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INTRODUCTION

Surrealism & Anti-colonialism
A Long View

> How we read Surrealism today…is neither a purely textual question nor a purely historical one. It is both; and by the questions we – or I – ask about Surrealist texts are determined both by Surrealism's history (itself 'to be read') and by our (my) own.
>
> – Susan R. Suleiman[1]

From before the official beginnings of the Surrealist movement, its future members denounced European imperialism. Some of the last manifestoes published by the Parisian Surrealist group supported Vietnamese and Algerian struggles for independence. From 1919 then, anti-colonialism was a line of critique that ran through Surrealism during the movement's first two decades, and continued through the era of decolonisation after the Second World War until the official closure of the Surrealism in the1960s.[2] Yet this narrative has yet to take shape. It is not commonly remarked that over a span of more than forty years the Surrealists published anti-colonial tracts and staunch criticism of the West, but it is routinely observed that in their collections, exhibitions and artwork they included objects and referred to the cosmologies of non-Western cultures. This latter tendency is often dubbed 'primitivism' and regarded negatively, and seen in the same light as the 'primitivism' of modernist movements that came before Surrealism.

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[1] Susan R. Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and The Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), xv-xvi.

[2] Jean Schuster officially announced that 'historical surrealism' was over in *Le Monde*, on October 4, 1969.

Synthetic readings of the aesthetic and the political currents of Surrealism are relatively rare. Consistent with this general paucity there have been only a few attempts to reconcile the political and aesthetic aspects of Surrealism's encounters with 'the cultural Other' and, as yet, few attempts to theorise these as a mode of cultural critique that prefigured or approximated a 'post-colonialist' discourse, poetics and aesthetics. To date, postcolonial studies have seldom been in productive conversation with Surrealism. A reason could be that Surrealism has been discredited from many sides, with Marxist intellectuals denying its revolutionary force and, more latterly, cultural theorists denouncing its 'primitivism'. Both discourses feed into postcolonial studies. Within literary scholarship there are studies relating to Surrealism and post-colonialism: a number of scholars have approached the writings of black poets and intellectuals who became Surrealists or were deeply influenced by Surrealism, but these are for the most part specialised historical studies of individual trajectories rather than studies of shared ideas. Carrie Noland writes,

> To a greater extent than has been recognized, surrealism and the debates it ignited played a large role in the development of a postcolonial theory in both French and English traditions. For critics from Sartre to Fanon to Said, surrealism represents the pinnacle of antinarrative poetics, the poetics of the nondescriptive, nonmimetic, and nonethnographic. When Fanon states in *Wretched of the Earth* that a poetry 'full of images' is 'a blind alley', and when Said, forty years later, reiterated in *Culture and Imperialism* that poetry wields a nonteleological, 'nomadic, migratory, and anti-narrative energy,' the type of poetic language being singled out – either to be rejected or celebrated – is one that cannot be 'exhausted' by recourse to its 'literal meaning,' it is a surrealist language that swerves away from 'the reality of its content' (Breton, 'Misère de la poésie').[3]

In Surrealism pictorial and poetic composition are not distinct or discrete activities as both are modes of expression that engage in 'la poésie': for example, Breton grounded Ernst's collage activities within the literary tradition that claims Lautréamont and Rimbaud as its founding fathers.[4] Nonetheless, much subsequent commentary and critique of Surrealism has stuck to disciplinary lines. As well as in tracts and poetic works, Surrealism's anti-colonial position was manifest in their periodicals, objects and exhibitions. There has been some attention to these, but the approaches tend to be focused on particular episodes.

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[3] Carrie Noland, 'Red Front/Black Front, Aimé Césaire and the Affaire Aragon,' *Diacritics* Volume 36, Number 1 (Spring 2006), 64 – 84, at 75.

[4] Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998) pp. 3 – 12 and passim.

The primary goal for this thesis then is to present a long view of Surrealism's anti-colonialism, as it was realised in the movement's diverse outputs. I have underpinned much of the formal discussion with references to concepts about space and subjectivity that are, in my opinion, intrinsic to the formal play of terms in Surrealist modes of collage and détournement. The aim here is to trace a long line of development through Surrealism, pinpointing its modes of anti-colonial signification.

In the first six chapters, the thesis delineates the development of Surrealist anti-colonial sentiment from the movement's inception until a point in time close to the death of André Breton, thereby paving the ground for a productive link to be made between Surrealism and postcolonial theory. By dint of his longstanding adherence to Surrealism and his keen exchanges with other thinkers, not just his position as founder and leader of the movement, Breton's place in the narrative of Surrealism's anti-colonialism is nodal. He was receptive to radical thinking and alert to the ideas of others, even in the face of intense personal and ideological differences. Figures of looser and shorter adherence to the Surrealist movement made signal contributions to its philosophical and political debates and its anti-colonial stance: such luminaries as Michel Leiris, Georges Bataille and Aimé Césaire were highly influential, and arguably more identifiable as anti-colonial thinkers than Breton. While I have neither the space to roundly elucidate their anti-colonial thought in all aspects, nor to outline their biographical connections to Surrealism in great detail, I have signalled the importance of these and other figures by focussing on key aspects of their thinking. My aim has been to point to ways in which their ideas inflected the politics and poetics of Surrealist anti-colonialism and, concomitantly, to emphasise their connectedness and indebtedness to Surrealism. I have tended to focus on points of intersection between thinkers: Breton's path crosses those of all the others and thus provides much of the connective tissue for my narrative.

At the time of writing, two monographs relating to Surrealism and colonialism have been published in English. Louise Tythacott's *Surrealism and the Exotic*, of 2003, is a work that is equivocal about Surrealism's anti-colonialism, and is not intended as an account of Surrealism's formal innovation.[5] David Bate's *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent*, of 2004, emphases the deconstructive effects of Surrealist photography, presenting a much more positive

[5] Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

and original view of Surrealism as a mode of dissent against colonialism, its temporal parameters though are confined to the 1920s and Thirties.[6]

To reappraise Surrealism in terms of its anti-colonialism entails a deliberate reframing of it as an object of analysis and a reinterpretation of data, much of which has already been analysed. Taking a lens to Surrealism's anti-colonialism demands identifying fixed ideas and interrogating them. To date, scholarly inattention to Surrealism's anti-colonialism is the result of restrictive conceptual framing by dominant methodologies that gave their stamp to post-war reception and interpretation of Surrealism. Pens were pushed according to the energies of doctrinaire Marxism, and post-Marxist tendencies in Frankfurt School criticism, Existentialism, and Greenbergian formalism. Later critiques of Surrealism were propelled by certain brands of liberal feminism, post-structuralism and postmodernist perspectives. These theoretical prisms have largely dictated conceptions of the relationship between politics and art, and the uptake of restricted conceptions of Surrealism has been widespread.

Within dominant discourses, there is a fixed idea that Surrealism arose as a revolutionary energy in response to the First World War, and then degenerated into a de-politicised period artistic style prior to the outbreak of the Second World War. In this narrative of early demise, a deciding moment is the split that occurred in the movement with the Second Manifesto in 1929. According to the *doxa*, this ruction cleaved the movement into Bretonian idealism versus Bataillan materialism. Such simplifications have generated a series of partial and partisan perspectives on Surrealism, many of which have been unaccommodating to its objects and poetic writing and especially inattentive to the complex developments in Surrealist expression after the mid 1930s.

Post 1935, irrespective of its estrangement from the Communist Party, the Surrealist movement continued to issue politically motivated tracts, and there were profitable collaborations between Breton and Bataille, and interchanges between their ideas. Moreover, Breton and Bataille found themselves allied in a debate against Jean-Paul Sartre in the post-war era about art and politics. Surrealism had indeed been popularised as a style and a fashion influence in the 1930s, but that should not obscure the fact that it continued to develop formal strategies, areas of theoretical

[6] David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London and New York: Taurus, 2004).

speculation and staunch political positions. Despite being pilloried on all sides throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Surrealism remained a future-oriented movement: its power for dissent, as well as its sense of social mission is clear in its anti-colonial thrust.

Some of the ideas that emerged in the immediate post-World War II era, and which have since prevailed in the standard historical accounts of Surrealism and its political engagement, are interrogated in Chapter One. There, I first take up historical treatments that present Surrealism as a depoliticised movement after its break with the Communist Party in 1935. Second, I counter an orthodox view of Surrealism as a period style, and point to a standard curatorial framework that privileges the visual forms of Surrealism at the expense of the movement's critical impetus. Last, the first Chapter opens onto a discussion of theorists who have debated the historicity of Surrealism as an avant-garde movement, taking up Peter Bürger's and Jürgen Habermas's related views on the supposed failure of Surrealism, views that gained much credence in the 1970s and 1980s. Both commentators present highly pessimistic views of the critical role of 'post-avant-garde' or 'postmodern' art. I argue that the methodological frame with which they designate Surrealism as an 'avant-garde' negates a notion of artistic agency based on desire over rationalism. This is an idea perpetuated within some contemporary commentary about Surrealism and anti-colonialism, distorting the terms of the discussion.

To acknowledge Surrealism's anti-colonial activities in the latter half of the Thirties is to counter the claim that Surrealism's political engagement ceased then. Its anti-colonial expressions receive only glancing attention in Marxist or Marxist-influenced accounts, if at all. They *have* gained some attention though, from scholars of cultural studies. However, a different *idée fixe* besets much of the literature from this quarter. A good proportion of writers who have approached Surrealism's engagement with other cultures have dismissed their aesthetic explorations out of hand, by taking the view that Surrealist anti-colonial political postures are contradicted by their 'primitivism'.

In Chapter Two, I review this corpus of critical literature. In it I hear echoes of a debate that peaked earlier, in which there were claims of Surrealism's purported misogyny, with similar methodological weaknesses. Comparable to an almost puritanical sense of offence at the 'women shot and painted' in the Surrealist cannon

of images, there has been a sense of disapprobation expressed over the Surrealists' penchant for collecting and displaying non–Western objects, and over what they sometimes enthusiastically referred to as 'savage art'. Again, this commentary takes a short view of Surrealism by fixing on its outputs and activities in the 1920s and early Thirties. Scholars coming from a cultural studies perspective have addressed Surrealism from what is intended to be a deconstructive standpoint, yet many show a lack of cognisance of the complexity of Surrealist signification or an unwillingness or inability to address its formal aspects. Ranjana Khanna acknowledges this lack of accommodation to Surrealism within post-colonial studies, pointing to an inhospitality to works of art, and its frequent inability to give a simultaneous analysis of the political and the aesthetic. Khanna writes,

> Much of the scholarship in post-colonial studies, whether in the literary context in which it was initially developed, or in the cultural studies, art history and historiographical fields in which it now finds itself, has often failed to allow for a reading of the aesthetic and the political to occur simultaneously. If the dominant aesthetics of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French painting is considered Orientalist, there has been an acknowledgement of the significance of the dominant ideology that reveals in art retrospectively a colonial legacy. But at times context and identity have begun to overshadow the work, representing a kind of inhospitality to the object under consideration. [7]

Here Khanna points to the way that the reading of an object can be sacrificed to a *telos* of partisan liberation politics. Whilst the Surrealists' collection and display of exotic objects have often been dismissed as 'primitivism' and 'Orientalism', and the encounters they have staged with other cultures construed as thoroughly imbricated by colonialism, it is clear that the attraction that exotic objects held for many Surrealists went far beyond a pecuniary interest: it reflected not only their cosmological concern with the power of myth, but a recognition of the power of objects as points of connection to an imagined, or not–yet–imagined realm. Thus an element of ambiguity hinges on Surrealism's encounters with other cultures, which was manifest in their predilection for exotic objects, but which extended and deepened to a broader and more speculative exploration of the relations of objects in space. To simply dismiss their artistic experiments in relation to their election of non–Western objects for inclusion into their range of 'Surrealist Objects' is to ignore the operation of desire in the Surrealists' activity. It is also to miss the open-ended and provisional nature of the Surrealist object.

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[7] Ranjana Khanna, 'Latent Ghosts and the Manifesto: Baya, Breton and reading for the future', *Art History* 26, no. 2 (April 2003), 238 – 280.

Today there certainly are contradictions for us in the Surrealists' dealings with 'the cultural Other', but there are good reasons to search for the productive aspects of contradiction in this regard, as we negotiate our supposedly *post* colonial condition in the present. 'The characteristic of Breton is to have held irreconcilable tendencies firmly together', says Maurice Blanchot in a sometimes slightly exasperated, but ultimately very positive, reflective essay on Surrealism.[8] Surrealism supports and nourishes a high degree of ambiguity as it seeks 'a certain point of mind in which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease being perceived as contradictory'.[9]

Chapter Three draws on theoretical approaches that have attended to the unconscious pulsation of Surrealism to account for its formal innovations and the way the Surrealists drew on, and referred to, other cultures.[10] These theorists affirm a view that a variety of Surrealist modes of aesthetic and poetic production contributed positively to its anti-colonial politics. Rosalind Krauss has made key contributions to this area of scholarship, as have Hal Foster and James Clifford. Clifford's seminal scholarship explores the links between Surrealism and ethnography, and is a keystone in the literature. In his view, 'ethnographic Surrealism' was a discursive field that permitted radical experimentation with identity, alterity and territoriality, and thus posed a genuine critique of the European *logos*. Recent commentators have provided close descriptive accounts of Surrealist artworks and manifestos, which have extended the discussion of the radicalism of Surrealist signification and the way

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[8] Maurice Blanchot, 'Reflections on Surrealism,' in *The Work of Fire,* translated by Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 90.

[9] André Breton, *Les Vases communicants* (Paris: des Presses Modernes, 1932), published in English as *Communicating Vessels,* trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris, with notes and introduction by Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln, Nebraska and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

[10] Pivotal Anglophone works that served to redefine the march of Surrealism were Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); and Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). These works have served underscore the profound power of the surrealising unconscious and to mark out a terrain in which Surrealism functions variously as symptom, counter, contradiction, and transgressive 'other' to modernism. Subsequent important works, which build upon the scholarly tradition set in play by Krauss and Foster are: Mary Ann Caws, *The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997). Caws establishes connections between 'the look' – the visual address of Surrealism, and baroque forms of representation. Kirsten Strom, *Making History: Surrealism and the Invention of a Political Culture* (Maryland, University Press of America, 2002). Strom makes the case that as well as buttressing their project through the self-conscious construction of a group identity (through group portraits and the like), the Surrealists sought to establish a long historical lineage through appropriating historical 'members'. Thus they sought to depict themselves as heirs to a long proto-Surrealist tradition, but moreover they went about creating a counter canon.

its poetics reveal and erode received imperialist ideas. A growing branch of scholarship is tracing the connections between Surrealism and the Négritude movement. By focusing on the way Surrealism engaged with non-European cultural forms, this thesis seeks to make a contribution to a seam of revisionist research, which has its roots in the mid 1980s. The viewpoints drawn on in Chapter Three permit speculation about whether it is meaningful to speak of a Surrealist post-colonial aesthetics.

Chapters Four to Six approach Surrealism's politics and aesthetics by framing a long view of its anti-imperial, anti-colonial tendencies. These three chapters connect events and data in the form of tracts, essays, objects and exhibitions, with an emphasis on Surrealism's art and design properties, in order to demonstrate that its use of collage was not at odds with its anti-colonialism, but integral to it. Writers with other agendas have afforded the same data peripheral glances or focused upon particular object or episodes, but my attention lies with the play of signification that occurs in Surrealism's anti-colonialist gestures, and in describing and analysing their means as they developed them over time. While Surrealist collage and assemblage is assuredly well recognised and commonly emulated, Surrealist appropriation and operations of displacement are more complex than often given credit for. In these Chapters I have addressed various modalities of Surrealist collage in their use for social commentary and destabilising effect. Given the forty-year scope of the trajectory covered in the three central chapters, I have been obliged to present much of the material in a fairly selective and summary way, but at certain points in the thesis I have engaged in descriptive analysis

Certain trends emerge in content and form over the different decades. In the 1920s the Surrealists engaged in a brand of 'counter-Orientalism' which drove at the heart of French nationalism and a broader set of cultural values – religious and racist – that underpinned France's 'civilizing' colonial mission, with its superficial ethos of universalism and progressivism. Here we see Surrealism's anti-Enlightenment values mobilised for cultural critique, and this is described in Chapter Four, where the discussion is focused on appropriation, juxtaposition and mimicry, with reference to Surrealist collecting, early exhibitions, and the design and content of *La Révolution Surréaliste.*

Chapter Five focuses on Surrealism's second decade. The 1930s saw the 'dissident Surrealists' exploring highly disruptive and aggressive discursive practices in the

periodical *Documents*, and for the Bretonian group this was a moment of intense experimentation with objects – exotic and Surrealist – and the beginnings of explorations into theatrical exhibition design. Their preoccupation with the circulation of objects and the cultural imbrications of space came about at the time when they grappled most desperately with the contradictions of their political position as intellectuals. Already, even before the era of war exile, the Surrealists experienced a form of intellectual exile, and a poetics/aesthetics of dispossession enters their spatial experimentation prior to the Parisian group's wartime dispersal.

Surrealist signification sought to explode the binary of 'Occident' and 'Orient', and the notions of subjectivity and alterity that arise out of it. I argue that the Surrealist enterprise and its collage aesthetic (in an expanded sense) put objects in circulation such that their meanings and mode of address were, and remain, latent; beyond artistic intentionality and open to interpretation and re-signification. Chapter Six develops the theme and formal poetics/aesthetics of *dépaysement* (displacement, expatriation and statelessness), and traces Surrealism's anti-colonial political gestures from the 1940s until the 1960s, with reference to exhibitions curated by Breton, informed by Bataille and designed by Marcel Duchamp.

Focal points for the Surrealists' post–Second World War political activities were France's seven-year war to maintain colonial possession of Indochina, and the Algerian War. Two exhibitions in particular, held in 1947 and 1959, referenced those struggles for self-determination and framed them within a broader critique of post-war imperialism and the stifling French conservatism and chauvinism of the time. This period of Surrealist activity has been the subject of a few vibrant and groundbreaking studies lately, but it remains under theorised.[11] Recent studies have begun to explore the political ramifications of Surrealist exhibitions, and I extend upon these accounts by arguing that from 1938, Surrealist exhibition design related the movement's mature speculative thought on embodied subjectivity to political oppression. Both Roger Caillois and Jacques Lacan moved in Surrealism's orbit in the late 1930s and 1940s, and I have set out to demonstrate how their writings on subjectivity and space infused the Surrealists' visual and spatial experimentation post–World War II.

[11] Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2001); Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938 – 1968* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005).

In depicting Surrealism's anti-colonialism as a positive vector, I do so with the awareness that it is a repressed storyline that has come of its time, and if we read Surrealism in this way, it is because we demand something of it in the present.

My own drive to try to mine Surrealism for its postcolonial implications is firmly situated in personal and geopolitical terms, as a second generation Australian of mixed European heritage.[12] Hybridity, *bricolage*, *métissage* and recycling – these notions centre upon issues of identity and Otherness and lie at the heart of much contemporary art. As practical means, appropriation, collage, assemblage, installation and museum 'intervention', as well as artistic collaboration, are modalities for art making and exhibition that define the norms of 'contemporary art practice'. In terms of concept and strategy there is, on the one hand, an obviousness in identifying these tendencies as having their roots in Surrealism. Nonetheless, such strategies are generally described as 'postmodern' and that designation generally does not afford a full reading of their political address or subjective element. Here then, there is a structure of denial and repetition: the Surrealist legacy is in partial eclipse. Whether or not we wish to seek to identify a 'postcolonial aesthetic,' a construct that I resist, Surrealist models of praxis have currency for artists whose work is concerned with encountering difference, constructing identities, and envisioning history – and the future – differently.

In Chapter Seven I have set the discussion of contemporary art locally. My rationale is to extend and apply the generalised discussion in Chapter Six about Surrealism and *dépaysement* to my own locale and moment: to bring the argument home and close to the present. The chapter links together works by Imants Tillers, Gordon Bennett, and Tracey Moffatt. Though my observations apply to a much wider range of Australian artists, I chose these three because of the way their practices intersect – with each other's, and within critical debate. Also, there were pragmatic reasons as these acclaimed Australians have been the subject of quite recent large-scale survey exhibitions. As well, they are the focus of intense critical commentary. Each of these three celebrated artists, in their way, deals with the repressed of Australian history and with the vestiges of colonial oppression that we live with today.

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[12] I find the terminology confusing: I was born in Australia of migrant parentage, which makes me a *second* generation Australian.

CHAPTER ONE

Surrealism, Politics & Psychoanalysis
Marxist Historiography & its Limitations

The work of art is valuable only insofar as it is vibrated by the reflexes of the future.

– André Breton.[1]

Even when they were closest to the Communist Party, the Surrealists' conception of political commitment extended beyond party allegiance. After their departure from the Parti communiste française (PCF) in 1935 they maintained a strong line of political activism and cultural critique as an unaligned vocal force, producing manifestos and other expressions of political dissent for more than thirty years. In the name of Surrealism and 'true Marxism', Breton spoke out forcibly against Stalinism at the Moscow trials of August 1936 and January 1937, at a time when many intellectuals on the left were mute apparatchiks, gagged by Party discipline. In 1938 Breton collaborated with Léon Trotsky to write *For an Independent Revolutionary Art*. After World War II, the Surrealists continued to campaign against colonialism. Yet, despite this and other evidence of ongoing political activity on the part of the Surrealists, there persists a conventional wisdom that Surrealism became apolitical in the latter 1930s and was disbanded with the onset of World War II.

[1] André Breton, cited in Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations*, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico 1992), 242.

Speaking in the 1950s, Breton wryly referred to Surrealism's *premature gravediggers*. He was in no doubt that the periodisation of the movement which sounded its death knell at the outbreak of the Second World War, or even before, was a programmatic suppression of Surrealism as it still lived.[2] There continues to be a widely accepted Marxist–inflected narrative which runs that in 1925 the Surrealists staunchly matched their political goals to those of organised Communism, but by the mid– to late Thirties had renounced their political aspirations in favour of making art. This version of history is restricted in its lines to the tendentious interactions between the Surrealists and the PCF, with little or no linkage of Surrealism's political conviction to its artistic or literary products. The first part of this chapter examines four texts that have chronicled the history of Surrealism's political engagement in this way: by Maurice Nadeau (1945), Robert Short (1966), Helena Lewis (1988) and Susan Suleiman (1991).[3]

I argue that not only do these accounts present a truncated narrative, they also fail to seriously engage with Surrealism's critique of Marxism. In particular, they do not adequately take into account the Surrealists' attempt to reinvigorate Marxist thinking through coupling it with the Freudian theory of the Unconscious, nor do they regard signification in poetic or visual language as politically effective. Moreover, they give inadequate coverage to Surrealism's anti-colonial activities. In the present chapter my discussion dwells on Breton's politicised text 'Limites non frontiers du Surréalisme' of 1936, a statement that encapsulates Surrealism's political position at a moment the four chroniclers wish to identify with Surrealism's renunciation of politics.

Counter to the four chroniclers, other key works in the secondary literature enable broader historical analyses of Surrealism's political dimension. Some of these point to, or engage with, primary Surrealist texts (not just the more outwardly polemical tracts) that signal Surrealism's reconsiderations of Marxism. Gérard Durozoi's *History of the Surrealist Movement* has an extensive historical scope.[4] An anthology

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[2] André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism with André Parinaud and Others* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), translated and with an introduction by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe, 1993).

[3] This is not an exhaustive list of such historical treatments of Surrealism, but these are four oft-cited texts that make the claims I have identified.

[4] Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* (*Histoire du mouvment surréaliste,* Éditions Hazan, 1997, translated by Alison Anderson, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Durozoi's major chronological account of Surrealism spans the years from 1919 until 1969. It redresses the historicisation of Nadeau's *History*, with two of its six

entitled *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, comprises a collection of fourteen essays and most of these extend the limits of the standard historical treatment of Surrealism and politics: some of them have a direct bearing on the topic of Surrealism and anti-colonialism.[5]

The second part of this chapter briefly outlines the way that mainstream formalist curatorial treatments undergird the idea that Surrealism had become a period style by the mid or late 1930s. In the Thirties, several survey exhibitions presented Surrealism in the context of other forms of visual modernism, to the neglect of its broader social and intellectual aspirations. However, while such exhibitions were taking place, the Surrealists themselves were developing their own brand of exhibit in defiance of formalist conventions. They theatrically reinscribed the gallery as a critical cultural and social space, in a way that contravened the idea of the visual autonomy of art works (a theme that is developed in Chapters Five and Six, with reference to Surrealism's post World War II anti-colonial politics).

The third part of the present chapter takes up the idea that the failure of Surrealism lay in its capitulation to the institutions of bourgeois art, an idea propounded by Peter Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* of 1974, and taken up by Jürgen Habermas in the following decade. Both authors take their bearings from Frankfurt School Critical Theory of the 1930s, but on the subject of Surrealism they depart from the earlier positions of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, who were more accommodating toward Surrealism and attentive to its psychoanalytic aspect, especially Benjamin.

Influenced by Surrealism, Benjamin saw the possibility for an oppositional order in the Freudian Unconscious and obsolete material of social life. Adorno expressed ambivalence about the potential for assimilating psychoanalytic method into a post-Marxian critique, but he recognised Surrealism's ability to mobilise subjective experience through aesthetic means against rationalism. Since the mid 1980s there has been a recuperation of the Unconscious as a historical force that is pivotal to

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chapters devoted to the post World War II era. Apart from its broad scope, it is a richly illustrated work that leans towards a visual account of the movement as well as a political one. If it has a shortcoming, it is that it gives less attention to the literary outputs of Surrealism than the visual, but it is an invaluable reference with no equivalent, and this thesis relies heavily on it for historical data.

[5] Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, eds. *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

Surrealism and its signifying functions. The driving scholarly works of Denis Hollier, Hal Foster and of Rosalind Krauss are keystones in the contemporary theorisation of Surrealism. This chapter concludes with Krauss's counter to Bürger's theorisation of Surrealism, and points to its implications for considering Surrealism and anti-colonial politics.

Four Marxist Chroniclers

One of Surrealism's principal 'premature gravediggers' was Maurice Nadeau. The core theme of his classic study, *Histoire du mouvement surréaliste* (*The History of Surrealism*) is Surrealism's torturous relationship to Communism.[6] His chronology traces the tensions that played out between Surrealism's revolutionary tendency and a Communist conception of revolution. Writing in 1945, Nadeau concludes that Surrealism had dispersed by the Second World War, and he sounds the movement's death-knell.[7] His *Histoire* conceives of the Surrealist's foray into politics in narrowly party-political terms, and of the movement as primarily a literary one. Gérard Durozoi passes a comment that endorses Breton's own view of Nadeau's sort of historicism, saying, 'In 1945 the suggestion that surrealism was not only finished as a movement but also outmoded clearly served the interests of the communist intellectuals as well as the existentialists. Sartre, who was preparing his periodical *Les temps modernes* (the first issue came out in October 1945), had cordial relations with Leiris and Queneau. Hostilities began when Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la literature?* (What is Literature?) was published, in 1947, a thread I shall pick up briefly in Chapter Six.[8]

Nadeau's account foregrounds particular occurrences of 1925 as markers of Surrealism's conversion to Communism. These events are similarly treated in Robert Short's highly influential essay of 1966, 'The Politics of Surrealism, 1920 – 36', which succinctly describes the Surrealists' political activities during the sixteen years within its scope. Helena Lewis's monograph on Surrealism and politics, *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism*, follows similar lines. Lewis's focus is restricted to Surrealist tracts and written statements, and discussion of the machinations that occurred between the Surrealists and other politicised intellectuals and the PCF

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[6] Maurice Nadeau, *History of Surrealism* (*Histoire du surréalisme*, 1945), translated by Richard Howard with an introduction by Roger Shattuck (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
[7] Breton's remarks about Nadeau's book are derogatory; see Polizzotti pp. 99 and 165 – 6.
[8] Durozoi, 443.

members.[9] Consistent with Nadeau's, these later accounts relate the story of the failure of Surrealism to assimilate its aims with those of orthodox Communism.[10]

Surrealism's political inauguration reputedly took place in 1925. That year, a serious rebellion broke out in the Rif region of Morocco. The Surrealists' objections to French interference in the Rif are brushed over in Nadeau's treatment, as though the Moroccan war provided merely an opportune moment for the Surrealists to fall in with other leftist groups rather than demonstrating genuine commitment to an anti-colonial cause. Nadeau points to a decisive transition to Communist adherence in Surrealism during this phase. Following his version of events, subsequent writers have viewed the significance of this episode as the Surrealist's first foray into Communism – as distinct from firming an anti-colonial stance already rehearsed in their writings.[11] (In Chapter Four this episode will be given an alternative inflection to demonstrate the earlier development of Surrealist's particularly anti-colonial political stance).

As well as brushing over the particularly anti-colonial aspect of Surrealism, Nadeau's assembly of the data excludes any consideration of Breton's deep-seated reservations over the Communists' ideological position during the period when the Surrealists were trying to secure their position as 'fellow travellers'. Short and Lewis largely reinscribe the lines of Nadeau's account. In her version, which is more extensive than Nadeau's, Lewis too emphasises the eagerness with which the Surrealists sought to be embraced by Communism and to demonstrate their revolutionary *bona fides*. She acknowledges that Breton strove to do so on his own terms, however, and offers a fleeting discussion of some of his reservations at the time.[12]

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[9] Helena Lewis, *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988).

[10] Robert Short, 'The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-36,' originally published in the *Journal of Contemporary History* I: 2 (September, 1966): 3 – 25. Reprinted in Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, eds., *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 18 – 36.

[11] This is true of the other commentators under scrutiny here (Lewis and Short), and similar views pervade the more general literature on the movement, even the most intelligent accounts. For example, in her very brief summation of these events, Chénieux-Gendron also reads them as a turning point in aligning the Surrealists with several leftist journals, and thence aligning with the Communist idea of revolution. See Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism,* translated by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 42 – 43.

[12] Lewis, 50 – 54.

Durozoi's more recent historical chronicle provides greater insight into the ambivalence of the Surrealists' early attitude toward Communism than the trail blazed by Nadeau. Durozoi acknowledges the statements by Breton that are conspicuously absent or minimised in Nadeau's, Short's and Lewis's accounts. These show Breton's genuine and sustained attempts to recast a crude opposition between the material and the ideal. Through the brief references he makes to the anti-colonial tracts and statements throughout the entire period he covers, Durozoi's account permits a long view of the Surrealists' attention to colonial issues, before, and well after 1935. Another corrective is Michael Löwy's close analysis of the political attitudes of the early years of Surrealism.[13]

Most chroniclers tell of how the Surrealists met regularly with other leftist groups in 1925 – the 'Clartéists' and the *Philosophies* group, in order to establish common goals and a combined group discipline.[14] These young intellectuals wished to align themselves with the PCF, but collectively resolved not to join it. To do so, they thought, would sacrifice the particular youthful and creative character of their united number.[15] Nonetheless, they came together to publish a tract whose expression of revolution was closely akin to that of the Party: the Surrealists, the Clartéists and the *Philosophies* group, together with another young group behind the periodical *Correspondences*, published the tract *Revolution d'abord et toujours!* Four thousand copies were printed and sent to newspapers, politicians and to the subscribers of *Clarté* and *La Révolution surréaliste*. It was published in *L'Humanité* on September 21, and then in *Clarté* and *La Révolution surréaliste* on October 15.[16]

Nadeau privileges this tract and, taking it on its own as he does, *Revolution d'abord et toujours* does seem to demonstrate the Surrealists' clear decision to toe the Party line. It reads in part:

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[13] Michael Löwy, 'The Revolution and the Intellectuals: Pierre Naville's Revolutionary Pessimism,' *Morning Star* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 46 – 50.

[14] Clarté was a liberal movement founded after World War I by Henri Barbusse and animated by the writers Jules Romains, Romain Rolland, and Paul Vaillant-Couturier (a founder of the French Communist Party). It was first intended to be an international pacifist movement that would bring together intellectuals from different nations. In the 1920s young Communists became influential members, and the group became increasingly orthodox in its Communist leanings. The *Clarté* journal was not an official communist journal, but had a close relationship with the Party. See Lewis, chapter three 'Surrealists and the Clarté Movement', pp. 37 – 54.

[15] Durozoi, 129 – 130; Short, 22 – 23.

[16] A translation of part of Revolution d'abord et toujours! was published as 'Revolution Now and Forever', in Franklin Rosemont, ed., *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings* (Chicago: Monad Press, 1978), 318 – 20. See also Durozoi, p. 126.

> We cannot conceive of the Revolution in any other form than its economic and social definition: the Revolution is the sum total of events that determine the transfer of power from the hands of the bourgeoisie into the hands of the proletariat, and the preservation of that power by the dictatorship of the proletariat. We are the revolt of the spirit; we consider bloody revolution as the unavoidable vengeance of the spirit humiliated by your works. We are not utopians: we conceive the Revolution only in its social form.[17]

Conforming to a leftist argot, this rhetoric seems to indicate that the Surrealists' position on revolution was one closely aligned with that of the Communist Party. Furthermore, as Nadeau and others report, following the joint manifesto, the Clartéists and the Surrealists declared their mutual intention to merge their publications: *Clarté* announced its plan to cease publication and with the Surrealists to found a new collaborative periodical to be called *La Guerre civile.* The Surrealists too made an announcement prefiguring the new journal – but did not indicate any intention to disband their own. *La Guerre civile* did not eventuate, *Clarté* continued, as did *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Relations between the Surrealists and *Clarté* remained cordial and they continued to publish each other's writings, but they remained distinct groups, with *Clarté* voicing a more orthodox Marxist line and the Surrealists adopting a more questioning and problematic position in their ongoing struggle to forge a line of independent artistic expression to serve Marxist ends.[18]

The strong Communist inflections of *La Revolution d'abord et toujours!* do not betray any of the reservations Breton had only lately expressed elsewhere. Just months earlier he had eschewed a materialist line. The *Philosophies* group too had maintained its distance from Communism and materialist philosophy. In position and tone *La Revolution d'abord et toujours!* seems to be commensurate with the trajectory of the Clartéists who had become more orthodox in their Marxist views. When other statements are considered alongside *La Revolution d'abord et toujours!* the Surrealists' position looks highly equivocal. Breton's own reticence over the Surrealists' early absorption into a politically dominated grouping is apparent in his other writings of the same time, but Nadeau ignores two particular documents that indicate Breton's hesitations and the tensions in the Surrealists' position, not evident in the line taken in *La Revolution d'abord et toujours!*

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[17] ibid., 130.

[18] Löwy, op cit., provides a full, balanced, and fascinating account of the relations between the publications and their groups.

Immediately on the publication of *La Revolution d'abord et toujours!* Breton penned a line of argument that went against its grain. He addressed a letter to the committee of the combined groups dated November 9, and then in December wrote an article, 'The Strength to Wait', later published in *Clarté*.[19] Both are energetic attempts to provide a pedagogy counter to the doctrinal Marxist position of the day and, as such, their exclusion from some historical accounts is significant. We might deduce from Breton's rapid qualification that the Surrealist voice and stance – and possibly the leanings of the *Philosophies* and *Correspondences* groups too – had been quashed in the collaborative process with *Clarté*. We may also surmise that the fairly formulaic expression of revolutionary perspective within the tract gave grist to the Surrealists, and provided the impetus for Breton to refine and make more explicit his own expressed position on political and social revolution.

In 'The Strength to Wait', Breton reflects on the intellectual history of poetry in the previous century, its power for revelation, and Surrealism's mission to redefine it in the light of such functions. He points to a convergence between poetic vision and the overall necessity for revolution, but acknowledges the distance remaining between the poet and the public: the result, he says, of the persistence of 'certain social conditions'.[20] Breton posits that historically it was poetic revolution – as in the case of Rimbaud – that preceded political upheaval. He argues that from the outset Surrealism called for a revolution *more general* than the political revolution sought by Communism: a revolution of all forms.[21] In his steadfast adherence to what we might call the cultural imperative, Breton offers a clear, pointed expression of his views within the context of Surrealism's first political collaboration, and these prove to be consistent with the developing political views he went on to express in such writings as *Les Vases communicants (Communicating Vessels)* of 1932, the tract *Pur un art révolutionnaire independent* (*Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*), written in 1938 in collaboration with Trotsky,[22] his *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not* (1942),[23] and *Arcanum 17* (1944).[24]

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[19] André Breton, 'The Strength to Wait', published in *Clarté,* no. 79 (December 1925); reprinted in *Oeuvres completes,* I: 917 ff.
[20] Durozoi, 131.
[21] ibid.
[22] André Breton, *Communicating Vessels (Les Vases communicants,* 1932), translated by Mary Ann Caws & Geoffrey T. Harris, with notes and introduction by Mary Ann Caws. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).
[23] André Breton, *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not,* in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 279 – 294.
[24] André Breton, *Arcane 17* (*Arcanum 17,* New York: Bretano, 1944), translated by Zack

Nadeau's exclusion of some of the complexities and early equivocations in the Surrealists' early courtship with Communism results in a smooth storyline with a central theme: Party allegiance. Likewise, Short plainly defines his point of interest in Surrealism's politics solely in terms of the movement's attempts to marry its energies with Communism, saying explicitly, 'The movement's political history lies in its tenacious efforts, set forth in some highly articulate polemical writing, to associate its intellectual, artistic and moral preoccupations with the aims and methods of international Communism.'[25] Limitations of scope, together with selective treatments of material and some outright inaccuracies in Nadeau's and Shorts' accounts (and to a lesser degree, in Lewis's), obscure the complexity and breadth of the Surrealists' early internal discussions over political and philosophical issues. Moreover, they fail to engage with the Surrealists' extra-Party political actions or their sustained critique of Marxism, which remained vital after their Party allegiance ceased.

Nadeau's treatment of 'The Moroccan War', the title of the eighth chapter of his book, is sandwiched between two chapters dealing closely with Surrealism's Communist dealings. In his preceding chapter, Nadeau depicts a sense of rising tension within Surrealism over a 'fundamental contradiction' about whether Surrealism was after all primarily an idealist, aesthetic calling, or a movement committed to revolt in a political sense. He paints this schism as a sharp distinction between the literary men on the right of the group and the political agitators on the left. In fact, despite its title, Nadeau's eighth chapter offers a negligible analysis of the Surrealists' attitude to the Moroccan colonial insurgency, drawing no connections between this particular political issue and the anti Western themes of *La Révolution surréaliste* that had gone before (I will draw these out in Chapter Four). Rather, Nadeau's focus rests exclusively on the collaboration with *Clarté* and the ideological disagreements that arose out of it. His subsequent chapter, 'The Naville Crisis', refers to debates in 1926 over the Surrealism's political commitment. Nadeau's depiction of the differences between Breton's and Naville's positions is very stark, and offers barely any coverage of Breton's considered responses to Naville, and nor does it discuss the two documents I have just cited, which give voice to Breton's considerations at the time.

Rogow (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1994)

[25] Short, in Spiteri and LaCoss, op cit., 18.

As joint editor of the first Surrealist periodical, *La Révolution surréaliste,* Naville penned a provocative discussion paper in pamphlet form in 1926: *La Révolution et les intellectuals (Que peuvent faire les surrealists?)* [*The Revolution and the Intellectuals (What can the Surrealists Do?)*].[26] There, he formulated a comparison between two attitudes of Surrealism which he saw as antipathetic: between what he called its *metaphysical attitude* – its theoretical speculations on the data of internal experience and certain experience of objects and events, and its *dialectical attitude* – 'the progress of the mind according to its consciousness of itself'. Naville saw the first as coinciding with a negative and individualistic attitude of anarchism, and the second as a collective route corresponding to a Marxist revolutionary path. He posed the question of whether it was necessary to believe in a liberation of the mind anterior to the abolition of the bourgeois conditions of life, or whether the mind's liberation depended on the abolition material conditions.

In Nadeau's treatment, Naville's and Breton's differences conform to those of a standard Marxist ideological joust over the relationship between base and superstructure, with Naville taking a materialist line and Breton rejecting economic determinism. This characterisation does poor service to both men's stances. Nadeau depicts Breton as an early casualty in this tousle, as one whose position dodged the main issue and lacked *realism*. This became a customary way of dismissing Breton: as a romantic, an anarchist, and an idealist. While there is truth in all of these charges, rather than assuming a simple idealistic opposition to economic determinism (as Nadeau would have it), Breton attempts to shift the ground from the standard joust by asserting the fundamental Surrealist principle of rejecting the binary opposition between the real and the imaginary. In Nadeau's depiction of the way this debate played out, at first Breton deftly sidestepped direct conflict with Naville by rejecting the clear delineation of options that Naville had put forward. For Nadeau, this is merely testament to Breton's skill as a tactician, however those two documents he overlooks, which I have just cited, each demonstrate Breton's earnest and strenuous rejection of the binary logic inherent in crude Marxism. For his part, Naville wished the Surrealists to marry their energies with the Party, but not to renounce their own passionate forms of subversion. Short's account also misrepresents the debate, saying that Naville's pamphlet was written by a *former*

[26] Pierre Naville, *La Révolution et les intellectuels (Que peuvent faire les surrealists?)* [*The Revolution and the Intellectuals (What Can the Surrealists Do?)]* a pamphlet published in 1926, reprinted in Naville, *La Révolution et les intellectuals* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

Surrealist, yet, as Michael Löwy confirms, Naville wrote it as a member of the Surrealist group – it was a Surrealist publication, *for* the Surrealist group as part of their internal debate.[27] The Naville-Breton debate in 1926 prefigures what became a pressing question in the 1930s: that of the place of the bourgeois intellectual in revolutionary struggle.

An aspect of the Breton-Naville exchange, an important plank in the discussion, is not given an airing in the standard accounts – which themselves focus on Surrealism and Marxism from a materialist perspective: that is that Naville not only sought to clarify the Surrealist position on revolution, he also challenged the mystification of Surrealism's 'opposition of 'the Orient' to the West. In 1924, Breton had ended his 'Introduction to a Discourse on the Paucity of Reality' with 'an ecstatic salute to the Orient, "made of rage and pearls" and spirit of the next Revolutions.'[28] Naville objected to what he saw as the Surrealists' 'crude opposition of an Orient to an Occident, both "mythical terms"'.[29] I will enlarge on the significance of this aspect of their debate in Chapter Four, arguing that Naville seems to be objecting to what we might see today as a brand of Orientalism in Surrealism, while Breton concedes that there is a mythological structure at play, yet he expresses an early insistence for the value of cultural iconoclasm as a mode of political dissent.

Following Naville's lead, in 1927 five key members of the Surrealist group, including Breton, joined the PCF, setting out their reasons for doing so in the statement entitled 'Au Grand Jour' (In the Light of Day). [30] Here they described their

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[27] The erroneous idea that *La Révolution et les intellectuels* was penned by an *ex* Surrealist occurs throughout the literature on Twentieth Century avant-garde movements, for example Raymond Spiteri makes the claim in an otherwise well researched essay in Bru and Martens, *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde 1906 – 1940*, (Amsterdam/New York: 2006), 34. Löwy's discussion of Naville's views forms an attentive and balanced account of the differences between Naville and Breton, presenting their discussions in a much more mutually tolerant light than do Nadeau, Short and Lewis. Löwy brings to light the personal tensions between the two men in the 1930s, and their reconciliation in 1938, when Naville was supportive of Breton's bid to meet with Trotsky. See Michael Löwy, *Morning Star*, 46 – 50, 126 n. 15; 56 – 57.

[28] Breton, quote in Löwy, *Morning Star*, 44.

[29] Pierre Naville, 'La révolution et les intellectuels', in *La Révolution et les intellectuels*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 96, quoted in translation in David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London and New York: Taurus, 2004), 133.

[30] Members of the Surrealist group who joined the PCF from 1926 were first Éluard, then within a few months Aragon, and finally Breton, Péret and Pierre Unik. Their position was explained in a pamphlet, *Au grand jour*, of April 1927. Mirò and Ernst were admonished for having collaborated on scenery for the Ballet russes. Philippe Soupault, Roger Vitrac and Antonin Artaud were 'excommunicated' in 1926. See Chénieux-Gendron, 42.

subscription to Hegelian dialectics and Marxism and, in an open address to Naville, they credited him with leading them to confront the issues they were discussing.[31] At this point in time, it was Artaud who perhaps most forcibly objected to the line of 'Au Grand Jour', in his 'A la grande nuit ou le bluff surréaliste' (which translates roughly as 'In the Dark of Night or Surrealist Bluff'). He said there could be no interest in seeing power transferred from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat, only in a truer conception of revolution, which, he argued, would change reality not simply entail the transfer of power.[32] In June 1927, Naville, who had by that time sided with the Trotskyist opposition in the Party, wrote 'Better and Worse', published in *La Revolution surréaliste* number 9 –10, arguing against those in the Party who wished to pressure the Surrealists into abandoning their artistic and literary exploits because they were supposedly anti-Marxist. Early the following year, Naville was expelled from the Party for his Trotskyist sympathies.[33] The split between Naville and the Surrealists occurred in the middle of 1928. There ensued several years in which relations between them were strained, however in the late 1930's there was a thaw between Breton and Naville, who, for all their differences, had each manfully tried to accommodate Marxism. [34]

Short covers the Surrealists' independent anti-fascist activities in the 1930s and their stance on the Spanish Civil War, but these are treated as themes secondary to the problematic association between Surrealism and Communism. Short presents the Surrealists' break with Communism in 1935 as the decisive dénouement of all their political ambitions. Two key events took place that year. A decisive rift between

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[31] Short, ibid., 24.

[32] Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. 1, Paris: (Gallimard, 1956), 284.

[33] Löwy op cit., provides a short gloss of the events surrounding Naville's expulsion from the PCF, 48–51. Durozoi too presents a close account of the period in which the Surrealists were trying to collaborate with different leftist intellectual groups and to align with the Party, but retain their specifically Surrealist conception of revolution. His discussion details the jostlings and disagreements with a much more sympathetic tilt to Surrealist values than do our four chroniclers. See Durozoi, 126 – 147.

[34] A founding member of the Surrealist group, Pierre Naville (1903–1993) co-edited the first issues of *La Révolution surréaliste* with Benjamin Péret. Naville's contention that Surrealism was incompatible with painting prompted Breton's *Surrealism and Painting.* Characterized as an unequivocal materialist in the standard accounts of Surrealism, actually Naville was a highly critical voice within the PFC. He was an early detractor of Stalin, and one of the founders of the Trotskyist Fourth International. His position was to broaden further, and later in life Naville discussed his Surrealist leanings in 1977 when he published his book *Le Temps du surréel* (*The Time of the Surreal*, Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1977), a volume in which he included his memories of the 'heroic' period of Surrealism, reprinted his own texts from that time, and presented his views on the importance of the movement, reaffirming the transformative power of the marvellous. See Durozoi, 686. While Naville was cruelly denounced in *The Second Manifesto*, his early 'defection' to Communism is misrepresented in the standard accounts.

Surrealism and French Communism was signalled by Breton's disruption of the International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture; then came the publication of the Surrealist's pamphlet *Du temps que les Surréalistes avaient raison*, (*The Time the Surrealists Were Right*), which denounced Stalinism. Short argues that afterwards there was a definite separation of the Surrealists' political activities from their artistic and literary endeavours.

Helena Lewis's book takes much the same line as Short's essay: it is a more detailed and at times a more nuanced discussion. Singular as an Anglophone monographic study of Surrealism and politics, like Short's essay, its scope is devoted to Surrealism's polemical statements and interactions with leftist groups and the PCF. It does not extend to interpreting political tendencies as they played out in the poetic and literary writings or visual works. Again, the drive of Lewis's book is to explore Surrealism's relation to Communism, whether in service to it or in dissent, through examining its overt engagement in organised political activity. Her short final chapter, 'The Revolutionary Legacy' is germinal in its undertaking, providing a signpost for future study, and there she briefly acknowledges Breton's wartime activities and his political activities in the 'New World', pointing to some latter anti-colonial positions that are absent in Nadeau's and Short's accounts.[35]

The essay of 1991 by Susan Suleiman, entitled 'Between the Street and the Salon: The Dilemma of Surrealist Politics in the 1930s', presents another variation of a very similar historical interpretation. The general lines of her argument are much like those of the other three chroniclers. Suleiman asserts that in the mid Thirties Surrealism underwent a transition from radical politics to de-politicised bourgeois artistic activity, from 'street to salon'.[36] However, the starting point for her discussion is the moment of the *International Exhibition of Surrealism*, which opened in London in June 1936 and coincided with the founding of the British branch of the movement.[37]

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[35] Lewis, op cit.

[36] Susan Suleiman, 'Between the Street and the Salon: The Dilemma of Surrealist Politics in the 1930s', originally in *V.A.R.* 7:1 (Spring 1991), reprinted in *Visualizing Theory*, edited by Lucien Taylor (New York and London: Routledge, 1994) 143 – 158.

[37] *The International Surrealist Exhibition* was held from 11 June to 4 July 1936 at the New Burlington Galleries in London. It was organised by Roland Penrose, David Gascoyne and other Britons, and Breton, Éluard, Hugnet and Man Ray from the Paris group. More than sixty artists from fourteen countries were represented and, according to Durozoi, it drew over twenty-five thousand visitors, see Durozoi, 306.

In making an opening speech at the London exhibition, Breton took the opportunity to present summarisation of the Surrealist political stance. Indeed, the text of the speech entitled, 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme' (variously translated as 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', 'Limits not Borders of Surrealism', and 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism') is sometimes dubbed 'the third manifesto'.[38] Suleiman takes issue with the ideas Breton presented on this occasion, interpreting them as a capitulation from what she sees as Surrealism's earlier more strenuous political stance. Her argument, encapsulated in her essay title, is that from a committed position in their early years, the Surrealists aligned themselves with bourgeois culture in the latter 1930s.[39]

In his opening address, 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme', Breton argues that in the late eighteenth century the English gothic novel expressed the crisis of its time. A principle motif of the genre was the castle, a vestige of the historical past and a trope that arose spontaneously but persistently, unleashing a flow of automatism, which outwardly directed the latent content of the age. Breton asks his audience:

> Are there places predestined for the accomplishment of the particular form of mental transmission [médiumnité] that manifest in such a case? Yes, there must exist observatories of the inner sky. I mean, naturally, observatories already existing in the outer world. This we may describe, from the surrealist point of view as the castle problem.[40]

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[38] The text of the speech was first published in an anthology edited by Herbert Read. As well as André Breton's speech 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme', other presentations were made including Herbert Read's 'Art and the Unconscious', Paul Éluard's 'La Poésie surréaliste', Hugh Sykes Davies' 'Biology and Surrealism' and Salvador Dalí's 'Fantomes paranoiaques authentiques'. 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme' was published in slightly updated versions after Breton's delivery of it, and is republished as 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism,' in A. Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* edited and introduced by Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), and 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism,' in *Free Reign,* translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). This translation of *La Clé des champs* (1953), dates this particular text as appearing in 1937, but the precise original publication details are not given. It is apparently a reworked version of the speech Breton delivered at the London *International Exhibition*, with the inclusion of some contextual details about the French strikes and developments in the Spanish Civil War that were contemporaneous with the exhibition in 1936, along with his retrospective remarks and evaluation of the success of the exhibition.

[39] Few authors have countered Suleiman's argument outright. An example is 'Surrealism in 1938: The Exhibition at War,' in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, edited by Raymond Spiteri and Donald La Coss (Ashgate: Aldershot and Burlington, 2003), 179 – 203. Here, Elena Filipovic contends that the staging of the *Exhibition Internationale du Surréalisme* in 1938 was a politicised exhibition, counter to the 'street to salon' position.

[40] André Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism,' quoted in Suleiman, 147.

Posing as a question the whereabouts of the *real* places for observing the inner sky, Breton advances a speculation about his historical moment. He asks, where are the *topoi*, the observatories, for discerning the critical latent issues of the age? He says,

> Human psychism in its most universal aspect found in the Gothic castle and its accessories a point of fixation so precise that it would be essential to discover the equivalent of such a place for our period. (Everything leads us to believe that it is not a factory).[41]

Suleiman takes Breton to task, seizing upon his parenthetic phrase, '*Everything leads us to believe that it is not a factory'*, to be indicative of the de-politicisation of his position. To make her case for the slippage from street to salon, she offers what she calls a 'symptomatic' and 'metaphorical' reading of 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme'. She cites material that I shall not take up here; suffice to note that she refers to statements by Aragon and Thirion, two Surrealists of strong Party leanings whose attitudes towards Surrealism were particularly conflicted at this critical moment. Rather like Nadeau's tilt toward Naville, Suleiman's emphasis on Aragon's and Thirion's ideas necessarily angles her perspective toward that of orthodox Marxism.

Suleiman argues that by contrast to the ideas Breton espoused in 1936, in his novel *Nadja* of 1928 he had depicted the street as *the* 'predestined place' for a chance encounter, the eruption of the marvellous in everyday life. She goes on to claim that, 'by January 1938 it had become clearer than before that any revolutionary politics that tried to exist outside the confines of the Communist Party in Western Europe during those years was doomed to fail.'[42] She notes the condescension and disapprobation to which the Surrealists were treated in the latter Thirties and after. Breton in particular suffered for what she calls his resolutely 'doomed' political stance against both fascism and Stalinism. She cites Jean Genier, whose statement provides an insight into the type of criticism the Surrealists faced at this point. Genier wrote,

> [Breton] proclaims the rights of the intellect and sides for the ideal Revolution, against actual revolutionaries. But that is quite useless: the age of heresies is over…we are now in the age of orthodoxies…To be a revolutionary today, against Stalin, is like being a monarchist against Maurras and Catholic against Pius X. These are very noble attitudes, but they are admissible only for young people. Maturity…

[41] André Breton, ibid., in Suleiman, 145.
[42] Suleiman, 157.

> hungers for achievements. What is urgent is not to proclaim a faith, but to join a party.[43]

Suleiman illuminates some of the historical detail of the time, and notes a number of Surrealist writings from the 1930s that clearly and explicitly state the problems of the political moment as a dilemma for intellectuals. These issues were central to many texts of the period, and certainly not relegated to subtext. In 'an age of orthodoxies' Breton felt a responsibility to be 'heretical': to question orthodoxy above all. In 1938, when with Trotsky he wrote *Pur un art révolutionnaire indépendent* (*Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art*), he affirmed yet again Surrealism's double-edged program of dream and revolution. Suleiman acknowledges the significance of this manifesto, which states that 'true art must be both absolutely free and committed to social revolution; that it could be aspired to by all…; that to call for an independent art was not the same as to call for a "pure" or disinterested art…; that to criticize the Soviet Union was not to criticize Communism, but its worst enemy; and that to be against both Hitler and Stalin did not mean one had to approve of the bourgeois democracies.'[44] Ultimately though, while she grudgingly admires him for it, Suleiman concludes that Breton refused to *bow to reality*.

I do not accept the sharp transition from street to salon that Suleiman tries to demonstrate. My uptake of Breton's personal position in the 1930s expressed in 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme' differs substantially from hers. Suleiman questions what she imagines to be Breton's refusal or inability to point to the Surrealists' *topos* for encountering shattering coincidences. Rather against her stated intention of demonstrating the Surrealists' withdrawal from political activity into the salon, her essay draws on data that demonstrates, to my mind, that the Surrealists had a firm grasp on the contradictions of the cultural politics of their day. They were alert to socio-psychological factors of the rise of fascism, and to the totalitarianism inherent in socialist realism. There were heated debates and rifts in their ranks, but those who remained with the Surrealist group, and some of those who remained on its margins, energetically refused to capitulate to an impasse commonly perceived in the politics of their day over the place of bourgeois intellectuals. Breton occupied that impasse. Indeed, it could be said that he personified the impossible position of a public intellectual in the late 1930s. Contra to Suleiman, I think that hindsight allows us to conceive of his position not as a futile, resigned political stance against fascism

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[43] Jean Grenier, 'L'Âge des orthodoxies,' *Nouvelle Revue Française* (April 19360), 482 quoted in Suleiman, 157, n. 28.
[44] Suleiman, op cit.,155.

and Stalinism, but one that resolutely withstood both, insisting at every turn that imagination and freedom of expression were necessary for social change. Also counter to Suleiman, I see continuities rather than a momentous shift or capitulation in Breton's political attitudes. In seeking to privilege 'the street' over 'the salon', Suleiman misreads Breton's depiction of 'the street' in *Nadja*, which he presents as a far more ambivalent social space than she seems to recognise.

Breton's audience, if at all familiar with Surrealist publications to 1935, would have readily identified the many haunts, not just the street, that figured in the imaginings of the young Surrealists. The flea market, the arcade, the park, the cinema, the café, as well as favourite galleries and monuments: these were the many Parisian staging posts for chance encounters and marvels. Such common spaces might not have the same 'revolutionary' inflection as Parisian streets with their barricades, marches and public demonstrations but they were just as favoured as 'observatories', and for similar reasons to the gothic castle. Contemporary Paris, with its cinemas and jazz clubs, did provide points of enthusiasm for the young Surrealists but, following other commentators – Walter Benjamin foremost amongst them, we can observe that Surrealism's principal *topoi* were the vestiges of the Nineteenth Century modern metropolis extant in the early Twentieth Century. Outmoded places and spaces were constitutive of 1920s Surrealism: the Surrealists staked these out, to provide themselves with 'physical points of fixation' for Unconscious processes.[45]

The Parisian streets as they appear in *Nadja* are social spaces for missed encounters as well as places where chance meetings occur.[46] In *Nadja* (contra to Suleiman's position) we read of Breton's early *ambivalence* over orthodox Communism; this ambivalence is extended to his experiences in the street. He recounts the first time he sets eyes on Nadja, immediately after he had purchased Trotsky's latest book from the Humanité bookshop. Nadja's upright posture, and the fact that she notices him contrasts to the stultified and stooped workers who were pouring onto the street at the end of the working day:

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[45] The value of the outmoded for the Surrealists is discussed by Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), and Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[46] Raymond Spiteri provides penetrating discussions of *Nadja* in 'Surrealism and the Political Physiognomy,' in Spiteri and LaCoss, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 52 – 72; 'Surrealism and the Political: The Case of Nadja,' in Sascha Bru and Gunther Martens, *The Invention of Politics in the European Avant-Garde 1906 –1940* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006), 183 – 202.

