony, claiming that the Catholic Church’s institutions such as “laws, courts, prisons, schools and money . . . universally have only a minimal interest compared to tikis and totems.”⁴⁷

As these statements attest, in targeting the universalizing projects of Christianity and the secular bourgeois state, surrealism’s anticolonial project does not as much oppose universalism as it seeks to reimagine it based on the values, beliefs, and practices of the cultures perceived to be superstitious, idolatrous, underevolved, or “primitive.” Many of the polemical essays in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (hereafter *LSASDLR*), historically the most politicized of interwar surrealist reviews, make explicit claims to this effect: for instance, Jacques Viot’s “Don’t Clutter Up the Colonies” (1930) argues against the logic of cultural and cognitive evolutionism that justifies colonialism’s civilizing mission, proclaiming to the contrary that “primitives should be taken as they are . . . Not having ‘evolved’ (to repeat a word so dear to us), they are intact. They have never sought to flee their shadow. . . . They are complete. They do not need to perfect themselves.”⁴⁸ If Viot utilizes “primitives” as a rhetorical shorthand for the colonized peoples, his reasoning simultaneously undercuts the term’s very foundation: the assumption that the world’s cultures may be ranked in terms of their supposed degree of evolutionary advancement. In “On Certain Characteristics Particular to the Civilized Mentality” (1933), Jules Monnerot, one of several Martinican intellectuals who had recently proclaimed alliance with the surrealists, more directly scrutinizes the meaning of civilization, seeing it not as a stage of advancement but a condition imposed by a bourgeois-capitalist form of life.⁴⁹

The latter is characterized by a proprietary individualism ("consciousness itself is only ever conceived there as the property of a subject"), the systematic repression of "nonrational thought" by logic, and more importantly the desire to universalize what the essay's title indicates as a "particular" condition: "The goal of the civilized person . . . is objectively to impose externally his own limits on other beings."⁵⁰

For Monnerot, Lévy-Bruhl's books—written in the period "when . . . the Third Republic had taken its colonial fill"—had served the "civilized mentality" by radically separating "nonlogic" and logic; the former "is almost exclusively the prerogative of the 'primitive'" whereas the latter "belongs by all rights to the civilized."⁵¹ Notably, by substituting Lévy-Bruhl's "prelogism" with "nonlogic" or alternatively "oneiric activity," Monnerot turns what the former conceived as an anterior stage into a cognitive mode, whose artificial separation from logic is ideological and without evolutionary basis: "Society, individualism, imperialism, industry and so on, which have worked to obtain this separation of two normal modes of the real functioning of the mind—oneiric and logical activity—have believed in it, correlative with an increasing . . . degradation of oneiric activity."⁵² The result, according to Monnerot, is the supremacy of a narrowly conceived reason and the oppression and marginalization of groups as well as individuals perceived to be lacking thereof: "The inferiority of primitives forced to contribute their lives and deaths to the colonists' material power is the same as that of the insane, poets and children. *They have no defence, they can always be out-REASONED*" [on peut toujours avoir RAISON d'eux].⁵³ Just as Leroy would conceive of "primitive reason" as the standard for all cultures, Monnerot imagines a reversal of the current hierarchy whereby "nonrational thought" becomes the criterion, and not the antithesis, of cultural achievement: "Strictly speaking, the strongest and most active forms of nonrational thought in civilized and capitalist societies . . . *with the sole exception of poetry*, seem to me inferior on all counts (as Lévy-Bruhl or Gobineau would say) to the whole of the nonrational manifestations they tell us are the reality of various 'tribes.'"⁵⁴ But if poetry is the only "nonrational manifestation" in the so-called civilized society that might be comparable to similar expressions and practices in Indigenous cultures, Monnerot nevertheless laments its "continuing existence as a literary form" due to "antipoetic social conditions."⁵⁵ He therefore applauds the surrealists not only for freeing poetry from the tyranny of logic but also for taking it to "shores where already it ceases to belong to literature"; that is, poetry in the hands of the surrealists is ready to become once again magical: "It is a question of using the results of an age that has denied sorcery to reinvent sorcery dialectically."⁵⁶

From Magic to Alteration: Einstein's and Bataille's Nondialectical Primitivisms

Thus far, I have suggested that Aragon's account of collage in 1930 may be understood in light of surrealism's general appeal to magic as the universal-

primitive paradigm of art. I have also tried to show how this appeal to magic, informed by aspects of interwar ethnology, aligns with the group's concurrent activism against colonialism in that it supports a theory of the co-evalness of the colonizer and the colonized. This, however, does not make "Challenge to Painting" any more convincing as a text of aesthetic theory for a fellow avant-garde critic like Einstein, who disapproved of the collage exhibition at Galerie Goemans as well as Aragon's positive evaluation of this art. Serving as the titular director of Bataille's subversive *Documents*, Einstein helped to solicit German-language scholarship for the review and also contributed his own texts; yet his alliance with Paris-based interwar surrealism remained tenuous.⁵⁷ As pointed out by Rainer Rumold, this senior figure of the European avant-garde (about ten years older than the surrealists) was politically radical but somewhat "conservative" in aesthetic matters, preferring "the eminently traditional form of canvas painting" and "an individual mode of production" to film and photography, in notable contrast to his German-Jewish peer Walter Benjamin.⁵⁸ Due to his nostalgic attachment to prewar cubism and suspicion of interwar artistic tendencies like geometric abstraction, constructivism, and collage, the surrealists around Breton did not altogether take seriously his philosophically inclined art criticism.⁵⁹ Yet I will make a case that Einstein's response to Aragon in 1930 merits consideration due to its robust engagement with surrealism's magical paradigm of art, which one misses in Benjamin's equally unconvinced reading of the same essay.⁶⁰ Specifically, though ostensibly concerned with the recent work of the artist Hans Arp, Einstein's essay for *Documents*, "Neolithic Childhood," ought to be read as a theoretical text that contests the demanualization of art and the obsolescence of technique as formulated by Aragon.⁶¹ As will be seen below, it also attests to a concerted effort to synthesize the core surrealists' magical paradigm of art with the aesthetic program of Bataille, which uses the ethnographic materials of Marcel Griaule and Georges-Henri Luquet to redefine the primitive in terms of acts of transgression.

In his review of the Goemans exhibition, Einstein makes exception for the cubist *papiers collés* (precedents of the surrealist collage) but finds the surrealist works to represent collage's "degenerate[ion] into facile puns" and "the artifice of a petty bourgeois décor."⁶² He is also patently irked by Aragon's praise for these works: "Aragon speaks to us about black magic, which we see everywhere like the laughing cow [popular brand of processed cheese]."⁶³ For Einstein, the disappearance of the painter's hand is not magic as Aragon claims but tantamount to the degradation of artisanry in the face of industrial manufacture. Between the lines, however, he concedes Aragon's point about collage's welcome affront to bourgeois individualism and commodification, stating reluctantly that "with the help of collages, one combatted precious, individual writing . . . as well as this old 'I' . . . posthumous signature after creation, actually its bankruptcy . . . psychic capitalization, petty income."⁶⁴ In the subsequent essay, "Neolithic Childhood," Einstein continues to rehearse in half-agreement the surrealist critic's polemic against artistic technique, dismissing it accordingly as "risk-free violence . . . that procures

the easiest of victories” and “nothing but the bad conscience towards the violated world.”⁶⁵ Moreover, he proves strongly susceptible to the notion of magic that Aragon evokes in “Challenge to Painting,” as attested by the essay’s lyrical beginning:

When we were children, we used to eat cakes that were similar to Arp’s works. They were made of dough and sugar, and we called them “dambedeys” [German figurative sweet bread]. We devoured enemy men and women, animals, stars and hearts, to renew and increase our “mana” by appropriating that of others. We munched on pre-history and lived in caves, torturing dolls before killing them. Cannibalism and the tunes of magical dance exhilarated us to the point of giddiness. . . . We absorbed houses, humans, beasts, we were drunk on power and sadism, consoled by the magical force of the incorporated substances. We painted our faces and hands with the hare blood, flour, ink and coal, and we all had magical names. We lived in a Negro village in the south, grouped in clans and tribes.⁶⁶

At once art criticism and poetic prose, this opening deploys magic as the common denominator linking what Maria Stavrinaki and others have described as a universalizing imagination of prehistory with a particularizing primitivism based on the idealization of living Indigenous cultures.⁶⁷ The identification of the authorial “I” with a collective and infantilized “we” meanwhile serves to liken Arp’s recent reliefs and sculptures to food and playthings with which children interact physically. But while this analogy enables Einstein to compare Arp to the child at play, the rest of the essay projects a different figure onto the Alsatian artist, namely, that of the magician-artisan that Hubert and Mauss theorize in their *A General Theory of Magic*.

As indicated by his use of the term *mana*, Einstein is almost certainly familiar with this seminal work; moreover, his characterization of Arp as a physically active craftsman preparing works with magical functions is specifically indebted to Mauss and Hubert’s consideration of the practical intertwinement of magic and artisanry. I have already mentioned the distinct types of causality that they ascribe to these two types of activity (heterogeneous versus homogeneous); however, the ethnologists recognize that both seek to effect change by manipulating natural forces, and are frequently inseparable in practice. “The traditional character of magic is found to be bound up with the arts and crafts [les arts et les industries],” they write, and “[T]here is probably not a single activity which artists and craftsmen perform which is not also believed to be within the capacity of the magician.”⁶⁸ Citing ethnographic evidence, they observe that in many cultures, the same individual can perform both the functions of the magician and the artisan. Especially in the process of preparing materials for magical rites, the magician can become *Homo faber*, fabricating

images from paste, clay, wax, honey, plaster, metal or papier mâché, from papyrus or parchment, from sand or wood . . . sculpts, models, paints, draws, embroiders, knits, weaves, engraves . . . makes jewellery, marquetry and heaven knows what else.⁶⁹

In "Neolithic Childhood," Einstein characterizes Arp's manual actions in ways that strongly evoke Mauss and Hubert's language in this passage. Arp "oils and varnishes his details, curls the leaves, rounds off the birds' eggs, shaves the necks of polished wood," "cooks, saws and carves," "cuts off all the necks so as to mold in wood the neck patented by Hans Arp."⁷⁰ If this abundant use of verbs suggests an indebtedness to the *General Theory*, Einstein's evocation of "a Negro belief"—where "a part means as much if not more than the whole" because "magic forces" are "concentrated in the fragment"—is more clearly derived from the ethnologists' metonymic concept of sympathetic magic.⁷¹ The latter, Mauss and Hubert write, is premised on the notion that "the part stands for the complete object. Teeth, saliva, sweat, nails, hair represent a total person, in such a way that through these parts one can act directly on the individual concerned, either to bewitch or enchant him."⁷² Accordingly, Einstein compares Arp's works to these paradoxically totalizing parts, which the artist had violently extracted from the whole: "every form and every isolation are . . . an assassination"; "through decapitation and dismemberment, the decisive element is isolated: concentrated possession and sadism"; "in this way, children destroy their dolls, cars and horses, hiding an ear, a lock of hair, a ribbon and a horse leg under their pillow."⁷³

I will turn momentarily to the source of Einstein's rhetoric of violence, namely, Bataille; meanwhile, it is important to note how much his image of Arp as a magician-artisan differs from the surrealist poets' concurrent consideration of the same artist as detached and demanualizing. In "Surrealism and Painting," Breton remarks on Arp's habit of outsourcing the production of his sculptures to carpenters.⁷⁴ In "Challenge to Painting," Aragon follows suit by praising the artist's impersonal oeuvre, which "owes nothing to paint texture or touch which stand for personality among so many painters" and can even be touched up by the owner ("if they get dirty you can repaint them without troubling their creator").⁷⁵ Yet it is precisely the surrealists' demanualized Arp, an interpretation that would have aligned the artist with the surrealist *and* constructivist makers of collage and assemblage, that Einstein finds unacceptable. If he dismisses the first group in his review of the Goemans exhibition, the second group receives his vitriol in "Neolithic Childhood," being equated with unoriginal "pedants of the circle and the square [who] are as repetitive as the naturalists; *their forms are determined from the start*, cowardly limiting all invention."⁷⁶ Betraying Einstein's aversion to the logic of the ready-made and of prefabrication, "Neolithic Childhood" thus amounts to an anticonstructivist interpretation of Arp as Eric Robertson suggests, "issuing a clear directive to Arp to abandon his flirtations with abstract groups such as Cercle et Carré . . . with which Arp became affiliated around this

time.”⁷⁷ Admittedly, failing to account for the nonpartisan character of Arp's interwar works, which as Briony Fer notes “can be abstract [constructivist] and Surrealist, rather than either one or the other,” “Neolithic Childhood” is not a fully compelling piece of art criticism.⁷⁸ But as a text of aesthetic theory, it presents an intriguing recuperation of technique—though conceived in a limited sense as manual-artisanal and uncorrupted by mechanization—by means of a primitivist discourse. And while it may be argued that Einstein ultimately misses what is at stake in the ethnologically informed art criticism of the surrealists, his somewhat contrived effort to respond to Aragon using Bataillean terms points illuminatingly to the tension between a dialectical primitivism aiming for coevalness (Breton's circle) and a nondialectical one based on the idea of transgression (Bataille).

When characterizing Arp's “neolithic childhood” as sadistic, cannibalistic, and destructive, Einstein echoes the influence of Bataille's “Primitive Art” in the preceding issue of *Documents*, an essayistic review of the ethnologist Luquet's book with the same title that ends by advancing a general theory of art making as transgression. If the essay's anti-idealism exemplifies Bataille's “hard” primitivism, which Rosalind Krauss has distinguished from a “soft” or aestheticized version in vogue in interwar Paris, its art theory is nevertheless comparable to that of Breton, Aragon, and their friends in its rejection of technique and its instrumentality, with the difference that Bataille's approach would be that of a violent “alteration” rather than circumvention by magic.⁷⁹ In his first essay for *Documents*, “The Academic Horse” (1929), Bataille begins to develop this approach by considering a set of historical materials readily available to him as a historian and archivist at the Bibliothèque nationale's Cabinet des Médailles (1924–30): the coins made by the ancient Gauls after classical Greek models, known for their simplification of the original prototypes (Figure 2.1). For Bataille, this well-documented instance of transformation by means of cultural transmission ought to be seen as the symbolic resistance of the so-called barbarians against a more technically advanced and socially organized group. To illustrate this dynamic, he does not hesitate to compare the ancient Gauls to “the current peoples of central Africa” but also to criminals in conflict with the law; the Greeks’ “perfect casting and intelligibility, implying the impossibility of introducing absurd elements, were as little to [the Gauls’] taste as police regulations are to the pleasures of the criminal classes.”⁸⁰ This antagonism between the transgressive Gauls and the law-enforcing Greeks means that their discrepant aesthetic expressions cannot be explained in terms of a gap in technical competence: “[T]heir [the Gauls’] imitations [of Greek coins] did not simply offer the usual barbarian imitations resulting from the clumsiness of the engraver. The fantastic horses imagined by various groups revealed *not so much a technical fault as a positive extravagance*, everywhere taking a first schematic interpretation to its most absurd consequences.”⁸¹

If “Academic Horse” rejects a techno-centric account of stylistic transformation, seeing the Gauls instead as intentionally debasing ideal Greek forms, it is in “Primitive Art” that Bataille explicitly theorizes this phenomenon

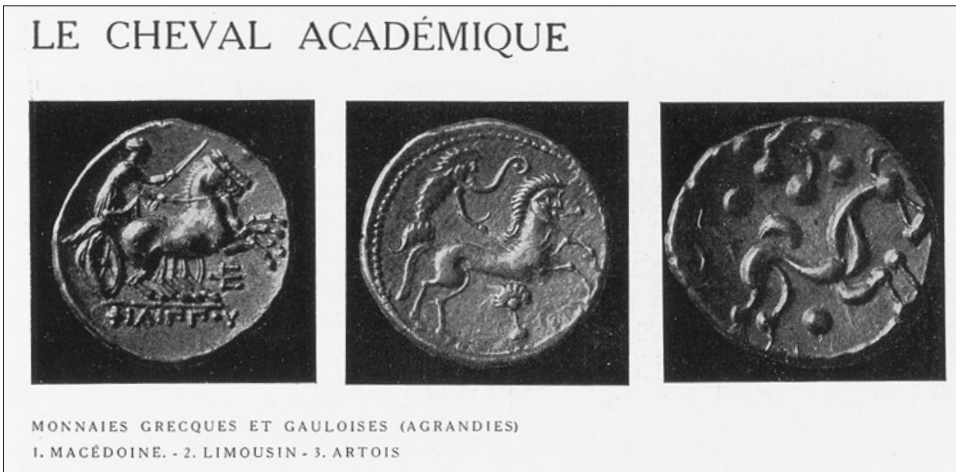


FIGURE 2.1. Montage showing Macedonian and Gaulish coins from Georges Bataille's essay, "Academic Horse." *Documents* 1, no. 1 (1929): 27.

through a tactical appropriation of the prehistorian and ethnologist Luquet's work on Paleolithic art and the art of modern-day children. Introducing Luquet's *L'Art primitif* (Primitive art, 1930), Bataille admits that, per inter-war standards, the author's efforts to uncover the historical beginnings of figurative art by analogizing prehistoric art to the graphic activities of living children is no longer considered scientifically valid.⁸² But instead of dwelling on Luquet's problematic conflation of the developmental histories of two unrelated art forms, Bataille turns to engaging with his general thesis concerning primitive—meaning anterior and originary—art, namely, that “*the genesis of figurative art consists in the passage from a fortuitous realism to an intentional realism.*”⁸³ This “passage” or process, which Krauss has characterized as imbued with a “cheerful progressivism,” can be more specifically analyzed in terms of the gradual development of technique through an increasingly rationalized causality.⁸⁴

In the book reviewed by Bataille, Luquet takes the child's gradual acquisition of graphic skill as model, observing an initial stage where random markings on a preexisting material support (e.g., paper, walls) are made with no intention to produce a proper image. Subsequently, in a liminal stage of “fortuitous realism,” this unintentional artist recognizes “accidental resemblances” (a bat, an umbrella, etc.) in these doodles or graffiti as if “by a sort of magic.”⁸⁵ Eventually, realizing that “his markings could resemble something, no longer just exceptionally but constantly,” the child tries to narrow the gap between the markings and the projected image, usually by means of “a few very simple additions.”⁸⁶ From here on, the debutant artist can “legitimately attribute to himself the faculty of *voluntarily accentuating a fortuitous resemblance.* He renews the exercise with increasing intentionality, and the success of these repeated efforts assures him of his possession of the same faculty.”⁸⁷ Finally, this mutual reinforcement of competence and consciousness leads to the stage that Luquet calls “intentional realism,” where

the artist's consciously applied technique yields a product adequate to the former: "[T]he marking contains all the elements of a proper drawing: intention of representing a well-defined object, execution, interpretation corresponding to intention."⁸⁸ In short, to the question, "How could an individual who had previously never executed any figurative art be led to produce it intentionally?" Luquet's answer is that the desire to create a representation (cause) gradually aligns with the production of a satisfactory one (effect).⁸⁹ His developmental theory of art, in the terms of Hubert and Mauss's analysis of magic and technique, can therefore be said to chart the passage from a "magical" stage of fortuitous realism (cause does not align with effect) to a "technical" one of intentional realism (cause aligns with effect); in the latter stage, the artist becomes what Aragon calls the "technical personality."

In his rejection of this account by Luquet of art as technical improvement, Bataille does not differ fundamentally from the surrealists, who applaud the hypothetical supersession of technique by magic; the only significant difference to the latter group resides in his notion of the transgression of technique by means of "alteration." In a footnote in "Primitive Art," Bataille attributes his use of the term "alteration" to Rudolf Otto's anthropological conception of a sacralized otherness: "The term 'alteration' expresses both a partial decomposition analogous to that of corpses and the passage to a perfectly heterogeneous state corresponding to what the Protestant professor Rudolf Otto calls the 'wholly other,' which is to say the sacred, realized, for example, in a ghost."⁹⁰ Given Bataille's own area of professional expertise, Stavrinaki has proposed another likely source for the term, namely, the nineteenth-century British numismatist John Evans, who had analyzed the "alteration" of classical forms in the hands of the Gaulish and British coin industries in *The Coins of the Ancient Britons* (1864).⁹¹ Informed by the theory of biological evolution, Evans sees variations in aesthetic forms in terms of advantage; the makers of Gaulish coins, using "the natural instincts of uncivilized man," would thus have simplified Greek forms and heightened their symmetry in order to facilitate production and propagation: "The reduction of a complicated and artistic design into a symmetrical figure of easy execution was the object of each successive engraver of the dies for these coins, though probably they were themselves unaware of any undue saving of trouble on their part, or of the results which ensued from it."⁹² Though compelling from a scientific perspective, Evans's theory of an unconscious, adaptive alteration in favor of facility is unlikely to resonate with Bataille, who in my view did not have to reach far for a concept of alteration closer to his own: the phenomenon of modification or correction in prehistoric cave art, discussed by none other than Luquet.

In an earlier work, *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man* (1926), Luquet observes that "Paleolithic drawings show examples of additions and corrections applied by someone subsequent to the author. . . . [T]he corrections can [also] be *alterations* applied by the originator himself."⁹³ In this scenario, in short, alteration involves an immediate action rather than slow transformation. In "Primitive Art," Bataille proceeds to conflate it with the stage preceding fortuitous realism—the phenomenon of "dirtied hands gliding across walls

or scribbles” that Luquet describes “without sufficiently insisting on this point.”⁹⁴ For Bataille, Luquet’s gloss over this preliminary stage results in a missed opportunity to theorize the “willful [*volontaire*] alteration of forms” as the true beginnings of art: “It is extremely important to observe that . . . it is always a question of the alteration of objects, whether the object is a wall, a sheet of paper, or a toy . . . a question of *altering* what one has at hand [*sous la main*].”⁹⁵ Removing the corrective function and the evolutionist bias in Luquet’s original usage of the term, Bataille takes to redescribing alteration as a repeatable act of destruction that each time produces a new figuration: “Art, since undeniably there is art, proceeds in this way by successive destruction. Insofar as it liberates libidinal instincts, these instincts are sadistic.”⁹⁶ “Primitive art” would thus no longer be a stage in an evolutionary history but this act of altering: “[T]he art that is inaccurately called primitive . . . would simply be characterized by the *alteration* of preexisting forms [*des forms présentées*].”⁹⁷

I have argued above that Breton, Aragon, and the contributors to *LSASDLR* sought to universalize the primitive and demote the bourgeois form of civilization to the position of the particular. Likewise, Bataille would seek to generalize alteration as the universal principle for art: it is exemplified as much by his own misdemeanor as a schoolboy, when he delighted in coloring his classmate’s suit and scribbling, as by the “graphomania” of Abyssinian children recently documented by the ethnologist Griaule, who “draw with charcoal on the columns or doors of churches. Each time they are caught in the act, they are beaten, but the lower parts of the churches are covered with bizarre rantings”⁹⁸ (Figure 2.2). By means of their common imperviousness to

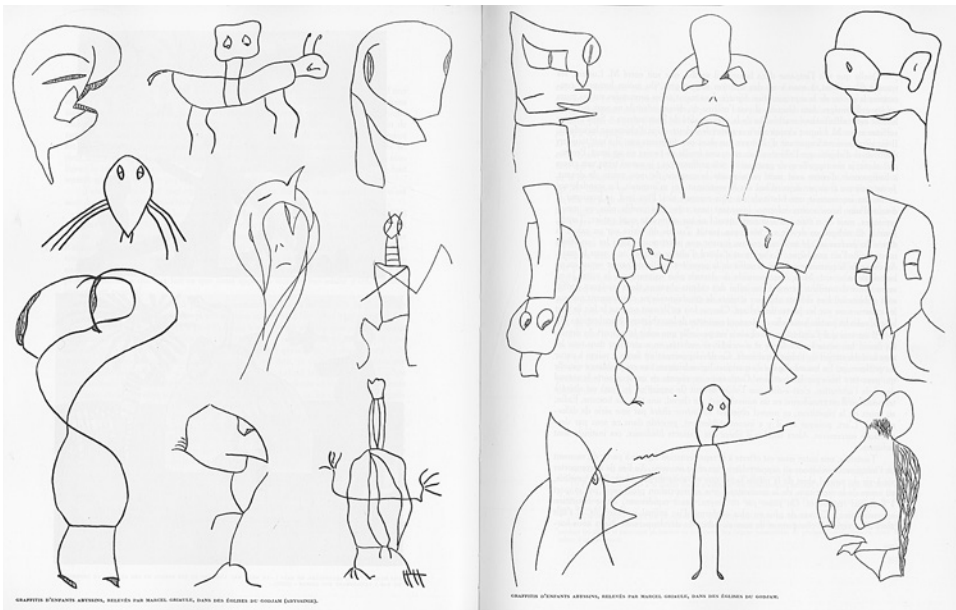


FIGURE 2.2. Examples of graffiti collected by Marcel Griaule. *Documents 2*, no. 7 (1930): 394–95.

discipline, in short, Bataille establishes the coevalness between European and African children as primitive—meaning transgressive—equals. But by insisting on the intentional (“willful”) character of their transgression, he also reaffirms the very connection between the creative *subject* and the creative *act* that Breton’s surrealism seeks to untether, having mandated that the poet’s ego should cede itself to “psychic automatism in its pure state . . . dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.”⁹⁹ As a result, a skeptic of surrealism like Einstein could find Bataille’s “alteration” productive for reinserting the individual artist’s hand into art making in defiance of demanualization. In great part due to their nondialectical primitivisms, which oppose artistic technique to the antitechnical ready-made, or primitive transgression to civilizing discipline, both Bataille and Einstein would ultimately show little interest in phenomena that could potentially overcome these dichotomies: for instance, *unwillful* alteration caused by the artist’s negotiation with preexisting tradition and materials, or the use of mechanical methods by prehistoric artists and children. In the next section, I will take for granted the significance of these phenomena for the core surrealists’ anticolonial project of “primitive reason” (Leroy), which seeks to close rather than widen the gap between the primitive and the civilized. Not only were they documented by interwar ethnologists, I will show that the same phenomena were also actively explored as methods by the visual artists of surrealism.

Unwillful Alteration and Primitive Demanualization: Interwar Ethnography and Surrealist Art

In his tactical use of Luquet’s and Griaule’s work, Bataille focuses on the action of alteration and the transgressive vandalism of children while leaving out aspects of their work less useful for his agenda. These omitted details not only document artistic activities that challenge received notions of “primitive art,” but also serve to shed light on similar phenomena either practiced or theorized concurrently by surrealist artists. On an ethnographic and linguistic mission in 1928–29, Griaule had amassed a large number of graffiti by children and adolescents in Gojjam (present-day northwestern Ethiopia), mostly found on church walls and fences. Several of them were reproduced in Bataille’s “Primitive Art” in 1930; three years later, Griaule published a more complete set in *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins* (1933) while also revealing the sociocultural and material conditions of their production. Although adult locals tended to consider them nonsensical, Griaule notes in his essay, the boys who produced the markings interpreted their iconographical contents “voluntarily and without any difficulty”; the ethnologist thus learned that “a large number of these subject matters were inspired by official paintings adorning the walls of the sanctuary, specifically classical religious scenes.”¹⁰⁰ Remarkably, fourteen of the eighty-four motifs reproduced in *Silhouettes* are horsemen, representing cavalier saints such as “Saint George slaying the dragon or

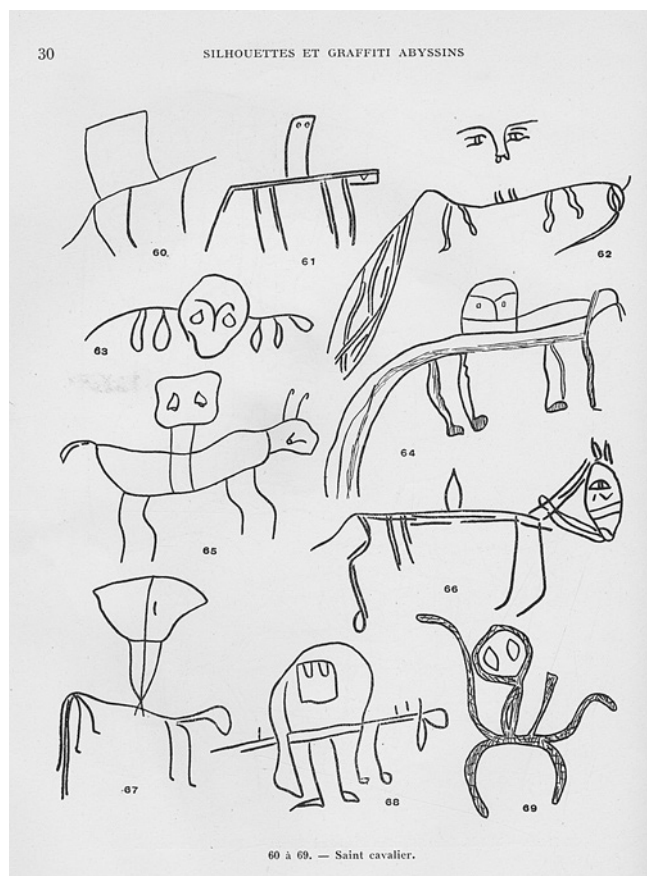
Saint Sousenios piercing the she-devil Berzelia”¹⁰¹ (Figure 2.3). Not unlike the Gauls’ transformation of the Greeks’ “academic horse,” the Abyssinian children’s imitation of this ubiquitous motif ends up altering the church painters’ conventional style. But instead of transgression, Griaule attributes this *alteration by means of imitation* to the semiconscious negotiation between “the children’s and young people’s desire for invention” and “a tradition that they internalized and only they could perpetuate.”¹⁰² He presents an example in *Silhouettes*, namely,

figure 25 [*sic*]. It represents two figures, the first and the last terms in a procession of ten clergymen wearing sacerdotal ornaments. The first wears on his head a complicated edifice of crowns, rings and horns (the last being rather unusual accessories); he is dressed in a long robe whose lower portion appears decorated with two hatched triangles, most likely representing the opening of the fabric laying atop another garment. The feet are indicated clearly. . . . From the second to the ninth figure in the series, the details become gradually simplified; the headdress becomes more schematic, the accessories and subsequently the body parts disappear until the final figure, presented here, is nothing more than a surprising summary of the first priest, which is impossible not to compare to an Egyptian silhouette.¹⁰³ (Figure 2.4)

Griaule is by no means the first to remark on this phenomenon of the “barbarization” of motifs by repeated copying, which early twentieth-century German researchers had also noticed in children’s art.¹⁰⁴ For my purpose, what is crucial is that the young artists described by Griaule, though manually producing each iteration of the motif, were already seeking to minimize manual labor by means of stylistic simplification. In the interwar Abyssinian context observed by Griaule, this strategy was clearly motivated in part by material conditions.¹⁰⁵ As the ethnologist indicates, because writing and drawing were privileges of the male and literate Christian clergy and largely prohibited to lay people, suitable materials, implements, and supports were scarce. Male children and adolescents thus resorted to carving or drawing on nondurable or intractable surfaces like dusty ground, skin, fibers, animal bones, or stone walls and wooden fences, and using minimally serviceable implements: “[D]rawings on stones are carved with the help of a knife, a nail fallen from a door, or a splinter from a harder stone.” Those on wood are

executed most often using pieces of charcoal fallen out of ceremonial censers, and more rarely with chalk, a piece of iron or stone, or a European pencil. . . . But apart from being expensive, this procedure presents real inconveniences due to the fact that the surface employed is not flat. As a result, the lead is used up rapidly or breaks, and the trace is not sufficiently visible.¹⁰⁶

FIGURE 2.3. Examples of figures representing saints on horseback. In Marcel Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins*, figures 60–69.



Under these unfavorable conditions, the artists would be strongly motivated to simplify each figure stylistically in order to optimize the number of figures made; as in the case of industrial manufacture, the minimization of manual work here enables greater reproductive facility.

Griaule's findings suggest that even the most transgressive acts of vandalism would still have to reckon with the resistance of the material environment, which means that alteration must be conceivable as at least partly fortuitous or *unwillful*. Alternatively, it might be possible to imagine will as sharable with the inhuman material, which surrealism's foremost photographer of the decade, Brassai, does in his concurrent documentation of Parisian street graffiti. In 1933, the same year as Griaule's *Silhouettes*, Brassai published his essay, "From Cave Wall to Factory Wall" in the review *Mino-taure*, accompanied by photographs of these clandestine markings, "gathered on random walks through Paris . . . a stone's throw from the Opéra" (Figure 2.5).¹⁰⁷ Partaking in the interwar avant-garde's prehistoric imagination, Brassai compares them to the Paleolithic paintings "in caves in the Dordogne, the Valley of the Nile, or on the Euphrates," which take on a new profile when "viewed in the light of ethnography."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Brassai later affirms his wish

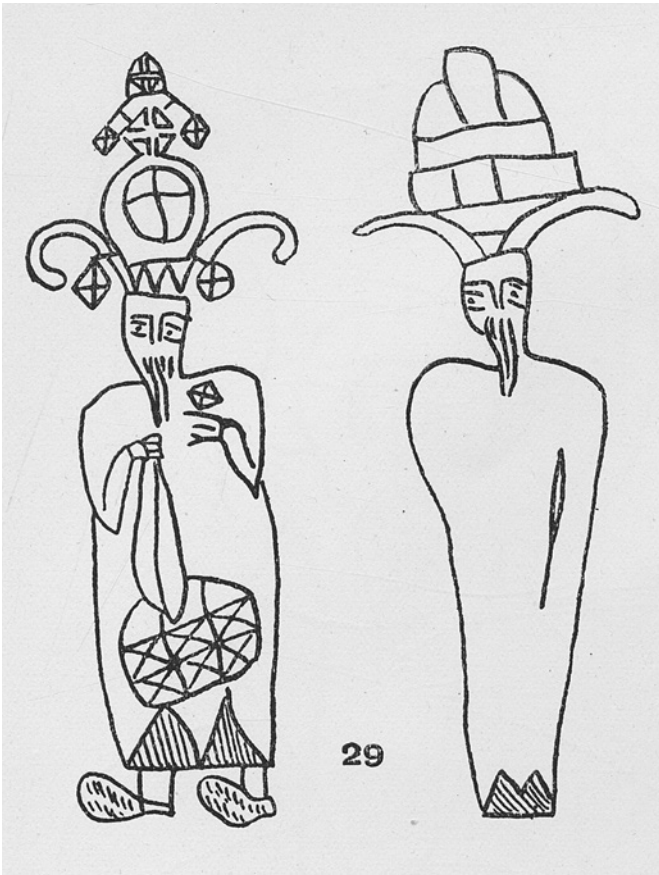
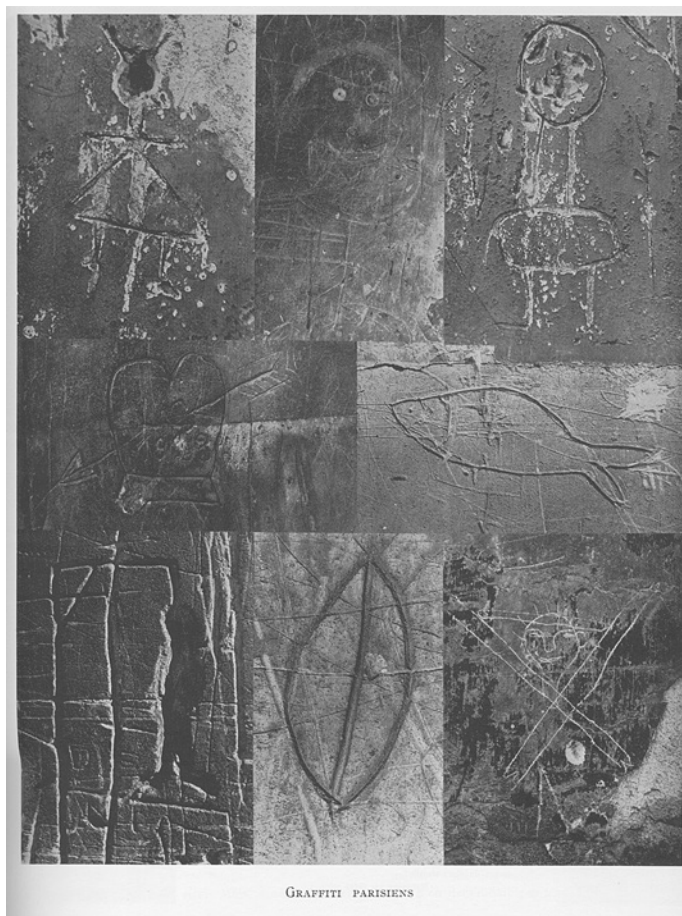


FIGURE 2.4. First and last figures in a series of ten clergymen. Marcel Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins*, figure 29.

to contribute to “an ethnology focusing on developed societies” without making explicit who or *what* are the ethnographic subjects in question.¹⁰⁹ On the one hand, they might be the anonymous children who insist on expressing their unconscious drives despite the hostility of the support: “How hard the stone is! How rudimentary the implements! No matter! This is no time for playing but for mastering unconscious outpourings.”¹¹⁰ On the other hand, the essay’s title suggests that the walls themselves, insofar as their hardness dictates the form of these markings, may also be considered creative subjects in their own right; for this reason, Brassai observes that “the baroque typical of children’s drawings is entirely absent” in carved graffiti and that “the change from paper, from the regulated to the clandestine, transforms the character of their expression.”¹¹¹ This emphasis on the materiality of the medium distinguishes Brassai’s account notably from that of Bataille, who recognizes no difference in terms of mediums in the Abyssinian children’s carved graffiti, his own childhood doodles in notebooks, and a drawing and watercolor on paper by the painter André Masson’s daughter (reproduced in “Primitive Art”).¹¹² In his postwar writings on graffiti, Brassai increasingly stresses the role and agency of materials and tools, claiming that they can

FIGURE 2.5. Parisian graffiti photographed by Brassäi. *Mino-taure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 7.



“transform artistic activity and even transfigure modes of thought.”¹¹³ He speculates furthermore that the resisting wall, unlike the docile paper, can eradicate the hand of the individual artist (what Aragon calls the “personal touch”), creating in turn an anonymous, collective style:

Paper submits—but the wall commands. It changes not only the vehicle of expression, but mental constructs too. . . . Here, everything arises from, and seems predetermined by, the material. The common style, the family resemblances that seems to link all graffiti, *as if they had been drawn by the same hand*, and the smoothed, worn, and corroded appearance, as if they were survivors from an early age, *derive from the wall itself*.¹¹⁴

The inanimate but imposing support of the wall, in short, is for Brassäi the ultimate artist and subject, whose materiality overrides the will of the individual artists and turns their multiple hands into a single, invisible one.

In the previous section, I have shown how Einstein, equating the dematerialized collage that Aragon celebrates with art’s pernicious assimilation into

modern industrial manufacture, strives to counteract this scenario with a primitivist image of the manually active magician-artisan, who is also the adult version of Bataille's destructive, vandalizing children. But as revealed by Griaule's ethnography and Brassai's paraethnography, even the seemingly primitive and manual art of graffiti can give rise to *some degree* of demanualization: either the labor- and material-saving simplification of form in Griaule's example, or, in Brassai's, the uniformization of individual styles by virtue of a common, materially resistant support. But by far the clearest and most radical examples of *primitive demanualization* are found in Luquet's studies of the art of the prehistoric Aurignacians and modern children, two human groups that the ethnologist mistakenly conflates. Nevertheless, in both types of art, Luquet productively identifies the use of methods that a nondialectical primitivism would have considered unique to industrial modernity, namely, the ready-made image and mechanical reproduction.

As discussed above, Luquet's idea of a preliminary stage of random markings before fortuitous realism was important for Bataille, who appropriates it for a theory of "primitive art" as "willful alteration." But in *Primitive Art*, Luquet also offers two alternative scenarios for the genesis of art that Bataille omits, both of which shorten the process toward a complete image. The first shortcut is achieved through filling in chance images found in nature:

It is . . . possible . . . that in the case of the Aurignacians as in the case of our children, artistic creation has from the very beginning not consisted in the execution of an entire figure on completely blank surface, but was initially limited to the physically easier and in particular psychologically simpler activity of intentionally completing a resemblance which the artist noted and judged imperfect in the pictures that were not his work. The child perfects, in this way, not only his fortuitous drawings but also unrelated productions and even natural accidents.¹¹⁵

Appropriating found images as the basis for further work, this first method proposed by Luquet can be conceived as a partial or assisted ready-made. By comparison, it is the second method he posits that qualifies as truly mechanical, enabling the creation and reproduction of an image in the absence of or before the acquisition of manual technique. In *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man* (1926), Luquet speculates that prehistoric animals and humans both habitually left finger-, hand- and footprints on the cave walls and floors, either by accident or as consequence of locomotion. But unlike other types of chance images, the imprint is already fully complete. As an *index* or sign of physical presence, the animal's prints serve as a language or set of codes for the hunter, who sees that "each animal leaves a characteristic footmark on the soft earth, that of the horse differing from that of the bison, rhinoceros, or felines, as the track of a web-footed bird differs from that of a waddling or gallinaceous species."¹¹⁶ As an *icon* or image, the handprint or the footprint is conducive to reproduction by "the process of mechanical design."¹¹⁷ Inspired

by their own accidentally left handprints, the Aurignacian artists would then proceed to make “intentionally executed handprints” on the walls either by “printed or transfer” (*par impression ou par décalque*) or “outlining” (*par épargne ou au stenciling*):

The hand soaked in liquid color was applied to the surface and left thereon its imprint. Or, when the hand had been placed on the naturally wet or purposely moistened surface, and even . . . where the surface had been tinted with a ground coloring of a different shade, the color was then applied all around either with the hand or with the mouth so as to leave a silhouette surrounded by a field of color.¹¹⁸ (Figure 2.6)

Prehistoric artists were thus already utilizing the mechanical method of printing, as Luquet demonstrates in this earlier work. In *Primitive Art*, he makes an even stronger case: Contrary to modern prejudices, this mechanically reproduced image generally *precedes* the manually executed one, both in prehistory and in the present.

On the one hand, the ethnologist maintains the passage from fortuitous

FIGURE 2.6. Pattern paintings in black (dark gray) and red (light gray) of hands, the cave of Gargas, Hautes-Pyrénées. Georges Luquet, *L'Art et la religion des hommes fossils*, 223.



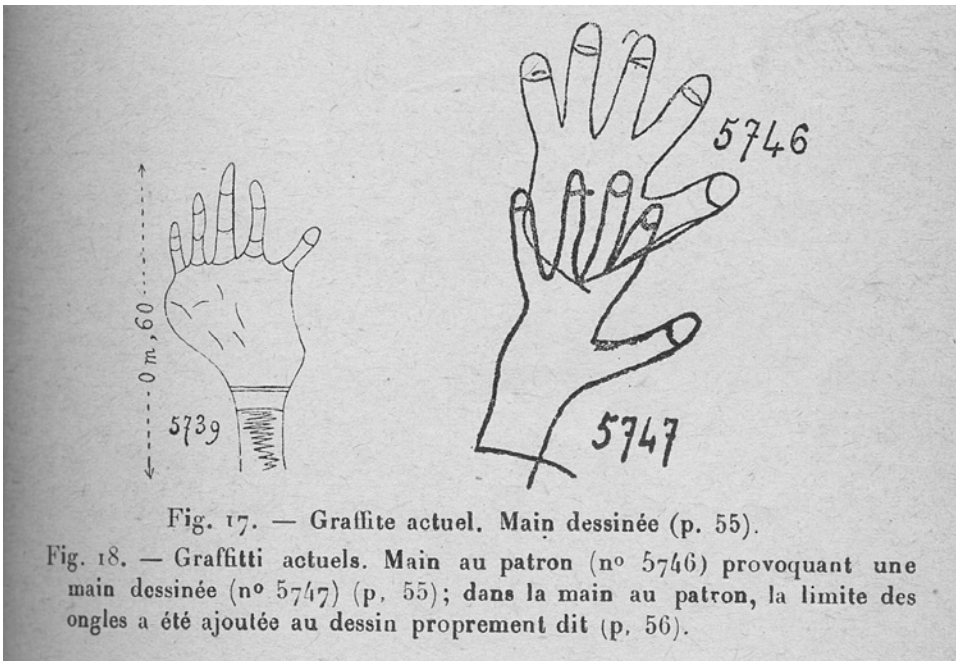


FIGURE 2.7. Graffiti showing a drawn hand (left) and a traced one (right; 5746) that consequently inspired a drawn one (right; 5747). Georges Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 55.

to intentional realism as the standard scenario for the genesis of figurative art. On the other hand, he also hypothesizes that “the intentional reproduction of initially accidental handprints was effectively one of the earliest, if not the first type of intentional drawing.”¹¹⁹ In the most innovative section of the 1930 book, which exceptionally does not derive from previous work, Luquet presents evidence for its plausibility, for instance “the immense numerical disproportion between hands that are really drawn and hands that are printed or stenciled” among the thousands of drawings by children and graffiti he had collected¹²⁰ (Figure 2.7). Among the meager number of manually executed hands, “most examples are found next to imprinted or stenciled hands, in such a way that the intention to execute them must not have been spontaneous but rather suggested by the sight of the latter.”¹²¹ For Luquet, this anteriority of the mechanical, which can even serve as a model for the subsequent manual image, can be explained by

the difference in the procedure of execution between drawing proper on the one hand and, on the other, a somewhat mechanical procedure that makes it possible to produce an image without having to know how to draw or to make the effort. . . . With children, therefore, the printing or stenciling of the hand seems dictated by the intention to produce an image by a purely mechanical method, thereby manifesting their creative faculty with maximum facility.¹²²

Admittedly, Luquet seems unable to explain this anteriority and predominance of mechanical methods in terms other than those of facility, let alone reconcile these facts with his technical-progressivist genesis of art.¹²³ Nevertheless, his research makes it possible to see the mechanical and the manual ultimately as coeval modes of making, and simultaneously available to artists of all times. An eight-year-old boy could therefore deploy both modes to obtain drawings of a hammer and a pair of pliers, Luquet shows, tracing the tools' contours directly onto paper and adding the rivet and interior curve of the hammerhead by hand (Figure 2.8).

In his ambitiously transhistorical study of chance or "potential" images, Dario Gamboni aligns Luquet's ethnographic research with the surrealist artists' experimentations on the basis that all partake in a historical anthropology of image-making based on "the recurrent idea . . . that the creation of the first representation was suggested by mental images (eidetism) or, in particular, by the perception of accidental images in natural sources or in non-iconic human traces."¹²⁴ In effect, surrealist art in this formative period would present several methods of primitive demanualization (following my rhetorical formulation) akin to those considered by Luquet in the ethnographic context.

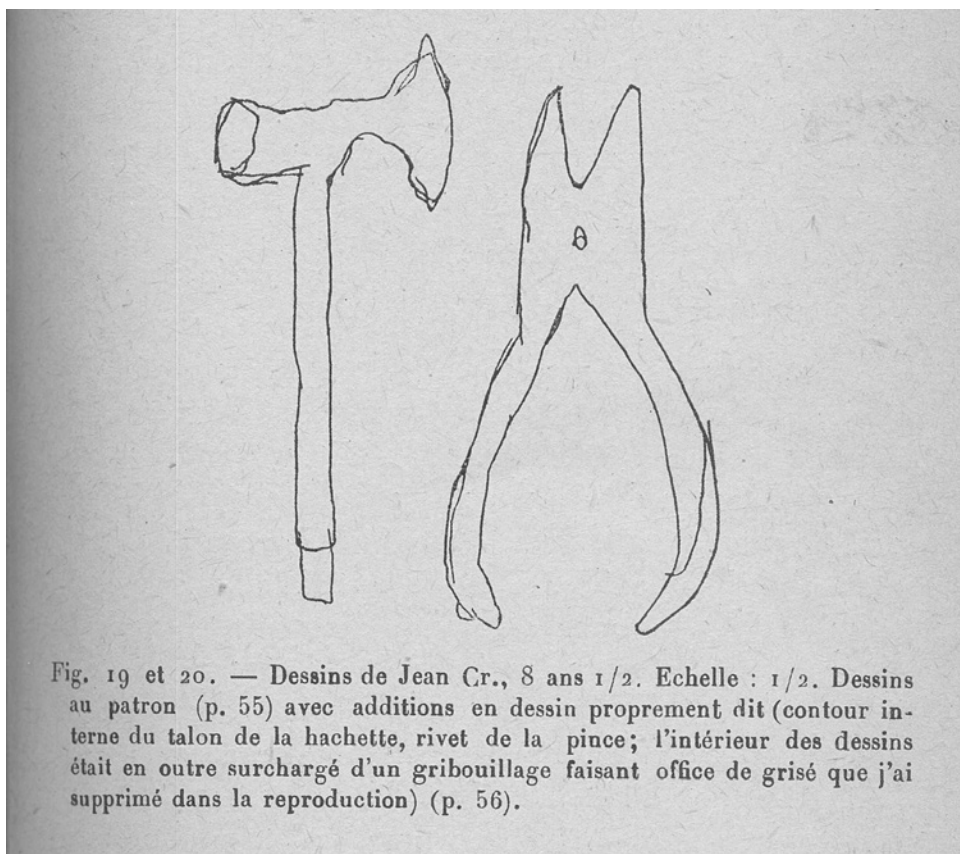


FIGURE 2.8. An eight-year-old boy's drawings of tools by tracing. Georges Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 57.

