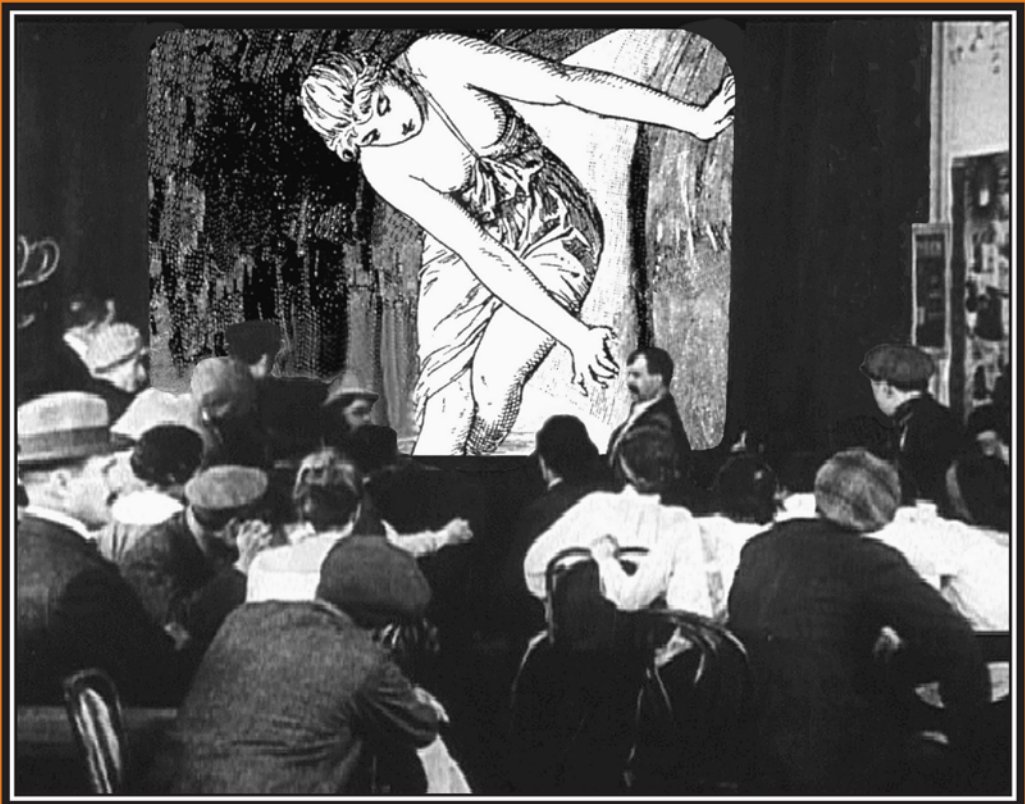


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The Screen in Surrealist Art and Thought

HAIM FINKELSTEIN



THE SCREEN IN SURREALIST ART AND THOUGHT



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Haim Finkelstein

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Introduction

"The perfect night of the cinema does not offer us merely the miracle of the screen, a neutral ground [*pays*] on which dreams are projected, but, more than that, it offers us the most enjoyable form of modern adventure," declared the young Surrealist Robert Desnos in a short article published in the *Journal Littéraire* in 1925.¹ Whatever the joys of the night and of modern adventure, Desnos conceives the "miracle of the screen" as a pivotal element of this experience. Two years later he would recall that in his childhood the cinema was the place where he felt at home; "Its darkness was like that of our bedrooms before going to sleep. The screen perhaps might be equal to our dreams."² The perception of the cinema screen as the site of a discourse analogous to the dream, a prevalent notion in Desnos's writings on cinema, was one to which many other Surrealists subscribed. Quite common, too, in avant-garde circles of the 1920s was the metaphorizing of internal processes in terms of cinema projection on an inner screen of the mind, with all that this entailed regarding the spatial properties of the dream. Jean Goudal, not himself a Surrealist, argued in his influential article "Surrealism and Cinema" (1925) that, in the cinema, "just as, in the dream, moving images lacking three-dimensionality follow each other on a single plane artificially delimited by a rectangle which is like a geometrical opening giving on to the psychic kingdom. The absence of color, too, the black and white, represents an arbitrary simplification analogous to those one meets in dreams."³

The spatial ramifications of the screen in metaphorical representations of internal processes – processes largely emblemized, in Surrealism, by the notion of the dream – is particularly significant in view of the fact that the Surrealists saw their project largely in spatial terms. This is well attested by the prevalence of spatial metaphors in Surrealist thought and writing, with the notions of surface and depth, the internal and external, and musings concerning what lies behind or beyond, taking the lead. "The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights," Breton

writes in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924). "If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them ..."⁴ A few lines later, in a note, he adds: "Account must be taken of the *depth* of the dream. For the most part I retain only what I can glean from its most superficial layers. What I most enjoy contemplating about a dream is everything that sinks back below the surface in a waking state ... In 'reality,' likewise, I prefer to *fall*" (*Manifestoes* 11; *OC I* 317). It is a question of contemplating rather than fully possessing what lies under the surface, and yet the mind in a waking state does not respond to anything but the "suggestions which come to it from the depths of that dark night to which I commend it" (12–13; 318).

Many of these spatial terms are derived from terminology associated with the dream, in terms of both traditional and Freudian conceptions. Undoubtedly, the Surrealists could have picked up Freudian terminology in any cursory reading, or from reading about Freud in contemporary psychiatric literature, or, for that matter, from popularizations. The often-used expression "depths of the unconscious" indicates the more common, and not quite accurate, view of the unconscious – one that probably had more impact on the Surrealists than Freud's careful characterizing of the notion. A somewhat inaccurate apprehension of Freud's first topology may have led to the perception of consciousness and the unconscious as two spatial localities, separate and hidden from each other, thus perhaps suiting the Surrealists' poetic and ideological purposes all the better. Such misconceptions may have been a consequence of Freud's own efforts in *The Interpretation of Dreams* to provide visual analogies for the idea of "psychical locality" within the "mental apparatus," although he himself warned against taking such analogies too far and insisted over and over again that the unconscious is not an anatomical concept and that the temptation to determine psychical locality in an anatomical fashion should be avoided. In their rhetoric the Surrealists thus tended to overlook such distinctions and to adopt the view often held by parapsychologists concerning the unconscious as a hidden second self.⁵ This proclivity for figurative representation of consciousness and the unconscious in "anatomical" terms as two contiguous spatial localities was particularly discernible in the rhetoric associated with psychic automatism. The inner voice dictating the automatic message was perceived as coming out of these depths of the unconscious and impinging on the surface of the conscious mind. No less discernible is the temptation to go altogether beyond such psychoanalytic concepts, even where these had markedly strayed from Freud's original notions. Breton was drawn, especially in the early years, to locate the source of "magic dictation" in some mysterious region other than "our own unconscious" or perhaps even associated with a "universal

consciousness," and saw the solicitations or words that emerged from this region as falling from the "mouth of shadows."⁶

In the Surrealism of the 1920s there is a marked correspondence, indeed a continuity, between such spatial conceptions as applied to internal processes and those associated with the notion of Surreality. "I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*," says Breton in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, adding that it is "in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession" (*Manifestoes* 14; *OC* I 319). Surreality perceived as a fusion – or, rather, a Hegelian resolution – of dream and reality, is thus a condition of being, a state of the mind, not to be attained but only to be striven for. The terms "surreality" and the "surreal" (*le surréel*) are often quite interchangeable in Surrealist writings (or writings concerning Surrealism), but more often than not the "surreal" implies a consciousness of Surreality as intimated by various experiences that appear to transcend the real. In his short text "A Wave of Dreams" ("Une Vague de rêves," 1924), Aragon argues that reality is an experience like any other, and that "there are other experiences that the mind can embrace which are equally fundamental such as chance, illusion, the fantastic, dreams. These different types of experience are brought together and reconciled in one genre, Surreality."⁷ Breton's position, on the other hand, appears to possess a metaphysical tinge, even though in his pronouncements he always quite categorically condemned any straying to metaphysics and transcendence. Surreality is evoked in the passage cited above in relation to what Breton terms the "great Mystery," and, as was rightly pointed out by Ferdinand Alquié (who identified Surrealism mostly with Breton's enterprise), it is easy to connect the striving for Surreality with "expectation for a beyond, to confound the surrealist consciousness with the religious consciousness."⁸ Alquié hastened to add, however, that it is, "paradoxically, an immanent beyond, inside the very beings whose appearance we experience, whose presence we perceive." However, Surrealist rhetoric, primarily as associated with Breton, is imbued with evocations of transcendence. As suggested by Annette Michelson, "Surrealist immanence is, in fact and unsurprisingly, transcendence in disguise."⁹ And while Aragon may proclaim the supremacy of a poetic Beyond – "The only meaning of the word Beyond resides in poetry"¹⁰ – there is always a slippage in the writings of Breton and other Surrealists into the uncertain ground of a metaphysical Beyond that is often spatially delineated and evoked. The idea of the surreal in Surrealist thought in the 1920s was undivided from the notion of mystery, to which there are many references in Surrealist writing of the time (or in writings by the Surrealists-to-be in the Dada days, before the movement was

formally launched). Mystery, especially in its spatial ramification, is often associated with the space hidden behind the surface of reality; with what may be glimpsed through the “window” (in the broad metaphorical sense assigned to it by Breton and other Surrealists) or behind the half-open door. As I point out in Chapter 2, Paris is the privileged site for the quest of the surreal within the real, because it is there that the threshold between the two realms governing Surrealist thought – the realm of dream and mystery, and that of the real – is to be found embedded in the surfaces of the visible. Doors and doorways are often evoked in Surrealist writings as conveying a sense of “openings” to the mystery and the Marvelous lurking in quotidian reality, intimated behind these surfaces.¹¹

Mystery, the surreal, the hidden depths of the mind, evoked in Surrealist writing – notwithstanding the professed allegiance to the notion of immanence¹² – as lying on the “other side of reality,” appear to be spatially allocated to a position in close proximity to the real, with a kind of separator or surface – or, in fact, a screen, to use the term I propose – separating these two contiguous spaces. Whereas the word “screen” itself appears in Surrealist writings mostly with reference to the cinema screen,¹³ I consider it as encompassing a far broader range of concerns. I posit, indeed, the notion of the “screen” as a spatial paradigm with far-reaching conceptual ramifications – especially in its metaphorical capacity as the surface or membrane that spatially defines and delimits the various dichotomies informing Surrealist thought. Mirroring the prominence of film as a figure and actual presence in the Surrealist experience in the 1920s, the screen paradigm subsumes a chain of representations, beginning with the conceptualization of the actual cinema screen, and continuing with the screen as a surface that constitutes a plane of projection, reflection, and seeing-through, a notion that governs various perceptions associated with Surrealist painting. Mystery, it should be noted, was for the Surrealists an indivisible part of the film experience. Thus Breton, recalling in 1951 his early cinema experiences, described cinema as “the only absolutely modern mystery”¹⁴ and referred to Mack Sennett’s comedies as “the most mysterious thing the movies have yet offered us.”¹⁵ The cinema screen served as a central implement of this experience of mystery precisely because it constituted a plane of projection that tantalizingly suggested a space lying beyond while also constituting a barrier to any attempt to encroach on this space. The metaphorical attempt to breach this barrier lies at the heart of the reconciliation project involving the basic sets of contraries that inform Surrealist thought: subjective and objective, interior and exterior, dream and wakefulness, reality and appearance, perception and representation.¹⁶

It is along these lines that, in Chapter 1, I present a passage in Robert Desnos’s “Pénalités de l’enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides” (1922), where the desire to “see from closer up,” to catch a look at what is happening behind

the screen, marks a transgressive attempt to go beyond the screen into a locale of primitive undifferentiation in which perception and representation are one. I follow this examination of the concept of the screen by considering a mode of vision presented in Louis Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1924), in which the notion of the windowpane, or the shop window, complements Desnos's screen as a mirror and window at the same time, and as the site of an admixture of the imaginary – a corollary of memory and desire – and the real. These combined notions of the screen are thus emblematic of one strand of spatial apprehension in Surrealism that, already in the early 1920s, informed the work of the young writers who constituted the core of the future Surrealist group. These two notions of the "screen," Desnos's and Aragon's, are further augmented by the introduction of another mode of vision – one intimated to the Surrealists by the serial films of Louis Feuillade, *Fantômas* (1913–14) and *Les Vampires* (1915–16) – which were among the highest placed in the Surrealist film pantheon. These films demonstrated the employment of a mode of vision in which space is structured in terms of a flat plane or planes that lie parallel to the projection plane or screen, both asserting and denying it. Feuillade's films, in their uncompromising assertion of surface (as a complement to their staging in depth), convey an enhanced sense of the "tangibility" of the screen as a projection plane through its association with the parallel planes lying "behind" it. This notion of the tangibility of the screen complements what I suggest regarding the role played by the concept of the screen in the writings of Desnos and Aragon, pointing out various issues concerning the nature of the vision applied by the Surrealists to their Parisian surroundings, as expounded in Chapter 2.

When the cinema screen is no longer directly addressed as such, the screen as a spatial paradigm indeed comes into its own as a metaphorical construction throwing light on some of the underlying tensions governing the Surrealist project in the 1920s. I use the term "paradigm" in the sense of an encompassing summation of articulations and creative stances that, in this particular context, are generally not quite willed or cognizant, but that subsume notions that, at times, even go against the grain of the declared Surrealist objectives. The main burden of the present study, as I see it, is to bring out hints and traces of the various expressions of this metaphorical construction. In Chapter 2, for instance, such perceptions are augmented by a consideration of the cinematic status of Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* as pertaining to a narrative movement across the surfaces of the real that employs a mode of dual vision of surface and depth, which I analyze in terms of a cinematic collage. The "screen" on which Aragon's cinematic collage unrolls is embedded in perceived reality as a façade with apertures – shop windows and doors – opening into interior spaces (conceived in their broader metaphorical sense), with these spaces carrying the major burden of Aragon's reveries and imaginative probing

of self. It is in a similar sense that I conceive of Breton's choice of several photographs of Paris by Boiffard as illustrations for his book *Nadja*. In both cases, the screen paradigm is brought to bear upon what I have referred to before as the threshold between the two realms governing Surrealist thought – the realm of dream and mystery and that of the real – to be found embedded in the surfaces of the visible. Contrary to the declared ambition of an ultimate conflation of these realms, Aragon's account of his roaming in the Passage de l'Opéra is permeated by a sense of something that forever will remain beyond reach, a mystery hidden behind this screen/surface; this also distinguishes Breton's vision in *Nadja* of the streets of Paris, which present a maze of façades to be deciphered, although much of the mystery lying behind them remains unsolved.

Various notions associated with the dialectics informing Surrealist thought with regard to the surfaces of the real also account for the metaphorical dimension of the window in Breton's thought as exemplified by the "window" introduced in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. As shown in Chapter 3, Breton's notion of the picture as a window does not refer strictly to a completely transparent opening into what lies beyond, but is also informed by the screen paradigm, with the painting's surface perceived as a locus of a dialectics of transparency and opacity, permeability, and reflectivity. The screen/window also emblemizes the view of painting – epitomized by Breton's perceptions regarding de Chirico – as an expression of a hidden mystery, of that which cannot be seen and which lies behind the "surface" or within the depths of the painting. Direct references to the cinema screen appear in several of Breton's texts, mostly with reference to Max Ernst's collages; one of these texts may have been a response on Breton's part to a debate concerning the possibility of Surrealist painting that raged in Surrealist circles in the mid-1920s and to the suggested recourse to cinema as an art form that might transcend the limitation of painting. The window metaphor is also associated with another window that is centrally located in Breton's thought – the window evoked in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, in which the image of the "man cut in two by the window" emblemizes the doubling or division of the self in the automatic process, with the windowpane serving as the separator between the two regions in the mind, the two fields of vision, the visible and the invisible, to which Breton often refers in his writing.

The screen paradigm encompasses a broad range of notions, from the metaphorical to the literal. Its presence in Breton's writings is structured on perceptions associated both with motifs partaking of the sense of barriers to sight within the painting (curtain, windowpane), and with formal considerations (layered depth conception). It is, however, in the paintings themselves – those done within the sphere of Surrealist activities in the 1920s – that the screen is most perceptibly literalized in terms of spatial conception

as well as the materiality of surface. The layered nature of Ernst's works, to which I turn in Chapter 4, suggests a conceptualization of painting as a representation or evocation of a mental space, partaking of various notions concerning the structure of the mind to which the Surrealists were privy very early in the 1920s. These include Freud's own efforts, in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and other texts, to provide visual analogies to the idea of "psychical locality" within the "mental apparatus." This conception may also have been associated in Ernst's mind with other theories concerning the structure of the mental apparatus that were propounded in the course of the study of psychic phenomena and spiritualism conducted during the turn-of-the-century period by researchers such as F.W.H. Myers, Théodore Flournoy, and Charles Richet. As I further argue, Ernst quite consistently investigated the notion of the screen as a central constituent in a chain of frames *en abyme* in relation to his conception of layered depth. Also proposed in this chapter is a consideration of the screen paradigm in its capacity of "skin," a notion whose implications are further broadened when considered in relation to the works of Miró and Masson in the following chapters. The "skin" quality is discussed here with regard to the tactile character of Ernst's frottage technique and the association of the physical aspect of the rubbing activity with masturbation. Painting is then considered as a purveyor of mystery and as subsuming mystery in its very form and mode of visual communication. Magritte's works, as shown in Chapter 5, with their intimation of an unknown located behind surfaces or planes lying within the pictorial space, at times parallel to the picture plane, exemplify this conception. The basic parameters of the paradigmatic screen as an implicit formal and conceptual presence in Magritte's paintings – and as a corollary of this, perceptions related to barriers to vision lying "within" the space of painting, which may be identified with the separators lying within its layered depth – derive from the screen in its cinematic dimension, particularly as epitomized for Magritte by Feuillade's serial films.

Spatial concerns – especially with regard to the question of surface and depth (that is, the material tangibility of the painting's surface in contradistinction to the illusory depth evoked through various formal devices) – are treated in Chapters 6 and 7 in relation to the notion of painting as an embodiment of the dialectics of opacity and transparency – this mostly with regard to the works of Masson and Miró – both in the formal sense of the interplay of surface and depth, and, metaphorically, as topographical representations of consciousness and the hidden depths of the unconscious, revealed or intimated in the process of automatic creation. This dialectic is also seen in terms of a containment of the Ocean (the unconscious, the site of automatism, the inner depths of the mind) within a more definable spatial location; with this containment viewed in the more perceptible terms of the containing function of the paradigmatic screen. The screen paradigm is considered in both chapters also in its

capacity of “skin” and in relation to various bodily notions that metaphorize psychological and psychoanalytical concerns. Surfaces in Miró’s paintings are viewed as being erotically charged by the function of “caressing”; furthermore, there is much in Miró’s work to warrant the perception that the surface of the painting serves as a containing element that implies a metaphorical presence of the artist himself within the pictorial space. A “visceral obsession,” to use Masson’s own term, and, indeed, the ubiquitous presence of the body or parts of the body, constitute one of the central motifs in Masson’s paintings and drawings of the 1920s. The sense of dispersal associated with the depiction of body parts represents, as I further argue, one side of a dichotomy whose other side is prescribed by the function of containment. My discussion of Masson’s work in this chapter focuses on this dichotomy in the light of Didier Anzieu’s notion of the ‘skin ego,’ which, while postdating by half a century the period under consideration (it was first proposed in 1974), still appears to me to be particularly applicable to Masson’s work.

The bodily dimension – the perception of the body in the work or the projection of the body on the work – associated with the spatial conceptions underlying the works of both Miró and Masson is significant for the light it sheds on their gradual estrangement from the Surrealist Movement. The layered depth conception in its bodily dimension gains a more developed form in Miró’s 1929 collages, with these indeed prefiguring or even heralding that break, by appearing to annul the dialectics of opacity and transparency signifying the earlier dream paintings in which Miró’s Surrealist affiliation achieved its most significant form. From the perspective offered by the notion of the skin ego, Masson’s sand paintings, which present the most tangible and also the most critical manifestation of skin in his work, also metaphorize the skin ego, in its capacity of a containing envelope or membrane, in a state of disrepair. And as I further argue, Masson’s estrangement from Surrealism is subsumed in the rejection of the Surrealist notion of containment; that is to say, in the abandonment of the conception of pictorial space that is regulated by the screen-skin, with its associated dialectics of opacity and transparency, surface and depth. I trace a development starting with the paintings of 1926–27, that reveal a growing tendency to do away with the layered depth of the earlier paintings, through the torn “skin” associated with the patches of sand in the 1927 works, and on to paintings that no longer possess these patches of skin, vestiges of a containing envelope. In the latter works, Masson removes himself quite radically from language and thus from the Surrealist concept of automatism, and with this he also annuls the notion of the screen as a Surrealist paradigm.

My contention, however, is that this estrangement from Surrealist aesthetics, quite extreme in terms of the aesthetics governing Surrealism in the 1920s, is not that far removed from the new direction of the movement in the 1930s. I have,

indeed, found the screen paradigm a useful tool in my endeavor to critically evaluate the transition between the 1920s and the 1930s. Quite discernibly, the greater part of my study is placed squarely in the 1920s,¹⁷ and it is mostly from the perspective of the 1920s that I consider the various developments leading into the 1930s. To state my thesis briefly, I see the spatial conceptions informing Surrealist thought and vision as governed in the 1920s by the quite pervasive notion of the screen paradigm discernible – at times by inference or obliquely – in various permutations in art and writing. In this respect Breton's window metaphor offers a locus of the various concepts of spatiality pertaining to painting. These reflect some of the means employed by artists associated with the movement in order to break loose from the constraints of Cubist form while preserving the imperatives of Modernism. The screen paradigm is also concomitant with the centrality of film as a "presence" during this decade.¹⁸ I should add a note of caution, however: I do not intend to apply the screen paradigm as some ultimate ordering principle or as an overall conceptualization encompassing everything that Surrealist art and writing present in these years. Rather, my argument is that it is conspicuous enough in the various representational modes with which Surrealism engaged at the time to warrant consideration as one of the keys to Surrealism, especially in the 1920s.

In Chapter 8 I trace what I consider to be the dissolution of the screen paradigm, beginning in the late 1920s. I should emphasize that this concluding chapter does not attempt a full representation of Surrealism in the 1930s; rather it suggests a few signposts or indications of general trends, which I associate mostly with Breton and Dalí as the exponents of the two major directions taken by Surrealism in this decade. I see these developments as reflecting a desire to overcome the separation of art and life for the purpose of affecting the social space. It is in this light that I trace the ideological shift underlying Breton's "trilogy" – from *Nadja*, through *Les Vases communicants*, and on to *L'Amour fou* – which is paralleled by the differences in the nature of the photographs accompanying *Nadja* (as discussed in Chapter 2) and the essays later included in *L'Amour fou*. As I point out, the screen associated with *Nadja* and Boiffard's images is torn asunder in order to form a texture that accomplishes a complete interpenetration of interior and exterior, of subjectivity and objectivity; the intimation of the Marvelous is not assigned to the space hidden behind the surfaces of reality, but is sensed everywhere and all around. I also associate the dissolution of the screen paradigm with the shifts to which the notions of psychic automatism and automatic writing are subjected. Whereas Breton's notion of the picture as a window suggests, in my reading, a metaphorical construction that subsumes the whole range of dichotomies informing Surrealist thought in the 1920s, the implied revision in his conception of psychic automatism does away with these tensions.

What matters to Breton is the artist's aptitude for generating images that will exercise an unconscious power over him; but it makes hardly any difference to him, as I contend, whether these images are presented in an illusionist spatial frame or on the all-out flatness of a modernist surface. Breton's changing attitude reflects (and augments) the "temptation" of illusionism discernible in the dream paintings of the 1930s, as well as the "return to automatism" in Surrealist painting in the later years of the decade.

This discussion is followed by a consideration of the dissolution of the screen paradigm in Dalí's work as reflected in the evolving spatial conception of his paintings and in the light of his theories as these touch on the object and on the paranoiac-critical activity in their declared purpose of intervening in life and in the social sphere. Such a purpose is manifested primarily in the aspiration to verify the reality of the paranoiac idea for others – a dominant theme in Dalí's evolving theory – as well as in the wish to engage beholders by assimilating them into the painting; the painting itself thus constitutes an image of the self projected by Dalí, with this inextricably related to the spatial character of Dalí's "stage." The visual order in quite a few of Dalí's paintings implies a negation of Renaissance space through a perspectival manipulation associated with a diagonal recession into space – at times in a zigzag motion – that has an obvious Mannerist character. This conception, as I further argue, complements the anamorphic vision that pervades Dalí's space – a vision in which the body, as exemplified by bodily concerns, drives and desires, is projected on this Mannerist space with its confusing interplay of surface and depth, the internal and the external. In Dalí's overall oeuvre, this vision also implies a commingling of the "internal" space of the painting and the space of the real, or, in other words, of art and life. With this breaching of the "barriers" between the internal and the external, the perceptual and representational, Dalí's paintings do away with the screen as a fulcrum of the dialectics of opacity and transparency. My conclusion is that this dissolution of the screen paradigm in Dalí's work and theory parallels a similar process in Breton's thought, both opening the way, theoretically and ideologically, to what is commonly referred to as "dream painting" – the illusionist or "veristic" form of Surrealist painting that attained prominence in the course of the 1930s. In the concluding sections, I trace the transition in Max Ernst's work away from a spatial conception informed by the screen paradigm, presenting these developments against the backdrop of the changing experience of film viewing associated with the introduction of sound.

At this point, I would like to devote a few lines to my approach to theory and its use as an interpretive tool. There is a marked tendency among publications devoted to Surrealism over the last two decades to adopt interpretive modes that rely heavily, at times almost exclusively, on specific theoretical frames. These are mostly psychoanalytical, whether Freudian or, as is often the case,

Lacanian. This tendency is even more pronounced in studies devoted to film in general, which, in France, beginning in the early 1970s, and later in Anglo-American criticism, have become quite imbued with Lacanian theory. I would like therefore to clarify my own methodology in this respect. My analysis of the manifestation of space in its various permutations – with the screen as a central spatial paradigm – is largely based on a close perusal of texts and visual works centering on Surrealism and its peripheries. Surrealism, then, is viewed “from within,” but with full cognizance of the often divergent theories and practices associated with it. This, however, does not preclude references at some points to other, more modern or contemporary theoretical models. There is, admittedly, something quite appealing about the rich suggestiveness of some of the modern theoretical uses of psychoanalysis and other related theoretical contexts; at times, the modern post-structuralist use of psychoanalysis by cultural critics also has its points of attraction. My reference to these in the course of my study lies, however, mostly in their use as a means of enhancing perceptions associated with the original material and of clarifying the original issues, and as guides for organizing and debating these issues conceptually. For example, in my discussion of Desnos’s text in Chapter 1, I adduce notions similar to his, with respect to the effect of cinema on the spectator, as developed in a psychoanalytic framework by film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry (“The Apparatus”) and Christian Metz (*Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*). But, to elucidate the way in which I put such theories to use as critical tools – and this should also clarify my position vis-à-vis Desnos – I do not feel obliged to go along with the full ramifications of Metz’s or Baudry’s theories. I do not see much merit in Metz’s call on Lacan’s mirror stage as a way of explaining the viewer’s identification with the screen. This does not necessarily mean that such identification cannot be posited with regard to the experience described by Desnos. Similarly, Metz’s and Baudry’s use of Plato’s cave as a correlative to the experience in the cinema is ridden with conceptual holes, but this does not necessarily mean that I should not consider Aragon’s actual references to the cave, especially for what they contribute to my inquiry into the cinematic dimension of *Le Paysan de Paris*.

The application of Freudian doctrine as a theoretical interpretive tool is also fraught with problems. It is precisely because psychoanalysis suffuses so much of Surrealist thought that one should be wary of indiscriminately applying psychoanalysis as a theoretical interpretative tool. However, while various notions related to Freud emerge quite often in my discussion, they are, on the whole, approached in their historical perspective and from within Surrealism. Furthermore, the material of the present study dictates devoting more space to what I would call a “constructive” misreading of Freud. Such a misreading might be viewed, with respect to most of the Surrealists, as resulting from a secondhand exposure to Freud through popularization of his theories. Max

Ernst's work, on the other hand, reveals a much more informed reference. It is, however, precisely because his work derives from a conceptualization of painting as a representation or evocation of a mental space partaking of various notions concerning the structure of the mind that it suits his purpose to literalize, in a pictorial form, Freud's own visual analogies to the notion of "psychical locality" within the "mental apparatus," notwithstanding Freud's warning against taking such analogies too far. With due attention to the stipulations introduced above concerning the application of psychoanalysis as an interpretive tool, at times I do not exclude consideration of various Freudian concepts to which the Surrealists were not privy. If I apply Didier Anzieu's concept of the skin ego, it is because, as I note in Chapter 7, Anzieu's thesis draws on a broad range of anthropological and artistic considerations as well as earlier psychoanalytical hypotheses. Thus Masson's drawings and paintings, to which this concept is applied, appear to be a largely intuitive outgrowth of this cultural framework, and in this capacity they obviously lend themselves well to such an explication. The application of Lacan's concept of the screen, as introduced in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, would have been tempting enough, given the centrality in my study of the notion of a screen.¹⁹ That I have refrained from doing so is certainly due to the obscurity of this concept, but, more than that, to my well-founded apprehension that such an effort might end up by constituting an illustration and explication of Lacan's concept rather than the other way around. A general consideration of the screen as a Surrealist paradigm rests on a theoretical basis whose ramifications are far too broad and rich to be confined to any single theoretical precept.

Notes

1. "La nuit parfaite du cinéma ne nous offre pas seulement le miracle de l'écran, pays neutre où les rêves sont projetés, elle nous offre encore la forme la plus sympathique de l'aventure moderne." Desnos, *Les Rayons et les ombres* 69. If not otherwise noted, the translations from the French are mine.
2. Desnos, "Fantômas, Les Vampires, Les Mystères de New York," in *Les Rayons et les ombres* 84; trans. in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 398 (translation modified).
3. Goudal, "Surrealism and Cinema" 356–7; for the English version, see also Hammond, *The Shadow and Its Shadow* 84–94. For the original French version, see Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* 305–17. Goudal's perceptions are central to several aspects of my argument, and I will return to them in the course of this study.
4. Breton, *Manifestoes* 10; Breton, *Oeuvres complètes* I 316. The three volumes of Breton's *Oeuvres complètes* are henceforth referred to as OC I, OC II, and OC III respectively.
5. In Chapter 4 I raise these questions with regard to what I consider to be the persistence in Max Ernst's works of a structure associated with the metaphors employed by Freud to illustrate his conception of the psychical apparatus.
6. Breton, "The Mediums Enter," *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 91; "Entrée des médiums," OC I 275.

7. Aragon, *Une Vague de rêves* 11; "A Wave of Dreams" 3.
8. Alquié, *The Philosophy of Surrealism* 84.
9. Michelson, "Dr. Crause and Mr. Clair" 40. Michelson expressed similar notions in an earlier essay as well: "Breton's Surrealism: The Peripeties of a Metaphor, or a Journey Through Impossibility" 73.
10. Aragon, *Traité du style* 208.
11. It was also in terms of the opening of "a window on the beyond" that Trotsky saw Breton's particular slant on the phenomenon of objective chance, as expounded in Breton's *L'Amour fou*. See Breton, "Visit with Leon Trotsky," in *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 45; "Visite à Léon Trotsky," in *OC III* 702. I return to Trotsky's criticism in Chapter 8.
12. As Breton wrote in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, "Everything I love, everything I think and feel, predisposes me towards a particular philosophy of immanence according to which Surreality would be embodied in reality itself and would be neither superior nor exterior to it. And reciprocally, too, because the container would also be the contents." Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* 46. See Chapter 3, note 1, for publication details of both the English and French editions of the book, as well as for a listing of the installments comprising it as these appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* between 1925 and 1927.
13. As noted in Chapter 8, Breton used the word "écran" in his essay "Le Château étoilé," published in the eighth issue of *Minotaure* (1936) and later included in *L'Amour fou*. In this particular capacity, the "screen" is associated with the concept of objective chance, with implications, however, that diverge from what I posit in relation to the screen paradigm in the 1920s.
14. Breton, "As in a Wood," *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 237; "Comme dans un bois," *OC III* 904.
15. "Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What It Consists Of," *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 124; *OC I* 307.
16. In the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism," Breton employs a somewhat different set of contraries, but these partake of the same thought: "Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions. Now, search as one may one will never find any other motivating force in the activities of the Surrealists than the hope of finding and fixing this point." *Manifestoes* 123–4; *OC I* 781.
17. I should add that my methodological preference – at least within the parameters of the present study and in light of the greater weight I place on the 1920s – is to consider Dada and Surrealism as one single development; that is, to consider the two movements, as Breton does, "correlatively, like two waves that cover each other by turns." See Breton, *Conversations* 44; *Entretiens (1913–1952)* 57.
18. It should be noted that, while much of what I propose in this study refers in some form or another to the effect that the film experience had upon Surrealist thought and aesthetics, I have not embarked on any sustained discussion of the Surrealist film per se. I see much in the film work done by the Dadaists and the Surrealists – from scenarios and screenplays to actual film production – to warrant an analysis along the lines proposed in this study with regard to the screen paradigm and in terms of the spatial character of Surrealist creation. However, this would constitute a different study altogether that would be best undertaken under a separate cover.
19. See Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 91–7, 106–8.



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Desnos's screen, Aragon's windowpane, Feuillade's "self-aware screen"

Behind the screen

My itinerary in this examination of the screen as a spatial paradigm with far-reaching conceptual implications for Surrealism begins with the screen as a central implement in Robert Desnos's cinema experience as evoked in a text written in 1922. The text is central enough to the coming discussion to be designated Desnos's cinema ur-text:

I stopped in front of a movie theater. Pretty faces smiled from the posters. I entered. On the blank screen, a luminous disk was projected in which no landscapes or people were to be seen.

Rows of empty seats followed attentively a magnificent spectacle that I couldn't see.

Furiously, I wanted to take a closer look. I climbed toward the screen. I was blinded by the light coming from the projector and saw in the screen two holes that were big enough to allow passage. I put my head through one of them. A panorama of the city spread out before my eyes. Aragon and Baron were trussed up through their bellies on two cathedral spires.

I understood that they too had wanted to see what lay behind the screen and the very beauty of their suicide was revealed to me.

[Je m'arrêtais devant un cinéma. De beaux visages souriaient sur les affiches. J'entrai. Sur l'écran blanc, un disque lumineux était projeté sans vue aucune de paysage ni de personnages.

L'assemblée des fauteuils vides suivait avec attention le spectacle magnifique que je ne voyais pas.

Furieux, le voulus voir de plus près, je grimpai après la toile. Je fus aveuglé par la lumière de la lanterne et je vis dans la toile deux trous grands à donner passage à un homme. Je passai la tête dans l'un d'eux. Le panorama de la ville s'étala à mes yeux. Aragon et Baron étaient plantés par le ventre à deux flèches de cathédrale.

Je compris qu'eux aussi avaient voulu voir ce qui se passait derrière la toile et la toute beauté de leur suicide me lut révélée.¹

A strange cinematic experience, this fantasy, and nothing like what we would expect in view of Desnos's writings on film in later years.² The passage occurs in the last pages of "Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides," a text composed by the young Robert Desnos in the course of a few months in 1922 and completed in the summer of that year. In a letter to Jacques Doucet, an art collector and patron of art and literature, who would eventually acquire the manuscript,³ Desnos referred to it as his "first work in prose" (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 500). It also constitutes Desnos's first evocation of a cinema experience.

The first pages of the text appeared under the title "Pénalités de l'enfer," in the fourth issue of *Littérature (Nouvelle série)*, in September 1922.⁴ In the following months, Desnos continued to write such short texts, planning to have the complete manuscript eventually published. In his letter to Jacques Doucet, Desnos related how he filled his hours of solitude with the kind of stories he had enjoyed putting together for as long as he could remember; these stories, which he often told himself before falling asleep, served as a preamble to the dreams that followed them. "*Nouvelles Hébrides* is nothing other than an honest record of one of these [stories], quite naturally mingled with a transcription of the dreams provoked by it" (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 500). He added that he was concerned neither with art nor with verisimilitude, but there is no doubt as to his working within the context of his new literary milieu in a manner informed by the writing practices of the young Dadaists and some of their immediate predecessors. In his letter to Doucet he notes that he had above all come under the influence of Apollinaire's *Poète assassiné*, and it was *Les Champs magnétiques* that left an imprint on the "supernatural part" of his manuscript (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 500).

While Apollinaire had a seminal influence on this generation of poets and writers, it was Breton and Soupault's seminal compilation of automatic texts, *Les Champs magnétiques* (1919), that provided the influences leading to the special quality of Desnos's text, in which many passages clearly indicate their origin in automatic writing. As noted by Marie-Claire Dumas, this text was a striking confirmation for Desnos of his own experiments in cultivating the state of daydream, on the threshold of waking and sleep, and it was under its stimulus that he devoted himself to automatic writing as practised by Breton and Soupault, perhaps in an even more extreme form (*Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites* 42). The sense of verbal freedom that such procedures

afforded resulted in strange metamorphoses and irrational formations, such as are found on every page of “Pénalités de l’enfer.”⁵ They often appear to be comprised of syntactically correct statements onto which, as in the following example, are grafted signifiers that produce irrational or nonsensical metaphoric formations:

Ah, do not attempt anything other than to wear out sidewalk and road by the scumble of your hands. The unsilvered mirrors feign impossible shipwrecks and the greased poles must not transform, in a sterile vertical effort, the useless impetus of arrows and shells. The compasses that are like a navel will jeer at the keepers of public gardens.⁶

[Ah, ne tente pas autre chose que d’user le trottoir et la route aux frottais de tes mains. Les glaces sans tain simulent d’impossibles naufrages et des mâts de cocagne ne doivent pas en un stérile effort vertical transformer l’élan inutile des flèches et des obus. Des boussoles en guise de nombril conspueront les gardiens de squares.]

The text also abounds in proverbial expressions, of the kind later adopted by Péret and Eluard in their *152 proverbes mis au goût du jour* (1925), in which popular sayings and proverbs are subversively transformed, turned against themselves while retaining their familiar form, resulting in an eruption of absurd or irrational metaphors.⁷

The narrative form adopted by Desnos in “Pénalités de l’enfer” largely reflects this newly awakened verbal freedom, with the text freely weaving together little stories and anecdotes, dream narratives and poetic interludes. This loose structure is unified somewhat through the quite sporadic appearances of the various characters populating its pages, most of whom – Breton, Mme. Breton, Aragon, Soupault, Péret, Vitrac, among others – are taken from his immediate social milieu.⁸ To these might be added fantasy figures such as, most notably, the ubiquitous Miss Flowers, the narrator’s erotic muse. However, these characters, real or imaginary, hardly lend any narrative consistency to the text. They appear unexpectedly, and as abruptly they disappear; they die, often horribly, at some point only to come to life again later in the story. This disjointed quality is further enhanced by the inexplicable changes of locale, the strange transformations and metamorphoses, and the frequent non sequiturs.⁹ What endows the text as a whole with some consistency is the pervasive mood of sado-masochistic violence and erotic fantasizing, at times quite sexually explicit, which permeates almost every page:

All of a sudden, Miss Flowers climbed out of a manhole. A child in the middle of the square alarmed the automobiles. Finally, a basin opened before us. Between two waters floated the heads of generals of the republic. Flowers fished out one in her parasol. The one belonging to Hoche. The fishermen of the quay were on their knees around her, masturbating in unison. Their

wives presented a strange tableau. The head of one completely buried in the sex of the other, they all spun around themselves like tops.

[Miss Flowers surgit d'une bouche d'égout. Un enfant au milieu de la place effrayait les autos. Enfin la rade s'ouvrit devant nous. Entre deux eaux flottaient les têtes des généraux de la République. Flowers en pêcha une dans une ombrelle. Celle de Hoche. Les pêcheurs du quai, à genoux autour d'elle, se masturbèrent en cadence. Leurs femmes présentèrent un étrange tableau. La tête de l'une complètement enfouie dans le sexe de l'autre, elles tournèrent sur elles-mêmes comme des toupees.] (64)¹⁰

Interspersed in the narrative are, at times, passages with all the trappings of the adventure novels gobbled up by Desnos in his childhood. To this might be added the influence of the movies, especially adventure serials with their exotic locales and personages. I see the extremely irrational tenor of many of the episodes as a parodic amplification of the dimension of fantasy and, often, the exoticism of many adventure serials made in the 1910s. Such, for instance, is the scene with the "army of Chinese" parading on the street. "They were wearing checked suits, armed with revolvers and carrying phonograph horns. Their lifeless eyes seemed like those of the blind" (63). The Chinese return a few pages later. "I pulled out the eyes of eighty Chinese that surrounded me. They let me do this without uttering a word. While I was shooting marbles, they went off marching at a pace slowed down by the factor of four" (96). I cannot trace the exact lineage of such scenes involving a multitude of Chinese (Chinese characters, figuring quite often in this text, seem to be an obsessive motif with Desnos). I am, however, tempted to suggest a possible link with the serial *L'Etreinte de la pieuvre* (1919), titled in English *The Trail of the Octopus*; especially the fifteenth episode, to which Breton refers at some length in *Nadja* (1928), "in which a Chinese who had found some way to multiply himself invaded New York by means of several million self-reproductions. He entered President Wilson's office followed by himself, and by himself, and by himself, and by himself; the President removed his *pince-nez*."¹¹ Desnos may have heard Breton speaking enthusiastically about this serial, which, as he attests in *Nadja*, "has affected me far more than any other ..." That the film may have been a topic of conversation among the Surrealists is indirectly implied by Georges Sadoul whose reference to this serial follows the remark that "our attitude [to film] was that of Breton."¹²

Sadoul is here referring more directly to Breton's mode of going to the movies as described in *Nadja*. This method consisted of strolling, without specific purpose, toward the end of the afternoon, along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, and going into a movie theater without looking to see what was playing (*Nadja* 37; *OC* I 663). Breton recalled this system of movie-going in an article "Comme dans un bois," published in 1951, in which he related how he

and his friend Jacques Vaché went to the movies in Nantes (this was during Breton's military service as a male nurse in 1916):

Jacques Vaché and I were particularly like-minded in that respect, and there was nothing we enjoyed so much as to choose a theater at random, barge in when the movie had already started, and leave at the first sign of boredom – of surfeit – to rush off to some other theater where we behaved in exactly the same way, and so on (of course, this would be too much of a luxury nowadays). I have never experienced anything quite as magnetizing: it goes without saying that more often than not we left our seats without even knowing the name of the movie, to which we were completely indifferent. Within a few hours on a Sunday, we had gone through all the movies that were being shown in Nantes: the important thing is that we came out of it “charged” for a few days; by tacit agreement, value judgments never came into play.¹³

What Breton and his friends saw in the movies, “whichever they were, was only a lyrical substance that had to be mixed and stirred in bulk and haphazardly. I think what we prized most in them, to the point of being indifferent to anything else, was this capacity to transport the mind elsewhere” (*Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 236). He considered this “change in mental scenery” as conducive to a sense of marvel, “compared to which the merits of any given film are of little consequence,” and that this sense of marvel “lies in the freedom granted to anyone to remove himself from his own life whenever he feels like it, at least in cities, as soon as he goes through one of those soundproof doors that opens onto darkness” (236–7). The cinema theater indeed constitutes one of the privileged sites for the young Surrealists – the writers associated with the journal *Littérature* – a place of magic and enchantment, of dreams come alive, offering intoxication, shock and thrill. Breton's enthusiastic “I have never experienced anything quite as magnetizing,” epitomizes the attitude to film of the Surrealist group as a whole.

Breton himself, looking back forty years later at these early film experiences, refers to these years as his “cinema age,” noting that “it must be acknowledged that there is such a time in one's life – and that one outgrows it.” In view of the relative paucity of references to cinema in his writings of the 1920s and 1930s, it might be assumed that in the 1920s he was already somewhat removed from that “age.”¹⁴ Desnos, too, perhaps more than anyone else, gave voice to this sense of the magic and enchantment of the movies, persisting in it in his writings throughout the 1920s, at a time when the thrill of youthful cinema viewings was already on the wane, not only for Breton but also for most other Surrealists. An inveterate moviegoer from an early age, Desnos in 1922 still carried with him his early memories of the cinema theater. Evocations of these memories, which to a large extent colored his later cinema experiences, are interspersed throughout his writings. The infancy of cinema as a form of entertainment appeared in his eyes to parallel his own youthful sensations.

In his very first piece of film journalism, a cinema column published in *Paris-Journal* on 6 April 1923, he writes: "The generation that arrived at the age of cinema; it opened its eyes in order to see cities in their entirety chasing nutty heads [*citrouilles en folie*] and to laugh at the tricks of the little chimney sweep and the kitchen help."¹⁵ Several years later, in an article appearing in *Le Soir* on 26 February 1927, Desnos again recalled:

We came to be born. We learned to read with *Les Misérables* and *Le Juif errant*. A tremendous desire for love, revolt, and the sublime tortured us. We weren't vicious; we were precocious ... For us and us alone, the Lumière brothers invented the cinema. There we were at home. Its darkness was like that of our bedrooms before going to sleep. The screen perhaps might be equal to our dreams.¹⁶

This mood permeates Desnos's film criticism, which he seldom approaches in the commonly accepted sense of analysis or critical evaluation, rather tending to concentrate on the effect film had on him, and on its poetic and oneiric quality, its revolutionary dimension, its passion, eroticism, and mystery.

I return then to the passage from "Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides," my point of departure for this chapter. In its expressed violence and hallucinatory character, it goes well beyond any of the film reviews Desnos started writing in 1923, notwithstanding their force in expressing a unique cinematic sensibility and their often excitable and passionate tone. It presents in an unmediated form and in complete freedom – this in line with the tenor of the work as a whole – what could be conceived as Desnos's innermost thoughts regarding film; but it also strays quite markedly from what we normally associate with the cinema as an institution. After all, what is projected on this "blank screen" is merely a "luminous disk ... in which no landscapes or people were to be seen." The "magnificent spectacle" projected on the screen, to which he remains oblivious, is "followed attentively" by the rows of empty seats. However, once this passage is considered in the context of the events surrounding it in the section of "Pénalités de l'enfer" where it is placed, it begins to disclose its full import. I refer to the no less hallucinatory scenes preceding it – those at the Trocadéro aquarium and the Musée Grévin – and the strange sights that the narrator encounters when he comes out of the wax museum, or saunters through the bizarre landscape of the "panorama" revealed to him behind the screen. It all starts when the narrator seeks a place of refuge at the Trocadéro aquarium, where, in one of the tanks, he sees the corpse of Vitrac, one of the contributors to *Littérature* (later a member of the Surrealist group), in the arms of a woman named Suzanne, a "batrachian who was pretty enough to cause volcanoes to melt under her lovers' feet." In response to Desnos's question whether she would love him a little, she rips a ribbon of flesh out of Vitrac's belly with her teeth.

There was a dribble of honeysuckle on her lips. But out of Vitrac's belly slipped red fish. They lined up and behind this screen. Suzanne was transformed into a flowering water lily. I picked up this beautiful yellow flower and put it in my buttonhole. Eels were now coming out of the belly of that one who was my friend. I went away with Suzanne's perfume and Suzanne herself on my clothes (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 99).

He then reaches the Musée Grévin, where he sees wax effigies of M. and Mme. Breton sitting on a settee. "Scraping with my nail, I realized that these were their corpses covered with a thin layer of wax. There were small and yellow light bulbs in their eyes. When one pushed Breton's belly, a mechanism said: 'It is malicious what you've just done.'" Coming out of the museum onto the boulevard, Desnos sees an empty hearse going past with a coachman, adorned with flowing ribbons, and four undertakers occupying the place of the missing casket, eating sausages and drinking red wine. Further on, he sees six confectioners in white clothes dragging a hand-drawn cart, each holding a red paper lantern. Later, in the cinema, having put his head into one of the two holes in the screen and seen a panorama of the city spread out before him – with a view of Aragon and Baron impaled on two cathedral spires – he must have gone through the screen, because he is obliged to go down from one balcony to another in order to reach the street and discover there the following sights:

The gutters were watercress beds in which frogs croaked. The automobiles had only two wheels placed one behind the other. People were half in blue and half in red ... Garden beds were replaced by pretty enamel signs carrying lovely numbers and fine letters. There were pictures of domino blocks and dice on the walls of houses.

Large herons tied by their feet to the ground by silk thread a hundred meters in length flew around above the Saint-Jacques tower. I didn't know where to go. The color of the flags had changed. They were made of asbestos with nickel poles. The unaccountable motto LAVOIR [wash house] was inscribed on their folds (100–101).

The scenes evoked in Desnos's narrative involve popular forms of entertainment that might be associated with the early "cinema of attraction" – to use the term introduced by Tom Gunning to designate the development of cinema during the turn of the century as a form of entertainment associated with café-concerts, music halls, fairground theaters, amusement parks, and carnival.¹⁷ What attracted visitors to the Musée Grévin and the panorama was not so much the experience of a complete surrender to the lures of the illusion of reality as amazement at the power of the effects employed to evoke such a strong sense of verisimilitude. The experience was analogous to that of the spectator of early cinema who was similarly flabbergasted by the power of cinema to create such a convincing effect of reality.¹⁸ The Musée Grévin scene in Desnos's narrative gives these perceptions rather a strange turn by

suggesting that the make-believe effect involved is literally skin-deep. The effigies of Breton and his wife appear lifelike; this quality is further enhanced by the clockwork quality of the Breton personage which introduces animation into the tableau. However, the “reality” of the corpses of Breton and his wife is easily exposed underneath the thin covering layer of wax.¹⁹ The strange metamorphoses undergone by Suzanne in the aquarium scene – which are, it should be noted, quite typical of what we find throughout “Pénalités de l’enfer” – may refer to the early cinema of attraction too, and, in particular, the trick films by Méliès and his followers.²⁰ Furthermore, with its lighted glass panes in the surrounding grotto-like darkness, the Trocadéro aquarium may have suggested to Desnos an analogy with the lighted screen in the dark theater (this point is taken up again later in this chapter).²¹ What takes place between the Musée Grévin and the Trocadéro aquarium is also replete with film references. The gag involving the four undertakers in the empty hearse²² – who occupy the place of the casket, eating sausages and drinking wine – may have been suggested by early French film comedies or their American counterparts, primarily those produced by Mack Sennett. Desnos saw Mack Sennett’s comedies as having already broken away from reality. In them, he writes in one of his essays, the true genius of cinema is to be hailed, and he lists eroticism, sensuality, and the comic and poetic “marvelous” as the impulses animating them.²³ The often derisive presentation of bourgeois pretensions found in Mack Sennett may have been directly responsible for the mockery of bourgeois propriety in Desnos; this, of course, would have been augmented by the whole tenor of anti-bourgeois sentiment characterizing the *Littérature* group.²⁴

While the panorama in this text – the one seen behind the screen – does not refer specifically to that form of entertainment, it seems quite reasonable to suppose that Desnos had such an aspect in mind. I should add that, in an article published in 1929, Desnos groups the “panoramas that filled with wonder our youthful eyes in the fairs of days gone by in Trône or Neuilly” with other forms of “modern imagery.”²⁵ Furthermore, I suggest that the scenes revealed to the narrator after he has gone through the screen and entered the “panorama” poetically evoke – albeit rather obliquely – the cinema and, indeed, embody an undercurrent of cinematic thought. By going through the screen, the narrator enters the two-dimensional make-believe reality of cinema in which lived experience is translated into representation and things recede into flat surfaces. It is a world of flat automobiles having only two wheels placed one behind the other. People make their appearance as two-dimensional figures, graphically patterned in red and blue. Houses are perceived solely in terms of the flat surfaces of walls bearing images of domino blocks and dice. Even the inscription of the word LAVOIR on the folds of the flags implies the flattening out of a spatial configuration.²⁶

This two-dimensional conception of the world seen behind the screen is a necessary constituent of what I would refer to as Desnos's screen awareness; or, in other words, his perception of the screen itself as an integral part of his film experience. It is to this that I turn now – to the "luminous disk" projected on the "blank screen"; to the "magnificent spectacle" that cannot be seen by the narrator himself, but is "followed attentively" by the rows of empty seats; to the narrator's desire to take a closer look, and his climbing toward the screen and putting his head through one of the two holes in it. This experience adduces the centrality of the cinema screen in Desnos's thought. The word "screen" is perhaps the one most used to express metonymically the institution of the cinema (consider the number of "screens" or "écrans" in the titles of articles, books, or film magazines). It is used as such quite often in Desnos's writings, but it is also conceived as the site of the film experience, again both literally and metaphorically. In its material capacity, the screen is, in the present text, a tangible thing, a barrier with holes in it, something one can go through. This deviation from common usage connotes various metaphorical implications that can be studied in the light of later writings by Desnos further conceptualizing the screen. I do not claim that it is all there in the early 1922 text; Desnos may have intuited much of it, progressively giving these screen-related notions a more distinctive and consequential expression in tandem with the development of his thought and writing.

As Desnos posits in this cinema *ur-text*, coming up to the screen and putting one's head through it in order to see what lies on the other side constitutes an act of transgression, associated in Desnos's mind with the institution of cinema itself. As exemplified here by Aragon and Baron who also "wanted to see what lay behind the screen," such a transgressive act may result in death or, as Desnos proposes, in suicide: "I understood that they too had wanted to see what lay behind the screen and the very beauty of their suicide was revealed to me." The implication is that what lies behind the screen is a forbidden sight; that it is associated with desire is well attested by the blatant eroticism imbuing the events surrounding this episode, and the manuscript as a whole for that matter. The sense of a forbidden sight, lying behind a screen or some other layer acting as a barrier, and the coming into the open of what is hideous, unmentionable, and yet desirable in some perverse form, pervades the scenes at the aquarium and the Musée Grévin. It is in this light that we may view the fish slipping out of Vitrac's belly, forming a screen or partition [*paravent*] behind which Suzanne undergoes a transformation; such is the "primal scene" involving the "parental" figures of M. and Mme. Breton, and the narrator's attempt to discover the truth of their corpses beneath the protective layer of wax. "It is malicious what you've just done," complains Breton's effigy in response to this attempt. The "punishment" of Aragon and Baron is the narrator's own. In a reversal of the roles of narrator and actor

typical of the narrative mode of “Pénalités de l’enfer,” and indeed of Desnos’s other Surrealist texts such as those brought together in *Deuil pour deuil* (a point to which I shall return), the scene of the impalement of Aragon and Baron on two cathedral spires reflects on the situation of the narrator himself, who has dared to take a peek at this forbidden sight.²⁷

The forbidden sight revealed behind the screen might also be associated with the “sleeping fits” of the “époque des sommeils,” the séances of hypnotic slumbers that began in Breton’s rue Fontaine apartment in September of 1922, at which Desnos was one of the star performers. As recalled by Breton,

... we lived through them [the sessions] in a state of exaltation. Everyone who witnessed Desnos’s daily plunges into what was truly the unknown was swept up into a kind of giddiness; we all hung on what he might say, what he might feverishly scribble on a scrap of paper. I’m thinking in particular of the “word games,” of a wholly new lyrical type, that he was able to string together for extended periods, at a tempo that was nothing short of prodigious. Desnos collected these “word games,” which he claimed were the products of telepathic communication with Marcel Duchamp (who was then in New York), under the title “Rose Sélavy” in *Corps et biens*. I used the word “prodigious,” by which I especially meant Desnos’s ability to transport himself, at will and instantaneously, from the mediocrities of daily life into a zone of illumination and poetic effusion.²⁸

Desnos’s cinema ur-text appears in the last pages of “Pénalités de l’enfer”; if these were written in the fall of 1922,²⁹ it would be quite feasible to discern in them a reference to what Desnos may have sensed in such practices as an encroachment on what might turn out to be not only a “zone of illumination and poetic effusion” but also a mysterious and forbidding territory.³⁰ The feeling of death cloaking the participants is aptly conveyed by the photographs of Desnos taken during one of these séances, included in *Nadja* (“Once again, now, I see Robert Desnos ... He ‘dozes’ but he writes, he talks” (*Nadja* 31, 33; *OC I* 661–2)). As noted by Michael Sheringham, Desnos is shown in them to be in a state of “living-dead.”³¹ Such a perception would not have escaped those who saw the photographs at the time they were taken, or those present at these sessions. Considering Desnos’s disposition at the time, as evinced by “Pénalités de l’enfer,” he himself would not have remained oblivious to this dimension of the “sleeping fits.” Rather, he would have seen death as an added constituent in the equation, an ineluctable instigator as well as a consequence of these practices. Furthermore, he would have seen both death and sleep as inextricably coupled with desire. Sleep, he writes in *Deuil pour deuil*, “clothes itself in our body while the woman we love who brought it to our bed is astounded by the funereal change that has overtaken our features ...”³²

Death and desire are intertwined on every page of “Pénalités de l’enfer,” and this is also largely true of Desnos’s two other prose works, *Deuil pour deuil*

and *La Liberté ou l'amour*.³³ Death for Desnos is also the ultimate consummation of desire. In his article "La Muraille de chêne," which appeared in the second issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, Desnos writes: "I cannot imagine love without its being mixed with the taste of death, which is, moreover, free of all sentimentality and all sadness. Marvelous satisfaction of sight and touch, perfection of pleasure, it is only through your intervention that my thought can connect with death. The fleeting character of love is also that of death."³⁴ Indeed, it should be noted that death is never permanent in Desnos's writing, nor does it result in complete annihilation. "But death? It is good for you" – thus concludes a chapter in *La Liberté ou l'amour!* entitled "Polemic against Death" ("Pamphlet contre la mort").³⁵ As Sheringham points out, death is also paradoxically the sign of vital intensity; it is a metaphorical death that allows the protagonist the freedom of the world of fantasy ("La mort et les lois du désir" 70–71). The fleeting character of death to which Desnos refers here is literalized in his prose works – in particular in "Pénalités" and *Deuil pour deuil* – in the constant deaths and resurrections of the characters. "Panic-stricken, I hurried to rescue her [Mme. Breton], forgetting that I was dead," the narrator tells us (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 49). Such fleetingness also characterizes the chaotic nature of desire, with its inconsistent objects, its provisional expression, and death as its inevitable consequence. In the aquarium scene, the narrator asks Suzanne: "Will you love me a little, even if it means dying after?"

Dreams and the whiteness of the screen

Behind the screen lies a landscape of death, fantasy, and the consummation of the most secret desire. The attempt to go through it or at least to see what lies beyond, marks for Desnos an act of transgression of accepted modes and mores which, as I have suggested, may be associated with automatic writing (or writing done under the "influence" in the framework of the "sleeping fits" – for Desnos there is no appreciable distinction between the two). This "dangerous landscape" behind the screen, where unconscious desires take over, is also the domain of the dream, and it is to the dream that I now turn – in its cinematic capacity and its association with the cinema screen, with Desnos's cinema ur-text again as my point of departure. While there is no reference to dreams in this text, and, indeed, an overt association of screen and dreams will appear only in later texts, I consider the cinema screen as inextricably associated by Desnos with the notion of the dream. That dreams and dreaming were constantly on Desnos's mind while writing "Pénalités de l'enfer" is evinced by the role of dreams and daydreams in the composition of this text, as described in the letter to Jacques Doucet to which I have referred. Also telling in this respect is the great number of dream narrations written by

Desnos in August and September of 1922.³⁶ There is also no question as to the centrality of dream as a presence throughout “Pénalités de l’enfer,” not because dreams are specified as such, but because the narrative movement of the text exhibits some obvious common ground with the dream. The contingent nature of the characters and their constant deaths and resurrections are complemented by the narrator’s own lack of coherent identity or motivation. Everything is possible, everything happens, because the narrator/dreamer wishes it. The dream’s function of wish-fulfillment is thus fully implemented in the text, and so also is its transgressive character, its disruption of the constraints of reality and of accepted morality. That this transgressive dimension is associated in Desnos’s mind with the institution of cinema itself is shown by the essays he wrote a short while after completing “Pénalités de l’enfer.” In “La Morale du cinéma,” an early piece published in May 1923, Desnos argued that “the life which is permitted to us is so limited that any free rein given to us, be it the most sterile, will seem to us as revealing the infinite. The cinema might admit of the absolute in action.” Thus, contrary to the “tacit laws of the good society,” the heroes of cinema dare do what fear impedes us from doing (*Les Rayons et les ombres* 38–9).

These perceptions derive on the whole from Desnos’s conviction that the liberating or subversive character of the cinema is analogous in all respects to that of dream, and that, in fact, the cinema offers an experience comparable to that of dreams. “How can one not identify the darkness of cinema with the darkness of night, films with dream?” he asks in “Dreams of the Night Transported to the Screen” (“Les rêves de la nuit transportés sur l’écran,” 1927). However, he also points out that rare indeed are the films that have not failed in this respect, for the filmmakers have “disregarded the essential characteristics of dream, its sensuality, its absolute liberty, its very baroque quality, and an atmosphere evoking the infinite and eternity ...” (*Les Rayons et les ombres* 80–81). Perceptions of the screen as the site of a discourse analogous to that of the dream are found throughout Desnos. At first these seem quite generalized. However, on closer perusal, Desnos’s cinema writings, including the ur-text, offer deeper and more significant intimations of the screen as the site of dream, and, by inference, of dream as a projection on some internal screen, and with further ramifications, to which I will return.

My concern at this point is primarily with the screen as a surface, a projection plane, and it is in this respect that the cinematic close-up emerges as a major consideration. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin lists the close-up among the changes brought about by film – the “focusing on hidden details of familiar objects” – as a technique through which “space expands.” The “enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what, in any case was visible, though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject.”³⁷ Such a revelation held

a sense of magic for film viewers in the early days of cinema. Tom Gunning notes that, many of the close-ups in early film "differ from later uses of the technique precisely because they do not use enlargement for narrative punctuation, but as an attraction in its own right" ("The Cinema of Attraction" 231). Much of this sense of magic was shared by the young Surrealists. In "Du décor" (1918), Aragon responds along these lines to this property of the screen as the surface accommodating such enlargement. "We must open our eyes in front of the screen," he says, adding, a few lines later, that "on the screen objects that were a few moments ago sticks of furniture or books of cloakroom tickets are transformed to the point where they take on menacing or enigmatic meanings. The theater is powerless where such emotive concentration is concerned."³⁸ What distinguishes Desnos's attitude, however, is the charge of eroticism that the appearance on the screen of these lights and shadows, these luminous images, holds for him. "One of the most admirable things about cinema and one of the reasons for the hatred shown it by imbeciles is its eroticism," he affirms in "Eroticism," an essay published in 1923. "These men and women, luminous in the dark, make their moving gestures in a sensual way. Imagine it, their flesh becomes more real than living people's, and while they move on screen toward an irrevocable destiny they are taking part, for the sensitive spectator, in some more miraculous adventure." A few lines later he evokes the miracle of the screen in terms of the "apparition of a dancer's shoulder, an adventurer's proconsular neck, a white hand, long and slim, 'sliding toward a letter' or a revolver, eyes above all else, more beautiful in the cinema's mysterious light ..."³⁹

I would like to draw attention to two aspects of this essay. Eroticism is perceived in terms of close-ups, particularly of human anatomy; and these images are distinguished primarily by their luminosity. Both concerns seem to imply that the images perceived on this bright surface of the screen in the dark cinema theater signify desire, perhaps even in the fetishistic dimension. Desnos indeed shows some theoretical proximity to Christian Metz's notion of the cinematic manifestations of the fetish, which Metz sees as consisting of the cinema's equipment and technique. The apparatus of the cinema, like the fetish, is a prop that "disavows a lack and in doing so affirms it without wishing to." The lack is subsumed in the "absence of the object, replaced by its reflection," and the technical equipment of the cinema, like a fetish, makes this absence forgotten. The cinema fetishist "must think at every moment (and above all *simultaneously*) of the force of presence the film has and of the absence on which this force is constructed."⁴⁰ Desnos, Breton and other Surrealists were not oblivious to "the force of presence the film has and of the absence on which this force is constructed," but they also conceptualized the surmounting of this absence as a poetic possibility, at times by seeing the luminous images on the screen as denoting a presence no less compelling than the absent object

it represents. Thus Desnos can maintain, again in "Eroticism," that the flesh of these "men and women, luminous in the dark," while they move on the screen, "becomes more real than living people's," and this establishes a "dual scenario" or "two discourses" involving the spectators and the figures on the screen, in which "facts and gestures are suddenly illumined as dazzling points of contact." In *Nadja*, Breton describes how, one afternoon, "in the side aisles of the 'Electric Palace,' a naked woman, who must have come in wearing only her coat, strolled, dead white, from one row to the next" (*Nadja* 39; OC I 668). Recalling this incident years later in "As in a Wood," Breton adds that the white figure of the woman seemed "phosphorescent" (*Free Rein* 239; OC III 906).⁴¹ Earlier, Breton describes entering the cinema through a "soundproof door that opens onto darkness" (237; 904). With this insistence on the whiteness of the figure, its phosphorescence, in the darkness of the cinema, it is as if Breton saw one of the "luminous" figures on the screen (here of course I am referring to Desnos's image) attaining a material form and coming down into the dark movie theater.

The white figure would not have seemed as phosphorescent, Breton emphasizes, had she not caught his eye while he was watching "an utterly absurd movie"; what matters is the fact that the phosphorescence becomes the major element in his field of vision. This palpability of luminousness brings me back to my original point regarding the assertion of the screen itself as a central implement in the cinema experience. What can be added now is the whiteness, the luminosity, of the screen in the dark theater. This envisioning of the screen may have been behind Desnos's choice of the Trocadéro aquarium as the locale of one of the scenes preceding the movie theater experience in the "Pénalités" text. In addition to its being a popular attraction in Paris at the time, the lighted glass panes in the surrounding grotto-like darkness may have suggested, as I have noted before, an analogy with the lighted screen in the dark theater.⁴² In Desnos's original cinema experience, the whiteness of the screen is defined by the luminous disk projected by a cone of blinding light, a disk that seems to stand for the screen as a whole, because there is nothing else to be seen there. In his essay "On Decor," Aragon seems to have been thinking along similar lines:

It is time someone slapped the public's face to see if it has blood under its skin. The consecration of catcalls that will gain cinema the respect of people of feeling is still missing. Get it, and the purity that attracts spittle emerges at last!⁴³ When, before the naked screen lit by the projector's solitary beam, will we have that sense of formidable virginity,

The white awareness of our canvas?

O purity, purity!

(Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory* 168)

Attracting spittle, mark of the spectators' engagement, the naked screen lit by the projector's solitary beam – the image is very close to Desnos's – denotes a "formidable virginity." "Le blanc souci de notre toile" is the last line of Mallarmé's poem "Salut"⁴⁴ which begins with "Rien, cette écume, vierge vers" – "Nothing, this foam, a virgin line [of verse]." "Rien," as noted by Wallace Fowlie, implies a thing and nothing, presence and absence.⁴⁵ The foam, like a line of poetry, designates only the surface; the reality is underneath. Aragon must have had the whole poem in mind when writing of the "virginity" and "purity" of the "naked screen" – the screen, which, for Desnos too, exists as a thing (a material thing) and nothing (the projected image), presence and absence, a foam designating surface but implying also a reality lying underneath.

All these connotations of the screen appear to have been, in some form or another, on the minds, not only of Desnos, Aragon and Breton, but of many other Surrealists and non-Surrealists. In 1925 Jean Goudal, not himself a Surrealist, wrote a very perceptive analysis of the relationship of Surrealism and cinema, in which he raised some objections to Surrealism as a literary movement but saw a great promise in the actual experience of film in which the Surrealist objective of the union of the "two states, dream and reality," or the "uniting of the conscious and unconscious on the same plane," is accomplished.⁴⁶ Of special significance for the issue of the representation of the dream or the unconscious in film is what Goudal sees as the place of the screen in this experience. "Let's go into a cinema," he says, "where the perforated celluloid is purring in the darkness. On entering, our gaze is guided by the luminous ray to the screen ... Life on the street outside no longer exists. Our problems evaporate, our neighbors disappear. Our body itself submits to a sort of temporary depersonalization which takes away the feeling of its own existence. We are nothing but two eyes riveted to ten square meters of white sheet" (355). The screen, "ten square meters of white sheet" on which a luminous ray is projected, becomes the site of a

...simulacrum of a uniquely visual kind. An actual hallucination is needed here which the other conditions of cinema tend to reinforce, just as, in the dream, moving images lacking three-dimensionality follow each other on a single plane artificially delimited by a rectangle which is like a geometrical opening giving on to the psychic kingdom. The absence of color, too, the black and white, represents an arbitrary simplification analogous to those one meets in dreams (356–7).

The above passage proposes two major considerations concerning what, at this point, I refer to as the screen paradigm. These will be examined here in relation to Desnos's writing, and, by extension, his notions of cinema, but their implications with regard to the screen paradigm will run through the ensuing discussion, in this and later chapters.⁴⁷ I begin with Goudal's

reference to the screen as a “white sheet” and his hypothesis that the “moving images lacking three-dimensionality” that are seen on the screen are like those seen in the dream, with the inference that the dream experience offers something comparable to the screen as one of its constituents; and that the dream is experienced as a film projection. The metaphorizing of internal processes in terms of cinema projection on an inner screen of the mind was quite common in avant-garde circles of the 1920s. At times, this had to do with an imaginative re-creation of a text in the reader’s mind. Picabia, to cite one example, defined his text *La Loi d’accommodation chez les borgnes* (1928) as “a film in three parts,” and explained in the preface: “So I am going to ask you for a few moments to enter my cinema ... I ask each of my readers to direct and project for himself [my scenario] on the screen of his imagination, a veritably magic screen, incomparably superior to the poor black and white calico of the movies ...”⁴⁸ At least on one occasion, Desnos went in for a more literal perception of this notion – perhaps when he was still working on the last pages of “Pénalités de l’enfer.” In a dream narrative of the night of 24 or 25 of September 1922, Desnos evokes the dream in terms of a film projection. The dream takes place in Breton’s studio. Breton, in an “atmosphere of absolutely unprecedented anxiety,” speaks to Morise who is seated on a settee placed against the wall. “Neither Simone Breton nor Vitrac nor myself were there: I was worried whether Simone or Vitrac were there and was surprised at their absence; as for myself, I wasn’t there, and this part of the nightmare was in the nature of a distant vision or of a cinematographic projection” (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 261).

Perceptions of this nature received sustained elaboration years later, in the dream screen hypothesis proposed by the psychoanalyst Bertram Lewin. Having heard his patients sometimes describe their dreams as being like film projections, Lewin defined the dream screen as “the surface on to which a dream appears to be projected. It is the blank background, present in the dream though not necessarily seen, and the visually perceived action in ordinary manifest dream contents takes place on it or before it.”⁴⁹ Lewin interpreted the dream screen as the hallucinatory representation of the mother’s breast during breast-feeding before the infant goes to sleep: “When one falls asleep, the breast is taken into one’s perceptual world: it flattens out or approaches flatness ... A dream appears to be projected on this flattened breast – the dream screen – provided that is, that the dream is visual; for if there is no visual content the dream screen would be blank ...” (421). For Lewin, the “blank dream screen is the copy of primary infantile sleep,” and as such it represents the wish to sleep. Furthermore, the visual contents, that is, the dream itself, represent the “opponents” of sleep, the “wakers” (422).

It was inevitable that Lewin’s hypothesis would be quite extensively debated by cinema theorists.⁵⁰ I am not concerned, however, with the validity

of the concept but, rather, with seeing how such an intuition, in some form or other, would have been entrenched in the Surrealist sensibility, mirroring the prominence of film as a figure and actual presence in the Surrealist experience in the 1920s. More specifically at this point, I aim to show the presence in Desnos's thinking of a form of conceptualization of something akin to the dream screen, whose ramifications go beyond what is implied by the dream narrative cited above. Here I return to Goudal's article and his representation of the screen as "ten square meters of white sheet," a "single plane *artificially delimited* [my emphasis] by a rectangle which is like a geometrical opening giving on to the psychic kingdom."⁵¹

I turn first to Desnos the writer and to what I consider to be the sense of "artificial delimitation" inherent in his prose fiction, beginning with the disappearance, or rather non-existence, of a psychologically defined "I," a consistent speaking voice. I have already referred to the provisional nature of the characters of "Pénalités de l'enfer," who establish themselves more by their action of the moment than by any sense of specified identity. Nor does the narrator himself present a coherent identity or motivation; everything is possible, everything happens, on the spur of the "moment" and as a function of some undisclosed narrative contingency. In *Deuil pour deuil* the status of the "I" is even more precarious because of the several not quite distinguishable speaking voices and the arbitrary application of quotation marks.⁵² *La Liberté ou l'amour!*, which, with its more specified characters and greater thematic unity, appears more of a "novel," presents, at times, a slippage between the "I" who narrates and the voice supposedly of a character; in the midst of an impersonal, "objective" narration, all of a sudden an undefined "I" intrudes. The disappearance of a coherent speaking voice, a narratively defined "I," leaves the stage open to Desnos the writer's own voice, and to a continuous self-reflexive disillusioning of the fiction, a return of the text on itself. This also takes the form, at times, of self-examination and reflection by Desnos on his own writing and on his use of language and style. As Mary Ann Caws cogently argues, the reader is forced to watch the author watching himself.⁵³ In the end, it all boils down to Desnos the author facing the blank sheet on which he writes, the "lambent paper sky" over which his pen flies (*Liberty or Love!* 64; *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (henceforth referred to as *LA*) 47), which is also the "arid plain of a manuscript" (73; 58). In *La Liberté ou l'amour!*, the description of the spanking of the teenage girl in a classroom is intercepted by the following authorial intrusion:

And now as a streak of lightning is about to appear in the sky which I have evoked, despite its blackness, on the white paper, I understand why the tableau has been composed in this manner. The similarity between the streak of lightning and the slap of the tawse on the white bottom of a sixteen-

year-old girl at boarding school is alone sufficient to call forth the storm in the midst of the impassive night which conceals the house (114; 103).

These interpolations indeed affirm the purely verbal standing of the novels, their unreality or artificiality, their “delimitation” or “framing” within the blank manuscript page, the “arid plain of a manuscript.”⁵⁴ I find this aridity of the manuscript page to be directly related to the images of the desert or the empty, deserted town often found in *Deuil pour deuil* and *La Liberté ou l’amour*.⁵⁵ The desert is a place of emptiness, of absence. Marie-Claire Dumas sees such emptiness as that by which the fantastical [*fantasmatique*] narrative constitutes itself, arguing that the “writing of the unconscious is sustained by an ‘I’ (*je*) which death renders impersonal; the writing would imply a putting to death of the conscious, individualized, socially defined aspect. For the text to come into being, the ‘*je*’ should become this death without name” (*Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites* 382). The desert is also the locus of dedifferentiation, and it is such lack of differentiation – verbal dedifferentiation – that underlies Desnos’s complex plays on words or his verbal puns. These experiments were generated by the interchange of initial letters of words and homonymic exchanges of syllables. Writing about Duchamp’s “word games” and those following them invented by Desnos, as noted before, in a state of hypnotic “sleep” (they were published in *Littérature*, nouvelle série, in December 1922), Breton described them as the apogee of continuous poetic effort to turn words away from their duty to signify, to empty them of their thought.⁵⁶ As pointed out later by J.H. Matthews, these “transformations require the poet’s attention to the word as sound, not as meaning.” The poet must separate the word from meaning and note “the arbitrary changes in sense, now produced by the interplay of homonyms ...”⁵⁷

Such word plays express an impulse toward language before difference or resemblance (or, in other words, before metaphoric equivalence). The words emptied of their thought, to use Breton’s expression, open themselves now to “command thought.” The “arid plain of a manuscript” is where the new thought assumes power; this is the sheet on which Desnos writes, a field of new or other verbal possibilities. An evocation of sleep in terms of this dedifferentiated emptiness is to be found in Desnos’s poem “The Spaces inside Sleep”:

When I close my eyes, phosphorescent flowerings appear
and wither and are reborn like fleshy fireworks.

Undiscovered countries across which I travel in the company of creatures.

You are there, for sure, beautiful and discreet spy.

And the palpable soul of the expanse.⁵⁸

This dedifferentiated expanse, the soul of which Desnos the writer touches (and in which he is being spied upon by his beloved),⁵⁹ constitutes also, to return to our ur-text, the screen on which a "luminous disk was projected in which no landscapes or people were to be seen." This luminous white screen too is a site of representation before difference. And whether or not we accept the full implication of Lewin's dream screen hypothesis, it would be quite fitting to apply to this notion of "representation before difference" Freud's concept that "dreaming is on the whole an example of regression to the dreamer's earliest condition, a revival of his childhood, of the instinctual impulses which dominated it"⁶⁰ – a time when, to use Jean-Louis Baudry's formulation, "perception and representation could not be differentiated, when the different systems were confused, i.e., when the system of Consciousness-Perception had not differentiated itself" ("The Apparatus" 311). Such lack of differentiation refers also to the open body boundaries between the infant and the mother's breast, and it would even be tempting to find in Desnos's writing hints as to a hidden, perhaps not fully conscious, association between the whiteness of the screen, this area of dedifferentiation, and the breast. The title of the poem "Blanc seing," included in his 1923 collection *L'Aumonyme* (which refers also to "homonyme"), is, in fact, a word-play on "blanc sein" or white breast (*Corps et biens* 59). "Seing" means signature, and the association is, perhaps, between the act of writing and the white breast, in the framework of a poem that is constructed around the urge to arrive at language before difference.

Projection and reflection: Desnos and Aragon

The notion of projection has come up several times in my discussion, but I have not yet considered its full implication as far as Desnos's "Pénalités de l'enfer" cinema experience is concerned. In order to do that, I will introduce another notion – one involving mirror and reflection – which, in Desnos's case, is equally applicable to film and to writing. A mirror does not appear as such in the ur-text, but it may be inferred from references to mirrors in Desnos's fiction and writings on cinema, and from the conceptualization of the specular quality of his writing. I have referred before to Desnos's self-observation in his prose work, to the self-reflexive disillusioning of the fiction and the return of the text on itself. The narrator in *Deuil pour deuil* – in any case, one of them – indeed proposes that "the imperturbable and ever-changing mirror reveals to me only myself" (*The Automatic Muse* 9; LA 121). This mirror is in contradistinction to a mirror held up to nature, and indeed in *La Liberté ou l'amour!* Desnos refers to the "stupid hope of transmuting paper into a mirror by means of magical and effective writing" (*Liberty or Love!* 73; LA 58).

Desnos's text-mirror is not only "ever-changing" or, rather, "always new" (*toujours neuf*);⁶¹ it also forms a play of mirrors with the series comprising the narrator's own shifting image, "his own unrecognizable image" (112; 101). As suggested in one of the texts of *Deuil pour deuil*, this reflection which he no longer recognizes, could attain an existence of its own, separate from his: "A wedding march of our reflections left behind in the mirror when the woman we ought to have met and never will comes to admire herself in it" (*The Automatic Muse* 50; *LA* 153). As a comment on the nature of writing – on Desnos's kind of writing – this parallels the cinema experience. Addressing the "adorable women in love films," Desnos professes:

You die and yet your doubles transferred to the fragility of the celluloid survive you and continue to carry out your actions of the moment. The projection does not stop at the screen. It goes through it, and, always growing bigger, continues to infinity like two mirrors reflecting each other.⁶²

The rather trite first part of this statement, concerning the survival of the star through her photographed double, is followed by a somewhat more complex assertion. Desnos may have meant that there is a continuous interaction, a mirror play between spectators and star, in which the image of the star is enhanced by the audience's desire, and it is to this enhanced image that the audience will react, and so on. In the light of the references to mirrors and reflection introduced above, this passage may also have reflected Desnos's perceptions regarding the act of writing, with its mirror play between the writer and the text. While this essay is dated to 1927, it is quite conceivable that some ideas along these lines were on Desnos's mind when he wrote the cinema passage in "Pénalités de l'enfer." In this experience too, the projection does not stop at the screen, and, as I have posited, what is seen behind the screen is a revelation of hidden desires which are Desnos's own. Or, to use Desnos's later expressions, it is a revelation of his own "unrecognizable image," which might mean the hidden self revealed only in the course of the "sleeping fits" or in the practice of automatic writing. Hence the luminous disk in which "no landscapes or people were to be seen" and which represents an endpoint, a radicalized form of this process of revelation.

Desnos's perceptions, as suggested in the cinema ur-text and expounded in later writings, primarily in the last piece discussed ("Mystères du cinéma"), come close to what Christian Metz, in his "Le Signifiant imaginaire,"⁶³ later postulated in a psychoanalytic framework regarding the effect of cinema upon the spectator, especially with reference to what he calls the spectator-screen relationship.⁶⁴ While the equation of screen and mirror, as inferred above, is present in some form or another throughout Desnos's writings, I do not think it has much in common with Metz's basic notion concerning the screen's functioning as "that other mirror" (*Psychoanalysis and Cinema* 4), the mirror re-

enacting the primordial experience of the mirror as defined in Lacan's "stade du miroir."⁶⁵ If Desnos's mirror does touch on this experience, it does so more in the sense of a regression to a pre-"stade du miroir" vision of fragmentation and dedifferentiation. I tend to discern a greater affinity between Desnos's vision and some of the notions Metz places under the heading of "Identification with the camera." Metz suggests that we all have

... experienced our own look ... as a kind of searchlight turning on the axis of our own necks (like a pan) and shifting when we shift (a tracking shot now): as a cone of light ... whose vicariousness draws successive and variable slices of obscurity from nothingness wherever and whenever it comes to rest (50).

And as a corollary, "All vision consists of a double movement: projective (the 'sweeping' searchlight) and introjective: consciousness as a sensitive recording surface (as a screen)." (Metz also refers here to Freud's view that consciousness is a dual recording surface, internal and external.) Metz continues:

During the performance, the spectator is the searchlight I have described, duplicating the projector, which itself duplicates the camera, and he is also the sensitive surface duplicating the screen, which itself duplicates the filmstrip. There are two cones in the auditorium: one ending on the screen and starting both in the projection box and in the spectator's vision insofar as it is projective, and one starting from the screen and "deposited" in the spectator's perception insofar as it is introjective (on the retina, a second screen).

Hence Metz's assertion that "the constitution of the signifier in the cinema depends on a series of mirror-effects organized in a chain, and not on a single reduplication" (51). Quite obviously, this image could be quite closely associated with Desnos's evocation of the two mirrors reflecting each other.

Desnos's cinema ur-text sustains, to some extent at least, Metz's notion of the identification of spectator and projector (and also spectator and camera, if the spectator's internal perceptions, on the other side of consciousness, are also those located on the other side of the screen). Granted that, in its elliptical, almost epigrammatic form the ur-text is open to a broad range of readings, and that I may have already burdened it with an excess of significations, I nevertheless propose to add yet another layer of meaning to the situation in the movie theater, as elicited by this text, that combines elements of Plato's allegory of the cave and the camera obscura.⁶⁶ Plato's allegory is primarily present in a converse sense, with the narrator straying from the passive posture of Plato's prisoners, represented by the empty seats that follow "attentively a magnificent spectacle that I couldn't see," by approaching the screen to take a closer look at the luminous disk projected on it. There is no indication that the movie theater, like Plato's cave, lies in darkness, although, as might be concluded on the basis of Desnos's later

writings, this darkness is very much part of his cinema experience. What deserves notice is the fact that Desnos is blinded by the light coming from the projector. Analogous to the light beam, whose source is outside the camera obscura, this might also refer to the idealist notion of the blinding light of truth, which reigns outside Plato's cave. In the present case, however, the truth lies "behind" the projection – behind the screen – and not in its source, the projector. This truth, however, is constituted by the props enabling the Platonic deception – the simulacra of reality expressed in the two-dimensional shapes and flags that, as we have seen, populate the world behind the screen, epitomizing the "truth" of the cinema, and, for Desnos the writer, the truth of the "arid plain of a manuscript." Thus the designation of what lies inside and what exists outside in Plato's allegory is reversed. There is one more detail in this text that should be noted: the two holes in the screen. I think the reference to eyes is self-evident, but there is perhaps also an allusion to the aperture in the camera obscura. Here again, the roles of inside and outside are reversed and there is no way of telling what is the direction of sight of the "eyes" or the aperture. One cannot really expect Desnos to be philosophically or conceptually wholly consistent in his narrative. It seems to me, however, that in this text he was aiming to evoke an interchangeability of inside and outside – of vision and inner vision, and, by extension, of consciousness and the unconscious, perception and representation⁶⁷ – with both spatial locations designating poetic virtualities, neither more "real" than the other. After all, the scene in the movie theater itself – with the luminous disk projected on the screen and the empty seats attentively following an unknown spectacle – is no less hallucinatory than what is encountered behind the screen.

While what has preceded the experience in the cinema theater proper, in Desnos's cinema ur-text, and what he discovers beyond the screen, all exist as poetic virtualities, Aragon, as opposed to Desnos, has one foot planted firmly in the real, with the surfaces of reality themselves forming an ever-changing screen – one allowing the intermingling of the fantastic and the real through a projection of the imaginary on the real. Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (*Paris Peasant*) is a story whose hero is Aragon himself, who roams through the Passage de l'Opéra and the park of Buttes-Chaumont, observing both with the eyes of a "peasant." In this sense, the book is autobiographical, but it does not follow the common autobiographical mold. It is, rather, a spiritual and intellectual adventure in which Aragon's experiences and encounters, internal or external, reveal their basis in a mythological conception of the world. In the world of this book, Aragon's encounters with Imagination and the "sense of uselessness," or the other personae his mind engenders, attain mythological stature. Hence the "Preface to a Modern Mythology" with which Aragon opens the book.

Aragon's struggle is against the constraints of reason and what is commonly taken for the "real." In his 1924 manifesto *Une Vague de rêves* (*Wave of Dreams*) he describes the true nature of the "réel" by noting the failure of attitude of those he refers to as "shame-faced" realists. Such are the

... well-meaning men these days, subsisting on a compromise between Kant and Comte. By abandoning the commonplace notion of reality for the concept of reality within they believe they have made a great leap forward – but their idol, the Noumenon [in Kant's philosophy, something that can be the object only of a purely intellectual, nonsensuous intuition], has been exposed as a very mediocre piece of plaster. Nothing can make people like this understand the true nature of reality, that it is just an experience like any other, that the essence of things is not at all linked to their reality, that there are other experiences that the mind can embrace which are equally fundamental such as chance, illusion, the fantastic, dreams. These different types of experience are brought together and reconciled in one genre, Surreality.⁶⁸

This refusal of the real and the attempt to understand the true nature of reality are placed, in *Le Paysan de Paris*, within the mythical framework of Plato's allegory of the cave. Similarly to the screen in Desnos's cinema ur-text, for Aragon, "the light splits as it traverses imagination's prison."⁶⁹ The cinema theater, as evoked by Desnos, stands in some respects for a prison within the mind, with the eyes of the mind, the holes in the screen, opening to a scene of Platonic props of deception. Aragon's text is replete with more overt allusions to Plato's cave, in which Aragon himself plays a dual role. In the first place, he is a prisoner, like the rest of humanity, in this "trompe-l'oeil" of so-called reality (*Paysan* 62). With the "sense of uselessness" squatting beside him, holding between its hands an accordion upon which one can read the word "PESSIMISM," he can only hear the words spoken to him with their bleak message concerning even the power of sleep and memory:

What did you think you were up to, my friend, out there on the frontiers of reality? [...] You will never leave your ship of illusions, your villa of poppies with its pretty roof of quills. Your gaolers that are eyes trudge back and forth, rattling their bunches of reflections. What a delusion, to think that by spending twenty-six years of digging, with a sliver of broken reason, a tunnel whose starting point is your mattress, you would finally surface at the seashore. Your memory opens on to a secret dungeon. There you will always find the same flowers, the same forests of tresses, the same disasters of caresses (*Paris Peasant* 49–50; *Paysan* 63–4).

"Your gaolers that are eyes trudge back and forth, rattling their bunches of reflections" – this seems to be the burden of Aragon's reading of Plato, concerning the role of the eyes themselves in the imprisonment within so-called reality. Only the imagination has the power of breaking loose from this prison within the eyes and the mind, from under "this great blob of

color that weighs down the depths of your retinas." The imagination, however, that "limitless strength of the unreal," more often than not remains unappreciated.

How mankind loves to remain transfixed at the very doors of the imagination! This prisoner would dearly love to escape but he hesitates on the threshold of possibilities ... He has been taught the mechanism of the logical sequence of ideas ... So he justifies his reason and his delirium by means of delirious reasoning.

(Here Aragon introduces as an illustration a bit of Kantian "sophism" from the *Critique of Pure Reason*.) And hence the exhortation: "The trouble is that you fail to appreciate the limitless strength of the unreal. Your imagination, my dear fellow, is worth more than you imagine" (60–61; 76–7).

Appearances, then, are a snare, an illusion, formed, to begin with, by vision itself, but the mind also takes on its share in controlling the way one perceives or interprets the data provided by vision. In *Anicet ou le panorama*, an earlier novel by Aragon which appeared in 1920, a silvered glass ball, with the "deformations due to the particular design of spherical mirrors," brings Anicet to contemplate the mutable nature of vision: "We believe that what we see exists as established by our eye, but if the ball were our eye we would have believed it as strongly."⁷⁰ I concluded earlier that Desnos's cinema ur-text connotes an interchangeability of inside and outside – of vision and inner vision, and, by extension, of consciousness and the unconscious, perception and representation. Aragon presents a similar notion of the interchangeability of the interior and the exterior, of the darkness of Plato's cave and the sunlight outside. This external reality, however, is far from being lighted up by truth. It is, rather, the site of fantasies projected from inside that are compounded by the "bunches of reflections" proffered by the eyes. This perspective on the nature of perception and the confluence of inner and outer vision finds its most potent expression in the experience of the reflections in the shop windowpanes which make up most of the wall space of the Passage de l'Opéra. Such an experience, as recounted by Aragon, takes place when, having quite a few drinks under his belt, he walks towards the Passage and hears a

... sort of humming noise which seemed to be coming from the direction of the cane shop, and I was astonished to see that its window was bathed in a greenish, almost submarine light ... I recognized the sound: it was the same voice of the seashells that has never ceased to amaze poets and film-stars. The whole ocean in the Passage de l'Opéra. The canes floated gently like seaweed (*Paris Peasant* 22–3; *Paysan* 30–31).

He then sees a very small human form swimming in the window, the apparition of a woman "moving about just behind the windowpane. Her hair floated behind her, the fingers occasionally clutched at one of the canes. At

first I thought I must be face to face with a siren ..." All of a sudden, despite her "emaciated features and distraught appearance" he seems to recognize in this woman a German prostitute he knew during the occupation of the Rhineland. "What on earth could she be doing here, among the canes?" he asks himself. " 'The Ideal,' I cried, finding nothing better to say in my confusion" (here, again, the allusion is to Plato). The "siren" then turns toward him – is this an invitation to an erotic encounter? – but the window display is "seized by a general convulsion." The brightness dies away, and the canes seem to turn and form a curtain hiding the vision (23; 32).

Aragon offers no definite explication of this strange experience. He points out that the cane shop had two windows; the one further from where he was standing contained also a collection of pipes, one of them a meerschaum whose bowl depicted a siren, her head "crowned with flowing hair." Is this the source of the hallucination? Or perhaps he had seen, reflected in the windowpane, the image of a woman, perhaps indeed a prostitute, standing behind him in the street? Aragon seems to suggest, however, that in this exchange of erotic fantasy and the real, the image in the mind, the illusion, the hallucination, could leave its mark on the real. Passing by the following morning he finds that the pipe whose bowl depicted a siren had been broken. "From the end of this pipe's illusionist stem there still protruded the twin curve of a charming breast: a little white dust that had fallen on the silesia fabric of an umbrella testified to the erstwhile existence of a head crowned with flowing hair" (24; 33).

Vision for Aragon appears to be analogous to what Desnos saw as a darkened movie theater with the screen illuminated, to use Aragon's expression, by the "great lighthouses of the mind" (13; 20). I will have more to say about the "film thinking" underlying Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* in the next chapter. Here I would note that the particular spatial connotations of Aragon's mode of vision, as persuasively exposed in the cane shop episode, intimate a doubling of vision consisting of the flat image on the glass pane, the site of hallucinatory vision, combined with the sight in depth of the interior of the shop window. The windowpane – or, rather, "window," which better connotes the delimitation imposed by the frame itself – the window, then, complements Desnos's screen as a mirror and window at the same time, and as the site of an admixture of the imaginary – a corollary of memory and desire – and the real. This is the sense of the screen as a central element in this spatial collocation – a surface that constitutes at once a plane of projection, reflection, and seeing-through and that functions as a membrane or separator between inside and outside. These are reversible in Desnos's conception, and, in Aragon's case, more congruent with the perception of surface and interior space as being equally applicable to concrete reality and the mind.