> The offices and the shops were beginning to empty out […] and already there were more people on the street now. I unconsciously watched their faces, their clothes, their way of walking. No, it was not yet these who would be ready to create the Revolution.[47]

Here then, Breton signals his attention to Trotsky alongside his doubts about the vitality and political engagement of workers on the street. The scepticism he was to express about the factory, or the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, which he expresses in 'Limites non frontières' is already present in *Nadja*. Returning then to 'Limites non frontières', Breton's address to an international event in 1936, under the cloud of advancing fascism, is continuous with his views in *Nadja* and consistent with 'The Strength to Wait' of 1926. In 1936 though, he was undoubtedly casting *beyond* the Parisian experimentation of the Twenties, and exhorting his audience to do the same. By trying to extend upon the 'Surrealist imaginary' of the 1920s he was not, ergo, renouncing an earlier political position, but publicly declaring one to suit the looming threat of fascism.

Breton's use of the 1936 exhibition opening as a political platform was something of a necessity as the Surrealists no longer had a journal to call their own and neither had they the print coverage formerly offered them by the leftist press. There was however *Minotaure* (1933 – 9), but the backers of the lavish magazine were opposed to publishing political polemic. Despite these obstacles, in the 1930s the Surrealists publicly opposed the doctrine of socialist realism and persistently avowed their support of 'true Marxism'. To continue to air their political views from an isolated position, they made the most of their opportunities, and as we have seen they succeeded in publishing significant political tracts.[48]

In 'Limites non frontiers…' Breton avows two political tenets: Surrealism's adhesion to the theory of dialectical materialism – including the necessity of social revolution and class struggle, and its adherence to the Marxist idea that the economic factor is not the sole determinant of history. In effect he presents a synopsis of ideas already rehearsed, evident in his *Les Vases communicants* of 1932, in which he explored the cultural possibilities of individual and collective action by attempting to synthesize the ideas of Hegel, Marx and Freud. Drawing on that conceptual framework in 'Limites non frontiers…' he denounces the Stalinist doctrine of socialist realism (by

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[47] André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris, Gallimard: 1928) translated by Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 63 – 64.

[48] These were 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism' (1936), and 'Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art' (1938), mentioned above.

this time the official doctrine of Soviet Russian and Western Communist parties), which, he says, 'attempts to impose on the artist the exclusive duty of describing proletarian misery and the struggle for liberation in which the proletarian is engaged'. Thus, he argues, socialist realism seeks to deal only with declared intentions and surface appearances. In so doing so, he says, it betrays Marxist teaching as Engels himself counselled against the flagrant didactic display of political opinions by authors and artists. Breton reaffirms Surrealism as a means to attaining revolutionary consciousness, and points to automatism and humour as two means of bridging contradictions between material conditions and consciousness. He restates the political position of Surrealism in Freudian terms, arguing that the role of Surrealism is to pursue the *latent*, not the manifest content of an age. He proceeds to present a discussion of the English gothic novel – fittingly, for his British audience – and points to the exhibition opening itself is a rare junction in space and time where, in a darkening age, a voice of dissent might be heard.

In 'Limites non frontiers...', by contesting the idea that the factory was to emerge as a site of proletarian revolutionary consciousness at any point soon, Breton questioned how revolution may take hold at the site of alienation. My reading of Breton is that in his view the modern factory was more likely to deaden imaginative and revolutionary thought, thus it might be a site of revolt, but not *revelation* and nor, therefore, of revolution. If the factory was unlikely to emerge as a site or motif for a leap of proletarian revolutionary consciousness, Breton posits as Surrealism's own central question, just as to *where* a political revolution may find its inspiration. This is my understanding of *the castle problem*, as he calls it. Here, rather than interpreting his stance as a retreat, as Suleiman does, I think we may take him simply at his word. Here is yet another insistent declaration of the importance of *rêve* as counterpart or forbear of *revolution*, with Breton arguing *yet again* for the importance of the imaginary for inciting change. Moreover, he presents to his listeners a forcible argument about the power of the past for eliciting change in the present or the future. He makes the point that the castle, a site of *class privilege* in the past, *once obsolete*, can accrue revolutionary potential. We might see as incipient to this logic an argument in favour of the production of so-called 'bourgeois art', for its revolutionary potential in the future.

Breton's imperative to excavate the repressed of history for repositories of liberating ideas and images runs counter to a crude Marxist linear evolutionary history, and

constitutes a core aspect of Surrealism that eludes much Marxist critical appraisal. In positing that there are, or should be, external spaces – sanctified or sanctifiable, fantasmic, heterogeneous sites – that enable the extension of the internal space of the mind or the imagination, Breton points to a *spatial* conundrum as well as an historical one. Notably, now that they, in turn, are outmoded, post-industrial sites such as factories – derelict, silent testaments to the bygone dominant mode of mechanical production – are places favoured for site-specific contemporary art. Breton's logic predicted this. Pointing to such an idea already in 1928, and again in 1936, his thinking anticipates later monumental works in which the poetics and production of social space are considered. This logic was seized upon by Walter Benjamin, and as I shall elaborate below, later influenced the likes of Guy Debord, Gaston Bachelard, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre and others, some of whom I will discuss in Chapter Six.

As Breton was speaking from the opening of an exhibition, the tenor of his thought was likely to have been in this vein: that the exhibition itself was a constructed space, a rare *public* space that in 1936 could permit relations and interests which could maximize social contradictions and permit change to occur, as distinct from a *salon* environment. Notably however, Breton and other Surrealists expressed their own reservations about their 1936 London international exhibition as a popular spectacle. One of the exhibition's organizers, David Gascoyne, an Englishman who spent a good deal of his time in Paris, reflected wryly on the way audiences took to the London show in droves:

> In England Surrealism was thought to be something artistic (with a vague revolutionary aspect which was forgotten as soon as possible). Last year there was an enormous International Surrealist Exhibition: Can you imagine it, it was madly successful, chic, mildly, faintly, shocking, 'amusing'. I was so fed up that I almost at once joined the Communist Party, and for several months was immersed in political action.[49]

Writing the year following the exhibition, Breton too expressed his concern over the reception of the exhibition and questioned whether the its success should be measured in visitor numbers:

> [W]e do not take as evidence of its thorough success the fact that […] curiosity spread to twenty thousand visitors, nor the fact that it received a blaze of

[49] Peter Nichols, 'Surrealism in England', in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature*, Laura Marcus and Peter Nicholls, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 403 – 404.

> publicity in England. Rather, that success lies in the fact that it provided ample and conclusive evidence that surrealism now tends to unify under its banner the aspirations of the innovative writers and artists of all countries…This unification, far from being a unification of style, corresponds to a new awareness of life that is *common to all.*[50]

As well as rejecting any notion of Surrealism as style, and emphasising the broad applicability of Surrealism as an international *conceptual* force, as distinct from a visual style, here Breton seems to be downplaying the populism of the London exhibition. At about the same time as the London exhibition, numerous other curatorial projects caused the Surrealists pause. Major survey shows were passing Surrealism off as a modernist art movement. In response, the Surrealists began to operationalise exhibition spaces in innovative and subversive ways, a theme that will be taken up in Chapters Five and Six.

Curatorial Approaches to Surrealism

A significant factor in the reception of Surrealism, and one that helps to perpetuate the view of Surrealism's descent into style or into 'the salon', is the manner in which Surrealist artworks were presented in many curated survey shows from the mid-1930s. As we shall discuss below, mainstream institutional curating of Surrealism conforms to the view of commentators like Bürger and Habermas who argue that Surrealism was effectively assimilated into the institution of bourgeois art.

A large exhibition was curated by Alfred Barr, for the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1936 – 7, entitled *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, the second in a MoMA series of exhibitions of 'modern movements', and a blockbuster success with audiences.[51] Barr's schema framed Surrealism according to a narrow set of art historical and aesthetic constructs and a teleology that conflated Surrealism with modernism. This curatorial approach raised Breton's ire and caused friction between Barr and the Surrealists. [52] Barr arranged Dada and Surrealist works alongside

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[50] André Breton, 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism,' op cit., in *Free Reign*, 9.
[51] Alfred Barr, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936).
[52] Polizzotti notes, 'the show was to include the work of many artists over several centuries, from such "precursors" as Dürer, Bosch, Arcimboldo, Blake, Goya, and Rousseau, through the Dadaists and other "Twentieth Century Pioneers," and finally to the Surrealists. To Barr's mind, the exhibit traces the genesis of the fantastic tendencies in art, with Surrealism as their culminating manifestation. But Breton, though agreeable to the exhibition in

‘fantastic art’ from the fifteenth century ‘to the French Revolution’ and in his curatorial essay he focused on the stylist connections between the historical works and those of the Twentieth Century. His catalogue essay outlines his curatorial logic, posing the Dadaists and the Surrealists as links in an assimilated chain of modernist development. Of the Dadaists he says,

> [T]hey even attacked art – especially ‘modern’ art – but while they made fun of the pre-War Cubists, Expressionists and Futurists, they borrowed and transformed many of the principles and techniques of these earlier movements. In so doing the Dadaists, while attempting to free themselves from conventional ideas of art, developed certain conventions of their own – for example, automatism or absolute spontaneity of form…, extreme fantasy of subject matter…, employment of accident or the laws of chance…, fantastic use of mechanical and biological forms…[53]

Barr focuses on image and form, and he discusses the technical devices used by Surrealist artists to accomplish ‘fantastical’ effects as modernist stylistic devices. The exhibition catalogue for *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* embodies a striking pedagogical schism however, as it includes two essays by the Surrealist Georges Hugnet that are wildly at odds with Barr’s essay and the exhibition itself. Hugnet expounds how a violent rejection of the social order underpinned Dada and Surrealism, and assert that Dada and Surrealism came to pit themselves *against* Cubism, Futurism and Expressionism.[54] Though his essays were commissioned to serve Barr’s exhibition of pictorial works, Hugnet clearly sets out the performative and provisional aspects of Dada and Surrealism. ‘There is no Surrealist art’, he asserts, ‘there are only proposed means…’[55]

In Paris in 1937 the staging of the *International Exhibition of Arts and Technology Applied to Modern Life* occurred – the last major international exhibition before the outbreak of the war. Unsurprisingly, in what was an intensely nationalistic display, the Surrealists were not represented in the French pavilion, though famously Picasso, who by this time had been in the Surrealist orbit for some years, was represented in in the Spanish pavilion with *Guernica*. The exhibition was Léon Blum’s Popular Front Government’s attempt to raise a spectacle of French civility in the face of the

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principle, wanted an exclusively Surrealist show, and threatened to withhold the group’s support if Barr kept to his original design.’ The exhibition went ahead according to Barr’s designs however, though not without further difficult communications with Breton. See Mark Polizzotti, 1995, 438 – 439.

[53] Barr, op cit., 11.

[54] ibid., 16.

[55] ibid., 52.

Spanish civil war and the mounting threat of Nazism. The domination of Germany's and the Soviet Union's monumental pavilions signified the looming threat of war. The same year, another notable exhibition was held at the Musée du Jeu de Paume, which included Surrealist works within a survey of modern art and precursors, called *Origines et dévelopement de l'art international indépendant,* and it was arranged in conformity with an evolutionary view of style congruent with Barr's curatorial strategy. It included indigenous objects from Africa and Oceania, works by Redon, Renoir, van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Rousseau and others, to demonstrate the influences on Fauvism and Cubism, fore-grounded as the instigating movements of modernism. The 'heirs' – Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism, were presented as movements in the wake of Abstraction.[56] Surrealist works were generously represented in the exhibition itself, but the accompanying catalogue essay was not sympathetic to them.[57] This exhibition drew a letter of protestation sent to government cultural officials, from a range of signatories, amongst whom there were a number of Surrealists, including Breton. It protested against the Parisian bias of the exhibition, which purported to be international in scope, as well as the highly selective representation of modern movements.[58]

Over the next decades, more survey exhibitions followed. In 1968, William Rubin mounted *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage,* followed by other exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art that presented Surrealism according to similar lights to Barr's: through a formalist frame that privileged the sculptural objects and paintings, and presented Surrealism as a chapter in modern art. A landmark counter to 'modernist' survey exhibitions was *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* at the London Hayward Gallery in 1978, curated by Dawn Ades. Rosalind Krauss remarked on how that exhibition transferred attention away from the pictorial and sculptural production of Surrealism and onto the periodicals.[59] On seeing it, Krauss formed the view that it was the periodicals that were Surrealism's primary productions and that photography held a special vocation for it, ideas that lead to her own groundbreaking curatorial

[56] Harris notes that this exhibition was staged as a corrective to a larger exhibition the same year: *Les Maîtres de l'art indépendant,* an exhibition of mainly French art. See Harris, 221–222.
[57] ibid., 223.
[58] ibid., 223.
[59] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,' *The Originality Of The Avant-Garde And Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 87 – 118.

exploit with Jane Livingstone, *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism*, of 1985.[60] These latter two exhibitions marked a turn in the critical scholarship on Surrealism that underlined the breadth of the Surrealist endeavour, the variety of its outputs, its nonconformity to the narrow structures of orthodox formalist art theory and, crucially, the psychoanalytic aspect of its mode of signification.

This critical direction from the mid-1980s posed a vital counterpoint to formalist dismissals of Surrealism and to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* of 1974 which, in turn, influenced the work of Jürgen Habermas in the eighties. These sociological accounts of avant-garde art are broadly consistent with the historical accounts discussed above, in that they depict Surrealism as a liquidated utopian force which left a weak critical legacy in the 'neo-avant-garde' art of the post-World War II period. Though they positioned themselves as inheritors and critics of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Bürger and Habermas took narrower and less accommodating views of Surrealism than did their predecessors, Adorno and Benjamin. We turn now to consider the connections and critical views that Critical Theory holds up to Surrealism.

Post-Marxist Theories of the Avant-Garde & Surrealism

The interests of the early Frankfurt School theorists were proximate to Surrealism: they took the view that instrumental reason had led to an irrational regress. Like the Surrealists, their critique of modernity sought to reach beyond an orthodox Marxist analysis of economic and class relations and to uncouple Marxism from its Enlightenment assumptions. Like the Surrealists, they sought to clarify Marx's conception of the mediations between the material relations of production and the realm of superstructure. Walter Benjamin,[61] Theodor Adorno[62] and Max Horkheimer[63] followed Surrealist and dissident Surrealist thought from the publication of the First Manifesto in 1924 to the explorations of the College of Sociology in the latter 1930s. Their fascination for Surrealism was, however, marked

[60] Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*, with an essay by Dawn Ades (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1985).
[61] Walter Benjamin, 1892 – 1940.
[62] Theodor W. Adorno, 1903 – 1969.
[63] Max Horkheimer, 1895 – 1973.

by suspicion towards its anarchic tendencies.[64] Both Benjamin's and Adorno's few writings that focus specifically on Surrealism share a profound ambivalence and have been subject to competing interpretations. This reading effect is typical of Benjamin's writings.[65] For many readers, Benjamin's orientation diverges from Frankfurt School theory, his point of difference being his application of psychoanalysis to Marxism.

Benjamin's critical negotiation with Surrealism began with his reading of the First Manifesto and Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* of 1926. Already in his 1925 essay, 'Dream Kitsch', Benjamin expresses a qualified enthusiasm for Surrealism. His essay of 1929, 'Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', presents a largely positive endorsement of the conjunction between politics and psychoanalysis forged by Surrealism, though the retrospective title indicates that at the time Benjamin thought that Surrealism was at a watershed.[66] He signals his early acceptance of Breton's definition of Surrealism as expressing the latent content of its age and applauded his 'radical concept of freedom' as he put it, which eschewed liberalism. He wrote of the Surrealists, 'They are the first to liquidate the sclerotic liberal-moral-humanistic ideal of freedom.'[67] In expressing his reservations over Surrealism, Benjamin said that while they intended to 'win the energies of intoxication for the revolution,' the Surrealists often found themselves in 'the humid

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[64] A fascinating account is Michael Weingrad's essay, 'The College of Sociology and the Institute of Social Research,' *New German Critique*, No. 84 (Autumn, 2001), 129 – 161. Here Weingrad sets out confirm the interactions between Bataille and Benjamin, and though the attempt is frustrated by the dearth of firm evidence available, he presents a fascinating and unprecedented account. Benjamin had some involvement with the Collège of Sociology in the latter 1930s, as did Adorno and Horkheimer, as attested by commentary in the correspondence between Adorno and Horkheimer about the Collège. The Collège de Sociologie was a circle active in the late Thirties which included the 'dissident' Surrealists, Bataille, Caillois and Leiris. The Collège looked to ethnography and archaeology in order not just to understand the ritual practices of other cultures, but to illuminate phenomena that are repressed in modern Western societies. Weingrad points to aspects of their joint work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to show their awareness of, and occasional dialogue with, the Collège circle.

[65] Habermas wrote presciently, 'Benjamin belongs to those authors who cannot be summarized and whose work is disposed to a history of disparate effects. We encounter these authors only with the sudden flash of contemporary immediacy in which a thought takes power and holds sway for an historical instant.' Jürgen Habermas, Philip Brewster, Carl Howard Buchner, 'Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism: The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin', *New German Critique*, No. 17, Special Walter Benjamin Issue (Spring, 1979): 30 – 59 at 32.

[66] Walter Benjamin, 'Dream Kitsch' (1925), in *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, ed. M.W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard UP, 1999). 'Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' (1929), in *One Way Street*, translated from the German, translators Edmund Jephcott, Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979).

[67] Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', ibid., 236.

backroom of spiritualism.'[68] Nonetheless, he was deeply influenced by Surrealist thought, seeing in it the potential for a method of 'materialistic, anthropological inspiration' for theorising experience, which could offer the prospect of a revolutionary practice. In my opinion, his observation was borne out not only in the direction he took his own work, but in Surrealism's onward development during the 1930s and after.

Three closely interconnected ideas animate Benjamin's 1929 appraisal and uptake of Surrealism: the integral part the Unconscious plays in cultural agency; the power of the outmoded, and the open signification of objects which have the potential to attain a new sensibility in the future, beyond the conscious intentionality of their maker. Benjamin's phrase 'profane illumination' denotes the effect of Surrealist practices for revealing aspects of the material and social world, whereby, he wrote, they sought to 'blaze a way into the heart of things abolished or superseded, to decipher the contours of the banal as rebus.... Picture puzzles, as schemata of the dream work, were long ago discovered by psychoanalysis. The Surrealists, with a similar conviction, are less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things.'[69] From such observations, Benjamin pursued his own ambitions of freeing Marxism from the conceptual limits of its Enlightenment assumptions and nineteenth century evolutionism by infusing it with Twentieth Century psychoanalysis. Like the Surrealists, he read concrete phenomena as symptomatic of collective desires. [70] In his 1935 essay 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', Benjamin writes,

> Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are images in the collective consciousness in which the old and new penetrate. These images are wish images; in them the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social product and the inadequacies in the social order of production.[71]

Enlarging on the ideas expressed in that essay, between 1927 and his death in 1940, Benjamin worked on his never-to-be-completed opus, *Das Passagen-Werk,* the

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[68] ibid., 189, 180.

[69] Walter Benjamin, 'Dream Kitsch' (1925), op cit., 4.

[70] Benjamin expressed his methodological intentions in a letter to Max Horkheimer of 1937, cited in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 22.

[71] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (1935), in *The Arcades Project,* trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard UP, 1999), 4 – 5.

arcades project.[72] He took his inspiration from the first part of Aragon's *Paysan de Paris* – seizing upon its central motif, the Nineteenth Century *passages*, and he sought to demonstrate that a dialectic plays out in the concrete reality of everyday life. Susan Buck-Morss posed the stakes of Benjamin's project this way: 'Could the metropolis of consumption, the high ground of bourgeois capitalist culture, be transformed from a world of mystifying enchantment into one of metaphysical and political illumination?'[73] [74] Benjamin's method was montage. He wrote of *Das Passagen-Werk*, 'Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show.'[75] In fact though, he did enter into his own analytical commentary. His text comprises blocks of quotations – in French or German – from mainly Nineteenth Century writers including Marx and Fourier; he gave prominence to Baudelaire and to Balzac and Hugo, among others. Around the central figure of the *passages*, other objects and figures gravitate. Benjamin refers to his organizing principle as a *constellation* model. Apparently unrelated historical events are placed in significant conjunction. Christopher Rollason says of Benjamin's model:

> The constellation links past events among themselves, or else links past to present; its formation stimulates a flash of recognition, a quantum leap in historical understanding. For example, the French revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1870 would all be placed in a constellar relation, as events separated in time but linked by a common insurrectionary consciousness.[76]

Benjamin's non-linear model for treating historical material can be seen as continuous with the Surrealist project, though he saw Surrealism's emphasis as in the

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[72] Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk* (*The Arcades Project*) was not published in German until 1982, as an edited version of his manuscript. It did not appear in English translation until 1999. Since he died before he could complete it, it is not certain what its final form would have been, but presumably it was always intended to be a whole constructed of fragments.

[73] Buck-Morss, op cit., 23.

[74] A penetrating gloss of Benjamin's interest in Surrealism and its influence on his work is Michael Calderbank, 'Surreal Dreamscapes: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades,' *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 1 (Winter 2003). Calderbank is careful to note that already, before confronting Surrealism, Benjamin's work on allegory showed a similar set of concerns, and cites other important sources and influences on Benjamin's thinking. Following other scholars, Calderbank points to difficulties in demonstrating clear links between Benjamin and the Surrealists. While it is known that Benjamin had some contact with the Collège de Sociologie in the 1930s, it is has not been possible for scholars to firmly establish an interpersonal link between Benjamin and the Surrealist group. Links can be made between Benjamin and Bataille, but relations between Benjamin and Breton are less certain. Our awareness of Benjamin's knowledge of Breton's writings emerges through Benjamin's citations and his correspondences with Adorno and other Critical Theorists, but it does not confirm that Benjamin was a close reader of much of Breton's work.

[75] Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project* (N 1a, 8), 460.

[76] Christopher Rollason, 'The Passageways of Paris: Walter Benjamin's Arcades Project and Contemporary Cultural Debate in the West,' The Walter Benjamin Research Syndicate website, <http://www.wbenjamin.org/passageways.html>

exploration of dream states, and distinct from his own concern for trying to affect an awakening. He writes in *The Arcades Project*, 'the concern is to find the constellation of awakening the dissolution of "mythology" into the space of history the awakening of a not-yet-conscious knowledge of what has been'.[77]

The proximity of his work to Surrealism was of concern to Benjamin and a point of friction between him and Adorno. In the debates between the two men during the 1930s, they differed over the dialectical potential of psychoanalysis as means for a critique of capitalism.[78] Adorno's direct commentary about Surrealism is reasonably limited. Much of what he has to say takes the form of fleeting references, scattered remarks about the Surrealist project in relation to what he saw as the irrationalist flaws of Benjamin's project. I come to the one essay he devoted to it below. It is likely that Adorno paid only distant attention to Surrealist art and its central writings, as his commentary is at a general level.[79] A key document for gathering Adorno's early attitudes towards Surrealism is the much-quoted 'Hornberg letter' of 1935, in which Adorno responds to Benjamin's 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. Here Adorno voices his scepticism about the Freudian model of the dream for analysing the superstructure.[80] He criticises Benjamin vulgar materialism, but at the same time warns him against adopting a construct of a Collective Unconscious like that of Jung's.[81] Adorno's reservation is that psychoanalysis is itself a bourgeois construct.

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[77] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), N1, 9, 458.

[78] Over the years, much of the speculation about the shared conceptual base (or otherwise) between Surrealism's and Benjamin's critique of Marxism has been relegated to footnotes, but lately it has been placed centre page. Margaret Cohen's book, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of the Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) works through Benjamin's and Breton's attempts to bring psychoanalytic thinking to a materialist re-conception of the Marxist notion of superstructure.

[79] A case in point is an oft cited reference that Adorno made to Benjamin about the apparent parallels between Breton's attempts to use dream work in *Les Vases communicants* and Benjamin's own arcades project. Adorno makes reference to a review of *Les Vases communicants*; there is no evidence I am aware of to suggest that either Adorno or Benjamin read Breton's book itself. (See Cohen, p. 128).

[80] In 1935, Adorno wrote to Benjamin in response to Benjamin's 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in which Benjamin made the connection between the cultural products that accompanied early industrial production and 'wish images', referring to the Freudian model of dream interpretation. In his view, such dream images of collective desire could be put to liberating, transformative ends. Adorno's response was sceptical and the tone of the letter gruff. The Hornberg letter has been the point of focus for many scholars.

[81] Richard Wölin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Wölin discusses the Benjamin – Adorno debates of the 1930s, see pp. 163 – 212.

Written thirteen years after Benjamin's death, Adorno's essay, 'Looking Back at Surrealism' of 1953, presents a consideration of Surrealism that recalls the reservations he expressed to Benjamin about his arcades project. Here, Adorno's central criticism is what he sees as Surrealism's avowed commitment to 'The Dream' as its central platform. With echoes of his earlier exchanges with Benjamin, he expresses reservations about psychoanalysis. In his view it provides a model for analysing a specifically bourgeois subjectivity. Adorno acknowledges that the mechanism of montage approaches an analytic function that can blast out the memories of childhood but, as he puts it, Surrealist collage does not 'transcend its own mundane referents'.[82] He argues that a juxtaposition of elements in itself does not constitute a dialectical method, but an *album of idiosyncrasies*. He argues that in its artworks, Surrealism represents a subjectivity defined by, but not identical to, modernism. In so doing, Adorno implicitly identifies that Surrealism is connected to *the repressed of modernism* (an observation which, as we shall see, is made explicit in the work of Rosalind Krauss, who refers to Adorno). He makes another crucial recognition – not necessarily with enthusiasm: that Surrealism's aesthetic is *pornographic* and thus, perhaps backhandedly, he acknowledges its specifically libidinal, transgressive charge.[83]

Adorno's ideas here seemingly confirm those he rehearsed in his correspondence in the 1930s: namely, that Surrealism's Freudian model of dream analysis is in itself a critique that depends upon, and remains within, bourgeois constructs, but rather than forming this firm conclusion, the essay rebounds and continues in ambivalence, its prose rich with imagistic language. Adorno surrealises his concerns and the essay culminates with an astonishing figure of the repressed of modernism as a tumescent eruption, a balcony, sprouting from the smooth, white wall of International Style modernist architecture. *First* Surrealism paints this eruption, and then, says Adorno, it happens:

> Surrealism thereby forms the complement of objectivity which arose at the same time. The terror, which in Alfred Loos' sense of the word, objectivity in front of an icon perceives as a crime, is mobilised by surrealistic shock. A house has a tumor – its balcony. Surrealism paints this: a growth of flesh crops out of the house. For moderns, children's pictures are the substance of what objectivity covers up with a taboo, because this substance reminds it of its depersonalized nature and thereby also reminds it that the matter does not end here, that its rationality remains rational. Surrealism gathers in what objectivity denies men; the misrepresentations show what

[82] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Looking Back at Surrealism', *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 86 – 90.
[83] ibid., 222

> the effect of inhibiting desire does. Through them surrealism salvages the archaic – an album of idiosyncrasies in which the claim to happiness, which man finds denied in his own technified world, goes up in smoke. If, however, surrealism seems obsolete, it is because man himself refuses the consciousness of renunciation which was fixed in the negative of surrealism.[84]

Adorno does not elaborate beyond this suggestive image – one might call it an ideogram. As a rhetorical move it is characteristic of Surrealism and Benjamin's style, and it would seem that this adoption of form is deliberate.[85] In this extraordinarily suggestive passage, the *fleshy* tumour of Surrealism is the excessive, libidinal outcrop of the denatured, rationalised, formal purity of modernist architecture. At the juncture of 1953, the figure of Loos and his no-longer-plain white wall might be construed as the International Style having become *passé* and prone to the forces of profane illumination. Are we to deduce from this that Adorno perceives the remaining possibility for a critical adversary culture in the heterogeneity of Surrealism? I find it tempting to read the rebus this way.[86] Adorno might suggest that modernist 'objectivity' cannot eliminate taboos, merely inhibit them. He ends with a caution that *if* Surrealism *seems* obsolete in 1953, this is merely evidence of the inhibition of desire, the disavowal of all that modernity too strenuously wishes to deny, and which remains internal to its Enlightenment project. By situating Surrealism *on the side of the repressed*, Adorno seems to posit that it inhabits or forges a small gap in bourgeois culture, and thus remains unassimilated.[87] The phrase 'Surrealism paints this: a growth of flesh crops out of the house', suggests – but certainly does not attempt to explain – the non-linear direction of causality between consciousness and the Unconscious to which Surrealism subscribed. My reading of Adorno here is that though he does not make it explicit, his position yields to Benjamin's somewhat.

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[84] ibid.

[85] Chiastic structure as a feature of Adorno's texts is discussed by Gerhard Richter in 'Aesthetic Theory and Nonpropositional Truth Content in Adorno', *New German Critique*, 33, 1, 97 (2006), 119-135. Richter discusses that a common device in Adorno's prose is to apply aesthetic principles to the writing, and the Surrealist style of encryption in 'Looking Back' exemplifies this tactic.

[86] This work, or at least my reading of it, runs against the grain of much of Adorno's earlier writing which points to the lack of possibility for marginal culture to contradict the culture industry, and is perhaps closer to his later approach to mediation in *Aesthetic Theory*.

[87] Writing in 1953, Adorno's essay harkens back to a Surrealism that seems to be lodged in the 1930s. One of the difficulties is assessing the positive valency (or otherwise) is that despite its title, the essay seems to be suggesting that the movement had not yet become historical. In fact, during the 1950s and 1960s the Surrealists too concerned themselves with the issue of mass consumption, and from a perspective comparable to that of Adorno and Horkheimer.

Bürger and Habermas do not take up Benjamin's or Adorno's consideration of Surrealism in relation to the way it harnesses the repressed of history as a mode of critique. In fact, they do not engage with Surrealism's mode of practice beyond a schematic discussion of collage. Indeed 'schematic' is how I would describe their approaches to Surrealism all told, as they do not offer a critique of Surrealism *per se*, but as it epitomizes their general category of 'the avant-garde'. To my mind, there are necessarily some shortcomings in their approach due to the high level of generality of their analyses.

In *Theory of the Avant-Garde* of 1974, Bürger discriminates between Surrealism and Romanticism and Modernism, pitting his category of the avant-garde as a specifically Twentieth Century assault on the institution of art. His is a more restricted framework for considering Surrealism's mode of resistance than either Adorno's or Benjamin's.[88] In the course of his analysis, Bürger presents a critique of Adorno for the latter's failure to distinguish the specific historical conditions of the avant-garde. In 'correcting' Adorno's position, Bürger treats Surrealism's formal innovations, its modes of signification, as secondary to what he sees as its main line of attack on the institution of art. In neglecting the historiographic aspect of Surrealism, which is central to Benjamin's concerns (and of some interest to Adorno), Bürger remains committed to a linear conception of the history of modernism and the avant-garde, as does Habermas.

Bürger argues that it was neither their critique of capitalism, positivism and instrumental rationality, nor their political views that defined the radicalism of the early Twentieth Century avant-gardes. He posits that art as an institution had assumed a perceptible form and structure after the First World War, which had flowed on from a sequence of historical transformations in Western culture since the late Sixteenth Century. He defines avant-garde movements specifically by their intentions to *sublate art into life*, a quest in which they ultimately fail, he says, because they were caught in the institutional constructs that determine art.[89] Citing

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[88] Peter Bürger, (*Theorie de Avantgarde 1974) Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw with a foreword by Jochen Schulte- Sasse, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[89] 'Sublate' connotes Hegelian thinking, referring to the assimilation of earlier forms in a synthesis that surpasses and negates as it incorporates. This is captured in the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, slightly adapted here: *Sublate v.t.* deny; cancel; reduce, especially an idea to subordinate part of a greater unity. Sublation, *n.* sublative, *a.* tending to remove. It has a more specific meaning: 'to negate or eliminate (as an element in a dialectic process) but preserve as a partial element in a synthesis'.

Duchamp's *Fountain*, Bürger argues that the readymade gesture had genuine impact but could not maintain its power to shock, ultimately taking its place within the museum 'as an autonomous work among others'. According to Bürger, following the initial shock waves of avant-garde anti-art works, subsequent gestures were merely repetitions.

For Adorno and Benjamin then, the 'function' of modern art, including Surrealism, is cognitive; that is to say, it has no social function, but contributes to knowledge and to social consciousness.[90] For Bürger and Habermas, by contrast, their interest lies not with the signifying power of avant-garde artworks, but with the category 'art' as a cultural vector, and in their view its impact is limited. While the avant-garde occupied a climactic moment in their view, they see that as having passed. Bürger argues that the avant-garde became historical, a phase that left in its wake a contemporary aesthetic which revived the bourgeois category of the work of art.[91] He says,

> [N]ow that the attack of the historical avant-garde movements on art as an institution has failed, and art has not been integrated into the praxis of life, art as an institution continues to survive as something separate from the praxis of life. But the attack did make art recognizable as an institution and also revealed its (relative) inefficacy in bourgeois society as its principle. All art that is more recent than the historical avant-garde movements must come to terms with this fact in bourgeois society. It can either resign itself to its autonomous status or 'organize happenings' to break through that status. But without surrendering its claim to truth, art cannot simply deny the autonomy status and pretend that it has a direct effect.[92]

In 'Modernity an Incomplete Project' Jürgen Habermas largely corroborates Bürger's original thesis. He broadly follows the former's categorisation of the avant-garde and his views on cultural agency.[93] I believe that in trying to take up Bürger's ideas in a distilled fashion, Habermas throws their difficulties into sharper relief. In his critique of Surrealism, Habermas echoes Bürger's stance by saying that the destruction of the sphere of art was Surrealism's prime goal, which it failed to execute, saying too that by the 1960s and 70s the Surrealist legacy had become repetitious and lost its force.

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[90] Adorno is sometimes characterised as advocating an art free of social content, whereas to my understanding, his aesthetic theory would deem this to be impossible. Rather, his theory of mediation goes beyond mere intentionality, with the 'truth content' having the potential to transcend its immediate social content. See Adorno *Aesthetic Theory* (1972), newly translated, edited and with an introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 373; 356 – 7.

[91] Bürger, op cit, 57.

[92] ibid.

[93] Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity an Incomplete Project', in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited and with and introduction by Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press 1983). Originally delivered as a talk in 1980; first published as 'Modernity versus Postmodernity,' *New German Critique* 22 (Winter, 1981).

Habermas's damning judgements on Surrealist experimentation demand to be quoted at length:

> [All] those attempts to level art and life, fiction and praxis, appearance and reality to one plane; the attempts to remove the distinction between artifact and object of use, between conscious staging and spontaneous excitement; the attempts to declare everything to be art and everyone to be an artist, to retract all criteria and to equate aesthetic judgment with the expression of subjective experiences – all these undertakings can now be seen to be nonsense experiments. These experiments have served to bring back to life, and illuminate all the more glaringly, exactly those structures of art they were meant to dissolve. They gave legitimacy, as ends in themselves, to appearance as the medium of fiction, the transcendence of the artwork over society, to the concentrated and planned character of artistic production, as well as to the special cognitive status of judgements of taste. The radical attempt to negate art has ended up ironically by giving due exactly to these categories through which Enlightenment aesthetics had circumscribed its object domain. The surrealists waged the most extreme warfare, but two mistakes in particular destroyed their revolt. First, when the contents of an autonomously developed cultural sphere are shattered, the contents get dispersed. Nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructured form; an emancipatory effect does not follow.
>
> The second mistake has more important consequences. In everyday communication, cognitive meanings, moral expectations, subjective expressions and evaluations must relate to one another. Communication processes need a cultural tradition covering all spheres… [94]

Habermas regards Surrealism as heir to Baudelaire's 'spirit and discipline of aesthetic modernity', the apotheosis of the strain of rebellious Romanticism. He makes less of a strenuous distinction between the avant-garde and modernism than does Bürger. Habermas does not take up the determinedly *post*-romantic tendencies in Surrealism in opposition to instrumental rationality (rather than merely a reaction to it), or accord it a position counter to Enlightenment values, so it is not clear the extent to which he regards Surrealism as anti-modern or anti-Enlightenment. Habermas formulates Surrealism's relation to modernism and postmodernism less strictly than does Bürger. He brokers less discussion than does Bürger of the implications of the categorical transformations that Surrealism effected. Habermas makes a brusque comment: 'nothing remains from a desublimated meaning or a destructured form'.[95] His sweeping dismissal of Surrealist signification, which declares that it amounts to nothing, prompted a response from Bürger in 1981. This seems to be a qualification of Bürger's own earlier stance. He wrote:

> [T]he failure of the demand for sublation should not be regarded as a mistake without results. On the contrary. If it is possible today to think about free productivity for everyone, then it is certainly due to the fact that the avant-gardists questioned the legitimacy of the term 'great art work'. The ecriture automatique still contains possibilities for the development of a free productivity which goes far beyond the surrealists' own endeavors. Finally, without the avant-gardist notion of

[94] Habermas, 11.
[95] ibid.

> montage numerous realms of contemporary aesthetic experience would be inaccessible. To sum up. The unsuccessful attack on the autonomous status of art is that event in the development of art which first broke with the aesthetics of autonomy, and *it has provided us with the possibility for overcoming the latter's limitations*.[96] [My emphasis]

Here, Bürger gives some credit to Surrealism's critical legacy as a productive means of signification. To my mind, weaknesses in Bürger's original approach are that he construes the 'institution of art' as monolithic; as more unified and historically determined than it is, rather a than a motile and contradictory set of social structures with relative independence. Originally, he adheres to an idea of the autonomous status of art. Similarly, I think the integrity or cohesiveness of this construct is overstated. By contrast, in the later statement above, Bürger allows that as a mode of productivity, Surrealism undercuts 'the aesthetics of autonomy'.

Following Bürger's early stance, in Habermas's view the failure of Surrealism came down to its assumption that 'the communicative practice of everyday life' could be redeemed from its over-rationalisation through one channel alone: art. This claim seems off the mark in the face of Surrealism's interpenetration of so many channels of cultural expression and domains of theoretical knowledge – literature, philosophy, and various aspects of science, linguistics, ethnography and psychoanalysis. Seemingly contradictorily, in declaring modernism incomplete and looking to revive the Enlightenment project, in a turnabout at the conclusion of his essay Habermas suggest that aspects of what he describes as the 'hopeless surrealist revolts' could be reappropriated.[97]

Bürger's (and Habermas's) category of *the* avant-garde and the level of his aesthetic theory overall suffers from over-generality. It is worth noting that the Surrealists rarely employed the term 'avant-garde' to describe themselves. I think we can discriminate between the Surrealist's attitudes and practices and those of Dada (and Futurism and Constructivism). Bürger's and Habermas's declarations of Surrealism's failed aspirations rest on the notion of an avant-garde defined by the goal of the 'sublation of life and art'. With its Hegelian overtones, the word *sublate* denotes not the crossing of disciplinary boundaries and different spheres of action but the forging of historical conditions whereby art could be transcended. This materialist conception

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[96] Peter Bürger, 'The Significance of the Avant-Garde for Contemporary Aesthetics,' *New German Critique* 22 (1981), 19 – 22.

[97] Habermas points to examples of educative programs to enlarge the accessibility of art and to broaden participation in creative pursuits.

of art is not consistent with Surrealism's own. Here, we might recall 'The Strength to Wait' of 1925, discussed above, and Breton's argument against any premature attempt, in the name of Marxism or revolution, to negate or overthrow poetry. The Surrealists did not effect the sublation of life and art in Bürger's terms, but they did undermine institutionalised aspects of the production and consumption of art and literature, and their activities took them beyond the aesthetic, into the social and political realm.

In an essay of 1989, contemporaneous with Habermas's, Rosalind Krauss countered Bürger's argument that the avant-garde was defined by its institutional critique. Taking Bürger's position as her point of departure, she argues that Surrealism attacked the presumed autonomy of the *cognitive field* of vision.[98] I will summarise her position presently. First, I wish to make the point that prior to Krauss's (and others') reshaping of the debate, there was a good deal of writing about the failure of the avant-garde, and the rise of postmodernism, in which Surrealism or important aspects of it were in eclipse because of the partial ways in which it had been theorised, particularly in Anglophone circles. I will dwell briefly on an example. Close on the heels of 'Modernity, An Incomplete Project', the sociologist Scott Lash wrote an article entitled 'Postmodernity and Desire', discriminating between Habermas's views and those of French theorists (cast as postmodernists), Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze. For its moment Lash's is a prescient critique of Habermas, but read today it exemplifies an aporia of its time: Surrealism itself is barely mentioned despite the fact its thematics percolate through Lash's entire discussion. The cited 'postmodern' writers are all connected with Surrealism in some way but this is not acknowledged.

Lash points to a *new* primacy of the Unconscious, of the bodily and material, of desire and libidinal impulses in the intellectual climate of the 1960s. He falls short of identifying the lineage of such emphases, and does not broker the idea that they might not be new at all. The Surrealist legacy is in eclipse here. In his gloss of Foucault's ideas about non-discursive language, dissent and counter-memory, Lash does draw the connection between Foucault's and Bataille's ideas on transgression.[99]

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[98] Krauss, Rosalind. 'The Master's Bedroom,' *Representations*, no. 28, (Autumn, 1989), 55 – 76.

[99] Lash gives a serviceable gloss of Bataille's idea of transgression with reference to his interest in sexuality, rapture and ecstasy in Christian mysticism. The nineteenth century saw the shaping of sexual discourse, which relegated sexual rapture to the unconscious. In transgression, sexuality opens onto limit experience. Op cit., 3 – 7. It is notable that both

He names Nietzsche, Bataille, Artaud, Blanchot and Klossowski as 'foremost purveyors of a postmodern aesthetic'.[100] Yet, not until a point in the text where Lash is obliged to pause to untangle his historical conception of postmodernism does Surrealism finally rate a mention by name, appearing just once in the text.

The theoretical framework offered by Krauss was a response to such aporias in the literature whereby Surrealism's influence failed to be adequately theorised and important linkages were overlooked. Countering Bürger's claim that the avant-garde was defined by its institutional critique, Krauss argues that the targets of practitioners affiliated with Surrealism, and those on its margins, were not limited to the autonomy of institutional practice: she says a line of their attack was the presumed autonomy of the cognitive field of vision. One of their prime targets was the hegemonic visuality that underpinned modernist practice:

> [T]he avant-garde Bürger is theorizing is not a specifically visual one – autonomy was sought earlier and more passionately in poetry than in painting; the techniques of chance, montage, and readymade are as available to literary as they are to visual practice; and many of the situations that Bürger ends up wanting to discuss, such as Bertold Brecht's theatre, make it clear that his avant-garde is indeed diffuse, embracing all areas of cultural practice.[101]

Krauss writes that Surrealism worked against an idea of an autonomous vision, 'freed from all obligations to the object and from all idiosyncratic definitions of the subject.' She says that a conception of 'an abstracted sensory stratum that could be made to appear in and of itself as a kind of Kantian category, this notion of visuality, was a founding conception of modernist pictorial practice, beginning in impressionism, developing in neoimpressionism, and maturing in both fauvism and cubism.'[102] She writes, 'It was this visuality that much of surrealism scorned, installing the limitless indeterminacy of the fetish in desire's place of honor as a way of rebuking the claims of reason always to be able to set before itself clear and distinct ideas.'[103]

Bürger and Habermas wrote about Bataille with scant acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Surrealism, with an emphasis on his antipathy toward it, and with no acknowledgement of his repositioning of himself in the 1940s as a Surrealist sympathiser.

[100] Lash, op cit, 8. I note that for many theorists of postmodernism the names Bataille, Artaud, and Klossowski (and others) are cited without reference to Surrealism, even in cases where Surrealism *is* referred to elsewhere in the same text – presumably on the understanding that these significant contributors to Twentieth Century intellectual life cut themselves loose from Surrealist influences such that their indebtedness and proximity to the movement need not be mentioned. This tendency obscures the reach and tenacity of Surrealist ideas.

[101] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Master's Bedroom', *Representations*, no. 28, (Autumn, 1989), 56.

[102] ibid., 56

[103] ibid.

Here, and in her other writings from during the 1980s and 1990s, Krauss argues that it is not *only* the category of *the visual* that Surrealism sets out to erode but, more generally, the idea that any realm of experience can be conceived of as existing purely objectively, as outside of the subject. For Surrealism, the affective human psyche is a mediating factor between the individual and supra-individual realms – natural, cultural and social.

In enlarging the terms of the debate from the post-Marixist conception of avant-garde art, Krauss allows for a broader view of the social character of art and opens the way for a more accommodating consideration of the politics of Surrealist signifying practice, taking into account the numerous transactions between the spheres of aesthetic and political action that occurred over many years in Surrealist practice. Hers was not the only voice expressing views that broadened the theoretical terrain. In her introduction to the 1976 reprint of *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution* Jacqueline Leiner makes the observation, 'It was Africa and the diaspora…that really put Surrealism in the service of the revolution.'[104] Thus she too reframes Surrealism, prefiguring a line of enquiry about anti-colonialism that gained momentum in the 1980s, but has been very slow to culminate. In Chapter Three we will explore perspectives that enlarge upon Leiner's positive observation, but first, in the next chapter I take up another line of negative critique.

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[104] Jacqueline Leiner, 'Les chevaliers du Graal au service de Marx,' Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution (reprint, Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1976), xviii.

CHAPTER TWO

An Appraisal of Surrealism's Detractors

Modernism, Primitivism & Surrealism

> As part of the dominating European ideology of racial difference and cultural superiority derived from the era of imperialist expansion and anthropological/archaeological inquiry, surrealism must be examined for its own collusion in the colonial enterprise. In fact, it practices—in its limitation and celebration of the Other — an aesthetics founded on European constructions of the primitive and the marvelous which place the movement in a contradictory position vis-à-vis the Other it so often celebrated.
>
> – Daniel Scott [1]

Surrealism's anti-colonial politics fell through the grid of Marxist accounts and sociological theories of 'the avant-garde' and, to date, the topic has been of only marginal interest to scholars of post-colonialism. With the notable exception of James Clifford, few writers before the mid 1980s focused intently on the politics and aesthetics of Surrealism as it addressed non-Western cultures. Then, from the mid-Eighties and into this century, the Surrealists' engagement with 'the cultural Other' became the subject of a scattering of published English language essays in journals of varied disciplines, isolated chapters in books, and a couple of monographs. Much of this writing takes a Cultural Studies approach, viewing Surrealism's enthusiasms for non-Western culture and artefacts in a negative light, as in the quotation that opens this chapter. The concern of the present chapter is to take up such negative appraisals of Surrealism's engagement with 'the cultural Other'.

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[1] Daniel Scott, 'Dreaming the Other: Breton, Césaire, and the Problematics of Influence,' *Romance Quarterly* 42, vol 1 (1995), 28 – 39, at 37.

Aspects of the discourse about Surrealism and 'the cultural Other' remain caught within the parameters set by an earlier general debate over modernism and primitivism, from over twenty years ago. William Rubin's MoMA exhibition of 1984, '*Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* was at the centre of much of that debate. An idea that underscores much of the discussion of that exhibition is that modernism depends upon a construction of its primitive Other. In keeping with the tenor of the discussion outlined in Chapter One, there has been a strong tendency for Surrealism to be designated as a modernist movement, its primitivism consistent with other Twentieth Century movements, and consistent over time. Rubin's MoMA exhibition designated Surrealist works as modernist. It spearheaded substantial critical commentary over Western art and its appetite for exotic forms, a discourse that ranges over art, literature, museum studies and anthropology, and the 'post-disciplinary' arena of Cultural Studies.[2]

At risk of being overly schematic, what we might roughly refer to as a 'Cultural Studies' approach (with an emphasis on the cultural context of Surrealism, its values or philosophy, and the content of some of its writings) has produced a line of critique that pejoratively dubs Surrealism as *primitivist.* In some cases, the argument stops there, but some commentators posit that the Surrealists' aesthetic primitivism devalued their anti-colonial stance, an argument which shadows the view expressed in the previous chapter: that Surrealist politics was betrayed by its artistic products. I do not wish to argue that Surrealism was free of primitivist tendencies: there is plenty of evidence to show that non-Western cultures held a fetishistic compulsion for the Surrealists. However, the particular purpose of the present chapter is to interrogate the blanket notion of primitivism as it has been applied to Surrealism, and to argue that Surrealism's engagement with 'the cultural Other' should not simply be generalised and conflated with other modernist primitivist tendencies in Twentieth Century art.[3] My main contention is that most of the accounts surveyed in this

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[2] William Rubin (ed.), *'Primitivism' In 20th Century Art: Affinity Of The Tribal And The Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

[3] I do not wish to imply that Surrealism was the only Twentieth Century movement with anti-colonial leanings. It is possible that the early anti-colonial attitudes of the Surrealists were influenced by Picasso and his circle. A cogent line of argument has been marked out by Patricia Leighten who points to the politicised context of Cubist primitivism, thus going against a long line of commentary (by John Berger amongst others) which would have it that Cubism was a purely formal exercise devoid of political motivation. Leighten points to the fact that in the 1910s, Picasso and his circle had strong anarchist connections who decried colonial atrocities in the Congo. See Patricia Leighten, 'The White Peril and *L'Art nègre*: Picasso, Primitivism, and Anticolonialism,' *The Art Bulletin* LXXII, no. 4

chapter do not take into account the complexity of the Surrealists' attitude to non-Western cultures. One of the main shortcomings of the Cultural Studies approach is its common emphasis on the political and popular culture context of Surrealism at the expense of the signifying stakes of its creative experimentation. There has also been a tendency to uncritically adopt the art historical distortions of earlier methodological approaches, without re-examining art and artefacts and the Surrealist's renditions of received tropes.

Modernism & Primitivism

In contemporary discussions of primitivism, a commonly expressed view is that modernist avant-garde appropriation is complicit with colonial values, and thus another plank of cultural imperialism. The avant-gardes of the Twentieth Century are portrayed as having romantic fixations on Africa as the 'dark continent'. The avant-garde, it is argued, conjures up a wild, vital and authentic 'Africanism' as antidote to the rationalism and spiritual paucity of the West. Some concessions to modernist primitivism might be granted: it is conceded by some detractors that primitivism had a role within avant-garde critiques of the decadence of Europe, or the West generally. However, the avant-gardes come under fire for perpetuating attitudes towards other cultures that continued earlier European Romantic traditions, particularly longstanding currents of French thought. With a generalising genealogical sweep, primitivist attitudes are commonly presented as continuous with a line of Eurocentric thought traced back to those of Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose ideas of 'noble savagery' are attributed to Twentieth Century avant-gardes.[4] Sometimes the genealogy is traced to earlier times, to the Renaissance philosopher Montaigne, for example.[5] In the case of the Surrealists, a connection is sometimes drawn to the romantic notion of 'barbaric otherness' invoked by their hero, the poet Arthur Rimbaud.[6]

(December 1990): 609 – 630, and *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897 – 1914* (Princeton: 1989).

[4] Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778) French Enlightenment philosopher and composer, author of *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, 1755, *On the Social Contract*, 1762.

[5] Michel de Montaigne (1533 –1592) French Renaissance philosopher.

[6] Arthur Rimbaud (1854 – 1891) French Symbolist poet. Precociously he produced his best-known works before he was twenty and then virtually gave up writing poetry to become a wanderer. From 1881 until the year of his death, he lived in Ethiopia. He returned to France for cancer treatment, and died there.

By claiming a long and unbroken ancestry for the alleged Eurocentrism of early Twentieth Century writers and artists, the next step is to posit that while they may have been intent on aesthetic radicalism and social critique, their primitivism was not significantly different from the racial suprematism that justified the brutality of colonialism. Western practices of referencing or appropriating from other cultures are seen as tantamount to colonialism, or at least to cultural imperialism. The conclusion drawn is that ultimately the 'colonial Other', as it appears in all of its forms in modernist literature and art, invariably serves to support a specifically Western subjectivity.

This general logic is evident in Marianna Torgovnick's book of 1990, *Gone Primitive*: *Savage Intellects, Modern Lives*, a well-known text on modernist primitivism, which touches on aspects of Surrealism, and exemplifies what I am here referring to as a Cultural Studies approach.[7] Torgovnick's points of reference are broad ranging and primarily textual, though the texts she discusses are concerned with aesthetic issues (including separate chapters each devoted to Roger Fry, the dissident Surrealist Michel Leiris, and William Rubin). Her critical stance is echoed by a current literary tendency to excoriate modernism as racist.[8] As in Torgovnick's book, it is often argued that modernist racism (in the form of primitivism or Orientalism) is entwined with sexism. According to Torgovnick, chauvinistic ideas adhered to even the most radical modes of cultural expressions of the Twentieth Century. A central tenet of her argument is that all forms of modernist primitivism – and here she includes Surrealism – 'take the West as norm and define the rest as inferior, different, deviant, subordinate, and subordinatable'.[9] Her contention is that avant-garde primitivism emanates from a patriarchal Eurocentric perspective – one that Westerners can only lately begin to dissociate themselves from, thanks to recent advances in critical thinking. Her approach characterizes primitivism as a unified, oppressive ideology and writers as diverse as Leiris,[10] novelist Joseph Conrad,[11] and ethnographer Margaret Mead,[12] receive similar treatment: as well as their intellectual

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[7] Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[8] Jane Marcus, 'Suptionpremises,' *MODERNISM/modernity* 9, no. 3 (2002), 491 – 502 reviews a number of books with the issue of modernism and race at their heart.
[9] Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, op cit., 21.
[10] Michel Leiris (1901–1990) Surrealist, ethnographer and poet.
[11] Joseph Conrad (Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski) (1857–1924), Polish-born English novelist, author of *Heart of Darkness* (1902).
[12] Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978) American anthropologist and author of numerous books on primitive societies including her bestseller, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928).

outputs, their biographical details are subjected to scrutiny and critique to cast aspersions on their personal and professional values.

Torgovnick draws a line between a prejudiced past, and an enlightened, culturally relativistic present and thus she demarcates a colonial, modernist 'then' and a post-modern, post-colonial 'now'. For Torgovnick, our current postmodern problems are mainly semantic: we lack the means to express the width and breadth of our cultural relativism. She laments, 'We simply do not have a neutral, politically acceptable vocabulary…' and in the face of this all we can do is to 'uncover, from a political and cultural perspective, the kinds of work key terms like *primitive* have performed within modern and postmodern culture and the kinds of work they have evaded and short-changed.'[13] Throughout her book Torgovnick's emphasis is on the negative side of the register: she is much more concerned to show how the writers under her lens confirmed racist stereotypes, rather than demonstrating how they may have offered means of challenging them and thus contributing to the reinvigoration of language and signification more generally.

Torgovnick's intellectual labour consists of picking through 'modernist' works to disclose the 'biases' and 'obsessions' of their authors. At times, she belies her subjects' own attempts to challenge traditional Western conceptions and to think across boundaries, and their willingness to engage in cross-cultural comparison as means of destabilizing traditional signification. Surrealism comes in for a fleeting and dismissive summation when Torgovnick names its violence, misogyny and Africanism almost in one breath:

> The Surrealists' interest in the primitive was often colored by an interest in violence and by a misogyny that finds its fullest expression in the opening sequence of *Le chien Andalu,* in which a young male fantasizes (and the audience seems to witness) the slitting of a young woman's eyeball by a razor blade. Dadaist and Surrealist works almost obsessively superimpose or juxtapose the white female with primitive masks, often creating a collage of white female body against African head, or white head against black; the absence or substitution of heads seems of special interest (see for example Man Ray's *Kiki*, also called *Noire et blanche*, Hannah Hoch's *Monument to Vanity II*; Max Ernst's *Elephant of the Celebes.*[14]

In fact, the two images that Torgovnick cites here (discounting that of Hannah Hoch, who was not a Surrealist) do not exemplify a much larger stock of Surrealist visual

[13] Torgovnick, 21.
[14] ibid., 102.

primitivist imagery as the passage implies, with the words 'often' and 'obsessively'. These oft-cited works are actually rare examples of such overt visual interplay of tropes. There are few other Surrealist visual forms to which we can confidently affix the label 'primitivism' (the following chapters of this thesis elaborate on this point).

Torgovnick's more sustained discussion relating to Surrealism is in the chapter she devotes to Michel Leiris, where she acknowledges his cultural relativity and his habit of introducing and reintroducing his key writings with new prefaces for each new edition, thus recontextualising and modifying his ideas all throughout his long working life.

Leiris's significant texts spanned the period from 1930 until the 1980s, and at various junctures he questioned traditional ethnographic assumptions, the state of the discipline, and its colonial origins. At times his play of language, his mode of authorial address, performs slippages and highlights the disjunction between his ethnographic voice and his autobiographical mode. At other times he carves out a careful methodological distance in his main text, but undercuts this somewhat by framing it with a personalised contextual preface. *L'Afrique fantôme* of 1934 is an ethnographic and confessional diaristic travelogue, and in it Leiris's slippages in voice expose the processes of erosion of the author's youthful assumptions about Africa and about himself, that take place over the course of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti.[15] Later, having become an ethnographer, Leiris wrote from an assumed position of neutrality, yet his reflexive habit of commenting on, and contextualising, his own texts incorporates an element of self-criticality and critique of cultural and methodological assumptions, a strong, ever-present element in his oeuvre.

Torgovnick acknowledges these aspects of Leiris's approach to ethnography, but her treatment of his work is far from laudatory. She seems to cast his interests in a shameful light, depicting him as a rather unstable obsessive whose predilections, indeed perversions, might point to generally held pathological views still shared today. She suggests that Leiris's authoritative scholarly work *African Art* of 1967 should be read in the light of his earlier autobiographical book, *Manhood*, written in the 1930; a work that she refers to as Surrealist. *Manhood* is a self-exposé, written at

[15] Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (originally published 1934. Paris: Gallimard, 1981). Led by ethnographer Marcel Griaule, the Dakar-Djibouti Mission travelled across French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa from Dakar to Djibouti, with the express purpose of collecting artefacts for the Trocadero, soon to be replaced by the Musée de l'Homme. More discussion of the Mission appears in Chapter Five.

a time when Leiris was being psychoanalysed. In a highly experimental literary fashion, it explores sexual and aesthetic themes influenced by Leiris's analytical exploration and Surrealism.