Around 1925, Ernst began to actively deploy the procedure *frottage* by taking rubbings of floorboards, leaves, linen, and miscellaneous objects, and seeing in their forms a plethora of chance images ranging from the simple to the complex: “human heads, animals, a battle that ended with a kiss (the bride of the wind), rocks, the sea and the rain, earthquakes, the sphinx in her stable, the little tables around the earth, the palette of Caesar, false positions, a shawl of frost flowers, the pampas.”¹²⁵ Rigorously speaking, however, Ernst’s innovation consists in naming and systematically applying a method that the artist himself attributes to Leonardo da Vinci, who had advised young artists to “look at any walls soiled with a variety of stains, or stones with variegated patterns. . . . [Y]ou will therein be able to see a resemblance to various landscapes graced with mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, great valleys and hills in many combinations.”¹²⁶ Yet even Leonardo can at best be seen as appropriating a phenomenon documented by ancient writers, and which Luquet considers the very origin of figurative art.

Another prevalent method of surrealist art approaches the condition of primitive demanualization in a less intuitive manner. In his 1945 essay, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” the critic André Bazin credits the surrealists with being the first to see the mechanical medium of photography as “actually contribut[ing] something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it”; “Photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity,” Bazin writes, “because it produces an image that is a reality of nature, namely, an hallucination that is also a fact.”¹²⁷ Taking his cues from the surrealists, Bazin finds that this objective character of the photograph makes it less akin to manually executed images than to indexical objects that take physical part of what they represent, like the mummy, the relic, the fingerprint, or the death mask, whose molding “involves a certain automatic process.”¹²⁸ Whereas “a human hand intervened” in a painting or drawing to “cast a shadow of doubt over the image,” a photograph is “an illusion by a mechanical production,” “an image of the world . . . formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man,” therefore “affect[ing] us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are an inseparable part of their beauty.”¹²⁹

In Bazin’s primitivist reading of photography as what medieval image theorists used to call *acheiropoietos* (images not made by the human hands), the medium reawakens “the proclivity of the mind towards magic” due to the proximity between its demanualized automatism and the autogenesis of natural phenomena.¹³⁰ Luquet gestured toward this notion when seeing the mechanical handprint as possibly the earliest, the most facile, and in this sense the most *natural* of images. Meanwhile, Breton and the surrealists, as Bazin rightly notes, would recognize this paradox in the moment of incorporating photography into the category of “surrealist painting.” In “Surrealism and Painting,” Breton praises the photographic medium for its potential ability to capture not the resemblance but the physical presence of Napoleon, much like “his imprint on certain objects.”¹³¹ He admires Man Ray’s photograms or Rayographs for animating human body parts and objects, which seem to “make

love" (as he elsewhere says of words in surrealist poetry) by touching: "[T]he pearl necklace slips from the naked shoulders on to the white page where a ray of sunlight whisks it away," resulting in "the delectation of the shadows."¹³² Seeing the shadows of Man Ray's positive prints as evocative of conjoined twins in relation to their negatives, Breton finds that the images and their templates "live and die from the same trembling, from the same hour, from the same lost or intercepted glimmers of light" and are "as necessary to each other as that which touches [is] to that which is touched."¹³³ As revealed by Breton's emphasis on contact, for the surrealists, photography dispenses with the human hand only in order to make room for an art making by the means of *impersonal touch* (modifying Aragon's term), a transmedial principle that encompasses two-dimensional imprinting as well as three-dimensional molding. Breton's text therefore offers a way of reading Arp's sculpture *with* rather than against the new mechanical medium. If Arp's "empty objects" are comparable to "secret moulds from which there emerge glass masks already worn away by constant use," their biomorphic contours bring to mind the experience of "walking on sand where each foot leaves an imprint that is not the same size as that foot."¹³⁴ Comparing the same artist's string reliefs, "these hard or tender loops," to "the qualities of heaviness and lightness of a swallow perching on a telegraph wire," Breton implies that these bent lines result ultimately not from the hand of the human artist, but from a nonanthropocentric touch that brings together the natural and mechanical realms.¹³⁵

Between Mechanization and Nature: The Automatic Hand as Subject

So far, I have tried to analyze the ambiguous relationship between interwar ethnology and surrealist art theory, partly in an effort to articulate the relationship between the surrealists' strategically appropriated ethnological concepts and the anticolonial position of the group around Breton. This analysis has hopefully revealed how, especially for the latter, the coevalness between the so-called civilized and the primitive in the moral-political realm was unthinkable without a parallel theory of the coevalness between the mechanical and the natural in the aesthetic realm. In this concluding section, I will suggest that the recurrent figure of the automatic, "magical" hand in surrealist art and publications can be understood in terms of the surrealists' interest in theorizing a mechanical-natural form of art making as well as a universal-primitive, nonanthropocentric subjectivity.

While surrealist art has consistently represented the hand as detached from the body, beginning with the lone glove in Giorgio de Chirico's mid-1910s paintings, the prototype of the *active*, autonomous hand appeared first in Ernst's early 1920s collages (Figure 2.9). By manipulating manuals of parlor magic found in the popular science magazine *La Nature*, specifically removing their instructional context and reorienting the hands in relation to one another, the artist creates the impression of truly magical hands that

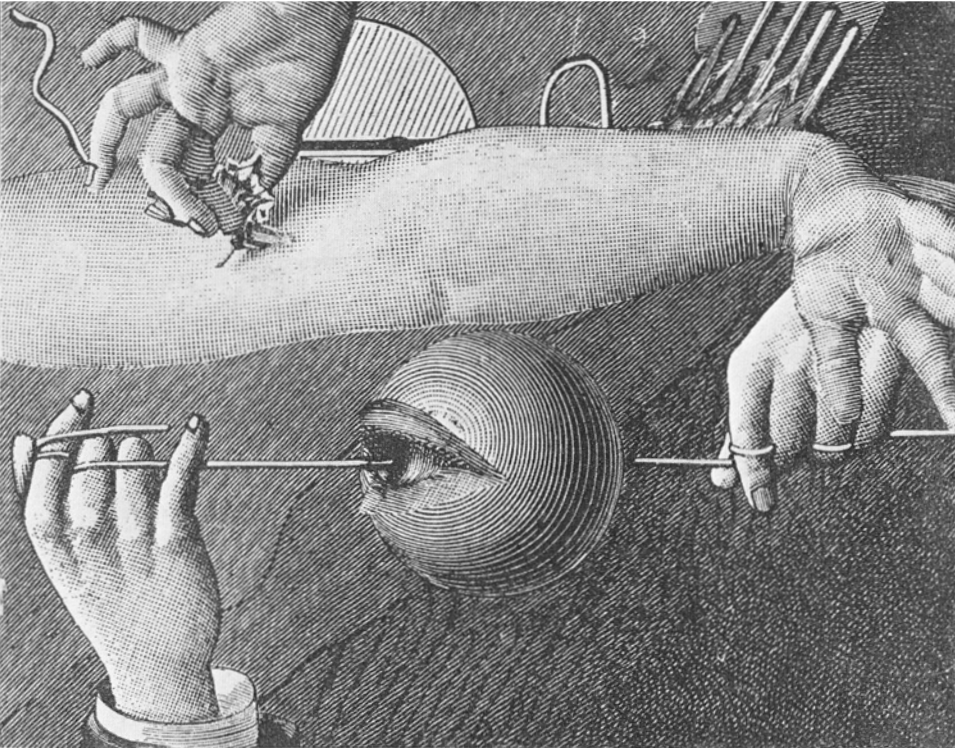


FIGURE 2.9. Max Ernst, collage for Paul Éluard's *Répétitions*, 1922. Copyright 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

resemble the multi-limbed bodies of insects or tentacular animals.¹³⁶ In his 1928 film, *L'Étoile de mer* (Starfish), Man Ray goes further by juxtaposing the human hand and foot with the five-limb sea creature, as shown in the two film stills in *Variétés*, as if turning them into animals (Figure 2.10). But while images of this type emphasize the animality of the hand, equally frequent in surrealist art is the representation of the hand as an instrument or apparatus. Apart from Giacometti's table-top sculpture with a punning title, *Main prise* (Caught Hand/Hand-Outlet), showing a hand like a mechanical part inside an obscure contraption, one can also cite photographs by Germaine Krull and Eli Lotar showing the hands as the reading instruments for the blind and the visually impaired (Figure 2.11). In her consideration of close-up photographs of the hand and handprints in interwar photography, Krauss interprets these images as commenting on the newly available hand-held camera as a prosthesis, as "another hand-manipulated tool, extending the body's powers in much the way the pencil does, functioning . . . as a kind of artificial limb."¹³⁷ But this is possible only because the hand itself is already protoprosthetic and the body's first tool, following Luquet's insight that "no object lends itself to these mechanical procedures [of art making] better than the hand, since one has it constantly at one's disposition for imprinting or for serving as stencil."¹³⁸ If "disembodied hands function as signifiers of psychic

FIGURE 2.IO. Photo-essay in *Variétés* 1, no. 2 (June 1928), showing two stills from Man Ray's *L'Étoile de mer*. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

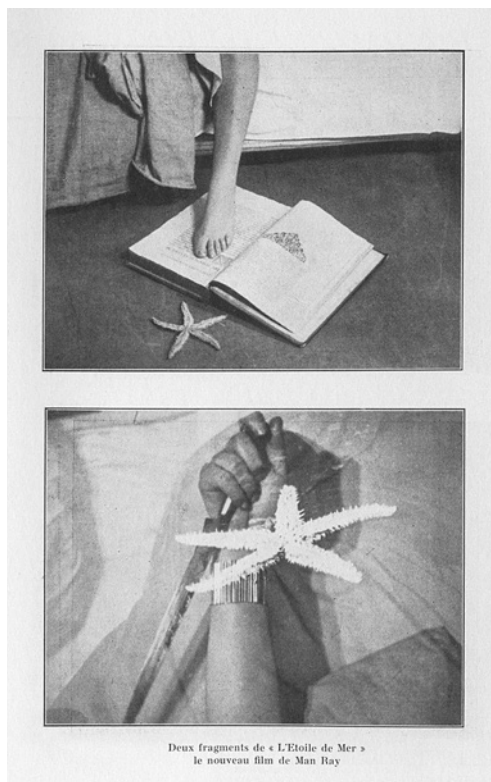


FIGURE 2.II. “Hands.” Photo-essay in *Variétés* 1, no. 9 (January 1929). Copyright Estate Germaine Krull, Museum Folkwang, Essen



dislocation" in surrealist art and literature, as Kirsten A. Hoving contends, this dislocated subject remains ambiguous insofar as being both an animal and a machine.¹³⁹

This simultaneously natural and mechanical hand as imagined by the surrealists, I want to suggest, can shed light on their position on the condition of demanualization (Roberts). In short, instead of opposing or denigrating manual crafts, as Einstein had thought when reading Aragon's "Challenge to Painting," the surrealists sought to imagine the paradox of a *manual automatism*. This is by no means a strictly surrealist concept, as attested by the fact that two international craft theorists of the interwar period, Henri Focillon in France and Soetsu Yanagi in Japan, have each independently come to a similar insight. For Yanagi, the superskilled artisans of robustly made, everyday utilitarian objects or *mingei* (folk crafts) are admirable because their technical virtuosity approaches a state of quasi-mechanization, so that "those who have mastered these skills are no longer aware of the techniques they use."¹⁴⁰ In this state, says Yanagi, the hand momentarily separates from the conscious mind, which is now freed up for other activities. Outsourcing the job to their experientially disembodied hands, as it were, the artisans "may be cheerfully talking and laughing as they work, but most surprising is their speed. . . . Thousands of times, tens of thousands of times, it is this repetition that frees their hands from thought. . . . *Their hands appear no longer to be their own but under the sway of some external force.*"¹⁴¹ Although there is no evidence that Yanagi had the surrealists in mind when theorizing the experienced artisans' automatic hands, this connection was made by none other than his son, the eminent industrial designer Sori Yanagi, who later would compare his father's notion of the "unconscious beauty" of *mingei* objects to "the beauty of automatism," "substantiated by the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and André Breton."¹⁴²

It is difficult to imagine the humanist Focillon—with his primitivist nostalgia for making by hand and strong disapproval for the mechanical medium of photography—celebrating with the Yanagis the hand's virtuosic approximation of the condition of the machine. Yet Focillon's "In Praise of Hands" (1934), a poetic essay doubling as pro-craft manifesto, nevertheless ends with a striking scenario of demanualization, not by means of quasi-mechanization but by the means of nature. In this seminal text, Focillon mostly praises *Homo faber* from cave dwellers to Paul Gauguin for working with their hands, yet he also makes a case for the autonomy of the hand, which serves the mind but is nevertheless not to be equated with the latter's "docile slave," for it is "endowed with a vigorous spirit, with a physiognomy" and "searches and experiments for its master's benefit; it has all sorts of adventures."¹⁴³ Pleading for the hand's emancipation, the author ultimately imagines this utopian scenario through a legend about the Japanese artist Hokusai, known for occasionally using natural objects to paint as substitutes for the brush and for incorporating accidents into his work. For Focillon, Hokusai's greatest feat consists in a spectacular demonstration of *painting without hands*: "Dipping the claws of a rooster in a pot of red paint, he made the bird run across

the scroll and leave its tracks on it. Everyone present recognized in them the water of the stream called Tatsouta carrying along maple leaves reddened by autumn. A charming piece of sorcery, in which nature seems to work unaccompanied to reproduce nature."¹⁴⁴ More radically than the automated hands of *mingei* artisans, Hokusai's hands magically achieve full autonomy from *Homo faber* through an animal surrogate. Painting literally like a foot (per the common French expression for gaucheness), these emancipated hands, reincarnated as the rooster's feet, deploy the mechanical method of imprinting at an efficient speed, rapidly reproducing multiple leaf motifs as well as the river's *run*—a universal gesture shared by natural phenomena, animals, humans, and machines.

Despite the intellectual differences between Focillon and the surrealists, his figure of the printing rooster as a substitute for manual painting sheds light on their comparable and concurrent efforts to redistribute artistic agency among the human, the machine, and nature in equal shares.¹⁴⁵ In a 1933 essay published in *LSASDLR*, for instance, Dalí imagines an automatic method that integrates the human hand, photography, and the industrial process of hot-dipping, hoping to produce sculptures or what he calls "psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic objects" that would resemble naturally formed meteorites (Figure 2.12). If, for Dalí, the medium of photography is comparable to the wireless telegraph due to its ability to create remotely, as suggested by the image of the inventor Guglielmo Marconi in the guise of a man rendered "automatic" by sedatives, this mechanical medium is also organic. Color photographs of Marconi himself "persecuting a frightened parrot with a long lead rod" are therefore said to multiply on this Marconi-like

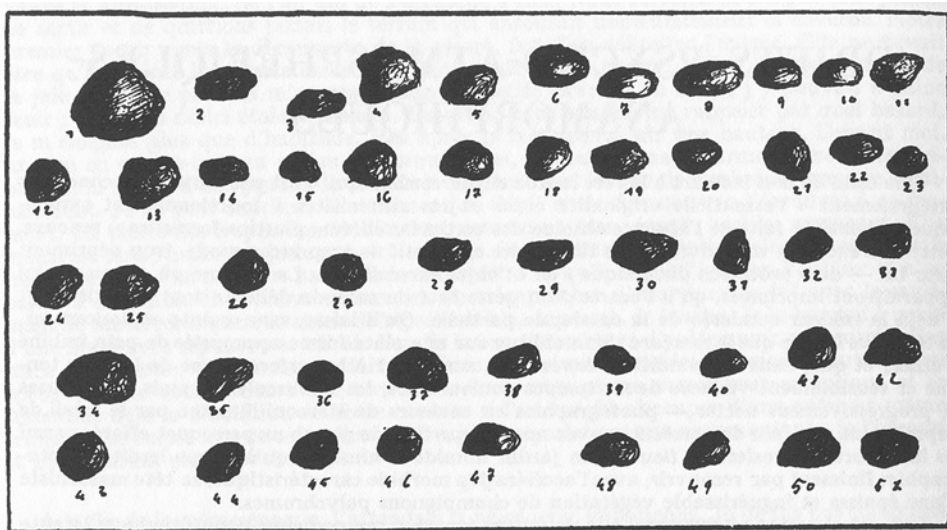


FIGURE 2.12. Salvador Dalí, "View of the New Psycho-Atmospheric-Anamorphic objects." *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (1933): 46. Copyright 2024 Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Artists Rights Society.

man's skin like fungus, "covering his masochistic head with a thick and incurable vegetation of polychromous mushrooms."¹⁴⁶ Proceeding to transpose this idea to sculpture, Dalí finds that this mechanical-yet-natural method would be possible only if the human agents involved are made blind, which in turn frees their hands to become autonomous. The multistep procedure goes as follows: A surrealist randomly chooses an object out of several previously set up by other surrealists in a darkened room; then, several "technicians" take turns touching and describing elements of the chosen object in order to reconstruct it, again in darkness. Reconstituted by tactile-verbal molding, the object will then be dropped onto a haystack "to enhance the incidental aspect," on which spot it will be photographed by a previously set up camera "but always without the photographer being able to see it."¹⁴⁷ The photograph, once developed, will be sealed unseen in a metal cube; the latter is then "dipped in an indeterminate mass of molten iron."¹⁴⁸ This process will finally produce "formless pieces of iron, with their most worthless, insignificant, and pitiful appearance."¹⁴⁹

While Dalí's notion of sculpting in total darkness evokes what Martin Jay has described as surrealism's anti-"ocularcentrism," the specific aim of this tactic here is not to denigrate vision but to activate the impersonal touch of "hands that read," as suggested by the title of the photo-essay in *Variétés*.¹⁵⁰ And if Dalí's emphasis on the formless character of the "psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic objects" (he uses the adjective "formless" no less than four times) is analogous to Bataille's "avoidance of form" as Krauss argues, the artist also makes the baseness of the Bataillean formless more physical than social-moral, suggesting that the objects have become lowly only as a result of being literally dropped from on high.¹⁵¹ More importantly, as the "real and authentic meteor of the imagination," Dalí's objects become formless or anamorphic not due to an alteration by human hands but to forces akin to the gravitational sculpting of "rocks falling out of the sky," whose "extraterrestrial origins show the indisputable existence of fragments of other celestial bodies."¹⁵² It is therefore crucial that the blind touch that initiates the creation of the object be followed by the hand's actions of release (dropping the object onto the haystack or into hot iron) or "letting go," to borrow from the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's poetic phrase for the nongrasping gesture of prehistoric handprints.¹⁵³ For Nancy, it is the human hand's momentary abandon of its prehensile potential that enabled the making of its own image by touch; for Dalí and the surrealists, the same gesture of "letting go" makes it possible to imagine the reconciliation of the human hand with the invisible hands of nature.

In the next chapter, it will be seen how nature emerges as one of the paradigms for surrealism's new automatism, and particularly in the intellectual space made possible by the review *Minotaure*. Meanwhile, one essay in particular in this foremost publication for 1930s surrealism can be read as the movement's own "praise of hands," in which the hands serving as model are those of nature. In Georges Hugnet's prose-poem, "Small Reverie of the Master Huntsman," the protagonist is a "beautiful palmist" who is



Calavas frères

PETITE RÊVERIE DU GRAND VENEUR

par GEORGES HUGNET

DE la main au gant, de la main-mesure à l'ombre, de la main de mer à la main de poule, de la main donnée à la main qu'on prête, il y a plus d'un pouce, plus d'une main, car il y a toute la main du destin, la main hiromancienne, cette main de gloire qui sous la flamme de sa bougie tient toutes les mains mortes, la main qui est une racine convulsée comme le cri de son arrachement.

Avant d'arriver à ce sourd château qui apparaissait et disparaissait en un tournemain, la belle chiromancienne, — c'était une main masquée haut et court dans une mitaine d'araignée, — dut franchir un sous-bois où passait de main en main un éventail. Là, tout un peuple avait la main légère : mains minérales qui mûrissent sous les yeux des alchimistes, mains fossiles, mains de racines, mains de madrépores dépayés, de champignons à la chair d'ombre, mains de poissons, et d'autres en bois ou en marbre, en plâtre, polies à la main.

D'une grande salle où on accédait par un hall à éclairage marin rempli de gants accrochés à des mains d'ivoire, partaient des couloirs dans les cinq directions des doigts. Une main harmonique avait présidé à cette disposition que précisait une main courante. Tout au long des couloirs, des socles en peluche supportaient des mains de verre tenant des vases ou des étoiles, des mains typographiques, des mains votives, des mains tranchées, des mains heureuses, des mains malheureuses, des mains de cire, des mains phénomènes.

On y déjeunait d'une main d'oublies.

I. Dans le pouce était aménagé un théâtre d'ombres pour que les mains pussent devenir des biches, des oiseaux, des paysages.

II. Dans l'index la main de Cléopâtre tournait, d'une blancheur de cralle, à la confusion de l'histoire.

III. Le médus abritait des mains qui halaient main sur main le câble du destin.

IV. Pour l'annulaire, il contenait une main hiéroglyphique dont les symboles miroitaient comme des bagues de fatalité.

V. Restait l'auriculaire la main chaude attrapait des mains et des mains, à pleine main, des mains fines qui s'appelaient fascinations.

À la place de la paume se trouvait donc la grande

salle. Des mains s'y distraisaient, nonchalantes, ou y jouaient à des poursuîtes. Mains droites et mains gauches en venaient aux mains. Ici, des mains imitaient des monstres dans les vetours. Là, des mains dans un cône de lumière jouaient au billard. Une harpe marchait toute seule, un peigne dans une chevelure, et bien d'autres objets encore, entourés de mains volantes. Un peu partout dormaient des mains. Mains longues, couchées comme des peaux de Suède, mains de sirènes dans des eaux de fuschine, mains aux ongles bleus de nuit, mains de jour, mains foudroyées par leurs lignes, mains d'agate, mains modelées, mains battues et mains à fouet, mains abandonnées comme une algue jetée sur le sable, mains, plutôt des caresses en forme de mains, endormies sur des conques de Vénus, mains dédaigneuses de gel et de fougère, mains aimées, mains de rêve et de pluie relâchées de fraîcheur, mains brûlées de la fièvre, mains comme des corps de femmes couchées, aux hanches saillantes, mains hantées semblables aux mains de diable des mers chaudes, mains sur la bouche, mains, mains... Et à l'écart, comme mue par le silence d'une tour dans le passé, une main hautaine, oublieuse de ses dentelles, caressait, on eût dit sans savoir, une statue attéridée par un long, précis, savant envoiement, de la façon dont elle aurait flatté la tête d'un lévrier.

C'est alors que, mystérieuses des mystérieuses parmi ces mains sans nom, la belle chiromancienne quitta sa robe de filouelle et fit glisser une tenture qui semblait ne devoir cacher qu'une fenêtre. Or, à travers un rideau de fumée que dissipaient des mains de bois tourné, apparut la Main, la Main qui en met sa main au feu, la Main maîtresse, la merveilleuse, la Main de sang, la main nue de Vengeance, la main nouée sur l'amour et la révolte, la main lourde, la Main Noire, la main qui étreint et relâche des mondes en loques, la Mandragore :

tout ce qui ne tient pas dans la main.

Georges HUGNET.



MASQUE ZUNI DE ANAHOLO (NOUVEAU MEXIQUE). LA MAIN PEINTE SUR LE VISAGE REPRÉSENTE UNE CONSTELLATION. L'OREILLE EST FIGURÉE PAR LA FLEUR D'UNE HERBE NARCOTIQUE.

FIGURE 2.13. *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 30. (Illustrations: Louis Igout, studies of a female hand, Calavas studio; "Anaholo" mask by the Zuni people, New Mexico.)

simultaneously a “masked hand, high and short in a spider glove without fingers.”¹⁵⁴ Crossing an undergrowth where “a fan was being passed from hand to hand,” she eventually enters a fairy world, a submarine castle where humans and natural entities are indistinguishable because *all* are hands:

Everyone there has nimble hands: mineral hands that mature under the eyes of alchemists, fossil hands, root hands, hands of displaced madrepores, those of mushroom with shadow flesh, the hands of fish, and others in wood or in marble, in plaster, polished by hand.¹⁵⁵

This kingdom of hands, Hugnet suggests, is a mirage created by magic, “which appeared and disappeared in a flip of a hand [*en un tournemain*].” But this magic can also be conceptualized as a state where hands are freed from the instrumentality of technique, and where *Homo faber*’s work (hand-polished sculptures in various materials) enter into communion with the inorganic and organic beings not made by human hands. Hugnet’s hands must therefore be read as figures for surrealism’s utopian subjects, characterized by heterogeneity, multiplicity, and nonanthropocentrism. In the previous chapter, I have shown how the surrealists appeal to the mask as the means of theorizing nonsovereign subjectivities that go beyond the narrow, bourgeois notion of the self. Here, by juxtaposing twelve photographic studies of a female hand by Studio Calavas with a Zuni hand-mask from New Mexico as illustrations, Hugnet and the *Minotaure* editors suggest that hands, instead of unalienable parts of individual bodies, can also be conceived as inhabitable and removable masks¹⁵⁶ (Figure 2.13). Though an extension of the subject, the hand is simultaneously an *other*, as the surrealists and the craft theorists speculate in their various accounts of manual automatism, enabling access to an impersonal subjectivity beyond the individual and the human.

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Minotaure as the Ethnography of the Subject

Automatism, Femininity, Heterogeneity

Unlike *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924–29) and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (LSASDLR, 1930–33), the movement's foremost organ in the 1930s did not begin as a surrealist review but gradually assumed a surrealist character. Launched on the initiative of fine arts editors E. Tériade and Albert Skira, the review *Minotaure* incorporated the influence of Georges Bataille, whom Skira approached first as a potential collaborator, as well as that of André Breton and Paul Éluard, who were informed of the project through the intermediary of Pierre Reverdy. Although Breton's circle came to represent the surrealist facet of the publication, often against the taste and preferences of its more conservative editors, Bataille (possibly helped by André Masson or Roger Vitrac) is credited with its title.¹ Had it not been for the personal antipathies between Bataille and select individuals in Breton's group, residual from the contentious era of *Documents*, the two groups might have even collaborated overtly on this multifaceted "literary and artistic review," whose scope includes "ethnography and mythology" as well as "psycho-analytic studies and observations."² Indeed, both the contributors and the review itself give evidence for the relative insignificance of the earlier polemic. Not only does the publication feature contributions of the core surrealists and former *Documents* figures such as Bataille, Michel Leiris, Jacques Baron, and Jacques Prévert, the contents and format also "openly and totally applies the techniques used by *Documents*," as suggested by José Pierre, but not "in the cause of vehement, sarcastic and cruel leftist opposition, [rather] in that of surrealism carried to the highest pitch of lyrical fervour."³ Dawn Ades similarly finds that "*Documents* and surrealism have come together in *Minotaure*, though the subversive, underground element in the *Documents* spirit is muted."⁴

If, to some, the reconciliatory *Minotaure* represents the regrettable neutralization of *Documents*, the significant presence of ethnological materials in this sumptuous art review still attests to the influence of Bataille and his circle of professional ethnologists; for instance, its second issue was entirely devoted to reports from the Dakar-Djibouti Mission led by Marcel Griaule, in which Leiris took part. But it has not gone unnoticed that the review also serves as a space for an unofficial, lay ethnography, which takes human as well as natural phenomena as its subjects. Pointing out how *Minotaure* blurs the conventional distinctions between aesthetic and ethnographic objects by giving

them equal treatment, Katharine Conley sees the photographer Brassai and other artists featured in this publication as taking an ethnographic approach to Western culture.⁵ According to Christopher Green, Brassai's protoethnographic photographs of Pablo Picasso's studio in *Minotaure's* inaugural issue influenced critics, who subsequently "structured that work [by Picasso] as if it was the material, the documentation of a new ethnology: a new 'science de l'homme.'" Even the scientific texts on animals in *Minotaure* might be read as advancing an "animal ethnography," as Effie Rentzou proposes, where "what could have passed as a standard zoological description acquires a depth of an account on human societies."⁷

If the lay ethnography of *Minotaure* is symptomatic of this method's non-specificity and adaptability to ethnology, sociology, criminology, zoology, psychiatry, and the arts, it also reflects the surrealists' empirical approach to intellectual problems that they believed could be addressed only at the intersection of these seemingly disparate disciplines or domains. In this chapter, I am concerned with particular moments during the review's six-year run where the surrealist artists, poets, writers, and their intellectual peers apply this paraethnographic lens to an investigation of the question of subjectivity. This approach was prompted in great part by the surrealists' ongoing revision of the founding theory of automatism, which necessitated a new supply of nonsovereign or automatic subjectivities found in everyday life and the natural world. By examining the contributions of Breton, Jacques Lacan, Salvador Dalí, Tristan Tzara, and René Crevel in *Minotaure's* early issues, I will show in the first half of the chapter how this *ethnography of the subject* serves to redefine automatism as an extroverted, active, and intentional mode of subjectivity, modeled on the feminine psychic position as well as nature. While this rapprochement of the feminine and the natural through automatism reflects the male surrealists' reliance on the mythologization of women and its implied stereotypes (justifiably criticized by Xavière Gautier and others), my claim will be that it also reconfigures the feminine as the universal position, in the sense of being predisposed to adopting *both* genders as masks.

In the absence of a univocal agenda, *Minotaure* served as a platform for surrealism's collective projects such as the revision of automatism, but it also included voices that might be potentially incompatible. Reading Roger Caillois's two essays on animal mimicry, I argue that his equation of automatism with the castration complex reveals yet another reason for the predominance of the feminine in 1930s surrealism. In short, the feminine preempts the pathologization of automatism, a perspective that a phallogentric position is prone to adopt. This does not mean, however, that the surrealists overlooked the pathogenic potential of the automatic subject. In the last section of the chapter, I will make the case that the surrealists considered the malady of the subject through the psychoanalytic lens of perverted narcissism rather than the biologicistic concept of mimetic "psychasthenia" (Caillois), thereby making possible a critique of what Bataille calls the "psychological structure of fascism" by means of a feminine mode of heterogeneity.

From "The Rotten Donkey" to *Minotaure*: Toward a New Automatism

The diversity of their contents notwithstanding, the first three regular issues of *Minotaure* in 1933–34 (no. 1, no. 3–4, no. 5) clearly cohere around the intellectual issue of automatism, the founding concept of the surrealist movement that now presents itself as significantly revised and broadened. This revision had been underway already since 1930 when, as a new member of the movement, Dalí introduced the para-psychopathological state of paranoia, derived most likely from Sigmund Freud, to supplement if not *supplant* automatism.⁸ In "The Rotten Donkey," a legendary text that appeared in Dalí's *La Femme visible* (1930) and also in the first issue of *LSASDLR*, the artist proposes paranoia as a new mental disposition or "crisis" that would "contribute to a total discrediting of the world of reality" in ways more active than "automatism and other passive states."⁹ Whereas automatism liberates the unconscious, paranoia more radically makes reality subservient to it; it "makes use of the external world in order to set off its obsessive idea. . . . The reality of the external world serves as an illustration and proof, and is placed thus at the service of the reality of our mind."¹⁰ In "The Sanitary Goat" (1930) of the same year, which also appeared in *La Femme visible*, Dalí uses for the first time the term "critical-paranoiac thought" (*pensée paranoïaque-critique*), presumably to stress its status as a "crisis" and to distinguish the critical method of paranoia from the psychopathological condition documented by doctors.¹¹

Because the early issues of *Minotaure* attest to the enduring legacy of Dalí's critical paranoia, it is necessary to briefly spell out its conceptual and aesthetic achievements. In contrast to the "psychic automatism" formulated by Breton in the founding "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924), referring to a "passive, or receptive, state of mind" that allows poets and writers to produce works "in the absence of any control exercised by reason," critical paranoia is the brainchild of a visual artist who ingeniously synthesizes the most significant theories of the surrealist image to date.¹² For Dalí, the paranoiac state is characterized by the perception of the "double image" or "the image of a horse that is at the same time the image of a woman"; subsequently, "a third image (the image of a lion, for example)" is produced that extends the process *ad infinitum*.¹³ In short, paranoia may be understood as a kind of perceptual "alteration" (Bataille) that produces the "multiple image" or "simulacra" without physically modifying the original model.¹⁴ Because each transformation remains equally distant from the model, the paranoiac image also mobilizes the law of the surrealist image with its two incongruous, "wild" terms, hence the "absence of the slightest osmosis between reality and the simulacra."¹⁵ Even more radically, Dalí would have the paranoiac simulacra triumph over reality as in a reversed mimesis: "[I]t is by their lack of congruity with reality . . . that the simulacra so easily assume the form of reality while the latter, in its turn, may adapt itself to the violence of the simulacra."¹⁶

As will be seen in the next section, it is Dalí's critical-paranoiac simulacra

that Breton would have in mind when theorizing the so-called eidetic image in *Minotaure* as a new form of visual automatism. For now, it is noteworthy that, as evidence for the triumph of the critical-paranoiac simulacra, Dalí cites Art Nouveau or “Modern Style ornamental architecture” (*architecture ornementale du Moderne Style*):

No collective effort has managed to create a dream world so pure and so disturbing as these Modern Style buildings, which, existing on the fringes of architecture, constitute in themselves a true realization of solidified desires and where the most violent and cruel automatism betrays a hatred of reality and the need to find refuge in an ideal world, in a manner akin to the way this happens in infantile neurosis.¹⁷

Reading the surrealists’ penchant for outmoded cultural forms in terms of an implicit critique of the progressivism of capitalist modernity, Hal Foster has found this project to be at risk of regression; Dalí’s infatuation with the obsolescent phantasmagoria of prewar Art Nouveau would thus represent one such instance of an infantile “withdrawal from social reality” of the present.¹⁸ Yet as pointed out by Steven Harris, historically, many surrealists took the contrary view of Dalí’s contribution, finding that “critical paranoia met the criteria for a surrealism that would be an active intervention into the world, preserving at the same time a sphere of autonomy for surrealist investigations into the workings of the mind.”¹⁹ If Breton almost immediately gave critical paranoia his highest endorsement, José Pierre suggests, it is because he saw Dalí’s concept as a needed antidote to automatism’s idealism, “its certain inclination . . . toward ‘the poverty of reality.’”²⁰ On a practical level, critical paranoia more specifically helped to deliver early automatism from the impasse that it had reached by 1929. As Breton laments in the “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1929), the practice is easily compromised by sloppy application, since authors claiming to write automatic texts often “let their pens run rampant over the paper without making the least effort to observe what was going on inside themselves.”²¹ With Dalí’s critical paranoia, this troubled automatism could now be renewed, made active and “extroverted” if not “exhibitionist,” as noted by Laurent Jenny, in that it no longer contents itself with trance and hallucination but “exhibits solidified desires” in the form of outlandish ornaments.²²

Welcomed enthusiastically by Breton and the surrealists, Dalí’s critical paranoia meanwhile interested another figure whose endorsement would become important for what I call *Minotaure*’s ethnography of the subject. Scholarly accounts differ slightly on the precise chronology of events, but most likely, having read Dalí’s “Rotten Donkey” in *LSASDLR*, the then little-known Lacan initiated contact with the artist; the two immediately connected over their common rejection of “the constitutionalist theories [of paranoiac psychosis] then almost unanimously accepted.”²³ From this moment and on, surrealism became a formative influence on the young psychiatrist, who went on

to coauthor a study in 1931 comparing the “inspired” writings of the patient Marcelle C. to the automatic texts of the surrealists.²⁴ In the following year, the publication of Lacan’s doctoral thesis *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (On paranoid psychosis and its relationships with the personality) made a splash in turn among the surrealists. In 1933, Joë Bousquet wrote a tribute to the protagonist of Lacan’s case study, the patient Aimée (née Marguerite Pantaine), and published extracts of her writings in the review *14, rue du Dragon*.²⁵ In the same year, Crevel, profoundly committed to exposing psychoanalysis’s polite racism and homophobia, endorsed Lacan’s “psycho-dialectic” consideration of psychosis in terms of the interdependence of psychic and social causes, noting that even Freud could not resist against a “mechanical materialism” when treating a homosexual patient.²⁶ Lacan’s “The Problem of Style and the Psychiatric Conception of Paranoid Forms of Experience” (1933) therefore appeared in the inaugural issue of *Minotaure* in a moment of mutual interest between the psychiatrist and various members of the surrealist movement.

If, according to Patrice Schmitt, Lacan’s engagement with Dalí lends scientific credence to the aesthetic theory of critical paranoia, the psychiatrist’s *Minotaure* essay meanwhile uncovers its anthropological significance. Without explicitly naming the surrealists, Lacan observes first that themes in the verbal and plastic productions of psychotics suffering from paranoia strongly recall those found in myth, folklore, and the work “of the greatest artists.” Second, these same materials tend to exhibit repeated structures and patterns, which Lacan describes as “iterative identification of object.”²⁷ Last, the irrational “symbols” produced by psychotics openly express “historically real social tensions” and psychic complexes that psychoanalysts struggle to wrest out of repressed neurotics.²⁸ From these facts, Lacan deduces an “anthropology,” by which he means the philosophical conception of the human being inflected by the findings of cultural anthropology: for instance, the latter’s documentation of non-Western civilizations’ not exclusively pathologizing treatment of mental anomalies and divergences.²⁹ In light of 1930s surrealism, by far the most consequential is Lacan’s observation concerning the formal character common to psychotic and surrealist writings:

Delirium indeed reveals itself to be very prolific in fantasms of cyclic repetition, of ubiquitous multiplication, of endless periodic returns of the same events, of the same persons doubled or tripled, and sometimes in hallucinations duplicating the subject’s person. These intuitions are manifestly akin to very constant processes of poetic creation and seem one of the conditions of typification, which creates style.³⁰

Reading this passage, Jenny finds it striking that, by *style*, Lacan does not mean “the mark of a unique expression” (as in an artist’s signature style) but “an iterative form, a process of ‘typification.’”³¹ This iterative style has therefore less affinity with Dalí’s individual style (as Schmitt suggests) than with

Modern Style, the “collective effort” (Dalí) that, having transformed the architectural landscape of an era, supports Lacan’s generalization of the schizographic style beyond the individual and the psychopathological condition.³²

In the following issue of *Minotaure*, Breton as the author of “The Automatic Message” will explicitly define Art Nouveau as the very generalization of this iterative style, modeled not on psychopathological art but on that of the spiritualist mediums. I will examine this essay in greater detail in the following section; in the meantime, it is crucial to note that this nonindividualist style emerging from the elemental structures of schizography is important for Lacan because it meets the minimum requirement for meaning making. Against positivist psychology’s mechanistic accounts of psychosis, Lacan believes that what these consider mere symptoms are actually “prolific in modes of symbolic expressions . . . which are not less furnished with an eminent *intentional* signification and with a very lofty, tensed *communicability*.”³³ Moreover, the fact that this manifest style in pathopsychological expression is not perceptually different from that of art, poetry, and myth makes it necessary to consider the insane as intentional subjects, even if they do not conform to the “bourgeois philosophical conception of man as endowed with absolute moral liberty and with responsibility appropriate to the individual.”³⁴ For Lacan, because “all these traits characteristic of paranoid lived experience leave it a margin of human communicability,” this psychopathological expression needs to be reintegrated into a broader anthropological phenomenon, which in turn affirms the belonging of the insane to “the human community.”³⁵

Although the older Lacan would come to express ambivalence in regard to a surrealist reading of his work, his encounter with the surrealists in his early years was uncontestably productive.³⁶ From the perspective of a surrealism in the midst of revising its founding concept, Lacan’s intentionalist conception of iterative style affirms new automatism’s character as active, extroverted, “objective,” and “interpretative,” as Dalí gleefully acknowledges in “Critical-Paranoiac Interpretation of the Obsessive Image of Millet’s *Angelus*.” Preceding immediately Lacan’s essay on style in the same issue of *Minotaure*, this text echoes the other surrealists’ admiration for Lacan’s 1932 thesis, stressing that the latter

perfectly accounts for the objective and “communicable” hyper-acuteness of the phenomenon, thanks to which the delirium assumes a tangible character . . . that situates it at the very antipodes of the stereotypy of automatism and dream. Far from constituting a passive element, as are the latter, propitious for interpretation and suitable for intervention, the paranoid delirium already constitutes in itself a form of interpretation.³⁷

In a later issue (no. 6), one finds thus a literal illustration of paranoia’s interpretative power. Dressed in his own obsessive image of *The Gleaners* and

Angelus, which have been turned into a mask and a costume, Dalí *interprets* the “critical-paranoic” images of Jean-François Millet’s realist paintings as a performative act. No longer mere hallucinations, these works become real objects—what Dalí calls “object-beings”—that mediate between the subject and the external world.³⁸

Automatism Universalized: Breton and Dalí in Issue No. 3–4

With Lacan’s philosophical-anthropological perspective as reinforcement, surrealism circa 1933 was prepared to elaborate on a new automatism, modeled on a generalizable critical paranoia that manifests concretely as iterative style. This elaboration occurs in a rather spectacular fashion in issue no. 3–4 of *Minotaure*, featuring Breton’s essay, “The Automatic Message” as theoretical anchor with a vast array of examples: anonymous Parisian graffiti photographed by Brassai (see chapter 2); eighteenth-century automata reimagined by Benjamin Péret; women’s “automatism of taste” in fashion analyzed by Tzara (I will return to this in the next section); and, predictably, what seems like endless images of Art Nouveau architecture and ornaments by Antoni Gaudí and Hector Guimard photographed by Brassai and Man Ray (Figures 3.1, 3.2). For Jenny, these materials bear witness to the “free rein” of a “totalitarian” automatism but also its neutralization or “pacification” by an “aesthetic rationale.”³⁹ He and Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron thus see Breton’s essay as “saying farewell to automatic writing” or “establish[ing] its final moment.”⁴⁰ Alternatively, as I want to suggest, this text and this issue of *Minotaure* can also be read as integrating a mature automatism with anthropological phenomena beyond the immediate purview of surrealism, with the aim of making automatism not “the prerogative of the chosen few” but “a common patrimony, of which everyone is entitled to a share.”⁴¹

As the readers of “The Automatic Message” have often noted, Breton distinguishes spiritualism from surrealist automatism in that the former attributes the voice heard by the subject to a deceased or supernatural being; by contrast, “the question of the exteriority of . . . one’s ‘voice’ could not even be posed” for the surrealists, who instead of dissociating seek to unify the voice of the unconscious with the personality.⁴² But this distinction aside, Breton observes that both spiritualism and surrealist automatism can manifest in a “strictly mechanical” (what he calls “motor-verbal”) or a more conscious (what he calls “auditory-verbal” or “visual-verbal”) mode.⁴³ In principle, Breton favors the mechanical mode for its greater degree of spontaneity, equating it with automatic or “unconscious writing” and “the limit toward which the Surrealist poet must strive.”⁴⁴ But he also recognizes the practical difficulty of maintaining this state for both spiritualist mediums and for the surrealist poets. The famed Hélène Smith (née Elise Muller) spoke and wrote in trance when practicing “motor-verbal” automatisms, but in more lucid states she would simply transcribe voices or copy images that came to her.⁴⁵ As her practice deepened over eight years, the schoolmistress and mediumistic

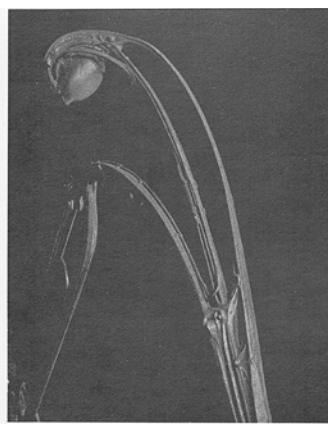


FIGURE 3.1. Man Ray, photograph of Antonio Gaudí's La Casa Milà, Barcelona. *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 70. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

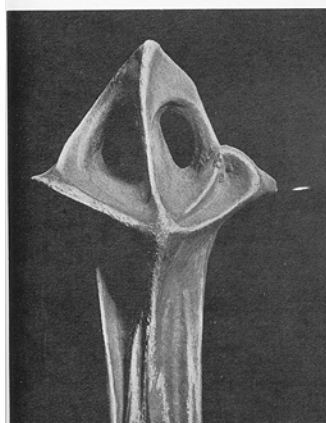
FIGURE 3.2. Brassai, Art Nouveau ornaments by Hector Guimard, inscriptions by Salvador Dalí. *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 75.



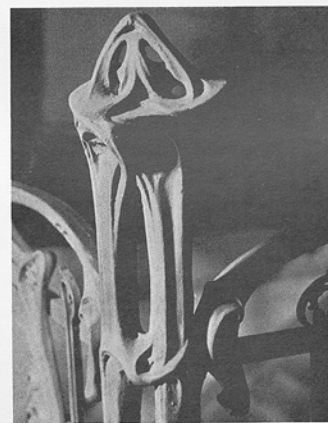
CONTRE LE FONCTIONNALISME IDÉALISTE, LE FONCTIONNEMENT «SYMBOLIQUE»-PSYCHIQUE-MATÉRIALISTE.



IL S'AGIT ENCORE D'UN ATAVISME MÉTALLIQUE DE L'ANGÈLES DE MILLET.



MANGE-MOI !



MOI ATASSE

AVEZ-VOUS DÉJÀ VU L'ENTRÉE DU MÉTRO DE PARIS ?

author Mlle. X would come to regret her own “progressive transformation from motor-verbal automatism to auditory-verbal automatism,” claiming to “greatly miss my initial automatism.”⁴⁶

For the surrealists, a purely mechanical automatism is likewise difficult to maintain for a slightly different reason. By this time, Breton no longer insists on the genuineness of the automatic work; instead, he is more concerned with the empirical fact that “a barely intermittent succession of visual images,” which the subject in trance “could not always resist capturing,” would frequently occur to interrupt the “murmur” of the automatic voice.⁴⁷ While Breton admits that these “visual or tactile images . . . freely operat[ing] in the immeasurable region that stretches between consciousness and unconsciousness” consist in “another form of automatism,” he finds them less rich in “visual meaning” than “verbal inspirations”; “*visual-verbal automatism has never seemed to me to create visual images that are in any way comparable*” to those produced by “*auditory-verbal automatism*.”⁴⁸ If Breton “establish[es] the priority of the verbal over the visual in the generation of any automatic expression” as Harris proposes, this preference is rooted in the poet’s aversion to descriptive realism even in the case of hallucinatory contents.⁴⁹ Visual automatism is bothersome, in short, because it compels the automatic subject to act like the medium in the “visual-verbal” mode: namely, to present a descriptive ekphrasis of the hallucinated objects in ways no different than real ones. He thus vehemently objects to the characterization of poets as “visionary”:

No, Lautréamont and Rimbaud did not see, did not experience a priori what they described; which is tantamount to saying that they didn’t describe it at all, but rather that they limited themselves in the dark corridors of their being to listening—indistinctly and, while they wrote, without understanding them any more than we do when we first read them—to certain accomplished and accomplishable works.⁵⁰

In contrast to “visual-verbal automatism,” Dalí’s critical paranoia and iterative style are neither descriptive nor disruptive to “auditory-verbal automatism”; they therefore present new possibilities for visual automatism in addition to departing from the “purely internal model” of surrealist art that Breton had previously upheld.⁵¹ Without naming Dalí but taking his critical paranoia for granted now as a new paradigm, Breton evokes the experiments of the Marburg school of psychologists as scientific evidence for its occurrence outside of psychopathology; children gazing at a real object over an extended period of time, the scientists had found, often generate an “eidetic (aesthetic) image” ex post facto, which is “infinitely variable, and shows some characteristic infidelities vis-à-vis the model”; for example, a horse-man would face the horse’s tail instead of its head, a letter can be flipped horizontally or vertically, etc.⁵² For Breton, the eidetic image is the basis for the occult practice of seeing into a crystal ball, and for Leonardo da Vinci’s

lesson of finding potential images in old walls and “coffee dregs, melted lead, fogged mirror.”⁵³ This experiential commonality makes it possible to see even the mystic Teresa de Ávila as having practiced an automatism *avant la lettre* by projecting upon her wooden cross the eidetic or “critical-paranoiac” image of “a crucifix made of precious stones,” thereby leading “the line along which mediums and poets take their place.”⁵⁴

Just as the eidetic image now serves as the common denominator of children’s play, the artist’s reverie, and the visions of diviners and mystics, the new definition of automatism as iterative style too is generalizable beyond surrealism. Certain examples of mediumistic art, self-taught art, and Art Nouveau architecture can all qualify as automatic for displaying a set of observable formal features “conceived under the same sign . . . the sign of the octopus.”⁵⁵ The latter is evoked by Breton not as a figure but as a metaphor for the logic of infinite proliferation, essentially the visual version of the iterative structures previously identified by Lacan in schizography: “the same dissimilarity in details; the same impossibility of repetition, which is precisely what engenders the true, captivating stereotype; the same delight [*délectation*] in endless curves, like those of young ferns, ammonite, or a curled fetus; the same meticulousness that, while exciting to behold, distracts us from enjoyment [*jouissance*] the overall object.”⁵⁶ The images reproduced

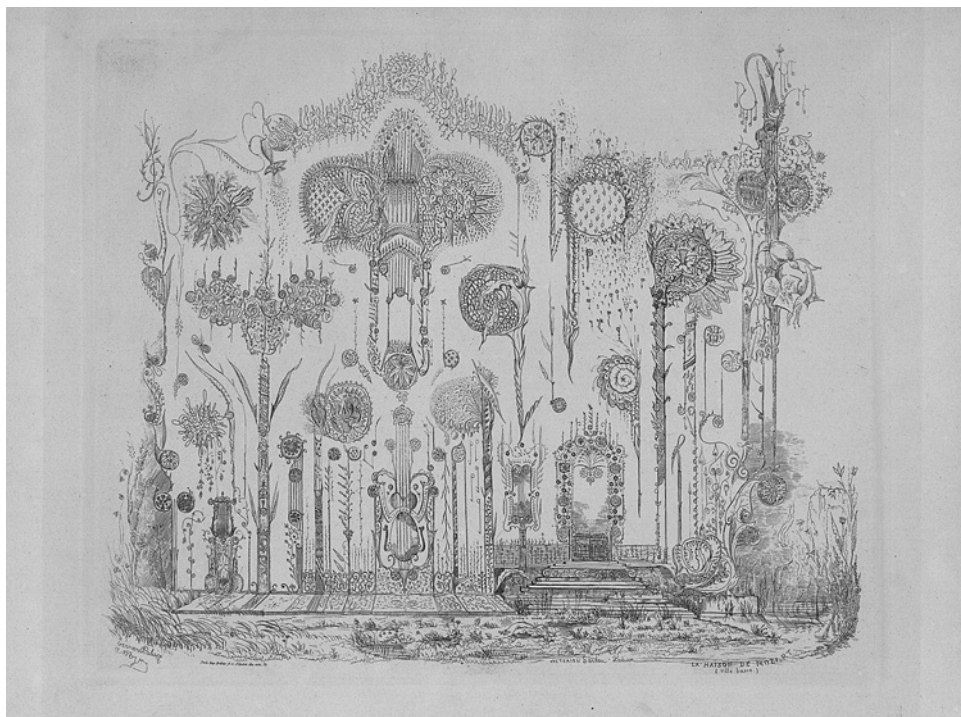


FIGURE 3.3. Victorien Sardou, *La Maison de Mozart (ville basse)*, c. 1857–1858. Automatic etching executed in nine hours, 41 x 55 cm. Photo: Olivier Laffely, Atelier de numérisation–Ville de Lausanne. Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne. Reproduced in *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (1933): 54.

with Breton's essay in this issue of *Minotaure* therefore underline the predominance of this iterative style across mediums, regardless of the makers' level of training. For instance, the playwright-turned-medium Victorien Sardou's automatic etching, "The House of Mozart on Jupiter" is presented as a virtual iteration of the rural postman and self-taught sculptor-architect Ferdinand Cheval's *Palais idéal* (Ideal Palace)⁵⁷ (Figures 3.3, 3.4). Sardou's own description of his imaginary house for the eighteenth-century composer also recalls Cheval's hand-built multiplex in Hauterives, Drôme (southeastern France), particularly its use of organic forms as ornaments as well as structural elements:

[O]ne of the edges [of the long window] is nothing other than an enormous reed whose leaves had been kept. The same goes with the crown of the main window, which looks like a G-clef: these are climbing plants that are interlaced and petrified. It is by this method that they take over the majority of the building's crowns, railings and balustrades, etc. Often a plant is even placed inside the wall with its roots and in the conditions to allow for free growth. It gets big, grows; its flowers bloom and spread at random.⁵⁸

On the one hand, Breton suggests that the collective application of this accumulative logic underlies the once fashionable Art Nouveau style, which represents "an attempt to generalize mediumistic drawing, painting, and sculpture and adapt them to the arts of furniture and building design."⁵⁹ On the other hand, seemingly wary of "pseudomorphosis," he avoids assuming a relationship of influence or parity of artistic intention between mediumistic art and Art Nouveau, commenting that "the two modes of expression . . . respond to such *divergent* needs for externalization."⁶⁰ In light of surrealism's new automatism, the crucial point is that subjects with "divergent needs" (be they mentally ill or healthy, trained or untrained) and different manners of "externalization" (be they involuntary or semivoluntary) can all be seen as operating automatically. Self-taught creators like Cheval and the miner Augustin Lesage, says Breton, often unconsciously reproduce forms found in their natural or professional environments; meanwhile, "the experienced artist or draftsman" may be so practiced that "the fact of tracing a line or curve very often falls into the domain of automatic, involuntary actions."⁶¹ Quoting an author from the *Occult Review*, Breton goes so far as claiming that "every action tends to become habitual, involuntary, and automatic since the first time it was done. . . . Even a mental attitude or a way of seeing things becomes habitual and, therefore, outside of the thinker's control."⁶² As examples of automatic works created by habit, this issue of *Minotaure* includes six "involuntary sculptures"—everyday objects in accidental forms—photographed by Brassai; three of which are made by the semi-intentional act of rolling pieces of paper (for instance, bus tickets).