Feuillade's layered depth

In pursuit of my argument that the screen functions as a spatial paradigm with far-reaching conceptual ramifications for Surrealist thought – I will introduce another manifestation of the screen that would have exerted a subtle effect on Surrealist sensibility, this time one associated with an actual film experience. Louis Feuillade's serials, especially *Fantômas* (1913–14) and *Les Vampires* (1915–16), are often listed together with the American-made *Les Mystères de New York* as occupying the highest ranks in the Surrealist pantheon of films. "It is in *Les Mystères de New York*, it is in *Les Vampires*, that the great reality of this century should be sought. Beyond fashion. Beyond taste," declares "Eternity," one of the characters in Breton's and Aragon's play *Le Trésor des jésuites* (1929).⁷¹ Desnos himself singled out three films equal to the task of giving expression to love, liberty, life, and poetry: "*Fantômas*, for revolt and liberty; *Les Vampires*, for love and sensuality; *Les Mystères de New York*, for love and poetry."⁷² *Les Mystères de New York* is the title given to the French version of the popular American serial *The Exploits of Elaine*, which owed much of its popularity – as did *Les Mystères de New York* in France – to the performance of the star, Pearl White.⁷³ If *Les Mystères de New York* is less prominent in my study, this is because of the special qualities of Feuillade's films, which distinguish them quite markedly from such elements as those that accounted for the Surrealists' enthusiastic acclaim of *Les Mystères de New York* and, for that matter, other serial films. For the Surrealists, who rejected the notion of "art film," serial films represented cinema in a pure state, not contaminated by "artistic means" or by "literature."⁷⁴ Surrealist rhetoric considered art merely as an expedient and – at least in the early part of the decade – a sorry one at that. Even worse in their eyes was the self-conscious manipulation of artistic means, which in the context of cinema implied, as the Surrealists saw it, an undue emphasis on technique – that is to say, on complex montage sequences, excessive use of superimpositions, orchestrated patterns of movement, peculiar camera angles, and so on – or, in other words, on what in critical parlance at the time became known as the cinematographic language.⁷⁵

Quite clearly, for the Surrealists the enchantment of film lay in capacities and qualities other than those associated with the art of the film or the film as art, and these qualities were amply demonstrated for them by Feuillade's crime serials, *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires*.⁷⁶ *Fantômas* had already been idolized by the young poets in Guillaume Apollinaire's circle, mostly as a literary phenomenon but also as a film, or, at times, quite confusingly, with little to distinguish one from the other.⁷⁷ The young Surrealists followed suit in championing what perhaps we should refer to as the *Fantômas* phenomenon, one combining film and novels. Indeed, their interest was divided equally between the 32 volumes of the series of *Fantômas* novels authored by Pierre

Souvestre and Marcel Allain (1911–13)⁷⁸ and the five episodes of the serial film directed by Feuillade (1913–14). There was great appeal for them in this figure of the “lord of fear,” who, in his daring criminal exploits, always managed to hit hard at the soft belly of the bourgeoisie.⁷⁹ Contrary to the serial *Fantômas*, *Les Vampires* had no literary antecedent, and no early avant-garde following. Its fascination for the Surrealists – at least on the level of character allure – lay mostly in the enticing figure of Irma Vep (the name is an anagram of “vampire”), the cohort of the *Grand vampire*, as interpreted by the actress Musidora. Her quintessential image as a figure clad in a black bodysuit (in addition to her many other disguises) epitomized for the Surrealists the attraction of female criminal seductiveness, a mixture of death and sexuality. “Musidora,” writes Desnos exultantly, “how beautiful you were in *Les Vampires*! Do you know that we dreamed of you and that when evening came you entered our bedrooms without knocking, dressed in your black tights, and on awakening the next morning we searched for a trace of the disconcerting ‘hotel mouse’ that had visited us.”⁸⁰

My basic premise is that perceptions similar to those associated with the quality of Feuillade’s vision were echoed in Surrealist discourse in general, and, indeed, may have found their way into it through direct exposure to these films.⁸¹ To present the gist of my argument as it will be worked out on the coming pages – my claim is that *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* would have appealed to the Surrealists not only because of their fascinating characters (Fantômas, Irma Vep, Les Vampires), or their themes, especially as defined within Surrealist lore (love, eroticism, crime, anti-bourgeoisie, revolt), but also because of a special feel and quality associated with the manner in which Feuillade’s camera captured the palpable surfaces of reality, the spaces associated with them, and the placement of characters and objects within them. This quality might be associated with the sense of the *insolite* and disorientation, as these are expressed by the urban or suburban setting, or the perception of the mystery and the Marvelous lurking in quotidian reality, in the midst of the bourgeois setting, behind doors or windows or some other hidden and unexpected openings. The Surrealists, indeed, could not have remained oblivious to this presentation of a very familiar world that, without any external change of appearance, revealed another mysterious and often threatening world, or, at least, offered intimations of its existence. A labyrinthine intermingling of the quotidian and the imaginary is manifested in the surfaces and spaces presented by the real, which constantly signify that what may seem or appear is not always what is. Killers may lurk behind the most innocent-looking doors (*Fantômas*, Sequel 3, “Le Mort qui tue”). A framed picture on the wall becomes a threatening dark opening at night (*Vampires*, Episode 1.4). Cupboards have hidden doors (*Vampires*, Episode III.7) or fake backs, and they may contain a corpse (*Vampires*, Episode IV.6). Wall

safes do not serve their purpose because they offer clear access from the room next door (*Vampires*, Episode IV.2; *Fantômas*, Sequel 5, “Le Faux magistrat”). Fantômas always manages to escape by making use of the illusory nature of everyday objects such as the coat with false sleeves (Sequel 2, “Juve contre Fantômas”) or the wall with the secret revolving panel (Sequel 3, “Le Mort qui tue”). This unsettling undermining of quotidian reality is manifest not only in the contingent nature of appearance but also in the spatial dislocations of the characters moving within it. It might appear as if the rules applying to the movement of characters are completely upset, and it is space itself – architectural space primarily – that manipulates the characters in their efforts to move from one location to another.⁸² Thus it would be natural in Feuillade’s world to creep over rooftops and slide down the side of the building; to go in and out of a room through the window or the chimney, or to pass from one place to another using manholes and underground ducts.⁸³

That *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* exhibit the immanence of another unknown reality within the real – with doors, windows, and other apertures all serving as intimations of that other reality, and, as such, also as passageways around which a sense of the *merveilleux quotidien* (quotidian marvelous) is focalized – is primarily to be accounted for, I maintain, by their spatial character. My analysis relies on expositions of these issues in Noël Burch’s book *Life to Those Shadows* (1990), and David Bordwell’s *On the History of Film Style* (1997). Burch introduces the notion of “primitive mode of representation” to designate early cinema’s “autarchy of the tableau,” that is to say, the basing of an extended episode on one tableau, with the fixed camera placed horizontally and frontally, viewing characters and setting from a point that is outside and at a distance from them. This, together with painted backdrops and vertical illumination, results in a visual flatness, with the screen presenting a surface to be scanned by eye movement.⁸⁴ Feuillade is seen by Burch as one of those filmmakers – he also singles out Perret and Jasset – who, however “innovatory they may have been, however beautiful the system of staging in depth that was their major contribution to the ‘language’ of the cinema, their films continued to observe the basic features of the primitive cinema (frontality, distance, centrifugality, autarchy of the tableaux) ...” (73). Bordwell, on the contrary, argues that, rather than treat these filmmakers in terms of a persistence of elements of the primitive mode of representation, this style should actually be viewed as constituting a “well-developed tradition of deep-focus, long-take filmmaking,” a style that largely marks the European cinema of the 1910s and that constitutes one of the alternatives to Hollywood continuity.⁸⁵ I follow Bordwell in borrowing Wölfflin’s concept of “planimetric” patterns in order to attribute to Feuillade a mode of staging in depth defined by a spatial conception based on layers lying in depth, parallel to the picture plane as well as to the background plane. An example of this spatial conception is a frame



1.1 *Les Vampires* (1915–16), Episode IV.3

from *Les Vampires* illustrating the bank scene (Episode IV.3, Figure 1.1). The interior of the bank is shown as a space divided by several lateral partitions or walls lying parallel to the picture plane. The two figures in the foreground stand against a wall with a large doorway, within which we see the figure of a woman (the disguised Irma Vep) in front of a partition, behind which, seen in a small window, sits the teller. The placing and movement of the actors are defined by the orthogonal architectural setting with its “planimetric” patterning, and it is this setting that largely accounts for the trajectory taken by the viewer’s vision. Such spatial conceptions for his interiors seem to be the rule for Feuillade,⁸⁶ even when there is only one defining wall (as in the basic planar conception of the “cinema of origins”).

It is this conception of layered depth – the structuring of space in terms of planes lying parallel to the projection plane or screen – that I see as paramount in Feuillade’s films. Feuillade pursues this orthogonal conception of space in outdoor scenes as well. Streets and buildings are more often than not viewed laterally as lying parallel to the projection plane; cars too often move across the screen along such a lateral path. There are several examples of this in *Juve contre Fantômas* (*Fantômas*, Sequel 2, Part I, “La Catastrophe du



1.2 *Fantômas* (1913–14), Sequel 2, “Juve contre Fantômas,” Part I, “Le Catastrophe du Simplon-Express”



1.3 *Fantômas* (1913–14), Sequel 2, “Juve contre Fantômas,” Part I, “Le Catastrophe du Simplon-Express”

Simplon-Express”). In these scenes, even the path taken by figures moving forward from a distance toward the foreground plane is often vertical rather than diagonal. Such movement is found, for instance, in the scene (Figure 1.2) in which *Fantômas*, disguised as the gangster Loupart, meets his assistant Joséphine. Space is defined by a perspective view of the street, centered on a vanishing point formed by the line of trees and the sidewalk curb. Loupart and Joséphine advance along a vertical path toward the camera, and then, taking their leave, move horizontally across the screen to leave the frame on right and left respectively. Following them, the reporter Fandor and Inspector Juve move along the same path. Even when the movement is diagonal, space still asserts itself as orthogonal. A couple of minutes later, in the following shot, Fandor follows Joséphine, both moving laterally across the street on the far sidewalk; Joséphine enters a dark doorway, and Fandor moves forward to sit at a café table facing this doorway (Figure 1.3). Both sidewalk and building front on the far side of the street and the ornamental iron framework of the sidewalk partition of the café form a perceptual space whose assertive orthogonality is enhanced by Fandor’s diagonal trajectory. It should be noted, however, that when it comes to outdoor scenes, and

only then, does *Les Vampires* exhibit a lesser allegiance to such orthogonal conceptions, perhaps because, by that time, Feuillade was already imitating more closely the chase scenes in American serials with their pronounced sense of diagonal movement.

This orthogonal or planimetric conception of a layered depth establishes a perceptual space in which the sense of deep-space staging is indeed retained, but that also offers, at the same time, an enhanced sense of flatness. The dominant spatial cues are associated with the flat surfaces that constitute the demarcations of the layers of space, the spaces “in between” being, on the whole, less emphatically defined (in fact, even a diagonal movement between these conspicuously presented planes will further articulate their presence). Notwithstanding the cues of perspectival depth, whenever these exist, such a sense of depth is denied in various outdoor scenes (especially those in *Fantômas*, as described above) and in most interior scenes. This is fully apparent, for example, in the scenes in which two adjacent rooms are shown in a perpendicular view, with the wall dividing them represented by a flat and narrow cross-sectional partition.⁸⁷ At times, it is the very pronounced centering of architectural elements, mostly doors and gateways, that accounts for such an impression. This conception is effected in *Fantômas* in the scenes involving the gateway to the “haunted villa” (Sequel 2, *Juve contre Fantômas*, Part III), and most conspicuously in scenes centering on doors. Such are the scenes involving the black-hooded assassins waiting behind a door (Figure 1.4, showing Sequel 3, *Le Mort qui tue*, Part III, “Le Banquier Nanteuil”), or those showing the hallway in Elisabeth Dollon’s boarding house (Sequel 3, Part V). Here the camera also captures a small section of the side walls, but the effect of the symmetrical arrangement of the centrally placed doors is so overpowering as to draw attention completely away from the perspectival lines of the side walls and focus it on the wall facing the viewer.

Furthermore, in their planar conception of layered depth and in their often uncompromising assertion of surface, Feuillade’s films convey an enhanced sense of the “tangibility” of the screen as a projection plane through its association with the parallel planes lying “behind” it. In arguing thus, I am reconsidering some notions of Rudolf Arnheim and Noël Burch, concerning which Bordwell expresses some reservations, perhaps because of his emphasis on “staging in depth.” The gist of Arnheim’s ideas is that, although the film represents a three-dimensional reality, what is shown to the viewer is a flat, geometrical display – a picture – which is the result of distortions and of the way the frame delimits the image, cutting it off from the spatial continuum.⁸⁸ This Modernist tension between pictorial flatness and the representation of depth is also at the basis of a pioneering study of film, Hugo Münsterberg’s *The Film, A Psychological Study* (1916). Münsterberg argued that “photoplay consists of a series of flat pictures in contrast to the plastic objects of the real



1.4 *Fantômas* (1913–14), Sequel 3, “Le Mort qui tue,” Part III, “Le Banquier Nanteuil”

world which surrounds us.”⁸⁹ He insists that the “depth effect” in film is undeniable (22), and yet

... we are never deceived; we are fully conscious of the depth, and yet we do not take it for real depth. Too much stands in the way ... the size and the frame and the whole setting strongly remind us of the unreality of the perceived space. But the chief point remains that we see the whole picture with both eyes and not with only one, and that we are constantly reminded of the flatness of the picture because the two eyes receive identical impressions” (23).

He concludes:

We certainly see the depth, and yet we cannot accept it ... It is a unique inner experience, which is characteristic of the perception of the photoplays. We have reality with all its true dimensions; and yet it keeps the fleeting, passing surface suggestion without true depth and fullness, as different from a mere picture as from a mere stage performance [italics in the original] (24).

To this notion of “surface suggestion” might be added another point made by Münsterberg, which I find very pertinent to my discussion. This is that

“the screen as such is an object of our perception and demands an adaptation of the eye and an independent localization” (23).⁹⁰ Such an assertion of the screen – what I consider to be the perception of the “tangibility” of the screen as a projection plane – is also operative in Feuillade’s films. In considering the visual design of these films, Bordwell suggests that Feuillade utilized compositional conceptions derived from late nineteenth-century academic painting, and he cites Feuillade to that effect:

In reality, the cinema proceeds as much, if not more, from the art of the painter than from that of the stage director, since cinema addresses itself to our eyes by combinations of light and changing tonalities [*virages*], and by qualities of composition. Why have films not given us sensations of beauty comparable to those aroused by a painting by Millet or a fresco by Puvis de Chavannes?⁹¹

Bordwell sees this choice of Millet and Puvis de Chavannes as confirming Feuillade’s “petty-bourgeois” tastes. “If only he had mentioned Courbet and Redon instead, he might be redeemable as protomodernist” (28). Contrary to Bordwell, I see the reference to Puvis de Chavannes as confirming Puvis’s own “protomodernist” stance for Feuillade. I suggest then that Feuillade would have had in mind, rather, the two-dimensional decorativeness of Puvis’s frescoes, with their “favoring” of the flatness of the painting surface to which painters such as Gauguin, Munch, and the Nabis responded, and that also paralleled the pictorial ideals of late nineteenth-century graphic art.

Self-aware screen

Feuillade, as cited above, associated the nature of flatness displayed by Puvis’s frescoes with the screen as a projection plane, with such an association resulting – in practice – in what I have been referring to as “favoring” of the screen. This is confirmed in particular by various scenes in *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* that involve performance. The first is the scene in *Fantômas*, which has drawn the attention of quite a few critics, in which Lady Beltham, *Fantômas*’s mistress, seated in a theater box, watches the actor Valgrand, “disguised” as *Fantômas*, perform in a play depicting *Fantômas* (in his identity as the criminal Gurn) in his cell before his execution (Sequel 1, *A L’Ombre de la guillotine*; Part III, “Autour de l’échafaud”). This is an image of layered depth in which the sides of the box frame the theater orchestra, while the proscenium arch frames the scene enacted on the stage where Gurn is seen walking restlessly in his cell (Figure 1.5). The scene on the stage is fully identical to the scene at the Santé prison showing the real Gurn in his cell. The scene intimates a confusion or, rather, conflation of the theatrical space and the space of reality – stage and actual prison cell – with, as a result, the merging of both spaces with the space of film. Similarly, the actor



1.5 *Fantômas* (1913–14), Sequel 1, “A L’Ombre de la guillotine,” Part III, “Autour de l’échafaud”

on stage who plays the role of Gurn/Fantômas – who impersonates, in fact, Fantômas – is the same one who plays the role of the film’s fictive hero Gurn/Fantômas (both roles are performed by a cinema actor called René Navarre). The prison cell on the stage may well have been used also for the scene taking place in the “real” prison, and most viewers, I imagine, would have been aware of such identification. What Feuillade creates in this scene is a “self-aware image,” to borrow the title of Victor Stoichita’s book on the subject of what he calls “early modern meta-painting.” Stoichita refers to niches, windows, and doors as “characterized through their capacity to define a field of vision. They are also negation of the wall and an affirmation of another space.”⁹² Stoichita then goes on to say what seems quite pertinent with regard to this scene in *Fantômas*:

The reproduction of “real openings” in paintings can be regarded as the image’s “autobiographical confession,” a confession that must be interpreted on the correct level, namely, the metaphoric level. To be more precise: still-life pieces, landscapes, and interiors are in no way, *a fortiori*, views of a niche, through a window or door; but it can be confidently maintained that paintings that depict a niche, window, or door are confirmation of a meditation on the structural consubstantiality between the picture frame and all other types of enframement (55).



1.6 *Les Vampires* (1915–16), Episode III.2

Whether or not we may apply at this point the notion of meditation, conscious or otherwise, to Feuillade there is no question as to the structural consubstantiality of the framing devices in this scene, with the borders of the screen on which the film is projected constituting yet another frame. This chain of frames *en abyme* – the frames around the illusory space of theater, the illusory space of reality represented as such in the film, and the space of film itself as projected on the screen – points to the screen as constituting the sole reality in this chain, and as forming a surface on which are conflated the various levels of reality represented by the planes that make up this layered depth.⁹³

Further corroboration for my hypothesis may be found in two sequences of *Les Vampires* that complement each another. The first is a nightclub scene in which Irma Vep, in an undercover role as an entertainer, is shown performing on stage (Episode III.2). With the stage flooded with light and bordered by dark curtains, and viewed frontally across the spectators' heads, the scene evokes a film projection (Figure 1.6). I would not have considered this in itself as significant, had there not been another scene (Episode VI.1) in which Guérande and Mazamette, watching a newsreel in a movie theater, recognize in it members of the Vampire gang (Figure 1.7). The scene presents some obvious similarities to the former, with the bright screen, again viewed



1.7 *Les Vampires* (1915–16), Episode VI.1

frontally, enclosed by dark borders; and, what is more significant, with the figures shown on screen appearing as if standing on a stage. They are seen in full length, on the edge of the “stage” (that is, with their feet almost touching the base of the image); the camera is stationary, and the painted backdrop behind them is essentially no different from the one seen behind Irma Vep. It is quite probable that, instead of shooting a film within a film – technically this could have been done at that time⁹⁴ – Feuillade placed his actors on a stage (a stage similar to the one on which Irma Vep performs) and shot the scene as if it were a film projection. It may not have been quite by choice, and there could have been some financial considerations involved. But then again, the conceptual proximity of the earlier scene might put things in a different perspective. Film and theater become indistinguishable within the space of Feuillade’s film, as the screen and the virtual screen are identified with the proscenium, while the surface of the actual screen on which *Les Vampires* is projected is established as a “representational field capable of representing its own process of representation.”⁹⁵

Such a perception of a “self-aware screen,” to further extend this notion of self-awareness or reflexivity, accentuates what I postulated earlier concerning the planar conception of the layered depth in Feuillade’s films, with its

uncompromising assertion of surface, and the sense of the “tangibility” of the screen through its association with the parallel planes lying behind it. These perceptions also complement what I have suggested concerning the essence of the Surrealist experience of these films. I observed that the sensations they arouse might be associated, on one hand, with the intimation of the unknown threat lurking behind the surfaces of reality – what amounts to a subversion of the complacency of the bourgeois setting. But on the other hand, there is also a special, indefinable aura – partaking of the mythical quality with which Aragon imbues the real – with its accompanying disorienting sense of the *insolite*. What I have associated with the perceptual and conceptual assertion of the screen – and primarily its conflation with the planes lying further away in the space of film – also marks its centrality in the experience of the immanence of another reality within the real. These notions of the tangibility of a “self-aware screen” – together with the associated conception of layered depth – complementing what I have suggested regarding the role played by the concept of the screen in the writings of Desnos and Aragon, point to various issues, addressed in the coming chapter, concerning the nature of vision as applied by the Surrealists to their Parisian surroundings. These will reappear in later chapters with regard to questions pertaining to the Surrealist pictorial space.

Notes

1. Desnos, “Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides,” in *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes* 100. Unless otherwise specified, translations from the French are mine. References to the original French texts are to the most readily accessible sources. At times, the original French is cited as well, following the translation or in a note.
2. I am happy to acknowledge my debt to David Wills, the only modern scholar, to my knowledge, to have given critical attention to this passage. My own exploration of the text has taken me, however, on a different trajectory. See David Wills, “Slit Screen,” in Kuenzli (ed.), *Dada and Surrealist Film* 86–98.
3. For the writing history of this manuscript and Desnos’s failure to publish it, see Marie-Claire Dumas’s notes in Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides* 497–504.
4. These pages include the texts appearing in Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides* 25–36. *Littérature* was the periodical published by the Parisian Dada group. For Desnos’s association with the young poets and writers of André Breton’s circle, see the “Chronologie” in Dumas (ed.), *Robert Desnos: Cahier dirigé par Marie-Claire Dumas* 402; see also Dumas, “Essai biographique,” in *Robert Desnos ou l’exploration des limites* 27–33.
5. This sense of freedom from subservience to past practices was perceived by Breton, who in a lecture given in November 1922 at the Ateneo in Barcelona, referred to Desnos as a “man freed of all constraints.” See Breton, “Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What It Consists Of,” *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 125; “Caractères de l’évolution moderne et ce qui en participe,” *OC I* 307.
6. Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides* 41. These and other verbal procedures in Desnos’s prose writings are analyzed by Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron who considers them in the light of Greek rhetorical tradition. See “L’adunation face à l’énigme et à l’impossibilité logique dans la prose narrative de Robert Desnos,” in Dumas (ed.), “*Moi qui suis Robert Desnos*” 101–113.

7. See Hubert, "Proverbes et images dans *Pénalités de l'enfer*" 115–125.
8. In his letter to Doucet, Desnos singles out Breton and Aragon, probably because of their friendly relations with Doucet at the time, as those who "quite naturally play a role in the stories I enjoy putting together ..."
9. These characteristics, as will be seen later, became the hallmark of Desnos's narrative technique in his "novels" *Deuil pour Deuil* (*Mourning for Mourning*, 1924) and *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (*Liberty or Love!*), 1927.
10. Sarane Alexandrian sees Miss Flowers as heralding the later appearance of Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes*. See *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* 268. Such a scene indeed presents a remarkable similarity to some of the images in Ernst's collage-novel.
11. Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard 32, 37; André Breton, *OC* I 663. The English translation is henceforth referred to as *Nadja*, the French original refers to *OC* I. *The Trail of the Octopus*, to use the English title, was a film in fifteen episodes produced in 1919 and shown in France in 1921. It concerns the machinations of a secret society whose hold resembles that of the tentacles of an octopus (*OC* I 1533).
12. Citing this passage in Breton's *Nadja*, Georges Sadoul provides the additional detail that "these hideous Chinese formed a secret society, 'The Zealots of Satan,'" but he is quick to emphasize that one shouldn't ascribe to the Surrealists or to Breton himself any adherence to some league warning against the "yellow peril" at the time. His statement with regard to this serial refers to the time he first met the Surrealists, around 1925–6. See "Souvenirs d'un témoin" 10.
13. André Breton, "As in a Wood," *Free Rein* (*La Clé des champs*) 235–6; "Comme dans un bois," *La Clé des champs* 291; *OC* III 903. For another translation, see Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and Its Shadow* 72–77.
14. In *Nadja* there is an expression of regret concerning the "disappearance of almost everything relating to *The Grip of the Octopus*." *Nadja* 152; *OC* I 746. While Marguerite Bonnet in a note (*OC* I 1533) argues that this disappearance has to do with the lack of printed documentation – which explains why there is a photograph in *Nadja* reproducing the leaflet with the plot summary of the fifth episode rather than the fifteenth, to which Breton actually refers – I still tend to see this regret as applying to the general disappearance of films of this nature.
15. Desnos, *Les Rayons et les ombres* 23.
16. Desnos, *Les Rayons et les ombres* 83–4; trans. in Abel, ed. *French Film Theory*, vol. I 398 (translation modified).
17. See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction." A similar idea is suggested by Vanessa Schwartz, who notes that, in order to "understand cinematic spectatorship as a historical practice, it is essential to locate cinema in the field of cultural forms and practices associated with the burgeoning mass culture of the late nineteenth century." See Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus" 110.
18. This aspect of early film spectatorship is explored by Tom Gunning in "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator"
19. Wax effigies, mannequins and other forms of counterfeit representation of the human body were, of course, quite popular in Surrealist circles. Breton, an enthusiast of the Musée Grévin, bemoans in *Nadja* the "impossibility of obtaining permission to photograph an adorable wax-work figure in the Musée Grévin, on the left, between the hall of modern political celebrities and the hall at the rear of which, behind a curtain, is shown 'an evening at the theater' ..." (*Nadja* 152). The English translation follows the 1928 edition of *Nadja*; in subsequent editions, this specific designation of the location of the wax-work figure is omitted. It is to be found in a note in *OC* I 1558.
20. For an extensive examination of these films, see Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town* 61–87, 278–297.
21. The Aquarium du Trocadéro was built in 1878, as one of the attractions of the Exposition Universelle of that year. The Hill of Chaillot (La colline de Chaillot) was chosen because it was the site of a deserted eighteenth century stone quarry, which allowed the planners to simulate a grotto-like environment by making use of the underground passageways. The Aquarium was closed down in 1985.
22. The image of four undertakers in a hearse – a "ludicrous vehicle," in Desnos's words – reappears in Desnos's novel *La Liberté ou l'amour!* in a chapter entitled "Polemic against Death."

23. "Le Rayon mortel" (*Journal Littéraire*, 15 November 1924), in Desnos, *Les Rayons et les ombres* 44.
24. Francis Picabia's and René Clair's film *Entr'acte*, made two years after Desnos wrote "Pénalités de l'enfer," contains a scene involving a hearse that presents some obvious affinities with Desnos's text. It is quite possible that when Picabia originally introduced in his brief notes for *Entr'acte* the idea of the funeral with the hearse drawn by a camel, he may have had in mind Desnos's "Pénalités de l'enfer," having read the manuscript in 1922 for the purpose of preparing illustrations for it once it was published. Mack Sennett and the early French directors of film comedies were major influences on René Clair. For Mack Sennett's influence on René Clair, see Chapter 3 in Kovács, *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*. As noted by Kovács (105), Mack Sennett's film *Heinze's Resurrection* (1913) may have provided the model for the chase scene in *Entr'acte* (1924). This could be quite true as far as Clair is concerned, but Picabia should still be given credit for conceiving a scene involving a hearse in the first place. A scene that similarly mocks the bourgeois sense of propriety and its feigned indifference to the lower classes occurs in Dalí's and Buñuel's film *L'Âge d'or* (1930). This time it is a farm cart bearing drunken laborers rather than a hearse that goes through a ballroom while the guests continue to talk and sip drinks as if oblivious to its presence.
25. "Imagerie moderne," in *Nouvelles Hébrides* 458. The article originally appeared in *Documents* 7 (December 1929) 377–78.
26. As Lucien Poznanski suggested to me, to the erotic connotation of the *lavoir* or wash house in the popular imagination might be added homophones such as "la voir" (to see her) and "l'avoir" (to have her). These could well be the inscriptions hidden behind the word LAVOIR, which – as perhaps hinted by Desnos – would be revealed once the folds of the flags are spread open.
27. The concept of "primal scene" is introduced here in quotation marks to designate the largely metaphorical sense in which I use it – essentially a forbidden sight involving parental figures. There is no question that the role of André and Simone Breton throughout "Pénalités de l'enfer" is that of often threatening parental figures. The first lines of the manuscript state that "on the door of M. and Mme. Breton there is a frightening inscription in chalk: 'You're in for a hiding'" (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 25–6). Their appearance is often accompanied by visions of a multiplicity of phalluses (48–9), or by an evocation of the narrator's own immolation and death.
28. Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* 67; *Entretiens* (1913–1952) 84–5. These sessions of hypnotic slumber, and particularly Desnos's role in them, are evoked in Aragon's 1924 manifesto, *Une vague de rêves* 18. For a more recent consideration of these sessions, see Dumas, *Robert Desnos ou l'exploration des limites* 45–50.
29. This would be true if the order of texts in the manuscript was chronologically determined, but I have not found any proof of this.
30. It is known that Breton himself came to see the danger involved in these experiments, and he was the one who put an end to them. In a 1959 interview, Breton related that he had tried to restrain Desnos "the moment I got to fear that his personal structure might not hold up. Yes, I continue to believe that, going on on this route beyond a certain limit, there is the threat of disintegration." See "Sur Robert Desnos," in *Perspective Cavalière* 170. Desnos was quite unhappy about Breton's decision and felt that the sessions should be continued. This, however, does not mean that he remained oblivious to their dangerous character. This might be evinced by several drawings he made in the course of the trances that were entitled "Mort d'André Breton," "Ici mourut Aragon," "Mort de Paul Eluard," etc. The point has been raised by Michael Sheringham, "La mort et les lois du désir" 76. Some of these drawings are reproduced in Desnos, *Écrits sur les peintres* 12; see also Dumas, "Notes sur Robert Desnos" 106–7; *Mort d'André Breton* and *Mort de Max Morise* are reproduced in Picon, *Surrealists and Surrealism* 45.
31. Sheringham, "La mort et les lois du désir" 71. Sheringham's article offers a sustained and well-argued exposition of the theme of death and desire in Desnos's prose writing, and I am greatly indebted to it for sustaining my own reading of these texts.
32. Desnos, *La Liberté ou l'amour* 158; "Mourning for Mourning," in *The Automatic Muse* 56.
33. The title *La Liberté ou l'amour*! is of course a pun on *La liberté ou la mort*! (Liberty or death), a cry heard in Paris at the time of the Revolution.
34. Desnos, "La Muraille de Chêne," *La Révolution surréaliste* 2 (15 January 1925) 22; also in Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides* 207. Mary Ann Caws sees this union of love and death as one of many examples of the principle of polarity in Desnos's poetry. See *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism* 179.

35. *La liberté ou l'amour* 65; Desnos, *Liberty or Love!* 80.
36. A few of these dream narrations were published in *Littérature*, n.s., no. 5, 1 October 1922. Others, most of which remained unpublished, are to be found in Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides* 258–61.
37. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations* 236.
38. "On Decor," in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 166. Perceptions similar to Aragon's are to be found in Jacques Vaché's letter to Breton, first published by Breton in 1919, in which Vaché evokes the film he'll play in, "With runaway cars, you know the kind, bridges that give way, and enormous hands crawling across the screen toward some document or other!" See "War Letter," in Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and Its Shadow* 48.
39. "Eroticism," in Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and Its Shadow* 195; "L'Érotisme," *Les Rayons et les ombres* 29.
40. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema; The Imaginary Signifier* 74. Of interest with respect to the close-up is also Metz's consideration of the position of the close-up in a classificatory schema constructed around metaphor and metonymy, and his subsequent assertion of the close-up's basis in synecdoche (171–2). As he points out, following Roman Jakobson (*Fundamentals of Language*, 1956), "one of the main ways in which the object is transformed into a sign, in the cinema, is by selectively representing one part of the object ... thereby choosing the meaning one wants to give it over and above this representation (but through it) ..."
41. A perception akin to Breton's with regard to the special quality of light coming from the screen is suggested by Aragon in his story "Paris by Night" ("Paris la nuit"), included in his collection of short stories and plays *Le Libertinage* (1924): "Since the invention of the cinema, at night you'd think you were watching a film; it looks like broad daylight with a blue wash over everything ..." Louis Aragon, *The Libertine* 141; *Le Libertinage* 323.
42. See note 21.
43. In similar fashion, writing about Cecil B. de Mille's 1915 film *Forfaiture* (*The Cheat*), Desnos defines the film masterpiece as one in which "the screen will be punctured by revolver shots at the spot where the offensive character is located; the utopian one, sadly, where the projectionist will clear the traces of kisses from the screen" (*Les Rayons et les ombres* 40).
44. See Hartley (ed.), *Mallarmé* 7. The translation suggests "our sail's white concern." "Canvas," however, seems more appropriate here.
45. Fowlie, *Mallarmé* 212–13.
46. Jean Goudal, "Surrealism and Cinema" 354, 355; see also Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and its Shadow* 84–94. For the original French version, see Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* 305–17.
47. It might be noted that Goudal's perceptions are inseparable from the experience associated with silent movies. In Chapter 8, I examine the effect that the introduction of the sound film may have had on the early perception of the cinema screen as the privileged site of the discourse of dream.
48. Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* 233. As noted above, this superiority of dream to cinema is often acknowledged by Desnos: "It's a cinema more marvelous than any other. Those who have a gift for dreaming know full well that no film can equal, in either unforeseen contingencies or tragedy, that indelible life to which their sleep is consecrated" (Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 283; *Les Rayons et les ombres* 32).
49. Lewin, "Sleep, the Mouth, and the Dream Screen" 420.
50. Foremost among them was Jean-Louis Baudry, who used the concept of the dream screen as an explanation for the cinematic apparatus. See Baudry, "The Apparatus." The article, originally entitled "Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l'impression de réalité," was first published in *Communications* 23 (1975): 56–72, and translated in *Camera Obscura* 1 (Fall 1976): 104–28. Baudry's argument is fiercely refuted by Noël Carroll, who questions whether "something like a dream screen is an essential or normal element of all dreams," pointing out the flimsiness of the association of screen and breast. See Carroll, *Mystifying Movies* 28–9. In a later article, it should be noted, Lewin himself admitted that his early formulations were naïve, especially with regard to the idea of the flat projection screen, and broadened his concept to include blank walls and television screens, or even "various shapes, ranging from spherical to flat ... balloons, sand hills, blackboards, photographic film, empty sheets of paper and other objects which could serve more or less for the optical projection of dream." Lewin, "Reconsideration of the Dream Screen" 190.

These considerations will come up again in relation to the confluence I will suggest between the screen and a wall or partition with apertures.

51. In his "On Decor," Aragon suggests similarly that "to willfully restrict the field of vision so as to intensify expression" is one of the "properties that help make cinematic decor the adequate setting of modern beauty" (Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 166).
52. *Deuil pour deuil* opens, to give one example, with the following evocation by an undisclosed narrator: "These ruins are situated on the banks of a winding river. The town must have been quite sizeable at some time in history" (*The Automatic Muse* 9; *La Liberté ou l'amour!* 121). But there is no indication as to who is the voice speaking in the next paragraph: "Strange diseases, curious customs – where is the bell's clapper of love leading me? Amongst these stones I can find no vestige of that for which I am searching."
53. Caws, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism* 172. One might note an example of this self-examination in *La Liberté ou l'amour!*: "Banality! Banality! That's the sensuous style for you! That's gushing prose for you. How far it is from the pen to the mouth" (*Liberty or Love* 62; *La liberté ou l'amour!* 45).
54. For this aspect of Desnos's fiction, see Sheringham, "La mort et les lois du désir" 75; see also Gaubert, "*Deuil pour deuil*, *La Liberté ou l'amour!*" 156. I am indebted to both for their perceptive readings of Desnos's prose fiction.
55. In *Deuil pour Deuil* Desnos often evokes the emptiness of the deserted town, while in *La Liberté ou l'amour!* one of Desnos's personae, the "white-helmeted explorer," is "irremediably lost ... more lost in his vast intuition of eternal events than in the sandy expanse of the equatorial plain where his genius, that wily guide, has led him ..." (*Liberty or Love* 112; *La liberté ou l'amour!* 100).
56. Breton, "Words without Wrinkles," in *The Lost Steps* 101; "Les Mots sans rides," in *OC* I 285.
57. J. H. Matthews, *Surrealist Poetry in France* 57.
58. "Quand je ferme les yeux, des floraisons phosphorescentes apparaissent et se fanent et renaissent comme des feux d'artifice charnus. / Des pays inconnus que je parcours en compagnie de créatures. / Il y a toi sans doute, ô belle et discrète espionne. / Et l'âme palpable de l'étendue." The poem was included in the collection *A la mystérieuse* (1926), which forms part of Desnos's *Corps et biens*, published in 1930. See Desnos, *Corps et biens* 93.
59. See also a translation of the poem by Michael Benedikt in *The Poetry of Surrealism* 252. Benedikt renders the word "étendue" of the last line cited ("Et l'âme palpable de l'étendue") as "Emptiness," However, the word "expanse" expresses better Desnos's images of the vast, dedifferentiated span of writing and sleep alike.
60. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 548.
61. I have cited from the translation in *The Automatic Muse*. However, "Toujours neuf" would be better translated as "always new" or "always other."
62. "Mystères du cinéma" (1927), in *Les Rayons et les ombres* 96.
63. Christian Metz's article "Le Signifiant imaginaire" (which forms part of *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*) was originally published in *Communications* 23 (1975): 3–55.
64. I should clarify my position in this respect. Without purporting to read Desnos in terms of the theoretical postulates of Metz, I am indicating certain points of contact between the two as a means of enriching our perception of Desnos's thinking. Desnos touches on this mirror notion at several points, obviously without presenting anything like the more developed, more coherent theory developed by Metz. Thus I am not concerned with later theoretical objections to Metz, as expounded, for instance, by Noël Carroll in *Mystifying Movies*. Nor do I wish to enter the more recent dispute concerning the status of the mirror stage in film theory, or the shifting of the weight from the mirror stage to the theory of the gaze in Lacanian film theory, as presented, for instance, in Joan Copjec, "The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan." These disputes are obviously of no significance in the present context. Desnos's perceptions only offer some points of contact, and at times he appears to work against the grain of Metz's theory.
65. What is characteristic of the cinema, argues Metz, is "the imaginary that it is from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier" (Metz 44). What is perceived on the screen is "not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror." However, while the film is like a mirror, "there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body" (45). Metz then argues that "what makes possible the spectator's absence from the scene – or rather the intelligible unfolding of the film despite that absence – is the fact

that the spectator has already known the experience of the mirror (of the true mirror), and is thus able to constitute a world of objects without having first to recognize himself within it. In this respect the cinema is already on the side of the symbolic ... The spectator knows that objects exist, that he himself exists as a subject ..." (46). In his article "Slit Screen," in a reading that relies heavily on Metz and Baudry (and, as all such readings do, leading to Lacan), David Wills follows Metz's argument concerning the correspondence, as well as the difference, between the experience of the spectator in the cinema and the experience of the Lacanian mirror (as expounded in the "mirror stage" thesis). I must confess that I am not fully in agreement with Wills's reading, not so much because of any shortcoming of his or Metz's theory, but simply because I do not think Desnos's text warrants such a consistent application of this theoretical framework.

66. Plato's myth has been adopted by film theory as yet another consideration of the cinematic apparatus. Such a notion is expounded primarily in the "Apparatus" essay (see note 50), in which Baudry draws a comparison between the situation in the cinema and that of the prisoners in the dark space of Plato's cave, who see the moving shadows on the wall and take them for reality. Baudry's arguments have had their share of critical disparagement, much of it quite justified. See, for instance, Noël Carroll's analysis of this theory in *Mystifying Movies* (30–31). Again, my interest lies not with the veracity of the theory, but with Desnos's poetic intuition. His account marks some points of contact with Plato's allegory, but only insofar as these support his vision and ideas.
67. At this point one may recall Freud's assertion that consciousness is a dual recording surface – internal and external.
68. Aragon, *Une vague de rêves* 11; "A Wave of Dreams" 3.
69. Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris* 63; *Paris Peasant* 49.
70. Aragon, *Anicet ou le panorama* 76.
71. Aragon and Breton, "Le Trésor des jésuites," *Variétés: Le Surréalisme en 1929*, 47. A facsimile edition of the journal was published by the Collection Fac-Similé (Brussels: Didier Devillez Editeur, 1994).
72. Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 398; *Les Rayons et les ombres* 84.
73. See Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave* 72, 545 (note 7), concerning the sources of *Les Mystères de New York* in various serials that had Elaine – Pearl White – as their heroine.
74. The Surrealists' response to the serial film was antithetical to the position of critics such as Ricciotto Canudo or Émile Vuillermoz, or of critics-filmmakers such as Louis Delluc, who advanced the notion of the cinema as art – a newborn art, but deserving of serious consideration as any other. For a detailed consideration of this issue, see Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave* 279–294. See also the fourth chapter of Nouredine Ghali's *L'Avant-garde cinématographique en France*.
75. For an example of such an exposition of the notion of the language of cinema, see Ricciotto Canudo's article, "Reflections on the Seventh Art" (1923), in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 291–303.
76. *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* were less popular in their time than was *Judex*, Feuillade's police serial that followed them in 1917 (Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave* 75). However, in the 1920s, it was for these earlier crime serials that the Surrealists reserved their allegiance, perhaps because of the moralizing attitude of *Judex*.
77. In 1913 Apollinaire and Max Jacob called for the creation of a "Société des Amis de Fantômas"; Apollinaire celebrated the *Fantômas* novels by Souvestre and Allain in an article that appeared in *Le Mercure de France* in July 1914; Blaise Cendrars, who defined the series as the "Aeneid of modern times," published a poem in June 1914 devoted to this "master of fear" in Apollinaire's review *Les Soirées de Paris*; Max Jacob devoted three poems to *Fantômas* in 1917. See Lacassin, "Fantômas ou l'opéra de treize sous" 3–6. For a review of Feuillade's *Fantômas* by Maurice Raynal, a young poet in Apollinaire's circle, see "Cinema Column: *Fantômas*" (1914), in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 89–90. Like other writers on the subject, Raynal hardly makes a distinction between film and novels. "What nobility! What beauty!" he exclaims in a paragraph referring to the authors. In the next paragraph he argues that there is "nothing in this involved, compact, and concentrated film but explosive genius." For a recent example of such a confusion, see Walz, "Serial Killings: 'Fantômas', Feuillade, and the mass-culture genealogy of Surrealism."
78. The high esteem in which the *Fantômas* novels were held in Surrealist circles is illustrated by Aragon's description of the "Bureau of Surrealist Research," at 15, rue de Grenelle, "romantic lodgings for unclassifiable ideas and revolutions in progress," where the Surrealists are "working

on a task that is enigmatic even for us, in front of a volume of *Fantômas* fixed to the wall by forks." Aragon, *Une vague de rêves* 26–7; "A Wave of Dreams" 10. Philippe Soupault attempted to bring the *Fantômas* novels into the Surrealist sphere by drawing an analogy between the way he and Breton wrote their respective contributions to *Les Champs magnétiques* and the work method of Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, who dictated their volumes "fourteen hours a day. I challenge any writer to write and even more so to dictate straight through for fourteen hours day after day for several days without observing an absolute automatism." See Soupault, "Observation présentée par M. Philippe Soupault (auteur en collaboration avec M. André Breton des "Champs Magnétiques")." Like Soupault, Desnos saw *Fantômas* as "one of the most formidable monuments of spontaneous poetry" ("Imagerie moderne," *Nouvelles Hébrides* 458).

79. Desnos acclaimed the film *Fantômas* for living up to the idea of revolt and liberty (Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 398; *Les Rayons et les ombres* 84), and Breton identified himself with *Fantômas* in the last text of "Soluble Fish" (*Poisson soluble*, 1924): "The walls of Paris, what is more, have been covered with posters showing a man masked with a black domino, holding in his left hand the key of the fields: this man was myself." See *Manifestoes of Surrealism* 109; *OC* I 399. The image of the masked man might refer either to the very striking cover of the first volume in the series, in which *Fantômas* is seen holding a bloodied dagger, or to the poster for the first film episode, in which the dagger was eliminated. I believe that Breton in fact referred to the cover of the novel, replacing the dagger with the *clé de champs*, the key to the fields, which, as noted by Jack Spector, means freedom. See Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing* 228 (note 89). Breton refers to illustrations of this kind in his "Notice to the Reader of *The Hundred Headless Woman*," first published as the preface to Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929), in which he applauds the "splendid illustrations of popular novels and children's books, such as *Rocambole* or *Costal the Indian*," and singles out the "genius" of the "man who created the covers of *Fantômas*." See Breton, *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 45–6; *OC* II 302–3. In his essay "Imagerie moderne," to which I have referred above, Desnos expressed his enthusiasm over the covers of the illustrated supplements of *Petit Journal* or the *Petit Parisien*, and of popular novels such as *Nick Carter*, *Sâr Dubnotal*, *Buffalo Bill*, *Texas Jack*, and above all *Fantômas*. He also commented on the extraordinary influence they had on the development of cinema and on modern vision (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 458).
80. Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 399; *Les Rayons et les ombres* 84. A photograph of Musidora in her black bodysuit, bearing Musidora's signature and a caption saying: "Ce que nous aimions" (what we have loved), accompanies the text of Aragon's and Breton's play "Le Trésor des jésuites" (*Variétés: Le Surréalisme en 1929*, between pages 54–55). Breton, who was fascinated by Musidora, wrote her a letter after seeing her in a stage show: "How can I tell you what you have come to incarnate for some: what a modern fairy, adorably gifted in evil, and so puerile – oh, your childish voice!" Cited in Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* 69.
81. Clearly, my concern is not with Feuillade's films at the time of their original showing but with their perseverance as a film experience of sorts for the Surrealists in the course of the 1920s. There is, of course, the question of what opportunities the Surrealists would have had to view these films. I have not found any reference to a re-issuing of *Fantômas* or *Les Vampires* in the exhaustive documentation provided by Christopher Gauthier in *La Passion du Cinéma*, nor in any other publication devoted to cinema-going in Paris in the 1920s. Nevertheless, it might be argued that, whether or not the Surrealists could have viewed Feuillade's films in the course of the 1920s, those old enough to have seen them – certainly Breton and Aragon, and others in Breton's circle, such as the slightly younger Desnos – would have retained in their memory strong impressions of various aspects of the films – these having in part to do with their spatial character – that were vivid enough to have left their mark, as I maintain above, on Surrealist discourse.
82. Some consideration of this spatial dislocation is offered in Brunetta, "Strangers in the dark, les 'Vampires' et le jeu des masques" 80.
83. Desnos could have had this aspect of Feuillade's serials in mind when he wrote the following passage in "Pénalités de l'enfer", which also retains something of the rhythm and tenor of the films:

Soon after I noticed that enemies had introduced chloroform into my room through the keyhole. / There was in my wall a hole made by tearing out a nail. I left through this hole as easily as through a carriage entrance. / After I returned the following morning I lay down exhausted. But the chloroform buzzed once again in my ears. A carriage entrance opened in the wall. I left through it. / In the meantime, René Crevel cropped up from the chimney (*Nouvelles Hébrides* 85).
84. References to these characteristics of the Primitive Mode of Representation are scattered throughout Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, but see a summary on p. 164.

85. Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* 135. For another detailed analysis of staging in depth and fixity of viewpoint in early French films, see Brewster, "Deep Staging in French Films 1900–1914."
86. As another example of an orthogonal spatial conception of this type in *Les Vampires*, I would cite the scene in which Guérand is shown in the foreground asleep at his desk, while the maid (the disguised Irma Vep) is seen behind him entering the room through a door within which is seen another interior space and another door at the back (Episode III.4).
87. As, for example, the crime scene involving a wall safe with a false back in *Fantômas* (Sequel 5, *Le Faux magistrat*, prologue). There is a similar scene in *Les Vampires* (Episode IV.2), as well as a scene of spying from one room into another through a mask hanging on the wall (Episode VIII.4).
88. In his *Film* (1933, or in the later 1966 adaptation, *Film as Art*) Arnheim contends that it is in such a deviation from an illusory spatial impression that film asserts itself as art. Bordwell considers these ideas of medium-specificity as not having aged well (*On the History of Film Style* 30). He is similarly critical of what he terms Burch's "Greenbergian modernism."
89. Münsterberg, *The Film: A Psychological Study* 19.
90. Following Arnheim and Burch, Stephen Heath proposes along similar lines: "As for the screen, it receives and gives the frame; its flatness halts the image and lays the base of that triangle for which the spectator's eye provides the apex. Doubtless there is a sheer pleasure for the position of the eye in the very fact of the projection of the frames onto and from the screen ... " Thus the screen is a "pure expanse that can be invested with depth. The screen, that is, is at once ground, the surface that supports the projected images, and background, its surface caught up in the cone of light to give the frame of the image. Ground and background are one in the alignment of frame and screen, the 'on screen in frame' that is the basis of the spatial articulations a film will make, the start of its composition." Heath, "Narrative Space" 392–3.
91. Bordwell, "La Nouvelle Mission de Feuillade" 12. Feuillade is originally cited in Lacassin, *Louis Feuillade* 115.
92. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image* 53.
93. It would be interesting to consider another performance scene which, while appearing to reverse the concept underlying the theater scene in *Fantômas*, ultimately suggests a similar conception. I am referring to the scene in *Les Vampires* in which a dancer performing as a vampire bat on stage eventually dies of a poisoned ring given her as a gift by the disguised Grand Vampire (Episode II.2). The most striking thing about it is the painted backdrop depicting the interior of a church in extreme perspectival foreshortening which deviates markedly from the orthogonality of the viewpoint on the stage and the proscenium. The ballet itself, however, is arranged horizontally on a narrow strip in front, thus making the painted backdrop all the more incongruous and further enhancing the orthogonal conception.
94. A striking example of the use of film within film is found in Léonce Perret's *Le mystère des roches de Kador* (1912), in which a woman, traumatized by a crime in which she believes her lover to have lost his life, is cured by the use of cinema as psychotherapy. A film made purposely for this cure, presenting a reenactment of the crime, is projected for her, and one sequence shows her watching this film-within-the-film and becoming increasingly distressed as it progresses, with this leading to her eventual cure. Perceptive discussions of this film are offered in Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town* 351–3, and in Bergstrom, "Introduction: Parallel Lines" 15–19.
95. Here I cite a phrase used by Rosalind Krauss in referring to the use of *mise en abyme* in Brassai's photographs, which I consider to be very fitting to the present discussion. See Krauss, "Nightwalkers" 37.



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Beyond the surfaces of the real

Doors and windows: gateways to mystery

In the preceding chapter I made several references to the role played in Feuillade's films by doors, or, for that matter, other apertures in walls. Doors and doorways, perceived as a means of entrapment or covert access, also constitute a central device in the formation of the layered depth characterizing many scenes, with the action, at times tantalizingly brief, glimpsed through them. But they also have the important function of evoking what cannot be seen behind them or within the darkness they frame. With all these permutations, Feuillade's doors and windows have a distinct echo in the Surrealists' perception of the mystery and the Marvelous lurking in quotidian reality behind doors or windows or other hidden or unexpected openings.

In "Comme dans un bois" (1951), evoking film's "capacity to transport the mind elsewhere," Breton described the "change in mental scenery" that takes place when one goes through "one of those soundproof doors that opens onto darkness."¹ Going through these doors also seems to stand in his mind for going through "a critical point as captivating and as elusive as the hinge between waking and sleeping." Thirty years earlier, in his essay "Entrée des médiums" (1922), where he enthusiastically described the "séances" that were taking place at that time, Breton accounted for the "magic dictation" of automatic writing, as practised by Soupault and himself in 1919 in *Les Champs magnétiques* (and by extension, what was taking place in the "séances"), as dipping into the "universal consciousness" and gathering words fallen from the "mouth of shadows."² The linking of darkness and shadows with the notion of a door (or, by extension, a mouth or any other aperture), with this door opening onto the mystery and the unknown – or, rather, intimating their existence – seems to be a continuous streak running through much of the Surrealist discourse. These doors, windows and other apertures are associated by Breton with the hidden recesses of the mind (Breton, I should add, was always tempted to associate

these hidden recesses with some universal mystery). For Aragon, they signified the darkness of the unattainable reality of existence: "The gateway to mystery swings open at the touch of human weakness and we have entered the realms of darkness," where the "whole fauna of human fantasies" drifts in the "dimly lit zones of human activity ..."³

References to doors and windows abound in Surrealist texts and poems. "I don't know any mystery, I don't even know the meaning of the word," insists Eluard in one of his prose poems, only to somewhat repudiate this statement by suggesting, a few lines later, that "Space then has doors and windows," implying that mystery, as intimated by doors and windows, is still possible.⁴ What is presumed to be present behind the door or window changes from one writer to another, and yet it is always the sense of mystery and the unknown that prevails. The unknown behind the door may possess an ominous or threatening dimension. In one of the poems of *La Vie immédiate* (1932), Eluard writes: "The doors open the windows are uncovered / A silent fire breaks out and dazzles me / All is set for me to meet / Creatures I never wanted to."⁵ It may also hold the promise of dream and poetry. For Pierre Reverdy, in his essay "Le Rêveur parmi les murailles" ("The Dreamer Amongst the Walls"), published in the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924), the void of death and the unlimited field of dreams exist behind the same door. When he no longer dreams, he writes, he cannot forget that he exists and that one day he will not exist anymore. "But between the two unequal jambs of the door opening into the void, I can flee, reach the other side of the wall, in order to mine the unlimited fields of dream which is the particular form that my soul gives to reality."⁶ For Desnos, in his novel *Liberty or Love!*, doors are open to an erotic encounter. "Paris bars its doors and windows, extinguishes its lamps... The naked woman knocks on every door, lifts each closed eyelid."⁷ In his erotic reveries, eroticism and mystery are conjoined. "My door was always open to mystery then, but mystery came in, closing it behind her, and ever since I have heard, without a word being spoken, an immense trampling of feet, that of the crowd of naked women laying siege to my keyhole" (*Liberty or Love!* 39; *La Liberté ou l'amour!* 20).⁸

In this chapter I examine the screen in Surrealist discourse of the 1920s in its metaphorical role as the threshold embedded in the surfaces of the real, and the special role assigned to the doors and windows planted in these surfaces as the loci serving as metaphorical passageways or thresholds between the two dichotomous realms governing Surrealist thought – that of dream and mystery and that of the real. What distinguishes the Surrealist poets from each other is often the way they conceptualize the functioning of these passageways. I see Breton and Aragon as representing, in this respect, two similar, but at some points divergent, attitudes, with these shedding light on the way they all envisioned the concept of surreality.

Le Paysan de Paris: the film

Aragon's vision is embedded in a close perception of the real. *Le Paysan de Paris* is quite unique in its propensity for the precise spatial definition of the locales described and of the itinerary taken by his "peasant" in his wandering around the Opéra district, and for its attentive observation of the surfaces of the real in their minutest details – especially those comprising the Passage de l'Opéra, the "big glass coffin that presides over the double game of love and death" (*Paris Peasant* 34; *Le Paysan de Paris* 44). In Chapter 1 I focused on the experience of the reflections in the shop windowpanes which take up most of the wall space of the Passage de l'Opéra, and the doubling of vision it implies – consisting of the flat image on the glass pane, the site of hallucinatory vision, combined with the sight in depth of the interior of the shop window. As I argued there, the window complements Desnos's screen as a mirror and window at the same time, and as the site of an admixture of the imaginary – a corollary of memory and desire – and the real.

In the coming discussion I will extend this notion of the screen to what I consider to be the cinematic collage comprising the book as a whole. Chapter 1 concluded with a consideration of the situation of Aragon, as the "spectator" in the cane shop episode, using terms referring to Metz's hypothesis, as cited before, concerning the

... two cones in the auditorium: one ending on the screen and starting both in the projection box and in the spectator's vision insofar as it is projective, and one starting from the screen and "deposited" in the spectator's perception insofar as it is introjective (on the retina, a second screen).⁹

There is no way of telling whether Aragon saw the situation in the cane shop episode in such precise cinematic terms. There is no question, though, as to the cinematic provenance of the thrust of the book as a whole. That Aragon saw *Le Paysan de Paris* in this light is illustrated by a letter he wrote to Jacques Doucet, in which he stated: "Voici, Monsieur, le début du second épisode de notre film, *Le Paysan de Paris* ..." ("Here, monsieur, is the beginning of the second episode of our film, *Le Paysan de Paris*").¹⁰ The imprint of the cinema on Surrealist writing has been dealt with by various writers and critics, with an emphasis on the cinematic qualities of Surrealist prose writing as well as in terms of the cinematic qualities of the Surrealist poetic image.¹¹ The book, clearly enough, contains various narrative forms that might be seen as referring to cinematic effects such as close-ups, superimpositions and dissolves (formed by the shift of images, their emergence out of each other).¹² The film status of *Le Paysan de Paris* may be considered more advantageously, however, in a somewhat different direction, not unrelated to the above but perhaps more conducive to a consideration of the "screen" capacity of the

surfaces of the real as these are perceived and evoked by Aragon. I return to the cane shop episode which, as suggested before, with its projection of the imaginary on the real and with the shop window as the "screen" on which this confluence takes place, could be analogized in filmic terms, as pertaining to the situation of the spectator vis-à-vis the film projected on the screen.¹³ This mode of dual vision of surface and depth also implies a confluence of fantasy and experienced reality, the imaginary and the physically palpable, which takes place on a metaphorical windowpane, a "screen," analogous, in the light of the concept I am about to introduce, to the sheet of paper serving as support for elements of collage; that is to say, as the setting in which the collage activity takes place.

In his 1923 essay "Max Ernst, peintre des illusions," which, unpublished at the time, was later included in *Les Collages* (1965), Aragon observes that Ernst's collage elements are, at times, so well incorporated in the picture as to be unnoticeable, while at other times, on the contrary, everything appears to be collage:

All these elements might serve Ernst in evoking others in a technique completely analogous to that of the poetic image. Here is a hedge over which horses are jumping. It's an illusion: look closer and what you have taken to be a hedge turns out to be a photographic model for crochet lacework. Max Ernst is a painter of illusions.¹⁴

The word "illusion" may designate mimetic representation so successful that it deceives the beholder into believing that it constitutes the thing itself. Applying this word to Ernst's collages might conceivably be seen as Aragon's way of reversing its commonly accepted negative connotations and getting at those "people who have a fixed idea about modern painting" (28). In the light of the main tenets expressed in *Le Paysan de Paris*, it seems more likely, however, that Aragon meant to suggest an analogy with the snare of appearance, the deception brought off by so-called reality ("You will never leave your ship of illusions ... Your gaolers that are eyes trudge back and forth, rattling their bunches of reflections"). The "illusion," in Aragon's example, would refer to the fact that, discerning the sense of the original image (the crochet lacework), or, conversely, being duped into seeing something else (a hedge) depends entirely on the spatial position of the viewer vis-à-vis the collage; that is to say, the sheet of paper on which these images are "glued." In that case, the collage sheet itself, serving as a support for the collage elements, is asserted in its capacity of a "screen" on which all these imaged possibilities nucleate.¹⁵

The film analogy goes deeper, however, and in order to further elucidate it, I suggest that the doubling of vision implied by the cane shop episode is emblematic of the book as a whole, or, more specifically, of the first part, "The Passage de l'Opéra." In his essay "On Décor," Aragon associates the cinema with the "obsessive beauty of commercial inscriptions, posters, evocative lettering, really

common objects, everything that celebrates life, not some artificial convention that excludes corned beef and tins of polish" (Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 165). Painters and poets alike know "how to be moved by a newspaper or a packet of cigarettes," argues Aragon, and, in another passage he associates this beauty of what are essentially collage elements with the willful restriction of the field of vision in the cinema; that is to say, with the delimitation imposed by the rectangular shape of the screen, which also allows focusing on an enlarged, and therefore circumscribed view of things – all this "so as to intensify expression" (166). This notion of intensified expression in the cinema may be associated with what Aragon, in the early 1920s, placed under the general heading of the Marvelous, with the collage serving as one of its major revelators. The collage technique, in poetry, painting and the cinema, is subsumed in the use of raw materials taken from the real; or, in the terms posited by Aragon, taken from the concrete, which is merely one provisional facet of the real, where the status of the latter in itself is also in question. The concrete is not the real, declares Aragon in the last pages of *Le Paysan de Paris*. "Is not the concrete, on the contrary, all that is beyond the real, is not the real the abstract judgment which the concrete presupposes only in the dialectical process?" It is the poetic image that might be conceived as the "greatest possible consciousness of the concrete," and thus there is "no other knowledge than that of the particular" and there is "no other poetry than that of the concrete" (*Paris Peasant* 201–2; *Le Paysan de Paris* 246–7).¹⁶ In its poetic application, the collage for Aragon is indeed the poetry of the concrete that makes use of lines of ordinary language, quotations from other authors, and the listing of ordinary, everyday objects.¹⁷ Collage in *Le Paysan de Paris* is embodied in the use of posters, advertisements, journal articles, menus, shop signs, or typographic arrangements of words (a good example of the latter is the explosion of the word "PESSIMISME" on the page, following its display on the folds of an accordion).¹⁸ We can see these collage elements as punctuating a textual fabric which, partaking of a continuous interchange of passages of minute description and poetic reveries – with the accompanying movement (concrete and metaphorical) between surface and depth, façade and inner space, light and darkness, the concrete and imagined – is textured like a collage comprising diverse textual units.¹⁹ Here another concept enters – the "instantaneous" – which is presented in the course of "Imagination's Discourse," following the introduction of the "new vice" named Surrealism, "offspring of frenzy and darkness":

Walk up, walk up, this is the entrance to the realms of the instantaneous, the world of snapshot.²⁰ Modern hashish eaters, you will have no cause to envy the awakened sleepers of the thousand and one nights [...] when, without even an instrument in your hands, you find yourselves evoking the hitherto incomplete gamut of their rapturous pleasures, and when you assume over the world such visionary power, ranging from the invention to the glaucous materialization of

the slippery gleams of the waking state, that neither reason nor the instinct of self-preservation, despite their beautiful white hands, could prevent you from using this power unreservedly ... (*Paris Peasant* 65; *Le Paysan de Paris* 82).

What is meant by this passage, I would suggest, is that the assumption of visionary power over the world might be construed in terms of instantaneous flashes of illumination. These flashes might be conceived, to follow the overall sense of this discourse, as moments of poetic insight that engender the Surrealist image. In the context of Aragon's roaming in the Passage de l'Opéra, these are "snapshots" on which is imprinted the perception of the Marvelous inherent in the chance encounters with the elements forming the surface of the real. Aragon's physical progression through this landscape consists of a sequence of "snapshots" that convey a sense of continuity and, indeed, of duration, and thus forms what I would tend to see in terms of a cinematic collage. This narrative progression is characterized, first, by a linear movement (albeit one dictated by chance) across the surface of the real, consisting of store windows, doorways, and other surface features of the structure. Intertwined in it is a series of forays into the spaces behind the façade, the movement into the shops, the inner hallways, and the hidden corners that are the site of darkness and mystery.²¹ And to further extend the cinematographic metaphor, each one of these discrete textual or narrative units serves, in a sense, as a cinematic sequence, or at times even a single shot.

Aragon: the glass house of double illusion

To summarize what I have suggested so far with regard to the film standing of *Le Paysan de Paris*, the "screen" on which Aragon's cinematic collage unrolls is embedded in perceived reality as a façade with apertures – shops' windows and doors – opening into interior spaces (conceived in their broader metaphorical sense), with these, I should now add, carrying the major burden of Aragon's reveries and imaginative probing of self. Following a visit to one of the shops, Aragon says:

This handkerchief saleswoman, this little sugar bowl ... are interior boundaries of myself, ideal views I have of my laws, of my ways of thought, and may I be strung up by the neck if this passage is anything else but a method of freeing myself of certain inhibitions, a means of obtaining access to a hitherto forbidden realm that lies beyond my human energies (*Paris Peasant* 88; *Le Paysan de Paris* 110).

The detailed descriptions devoted to the handkerchief saleswoman and the establishment over which she presides augment the experience of the Passage in its emblematic capacity. The shop window contains a display of symmetrically arranged handkerchiefs

... suspended above somber-hued petticoats which prevent the idle gaze from roaming over the shop's contents at its ease. Really a very peculiar collection of hopelessly unfashionable handkerchiefs, in red, green, or blue cambric, but in impossible taste with their little pictures, their commonplace little embroidered patterns, their black hems. They could never conceivably tempt anyone. As for the petticoats ... can there really be women who wear these plum-colored petticoats with their long stripes in matching tones? It is difficult to see inside the shop unless one glues one's face to the plate glass ... (83; 104).

The old-fashionedness, indeed obsolescence of the handkerchiefs displayed, is also associated with the appearance of the saleswoman herself, with her slightly out-of-date clothes, the skirt, "shorter than they are worn these days, 1917-style or thereabouts," or the bodice, "a masterpiece of appliqué work in a long-vanished style" (87; 108–9). These are also associated with the obsolescence of the Passage itself, which, representing an outmoded architectural conception, is about to be demolished. This quality of the outmoded is in itself one of the main attractions that the Passage holds for Aragon.²² The Passage and other structures of its kind – "human aquariums" Aragon calls them – are to be regarded as the "secret depositories of several modern myths: it is only today, when the pickaxe menaces them, that they have at last become the true sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral, the ghostly landscape of damnable pleasures and professions. Places that were incomprehensible yesterday, and that tomorrow will never know" (14; 21). These ephemerals, these inanimate objects, argues Aragon, "may sometimes assume the reflection of their [the living's] most secret motives: and thus our cities are peopled with unrecognized sphinxes which will never stop the passing dreamer and ask him mortal questions unless he first projects his meditation, his absence of mind, toward them" (13; 20). Aragon is a dreamer who does project his meditation toward these objects; he is the passerby who walks along the "screen" separating the "ghostly landscape" (*paysage fantomatique*), the space of mystery and dream, from the realm of the real. The shop window, like the Passage itself, is the site of dream, which, as we have seen before with regard to the cane shop episode, is a dream colored by desire, or, indeed, the dream of desire.²³ This is made quite clear in the pages on the handkerchief shop, whose proprietress, it seems, sells more than handkerchiefs to her gentlemen customers (who are let in one at a time). These erotic trysts in themselves are not significant enough to warrant the above suggestion. But let us see how Aragon spatially defines the goings-on in this establishment and the view it presents to the observer standing just outside. The shop is situated between, on one side, a narrow lane bathed in shadow, on which it has a side door and a window, and, on the other side, the "black opening" of a stairway. Vision through the window is obstructed by the linen curtain running along the lower half, and the door seen on the far side remains closed. "It is difficult to see inside the shop unless

one glues one's face to the plate glass: even then, one can only just make out a workbasket, and a piece of work left lying near an empty chair." Also, there is a woman friend of the proprietress "who never emerges from the darkest reaches of the shop" (82-4; 103-5). The shop window serves as a barrier to the satisfaction of desire while it tantalizingly offers brief glimpses of dark recesses containing an erotic mystery. What I have noted before regarding the windowpane of the cane shop as a plane of projection, reflection, and seeing-through is equally applicable here; desire is reflected back on the subject who engenders it, with the window serving in a double capacity as an exterior barrier and an "interior boundary of myself," to paraphrase Aragon.

Doors too play an important role in this pursuit of mystery. The general sense of movement, at least in the Passage de l'Opéra section, is one of lateral progression across the façade and an up-and-down movement through doors and into interior spaces. The structuring principle informing the exterior of the Passage, as disclosed by Aragon's description, is repeated in some of the interior spaces. Such, for instance, is the hotel of somewhat dubious character in which the corridors, like the alleys of the Passage itself, are accessed from both ends and where movement along the corridor reveals the spaces behind the doors strung out throughout its length:

In this romantic lodging-house, whose doors sometimes gape open, revealing interiors like the empty carapaces of weird shellfish, the way the premises are arranged reinforces the already dubious air given it by the rather commonplace uses to which a floating population is capable of putting it. Long corridors, like theatre wings, are strung with boxes, I mean rooms, all on the same side overlooking the passage. A dual system of stairways provides access to the passage at two separate points. Everything is contrived to facilitate hasty departures, to conceal from casual observers the trysts which will muffle some huge secret behind the faded sky-blue wallpaper of a banal décor (*Paris Peasant* 17; *Le Paysan de Paris* 24).

The tantalizing world of erotic mystery intimated by these corridors may be accounted for by the mingling of exterior and interior – of private space and public space – and, consequently, the double game of exposure and concealment in which doors play a major role.²⁴ "A half-opened door releases a flash of *négligée*, a trill of song. Then a happiness unravels, fingers unlace, and an overcoat makes its way down towards the anonymous day, towards the country of respectability" (17; 24). The thick erotic atmosphere of such evocation, which permeates for Aragon the dream space of the Passage as a whole – this "big glass coffin that presides over the double game of love and death" – is the stuff film melodramas or theater pieces are made of. For Aragon, it is the Théâtre Moderne, located in the Passage de l'Opéra, that represents this "type of theater whose sole aim, whose sole means, is love itself," and which is "without doubt the only one offering us a truly modern dramaturgy free of all fakery" (108-11; 133-7). Aragon provides a very

detailed description of the clientele, the actresses, and the plays themselves. "The very spirit of the primitive theater is preserved here through a natural communion between audience and performers arising out of desire on the one side and the girls' provocative behavior on the other ..." This "Alhambra of whores, at the foot of these fountains, these moral confusions which are marked simultaneously by the claw of the lion and the teeth of the pimp," is where the "mind is trapped by these networks which lure it irretrievably towards the final chapter in its destiny, the labyrinth without a Minotaur." These are just a few choice phrases out of the rich poetic web spun by Aragon in this evocation of the Théâtre Moderne as one of those privileged places that exercise an inexplicable power over him, that plunge him into mystery, serving him in his endeavor to "integrate the infinite in the finite guise of the universe" (113–115; 142–4).

However inexplicable this power is, it could be further elucidated in relation to a similar description of the Théâtre Moderne given in *Nadja*. What retains Breton's memory more than anything else is "the 'bar' upstairs, terribly dark too with its impenetrable bowers, 'a living room at the bottom of a lake' ..." ²⁵ Walter Benjamin was particularly taken by Breton's description of the Théâtre Moderne, which he was "inconsolable not to have known." Breton's description of the bar with its dark, impenetrable recesses reminds him of the "most uncomprehended room in the old Princess Café. It was the back room on the first floor, with couples in the blue light. We called it the 'anatomy school'; it was the last restaurant designed for love." ²⁶ Breton's account is followed by the memory of the pretty actress who sings a quatrain about her readiness for a new love, and by his confessing of a wish he always had of meeting "at night and in a woods, a beautiful naked woman." Benjamin, then, responds to the desire underlying Breton's account, which is comparable to the erotic atmosphere in which Aragon's account is wholly immersed. Aragon too pays special attention to the bar of the Théâtre Moderne, which appears to represent a desired yet forbidden place, with most of the spectators being content to stare disconsolately into it from the doorway. The reason for this is prosaic enough and has to do with the fact that using the bar entails ordering a drink, but it is also emblematic of a deeper strain of pessimism – the sense of something that forever will remain beyond reach – that runs through this account of the Théâtre Moderne or of the Passage as a whole. Aragon feels he is being drawn there to the "great vertigo where consciousness is aware of being nothing more than a stratum of unfathomable depths ..." ²⁷ Such a vertigo is experienced by Aragon also at another location in the Passage,

... just beyond the little flight of steps leading down into the rue Chauchat, at that farthest point of mystery toward the north ... in the farthest reaches of

the two kinds of daylight which pit the reality of the outside world against the subjectivism of the passage ... in this strange zone where all is distraction, distraction of attention as well as of inattention, so as to experience this vertigo.

The vertigo to which he refers is seen in terms of a "double illusion," at a point of contact where the "two great movements of the spirit are equivalent and all interpretations of the world have lost their power over me," where "two universes begin to fade" – that of appearance and subjectivism and the one associated with the outside world (47; 60–61). External reality is characterized by its disorder, the world of appearance and subjectivity by its "arbitrary arrangements." The latter is the "great arcade illuminated by my instincts." Standing at "this sentimental crossroads" between the two universes, Aragon does not experience the slightest stirring of hope at the sight of either of them. "Everything signifies havoc. Everything is crumbling under my gaze" (47–9; 61–63).

What Aragon expresses in this passage seems to parallel quite closely his exposition of the coming into being of the Surreal out of an experience of duality as presented in *Une Vague de rêves*:

Having weighed up its experience of Reality – in which it indiscriminately mixes everything that exists – the mind naturally juxtaposes what it knows of the Unreal. Only when the mind has gone beyond these two notions can it begin to envisage a wider experience, one where these other two experiences co-exist, and that is the Surreal. Surreality, the state where these concepts are fused by the mind, is the shared horizon of religion, magic, poetry, dreaming, madness, intoxication and this fluttering honeysuckle, puny little life, that you believe capable of colonizing the heavens for us.²⁸

Aragon thus proposes a dualism of reality and the Unreal, with these two states, when fused in the mind, bringing about an intimation of the Surreal. However, these notions are preceded in this paragraph by Aragon's quite pessimistic assertion that, in order to really understand the concept of the surreal, "we have to extend it; view it perhaps like the horizon which continually flees before the walker, for like the horizon this concept exists between the mind and what it knows it will never reach." In her extensive study of Breton's early career, Marguerite Bonnet argues that, contrary to Aragon, Breton believes in the interpenetration of reality and the Surreal,²⁹ and she cites to that effect Breton's well-known assertion in *Surrealism and Painting* (1928) (henceforth referred to as *SP*) concerning his predisposition to a "particular philosophy of immanence according to which surreality would be embodied in reality itself and would be neither superior nor exterior to it" (*SP* 46). However, Breton's position is not that different from Aragon's, once we look again at his earlier statement in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) concerning his belief in the

... future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality ... It is in quest of this surreality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession (*Manifestoes* 14; *OC I* 319).

Breton's castles

Notwithstanding this closeness of Breton's and Aragon's notions of surreality, there is, as I have suggested before, a marked difference in the conceptualization of the passageways connecting the two states – spatially defined as two zones or realms – comprising the two sides in this dialectical resolution which engenders the Surreal. Aragon's conception, as I have analyzed it – which constitutes, in fact, a conceptualization of his screen paradigm – consists of the interacting of the flat image on the glass pane, the site of hallucinatory vision, and the sight in depth of the interior of the shop window. He sees this doubled vision in terms of the “double illusion” at a point of contact where the “two great movements of the spirit are equivalent” (47; 61), with this also hinting at the provisory or tentative nature of both sides of the equation. In their mingling of exterior and interior, doors, too, exhibit a dual character consisting of a double game of exposure and concealment. I turn now to a consideration of these passageways in Breton's thought, and, to begin with, I wish to draw a distinction between the 1920s and the 1930s. Much of what I have argued so far in this chapter hinges on the perception of the two dichotomous realms governing Surrealist thought – the realm of dream and mystery and that of the real. Alluding to these two realms in the early 1930s in his book *Les Vases communicants* (*Communicating Vessels*, 1932), Breton affirms his hope that Surrealism will be considered “as having tried nothing better than to cast a *conduction wire* between the far too distant worlds of waking and sleep, exterior and interior reality, reason and madness, the assurance of knowledge and of love, of life for life and the revolution, and so on” (*Communicating Vessels* 86; *OC II* 164). The conduction wire or the communicating vessels of the title are two of the spatial metaphors Breton uses to describe the connection between these worlds of dream and reality; to these two may be added the door metaphor encountered earlier in the book when, speaking of Hervey-Saint-Denys's *Les Rêves et les moyens de les diriger: Observations pratiques* (1867), Breton expresses his opposition to isolating the world of reality from the world of dream, “to the benefit of a confusing philosophy.” He sees Hervey's study of dreams as helping to bring about the “conversion progressively more necessary ... of the imagined to the lived or, more exactly, to the ought-to-be-lived,” and he sees in Hervey's method “a door half-opened, beyond which there is only a step to take in order, upon

leaving the vacillating house of poets, to find oneself fully in life" (4–5; 104). It may be noted that, at this point in the early 1930s, Breton placed the emphasis rather on the passage from dream to reality, with the door between them at least half-opened. This was in line with the function he assigned to the "poet to come" of surmounting the "depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream" (146; 208), with art and poetry thus serving as links uniting the world of everyday reality with that of the Marvelous or the Surreal. Close to ten years earlier, however, Breton's perceptions were more emphatically geared to peering through this half-opened door, but in a contrary sense – into the domain of dream which is also that of mystery and the unknown. To pursue further the implications of this metaphor of the half-opened door, I would argue that in the 1920s, and especially in the first half of the decade, the possibility of having such a half-opened door between the two domains was sensed as a potentiality associated with the practice of automatic writing, dream narratives, and hypnotic séances. I see Breton in those years vacillating between the possibility of a half-opened door and a door that is closed and thus only intimates the mystery lying beyond in what is often perceived as a "forbidden zone," or, at times, the ominous interior of the "mouth of shadows."

The notion of a domain of mystery and the unknown lying beyond the world of appearances or the circumstances of the real is exemplified by Breton's extensive account of the play *Les Détraquées* as performed at the Théâtre des Deux Masques, "which remains and will long remain the only dramatic work (I mean: created exclusively for the stage) which I choose to recall" (*Nadja* 40; *OC* I 669). Breton's description of this theatrical experience hinges on what he considers to be the greatest merit of the play – the mystery surrounding the plot and motivation. What becomes clear as Breton's narration progresses is that everything happens elsewhere, behind the doors, seen perhaps through the window, but not by the spectators. In other words, the active interchange between the two domains – of mystery and the real – is effected through doors and windows, but with the beholder denied actual access to the space lying behind them. The characters are generally waiting for something or someone; the principal of the girls' school is waiting for a "Solange." "From time to time she goes to the window overlooking the garden where we can tell that the recess period has just begun: we have heard the bell, then the occasional happy cries of girls ..." The "moronic gardener" is the messenger of a Greek tragedy: "Mademoiselle Solange did not get off the train." A school girl who is called in to meet her grandmother seems frightened to tell her anything. "On the threshold, she seems to be torn by a great inner conflict. She exits running." After Solange finally comes in, and following a rather cryptic and ominous conversation between herself and the principal, the "two women lean out of the window for a long moment. Silence. A BALLOON FALLS IN THE ROOM.

Silence. 'There she is! She's coming up.' " The child enters again, approaching the balloon, her eyes fixed on the principal's. A commotion in the second act concerning the disappearance of the child, in which, again, speculations are rife about what could have happened elsewhere, ends up – at least for Breton – with the girl's corpse falling out of a cabinet. What I have presented here is a brief summary of Breton's more extensive account, which still leaves us with all kinds of questions. And not only us. Having seen the play a few times, and running through it in his mind, Breton can only ponder the "lack of adequate indications as to what happens after the balloon falls and the ambiguity about precisely what Solange and her partner are a prey to that transforms them into these magnificent predatory beasts ..." (40–50; 669–73). The play was written by an actor called Pierre Palau, with the collaboration of the eminent neurologist Joseph Babinski. In a note appearing in the 1962 edition of *Nadja*, Breton described his surprise in learning that Babinski, who was for a short while his teacher in 1917, had indeed been involved in this production. He also referred to the unabridged text of the play published in the first issue of the periodical *Le Surréalisme, même* (1956), with a postscript by Palau. There are many differences between the published version and Breton's account; some of these would have been due to the cuts effected when the play was first produced; it is quite possible that Palau himself revised and enlarged the text specifically for this publication.³⁰ Easily discernible, however, is Breton's tendency to omit from his account anything that would make the plot more comprehensible and to leave the play with a very broad margin of mystery – a mystery associated with what goes on elsewhere, in the spaces behind the wall.³¹

Breton's fascination with *Les Détraquées* might also be related, in mood and spatial disposition, to his Gothicism, his taste for the Gothic novel. "Only the marvelous," he writes in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, "is capable of fecundating works which belong to an inferior category such as the novel," and M.G. ("Monk") Lewis's *The Monk* is for him a proof of this:

It is infused throughout with the presence of the marvelous. Long before the author has freed his main characters from all temporal constraints, one feels them ready to act with an unprecedented pride. This passion for eternity with which they are constantly stirred lends an unforgettable intensity to their torments ... (*Manifestoes* 14–15; *OC I* 320).

These ideas received a more sustained elaboration a decade later in the essay "Limites non-frontières du surréalisme" (1936), in which Breton said that Surrealism sets out to express the "latent content" of a period, and that the "fantastic" is the ideal key to it, "the way for us to explore the secret depths of history that disappear beneath the web of events."³² The gothic novel is a primary exponent of this "fantastic," and is "symptomatic of the great social upheaval that shook Europe at the end of the eighteenth century" (*Free Rein*

15; *OC III* 667), Breton's involved historical argument is of lesser interest here than the materialization of this gothic fantasy in the image of the castle. Quoting from Horace Walpole's well-known letter concerning the origin of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) in a dream memory of an ancient castle with a gigantic hand in armor seen on the uppermost banister of a great staircase, Breton took this as an affirmation of the Surrealist method's reliance on the dreaming process and on automatic writing. He saw the "castle question," as he named it, as focusing on the need in the present to find an equivalent to the gothic castle:

The human psyche, in its most universal form, found in the gothic castle and its accessories a point of fixation so precise that it would be essential to discover what would be the equivalent of such a place for our own period. (Everything leads us to believe that it is definitely not a factory.) But Surrealism is still in the process of registering the transfer, occurring between the period of the gothic novel and our time, of the highest emotional charges from miraculous *apparitions* to wondrous *coincidence*: it only asks that we allow ourselves to be guided toward the unknown by the glimmer of those coincidences, which is at present brighter than any other one, isolating it whenever possible from the minor events in life (*Free Rein* 16; *OC III* 669).

The last lines of this passage refer specifically to Breton's preoccupation in the 1930s with the question of *l'hasard objectif* or objective chance. In the 1920s, the castle image was more immediately associated with dream, automatism, and the related notion of the Marvelous. The way Breton employs this image reflects his efforts to create a coterie of friends who would engage in these practices on a daily basis. In the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, an imagined castle provides the most fitting place for the assemblage of those friends. Some of them – each mentioned by his name – live there as permanent guests; others, like Picabia, come now and then to pay a call; "Picasso goes hunting in the neighborhood."³³ What is more important in the present context is the notion of the castle as another privileged place – both as a place in "reality" and as an imagined edifice of a character echoed at times by various places existing in reality – whose dark corridors and recesses, shuttered windows and closed doors provide those points of contact between the real and the realm of dream, mystery, and the unknown. Evocations of such features of Breton's idealized castle – whether or not these specifically refer to a castle – are found everywhere in his writing of the 1920s and the 1930s. Again, in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton describes the mind in a waking state as responding to "suggestions which come to it from the depths of that dark night to which I commend it," seeing this darkness in terms of a corridor the key to which he would like to provide (*Manifestoes* 12–13; *OC I* 318). Dark underground passages in gothic novels represent the "slow progress of the individual toward the light in the perils of darkness."³⁴ The association of light with a journey on a long stairway descending downward occurs in one of the dreams

Breton published in *Littérature* in March 1922 (and included a year later in the collection *Clair de terre*). It is a dream replete with gothic elements, in which Breton, guided by a “genius” (perhaps Paul Valéry) who leads him down this stairway, goes into two rooms – his presence unfelt like that of a revenant in a gothic tale – one occupied by Georges Gabory, a relatively obscure poet, the other by the better known Pierre Reverdy. The light in the first room is “only daylight from an unfathomable vent”; in the next room, the light is a little better. There is an armchair in front of a table in the third room that “seems destined for me.” He sits down to the task of writing poems. “But, though I abandon myself entirely to the greatest spontaneity, I only manage to write these words on the first page: The light ... The moment this is torn up, on the second page: The light ... and on the third page: The light ...”³⁵ There is an obvious dimension of self-aggrandizement in this dream, in which, as noted by Jack Spector, the light represents Breton’s “high ambition and confidence”; it is the interior light of the poet.³⁶ It is also the light of the “imaginativeness” (*fantaisie*) by which Breton and his guests live and which illuminates the road leading to his imagined castle.

More than anything else, the castle is epitomized for Breton by the image of a secluded room high in the tower. It dominates the first text of “Soluble Fish” (“Poisson soluble”) that presents all the trappings of a gothic tale:

The phantom enters on tiptoe. He quickly inspects the tower and descends the triangular staircase. His red silk stockings throw a whirling light on the slopes of rushes. The phantom is around two hundred years old; he still speaks a bit of French ... A woman is singing at the window of this fourteenth-century château. In her dreams are black walnut trees (*Manifestoes* 52; *OC I* 349–50).

The sense of mystery and the unknown, as associated with this image of the closed room high in the château, is more elaborately expressed in *Nadja*, in the account of Breton’s and Nadja’s short stay in the town of Saint-Germain:

Here, high in the château, in the right-hand tower, there is a room which, certainly, no one would dream of showing us, which we would perhaps be wrong to visit – there is scarcely reason to try – but which, according to Nadja, is all that we would need to know in Saint-Germain, in fact. How much I admire those men who decide to be shut up at night in a museum in order to examine at their own discretion, at an illicit time, some portrait of a woman they illuminate by a dark lantern. Inevitably, afterwards, they must know much more about such a woman than we do. Perhaps life needs to be deciphered like a cryptogram. Secret staircases,³⁷ frames from which the paintings quickly slip aside and vanish (giving way to an archangel bearing a sword or to those who must forever advance), buttons which must be indirectly pressed to make an entire room move sideways or vertically, or immediately change all its furnishings; we may imagine the mind’s greatest adventure as a journey of this sort to the paradise of pitfalls (*Nadja* 112; *OC I* 716).

In this passage Breton comes close to metaphorizing life with its dark corners and mysteries – and, by the same token, the inner life with all its hidden recesses – in the image of the castle with the inaccessible room in the high tower.³⁸ In its capacity as dream space, it is no different from the castle erected in the mind, such as the one described in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* or the one intricately envisioned in “Il y aura une fois,” a text prefacing the collection of poems *Le Revolver à cheveux blancs* (1932). “The imaginary [*l’imaginaire*] is what tends to become real” Breton declares and goes on to make this dream château as real as possible. There is evidence of some parodic intention, especially when it comes to elaborating gothic elements such as the “long hallways, very dark,” or the meals served to “three girls who will be invited to spend time at this place, these girls being the most recent to have achieved renown in a scandal about some haunted house” (*Earthlight* 90–91; *Clair de terre* 101–2; *OC II* 51). Breton’s less obvious intentions come to the fore in his description of the five rooms, “with their windows and doorways boarded up, access to them rendered almost impossible without compromising the oath taken to not try and look into them.” Three of the rooms are described in some detail – one containing mannequins and wax figures arranged so as to create the “greatest spirit of abandon:” one with “eccentric suitcases, large sunflowers and witty party favors,” and the third, a “luxurious nursery” in which the cradle is decorated by a dagger. The real mystery, however, is engendered in relation to the fourth and fifth rooms, with the stipulation that Breton will be the “only one to know what will take place in the fourth, and that just one trustworthy man should know the true purpose of the fifth, without possessing more than myself or anyone else the ideological key to the whole.”

The conception underlying the fourth and fifth rooms is close enough to the one informing Duchamp’s “assisted Readymade,” *With Hidden Noise* (*A Bruit secret*, 1916), which was made of a ball of twine inserted between two brass plates. Inside, a small object, added by Duchamp’s friend Walter Arensberg, could be heard tinkling against the metal, but only Arensberg knew what it was. On the upper and lower plates, there were inscriptions made up of abbreviated French and English words, the meaning of which was known only to Duchamp. Thus Duchamp “created” a secret, since no one, to paraphrase Breton, would have possessed more than anyone else the key to a full knowledge of the object.³⁹ By the same token, this arrangement of the rooms in the dream castle frames a mystery behind their closed doors. Breton seems to argue that the creation of a secret or a mystery is not an end in itself.

What, above all, I wish to defend here is only the guiding principle of a fellowship whose advantage would be to place the mind in a position which seems to me poetically the most favorable. The matter at hand, right now, is not to delve any deeper into the secrets of such a community (*Earthlight* 94; *Clair de terre* 105; *OC II* 53).

True enough, this guiding principle – and, in fact, the text as a whole – seems to reflect an initiatory myth of occultation associated with the ideological stance propounded in *Les Vases communicants*, published in the same year, which, as noted above, called on the “poet to come” to surmount the “depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream.” However, the whole thrust of this creation of *l’imaginaire* seems to hark back to what I consider to be Breton’s prevailing mood in the 1920s, which was dominated by the pursuit of mystery nestling behind walls, doors, and windows as a correlate to the apprehension of the Marvelous or the Surreal within the real.⁴⁰ I would also suggest, in order to bring Aragon back into the equation, that such a pursuit might be seen in terms of a dialectic interplay of Breton’s castle with its dark passageways and thick walls (and, by extension, the façades of the Paris buildings among which he roams) and Aragon’s Passage de l’Opéra with its glass surfaces. By associating these notions of castle and Passage – and the related thick walls and glass – specifically with Breton and Aragon, I do not wish to imply that they should be exclusively allocated as such. The two, or, for that matter, other Surrealists, partake of this dialectic in different ways at different times and in different circumstances, and in response to different creative contexts.⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that, in the early 1920s, Breton placed greater weight on the interior vision, with its correlative subsumed in the mystery lying behind the surfaces of the real, while Aragon did not conceive of the marvelous separately from the concrete, and preferred the sense of mystery engendered by the play of reflections and what is seen behind windowpanes, or by the reality one can catch a glimpse of behind the half-opened door. I should only add at this point that the interplay of Breton’s castle and Aragon’s Passage de l’Opéra also subsumes a dialectic of transparency and opacity – one that will emerge in the coming chapters in relation to Breton’s window metaphor, and, in view of the work of several of the painters active in the Surrealist sphere in the 1920s, with regard to the dialectics of surface and depth within the “window”-frame of the painting.

The street as “canvas backdrop” – photographs in *Nadja*

As the preceding discussion readily discloses, Breton’s castle does not constitute a monolithic notion. The castle in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* epitomizes his desire to create a community of poets who “practise” Surrealism; the one addressed in the early 1930s has more to do with Breton’s political agenda at the time and the need to formulate a new collective myth of initiation. It is mostly the château in Saint-Germain, as a dream space incarnating life with its dark corners and mysteries, that exemplifies the mental stance adopted by Breton in the course of his wanderings in the streets of Paris, consisting of a movement along the surfaces of the real and an interior voyage through the

self. *Nadja* is indeed above all a book about Paris, or, more accurately, Paris as the privileged site for the search of the surreal within the real or the given. It is in Paris that Breton can experience to the fullest the Surrealist ambition, as expressed in "What is Surrealism?" (1935), to "deepen the foundations of the real; to bring about an ever clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses."⁴² It is in Paris that the threshold between the two realms governing Surrealist thought – the realm of dream and mystery and that of the real – exists on every corner, at times in the least likely places. It is there also that the potential "movement" between the two realms, or the perception of what exists on the "other side," achieve their problematic essence. Almost a decade after he wrote *Nadja*, Breton was still quite hesitant about how to proceed with the Surrealist aim of bringing about a unification of interior reality and exterior reality (it was under these labels that he tended to see these realms of dream and reality at the time), arguing that

... we have assigned ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on every possible occasion, of refusing to allow the pre-eminence of the one over the other, yet not of acting on the one and on the other *both at once*, for that would be to suppose that they are less apart from each other than they are ...

In the same paragraph he proposes more explicitly that Surrealism's "unceasing wish, growing more and more urgent from day to day, has been ... to pursue our investigations with all windows open on the outside; and to assure ourselves that the results of these investigations would be capable of facing the breath of the *street* [le vent de la rue]."⁴³ The windows, as we have seen, might stand for all those apertures that serve as thresholds between the two realms. It is in this respect that the screen/window paradigm, discussed in this and the preceding chapter, is usefully brought to bear on Breton's vision of Paris, its streets and façades, as narrated in *Nadja* and other texts of these years.

Writing of his experiences at the Théâtre Moderne, Breton notes that the "ridiculous acting of the performers ... always reminded me of a canvas backdrop [*une toile de fond*]" (*Nadja* 38; OC I 663). Breton may have associated this canvas backdrop with the primitive backdrops in photographers' studios at the time.⁴⁴ Elements referring to such photographers' backdrops appear also in Max Ernst's painting *At the Rendezvous of Friends* (1922).⁴⁵ In her study of Ernst's psychoanalytic sources, Elizabeth Legge refers, in a somewhat offhand manner, to the lightheartedness of the poses "in the manner of a seaside photograph – real heads, emerging from comic painted bodies ..."⁴⁶ I see this aspect of the painting – the "backdrop" quality of the setting, the disproportion and awkward combination, at times, of head and body, and the general sense of "primitiveness" exuded by it – as having some significance in itself, whatever the many other intriguing explanations for the strange gestures and postures of the painted figures.⁴⁷ Ernst himself refrained, on the whole, from offering any

clues, although in later years he hinted at the source of the strange hand gestures in deaf-mute language.⁴⁸ Breton, however, would have had little need for direct references to these sources; their strangeness and indecipherability would have constituted a sufficient stimulus for him. Had he known of the origin of the strange gestures in deaf-mute language (and that may have been the case), he would have appreciated the fact that these remain gestures without meaning, empty signs, in fact. He probably would not have remained oblivious to a certain kinship between the postures in the painting and those characterizing the friends who had taken an active role in the hypnotic sessions organized at his home; such a kinship may be discerned in a photograph included in *Nadja* of Desnos in a trance, his hand forlornly straying over his face. To return then to the Théâtre Moderne, the “ridiculous acting” of the performers would have conveyed for Breton the same dissociative quality of gesture and meaning. And as in Ernst’s painting, the “canvas backdrop” that this experience constitutes for him is something that needs to be “deciphered like a cryptogram,” without this purpose ever being fully accomplished. This is also Breton’s deciphering of his sense of himself (the purpose of the book as disclosed in its first paragraphs), and, indeed, following the reference to the canvas backdrop, Breton hints at this connection of self and place: “But what could I find for the fleeting and so easily alarmed image of myself, that image I am talking about, which is worth the welcome of this hall with its great, worn mirrors, decorated toward the base with gray swans gliding among yellow reeds ...”