Torgovnick writes that *Manhood* followed Leiris's 'nervous breakdown' and 'extensive psychoanalysis', and that it is 'a Surrealist autobiography, intent on self-exposure. In the next breath she says it is 'fictional in tone and perhaps in construction.[16] It is not entirely clear to me what Torgovnick means by saying the book is fictional in tone. At times, it plumbs unconscious themes and raises these to vivid and even feverish language; it is also unsparing in its gritty and unsavoury detail about personal habits and bodily functions. To my eye, it cannot be read in a completely literal fashion, but neither should it be considered fiction: rather, it is an exposé of Leiris's internal life. Nor should it be pathologised, as Torgovnick seems to be doing by mentioning Leiris's 'nervous breakdown' and opining that the book is, 'to put it mildly, disturbing.'[17] She claims, 'the terms Leiris chooses for his exposure of self [in *Manhood*] should be taken seriously and count as facts about his brand of primitivism, even if they are '"invented" or "constructed" facts.'[18] Thus, according to Torgovnick, Leiris's discussion in *African Art* of aesthetic and ritual practices such as patterned scarification, tattooing and circumcision should be read in the light of his personal preoccupations and his response to Lucas Cranach's painting of Lucrece and Judith. In the 1930s, he described the painting in voluptuous terms, and called it 'arousing'. This flight of interpretation and fantasy Torgovnick seems to find especially 'disturbing', and she seems to suggest that his interest in phenomena like African body adornment is driven by the same voluptuous and obsessional impetus, however her discussion does not draw out a clear assertion about a common fetishistic aspect. She ends her chapter on Leiris with a rhetorical question, and a rumination that strikes an ambivalent note:

> Can we say, with absolute confidence, that [Leiris's] obsessions are his alone and not more widely shared, even if at less perverse levels, among us? Even when they are not the formalist connoisseur's objects of desire primitive works sometimes remain objects of more obscure desires – desires implicit in Leiris's metaphor of the museum as whorehouse.[19]

The question hardly needs to be asked, for assuredly Leiris is not alone with his

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[16] Torgovnick, op cit., 107
[17] ibid.
[18] ibid., 107 – 108.
[19] ibid., 110.

fascinations and fetishes. I do not share Torgovnick's sense of disturbance or squeamishness over his candour or his life of the mind. Leiris took an ethnographer's curiosity to his obsessions, as well as some psychoanalytic knowledge. He plumbed his own psyche to excavate its cultural debris, and had the experience and where-with-all to do so. In posing that exotic objects operate in a register that exceeds the supposedly neutral aestheticism of formalism and into a register of fetishistic desire, Torgovnick's critical impetus hardly opens onto new speculation, but into territory already marked out by Surrealist objects generally. Whether sourced from exotic places or found locally, Surrealist artefacts operate as obscure objects of desire, and the Surrealists recognised them as such. Torgovnick seems to find such unabashed carnality discomforting, and she does not enter into a full discussion of the fetishistic thrall that such objects had for the Surrealists. She offers no consideration of the ways in which the aesthetic and literary experiments of Surrealism (or other movements for that matter), in their appropriation and bricolage deliberately disturbed dominant representational codes. Torgovnick's discussion of Leiris's interests and expertise is not sympathetic to his own suspicions of cross-racial desire, his struggles of conscience, and the numerous revisions of his own views that he works through in his highly self-critical autobiographical writings over many decades, in which he frequently indicts himself, identifying and analysing his own romanticism and racism. More probing and open readings of his oeuvre have taken account of the serious and committed work Leiris carried out in Africa in the latter part of his career.[20]

Gone Primitive has been well received from some quarters, and it is cited in numerous dissertations and scholarly essays whose authors assemble yet more data in support of its assumptions.[21] It has also prompted rigorous opposition and been the

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[20] A strong and balanced discussion of Leiris's self-diagnosed racism is Ruth Larson's essay, 'Michel Leiris: Race, Poetry, Politics; Rereading the Mission Lucas,' *SubStance*, 102, Vol. 32, no. 3, (2003), 133 – 146. Larson focuses on postwar work that Leiris did, particularly as a delegate of the Mission Lucas, charged to investigate forced labour on the Côte d'Ivoire. Over the 1950s, 60s and 70s, he was to publish critical memoires in which he considered the difficult relationship between literary inspiration and political action, and these are ably discussed by Larson.

[21] Torgovnick's work is cited in numerous dissertations and scholarly essays, whose authors emulate its method of interpretation, often against the grain of the primary documents under scrutiny, to perpetuate its central claim. An example is Nevine Nabil Dernian, *Modernist Primitivism: Seeking the Lost Primitive Other in Works of Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris and René Char*, PhD dissertation, Ohio State University. Dernian capably describes primitivism in numerous different manifestations, and compares the different primitivisms functioning in the three French authors under examination. Yet the thesis concludes

subject of trenchant criticism.[22] Marjorie Perloff's critique characterises Torgovnick's position as *Puritan*, an observation I find incisive. Perloff objects to Torgovnick's moralising, to the way she conflates a wide variety of approaches as 'modernist', and to the lack of historical relativism applied by Torgovnick. Perloff writes, 'I wish I could say my summary of Torgovnick's argument was simplified, but the fact is that the colonialist Joseph Conrad and the racist D. H. Lawrence, the voyeuristic Bronislaw Malinowski, and even the cowardly Margaret Mead who, despite her own lesbian leanings, 'stop[ped] short of explicitly writing against homophobia' (*GP*: 238) – all these are found wanting according to the severe Puritan yardstick applied to them in *Gone Primitive*.' [23] A similar note of piety that chimes in Torgovnick's discussion is common to the works discussed next.

Surréalisme blanc / 'negrophilia'

The three books I am about to discuss in this section each contribute something to a contextual analysis of Surrealism in connection with 'the cultural Other'. All of them share Torgovnick's underlying logic about an inherent racism in 'modernism', in this case Surrealism. Jack Spector's book, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919 – 1939: The Gold of Time*, summarises the intellectual currents of the Third Republic era quite

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sweepingly by quoting Torgovnick that 'the real secret of the primitive in this century has often been the same secret as always: the primitive can be – has been, will be (?) – whatever Euro-Americans want it to be', thus ultimately conflating Breton's, Bataille's, Leiris's and Char's views with Rousseau's idealisation of the *bon sauvage*: '[F]rom Jean-Jacques Rousseau to René Char,' Dernian writes, 'the notion of the primitive did not evolve; it remained idealized as the premise of humanity and the lost place to which modern people must return.' This conclusion does not seem to be supported by the evidence amassed. Another example is Michele Greet, 'Inventing Wifredo Lam: The Parisian Avant-Garde's Primitivist Fixation', *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, Issue 5, 2003, <http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_5/Michele_Greet/MicheleGreet.html> Greet argues that in their dealings with Wilfredo Lam, Pablo Picasso and André Breton 'each mythologiz[ed] him in order to validate their own perceptions of non-western cultures.' This opinion seems just as disrespectful of Lam as it does of Picasso and Breton.

[22] Frank Kermode provides a well-argued defence of modernist writers, demonstrating that there is no clear distinction between important modernist writers and supposedly more radical 'postmodern' writers in the their use of tropes that denote a 'cultural Other'. Moreover, he acknowledges that in earlier texts the trope of the primitive most often occurred where the most formally radical ideas were explored, and so we should not be blind to its critical potential. See Frank Kermode, 'Modernism, Postmodernism, and Explanation,' in Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush (eds), *Prehistories of the Future: the Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 359 – 374.

[23] Marjorie Perloff, 'Tolerance and Taboo: Modernist Primitivism and Postmodernist Pieties' <http://www.wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/tolerance.html>.

neatly, focusing mainly on the 1920s.[24] Archer-Straw's *Negrophilia* offers a lively description of the early jazz era in Paris and the stark way that racial difference was constructed and perpetrated through rigid stereotyping within popular culture: her last chapter is devoted to Surrealism.[25] Jody Blake's book, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900 – 1930*, marks out a similar terrain to Archer-Straw's, focusing on the Surrealists' interest in jazz as evidence of their primitivism.[26] I will deal with each in some detail now.

The stated goal of Spector's book is to provide an historical context and intellectual background to the Surrealist movement by relating it to the education system that shaped its members, and against which they rebelled. The fifth and final chapter of his book relates specifically to the topic at hand, entitled 'The Surrealist Woman and the Colonial Other'. Here he describes how the Surrealists distanced themselves from their families and schooling, turning to poetry and sexual adventure in their quest for alternatives to the prevailing rationalism that underscored the French education system. Spector argues that even as they sought to resist the precepts of their education, the Surrealists were conditioned by their schooling.[27] In his last chapter, Spector adopts a highly censorious position towards the Surrealists. He depicts them as inhospitable to blacks and women and attributes their faulty attitude to their upbringing and, in particular, the chauvinism of their schooling, the values of which, in his view, they were incapable of rejecting. In so doing, Spector aligns himself with one side of the debate that played out over the topic of Surrealism-and-women, and claims that Surrealism's sexism was matched in its racism.[28] In the 1980s it was a

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[24] Jack Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing, 1919 – 1939: The Gold of Time,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[25] Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s,* (London, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

[26] Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900 – 1930*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

[27] Spector, op cit: 15.

[28] As noted in my Introduction, clamorous debate over Surrealism and women took place in the 1980s. Simone de Beauvoir provided perhaps the earliest feminist analysis of 'Woman' in Breton's poetry, in *The Second Sex* (*Le deuxième sexe,* Paris: Gallimard, 1949, trans. and edited by Howard M. Parshley New York: Knopf, 1953). Xavière Gauthier made a more concerted assault on Surrealism in her book of 1971: Xavière Gauthier, *Surréalisme et sexualité* (Paris, Gallimard, 1971). For recent comment, see Robert James Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995). In response to Krauss's 'Corpus Delecti' (1985), several texts were published: Mary Ann Caws, 'Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art,' in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives,* edited by Susan Suleiman (Cambridge, Harvard, 1986), 262-287; Hal Foster, 'l'Amour faux, *Art in America* 74 (January 1986), 116-129; Rudolf Kuenzli, 'Surrealism and Misogyny,' in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, *et al*. (Cambridge, MA, MIT, 1991), 17 – 26; Robert Belton,

common charge that the Surrealists were a men-only group and a white-only group, an accusation that Spector makes to indicate their misaligned personal politics:

> The Surrealists' dilemma about women – accepting them as equal, creative subjects or reducing them to dependent objects – reflects their deep-seated ambivalence as white, male, French middle-class revolutionaries whose enemies were in a sense themselves; for in opposition to the values of their class, they theoretically extended their sympathies to the non-white, the female, the non-French, and members of the working class. They maintained a similar ambivalence toward the colonial other – they cultivated only Francophone intellectuals and poets who accepted features of the Surrealist program, and never showed much interest in sympathy with the fate of the unfortunate populace as a whole.[29]

Spector castigates the Surrealists for failing to exercise today's standards and values, as though they can be discredited by their failure to apply affirmative action principles in recruiting their group which, after all, was not a business corporation but a narrow circle of collaborators who gravitated toward each other by force of mutual attraction, plus a wider circle of looser affiliates. He writes,

> Consistent with the middle-class home life of their childhood and their early education, the Surrealists saw women in subordinate roles, not as leaders or policy makers or (at first) as artists. Women filled familiar roles as lovers, seers, and hysterics, which complemented the main activity of the fraternity: they were gazed at as beloved objects, were made utter enigmas for the benefit of attentive poets, and to perform charming choreographies. While remaining on the periphery as wives and mistresses, women sometimes participated in group activities during the Twenties and performed secretarial tasks in the Surrealist Bureau.[30]

No doubt there were limitations in the 1920s when it came to the Surrealist's feminist *bona fides*, but what fatuous anachronism to castigate them for failing to see women *as policy makers* in the 1920s. As Spector himself concedes, women who started on the margins of the group – as lovers, models or assistants – often became active participants. Similarly, in considering the immediate social context of Surrealism in the Twenties and into the Thirties, to consider the charge that Surrealism was a white-only group, we must question whom, amongst 'colonial Others' *other than* educated Francophone blacks could possibly have shown an interest in French Surrealism's poetic or artistic experimentation or political espousal. Without describing the participation of the blacks who came to the movement in the 1930s, Spector erroneously characterises the Surrealists as having 'cultivated' black involvement, whereas black francophone poets, artists and philosophers gravitated

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'Speaking with Forked tongues: "Male" Discourse in "Female" Surrealism?', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, *et al*. (Cambridge, MA, MIT, 1991), 60 – 62.

[29] Spector, op cit., 21

[30] ibid.

towards Surrealist ideas by their own volition and adopted Surrealist practices by their own election. Some became prominent in the group; others openly acknowledged Surrealism as an influence. The list includes such luminaries as Aimé Césaire[31] and Suzanne Césaire[32] from Martinique, Léopold Sédar Senghor[33] from Senegal, L.G. Damas from Guyana,[34] the West Indian Jules-Marcel Monnerot,[35] Pierre Yoyote,[36] and Wilfredo Lam, of Cuban origin.[37] The careers and outputs of black Surrealists are the subject of recent scholarship, some of which I refer to in the next chapter. Spector's charge that the Surrealists were a white-only group is inaccurate, and his charge that the Surrealists failed to show much interest or sympathy with the fate of colonial subjects flies in the face of their express antipathy to colonialism. He asserts that Surrealism was a movement that was ultimately 'formed' or 'influenced' by the positivist education system experienced by its key members. This is in spite of the fact that they so vociferously rejected it. Spector's is

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[31] Aimé Fernand David Césaire (1913 – 2008) African- Martinican francophone poet, author and politician. One of the founders, with Senghor and Damas, of the Négritude movement who created the Parisian literary review *L'Étudiant Noir* (*The Black Student*) in 1935.

[32] Suzanne Césaire (1915 – 1966) née Roussi, b. Martinique. Essayist, playwright, activist and academic. Met Césaire in Paris as a student. In 1941, with her husband and Rene Menil, co-founded the journal *Tropiques* in Martinique. In 1955 she returned to Paris, and separated from Césaire in 1963.

[33] Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906 – 2001) poet, politician, and cultural theorist and one of the founders of the Négritude movement. Senghor was the first African to sit as a member of the Académie française. He was also the founder of the political party called the Senegalese Democratic Bloc. He served as the first president of Senegal (1960 – 1980).

[34] Léon Damascus Damas (1912 –1978) poet, politician, academic, teacher and cultural missionary, one of the founders of the Négritude movement. Born in Cayenne in French Guiana, but went to Martinique in 1924 where he was a classmate of Aimé Césaire, and then to Paris to study in 1929. As a student in Paris, Damas enrolled at the Institute of Ethnology, and he contributed to literary, Marxist and black activist journals. In 1934 joined an ethnological mission to Dutch and French Guyana. In the 1960s Damas was based in the U.S.A and Paris, but worked and travelled widely.

[35] Jules Monnerot (1909 – 1995 b. Fort-de-France, Antilles). French essayist, writer and journalist. One of those involved with the black student journal *Légitime defense* in 1932. He contributed to *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*, and co-founded the Collège de sociologie (1939) with Georges Bataille and Roger Caillois, and the magazine *Critique* (1946). He also collaborated on *Acéphale*. Curiously, after the war Monnerot became increasingly right wing and toward the end of his life was involved in the National Front.

[36] Pierre Yoyotte (19?? – 1940) In *Brown, Black and Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora* (Texas: Texas University Press, 2009) the authors Franklin Rosemont and D.G. Kelley write that Yoyotte's biography remains a mystery and even his close friends did not know where or when he was born. Yoyotte published articles in *LSASDLR*, *Documents* and *Minotaure.*

[37] Wifredo Óscar de la Concepción Lam y Castilla, Cuban-born French Painter (1902 – 1982) Originally studied law in Havana, but abandoned it in favour of painting, and studied art in Madrid. In 1938, Lam moved to Paris where Picasso was an enthusiastic supporter of his work. He met Breton in 1939. Lam left for Marseille in 1940 where he rejoined the Surrealists. Lam and Breton collaborated on the publication of Breton's poem *Fata Morgana*, which Lam illustrated. Lam spent the duration of the war in Havana. In 1946, he and Breton spent four months in Haiti. In 1952, Lam resettled in Paris.

a *post hoc* argument with no explanatory force, and too slight to operate effectively as a central thesis, and so the data emerges as unrelated anecdote.

Petrine Archer-Straw's *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, published in 2000, presents a descriptive account of the early jazz scene in Paris. The book offers pictorial and descriptive material and provides a vivid account of the racist categories perpetuated by popular culture in the Twenties, which subjected blacks – whether they hailed from New York or the French colonies – to the same types of confining stereotypes. Despite her rich descriptive treatment of this contextual material, Archer-Straw's discussion of the Parisian avant-garde is poor.[38] Her fifth chapter, 'The Darker Side of Surrealism' is flawed in its conception and presents awkwardly assembled and badly analysed material containing numerous factual errors and jarring inconsistencies. She denounces Surrealist 'negrophilia', singling out the *Documents* group – Bataille and Leiris – for particular condemnation.[39] Her final chapter is erroneous at the outset, opening with the claim that Bataille and Leiris had 'come to appreciate black culture through their interest in ethnography.'[40] The jazz scene in Paris did play an early part in the development of some of Leiris and Bataille's passions, but their interest in ethnography came later. Leiris credits jazz and Surrealism as starting points for his enthusiasms, which led him to Africa and thence to ethnography.[41] Archer-Straw's charge that *Documents* simply 'valorised negatives' is a claim about straightforward inversions of received opposites or hierarchies and it does not stand up to scrutiny, and her discussion of the rather naïve views of the young Surrealists do not acknowledge their own later self criticism and the fact that their views became more sophisticated over time.

Part of Archer-Straw's discussion focuses on issue four of *Documents*, of September 1929. She claims that it references black culture in an exploitative fashion to

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[38] The book has drawn polarised critical responses: some are similarly ill informed, and others take it to task. Jane Marcus's review is particularly pointed, and I concur with her. She writes, 'The sweeping assumptions and simplistic overgeneralizations of *Negrophilia* are aimed at a popular audience unfamiliar with the debates across the fields of art history, ethnography, and photography. The book's chapters […] add little that is not already known to scholars of the phenomenon known as modernist primitivism. Indeed, in claiming to "challenge" "'Eurocentric' art historical writing about other cultures," the author overstates the significance and originality of her contribution while giving short shrift to the serious and pathbreaking scholarly work that has opened this avenue of inquiry. Jane Marcus, 'Suptionpremises', *MODERNISM / modernity*, 9, no. 3 (2002), 491 – 502.

[39] Archer-Straw, op cit.

[40] ibid., 135.

[41] Michel Leiris quoted in Jean Jamien and Sally Price, 'A Conversation with Michel Leiris,' *Current Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (Feb 1988): 157 – 174.

illustrate its own 'ideological persuasions'. At one point she lambasts Leiris for his insensitivity to the political aspirations of contemporary blacks; two paragraphs later she writes that 'the dissidents under Bataille and Leiris promoted the rights of all people under self-determination…'[42] Her inflamed concluding paragraph reads,

> The 'sousrealists' [a term Archer-Straw coined in order to designate the 'dissident Surrealists' in their adherence to a base materialism] used black culture as a resource to work through and act out their lop-sided view of the world. They consciously mapped out a whole network of ideas under the guise of ethnography. Their favouring of black culture reflected another, more conceptual level of exploitation that was subversive and reflective of their own ideological persuasions. Although oppositional to colonialism, they posited an alternative that was as sinister in its baseness and as misguided in its interpretations.[43]

Archer-Straw's foregoing discussion does not forge a clear path to these strident conclusions. The 'ideological persuasions' and 'whole network of ideas' that *Documents* 'maps out' are not clearly articulated. Nor is there a depiction of the 'sinister alternative' to colonialism that *Documents* that is supposed to posit. Despite her stated intention to take a 'close look at language and visual expressions', Archer-Straw offers very partial readings of particular photographic juxtapositions in *Documents*. She points accusingly at Brancusi's sculptures as perpetuating black/white dichotomies, without considering any possibility of irony in his work, and without providing any references to make good her assertion that Giacometti's work was directly influenced by Brancusi.[44] The assertion both artists were primitivists is a line of argument that is not paved out. Archer-Straw completely fails to acknowledge that blacks who organised against colonial oppression did purposefully adopt Surrealism. She writes,

> Despite valorizing negatives, *Documents's* depictions of black people differed little from Brancusi's use of opposites. The magazine used them as coded accessories that undermined rather than enhanced the white subjects they despised. Whether used to enhance or subvert, the results were just the same: the journal's affirmation of what the 'sousrealists' understood black culture to be hindered rather than helped the New Negro's thrust towards acceptance and equality. *Documents's* images did nothing for black awareness, or for European awareness of blacks. The New Negro aspired to collaborate in modern art practice; it did not help black culture in any way to be portrayed by 'sousrealism' as 'subversive', rather than subverted.[45]

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[42] ibid., 152.
[43] ibid., 157.
[44] There is no mention, for example, that the sculpture entitled *White Negress* is an abstract portrayal of, or tribute to, Nancy Cunard, a detail that widens the address of the work considerably.
[45] ibid., 157.

Covering similar terrain to Archer-Straw, in *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900 – 1930,* Jody Blake seeks to establish connections between black music and avant-garde art in Paris.[46] Blake's referencing of other scholarly sources is far more thorough than Archer-Straw's. Her chapter on Surrealism in the 1920s, 'Jamming on the Rue Fontaine', traces interconnections between Surrealism and popular culture, and her evocation of the Montmartre nightclubs is rich. She recounts how the Surrealists were enthused by the influx of American jazz and the nightclubs that sprang up in 1920s Paris, and gives a highly evocative account of the vibrant, alluring atmosphere of the clubs. She says that some of the Surrealists sought out the best and most authentic in jazz music that Paris had to offer.[47] They frequented two notable clubs, the Tempo Club and The Grand Duke (close to Breton's apartment in the rue Fontaine), places that African-American entertainers went to make music for their own enjoyment. Blake writes that the Surrealists discovered 'the impromptu and improvisational music that would later be called jamming.'[48] They also frequented the Caribbean ballroom known as Bal Nègre or the Bal Doudou, next door to where André Masson and Joan Miró lived on the rue Blomet, a place where blacks from Haiti, Guadeloupe and Martinique gathered.[49] Apart from the live entertainment, Blake recounts, some of the Surrealists, including Philippe Soupault, Robert Desnos and Marcel Duhamel collected imported recordings of African-American music by band leaders like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Frank Trumbauer and female vocalists such as Sophie Tucker, Lee Morse and Vaughn de Leath.[50] Duhamel went to New York City in 1927, and Desnos to Havana in 1928, and each of them pursued their exploration of jazz music.

While the depth of her research is greater and the discussion more measured, Blake's position coincides with Archer-Straw's. Her purpose is to demonstrate the Surrealists' *mis*understanding and *primitivist* conception of jazz, and to show their uncritical position with respect to the popular culture of the day. Without using the pejorative 'negrophilia', she claims that in their great enthusiasm for jazz, and despite their apparent connoisseurship, rather than conceiving of it as a modern form, the Surrealists projected a wild, irrational, elemental and primitive blackness onto it,

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[46] Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900 – 1930*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
[47] ibid., 112.
[48] ibid., 114.
[49] ibid., 115.
[50] ibid., 116.

thus demonstrating their racist essentialism. Blake writes that the Surrealists' conviction was that,

> African-American musicians 'instinctively' achieved what they had to learn how to do, which was to express themselves spontaneously, unhampered by exterior considerations and drawing on inner sources of creativity. The surrealists' enlistment of jazz in their cause typifies their practice of validating their own approach to creativity by appropriating the work of 'uncivilized' and 'unsocialized' artists. They included 'tribal' sculpture in their exhibitions and published drawings and paintings by mediums and madmen in their books and periodicals. To authenticate their own self-conscious primitivism, in all instances the surrealists looked to cultures and individuals who they believed had escaped or resisted the stranglehold of Western logic and morality.'[51]

According to Blake, in the Surrealist schema jazz is the same as *la mentalité primitive.* Her contention that the Surrealists believed that jazz improvisation was 'instinctive' is evidenced by her reading of the novel of 1927 by Philippe Soupault,[52] *Le nègre*, which tells the story of a friendship between a black American jazz drummer and a white Frenchman through the eyes of the white narrator.[53] Blake compares this story with Breton's *Nadja* as an exploitative exploration of Otherness.[54] Soupault comes in for condemnation because, she argues, his writing presents the idea that African-Americans were born musicians and dancers, able to abandon themselves vertiginously to the force that animates their music.[55] Soupault's interpretation of the creativity of African American musicians and dancers, according to Blake, reflects Surrealist ideas about pure psychic automatism but *also* coincides with deeply entrenched racial stereotypes present in contemporary popular portrayals of black performers. She writes,

> [B]lack musicians and dancers, eyes closed in melodic rapture, limbs rotating in a rhythmic frenzy, [in *Le nègre*] were portrayed abandoning themselves to the mysterious forces the surrealists courted. Likewise, as in Pol Rab's illustrations for Stéphane Manier's *Sous le signe du jazz* (1926) and Marcel Vertès's lithograph from the series *Les Dancings* (1925), French men and women were depicted succumbing to the epidemic of irrationality unleashed by jazz. Indeed, according to critics, neither the entertainers nor their audiences could resist being plunged 'into the torpor of a monotonous automatism' by the 'dominating and hypnotic resources of rhythm'.[56]

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[51] ibid., 19.

[52] Philippe Soupault (1897 – 1990) was involved with the writing of *Champs magnétiques* with Breton, but withdrew early from Surrealism. He received severe treatment from Breton about his investment in 'literature'. A difference between Soupault's *Le nègre* and Breton's *Nadja* is that Soupault's work is a novel, whereas Breton's work was determinedly not a novel; it is a memoir rather than a work of fiction.

[53] Philippe Soupault, *Le nègre* (Paris: Seghers, 1975)

[54] Blake, op cit., 120. Here again, an interpretation of Breton as having shamelessly exploited the mad Nadja for her story is not an uncommon reading of his book, which to my reading offers Breton's self-indictment. The reader is in a position to judge Breton by virtue of the fact he rather mercilessly judges himself.

[55] ibid., 120 – 121.

[56] ibid,. 121.

There are a number of conflations and logical slippages here. In connecting the descriptions *Le nègre* to popular illustrations, Blake cites Pol Rab and Marcel Vertè, who had no relation to Surrealism. They presented caricatures of blacks that are not in the same order as Soupault's characterisations, but are at the very least derisive and bear no resemblance to pictorial Surrealism, but accord to a type of modernist Art déco that the Surrealist's repudiated (see Fig. 1).

Moreover, the novel *Le nègre* occupies an uneasy relation to Surrealism. While Soupault occupied an important place in Surrealism early in the movement, his fiction writing was a cause of disagreement with the group, corresponding to the very style of descriptive realism that Breton rejects uncategorically in the *First Manifesto*. *Le nègre* is a novel in the ordinary sense of the word: it is a linear narrative with fictitious characters and, as such, it does not belong to the Surrealist cannon. Aside from whether or not *Le nègre* can be considered as a Surrealist work, it is questionable whether the story or its character depictions square with the argument that Blake tries to develop.

Fig. 1. Illustration of La Revue nègre by Pol Rab reproduced in the novel *Sous le signe du jazz* (*Under the Sign of Jazz*) by Stéphane Manier, 1926. Private collection.

In *Le nègre*, Soupault evokes jazz clubs and the music through the eyes of a fictitious narrator. At one point, the white narrator imagines himself as black, with kinky hair. The character idealizes and partially identifies with his friend, a black drummer. We cannot confidently assume that this reflects Soupault's *own* identifications with the 'Negro Other': it may, but even so, there is something revealing about the fact that later, the white protagonist declares with regret that he cannot maintain his fantasy. Indeed, the story can be read as a caution about such naïve identification in a cross-race friendship, and it makes some apposite observations about the European attitudes of its time. It would be a mistake to impute the views of the fictitious character to Soupault himself, and more difficult yet to make any imputation, from what is quite an ambivalent novel, about the Surrealist movement and its opinions of jazz. Through referencing this novel, and particularly the attitudes of the white narrator, Blake casts the aspersion that inherent to the Surrealists' misunderstanding of jazz is a conflation that equates the licentious, urban phenomenon of the jazz club and the 'savage' ritual of the 'Dark Continent', and in formulating her argument she makes other dangerous leaps:

> Making their presence felt beneath the surface of these descriptions of *les années folles* (the French equivalent of the Roaring Twenties) are images of 'savage' rituals from both the Dark Continent and the New World. These sorts of imaginative confusions of Africa and America, and of religious rites and commercial entertainment, are also central to surrealists' interpretation of jazz. Soupault's description of the infernal racket of tap dancing *is as evocative* of the legendary bloodcurdling signal drums of the African jungle as it is of the so-called talking feet of the music-hall stage [my emphasis].[57]

Blake takes Soupault (not the character in his novel) to task for the grossly oversimplified notion that African-American music and dance were totally free of rules, and this is an imputation she supports through referencing other popular representations of rapture or frenzy from the time, which do not have a direct link to Surrealism. In a similar vein, Blake attributes a chain of associations to Leiris, to demonstrate his even more explicit comparisons between jazz and 'primitive religious hysteria'.[58] Here again, while there was assuredly a naivety in Leiris's youthful views, it does him a disservice to say he subscribed to simple-minded equivalence of modern jazz to 'jungle music' even in the 1920s, as she imputes, and it does more of a disservice to *Documents.* Throughout Surrealism's history, *états sécondaires*, or altered states of consciousness were an abiding interest. Early on, as members of the Surrealist circle later said of themselves, they were guilty of a type of

[57] ibid., 121.
[58] ibid., 124.

inverse racism, but Leiris himself provides an even handed and frank critique of his own trajectory from being influenced by the cultural stereotypes of the 1920s to broadening his perspective and experience and arriving at a culturally relative view.[59]

Leiris was to acknowledge his early naïve romanticism, but in enlarging upon his position years later, he said, 'I was very ready to think of jazz as being something like trance. And I don't think that's totally wrong.' He also said, 'For me it [jazz] represented exoticism in the context of American industrial society. Jazz was simultaneously part of industrial civilization and Africa.'[60]

Blake does not broker an alternative argument: that the Surrealists may have viewed jazz as a modern, urban phenomenon with an African inheritance; that for them, jazz improvisation corresponds not to 'pure instinct', but to a trance-like state of being able to play with a spontaneity that is based on virtuoso skill. The central deficiency in Blake's approach though is that it does not demonstrate if, or how, the Surrealists did enlist jazz in their cause. Seizing on the affinity that she claims the Surrealists saw between jazz and automatism, she says that their enthusiasm was about much more than mere entertainment, however that claim is not well supported: it would seem that for the Surrealists, jazz *was* mainly a form of entertainment, quite aside from their Surrealist pursuits, but a modern form for which they had passion and respect.

Some Surrealists recognised an affinity between jazz improvisation and automatic writing, but, problematically, Blake does not acknowledge that jazz was marginal to the early development of Surrealism in the early 1920s. Despite the fact that some Surrealists listened to it, there are few Surrealist references to jazz prior to the dissident Surrealist periodical *Documents* of 1929 and 1930, in which Leiris wrote about jazz and popular music. In 1953 Gérard Legrand discussed commonalities between Charlie Parker improvisation and automatic writing in *Puissance du jazz*.[61] Leiris himself expressed a firm view about jazz in relation to Surrealism. In the interview conducted by Jean Jamin in 1988, he says that improvisation was a feature of jazz that had a commonality with Surrealism, but music and Surrealism *as a mode of signification* are incommensurate:

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[59] Sally Price and Jean Jamin, 'A Conversation with Michel Leiris', *Current Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (Feb., 1988), 160.
[60] ibid., 160.
[61] Gérard Legrand, *Puissances du jazz* (Paris: Arcanes, 1953).

> [Leiris:] There's no way you could have had surrealist music. In order to have surrealism, there first has to be realism. There has to be a reality to manipulate. Music (and I am not denigrating it when I say this) has absolutely nothing to do with reality. It's a system that has no signs. Music has no signification. What matters are the relationships between sounds. Surrealist music is inconceivable. Literary surrealism, yes, because literature is made of words. Pictorial surrealism, yes, because pictures are made of images. But a musical surrealism? What could it be based on?
> [Jamin:] You wouldn't consider jazz surrealist in a way?
> [Leiris:] Not at all. At least not as I see it.[62]

Some Surrealists' apparent connoisseurship does not point to a necessary link between jazz and Surrealism. Blake does not demonstrate the link and, at best, her discussion provides no more than a lively descriptive contextual backdrop to the first decade of Surrealism, and some evidence to show that they were engaged in the popular culture of their day. Her purpose is to underscore the racism of the jazz age and, within that, to demonstrate Surrealism's complicity with it, but not to ask to what extent Surrealism offered any sort of critique of ethnocentrism.

To this point, we have covered the works most hostile to Surrealist 'primitivitism', which lack engagement and sympathy with the poetic and visual operations of Surrealism. None of them offers a discussion of the products of Surrealism, nor the Surrealist's express purposes in dealing with non-Western artefacts. A common feature of these studies is that their analyses are primarily contextual and their conclusions are arrived at through imputation.[63] The three works to be reviewed next are stronger pieces of scholarship than those just discussed. They address Surrealism's 'vanguard' status as a modernist movement.

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[62] Price and Jamin, 160.

[63] A review of some of the literature under scrutiny here was written by Simon Baker, 'Search Fi A Find – The Black Art of Paris,' in *Oxford Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (2003), 186 – 191. Baker compares and contrasts three books (by Archer-Straw, Blake and Bate) each of which include a strand of discussion about Surrealism and primitivism. His treatment of Archer-Straw's book is very restrained, but he points to its key problem, saying that the approach 'switches from the gallery opportunism associated with Cubism to Dada and Surrealism without always making sufficient allowances for the difference in the forms of "negrophilia" at work.' (p.187). Baker pulls up Archer-Straw on the way that she 'glosses over' the case of Man Ray's photography and its incorporation of multiple and ironic references. I would say rather that the book fails to distinguish between the significance of avant-garde appropriation, and the popular cultural values it was referring to. As I go on to argue in the next chapter, David Bate's approach provides a corrective.

Vanguard Primitivism

Phyllis Taoua's essay, 'Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture' characterises Surrealism's 'vanguard primitivism', but Taoua argues that ultimately it is ethically incompatible with their politics of anti-colonial protest.[64] Louise Tythacott's *Surrealism and the Exotic* of 2003 is the first monographic study of Surrealism and primitivism.[65] In a similar vein to Taoua, Tythacott argues that in many ways the Surrealists were 'ahead of their time,' but contends that despite their best efforts they were caught in the ideological web of Western cultural imperialism. The scope of Tythacott's study is greater and the data rich, but ultimately her interpretation of it leads her to adopt an opinion which lines up with those of Spector, Archer Straw and Blake. Both Taoua and Tythacott pose firm commonalities between the Surrealists' views and those of their influences, for example Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Arthur Rimbaud, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Sigmund Freud and James Frazer.[66] The imputation that the Surrealists faithfully subscribed to the ideas of their intellectual heroes is a weakness in the arguments. The third text discussed in this section is an essay, 'Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of "Reason": Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude' by Amanda Stansell.[67] Stansell shares some of the views of Taoua and Tythacott, but provides a much more positive view of Surrealism's power to confront racist stereotypes, and her perspective is linked in important respects to those authors represented in my next chapter.

In 'Of Natives and Rebels…' Taoua describes the Surrealist's primitivism, posing an inextricable connection between their preoccupation with the Unconscious and their interest in non-Western cultures. She says they looked to both to challenge the alienating aspects of their own culture, and she dubs this tendency 'vanguard primitivism.' She wishes to claim that primitivism was *instrumental* for defining essential Surrealist concepts, principally the Unconscious, arguing that the pitfalls of

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[64] Phyllis Taoua, 'Of Natives and Rebels: Locating the Surrealist Revolution in French Culture,' *South Central Review* 20 (Summer – Winter, 2003), 67 – 110.

[65] Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

[66] *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, published in 1890 was written by Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer (1854 – 1941). French philosopher Lucien Lévy-Brühl (1857 –1939) wrote *How Natives Think* (1910). He distinguished between the 'primitive' and the Western mind, arguing that the primitive mind does not differentiate the supernatural from reality, and doesn't address contradictions.

[67] Amanda Stansell, 'Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of "Reason": Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritiude,' in Raymond Spiteri and Donald La Coss, eds., *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 111 – 126.

vanguard primitivism 'are not peripheral to the Surrealist movement but rather embedded in the very logic of Surrealism.'[68]

> During the interwar years [writes Taoua], vanguard primitivism became a *trend*: it was a fashionable expression of cultural desire; an affiliation with elsewhere born of disillusionment. This imaginary space of dissidence – a place to sit aside (*dissidere*) – is a historical abstraction predicated on multiple forms of remoteness: formal, cultural, temporal and geographical. References to non-Western cultures in these terms became part of an avant-garde cultural idiom that was influenced by Pablo Picasso's discovery of African masks and the formalist experimentation to which his Africanist epiphany led. During the 1930s, an aesthetic interest in non-Western cultures among Parisian artists directly contributed to the development of an ethnographic study of the distant lands from which the objects in the Trocadéro came…. Surrealism actively participated in this ongoing process of cultural exploration and incorporation with a range of publications from Philippe Soupault's novel *Le nègre* (1927) to essays on "*la mentalité primative*" in *Surréalisme au service de la revolution* (1933).[69]

A weakness here is that Taoua does not discriminate between Surrealism and other 'vanguards'. In referring to Picasso's work of the 1910s, Taoua rather indiscriminately rolls it together with Surrealism. Other lapses into broad generalisations about 'vanguard primitivism' and her connections between Rimbaud and Surrealism, and Cubism and Surrealism, blur, rather than clarify, her attempt to distinguish a specifically Surrealist primitivism from other modernist tendencies. The question as to just *where* Surrealism's 'embedded' primitivism is locatable and self-evident proves difficult for her to answer convincingly. Taoua refers to one clear instance, but some of her points of reference are no more compelling than those we have already reviewed.[70] She discusses Soupault's *Le nègre* in a way that closely accords to Blake's analysis above, by conflating the idealization of the black character by the novel's white protagonist with the values the author. She too takes Soupault to task for *his* ambivalent idealisation of the 'primitive Other', rather than crediting his writing with any measure of critical perspective by interpreting the ambivalence of his novelistic characterisation of cross-cultural confrontation as strategic. Like Blake, Taoua neither pauses to reflect upon the appropriateness or otherwise of considering *Le nègre* as an exemplification of Surrealism, nor the obstacle its literary status *as* a novel might impose for making imputations from it about Surrealist primitivism.

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[68] Phyllis Taoua, 'Of Natives and Rebels...', 70.
[69] ibid., 69
[70] Taoua quotes the passage I have quoted above, from André Breton's 'Surrealist Situation of the Object' (translation of 'Situation surréaliste de object'), p. 76, in which he refers to the uninhibited imaginations of 'primitive people and children.'

Elsewhere too, Taoua's exposition of Surrealist primitivism strains under the pressure of its high level of imputation. She tries to go beyond the explicit textual references to primitivism in Surrealism, which are few, to extract more *subtle* and *implicit* indications of primitivism, saying,

> Beyond the artist's desire to find a new skin – "*se faire une peau neuve*" – which was inspired by an interest in liberating the subject from cultural baggage and reconnecting with a wild, untamed self, other more subtle traces of this cultural field are implicitly operative.[71]

This approach seems problematic. Certainly, Gauguin could be viewed through this prism. So could the young Leiris, whose ethnographic excursion to Africa can indeed be construed as seeking a new skin, à la Rimbaud, but he quickly came to see the absurdity of this himself, and this realisation forms part of his ethnographic self-critique. The motivation to find a new skin seems to me to apply less well to other Surrealists.[72] They did not seek to 'go native' but, as Taoua asserts herself, to plumb the Unconscious. This relates far more closely to Freudian psychoanalysis than with the idealism, say, of Rousseau. It is through an analysis of the *First Manifesto* that Taoua tries to develop her claim that the unconscious for Surrealism is romanticised and primitivised:

> An idealized primitivity representing that which comes before Western education and the process of acculturation links the unconscious and "primitive" cultures for the Surrealists, who approach both terrains as sources of artistic inspiration.[73]

In her reading of the *Manifesto*, Taoua imputes the presence of Rousseau's noble savage, an idea, she says, that 'undergirds Breton's social criticism, which values the native instincts in human beings which are ostensibly corrupted by education and the alienating experience of acculturation into the French middle class.'[74]

By their very nature, Breton's manifestos of Surrealism are pregnant with latent meaning, meaning not-yet-manifest, and they invite us to read them associatively. Nonetheless, I find Taoua's evocation of Rousseau's looming ghostly presence in the Manifesto to be misplaced. The Manifesto makes its own architecture and scaffolding apparent: it brims with references that genuinely do 'undergird' it, but in its pantheon of imaginary forebears and collaborators, we do not find Rousseau.

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[71] ibid., 70.

[72] Until the Second World War, few of the French Surrealists travelled extensively, and not in a manner of extended immersive journeys. During and after the war this was to change, with several Surrealists taking exile in the United States, most of them returned to France after the War. Max Ernst lived in Arizona, with his wife the Surrealist Dorothea Tanning, from 1948 until 1953 when he resumed living in France. See also p. 108, f.n. 5.

[73] ibid., 76.

[74] ibid., 74.

Moreover, Breton does not argue that human beings are corrupted by education *per se*, but specifically objects to the prevailing model of French education and its foundational positivist values, which, he argues, atrophy the imagination. Taoua continues to pick through the text of the *First Manifesto,* imputing necessary links between the concept of the Unconscious and a romanticised 'primitive Other'. She points to the way Breton refers to 'human exploration' into the Unconscious and, in his use of language, she imputes a link with imperialist voyages of discovery. Even if this metaphorical undercurrent *were* there, it would be difficult to argue that it demonstrates that Breton subscribes to a colonialist ideology. In a similar mode of conflation, Taoua points to the Unconscious being linked to *étranges* forces – strange or foreign forces – and so she infers in the *First Manifesto* the familiar overlap between the 'Dark Continent' of the Freudian Unconscious. Certainly, Surrealism has at its very basis a concern with Otherness at a psychological and cultural level, and these concerns were cultivated through their interest in psychoanalysis and ethnography, but they responded to ideas on their own terms, seldom in an orthodox fashion. Taoua's level of analysis and her method of trying to read Surrealist expression against its grain seems forced and reductive, seeking as it does to equate Surrealism to the ideas of its sources and historical influences, to which it was seldom faithful. The same problem besets Louise Tythacott's *Surrealism and the Exotic*.

Tythacott's book has great documentary strength. It marshals data that has not been catalogued before. The archival referencing behind *Surrealism and the Exotic* is comprehensive, and this thesis is indebted to the bibliographic sources relating to primary texts in this area of study. The powers of the book's interpretation and critique are less compelling. Its main contribution to the field of enquiry lies in its third chapter, which details the involvement of some of the Surrealists in the acquisition of tribal objects for the Parisian marketplace and their relationships with the leading commercial galleries that dealt in these objects. Tythacott's account of the various Paris dealerships that traded and exhibited imported cultural objects gives a clear idea of the sheer volume of artefacts being imported to satisfy the growing popularity for exotica. The picture that emerges from her discussion is that a number of notable figures in Paris's artistic and literary circles supported the dealers. There was a closely interconnected network of artists and writers participating in the business and scholarship attached to the dealing galleries. Presently I will return to Tythacott's discussion of the dealers to draw out some of the implications of her

study into this aspect of commercial activity. I view other aspects of her approach less favourably, and I will address these now.

Tythacott argues that despite their intentions to disavow nationalism, imperialism, and racial inequality and against their critiques of evolutionary thought, the Surrealists simply *inverted* social Darwinist hierarchies and placed 'the primitive' at the top of a scale of human creative achievement, rather than at the foot of such a ladder.[75] She describes Surrealism as 'torn by contradictory impulses, oscillating between modernist and more progressive views'.[76] What is more (consistent with the way I understand Taoua's study) she declares that 'many Surrealists remained locked within the framework of early twentieth-century Eurocentric primitivist references'.[77] However, she praises the Surrealists for being some of the first to challenge 'the lowly position accorded to non-Western peoples in the West.'[78] 'Thus', she writes,

> [W]e encounter a paradox here – that the Surrealists were, on the one hand, progressive and radical, and on the other, fixed within the world-view of their time. Though bounded by prevailing cultural concepts – evolutionism, psychoanalysis, primitivism – they continually problematised them. They turned to the latest theorists to construct their image of the primitive. They drew on the then progressive ideas of Freud and Lévy-Bruhl. Yet while disavowing the discourses of evolutionism and aesthetic primitivism they constructed in their place equally problematic discourses of the fantastic, the magical and the mythical. Though their radicalism enabled them to stand outside some of the dominant bourgeois ideologies of European modernist society, they never totally broke free, of the boundaries of their own (largely French) race, language and culture. This book, then, has *a double mission – to expose the Surrealist's idealization of the primitive, yet also to locate and understand Surrealism within the parameters of its time*.[79] [My italics]

Tythacott's 'double mission' seems to amount to a *single* mission: that is, to show that in their idealization of the primitive and their reliance on received ideas, the Surrealists ultimately failed in their avowed intention to reject and subvert the French imperialist values of their day. The scope of her study and the methods she uses do not uphold the bald claims that she makes. For instance, though in the passage above she cites Freud and Lévy-Bruhl as 'progressive theorists' who inspired the Surrealists, she offers no discussion of the ways in which the Surrealists *departed* from their views.[80] It is a specious move to fully equate a Surrealist position with that

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[75] Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 12.
[76] ibid., 11.
[77] ibid., 13.
[78] ibid., 12.
[79] ibid., 14.
[80] Again, the interview between Leiris and Jamin is enlightening. Jean Jamin says, 'I came across a 'Read/Don't Read' list which included Lévy-Bruhl's *Mentalité primitive* in the

of an influential source. Marx and Freud *were* Surrealist influences, but it is commonly acknowledged that the Surrealist's reception of their theories were partial and questioning. Much the same can be said about the influences of anthropology upon Surrealism. Over time, different Surrealists variously cited Fraser, Lévy-Bruhl, Levi-Strauss and other anthropological influences. These are theorists whose positions are by no means in fully accord with each other, and whose influences on Surrealism are by no means direct.

Tythacott points to the Surrealists' engagement with procuring and collecting artefacts as a fundamental contradiction in their ideological stance, and here I think is her strongest argument. She writes,

> Surrealists were fervently anti-colonial and anti-capitalistic, intrinsically opposed to the plundering of indigenous cultural wealth for the European market. Nevertheless, they amassed *as much as they could* from the colonial metropolis. We have seen how [the Parisian art dealer] Guillaume acquired his stock of African objects through his contacts with colonial rubber companies, and from advertisements placed in the colonial press. No doubt the Surrealists too would have been aware of such modes of acquisition. For all their anti-colonial proclamations, the Surrealists' ethnographic collections blatantly mirrored the geography of French colonial possession. These collections, in other words, were predicated upon the very colonial and capitalist distribution networks they despised.[81] [My italics]

The Surrealists' various points of engagement with the fashionable trade in ethnographic objects raise questions about their values, and clearly do not accord with today's standards. By the 1920s, for many on the left of politics, the colonial rubber trade was ignominious and Tythacott argues that the trade in ethnographic objects was a sideline of the rubber trade. In the case of the dealer Paul Guillaume, the link between the rubber trade and the trade in exotic objects is apparent. Guillaume established his commercial gallery in the 1910s and, before that, he had been an employee in a rubber tyre firm when Joseph Brummer, a collector and dealer, approached him to procure objects for him through Guillaume's colonial contacts. Guillaume went on to become a highly prestigious dealer between the wars, amassing his own extensive tribal art collection. He was particularly notable because he cultivated scholarly and artistic interest in his business dealings, and published a good many informative catalogues for his exhibitions, which became world-renowned. Apollinaire, for example, wrote a preface to a publication by his gallery. If we take on board the connection between the rubber trade and the trade in tribal

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banned column, as well as Durkheim!' to which Leiris replies, 'Yes but Lévy-Bruhl was inspiring to me, not for the surrealists.' See Jamin, op cit., p. 161.

[81] Tythacott, 96.

objects, the practice of collecting these certainly seems at odds with an anti-colonial political stance.

It was Charles Ratton, who began to collect in the 1920s, who forged close links with anthropologists and the Surrealists. He placed advertisements in *La Révolution surréaliste* from 1927 and worked with Tristan Tzara on an exhibition of nearly three hundred objects. He also organised an auction of objects from Breton and Éluard's collections in 1931. Tythacott details how the Surrealists' paths crossed with other dealers too. The collector Doucet employed Breton and Aragon.[82] Breton later opened his own commercial gallery, the Gradiva, which sold exotic objects as well as Surrealist art.[83] Paul Éluard,[84] for his part, travelled as a buyer for Ratton, and Tzara and other Surrealists occasionally worked for various dealers and collectors.[85]

The Surrealists acquired objects for their own private collections. They used them in public exhibitions, and they sold them for profit. I think it must be conceded that these aspects of their practice do not square with the values that many people hold today. However, I see the need to question whether the Surrealists' collecting habits nullify their moral stance with regard to colonialism, and according to what moral authority. Few are immune from similar criticism. If we opt to castigate the Surrealists for buying and selling exotic objects and dismiss their views on the basis of the value position that this trading could imply, as historical actors we should be aware that as individuals our own consumption patterns are implicated in a system of production and trade that has not shaken off the colonial past.

While Tythacott usefully questions the Surrealists' complicity in the trade of exotic goods, her argument is marred by tendencies for overstatement and selectivity. She maintains, in the passage quoted above, that the Surrealists amassed *as much indigenous cultural wealth* from the colonial metropolis *as they could*, as though acquisitiveness was their motivating factor. There is evidence to support the fact that some of the Surrealists were very canny in their collecting and dealing, but they were not greedy or venal. It is hardly the case that they hoarded *vast* quantities, and many of the objects were not so much 'wealth' as inexpensively sourced objects chosen for

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[82] Jacques Doucet (1853 – 1929) couturier, collector of manuscript and painting, and patron of art and literature in Paris from 1880 until his death.
[83] Tythacott, op cit., 93 – 94.
[84] Paul Éluard (Eugène Émile Paul Grindel) (1895 –1952), French poet and a founder of the Surrealist movement.
[85] Tythacott, 94.

their intrinsic interest and the associations they suggested to the purchaser. For the most part, the Surrealists' collections were crowded into rather modest living quarters. Moreover, the range of their collections did not closely mirror the French colonial commodity market. In fact they developed preferences for Oceanic, Amer-Indian and Pre-Columbian objects.

Tythacott concludes her chapter with a rather torturous attempt to draw a parallel between ethnographic museum collections and Surrealist collection and exhibition. She argues that both modalities displace tribal objects from their original cultural contexts and resituate them in narratives that present conceptual frameworks. This much is true. But then the comparison is pushed past breaking point. Tythacott says,

> Museums and art galleries become mechanisms for attributing and concentrating taste and knowledge: they sanctify, legitimate and publicly house the valued and the significant within society. Like the Surrealist collector, the museum ideology confers status on the objects it holds. The museum experience itself, the flow of the visitor, is enshrined in a certain form of discipline and ritual. And these notions of ritual and aura generated around the object in a museum are similar to the concepts that… the Surrealists attempted to create as part of their own world view.[86]

By labouring the general similarities between disparate and opposed realms of exhibition and by offering no discussion of the significant differences between museum exhibit and Surrealist display, Tythacott's argument resorts to bold assertion and neglects contrary evidence. Effectively, she is arguing that Surrealism is a continuation of a dominating European ideology of cultural acquisition. Certainly museums and Surrealist collections or exhibitions both employ *modes of display* in which there is *some* acquisitive logic at work, but the 'ideological' frameworks are vastly different: museum classification systems and the Surrealists' staging of objects are worlds apart. In an ethnographic or art museum objects are selected, in vast quantities, to be stored and displayed according to established disciplinary taxonomies. The ordering might be according to beaux art hierarchies or taxonomic systems based on Enlightenment or positivist philosophies, according to their inherent evolutionary assumptions. The totalising message behind such collections is a corroboration and commemoration of ideas of national history and the illustration of the cultural supremacy of Western values. In a Surrealist collection or exhibition, juxtapositions and associations are put into play precisely to destabilise any such systems, according to the logic of Surrealist collage. If there is a key deficiency in

[86] ibid., 105.

Tythacott's analysis, it is a lack of attention to the perversity of Surrealist collage and *détournement*, and a lack of awareness of the non-assimilative nature of it.

Amanda Stansell's essay, 'Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of "Reason": Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritiude', echoes some of Tythacott's assertions, but ultimately it offers a profoundly different analysis of Surrealism's engagement non-Western cultures, presenting a developmental treatment of the way Surrealist perspectives altered over time: from a naïve, celebratory primitivism through to a more sophisticated mode of critical expression. Stansell writes,

> [Their] attempt to step outside dominant Western culture ironically allied the Surrealists with another set of European ideas – 'primitivism', a perspective on non-Western art. Although primitivism was intended to be commendatory, those who saw art in these terms were limited by the tendency to romanticize the 'innate creativity', or 'emotional nature' of indigenous peoples. The Surrealists often shared these assumptions. Their critical lens did not allow them to see other peoples as equally 'cultured'.[87]

Like Tythacott, she says that the Surrealists both challenged and replicated the discourses of their time and, like Tythacott, Stansell claims that they often resorted to a simple hierarchy reversal of old binaries, privileging the non-rational over the rational. She too asserts that the prominent ethnologist Lévy-Bruhl was an important influence on the Surrealists (as I have already said, his direct influence is actually difficult to demonstrate, and while Leiris cites Lévy-Bruhl as a personal influence, he does say the latter was not of great interest to the Surrealists). Stansell writes of Lévy-Bruhl's classic study, *The Primitive Mentality*, that indigenous cultures emphasised dreams and invisible forces: 'In contrast to these discourses that explicitly or implicitly upheld the superiority of European society,' she writes, 'the Surrealists glorified non-Western cultures through emphasising the potential of the non-rational to 'liberate' repressive European society.[88] As I responded earlier, to the much more hostile writers and with reference to Leiris's own recollections, these generalisations do apply to Surrealism in its early years. Where Stansell's account of Surrealism and its non-Western engagement departs radically from those of the aforementioned commentators is in the way she discusses its signification and how it developed to counter the received ideas that inflected their early considerations of other cultures. In this respect her view lines up with the more positive views of Surrealism's *counter*-primitivism outlined in the next chapter.

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[87] Amanda Stansell, 'Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of "Reason": Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritiude,' in Raymond Spiteri and Donald La Coss, eds., *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 111 – 126, at 122.
[88] Stansell, 121.

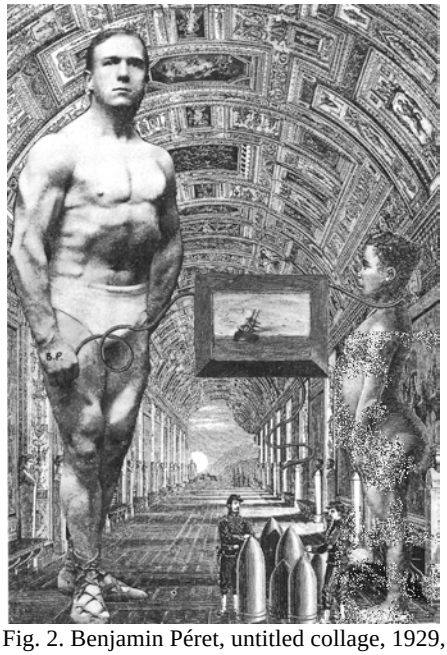

Fig. 2. Benjamin Péret, untitled collage, 1929, frontispiece to Péret *Oeuvres completes*, vol. 4 (Paris, Losfed-José Corti, 1991).

Stansell discusses the destabilising effect of Surrealist juxtaposition through referring to one of the few Surrealist collages that has content directly relating to colonialism, an obscure work by Benjamin Péret of 1929 (Figure 2). She argues that the collage puts into play a set of terms, such that it destabilises the fixed racial stereotypes it has appropriated. She writes,

> Péret keeps hierarchical racial figures in play and thus encourages the spectator to reconsider their complex cultural meanings. Such artwork reaches towards a racial politics that avoids the limitations of both a humanist liberalism based on universal similarity, and a separatist essentialism based on unbridgeable alterity. This dialectic of difference encourages a continually unsettling movement between identity categories, since it foregrounds relationships among groups of people, while acknowledging that cultural constructions have material social effects that cannot be dismissed simply through a representational synthesis…The Surrealists' presentation of racial difference as socially constructed, yet unfixed, anticipates the work of 'whiteness' critics.[89]

Later in her essay she presents a very astute analysis of specific Surrealist texts (we shall visit it below). To build upon Stansell's remarks, I would say that Péret's collage posits a sort of algorithm of the terms slavery, militaristic colonial oppression, and Western aesthetics. To my eye, the relation he has set up between these terms suggests that racial prejudice is inherent to the system of Western aesthetics. The binary between Western and non-Western aesthetics is configured here to *be* a hierarchy – as indicated by the master-slave relation denoted by the whip, and by the incommensurate scale of the figures, who are clearly distinguished on the basis of stereotypical racial signifiers. From the line of whip hangs a painting

[89] ibid., 115.

of a listing ship, a connection between art and voyages of discovery. The juxtaposition of the figure of the gormless Caucasian athlete and the female figure – which approaches the stereotype of a 'Hottentot Venus', is a swipe at Eugenics within the broader frame of a hierarchy of aesthetics. The term 'primitivism' does not seem to have much purchase here, because in this work we are firmly in the realm of iconoclasm, rather than any naïve celebration of a 'cultural Other'.