There is an additional experiential mode that may be incorporated into

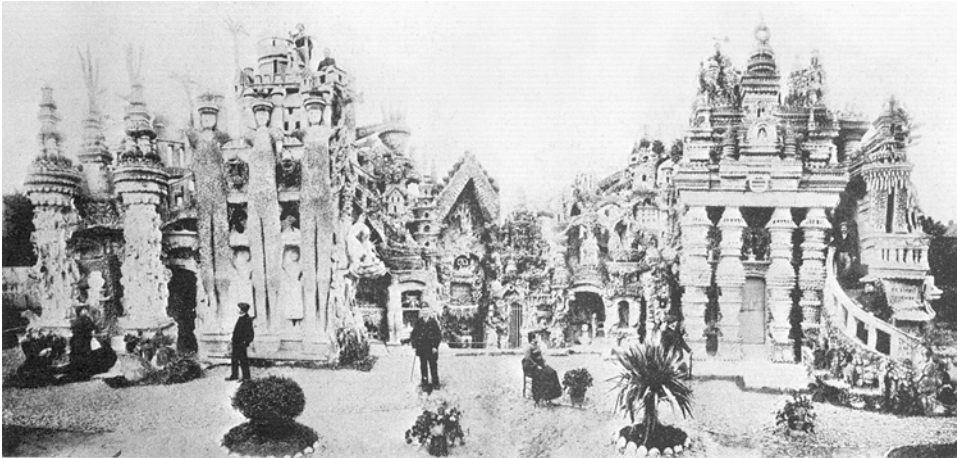
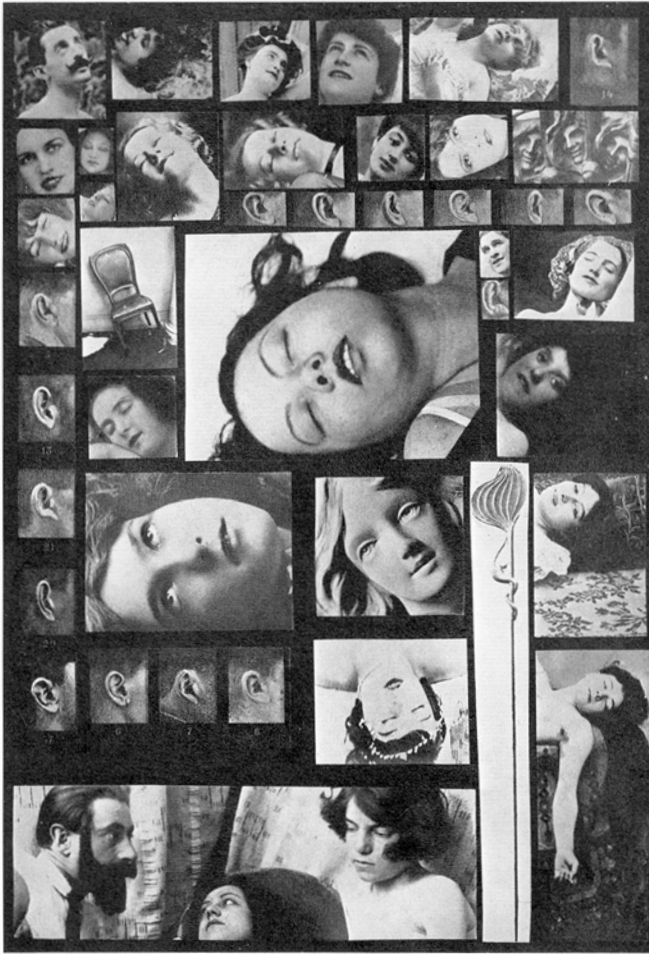


FIGURE 3.4. The postman Ferdinand Cheval's *Palais idéal*, Hauterive, Drôme. *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 65.

new automatism, which Breton mentions in passing in his essay: the “delight” (*délectation*) that supposedly underlies the infinite accumulation of forms in Art Nouveau and mediumistic art, which creates iterative style. This association of pleasure with repetition—*bis repetita placent* (whatever repeats pleases) per the ancient saying—is reinforced in this issue by Jean Frois-Wittmann’s “L’art moderne et le principe du plaisir” (Modern art and the pleasure principle), but above all developed by Dalí’s three-part contribution revolving around Art Nouveau, which stresses its para-erotic character. The essay “On the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Modern Style Architecture” therefore ends with a substantial postscript not listed in the table of contents, entitled “The Phenomenon of Ecstasy”; this textual outgrowth further extends to the legendary full-page photomontage serving as its iconographical companion, which upstages both texts with its dizzying ensemble of images (Figure 3.5). The succession of the three components thus resembles the growing “octopus” structure of Art Nouveau and mediumistic art; read together as a whole, they show how Dalí utilizes “ecstasy” as a third term that reconciles early automatism’s presumed passivity or involuntariness with critical paranoia’s active and transformative function.

On the one hand, Dalí’s texts and the photomontage all equate “Modern Style,” the material manifestation of ecstasy, with passivity. In “On the Terrifying and Edible Beauty,” he describes Gaudí’s undulating façades and Guimard’s protean ornaments as soft and feeble structures nearing collapse or dissolution: “tilted, unable to support themselves on their own, like the weary necks of heavy hydrocephalic heads,” “*sculpted water* with a photographic intensity,” “true ‘masochistic column,’” “feverish, lightly feverish flesh (37.5°C) . . . not intended to support anything other than the much talked-about dragonfly with an abdomen that is soft and heavy.”⁶³ In the photomontage, the dainty Art Nouveau clock-hand with its ornamental leaf, the arabesque tendril in the lower right corner, and the toppling chair in the



LE PHÉNOMÈNE DE L'EXTASE

PAR SALVADOR DALÍ

FIGURE 3.5. Photomontage for Salvador Dalí's "Le phénomène de l'extase," *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 77. Copyright 2024 Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, Artists Rights Society.

upper left (cropped out from Man Ray's photograph of the 1933 surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre Colle) altogether give the effect of trembling or fainting, as if these inanimate objects were succumbing to invisible forces like wind or gravity.⁶⁴

On the other hand, the artist ascribes intentionality to these supposedly passive objects, for instance in the prosopopoeial captions for two of Brassai's Guimard ornaments: "eat me!" and "me too," which literalize Lacan's equation of style—"Modern Style" in this case—with communicability (see Figure 3.2). The objects are also made intentionally expressive by virtue of being given "psychopathological parallels" that commonly make manifest unconscious desires, such as dream; "erotic ecstasy," "dementia praecox" (which Lacan had shown to be rich in unrepressed expressions), and hysteria of "women revealed and known from Charcot and the Salpêtrière School."⁶⁵ Here, Dalí is alluding explicitly to Breton and Louis Aragon's coauthored text in 1928 commemorating "The Quinquagenary of Hysteria (1878–1928)," which reclassifies the now scientifically discredited nineteenth-century faux disease as a

Echoing Breton, who sees in Art Nouveau and mediumistic art “the same impossibility of repetition [that] engenders the true, captivating stereotype,” Dalí calls attention to the same dialectic between repetition and difference in the sixteen photographs of ears in the photomontage, similarly shaped yet nonidentical to another. Lined up in strips (in the upper-right corner and in the middle section), they also give the impression of one ear progressively changing in the manner of the precinematic zoetrope.⁷⁰

From the prominence of women’s faces in the photomontage, one deduces that the feminine is the means by which Dalí tries to reconcile the apparent paradox of an automatism that would be both passive and active, nonviolent yet still critical and transformative. Reading this photomontage closely, Michel Poivert has pointed out its similarity to two earlier montages from *La Révolution surréaliste* that foreground the feminine image as icon: the (male) surrealists’ group portraits around the assassin Germaine Berton in 1924 and around René Magritte’s *Hidden Woman* (1929), both of which were inspired by the format of scientific synoptic charts⁷¹ (see chapter 1). For Poivert, the 1933 montage, devised by Dalí with the help of several surrealists, functioned similarly as a statement on the collective identity of surrealism; he also notes that it includes no phallic object, with the possible exception of the elongated clock-hand, even though the overtly feminine character has been sidelined in most readings of this legendary work.⁷² For Rosalind E. Krauss, the rotation of many women’s heads to the horizontal position transforms their mouths into animal prows, a regression that Bataille believes to happen to humans when undergoing extreme experiences.⁷³ Because the bodies have been consistently cropped out, Simon Baker situates the same work in the Bataillean iconography of dismemberment and decapitation, motivated largely by an interest in the anthropological phenomenon of sacrifice and the “voiding of identity” of the sacrificial victim.⁷⁴ Yet the fact remains that heads, more precisely expressive *faces*, predominate here rather than body parts, suggesting that the work is better read as representing the “hundred-headed” (*100 têtes*) rather than “headless” (*sans tête*) woman, per the title of Max Ernst’s 1929 collage novel.⁷⁵

Instead of the headshots of surrealist men as in the earlier photomontages, the central image (Janet Fukushima’s recumbent face photographed by Brassai) in the “Phenomenon” montage is surrounded by twenty-eight more faces (including four sculpted ones), of which twenty-six present as female. More than half of these are oriented horizontally or diagonally, many with half- or fully closed eyes like models in erotic prints; others either turn their eyes upward like ecstatic saints or look directly out at the viewer.⁷⁶ Since virtually all of the faces are cropped at the neck or at the shoulder (frustrating a male gaze seeking to consume female nudity), it is impossible to determine if the women’s rapture results from physical satisfaction, spiritual exaltation, or deep sleep. What remains clear is that their “ecstasy” consists of a range of experiences of pleasure, which Dalí underlines in “On the Terrifying and Edible Beauty” when describing them as smiling or laughing. In so doing, he also situates pleasure, now a possibility for new automatism, as a state

fluctuating between the involuntary and the voluntary: “[T]hese reflex and treacherous facial contractions betraying ‘repression-defense’ will have the effect of alternating between *voluntary* and understanding smiles . . . and the frank, explosive, *irresistible* laughs, that, nevertheless, do not betray any vulgarity.”⁷⁷

For its emphasis on the feminine as an experiential and *subjective* mode, the photomontage for “The Phenomenon of Ecstasy” differs importantly from many idealizing and de-idealizing representations of women as mere image (Magritte’s *Hidden Woman*, Seabrook’s *Caput Mortuum*, etc.). Its treatment of the severed body part—the ear—also departs from the Bataillean model of the phallic “little thing” (Barthes), created by visually severing the toe, the eye, or the mouth from the rest of the body (see Figures 1.15, 1.16). Derived originally from the criminologist Alphonse Bertillon’s anthropometric photographs, which served to reduce male criminals to their individual anatomical parts for the purpose of identification, the serial ears are here *refacialized* by virtue of being embedded in a sea of women’s faces, thereby becoming the men’s new masks. If the surrealist men in Magritte’s 1929 montage avert their eyes from the feminine image (see Figure 1.9), the men here are themselves hidden behind their ear-masks; with ears instead of eyes, they do not see but can presumably *hear*—an active-passive faculty—the chorus of the women’s laughter.

Moreover, placed next to Art Nouveau objects, the ears become *ornamental*. This reading is supported not only by Dalí’s anatomical conception of Art Nouveau buildings as faces and bodies, but also by the source from which Dalí most likely found the images: a 1901 issue of the popular science journal *La Nature*, a beloved source for the surrealists, in which the ears appeared as illustrations for Henri Coupin’s essay, “Notre oreille” (Our ear).⁷⁸ Commenting humorously on Bertillon’s scientific morphology of ears, Coupin sees it as a system of styles, according to which the orifice is classified as “open, intermediary, adherent,” and the lobe “descending, at right angle, intermediary and gulf,” etc.⁷⁹ Unlike most animal ears, Coupin adds, the human ear’s main function is decorative, as attested by the anthropological fact of ear adornments: “Among our civilized races, these ornaments are light and do not modify the form of the auricle [*pavillon*]. By contrast, among some savage peoples, notably the inhabitants of the Marquise Islands, they are heavy weights made of metal, ivory, or seashells: under their impact, the earlobe is seen to extend little by little, sometimes reaching as far as the shoulders.”⁸⁰ In short, for the author of “Our Ear,” the human ear represents excess, but not of the sacrificial kind previously imagined by Bataille in his *Documents* essay on Vincent van Gogh. For Bataille, the artist’s self-mutilation was a parasacrificial act; his severed ear is therefore comparable to the finger bitten off and the eye gouged out for ritual sacrifice, which requires the violent expulsion of a part of the whole.⁸¹ By contrast, the excess that Coupin describes is that of the nonutilitarian ornament, which Dalí appropriates as synonymous with pleasure and “ecstasy.” The latter concept in turn challenges Coupin’s racializing statement about the nonmodification of supposedly “civilized”

ears. After all, the ears in the photomontage *are* changing—not passively as in the earrings’ deformed support but actively or *automatically* as “Modern Style” ornaments in the flesh, morphing gradually into the uncanny images of the female sex.

The Hats and the Mannequin: Tzara’s Femininity, Crevel’s Hermaphroditism

On one level, nothing is more quintessentially surrealist than this equation of automatism with the feminine: “automatic woman” has been a recurring theme in the movement’s art and critical practices from the outset, as Conley and Abigail Susik have pointed out.⁸² What I want to stress here is rather how this equation is itself being transformed in the 1930s as the surrealists collectively theorize the feminine as a *universal* paradigm of the subject. Still underappreciated in surrealism scholarship, this universalization of the feminine is at work in Dalí’s cunning transformation of the male criminals’ ears into vaginal forms; it is even more explicit in Tzara’s and Crevel’s illustrated essays on the everyday phenomenon of fashion for two consecutive issues of *Minotaure* (no. 3–4 and no. 5), both of which reformulate the feminine in terms of a capacity for adopting both gender dispositions.

Published in the lavish issue no. 3–4, following immediately Frois-Wittmann’s essay on the pleasure principle, Tzara’s “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste” follows the longstanding trope of surrealist urban mythology established by Aragon’s *Paris Peasant* (1926). Seeing the city of Paris as a mythic quasi-nature, Aragon’s seminal text had instigated “the return of the repressed ‘paysan’ kernel of the Parisian (and French) intellectual,” as Rentzou has argued, using the imagined agrarian perspective to reenchant a metropolis increasingly associated with deracinated cosmopolitanism.⁸³ Applying this primitivizing optic, Tzara sees women as flora and fauna who are simultaneously “in the streets and in the woods,” who “walk on a spider’s web” and are clothed in “the most beautiful vegetation of the moment.”⁸⁴ At risk of reaffirming the cliché regarding women’s supposed proximity to nature, the author adopts the paraethnographic approach of a naturalist studying animal behavior; accordingly, the cultural phenomenon of fashion should be considered as reflecting the instinctive “self-adornment among females,” which “begins . . . relatively low on the zoological scale.”⁸⁵ Yet as Tzara proceeds, he begins to retreat from this facile biologism; what he initially calls instinct turns out increasingly to resemble what Breton in “The Automatic Message” describes as habit. Implicitly contesting an intellectual tradition that associates women with mindless consumerism, Tzara resists the notion of “the blind submission of women to fashion,” pointing out that “the possibility of *choice* always remains for a woman” despite the best efforts of “capitalism to impose merchandise on the consumer with the help of advertising.”⁸⁶ On the one hand, women’s choices in fashion reflect without fail the choosers’ unconscious sexual desire: “[T]he choice of one hat over another among dozens of types . . . corresponds infallibly to a woman’s precise human

desires” and is therefore “never mistaken.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, Tzara makes clear that this expression of unconscious desires through style results from practice: “Through hesitations and vacillations, the aesthetic law she has created for herself will be transformed into a pretext and a necessary intermediate, soon systematized to the point of becoming automatic.”⁸⁸ In short, not animal instinct but accumulated experience in making aesthetic choices is what produces an “automatism of taste” over time. Like the practiced artist Breton evokes for whom drawing becomes second nature, fashionable women exercise this “transformation of desires into physical symbols . . . with the utmost *skill*.”⁸⁹

Taking for granted Breton’s and Dalí’s para-erotic interpretation of iterative style, Tzara observes in contemporary women’s hat fashion a preference for open and multifarious forms over the monolith, which he equates with the phallic. “An anonymous, invisible majority,” he claims, has overwhelmingly given its favor to “creased hats” of various styles while rejecting “their polar opposite, the tarboosh, whose masculine character is undeniable.”⁹⁰ Meanwhile, certain accessories historically associated with male attire such as the garter elastic, the detachable collar and the tie have been appropriated to become “garnish” for creased hats; no longer signs of virility, they are made to “surround the reproduction of the female sex which these women wear on their heads.”⁹¹ Recalling Dalí’s visually rhetorical transformation of the sixteen male criminals’ ears into vagina-like ornamental forms, Tzara sees women’s creased hats—which “at first must have imitated those for men”—morphing into the image of “a woman’s genital,” of which thirteen iterations are illustrated in the diagram (Figure 3.7). But instead of imitating the physical appearance of actual genitals, Tzara stresses that the hats consist in “ideal sculptural representation,” “a purely subconscious representation without connection to the actual morphological state of the correlative organs.”⁹² As “simulacra” (Tzara uses this Dalí-inspired term twice in the essay), they are more appropriately seen as materialized metaphors for a variety of feminine psychic dispositions: for instance, the “yawning orifices” on “truly lewd hats” signify immodesty (upper left corner in diagram) whereas “the narrowest example of slit” with sewn lips points to “a state of regressive virginity” (upper right corner).⁹³ If the ornaments “hanging down in tatters” on the dark mourning hat suggest “lacerated flesh” and masochism in grief, then the hat with a metal ring running through the slit symbolizes “involuntary chastity” (center of diagram).⁹⁴ Finally, there is the “anal disposition” of the *excreting* hats where “the slit, instead of indicating a void, is turned entirely inside out in relation to the hat’s outer surface”; some go as far as to spill over like a cornucopia, “with a viscous, coagulated, and translucent substance, vaguely evoking plants, fruits, and flower overflowing the banks of the slit as if flooding from within” (center of second row).⁹⁵

Drawing the analogy between hat styles and feminine genitalia as symbolic forms, Tzara thus subverts the classic Freudian consideration of the pseudo-phallic hat in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.⁹⁶ In her various readings

veilleuse leçon d'adaptation aux règnes naturels, où la vigueur des yeux rencontre la tendresse de la peau et où rien ne cesse de se ranger contradictoirement dans l'ordre, à chaque pas nouvellement acquis, de l'universelle nécessité de palpitier.



Été 1933. Les chapeaux des femmes me font redécouvrir le temps où l'in vraisemblable invasion des fleurs m'apportait, avec la fraîcheur de la jeunesse et de la désolation, le sens d'une volupté tactile et visionnaire que je dus regarder comme la confirmation de ma nature sous sa forme la plus secrète, celle des représentations sexuelles. C'est sous l'écorce du symbolisme latent qui, petit à petit, se durcit sur la conscience des individus qu'il faudra rechercher les attirances que toujours ont exercé sur eux les données avouables et inavouées des explorations de toutes sortes, des lectures, des angoisses et des événements. On crée, en bonne part, ces événements, pour répondre à des désirs et, en partie, on leur superpose l'image de la rencontre déterminante de la portion fortuite de vie qui désormais lui sera tributaire. C'est donc en faisant la soustraction qui s'impose, à chaque écrit, de la part obsessionnelle de l'auteur, qu'on arrivera à déterminer le résidu d'objectivité d'une œuvre. La logique n'est plus d'un grand secours pour des opérations de ce genre et l'observation n'entre en ligne de compte que comme objet de polarisation de tout un monde de désirs et de perversions.

Il semble que le monde merveilleux des représentations sexuelles les plus reculées dans la structure psychique des êtres humains, plus particulièrement des femmes, soumis à une étrange loi de dépassement et d'opposition, loi de continuelle mobilité, vérifiée par l'acceptation ou rejetée par la masse et appelée *la mode*, il semble que ce monde qui répond à une nécessité inéluctable, partiellement régi par les instincts — celui de s'embellir, chez la femelle, à partir des échelons zoologiques relativement bas — et partiellement perfectionné selon les besoins d'une cause plus raffinée, il semble que ce monde est caractérisé par une *mise en valeur* des différentes parties du corps pour lesquelles les embellissements servent en même temps *d'enseigne* et *d'appel*.

C'est, pour ainsi dire, l'interprétation inconsciente d'une série de représentations, restées cachées au sujet, qui s'exprime par un symbole dont les caractères sont tirés de la vie courante. Il est difficile de dire au juste, ce qui pousse l'être humain à s'exprimer de cette manière mais tout porte à croire que c'est la libido ; le ralentissement, par la vieillesse, de l'élan amoureux accompagné de la perte du besoin de plaire en est une preuve suffisante. Les symboles sexuels ont été amplement étudiés par la psychanalyse, il s'agira pour moi d'indiquer à leur lumière jusqu'à quel point le goût peut s'assimiler les critères esthétiques et les possibilités qui nous sont offertes de retrouver dans ces derniers les racines foncièrement humaines.

Les chapeaux que, récemment encore, les femmes portaient, les chapeaux à forme fendue qui, à leur début, devaient imiter ceux des hommes, les chapeaux dont, au cours de leur évolution, la ressemblance avec le sexe féminin est devenue non seulement

frappante, mais significative à plus d'un titre, ont enfin confirmé d'une façon éclatante ce que j'avance par l'exemple des deux spécimens ici reproduits : le chapeau exécuté en élastiques de tire-chaussettes et celui dont la calotte est entourée d'une garniture imitant un faux-col à coins cassés pourvu de sa cravate. Dans la manière même dont ces deux attributs, les plus marquants du costume masculin, le tire-chaussettes tendu faisant appel à une image de la virilité et la cravate dont le rôle symbolique est connu, dans la manière même dont ils entourent la reproduction de ce sexe féminin que les femmes portent sur la tête, il faut être aveugle pour ne pas voir, non pas uniquement un effet de la fantaisie qui, elle, ne joue que le rôle d'ingénieuse entremetteuse, mais une réelle force de justification que les créatrices de ces modèles ont donnée à leurs œuvres.

Il ne faut pas croire à une soumission aveugle des femmes à la mode. Il ne faut pas non plus sous-estimer le rôle qu'y jouent les facteurs économiques et sociaux. L'importance de ceux-ci une fois admise et le mécanisme de l'adaptation à la mode dominante (qui agit sur la femme plutôt comme force de suggestion), mis sur le compte d'un phénomène de psittacisme et du pouvoir dont jouit le capitalisme d'imposer la marchandise à l'aide de la réclame de la mode, du patriotisme, etc., il reste toujours à la femme la possibilité du *choix* et c'est là que se développeront les différenciations qui font l'objet de mes observations. Il ne suffit pas du lancement d'une mode pour que celle-ci réussisse à s'imposer. Une majorité anonyme et invisible exerce un contrôle constant, par élimination, sur l'efficacité de la mode en tant que répondant aux possibilités de transformations et d'accaparement par un maximum de formes représentatives à fonctionnement sexuel. Précédant immédiatement la mode des chapeaux à forme fendue et par opposition à elle, la chéchia, dont le caractère sexuel masculin est hors de doute, fit un passage de courte durée. C'est à l'échec de cette mode que nous devons l'apparition du chapeau qui nous préoccupe et qui se fixa définitivement sous la forme décrite, la couleur blanche ou crème qu'il affectionnait au début faisant encore augmenter la ressemblance de la chair, ou fallait-il voir dans la couleur blanche un symbole de la virginité intentionnelle, de la candeur, par contraste au cynisme de la forme ? A travers d'innombrables variétés intermédiaires, passant

par des phases plus ou moins imitatives et réalistes, les lèvres de ses fentes allaient du plus large entrebâillement (on pouvait rencontrer des chapeaux véritablement crapuleux) jusqu'aux fines ouvertures invitant les plus délicieuses conceptions à un rêve de fragilité et de délicatesse. La pointe extrême de l'étroitesse de la fente est donnée par le chapeau dont les lèvres sont cousues, de façon à ne laisser visible qu'un soupçon à leur commissure. Faut-il croire qu'il existe chez chaque femme, sous forme de représentation psychique, un état graduel de virginité arriérée, représentation purement subconsciente n'ayant pas de rapport avec l'état morphologique réel des organes corrélatifs ? A considérer certains cas de complexes d'infériorité suivis du désir de castration qui se manifeste par l'amour inconsidéré des cicatrices, tendant, en un mot, à la déchéance, le port de ces chapeaux constituerait un



FIGURE 37. Illustration for Tristan Tzara's "D'un certain automatisme du goût," *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 82.

of this text, Krauss has nevertheless focused on the exceptionally phallic prototype known as “Savile Row,” one of three designed by Elsa Schiaparelli and photographed by Man Ray to serve as illustrations.⁹⁷ Instead of the anal disposition, Krauss sees this fedora-inspired hat as rewriting the gaping labia-like slit as the foreskin of the penis: “Firmly rounded, aggressive, the crown of the hat ris[ing] up toward its viewer like the tip of the male organ, swelling with so much phallic presence.”⁹⁸ Assuming the validity of this reading, what still needs to be stressed is that the phallic in this context is a hat and *nothing more*; just like the attitude of “womanliness” analyzed by the British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere, “manliness” becomes a provisional “masquerade” that can be put on and taken off.⁹⁹ No longer the universal disposition, it is one among many possible ones for the subject (the fedora is still outnumbered by the vaginal creased hats); moreover, one can speak of multiple phallic dispositions rather than merely one. To this point, Tzara’s *Minotaure* essay includes another Schiaparelli design known as “Mad Cap,” which displays a whimsical, pointy horn as a phallic form. Not only does the oblique angle soften the aggressivity of this pseudophallus, the fact that the material consists of “a knitted tube of fabric that took on practically any shape” as Dilys E. Blum notes makes it less like the hard “Savile Row” and more similar to “Crazy Coxcomb,” a third design photographed by Man Ray and modeled by Schiaparelli herself¹⁰⁰ (Figure 3.8). Both of the soft hats, which the wearer can style in a variety of ways, serve as instructive models for reconceiving

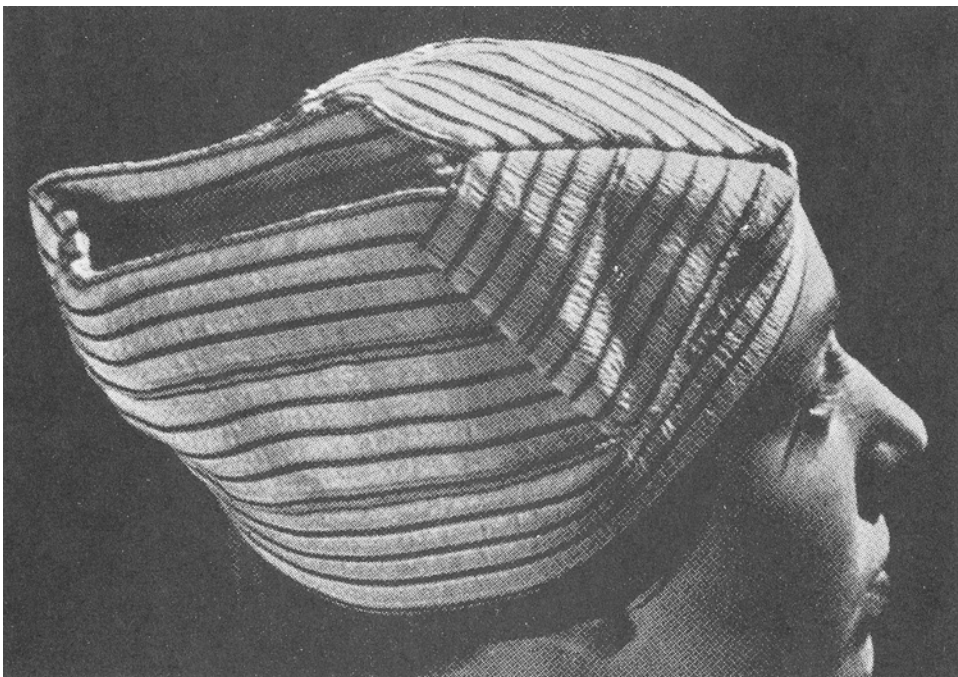


FIGURE 3.8. Man Ray, photograph of Elsa Schiaparelli modeling the hat design known as “Crazy Coxcomb,” 1933. *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (1933): 83. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

the feminine instead as the universal disposition—that is, not as the absence of the phallic, but as the potential capacity for adopting both psychic genders and all physical shapes as hats or masks.

Although Tzara does not theorize the feminine in terms of androgyny, this possibility is implied by Man Ray's photographs of the three Schiaparelli hat designs and is soon taken up explicitly by Crevel in the following issue of *Mintoaure* (no. 5). In the prose-poem, "The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin," the subject incarnating automatism is a "mannequin," which in the French may refer to a human model or an inanimate dummy. But instead of serving as a passive support for displaying fashion, the Great Mannequin as imagined by Crevel is herself a shopper, choosing from not only clothes but fabric of all kinds: "Department stores, especially during sales of household linen, are showrooms of skin, miles of skin offered up to the Great Mannequin's desires."¹⁰¹ Yet another iteration of the surrealist theme of the veiled woman (see chapter 1), the Great Mannequin does not as much wear fabric as she is herself fabric anthropomorphized. Illustrated by plates from George J. Cowan and Will H. Bates's instructional manual on merchandise draping (a work introduced to the surrealists most likely by Ernst), she has no skeleton and dons decorative objects in the place of a head.¹⁰² But while possessing one hundred heads in the form of a lampshade, a knot, or a ball of flowers, she is also headless in that she dispenses with any part of the body that might serve as pseudophallus (Figure 3.9). According to Crevel, this figure is "so perfect that in her peregrinations she doesn't always bother to take her head, arms and legs with her. Legs . . . those scissors for cutting up space, are what she bothers with least of all."¹⁰³ Radically antiphallic, "this woman who is a woman twice over since she is the daughter of feminine apparel and nudity" is ultimately compared to the porous beehive, the limbless seal, or the spineless "invertebrate [who] sets out to fascinate what will allow it to take shape."¹⁰⁴

The Great Mannequin's ultrafemininity, however, is in no way to be conflated with docility; Crevel emphasizes that "she is too untamed to resign herself to roles of pure display and attitudes with no resonance" and "the frost of a shop window, the angry affectations of the façades vainly tried to stop her impulsion."¹⁰⁵ Reflecting the author's own anticolonial politics, this figure is said to emanate "an African majesty" on "sordid street corners, at the crossroads of European misery."¹⁰⁶ Regardless of whether she might be attributed an "African descent" as Crevel's biographer François Buot suggests, her recalcitrance ("no skirt could ever hinder her long stride") is the same as that of the colonized, "the dark-skinned men whom the hounds of the capital gnaw down to the bone" and to whom she calls, says Crevel, like "her lovers, her brothers."¹⁰⁷ More important than her racial ambiguity, the Great Mannequin is capable of adopting the "masculine form" when "unit[ing] with her opposite, with silk, in an embrace so sweetly enveloping that from the rigid ensemble and flecked material, from the mannequin and her fabric, from the fabric and its mannequin, will be born a new, dual, total reality."¹⁰⁸ This assimilation of both masculine and feminine forms recalls Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic reading of gender travesty in Breton's *Soluble Fish*, where the

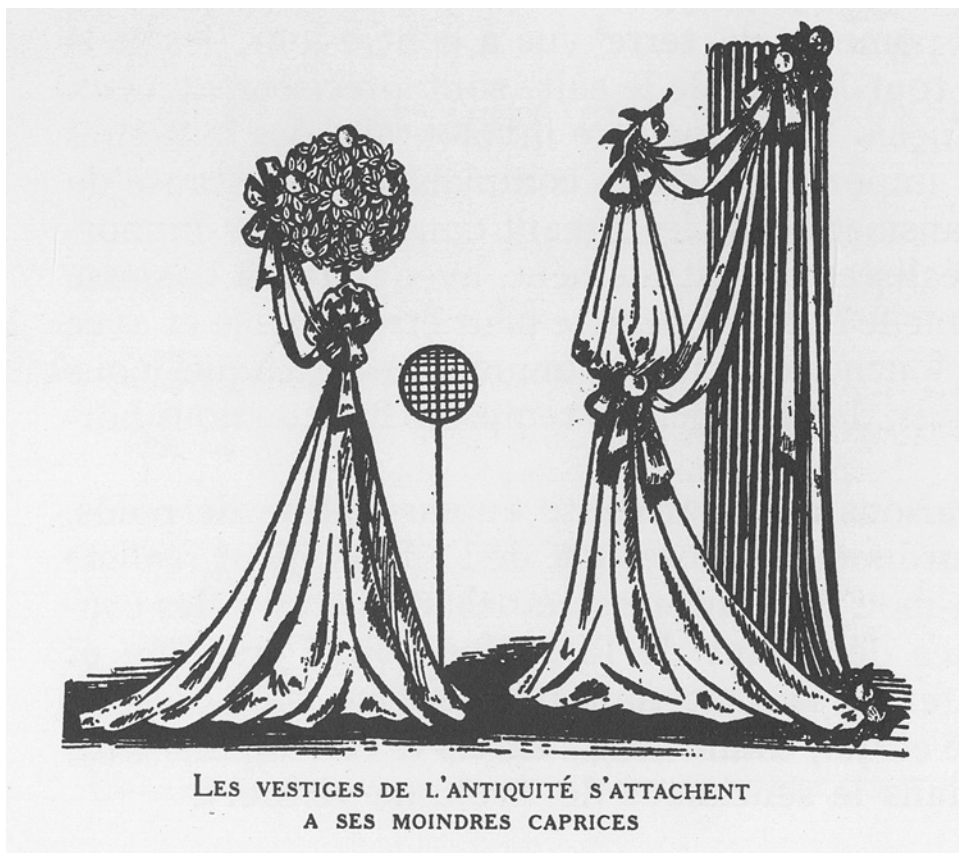


FIGURE 3.9. George J. Cowan and Will H. Bates, *Koester School Book of Drapes*, 1913, pages 123, 128, 147. Reproduced as illustrations for René Crevel's "La grande mannequin cherche et trouve sa peau," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 18–19.

male narrator adopts a feminine guise as the means to defend against self-dissolution, becoming "neither one nor the other" or "le hors sexe."¹⁰⁹ But due to the Great Mannequin's primary identification with a universal-feminine position, her travesty does not as much overcome sexual difference as it internalizes both sexes as guises; she is therefore "caricature of neither Hermes nor Aphrodite" and "could never be unsexed" according to Crevel.¹¹⁰

In the pages immediately following Crevel's essay in this issue of *Minotaure*, one recognizes what Kristeva describes as the "ludic" character of gender travesty in two photographs by Man Ray, showing either Crevel or Dalí from the back and veiled from head to toe as illustrations for Dalí's "New Colors of Spectral Sex-Appeal."¹¹¹ Enacting the all-fabric Great Mannequin, this veiled figure simultaneously alludes to the mourner seen from the back in the late nineteenth-century Romantic painter Arnold Böcklin's *The Isle of the Dead*.¹¹² These "object-beings" (Dalí) turn the veil into a mask that the feminine and masculine subject can both adopt; they also introduce an alternative schema of difference that departs from the masculine and the feminine, the phallic and the vaginal. Describing the "parallelism of the antagonisms between

the phantom and the specter,” Dalí characterizes the former as absorptive, immobile, and “obese,” represented by a “‘substantial’ figure wrapped in a sheet, a shoe on the head”¹¹³ (Figure 3.10, left). Its antithesis is the emanating, speedy and “extra-thin” specter, which appears more fragile by virtue of being photographed from farther away and balancing precariously a long, scraggly stick on its head (Figure 3.10, right). For Dalí, the phantom as the “receiver of light” and the specter as the “projector of light” can be male or female (Freud and La Gioconda belong to the former category; Picasso and Gala to the latter). Meanwhile, the principle of difference is maintained in that the two terms are incommensurable and mutually dependent.

From a figurative perspective, both the phantom and the specter remain vertical, their statuesque bodies forming strict right angles in relation to the ground. A few pages later in this issue of *Minotaure*, Man Ray’s “Horizons-Dances” provides a contrast to this uprightness by paying homage to horizontal movements in dance. Contesting the architectural phallic, exemplified by the Eiffel Tower and New York City skyscrapers, the photographer claims that “dance, considered and practiced in an impartial fashion, settles in a comfortably horizontal character with a vegetal aspect.”¹¹⁴ Importantly, *vegetal* is synonymous with *variety*, as attested by Man Ray’s use of no less than eight vegetables (cabbage, leek, lettuce, beet, pepper, onion, radish, and artichoke) as classificatory terms for the movements of eight female dancers (four

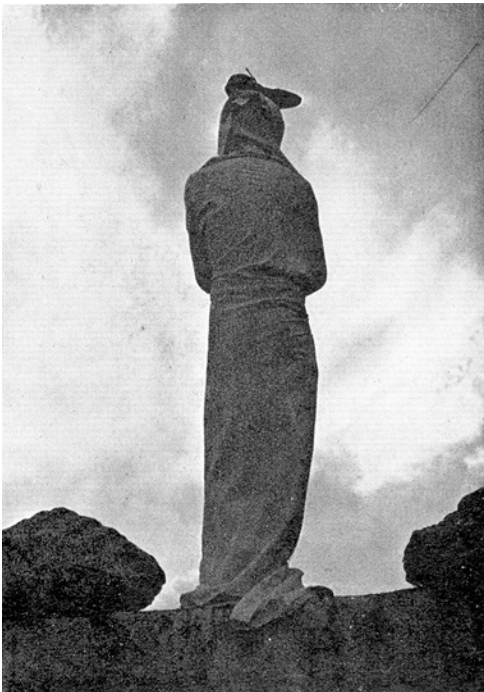


FIGURE 3.10. Man Ray, wrapped figure is either René Crevel or Salvador Dalí. In Salvador Dalí, “Les nouvelles couleurs du sex appeal spectral.” *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 20–21. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

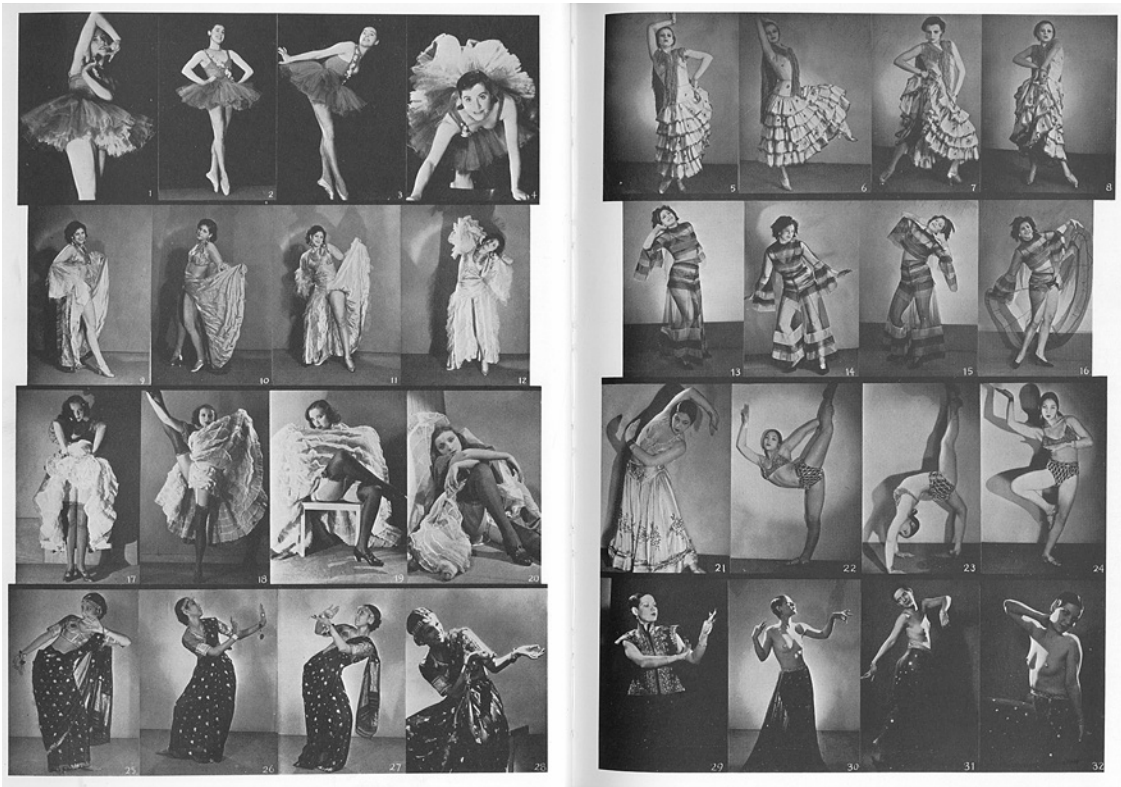


FIGURE 3.11. Man Ray, photomontage of eight dancers illustrating his essay, “Danses-horizons.” *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 28–29. Copyright Man Ray 2015 Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2024.

images for each totaling thirty-two on the two facing pages) (Figure 3.11). In apparels that read as blossoming veils, the women’s multifarious movements, just like the multiform hats in Tzara’s essay, suggest that difference can in no way be reduced to dichotomies.

The notion of difference needs to be stressed here, since, for the surrealists of the 1930s, to be automatic and universal-feminine (predisposed to both genders) is precisely *not* to be the selfsame. Apart from their emphasis on the irreducible difference between the subject and its veils, ornaments, hats, and dances, two illustrations in Crevel’s text make the point of explicitly refuting sameness. In one, the headless and limbless Great Mannequin, represented by a drapery stand for a shop window, stands next to a large plant on a column-pedestal, a pseudophallus that serves as her opposite (Figure 3.12, top). In another, two identical drapery stands represent the Great Mannequin and her presumed twin, who, like quarrelling sisters in a comedic act, turn away from one another in such a way that makes their mirroring likeness even more conspicuous (Figure 3.12, bottom). In his essay, Crevel projects onto these images a fictional developmental history informed by the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism. In “On Narcissism” (1914), Freud had

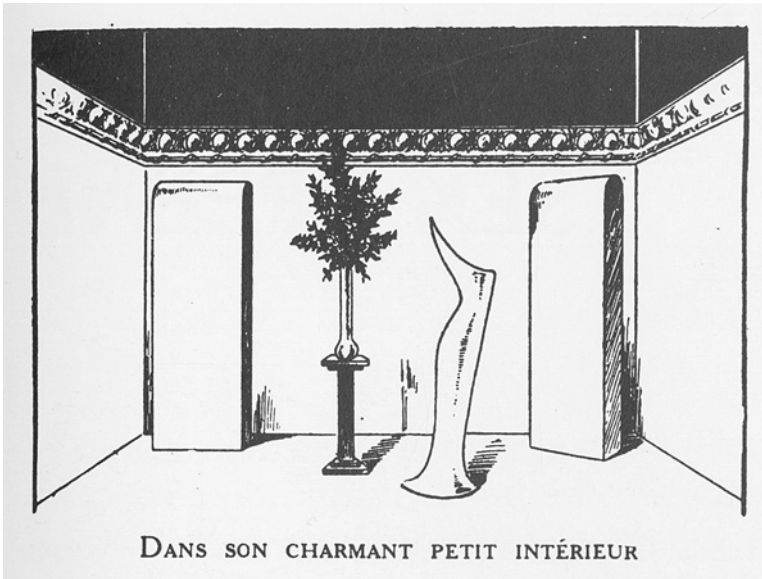
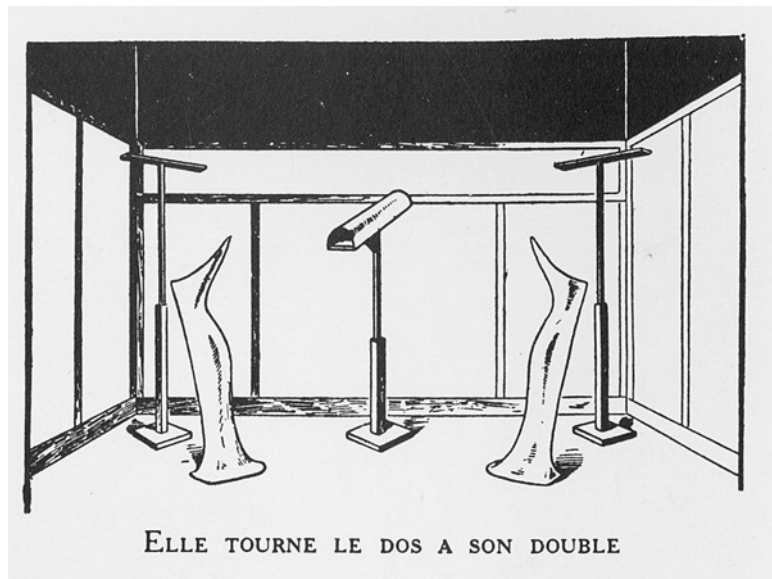


FIGURE 3.12.
George J. Cowan
and Will H. Bates,
*Koester School Book
of Drapes*, 1913, 286,
288. Reproduced
as illustrations for
René Crevel, “La
grande mannequin
cherche et trouve sa
peau.” *Minotaure*,
no. 5 (1934): 18–19.



posited the existence of a “primary and normal narcissism” that helps the infant transform its autoerotic instincts into “object-libido” (psychic energy directed toward an external object); eventually, the healthy ego would depart from this primary narcissism while seeking to recover it in adulthood by satisfying the demands of “an ego-ideal imposed from without,” which serves as “the substitute for the lost narcissism of [the ego’s] childhood in which he was his own ideal.”¹¹⁵ Accordingly, Crevel imagines the Great Mannequin as breaking out of the solitude of a solipsistic subject: “[N]arcissism and the orchestration of egocentric niceties will soon take her out of herself.” Not content with self-doubling, her identity shifts furthermore toward difference:

"She has already turned her back on her double and, on the threshold of night, has gone off, flying away."¹¹⁶

For the author of "The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin," narcissism is the primary condition that the desiring subject leaves behind in order to orient herself to the other. But far from being idiosyncratic, Crevel's mention of this psychoanalytic concept is also part and parcel of 1930s surrealism's growing interest in the pathogenic potential of mimetic identification, both on the individual and on the collective level. In the following section, I will show how this general concern underlies the second series of *Minotaure* (issues no. 6–9), resulting in two prominent modes of critique: a psychoanalytic one on the one hand, which focuses on arrested narcissism as a psychic phenomenon with social consequences, and a biological one on the other, which takes mimicking insects' "psychasthenic" assimilation into the environment as the model for theorizing dispossession.