This “canvas backdrop” is yet another manifestation of the screen/window paradigm to which I referred above; what remains hidden from view is what lies behind this canvas backdrop, and it is this quality that appears to dominate the manner in which Breton responds to Paris and its streets, whose surfaces evince a mystery, a sense of the unknown lying behind them, and which, like life itself, also need to be “deciphered like a cryptogram.”⁴⁹ Breton’s evocation of the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle sheds additional light on the experience at the Théâtre Moderne and on the implications of the canvas backdrop. The Boulevard at one time revealed itself to him as

... one of the major strategic points I am looking for in the matters of chaos; points, I persist in believing, for which are provided obscurely some markers – for me as for anyone who chooses to yield to similar instances, provided that the most absolute sense of love or revolution will be at stake and involve the negation of everything else” (*Nadja* 152–3, translation modified; OC I 748).

This is, however, part of a very long and rather convoluted sentence, and Breton’s point is, first, that the Boulevard came up to his expectations at the time of the “magnificent days of riot called ‘Sacco-Vanzetti’ ” – the public protests against the execution of the two Italians – when Breton himself was absent from Paris. His second point, however, is that the “Boulevard Bonne-

Nouvelle, the façades of its movie-theaters repainted, has subsequently become immobilized for me, as if the Porte Saint-Denis had just closed ...” In other words, the quality evinced by these surfaces, hinting at all these obscure “markers” or the “signals” to which he refers on the first pages of the book, was lost after these façades were repainted. In *Nadja* they remain, however, as mere markers or obscure solicitations. Breton cannot penetrate behind these surfaces. He needs someone like Nadja to be a potential bearer of the key to these mysteries; Breton devotes a few pages to Nadja’s perceptions, while they are having dinner in a restaurant on the Place Dauphine, of what lies behind the surfaces of reality. “She is certain that an underground tunnel passes under our feet, starting at the Palais de Justice ... Where only two or three couples are at this moment fading into the darkness, she seems to see a crowd. ‘And the dead, the dead!’ ” (83; 695). She has a premonition that a dark window will light up in red (which it does); she sees a flaming hand over the Seine. Breton remains an observer; he attributes the violent headache he has the next morning to “last night’s emotions and also to the effort of attention, of accommodations, which I have had to make” (*Nadja* 90; OC I 701).

Paris in *Nadja* indeed presents a maze of façades to be deciphered, although for Breton much of its mystery remains unraveled. But then, the quest itself constitutes an “errance mentale” (mental wandering), to use Marguerite Bonnet’s descriptive phrase for *Les Champs magnétiques* (André Breton 176), a voyage of self-discovery through a storehouse of signs to be deciphered.⁵⁰ As noted by Michel Beaujour,

Nadja is the narrative of an ethnological expedition toward the interior of a singularly disquieting city, a haunted Paris that unveils little by little its spells, confesses its periodic human sacrifices and rituals, puts before us its possessed and its mirages, which the camera has been able to capture and present to us as if we were there.⁵¹

Indeed, an essential part in the documentation of this quest was assigned by Breton to photographs. These act as a means of authenticating various narrative elements and of doing away with verbal description; but there appears to be a somewhat more elusive added dimension to them:

I have begun by going back to look at several of the places to which this narrative happens to lead; I wanted in fact – with some of the people and some of the objects – to provide a photographic image of them taken at the special angle from which I myself had looked at them. On this occasion, I realized that, but for some exceptions, most of the places more or less resisted my venture, so that, as I see it, the illustrated part of *Nadja* is quite inadequate (*Nadja* 151–2; OC I 746).

However inadequate he may have felt these photographs to be, some of them do disclose the “special angle” from which he would have liked them to be taken. Breton does not offer any explanation of what this “special angle” consists; it

may, of course, refer literally to the angle at which the object photographed is viewed, but not merely that. More likely, it would respond to a special sense of expectation and mystery associated with the locales photographed. Such is the area in which he roams,

... along the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle between the *Matin* printing office and the Boulevard de Strasbourg. I don't know why it should be precisely here that my feet take me, here that I almost invariably go without specific purpose, without anything to induce me but this obscure clue: namely that it (?) will happen here (32; 661–3).

The greater part of the photographic representation of these Parisian locales, which seems to be Breton's main concern in his assessment of the illustrations of *Nadja*, was the work of Jacques-André Boiffard, who was Man Ray's assistant in these years. A copy of *Nadja* was dedicated to Boiffard with these words: "To Jacques-André Boiffard, to whom I owe the most beautiful photographs in this book and through whose eyes I have seen the true sites known by mine ..." ⁵² What was the special quality, the "special angle" that rendered these photographs "beautiful" in Breton's eyes, in spite of the fact that most of them "more or less resisted my venture"? Walter Benjamin, in his article "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia" (1929), was the first to sense this special quality:

In such passages in Breton [the reference is to the descriptions of various places to which Breton felt particularly attracted], photography intervenes in a very strange way. It makes the streets, gates, squares of the city into illustrations of a trashy novel, draws off the banal obviousness of this ancient architecture to inject it with the most pristine intensity toward the events described, to which, as in old chambermaids' books, word-for-word quotations with page numbers refer (Benjamin, *One-Way Street* 231).

These photographs of Parisian scenes, in their "banal obviousness" and their resemblance to illustrations of "trashy novels" and "old chambermaids' books," ⁵³ only serve, as Benjamin saw it, to enhance the "pristine intensity" of these locales as the stage on which the events described take place. Closer to our time, Michel Beaujour suggested, like Benjamin, that "what we are shown is *nothing*: not only have these places resisted the photographer, but those that have allowed themselves to be captured 'at the special angle from which I myself had looked at them' are perfectly dumb: they suggest nothing in these banal photographs ..." Beaujour saw this banality as a voluntary expedient; had Breton wished to suggest the Marvelous of these places, he would have approached Man Ray.

These photographs, almost empty of human presence, correspond to a degree zero of representation: they are never removed from the amateur's snapshot [*cliché* in the original, in both senses of the word] or from outdated picture

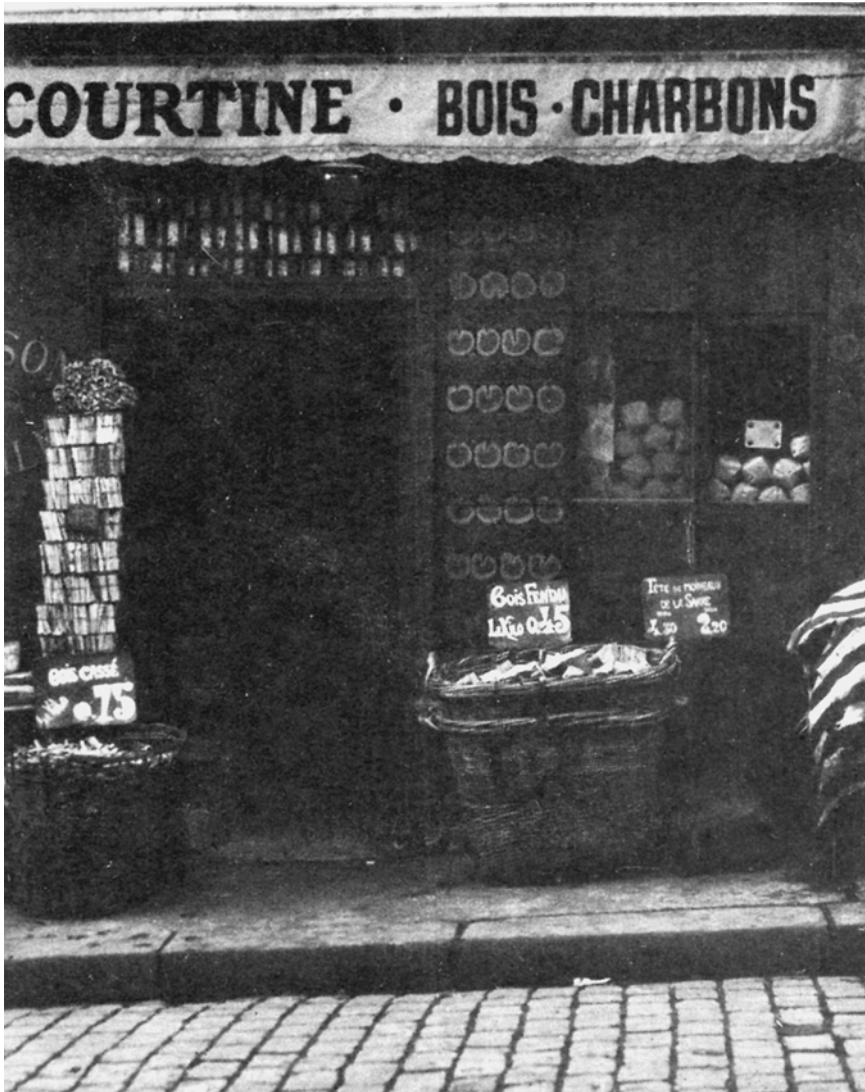
postcards. The special angle of Breton's look is no angle at all ... [The illustrations'] banality is less due to the photographer's lack of skill than to his will not to inflect the sense of his snapshot, not to make it say more than the cold eye of the scientist would have captured (Beaujour, "Qu'est-ce que 'Nadja'?" 797).

Dawn Ades follows Beaujour in arguing that, in "Boiffard's photographs there is clearly an effortless avoidance of picturesque effect, which is in accord with Breton's choice of the medical observation style" ("Photography" 163). However, both Ades, writing in 1985, and Ian Walker in a more recent study, object to Beaujour's somewhat disparaging reference to "amateur's snapshot" and "outdated postcards," and argue that Boiffard understood quite well what Breton wanted and that the pictures are in fact the result of a collaboration between Breton and Boiffard.⁵⁴ In considering the special quality of these photographs, I turn to an earlier commentator, Annette Michelson, who, in an essay primarily concerned with René Clair's film *Paris qui dort*, also offered some very suggestive remarks about Boiffard:

Boiffard's photographs in illustration of the promenades and expeditions of *Nadja* introduce us, through the arcades of the Palais Royal or the Place Maubert, into the theater of the surrealist encounter. This is the space of daily existence from which the stream of life has been evacuated, in which movement is cancelled. The social arena has been transformed into the theater of the private encounter.

This is also the space of Atget's Paris. To Walter Benjamin his photographs evoked, in their vacant stillness, the scene of a crime. Let us say, rather, that they project a sense of imminence, of occurrences past or still to come. In them time is suspended: we are *between times*. These streets, squares, boulevards, arcades are cleared for the emergence of "*le merveilleux*"; their emptiness is *ecstatic*.⁵⁵

That the absence of human figures in Boiffard's photographs marks a site cleared for the emergence of the Marvelous or for the chance encounter is also a point taken up by Dawn Ades.⁵⁶ But it is precisely with regard to this notion that I differ from both Michelson and Ades, at least in what concerns Boiffard's photographs in *Nadja*. The perspective I would like to offer puts weight not so much on the emergence of the Marvelous in the empty street as on the retaining of an intimation of a mystery present behind its façades. The notion I introduced earlier concerning the "canvas backdrop" as a manifestation of the screen/window paradigm which dominates the manner in which Breton responds to Paris and its streets, may be brought to bear on the photographs of *Nadja* as well. Not all of them, of course, but there are a few, I suggest, that would satisfy Breton's "special angle." These are the photographs that show façades whose surfaces evince a mystery, a sense of the unknown lying behind them, and which, like life itself, need to be "deciphered like a cryptogram". Four of these photographs adopt a frontal, or close to frontal, view of the façade ("My point of departure will be the Hôtel des Grands Hommes"; "The



2.1 Jacques-André Boiffard, illustration in *Nadja* (1928), "The words: BOIS-CHARBONS"

words: BOIS-CHARBONS" (Figure 2.1); "The Humanité bookstore"; and "At the Nouvelle France"). Two offer an oblique view ("We have our dinner served outside by the wine seller"; "CAMEES DURS"). All these façades have one thing in common: they present themselves, on the whole, as plane surfaces, their interiors almost blocked off or impenetrable; apertures such as doorways



2.2 Jacques-André Boiffard, illustration in *Nadja* (1928), "The Humanité bookstore"

or windows are mostly dark areas devoid of distinct features.⁵⁷ The figure of a woman in a high window at the Hôtel des Grands Hommes is too small to be noticed; the books in the window of the Humanité bookstore appear almost like surface decorations on the windowpane (Figure 2.2); the façade of the Nouvelle France café is all signs and inscriptions. The "signs" in these

photographs, to which Ades and Walker draw attention (the “On signe ici” on the façade of the Humanité bookstore, which, as noted by Walker, points, along Rue Lafayette, to where Breton will meet Nadja; the white tablecloth in the black space under the awning of the cafe at the Place Dauphine, noticed by Ades), constitute part of the surface texture without implying any sense of penetration into the spaces beyond it. Human activity is discernible only in the markings it leaves on these surfaces. I should mention in this respect Breton’s evocation of “the charm of naked walls with their flowered papers and their shadows of mantelpieces in apartment houses under demolition” (*Nadja* 108; OC I 714).⁵⁸

It seems inevitable that a discussion of Boiffard should include considerations of Eugène Atget, who may have influenced Boiffard at the time the latter was working on the photographs for *Nadja*, with this taking place after Man Ray had discovered this anonymous photographer’s work and had it published in *La Révolution surréaliste* (nos. 7 and 8, 15 June and 1 December 1926).⁵⁹ Of special interest to me are the two images that appeared in issue no. 7, precisely because they invite comparison with Boiffard’s work, whether or not they also indicate a direct influence. One is an image of a corset shop (Figure 2.3), inserted in a dream narrative by Marcel Noll (p. 6); the other, inserted in a text by René Crevel (“Le Pont de la mort”), is entitled “Versailles” and shows a woman standing in a doorway in what appears to be a shop front (p. 18). There are various ways of reading their meaning, in particular in terms of the dialogue they have with the texts in which they are placed.⁶⁰ What distinguishes these two images in the context of the present discussion, however, is that they answer in all respects to what I have posited with regard to Boiffard’s photographs; like Boiffard’s images they objectify the notion of the “screen.” In the corset shop window, the densely arranged corsets seen against the dark background block off any attempt to view what lies in its interior. It may remind us of the handkerchief shop described in *Le Paysan de Paris*, whose window serves as a barrier to the satisfying of desire while hinting at an erotic mystery: “In the arcade windows, the symmetrically displayed handkerchiefs form triangles suspended above somber-hued petticoats which prevent the idle gaze from roaming over the shop’s contents at its ease” (*Paris Peasant* 83; *Le Paysan de Paris* 104). The façade of the brothel, with its dark doorway and shop windows, also presents an impenetrable barrier to vision.⁶¹ Shop windows turn out indeed to be particularly apt indices of such perceptions of the façade. Comparing Boiffard’s shop window (CAMEES DURS) with an unspecified image by Atget, Dawn Ades has acutely observed that Boiffard avoids the use of reflection for disorientation or magical effect. “In Boiffard’s work, the window reflection of the Palais Royal Gardens does not disturb or render ambiguous our reading of the photograph. By contrast, the Atget is



2.3 Eugène Atget, *Corset Shop*, in *La Révolution surréaliste*, December 1926

disorienting and promises a kind of magic generated with the image – like the pipe-shop window in Aragon's *Paris Peasant ...*" ("Photography and the Surrealist Text" 163). What Ades does not consider, however, is the general lack of reflections in Atget's work before the mid-1920s. It is only in his latest photographs of shop fronts, in the two or three years before his death in 1929,

that effects such as these are employed. Such is, for instance, the well-known photograph of mannequins in a tailor's window who seem to be strolling in the reflected street (*Avenue des Gobelins*, 1925). Similar to this is the window of a car dealership, in which the forms of cars are intermingled with reflected trees (*Boutique d'automobiles, avenue de la Grande-Armée*, 1924–25). It would be interesting, indeed, to consider, in this respect, Atget's mounting interest in such images as reflecting the closer ties he had then with the Surrealists. As I have argued before, an attention to effects of reflections on shop windows, in the mid-1920s, is more in keeping with Aragon's conception than Breton's. It is only later, in the 1930s, primarily in Brassai's photographs (other than the ones used in *L'Amour fou* but still done within the Surrealist context), that reflections become a significant theme.⁶²

This chapter has dealt with the screen paradigm as manifested in images of façades, windows and doors in Surrealist texts of the 1920s, with these texts intimating a notion of the surreal in terms of the mystery lying behind the screen, behind the surfaces of the visible, and which may also be perceived in the play of projection, reflection, and perception of depth. My study posits the presence of this screen as a subliminal form in many Surrealist works, from the photographic illustrations of Surrealist texts in the 1920s to the conjunction of notions relating to Breton's window metaphor, to which I turn in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Breton, "As in a Wood," *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 237; OC III 904.
2. Breton, *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 91; OC I 275. The "bouche d'ombre" is a reference to Victor Hugo's *Contemplations* (note in OC I 1304).
3. Aragon, *Paris Peasant* 13; *Le Paysan de Paris* 20.
4. "... je ne connais aucun mystère, je ne sais même pas la signification du mot ... L'espace a alors des portes et des fenêtres." The poem is "Pour se prendre au piège," in Eluard, *Capital de la douleur* 55; "To Be Caught in One's Own Trap," in Eluard, *Capital of Pain* 54.
5. "Des portes s'ouvrent des fenêtres se dévoilent / Un feu silencieux s'allume et m'éblouit / Tout se décide je rencontre / Des créatures que je n'ai pas voulues." Eluard, *La Vie immédiate* 28.
6. *La Révolution surréaliste* 1 (1 December 1924): 19. If not otherwise noted, the translations from the French are mine.
7. Desnos, *Liberty or Love!* 43; *La Liberté ou l'amour!* 25.
8. It might be useful to recall a similar thought regarding the erotic encounter as expressed by Breton in "The Disdainful Confession" ("La Confession dédaigneuse," 1923): "Every night I would leave the door to my hotel room wide open in hopes of finally waking beside a companion I hadn't chosen." *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 4; OC I 196.
9. Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* 50.
10. Bonnet, "L'Aube du surréalisme et le cinéma " 94. Bonnet cites Roger Garaudy, *L'Itinéraire d'Aragon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961) 146.

11. I should mention, in this respect, Bonnet's article (see note 10 above), as well as a more recent article by Richard Abel, "American Film and the French Literary Avant-Garde (1914–1924)." Steven Kovács, in his study *From Enchantment to Rage: The Story of Surrealist Cinema*, provides several examples of such influence. With regard to poetry, Bonnet cites Goudal's remark in "Surrealism and Cinema" that Breton's "dreamed poems" collected in "Soluble Fish" ("Poisson soluble"), the text for which the *Manifesto of Surrealism* originally served as a preface would be more readily accepted by the public if treated like film scenarios (95). See Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I 358.
12. Marguerite Bonnet cites various examples of these effects in "L'Aube du surréalisme" 94–5.
13. The perception of the window as cinema screen applies to the two viewing directions, looking from the outside into the shop window (Aragon) and looking out from within a closed space. Richard Abel refers to a short poem by Soupault, "Café," published in *Sic* early in 1918, in which "a window becomes a screen through which the poet 'regarde le film invariable' of life in the street. Suddenly, his vision vanishes as someone turns on the electricity." See "American Film and the French Literary Avant-Garde" 101.
14. Aragon, *Les Collages* 30.
15. An interesting analogy might be drawn between the beholder's response to Ernst's "illusion," as implied by Aragon's text, and Tom Gunning's account of the effect on early cinema audiences of a train rushing forward (as in Lumière's *Arrival of a Train at the Station*): "Rather than mistaking the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from credulity, it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that renders the viewer speechless. What is displayed before the audience is less the impending speed of the train than the force of the cinematic apparatus. Or to put it better, the one demonstrates the other." Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment" 118.
16. "Fantasy, the beyond, dream, the afterlife, paradise, hell, poetry, so many words for designating the concrete," wrote Aragon in *La Révolution surréaliste* 3 (April 1925) 30.
17. See Caws, *The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism* 39–43.
18. A similar procedure had been applied by Breton in his poem "Le Corset mystère," which appeared in *Littérature* 4 (June 1919), with a reproduction of the manuscript copy of the poem made for Aragon by Breton. Breton himself referred to the poem in 1930 as a collage made up of fragments of advertisements alternating with ready-made expressions, specifying that the "Le Corset Mystère" is a "very pretty shop sign that might still be seen on a first-floor balcony on the rue de la Paix" (OC I 1098).
19. For considerations of the collage in Aragon's writing, and particularly in *Le Paysan de Paris*, see Kiyoko Ishikawa's discussion in *Paris dans quatre textes narratifs du surréalisme* 149–51; see also Lévi-Valensi, *Aragon romancier* 90–91.
20. The translator has here added the phrase "the world of snapshot" to "the realms of the instantaneous" in order to emphasize the dual sense of the French *instantané* which designates the adjective "instantaneous" (here also used as a noun), as well as the noun "snapshot."
21. As noted by Lévi-Valensi, these are accesses to a new universe, with the shop windows and entrances functioning as incipits and the worlds into which they open serving as parentheses embedded in a text (*Aragon romancier* 91).
22. The notion of the outmoded is associated with the *objet insolite*, the bizarre object that is to be discovered in some forgotten corner of the Marché aux puces; one of those objects that "can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned [démodés], broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse ..." (Breton, *Nadja* 52; OC I 676). For the place occupied by the *objet insolite* in Surrealist thought, see Chapter II in my *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object*. In the last two decades there have been many attempts to read the Surrealist taste for these objects in general, and Aragon's account of them in particular, in the light of the notion of the outmoded as defined by Walter Benjamin, who greatly admired *Le Paysan de Paris*. Benjamin's Arcades Project has largely to do with Surrealism's major concerns, and most theoretical accounts of this work touch on this connection to a greater or lesser extent. Benjamin's particular slant on Surrealism is only tangential to my present concerns and I shall refer to it only sporadically and without doing justice to the quite extensive critical literature devoted to these issues. In what specifically concerns Surrealism, I should single out Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*. In his book *Compulsive Beauty*, Hal Foster posits a connection between, on the one hand, the Surrealist concern with the Marvelous and the Freudian notion of the uncanny and, on the other, the Marxian (and Benjamin's) concern with the outmoded. Johanna Malt's *Obscure Objects of*

Desire: Surrealism, Fetishism and Politics, presents the most cogent and persuasive recent reading of Benjamin's reading of Aragon.

23. Such a dream of desire seems to constitute one of the hidden, at times unconscious, motivations informing the Surrealist taste for the *objet insolite*. It may be glimpsed behind Breton's affirmation, in his early essay on Apollinaire, that "our tastes" resemble those of Clarisse, Paul Morand's beautiful heroine, for "Small, unimaginable, ageless objects, never even dreamed of: the museum of a wild child, curiosities from insane asylums ..." *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 17; OC I 208. In *Les Vases communicants* Breton relates how one day he noticed in the window of a small stocking shop a "very dusty bouquet of silkworm cocoons suspended from some dry branches rising from a colorless vase." What attracts him most in this display is the "purely sexual idea of the silkworm and the leg that the exposed stocking nearest to the vase was designed to sheathe." *Communicating Vessels* 98; OC II 173.
24. It is, indeed, not by chance that corridors figure quite frequently in Surrealist writing, films, and film scenarios. Such are, for instance, Soupault's evocations of a "bleeding corridor in which our sins are hung up, delightful pictures in which however grey predominates," and of the "corridors of the grand hotels," in the texts accredited to him in *Les Champs magnétiques*. See *The Automatic Message* 63, 115–116; Breton, OC I 57, 90. The first scene in Salvador Dalí's scenario *Babaouo* (1932) takes place in the corridor of a large hotel. A bellhop tries in vain to deliver a letter, because of the "concert of strident, hysterical sounds of laughter, mingled with violent crashing noises" coming from the room. Finally the door opens a little, "just enough to allow us to get a partial view of a woman clad in a transparent negligee." See Dalí, *Collected Writings* 142.
25. Breton, *Nadja* 38; OC I 668. Breton is citing here from the "Alchimie du verbe" section in Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell (Une Saison en enfer, 1873)*. To cite the whole passage, "Poetic old-fashionedness figured largely in my alchemy of the word. / I grew accustomed to pure hallucination: I saw quite frankly a mosque in place of a factory, a school of drummers made up of angels, carriages on roads in the sky, a parlor at the bottom of the lake; monsters, mysteries. The title of a vaudeville conjured up horrors before me." *Rimbaud: Complete Works* 194–5.
26. Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in *One-Way Street and Other Writings* 230–231.
27. *Paris Peasant* 111; *Le Paysan de Paris* 137 ("ce grand vertige où la conscience se sent un simple palier des abîmes").
28. Aragon, *Une Vague de rêves* 15–16. "A Wave of Dreams" 5.
29. Bonnet, *André Breton* 384–5.
30. See a note concerning these changes in OC I 1535.
31. In keeping with his predilection for mystery, Breton notes his preference, when going to the flea market, for objects that are "old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse"; such as, for instance, the "irregular, white, shellacked half-cylinder covered with reliefs and depressions that are meaningless to me," which turns out to be some kind of a three-dimensional statistical device, with this not making it any less mystifying for Breton (*Nadja* 52; OC I 676).
32. "Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism," in *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 13; OC III 665. An earlier version of the essay in English translation, under the title "Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism," appeared in Read (ed.), *Surrealism*, originally published in 1936–37.
33. *Manifestoes* 16–17; OC I 322. For considerations of this castle, see also Bonnet, *André Breton* 344; Philippe Audoin, *Breton* 187.
34. "Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism," in *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 14; OC III 666.
35. Breton, "Five Dreams," *Earthlight* 37–8; "Cinq rêves," *Clair de terre* 37–8; OC I 149–50.
36. See Jack Spector's extensive and useful discussion of this element of light in Breton's thought, in relation to the significance of light in painting as suggested during the 1920s by Apollinaire, Delaunay, and others. *Surrealist Art and Writing* 49–51.
37. In his early poem "Age" (1916), Breton makes use of comparable elements, but to a different effect and mostly in relation to notions of freedom and personal achievement. "I'm coming out of the haunted forest; I'm braving the roads, torrid crosses," declares Breton, exhorting himself to "inhale space," break free of "parched walls," and "achieve the overwhelming poetry of staircase landings." As noted by the translators of the English edition of *Clair de terre*, staircases, flights of

steps, and staircase landings were an obsession of Breton's and may be encountered in 13 of the poems in this selection of his work. See *Earthlight* 24, and note on p. 168; *Clair de terre* 22; *OC* I 8.

38. In an early poem, "Le Corset mystère" ("The Mysterious Corset"), included in the early collection *Mont de piété* (1919), Breton posits an analogy of the castle and the head, possibly as an expression of his perception that the castle and the head are both sites of dream and the unknown: "UN CHATEAU A LA PLACE DE LA TETE" (a castle instead of a head). *Earthlight* 31; *OC* I 16.
39. I would hazard a guess that Breton could have had Duchamp's object in mind while writing this text. The object is not mentioned in Breton's seminal study of Duchamp, the essay "Lighthouse of the Bride" ("Phare de La Mariée," *Minotaure* 6, Winter 1934), and, as far as I know, it had not been out of the US during the 1930s. A reference to it, however, is included in Duchamp's *The Green Box* (1934), a collection of notes and other materials pertaining to the *Large Glass*, and Breton, who was quite close to Duchamp in the years preceding the appearance of *The Green Box*, would have been in a position to learn of its existence (as he learned about other objects mentioned in his essay which he could not have seen).
40. In his article "De l'Océan au Château: Mythologie surréaliste" ("From Ocean to Castle: Surrealist Mythology"), Michel Beaujour associates the "fifth room" with the later essay "Memory of Mexico" (1938), in which Breton describes a visit to a strange dwelling, with a "fantastic set of stairs" and illusionist decoration. "On the second floor one passes by a wide blocked-up door, condemned to being its own shadow. As I was to be told later, all the exits of the room onto which it used to open were walled up as soon as the former mistress of the house had been embalmed inside it ... Naturally, the presence of that great lady, all the more oppressive for being invisible, seems to account for the dreamlike atmosphere of the house" (*Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 26; *OC* III 681). Beaujour draws an analogy between the two rooms, implying that the mystery behind the blocked-up door is the presence of death in the depth of a labyrinth of illusions (366). I do not think this analogy is necessary for such perceptions regarding the earlier text. Desnos's notion of the screen and going beyond it (with death as the ultimate consummation of desire); and Aragon's vision of the Passage de l'Opéra as a "big glass coffin that presides over the double game of love and death" – all point to a similar conclusion. In the section entitled "Against death" in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton says: "Surrealism will usher you into death, which is a secret society" (*Manifestoes* 32; *OC* I 334). See Beaujour, "De l'Océan au Château: Mythologie surréaliste" 353–70.
41. I do not wish to imply, for instance, that glass does not play a role in Breton's thought. In *Nadja*, Breton says: "I myself shall continue living in my glass house where you can always see who comes to call; where everything hanging from the ceiling and on the walls stays where it is as if by magic, where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets, where who I am will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond" (*Nadja* 18; *OC* I 651). This, however, applies more to his conception of himself as a writer who does not disappear behind his work. Like Aragon, in *Nadja*, Breton also experiences the deceptive power of reflections: "Suddenly, while I am paying no attention whatever to the people on the street, some sudden vividness on the left-hand sidewalk, at the corner of Saint-Georges, makes me almost mechanically knock on the window. It is as if Nadja had just passed by" (*Nadja* 91; *OC* I 701). On the other hand, in his play *The Mirror-Wardrobe One Fine Evening* (1923) Aragon appears to spoof the motif of the mystery behind the locked door or that of the magic of reflections. Mystery, or the "key to the mystery," as argued by one of the characters, is associated with the wardrobe's contents which no one is allowed to see. The mirror which is ultimately shattered is also a clue, but an empty one at that, because ultimately there is no mystery, and out of the wardrobe, once its door is opened, come the characters first seen in the prologue to the play. An English translation of the play is included in Benedikt and Wellwarth (eds), *Modern French Theatre: An Anthology of Plays*. For a reading of the play, see Matthews, *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism* 73–81.
42. "What is Surrealism?" (1935) in Breton, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings* 115; "Qu'est-ce que le surréalisme?" in *OC* II 231.
43. *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings* 116; *OC* II 231). I have somewhat revised the English translation of this sentence, in which "toutes fenêtres ouvertes sur le dehors" is translated as "with our eyes open to the external consequences," which, I think, misses the point and does away with the window as an element that figures largely in Breton's thought as one of these thresholds between the two realms.
44. Several photographs exist of members of the group on outings, in which they appear seated in a painted automobile or airplane. See, for instance, the photographs taken at the Montmartre Fair in 1923, in Beaumelle et al., *André Breton* 115.

45. It was shown at the Salon des Indépendants in 1923, and was reproduced in *Paris-Journal*, April 13, 1923. See Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* 347, note 30.
46. Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* 145.
47. The psychiatric background of this feature of the painting is dealt with extensively by Legge (145–69). See also Camfield 128–32.
48. Ernst was well acquainted with deaf-mute language, since his father was a teacher of the deaf; however, as noted by Legge (145), Camfield (129) and others, none of the gestures correspond to any of the languages of the deaf. Both Legge and Camfield argue that Ernst may have been influenced by visual models found in Kraepelin's group photographs of catatonic patients and by Prinzhorn's book on the art of the mentally ill. The evidence for this is quite irrefutable, and it is possible that Breton and others in his circle, who knew the painting and were close to Ernst at the time, would have been aware of these sources.
49. The street is one of the places that are, for Breton, the most propitious for the *insolite* encounter, for the experience of the Marvelous. "The street, which I believed could furnish my life with its surprising detours; the street, with its cares and its glances, was my true element: there I could test like nowhere else the winds of possibility." "The Disdainful Confession," *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 4; OC I 196.
50. For a very detailed exposition of the presence and function of Paris in the writings of Breton and the other Surrealists, see Bancquart, *Paris des Surréalistes*.
51. Beaujour, "Qu'est-ce que 'Nadja'?" 797.
52. As quoted in Dawn Ades, "Photography and the Surrealist Text" 161. Quoted originally in Dominique Lecoq, "Jacques-André Boiffard ou l'histoire d'un oeil," *Georges Bataille et Raymond Queneau*, 1930–40, no. 4 (Clermont-Ferrand: n. pub., 1982): 40.
53. Benjamin seems oblivious to the fact that it is not just "trashy novels" and "old chambermaids' books" that employ this approach, but also the adventure books and children's books with their "splendid illustrations," to which Breton often refers. In his "Notice to the Reader of The Hundred Headless Woman" Breton appears to quote such captions ("They all went for their swords at the same moment"), referring to them as that which "tint[s] our enchantment and terror." Breton, *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 45–6; OC II 302–3.
54. Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams* 59.
55. Michelson, "Dr. Crause and Mr. Clair" 42.
56. Ades suggests, quite ingeniously, that the avoidance of human activity and city life is deliberate. "The experience of the street has to do with life, but it has not to do with industry, toil, urban animation . . ." (163). Ian Walker points out many instances of small human figures that may be discerned in the photographs and notes that in some cases the evocation of presence is as haunting as any absence. He also suggests that these presences have not been noted because of the "seductiveness of the myth of emptiness," and agrees that the figures are small, and, in the published versions, difficult to read (62).
57. I have not included the photograph of the "Sphinx-Hôtel, Boulevard Magenta" in my list because its oblique view of the frontage does not present the unmitigated planarity of the others, nor the haunting emptiness; and thus does not convey the same sense of mystery.
58. It seems to me that it is this predilection of Breton's for the plane surface of the blocked-off façade – the "screen" intimating the mystery lying beyond it while denying access to it – that may have been instrumental in the choice of a photograph included in the last issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (1929). It is a frontal view of a small building, with a closed-up shop front and with four shuttered windows in the two storeys above it. A large sign with the word FORTUNE is placed between the two rows of windows. Beneath the image appears the caption MAISON-ATTENTAT ("attentat" means attempted murder, assassination, or attack). The placing of this photograph in the middle of an article by André Thirion, "Note sur l'argent," suggests, as noted by Ian Walker, that the "fortune within is being nefariously and possibly violently acquired" (Walker 76). Walker also presents very intriguing information concerning the subsequent use of this image by the poet René Char, analyzes the epigrammatic poem associated with it, and, finally, reveals that this was the house of a friend of Char's named Jean Fortune. While the implication is that it was Char who was instrumental in having this photograph published in *La Révolution surréaliste*, I tend to consider as no less significant the fact that Breton, as the editor, would have had the last word on the decision to use it. Magritte may have sensed this particular quality of the photograph (I will

consider this aspect of his work in greater detail in Chapter 5). A painting by Magritte entitled *L'Attentat* (*Act of Violence*, 1932) presents the same kind of frontality, consisting of a "cubed" sky with clouds, a naked torso in a mirror, and, at the center, the stark façade of a building with rows of uniform and empty windows that could also be a painted backdrop (Cat. 59 in Sarah Whitfield, *Magritte*; Cat. 99 in Ollinger-Zinque and Leen (eds), *René Magritte 1898–1967*). It would be quite tempting to consider this image as having been on Magritte's mind while painting his *L'Attentat*. There is hardly any doubt as to Magritte's having seen the photograph, since, in the same issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, his picture-essay "Les mots et les images" and the photomontage of the Surrealists around his painting of a naked woman (*Je ne vois pas la / cachée dans la forêt*) also appeared.

59. Ian Walker devotes a full chapter to the "Surrealist Atget," and there is no need for me to go into all the details of this dimension of Atget's work and career. It should suffice to mention here that he was a relatively anonymous maker of photographic documentation of the side of Paris which, as noted by Molly Nesbit, is missing from the usual bourgeois image – Paris without the high life, a Paris that was a "mass of common detail." His rise to fame, in both Surrealist and in other avant-garde circles, began only after his death in August 1927. See Nesbit, *Atget's Seven Albums* 5.
60. Walker argues that the "decapitated" corseted dummies interact with the context of the Revolution and the Marquis de Sade of Noll's dream; the title "Versailles" is an ironic comment on the image of a prostitute standing in front of what is in fact a brothel (90, 92). Atget himself was probably quite unaware of any such implications.
61. Another photograph by Atget, reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* as an illustration for Eluard's text "Les Dessous d'une vie ou la pyramide humaine" (*La Révolution surréaliste* 8 (1 December 1926) 20–21), presents a similar image of impenetrable darkness. The image is that of a staircase banister spiraling downward (to the "undersurface" of the title) and around a dark and opaque wall. The photograph may have been chosen, quite likely by Man Ray, as an image that complements Man Ray's own photograph on the cover of the fourth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (July 1925) showing a mannequin moving up a spiraling staircase, her hand pointing up. Whereas in Atget's photograph the staircase spirals down to a mysterious bottomless region, Man Ray's staircase rises from well-defined floor tiles with the mannequin pointing to an unknown region above. Both, however, may define one and the same region of dreams and the unconscious. In Chapter 3 I associate Man Ray's photograph with Morise's text "Les Yeux enchantés" (December 1924).
62. The question of a possible Surrealist reading of reflections in Brassai's photographs of the early 1930s is considered in some depth in Krauss, "Nightwalkers."

Breton's windows

"A vista stretching away before me and out of sight"

With the pursuit of the mystery ensconced behind façades, or intimated behind doors and windows, as a correlate to the apprehension of the Marvelous or the Surreal within the real, it would seem almost inevitable that the metaphorical dimension of doors and windows would also resonate in Breton's reflections on art. This dimension indeed comes to the fore in Breton's window metaphor, introduced in what has become an often-cited passage in the first installment of his "Le Surréalisme et la peinture" (*La Révolution surréaliste* 4, 15 July, 1925).¹ It appears in the midst of reflections on the inherent limitation of vision insofar as the whole field of visionary possibilities is concerned. Breton's question, "who is to draw up the scale of vision?" testifies to his realization that there are no yardsticks by which one might evaluate the nature of the different experiences associated with vision:

... there is what I have looked at in vain and so never dare to see, which is everything that I love ... there is what others have seen, or claim to have seen, and that by means of suggestion they are able or unable to make me see; there is also what I see differently from the way in which anyone else sees it, and even what I begin to see which is not visible. And that is not all (*SP* 1).

But there is also the need "to fix visual images, whether or not these images pre-exist." And when one looks at a picture in a book – any picture, as Breton would have it – "things that surrounded me cease to exist," with something else coming to replace them. He therefore concludes:

It makes no difference whether there remains a perceptible difference between beings which are evoked and beings which are present, since I dismiss such differences out of hand at every moment of my life. This is why it is impossible for me to envisage a picture as being other than a window, and why my first

concern is then to know what it *looks out* on, in other words whether, from where I am standing, there is a "beautiful view," and nothing appeals to me so much as a vista stretching away before me and out of sight (SP 2-3).

Ostensibly a simple re-statement of a basic Renaissance conception, this statement constitutes, on the contrary, a confluence of far-reaching concerns, to which I address myself in the coming discussion. Breton's equation of picture and window appears to suggest that the work of art can make up for the limitation of vision and light up all the obscure corners of normal vision. Indeed, the conception of a picture in terms of a window opening onto a "vista stretching away before me and out of sight" ("à perte de vue," that is, as far as the eye can see) appears to imply an unhindered view to a distant horizon, to the limits of the power of discrimination of the human eye. This is applicable also to Breton's concept of the "internal model," which is commonly taken to imply – and Breton's text generally appears to suggest such a reading – an image that is generated in the imagination as a wholly realized embodiment of an inner vision. Furthermore, much of what Breton says in introducing the window metaphor or the concept of "internal model" could be interpreted as a call for the employment of traditional painting techniques for the purpose of giving materiality to the "virtual images" created by poets in their evocation of an unknown territory, "where 'a drawing-room at the bottom of a lake' had seemed the most natural thing in the world" (SP 5).²

The question that needs to be asked at the outset is whether this implies that the "narrow concept of imitation which art has been given as its aim," denounced by Breton on these pages, has merely shifted to another object of imitation, this time an image formed in the depths of the mind. That this is not wholly the sense of Breton's argument is suggested later in the text, when Breton confesses that it "remains to be determined what we may understand by *internal model*" (SP 4). His assertion that "the plastic work of art will either refer to a *purely internal model* or will cease to exist" appears to follow directly upon an observation concerning the "present state of development of thought structure, when the external world, in particular, seems increasingly suspect ..." If the structure of thought is at the root of the limitation of perception, should we not expect this to be true for the perception of the internal model as well? As will become clear in what follows, Breton is moving between two somewhat conflicting conceptions of painting that also complement each other. One, indeed, holds painting to be a means of revolutionizing perception and overcoming the inherent limitation of vision, by its capacity to subvert the representation of the real through the creation of new, never-before-seen images. The other conception sees painting as an expression of a hidden mystery, one that subsumes the unknown in its very essence and form.

There are, indeed, various hints in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* and other writings by Breton that indicate that by “out of sight” (“à perte de vue”) a limit point is implied beyond which lies the other side of existence,³ which is also a representation of the other, less accessible, region in the mind. In other words, it refers to an intimation of some element or quality in the painting that may be felt by the beholder to exist without actually being perceived. There is, for instance, the comment in the opening paragraphs of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* that poets such as Rimbaud and Lautréamont brought about a change in the mode and scope of vision, “so that our eyes, our *precious* eyes, have to reflect that which, while not existing, is yet as intense as that which does exist, and which has once more to consist of real visual images” (SP 5). Breton thus may be referring to the possibility that not only will the work of art display that which does not exist – that is, what has no prior existence in the visible world – but also that our eyes will reflect, or indeed project on the painting that which does not have prior existence in the painting itself. His poetic response – and this goes for other Surrealists as well – is directed not only at what he sees in the painting but also at what he does not see or that which is intimated by the work without it being there.

For Breton, in other words, the “internal model” encompasses not only what is seen – however unknown it may be – but also the not-seen or the invisible. I suggest that Breton’s main concern, especially in the 1920s, was with painting as an embodiment of the notion of the Marvelous; that the “poétique des effets”⁴ involves an experience analogous to the experience of the Marvelous in the framework of the real, which, as suggested in Chapter 2, is a correlative of the sense of mystery and the unknown engendered within the real. Mystery refers, as shown before, to the space hidden behind the surface of reality – behind the “canvas backdrop” – as a manifestation of the screen/window paradigm which dominates the manner in which Breton responds to Paris and its streets. Mystery, as I argue in what follows, is also a major concern of Breton’s, implied or at times distinctly stated, in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* and other writings (as well as, to a varying degree, in the writings of other Surrealists who were close to him in the 1920s). With its presence intimated by the evocation of (or implied reference to) what is hidden, what cannot be seen – the unseen lying behind the “surface,” within the depths of the painting – mystery also informs his window metaphor. The “out of sight” quality, an essential dimension of the experience of looking at a painting, is part of a series of dichotomies that inform both the experience of the external world and of the work of art. As I will argue in this chapter, when dealing with various issues concerning the notion of the picture as a window that figure primarily in Breton’s writings, the work of art subsumes these dichotomies in the very essence of the “window” posited by Breton, in terms of both the spatial character of the vista it looks out on and the nature of

the interaction – the exchange of “signals” – between the two spaces separated by the “windowpane.” My concern thus is with both surface and depth – with the nature of the “windowpane” and the essence of the space lying behind it. In what follows I consider Breton’s window metaphor as partaking of the notion of layered depth and in relation to the perception of the surface of the painting as constituting, literally and metaphorically, a screen that conceptualizes the dialectics associated with the process of automatic creation. These considerations will be placed in high relief in the light of various hints that can be gleaned from Breton’s writing concerning what I consider to be an underlying cinematic dimension in his perceptions regarding painting.

Before proceeding with this discussion, I would like to bring up a quite crucial additional consideration. An attempt to discern some of the underlying motivation informing Surrealist writing on art – its sub-text, so to speak – should take into consideration the special nature of this writing. Much of what might be labeled art criticism in the Surrealist framework, especially in the years preceding the book publication of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in 1928, has an obvious playful quality that seems to imply an inherent disregard for the possibility of Surrealist painting as such, as well as to express a disdain for the more normative form of art criticism.⁵ Far from consistent critics, the Surrealists exhibited in their writings on art a pronounced disregard for formal consideration and for any form of aesthetic evaluation; an obliviousness that extended, at times, even to the visual content of the work itself. One of the modes of introducing an exhibition involved the formation of a text based on the titles of the works exhibited. Such, for instance, is Breton’s and Desnos’s collaborative catalogue introduction for the first group exhibition of Surrealist painting, held at the Galerie Pierre in 1925, in which were integrated titles of works by Man Ray, Picasso, Arp, Klee, Masson, Ernst and others.⁶ A more direct response to various images and motifs found in a painting might serve as a springboard for a string of poetic musings. An example is Aragon’s evocation of Masson and other painters in *Une Vague de rêves*: “André Masson presides over the release of doves at every crossroad: the beautiful knives he will have seen everywhere are ready to be seized at last. If the houses in Paris are mountains it’s because they’re reflected in Max Morise’s monocle ...”⁷ It should be kept in mind that even a text that offers a more sustained response to the art under consideration, such as Breton’s *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* appears to be, still constitutes a poetic response.⁸ What Breton suggests on an analogous plane, as a metaphorical expression, cannot and should not be literalized – that is, perceived as an image to be specifically delineated within the “window” frame, indeed the picture frame – but should rather be probed for what it means within the overall poetic framework suggested and pursued in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* and other texts of Breton’s, poetic or discursive.

"What lies beyond?"

Breton's response to de Chirico's work will serve very well as my point of departure for a pursuit of the concerns underlying the window metaphor. At the time he wrote *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton had already despaired of de Chirico and lamented the betrayal of his early promise, but he was still enthralled by de Chirico's early work and he saw it, as he had four years before, as indelibly fixing in memory the "veritable modern mythology" that it had helped bring into being.⁹ At some point in the midst of his quite extensive appraisal of de Chirico in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton makes the following statement:

What greater folly than that of this man, lost now among the besiegers of the city he had built and rendered impregnable! This city will never cease to confront him, as it will so many others, with its merciless severity, for it was he himself who designed it so that whatever happens there had no choice but to happen in just that spot. This city as self-contained as a rampart, this city lit from within itself in broad daylight is the *Invitation to Wait*. How many times have I tried to get my bearings here, to perform the impossible feat of circling this building, to work out the far from alternating rising and setting of the suns of the mind! (SP 13)

The unsuccessful attempt to "perform the impossible feat of circling this building" characterizes the very essence of Breton's mode of interrogating de Chirico's paintings. It involves a tantalizing knowledge that there is something there, behind the ramparts that close off the view; and that the mystery or enigma embedded in just such a perception is what gives these paintings their power over the beholder – their ability to communicate the "most disquieting aspects of external appearances" (16), the sense that "everything seems so close to existence and yet bears so little resemblance to what really exists!" (13). The painter himself must keep up this sense of mystery; otherwise, his work will lose its sustaining power, as de Chirico's had done when he "suddenly imagined one day that he was the master of his dreams!" (16).

Much of what appears on these pages in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* is colored by what Breton found in a manuscript written by de Chirico in French, probably in 1913–14, which was in the possession of Paul Eluard. That Breton had read this manuscript quite attentively is attested by a footnote added in the 1928 published version of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*,¹⁰ in which excerpts from this manuscript are introduced for the purpose of showing how removed was the later de Chirico from the promise he had shown in his youth. This citation reads in part:

To be really immortal a work of art must go completely beyond the limits of the human, to where good sense and logic are absent. In this way it will come close to the dream and to the mentality of children.

The truly profound work will be drawn up by the artist from the innermost depths of his being ... What I hear is worthless: there is only what I see with my eyes open and, better still, closed...

One bright winter afternoon I found myself in the courtyard of the palace of Versailles. Everything looked at me with a strange and questioning glance. I saw then that each column, each window had a soul that was an enigma... At that moment I was filled with the sense of mystery that drives men to create certain things. And the creations seemed even more mysterious than the creators (SP 18–19).

When Breton commented on the “impossible feat of circling this building” he may have had in mind the following passage in this manuscript (quite tellingly, in his citation Breton retained only one sentence, preferring no doubt to appropriate the rest elsewhere in his commentary):

In a profound painting ... one must fall silent when one has penetrated it in all its profundity, when one turns the corner of all its walls, and not of its walls alone. Then, light and shade, lines and angles begin to talk, and music too begins to be heard, that hidden music that one does not hear. What I listen to is worthless: there is only what I see with my eyes open – and even better closed. There is no mystery in music; that is precisely why it is the art people enjoy most, for they always discover in it more sensations.¹¹

It would appear as though, while Breton is emphasizing the impossibility of circling the building in a de Chirico painting, de Chirico himself asserts that one can turn the “corner of all its walls, and not of its walls alone.”¹² This feat, however, would be best performed with the eyes closed, conceded de Chirico, who at this stage in his work had been most concerned – and this is what endeared him later to Breton – with the mystery evoked by a painting. Such a mystery, hints de Chirico, raises unanswerable questions; it leads painting to its “utmost limits” and to the “final effort,” when “painting too will have its picture that will carry us *beyond all pictures*” (Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* 245).

Something of these perceptions carried over to later writings of de Chirico. In “The Architectonic Sense in Ancient Painting,” an article published in *Valori Plastici* in May–June 1920, de Chirico retained his earlier “metaphysical” stance concerning the unknown content of art, even while shifting his sights to ancient and Classical painting. One paragraph is significant enough in terms of my current consideration to be quoted in full:

In the work of Giotto, too, the architectonic sense creates great metaphysical spaces. All the openings (doors, arcades, windows) that accompany his figures portend the cosmic mystery. The square of sky outlined by a window is a second drama inserted into that enacted by the figures. Indeed, more than one disturbing question comes to mind where the eye meets that blue or greenish sky, enclosed by the lines of geometricized stone: What lies beyond? Perhaps that sky lies over a deserted sea or a populated city? Or perhaps it stretches over a great expanse of free and restless

nature, wooded mountains, dark valleys, and planes gouged out by rivers? And the perspectives of the buildings rise full of mystery and foreboding, the angles conceal secrets, and the work of art is no longer a dry episode, a scene limited by the acts of the figures represented, but is the entire cosmic and vital drama which envelops man and constricts him within its spirals, in which past and future are confused, in which the enigmas of existence, sanctified by the breath of art, strip off the tangled and fearful aspects that man imagines beyond art to restore the eternal, tranquil and consoling aspect of the structures that are created by genius.¹³

The ideas expressed in this passage are still fully applicable to de Chirico's early work. More significantly, the question "What lies beyond?" – notwithstanding its bald quality and the somewhat unexceptional speculations it provokes ("a deserted sea or a populated city?") – seems to be one that Breton would have found quite amenable to his own concerns.¹⁴ That the city created by de Chirico would provoke such musings – such a forlorn and despairing desire to search it – is what others in Breton's circle expressed as well. Desnos wrote:

For de Chirico, the closed doors opened of themselves to mysterious landscapes ... One would be waiting for the arrival of unexpected deities. Perhaps their meeting was already terminated, maybe they were already departed on their different routes. But the landscape was heavy with their powers, and what a sky above all this.¹⁵

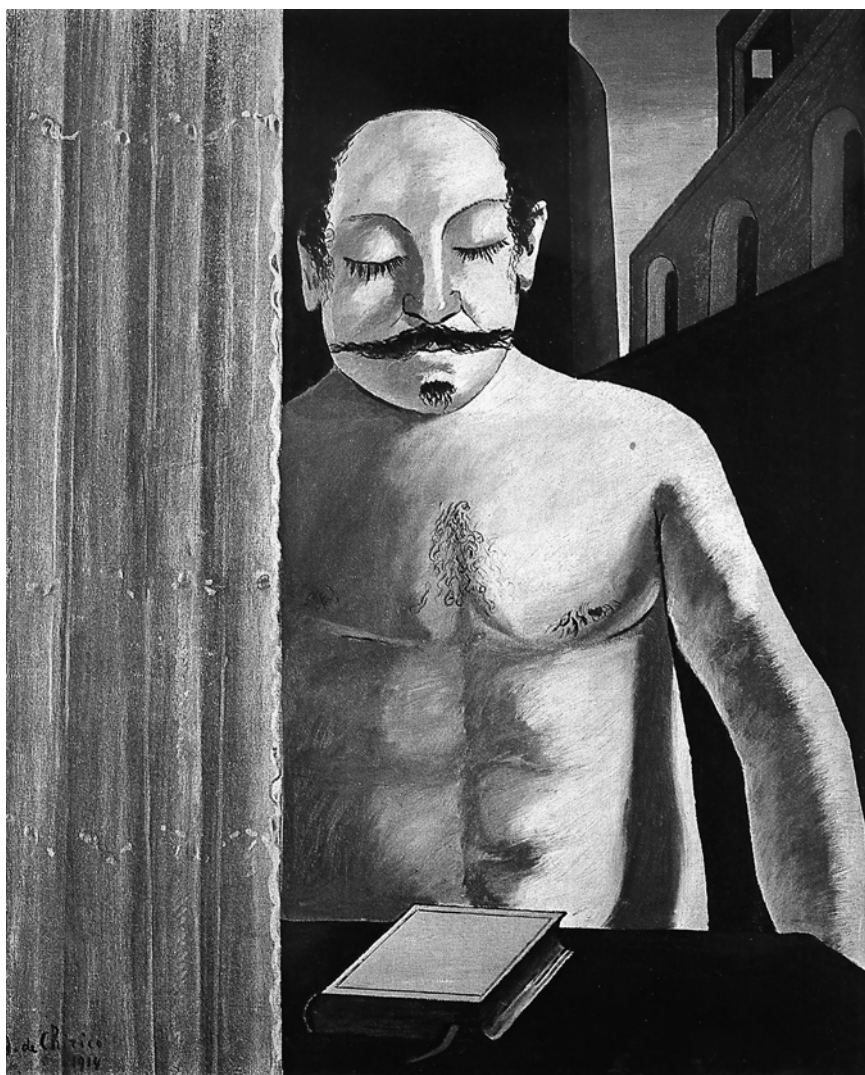
René Crevel wrote about having

... [an] urge to go for a walk through de Chirico's paintings; cities of sumptuousness, I say, and harmony; cities that nonetheless disturb us, because they appear to radiate the indifference of a flesh that no longer feels alive ... We had to breathe the same air in cities that had been buried and hidden from view; but before the curtain of green lava falls over them for ever, let us explore.¹⁶

But no exploration, it seems, would annul the sense of mystery imparted by de Chirico's works, "the mystery that belongs to all, that is shared by all," to which Aragon refers.¹⁷ This, however, has not deterred the Surrealists from trying once and again to probe these canvases for some answer, however hopeless such an endeavor might seem.¹⁸

"Gauzes of vision"

Quoting de Chirico concerning the latter's preference for seeing with his eyes closed, Breton may have had in mind the image of the naked man with his eyes closed in de Chirico's *The Child's Brain* (*Cerveau de l'enfant*) which Breton owned over a long period (Figure 3.1). In 1954 Breton wrote an essay in which he referred to this painting as "among all contemporary plastic works, the one most highly charged with the 'quotidian magic,'" a painting "endowed with



3.1 Giorgio de Chirico, *The Child's Brain*, 1914

an exceptional power to shock."¹⁹ Breton also described how, while going by bus along the rue La Boétie, he had caught a glimpse of it in the window of Galerie Paul Guillaume, and, swayed by impulse, he left the bus in order to get a closer look. There were various reasons for the great attraction the painting held for him, not the least of these being the perception of the figure as that of the father (in the essay Breton quotes at length two psychoanalytical

analyses of this motif in the painting) who is at the same time also a poet-creator and a seer.²⁰ My concern at this point, however, is with another aspect of the painting; one that has to do with the curtain that blocks off the left side, cutting into the man's figure.²¹ Breton referred to the curtain in an interview with Charles Henri Ford that appeared in *View* (New York) in August 1941. Commenting on the war in Europe, Breton declares there that it is

... Eros who will be called upon, in the days to come, to restore the balance that has tipped in death's favor. Nothing seems better suited to meet the challenge than two paintings, chosen from extremely different sources, both of them outside of Surrealism: Edward Hopper's *New York Movie* and Morris Hirshfield's *Nude (at the Window)*. The very beautiful young woman lost in her daydream, standing apart from what the others find so absorbing; the heavy mythical column; the three lamps of *New York Movie* seem laden with a symbolic meaning that seeks an exit through the curtained stairway. Interestingly, it is also between curtains – one raised, the other drawn aside – that Hirshfield's nude offers herself ... I'm realizing that a half-drawn curtain also played a major part in my long-standing attraction toward De Chirico's most 1914 painting: *The Child's Brain* ... It seems to me that in times of serious external crisis, this curtain, which expresses the need to pass from one era to the next, must somehow make its presence felt, visibly or not, in any work able to confront the viewpoint of tomorrow (*Conversations* 184–5; *Entretiens* 228–9).

At that point and in accordance with his thesis, Breton could well perceive the curtain in its temporal – or rather historical – dimension as expressing the “need to pass from one era to the next.” Poetic license apart, I do not quite see where this fits into the general drift of this part of the interview, where, to follow Breton's ideas, the curtain offers an exit to dream – a dream that is the equivalent of the film showing on the screen at the top left corner of Hopper's painting (although the young woman seems oblivious to it) – or serves to frame an erotic nude (who “offers herself”). I do not wish, however, to “correct” Breton's own musings on the curtain, but rather to explore them further for what they may reveal of his long-standing engrossment with the notion of the curtain, which may have originated in his early fascination with de Chirico's painting.²² Much of this has to do with the curtain's capacity to hide – or at times reveal – whatever lies behind it, and in this respect it is sometimes placed at the heart of a dialectics central to an important essay written by Breton about a year after the publication of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in book form.

“What, again, is this visual field sadly lit by physical considerations and outside of which no element of the canvas has been considered,” asks Breton in “The X ..., Y ... Exhibit” (1929),²³ yet another instance of his continuing critique of naturalist painting, which, in the postwar years, regained stature as a modern style and was promoted by magazines such as *L'Amour de l'art* or *L'Art vivant*.

What is this visual field next to the other, whose ceaseless exhibition hardly suffers from the texture or arrangement of a sensitive organ like the human eye, stupid when compared to that of a chameleon, and especially to the eyes behind the eyes, of which little Cornelius, Achim von Arnim's adorable character, was so justly proud?²⁴ This field, I was saying, where there appears (according to the least prevalent psychic laws) the substance of human thought delivered to its spirits and personal demons ..."²⁵

The "stupid" human eye is unable to go beyond physical considerations; it is what " 'physically,' as they say, keeps us from seeing clearly," leaving us with "those famous trees!" argues Breton in his catalogue introduction for the first Dalí exhibition in Paris (November–December 1929). The "famous trees" exemplify the regressive return to nature of French art of the 1920s, and, for Breton, the "secret of Surrealism lies in the fact that we are convinced that something is hiding behind them."²⁶ What lies behind these "famous trees" is "Cimmeria, the only new place we have discovered lately and that we mean to keep for ourselves"; it is the region beyond the real, the "distant countrysides," the "marvelous land of treasures," over which, Breton says, Dalí reigns.²⁷

The separation of two regions, that of the visible and the one lying hidden behind the "famous trees," is also associated with the image of the curtain "There is ... there is a mask covering all the faces we think we see most clearly: each landscape finds us in the same expectant pose, as if watching a curtain rise ..." (*Break of Day* 42; *OC II* 299–300). In Breton's involved dialectics, the two regions, the two fields of vision, should be fused; the curtain separating them should be pulled aside or raised.²⁸ But he is also aware of the often hopeless nature of such an ambition. And while the curtain may be "invisibly raised," he notes in a poem cited before, "There's / Only for me to lean over the cliff / Of the hopeless fusion of your presence and your absence."²⁹ Painting in Breton's thought may exemplify this dialectics by intimating the existence of this "second landscape" or "second zone" – the artist may, at times, have the courage to delve into the "unknown" and bring back the images found there³⁰ – while also incarnating the curtain, or the many curtains, that, literally or metaphorically, serve as barriers to vision. Such an intimation of the unknown is also present in a painter such as Cézanne, who, for Breton, "is not above all a painter of apples, but the painter of *The House of the Hanged Man*," one who was more concerned by the aura of unknown menace than by "technical preoccupation." And Breton notes with regard to Cézanne's *Young Man before a Skull* (1890) that "metaphysical unease falls on the painting *through the pleats of the curtain* [Breton's emphasis]."³¹ In Chapter 8 I consider the quite marked shift in Breton's views on art between the 1920s and the 1930s; however, some tropes persisted in his thought over the years, the notion of the "curtain" being one prominent example. Breton opens a late essay on the quite insignificant

painter Le Maréchal with a quote from Rimbaud: "There were visions behind the gauze of the curtains." The quote is taken from a passage in the famous "Lettre du voyant" in which Rimbaud criticizes the romantic poet Alfred de Musset for closing his eyes and not being willing to try and look behind these gauzes.³² For Breton, the "poet and artist have never ceased and will never cease to try to see *behind it* [the "gauze of the curtains"]" (SP 265). But, again, this endeavor is never to be completed.

He [le Maréchal] knows that visions are still a gauze behind which are hanging other gauzes of visions, and so forth; hence his despair at having to reckon with human time, which tears his works away from him before he has been able to complete them (that is to say, to peel away successive layers until the glowing kernel is revealed). It has been the same with many great visionaries, including Gustave Moreau, whose most important works were all supposedly abandoned "in course of execution," but in reality because they were hovering on the edge of the abyss, permeated with the perfume of the forbidden (SP 266).

The implication, although Breton does not spell it out in these terms, is that the "gauzes of visions" behind which the artist should attempt to look are also subsumed in the work itself. The artist's attempt is analogous to the beholder's mode of interrogating the paintings for what lies behind these gauzes. We who interrogate de Chirico's early paintings, suggests Breton in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, "shall go on questioning them for the rest of our lives ..." (SP 18). Such questioning promises an eventual revelation that will take place, Breton goes on to say, "when the book whose mute binding we have contemplated for so long opens up at the page marked in it, which will be at the time that the train is due, at the hour that must be about to strike, there among the arcades ..." (SP 19). The book with the mute binding is, obviously, the mysterious book of *The Child's Brain* with its red tongue-like page marker – a book that may serve as an emblem of the mysteries lying behind the curtain, or, in fact, behind all the "gauzes" or surfaces the painting presents to the beholder. Similarly to Moreau's works, this painting would have been perceived by Breton as one "hovering on the edge of the abyss, permeated with the perfume of the forbidden." The curtain, partially blocking off the body of the naked figure of the "father," emblemizes the hidden sexual dimension commented upon by various critics. Breton himself, in introducing Alberto Savinio in his *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, placed the painting, listed among the works comprising the modern myth created by Savinio and his brother Giorgio de Chirico, at the "very heart of the symbolic sexual world ..." ³³ As spatially positioned in the painting, the curtain asserts itself as a surface element; it also defines the painting's surface as a window. These aspects of the painting will return in the following discussion, in a consideration of the surface of painting – the "windowpane" – as implied by Breton's window metaphor.

"Knocking at the window"

Given the centrality of the window motif in my discussion, I should adduce another window that occupies a quite prominent place in Breton's thought. Associated with a great formative myth of Surrealism, this window is a pivotal element in a well-known passage in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* in which Breton describes the "discovery" in 1919 of automatic writing:

One evening, therefore, before I fell asleep, I perceived, so clearly articulated that it was impossible to change a word ... a rather strange phrase which came to me without any apparent relationship to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was then involved, a phrase which seemed to me insistent, a phrase, if I may be so bold, *which was knocking at the window*. I took cursory note of it and prepared to move on when its organic character caught my attention. Actually, this phrase astonished me: unfortunately I cannot remember it exactly, but it was something like: "There is a man cut in two by the window," but there could be no question of ambiguity, accompanied as it was by the faint visual image of a man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body. Beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt, what I saw was the simple reconstruction in space of a man leaning out a window. But this window having shifted with the man, I realized that I was dealing with an image of a fairly rare sort, and all I could think of was to incorporate it into my material for poetic construction (*Manifestoes* 21–2; *OC* I 325).

The outcome of this experience, as Breton relates it – the story has been told and commented on countless times in studies devoted to Surrealism, and there is no need to go into it in detail – was the attempt to obtain "a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue ... akin to spoken thought." With the realization that the "speed of thought is no greater than the speed of speech, and that thought does not necessarily defy language, nor even the fast moving pen," Breton and Soupault decided to "blacken some paper, with a praiseworthy disdain for what might result from a literary point of view." The result was the collection of texts entitled *Les Champs magnétiques*.

It is with this in mind that I return once again to de Chirico's *The Child's Brain*, a work in which yet another window plays a not insignificant role, a small window against a dark background in a spatially indeterminate position. The vertical frame is slightly off true verticality and the lower frame is tilted so as to suggest a spatial recession, but with nothing else in the painting to warrant such a recession. This lack of spatial clarity is enhanced by the fact that the left corner of the window seems to prick the figure's shoulder. Indeed, rather than clearly planted in the back wall, this "window" looks like a large pane of glass floating in space and situated almost perpendicularly to the man's body. Such a spatial arrangement – however tentative it may appear – brings to mind a possible correlation between de Chirico's painting and Breton's text.

In the more obvious sense, there is certainly a man in the painting whose figure appears to be "cut" by a window – the "window" suggested by the curtain and formed by the frame of the painting.³⁴ More accurately, however, it is the edge of the table that appears to thrust into the man in mid-figure. Furthermore, viewed along these lines, the image does not convey the sense of a "man walking cut half way up by a window perpendicular to the axis of his body." I tend rather to associate the "window perpendicular to the axis of his body" as the one hovering above the man. True enough, unlike the window suggested by the curtain and defined by the painting's frame, it does not cut the body in two and its position in relation to the figure does not suggest a man leaning out of a window. But the latter suggestion is Breton's own conscious interpretation of this "reconstruction in space."³⁵ The curtained window, on the other hand, certainly does not possess the quality of an "image of a fairly rare sort" and it hardly conveys the sense of a window shifting with the man. Both qualities would be more readily associated with the window hovering above him. The two "windows" in the painting indeed appear to complement each other, and it is in this light that I tend to consider this painting as having directly prompted Breton's verbal image, perhaps without his being quite aware of this ("... which came to me without any apparent relationship to the events in which, my consciousness agrees, I was then involved"). At the very least, Breton may have unconsciously associated this painting with his automatic phrase, after the phrase had already "knocked at the window," with this prompting him to single it out from among other automatic phrases and use it later in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*.³⁶ Both hypotheses seem quite feasible in view of the great attraction the painting held for Breton from the moment he had first seen it (probably in 1918, around the time or perhaps just before the phrase "knocked at the window").

I do not think I need to dwell too much on the connection between the window evoked in the *First Manifesto* and the window metaphor in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. Breton does not refer explicitly to such a connection, but it is also warranted by the link I have postulated with de Chirico's painting and the whole associational framework surrounding it. The two windows in fact are complementary. The phrase "a man cut in two by the window" may be seen as emblemizing the mind of the person engaged in automatic writing, with the accompanying doubling or dissociation of the self. The automatic phrase in this process comes from the dark and "hidden places" in the depths of the psyche, "knocking at the window" and impinging on the writer's mind on the other side of the pane.³⁷ The windowpane is thus conceived to be a separator between these two regions, and, in the light of the analogy suggested here, such a windowpane is also to be associated with the painting-as-window as postulated in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. To further extend the analogy, the two regions separated by the windowpane might be associated with the

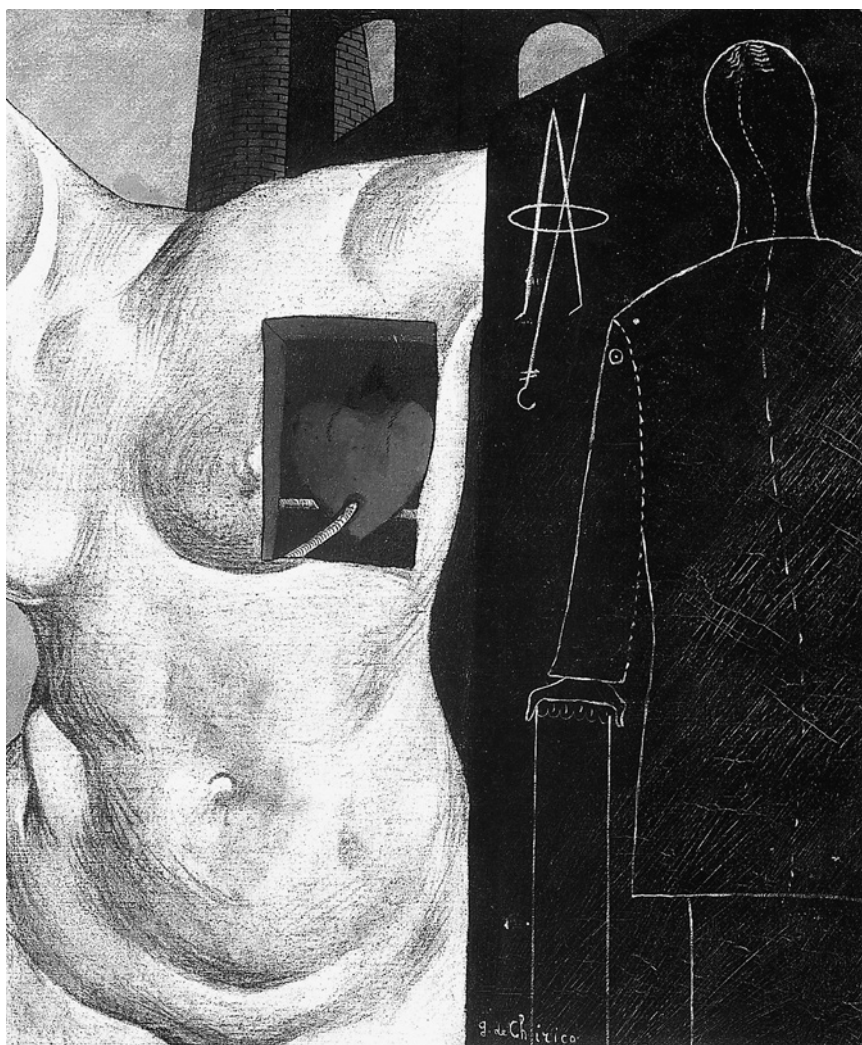
two regions in the mind to which I have referred in relation to painting – the visible and the one hidden behind the “gauzes of vision” – perceived in terms of two adjacent spaces.

With such an analogy in mind, one could well ask what the nature of this windowpane assigned to Breton’s window-picture is and what function it performs. As I have indicated earlier in this chapter, the phrasing of Breton’s original conception of a picture in terms of a window opening on a “vista stretching away before me and out of sight” (that is, as far as the eye can see) is likely to cause some misreading of this passage and its implications as far as the notion of Surrealist painting is concerned. It might be seen as vindicating, and, indeed, pointing the way to what is perceived to be the dream-inspired illusionist form of Surrealist painting, with its impression of deep space and distant vistas stretching to a remote horizon. Breton’s wording would seem to confirm such a reading, in particular in light of the detailed description of his absorption in an illustration found in a book – presumably one of those adventure books for children whose illustrations he would enthusiastically acclaim, a few years later, in his “Notice to the Reader of The Hundred Headless Woman” (*Break of Day* 41–2; *OC II* 302–3) – where the “angle of the ceiling and the two walls in the engraving easily take the place of the angle of this ceiling and these walls” (that is, the ceiling and walls of the room in which he is sitting at the moment) (*SP* 2). The phrasing gives the impression of a complete surrender to the lure of the illusion, a desire to be engulfed by the spatial illusion effected by the perspectival lines of the illustration, with a marked disregard for the material surface of the picture.

It is in this light, indeed, that Breton’s text is generally viewed by modern commentators, although the nature of such a spatial illusion remains a somewhat debatable issue.³⁸ There are, however, various hints in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* and other writings that indicate that, in pursuing the implications of his notion of the picture as window, Breton may have had in mind a surface that was far from being ideally transparent, and that this awareness may have echoed earlier perceptions regarding surfaces that might be conceived rather in terms of projection, reflection (or even refraction), and seeing-through. One of the earliest perceptions concerning such a surface is associated with the title “La Glace sans tain” assigned to the first section of Breton and Soupault’s *Les Champs magnétiques*.³⁹ The title, referring to unsilvered glass or a two-way mirror, sums up the basic dialectic involved in the process of automatic writing, as Breton and Soupault saw it, with its doubling of transparency and opacity, seeing-through and reflection. The transparency and opacity are applicable both ways, from both sides of the mirror. Signified on the one hand is the movement of the verbal flow gushing out of the depths of the mind and reaching the medium of reception, the writer, while also being refracted or thrown back by the inner surface of the mirror serving as a filter;

as Breton phrased it later in the *First Manifesto*, the phrase was “knocking at the window,” with the connotation of seeking admittance.⁴⁰ The two-way mirror is the site of an admixture of the imaginary – a corollary of memory and desire – and the real; it reflects or mirrors the reality of the writer as well as what the writer projects on it; at the same time, it allows a partial view of the depths of the mind, albeit one dependent on the distorting quality of the mind’s internal mirror. Breton was to refer later to this in terms of a unifying of the personality, unifying the “medium” and the psychological personality through a continuous awareness of what one writes or draws.⁴¹

The dialectics of opacity and transparency that I have located on the “surface” of the two-way mirror – a metaphorical construction that is consubstantial, as will become increasingly clear, with the screen paradigm – might be accounted for in relation to the Surrealist effort to “restore language’s true destination,” as argued by Breton, by turning words away from their duty to signify and to empty them of their thought.⁴² The separation of the word from fixed meaning brings home the sense of the opacity of language (the arbitrariness and abstract nature of phonetic sounds or syllables) but also its openness or transparency (its broader signifying quality). It might, indeed, be argued that language itself constitutes an obstacle on the way to attaining the ideal of “pure expression” with which Breton identified Surrealism in the *First Manifesto*.⁴³ As Laurent Jenny put it, there is “by definition no common measure between the ‘purity’ of expression and the very diverse but uniformly impure verbal forms that supposedly refer to it ... automatic writing is defenseless against the impurities that pepper its discourse.”⁴⁴ These issues will be considered in the coming chapters in greater detail, especially in what concerns their application in the visual field. Here I would like to pursue the implications of the notions expressed above with regard to the two-way mirror and point out an immediate correlation with Breton’s conception of painting, as expounded in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. In arguing that “men will long feel the need to retrace to its true source the magical river that flows from their eyes, bathing with the same light and the same hallucinatory shadow those things that are and those things that are not” (SP 7), Breton is utilizing the earlier and quite common notion of vision in terms of rays coming out of the eye toward the object seen rather than the other way around. The implication, similarly to what is suggested by the two-way mirror, is that the painting-window is to some extent also a reflecting surface, with the reflections originating in the viewer. This function of the picture as a mirror, or rather a two-way mirror of the kind described above, may have been alluded to by Breton in another passage in which he refers to Picasso’s painting *Man with the Clarinet* as “proof of our unwavering proposition that the mind talks stubbornly to us of a future continent, and that everyone has the power to accompany an ever more beautiful Alice into Wonderland” (SP 6). The context here suggests viewing



3.2 Giorgio de Chirico, *J'irai ... le chien de verre* (*I'll Be There ... The Glass Dog*), April–May 1914

Alice as leading the beholder “through the looking glass” to this wonderland, a “future continent” in which the supreme unification of dichotomous notions of exterior reality and inner vision takes place.⁴⁵ The text titled “La Glace sans tain,” an allusion to a painting by Matisse, also refers, albeit more obliquely, to another painting in which a window occupies a central position. I am thinking of the passage contributed by Soupault – Breton declared it was the

most beautiful in the book⁴⁶ – that reads in part: “The window carved in our flesh opens on to our heart. There can be seen an enormous lake on which at noon russet dragon-flies as fragrant as peony-finches come to settle.”⁴⁷ An image corresponding to this text is to be found in de Chirico’s painting *J’irai ... le chien de verre (I’ll Be There ... The Glass Dog, 1914)*.⁴⁸ One of the central elements is a window-like opening, in which hangs a red heart carved into the flesh of a headless female torso (Figure 3.2). At one time the painting belonged to Breton and was reproduced in the fifth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* to accompany his text “Lettre aux voyantes.” Breton and Soupault probably knew the painting at the time they wrote *Les Champs magnétiques* because it was then part of the Paul Guillaume Collection in Paris. What is interesting about this correspondence is not just the similarity of motifs but also some other features of the painting that may have persisted in Breton’s mind in later years. One notes first the shallow depression made by the window aperture (through which the dark background supposedly behind the torso is disclosed) flattening the torso in a way that somewhat belies its more voluminous aspect. Next to the torso there is a dark wall or panel seeming to continue the background perceived behind it, on which is drawn in white chalk a curious hieroglyph and the tailor’s-dummy-like figure of a man.⁴⁹ What strikes me most in this enigmatic painting is the juxtaposition – one that can hardly be overlooked – of the outline drawing of the chalk figure, in which no volume is discernible, and the torso whose roundness is undermined by the shallow window that opens into a mysterious darkness. I conjecture that Breton could have perceived in this spatial constellation an image that paralleled his window metaphor, in its verbal and visual contexts alike, as asserting the surface, and, at the same time, “cutting” into the body and presenting depths stretching away “à perte de vue.”⁵⁰

Such an assertion of the surface of painting, of the picture plane, seems contrary to what is often construed as Breton’s complete disregard for the formal or material aspects of painting.⁵¹ However, I do not necessarily consider this assertion of surface so much in the Modernist sense – that is, in terms of the tangible perception of paint as a material presence on the surface of the painting – although such considerations will become quite imperative, as I show later on, with regard to the paintings of Miró and Masson, for instance. I am more concerned with the assertion of the surface of painting as a “screen,” that is, as a “windowpane” that functions as a dynamically reactive element in the interplay of surface and depth. This conception may have much in common with the Modernist attitude, but it also points to what is specifically “Surrealist” in its essence, in the nature of its images. This attitude is fully illustrated, to give just one example, in an early text by Breton, the catalogue essay “Francis Picabia” that introduced the Picabia exhibition of watercolors in Barcelona (Dalmau Gallery, 18 November–8 December 1922). Describing

Picabia's works as "compositions in which visual values, unadulterated by any representative or symbolic intent, are no more significant than the signature and the title," Breton adds that, "for the first time, a form of painting has become a source of mystery, after having for so long been only speculation about mystery."⁵² But speaking about Picabia in a lecture given in Barcelona at the time, Breton notes: "We are dealing here not with painting, or even with poetry or philosophy of painting, but instead with the internal landscapes of a man who struck out long ago for his own furthest pole."⁵³ This assertion of the unadulterated visual values in Picabia's work, combined with notions concerning the form of painting as a source of mystery and as a representation of an "internal landscape," sums up much of what I have considered so far in terms of the dialectics of surface and depth in Breton's window metaphor. This dialectics also underlies Breton's views concerning the cinematic dimension of painting, as these will be explored in the following pages.

"The most captivating film in the world"

What I have considered so far with regard to de Chirico's painting *The Child's Brain* largely accounts for the attraction it held for Breton. There is, however, another aspect, perhaps not as readily discernible but no less significant, that would have drawn Breton to the painting, and it is to this that I turn now. Going back to the curtain and the window, the elements placed on either side of de Chirico's "dreamer" – the man with his eyes closed – I would add another associative link that might have been on Breton's mind, given his later consideration of this painting in relation to Hopper's *New York Movie*. Whereas Breton linked the two paintings, as noted before, in terms of the curtains found in both, I propose to extend this association to the window in one and the partial view of the cinema screen in the other, and consider both as "screens" – one in its literal capacity, the other in a more metaphorical sense. The somewhat ethereal effect of the screen in the Hopper – tinged with blue and in strong contrast to the dark theater – is quite unlike the more substantial and colorful representation of the window in the de Chirico. But there is a somewhat insubstantial quality to the latter as well, which may be due, primarily, to its indeterminate spatial situation and the impression it gives of floating in mid-air. As noted before, its lower frame is tilted so as to suggest a spatial recession, but with nothing else in the painting to warrant such a recession. Furthermore, the view seen through the window seems quite unrelated to the spatial scheme established by the painting as a whole, especially in view of the rather excessive height of the arcade (even in relation to de Chirico's generally very high arcade openings). In fact, the angle at which this arcade is depicted and its placement in the window evoke

a sense not so much of a window looking out on a view but, rather, of an oblique view of a painted panel floating in mid-air. A painted panel would have been swallowed up in the darkness enveloping it; this panel, on the other hand, might be read also as a glass pane or a mirror reflecting a view existing elsewhere, perhaps even the view the man would see with his eyes opened.⁵⁴ His eyes are closed, however, and with the lower corner of the "window" touching, slightly pricking, the shoulder of this dreamer, it seems more likely that the window represents some kind of an inner vision, one projected on an inner screen of the mind.⁵⁵ And it would have been well within Breton's associational framework to consider it also in terms of a cinema screen.

That for Breton some film association would have readily come to mind with regard to de Chirico is a notion substantiated by the not insignificant role played by cinema in de Chirico's work. Given his close association with Guillaume Apollinaire who was consistently enthusiastic about the cinema, praising it in his journal *Les Soirées de Paris* as a medium embodying the new spirit, de Chirico could not have been oblivious to the cinema. As has been noted by various commentators, both he and his brother Alberto Savinio were keen on the movies, to which there are frequent references in their writings.⁵⁶ The motifs of projection and screen come up at times in de Chirico's writing and are often interlocked with ideas related to the theater stage with its curtain and backdrop. To cite de Chirico's "Apollinaire," a text written in 1918,

I see again, as one sees in dreams, an apartment house with six stories daubed in gray, and high above two rooms beneath the roof ... The curtain closes and a miraculously tender picture forms itself silently ... [I see] as if within the luminous ray of a magic lantern the fatal rectangle of a Veronese blue sky that projects itself on the wall, and on this sky the profile of the sad centurion bends anew ... It is Apollinaire, Apollinaire the returned one.⁵⁷

This evocation of a profile projected on a rectangle of a Veronese sky refers to the painting *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire* (1914). It has been noted that the silhouette of Apollinaire's head derives from the shadow theaters that came back into fashion at the turn of the century; it also reflects the lure of targets in shooting galleries, and it should obviously be associated with de Chirico's almost obsessive interest in shadows.⁵⁸ The box-like structure with the screen or backdrop at the back, on which Apollinaire's silhouette is projected, is similar to the spatial arrangement of various paintings done for a while after 1914. Foreground elements in these paintings, tilted in extreme foreshortening, frame a kind of backdrop, irregular in form, that contains images – generally de Chirico's typical buildings and urban landscapes – that seem to be dissociated from the foreground spatial context.⁵⁹ These backdrops, often lighter and more brilliant in color than the foreground elements or the elements adjacent to them (such is, of course, also the "window" in *The Child's Brain*) appear

like projections in a dark theater (or in a camera obscura). References to such a backdrop or screen are found often in de Chirico's novel *Hebdomeros* (1929). Written in French in the late 1920s, the novel reflected many of his preoccupations and motifs of the time but also referred to earlier periods in his work. Space as comprising successive planes or screens is evoked in a hallucinatory scene where

[s]uddenly all this *open air* lost its atmosphere, its *Stimmung*; the beams in the ceiling and the floorboards appeared brightly lit from the side. "It's a trick by the local photographer," people whispered in the cafés and the public squares. Another movement; a plane of the décor changed, a screen removed, a curtain raised, and now it is *the ball*; the fête ...⁶⁰

While the theater forms an obvious conceptual framework for such scenes, what should be emphasized is that the apparitions are materialized on a plane, a screen or a wall:

So that was why he spent whole nights sitting up in his bed ... but at such moments it happened sometimes that the wall at the back opened, like the curtain in a theatre, and then there appeared spectacles which were sometimes frightening, sometimes sublime or delightful; a storm at sea with hideous gnomes grimacing and gesticulating in hostile fashion on the foaming crests of the waves, and sometimes also a springtime landscape, astonishing in its poetry and tranquility; hills of delicate green framed a path with almond trees ... along this path there walked, clad in white, a woman with a thoughtful and serious face (21).

Whereas de Chirico refers to a curtain in a theater, the whole sense conveyed by this scene is more closely attuned to the cinema; the visions appear as if projected on the wall and the scenes depicted are more cinematic than theatrical. *Hebdomeros* was published quite some time after Breton's first exposure to *The Child's Brain*, but even in the earlier years, a reading of de Chirico's painting along these lines would have come naturally to Breton. Such an assumption would be justified especially in view of his close association with Apollinaire and his correspondence with de Chirico before their breakup.

Breton's early enthusiasm for the cinema, as described in Chapter 1, forms a solid enough foundation for my hypothesis concerning the formative effect that cinema had on his early thought. But, reiterating the argument offered above, I would suggest that it is also probable – especially in view of the particular stature of *The Child's Brain* in Breton's thought and his association in later years of this painting with Hopper's *New York Movie* – that de Chirico's "backdrops" or "projections" were at least partially responsible for what I consider to be a presence in his view of painting of a "screen" that may be associated with the cinema screen. There are, admittedly, few direct references to cinema in Breton's writings on art, but these, it seems to me, deserve special

attention, and should also be seen in relation to ideas about the cinema that were current among close associates of his at the time. A brief evocation of cinema in relation to art is to be found in a passage in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in which Breton comments on the *dépaysement* of the original sense of the elements comprising Ernst's collages:

Faced with a situation that involved an increasingly parsimonious use of words, the denial of color in favor of recognizing only two tones – cold and warm, an agreement to disagree on everything except the meaning of the words “window”, “road”, “sky”, which were themselves connected together only by a sort of screen, as in the cinema, Max Ernst offered a vocabulary that genuinely included all existing words, though he was perfectly happy to dispense with the meaning of several of them and, even more scandalously, to dispense with the aura conferred on them by a more or less emotive value. The day of the pipe, of the newspaper which is not even tomorrow's issue, of the guitar was almost over (*SP* 25).

This passage ostensibly places Ernst in opposition to the limited vocabulary of Cubism – one comprising pipe, newspaper and guitar – or to the Purist reduction of motifs and limited range of tonal values. This, however, does not account for the reference to the “words ‘window,’ ‘road,’ ‘sky’”, which were themselves connected together only by a sort of screen, as in the cinema.” It should be noted, moreover, that this is not the first time Breton had made use of this last phrase. In his “Carnet 1920–1921,” he writes about Derain:

Derain does not believe in colors: there are only two tones: cold and warm. Many painters manage to produce with red and green only gray. When he goes to a foreign country, he studies its language by paying attention only to the adverbs, with which he makes do. He takes from the language only absolute tonalities such as window, road, sky. Between them is placed a sort of screen, to which they owe their life, as in the cinema⁶¹ (*OC I* 617).

These quite confused ideas transcribed in the course of a meeting with Derain⁶² were later somewhat diverted from their original context and applied to Cubism or Purism, in order to illustrate the limited vocabulary of these styles in contradistinction to Ernst's vocabulary that includes “all the existing words.”⁶³ However, “window, road, sky” are not elements usually associated with Purism or Cubism. But they might be related to the ever-changing view of road and sky as seen from a moving vehicle or train, within the fixed frame of the window, a not infrequent scene in the films of the period, and one which might even be associated with some extraordinary experiences of Breton's.⁶⁴ Be this as it may, the phrase concerning window, road, sky, “connected together only by a sort of screen, as in the cinema,” implies a temporal progression and a cinematic continuity that go beyond the frame of the static painting. It might be conjectured that, while writing this passage concerning Ernst in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton had in mind these allusions to cinematic

continuity and temporal progression – however vague and undeveloped they turned out to be – precisely because the early installments of this essay, published no more than two years before the installment that included the Ernst section, came about largely as a refutation of texts by two of his close Surrealist colleagues who questioned the possibility of Surrealist art and also suggested some recourse to cinema as an art form that might transcend the limitation of painting.

The debate concerning the possibility of Surrealist painting was launched with the publication of Max Morise's essay "Les yeux enchantés" (RS 1 April 1924) and Pierre Naville's contribution to the "Beaux-arts" section of the third issue of RS (April 1925) – texts to which Breton's essay was a direct rejoinder. It was the limiting definition of Surrealism in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* ("Pure psychic automatism ...") that made it difficult to annex to Surrealism a mediated form of expression such as painting. I turn first to the later text, Naville's, because it constitutes the simple and quite blatantly stated assertion that "there is no *Surrealist painting*. Neither the marks of the pencil made by random movements, nor the image that retraces dream figures, nor imaginative fancies, of course can be so characterized" (RS 3, 27). This is so, argues Naville, because in painting the mind can admit only rectangular forms associated with corners and frames. He contrasts this limiting rectangular vision with the unlimited movement associated with the "spectacle" of the street with its "kiosks, automobiles, their doors howling, their lights flashing in the sky." Such a spectacle, unlimited by the rectangular vision, is also the one offered by the cinema, "not because it is life, but the marvelous, the arrangement of chance elements." Clearly, Naville sidesteps the issue of art by opting for the experiences offered by daily life as a correlate of Surrealist automatic creation. Cinema seems to him an art form that offers something akin to this spectacle, in view of the experience of the Marvelous it produces through the fortuitous essence of its images, and the cinematic sequence of images that open up the constricting rectangular frame of painting.

Morise declares at the outset of his more involved and demanding argument that the "only precise representation today of the idea of Surrealism" is epitomized by the mechanisms involved in the creation of the texts of *Les Champs magnétiques*, Breton and Soupault's collaborative book, and the unexplored spheres which these introduce:

This universe, on which a window is open,⁶⁵ could and should henceforth belong to us, and it is impossible for us not to try and bring down the wall that separates us from it; each mode of exteriorizing thought undoubtedly presents us with a weapon made to achieve this. What surrealist writing is to literature, surrealist plastic art should be to painting, to photography, to everything made to be seen.

But where is the touchstone? (RS 1, 26)

The touchstone, for Morise, lies in the dynamic quality of the course of thought and its temporal character, as embodied in a "succession of images, the flight of ideas" that cannot be effected in a painting. "Cinema – an advanced cinema that releases us from technical procedures," suggests Morise, "opens to us a way toward a solution of this problem." He does not pursue this idea any further, perhaps because such an advanced cinema was technically not yet feasible. He returns to painting and argues that, even if the painter managed to place on the canvas successive scenes, similarly to early medieval painters (Morise refers to them as "primitives"), the process of painting tends in itself to interfere with the dictation of thought. This, argues Morise, is also true for the representation of dream images. De Chirico had only to reproduce the strange landscapes that appeared to him,

... trusting to the interpretation his memory offered him. But this effort of second intention [the French term Morise uses is *seconde intention* – does he mean secondary revision or elaboration?], which necessarily deforms the images and makes them come up to the surface of consciousness, clearly shows us that one must give up looking in this for the key to surrealist painting. Quite the same, admittedly, but no more than a dream narration, a painting by Chirico should not be considered as typical of surrealism: the images are surrealist, their expression is not.

By "expression" Morise means the process of translating thought into some medium of expression, of which the verbal appears to him superior to all others. This is so because, while the word is "identified, so to speak, with thought, the marks of the brush, on the contrary, translate the mental images only indirectly and do not carry in themselves their representation" (26). Refuting thus the notion that the manual act of laying paint on canvas might be conceived of as the equivalent of writing, Morise arrives at quite a bizarre conclusion:

The first cubist paintings – no preconceived idea came to impose a concern with any representation whatsoever; the lines got organized as they appeared and as if *by chance*, so to speak: pure inspiration, it appears, presided over this mode of painting ... At each moment, the painter was permitted to take a cinematographic snapshot of his thought, and, as his thought had turned at times to the objects surrounding it, he invented the collage that made it easy for him to make use of ready made figures which his imagination could instantaneously arrange (27).