Stansell goes on to argue that it is important to look at the Surrealists' primitivism in the context of their entire oeuvre.[90] Her discussion invites an interpretation of Surrealism as a trajectory through expressions of earlier naïve forms of primitivism, to a more sophisticated political stance on colonialism and cultural imperialism that anticipates post-colonial discourse. This part of her discussion shows commonalities with commentators we shall address in Chapter Three. Through her analysis of particular texts, Stansell presents strong evidence for how Surrealism developed its views about racial difference and cultural assimilation through its poetics. Her close analysis of later Surrealist texts demonstrates that the play of signification with Surrealist anti-colonial works went well beyond the simple inversion of 'antinomies' and hierarchies that some writers have identified (Archer-Straw, Blake and Tythacott, discussed above).

Stansell argues that the Surrealists' views on colonialism and its inherent racism were connected to their central theoretical position: their critique of reason. She attends to the historical context and the functioning of 'primitivisms' instead of viewing primitivism as a unified ideology. Her discussion covers an extended period, and she describes the sympathies between the Surrealists and the Caribbean intellectuals and black activists in the 1930s and Forties. Thereby, she covers an aspect of Surrealism that has been sorely neglected in the literature (as we saw in the writings of Spector and Archer-Straw) but which, as we shall see in the next chapter, has recently gained attention from scholars. Like Stansell, these commentators attend closely to the various referencing methods the Surrealists' used, and how these changed and developed over time. Their formal attentiveness is directed toward the various modes of visual signification used by the Surrealists and how their commentary undid received ideas, pointing to the view that any idea of a unified 'Primitivism' in relation to Surrealism is difficult to support.

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[90] ibid., 122 – 123.

CHAPTER THREE

Anti-Colonialism & Counter-primitivism
A Survey of the Literature

While a number of writings on Surrealism and primitivism have appraised its engagement with non-Western cultures in a negative light, other theorists have evaluated Surrealism more positively in this regard, and it is these writers who have been most influential in the development of my position on Surrealism and anti-colonialism. This chapter surveys those commentators who look positively upon Surrealism's engagement with non-Western cultures and who see utility in its modes of dissent, counter-primitivism and signification. These writers are attentive to the visual works of Surrealism and they analyse the Surrealists' formal operations not merely as stylistic experiments but as a signifying practice with political import, unlike the writers considered in Chapter One, who see Surrealism's formal experimentation as a retreat from politics. From the survey in this chapter, it begins to emerge that formal and conceptual development occurred in the Surrealist plastic arts along with the development of their post-colonial politics.

The first major investigation of Surrealism's relation to non-Western cultures was the ground-breaking essay by James Clifford written in 1981, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism',[1] a version of which later formed the core chapter of his landmark book of 1988, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature,*

[1] James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Surrealism,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October, 1981), 539 – 64.

and Art.[2] Clifford ably demonstrates that the 1930s were a crucible moment when Surrealism and ethnography interpenetrated. Clifford reinscribed Surrealism as a field of multidisciplinary study, and his scholarship recuperates a discursive space that it marked out, which crosses a number of other discourses and practices: literature, psychoanalysis, art, gallery exhibitions, politics and – Clifford's point of entry – ethnography. His turn to the 1930s is prompted by the intellectual crisis of the 1980s, by which the authority, objectivity and theoretical distance of the ethnographer had been thrown into doubt. Clifford gathers together what he calls 'symptoms of a pervasive postcolonial crisis of ethnographic authority', hence his title: the predicament of culture.[3] He offers a critique of the power structures inherent in anthropology, and in Western visions and practices more generally, advocating an ethnographic practice in which the social scientist takes a reflexive stance, a stance that it took at the outset.

Clifford weighed in to the debates over Rubin's MoMA exhibition of 1984.[4] From the ferment of the 1980s, he looks back to Surrealism as the source of a counter-tradition to the positivist anthropology that was ascendant in the 1930s and which prevailed until the late 1970s. By coining the phrase 'ethnographic surrealism', Clifford identifies an orientation that amounts to a disenchanted viewpoint from which to consider modernity. While his object of analysis shares some of the ground trodden by art historians, its different scope sparked a timely re-evaluation of the intellectual legacy of Surrealism, serving as a potent reminder, especially to an Anglophone readership, that indeed Surrealism had been more than an artistic and literary movement. Clifford's provocation points to the need to reconsider the disciplinary strictures that had come to be applied to Surrealism. He wrote, 'my aim is to cut across retrospectively established definitions and to recapture, if possible, a situation in which ethnography is again something unfamiliar and surrealism not yet a bounded province of modern art and literature.'[5]

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[2] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century, Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
[3] ibid., *x.*
[4] James Clifford, 'Histories of the Tribal and the Modern,' *Art in America* 73, no. 4 (April 1985), 164. Reprinted in Flam, Jack and Miriam Deutch eds. *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 351 – 368.
[5] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, op cit., 117.

Clifford's approach yields a vivid descriptive account of various strains in Parisian cultural life in the 1920s and Thirties. He touches on jazz, the newly established Institut d'Ethnologie and the ethnographic teachings of Marcel Mauss who enthused a generation of scholars. Clifford points to the growing anti-colonialist sentiments amongst the avant-garde and the political left, and the way these phenomena percolated through intellectual and cultural life through the Thirties and after. His approach is genuinely ground breaking and speculative. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many writers have expanded upon Clifford's contextual material, but not always in a well-directed fashion, however other scholars have taken up the idea of 'ethnographic Surrealism' to encapsulate a critical strand of Surrealism.

Clifford provides an account of the history of French ethnography between the wars, drawing this together with the history of Surrealism, broadly defined. Through telling the tale of two museums, the old Trocadéro museum, and the new Musée de l'Homme, he demonstrates that ethnographic and Surrealist practice were connected, if antagonistic. He recounts that the 'Troca' of the 1920s was 'a jumble of exotica', smelling of dampness and rot, with mislabelled, misclassified *objets d'art*, corresponding to the flea-market aesthetics of ethnographic surrealism.[6] Despite its chaos – or because of it, it was very popular and rode the crest of the wave of enthusiasm for *l'art nègre.* Clifford describes how, during the Twenties, the term '*nègre'* 'could embrace modern American jazz, African tribal masks, voodoo ritual, Oceanic sculpture, and even pre-Columbian artefacts. It had attained the proportions of what Edward Said has called an 'Orientalism': a knitted-together collective representation, figuring a geographically and historically vague, but symbolically sharp, exotic world.[7]

Under the leadership of Georges-Henri Rivière, the Trocadéro was restored, but no sooner had the restorations been completed in 1934, than the plan for its demolition and replacement was unveiled. 'The old Byzantine structure was to be razed to make way for a dream building that would sublimate the anarchic cosmopolitanism of the Twenties into a monumental unity: "humanity". The Musée de l'Homme, a name that has only recently become multiply ironic was, in the mid-Thirties, an admirable ideal, at once scientific and political in significance'.[8]

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[6] ibid., 135.
[7] Said, 1978a, discussed in Clifford *The Predicament of Culture*, p. 136.
[8] Clifford, ibid., 138.

In the Musée de l'Homme, African sculptures were displayed regionally along with related objects, says Clifford, indicating that this mode of classification reflected the emergence of more distinct, discrete categories of modern art and ethnology in 1937 than in the decade before.[9] In other words, the development of the Musée de l'Homme made manifest the differentiation, formalisation, institutionalisation and professionalisation of separate disciplines of cultural practice – for example, avant-garde practice and ethnology, arenas that had productively crossed and informed each other a few years earlier. The more formalised and ideologically defined Museum lost connection with Surrealism. The more stable and mature version of French ethnography was less eccentric and, most importantly, less willing to 'dislocate the orders of its own culture'.[10] Leiris, who was to work at the Musée de L'Homme for three decades, expressed ambivalence about the new institution. While he praised its humanist, progressive aims, Leiris allowed himself a regretful glance backward to the old Trocadéro, with its distinctive ambiance and a 'certain familiar air (lacking didactic rigidity)'.[11] 'The danger', Leiris wrote, was that 'in the service of those two abstractions called Art and Science, everything that is living fermentation' would be 'systematically excluded'.[12] The *Documents* group however, continued to fly the flag at the very edges of this newly consolidated ethnographic paradigm, continuing the reflexive and unstable forms of endeavour of that loose conjunction 'ethnographic Surrealism'.

The Musée de l'Homme had opened its doors in June 1938, and by this time the renegade Surrealists had just formed the Collège de Sociologie. In Clifford's unfolding of events, the Collège was a counter-force to the 'official' development of French ethnology, or what could be seen as the ossification of the field. The Collège group that formed around Bataille included Michel Leiris, Roger Caillois – another dissident Surrealist, and other intellectuals including some students of Marcel Mauss. Of the formation of this group, Clifford says: 'Their turn to sociology (less sharply distinguished from ethnology than in England or the United States) signalled a rejection of what they saw as Surrealism's over-identification with literature and art, its excessive subjectivism and concern with automatic writing, individual dream

[9] ibid., 140.
[10] ibid., 141.
[11] ibid., 144
[12] Clifford, ibid., 144, quoting Leiris, Michel, 'Du musée d'ethnographie au Musée de l'Homme.' *Nouvelle revue française,* 299: 344 – 345.

experience, and depth psychology.'[13] Their project can also be seen as a more extreme, and covert, progression of the aggressive power of *Documents*.

The Collège de Sociologie met for two years in the dining room of a Latin Quarter café. It was an attempt to reintegrate scientific rigor and personal experience in the study of cultural processes. Clifford says of its project:

> [T]he founders of the Collège were preoccupied with ritual moments when experiences outside the normal flow of existence can find collective expression, moments when cultural order is both transgressed and rejuvenated. They adopted the Durkheimian concept of the sacred to circumscribe this recreative domain. While they shared Durkheim's interest in the constitution of collective order, the members of the Collège de Sociologie tended to focus on the regenerative processes of disorder and the irrepressible irruptions of the sacred in everyday life. From this standpoint, the subversive critical activities of the avant-garde could be seen as essential to the life of society: the circumscribed position of 'art' in modern culture could be transcended, at least programmatically.[14]

The Collège folded because of internal dissention and the outbreak of war. In his chapter, 'On Collecting Art and Culture', Clifford describes and discusses the significance of the Surrealists' collecting of tribal artefacts in the war years, drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss's recollections of New York during the Second World War.[15] Lévi-Strauss describes New York in the 1940s as the ultimate cosmopolitan melting pot, a chaos of multiple possibilities replete with objects from all over the globe. Many of these objects were signs of vanishing worlds.[16] Julius Carlebach, the Third Avenue art dealer who ran the gallery that Lévi-Strauss and the Surrealists frequented, stocked Northwest coast, Melanesian, and Eskimo pieces. There was also the Bronx warehouse of the Museum of the American Indian, which held century old Kuskokwim Eskimo masks, with rich visual puns. The museum director George Heye called them 'jokes' and sold them off cheaply. It is said that the Surrealists bought the best of them. In 1946 Max Ernst and several others staged an exhibition of them. Clifford argues that in moving these objects across town, the Surrealists in effect declassified them as scientific specimens and reclassified them as art. According to Clifford, Surrealist collecting of such objects during the Forties was

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[13] ibid., 141.
[14] ibid., 141 – 142.
[15] Clifford, ibid., 215 – 251. Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'New York in 1941,' published in English in 1985, and in the original French, 'New York post-et preefiguratif', in 1983. See Clifford, 236 – 238.
[16] ibid., 238.

part of a struggle to gain aesthetic status for these increasingly rare masterworks.[17] Whether or not we accept the idea that the Surrealists were bent on classifying ritual objects as *art* in any conventional Western sense, Clifford's account alerts us to the fact that these objects were not widely valued at the time for either their ethnographic or aesthetic attributes, and would most probably have been destroyed or dispersed without the Surrealists' attentions. To some extent, this insight into the fact that the Surrealists saw value where others did not, counters Louise Tythacott's view (discussed in the last Chapter). In Tythacott's opinion, Surrealist collecting of tribal artefacts simply reflected and extended the prevailing primitivist view of such objects, and was in itself a plundering of colonised cultures. Previously, I posed the question of whether the Surrealists' election of non-Western objects was an encounter of Western aesthetics with Otherness. By contrast to Tythacott, Clifford, underscores how unconventional the Surrealists' election of objects was, and how much at odds with the conventions of Western aesthetics and with ethnographic norms and values as they cohered in the 1930s.

Proceeding from a similar historical moment to Clifford (and Marianna Torgovnick), Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster each wrote landmark essays in 1984 and 1985 respectively, dealing with aspects of Surrealist primitivism and the ways in which it diverged from modernism. Foster's essay, 'The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks', addresses William Rubin's maligned exhibition of 1984 as its point of departure for a discussion of primitivism, but in marked contrast to Torgovnick, Foster distinguishes Surrealism from other modernist movements and signals the possibility of a Surrealist *counter*-primitive poetics.[18] His approach in this short but incisive essay is reasonably schematic and general. As his title suggests, Foster acknowledges a primitive Unconscious in modern art, but within Surrealism he recognises the potential to blast out the primitivist assumptions of modernism. Rosalind Krauss's essay pointedly distinguishes between different strains of primitivism within Surrealism, with specific reference to the unfolding of Giacometti's most confronting works of the 1930s, at the height of his Surrealist phase. By distinguishing the between 'soft' formalist or modernist primitivism that Giacometti explored, and the formally powerful and deeply fetishistic abstraction that

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[17] ibid., 238 – 239. In sketching the New York tribal art scene Clifford draws on Edmund Carpentier, 'Collecting Northwest Coast Art,' In Bill Holm and Bill Reid, *Indian Art of the Northwest Coast* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1975), 9 – 49.

[18] Hal Foster, 'The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art, or White Skin Black Masks', originally published in *October*, 1985 and republished in *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, (Washington, Bay Press, 1985), 181 – 208.

she dubs 'hard' primitivism, Krauss eschews any idea that the 'primitivism' of Surrealism was a static or unified mode of practice. Rather, she begins to delineate a line of development within it.

Key methodological issues emerge from comparing Torgovnick on the one hand, and Krauss and Foster on the other. One is the question of agency in relation to culture, which Foster and Krauss each address more forcibly than does Torgovnick. The other concerns Surrealist signification. Foster underscores the idea that signifiers are free floating, and he suggests that at least some enterprises, specifically the so-called renegade Surrealists' exploits, created a site of negotiation for different kinds of 'Otherness' to be explored. Thus, for Foster, 'primitivism' is not the cohesive ideology that it is for Torgovnick, but various modes of signification that can be turned against themselves.[19] Krauss underscores the great difficulty in attributing intentionality to works that deliberately draw on Unconscious forces, and which thus engage in multifarious personal and social referentiality.

In Rosalind Krauss's 1984 essay, 'No More Play', like Foster's approach, her uptake of the development of Surrealist primitivism resonates throughout with Bataille's interests.[20] Krauss expresses the view that the challenge Surrealism posed to Western values was robust, but she acknowledges that many of those who became Surrealists or close associates displayed modernist primitivist tendencies in their early work. She affirms that Giacometti's earlier works, such as *The Couple* and *Spoon Woman,* from 1926-1927 (pictured below, see Figs. 3 and 4) take formal lessons from African carved objects, noting that the artist had a store of illustrated publications like *Cahiers d'art* (and later *Documents* itself) from which he would make sketches for his sculptures after the photographic illustrations of 'tribal' objects. In Krauss's view, *The Couple* accords with an Art déco style of stylized, generalised 'tribal' forms.

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[19] Few writers have taken up the route signalled by Foster. Victor Li's recent monograph, *The Neo-primitivist Turn* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) was apparently influenced by Foster's 1985 approach to the topic of primitivism. Li fruitfully develops some avenues suggested by Foster, examining the persistence of primitivism within the context of postmodernist anti-primitivist scholarship such as that of Torgovnick, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Sahlins and Habermas. He takes a philosophical, literary and anthropological itinerary, its focus restricted to theoretical counter-discourse. He gives a very short but quite incisive discussion of the Collège de Sociologie, but does not connect its energies and interests with those of Surrealism. Questions of primitivism in art and appropriation barely form a strand of his thesis. Throughout the book there are a smattering of references to Bataille, whom he dubs a postmodernist. Though it cites Foster, Li's recent book perpetuates the type of eclipse of Surrealism discussed in Chapter One.

[20] Rosalind Krauss, 'No More Play', *The Originality Of The Avant-Garde And Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge, Massachussets, MIT Press, 1985), 42 – 85.

Spoon Woman, which she would prefer to think of as the latter work, though its creation is usually attributed to 1926, is less stylized and attains, she says, a 'prismatic abstraction'.[21] She puts forward the idea that this formalist primitivism, lauded by the likes of Roger Fry and Paul Guillaume is, by another set of standards, aestheticised and 'gutless'.[22] (While it does not come into Krauss's discussion, it is worth noting that both Man Ray and Ernst produced early comparable sculptural works at around the same time).

Figs. 3 & 4. Alberto Giacometti, *The Couple*, 1927 (cast 1955). Bronze, 59.6 x 38 x 17.5 cm. Alberto Giacometti, *Spoon Woman*, 1926 – 27. Bronze, 144.8 x 51.4 x 21 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Of the scholarship in Paris at the time, Krauss references a book published in 1925 by the art and artefact dealer Paul Guillaume, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*. Guillaume insists upon a primal, instinctive drive to make art, based on free play. He makes a claim about a universal aesthetic drive, a 'will to art' in children, which, he says, equates to an uninhibited urge expressed in negro art. Here, Krauss tells us, Guillaume is in accord with his contemporary, the psychologist G.H. Luquet. She says, 'Luquet's conviction that the art of children and the art of primitive man form a single category, one which contests the values of "civilized" art, was undoubtedly

[21] ibid., 48 – 49.
[22] ibid., 51 – 2.

what interested Georges Bataille and drew him to review Luquet's book in the magazine *Documents*.[23] I will return to Bataille's review presently.

In 'No More Play' Krauss does not overtly challenge the curatorial assumptions of Rubin's "Primitivism" show, but her essay begins by foregrounding the problematic attribution of origins to Giacometti's sculptures, beginning with conflicting accounts about the sources of *Invisible Object* of 1934, and thus we are alert to the genuine difficulty in attributing context and intention to such Surrealist objects. A prominent account of the genesis of this work features in the opening passages of Breton's *L'amour fou*, in his account of a trip to the flea market at St-Ouen.[24] Here, he recounts how he and Giacometti are each seized by desire to purchase a useless object. Breton buys his shoe-spoon, a little carved folk object, and Giacometti buys a mask, which, Breton claims, serves in just the same way as a dream solution to a formal problem Giacometti was having with an unresolved head of a sculpture. Krauss shows that this account varies considerably from a later one written by Leiris for a 1951 catalogue, and prompted by Giacometti himself, who recalled seeing the same pose adopted by a little Swiss girl. Krauss tells of a third perspective, that of an art historian and leading scholar of Giacometti's work who locates the source of the head of *Invisible Object* as a Solomon Island statue that the artist had seen in an ethnographic museum in Basel. Krauss disputes none of these accounts, but points out that while the last is difficult to verify for certain, it gains credibility from what is already known about Giacometti's interests in ethnographic objects, and 'the primitivized formal logic' of some of his earlier work. Krauss's essay demonstrates that the 'primitivism' in Giacometti's work, after a certain point when he began to associate with some of the Surrealists, is by no means a mode of simple appropriation of forms, but a multifarious web of associations to numerous references. As her argument develops, Krauss shows that behind the multi-referential *modus*, lies a general intention to confound categorical boundaries, and she makes the claim that this manner of operating has philosophical implications.

Giacometti met André Masson in 1928, at an exhibition of Giacometti's work, and Masson introduced him into the *Documents* group. He formed a particularly close friendship with Leiris and was deeply influenced by the ethnographic interests and pursuits of the *Documents* group. From what Krauss calls his 'soft primitivism' – the

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[23] ibid., 52.

[24] André Breton, *Mad Love* (*L'Armour fou*, 1937), translated by Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 25 – 38.

aestheticised formal logic Giacometti used in the latter Twenties, he developed a different leaning. This is exemplified in *Suspended Ball.* Giacometti came into Breton's orbit only *after* he had produced *Suspended Ball* in 1930 – 31.[25]

Fig. 5. Alberto Giacometti, *Suspended Ball*, 1930 – 31. Plaster and metal, 61 x 36 x 33.5 cm.
The Alberto Giacometti Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Basel.

Krauss outlines how he moved from an aesthetic concern with 'primitive' forms, in his works from 1926 to 1928, to a new register of abstraction that drew on interests that were dear to Bataille. From 1930, Giacometti's work displays the type of erotic-sacrificial charge and ambivalence that were the currency of *Documents*. In this second phase, Giacometti's objects take on multifaceted structures that operate through oscillations and paradoxical associations. *Suspended Ball* of 1930–31, with its fundamental sexual ambiguity and series of phallic substitutions, caused a sensation with Breton and the Surrealists. Krauss relates its form to the series of orbs that circulate in Bataille's *Histoire de l'Oeil*.[26] To account for the level of abstraction and the latent sexual cruelty implicit in Giacometti's sculpture, she elucidates ideas that were circulating in the *Documents* group at the time, which she calls a 'hard' use of primitivism, that is –

> to use ethnographic data to transgress the neat boundaries of the art world with its categories of *form*…as opposed to what I referred to as the 'soft' or aestheticized version of it. It certainly cannot limit itself to borrowing this or that shape from the repertory of primitive objects the way even art school students (particularly within

[25] Krauss, 'No More Play', 56 – 57.
[26] ibid., 58.

> the decorative arts) were being encouraged to do in the 1920s. Instead it uses the 'primitive' in an expanded sense (although with close attention to ethnographic detail), to embed art in a network that, in its philosophical dimension, is violently anti-idealist and antihumanist.[27]

In Bataille's aforementioned objections to a book *L'Art Primitif*, written by the psychologist G. H. Luquet, he takes a characteristically oblique swipe at it. Bataille disputes Luquet's view that the pleasure principle is behind all impetus to draw. Luquet puts forward an evolutionist account of the development of figuration in which children progress from random, to vaguely representational drawing, to forms of realism, the ultimate stage being visual realism which accords to 'the Western adult's preoccupation with mimesis', says Krauss.

> In Luquet's program, then, an absolute freedom and pleasure initiates the impulse to draw; it is this instinct, not the desire to render reality, which is primal. On top of this foundation a procedure is gradually built for adjusting the mark to the condition of representation…a "system" of figuration develops over the entire domain of primitive art, whether that be the drawings of children, graffitists, aborigines, or peasants… In Luquet's scheme, knowledge is thus generously added to pleasure.[28]

To the contrary, Bataille argues that drawing is driven by an urge to deface, alter or deform more than an urge for pleasure: the instincts behind drawing can be sadistic and sacrificial, he argues.[29] This perspective influenced and liberated the artists in contact with *Documents*, and Krauss accounts for Giacometti's move into a more complex set of references by his involvement with Bataille's circle. The word Bataille used to encapsulate the sadism in art is *alteration*, which connotes a double direction in changes of state: self-representation and decomposition, diffuseness to specificity or *vice-versa*.[30] This sort of confounding of logic and play of contradiction characterises Bataille's thought: it came to influence Giacometti and is very apparent in *Suspended Ball*, the *informe* logic of which is a radical swipe at humanist values. Krauss's discussion of form and *informe* in relation to primitivism is echoed and affirmed by Hal Foster.

In Foster's critique of the MoMA show, he argues that it reproduces an

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[27] ibid., 64.
[28] ibid., 53.
[29] Georges Bataille, 'l'Art primitif,' *Documents* II, no. 7 (1930), 389–97. Discussed in Krauss, ibid, 52 – 55.
[30] ibid., 54. Here for brevity I am paraphrasing Krauss rather bluntly. She conveys Bataille's ideas with attention and precision.

Enlightenment, humanist, evolutionist logic that situates 'the primitive' in relation to 'the modern' through a process of projection and abstraction. Responding to the exhibition's curatorial logic, Foster takes a line that has some commonalities with Torgovnick's general thrust against modernist *per se*. Foster identifies Rubin's curatorial strategy as a late manifestation of institutionalised formalism and he argues that within this exhibition, difference is subsumed into Western universality. He writes that its primitivism –

> not only absorbs the potential disruption of the tribal objects into western forms, ideas and commodities; it also symptomatically manages the ideological nightmare of a great art inspired by spoils. More, as an artistic coup founded of military conquest, primitivism camouflages this historical event, disguises the problem of imperialism in terms of art, affinity, dialogue, to the point (the point of the MOMA show) where the problem appears 'resolved'.[31]

Foster makes a clear distinction between Rubin's formalist curatorial strategy, on the one hand, and on the other, the approaches taken by various artists and writers in the earlier part of the Twentieth Century whose works were exhibited within the '*Primitivism'* exhibition. To Foster's reading, the curatorial strategy of the exhibition furthers one particular modernist tendency to domesticate, contain and dialectically incorporate what it designates as the primitive. 'In its modernist version', he writes, 'the primitive may appear transgressive, it is true, but it still serves as a limit: projected within and without, the primitive becomes a figure of our unconscious and outside (a figure constructed in modern art as well as in psychoanalysis and anthropology in the privileged triad of the primitive, the child, and the insane).[32]

This conflation, of what Foster calls the 'privileged triad' of the primitive, the child, and the insane, certainly runs through Surrealism, particularly through its connection with Freudian psychoanalysis. We see it in 'Situation surréaliste de object', written in 1935, where Breton explains the paranoiac-critical method as a means to privilege the pleasure principle over the reality principle, as a way to plumb the 'primitive' or *id* aspects of the psyche and, in doing so, he invokes the idea of the uninhibited, instinctual nature of primitive people and children. Says Breton,

> The important thing is that recourse to mental representation [outside of the physical presence of the object] furnishes, as Freud has said, 'sensations related to processes unfolding in the most diverse, and even the deepest layers of the psychic mechanism.' In art the necessarily more and more systematic search for these sensations works toward the abolition of the ego by the id, and consequently it endeavors to make the pleasure principle hold clearer and clearer sway over the

[31] Foster, op cit.
[32] ibid., 196.

> reality principle. This search tends more and more to liberate instinctive impulses, to break down the barrier that civilized man faces, *a barrier that primitive people and children do not experience*.[33] [My italics]

Breton's statement encapsulates one aspect of Surrealism's primitivism, which is Freudian in its logic. The primitive in this conception is on the side of the instinctual. This is one of the last times that Breton was to use the terms 'civilised' and 'primitive' without quotation marks, and perhaps had he done so, the passage may not seem so problematic. In his essay, Foster goes on to explain the cultural functions that primitivism can perform: the fetishistic recognition-and-disavowal of difference; the misrecognition or misconstruction of the other. His critique pursues the significance of the MoMA exhibition as a doomed recuperative bid for formalism, and he points to other social and political ramifications of its curatorial manoeuvres:

> To value as art what is now a ruin; to locate what one lacks in what one has destroyed: more is at work here than compensation. Like fetishism, primitivism is a system of multiple beliefs, an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction: a repression of the fact that a breakthrough in our art, indeed a regeneration of our culture, is based in part on the breakup and decay of other societies, that the modernist discovery of the primitive is not only in part its oblivion but its death. And the final contradiction or aporia is this: no anthropological remorse, aesthetic elevation or redemptive exhibition can correct or compensate this loss *because they are all implicated in it.* [Foster's italics] [34]

A feature of Foster's stance (that distinguishes it from that of Torgovnick, and other commentators we considered in the previous Chapter) is the fact that he does not attempt to write from a position of assumed moral superiority. Through his mode of address, 'we', his readers, along with Foster, remain implicated in a primitivist conundrum in the present time. He argues that the modernist construction of a fetishistic primitivism renders a temporary ideological solution: modernism creates its own docile primitive Other, but this 'resolution' is but a repression. 'Delayed in our political unconscious', he writes, 'the primitive returns uncannily at the moment of its potential eclipse. The rupture of the primitive, managed by the moderns, becomes our postmodern event'.[35] For Foster, this 'postmodern event' is signalled by Michel Foucault's recuperation of Georges Bataille's transgressive position as counter and alternative to a Hegelian mode of dialectical contradiction.

Foster does not make the assumption of a unified modernism (another way in which

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[33] André Breton, 'Surrealist Situation of the Object' (translation of 'Situation surréaliste de object'), in Rosemont, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 273.
[34] Foster, op cit., 199.
[35] ibid., 204.

his argument presents a contrast to Torgovnick's). By citing Bataille in particular, he tentatively posits a counter-discourse and counter-practice to modernist primitivism presented by the Surrealists' and dissident Surrealists' reception of the 'primitive' as a rupture. For them, Foster says, the primitive was less a solution to Western aesthetic problems than a disruption of Western solutions.[36] He points to non-Western objects as having an operant value for the Surrealists through its *bricolé* heterogeneity.

Foster's short review essay of 1985 offers an indication of the potential hazards and tactical value of *bricolage* as a strategic counter-primitivist practice.[37] It also gestures toward a genealogy between 'ethnographic Surrealism' and post-structuralism: a lineage of transgressive intention that connects Lévi-Strauss, Bataille and Lacan to Baudrillard, Foucault and Derrida. With reference to Rosalind Krauss, Foster suggests that at the 'heart of the surrealist scandal' was what became the poststructuralist and feminist deconstruction of oppositions. He writes, 'It is this transgressive enterprise that is dismissed as "arbitrary" and "trivial" in post-war American formalism in which, in a neo-modernist moment, crisis is once more recouped for continuity'.[38]

Recently, David Bate has made a significant contribution to the terrain marked out by Krauss and Foster, by offering a close formal and contextual discussion of works and in so doing, identifying a major tendency of 1920s Surrealism, other than the 'soft primitivism' that Krauss identifies.[39] He analyses the strong iconoclastic aspects of early Surrealism that set it in opposition to modernist tendencies that appropriated and tamed exotic forms. His extended discussion of Man Ray's photomontage *Le Violon d'Ingres*, of 1924, is incisive and posits a very deliberate form of anti-Orientalist iconoclasm in the artist's approach. Bate identifies that Man Ray takes a deliberate swipe at Ingres as a pillar of French patriotism and imperialism. Bate explains that the phrase 'le violon d'Ingres' is a colloquialism that refers to Ingres' secondary talent (in English we might say 'second string'): his hobby of playing the violin. The way Man Ray's model, Kiki (Alice Prins, a.k.a. Kiki of Montparnasse) has been posed and turbaned makes a direct reference to two of Ingres' figures,

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[36] ibid., 200.
[37] ibid., 201 – 202.
[38] ibid., 203.
[39] David Bate, *Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London and New York: Taurus, 2004). Bate explores themes of social critique and anti-colonialism in Surrealism with respect to photography.

possibly taken from the same model at same sitting: the lone figure in *Le Bain Turque* of 1863, and the near-central figure in *Baigneuse de Valpinçon*, 1808.

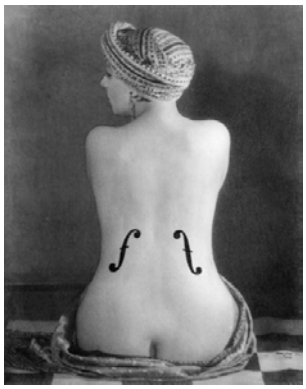

Fig. 6. Man Ray, *Le Violon d'Ingres* 1924
Silver nitrate print with markings in pencil and Indian ink, 31 x 24.7 cm. Centre Georges Pompidou Musée national de l'art moderne.
Fig. 7. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Le Bain Turque*, 1863, oil on canvas on wood panel, 108 x 110 cm. Musée du Louvre.
Fig. 8. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Baigneuse de Valpinçon*, 1808, oil on canvas 1.46m x 97.5cm, Musée du Louvre.

The visual pun, the equivalence and oscillation between woman and musical instrument, has the sexual connotation of a woman being 'played', the word *jeu* having a string of linguistic associations to play and sexual and sensual indulgence, thus the simple manoeuvre of adding the two '*f*' holes makes the objectification of the woman in the image overt. Why does Man Ray make a vulgar joke at the expense of Ingres? Bate says the answer lies in Ingres' newly heightened status as a patriot. By the time Man Ray arrived in Paris from New York in 1921, Ingres had recently been raised and critically legitimated as a scion of French tradition and a point of origin for modern art in France, referenced by a number of moderns, notably Picasso and Matisse. Bate notes too that there had been a prior Surrealist denunciation of the institutional adulation of Ingres, published in *Littérature*, a year before Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres* was published there. A letter to the editor (Breton) was entitled 'Académisme', and penned by 'F.P.' (thought to be Francis Picabia). It ridicules the inflation of Ingres' reputation and the profiteering that went with it.[40] Bate remarks that pre-war critics, such as Apollinaire, had referred to Ingres in order to legitimate new art – specifically Cubism, but post-war commentators such as the Surrealists wished to distance themselves from Ingres, and so Man Ray's image is a tilt at an academic high art tradition.[41]

[40] Bate op cit., 124.
[41] ibid., 125.

The Orientalism of *Le Violon d'Ingres* is carefully unpicked in Bate's account, and revealed to be a commentary on the 'Orientalism' of popular culture at the time. (Bate's account thus runs counter to Archer-Straw's and Blake's, which, as we saw in the previous Chapter, both suggest continuity and complicity between Surrealism and the popular imagery of the day). Bate identifies the image's direct reference to Parisian fashion: the model's headwear is not a turban, but a modish hat emulating a turban, by the Paris designer Paul Poiret. Similarly, the earrings were those in vogue at the time, probably cheap costume jewellery. Bate indicates that the Orientalism within the photograph gestures to a local Parisian popular type of Orientalism, thus the play of references links Ingres' 'classic' odalisques with current fashion.[42] In other words, Man Ray pictures an existing commodified style. The popularisation of the 'Oriental' as a metropolitan fashion accessory, Bate says, was no longer 'only as an ideology of the East (myths, images and concepts used to legitimate a colonial politics) but also as a type of cultural practice 'internalised' as modern forms for pleasure, eroticism and leisure.[43] It is as though at the high point of European colonialism, the colonising culture had absorbed its own myths and fantasies of Otherness. Here, in a suitably displaced discourse, was a frame through which sexuality could be spoken and the Western body eroticised.[44] But Man Ray has made it smutty! His photographs resemble the pornographic postcards still freely available in the stalls along the Seine.

Bate makes an interesting observation about the sexual aspect of the photograph: the photograph testifies to a type of Orientalism introjected onto a Western subject, into Western commodities and into Western cosmopolitanism. One particular effect of this type of structure was the adoption of the wantonness that had previously been attributed to the East (signified by the trope of Eastern harem culture) as a form of emergent libertarianism in the West.[45] An effect of this conflation and introjection of what had been Orientalism onto metropolitan culture is the recognition that the once apparently clear oppositions between Orient and Occident, East and West, which formed the basis of European cultural identity, were now collapsing, and a new anxiety-provoking 'hybridity' had recently emerged. Bate notes that according to

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[42] ibid., 126 – 127.

[43] Other relevant contextual material relates to the *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931 and grand exhibits before it, particularly the 'Art Déco' exposition of 1925. The Surrealists were alert to the cultural politics at play in the construction of a fashionable style that has been called the 'coloniale moderne,' hence their brand of parodic or counter-Orientalism in the mid Twenties.

[44] ibid., 127.

[45] ibid., 128

Homi Bhabha, hybridisation as a function of colonial representation is ultimately problematic to colonial power, as it can have a relativising effect. 'Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority – its rules of recognition'.[46]

It is the case that Man Ray's photomontage stages a hybridity and 'assimilation' – or at least mystification – that has already occurred, made evident by the prefabricated turban hat and the ersatz jewellery. As I have mentioned in Chapter One and will go on to elaborate in Chapter Four, the political backdrop at the time was the crisis of the Moroccan war and more general right-wing discourse about threats to Western culture from Asia and Africa.[47] At the same time, colonialists were increasingly adopting an assimilationist line and, as well, Paris was developing a modish cosmopolitan 'art déco' style, a hybrid of the modern and the 'primitive'.

Bate brings this point to bear on the discussion of *Le Violin d'Ingres*, pointing out that the image does not result in an 'ideal fusion' of opposites or even formal oppositions, such as past/present, Orient/Occident, woman/violin, painting/photograph, animate/inanimate. Rather, he argues, the image contains tensions and irresolvable contradictions: 'In this respect, the image sets up what psychoanalysis describes as a "psychical conflict"'.[48]

Elaborating on his theme, and drawing on Norman Bryson's analyses of *Bain turc* and *Valpinçon baigneuse*, Bate discusses another aspect of the image that has an unsettling quality. The turn and slight incline of the head, which is slightly more pronounced that in either of Ingres' paintings, suggests that the woman in the hat and earrings has cocked her ear, as though listening to something behind her, so that her self-containment and composure are slightly disrupted. The viewer is thus put in the position of intruder and seducer. Bate reads the photograph, which undermines Ingres as a 'father' of French art, as a classical Oedipal triangle. His Freudian reading of the image may appear to be over-wrought, but Bate drives a sharp argument about the

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[46] Bate, 128, quoting Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 114

[47] Here Bate cites writings by Paul Valéry, and by Henri Massis. The tone of Massis's writing is blatantly xenophobic. Fearing European cultural contamination, Massis sees a solution in Catholicism, 'the only possible assimilator of the Asiatic genius', Massis, *Defense of the West*, 203. Quoted in Bate p. 131.

[48] ibid.

relationship between Man Ray as a Surrealist and the structure of his photographic gesture against Ingres.

As a tactic, Surrealist references to the 'the Orient' were denounced by Pierre Naville, but energetically defended by Breton. Breton, as we shall see, acknowledged 'the Orient' as a mythical construct and argued that as such, for Surrealism it could have a destabilising force. Bate considers the image in relation to the textual content of the *La Révolution surréaliste* at the time. As I shall elaborate in the next Chapter, *La Révolution surréaliste* made numerous references to an imaginary 'Orient' as an anti-Western gesture, especially in its 1925 – 6 issues. Against the debate between Naville and Breton (and others), there can be no question that *Le Violin d'Ingres*, whatever else it may reference, is a deliberate, wry and complex contribution by Man Ray to a discussion that was taking place in the Surrealist group about an entrenched and popularised French metropolitan style, and a tilt at one of the most notable and celebrated perpetrators of an Orientalist aesthetic.

Bate also offers an extended discussion of Man Ray's *Noire et blanche*, which first appeared in Paris *Vogue* in May of 1926. Here he takes up the problematic of objectification. Once again, the model is Kiki, and her white mask-like, highly made-up face is counterpoised to the black ebony of a Baule mask. Bate situates this image against the background of the craze for 'Art déco', and discusses the formal terms of the image as a play of signification between similarities (points of identification or 'affinity' between the two 'faces' as objects) and of difference (exoticism).[49]

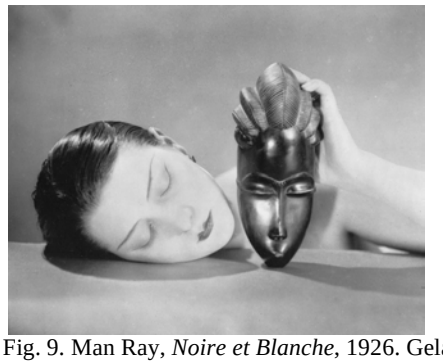

Fig. 9. Man Ray, *Noire et Blanche*, 1926. Gelatin silver photograph 21.9 x 29.4 cm.

The mutual juxtaposition of the white, modern *chic* face, and the black, exotic mask sets up a relationship between the two objects and, Bate argues, a set of irreconcilable differences. He sets these relations in the broader context of a discussion of the terms

[49] 'Art déco' was a neologism at the time, a term that came out of an abbreviation of the title of the 1925 Parisian *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* (International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Art), and was later popularised.

of Surrealist objects, arguing that all types of objects within Surrealism have a certain equivalence, insofar as they are connected to 'preconscious residues of previous mental activities'. He goes on to say that the Surrealist object is a *déjà vu:* an already-seen thing. In other words, objects for the Surrealists are taken up already embedded in chains of significance. Bate argues that for the Surrealists, non-European objects evoke a sense of 'the primitive' in the same way as objects they found or made.[50] Writing about the Surrealists' passion for collecting 'ethnographic' objects, he writes that their motives in engaging with 'tribal' objects followed Apollinaire's call for a 'critical apparatus' for these objects. Bate is of the opinion that the Surrealists' relationship to 'the primitive' can be distinguished from the orientation of other moderns:

> [A] distinction should be drawn between the object as signifier and the discourse in which its signified is constituted. Although the word 'primitive' as a noun does appear in the writings of Breton and other surrealists, it is certainly a mistake and reductive to conflate this surrealist interest and use of those objects in their discourse with the appropriation of those objects to a modernist primitivizing art discourse. In surrealism non-European objects were valued in their own right and placed alongside objects made by the surrealists. In modernism such objects were another iconographic source to appropriate and devour.[51]

To illustrate this point in his reading of *Noire et blanche* Bate draws a contrast between the juxtaposition of the face of a woman and an African mask with the elision of masks and women's faces in Picasso's *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* (1907). Bate sees Picasso's painting as a conflation of female sexuality and black exoticism into a 'visually abrasive condensation of a white female *as* a primitive mask', whereas Man Ray, Bate writes, 'puts together in the same space objects from different taxonomies'. In Man Ray's picture, Bate contends, different things are juxtaposed, 'but they are never reducible to the same; the image elides this reduction in their very distinct "objectness", as different things'.[52] Adam Jolles calls this aesthetic of juxtaposition and equivalence of Western and non-Western 'cultural syncretism'.[53]

The particular strengths of Krauss' and Bate's approaches to Surrealist objects are that they indicate the multifarious ways in which these function as signifiers, and promote the idea that no simple notion of equivalence or 'affinity' can serve to capture Surrealist 'primitivism'. Each of them seizes upon a different aspect of

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[50] Bate, 193–194.
[51] ibid, 193.
[52] ibid, 196
[53] Adam Jolles, 'The Tactile Turn: Envisioning a Postcolonial Aesthetic in France,' *Yale French Studies*, No. 109, *Surrealism and Its Others* (2006), 17 – 38.

Surrealist signification to make their point, with Bate's focus on what we might call Surrealist 'counter-Orientalism', and Krauss's more upon the tendency for what she calls 'hard primitivism'. Her emphasis seems closer to Clifford's designation of ethnographic Surrealism.

Adam Jolles invites us to consider whether we can identify the emergence of a specifically postcolonial aesthetic in the 1930s, by positing that post (or anti) colonialism was pointedly expressed through a haptic sensibility that percolated through Surrealism.[54] To an extent, his posing of this question is a rhetorical conceit: he acknowledges that '[s]ceptics should rightly balk at the suggestion that any single perceptual domain, tactile or otherwise, might satisfy the avant-garde anticolonial imperative at the beginning of the 1930s, especially among the Surrealists.'[55] Perhaps then it would be more appropriate to frame the question in terms of the extent to which an emphasis on the haptic serves anti-colonialism and postcolonialism within Surrealist poetics, and Jolles provides examples to show that it was a significant aspect.[56] As I shall argue in Chapter Five, the Surrealists explored other poetics too in the Thirties, to express their anti-colonial sentiments.

Jolles argues that in the early 1930s there was a sudden tactile turn in Surrealist art.[57] He suggests a causal link with the fact the PCF was itself focused on French imperialism at the time. He suggests the haptic turn was prompted by the spectacle of the *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931, and a 'profound ambivalence about the capacity of any aesthetic based exclusively on optical perception to divorce itself from the culture of colonialism'.[58] The reason for the ambivalence, he argues, was that the *Exposition Coloniale* had adopted the tropes of admixture and hybridity that the Cubists and the Surrealists had been using, but with opposite intentions. Consistent with Bate's analysis above, Jolles argues that Man Ray in particular had produced homologies between indigenous and Western forms with the goal of advancing a kind of cultural levelling that would lead to the dismantling of established imperial

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[54] Adam Jolles, 'The Tactile Turn: Envisioning a Postcolonial Aesthetic in France,' *Yale French Studies*, No. 109, *Surrealism and Its Others* (2006), 17 – 38.

[55] ibid., 38.

[56] Jolles's rhetorical style is contrarian. In offering his observation that there was a turn to the haptic, he deliberately overstates his case, and at the same time invites his reader to be sceptical.

[57] Throughout his text, Jolles studiously avoids the words Surrealists or Surrealism, preferring to use 'French avant-garde' and 'communist avant-garde artists'. There is not a great deal of benefit in this that I can see, except that it allows him to include Picasso and Hannah Hoch in his discussion. In paraphrasing and relating to Jolles's contribution to this field I have used 'Surrealist' and 'Surrealism,' consistent with my usage throughout.

[58] Jolles, 17.

hierarchies. However, the architecture and design for the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale* also employed a cultural syncretism, a hybridizing aesthetic which reified those hierarchies. Here Jolles draws upon the excellent scholarship of Patricia Morton who analyses the design concept for the *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931, and posits that it promoted a 'coloniale moderne' aesthetic which fused metropolitan and indigenous elements in a physical manifestation and aggrandisement of the idea of 'Greater France'.[59] In 1931, the Surrealists held a counter exhibition, *La verité sur les colonies* (The Truth About the Colonies) in protest against the *Exposition coloniale*, an installation in which arefacts were accompanied by supplementary texts. Jolles argues that *La verité les colonies* called into question the viability of cultural levelling as an interpretive strategy.

In developing his thesis about the haptic, Jolles takes us to Giacometti again and, importantly, to some essays by Tristan Tzara. In an essay of 1933, 'Primitive Art and Popular Art,' Tzara says that to appreciate non-Western art it is necessary to realize that it had been shaped by perceptual categories that rarely prioritized aesthetics in the way their Western counterparts did, but by an episteme that privileges utility.[60] Tzara attempts to draw out the correlation between utility and tactility in another essay in *Minotaure* the same year entitled, 'Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste,' where he talks about our love for artworks being predicated on our desire to return to the womb: a desire for total sensual gratification. An object that has gained patina bears evidence that it has been desired and touched, 'proof, Tzara concludes, that they had "already answered the intrauterine desires of a whole series of individuals." Objects that have been repeatedly handled, by definition then, respond to a tangible, social need, "a desire which often takes the collective and organized form of some kind of magical use."'[61]

Jolles argues that Tzara's reason for developing this elaborate theory of tactility in relation to non-Western art was to offer a prescription for both contemporary artistic production and ethnographic inquiry, 'an antidote to the crisis of cultural syncretism and an alternative model to the Trocadéro ethnographers.[62]

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[59] Patricia A, Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition*, (Paris. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2000).

[60] Tristan Tzara, 'Art primitif et art populaire,' *Oeuvres* vol. ed. Henri Behar (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), cited in Jolles, 34.

[61] Tristan Tzara, 'D'un certain automatisme du goût,' *Minotaure*, 3 & 4 (1933), 81 – 84; trans. by Pontus Hulten as 'Concerning a Certain Automatism of Taste' in *The Surrealists Look at Art*, ed. Hulten (Santa Monica: Lapis Press, 1990), 210. Cited in Jolles, 35.

[62] Jolles, op cit., 36.

Fig. 10. Man Ray, *Woman Holding Giacometti's Objet disagréable (Disagreeable Object),* 1932 Gelatin-silver print. Man Ray Trust.

Jolles' inclusion of Man Ray's *Woman Holding Giacometti's Objet disagréable (Disagreeable Object),* which he says himself is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the tactile turn he seeks to identify, seems to resonate with Tzara's strange thesis. A bare-breasted woman, Kiki again, tenderly nurses the giant phallic object, 'disagreeable' on account of its barbs. She seems unperturbed, and almost maternal toward it. I think that indeed, Tzara's remarks do relate to a concern for tactility, but not *only* that. As well as creating objects and images that invite a haptic response, the Surrealists became engaged in exhibition and periodical design geared to categorical disruption and collective experience. In saying that Tzara's remarks are intended to counter 'the Trocadéro ethnographers', Jolles does not acknowledge that actually some of these people were to contribute to *Documents. Documents* itself posed a radical assault on cultural syncretism.

Lately the scholarship on *Documents* has grown.[63] An essay by Simon Baker 'Variety [Civilizing "Race"]' takes up the portrayal of civilisation and race in *Documents*.[64] (He approaches its content from an utterly different standpoint than that of Archer-Straw who, as we saw in the previous Chapter, argues that the content of *Documents* supports the perverse and Eurocentric views of Bataille and Leiris). Baker's analysis addresses *Documents'* critique of racism. Denis Hollier's essay is more equivocal.[65]

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[63] In 2006 an exhibition, *Undercover Surrealism: Picasso, Miró, Masson and the Vision of Georges Bataille*, was held in London at the Hayward Gallery, and the accompanying catalogue presented a number of perspectives on the challenges presented by *Documents*. See Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille* and *DOCUMENTS* (London: Hayward Gallery/Southbank Centre; Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

[64] Simon Baker, 'Variety [Civilizing "Race"]', in *Undercover Surrealism*, 65 – 71.

[65] Denis Hollier, 'The Question of Lay Ethnography (The Entropological Wild Card),' in *Undercover Surrealism, Georges Bataille and Documents (*London: Hayward Gallery; Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 58 – 64.

Hollier extends upon Clifford's periodisation of *Documents* as existing in that uncertain moment just before ethnography cohered as a discipline (particularly in its museological manifestation). Hollier seems bent on adjusting the idea of 'ethnographic Surrealism' by emphasising the strictly amateur status of the ethnographic aspect of *Documents*. He notes that neither Griaule nor Leiris were qualified as ethnographers during its day, and at that point in time even Georges Henri Rivière (who was to be on the directorial team for the new Musée de l'Homme) rated a fairly low ranking as an amateur ethnographer. Hollier's point seems to be that the primitivism of *Documents* was neither scientific nor even systematic, but an election of passion: in other words a primitivism, not an ethnography. However, Hollier observes that over the short life of *Documents* its contributors showed increased diffidence *vis-à-vis* primitivism. He also distinguishes between contributors, characterising Einstein as standing for some disciplinary segregation, but Bataille and Leiris pursuing their heterophilia by deliberate blurring the line between primitive and non-primitive, art and popular culture and explicitly countering the position of any connoisseur who would look for purity and authenticity.

Another publication which highlights Surrealist anti-colonialism is *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (1996), an anthology of writings by Caribbean and French Surrealists edited and translated into English by Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski.[66] It presents a collection of primary texts with an introductory essay by Michael Richardson that offers a potted history of Surrealist anti-colonialism against an outline of the Nineteenth Century origins of 'French colonial myth', contextualising the writings collected in the volume.[67] Richardson suggests that the French legitimised their colonial pursuits with more subtlety than the British, with a racism that was less biological and more cultural but no less brutal, with insidious effects upon cultural identity. 'The [French] colonial lie', Richardson writes, 'was not that non-Europeans were inherently inferior, but that their culture had lagged behind in the development of modern society, leaving them adrift in a stage their French masters had long left behind. For colonial blacks, the assumption was that they could become 'civilized', "French with a black skin", only to the extent that they renounced their own, supposedly inferior, culture to embrace the values of

[66] Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, translators and editors, *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean* (London and New York: Verso, 1996).
[67] Jules Monnerot, *La poésie moderne et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

French civilization.'[68] This assimilationist ideology was related to confidence in French culture itself: Richardson acknowledges that the First World War put such a dent in the French sense of cultural superiority that there were important consequences for its relations with the colonies.[69] He traces the contours of an anti-colonial political position in Surrealism through certain tracts and events that involved whites and blacks.[70]

For Surrealism, the traffic between the colonies began to go in the other direction when Breton was exiled to New York in 1941, and stopped over in Martinique en route. There he met Aimé Césaire, his wife Suzanne Césaire, and René Ménil. The three had just produced the first issues of the periodical *Tropiques*. In Richardson's characterisation, 'it [*Tropiques*] would function simultaneously on three ideological levels.' He writes that it operated 'as a focus for a developing black consciousness in Martinique; as a covert locus for the anti-Vichy struggle (during the war Martinique was administered by Vichy); and as a journal for international surrealism'.[71] This last assertion of Richardson's is controversial, because it might suggest that Surrealism instigated *Tropiques*, which in fact began quite independently and without Breton's awareness (and I recount the story in Chapter Six), but when Aimé Césaire and Breton met, they each recognised in the other kindred aims and poetic values. Richardson refers to Suzanne Césaire's essay, 'Surrealism and Us' from *Tropiques*, in which she delineates the use value of Surrealism – *their* version of Surrealism – for Martinican anti-colonialism. She ardently avows the living dynamic presence of Surrealism in 1943, and the tenacity with which it extended the demand for the emancipation of thought and expression. Richardson quotes the following passage by Suzanne Césaire:

> Our surrealism will then deliver it the bread of its depths. Finally these sordid contemporary antinomies of black/white, European/African, civilized/savage will be transcended. The magical power of the mahoulis will be recovered, drawn forth from the living sources. Colonial stupidity will be purified in the blue welding flame. Our value as metal, our cutting edge of steel, our amazing communions will be rediscovered. Surrealism – the tightrope of our hope.[72]

Aimé Césaire's perspective, Richardson writes, was a poetic, linguistic and moral sensibility. Césaire's Surrealism often revealed an uneasy theoretical idealism, says

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[68] Richardson, op cit., 2.
[69] ibid., 2 – 3.
[70] ibid., passim.
[71] Richardson op cit., 7.
[72] Suzanne Césaire, '1943: Surrealism and Us,' originally published in *Tropiques*, 8 – 9, (October 1943), quoted in Richardson's introduction to *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, p. 7, and printed in translation in the same volume, at pp.123 – 126.

Richardson. For Suzanne Césaire and Ménil, Surrealism was more of a critical tool with which to explore their cultural context. Ménil, a philosopher, was most engaged with Surrealism's Hegelian connection. After the war, Césaire and Ménil went their separate ways. Césaire became a 'foremost – if somewhat ambivalent – [exponent] of négritude, while Ménil would be one of its more trenchant critics.[73]

Négritude was a movement that emerged after World War II, formed by Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, a rallying point for black activism that was soon to be declared obsolete by a subsequent stage of political critique that repudiated its essentialism and replication of racial stereotypes. In his Introduction, Richardson sketches Ménil's critique of Négritude:

> For Ménil, Négritude came to stand for a political doctrine whose apparent ideological credentials were a mask by which European imperialism used the native petty bourgeoisie to ensure the continuance of a neo-colonialist mentality following independence that would ensure continuing European dominance.
>
> Although the reductive essentialism that came to dominate Négritude had been defined in Césaire's poem ('Those who invented neither gunpowder nor compass/Those who never knew how to conquer steam or electricity/But who abandoned themselves to the essence of all things'), it was Senghor who established the ideological gloss. Or more specifically, if we accept Ménil's argument, Négritude was established as a political ideology neither by Senghor nor Césaire, but by Jean-Paul Sartre in 'Orphée noir', his influential introduction to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache,* published in 1948 and acting as a rallying cry for concepts of negritude.[74]

Amanda Stansell remarks on Négritude's detractor, Franz Fanon. She says, 'he argued in *Peaunoire, masques blancs* (1952) that Négritude was part of a dialectic that functioned to maintain white people as the dominant term'.[75] Stansell goes on to say that Négritude was a necessary step towards decolonisation, 'particularly in terms of fighting the "psychological chains of colonization", as Césaire put it. Négritude used what post-colonial theorists now term '"strategic essentialism", the use of stable identity categories in specific historical situations to achieve a sense of self-respect necessary for combating colonialism'.[76] The debate over Césaire's Négritude is beyond the scope of this thesis. I will observe, however, that not only did his poetics seem to inflect Breton's in the 1940s, but the very fusion of the political and poetic in the Martinican writing infused the cultural politics of the white Surrealists in the 1940s and the 1950s, and I elaborate on this in Chapter Six.

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[73] Richardson op cit., 8.
[74] ibid., 8 – 9.
[75] ibid., 124.
[76] ibid., 124. Here Stansell cites 'Criticism, Feminism and the Institution: An Interview with Giyatri Spivak,' in *Thesis Eleven* 10 – 11 (1984 – 5), 183 – 84.

In a review of *Refusal of the Shadow,* Brent Hayes Edwards is highly critical of the anthology because, he argues, Richardson inflates the importance of *Légitime défense* at the expense of a wide range of other black intellectual work of the 1920s and 1930s.[77] Herein we enter a debate which continues amongst scholars, about the relationship between Négritude and Surrealism, the meaning of the encounter of these two modes of thought, and whether the relationship that sprang up between Breton and Césaire, can, should, or must, be conceived as an instance of the dominating European practice of cultural acquisition. In other words, did Breton – for Surrealism – lay claim to Césaire's Négritude?[78] I believe the answer is no, though Césaire's poetics influenced Breton's idea of Surrealism in the 1940s, and I shall take up Breton's 'A Great Black Poet' again in Chapter Five. For now, with reference to Breton's return passage to Europe, we can look to the tone of his language to remark that by this point in time, Breton's mode of address showed his a cognisance and regard for relating *as* a 'cultural Other'.

Finally, to return to the visual, with respect to anti-colonialism or postcolonialism in visual art from the late 1930s and beyond, there is a paucity of literature. Alyce Mahon's book *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938 – 1968* is a brilliant exception.[79] Her book provides visual documentation and discussion of the series of international Surrealist exhibitions between 1938 and 1959, and some of these were anti-colonialism and pro decolonisation. Mahon addresses the Surrealist exhibitions and events of this era from a political standpoint, looking at the way libidinal aesthetics and poetics cross-inform the politics. She argues that the Surrealists' EROS exhibition (Exposition Internationale du Surrealism), which ran from December 1959 to February 1960, was part of a broader concerted campaign against French policies in Algeria. It harnessed the eroticism of the Marquis de Sade, claiming that Sade's philosophy could illuminate and counter the political obscenities of the day.[80]

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[77] Brent Hayes Edwards, 'The Ethnics of Surrealism,' *Transition* 78, 1998: 84 – 135. Edwards' complaint is that Richardson's is a study of Surrealism in relationship blackness, rather than a study of international black activism and Surrealism's contribution to it.