From Narcissistic Doubling to Psychasthenic Mimicry: Lacan, Éluard, Bellmer, Caillois

As readers of psychoanalysis, the surrealists would have been familiar with Freud's account of narcissism, but the more immediate source informing the investigations of this phenomenon is Lacan's essay in issue no. 3–4 of *Minotaure*, "Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters," which needs to be recounted briefly due to its significance for the subsequent development of this theme in the review. The subject of Lacan's text was one of great interest for the surrealists, namely, the brutal murder of their mistresses by two domestic servants from the town of Le Mans, following what appeared to be a trivial quarrel. Some three months after its occurrence, the surrealists reported sympathetically on the incident in the May 1933 issue of *LSASDLR*. According to the coauthors Éluard and Péret, the two proletarian sisters acted in rebellion against the "discipline, demands and injuries" of the bourgeois employers; "Fear, fatigue and humiliation slowly gave rise to hatred" until the fateful night of revenge, when Christine and Léa Papin struck their oppressors, "gouging out their eyes and crushing their heads."¹¹⁷ Yet as Jonathan Eburne has pointed out, the surrealists' early reading of the crime in terms of class conflict does not rule out its *expressive* character; their deliberately macabre description of the murder therefore stands apart from the sentimentalizing accounts found in bourgeois as well as communist presses.¹¹⁸ Closely following the *LSASDLR* report, Lacan's "Motives" in *Minotaure* shows a further shift of emphasis in interpretation. Without discounting the social dimension of the crime, the psychiatrist focuses on the psychic causes of the Papin sisters' actions, taking as his point of departure the courtroom psychiatrists' assessment of the defendants' mental illness. For Lacan, the two women's unusual codependency reflects the latent homosexuality Freud had identified in primary narcissism, but, importantly, they "did not evolve beyond" this stage; "the 'malady of being two' from which these patients suffered hardly freed them from the malady of Narcissus."¹¹⁹ Instead

of cathecting their libido in objects different from themselves, they became a “psychological couple,” “true twin souls [who] formed a world forever closed” and who “could not even create the distance necessary [between them] for murdering each other.”¹²⁰ Comparing the Papins to his patient Aimée, Lacan notes that the latter had assaulted a celebrity actress (Huguette Duflos) “whom she hated just because that being represented the ideal she had of herself”; likewise, acting on a paranoiac projection that is real instead of “critical” (Dalí), the sisters “mingled the mirage of their illness with the image of their mistresses. It was their own distress that they hated in the couple whom they led into an atrocious square dance.”¹²¹

As *Minotaure* entered its mature period in the years 1935–36, pathogenic narcissism continued to recur as a theme, with Éluard’s prose-poem “Appliquée” in issue no. 7 as the most direct response to Lacan. Including illustrations by the German artist Hans Bellmer, who recently initiated contact with the surrealists after seeing issue no. 5 of *Minotaure*, “Appliquée” enacts a scene of primary narcissism in childhood that ends in a violent brawl.¹²² If the name of its eponymous protagonist—a mythic little girl or an animated doll—recalls Lacan’s patient “Aimée,” Appliquée’s creation of Amimère as her double also mirrors the psychological coupling of the Papin sisters. As if illustrating the dynamic between the dominant Christine and the submissive Léa, Éluard contrasts Appliquée, a name with harsh plosive consonants, with the softly nasal Amimère, “the all-beautiful, the sweetened one [*la sucrée*] who has no back,” and whose name is a composite of “friend” and “mother.”

Reinforced by Bellmer’s uncanny naturist postcard, showing seven nude pubescent girls seated in a row and forming one multilimb aggregate body, the poetic fairytale begins with images of multiples (snowmen and snowwomen, “four mannequins of bad taste,” “strange little girls wait[ing] for parties”), which are suggestive of the infantile phase of preindividuation.¹²³ Eventually, Appliquée emerges as an individual subject; she is first born (*mise au monde*) and then put on stage (*mise en scène*).¹²⁴ Before long, she creates a companion for herself; she “multiplies her naked feet” and eventually “courts the image that she made of herself. How not to be two when one feels so lonely? How not to dream of a confidante when one is so secretive?”¹²⁵ But just as Aimée and the Papin sisters end up assaulting their narcissistic double as persecutory ego ideals, Appliquée eventually turns on Amimère:

Amimère is hiding, she is afraid. Appliquée took her mask, to share everything. Amimère is huddled in bed. Appliquée, teeth clenching with rage, eyes empty, eats the lips of her mask like embers.¹²⁶

As implied by the sequential montage of images on the page, the confrontation between the narcissistic subject and her double results in the catastrophe of de-idealization (Figure 3.13). On the top, two little girls in a room, one in a nightgown and the other unclad, are placed next to an image of the Expressionistic art-dolls by the German artist Lotte Pritzel as the former’s exaggerated adult ideal.¹²⁷ With their elongated bodies, made-up faces, and

dance-like gestures, the art-dolls look highly artificial but also fragile, as suggested by their juxtaposition with Bellmer's still-life composition of broken trinkets. Here, a snake holding a ring in its mouth is surrounded by what looks like a shattered ornamental form; below, as if indicating the aftermath of the brawl in the nursery, two disembodied white masks lie atop a heap of



Appliquée fait la cour à l'image qu'elle se forme d'elle-même. Comment ne pas être deux quand on se sent si seule? Comment, quand on est si secrète, ne pas rêver d'une confidente? Cette fois, ce sera Amimère, la toute-belle, la sucrée qui n'a pas de dos et qui parlait, tout à l'heure, en dormant.

Appliquée craint la campagne, ses champs tachés de froid, ses corbeaux éteints, ses masures si éloignées l'une de l'autre qu'elles traduisent crûment l'immensité de la haine, pour toujours. Amimère, pieds nus, ignorante, est juchée sur un rocher, moulin d'oiseaux. Elle fait signe à Appliquée de venir s'asseoir dans un des bosquets de roses de la mer qui bat la cloison. Le ciel tourne mal. La carte consultée trop tard, on est perdu. Il faudra s'en retourner par le tunnel des Danaïdes. En attendant, la double anguille profite de sa liberté. Elle joint les mains et ferme un œil. Dans le parloir mille précautions à prendre, le velours à ne pas ternir, les murs à ne pas marquer, mille précautions à prendre, mais tout à toucher.

Amimère se cache, elle a peur. Appliquée lui a pris son masque, pour tout partager. Amimère est blottie au fond du lit. Appliquée, la rage aux dents, les yeux vides, mange les lèvres de son masque, comme des braises. Elle n'a plus de salive. Rien ne diffère de la mort, sinon le feu. Le lit noir, immobile, a besoin d'une leçon. Il moulera la lave, on l'ensevelira dans des cendres blanches.

Et la foudre apporte l'oubli.

☆

Sensible lendemain, poussière secouée au soleil, comme un grand échassier fou. Flèche fine du dernier frisson. Le jouet n'a plus une goutte de sang. Non cette enfant d'hier, ardente, intacte, mais un chiffon vide contre un mur. Et une voix qui annonce, définitivement.

PAUL ÉLUARD.

FIGURE 3.13. Paul Éluard, "Appliquée." *Minotaure*, no. 7 (1935): 16.



FIGURE 3.14. Hans Bellmer, *Composition. Minotaure*, no. 7 (1935): 14. Copyright 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

hair or thorns like broken eggshells, indicating that the theater of ideality had been brought to ruins. On the page facing the title of Éluard's essay, one finds another *Composition* by Bellmer reproduced in large format: instead of faces or masks, the murder scene here is portrayed by two pairs of legs from female dolls mixed with objects suggestive of childhood and the domestic sphere such as ribbons, a doily of faux lace, and crushed candies (Figure 3.14). Yet it is crucial to note that this violence occurs on the symbolic level and is directed toward images and objects rather than real persons. Presumably, this is why the prose-poem resolves the scene of sadism with a "sensible day after" (*sensible lendemain*): dust "shaken in the sun" seems about to settle; "the toy no longer has a drop of blood"; and the "ardent and intact . . . child of yesterday" is now replaced by "an empty rag against the wall."¹²⁸

With "Appliquée," the phenomenon of doubling is conceived in psychic terms as the perversion of primary narcissism; consequently, the dissipation of the ego-ideal as representation is the psychoanalytic remedy advanced by Éluard/Bellmer. By contrast, for Caillois, the author of "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" in the same no. 7 issue of *Minotaure*, doubling is not as much a psychical action on the part of a psychoanalytic subject as a quasi-pathological phenomenon found in nature. Recently recruited by Breton, the young neophyte to surrealism had published an essay a year ago on the

praying mantis, which appeared right after Dalí's "New Colors of Spectral Sex-Appeal" and Man Ray's photographs of the surrealist "phantom" and "specter" in *Minotaure's* no. 5 issue. In this context, Caillois's "The Praying Mantis: From Biology to Psychoanalysis" seems to be a bona fide affirmation of surrealist automatism and ethnography of the subject. Adopting the double perspectives of anthropology and biology, Caillois pays tribute to the "lyrical objectivity" of the praying mantis, citing ethnographic evidence from world cultures and including the surrealists' habit of breeding mantises as pets.¹²⁹ For Breton, Éluard, and Dalí, says Caillois, the animal represents "the ideal mode of sexual relationship" where "the act of love . . . diminishes the male and aggrandizes the female."¹³⁰ Expanding on the observation of physiologist Léon Binet, who compares the mantis to "a machine with highly advanced parts, which can operate automatically," Caillois goes as far as to describe it as "a female android," "an artificial, mechanical, inanimate, and unconscious machine-woman—incommensurate with man and all other living creatures."¹³¹ The female praying mantis therefore serves as a zoological iteration of the automatic subject with the difference that, contra Dalí, Tzara, and Crevel, Caillois associates her more with a radically unconscious death drive than with semi-voluntary pleasure and ecstasy:

Above and beyond its jointed rigidity, which recalls a coat of armor or an automaton, it is a fact that there are very few reactions the mantis cannot perform in a decapitated state—that is, without any center of representation or voluntary activity. In this condition, it can walk; regain its balance; sever a threatened limb; assume the spectral stance; engage in mating; lay eggs; build an ootheca; and (this is truly frightening) lapse into feigned rigor mortis in the face of danger or when the peripheral nervous system is stimulated. . . . [T]he mantis, when dead, should be capable of simulating death.¹³²

Apart from affirming surrealist automatism, however, there is a larger intellectual project at stake in Caillois's "Praying Mantis" that anticipates his eventual break from the movement.¹³³ As indicated by the subtitle and the last paragraph of the "Praying Mantis," the author's ultimate ambition is to "seek their origins [those of psychic complexes] in comparative biology rather than in the human mind alone"; for example, castration anxiety would be explained by the phenomenon of sexual cannibalism in the animal world rather than by psychoanalysis.¹³⁴ In the second of his two contributions to *Minotaure*, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," Caillois takes this approach further: the psychic action of doubling, what Lacan and the surrealists identify in narcissism, is equated instead with the natural phenomenon of animal mimicry (*mimétisme*).

Like his "Praying Mantis," Caillois's "Mimicry" is to a large degree a tribute to para-artistic phenomena in nature. If the former text equates the mantis

with lyricism, the latter likewise describes mimicking insects as enacting the equivalent of a photographic or 3D-printing process in nature:

Morphological mimicry could then be, after the fashion of chromatic mimicry, an actual photography, but of the form and the relief, a photography on the level of the object and not that of the image, a reproduction in three-dimensional space with solids and voids: sculpture-photography or better *teleplasty*.¹³⁵

Convinced that mimicry is creative, Caillois resists utilitarian explanations that consider the phenomenon in terms of self-defensive camouflage against predators. Inedible insects who “have nothing to fear” are also sometimes mimetic, he argues, and carnivores hunting by smell are “not at all fooled by homomorphy or homochromy.”¹³⁶ It is equally out of the question for Caillois that such resemblances could have resulted from chance: the combination of various traits that make an insect similar to a plant is not “one combination like any other” but one whose “mutual organization” contributes specifically to resemblance.¹³⁷ Instead, insect mimicry is a “*luxury* and even a dangerous luxury,” as exemplified by the suicidal Phyllis insects who

browse among themselves, taking each other for real leaves, in such a way that one might accept the idea of a sort of collective masochism leading to mutual homophagy, the simulation of the leaf being a provocation to cannibalism in this kind of totem feast.¹³⁸ (Figure 3.15)



FIGURE 3.15. *Phyllie bioculatum* (Phyllis insects disguised in solar green, polygonal). *Minotaure*, no. 7 (1935): 5. Photographs by Le Charles.

Aligning with the broadly nonanthropocentric outlook of *Minotaure*, Caillois's thematization of the mimetic impulse in nature especially recalls Éluard's poem, "Un visage dans l'herbe" (A face in the grass) in the inaugural issue of the "animal-headed review," which imagines human and suprahuman creativity as belonging to the same procreative principle in nature. Yet a comparative reading of Caillois's essay and Éluard's poem would reveal the two as ultimately representing incommensurable conceptions of surrealist automatism.

Inspired by a Nias Island palm mask from the Ethnographic Museum of Basel, "A Face in the Grass" produces the effect of anonymity by using plain words and simple syntax, and by partially obscuring the poet's identity (given only by his initials) (Figure 3.16).

After the leaf-insect, the leaf-man.
A face hatches in a nest of verdure.
The vegetal seduces the rain.
From a hole, water gives itself to the first to come along.

(Après l'insecte-feuille, l'homme-feuille.
Un visage éclôt dans un nid de verdure.
Le végétal séduit la pluie.
L'eau, dans un trou, se livre au premier venu.)¹³⁹

Per the double meaning of the preposition "after" in the first line, "leaf-man" genealogically succeeds and is also modeled on the "leaf-insect." Like the parent and the child, the two figures have in common the component of the leaf as well as their composite character, but are not identical. As if rewinding backward to the moment of conception, the next line imagines the leaf-man's spontaneous or *automatic* birth, hatching magically like an egg in a grass nest. Finally, in the last two lines, the poet shows the origin of the creature in the coupling between a seducing vegetation and consenting water, which "gives itself." In this scenario, nature is a paradigm for automatism in that its movements reflect the latter's active-passive principle; more importantly, in accordance with the surrealist equation of subjectivity with desire, non-human entities (rain, grass, insect) can now be imagined as desiring subjects due to their protoerotic interactions.

In "Mimicry," Caillois also imagines nature as creating automatically vis-à-vis a mimetic mechanism, with the difference that the latter stems not from desire but from a quasi-pathological condition he calls "psychasthenia," using the early twentieth-century psychiatric term for affective alienation and loss of will. Whereas Éluard's poem conceives of mimicry in terms of kinship and resemblance (the leaf-man comes/takes after the leaf-insect), the same concept for Caillois is defined more strictly as "a means, if not an intermediate stage" leading to "*assimilation to the surroundings*" or space; "cases in which the animal mimics another animal" are therefore excluded.¹⁴⁰ The mimetic phenomenon, he says, "is never carried out except



FIGURE 3.16. Nias Island mask with poem by Paul Éluard, "Un visage dans l'herbe." *Minotaure*, no. 1 (1933): 1.

Un visage dans l'herbe.
(Musée ethnographique de Bâle).

*Après l'insecte-feuille, l'homme-feuille.
Un visage éclôt dans un nid de verdure.
Le végétal séduit la pluie.
L'eau, dans un trou, se livre au premier venu.
P. E.*

in a single direction," namely, toward a lesser degree of life (*"life takes a step backward"*); what is more, it consists of a movement toward sameness ("homomorphy," "homochromy," and "homophagy").¹⁴¹ Caillois's radically homogenizing mimicry therefore differs from the bidirectional travesty conceived by the older surrealists, notably Tzara and Crevel; it also implicitly contests the surrealist theory of style as iteration (Lacan), a type of repetitive structure that produces "dissimilarity" (Breton). It therefore comes as little surprise that Caillois would eventually reject Dalí's theory of critical paranoia, which emphasizes the discrepancy between reality and simulacra. Looking at Dalí's paintings circa 1930, he dismisses the artist's explanation of the figures: "[W]hatever the artist may say, these invisible men, sleeping women, horses and lions are less the expression of ambiguities of paranoiac 'plurivocities' than of mimetic assimilation of the animate to the inanimate."¹⁴² To support his own univocal and nonpsychoanalytic theory of mimicry as "a

single process,” Caillois equates the experience of “*depersonalization by assimilation to space*” in schizophrenia with “what mimicry achieves morphologically in certain animal species.”¹⁴³ The physician and psychologist Pierre Janet and phenomenological psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski, says Caillois, have both described the experience of schizophrenic patients in terms of the “lack of distinction between the milieu and the organism”:

To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at *himself* from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, *dark space where things cannot be put*. He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*.¹⁴⁴

Due to the idiosyncrasy of Caillois’s notion of mimicry, its relationship to the critical theory of surrealism has yet to be securely established. In their erudite study, David Lomas and Jeremy Stubbs have shown how it may be called upon to interpret a variety of surrealist art that thematizes simulation, by the likes of Ernst, Dalí, and Remedios Varo.¹⁴⁵ Yet Krauss’s earlier account stresses the difference between Caillois’s mimicry and surrealist simulation due to the former’s radical departure from the realm of representation and signification. For Krauss, Breton sees “nature’s doubling” as producing the “non-self-identical . . . because the double it generates within itself restructures it as sign. It is thus matter that is revealed as never wholly in-itself but always already signifying”; by contrast, Caillois’s mimicry consists of “a doubling that would not be the generator of form,” “a failure to maintain the boundaries between inside and outside, between . . . figure and ground”; its “effacement of the figure” is hence closer to Bataille’s radically antifigurative concept of the formless.¹⁴⁶ But in the context of the *social critique* that *Minotaure* and more broadly the 1930s intelligentsia would come to develop at the eve of World War II, the more important point of difference is arguably that between the older surrealists’ dialectical conception of critical paranoia and ecstasy as active-passive and Caillois’s nondialectical psychasthenia, described by Denis Hollier as “a drop in the level of psychic energy, a kind of subjective detumescence, a loss of ego substance, a depressive exhaustion close to what a monk would call *acedia*.”¹⁴⁷

As Hollier has argued, Caillois’s *Minotaure* essays need to be read as prefiguring his postsurrealist activities in the College of Sociology (1937–39), the group he cofounded with Bataille and Leiris dedicated to the scientific study of the sacred as well as the resacralization of society. Perceiving modern society as homogenized and de-virilized by secularism and egalitarianism, the College’s “activist sociology” proposes to remedy this decadence with “the restoration of hierarchical differences.”¹⁴⁸ In this light, it becomes clear that “Caillois’s description of mimetic behavior [in his *Minotaure* essay]

is . . . no praise of psychasthenia” and consists instead in a rhetorical appeal for its overcoming by *distinction*, by which Caillois means not only difference but more specifically the ontological superiority of the masters to the slaves, of the aristocrats to the commoners.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, in his chillingly elitist “Winter Wind” (*Le vent d’hiver*), a founding text for the *College*, Caillois imagines a squad of individualists (modeled on Charles Baudelaire and Friedrich Nietzsche) who would stand apart from “the multitude of wretched people,” in the same way good fruits are kept separate from diseased ones during harvest “as a health measure.”¹⁵⁰ Approximating the logic of social Darwinists, he welcomes “a cold wind” that would be “murderous and so salubrious, one that kills the fragile, the sickly, and the birds,” leaving only “the hardy nomads” who are “intoxicated with the glacial, tonic violence” and have “come to laugh at the wind.”¹⁵¹

Conceived as ontological feebleness and infirmity, Caillois’s mimetic psychasthenia therefore functions as preparation for a discourse about mastery, which, Hollier notes, requires adopting a “masculine frigidity” that would be the opposite of impotence, because “it is not that which falls short of an unattainable pleasure, but that which goes beyond a pleasure that has been surpassed . . . [O]ne should see in that frigidity the height of virile potency.”¹⁵² From this masculinist-elitist perspective, it is imperative to renounce pleasure, which Caillois equates with servitude and self-loss, in favor of domination. As he states in a 1937 review for *La Nouvelle Revue française* of two books on chess (one of which is *Opposition and Sister Squares Are Reconciled* by Marcel Duchamp and Vitaly Halberstadt), the thinking man

does not lack imagination, but he prefers to master instead of submitting to it, believing that domination is preferable to pleasure [*jouissance*] or knowing from experience that the most acute pleasure resides in the very exercise of domination. Similarly, one can imagine that there are those who, when making love, enjoy [*jouissent*] less the pleasure they feel than the one they provoke, since the former does not leave them in possession of themselves, whereas the latter give them possession of others.¹⁵³

It would be futile to try to determine if young Caillois’s fascination with distinction and domination was the cause or the effect of his intellectual rejection of surrealism and psychoanalysis, both of which maintain the equality of all subjects before the sovereign unconscious. What is clear is that his turn away from surrealism (a move he would come to question at a later date) led him to a reductive biologism against which Crevel had warned, and also to a phallogocentric conception of power as virility that would have been impossible in a surrealism that exalted femininity.¹⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Caillois’s manic defense against pleasure reveals yet another reason for the other male surrealists’ consistent identification of the universal subject-position with the feminine: It makes it possible for them to theorize a noncastrative pleasure that would not consist in dispossession, which Lacan later calls the “*jouissance* of the

woman . . . beyond the phallus” with the understanding that some men may also ally themselves with it: “There are men who are just as good as women. It does happen. And who therefore feel just as good.”¹⁵⁵

Minotaure as Social Critique: Surrealism’s Feminine Heterogeneity

Reacting defensively toward the homogenizing forces of modernity, Caillouis and the College of Sociology have at times been read as justifying social hierarchy and order from the perspective of a “reactionary avant-gardism,” if not a crypto-fascism.¹⁵⁶ But far from being unique to this group, one recalls that the suspicion of homogeneity is also a characteristic of surrealism, whose critical theory and aesthetic practice I have analyzed at length in terms of a consistent preference for difference and the multiform. Though surrealism’s paraethnography tends to prioritize subjectivity, in contrast to the College’s sociological considerations of collective phenomena like war, sacrifice, festival, and fraternity, the two groups share a broadly anthropological outlook that would carry over to their respective analysis of the mounting sociopolitical crisis of the 1930s. In this last section, I will suggest that several contributors to the middle and last series of *Minotaure* (1936–39) became increasingly concerned with what Bataille calls “the psychological structure of fascism,” yet came to a different diagnosis thereof than the one offered by Bataille and his College colleagues due to their distinctively surrealist conception of a *feminine heterogeneity*.

In “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” an essay Bataille published in two installments for the review *La Critique sociale* in 1933 and 1934, he analyzes the current implosion of the bourgeois nation-state in terms of the confrontation of incommensurable social forces, which he describes as *homogeneity* and *heterogeneity*. The former refers to “delineable persons and situations” that are “commensurable” and can be assimilated into the social totality; in modern society, it is specifically associated with the bourgeois class as owners of the means of production.¹⁵⁷ The antipode of homogeneity is “heterogeneous social existence,” which refers to “everything rejected by homogeneous society as waste or as superior transcendent value.”¹⁵⁸ Inherently dualistic, heterogeneity for Bataille may be high or low: In terms of the body, it refers both to its most eroticized parts and its waste products; socially, it includes noble as well as ignoble “social forms that homogenous society is powerless to assimilate: mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individuals or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.).”¹⁵⁹

For Bataille, who does not disavow psychoanalysis like his future collaborator Caillouis, the marginalization and censorship of heterogenous elements by homogenous society is comparable to the repression of the unconscious by the conscious psyche, so that “the difficulties opposing the revelation of unconscious forms of existence are of the same order as those opposing the knowledge of heterogeneous forms.”¹⁶⁰ Yet this repression occurs in different forms in traditional and modern societies. Historically, says Bataille,

homogeneous society safeguards its own unity by making use of high/noble heterogeneity in “imperative” or “sovereign” form (the king), charging it with the sadistic suppression or discipline of low/ignoble heterogeneity (impoverished classes, foreign societies, etc.). An example is the army, which, Bataille points out, typically recruits its members from “a vile segment of the population” whose wretchedness is then violently “negated by the parade, by the uniform, and by the geometric regularity of cadenced movements.”¹⁶¹ Importantly, he characterizes this transformation in terms of the activation of passive elements (“every lower form, every ignominy, being by definition passive, is transformed into its opposite by the simple fact of a transition to action”) and the imposition of form on the formless:

Starting with formless and impoverished elements, the army, under the imperative impulse, becomes organized and internally achieves a homogeneous form on account of the negation directed at the disordered character of its elements: in fact, the mass that constitutes the army passes from a depleted and ruinous existence to a purified geometric order, from formlessness to aggressive rigidity.¹⁶²

For Bataille, fascism in the twentieth century brings back the “anachronistic phantoms” of monarchical societies and theocracies in its formation of “a total heterogeneous power.”¹⁶³ Fascist leaders like Mussolini and Hitler are “incontestably part of heterogeneous existence” and “stand out as something *other*” whereas “democratic politicians . . . represent in different countries the platitude inherent to *homogeneous* society.”¹⁶⁴ But as the product of a nominally democratic society, fascist heterogeneity cannot be subverted like monarchical heterogeneity. “Immobilized and immobilizing” due to the consensus of homogenous society, monarchy can be subverted when the “lower forms” (the poor and the oppressed) enter into movement and become “*subversive forms* . . . with a view to the struggle against the sovereign forms.”¹⁶⁵ By contrast, in democracy, where “the heterogeneous imperative agency (nation in republican forms, king in constitutional monarchies) is reduced to an atrophied existence,” such resistance is no longer necessary.¹⁶⁶ Consequently, for Bataille, fascism constitutes not only “a concentration and so to speak condensation of power” but also the neutralization of the lower classes by social assimilation, the “accomplished uniting of the heterogeneous elements with the homogeneous elements, of sovereignty in the strictest sense with the State.”¹⁶⁷

Going beyond the economic model of Marxism, Bataille’s essay attests to an effort on the part of interwar intellectuals to theorize the collapse of liberal democracy and the rise of totalitarianism in 1930s Europe in psychological or affective terms. This approach would eventually find echoes in *Minotaure*, nominally a review of literature and the arts that nevertheless cannot be characterized as *merely* aesthetic. As Jean-François Revel notes in 1962 on the occasion of an exhibition of the review’s contents, “at no point is the anxiety in which Europe was living politically during the years 1933–39 completely

absent from *Minotaure*.”¹⁶⁸ In the review’s second to last issue (no. 11 from 1938), an essay by Nicolas Calas, another newcomer to surrealism, virtually follows Bataille’s analysis of fascism’s ambiguous relationship to heterogeneity, using more explicitly psychoanalytic concepts. Like Bataille and Caillois, the author of “Love of Revolution in Our Time” equates the egalitarianism of modern bourgeois society with homogenization. The equality of the sexes had already begun to erase gender distinction, says Calas, all the more so as emancipated bourgeois women covet the conditions and privileges of their male counterparts (as in the fictional example of Emma Bovary); meanwhile, modern society also undermines traditional patriarchy with its preference for a camaraderie among similar equals. While Calas’s conservative views regarding gender and the family are at odds with surrealism’s left-wing politics, it is his attention to the question of desire and idealization in the “fascist complex” that overlaps with the intellectual concerns of *Minotaure* as discussed in this chapter. Appealing simultaneously to authority and to an exclusively masculine camaraderie, the fascist imaginary according to Calas harbors an incoherent ego-ideal that conflates the image of the father with that of the brother, resulting in the eventual replacement of the Oedipal complex with intense homoeroticism: “If the leader is not simply a father, but also a lover, it must mean that his authority cannot be based on the Oedipus complex; it must also depend upon a neurotic sublimation of homosexual love. . . . [T]he power of a Führer lies in the greatest of forces, on the most affective and intense connection, on the love of the lover.”¹⁶⁹ But because all erotic love is inherently intense and instable, he predicts the imminent collapse of a short-lived “affective State,” which like all “amorous states” will be followed by a return to “the calm authority of the Father as symbolized by the monarchy.”¹⁷⁰

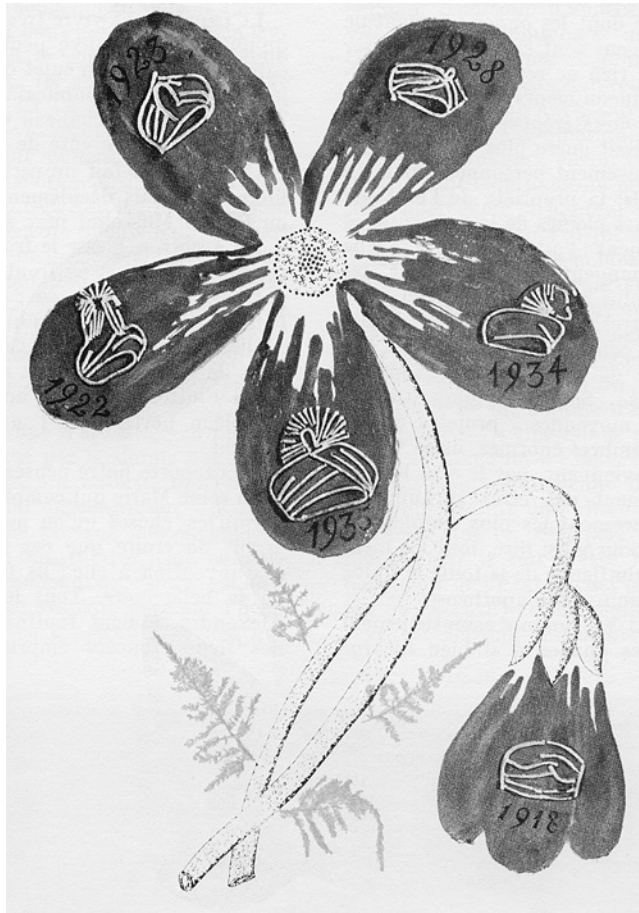
Calas’s essay has in common with Bataille’s earlier analysis not only its consideration of fascism as an affective phenomenon, but also its fascination with a “heterogeneous imperative agency” (Bataille) that would either be the historical precedent or reactionary alternative to fascism. In part prompted by the hyperphallic imaginary of fascism itself, the two authors imagine this agency in strictly masculine terms; consequently, “The Love of Revolution in Our Time” and “The Psychological Structure of Fascism” are both haunted by the figure of the king. It is worth pointing out that the headless man serving as the icon for Acéphale, the secret society Bataille founded in 1936, evokes the monarch decapitated during the French Revolution. The case of Calas is even more disturbing, as he would eventually reveal his ambivalent interest in Adolf Hitler as a “romantic” figure, to Breton’s strong disapproval.¹⁷¹ In this larger context, Edward James’s 1936 essay for *Minotaure*’s issue no. 9, “Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine” (The people’s hat and the queen’s hats), may be read as advancing what is excluded by the other two thinkers’ masculinist mode of critique, namely, the possibility of a heterogeneous agency conceived from the point of view of the feminine, which undermines homogeneity (Bataille) and homologism (Caillois) without resorting to an imaginary of violence.

Thematically related to Tzara's paraethnography of women's hats and theoretically indebted to Dalí's critical paranoia, James's text pays tribute to the "hallucinatory" survival of monarchy in the contemporary period, a phenomenon as "marvelous" (the essay claims to respond to the editors' solicitation of materials related to this surrealist concept) as it is necessary, because "the human heart has a need [*besoin*], need, need [*sic*] splendor, luxury, pride, vanity, glory and sovereignty. It needs these perhaps more than love, at least more than bread."¹⁷² Repeating the word "need" four times and using six synonymous nouns in succession, James here deploys the iterative style that Lacan and Breton had observed in automatic productions and Dalí in the Art Nouveau style. This excess indicates that the "need" described here is not utilitarian but an aesthetic one for enjoyment; the people's need or desire for monarchs is therefore comparable to that for hats, conceived as ornaments rather than protective gear: "A people can very well live without a hat—just like how a bald man can live without hair, but baldness is not a matter of pride."¹⁷³ In addition to serving metaphorically as the people's hat, the monarchs also wear actual hats, which James following the surrealists conceives as aesthetic structures with symbolic functions. If Tzara had interpreted the multiplication of vaginal forms on women's hats as a covert protest against the monolithic and the phallic, James likewise sees the English queens' multifarious hats as mocking the French president's meager "little beret" and the fascist leaders' "steel helmet."¹⁷⁴ Whereas hats for Tzara represent female genitals through which women express themselves as desiring subjects, the queen's hats represent desserts and flowers that instead fulfill the people's desires, in relation to which the monarchs are but *objects*:

Her majesties have no idea that to the eyes of the people their hats could suggest cakes, soufflés, pies, and puddings. While the soufflés on the hat of her daughter-in-law [Queen Mary] hardly ever look raised à point, the little purple jam tarts that the old Queen Alexandra donned by contrast resemble millefeuille cakes very appetizingly; in spite of their forms being those of sweets, their colors remaining nevertheless those of the garden.¹⁷⁵ (Figure 3.17)

Given its concurrence with "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," James's essay reads like a humorous celebration of what Bataille describes in tragic terms as the "atrophied" state of heterogeneity in the form of constitutional monarchy. But by taking the queen rather than the king as the model for monarchical authority, James makes it possible to think "heterogeneous imperative agency" beyond the dichotomies of weak and strong, passive and active, formlessness and form. Instead of sadistic discipline and rigid form, which are characteristics of Bataille's (masculine) heterogeneity, the queen's hats present a feminine heterogeneity that would be soft and pleasure giving. Whereas high/noble heterogeneity for Bataille is in the position of activating a low/ignoble and passive heterogeneity, the reverse is true for James, who sees the monarchs instead as passive objects being activated by the wishful

FIGURE 3.17. Illustration for Edward James, "Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine." *Minotaure*, no. 9 (1936): 58.



projection or "critical paranoia" of their subjects. Like "effigies, living totems, big marionettes," "lightning-rods," or "mediums, vases, vessels," says James, the almost inanimate monarchs become sovereign only

by the simple and primitive fantasy of the average person that concentrates upon them, they fill themselves with this objective idea just like an element, they are all impregnated by royal fluid, by the electricity whose waves coming from everywhere and where they know people are thinking about them, so that nothing is left from their original ego other than the surface, of which even the unconscious gestures and physical contours have become stereotypes by virtue of seeing themselves so often in photographs. . . . The King and the Queen are two urns filled with the idea of what their people want them to be: adoration and the royal mythology develop them, change them inexorably, mold them in molds that are more imperative than the ones destiny employs for the rest of us. From the chrysalid of their personal,

often simple and bourgeois tastes, they are metamorphosed into butterflies.¹⁷⁶

If the desires of the people—here *subjects* in the double sense—mold the monarchs in “imperative” ways, James stresses that these forces are noncoercive, hence his use of aqueous metaphors (fluid and electricity). And if the passive monarchs forgo their ego, it is neither to undergo a psychasthenic assimilation into the environment like mimicking insects (Caillois), nor to obtain superhuman distinction above others, but to gradually metamorphose into something *other* than themselves, like the fully formed butterfly blossoming out of the inchoate chrysalid.

In the period leading up to World War II, it would seem that western Europe could imagine a feminine imperative heterogeneity only in the realm of the symbolic (James’s ornamental, politically powerless monarchs), yet as I will show in the following chapter, Leiris’s professional ethnographic fieldwork in Ethiopia in this period would present a case of feminine imperative heterogeneity robustly integrated in social practice. In brief, thanks to her virtuosic practice of possession by various spirits known as the *zars*, the charismatic Malkam Ayyahou of Gondar is able to serve her community in multiple capacities as healer, advisor, arbitrator, and organizer, as if wearing different professional (not merely decorative) hats. But from the perspective of *Minotaure*’s paraethnography, even the symbolic is far from being infelicitous. In an essay on “Mirrors” in issue no. 11, Pierre Mabilie argues that symbolic representation is indispensable to the formation of the subject; specifically, there could be no “self” without the access to the mirror reflection, whose ideality can be intoxicating. As “a kind of popularization of Lacan’s theories of the mirror stage” as Krauss suggests, Mabilie sees the mirror reflection as helping the infant transition from “coenaesthetic perceptions” (the more or less confused experience of bodily sensations and movements) to the development of first-person consciousness: “I see among others this fellow who smiles when I contract a muscle, who becomes pale when I am sick, and habit assures me that he externalizes my ‘self’ [*moi*]. I imbue him with the coherent whole I am; inversely, I make him participate in my life. In this exchange, consciousness of my being has been acquired.”¹⁷⁷ Yet as Lacan would later stress in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” (1949), the image in the mirror is precisely not an identical reproduction of the self but an *other*. Alluding to Caillois’s *Minotaure* essay on animal mimicry, Lacan turns the former’s argument about homological assimilation into the very evidence for “heteromorphic identification,” by which he means the infantile subject’s prelinguistic assumption of its own mirror image as a more coherent but ultimately fictional “ideal-I,” whose disaccord with the reality of the subject is never to be fully resolved.¹⁷⁸

In “Mirrors,” Mabilie likewise emphasizes this alterity between the real and the ideal, cautioning in particular that the solipsism of intellectuals can

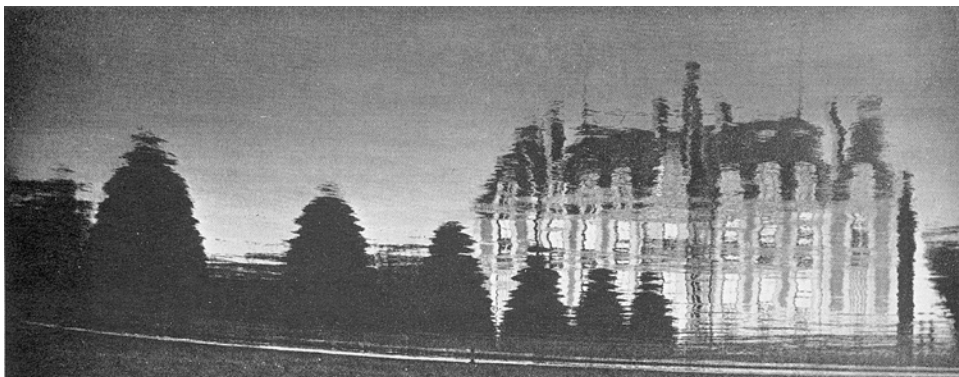


FIGURE 3.18. Raoul Ubac, photographs for Pierre Mabilie's essay, "Miroirs." *Minotaure*, no. 11 (1938): 14, 17. Copyright 2024 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

render them vulnerable to the fate of the mythic Narcissus. As if affirming Calas's critique of the unreal image of the fascist leader in the same issue of *Minotaure*, he warily regards the overridealized double "in which we impart all the hopes of which reality deprives us."¹⁷⁹ But instead of deferring to a Neoplatonic renunciation of all images as mere illusions, Mabilie engages an anthropological perspective that recalls the significance of non-idealizing representations, such as the ancient Egyptians' conception of the person as consisting of the body, the breath, the shadow, the likeness, and the name. Similarly, many Mediterranean cultures consider the likeness and

the shadow not as attributes but as actual parts of the person, with their own autonomous reality. To the comparatively modern mirror image, which reinforces the first-person self (*moi*), Mabile opposes these “less intellectual,” more objective entities that constitute the subject in the third person as “soi,” just as the ethnologist Marcel Mauss in the same period would recall the premodern conception of the person as not a self but a mask (*persona*).¹⁸⁰ According to Mabile, the public’s perplexity as regards the art of the contemporary era stems from the latter’s departure from the mimetic model of the mirror in favor of what Margaret Iversen calls the “anamorphic image,” exemplified by Raoul Ubac’s manipulated photographs.¹⁸¹ In the context of *Minotaure* and 1930s surrealism, these works not only illustrate Mabile’s essay but also affirm more broadly the movement’s new automatism as style, since the quivering reflection on the surface of the water basin turns the classical form of the Château de Sceaux into an undulating façade that recalls the Art Nouveau architecture admired by Dalí (Figure 3.18, top). Meanwhile, the face of the model Agui (Agathe Schmidt) and her double in the horizontal orientation resemble at once the fallen masks in the illustrations for “Appliquée” and the submerged faces of the drowned, a destiny Mabile ascribes to Narcissus in his retelling of the myth (Figure 3.18, bottom). With their dramatic use of chiaroscuro (the brightly lit chateau versus the dark topiary trees; Agui’s faces floating in black water), both works can be said to propose an anthropology of the image that reintegrates the mirror reflection into that of the shadow, thereby breaking the narcissistic spell. For Mabile and for the contributors of the *Minotaure* presumably, the arts would therefore serve this paradoxical social function in a time of excessive conflation of the real and the ideal, namely, to expose the facticity of illusions and their dependency on the material world: “Behind the flat surface of the lake are not illusory poplar trees, but the intense life of waters. Behind the mirror is the metal with its properties.”¹⁸²

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The Surrealists as Ethnographers

Possession, Aesthetics, Subjectivity

In the preceding chapters, the ethnographic dimension of surrealism is considered to extend far beyond the context of the review *Documents*, where defecting members of the movement consciously collaborated with professional ethnologists. I have tried to show how the so-called core group of surrealists, too, had undertaken intellectual investigations that may be described as paraethnographic, and whose primary aim was to uncover and valorize unconscious, often overlooked and socially marginalized forms of subjectivity. The sometimes polemical, sometimes friendly dialogues among various members and adherents of the surrealist movement, I suggest, contributed altogether to a theory of the subject conceived in phenomenal terms, identified not with an essential self but with figures like the veil, the mask, the hand, the hat, and the ornament. Especially for the poets and artists around Breton, this nonsovereign subjectivity promises to close the perceived gap between a rationalizing modern civilization and the “prelogical” cultures dominated by the former; the colonizer and the colonized are thus imagined as coeval in that both are submitted to a “primitive reason” and autonomous agency beyond the human, regardless of degree of technological advancement. Last, I show through a reading of the surrealist components of *Minotaure* that this phenomenal and nonsovereign subject is as universal as it is feminine identified, and therefore in the position to critique a phallogentric conception of power as “heterogeneity.”

In this final chapter, the collective investigations that I have characterized as surrealism’s ethnography of the subject will be applied as the framework for rereading the professional or protoprofessional ethnography by two surrealists who conducted fieldwork in the early 1930s under dramatically different circumstances. Though not unknown, Benjamin Péret’s texts on Afro-Brazilian *candomblé* and those of Michel Leiris on the *zar* cult in northern Ethiopia have thus far received far less attention than the latter’s *Phantom Africa* (*L’Afrique fantôme*), considered by James Clifford to be the paramount if the only example of “surrealist ethnography.”⁷¹ In this monumental set of fieldnotes, Leiris documents not only the daily activities of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931–33) on which he served as secretary-archivist, but also his own fluctuating psychological states. Described by literary critics variously as “autoethnography,” “ethnobiography,” or “ethnopoetics,” this unclassifiable work is seen above all as undermining professional anthropology’s traditional

claim to objectivity, showing that ethnography “can no longer be seen as the empirical, descriptive dimension of anthropology, a general science of the human” but “emerges as the theory and practice of juxtaposition.”²

Nevertheless, as Leiris himself and many of his readers have observed, *Phantom Africa* remains an exceptional text; it is the only one where “there is no break between my [Leiris’s] work as an ethnographer and my activity as writer” and, as a result, is to be distinguished from the same author’s nonliterary scholarship in ethnology and the history of art, and from other examples of ethnographical work by members of the surrealist group.³ The textual experimentation and disciplinary critique that have made for the renown of *Phantom Africa*, for instance, are conspicuously absent in Péret’s thirteen short articles on *candomblé*, published in the São Paulo newspaper *Diário da Noite* between November 1930 and January 1931. Now collected under the title *Candomblé et Makumba* (Candomblé and macumba), they consist of nine texts of first-person participant observation and a long essay of historical synthesis entitled “Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens” (The origins of the beliefs of Black Brazilians), published in four installments.⁴ While this collection of texts constitutes “a kind of ethnography” for Emerson Giumbelli, it is clear to Arthur Valle that they do not qualify as “surrealist ethnography” in the sense understood by Clifford and can at best be described in terms of an “ethnopoetics” (term coined by the poet Jerome Rothenberg).⁵ As for Leiris’s three *zar*-related academic publications in the 1930s and his belated monograph in 1958, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (Possession and its theatrical aspects among the Ethiopians of Gondar), they are even more decisively disqualified from the subversive genre named by Clifford; written in lucidly classical prose and minimizing the subjectivity of the ethnographer, these texts have since then been incorporated into the standard scholarly bibliography on *zar*.⁶ Indeed, whereas *Phantom Africa* exemplifies what Paul Christopher Johnson calls a “left-handed” ethnographic writing, which “might include the use of a narrative style of ethnography, the assumption of a cultivated ‘postmodern’ stance, the inclusion of personal disclosures including mistakes and transgressions as well as the blind spots of ethnographic knowledge,” the *zar* works remain more at home in a systematic ethnography practiced “with the right hand,” which entails “the bracketing of the observing body.”⁷

If not “surrealist ethnography,” my claim will be that Péret’s and Leiris’s respective work on *candomblé* and *zar* nevertheless contribute to surrealism’s ethnography of the subject; specifically, they show how the nonsovereign modalities of subjectivity theorized by the surrealists may be effectively integrated into social practice vis-à-vis the cultural phenomenon of possession. Following the double meaning of “subject” in Breton’s eponymous text from 1916, the practitioners of *candomblé* and *zar* in Péret’s and Leiris’s accounts are ethnographic subjects being observed and interviewed, but they are also expressive and moral subjects who assume agency in aesthetic performance and its interpretations, as will be seen below. From the perspective of the social critique of the interwar intelligentsia, moreover, both authors can be read as uncovering possession as a phenomenon of social heterogeneity

that proves productive on the level of action. If Péret finds evidence for the historical role of *candomblé* in preparing its enslaved practitioners for revolt against the ruling class, Leiris in turn provides an example of nonimperative authority in the chief healer of Gondar, Malkam Ayyahou, whose virtuosic possession enables her to lead and serve her community. In Péret's case, the application of a Marxist analytical lens would lead him to equate the *candomblé* practitioners' rebellions with their anticipated political emancipation. By contrast, by focusing on the aesthetic or "theatrical aspects" of *zar*, Leiris makes it possible to see the enjoyment of the predominantly female *balazars* ("horses," meaning those possessed by *zars*) as a covert form of agency, despite their subaltern status in relation to the native patriarchy and the French mission.

From Primitivist Aesthetic to Political Action: Péret on *Candomblé*

In an interview from 1986–87, an older Leiris recognizes that he was the only surrealist to become a professional anthropologist, but not the only one to undertake ethnographic research in the vein of cultural anthropology; for instance, Péret had collected Amerindian myths, and Breton documented Hopi culture in the Pueblo Region.⁸ To these examples mentioned by Leiris, one might add the founding of the Haitian Bureau of Ethnology by Pierre Mabilie, the surgeon and ethnologist who gave Breton access to Vodun ceremonies in Haiti, not least the precocious reportage of *candomblé* by Péret, whom Michael Löwy considers "the first surrealist to undertake an anthropological field investigation."⁹ Taking place shortly before Leiris joined the Dakar-Djibouti Mission, Péret's investigations came about under more fortuitous circumstances. Newly married to the singer Elsie Houston, he found himself in her native Brazil in 1929 and unable to secure funds for carrying out intended fieldwork among the Amazonian Indians. He subsequently turned his attention to *candomblé* as practiced among Afro-Brazilian communities in Rio de Janeiro, which he interpreted through the double perspectives of surrealism and Marxism. Given this *parti pris* of the ethnographer, it is important to recall that 1930–1932 was a period of intense political engagement for the surrealists, who also actively sought alliances with intellectuals and artists beyond the European continent. Péret did likewise in Brazil: He connected almost immediately with Oswald de Andrade's group around the *Revista de Antropofagia*, who publicly announced Péret's visit on March 17, 1929, while strategically repositioning their own movement as the rightful successor of Paris-based surrealism.¹⁰ Shortly after, Péret adhered to the Trotskyite branch of the Brazilian Communist Party, Liga Comunista—Oposição de Esquerda, which would eventually lead to his incarceration and expulsion from the country in December 1931.¹¹

Although the surrealists in Paris were publicly renouncing Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's work on the "primitive mentality" due to its implicit racism and complicity with colonialism, Péret's contemporaneous *Candomblé and Macumba* is not free of the bourgeois intellectual's fascination for an allegedly primitive culture. From the outset, the author admits to approaching his subject

mainly from “a poetic point of view,” finding the popular religion to “overflow with primitive and savage poetry.”¹² Yet as Rafael Cardoso points out, Péret’s ethnography still comes nowhere near the sensationalist depictions in mainstream Brazilian press and, in the context of avant-garde primitivism, might even be seen as a welcome corrective to the *Antropofagia* group’s relative reticence on Afro-Brazilian cultures.¹³ Moreover, I want to suggest that the notion of “primitive” in Péret’s otherwise informed consideration of *candomblé* serves as a shorthand for more specific qualities, which can be analyzed in anthropological, social, and aesthetic terms.