Morise does not persist in this farfetched analogy between early Cubist painting and Surrealist automatic procedures (which should by right remain a negligible aspect of his argument), and one may well believe that it was used merely in order to introduce the possibility of a "cinematographic snapshot of his thought" associated with collage as a technique permitting instantaneous arrangement of pre-existing materials. This possibility is then considered in relation to the art created by the insane, or by seers and mediums, due to

their ability to reproduce the elements that present themselves to the mind in all their complexity, as summarily as possible, the moment they attain consciousness. In this mode of creation,

The forms and colors are formed with no heed to the object, organizing themselves without any premeditation ... A great many of the paintings of the insane and mediums offer thus to view the strangest appearances, bearing witness to the most imperceptible undulations of the flux of thought. One could formulate an algebraic equation that this kind of painting is in relation to *x* as an account of a medium is to a surrealist text.⁶⁶

This “*x*” stands for what is the yet unknown true Surrealist painting; Morise has no concrete idea of what this “*x*” might be, and he concludes his essay with a few rather obscure sentences:

Who then is this man whom we see, on the head, mounting with a lazy gesture the steps of a staircase that leads nowhere? Who is this Man Ray, our friend, who, from objects of the highest necessity makes, with the aid of sensitive paper, objects of the latest luxury? Who is this white woman who passes by in an automobile amid men in top hats?⁶⁷

Breton entered the debate by approaching these issues in a different manner altogether. To Naville’s “there is no Surrealist painting” he responded in the opening section of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* by asserting the privileged position of painting, alongside literature, as a means of opening vision to the Marvelous. Unlike Morise, who, at this point, still persists in trying to base his argument for “*x*,” a yet unknown type of painting, on the presumed equivalence of verbal and plastic language, Breton altogether abrogates any consideration of the automatic process and technique and upholds a “*poétique des effets*” – he shows no interest, for instance, in Ernst’s *frottage* as a technique, and is reluctant, as I show in Chapters 6 and 7, to consider automatism with regard to the processes employed by Miró and Masson. The painting that gains his approval is the one free of the constraints of convention, and that provides a channel between the painter’s imagination – the “internal model” formed in the mind – and its counterpart in the beholder’s own imaginative faculty:

O Picasso, you who have carried the spirit, no longer of contradiction, but of evasion, to its farthest point. From each one of your pictures you have let down a rope-ladder, or rather a ladder made of the sheets of your bed, and we, and probably you with us, desire only to climb up into our sleep and down from it again (*SP* 6).

What I would insist on in terms of the present discussion is that Breton could not have remained oblivious to the cinema as a major factor underlying Morise’s elaboration of “*x*,” the still unknown mode of Surrealist painting that should combine the notion of “cinematographic snapshot of thought” with a

method that parallels verbal automatism by offering a "succession of images." Morise's ideas may have prompted on Breton's part speculations concerning the kind of painting that might subsume such cinematographic effects – this certainly would have been in line with his "poétique des effets," all the more so since he fully concurred with Naville's reference to cinema as effecting a sense of the Marvelous.⁶⁸ What are rather vague references to the screen in relation to the cinematic temporal progression, as suggested in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, might be augmented, however, by an earlier view concerning the cinematic dimension of Ernst's art, introduced by Breton in a text included in the catalogue of the Ernst exhibition at the Galerie Au Sans Pareil in May 1921.

Breton opens this essay with the assertion that the "invention of photography dealt a mortal blow to old means of expression, as much in painting as in poetry, where automatic writing, which appeared toward the end of the nineteenth century" – here Breton refers to Rimbaud and his "Lettre du voyant" and to Lautréamont – "is a veritable photography of thought."⁶⁹ He then argues that human imagination cannot produce a totally new element, and thus, going beyond the accepted meaning of things would be accomplished only by grouping them and bringing them together, so as to create a spark. This would be achieved "without leaving the field of our experience"; our systems of references removed, we are disoriented "within our own memories." Breton thus associated Ernst's collage method with Reverdy's conception of the poetic image. This definition came up at times in his writings of the early 1920s, and was recalled a few years later in a modified form in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*.⁷⁰ This analogy of verbal and visual collage is at the base of Breton's exposition of Ernst's collage technique. In addition to the stamped and rubbed drawings (that is, drawings comprising pencil rubbings on paper laid over printing blocks) and overpaintings,⁷¹ Ernst's 1921 exhibition included photocollages or photographic reproductions of collages. Breton was particularly taken with the photographic collages, as evinced by a letter to Derain dated to October 1921, in which he refers to Ernst as one "who paints on photographs, which themselves are the result of a combination of existing printed material, such as illustrated advertisements, botanical plates, sports pictures, instructions for women's handicrafts, etc."⁷² It is in terms of this view of Ernst's collages that the cinema is brought in. "Today, thanks to the cinema," Breton notes, "we know how to make a locomotive *arrive* on canvas."⁷³ Cinema is seen here as a means of doing away "with a few rules, such as the rule of the three unities." Ernst is described, in light of the cinema's role of expanding the field of human experience, as the "man of these infinite possibilities," one who "projects before our eyes the most captivating film in the world ..." And Breton associates this film with the notion of "photography of thought" with

which he opened the essay, arguing that Ernst “illuminates the innermost depths of our internal life with an unparalleled light.”

But in what sense do Ernst’s collages manifest their film affiliation? There are two points that might be noted in Breton’s account of cinema. To begin with, all the examples he adduces to illustrate cinema’s special capacities have to do with its temporal dimension and its ability to accelerate or decelerate time (“we will perceive without a single blink of an eye the passage from birth to death”). Then he speaks about making the locomotive arrive in the picture (“faire arriver une locomotive sur un tableau”), indicating that the temporal progression, at least as far as Ernst is concerned, is subsumed in, or comprehended by the picture itself. On the most obvious level, Breton would have seen Ernst’s “most captivating film” in terms of the evocation of motion as effected through the exaggerated or awkward “gestures” of the creatures populating these works. This is due to the effect of *dépaysement*, that is, the disconcerting translation of the collage elements from their original context into the new, often effected through a dislocation from the earlier spatial location to the new one.⁷⁴ Motion was also evoked by juxtaposing several tilted cut-out figures, or by combining elements through overpainting (on collaged elements or on a whole readymade illustration) so as to form an orchestration of slanting forms.⁷⁵ With the surface of the collage perceived as analogous to the cinema screen, the concept of the “off-frame” or “off-screen space,” usually used in film theory,⁷⁶ would also be applicable to Ernst, especially in works in which collage elements appear to be cut off by the frame or even to encroach from beyond the frame on some interior space.⁷⁷

All this is significant enough in illustrating the cinematic provenance of Breton’s response to Ernst. No less pertinent, however, to the present discussion is another dimension of Ernst’s works of those years that Breton may have perceived in cinematic terms, with this specifically having to do with their spatial conception. As noted before, collage is perceived by Breton not only as the visual equivalent of the verbal image but also, to quote again his letter to Derain, in terms of painting on photographs, “which themselves are the result of a combination of existing printed material.” The combination not only involves a juxtaposition of disparate elements taken from distant realities, in accordance with the definition of the verbal image, but is also a function of the process of laying one element on top of the other. These overlapping elements project a sense of layered depth, in which depth is a function of the successive layers comprising it. Such a perception of layers is true even of photographic collages such as those of the *Fatagaga* series (done in collaboration with Arp, who mostly supplied the titles) – or, for that matter, of any photographic reproduction of an original photographic collage intended to obliterate the “seams” and enhance the illusory quality of the work. It is also in evidence in the overpaintings, where it is illusionistically

augmented by the painted visualization of the strata defining the landscape, which, while presented as if in a cross-sectional view, also evoke a sense of spatial recession, with the diverse creatures populating this space located in various "depths" constituted by the low ranges of ground that appear to rise one beyond the other.⁷⁸

I return to Ernst's layered depth conception in the following chapter. My concern at this point, however, is with the cinematic dimension of this conception, especially with regard to its possible reverberation in Breton's thought. In comparing Ernst's integrated images (that is, the photographic collages referred to above) to the collages of the Berlin Dadaists, Werner Spies points out the emphasis in the Berlin collages, as opposed to Ernst's, on breaks and gaps and to the "staccato juxtapositions" they produce (*Max Ernst Collages* 70). The Berlin collage, he argues, "can be compared to film montage, in which abrupt changes of viewpoint, according to Eisenstein, create pathos." Static contrasts and discontinuity of this kind can only meet, according to Eisenstein, in the medium of film. Eisenstein is quoted by Spies to the effect that a link between the two tendencies, that of continuity and that of segmentation – "that is, between the unity of a *whole* and the independence of the *isolated* elements – can be achieved only through film."⁷⁹ Spies, however, holds that Ernst was "concerned with integration, with a disciplining of his material that did not come naturally to the technique of collage" (71). I would argue, on the contrary, that Ernst was more interested in a dialectic of integration and fragmentation, as manifested in the interplay of continuous spatial recession and the discontinuous segmentation of the layered depth (with this also having far-reaching implications with regard to the assertion of surface). While I leave for later (Chapter 4) a fuller exploration of this aspect of Ernst's work, I would refer now to Eisenstein, in order to amplify this cinematic notion. In one of his essays on montage, Eisenstein argues that "to achieve its result, a work of art directs all the refinement of its methods to the *process*. A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator."⁸⁰ He adds in a footnote that "this same dynamic principle lies at the base of all truly vital images, even in such an apparently immobile and static medium as, for example, painting." Breton does not say anything explicit along these lines; he would not have remained oblivious, however, to Max Morise's ideas concerning the visual analogy to the temporal succession of verbal images. But whereas for Morise this might be effected by the perception in the picture of "different regions appearing simultaneously," Breton's conception might dictate a temporal succession, or, in other words, a narrative, effected by an eye movement that penetrates the depths of the picture by going through its various layers or the regions lying one behind the other. In view of what I have noted before with regard to Breton's notion of the curtain or gauzes in painting, such a narrative

movement might be perceived as exemplifying the attempt to penetrate depth while being blocked at some point or another along the way. Furthermore, it might be associated with the Surrealists' perception of layered depth in film, especially in light of Feuillade's example. I should add that this narrative movement should not be confused with the narrative mode adopted by Breton or Desnos, as noted before, in their evocations of de Chirico's paintings, or by Desnos's poetic "movement" through the works of artists such as Masson and Tanguy.⁸¹ Such a verbal narrative, while resembling perhaps the movement of a film, and quite superficially at that, is after all a poetic response that only provides a secondhand version for what I consider to be the more profound Surrealist mode of viewing a picture, at least in the terms proposed here.

The importance of the cinematic metaphor in Breton's perceptions regarding painting lies not only in the introduction of a temporal dimension into the experience of art as a mode of Surrealist experience, but also – and perhaps more significantly – for the light it sheds on what has been a continuous concern in this chapter and that is Breton's window metaphor, especially in respect to the screen paradigm. Breton's window metaphor, viewed within the broader conceptual framework established in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* and in other writings, complements the writings of Desnos and Aragon as presented earlier in this study. The whole range of apprehensions encompassed by these writings – Breton's and the others' – will serve as a conceptual framework for the examination undertaken in the following chapters of the various forms under which the screen paradigm is manifested in the works of artists associated with the Surrealist movement in the course of the 1920s. Encompassing a period of more than 10 years, from the late 1910s to the late 1920s, Breton's writings may be perceived as presenting the work of artists who were close to him at the time as seen through the prism of his evolving Surrealist concerns. By the same token, it would be equally correct to view the latter as having been molded in part by works of art that may have been initially conceived independently of the Surrealist aesthetic. In the coming chapters I embark on an extensive analysis of the various permutations of the screen paradigm, joined with Breton's window metaphor, as a more or less implicit spatial element in much of the art produced within the Surrealist sphere especially in the course of the 1920s. The discussion centers on the "screen," with the adjoined notion of layered depth, as a major structural paradigm shared by all the artists considered. Its basic parameters, however, derive from different conceptualizations. As proposed in the next chapter, Ernst arrives at this paradigm through perceptions gained from his exposure to Freudian dream mechanisms as well as from various other hypotheses concerning the structure of the mind (those of Myers and Flournoy, in particular). Magritte, for his part, arrives at an analogous visual concept from his earlier adoption of the notion of mystery as a dominant structuring principle, as well as from the vantage

point of film, particularly in relation to various spatial concerns associated with Feuillade (Chapter 5). The screen as a spatial paradigm plays a pivotal role in the consideration of the dialectics of opacity and transparency (seen also in terms of containment and dispersal) – perceived mostly in relation to the works of Masson and Miró – both in the formal sense of the interplay of surface and depth, and, metaphorically, as topographical representations of consciousness and the hidden depths of the unconscious, revealed or intimated in the process of automatic creation. primarily in relation to the perception of the surface of the painting as a screen that is analogous to the two-way mirror and that conceptualizes the dialectics of opacity and transparency associated with the process of automatic creation.

Notes

1. Breton's text was published in *La Révolution surréaliste* between 1925 and 1927, in four installments. These, with additional passages devoted to Miró, Tanguy and Arp, appeared in book form in the 1928 Gallimard edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. The edition was augmented in 1945 in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture, suivi de Genèse et perspective artistiques du surréalisme et de Fragments inédits* (New York: Brentano's). The larger and definitive edition appeared in 1965 under the title *Le Surréalisme et la peinture, Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée 1928–1965* (Paris: Gallimard). An English translation by Simon Watson Taylor appeared in 1972 under the title *Surrealism and Painting*. Conveniently enough, the English edition quite consistently follows the pagination of the 1965 Gallimard. Page references, consequently, apply to both and are to *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* or in the abbreviated *SP*. The pagination in *SP* of the four original installments in *La Révolution surréaliste* is as follows: First installment, *RS* 4, 15 July 1925, pp. 26–30, *SP* 1–7 (end of second paragraph, "grâce à Picasso et à Braque"). Second installment, *RS* 6, 1 March 1926, pp. 30–32, *SP* 7–12 (bottom of page). Third installment, *RS* 7, 15 June 1926, pp. 3–6, *SP* 13–19 (a third down the page, "nous aurons seuls à intervenir"); the long footnote concerning de Chirico in *SP* 18–19 does not appear in *RS* and was added in the 1928 edition. Fourth installment, *RS* 9–10, 1 October 1927, pp. 36–43, *SP* 19–36 (end of the quotation from Poe's *Marginalia*).
2. For this passage from Rimbaud's "Alchemy of the Word" section in *A Season in Hell* ("Alchimie du verbe," *Une Saison en enfer*, 1873), see Chapter 2, note 25.
3. In interviews and on many other occasions, Breton lovingly evoked the memory of Apollinaire, his mentor, in many respects, at the beginning of his writing career. See Breton, *Conversations* 15–6; *Entretiens (1913–1952)* 23–4. Traces of Apollinaire's poems and ideas are to be found everywhere in Breton's writing. The equation of what is seen "à perte de vue" with some unknown quality existing beyond vision may parallel what is expressed in a passage in Apollinaire's poem "Les Collines" ("The Hills"), included in *Calligrammes*, which reads: "Le chauffeur se tient au volant / Et chaque fois que sur la route / Il corne en passant le tournant / Il paraît à perte de vue / Un univers encore vierge" ["The driver grips the steering wheel / And every time along the road / He blows the horn rounding a curve / There appears on the horizon's rim [à perte de vue] / A universe as yet unknown"]. Apollinaire, *Selected Writings* 150–151.
4. This is an expression coined by Elza Adamowicz in referring to Breton's disregard for process or technique in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. See Adamowicz, *Ceci n'est pas un tableau* 17.
5. Breton indeed bemoaned the "utter bankruptcy of art criticism" which was epitomized for him by the "articles of a Maurice Raynal, a Louis Vauxcelles, a Florent Fels [that] surpass the limits of imbecility" (*SP* 8).
6. Breton and Desnos, "La Peinture surréaliste" in *OC* I 915–6; Desnos, *Ecrits sur les peintres* 80–81. Ernst emulated this method in his "Au-delà de la peinture" (1936). See Max Ernst, *Écritures* 246–8; *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting* 9–10.
7. Louis Aragon, "A Wave of Dreams" 9; *Une Vague de rêves* 23.

8. As maintained by Michel Riffaterre, Breton's writings on art utilize the rhetoric of *ekphrasis*, but this is a symbolic gesture since there is no description of the painting, merely an account of his emotions in relation to its visionary dimension, with no indication what in the painting provoked them. Riffaterre remarks that Breton substitutes for the normative analytical metalanguage of art criticism a "discours du moi," putting himself on the scene, reflecting himself in the artist and the work that are the objects of his gloss. See "Ekphrasis lyrique" 180. Renée Riese Hubert similarly notes that, "in his autobiographical project, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton essentially is in search of an image in which he will recognize himself." See Hubert, "La Critique d'art surréaliste: creation et tradition" 218.
9. "Giorgio de Chirico," in *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 66; OC I 251.
10. The 1928 footnote replaced another one that included a slighting reference to the preface written by the "ignoble crétin Albert-C. Barnes" for de Chirico's exhibition at the Galerie Paul Guillaume in June 1926. *La Révolution surréaliste* 7 (15 June 1926) 5.
11. "Appendix A: Manuscript from the Collection of the Late Paul Eluard," in Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* 245. Max Morise quoted from this manuscript in his criticism of the de Chirico exhibition at the Galerie de l'Effort Moderne in May 1925. In the passage cited by Morise, de Chirico says that a painting that has as its purpose the Impressionist attempt to give the sensation of light "will never give me the sensation of something new, of something that, previously, I have not known." See Max Morise, "A propos de l'Exposition Chirico," *La Révolution surréaliste* 4 (15 July 1925), 31. Similar ideas are expressed in a short text by de Chirico that appeared in the fifth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (p. 22), under Masson's drawing *La Naissance des oiseaux* (placed just below the conclusion of Breton's essay "Lettre aux voyantes"): "One should never forget that a painting must always be the reflection of a profound sensation, and that profound means strange and that strange means little known or altogether unknown." If not otherwise noted, the translations from the French are mine.
12. It is quite probable that Eluard had in mind this passage from the manuscript when he wrote the poem "Giorgio De Chirico" (*Mourir de ne pas mourir*, 1924, later included in *Capitale de la douleur*, 1926); one of whose stanzas reads: "Un mur dénonce un autre mur / Et l'ombre me défend de mon ombre peureuse, / O tour de mon amour autour de mon amour, / Tous les murs filaient blanc autour de mon silence" ["A wall reveals another wall / And the shade protects me from my fearful shadow, / O tower of my love around my love, / Every wall spun out white around my silence"]. Eluard, *Capitale de la douleur* 62; *Capital of Pain* 61.
13. See Carrà, *Metaphysical Art* 95. A similar idea is expressed in "On Metaphysical Art" (*Valori Plastici*, April–May 1919), in which de Chirico describes a metaphysical work of art as one that gives the impression that "other signs apart from those already apparent are about to enter the rectangle of the canvas. Such is the revealing symptom of the inhabited depth. For this reason the flat surface of a perfectly calm ocean disturbs us, not so much because of the idea of the measurable distance between us and the sea bed, but more because of all the elements of the unknown hidden in that depth" (*Metaphysical Art* 90).
14. As far as I can tell, there is no direct reference to this text in Breton's writing; it is quite possible, however, that Breton knew it or knew of it through the correspondence he had with de Chirico in the early 1920s. Breton had been acquainted with at least some of the *Valori Plastici* publications; his review of one of these, the monograph *12 opere di Giorgio de Chirico* (1919), was published in *Littérature* in 1920 and was later included in *Les Pas perdus*.
15. Desnos, "Peinture surréaliste" (1929), in *Ecrits sur les peintres* 111. In the texts collected in *Deuil pour deuil* (*Mourning for Mourning*) and in the novel *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (*Liberty or Love!*), Desnos evokes cities that convey a sense of an unknown threat and a feeling of stricture that appear to have been directly drawn from de Chirico's canvases. "In these sunny, and deserted squares fear takes hold of us. But despite our fear, nobody, absolutely nobody, approaches us. The ruins are uninhabited." See "Mourning for Mourning," in *The Automatic Muse* 9; "Deuil pour deuil," in *La Liberté ou l'amour!* 121.
16. René Crevel, "Merci, Giorgio de Chirico," in *Disque vert* 3 (December 1923), cited in "De Chirico et les surréalistes: Une documentation," in Rubin, Schmied and Clair, *Giorgio de Chirico* 261. In his article on dreaming, "Je ne sais pas découper," Crevel also referred to Breton's particular preoccupation with the mystery inherent in de Chirico's work: "I am thinking of this jar that, in a setting by de Chirico, quite close to this house which, according to you, Breton, houses a sphinx, remains on the empty stage after the departure – finally – of these tiresome dancers." *La Révolution surréaliste* 2 (15 January 1925) 26. The reference is to sets designed by de Chirico for the Italian folkloric ballet *La giara* by Alfredo Castella and Luigi Pirandello, performed by the Ballets Suédois in 1924. Crevel's observation regarding the sense of emptiness after a recent departure; the

singular quality of the jar that seems dislocated in this setting, and the reference to a perception of the mystery – the sphinx – hidden behind the walls of the house – all this would have been applicable to the paintings as well.

17. Aragon's catalogue preface for the exhibition *Oeuvres anciennes de Georges de Chirico*, Galerie Surréaliste, February 15 – May 1, 1928. See "Le Feuilleton change d'auteur: Préface-pamphlet," in *Écrits sur l'art moderne* 20.
18. De Chirico's painting *The Enigma of a Day* (1914) was indeed the subject of an "experimental research concerning the irrational possibility of penetration and orientation in a painting" ("sur les possibilités irrationnelles de pénétration et d'orientation dans un tableau") whose results were documented in the sixth issue (May 1933) of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (henceforth *Le Surréalisme ASDLR*). To the participants in this survey were addressed questions such as "where is the sea?" "where would a phantom appear?" "in what place would one make love?" "where would one masturbate?" as well as a request to describe the views around the city. Commenting on this survey, Paul Eluard said that those who had set up the questionnaire were led by a desire to enhance the fantasy of the depicted place that seemed as if nothing should ever happen there; "to revive, by introducing them into the painting, all these things that seemed to be frozen in a particularly empty moment in life. A phantom, an elephant, a stork ... it was enough to liven up this torpid dream. It might be seen by the responses that the adventure was dramatic and what a nightmare it turned out to be for those traveling through this forbidden zone" (*Le Surréalisme ASDLR* 6 (15 May 1933) 21). The responses to the questions – most of which were quite bland – far from dissolving the mystery, were, rather, reflections of the participants' structure of mind vis-à-vis the mystery inherent in the painting.
19. See Breton, "Lettre à Robert Amadou," *Perspective cavalière* 38. For an extensive consideration of the special place occupied by this painting in Breton's life and thought, see Thévenin, "Les énigmes du 'Cerveau de l'enfant.'"
20. See Baldacci, *De Chirico* 245. In a lecture he gave in 1922, Breton hinted at de Chirico's seer-like stature: "It is a good thing, now and again, to make room for terror, and I can't help seeing, for example, in the canvases Chirico painted between 1912–1914 so many rigid images of the declaration of war ... for the first time in centuries, Chirico has made us hear the irresistible and unjust voice of the soothsayers." "Characteristics of the Modern Evolution," *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 115; "Caractères de l'évolution moderne," *OC I* 299.
21. Considerations of another significant element in the painting, the oblique window at the top right – a window opening onto a typical de Chirico scene consisting of what looks like a partial view of a red tower and an arcade – will figure later in the chapter with reference to the cinema screen.
22. "Memory traces" of this painting might be discerned in texts by Breton in which a curtain is associated with a building seen through the window or with the naked figure of a man. In his poem "Always for the first time," Breton evokes "a house at an angle to my window / A completely imaginary house," which is associated with an "unbroken darkness," and a curtain that is "invisibly raised." The poem is included in his collection *The Air of the Water* (1934), in *Earthlight* 158–9; "Toujours pour la première fois," *L'Air de l'eau* (1934), in *OC II* 407–8. See also one of the unpublished texts of "Poisson soluble:" "The agate nonchalantly stretched herself on the couch strewn with primroses, looking at me for a long time. I was stripped to the waist, and I was no longer surprised at all by my own silence. Then the agate, raising the curtains on this large room ..." ("Poisson soluble II," text 43, *OC I* 556–7).
23. This text formed the catalogue introduction for the *Exposition Delbrouck et Defize* at the Galerie Van Leer in April 1929. For a detailed study of the text and the exhibition in its historical and critical perspective, and of the two Belgian artists, see Vovelle, "L'idée et la stratégie dans l'approche de la peinture: l'exemple des Belges."
24. The reference is to Achim von Arnim's "Isabelle d'Égypte." See also Breton's "Introduction to Achim von Arnim's Strange Tales," in *Break of Day (Point du jour)*.
25. "The X ..., Y ... Exhibit," in *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 43; "Exposition X ..., Y ..." in *OC II* 300.
26. "The First Dalí Exhibit," *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 52–3; "Première exposition Dalí," in *OC II* 308–9.
27. Breton may have referred here to the "Alchimie du verb" section in Rimbaud's "Une Saison en enfer," in which a weary dreamer is led to the "edge of the world and Cimmeria, a land of darkness and whirlwinds" ("aux confins du monde et de la Cimmérie, patrie de l'ombre et des tourbillons"). *Rimbaud: Complete Works* 200–201. In an editor's note (*OC II* 1473), Breton's

"Cimmeria" symbolizes what is opposed to the society of ease and the commerce of art, from which Breton hopes Dalí will extricate himself. I tend to see it, moreover, in terms of what Breton refers to as Dalí's "second landscape," his "land of treasures." Breton might also have seen these Cimmerian "treasures" as dark and forbidding as the "beasts of prey" inhabiting Dalí's canvases (*Break of Day* [*Point du jour*] 53). Dalí made use of the expression "land of treasures" in his essay "L'Ane pourri," published in *La Femme visible* (Paris: Editions surréalistes, 1930); and in *Le Surréalisme ASDLR* 1 (July 1930). See Dalí, *Collected Writings* 225.

28. I see in Breton's evocation of curtains an echo of the following excerpt from Apollinaire's poem "Fenêtres" ("Windows"): "Tu soulèveras le rideau / Et maintenant voilà que s'ouvre la fenêtre / Araignées quand les mains tissaient la lumière / Beauté pâleur insondables violets / ... La fenêtre s'ouvre comme une orange / Le beau fruit de la lumière" ["You will lift the curtain / And now look at the window opening / Spiders when hands were weaving light / Beauty paleness unfathomable violet tints / ... The window opens like an orange / Lovely fruit of light."]. See Apollinaire, *Selected Writings* 140–141. The raising of a curtain in order to reveal some hidden transcendent view occurs quite often in Symbolist poetry. In his essay "Crisis in Poetry" (1895) Mallarmé says that his period is witnessing "a fluttering of the temple's veil" (*Selected Prose Poems, Essays, and Letters* 34); implying that the boundary between the physical and the transcendent is shifting and growing uncertain. Like Apollinaire, Mallarmé was a constant poetic presence in Breton's mind, even when Breton was no longer following his poetics. Notwithstanding the somewhat metaphysical purport of Mallarmé's notion of the raising of the veil, it forms an obvious analogy with Breton's perceptions regarding the curtain as that which blocks a view of the "other region" in the mind.
29. "Always for the first time," in *Earthlight* 158–9; "Toujours pour la première fois," in *OC II* 407–8.
30. Thus, for example, Max Ernst has the "courage to make each of his first paintings a plunge into the unknown" (*SP* 66). Yves Tanguy "bring[s] back to us, from the unknown, images that are just as concrete as those that we take for granted as being known" (*SP* 44). Or there is Picasso, whose "entirely revolutionary approach ... expresses itself in the unintermitting temptation to confront everything that exists with everything that might exist, to conjure up from the unknown everything that could urge the familiar to display itself less unthinkingly" (*SP* 105).
31. *Mad Love* (*L'Amour fou*) 104, 106; *OC II* 772.
32. "Musset n'a rien su faire: il y avait des visions derrière le gaze des rideaux: il a fermé les yeux." See Rimbaud: *Complete Works* 310–311. In this "Lettre du voyant," addressed to Paul Demeny (15 May 1871), Rimbaud made his famous declaration "Car Je est un autre" and advocated that "Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens" ("For I is someone else"; "The poet makes himself a seer by a long, immense and controlled derangement of all the senses").
33. Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor* 287; "Anthologie de l'humour noir," *OC II* 1123. See also Breton's essay "Lettre à Robert Amadou," *Perspective cavalière* (see note 19 above). Paule Thévenin ("Les énigmes du 'Cerveau de l'enfant' ") has dealt quite extensively with the erotic dimension of the painting, with reference to the figures, present or implied, of both the father and mother. Paolo Baldacci cites a handwritten poetic text by de Chirico, datable to 1913–14, which "recalls the morbidly sensual treatment of the male body encountered in the painting." The text reads in part: "... Through / the opening of his putrefying hairshirt I saw / the beauty of his pale white body / like a statue of love." See Baldacci, *De Chirico* 266 (note 68).
34. A correlation between the painting and Breton's text along these lines has been suggested by Paule Thévenin. See "Les énigmes du 'Cerveau de l'enfant' " 102.
35. Speaking to Jacques Doucet in 1921, Breton cited this phrase as "Un homme a une fenêtre qui lui passe par le milieu du corps" ("a man having a window passing through the middle of his body"). In the *Manifeste du surréalisme* it is: "Il y a un homme coupé en deux par la fenêtre." See *OC I* 1354.
36. This contention gains in weight in light of the fact that de Chirico was on Breton's mind while composing these paragraphs concerning the beginning of automatic writing. In a footnote concerning a possible somatic basis for the automatic process, in which he cites Knut Hamsun's claim that it was hunger that brought about such a flow of "beautiful phrases," Breton also notes that "Apollinaire asserted that Chirico's first paintings were done under the influence of cenesthetic disorders (migraines, colics, etc.);" *Manifestoes* 23; *OC I* 326.
37. As Breton says in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, "let us not lose sight of the fact that the idea of Surrealism aims quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden

places and the progressive darkening of other places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory ..." *Manifestoes* 136–7; *OC* I 791.

38. Christopher Green, for instance, sees in Breton's conception of the picture as a window an implied refusal of the Cubist stress on the autonomy of the artwork, noting that for the Cubists the "painting was in the first place a flat material surface on which coloured shapes in paint or some other material were disposed. It was an opaque material thing with its own properties, which only secondarily, by the exploitation of those properties, might become 'transparent.' For Breton, the picture plane was a window because it was an opening out for the imagination, not because it was an illusionist representation; significantly he did not present it as a mirror held up to the world: it was transparent, not reflective." Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies* 272. In her article "Surrealism and Painting: Describing the Imaginary," Jennifer Mundy similarly argues that Surrealism, in its "dependence on the analogy of painting as window, and insistence on the passivity of artists ... before the creative turmoil of the lower strata of the mind," is committed to the extreme version of mimesis adopted by the realist aesthetic, that "claimed a near-perfect reproduction of a view of the world through the transparent medium of the surface of art ..." Mundy, "Surrealism and Painting: Describing the Imaginary" 497.
39. "La Glace sans tain," by Breton and Soupault, was published for the first time in *Littérature* 8 (October 1919). The heading "La Glace sans tain" refers to the former title of a painting by Matisse at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, now titled *The Blue Window* (1913). See the note in *OC* I 1149.
40. Considerations of transparency and opacity may also be applicable to the reception of the automatic text by the reader. Steven Harris argues that the "two-way mirror of its title is transparent from the point of view of expression, that is, from the other side of the mirror, but is opaque from this side, in its puzzled reception by both writer and reader. If transparency is given to be the direct transcription of thought, transparency as the immediately understood direct expression of the unconscious is something that will only occur in utopia, when interior and exterior life will no longer be in contradiction." I would, on the contrary, argue that the two-way mirror is not transparent, or not fully transparent, from the point of view of expression precisely because no direct transcription of thought is possible; there are always some obstacles involved – curtains in the mind that are to be turned aside or raised, to use Breton's expression, as referred to before. See Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* 184.
41. "The term 'automatic writing' as it is used in Surrealism ... has always seemed to me the limit toward which the Surrealist poet must strive, while not losing sight of the fact that, contrary to what spiritualism aims to do – dissociate the psychological personality from the medium – Surrealism proposes nothing less than to unify that personality. It is obvious that, for us, the question of the exteriority of (let's say, for simplicity's sake) one's 'voice' could not even be posed." See "The Automatic Message" (December 1933), in *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 137; "Le Message automatique," in *OC* II 387.
42. Breton, "Words without Wrinkles," in *The Lost Steps* 100–101; "Les Mots sans rides," in *OC* I 284–5.
43. "Soupault and I baptized the new mode of pure expression which we had at our disposal and which we wished to pass on to our friends, by the name of SURREALISM." *Manifestoes* 24; *OC* I 327.
44. Jenny, "From Breton to Dali: The Adventures of Automatism" 107.
45. As noted by Elizabeth Cowling, Breton seems to have seen Picasso's *La Petite fille au cerceau*, reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 5 (p. 23), with its image of a girl standing before a mirror, as a representation of Alice and, as such, an example of Picasso's supreme ability to unite the real and the imagined, the conscious and the unconscious. See Cowling, " 'Proudly We Claim Him as One of Us' " 95. It might be added that the molded frame of the mirror behind the girl could indeed be associated with the frame of a painting.
46. Bonnet, *André Breton* 176.
47. Breton et al., *The Automatic Message* 63; *OC* I 57. This passage is cited in the "Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme," together with a few other citations, under the term "Fenêtre," *OC* II 810.
48. This correspondence has been noted by Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing* 35.
49. Soby sees this figure as a statue that is "no longer presented as if it were of stone but as if it were a stuffed cloth figure with sewn seams. We are perhaps at the beginning here of the metamorphosis

from sculpture into mannequin, soon to take place in de Chirico's iconography." Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* 98.

50. I have not found any explanation for the enigmatic title of de Chirico's painting. Paolo Baldacci notes that it is coeval with the painting, which is included in the list of works sent in 1914 by Paul Guillaume to Alfred Stieglitz, but adds that it does not seem consistent with de Chirico's own titles. See *De Chirico* 267 (note 97). It might have been a title assigned to the painting by Apollinaire. In its notion of an unseen guarding presence (glass dog), it may have struck Soupault and Breton enough to have left some traces in their own writings. Thus Soupault writes in the text of *Les Champs magnétiques* titled "Gants blancs" ("White Gloves"): "A man descends the stairs of sleep and notices that it is raining; the window-panes are white. A dog is known to be resting near him. All obstacles are present ... The skies' great curtains open." Breton et al., *The Automatic Message* 115; OC I 90. The window in the painting placed just below the exposed armpit of the female torso, and the very pronounced Veronese green sky might have provoked the following lines in Breton's poem "Le Volubilis et je sais l'hypoténuse": "Pour l'estime des mondes les plus féminisés / Dans l'aisselle des astres / Là où le dogue des cieux garde les corps au bois dormant" [For the esteem of worlds most feminized / In the armpit of stars / There where the mastiff of the sky guards the bodies in the sleeping wood"]. (The last image evokes the image of "la belle au bois dormant," that is, the sleeping beauty.) OC I 167.
51. Johanna Malt, for example, argues that in "much of his writing on painting, Breton resists treating its formal and material concerns, viewing pictures as pure images, rather than as objects." Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire* 145.
52. *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 98–9; OC I 280–3.
53. "Characteristics of the Modern Evolution," *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 115; "Caractères de l'évolution moderne," OC I 299.
54. It may be noted that many of the windows in de Chirico's paintings are hardly distinguishable in form, texture or paint handling from the framed pictures found primarily in his "metaphysical interiors" (begun in 1916).
55. I have referred before to Picabia's 1928 text (Chapter 1, documented in note 48) in which he asks each of his readers "to direct and project for himself on the screen of his imagination, a veritably magic screen, incomparably superior to the poor black and white calico of the movies." Virmaux, *Les Surréalistes et le cinéma* 233.
56. In her article on de Chirico's theater, Marianne W. Martin writes primarily on the theatrical dimension of de Chirico's art and writing, but she also includes references to the cinema, noting the influence of early trick and detective films on de Chirico's pictorial conception: "Cinematic close-ups, multiple exposures, shifts of viewpoints, cutting – provoking spatial and temporal discontinuity; suggestion of flux, animation of the inanimate, simultaneous assertion and denial of the third dimension – were undoubtedly of much interest to him." See "On de Chirico's Theater" 89.
57. Cited in Martin, "On de Chirico's Theater," 82; also in Fagiolo dell'Arco, "De Chirico in Paris, 1911–1915" 24–25.
58. The subject is treated quite extensively by both Marianne Martin and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco (see the preceding note).
59. Such an arrangement is found, for instance, in *The Fête Day* (1914); *The Sailors' Barracks* (1914); *The Evil Genius of a King* (1914–15); *Still Life "Torino 1888"* (1914–15); *The Amusements of a Young Girl* (1916?). Such dissociation is at times also apparent in the windows or doors inhabiting de Chirico's canvases, which, as noted before, appear like framed pictures; for example, *The Philosopher and the Poet* (1914); *The Astronomer* (c.1915).
60. De Chirico, *Hebdomeros: A Novel* 44.
61. I am grateful to Henri Béhar for drawing my attention to this passage in the "Carnet."
62. Other thoughts of Derain's to which Breton was exposed in this visit were used by him in the essay "Idées d'un peintre" (included in *Les Pas perdus*).
63. Another example for such a diversion of context occurs in a passage devoted to Derain in Breton's "Carnet 1920–1921," this time referring to Derain having for a long time thought of photographing Napoleon. "One should be able at least to get hold of his image, to discover his footprints on

certain objects" (*OC I* 617). This idea was used in a passage on Man Ray's photographs: "For whoever is expert enough to navigate the ship of photography safely through the bewildering eddies of images, there is the whole of life to recapture as if one were running a film backwards, as if one were to be confronted suddenly by an ideal camera in front of which to pose Napoleon, after discovering his footprints on certain objects" (*SP* 33).

64. The installment of "Le Surréalisme et la peinture" in which the section devoted to Ernst is included appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* 9–10 (October 1927), hence following the events surrounding Breton's and Nadja's short affair, taking place in 1926, as described in the second part of *Nadja*. I can only hazard a guess as to a possible relationship between this re-use of the phrase "window, road, sky" and two experiences that Breton had with Nadja. One involved a train trip the two took together in which Nadja became obsessed with what she claimed to be a head seen upside down in the top of the car window (*Nadja* 107; *OC I* 713). This event is narrated in the October 12 entry in which Breton also refers to having asked Ernst to paint Nadja's portrait. The other experience involves the car ride in which Nadja pressed the accelerator and tried to cover Breton's eyes, "so that we should collide at full speed with the splendid trees along the road" (153; 748). I do not claim this to be incontrovertible evidence for such an association, but I am suggesting that something of that nature could have impinged on Breton's mind while he wrote these lines in *SP*. Or, for all we know, it may have been a film Breton saw around that time. I should mention in this respect Man Ray's film *Emak Bakia* that was shown for the first time toward the end of 1926 to a small group of friends. The film has a sequence involving a ride in an open sports car in which the tilted camera reveals both road and sky viewed from within the moving car. Man Ray remembered that his Surrealist friends, who had been invited to the screening of the film, were not too enthusiastic, and he ascribed this to the fact that he had not presented the work under the auspices of the movement. Nevertheless, a memory of this sequence may have been in Breton's mind as well. See Man Ray, *Self Portrait* 222. For more on *Emak Bakia*, see also Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray: American Artist* 133–4.
65. It might be wondered whether Breton was thinking of this "window" when elaborating his own window metaphor.
66. Morise may be following here Breton's account in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, considered earlier in this chapter, concerning the "faint visual image" that accompanied the phrase "There is a man cut in two by the window." Breton adds in a note that such visual apparitions are "... fully as clear as auditory phenomena. With a pencil and white sheet of paper to hand, I could easily trace their outlines. Here again it is not a matter of drawing, but simply of tracing. I could thus depict a tree, a wave, a musical instrument, all manner of things of which I am presently incapable of providing even the roughest sketch. I would plunge into it, convinced that I would find my way again, in a maze of lines which at first glance would seem to be going nowhere. And, upon opening my eyes, I would get the very strong impression of something 'never seen.' The proof of what I am saying has been provided many times by Robert Desnos: to be convinced, one has only to leaf through the pages of issue number 36 of *Feuilles libres* which contains several of his drawings (*Romeo and Juliet*, *A Man Died This Morning*, etc.) which were taken by this magazine as the drawings of a madman and published as such" (*Manifestoes* 21; *OC I* 325). Breton's reference is to an essay entitled "Le Génie sans miroir" that appeared in *Les Feuilles libres* in 1924 under the name of Paul Eluard and contained drawings supposedly made by the insane. It was only later that Eluard revealed that the essay was a hoax perpetrated, text and drawings alike, by Desnos. The article, as it appeared originally, is reproduced in Dumas (ed.), *Robert Desnos: Cahier dirigé par Marie-Claire Dumas* 81–96. For other "mediumistic" drawings by Desnos, see Dumas, "Notes sur Robert Desnos." A substantial selection of his drawings is included also in Desnos, *Ecrits sur les peintres*.
67. Was Morise aware of the photograph by Man Ray showing a mannequin going up an elaborate circular staircase that was used for the cover of the issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* that came out three months later? He may, indeed, have been privy to the preparation of this issue. It would be equally valid to suppose that Man Ray's cover constituted a response to Morise's text, or, perhaps, even to the image of a woman on a staircase in the drawing by Masson that was inserted in that text (more about this drawing in Chapter 5). The woman in the automobile amidst men in top hats might refer to a typical scene from the movies of the time. It should also be recalled that a top hat was used as cover illustration by Man Ray for the early issues of *Littérature*.
68. Breton also knew Jean Goudal's essay "Surrealism and Cinema" (February 1925), some aspects of which have been considered in Chapter 1, where Goudal raised objections, first, to the Surrealist method as defined in the *First Manifesto*; also, given the "antilogical ambitions of Surrealism," he criticized what he considered to be an inherent "personal, incommunicable mode of expression" (Goudal, "Surrealism and Cinema" 355). However, these objections lose their value, he argued, "as soon as one applies the Surrealist theories to the domain of cinema." Thus the objection to method, which he saw in terms of the difficulty of uniting the conscious and the unconscious on the same

plane, loses its relevance when it comes to the cinema, "in which the thing seen corresponds exactly to a conscious hallucination" (355). The second objection does not apply to cinema either, because, while "the complete repudiation of logic is forbidden to language, which is born of this logic, the cinema can indulge itself in such repudiation without contravening any ineluctable internal necessity" (357). Breton naturally would not have agreed with Goudal's criticism of the Surrealist method, but he would have found nothing wanting in Goudal's assertions regarding cinema. It is quite likely that Goudal was also on his mind at the time he wrote *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. Years later, in "As in a Wood," Breton bemoaned the "parsimonious use" being made of the "original means of motion pictures," noting that "Twenty-five years have elapsed since M.J. Goudal, in the *Revue Hebdomadaire*, pointed out how perfectly suited to the surrealist expression of life those means were ..." *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 239; "Comme dans un bois," *OC III* 907.

69. Breton, "Max Ernst," in *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 60–61; *OC I* 245–6.
70. For an early presentation of the nature of the Surrealist image, see "Words without Wrinkles," *The Lost Steps* 100; "Les Mots sans rides," *OC I* 284. An explicit reference to Reverdy's conception of the poetic image figures in "Manifesto of Surrealism," *Manifestoes* 20; "Manifeste du surréalisme," *OC I* 324. A more extensive treatment of the nature of the Surrealist image is to be found primarily in *Manifestoes* 36–9; *OC I* 336–9.
71. To briefly introduce this technique, these are full-page illustrations, taken from teaching-aids catalogues or commercial advertisements, parts of which are concealed by an additional layer of watercolor or gouache, with the remaining images modified through the addition of lines and forms.
72. The letter is cited in Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 67.
73. Breton's reference is to the Lumière brothers and their film *Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1895).
74. Breton referred specifically to this effect of *dépaysement* with reference to Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 têtes*, declaring that "Surreality will depend on our will toward complete disorientation [*dépaysement*] from everything." See "Notice to the Reader of The Hundred Headless Woman," in *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 48; "Avis au lecteur pour 'La Femme 100 têtes' de Max Ernst," *OC II* 305. While in the collage novel this effect is more pronounced, it is also found in works of the early 1920s, such as *Song of the Flesh – The Shitting Dog*, c.1920 (Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, color plate 23) or *Child*, a collage included in *Répétitions* (1922).
75. I refer, for instance, to the use of cut-out forms in *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1920) or *Dada-Degas* (c.1920–21), or to the movement of the strange creatures populating *The Grass Bicycle* (c.1921). Spies notes the importance of such evocation of motion as evinced by drawings Ernst made in 1922 in Paris, published in *Littérature* and *La Révolution surréaliste*, and in a preparatory sketch for *Au rendez-vous des amis* (1922). (*Max Ernst Collages* 58).
76. For an early but still quite influential treatment of this concept, see Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*. For a later consideration of off-screen space, see Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*.
77. Such, for instance, are the hands extended from beyond the frame in several of the collages included in Eluard's *Répétitions* (1922) or made by Ernst for his and Eluard's collaborative book *Les Malheurs des immortels* (1922).
78. Such stratiform visions appear, for instance, in *Always the Best Man Wins* (1920) or *Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss* (c.1920).
79. The quote is taken from a French translation of Eisenstein that appeared in Paris in the journal *Change* in 1968.
80. Eisenstein, "Word and Image," in *The Film Sense* 17.
81. Desnos's essay "Surréalisme" (*Cahiers d'art* 8 (1926) 210–213) incorporates mostly such narrative responses to Masson, Miró, Malkine, Tanguy and others. See Desnos, *Écrits sur les peintres* 88–94. Such narratives have been similarly considered by Elza Adamowicz. I disagree, however, with her contention that Breton's art discourse "denies the painting as surface and as space: Breton prefers temporality to space, and depth or lateral drift to surface." Temporality, in my conception, is for Breton a correlate of the layered depth, as is also the surface. See Adamowicz, *Ceci n'est pas un tableau* 54.

Max Ernst – conceptualization of mental space

Some paintings by de Chirico played a central role in the preceding chapter in the elaboration of Breton's window metaphor. His work comes up again now, primarily in relation to its spatial conception, because of its seminal influence on Ernst's early work (similar considerations will be brought to bear in Chapter 5 on Magritte's paintings of the 1920s). Breton's response to de Chirico's work in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* pivots mainly on its enigmatic character, the mystery it holds for the viewer; its power to suggest the "most disquieting aspects of external appearances, particularly all those things around us that share simultaneously the characteristics of life and death ..." (SP 16). For Breton and his fellow writers and poets, what lies hidden behind the surfaces depicted in de Chirico's works is a mystery, or, to use de Chirico's more frequent term, an enigma. In the fifth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (p. 22) de Chirico is quoted as saying: "One should never forget that a painting must always be the reflection of a profound sensation, and that profound means strange and that strange means little known or altogether unknown." What the writers responded to was primarily the haunting quality of the cityscapes, the deserted squares, the ominous shadows whose sources remained mysteriously concealed, the sense of time at a standstill. I have referred to the evocations of deserted cities – so much like de Chirico's – and the sense of an unknown threat permeating the public squares, as found in Desnos's texts collected in *Deuil pour deuil* (*Mourning for Mourning*) and in the novel *La Liberté ou l'amour!* (*Liberty or Love!*). Poetic evocations like these are a response to the mood – the *Stimmung*, as de Chirico would say – imparted by the sense of emptiness and by the unknown drama felt to be taking place behind walls.¹ For the writers, the definition of the poetic image in terms of a meeting of distant realities or the incongruous juxtaposition of disparate and unrelated elements became associated with de Chirico as well, in particular with regard to objects populating his "metaphysical interiors" after 1917.

De Chirico's spatial form

It was de Chirico's spatial conception, however, that, more than anything else, provided a common base for quite a few of the artists associated with the Surrealist Movement. These artists, for the most part, wished to break loose from the constraints of Modernism – from the rigid formalism of late Cubism, the Purist requirement of plastic “purity,” and the expressive brushwork of the revived naturalist styles – while still retaining a semblance of Modernist ambience, so as not to appear overly academic.² What the artists sensed – perhaps more so than the poets and critics – was that de Chirico's seeming allegiance to the pictorial model of the Italian Renaissance, while applicable enough to the work begun in the late 1910s, was incompatible with his earlier work. As William Rubin notes, “Renaissance perspective projects a space that is secure and eminently traversible. De Chirico's tilted ground planes, on the contrary, produce a space that, when not positively obstructed, is shallow and vertiginous.”³ Pointing out the low relief or the crude hatching that characterize de Chirico's modeling method, Rubin further argues that the “modern effect of the early de Chirico depends upon the fact that his linear perspective ... by *not* being reinforced through the traditional concomitants of modeling in the round and/or aerial perspective, *remains a purely schematic scaffolding* that does not force a picture into a condition of spatial illusionism” (61). Rubin explains that perspective orthogonals, unaided by other perspectival devices, leave the eye a choice and can be understood as a schematic indication of three-dimensional space or they can be seen as simply a pattern of lines on a flat surface. As an example he cites the receding plane of the plaza in *Gare Montparnasse*, which de Chirico's handling of linear perspective and shadow tilts so vertically as to invite the eye to see its shape as lying parallel to the picture plane.

De Chirico's space is indeed far from the “vast, illusionistic, albeit distorted space” to which critics at times refer.⁴ In fact, even in the earliest works, his spatial conception is marked by a sense of constriction or delimitation and a distinct proclivity for a planimetric conception of curtains and walls lying parallel to the picture plane. This is fully apparent in the first paintings of his Parisian sojourn (1911–12), in which space is enclosed by walls or parapets that are parallel to the picture plane and partially hide what lies behind them – be it a sail or a locomotive (for example, *The Enigma of the Arrival and the Afternoon*, 1911–12). While in 1912 the strict planimetric conception is at times already largely eschewed, there are always architectural elements (pedestals, for instance, or distant parapets) that retain this quality and that enhance, and are enhanced in turn, by the planar conception formed by the large flat surfaces. Even the works exhibiting different points of perspective and a dizzyingly tilted space often still display an element that lies parallel to the

picture plane (for instance, the side of the station facing us in *Gare Montparnasse*, early 1914), serving as a spatial anchor for the various orthogonally defined planes, aligning them also to the picture plane. The overall spatial effect of these works is characterized by a dominant frontality, with figures and objects placed in a compressed foreground space that is incongruent with the sloping spatial recession lying behind it.⁵

“Succession of contradictory images” – Ernst’s layered depth

It is to de Chirico that Ernst’s early works owe their layered conception, flattening of space, and, above all, the spatial ambiguities and paradoxes they embody. The works done in the late 1910s and early 1920s disclose two complementary modes of spatial organization that, while manifesting a chronological progression, also reveal substantial overlapping. One is related to the influence of de Chirico; the other, with its major techniques of overpainting and collage, involves the manipulation of readymade print materials. The work done by Max Ernst after he saw one or two issues of *Valori Plastici* in which works by de Chirico and Carrà were reproduced – he may have been exposed also to *12 Opere di Giorgio de Chirico*, a booklet of reproductions published by *Valori Plastici* in August 1919 – presents the strongest case for this stylistic influence. The exaggerated perspective of the swimming pool in his 1919 painting *Aquis Submersus* appears to have been inspired by the platform in de Chirico’s *Sacred Fish* (1919). As argued by Lucy Lippard, de Chirico’s influence extends also to the spatial ambiguity of Ernst’s *Resurrection of the Flesh*, an ambiguity which became a distinguishing feature of his later Dada collages. “This consists of a rather awkward superimposition of shallow upon deep space, omitting the expected passage between the two, an interruption of a long vista to the vanishing point by off-center placement of the repoussoirs. The rectangular bars on each side, parallel to the picture plane, serve to flatten out the effects of hurtling illusionism and throw doubt on the ‘reality’ of the entire scene.”⁶ Another response, in 1919–20, to de Chirico’s work was *Fiat modes, pereat ars* (*Let There be Fashion, Down with Art*), a portfolio of eight lithographs that reflected the influence of Picabia’s mechanical drawings; but, more significantly in terms of the present discussion, it was done, as Ernst acknowledged later, “en hommage à Chirico.”⁷ With their plunging perspective and tilted ground plane, at times emulating de Chirico’s floorboards, these prints appear even starker and more extreme than de Chirico’s (this may reflect the fact that the paintings as reproduced in *Valori Plastici* consisted of contrasting monochrome illustrations). These lithographs indeed appear to present in a clear schematic form what William Rubin discerned in de Chirico, and as such they would have served as blueprints for

Ernst's continuing preoccupation with de Chirico, as revealed a short while later in his newly developed techniques of overpainting and collage.

There is indeed a marked continuity of a de Chirico presence in Ernst's work in 1919–20, in terms both of iconography and of spatial conception.⁸ The mode employed in *Resurrection of the Flesh*, with its pronounced perspectival recession, was combined with an enhanced sense of surface.⁹ This spatial form, further augmented by the use of the graphic and photographic readymade elements that became Ernst's main materials in 1920, is fully evident in the interior spaces – the “rooms” or stages – with their tilted floors and pronounced boards. It left its traces even on the landscape format that soon became quite dominant in his work. It is this combination of “stage perspective” and landscape elements that accounts for the “strange concatenation of exterior and interior space, room-landscapes and landscape-rooms” that Werner Spies discerns in Ernst in these years.¹⁰ These works came under the rather generalizing appellation of “collage” that encompassed the various techniques of collage, photocollage and overpainting. Collage was considered by Breton and other Surrealists to be a creative mode embodying in the most exemplary manner the basic principle of the Surrealist verbal image in its pictorial application. In his 1921 essay on Ernst, Breton defined this principle in terms of the “marvelous ability to reach out, without leaving the field of our experience, to two distinct realities and bring them together to create a spark.”¹¹ This view was generally accepted by later commentators as well, perhaps due to Ernst's own definition of collage in terms of the “exploitation of the chance meeting of two distant realities on an unfamiliar plane.”¹² Another prominent viewpoint from which the Surrealist collage was to be considered concerned the temporal and cultural dissociation of its components from their original context. What attracted Ernst and the Surrealists was the perception of uncanniness and mystery embedded in the dislocated images of advertisements for consumer goods or teaching aids, whose original function seemed to be completely eroded. They were also taken with the aura of the old-fashioned wood engravings illustrating nineteenth-century novels of adventure and romance or sensational crime journals.¹³ Describing the fascination exerted by the illustrations of adventure stories and the covers of popular crime magazines, Breton noted that “these pages, displaying an agitation all the more extraordinary in that its pretext escapes us – as is the case with pages from any technical work, provided it treats nothing familiar to us – give us the illusion of actual cuts made in time, space, customs, and even beliefs.”¹⁴

I see in these “cuts” made in space a reference to another type of dissociation, related to the notion of “systematic displacement,” to use Ernst's phraseology, as it is manifested in the way Ernst's collages plot space. Indeed, most of Ernst's works at the time – whether interior spaces or landscapes

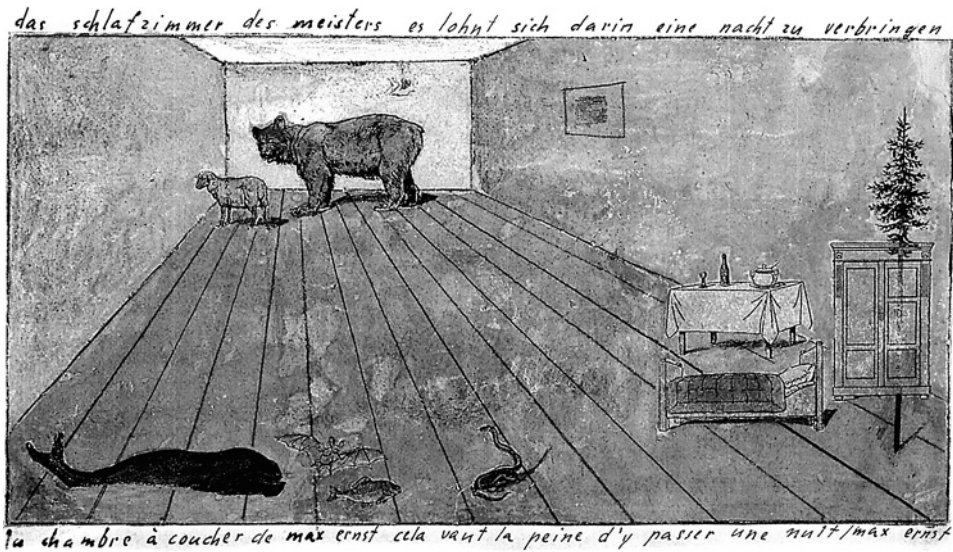
or combinations of the two – exhibit a marked sense of spatial dissociation derived from their layered depth in its permutations; furthermore, this spatial form is inextricably related to the nature of the mediums employed by Ernst as well as the technical processes involved.¹⁵ In his “Notes for a Biography” Ernst describes the process of creating his collages and overpaintings. Looking at the catalogue of teaching aids,

Max Ernst feels his “visionary faculties” to have suddenly become so intensified that he begins seeing the newly emerged objects against a new background. To capture this new background, it was enough to put to use a little paint, a few lines, a horizon, a sky, a wooden floor, or any other thing.¹⁶

In “Beyond Painting” Ernst similarly affirms that the confrontation with these catalogue pages

... provoked in me a sudden intensification of the visionary capacities and gave birth to a hallucinating succession of contradictory images, of double, triple, and multiple images which were superimposed on each other with the persistence and rapidity characteristic of amorous memories and of hypnagogical visions. These images called up new levels for their meetings in a new unknown (the unsuitable plane). Then it sufficed simply to add to these catalogue pages, by painting or drawing, and thus only docilely reproducing what was visible within me – a color, a pencil line, a landscape foreign to the represented objects, the desert, a sky, a geological cross-section, a floor, a single straight line for the horizon, to obtain a set and faithful image of my hallucination ...¹⁷

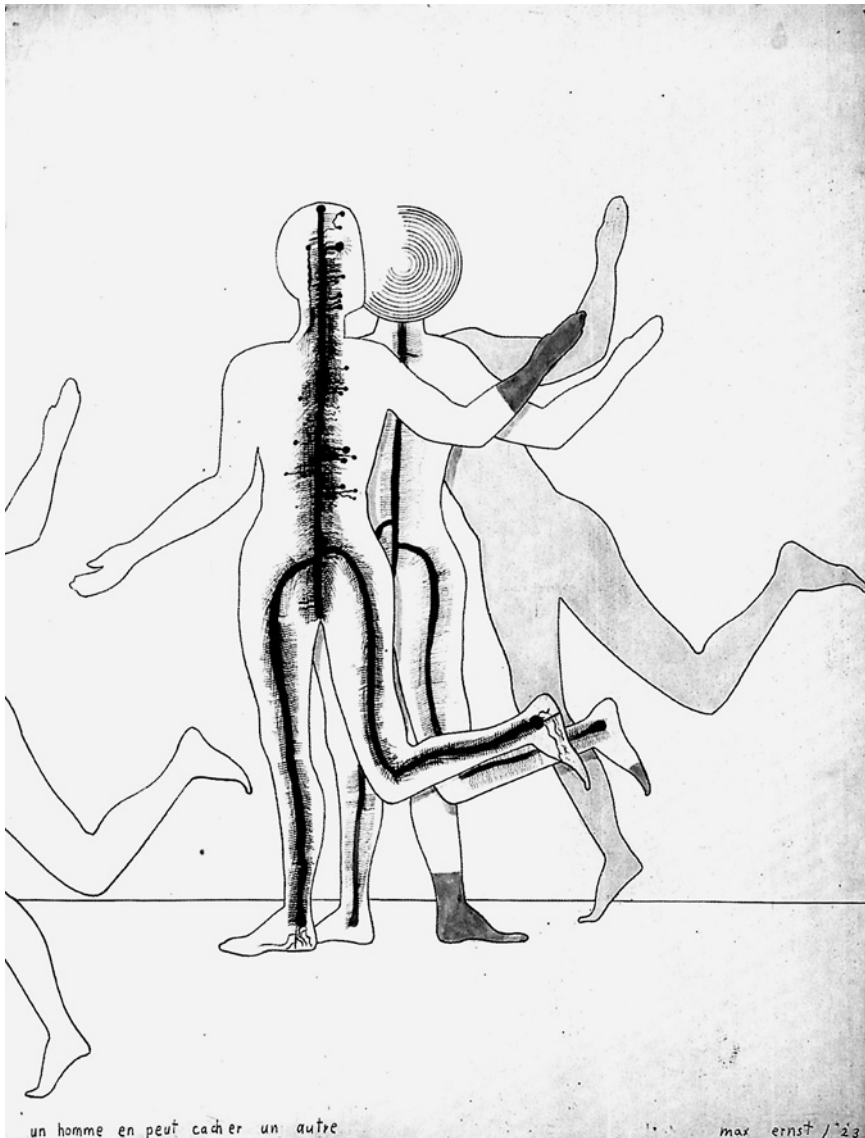
One element that Ernst appears to single out in these evocations of his method is the piling up of “contradictory” images in layers constituting a “new background” or “new levels.” The layered nature of space in Ernst’s works is constituted by paint layers (whose texture at times also plays a significant role, as I shall point out later on) or by the various collage elements, that, in their different textures, spatial associations, and position qua layers, constitute partial obstacles that deny an unhindered penetration into the depth of the collage. These barriers to vision thus serve to trap the eye in the different layers while still drawing it further away – or deeper – into the space of the collage.¹⁸ The perception of layers derives also from lines drawn so as to define spatial position (in terms of what layer lies above or below),¹⁹ as well as from pictorial devices that represent such layers within an illusionary pictorial space. The interior spaces or “rooms” appearing in overpaintings such as *Hydrometric Demonstration of Killing by Temperature* (1920) and *Two Ambiguous Figures* (c.1920) exhibit perspectival lines projected toward inner flat surfaces that lie parallel to the picture plane.²⁰ The various parts of the objects shown in the original illustration appear to be frontally placed, but their position in the different depths within the pictorial space remains somewhat indeterminate because of the ambiguities informing



4.1 Max Ernst, *The Master's Bedroom It's Worth Spending the Night There*, c.1920

the various layers (for instance, in *The Master's Bedroom*, c.1920, Figure 4.1). The basic landscape format of Ernst's "animated landscapes" – populated by fantastic figures that form a strange amalgam of the organic and the mechanical – generally consists of a low horizon line or distant mountains, with both ground and sky lying parallel to the picture plane. However, the layered conception that dominates Ernst's spaces is frequently manifested in a stratiform vision, such as the one informing *Stratified Rocks*, *Nature's Gift of Gneiss Lava Icelandic Moss* (c.1920). In these works, what appears to be a cross-section of a stratified ground may also evoke a sense of spatial recession, with the different strata appearing to constitute low ranges of ground rising one beyond the other.

A layered depth conception, generally involving an unmitigated frontality of the parallel planes lying within the pictorial space, is in evidence in quite a few of Ernst's paintings and drawings done after 1921. It may have derived from his work in the mediums of collage or overpainting. More significantly, this has to do with the frontality often exhibited by the source materials themselves – catalogue illustrations or scientific and technical diagrams – that persist in paintings that rely on these sources and that employ a collage-like layered conception. To this category belong, for instance, the works having the theme of doubled figures (*Birds-Fish-Snake*, c.1921; *Untitled (Man Will Never Understand It)*, 1922–23; *Castor and Pollution*, 1923), with their combined source materials referring to scientific diagrams and



4.2 Max Ernst, *One Man Can Hide Another*, 1923

occult or alchemical illustrations. To these may be added the astronomical diagrams of eclipses used in *Man Shall Know Nothing of This* (1923). The use of stencils calls for such a conception too, as exemplified by the stenciled human figures in the drawing *One Man Can Hide Another* (1923; Figure 4.2).

Ernst's works have elicited a broad range of interpretations referring to alchemy, the occult or psychoanalysis; those having the theme of doubled figures have also been viewed as reflecting Ernst's personal situation in the Eluard household.²¹ In proposing to view Ernst's works in terms of a representation or evocation of a mental space, partaking of various notions concerning the structure of the mind, I do not discard all other interpretations but I suggest that my conception may account for a deep-seated spatial vision that largely transcends the particulars of the alchemical or psychoanalytic approaches.

The gaze turned inward

There is by now something almost self-evident about perceiving in Ernst's work an all-encompassing motivation to turn the gaze inward, into the reality of the mind. This turning of the gaze inward is sometimes considered as epitomized by Ernst's adoption of de Chirico's motif of the closed eyes. I have referred before to de Chirico's statement that "there is only what I see with my eyes open and, better still, closed," and to its most potent pictorial expression in his painting *The Child's Brain*, as manifested by the figure representing both the father and the poet-creator as a seer.²² The motif of the closed eyes, taken up in *Pietà or Revolution by Night* (1923; Figure 4.3), is generally considered with reference to an inward-turned gaze. However, this enigmatic painting does not offer any clear clues as to what is being seen with the eyes closed or what form this inner vision assumes. It might be pointed out that in Ernst's work closed eyes do not necessarily imply sleep or dream, as shown by the paintings in which the motif of blindness or blinding figures.²³ Ernst himself was quite wary with regard to the representation of dream in painting, as is apparent in his 1934 essay "What Is Surrealism?":

Thus, when it is said of the Surrealists that they paint constantly changeable dream-reality, this does not mean that they paint a copy of their dreams (that would be descriptive, naïve naturalism), or that each individual builds his own little world of dream elements ... but that they freely, bravely, and self-confidently move about in the borderland between the internal and external worlds which are still unfamiliar though physically and psychologically quite real ("sur-real"), registering what they see and experience there, and intervening where their revolutionary instincts advise them to do so.²⁴

For Ernst, thus, the projection of an inner vision in painting should not involve a slavish copying, or, in other words, a presentation of some dream reality. This, however, does not preclude the possibility that moving about "in the borderland between the internal and external worlds" might entail



4.3 Max Ernst, *Pietà or Revolution by Night*, 1923

some form of conceptualization of the dream process itself. My concern is not so much with what a method of interpretation such as psychoanalysis, for instance, may offer. The problems involved in taking psychoanalytic interpretation too far have been considered quite extensively in the literature

devoted to Ernst. There is, to begin with, a basic inscrutable dimension to Ernst's use of motifs that often defies a fully systematic interpretation. Ernst himself, as Werner Spies testifies, rejected what he called "explaining to death." Spies indeed notes that Ernst's enigmatic imagery is not the "result of clever riddle-making to which he himself might be thought to hold the key. The impenetrability he demonstrates has to do with the way he views the world, a philosophy that compels him to confront convention and reason with unprecedented, profoundly unsettling imagery" (*Max Ernst: A Retrospective* 49). Such impenetrability is also inherent in the dreamwork, since, according to Freud, the productions of dreamwork "are not made with the intention of being understood."²⁵ As Freud said,

... [t]he dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation, we should clearly be led into error (277).

He also adds that a dream is a picture puzzle or a rebus that is put together like a "poetical phrase of the greatest beauty and significance" and that "our predecessors in the field of dream-interpretation have made the mistake of treating the rebus as a pictorial composition: and as such it has seemed to them nonsensical and worthless" (278). Ernst's interests, indeed, lay elsewhere, and he would have preferred his images to retain something of their rebus-like impenetrable quality. His work contains some references, at times quite obvious ones, to Freud's dream symbols or to the case histories, but there is a point beyond which any attempt at a more thorough and consistent interpretation is bound to remain largely unsatisfied.²⁶ This is true also for the attempt to systematically impose an alchemical reading on his work, although some works of Ernst's, for instance the collage novel *Une Semaine de bonté*, provide quite a coherent and systematic utilization of alchemical imagery. As argued by Elza Adamowicz with regard to Ernst's collage novels, but this would be applicable to his work in general, "[s]uch totalizing readings, predicated on psychoanalysis or alchemy, claim to tease out the meanings already secretly encoded in the juxtaposed images. Yet, however attractive they may appear, they do not take into account Ernst's deliberately manipulative practice of fragmentation and *détournement* ..." (Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* 124–5). The inescapable conclusion is that there is no final explanation of the enigma, and thus, to quote the caption appearing on the last pages of the first collage novel, "the hundred headless woman keeps her secret" ("*la femme 100 têtes garde son secret*").

Rather than take this rather well-trodden path of psychoanalytical or alchemical interpretation, I propose to consider psychoanalysis and the various psychological or parapsychological theories to which Ernst would have been exposed as constituting a discourse that defines the basic paradigms underlying his mode of spatially configuring his materials. The spatial form, or, to be more specific, the layered depth conception, seems to me to be central to Ernst's work – the coming discussion aims to substantiate this assumption – precisely because it derives from a conceptualization of painting as a representation or evocation of a mental space partaking of various notions concerning the structure of the mind.²⁷ Ernst may have found a confirmation and further incentive for the spatial character of his work in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, especially in Freud's own efforts to provide visual analogies for the idea of "psychical locality" within the "mental apparatus."²⁸ Freud warned against taking such analogies too far and insisted over and over again that the unconscious is not an anatomical concept and that the temptation to determine psychical locality in an anatomical fashion should be avoided. He suggested instead that the mental apparatus should be pictured as

... resembling a compound microscope or a photographic apparatus, or something of the kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated. I see no necessity to apologize for the imperfections of this or of any similar imagery. Analogies of this kind are only intended to assist us in our attempt to make the complications of mental functioning intelligible by dissecting the function and assigning its different constituents to different component parts of the apparatus (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 536).

Freud follows this conception of the psychic apparatus by defining its components as "systems" that "stand in a regular spatial relation to one another," similarly to the lenses in a telescope, and between which the excitation in any psychical process passes in a temporal sequence. He then posits a sense of direction in this apparatus, with psychical processes advancing from the perceptual or sensory end – the system Freud calls *Pcpt.* – to the motor end (537). The graphic schemes Freud provides to clarify his conceptions involve, indeed, a series of parallel lines, with these located between the two ends, the perceptual and the motor, bearing memory traces of the perceptions which impinge on the psychical apparatus. Freud writes that the "very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory, while behind it there lies a second system which transforms the momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces" (538). He then designates the last of the systems at the

motor end as the “preconscious,” to indicate that the “excitatory processes occurring in it can enter consciousness without further impediment provided that certain other conditions are fulfilled: for instance, that they reach a certain degree of intensity.” The system that lies next to this last one is described as the “unconscious,” because “it has no access to consciousness except via the preconscious, in passing through which its excitatory process is obliged to submit to modifications” (541). Freud thus – and I will not go into the whole involved argument – locates the impetus to the construction of dreams in the unconscious, arguing that the path

... leading through the preconscious to consciousness is barred to the dream-thoughts during the daytime by the censorship imposed by resistance. During the night they are able to obtain access to consciousness; but the question arises as to how they do so and thanks to what modification. If what enabled the dream-thoughts to achieve this were the fact that at night there is a lowering of the resistance which guards the frontier between the unconscious and the preconscious, we should have dreams which were in the nature of ideas and which were without the hallucinatory quality in which we are at the moment interested ... The only way in which we can describe what happens in hallucinatory dreams is by saying that the excitation moves in a backward direction. Instead of being transmitted towards the motor end of the apparatus it moves towards the sensory end and finally reaches the perceptual system.

Dreams thus have a regressive character, and the transformation of thoughts into visual images may be the result of the

... attraction which memories couched in visual form and eager for revival bring to bear upon thoughts cut off from consciousness and struggling to find expression. On this view a dream might be described as *a substitute for an infantile scene modified by being transferred on to a recent experience*. The infantile scene is unable to bring about its own revival and has to be content with returning as a dream (546).²⁹

The pictorial representation Freud offers is a snare – the “snare of thingness,” to quote Paul Ricoeur³⁰ – but Ernst, whose basic inclination was to reify concepts associated with processes of the imagination (as exemplified by his alchemical motifs), would have found visually stimulating the representation (in a manner exceeding Freud’s own cautious attitude) of a series of planes corresponding to psychical localities, at varying distances from consciousness, on which are imprinted memory traces constituting modified infantile scenes, retrieved as dreams, hallucinations, daydreams, or screen memories. He would have found equally intriguing the notion of a resistance which limits free commerce between the two systems, the unconscious and the preconscious; in his visually determined conception, this would have implied identifying these planes as constituting partial barriers to sight that are probed by the inward eye (without fully revealing themselves).³¹ This conception of visual

analogies for the unknown or partially unknown layers within the mind might have been augmented by Freud's argument concerning the notion of the unconscious as presented in his 1915 essay "The Unconscious," in which he suggests that

... [a]nalysis shows that the individual latent mental processes inferred by us enjoy a high degree of independence, as though each had no connection with another, and knew nothing about any other. We must be prepared, it would appear, to assume the existence not only of a second consciousness in us, but of a third and fourth also, perhaps of an infinite series of states of consciousness, each and all unknown to us and to one another.³²

This is merely one stage in the argument, and Freud hastens to add that "what is proved is not a second consciousness in us, but the existence of certain mental operations lacking in the quality of consciousness" (121).³³ However, the notion of a series of states of consciousness might have been associated in Ernst's mind with other theories concerning the structure of the mental apparatus propounded in the context of studies of psychic phenomena and spiritualism conducted in the turn-of-the-century period by researchers such as F.W.H. Myers, Théodore Flournoy and Charles Richet. With Ernst's interest in the various exponents of psychological theory of the time, it would seem inevitable that, like many of the future Surrealists, he would have had at least a secondhand knowledge of Myers's theories, following their exposition by Théodore Flournoy.³⁴ In his book *Esprits et médiums: mélanges de métapsychique et de psychologie* (1911), Flournoy described Myers's notion of the subliminal self as follows:

Between our ordinary consciousness [the supraliminal] and our latent consciousness [the subliminal] there are perpetual changes and fluctuations along their border; the level of separation is not constant; the partition is not impervious; the threshold is not fixed between these parts of our being; there occur phenomena of osmosis from one to the other, or mingling, as between liquids of varying density, when the bottle is shaken ... constantly, also, messages are sent from our subliminal regions to our personal consciousness, carrying with them, in the most diverse forms (as sensory automatisms) contents of the most varied value – visual hallucinations, auditory hallucinations, submerged ideas, emotions, irrational impulses, etc.³⁵

These ideas were set forth by Myers in a series of articles published from 1892 on and in his unfinished book, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903), in which he defined the subliminal self in terms of a

... continuous subliminal chain of memory (or more chains than one) involving just that kind of individual and persistent revival of old impressions, and response to new ones, which we commonly call a Self – I find it permissible and convenient to speak of subliminal Selves, or more briefly of a subliminal Self.³⁶

Dreams, hypnosis, somnambulism, automatic writing and other psychological phenomena can only be understood and explained, Myers maintained, on the assumption that one's supraliminal stream of consciousness is continually being influenced and intruded upon by "uprushes" of submerged or subliminal streams of consciousness. Myers also posited a form of "gradations," that is, stages of subliminal faculty, below the level of conscious thought, in the "deeper strata of our being":

We may reach by artifice (that is to say) some subliminal faculty, and yet we may not be reaching any central or controlling judgment. We may be reaching centers which exercise over those subliminal faculties only a fragmentary sway; so that we shall have no reason for surprise if there be something dreamlike, something of bizarrerie or of incoherence, in the manifestation which our experiment evokes (116).

There is, indeed, some correlation between many of the ideas expounded by Myers and Ernst's pictorial concerns. Particularly pertinent in this respect is Myers's notion of the threshold of consciousness and the osmosis between the parts of our being that may be designated as "subliminal selves," and that may be conceived of as phases or layers of being. Equally significant is the associated concept of a "stream of consciousness" comprising the subliminal selves and the supraliminal self, with the subliminal selves forming chains of memories combining "old impressions, and response to new ones." These ideas, combined with Freud's topographical conception and its scheme of series of planes corresponding to psychical localities, are echoed in a striking manner in various manifestations of Ernst's layered depth conception. There are two works that appear to epitomize best some of the notions presented above. In the drawing *One Man Can Hide Another* (1923, Figure 4.2), Ernst used two different stencils of human figures – one with a raised leg, the other a running figure – placing three of them one behind the other in overlapping layers (or, rather, four layers since one plane is constituted by a bodiless foot). Additional complexity derives from the layering of the levels of pictorial representation associated with the figures – from the empty outline, to the outline filled with flat color, and the two upper layers in which the figures are seen as if probed, at different depths, by an X-ray machine to reveal what look like veins or nerves. The work has been interpreted in terms of the theme of the *Dioscouri* and with reference to Ernst's collaborations with Eluard or his relationship with Eluard and his wife Gala.³⁷ I see in it, rather, a very clear representation of psychic apparatus with its layers of "selves" whose varying "definition" reflects a probing from the conscious self to the less defined selves at the deeper, less known strata of the mind – in other words, a movement deeper into the primitive layers of infant memories. The "hiding" then is tantamount to the barriers to vision constituted by the different layers, representing the blocking of the movement back to the perceptual system

associated with the “infantile scene,” with this curtailment partially overcome in dreams.³⁸

A similar representation of the psychic apparatus with its layers of “selves” may be suggested, albeit in a form that strays somewhat from the planimetric and frontal conception of the layered depth, in *Pietà or Revolution by Night* (1923, Figure 4.3), which I mentioned earlier in relation to the notion of the inward-turned gaze. This painting, like most of the other works by Ernst to which I have been referring, has been subjected to a plethora of interpretations, with its three figures placed in a variety of dramatic roles. The *Pietà* motif deviates somewhat from its traditional trappings, with the mother replaced by a man with moustache and bowler hat – often identified with Ernst’s father – and the dead Christ by a young man in a trance-like or catatonic state, often identified as Ernst. The third figure, sketched on a wall, is that of a bearded man with a bandaged head. Most of the usually very involved interpretations, which cannot be presented here in detail, attempt to account for the reversal of the roles of the *Pietà* motif.³⁹ I propose a reading which does not necessarily discard these interpretations but rather complements them by placing them in the broader framework of mental space. The three figures appear in various states, referred to by Uwe Schneede in terms of “materialization or dematerialization.”⁴⁰ These include the line drawing on the wall, the simplified line drawing with fill colors (gray in the face and legs, the white shirt and the red pants) representing the young man, and the somewhat more developed figure of the kneeling man, with its modeling and shading produced by hatching. The three figures present to varying degrees a dematerialized, phantom-like appearance. The young man appears to be a flat cut-out figure lacking in volume.⁴¹ The figure of the kneeling man, despite the rather more elaborate illusionist shading, also appears to be quite flat (only the legs seem to be rendered more in the round); indeed, the hands are dematerialized to the extent that the fill color of the young man’s clothes is exposed through them. The three figures thus may represent three “selves” – or they may serve as “screens” for the figures dominating these “selves” – in different mnemonic layers in Ernst’s psychic apparatus, with these layers reflecting different levels of intensity of excitation, to go by the Freudian concept, that are pictorially manifested in their dematerialized states.

This then would account for the apparent reversal of roles, which is tantamount, in fact, to the fusion of the identity of the son with that of the father as well as with the mother hidden behind the figure of the father (as suggested by Legge). *Pietà* is often considered alongside de Chirico’s *The Child’s Brain*, in which, as I have suggested before, there is a merging of father and son in the figure of the poet-seer.⁴² I consider de Chirico’s *J’irai ... le chien de verre (I’ll Be There ... The Glass Dog)*, 1914, Figure 3.2) as another

painting with which Ernst's *Pietà* might be associated. As pointed out in Chapter 3, it displays an image of a torso that appears flattened despite its modeling and, next to it on a wall or panel, a drawn image of a mannequin-like figure of a man. Ernst may have perceived in de Chirico's painting, with which he would have been acquainted,⁴³ an allusion to a text published in 1919, in which de Chirico describes the "metaphysical aspect of things" by noting that

... every object has two aspects: one current one which we see nearly always ... and the other which is spectral and metaphysical and seen only by rare individuals in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction, just as certain hidden bodies formed of materials that are impenetrable to the sun's rays only appear under the power of artificial lights, which could, for example, be X-rays.⁴⁴

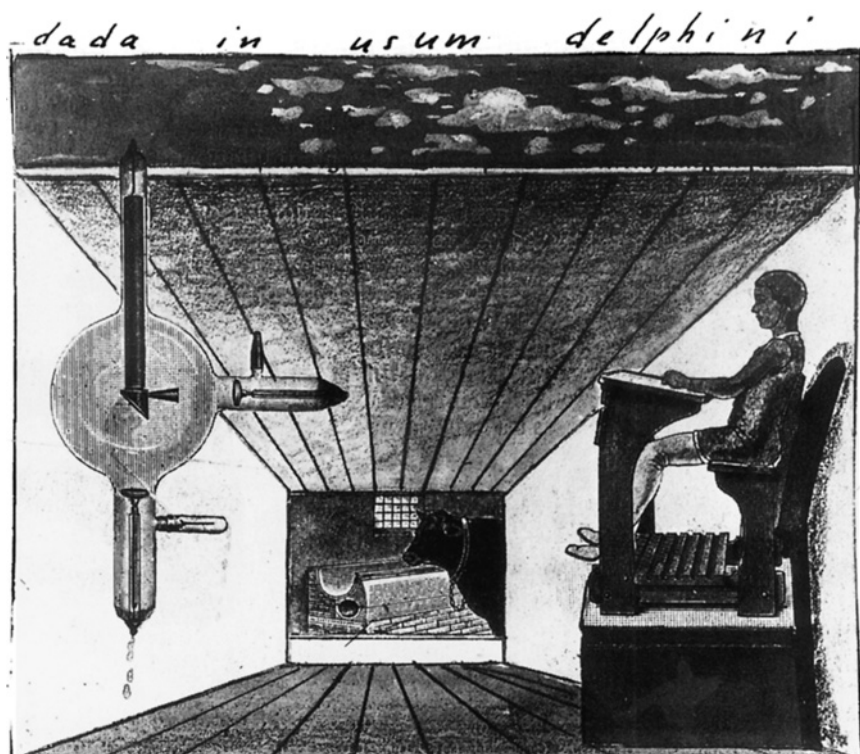
Ernst could easily have seen how this idea of a "spectral and metaphysical" aspect, translated into the Freudian context, would fit into his perceptions regarding the psychic apparatus, as given form in his own work.

It is significant that two of the three dematerialized figures inhabiting the space of *Pietà* are associated with walls – the brick wall echoed in the color and texture of the figure of the father, and the smoother wall on which appears the drawn figure of the bearded man. Brick walls or walls in general often appear in Ernst's work as illusionist representations of barriers evoking a sense of concealment, together with complementary suggestions of both liberation and ingress (often in the sense of penetration into a forbidden zone). Some of these manifestations can be briefly mentioned. One could include the small aperture in a wall that serves the voyeuristic witnesses in the painting-manifesto *The Virgin Spanking the Christ Child before Three Witnesses: André Breton, Paul Eluard and the Painter* (1926). The blindness of Saint Cecilia to the outside world – her act of creating by the power of interior vision – is evoked by her confinement within an enclosure made up of uneven blocks in which eye-like forms are inlaid (*Saint Cecilia (The Invisible Piano)*, 1923). The brick wall in *Oedipus Rex* encloses a place of confinement out of which jut the disembodied fingers that represent the liberated oedipal impulse together with its castrating implication. A hand comes out of an aperture in a wall in *At the First Limpid Words* (1923), one of the murals made by Ernst for Paul and Gala Eluard's house in Eaubonne. Associated with the figure of Gradiva in Freud's essay "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's 'Gradiva,'" – in this analysis of Jensen's "Pompeian fantasy," walls play a rather conspicuous role – this hand has been seen as a representation of the legs and pubic area of a nude woman, and, in its verticality, as a phallicized image.⁴⁵ My interest, however, is directed at the spatial implication of the wall, which, in the original location of this mural in the Eluards' bedroom, would have been seen alongside another wall depicted in the mural entitled *Natural History*, painted on an adjacent wall of the

bedroom.⁴⁶ Whereas in the first painting, the hand beckons the beholder into the hidden, perhaps forbidden, garden that is represented by artichoke-like plants, the other mural presents a view of the garden within this enclosure, with its somewhat threatening spiky plants. The quite inconsistent scale of the combined image of the two walls appears to retrace the ambiguities of the early collages and foreshadows the no less ambiguous spatial character of the collages of Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 têtes* (to which I turn in Chapter 8). To go back to *Pietà*, the walls might be seen as representing barriers to sight that are to be overcome by the elimination of normal sight, as represented by the closed eyes of the figure drawn on the wall and the young man's open eye that stares unseeingly into space – both displaying an inward-directed look – as well as by the half-closed eyes of the father. What they see or do not see is the forbidden sight associated with the oedipal situation. The situation then epitomizes Ernst's voyeuristic layered depth – a pictorial space that analogizes a probing through the layered barriers deeper into the domain of the forbidden sight of some repressed infantile scene, associated – as has been suggested by some interpretations of the painting, but that is applicable to Ernst's work of the 1920s as a whole – with the primal scene, or its fantasied representation.⁴⁷

Ernst's proscenium – picture plane and screen

A special case of the layered depth conception calls for mention here, partly because it also leads me to a consideration of the screen paradigm in Ernst's work. I refer in particular to two works done in 1920, the collage *Dada in usum delphini* (Figure 4.4) and the overpainting *The Master's Bedroom It's Worth Spending the Night There* (Figure 4.1). Both works emulate the spatial construction employed by de Chirico in 1914–15, where the tilted floor and the exaggerated foreshortening of the walls constitute a kind of a box-like arrangement or a stage that frames what in the back looks like a wall, a backdrop or window. I have noted the basic frontal orientation in Ernst's works of the early 1920s of the collage elements, or, in the overpaintings, of the various sections of the objects in the original illustration that have not been painted out. These objects, as I have maintained, are sometimes placed at different depths within the work while retaining their frontality, and, consequently, they display a distinct sense of spatial incongruity. In *Dada in usum delphini* these objects are the student at his desk, the X-ray tube with its erectile projection, and the cow. Arrayed in *The Master's Bedroom* are various animals, two seen against the back wall, as well as a bed and other pieces of furniture. Dada as a form of liberation is bowdlerized in *Dada in usum delphini*,⁴⁸ perhaps because the student, enclosed in a room away from



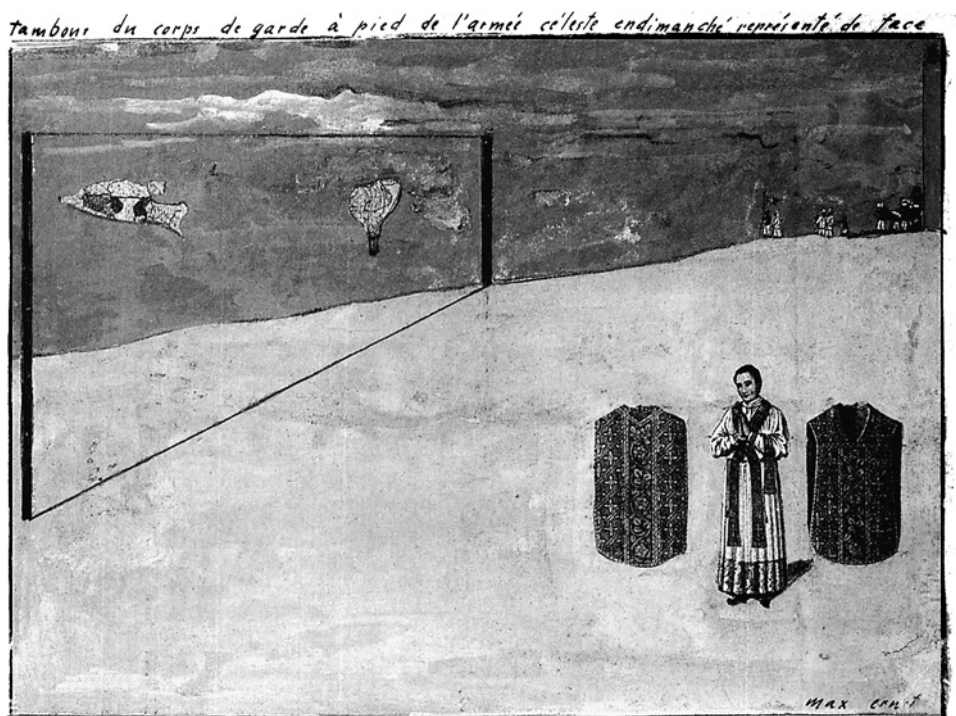
4.4 Max Ernst, *Dada in usum delphini*, c.1920

the open sky above, is exposed to the authority of the obscene-looking X-ray tube – a parental figure with a threatening phallic protuberance – with the haltered cow appearing in an analogous position. It could also be conjectured that the cow is a projection on the back wall because her space is not truly contiguous with that of the student. The back wall opening, that might be conceived of as a proscenium of sorts, lies parallel to another proscenium opening – to which the student and the X-ray tube appear to cling – marked by the separator between the room and the sky. The second proscenium opening seems to merge with the picture plane that constitutes – following a line of reasoning that I have already employed with regard to Feuillade’s films – the sole reality in a chain of frames *en abyme* and on which are conflated the various levels of reality represented by the planes that make up this layered depth. The picture plane is thus the “screen” (in the sense assigned to this concept before), which, to return to the Freudian scheme presented above, might be associated with the preconscious. In this scheme, the *Pcpt.* system receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace

of them – these are contained by the mnemonic “stations.” The layers then are the mnemonic elements which, in their modified form and as a result of a diminution in resistances (in hallucination or dream, for instance), impinge upon the sensitive screen associated with the preconscious and are then transmitted to consciousness. A similar scheme appears to be in effect in *The Master’s Bedroom*, although in this case the back wall in its role as a second proscenium opening remains blank. This work also differs in its materializing of the “screen” in a more tangible and perceptible form in the layer of gouache paint that, as in all overpaintings, blocks out some of the elements in the original illustration while letting others show through. What is particular about this paint layer is that it is laid unevenly and thinly enough so that its surface harbors very faint traces of the hidden images.⁴⁹

In this respect the work exemplifies a set of notions associated with Breton’s and Soupault’s image of the unsilvered glass or the two-way mirror, in terms of a reasoning proposed in Chapter 3. Ernst may have intuited much of what is implied by this perception of the painting’s surface (even though it is not at all certain that, by 1920, he would already have been acquainted with the notion of “la Glace sans tain,” as represented in *Les Champs magnétiques*). I suggest, then, that the gouache layer may have appeared to Ernst in its representational capacity as a surface on which are fused indistinct visual stimuli coming out of the depths of the mind with the more explicit images that might be associated with external reality. As such, the implications of this work are wide-ranging. It may be conceived of, again, in terms of the Freudian scheme, as a representation of the sensory inputs from the mnemonic layers of the psychic apparatus which submit to modifications on their way to consciousness. Furthermore, the “screen,” the layer of gouache paint is, in this case, the site of a dialectics of opacity and transparency, and as such it may embody the domain to be represented in a Surrealist work, as described by Ernst in the passage cited before from “What Is Surrealism?” – one extending “between the internal and external worlds.”⁵⁰

I believe that Ernst quite consistently investigated the notion of the screen as a central constituent in a chain of frames *en abyme* and in relation to the Freudian scheme presented above. I find some indication of his thought in this respect in *Drum of the Infantry of the Celestial Army Represented Abreast in Their Sunday Best* (Figure 4.5), another overpainting done probably in 1920. The original page from the teaching-aids catalogue is covered by paint to suggest a desert plateau – with only the images of a priest and some objects of religious significance not painted over – and an open sky in which hang two rather obscure forms that look like a fish and a balloon (parts of what was originally a map of Palestine). Painted in are two poles with connecting lines between them, above and below, that appear to frame a transparent



4.5 Max Ernst, *Drum of the Infantry of the Celestial Army in their Sunday Best Portrayed Frontally*, c.1920

glass panel, with the land and the sky extending uninterruptedly into it from beyond the frame. This arrangement might, on the other hand, also be perceived as a panel on which the land and sky and the objects hanging in the sky are painted. There is, however, an added ambiguity derived from the fact that, while the panel is placed in perspectival recession, the hanging objects appear frontally oriented (as in the original illustration). Here, again, the layer of paint that is identified with the surface of the work becomes associated with the screen, as a barrier that at the same time reveals and conceals what lies behind it.

Screen and skin – Ernst's frottage

I do not claim that Ernst was at all times fully cognizant of the full implication of the picture as window, modified by the concept of the screen, with its action of revealing and concealing, and with this action extending also to the layers

– windows, screens – stacked behind it (and that also partially merge into it). What I have suggested in the present analysis is that he would have been aware of the Freudian dimension of his spatial conception and that he would have actively pursued it in his work. This dimension may have gained impetus in Ernst's mind following the publication in 1923 of Freud's *The Ego and the Id*, with this having some bearing on Ernst's practice of frottage and grattage after 1925, and, perhaps more significantly, on the nature of self-probing and self-representation associated with the manner in which he introduced these techniques to his Surrealist friends.

In his theorizing in this study of the topographical structure of the ego, Freud described consciousness as the surface of the mental apparatus that is spatially the first one reached from the external world.⁵¹ Basing his discussion on ideas concerning the structure of the psychic apparatus introduced in *The Interpretation of Dreams* and "The Unconscious," Freud identifies the ego with what starts out from its nucleus in the system *Pcpt.* (perceptions that are both external and internal) and that begins by being *Pcs.* (preconscious). He calls the other part of the mind, into which the ego extends, and which behaves as though it were *Ucs.* (unconscious), the "id" (13).⁵² In Freud's construction, and the diagram accompanying it, the individual is a "psychical id, unknown and unconscious, upon whose surface rests the ego, developed from its nucleus the *Pcpt.* system" (14). The ego, as Freud further explains,

... is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world through the medium of the *Pcpt.-Cs.*; in a sense it is an extension of the surface-differentiation. Moreover, the ego seeks to bring the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality principle for the pleasure principle which reigns unrestrictedly in the id (15).

He then considers the formation of the ego and its differentiation in terms of bodily experiences, arguing that the ego as a psychical envelope derives from the bodily envelope, the skin: "A person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring. It is seen like any other object, but to the touch it yields two kinds of sensations, one of which may be equivalent to an internal perception" (15).