[78] Daniel Scott depicts the interaction between Breton and Césaire in this way in 'Dreaming the Other: Breton, Césaire, and the Problematics of Influence,' *Romance Quarterly* 42 vol 1 (1995), 28 – 39.

[79] Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros 1938 – 1968* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2005).

[80] ibid., 149.

Taken together, the secondary literature reviewed in the present chapter counters a widespread view that Surrealism was complicit with colonialism. In identifying strong veins of anti-colonialism running through Surrealism, and by acknowledging the complexity of Surrealist signification, the writers reviewed here have seized upon different aspects of Surrealist aesthetics and poetics, and their viewpoints dispel the idea that Surrealist 'primitivism' was unified. What is more, the positions discussed here point to the fact that Surrealist 'primitivism' was not static, but underwent a developmental trajectory in line with its anti-colonial ethos. The following chapters flesh out characteristics of Surrealist anti-colonialism, with the aim of further describing and analysing the poetics and pragmatics of these gestures. The next chapter provides a discussion of the strategies of counter-Orientalism of Surrealism as they appeared in the 1920s according to a logic of destabilising collage-montage in which mimicry was a key tendency.

* * *

CHAPTER FOUR

Counter-Orientalism
The Collage Aesthetic of the 1920s

> Surrealist collage cannot be reduced to a cutting and pasting technique, a material practice of collating distant realities. It is also, and more essentially, a creative act of *détournement*, through the subversive manipulation and creative transformation of ready-made elements, forging the surreal out of fragments of the real, suggesting a *merveilleux* through the combination of banal and defunct images, clichés and rewritten texts. It is essentially a semiotic practice of transforming pre-formed iconic or verbal messages…
>
> – Elza Adamowicz [1]

In the 1920s the Surrealists mounted a generalised rebellion against Western society and a clear anti-colonial polemic arose in their periodicals and tracts. They were adroit at recognising the normative workings of the spectacle of cultural imperialism, and they deliberately tried to use its own means and tropes against it. Their critique of the West percolated through *La Révolution Surréaliste* (which ran from 1924 until 1929) in tracts and articles published there and elsewhere. In this chapter and the next, my aim is to show the continuities and variations in the movement's responses to colonialism through their writing and visual experimentation. Within their periodicals and in their staging of objects, their subversive collage-montage operations were calculated to expose or deconstruct what we might call an imperialist cultural hegemony. The Surrealists' own developing understandings and theorisations of their strategies becomes explicit in their writings at times, and I will refer to some of these.

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[1] Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17.

Formative Passions

In the 1920s, the Surrealists' points of engagements with other cultures and their artefacts were aligned with their very general critique of 'Western civilization' and their concomitant attack on Enlightenment values. Retrospectively, Michel Leiris spoke of the formative stages of his own 'intellectual itinerary' that led him to anthropology, saying,

> In terms of my own experience, I can say quite frankly that it was surrealism, which I was involved with during the first four years (1925 – 1929) and which represented for me the rebellion against the so-called rationalism of Western society and therefore an intellectual curiosity about peoples who represented more or less what Lévy-Bruhl called at the time the mentalité primitive.[2]

Interviewed in the 1980s, Leiris speaks at a humorous distance from the exploits of early Surrealism. What he has to say about the first years of the movement accords with what many commentators seem to believe were the values it supported for all time. In this interview, Leiris is clear about the fact he did not reject Surrealist ideas, though he chose not to remain loyal to Breton personally, and thus I think we have to be alert to the way Leiris' intellectual development occurred in terms of its *continuities* with Surrealism (indeed the same can be said of all who passed through the Surrealist movement), and the way connected intellectual influences filtered through the movement and the camp of the 'dissident Surrealists'.[3]

Asked if he talked about anthropology in the company of the Surrealists in the early days, Leiris says, 'No, we talked rather about the Orient in the Rimbauldian sense: Orient with a capital O, meaning all that is not part of the Occident…' He continues, 'We stood firmly against the West…. What was going on was a rebellion against Western civilization, plain and simple'.[4] For the first few years of the movement, this spectral mythic Orient was a presence. I will argue, however, that it approached a counter-Orientalism from inception.

At first, as Leiris indicated, the Surrealists' target was very wide: it was 'rationalism' or 'the West' that came under fire. Some of their early strategies bore traces of the anarchic aggression of Dada, and followed from and developed earlier insurrectory

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[2] Michel Leiris, as quoted in Jean Jamin and Sally Price, 'A Conversation with Michel Leiris,' *Current Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (Feb 1988), 157.
[3] Leiris says, 'I never really rejected Surrealism as such, like several others I rejected the tutelage of Breton…' ibid., 159.
[4] ibid.

gestures of Pablo Picasso and Alfred Jarry. The Surrealists' rhetoric and visual statements in the Twenties often amounted to a deliberately destabilising parodic re-use of Orientalist tropes (some of which we have seen through David Bate's analysis referred to in Chapter Three). I will argue in the present chapter that the Surrealists did not perform simple reversals of binaries according to a logic of direct negation (as some detractors have argued, referred to in Chapter Two). The Surrealists' acts of juxtaposition and displacement were calculated precisely to trouble Western binary thinking, and it is not fitting to attribute a postmodernist bias for pastiche, simple irony or purely parodic mimeticism to their undertakings.

To fix on the beginnings of Surrealism's interest in non-Western cultures, we can look to its germination prior to 1924. In the 1910s, Picasso's circle and Alfred Jarry were already expressing criticism of what was happening in the colonies. Jarry expressly pilloried the abuse of colonial power in *Ubu Coloniale.* In *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, of 1907, already Picasso did not reproduce a straightforward primitivism, but a conflation of ideas about alterity and a crisis of Western subjectivity. During the very early years of Surrealism, or proto-Surrealism from 1922, germinal tendencies of their engagement with other cultures were already evident: the key protagonists had a passion for collecting and displaying tribal objects alongside European works; they shared an antipathy towards colonialism, and expressed a jaundiced view of the official spectacles that promoted it.

In the first two decades of the movement, the Surrealists' main point of contact with other cultures was through the imported objects that had been in vogue in Paris since the turn of the century.[5] The founders of Surrealism continued the practice of collector artists who preceded them. In the 1910s, the young Breton and his friends had been recognised by Guillaume Apollinaire, and in his apartment, Breton, Aragon

[5] The only Surrealist to make any significant journey abroad in the early years of the movement was the French poet Paul Éluard, but his motivation seems to have been personal. In early 1924 Gala Éluard had a serious intimate liaison with the German artist Max Ernst, and Éluard left his wife to travel to the Pacific Islands (the Antilles, Panama, Tahiti, the Cook Islands, New Zealand, Australia, the Celebes, Java, Sumatra, Vietnam, Ceylon) for seven months. Accompanied by Ernst, Gala visited Éluard in Saigon and they reached a reconciliation and they returned to France together. These events are chronicled in Éluard's letters to his wife: Paul Éluard, *Letters to Gala (1924 – 1928)*, trans. Jesse Browner (Paragon House, New York, 1989), *passim.* I am indebted to one of my thesis examiners for clarifying these facts. See also Malcolm Haslam, *The Real World of the Surrealists* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978), 130.

and Soupault were exposed to an eclectic collection.[6] It included works by the Cubist painters, paintings by Douanier Rousseau, Marc Chagall and Giorgio de Chirico, along with African and Oceanic artefacts.[7]

Apollinaire was close to the dealer Paul Guillaume, and wrote essays for his catalogues on African and Oceanic art. This earlier generation of artist-collectors had a predilection for exotica because they equated it with unreason. In exotic objects they saw an antidote to a classical tradition based in rationality and the rule of reason. Following their predecessors, from the earliest beginnings of the movement many of the key members of Surrealism had a passion for collecting and through their dealings with objects, they began to consider the cosmologies and cultures of the peoples who made them. At a certain point their emphasis on a mythic 'Orient' subsided – it had ebbed by about 1929, superseded by a more concrete interest in other cultures.

Figs. 11 & 12. Guillaume Apollinaire's apartment, and detail, photograph by René-Jacques, 1954.

Like Apollinaire, the principal founding members of the Surrealist movement took to collected tribal artefacts and 'fetishes', and they too surrounded themselves with such objects in their domestic spaces, displaying them alongside contemporary artworks

[6] Guillaume Apollinaire (1880 – 1918) pseudonym of Wilhelm Apollinaris de Kostrowitzky. A poet who edited a number of reviews, published satirical and semi-pornographic texts. He was associated with Cubism and Orphism, and coined the term 'surrealism'.

[7] Says Breton, 'There [in Apollinaire's apartment] one would thread one's way between the shelves of books, the rows of African and Oceanic fetishes, the paintings of a kind that was then revolutionary – Picasso, Chirico, Larionov…There was no more intricate path than the one that led to the table at which he sat…' See Elizabeth Cowling, 'An Other Culture', in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978 p. 454. Cowling quotes from André Breton, *Entretiens 1913 –52 avec André Parinaud* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 23.

and bric-a-brac. André Breton reputedly bought his first object from the South Seas before he left school; Paul Éluard, Max Ernst, Wolfgang Paalen and Tristan Tzara were also collectors of note.[8] (see Figs. 11 – 14, of Apollinaire's study and Simone Breton in the rue Fontaine studio).

In the early years of the Surrealist movement, when Breton took up residence in Pigalle, at 42 rue Fontaine, he decorated his studio apartment with a mélange of auratic objects.[9] Though he subsisted on limited means, Breton was an avid collector.[10] His collecting habits relied on a random quality, and it is legendary that he frequented le marché aux puces at Saint-Ouen. He said 'The pleasure in making a find is in direct proportion to the difference which exists between the object sought and the object found.'[11] Breton's pronouncement is Freudian in its logic, but in *his* collecting habits Freud had a preference for classical antiquities.

Figs. 13 & 14. Breton's apartment in the 1920s: Simone Breton in the rue Fontaine studio in the early years, S. Sator Archives, Paris; Man Ray, *Simone Kahn*. c.1925. Gelatin silver photograph, 7.8 x 5.5 cm, Private collection.[12]

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[8] Malcolm Haslam writes, 'Before he left school, Breton had purchased, with the money he won as a prize, a fetish object from the South Seas, and from 1910 he could have visited the collection of Oceanic art which was put on show that year at the Trocadéro. He may well have read Emile Durkheim's book, published in 1912, on the mystical owner, *mana*, of the totems and other religious images of Australia.' Malcolm Haslam, *The Real World of the Surrealists* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1978), 31.

[9] Breton moved into his two-room apartment, in the Northern end of the 9th Arrondissement, on January 1, 1922. It is a short walk from the elegant studio on the rue de la Rochefoucauld that had been home to the French Symbolist artist Gustave Moreau (1826 – 1898), a painter whose work Breton admired and which formed the subject of an appreciative study in his later anthologised publication, *Surrealism and Painting* of 1928.

[10] See Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 168. The purchase of *Les Demoiselles* and its significance was previously discussed in Chapter One.

[11] Breton quoted in Elizabeth Cowling, 'An Other Culture', in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 457.

[12] I note that in Rosalind E. Krauss's 'No More Play', *The Originality Of The Avant-Garde And Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 42 – 85, at 81, a cropped version of this image is erroneously attributed to Jacques-André Boiffard, c. 1930.

In Breton's own apartment, artworks by close colleagues and other contemporaries hung alongside stuffed birds, minerals, glass bottles, framed butterflies, coins, jewellery and his collection of 'savage art', as he called it: African and Oceanic masks and 'fetishes'.

Figs 15 – 18. Breton's atelier, c 1960s. Photos by Sabine West.

Except for his years of exile during the war, Breton's address and the style of décor scarcely changed for the rest of his life. He lived out most of it in the same building (he moved one storey, into a larger apartment). He returned to it after his wartime exile in America with Native American and Eskimo objects, which feature in the two lower images above.[13] Unlike Freud's dwelling, Breton's was not made into a

Simone Kahn and Breton married in 1921, which makes the fact the photograph is titled 'Simone Kahn' is an interesting anomaly.

[13] Breton's apartment and collection is documented in a film made by Fabrice Maze, *L'oeil à l'état sauvage: l'atelier d'André Breton*, France, 2002, production Aube Breton, Elléoüt, Seven Doc, Centre Pompidou. Comprehensive descriptions of the atalier's layout and the arrangement of its objects is provided in an essay: Dagmar Motycka Weston,'The Situational Space of André Breton's Atelier and Personal Museum in Paris.' Conference

museum, though now a massing of his objects is part of the collection of the Centre Pompidou. This arrangement gives the visitor an appreciation of the diversity of the objects Breton collected, and the binding nature that his personal aesthetic imposed upon the collection, however it cannot impart the atmosphere of the way Breton constructed his poetic domestic space. In Chapter Six, I develop a discussion of the Surrealists' innovative exploits in exhibition design, and doubtless their command of transformative spaces must have owed much to their personal experience of having effectively lived within their own 'installations' for decades.

Breton's collecting showed perspicacity as well as desire, and through his knowledge of literature and art his acumen earned him a modest living in the early days. He worked as a curator for the *haute-couturier* Jacques Doucet,[14] a collector of manuscripts, rare books and art, for whom he purchased Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907).[15] Doucet was no connoisseur of modern art and was dissatisfied with the acquisition, demanding from Breton a number of written assurances of the worth of the painting. One of these file letters is quite telling, because in it Breton makes it clear that he reads Picasso's primitivism as a comment on nothing other than Western civilization. In other words, in today's terms it would seem that Breton sees Picasso's work as an Orientalism, but of a radical critical order:

> Can you have the slightest doubt about my opinion of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon?*... Without [the painting], as I've told you many times, there would, to my mind, be no means of representing the *state of our civilization* today from this particular angle. While I generally favor [sic] poetic research, when it comes to determining the sense of an age, I cannot help seeing *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* as the most important event at the beginning of the 20th century…[16]

From early days, their 'private' interest in non-Western objects intersected with the public production of the Surrealists. During the interwar period, their appropriations went beyond private display and collection, and in many cases the they loaned objects from their own collections for public exhibitions. In *La Révolution surréaliste* photographic illustrations of exotic objects were set against images of Surrealist objects and their texts. Similarly, displays of exotic artefacts were exhibited in

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paper, *The Role of the Humanities in Design Creativity International Conference 2007*. The sale and acquisition of items from the collection is discussed by Alan Riding, in 'Surrealism for Sale, Straight from the Source: André Breton's Collection is Readied for Auction', *New York Times*, 17 December, 2002, <http:/www.nytimes.com/2002/12/17/arts/surrealism-for-sale-straight-source-andre-breton-s-collection-readied-for.htm>.

[14] Jacques Doucet (1853 – 1929) French fashion designer and collector of art and literature.

[15] Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 146.

[16] André Breton, in a file letter to Jacques Doucet, quoted in Polizzotti, 223.

parallel to contemporary works in commercial gallery exhibitions. The exhibitions of the 1920s comprised juxtaposed displays of Surrealist and exotic objects.

The earliest Surrealist (or proto-Surrealist) response to French colonialism precedes the *First Manifesto* and was in response to the *Exposition Coloniale de Marseilles* in 1922, which Breton and Aragon visited together. Antonin Artaud saw it too, and was impressed by a troupe of Cambodian dancers.[17] Aragon wrote a short piece, 'Souvenirs de voyages: L'Exposition Coloniale de Marseilles,' published in *Littérature*, and here we can discern an embryonic form of Surrealist objection to an official colonialist spectacle.[18] The stylized exoticism of the publicity materials, featuring exotic architecture and a harmonious image of a multi-racial Greater France, are pictured below (Figs. 19 & 20). Aragon writes that Breton bought an armadillo from one of the displayed 'natives', which he sold on to another man. According to Aragon's report, Breton responded to the displays by describing them as 'the saddest zoological gardens he knows of'.[19]

Figs. 19 & 20. Programme and poster from the *Exposition Coloniale de Marseilles*, 1922

Aragon's short passage on this exposition hardly constitutes a political critique: rather, it is a reflective, acerbic piece of description relating specifically to an official spectacle of French colonialism. Breton's reported response to the display is a caustic-yet-mournful comment on the 'human zoo' aspect of it, a feature that was not peculiar to this particular exposition: live human exhibits had been a common feature of previous expositions depicting colonial interests, and were to be a prominent aspect of the *Colonial Exposition* of 1931. The curious interaction Aragon recounted

[17] Haslam, 130.
[18] Louis Aragon, 'Souvenirs de voyages: L' exposition Coloniale de Marseille', *Littérature*, no. 8 (Jan 1923), 3 – 4.
[19] Aragon, ibid., quoted in Tythacott, 62.

between Breton and the human display – the purchase and sale of the armadillo, might point to Breton's performative side, or opportunism: he may have seized upon a chance encounter and perhaps even the opportunity of a quick profit, or he may have made a performative gesture (fraternising with the human specimens?), but we can only speculate, just as we can only speculate about Breton and Aragon's reason for visiting the Marseille exposition at all. Aragon's report seems to be the only direct mention of it: but this slight reference prefigures the Surrealists' much more strident objections to colonialism.[20]

In his 'Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité' ('Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality') of September 1924, Breton pitted 'the Orient' as a catalyst and source of inspiration for the Surrealist movement in the face of a corrupt and ailing West.[21] He writes,

> Latin civilization is over and done for and, as for me, I ask that not a single finger be lifted to save it. At present, it is the last bastion of bad faith, of decrepitude, and of cowardice. Compromise, trickery, promises of peace, vacant mirrors, selfishness, military dictionaries, the resurgence of foppishness, the return to the Church, the eight-hour work day, burials worse than in plague years, sports: one might as well just throw up one's hands.[22]

This diagnosis of Western demise is followed by an appeal to a mythical 'Orient':

> Orient, O victorious Orient, you whose value is only symbolic, I am at your service, Orient of pearls and of rage! Be it in the flow of a phrase or in the mysterious wind of a jazz tune, allow me to recognize your resources in the Revolutions to come. You who are the radiant image of my dispossession, Orient, beautiful bird of prey and innocence, from the depths of the realm of the Shades, I implore you! Inspire me, that I might be someone who no longer has a shadow.[23]

In the very first issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, of December 1924, there is mention of a survey that had been conducted by the periodical *Les Cahiers du mois*, a special issue of which had been entitled, 'Les Appel de l'Orient' ('The call of the East'). Durozoi notes that several of the Surrealists responded. Presumably, their

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[20] Commenting on Aragon's piece in *Littérature*, Jack Spector writes that 'Neither poet had any sympathy of insight into the native cultures, nor had they yet acquired the appropriate Marxist anti-colonial rhetoric'. To the contrary, I am arguing that the piece of writing denotes their sympathy with 'native culture' and in particular, with the people who were on display. I would contend that the absence of 'appropriate Marxist anti-colonial rhetoric' hardly nullifies Aragon's responses to the exposition.

[21] André Breton, 'Introduction au discours sur le peu de réalité,' translated as 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality,' by Richard Sieburth and Jennifer Gordon, *October* 69 (Summer 1994), 132 – 144.

[22] ibid., 143.

[23] ibid., 144.

discussions prompted the focus of their own periodical.[24] A Surrealist anti-colonial position emerged forcibly in the third edition of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (of 15 April, 1925). It was reiterated in the fourth edition, of July that year. We shall dwell upon these two issues, in which the Surrealists' germinal anti-colonial, anti-Western position is evident in a raw form, uninhibited and uninflected by Communist rhetoric. At this time they were not yet affiliated with the Communist Party, and their written output showed sympathy– though not deep familiarity– with Marxist ideas and Communist argot.[25] The issue comprised a number of general criticisms of Western values and religion, and overt criticisms of colonialism in Africa. At the time, the third edition of *La Révolution Surréaliste* was being prepared with Artaud at the helm of both of the periodical and the Bureau of Surrealist Research. The pages of the April 1925 issue bore the stamp of the anarchic insurgency of his temperament, which seems to have been contagious, as the mood percolates through the other contributions. In only a matter of weeks Breton stepped in to change things because, as he was to comment later, the brutality of the verbiage worried him. Nonetheless, during those few weeks, as Breton himself owned, Artaud regalvanised the group's desire for insurgency.[26]

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[24] Durozoi notes that Breton, Crevel, Deltiel and Soupault responded to the survey. Breton's response was, 'I find it pleasing that western civilisation is at stake. Enlightenment now comes from the Orient. I do not expect "the East" to bring riches or renewal to us in any way, but rather to conquer us. (*Oeuvres completes*, I: 898), quoted in Durozoi, p. 715, n. 34. Further, Durozoi notes that Breton wrote in the Surrealist bureau's notebook that 'we examine very closely the question to what degree *La Révolution surréaliste* can or must join in a campaign *for the Orient*.' Also Durozoi, p. 715, n. 34.

[25] Under Artaud's penmanship the group expressed a vehement collective desire to be more of an external force, with an early allusions to materialism, in the 'Declaration of January 27, 1925', in which he wrote one of the most pointed definitions of Surrealism, and one that was to resonate throughout the movement's future grappling with Communism: 'SURREALISM is not a poetic form. It is a cry of the mind turning back upon itself, and is determined to break apart its fetters, even if it must be by material hammers'. Antonin Artaud, 'Declaration of January 27, 1925', quoted in Polizzotti, 232.

[26] Retrospectively, Breton was to say that he experienced a strong but nameless disquiet about the fever pitch that the group underwent during this short period of Artaud's helmsmanship, and felt alarm at the level of violence inherent in the language. Nonetheless, he saw it as a galvanising time. 'If I completely shared in the spirit behind these texts – moreover, they were the fruit of long discussions between several of us – and I had few reservations as to their content, I soon began to worry about the atmosphere they were creating. The very fact of their rapid succession, and the fact that this highly polemical activity necessarily tended to subsume all the others, gave me the impression that, without our quite realizing it we had been seized by frenzy, and the air had rarefied around us. Looking at the situation more closely today, I better understand my resistance, which at the time remained obscure. That half libertarian, half-mystical path was not really mine, and I came to see it as more of a dead end (I wasn't the only one). The space that Artaud led me into always strikes me as abstract, a hall of mirrors. For me, there's always something 'verbal' about it, even if that verbal is very noble, very beautiful. It's a place of lacunae and ellipses in which, personally, I lose all my means of communication with the innumerable things that, despite everything, give me pleasure and bind me to this earth. We forget too easily that Surrealism has an enormous capacity for *love*, and that what it violently condemned were precisely the things

Artaud penned a number of anonymous open letters: 'Letter to the Rectors of European Universities', 'Address to the Pope', 'Address to the Dalaï Lama', 'Letter to the Schools of Buddha', and 'Letter to the Chief Physicians of the Insane Asylums'. In general, the content of these served to formulate an alterity to Western thought, and to contrast the intellectual poverty of Western culture with richer Eastern values of spirituality.[27] There was also a rather more concrete, specifically anti-colonialist entry by Paul Éluard, entitled 'La suppression de l'esclavage' ('The Suppression of Slavery).[28] In this piece, Éluard paints an image of the approaching violent, catastrophic collapse of Western domination under the pressure of an 'Orient' *of its own devising*, and opposed by its own colonies. His conception of the West being threatened by a construct produced through its own projections exemplifies an early Surrealist insight, which runs against the grain of the apparently romanticized 'spiritualism' that Breton later isolated as a point of disquiet for him.

Breton asserted more influence over *La Révolution surréaliste* number four (July, 1925). In it, he began his study of 'Surrealism and Painting' and he included more art reproductions than in the previous issues. Though he moved to balance the violent invective that had emerged under Artaud, Breton did not eliminate it. In this issue, in a similar mood to before, there is an image of a threatening Orient conjured up by Aragon, who writes:

> We shall triumph over everything. And first of all we'll destroy this civilization that is so dear to you, in which you are caught like fossils in shale. Western world, you are condemned to death. We are Europe's defeatists…let the orient, your terror, answer our voice at last! We shall waken everywhere the seeds of confusion and discomfort. We are the mind's agitators. All barricades are valid, all shackles to happiness damned. Jews, leave your ghettos! Starve the people, so that they will at last know the taste of the bread of wrath! Rise, thousand armed India, great legendary Brahma. It is your turn, Egypt! And let the drug merchants fling themselves upon our terrified nations! Let distant America's white buildings crumble among her ridiculous prohibitions. See how dry the earth is, and ready, like so much straw, for every conflagration. Laugh your fill. We are the ones who always hold out a hand to the enemy…[29]

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that impaired love…I tried with uneven success to explain that we still wanted very much to 'do away with the *ancien régime* of the mind,' but that, in order to do this, it was not enough to try to 'intimidate the world by banging it over the head with brutal demands.' Breton, *Conversations*: 86.

[27] See Bate, 129, and Polizzotti, 230 – 235

[28] Paul Éluard, 'La suppression de l'esclavage,' *La Révolution surréaliste* 3, 15 (April, 1925), 19.

[29] Louis Aragon, *La Révolution surréaliste*, No 4, July 1925, quoted in Nadeau, p. 111. Aragon's text is entitled *Fragments of a lecture given at Madrid at the Residencia des Estudiantes, April 18, 1925.*

La Révolution surréaliste might be read as adhering to a binary logic that separates 'the West from the 'rest', due to the physical organization of the pages and the negating poetics – visual and verbal – in the polemics, perhaps particularly in the third issue, and in Aragon's diatribe from the fourth issue. From such a straightforward reading, it would be but a short step to conclude that the Surrealists wished to abandon the West and naively identify with the 'exotics' they refer to. However, I contend that there is not a clear-cut binarism about the dynamics at work in the periodical; rather there are linguistic slippages between abstracted notions of Occident and Orient. Of relevance here is the polemical exchange that took place between Breton (and Éluard) on one side, and Pierre Naville on the other, over 1925 to 1926. In Chapter One I referred to the ideological battle, depicted by Nadeau and others as a stoush over the Surrealist versus Communist definitions of revolution. I will elaborate now on another dimension of the debate and as I have already alluded, it does not figure as significant within the Marxist chroniclers' account of the Naville-Breton debate.

As we saw, in *The Revolution and the Intellectuals,* written over winter, 1925 – 1926, Naville laid a charge against what he viewed as Surrealism's idealism. He also complained about what he saw as Surrealism's celebration of an imaginary Orient, responding to expressions of Breton's, Aragon's and others referred to above. Breton responded to these charges, as did Éluard. I wish to suggest that the anti-binary attitude and logic propounded by Breton and Éluard extends to the visual poetics of Surrealist practice in these early years, and that it became more pronounced, more radical and aggressive in subsequent periodicals. I contend that the type of relation the Surrealists tried to reveal between 'Occident' and 'Orient', and between exotic objects and the works of the artists in their circle, was not clearly oppositional and neither was it geared toward demonstrating straightforward 'affinities' – either formal or conceptual, between exotic objects and contemporary art or Western and non-Western cultures. Rather, through exploiting the logic of displacement that is inherent to Surrealist collage-montage, the Surrealists set loose all manner of signifiers that are the currency of colonial oppression. Here, I am echoing the logic used by Rosalind Krauss, when she speculated that in their use of the photographic medium the Surrealists were proto-feminist.[30] I will return to an analysis of the specific ways in which this logic of displacement is put to the service of the emerging

[30] Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography in the Service of Surrealism', in Krauss and Jane Livingston. *L'amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*. (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1985).

anti-colonialism in *La Révolution surréaliste* issues three and four, after a brief excursion intended to underscore the centrality of collage to Surrealist practice, followed by a discussion of the political stakes of the time.

Anti-colonial Poetics in *La Révolution surréaliste*

A number of the Surrealists were developing congruent theories of the image in the 1920s. Breton's *Surrealism and Painting*, which originally appeared in instalments in *La Révolution surréaliste*, is perhaps the best-known deliberation.[31] Ernst himself, Aragon, and others each made solid pronouncements about the function of collage for accomplishing surreality. The lessons drawn from the pictorial logic of collage inform an understanding of Surrealist painting and photography. In other words, the Surrealist theory of image *in toto* is indebted to their principle of collage. The Surrealist collage operation is allied to poetry, in terms of language play that delivers surprising collisions that may simultaneously negate previous forms and suggest new ones. Similarly, the organization of the pages and content of the Surrealist journals can only be adequately understood as operating through collage-montage and *détournement* principles. With regard to objects, again, collage-montage operations of productive and open juxtaposition are behind the principle of Surrealist exhibition practice right from the outset.

I wish to focus now on these poetics in the form of the polemical and visual provocations of *La Révolution surréaliste*, specifically the third issue. Written like an epitaph its title proclaimed, '1925. END OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA', posing a negation of European religious values. It is patently untrue! To misquote Mark Twain, 'reports of the death of Christianity in 1925 are grossly exaggerated.' This style of a shrill headline is a fiction, used for effect. The use of type, layout and illustration is also sensationalist and polemical but, design wise, it is controlled by a formal simplicity.

[31] André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

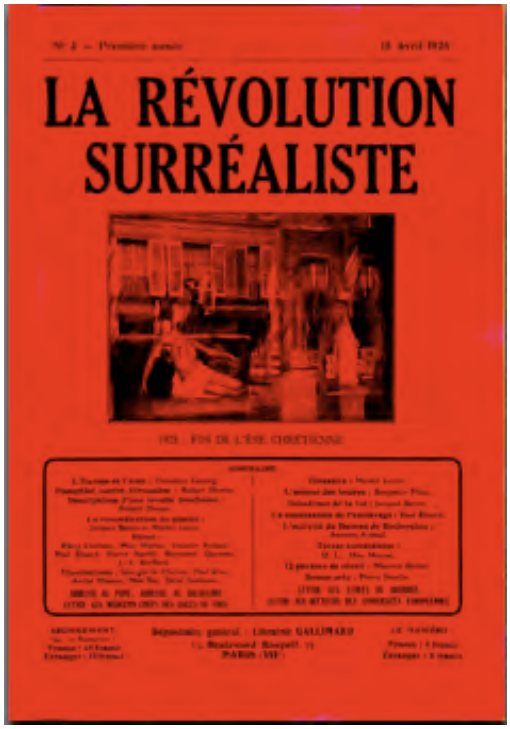

Figure 21. *La Révolution surréaliste* no. 3, April 1925, front cover.

Artaud's 'Adresse au Pape' takes up one full page of a double spread, and his 'Adresse au Dalaï-Lama' is on the facing page. In 'addressing' the Dalaï-Lama, at least on the surface the anonymous Artaud seems to offer him respect and adherence. By contrast, the tone he uses in his 'Adresse au Pape' is rude and aggressive: he addresses the pope as 'pope dog'.[32] 'Great Lama', opens Artaud in a tone of exaggerated reverence, 'we are your most faithful servants, give us, send us your insight, in a language that our contaminated European spirits might understand, and if needs be change our spirit…' The note of facetiousness becomes more pronounced when Artaud writes that he wishes to learn to levitate: 'Teach us Lama', he writes, 'the material levitation of the body, and how the earth can no longer have a hold over us. For you know which transparent liberation of the soul, which freedom of the Spirit within the Spirit, oh worthy Pope, Pope of the true spirit, we refer to.'[33]

To interpret Artaud's verbal gestures literally, as indicating his rejection of Catholicism in favour of an earnest adherence to Buddhism (as distinct from a keen interest in it), would surely be mistaken, as it would to interpret the 'letters' as

[32] 'Address to the Pope', translated and published in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, Edited and translated by Michael Richardson and Krysztof Fijalkowski (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 142.
[33] 'Address to the Dalaï Lama', translated and published in *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, edited and translated by Michael Richardson and Krysztof Fijalkowski (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 141.

though they were directed to their addressees in earnest.[34] These are rhetorical sacrilegious flourishes – missives from an unnamed vector to abstracted entities. Though the periodical embodies a general tendency for negation and comparative juxtaposition, to my eye there are no firm polarities or binary oppositions in evidence. If *La Révolution surréaliste* does not resort to a play of 'dual oppositions' or overweening binary logic, then what order of disruption does it employ? I wish to argue that the type of negative provocation it rests on is a *proximate* and *parasitic* model of appropriation and mimicry.

Perhaps partly to distinguish itself from its non-decorous Dada precursor *Littérature* – which had often born an anarchic rugged amateurism in its design, and at other times showy dynamic typography – the much more restrained appearance and poetics of *La Révolution surréaliste* aped the sombre formality of the scientific journal *La Nature*.[35] By adopting a relational – with hindsight we can even say 'situational' – position, in relation to *La Nature* through imitating its format, *La Révolution surréaliste* created a particular reading effect, which was not entirely satirical. It was a calculated and deliberately calibrated effect, as Benjamin Péret describes the strategy with precision in the first number of the periodical. 'Take a scientific review [he wrote]: already your understanding, if you are not versed in the sciences it deals with, wanders. A certain spirit of invention begins to penetrate you, because you are obliged to lend a meaning to the facts you find given which they do not have …'[36]

In mimicking *La Nature* then, *La Révolution surréaliste* does not seek to mount an outright negation of the authority of the former. This is not a simple overturning of scientific values: it is not parodic in such a straightforward or hostile sense, but in a more general and open way, intended to instigate a *productive* reading effect. Rather than totally negating it, *La Révolution surréaliste* draws some energy from the authoritative style of *La Nature*, taking on something of its 'scientism', which is more than an attempt to superficially encode itself with scientific gravitas. As Breton says in the *First Manifesto* and elsewhere, the Surrealists were against Positivism: they were in earnest, however, about their own area of enquiry as research. So, while the reading effect of *La Révolution surréaliste* is quasi-authoritative, it is also

[34] *La Révolution surréaliste* 3, 16 – 17.
[35] Ades, 189 – 90.
[36] Péret, quoted in Ades, 190

provocative and open-ended, such that the mind of the reader 'may wander' (here we can see a prequel to the Situationalists' idea of *drift*, or *dérive*).[37]

By and large, the way the objects were photographically displayed in *La Révolution surréaliste* was in a 'straight' documentary mode – again, a visual parallel to the style of photography in *La Nature*. In keeping with this, frequently text was set in relationship to photographs, to construct a productive rebus effect. This mode of arrangement does not immediately call into question whether the objects are classified as 'ethnographic' or 'scientific' specimens or as '*objets d'art*'. It is not a case of pitting 'ethnographic' *against* 'artistic' values: rather, a floating of declassified objects. Such *déclassé* ambiguity is in keeping with the organization and design of the journal, and such cross- or anti-categorical signification was to become more extreme in subsequent periodicals. Already though, there is a visual politics in operation in *La Révolution surréaliste*, with a discernable anti-colonial emphasis.

Early Surrealist Anti-Colonial Politics

It is commonly recognised that certain political events of 1925 prompted the politicisation of the Surrealists.[38] As we saw in Chapter One, this moment has been depicted not just as Surrealism's entrance into the political arena but, from the perspective of a Marxist-inflected narrative, portrayed more specifically as a courtship between Communism and Surrealism, culminating with the tract of 1927, *Au Grand Jour* (*In Broad Daylight*) and the Surrealists' recruitment to the PCF. Here, I wish to re-inflect that narrative, by pointing to the colonial issues that drew the Surrealists into politics, and by focusing on particular tactics and commentary

[37] The Situationist International (SI) was a group founded in 1957. Their theoretical perspective was explicated in influential book *The Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord. One of the basic Situationalist practices was *dérive*, or drift. "Théorie de la dérive" was published in *Internationale Situationniste* #2 (Paris, December 1958) 'In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.' <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/2.derive.htm>

[38] David Drake, 'The PCF, the Surrealists, Clarté and the Rif War', *French Cultural Studies* 17, 2 (June 2006), 173 – 188. Drake's account is a particularly useful rendition of the unfolding of events in the Rif, and the conflicted responses to them from the French intelligentsia. Drake tends to lend support to commentators who emphasise the Surrealists' pragmatism in joining a coalition of interests, while my interpretation leans in the direction of Rosemont: see the next note.

they used. I wish to prepare the ground here for my main argument: that Surrealism's relation to Communism, which has so often been depicted as the sum of its political adventure, was a relatively short chapter in a wider and longer political engagement, an abiding aspect of which was anti-colonial politics.

In the years 1925 to 1927 we by no means see a clarification towards Surrealism's decisive conversion to Communism.[39] Rather, the Surrealists grappled with the issue of their own revolutionary dynamism and its relation to party politics, and their ranks were not at all galvanised over their revolutionary principles. There was dissention from the outset, and a number of reversals in the Surrealists' acceptance of Communism. Moreover, there was hardly a clear party line in the PCF itself at this time; rather, an unholy alliance of jostling interests.[40] On the other hand, with regard to their opposition to colonialism, the Surrealists were clear and resolved. To refer to Leiris again, in 1988 he recalled that in the dawning of the movement the young Surrealists did not conceive of their rejection of Western civilization in terms of a rejection of capitalist society – that came later. Nothing could be clearer than Leiris's summation that the sentiment of anti-colonialism spawned the Surrealists' political energy. He says, 'our first political manifestation was the Saint-Pol Roux banquet, which was, in effect, a protest against the war in Morocco. The cry was "Vive Abd-el-Krim!"...[O]ur first political statement was the adoption of an anti-colonial stance.'[41]

In 1925 a rebellion was led by Mohamed be Abd-el-Krim, a Berber leader in the Rif

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[39] Franklin Rosemont regards the events of 1925 differently to Drake: see his sixth chapter of the book, *André Breton and the First Principles of Surrealism* (London, Pluto Press, 1978), 36 – 42. His account is highly descriptive of the ambivalence of the Surrealists with regard to Party allegiance.

[40] On the composition of the PCF in 1925, Drake sums up its diversity and factionalism in the following way: 'The PCF was born of the split in the Section française de l 'Internationale ouvrière (SFIO) at Tours in December 1920 when a majority of the SFIO voted in favour of membership of the Third International (Comintern). Initially, the fledgling party, the Section française de l'Internationale communiste (SFIC), renamed the Parti communiste français (PCF) in October 1921, was a far cry from the centralised, bureaucratic, authoritarian, Moscow-dominated organisation that it would become. It was composed of pacifists, disgusted by the 1914 'betrayal' by the Second International, anarcho-syndicalists who were rejecting the reformism of the SFIO, 'centrists' whose support for the 21 Conditions of the Third International was lukewarm to say the least, and others who wanted the closest possible links with the International. Unsurprisingly, the first few years of the Party's life were dominated by a constant jostling for power.' See David Drake 'The PCF, the Surrealists, Clarté and the Rif War', *French Cultural Studies* 17, 2 (June 2006), 173–188.

[41] Michel Leiris, quoted by Price and Jamin, op cit., 58.

region of Morocco, then under the control of Spain.[42] France sent a large number of troops to put down the insurgency. At this time Maréchal Hubert Lyautey was in charge of the colony. Interestingly, it was Lyautey who became the director of the Colonial Exhibition of 1931.[43] The French entered into the Moroccan war on the side of the Spanish, against the well-organised insurgent army. The campaign ended with the surrender of Abd-el-Krim in the spring of 1926.

Polemical disputes between Aragon and *Clarté* group had occurred before, but the French interference in the Rif uprising prompted the Surrealists to align with their erstwhile rivals at *Clarté*.[44] In July 1925, *Clarté* published a special issue denouncing the war in Morocco: it included an open letter to readers, inviting responses for the next issue, along with a four-and-a-half-page statement, 'Ce que nous pensons', by Marcel Fourrier putting forth the *Clarté* anti-colonial position. The fifty-two responses to the open letter in the special edition on the Rif war were published in the subsequent issue of *Clarté*. They came from intellectuals of all stripes, including the Surrealists (René Crevel, Paul Éluard, Antoine Artaud and Louis Aragon contributed), leftists who were against French involvement in the war, as well as correspondents who supported the war on the basis of the supposedly civilising effects of French colonialism.[45] The Surrealists expressed negative views on French nationalism and patriotic fanaticism. A manifesto by Henri Barbusse was also reprinted in the special edition (it had appeared days earlier in *L'Humanité*) entitled *Appel aux Travailleurs intellectuels: Oui ou non, condamnez-vous la guerre?* [*Call*

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[42] Morocco became a French protectorate under the Treaty of Fès in March 1912. In November 1912, France signed the treaty in Madrid dividing Morocco into four: the French administrative zone with Rabat as its capital covering some ninety per cent of the country, a small Spanish protectorate with its capital in Tétouan, a southern protectorate administered as part of the Spanish Sahara, and an international zone around Tangier. Mohamed be Abd-el-Krim, a Berber leader of the Beni Ourriagli tribe, led Rifian tribesmen in the Eastern part of Spain's Moroccan Protectorate against the Spanish occupation of his homeland, inflicting a decisive defeat on the Spanish forces. See Drake, and also José E. Alvarez, 'Between Gallipoli and D-Day: Alhucemas, 1925,' *The Journal of Military History* 63 (January 1999, 75-98); David S. Woolman. *Rebels in the Rif: Abd el Krim and the Rif Rebellion*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1968).

[43] Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey (1854 –1934) French army general, the first Resident-General in Morocco from 1912 to 1925, and from 1921 Marshal of France. He was appointed by the French government to organise the Colonial Exhibition of 1931.

[44] The Clarté group was formally launched on 10 May 1919, under the pacifistic and humanitarian influence of Henri Barbusse, Raymond Lefebvre and Paul Vaillant-Couturier. It was founded as an 'International of the Mind', to which intellectuals of all countries were enjoined to contribute. At first, the group's platform was broadly humanist, but by the mid-Twenties it came out strongly in favour of Bolshevism and aligned to the Communist Third International, though its members had not joined the French Communist Party. The group was riven with tensions between Barbusse and younger radical members. See Nadeau, 118, and Drake, 5.

[45] Lewis, 44 – 5; Drake, 8.

to Intellectual Workers: yes or no, do you condemn the war?]. The tone of it was reformist and called for a pacifistic solution to the war, rather than coming out in support for the Rifians.[46]

There was a strong reaction to Barbusse's text in the October issue of *Clarté*. The Surrealists criticised it for making the mistake of appealing to French nationalism, and the *Clarté* group distanced itself from Barbusse's position. Mild though it may have been, Barbusse's manifesto prompted opposition from many members of the *Académie française* and other conservative literary identities who swiftly declared their support for the government in a document called *Intellectuels aux côtés de la patrie* (*Intellectuals on the Side of Patriotism*).[47]

On the second of July 1925 (the same day that *L'Humanité* had originally published Barbusse's 'Call to Intellectual Workers'), members of the Surrealist group went to a banquet in honour of the Symbolist poet, Saint-Pol-Roux, attended by the Parisian literati (this is the banquet Leiris referred to, in the statement quoted earlier, as marking the first overt political activity of Surrealism). The Surrealists arrived early and under each plate placed a copy of a letter, bearing the date of the previous day, addressed to Monsieur Paul Claudel, the French Ambassador to Japan. It was a retort to a statement Claudel had made to the Italian press, saying that he could find only one rationale in Dada or Surrealism: 'a pederastic one'.[48] He was reported as saying:

> Many are surprised that I am [not only] a good Catholic, but a writer, a diplomat, French ambassador, and a poet. But I find nothing strange about this. During the war, I went to South America to buy wheat, tinned meat, and lard for the army, and managed to save my country some two million francs.[49]

The Surrealists capitalized on Claudel's boast about procuring lard. Their open letter to him read in part:

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[46] Drake explains the anomalous fact that Barbusse's text was apparently endorsed in print by twenty members of the editorial committee of Clarté and nineteen Surrealists (including Breton, Artaud, Éluard and Crevel). He points out that 'a number of names of people that appeared at the foot of the text were no longer members of the group to which they were assigned. For example, Jean-Richard Bloch had not written for Clarté for some time and Vaillant-Couturier, like Barbusse, had had no editorial role in the review since 1923. Artaud had refused to sign the text, but his name appeared just the same. It would therefore appear that the names of a number of people had been included without their having been consulted'. Nonetheless, some radicals had apparently voluntarily signed. See Drake pp. 10 – 11.

[47] Lewis, 34. David Drake provides a detailed account of the varied range of responses to Barbusse's statement, and explains the anomaly of the way the Surrealists and Clarté originally supporting it, and then becoming openly hostile to it. See Drake pp. 10 – 12.

[48] Durozoi, 90.

[49] Lewis, 26.

> We fervently hope that wars and colonial insurrections will annihilate this Western civilization…. We take this opportunity to disassociate ourselves publicly from all that is French, in words and actions. We assert that we find treason and all that can harm the security of the state much more reconcilable with poetry than the sale of 'great quantities of lard.' …Write, pray and slobber on; we demand the dishonour of having treated you for once and for all as a pedant and a swine.[50]

The sentiments of anti-colonialism, anti-nationalism and denunciation of Western civilization are abundantly evident here, but the tone is not new: it reiterates the sentiments already expressed in *La Révolution surréaliste*, as we have seen. The publication of *Appel aux Travailleurs intellectuels* and *Intellectuels aux côtés de la patrie*, as well as the open letter to Claudel, created palpable tension at the banquet, and the reactionary content of the speeches drew heckling from the Surrealists. A fight broke out, the police were sent for. Many Surrealists were arrested and Leiris was badly beaten by the police.[51] [52] In the immediate aftermath of the banquet the Surrealists gained notoriety and condemnation from the literary establishment.[53]

This incident captures something of the origins and the attitudes behind the Surrealists' political stance and their early conception of revolt, and rings with overtones of anarchic, declamatory chaos. The tone of the missive is redolent of Dada. As the Surrealists' antics are continuous with the spirit and the political sentiments of the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, the event did not constitute the original expression of their anti-colonial stance, but as their first public political gesture. The brawl was not 'inaugural' in terms of galvanising the Surrealists' Communist leanings, though it has been referred to as such a point of origin in standard accounts. Rather, as Leiris said himself, it demonstrated a position of anti-colonialism. Breton said later that the fracas marked the decisive severance of their connections with the Parisian literati, and a renewed focus on the political sphere.[54]

With the smell of burning bridges, the Surrealists joined the 'Clartéists' to form a counter-position in support of the rebels, against the French military intervention,

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[50] ibid, 26.
[51] Durozoi, 90.
[52] Breton's later amusing recollections of the banquet confirm most of these details, with some slight variations in emphasis. See André Breton, *Conversations: the Autobiography of Surrealism*, with André Parinaud and Others, translated by Mark Polizzotti, New York, Marlow, 1993, originally published in French entitled *Entretiens* by Gallimard in 1952, pp. 88 – 89.
[53] Lewis, 25 – 6.
[54] André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism, with André Parinaud and Others*, translated and with an introduction by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe and Co.), p. 89.

joined by writers for the review *Philosophies,* and by the Brussels group who produced *Correspondences.* As discussed in Chapter One, in August of 1925 the members of these literary groups countersigned the declaration *La revolution d'abord et toujours!* (*The Revolution First and Always!*).[55] The manifesto was squarely 'political' insofar as it lamented the predicament of the wage earner. In general terms it also rejected the colonial values and laws that underpinned the French presence putting down the native insurgents in Morocco. But in fact, *La revolution d'abord et toujours!* makes no direct reference to actual events in the Rif: its anti-colonialism is broad-brush. Breton declares his rejection of the ideas upon which Western civilisation is based, and he explains in a footnote that the Orient is everywhere: a state of mind, which is opposed to enemies of liberty and contemplation.[56] Thus, with respect to its anti-colonialist stance, *La revolution d'abord et toujours!* presents cultural critique over political analysis. Its message about colonialism, cultural imperialism, and 'the Orient' as a 'state of mind' points to a possible cultural counterforce.

Counter-Orientalism

In professing his 'faith in the Orient', and in stating that 'today, our light comes from the East', and calling for the 'extermination of Mediterranean influences', Breton's embrace of 'the East' in the first years of the Surrealist movement, Polizzi writes, reflected his hatred of 'Latin reason' – classicism – rather than a close interest in 'Eastern' thought, and he owned to the fact that he was attracted to the East 'more as an "image" than as a reality…'[57] In saying so, he makes the point that 'the Orient' is precisely an abstraction, and one he wishes to turn to advantage.

As we saw in Chapter One, not long after, in 1926, Pierre Naville, member of the Surrealist group and an editor of *La Révolution surréaliste,* moved to clarify the Surrealist position on revolution and in doing so, he challenged the mystification of what he described as Surrealism's appeal to a mystical 'Orient'. Naville decries any 'crude opposition of an Orient to an Occident, both "mythical terms".[58] Against this,

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[55] *La revolution d'abord et toujours!* (The Revolution First and Always!) August 1925
[56] Drake, 173 – 188.
[57] Polizzotti, 233.
[58] Pierre Naville, 'La révolution et les intellectuels', in La Révolution et les intellectuals, (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 96, quoted in Bate p. 133.

in September 1926, Breton sought to clarify his position, responding the pamphlet 'Légitime défense'.[59]

Though they made no explicit reference to indicate that the Surrealists were abreast of current cultural debate, the third and fourth issues (April and July) of *La Révolution surréaliste* seem to gesture toward other commentary over the crisis of the West (as I noted above, the first issue briefly referenced a survey about the power of 'the Orient'). In 'Légitime défense', Breton explicitly cites contemporaneous commentary, including *Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abenlandes*) by Spengler and André Malraux's *La Tentation de l'Occident*.[60] He defends himself against the crude materialism that Naville had charged him with, specifically arguing against Naville's binary opposition and calling it an 'entirely artificial opposition between the mind *a priori*" and 'the world of facts'. Breton countered Naville's charges over the way the Surrealists used the myth of the Orient by gesturing to the way a slippage in signification can be productively exploited. Breton argued that given the fact that the word was being used with great frequency in those days, the 'Orient' must signal a special anxiety (on the side of the reactionaries) as well as 'a secret hope' and he asks why, under those conditions, the Surrealists should not 'continue to claim our inspiration from the Orient, even from the "pseudo-Orient" to which Surrealism consents to be merely an homage as the eye hovers over the pearl?'[61]

Acknowledging the absence of an 'Orient' in geographic reality, and recognising it as a projection, Breton feels justified in enlisting it as a provocation. We might read his position retroactively, as close to a Derridian analysis. In 'The Object of Post-Criticism' Gregory Ulmer provides a neat grammatological discussion of the logic of collage-montage that applies.[62] In Derrida's conceptualisation of citation, 'Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so

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[59] Légitime défense, pamphlet published in September 1926, and republished in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 8, 1, December 1926.

[60] André Malraux's novel, *The Temptation of the West* (1926) is written in the form of a correspondence between a Westerner and an Asian comparing their cultures. The German historian Oswald Spengler wrote *The Decline of the West* in two volumes, the first published in 1918, the second volume, subtitled *Perspectives of World History*, published in 1923. Spengler argues against an idea of evolutionary progression of civilisations, and for cycles of rises and falls, with Western civilisation having met a stage of crises.

[61] Breton 'Légitime défense', quoted in Nadeau, 252 – 3.

[62] Gregory Ulmer, 'The Object of Post Criticism', in Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983).

doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable'.[63] In line with this logic, one might think of the way the Surrealists were enlisting the 'Orient' as a counter hegemonic intervention: in other words, in enlisting of a pre-existing mythical construct as a provocation, their moves can be seen as a counter-Orientalism. Slightly sceptically, Christopher Bush argues that the 'The Orient' for some avant-gardes functioned as a shifter: as a way of referring to, or figuring an internalised 'Otherness' of Western modernity, however he cautions that this sort of play of signification can perpetuate ignorance or disregard for reality:

> The problem with modernist Orientalism is less that it mistook its imagined Orient for a real place, than that its awareness of this imaginary status seldom went beyond an aesthetics of estrangement that refused the reality of the places these topoi once named. The problem, then, is neither a lack of knowledge nor faulty knowledge, but a relation to external otherness that refuses epistemic claims as such.[64]

Denis Hollier has recently underscored the need not to confuse the spectral nature of the Orient in early Surrealism with anything like an ethnographic object of analysis.

> [T]he Orient, [for the Surrealists] relatively unanchored on the map, was as undefined conceptually as it was geographically, an Orient with no self-image, no objective credentials, defined simply by the unlocatable menace that some Western intellectuals feared, but that the surrealists were delighted to see hovering over Europe. In this context, to lay claim to any kind of fieldwork would have made no sense. Aragon apostrophizes India as Artaud does Tibet, and Breton China, without giving thought, however slightly, to any direct connection with those geographical cultural entities. In that sense, however serious an individual's discontent with his own civilization needed to be in the 1930s in order for him (or her) to become an ethnographer, it had nothing in common with such an abstract, global *a priori* rejection of the West.[65]

I think it is useful to distinguish between an iconoclastic counter-Orientalism of 1920s Surrealism, and their ethnographic interest that emerged in the Thirties. As David Bate so ably demonstrates with reference to Man Ray's photographs, in the 1920s Surrealists seized upon the tropes of Orientalism to highlight the emergence of a mythical 'colonial moderne.' Through Clifford, Krauss and to an extent Foster, we can see that it was not until the early Thirties that an 'ethnographic' strain really took hold. Hollier's argument is rather elliptical however. He seems to suggest that in referencing an 'Orient', the Surrealists resorted to an inverse opposition, and if this is his position, I disagree with him at this point, and side with Bate. Hollier writes:

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[63] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context,' in *Glyph* 1 (1977), 185, quoted in Gregory Ulmer, 'The Object of Post Criticism', in Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 89.

[64] Christopher Bush, 'The Other Of The Other? Cultural Studies, Theory, And The Location Of The Modernist Signifier,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 42, no. 2 (2005), 164.

[65] Denis Hollier, 'Surrealism and its Discontents,' *Papers of Surrealism* Issue 7, 2007: *The Use-Value of Documents*, 7.

> [In Surrealism] the imposition of the East versus West binary model onto the experience of alterity evacuates its concrete content. Alterity here is constructed on the basis of a mere rotation, a mere reversal, or a negative print.[66]

It is possible that Hollier is making the case that in posing oppositional terms, the Surrealists sought to reveal and *confound* dualisms such as Orient-Occident, and play with them in the realm of signification, in a bid to *undo* binaries. Such a strategy can have its shortcomings, in that it is focused on European thought and its phantasms. Hollier writes, 'Orientalism and ethnography belong to two separate discursive systems between which interferences may without doubt occasionally take place, but whose syntaxes remain nevertheless independent'.[67] The two discursive strains do seem to have occurred as a sequence in the development of Surrealist anti-colonialism and its aesthetic. Éluard's and Breton's early conception of 'the Orient', (or we might say their counter-Orientalism), is indicative of the partly self-aware nature of Surrealist primitivism in the 1920s, which began to question and disrupt both the official colonialist line and Romantic primitivism. But as we shall see, the Surrealist position did not remain fixed, and by the end of the Twenties, the counter-Orientalist tactic waned in favour of others. Visually, several of Man Ray's photographs of 1925 – 26 are congruent with Éluard's and Breton's discussions at this moment (as we saw in Chapter Three, via David Bate's discussion of two of them).

Figs. 22 & 23 Man Ray, *Kiki* c. 1925. Gelatin silver photograph, 12.2 x 17.4 cm, Private collection. Francisco de Goya, *La Maja desnuda*, c. 1797-1800, 98 x 191 cm, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Provoked by Naville, Breton's delineation of the mythical status of 'the Orient' makes clear his position: *as* a phantasm, the 'Orient' could be destabilising of a real order. This idea of the mythic Orient used as a provocation and threat to the West describes its appearance in the contents of the third and fourth issues of *La Révolution surréaliste*, alongside explicitly anti-colonial sentiments and it provides a context for Surrealist exhibitions staged around this time. Breton's text also provides

[66] Hollier, ibid.
[67] ibid., 5.

a context for the domesticated fantasia of Man Ray's *Kiki* photograph of circa 1925 (Fig. 22). This image fires two shots at Western bourgeois propriety. Kiki may be exquisitely beautiful here, but the encoding of the image is provocative. Though her head is inclined differently and she does not lock gazes with us, in other respects the figure's pose has commonalities with that of the reclining figure in Fransisco de Goya's *La maja des nuda (The Naked Maja)* of circa 1800; to my eye, it instantly recalls the Goya painting.[68] *La maja des nuda* had caused a scandal in its day. It was thought to be obscene because of the open pose, which revealed pubic hair, as well as the questionable identity of the woman: clearly neither nymph nor goddess. Though I have found no commentary to support my conjecture, I think here Man Ray deliberately reprises Goya's infamous gesture.

In Man Ray's tableau we see a collision of the real and the mythical, a confusion of art, pornography and popular culture, with a likely reference to Goya's suspension of modest pictorial conventions. This 'odalisque' or 'maja' is no painted phantom, but a New Woman with contemporary modish 'flapper' makeup and hairstyle: she is a libidinous libertine reclining amongst the imported textiles that had by then become familiar Parisian domestic trappings. This is yet another conflation by Man Ray of the colonial and the modern. In Man Ray's photograph, the 'Oriental' trappings of the fashionable salon are aligned to a figure of femininity that is pre-codified (via the reception of *La maja des nuda*) as overtly and wantonly sexualised. The scandal of Goya contrasts to the respectability of Ingres, to whom he refers in his other Orientalist photographs of the same period.