From a historical-anthropological perspective, “primitive” in Péret’s usage refers first to the retention of animist beliefs and practices, either despite or in the absence of Islamicization. In “The Origins of the Beliefs of Black Brazilians,” he synthesizes the research by Nina Rodrigues, Manoel Querino, Braz do Amaral, and his friend Nobrega da Cunha, noting that Black Brazilians descend mainly from the largely Islamicized Nago peoples of the West African Slave Coast and the Bantu peoples from Central Africa, who “had not been Islamicized and therefore remained in a more primitive state.”¹⁴ As a result of enforced assimilation in slavery, the more unified Nagos eventually absorbed the relatively heterogeneous Bantus while adopting the latter’s animist divinities and incorporating pagan elements of New World Catholicism (e.g., the veneration of saints and relics). In the ensemble of *candomblé* rites practiced in states like Bahia (former center of the slave trade), Rio de Janeiro, and Minas Gerais, one therefore attests to a reversal of the Islamicization that had previously taken place on the African continent. For instance, says Péret, the African Nagos’ almighty, benevolent and invisible god Olorum, previously imported “in the luggage of the Muslim conquerors,” would disappear among the Black Brazilians; the latter venerated instead the “eternal Father” Odua as “a material being . . . equivalent of the wooden idols that populate the Slave Coast, so close to the saints in plaster and Christs in cardboard.”¹⁵ From one of his main informants, Péret even obtained a typology establishing the equivalency between *candomblé* figures and Catholic saints (Oxagà as Christ, Xango as St. Jerome, etc.)¹⁶

For Péret, a divinity with material presence like Odua is “more in accord with the primitive mentality—which the Blacks conserved in Brazil thanks to three hundred years of abominable slavery—than with the immaterial god of the ancient civilization.”¹⁷ Connecting animism with the condition of social oppression, Péret here points to a second possible definition of “primitive” as the culture of a racialized underclass. In the ethnographic part of *Candomblé and Macumba* (the first nine texts), Péret observes the social and racial differences in the two predominant “orders” (*lei*) in contemporary Rio: Whereas the “Angola” order consisted mainly of educated Creoles, the adherents of the “Nago” order belonged almost exclusively to the disenfranchised Black working class.¹⁸ More sympathetic to the latter, Péret portrays their respective leaders in contrasting ways: Mother M., presider of the Angola order, is as “solemn” and “uninteresting” as a Catholic cardinal, whereas the Nago healer Uncle F. is unaffected and inclusive, serving the faithful as well

as nonbelievers.¹⁹ This difference manifests also in the quality of the rites considered from an aesthetic point of view. Accordingly, at a sacrificial rite presided by Uncle F., Péret claims to have witnessed “perhaps the most beautiful dance I have seen in my life,” performed impromptu by a female adherent more virtuosic than Josephine Baker.²⁰ By contrast, the group dancing at the Xango ceremony celebrated by Mother M. struck him as formulaic and uninspired, consisting of the same steps “as those of the samba danced during the carnival on the Praça 11 de Junho in Rio”; “None of these hypnotic dances gave rise to the savage and majestic scenes that I witnessed in the territory of Uncle F.”²¹

From Péret’s description of dances at Uncle F.’s Nago ceremonies, a third definition of “primitive” might be established in relation to aesthetic performance: namely, the degree to which it embeds the religious phenomenon of possession. Despite the latter’s centrality in *candomblé*, Péret’s account indicates that its manifestation differs from rite to rite. At Mother M.’s ceremony, for instance, the ethnographer is struck less by the movements of the adherent in trance than by the excited audience’s attempt to decipher the identity of the descending divinity by projection. As in a game of charades, or what the surrealists might consider a gamified form of collective critical paranoia, they would take turns crying out the names of various *candomblé* figures: “Xango!,” “Oxocel!,” “Ogum!”²² By comparison, the dancer at Uncle F.’s more intimate and less spectacular setting gave a more suggestive performance of possession for Péret, who notes that “her entire body moved. She resembled at the same time a serpent, a cat playing with a mouse, a flame shaken by the wind.”²³ That is, the dancer’s rhythmically arabesque movements themselves gave strong evidence of the presence of another, invisible being. Active like a cat manipulating its prey, and passive like a flame being blown, she appeared to be dancing and *danced* at the same time.

In the next section, it will be seen how Leiris’s in-depth study of *zar* foregrounds precisely this active-passive effect in the performance of *gourri*, the Ethiopian term for ecstatic movements that occur in a trance state. As for Péret, who is susceptible to the aesthetics of *candomblé* but does not foreground it in his studies, more important is the tension between a Marxist reading of this popular religion and what might be described as a surrealist one, which I propose can be perceived in his assessment of *candomblé*’s medical-therapeutic value. Péret recognizes the latter at a ceremony of white magic aiming to cure a young woman of nervous attacks, noting that “no specialist would have failed to recognize her neuropathy at first sight. . . . I believe she is a hysteric.”²⁴ Cognizant of the scientific community’s skepticism toward this folk medicine, he cites the not-yet-published work of his friend, the Brazilian psychiatrist Osório Cesar (sometimes Cezar) and concedes that there are likely connections between the practice of *candomblé* and the predisposition to neuroses and psychoses.²⁵ But departing from professional psychiatry’s pathologization of *candomblé*, Péret disagrees with Cesar’s call for its prohibition, deferring instead to the psychoanalytic interpretation of all religions as latent neurosis; by this logic, Péret says, Catholicism would also

need to be banned. But arguably, the stronger evidence against the scientists' hasty condemnation of *candomblé* is provided by Péret's ethnography. For instance, an interview with Uncle F. suggests that adept practitioners have a clear sense of the distinction between normal and abnormal ("mad") types of possession. In the former, "the spirit of the person retreats from his or her body and returns only when the [descended] spirit of the saint leaves"; in the latter, what Uncle F. calls "spiritism," "the spirit enters the body of the person without the latter's consent," leading to a battle over the same corporeal territory so that "little by little, the person goes mad."²⁶

Instead of professional psychiatry, what would ultimately undermine the value of *candomblé* is paradoxically Péret's own Marxism, according to which this popular religion of the enslaved cannot but be seen as the "opium of the people." Following Marx's historical-materialist critique of religion, which Péret quotes at length in the last of the thirteen texts in *Candomblé and Macumba*, he concludes that *candomblé* consists of "an elementary form of protest against the oppression that society imposes on its members, on its most miserable class."²⁷ As political theorist, he is therefore eager to show that *candomblé* dance—whose effect of semipassivity he had admired in his capacity as ethnographer—can inspire revolts, of which "the majority . . . have the character of 'holy war.'"²⁸ For example, the governor of Bahia prohibited dancing in the city in 1814, knowing its centrality in *candomblé* rites and its potential for enabling conspiracy; in 1816, it was effectively after a ceremonial dance that the enslaved Brazilians armed themselves and massacred the slave owners in their vicinity. For many commentators, Péret's theorization of the transformation of *candomblé* into political action must be regarded as double-edged, since it leads him to predict the religion's eventual demise: "As these poor people [*les pauvres*] gradually obtain consciousness of their oppressed condition, this form of revolt [*candomblé*] will disappear in order to become conscious revolt."²⁹ If this statement risks reducing the value of *candomblé* to its potentially political outcome, as suggested by Elizabeth Ginway, Giumbelli more explicitly underlines the paradox whereby Péret's "praise of the primitive [religion] is accompanied by the denunciation of its limitation."³⁰ In short, eager to see its practitioners evolve from a perceivably unconscious, primitive ("elementary") revolt to *real* emancipation, Péret ultimately underestimates the cultural and aesthetic complexity of *candomblé* (for example, the technical aspects of its dance as pointed out by Valle).³¹ He therefore forecloses the possibility of theorizing emancipation from within this popular religion, and of seeing the practice of possession itself as already predisposing participants to agency and subjecthood, as Leiris does in his nearly concurrent work on *zar*.

Possession and Its Aesthetic Aspects: Leiris on *Zar* as Masquerade

In 1931, intending to cure himself of his malaise with Parisian literary life, Leiris joined the Dakar-Djibouti Mission across sub-Saharan Africa under the leadership of his friend, the ethnologist Marcel Griaule.³² During the

final segment of the mission, a five-month encampment in Gondar, northern Ethiopia, between July and December 1932, Leiris conducted extensive field-work among the female adepts of *zar*; a syncretic religion revolving around possession like *candomblé*, but with considerably more ancient roots in the region between West Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. If the material resources and daily contact (including cohabitation) with the ethnographic subjects make for the quality of Leiris's research, it should nevertheless be pointed out that it took place only with the dubious sponsorship of the French colonial government and its corporate collaborators. Whereas the politics of Péret's ethnography in Brazil was consistent with that of the surrealist group in Paris, Leiris's participation in the mission obliged him to betray his friends' militant anticolonialism, for which he was duly reprimanded.³³ Although his *Phantom Africa* ended up compromising French colonial ethnography by revealing the mission's unscrupulous looting of African art and manipulation of the locals (hence Griaule's objection to its publication), to consider the work itself an anticolonial text would be an overstatement, as Brent Hayes Edwards points out.³⁴ Instead, the ultimate value of *Phantom Africa* resides in serving as possibly the earliest instance and therefore model for a self-critical ethnography, which questions its own claim to objectivity and recognizes intersubjectivity as inherent in the practice of "writing cultures."³⁵ If Leiris's nonliterary or *straight* ethnography similarly betrays the politics of surrealism in terms of the circumstances of production, I want to suggest that the *contents* of his work on *zar* nevertheless realign with the movement's intellectual concerns as addressed in the previous chapters. For this reason, these texts must be read not only in relation to Leiris's own writerly activity, which Irene Albers has likened to a form of possession, but also vis-à-vis surrealism's critical concepts and theory of the universal-feminine subject-as-mask.³⁶

Drawing on the materials gathered in 1932 on *zar*, Leiris eventually published three academic articles in the same decade: "Le culte des zârs à Gondar" (1934), "Un rite médico-magique éthiopien: Le jet du *dangârâ*" (1935), and "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord" (1938). Given the broad definition of ethnography at stake in this book, it is worth noting that the earlier two texts appeared in *Aethiopica: revue philologique* but the last one in *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*, attesting to the significant overlap between the disciplines of psychiatry and ethnology in interwar France.³⁷ But as indicated by the monograph Leiris published belatedly some twenty years after completing field research, *Possession and Its Theatrical Aspects Among the Ethiopians of Gondar* (1958), the ethnographer's predominant preoccupation is ultimately the *aesthetic* aspects of *zar*, which permeate virtually all of its practices no matter if serving therapeutic, juridical, or ceremonial functions. Already in the 1930s, Leiris was developing this perspective, as evidenced by a passage that appears verbatim in "Le culte des zârs" and "La croyance," and then again in *Possession*. The passage concerns the chief healer and cult leader of Gondar, who was the mission's most important informant and reputed to be possessed by a large number of spirits known as

zars. Having watched Malkam Ayyahou over five months, Leiris concludes that she should be considered a virtuosic actress: “[H]er *zars* constitute for her a kind of wardrobe of personalities that she could put on according to the various needs and hazards of her daily existence, personalities that provided her with readymade comportments and attitudes on the threshold between theater and life.”³⁸ For the ethnographer, in short, the *zars* can be conceived as invisible masks, which the elderly *zarine* and other *balazars* incarnate performatively through the phenomenon of possession.

Undoubtedly informed by his own interest in disguise and masquerade (discussed in chapter 1), Leiris’s comparison of the Ethiopian *zars* to masks may have also been prompted by his exposure to other African mask societies on the same expedition—for instance, those found among the Dogons in West Africa. Featured prominently in *Minotaure*’s special issue on the materials and findings of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (no. 2), the Dogons’ highly sculptural masks representing animals and mythic beings were among the cultural objects most studied, coveted, and avidly acquired by the French (Figure 4.1). In his article, “Masques dogon,” Leiris reports on the centrality of masks to Dogon ceremonial culture and, more important for my purpose, their role in articulating sexual difference and maintaining gender division. Like most African mask societies, those of the Dogons were restricted to adult men; boys would be initiated into them at various ceremonies, preceded by the secret fabrication of costumes (by neophytes) and masks (by older initiates) away from the company of women. The night before dancing publicly in masks, men are forbidden to have sexual contact with their wives; in addition, women and children are allowed to watch the masquerade from



FIGURE 4.1. Dogon dancers wearing animal masks, Ireli, southern Sudan. Mask types from left: hunter, white monkey, and antelopes. In *Minotaure*, no. 2 (1933): 45.

afar but prohibited from coming into physical contact with the maskers or the masks as objects.³⁹ This gendered practice of masquerade is supported by a Dogon myth that Griaule later recounts in his monograph, *Masques dogons* (1938), according to which the two sexes had originally battled for possession of masks and costumes until the men prevailed; “[O]therwise men would have become women’s slaves.”⁴⁰

In light of this frequent association of masks with masculine power in many sub-Saharan cultures, Leiris’s reading of *zar* suggests that, for women dispossessed of physical masks, the practice of possession can provide access to an alternative, virtual masquerade that circumvents social interdictions as well as the material and labor cost of fabrication.⁴¹ Assuming that *zar* in Ethiopia may be conceived as a mask society without physical masks, then, what distinguishes it additionally from the exclusively male ones commonly found in Africa is its universality. According to some locals, more or less every person is possessed by one or two, even multiple *zars* without necessarily manifesting symptoms. Though predominated by women at the leadership and congregational level, and officially condemned by the all-male clergy of the native Christian church, *zar* maintains followers from both sexes, who may be Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or pagan. Reflecting the gender, confessional, ethnic, and social diversity of their devotees, the *zars* themselves are also male or female, Christian or Islamic, Amharic- or Arabic-speaking, highly or lowly ranked. In his report to the Royal Institute of Anthropology in London in 1934, Griaule effectively remarks on this “generality” of Ethiopian *zar* as “one of the most curious aspects of this institution.”⁴² (Leiris even recorded the existence of a “European *zar*,” who wears a felt hat and receives absinthe as offering.⁴³)

Ontologically speaking, the region’s mythology conceives of *zars* as the doubles—more precisely, shadows rather than mirror images—of human beings. Descended from Eve’s fifteen most beautiful children, who were hidden by their mother at birth and consequently condemned by the angry Creator to permanent invisibility, the *zars* are said to avenge this original injustice by possessing their siblings in flesh, the descendants of Eve’s other fifteen progenies, striking them with a wide variety of illnesses, accidents, conflicts, and unusual behaviors. Meanwhile, the *zars*’ negative relationship to the world of appearance—what they had been denied at birth—also means that they crave the limelight. Consequently, according to local informants, they prefer women or physically attractive individuals as targets; conversely, being possessed by a *zar* supposedly enhances the *balazar*’s beauty, so much that an adept is overheard regretting the end of trance at a *wadadja* or invocation ceremony: “When the *zar* leaves, the *weqabi* [guardian spirit] of the women leaves. . . . Ah! It’s the *zar* that makes their faces lovely.”⁴⁴ In “La Croyance,” Leiris observes how “it is difficult to know if *zar* is the cause of beauty or beauty the cause of *zar*”; in *Possession*, he recounts how the *zars* often demand that his or her “horse” get a new hairdo, put on a new dress, wear a gold or silver ring, bracelet, or anklet; as a result, the afflicted would often be entitled to accessories or a beauty service financed by her spouse or a family member.⁴⁵ While

these accounts make clear that possession by *zars* can manifest as vanity, the psychic complex at question here would not be narcissism, since beauty is attributed decisively to an external *other* rather than to the self. The *zars* should therefore be seen as costumes and masks, “mythic figurations” for specific activities or behaviors that the *balazars* might take on or succumb to: “[W]hen a person is supposed to incarnate a genie in the moment of giving in to a particular behavior (e.g., a *zar* known for being angry, if she is angry), the *zar* constitutes practically a theatrical mask that the person no more than puts on (thereby becoming the *zar* by the mere fact of putting it on).”⁴⁶ From the emic perspective, however, the reverse is equally true: the *zars* also inhabit their human “horses” as masks, mediums, or vessels; thanks to these surrogate bodies, the immaterial beings are able to momentarily overturn their shadowy existence and become perceivable in the visible world.

As Leiris’s ethnography would make clear, the reversibility of this relationship between the *zar* and the *balazar* is indicative of the general ambiguity of possession. From a physiological perspective, the experience of trance as reported by the *balazars* has many features in common with the radical, para-pathological passivity that Roger Caillois calls psychasthenia. Without exception, the women interviewed by Leiris describe themselves as being overcome by the descending *zars*, beginning typically with feelings of fatigue and relaxation that lead to yawning, stretching, and “a sensation of oppression, of being crushed; a pain in the shoulders or at the side; the impression of being ‘invaded by bees’ or pierced by a spear.”⁴⁷ Importantly, the signs or symptoms of trance are incremental rather than abrupt: “The testimonies are consistent in that the possessed does not lose her consciousness all at once but rather effaces herself progressively: quivering, tingling, shooting pains, trembling, hiccups, buzzing in the ears, generally sensation of heaviness and anguish [*angoisse*] are the signs announcing the trance.”⁴⁸ But from a cultural perspective, the fact that trance is typically induced in a ceremonial setting with music and manifests in dance-like gestures known as *gourri* suggests that it cannot be an altogether passive phenomenon (Figure 4.2). According to Malkam Ayyahou, *gourri* signifies the triumph of the descending *zar* over his or her “horse,” who is physically agitated like a hunted prey or an animal being sacrificed; alternatively, to one of the *zarine*’s followers, the same agitation signifies copulation with the *zar*.⁴⁹ This ambiguity suggests that *zar* possession has less affinity with psychasthenia than with erotic *ecstasy*, whose semivoluntary character is stressed by Salvador Dalí and the surrealists. A rigorous study of *zar*, in short, must attend to the physiological aspects of possession as well as “the structure of ecstasy,” to borrow Roger Bastide’s term in reference to the aesthetic facet of *candomblé*.⁵⁰

According to Leiris’s ethnography, far from losing distinction as in Caillois’s psychasthenia, the possessed in the *zar* cult acquires an increasingly distinct identity in the course of manifesting *gourri*. The latter, beyond the general effect of domination, is seen by the *zar* adepts in terms of a typology. While not all *zars* produce *gourri*, those who do present basically two types: either the rotation of head and the chest, or bending forward



FIGURE 4.2. The adept Abitchou executing *gourri* at a *djebata* (minor sacrifice), October 4, 1932. (Left: Malkam Ayyahou)

and backward as if performing the Muslim prayer, which would identify a *zar* as Islamic. In addition to these corporeal movements, the manifestation of *foukkara* or declamatory speech furthermore indicates that the *zar* is a military figure (for instance, if he boasts or praises his commander).⁵¹ Language or accent also gives away the *zar*'s ethnic origin, as in the case of the *wouriéza* or the *zars*' pages, who speak a pidgin Amharic mixed with Arabic words.⁵² For the healer, who presides over the *wadadja* for the benefit of her patient, the typology of *gourri* serves as a symptomatic chart for identifying the responsible *zar* as well as his or her attitude toward the afflicted. Further distinctions between styles of *gourri* might thus be made: for example, the benefic "*gourri* of forgiveness" that indicates relief for the patient versus "*gourri* of the stick," which suggests the persistence of the illness caused by a hostile *zar*.⁵³

As dramatized physical or psychic symptoms, *gourri* might be likened to the hysteric attitudes photographed by the medical staff of the Salpêtrière hospital, with the difference that, instead of being identified with general affects (e.g., "attitudes passionnelles"), gestures would be associated with particular *zars* for whom *gourri* serve practically as kinesthetic masks (see Figure 3.6). In the fin-de-siècle European hospital, though, the theatrical

dimension of hysteria—what the surrealists recognize as its expressive character—is omnipresent but suppressed by the scientific character of the medical establishment. By comparison, *zar* not only recognizes but flaunts its aesthetic elements. The most obvious example is the parade of the adepts in fancy dress on feast days, which reminded Leiris of “the entrance of the masquerade ball.”⁵⁴ Donning accessories that would be ordinarily kept at the *zarine*’s house, the women could be identified as specific *zars* by their attributes, such as headbands, loincloths, and belts, often in specific colors (for example, the diadem, black stole, and whip are uniquely worn by the chief *zar* Seyfou Tchenguer). More striking to the western European observers, this effect of the carnivalesque extends into sacrificial ceremonies where, in order to signify their acceptance of the offerings, the manifesting *zars* would put on makeshift garments made from parts of freshly slaughtered animals:

Before the slaughtered animal, reciting his war song, [the *zar*] does his victory *gourri* as if he had just dominated a patient or vanquished an evil enemy spirit. Dressed in the remains of the victim (its plumage, called *salaba* or “trophy” in the case of poultry; its *mora* or peritoneum as well as its skin or *dam lebsu*, “blood dress” in the case of a sheep or goat; the peritoneum and the stomach in the case of a cow), he triumphs like a hunter who just brought down a big game.⁵⁵

If the more permanent accessories serve to identify *zars* in terms of individuality, the sacrificial garments indicate first and foremost their rank. Whereas “trophies” (chicken plumage) are associated with minor *zars*, who usually receive poultry as offerings (Figure 4.3), a highly ranked *zar* by contrast would be signified by the scenario of “entering the *mora*” or the peritoneum, which would be possible only when an ovine and bovine animal is offered.

It is worth recalling that, prior to leaving for the mission, Leiris and his friend Bataille both contributed essays to *Documents* pertaining to the unexpected confluence of the high and the low as anthropological and aesthetic phenomena. In “Slaughterhouse,” an entry for “Critical Dictionary,” Bataille expresses fascination for the physical proximity of the slaughterhouse and the temple in certain cultures, which results in the “disturbing convergence of the mysteries of myth and the ominous grandeur of those places in which blood flows.”⁵⁶ In “Man and His Insides,” Leiris in turn urges his readers to see the body’s internal organs not as “crude matter, a contemptible magma of viscera,” but as a “mysterious theater in which all exchanges take place.”⁵⁷ Without necessarily negating these poetic musings of the French bourgeois literati, the cultural practices of *zar* make it possible to see the pragmatic reason for combining a place of worship with that for butchering (the freshest meats can be offered to the gods and then enjoyed by the congregation); they also show that what most effectively transforms the abject into the noble is not the rhetoric of individuals but rituals performed before a participating



FIGURE 4.3. The *zar* adepts Aggadetch and Abitchou wearing *salabas* (trophies made of the remains of chickens) at the *djebata* for their respective *zars*, October 4, 1932.

collective. By presenting, or more precisely *re-presenting* butcher scraps as ceremonial props, the Ethiopians turn what would otherwise be waste products into sacred *signs* of supernatural beings. On the momentous occasion of a major sacrifice to one of the *zars* possessing the *zarine's* attractive daughter, Leiris witnessed a memorable example of this transfiguration. Incarnating the *zar* Abba Moras Worquié, Emawayish accepts the sacrificial offering of a sheep by wearing its inflated intestine as a crown, and its peritoneum over her shoulders like a royal mantle. This sight provoked her sister-in-law to exclaim to the members of the mission, "If you could have seen her like this when she was young, how pretty she was!"⁵⁸ Recording this admiring remark in *Phantom Africa*, Leiris proceeds to add his own: "It makes me think less of a piece of anatomy than a tiara of mercury."⁵⁹

Zars as Hats: Malkam Ayyahou's Vita Activa

Leiris might have regarded *zar* first and foremost as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon with a physiological basis, but in his conclusion to *Possession*, he also considers its social efficacy. Matrilineal and strongly associated with women (the genies themselves descend from the mythic Eve; daughters

inherit their mothers' *zars* and sometimes the position of *zarine*), *zar* ultimately serves an empowering function for the politically and economically disenfranchised women in interwar Ethiopia. In this traditional Christian patriarchy, now subject to a semicolonial condition, *zar* as an institution or "cultural system" provides "an immediate means to freedom [for women] due to the opportunities for escape that they provide. As for trance, it is an eventual means of exerting pressure on those in their entourage, comparable to what a nervous fit or fainting spell can do in our society."⁶⁰ Admittedly, a Marxist perspective might not equate this social efficacy by means of religion with political power, yet some of Malkam Ayyahou's practices, I want to suggest, can nevertheless be considered political according to a more ancient understanding of the concept as public action.

While the fact of being constantly possessed makes it challenging to isolate the *zarine*'s own personality from that of her *zars*, a closer look at the facts in *Phantom Africa* and Leiris's scientific work can nevertheless contribute to a rough biographical sketch. An Amharic-speaking native of Gondar, Malkam Ayyahou (whose name means "I saw beautiful things" or "I have seen beautifully") is said to trace her ancestry back to the Solomonic emperors through both of her parents.⁶¹ Through the intermediary of her longtime friend Abba Jérôme, a defrocked Jesuit priest who served as Leiris's assistant and translator, she met Leiris for the first time on July 28, 1932. She was then the chief healer of the Baata neighborhood, living on the second floor of a round house at the foot of one of Gondar's hills.⁶² By then, she had been a widow for thirty-four years, her husband having served in the Italian army and died in the Battle of Adwa in the first Italo-Ethiopian War in 1898.⁶³ Although her age cannot be clearly established, her daughter Emawayish, whom Leiris determined was about thirty years old, was known to have a grandchild and a daughter on a second marriage. Assuming that childbearing age for women could be as early as fifteen or sixteen according to local customs, the *zarine* could be anywhere between her late forties or early sixties, though the photographs taken by the mission seem to favor a more advanced age. In the local context, however, the *zarine*'s exact age is less important than the general perception of her as calmer than her younger self. Constantly engaging in erratic, antisocial, and often dangerous behaviors according to those who had known her in the past, the young Malkam Ayyahou in this regard is comparable to many of surrealism's muses, such as Léona Delacourt (Breton's Nadja), Marguerite Pantaine (Jacques Lacan's Aimée), and Christine and Léa Papin. But unlike that of her French counterparts, the madness of the young Malkam Ayyahou was understood in medical as well as religious terms by her native society as *zar* possession. More importantly, instead of leading to social marginalization or criminality as was inevitably the case of the French women, Malkam Ayyahou's condition eventually abated and transformed into a socially productive gift, "either because age mellowed her . . . or because the rites that she underwent had a calming effect on her."⁶⁴

In *Possession*, Leiris devotes an entire chapter to analyzing *zars* as "symbol of a comportment and promoter of an action."⁶⁵ The most conspicuous

example is indeed that of the *zarine*, who habitually performs a variety of service roles while possessed by the particular *zars* corresponding to them. In another passage that Leiris wrote in the 1930s and recycled for the 1958 book, he notes:

With Malkam Ayyahou, who is possessed by a large number of different *zars*, it seems that a special *zar* is assigned to each of her everyday activities. It is as Abba Yosèf that she fulfills her Christian duties by giving moral lessons to her entourage; as Seyfou Tchenguier that she holds her healer's *guenda* (literally "trough," tray for the ritual service of coffee); as Abba Qwosqwos that she used to build houses for sale, keeps up her current house and does business in general; as Chankit, the black female servant of Rahiélo or one of the most important female *zars*, that she receives guests and serves them drinks and food. Likewise, from a ritual point of view, certain *zars* have a very defined role, such as Gragn Sellatié, in whose name Malkam Ayyahou presides over the skinning of sacrificial animals.⁶⁶

Enabling Malkam Ayyahou to alternate between her respective roles as a teacher, builder-architect, real estate manager, hostess, and ritual celebrant, the *zars* in this case are not only dramatic personas or masks; they should also be conceived of as professional hats. Like the ornamental hats on the heads of contemporary Parisian women, which according to Tristan Tzara reflect their appropriation of men's fashion, the *zar*-hats are also transgressive in terms of gender; specifically, they enable Malkam Ayyahou to routinely assume male personas, including the virile Abba Qwosqwos, without becoming susceptible to castration (the phallus is no more than a hat that can be put on and taken off at will). Constantly changing like the queen's hats celebrated by Edward James, the *zars* serve to maintain the *zarine*'s sovereignty in the eyes of her community without fixing it as one imperative form. But there is one major difference between the *zars* and the hats of the Parisians and the English monarch: the former are decisively *active* in that they serve to accomplish tasks, and are therefore as much symbolic hats as hands in actions. Philosophically speaking, they make it possible for a peasant woman like Malkam Ayyahou to engage fully in what the philosopher Hannah Arendt describes as the human beings' *vita activa*, consisting of labor (represented by Chankit), work/fabrication (represented by Abba Qwosqwos), and action and speech in the public arena (represented by Abba Yosèf and Seyfou Tchenguier).⁶⁷ In effect, Malkam Ayyahou's practice leads Leiris to see *zar* as achieving a circumstantial gender equality: "Since the masculine sex does not have more privilege in the domain of *zar* than in that of illuminism broadly speaking, women are able to affirm themselves as the equals of men through the intermediary of entities that allow them to publicly assume masculine roles—a highly figurative form of this affirmation."⁶⁸

Wearing her various *zar*-hats, Malkam Ayyahou exercises arguably the

greatest degree of agency in the domain of *interpretation*. If her own act of being possessed consists in interpreting roles, she also interprets the possessed states of others through a process akin to medical diagnosis. At the various *wadadjas* documented by Leiris, a proceeding known as *falafalla* (meaning “to peel” or “to extirpate something from the flesh”) provides the opportunity for the *zarine* to “interrogate” the meddling *zar*, compelling the latter to make known his or her identity. And just as the doctor at Salpêtrière’s public demonstration of hysteria—a kind of secular, European *falafalla*—offers suggestions to the typically hypnotized patient in order to induce the performance of symptoms, the Ethiopian healer invites the patient to manifest *zar*-specific *gourri* under her guidance if not instructions. How this “ecstatic training” (to borrow Carl Einstein’s metaphorical term for the painter André Masson’s automatism) proceeds is especially clear in the case of *gourri* for beginners, which might be likened to a kind of puppeteering or a dance lesson:

In the case of neophytes, one frequently observes a kind of teaching [at the *wadajda*], where the healer first tries to provoke the *gourri* mechanically, either pushing the patient lightly or shaking her head with a whip wrapped around her neck. Little by little, trances become spontaneous and less disorderly, except when a malevolent spirit intrudes. This, according to the indigenous

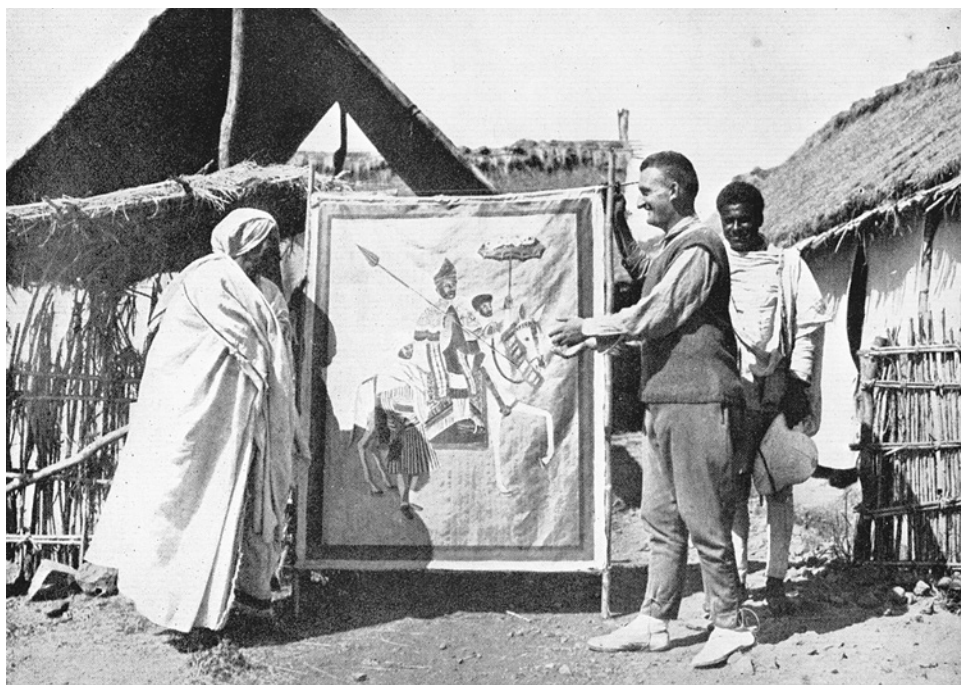


FIGURE 4.4. “Before the house of the mission at Gondar, Gaston-Louis Roux offers to Malkam Ayyahou a portrait of Ras Haylou painted by him, in which she recognizes the effigy of her great *zar* Abba Qwosqwos.” *Minotaure*, no. 2 (1933): 74.

perspective, corresponds either to the training [*dressage*] of the *zar*, or to the clarification of the situation, whereby there is no longer a multitude of spirits fighting to possess the patient or an ill-tempered *zar* refusing to come in clear.⁶⁹

If this scenario reveals that the healer is as much an interpretant as creator of *gourri*, it should be recalled that, according to Dalí's theory of critical paranoia, an interpretative act can have the effect of transforming reality into its image. With *zar*, this transformation is even more effective due to the collective character of its critical-paranoiac images; virtually all community members, including those on the periphery of *zar* culture, are familiar with its pantheon and conversant in its technical language.

According to several examples given by Leiris in *Phantom Africa*, *zar* is persuasive not only to the fervent female devotees; men, including non-believing ones, can also succumb in various ways to its suggestive interpretations. The clearest case is that of the Christian cleric Enqo Bahri, who had been bedridden due to a swollen left thigh or "some sort of elephantiasis"; determining that he had been afflicted by the leper *zar* Azaj Douho "who gives scabies and sores," Malkam Ayyahou manages to convert him to the cult after his recovery.⁷⁰ Another example concerns the nonbelieving Abba Jérôme, who is nevertheless cognizant of the social prestige of *zar* and intimidated by the *zarine*. Discovering that he had scabies, he was "scared stiff that Malkam Ayyahou will notice it and brag of having had him smitten by the *zar*," and was therefore "determined at any price not to let her see him in this state."⁷¹ Last, in perhaps the most unusual case of persuasion by the means of *zar*, Malkam Ayyahou succeeds in extorting a painting by Gaston-Louis Roux from the French mission by reinterpreting it as one of the *zars* in her regular repertory (Figure 4.4). From Paris, the mission had brought with them Roux's equestrian portrait of the governor-prince Ras Haylou, Griaule's host during his first Ethiopian mission, with the intention of offering it to the sitter. Unable to deliver the gift on this trip due to Ras Haylou's imprisonment on conspiracy charges, the mission kept the painting at the encampment, thereby providing opportunities for Malkam Ayyahou to remark on its resemblance to her military *zar* Abba Qwosqwos.⁷² Not far-fetched given the widespread understanding of *zars* as triumphant horsemen riding their "horses" or *balazars*, this projection—the *zarine*'s critical-paranoiac image, as it were—eventually convinced the mission to make "the picture . . . the property of Abba Qwosqwos."⁷³ At a momentous meeting shortly before their departure, "Roux announces this in a solemn voice; Malkam Ayyahou lets out a great roar, leans forward sharply, and then straightens up, and Abba Qwosqwos acknowledges the gift. Everyone receives his blessing."⁷⁴

Balazars as Agents: From Enjoyment to Responsibility

For the ethnographer attentive to the agency of the possessed, the case of Malkam Ayyahou is obvious due to her active and impactful life as the leader

of the Gondar cult. For the other female followers and participants of the cult, agency manifests in comparatively more subtle and covert ways: for example, in their enjoyment of *zar* as socialized entertainment. It has been previously established that *zars* are known to afflict humans with maladies and mishaps; but as yet another example of their ambiguity, they are also associated with pleasure according to several of Leiris's informants. "When the *zar* sings, recites the *foukkara* and makes his horse do the *gourri*, it means for him his joy, his *festa*, the pleasures of his guts, his Easter, his entertainment," says a young widow from Tigray; similarly, a former soldier and healer defines the *wadadja* as the happy songs of *zars* when socializing ("[W]hen the *zars* get together, and when they are happy after enjoying food and drinks, they recite very lovely *wadadja*, and those who are in the forest, in the stones and in the bushes do marvelous *gourri*").⁷⁵ Correlating to this characterization of *zars* as festive personalities, Leiris observes that the *balazars* on feast days "take pleasure in showing themselves off dressed in these picturesque costumes [of the *zars*]."⁷⁶ A merchant's daughter and regular at Malkam Ayyahou's court even invited him and Abba Jérôme to preview her outfit and see "how beautiful she would look when dressed as her principal *zar*, Abba Negousié, for the upcoming *wadadja*."⁷⁷ That is, though the *wadadja*'s ostensible purpose is to diagnose maladies, it is still a joyful social gathering; the prospect of being seen and admired in addition to the promise of relief for the patient makes it so that the latter would often "look forward to it since the morning (just as in other milieus people can look forward to a ball)."⁷⁸

In the more extreme case of Malkam Ayyahou, who is so often possessed that she "only spoke of herself in the third person even when not in trance," there is virtually no distinction between her joy and that of the *zars*.⁷⁹ For instance, it was not lost on Leiris and members of the mission that the delight of Abba Qwosqwos when receiving Roux's painting was that of Malkam Ayyahou; in a notebook studied by Jacques Mercier, Leiris records the *zarine*'s comment that the gift of the painting "is more pleasing [to her] than money because it is something that lasts."⁸⁰ In *Phantom Africa*, the ethnographer goes as far to show that, independently of the manners of specific *zar* characters, their sheer quantity and frequency of visit can serve to indicate the elderly woman's mood. On one occasion, thrilled to receive some perfume and fireworks from the mission, she "sings, whistles . . . dances and embodies an infinite number of characters, corresponding to the *zars* who inhabit her."⁸¹ Some two weeks later, Leiris finds the elderly woman in a contrary state: "She is really forlorn. . . . She sings very little, does not manifest many *zars*, improvises very few poems. I think there must be more family troubles."⁸²

Due to the general recognition of *zar* as an institution that indulges women's pleasures, it is regarded by some members of the Ethiopian patriarchy as socially harmful. In a footnote in *Possession*, Leiris presents some of the common grievances leveled against the possessed, including their neglect of household duties and burdening of their husbands with *zar*-related expenses.⁸³ Philosophically, the fact that the *balazars* enjoy their possessed

state would also confirm Caillois's cautionary equation of pleasure with *dispossession*; pleasure, says the interwar European thinker, "does not leave [individuals] in possession of themselves."⁸⁴ By contrast, instead of vilifying or trivializing pleasure, and specifically that of women, Leiris's sympathetic account implicitly aligns it with "ecstasy," which the surrealists conceive as an active and passive, automatic but intentional mode of the subject. What is more, I want to suggest, his analysis of the *balazars*' practices of atonement and apology uncovers the multiple ways in which the women *re-possess* themselves, as it were, by taking ownership or responsibility for the *zars*' actions.

According to the standard account from the emic perspective, if the *balazars* behave and act in unusual ways due to being possessed, then they are acting merely as the *zars*' agents, in the legal sense of acting on behalf of someone else. Leiris's close examination, however, reveals a more complex picture: for example, in the course of treatment, the healer and her consenting patient almost always end up reinterpreting the *zars*' meddling as reactions to or retaliations against human wrongdoings—for example, neglecting to venerate the genies of one's late mother, being delinquent on payments to a healer, betraying a healer by attending another healer's ceremonies, picking lemons before the appropriate season, or mistreating one's wife.⁸⁵ Consequently, the amelioration of the situations also depends on human actions such as sacrifices to *zar*, attendance at *zar* ceremonies, payment, or better treatment of others. According to the ethnologists Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, this approach to causality would qualify as more magical than technical.⁸⁶ But from a social perspective, these routine admissions to offenses and commitments to making amends make clear that, far from being mere agents of the *zars*, the women also tacitly understand themselves as *moral agents*. For example, Leiris examines the case of a woman named Adannakoush who, having broken two carafes while doing *gourri* at a sacrifice hosted by Malkam Ayyahou, is expected to apologize. On one hand, by having her male companion apologize on her behalf, Adannakoush consents to his status as her guardian and her own status as his dependent. On the other hand, for Leiris, the fact that the wrongdoings were attributed to her *zar* means that it is still she who assumes moral agency:

In theory, the *zar* is the only instigator of what his or her "horse" had done in her unconscious state, yet we see that a healer makes the adept at least partially responsible for an action. . . . The *zar* of Adannakoush had broken the two carafes, yet she is considered to be sufficiently associated with this *zar* to be reproached for failing to offer apologies. In this case, the apologies would be clearly her own and not the *zar*'s, since her boyfriend Kasahoun (associated with her and not to the *zar*) was allowed to make them for her. . . . If it is understood that the *zar* who possessed her had broken the carafes, it is still she who must ask for forgiveness for

this unintentional mistake whose consequences were quickly felt by someone in her circle.⁸⁷

Put differently, in the very moment of shifting the obligation to apologize to her male guardian, Adannakoush herself becomes a guardian in turn for her *zar*; the latter has now become her child or pet whose mischiefs she has to own like a parent or pet owner.

If apology might be considered an art well practiced by the *balazars*, its most creative practitioner is expectedly Malkam Ayyahou. In an almost comic episode that Leiris reports in *Phantom Africa* and analyzes at greater length in *Possession*, the *zarine* misses a scheduled recording session with Leiris but blames it on Abba Qwosqwos's obstruction (in reality she had been under community pressure to reduce contact with the mission); subsequently, it is in the guise of the same *zar* that she apologizes and makes up with the French ethnographers, promising in turn to hold a *wadadja* that they could record. In other words, both the blame and the obligation to apologize are now assigned to the *zar*, who is Malkam Ayyahou's agent rather than vice versa. The situation develops further: At the promised ceremony, intended to treat a patient whom the mission had recently placed in the charge of a nurse from the Italian consulate, "several *zars* belonging to Malkam Ayyahou showed submission [to the mission] by declaring themselves 'slaves of the French' through her mouth."⁸⁸ In this instance, it seems clear to Leiris that the *zarine* is the master puppeteer of her *zar* puppets, whom she manipulates as the means of

doubly saving face [*doublement sauver la face*]. On the one hand, she reconciled with us without having to make a confession and, on the other hand, she would be able to attribute any improvement on her patient's condition to the *zars* and not to the nurse from the Italian consulate.⁸⁹

What Leiris neglects to mention here (possibly out of embarrassment) is that the *zars* are charged with more than just apologizing on Malkam Ayyahou's behalf; she has also given them the task of mocking the French. Aware of the impossibility of equality in an ethnographic situation enabled by colonialism, the elderly Gondar healer takes this opportunity to make a fool of the masters who, having either refused or been barred from enjoyment due to their position of domination, become now the object of laughter for the slaves.

Appropriating the *Zars*: The Image as Negative Fetish

In 1929, when still a writer negotiating between his attachment to surrealism and his friendship with Bataille, Leiris published an essay on Alberto Giacometti for *Documents* that compares the sculptor's works to fetishes. Instead of a capitalist commodity, the fetish Leiris has in mind is affective,

representing “our love for ourselves, projected out from within and bearing a solid carapace that traps it between the limits of a precise thing and situates it . . . in the vast unknown room we call space.”⁹⁰ Some half a century later, drawing on Leiris’s essay, the intellectual historian William Pietz proceeds to offer a theory of the fetish as an irreducibly material thing that performs the functions of *territorialization* (serving as “a material space gathering an otherwise unconnected multiplicity into the unity of its enduring singularity”), *historicization* (serving to fix an unrepeatable event in time), *reification* (formalizing institutional or “social” value), and *personalization* (“ground[ing] the self-identity of particular, concrete individuals”).⁹¹ By theorizing the fetish, Pietz makes this word (from the pidgin Portuguese word *fetisso*) productive beyond its historical use by uninformed sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European traders, who referred to West African cultural objects as such to both designate but also cast doubt on their possible magical value.

For Rosalind C. Morris, Pietz’s theory of the fetish is one of failure; by projecting Leiris’s reading of Giacometti’s works as the materialization of “crisis” “backward into the history of intercultural misunderstanding,” Pietz makes it possible to see the fetish as “not only a crisis of the Western self but also the inaccessibility and, from within Western ethnocentrism, perhaps even the impossibility of African subjectivity.”⁹² Following Pietz and Morris, the some 3,500 objects acquired or pillaged by the Dakar-Djibouti Mission may be considered fetishes, not because they capture or “trap” (Leiris) the essence of African cultures but because they respond above all to the fetishism of Westerners, specifically their desire to reify spatially and temporally specific phenomena of culture as commodities for the art market or scientific objects in museums.⁹³ In orthodox Christian Ethiopia in particular, the mission’s collecting activities focused on manuscripts, amulets, and large-scale mural paintings, the latter being removed manually from two churches and replaced by hand-painted replicas.⁹⁴ But notably, among the treasures of Ethiopian cultural patrimony appropriated by the mission, few are related to *zar*, an intangible culture of mainly symbolic forms (songs, dances, theatrical roles, rituals) that makes use of low-grade, perishable materials (accessories and butcher scraps). By way of concluding this last chapter, I want to consider two rare examples of “*zar* booty” (to use the expression of Mercier) that capture the genies in visual form, both of which resulted directly from contact with the French ethnographers: the manuscript by Enqo Bahri, whom Leiris commissioned to produce an iconography of major figures in the pantheon, and Malkam Ayyahou’s rudimentary drawings of *zars*, made to reciprocate the mission’s gift of Roux’s painting.⁹⁵ Like Pietz’s fetish, both sets of work aim to fix a culture or social practice on the support of material objects that could be removed from their original spatiotemporal context. But in view of Leiris’s negative, surrealist conception of the fetish, I will argue that they represent ultimately not “the impossibility of African subjectivity” as Morris holds but the difficulty of using static images to capture nonsovereign subjects like *zars*, which manifest almost entirely through practice.

For most of its devotees, *zar* is a living practice, so its scientific documentation and transformation into written knowledge can be perceived as already appropriative. For example, seeing Abba Jérôme write down the names of *zars* in his notebook on Leiris's behalf, the adept Abitchou protested vehemently, "*Zar* is like my father and mother. Don't take it away with the paper! I will die if the *zar* leaves me."⁹⁶ While Enqo Bahri's *Les Rois des Zar* (The kings of *zar*) similarly represents an instance of ethnographic appropriation with a local collaborator, the fact that the latter in this case was himself a *zar* practitioner lends the manuscript a peculiar status. Though professionally active in the orthodox church and serving as *marguiéta* (music and liturgical master), Enqo Bahri belonged to a minority of men possessed by *zars* and was considered a peripheral member of the cult. (Accounts differ on the extent of his possession: Malkam Ayyahou is said to have transferred his *zars* to his wife to protect him from going into trance, yet the priest Ayyélé claims that the churchman experienced trance like any *balazar*.⁹⁷) Provided with pens, gouache, and parchment by Leiris, he produced eighteen portraits of *zars* using a hieratic style typical of the protective amulet-scrolls that *dabataras*



FIGURE 4.5. The *zar* Abba Lisana Worq with three attendants. Folio 1 verso, Éthiopien 578. Bibliothèque nationale de France.



FIGURE 4.6. The *zar* Lady Rahiélo with her servants. Folio 5 recto, Éthiopien 578. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

(unordained ministers) like him would regularly fabricate for the community.⁹⁸ Showing them sometimes as standing alone and sometimes as groups, these drawings serve above all to chart the powerful *zars* in terms of familial relationships and social hierarchy. For instance, the Christian monk Abba Yosèf, “the confessor of all *zars*” and his page Abba Lisana Worq are painted on the recto and verso of same sheet to indicate their association; the latter is furthermore shown with three assistants (Figure 4.5). Another Christian *zar*, the patriarch Seyfou Tchenguer, is shown on the opposing page of his Islamic brother Abba Lafa Tchenguer. If Seyfou Tchenguer’s sister, the grande dame Rahiélo, is seated in her throne and attended by two slaves (Figure 4.6), the most prominent of her slaves, Chankit, is also a kind of queen with no less than seven slaves of her own (Figure 4.7). Most intriguingly, Enqo Bahri shows the “love rival” *zar* Adal Gwobena, prone to meddling in marital affairs, with two pages and additionally five *zars* prostrating in the horizontal position, suggesting *zars* are in turn possessed by other *zars* in a structure resembling the infinity mirror (Figure 4.8).