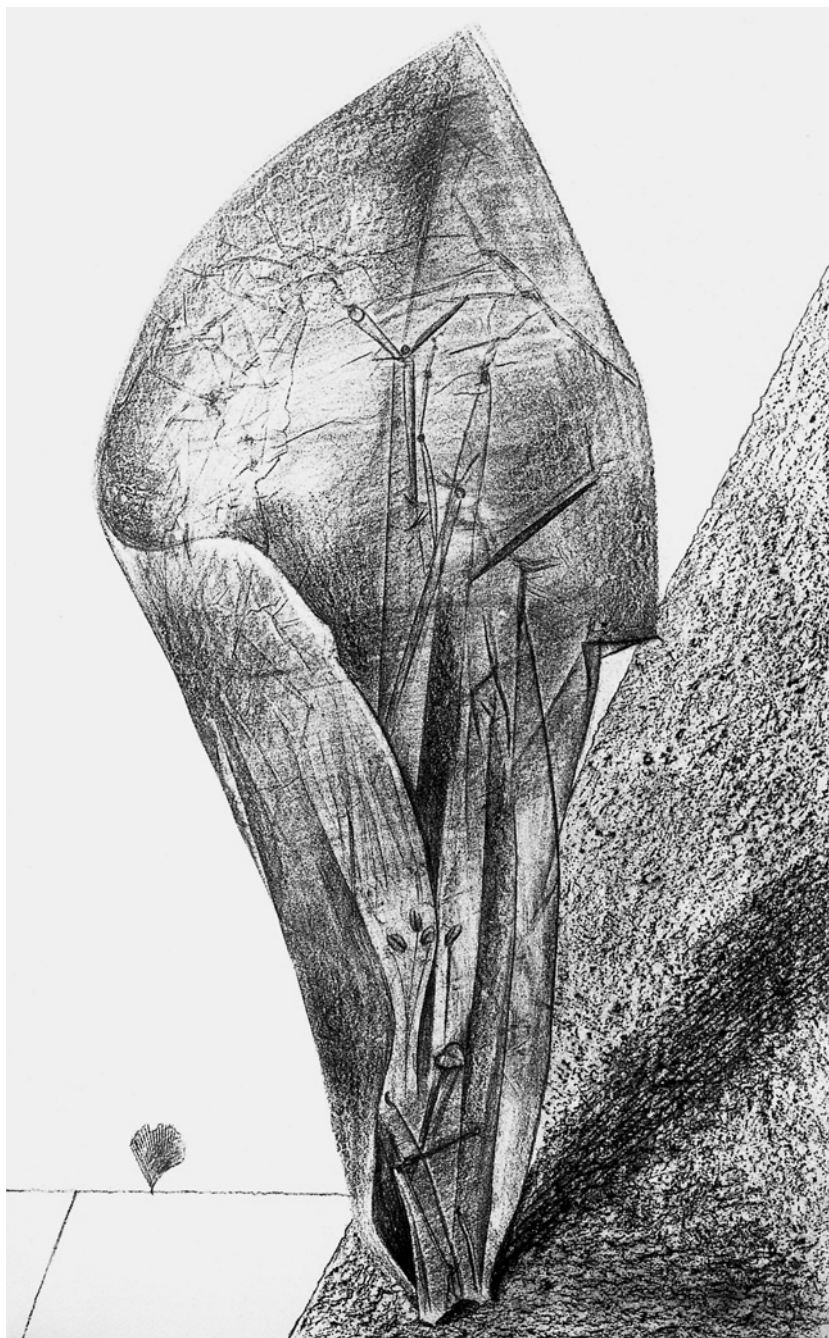
This view of the surface of the body – the skin, in fact – as the meeting place of both internal and external perceptions would have appealed to Ernst, particularly in light of a general proclivity on his part for the representation of motifs associated with the notion of skin. This pertains, to begin with, to the pictorial realization of skin as a layer that at times may appear tangible enough to be peeled off to reveal what lies underneath. That Ernst's interests lay in part in such notions is readily discernible in the many instances of *écorché* motifs, peeled layers and exposed internal organs found in the earliest collages and overpaintings, in which he made use of anatomical charts.⁵³

This is also apparent in a few of his photcollages in which the human body, presented as subsisting between the animate and the inanimate, shows only an empty outer armature.⁵⁴ In the light of what I proposed earlier concerning the notion of the screen and the related layered depth conception as Ernst's main formal tools for representing the structure of the mind, it would seem quite reasonable to see these bodily motifs of peeled layers and exposed organs as metaphorical representations of the skin in terms of the symbolic task assigned to it of containing the hidden space of the unconscious.

The metaphorical presence of skin in Ernst, particularly as yet another manifestation of the screen paradigm, gains in depth and significance in relation to the technique of frottage, especially in the light of his own intuitive perceptions. These were expressed in a text entitled "Visions de demi-sommeil" ("Visions of Half-Sleep"), published in *La Révolution surréaliste* 9–10 in October 1927 (p. 7).⁵⁵ It is a text that fits well enough Freud's definition of "screen memory," with Ernst seeing himself at an age between 5 and 7 lying in bed and looking at the bedpost panel on which, and in front of which, the action of the "screen memory" takes place. The panel is "crudely painted with large black strokes on a red background, representing false mahogany and provoking associations of organic forms"; in front of it "a black and gleaming man makes slow, comical, and, according to my memories of a later period, joyously obscene gestures. This funny man wears my father's turned-up moustaches."⁵⁶ Breathing loudly, the man uses a crayon and "hastily traces the black lines on the false mahogany. Quickly, he gives it some new, surprising, and despicable forms. He exaggerates the resemblance to ferocious or vicious animals to such a point that they come alive, inspiring me with horror and anguish." He gathers up these creations in a vase that he paints in space. The vase, spinning, becomes a top and the crayon turns into a whip. The man then "wields the whip with all his might and accompanies his movements with terrible gasps of breath, like the blasts of an enormous, enraged steam engine." Ernst then reveals the meaning of this "vision of half-sleep" by recounting how a "precise memory" of this vision arose in him at the "age of puberty, while seriously examining the question of how my father must have comported himself on the night of my conception ..." The evocation of the "terrible gasps of breath," accompanying the movements of the man, and the association in later life of this vision of half-sleep with parental intercourse, clearly point to this text as an account of sexual intercourse that constitutes a screen memory concealing an earlier memory, or, more probably, a fantasy of the primal scene.⁵⁷ This dream may be further linked to Freud's case of the "Wolf Man," with its screen memory in which the child sitting in front of an open window observes seven wolves staring at him, motionless in a tree.⁵⁸ In Freud's construction, the wolves represent the child's father, and the dream conceals the child's repressed memory of actually observing intercourse

between his parents.⁵⁹ However, as cogently noted by Elizabeth Legge, Ernst's dream-hallucination does not resemble a recollection of the primal scene; she suggests, rather, that Ernst had constructed this dream, recalled in puberty, as a masturbatory fantasy, drawing on one of Freud's dream analyses in which a whip is an allusion to masturbation.⁶⁰ Such a forbidden activity, Freud notes, is projected onto the father, and this is clearly the case in Ernst's fantasy. What is important to note is that the masturbation fantasy is associated with the father figure's artistic activity, one that reflects, as if in a distorting mirror, Ernst's own methods of frottage and grattage (hence the crude imitation of wood grain and the grotesque image of the creative act itself). In "Beyond Painting" Ernst clearly linked his discovery of frottage to this childhood memory, "in the course of which a false mahogany panel facing my bed played this role of optical *provocateur* in a vision of near-sleep," with this prompting him to assist his "hallucinatory faculties" by covering the floorboards with sheets of paper and rubbing them so as to bring out the textured grain (Lippard 120–121; *Ecritures* 242). Fully aware, one would imagine, of the masturbatory dimension of this "vision of half-sleep," Ernst would not have remained oblivious to a possible association of the physical aspect of the rubbing activity with masturbation, all the more so since the resulting hallucinatory succession of images came "with the persistence and rapidity of amorous memories."⁶¹ This would have also implied an equation of the surface of the frottage with skin, the skin being, of course, the medium of such masturbatory touching.

It is in the light of this perception of Ernst's method that his overpainting *The Master's Bedroom* (1920) returns to my discussion. There are some formal considerations that may link the later text with the early work, and, indeed, Ernst may have had in mind the overpainting while describing the vision of half-sleep and introducing into it various psychoanalytical associations. The scenic effect alluded to in Ernst's text, consisting of a head-on view of the panel, with its imitation of the grain of mahogany, in front of which the dramatic action involving the comical figure of the father takes place, is analogous to the "stage" depicted in *The Master's Bedroom*. With its immobile animals and the window opposite the bed, *The Master's Bedroom*, like the "Vision of Half-Sleep," appears to evoke the primal scene in Freud's case of the "Wolf Man." Rosalind Krauss has noted this similarity by referring to the bed and window on the right-hand side of the work (Krauss, *Optical Unconscious* 58ff.). I would rather see the open window of the Wolf Man's dream as covering the whole surface of Ernst's work – as being, in fact, the equivalent of Breton's window in its capacity of a "glace sans tain." There is no great need, however, to conjure up the Wolf Man's dream in order to suggest, as I do now, that the uneven and visually quite suggestive layer of paint in the overpainting could have played a role similar to that of the textures formed later in the frottage process, by serving as an "optical *provocateur*" that prompts the painter "to pick out and



4.6 Max Ernst, *She Guards her Secret*, 1925. *Histoire Naturelle*, Plate 10

project that which sees itself in him" (Max Ernst: *Beyond Painting* 8; *Ecritures* 244). The early overpainting, then, with the whole range of underlying qualities associated with the concept of a two-way mirror, complements Ernst's later text, with its suggestions concerning the equation of the surface of the frottage with the notion of skin. The picture within a picture in the first plate of Ernst's portfolio of frottages *Histoire naturelle* (1925) is akin to the "stage" arrangement with its back wall in *The Master's Bedroom* (as well as other earlier collages and overpaintings).⁶² The gouache layer in the overpainting, spreading over the greater part of the surface, and the frottage texture in the *Histoire naturelle* plate that extends uninterruptedly from the picture shown within to the surface surrounding it, both assert the surface in its role of screen and skin. The skin indeed constitutes a continuous presence in Ernst's frottages in the web of delicate lines that branch out, disappear and come up again; it seems as though the thin, almost translucent layer registers a map of nerves and blood vessels on its surface (Plate 10 in the original, reproduced here as Figure 4.6); the texture of a leaf, when applied to some imaginary creature, attains the diaphanous quality of an insect's wing (Plate 24 in the original). Ernst's intuitive perception of the "skin" of painting as a sensitive epidermal layer that serves as an interface for internal stimuli and external projections – what the artist sees within himself and the external effect of the wooden floor or the other textures used in the frottage process – comes quite close to the conception underlying Miró's and Masson's "epidermal" concerns as these will be introduced further on in this study.

Notes

1. For an exposition of de Chirico's works in terms of the Freudian notion of the Uncanny, see Clair, "De la métaphysique à l'inquiétante étrangeté," in *Malinconia: Motifs saturniens*.
2. In an essay (1941) written close to twenty years after the advent of Surrealism, Breton noted de Chirico's almost universal appeal to artists associated with the Movement: "But the paintings accomplished by Chirico before 1918 are the only ones to have won the unanimous approval of the most exigent and skeptical members of the younger generation during these last twenty years. They alone among the artistic output of that period have retained a unique prestige, and, judging by the gift they possess of rallying around them the least conformist minds and those most divided in opinion, it is evident that their influence remains as powerful as ever and that their career has only just begun" (*SP* 63).
3. Rubin, "De Chirico and Modernism," 58.
4. I am citing Laura Rosenstock's article, which presents, in most other respects, a more accurate reading of de Chirico's space. See "De Chirico's Influence on the Surrealists" 127.
5. De Chirico was often considered to be a modern Uccello. The critic Ardengo Soffici, cited in 1914 by Apollinaire, observed that de Chirico was "a kind of Paolo Uccello in love with his divine perspective," but he also emphasized that de Chirico was "above all, an absolutely modern painter." See Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art* 422. The comparison of de Chirico with Uccello is, indeed, quite telling, not so much because of the use of perspective; I would suggest, rather, that Uccello exhibits at times the same separation of foreground from background space. Significantly enough, Breton chose one of the panels of *The Battle of San Romano* (Louvre) as an illustration for

Le Surréalisme et la peinture. What distinguishes this particular panel is the relative lack of spatial clarity of the dense mass of horses and horsemen that results in a conspicuous impression of surface orchestration of forms.

6. Lippard, "Dada into Surrealism: Max Ernst" 66.
7. Ernst, "Notes pour une biographie," in *Ecritures* 31.
8. The article by Laura Rosenstock cited above presents a thorough survey of de Chirico's influence.
9. Such spatial conception, as noted previously, is one of the things that endeared Uccello to Breton and his friends. There is no way of telling whether in 1919 Ernst was familiar with Uccello's paintings; however, considering that de Chirico had already been associated with Uccello by Apollinaire and in view of the current reputation of Uccello among the Surrealists, it is quite conceivable that at some point in the early 1920s Uccello would have been on Ernst's mind. Be this as it may, the spatial conception of *Resurrection of the Flesh* persists in many of the overpaintings and collages in the coming years.
10. Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 50. Ernst's predilection for the landscape format is a mark of his deep roots in the German romantic tradition as exemplified primarily by Caspar David Friedrich. For an extensive treatment of this affinity with German Romanticism, see Maur, "Max Ernst and Romanticism."
11. Breton, "Max Ernst," *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 60; *OC I* 245.
12. *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting* 13; Ernst, *Ecritures* 253.
13. Commenting on the Surrealist collage, Elza Adamowicz notes that the "surrealists are attracted by images already cut off from their original cultural space, images which are defunct or devalued, past or exotic, ephemera whose meanings are eroded through distance, whether topographical, historical, ethnographic or utilitarian." Werner Spies similarly refers to the "aura of dissociation" attached to the collage elements; these offer either a "recognizable original context or evocative echoes and vibrations of some original context." When seeing the collage, Spies writes, one should sense that these elements have been torn, dissociated, from their contexts, even without knowing what these contexts were. See Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* 38; Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 25. See also the detailed commentary on the Surrealist "outmoded" – that combines considerations of the Freudian notion of the Uncanny with Walter Benjamin's theory of the outmoded – presented in Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*.
14. "Notice to the Reader of *The Hundred Headless Woman*," *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 46–7; *OC II* 304.
15. The basic element of the "overpainting" was an un-cut-up illustration, taken from a commercial catalogue or from one of Ernst's favorite sources, the teaching-aids catalogue *Bibliotheca Paedagogica* (1914). Parts of this sheet were concealed by an additional layer of watercolor or gouache, with the remaining images modified through the addition of forms and lines (and at times also the pasting of other collage elements). I see no need in the present discussion to go into all the permutations of collage in Ernst's work, and it is enough to note the use of various materials and textures that assert themselves as spatially distinct layers lying within the spatial recession or "depth" of the collage, or, rather, formulating a sense of this recession. For an exhaustive (at times, truth be said, quite exhausting) survey of the various forms, techniques and processes of Ernst's collages, see Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*.
16. "Notes pour une biographie," *Ecritures* 31. The text in *Ecritures* is translated from *Max Ernst*, exhibition catalogue, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, 1963.
17. I have chosen at this point to quote the English translation by Lippard because it is more accurate than the one in *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting*. See Max Ernst, "Beyond Painting," in Lippard (ed.), *Surrealists on Art* 128. See also *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting* 14; *Ecritures* 258–9.
18. Such is, for instance, the perception of great depth formed by the various textured fragments of photographs and cut-out figures hovering in space above a dark indeterminate ground (in fact, an aerial photograph) in *Massacre of the Innocents* (c.1920). It seems to me that even in the photographic enlargements of photocollages (especially the FaTaGaGa series done in collaboration with Arp), intended by Ernst to be reproduced so as to "hide the seams," the layering is still quite evident. Ernst's purpose was to eliminate the process of creation of the collage, but, I should add, without necessarily eliminating the structuring principle underlying the resulting image. See Ernst's letter to Tristan Tzara in which he asks Tzara to "show the engraver how to hide the seams in the reproductions of the pasted pieces (so as to keep the Fatagaga secret a secret)." Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 271.

19. A well-known example would be *Katharina Ondulata* (1920), in which the various wallpaper elements are spatially defined by the lines marking their borders.
20. Ernst's collages for Eluard's *Répétitions* (1922), as well as the collages prepared for their collaborative book *Les Malheurs des immortels* (1922), include many illustrations of interior spaces or rooms, defined by back walls and lateral wings.
21. See Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources*; M.E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*. A useful summary of these interpretive approaches is given in Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism*.
22. James Thrall Soby believes that this is an image of the artist's father, "motivated by childhood fears of parental authority." He also cites Robert Melville's comment that the eyes are closed "for the simple reason that the child (de Chirico) would not dare to look if they were open." This, however, seems to contradict another view, with which I tend to concur, that the image represents an inward-turned gaze, and, further, that it is precisely this perception of the motif to which Ernst responded. See Soby, *Giorgio de Chirico* 74–5.
23. The motifs of closed eyes and blindness are treated quite extensively by Schneede, "Sightless Vision: Notes on the Iconography of Surrealism." See also Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 112–113.
24. "What Is Surrealism?" in Lippard, *Surrealists on Art* 135–6; *Ecritures* 232.
25. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 341.
26. The pitfalls lying in wait for anyone who attempts to interpret symbolism in Ernst's paintings based on models in Freud's writings are looked into by quite a few Ernst scholars. I should single out Elizabeth Legge's study *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources*. There are also some useful comments on this issue in Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* 134ff.
27. I see a connection between my approach and that adopted by Charlotte Stokes in her article "Collage as Jokework." Stokes proposes that Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* was more helpful in providing Ernst with structural models than *The Interpretation of Dreams* (199). Focusing on Ernst's painting *Oedipus Rex* (1922), Stokes argues that it consists of a catalogue of Freud's joke-making devices (such as puns and juxtapositions) that Ernst has translated into visual mechanisms. In assigning greater importance to form rather than subject, Ernst follows Freud who has written in *Jokes* that humor resides in the form of the joke as well as in the subject. Stokes sees the entire painting as a "pictorial allegory of the repression and release found in Freud's exercise of joke-making" (201). The wall in *Oedipus* is "an apt representation of social and personal suppression of neutral and socially unacceptable feeling" while "the window is, like the joke, the hole punched in this wall of resistance" unexpectedly releasing feelings ... (201). I agree with Stokes about the importance of form in Ernst's work; I lay greater weight, however, on spatial form which, in my reading, informs the content; consequently, I differ with Stokes in assigning greater importance to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where I find spatial constructs of the kind that would have appealed to Ernst.
28. I should emphasize that I do not wish to imply that Ernst's work directly illustrates the theory but, rather, that it reflects some deeper ingrained concerns of Ernst's – a structure of thought, so to speak – that echo what had been garnered in his mind after years of exposure to Freud's writings as well as to other psychological works. For details concerning Ernst's exposure to Freud, see Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* (Chapter 1). See also Spies (ed.), *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* 33–5; Malcolm Gee, "Max Ernst, God, and the Revolution by Night."
29. Freud developed further these ideas concerning repression and the conditions under which mental acts pass from the unconscious into consciousness in his 1915 essay "The Unconscious."
30. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* 105.
31. Freud suggests such a view of the "essential nature" of consciousness: "we see the process of a thing becoming conscious as a specific psychical act ... and we regard consciousness as a sense organ which perceives data that arise elsewhere" (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 144).
32. Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious" (1915), in Freud, *General Psychological Theory: Papers on Metapsychology* 120.
33. In the article "The Question of Lay Analysis," which appeared translated into French in *La Révolution surréaliste* 9–10, pp. 25–32, Freud warns us not to confuse the unconscious with the subconscious. As noted in the Introduction, the frequently used expression "depths of the unconscious" indicates the more common, and not quite accurate, view of the unconscious

– one that probably had more impact on the Surrealists than Freud's careful characterizing of the unconscious. The Surrealists tended to overlook the true sense of the perception of the unconscious as a psychical locality and adopted a view often held by parapsychologists concerning the unconscious as a hidden second self.

34. In later years, Breton, while denying the tenets of spiritualism, referred quite warmly to those psychologists whose work managed "to fit together, to combine with my other ways of seeing, thanks to my enthusiastic admiration for Freud, which has never left me." Breton, *Conversations* 60; *Entretiens* (1913–1952) 76. In "The Automatic Message" (1933), Breton extolled Myers, "who predated Freud, and who, in an entirely new and fascinating context, later enabled Théodore Flournoy to conduct his admirable explorations," mostly geared to "determine the precise constitution of the subliminal." *Break of Day* (*Point du jour*) 129; *OC II* 379. An extensive consideration of the place of Myers' ideas in Breton's thought is offered in Jean Starobinski's seminal essay "Freud, Breton, Myers." This essay is one of a few studies aiming to show the primacy of Myers or Janet in the elaboration of the notion of psychic automatism. Starobinski's contention concerning the influence of Myers on Breton in the early stages of the elaboration of the Surrealist theory, leading to the *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924, is refuted by Marguerite Bonnet who argues that Breton could have become acquainted with Myers at the very earliest in 1924, through a reference in *Etudes et réflexions d'un psychiste*, a French translation of William James. See Bonnet, *André Breton* 104ff. See also Hubert, "Autour d'un carnet d'André Breton (1920–1921)" 137ff; Alexandrian, *Le Surrealisme et le rêve* 77ff.
35. Quoted by Sonu Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène" xvi.
36. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* 26. For a balanced response to Myers's achievement as well as a thorough history of Myers's activity in the Sidgwick group and the Society for Psychical Research, see Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research*.
37. The title, as Ernst told Spies, came from a sign found in train stations saying "Attention, un train en peut cacher un autre" ("Attention, one train can conceal another"). Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 117. As noted by Camfield, Soupault used a similar phrase in a review of Eluard and Ernst's *Les Malheurs des immortels*: "There one hides behind the other, and the other conceals himself behind his collaborator" (Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* 133). For an extensive discussion of the Dioscuri theme, see Chapter 4 of Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources*.
38. The painting *Man Shall Know Nothing of This* (1923) presents an analogous vision of "hiding," this time using cosmological motifs of solar or lunar eclipse. The alchemical allusions combined with their psychoanalytical implications have been amply dealt with in Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, and Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources*.
39. Malcolm Gee argues that Ernst "based his composition on a detailed understanding of the relation posited by Freud between dream images and latent material, and that the 'message' hidden in this way in the picture concerns his own problematic childhood" (Gee 86). He suggests then that the painting, showing Max Ernst "in the lascivious embrace of his father" (88), represents an inverted oedipal pattern. "The 'message' of the painting, therefore – that Ernst 'desired' his father as well as hating him" (89) – is further augmented, in Gee's analysis, in the light of Freud's case history of "The Wolf Man," first published in 1918, which offers many similarities with the situation presented in Ernst's painting. Elizabeth Legge argues that, if the central meaning of the painting is an oedipal ambivalence toward the father, then the painting's quite recognizable figures of both father and son make the proposed reliance of the painting on Freudian dreamwork mechanism quite problematic, since there is no masking of the situations and identities involved (Legge 59). She suggests one substitution in the painting, that of the father for the mother, and further relates the painting to various childhood situations, with the young man, Ernst himself, identified with the visionary power of the insane. The last point also accounts for the "transparent" outline figure on the wall in its role as an invisible spectator in a paranoid delusion, and Legge also notes that the young man's posture recalls illustrations of catatonic patients in Kraepelin's psychiatric treatise on dementia praecox.
40. Uwe Schneede, who rejects the "compulsively psychoanalytical interpretations" presented above, suggests instead that the underlying theme of the picture is art itself, with the different states of representation of these figures referring to the three artistic genres of painting, sculpture and drawing. While I too refer to these states of pictorial definition, I find his argument to be excessively reductive. See Schneede, "Sightless Vision" 351.
41. Contrary to Schneede's supposition, this figure certainly cannot represent the genre of sculpture.
42. There is some resemblance between the two "fathers," especially in the downward and complacent look and the half-closed eyes. The bearded man drawn on the wall might also be

associated with a father figure, but I confess I cannot account for his bandaged head. I find Gee's suggestion that this is a representation of Freud somewhat facile; nor do I concur with Schneede's hypothesis that it may refer to Apollinaire's head injury. It may reflect some hidden association of Ernst's, perhaps as an oblique reference to mental injury associated with a father figure.

43. The painting was acquired by Breton in the early 1920s and was inserted in Breton's text "Lettre aux voyantes" in *La Révolution surréaliste* 5 (15 October 1925) 21.
44. Giorgio de Chirico, "On Metaphysical Art," in Massimo Carrà (ed.), *Metaphysical Art* 89.
45. For the Eaubonne murals, and particularly *At the First Clear Word*, see Chapter 4 in Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources*; Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* 139–47; Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* 67–8.
46. For a photograph of these murals in the Eluards' bedroom prior to their removal in 1967, see Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* 145.
47. The motif of the wall might be considered in the light of Bertram Lewin's hypothesis of the dream screen, to which I referred before, however removed it is in time from the period of Ernst's work that is under consideration here. See Chapter 1 for Lewin's theory of the dream screen and for a brief reference to the refutation of its application to film theory, as well as criticism of his interpretation of the dream screen as the hallucinatory representation of the mother's breast during breast-feeding before the infant goes to sleep. Ernst obviously would have been completely unaware of any such theory (most of Lewin's sources also belong to the 1930s or later); also, I do not see any need to apply to Ernst Lewin's interpretation of the dream screen as a representation of the mother's breast (although it would be tempting to consider in this light some of the "close-ups" of the white figures in Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 têtes*, to be considered in Chapter 8). In a later article, however, Lewin provides some examples of the dream screen that seem to parallel various "screens" and screening devices found in Ernst's work. Lewin notes that the dream screen may come to be represented by a wall, or by some similar object such as a blackboard; he also notes the frequency with which such representations appear in dreams that have to do with the primal scene, "doubtless expressing the wish of the dreamer to preserve sleep throughout the duration of parental coitus." However, in Ernst's case the purpose of Lewin's dream screen is somewhat reversed; Ernst recreates the window opening to what lies behind as a means of representing a continuously deflated desire to look behind the "wall" into the forbidden zone. See Lewin, "Reconsideration of the Dream Screen" 187–9.
48. Used a few times by Freud, the expression "in usum delphini" means "for the use of the Dauphin" – in reference to an edition of the classics prepared for his son by order of Louis XIV. See note in Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 102.
49. Rosalind Krauss is the first, I believe, to have drawn attention to this particular quality of *The Master's Bedroom*. I owe a great deal to her reading of this work, although some of my conclusions follow a different route. Krauss considers the visual model presented by this work in terms of Freud's notion of the "mystic writing pad," as an analogy to the *Pcpt.-Cs.* system. In this contraption, the top sheet retains visible marks as long as it is in contact with an underlying slab of wax; once separated from it, the marks disappear but are retained by the wax. Following my earlier line of reasoning, I propose rather an analogy with the two-way mirror. See *The Optical Unconscious* 53–8.
50. In "Beyond Painting" Ernst, following Rimbaud's "Lettre du voyant," similarly defines the role of the painter as being geared to projecting "that which sees itself in him," with this again setting up a dialectic of the internal and external. See *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting* 8; *Ecritures* 244.
51. Freud, *The Ego and the Id* 9.
52. It has often been noted that the correct translation of these terms, the ego and the id, should be "I" and "it." I will retain, however, the terminology of the translation I have been using.
53. Such images might be found, for instance, in *Young Man Burdened with a Flowering Faggot*, c.1920; *The Somnambulist Elevator*, 1920; *The Horse, he's a Little Sick*, c.1920; *Stratified Rocks, Nature's Gift of Geiss Lava Icelandic Moss*, c.1920; *The Word*, 1921.
54. For example, his 1920 *Self-Portrait*, *The Punching Ball or the Immortality of Buonarroti*; the FaTaGaGa collage *Here Everything Is Still Floating*, 1920; *Santa Conversazione*, c.1921. The empty body interiors hinted at in some of the photocollages (for example, *The Anatomy (The School-Prepared Anatomy)*, 1921) disclose a related development, leading to motifs of shell-like hollowed-out bodies or apertures carved into the body, which, at times, turn the outer layer of the body into a thick armature. This motif has its most developed form in paintings such as *Dada Gauguin* (1920) and

Woman, Old Man, and Flower (1924). At times, the bodies are enclosed within a second “skin” in the form of a shell-like armature, as in *Long Live Love* or *Charming Countryside* (1923) and *Saint Cecilia (The Invisible Piano)* (1923). This motif, perhaps derived from related motifs in de Chirico, has been interpreted as symbolizing “in a concrete format the relationship between the inner and outer consciousness.” See Rosenstock, “De Chirico’s Influence on the Surrealists” 116. I tend to see it as another embodiment of Ernst’s conception of the psychic apparatus; this time, however, rather than informing the spatial conception of the work as a whole, it is manifested in the human form itself in a shell-like shape or as enclosed within a shell.

55. This text comprises the first few paragraphs of Ernst’s essay “Au-delà de la peinture” (“Beyond Painting”), that appeared first in *Cahiers d’art* 6–7 (1937).
56. Lippard (ed.), *Surrealists on Art* 118–119. I again quote the English translation by Lippard rather than the one in *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting*. It should be noted that in the two translations, the sentence before last reads respectively “according to my memories of a time long past” and “memories of a very obscure epoch,” whereas the original refers to a “far later period,” which also fits better the notion of “screen memory.” For the French version of this text as later incorporated in “Au-delà de la peinture,” see *Écritures* 237–9.
57. Ernst hints at this possibility in the later version of the text. In the earlier version he says that, since that day at the age of puberty, “I have been unable to get rid of a clearly unfavorable impression of my father’s conduct on the occasion of my conception.” To this he added later, “a totally gratuitous impression in any case, perhaps very unjust, but, on reflection ...” In a later text, “Notes for a Biography” (1963), Ernst referred to this vision as an hallucination caused by fever brought about by measles. “Notes pour une biographie,” *Écritures* 16. Dalí must have had Ernst’s “vision of half-sleep” in mind when he produced his own, far more oblique, evocation of parental intercourse in a section of his poem “L’amour et la mémoire” (1931). The poem evokes a vision of William Tell climbing a tree, a loaf of bread in a cloth girdle hanging from his teeth. The text emphasizes his “jerky and convulsive contractions” that are quite unlike the “more rhythmical and dignified contractions” that might be accomplished with more practice. The laborious climb is concluded with Tell, “the eyes angry and bloodshot / the nether lip gnawed and bleeding,” placing the bread in the midst of a nest. See Dalí, *Collected Writings* 169–72. Screen memories are defined by Freud in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* as memories that correspond to fantasies of what had never happened; they represent, rather, what the patient fears or wishes might happen, with this repressed material emerging again only in the course of analysis. See Chapter 4 in Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (standard edition), vol. 6 (London: Hogarth Press, 1960).
58. For a very thorough analysis of this image, as recreated in a famous drawing made by the Wolf Man in the course of his analysis, see Davis, *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves*.
59. Malcolm Gee presents a very detailed and quite intriguing analysis of a possible connection between Freud’s case of the “Wolf Man” and Ernst’s text. See “Max Ernst, God, and the Revolution by Night.” For the case history, see Freud, “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis” (1918), in *Three Case Histories*.
60. Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* 6–7. Freud refers to the whip in this capacity in his analysis of the “Bismarck” dream in which he notes that the “fact that the dreamer took the whip in his hand was a clear allusion to masturbation, though the reference was not, of course, to the dreamer’s contemporary circumstances but to childish desires in the remote past.” *The Interpretation of Dreams* 380.
61. “It is a familiar fact that masturbation, though a single and uniform action, accompanies the most various forms of sexual phantasying,” Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 309.
62. At times, the box-like or stage construction is realized in full in the frottage, as, for example, in Plate 19 of *Histoire naturelle*.

Magritte's layered depth

Magritte's "Surrealist mystery"

As we saw in the last chapter, de Chirico's unique conjoining of shallow foreground space and a recessive, often layered, depth appealed to quite a few Surrealist artists, as offering ample scope for the expression of the new Surrealist mood and vision. De Chirico's example was also central to Breton's view of painting as conveyor of mystery, or, rather, as subsuming mystery in its very form and mode of visual communication. This mystery, Breton thought, was destined never to be fully exhausted, since the Marvelous could only be intimated by what remained hidden from view. Magritte, more persuasively than any other Surrealist artist, strove to engage this dimension of mystery as a central motivation in his endeavors. Magritte's work is not central to developments on the Parisian Surrealist scene during the greater part of the 1920s; nevertheless, it may throw much light on some of the issues with which I am concerned, especially with regard to the screen and layered depth conception in relation to the idea of mystery as a dominant structuring principle. The word "mystery," often used by Magritte, especially in later years, might be associated with de Chirico's "enigma,"¹ notwithstanding the different meanings these notions held for the two. It might be further kept in mind that the meaning the word "mystery" presented to Magritte shifted somewhat over the years, and that the notion itself figured in his writings only in the late 1930s.² The scarcity of references to mystery in the early texts does not mean, however, that mystery was not on Magritte's mind; on the contrary, in the coming discussion I shall attempt to show that mystery was essential to his conception in the latter half of the 1920s. I also suggest that the later statements on mystery may be seen as illuminating the nature of the earlier work, in particular its spatial conception. While insisting throughout his later career that mystery – what he at times refers to as "Surrealist mystery" – is evoked by bringing together in a certain manner

the known figures of the visible world,³ Magritte also hinted that the crux of his investigation of this notion is the distinction between the invisible and the hidden. Magritte was quite removed from the Surrealist “temptation” of the Beyond, especially as this evolved in the 1930s following Breton’s call in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929) for the “occultation of Surrealism.” He was somewhat closer in this respect to the attitude expressed by Breton in a passage in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, in which Breton describes, not without some admiration, de Chirico’s “ability” to determine, with the help of a pocket-mirror, that a child they – Breton, Aragon and de Chirico himself – saw selling flowers in a café was in fact a ghost.⁴ This contradictory attitude, which might be called credulous incredulity with regard to the unknown, is quite close to Magritte’s way of looking at the world; the only difference is that he has little need for ghosts or any other metaphysical trappings. He can maintain that

Mystery is there because the poetic image has a reality. Because the “inspired thought” imagines an order that unites the figures of the visible, the poetic image has the same genre of reality as that of the universe. Why? Because it ought to respond to an interest we naturally have in the unknown. When one thinks “universe”, it’s the unknown one thinks of – its reality is unknown ... Thus, I make – with known things – the unknown.⁵

The mystery subsumed in the unknown might be associated with what is hidden and with what is invisible; whereas in his later career Magritte seems to have placed the burden on invisibility, in the 1920s he was more concerned with the hidden unknown. “An unknown being at the bottom of the sea, this is not the invisible, but the visible that is hidden,” he says, adding later that “everything we see hides another thing, we always wish to see what is hidden by what we see.”⁶ While these ideas were expressed with reference to the 1964 painting *The Son of Man* (*Le Fils de l’homme*), in which an apple hides the face of a bowler-hatted man, it is equally applicable to Magritte’s spatial conception in the 1920s.

De Chirico’s question “What lies beyond?” is a primary consideration (although Magritte does not phrase it as such), precisely because an answer is never given. The mystery remains intact, the unknown remains an unknown. At times, the unknown is evoked as a frame enclosing a dark void, often in conjunction with a lighted space or an open sky.⁷ More often, especially in the 1920s, the unknown is spatially intimated behind surfaces or planes lying within the pictorial space, at times parallel to the picture plane. Such a spatial conception, while owing much to his having seen late in 1923 a reproduction of de Chirico’s painting *The Love Song* (*Le Chant d’amour*), entered Magritte’s work only later in 1925. The painting *The Blue Cinema* (*Cinéma bleu*) might be seen as a pivotal work exemplifying the transition in

that year from the flat and quite uniform color planes of the Cubist/Futurist or Orphist works of the early 1920s to a new manner of spatial dislocation.⁸ Referring in his lecture “La Ligne de vie” to his work until 1925, Magritte spoke of his search for the plastic equivalents of the visible world, and how eventually he

... found the same abstraction [of his painted images] in the real world itself as in my pictures, since, despite the complicated combinations of details and shades of color, I could see it as if it were just a curtain hanging in front of my eyes. I became quite uncertain of the depth of the countryside, and far from being convinced of the remoteness of the light blue of the horizon, which I experienced immediately as being simply situated on a level with my eyes. I was in the same state of innocence as a child in its cot who thinks he can grasp a bird flying past in the sky.⁹

While in certain respects *Cinéma bleu* looks back to the earlier style, it also foreshadows developments that were central to Magritte's work in the coming year. The still quite dominant flatness already exhibits a head-on engagement with questions of spatial organization. The “ground” or floor area on which a woman's figure is placed is ambiguously defined both as receding in space and as lying parallel to the picture plane. The red curtain falls to the floor at two spatially divergent locations, and, in a manner not unlike that of the Cubist *papiers collés*, appears to be placed at once in front and behind the columnar front of the building. The *bilboquet* (a turned wood element, often depicted by Magritte, for which he used the French term for a cup-and-ball toy), which is the only element to be modeled in the round and to possess bulk, appears to lie on the ground plane but also to be stuck to its vertical surface, with the flat pole of the “Cinéma bleu” sign falling right on top of it.

The painting thus may be read in terms of a systematic disruption of Renaissance perspective.¹⁰ My concern, however, is more with two considerations that derive from its spatial character and that are fully applicable to other works by Magritte done from 1925 on. One concerns the illusionist representation of layers or surfaces placed within the painting's pictorial space; the other pertains to the spatial ambiguities and paradoxes associated with this conception. These closely interrelated aspects of Magritte's work refer quite significantly to Ernst's collages, which, with their frontal layered conception, flattening of space, and the visual ambiguities and paradoxes derived from the articulation of conflicting spaces, offer a direct model for many of Magritte's concerns. These considerations also lead ultimately to similar perceptions with regard to the notion of the screen and the affirmation of the picture's surface. I will start with the layered spatial conception that is in evidence in many of Magritte's works of the second half of the decade. This conception involves a recessive arrangement

in depth of parallel planes that are mostly vertical surfaces positioned one behind the other in a rather shallow space, at times placed at an angle to the picture surface, more often lying parallel to it.¹¹ Magritte's space, in this respect, is quite different from de Chirico's often distorted and vertiginously foreshortened space. In spite of these differences, I do not discount a continuing de Chirico influence, which has more to do with the sense of constriction and delimitation, together with a marked assertion of the picture surface. It has been argued that the straightforward viewpoint, frontality, and symmetry often characterizing many of Magritte's works derive from the direct influence of Carlo Carrà and Giorgio Morandi, who combined de Chirico images with a frontal box-like spatial arrangement.¹² In what follows, I argue that the layered spatial conception, with its frontal and symmetrical orientation, may be premised in terms of a direct influence of the cinema.

Magritte's cinema – *Fantômas* and layered depth

Critics such as Suzi Gablik, David Sylvester and Robert Short have commented on the influence of cinema in Magritte's work, an influence summarized by Robert Short in terms of a "cultivation of pictorial equivalents to filmic devices such as framing, montage, camera movement, simultaneity, point of view, depth of field and narrative sequentiality."¹³ This influence might be discerned in the use of multiple images in compartmentalized works such as *The Man with the Newspaper* (*L'homme au journal*, 1928) – with its four images of a room, the first one containing a man reading a newspaper – which suggest the frames or narrative sequence of a motion picture. *The Depths of the Earth* (*Les Profondeurs de la terre*, 1930) consists of a sequence of four images that convey the sense of a camera movement, beginning at the treetop, moving down to a general landscape view and further down to the shrubs closer to the ground. A cinematic fragmentation of a figure in separate close-ups is emulated by the separate frames comprising a nude in *The Eternally Obvious* (*L'Evidence éternelle*, 1930). That Magritte would have associated such works with film is indicated by the screenplays he composed with Paul Nougé. One of these, written probably in 1928, presents a sequence of images that alludes to a few of the compartmentalized works done around that time.¹⁴

Magritte's admiration for Feuillade's serial film *Fantômas* is well documented, and the influence Feuillade's films had on his work in terms of individual images has also been noted. Such are the images of figures clad in black bodysuits in *The Man from the Sea* (*L'Homme du large*, 1927) or *The Female Thief* (*La Voleuse*, 1927) that could be identified with Feuillade's black-clad

figures, especially the fascinating thief Irma Vep in *Les Vampires*, as played by the celebrated Musidora, whose quintessential image as a figure in a black bodysuit epitomized for the Surrealists the attraction of female criminal seductiveness. In Chapter 1 I dealt quite extensively with the idolizing, on the part of the poets in Apollinaire's circle and later the Surrealists, of the 32 volumes of the series of *Fantômas* novels by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain (1911–13), as well as of Feuillade's serials, especially *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires*. I also remarked that, in the case of *Fantômas*, there is on the part of the Surrealists some confusion at times between the films and the novels, with observations concerning the renown of the book series indiscriminately applied to the film series. Magritte undoubtedly was a fan of the *Fantômas* novels (as he was of other pulp fiction heroes such as Nick Carter and Nat Pinkerton), and the texts he wrote in which *Fantômas* and other pulp heroes are evoked could have been stimulated equally by the novels and magazines and by Feuillade's films. In texts such as "Nick Carter" (1927) and "Notes sur *Fantômas*" (published in the magazine *Distances* in March 1928),¹⁵ the hero, a master of his dreams, cannot be captured because he dreams of his own disguises. *Fantômas* is "never entirely invisible. His portrait may be seen through his face ... His movements are those of an automaton; he brushes aside the furniture and walls which are in his way." Epitomizing the dialectics of visibility/invisibility which is central to Magritte's thought, *Fantômas* indeed merges into his surroundings and can pass unseen through matter, and thus he also embodies the dialectics of surface and depth.¹⁶

In another text, "L'Homme au visage sans chemin" (1928), under the subtitle "Théâtre en plein cœur de la vie" ("Theater at the heart of life"), Magritte evokes a princess "coming out of the wall in the house surrounded by magnificent sky ... the light was comprehensible but for a few shadows without cause and the absence of depth beyond the open doors" (*Écrits complets* 45). These depthless doorways – so much like the dark recesses in Feuillade's films – harbor for Magritte, as they do for Feuillade, a sense of the mystery lying within. This is just one indication out of many reflecting a direct association of Magritte's mode of vision with the serial film *Fantômas*. The quintessential embodiment of Feuillade's film may be found in *The Murderer Threatened* (*L'Assassin menacé*, 1927, Figure 5.1), a work directly alluding to the scenes in the film involving the black-hooded assassins waiting behind a door (Sequel 3, *Le Mort qui tue*, Part III, "Le Banquier Nanteuil," depicted in Figure 1.4). Commenting on this painting, David Sylvester notes

... the pervasive influence of Feuillade's way of seeing the world – an impassive gaze at acts or threats of violence or aberrations of nature or states of madness presented in a tidy, formal, often symmetrical setting, a gaze from a constant position at the level of the scene and squarely facing its centre. This is how Magritte's art also coolly confronts the world in all its terrible mystery (104).



5.1 René Magritte, *The Murderer Threatened*, 1927

I would argue, rather, that the influence of Feuillade goes far deeper than Sylvester believes, and that it has to do mainly with what I suggested before concerning Feuillade's mode of structuring space (Chapter 1). To sum up my earlier argument, I see the conception of layered depth – the structuring of space in terms of planes lying parallel to the projection plane or screen – as paramount in Feuillade's films. The placing and movement of the actors are defined by the orthogonal architectural setting with its "planimetric" patterning, and it is this setting that largely accounts for the trajectory taken by the viewer's vision. Such a layered depth is, of course, also a major spatial feature of *The Murderer Threatened*, in which space is literally partitioned off with one partially enclosed area giving out on another.¹⁷

Feuillade's layered depth conception, as employed in *The Murderer Threatened*, underlies the way Magritte often plots space. So far I have referred to this conception mostly in terms of the vertical planes or surfaces defining the pictorial space. But, in fact, the presence of a layered depth, with all the related notions of the merging of forms and the seeing of forms

through solids, is to be found everywhere in Magritte. I have quoted his statement that “everything we see hides another thing; we always wish to see what is hidden by what we see” (*Ecrits complets* 603), and this seems to be indeed the controlling idea underlying many of his spatial strategies. These are related to the collage technique which was a direct corollary to his early vision of flatness, even where no actual collage elements were involved.¹⁸ The layered arrangement of such collages painted by hand¹⁹ – Magritte started doing them in the second half of 1926 – was an outgrowth of a method of “piling” painted elements, that look like collage segments, one on top of the other. These “collage” segments attain a reality all their own by becoming tangible cut-out forms illusionistically placed within the pictorial space, at times even tilted away from the picture surface.²⁰ At the same time, such cut-out forms also enhance the sense of the painting’s surface, by appearing to have been applied directly to it as collage elements.²¹ The layered conception also calls for a variety of spatial paradoxes. In *The Annunciation* (*L’Annonciation*, 1930), for instance, there are three levels of pictorial depth – the fully rounded *bilboquets*, the relatively flat iron curtain with the *grelots* (small iron bells), and the paper cut-out – all in a landscape setting. The completely flat paper cut-out might have been conceived as having been actually cut out of the surface of the painting or directly applied to it, were it not for the shrubs on top of it that render it as yet another landscape element.

Another complex play of surface and depth is brought about in *The Muscles of the Sky* (*Les Muscles célestes*, 1927), in which a platform made of floorboards is shown in perspective against a black, irregularly shaped form (supposedly representing foliage and trees), with the latter placed against a cloudy sky. Down from the sky come tentacles of “sky matter” that attain the character of tangible cut-out forms (tangible enough to throw a shadow) placed illusionistically on this platform.²² A related stylistic pursuit discernible in Magritte’s work from 1927 on sheds additional light on the assertion of the painting’s surface. Magritte may have echoed this “skin” quality of Ernst’s frottages in his painting *Discovery* (*Découverte*, 1927), in which the skin turns into the veined texture of a wooden plank.²³ Such textures are evoked also as if rising through what appears to be a thin, almost transparent epidermal layer constituted by the layer of paint; as if, indeed, the painted landscape with its large expanse of sky was thinly painted over a wooden plank (*The Cultivation of Ideas* (*La Culture des idées*), 1927; *A Passion for Light* (*La Passion des lumières*), 1927). Images of the sound holes of string instruments at times emerge in this thin epidermal layer, as if to enhance the sense of the wooden support lying underneath (*The Lining of Sleep* (*La doublure de sommeil*), 1927). In a letter to Paul Nougé in 1927, Magritte described how he “found a new potential in things – their ability to become *gradually* something else, an



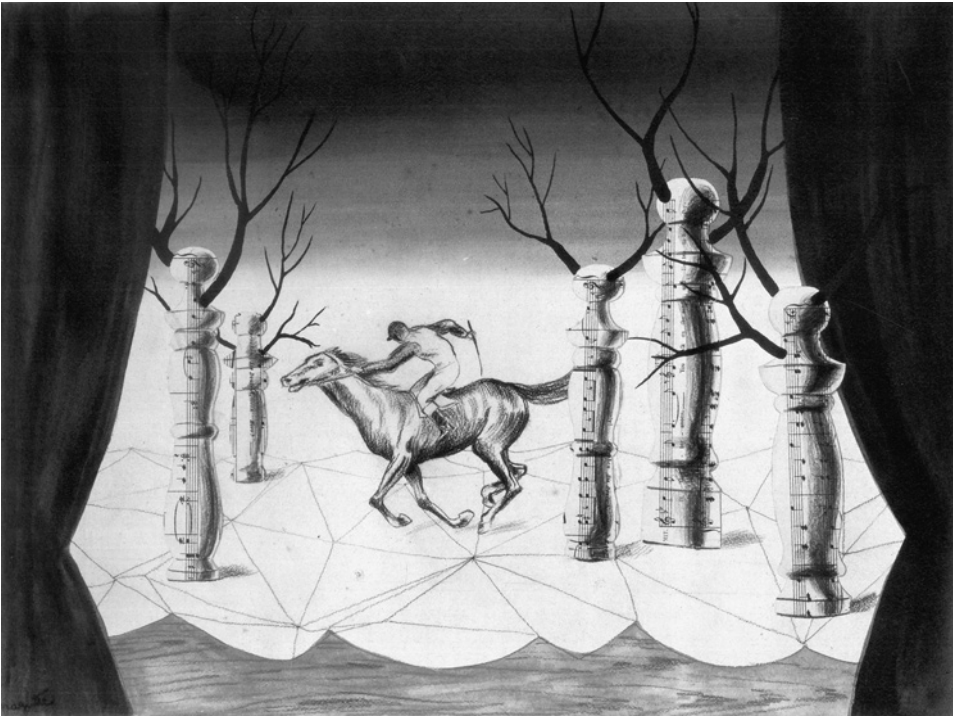
5.2 René Magritte, *The Secret Double*, 1927

object *merging into* an object other than itself. For instance the sky in certain places allows wood to show through" (Whitfield, *Magritte* cat. 28). Magritte's notion of skin, quite obviously, has an entirely different meaning from Ernst's perception of the "skin" of painting as a sensitive epidermal layer serving as an interface for internal stimuli and external projections – what the artist sees in himself and the external effect of the wooden floor or the other textures used in the frottage process. Magritte's more philosophical turn of mind led him to musings on the nature of vision in relation to the surfaces of the real that center on the paradoxical conception of the painting's surface as an epidermal layer that might be painted over or peeled off and that, at the same time, is consubstantial with part of the object that is illusionistically presented within the space of the painting. In *The Secret Double* (*Le double secret*, 1927), the canvas on which a woman's head is painted seems literally sliced off, with this tattered piece of canvas then glued alongside the head (Figure 5.2). This could have been seen as a painted representation of the technique of *papier collé*, but for the fact that the "removal" of the fragment reveals an inner dark space inhabited only by several *grelots*.²⁴ In *The Titanic Days* (*Les jours gigantesques*, 1928) the outline of the woman's figure is delineated as a surface element

that “contains” a fragment of the male figure attacking her; in other words, the combined figures of the man and the woman are projected as a surface element, with the figure of the man trimmed off by the outline of the woman.²⁵ The implication is that the surface of the painting, rather than constituting a transparent windowpane, is itself a kind of screen that partly conceals what may lie underneath.

Magritte's screen – frames *en abyme*

Magritte adopted various strategies for affirming the picture surface – from the word-paintings in which the words appear as if they were applied directly to the surface with no attempt to place them spatially, to the compartmentalized paintings in which the frames, placed together, form a kind of screen that lies parallel to the picture plane. Then there are the slabs of lead placed frontally in which are embedded various elements within biomorphic openings.²⁶ In other paintings, however, Magritte revokes more emphatically any sense of the surface as a transparent window effecting a direct extension of one space into the other. As such, the surface might be identified with the paradigmatic screen theorized above. This line of reasoning gains weight in the light of a complementary consideration of the layered depth conception, this time in terms of various spatial ambiguities and paradoxes associated with a spatial conception that Magritte adopted in 1925–26 and to which he returned in the early 1930s. The early works of this kind reveal the influence of both de Chirico and Max Ernst, with the influence of Ernst's early collages (of the late 1910s and the early 1920s), as I have noted before, discernible mostly in the *papiers collés* done in 1926. In *The Lost Jockey* (*Le jockey perdu*, 1926, Figure 5.3), for instance, the “musical” chessmen and the jockey seem to be projected on a backdrop that, ambiguously, also extends forward to form the stage floor, while the curtain plays a similarly ambiguous role by being placed both in front and behind one of the chessmen. In *The Window* (*La Fenêtre*, 1925), de Chirico's spatial conceptions get a strong foothold. While the image of the hand that seems to be trying to grasp a flying bird may derive from images of hands and birds in Ernst's early work, the spatial ambiguities associated with the window reveal a closer affinity to de Chirico. The window is placed against a uniformly dark and flat background in which a sense of spatial recession is evoked only by the pyramid and by a strip of flat ground extending from it into the part of the window which reveals a large box-like form; the other part of the window, enclosed on one side by a curtain, opens into a rustic landscape. The images of hand and bird, following this motif in “*La Ligne de vie*” cited above (“I was in the same state of innocence as a child in its cot who thinks he can grasp a bird flying past in the sky”), represent Magritte's



5.3 René Magritte, *The Lost Jockey*, 1926

assertion that there is no way of telling which part of the window is the “real” one and which one is a flat projection. I see in this a reference to the spatial arrangement found in various paintings done by de Chirico in 1914 and a short while later (as noted already in Chapter 3 with regard to *The Child’s Brain*). Foreground elements in these works, while tilted in extreme foreshortening, still constitute a kind of box-like arrangement or stage that frames what looks like a backdrop or window, at times irregular in form, containing images – generally de Chirico’s typical buildings and urban landscapes – that seem to be dissociated from the foreground spatial context. Due perhaps to his work in designing theater sets in 1925,²⁷ some of Magritte’s 1926 paintings evoke stage sets that exhibit a rather steep spatial recession, at times with stage flats – *The Difficult Crossing* (*La Traverse difficile*) is one prominent example – and that also contain a backdrop painting or a window at the back. The backdrop at times seems to invade the stage itself, but even then it still retains the flat quality of a backdrop.²⁸

It is the ambiguity that surrounds this backdrop, or what is in fact a picture within a picture – is it a projected or painted image or an opening into an

adjacent space? – that informs quite a few of Magritte's works at that time and that presents the question "what lies beyond?" The curtain framing the backdrop lies at times ambiguously close to the picture surface – as, for instance, do the two wings of the curtain in *The Migrant Angel* (*L'Ange migrant*), 1926 – defining the picture surface itself as a proscenium, and thus endowing the whole image with the sense of ambiguity associated with the backdrop image. In *Nocturne* (1925), a curtain encloses a space prescribed by a striated ground on which is placed a flat cut-out image of a spindle with musical notations. The central element, however, is a picture located within this space, depicting a small house on fire in the midst of a dark landscape; a flying bird crosses the surface of the picture, which also constitutes the threshold between these two incongruous spaces.²⁹ The painting thus exemplifies what I see as a basic characteristic of Magritte's pictorial conception – the formation of conceptual analogies based on the congruence of various space-defining elements (including, at times, the picture plane itself), with this also calling attention to the paradoxical nature of these spaces. In *Nocturne*, an analogy is suggested between the painting's surface and the surface of the picture lying within; in other paintings, the often vertical planes placed within the pictured space both conceal and enticingly intimate the existence of an unknown lying behind them, while positing the picture plane itself as a paradoxical threshold performing a similar function. The canvas of a framed painting, in *The Signs of Evening* (*Les Signes du soir*, 1926), has been cut open and peeled off to reveal the landscape within; one of the spheres around the tree depicted in this scene has rolled out into the "real" landscape. But how real is it? The framed painting appears to be placed in front of a distant landscape consisting of the dark silhouette of a mountain shown against a golden evening sky, but it could also be leaning against a vertical surface on which these mountains are simply painted.

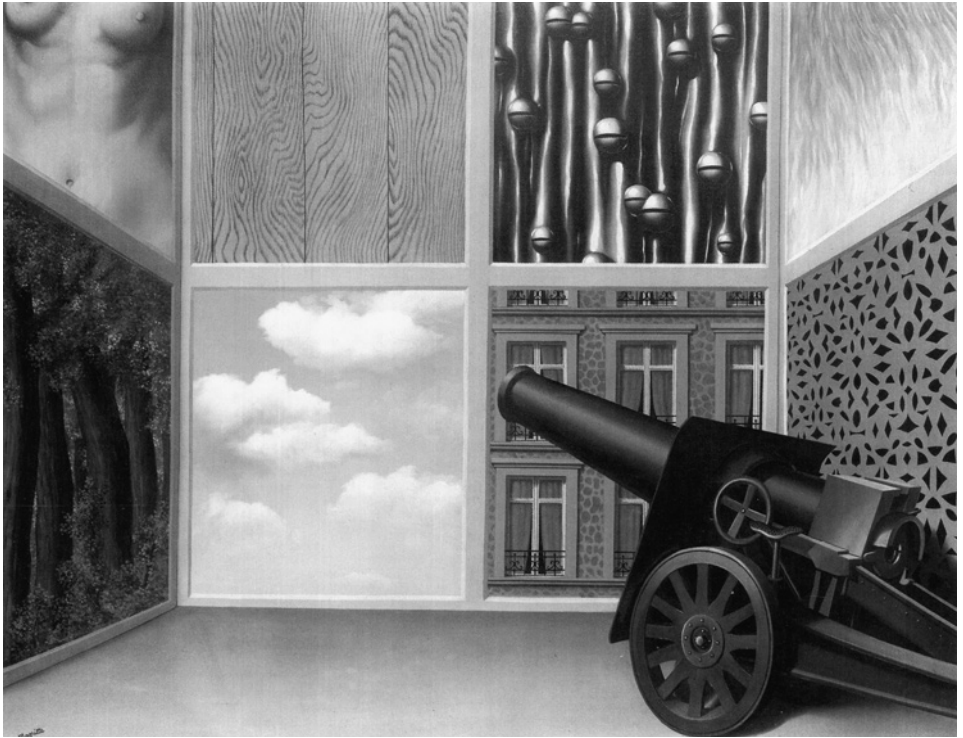
The works discussed in the last paragraphs embody, as I have noted, various formal and conceptual analogies that call attention to the painting's surface in its role as a threshold separating two divergent spaces. These analogies also justify conceiving the picture-within-a-picture device in terms of frames *en abyme*. All the compartmentalized paintings, it should be noted, involve pictures (or words) within frames – this is one of the major directions taken by Magritte's work late in 1927. However, the notion of frames *en abyme* is taken up again only in 1930–31, in works whose affirmation of the picture surface as a screen makes good Magritte's dictum that what you see is not all that there is. Furthermore, I see this screen – to return again to a notion in my earlier discussion of *Feuillade* – as a "self-aware screen," a "representational field capable of representing its own process of representation";³⁰ one that constitutes the sole reality in a chain of frames *en abyme*, on which are conflated the various levels of reality represented by the planes which make up the

layered depth. To recall my earlier argument, such a perception of a “self-aware screen” accentuates what I postulated concerning the planar conception of the layered depth in Feuillade’s films, with its uncompromising assertion of surface, and the resulting sense of the “tangibility” of the screen, gained through its association with the parallel planes lying within the filmed space. I observed that the sensations Feuillade’s films arouse might be associated with the intimation of the unknown threat lurking behind the surfaces of reality – what amounts to a subversion of the complacency of the bourgeois setting. But there is also, on the other hand, a special indefinable aura associated with this spatial representation, accompanied by a disorienting sense of the *insolite*. It is enough to replace “insolite” by “mystery” – to which a no less threatening sense of the unknown is attached – in order to locate similar perceptions in Magritte.³¹

I turn now to Magritte’s *The Human Condition* (*La Condition humaine*, 1933), a work that in the present discussion represents various related pictorial investigations embarked upon by Magritte throughout the years.³² In “La Ligne de vie” he clarifies the thought behind this painting:

I placed in front of a window, seen from inside a room, a painting representing exactly that part of the landscape which was hidden from view by the painting. Therefore, the tree represented in the painting hid from view the real tree situated behind it, outside the room. It existed for the spectator, as it were, simultaneously in his mind, as both inside the room in the painting, and outside in the real landscape. Which is how we see the world: we see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of it that we experience inside ourselves.³³

The last lines concerning the way we see the world also apply to what Magritte wishes his painting to represent. In terms of the analogy suggested by this representation of frames *en abyme* – painting, window, painting within the painting – the surface of the canvas itself constitutes a screen. This screen is essentially analogous to the actual cinema screen in scenes in Feuillade’s films involving the theater stage and a film within a film. In these scenes, as noted before, the screen and the virtual screen identified with the proscenium become indistinguishable, with the actual screen on which Feuillade’s film is projected established as a “self-aware screen.” The confusion regarding the nature of the scene shown in the film (does it constitute a theater presentation or a film projection?) is analogous to not knowing what one sees in the painting. What Magritte implies in “La Ligne de vie” was more explicitly phrased in a letter to Breton in 1934, which raised the possibility that, “behind the picture the scene is different from what one sees” (Sylvester 298). As Eric Wargo suggests, in a detailed analysis of *The Human Condition*, there might not be anything there at all.³⁴ To go by the logic of this arrangement of frames *en abyme*, the surface of Magritte’s canvas itself may hide things other than those depicted on it,



5.4 René Magritte, *On the Threshold of Freedom*, 1930

and perhaps nothing at all.³⁵ One can draw a line connecting this nothingness – this void intimated behind the screen – with the darkness in other works by Magritte, revealed behind the “canvas,” where portions of it have been cut out; or within the openings in the lead tablets; or with the darkness marking the unknown spaces behind a corner.³⁶ This is also the darkness of a corridor, visually equated with the open mouth of a woman crying out in terror evoked in Magritte’s film script; and, to further extend this cinema associations, this dark void may also refer to the dark depthless windows and doorways in Feuillade’s films. It may have been a similar terror of the void that Desnos felt while confronting the “whiteness of the screen” in the cinema experience described in “Pénalités de l’enfer” (Chapter 1).

The screen asserts its presence in Magritte’s works quite uncannily at times. The fragmented images placed in compartments in *On the Threshold of Freedom* (*Au Seuil de la liberté*, 1930, Figure 5.4) form a back wall with lateral wings. The images on these wings should be seen in their foreshortened form, as indeed most appear to be presented. This is not true, however, of the naked torso of

a woman which, despite the fact that it should be viewed sideways, appears to be placed frontally as if it were merged with the surface of the painting.³⁷ As argued by Jean Clair, “The clear wall of glass which Leonardo defined as painting, Alberti’s perfect *interseguazione*, becomes the shoddy trick of a prestidigitator, whisking screens on and off in order to make images appear and disappear.”³⁸ Clair’s example is the 1964 *Evening Falls* (*Le Soir qui tombe*), but earlier works can be cited too, such as *The Key to the Fields* (*La Clef des champs*, 1936) or *The Domain of Arnheim* (*Le Domaine d’Arnheim*, 1949). In these works, the pane of a window looking out on a landscape is broken, with the splinters piled underneath it still retaining images which are identical to the parts of the landscape that are perceived through the gaps in the broken pane.³⁹ The windowpane is analogous in this respect to the painting on the easel in *The Human Condition*, with both presenting an analogy with the opaque screen that is the surface of the painting, and, ultimately, with the barriers to sight in our vision of the world.⁴⁰ Magritte’s painting seems thus to be one of the most subtle and profound pictorial representations of what years later Breton observed with regard to another painter (adopting, as noted in Chapter 3, an expression coined by Rimbaud): “He [le Maréchal] knows that visions are still a gauze behind which are hanging other gauzes of visions.” It is quite striking that Breton associated these “gauzes of vision” with the sense of a painting “hovering on the edge of the abyss,” that he discerned in the works of Gustave Moreau (*SP* 266). Such an “abyss” could be equally applicable, in Magritte’s work, to the nothingness, the void, intimated behind the screen.

Notes

1. As reported by Jacques Meuris, when it came to Magritte’s works, his friend Paul Nougé preferred “enigma” to “mystery.” See Meuris, *René Magritte* 114.
2. To go by the thematic index (admittedly, quite rudimentary) included in Magritte’s *Ecrits complets*, the majority of references to mystery – but for one or two slight allusions in the 1920s and five in the 1930s–1940s – occur in texts written in the 1950s and 1960s. This can be accounted for on the grounds that, of the more than two hundred texts included in the *Ecrits complets*, only about twenty were written in the 1920s, and only a few more before the mid-1930s. Furthermore, most of these earlier texts, with the exception perhaps of “Les mots et les choses” (1929), are occasional pieces of writing – aphorisms, short prose poems, short texts intended as film scenarios, and so on. On the other hand, most of the texts published after the mid-1930s constitute a commentary by Magritte on his own work, whether in the form of an original essay or in an interview, and it is in these texts that he deals consistently with the question of mystery in all its forms. See Magritte, *Ecrits complets*, *passim*.
3. “Interview Jean Stévo III” (1961), in Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 547; “La Voix du mystère” (1962), in *Ecrits complets* 548.
4. *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 17. Breton also remarks that it may not be “inappropriate to apply to him [de Chirico] the phrase that, weaving through the night of the unknown, the future and the cold, must send shivers down the spines of the spectators of that marvelous film *Nosferatu*: ‘When he reached the other side of the bridge the ghosts came to meet him’.” (*SP* 16).
5. “Interview Paul Waldo Schwartz,” in Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 683.

6. "Interview Jean Neyens," in Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 603.
7. In *The Voice of Silence* (*La Voix du silence*, 1928), for instance, space is partitioned by a wall into a lighted room and a dark, featureless emptiness. *The Use of Speech* (*L'Usage de la parole*, 1928) presents a canvas divided horizontally in the middle, the lower part showing two heads talking against a dark background (the disjointed words appearing in balloons), the upper half being an open sky. A woman looks into the frame of a mirror or a picture in which a dark void is enclosed in *The Perfect Image* (*L'Image parfaite*, 1928).
8. David Sylvester notes that *Cinéma bleu* refers to a picture house Magritte had frequented in Charleroi. See David Sylvester, *Magritte: The Silence of the World* 63. I am tempted to see in the title a reference to the occasional bluish tinge of the screen on which a black and white film is projected; this would have some bearing on what I argue later with regard to the influence on Magritte of Feuillade's films.
9. The quotation is taken from a translation of a lecture entitled "La ligne de vie," given by Magritte in 1938, included in David Sylvester and Sarah Whitfield's article "Magritte's Lost Lecture," in Ollinger-Zinque and Leen (eds), *René Magritte 1898–1967* 45. For the original text of the lecture, see "La Ligne de vie I," in Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 103–113. A later autobiographical text based on this lecture was published in the Belgian magazine *L'Invention collective* 2 (February 1940) 11–14. See "La Ligne de vie II," in *Ecrits complets* 142–6. For the English version of this text see Gablik, *Magritte* 183–4.
10. Silvano Levy, who offers a very close analysis of *Cinéma bleu*, sees Magritte's initial attempts as representing a subversion of the pictorial conventions characterizing academic painting that go back to Alberti's treatise on perspective. See "René Magritte: Representational Iconoclasm" 15–29.
11. A painting such as *The Silvered Chasm* (*Le Gouffre argenté*, 1926) is an example of planes placed at an angle to the picture plane. An irregularly shaped hole torn in a vertical wooden wall reveals another wall lying behind it – apparently made of some metal – with the ominous suggestion of an abyss extending between the two. Another example of this mode of viewing the world is *The Vulture's Park* (*Le Parc du vautour*, 1926), with its box containing a tree and two white frames stacked up behind and parallel to it. Most of the works in which cut-out shapes appear to be stuck to the picture surface present an unmitigated frontal view, as do works with lead tablets or slabs with objects set into them, compartmentalized pictures and word-paintings. I will have more to say about these works later in this chapter.
12. See Sylvester, *Magritte: The Silence of the World* 65.
13. Short, "Magritte and the Cinema" 101. See also Gablik, *Magritte* 62.
14. The scenario begins with a frontal view of a man holding up his hand so as to hide his face, and a woman seen in profile facing a wall; the image of a mirror follows reflecting a painted canvas that is eventually broken by a huge stone. The scenario then suggests a correlation between the darkness of a corridor on which the camera lingers, and, a few shots later, the darkness of the open mouth of the woman crying out in terror. The painting *The Nocturnal Kind* (*Le Genre nocturne*, 1928) depicts a woman hiding her face with both hands, and, next to her, what looks like a broken mirror or a hole in the wall showing another cracked wall behind it. See "L'Espace d'une pensée," in Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 66.
15. Both "Nick Carter" and another text written a little while later, "Il était parti seul ..." might be seen as early preparatory versions for "Notes sur Fantômas." For these texts, see Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 41 ("Nick Carter"), 47 ("Il était parti seul ..."), 48–9 ("Notes sur Fantômas"). A partial English translation of "Notes sur Fantômas" is given in Gablik, *Magritte: The Silence of the World* 48.
16. A work painted in 1927 or 1928 entitled *The Barbarian* (*Le Barbare*), showing the head of a masked man wearing a top hat merging with the brick wall seen behind him, exemplifies this ability of Fantômas, as conceived by Magritte, to pass through solid objects. The work no longer exists (it was destroyed during the London blitz), but it can be seen in a photograph taken in 1938 of Magritte posing next to it. For the photograph, see Gablik, *Magritte*, illus. 43, and Sylvester, *Magritte: The Silence of the World*, 14.
17. In addition to the influence of Feuillade's films, other formal sources might be discerned as well. Meuris (137) sees in *The Murderer Threatened* a representational technique borrowed from the comic strip and Epinal prints. (The *images d'Epinal* were popular woodcuts sold door-to-door in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France.) David Sylvester (104) perceives a resemblance to Flemish religious painting of the fifteenth century, where the main action takes place in the middle, a window is placed centrally beyond, and attendant saints figure in the foreground to right and left. Ellen Handler Spitz argues that, spatially, the painting evokes early Netherlandish

pictures by Pieter de Hooch and Jan Vermeer with their interior spaces. She further thinks that the "one-point perspectival composition, however, also stimulates eerie associations to the religious paintings of the high Renaissance. Cold, lifelessly colored, and geometric, each compartment conveys in visual terms the discrete, hyper-rational, but unintelligible component of a dream sequence." See Spitz, *Museums of the Mind* 28.

18. Magritte started experimenting with *papiers collés* in 1925, with Max Ernst's early collages acting as a direct influence. Several of the *papiers collés* at that time were related to oil paintings; others are independent. In his lecture "La Ligne de vie" Magritte evoked the "new vision through which the spectator might recognize his own isolation and hear the silence of the world," associating it with de Chirico as well as with Max Ernst's illustrations for Eluard's *Répétitions* in which Ernst "splendidly demonstrated, by the overwhelming effect of collages made up of old magazine engravings, that everything that gave traditional painting its prestige could easily be dispensed with." See Ollinger-Zinque and Leen (eds), *René Magritte 1898–1967* 44.
19. In "Beyond Painting" (1937) Max Ernst described Magritte's paintings as "collages entirely painted by hand." See *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting* 17; "Au-delà de la peinture," in *Écritures* 266.
20. Such forms appear, for instance, in *Figures of Night* (*Les Figures de nuit*, 1927). In *The Finery of the Storm* (*La Parure de l'orage*, 1927) they exhibit the distinct patterns of decorative paper cut-outs.
21. These are, for instance, the irregularly shaped white forms lying flat on the surface in *A Taste for the Invisible* (*Le Goût de l'invisible*, 1927). Sarah Whitfield notes that Magritte made a version of the same image in gouache, using white pasted paper to represent these painted cutouts (Whitfield, *Magritte* cat. 20).
22. Magritte referred to this painting in "Les Jambes du ciel," a text written in 1927 evoking the floor lighted up by the moon that "hides a piece of the sky. But a piece of the floor is itself hidden by the legs of the sky ..." *Écrits complets* 39.
23. As noted by Sarah Whitfield (*Magritte* cat. 28), Magritte would have known Ernst's *Histoire naturelle* through its showing in Brussels in the fall of 1926.
24. Here again there is a marked difference between Magritte's conception and Ernst's. The only painting by Ernst that literalizes such a conception – it precedes Magritte by three or four years – is the oil painting *Portrait of Gala* (1924), based on a photograph of Gala's eyes by Man Ray, in which part of the portrait appears to be peeled off to reveal the canvas underneath.
25. Referring to this work in a letter, Magritte explained that "the man seizes the woman; he is in the foreground; necessarily therefore the man conceals parts of the woman, the part where he is in front of her, between her and our vision. But the discovery lies in the fact that the man does not overlap the outline of the woman." Cited in Whitfield, *Magritte* cat. 36; for the original French version, see *Écrits complets* 52.
26. Representative works include: *Swift Hope* (*L'Espoir rapide*, 1927); *The Living Mirror* (*Le Miroir vivant*, 1928); *The Six Elements* (*Le Six éléments*, 1929); *The Imp of the Perverse* (*Le Démon de la perversité*, 1927).
27. See the "Chronology," in Whitfield, *Magritte* 302.
28. Such is the stormy sea in *The Birth of the Idol* (*La Naissance de l'idol*, 1926), which is identical to the backdrop image in *The Difficult Crossing*, although this time it appears to surround the ground leading to it.
29. A similar conception underlies *After the Water, the Clouds* (*A La Suite de l'eau, les nuages*, 1926; Ollinger-Zinque and Leen (eds), *René Magritte 1898–1967* 25), in which the clouds appearing in a curtained window also enter the room.
30. Here I cite again what Rosalind Krauss says in a different context in "Nightwalkers" 37.
31. I have not found any indication that Magritte was aware of the presence of a frame *en abyme* dimension in Feuillade's films. However, given his predilection for this mode of viewing the world in his own art, as well as his close acquaintance with the films, it is quite conceivable that he responded, perhaps quite intuitively, to these perceptions. Be this as it may, such considerations have little relevance to my discussion, since what I am positing is a mode of vision associated with the notion of the screen – one that Magritte and other Surrealists cultivated irrespective of particular paths of influence.
32. An early example is *The Fair Captive* (*La Belle captive*) of 1931.

33. "Lifeline," in Gablik, *Magritte* 184; "La Ligne de vie II," in Magritte, *Ecrits complets* 144.
34. Wargo, "Infinite Recess" 58.
35. Breton may have been thinking along similar lines about a nothingness lurking behind the screen (and hence, behind the surface of the real) when he wrote in the spirit of Plato's parable: "Figures of our suspicion, beautiful, pitiful shadows prowling round our cave: we know that you are shadows." *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 46.
36. Examples of such evocations of a void are *The Alphabet of Revelations* (*L'Alphabet des révélations*, 1929); *The Daring Sleeper* (*Le Dormeur téméraire*, 1928); *A Courtesan's Palace* (*Le Palais d'une courtisane*, 1928).
37. The situation is reminiscent of what I suggested in the last chapter with regard to the notion of the screen as applied to Ernst's overpainting *Drum of the Infantry of the Celestial Army Represented Abreast in Their Sunday Best* (1920, Figure 4.5). However, Magritte's underlying sense of the screen – its use as a philosophical tool for questioning the unknown mystery within the real – diverges quite radically from Ernst's concerns, which are geared primarily to analogizing by various means the psychic apparatus in terms of exploration of his own psychic makeup.
38. Clair, "Seven Prolegomenae" 102–3.
39. Two verbal evocations of similar windowpanes that are not quite transparent come to mind. In "Gants blancs" ("White Gloves"), one of the sections of *Les Champs magnétiques*, Soupault writes: "A man descends the stairs of sleep and notices that it is raining: the window-panes are white" (Breton et al., *The Automatic Message* 115; Breton, *OC I* 90). In text 32 of "Poisson soluble" Breton refers to a windowpane that has fallen out, with the pane having the "peculiarity of being the color that is called 'dawn,' while the windowpane which had remained intact, was, on the contrary, faintly blue" (*Manifestoes* 108; *OC I* 398).
40. Clair's conclusion is very pertinent to my discussion: "... Magritte, who, while seeming to reinstate the apparatus of classical perspective, cannot rest until he has perverted and negated its transparency, shares in that 'modernism' which declares the painting to be a flat, material, opaque, afocal, and amorphous space – in a manner as 'abstract' as that of Mondrian" ("Seven Prolegomenae" 103).



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Dialectics of opacity and transference – Miró

In this chapter, as in the one to follow, I continue my perusal of Surrealist painting (or painting done within the sphere of Surrealist activities) from the perspective of the screen paradigm as an implicit spatial element. It would seem inevitable that spatial concerns – especially with regard to the question of surface and depth; that is, the material tangibility of the painting's surface in contradistinction to the illusory depth evoked through various formal devices – will come up in relation to the situation of painting in the early 1920s. These questions were at the basis of the predicament of the Surrealist artist, who was placed between two conflicting demands. There was, on the one hand, the Modernist imperative to do away with the illusory representation of depth and to recreate depth as a plastic reality (without destroying the two-dimensional essence of the picture plane). On the other hand, the artist experienced as a Surrealist the no less fundamental need to suggest depth or extension in terms of a spatial conception that would accommodate what Breton referred to as “internal model”; one that would also represent, in terms of what I am proposing in this study, what might be called a model of the interior. The notions of surface and depth, that are central, as I argued in Chapter 3, to the notion of psychic automatism, also emerge in relation to the pursuance of automatism in the pictorial domain.

Surrealism and the subversion of Cubism – Miró and Masson

With Miró and Masson as the two artists on whom the discussion centers in this and the next chapter, it is essential to take into account the inescapable distinction between the vision of art expressed by the major Surrealist writers and the particular attitudes of those artists who were associated with the writers, but did not necessarily conform in full to the Surrealist ethos or the ideological demands of the movement. With this stipulation in mind,

and while it might be agreed that Miró and Masson were first and foremost painters, it should also be recognized that, in the course of the 1920s (and in Masson's case, sporadically in the 1930s and early 1940s), they both worked within a certain ambience – social, political, ideological, cultural – that was highly colored by writers associated with Dada and later with the Surrealist movement.¹ Also to be noted is the dynamic give-and-take interaction in the Surrealist context between writers and painters. While in the beginning the artists' work may have been conceived independently of the Surrealist aesthetic, it was left to the writers – Breton, Aragon, Desnos, Morise, Michel Leiris and others – to formulate and define the Surrealist aspect of these works and to establish their significance as Surrealist creations; reciprocally, this created a climate to which the painters themselves would not have remained oblivious.

Also to be brought into the equation are the critics functioning outside the Surrealist circle – in the second installment of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton singled out Maurice Raynal, Louis Vauxcelles and Florent Fels as having written articles which “surpass the limits of imbecility” (SP 8) – but whose influence was far from negligible, especially with regard to those artists who were less committed to the Surrealist stance.² These critics, who were on the whole quite hostile to Surrealism, often responded favorably to what the Surrealist artists had in common with prevailing artistic concerns – chiefly in the perspective of formal innovation – but vehemently opposed what they considered to be the Surrealist – hence necessarily literary – dimension of the work. Such formalist contentions regarding the works of Miró, Masson or Ernst were not necessarily inaccurate; it was the lack of sympathy with the subversive dimension of these works and a complete obliviousness to the metaphorical quality of their formal character (on which the coming discussion largely focuses) that separated these critics from their Surrealist counterparts. The Surrealist writers, in turn, questioned the values represented by most of the art trends that came into being in the years following the war. To begin with, they were opposed to various modes of the naturalist representation of external reality which, in the 1920s, returned with a vengeance in reaction to prewar Cubism. Writing in the mid-1930s, Breton seems to have been looking back at the 1920s in pointing out the limitations of painting that “concerned itself almost uniquely with expressing the obvious relationships that exist between the perception of the outside world and the *ego*.”³ By this he targeted various brands of Naturalism, promoted by magazines such as *L'Amour de l'art* or *L'Art vivant*, that were concerned with giving full play to form, color and brushwork as a means of expressing the artist's mood and personality. Breton also vehemently opposed Braque's return to naturalism, although he could not deny the fact that “for several years he followed independently the path

... on which Picasso and he were alone" (SP 10). While he was quite close to Derain in the early 1920s, I suspect he may have admired the quality of Derain's mind more than his art,⁴ and in 1927, when the last installment of "Le Surréalisme et la peinture" appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste*, he could refer contemptuously to Derain's assertion that "it would have been a falsehood for him to paint a woman 'without tits and bottom' " (SP 23).⁵ Derain, and other artists who similarly adopted a Cézannesque style as a tame offshoot of Cubism, represented for Breton all that was wrong with the postwar reaction to what were considered to be the experimental excesses of Modernist styles, primarily Cubism, of the years before the Great War.⁶

However, the Surrealist attitude equally diverged from the Modernist position represented by the Purist (or post-1918 Cubist) conception of art as an autonomous category. The Surrealists were opposed to the separation of art and life that this entailed, and it was on this ground that the main battle was waged for a conception of Surrealist art that would confirm its avant-garde status while distinguishing it from the Modernist ideal of aesthetic purity. The theory underlying this ideal was based on the conception underlying Juan Gris's procedures and was further promulgated by Pierre Reverdy, editor of the review *Nord-Sud*.⁷ Reverdy called for a painting that would constitute a manifestation of poetic thought without resorting to literary means. In his influential essay "On Cubism" he asserted that "cubism contains the means of constructing a picture by taking the object as a pictorial element only, quite apart from the anecdotal standpoint." What has to be done then is to extract from the object "what is eternal and constant."⁸ There were, to be sure, many points in common between nascent Surrealist attitudes and the theory underlying Reverdy's notion of artistic purity. Breton based his conception of the Surrealist poetic image on Reverdy's definition, with its emphasis on the image as a "pure creation of the mind" that "cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. / The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional power and poetic reality."⁹ Breton objected, however, to the implied premeditation involved in the creation of the image, and argued that the spark obtained must derive from a fortuitous juxtaposition encountered in the process of automatic writing. The strongest image is not one presenting a "true" relationship but one that is "arbitrary to the highest degree" (*Manifestoes* 38; *OC I* 338). Such a rejection of poetic control was in contradistinction to the ideas of clarity and order underlying the theories expounded by the Cubist and Purist proponents of Reverdy's ideal of purity, especially those associated with the Purist review *L'Esprit nouveau*.¹⁰

Picasso represented for Breton an assertive stance of rejection of the "mediocre and indefensible" Cubist doctrine, a dogmatic manifestation of

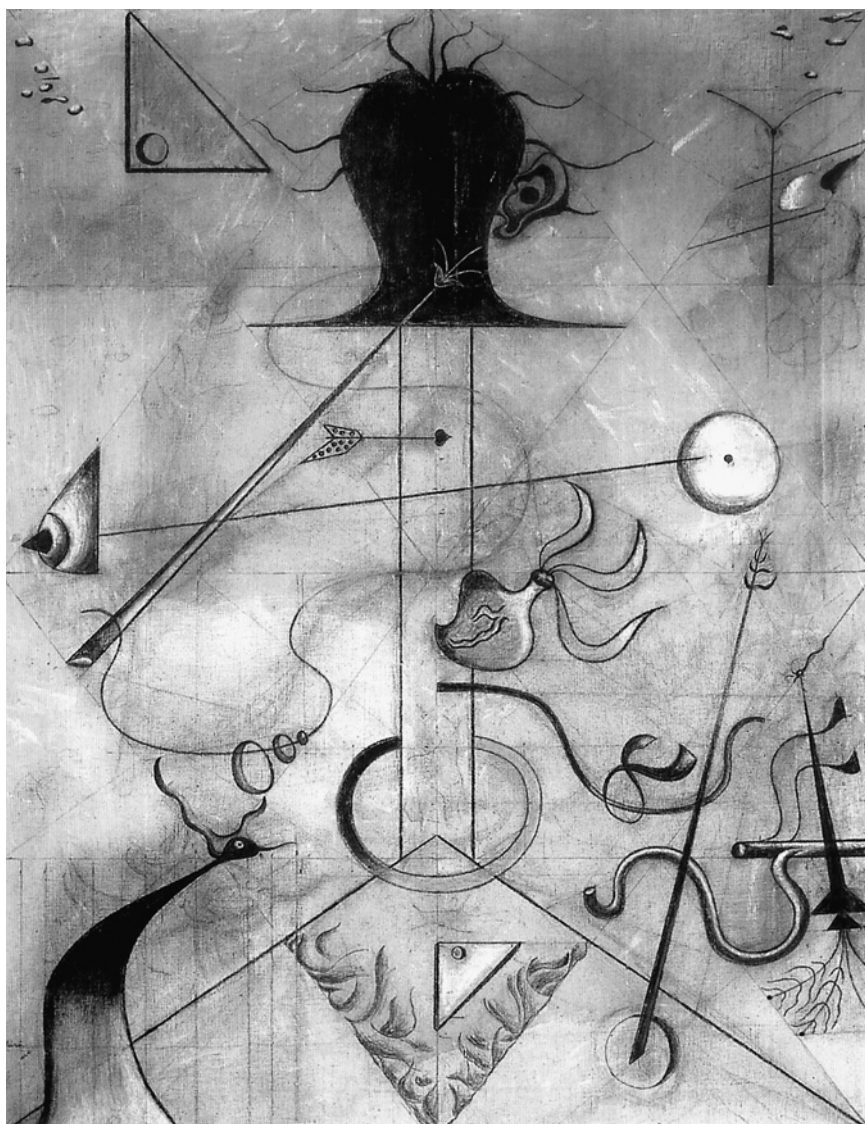
late Cubist theory that appeared to Breton to be wholly inimical to Picasso's break with representational convention, in his early as well as current work. Breton saw Picasso as an artist whose "discovery of virgin territory, on which the most sparkling whim can roam freely, is perhaps the first instance of art taking on a certain *outlaw* side [*un certain côté hors la loi*] ..."¹¹ This "outlaw side," which, as Breton said later in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, rendered it impossible to apply a "rigorous system" to Picasso's methods (SP 7), also enabled Picasso to explore the unknown territory discovered by poets such as Rimbaud, Lautréamont and Mallarmé and to "give materiality to what had hitherto remained in the domain of pure fantasy" (SP 5). It was above all this subversive quality of Picasso's work that would have justified Breton's claim that Picasso was "as one of us" (SP 7).¹² Breton, one can imagine, would have liked to see in this "outlaw side" a continuous effort on Picasso's part at subverting even his own Cubist formal innovations – those that, indeed, endeared Picasso to the critics and theorists of *L'Esprit nouveau*, for instance. However, the essence of such an "outlaw" stance appears to have remained undivided, in Breton's eyes, from the Cubist formal character as an underlying presence – indeed, an infrastructure – in the work of art. As opposed to other directions taken by Picasso in the early 1920s – Neo-Classicism, for instance – Cubism still seemed to Breton to constitute a ground which would prove to be the most fertile for the growth of a Surrealist art.

A Cubist infrastructure against which they would stretch their formal and conceptual muscles seems to have been at the heart of Miró's and Masson's aesthetic stance in the 1920s. Where there are vestiges of Cubist grid, these are imbued with images that are antithetical to the Reverdian ideal of aesthetic purity and that are disruptive of the Modernist notion of the autonomy of the work of art. Miró's flow of fantastic personages and erotic metamorphoses, Masson's engagement with images of war, death and sex – all these constitute expressions of underlying themes that have little to do with the formalist concerns of Cubism. "Obviously for Joan [Miró] as for myself," wrote Masson in later years, "poetry, in its largest sense, was of major importance. Our ambition was to be painter-poets, and therein lay our difference from our elders, who, while associating with the best poets of their generation, had a crazy fear of being considered by the critics as 'literary painters.'"¹³ Commenting on the Cubist painters, Masson argued that even the greatest of them "limited themselves to painting common utensils (heritage of Cézanne) and figures petrified in their construction, and were opposed to the representation of profound instincts, to a vision of the universe; they refrained from expressing what is at the root of being: hunger, love and violence ..."¹⁴ Miró and Masson both downplayed the role of Cubism in their evolving styles. Masson in



6.1 André Masson, *The Four Elements*, 1924

later years acknowledged the influence of Cubism, but only in some works of 1922–24, “just before Surrealism,” asserting that he freed himself from it with *Les Quatre éléments* (*The Four Elements*, 1923–24, Figure 6.1).¹⁵ And Miró, describing his work on *Portrait of Mme K.* (1924, Figure 6.2), relates how he was “planning to do something realistic, but then I started eliminating, eliminating until I got to the point where I was completely anti-Cubist and then I even eliminated cubism from my work. Maybe Picasso was right



6.2 Joan Miró, *Portrait of Mme. K.*, Paris, Spring 1924

when he said what he did." The reference is to Picasso's acknowledgement (on Miro's evidence) that he, Miró, was "the only person after him to have taken a step forward in painting."¹⁶

Eliminating Cubism could have been seen as a step forward, and, quite obviously, the imagery introduced by Miró and Masson in their works

played a major role in this endeavor. However, Cubist spatial structures were still there *sous-sol*, and it was their perversion – the occasional complete inversion of their conceptual basis – that constituted for Miró and Masson their twofold engagement with the formal issues of Modernism and with the Surrealist vision and ideology. Cubism is commonly seen in terms of the flat surface of Modernism, but, taken in its broadest purport, it revealed in the course of its development a variety of spatial conceptions. These include the fragmented, shallow depth of Analytic Cubism, as well as the stress on the pictorial surface in Cubist collage, with its denial of illusory depth, which does not preclude a perception of depth in terms of ambiguously placed overlapping elements. Modernist flatness, in its most unmitigated form, appears in the paintings of Albert Gleizes, for instance, as opposed to Synthetic Cubism which offers a more complex engagement with conflicting assertions of flatness and depth. Such spatial ambiguities are exploited in Picasso's works, especially in the years immediately following the war, and they come fully into play in his paintings of a still-life in front of an open window (for instance, those done in 1919 in Saint Raphael, or later, in 1924–25), in which an equivocal relation exists between interior space and the space viewed outside the window. These works exhibit a layered depth comprising a succession of flat planes that interpenetrate and cut into one another and are ultimately pulled up together on the painting's surface.¹⁷ A planimetric spatial conception partaking of a succession of flat planes lying parallel to the picture's surface also characterizes Léger's paintings, in particular those done in the first half of the 1920s.¹⁸ The placement of the figures, and later the still-life elements, in increasingly spatially determined architectural settings, reflects the gradual incorporation of Purist elements in his work. Purist painting indeed suggests depth and space, but, as Ozenfant and Jeanneret argued in an article published in 1921, "[p]erspective means the creation of virtual space." This space, as exemplified by the work of Jeanneret, comprises an arrangement of planes running parallel to the picture plane, on which is rendered the "representation of the essential and invariable characteristics of bodies," that is to say, representations of objects that are not deformed by classical perspective. Their "true" form is thus projected directly onto the plane lying parallel to the picture surface, while retaining a semblance of volume as well.¹⁹ However complicated the perspectives used in these paintings, they were ruled by a sense of logic and order quite inimical to the perceptions of artists such as Miró and Masson, who felt closer to Picasso's spatial ambiguities, combined as they were with an imagery suggestive of violence and eroticism. My basic premise in considering what is specifically Surrealist in the work of Miró and Masson is dictated by my belief that, with all the subversive freedom they adopted, in an ideological framework partaking of various Surrealist concerns, they

were still working out of Cubism. In this they differed, for instance, from Picabia's "total incomprehension of surrealism," as Breton described it, and his rejection of any aesthetic or ideological stance, except for the "violent feeling of disgust at the commercial transactions to which every work of art is subject today (SP 21).²⁰ As will become clear, while the underlying spatial structuring of Miró's and Masson's paintings refers primarily to a layered or planimetric conception, their manipulation of this conception to their own specific ends reflects a commitment to Surrealist vision that is no less compelling than their thematic straying from the Cubist or Modernist aesthetic.

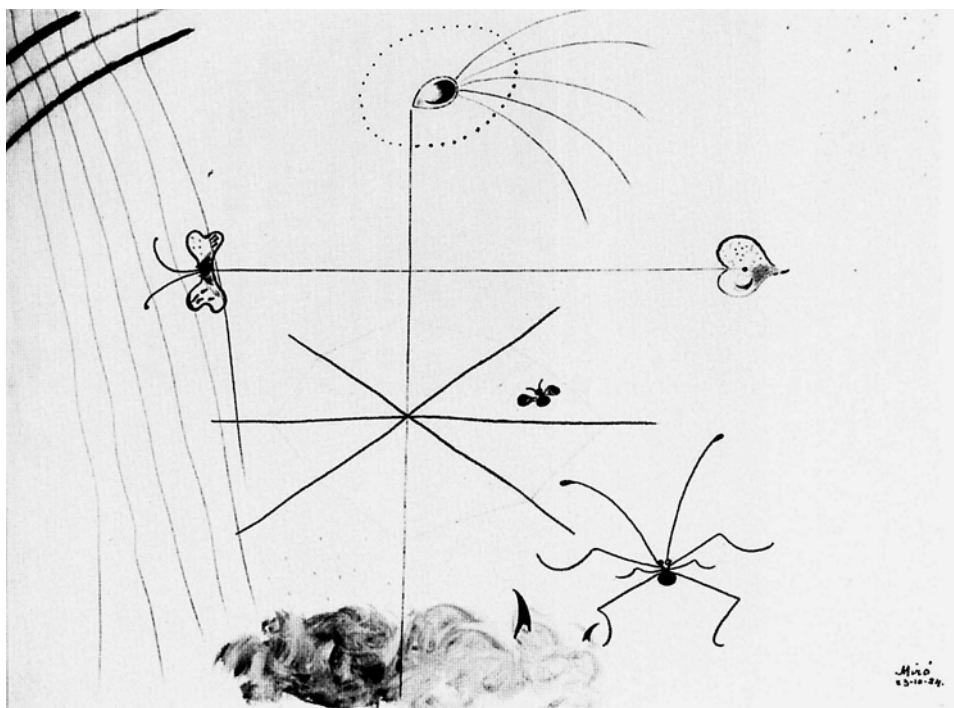
There is certainly much truth in Christopher Green's contention that the structures of Cubism could be adapted as signs of captivity against which to set the signs of Surrealist freedom (I should add that there is an abundance of imagery of captivity and liberation in Breton's poetry and automatic texts of these years).²¹ However, I assign a greater significance to the role of these structures as marks of the screen/window and the planimetric conception of space, in which this surface or "screen" merges with the structure of transparent – or rather semi-transparent – planes lying parallel to and "beyond" it. This spatial conception – to present in a nutshell the major considerations introduced in the coming discussion – will be approached as an embodiment of the dialectics of opacity and transparency, both in the formal sense of the interplay of surface and depth, and, metaphorically, as a topographical representation of consciousness and the hidden depths of the unconscious, revealed or intimated in the process of automatic creation. This dialectics will be seen in terms of a containment of the Ocean (the unconscious, the site of automatism, the inner depths of the soul) within a more definable spatial location; this containment being viewed in the more perceptible terms of the layered depth lying behind, and subsumed by, the paradigmatic "screen."