Perhaps the emphasis on 'the Orient' at the early stage of the movement should not be surprising, as few of the Surrealists demonstrated a great deal of knowledge about non-Western societies. Yet, though it was certainly a fantasia of a kind, the play of difference occurring in their staging of objects was not simply binary, it was neither completely romantic, nor yet was it ethnographic: it was a response – and a self-aware response, to the Orientalism of the day, and operated in relation to it. Two

[68] Goya was summoned before the Spanish Inquisition for interrogation as to who had commissioned this 'obscene' painting. The painting remained topical and scandalous in the Twentieth Century, though I have not turned up any particular commentary from the mid Twenties which might back up my conjecture about it having been a reference for Man Ray. Two sets of stamps depicting *La maja desnuda* in commemoration of Goya's work were privately produced in 1930 and later approved by the Spanish Postal Authority. That same year, the US government barred and returned any mail bearing the stamps, which may or may not bear out my speculation about Man Ray's earlier recognition, and exploitation, of the codification of the Maja pose as obscene.

exhibitions of 1926 and 1927 operate according to a *relational*, rather than a 'dualistic' logic, in a similar fashion to that which I have argued is at work in *La Révolution surréaliste.*

In 1926 the inaugural exhibition at the Surrealist Gallery was *The Pictures of Man Ray and Island Objects*, which presented paintings by Man Ray along with tribal objects, some loaned by Breton, including masks from New Guinea and New Ireland and objects from the Marquesas Islands and Easter Island.[69] Elizabeth Cowling notes a clear difference between the way the Surrealist displayed such things, and the way they had been operationalised by the Dadaists. The Surrealist attitude towards what might collectively be termed *objects of alterity* – 'Oceanic sculpture, objects made by madmen or drawings by mediums', Cowling depicts as respectful, indeed scholarly, while the Dadas might have employed displaced or 'found' exotic objects to simply shock and disrupt.[70] I think in general terms Cowling is right, though the Surrealists did seem to seize upon objects that refer to fertility, virility, and eroticism, and by putting them on open display, such objects necessarily offended prevailing bourgeois values.

TEXTES SURRÉALISTES

I

Le Jugement dernier avait été mis d'un premier classement
Puis d'un second auquel prenaient part les vents et les marées
Les vents et les marées
Et ceux qui avaient vécu par monts et par vaux
Contre vents et marées
Formaient en avant de la troupe un arbre à demi décapité
Qui prenait le ciel comme un bateau qui sombre
Il était environ quatre heures de l'après-midi
L'appareil du temps continuait à fonctionner tant bien que mal
Il inquiétait fort les pénitences
Ces femmes nuées d'amour
Qui hantaient la pastille du ciel
Elles portent les maillots de l'ombre de l'horloge de l'astre et du jour d'été
Quatre heures il n'était encore que quatre heures
Et j'étais condamné depuis longtemps
J'étais condamné à graver un escalier détruit
Comment m'y prendre
Le bord du ciel était garde par des chats-huants
Sur la première marche un meublant était assis à côté d'un paon
La brèche avait étalé ses éventails mécaniques au-dessus de tout ce que je pensais
Il ne m'arrivait que des bribes du discours de distribution
Traduit victorieusement de l'Oubli
Oubli j'arrive à peine
Oubli rappelle-moi au souvenir de l'Oubli
Des cercueils traînaient des balcons et des pétales
Ils étaient reçus par un grand explorateur crânant de chiens blancs
Par ici c'est-ce c'est derrière le champ de tir
C'est sur l'esplanade des étoiles
J'assistais assis à une bagarre et le théâtre de cette bagarre était une rosacée
Mais les fleurs étaient immenses
Comme l'offense
Le cornet surtout m'intriguait
Ses falaises étincelantes où j'avais je déjà vu
Comme les pierres faisient à l'approche de sa main
Comme les lentes avaient passé
Les corniches invitent passage à des relats de givre
Mais d'un givre qui durerait au soleil
Les premiers s'en étaient allés et les derniers étaient pâles
La musique grattouillait
Sur les barricades et dans les haies
Oseants mon les oiseaux-fleurs
Les vierges nées étaient nues
Leur chair brûlait comme devrait brûler le diamant
Leur repentir laissait petite à vue d'œuvre
Dans leurs cheveux un croissant joli et leur cœur transparent était un croissant aussi
Les pages dont le montant était tout de toutes les femmes
Ne parvenaient pas à détourner les yeux du Buste étrange qui s'étonnait toujours
Le Buste avait été tout le monde et moi-même
Il était maintenant un croissant de branches dans une forêt
Sur l'une il y avait un nid
Mais dans le nid brûlait il n'était à rien que quatre heures
J'ai déjà dit que j'étais condamné

Mais quoi il fait dix heures du matin
Il fut à nouveau temps de ramasser les cendres
Les chevaux avaient faim
On vit passer une voiture sans frein pour les décrottes
On vit des oiseaux s'évaporer par la portière
Et l'on dit qu'une femme était enchantée qui le marche-pied
Je suis celui qui ne sait qui vit ou qui meurt
Celui qui brûle de ne pas savoir
Celui qui sait trop bien qu'il brûle et qu'il sait
Mêmes ressemblaient des bagues que je n'ai pas

Fig. 24. *La Révolution surréaliste*, 6, March 1 1926, p. 5. A New Mecklenburg mask illustrates 'Surrealist Texts'.

[69] The Surrealist Gallery opened on March 26, 1926, at 16 rue Jacques-Callot. It was officially managed by Marcel Fourrier, subsequently Roland Tual and then Marcell Noll, with Breton in the role of advisor. See Durozoi, 121.

[70] Elizabeth Cowling, 'An Other Culture', in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, (London, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 454.

A sculpture from the island of Nias, a figure with an erect phallus, presided over the gallery window and appeared on the poster and catalogue cover for *The Pictures of Man Ray and Island Objects* (see figs 25 and 26).[71] Durozoi notes that for the era, the exhibition's configuration of exotic objects and Western art was 'perfectly incongruous and therefore all the more sensational'.

Fig. 25. Man Ray, *Moonrise over the isle of Nias*, 1926
Gelatin silver photograph, 14.0 x 9 cm, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée national de l'art moderne.

The catalogue itself was illustrated with Oceanic objects, with captions that valorised the societies that created them, and associated their cosmologies with Surrealist interests. For example the caption 'Easter Island, the Athens of Oceania' expresses a sort of counter-classicism.[72] Yet, following my commentary about the relation of *La Révolution surréaliste* vis-à-vis *La Nature*, I would point out that the relationship drawn between Man Ray's pictures and the 'Island Objects' is not an analogue and nor do they bear formal similarities: they are not opposed nor are they similar, but are drawn together to elicit an opportunity for the viewer's mind to forge connections. The result of their juxtaposition is ultimately to point toward broad-ranging cosmological ideas, evidence of a realm of the sur-real.

[71] Durozoi, 121.
[72] *The Pictures of Man Ray and Island Objects*, exhibition catalogue held in the stacks of the Kandinsky Research Library, Georges Pompidou Centre.

Figs. 26 & 27. *Les Tableaux de Man Ray et objets des îles (The Pictures of Man Ray and Island Objects)*, Galerie Surréaliste 1926, exhibition catalogue.

In the following year an exhibition along similar lines was staged: *Yves Tanguy and Objects from America*.[73] A number of the Surrealists had become interested in Amerindian and Latin American artefacts, particularly Hopi Kachinas[74], Inuit masks and Mexican Pueblo dolls, and their interest had begun to take a scholarly attitude toward such things, which became partly an aesthetic appreciation of them and partly a recognition of the fact that such objects had a performative and ritualistic social function.

A photograph of a Kachina doll was used in *La Révolution surréaliste* (see Fig. 28).[75] Two illustrations presented opposite each other compose a formal relation, but again, it is not a relation that pushes analogy: on the left-hand page, a Kachina doll, on the right-hand page, a *cadavre exquis*. Paul Éluard wrote to his wife Gala of Pueblo dolls describing them as, 'that which is most beautiful in the world'.[76] In calling the dolls beautiful, Éluard identifies a beauty that did not conform to any widely accepted standard.

[73] Durozoi p. 121.
[74] The Native American Hopi people from the San Francisco Peaks, near Flagstaff, carve Kachina figures from cottonwood root and paint them to give form to spiritual ideas from their mythology. The carved figures are given to children, to teach them these ideas. See <http://www.nativeamericanlinks.com/kachina/kachina.htm>.
[75] *La Révolution surréaliste*, (October, 1927): 9 – 10.
[76] Paul Éluard, *Lettres à Gala*. Paris, Gallimard: 22. Letter dated late May, 1927.

34 CORPS À CORPS

Nouveau-Mexique

PIPE EN TERRE
À TOUR D'IVOIRE
par SCORBUT (Morbihan)

CORPS À CORPS 35

— Faites-moi seulement la raie. Pour le reste je me peignerai bien moi-même, lui répondis-je excédé.

Pendant plus d'une journée le traîneau glissa rapidement entre une double haie de pare-vipères qui ostensiblement grevaient notre bizarre attelage et s'enfuyaient aussitôt que nous étions disparus en poussant des cris si percants que les oiseaux effrayés tombaient sur le sol où ils restaient plaqués comme un mêlé-cou de mastic sur une glace. Je commençais à m'inquiéter, d'autant plus que dans l'air flottait une indéfinissable odeur qui tenait du parfum des artichauts et de celui d'une étoffe bien moisie. À notre vitesse qui croissait sans cesse! Et le pays qui était devenu grand comme une église? Ce minéral m'inquiétait plus que je ne saurais le dire avec son immense face pâle hagrée verticalement d'une épée et d'un pistolet dressés de chaque côté d'un énorme bec supportant une grande canne à laquelle étaient attachés trois de cinquante ballons d'enfants. A vrai dire, ces ballons dont je ne comprenais pas l'image m'intriguaient beaucoup. C'est que la plupart d'entre eux contenaient un homme à barbe dans la poitrine duquel un grand nombre de décorations coulées, ouvrait comme une porte et laissait voir à l'intérieur une poubelle débordant de ces énormes qui se pressaient et s'écrasaient

Figs. 28 & 29. *La Révolution surréaliste* (9-10, October 1, 1927), 34 – 35.

In Tanguy's exhibition, his paintings were presented with pre-Columbian objects and more recent articles from the Americas. The catalogue essays by Breton and Éluard made connections between the Amerindian cultures and Surrealist concerns with dreams. Tanguy's work, and the objects made by Native Americans were put forward as evidence of a sphere beyond. Together with Breton, Tanguy gave titles to the paintings based on a 1922 book, *Treaty of Metaphysics*, by Charles Richet, a Nobel Prize winner for medicine. It explored different forms of cognition, hypnosis and dream states. The catalogue essays indicate that the display of appropriated cultural objects sat 'in dialogue' with artworks produced by Man Ray and Tanguy, but no particular connections are drawn between the two cultures. The mode of exhibition is clearly not intended to draw out formal resemblances: Tanguy's works and the objects from the Americas bear no visual similarity. To loosely paraphrase Max Ernst, the two-handed exhibition strategy seems to be more in line with bringing together distant realities, with the exhibition space itself as the unfamiliar plane upon which they meet. By the late Twenties though, this type of homological strategy was wearing thin and, as other commentators have pointed out, there was turning point between the Twenties and the Thirties, which gave way to a more informed and engaged position with respect to colonised countries, and a retreat from the emphasis upon a fantastical 'Orient'.

The Surrealists' map of the world appeared in the Belgian journal *Variétés* in April 1929. It has been discussed rather earnestly as a manifesto of sorts, as documentary evidence of a world view or a Surrealist geography, and as indicative of the

Surrealists' interests and politics of the time, but the playfulness and absurdity of the illustration is frequently ignored. The Surrealist map thumbs its nose at a tradition of triumphalist maps, a standard means of representation that carved the world up according to conquest and domination, concomitant with an evolutionary view of history (Cowling notes that the map is a witty alternative to the imperialist maps that adorned classrooms).[77] Perhaps it can be read as a retrospective consideration of the Surrealist Twenties, and a consideration of Surrealism's foregoing emphasis upon phantasm, rather than the material circumstances of colonialism.

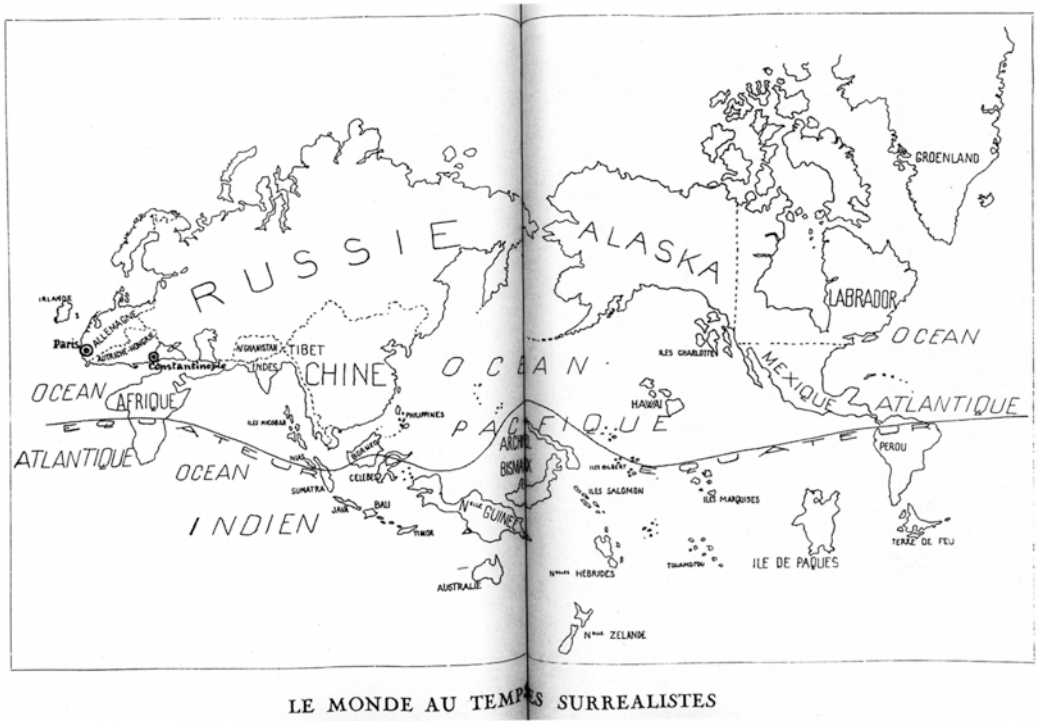

Fig. 30. 'The World at the Time of the Surrealists', *Variétés*, April 1929.

As a pictorial device, the map reorders a European sense of centres and margins as a play on cartography as a tool of imperialism. In the reconfigured world, nearly all the European nation states, including France, are negated. Paris is depicted as the capital of a great Germany, a revision that might refer to the Surrealists' approval of German Romanticism or Hegelian philosophy. Colonizing nations are practically obliterated: Britain is a mere dot, dwarfed by Ireland's significant presence. The Pacific Ocean is placed at the centre of the world, and many countries with indigenous cultures are writ large, though not Africa.

Cowling sees it as indicative of the Surrealists attaching importance to 'primitive' cultures "the northern hemisphere is dominated by Russia and Alaska – Russia for

[77] Cowling, 464.

political reasons, Alaska because of its astonishing ceremonial masks – and the southern hemisphere by the Pacific Islands – islands in which the "power of figuration" is, indeed, "magic"'.[78] The rather diminutive scale of Africa she views as unsurprising since the continent was identified with the imaginative terrain of the Cubists and others before Surrealism, so its proportions might be read as referring to the fact that it is already 'discovered' or 'colonised'.[79]

There are limitations to referring to this illustration as a means of accounting for Surrealist interests, even at the time, let alone in the years following its execution. Notably, many areas that *were* of distinct interest to Surrealists at the time are absent from the map. While the Cubists may have 'mined' Africa, it was nonetheless within the realm of Surrealist concerns: some of them collected African objects, as well as items from Oceania and the Americas: Leiris was to travel to the continent more than once. Similarly, in excising America, whoever drew the map obliterated the site of Amer-Indian culture. The drawing is usually attributed to Tanguy, but there is little documentation about how it came into existence, or who might have been involved in its conception. For 'Surrealism in 1929', what emerges most forcibly in the map is the negation of Europe, a theme that ran throughout the 1920s for the Surrealists, and a type of self-conscious Orientalism, which was to give way to a more aggressive form of expression.

Writing in 1929, in an article entitled 'Introduction à 1930' which declares its retrospection on Surrealism in the Twenties, Louis Aragon distances Surrealism from modernism. He points to the tremendous infiltration of the type of modernist aesthetic typified by the 1925 Art Déco exposition, and registers his antipathy towards it, saying,

> A modern style exists in France today, thanks to the 1925 exhibition. It's at this point that I can no longer go to the café, now that they've all become modern. [80]

Here, without any specific reference to the appropriation of 'primitive' forms except his reference to Art Déco, Aragon pits Surrealism against any sort of received modernism, by acknowledging how the shock value of modern art is assimilable into

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[78] ibid.
[79] ibid.
[80] Louis Aragon, 'Introduction à 1930', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 12, December 1929, p. 62. Translated in Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2004), 23.

the social order. At once he takes a position about Surrealism in relational proximity to modernism and makes a point about the stylistic preoccupation of modernism:

> [S]urrealism is not tied to a distinct modernism (*moderne*) as were, for example, cubism or futurism, but expresses itself systematically, rather, through the modernity [or modernism] (*moderne*) of its period.[81]

Aragon is at pains here to distinguish Surrealism itself as something other than a visual style, and to depict it as a critical modality that operates *through* and, we could say, in addition, *upon* visual style. For Aragon, Art Déco emerged as a conservative style: an assimilating, retrograde type of modernism that incorporated non-Western tropes. He wrote about Art Déco as having absorbed Cubism and liquidated its critical potentialities. In its early years, Cubism held an initial attraction for the Surrealists, confirmed by Breton's acquisition of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* for Doucet and the reasoning he gave for the purchase. However, the appeal of Cubism waned, as Aragon makes plain, when it was taken up as a fashion and programmatically incorporated into popular design:

> This was in the period [Aragon writes] when a sanctioned and commercialized cubism no longer involved any new ideas, nor put anything in question. The debate which one could pursue passionately in 1910 ended in the décor of the Ballets russes, in a kind of official flavour of which the traces would be retrievable in the governmental decrees of 1919, and in the ministerial instructions unofficially given to the manufacturer of the Faubourg Saint Antoine to work toward the advent of a modern style in view of the 1925 exhibition [*Exposition internationale des arts Decoratifs et industriels modernes*].[82]

In identifying the tipping point of Cubism's radical use of 'primitive' tropes tilting into a style of colonialist modernism, Aragon posits a critical relation between Surrealism and modernism. We may recall from Chapter One, Adorno's image of the tumescent Surrealist balcony erupting from the pristine side of a modernist building. Aragon's position in 1929 makes it clear that Surrealism itself cannot adopt its own fixed style, as no set of formal attributes can be permanently innovative or questioning, and thus Surrealism must 'express itself systematically'. According to this logic, it would make no sense to try and define a particular anti-colonial aesthetic through specifying formal attributes; rather the issue is to account for the interplay between signifying modalities. Where Surrealist practice is most effective, it reveals

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[81] Aragon, ibid, in Harris, p. 23. My tendency would be to translate the word 'moderne' here as 'modernism' each time.

[82] Louis Aragon, 'Introduction à 1930', *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 12, December 1929, p. 62. Translated in Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), 23.

the constructed and contingent nature of categories of representation. With the launch of the dissident Surrealist periodical *Documents* (1929 to 1930) the Bataille group sharpened their brand of expression according to what James Clifford dubbed 'ethnographic Surrealism', and what Rosalind Krauss referred to as 'hard primitivism'. In Chapter Three, we saw how once he had moved into the *Documents* circle, the tenor of Giacometti's 'primitivism' changed from a tactic of formal appropriation of non-Western forms, to a concern with encapsulating instinctual erotic and violent energies in sculptural form, and by the 1930s Giacometti's work was no longer 'primitivist' in any straightforward stylistic sense, but multi-referential.

Georges Bataille founded the periodical *Documents* (1929 – 1930) just before Breton staged a purge of the Surrealist group. Breton sent out a letter to Surrealists and those on the edges of the group, which pressed them to specify their present ideological position to determine future group action. The replies were read out at a subsequent meeting, at the Bar du Château, ostensibly called to discuss the treatment of Trotsky who had just been expelled from government by Lenin and exiled. Bataille's letter of reply famously read 'Too many fucking idealists'.[83] The meeting quickly descended into a slanging match. Out of it came many withdrawals from the group, and a gravitation of some members and affiliates to Bataille's *Documents.* The publication of the Second Manifesto in the last edition of *La Révolution surréaliste* (December 12, 1929) signalled the end of one phase of Surrealism and the beginning of another. In Chapter Five we will look to the particular and extreme use of collage logic in the editorial strategy that underpinned *Documents*, and the innovations and political implications of the Surrealist object.

[83] Polizzotti, 316.

CHAPTER FIVE

Radical Alterity
Surrealist Anti-colonialism in the 1930s

> The surrealist moment in ethnography is that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity. This moment is repeatedly produced, and smoothed over, in the process of ethnographic comprehension. But to see this activity in terms of collage is to hold the surrealist moment in view – the startling co-presence on Lautréamont's dissecting table. Collage brings to the work (here the ethnographic text) elements that continually proclaim their foreignness to the context of presentation. […] To write ethnographies on the model of collage would be to avoid the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes, or as unified, realistic worlds subject to a continuous explanatory discourse.
>
> – James Clifford [1]

In the 1930s Surrealism engaged in provocative anti-colonialism, and a poetics of displacement and radical alterity – *détournement* – ran through it. In 1931 the polemical counter-exhibition, *The Truth About the Colonies* was staged as protest against the grandiose spectacle of the Colonial Exhibition that year, as well as the publication of pamphlets denouncing colonialism. The *Second Manifesto* of 1929 spelled the division of the group, and the distinction between 'orthodox' and 'dissident' modes of Surrealism was manifest in the two periodicals, *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (1930 – 1933) and *Documents* (1929 – 1930). In fact, Bataille had begun working on *Documents* a few months before the crisis broke, though its first issue came out after the purges of 1929, when Breton denounced former members and associates.

[1] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and* Art (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 146.

Formed around Bataille, the *Documents* group sharpened its brand of destabilising primitivist signification, discussed in the first section of this chapter. Meanwhile, Breton's circle became more preoccupied with objects during the period covered by *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution*, employing them in a fashion that caused deconstructive slippages for heterogeneous effect. At the same time they were writing anti-colonial manifestoes, which also partook of experimentation with form: their mode of signification brought the issue of race to the fore. I discuss the activities of the Bretonian group in the second part of this chapter. In the third part, I address the themes that emerged in *Minotaure* (1933 – 1939), in which the interests of the Surrealists and the 'dissidents' converged in a manner that was ethnographic and psycho-sociological.

Minotaure was a staging post for a reprise and substantial reworking of vintage Surrealist themes: the Unconscious, automatism and metamorphosis. In its pages there emerged a combination of ideas that ran counter to an overly subjectivist Western notion of the sovereign individual with a rational mastery of its self. It would be overstating the case to say that a definitive Surrealist theory of subjecthood and alterity emerged from *Minotaure*, yet in the fabric of ideas presented in its pages, woven from a blend of psychoanalytic, ethnographic and sociological observations, there emerged interlaced and complementary critiques of structures of representation, power and domination. I argue that far from having become depoliticised or stagnant in its poetics, over the course the 1930s the Surrealists married their anti-colonialism with formal experimentation and a critique of Western subjectivity. While a disruptive formal play emerges, however, it is not apt to speak of an *anti*- or *post-colonial aesthetic*, as such, emerging in Surrealism. Rather, the Surrealists employed various ways and means for producing destabilising poetic effects with which to interrogate the aesthetics and symbolism of 'the colonial moderne' and its ideological and categorical trappings, primarily those to do with race and cultural alterity. In my final chapter, I will bring these insights to bear on examples of contemporary art.

Documents & 'Dissident Surrealism', 1929 – 1930

Bataille edited *Documents* in co-operation with Michel Leiris and the German poet, critic and essayist Carl Einstein.[2] For Bataille, the periodical was a vehicle through which he expressed his aggressive anti-idealism and sceptical view of the principle of historical materialism. David Sylvester described the review as 'a maverick magazine which was in part the embodiment of a sort of heretical Surrealism.'[3] Various other commentators have located *Documents* as a complement to, or enlargement of, Surrealism, rather than an oppositional force. 'Where *Documents* differed from *La Révolution surréaliste*', offers Dawn Ades, 'was that the latter offered openly highly personal and individual experiences, its field of action being "the operations of the mind" while in *Documents* Bataille explores the "obscure intelligence of things."'[4] *Documents* presents an intensification of the provocative, abrasive thrust of the Surrealist strategies against received categories, primarily through the operation of dissonant modes of collage-informed association. Bataille himself famously expressed his desire for the periodical to act as 'a war machine against received ideas'.[5] *Documents* by no means contributes to a programmatic anti-colonialism (by contrast to *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution,* which does), but it poses all manner of attacks to the very categories of thought that undergird Western imperialism.

Documents was initially subtitled *Doctrines, Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie,* and these categories were put into relation and tension. After the first three numbers the category *Doctrines* was removed and *Variétés* introduced, signalling a shift in content toward more coverage of popular culture and entertainment – which included jazz and black musical theatre, along with film stills and photographs of stars.[6] In an example of *Documents'* continuity with 'orthodox' Surrealism, a diatribe from Leiris

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[2] Artists associated with *Documents* were Masson, Boiffard, Giacometti, Picasso, Miró, Arp and Klee. The journal came out in eight issues under the editorship of Bataille, then Wildenstein the publisher withdrew his support for it. A further two issues appeared without Bataille and his coterie of contributors, and these had a different character, described by Ades as a 'pale imitation of the *Gazette des Beaux Arts'*, see Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 241.

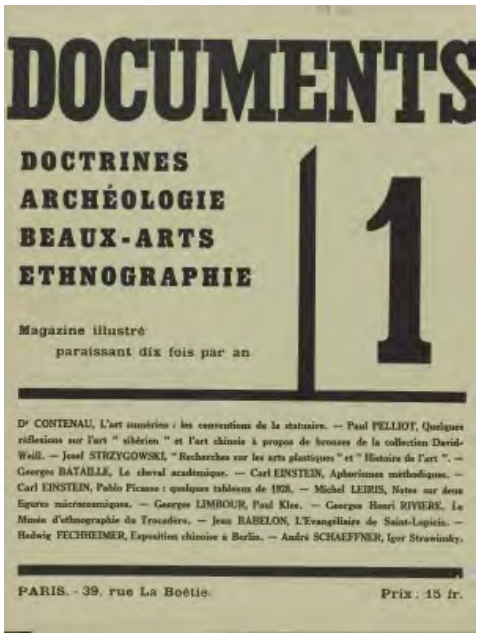
[3] David Sylvester, introduction, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 3.

[4] Ades, 230 – 231.

[5] Bataille, quoted in Ades, op cit., 231.

[6] ibid., 231.

resonates with the same sort of invective as we saw in the early issues of *La Révolution surréaliste* four years earlier.


DOCUMENTS

DOCTRINES
ARCHÉOLOGIE
BEAUX-ARTS
ETHNOGRAPHIE

Magazine illustré
paraissant dix fois par an

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Dr CONTENAU, L'art sumérien : les conventions de la statuaire. — Paul PELLIOT, Quelques réflexions sur l'art " sibérien " et l'art chinois à propos de bronzes de la collection David-Weill. — Josef STRZYGOWSKI, " Recherches sur les arts plastiques " et " Histoire de l'art ". — Georges BATAILLE, Le cheval académique. — Carl EINSTEIN, Aphorismes méthodiques. — Carl EINSTEIN, Pablo Picasso : quelques tableaux de 1928. — Michel LEIRIS, Notes sur deux figures microcosmiques. — Georges LIMBOUR, Paul Klee. — Georges Henri RIVIERE, Le Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro. — Jean BABELON, L'Evangéliaire de Saint-Lopicin. — Hedwig FECHHEIMER, Exposition chinoise à Berlin. — André SCHAEFFNER, Igor Stravinsky.

PARIS. - 39, rue La Boétie. Prix : 15 fr.

Fig. 31. *Documents* issue 1, 1929, front cover.

In this short essay entitled 'Civilization', Leiris denies the very existence of anything approximating Western civilisation, except as a superficial and very unstable veneer of social *habitus*. He writes:

> All our moral habits and our polite customs, that delightfully coloured cloak that veils the coarseness of our dangerous instincts, all those attractive forms of culture of which we are so proud – since it is thanks to them that we are able to regard ourselves as 'civilised' – are ready to disappear at the slightest turbulence, to shatter at the least impact (like the insubstantial mirror of a fingernail whose polish cracks or becomes scratched), allowing our horrifying savageness to appear in the interstices, revealed in these fissures just as hell might be in the chasms opened by earthquakes, whose revolutions in the cosmic order under the fragile skin of the earth's circumference and momentarily bare the fire at its centre, which melts stone in itself in its wicked and violent heat.[7]

Here Leiris poses European culture as a sham, its taste and morality a flimsy cloak for the violence at its core. He continues,

> We have had it with all of that, which is why we should like to get closer to our primitive ancestry, why we have so little respect remaining for anything that does not annihilate the succession of centuries in one stroke and put us, stripped naked, in a more immediate and newer world.[8]

Along with an attack on aesthetic ideals, *Documents* challenged a number of received ideas that bear upon a conception of human universalism. As well as the opposition

[7] Michel Leiris, 'Civilisation', *Documents* 4 (1929). Translated by Lynda Davis in *Brisées*, 1989, 21.
[8] ibid.

between ‘civilized’ and ‘primitive’, the very notion of race was problematised. In keeping with the journal’s anti-idealist attitude, the functions of photography, juxtaposition and pastiche were taken to more challenging levels of dissonance in *Documents* than in *La Révolution surréaliste*. The inclusion of the category ‘Variétés’ (popular entertainment music and musicals) worked to undercut the category ‘Beaux-arts’. Beaux-arts aesthetic categories were also perturbed through a play of image selection and placement. There was an implied equivalence between the diverse images of contemporary art, photographs drawn from the popular press, archival photography, ethnographic documentary photography, cultural artefacts from varied cultures: hence the title ‘documents’, a generic term to cover any and every item. *Documents* set these diverse categories in dynamic relation to each other, to produce a challenging, open reading effect. A visual strategy was to ‘ethnographically’ pit a picture or object’s function or ‘use value’ against its aesthetic autonomy: images and text were juxtaposed so as to re- or de-contextualise each other. Clifford encapsulates this particular type of aggressive, disruptive principle thus:

> *Documents*, particularly in its use of photographs, creates the order of an unfinished collage rather than that of a unified organism. Its images, in their equalizing gloss and distancing effect, present in the same plane a Châtelet show advertisement, a Hollywood movie clip, a Picasso, a Giacometti, a documentary photo from colonial New Caledonia, a newspaper clip, an Eskimo mask, an Old Master, a musical instrument – the world’s iconography presented as evidence of data. Evidence of what? Evidence, one can only say, of surprising, declassified cultural orders and of an expanded range of human artistic invention. This odd museum merely documents, juxtaposes, relativizes – a perverse collection.[9]

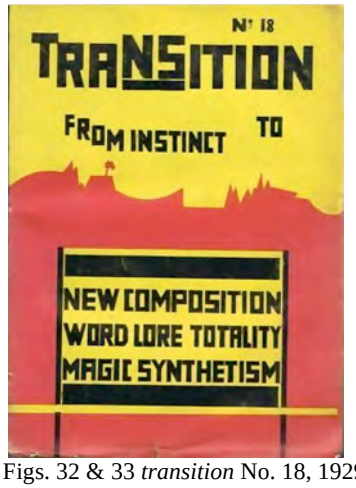
Clifford describes how, in *Documents*’ narrow juncture of 1929 – 1930, ethnography itself had not yet coalesced into a firm discipline, a process of institutionalisation that occurred rapidly in the ensuing years (a gloss of his account was presented in Chapter Three). *Documents* used ethnography in its ‘larval’ state, in a loose and provocative fashion, in conjunction with its particularly abrasive mode of collage as cultural criticism. This moment of such convergence between ethnography and Surrealism (or dissenting Surrealism) was very particular, and so it invites a careful analysis of the periodical, beyond any easy dismissal of it as merely an aberrant, apolitical, or perverse funnelling of ideas through Bataille’s or Leiris’s eccentricities.

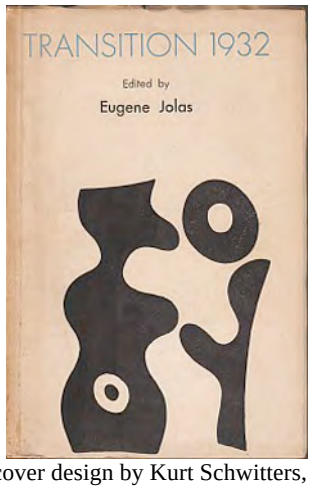
As in the discussion in the previous chapter about the collage principle of *La Revolution Surréaliste* and its appropriation of the design qualities of *Le Nature*, the nature of the particular dissonance at work in *Documents* can usefully be broached

[9] Clifford, 133–134.

through a comparative treatment, and here I will be drawing on a study by Rainer Rumold, who contrasts *Documents* to another ethnographic publication of its day, *transition*.[10] As well as being prime movers for *Documents*, Leiris and Einstein also contributed occasionally to the periodical *transition*.[11] We can consider the relationship of *Documents* as a counterfoil to *transition*. The proximity between *Documents* and *transition* is at once closer and more abrasive than that between *La Révolution surréaliste* and *La Nature*. As we saw, the appropriation logic behind *La Révolution surréaliste* was to mimic a scientific journal to confound any ready recognition of it as an art or literary magazine and to produce an uncategorical reading effect, not bound to the strictures or territorialism of disciplinary lines. By contrast however, the relation between *Documents* and *transition* is at once proximate and oppositional as both periodicals occupied the cusp between ethnographic and artistic and literary interests, but one might say that *transition* was cross-disciplinary while *Documents* was anti-disciplinary. While *Documents* had an agenda of a total critique of Western ideology, *transition* was in some respects a more conventional avant-gardist journal.

Transition ran from 1927 to 1938 under the editorship of Eugene Jolas.[12] Jolas held to a modernist primitivism that the *Documents* team sought to eschew.





Figs. 32 & 33 *transition* No. 18, 1929, cover design by Kurt Schwitters, and *transition*, No. 21, 1932,

[10] Rainer Rumold, 'Archeo-logies of Modernity in *transition* and *Documents* 1929/30', *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2000.

[11] The French *transition* periodical edited by Eugene Jolas ran from April 1927 until Spring 1938 A total of 27 issues were produced, Monthly until March 1928, then quarterly until Spring 1938. (Not to be confused with the African intellectual magazine that was launched in Uganda in 1961). Jolas was an American, raised in France.

[12] According to Rumold there are two contributions by Michel Leiris, 'From the Heart to the Absolute,' an excerpt from his novel *Le Point Cardinal*, and a poem. 'Both texts', Rumold writes, 'evoke a dreamscape of primordial battles, eros and thanatos.' Rumold, 48.

The idea for *transition* was to distribute it as a trans Atlantic journal and its content was international in scope. Jolas initially published material in English translation from a wide variety of different languages, and later he published material untranslated. Rumold describes Jolas's project as 'an idealist vision of a multi-lingual, transnational, universalist poetic language for modernity.'[13] Jolas subscribed to a universalist Jungian notion of a 'Collective Unconscious' and a romantic vision of avant-garde poetry's ability to reunite the modern subject with the object world through engaging in mysticism to undermine the intellect.[14] Retrospectively, in 1949, Jolas coined the term 'pan-romanticism' to capture the project of *transition*. In his words, '*Transition* contained elements of gothic, romantic, baroque, mystic, expressionist, Dada, surrealist, and, finally, verticalist modes of thinking. In the last phase, it tried to blend these traditions into a cosmic, four-dimensional consciousness.' Rumold comments,

> Jolas's intention was to realign the wildly subversive, amoral, quasi-pagan discourse of the avant-garde with a longstanding 'metaphysical,' meaning also ethical, Western tradition. *Transition* also attempted to ally avant-garde aesthetics with the scientific discourse of contemporaneous ethnology. […] In sum, Jolas's poetology of the avant-garde is linked with the politics (in the widest sense of the word) of the reintegration of the language and images of avant-garde literature and art into Western philosophical and scientific, psychoanalytic and ethnological traditions. Such a conservative, if not eclectic, goal gave to art – altogether within a longstanding Romantic tradition – the power of the highest value. The supremacy of art has been, and for some still is, clearly a cornerstone of the construct of Western cultural identity.[15]

Through comparison, Rumold throws into relief some of the aspects of *Documents* that distinguish it from the romantic modernist primitivism embodied by *transition*. Jolas's mission largely subscribed to a traditional Beaux-arts hierarchy and *transition*'s universalist point of view of artistic creativity was a point of provocation and dissention for *Documents*. From the perspective of *Documents*, *transition*'s values are Eurocentric, and *Documents*' de-stabilising program included that of undermining the very type of aesthetic privilege assumed by *transition* in its aestheticisation of non-Western artefacts.[16]

With Bataille and Leiris at the helm, *Documents* presents a sharply different model of human subjectivity to that of *transition*. Bataille's contributions are aggressively anti-

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[13] Rumold, 46.
[14] ibid., 51 – 52.
[15] ibid., 49.
[16] Rumold (see p. 48) observes that the differences in the 'primitivisms' of the two journals foreshadow some of the controversy that surrounded the MOMA exhibition *'Primitivism' in Twentieth Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984 – 85).

humanist, anti-idealist and anti-formalist. His essays are accompanied by jarring visual moments of abhorrent physiological images, including images of bloody prehistoric human sacrifice. In no less dramatic terms, though less violently, Carl Einstein's writings develop the theme of shattered – or rather soluble – subjectivity. His essays on Masson, Miro and Arp approximated something like an 'ethnology of the contemporary artist.'[17] Writing about Masson's painting, Einstein explains that they enact self-sacrifice, a hallucinatory dissolution of the subject. Einstein, Rumold writes, argues that 'the development of the surrealist artist's work requires a series of individual *études*, each an instance of "ecstatic training," an experimental step in the cultivation of the technical ability to recreate pre-logical experiences at will'.[18]

> In short, for the Einstein of the Masson essay, the sacrifice of narration for the image is the self-sacrifice of the modern subject in order 'not to be killed' by logic (the logic of the three-dimensional image and the conceptual word). This is what he meant by his somewhat innocuous and opaque opening phrase that contemporary aesthetic production, if up to date, has to 'risk [its] head.' To 'risk one's head' (in the French version 'parier la tête,' in the essay's German version 'den Kopf Einsetzen'), however, does not simply signify loss but simultaneously activation (Einsatz) of one's head, as Masson's work is the result of a conscious effort, of an 'ecstatic training'.[19]

Documents' signifying practice extends upon strategies of psychical, political and cultural disruption related to Surrealism's earliest and abiding preoccupations with trance and automatism on the one hand, and what we might refer to as a negative utopianism on the other. In *Documents* these *Surrealist* tendencies (if not Surrealist then what?) are more aggressively intellectualised. *Documents* (and, as we shall see, *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution*) reached beyond Freudian psychoanalysis in some of its speculative writing. Noting that Einstein's essay predated Lacan's 1936 lecture on the 'Mirror Phase' by seven years, Rumold makes the observation that with hindsight, through Lacan's conception of the mirror stage, we can say that Einstein pitches his search for authenticity to a stage before the mirror stage; prior to the scaffolding of language. Indeed, it is tempting to read other aspects of Surrealism prior to 1936 through the prism of the Mirror Phase and it may well be that these ideas were in circulation within Surrealist circles well before they were more broadly disseminated. It is also possible that the theory of the Mirror Phase derived at least in part from the ideas of Einstein's essay. Irrespective of which followed which, there are commonalities between these and other writings of about

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[17] Carl Einstein, 'André Masson: étude ethnologique,' in *Documents* 2, 1929, on 'Joan Miró (Papiers collés à la galerie Pierre)' in *Documents* 4, 1930, and on Hans Arp, 'L'enfance néolithique' in *Documents* 8, 1930.
[18] Rumold, 53 – 54.
[19] ibid., 56.

the same time which point to a conception in common, of a desiring, transformative, and inherently 'open' subject.

Numerous entries in *Documents* took up ethnographic issues, and some adopted a removed attitude toward aspects of European culture. For example, an exhibition review by Leiris presents a critical discussion of musical instruments being statically arranged as exhibited objects, in disregard for their performative, ritualistic function. This predates much contemporary museological discussion of the breach of context that occurs in museum displays of such operational items.[20] A concern not just with cultural relativity, but with racism occurs in Robert Desnos's article, 'The Mystery of Abraham the Jew', an examination of a fourteenth century alchemist, Nicolas Flamel. It is a discussion of magic through which Desnos alludes to the projection and introjection of alterity onto Jews within Europe, a clear example of an exoticism, but intra-European. [21] The issue of race is also problematised in *Documents* use of images.

In *Documents* issue four, of September 1929, various portrait photographs from different sources are arranged in conjunction. Four portrait shots fill a page, each showing a centrally positioned person in western garb, in different localities. Unto itself, each picture complies with the formal conventions of photographic portraiture, though two are more conventional studio portraits. One of these, taken by Nadar, shows a regal young woman in riding costume; another shows a seated man in hunting attire. In an apparently more recent and more informal image, a little girl stands with a bottle of milk in each hand. She occupies most of the frame, and her clear-eyed gaze is directed straight at the lens. In the top right image a barefoot man dressed in a suit and top hat, pushes a baby carriage.

This last mentioned photograph has several internal disjunctions. The central figure's bare feet are at odds with his formal albeit rather crumpled clothing; the fact that a man pushes a pram is strange in itself; his very diminutive stature and rather closed, sorrowful countenance make him something of a curiosity. These attributes all contrive to make him appear both aberrant and abject, whereas the other figures each have poise and confidence in their bearing which gives them the air of being fully complicit in the making of their image.

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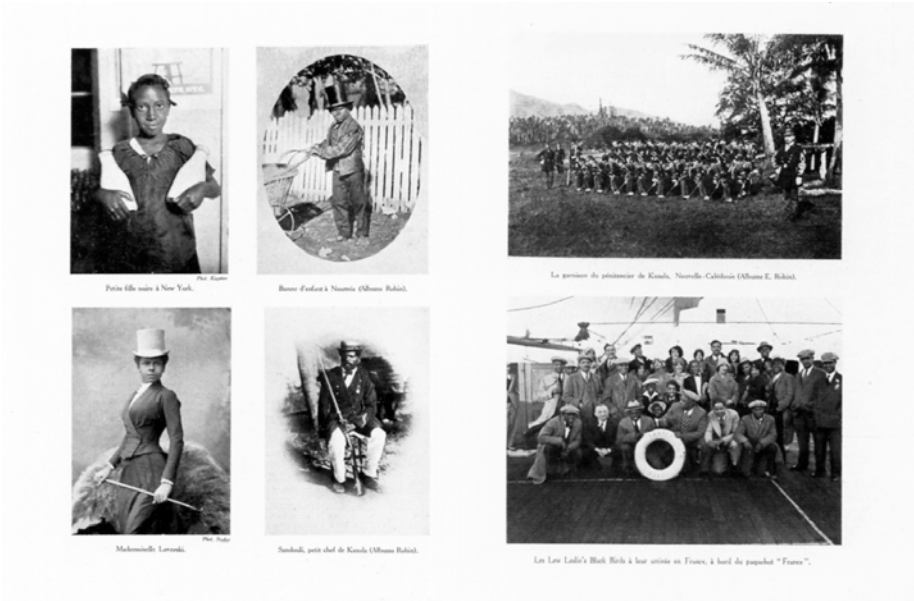
[20] Michel Leiris, Grillot du Giury's *Le Musée des Sorciers*, in *Documents*, no 2 (May 1929).
[21] Robert Desnos, 'The Mystery of Abraham the Jew', *Documents*, no. 5, October 1929.



Figs. 34 & 35. Pages from *Documents* issue four, September 1929.

As these are separately made portraits from diverse contexts it is not logical to ponder what they 'mean' as a group, yet we are invited to do so. There is a deliberateness in their mounting which seems to give us reason to: the two rectangular images on the left depict females; the two oval pictures on the right depict men. This balance and symmetry suggests an album arrangement. But taken together the apparent differences in time, space and photographic style, and the incidental similarities in pictorial composition are secondary to the fact that each photograph portrays a black subject. That common element becomes the remarkable point of comparison and frisson. The grouping is undeniably, but almost unaccountably, disconcerting. This unsettling effect is the result of accumulation and juxtaposition. In each case, there is a dignified central subject, but placed together the portrait shots gather associations and gain curiosity. Any one of these images taken individually could be appreciated as a 'neutral' product of a photographic encounter or as an historical artefact, but taken together there is a shift in connotation and they become a 'photo essay' about race and a testament to European fetishism. The voyeurism of the photographic medium in itself becomes a point of discomfort, as does the 'collectability' of the image in this 'album of blackness'. The ensemble constitutes something like a *faux pas*. There is a sense of exploitation and shame in the assemblage, as though a series of black people have been *put on parade* – yet this is not literally the case: it is self-evidently a pastiche of separate images.

The sense of relation between these photographs is echoed in another juxtaposition over the page, which includes a New Caledonian prison garrison with children

arrayed in orderly parade rows, wearing uniforms. Here, indeed, people have precisely been put on parade, and this really *is* a spectacle of exploitation. Placed directly above on the page, is a press photo of the American Black Birds musical troupe, on board the liner *France* on their arrival in Le Havre.

Simon Baker provides an acute discussion of the way he sees the last two images as providing a point of clarification for the entire assembly of photographs. Perhaps he is overstating the case a little, as I don't think the turn of the page provides a solution to a puzzle: a rebus effect still operates. Baker writes that once the page is turned to reveal the last two images –

> … it becomes obvious that the Canaques and the rest of the indigenous population of New Caledonia have been the unwitting victims of that pernicious European cultural export: criminal justice. In this case the prison garrison at Kanala would have been associated with communards, political enemies of the state exiled after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. In the context of which all the dubious markers of 'civilization': the children's ability to form a parade line, the anomalous straw boaters and top hats are cast as the side effects of a 'civilizing mission' founded on exploitation and utilitarian inhumanity. Meanwhile, the final juxtaposition suggests that in return for the precious European 'gift' of 'development', an alternative cultural export (albeit one refined to meet European expectations) arrives from New York. The implications seem clear: 'white' France exports undesirables and builds prisons; 'black' America sends jazz.[22]

The content of *Documents* counters the celebratory sense of liberalised internationalism propounded by *transition.* Jolas's benign vision of one polyglot world contrasts to *Documents'* appropriations and generative associations that produce a troubling version of global imperialism: an internationalism that does not cohere, and comes at a very great cost to some. As Clifford argues, the ethnographic vision offered by *Documents*, based on the model of collage, avoids the portrayal of cultures as organic wholes.

***Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution* (1930 – 1933)**

The content of *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (*LSSDLR*) (1930 – 1933) carried forward the Surrealists' programmatic anti-colonialism. The general tenor of *Le Surréalisme SDLR* is more polemical than either its precursor *Le Révolution Surréaliste*, or *Documents*. Physically less assuming, its construction is plain and small. Its two-year lifespan (there were six issues in all) corresponded to a

[22] Simon Baker, 'Variety: Civilizing "Race"' in *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents* (London and Cambridge Massachussetts, Hayward Gallery and MIT Press, 2006, 65 – 71), at 69.

particularly turbulent patch for the Surrealist movement in relation to Communism, and coincided with the unfolding of the painful and lengthy process of divorce between Aragon and Surrealism.[23] Alongside the drawn-out tension between Breton and Aragon and the tug of war between Surrealism and the Party, there was a sharpening of attitudes, and this is reflected in *LSSDLR.* Theoretical texts were prominent as well as political ones. Freud was approached in a critical spirit. De Sade and Hegel emerged as central currents. Colonial imperialism stayed in line for trenchant criticism.

The first issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution* came out in July 1930. It made clear its alignment with the directives of the Parti communiste française, but a careful balance was maintained between political and ideological expression and content that dealt with Surrealist creativity and exploration.[24] Financial constraints did not allow high production values, and the practice of 'floating' visual signification that had been previously been developed through the juxtaposition of text and images in *La Révolution surréaliste,* and which was further developed in *Documents,* was not pursued. In a constrained format, photographs were reproduced together in one section rather than interpolated throughout the text and, overall, the physical organisation of the journal did not figure the formal instability, dynamism, play and confrontation of *Documents.*

Despite, or perhaps because of, the necessary visual restraint of *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution,* the Surrealists' practice of politicised juxtaposition was further exploited in their exhibition design. The exhibition *La Vérité sur les colonies*

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[23] Aragon and Sadoul attended the Congress of Revolutionary Writers in Kharkov in 1930 and signed a constructed 'confession' document denouncing the *Second Manifesto,* agreeing to subject all further Surrealist literary activity to Party vetting. On their return to Paris, Aragon and Sadoul were to recant; then Aragon went on to publish a poem he had written in Moscow, *Front rouge,* a polemical work with violent imagery. He was prosecuted for the content, deemed to be an incitement of military disobedience. Breton published the pamphlet 'L'affaire Aragon', which argued against the interpretation of poetic text 'for judiciary ends'. He followed with a fuller discussion of the issues in 'Misère de la poésie', where he criticises 'Front rouge' calling it a 'circumstantial poem' (i.e. a piece of political cant). Nonetheless, he defended it on the basis that a poem should not be "judged on its successive representations, but on its power to incarnate and idea, for which these representations, freed from all need of rational connection, only serve as a base". He went on to attack the Kharkov conference, and to refer to an internal Party control commission enquiry into a *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (*SASDLR*) article by Dalì, judged to be pornographic and thus anti-revolutionary. As this conflict was a matter of internal Party dispute, Breton was in breach of Party discipline by discussing it publicly. This 'indiscretion' pushed Aragon to distance himself from Breton, and he publicly denounced Surrealism in favour of full adherence to the Communist Party.

[24] Durozoi offers a discussion of the deliberate balance kept between political and creative themes in *Le Surréalisme au service de la revolution,* see pp. 196 – 198.

(*The Truth About the Colonies*) took place from September 20, 1931 until February 1932, as a counter to the grandiose national event, the *Exposition Coloniale* of 1931. The *Exposition coloniale* galvanised the Surrealists, who also responded with two declamatory pamphlets.

The Surrealist use of objects from other cultures was not exclusively anti-colonial or scholarly, it must be said. In the lead up to the *Exposition coloniale*, Tristan Tzara, along with the dealers Loeb and Ratton, organised an exhibition of tribal objects, at the Galerie Pigalle. The same period saw a large auction of tribal objects from the collections of Breton and Éluard, which can only be seen as an instance of strategic opportunism. At a time when money was very tight, they chose to sell off substantial portions of their collections during the *Exposition coloniale*, to take full advantage of popular interest in such objects. These events, all of which have some bearing on the theme of Surrealism and 'primitivism', occurred within the context of the *Affaire Aragon*, which played out in several instalments between the end of 1930 and the end of 1931. Relations between Aragon and Breton were very strained but nonetheless during this stretch they collaborated on non-Communist-Party-affiliated projects, two protest tracts against the Colonial Exposition of 1931 and the third and fourth issues of *Le surréalisme au service de la revolution*, published in November 1931.

***Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale*, 1931**

Two days before *l'Exposition coloniale* opened in May 1931, the Surrealists distributed five thousand copies of a pamphlet entitled, *Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale*, which called for a boycott of the Colonial Exhibition, and protested against the 'idea of colonialist banditry'. The pamphlet was handed out on the streets and at the gates of a number of factories. Durozoi's account reads,

> The pamphlet attacked what it called the 'swindler-concept of a 'Great France', where the world of finance, church and army had gathered, one that aimed to 'give the citizens of Metropolitan France the conscience of landlords which they will need in order to hear without flinching the echo of distant shootings.' The surrealists reiterated, moreover, that Lenin had recognized the colonial peoples as allies of the world proletariat' and urged their readers to demand 'the immediate evacuation of the colonies'.[25]

[25] Durozoi, 220.

The pamphlet declared that Lenin was the first to understand that the colonial people were the natural allies of the proletariat, and that the whole exhibition was designed merely to serve the purposes of the bourgeoisie'[26].

> The presence on the inaugural stage of the Colonial Exhibition of the President of the Republic, the Emperor of Annam, the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, of several governors and old soldiers, opposite the missionaries' pavilion, and those of Citröen and Renault, clearly expresses the complicity of the entire bourgeoisie in the birth of a new and particularly intolerable concept: 'La Grande France'. It is a question of giving to the citizens of metropolitan France the feeling of being proprietors which is needed so they can hear the distant sounds of gunfire without flinching. It is a question of annexing a view of minarets and pagodas to the fine scenery of the French countryside.[27]

In addition to its mode of outright Marxist critique, *Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale* makes a pointed attack on racism through the very texture of its language. As Amanda Stansell demonstrates in her penetrating analysis of the tract, the manifest content of colonial critique is underscored by word play that denotes racial difference through references to whiteness and colourlessness, thus the verbiage of the tract performs its own critique of racism through a play of dissolving stereotypes. The linguistic moves exemplify a tactical position, which, in form and message, undercuts colonialism by deliberately destabilising the normative categories through which it spreads its message of European cultural superiority and assumption of whiteness as the norm. Stansell's analysis is apposite:

> In a passage indicting the forced labour that sometimes even killed native workers, the Surrealists write: 'these [colonized] men who are distinguished from us only by our *whiteness* [*nôtre qualité de blanc*], we who say men of colour, we [who are] men without colour'. When they name themselves and the colonialists 'men without colour', having colour becomes the norm from which white people deviate. Furthermore the subtleties of the phrase '*nôtre qualité de blanc*' connect it very closely to current notions of 'whiteness'. On one level, the word 'qualité' in this kind of construction means a position, distinction or authority, and therefore the phrase translates to 'our status as whites' and speaks of power structures rather than skin colour. Yet the choice to italicise the word 'white' and to use the word 'qualité', which can also mean simply an attribute with no positive connotations, deflates the 'status of whites' by showing such status to be based on something as arbitrary as skin colour. [T]his phrase acknowledges the cultural power of 'whiteness', while at the same time undermining it.[28]

One night in late June, the Dutch East Indies pavilion at the Colonial Exhibition burnt down. The Surrealists followed the disaster with a second pamphlet, *Premier bilan de l'exposition coloniale*. In it they compared the fire with the sacking and pillaging of other cultures by colonialists, and deplored the loss of 'the most precious testimonies of intellectual life in Malaysia and Melanesia, among the rarest and most

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[26] Lewis, Helena *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism*, (Edinburgh University Press: 1990), 95.
[27] ibid.
[28] Stansell, 119.

ancient artistic specimens known from these regions, objects that had been taken violently from those who had created them'.[29]

Following their two tracts criticising the *Exposition Coloniale* and what it represented, the Comintern representative Alfred Kurella invited the Surrealists to organise an exhibition as a form of demonstration against the *Exposition* under the auspices of Ligue contre l'imperialism et l'oppression coloniale (The Anti-Imperialist League), an arm of the French Communist Party.[30] They were offered the old Soviet pavilion designed by Konstantin Melnikov for the 1925 *Exposition des arts décoratif*, a modernist building which had been relocated to a new site at number eight, on the avenue Mathurin-Moreau.[31]

La Vérité sur les colonies (*The Truth About the Colonies*) exhibition ran from September 20, 1931 until February 1932. Some of the displayed objects were indigenous, and some were artefacts of colonialism. As one component of their exhibition, the Surrealists assembled a collection of African, Oceanic, and Native American objects. The other component was a didactic display denouncing the imperialism of French colonialist policies. Accompanying the static portions of the exhibition were performances by Antillean and West African members of the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre, who organized musical performances that they claimed would be a 'revolutionary success'.[32]

There are a number of complexities about *La Vérité sur les colonies*, as Harris and others have noted. The various commentators take conflicting views of its rationale.[33] Jody Blake, whose writing on Surrealism and jazz was discussed in Chapter Two, argues elsewhere that though the Surrealists' intention was to put cultural objects and practices on display for the purpose of subversion, *La Verité sur les colonies* operated within the paradigms of Western art and entertainment, and thus within the same type of framing as the official *Exposition*.[34] She contends that imported objects were 'presented as a function of the intentionality of, and a credit to, their exhibitors

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[29] *Premier bilan de l'exposition coloniale*, quoted in Durozoi, 220.
[30] Those participating were Aragon, Sadoul, Thirion, Tanguy and Éluard.
[31] The site was property belonging to the Union des syndicates de la Seine, presently the site of the headquarters of the PCF.
[32] Harris, 53 – 54.
[33] Jody Blake, 'The Truth About The Colonies, 1931: Art Indigène In Service Of The Revolution', *Oxford Art Journal* 25, Issue 1 (2000), 35 – 58.
[34] Ibid., 54.

rather than their creators'.[35] To the contrary, I would argue that the objects were displayed precisely with the oppressed condition of their creators in mind, that this was made explicit through captions and the display of Western 'artefacts' that were arranged to signify exploitation, and according to quite different framing devices to the official *Exposition*, which was effectively a gigantic *tableau vivant* deliberately designed to obscure the inherent violence of colonialism. My view accords with that of Adam Jolles, who recognises that the curators of *La Vérité sur les colonies* had a documentary and didactic purpose, and eschewed a homological display in favour of one that amplified the contradictions of the *Exposition coloniale*. Jolles writes, 'To draw homologies, either formal or otherwise, between imperial French objects and pre-colonial fetishes, its curators argued, would be to ignore the gross political disparities brought into jarring view by the *Exposition coloniale*.'[36] There were no contemporary European art works included in *La Vérité sur les colonies*, and in Jolles's estimation, the strategy offered 'an important political retort […] to both the regressive ethnographic platform espoused by the *Exposition coloniale* and the more moderate, but politically vacuous humanism presented at the new Trocadéro'.[37]

Jolles comments though that the exhibition provided no clues as to how a European artist could go about developing an aesthetic that would be sensitive to the politics of colonialism.[38] Following Aragon's rejection of modernism and style, referred to above, it should not be surprising that *La verité les colonies* did not set out to present a postcolonial aesthetic through the manufacture of objects, but concentrated instead on display tactics that drew attention to the political function of public spectacles.