While Enqo Bahri’s literacy and artistic competence enabled him to



FIGURE 4.7. The *zar* Chankit with her slaves, including Gintut (middle left) and Mätäfat Wärqé (lower left). Folio 7 verso, Éthiopien 578. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

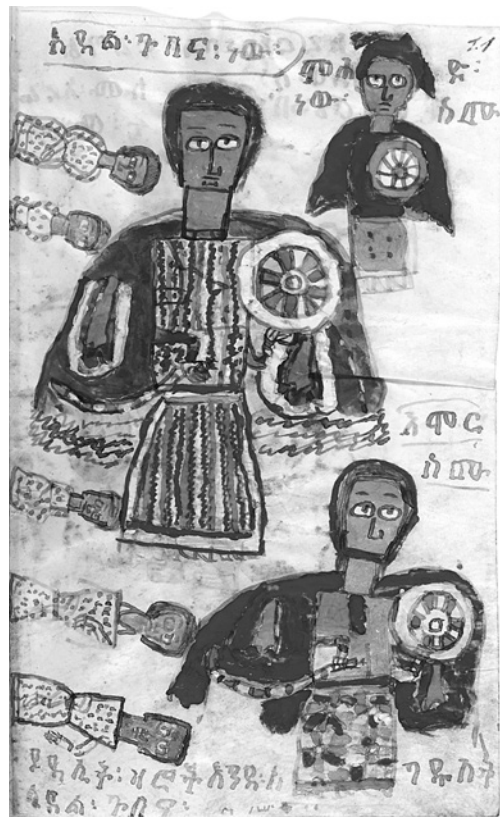
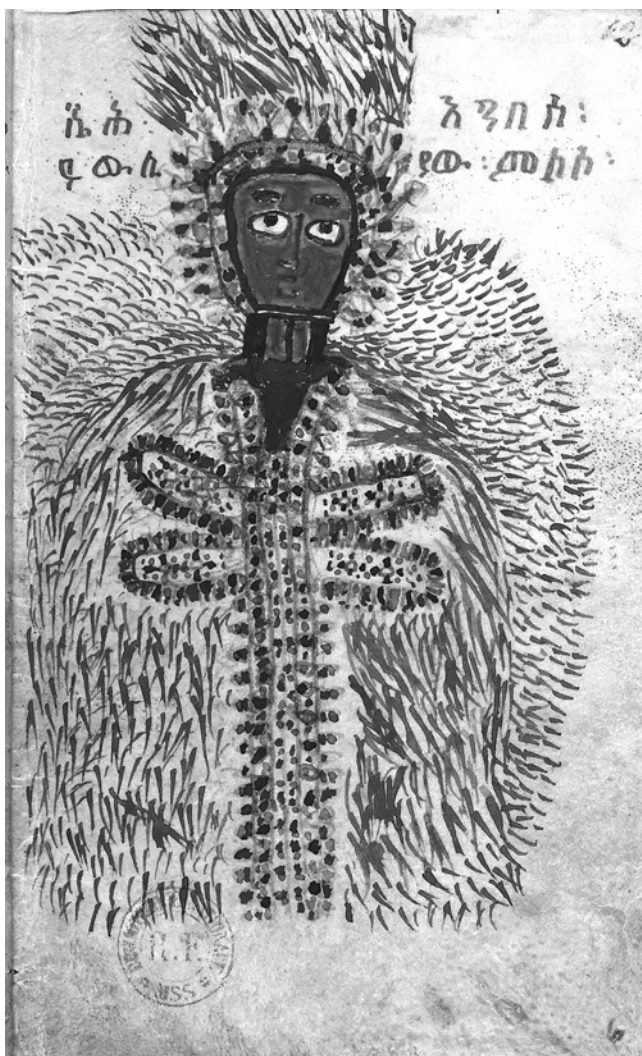


FIGURE 4.8. The “love rival” *zar* Adal Gwobena with his pages and five of his *zars*. Folio 11 recto, Éthiopien 578. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

visually reconstruct the *zar* pantheon in an objectively informative manner, observers have not failed to notice the personal nature of some of the figures. For example, the conspicuous absence of Azaj Douho, Mercier suggests, may be due to the artist's fear of the very leper *zar* who had struck him with elephantiasis.⁹⁹ Seeing that, on the last pages of the manuscript, Enqo Bahri had shown his own principal *zar* Cheik Ambaso face to face with Ararié, the *zar* of his wife, Leiris believes that the pair forms a symbolic matrimonial portrait, reflecting the artist's personality as a "sedate family man."¹⁰⁰ Assuming that Leiris is correct to see Cheik Ambaso as a stand-in for Enqo Bahri himself, this figure deserves further scrutiny (Figure 4.9). First, it comes as no surprise that Enqo Bahri, having been cured of his illness, should identify with the *zar* with a rank superior to Azaj Douho, whom the latter serves as a page. Second, being responsible for assigning each *zar* his or her activity,

FIGURE 4.9. The *zar* Cheik Ambaso. Folio 12 recto, Éthiopien 578. Bibliothèque nationale de France.



pacifying those who are violent, and rousing those who are lazy, the managerial Cheik Ambaso is also said to be the reason why Enqo Bahri might convert to Islam.¹⁰¹ For the Christian cleric, this conversion would presumably entail a major transformation of his professional and personal identity, which may in part explain the unusual technique used for depicting this figure. With Cheik Ambaso, the dark outlines applied consistently to the other *zars* in the manuscript are limited to the face and neck; the rest of the picture is executed in a quasi-pointillist technique. Using alternating touches of cobalt blue and red on his diadem, his body, and what looks like two pairs of arms, in addition to light brown strokes all around to form a flaming cloak, Enqo Bahri shows this *zar* as dissolving into a sea of fire. Admittedly, one cannot rule out the possibility that he resorted to these broken strokes to save time (the manuscript was delivered the day of the mission's departure from Gondar). Yet the personal significance of this *zar* for the artist makes it more likely that he had meant to represent his own experience of possession, which in this case can potentially undo or *dispossess* him of his self.

As suggested by the instructive example of *Les Rois des Zar*, while the *zars* may be depicted figuratively in the same manner as saints or holy figures, the phenomenon of possession would continue to elude even the most competent of visual artists. This difficulty can be largely attributed to the difference between image making and possession as two different types of representation; the former requires critical distance whereas the latter demands embodiment. That is, in the moment of making an image, the artist is obliged to play the active role while making the depicted *zar* passive, which contradicts the standard emic conception of the *zar* as "promoter of action" and of the possessed human as passive support. Presumably due to this tension, Enqo Bahri felt least capable of rendering his own *zars* and, for this reason, did not depict Azaj Douho at all and made Cheik Ambaso virtually formless. It would not have occurred to him to circumvent this difficulty by assimilating image making into the very paradigm of possession, whereby the active artist, too, would be a *zar*.

When drawing the *zars* for the mission, Malkam Ayyahou effectively adopted this tactic, suggesting that both dispositions—critical distance and embodiment—were available to the *zarine* as possible ways of relating to these beings. Apart from reciprocating the gift of Roux's painting, Mercier proposes that Malkam Ayyahou might have offered these drawings ("among the rare works that the mission acquired neither by purchase nor by rapine but as the result of an encounter") after seeing Enqo Bahri receive the commission from Leiris.¹⁰² If these two sets of work are related, it goes without saying that the illiterate healer, unaccustomed to using pen and paper, could not be expected to produce images with a comparable degree of precision. What she nevertheless managed was the distinction between the two sexes: the male *zars* are hairless (Abba Yosèf, Abba Lisa Worq, Azaj Douho), and the female ones have strands of hair radiating out of their heads (Abarras, Gintut, Mätäfät Wärqué, Tamarta)¹⁰³ (Figures 4.10, 4.11). More importantly, though

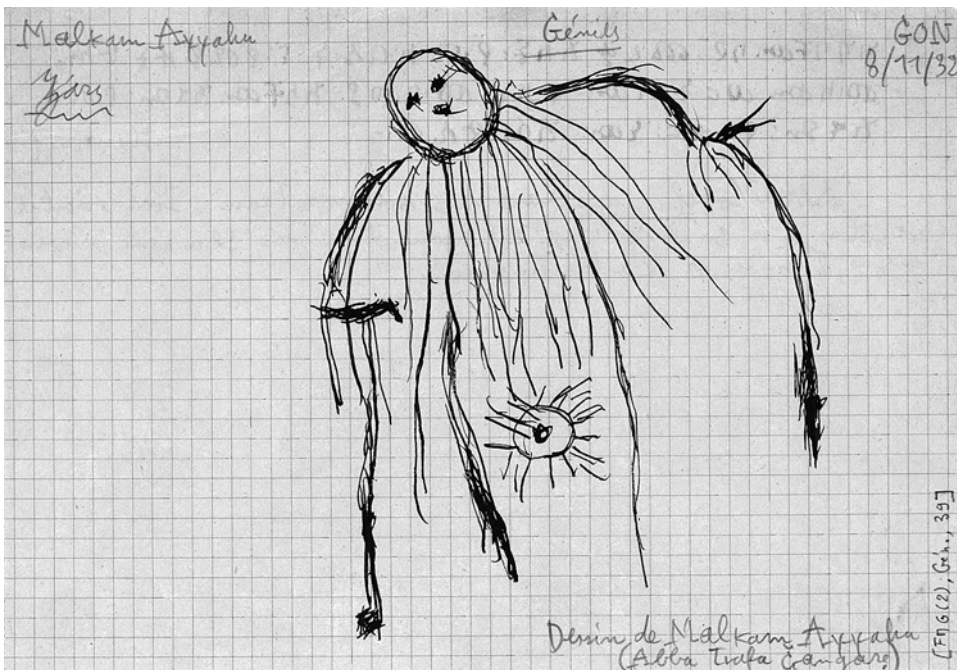


FIGURE 4.IO. The male *zar* Abba Yosèf drawn by the *zar* Abba Lafa Tchenguérié through the intermediary Malkam Ayyahou. Fonds Marcel-Griaule, Bibliothèque Éric-de-Dampierre, LESC/CNRS, Université Paris, Nanterre.

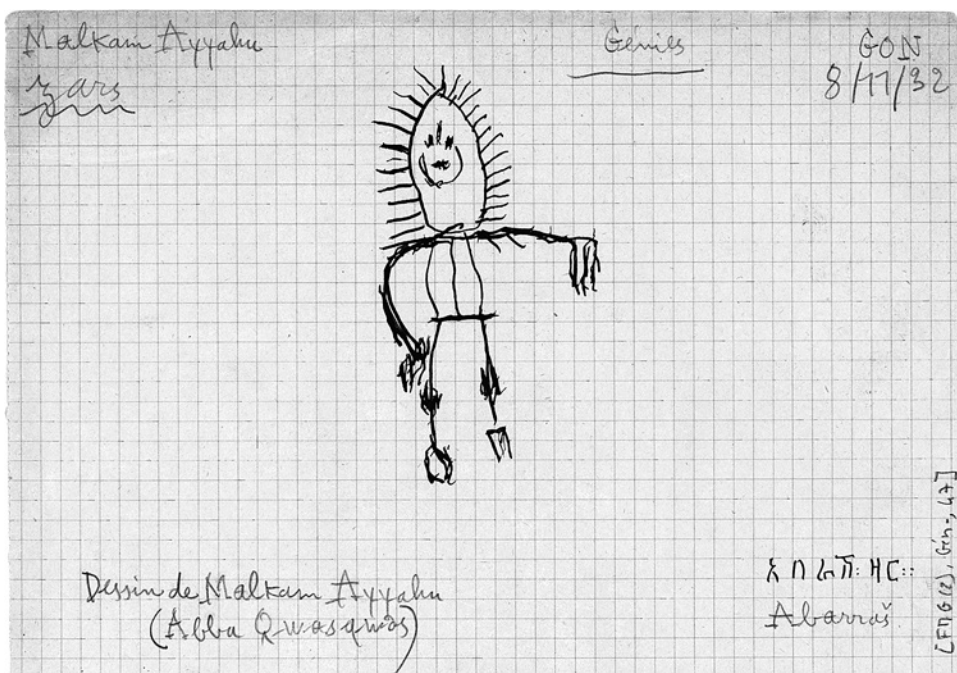


FIGURE 4.II. The female *zar* Abarras drawn by the *zar* Abba Qwosqwos through the intermediary Malkam Ayyahou. Fonds Marcel-Griaule, Bibliothèque Éric-de-Dampierre, LESC/CNRS, Université Paris, Nanterre.

the images themselves provide comparatively little information about the *zars* as figures, their authorship is highly revelatory of Malkam Ayyahou's idiosyncratic approach to possession. Strikingly, each of the seven *zars* was drawn when Malkam Ayyahou was possessed by one of three entirely different ones. Five drawings were thus attributed to Abba Lafa Tchenguérié, the Islamic brother of the prominent Christian *zar* Seyfou Tchenguér, and the other two to Abba Qwosqwos and Chankit. In short, no *zar* drew himself or herself; the artist *zars* were precisely not the ones serving as models.

Incarnating one *zar* while drawing another, the *zarine* shows how she understands image making as necessitating two figures, each occupying a different role. Notably, the two *zars* on whom she calls most often for everyday tasks, Abba Qwosqwos and Chankit, participate in the role of the active artist rather than that of the passive model. What she applies here is therefore not technical skills but an analogical imagination that makes image making coeval with possession, which likewise requires an active role (*zar*) and a passive one (*balazar*). What is more, for a virtuoso of possession like Malkam Ayyahou, the *zars* themselves can ultimately play both roles; they can alternate between being "subjects of attribution" and "subjects of imputation," to use the helpful terms of the philosopher Alain de Libera.¹⁰⁴ When depicted as a static image, the *zar* fulfills the former, more ancient conception of the subject as a passive receptacle for specific qualities or attributes. But when making an image or possessing a *balazar*, the *zar* becomes a modern subject to whom actions and responsibilities (including authorship) may be imputed. It is by incarnating her *zars* in both of these capacities that Malkam Ayyahou maintained possession as a socially productive and imaginative practice of universal subjectivity.

Epilogue

The Good Mask as Resistance

Though not known as a commentator of the historical avant-garde, the political philosopher Hannah Arendt provides an astute though disturbing description of its ethos in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). In a section of the book on the “temporary alliance between the mob and the elite,” she considers the sentiments motivating the so-called front-generation—nonconformist European writers and intellectuals defined by the experience of World War I—as uncannily proximate to those of the mob and the masses in the interwar period. Because of their “justified disgust” with a decaying European civilization dominated by bourgeois values, this intelligentsia identified with the tradition of Nietzsche, Rimbaud, and Bakunin and wished for “the ruin of this whole world of fake security, fake culture, and fake life”; they therefore found themselves strange bedfellows of mob leaders, individuals from the fringes of traditional class society who sought to destroy respectability as revenge for their own marginalization.¹ Like the idealistic instigators of the French Revolution, the avant-garde “strove to assert the grandeur of man against the pettiness of the great”; this genuine contempt for genius certainly distinguishes them from the mob’s veneration of the heroic individual (e.g., the supreme leader of totalitarian regimes) but hardly from the condition of anonymity afflicting mass society.² Thus only in a limited sense does Arendt sympathize with the front generation’s “yearning for ‘losing their selves’” and their “antihumanist, antiliberal, anti-individualist, and anticultural instincts.”³ Since Adolf Hitler appealed to similar sentiments to garner support for Nazism, she ultimately indicts this elite for their “lack of a sense of reality” and “its perverted selflessness, both of which resemble only too closely the fictitious world and the absence of self-interest among the masses.”⁴

Assuming the validity of Arendt’s analysis, surrealism stands to be considered an anomalous instance of the interwar intelligentsia that aspired less to anonymity and “selflessness” than to the condition of the mask, whose political significance the same Arendt underlines in her essay “On Revolution” (1963). Reflecting on the violent aftermath of the French Revolution, the philosopher proposes that the revolutionaries, though initially inspired by the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment, ended up betraying them due to their failure to distinguish between the bad mask of hypocrisy and the *good* mask of the legal persona:

By the unending hunt for hypocrites and through the passion for unmasking society, [the men of the French Revolution] had, albeit

unknowingly, torn away the mask of the persona as well, so that the Reign of Terror eventually spelled the exact opposite of true liberation and true equality; it equalized because it left all inhabitants equally without the protecting mask of a legal personality.⁵

By way of conclusion, I want to offer two examples of how participants of the surrealist movement activated the good mask as the means of resistance during World War II, a period in which populations in occupied or colonized territories were left in the same precarious and alienated state as the newly emancipated *Homo natura* of the 1790s.

In 1940, the poet and artist Claude Cahun and her partner Suzanne Malherbe, who had lived on the Channel Island of Jersey since 1937, began distributing anti-Nazi counterpropaganda in the form of inscriptions and tracts. Between 1940 and the liberation, the two women produced some 5,000–6,000 documents that undermined the German occupation and war efforts. In addition to inscriptions on cigarette packaging, pieces of wood, and walls of buildings, they left pamphlets inside magazines at newsstands, on barbed wires, in parked cars, and at churches, army quarters, and cemeteries. To conceal their identities, they signed these documents as “Nameless Soldier” (*Soldat ohne Namen*), a fictive persona that simultaneously reflects the condition of anonymity imposed by totalitarian systems as well as Cahun’s own lifelong interest in the disidentification of the self. Recalling that Cahun and Malherbe also conceived of their farmhouse La Rocquaise as “the nameless farm,” the former’s eminent biographer Françoise Leperlier proposes that “the epic of Nameless Soldier satisfied this taste and quest for anonymity . . . which had already led to the abandonment of Lucy Schwob [Cahun’s name at birth] and then Claude Courlis [her first nom de plume]. . . . The insistence on privacy awakens this old, irreducible will to *undefining the self* [*s’indéfinir*].”⁶

But while “Nameless Soldier” thematizes anonymity, it remains an identity in that it resounds the voice of resistance and acts in service of the good, thereby meeting the baseline criteria for the good mask.⁷ Moreover, insofar as Cahun qualified her and her partner’s wartime activities as “militant surrealist actions,” as she wrote in a 1946 letter to André Breton, it is worth considering the persona of “Nameless Soldier”—what in Cahun’s native French would have been *Le Soldat sans nom*—in surrealist terms: namely, as “Soldier with a Hundred Names” (*Le Soldat 100 noms*), following the punning title of Max Ernst’s collage-novel, *La Femme 100 têtes*. In effect, though Cahun personally identified with this name, she and Malherbe began to sign their clandestine works as “Nameless Soldier and His Comrades” starting in 1943, thereby extending it to a collectivity consisting of international dissenters. That “Nameless Soldier” is not *one* is also attested by its animation by two female creators in the habit of working under *noms d’artiste*. The young Schwob had published as Claude Courlis and Daniel Douglas before settling on Cahun, and Malherbe had produced extensive works as a Symbolist artist-illustrator under the pseudonym Marcel Moore. These multiple names behind the “Nameless Soldier” defied the expectations of the Gestapo, who,

arresting Cahun and Malherbe after four years of activities, could not reconcile the actresses with their mask. "Even with the proofs in their hands, they couldn't believe their eyes," writes Cahun gleefully in her postwar reminiscence. "[T]hey remained persuaded that we couldn't have been anything more than accomplices . . . of X. In order to get them to stop interrogating us for our hypothetical affiliations with . . . X, or with the Intelligence Service (!!!), it was necessary to demonstrate to them that we were fully aware of and capable of our . . . 'crimes.'"⁸

By comparison to the actions of Cahun and Malherbe, Susanne Césaire's means of engagement was not perilous to the same degree (the couple was sentenced to death and escaped execution only thanks to the liberation). Yet the pro-surrealist review to which she and other Martinican intellectuals contributed, *Tropiques*, was no less intransigent in spirit against the forces of fascism, imperialism, colonialism, and "the shackles of absurd logic and so-called Western reason."⁹ Banned at one time by the collaborationist Vichy regime in France for its "revolutionary, racial, and sectarian" character (it sympathized with communism and Black internationalism), *Tropiques* was a literary, arts, and scientific review comparable to *Minotaure* but without the latter's visual sumptuousness. Its contributors—among whom were Suzanne and Aimé Césaire and the writer René Ménénil—were political allies of the surrealists with whom they also shared the same literary predecessors, namely, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Lautréamont. Having in common with their Parisian counterparts a philosophical-anthropological outlook on culture, the *Tropiques* group of writers was specifically concerned with applying it to the Martinican situation, which would result in "a study of the Caribbean environment (history, flora, fauna)" and "an ethnographic approach to Creole tales and an attempted inventory of the folklore elements, a cross-checking of forms of civilization common to Africa and the Caribbean."¹⁰ But if *Tropiques* served as the space for imagining a Caribbean surrealism in solidarity with Black empowerment ("[M]illions of Black hands . . . will spread terror everywhere. . . . Our surrealism will then supply them the leaven from their very depths"), this project was incomplete for Suzanne Césaire without a critique of colonial subjectivity.¹¹ Specifically, in essays such as "The Malaise of a Civilization" and "The Great Camouflage," she evokes the figure of the mask not only as a symptom of the colonial situation but also as the possible means of transforming it.

Considering the natural beauty of her native Antilles ("beautiful green waves of water and of silence . . . the purity of sea salt"), Césaire sees it as a "great camouflage" that obscures the region's material realities: "[I]f my Antilles are so beautiful, it is because the great game of hide-and-seek has succeeded . . . because the weather is certainly too good that day for seeing clearly."¹² Removing this façade, she uncovers these colonized "French islands" as the place where "they debase the thousands of Blacks" through wage labor and a castoff capitalism of outdated factories, "second-rate manufacturers and grocers," and junkyards from which children salvage materials.¹³ Even more lamentable for Césaire is the social comportment of bourgeois

Caribbeans, for whom assimilation has become the “fundamental goal” since the moment of emancipation.¹⁴ Prefiguring Franz Fanon’s notion of “Black skin, White masks,” Césaire notes how this class of individuals, as a reaction against the pre-emancipation interdiction of assimilation (laws prohibiting Blacks from practicing middle-class professions or even wearing perceivably “White” clothes), overcompensate by adopting the manners of the colonizers and their values of “competitiveness . . . economic fortune, diplomas, unscrupulous social climbing . . . the race to monkey tricks.”¹⁵ Due to the persistent racism of White metropolitan Europeans, the assimilative project does not succeed except at exacerbating the destruction of the identity of the Antilleans. This process had begun centuries ago with the geographical displacement of their African ancestors by the slave trade, and was worsened by their subsequent subjection to foreign cultures: “Here is an Antillean, great-grandson of a White colonizer and a slave Negress. . . . [H]e cannot accept his negritude; he cannot whiten himself. Spinelessness takes hold of this divided heart. . . . [T]hus blossoms in the Antilles this flower of human baseness [*bassesse humaine*], the colored bourgeoisie.”¹⁶

But just as Arendt sees the modern predicament of identity loss as redeemable through the ancients’ legal persona or mask, Césaire proposes to counteract the bad masks of camouflage and assimilation with a good mask, specifically the poetic figure of the “plant-man” that had since then intrigued her readers:

What is the Martinican?—A plant-human [*l’homme plante*]. Like a plant, he abandons himself to the rhythm of universal life. There is not the slightest effort to dominate nature. Mediocre farmer. Perhaps. I am not saying that he makes the plant grow: I am saying that he grows, he lives in a plant-like manner. His indolence? That of the vegetal. Do not say “he is lazy,” say “he vegetates,” and you will speak the truth for two reasons. His favorite phrase: “Let it go.” By that, understand that he lets himself be carried along by life, docile, light, un-insistent, non-rebellious—in a friendly way, lovingly. Obstinate moreover as only a plant can be. Independent (independence, autonomy of the plant).¹⁷

In the colonial context of Martinique, Césaire’s “posthuman” figure mirrors the “divided heart” of the Creole individual, with the difference that the two ontologically incommensurable parts represent nonassimilation instead of failed assimilation.¹⁸ This chimera thus recalls as much the “leaf-man” (*homme-feuille*) in “A Face in the Grass” in the first issue of *Minotaure* as the Nias Island grass mask that inspired Paul Éluard’s poem. While the plant-man’s vegetal passivity (“docile,” “un-insistent,” “non-rebellious”) intentionally approximates the moral “spinelessness” (*la veulerie*) that Césaire sees in the assimilated Creole, the “autonomy of the plant”—a clear reference to surrealist automatism—overcomes this very condition through a covert form

of agency. In contradistinction to Caillois's castrative "psychasthenia," the automatism of the plant-man evoked by Césaire is precisely *not* assimilative; the Martinican imagined by Césaire does not lose distinction like Caillois's mimetic insect or schizophrenic subject, but instead forges a new and chimerical identity by means of a mask.¹⁹ The automatic plant-man thus theorizes a *nonanthropocentric agency that superficially resembles passivity* as the dialectical antithesis of the colonizers' bourgeois industriousness, *a human passivity that superficially resembles agency*.

For Césaire, the plant-man as a figure thus serves to empower the colonized in their refusal of the colonizers' blackmail, namely, the impossible choice between dehumanization and anthropocentrism. What is more, her allusion to this mask that the surrealists had initially borrowed from Oceanic art made it possible to see colonial intellectuals as strategically borrowing the surrealist identity itself as a mask. In his retrospective consideration of the *Tropiques* project, Ménénil warns against a facile, mechanistic reading of its relationship to surrealism: "To picture the borrowing [*emprunt*] of what are called 'surrealist processes' or the 'surrealist image' as coins slipped from one hand (French) to another (Caribbean) is really and truly an admission of analytical incomprehension and impotence."²⁰ Instead, he explains that the *Tropiques* group actively borrowed not the contents but the "functional operation" of surrealism as the means to obtain access to the universal. Because "cultural borrowing . . . is a fact of universal civilization," says Ménénil, it "could not in the present case be reduced [to] . . . a negative, colonial phenomenon of political assimilationism."²¹ Put differently, for the Caribbean intellectuals, the surrealist identity is not assimilative because it is *a mask and nothing more*, as the philosopher Mladen Dolar once said of the voice.²² Unlike the White mask that colonizes the self, the surrealist mask, like all authentic masks, can be donned and removed depending on the circumstance.

For Arendt, this impermanence of the mask constitutes the ultimate advantage of "adopting the notion of persona" for a relational conception of identities: "[T]he masks or roles which the world assigns us, and which we must accept and even acquire if we wish to take part in the world's play at all, are exchangeable; they are not inalienable in the sense in which we speak of 'inalienable rights,' they are not a permanent fixture annexed to our inner self."²³ For subjects in minoritarian or subaltern positions, it may be that the good mask (be it surrealist, communist, Black, queer) enables the sounding of the universal voice in service of what the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak calls "epistemological performance," which like all performances is necessarily provisional.²⁴

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Acknowledgments

The intellectual roots of this book go back as far as 2006–2008, the two productive years of research and thinking that I spent in Paris thanks to fellowships from the Fulbright and Georges Lurcy foundations. Apart from these, I have received support mainly from individuals, beginning with several important teachers who offered their mentorship in official and unofficial capacities. Michael Stone-Richards, my first *maître*, introduced me to surrealism as a matrix for aesthetics, critical practice, and philosophical anthropology; this book reflects but a small fraction of what he taught me. Rainer Rumold at Northwestern University helped me appreciate the humanistic importance of the antihumanist historical avant-garde, and Reinhold Heller and Martha Ward at the University of Chicago showed me the power of historical research. I am indebted to a brief but impactful encounter with Julia Kristeva at the Université de Paris VII, who urged me not to abandon the question of the subject. Georges Didi-Huberman's work and lectures at the EHESS informed my thinking about the philosophical and ethical significance of images. Carlo Severi at the same institution accepted me as a student-at-large, offering me multiple ways of relating surrealism's lay ethnography to the anthropology of art.

Many facets of this project benefitted from peer feedback. I thank especially the organizers of the following symposiums for including me in generative discussions about surrealism, primitivism, aesthetic philosophy, and interwar European intellectual history: Hana Gruendler ("Subject and Subjectivization in Art [History] and Philosophy" at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence, 2016), Tom Holert ("Deep Time and Crisis, c. 1930" at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, 2018), and Samuel Spinner and Ben Etherington ("Eccentric Primitivisms" at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, 2022). On these and other occasions, exchanges with Irene Albers, Marina Bedran, James Clifford, Ben Gillespie, Charles W. Haxthausen, Sven Lüttiken, Alys Moody, Benjamin Murphy, Albert Narath, Sylvester Ogbechie, Vaclav Paris, Andrei Pop, Rachel Silveri, Maria Stavriniaki, Jacob Stewart-Halevy, Abigail Susik, and Sarah Warren kept my thinking in good company. At the University of British Columbia in 2022, Julia Orell and her colleagues and students in the Department of Art History, Visual Art & Theory gave me the opportunity to present this book's overarching argument in a public lecture.

This book has been rewritten in its entirety no less than three times, so I am especially indebted to the readers of earlier versions, charged with the laborious task of engaging with my ideas while they were still in formation. Todd Cronan's comments in 2018 helped me formulate a new introduction after a radical reconception of the scope of the project. The careful reading

of the manuscript by Katharine Conley, Julia Kelly, and Michael Richardson improved its quality before submission to the publisher. Natalya Lusty and another reader commissioned by the University of Minnesota Press provided engaged and encouraging reviews of the nearly completed work; few documents in my career had been as inspiring to write as my author's response to their insightful and helpful suggestions.

At the University of Oregon, I am grateful for the collegial and supportive environment maintained by my colleagues in the Department of the History of Art & Architecture. A note of special thanks to Sherwin Simmons for many years of mentorship, and to Keith Eggener for shouldering committee work that coincided with a manuscript deadline. Other humanist colleagues such as Ken Calhoon, Roy Chan, and Sangita Gopal kept the intellectual in me alive, without which it would have been impossible to maintain momentum on this project. As fellow scholar-writers, Mayra Bottaro and Abigail Fine provided unfailing solidarity and understood the necessity of solitude for serious writing. My research assistant Suntisuk Prabunya's editorial suggestions improved the style of my prose; his enthusiastic engagement with the book's contents convinced me of surrealism's continuing relevance for students of the present generation. At the Center on Diversity and Community (CoDaC), I thank Charlotte Gallagher and Michael Murashige for their professional and writerly advice. Both CoDaC and the Center for Study of Women in Society (CSWS) provided funding for external mentorships, which helped move this project forward. As the manuscript approached the finish line, the Oregon Humanities Center offered a publication subvention that covered most of the licensing fees of images, and a generous gift from the Office of the Provost and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI) made it possible for the University of Minnesota Press to bring this book out in its optimal format.

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At the turn of the millennium, when I began to apply to graduate programs as an undergraduate senior, an esteemed professor at Northwestern University questioned in the most benevolent way possible my choice of becoming a Europeanist with a French specialization, believing that it would have been more professionally savvy to apply my aptitude in Chinese Mandarin to the growing field of East Asian studies. Reflecting on my somewhat unusual career as an Asian-American Europeanist in the Western academy, I want to credit my early exposure to Europe to my paternal aunt and uncle, Lifeng Cheng-Lee and Chia-Yau Cheng, who have even fewer peers than I do as Taiwanese academics and scientists in Spain and Portugal. Their appreciation for the folk cultures of Iberia and our native Taiwan has given me a unique perspective on the universality of the "primitive."

It had not always been clear that my work on this book would coalesce and materialize in this form. During this long period of uncertainty, the rare gift of disinterested friendship kept my personality intact independently of my scholarly mask. Alan Smith and his devotion to the vocation of painting provide an important example of patient and thoughtful work; thanks to his and Lennox Morrison's good office, I wrote uninterrupted for two weeks in the summer of 2013 at the Casa Zia Lina in Elba, Italy. Conversations with Frederic Delmotte ensured that I did not lose sight of the beauty of the sensible world. Through the language of music, Colin Pip Dixon and Arnaud Ghillebaert helped me think more like a creator than a producer. Gale L. Kenny and Hue-Ping Lin could always be counted on for practical advice and needed entertainment; the latter also hosted me in her secluded cabin on the Mackenzie River in Vida, Oregon, in the summer of 2020, where I began drafting the third and last version of this book. In fall of the same year, the cabin was destroyed in the wildfires, and since then rebuilt. Its reconstruction and the multiple ones of this book taught me that it is never too late to begin, *again*.

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Notes

Introduction

1. See <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/ressources/oeuvre/cejzddz> for documentation of the inscription, dated 1954.

2. Jacques Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception of Paranoiac Forms of Experience. Translated by Jon Anderson," *Critical Texts* 5, no. 3 (1988): 5.

3. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 134.

4. Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 147.

5. See James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (University of California Press, 1986).

6. See notably Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota Press, 1985); "Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing," ed. Annette Michelson, Rosalind E. Krauss, and Allen S. Weiss, special issue, *October* 36 (1986). For special issues on Bataille's *Documents* activities, see also *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no. 1 (1991) and *Papers of Surrealism* no. 7 (2007). For the reprint of *Documents* and the catalogue of Hayward Gallery exhibition, see Denis Hollier, ed., *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés. Réimpression*, 2 vols. (Jean-Michel Place, 1991); Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (Hayward Gallery and MIT Press, 2006).

7. William Rubin's and Kirk Varnedoe's controversial 1984 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art notoriously presented the historical phenomenon of "modernist primitivism" almost exclusively from the point of view of artistic influences or superficially perceived "affinities" between tribal and modern works. See William Rubin, ed. *"Primitivism" in Twentieth-Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, 2 vols. (Museum of Modern Art, 1984). Some of the key texts criticizing MoMA's "Primitivism" exhibition have been reprinted in Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch, eds., *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History* (University of California Press, 2003). In part prompted by Clifford's and others' criticisms of the show, scholars have since then attended to more invisible links between avant-garde and ethnographic objects, for instance their commonly anti-aesthetic status at this historical juncture. For examples of research in this vein, see Jack J. Spector, "The Avant-Garde Object: Form and Fetish between World War I and World War II," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 12 (1986): 125–43; Janine Mileaf, "Body to Politics: Surrealist Exhibition of the Tribal and the Modern at the Anti-Imperialist Exhibition and the Galerie Charles Ratton," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (2001): 239–55; Adam Jolles, "The Tactile Turn: Envisioning a Post-colonial Aesthetic in France," in "Surrealism and Its Others," ed. Katharine Conley

and Pierre Taminiaux, special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 109 (2006): 17–38; Julia Kelly, *Art, Ethnography and the Life of Objects: Paris, c. 1925–35* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

8. Jean Jamin, “L’ethnographie, mode d’emploi,” in *Le Mal et la Douleur*, ed. Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr (Musée d’Ethnographie, 1986), 53. The surrealists vociferously opposed French colonialism, and while some left-leaning ethnologists might do the same, Jamin points out, the profession nevertheless “was bound to comply with colonialism, which it did shamelessly” (my translation, 51).

9. Michael Richardson, “An Encounter of Wise Men and Cyclops Women: Considerations of Debates on Surrealism and Anthropology,” *Critique of Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1993): 63.

10. Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real: The Avant Garde at the End of the Century* (MIT Press, 1996), 175.

11. Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” 178–79.

12. Irene Albers, “Ethnographic Surrealism,” in *Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present, c. 1930*, ed. Anselm Franke and Tom Holert (Diaphanes, 2018), 249.

13. Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Harvard University Press, 2005 [1999]), 217; Michel Beaujour, “Qu’est-ce que *Nadja*?” *La Nouvelle Revue française* 15, no. 172 (1967): 780–99.

14. Natalya Lusty, “‘Dream Kitsch’: Surrealism, Walter Benjamin and the Agency of the Dream,” in *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History*, ed. Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty (Routledge, 2013), 121–47; Natalya Lusty, “Surrealism and Dreams,” in *Surrealism*, ed. Natalya Lusty, *Cambridge Critical Concepts* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 94–111. The Central Bureau of Surrealist Investigations on rue de Grenelle was the headquarters of the movement between October 1924 and April 1925, and was open to visitors. See the instructive history of the short-lived institution in Julia Kelly, “The Bureau of Surrealist Research,” in *Twilight Visions: Surrealism and Paris*, ed. Therese Lichtenstein (University of California Press and Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2010), 79–101.

15. Effie Rentzou, “*Minotaure*: On Ethnography and Animals,” *Symposium* 67, no. 1 (2013): 25–37; James Leo Cahill, *Zoological Surrealism: The Nonhuman Cinema of Jean Painlevé* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

16. Vincent Debaene, *Far Afield: French Anthropology between Science and Literature*, trans. Justin Izzo (University of Chicago Press, 2014), 52.

17. Vincent Debaene, “A Case of Cultural Misunderstanding: French Anthropology in a Comparative Perspective,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (2013): 650.

18. “It is always difficult for the French historian to rid himself of the idea that Balzac gave a better account than he ever could of the relationship between Paris and the provinces in the nineteenth century,” and “for the French sociologist not to believe that Proust gave magisterial and definitive form to the sociology of salons.” Debaene, *Far Afield*, 58.

19. Debaene, *Far Afield*, 57.

20. Hollier used this term “lay ethnography” to refer to the unsystematic or “entropological” ethnography of the *Documents* circle, though potentially more helpful for my purpose is Lusty’s personal suggestion to me to describe the core surrealists as conducting a “latent ethnography.” See Denis Hollier, “The Question

of Lay Ethnography: The Entropological Wild Card,” in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Hayward Gallery and MIT Press, 2006), 58–64.

21. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “History and Anthropology,” in *Structural Anthropology* (Basic Books, 1963), 2. Apart from ethnography’s nonspecificity in relation to disciplines, Lévi-Strauss also notes that the term maintains the same meaning everywhere in contradistinction to “anthropology” or “sociology,” whose methods and scope often differ between Francophone and Anglophone countries.

22. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Atheneum, 1974), 20. See my epigraph for the full passage.

23. See Breton’s letter to Paul Valéry in November 1916. Quoted by Marguerite Bonnet, “La rencontre d’André Breton avec la folie,” in *Folie et psychanalyse dans l’expérience surréaliste*, ed. Fabienne Hulak (Z’Éditions, 1992), 134. My translation. As Bonnet shows, other letters from Breton from this period attest to his enthusiastic readings in medical literature on mental disorders. For more on Breton’s wartime experience with psychiatry, see also Bonnet’s notes for “Sujet,” in *André Breton, Œuvres complètes, I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard, 1988), 1104–6.

24. Bonnet, “La rencontre d’André Breton avec la folie,” 134.

25. André Breton, “The X . . . , Y . . . Exhibit,” in *Break of Day*, ed. Mary Ann Caws and Mark Polizzotti (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 42. Breton remembers the same man again in his 1952 interviews with André Parinaud, describing him as young, well-educated and stubborn in his belief that “the supposed war was only a simulacrum.” André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 21.

26. André Breton, “Subject,” in *Selections*, ed. Mark Polizzotti (University of California Press, 2003), 129.

27. “Haven’t I shown, by my total consent to sacrifice my life . . . just how civilized I am?” Breton, “Subject,” 130. For the early modern European conception of madness in terms of savagery, see Michel Foucault’s well-known account in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (Pantheon Books, 1965).

28. Breton recalls in his 1952 interview Vaché’s exact phrase, “L’ART EST UNE SOTTISE,” from a letter to Breton dated May 9, 1918. See Breton, *Conversations*, 34; Jacques Vaché, “Lettres,” *Littérature*, no. 6 (1919): 14.

29. Benjamin, “Surrealism,” 208.

30. Fragment 20 in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Look, Listen, Read*, trans. Brian C. J. Singer (Basic Books, 1997), 144. Lévi-Strauss obtained the permission of Elisa Breton and Aube Elléouët to publish Breton’s response to him following his original query.

31. Ian Walker, “Phantom Africa: Photography between Surrealism and Ethnography,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 37, no. 147 (1997): 635–55. See also Sheringham’s discussion of the “documentary impulse” that links “the project of *Documents* and its treatment of images” to “Bretonian Surrealism.” Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 100.

32. James situates the ethnographic dimension of surrealism in a “documentary imagination” that she sees as pervasive in surrealism and other forms of realism in

twentieth-century French literature. See Alison James, “‘Pris sur le vif’: The Surrealist Poetics of the Document,” in *The Documentary Imagination in Twentieth-Century French Literature: Writing with Facts* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 77–122.

33. André Breton, *Nadja*, in *André Breton, Œuvres complètes, I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard, 1988), 645. Breton evokes the model of medical observation also in *Mad Love* (1937) in regard to incidents of objective chance: “Only a precise and absolutely careful reference to the emotional state of the subject to whom such things happen can furnish any basis for their evaluation. Surrealism has always suggested they be written like a medical report, with no incident omitted, no name altered, lest the arbitrary makes its appearance.” André Breton, *Mad Love*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 39.

34. Beaujour, translated and cited by Dawn Ades, “Photography and the Surrealist Text,” in *L’Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 161–63 (Beaujour’s emphasis); originally Beaujour, “Qu’est-ce que *Nadja*?” 797.

35. Louis Aragon and André Breton, “The Quinquagenary of Hysteria (1878–1928),” in *Surrealism*, ed. Patrick Waldberg (Thames & Hudson, 1997 [1965]), 62.

36. Debaene, *Far Afield*, 6. Beaujour and Walker have also remarked on the proximity between *Nadja* and *Phantom Africa*. On the eve of departing on the Dakar-Djibouti Mission across sub-Saharan Africa, Leiris praised ethnology as “this magnificent science that places all civilizations on the same ground and considers none of them more valuable than another.” Michel Leiris, “L’œil de l’ethnographe (À propos de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti),” *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 7 (1930): 407.

37. Benjamin, “Surrealism,” 208.

38. Debaene, *Far Afield*, 57.

39. Elza Adamowicz, “Masking,” in *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 130.

40. Breton, “Subject,” 129–30.

41. Yve-Alain Bois, “The Use Value of ‘Formless,’” in *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Zone Books, 1997), 25.

42. Rosalind E. Krauss, “No More Play,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press, 1985), 69.

43. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (MIT Press, 1993), 155. Krauss here refers to the young surrealist Roger Caillois’s comparison of insect mimicry to schizophrenic “psychasthenia,” which she connects to Bataille’s formless. She borrows the term “subjective detumescence” from Denis Hollier’s essay on Caillois: Denis Hollier and William Rodarmor, “Mimesis and Castration 1937,” *October* 31 (1984): 11.

44. Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT Press, 1993), xiv.

45. Jack J. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919–39: The Gold of Time* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

46. Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Michael Richardson and Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (Verso, 1994). One issue at stake in Harris’s work is surrealism’s relationship to “modernism,” which a

“postmodern” reading forecloses. For a critique of postmodernism’s caricature of modernism, see Richard Shiff, *Doubt* (Routledge, 2008).

47. Rosalind C. Morris, “After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation, Comparativism, Critique,” in *The Returns of Fetishism* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 269. Morris sees this phallicism (rightly in my view) as symptomatic of the difficulty if not failure of the formless as a Bataille project.

48. Krauss, “No More Play,” 64; Rosalind E. Krauss, “The Destiny of the In-forme,” in *Formless: A User’s Guide* (Zone Books, 1997), 238.

49. For Foster’s critique of avant-garde primitivism and feminine identification from the point of view of “white heterosexual masculinity,” see in particular Hal Foster, “Outmoded Spaces,” in *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT Press, 1993), 157–91; Hal Foster, “Primitive Scenes,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993).

50. Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” 175.

51. The English translation of Ernst’s work as *The Hundred Headless Woman* has the unfortunate effect of conserving the singular “Woman” without the plural “100 têtes” (heads), thereby obscuring its chief difference from the masculine and unambiguously singular *acéphale*.

52. For Benjamin’s remarks on child’s play as mimetic-empathic masquerade, see Walter Benjamin, “Some Remarks on Folk Art,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 279; Walter Benjamin, “Berlin Childhood Around 1900,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 375.

53. See Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Les masques, le diable, les morts,” in *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps: Essai d’anthropologie médiévale* (Gallimard, 2001), 211–37; Cesare Poppi, “Persona, Larva, Masca: Masks, Identity and Cognition in the Cultures of Europe,” in *Mind, Man and Mask*, ed. S. C. Malik (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Aryan Books International, 2001), 128–54. One notable exception to the medieval vilification of the mask is the *santo volto* or “holy face” of God, considered ontologically distinct from the human *viso* and therefore a kind of benevolent mask. See Jean Clair, “Trait pour trait, oeil pour oeil, dent pour dent,” in *À visage découvert*, ed. Georges Didi-Huberman (Flammarion and Fondation Cartier, 1992), 122–35.

54. Poppi, “Persona, Larva, Masca,” 142.

55. See Koerner’s and Damisch’s illuminating and compatible accounts of this development, whereby the discreditation of classical semiotics of expression, now considered affecting and inauthentic masks, led to the increasing illegibility of faces in painting as the new criterion for truthfulness. Joseph Leo Koerner, “Rembrandt and the Epiphany of the Face,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 12 (1986): 5–32; Hubert Damisch, “L’alphabet des masques,” *Nouvelle Revue de psychanalyse* 21 (1980): 93–131.

56. Jean Starobinski, *Interrogatoire du masque* (Éditions Galilée, 2015), 60 (my translation). Starobinski’s essay originally appeared in three installments, respectively in February, March, and April 1946 in the review *Suisse contemporaine*.

57. Melissa Hyde, “The ‘Makeup’ of the Marquise: Boucher’s *Portrait of Pompadour at Her Toilette*,” *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2000): 453–75.

58. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Indiana University Press, 1984), 40.

59. Georg Simmel, "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face," in *Essays on Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Austin Harrington (University of Chicago Press), 233.

60. On modernism's complicity with neohumanism, see notably Kenneth Silver, *L'Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton University Press, 1989); Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (Yale University Press, 1995); Gottfried Boehm, Ulrich Mosch, and Katharina Schmidt, eds., *Canto d'amore: Classicism in Modern Art and Music, 1914–1935* (Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel/Kunstmuseum, 1996).

61. Georges Bataille, "Le masque (1934?)," in *Œuvres complètes, II* (Gallimard, 1970), 404–5.

62. Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self," in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14.

63. Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind," 12. As Mauss notes carefully, this in no way implies that the notion of the self does not exist in particular societies: "There has [n]ever been a tribe, a language, in which the term 'I', 'me' (je, moi) . . . has never existed" and "There has never existed a human being who has not been aware, not only of his body, but also at the same time of his individuality, both spiritual and physical," 3.

64. Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind," 16.

65. Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (Methuen, 1986), 38.

66. Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," 38. In one of these dreams, people "put on masks and escaped injury" from a collapsed tower on a hill.

67. Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," 38 (my emphasis).

68. On the surrealist imaginary of the feminine, see Xavière Gautier, *Surréalisme et sexualité* (Gallimard, 1971); Erika Billeter and José Pierre, eds., *La Femme et le Surréalisme* (Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1987). Of the still growing corpus of literature on the history of women in surrealism, see notably Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli, and Gloria Gwen Raaberg, *Surrealism and Women* (MIT Press, 1991); Renée Riese Hubert, *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, and Partnership* (University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Whitney Chadwick and Dawn Ades, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation* (MIT Press, 1998); Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (University of Texas Press, 1998); Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Ashgate, 2007); Patricia Allmer, ed., *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* (Prestel and Manchester City Art Gallery, 2009).

69. Stephanie D'Alessandro and Matthew Gale, *Surrealism Beyond Borders* (Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2022). For surrealism's internationalization and relationship to the intelligentsia of color, see Jean-Claude Michel, *The Black Surrealists* (Peter Lang, 2000); Phyllis Taoua, *Forms of Protest: Anti-Colonialism and Avant-Garde in Africa, the Caribbean and France* (Heinemann, 2002); Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza, eds., *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto* (Getty Research Institute, 2012). Additionally, primary sources and documents by surrealists of color have been translated and

collected in Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (Verso, 1996); Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley, eds., *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (University of Texas, 2009).

70. M. Stone-Richards, “Surrealist Subversion in Everyday Life,” in *Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora*, ed. Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley (University of Texas, 2009), 329–30.

71. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (Grove, 1967). In Fanon’s usage, the mask as a figure is pejorative and connotes inauthenticity.

72. The Martinicans’ manifesto deliberately echoes Breton’s eponymously titled one from 1926, which addresses the tension between the surrealist conception of total revolt and the agenda of the French Communist Party. English translations of both manifestos can be found in André Breton, “Legitimate Defense (1926),” in *The History of Surrealism*, ed. Maurice Nadeau (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 242–56; Étienne Léro, Thélus Léro, René Ménil, Jules-Marcel Monnerot, Michel Pilotin, Maurice-Sabas Quitman, et al., “Légitime Défense: Declaration,” in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Verso, 1996), 41–43.

73. See notably the contributions to Natalya Lusty, ed. *Surrealism*, Cambridge Critical Concepts (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson, eds., *Surrealism: Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2016).

74. See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (Columbia University Press, 2014 [1983]).

I. Figuring the Subject in Surrealism

1. Bataille called the surrealists “beaucoup trop d’emmerdeurs idéalistes” when responding to Breton’s 1929 group survey, a remark often cited as representing Bataille’s view of surrealism. See Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Harvard University Press, 1989). For the personal jealousies that contributed to the tension between Breton and Bataille, see Michel Leiris, “From the Impossible Bataille to the Impossible Documents,” in *Brisées: Broken Branches* (North Point, 1989), 240. For Bataille’s own recount of his circumspect reconciliation with surrealism and with Breton, see “Notes on the Publication of ‘Un Cadavre’” and “Surrealism from Day to Day” in Michael Richardson and Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism* (Verso, 1994), 30–47.

2. The defecting surrealists (Georges Ribemont-Dessaigne, Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneau, Roger Vitrac, Michel Leiris, Georges Limbour, Jacques-André Boiffard, Robert Desnos, Max Morise, Bataille, Jacques Baron, and Alejo Carpentier) published “A Corpse” on January 15, 1930, which includes Eli Lotar’s photomontage of Breton in the guise of *Ecce Homo*. All signatories except Morise and Carpentier were contributors to *Documents*. The title of the pamphlet references the surrealists’ collective indictment of the novelist Anatole France in 1924 under the same title. For a translation of the pamphlet and details on the circumstances of its production, see Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism*. For Breton’s response to this invective, see the 1930 version of the “Second Manifesto”: André Breton, *Second manifeste du surréalisme* (Éditions Kra, 1930).

3. Georges Bataille, "The Language of Flowers," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 12. Originally Georges Bataille, "Le langage des fleurs," *Documents: Doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie* 1, no. 3 (1929): 160–64. It should be noted that the bellflower is the only one showing a disfigured plant among the images by Blossfeldt used in Bataille's essay. For this reason, Walter Benjamin could admire the same works by Blossfeldt for revealing "an entire, unsuspected horde of analogies and forms in the existence of plants," which "were never a mere model for art but . . . originary forms in all that was created." Walter Benjamin, "News About Flowers," in *Selected Writings, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Belknap, 1999), 156. On Blossfeldt's work, see Hans Christian Adam, ed., *Karl Blossfeldt, 1865–1932* (Taschen, 1999).

4. André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1972), 185–86. Originally André Breton, "Second manifeste du surréalisme," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 12 (1929): 1–16.

5. Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," 184.

6. Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," 183.

7. For Breton's discussion of *Large Glass*, see André Breton, "Marcel Duchamp," in *Oeuvres complètes, I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard, 1988), 272. The essay appeared originally in the October 1922 issue of the new series of *Littérature*, which also features Man Ray's photograph *Dust Breeding*, showing the lower half of *Large Glass* as an enigmatic landscape. For my discussion of this work as marking the transition from Dada to surrealism, see Joyce Suechun Cheng, "Paris Dada and the Transfiguration of Boredom," *Modernism/modernity* 24, no. 3 (2017): 599–628.