Miró's spider's web

I will examine first the nature of Miró's surfaces and pictorial space, with a consideration of Masson to follow. Miró's paintings from 1920 on present an increasing flatness of pictorial space, beginning with the tilting up of the table top in paintings such as *The Table (Still Life with Rabbit)* of 1920–21 and *Table with Glove* (1921).²² The former, while exhibiting some spatial recession, also possesses a pattern of horizontal lines that might convey a sense of a layered spatial conception.²³ A layered depth is more readily discernible in *The Farm* (1921–22) in which the pattern of horizontal dividers serves to spatially locate various structures and landscape features lying parallel to

the picture's surface. In *The Tilled Field* (1923–24), a painting done a year later, Miró appears to have largely dispensed with the perspectival recession still evoked by *The Farm* (with only the diminution in size of objects lying “within” the pictorial space to fulfill this function). The flat pattern of color areas (in which the various smaller forms and creatures are set),²⁴ and the lines defining the horizon and the division of land and water (a geometric division lacking materiality), point to the reductive signs and weightless lines that characterize *The Hunter* (*Catalan Landscape*) 1923–24), the gridded pictures of spring 1924, and other paintings of 1924–25.

Considerations of the painting's surface and the representation of pictorial space or depth are at times quite inextricable; this is particularly true, in Miró's case, of the paintings done in 1924–27, which disclose an interaction and inversion of depth and surface. I begin, however, with an examination of the surface as distinct from the pictorial space figured “behind” it. In a letter to the poet Michel Leiris (10 August 1924), Miró described drawings in which objects and isolated letters “fly around on a flat surface” (Rowell, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 86). He may have been referring to preparatory drawings for *The Hunter* or to 1924 drawings in the “Montroig Sketchbook,”²⁵ in which, indeed, signs and symbols appear to be fluidly metamorphosed into each other (hence the “flying around”) on the surface of the drawing sheet.²⁶ What looks like an horizon line in some of the drawings is more of a separator than an indicator of depth, and it functions in this respect similarly to the orthogonals crossing it. In *The Hunter*, this crossed pair of lines represents the horizon and the hunter's torso; in their more involved form, these vertical and horizontal lines, to which diagonals are added, create the geometric grid governing several paintings and drawings done in spring 1924, such as *The Kerosene Lamp* and *The Family*.²⁷ William Rubin speaks of a “quasi-Cubist grid” that holds together the curvilinear and biomorphic motifs in *The Family*, and notes that Miró referred to this practice as “a holdover from my Cubist days” (*Miró in the Collection of the MoMA* 29). It would appear, however, that Miró's remark was somewhat facetious, and that the grid meant more to him than merely a vestige of past practices. This is manifest in drawings made in the fall of 1924 in which Miró used the watermarks on the Ingres paper as readymade forms to which his own lines were added; he made similar use of the grid formed by chain and laid lines (verticals and horizontals).²⁸ In speaking of the purposes served by such surface practices involving grids of all kinds, I follow Anne Umland's very perceptive analysis of the drawing entitled *Woman and Insects* (Montroig, 23 October 1924; Figure 6.3). The central images in this drawing – a spider's web, similar to the grid of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines referred to above, and a rainbow formed by three colored lines in red, yellow and blue – allude, as Umland shows, to a passage from Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations*



6.3 Joan Miró, *Woman and Insects*, Montroig, 23 October 1924

that held a special importance for Miró.²⁹ The passage, in a section entitled “Après le déluge” (“After the Flood”), reads: “As soon as the idea of the Flood had subsided, / A hare stopped in the clover and the swinging flower bells, and said its prayer through the spider’s web to the rainbow” (*Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters* 212–213). Umland argues that the connection between the drawing and the quote from Rimbaud implies that Miró may have considered the spider’s web as a counterpart to a sort of “personalized Albertian ‘veil.’” Carolyn Lanchner used the same expression earlier in referring to the grid in red pencil left partly visible in Miró’s painting *Carnival of Harlequin* (1924–25).³⁰ In view of my claims earlier in this chapter, and, indeed, following the whole thrust of my argument in this study, I see the spider’s web, in the perspective offered by Rimbaud’s text, as a representation that both metaphorizes and literalizes the manifestation of the screen paradigm as an implicit spatial element in Miró’s work.³¹ My concern at this point is with the screen in its capacity as a plane of projection and seeing-through, that also functions as a membrane or separator between inside and outside, and, as such, plays a pivotal role in a dialectics of opacity

and transparency. What is, of course, central to Rimbaud's passage, in the perspective given it by Miró, is that the hare says its prayer to the rainbow "through the spider's web." The spider's web asserts its presence as a layer over what is seen behind it, but it also allows the "seeing-through." The rainbow constitutes a phenomenon of non-material color bands appearing in the sky; it seems to be enmeshed in the atmosphere and yet it frustrates any attempts to allocate to it a specific spatial location. For Miró, this passage thus evokes the interplay of the painting's surface, symbolized by the spider's web, and the half-hidden, at times indeterminate or barely hinted-at representations lying in the boundless space existing behind it, to which the rainbow alludes.³²

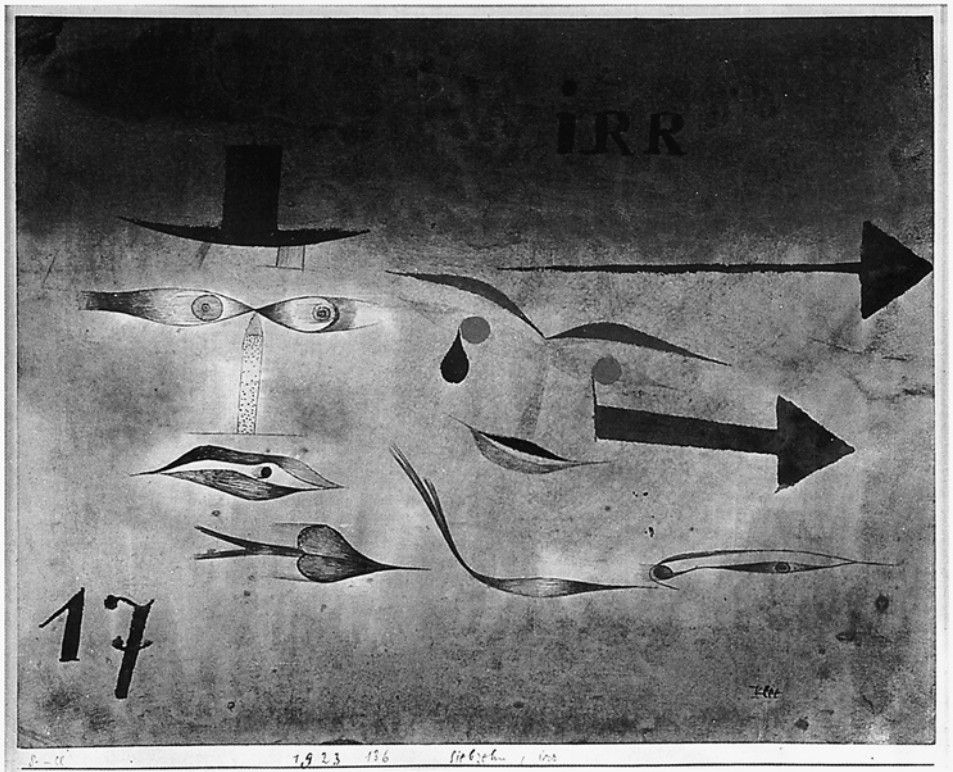
"The air is a window" – Miró's layered depth

Reflections on pictorial space inevitably come to the fore in considerations of the surface of Miró's paintings. Rosalind Krauss sees the representation of space in Miró mostly as a function of the way the lines constituting a surface-structure effect a separation of figure from ground (*Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields* 14). Thus she considers the crossed pair of lines in *Head of a Catalan Peasant IV* (1925, Figure 6.4) as existing "in the pictographic, non-dimensional space of writing; but also as a rudimentary schema of perspective," in which the horizontal axis "pulses between its proximate position as part of the figure and its infinite one as an outpost of space" (19).³³ Yet for Krauss Miró's space remains a "weightless ideographic space," an "open, luminous field," and it is in this respect that I disagree with her otherwise admirable analysis.³⁴ I see Miró's space as exhibiting layered depth, substance, atmosphere; and, in terms of the screen paradigm, as partaking of the dialectics of opacity and transparency in a more involved manner than merely in terms of the interaction of surface and depth. A starting point for such a consideration is the atmospheric space evoked in *The Hunter*, perhaps the first of many works in which the rather loose brushwork – or the more pronounced scumbling in later works – allows the underpainting to show through and suggests a sense of breathing, airy color suffusion, "enveloping spatial permeation," to use Carolyn Lanchner's expression.³⁵ It is perhaps this quality that Breton responded to in his rather cryptic remark concerning Miró's perception that "the air is a window opening on to a rocket or an enormous pair of moustaches" (*SP* 40). At this point I would like to bring in Paul Klee, whose paintings and drawings, exhibited in Paris in the mid-1920s, were also illustrated in *La Révolution surréaliste*. Among artists, Miró and Masson display the greatest debt to Klee's example, a debt they both quite readily acknowledged.³⁶ Masson may have found in Klee another confirmation for his practice of automatic drawing, although there



6.4 Joan Miró, *Head of a Catalan Peasant IV*, Montroig, July–September 1925

is a marked difference between their methods and the nature of their lines.³⁷ Miró's lines, such as those that characterize some of the paintings executed in Montroig in summer/fall of 1924 (for instance, *Bouquet of Flowers*, *The Overthrow*, or *The Hermitage*), exhibit a far greater affinity with Klee's. No less significant, however, is Klee's mode of representing space, to which both Miró



6.5 Paul Klee, 17, *Astray (Siebzehn, irr)*, 1923

and Masson may have been exposed in reproductions of his works, and, quite possibly, directly, in the case of drawings and paintings shown in Paris at the time.³⁸ In his "Eloge de Paul Klee" (1946), Masson refers to Henri Michaux, who, "not without humor, wrote of the paintings of a school considered until now to be one of the most liberated with regard to servility to the visual" – meaning Cubism – "that 'it is known that you can't see into them further than three meters.' On the contrary, what Klee seeks is the unlimited."³⁹ This sense of the unlimited, quite prominently evoked in Masson's writings (I will return to these), does not necessarily mean an unhindered penetration into a limitless pictorial space. Both Miró and Masson perceived in Klee's example a measure of confinement of what is fluid or "unlimited" – deriving from the nature and substance of the atmospheric ground and its interplay with the rather opaque marks, lines and forms placed within it, suspended between surface and deep space. Klee's drawing 17, *Astray* (1923, Figure 6.5) – "Dix-sept égarés," as the reproduction in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* was titled – is the

most immediate example of this spatial conception. The number "17," the German word "irr," the two arrows, the marks designating the presence of a man and a woman – all these, to use Ann Temkin's phrase, "swim across an aqueous space of irregular splotches and vague horizontal zones formed by repeated washings of watercolor."⁴⁰ However, they do not swim across so much as they are perceived to interact with the varying opacities, and hence the varying depths, of the watercolor washes.⁴¹

There is no need to harp on what is an obvious correlation between Klee's conception and the dialectics of opacity and transparency that I have conjectured with regard to Miró. In later years, with the atmospheric and scumbled grounds well behind him, Miró would state that a "shaded form has less impact than one that is not shaded. Shading prevents this shock and restricts movement to one in visual depth. Without shading or chiaroscuro, there is no precise indication of depth: movement can go on to infinity."⁴² But in many works done after 1924, the movement to infinity is effected through a succession of opacities in a layered depth conception which also regulates the sense of infinitude or limitlessness often associated with Miró's grounds.⁴³ Such a conception is evinced by the partially erased lines in white crayon in the quite elaborate drawing *The Family* (charcoal, red chalk, pastel and crayon on paper, 1924). These fuzzy white outlines appear alongside the firmly delineated forms done in charcoal, as if they were their "shadows" (white shadows for all that) projected on a layer lying deeper beneath the surface.⁴⁴ A painting utilizing a similar technique, *Portrait of Mme K.* (1924, Figure 6.2), reveals a shadowy underlayer comprising faint lines and softly shaded areas done in charcoal.⁴⁵ These shadowy areas and fuzzy lines are not the outcome of an unsuccessful attempt at erasure but rather the mark of a willed decision on Miró's part. They foreshadow a spatial conception of layered depth that was to attain its most conspicuous form in a large series of paintings begun in the winter of 1924–25 and continued through 1927. These go by the name of "dream paintings," a term coined by Jacques Dupin that has gained currency in the literature devoted to Miró.⁴⁶ Without necessarily following Dupin's strict definition, I will consider primarily the paintings that present a surface layer of well-defined lines, signs and forms, whose opacity and flatness seem to be in contradistinction to the loosely painted, evanescent and flowing tempera grounds. At times these grounds show an expressive brushwork and a rather rough scumbling, as in the somewhat earlier *Bather* (fall 1924); other works, such as *Head of a Catalan Peasant IV* (July–September 1925, Figure 6.4), exhibit softer scumbling and a more pronounced inner luminosity. And then there is the even more luminous and evanescent ground formed by a succession of thinned washes and transparent glazes, manifested most prominently in Miró's best-known work in this style, *The Birth of the World* (July–September 1925).⁴⁷ The layered conception in all these works is discernible not only in

the distinction between the opaque surface elements and the ground but also within the ground's illusionist depths.⁴⁸

In pursuing questions that come up in relation to the spatial form of Miró's dream paintings, their presumed automatic origin, or rather their relation to the Surrealist notion of psychic automatism, should be looked into as well. What might be noted at the outset is that the dream pictures, with very few exceptions, were not exhibited at the time they were created and none was reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste*. Raymond Spiteri has correctly observed that what Breton wrote in 1928 regarding Miró's painting – "... it is permissible to see a pitch fork in every star, to see 'a substance full of points, lines and angles,' that and nothing more, in even a human body, to see a feathered animal, in terms of its feathers ..." (SP 37) – applies quite well to Miró's figurative imagery and is less successful in describing the dream paintings.⁴⁹ But perhaps the dream paintings are altogether absent from the passages devoted to Miró in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*. William Rubin has argued that the dream paintings were the ones that confirmed Miró's Surrealist status in Breton's eyes, and that he was thinking of these paintings when he wrote in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* that it was "by such pure psychic automatism that Miró may pass for the most Surrealist of us all."⁵⁰ Rubin based this assertion on what Breton had told him in an interview held in 1959; these later avowals, however, may not quite reflect the situation in 1925. Furthermore, as Kim Grant pointed out, this statement regarding Miró in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* is a backhanded compliment.

Not only does this text reveal Breton's objections to Miró's unintellectual dedication to artistic creation, but it also shows the extent of his fears regarding automatism in the visual arts. As he wrote, Miró has "very summarily" verified the value of automatism, and this summary is effectively superficial and mindless. Miró's painting was an example of a sort of easy automatism achieved by a true painter, and this is something of which Breton was highly suspicious; as he wrote, it leads to the danger of becoming "merely hands that paint."⁵¹

It is, indeed, debatable whether the notion of automatism could at all be applied to the dream paintings. Interviewed in 1948 by James Johnson Sweeney, Miró, referring presumably to his current work, described how "the picture begins to assert itself, or suggest itself under my brush ... The first stage is free, unconscious ... [But] the second stage is carefully calculated."⁵² This statement, however, does not truly express the way Miró worked on the earlier canvases; the first stage is not so much an unconscious scribbling as a free handling of paint broadly brushed on the canvas. The second stage is not an elaboration arising from the first; the firmer lines and forms do not follow the stains, dribbles and fluid forms of the ground but rather are placed in relation to them as separate layers in a collage. As noted by Christopher

Green, Miró's sketchbooks reveal that the dream paintings closely followed the quick pencil sketches done beforehand and thus they may be automatic only at second-hand.⁵³

"The whole depth and the whole surface of an ocean"

There is, however, a different way in which the dream paintings refer to psychic automatism. I return to the "spider's web" of lines constituted by the grid and the ideogrammatic signs designating objects and figures. To these may be added the words and scattered letters inscribed on the surfaces of Miró's paintings. In the letter to Leiris (10 August 1924) to which I have referred previously, Miró describes the works on wood "in which I take off from some form in the wood." He continues:

Using an artificial thing as a point of departure like this, I feel, is parallel to what writers can obtain by starting with an arbitrary sound; the R.R. from the song of a cricket, for example, or the isolated sound of a consonant or vowel, any sound, be it nasal or labial, This can create a surprising metaphysical state in you poets, even when you use the sound of vowels or consonants that have no meaning at all (Rowell, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 86).

The analogy between the use made of forms in the wood, giving rise to marks of all sorts, and the sound of consonants or vowels at the root of poetic creation (and, by extension, of language itself) leads Miró to think of the sheets of paper he uses for his sketches, on which are placed "dissociated drawings" and "on which I jot down a number of remarks: names of colors or simply the monosyllable *yes* ..." He then says that in "other drawings, of objects that fly around on a flat surface, I write isolated letters. I agree with Breton that there is something extremely disturbing about a page of writing." Miró's reference is to the essay "Ideas of a Painter" (1921), in which Breton paraphrases André Derain, probably through the filter of his own thoughts at the time. In the passage alluded to by Miró, Derain ponders the disturbing quality of the shifting of forms and curves into signs (astrological signs, letters of the alphabet), that, while conventional, still convey a sense beyond their intrinsic form ("to think that *that* can make people act") (*The Lost Steps* 64; OC I 249). The disturbing quality which Miró himself discerns in his drawings and canvases has more to do, however, with their power to move. "These [the canvases that are "simply drawn"] move us in the elevated sense of the word, like the tears of a child in its cradle. The others [the "ones that have been painted"] are like the screams of a whore in love." More significantly, Miró appears to conceive of his drawings and the paintings evolving from them in terms of a "page of writing," whose disturbing, or rather disconcerting quality derives from

the suspension of his signs-marks between the verbal and the pictorial; and, in both systems, between signification or, indeed, transparency, and opacity. What is involved then is the “crossed” purpose of the pictorial and semantic signification on the one hand, and the arbitrary and non-descriptive character of the mark on the other. Miró thus introduces his drawings and canvases into the heart of the debate concerning language that was raging at the time, especially with regard to the way the Surrealists made use of language in an effort, to cite Breton, to “restore language’s true destination, which for some (myself included) promised to take knowledge a giant leap forward and exalt life by as much.”⁵⁴

It seems inevitable that Miró, who was close to Robert Desnos and Michel Leiris, would introduce language into his drawings and paintings in a manner consubstantial with their language concerns. The latter are exemplified by the word plays – the breaking up of words and the assembling of new words through the use of anagrams, homonyms and other devices – published by Desnos in *Littérature* in December 1922 under the pseudonym of Rose Sélavy, or those incorporated in the poems published in 1923 in the collections *L'Aumonyme* and *Langage cuit*. Similar procedures were employed by Leiris in his “Glossaire: J’y serre mes gloses,” published in *La Révolution surréaliste* in 1925.⁵⁵ Contrary to the information on words given by dictionaries, which is based on usage and etymology, Leiris, in a note following his “Glossaire,” advocated dissecting words so as to “discover their most hidden qualities and the secret ramifications that spread throughout the language, channeled by the association of sounds, forms and ideas. Language then turns into an oracle and we have in it (however tenuous) a thread that will guide us through the Babel of our minds.” As noted before, the separation of the word from fixed meaning brings home the sense of the opacity of language (the arbitrariness and abstract nature of phonetic sounds or syllables) but also its openness or transparency (its broader signifying quality). The arbitrary nature of the written sign is fully exemplified by Benjamin Péret’s “Les parasites voyagent” (“The Parasites go on a Journey”), a text published in the fourth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (July 1925), illustrated with Miró’s painting *The Hunter*, in which words are created or exchanged arbitrarily to stand for others.⁵⁶ The freedom of words from fixed meaning is analogous, in Miró’s paintings (as well as Masson’s), to the openness of his sign systems and the shifting of his pictorial signs from one denotative sense to another. Furthermore, the scattered words, letters and phrases inscribed in Miró’s canvases evince a more direct relation to the Surrealist use of language advocated by Breton in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*. As I observed in Chapter 3, the concept of “glace sans tain” or unsilvered mirror (two-way mirror) refers to the basic dialectics involved in the process of automatic writing, as Breton and Soupault saw it, with its doubling of transparency and opacity, seeing-through, projection and

reflection; transparency and opacity are applicable both ways, from both sides of the mirror. The two-way mirror reflects or mirrors the reality of the writer as well as what the writer projects on it; at the same time, it allows a partial view of the depths of the mind, albeit one dependent on the distorting quality of the internal mental mirror. As such, the two-way mirror is also applicable to the painting's surface, as illustrated in my reading of Breton's notion of the picture as window. It is in this broad perspective, I suggest, that the conceptual essence of the surface in Miró's painting should be viewed; that is to say, as literally and metaphorically a screen that conceptually subsumes the two-way mirror as a central constituent in the practice of psychic automatism.

To follow up on this suggestion, I will approach Miró's layered depth, in its relation to the surface-screen, as a metaphorical representation of consciousness and of the hidden depths of the unconscious revealed or intimated in the process of automatic creation. I will enlist for this purpose the concept of the Ocean, for which I am indebted to Michel Beaujour whose article "De l'Océan au Château: Mythologie surréaliste" ("From Ocean to Castle: Surrealist mythology") presents the Castle and the Ocean as two mythical arrays that constitute the cardinal points of Surrealist thought and activity.⁵⁷ To follow Beaujour's thinking, the "hypothesis of a psychic unconscious is readily stated in the form of spatial images of depth. It seems that we spontaneously choose the representation of aquatic depths, which at once satisfy our need of mystery and ambivalence" (354). The image of an ocean as a representation of the unconscious figures a few times in Aragon's texts. Such is, for instance, his evocation of Desnos's utterances in the course of an hypnotic trance:

Robert Desnos has only to close his eyes in a café and, regardless of the sound of voices, the bright light, being jostled by passers by, he starts to speak; amid the beer glasses and saucers the whole Ocean collapses with its prophetic din and vapors decorated with long oriflammes.⁵⁸

In another text, Aragon writes of the

... abyssal mass, a foaming and large interior sea, which passes under Paris and that flowed under Delphi. Sole meaning of the word Beyond, you reside in poetry, at the point where there awakens a Mediterranean of murmurs ... Robert Desnos speaks ... and right away the great communal sea is in the room ...⁵⁹

Psychic automatism as an immersion in a fathomless ocean is a utopian ideal; associated with this ideal is the ambition to become a "soluble fish,"⁶⁰ to dissolve in this interior sea of the unconscious that is common to all of humanity, amounting to a loss of one's individual identity. But there is also a threatening quality to such formlessness and loss of self. An experience of the indeterminateness of the "Ocean" of the unconscious may have been suggested by Breton in "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of

Reality" (first published in 1924): "The fearless soul plunges into a land with no escape, where one's eyes open without weeping. One wanders here to no purpose; one obeys without anger. One can see behind oneself without turning around" (*Break of Day* 5; *OC II* 267). To become a "soluble fish" proved also to be a utopian ambition because the Ocean, with its vastness, limitlessness, unattainable depths was not easily translatable into images; it could not express, for instance, the *merveilleux quotidien*, the perception of a mystery within the real, on which the Surrealists based their experiences of Surreality. To follow Aragon, the Ocean might be referred to in terms of "abyssal mass, a foaming and large interior sea," or "a Mediterranean of murmurs,"⁶¹ but when Aragon evokes the "whole ocean in the Passage de l'Opéra" in the cane shop episode (*Paris Peasant* 22–3; *Paysan de Paris* 30–31), he needs the windowpane to contain it. Or it is a door which defines but hardly delimits its existence, as remarked by Aragon in a passage cited before: "The gateway to mystery swings open at the touch of human weakness and we have entered the realms of darkness. One false step, one slurred syllable together reveal a man's thoughts. The disquieting atmosphere of places contains similar locks which cannot be bolted fast against infinity" (13; 20).

The formlessness of the Ocean is tantamount to its inaccessibility to language (to use Beaujour's apt phrase). An automatic text, however, does make use of language, and, as such, it does not constitute a direct representation of the Ocean but rather a verbal approximation, it might be proposed, that parallels the structure of thought in its shift from the non-verbal to the verbal.⁶² Analyses of automatic texts often reveal that the "words make sense only within the limits of relatively short groups, and there are semantic incompatibilities between these groups."⁶³ Mary Ann Caws sees the Surrealist automatic prose texts as revealing "passages placed in stylistic relief, composed of salient elements analyzable on the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic levels." These passages may be reassembled into a coherent text; and as such they constitute "visible protrusions on the surface of a generating theme for the 'unconsciously' or spontaneously produced images of the automatic text."⁶⁴ In the terms I am proposing, the automatic text presents an envelope or surface of coherence over an oceanic formlessness constituted by a multiplicity of sense and of verbal suggestions. Throughout the greater part of the 1920s, the Surrealists felt they should allocate the Ocean (the unconscious, the site of automatism, the inner depths of the mind) a more specific spatial location; "contain" it, so to speak, in the more perceptible terms of the space behind the paradigmatic "screen." Or, they may have been aware that such a containment is willy-nilly an outcome of any automatic process. I would argue, furthermore, that Miró created a plastic analogy – a mimesis, so to speak – of this state of automatic creation by formulating a pictorial idiom involving surface markings over an "ocean" of plastic possibilities. In "Saint Sebastian" (1927), Dalí's first major

published text – in a section devoted to “Saint Sebastian’s magnifying glass,” an instrument of vision that for Dalí symbolizes the act of looking – there is a passage that appears to follow Miró’s conception quite closely:

I see in the nicked headlight of an *Isotta Fraschini* a girl playing polo. I do no more than let my curiosity lead me to her eye, which then occupies the whole field of vision. This single eye, suddenly enlarged to become a sole spectacle, is the whole depth and the whole surface of an ocean on which sail all poetic suggestions, and where all the plastic possibilities are stabilized ... One can see once again the eye in its primitive dimension at the depth of the concave mirror of the headlight, now like an unusual organism in which swim the precise fish of the reflections in their watery, lachrymal medium.⁶⁵

I suggested earlier that Miró’s spider’s web might be seen as a representation that both metaphorizes and literalizes the manifestation of the screen paradigm as an implicit spatial element in his work. To extend this metaphor, the surface’s spider’s web is the projection upward of what lies deep in the Ocean, but it also serves as a net thrown into the Ocean to catch these vestiges of dream or the unconscious.⁶⁶ It might also be noted that images relating to swimming or bathing in Miró’s work – as, for instance, those in *The Bather* (1924) with its loosely brushed blue ground, or in *The Siesta* (1925) – convey a sense of the vertiginous quality of being immersed in eddying inchoateness. This “oceanic” quality is contained by the net, the surface’s spider’s web, the schematic representation of waves (*The Bather*) or the diagrammatic representation of the swimmer’s motions (*The Siesta*). The means of containment are varied, however; with surface and depth, inside and outside, often inversed, so that what lies furthest in the “depths” of the painting also rises on the surface. I think that this is one of the purposes served by the vague imprints of the underlying stretcher bars and crossbars in several paintings. These may have been the inadvertent result of the brushwork and scumbled paint of Miró’s ground, but he has kept them, and, in a few cases, purposefully added them. These marks constitute yet another layer within the depth of the painting. Unlike the layers formed by the scumbled paint and the application of washes and glazes (that might be perceived as illusionist representations of depth), such marks evince the existence of a material layer on the “other side” of the canvas. However, they also constitute an element that serves as the immediate ground for the uppermost surface marks.⁶⁷ This inside/outside reversal defines their position in the painting in terms of a “screen” that contains the “ocean” of formlessness.

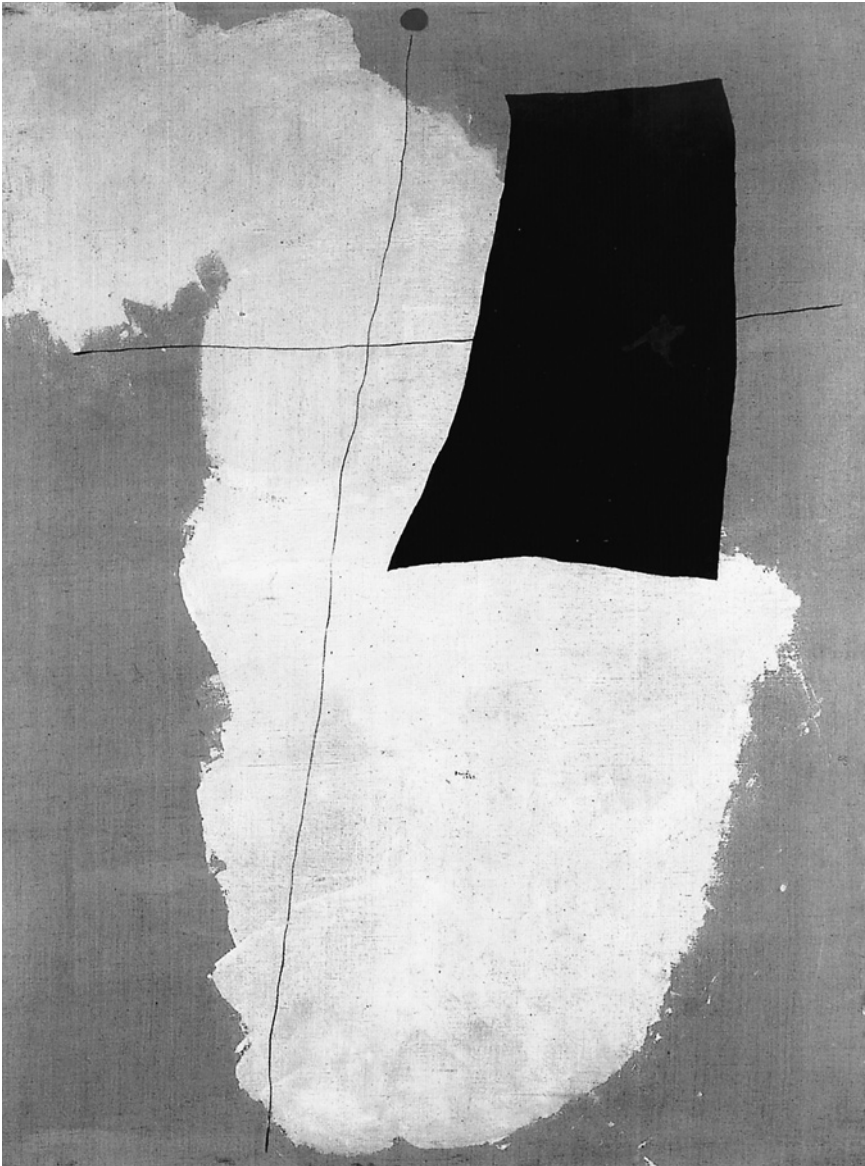
In defining the picture as an artifact – as a canvas stretched on a stretcher – the traces of the stretcher bars partake of Miró’s general strategy of defining a condition of self-referentiality or reflexivity that, again, turns on the notion of the screen. The marks of the stretcher bars function as an internal frame, similarly to the way Picasso, according to Apollinaire, “entrust[ed] real

objects to the light – a two-penny song, a real postage stamp ...” Such an object “constitutes the internal frame of the painting, marking the limits of its depth just as the frame marks its exterior limits.”⁶⁸ The surface of the picture in its screen capacity is fully in evidence in Miró’s *Painting-Poem* (“*Photo – This is the color of my dreams*”) (1925), in which the uniform light-beige color field bears the inscription “Photo” close to the top-left corner; at the bottom, closer to the right-hand side, there is a lump of dirty-blue paint with the inscription “*ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*” placed next to it. The splotch of blue is a “sample” of the ground that, in other paintings, covers the whole canvas; the inscription next to it discloses the artifice involved in conceiving of the painted ground as the abode of dreams – the “other side” of the wall, in Reverdy’s metaphor. The indisputable reality of this blob of paint is in contradistinction to the conventional nature of the inscription “Photo,” but its representational stance seems to be confirmed by this assertion of photographic veracity. Miró thus creates an internal frame that, in this particular case, is identical to the painting itself, in an extreme form, indeed an end-case, of the *mise-en-abyme* conception which I have considered at some length with regard to both Ernst and Magritte.⁶⁹ An internal frame is literally depicted in *Painting* (January–February 1927, The Philadelphia Museum of Art), in which the illusory reversal of painted/non-painted (an area of white paint is made to look like an unpainted canvas) confirms the status of this frame as the site of projection.⁷⁰ A film projection, I dare say, in view of the lines comprising a projection cone that start in a point at the left of the canvas (which might also represent, to go by Christian Metz’s suggestion, as noted in Chapter 1, a cone starting from the screen and “deposited” in the spectator’s perception). In the earlier *The Siesta* (1925), the sight lines originate in the eye of the figure, whose rectangular head serves also as a screen on which might be projected what the figure sees. Such internal frames, in their cinema screen capacity, also offer a refutation of Naville’s contention (*La Révolution surréaliste* 3, April 1925) that “there is no Surrealist painting,” because, he argues, in painting the mind can admit only rectangular forms associated with the corners and frames; cinema, on the contrary, is unlimited by rectangular vision (Chapter 3). The internal frame, placed within the ground, constitutes a window-screen – indeed, a roving cinema screen – that, while partaking of the dialectics of opacity and transparency, engenders a movement into the depth of the picture.

That these internal frames could have referred to the cinema screen might also be conjectured on the basis of a collage made in 1929 (Montroig, late July–early October), which, in its original state, included a whole newspaper sheet taken from the Barcelona newspaper *La Publicitat*. In considering this collage’s cinematic provenance, in relation to the association of the newspaper sheet with the cinema screen, it will not be too far-fetched to assume that it was not by chance that Miró chose the cinema page with its conspicuous display of

the word "CINEMA." At that time, cinema occupied a prominent position in avant-garde circles in Barcelona, and it is quite likely that Miró participated in deliberations concerning cinema, the more so because of his quite close contact with Dalí, who was at the time one of the most vociferous promoters of this medium.⁷¹ There is a question concerning the physical orientation of this collage; early photographs show it in an upright position, which is also that of the newspaper sheet; in its present form (and as it is displayed in The Museum of Modern Art, New York) it is placed horizontally, with only a small circular piece remaining of the newspaper sheet.⁷² Obviously, with the collage in an upright position, the film content of the page could have been read; the horizontal orientation enhances the sense of the newspaper sheet as a laterally extended cinema screen. In the latter case, while the title "CINEMA" is still legible, the newspaper page as a whole presents a structure of surface markings of the kind Miró made use of earlier in his career. In both orientations, the page constitutes an inner frame that defines the cinematic dimension of the work.

A special case of the internal frame deserves some notice. *Painting (The Toreador)* (Figure 6.6) might be associated with the series referred to previously in relation to the Philadelphia Museum *Painting*, and it was done around the same time (January–mid-February 1927). It exhibits the same reversal, with the area painted white over the beige ground appearing to constitute an unprimed canvas. A pair of crossed lines with a small red circle on top (a structure similar to that in *Head of a Catalan Peasant IV*) extends over the greater part of the breadth and length of the canvas, with a large black irregularly shaped rectangular form poised over the right "arm." The structural ambiguities inherent in the reversal of roles of white and beige are further heightened by the precarious spatial condition of the black rectangle, which evokes a fathomless depth while appearing also to be the uppermost layer of paint. The black rectangle constitutes an internal frame that might be seen as a representation both metaphorical and literal of the essential emptiness underlying the condition of painting. This implies a reversal of the dialectics of opacity and transparency, with the black rectangle simultaneously representing a transparent vision into an emptiness and the opacity of a surface element. Emptiness in Miró's work is often associated with the notion of emptiness introduced in Michel Leiris's essay "Joan Miró" published in October 1929 in *Documents*. Leiris advocates accustoming oneself to an "exercise analogous to that performed by certain Tibetan ascetics for the purpose of acquiring what they call, more or less [...] the *understanding of emptiness* [*compréhension du vide*]." The exercise involves, first, a perfect possession of an image, and then a subtraction, one by one, of all its elements, until the spirit is ready to "see and contemplate emptiness"; the image is then reconstructed step by step. A succession of these "destructions and reconstructions" brings about a "total understanding of



6.6 Joan Miró, *Painting (The Toreador)*, Paris, January–mid February 1927

physical emptiness, the first step towards an understanding of true emptiness – of moral and metaphysical emptiness, which is not ... the negative notion of nothings but the positive understanding of a term at once identical and

contrary to nothingness ..."⁷³ Leiris sees Miró as one of the contemporary painters "who have gone furthest in this sort of endeavor." He then somewhat lamely qualifies this emptiness by suggesting that this is what allowed Miró to rediscover "such a childhood, at once so serious and so clownish." It seems to me, however, that Miró's emptiness, as represented by the black rectangle, is much starker than Leiris's notion. It suggests an Ocean emptied of any sort of "poetic suggestions" and "plastic possibilities," to use the phrases by Dalí cited before. This emptiness is closer to the one suggested a few years earlier in Leiris's novel *The Cardinal Point* (*Le Point cardinal*), in a scene concerning a theater stage. "The curtain remained poised, forever poised, while the set gradually darkened, as if a sheet of nothingness had been dropped in front of it, casting the entire scene on the other side of the bright footlights into blackness, like a balcony over an abyss."⁷⁴ The "sheet of nothingness" that is Miró's black rectangle might be seen in terms closer to Mallarmé's "gouffre" (abyss), the darker side of Mallarmé's "azur," a word "combining the meaning of "blue" and "sky."⁷⁵ Mallarmé, placed high in Miró's pantheon of poets, appears to have provided him with both elements as dominant images: the "blue totality" of the sky and the "black chaos of nothingness," to use Anna Balakian's phrases, as the two sides of existence, evoked in the poems "Les Fenêtres" and "L'Azur." The black rectangle constitutes one of these sides, but it is a side never so starkly revealed before in Miró's paintings. Miró at times tended to present, again in Mallarméen terms, a situation analogous to that of the poet who feels guilt at not being able to comprehend and recreate the purity of the blue sky and tries to make a kind of blackness in order to efface the presence of the sky (Fowlie, *Mallarmé* 36). What results is a kind of ashen and dirty combination of the two, and hence Mallarmé's invocation: "Fogs, arise! Pour your monotonous ashes with long tatters of mist into the skies ... and build a vast, silent ceiling!"⁷⁶ It may have been this quality of some of Miró's grounds that elicited Michel Leiris's evocation of

... those immense canvases that seemed not so much painted as soiled, murky as ruined buildings, alluring as faded walls on which generations of poster-plasters, together with centuries of drizzle, have inscribed mysterious poems, long spots with evil configurations, as uncertain as alluvial deposits that have come from some unknown place, sands carried along by rivers with perpetually changing courses, subject as they are to the motion of the wind and rain ("Joan Miró" 264; *Brisées* 27).

Leiris's rather extreme phrasing is quite applicable to *The Birth of the World* (1925) and perhaps also to the later "*Musique – Seine – Michel, Bataille et moi*" (1927), but only partially so to Miró's other dream paintings. It reflects, rather, his own shift in the late 1920s from Breton's Surrealist aesthetics to the orbit of Georges Bataille.⁷⁷ A shift away from Breton is heralded by Miró's black rectangle as well. In introducing the black rectangle into his 1927 painting,

Miró appears to have symbolically removed himself from the Surrealist Ocean with its myriad verbal/plastic possibilities. The flatly textured color of his “summer landscapes” of 1926 and 1927, and of the Dutch Interiors and Imaginary Portraits of 1928 and 1929, appears to deny the spatial connotations of his dream paintings. If, as I have suggested before, Miró’s “spider’s web” might be seen as a representation that both metaphorizes and literalizes the manifestation of the screen as a semi-transparent container of the Ocean of automatism and the unconscious, in the later works he does away with it and opts for a firm contouring of his poetic inventions.⁷⁸ When Breton wrote the paragraphs devoted to Miró in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, in which he expressed reservations about Miró’s facile automatism and his giving himself up “utterly to painting and to painting alone” (SP 36), he may have had in mind not so much the “dream paintings” – these may have been altogether absent from this section, as noted before – but rather the more recent ones of 1926–28.⁷⁹ Miró’s collages of 1928–29, to which I will turn below, were a radical response to Breton’s criticism, demonstrating that he could do a lot more than merely devote himself to “painting alone.”⁸⁰

“When I paint, I caress what I am doing” – Miró’s skin of painting

A substantial part of my discussion of Miró has been devoted to considerations of pictorial space in which various surface practices play a critical role. I do not want to dwell too much on the obvious in positing now an analogy between Miró’s surfaces and the notion of skin; I will only present a few specific points that will emphasize this correlation. I begin by citing two letters by Miró. “When I paint, I caress what I am doing, and the effort to give these things an expressive life wears me out terribly,” wrote Miró to his friend Roland Tual in July 1922. In the letter cited before to Michel Leiris (August 1924), he wrote:

Portrait of a charming lady friend from Paris – I begin with the idea of touching her body *very chastely*, beginning with her side and going up to her head. Profile drawn in charcoal. A vertical line for the breasts; one is a pear that opens and scatters its little seeds ... On the other side, an apple being pecked at by a bird. Sparks fly out of the wound caused by this pecking. Below, going across the sex (I insist on my very chaste and respectful intentions) a comet with its luminous tail ... (Rowell, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 79, 87).

The two letters testify not only to a sensitive response to the surface of the object to be painted but also to the painted surface itself; in both cases, this sensitivity is underpinned by the action of caressing, of touching; it is effected by the reciprocity of contact between surface and skin. That such touching, *pace* Miró’s protestations, was erotically charged – with this eroticism

translated into a mode of vision – might be discerned in a collage dedicated to Michel Leiris in 1924, in which a sinuous line extended horizontally is topped on its crests by eyes; the shape of the line resembles the curves representing the female body in paintings such as *Portrait of Mme. B.* (1924) or *Painting-Poem* (“Oh! one of those gentlemen who has done all that!”) (1925).⁸¹ The eyes thus appear to represent the skin in its capacity of a tool of vision. The drawing of a snail with the antennae as the main sense organs accentuates the connection between touch and vision; the collaged feather, a fetish object, adds an erotic dimension to this touch-vision.⁸² The brown-beige color of the wrapping paper Miró used for this collage may refer to the earth, but it is also flesh-colored enough to augment the overall sense of human skin. Skin is also evoked in a few 1925 paintings, in which the human figure appears as a spectral apparition, exhibiting soft, almost translucent, serpentine streaks of white paint, that seem to fade into the layer of ground paint.⁸³ A passage in Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* – underlined by Miró in his copy of the book – seems to evoke a sensation quite akin (although reversed in color values) to that conveyed by these vestiges of skin: “She was a dark-haired, voluptuous woman on whose white skin delicate veins appeared in such great numbers that she seemed blue ...”⁸⁴

What I have sketched above should not be taken for more than what it is – suggestions or hints of some implied analogy that may have been on Miró’s mind at the time, between the painting’s surface and the notion of skin. But having postulated such an analogy, I can see much in Miró’s surfaces that corroborates this assumption. The surfaces of the paintings, in particular those begun in the summer of 1924, possess the kind of tactile quality that bespeaks a sense of living matter pulsating underneath the “skin” of the painting. In *The Hunter* (1923–24), for instance, the skin of the painting, subsumed in the flesh-colored paint layer representing the earth, appears to permeate the canvas as a whole and to intimate a body hidden behind the pictographic representation of the eponymous hunter. Furthermore, there is much in Miró’s work to warrant the perception that the surface of the painting serves as a containing element implying the metaphorical presence of the artist himself within the pictorial space. As has often been noted, the staring disembodied eyes placed within the space of works such as *The Hunter* and *The Family* (1924) constitute a representation of the artist “within” his work. Such a representation annuls traditional Renaissance perspective, with its convergence of all orthogonals in a vanishing point that has an identical geometric counterpart outside the painting, in the location of the artist’s eye (and presumably the beholder’s). In placing his eye, and by extension, his body, within the picture, Miró appears to emulate the northern tradition of perspective construction in which viewers are placed within the picture.⁸⁵ These perceptions are sustained by what I have conjectured with regard to

the way Miró's paintings analogize psychic automatism, with its envelope or surface of coherence over an oceanic formlessness constituted by a multiplicity of sense and of verbal suggestions; the eye and its white "shadow" are located on the surface but also occupy a viewpoint within the pictorial space. I should add that the identification of pictorial space with the space of the body, with the added analogy of surface and skin, is also subsumed in several paintings in the imprint of the underlying stretcher bars. A consequence of the brushwork and scumbled paint of Miró's ground, as noted before, these imprints are also indexical marks of the physical engagement of Miró's body with the canvas and with the material layer behind it (the stretcher bar); the body, as a result, is literally and metaphorically stamped within the pictorial space.

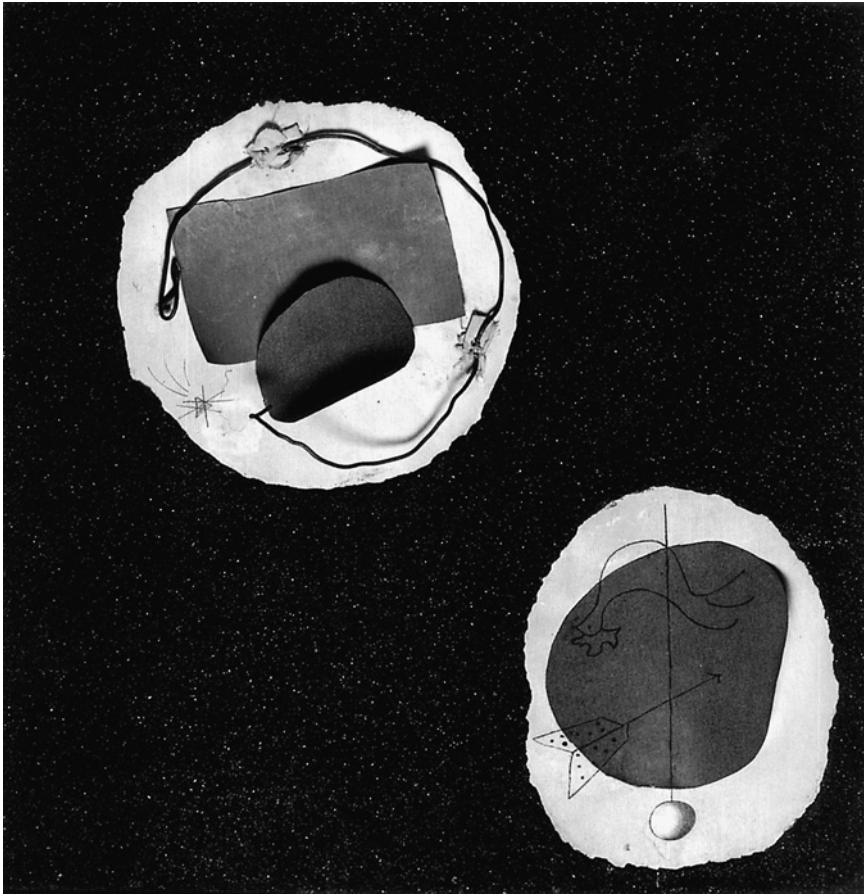
Mangled opacity – Miró's collages of 1929

Skin and body reassert their presence in Miró's work in the collages of 1928–29, in which he attempted to realize his ambition to "assassinate painting." Coming after his "summer landscapes" of 1926 and 1927, with their flatly textured forms and poetic-anecdotal character, and partly overlapping the Dutch Interiors and Imaginary Portraits of 1928 and 1929, the collages might be considered, at least with respect to their spatial conception, as a reversion to the earlier dream paintings. This was perceived by Aragon, who, in "La peinture au défi," the catalogue essay for the 1930 *Exposition de collages*, commented that the paper used in these collages "is generally not wholly glued; its edges are free, it waves and flutters ... It is difficult to say whether Miró's collages imitate his painting or whether his paintings imitated in advance the effects of collage, as Miró gradually came to practise it. I am inclined toward the last interpretation."⁸⁶ It may be assumed that Aragon's words refer specifically to the kind of painting represented by *Painting (The Toreador)*.⁸⁷ This is a reasonable conclusion, in view of the fact that in the same passage Aragon refers to paintings in which the white patch added to the colored canvas appears as if it were an unprimed canvas left unpainted. It seems to me, however, that Aragon's comment would be equally applicable to the dream paintings in general, whose layered conception is discernible not only in the distinction between the opaque or semi-transparent surface elements and the ground but also within the ground's illusionist depths. This layered conception, in the form it assumes in the collages, also extends further the earlier metaphorical entry of skin and body into the work.

Unlike the surfaces of the 1924–27 paintings, those of the four collages in the 1928 series of *Spanish Dancers*, done on flock paper and painted wood, are characterized by their spare and uniform quality. However, the flock paper is given to scratching and other forms of surface manipulation;⁸⁸ furthermore,

its texture, similarly to the other textured papers used by Miró, offers a pronounced tactile quality. Its softness, for instance, is quite in contrast to the more abrasive character of the sandpaper used in three of the *Dancers*; the marks left on its surface by friction enhance the sense of a skin, with an added erotic suggestiveness related to the friction of skin against skin (akin in import but not in form to the rubbing associated with Ernst's frottages).⁸⁹ Its proneness to scratching makes it appear quite vulnerable, with this sense further augmented by the surface's "acceptance" of the nails and pins stuck into it, in what appears to be a sado-masochistic ambivalence regarding the infliction of pain. That Miró was fully cognizant of this range of implications associated with his use of nails can be seen in the *Relief-construction* on which he worked in Montroig in August–November 1930 (now at The Museum of Modern Art, New York). The central element, which suggests a female torso, is strewn with metal staples that have their sharp ends safely tucked within the wood. A red disk, representing the sun, has nails whose sharp ends project threateningly from it. As attested by William Rubin, Miró said that he intended these nails to carry a connotation of discomfort and aggression.⁹⁰ However, beyond this obviously hostile image, the construction might be linked to Miró's quite frequent association of the sun with both male and female sexuality.⁹¹ It might be further associated with Georges Bataille's text "The Solar Anus" in which a phallic and aggressive sun "loves the Night and directs its luminous violence, its ignoble shaft, toward the earth, but it finds itself incapable of reaching the gaze or the night, even though the nocturnal terrestrial expanses head continuously toward the indecency of the solar ray."⁹²

The layered depth conception in its bodily dimension attains a more developed form in the 1929 collages. These, unlike the *Spanish Dancers*, lack an appellation that would associate them with the human body; the body is nonetheless there, asserting its presence in the extreme disruption of its envelope, the skin, and in the inside/outside reversal of its layers. Organic configurations partaking of human anatomy do exist at times (for instance, in a collage now at the Centre Pompidou, Dupin, *Miró* 258), but these are less potent as body images than the pathetically curling edges of half-glued collage elements that are so much like the skin around an open wound (Figure 6.7). This rupturing of the outer envelope of the body, that which endows it with its unity as an organism, is fully evinced by the holes cut into the support. Within these holes other layers are located, other pseudo-supports and collaged elements, with an ensuing confounding of figure and ground, of the collaged element and its support, of skin and insides. The collages thus appear to constitute a subversive practice intended to undermine the basic Western conventions of painting that insist on the primacy of the support.⁹³ What is more crucial to my discussion is the difference between the layered conception characterizing the collages and the one associated with the



6.7 Joan Miró, *Collage*, Montroig, late July–early October 1929

dream paintings. The collages appear to annul the dialectics of opacity and transparency signifying the dream paintings – in which the surface or “screen” is merged with the structure of semi-transparent planes lying parallel to it in a receding structure opening into spatial boundlessness. The layers comprising the collage, while breached and ruptured at points, display an unmitigated opacity (this is forcefully brought out by the continuity of the pencil lines running over the various “levels” of the collage elements). These differences gain in significance in the light of the growing affinity, in the summer of 1929, between Miró’s creative stance and Georges Bataille’s aesthetic position (Miró had close ties also with Leiris, Desnos, Artaud, Masson, and others who comprised the *Documents* group).⁹⁴ The body dimension of the 1929 collages,

indeed, comes close to Bataille's aesthetics of desublimation (as opposed to the Bretonian sublimation with its transcendent notion of surreality), and its mutilation represents something akin to Bataille's notion of *altération*. The layers comprising the "body" in Miró's collages, with their rather unpleasant surface textures, at times, and with their sense of gross matter, emblemize the body as having been reduced to the ignominious status of a big toe. As presented by Bataille in his essay "The Big Toe," this is the lowest part of the body, the furthest from any idealizing notion. Its "seductiveness," removed from any "poetic concoctions," implies a return to reality "without transpositions," that is to say, without any metaphorical substitution (Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 23). Opposed to the Surrealist privileging of metaphor – that is, to what enhances the transparency of language – Bataille wanted to do away with the metaphorical function of language and render it opaque.⁹⁵ This brings me back to my argument that Miró's dream paintings might be perceived both in the formal sense of the interplay of surface and depth, and, metaphorically, as representing consciousness and the hidden depths of the unconscious, revealed or intimated in the process of automatic creation. The 1929 collages, in their mangled opacity, deny the metaphoric basis of the dream paintings and thus point to Miró's estrangement from what might be seen as the essence of his Surrealist affiliation.

Notes

1. The Dada and Surrealist writers were not the only ones to whom the artists turned; however, by the same token, the Surrealist writers themselves worked within a broad intellectual and literary context that extended from Symbolist poets such as Mallarmé to Apollinaire's circle and poet-critics such as Paul Reverdy.
2. To these should be added the influential critics Christian Zervos and Tériade, who were associated with the journal *Cahiers d'art* from its inception in 1926.
3. Breton, "Surrealist Situation of the Object" (1935), in *Manifestoes* 272; "Situation surréaliste de l'objet," *OC* II 489.
4. This admiration is fully evident in the essay "Ideas of a Painter," first published in *Littérature* in 1921 and later in *The Lost Steps* (*Les Pas perdus*); parts of it were also included in the section devoted to Derain in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* (21–2).
5. In the lecture Breton gave in Barcelona in 1922, he spoke scathingly about "everything that is being said about a classical renaissance (explain yourselves!), about a return to nature (spare me the idiocy), and about the serious labor that consists in copying fruits because, alas! that's what sells ..." "Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What It Consists Of," *The Lost Steps* (*Les Pas perdus*) 125; "Caractères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe," *OC* I 307–8.
6. For a full and informative treatment of developments in French art in the post-First World War years, I would recommend the following titles: Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies*; Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts*; Silver, *Esprit de Corps*; Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia*; Spiteri, "'Battant comme une porte.'"
7. In a "Response to a questionnaire on his art" (1921), Gris asserted that he tried to "make concrete that which is abstract. I proceed from the general to the particular." Whereas Cézanne turns a bottle into a cylinder, he, Gris, begins with a cylinder in order to make a bottle. Gris

also emphasizes the poetic quality of his creations by declaring that his painting is to the other, Cézanne's presumably, what poetry is to prose. See Chipp (ed.), *Theories of Modern Art* 274.

8. Pierre Reverdy, "On Cubism" (1917), in Fry (ed.), *Cubism* 145. Reverdy also argued that works of art, "in detaching themselves from life, find their way back into it, because they have an existence of their own apart from the evocation or reproduction of the things of life." As further discussed in the present chapter, this going back into life of the autonomous artwork was unacceptable to the future Surrealists.
9. Breton quotes Reverdy in *The Manifesto of Surrealism*. See *Manifestoes* 20; *OC I* 324. Reverdy's definition is included in the essay "L'Image" that appeared in *Nord-Sud* 13 (March 1918). See Reverdy, *Plupart du temps* 409–11.
10. The series of debates launched especially in the first issues of *L'Esprit nouveau* provides another meeting point with nascent Surrealism. The poet and theorist Paul Dermée, who edited these issues, was particularly interested in the origin of poetic thought in the unconscious associations formed in the mind, and propounded a notion of automatic writing that converged at some points with Breton's conception. Kim Grant, who offers a detailed and well-argued discussion concerning the encounter of Purist and Surrealist theory, sums it up thus: "The primary difference between Breton's theory of automatic writing and the Purists' theory of artistic creation ... lies in their respective conceptions of the fundamental nature of the human mind. For Breton, automatic writing was proof of the essential and irreducibly multiplicitous nature of thought and the human mind; for the Purists, art was proof of the inherently rational, logical, and ordering tendencies of the mind." See Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts* 42.
11. Breton, "Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What It Consists Of" (1922), in *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 114; *OC I* 297.
12. For an extensive view of Breton's efforts to bring Picasso into the Surrealist orbit, see Cowling, "Proudly We Claim Him as One of Us."
13. André Masson, "A Joan Miró pour son anniversaire" (1973), in Masson, *Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 87.
14. Masson, "Peindre est une gageure" (1941, written in 1939), in *Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 15.
15. Masson, *Vagabond du surréalisme* 20. "Moreover, what is often thought to be Cubist influence on my paintings of 1923/4 and at times even until 1925 has to do rather with Piranesi's influence, and in particular his 'Prisons.'" (24)
16. "A Conversation with Joan Miró" (by Francesc Trabal, in *La Publicitat*, Barcelona, July 14, 1928), in Rowell (ed.), *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 93.
17. At times, a spatially ambiguous placement of human figures contributes to this complex intermingling of planes. Such a conception is evidenced in Picasso's 1925 painting *Jeunes filles dansant devant un fenetre* (now titled *The Dance*) that was reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* 4 (15 July 1925) 17. A similar spatial play, this time involving the use of a mirror, is found in an earlier painting, *Girl with a Hoop (La Petite fille au cerceau)*, 1919, reproduced in *RS* 5 (15 October 1925) 23.
18. I use the term "planimetric" in the same way I did in Chapter 1 with regard to Feuillade's spatial conception.
19. The article is quoted by Bruno Reichlin in an essay on the connection between Purist art and architecture. See "Jeanneret-Le Corbusier, Painter-architect."
20. When it comes to Picabia, said Breton earlier in the 1920s, we are dealing with the "internal landscapes of a man who struck out long ago for his own furthest pole." See "Characteristics of the Modern Evolution" (1922), in *The Lost Steps (Les Pas perdus)* 115; *OC I* 298.
21. Green observes that Masson and Miró were able to neutralize Cubism by adapting certain of its practices to the Surrealist search for the Marvelous, and that the geometric structures thus adapted contained images disruptive of the Cubist aesthetic of self-sufficiency and purity (*Cubism and Its Enemies* 98). He sees Miró's spacious grounds as images of liberation in dream and imagination; Masson's automatic drawing, transposed into painting, is a mark of imaginative flow within the tight structures of Cubism.
22. For a more extensive survey of these early developments, see Dupin, *Miró*. See also Lanchner, "Peinture-Poésie, Its Logic and Logistics"; Rubin, *Miro in the Collection of the MoMA*.

23. A starker frontality characterizes *Still Life II (The Carbide Lamp)* and *Still Life III (Grill and Carbide Lamp)*, both done in 1922–23, in which the “lighted” area on which the objects are placed (or, rather, over which they hover), while appearing to be tilted, retains an unmitigated sense of flatness.
24. Depth in *The Tilled Field*, notes Rosalind Krauss, is “symbolized in the flat,” as in medieval Catalan fresco painting. See “Magnetic Fields: The Structure” 16.
25. For the sketchbooks, see Picon, *Joan Miró: Carnet catalans*. Selected drawings from the sketchbooks are included in a recent catalogue, Beaumelle (ed.), *Joan Miró 1917–1934* 124–9.
26. Margot Rowell describes Miró’s work after 1922 in terms of “a stream-of-consciousness flow or linear narration across the canvas; constellations of connected or disconnected signs; a Mallarméen emptiness or a field of saturated color, articulated by signs vertiginously floating in space.” Rowell (ed.), *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 11. I will return later to the notion of Mallarméen emptiness.
27. To these might be added *Spanish Dancer* and *Portrait of Mme. K.*, in which the grid is somewhat less systematic (in the latter, for instance, there are no true horizontals).
28. See Umland, “Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s” 146–8. In his letter to Leiris (10 August 1924) Miró wrote: “I have done a series of small things on wood, in which I take off from some form in the wood” (Rowell (ed.), *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 86). The reference is to works done on wood in Montroig in August 1924, in which, again, Miró made use of something that already existed, that is, the surface’s striations.
29. In her dissertation, Umland cites this passage twice (“Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s” 151–4, 305–6). Miró referred to the lines in a sketch for the *Publicitat* collage (see below), and again in a conversation with Jean-Clarence Lambert. See Umland, “Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s” 152 (note 266), 305 (note 40).
30. “Thus he has a personal sort of Albertian ‘veil,’ providing lines of force and a series of intersections useful in making strategic decisions about composition.” Lanchner, “*Peinture-Poésie*, Its Logic and Logistics” 20.
31. In line with the methodology I employ throughout this chapter, I will not consider all at once the various forms of conceptualization of the screen paradigm, as in the preceding chapters; these will emerge progressively in the course of the discussion.
32. Analyzing this drawing, Charles Palermo insists on an analogy between the canvas and a pictorial space defined by the spider’s web and the rainbow, while I consider the rainbow as representing what lies behind the surface, or, more accurately, as constituting one of the elements in the dialectics of surface and depth, opacity and transparency. Palermo bases his analogy in part on the connection in French between the word canvas or *toile* and the spider’s web – *toile d’araignée*. See “Tactile Translucence: Miró, Leiris, Einstein” 35. Elza Adamowicz has teased out such a play on the double meaning of spider’s web and canvas in Breton’s reference to a still-life painting by Braque (in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 10–12): “By the light of what more beautiful star [*étoile*], beneath what more shining dew [*lumineuse rosée*] could ever be woven the canvas stretched taut [*se tisser la toile tendue*] between this blue tobacco packet and this empty glass?” See Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* 64. It might be added that the play on *toile* and *étoile* endows the canvas with a surface quality (“shining dew”) that conforms to what I have proposed with regard to Breton’s window metaphor. I will refer later in this chapter to a possible broadening of this metaphorical chain by the notion of *toile* as a reference to the cinema screen.
33. For Krauss, words, in their relation to visual symbols, perform on the level of structure as well. Considering Miró’s debt to Apollinaire’s *calligramme*, a poetic form that creates an image simultaneously in visual and verbal form, Krauss illustrates her contention that Miró’s inscriptions work also at the level of pictorial structure with a perceptive reading of the 1927 painting *Un Oiseau poursuit une abeille et la baisse* (25–6). In *Landscape (The Grasshopper)*, 1926), by scattering and rendering quite indecipherable the letters comprising his name, “Miró forces the reading of the words (his name) to overlap the act of looking. For reading becomes synonymous with the search, the exploratory piercing of the flat field, that is necessary to transform the continuous surface of the yellow ground into the illusionist depth of the pictorial world” (“Magnetic Fields: The Structure” 34).
34. In a later essay, Krauss somewhat disavows her earlier conception of Miró’s grounds – mostly those associated with the “dream paintings” – which she saw then “in relation to color-field painting, which is to say, an aesthetic of disembodied, dematerialized, optical space.” She places Miró deeper in Bataille’s orbit and concludes that it is “against the background of the dirty wall rather than the blue infinity of the cosmos that the transformational chains of the Miró

imaginary should be seen." See " 'Michel, Bataille et moi' " 5, 9. I will have more to say later about Miró and Bataille.

35. Lanchner, "Peinture-Poésie, Its Logic and Logistics" 24. See also Rubin, *Miro in the Collection of the MoMA* 24.
36. "Together, Masson and I discovered Paul Klee, a discovery that was essential to both of us," recalled Miró in "Memories of the rue Blomet," transcribed by Jacques Dupin, 1977. In Rowell (ed.), *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 101. In 1922 Masson found a German publication with reproductions of works by Klee and excitedly showed it to Miró. Masson later recalled: "It was the single most important thing to take us out of Cubism." Cited in Lanchner, "André Masson: Origins and Development" 102. For detailed information regarding this German book and the Klee works reproduced in it, see Lanchner, "Klee in America" 88. I should also note Ernst as one of the Surrealist painters influenced by Klee's example; his thin gouache washes in the overpaintings may have reflected knowledge of Klee's watercolor grounds. In 1919 Ernst went into Goltz's bookshop in Munich and saw works by Paul Klee, and later also visited him. See Spies, *Max Ernst Collages* 35.
37. Masson may have responded to an "automatic drawing" by Klee, *The Eye of Eros* (1919), reproduced in a book on Klee written by Wilhelm Hausenstein and published in 1921, that appears to fit the circumstances of its discovery by Masson. See Lanchner, "André Masson: Origins and Development" 102 and note 73; Lanchner, "Klee in America" 89–90.
38. Some of these may have been the ones reproduced in the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (April 1925); a more propitious opportunity for viewing Klee's work was offered later by the exhibition held in October 1925 at the Galerie Vavin-Raspail.
39. Masson's text appeared in *Fontaine* 53 (June 1946). It is included in André Masson, *Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 124–7. I should mention in this respect Robert Desnos's enthusiastic response to Klee's art in his article "Peinture surréaliste" (1929), in which he says that "never has a voyage through infinity laid anchor in such a fine port!" See Desnos, *Ecrits sur les peintres* 112.
40. Ann Temkin, "Klee and the Avant-Garde 1912–1940" 22. Temkin's article should be consulted for its detailed and perceptive consideration of the relationship of Klee and the Surrealists.
41. This quality is particularly discernible in the oil transfer drawings. The process is too complex to be described here in full. It is enough to note that watercolor is applied to a sheet onto which lines and forms in black oil paint have been transferred, with the result that the lines appear both above and under the watercolor layer. See note 63 in Temkin 37.
42. "I Work like a Gardener," an interview with Yvon Taillandier in *XXe siècle* (Paris), 15 February 1959. Included in Rowell (ed.), *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 251. Miró may have been thinking of paintings like those done in 1934 in which shapes based on collages are placed on rather uniformly colored dark or blue-green grounds; or perhaps he was looking ahead to the "blue paintings" done in 1961.
43. For Desnos, Miró's vision reveals the "souls coming out of the depths of the earth and the abysses of creation," out of a "ground of multiplied infinities." See "Miró" (1929), in *Ecrits sur les peintres* 107.
44. On the basis of what she learned from the Department of Conservation at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Carolyn Lanchner argues that the white lines are the result of Miró's decision not to erase the lines of his original images and instead to use the method of stumping ("Peinture-Poésie, Its Logic and Logistics" 34).
45. Such a faint shadowy underlayer in black might be discernible also in *Harlequin's Carnival* (1924–25).
46. Dupin is careful to distinguish these paintings, which he defines as "receptacles for dreams," from "painted dreams," and argues that they all "possess the character of oneiric effusions." See Dupin, *Miró* 157, 162.
47. For a detailed description of procedures employed by Miró in *The Birth of the World* – and this applies, to a greater or lesser extent, to most of the works in this vein – see Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the MoMA* 32–3.
48. For a discussion of Miró's ground in *Head of a Catalan Peasant IV*, see Charles Palermo in "Tactile Translucence: Miró, Leiris, Einstein." While I concur with Palermo's observations, I tend to assign to Miró's layered depth, as shown in the coming discussion, a metaphorical dimension that is quite

different from the one Palermo suggests. For another response to Miró's layered conception, see Walter Erben's discussion of the three levels of space in *Le corps de ma brune* (1925), the spacious brown surface, the semi-transparent paint applied to it and the firm black words of the inscription. *Joan Miró 1893–1983* 45.

49. Raymond A. Spiteri, "‘Battant comme une porte’" 326. In attempting to account for this omission of the dream paintings from Breton's text, Spiteri suggests that the problem lay in Miró's reluctance to give the type of political and ethical commitment that Breton demanded, and that the dream paintings demonstrated hesitation before the imperatives of action (331).
50. Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the MoMA* 32 (and notes on pp. 116–117).
51. Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts* 202. I will consider later Breton's rather pronounced obliviousness to graphic automatism in Masson's work.
52. Cited by Rubin, *Miró in the Collection of the MoMA* 32. See also James Johnson Sweeney, "Joan Miró: Comment and Interview," *Partisan Review* (New York) 15.2 (March 1949) 38–41.
53. Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies* 267–71. Green readily acknowledges, however, that Rubin wrote his account of Miró's working method on the dream paintings, claiming that Miró free-associated on the canvas and discovered his motifs in the act of painting them, before the publication of Miró's sketchbooks.
54. Breton, "Words without Wrinkles," in *The Lost Steps (Les Pas Perdus)* 100; "Les Mots sans rides," in *OC I* 284.
55. "Rose Sélavy," "L'Aumonyme" and "Langage cuit" were included (with some omissions) in the volume *Corps et biens*, first published in 1930. See Desnos, *Corps et biens* 31–86. For Leiris's text, see *RS* 3 (April 1925) 6–7.
56. The text is an excerpt from the novel *Mort aux vaches et au champ d'honneur (Death to the Cows and the Field of Honor)* that was published in full only in 1953. Péret provides a key to his new words at the foot of the page. To take an example from the second line of the text. "J'avais reçu un ferreux (1) sur le rond (2) ..." ("I had gotten a ferrous on the round ...") where the new noun "ferreux" (normally an adjective meaning "ferrous") is given in the key (to which the numbers refer) as having the meaning of "éclat d'obus" (a piece of shrapnel); "rond" (the adjective "round") is presented as a noun meaning "tête" (head). See *RS* 4 (July 1925) 12–15. For a brave attempt at an English translation (quite an impossible task), see Péret, *Death to the Pigs, and Other Writings*.
57. See Beaujour, "De l'Océan au Château: Mythologie surréaliste." To briefly present Beaujour's thesis, the Surrealist quest might be seen in terms of a dialectics between the Ocean and the Castle – between openness and occultism, public revelation and esoteric illumination. Psychic automatism seemed to provide the Surrealists with some mastery over the Oceanic depths of the unconscious, with the mythical image of the ocean perceived as a sea located in the interiority of the individual but shared by all of humanity, beyond time and space (356). Beaujour sees, however, a growing awareness on the part of the Surrealists of a chasm opening between the belief in the existence of a common ocean and the despair resulting from an awareness of its inaccessibility to language. Breton, Aragon and other Surrealists were in any case loath to submit completely to such anonymity. With the pair individuality-collectivity gradually assuming in the 1930s a political significance which limited its poetic reach, the myth of the ocean came to be supplanted by the need for a collective myth that would conciliate psychoanalysis and Marxism; the openness of the Ocean gave way to the "occultation" of Surrealism demanded by Breton in the *Second Manifesto* (1930). It is in this light that Beaujour considers also the locked rooms in Breton's text "Il y aura une fois"; they express an initiatory myth of occultation and a way of domesticating the Marvelous (365). (See Chapter 2 for an analysis of these rooms in relation to Breton's notion of the Castle). I differ with Beaujour, however, on various counts. In my reading of Breton's notion of the Castle, as presented in Chapter 2, I am less concerned with the Castle as a representation of the occultation of Surrealism in the 1930s; I tend rather to see it in terms of the mystery sensed behind its thick walls (translated to the façades of Paris buildings as the bearers of mystery). I also differ with Beaujour in giving greater weight to the concept of the Castle in the 1920s, in all of its ramifications. Indeed, as I suggested, this concept might be further refined and considered as one of the terms of a dialectical interplay – one involving Breton's metaphorical Castle with its dark passageways and thick walls (and by extension, the façades among which he roams) and Aragon's *Passage de l'Opéra* with its glass surfaces. What I also propose is the ultimate conjunction of the Castle, in this broad dialectical sense, with the notion of screen. As opposed to Beaujour's diachronic view, I argue that the Castle – that is, in its capacity of a screen – should be seen as a concurrent and necessary complement to the Ocean; in the context

of the present discussion relating to Miró, I would see this interplay in terms of the dialectics of transparency and opacity.

58. Aragon, "A Wave of Dreams" 6; *Une Vague de rêves* 18.
59. Aragon, *Traité du style* 208.
60. "Poisson soluble" is the title given by Breton to the collection of automatic texts published together with the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, and for which the *Manifesto*, in fact, was meant to serve as an introduction.
61. A similar evocation of an "oceanic" formlessness is to be found in the first text in Eluard's *Les Dessous d'une vie ou la pyramide humaine* (*The Undersurface of a Life or the Human Pyramid*) that appeared in *La Révolution surréaliste* 8 (1 December 1926): "I was subsequently tempted by a mystery where forms played no role. Interested in a faded sky from which birds and clouds were banished. I became enslaved to the pure faculty of sight, slave to my unreal and virgin eyes ... I suppressed the visible and the invisible. I lost myself in an unsilvered mirror. Indestructible, I was not blind" (20). In Chapter 2 I referred to the image photographed by Eugène Atget which accompanies this text.
62. I do not go as far as Michel Riffaterre does in arguing that the function of automatic texts resides in their being a mimesis of the unconscious. See Riffaterre, "Semantic Incompatibilities in Automatic Writing" 238. The notion of the shift from the non-verbal to the verbal comes up again in Chapter 8.
63. Riffaterre, "Semantic Incompatibilities in Automatic Writing" 223.
64. Caws, "Antonin Artaud: Suppression and Sub-Text" 254.
65. Dalí, "Saint Sebastian," in *Collected Writings* 22. Originally published as "Sant Sebastià," in *L'Amic de les arts* (Sitges) 2.16 (31 July 1927) 52–4. For the original Catalan version, see Dalí, *L'Alliberament dels dits: Obra catalana completa* 15–23.
66. A notion such as this appears in Pierre Reverdy's essay "Le Rêveur parmi les murailles" ("The Dreamer among the Ramparts"), published in the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (December 1924). Reverdy writes about going to the other side of the wall into the limitless field of dream; however, dream develops only in images, and this preverbal condition can only take shape in words. "The poet's dream is that immense fine-knitted net that hopelessly sweeps the deep water in search of a doubtful treasure" ("Le Rêveur parmi les murailles" 19).
67. As noted by Carolyn Lanchner, Miró was "a painter of his time, and was not trying to create a Symbolist, Whistlerian fog. In countering such an effect, the stretcher imprint had a double utility: as a diagram of surface, it visually binds the luminous veils of paint to a condition of planarity; and as line ... it deprives ground of recessive retreat by moving it in front of mark." Lanchner, *Joan Miró* 43.
68. Apollinaire's essay "Pablo Picasso" appeared in *Montjoie!* (18 March 1913). See *Apollinaire on Art* 279.
69. I am considering this painting solely from this perspective of reflexivity and in relation to the notion of the screen. For other interpretations, see Umland, "Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s" 198–204.
70. This is one of the paintings to which Aragon refers in "La peinture au défi": "A funny man, Miró ... he makes paintings on colored canvas, painting there only a white patch, as though he had not painted in that spot, as though the canvas were the painting." See Lippard, *Surrealists on Art* 49; Aragon, *Les Collages* 67.
71. The most extensive treatment of the *Publicitat* collage is to be found in Umland, "Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s," mostly in Chapter 4 (292ff.) but with some references also in Chapter 5. For Miró and cinema, see 316ff in the last-mentioned publication. References to the cinema are scattered throughout Dalí's early writings. See in particular Sections Two and Four in *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*. The series of articles sent by Dalí from Paris and published in *La Publicitat* between April and June 1929 abound in references to cinema. See *Collected Writings* 105–117. For a discussion of film and photography in Dalí's theoretical writings and his collaboration with Luis Buñuel, see Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí's Art and Writing*, mostly in pp. 70–97.
72. The work in its original state was illustrated in *Ahora* (Madrid), 24 January 1931. See Umland, "Joan Miró's Collage of Summer 1929" 64; see also "Chronology," in Beaumelle (ed.), *Joan Miró 1917–1934* 354. Also reproduced in the last-mentioned publication (352) is a photograph taken on

3 December 1930 of the vandalized Surrealist exhibition in Studio 28 following the showing of *L'Âge d'or*, in which the canvas is seen in an upright position. According to Umland ("Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s" 295), Miró told Jacques Dupin that the collage should be reproduced horizontally.

73. Michel Leiris, "Joan Miró" 263; English translation in Michel Leiris, *Brisées: Broken Branches* 25.
74. Written in October 1925, the novel was not published until 1927. See *The Automatic Muse* 63.
75. Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal* 78.
76. "Brouillards, montez! Versez vos cendres monotones / Avec de longs haillons de brume dans les cieux / Qui noiera le marais livide des automnes / Et bâtissez un grand plafond silencieux!" Hartley (ed.), *Mallarmé* 27. I should add that it is quite likely that Leiris, whose evocation of the soiled and murky quality of Miró's canvases follows in my discussion, knew these lines. A decade later, in a short text entitled "Glossaire: J'y serre mes gloses" (1939), Leiris wrote: "Midway between the too-soiled ground and the too-sublime vaults, at the level of the air, entering the skin of the role, poetry plays its game." Leiris, *Brisées* 79.
77. Leiris's frame of reference is obviously quite removed from Breton's enthusiasm for "the charm of naked walls with their flowered papers and their shadows of mantlepieces in apartment houses under demolition" (*Nadja* 108; *OC* 1714).
78. Margit Rowell's conjecture (*Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 12–13) that "it was perhaps to avoid a facile identification with Surrealist concerns (in terms of "dream imagery" or the unconscious, for example), that Miró turned to a more precise and concrete kind of painting," is only partially correct. I think that Miró meant the new paintings to give a more precise form to his Surrealist concerns, whereas the earlier dream paintings conceptualized these concerns in a more oblique fashion. On the whole, it is only in hindsight that the dream paintings have attained their full Surrealist stature.
79. This is also borne out by the fact that paintings by Miró reproduced in the last three issues of *La Révolution surréaliste* are dated to this period. *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, 1926 (RS 9–10, October 1927, p. 62); *The Grasshopper*, 1926 (RS 11, March 1928, on an inner title page, in an advertisement for the Galerie Surréaliste); an untitled painting in RS 12, December 1929, p. 52 that should be dated to 1928 (I have not been able to locate it, but it is identical in many respects to the 1928 painting *The Lovers*, now in Tokyo).
80. The most immediate response, as noted by Umland ("Joan Miró's Collage of Summer 1929" 53), were the four collages of the 1928 series of *Spanish Dancers*. The sparest in its means, *Portrait of a Dancer*, was offered to Breton as a gift. Another was in Aragon's collection. The two were reproduced in *Variétés: Le Surréalisme en 1929* (June 1929), following p. 22.
81. An unmitigated eroticism is very much in evidence in quite a few of Miró's works. Rosalind Krauss has drawn attention to the "throbbing genitalia that enter Miró's painting in the summer of 1924 as the only palpable organic elements to be hung on his otherwise diagrammatic stick figures, whether it's the hunter gaily ejaculating in the *Catalan Landscape* or the extraordinary maternal vulva sprouting, bulblike, in the center of *The Family*." She notes the metaphorical strings involving the equivalence of the lips of the mouth to those of the labia, with these further transmuted to images of the sun and spiders (" 'Michel, Bataille et moi' " 5–6). But it is not only the stick figures that ejaculate; in *The Trap* (1924), for instance, the penis and body possess quite a palpable bodily presence, admittedly combining the organic and vegetal but not therefore prevented from ejaculating and farting. Hints of skin texture and body hair augment the sense of the skin as a purveyor of sensations resulting in ejaculation.
82. Robert Lubar has noted the association of touch and vision represented by the snail in this work, with the added suggestion that "looking is never a purely disinterested sensory experience, but is deeply involved with fetishism and with desire." "Miró's Defiance of Painting" 90. Anne Umland examines in some detail the fetish aspect of this work, to which Leiris responded in his first article on Miró, published originally in English translation in *The Little Review* (New York) 12.1 (Spring–Summer 1926), "A Challenge to Painting: Miró and collage in the 1920s" 63–4.
83. *Painting-Poem* ("My Dark-Haired Girl's Body"), 1925; *Lady Strolling on the Rambla of Barcelona*, 1925.
84. Quoted in Beaumelle, "The Challenge of Miró's 'X' " 25.
85. Svetlana Alpers starts her analysis of the Northern system with the first Northern treatise on perspective, that by Jean Pélerin, known as Viator. Viator, she notes, locates the eye point "not at a distance in front of the picture, but rather on the very picture surface itself, where it determines

the horizontal line that marks the eye level of persons in the picture. The eye of the viewer (who in Alberti's construction is prior and external to the picture plane), and the single, central vanishing point to which it is related in distance and position, have their counterparts here within the picture." See Alpers, *The Art of Describing* 53. Krauss and Rowell have associated Miró's disembodied eye, pierced by what represents an horizon line, with Ernst's motif of the pierced eye in a collage for *Répétitions*. They also note that, in a discussion with them, Miró spoke of "crossing the horizon by the trajectory of his vision which unites earth and sky along a vertical axis," and they add another trajectory, "one which extends backward and forward in depth, moving from the subjective space behind the painter's eye out towards the outposts of external, objective reality. The eye is, then, literally the hub of this painting, connecting its external vanishing point and the internal source of its imagery ..." See Krauss and Rowell, "Catalogue of the Exhibition," in *Joan Miró: Magnetic Fields* 77–8.

86. Aragon, "Challenge to Painting," in Lippard (ed.), *Surrealists on Art* 49–50; Aragon, *Les Collages* 67–8.
87. The point is made, for instance, by Umland, "Joan Miró's Collage of Summer 1929" 56.
88. Three were done on flock paper and one on painted wood. The collage on flock paper that was in Aragon's collection shows areas in which the flocking was removed by a gyrating, frictional motion of the sheet of paper at the center. For an exhaustive technical analysis of these collages, and also of the collages of 1929, see Umland's dissertation "Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s"; in particular, cat. 9 to cat. 35, pp. 545–624. I should add that Umland's analysis of all these collages deals with a very broad range of conceptual and technical concerns and provides the most thorough treatment to date of these works. My discussion, consequently, touches solely on their skin/body dimension.
89. Anne Umland sees in the nail, cork and set-square of the *Spanish Dancer*, now in a private collection, attributes of both sexes in which the protruding cork, seen head-on, may also look like a hole. This ambivalence establishes the cork's status as fetish object that both affirms castration or lack and disavows the absence of the imagined maternal phallus. The cork thus suggests, argues Umland, that the "bodies" of Miró's *Spanish Dancers* should be considered as sites of projection of male fantasies and desire, thus introducing "male" presence into the preserve of the "female" dancer. "Joan Miró and Collage in the 1920s" 271–6.
90. Rubin also associates Miró's nails with the nails hammered from the back through the surface of Picasso's *Guitar* (1926). See *Miró in the Collection of the MoMA* 52.
91. As noted by Krauss and Rowell, the shape of the sun in *The Hunter* recurs in the sky of *Harlequin's Carnival*, where it is visually congruent with the creature at the center that Miró identified as the "sex of a woman in the form of a spider." See Krauss and Rowell, "Catalogue of the Exhibition" 78. The quote by Miró is taken from a poetic text entitled "Harlequin's Carnival" that appeared in *Verve* (Paris) in January–March, 1939. The text is included in Rowell (ed.), *Joan Miró: Selected Writings* 164.
92. Bataille, *Visions of Excess* 9. Written in 1927, the text was first published in 1931 with illustrations by André Masson. It thus seems quite likely that by 1930 Miró would have been acquainted with it.
93. In an influential essay, Meyer Schapiro has considered the rectangular form of the sheet of paper or any other support, with its "clearly defined smooth surface on which one draws and writes" as a field that "corresponds to nothing in nature or mental imagery where the phantoms of visual memory come up in a vague unbounded void." He points out that the prehistoric artist making the cave paintings worked on a field with no set boundaries. The smooth prepared field is an invention of a later stage of humanity. Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs" 209.
94. These affinities have been dealt with quite extensively over the last two decades and there is no need to go over this ground again. See Rosalind Krauss, "'Michel, Bataille et moi'"; Briony Fer, "*Poussière/peinture*: Bataille on painting"; Carolyn Lanchner, "*Peinture-Poésie*, Its Logic and Logistics" 53, 56–7.
95. For an illuminating discussion of the relation between Surrealist writing and Bataille's work with respect to image and metaphor, see John Lechte, "Surrealism and the Practice of Writing."



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Dialectics of containment and dispersal – Masson

“Dream of a subterranean architecture”

My analysis of Masson’s spatial concerns follows in general outline the discussion of Miró’s work in the course of the 1920s, and much of the notional and analytical material pertaining to Miró would be applicable to Masson, notwithstanding the obvious differences between them. Masson is much more outspoken than Miró in utilizing spatial notions when expressing the wellsprings of his art. In the 1920s he employed images of descent into the limitless depths of eternity and the unconscious in a manner that conformed quite closely to Surrealist thought. Thus in a letter to Breton in 1925 he said that “what matters to us absolutely is possible only with the sense – dare I say ‘knowledge’ – of eternity,”¹ and in a letter published in the fifth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (15 October 1928) he proclaimed that “life as conceived of by western civilization no longer has any reason to exist, and it is time to sink into the internal night in order to find a new and profound reason for being” (30).² More than a decade later, in an essay written in 1941, he affirmed that the Surrealists “would arouse from the darkest depths of our instincts strengths that were tacitly prohibited from being exposed, and would give form to the aching, disturbing and thrilling metamorphoses of our unconscious.”³ This was written at the time of the renewed intimacy of Masson and Breton, following the few months they spent together in Martinique; but still later, when he was quite removed from Surrealism, his rhetoric still bore traces of these early ideas, with a somewhat different slant associated with his then current concerns.⁴

Masson’s preoccupation with the representation of space is clearly much more in evidence in his work than in Miró’s, perhaps because of the much greater weight he gives to the Cubist infrastructure as the spatial foundation for the growth of his forms. Masson considered the originality of Cubism to have been related to the way this school, without any known precedent, represented depth (*profondeur*). “Passing beyond the conventional limits of

the third dimension used since the Renaissance, Cubism established a new dimension ...” This led the Cubists, continues Masson, to a new knowledge of the space or distance (*intervalles*) between objects. Space as engendered by the *intervalles* is to be distinguished from space as defined by objects placed against a background. In the latter case,

... we are not dealing with space but merely with extension [*l'étendue*], such as it is ‘slavishly’ reproduced for us by the camera or in academic painting. In Cubist painting, these are the objects determined by the painter, or rather their dynamism, that create this kind of space, one endowing the picture with its unity.⁵

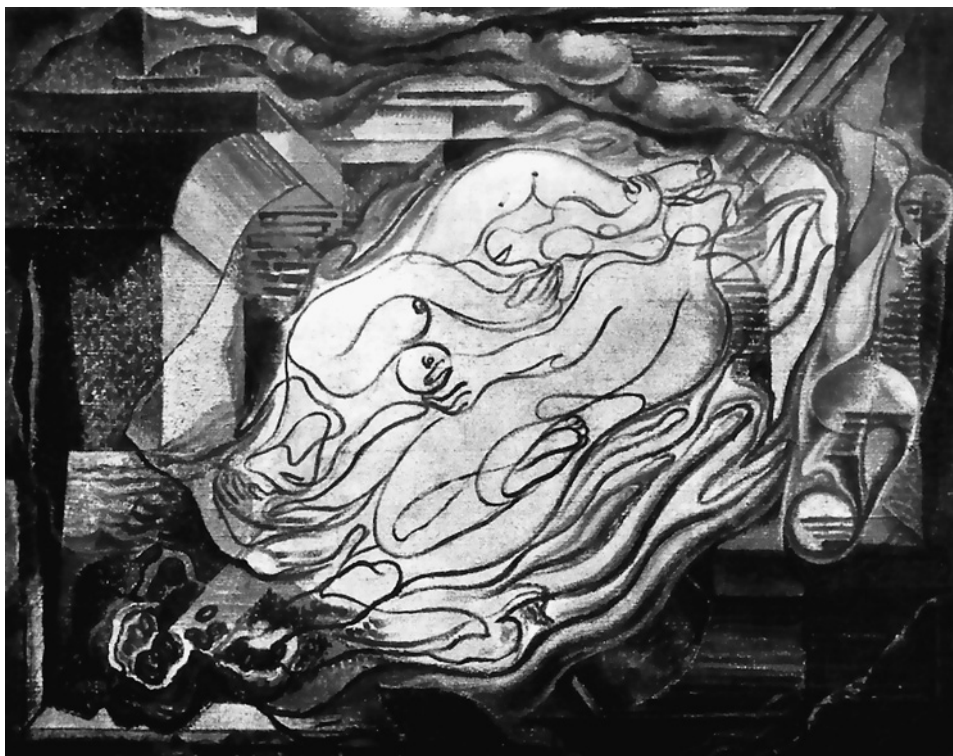
The particular form of Cubism that conformed to Masson’s conception was Analytic Cubism. Its shallow, low-relief space, with ambiguous shadowy depths and fragmented planes that merge into one another to form transparent crystalline structures, was well-suited to serve as a receptacle for Masson’s motifs. The infrastructure of Analytic Cubism appears in its most unmitigated form in *The Meal* (*Le Repas*, 1923), with its broken planes demarcating figures and table, around which are assembled disembodied hands holding glasses, fish, knife, lemon; it is similarly in effect in *Card Players* (*Les Joueurs*, 1923) and *Card Tricks* (1923).⁶

This universe of floating fragmented forms, which gradually becomes one of continuous transformation – a merging of the cosmic and the mundane in which “rocks become clouds/animals constellations”⁷ – becomes also increasingly contoured by various architectural elements. Traces of such forms may be discerned in 1923 works such as *Man with an Orange* (*L’Homme à l’orange*), but in 1924–25 they come into their own, attaining true structural import. The architectural elements consist mostly of box-like forms and walls or partitions placed at an angle to the picture’s surface, but without producing a consistent sense of depth. The partially transparent planes constituting the setting merge with figures in varying degrees of fragmentation and abstraction placed within them, the overall effect still conforming to the Cubist spatial conception.⁸ De Chirico’s influence has been inferred by several commentators; however, in what concerns the spatial conception of Masson’s works, unless we except *The Four Elements* (*Les Quatre éléments*, Figure 6.1), with the box-like element and the figure placed within it, I do not see much else in them to warrant such a conjecture.⁹ Far more significant is the architecture of Piranesi, which Masson discovered early in 1924, not so much for the vaults, arches and entablatures that find their way into several works as for the labyrinthine character assumed by the intermingling of flowing forms and the irrational structures constituted by the more rigid architectural elements.¹⁰ While admitting an early Cubist influence, Masson argued that this was true only for some works of 1922–24, just before Surrealism, and that he freed himself from Cubism with *The Four Elements* (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 20);¹¹ what was seen by others in his paintings

of 1923–24 as Cubist influence was, in fact, the influence of Piranesi's "Prisons" (24). He goes on: "It is quite clear that the Cubists' concerns had nothing to do with Piranesi's. His imaginative works are always constructed in such a way as to form what are almost bodies constituted by the architecture, with plenums and vacuums that have nothing to do with real architecture" (25).¹² Piranesi complemented what Masson may have felt with regard to the architecture he had found in Klee. In the preceding chapter I considered Klee's direct influence on both Masson and Miró. Citing Masson about Klee's search for the unlimited, I also noted that the results of this influence were more immediately apparent in Miró than in Masson. The more subtle influence exerted by Klee, however, may be related to a quality of his work perceived by Antonin Artaud, whose 1923 article on Klee was entitled "A Mental Painter:"

I rather like some of his nightmares, his mental syntheses conceived as architectural structures (or his architectural structures with a mental quality), and some cosmic syntheses in which all the secret objectivity of things is made tangible ... Organization of visions, of forms; fixation, stabilization of thoughts, inductions and deductions of images, with the conclusion that flows from these. Organization of images, search for the underlying meaning of certain images, clarifications of visions of the mind: such seems to me to be this art.¹³

The "organized visions" with their "quality of mental objects" were exemplified, for Artaud, and probably for Masson as well, by what Klee called the "wandering viewpoint" and by his deviations from a logical perspective, embarked upon in a series of works begun in 1920. One work in this series, *Room Perspective with Occupants* (watercolor over oil transfer drawing, 1921), shown as *Chambre spirite* at the *Exposition de la peinture surréaliste* held at Galerie Pierre in 1925, shows the "occupants" subjected to the inhuman machinations of the perspective system by being trapped within the perspective lines. Another work, *Arab City* (watercolor and oil transfer drawing on plaster-primed gauze, 1922), presents various vanishing points that create clashing perspectival systems (some of these systems are "defined" by small human figures at the bottom and an open eye in the middle left of the painting).¹⁴ The representation of architecture as a mental construct led Masson, however, in a different direction, largely defined by the shifting relationship between the architectural elements and the motifs and figures placed within them. Tensions are formed, already early in 1924, between the broken planes, walls and partitions, in the Piranesi-like claustrophobic spaces of his dungeons and towers, and the hemmed-in human figures.¹⁵ The figures appear surrounded by the darkness perceived beyond and sighted between the architectural forms (in *The Cardinal Points* (*Les Points cardinaux*), 1924) the figures are shown only partially and it is mostly the disembodied imploring hands that emerge from the structure).¹⁶ These early figures, with their Derain-like modeling, were soon replaced by forms and motifs similar



7.1 André Masson, *Nudes and Architecture (Nus et architecture)*, 1924

to the free-flowing forms and lines of drawings made at the time. Such are the female nudes in *Nudes and Architecture (Nus et architecture)*, 1924, Figure 7.1) or *Two Nudes (Deux nus)*, 1924) that appear to be floating within a bubble-like larval form bursting out of the confining architectural frame. As Masson remarked later, "When one observes some paintings of 1924, at first they seem Cubist, but ultimately they merely represent the need for a frame; at the very center of the painting, there is an explosion." The architectural side of Cubism, he continues, "is negated at the center, because of the appearance of an exploding figure" (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 26).