Since some of the Surrealists had their own collections of exotic objects, the curators drew on some of their items for the displays. Because of their connections, they were also able to convince major dealers to loan objects to the counter exhibition: these collectors were also lenders to the official exposition. Again, a number of contemporary commentators have been perplexed by the complex and contradictory affiliations at work. The prominent collector and dealer Charles Ratton lent works to the *Exposition Coloniale*, and he also contributed images and text to Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology. He auctioned Breton and Éluard's tribal object collections in 1931, and it was at his gallery that the Surrealists held their 1936 *Exposition surréaliste*

[35] ibid., 36.
[36] Jolles, op cit., 26.
[37] ibid., 28.
[38] ibid.

d'objets.[39] These crossovers have been remarked upon as conflicts of interest and compromised ethics. Certainly *La verité les colonies* rests on paradox, but its purpose is to reveal the very sorts of contradictions that the official exhibition sought to elide. Its impact is difficult to ascertain. Some commentators have considered it an ineffectual gesture, since in excess of 33 million visitors attended the *Exposition Coloniale* whilst a reported five thousand attended *La Vérité sur les colonies*. However, given its modest scale, perhaps this is not an inconsiderable number for a highly unusual exhibition. Critical response to the exhibition was fairly muted. Harris writes,

> Thirion tells us in his memoirs that PCF officials stayed away from the exhibition, despite Kurella's involvement; but there was no disapproval or criticism expressed in the occasional articles *L'Humanité* devoted to it from July to December 1931, and Marcel Cachin, the director of *L'Humanité*, praised the exhibition unequivocally. On the other hand the surrealists' role in organising the exhibition went unacknowledged, since it was put together under the auspices of the Ligue contre l'imperialisme et l'oppression coloniale, one of the party's paper organizations. The lack of recognition also has something to do with the suspicion in which the party held the surrealists.[…] [t]he Communist members of the surrealist movement, Aragon, Sadoul, Unik, and Alexandre, were under intense pressure from the party to split with their group; Thirion, who had been invited by Kurella to organize *La Verité sur les colonies*, was expelled from the PCF in 1931; and the figures in the French Party responsible for culture were beginning to organize the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionaries (AEAR), from which it was already envisaged the that the surrealists would be excluded.[40]

Not a great deal can be said with certainty about *La Vérité sur les colonies* and its visual impact as there is only one extant documentary representation of it: the much-reproduced pair of grainy, indistinct photographs that appeared on the back page of *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, number four of December 1931 (see fig. 36).[41] However, from what can be gathered, the display strategy deserves comment.

With its overt political message and novel structure, *La Vérité sur les colonies* relates to the debate of the day in the first phase of Stalinism, over how literature – and by extension art – could become an instrument of Communism. The polemical exhibit was calculated as an anti-colonial display and a counter to the triumphal spectacle presented by the *Exposition Coloniale*. Here we see something of a visual analogue to those debates and thematic excursions that were aimed at defining Surrealism in relation to the real, and with respect to the Surrealists iconoclastic references to 'the Orient' in the mid 1920s. By 1931, this has given way to a play of signification that

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[39] Harris, 249 – 250, note 13.
[40] ibid., 54.
[41] I note that these pictures are low quality in the original publication, and that most reproductions in books have been digitally enhanced for contrast and sharpness, as have these.

had less to do with the phantasm of Orientalism and was more attentive to conditions in colonised countries.

Fig. 36. *À l'Exposition La Vérité sur les colonies*, in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no. 4 (December 1931), 40.

In the service of its polemics, *La Vérité sur les colonies* was formally innovative, in its combination of text and a strategic mix of eclectic objects. From the image on the left, we can make out what looks to be a vitrine display or items set out on a plinth against a wall. The label 'Fétiches Européens' lies before three figurines that differ slightly in scale. These are objects that today we might describe as kitsch: poor representations all of which depict dark-skinned figures. The one in the centre appears to be a choir boy in a cassock, holding a collecting bowl (or bag) inscribed with the word, 'merci'. To the right, we see what appears to be a black Madonna and Christ child. The figure on the left is more difficult to make out, but appears to be a bare-breasted female, with arms raised behind the head. The buttocks are thrust out, in an overtly sexualized posture (they may refer to a Hottentot Venus stereotype, but the generous proportion may be a shadow effect). The figurines interrelate and cross-reference each other through race, gender, and religion. Two of them are associated with the church; all three are black; two are female. Their juxtaposition highlights the connections between Christianity, racism, colonial oppression and sexism in the European imagination.[42] These associations, which draw out the connections between colonialism, racism and Sadist desire, owe much not only to Bataille, but to Dalí's research into Surrealist objects and particularly fetishism. Harris notes that the year before, Dalí had suggested an exhibition of Catholic fetishes. He had seized upon the sexualised nature of Catholic objects and images, which he believed to be closely

[42] Harris, 70 – 71.

related to the sexual perversions of pederasty and Sadism. Harris offers an attentive analysis of the display.

> [T]he figures evoke, without exemplifying them precisely, the three types of fetishism with which the surrealists would be familiar through their understanding of psychoanalysis, Marxism and 'primitive' art: a sexual fetishism, in the exaggerated figure of the African woman; a commodity fetishism, as represented by the charity figure (who underscores the monetary interests of the church); and a religious fetishism, relativizing the religious nature of fetishes from Europe and its colonies. It is the juxtaposition of the three figures that reveals their fetishistic qualities, which are unconscious expressions of the dominant culture; none of these figures has any intrinsic value for the surrealists, but are all banal examples of an oppressive cultural production that they oppose with their own work. The passivity of all these figures indicates not so much the sadism that Dalí attributed to Catholic fetishes, as a masochism that European culture projects onto the non-European other (and onto the Virgin and Child) – in contrast both to the art of oppressed peoples displayed elsewhere in the anti-colonial exhibition, and to the desublimated expression of surrealist objects, which are their dialectical complement. In the implicit contrast between 'European fetish' and surrealist object, a distinction is made between an object which veils its fetishism and one that accepts and celebrates it. In this way the surrealists attempted to demonstrate that the products of their autonomous activity sustained a critical relation to the culture to which both they and the Communists were opposed, without being exclusively or primarily political in nature.[43]

The photograph on the left presents another hall of the exhibition, where a large banner on the back wall bears Marx's slogan, 'A people who oppresses others can never be free.' Before the banner we can make out groupings of what are evidently indigenous objects. Little can be deduced from the photograph about the precise arrangement of these, but it appears that apart from the text on the banner, the arrangement of the display apes the way artefacts might be ordered in an ethnographic museum.

While the *Colonial Exhibition* elided the reality of violence and subjugation of colonialism, *The Truth about the Colonies* sought to make that violence explicit: to reinsert it into the field of vision through *détournement*. Using much the same means, though clearly on a far more humble scale, the Surrealist exhibition highlighted the visual politics of display, to demonstrate that the official spectacle was a politicised phantasmagoria. The other overt aspect of *The Truth about the Colonies* was its commentary about race and racism, and the content of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* illuminates this. Along with the photographs of the exhibition, *LSSDLR* number four included an article by René Crevel that decries the pervasive influence of colonialism and draws together several themes. He writes that the worst manifestations of colonialism are in 'cunning liberalism', and talks about racism as a pathological ideology that supports it. As an example of racism, he cites a text that

[43] ibid., 71.

had recently appeared in *Revue de Psychanalyse*, which, he says, suggests by implication that 'the unconscious of the black man is not capable of such distinguished conflicts as that of the white man.'[44]

The following year saw the publication of *Murderous Humanitarianism*, the manifesto that brought the Bretonian Surrealists into collaboration with Martinican scholars who had identified themselves as having adopted the energies of Surrealism, and who formed their relation to Surrealism against the context of the *affaire Aragon.*

Légitime défense & *Murderous Humanitarianism*

In 1932 some young scholars, domiciled in Paris and studying at the Sorbonne, published a single issue of a student journal called *Légitime defense*, and by taking their title from Breton's 1926 pamphlet of that name they announce its connection to Surrealism. Étienne Léro, René Ménil, and Jules Monnerot were Caribbean-born poets who frequented the same cafés as the Surrealists and attended their debates on politics and aesthetics. Taking their lead from Surrealism, these self-identified members of 'the French mulatto bourgeoisie' declared their intention as 'class traitors' to 'take treason as far as it will go'.[45] In their declaration, they hail Marx's dialectical materialism and their 'unreserved acceptance' of Surrealism, 'with which', they say, 'our destiny in 1932 is linked':

> In the concrete realm of means of human expression, we […] unreservedly accept surrealism with which our destiny in 1932 is linked. We refer our readers to André Breton's two manifestos and to all the works of Aragon, André Breton, René Crevel, Salvador Dalí, Paul Éluard, Benjamin Péret and Tristan Tzara. We consider it one of the disgraces of our age that these works are not better known wherever French is read. And in Sade, Hegel, Lautréamont and Rimbaud – to mention just a few – we seek everything surrealism has taught us to find. [46]

In their preface, Léro, Ménil, and Monnerot emphasise the date of their embrace of Surrealism and the nature of the Surrealism to which they adhere, pointedly stating their ambition to accommodate the positions of *both* Aragon and Breton by encompassing the production of metaphor *and* political reference. They support Breton's ideal of a revolutionary language – capable at any moment of exceeding its

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[44] Crevel, quoted in Ades, 259.
[45] *Légitime défense*, quoted in Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski, *Refusal of the Shadow*: *Surrealism and the Caribbean* (London: Verso, 1996), 4.
[46] *Légitime defense*, in Richardson: 41 – 43.

literal sense, and make it plain that they want poetry to be politically relevant as well as formally innovative.

One of the authors, Jules Monnerot, became a prominent Surrealist and also worked with the 'dissident Surrealists', and went on to publish *La Poésie et le Sacré* in 1945, a discourse on the meaning and significance of Surrealism and its mode of operation, yet to be translated into English. In 1932, Monnerot, Pierre Yoyotte and other Martinicans behind *Légitime défense* in collaboration with Breton and his colleagues wrote the tract *Murderous Humanitarianism*, published in 1934 in Nancy Cunard's *Negro: an Anthology*, but possibly written in 1932.[47] In this tract, the authors take up the issue of colonialism and racism. Marking the collaboration between white and black Surrealists, the form of the tract amplifies its content. Written multi-vocally, its voice reflects the cultural diversity of the signatories. The manifesto undergoes shifts in its authorial voice, in a similar vein to *Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale,* but this time the poly-valence reflects the cultural or racial mix of the authorship. The final sentence of the tract reads, 'the whole object of our romantic exoticism and modern travel lust is of use only in entertaining that class of blasé client sly enough to see an interest in deflecting his own advantage the torrent of energies which soon – much sooner than he thinks – will close over his head.'[48]

Amanda Stansell's gloss of *Murderous Humanitarianism* has great force. She illuminates the shifting 'voice' of the manifesto, sometimes a 'white man's' voice, sometimes the voice of the racially oppressed bourgeois black, in keeping with the cultural diversity of the signatories.[49] Stansell demonstrates how the choice of language and dissonant style yields complex multi-vocal and contradictory effects. Her reading is attuned to the nature of the Surrealist poetic innovation within the text. Their strategies, she claims, challenged fixed categories of race. Thus, she says, it anticipated current scholarship on 'whiteness' as a normative category, which compellingly demonstrates that 'the normative status of whiteness paradoxically makes it both ubiquitous and unseen. To combat whiteness is therefore to make it visible. To accomplish this goal, "whiteness needs to be made strange"', she writes,

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[47] Durozoi says that *Murderous Humanitarianism* was probably written in May and June of 1932, and that it was translated into English for Nancy Cunard's Negro Anthology, by Samuel Beckett. See Durozoi, p. 305. Nancy Cunard (ed*) Negro: An Anthology* (London: Wishart, 1934). A much-abridged version of *Negro: An Anthology* was republished with an introduction by Hugh Ford, (New York: Ungar, 1970). *Murderous Humanitarianism* is reprinted in *Tracts surréalistes*, ed. Jose Pierre, 2: 441 ff.

[48] Breton et al., *Murderous Humanitarianism,* quoted in Stansell, p. 120.

[49] ibid, p. 327.

quoting Richard Dyer's book *White*.[50] Stansell duly credits Surrealism with the means to make the familiar strange, and as having had positive political and social impact through their anti-colonialist and anti-racist interventions, and acknowledges that black activism itself was at a germinal theoretical stage. She writes, 'Even [their] limited viewpoint was at the time politically advantageous, since it precipitated alliances with Caribbean intellectuals and Négritude activists who were using a similar broad critique of Western reason to promote a strong African diasporic cultural identity'.[51] Pointing to the poly-vocal play, and the way it affects a slippage of the notion of race, Stansell writes,

> The voice is not 'white', since the essay uses the phrase 'the white man and his actions' to represent the object of critique. Yet it is not written exclusively from the perspective of the Caribbean Surrealists, nor is it a 'colourless' voice. Instead the perspective is unstable. The 'our' in this passage refers to three groups simultaneously. It refers to the French, since the essay as a whole criticizes the bourgeoisie for an obsession with a 'mystic Orient'. Yet 'our' is also a specifically black voice, since a referral to the 'degradation' of those blacks who play 'fashionable jazz' precedes this sentence; presumably they would be the ones 'entertaining blasé clients'. Finally, 'our' is the Surrealists – originally a white group, at this moment in transition to being racially mixed – in which case 'romantic exoticism' is a self-critique of their fascination with other cultures and their former self-definition as an extension of romanticism. The reader is encouraged to consider who is culturally linked to exoticism and why.[52]

I would say the voice of *Murderous Humanitarianism* is the anguished voice of all of its authors. Though not a deracinated voice, it expresses an economy of desire that is caught in and of the colonial moment, but which projects beyond it. In the French language it refers to a French identity that reflects the scope of a 'Greater France', but rises against the colonial condition and counteracts the constructed hegemony that spectacles like official colonial exhibitions are calculated to produce.[53] *Murderous Humanitarianism* overtly identifies its own burdens of romantic exoticism and bourgeois metropolitanism in self-critique, with the implication that we are all implicated in exoticism.

Much the same can be said of *La Vérité sur les colonies*, in my view. It does not make a virtue out of its appropriations, but configures them in such as way as to disclose the condition of colonial appropriation. In *Murderous Humanitarianism*, as

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[50] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 9, quoted in Stansell.
[51] ibid., 112.
[52] Stansell, 120.
[53] Three other younger students subsequently produced their own publication – the Martinican Aimé Césaire, together with Guyanese Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal published a single issue *L'étudiant noir* in 1934. Apparently *L'étudiant noir* did not come to the attention of the Surrealists: it was not until he stopped in Martinique, en route to the United States, that Breton discovered Aimé Césaire's writing. See Richardson, p. 5.

in *La Vérité sur les colonies*, we see express anti-colonial sentiment married to a breach or eruption of the conventions of language and visual signification. I want to turn now to the last periodical under discussion in this chapter, *Minotaure* and to mount an argument that despite the fact that many commentators have passed it off as an apolitical periodical, its poetics further contribute to 'counter-primitivism' or 'ethnographic Surrealism' through its explorations of radical alterity.

***Minotaure*, 1933 – 1939**

Published by Albert Skira and Edouard Tériade from 1933 to 1939, *Minotaure* is distinguished by its luxurious production values.[54] Not strictly a Surrealist periodical, because they did not have editorial control, *Minotaure* sustained and developed many central Surrealist interests and ideas that had been pursued in *Documents*. [55] As Skira did not permit contributors to publish their political or ideological views in *Documents*, no manifestos or tracts appeared on its pages. Hence, for some contemporary commentators *Minotaure* evidences Surrealism's descent into a luxury commodity and 'salon' values, but I wish to argue to the contrary. Though virtually free of polemic, *Minotaure* did at times reflect the Surrealists' political views. Moreover, it provided a platform for developing broader discursive exploration and cultural critique, which complemented their politics. I wish to argue, in this and the next chapter, that the themes developed in *Minotaure* had political implications which fed into the Surrealists' cultural politics in the post war period, when they were reprised. In particular, I shall argued that ideas that were first manifest in *Minotaure* powered Breton's curatorial exploits in the post World War II decades.

The first two issues of *Minotaure* came out simultaneously. One was a special issue devoted to the Dakar-Djibouti Mission. The end of *Documents* had coincided with Michel Leiris's departure for Africa, as the secretary for the contingent in the Mission, a scientific expedition that sought information on African religious and social life. Its itinerary privileged African societies that had had the least contact with

[54] Albert Skira was a Swiss arts book publisher. Polizzi writes that Breton and Éluard had been approached by Skira in February, at which time *SASDLR* had not yet folded, and they had been noncommittal. Polizzi speculates that Breton's reticence may have been because Skira and Tériade had wanted him to co-edit the journal with Bataille, and for it to be modelled on the defunct *Documents.* See Polizzi, p. 390 – 391.

[55] While *Documents* has received a good deal of retrospective scholarship in recent years, *Minotaure* has received less attention, and presents a fertile seam for future research.

the West. It was sponsored by the Musée de l'Homme and led by Marcel Griaule, and ran from 1930 to 1931, its purpose to collect vast quantities of indigenous artefacts for museological display in Paris.[56] While the first issue of *Minotaure* was devoted to the Dakar-Djibouti Mission, effectively, all three of the first issues of created a context for discussing tribal practices and art from the Mission alongside works by Pablo Picasso, André Masson, Man Ray, and Brassaï. *Minotaure* saw a fusion of aspects of Surrealism and a variety of 'ethnographic surrealism' penetrated its overall poetics.

Figs. 37 & 38. *Minotaure*, no. 2, 1933. Cover by Gaston-Lois Roux; Frontispiece by Diego Rivera, *Minotaure* no. 12 – 13, 1939.

The 'dissident' Surrealists initially animated *Minotaure*. Bataille was to contribute to it only once, and the journal became a vehicle for Bretonian Surrealism, but Bataille's ideas inflect it strongly. Dawn Ades wrote that *Documents* and Surrealism came together in *Minotaure*. She notes a quip by Breton in which he describes Surrealism at the time as being 'reduced to dividing its activities into two parts, one of which is translated into tracts, while the other sought the greatest possible expansion in the luxurious review *Minotaure*.'[57] Though Breton's phrase has been seized upon as evidence of Surrealism's division into 'artistic' and 'political' streams, the segmentation is in fact by no means so clear-cut, and indeed the Surrealists succeeded in wresting a great deal of expansion from the remit Skira offered. The *Minotaure* years overlap with the activities of Contre-Attaque (discussed briefly below) as well as the especially esoteric activities of the Collège de sociologie circle, who published *Acéphale* (1936 – 1939), and in fact many of the

[56] The Dakar-Djibouti Mission, led by Marcel Griaule, travelled across French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa from Dakar to Djibouti. As an enthnographer, Griaule made his name with his work among the Dogon.

[57] André Breton, *Entretiens 1913 – 1952*, 179, quoted in Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed (*Arts Council of Great Britain 1978), 280.

currents of these covert pre-war activities inflect the writings in *Minotaure*. While Ades briefly comments that *Minotaure* was 'blind' to Surrealism's political side and that the periodical was devoid of the political tenor of *SASDLR* and lacked the subversive spirit of Bataille that had animated *Documents*, her summation suggests that the separation of activities was clearer than it was and does not do justice to the rich content of *Minotaure*.[58] Though not free to engage in the overt political posturing of *SASDLR*, *Minotaure* was not apolitical, merely non-polemical and it made reference to the Surrealists' directly political gestures.

An example of *Minotaure's* political content is Breton's essay, 'Souvenir du Mexico' where he writes of his stay in Mexico with Trotsky and Diego Rivera (who designed a front piece for *Minotaure*, pictured above) and refers to the tract that he wrote with Trotsky – *not* published in *Minotaure – Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art* of 1938.[59] The Mexico essay is illustrated with the now-famous photograph of Breton with Trotsky and Rivera, as well as a number of photographs by the Mexican photographer, Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Breton's essay offers a cultural and political analysis which reflects upon the class struggle in Mexico at a time when oil workers there were locked in conflict with the government over the nationalized oil industry, and foreign trading partners had boycotted trade. He links his discussion of Mexico's revolutionary present with its pre-conquest past, in a discussion of the place of death-in-life in Aztec culture. His treatment of the subject of death and sacrifice and of worlds beyond, along with Alvarez Bravo's images of graves and corpses of strikers, not only connect Mexico's present with its past, but relate to broader themes dear to Bataille: indeed, Breton's perspective seems indebted to Bataille. Between *Minotaure's* covers there were other sparkling, remarkable writings as well as brilliant experimental photographs and pictorial essays. The themes also cross with the more obscure activities the Surrealists were pursuing in other contexts.

Consistent with the title of the review, many of its themes are redolent of Bataille's interests, so while his direct personal contribution to *Minotaure* may have been slight, the periodical reveals his influence on Surrealism during this time. Diverse in disciplinary terms, the topics covered in the writings cohere curiously. Aspects of 'Surrealist ethnography' encircle a number of the connected themes explored, including spirit possession, sacrifice, paranoia (elaborated by Dalì and Lacan), 'convulsive beauty' (Breton's explication encircling eroticism, desire and

[58] Ades, 280.
[59] André Breton, 'Souvenir du Mexico,' *Minotaure* numbers 12 and 13 (May 1939).

automatism), and the luminary piece of writing by Roger Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychanasthénie légendaire'.[60] The latter is a meditation on camouflage behaviour in insects as psychosis rather than adaptive behaviour. It presents the idea of a scopic drive turned on its own subject. Caillois envisions not so much a *divided* subjectivity, so much as a deliquescent, mimetic subject, motile, permeable to its surroundings and vulnerable to spectacle.

In 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', Caillois addresses scientific approaches to camouflage tendencies in animals, calling into question any assumption that an animal's ability to mimic the appearance of its environs is necessarily an adaptive mechanism. He dismisses the idea that mimicry has the utility of disguise, arguing that in most cases, predators do not hunt by sight, but rather by smell. Caillois posits that such mimicry is an epiphenomenon, and one that can be counter-utilitarian: 'a *luxury* and even a dangerous luxury, as it does occur that mimicry makes the mimetic creature's condition deteriorate'. The case of the Phyllidae is particularly wretched, he writes: 'They graze on each other, literally mistaking other Phyllidae for real leaves. Therefore, this could almost be viewed as some sort of collective masochism culminating in mutual homophagy – with the imitation of the leaf serving as an *incitement* to cannibalism in this particular kind of totemic feast'.[61] Caillois argues that such mimicry is a disorder of spatial perception: a collapse of a primary distinction by an organism between itself and its environment.

> [P]erceiving space is certainly a complex phenomenon, as it is impossible to dissociate spatial perception and representation. In this respect, space is a double dihedral continuously changing its size and location: it is *a dihedral of action* with a horizontal plane determined by the ground and a vertical plane determined by the person who is walking and thus, pulling the dihedral along with at the same time; and it is also a *dihedral of representation*, shaped by the same horizontal plane as before (which is represented, though, rather than perceived) and cut by the vertical plane just where the object appears in the distance. Matters become critical with represented space because the living creature, the organism, is no longer located at the origin of the coordinate system but is simply one point among many. Dispossessed of its privilege, it quite literally *no longer knows what to do with itself*. This clearly recalls crucial aspects of the scientific outlook, indeed, it is noteworthy that modern science has been producing increasing numbers of precisely such represented spaces.[62]

Caillois extends his observations about mimicry in animals to humans, drawing on

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[60] Roger Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', *Minotaure*, 7 (1935) 5 – 10. republished in translation as 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' in The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader, edited and translated by Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 89 – 103.
[61] Caillois, 97.
[62] ibid.

classic ethnographic studies to argue that the principle of association witnessed in mimetic behaviour is the principle of *magic*: 'The law of magic, *Things that have once touched each other stay united*, corresponds with the principle of association by contiguity, just as the principle of association by similarity precisely corresponds to the *attractio similium* of magic: *Like produces like*.'[63] Like any number of Surrealist writings, Caillois' essay is indeterminate in its ramifications. We can extend from his observations to ponder on human psychosis, or any subject's permeability to their physical or social milieu. In the context of *Minotaure* in 1935, Caillois' themes of mass deception or even hypnosis through the play of images, collective masochism, and the way subjectivity is interdependent on socially constructed space could be seen as a commentary on fascism. It can be linked to modern phantasmagoria, including that of exhibits such as the *Exposition coloniale.*

Lacan, whose first rendition of 'The Mirror Stage' was presented the following year, enthusiastically received Caillois' conception of spatially constituted subjectivity and, as I have noted with respect to *Documents*, shades of the Mirror Stage idea seem to percolate through Surrealist thinking in the years prior to Lacan's formal presentation of his theory in 1936.[64] Irrespective of whether or not the overlap in ideas is coincidental, in *Minotaure* we see a maturing of ideas around a conception of subjectivity as spatially, corporeally and socially ordered: this is a subject ordered, and disordered, by processes of *mimetic-metamorphosis*. In this conception, subjectivity is permeable and plastic: not quite relinquishable, but alterable. This broad conception infiltrates writings in *Minotaure* that have quite different bearings: the peculiar 'naturalism' of Caillois, the satirical psycho-social observations of the quotidian by Dalì, and the troubled ethnographic strain in Leiris.[65]

In Leiris's account of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti in *Minotaure* number 2, of 1933, he reports on Dogon initiation rituals, detailing the complex of taboos, rules, mores and material artefacts used, including masks and other props, which come together in an elaborate pageantry. He formulates an argument that the metamorphic rite of passage is a matter of dramatic technique: the transformation of the subject is effected *theatrically*, as a technical operation. I see an overlap here between Caillois' implied subject in space, and Leiris's social actor, engaged in ritual. In his book

[63] ibid.
[64] The extant published version of Jacques Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage as the Formative of the function of the "I"' is the latter version, from 1949, republished in *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 3.
[65] I touched upon Leiris in Chapter Two, see pp. 53–55.

published the following year, *L'Afrique fantôme*, through his references to African objects and experiences, Leiris enters into areas of his desire, fantasy, dream and their fictionalisation.[66] To some extent *L'Afrique fantôme* follows the genre of scientific travel journals of a respected literary and scientific tradition drawn from the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. In other ways, it functions rather like a self-consciously failed attempt to realise the sexualised exoticism of literary orientalism – in Gustave Flaubert's novel *Salammbô* of 1862, for example. It documents the metamorphic power of travel and subjection to foreign experience. The objective status of ethnographic method, the position of the authorial subject, the problem of observation, and the issue of desire as it functions in encountering the 'cultural Other' are all issues that Leiris problematises. In both the account of the Dogon rituals and Leiris's descriptions of his own travel experiences he depicts a type of 'invaded' subjectood. Similarly to Caillois' and Lacan's observations, an *informe* subjectivity animates Leiris's writings.

In its double issue number 3–4 from December 1933, *Minotaure* included five articles on psychology, including a psychoanalytic study by Jacques Lacan, three articles on automatism, two articles each on photography and divination, and one each on painting, sculpture, architecture and music, together with a survey on objective chance. This issue features the series of six photographs of 'involuntary sculptures' by Brassaï,[67] which accompany an article on Art Nouveau by Dalì, who most likely also wrote the captions for Brassaï's images. At this time (1933 – 4) Max Ernst was working on *Une Semaine de Bonté*, which I think can be construed as a sort of psycho-social commentary of norms and manners and what they deny or repress, and presently I will discuss commonalities between Ernst's pictorial novel and the thematics of *Minotaure*.

Brassaï's photographs *Involuntary Sculptures* simultaneously evoke scientific-historical and aesthetic-ahistorical time. On the face of it they seem to alluding to a primordial moment and at first blush they look to be quite abstract. On longer, closer inspection, and in concert with the cryptic captions, they equate to a forensic style of photography based on extreme close up and isolation of data. They 'ethnographically' document minute aspects of unconscious Parisian daily life.

[66] Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme* (originally published 1934, Paris: Gallimard, 1981).
[67] Brassaï, (1899 – 1984) adopted name of Gyula Halasz, born in Brasso, Transylvania.

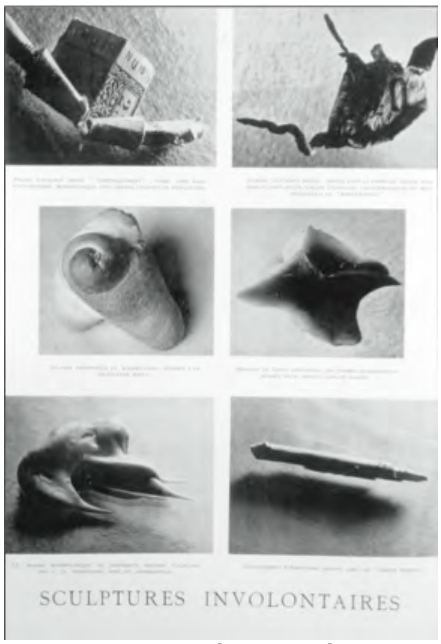

Fig. 39. Brassaï's *Involuntary Sculptures*, *Minotaure* 3 – 4 (1933).

Dalí's absurd captions extend the 'ethnographic' interest of the images, for example, referring to the images in the lower right and top left, he has labelled them, 'Symmetrically rolled bus ticket, very rare form of morphological automatism with evident seeds of stereotyping'; 'Rolled bus ticket, found in the vest pocket of an ordinary bureaucrat (from the Crédit Lyonnais bank)'. The two fiddled-over bus tickets from Parisian pockets evidence something like a common nervous tic discovered amongst office workers, not quite a custom, more of a *habitus*.

Dalí's hilarious essay in *Minotaure* takes a similar 'lens' or analytical method to Art Nouveau, and he analyses the manner in which its architectural forms provoke modern desire. There is something about Dalí's approach, which could be called mytho-political, that echoes Leiris's blend of subjectivism and searing objectivity, albeit ridiculously. Dalí too tests whether the distinction between 'document' and 'art' can be maintained in metropolitan life, in the unconscious habits of people as they unwittingly work over their detritus and engage with public spectacle. Dalí describes how Art Nouveau architecture makes buildings look like cakes, which, far from being problematic for him, enhances their appeal and accentuates their 'hyper-materialization' of the instinctual urges in which all supposedly 'ideal' desires are rooted. Art Nouveau architecture embodies 'continuous erotic ecstasy,' and is consequently utterly antirational, even 'hysterical.'[68]

[68]Salvdor Dalí, 'De la beauté terrifiante,' *Minotaure* 3 – 4 (1933), 70 – 73.

Une Semaine de Bonté, 1934

Max Ernst's collage novel *Une Semaine de Bonté* of 1934 forcibly echoes themes in *Minotaure*, as well as harbouring the aggression seen in the collage principle of *Documents.* Here too is an atmosphere of 'continuous erotic ecstasy,' with an element of 'primitivism' undercutting Western bourgeois domesticity, which can also be read as an attack on the hegemony of the 'rationalist' panorama of Western culture. In *Une Semaine* there is a blend of voluptuousness and monstrousness (there are plenty of naked damsels and numerous totemic hybrid creatures) appearing within stuffy interiors and poky residential streets. The plates show a number of similar rooms in which the décor and clothes are middle-brow, but in each case the atmosphere erupts into consternation: floods, scenes of seduction, punishment of persecuted women by lion-headed, bird-headed or Easter Island headed men. On the one hand, the glut of mythological allusions point to Ernst's rejection of stifling bourgeois respectability. On the other hand, in the melodramatic structure there is a diagnostic reading: that despite its trappings, beneath the veneer, this realm of supposed respectability – or 'civilisation' – harbours irrepressible passion, violence and danger.

The December 1933 issue of *Minotaure* published Jacques Lacan's essay on the highly publicised case of the murderous Papin sisters, who had been reliable servants until they butchered their employers, a mother and daughter. Having killed them, over a petty misunderstanding – a minor rebuke over a failure to switch off the electricity, the sisters sexually mutilated the bodies of their mistresses. Afterwards, they washed and went to bed – together.[69] The crime was mystifying because it was not premeditated and the killers could not name dissatisfaction or hatred as their motive, and it was only *after* the crime had been committed that one of the sisters exhibited evident symptoms of insanity. Lacan says that the only explanation that can be offered is psychoanalytic, as the motives for such a crime could only be unconscious. He looks to the limited detail of the sisters' life together and their exclusive affection for one another to deduce their sado-masochistic homosexual relationship and their paranoia.

[69] Jacques Lacan, 'Motifs du crime paranoïaque: Le crime des soeurs Papin,' *Minotaure* 3 – 4 (December, 1933)

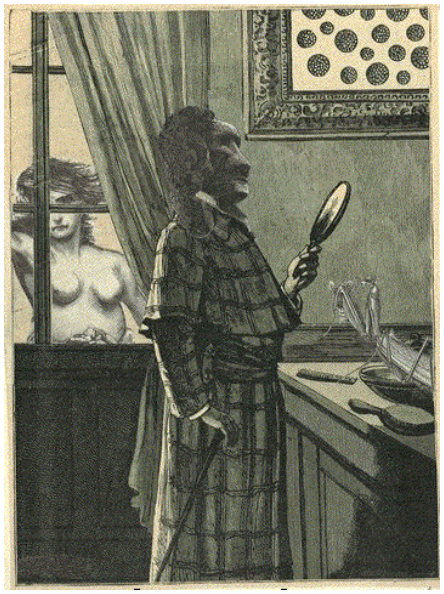

Fig. 40. Max Ernst, *L'île de Pâques 2*, collage from *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1933 – 4 (Fifth Book. Element: Darkness).

This plate, and others, from Ernst's collage novel seems to allude to a psychological register of domestic turmoil, such as that conjured up by the case of the Papin sisters. The central figure with a walking cane and an Easter Islander statue's head regards himself in a hand mirror, overlooked by a naked woman peering through the window. As the eyes of both figures are obscure, to talk of gazing and peering raises a difficulty, nonetheless, the masculine figure holds a mirror to its Easter Island face, and the shape in the mirror does not seem to match it, suggesting perhaps that the mirror image shows an ordinary face of a man, which might match the body. Ernst's figure promotes the idea that this person's emotional reality is the monstrous head, the ancient or 'primitive' element. On the dressing table we can see part of an oversized praying mantis, or is it one mantis eating another? (After copulation, the female mantis eats her mate, and for the Surrealists, this insect was a powerful representation of Thanatos: Freud's death instinct). There are Oceanic references in *Minotaure* (and *Documents*) too, as in Ernst's references to the Easter Island heads. The superimposed heads in *Une Semaine de Bonté* relate to masks, a central topic in *Minotaure*. Ernst's transposed collaged heads connect to Bataille's notion of the *acéphale*. Further, these relate to a meditation by Georges Limbour about masks, in which he fumes about the European ransacking of Melanesia and expresses anti-colonialist sentiments. He also writes about the mask of modernity: the gas mask. Krauss notes the association of tropes in common between *Une Semaine de Bonté* and *Minotaure* also relate to Giacometti's *Invisible Object*:

> …Ernst's associations in *La Semaine de Bonté* of the mantis with the context of Oceania and the site of the Papuan spirit bird provides yet one more aspect of the many factors that determined the conception of *Invisible Object*, with its own inclusion of a bird's head reminiscent of 'Loplop' it establishes a conceptual site within which to see how the logic of *Invisible Object* works to combine the Solomon Islands spirit of the dead with the mytho/biological purveyor of death supplied by the form of the mantis…[70]

The complexity of these conjunctions shows the play and admixture of shared tropes in Surrealism by the mid 1930s, which extend well beyond the realm of an exploration of ancient myth and beyond a romantic conception of 'the primitive.' The poetics of anxiety is loosely defined but virtually unrestricted. It identifies a psychical field that is specific to the political and social anxieties of the day, over the psychology of fascism and trepidation about war. We enter into the realm of the death instinct: and a Surrealist attempt to locate a mythology of its own day – the latent content of its time. These themes were played out more covertly and explicitly in the activities of Contre-Attaque, which I will discuss briefly in the next section. In summing up on *Minotaure* and *Une Semaine de Bonté*, I wish to underscore the point that in these publications, the Surrealists and those on the edges of the movement pursued a strong political undercurrent, or perhaps socio-political current, which I see as intimately linked with the more obviously political themes explored in Contre-Attaque. Finally, I wish to suggest that these ideas are again made manifest in the Surrealists last pre-war exhibition in 1938.

Contre-Attaque, 1935–1936

Having been symbolically reunited on the pages of *Minotaure*, following Breton's split with the PCF in 1935, Bataille and Breton came together to form the group Contre-Attaque, which held meetings over an eighteen-month period. Increasingly isolated by their critique of nationalism, the Surrealists found themselves without party or popular support in a period increasingly dominated by party politics and nationalism on the right and the left. The idea for forming the group came from Roger Caillois, who saw the need for a 'Union of Revolutionary Intellectuals'. Contre-Attaque was set up as an antidote to Stalinist Communism, and its central target was nationalism, which its members objected to as a false form of social integration, which they saw as leading inexorably to a war between nations. They shared a total lack of confidence in the ability of the Front Populaire (created in

[70] Krauss, op cit., 72.

1935) to bring about the necessary transformation of society through political means alone. They observed that *the home*, *patriarchy*, and *capitalism* were condensed by both Nazi and Stalinist propaganda. To my eye, the violent undercurrents of this mythological triad are explored through the Surrealist poetics of the day, in the mayhem of *Une Semaine de Bonté* and in many of the writings in *Minotaure* taking the form of a 'domestic uncanny', which also percolated through other work of the 1930s. In *Minotaure*, as I have outlined, there was a preoccupation with a spatialised, unstable subjectivity. In Contre-Attaque a theme of radical homelessness emerged, but due to the short life of this group it did not take shape in Surrealist formal experimentation in that moment. However, it was to emerge forcibly during and after the war, finding form in images, objects and innovative exhibition design. The Surrealists disbanded Contre-Attaque, reputedly because of perceived fascist sympathies emerging within the group. After its dissolution, Breton continued to be engaged but on the margins of Communist-aligned activities, seeking an alliance with Trotsky. Bataille, on the other hand, engaged in the increasingly esoteric activities of the *Acéphale* group and the Collège de Sociologie. Of communications between Bataille and Breton, Richardson writes, 'There appeared to have been few direct contacts between [them] during this period, and for those of Breton's circle – judging from comments by Pierre Mabille and Nicolas Calas – there was a sense of disappointment that Bataille should become obsessed with what they perceived as irrelevancies, rather than any hostility'.[71] As we shall see in the next chapter, in the 1940s, the interests of Bataille and the Bretonian circle were to converge again.

Two Exhibitions: 1936 & 1938

Two exhibitions took place in the latter half of the 1930s, which demonstrate similar collage strategies to those we have seen in the publications discussed above: strategies of jarring juxtaposition and categorical 'flattening' of hierarchical distinctions. At the Ratton Gallery, which specialised in selling exotic art, the *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* of 1936 had something of a quasi-ethnographic appearance, partly by dint of the gallery space and furniture. A diverse array of objects were placed in vitrines and on plinths, as well as wall mounted, in an apparently orderly display – at least on the face of it. However, the heterogeneity of the objects and their manner of display was a provocatively de-classificatory move,

[71] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, edited, translated and introduced by Michael Richardson (London and New York, Verso, 1994), 10 – 11.

underscored by Breton's absurdist typological categorisations of the objects in his catalogue essay. Their organisation went against aesthetic or museological taxonomies.

Among the objects in the vitrine pictured in a documentary photograph, (Fig. 41), we can discern a few 'mathematical objects' (top shelf), a Kachina doll, other hard-to-identify indigenous objects, and Duchamp's *Bottlerack* and *Why Not Sneeze? Bottlerack* under these conditions becomes a specifically French curio, a culturally specific artefact among others. In the photograph, Dalì's *Veston Aphrodisiac* is visible next to the vitrine: it is a dinner jacket with shot glasses attached to it. Next to it is placed a bottle of Crème de Menthe. The manner of display has a distancing effect upon the objects, and they become specimens and curiosities. Aside from the manner of display, some of the objects have a perplexing quasi-ethnographic status in and of themselves.

Fig. 41. *Exposition surréaliste d'objets,* (*The Surrealist Exhibition of Objects*), May 1936, Charles Ratton Gallery, Paris. Photograph by Man Ray.

The *Veston Aphrodisiac* suggests that the cocktail hour is a lightly masked mating ritual. Another memorable object from that exhibition, Meret Oppenheim's *Object* (also known as *Le Déjeuner en fourrure*), completely fetishises the genteel (English) habit of taking tea. The sexual provocations of *Le Déjeuner en fourrure* have been thoroughly worked over: the ensemble invites the 'coital' act of stirring the cup with the spoon, and conjures the highly suggestive sensation of drinking from wet fur. But

an anti-colonial aspect can also be read into the transposition of the refined porcelain cup – for supping tea, that colonial plantation commodity. By cladding the china in the fur of a dead exotic animal it looms as a sort of curious trophy, and thus a supposedly genteel, civilized habit is transposed, not only into a sexualised encounter but an exploitative and barbaric one.

Fig. 42. Meret Oppenheim, *Object/ Le Déjeuner en fourrure*, 1936
Cup, saucer, and spoon covered in Chinese gazelle fur. Museum of Modern Art. New York.

Two years later, there was an upping of the stakes of exhibition design. The 1938 *International Surrealist Exhibition* was a response to two notable exhibitions of the previous year: the infamous Nazi *Degenerate Art* exhibition held in Berlin, and the Parisian *International Exhibition of Art and Technology Applied to Modern Life,* auspiced by the Popular Front Government of the day. Duchamp was invited by organizers Breton and Eluard to design the *Exposition Internationale du surréalisme* of 1938, with assistance from Dalì, Ernst and Man Ray.[72] This was to be the first of five highly orchestrated and theatrical exhibitions organised by the Surrealists and designed by Duchamp.[73]

The 1938 exhibition was not only a comment on the state of supposed Western 'civilisation' under the shadow of Nazism but, as Filipovic has remarked, it also staged strategic contraventions of 'the Enlightenment organization of knowledge and rationalist project of the museum.'[74] The exhibition was held at Georges Wildenstein's Galerie Beaux-Arts, an auspicious eighteenth century building. The traditional gallery space was filled with a large number of paintings, graphic works and objects displayed to create an immersive and disorienting environment.

[72] Durozoi, 339 – 345.
[73] The other four exhibitions were the 1942 *First Papers of Surrealism* show in New York; The *Exposition Internationale du Surrealism* of 1947, in Paris; *EROS* in Paris in 1959, and the 1960 Surrealist *Enchanter's Domain,* in New York.
[74] Filopovic, 181.

Fig. 43. *The International Exhibition of Surrealism,* Gallery des Beaux-Arts, Paris Jan–Feb 1938. Left, the central hall, designed by Marcel Duchamp, as it was being set up. Right, Salvador Dalì, *Taxi pluvieux* (Rainy Taxi).

The Gallery's ornate eighteenth-century decorative details were covered; there was no ambient lighting; spectators negotiated the rooms by torchlight – though apparently most of the torches were souvenired, and so fixed lighting was resorted to after the opening night.[75] One hall became the *rue surréaliste,* a street of mannequins, each dressed and decorated by a different artist, presenting a Surrealised Parisian streetscape. A suite of Bellmer's *poupée* images was displayed on the wall between two of the mannequins. Another element of the exhibition was Dalì's *Rainy Taxi,* a taxi fitted out with an internal sprinkler system and foliage, occupied by mannequins and live snails. Durozoi describes the central hall, designed by Duchamp, in this way:

> From the vaulted ceiling hung twelve hundred coal sacks, and the undulating ground was covered with dead leaves, moss, and ferns, in the middle of which was a pond. At the centre of this space, which was both womblike and rustic, stood a brazier (whence the diffuse fear that the coal dust falling from the sacks would start a fire) like an invitation to stand huddled together; in the four corners of the hall were beds of a somewhat garish luxury, like nothing other than an invitation to lie close together.[76]

The coal-burning brazier was the room's main source of light. The chamber had a 'smell scape' of brewing Brazilian coffee – 'odeurs de Brésil' as the catalogue described it, and a soundscape of recorded hysterical laughter. Mahon says the latter 'lent an uncanny, macabre tone to the spectator's experience for, as Man Ray stated, it was intended to dissuade "any desire on the part of visitors to laugh and joke"'.[77] A recording of a German army marching tune was played at the opening, a clear reminder of developments in the outside world. Filipovic writes,

[75] ibid., 193.
[76] Durozoi, 342 – 343.
[77] Mahon, 52.

> Dirty, dark, loud and hysteric, the 1938 Exposition's substitution of interference and disorientation for the traditional orderliness of the exhibition space touched on more than simply aesthetic issues. Without banners, slogans or explicit political declarations, the Surrealists' idiosyncratic installation defined a form of ideological critique that concentrated on the disruptive potential of process, ephemerality, instability and visual frustration against the period's exhibitionary commonplace of stasis, solidity, sanity and visual primacy… As the movement's 1938 staging recast the bourgeois eighteenth century interior of the Parisian gallery in which it was housed, it also pointed to what museological spaces of the day hid: that walls were not neutral, that display strategies were not objective, and that careful taxonomies and room enfilade held up the fragile foundations of national chauvinism, authoritative rule and art history alike.[78]

In a formal sense, the curatorial and design strategy here undoes certain aesthetic and institutional orthodoxies, and it conflates a number of social forces for critique. While not overtly anti-colonial in its import, there is a mockery of the inherent chauvenism of traditional museological and gallery display in this particular exhibition, which operates according to the principle of association by contiguity that was evident in the thematics and the physical organization of *Documents.* By juxtaposing ornate Eighteenth Century architecture with German marching music, the smell of coffee, and the threat of igniting coal dust – and so forth, it created a siege-like atmosphere. Moreover, this was an atmosphere that sought to envelope and permeate the viewer, as opposed to creating an objective distance between observers and objects, and this logic carries with it resonances of Caillois', Lacan's and Leiris' *Minotaure* themes, of a subjectivity marked by its penetrability and spatial interrelatedness. Here, in the 1938 *International Surrealist Exhibition*, is an infected and infectious Uncanny space that seeks to be hypnotic, and to treat its audience as a *public* by configuring the site for shared experience rather than a space that permits an individual 'reading' of isolated works. As Breton was to comment after the war, there was a prescience about the hysterical yet sombre mood of this exhibition, which was arranged in a rather instinctive fashion, reflecting the anxiety of the times, rather than intentionally predicting the Second World War.

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[78] Filipovic, 181.

CHAPTER SIX

Decolonisation & *Dépaysement*

Surrealist Anti-colonial Poetics After World War II

> Certainly the theatre is that practice which calculates the observed place of things: if I put the spectacle here, the spectator will see this; if I put it elsewhere, he won't see it and I can take advantage of that concealment to profit by the illusion: the stage is just that line which intersects the optic beam, tracing its end point and, in a sense, the inception of its development: here would be instituted, against music (against the text), *representation.*
>
> – Roland Barthes[1]

In the post Second World War period, Surrealism was excoriated from all sides – for its lack of political commitment, its utopianism, or, in the eyes of a younger generation, its staidness – yet it continued in its political dissent and cultural critique. Decolonisation and wars of national independence were prominent among the Surrealists' range of geo-political concerns, and after the war they published tracts and a number of anti-colonial statements calling for the end of French colonialism in Vietnam and Algeria. Their broader ambit was to oppose the type of conventional thinking that they saw as responsible for making nationalism, imperialism and colonial exploitation politically acceptable. In the years immediately preceding the Second World War, themes of statelessness and displacement – *dépaysement* – had already begun to appear in key Surrealist writings and visual works, and during the war years and in its aftermath, these were further developed and refined and expressed by various means. As we saw in the previous chapter, as well as in particular works, these ideas were made manifest in the periodicals *Documents* and *Minotaure,* and in innovative polemical and theatrical exhibition design.

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[1] Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, Translated by Richard Howard. (Berkeley: University of California: 1991), 89 – 97, at 89.

Some of the Surrealists and their associates weathered the war in France, but key members of the group sought exile, including Breton, Ernst, Duchamp and Masson.[2] Their wartime concerns and experiences in exile deepened their anti-colonialism and prompted in their thinking a correlation between colonialism and fascism. The Surrealists' post-war emphasis on cultural and social arenas was a reaffirmation of their political consciousness. While they operated at a distance from party politics, their position on liberty of the mind and free expression crystallised some of their earlier political views. After the liberation of Paris, Breton not only identified a need for the expression of political dissent, but also for social reparation and he set about defining a role for Surrealism in the restoration of social aspirations: to redefine liberty in a post-war society in which democracy had been compromised by politically conservative ideology, increasing normative control and self-censorship. In the longer term, Breton's conception of liberty applied to the unravelling colonial situation. He saw an ongoing role for Surrealism not just in outright political dissent against the French Government's military enforcement of colonial suppression, but in revealing and objecting to the cultural values that continued to undergird colonial brutality.

In the latter part of the 1940s vintage Surrealist interests – in the Uncanny, eroticism, taboo, sacrifice and Sadism – were reprised as antidotes to the constrictions of the Fourth Republic, and then more forcibly with the advent of the Fifth Republic.[3] The Fourth Republic underwent marked instability and frequent changes in government. Decolonisation was an insistent problem, and the military rebellion in Algeria in May 1958 caused a coup d'état which forced a referendum that led to the establishment of

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[2] Detailed histories of the Surrealists' exodus from Europe in the late Thirties and early Forties are provided by Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), and Dickran Tashjian, *Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde 1920 – 1950* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995). Many of the Surrealists and associates stayed in France. Chénieux-Gendron says the painters Jacques Hérold, Victor Brauner, Oscar Dominguez and Adolphe Acker, remained in France, as did Robert Desnos, Michel Leiris, Raymond Queneau, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Philippe Soupault, Tristan Tzara and Pierre Unik who published writings from time to time during the war years. Paul Éluard, who broke with Breton in 1938, remained in France and published work in the Communist press. René Char did not publish at all and was active in the Resistance. See Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism* op. cit., 77 – 78. Georges Bataille remained in France and wrote, but due to recurrent tuberculosis he left the Bibliothèque nationale in 1942 to recuperate in Vézeley where he continued to write. See Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 7.

[3] The Fourth Republic was the republican government of France between 1946 and 1958, its constitution adopted on 13 October 1946.

the Fifth Republic, on 5 October 1958, and de Gaulle's return to power.[4]

In this era the Surrealists reprised earlier activist tactics – the manifesto and the formation of organised intellectual alliance and social movements, as well as new modes of communication and group action. In their theatrical exhibition designs in the 1940s they staged the political anxieties of their time over war, exile, government censorship, terrorism and colonial oppression. Their exhibition designs were developed more conscious and theoretically, building on the experimentation of the Thirties.

Rich conceptual threads that had run through *Minotaure* in the late Thirties and through Surrealism during the war years were reprised after World War II. To my mind, experimentation in the post war years demonstrated that lines of speculation rehearsed in *Minotaure* had, or came to have, political relevance. Moreover – though this is not a line I have the space to pursue in this thesis – many of the themes from *Minotaure* were developed with explicit political intentions, in the Surrealist publications that were launched by the group and on its margins, and these included *Neon; Médium; Phases; Bief; le surréalisme, même* and *Le Quatorze Juillet.* The latter two, *le surréalisme, même,* and *Le Quatorze Juillet* (not strictly a Surrealist publication) were particularly instrumental in plaiting together themes of Gaullism, fascism and colonialism for strident critique.[5] These conceptual tendencies contributed to the innovative a line of formal spatial experimentation during the post-war period. In earlier chapters, I dwelt on Surrealist primitivism and ethnography, and in the previous chapter, particularly with respect to *Minotaure* and the Collège de Sociologie, I pointed to a psycho-sociological tendency within Surrealism and on its margins. This tendency was manifest from the later 1930s, when the Surrealists' curatorial conceptualisation and physical staging of exhibitions took object relations to a new level by implicating the sensoria of audience members in playful and interactive ways. That is not to say, as many have, that in and of themselves

[4] Charles de Gaulle (1890 – 1970). During World War II General de Gaulle formed the French Free Forces, comprised of exiled French officers. At the time of the liberation of France in 1944 he headed a government in exile. He then served as prime minister in the French Provisional Government. He came out of retirement to serve as the first President of the Fifth Republic from 1959 to 1969. Events of May 1968 threatened to topple the government but de Gaulle survived the crisis with an increased majority in the Assembly, however he resigned after losing a referendum in 1969.

[5] Except to briefly note their anti-colonial content at some points, I have not offered an analysis of the poetics and politics of these periodicals here. I believe this is an under researched area, and worthy of further study. Durozoi offers useful overviews of the publications in his chapters covering the post World War II period.

Surrealist objects and imagery were moribund. Powerful singular works were produced, and indeed in the post-war period Breton seized upon visual expression more than ever, to cut across linguistic and cultural barriers. As Breton and Bataille themselves noted though, there was a good deal of derivative and empty work produced under the banner of 'Surrealism'. However, the Surrealists' explorations into spatial design and the manipulation of conditions of spectatorship were significant innovations with two-fold intentions. These intentions were prefigured in Breton's speech, 'Limites non frontiers du Surréalisme' of 1936, which we dwelt upon in Chapter One. First, physical spaces were purposefully designed and constructed to demonstrate how the *merveilleux* may erupt in social situations. Second, in so doing, the Surrealists created auratic spaces to be experienced by the audience as a *public*, as distinct from atomised individuals each caught in a singular viewing moment, witnessing 'autonomous' works of art. The Surrealists' exhibition praxis configured the gallery as a space for social interaction and shared experience.

Two major post-war exhibitions were designed by Marcel Duchamp, at Breton's invitation, and animated by geopolitical and anti-colonial concerns: *Surrealism in 1947* and the 1959 *EROS* exhibition staged critiques of their respective political climates. *EROS* was staged at the very height of the Algerian war. It closed in 1960, the year France capitulated to Algeria's fight for independence. In a statement he made soon after the 1947 exhibition, Breton said that by the means of visual arts, which cross the barriers of language, Surrealist action consisted of a threefold pact: 'to contribute, as much as one can, to the social liberation of man, to work without respite toward a *total* renewal of mores, to reshape human understanding.'[6] Breton's curatorial direction in that exhibition focused on myth in a way that intersected with Bataille's concerns, and here we see a late flowering of Surrealism's so-called 'primitivism'. The 1959 exhibition staged the interplay between Orientalism, sexual abuse and torture as forms of warfare.

In the present chapter, I further develop the argument from the previous chapter, which explored the way in which, during the latter part of the 1930s, the Surrealists' spatial and psycho-social experimentation referenced ideas expressed by Lacan, Caillois, Bataille and Breton himself. Here I wish to show how these ideas came to be inserted into architectural and social space via exhibition design, and I consider

[6] André Breton, 'Surrealist Comet,' (1947) *Free Reign* (*La Clé des champs*, 1953), translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 88 – 97.

some later writings which bear Surrealism's influence and provide a retrospective account of the Surrealist exhibition praxis. Among these I include ruminations by Michel Foucault[7] and the more recent popular writing of Nicolas Bourriaud.[8]

Aimé Césaire, 'A Great Black Poet'

In March 1941, Breton, his wife Jacqueline and their nine year old daughter Aube left France, on board the SS *Capitaine Paule Lemerle*, bound for New York. Other Surrealists who took the same passage were Victor Serge, and Wilfredo Lam (who disembarked in Cuba, his country of origin).[9] On board, Breton befriended anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and their friendship continued in New York. The voyage was broken in Martinique. On arriving in Fort-de-France, Breton was interned for several days.[10] André Masson arrived in Martinique a week after Breton, and together they produced the group of texts and drawings that comprise the small book, *Martinique, charmeuse de serpents* (*Martinique Snake Charmer*), a shared memoir of their encounter with the island.[11] It includes the text 'Creole Dialogue', a conversation between Breton and Masson, and a reprint of the essay, 'A Great Black Poet,' Breton's tribute to Martinican poet Aimé Césaire.

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[7] Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984) French philosopher and cultural theorist and perhaps the most often cited intellectual of our day.

[8] Nicolas Bourriaud (born 1965) curator and critic who co-founded the Palais de Tokyo, and from 1999 to 2006 was its co-director. He also founded and directed the periodical *Documents sur l'art* from 1992 – 2000. Bourriaud coined the term 'relational aesthetics' in 1995. His book of that title has been influential for contextualising particularly European art in the early 1990s. Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Wood with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002).

[9] From October 1940, Breton, his wife and daughter and other Surrealists were domiciled in Marseilles, at the villa Air-Bel, under arrangements by the Emergency Rescue Committee, an American organization that aided European intellectuals. Some of them, including Breton, were under the particular scrutiny of the Vichy regime and the peril of their position is often overlooked by commentators who criticise Breton's decision to go into exile. In December 1940, Breton was arrested as a preventive measure on the occasion of a visit to Marseilles by the chief of state. His *Anthology of Black Humor*, printed in April 1940, and then the poem *Fata Morgana*, printed at the beginning of March 1941, were delayed in publication by the censor. See Durozoi p. 384; Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron and Andrew Eastman, 'Surrealists in Exile: Another Kind of Resistance,' *Poetics Today* 17, no. 3, 'Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives I' (Autumn, 1996): 437 – 451, at 440, f.n 1.

[10] The local Vichy authorities had been tipped off that Breton was a known agitator and could incite hostility toward the administration in Martinique.

[11] André Breton, *Martinique Snake Charmer* (*Martinique, charmeuse de serpents*, Société nouvelle des editions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1972), translated by David. W. Seaman, with an introduction by Franklin Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas, 2008).