8. For Duchamp's identification of the figures, see his diagram in Marcel Duchamp, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Da Capo, 1973), 20–21.

9. Katharine Conley, *Surrealist Ghostliness* (University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

10. Prompted by Barthes's essay, the surrealists conducted an "inquiry into striptease" in the tradition of their group survey, publishing the results in *Le Surréalisme, même*, no. 4–5 in spring 1958 and 1959. See also José Pierre, "An Inquiry into Striptease (1958–59)," in *Investigating Sex: Surrealist Research, 1928–32* (Verso, 1992). For a discussion of dance as veil or cover, see the remarks on the legendary Ballet Russe dancer Vaslav Nijinsky by Jacques Rivière, "Le Sacre du Printemps," in *The Ideal Reader*, ed. Blanche A. Price (Meridian Books, 1960), 125–47. I thank Abigail Fine for the last reference.

11. Roland Barthes, "Striptease," in *Mythologies* (Hill and Wang, 1972), 85–86.

12. André Breton, "Soluble Fish," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan, 1972), 84.

13. Breton, "Soluble Fish," 97.

14. Breton, "Soluble Fish," 97.

15. Julia Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté de l'automatisme: À propos de *Poisson soluble*," in *Une pelle au vent dans les sables du rêve: Les écritures automatiques* (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1992), 116. My translation here and thereafter of Kristeva's text.

16. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 117.

17. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 121–22.

18. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 120.
19. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 115, 116, 120.
20. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 121.
21. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 124.
22. Breton, "Soluble Fish," 109. Translation modified.
23. André Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," in *Break of Day*, ed. Mary Ann Caws and Mark Polizzoti (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 4. Translation modified. "Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité" was first published in *Commerce* 3 (Winter 1924).
24. Kristeva, "L'inquiétante étrangeté," 116.
25. André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (Grove, 1985), 11. Breton's italics.
26. Breton, *Nadja*, 116, 121.
27. Breton, *Nadja*, 129.
28. Ernst Benckard, *Das ewige Antlitz: Eine Sammlung von Totenmasken mit einem Geleitwort von Georg Kolbe* (Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1926). Éluard most likely discovered the book in the late 1920s and then recommended it to Breton and others. While Amy Lyford relates the surrealist death masks to the surgical mouldages of the dead and the mutilated at the hospital Val-de-Grâce where Breton and Aragon served as wartime physicians, Jeremy Stubbs considers them rather in the context of the artists' obsession with death and immortalization of their work. Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France* (University of California Press, 2007); Jeremy Stubbs, "Surrealism and the Death Mask," in *Dying Words: The Last Moments of Writers and Philosophers*, ed. Martin Crowley (Rodopi, 2000), 69–93.
29. André Breton, "Le masque du jour," in *Oeuvres complètes I*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard Pléiade, 1988), 1036. Despite Breton's mention of Haman in his text and other conflicting attributions, the masks are now established as the creations of the artist René Iché. For exchanges between Breton and Éluard about the fabrication of the death masks, see the editor Marguerite Bonnet's notes, Breton, "Le masque du jour," 1770–71.
30. Breton, "Le masque du jour," 1771.
31. In his book of poems dedicated to *L'Inconnue*, Marius Grout determines that the object had been cast after a live model in sculptors' studios around 1875. See the erudite study by Anne-Gaëlle Saliot, *The Drowned Muse: Casting the Unknown Woman of the Seine Across the Tides of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2015). In the surrealist circle, the object inspired not only Éluard's and Breton's death masks but also Aragon's novel *Aurélien* (1944) for which Man Ray produced a series of illustrations in the 1960s. Breton alludes to *L'Inconnue* in a later text on masks, André Breton, "Phénix du masque," in *Oeuvres complètes, IV*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Étienne-Alain Hubert, Philippe Bernier, and Marie-Claire Dumas (Gallimard, 2008), 990–94.
32. Comparing these photo-portraits to the surrealist death masks, Lyford notes that the former "record the living as dead." Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*, 71. Informed by surrealism, the critic André Bazin names the death mask as one of photography's ancestors, which like the mechanical medium produces an image of reality by contact and "an automatic process." See André Bazin, "The Ontology

of the Photographic Image. Translated by Hugh Gray," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 7.

33. On the circumstances that led to Magritte's photomontage, see David Sylvester, "The Great Surrealist Icon," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 7/8 (1984): 155–58. Nearly all the surviving photo booth portraits of the surrealists were from this period.

34. The linguist Roman Jakobson's technical term for the replacement of the word with an image is "intersemiotic translation," or "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems." Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *On Translation*, ed. Reuben A. Brower (Harvard University Press, 1959), 233.

35. Bataille, "The Language of Flowers," 12.

36. Georges Bataille, "Formless. Translated by Domini Faccini," *October* 60 (1992). Originally Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire: Informe," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 7 (1929): 382.

37. Bataille, "Formless. Translated by Domini Faccini." Translation modified.

38. Hubert Damisch, "L'art informel," in *Fenêtre jaune cadmium, ou, le dessous de la peinture* (Seuil, 1984), 136.

39. Georges Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe, ou le gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille* (Macula, 1995).

40. For Bois's and Krauss's approach to "formless," see notably the entries "The Use Value of 'Formless,'" "The Destiny of the Informe," "Figure," "Base Materialism," and "Dialectic" in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (Zone Books, 1997). For instructive summaries of the stakes of this debate, see Hal Foster, Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, and Helen Molesworth, "The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the *Informe* and the Abject," *October* 67 (1994): 3–21; Brent Hayes Edwards, "The Ethnics of Surrealism," *Transition* 78 (1998): 84–135. I thank Jonathan Eburne for calling my attention to Edwards's text.

41. Roland Barthes, "Outcomes of the Text," in *The Rustle of Language* (Hill and Wang, 1986), 248. Barthes also uses the term "vocables" or, somewhat confusingly, "aspects," which Fédida inherits.

42. Pierre Fédida, "The Movement of the Informe. Translated by M. Stone-Richards and Ming Tiampo," *qui parle* 10, no. 1 (1996): 53. Originally Pierre Fédida, "Le mouvement de l'informe," *La Part de l'oeil*, no. 10 (1994): 21–27.

43. Tustin cited by Fédida, "The Movement of the Informe," 59.

44. Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. Betsy Wing (MIT Press, 1989), 77.

45. Michel Leiris, "Glossaire: J'y serre mes gloses," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 3 (1925): 7.

46. See Leiris's "Glossaire" in issues 3, 4, and 6 in *La Révolution surréaliste*.

47. Michel Leiris, "Glossaire: J'y serre mes gloses," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 6 (1926): 21.

48. Leiris, "Glossaire" (1926), 21.

49. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 28.

50. Georges Bataille, "Materialism," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 15–16. Originally Georges

Bataille, "Dictionnaire critique: Matérialisme," *Documents: Doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie* 1, no. 3 (1929): 170.

51. Georges Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 47. Bataille's emphasis. Originally Georges Bataille, "Le bas matérialisme et la gnose," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 1 (1930): 1–8.

52. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 77–78.

53. Roland Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," in *Critical Essays* (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 244–45. For the text by Reverdy that Barthes cites, see Pierre Reverdy, "L'image," in *Nord-Sud, Self Defence et autres écrits sur l'art et la poésie (1917–1926)* (Flammarion, 1975), 73–75.

54. Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," 244–45. Barthes here borrows the opposition of metaphor and metonym from Roman Jakobson.

55. Georges Bataille, "Eye," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 17–19. Originally Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire: Oeil: Friandise cannibale," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 4 (1929): 216.

56. Baron writes that "according to [Alfred] Jarry, it would seem that a lobster is in love with a can of corned beef." See Jacques Baron, "Dictionnaire: Crustacés," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 332. For Jarry's text, see Alfred Jarry, "Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll," in *Oeuvres complètes, I*, ed. Michel Arrivé (Éditions Gallimard, 1972), 699–700.

57. Georges Bataille, "Slaughterhouse. Translated by Annette Michelson," in "Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing," ed. Annette Michelson, Rosalind E. Krauss, and Allen S. Weiss, special issue, *October* 36 (1986). Originally Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire: Abattoir," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 329.

58. Barthes, "The Metaphor of the Eye," 245.

59. Robert Desnos, "Dictionnaire: Oeil: Image de l'oeil," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 4 (1929).

60. Marcel Griaule, "Dictionnaire: Oeil: Mauvais oeil," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 4 (1929): 218.

61. Georges Bataille, "Mouth," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 59–60. Originally Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire: Bouche," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 5 (1930): 299–300.

62. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, 80.

63. Georges Bataille, "The Big Toe," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 21. Originally Georges Bataille, "Le gros orteil," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 297–302.

64. Barthes, "Outcomes of the Text," 243. Barthes's italics. Patrick ffrench has recently pointed out that, prior to the 1970s, the reception of Bataille has not typically focused on his activities during the *Documents* period, Barthes's essay being an exception. Patrick ffrench, "Documents in the 1970s: Bataille, Barthes and 'Le gros orteil,'" *Papers of Surrealism* 7 (2007).

65. Barthes, "Outcomes of the Text," 245.

66. Ralph von Koenigswald, "Têtes et crânes (Crânes d'ancêtres et trophées de guerre chez les peuples primitifs)," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 6 (1930): 353–58.

67. Besides this fragment from Cranach's painting, the montage includes another European example, namely, the photograph of an unidentified overweight woman, presumably as an example of thing-ification through becoming "big" (*gros*), as in "big toe" (*gros orteil*).

68. Georges Bataille, "Le masque (1934?)," in *Oeuvres complètes, II*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard, 1970), 405. This text was submitted to the surrealist review *Minotaure* but did not ultimately appear for reasons related to length. Despite the slightly later date, its relationship to the macabre *Documents* montage is evident from its contents.

69. Bataille, "Le masque (1934?)," 405.

70. Leiris, "From the Impossible Bataille to the Impossible *Documents*," 242.

71. Georges Bataille, "Dictionnaire: Métamorphose: Animaux sauvages," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 333–34.

72. See Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body (1935)," in *Techniques, Technology and Civilization*, ed. Nathan Schlanger (Durkheim, 2006), 77–95.

73. Marcel Griaule, "Dictionnaire: Métamorphose: Jeux abyssins," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 332–33. Griaule explains the mechanism of the guinea fowl in greater detail in his ethnographic study of Abyssinian games and play, *Jeux et divertissements abyssins*, vol. 49, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études (Librairie Ernest Leroux, 1935), Pl.XIV.

74. Michel Leiris, "Dictionnaire: Métamorphose: Hors de soi," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 333.

75. Leiris, "Dictionnaire: Métamorphose," 333.

76. Georges Bataille, "Surrealism from Day to Day," in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, ed. Michael Richardson (Verso, 1994), 36.

77. Michel Leiris, "The Loves of Holofernes," in *Manhood* (Grossman, 1963), 127.

78. Georges Limbour, "Aeschylus, Carnival and the Civilized. Translated by Dominic Faccini," *October* 60 (1992): 53. Originally Georges Limbour, "Eschyle, le carnaval et les civilisés," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 2 (1930): 97–101.

79. Limbour, "Aeschylus, Carnival and the Civilized," 53.

80. Limbour, "Aeschylus, Carnival and the Civilized," 54–55.

81. Limbour, "Aeschylus, Carnival and the Civilized," 56–57.

82. The individual in Boiffard's photographs is sometimes identified as the filmmaker Pierre Prévert, brother of Jacques Prévert. See Alain Sayag et al., *Atelier Man Ray: Berenice Abbott, Jacques-André Boiffard, Bill Brandt, Lee Miller, 1920–35* (Centre Georges Pompidou and Philippe Sers Éditeur, 1982), 36.

83. Though Leiris indicates in his essay that Seabrook had sent him "the photographs reproduced here, which show a woman wearing a leather mask designed by him and executed according to his instructions in New York," various scholars have also attributed the photographs to Boiffard or Man Ray, the latter having produced other sadomasochist photographs in 1929–30 involving Seabrook, Lee Miller, and other unnamed female models. Thanks to Clément Chéroux and Damarice Amao, the photographs are now securely attributed to Seabrook. For the latter and

formerly disputed attributions, see Clément Chéroux and Damarice Amao, eds., *Jacques-André Boiffard, la parenthèse surréaliste* (Éditions du Centre Pompidou and Éditions Xavier Barral, 2014), 84–85; Janine Mileaf, “Between You and Me: Man Ray’s Object to Be Destroyed,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 1 (2004): 4–23; Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities*; Susan Zieger, “The Case of William Seabrook: Documents, Haiti, and the Working Dead,” *Modernism/modernity* 19, no. 4 (2012): 737–54.

84. Michel Leiris, “The ‘Caput Mortuum’ or the Alchemist’s Wife,” in *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas*, ed. Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 69. Originally Michel Leiris, “Le ‘Caput Mortuum’ ou la femme de l’alchimiste,” *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 8 (1930): 21–26.

85. In paragraph 44 in *Logic*, Hegel would write: “The *thing-in-itself* . . . expresses the *ob-ject*, inasmuch as *abstraction* is made of all that it is for consciousness, of all determinations of feeling, as well as of all determinate thoughts about it. It is easy to see what is left, namely, what is *completely abstract*, or totally *empty*, and determined only as what is ‘beyond’; the *negative* of representation, of feeling, of determinate thinking, etc. But it is just as simple to reflect that this *caput mortuum* is itself only the product of thinking, and precisely of the thinking that has gone to the extreme of pure abstraction, the product of the empty ‘I’ that makes its own empty self-*identity* into its *ob-ject*.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic, with the Zusätze*, trans. Théodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Hackett, 1991), 87. The editors of this translation note that “caput mortuum” “was the alchemist’s term for the ‘dead’ precipitate that remained when all the ‘living spirit’ had been extracted or given off” (316n45).

86. Leiris, “The ‘Caput Mortuum’ or the Alchemist’s Wife,” 71. Leiris’s emphasis.

87. Leiris, “The ‘Caput Mortuum’ or the Alchemist’s Wife,” 69, 71.

88. Leiris, “The ‘Caput Mortuum’ or the Alchemist’s Wife,” 69–71.

89. For instance, the theologian Amy Hollywood has considered Bataille’s life-long obsession with the photograph of a Chinese victim of imperial torture in relation to the Christian contemplation of the crucified body of Jesus; nevertheless, Bataille’s nonparticipation in the physical suffering he beholds separates his practice from that of his model and precedent, namely, the medieval mystic Angela of Foligno. See Amy Hollywood, “Mysticism and Catastrophe in Georges Bataille’s *Atheological Summa*,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (University of Chicago Press, 2003), 161–87; Georges Bataille, *Guilty*, trans. Bruce Boone (Lapis, 1988). Similarly, Bataille’s fascination with sacrifice leads him to adopt a quasi-fetishistic view of this cultural practice in Mesoamerica. See Georges Bataille, “Extinct America. Translated by Annette Michelson,” in “Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing,” ed. Annette Michelson, Rosalind E. Krauss, and Allen S. Weiss, special issue, *October* 36 (1986): 3–9. Originally Georges Bataille, “L’Amérique disparue,” in *L’Art précolombien: L’Amérique avant Christophe Colomb* (Les Beaux-Arts, 1928), 5–14. *Documents* later published a scholarly article on the same subject by Roger Hervé, “Sacrifices humains du Centre-Amérique,” *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 4 (1930): 205–13.

90. Leiris, “The ‘Caput Mortuum’ or the Alchemist’s Wife,” 68.

91. Michel Leiris, “Man and His Insides,” in *Brisées: Broken Branches* (North

Point, 1989), 44. Originally Michel Leiris, "L'homme et son intérieur," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 5 (1930): 261–66.

92. Leiris, "Man and His Insides," 43.

93. Leiris, "Man and His Insides," 43.

94. Leiris, "Man and His Insides," 41.

95. Leiris, "Man and His Insides," 45.

96. Leiris, "Man and His Insides," 41.

97. Jack J. Spector, "The Avant-Garde Object: Form and Fetish between World War I and World War II," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 12 (1986): 142.

98. According to William Pietz, the word *fetish* originated from no particular society but from "a cross-cultural situation formed by the ongoing encounter of the value codes of radically different social orders." William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (1985): 11. See chapter 4 in this volume for more detailed discussion of Pietz's theory.

99. The *Documents* editors indicate that these consist of "giant bulbs full of water from the miraculous fountain of Liesse, inside which various Passion instruments are suspended on globules of glass as well as a bunch of more or less heteroclitite figures." Editors, "Notre-Dame de Liesse," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 5 (1929): 282. For the Golden Madonna and related objects, see in the same issue, Wilhelm Kästner, "Un Atelier d'Orfèvrerie à Essen vers l'an 1000," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 5 (1929): 240–47.

100. Julia Kelly, "Between Art and Ethnography: Michel Leiris and the Sculpture of Alberto Giacometti," *Histoire de l'art*, no. 50 (2002): 123. Theoretically less developed by comparison to those of Breton and Bataille, Leiris's writings on surrealist art have nevertheless begun to be recognized. For other productive Leirisian readings of surrealist art apart from Kelly's, see Charles Palermo, "Tactile Translucence: Miró, Leiris, Einstein," *October* 97 (2001): 31–50; Charles Palermo, *Fixed Ecstasy: Joan Miró in the 1920s* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Susan Laxton, *Surrealism at Play* (Duke University Press, 2019).

101. See Carl Einstein, "André Masson, an Ethnological Study," in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Hayward Gallery and the MIT Press, 2006), 245–47; Carl Einstein, "André Masson, étude ethnologique," *Documents: Doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie* 1, no. 2 (1929): 93–105.

102. Didi-Huberman, *La Ressemblance informe*, 96.

103. Michel Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Hayward Gallery and the MIT Press, 2006), 249. Originally Michel Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 4 (1929): 209–10.

104. Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," 16. Breton also used the term *fetish* in passing to describe motifs in Miró's paintings in "Surrealism and Painting," in *Surrealism and Painting* (Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 2002), 40.

105. Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," 250.

106. Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," 250. Translation modified.

107. Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," 250.

108. Leiris, "Alberto Giacometti," 250–51.

2. Surrealism's Primitive Reason

1. The reading list first appeared on the back cover of a catalog of surrealist publications issued by the bookshop José Corti in November–December 1931. It can be found in English in “Read . . . Don’t Read,” in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Pluto, 2001), 146.

2. Jean-Claude Blachère, *Les Totems d’André Breton: Surréalisme et primitivisme littéraire* (Editions L’Harmattan, 1996).

3. Tessel Bauduin’s rich study of surrealism and occultism addresses the presence of anthropology and comparative religion among Breton’s occult sources. See Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam University Press, 2014). For Breton’s and the surrealists’ suspicion of ethnology, see Blachère, *Les Totems d’André Breton*. The surrealists’ collection and reception of Indigenous arts have been helpfully detailed in Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (Routledge, 2003).

4. Acquainted in 1941 on a boat bound for Martinique, Breton and Lévi-Strauss eventually ended up in New York City where they saw each other regularly, having in common a passion for Amerindian art. For Lévi-Strauss’s relationship with the surrealists, see Marie Mauzé, “Aux invisibles frontières du songe et du réel: Lévi-Strauss et les surréalistes,” in *Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Michel Izard (L’Herne, 2004), 152–61.

5. André Breton and Gérard Legrand, *L’Art magique* (Formes et reflets and Club français de l’art, 1957). For details about the genesis of *L’Art magique*, see the notice by Étienne-Alain Hubert for André Breton, “L’Art magique,” in *Oeuvres complètes IV (Écrits sur l’art et autres textes)*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Étienne-Alain Hubert, Philippe Bernier, and Marie-Claire Dumas (Éditions Gallimard, 2008), 1218–26. A helpful introduction to this major book by Breton is found in Gavin Parkinson, “Toward *L’Art magique*: Surrealism and Magic in the 1950s,” in *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity*, ed. Gražina Subelytė and Daniel Zamani (Prestel, 2022), 83–97. All translations from *L’Art magique* in the original French are mine; the recent English translation of Breton’s text by Michael Richardson, Krzysztof Fijalkowski, and Dawn Ades, *Magic Art* (Fulgur, 2024) became available shortly after the completion of my manuscript.

6. See Jean Jamin, “L’ethnographie, mode d’emploi,” in *Le Mal et la Douleur*, ed. Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr (Musée d’Ethnographie, 1986), 45–79.

7. One of Breton’s respondents, the Italian theologian Enrico Castelli, was particularly critical of the ethnologists’ narrow response to the survey, citing Lévi-Strauss as a counterexample of an ethnologist receptive to the psychological dimension of magic and art.

8. The recent exhibition at the Museum Barberini has given considerable attention to surrealist art thematizing magic: Gražina Subelytė and Daniel Zamani, eds., *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity* (Prestel, 2022).

9. See Klaus H. Kiefer, “Die Ethnologisierung des kunstkritischen Diskurses—Carl Einsteins Beitrag zu *Documents*,” in *Elan Vital oder das Auge des Eros*, ed. Hubertus Gäßner (Haus der Kunst, 1994), 90–103.

10. A self-critical anthropologist, Fabian faults his own discipline for its

“persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.” Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (Columbia University Press, 2014 [1983]), 31. Fabian’s emphasis. Conversely, for self-critical historians, it is an “ethnological” consideration of past cultures (e.g., the European Middle Ages) that can serve as the salutary means for overcoming the prejudicial allochronism of the historical method, with its privileging of rapidly transforming societies with written documents. See Jacques Le Goff, “The Historian and the Ordinary Man,” in *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 225–36.

11. Louis Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” in *The Surrealist Look at Art*, ed. Pontus Hulten (Lapis, 1990), 66.

12. Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” 55–56.

13. John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (Verso, 2007), 87–88. Roberts uses the term *demanualization* when describing “a post-prosthetic economy and humanity,” where “prosthetic technologies allows the precision and dexterity of the hand to be invested outside of the body in unprecedented ways” and “the human hand is viewed only minimally attached to the manipulation of sensuous, material form, and is therefore judged to be subordinate to the ‘labour of machines’” (92).

14. Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, 3. Roberts’ italics.

15. John Roberts, “Art After Deskilling,” *Historical Materialism* 18 (2010): 82.

16. Roberts, “Art After Deskilling,” 91.

17. These two works were included in the “table de reproductions” in the catalogue, a separate list from the thirty-four works actually shown in the exhibition. See Louis Aragon, *La Peinture au défi* (Librairie José Corti, 1930).

18. Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” 61.

19. Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” 56–57. My emphasis.

20. Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” 60–61.

21. Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” 51. Aragon here evokes the figure of the bowler hat as a metonym for the bourgeois man.

22. André Breton, “Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality,” in *Break of Day*, ed. Mary Ann Caws and Mark Polizzoti (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 13–14.

23. André Breton, “Words Without Wrinkles,” in *Lost Steps* (University of Nebraska, 1996), 100.

24. André Breton, “Surrealism and Painting,” in *Surrealism and Painting* (Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 2002), 35. Breton here quotes from Poe’s “Marginalia,” part 12. See Edgar Allan Poe, “Marginalia,” in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe. 16 vols.*, ed. James A. Harrison (Fred de Fau, 1902), 155–56.

25. Aragon, “The Challenge to Painting,” 56–57.

26. Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 108. Mauss republished the essay in 1950 in Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, “Esquisse d’une théorie générale de la magie (1902–03),” in *Sociologie et anthropologie* (PUF, 1950), 1–141.

27. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 20.

28. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 20. My italics.

29. Breton, “L’Art magique,” 62.

30. Breton, "L'Art magique," 53.
31. Breton, "L'Art magique," 64.
32. Breton, "L'Art magique," 64.
33. Breton, "L'Art magique," 73.
34. Jean Paulhan, "La mentalité primitive et l'illusion des explorateurs (1925)," in *Oeuvres complètes, volume II* (Cercle du Livre Précieux, 1966), 144.
35. Paulhan, "La mentalité primitive," 151. A specialist of Malagasy, Paulhan had collaborated with Paul Éluard on the Dada review *Proverbe* in 1920–21.
36. René Daumal, "Lévy-Bruhl: l'âme primitive," *Le Grand Jeu*, no. 1 (1928): 49. Daumal subsequently gave a more favorable review of Lévy-Bruhl's *La Mythologie primitive* (1935), seeing the later work as advancing toward a perspective where "the two mentalities," the so-called primitive and the civilized, "will encounter one another." Daumal, "La Mythologie primitive par L. Lévy-Bruhl," *La Nouvelle Revue française* 260 (1935): 773–77. For the relationship between surrealism and Daumal's group, see Dennis Duncan, "Introduction," in *Theory of the Great Game*, ed. René Daumal and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (Atlas, 2015), 7–28.
37. Philippe Sabot, "Primitivisme et surréalisme: une synthèse impossible?," *Methodos*, no. 3 (2003): 113–36. The new English title of Lévi-Strauss's seminal work, translated misleadingly in 1966 as *The Savage Mind*, makes it easier to see its affinity with Leroy's *Primitive Reason*. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Wild Thought*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and John Leavitt (University of Chicago Press, 2020).
38. Olivier Leroy, *La Raison primitive: Essai de réfutation de la théorie du prélogisme* (Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927), 102. All translations of Leroy's text are mine. Leroy's extensive discussions of concreteness in the specialized language of artisans in *Primitive Reason* might have informed Daumal's evocation of the figure of the carpenter in his 1928 essay critiquing Lévy-Bruhl.
39. Tristan Tzara, "Art primitif et art populaire," in *Oeuvres complètes, tome 4* (1947–1963), ed. Henri Béhar (Flammarion, 1980), 519.
40. See Raymond Michelet, "'Primitive' Life and Mentality," in *Beckett in Black and Red: Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro* (1934), ed. Alan Warren Friedman (University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 108–48. Cunard claims that "it was from the Surrealists that Michelet came to me," thus making it likely that they would have been also familiar with Leroy, a major reference for Michelet. Nancy Cunard, "Foreword," in *African Empires and Civilization*, ed. Raymond Michelet (PANAF Service Limited, 1945), v.
41. Leroy, *La Raison primitive*, 18.
42. Leroy, *La Raison primitive*, 18.
43. André Breton et al., "Don't Visit the Colonial Exhibition," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Pluto, 2001), 184.
44. Breton et al., "Don't Visit the Colonial Exhibition," 184. My emphasis.
45. Breton et al., "Don't Visit the Colonial Exhibition," 184. Italics in the original.
46. André Breton et al., "First Appraisal of the Colonial Exhibition," in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Pluto, 2001), 186–87.
47. Breton et al., "First Appraisal of the Colonial Exhibition," 186–87.
48. Jacques Viot, "Don't Clutter Up the Colonies," in *The Surrealism Reader*, ed. Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (University of Chicago

Press, 2015), 113. Originally Viot, “N’encombrez pas les colonies,” *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 1 (1930): 43–45.

49. In the 1932 tract, “Légitime Défense” (1932), Monnerot and other Martini-can intellectuals had declared their opposition to the French national state and the mixed-race Caribbean elite of their birth while allying with Marxism and surrealism. Étienne Léro et al., “Légitime Défense: Declaration,” in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Verso, 1996), 43. The facsimile of this legendary document can be found in Étienne Léro et al., *Légitime Défense*, ed. René Ménil (Jean-Michel Place, 1979).

50. Jules Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson (Verso, 1996), 61–62. Originally Monnerot, “À partir de quelques traits particuliers à la mentalité civilisée,” *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (1933): 35–37. My modification of the translated title.

51. Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” 62.

52. Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” 62.

53. Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” 62. Italics and capitalization in the original; my modification of the English translation.

54. Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” 62. Monnerot’s emphasis.

55. Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” 64.

56. Monnerot, “On Certain Common Characteristics of the Civilized Mentality,” 64.

57. For details of Einstein’s involvement in *Documents*, see Conor Joyce, *Carl Einstein in Documents and His Collaboration with Georges Bataille* (Xlibris, 2003).

58. Rainer Rumold, *Archaeologies of Modernity: Avant-Garde Bildung* (Northwestern University Press, 2015), 168. Among Benjamin’s various essays on new media is the essay of near cult status, Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility. Second Version,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap, 2002), 101–40.

59. See for instance René Crevel’s jeering response to Einstein’s reception of Fernand Léger: René Crevel, “Critique d’art,” *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 1 (1930): 12. The essay that provoked Crevel’s reaction was Carl Einstein, “Léger, oeuvres récentes,” *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 4 (1930): 191–95. For Einstein’s negative reception of abstract art, see his “L’exposition de l’art abstrait à Zurich,” *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 1, no. 6 (1929): 342.

60. Reporting on “Challenge to Painting” belatedly in his second “Letter from Paris” in 1936, Benjamin misreads the essay somewhat as an instance of the surrealists’ *aesthetic* redemption of photography. However, he was correct that the medium’s “social impact,” specifically its appeal to the masses, was generally overlooked in surrealism. Walter Benjamin, “Letter from Paris (2),” in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap, 2002),

241. For Benjamin's otherwise sympathetic reception of surrealism, see his "Dream Kitsch: Gloss on Surrealism" (1927) and "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), in *Selected Writings, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone, vol. 2 (Belknap, 1999), 3–5, 207–21.

61. This essay is one example of Einstein's ethnologically inflected art criticism of this period; another is his "ethnological study" of the painter André Masson: Carl Einstein, "André Masson, étude ethnologique," *Documents: Doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie* 1, no. 2 (1929): 93–105. This essay is available in two English translations: Einstein, "André Masson, an Ethnological Study," in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Hayward Gallery and the MIT Press, 2006), 245–47; Einstein, "André Masson: Ethnological Study," in *A Mythology of Forms: Selected Writings on Art*, ed. Charles W. Haxthausen (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 203–11.

62. Carl Einstein, "Exposition de collages (Galerie Goemans)," in *Werke, Band 3, 1929–1940*, ed. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Fannei & Walz, 1996), 139. Originally Einstein, "Exposition de collages (Galerie Goemans)," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 4 (1930): 244.

63. Einstein, "Exposition de collages (Galerie Goemans)," 140.

64. Einstein, "Exposition de collages (Galerie Goemans)," 140.

65. Carl Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," in *Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present, c. 1930*, ed. Anselm Franke and Tom Holert (Diaphanes/Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2018), 74–75. Originally Einstein, "L'enfance néolithique (Hans Arp)," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 8 (1930): 35–43. Reprint in Einstein, "L'enfance néolithique," in *Werke, Band 3, 1929–1940*, ed. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Fannei & Walz, 1996), 170–174.

66. Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," 74.

67. See Maria Stavrinaki, "Why Did the 1930s Identify with Prehistory?," in *Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present, c. 1930*, ed. Anselm Franke and Tom Holert (Diaphanes/Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2018), 84–92. Stavrinaki and her collaborators Rémi Labrusse and Stefanos Geroulanos have recently argued that "the interest that the moderns—especially artists—showed toward prehistory has long and wrongly been considered a mere aspect of the primitivist phenomenon," and that "the idea of prehistory cannot be integrated into the vast network of so-called primitivist practices, even if it is intertwined with them." Stefanos Geroulanos and Maria Stavrinaki, "Editorial: Writing Prehistory," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 69/70 (2018): 1; Rémi Labrusse and Maria Stavrinaki, "Éditorial," *Les Cahiers du musée national d'art moderne*, no. 126 (2014): 126. My translation of the latter passage.

68. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 19–20.

69. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 53–54.

70. Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," 74–75.

71. Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," 75.

72. Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 64; Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," 75.

73. Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," 74–75.

74. Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," 36. In the same text, Breton connects Arp's practice to others that similarly resist the notion of artists as "merely 'hands that paint'" (47).

75. Aragon, "The Challenge to Painting," 67.

76. Einstein, "Neolithic Childhood," 74–75. My italics.
77. Eric Robertson, *Arp: Painter, Poet, Sculptor* (Yale University Press, 2006), 79.
78. Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (Yale University Press, 1997), 59.
79. Rosalind E. Krauss, "No More Play," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press, 1985), 64. In this essay, Krauss advances Bataille's "hard" primitivism as an interpretative lens for Alberto Giacometti's sculptures. See also her discussion of Bataille's "Primitive Art" in Rosalind E. Krauss, "Olympia," in *Formless: A User's Guide* (Zone Books, 1997), 147–152.
80. Georges Bataille, "The Academic Horse. Translated by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski," in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Hayward Gallery and the MIT Press, 2006), 238. My emphasis. Originally Georges Bataille, "Le cheval académique," *Documents: Doctrines, archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie* 1, no. 1 (1929): 27–31.
81. Bataille, "The Academic Horse," 238. My italics.
82. For a history of this mode of research and its eventual obsolescence, see the instructive study by Barbara Wittmann, "A Neolithic Childhood: Children's Drawings as Prehistoric Sources," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 63–64 (2013): 138.
83. G.-H. Luquet, *L'Art primitif* (Gaston Doin & Cie, 1930), 32. Luquet's emphasis.
84. Krauss, "No More Play," 54.
85. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 33.
86. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 39, 41.
87. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 41. My emphasis.
88. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 42.
89. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 10.
90. Georges Bataille, "Primitive Art," in *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, ed. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Zone Books and MIT Press, 2005), 193n3.
91. Maria Stavrinaki, *Transfixed by Prehistory: An Inquiry into Modern Art and Time*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Zone Books, 2022), 279. Stavrinaki's suggestion is compelling given the significance of the case of Gaulish coins for interwar studies of "primitive art," however the term is conceived. For instance, in his study of Amerindian arts of the Pacific Northwest Coast, the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas would also refer to "the standard example . . . of the degeneration of Greek coins when copied by Keltic imitators which led to a complete disruption of the original design." See Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (Dover, 1955), 130.
92. John Evans, *The Coins of the Ancient Britons* (J. Russell Smith, 1864), 28.
93. G.-H. Luquet, *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man*, trans. J. Townsend Russell (Yale University Press and Oxford University Press, 1930), 133–34. My emphasis. Bataille knew this work well, having cited it in "Primitive Art" against Luquet's own stylistic conception of primitive art. On another occasion, he quarrels with Luquet's protosemiotic analysis of Paleolithic handprints in the same book, proposing to see them instead as representing mutilated fingers. See Georges Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 69, 72n20. Originally Bataille, "La mutilation sacrificielle et l'oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 8 (1930): 10–20.
94. Bataille, "Primitive Art," 40.

95. Bataille, "Primitive Art," 40–41. Bataille's emphasis.
96. Bataille, "Primitive Art," 41.
97. Bataille, "Primitive Art," 39–40. Translation slightly modified; both emphases are Bataille's.
98. Bataille, "Primitive Art," 41.
99. André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1972 [1969]), 26.
100. Marcel Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins* (Maisonneuve & Larose, 2001), 16. Bataille seems perfectly aware of this: In a footnote in "Primitive Art," he mentions that Abyssinian children often drew during church services and were inclined to give polysemous interpretation of the figures. Bataille, "Primitive Art," 193–94n5. Note that Luquet had observed the same in children during the phase of "fortuitous realism."
101. Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins*, 16.
102. Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins*, 16.
103. Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins*, 16–17. Griaule's original text refers to figure 29 as 25 by mistake.
104. For example, the physiologist Max Verworn had a European child draw an unfamiliar animal and had a second child copy it. "After several repetitions, the original was so strongly altered or geometrically transformed that it could no longer be recognized." Wittmann, "A Neolithic Childhood: Children's Drawings as Pre-historic Sources," 138.
105. Walter Benjamin's texts on children's toys at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s similarly address this phenomenon of creative simplification among vernacular art forms. See notably "The Cultural History of Toys" (1928), "Toys and Play" (1928), "Old Toys" (1928), and "Russian Toys" (1930) in Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1927–1934*, 98–102, 113–21; Benjamin, "Russian Toys," in *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*, ed. Ursula Marx et al. (Verso, 2007), 107.
106. Griaule, *Silhouettes et graffiti abyssins*, 14–15.
107. Brassai, "From Cave Wall to Factory Wall," in *Graffiti* (Flammarion, 2002), 139.
108. Brassai, "From Cave Wall to Factory Wall," 139. Originally Brassai, "Du mur des cavernes au mur d'usine," *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (1933): 6–7.
109. Brassai, *Graffiti* (Flammarion, 2002), 8. For the ethnographic character of this work, see also Marja Warehime, *Brassai: Images of Culture and the Surrealist Observer* (Louisiana State University, 1996); Katharine Conley, "Modernist Primitivism in 1933: Brassai's *Involuntary Sculpture* in *Minotaure*," *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 1 (2003): 127–40.
110. Brassai, "From Cave Wall to Factory Wall," 139.
111. Brassai, "From Cave Wall to Factory Wall," 139.
112. Bataille's and Brassai's considerations of graffiti also differ in that the latter glosses over the artists' destructive impulse, "claiming art as a formal expression of man's survival instinct and a means to self-knowledge." Warehime, *Brassai*, 99. As Brassai affirms: "Carving one's name, one's love, or a date on the wall of a building is a type of vandalism that cannot be explained by the destructive impulse alone. I see in it rather the survival instinct of all those who cannot erect pyramids or cathedrals to perpetuate their name." Brassai, *Graffiti*, 18.
113. Brassai, *Graffiti*, 42.

114. Brassai, *Graffiti*, 42–43. My emphasis.

115. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 61. Cited in Bataille, "Primitive Art," 37.

116. Luquet, *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man*, 128. Note that Luquet's contemporary Leroy would cite the reading of animal and human imprints as an example of "primitive reason" against racist notions about present-day Indigenous peoples' natural instincts. Parents are expected to teach their children, sometimes reproducing tracks on sand for them to copy; relatives and friends would show a deliberately lost child how to find the mother by reading her footprints. "In these conditions," Leroy concludes, "there is nothing extraordinary in that the Indigenous are skilled at identifying the tracks that they encounter. It is a science indispensable for them, which they acquire by means that we [modern Europeans] would also employ." Leroy, *La Raison primitive*, 85–86.

117. Luquet, *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man*, 132.

118. Luquet, *The Art and Religion of Fossil Man*, 129.

119. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 57.

120. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 56.

121. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 55.

122. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 56.

123. Georges Didi-Huberman provides a more imaginative formulation of the technical facility of handprint in terms of its immediacy and its double status as index-icon: "[T]he direct application of the hand, its contour or its shadow, makes it immediately visible, even recognizable as individuality. In semiotic terms, one might say that the human hand admits a particularly easy complicity between its *index* (contact) and its *icon* (resemblance). This ease—which is also a polyvalence, a power [*puissance*—explains perhaps in part the universality of handprints; it has allowed the prehistoric person to create a *figure* out of a *gesture*, whatever its meaning may have been, without or almost without mediation." Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Empreinte* (Centre Georges Pompidou, 1997), 31. My translation; Didi-Huberman's emphasis.

124. Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art* (Reaktion Books, 2002), 22.

125. Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Wittenborn, Schultz, 1948), 7.

126. Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (Yale University Press, 1989), 222. For the use of chance images in Renaissance art, see H. W. Janson, "The 'Image Made By Chance' in Renaissance Thought," in *Sixteen Studies* (Harry N. Abrams, 1974).

127. André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image. Translated by Hugh Gray," *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 8–9.

128. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 7. *Indexicality* is a term frequently used by theorists of photography to refer to its objective character, for instance Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text* (Hill and Wang, 1985), 32–51; Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (MIT Press, 1985), 196–209; Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," in *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism*, ed. Rosalind Krauss, Jane Livingston, and Dawn Ades (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 13–54. The latter essay by Krauss closely follows Bazin on the ontology of photography and its status in surrealism.

129. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 7.

130. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," 6. During the period of Byzantine iconoclasm, the iconophiles used the concept of *acheiropoietos* (miraculous image made without the human hand) in order to counter the charge of idolatry. For the affinity between Bazin's ontology of the photograph and the position of Byzantine iconophiles, see Devin Singh, "Iconicity of the Photographic Image: Theodore of Stoudios and André Bazin," in *Byzantium/Modernism: The Byzantine as Method in Modernity*, ed. Roland Betancourt and Maria Taroutina (Brill, 2015), 237–53.

131. Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," 33. Breton's italics; translation modified.

132. Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," 33. Translation modified. In "Words Without Wrinkles," a text written signifying the end of Paris Dada and the beginning of surrealism, Breton had famously declared: "Words . . . have finished playing games. Words are making love." Breton, "Words Without Wrinkles," 102.

133. Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," 33.

134. Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," 47. The image of hollow footprints on the sand should remind readers of Breton's title for the collection of essays written at the end of his Dada period, *Lost Steps* (Les Pas perdus), which also means "what is not lost" in French.

135. Breton, "Surrealism and Painting," 47.

136. Werner Spies rightly observes that Ernst's hands, though severed from the body, remain "hands in action." Werner Spies, *Max Ernst, Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person* (George Braziller, 1983), 26.

137. Rosalind Krauss, "When Words Fail," *October* 22 (1982): 95.

138. Luquet, *L'Art primitif*, 56. Luquet's observation later became the basis of the paleoanthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan's work on the evolutionary history of technology, as represented by his seminal 1967 book, *Gesture and Speech*, trans. Anna Bostock Berger (MIT Press, 1993). Leroi-Gourhan acknowledges Luquet's work in his essay "The Hands of Gargas: Toward a General Study. Translated by Annette Michelson," *October* 37 (1986): 18–34.

139. Kirsten A. Hoving, "'Blond Hands over the Magic Mountain': Photography in Surrealism's Grip," in *Speaking with Hands: Photographs from the Buhl Collection*, ed. Jennifer Blessing (Guggenheim Museum, 2004), 93. See also her earlier essay, Kirsten H. Powell, "Hands-On Surrealism," *Art History* 20, no. 4 (1997): 516–33.

140. Soetsu Yanagi, "The Beauty of Miscellaneous Things (1926)," in *The Beauty of Everyday Things* (Penguin Books, 2017), 43.

141. Yanagi, "The Beauty of Miscellaneous Things (1926)," 43. My italics. Recently, the philosopher Jacques Rancière has come close to theorizing this manual automatism of workers on the verge of emancipation, exemplified by the distracted servants in Jean Siméon Chardin's paintings and the happily multi-tasking factory employees in Dziga Vertov's 1929 documentary film, *Man with a Movie Camera*. See Jacques Rancière, "Time Redivided," in *Critical Inquiry Blog*, November 9, 2021, <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2021/11/09/time-redivided/>.

142. Sori Yanagi, "Soetsu Yanagi's Mingei Movement and the Next Stage," in *The Philosophy of Design: Essays* (Yanagi Design Office, 2015), 267. Translation slightly modified.

143. Henri Focillon, "In Praise of Hands," in *The Life of Forms* (Zone Books, 1992), 157, 180.

144. Focillon, "In Praise of Hands," 176, 178.

145. Adam Jolles has remarked on Focillon's and Aragon's contrasting positions on photography in his consideration of 1930s surrealism's interest in tactility: "[W]here Aragon had imagined that the new medium of collage might serve to liberate contemporary artists from the aesthetic constraints of the hand, Focillon, by contrast, completely disavowed contemporary mechanical reproduction in favor of a return to artisanship and its implied connection to 'eternal antiquity.'" Adam Jolles, "The Tactile Turn: Envisioning a Postcolonial Aesthetic in France," *Yale French Studies*, no. 109: "Surrealism and Its Others" (2006): 34.

146. Salvador Dalí, "Objets psycho-atmosphériques-anamorphiques," *Le Sur-réalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (1933): 45. My translation. See also Dalí, "Psycho-atmospheric-Anamorphic Objects," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 244–48.

147. Dalí, "Psycho-atmospheric-Anamorphic Objects," 246.

148. Dalí, "Psycho-atmospheric-Anamorphic Objects," 247.

149. Dalí, "Psycho-atmospheric-Anamorphic Objects," 247.

150. See Martin Jay, "The Disenchantment of the Eye: Bataille and the Surrealists," in *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (University of California Press, 1993), 211–62. In "In Praise of Hands," Focillon evocatively describes hands as "eyeless and voiceless faces that nonetheless see and speak." Focillon, "In Praise of Hands," 157.

151. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (MIT Press, 1993), 149–50.

152. Dalí, "Psycho-atmospheric-Anamorphic Objects," 248.

153. Jean-Luc Nancy, "Painting in the Grotto," in *The Muses* (Stanford University Press, 1996), 69–79. In the context of this chapter, Nancy's "letting go" may be read as an instance where the hand *demanualizes itself*, abdicating its own technicity.

154. Georges Hugnet, "Petite rêverie du grand veneur," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 30. My translation. In *Minotaure*, another surrealist "praise of hands" comes closer to Focillon's more humanist vision by associating the hand with the heart as opposed to reason: Léon-Paul Fargue, "Pigeondre," *Minotaure*, no. 6 (1935): 29.

155. Hugnet, "Petite rêverie du grand veneur," 30. My translation.

156. The Zuni mask is identified as representing the deity or kachina "Anahoho," but interpretations of the name's meaning vary. The caption in *Minotaure* claims that the hand represents a "constellation" (supporting Hugnet's notion of nature's hands), but ethnographic accounts indicate that term "Anahoho" in Zuni mythology represents brother spirits, known for having their faces covered with handprints of either blood or soot. In the latter case, the brothers would have either fought a battle with the Navajos (Ruth Bunzel) or be grieving the destruction of their village (Frank Hamilton Cushing, Barton Wright). See Ruth Bunzel, "Zuñi Katchinas," in *Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Smithsonian Institution, 1930), 993–94; Barton Wright, *Kachinas of the Zuni* (Northland Press and Southwest Museum, 1985), 63–64.

3. *Minotaure* as the Ethnography of the Subject

1. For the inception of *Minotaure*, see Dawn Ades, "Minotaure," in *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 278–93; Albert Skira, "Introduction," in *Minotaure. Authorized reprint edition in four volumes*. ed. Albert Skira and E. Tériade (Arno, 1968); Valerie Holman, "The Artist in His Element:

Minotaure's Coverage of the Visual Arts,” in *Focus on Minotaure: The Animal-Headed Review* (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1987), 127–40. According to Masson in 1942, he and Bataille, who were then interested in “Greek and Iranian mythologies,” came up with the name, but Skira attributes it instead to Vitrac in his introduction to the 1968 reprint of *Minotaure* by Arno Press. For the surrealists’ fraught collaboration with the other *Minotaure* editors, see in particular Paul Éluard’s 1934 letter concerning the seventh issue in Robert D. Valette, *Éluard, livre d'identité* (Tchou Éditeur, 1967), 127.

2. Based on an exchange between the two in February 1933, Éluard was more reluctant than Breton to work with Bataille on *Minotaure*. But just one month later, Éluard became more receptive to the idea, noting in a letter to Valentine Hugo that the collaboration could happen if Bataille “would take the first step toward public reconciliation, [then] everything might be arranged. I hope it will be.” See André Breton and Paul Éluard, *Correspondance 1919–1938*, ed. Étienne-Alain Hubert (Gallimard, 2019), 281–86; José Pierre, “André Breton and/or ‘Minotaure,’” in *Focus on Minotaure: The Animal-Headed Review* (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1987), 97–98. I thank Michael Richardson for alerting me to the Breton–Éluard correspondence.

3. Pierre, “André Breton and/or ‘Minotaure,’” 100.

4. Ades, “*Minotaure*,” 280.

5. “Brassaï’s ‘involuntary sculptures’ received equal billing with art by mediums and the mentally ill, as well as African masks and with sculptures by such artists as Picasso and Giacometti photographed in their studios.” Katharine Conley, “Modernist Primitivism in 1933: Brassaï’s *Involuntary Sculpture* in *Minotaure*,” *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 1 (2003): 133.

6. Christopher Green, “Zervos, Picasso and Brassaï, Ethnographers in the Field: A Critical Collaboration,” in *Art Criticism Since 1900*, ed. Malcolm Gee (Manchester University Press, 1993), 126.

7. Effie Rentzou, “*Minotaure*: On Ethnography and Animals,” *Symposium* 67, no. 1 (2013): 30, 34. I thank Katharine Conley for calling my attention to this article.

8. For Dalí’s Freudian sources, see in Klem James, “Psychoanalysis,” in *Surrealism*, ed. Natalya Lusty (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 57.

9. Salvador Dalí, “The Rotting Donkey,” in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 223. Originally Dalí, “L’âne pourri,” *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 1 (1930): 9–12. To approximate the original in French, I have modified Finkelstein’s translation of Dalí’s title.

10. Dalí, “The Rotting Donkey,” 223.

11. Salvador Dalí, “The Sanitary Goat,” in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228. Originally in Dalí, *La Femme visible* (Éditions Surréalistes, 1930), 21–34. As made clear by Dalí’s mention of “our critical-paranoiac thought” (notre pensée paranoïaque-critique), the term “critique” is meant to be an adjective rather than a noun. Caillois later confirmed that, for the surrealists in the early 1930s, “the important thing here was not the word *paranoia*. . . . [I]t was the word *critical*. This was something quite new for the group, this idea that the simulation of delirious psychotic mechanism could occur together with their critical examination and present itself as a method.” Roger Caillois, “Testimony (Paul Éluard),” in *The Edge of Surrealism*, ed. Claudine Frank (Duke University Press, 2003), 61. Accordingly, I will use “critical paranoia” or “critical-paranoiac” instead of the more common “paranoia-criticism” or “paranoid criticism.”

12. André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1972 [1969]), 26.

13. Dalí, "The Rotting Donkey," 224.

14. Dalí, "The Rotting Donkey," 224–25.

15. Dalí, "The Rotting Donkey," 225.

16. Dalí, "The Rotting Donkey," 225.

17. Dalí, "The Rotting Donkey," 225. Translation modified to reflect Dalí's preference for the English term "Modern Style," no doubt for its exotic effect.