"Armor of glass"

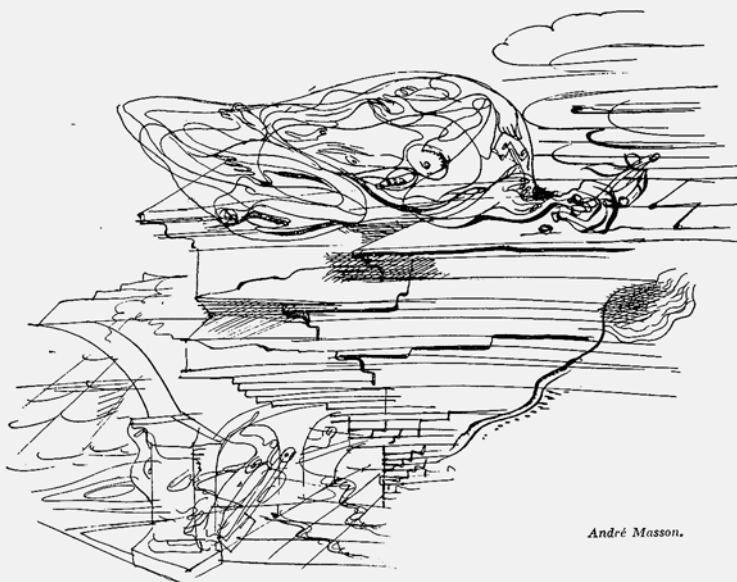
The flowing lines and organic forms bursting in the midst of these paintings might be associated with two general directions taken by Masson in his

drawing practice at the time. There are the drawings commonly considered as having been created in an automatic process and those in which the flowing lines and organic forms appear to grow in and around a more rigid geometric frame comprising architectural elements, mostly fragments of columns, pilasters and inverted capitals. These two types of drawings were illustrated in the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (December 1924). The one inserted in Max Morise's essay "Les Yeux enchantés" (p. 27), with its geometric frame of architectural elements and, in the middle, the suggested figure of a woman on a staircase (not easily recognizable because the drawing was reproduced upside down), is closely related to much of what Masson was doing in 1923–24 (the architectural dimension is even more pronounced in a drawing that appeared in the third issue, April 1925, Figure 7.2). The second drawing, inserted in the section of automatic texts entitled "textes surréalistes" (p. 14), with its flowing and rather abstract linear texture and the representational elements emerging out of it (hands, rope, knife, etc.), is a more typical representative of the type of drawing associated with Masson's practice of automatism.

It is commonly recognized that Masson began his experiments with automatic drawing before his meeting with Breton in February of 1924.¹⁷ It would, indeed, be a mistake to consider the drawings done before 1924 as constituting a direct expression of Surrealist psychic automatism. Nor would it be quite accurate to consider as such the drawings done in the heyday of Masson's Surrealist affiliation. A salient feature of these spontaneously formed lines was their potential for poetic metamorphosis, which allowed Masson's motifs to slip smoothly from one denotative framework to another, from one level of being to another; to represent different things at once, by a substitutive activity involving parts of the body, male or female, fish and birds.¹⁸ As I have already suggested, Masson's intrinsic concerns lay more with the tension formed between the free-flowing line and the geometric structure against which it acts. Thus the metamorphic, essentially Heraclitean universe, with its constant flux and unceasing movement between unity and dispersal, reflects one side of a central dichotomy in Masson's thought and work – a dichotomy between the Dionysian, unconscious, unfettered expression on the one hand, and the intellectual, conscious control on the other; between the work as a "mental object," to use Artaud's expression, and the external claims of consciousness and the world. As argued by Florence de Mèredieu,

As a reader of Nietzsche, Freud and Heraclitus, but also of Hegel and many others, Masson has never ceased indeed from placing his work under the combined sign of instinct and the unconscious, on the one hand, and reason and consciousness on the other – the recourse to one allowing him to exacerbate the other in an incessant back-and-forth play.¹⁹

TEXTES SURREALISTES



André Masson.

Max Morise :

Sources de l'Oubanghi, gonflement des péripatéticiennes dont le ventre porte le fœtus mercenaire, simulation du désespoir, exécutions arbitraires de meurtriers bienfaisants, lys purs, chacals rôdants, férocité des hiéroglyphes, borborisme de l'estomac de Jéhovah, dynasties perverses par de longs siècles de triomphe et des crimes innombrables, lutteurs musclés, saucissons d'Arles, fidèles sectateurs de l'amour et de la damnation, filles-mères, Caligulas à la longue barbe et à l'œil petit, tritons et naïades, marmitons et filles de cuisine, jaguars indomptés des mers océaniques, loufoques et scarabées, catholiques et cathareux, formes indécovertes de la loi de la gravitation universelle, pôles, je vous porte en mon cœur. Vous êtes les engoulevants rapaces qui arrachent aux entrailles des demi-dieux la fièvre du doute qui y déroule son interminable et majestueuse procession. Vous êtes les échelas où s'enlacent les haricots verts de mon aspiration. Vous êtes météores. J'engage les hommes dépourvus de sens commun et lâches à se dévêtir des vêtements de boue séchée qu'ils portent en guise de gilet de flanelle et à se prosterner. L'époux tuera l'épouse, le

filis sodomisera le père, et le vaccin châtier l'enragé. Le flot des carapaces vermeilles commence à couler. Le lit de la Seine déborde du suc gastrique des faux prophètes. Le tonnerre a des bornes, les fromages sont accouplés aux biques, et les desseins de la Providence ne sont plus de mise. Il y a une différence capitale entre la guerre et la superstition : cette différence, c'est le poulpe aux yeux bleus, c'est le zèbre du désert, c'est la figure succulente, c'est l'Indo-Chine tout entière avec ses filles, avec ses collines, avec ses soubresauts, ses pâtisseries et ses limaçons ; c'est aussi le fond de mon palais et le seuil de mon œsophage, avec ses capitales, avec ses divinités de bois et de beurre frais, avec ses généraux à la poitrine fécale. La joute commence ; j'entre en lice et je tire un coup de revolver dans la direction du Président de la République, qui par bonheur n'atteint que le Président du Sénat. Il est mort, mais la joute continue et il ne reste qu'une heure avant le coucher du soleil. Les pigeons voyageurs se hâtent. Leur vol se fait plus lent et soudain leurs ailes se figent. Quel est ce bruit de coups de poings que j'entends sur ma nuque ? Quelle est cette voiture hermétiquement close qui passe devant mes yeux ? Où vont ces régiments en marche ?

This is indeed the basis of the dialectic underlying his work in the 1920s, one involving liberation and constraint, dispersal and containment.

Another aspect of Masson's works, particularly those of 1923–25, bearing directly on the screen paradigm, particularly in relation to Breton's window metaphor, concerns the distribution of motifs within the "window box" of the painting. What I am alluding to is the crowding of the motifs around the surface of the painting, their pressing "upward" against the conceptual windowpane. In the still lifes and figure paintings of 1923, with their plethora of figures and hands surrounding a tilting table top, such an organization may appear simply as a typical Cubist spatial conception, as it probably started out to be. However, there are various hints that put a different slant on it. Earlier I referred briefly to the transparent crystalline structures of these works as suiting well their function as receptacles for Masson's motifs. Masson preferred to see this transparency as deriving from sources that were intrinsic to his vision, and, by implication, beyond any dependence on Cubism. Referring to his still lifes of 1923, Masson spoke of a "multiplicity" of objects in glass. "Exploding pomegranates, photographs of Italian monuments such as Piranesi's prisons, were seen through a succession of glass panes ...". And he adds that this transparency was the "real theme of these paintings."²⁰ The transparency extends well beyond the 1923 still lifes; the "exploding pomegranates" refer, in fact, to the sectioned forms that appear as if they had been sliced off by a glass pane that might be identified with the picture surface – in an obvious, though perhaps quite fortuitous, confluence with Breton's image of "a man cut in two by the window." Or perhaps such a confluence was not quite fortuitous, once we consider that in 1925, following the publication of Breton's *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Masson made two paintings in which this sectioning off of pomegranates is most glaringly in evidence, within a generally transparent setting formed by what appear like glass panes merging with the picture's surface. In *The Woman*, the body of the female figure appears to be cut in two, sectioned off, by the transparent glass panes defining its Cubist spatial organization, the open pomegranate seemingly representing a cross-section of the body with its internal organs exposed. With regard to *The Armor* (*L'Armure*, 1925, Figure 7.3), Masson said later: "This female armor, it has the appearance of crystal. Its head is replaced by a flame. The neck is cut. The sex lies next to an open pomegranate: the only fruit that bleeds" (Clébert, *Mythologie* 32). What also appears to thrust against the glass pane of the window-surface is the torso itself, with this perception augmented by its distinct outline, drawn as if on a flat surface. The quality of glass was recognized by Breton and Desnos, who, in their preface to the catalogue of the Surrealist exhibition held at the Galerie Pierre (November 1925), described this painting as an "armor of glass."²¹



7.3 André Masson, *The Armor* (*L'armure*), 1925

The screen-window quality of Masson's surfaces is also effected by the architectural structure in which the topmost layer appears to constitute a frame that merges with the picture plane. In *Les Soupiraux* (1924) this frame literally constitutes the cellar windows of the title. What is also apparent, especially in 1924–25, is the layered depth conception consisting, to a varying degree, of walls, partitions, and, most significantly, semi-transparent planes that combine a seeing-through and a refraction.²² What is also quite discernible is the assertion of the picture's surface by the conspicuous surface quality of the linear textures defining the figures or body parts that float within the confines of the architectural frame.²³ To these might be added the ubiquitous rope always depicted as a surface inscription which also possesses bulk, and as such reinforces the material quality of the glass pane that constitutes the screen-window. Reflecting in later years about the meaning of the rope in his work, Masson suggested an analogy with writing. "A familiar experiment consisted of throwing a piece of twine on a sheet of white paper: what appeared were movements of undeniable grace."²⁴ I have noted above that Miró tended to conceive of his drawings and the paintings evolving from them in terms of a "page of writing." As I argued there, the marks on this "page of writing" signify the "crossed" purposes of pictorial and semantic signification on the one hand, and the arbitrary and non-descriptive character of the mark on the other, with their adjoining dialectics of opacity and transparency. To return to *The Armor*, I suggest that, in poetically evoking an "armor of glass," Breton and Desnos may have felt that the transparency in the painting was analogous to the transparency of language, its openness to transformation; that the metamorphic quality of its motifs (with body parts transformed into fish, pomegranate, bird and flame) paralleled wordplays such as those applied by Boiffard to the names of various members of the Surrealist group. These wordplays were published under the title "Nomenclature" in the fourth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (15 July 1925, p. 22) accompanied by a reproduction of *The Armor*.²⁵ I should note that the "armor of glass" is an oxymoronic expression that conveys also the sense of the opacity of the armor; that is, in terms of Masson's paintings, the material opacity of the surface elements (this character of the armor will become more intelligible in the course of this chapter).

It is in the light of this dialectics of opacity and transparency, in relation to the surface of the painting as a "page of writing," that Masson's automatic drawings may again be approached. "To describe this sort of drawing," Masson tells us, "Harold Rosenberg suggested the word arena. I consider this word to be very accurate. The white paper is for me an arena ... an arena without limits" (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 84). This arena is a blank, non-existent space²⁶ that is analogous perhaps to the emptiness that one must create within oneself, as the first step in the procedure of automatic drawing,

as Masson described it. “Il faut faire le vide en soi,” he says, adding that “the automatic drawing having its source in the unconscious should appear like an unpredictable birth. The first graphic apparitions on the paper are pure gesture, rhythm, incantation, and as a result these are pure scribbles. This is the first phase.” Following the first phase, whose results, Masson insists, are “absolutely abstract,” in the second phase, “the image (that had been latent) now claims its rights. Once the image has appeared, one should stop. This image is nothing more than a vestige, a mark, a piece of debris.”²⁷ In the terms I have posed, the first phase might be seen as resulting in the opacity of what Roger Cardinal refers to as “turbulence of arbitrary non-meaning” (88), while the second phase is defined by the transparence (or semi-transparence) of communicable motifs.²⁸ Masson himself saw the process of automatic creation as being closely dependent on the structure of the interior space, the space of the mind:

I imagine internal space as if divided into different layers: the layer closest to consciousness is the one in which appear images that are already the kind of images one can note down and develop – I have done so – and the deepest layer is completely unconscious: I don’t know what goes on there (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 81).

This quotation reflects a viewpoint that is chronologically quite removed from the period under consideration; however, I see this vision of the layers in the mind as having been deep-seated enough to serve as a dominant structural paradigm in the paintings of 1924–25 with their pronounced layered depth conception. Again, in hindsight, Masson preferred considering such spatial conception as quite contrary to his later concerns, but with the implication that this was a reigning paradigm in his early work. Thus in *Métamorphose de l’artiste* (1956) he distinguishes between two types of painting. The first one, aiming for a projection on a plane, reveals a preference for the distribution of forms parallel to the given surface. It is a style that elevates a succession of walls, transparent or veiled, between the bodies or objects, the first being the privileged one. This style of “l’espace-limit” weighs against the form, limits expansion and curbs relief. The second is baroque painting with its limitless depth, in which all directions lead to the vanishing point and forms tend diagonally into the center, and everything is swept in pictorial gusts covering the entire field (56–7). Now, while Masson’s sympathy at the time is obviously with the free and limitless baroque space, he presents quite an accurate definition, however unfavorable, of what he calls the style of “l’espace-limit,” or what I have been referring to as the layered depth conception. In terms of the suggested analogy between the layered depth conception and Masson’s vision of the structure of the mind in the automatic process, the linear motifs in the 1924–25 paintings, hovering within the architectural frame and pressing against the painting’s surface, represent the “layer closest to consciousness.”

In fact, it might be quite credible to see these paintings, in which the forms created in the automatic process are only symbolically represented, or at best imitated, as constituting an allegory of the Surrealist creation, in which, beyond the surface elements, the dark spaces glimpsed behind the semi-transparent layers at the heart of the labyrinth are representative of the unknown recesses of the mind. This quality of Masson's paintings must have been sensed by Antonin Artaud, one of the most perceptive commentators on Masson's work, who felt close to Masson because he saw in his work something that paralleled his own sense of being unable to possess his mind "in its entirety." In Masson's space, with its uncanny conjugation of reasoned layered structure and intuitive fragmented Oceanic turbulence, he found a strong pictorial expression for thought in the process of fragmentation. Such are the spatial perceptions informing parts of Artaud's *The Umbilicus of Limbo* (*L'Ombilic des limbes*). His description of Masson's painting *Man* (*Homme*) contains lines particularly expressive of what I consider to be the essence of Masson's spatiality:

The canvas is hollow and layered. The painting is well enclosed in the canvas. It is like a closed circle, a kind of abyss which turns and divides into two parts at the middle. It is like a mind that sees itself and grows hollow, it is kneaded and shaped incessantly by the clenched hands of the mind. But the mind sows its phosphorus.²⁹

This evocation in the light of what I have posited in the present chapter does not present a complete view of Artaud's response to Masson's paintings. The full import of Artaud's text, as well as of other texts of his that allude to Masson's paintings or touch on them directly, will be further elucidated in the light of the considerations of Masson's spatial conception as applied to various bodily concerns, to which I turn next.

Masson's "skin ego" – containment and dispersal of the body

In the discussions devoted to Ernst and Miró (and to a lesser extent Magritte), I introduced another perspective on the spatial concerns underlying the works of these artists by exploring the screen paradigm in its capacity of "skin." A "skin" quality might be readily intuited with regard to the tactile character of the surfaces created by the artists discussed so far. In Masson's case, this quality is discernible in relation to various body concerns associated with what might be called the space of the body. In the coming discussion I will address more specifically the notion of the body qua body and the situation of the body in space, in the light of further psychoanalytic considerations that apply more specifically to these concerns and that are associated with the concept of "skin ego."

As observed before, Masson's paintings, late in 1923 and in 1924, often present human figures hemmed in by a rigid and constricting architectural frame in a spatial conception combining a transparent crystalline structure derived from Analytic Cubism with hints of perspectival recession. In 1924 an increasingly irrational space and labyrinthine architecture (alluding to Piranesi's "Prisons") harbor floating fragmented forms of objects and body parts that metamorphose into each other. Looking back, Masson saw this body-oriented vision in terms of an explosion caused by the presence of the human figure within the architecture. The architectural side of Cubism, he said (to quote him again), "is negated at the center, because of the appearance of an exploding figure" (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 26). Furthermore, the architecture itself, especially when it partakes of Piranesi's forms, constitutes a body, at times eviscerated and dispersed. What Masson wrote in 1956 about his automatic drawings seems quite applicable to the paintings of 1924–25, and in particular to the vision guiding them: "The almost invariably labyrinthine images displayed disemboweled bodies with their digestive organs exposed. In what concerned female figures, this visceral obsession was at times veiled through the symbolic replacement of an open fruit. Male figures were never preserved from wounds and mutilations" (*Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 33). And still later, looking back at these paintings in his interviews with Gilbert Brownstone in 1975, he noted the unsympathetic response he had gotten for the many decapitated figures in his early paintings. "I have been accused of mutilating the body for the sole purpose of being offensive, whereas for me the bursting and dispersal of the body corresponded to the idea of a reunion with the universe" (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 69). These ideas, however, reflect Masson's later attitudes – associated with what he was doing in his American period and later – and one should look elsewhere for the ideas that underlay his earlier motifs of fragmentation and dispersal.

This sense of dispersal constitutes one side of a dichotomy whose other side is prescribed by the function of containment visually effected in the paintings of 1924–25 by means of various spatial configurations. One of these, to which I have alluded before, consists of a bubble-like form, an envelope or sac – containing free-flowing lines as well as more developed motifs – that floats within the space of the page (in the drawings) or within the frame of architectural elements (paintings and drawings alike). It is in respect to this particular configuration that the dichotomy of dispersal and containment might be advantageously considered, primarily in the light of a psychoanalytical notion which, while postdating by half a century the period under discussion, still appears to me to be particularly applicable to Masson's work. I am referring to Didier Anzieu's notion of the skin ego, first proposed in 1974 in an article which was later expanded into a book. Anzieu

considers the skin ego as a psychic envelope that “guarantees the psychical apparatus a sure and continuous sense of basic well-being.”³⁰ It is a “mental image of which the Ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body.” I do not need to go in detail into the process of skin ego formation, as Anzieu described it, nor into the clinical usefulness of this concept. It will be enough to consider its implication, both in the early Freudian context and as developed by Anzieu; to consider, indeed, the equation of the skin as a bodily organ with the ego as a psychic organ. Anzieu takes off from Freud’s theorizing of the topographical structure of the ego in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), already considered in some detail in Chapter 4. As I noted there, Freud writes that the ego as a psychical envelope derives from the bodily envelope, the skin: “A person’s own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring. It is seen like any other object, but to the touch it yields two kinds of sensations, one of which may be equivalent to an internal perception” (*The Ego and the Id* 15).

Freud’s assertion that the tactile provides both an internal and an external perception is seen by Anzieu as alluding to the fact that “I feel the object touching my skin at the same time as I feel my skin touched by the object” (*The Skin Ego* 85). Freud’s conclusion is that the “ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (*The Ego and the Id* 16).³¹ Anzieu extends these ideas further, arguing that the containing function of the skin ego corresponds to the skin, into which all the external sense organs are inserted. He sees its formation in terms of a mental representation emerging from the interplay between the mother’s body and the child’s (101) – between the maternal environment that surrounds the baby with an “external envelope made up of message” and an inner envelope, the surface of the baby’s body, that defines the baby’s emerging ego, its individualization (62).³² The skin ego’s function is to serve as a container for the psychical apparatus, at least in an early stage, when it is “imaginarily represented as an outer shell, the instinctual Id as an inner kernel, the two terms each having need of the other. The Skin Ego cannot function as a Container unless it has drives to contain, to localize in bodily sources, and later to differentiate” (101). In addition, the baby’s skin is the object of libidinal cathexis on the part of the mother; this results in the skin ego’s “drawing in libidinal cathexis over its entire surface and becoming a complete envelope of sexual excitation” (104). Consequently, another function of the skin ego is that of “libidinal recharging of the psychical functioning.”

A great deal of what I have presented here – constituting only some highlights of Anzieu’s thesis – might serve as a basis for interpreting, or rather, throwing additional light on Masson’s spatial conception. Admittedly,

this is the closest that I will come to using psychoanalysis as an interpretive tool. If I do so here it is because I regard Anzieu's thesis as drawing on a broad range of anthropological and artistic considerations as well as on earlier psychoanalytical hypotheses. As Anzieu himself observes, the skin ego, in structure as well as functions, "is not a single organ but a whole set of different organs. Its anatomical, physiological and cultural complexity prefigures the complexity of the Ego on the psychical plane" (14).³³ Masson's drawings and paintings appear to be a largely intuitive outgrowth of this cultural framework, and in this capacity they obviously lend themselves well to such an explication. The "sleeper" motif appears in *Study for "Nudes and Architecture"* (1923–24) as a male figure encompassing in its arms a cocoon-like sac, a sort of placenta containing floating female forms that appear as if engendered by the male figure as objects of his desire.³⁴ This sac or envelope, appearing in many of Masson's automatic drawings, may also contain male figures (as, for instance, in the portraits of Aragon, Breton and Eluard),³⁵ but for the most part this motif is associated with female figures. These figures are contained and containing; where the envelope is placed within an architectural frame, it often completely encloses the female forms within it.³⁶ There are drawings in which the female figure itself becomes a container enclosing various forms, including phalluses or extra pairs of breasts, often in association with the motif of the rope, itself a phallic symbol.³⁷

The mother envelope

The motif of the enveloping membrane, to follow Anzieu's ideas, might be seen as an attempt at a recreation of the protective, containing mother envelope, intended to counter the separation from the mother, perceived in the theoretical framework of the skin ego in terms of the tearing away of the common skin between mother and child. I should emphasize that I do not claim this to be a clinical analysis of Masson, but rather a construction aided by a psychoanalytical context, based primarily on a close scrutiny of the various motifs found in Masson's work. Thus the protective mother envelope, as an all-encompassing female figure, is often depicted as giving birth to the whole of creation.³⁸ A large female figure, in one of Masson's 1925 drawings, is shown submerged in water and surrounded by fish (Figure 7.4). With her head metamorphosed into a leafy branch and her breasts sparkling like stars, she appears to subsume the whole of creation. The analogy of the mother motif with this all-encompassing spatial presence is suggested, perhaps inadvertently but no less meaningfully, by the two titles under which the drawing is known, *La Mère (The Mother)* and *La Mare (The Pond)*.³⁹ All-encompassing breasts-stars, covering the whole space of drawings and



7.4 André Masson, *La Mare (La Mère)*, 1925

paintings also present an all-over erotic envelope.⁴⁰ The exposed and open vagina found in many of Masson's drawings is another motif revealing a wish to return to a safe protective mother environment.⁴¹

The image of a vagina that looks like a staring eye⁴² appears in a self-portrait made in 1925, within an encompassing envelope that seems to have risen out of the sleeper's head, as if it were an expression of his inner vision. The sleeper himself is also enclosed within an envelope that contains a woman's breast.⁴³ In paintings such as *Man (Homme, 1924)* or *Le Torse (Nature morte) (1924)*, there is a reversal, with the outlined figure of the man appearing to exhibit an indeterminate sexual identity (or even to possess what looks like female genitals). Antonin Artaud must have sensed this ambiguous or dual sexual identity in Masson's paintings. This comes through quite clearly in the text cited above in which he evokes *Homme*:

A slender belly. A belly of fine powder, as in a picture. At the foot of the belly, an exploded grenade ... Above the belly one can see breasts. And higher up, and in depth, but on another level of the mind, a sun burns, but in such a way that it seems to be the breast that burns. And at the foot of the grenade, a bird (Artaud, *Selected Writings* 66; *Oeuvres complètes I* 76).

The central motif in *Homme*, the outlined figure with pronounced delineation of chest and belly, appears in several drawings. In *Le Torse et les Arcades* (1925, Archives Louise Leiris 9076/57122) there is a large vulva-shaped opening in the belly area. In another drawing made in 1925 entitled *L'Armure* (Archives Louise Leiris 9078/50961), the male figure similarly exhibits a sexual ambiguity and is surrounded by female breasts. There is, indeed, an undeniable connection between this motif and that of the painting *The Armor (L'Armure)*, one that may have been sensed by Artaud as well. A text "written under the inspiration of paintings by M. André Masson," published in *La Révolution surréaliste* early in 1925, seems to resemble quite closely the one devoted to *Homme*, but also to refer more directly to *The Armor* or the drawings associated with it:⁴⁴

But the air was like an inhaling void in which the woman's bust arrived in the general trembling, in the shaking up of this glazed world that swirled in splinters of brows and rattled its vegetal columns ... But under the ice, a frightening noise traversed by cocoons of fire surrounds the silence of the naked belly that is deprived of ice ... The cold swaying of the columns divides my spirit in two, and I touch this sex of mine, the sex at the bottom of my soul, which rises in a burning triangle (RS 2 (January 1925) 6–7; *Oeuvres complètes I* 314–315).

The image of a woman's bust surrounded by flames, the flames also defining a "burning triangle" in the vulva area, is found in *Torse flamme au soleil* (1925, Archives Louise Leiris 9091/57135), a drawing that was published in the April 1925 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (p. 23). The torso in the drawing, in which the breasts seem like rigid shells that are almost cut off from it, closely resembles that of *The Armor*. Furthermore, while the suggestion of splintered glass in Artaud's text might refer to the transparent crystalline structures

that characterize many of the 1923–25 paintings, it may reflect even more forcefully the quality associated with *The Armor* to which Breton and Desnos responded in describing it in terms of “armor of glass.” Various aspects of the concept of skin ego might add another layer of meaning to images of this nature. Anzieu devotes considerable space in his book to consideration of the excesses or deficiencies of the containing function of the skin ego in its role as protective shield associated with the enfolding presence of the maternal envelope. To cite Anzieu,

The failure of this containing function of the skin ego results in two forms of anxiety. An instinctual excitation that is diffuse, constant, scattered, non-localizable, non-identifiable, unquenchable, results when the psychical topography consists of a kernel without a shell; the individual seeks a substitute shell in physical pain or psychical anxiety: he wraps himself in suffering. In the second case, the envelope exists, but its continuity is broken into by holes. This skin ego is a colander: thoughts and memories are only with difficulty retained; they leak away ... It is a cause of considerable anxiety to have an interior which empties itself, especially of the aggression required for any kind of self-assertion (*The Skin Ego* 102).

The “armor” in the painting and the associated drawings represents a rigid shell, quite unlike the more pliant forms of female bodies, or the envelopes surrounding them, in some other drawings and paintings. As such, it is analogous, in Anzieu’s scheme, to the “crustacean” ego, “in which a rigid shell replaces the missing container and prevents those functions of the skin ego which should develop later from being triggered” (102). Again, I do not wish to claim a complete congruence, certainly not in the clinical sense, between Anzieu’s notion and Masson’s pictorial conception. I am merely positing an attempt on Masson’s part at a symbolical denial of the sense of diffusion and scattering that characterizes much of his imagery at the time and that has a counterpart also in the indeterminate sexual identity of the motifs populating the drawings and paintings linked to *The Armor*. In this sense, Anzieu’s notion offers a more nuanced perspective concerning what I have referred to as the dichotomy of containment and dispersal in Masson’s works. The skin ego might be perceived as being symbolically asserted in the flattened, containing form of the screen-windowpane quality of Masson’s surfaces. As shown before, it has to do with the crowding of the motifs around the surface of the painting; their pressing “upward” or “forward” against the conceptual windowpane in such a way that bodies or parts of bodies, or pomegranates for that matter, appear sectioned off, as if sliced by a glass pane that is identical with the picture surface. The windowpane as one flattened part of the larger all-encompassing envelope is thus another means of containing the dispersal of motifs. In the drawings, at times, the all-around scattering of limbs, breasts, stars (or breasts-stars), fruit, and what look like eyes or heads of birds, appears to present a dense

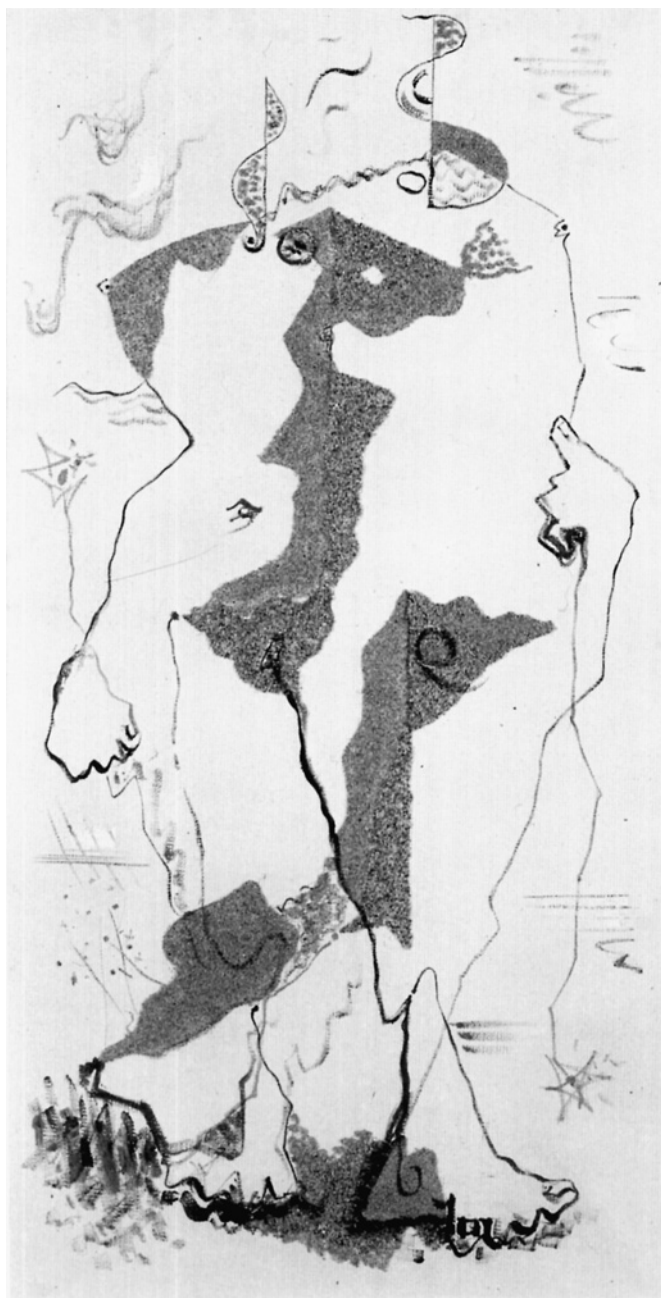
surface texture (indeed, a screen identified with the sheet of paper) that seems like a female envelope subsuming the whole of creation.⁴⁵

Masson's "precipitates" – the skin ego in disrepair

I turn now to the sand paintings, which present the most tangible, and also the most critical manifestation of skin in Masson's work. An implied reference to this quality of the sand paintings might be found in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, where, in the section devoted to Masson, Breton cites Edgar Allan Poe concerning processes associated with the "chemistry of the intellect," in which the "admixture of two elements results in a something that has nothing of the qualities of one of them, or even nothing of the qualities of either" (SP 35). The phrase "chemistry of the intellect," which Breton considered to agree well with "Masson's science," applies to an imaginative activity that seems related to Breton's concept of the poetic image.⁴⁶ By the time he wrote this passage on Masson, Breton had already applied this notion of the poetic image to the domain of plastic creation in his earlier essay on Max Ernst (1921) and, less explicitly, in the paragraphs devoted to Ernst in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*.⁴⁷ However, the imagery Breton employs in illustrating his contention connotes a somewhat different sphere of experience. Such a "chemistry of the intellect," he argues, tends to "suggest to us far more than those reactions of which we wish to be only distant witnesses," and he goes on to characterize these reactions in terms of bodily reactions to the heat and cold of other bodies, with these reactions causing changes of color. He adds, however, that

... it does not matter whether or not the reaction of our body when it is warm against this same body when it is cold would turn anything blue and then back to pink, under our eyes, other than the sunflower winding itself around the seasons: what is important to know is that these reactions will always lead us to these pictures and that these pictures will appear to us as inevitable and dazzling "precipitates" (SP 35).

This passage implies, or leads to, Breton's perception that what happens on canvas – reactions and changes of color similar to those experienced by the body's reaction to heat and cold – results in having these pictures appear to us as "inevitable and dazzling 'precipitates.'"⁴⁸ In other words, these precipitates, condensing as images on canvas, are analogous to reactions experienced by the body. Bodily reactions of heat and cold are a surface experience, felt and communicated by the skin. It appears, indeed, that in this passage Breton is expressing, whether he is fully aware of this or not, a response to painting that involves perceiving the surface of the painting or elements on the surface as constituting a sort of skin.



7.5 André Masson, *The Strollers (Les Promeneurs)*, 1927

As published originally, the section concerning Masson concluded the last installment of "Le Surréalisme et la peinture" to appear in *La Révolution surréaliste* (issues 9–10, October 1927), and it is quite likely that Breton, while reluctant to consider Masson's work as embodying graphic automatism and without specifically referring to it as such, was responding to Masson's latest works that, in 1927, consisted mostly of sand paintings. He may have seen a painting of the year before, *Les Ecorchés* (1926), in which two flayed figures are depicted, with the flayed areas exposing visceral forms. The shapes of these flayed areas are almost identical to those of the patches of sand in quite a few of the sand paintings picturing figures; for instance, *The Strollers* (*Les Promeneurs*, 1927, Figure 7.5) and *Man and Woman* (1927). The texture of the sand notwithstanding, the impression is that of pieces of flayed skin glued to the surface and made sensitive (*écorché vif* means hypersensitive), almost vulnerable, by the web of deft automatic lines in and around them. Such associations would have been augmented by the omnipresence of the human body or parts of it in Masson's earlier works. It might be added that Breton's references to the bodily sensations of heat and cold as analogous to pink and blue, presumably signifying warm and cold colors, may have been prompted by the areas of blue and red in sand paintings such as *Battle of Fish* (*Combat de poissons*, 1926), *Fish Drawn on the Sand* (*Les Poissons dessinés sur le sable*, 1927), and *Figure* (1927). It should also be noted, however, that the red color, appearing more often than blue, obviously connotes blood, further augmenting the perception of torn skin.

A kinship of sorts might be discerned between Masson's sand paintings and Ernst's frottages and grattages. Such kinship is largely due to the posterior pronouncements made by Masson and Ernst concerning the Surrealist motivation – that is, the dimension of psychic automatism – underlying both practices. In both, the stress is on the random, uncontrolled formation of the primary visual texture – the pouring of glue and the scattering of sand in the sand paintings; the rubbing of paper over various textures, or, in the grattages, the scraping of the surface layers of paint over an assortment of objects – that serves to stimulate the mind to engage itself in the automatic process of "discovering" images lying hidden within its innermost recesses.⁴⁹ What is particularly significant, however, is the concern of both techniques with the tactile quality of the materials involved, whether this has to do, as noted by Breton, with Ernst's examination of the "substance of objects, with complete freedom to determine new shadows, attitudes and shapes for them" (*SP* 30) – that is to say, the process of transferring the tactile qualities of objects to the paper or canvas – or the augmenting of the tactility of the painted surface itself, with this applying equally to sand paintings, grattages, and even to the frottages.⁵⁰

From the perspective offered by the notion of the skin ego, however, Masson's sand paintings also metaphorize the skin ego, in its capacity of a containing envelope or membrane, in a state of disrepair. The fusion of skins, with the patches of sand spreading along the contact areas of the two bodies, in sand paintings such as *Man and Woman* and *The Strollers*, both dated to 1927, still constitutes a symbolical gesture of uniting the figures and repairing the envelope; but this is to no avail and the stripped-off quality remains dominant. The patches of rent and torn skin, betokening a flayed body,⁵¹ appear indeed to illustrate the disruption of the skin ego's function "as a containing, unifying envelope for the Self; as a protective barrier for the psyche, and as a filter of exchanges; and a surface of inscription for the first traces, a function which makes representation possible" (Anzieu 97). The skin ego in its containing capacity, as subsumed in the enveloping sac or the screen-window dimension of the painting's surface, was Masson's symbolic pictorial gesture of placing his Dionysian, instinctual drives – the inducements emerging from the depths of the unconscious, to use the term which he was to adopt intermittently, without ever fully subscribing to the Freudian viewpoint – within a controlling, intellectual order. It is Masson's version of the Surrealist containment of the Ocean. As I shall go on to show, Masson's estrangement from Surrealism is subsumed in the rejection of this Surrealist notion of containment of the Ocean; that is to say, in the abandonment of the conception of pictorial space that is regulated by the screen-skin, with its associated dialectics of opacity and transparency, surface and depth.

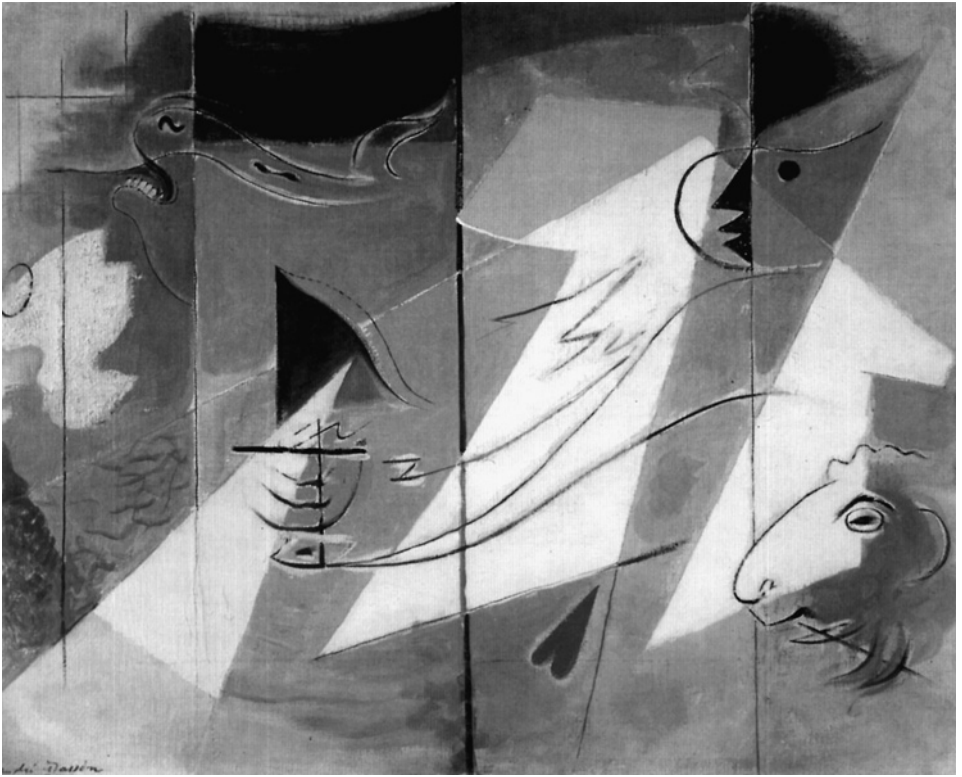
The dissolution of the screen paradigm – Masson's "mystical anatomy"

There are quite a few causes for Masson's disaffection with Surrealism, not the least being his complex and quite tense relationship with Breton and the growing estrangement between them that ultimately resulted in his defection from the Surrealist ranks in 1929.⁵² The beginning of this estrangement from Surrealism may be traced to Masson's disappointment with Breton's failure to consider his automatic practice attentively in the rather noncommittal treatment in the fourth installment of "Le Surréalisme et la peinture" (*La Révolution surréaliste* 10, October 1927), in which greater weight is given to Masson's moral position, the works themselves being described merely as "precipitates" of the mind, that is, as the material outcome of Masson's "chemistry of the intellect" (SP 35). This omission may have been due to Breton's concern that graphic automatism was liable to fall into the trap of becoming the facile creation of "hands that paint" (SP 36).⁵³ It has also been suggested that Breton's rejection of Masson may have come from his fear that Masson's successful and abundant production of automatic drawings might lead to an academic formula (Spector,

Surrealist Art and Writing 109). Furthermore, it seems to me quite likely that Breton, fully cognizant of Masson's range of intellectual proclivities, sensed that, when it came to psychic automatism, Masson's attitude was not quite an unqualified adherence to it as a Surrealist principle.⁵⁴ It might be recalled that in 1927, when Breton wrote the Masson section of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Masson's recent output – beginning with works done in 1926 – consisted of paintings that disclosed his effort to free himself of the Cubist grid by arriving at what Carolyn Lanchner describes as a compromise between painting and drawing, with the “exhilaration of line” almost matching that of the automatic drawings. (“André Masson: Origins and Development” 119). In 1927, in the more recent sand paintings, the line – or rather line and patches of poured sand and spilled paint – appeared to emulate the level of automatic freedom of his drawings. Nevertheless, these were precisely the works ignored by Breton and probably by most other Surrealists.⁵⁵

It is in these paintings of 1926–27 that Breton may have sensed that Masson was distancing himself from Surrealism and, in a sense, also from Surrealist automatism. The 1926 paintings reveal a growing tendency to do away with the layered depth of the earlier paintings, with its accompanying dialectics of opacity and transparency; to flatten the ground in order to prepare it for the free play of the automatic line. A painting such as *Les Ecorchés* (1926) still displays an obvious structure of flat planes placed within the pictorial space, and, as noted before, the flayed areas of the figures expose what looks like viscera. Other paintings, such as *Children of the Isles* (*Enfants des îles*, 1926) or *Death's Head* (*Tête de mort*, 1926), show a flat and uniform ground and appear closer to a drawing in which the pen has been replaced by a brush. Most of the sand paintings retain this flat ground on which the patches of sand are superimposed only in spots. In most of these paintings Masson sets down marks of violence and death, sex and suffering, as surface elements; the suggestion of internal space is no longer in evidence. I have cited Anzieu's assertion that when the external shell, the envelope is missing – when the interior “empties itself” – the “individual seeks a substitute shell in physical pain or psychical anxiety: he wraps himself in suffering” (Anzieu 102). Michel Leiris must have sensed this quality in Masson's 1928–29 paintings. In his journal entry for 13 May 1929, he describes Masson's recent paintings, in which the

... clusters of objects [those found in the 1923 paintings] were replaced by clusters of parts of the body, particularly orifices such as anus, vagina and, as it happens, navels. These clusters constitute the fixed points of the paintings. Around them everything turns, takes shape and comes undone. It could be said that they pin the painting, like a swirling live animal, to the canvas. It is perhaps because of these fixed points that the latest paintings of Masson have such a tragic appearance of massacre, as if they are trying to put up a struggle, to tear out, in the motionless agony of the crucified.⁵⁶



7.6 André Masson, *Slaughterhouse (L'Abattoire)*, 1930

The works to which Leiris refers no longer possess the patches of skin, the vestiges of a containing envelope. Masson may have felt that the “guidance” for the painter offered by the accidental and unplanned patches of sand was not conducive to the kind of freedom he had exercised in some of the drawings; the freedom that a more uniform layer of sand could afford him as, for instance, in *Fish Drawn on the Sand* (1926).⁵⁷ The surfaces in the works following the sand paintings are divided into flat rectangular planes in contrasting colors (yellow, dark green, ochre), whose edges lie parallel to the painting’s frame; these serve as a ground on which are placed the clusters of parts of the body to which Leiris refers – sheep’s heads, fish heads or curves of a female body (Figure 7.6).⁵⁸ These surfaces also gave Masson free rein to indulge his innate bent for what Michel Leiris referred to as “line in motion, rather than a line striving to define a structure.”⁵⁹ Masson’s lines, with their rather decorative undulations and suggestive curves are, by that time, quite removed from any affinity to his former automatic line. They are, according

to Carl Einstein, the outcome of a “hallucinatory speed” (*vitesse hallucinatoire*), an expression of the “flood of dynamisms” (*fleuve des dynamismes*) resulting in a “psychogram” that Einstein sees in terms of “spontaneous writing” (*écriture spontanée*).⁶⁰

In this 1929 essay, Carl Einstein, one of the most prominent contributors to *Documents*, provided an alternative to the Surrealist automatism that appears to have well fitted Masson’s purposes at this point.⁶¹ Writers, says Einstein, shackled by “accepted grammar,” limp behind painters like Masson. The purpose now is to undermine reality by hallucinatory means; but hallucination, says Einstein, should not be practised in a subjective manner that merely refers to bourgeois commonplaces; personal obsession has little chance of bringing about a true liberation. The hallucinatory forms should be seen as signs of an inevitable process in which all egocentric reactions disappear (95, 100). Einstein sees this process in terms of a “dissociation of consciousness,”⁶² and he argues that

... there is no concordance between the continuance of notions of consciousness and the succession of hallucinatory signs ... from his point of view, the rationalist uncovers the disorder in all psychological processes. But it is precisely in this discordance between hallucination and the structure of objects that lies our small chance of freedom, the possibility of changing the order of things (98).

The “psychogram” is an expression of the return to mythological creation based on psychological archaism in which the distance between subject and object is diminished. Man and his objects – the fish and birds in Masson’s paintings – form a unity, a “totemic identification” in which the subject is no longer at the periphery of his construction. In Einstein’s ethnographic view, the identification with the animal makes possible the subject’s projection of a sacrifice of himself, of his own death, with the aim of deferring it. Einstein’s conclusion is that the “limits of objects have disappeared. Man no longer observes. he lives in the orbit of objects that have become psychological functions. Optical simultaneity is replaced by analogies. One can speak of mystical anatomy” (102).

In the last paragraph of his essay, Einstein refers to the form of Masson’s works, arguing that in some cases, “the speed of the hallucination is such that only lines are used. In other paintings, the forms meet with a tectonic order, so that the painter encounters a defense that saves him from being destroyed by the dynamism of his hallucinations” (102). The distinction, it seems to me, is between those paintings in which the lines and form have the freedom of the untrammelled open ground as opposed to those in which they interact with a background of flat rectangular planes, in which a tectonic quality may be discerned in the contrasting color of these rectangles or in their supposed placement one on top of the other, as, for instance, in *The Trap and the Bird*

(*Le Piège et l'oiseau*, 1928). This “tectonic” conception, in which the surface remains quite opaque in its unmitigated flatness, is altogether different from the layered depth conception underlying Masson’s paintings of 1923–25. It does not allow for the dialectics of opacity and transparency, which, in the earlier paintings, is configured in the structure constituted by the surface-screen and the semi-transparent layers placed within the semi-illusionist pictorial space. This dialectics, as we have seen, is based on an analogy of the spatial conception in which the surface of the painting is the equivalent of a “page of writing,” with the Surrealist notion of verbal automatism seen in terms of the opacity and transparency of language. In his paintings after 1928, Masson removed himself quite radically from language and thus from the Surrealist concept of automatism – a point fully demonstrated by Einstein – with this also annulling the notion of the screen as a Surrealist paradigm. However, this estrangement from Surrealist aesthetics, quite extreme in terms of the aesthetics governing Surrealism in the 1920s, was not that far removed from the new direction of the movement in the 1930s. Indeed, the Modernist assertion of surface after 1928, that liberated Masson from Surrealist spatiality, may have been instrumental in opening the way in the early 1930s to a return to a form of modeling and spatial illusionism. This new direction, however, while retaining some of Masson’s themes and perceptions in the earlier work, was altogether different from it in terms of its reigning spatial form, by then quite removed from any conformity to the dialectics underlying the screen paradigm.

Notes

1. Letter to Breton, 21 October 1925, in Masson, *Les Années surréalistes* 107. If not otherwise noted, the translations from the French are mine.
2. These ideas had direct counterparts in various motifs introduced in the paintings. As Christopher Green correctly points out, sleep and the dream – as expressed by the figures of sleepers or dreamers – play a conspicuous role in Masson’s works of 1923–25 in a way not found in Miró. The dreaming figure is the central character in *The Sleeper* of 1924–25 and appears as a severed head in *The Vents* (*Les Soupiraux*) of 1924. See Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies* 282.
3. Masson, “Origines du Cubisme et du Surréalisme” (1941), in *Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 19.
4. In 1956, at the time his work was influenced by Chinese painting and oriental calligraphy, Masson wrote: “A painting is a voyage in another world, akin to the world of depths; not a simulacrum of a masked reality or of some evasive fiction, but the echo of a wakeful and bright reality.” Masson, *Métamorphose de l’artiste* 125. Still later, he wrote about his painting *The Four Elements* (*Les Quatre éléments*, 1924): “The important thing was to affirm in an effective manner what was most profound within oneself: the fantasies, desires, and whatever came from the internal space.” Masson, *Vagabond du surréalisme* 29. I should add that, although these books were written years after the period under consideration, I find them illuminating enough in revealing, often quite inadvertently, some of Masson’s earlier concerns; this is most often the case when he compares his earlier work to the later.
5. Masson, “Peindre est une gageure,” *Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 14–15.

6. The disembodied hands, fish and birds – and in somewhat later works, images of sleepers – may have a source in Ernst. To these were added Masson's own distinct images of ropes, knives, nudes, and pomegranates.
7. Leiris, "Désert de mains," in Leiris and Limbour, *André Masson et son univers* 36.
8. To cite a few examples, *Sleeper* (1923–24), *The Four Elements* (1924), *Man Seated at a Table (Portrait of Michel Leiris)* (1924), *Man Holding a Cord (Homme tenant une corde)*, 1924).
9. Laura Rosenstock sees de Chirico's influence in terms of semi-illusionist but disoriented and inconsistent space; the box-like forms and architectural partitions, enlarged still-life elements, detached hands, mannequin figures and statues, and draftsman's triangles. See "De Chirico's Influence on the Surrealists" 126. Carolyn Lanchner discerns in *The Four Elements* "Chiricoesque, semi-illusionistic depiction of the dream image." See "André Masson: Origins and Development" 103.
10. This conception is in evidence, for instance, in the 1924 paintings *Les Soupiraux*, *Two Nudes*, *Nudes and Architecture*, *Man in the Tower (L'Homme dans la tour)*, *Man (Homme)*, *The Torso (Still Life) (Le torse (nature morte))*, *The Abandoned City (La Ville abandonnée)*; in 1925, in *The Constellations* and *The Wreath (La Couronne)*.
11. *The Four Elements*, with its symbols of Heraclitean polarities, was the first painting by Masson to be purchased by Breton; its attraction for him perhaps lay in the combination of this symbolism with the Chiricoesque space.
12. The equation of the labyrinth and the human body, the female body in particular, will come up later in this chapter. What Piranesi's work would have meant for Masson may be discerned in an essay by Henry-Charles Puech, "Les 'Prisons' de Jean-Baptiste Piranèse" (1930). Puech evokes Piranesi's visions in terms of a "dream of a subterranean architecture, disproportionate in its dimensions and its multiplications." He elaborates: "With Piranesi, classicism resolves itself straight out into a perfectly inhuman vision of things. Man is overwhelmed for good by what he has created ... The obsessive idea of the construction, an arrangement of stones or machines, these human triumphs! opens and captures an indeterminate perspective of nightmares and punishments multiplied by the automatic law of the vaults, pillars and levels, in an accretion that no longer would there be any grounds for stopping ..." (Puech 204).
13. Originally published as "Un peintre mental" in *Bilboquet* 2 (1923). See Artaud, *Selected Writings* 27; Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes* I 272.
14. Masson and Artaud were probably not familiar with Klee's theories or teachings (he began to teach perspective at the Bauhaus in 1921). For a detailed study of Klee's interest in physics and mechanics, and the way this interest was reflected in his teaching and paintings, see Henry, "Paul Klee's Pictorial Mechanics."
15. As observed by Carolyn Lanchner, "He [Masson] was at this moment almost literally Pierre Reverdy's poet: the dreamer among the ramparts, a captive trying to tear down prison walls – an image he himself would project in many pictures of the next two years." "André Masson: Origins and Development" 101.
16. Such images may have inspired Paul Eluard's prose poem "André Masson" (*La Révolution surréaliste* 4, July 1925, 5); some lines read: "The lines of the hand, so many branches in the whirling wind. Ramp of the winter months, pale day of insomnia, but also, in the shadow's most secret room, the garland of a body around its splendor."
17. See, for instance Lanchner, "André Masson: Origins and Development" 102. Christopher Green too contends that the automatic drawings and their painted relatives developed to some extent independently, acquiring a Surrealist identity in the fullest sense only later (Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies* 258).
18. For a consideration of this metamorphic quality in Masson's lithographs for Leiris's book *Simulacre* (1925) see Monahan, untitled catalogue essay, 56.
19. Mèredieu, *André Masson: Les dessins automatiques* 15. Raymond Spiteri observes that "Masson opposed the intellectual quality of architecture to the nude as a emblem of bodily desire." See "Battant come une porte" 179.
20. Masson also relates how Raymond Roussel bought one of his still lifes because he liked the transparency. See Clébert, *Mythologie d'André Masson* 26.
21. Breton, *OC* I 915; Desnos, *Ecrits sur les peintres* 80.

22. This conception is clearly present, for instance, in *Man* (1924), *The Wing* (1925), *The Constellations* (1925), *The Wreath* (1925), *Bird Pierced by Arrows* (1925), *The Star* (1925).
23. Again, in *Les Soupiraux*, as well as, for instance, in *Two Nudes* (1924), *Nudes and Architecture* (1924).
24. Clébert, *Mythologie d'André Masson* 33. In the same passage, Masson also refers to the rope in terms of unconscious allusion to future labyrinths and as embodying his "visceral obsession" (I turn to this obsession later in the chapter).
25. To cite one example, "André Masson" is metamorphosed into "le son des antres" (literally, "the sound of the lair"). This parallelism of Masson's painting and Boiffard's wordplays was suggested by Kim Grant, *Surrealism and the Visual Arts* 120.
26. To cite Michel Leiris on Masson's automatic drawings, "These drawings are not *constructed*. Rather, they develop and structure themselves in the non-existent space of the blank page, not even framed by an imaginary margin." Leiris, "The Unbridled Line," in *André Masson, Drawings* (n.p.).
27. Masson, "Propos sur le surréalisme," *Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 37. Roger Cardinal defines this process in terms of "an initial 'blind' release of non-rational energy [that] is overtaken by a reflex of intellectual construal," with the latent image, hovering on the verge of definition, implying a semi-conscious symbolism, which Cardinal sees as a secondary formation elicited from the primary, unconscious mass of scribbling. See Cardinal, "André Masson and Automatic Drawing" 85–6.
28. As suggested in Chapter 3, the situation is somewhat more complex; opacity can be seen also in terms of the external impulses imposed on consciousness that render somewhat opaque the message received from within. Or, in relation to Masson's drawings, not only the unconscious but also the signals received from without are concretized on the paper.
29. Artaud, "Description of a Physical State," from *The Umbilicus of Limbo* (1925), in Artaud, *Selected Writings* 66; Artaud, "Description d'un état physique," *L'Ombilic des limbes*, in *Oeuvres complètes I* 77.
30. Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* 39–40.
31. As observed by Laura Marcus, Freud's notions of the ego as a bodily "projection," and his view of the surface of the body as a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring, allow us to "bring together the concepts of 'projection' as 'prosthesis' (the body extended or projected into the world) and as a 'screening', whereby not only the subject's body but his/her relationship to the 'skin', the screen/surface, of the other (the mother) is projected or imaged." Marcus, "Introduction: Histories, Representations, Autobiographies in *The Interpretation of Dreams*" 40.
32. At this point I may refer again to Bertram Lewin's concept of dream screen, and to his suggestion that the dream screen "may partake of cutaneous qualities; the original fusion of breast and the sleeper's skin in babyhood may enable the skin to register itself on the dream screen." He adds, however, that this point is "still obscure." Anzieu had Lewin's concept in mind while developing his own notions. See Lewin, "Sleep, the Mouth, and the Dream Screen" 429.
33. In the cultural and anthropological framework, the skin figures in a wide range of attitudes related to tactile stimulation, such as those associated with taboos on touching. Fantasies of skin mutilation, expressed in Western painting in images of ripped skin and flaying, may be linked to masochism as embodied by the application of corporal punishment to the surface of the skin.
34. See Mèredieu, *André Masson: Les dessins automatiques*, Plate 37, p. 33.
35. Mèredieu, Plates 35, 36, 38, pp. 32–3.
36. For instance, in the drawing published in *La Révolution surréaliste* 3 (April 1925) 18 (Figure 7.2). This conception is also found in paintings such as *Nudes and Architecture* (1923–24, Figure 7.1) and *Two Nudes* (1924).
37. Such motifs might be viewed as reflecting a fetishistic replacement or compensation for the absence of the mother's penis. See a Lacanian response to this image in Vermeersch, "Le Retour à la ligne." Vermeersch focuses on three drawings: *Scène Sadique*, 1925 (Archives Louise Leiris 9097/57118), automatic drawing, 1925 (Archives Louise Leiris 9082/57117), and an automatic drawing published in *La Révolution surréaliste* 3 (April 1925) 10.
38. One of Masson's most potent expressions of this idea is found in his drawing *La Naissance des oiseaux* (*The Birth of Birds*, 1925), reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* 5 (October 1925) 22. A

similar drawing is *Les Amoureux* (*The Lovers*, 1925, Archives Louise Leiris 13677/50779). The drawings are reproduced in Mèredieu 8–9.

39. See Plate 11 in *André Masson: Drawings*; Mèredieu 36 (Plate 41).
40. This conception underlies drawings such as *Soleils furieux*, reproduced in *La Révolution surréaliste* 5 (October 1925) 7 and *Les Etoiles* (1925, Archives Louise Leiris 9086/57115), as well as the painting *The Wing* (*L'Aile*, 1925). Masson insisted that the automatic drawings “almost always had a sort of erotic base. An eroticism that may have been that of the Cosmos, but the element was Eros.” Clébert, *Mythologie d'André Masson* 29. In an essay published in *Minotaure* (May 1939) and later included in the Gallimard edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Breton wrote: “In Masson's work, eroticism must be considered the keystone ...” (*SP* 154).
41. This motif receives its most literal expression – perhaps excessively so – in the 1930s, in a great number of drawings and paintings. See, for example, *Commentary on a Drawing by Blake* (*André Masson Drawings*, Plate 53); *The Earth* (1939), one of the sand paintings of the late 1930s.
42. Masson illustrated the first edition of Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil* (*The Story of the Eye*), published in 1928 under the pseudonym Lord Auch. Commenting on the novel, Barthes points out a “general contagion of qualities and actions: by virtue of their metaphorical dependence eye, sun, and egg are closely bound up with the genital; by virtue of their metonymic freedom they endlessly exchange meanings and usages ...” Such a metonymic freedom – exemplified in the book, for instance, by the closing off of a chain of metaphors with the insertion of an eye in a vagina – seems to underlie Masson's vision as well. See Roland Barthes, “The Metaphor of the Eye” 125.
43. See also, for instance, *Autoportrait* (*Le Dormeur*), 1925. Archives Louise Leiris 5783, Mèredieu 30 (Plate 34).
44. While *The Armor* is dated to 1925, it is quite conceivable that it was completed closer to the time Artaud wrote this text, that is, toward the end of 1924; however, there is no evidence to confirm this supposition.
45. I should add that, as argued before, this “windowpane” bears directly upon the screen paradigm in its capacity as a “page of writing.” This function is substantiated again by the notion of the skin ego, which, as Anzieu proposes, is the site and means of communicating with others; it is also an “inscribing surface,” a sensitive surface, capable of registering traces and inscriptions left by those others (40).
46. As developed in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton's Surrealist image is based on Reverdy's concept of the image as a pure creation of the mind arrived at through the bringing together of distant realities. For Breton's early presentation of the nature of the Surrealist image, see “Words without Wrinkles,” *The Lost Steps* (*Les Pas perdus*) 100; “Les Mots sans rides,” *OC I* 284. An explicit reference to Reverdy's conception of the poetic image figures in “Manifesto of Surrealism,” *Manifestoes* 20; “Manifeste du surréalisme,” *OC I* 324. An extensive treatment of the nature of the Surrealist image is found primarily in *Manifestoes* 36–9; *OC I* 336–9.
47. This point has already been touched on in Chapter 4. In his Ernst essay Breton argued that human imagination cannot produce a totally new element, and thus, going beyond the accepted meaning of things could be accomplished only by grouping them and bringing them together, so as to create a spark. See “Max Ernst,” in *The Lost Steps* (*Les Pas perdus*) 60–61; *OC I* 245–6.
48. Breton considered the products of automatic writing in terms of “precipitates,” as evinced by the copy of *Les Champs magnétiques* he annotated in 1930, where he notes that the title of this book was initially meant to be *Les Précipités*; see *OC I* 1128. The use of this expression in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* with regard to Masson was primarily due to the introduction of the Poe quotation on the “chemistry of the intelligence,” and I do not believe that at that point it was associated in Breton's mind strictly with automatic writing. I should add that in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* Breton described the process of heightened perception in terms of the (al)chemical process of obtaining precipitates from a solution: “This idea, this woman ... What they do is isolate the mind for a second from its solvent and spirit it to heaven, as the beautiful *precipitate* it can be, that it is” (*Manifestoes* 13; *OC I* 318).
49. There is some affinity between Ernst's and Masson's accounts of the discovery of their techniques. Furthermore, both refer to the textures created in the course of their processes as being analogous to Leonardo's stained wall. See Max Ernst, “Beyond Painting” (1936), in *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting* 7, 11; Max Ernst, “Au-delà de la peinture,” in *Écritures* 242, 249–50. Clébert, *Mythologie d'André Masson* 33–4. The two artists may even have subtly influenced one another. In embarking on his sand paintings, Masson appears to have followed the example of Ernst's frottages; Ernst could have had the character of the lines in Masson's automatic drawings in mind when, in the course of

work on his grattage painting *La Horde* (1927), he dropped a string soaked in paint on the canvas. Also of some significance is the fact that a sand painting by Masson and Ernst's *La Horde* were both reproduced in the same issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (9–10, October 1927, pp. 10 and 39 respectively).

50. Elizabeth Legge sees in the frottage, as in the collage, an assertion of surface through a intermingling of identities of different things and visual puns ("Zeuxis's Grapes, Novalis's Fossils, Freud's Flowers" 156), and associates the frottage with *trompe l'oeil* illusionism. "*Trompe l'oeil* relies on the semblance of tactile surfaces, housed in shallow controlled spaces – boxes, cabinets, picture frames – for creating a simulacrum of the real. Frottage exploits the tactile for a related purpose" (159). This is most apparent in the woodgrain in Ernst's frottage. "It is as if the boards are a slice of the 'real,' an embodiment of *trompe l'oeil* verisimilitude, intended to keep the viewer confused about the distinction between the optical and the real" (159).
51. The fantasy of a flayed body, says Anzieu, underlies the behavior of the perverse masochist (41), and he adds that the "original masochistic phantasy consists in the representation, firstly, that the mother and child share a single skin, a skin figurative of their symbiotic union, and secondly, that the process of detachment and the child's attainment of autonomy involves a rending of that common skin. This phantasy of being flayed is borne out by observation of domestic animals being slaughtered and prepared for the table ..." (42).
52. I will not go in any detail into the various circumstances surrounding Masson's ultimate falling out with Breton. These were associated with the "crisis of 1929" which brought about a general schism in Surrealism and an excommunication of some hitherto prominent Surrealists. It may have also been prompted by Masson's own alliance with the dissident group formed around the new magazine *Documents* under the editorship of Georges Bataille. For the "crisis," see the documentary account entitled "A suivre" that was assembled by Breton and Aragon and published as an insert printed on red paper in the special unnumbered June 1929 issue of *Variétés* (*Le surréalisme en 1929*). It is also included in Pierre, *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives 1922–1939* 96–129. For a good analysis of Masson's involvement in this crisis, his alienation from Breton, and the reception of his work by the *Documents* critics, see Spiteri, "Battant comme une porte," 227–44.
53. This slighting remark, while not specifically referring to Masson, appears in the published version of Breton's essay in the paragraph immediately following the section devoted to Masson. I imagine Masson would have found this particularly disturbing.
54. In later years Masson insisted on his freedom from Breton's automatism. "I basically thought, contrary to Breton, that the essential value will never lie with automatism but with the Dionysian spirit; that automatism is a facet of the Dionysian spirit that corresponds to a kind of ecstatic and explosive state that allows coming out of oneself, giving free rein to one's instincts, with this leading to automatism" (*Vagabond du surréalisme* 80).
55. It should be noted that the 1927 installment of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* did not include any of Masson's works (the only illustrations were Ernst's *La Horde* and a photograph by Man Ray), although one of the sand paintings did appear elsewhere in the same issue (*La Révolution surréaliste* 9–10, p. 10). To go by the paintings reproduced in several issues of *La Révolution surréaliste* and in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* in the book version, Breton's preferences lay more with paintings such as *The Four Elements* (which he owned) and others displaying architectural elements and a Cubist grid. The imaginative quality of these paintings, particularly manifested in their metamorphic character, appeared more conducive to the formation of images analogous to Breton's concept of the poetic image, as developed in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*. In "Propos sur le Surréalisme" (1961) Masson complains: "Let me emphasize: I do not recall any of my Surrealist friends purchasing even one drawing of mine that was truly automatic or a sand painting; they owned others. As I have just told you: more 'labored,' more static, but for me less Surrealist" (*Le Rebelle du surréalisme* 35).
56. Leiris, *Journal* 161.
57. Masson's paintings of 1928–29 also reflect his growing allegiance to the avant-garde aesthetics represented by *Cahiers d'art*. Accepting Zervos's offer to publish an article about his work, Masson stipulated that there should be no word about Surrealism ("pas un mot sur le surréalisme"). See Masson's letter to Kahnweiler (10 May 1928), in Masson, *Les Années surréalistes* 141. Tériade, who wrote the article, while upholding Masson's 1928 work, criticized what he saw in Masson's earlier paintings: "Automatic writing, drawings tormented to the point of exacerbation, unreal graphics following the obscure movement of instinct or cerebral emotion, games of surface stained with various layers of sand." See Tériade, "André Masson" 42.
58. I am referring to 1928–30 paintings such as *The Butcher* (*Le Boucher*); *Slaughterhouse* (*L'Abattoir*); *Nudes*; *Nudes in an Underground Chamber*. In 1929–30 works such as *Animals Devouring Themselves*

(*Animaux se dévorant entre eux*, 1929) and *The Fishmongers* (*La poissonnière*, 1930), the division into planes is replaced by a largely uniform ground.

59. Leiris, "The Unbridled Line" in *André Masson Drawings* (n.p.).
60. Carl Einstein, "André Masson, étude ethnologique" 102, 100. Reproductions of Masson's works and an appended list of "a few important paintings by André Masson" cover the whole range of his work from 1922 to 1929. However, the essay primarily reflects Einstein's response to the 1928–29 works.
61. It would also seem reasonable to suppose that the direction taken by Masson in 1928–29 would have reflected his longstanding close association with members of the *Documents* group, especially at the time when he was keen on moving out of Breton's orbit.
62. This, of course, is contrary to Breton's contention that, unlike automatic writing as practised by mediums, that aims to "dissociate the psychological personality from the medium," Surrealism "proposes nothing less than to unify that personality." See Breton, "The Automatic Message," *Break of Day* (*Point du jour*) 137; "Le Message automatique," *OC II* 186. The essay was first published in *Minotaure* 3–4 (December 1933).

Into the 1930s – eclipse of the screen paradigm

In this chapter I consider several developments that dominated Surrealist spatiality in the 1930s, deriving from – at times contradicting – the various spatial concepts underlying Surrealist thought in the 1920s which I associated with the screen paradigm. My concern now is to approach these developments as reflecting a general eclipse of that paradigm. Throughout this study, I have posited the notion of the “screen” as a spatial paradigm with far-reaching conceptual ramifications – especially in its metaphorical capacity as the surface or membrane that spatially defines and delimits the various dichotomies informing Surrealist thought in the 1920s. I have posited the screen as a correlate to the sense of mystery, characterizing a mode of experiencing the Marvelous and the Surreal at the heart of reality. The screen was considered also as an implied spatial metaphor associated with the Surrealist notion of automatic writing, especially in terms of the dialectics of opacity and transparency. I applied these metaphorical constructions to Breton’s window metaphor and traced the basic parameters of the paradigmatic screen (and the associated notion of layered depth) in the paintings of some of the major artists associated with Surrealism in the 1920s. This brief summary of the various aspects of the screen paradigm as a dominant construction in the Surrealism of the 1920s defines the general course of my current discussion in which I trace what I consider to be the dissolution of the paradigm, beginning in the late 1920s. It is, indeed, in this light that the full significance of the shift from the 1920s to the 1930s might be revealed. I should emphasize that this concluding chapter does not offer a full representation of these developments; it suggests, rather, a few signposts or indications of general trends, which I associate mostly with Breton and Dalí as the exponents of the two major directions taken by Surrealism in the 1930s.¹ In the final sections, focusing on Max Ernst’s three collage novels, I trace the transition in his work away from a spatial conception informed by the screen paradigm. I then note these developments against the backdrop of the changing experience of film viewing associated with the transition from silent cinema to sound.

From “revolution by night” to a revolution by day

The various developments that I have placed under the label of an eclipse of the screen paradigm should be viewed against the backdrop of a general change of orientation undergone by the Surrealist Movement. This change may be primarily viewed in the light of a shift “toward a new psychic reality integrated into the external world of the visible and the social” (Spector 61). It implies a newly awakened desire to overcome the separation of art and life that, following the debacle of the Surrealists’ attempt in the 1920s to join the Communist Party and to take part in its daily activities, appeared to offer an alternative mode of affecting the social space.² This turn is already reflected in the “Second Manifesto of Surrealism” (1929), in which Breton indicates a change from the experimental phase broached in the *First Manifesto*, with its emphasis on the mind responding to “suggestions which come to it from the depths of that dark night to which I commend it” (*Manifestoes* 13; *OC I* 318). The emphasis now is still on the “total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than the dizzying descent into ourselves,” but without losing sight of the fact that we are really “part of the world” and that this imaginative activity should have a concrete effect on reality (136; 791).

The crux of the problems underlying the political and philosophical course of Surrealism in the 1920s and 1930s lay in the role of the individual creative artist within this general movement for the emancipation of mankind, especially with regard to its more material or practical aspects. The Surrealists after all were artists and writers, and the means they adopted for the purpose of bringing about the liberation of mankind were quite naturally more directed toward the sphere of “interpretation” and of artistic or poetic expression. Breton was well aware of the difficulties posed by these conflicting aims. The dilemma of innovative writers and artists, as he defined it in 1935 in *Position politique du surréalisme*, was that “either they must give up interpreting and expressing the world in the ways that each of them finds the secret of within himself and himself alone ... or they must give up collaborating on the practical plan of action for changing this world.”³ A few years earlier, when he wrote *Les Vases communicants* (1932), Breton was still optimistic enough to propose that the Surrealist ambition was to “unite, by means of a foolproof knot whose complexity is designed to make it so, this process of transformation with that of interpretation.”⁴ He saw the solution in a dialectical conciliation of these contraries, prophesying that the “poet to come will surmount the depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream” (146; 208). The visionary passage in *Les Vases communicants* in which this statement occurs, however utopian in tone, points to the means tentatively proposed by Breton for conciliating action and dream, art and revolution:

He [the poet to come] will hold together, whatever the cost, these two terms of human relationship ... the objective consciousness of realities and their interior development, since this relationship, through individual feeling on the one hand and universal feeling on the other, contains something magical for the time being. This relationship may seem magical, in that it consists of unconscious, immediate action of the internal on the external and that there easily enters into the summary analysis of such a notion the idea of a transcendental mediation which is probably rather that of a demon than that of a god. In any case, the poet will oppose this simplistic interpretation of such a phenomenon ... it will be his task to produce the major item that will put an end to the debate (147; 208).

What Breton proposes in this passage, to begin with, is exposing art and poetry to the realities underlying moral and revolutionary thought, and, conversely, introducing art and poetry into life as privileged expressions of revolt.⁵ As I shall consider further on, in referring to an "unconscious, immediate action of the internal on the external" – and in insisting that, while this action may seem magical, it should not be confused with the idea of a transcendental mediation – Breton is pointing to the tightrope-walking associated with objective chance (*l'hasard objectif*), one of the major concepts introduced in a few writings that later made up *L'Amour fou*, his next great narrative text.

These developments were given a rather peculiar slant in Dalí's, at times quite idiosyncratic, version of the turn taken by the movement in the early 1930s, presented in his 1932 essay "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment." Dalí's basic argument was that changes in the Surrealist concept of the object reflected "how the surrealist view of the possibilities of action on the external world may have been and may still be subject to change" (*Collected Writings* 235). He adopted the title of Ernst's painting *Revolution by Night* as his point of departure for an evocation of the first phase of Surrealist experimentation – "a nocturnal and indeed subterranean phase" – with its experiments with "poetic solicitation, automatic writing, and accounts of dreams." The object, real or imaginary, encountered in these experiments, was "regarded as a disturbing and arbitrary 'being' and was credited with having an existence entirely independent of the experimenters' activity." The early part of this phase, in Dalí's tongue-in-cheek account, refers to the period of trances or sleeping fits in 1922–23, the Surrealists being evoked as "highly developed automatic puppets," sitting around a big table used for experiments,

... a delicate nickel apparatus like an astrolabe being fixed to their necks and fitted with animal membranes to record by interpenetration the apparition of each fresh poetic streak, their bodies being bound to their chairs by an ingenious system of straps, so that they could only move a hand in a certain way and the sinuous line was allowed to inscribe the appropriate white cylinders. Meanwhile their friends, holding their breath and biting their lower lips in concentrated

attention, would lean over the recording apparatus and with dilated pupils await the expected but unknown movement, sentence, or image (236).

Such passive anticipation also characterizes the response to the strange objects encountered in daily life – referring to *Nadja*, Dalí notes the woman's bronze glove that found its way to the "Centrale Surréaliste" and the strange half-cylinder encountered by Breton in the Saint-Ouen flea-market. These experiments, moreover, also revealed the "*desire for the object*, the tangible object. This desire was to get the object at all costs out of the dark and into the light, to bear it all winking and flickering into the full daylight" (237). This movement from the "revolution by night" to a "revolution by day" was heralded, in Dalí's scheme, by Breton's call for the creation of dream objects, expressed in the essay "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality."⁶ Breton's "principle of verification" – which Dalí lauds on a few occasions as the "most lucid and prophetic moment of Surrealism" – implies a demand to endow the poetic creation with a tangible character that will help "displace the boundaries of so-called reality" (*Break of Day (Point du jour)* 16–17; *OC II* 277–8). Breton's proposal offered Dalí an early theoretical basis for his own conception of the "objects functioning symbolically," first exposed in his 1931 essay "Surrealist Objects."⁷ The "revolution by day" – Dalí stipulated that the "day meant must be the exclusive day of dialectical materialism" – was also brought about, in Dalí's scheme, by the simulation of mental diseases, illustrated in Breton's and Eluard's book *The Immaculate Conception*,⁸ and by his own paranoiac-critical activity, which, at the time he wrote "The Object as Revealed," was still in the early stages of theoretical formulation.⁹

Dalí saw these practices as constituting a link between psychic automatism and the advent of the object, one that helped bring the object out of the "darkness" – subsumed in its arbitrary and unknown "being" – and into the "light of things in the external world" (239). As a result, "we are led to regard the world of objects, the objective world, as the true and manifested content of a new dream." A passing reference made by Dalí a few lines later to "André Breton's next book," *Les Vases communicants*, may throw light on the last statement. In the second section of this book Breton analyzes a period in his life and shows how dreams infiltrated his waking experience and life arranged itself around him as in a dream, in accordance with his emotional problems at the time. In perceiving the world of objects as the content of a "new dream" Dalí may be referring to a similar "*rêve éveillé*" or waking dream. However, while Breton's waking dream had been forced on him by an emotional crisis, the implication as far as Dalí was concerned – again, in the light of later pronouncements – was that his "new dream" would be attained by an active simulation of a paranoiac state. Notwithstanding the obvious "political" dimension of "The Object as Revealed" – with Dalí placing himself

not much behind Breton and quite in the forefront of these developments – he put his finger there with great perceptiveness on what was the quintessential sense of the changes sustained by Surrealism in the advent of the 1930s. The evocation of a mood characterized by a passive anticipation of the unknown poetic movement – the “feel of darkness, which for us shrouded the whole business” (237) and the pursuit of unknown objects having an existence independent of the experimenter – constituted a rather ironic critique of the pursuit of the Marvelous in the early years of the movement.

“All things being rendered totally transparent”

As I argued in Chapter 2, the screen paradigm is inextricably related to another notion which I consider to be central to Surrealist thought of the 1920s. Mystery is a term that throughout the 1920s stands for the perception of the Marvelous within the real, which, in its spatial ramification, refers to the space hidden behind the surface of reality; to what may be glimpsed through the “window” (in the broad metaphorical sense assigned to it by Breton and other Surrealists) or behind the half-open door. In its broader implication, mystery stands also for the unknown within – the hidden regions within the mind or what lies hidden behind the commonplaces formed by stultified language – glimpsed only intermittently in activities that bear the stamp of psychic automatism. Considering this dimension of the screen paradigm in the last part of Chapter 2, I paid particular attention to its manifestation in the text and photographs of Breton’s book *Nadja*. What I did there may serve as a point of departure for my present argument. I propose a mode of comparing Boiffard’s photographs for *Nadja* with those made by Brassai for essays by Breton published in the Surrealist-oriented periodical *Minotaure* in the early 1930s (later to be included in *L’Amour fou*), as well as with related works of Brassai’s also published in that periodical. There is quite an extensive literature devoted to Brassai’s work in general, and to his photographic “night pictures” of the 1930s in particular,¹⁰ and I will, therefore, limit myself to the night pictures that were published in the seventh issue of *Minotaure* (1935).¹¹ Of particular interest are the images illustrating Breton’s essay “La Nuit de tournesol,” later included in *L’Amour fou* (“La Tour Saint-Jacques”; “Marché aux fleurs”; “Les Halles,” in *Minotaure* 7, pp. 50–52). I will not consider them in terms of Brassai’s own attitude and his perceptions regarding their possible Surrealist affiliation, but more with regard to the way they may have reverberated within the conceptual and affective context of Breton’s thought at the time.¹² The perspective suggested by the earlier analysis of Boiffard’s work may usefully launch the current examination. The essay “La Nuit de tournesol” is an account of Breton’s meeting with a

beautiful unknown woman – his future wife Jacqueline – and their walking around Paris by night, a hallucinatory excursion that begins at Les Halles, continues in the Tour Saint-Jacques area, and ends up at the Quai aux Fleurs in the Ile de la Cité. This night walk turns out to be, in Breton's after-the-fact interpretation, the fulfillment of a similar movement across Paris evoked in an automatic poem written a decade earlier. As Breton argues, "I believe it is possible to confront the purely imaginary adventure which is framed in the poem and the later realization – impressive in its rigor – of this adventure in life itself." And he concludes, following his line-by-line reading of the poem: "I say that there isn't anything in this poem of 1923 that did not announce the most important thing to happen to me in 1934" (*Mad Love (L'Amour fou)* 57, 65; *OC II* 725, 733). To illustrate "La Nuit de tournesol," Breton undoubtedly would have asked for night pictures of the central locales of this excursion, and he seems to have been satisfied with those done for him (or offered to him) by Brassai.¹³ Even a cursory look would reveal a marked difference between these images (or the images of "Nuits parisiennes," for that matter) and Boiffard's work for *Nadja*. As opposed to the broad daylight to which Boiffard's sites were exposed – with the resulting emphasis on dark recesses and apertures within the brighter surface of the façades – Brassai's pictures are shrouded in darkness (Figure 8.1). However, they are quite unlike some of the pictures collected in the earlier album *Paris de nuit* (1932) – for instance those of the Paris quays at nights, with the fog rising from the river and softly obscuring the branches of the bare trees – for which the appellation "romantic" seems quite appropriate. They are free of fog (there is only some haze around streetlights) and offer quite a sharp delineation of details, architectural and other. The bare branches of trees are clearly set off against the scaffolding on the Tour Saint-Jacques; the bunches of flowers in the Flower Market or the products piling up in Les Halles are luminously present. The sense of mystery emanating from these images is due primarily to the interpenetration of light and darkness, an intricate play of light and shadow whose fine detail, however lost in the smaller illustrations of the book *L'Amour fou*, is fully effective in the earlier *Minotaure* publication. My understanding of the sense in which the word "mystery" might be applied to these images also guides me in attempting to compare Boiffard's images to those of Brassai. Speaking of *Paris de nuit*, Ian Walker makes use of Breton's distinction between "mystery" and the "Marvelous" in order to argue that Brassai's photographs are mysterious rather than marvelous, whereas it was the Marvelous that the Surrealists valued most (Walker 152). While such a distinction holds, indeed, for the photographs of *Paris de nuit*, it would not apply to those illustrating "La Nuit de tournesol." I would argue, on the contrary, that the issue there does not involve so much a distinction between the notions of mystery and the Marvelous; it has to do rather with the spatial

toute l'insécurité qui est en moi dès que, cette nuit-là, je me reprends à lire dans l'avenir ce qui pourrait, ce qui devrait être si le cœur *disposait*. La liberté à l'égard des autres êtres, la liberté à l'égard de celui qu'on a été semble ne se faire alors si tentante que pour mieux m'accabler de ses défis. Qui m'accompagne à cette heure dans Paris sans me conduire et que, d'ailleurs, moi non plus, je ne conduis pas? Je ne me rappelle pas avoir éprouvé de ma vie si grande défaillance. Je me perds presque de vue, il me semble que j'ai été emporté à mon tour comme les figurants de la première scène. La conversation qui, tant que ma trop belle interlocutrice est demeurée assise en face de moi, glissait sans obstacle d'un sujet à l'autre, n'effleure plus maintenant que le masque des choses. Je me sens avec effroi la conduire à sombrer malgré moi dans l'artificiel. J'en suis réduit à m'arrêter de temps à autre pour immobiliser devant moi le visage que je ne puis supporter plus longtemps de voir s'offrir de profil, mais cette démarche enfantine ne me rend, à vrai dire, qu'une très courte assurance. Il me deviendrait peut-être brusquement impossible de faire un pas, sans le secours d'un bras qui vient s'unir à mon bras et me rappeler à la vie réelle en m'éclairant délicieusement de sa pression le contour d'un sein.

Tandis que nous nous attardons une heure plus tard dans les petites rues du quartier des Halles, j'éprouve d'autant plus durement l'éclipse de ce sein, commandée par les difficultés de la circulation à deux parmi les camions dans cette rue qui s'enfle sans cesse, qui monte comme la mer vers l'appétit immense du prochain jour. Mon regard, des magnifiques cubes blancs, rouges, verts des pimeurs glisse malencontreusement sur le pavé luisant de déchets horribles. C'est aussi l'heure où des bandes de fétards commencent à se répandre en ces lieux pour y finir la nuit dans quelque petit torchon renommé, jetant dans la cohue robuste et franche du travail, la note noire, mousseuse et équivoque des tenues de soirée, des fourrures et des soies. Allons! c'est seulement dans les contes qu'il

est impossible au doute de s'insinuer, qu'il n'est pas question de glisser sur une écorce de fruit. Je vois le mal et le bien dans leur état brut, le mal l'emportant de toute la facilité de la souffrance: l'idée qu'il est au loin, peut-être seul créateur de bien ne m'effleure même plus. La vie est lente et l'homme ne sait guère la jouer. Les possibilités d'atteindre l'être susceptible de l'aider à la jouer, de lui donner tout son sens, se perdent dans la carte des astres. Qui m'accompagne, qui me précède cette nuit encore une fois? Demain reste fait de déterminations bon gré mal gré acceptées sans tenir compte de ces boucles charmantes, de ces chevilles paires à des boucles. Il serait temps encore de reculer.

Quel avertisseur fonctionnera jamais pour faire entendre la voix de la déraison, si je parle le langage qu'on m'a appris, et soutenir que demain sera *autre*, qu'il s'est mystérieusement, complètement déchiré d'hier? J'étais de nouveau près de vous, ma belle vagabonde, et vous me montriez en passant la Tour Saint-Jacques sous son voile pâle d'échafaudages qui, depuis des années maintenant contribue à en faire, plus encore, le grand monument du monde à l'irrévé. Vous aviez beau savoir que j'aimais cette tour, je revois encore à ce moment toute une existence violente s'organiser autour d'elle pour nous comprendre, pour contenir l'éperdu

dans son galop nuageux autour de nous:

*A Paris la Tour Saint-Jacques chancelante
Pareille à un tournesol (*)*

ai-je dit assez obscurément pour moi dans un poème, et j'ai compris depuis que ce balancement de la tour était surtout le mien entre les deux sens en français du mot *tourne-sol*, qui désigne à la fois cette espèce d'hélianthe, connue aussi sous le nom de grand soleil et le réactif utilisé en chimie, le plus souvent sous la forme d'un papier bleu qui rougit au contact des acides. Toujours est-il

(*) Cf. *Le Résolvant à cheveux blancs* (Les Cahiers libres, édit.).



LA TOUR SAINT-JACQUES.

Brassai.

allocation of the sense of mystery, its perception as an immanence within the real which is tantamount to the apprehension of the Marvelous.¹⁴

As I have said, mystery is inherent in the spatial conception informing Boiffard's closed-off façades and shadowy doorways. His photographs thus preserve the mystery, keep intact the "cryptogram" to be deciphered which is Nadja's life and the book as a whole. Breton may speak in *Nadja* of the "almost forbidden world of sudden parallels, petrifying coincidences"; however, he concerns himself with fortuitous facts of unverifiable intrinsic value, which on each occasion present the appearance of a signal, "without our being able to say precisely which signal, and of what" (*Nadja* 19; *OC I* 651). If there are more direct encounters with the unknown in the book, it is mostly Nadja who propels them, with Breton remaining outside the mystery. *Nadja* is, in fact, a book about missed encounters. A few years after Breton wrote *Nadja*, in *Les Vases communicants*, the second book in his "Surrealist Trilogy," such wished-for encounters result in the emotional crisis of a "délire d'interprétation" (interpretive delirium), in which dream infiltrates reality, with life arranging itself around Breton as if in accordance with his emotional problems. As he admits, the "least object, to which no particular symbolic role is assigned, is able to represent anything. The mind is wonderfully prompt at grasping the most tenuous relation that can exist between two objects taken at random" (*Communicating Vessels* 108–9; *OC II* 181). The implication is that the perception of reality may broaden in a manner which resembles the creation of poetic images in an automatic text. Breton's method in this book reveals his professed purpose of bringing together Marxism and psychoanalysis under one theoretical and practical roof. The framework of his dream interpretation is rigorously materialist, and, while appearing to follow Freud's methods, Breton follows, in fact, his own route of considering strictly the manifest content of the dream insofar as his acknowledged life experiences are concerned.

In the terms posited for the present discussion, a significant shift might be discerned from *Les Vases communicants* to *L'Amour fou* (1937) – or, rather, to a few sections of the book that appeared beforehand as magazine essays.¹⁵ From the materialist framework of *Les Vases communicants*, and while continuing to affirm his allegiance to dialectical materialism, Breton moved within a short while to an interpretation of the Surrealist Marvelous that was tinged with occult elements. Beginning with these essays, Breton progressively renounced the materialist vocabulary and turned to a more spiritual conception of love and the erotic encounter. In *L'Amour fou* he evoked a "délire d'interprétation" that was similar in some respects to the one experienced before, although with the stipulation that the "interpretive delirium begins only when man, ill-prepared, is taken by a sudden fear in the *forest of symbols*" (*Mad Love* 15; *OC II* 685). Here Breton is asking for the eruption of a solution within the "magic-circumstantial" aspect of the revelatory and violently illuminating

experience which he names “la beauté convulsive” (convulsive beauty). In this sense magic is, for Breton, a matter of a gesture constituting a symbolic acquiescence with some magical formula (for instance, opening a door, shutting it, and opening it again in order to make a woman appear). This “magic-circumstantial” formula is most extensively manifested in the domain of the objective chance (*hasard objectif*), defined – Engels and Freud reconciled – as “the form making manifest the exterior necessity which traces its path in the human consciousness” (23; 690). Breton appears enthralled by the “magic-circumstantial” web of coincidences and premonitions leading him to the encounter with a “unique and unknown woman.” Notwithstanding its materialist basis, however, the “magic-circumstantial” formula as manifested in the book is not without an occult undertone.¹⁶ Thus Breton is even ready to concede that formerly, in his dream analysis in *Les Vases communicants*, it was only the concern he felt about cutting himself off from practical revolutionary action that could have made him refrain from attributing a transcendental character to the oneiric activity (*Mad Love* 64–5; *OC II* 733). Such scruples are no longer in evidence in *L’Amour fou*, in which love has the special role of penetrating the “deepest night of human existence” (40; 711). Breton’s engagement with the concept of objective chance is not free of fear.

I confess I am hesitant to take this leap, fearing a fall into some endless unknown. Shadows of all sorts swirl rapidly about me, creating high walls whose lack of substance I am powerless to prove. Yet these same shadows seem to yield not the slightest hint about one episode of my life, so oddly moving as it was revealed to be (39; 710).

The episode referred to is the one described in “La Nuit de tournesol,” an experience Breton saw as combining “both a remarkable happiness and disturbance, a mixture of *panic-provoking* terror and joy.” And he goes on to say that it is “as if suddenly, the deepest night of human existence were to be penetrated, natural and logical necessity coinciding, all things being rendered totally transparent ...” (40; 711). Brassai’s photographs, suffused in shadows and night, reflect this space of the encounter – a space open to solicitations from all around, one in which light and shadow interpenetrate in a transparency that retains both of them. Mystery is located not behind the “screen” but as part of a textured “screen” in which there is no separation of interior from exterior. The word “écran” (screen) signifies, in the fifth part of *L’Amour fou*, a concept, or rather a “technique,” as Breton refers to it, for interrogating various textures. Such a technique, identical with the one Leonardo advocated to his students, brings out for the person interrogating the texture all kinds of images that lie in his own subjectivity. “The whole problem of the passage from subjectivity to objectivity is implicitly resolved there, and the implications of this resolution are fuller

of human interest than those of a simple technique, even if the technique were that of inspiration itself" (86; 753). Interrogating this screen will bring a person – "if his questioning is worth it" – the "strength of that *objective chance* which makes a mockery of what would have seemed most probable. Everything humans might want to know is written upon this grid [*écran*] in phosphorescent letters, in letters of *desire*" (87; 754). This part of *L'Amour fou* appeared as an essay entitled "Le Château étoilé" (*Minotaure* 8, 15 June 1936), which was illustrated with frottages by Max Ernst. What is interesting to note is that these frottages, in their intricate play of light on dark, show a marked kinship, notwithstanding some obvious differences, with Brassai's photographs for "La Nuit de tournesol." The "screen," then, as a common notion underlying both, is conceptually quite different from the one I posited for *Nadja* and Boiffard's images. The translation of the French *écran* as "grid" might indeed fit better what is in fact a three-dimensional spatial concept – or perhaps even in terms of a fourth dimension, to go by Breton's interest in this concept later on in the decade¹⁷ – implying an immanence bordering on transcendence that permeates space. The screen associated with *Nadja* and Boiffard's images has been torn asunder, so to speak, in order to form a texture that fulfils this complete interpenetration of interior and exterior, of subjectivity and objectivity; the intimation of the Marvelous is not allotted to the space hidden behind the surfaces of reality but is sensed everywhere and all around.

This brings me again to the question of doors, addressed in Chapter 2, in order to draw another distinction between Breton's Surrealism of the 1920s and that of the 1930s, between *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou*. I have dealt quite extensively with Breton's notion of the door as a conceptualized passageway between the two spatial localities comprising the two sides in the dialectics of the Surreal. Walter Benjamin considered the "dialectical kernel that later grew into Surrealism" in similar terms, with "threshold" at times standing for "door": "Everything with which it [Surrealism] came into contact was integrated. Life only seemed worth living where the threshold between waking and sleeping was worn away in everyone as by the steps of multitudinous images flooding back and forth ..." ¹⁸ Doors are also associated in the Surrealist mind with corridors, and it seems that Benjamin had such a connection in mind when he described the shock he felt, while living in a Moscow hotel, on discovering how many doors in the corridors were always left ajar:

In Moscow I lived in a hotel in which almost all the rooms were occupied by Tibetan lamas who had come to Moscow for a congress of Buddhist churches. I was struck by the number of doors in the corridors that were always left ajar. What had at first seemed accidental began to be disturbing. I found out that in these rooms lived members of a sect who had sworn never to occupy closed rooms. The shock I had then must be felt by the reader of *Nadja* (*One-Way Street* 228).

Benjamin may also have had in mind Aragon's evocation in *Le Paysan de Paris* of the "romantic lodging-house, whose doors sometimes gape open ... Long corridors, like theatre wings, are strung with boxes, I mean rooms, all on the same side overlooking the passage" (*Paris Peasant* 17; *Paysan* 24). More significantly, Benjamin makes this parenthetical remark by way of fortifying his contention that *Nadja* illustrates a number of the characteristics of his notion of "profane illumination," noting that Breton had called *Nadja* "a book with a banging door" (a phrase given in the English translation of *Nadja* as "books left ajar, like doors"; both translations render somewhat inaccurately Breton's original "livres qu'on laisse battants comme des portes" (*Nadja* 18; *OC I* 651) with its connotation of swinging door). The door metaphor appears again a couple of pages later, following a passage in which Benjamin refers to the photographed Parisian scenes in *Nadja* in terms of their "banal obviousness" and their resemblance to illustrations of "trashy novels." Benjamin then says: "And all the parts of Paris that appear here are places where what is between these people turns like a revolving door" (*One-Way Street* 231). Now the difference between a swinging door and a revolving door is that a swinging door opens into an interior space and out of it, and it can also remain closed. Breton used this as a metaphor for a book that allows diverse materials to be added or subtracted from one published edition to the next. A revolving door, as Rosalind Krauss observes, does not distinguish between inner and outer surfaces and can be open and closed at the same time.¹⁹ The whole thrust of my argument so far points to the "revolving door" as a metaphor that could be applied with greater benefit to *L'Amour fou* than to *Nadja*. To extend the implication of the "swinging door" image to Benjamin's notion of a "threshold between waking and sleeping," *Nadja* preserves the mystery intimated behind the swinging door in its closed state, the door in its conceptualization as "screen." *L'Amour fou* points to a conflation of exterior and interior analogously to the revolving door's lack of "inside" and "outside" properly speaking. The *Nadja* period is about surface, screen, boundary, with only intimations of what lies beyond; *L'Amour fou* posits an "oceanic" extension of the "encounter" through space and time and a complete interpenetration of exterior necessity and human interiority.

"An infinitely precious substance"

What I have argued so far with regard to the shift undergone by the screen paradigm is inextricably bound to the theoretical and practical changes to which the notions of psychic automatism and automatic writing were subjected. I will now take a closer look at Breton's changing attitudes, and what these might imply with regard to his views on art. Following the heyday

of automatic writing and dream narratives during the greater part of the 1920s, toward the end of the decade the original enthusiasm and hopes concerning these practices were already on the wane. In the *Second Manifesto* Breton voiced his disappointment with the texts produced by these procedures, noting that they seemed "a little too much like 'virtuoso pieces'" and that they were not free of clichés (*Manifestoes* 157–8; *OC I* 806). But there was also a significant change in his views concerning the role assigned to these practices. While in the earlier years the Surrealists were satisfied with their role as "modest recording instruments" (28; 330), that can only be enthralled by the fortuitous and surprising arrival of the dazzling image, in the *Second Manifesto* Breton declared that it was incumbent upon the Surrealists to "try and see more and more clearly what is transpiring unbeknownst to man in the depths of his mind" (159; 808). He extended this demand for greater self-awareness of what was taking place in such processes to the study of the "most complex mechanism of all, 'inspiration' ..." (161; 809). Breton also upheld the Freudian notion of sublimation and maintained that by transforming dreams into artistic creations one can "escape the fate of neurosis" and "make contact with reality" (160; 808).

This expression of a need for a greater contact with reality – which seems, indeed, to underlie much of what Breton says elsewhere in this text with regard to the products of psychic activity – led in the course of the early 1930s to two somewhat divergent positions. On the one hand, Breton appears to advocate a more conscious application of these methods – a greater self-awareness in the process of creation – for the purpose of changing reality and bringing about the "emancipation of man." He is also less insistent on the "exclusiveness" of these procedures in the process of artistic creation. Psychic automatism "has never constituted an end in itself for Surrealism," he says in 1935, adding that such technical procedures were developed in order to block the "coalition of forces that seek to make the unconscious incapable of any sort of violent eruption" (*Manifestoes* 231–2; *OC II* 437–8). The other notion of psychic automatism is advanced in the essay "The Automatic Message" (1933), in which, while declaring that the history of automatic writing in Surrealism is "one of continual misfortune," Breton also admits to having "omitted, even in a series of publications that came after the first *Manifesto*, to specify the nature of the obstacles that often conspire to divert the verbal outflow from its original direction."²⁰ These obstacles, however, are already quite clearly implied in the advice to the practitioner of automatic writing given in the *First Manifesto* in the section entitled "Secrets of the Magical Surrealist Art," in which Breton lists all those things that conspire against the stature of automatic writing as a "new mode of *pure expression*" (*Manifestoes* 24; *OC I* 327). In 1933, in "The Automatic Message," Breton accepts the limitations inherent in this conception and attempts to make virtues out of them. Thus, one of the major obstacles has

to do with the “barely intermittent succession of visual images that occurred during the very act of listening, interrupting the murmur, and that, to the latter’s great detriment, we could not always resist capturing” (*Break of Day* 140; *OC II* 388). But then he also asserts that he considers “verbal inspiration infinitely richer in visual meaning, infinitely more resistant to the eye, than visual images properly speaking,” adding that “Lautréamont and Rimbaud did not *see*, did not experience *a priori* what they described ... they limited themselves in the dark corridors of their being to listening ... ‘Illumination’ comes *afterward*” (141; 389). At this point Breton shifts his sights to the *effect* of automatic writing – to the “thrilling visual images for the reader” and to the visual hallucinations impinging on one who “fervently” practises automatic writing. This leads him to consider the “remarkable aptitudes [that] can be cultivated in children, which consist in being able to change a given object into anything at all simply by staring at it.” The eidetic images thus formed “tend to demonstrate that perception and representation – which to ordinary adults seem so radically opposed – should be seen as products resulting from the dissociation of a single, original faculty.” This “state of grace,” which Breton associates with primitive peoples and children, is something that should be recovered, purposefully in order to deprive the “distinction between the subjective and the objective of its necessity and its value” (142–3; 391).

Breton, it appears, while proclaiming the priority of the verbal over the visual, sees the accomplishment of the major Surrealist project of unifying perception and representation, the subjective and the objective, in terms that are strictly visual (even though they might be provoked by verbal stimuli).²¹ This constitutes, in fact, a wished-for (though not fully acknowledged) return to the ideal of “pure expression” that is to be accomplished by bypassing language altogether. As cogently argued by Laurent Jenny, the “‘purest’ expression aimed at by surrealism proves in fact to be purified of all language. It is a point of emergence of live speech, before it is compromised by any real form, a ‘spoken thought’ prior to speech ...”²² Such purity, obviously, is unattainable on the practical plane.

There is by definition no common measure between the ‘purity’ of expression and the very diverse but uniformly impure verbal forms that supposedly refer to it ... automatic writing is defenseless against the impurities that pepper its discourse. And from impurity to impurity, it finds itself open to all the slags of speech: commonplaces, tricks, pastiches ... Purporting to submerge the world, it finds itself in the position of being ceaselessly protected against itself, revived, replenished at the level of its principle (107).

Jenny is pointing in fact to what I have placed under the label of the “*glace sans tain*,” as another appellation for the screen paradigm. I used the concept of the “*glace sans tain*” or two-way mirror to refer to the basic dialectic involved

in the process of automatic writing, with its doubling of transparency and opacity, or, in Jenny's terms, purity of expression and the impurity of verbal forms. In "The Automatic Message" Breton appears to contemplate a mode of creation that, in its declared aim to re-associate perception and representation and unify the subjective and the objective, the internal and external, does away with the screen of language. This is a utopian wish, one that is not to be fulfilled in practice, unless the practitioner were a medium or a child. Automatic writing, as noted before, remains an ideological and theoretical demand in Breton's writing, but there is also some justice in Laurent Jenny's observation that in "The Automatic Message," in the "guise of a return to basics, it really is a question of saying farewell to automatic writing" (Jenny 106).

In the field of art, there are two consequences that might be ascribed to this shift in Breton's attitude regarding psychic automatism, and that, as a corollary to this shift, would be applicable to what I have considered so far in terms of a dissolution of the screen paradigm. Breton's notion of the picture as a window suggests a metaphorical construction that subsumes the whole range of dichotomies informing Surrealist thought in the 1920s, and that is conducive to a pictorial space produced by a tension of surface and depth and to a perception, at times, of a layered depth. I have also posited a confluence, in this respect, between what might be garnered from Breton's writing (as well as writings by others in Breton's circle) and the structuring principle governing much of what was done by artists associated with the Surrealist Movement in the 1920s – with a special emphasis on the work of Ernst, Magritte, Miró and Masson. From the late 1920s on, such a dialectical vision is often less in evidence in Breton's writings, whether in texts dealing with the work of specific artists or in his references to painting in other texts. In the *Second Manifesto*, Breton places the onus on images created by unexpected or irrational juxtapositions, and he illustrates this contention by referring to a text by the fourteenth-century occultist and alchemist Nicolas Flamel in which are evoked, as if side by side, the figures of a king with a great cutlass and a young man with winged feet, towards whom comes "running and flying with wings outspread a tall old man who wore a clock affixed to his head" (*Manifestoes* 175; *OC I* 820). "Doesn't this sound like *the Surrealist painting?*" exclaims Breton enthusiastically, although he stipulates that it is not a question of "a simple regrouping of words or a capricious redistribution of visual images, but of the re-creation of a state which can only be fairly compared to that of madness." The last statement appears to have been intended to mitigate somewhat the brashness of what really amounted to a rather loose and uncritical definition of Surrealist painting. But in his catalogue introduction "The X ..., Y ... Exhibit" (1929), Breton similarly describes the kind of painting where "oneiric values have definitely won out over the others" – one in which a horse is

galloping on a tomato that is also a child's balloon, and where the horse is about to merge with the cloud.²³ In Breton's thinking on art in the 1930s, such juxtapositions, evincing the presence of "oneiric values," take the lead. What is absent in such a conception, however, is the range of tensions associated with the screen paradigm. Indeed, it hardly matters now whether these juxtapositions are presented in an illusionist spatial frame or on the all-out flatness of a Modernist surface. This is fully evinced, for instance, in Breton's obliviousness to the stylistic eclecticism of Victor Brauner – the continuous fluctuation in Brauner's work between illusionist space and a pictographic conception. What matters to Breton is the artist's aptitude for creating images that will exercise an unconscious power over the viewer.

Very far beyond any question of immediate agreement or disagreement (so much the worse for anyone who is horrified, at this juncture, to find himself confronted by a toad instead of a human face), an aptitude of this sort is the only relevant factor, the one base upon which art may legitimately build its criterion of authenticity.²⁴

The somewhat ambiguous consideration of psychic automatism in "The Automatic Message" foreshadows – indeed opens the way towards – Breton's response to what he labels a "return to *automatism*" in Surrealist painting in the late 1930s. This new "*absolute automatism*," Breton argued in 1939, was quite different from the earlier collages and frottages or the first, most valid results of the paranoiac-critical activity. These had "always maintained a certain ambiguity between the involuntary and the voluntary and had consistently emphasized their rational aspect." Dominguez, in his "decalcomania without preconceived object," and Paalen in his "fumage," have, on the other hand, remained "absolutely faithful" to the "inspiration yielded by their precious unpremeditated discoveries."²⁵ These techniques – based on the fortuitous textures formed on the picture surface by paint spread between two sheets rotated against each other and then peeled away (decalcomania) or by the patches of soot formed by a candle flame (fumage) – are still further removed from the interplay of surface and depth, inscription and oceanic formlessness, displayed in Miró's works, or from the dialectics of opacity and transparency that I have associated with Masson's automatism. In the 1920s, at the time of Masson's first engagement with automatism, Breton largely ignored these efforts (Chapter 7). In 1941, at a time of renewed intimacy, and, perhaps, in response to the freedom of line in Masson's current work, Breton returned to Masson's automatism, applying to it a rather awkward mixture of earlier and current concerns. Thus he argued that the discovery of automatism

... literally gave *wings* to the artist's hand. Not content simply to trace the shape of objects, this hand, enamored of its own movement and of that alone, described the involuntary figures within which ... these shapes

were destined to become re-embodied. Indeed, the essential discovery of surrealism is that, without preconceived intention, the pen that flows in order to write and the pencil that runs in order to draw spin an infinitely precious substance which ... appears charged with all the emotional intensity stored up within the poet or painter at a given moment.²⁶

The analogy of automatic drawing and automatic writing – however shaky in theoretical import – is not too far removed from Breton's earlier conception of automatism. Furthermore, it would be applicable to some extent to Masson's automatic drawings, at least in terms of the dialectics of opacity and transparency that I have posited in my consideration of Masson's automatism. However, this analogy is wholly inadmissible in Breton's new perceptions regarding automatism, which, "inherited from the mediums," achieves "rhythmic unity" and "spin[s] an infinitely precious substance" that is comparable not so much to a verbal text as to the constructive principle underlying a bird's nest (*SP* 68). Here Breton gives the clearest expression of his concern with the turn to a primitive, non-verbal, form of what is essentially a gestural automatism, one that is free of the dialectical tensions of surface and depth, opacity and transparency that I have associated with the earlier notion of automatism. It should be noted that Breton himself may have sensed this, and he hastens to add that this view of automatism, without "prejudice to the deep individual tensions that graphic and verbal automatism brings to the surface and is to some extent able to resolve," corresponds to the "by now widely acknowledged non-differentiation between sensory and intellectual functions" (*SP* 70).

Dalí's stage of paranoia-criticism

Breton's call, as expressed in the passage from *Les Vases communicants* cited above, for an "unconscious, immediate action of the internal on the external" remained, on the whole, a deferred program that yielded no immediate consequences. The only mode of artistic production that Breton himself saw in more practical terms concerned the creation of dream objects (first suggested in 1924), in the hope, expressed in the 1936 essay "Crisis of the Object," that the "multiplication of such objects would entail the depreciation of those objects of often dubiously accepted usefulness which clutter up the so-called real world." The contact with "dream-engendered objects representing pure desire in concrete form" will unleash the powers of invention and will result in the "objectification of the very act of dream, its transformation into reality" (*SP* 277). Breton's own engagement with the object, however, was largely experiential, and it is in this respect that the critical difference between himself and Dalí is to be discerned. The process of discovery undergone by Breton, as

recounted in *L'Amour fou*, vis-à-vis the slipper-spoon encountered in the flea-market, involved delving into his own preconscious in order to discover there a need, unknown until this encounter, set up by desire. While this attitude implies a profound interaction with the object – one rather removed from what in *Nadja* amounts to a passive response to the mystery embodied by an indecipherable object – it still does not fully answer Breton's wished-for unification of the process of interpretation with that of transformation; at the most, the transformation is subsumed in Breton's deepening perceptions regarding his own hidden desires. The essential passivity characterizing this limited sense of transformation is also at the basis of Breton's criticism of the conscious incorporation of sexual content that distinguishes Dalí's concept of "objects functioning symbolically" (*objets à fonctionnement symbolique*).²⁷ Dalí, indeed, advocated the active soliciting of the mind to discharge the images hidden in the unconscious through a conscious incorporation of sexual content.

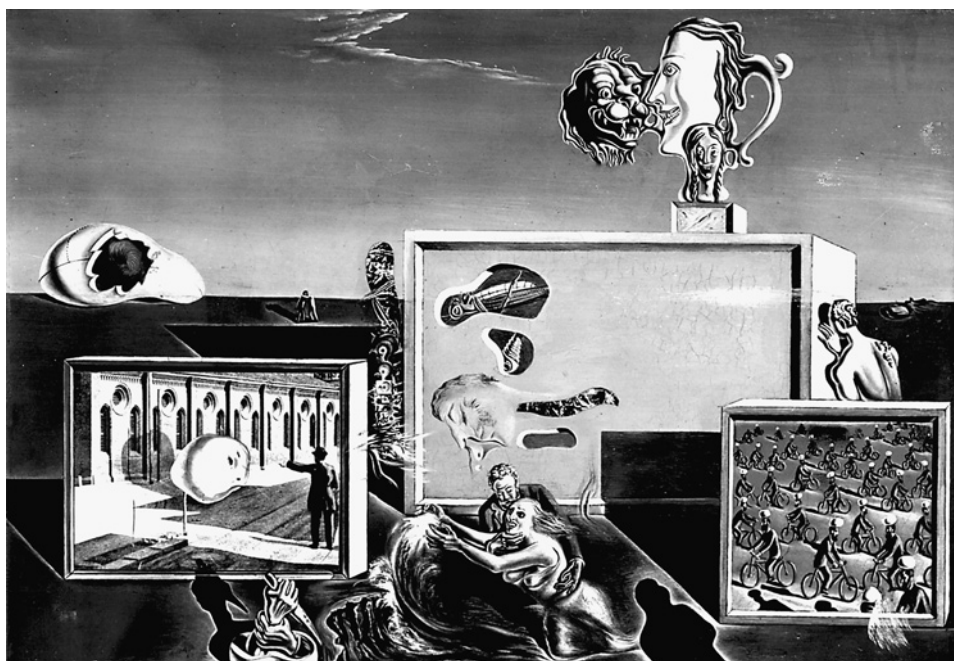
Even in the case where the erotic desires and fantasies in which the objects in question have their origins would be included in the common classifications of the "normal," the object itself and the phantasms its functioning could set off always constitute a new and absolutely unknown series of perversions and, as a result, of poetic acts.

The proliferation of objects functioning symbolically, Dalí appears to suggest, will enhance man's "capacity for perverting his thoughts," and thus help bring about "man's true spiritual culture" which is the "culture of desire."²⁸ Furthermore, the implication of Breton's "principle of verification" and of his proposed dream objects was expanded by Dalí to include the paranoiac mechanisms. In an article published in 1933, constituting the most extensive elaboration of his theory of paranoia, Dalí considered this "verification" as applying mostly to "delirious objects," noting that

[t]he paranoiac mechanism cannot but appear to us, from the specifically Surrealist point of view adopted by us, as proof of the dialectical value of this principle of verification, through which the very element of delirium goes in actual fact into the tangible domain of action, as the guarantor of the sensational victory of Surrealist activity in the domain of automatism and dream.²⁹

This idea of intervention as effected by the paranoiac-critical activity is clearly spelled out in a later definition of this activity as one that

... organizes and objectifies in an exclusivist manner the unlimited and unknown possibilities of systematic associations of subjective and objective phenomena appearing to us as irrational solicitations, solely by means of the obsessive idea. Paranoiac-critical activity reveals by this method new and objective "meanings" of the irrational, and it makes the very world of delirium pass tangibly to the level of reality.³⁰



8.2 Salvador Dalí, *Illumined Pleasures*, 1929

The coming discussion hinges on this notion of intervention. As noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, I consider Dalí's work in the course of the 1930s to be emblematic, in many respects, alongside that of Breton, of a central ideological and aesthetic strand in the Surrealism of the 1930s. In what follows, I trace the dissolution of the screen paradigm in Dalí's work, as reflected in the evolving spatial conception of his paintings and in the light of his theories, as these touch on the object and on the paranoiac-critical activity as practices whose declared purpose is to serve as forms of intervention in life and in the social sphere. I take as my point of departure a mode of spatial subversion that characterizes some of Dalí's paintings of 1929–31. These paintings, while appearing to follow quite closely the spatial conception of Renaissance painting, undermine it quite craftily by evoking what appears to be an horizon line but on which practically no vanishing point might be located. In quite a few of his 1929–30 works – most notably in *Le Grand masturbateur* and *Illumined Pleasures* (Figure 8.2) – the figures and objects, placed on a flat and featureless plane, appear to lie too close to the horizon line (their shadows are at times cut off by it), with the result that the horizon – or rather the edge of this plane – is brought unnaturally close to the foreground, an effect enhanced by the total absence of atmospheric perspective. In many paintings, indeed,

there is a suggestion of a sheer drop from a point located not too far on the plane into an unseen chasm lying beyond it. A comparison with de Chirico is, in this respect, quite telling, since we find a similar spatial conception in his works. In *The Disquieting Muses* (1917), to take one outstanding example, there is no horizon line in evidence since the plane is blocked off by buildings, and it seems indeed as though the plane is cut off rather abruptly on the left, revealing buildings situated behind, and somewhat below it. Several of Dalí's 1929–30 paintings employ, to a greater or lesser degree, this suggestion of a space hidden behind the feigned horizon line.

The question that needs to be asked at this point is why Dalí chose to adopt this edge-of-the-plane conception, this peculiar employment of perspective, which, while not entirely doing away with the rules of perspective, still annuls its spatial implication. To stay a moment longer with de Chirico, in these works Dalí may have given his own version of what de Chirico expressed in "The Architectonic Sense in Ancient Painting" (1920), one of his articles in *Valori Plastici*, which Dalí, an assiduous reader of the magazine, very probably would have known. I have dwelt at some length on this article in Chapter 3, and at this point I suggest that the question "What lies beyond?" would be applicable to the sheer drop behind this assumed horizon line in Dalí's paintings or even to the canvas-like sky seen behind it, with its suggestive evocation of the mystery lying behind the surfaces of the real. There was, for Dalí, great value in this sense of a mystery intimated by the hidden space, as evinced by what he seems to be hinting at in "Rêverie" ("Daydream"), his account of a masturbatory daydream published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* in 1931. In this text Dalí accounts for the emotional significance flowing from the curtain in a painting by Vermeer in terms of his perception of space as a container of erotic content. The curtain, he tells us,

... may be identified in terms of its form, its place, and above all, its emotional and moral significance, with the curtain that, in the dream, served to conceal several small cows, in the far end of a very dark stable, where, very excited by the stench of the place, I sodomize the woman I love, in the midst of the excrement and rotting straw.³¹

This might be related to Dalí's engrossment around that time with depictions of drapery or curtains, as evinced, for instance, in his painting *The Old Age of William Tell* (1931), in which a sheet hung between two tall pedestals serves as a screen that seems to conceal – to go by the postures of the figures that are partially hidden behind it and in view of Dalí's predilections – an obscene sexual activity taking place behind it, but on which is also projected the shadow of a lion, Dalí's emblem of desire. It might be noted that, rather than retain the sense of enigma – rather than remain with the question "what lies beyond?" which is not quite answerable in the Chiricoesque context, nor in the general framework of Surrealist thought in the 1920s – Dalí provides a

specific description of the scene behind the stable curtain. This masturbatory fantasy is specific and detailed enough to dispel any sense of mystery. I should add at this point that there is also an obvious theater stage quality to the arrangement of curtain and figures – in the daydream as well as in paintings in which a curtain figures – with this quality having far-reaching implications with regard to the development of Dalí's spatial conception in the course of the 1930s.

The application of de Chirico's question to Dalí's works in this early stage of his Surrealist affiliation appears to confirm Breton's initial comments concerning Dalí. As noted in Chapter 3, in his introduction to the catalogue of the first Dalí exhibition in Paris (November–December 1929), Breton makes fun of the "famous trees" that exemplify for him the regressive return to nature in French art of the 1920s; for Breton, the "secret of Surrealism lies in the fact that we are convinced that something is hiding behind them."³² What lies behind these "famous trees" is "Cimmeria, the only new place we have discovered lately and that we mean to keep for ourselves"; it is the region beyond the real, the "distant countrysides," the "marvelous land of treasures" over which, Breton says, Dalí reigns. When he wrote these lines, Breton still had one foot planted in the conception of mystery and the Marvelous as being situated behind the surfaces of the real – a conception that, in my construction, is subsumed in the notion of the screen as a reigning spatial metaphor. Such a conception implies that "each landscape finds us in the same expectant pose, as if watching a curtain rise ..."³³ But in his Dalí essay Breton was also to some extent defining the direction taken by Surrealism in the coming years by arguing that only one method remains for "suppressing those trees," and that "in the long run everything depends on our power of *voluntary hallucination*."

By that time Breton may have been privy to Dalí's ideas, even before Dalí wrote "L'Ane pourri" ("The Rotting Donkey"), the essay in which he laid the ground for what he later termed paranoia-criticism or paranoiac-critical activity.³⁴ However, some of the expressions Breton uses in his catalogue introduction may have slipped into Dalí's essay, especially with respect to the notion of the simulacra. Dalí seems to imply that what we normally perceive as external reality persistently assumes certain forms – the simulacra – under which the concrete is hidden:

Nothing can prevent me from recognizing the multiple presence of simulacra in the example of the multiple image, even if one of its states adopts the appearance of a rotting donkey ... nothing can convince me that this merciless putrefaction of the donkey is anything other than the hard and blinding glint of new precious stones.

Nor do we know if the three great simulacra, excrement, blood, and putrefaction, do not expressly conceal the coveted "treasure land" (225; 11).

While Dalí at this point followed Breton in emphasizing the hidden quality of this "treasure land," arguing that "we have long ago learned to recognize the image of desire hidden behind the simulacra of terror, and even the awakening of 'Golden Ages' in the ignominious scatological simulacra,"³⁵ he was soon to develop the theoretical tools intended to make concrete the world of delirium. Breton's "voluntary hallucination" became in Dalí's theory the new tool of paranoiac-critical activity, although he insisted on the distinction between hallucination – albeit a "voluntary" one – and the products of the paranoiac process. Opposed to hallucination, he argued from the start, the paranoiac activity "always makes use of materials that are controllable and recognizable ... Paranoia makes use of the external world in order to set off its obsessive idea, with the disturbing characteristic of verifying the reality of this idea for others" (223; 10).³⁶

This aspiration to verify the reality of the paranoiac idea for others became a dominant theme in Dalí's evolving theory, often associated with the notion of theater or the stage.³⁷ It is clearly manifested in the edge-of-the-plane conception – or edge-of-the-table, to go by the indeterminate scale in many of the works³⁸ – that implied a circumscription of space and the formation of an arena on which the motifs would be distributed. This seems to have been Dalí's main procedure regarding spatial representation in the early years, until, say, 1932–33. Such a circumscription of the arena on which the figures and objects are placed is also effected by the use of platforms or large pedestals, whose ubiquitous presence in Dalí's work of these years attests to their conceptual importance. The platform is often depicted as a low pyramidal arrangement whose steps extend all the way to the edge of the plateau, which, as noted before, may serve as an artificial horizon (*The First Days of Spring*, 1929; *The Hand*, 1930; *Premature Ossification of a Railway Station*, 1930). In several works, such an arrangement of platforms on different levels, placed within a broader vista, serves as the main setting for the motifs (*Surrealist Object, Gauge of Instantaneous Memory*, 1932). These spatial constructions provide a setting that accommodates a major conceptual scheme associated with the theater stage. That Dalí had been thinking all along in terms of the theater stage can readily be seen, as early as in 1929, in the enhancement of stage-like effects such as the excessive tilting up of the ground behind the foreground figures in a pronounced diagonal recession (somewhat in the manner of Serlio's stage), and, at times, in the lack of spatial continuity between foreground elements and the background which seems at times like a backdrop.³⁹

Dalí's ambition with regard to his theories speaks of demonstration, indication and persuasion as the means of verifying the reality of the paranoiac idea for others by discrediting their perception of reality through the obsessive power of the paranoiac's mind. The theater stage as a dominant structural metaphor in Dalí's work – defined by the circumscribed space in his



8.3 Salvador Dalí, *The Average Fine and Invisible Harp*, 1932

earlier 1929–32 works, and by the platforms and the general layout in the later ones – supplies the arena on which the obsessive idea is verified and made concrete, and acts as the locus of the unfolding structures of interpretation

formed in the paranoiac process. In addition, the stage might be viewed as a manifestation of Dalí's overriding desire for mastery which entails structuring the beholder's mode of viewing the painting, with this primarily being a corollary of the painting's own mode of addressing the viewer. It can easily be seen that the theater stage, in its role as a dominant spatial conception in many of Dalí's works, points to the painting's function as *presentation* rather than *representation*. This function is often also accomplished – as in the late medieval theatrical genre of *tableaux vivants* – by the presence of small figures acting as demonstrators.⁴⁰ These are at times an adult and a child (little Dalí and his “father”?) with the adult pointing to the “objects” on display. A related function is that of “gaze directing.” This constitutes the gesture of a hand, capturing the gaze of the observer and directing it toward a point in the picture, or else the gaze of the demonstrator himself establishes a contact with an external observer. Figures in Dalí's paintings appear at times to be looking directly at the viewer, as if aware of being “photographed”; which in fact is often the case, as, for instance, in *The Average Fine and Invisible Harp* (1932, Figure 8.3), for which Dalí, in fact, used a photograph. They are often also shown in the act of displaying some object for the benefit of the beholder.⁴¹ Even without an overt gesture of demonstration, objects and figures often appear to position themselves specifically for the beholder's perusal, arranged frontally, as if addressing him. Dalí's double and multiple images could be viewed as presentations or demonstrations, once we choose to see them as indices or marks of the paranoiac-critical activity rather than as representations that mirror reality. It is in this capacity that Dalí's anthropomorphic landscapes should be viewed – paintings that may be read as landscapes strewn with human figures and, alternately, as a human face or, at times, a partial or full human figure (for example, 1936 works such as *Le Grand paranoïaque*, or *Head of a Woman Having the Form of a Battle*) – as well as his morphological echoes in which one obsessive form appears under various guises throughout the space of the painting (for instance, *Nostalgic Echo*, 1935).⁴²

The body in space and the space of the body – Dalí's anamorphic vision

The visual order of Dalí's paintings, with its circumscribed space and especially the sense of a *tableau vivant*, enhances our consciousness of a seeing presence within the painting; one looking back at the beholder, engaging him and assimilating him into the painting, with the painting itself constituting an image of the self projected by Dalí. This visual order is inextricably related to the spatial character of Dalí's stage. The theater stage was often associated in Dalí's mind with the negation of Renaissance space; this in turn implied a perspectival manipulation associated with a diagonal recession into space,



8.4 Salvador Dalí, *Portrait of Gala with Two Lamb Chops Balanced on her Shoulder*, 1933

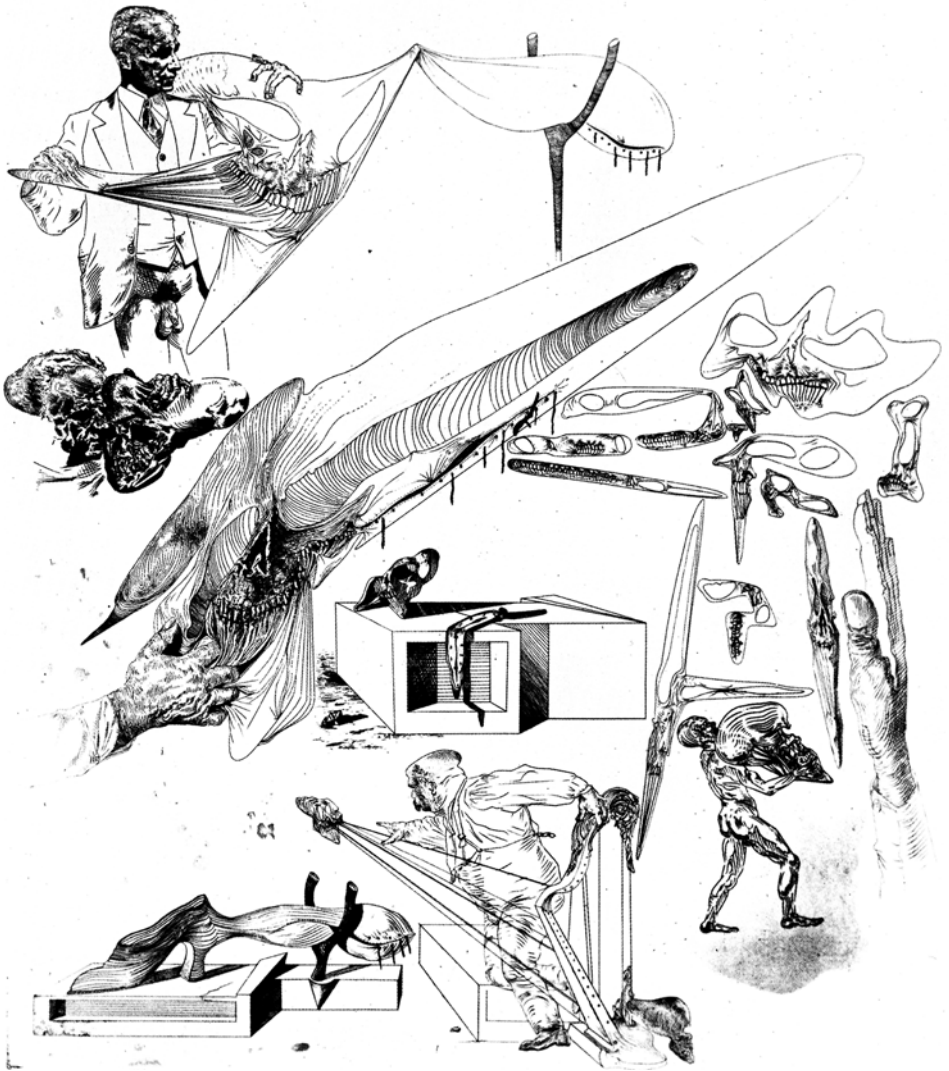
at times in a zigzag motion. Space is twisted into an acute diagonal, at times in an off-centered composition (Figure 8.4 is one example), with perspective orthogonals tilted almost vertically and the ground plane excessively raised. Perspectival deviations of this type exhibit a marked kinship with the nature of distortion often found in Mannerist painting.⁴³ This also accounts for the fact that while Dalí's paintings convey for most beholders an impression of "unbounded horizon" and "sense of vastness," in many cases this is at best an illusory impression, often accomplished by the extreme scaling down of forms and the exaggerated or abrupt convergence of the lines of walls, platforms or other structures – an effect not unlike that of looking through a glass ball or a magnifying lens held at some distance from the eye, or at the reflection in a concave mirror (a common Mannerist effect), where a whole landscape is scaled down to be encompassed within a small field of vision. Dalí was all along aware of this effect of diminution of scale. In a 1927 text he wrote: "In a large and clear cow's eye we see, spherically deformed, an extremely white minuscule post-machinist landscape, detailed enough to delineate a sky in

which float diminutive and luminous clouds" ("Photography: Pure Creation of the Spirit," *Collected Writings* 47). This conception was presented by Dalí in its most explicit form in his works on the theme of Palladio's Corridor (1937), alluding to Andrea Palladio's Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza where the corridors opening out of the proscenium arch rise and taper gradually in a way that enhances the perception of recession and depth.

Contrary to the Renaissance perspective in which space is conceived and ordered by the cone of vision – with the implication that the ideal position of the viewer should be located at the apex of this cone, that is, outside the space of the picture – Dalí's space, which offers no easily definable viewpoint (or rather with its suggestion of a multiplicity of optional viewpoints), draws viewers into the painting; incorporates them, so to speak. Indeed, it seems that Dalí in the early 1930s intuited much of what we find in modern theory concerning the viewing subject's position in relation to the painting's perspective and the way the painting addresses him. Martin Jay, for instance, notes in Renaissance perspective a "withdrawal of the painter's emotional entanglement with the objects depicted in geometricalized space"; the gap between spectator and spectacle widens, and the bodies of the painter and viewer are "forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye."⁴⁴ As a result of the distance created between the disincarnated eye and the depicted scene, the painting "lacks the immediacy associated with desire." The body returns, and with it the re-eroticizing of the visual order, once the Renaissance coherent essence opens up to accommodate a multiplicity of visual spaces, as in the Baroque.⁴⁵ In his book *Downcast Eyes*, Jay evokes the Baroque's subversion of the dominant visual order of scientific reason (as exemplified by Renaissance perspective, for instance) in terms of a "confusing interplay of form and chaos, surface and depth, transparency and obscurity," and an "overloading of the visual apparatus with a surplus of images in a plurality of spatial planes. As a result, it dazzles and distorts rather than presents a clear and tranquil perspective on the truth of the external world."⁴⁶

I do not want to imply that the Mannerist or Baroque spatial conception is universally applicable to Dalí's paintings – there are many that exhibit a perspectival view that is more closely attuned to the Renaissance space. But there is another formal aspect of his painting which brings home this sense of an engulfing space – a space, I should add, that is wholly eroticized – even when the spatial conception displays an affinity with academic painting. I refer to the form taken by the pictorial projection of bodily concerns of Dalí's that are associated with his oral and anal fantasies of destruction, sadism, incorporation or cannibalism. These concerns had their earliest formal expression in Dalí's art in shapes touching on art nouveau ornamentation, and were manifested, after 1931, in terms of what he later referred to as the "morphological aesthetics of the soft and hard."⁴⁷ This involves a confounding of expectations of the

hard and soft; the softening of hard objects and the hardening or, at times, fossilization or petrification of soft ones. Such mechanisms are exemplified most prominently in the deformation of the human body, mostly the skull and bones, with a special emphasis on monstrously developed heads and all kinds of protrusions sprouting from the body, in which the borders separating the animate from the inanimate are obliterated (Figure 8.3).⁴⁸ It is in the light of these deformations that I can argue that Dalí's spatial conception is not wholly dependent on a Mannerist manipulation of the field of vision. The sharp elongations and protuberances, and the excessively long skulls so often found in the paintings of the first half of the 1930s point to the anamorphic rebus as their source of formal as well as thematic inspiration.⁴⁹ The anamorphosis, in its earlier form, was a play of perspective popular in Mannerist art. It is a picture-puzzle whose frontal view shows a jumble of lines, usually drawn laterally across the picture and depicting broad vistas, yet viewed sideways, at a certain angle, the picture reveals distinct shapes, human figures, or portraits.⁵⁰ The connection between skull deformations and anamorphosis is illustrated in a line engraving entitled *Soft Skulls and Cranial Harps* (1935), which contains some examples of the "cranial harp," a variation of the soft skull motif (Figure 8.5). The skulls depicted in this engraving exhibit a distention that is obviously of anamorphic origin and is quite reminiscent of the efforts of Mannerist practitioners of this diversion. The most curious element in the engraving is the figure of a man plucking the strings of a harp, the strings forming a net of lines (similar to lines in a perspective drawing) meeting at some vanishing point located in a small skull. This arrangement resembles Dürer's device for perspective drawing comprising a frame with strings passing through it toward different points on the object to be depicted. Such a device was also used to attain correct anamorphic images. Dalí was a great enthusiast and promoter of these images, and especially of one particular form of the anamorphosis, the "conic anamorphosis," which he defined in his essay "The Latest Modes of Intellectual Stimulation for the Summer of 1934": "Flat reconstitution of the deformation reflected in a very smooth cone. The best examples date to the 1900 period."⁵¹ The circular anamorphic image created with this device offers a jumble of distorted forms, mostly parts of the human body, which seem to fill up the whole of space. It is only when we look directly through its apex at the conic mirror placed at the center of the anamorphic image that the dispersed image is reformed to present a more or less coherent picture.⁵² Dalí's writings do not contain, on the whole, many references to anamorphoses, nor do we find specific implementations of these devices in his paintings.⁵³ Perhaps the technique as such was quite superfluous for Dalí, whose distended forms supplied aesthetic equivalents for a whole array of psychic or psychosexual preoccupations.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the anamorphic vision permeates Dalí's paintings in terms of both their visual



8.5 Salvador Dalí, *Soft Skulls and Cranial Harps*, 1935

order and their thematic, indeed ideological and philosophical outlook. The group of works known as the "Anthropomorphic Landscapes," in which images of human faces and partial or full human bodies, hovering ghostlike over the landscape, are constituted by an adroit arrangement of small humans (at times on horseback) apparently strewn over a plane, present a confusing

interplay of surface and depth in an anamorphic process of fragmentation and re-formation.⁵⁵

The anamorphic vision, with its dual surface and depth projection of bodily concerns, shows that Dalí unquestionably intended the universal eroticization of the objects of external reality to extend to the whole of space. In the documentation of his essay "Aerodynamic Apparitions of 'Beings-Objects,'" (1934), he significantly included a small reproduction of the anamorphic skull in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*. In this essay he developed an extended conceit concerning the extraction of comedones, or blackheads, out of the pores of the nose, equating what he considered to be the viscous consistency of the physical and conceptual space of modern thought with the flesh of the nose. Dalí sees the objects and people inhabiting the moral, philosophical and physical space of modern thought in terms of these "aerodynamic," "oozy," and "atmospheric" comedones, the "strange bodies" of space. Thus, mechanical and functional objects should be replaced, he argues, by aerodynamic or streamlined ones, "gelatinous, flattened," with "supersmooth curves" and a "massive salivary anatomy" of the "Mae West – Art Nouveau" type.⁵⁶ These "supersmooth curves" or "aerodynamic curves" are for Dalí the formal imprints of the curvature of eroticized space, a space that has become, as he argues in another text, "this physical thing that is terribly material, terribly personal and meaningful, that squeezes us all like real comedones."⁵⁷

Dalí's paintings thus present an anamorphic vision in which the body – as exemplified by bodily concerns, drives, and desires – is projected on a Mannerist space with its confusing interplay of surface and depth, the internal and the external, in an amalgam of internal sensations and fragmented external stimuli. In Dalí's overall oeuvre, this vision also implies a commingling of the "internal" space of the painting and the space of the real, or, in the more extended sense to which I am leading, between art and life. Dalí's notion of "beings-objects" implies an irruption into the social and cultural space of human beings, in their capacity of excremental objects, which, in the light of their analogy with the aerodynamic "comedones," exemplify a form of "moral aerodynamism." The sadistic impulse inherent in Dalí's example for "moral aerodynamism" – the placing of an omelet on the shaven head of a "clean little old lady, in the most advanced stage of decrepitude," rented for this purpose (*Collected Writings* 210–211) – implies a hidden underground action against the norms of society. It is liable to produce, as Dalí argued with regard to a similar proposal in another essay, "deep currents of demoralization and cause serious conflicts in interpretation and practice"⁵⁸ It holds a promise of encompassing the broad range of perversions and erotic concerns that Dalí has previously applied to the idea of the Surrealist Object. There is in this respect a marked similarity between Dalí's ideas and those proposed by Georges Bataille in his essay "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade."⁵⁹ To cite Bataille,

Sadism ... appears positively, on the one hand, as an irruption of excremental forces ... and on the other as a corresponding limitation, a narrow enslavement of everything that is opposed to this irruption. It is only in these concrete conditions that sad social necessity, human dignity, fatherland and family, as well as poetic sentiments, appear without a mask and without any play of light and shadow ...⁶⁰

The whole array of ideas underlying Dalí's concept of "beings-objects" informs his notion of "performance," to apply this term in its modern usage. In "Lettre à André Breton," published in the catalogue of his exhibition at the Pierre-Colle Gallery in June 1933, Dalí offered a somewhat whimsical account of the birth of the Surrealist Object, which he traced back to the Cubist collages and *papiers collés*. The growth and greater concretization of the collage elements, together with the progressive reduction of their support, led eventually, Dalí argues, to the point where the object fell out materially from the picture and started living its "prenatal life" (*Collected Writings* 251). Dalí then relates this stage to some of the phases of the object he identified in his earlier writings, including symbolic functioning and cannibalism, and announces that all this ends up in the possibility of a "keen lyrical and irrational utilization of real and concrete objects" leading to

... the coming and grandiose actuality of the opera, that is none other ... than the irrational and acute use of the objects and "beings-objects" surrounding us, with the complete confounding of all the lyrical genres, that makes possible for us today the true manifestation of vital "acts-objects" of the most demented kind, enabling you to experience in its most complete form the dynamic "concrete irrationality" of the authentic "modern and Surrealist hysteria" (252).

Dalí's notion of "performance" is exemplified in this essay, for instance, by the "helmet invented by de Sade for the purpose of amplifying and converting the screams of pain of the victims into great bellowings of cattle" (252). A similar notion introduced in an essay written around the same time concerns "one of those tragic and grandiose sadomasochistic-edible costumes ..."⁶¹ Special costumes, headdresses and other accouterments are rife in Dalí's writing and artistic practice. Here again, as in most other areas of his activity, Dalí moved between high fashion commercial exploits to conceptions that were more intriguing and thought-provoking, such as the *Aphrodisiac Jacket* (1936), with its underlying notion of the distribution of erotic stimuli all around the body. Costumes of this type often figure in "performances," such as the bizarre event in 1934 in which Dalí, standing on a low table amidst pen holders and inkstands, wore a strange costume bearing large-scale reproductions of Millet's *L'Angélus* (photographs of this exploit illustrate the "Beings-Objects" essay).

Dalí's idiosyncrasies and excesses were geared uniquely to his own needs and vision. Furthermore, his object production, or the actual implementation

of the ideas associated with the concept of the “beings-objects,” exhibits a pronounced gap between theory and artistic practice. But with all this taken into account, there is much in the course followed by his art and theory that would still be applicable to the broader framework of Surrealist aesthetics as well as to the declared aim of bringing about a greater intermeshing of art and the social sphere, to introduce dream into life. As I observed earlier in this chapter, I do not propose to fully portray Surrealist thought and art in the 1930s but rather to suggest a few major trends, mostly in terms of what I consider to be the eclipse of the screen paradigm. Under this heading falls Dalí’s very significant contribution to the proliferation of activities associated with the creation of Surrealist Objects and their display in the public sphere. I believe that the concept of “beings-objects” was also instrumental in the growing interest in “performance,” although in the 1930s this role was taken over by mannequins. A docile substitute for a live person, the mannequin, like Bellmer’s *Poupée*, could easily submit to sadomasochistic manipulation and lend itself to any attempt to transgress the limitations of the human body.

My main concern in this discussion, however, has been with what I have considered in terms of the often discernible aim of merging the “internal” space of the painting (and, by extension, of its creator) and the space of the real; breaching the “barriers” between the internal and the external, the perceptual and representational. In the terms posited throughout this study with regard to the screen paradigm and the associated layered depth conception, it might be argued that Dalí’s paintings do away with the screen as a fulcrum of the dialectics of opacity and transparency; as a surface that encompasses – to use Dalí’s words in the early text cited before – the “whole depth and the whole surface of an ocean on which sail all poetic suggestions, and where all the plastic possibilities are stabilized” (*Collected Writings* 22). The dissolution of this dialectics – in tandem with Breton’s abandonment, in the course of the decade, of the full range of tensions associated with the screen paradigm – opens the way, theoretically and ideologically, to what is commonly referred to as “dream painting” – the illusionist or “veristic” form of Surrealist painting that attained prominence in the course of the 1930s, especially in the work of newcomers to the movement or those acting in its periphery.

It should be emphasized, indeed, that Surrealism in the 1920s presents no particular proclivity for “dream painting” in its illusionist conception; that is to say, painting that is removed from the spatial conception associated with the screen paradigm. Max Ernst’s collage-based paintings of the early 1920s might be the closest that Surrealist painting (here, rather, pre-Surrealist painting) approached to this appellation. However, as shown earlier in this study, in their layered conception they also embody the dichotomies and tensions associated with the screen paradigm. Neither would Magritte’s work fit the label of “dream painting”; furthermore, the greater part of his

activities during the 1920s was centered in Brussels, even when he lived in Paris (1927–30). Tanguy's paintings in the 1920s, with their collage effects and the extreme de Chirico-like tilting of the ground plane, resulting in a marked tension of surface and depth, do not easily fall into this category either; all the more so since, with their surface elements lying between inscription and representation, they come close to Miró's works. It was only in the early 1930s, largely following Dalí's lead, that Tanguy turned to a more pronounced form of illusionism. The situation indeed changed quite radically in the 1930s. The "temptation" of illusionism is discernible even in the forays into this domain of first-generation artists such as Masson and Man Ray.⁶² Max Ernst, too, was by the early 1930s already far removed from his de Chirico-like collage paintings of the early 1920s. The transition in his work away from a spatial conception informed by the screen paradigm deserves special consideration at this point, in particular because it will lead my discussion again to the notion of the screen in its cinematic provenance.

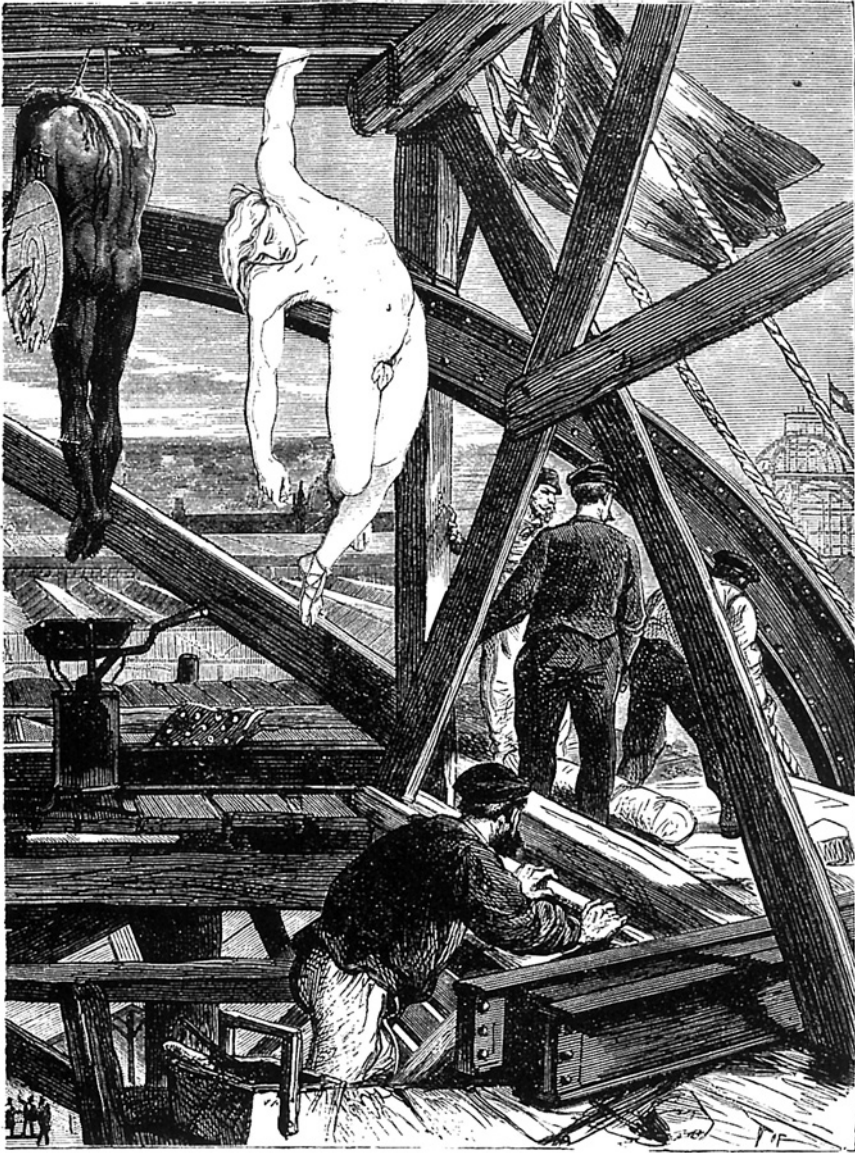
A succession of dream images – Max Ernst's collage novels

I do not claim that, in the course of the 1920s, Ernst was at all times entirely cognizant of all the implications of the picture as window, modified by the concept of the screen with its action of revealing and concealing. What I suggested in the analysis offered in Chapter 4 is that he would have been aware of the Freudian dimension of his spatial conception and that he would have actively pursued it in his work. The screen as a spatial paradigm is traceable in Ernst's work throughout the 1920s in the layered conception of both collages and paintings, and effects a conceptualization of mental space in visual terms; it is also a central constituent in a chain of frames *en abyme*. Now I would like to single out another manifestation of the screen, one that is most fully and extensively expressed in the first collage novel *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929).

My concern is with the "white figures" that populate many of the plates in this book. The sources are mostly line engravings of the kind found, for instance, in illustrations in the style of Flaxman and his followers; other sources are engravings in journals such as *L'Illustration*, or engraved images of classical or pseudo-classical sculpture.⁶³ These figures have been analyzed in terms of a subversion of the nineteenth-century academic nude, intended to "extract" an erotic essence out of a social context of bourgeois respectability (Charlotte Stokes); the deconstruction of classical sources has been considered in terms of a *dépaysement* of their status as the "material embodiment of a society's ideological values" (Elza Adamowicz).⁶⁴ What distinguishes these "white figures" is often, literally, their clear and light appearance,

especially when seen against the generally darker and more densely textured illustration that provides the primary layer of the collage. Ernst, it appears, made it a point to select illustrations with a clear outline; where there is some shading, it remains close to the outline and is not as dense as the surrounding photogravure texture. These “white figures,” especially in their sculptural form, may have antecedents in the white sculptural figures, starkly placed against a darker background, in a few works by de Chirico done in 1914.⁶⁵ They also may have referred, in Ernst’s own work, to the stencils used in paintings such as *One Man Can Hide Another* (1923) or *The Fall of an Angel* (1922).⁶⁶ Because of their clear and bright silhouette, these figures appear to intrude on the space of the original illustration by superimposing on it another “film” or layer – or indeed a projection plane – that adheres to the picture plane, even where some elements of the original illustration appear to extend over it. As such, they also exhibit an extreme spatial displacement through a tilting of their original spatial configuration (for instance, Plates 42 and 83 in *La Femme 100 têtes*); they hover like apparitions (for instance, Plates 30, 68; and Plate 140, reproduced here in Figure 8.6);⁶⁷ their presence sometimes hinted at by isolated limbs or truncated bodies, or by bodies and limbs cut off by the frame.⁶⁸ The “white figures” might thus be seen as yet another assertion of the screen in Ernst’s work as the site of confluence of conflicting spaces. In the light of my earlier consideration of the collages of the early 1920s as representations of mental space, it would not be too far-fetched to view the obvious disjunction – in terms of spatial position as well as pictorial definition – between the “white figures” and the other layers of the collage on which they are projected as representing different psychic localities.⁶⁹ Such a conception would be especially applicable to the Freudian notions of resistance and the different stages of excitation associated with memory traces which impinge on the psychical apparatus, since these are located at different points between perceptual and motor ends.

There is, however, also a rather conspicuous difference between Ernst’s collages of the early 1920s and those of the 1929 collage novel *La Femme 100 têtes*, one that lies not so much in the technique employed, nor even in the source materials (although there are some obvious differences too), but rather in their respective ideological and cultural frames of reference.⁷⁰ In both the early and later collages, the notion of the dream asserts itself in relation to the conceptualization of mental space. However, Ernst’s closer ties with the Surrealists (notwithstanding the ups and downs in his relationship with Breton) in the course of the 1920s and into the 1930s made the representation of dreams a growing concern of his. In my discussion of Ernst I quoted a passage from his 1934 essay “What Is Surrealism?” in which he writes that the Surrealists “move about in the borderland between the internal and external worlds which are still unfamiliar though physically and psychologically



8.6 Max Ernst, *La Femme 100 têtes*, Plate 140, "Elle garde son secret"
("She keeps her secret")

quite real ("sur-real"), registering what they see and experience there ..." In terms of this greater concern with the representation of dreams, I suggest, the notion of the dream comes into *La Femme 100 têtes* not only as a form

of conceptualization that structures the individual collages; but also in the sequential movement of the collages that utilizes structural means analogous to the mechanisms of dream-formation (such as condensation or the creation of composite structures), as well as by the use of symbolic themes in a way that often parallels the mechanisms underlying Freudian dream symbolism. This sequential movement, as in dreams, consists of a sequence of disjointed representations of characters and locales, as well as a contrapuntal relation of image and caption.

The sequential movement of *La Femme 100 têtes* readily brings to mind an analogy with film, with the film itself subsumed in the temporal sequence of the frames-plates comprising the book as a whole. Much of the pace of this temporal sequence is dictated by the captions that, like intertitles in silent films, interrupt the visual continuity. The individual collages are also analogous to the primitive tableaux of early cinema, where the pace of the film depends on the amount of information contained by the fixed shot that is to be scanned by the viewer. This scanning of Ernst's collages applies both to the image as a surface element and to the movement through the layers-barriers and into the depth of the image (to which, as shown before, Breton applied a cinematic dimension). Given the prominence of film in Surrealist thought in the course of the 1920s, such a film analogy would have inescapably been on Ernst's mind while working on the book.⁷¹

It is, however, in view of the screen paradigm and the "white figures" that the film provenance of Ernst's collage novel gains a more profound significance. In Chapter 1 I introduced the notion of the "whiteness of the screen," its luminosity in the course of a projection in the darkened cinema, as one of the factors contributing to the magic of cinema in the eyes of the Surrealists. One aspect of this quality of the screen gained the particular attention of Robert Desnos, who, in his essay "Eroticism," evoked the charge of eroticism brought about by the appearance on the screen of the luminous images of men and women, whose "flesh becomes more real than living people's ..."⁷² The implication is that the luminous images perceived on the surface of the screen in the dark cinema theater signify desire, perhaps even in its fetishistic dimension. Ernst's "white figures" denote the presence of the white screen as a surface on which the other collage elements converge and that might be conceived as analogous to an internal screen on which a dream film is projected. The "white figures" themselves, completely cut off from their original setting and estranged in their new one, signify a fetishistic absence that, to follow Desnos's argument, denotes a presence that is no less compelling than the missing object it represents.

The particular characteristics of *La Femme 100 têtes* in its film stature might be seen in higher relief in view of the collage novels that followed it. The quite persistent presence of "white figures" throughout *La Femme* – not in every

plate but enough to be fully discernible – becomes particularly pertinent in view of the almost complete lack of such figures in the 1930 collage novel *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au carmel* (*Dream of a Young Girl who Wished to Enter the Carmelite Order*); this is true also of the novel that followed in 1934, *Une Semaine de bonté; ou, Les Sept éléments capitaux* (*One Week of Kindness; or, The Seven Capital Elements*). *Rêve d'une petite fille* still exhibits a layered spatial conception, derived from the relative lack of spatial and textural congruence of the collage elements, which, while not as distinct or disjunctive as the “white figures,” clearly refer to their various source materials. Hardly any layered conception can be distinguished in *Une Semaine de bonté*; the collages, looking indeed like original images that have not been tampered with, present their fantastic and grotesque characters and situations within a coherent and convincing spatial setting. The collages in *Une Semaine de bonté* are thus further removed from the flatness associated with the assertion or “favoring” of the screen in *La Femme 100 têtes*, in particular where a “white figure” demands the viewer’s attention. This transition might be viewed in the light of a general turn in Ernst’s work of the 1930s toward a form of spatial illusionism that largely annuls the screen paradigm as a dominant presence. His *Loplop Introduces ...* series, begun at the time he was occupied with *La Femme 100 têtes* and on which he continued working until 1931, is the last extensive appearance of the screen paradigm in Ernst in the 1930s.⁷³ The screen is manifested in these works in their use of internal frames and “pictures within pictures”; lying parallel to the picture plane, these frames are thus distinguished by the layered depth and the overall flatness that exemplify the notion of frames *en abyme* associated with the earlier collages (such frames exist in several other collages done mostly in the years 1933–34). I should add that the “picture within picture” is an element found in quite a few plates of *Une Semaine de bonté*. However, these frames – associated with the pictures or mirrors hanging on the walls of the bourgeois interiors that constitute much of the setting in the third book of this collage novel – do not exemplify the condition of the screen paradigm as a central constituent in a chain of frames *en abyme*; in other words, they are not congruous with layers lying within the depth of the picture that parallel the picture plane, and, consequently, they do not define a form of representation associated with the representational mode that frames the collage as a whole. These frames, however, are not without significance; rather, they seem to constitute a reference to Ernst’s own earlier insistence on the screen as a spatial paradigm; as such, they might be viewed as a form of representation of the screen rather than its direct embodiment.

Such a distinction may also shed light on the different permutations of the dream as the impetus propelling the narrative movement in the three collage novels, as well as on their cinematic dimension. *La Femme 100 têtes* leaves the reader with a distinct sense of the rather disjointed, dreamlike quality of its

sequential progression.⁷⁴ This quality appears to satisfy an observation made by Antonin Artaud in 1927 to the effect that the

... cinema is made primarily to express matters of the mind, the inner consciousness, not by a succession of images so much as by something more tangible which restores them to us with direct matter, with no interpositions or representations. The cinema has arrived at a turning point in human thought, precisely at the moment when language is losing its symbolic power, when the mind is tired of simulation.⁷⁵

The distinction for Artaud is thus between attempts at presenting the unconscious as an implied presence in dreams in a form analogous to the recollection (or reproduction) of a dream and that requires the use of language, and a form that gives shape more directly to the internal experience of the dream (at least in the terms envisioned by the artist). In his first collage novel, Ernst appears to have opted for the second course. The following novel, *Rêve d'une petite fille*, presents a greater narrative continuity in terms both of the sequence of images within each chapter and of the captions. The latter, unlike the very brief and rather cryptic texts of *La Femme 100 têtes*, offer long dialogues that at times extend over two or more plates. What also unifies this collage novel is the persistent anticlerical tone, with church, clergy and God figuring amidst images of lust and violence.⁷⁶ As in *La Femme 100 têtes*, the dream dimension is introduced, insofar as individual collages are concerned, by structural means analogous to the mechanism of dream-formation. However, it might also be seen – at least with regard to the film perspective that I am introducing here – that *Rêve d'une petite fille* does not partake of the same dream-like quality as *La Femme 100 têtes*, precisely because it presents a far more unified whole and a more pronounced narrative continuity. *Une Semaine de bonté* is far too complex in symbolism and structure to be adequately described here.⁷⁷ There are no captions, but a strong sense of continuity is communicated by the visual themes within each of the seven parts, in terms of the protagonists and their attributes, the settings, and other controlling images. With its references to Freudian dream symbolism and with the hallucinatory and fantastic quality of much of the visual material, this collage novel appears to partake of what is generally assumed to be the representation of dream images. However, the convincing illusionist presentation of the motifs within their spatial setting enhances the sense of a reproduction of a dream rather than of what might be associated with the direct presentation of an internal process.

I have traced the transition in Ernst's collage novels in terms of the changing cast of the dream concept and in the light of the general movement in Surrealism in the early 1930s to which I have devoted the greater part of this chapter, toward a conception of painting removed from the themes and forms associated with the screen paradigm. This transition might also be viewed against a background formed by the general shift in these years from silent

films to sound, and it is to this shift that I turn in the following section, which concludes this chapter and, in some respects, the study as a whole.

“To get rid of this puerile ‘convention’ that is the screen”

I began my first chapter with a consideration of the cinema screen as a figure that has structured much of what I consequently associated with the screen paradigm, and it is only fitting that I should conclude with some thoughts concerning the place of the cinema screen in Surrealist thought and aesthetics in the 1930s. It might be noted, however, that, whereas in the 1920s, and especially in the early part of the decade, the cinema was very much on the mind of the young Surrealists (as evinced by the frequent references to film in their writings, as well as by their creative engagement with film or their activity as film critics), by the early 1930s there was already a sharp decline in their interest in the medium. The few texts relating to film written by Surrealists or ex-Surrealists convey the sense of a general disenchantment with the direction taken by the cinema in those years. To this might be added a sense of failure associated with the prospect of an authentic Surrealist cinema. Coming close on the earlier enthusiasm for the kinds of films represented by Buñuel's and Dalí's *Un Chien andalou* (1929) or *L'Age d'or* (1930), there was a growing awareness that, with the advent of sound films, the earlier era of artistic freedom associated with the silent film had come to an end.⁷⁸ These developments deserve far more space than can be allotted to them here. My concern, however, is solely with the adverse effect that the introduction of the sound film may have had on the early perception of the cinema screen as the privileged site of the dream discourse, partly in relation to the waning of the sense of the cinema screen as the locus of a “surface suggestion” associated with the tension between flat, geometrical display and representation of depth (Chapter 1). These considerations throw additional light on the eclipse of the screen paradigm, particularly in view of my earlier argument concerning the way the experience of the cinema screen may have contributed to the conceptualization of the screen as a spatial paradigm. Given the paucity of Surrealist texts bearing directly upon these developments, much of what follows is a conjecture based on materials linked to earlier perceptions concerning the cinema screen. To this I have added various responses to these developments on the part of writers who, notwithstanding their quite tangential association with Surrealism at the time, may have created a climate of thought to which the Surrealists could not remain oblivious.

I will begin with Goudal – citing him once again because he expresses so well the response to the screen to which I am referring – and to his observation that, on entering the cinema, “our gaze is guided by the luminous ray to the

screen ... Our body itself submits to a sort of temporary depersonalization which takes away the feeling of its own existence. We are nothing but two eyes riveted to ten square meters of white sheet."⁷⁹ In his perception, the screen becomes the site of a

... simulacrum of a uniquely visual kind. An actual hallucination is needed here which the other conditions of cinema tend to reinforce, just as, in the dream, moving images lacking three-dimensionality follow each other on a single plane artificially delimited by a rectangle which is like a geometrical opening giving on to the psychic kingdom. The absence of color, too, the black and white, represents an arbitrary simplification analogous to those one meets in dreams (356–7).

Goudal emphasizes what is crucial to my contention – the two-dimensional sense of the projection, its “arbitrary simplification” represented by the black and white.

For the Surrealists, such an “arbitrary simplification” meant, indeed, a merging of the screen in its capacity of a central implement in actual film projection with an implied “screen in the mind” or “dream screen.” A somewhat different perception, although arising from similar considerations, was suggested by Artaud, in articles written in 1927, accompanying work on his screenplay for *La Coquille et le clergyman* (*The Shell and the Clergyman*). He saw as mistaken the

... kind of venial hybrid art which insists on translating into more or less suitable images psychological situations that would be perfectly at home on the stage or in the pages of a book but not on the screen, since they are merely the reflection of a world that depends on another source for its raw material and its meaning.⁸⁰

Cinema should be distinguished from theater; it should not attempt to convince us of the “reality” of its images;

... [the] human skin of things, the epidermis of reality: this is the primary raw material of cinema. Cinema exalts matter and reveals it to us in its profound spirituality, in its relations with the spirit from which it has emerged. Images are born, are derived from one another purely as images, impose an objective synthesis more penetrating than any abstraction, create worlds which ask nothing of anyone or anything (151–2).

Film then “gives objects a separate existence by isolating them so they become progressively more independent and detached from the object’s normal sense.”⁸¹ Having lost in the early 1930s any hopes that he may have had with regard to cinema, Artaud bemoaned the fact that filmmakers had forgotten that cinema “does not take the place of life; these are broken pieces of objects, cutouts of views, unfinished puzzles of things which it binds together forever ... we must realize that it is an incomplete world which the cinema presents,

and from a single remote point ..."⁸² Here Artaud, in fact, evokes the screen as the site of the "artificial delimitation" or "arbitrary simplification" referred to by Goudal, with the implication that the "epidermis of reality," to follow his terms, would attain its essence on a site defined by the screen as a kind of epidermal surface.

There were film critics who saw things quite differently. In his 1929 article "Technique and the Future" (1929), Léon Moussinac advocated going beyond the conventional rectangular screen, citing to this end a scientific study by Roger Charpentier in which it was argued that "the retina is not physiologically disposed to appreciate a white rectangle."⁸³ To counter this limitation, Charpentier suggested that the screen be adapted to the shape of the whole visual field, which he saw in terms of a horizontal ellipse. With the theater itself having, on the screen side, an elliptical section, "the section of the spectator's visual cone, instead of being haphazard (e.g., rectangular) will approximate the physiological visual field." Moussinac, indeed, was one of the critics who saw technological progress as a necessary means for endowing films with greater verisimilitude, with this further enhancing the truth of their human content. The most radical technological change was associated, of course, with the introduction of sound. There is no need to go in detail into the theoretical debate raging from 1929 on between those who embraced this change and those who saw the sound film as an adulteration of what had made silent film a unique art form.⁸⁴ For my purpose, it will suffice to consider sound in film – with this applying equally to what came close to being filmed theater and to films attempting a more innovative use of sound – as locating its sources consistently within the film space (and also "off-space"); indeed, sound defines this space more emphatically, thus further enhancing the "impression of reality," to the detriment of the "arbitrary simplification" associated with the screen. Benjamin Fondane, a poet who wrote film scenarios in the 1920s that are very close to the spirit of Dada and Surrealism, expressed misgivings about the turn taken by cinema in the early 1930s, especially with the shift to sound. In his essay "From Silent to Talkie: The Rise and Fall of the Cinema" (1930), he argues that in the "silents, the succession of shots occurred solely in time and duration, the space factor playing no role in the production of rhythm." Now, with the introduction of sound, "the importance of rhythm – i.e., montage – loses all meaning and allows dialogue, song, dance, to take complete possession of space, to mark it by their takeover, and even to immobilize it."⁸⁵ A few years later, in his article "Cinéma 33," he viewed these changes even more cynically, lamenting that the "free" poetry of film was in fact bound to the large and costly production made imperative by the talking picture. Silent film, he argues, was born and had developed under the sign of misunderstanding. "The silent film had been lucky due to the absence, backwardness or deficiency of its technique. From

its beginnings, its producers, marvelously informed, were frightened by the deafness of the child, its pallor, is thinness. The physicians were called to give him sound, color and depth."⁸⁶ These qualities were meant to enhance the cinema's ability to copy life. "With all these improvements: sound, depth, color, toward which film is being pushed, isn't it being brought to a kind of theater that it is in the process of greedily swallowing, dish and bones included?" (104). With the chase after improvements of this kind, it "would be needed then to get rid of this puerile 'convention' that is the screen that renders film into nothing short of a painted canvas. Let's scrap it! film will be projected in empty space" (103). This is, of course, a tongue-in-cheek proposal, and it is in this spirit that Fondane also refers to Georges Neveux, who in his essay "The Tunnel 1930–1940" (1933) contended, somewhat in the spirit of mockery too, that film having "depth" (that is, three-dimensional film) will suppress editing. "The flat film undoubtedly tried to compensate for the dimensionality it lacked with rapid shot changes, chases, battles, and startling lighting effects ... The discovery of 'dimensionality' has changed all that. Our eye is now overwhelmed by what it sees in three dimensions." And furthermore, "our gaze can now penetrate into the film."⁸⁷

Enabling the gaze to penetrate into the film, getting rid of the "puerile 'convention' that is the screen" – these ambitions, however jocular the manner of their presentation, are inimical to everything that the screen paradigm had stood for in the 1920s. On the basis of their writings on film in the 1920s, it would be reasonable to suppose that the Surrealists shared the misgivings expressed by these writers. That is not to say that the eclipse of the screen paradigm should be directly associated with the arrival of sound films; there were other, far more significant factors involved that had to do mostly with the general theoretical and ideological shift undergone by Surrealism in these years, as I have traced it earlier in the present chapter. It might, however, be stressed that the "possession of space" (to use Fondane's expression) effected by sound films formed a fitting background of mood and thought for the evolving Surrealist ambition, in the course of the 1930s, to introduce psychic reality into the space of the visible and the social – an ambition for which the notion of the screen could no longer offer an adequate spatial paradigm.

Notes

1. It should be noted that Georges Bataille, however significant his contribution may have been to various critical discourses in the 1930s, remains quite tangential to a discussion focusing on the Surrealist screen paradigm and its eclipse. I have noted the impact of Bataille and of the *Documents* group on the development of both Miró and Masson in the late 1920s. However, my critical preference is to place Bataille apart from the development of Surrealism in the 1930s and to leave the arena to Breton and Dalí as the two major voices.

2. The Surrealist movement's involvement with the Communist Party and the whole thorny question of revolutionary aesthetics are subjects that have been dealt with extensively in several studies of the politics of Surrealism. I should single out Robert Short's early essay "The Politics of Surrealism, 1920–36" (1966). See also Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism*; Pierre, *Position politique de la peinture surréaliste*; Janover, *Surréalisme, art et politique*; Spiteri, "Battant comme une porte"; Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire*.
3. Breton, "Political Position of Today's Art" (1935), in *Manifestoes* 214; "Position politique de l'art d'aujourd'hui," *OC II* 418–419. *Position politique du surréalisme* was a book published by Breton in 1935 that included interviews, speeches and collaborative tracts. "Position politique de l'art aujourd'hui," as well as other speeches, was included in the 1962 edition of Breton's *Manifestes du surréalisme*.
4. Breton, *Communicating Vessels* 128; "Les Vases communicants," *OC II* 193.
5. Breton remained quite hesitant with regard to the question of priorities. In "What Is Surrealism?" a lecture given in Brussels and a pamphlet issued in 1934, he stated firmly that the "liberation of the mind, the express[ed] aim of surrealism, demands as a primary condition, in the opinion of the Surrealists, the liberation of man ... today more than ever the surrealists rely entirely, for the bringing about of human liberation, on the proletarian revolution." Breton, *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings* 115; "Qu'est-ce que le surréalisme?" *OC II* 230. In his "Speech to the Congress of Writers," given in Paris in June 1935, he argued that the "activity of interpreting the world must continue to be linked with the activity of changing the world," but emphasized that the poet's or artist's role is to "study the human problem in depth," and that "it is precisely the unlimited advance of his mind in this direction that has a potential value for changing the world ..." *Manifestoes* 240; "Discours au Congrès des écrivains," *OC II* 458.
6. The essay "Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité" was first published in *Commerce* 3 (Winter 1924) and later as a pamphlet in 1927. It was included later in the collection *Point du jour*. See *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 3–20; *OC II* 265–80.
7. Dalí, *Collected Writings* 231–4; "Objets surréalistes," *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (Paris) 3 (December 1931): 16–17 (henceforth *Le Surréalisme ASDLR*). For the Surrealist Object and Dalí's objects in theory and practice, see Finkelstein, *Surrealism and the Crisis of the Object*; idem, "The Incarnation of Desire: Dalí and the Surrealist Object"; Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*; Malt, *Obscure Objects of Desire*.
8. *L'Immaculée conception* (1930) was Breton and Eluard's joint undertaking to create a series of automatic texts for the purpose of a systematic exploration, through simulation, of some predetermined themes related to stages of human life and to known forms of insanity, such as, for instance, mental debility and delirium of interpretation. For *L'Immaculée conception*, see *OC I* 841–84; *The Automatic Message* 163–221.
9. By that time, Dalí's most precise and comprehensive exposition of the paranoiac process had appeared in "The Rotting Donkey" ("L'Ane pourri," 1930). See "The Rotting Donkey," in *Collected Writings* 223–6; "L'Ane pourri," in *Le Surréalisme ASDLR* 1 (July 1930): 9–12; *La Femme visible* 11–20.
10. In 1930 Pierre Mac Orlan wrote a preface for the volume *Atget photographe de Paris*, a monograph illustrated with prints from Berenice Abbott's Atget collection. Mac Orlan commented on what he considered to be the two different worlds that photographic views of Paris offer, "that of the day and that of the night." The contention that photography "makes use of light to study shadow," and that it "reveals the people of the shadows," which underlies Mac Orlan's notion of the "social fantastic," served some commentators in their reading of Brassai's work, but it is only peripheral to my present interests. See Mac Orlan, "Preface to Atget Photographe de Paris" (1930), in Phillips (ed.), *Photography in the Modern Era* 41–9.
11. These include a two-page spread entitled "Nuits parisiennes" (pp. 24–5); the three photographs accompanying Breton's text "La Nuit de tournesol" (pp. 50–52); two photographs inserted in a translation of the ninth dream in Young's "Night Thoughts" (pp. 30–31); and, under the heading of "Paris a sept collines aussi; où sont-elles dans la nuit?" (Paris too has seven hills; where are they in the night?) two photographs of gargoyles atop Notre-Dame seen against the background of a Parisian cityscape and an image of the Seine at night (pp 70–71).
12. Brassai himself attested to the fact that "people thought my photographs were 'Surrealist' because they showed a ghostly, unreal Paris, shrouded in fog and darkness. And yet the surrealism of my pictures was only reality made more eerie by my way of seeing." Quoted in Lionel-Marie, "Letting the Eye Be Light" 160.

13. Brassai's contribution to Breton's "La Nuit de tournesol," to go by his own recollection, consisted of images he already had of the sites Breton asked for; whether Breton was aware of this or not, these were the ones used (Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams* 149).
14. Breton's essay "Le Merveilleux contre le mystère" ("Marvelous versus Mystery," 1936) deals specifically with Symbolist poetry, and the "mystery" of the title has more to do with mystification, "Mystery as an end in itself, intentionally injected – at all costs – into art as into life." This is not the mystery to which I refer throughout the present study. See *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 6; OC III 658.
15. The various texts, later included in *L'Amour fou* (1937), appeared in *Minotaure* (no. 5, February 1934 and no. 7, June 1935) and *Documents* 34: *Intervention surréaliste*, Nouvelle série no. 1, June 1934.
16. This was a point made by Trotsky in their 1938 meeting in Mexico. However, Breton was able to convince Trotsky that he had not, after all, kept open in *L'Amour fou* a "little window on the beyond." See André Breton, "Visit with Leon Trotsky," the text of an address given in November 1938 at a meeting held in Paris by the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste, in *Free Rein (La Clé des champs)* 45; "Visite à Léon Trotsky," in OC III 702.
17. In his essay "The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting" (1939), Breton evokes the "need for a suggestive representation of the four-dimensional universe," this in relation to Einstein's concept of space-time, and he refers in particular to the representation of the four-dimensional universe as exemplified by Oscar Dominguez's method for obtaining "lithochronic surfaces" (SP 148–9).
18. Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," *One-Way Street and Other Writings* 226.
19. Rosalind Krauss, in citing this passage, argues that Benjamin's reference is to photographs in both *L'Amour fou* and *Nadja*. This is obviously incorrect, given that Benjamin's essay was published in 1929. Nevertheless, I am fully in agreement with her application of the image of the revolving door to *L'Amour fou*. See Krauss, "Nightwalkers" 34.
20. Breton, "The Automatic Message," in *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 130–131; "Le Message automatique," OC II 380. Breton lists the main shortcomings of the actual practice, including the use of automatic writing for the sake of "literary effects"; the half-measure of "encouraging the eruption of automatic language in the midst of more or less conscious developments"; and pastiches of automatic texts (131; 381).
21. It should also be noted that in this essay Breton does not hide his admiration for the "automatic" creations of mediums which he appears to consider as authentic; he even grants their makers a measure of critical freedom. While referring to mediumistic writing and drawing alike, he sees the drawing as more interesting than the writing and less contaminated by spiritualist clichés. The wealth of illustrations devoted to the art of mediums in the original publication of this essay in *Minotaure* testifies to this preference. See *Minotaure* 3–4 (December 1933): 54–65.
22. Jenny, "From Breton to Dali: The Adventures of Automatism" 107.
23. Breton, *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 43–4; "Exposition X ..., Y ..." in OC II 301.
24. "Victor Brauner" (1934), in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 121. At the time he wrote this introduction to the exhibition, Breton would have seen works by Brauner that exhibit a Chiricoesque space alongside others in which images are placed within rectangles formed by the division of the surface into a grid. One of the latter, for example, is *The Strange Case of Mr. K.* (1934), a work acquired by Breton at the time.
25. "The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting" (1939), in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 145.
26. "Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism" (1941), in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 68.
27. The divergence between Breton and Dalí on this issue has been dealt with, by myself and others, in publications on the subject of the Surrealist Object, and there is no need at this point to consider it further. See note 7 above.
28. Dalí, "Surrealist Objects," in *Collected Writings* 232; "Objets surréalistes," *Le Surréalisme ASDLR* 3 (December 1931): 16–17.
29. Dalí, "New General Considerations Regarding the Mechanism of the Paranoiac Phenomenon from the Surrealist Point of View," in *Collected Writings* 262; "Interprétation paranoïaque-critique de l'image obsédante 'L'Angélus' de Millet: Prologue: Nouvelles considérations générales sur le

mécanisme du phénomène paranoïaque du point de vue surréaliste," *Minotaure* (Paris) 1 (June 1933): 67.

30. "The Conquest of the Irrational" ("La Conquête de l'irrationnel"), *Collected Writings* 268.
31. Dalí, "Daydream," *Collected Writings* 152–3; "Rêverie," *Le Surréalisme ASDLR* 4 (1931): 32.
32. Breton, "The First Dalí Exhibit," *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 52–3; "Première exposition Dalí," in *OC II* 308–9.
33. Breton, "The X ..., Y ... Exhibit," in *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 43; "Exposition X ..., Y ..." in *OC II* 300. The text was first published as the preface to the exhibition catalogue *Exposition Delbrouck et M. Defize* (Paris, April 1929).
34. Dalí's basic aim, as presented in his statement of purpose, is to "systematize confusion" – to create a new order or system from elements taken in the external world that otherwise would be unrelated to one another – and thereby subvert the world of reality. *Collected Writings* 223; *Le Surréalisme ASDLR* 1 (July 1930): 9.
35. Dalí is expressly referring here to a sequence appearing early in the film *L'Age d'or*, in which there is an eruption of scatological imagery in connection with motifs associated with desire.
36. The paranoiac-critical activity is more fully defined in "The Conquest of the Irrational" as a "spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the interpretative-critical association of delirious phenomena," one that "organizes and objectifies in an exclusivist manner the unlimited and unknown possibilities of systematic associations of subjective and objective phenomena appearing to us as irrational solicitations, solely by means of the obsessive idea. Paranoiac-critical activity reveals by this method new and objective 'meanings' of the irrational, and it makes the very world of delirium pass tangibly to the level of reality" (*Collected Writings* 267–8).
37. Much of what I present in this section is treated more extensively in my article "Dalí's Small Stage of Paranoiac-Ceremonial."
38. In some paintings, small objects are enlarged as if seen in close-up on a table top, at times attaining gigantic proportions, especially when placed in close proximity to small human figures. Such, for instance, are the fried eggs in *Fried Eggs on the Plate without the Plate* (1932).
39. Dalí's predilection for the theater stage is also apparent in his constructions of boxes with painted glass panels, such as in *Babauo* (1932) and *The Little Theater* (1934), or, a few years later, in the enclosed box-like, or rather stage-like, conceptions of pictorial space in 1937 works such as *Queen Salomé* and *Herodias*. To these might be added the lines receding into space found in many works, which are not unlike the boards of a stage. While they clearly allude to similar motifs in de Chirico, it seems likely that Dalí was also fully aware of their stage-like character, the more so since the theatrical dimension of de Chirico's work was a notion current at the time, and Dalí would also have been acquainted with de Chirico's forays into the theater. See Martin, "On de Chirico's Theater."
40. See Gandelman, "The Gesture of Demonstration," in *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*, for an interesting treatment of the uses of the "gesture of demonstration" in Italian Quattrocento painting. Gandelman argues that this gesture of demonstration "not only appeals to us to focus our attention on a particular object or detail inside the painting. It also, by virtue of its merely being there as an important element in the painting, proclaims the whole picture to be an appeal structure and not an illusion of reality." Gandelman bases his classification of such gestures on the model of classification of speech acts developed by J.L. Austin. See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.
41. The displaying of some object for the benefit of the beholder is found in works such as *Cardinal, Cardinal!* (1934), in which Gala is seen holding an elongated, eel-like object for the viewer's perusal. In *Suburbs of a Paranoiac-Critical Town: Afternoon on the Outskirts of European History* (1936), Gala holds up a bunch of grapes, as a demonstration of the concept underlying the "morphological Echoes," that is, the formal analogies between the images occupying the space of the painting.
42. See Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí's Art and Writing*, especially Chapter 14, 190–210.
43. A Mannerist spatial form is discernible in 1930 paintings such as *The Font*, *The Bleeding Roses*, and *Vertigo – Tower of Pleasure*; later, in *The Dream* (1931), *Fried Eggs on the Plate without the Plate* (1932), *Masochist Instrument* (1933–34), *Gala and the Angelus of Millet ...* (1933), *Portrait of Gala with Two Lamb Chops Balanced on her Shoulder* (1933, Figure 8.3), *Atmospheric Skull Sodomizing a Grand Piano*

(1934), *The Signs of Anguish* (1934); and later still, in *The Invention of Monsters* (1937). It might also be noted that even the almost frontal conception of *Illumined Pleasures* (1929), for instance, with its framing devices that appear to lie parallel to the picture surface, is disturbed by an oblique view of the frames and a contrary sense of the shadows that evoke a zigzag movement into space.

44. Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" 4. Similar notions have been suggested by Norman Bryson in *Vision and Painting*.
45. It seems to me that Jay's conception is more applicable to Mannerism, or to those proponents of Baroque painting that appear to employ various spatial devices that are akin to those practised by Mannerist painters.
46. Jay, *Downcast Eyes* 47–8.
47. Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* 304.
48. For a more complete exposition of these developments, see Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí's Art and Writing*, especially Chapter 11, 140–61.
49. Finkelstein, "Salvador Dalí's Soft Forms, 1927–1940" 252–4; Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí's Art and Writing* 150–152.
50. For a full account of the various forms assumed by the anamorphoses, see Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphoses ou Thaumaturgus Opticus*.
51. Dalí, *Collected Writings* 254–5; the essay "Derniers modes d'excitation intellectuelle pour l'été 1934," appeared in *Documents 34: no. spécial Intervention surréaliste* 33–5.
52. See examples of conic anamorphoses in Baltrušaitis 141, 144.
53. The "conic anamorphosis" appears in the titles of a few drawings, for instance, *Conical Anamorphosis* (1933, The Salvador Dalí Museum, St Petersburg, Florida). It is also referred to in the title of the painting *Gala and the Angelus of Millet Immediately Preceding the Arrival of the Conic Anamorphosis* (1933), but this technique is nowhere utilized as such.
54. To his definition for the conic anamorphosis, Dalí added a "psychical" counterpart: "*Psychic anamorphosis*: Instantaneous reconstitution of desire deformed through its refraction by a cycle of memories," with a "cycle of masochistic memories" as one of its implementations. *Collected Writings* 255.
55. In an earlier article I suggested an analogy between the small figures strewn over a plane and engaged in combat in a few of these works (*Head of a Woman Having the Form of a Battle*, 1936; *Spain*, 1938), and Erhard Schön's woodcut *Puzzle Picture with Four Portraits* (c.1534), which shows a panoramic expanse of landscape strewn with small figures of men – bands of soldiers or marauders – roaming the desolate land. Viewed sideways the anamorphosis reveals portraits of kings and popes. This apocalyptic vision has much in common with the chaotic sense conveyed especially by *Spain*. See Finkelstein, "Dalí's Anthropomorphic Landscapes." For Schön's woodcuts, see Baltrušaitis 16–19.
56. Dalí, "Aerodynamic Apparitions of 'Beings-Objects,'" in *Collected Writings* 209; first published as "Apparitions aérodynamiques des 'Etres-objets,'" *Minotaure* (Paris) 6 (Winter 1934–35): 33–4.
57. "The Conquest of the Irrational" ("La Conquête de l'irrationnel"), *Collected Writings* 272.
58. "The Object as Revealed in Surrealist Experiment" (1932), *Collected Writings* 241.
59. Written in 1929–30, the essay was not published at the time, but it may be quite safely assumed that Dalí would have been acquainted with the ideas expressed in it. For a detailed analysis of various points of comparison between Bataille's essay and Dalí's concept of "beings-objects," see Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí's Art and Writing* 173–4.
60. Bataille, "The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade," in *Visions of Excess* 92–3.
61. "Concerning the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture" (1933) *Collected Writings* 193–4; "De la beauté terrifiante et comestible de l'architecture modern style," *Minotaure* (Paris) 3–4 (12 December 1933): 69.
62. Of the newcomers to the movement, there were artists who, at least at some point in the course of the 1930s, indulged in a form of illusionism – Victor Brauner, Oscar Dominguez, Jacques Hérold, Leonor Fini, Wilhelm Freddie, Remedios, and others.

63. Ernst's collage elements are, of course, more varied in their sources and techniques. The sources are dealt with quite exhaustively in Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*. See also Stokes, "La Femme 100 têtes by Max Ernst." Earlier and shorter treatments of sources are to be found in Hofmann, "Max Ernst and the Nineteenth Century" 11–13; Spies, "The Laws of Chance."
64. Stokes, "The Statue's Toe"; Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image* 160ff.
65. For instance, the two quite similar paintings, *The Torment of the Poet* and *The Poet's Enemy*, both of fall 1914 (Baldacci, *De Chirico*, Plates 79, 80). The first was shown in Paris in 1922, the second was purchased by Jean Cocteau.
66. There are other precedents of white silhouettes in Ernst. The shirt of the young man, who may be Ernst himself, in *Pietà or Revolution by Night* is white, and it may refer to an episode that took place during a séance in Breton's apartment in 1922 in which Ernst probably participated. Desnos was asked, "What do you know about Max Ernst?" and his response was "The white shirt of Fraenkel at the Salpêtrière." Breton reported this in "Entrée des médiums," *Littérature* 6 (1 November 1922) 10 (séance on 30 September 1922). The white figures in *La Femme 100 têtes* may have found their way into one of the dreams narrated by Breton in *Les Vases communicants*, where two little girls appear to him: "Naked, both of them, they form a white block moving in the most harmonious of ways." Breton, *Communicating Vessels* 58; OC II 144.
67. Aragon may have had this quality of the white figures in mind when he wrote that Ernst "tries to acclimate the phantom that he has just precipitated into a foreign landscape ..." "Challenge to Painting," in Lippard (ed.), *Surrealists on Art* 47; "La Peinture au défi," in *Les Collages* 62.
68. Such are, for example, the hands coming from beyond the frame in Plates 115 and 116; bodies cut off by the frame, as in Plate 143; truncated legs popping out of a box in Plate 4. Breton was fully aware of these forms of displacement. In his "Notice to the Reader of *The Hundred Headless Woman*" he declares that "Surreality will depend on our will toward complete disorientation from everything (and it goes without saying that you can disorient a hand by isolating it from its arm ...)," adding, probably with reference to the displacement of statues in Ernst's collages, that "for this statue to be really disoriented, it must first have lived a conventional life, in its conventional place." *Break of Day (Point du jour)* 48; OC II 305.
69. These disjunctions are too much in evidence to be glossed over. I disagree with Evan Maurer's assertion that, in *La Femme 100 têtes*, Ernst "was concerned that the collages should look like original images, and so took great pains to remove all traces of his cutting and pasting procedures." This might be true of *Une Semaine de bonté* or even of *Rêve d'une petite fille qui voulut entrer au Carmel*, but it is patently incorrect as far as Ernst's first collage novel is concerned. See Maurer, "Images of Dream and Desire" 64.
70. In the present study I cannot begin to consider this rather intricate aspect of *La Femme 100 têtes* or its broad range of imagery. Nor can I begin to do justice, further on in this discussion, to the thematic strength of *Rêve d'une petite fille* or *Une Semaine de bonté*. My sole purpose is to consider them from the point of view of the screen as a spatial paradigm, with this touching later on questions related to cinema and to the transition from the silent film to sound.
71. Ernst may have found a precedent for such a film in pictures in books by Frans Masereel, which clearly display their association with cinema. Such are *Groteskfilm* (published in Berlin in 1921), and *La Ville* (published in Paris in 1925). Several of the plates in the latter book refer specifically to the cinema; it also follows the model of city films made in the 1920s, such as Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* (1926) and Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927).
72. Desnos, "Eroticism," in Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and Its Shadow* 195; Desnos, *Les Rayons et les ombres* 29.
73. The Loplop figure, with its particular personal significance for Ernst, is far too involved to be adequately dealt with here. For an exhaustive treatment of the subject, see Spies, *Max Ernst, Loplop: The Artist in the Third Person*.
74. This, however, does not deny the value of the attempts on the part of several critics – notably Charlotte Stokes in her dissertation – to analyze various unifying elements in its design or "plot."
75. Artaud, "Motion Pictures and Witchcraft" 180; "Witchcraft and the Cinema," in Artaud, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 66. The quotation combines both translations.
76. Ernst probably made this collage novel around the time he was acting in a small role in Dalí's and Buñuel's film *L'Âge d'or* – a film, it may be recalled, distinguished by its vehement anticlerical tone. Of some significance for my discussion of Ernst is the combination in this film, one of the earliest

sound films made in France, of spoken dialogues and the use of intertitles. Also noteworthy is the rather innovative use of sound, with the disjunction of sound and image. These characteristics offer quite striking parallels to devices of narrative continuity utilized by Ernst.

77. For a thorough investigation of alchemical symbolism in *Une Semaine de bonté*, see Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*.
78. I should mention in this respect Dalí's "Short Critical History of Cinema," published as a preface for his film scenario "Babaouo" (1932), where he declares that the "cinema is infinitely poorer and more limited, with regard to the expression of the real functioning of thought, than writing, painting, sculpture, and architecture." See *Collected Writings* 137. See also Artaud's "The Premature Old Age of the Cinema" (1933), and several articles by Benjamin Fondane, to which I turn below.
79. Goudal, "Surrealism and Cinema" 355.
80. Artaud, "Cinema and Reality," in *Selected Writings* 150.
81. "Witchcraft and the cinema," in Artaud, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 65; also, "Motion Pictures and Witchcraft," 178. I am quoting the *Tulane Drama Review* translation.
82. "The Premature Old Age of the Cinema" (1933) 123. It should be emphasized that Artaud insisted that "pure cinema" or "absolute cinema" – referring to the experimental abstract film – was an error. This position was shared, as noted in Chapter 1, by most of the Surrealists, who objected also to the art film, especially as espoused by French "impressionist" filmmakers, who valued visual rhythms, surface compositional patterns, and effects such as dissolves, fades, irises, blurred or out-of-focus shots, and superimpositions. All these were devices that asserted the surface, the screen, but in a way that was quite removed from the Surrealist screen paradigm.
83. Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. I, 426.
84. The second volume of Richard Abel's anthology, *French Film Theory*, presents the full range of these debates.
85. See Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. II, 51; see also Fondane, *Ecrits pour le cinéma* 81.
86. Fondane, "Cinéma 33," *Ecrits pour le cinéma* 99–100.
87. Georges Neveux, "The Tunnel 1930–1940," in Abel (ed.), *French Film Theory*, vol. II, 119.

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