18. Hal Foster, "Outmoded Spaces," in *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT Press, 1993), 182. For the obsolescence of Art Nouveau in the interwar period, see Robert de la Sizeranne, "À l'Exposition des Arts Décoratifs: où en est le style moderne?," *Revue des Deux Mondes* 28, no. 2 (1925): 433–45. This commentary was published on the occasion of the International Exhibition of Decorative and Modern Industrial Arts in 1925, whose naively modernist rhetoric greatly irritated the surrealists. See Louis Aragon, "Chroniques: Au bout du quai, les Arts Décoratifs!," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 1 (1924): 26–27; Louis Aragon, "Fragments d'une conférence," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 4 (1925): 23–25.

19. Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 127.

20. José Pierre, "Breton et Dalí," in *Salvador Dalí: Retrospective 1920–1980*, ed. Daniel Abadie (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979), 140.

As evidence, Pierre cites Breton's and Éluard's enthusiastic appraisal of critical paranoia in the insert for Dalí's *La Femme visible*.

21. André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1972), 158.

22. Laurent Jenny, "From Breton to Dalí: The Adventures of Automatism. Translated by Thomas Trezise," *October* 51 (1989): 111.

23. Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (Dover, 1993 [1942]), 18. Dalí's almost certainly erroneous claim that Lacan initiated contact after reading "an article of mine in the review *Le Minotaure*" misled several scholars to date their encounter in 1933. More likely, the article in question was Dalí's "Rotten Donkey" (1930) in *LSASDLR*, of which Lacan was a reader. See Patrice Schmitt, "De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec Salvador Dalí," in *Salvador Dalí: Retrospective 1920–1980*, ed. Daniel Abadie (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1979), 262; Margaret Iversen, "Paranoia: Dalí Meets Lacan," in *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 53.

24. Jacques Lacan, J. Lévy-Valensi, and P. Migault, "Écrits 'inspirés': Schizophrénie (1931)," in *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité* (Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 365–82. In a letter from 1932, Breton cites this study in turn as evidence that poetry does not discriminate between the sane and insane, and that surrealist automatism can contribute to the scientific study of the human mind. See André Breton, "Letter to André Rolland de Renéville" (1932), in *Break of Day* (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 72–77.

25. Joë Bousquet, "Aimée," *14, rue du Dragon*, no. 1 (1933): 4. Aimée was arrested on April 18, 1931, for assaulting the actress Huguette Duflos at the Théâtre Saint-Georges, and was eventually transferred to the clinic of the asylum Sainte-Anne where she became Lacan's patient. See Jacques Lacan, *De la psychose paranoïaque*

dans ses rapports avec la personnalité, suivi de Premiers écrits sur la paranoïa (Éditions du Seuil, 1975); Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France, suivi de Jacques Lacan, esquisse d'une vie* (Fayard La Pochothèque, 1994/1993).

26. According to Crevel, Freud claims to have cured a married man of his same-sex attraction by a testicular transplant. René Crevel, "Notes en vue d'une psychodialectique," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (1933): 48–52. Crevel had previously called out the racism of a reviewer for the *Revue française de psychanalyse*, who had suggested that Black patients were devoid of an unconscious. See René Crevel, "The Patriotism of the Unconscious," in *The Surrealism Reader*, ed. Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 119. Originally Crevel, "Patriotisme de l'inconscient," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 4 (1931): 3–6. Harris has rightly situated the surrealists' reception of Lacan in relation to interwar intellectuals' interest in reconciling Marxism and psychoanalysis: Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche*, 121.

27. Jacques Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception of Paranoiac Forms of Experience. Translated by Jon Anderson," *Critical Texts* 5, no. 3 (1988): 6. Originally Lacan, "Le problème du style et la conception psychiatrique des formes paranoïaques de l'expérience," *Minotaure*, no. 1 (1933): 68–69.

28. Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception," 6.

29. Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception," 4, 6.

30. Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception," 6.

31. Jenny, "From Breton to Dalí," 110.

32. Schmitt claims that Lacan's essay in *Minotaure* "is about style, and this style is that of Dalí." Schmitt, "De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec Salvador Dalí," 265.

33. Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception," 5. My emphasis.

34. Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception," 5.

35. Lacan, "The Problem of Style and Psychiatric Conception," 6.

36. Lacan shared his aversion to being "attributed a surrealism that is far from my taste" in *Annuaire de l'École de la Cause Freudienne* in 1980. Cited by Jean-Claude Maleval, "De la contribution laterale: Lacan et le surréalisme," in *Folie et psychanalyse dans l'expérience surréaliste*, ed. Fabienne Hulak (Z'Éditions, 1992), 204. See also Alain Grosrichard, "Dr. Lacan, 'Minotaure,' Surrealists: Encounters," in *Focus on Minotaure: The Animal-Headed Review*, ed. Claude Lapaire (Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, 1987), 159–73. For an example of a surrealist reading of Lacan's theory of images, see Margaret Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

37. Salvador Dalí, "New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 260. Originally Dalí, "Interprétation paranoïaque-critique de l'image obsédante 'L'Angélus' de Millet," *Minotaure*, no. 1 (1933): 65–66. Finkelstein's translation uses the subtitle of the original.

38. See Dalí, "Apparitions aérodynamiques des 'Êtres-Objets,'" *Minotaure*, no. 6 (1935): 32–34. Dawn Ades has described these images as "photographs taken of [Dalí] wearing a kind of hood extending down to his waist and completely covering his face, on which are reproductions of two paintings by Millet including the

Angelus.” Dawn Ades, *Dalí and Surrealism* (Thames & Hudson, 1982), 163. The white pantaloons worn by the figure is possibly a parody of Napoleon, whose heavily padded clothing Dalí references in an earlier *Minotaure* article: “I wish especially to draw attention to Napoleon’s good-to-eat pants, that render palpable and suave the superfine, tender and confused volumes that you know as well as I do, and this due to the following factors: ‘dismountable’ abdomen and thighs, that are separated, isolated, atmospheric and spectral, their superfine whiteness framed in black; and then, the phantomlike posture of the silhouette of the rest of the costume (including the hat) that is also well known to all.” Dalí, “The New Colors of Spectral Sex-Appeal,” 207. Originally Dalí, “Les nouvelles couleurs du sex appeal spectral,” *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 20–22.

39. Jenny, “From Breton to Dalí,” 114.

40. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, “Toward a New Definition of Automatism: *L’Immaculée Conception*,” *Dada/Surrealism*, no. 17 (1988): 74; Jenny, “From Breton to Dalí,” 106n3.

41. André Breton, “The Automatic Message,” in *Break of Day*, ed. Mark Polizzotti and Mary Ann Caws (University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 138. Originally Breton, “Le message automatique,” *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (1933): 55–65.

42. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 137.

43. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 132. Breton’s italics.

44. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 137.

45. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 132. Translation slightly modified. “Motor-verbal” in English more accurately reflects the sequence of the two terms.

46. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 136–37.

47. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 140. In the same essay, Breton goes as far as suggesting that surrealism’s “adversaries” are those who “value only the authenticity of the automatic product” instead of “wish[ing] to see it reconciled with something other than itself” (130). For the surrealists’ fascination with simulation and relative indifference to the question of authenticity, see David Lomas and Jeremy Stubbs, *Simulating the Marvelous: Psychology–Surrealism–Postmodernism* (Manchester University Press, 2013).

48. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 140–41. Breton’s italics.

49. Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, 192. Harris is correct about Breton’s preference in the case of surrealist automatism, but in the case of mediumistic productions, Breton takes the contrary position, stating that “the various samples of mediumistic automatic writing occasionally offered to our curious eyes are hardly as interesting as the drawings that derive from the same source.” Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 135.

50. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 141. Breton had polemicized against descriptive realist novels in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*: “There is nothing to which their vacuity can be compared: they are nothing but so many superimposed images taken from some stock catalogue, which the author utilizes more and more whenever he chooses.” Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 7.

51. Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 2002), 4.

52. Breton, “The Automatic Message,” 142–43. The ethnologist and archaeologist Georges-Henri Luquet also discussed this phenomenon as contributing to the emergence of figurative art (see chapter 2).

53. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 127.

54. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 127.

55. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 135. Breton is alluding to the "octopus, with eyes of silk" that Lautréamont evoked in his hymn to the ocean in *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868). See the editor's notes in André Breton, "Le message automatique," in *Oeuvres complètes, II*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard Pléiade, 1992), 1539.

56. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 135.

57. Though Breton did not visit Cheval's Ideal Palace before 1931, the structure was likely known to the surrealists before. The Belgian journal *Variétés* published several images of this monument in 1929, for instance in the special issue, *Le Sur-réalisme en 1929*. A photograph of Breton seated inside the Palace appeared in *Vases communicants* (1932).

58. Victorien Sardou, "La Maison de Mozart dans Jupiter," *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 54. My translation.

59. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 135.

60. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 135. My italics. Defined by the art historian Erwin Panofsky as "the emergence of a form A, morphologically analogous to, or even identical with, a form B, yet entirely unrelated to it from a genetic point," the phenomenon of pseudomorphosis has been recently taken up by Yve-Alain Bois in relation to twentieth-century abstract art. Yve-Alain Bois, "On the Uses and Abuses of Look-Alikes," *October* 154 (2015): 127-49.

61. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 134.

62. Breton, "The Automatic Message," 134. Breton here quotes a writer from the April 1910 issue of the *Occult Review*. For more discussion of Breton's idealist conception of habit as the "spirit" of nature, see my essay, Joyce S. Cheng, "Picasso's Habits: André Breton on Art, Nature and Reflexivity," in *Surrealism*, ed. Natalya Lusty (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

63. Salvador Dalí, "Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 195-96. Originally Dalí, "De la beauté terrifiante et comestible, de l'architecture Modern' Style," *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 69-76. My modification of the translated title in the body text.

64. Salvador Dalí, "The Phenomenon of Ecstasy," in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 201. Originally Dalí, "Le phénomène de l'extase," *Minotaure*, no. 3-4 (1933): 76-77. Translation slightly modified.

65. Dalí, "Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture," 198.

66. Louis Aragon and André Breton, "The Quinquagenary of Hysteria (1878-1928)," in *Surrealism*, ed. Patrick Waldberg (Thames & Hudson, 1997 [1965]), 62. Originally Aragon and Breton, "Le cinquantenaire de l'hystérie," *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 11 (1928): 20-22. For a reading of Dalí's *Phenomenon* in terms of hysteria, see Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (MIT Press, 1993); David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (Yale University Press, 2000).

67. Dalí, "Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture," 198.

68. Salvador Dalí, "The Phenomenon of Ecstasy," in *The Collected Writings*,

ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 201; Dalí, “The Rotting Donkey,” 225.

69. Dalí, “The Phenomenon of Ecstasy,” 201.

70. Donning a necklace made of a zoetrope, Dalí’s polychrome sculpture *Bust of Retrospective Woman* (1930) was shown in the same exhibition as the toppling chair in the *Phenomenon* photomontage, making it likely that Dalí had this technology in mind when orchestrating the effect of the ears.

71. Michel Poivert, “‘Le phénomène de l’extase’ ou le portrait du surréalisme même,” *Études photographiques*, no. 2 (1997): 100–104.

72. Poivert, “‘Le phénomène de l’extase,’” 99. Though attributed to Dalí, the photomontage benefitted from Brassai’s photography and final preparation by the *Minotaure* editorial team. The head of the nymph is an ornament on a vase belonging to Éluard, who mentioned having Brassai redo the photograph of “ma tête modern’s style” in a letter from September 1933. Paul Éluard, *Lettres à Gala, 1924–1948*, ed. Pierre Dreyfus (Éditions Gallimard, 1984), 223. The same object reappears in the same issue of *Minotaure* with the caption “Ecstasy of sculpture,” also photographed by Brassai.

73. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (MIT Press, 1993), 156–57. Krauss here reads Dalí’s photomontage through the lens of Bataille’s *Documents* entry, “Mouth,” which serves to steer the work toward a depsychologized interpretation as representing “bodies assaulted from without” rather than “bodies seized from within” by “psychic states.” See Krauss, “Corpus Delicti,” *October* 33 (1985): 45; Georges Bataille, “Mouth,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 59–60.

74. Simon Baker, “The Thinking Man and the femme sans tête: Collective Perception and Self-Representation,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 38 (2000): 206.

75. See Max Ernst, *The Hundred Headless Woman = La Femme 100 Têtes* (G. Braziller, 1981). My reading thus differs from that of Baker, who, as indicated by the title of his article, sees the women in the photomontage as headless/*sans tête*. Baker, “The Thinking Man and the femme sans tête,” 186–210.

76. The photomontage utilizes several images from erotic postcards in Dalí’s and Gala’s collection, which had to be rephotographed and resized. See Éluard, *Lettres à Gala, 1924–1948*, 223. The ménage à trois in the lower left of the photomontage is from an anonymous print circa 1900, reproduced in Quentin Bajac and Clément Chéroux, eds., *La Subversion des images: Surréalisme, photographie, film* (Centre Georges Pompidou, 2009), 298.

77. Dalí, “Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture,” 193. Both emphases are mine.

78. Poivert, “‘Le phénomène de l’extase,’” 107. *La Nature* was a regular source of materials for Ernst; it also famously informed the layout of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which the surrealists did not wish to appear overly aesthetic. See Dawn Ades, “La Révolution surréaliste,” in *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 188–206; Ian Walker, “La Révolution surréaliste and the Urban Spectacle,” in *City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris* (Manchester University Press, 2002), 68–87. For Dalí’s equation of Art Nouveau buildings with bodies, see Salvador Dalí, *The Cuckolds of Antiquated Modern Art*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (Dover, 1996 [1957]), 29.

79. Henri Coupin, “Notre oreille,” *La Nature*, no. 1470 (1901): 139. My translation.

80. Coupin, “Notre oreille,” 138. My translation.

81. Georges Bataille, “Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,” in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota, 1985), 61–72.

82. See Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Abigail Susik, *Surrealist Sabotage and the War on Work* (Manchester University Press, 2021).

83. Effie Rentzou, “Cosmopolitan Peasants: The Foreignness of the Avant-Garde,” in *Concepts of the World: The French Avant-Garde and the Idea of the International, 1910–1940* (Northwestern University Press, 2022), 193.

84. Tristan Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” in *The Surrealists Look at Art*, ed. Pontus Hulten (Lapis, 1990), 203. Originally Tzara, “D’un certain automatisme du goût,” *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (1933): 81–84.

85. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 204.

86. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 205–6. Tzara’s emphasis. The stereotype of women as mindless consumers had been established by nineteenth-century novels like Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Émile Zola’s *Au bonheur des dames* (1883), and exacerbated by Gustave Le Bon’s psychological consideration of the crowd as effeminate. For a critique of this tradition for its masculinist bias, see the important essay by Andreas Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman,” in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. Tania Modleski (Indiana University Press, 1986), 188–207.

87. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 207–8.

88. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 207.

89. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 208. My emphasis.

90. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 206.

91. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 205.

92. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 207.

93. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 206.

94. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 207.

95. Tzara, “Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,” 206–8.

96. Sigmund Freud, “The Interpretation of Dreams II,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works. Volume V (1900–1901)*, ed. James Strachey (Hogarth, 1953), 360–62. For a discussion of the Freudian reading and the significance of hats for surrealism generally, see my short essay, Joyce Cheng, “Hats,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Surrealism*, ed. Michael Richardson, Dawn Ades, Krzysztof Fijalkowski, Steven Harris, and Georges Sebbag (Bloomsbury, 2019), 420–22.

97. Probably out of an interest to support his thesis about women as an “anonymous majority” exercising an “automatism of taste,” Tzara fails to name Schiaparelli and her designs in his essay. For identification of the three hat designs featured in his *Minotaure* article, see Dilys E. Blum, *Shocking! The Art and Fashion of Elsa Schiaparelli* (Philadelphia Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2003), 127.

98. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 162.

99. Joan Riviere, “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (Methuen, 1986), 35–44.

100. Blum, *Shocking!*, 55. According to Blum, the tube-form soft hat, worn by the actress Ina Claire, was subsequently copied by an American manufacturer and marketed as “Mad Cap.”

101. René Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” in *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas*, ed. Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 41. Originally Crevel, “La grande mannequin cherche et trouve sa peau,” *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 18–19. My slight modification of the translated title.

102. George J. Cowan and Will H. Bates, *Koester School Book of Drapes: A Complete Textbook and Course of Instruction in Merchandise Draping* (The Dry Goods Reporter, 1913). Werner Spies has shown how Ernst mined this book for materials for his collages, and Alfred Barr Jr. included it as an example of parasurrealist “commercial and journalistic art” in his 1936 exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. See Werner Spies, *Max Ernst: Collages*, trans. John William Gabriel (Harry N. Abrams, 1988); Alfred H. Barr, ed. *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

103. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 42.

104. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 41, 45.

105. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 41.

106. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 42.

107. François Buot, *René Crevel: Biographie* (Bernard Grasset, 1991), 377.

108. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 42.

109. See my discussion of Kristeva’s text in chapter 1.

110. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 42.

111. Crevel was closely associated with Dalí in the period when these photographs were taken. He traveled with the artist to Barcelona to admire Gaudí’s “Modern Style” architecture and was possibly the first to receive the notion of “critical paranoia.” See Buot, *René Crevel: Biographie*, 301–5.

112. Dalí refers to the “phantom” of a nursemaid as “keep[ing] still, while in the landscape in which it gets wet, between the Böcklinian cypresses and the clouds of a Böcklinian storm.” Salvador Dalí, “The New Colors of Spectral Sex-Appeal,” in *The Collected Writings*, ed. Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 204.

113. Dalí, “The New Colors of Spectral Sex-Appeal,” 205.

114. Man Ray, “Dances-Horizons,” in *Writings on Art*, ed. Jennifer Mundy (Getty Research Institute, 2016), 110. Originally Man Ray, “Danses-horizons,” *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 27–29. For Man Ray’s orchestration of the dances in collaboration with the dancers, see Analisa Leppanen, “‘I’d Like to Dance Like a Madman’: Flamenco and Surrealism,” *Art Journal* 78, no. 3 (2019): 32–33.

115. Sigmund Freud, “On Narcissism (1914),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Volume XIV*, ed. James Strachey (Hogarth, 1957), 100, 94. Lacan would have been familiar with Freud’s theory of narcissism, addressed also in a 1922 paper that Lacan translated in 1932: Sigmund Freud, “Some Neurotic Mechanisms in Jealousy, Paranoia and Homosexuality (1922),” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Volume XVIII*, ed. James Strachey (1955), 232. Originally published as “De quelques mécanismes névrotiques dans la jalousie, la paranoïa et l’homosexualité. Traduit de l’allemand par Jacques Lacan,” *Revue française de psychanalyse* 3 (1932): 221–32.

116. Crevel, “The Great Mannequin Seeks and Finds Her Skin,” 45.

117. Paul Éluard and Benjamin Péret, "Revue de la Presse," *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 5 (1933): 27–28. My translation.

118. See the detailed discussion of the Papin case and its significance for surrealism in Jonathan P. Eburne, *Surrealism and the Art of Crime* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 176–93.

119. Jacques Lacan, "Motives of Paranoiac Crime: The Crime of the Papin Sisters," *Critical Texts* 5, no. 3 (1988): 11. Originally Lacan, "Motifs du crime paranoïaque: le crime des soeurs Papin," *Minotaure*, no. 3–4 (1933): 25–28.

120. Lacan, "Motives of Paranoiac Crime," 10, 11. Translation modified. Lacan's observation of latent homosexuality is based on the older sister Christine's declarations, such as "I really think that in another life I must have been my sister's husband," and not on any evidence of sexual relationship between the sisters.

121. Lacan, "Motives of Paranoiac Crime," 11. Translation modified.

122. *Minotaure* subsequently published Bellmer's articulated doll from 1934 in issue no. 6: Hans Bellmer, "Poupée. Variations sur le montage d'une mineure articulée," *Minotaure*, no. 6 (1935): 30–31. For more on Bellmer's encounter with surrealism, see Peter Webb and Robert Short, *Hans Bellmer* (Quartet Books, 1985); Michael Semff and Anthony Spira, eds., *Hans Bellmer* (Centre Pompidou, Hatje Cantz and Whitechapel, 2006).

123. Jean-Charles Gateau considers this photograph an example of the naturalist aesthetic of the Third Reich, even if Bellmer/Éluard most likely saw in it "less the glorification of the outdoors than the mystery of metamorphosis." Robert Short similarly suggests that "For Bellmer and for Éluard, whose own daughter, Cécile, had just turned seventeen, its [the photograph's] appeal lay in its evocation of the mystery of the metamorphosis of child into woman." Jean-Charles Gateau, *Paul Éluard et la peinture surréaliste (1910–1939)* (Librairie Droz S. A., 1982), 316; Webb and Short, *Hans Bellmer*, 55. My translation of Gateau's text as well as Éluard's "Appliquée."

124. Paul Éluard, "Appliquée," *Minotaure*, no. 7 (1935): 15.

125. Éluard, "Appliquée," 16.

126. Éluard, "Appliquée," 16.

127. Likely provided by Bellmer, this image of Pritzel's dolls had appeared in an article, "Neue Wachspuppen von Lotte Pritzel," from an issue of *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* edited by Hofrat Alexander Koch, October 1913–March 1914.

128. Éluard, "Appliquée," 16.

129. Roger Caillois, "The Praying Mantis: From Biology to Psychoanalysis," in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (Duke University Press, 2003), 80–81. Originally Caillois, "La mante religieuse: De la biologie à la psychanalyse," *Minotaure*, no. 5 (1934): 23–26. Caillois repeatedly uses the adjective "lyrical" in this text, and "lyrical objectivity" occurs at least twice.

130. Caillois, "The Praying Mantis," 76.

131. Caillois, "The Praying Mantis," 78–79. The work cited is Binet's *Vie de la mante religieuse* (1931).

132. Caillois, "The Praying Mantis," 79.

133. For Caillois's statements concerning his difference from surrealism on the level of method, see in particular Roger Caillois, "Letter to André Breton," in *The Edge of Surrealism*, ed. Claudine Frank (Duke University Press, 2003), 84–86; Caillois, "Testimony (Paul Éluard)," 60–65. Apart from his preference for the

method of the sciences over that of poetry, Caillois also disapproved of what he perceived as the surrealists' "tentative" practice of automatism. On Caillois's fraught indebtedness to surrealism, see the instructive introduction by Henri Béhar, "Roger Caillois, 'boussole mentale' du surréalisme," in *Roger Caillois: la pensée aventurée*, ed. Laurent Jenny (Belin, 1992), 15–31.

134. Caillois, "The Praying Mantis," 81.

135. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia. Translated by John Shepley," *October*, no. 31 (1984): 23. Caillois's emphasis; originally Caillois, "Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire," *Minotaure*, no. 7 (1935): 4–10.

136. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 24–25.

137. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 23.

138. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 25. This and all following emphases are Caillois's.

139. Paul Éluard, "Un visage dans l'herbe," *Minotaure*, no. 1 (1933): 1. My translation in English.

140. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 27. The exclusion of animal-to-animal mimicry is made in footnote 39.

141. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 30.

142. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 31. Caillois here contests Dalí's theory as presented in *La Femme visible*, specifically the essay "Sanitary Goat."

143. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 30.

144. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 30. Caillois was likely alluding to Janet's *Les obsessions et la psychasthénie* (1903). The works by Minkowski cited in "Mimicry" are Eugène Minkowski, "Le problème du temps en psychopathologie," *Recherches philosophiques* II (1932–33): 231–56; and Minkowski, "Le temps vécu," *Études phénoménologiques et psychopathologiques* (1933): 382–98. Like the latter, Caillois was a contributor to *Recherches philosophiques* (1933–1936), a review of philosophy, psychology, and anthropology with a phenomenological inflection.

145. See the chapter "Artist-Sorcerers: Mimicry, Magic and Hysteria" in Lomas and Stubbs, *Simulating the Marvelous*, 118–49.

146. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, 155. This affinity is affirmed by Caillois's alliance with Bataille after breaking with the surrealists.

147. Denis Hollier and William Rodarmor, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," *October* 31, no. Winter (1984): 11. Hollier's emphasis.

148. Hollier and Rodarmor, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," 5.

149. Hollier and Rodarmor, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," 11.

150. Roger Caillois, "Winter Wind," in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, ed. Denis Hollier (University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 37–38. Originally given as a talk at the Grand Véfour café at the Palais-Royal, "Winter Wind" appeared in *La Nouvelle Revue française* in July 1938 with "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" by Bataille and "The Sacred in Everyday Life" by Leiris, which served as quasi-manifestoes for the College.

151. Caillois, "Winter Wind," 42.

152. Hollier and Rodarmor, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," 9–10.

153. Roger Caillois, "Jeux et techniques," *La Nouvelle Revue française* 49, no. 288 (1937): 513–14. My translation.

154. For Caillois's ambivalence about his youthful abandonment of surrealism in

favor of the College of Sociology, see Caillois, "Argument," in *Approches de l'imaginaire* (Gallimard, 1974), 11–13.

155. Jacques Lacan, "God and the Jouissance of the Woman," in *Feminine Sexuality*, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (Pantheon Books, 1982), 145, 147.

156. Hollier and Rodarmor, "Mimesis and Castration 1937," 4. Of the interwar criticisms cited by Hollier, particularly noteworthy is that of Walter Benjamin, a peripheral participant in the College on good terms with Bataille, who was nevertheless shocked by Caillois's "pathological cruelty" and intellectual affirmation of "fascist praxis." See Benjamin's letters to Max Horkheimer on the College in Marcus Coelen, Muriel Pic, and Theodor Adorno, "Walter Benjamin et le Collège de sociologie," *Critique* 1, no. 788–89 (2013): 97–109. For Caillois's proximity to the intellectual ideas of the far right, see also Jean-François Fourny, "Roger Caillois au Collège de Sociologie: la politique et ses masques," *The French Review* 58, no. 4 (1985): 533–39.

157. Georges Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 138.

158. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 142.

159. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 142.

160. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 141.

161. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 150.

162. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 150–51.

163. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 153.

164. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 143. Bataille's italics.

165. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 157.

166. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 158.

167. Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," 154–55.

168. Jean-François Revel, *Minotaure* (Galerie d'Art L'Oeil, 1962). The exhibition at the Galerie d'Art L'Oeil showed mainly surrealist contributions, and is preceded by one organized by Skira and Tériade in 1934 to promote their recently founded review. Revel's comment challenges the widespread perception of an apolitical *Minotaure*, a "sumptuous publication, printed in a limited edition inaccessible to proletarian pocketbooks" and "addressed only to the despised bourgeoisie" as Brassai would put it somewhat disingenuously. Brassai, *Conversations with Picasso*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11.

169. Nicolas Calas, "Love of Revolution in Our Time," in *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas*, ed. Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 207. Originally Calas, "L'amour de la révolution à nos jours," *Minotaure*, no. 11 (1938): 52–53. Calas most likely meant "neurotic repression" of homosexual love rather than "neurotic sublimation." According to Freud, sublimation cures neurosis by channeling rather than repressing libido. Calas acknowledges the repressive nature of fascist homoeroticism when pointing out that fascist countries severely punish "all homosexual love not directed towards the leader." Calas, "Love of Revolution in Our Time," 207. For a later critique of fascist homoeroticism, see Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Under the Sign of Saturn: Essays* (Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980 [1972]), 71–105.

170. Calas, "Love of Revolution in Our Time," 207. Calas may be alluding here to his native Greece, which had just restored its monarchy in 1935 by a popular referendum with questionable legitimacy.

171. The letters Calas and Breton exchanged in 1942 on this topic can be found in Dimitri Kravvaris, André Breton, and Nicolas Calas, "Nicolas Calas–André Breton: Lettres sur Hitler et l'impuissance de la littérature," *Mélusine* 31 (2011): 231–52.

172. Edward James, "Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine," *Minotaure*, no. 9 (1936): 56.

173. James, "Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine," 57.

174. James, "Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine," 57.

175. James, "Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine," 58.

176. James, "Le chapeau du peuple et les chapeaux de la reine," 57.

177. Rosalind Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," in *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism*, ed. Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston (Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985), 78; Pierre Mabille, "Mirrors," in *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas*, ed. Dawn Ades, Michael Richardson, and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 52. Originally Mabille, "Miroirs. Photographies de Raoul Ubac," *Minotaure*, no. 11 (1938): 14–18, 66. Two years earlier, Lacan had given a paper for the fourteenth International Congress of Psychoanalysis in August 1936, entitled "The Looking-Glass Phase." Although the script of Lacan's paper did not survive, the title, listed on page 78 of the *IJP* (volume 18, no. 1, 1937), indicates its relation to the famous essay Lacan eventually published in 1949.

178. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience (1949)," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (W. W. Norton, 2006), 77 [95–96].

179. Mabille, "Mirrors," 56.

180. Mabille, "Mirrors," 56. See Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person; the Notion of Self," in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1–25.

181. Iversen opposes the "anamorphic" paradigm of images to a "mirror model" of art in her study of Lacan's surrealism-informed theory of images. Iversen, *Beyond Pleasure: Freud, Lacan, Barthes*. For details of Ubac's procedures, see Christian Bouqueret, *Raoul Ubac: Photographie* (Éditions Léo Scheer, 2000).

182. Mabille, "Mirrors," 59.

4. The Surrealists as Ethnographers

1. Making "surrealist ethnography" the companion term to the "ethnographic surrealism" of Bataille's *Documents*, Clifford stresses that both are "utopian constructs" and that "there are no pure examples" of the former "except perhaps Leiris's *L'Afrique fantôme*." James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 146–47.

2. Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," 147. Although Leiris refused to consider his autobiographical work (including but not limited to *Phantom Africa*) in terms of an "ethnography of the self," the latter has constituted an important interpretative lens for his literary oeuvre. See Michel Leiris, Jean Jamin, and Sally Price, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," *Current Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (1988): 172; Philippe Lejeune, "Michel Leiris, autobiographie et poésie," in *Le Pacte*

autobiographique (Éditions du Seuil, 1975), 245–307; Michel Beaujour, “Leiris: Poétique et ethnopoétique,” *MLN*, no. 105 (1990): 646–55; Alexander Riley, “Ethnography of the Ek-Static Experience: *Poésie Auto-Socioanalytique* in the Work of Michel Leiris,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44, no. 3 (2014): 362–86.

3. Michel Leiris, “*Documents*, Minotaure et Cie: Propos recueillis par Olivier Corpet,” *Magazine Littéraire*, no. 302 (1992): 39. My translation. On the distinction between *Phantom Africa* and Leiris’s academic ethnography, see also Michel Leiris, Madeleine Gobeil, and Carl R. Lovitt, “Interview with Michel Leiris,” *SubStance* 4, no. 11–12 (1975): 44–60; Leiris, Jamin, and Price, “A Conversation with Michel Leiris,” 157–74. For readers of Leiris who take this distinction for granted, see Édouard Glissant, “Michel Leiris ethnographe,” *Lettres nouvelles* 4, no. 43 (1956): 609–21; Jean Jamin, “L’ethnographie, mode d’emploi,” in *Le Mal et la Douleur*, ed. Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr (Musée d’Ethnographie, 1986), 45–79.

4. Péret often uses *macumba* and *candomblé* interchangeably, although some of his sources see the former as derivative from the latter. I will use *candomblé* in accordance with contemporary conventions.

5. Emerson Giumbelli, “Macumba surrealista: observações de Benjamin Péret em terreiros cariocas nos anos 1930,” *Estudos Históricos* 28, no. 55 (2015): 94; Arthur Valle, “‘Exu, c’est pour vous’: Benjamin Péret visita locais de culto afro-brasileiros em 1930,” *MODOS: Revista de História da Arte* 6, no. 1 (2022): 347.

6. For anthropological scholarship on *zar* that cites Leiris’s work, see Simon D. Messing, “Group Therapy and Social Status in the Zar Cult of Ethiopia,” *American Anthropologist* 60, no. 6 (1958): 1120–26; Allan Young, “Why Amhara Get *kureynya*: Sickness and Possession in an Ethiopian Zar Cult,” *American Ethnologist* 2, no. 3 (1975): 567–84; I. M. Lewis, “Introduction: *Zar* in Context: The Past, the Present and Future of an African Healing Cult,” in *Women’s Medicine: The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond*, ed. I. M. Lewis, Ahmed Al-Safi, and Sayyid Hurreiz (Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 1991), 1–16.

7. Paul Christopher Johnson, “Scholars Possessed! On Writing Africana Religions with the Left Hand,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 4, no. 2 (2016): 156. For Johnson, Leiris is one among many ethnologists who practiced both forms of ethnographic writing.

8. Leiris, Jamin, and Price, “A Conversation with Michel Leiris,” 161. For the works mentioned by Leiris, see André Breton, “Carnet du voyage chez les indiens Hopi (1945),” in *Oeuvres complètes, III*, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Philippe Bernier, Marie-Claire Dumas, Étienne-Alain Hubert, and José Pierre (Gallimard Pléiade, 1999), 183–209; Benjamin Péret, ed. *Anthologie des mythes, légendes et contes populaires d’Amérique* (Éditions Albin Michel, 1960). An English translation of Breton’s notebook can be found in the special issue of *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* as well as the translator’s essay, Katharine Conley, “From the Studio to the Field: André Breton’s ‘Hopi Notebook,’” *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 14, no. 2 (2023): 160–83.

9. Michael Löwy, “La Commune des Palmares: Benjamin Péret et la révolte des esclaves du Brésil colonial,” *Tumulte*, no. 27 (2006): 60. For Mabilie’s work in Haiti, see J. Michael Dash, “*Le Je de l’autre*: Surrealist Ethnographers and the Francophone Caribbean,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 1, France’s Colonies and the Second World War (2007): 84–95. For Breton’s meeting with Mabilie in Haiti, see

"Pont-Levis," in André Breton, "Perspective cavalière," in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 4, ed. Marguerite Bonnet, Étienne-Alain Hubert, Philippe Bernier, and Marie-Claire Dumas (Gallimard, 2008), 1000–1009.

10. In the *Diário de São Paulo*, de Andrade and Oswald Costa published this text of endorsement under the Amerindian-influenced pseudonym "Cunham-bebinho," declaring, "After Surrealism, only Anthropophagy." See Oswald de Andrade, "Péret," *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 28, no. 51 (1995): 69.

11. For Péret's activities in Brazil, see M. Elizabeth Ginway, "Surrealist Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism," *Hispania* 75, no. 3 (1992): 543–53; Rafael Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White: Art and Image, Race and Identity in Brazil, 1890–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 195–203.

12. Benjamin Péret, "Candomblé et Makumba (1930)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 73. All subsequent translations of Péret's *candomblé* texts are mine.

13. Cardoso, *Modernity in Black and White*, 195–203.

14. Benjamin Péret, "Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens (1931)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 97.

15. Péret, "Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens (1931)," 100, 102.

16. Benjamin Péret, "La mythologie 'Nagô,'" in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 91.

17. Péret, "Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens (1931)," 102.

18. Despite his awareness of the diversity of *candomblé* (Nobrega documented no less than twelve orders in Rio alone), Péret's ethnography has been criticized for reducing *candomblé* to the practices of Nagô and Angola orders. See Valle, "'Exu, c'est pour vous,'" 340–76.

19. Péret, "Candomblé et Makumba (1930)," 74.

20. Benjamin Péret, "Un dîner de saints (1930)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 80.

21. Benjamin Péret, "Une fête à Xangô dans 'la loi d'Angola' (1930)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 85–86.

22. Péret, "Une fête à Xangô dans 'la loi d'Angola' (1930)," 86.

23. Péret, "Un dîner de saints (1930)," 80.

24. Benjamin Péret, "'Mané Kurù', 'Pereké', Allan Kardec et Cie (1930)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 87.

25. The book mentioned by Péret is Cesar's *Misticismo e Loucura: Contribuição para o estudo das loucuras religiosas no Brasil* (1939). One of several early twentieth-century Brazilian medical doctors concerned with the psychopathology of *candomblé* (another example is the overtly racist Rodrigues), Cesar was also interested in the relationship between art and madness. For his activities as collector and promoter of the art of psychiatric patients, see Kaira Marie Cabañas, *Learning from Madness: Brazilian Modernism and Global Contemporary Art* (University of Chicago Press, 2018). For the intersection between medicine and ethnography of *candomblé*, see Roger Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia (rite Nagô)* (Mouton & Co, 1958); Roger Bastide and Osório Cesar, "Pintura, loucura e cultura," *Arquivos do Departamento de Assistência a Psicopatas do Estado de São Paulo* 22 (1956): 51–70.

26. Benjamin Péret, "'Ogum' devant le tribunal suprême (1930)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Louis Bédouin (Librairie José Corti, 1992), 94.

27. Péret, "Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens (1931)," 105–6.
28. Péret, "Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens (1931)," 106.
29. Péret, "Les origines des croyances des Noirs brésiliens (1931)," 107.
30. See Ginway, "Surrealist Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism," 550; Giumbelli, "Macumba surrealista," 99–100.
31. Valle, "'Exu, c'est pour vous,'" 363–64.
32. See Leiris's statement announcing his ethnographic turn in Michel Leiris, "L'oeil de l'ethnographe (À propos de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti)," *Documents: Archéologie, beaux-arts, ethnographie, variétés* 2, no. 7 (1930): 405–14.
33. According to Jean Jamin, Leiris in the mid-1990s remembers being reprimanded by the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, who had become a surrealist while Leiris was traveling in Africa, "not for becoming a dissident [surrealist] but for having participated in this 'colonialist' mission." Jamin, "L'ethnographie, mode d'emploi," 55n9. My translation.
34. Brent Hayes Edwards, "Introduction to the English Translation," in *Michel Leiris, Phantom Africa* (Seagull Books, 2017), 1–52. For Griaule's negative reactions to *Phantom Africa*, published without his agreement, see Leiris, Jamin, and Price, "A Conversation with Michel Leiris," 171.
35. For Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Phantom Africa* is the first of "aberrant" ethnography that led eventually to anthropology's self-questioning. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (University of California Press, 1986), 13.
36. Among the readers of Leiris's literary work, Albers is exceptional for giving the *zar* studies considerable attention. See Irene Albers, "Mimesis and Alterity: Michel Leiris's Ethnography and Poetics of Spirit Possession," *French Studies* 57, no. 3 (2008): 271–89; Albers, "Schreiben als Besessenheitskult: Leiris und der äthiopische *zar*," in *Der diskrete Charme der Anthropologie* (Konstanz University Press, 2018), 399–451.
37. See Michel Leiris, "Le culte des zârs à Gondar (Éthiopie septentrionale)," *Aethiopica: revue philologique* 2, no. 3–4 (1934): 96–103, 125–36; Leiris, "Un rite médico-magique éthiopien: Le jet du *danqârâ*," *Aethiopica: revue philologique* 3, no. 2 (1935): 61–74; Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord," *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* 35, no. 1–2 (1938): 107–25. The following citations refer to reprinted versions.
38. This same passage appears in Michel Leiris, "Le culte des zârs à Gondar (Éthiopie septentrionale)," in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti*, ed. Éric Jolly and Marianne Lemaire (Éditions les Cahiers, 2015), 899–900; Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," in *Miroir de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean Jamin (Gallimard, 1996), 942; Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, in *Miroir de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean Jamin (Gallimard, 1996), 950.
39. See Michel Leiris, "Masques dogon," *Minotaure*, no. 2 (1933): 45–51.
40. Marcel Griaule, *Masques dogons* (Institut d'Ethnologie and Musée de l'Homme, 1983 [1938]), 59–61.
41. Two pieces of anthropological evidence can support this hypothesis. First, it has been noted that, in traditional African societies, "woodcarvers are without exception men," to the point that "even the masks of the Sande women's association in Sierra Leone are the work of male artists." Maria Kecskési and László Vajda, "I Am Not Myself," in *African Masks from the Barbier-Mueller Collection*,

ed. Iris Hahner-Herzog, Maria Kecskési, and László Vajda (Prestel, 2004), 20. Women's restricted access to masks in traditional Africa is therefore likely a by-product of the sexual division of labor. Second, Leiris reports that, among the Dogons, a woman who comes into contact with a mask in violation of the taboo is believed to become susceptible to "being possessed," which points to a popular conception of possession as a kind of unofficial masquerade. Leiris, "Masques dogon," 51.

42. Marcel Griaule, "Les génies 'Zar' en Abyssinie," in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti*, ed. Éric Jolly and Marianne Lemaire (Éditions les Cahiers, 2015), 846. My translation, and also for all texts on *zar* by Leiris.

43. Michel Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, trans. Brent Hayes Edwards (Seagull Books, 2017), 509.

44. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 944.

45. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 944; Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 982.

46. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 945.

47. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 936.

48. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 1041–42.

49. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 936.

50. Bastide, *Le Candomblé de Bahia (rite Nagô)*. Likewise interested in the aesthetic dimension of possession, Bastide responded complementarily to Leiris's book, which appeared the same year as his book. See Bastide, "Réponse à Michel Leiris (lettre de 15 mai 1958)," *Gradhiva*, no. 7 (2008): 68–69.

51. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 935–36. Apart from military speech, possession by military *zars* (strikingly frequent among the group Leiris studied) can also manifest in the military dance known as *dankara*. See Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 996n48.

52. Leiris, "Le culte des *zârs* à Gondar (Éthiopie septentrionale)," 891; Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 938; Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 973.

53. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 936.

54. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 989.

55. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 938.

56. Georges Bataille, "Slaughterhouse. Translated by Annette Michelson," in "Georges Bataille: Writings on Laughter, Sacrifice, Nietzsche, Un-Knowing," ed. Annette Michelson, Rosalind E. Krauss, and Allen S. Weiss, special issue, *October* 36 (1986): 11.

57. Michel Leiris, "Man and His Insides," in *Brisées: Broken Branches* (North Point, 1989), 41, 45.

58. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 989.

59. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 524.

60. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar (1958)*, 1060. I borrow the term "cultural system" from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, "Art as a Cultural System," *MLN* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1473–99.

61. Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (1934), in *Miroir de l'Afrique*, ed. Jean

Jamin (Gallimard, 1996), 582n125. Part of Leiris's footnote is translated in Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 471.

62. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 459. Leiris provides the name of Malkam Ayyahou's neighborhood in Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 949.

63. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 459.

64. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 975.

65. See chapter 3 in Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958).

66. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 950. This passage is taken verbatim from Leiris, "Le culte des zârs à Gondar (Éthiopie septentrionale)," 899.

67. See Arendt's account of *vita activa* in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1957).

68. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1060.

69. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 936. In the September 15 entry of *Phantom Africa*, Leiris documents a *wadadja* in which Malkam Ayyahou induces *gourri* in a young girl using this method. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 529–530. Einstein uses the term "ecstatic training" in Carl Einstein, "André Masson: Ethnological Study," in *A Mythology of Forms: Selected Writings on Art*, ed. Charles W. Haxthausen (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 211.

70. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 574–75.

71. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 617.

72. See the entry on August 28 in Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 493.

73. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 615.

74. See the November 8 entry in Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 615.

75. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 981.

76. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 988.

77. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 989.

78. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1054.

79. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 942.

80. Cited by Jacques Mercier, "Rencontres, fiches et savoir: le butin des zar," *Gradhiva* 14 (1993): 43. This comment does not appear in *Phantom Africa*.

81. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 480.

82. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 502. Translation modified.

83. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1056n14.

84. Roger Caillois, "Jeux et techniques," *La Nouvelle Revue française* 49, no. 288 (1937): 513–14. My translation.

85. Leiris, "La croyance aux génies *zar* en Éthiopie du Nord (1938)," 932–33.

86. See Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). I discuss this text in greater detail in chapter 2.

87. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1038.

88. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1026. See the October 24–26 entry in Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 598–99.

89. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1026.

90. Michel Leiris, “Alberto Giacometti,” in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, ed. Dawn Ades and Simon Baker (Hayward Gallery and the MIT Press, 2006), 249.

91. William Pietz, “The Problem of the Fetish, I,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 9 (1985): 15. I thank Sven Lütticken and one of my manuscript readers for inviting me to engage Pietz’s work.

92. Rosalind C. Morris, “After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation, Comparativism, Critique,” in *The Returns of Fetishism* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 160.

93. The acquisition of African objects for the Trocadéro Ethnographic Museum (revamped in 1937 as the Musée de l’Homme) was one of the mission’s main objectives. It remains the most fraught aspect of this ostensibly scientific project sponsored by the French colonial government. For details of the mission’s exploits, see Griaule’s reports in Éric Jolly and Marianne Lemaire, eds., *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti* (Éditions les Cahiers, 2015). For criticism of the mission’s activities as theft, see notably Ruth Larson, “Ethnography, Thievery, and Cultural Identity: A Rereading of Michel Leiris’s *L’Afrique fantôme*,” *PMLA* 112, no. 2 (1997): 229–42.

94. See Claire Bosc-Tiessé and Anaïs Wion, “Collecter et enquêter à Gondär en 1932: le travail de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti comme reflet de son temps,” in *Peintures sacrées d’Éthiopie* (Éditions SEPIA, 2005), 13–18; Marcel Griaule, “Peintures abyssines,” *Minotaure*, no. 2 (1933): 83–88; Marcel Griaule, “L’enlèvement des peintures d’Antonios,” in *Cahier Dakar-Djibouti*, ed. Éric Jolly and Marianne Lemaire (Éditions les Cahiers, 2015), 744–76.

95. See Mercier, “Rencontres, fiches et savoir: le butin des zar,” 41–50.

96. Leiris, *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar* (1958), 1059.

97. Jacques Mercier, “Note sur les oeuvres graphiques illustrant la présente édition,” in *Miroir de l’Afrique*, ed. Jean Jamin and Jacques Mercier (Gallimard, 1996), 915.

98. Ethiopians of all confessions wore these amulet-scrolls in leather cases around the neck. For the mission’s acquisition of these objects, see Deborah Lifszyc, “Amulettes éthiopiennes,” *Minotaure*, no. 2 (1933): 71–74.

99. Mercier, “Note sur les oeuvres graphiques illustrant la présente édition,” 915.

100. Leiris, *Phantom Africa*, 650.

101. On the zar Cheik Ambaso, see also the editor’s notes in Michel Leiris, *Miroir de l’Afrique*, ed. Jean Jamin (Gallimard, 1996), 1002, 1050.

102. Mercier, “Note sur les oeuvres graphiques illustrant la présente édition,” 914.

103. At the time of my visit, only six of the seven drawings were located in the Griaule archive at the Laboratoire d’ethnologie et de sociologie comparative, Université de Paris X-Nanterre. The drawing of Tamarta by Chankit (reproduced in Mercier’s book but misidentified as Gintut) was missing. See Mercier, “Rencontres, fiches et savoir: le butin des zar,” 44; Jacques Mercier, *Les Traverses éthiopiennes de Michel Leiris* (L’Archange Minotaure, 2003), 52.

104. For de Libera's instructive archaeology of the subject, see particularly his lectures on March 20 and 27, 2014, in Alain de Libera, *L'Invention du sujet moderne. Cours du Collège de France 2013–2014* (Vrin, 2015), 53–86.

Epilogue

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harvest, 1968), 328.
2. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 332.
3. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 327, 330.
4. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 335.
5. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Viking, 1965 [1963]), 104.
6. Françoise Leperlier, *Claude Cahun: L'écart et la métamorphose* (Jean-Michel Place, 1992), 279. My translation.
7. For Cahun's meditations on the ambiguity of good and evil, see Claude Cahun, "The Border Post," in *Exist Otherwise: The Life and Works of Claude Cahun*, ed. Jennifer L. Shaw (Reaktion Books, 2017), 269–70.
8. Claude Cahun, "Le muet dans la mêlée," unpublished, c. 1948. Cited in Jennifer L. Shaw, *Exist Otherwise: The Life and Works of Claude Cahun* (Reaktion Books, 2017), 226.
9. Suzanne Césaire, "Surrealism and Us," in *Writings of Dissent (1941–45)*, ed. Daniel Maximin (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 35. *Tropiques* took an explicitly surrealist turn in 1942 following Breton's visit to Martinique.
10. René Ménéil, "For a Critical Reading of *Tropiques*," in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (Verso, 1996), 73–74.
11. Césaire, "Surrealism and Us," 38.
12. Suzanne Césaire, "The Great Camouflage," in *Writings of Dissent (1941–45)*, ed. Daniel Maximin (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 39.
13. Césaire, "The Great Camouflage," 41, 43.
14. Suzanne Césaire, "The Malaise of a Civilization," in *Writings of Dissent (1941–45)*, ed. Daniel Maximin (Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 31.
15. Césaire, "The Malaise of a Civilization," 32. My modification of the translation.
16. Césaire, "The Great Camouflage," 43.
17. Césaire, "The Malaise of a Civilization," 30.
18. Lauren L. Nelson uses the contemporary term "posthuman" in her reading of Césaire. See Nelson, "Suzanne Césaire's Posthumanism: Figuring the *Homme-plante*," *Feminist Modernist Studies* 3, no. 2 (2020): 162–79.
19. Hugo Salas has related Césaire's notion of camouflage to Caillois's essays on insect mimicry in *Minotaure*, which she most likely knew given the fact that several future contributors to *Tropiques* were already in contact with the surrealists in the 1930s. See Hugo Salas, "The Dead End of Representation: Suzanne Césaire Discusses Roger Caillois," *Research in African Literatures* 53, no. 4 (2023): 160–72.
20. Ménéil, "For a Critical Reading of *Tropiques*," 71. My modification of the translation.
21. Ménéil, "For a Critical Reading of *Tropiques*," 71. Same modification of translation as above.
22. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT Press, 2006).

23. Hannah Arendt, "Prologue," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (Schocken Books, 2003). Arendt evokes this removability of the mask in a speech when receiving Denmark's Sonning Prize, referring to the necessary incommensurability between her private self and her public persona.

24. See Cathy Caruth, "Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," in "Literary Criticism for the Twenty-First Century," special issue, *PMLA* 125, no. 4 (2010): 1023.

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