The poetics of Surrealism had been injected with a Martinican influence in the Thirties and, as discussed in the previous chapter, the tract *Murderous Humanitarianism* of 1934 attests to a procedure of cross-cultural inflection: a play of poetics within a political tract. The meeting between Césaire and Breton in Martinique confirmed for Breton the necessity of poetic expression as a mode of dissent and a means of liberation, and Césaire's influence can be seen in Breton's poetry from the early 1940s, in which he is politically explicit: he calls for oppressed people to free themselves from domination.[12] The inclusion of political content in Breton's poetry demonstrates a shift in attitude from the days of the 'Affaire Aragon' between 1931 and 1932, when he had been reticent about the value of 'occasional' poetry. The voyage across the Atlantic marked a broadening and enriching of Breton's political and aesthetic concerns, as evidenced by the collection of writings, *Martinique, charmeuse de serpents.*

In their 'Creole Dialogue', Breton and Masson express their responses to the tropical lushness of the Caribbean with a self-conscious Orientalism.[13] As two Frenchmen abroad, they describe the island of Martinique as a magical landscape, and though theirs was an enforced voyage of necessity, their language is delirious. Jacqueline Chenieux-Gendron writes, 'however painful exile may have been for the surrealists, it was experienced nevertheless as a voyage of initiation – as if it were turned inside out, like the finger of a glove, into a voyage of magnetic attraction.'[14] Masson says, 'The forest surrounds us; we knew of it and its sorcery before we arrived. Do you remember the drawing I called *Délire vegetal?* The deliriousness is here… We are one with these layered trees…'[15] Breton continues, '[…] Everything has been like this, unchanged for so long… In the end one realizes that surrealist landscapes are less arbitrary. Landscapes were destined to find their highest expression in countries like these where nature has not been dominated in the least. What a Rimbaud-like dream on shifting surfaces[…]. It is striking to realize that Gauguin, among others,

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[12] In Breton's poem 'Les États generaux', he expresses a wish to see the 'black race' and the 'red race' to free themselves from white domination, and for women to free themselves from masculine oppression. For commentary, see LaCoss, 'Attacks of the Fantastic,' in Spiteri and LaCoss, 267.

[13] Masson and Breton, 'The Creole Dialogue between André Breton and André Masson,' in *Martinique Snake Charmer,* op cit.

[14] Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron and Andrew Eastman, 'Surrealists in Exile: Another Kind of Resistance,' *Poetics Today* 17, no. 3, 'Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives I' (Autumn, 1996): 437 – 451, at 439.

[15] Masson and Breton, 'The Creole Dialogue between André Breton and André Masson,' in *Martinique Snake Charmer,* 43.

travelled through Martinique and thought about remaining here.' [16] Masson replies, 'Exoticism, people say in derision, exoticism, and thus they have the last word. But what is meant by exoticism? The whole earth belongs to us. Just because I was born by a weeping willow does not mean I should have to dedicate my work to such a narrow theme.'[17] The tropical idyll is only one facet of *Martinique, Snake Charmer*. Other essays 'Troubled Waters' and 'A Great Black Poet,' tell of the poverty and corruption on the island, the oppressive atmosphere of the Vichy regime and the way it spreads its fascist tentacles to Martinique.[18]

In 'A Great Black Poet,' Breton tells his story of meeting Césaire as a series of chance encounters. He writes that on his release from the internment camp in Fort-de-France, he undertook to buy his little daughter a ribbon, and in the shop he came across the first issue of the magazine *Tropiques*, produced by Aimé and Suzanne Césaire and Réné Ménil, which he read with amazement, delighted to find that Fort-de-France under Vichy administration had produced something so outspoken, crystalline and stirring.[19] Breton affirms Aimé Césaire's proclamation: 'We are among those who say *no* to the shadow.' This shadow is a fusion of colonial and fascist oppression. Indeed, fascism can be read through Césaire's and Breton's lens as nothing other than colonial racism.

The owner of the shop which stocked *Tropiques* was Ménil's sister, and she was able to set up rendezvous for Breton to meet Ménil and the next day, Césaire. Césaire and Breton both saw their meeting as momentous. Césaire presented Breton with a copy of his *Cahier du retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land)*.[20] In his tribute to Césaire and his *Cahier*, Breton forcefully depicts their meeting through his reaction to the other man's *blackness*, the marker of Césaire's aspirations and his poetic core: 'And the next day Césaire. I can recall my initial response in discovering his pure blackness, something I did not notice at first because of his smile.' Breton continues with the same insistence,

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[16] ibid., 43 – 4.
[17] ibid., 44.
[18] ibid., 65 – 82.
[19] André Breton, 'A Great Black Poet,' in *Martinique Snake Charmer*, 85 – 94. This text served as the preface to the French and to the bilingual edition of Aimé Césaire's *Notebook to my Native Land* and was first published in *Tropiques*, no. 11, Martinique, 1944.
[20] Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 1947), translated and edited by Clayton Eshelman and Annette Smith with an introduction by André Breton (Middletown CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

> ‘…he is a human cauldron heated to boiling point. In that state, his knowledge, raised to the higher level, combines with his magic powers. For me his appearance in his own element – and I do not mean only on that day – takes on the significance of a *sign of the times*. Césaire single-handedly defies a period in which we appear to be watching the general abdication of the human spirit, in which nothing appears to be created now except to perfect the triumph of death, in which art, too, threatens to become petrified in old notions. That first fresh, revitalizing breath of air capable of giving back our confidence is the contribution of a black man. And it is a man who handles the French language today as no white man is capable of handling it. And it is a black man who is the one guiding us today into the unexplored, seeming to play as he goes, throwing ignition switches that lead us forward from spark to spark. And it is a black man who, not only for blacks but for all humankind, expresses the questions, all the anguish, all the hopes and all the ecstasy and who becomes more and more crucial as the supreme example of dignity.[21]

Césaire’s inflamed reforging of the French language is a noted feature of his mode of poetic production.[22] At once his usage constitutes a form of revolt against conventional language – precisely the language of the colonising power – and a refusal to assimilate to it, and the revivification of French through an infusion of Creole. Breton’s laudatory response to Césaire’s *Cahier du retour au pays natal* is two-fold. Its demand for a redress of the misery and exploitation of colonized people, Breton says, cannot be denied: ‘One cannot insist strongly enough that his demands are deserved…’[23] Appraising the poetic language, Breton says it transcends its own colonial condition:

> [I]t would be unpardonable to detract from the impact of Césaire’s intervention, no matter how profound it is, by being content with the immediate implications of his protests. What makes his demand priceless in my eyes is that it always transcends the anguish of blacks that is built into their fate in modern society and unites not only the anguish of all poets, all artists, and all true thinkers, but through his verbal genius it embraces all that is intolerable and also all that is improvable in the human condition by our society.[24]

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[21] ibid., 87 – 88.

[22] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to contribute to the discussion of the reception and critique of Césaire’s poetry and his conception of Négritude. Debates have turned on Césaire’s signification in his choice of writing in French. Earlier critical assessments, like that of Césaire’s one-time pupil Franz Fanon, have rejected the former’s aesthetic choices and his creolised French as being too florid and too surreal, arguing that language should be transparent: Fanon posited the need for a literature of clarity and combat (we could say a more ideological literature than was Césaire’s). Later critics saw a flaw in Césaire’s use of French, positing that to be true to his cause he should have used his native Creole. In my view such critical positions are impoverished because they fail to recognise the multivalent referential nature of Césaire’s poetry, celebrated by Breton, especially the way it related to a specific historical and geographic situation *and* generalised well beyond it by virtue of Césaire’s appropriation and adaptation of the French language. An excellent discussion of Césaire, poetic signification, politics and Surrealism in relation to the demands of postcolonialism is Carrie Noland, ‘Red Front/Black Front, Aimé Césaire and the Affaire Aragon,’ *diacritics* 36: 1 (Spring 2006), 64 – 84.

[23] ibid., 92.

[24] ibid., 93.

A number of scholars have attended to the fact that on reading Césaire's *Cahier* Breton revised his earlier pronouncements like *Misère de la Poésie*, which had rejected all poetry *à sujet* (in other words, 'occasional poetry': all poetry based on a political topic or historical subject).[25] Breton makes clear in his comments that he has come to terms with the ways the *Cahier* is incontrovertibly Caribbean, a clear resuscitation of historical memory, and a project not just of psychic dis-alienation but also of social re-rooting (*enracinement*). In Breton's essay it is as if he debates with himself, and concedes that Césaire is right in his estimation of the function of poetry as a means of making a direct geo-politically specific argument. In other words, Breton recognises an anti-colonial function for poetry and a specific poetics of anti-colonialism in Césaire's use of language. However, he also argues that the cause of the subjugated black is a quest for universal liberty.

Through Breton's commentary, Césaire's authorial and social position could be seen in Hegelian terms: as the refusal by the slave of given conditions; the assumption of sovereignty as a form of rage that becomes affirmative and beautiful. Perhaps though, at this point, Breton is loosening his adherence to Hegel somewhat. On the last page of 'A Great Black Poet,' it is not in the name of Hegel nor Marx, that Breton commits Surrealism to Césaire's cause, but in the name of Lautréamont – whom Césaire and Breton shared as an inspiration before they had met – that Breton dedicates the liberation of colonised people and slaves. Not long after Breton's arrival in New York, he wrote *Prolégomènes á troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non* (*Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not*).[26] This was published in the newly established Surrealist journal *VVV* in 1942.[27]

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[25] In 'A Great Black Poet' Breton makes an overt play of his whiteness and Césaire's blackness. Brent Hayes Edwards provides a rich reading of *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* and 'A Great Black Poet'. He notes that Breton utilises the Bataillan method of '*alteration'*, and he alludes to James Clifford's reference to Césaire's 'poetics of neologism'.

[26] André Breton, *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not,* in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 279 – 294. I note that in her Introduction to her English translation of *l'Amour fou*, (*Mad Love,* Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1987) Mary Ann Caws dates the publication of the *Prolegomena* as 1955 (she also erroneously states that Breton died in St.-Cirq-la-Popie, whereas he travelled from there and died in Paris), see Caws, p. xi.

[27] *VVV* was a Surrealist periodical published out of New York, edited by David Hare, a young photographer, with Breton and Ernst as advisors. The first issue came out in June 1942, subtitled *Poetry, Plastic Arts, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology.* Breton accounted for its title thus: 'Not only is V for *voeu* (wish) – and energy – the wish to return to an inhabitable world…but a double V signifies… V for victory over everything which tends to perpetuate the enslavement of man by man and …V also over everything which stands in

Prolégomènes á troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non, 1942

Listing the most lucid, daring and non-conformist minds of the day in the *Prolegomena* to his manifesto ('or not'), Breton names Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and then Aimé Césaire, 'black and magnetic, who is writing the poems we need today, in Martinique…' [28] Thus the *Prolegomena* acknowledges a proliferation of surrealising energies. None of the three named are Surrealist adherents, but Breton says that in their proximity to Surrealism, Bataille, Caillois and Césaire all define its non-conformist possibility. In his *Prolegomena* then, Breton announces the conceivability of new beginning for a Surrealism that is not identical to its erstwhile products. (As we shall see, Bataille was to echo this idea when he began to write on Surrealism after 1945). Breton took aim against Aragon and at Dalì, each exemplifying different aspects of what Surrealism was *not*: neither socialist realism, nor the populist, commodified, formulaic version of Surrealism seen in the department-store window-dressing on Fifth Avenue.[29] Breton denounced the derivative uses of Surrealist techniques, especially in painting, by imitators of Chirico, Picasso, Ernst, Masson, Miro, and Tanguy, writing, 'tomorrow it will be Matta.' 'So here I am', he wrote, 'twenty years later, compelled, as in my green years, to pronounce myself against all conformism and, while saying it, have in mind a too obvious surrealist conformism as well.'[30]

A turn seems to have been occurring in Breton's thought at about this time, toward a particularly vertiginous poetics, and here the felicitous meeting with Césaire must have been influential. The *coda* to the *Prolegomena*, *The Great Transparent Ones*, does not in itself constitute a myth; it does not tell a story, but is written in a dizzying, disorienting way. A text of remarkable openness, it is intended as an antidote to the disgust and negativity of its day. It marks out an arena for speculative, imaginative thought and invites its readers to occupy its vague territory and to take up its suggestions as an incitement to direct the mind beyond what is apparent to the senses. Breton recalls the man blind from birth, about whom Diderot writes. While

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the way of the mind's emancipation.' 'To the V which signifies… an eye turned towards the outside world… some of us have never ceased to oppose VV…the eye turned towards the inner world…, whence *VVV*, a synthesis (of the principle of reality and the principle of pleasure), and a global outlook…which includes the myth in formation behind the VEIL of events.' See Durozoi, 398.

[28] Breton, *Prolegomena,* 284, 287.

[29] ibid., 282.

[30] ibid.

Diderot's blind man is surrounded by shadow, Breton tells his readers that we are surrounded by transparent air. He posits that the historical situation requires the reader to seek signs of the unknown within the air's transparency. The very form and authorial address of the writing is powerfully and curiously oblique, as though it is the air itself which speaks. Every proposition is posited in a highly qualified manner: *perhaps… one can go so far… may be… nothing necessarily....* Breton writes:

> Man is perhaps not the centre, the cynosure of the universe. One can go so far as to believe that there exists above him, on the animal scale, beings whose behaviour is as strange to him as his may be to the mayfly or the whale. Nothing necessarily stands in the way of these creatures' being able to escape man's sensory system of reference through camouflage of whatever sort one cares to imagine, though the possibility of such camouflage is posited only by the *theory of forms* and the study of mimetic animals…[31]

We are invited to imagine creatures different from ourselves, who may pose a danger to all of our reference points: our *theory of forms*, and who may reveal themselves to us at some point of our own *extremis*. Here are strong shades of earlier writings, specifically Bataille's notion of the *informe* and Caillois' 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia'. Implied is the idea that a moment of *unknowing* (one of Bataille's privileged states), a critical moment of being pushed to the brink, opens onto new possibilities. Breton continues,

> There is no doubt that there is ample room for speculation here, even though this idea tends to place man in the same modest conditions of intervention in his own universe as the child who is pleased to form his conception of an ant from its underside just after he's kicked it over an anthill. In considering disturbances such as cyclones, in the face of which man is powerless to be anything but a victim or a witness, or those such as war, notoriously inadequate versions of which are set forth, it would not be impossible, in the course of a vast work over which the most daring sort of induction should never cease to preside, to approximate the constitution of such hypothetical beings (which mysteriously reveal themselves to us when we are afraid and when we are conscious of the workings of chance) to the point where they become credible.[32]

Breton's message is that much is still unknown, unseen and as yet imperceptible to us. His words are not constructed so as to arouse the reader's *belief* in the mythical entities he proposes, but to engender a capacity for wonder and an ability to *entertain a possibility* beyond current plausibility. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron writes that in *The Great Transparent Ones,* 'the speculative imagination is indistinguishable from the poetic imagination, since the text works at a degree of generality in which the poet Novalis is cited as witness along with William James and a former director of

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[31] André Breton, 'The Great Transparent Ones,' *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 293.
[32] ibid., 293.

the Institut Pasteur in Paris.'[33]

The *Prolegomena* and *The Great Transparent Ones* synthesise strains of Surrealism's development in the years immediately preceding the war. Breton signals a turn that has commonly been misinterpreted by his critics as his retreat from political interests into regressive myth and mysticism. This idea undergirds a view on the Surrealists' understanding of so-called 'primitive society': a perception that they had an abiding nostalgic longing for, and belief in, the possibility of a return to ritualistic social solidarity. Such a verdict constitutes a misconception about the Surrealists' interest in myth and poetic language as it had developed by the early 1940s. Breton's was an attempt to be forward looking under conditions of the utmost pessimism. As we shall see, Bataille became an important interlocutor to these ideas, and he gave considerable attention to identifying the potential value of Surrealism in the post-war period.

While the political stakes of Surrealism were no longer tied to the Communist Party, in wartime and after geopolitical issues were at the forefront of its concerns. Breton began his book *Arcanum 17* (*Arcane 17*) in 1944, as he travelled through eastern Canada, during a journey with his new lover Elisa Claro.[34] News of the liberation of Paris reached them there and the title of Breton's book refers to the Tarot symbol of the star, a sign for resurrection and hope.[35] After Germany conceded defeat in May 1944, Breton travelled with Elisa to Nevada, to get a quick divorce from his second wife Jacqueline and in order to marry Elisa. The newlyweds travelled back to New York via Arizona and New Mexico, visiting Hopi and Zuni settlements. Throughout the trip, Breton read an old edition of Charles Fourier's complete writings, and composed his epic poem, *Ode to Charles Fourier*. Here, he addresses Fourier and ruminates on the Native Americans, whose oppressed condition he witnessed. The work is a meditation on love, eroticism and liberty and the text is conceived to gather energy and optimism in a derelict era.

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[33] Chénieux-Gendron, Jacqueline, and Andrew Eastman, 'Surrealists in Exile: Another Kind of Resistance,' *Poetics Today* 17, no. 3, 'Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives I' (Autumn, 1996): 437 – 451, at 448 – 449.

[34] Elisa Claro (1906 – 2000, née Bindhoff) became Breton's third wife. Born in Chile of French parents, she was an American immigrant. She remained with Breton for the rest of his life.

[35] Breton speaks of the conditions for writing *Arcanum 17* in *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* (New York: Marlowe, 1993), 158 – 167. More broadly, he gives a summation of what he saw as the imperative for social aspirations to be developed in the post-war period.

Apart from the excesses of his style and the wildness of his lurches into fantasy, an aspect of Fourier's influence on Breton was his distinction between liberation and liberty, which coincided with the long-held Surrealist position that liberty is not attainable by political means alone. 'The effort of liberation,' Breton writes in *Arcane 17*, 'only coincides in a partial and fortuitous manner with the struggle for liberty. A quite formal distinction between these two terms is imperative today when some are preparing to take advantage to the detriment of liberty […] Liberty is not, like liberation, a struggle against sickness, it is *health*. Liberation might make us believe that health has been recovered, though it only signifies a remission of the illness, the disappearance of its most obvious and alarming symptom.'[36] Before returning to France, Breton spent several months on a lecture tour of Martinique and Haiti.[37] His lectures on Surrealism and liberty in Haiti caught the attention of the general press and emboldened the students behind the newspaper, *La Ruche.* A train of events led to riots in Haiti, the fleeing of the American-backed president Elie Lescot, and the establishment of a new revolutionary government.[38]

On returning to *his* native land in 1946, Breton found himself marginalised by Communists and Existentialists, in an environment where those who had been exiled or not participated in the Resistance received condemnation. His first public engagement was to preside over an event to honour Antonin Artaud.[39] He began

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[36] André Breton, *Arcanum 17*, translated by Zack Rogow (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1994), 94.

[37] Breton's gives his own brief account of these episodes in *Conversations*, see pp. 158 – 161.

[38] Breton's public addresses were more or less similar to others he had given on themes of Surrealism and the Surrealist concept of liberty. Reportedly, he was careful to avoid directly critical political references, on account of the fact he was a visitor in an official capacity, but in the tinderbox situation in Haiti, his message seemed to provide a spark. Biographer Mark Polizzotti is circumspect about attributing the spark of the riots to Breton's speeches. See Polizzotti, pp. 530 – 534. Durozoi is much bolder in his claims about the Haitian students' embrace of Surrealism and its instrumentality for their uprising. He writes, 'from a rational point of view, the exalted youth of Haiti – if only because of the poverty in which they languished – should have been judged politically immature; but they had understood perfectly the integral powers of liberation that resided surrealism the moment they encountered one of the movement's major representatives. They also embraced surrealism because they had understood that it did not view the black population with the mixture of compassion and paternalism that ordinarily only served to maintain their subjugation: the stature granted to Césaire, the exhibition of works by Lam, presented by Breton, which was held at the end of January in the Centre d'art in Port au Prince, the attention paid to the painter Hector Hyppolyte or the poet Magloire Saint-Aude […] all these elements suffice to prove that surrealism expected a great blossoming from this place that had not yet been named the "Third World" – suggestions, if not solutions, for the total liberation of humanity.' Durozoi, p. 460.

[39] A prematurely aged Antonin Artaud had been released from the Rodez asylum in May 1946, and returned to Paris on the same day as Breton, Polizzotti recounts. See Polizzotti, p.

tentatively, 'I have only been back in Paris a short while and I was away too long to know whether I am already once more attuned to this city, whether I am fully aware of the emotional currents that run through it, whether I will immediately be able to find the right *pitch.*'[40] In celebrating Artaud, Breton affirmed the primacy of free and original expression over politically subjugated art – whilst not decrying engaged art.[41] He said, 'Only scorn must greet any form of "commitment" which falls short of this triple and indivisible aim: transform the world, change life, remake human understanding from scratch.' In saying so, Breton was amending the hostile position that the Surrealists had taken in 'Au grand jour' in 1926, where Artaud was scorned for his refusal to link his work to Communism. Artaud had argued back in 'A la grande nuit ou le bluff surréaliste' ('In the Dead of Night or Surrealist Bluff') that the only true revolution was one capable of destabilising the current foundation of things and altering the angle of reality. There could be no interest, he had said, in seeing power transferred from the bourgeoisie to the proletariat. Revolution, he had argued, was about changing reality not the transfer of power.[42] In 1946, Breton affirms Artaud's views, though we need not see this as an oppositional view to that of Césaire: rather, I would argue, by 1946, Breton embraces both.[43]

From 1946 a group formed around Breton, drawing together those who thought Surrealism offered a route out of rigid Communism or pessimistic Existentialism. There were those, René Magritte for one, who were disappointed in the Bretonian group's lack of party allegiance.[44] Breton's *Arcanum 17* (*Arcane 17*) first published in New York, received hostile responses from Communist critics in Paris, but hospitable gestures were also forthcoming.[45] A public welcome note was extended to Breton from André Julien in the pages of *Le Libertaire*, the Parisian weekly paper of the Federation Anarchiste. In 1946 Bataille founded the periodical *Critique*, and in its

539. Artaud's friends, Jean Peaulhan and Arthur Adamov organised the benefit for Artaud, and asked Breton to preside over it. See Durozoi, p. 460.

[40] André Breton, 'A Tribute to Antonin Artaud,' in *Free Rein* (*La Clé des champs*, 1953), translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 77.

[41] It is significant that Artaud had always held out against the politicisation of art. His response to *Au grand jour* was *À la grande nuit ou le bluff surrealist* (June 1927), in which he proclaimed that the only revolution was a spiritual and metaphysical one. See Durozoi, pp. 650 – 651. In effect then, Breton affirms Artaud's position in his 1946 address, and in doing so he may appear to embrace a contradiction.

[42] Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. 1, Paris: (Gallimard, 1956), 284.

[43] ibid., 78.

[44] René Magritte and some associates in October 1946 co-signed 'Manifesto Number 1' of *Le Surréalisme en plein soleil*, which castigated Surrealism for falling back onto purely artistic motivation. See Durozoi, 461.

[45] Durozoi , 457, and 744, note 25.

second issue he published a review of *Arcane 17*, and, as its title suggests, his focus was wider: 'Surrealism and it Differences from Existentialism'.[46] Here Bataille pays close attention to the Breton's themes as elaborated in *Arcane 17* and in *Ode to Charles Fourier*, and he surveys and positively appraises the most extreme function of poetry as conceived by Surrealism. Bataille underlines the Surrealist idea of liberty as a moral imperative, writing approvingly that it 'brings everything into question.' [47] Bataille offers a distinction between Romanticism and Surrealism, saying that Romanticism 'also reached out towards the entirety of what is possible. But it never took shape to the point of being formulated as a necessity.'[48] Distinguishing between Surrealism and Existentialism, he posits that for Surrealism, liberty is not based in a rational ability to choose, but an ecstatic unleashing: an 'overpowering affirmation', he calls it.[49] He goes on to make an observation which echoes Jules Monnerot's then recently published book on Surrealism as a social movement, *La Poésie moderne et le sacré*, of 1945.[50] Monnerot depicts the Surrealist group as operating as a *bund* or a set; a group bonded by election and shared passion, akin to a religious sect, whose products surpass individualism. Bataille makes the point that the Surrealists' realisation was that the group imagination surmounted that of the individual.[51]

On his return to Paris, Breton was in no doubt that the studious denial of Surrealism he was generally met with amounted to a form of political suppression. He described how he found Stalinist intellectuals acting as gatekeepers there:

> The Stalinists, the only ones who had a strong organization during the clandestine period, had managed to fill almost all the key positions in publishing, the press, the radio, the art galleries, etc. They were determined to stay there, by using means that had been defined long before for their own benefit, but that they had recently been able to perfect on an experimental level. No matter how long I had been aware of these means, I must admit that, in their application, wherever I looked, they went far beyond what I had anticipated…. On the intellectual level, it goes without saying that it was vital to neutralize and silence those who were in a position to denounce such an operation by breaking through to their true motives.[52]

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[46] Georges Bataille, 'Surrealism and How it Differs from Existentialism,' in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*. Edited, translated and introduced by Michael Richardson, (London: Verso, 1994) 57 – 70, originally published in *Critique*, nos. 15–16 (July 1947).
[47] ibid., 57.
[48] ibid.
[49] ibid., 67.
[50] Jules Monnerot's *La poésie moderne et le sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).
[51] According to Richardson, Bataille read Monnerot's book, published in 1945, and it had a strong effect on him. See Richardson, op cit, p. 11.
[52] The Communist Party had been electorally successful, so its cultural ambitions were enforced politically. André Breton, *Entretiens*, quoted in Durozoi p. 443. Durozoi adds the note that if the reader suspects Breton of exaggerating, his remarks are paralleled by

The situation meant that opportunities for publication were limited for Breton and his followers.[53] Jean-Paul Sartre had become pre-eminent within the French intelligentsia and his influence was decisive because he headed the authoritative periodical *Les Temps Modernes.* Bataille, along with Michel Leiris, Albert Camus and practically the entire Parisian intelligentsia had worked on that review during wartime. Louis Aragon edited the newspaper *Ce Soir* until 1953, and then began to edit the weekly *Les Lettres françaises.* He also had a position on the CPF Central Committee from 1950–1960. One assault on Surrealism came from Tristan Tzara, who had converted to Communism. He gave public lectures on Surrealism in which he argued that the Surrealists were out of touch, and criticised them for observing the Occupation from 'the top of the Statue of Liberty.'[54] In the face of such hostility, Bataille's embrace of Surrealism formed a marked contrast. Michael Richardson explains Bataille's renewed vigour toward Surrealism as due, in part, to his 'evident distaste for the mood of the time, for a post-war euphoria heavily marked by guilt and spite.'[55] In that atmosphere, Surrealism offered Bataille a direction to raise the questions he wished to address.

In a short piece he penned in 1946 entitled 'On the Subject of Slumbers', Bataille appointed himself as the one who was in the prime position to reappraise Surrealism.[56] He wrote:

> Whenever the occasion has arisen, I have opposed surrealism. And I would now like to affirm it from within as the demand to which I have submitted and as the

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Maurice Blanchard's, which make mention of a 'mafia' of Stalinists. See Durozoi p. 742, note 8.

[53] The situation was not completely muted, for instance there were two special issues of *Les Quatre Vents* (no. 4 February 1946), immediately prior to Breton's return to France, and a special issue for a text by Pierre Mabille written in Mexico (*Le Merveilleux*, 1946) entirely devoted to Surrealism, as well as contributions within the rest of the run of issues. *Les Quatre Vents* printed writings by Surrealists and 'renegades', and dealt with themes that were close to Surrealism.

[54] Tristan Tzara, *Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre*, a lecture given at the Sorbonne, 17 March, 1947. Republished, Paris, Editions Nagel, 1948 and 1966. Cited in Alyce Mahon, p. 113. On April 11, 1947 Tzara, gave an address at the Sorbonne: *La dialectique de la poésie*, in which he argued that Communist commitment supplanted Surrealism and fulfilled its initial ambitions. The Surrealists disrupted the event, but were present as a tiny minority in the audience. See Durozoi , p. 463 and Polizzotti, p. 544.

[55] Richardson, op cit., 3.

[56] Georges Bataille 'On the Subject of Slumbers,' originally published *Troisième convoi*, no. 2, January 1946, republished in Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, edited, translated and introduced by Michael Richardson (London, Verso, 1994), 49 – 51.

> dissatisfaction I exemplify. But this much is clear: surrealism is defined by the possibility that I, its old enemy *from within*, can have of defining it conclusively *It is genuinely virile opposition – nothing conciliatory, nothing divine – to all accepted limits, a rigorous will to insubordination*.[57]

This was the first of several statements from Bataille on Surrealism written over the next decade.[58] While he remained at a remove from Surrealism's overtly political expressions (he does not appear as signatory to their tracts), he acted as a positive critic and interlocutor for Surrealism, and his ideas inflected several projects, as I shall describe. The review he founded, *Critique*, received contributions from Surrealists – and 'dissidents', though I believe that after Breton's *Prolegomenon* and Bataille's 'On the Subject of Slumbers', this distinction loses credence, and as he does himself, we may confidently refer to Bataille as a Surrealist.

From February 1947, Sartre began a serialised attack on Breton in *Les Temps modernes*. In *Qu'est-ce que la literature?* Sartre discriminated between the 'Nothingness' of Existentialism and what he depicted as the wanton abrogation of moral and cultural responsibility of Surrealism.[59] Sartre's recognition of Surrealism's utopianism is not an outright misrepresentation, but a partial view that marks out his own emphasis on choice, rational volition, and artistic commitment. In his view, Surrealism is ultimately nihilistic. By direct contrast, Bataille characterised Surrealism as a form of agency that ran against the grain of theories of social determinism and conventional notions of political consciousness. A clear but

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[57] ibid.

[58] From 1945 until 1951 Surrealism was at the forefront of Bataille's thought and he wrote a number of short pieces, published and unpublished, on the subject. They were mainly review articles and catalogue essays, and what appears to be the first chapter of aborted book about Surrealism. In 1994, these were published as an anthology in English translation, entitled *The Absence of Myth*, edited and translated by Michael Richardson. This collection, with Richardson's excellent introduction, clarifies Bataille's inextricable relation to Surrealism, and his avowed abiding interest in it after the war. In his written deliberations, Bataille set out to reappraise Surrealism's significance, to re-specify its main tenets and to re-evaluate its ongoing revolutionary potentials. Bataille's proximity to Surrealism after the war, Richardson speculates, was probably encouraged by his friend Michel Fardoulis-Lagrange, who was behind the journal *Troisième covoi*, for which Bataille wrote articles, including two on Surrealism (See Richardson, 3). The six years in which his commentaries on Surrealism were written were the most prolific in Bataille's life, when he wrote his major works. As Richardson argues, Surrealism was the key to most of his work, including his best known and most respected writings; especially significant for *La part maudite* and *Théorie de la Religion* – both written during this time, but not published until after his death.

[59] *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* was serialised in *Les Temps modernes* from February 1947. It was reprinted in book form: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* Paris, Gallimard: 1947. Translated by Bernard Frechtman as *What is Literature?* with an introduction by David Caute (London: Methuen, 1967).

qualified endorsement of Surrealism and repudiation of Existentialism lies in a footnote to Bataille's essay, 'On the Subject of Slumbers':

> It is unfortunate, if you like, that the intellectual aptitude of the surrealists could not have been up to the same level as their undeniable power to undermine. Today the intellectual value of existentialism is certain, but it is difficult to see what energy it would support. It is equally difficult to recognize the evidence: although surrealism may seem dead, in spite of the confectionery and poverty of the work in which it has ended (if we put to one side the question of Communism), *in terms of mankind's interrogation of itself*, there is surrealism and nothing. [60]

In 1947 the Surrealist group published two tracts which give clear expression of their abiding anti-colonial stance. In April they issued *Liberté est un nom vietnamien*, expressing their support for independence in Vietnam.[61] With this manifesto, carrying twenty-five signatures, the Surrealists demonstrated a firm political position, and accused the Communists of inactivity and duplicity with regard to the Vietnamese situation. Their accusation was that the same old tactics were being employed: the use of imperialist prestige to invigorate and unify the French nation.[62] The tract was a pointed rejoinder to various pieces of criticism levelled at the Surrealists, from Sartre, Henri Lefebvre, Tristan Tzara and others about their lack of political engagement, and a counter accusation: that the situation of colonial oppression was being concealed by political interests on all sides.[63] The tract began with an indictment of the suppression of news coverage and intellectual discussion about the Vietnam war: 'The press in so-called "free" France, subject to censorship now more than ever, remains silent about the secret war in Asia.'[64] As Durozoi comments, this tract is consistent with Surrealism's long held position against colonialism:

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[60] Georges Bataille, 'On the Subject of Slumbers,' *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, edited, translated and introduced by Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), 51.

[61] *Liberté est un nom vietnamien*, April 1947 and *Rupture Inaugurale*, June 1947. See Durozoi, 463. Signatories were: Adolphe Acker, Maurice Bonnefoy, Joey Bousquet, Francis Bouvet, André Breton, Jean Brun, Jacques Brunius Eliane Catoni, Marcelle Ferry, Guy Gillequin, Jacques Halpern, Arthur Harfaux, Maurice Henry, Marcel Jean, Pierre Mabille, Genevieve Mayoux, Francis Meunier, Maurice Nadeau, Henri Parisot, Henri Pastoureau, Benjamin Peret, Yaroslav Serpan, Yves Tanguy.

[62] The French navy bombarded Haiphong in November 1946, slaughtering hundreds and possibly thousands of civilians. The incident marked the beginning of a seven-year war in which France vainly struggled to retain colonial possession of Indochina, being replaced in the field by the United States. See LaCoss, op cit.

[63] 'Liberté est un nom vietnamien,' *Le Libertaire* (22 May 1947), 3, quoted in LaCoss, 'Attacks of the Fantastic,' Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, eds, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 287.

[64] ibid.

> The text reasserted the anticolonialist stance that had been that of the group since the Rif War in Morocco and constituted a reaction against the events signalling the beginning of a war that would not end until 1973. It simultaneously denounced the silence of the press, officials, and the 'elect of the working class' and reiterated that the main demand of the surrealists had been and remained the liberation of mankind and that they had not given up on calling for the radical transformation of society.[65]

In 1947 the Communist ministers who still held positions in government (they were to be ousted in May) voted for military funds for French presence in Indochina, thus actually taking a stance against the Vietnamese Communist leader, Ho Chi Minh. Only *after* it left government did the Communist Party change its line and denounce the war as American imperialism.[66] A month later (in June), another Surrealist tract, *Rupture inaugurale* was published, more general in its ambit than the April statement. It defined Surrealism's prejudicial attitude to partisan policies, reinscribing the line they had taken in the pamphlet *Du temps où les surréalistes avaient raison* of 1935. *Rupture inaugurale* marked the beginning of the long period until 1956, during which the group would cease to have contact with any political organization.[67] The tract was, says Durozoi, a response to 'all those who would reproach the movement for its "idealism" or its rejection of "commitment"'.[68] In particular, it took up the criticisms levelled by Sartre. *Rupture Inaugurale* held up the Marquis de Sade, Freud and Fourier as key figures who stood for liberty, and these figures were given prominence in the forthcoming 1947 exhibition.

Le Surréalisme en 1947

Le Surréalisme en 1947 was exhibited in Paris and then in Prague. Its straightforward title was a defiant assertion of Surrealism as an ongoing concern at a time when it received obituary notices from all sides. The exhibition was held at the Galerie

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[65] Durozoi, 463.
[66] Durozoi, 745, note 34.
[67] During the Forties and into the 1950s, apart from maintaining its anti-colonial stance Breton was a vociferous critic of the excesses of Communism, and later of McCarthyism. He took a decisive stance over the execution of Czech historian Zavis Kalandra. Breton published an 'Open Letter to Paul Éluard' in *Combat,* along with a petition to the Czech president demanding a stay of execution. Breton wrote to Éluard, calling on their shared memories of their first visit to Prague in 1935, when Kalandra showed himself to be a particularly open, hospitable man, with sound values: 'It was he [Breton wrote to Éluard] who, in the Communist press, gave the most penetrating analyses of our books, the most worthwhile accounts of our lectures. He would not rest until he had put all the major venues where intellectuals and workers met at our disposition'. Éluard (infamously) responded, 'I have too much to do with the innocents who proclaim their innocence to deal with the guilty who proclaim their guilt.' Kalandra was executed. See Durozoi, p. 465.
[68] Durozoi, 463.

Maeght in Paris from July 7 and its opening coincided with the launch of the Parisian re-issue of Breton's book *Arcanum 17*. Breton drew the curatorial premise for the exhibition directly from his *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not*, and invited participants to respond to the provocation he had posed in the *Prolegomena*: 'What should one think of the postulate that "there is no society without a social myth"? in what measure can we choose or adopt, and *impose*, a myth fostering the society that we judge to be desirable?'[69]

The physical staging of *Le Surrealisme en 1947* was highly dramatised and reprised the theatricality of earlier pioneering Surrealist shows. It was conceived largely by Duchamp and produced largely by the Austrian-born designer Frederick Kiesler.[70] Between them they created an environment that incorporated myth, tales of romance, Oedipal fantasy, taboo and transgression. Duchamp designed the exhibition from New York, and Keisler spent four months in Paris constructing it – incorporating some of his own design touches. Conceptually, the exhibition synthesised and reprised Surrealism's developments over the wartime period: the curatorial premise and catalogue essays recall the remarkable ideas that had percolated through *Minotaure* before its production was halted by Europe's descent into war.

In creating the 1947 exhibition, Breton, Duchamp and Kiesler brought together aspects of two prior exhibitions of 1942, namely *First Papers of Surrealism*, staged by Breton and Duchamp in a ballroom at the Whitelaw Reid mansion in Madison Avenue, and *127 Objects, Drawings, Photographs, Paintings, Sculptures and Collages from 1910 to 1942*, the inaugural exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, on Fifty-seventh Street, designed by Kiesler.[71] In different ways, each of these earlier exhibition designs had staged a poetics of exile, displacement, historical crisis and psychological transformation. Each had given prominence to the relations between viewers, objects and the gallery space itself, and

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[69] Breton, op cit., 287 – 8.

[70] Frederick John Kiesler (1890 –1965) began his career as a theater and art-exhibition designer in the 1920s in Vienna and Berlin, and moved to New York City in 1926. His design principles are set down in two manifestos, the essay 'Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture' (*Partisan Review*, July 1949) and *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (New York: Brentano, 1930), which consider relationships between space, people, objects and concepts. See Stephen Phillips, 'Introjection and Projection: Frederick Kiesler and His Dream Machine,' in *Surrealism and Architecture*, edited by Thomas Mical (London: Routledge, 2004).

[71] T. J. Demos, 'Duchamp's Labyrinth: First Papers of Surrealism', 1942', *October* 97, (Summer 2001), 91 – 119.

in each case the supposed 'neutrality' of the gallery had been contradicted. In *Le Surrealisme en 1947,* Breton as curator along with the designers, took directorial, almost dramaturgical roles, by imposing a visual principle upon pre-existing works as well as creating opportunities and situations for new ones. Together Breton, Duchamp and Kiesler created a spatial mode of formal exploration which was contrived to heighten an audience member's awareness of the illusory situation in which they found themselves. This type of audience experience goes beyond the ocular and into a totalizing atmosphere: a theatrical address to all senses. The exhibition forms a collage relation between its component parts, setting works in dynamic, and in some instances jarring, juxtapositions. The Surrealist alteration of the normal coordinates of aesthetic experience resounded with the political situation.[72]

The exhibition presented a labyrinthine space for the viewer's negotiation, interaction and immersion. It was configured rather like a birth canal and indeed, the whole concept was feminised – conceived of as an initiatory space: a series of rites of passage. Mahon describes the arrangement of the exhibition thus:

> [A] path was mapped out for the public which began by presenting Surrealism's artistic and literary heritage, then pre-war Surrealism, followed by a central egg-shaped room devoted to superstition, and finishing with the new and mythological in the form of a room with altars and totemic sculptures.
>
> The spectator's experience is best understood as a series of 'stages', in keeping with the concept of initiation. It first involved an ascension into true, contemporary Surrealism, via twenty-one red stairs, each decorated to look like the spine of a book, representing the twenty-one major arcanes of the Tarot and the 'forefathers' of Surrealism…. Sade was duly represented…his *Justine* being chosen to represent 'The Chariot' card.[73]

Among the other arcana, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* represented 'The Devil', and Isadore Ducasse's *Complete Works* represented 'The World'.[74] On entering the upper gallery

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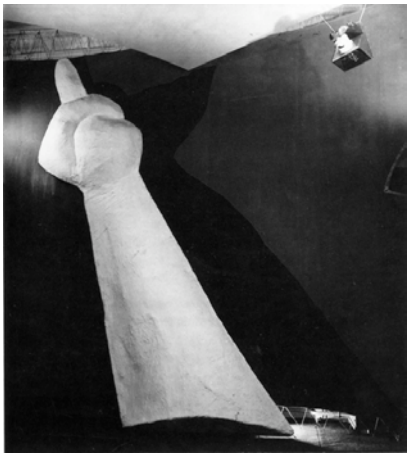
[72] In T.J. Demos's view, Duchamp's approach in 1942 was *antithetical* to Breton's direction at the time. Demos argues that Kiesler's model provides a uterine, *compensatory* home in reaction to the Surrealists' wartime exile, and reflected Surrealism's retreat into myth. This interpretation reflects what I see as a common *mis*interpretation of Breton's *Prolegomena* and I do not believe a firm opposition between the two exhibitions can be upheld. As aspects of both were reprised in the 1947 exhibition, designed and constructed by Duchamp and Kiesler in collaboration, I think we should be alert to sympathies as well as differences between the 1942 shows. Breton was to comment on the way Duchamp's string prefigured the postwar social malaise, see 'Before the Curtain', *Free Rein* (*La Clé des champs,* 1953), translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 82.

[73] Mahon, 118.

[74] ibid.

space, 'the spectator had effectively taken the first step in initiation', says Mahon.[75] The first chamber displayed paintings by Tanguy, Matta and Miró; Calder mobiles were suspended from the ceiling, and Arp's white-grey aluminium sculpture *Fruit of the Moon*, of 1936, sat on the floor.[76] The second chamber, the 'Room of Superstitions' was grotto-like with a mossy, damp atmosphere. The walls were draped in black curtains, through the openings of which paintings could be seen. From the lowered ceiling hung grey organic cloud forms designed by Tanguy.[77]



Figs. 44 & 45. Etienne Martin, *Totem of Religions*, executed for the 'Room of Superstitions', *Surrealism in 1947* exhibition, Gallerie Maeght, 7 July–30 September, 1947. The model wears the latex breast from the catalogue cover, designed by Duchamp and Donati.
Frederick Kiesler, *Anti-Taboo Figure*, executed for the 'Room of Superstitions', *Surrealism in 1947* exhibition, Gallerie Maeght, 7 July–30 September 1947. Photo, Willy Maywald.

A blue-green light filled the room, which, according to Sarane Alexandrian, 'had a disturbed and disturbing atmosphere'.[78] One of the paintings was Max Ernst's *Euclid*, 1945, and Ernst's *The Black Lake* was painted on the floor, surrounded by shapes intended to represent 'the atavistic fears of mankind'.[79] David Hare's life sized sculpture *Anguish-Man* stood in this room, along with Kiesler's own looming plaster sculpture, *Anti-Taboo Figure*, and Etienne Martin and Françoise Stahly's sculpture, *Totem of Religions.* The objects in the 'Room of Superstitions' exhibit a 'primitivism' taken to soaring sculptural heights, one that makes no particular formal references to, or appropriations from, indigenous sources but gestures toward a mythic realm in general. Situated near the *Anti Taboo Figure* was a peephole installation, *The Green Ray*, devised by Duchamp using sheets of blue and green gelatine, which emitted a flash of green. Duchamp took his title from the Jules Verne

[75] ibid.
[76] ibid., 118 – 119.
[77] LaCoss, op cit., 278, f.n. 32.
[78] Sarane Alexandrian, *Surrealist Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), quoted in Mahon, 119.
[79] Sarane Alexandrian, quoted in Mahon, ibid.

story of 1882, ‘in which a young woman decides between two lovers, a scientist and an artist, on the basis of her quest for the green light that appears on the horizon just before sunset. When the scientist informs her that it is just an optical illusion, she chooses the artists as her lover.’[80]

Mahon reports that the critic Pierre Guerre described the room in magical terms in a review for *Cahiers du Sud*, emphasising the lighting and sense of adventure the space offered the viewer.

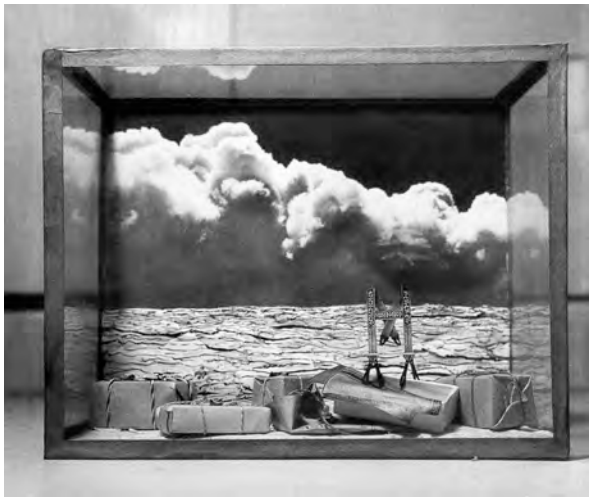


Fig. 46. Marcel Duchamp, *The Green Ray*, Assemblage/photo collage, constructed by Frederick Keisler to Duchamp’s specifications for the ‘Room of Superstitions’, in the exhibition *Surrealism in 1947*. Photo Denise Bellon.

Fig. 47. ‘The ‘Room of Superstitions’, *Surrealism in 1947* exhibition: David Hare, *Anguished Man*; Roberto Matta, *The Whist*; Joan Miró, *The Rigid Cascade of Superstitions*; Yves Tanguy, *The Ladder Announcing Death.* All 1947. Photos, Willy Maywald.

The next room was the ‘Rain Room’, divided in two by a ‘curtain of rain’, which ‘fell onto a floor of duckboards’ and conceived as a stage of purification, decorated

[80] Mahon, 123.

with artificial grass and a billiard table (provided for use).[81] Having passed through, the visitor could then make their way past Jacques Hérold's sculpture, *The Great Transparent One*, (a reference to Breton's text of that title), and along to the 'Labyrinth of Initiations', a space divided into twelve octagonal spaces each housing an altar made by a different artist. For each of these, Breton had specified a mythic reference for the artist to take as their point of departure. Wilfredo Lam's altar was entitled *The Hair of Falmer*. Beneath a scalp of abundant hair, a curious four-breasted form holds knives in each of its two hands, The entire effect is rather like a weird coat of arms. Set before it were food offerings; behind it, an inverted crucifix.[82]

Accompanying the exhibition was a thick catalogue designed by Duchamp and Enrico Donati [83]. It bore on its cover a latex breast mounted on black velvet, with the caption '*Please touch*', in contravention of the usual museum injunction.[84] Bataille contributed a short text to the catalogue, entitled 'The Absence of Myth'.[85] He also wrote a review of the exhibition. His fragmentary essay 'The Absence of Myth' can be read at a general level as a response to the Second World War, and more specifically as an attentive reply to Breton's *Prolégomènes à une troisième manifeste,* from which had come the key curatorial question on the possibility of myth. Bataille writes,

> If by abolishing the mythic universe we have lost the universe, the action of a revealing loss is itself connected with the death of myth. And today, because a myth is dead or dying, we see through it more easily than if it were alive: it is the need that perfects the transparency, the suffering which makes the suffering become joyful. 'Night is also a sun', and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the only *true* myth.[86]

Bataille's message here about renouncing and seizing upon myth as the one function resonates with the exclamation of one of Marcel Proust's characters, the painter Elstir: 'one can only create what one has renounced'.[87]

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[81] ibid., 124.
[82] ibid., 126.
[83] Enrico Donati (1909 – 2008) American Surrealist painter and sculptor, Italian by birth, who moved to the USA in 1934, and met Breton and Duchamp there.
[84] Alyce Mahon, 'Staging Desire' in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, edited by Jennifer Mundy with consultant editor, Dawn Ades and special advisor Vincent Gille (London: Tate Modern, 2001), 282.
[85] Georges Bataille, 'The Absence of Myth', republished in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, edited, translated and introduced by Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), 48.
[86] ibid., 48
[87] Marcel Proust, cited in Hanna Segal, *Dream, Phantasy and Art* (London: Tavistock, 1991), 89.

Amongst very mixed exhibition reviews, Sartre came forth with a virulent salvo on the ideas espoused in the catalogue to *Le Surrealisme en 1947*. Sartre's critique fails to accommodate the idea that the Surrealists were not simply trying to reinstate the mythic in a nostalgic or retrograde manner. His assault was a factor in provoking Bataille's departure from *Les Temps modernes.*[88] Chénieux-Gendron discusses Sartre's attack. 'According to [Sartre]', she writes, 'the Surrealists preach, particularly through automatic writing, the dissolution of the individual consciousness and also, by the symbolic annulment of "object-witnesses," the dissolution of the objectivity of the world'.[89] Sartre is partly correct: the Surrealists actively promote a quality of subjectivity that is destabilising, but he does not acknowledge that it is the oscillation between objectivity and its dissolution which propels Surrealism; nor does he recognise the possibility and hope within this provisional, contingent position – something that Bataille seized upon. Chénieux-Gendron herself counters Sartre's negative estimation, arguing that Surrealism sought to revitalise political action through its practical activities, ethical or artistic, and to make *another* sense emerge, 'discovered by some people in and through pleasure and by others in and through the seizure of projective desire (that is "objective chance"). Pleasure on one side, in which the body rediscovers its sense and sensibility rediscovers its comforts; on the other side, a new ethic of desire, in which time rediscovers an undeniable orientation.'[90] Chénieux-Gendron reads *Les Grands Transparents* as primarily a vote for intellect and not, as some commentators of the day – including Sartre – seemed to receive it: as a regression into mysticism.[91] While I agree with Chénieux-Gendron that *Les Grands Transparents* was a bid for radical intellectual speculation, I think it is also worth underscoring Bataille's reading of Breton's direction as a means of awakening the faculties of attuned experience – themes he would explore in his own work, *L'Experience interior* (*Inner*

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[88] Aside from his critique of Surrealism, Sartre declared that Bataille's concerns with myth and sacrifice were outmoded relics of prewar thinking, and he thought that they should be replaced with a more constructive mode of engagement. A rich discussion of the terms of such debates between Sartre and Bataille, and the Nietzschian tendencies running through Bataille, Leiris, Blanchot and Foucault is provided in Allan Stoekl, *Politics, Writing, Mutilation* (Minneapolis: University of Minesota Press, 1985).

[89] Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism,* translated by Vivian Folkenflik (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 6. See also Michel Beaujour, 'Sartre and Surrealism,' *Yale French Studies*, No. 30, J.P. Sartre (1963), 86 – 95.

[90] ibid., 6.

[91] Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, 'The Poetics of *Bricolage*: André Breton's Theoretical Fables,' in King, Russell and McGuirk, Bernard (eds.), *Reconceptions Reading Modern French Poetry*, University of Nottingham (no date), at pp. 75 – 76.

Experience).[92]

In 'On the Subject of Slumbers', Bataille argued that automatic writing had opened up two paths:

> [O]ne led to the establishment of works, and soon sacrificed any principle to the necessities of works, so accentuating the attraction value of paintings and books. This was the path the surrealists took. The other was an arduous path to the heart of being: here only the slightest attention could be paid to the attraction of works; not that this was trivial, but what was then laid bare – the beauty and ugliness of which no longer mattered – was the essence of things, and it was here that the inquiry into existence in the night began. Everything was suspended in a rigorous solitude. The facilities which connect works to the 'possible' or aesthetic pleasure, had vanished… Today the books are in order on the shelves and the paintings adorn the walls. This is why I can say that the *great surrealism* is beginning.[93]

Bataille's last lines echo the misgivings Breton expressed in his *Prolegomena* about much Surrealist expression having come to conform to a derivative style. In *Surrealism in 1947*, the paintings *were* on the walls and the books on the shelves (or rather, they had become steps!) but beyond the works, the theatricality of the exhibition space produced a Surrealist *topos*, a zone of experience and enquiry that was not purely aesthetic, nor necessarily pleasurable. This modality, auratic or ambient, was not an attempt to re-enchant art, or reassert the autonomy of the object, but as Bataille's comments indicate, to lay bare the essence of things.

Breton's catalogue essay for the 1947 exhibition, 'Devant le rideau' ('Before the Curtain') offers a critical reflection on the displays of 1938 and 1942, and a rationale for the method of staging the 1947 exhibition. With some bitter satisfaction he refers to the hostile reception that had met the earlier exhibitions of 1938 and of 1942, and says that though the full import of these was not clear at the time, they had since proven to have been prescient. 'Devant le rideau' argues that *Surrealism in 1947* was more developed and self-conscious in its approach than in the three earlier exhibitions of 1938 and 1942 and drew lessons from them. Breton describes the exhibition space as a 'zone of agitation that lies on the borders of the poetic and the real.'[94] In the 1947 conception, Breton argues that the exhibition space was explicitly conceived of as a spatial analogue to the type of dissenting utopianism that had been

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[92] Georges Bataille, *L'Expérience intérieure* (Editions Gallimard: 1954) translated as *Inner Experience*, and with an introduction by Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

[93] Georges Bataille, 'On the Subject of Slumbers,' op cit., 51.

[94] André Breton, 'Devant le rideau' ('Before the Curtain'), *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, exhibition catalogue, pp. 13 – 19, translated as 'Before the Curtain,' in *Free Reign*, *La Clé des champs*, 1953), translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 80 – 87.

his earlier express concern (since 1936, or even before). He writes of dispensing with the pretension of ruling over symbols dispassionately and, instead, of lending oneself to the '*great disorientation,* this time not within a limited space – as in a game of blind man's bluff – but in all of space and all of time, without keeping the least point of reference. The attitude we advocate in this regard is not essentially different from the one we are known to have assumed some time ago when facing the blank page.'[95] Breton compares the often-haphazard conjunctions and flux afoot in the exhibitions with the suspension of centred subjectivity and judgement that occurs in automatic writing. With respect to the exhibition space, Breton's references to blind man's bluff and navigation without coordinates is congruent with Bataille's thinking, and refers to spatial experimentation that I wish now to elaborate through a range of other references.

In the *Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not,* Breton had referred to Roger Caillois' extraordinary essay, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,' published seven years earlier in *Minotaure* (1935).[96] Caillois' text can be read as an account of the Surrealist Uncanny taken to its furthest extreme: to a point at which the object world not only returns the gaze of the beholder, but at which space becomes engulfing. The subject loses all sense of correlates and the figure-ground relation becomes a fusion. Caillois' speculations are echoed in Lacan's 'Le Stade du miroir' (The Mirror Stage) first presented a year after the publication of 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', in 1936.[97] In their considerations of the constitution of the desiring subject in space, Bataille, Caillois and Lacan each present a counter to the Cartesian subject through their interrogations of the axes of perception,

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[95] ibid., 82.

[96] Roger Caillois, 'Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire', *Minotaure,* 7 (1935) 5 – 10, republished in translation as 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia' in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, edited and translated by Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 89 – 103.

[97] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of The Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,' *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1 – 8. A great deal of confusion has reigned over the original date of publication of 'The Mirror Stage…' The version repirinted in *Écrits* was first presented and published in 1949, however Lacan first presented his theory at the Marienbad Congress in 1936. His talk was cut short by Ernest Jones and in protest Lacan did not submit his text for publication. The belated publication makes it difficult to ascertain the uptake of the theory. The historical view has been confused by the fact that it was thought that a previous published, or at least public, version of a text existed, but this was not the case. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan clarifies the matter, explaining that Lacan had referred people to his text on the family, published in the 1938 *Encyclopédie française*. See Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, *Jacques Lacan and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986.; J. Lacan, "Le Complexe, Facteur Concret de la Psychologie Familiale," in L'Encyclopédie française, ed. A. de Monzie, vol. 8 (Paris, 1938), 8. For a discussion of Lacan's text and its provenance, see Carolyn Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

representation and desire. In my view, the spatial mimetic conceptions of subjectivity rehearsed in the 1930s present advances on the incipient model of subjectivity in Breton's conception of automatism. In 1947, Breton refers to the suspended subjectivity of automatism in connection with the exhibition observer's passage through an orchestrated, but not completely premeditated, Surrealist display space.

In Henri Lefebvre's book, *The Production of Space* of 1974, he wrote, 'The leading Surrealists sought to decode inner space and illuminate the nature of the transition from this subjective space to the material realm of the body and the outside world, and thence to social life'.[98] This statement seems to read positively, but Lefebvre's account of Surrealism was not favourable on the whole. He thought the Surrealists failed in this quest and in their political mission. I think that Lefebvre himself fails to recognise that the 'transition' between inner and outer space is not just one directional in Surrealism, but operates as an interchange. Lefebvre seems to credit himself with the idea that real space can envelop psychic space, yet I think the Surrealists sought to impose a pressure, if you will, of the social, cultural and political onto, or into, subjective space, by their decoding of social and political in their curatorial and artistic endeavours.[99] The Situationalists reformulated the Surrealist conception of the subject-in-space, but they, in turn, did not adequately theorise or perhaps fully acknowledge the Surrealists' own spatial experiments. By contrast however, in a lecture of 1967, Michel Foucault encapsulated a simultaneously mythic and real space of contestation and one that seems perfectly continuous with the Surrealist project. A transcript, or rather annotation of the lecture 'Other Spaces' was not published until 1984 and it is unclear to what extent Foucault's ruminations directly reference Surrealism.[100] Foucault's text does serve to crystallise the ideas that Breton set forth in 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism' (where he described the 'castle problem' – the question of *where* or perhaps *how* to

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[98] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 18. (Originally published 1974).

[99] Ideas to do with subjecthood and space percolate through French writing in the period that followed the 1947 exhibition. Guy Debord and the Situationalist International, formed in 1957 took up the spatial and spectacular aspects of 1940s Surrealism. Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* was published in 1958. With hindsight we can discern the influence of Surrealism on such writers, but their work did not necessarily fully recognise or incorporate the level of the Surrealists' own theorisation of their spatial explorations.

[100] Michel Foucault, 'Des Espace Autres' was a lecture given by Foucault in March 1967, a text of which was later published by the French journal *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* in October, 1984. The manuscript was not finalized by Foucault, but released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before his death. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec. <Michel%20Foucault,%20Of%20Other%20Spaces%20(1967),%20Heterotopias.html>

recognise a real space of revelation and contestation), and in 'Before the Curtain' where he takes up the same problematic, presenting a material solution with his particular conception and use of the gallery as a space of deliberation and contestation.

In 'Other Spaces', Foucault coined the phrase 'heterotopic space', which is congruent with the spatial aspect of Surrealist thought of the late Thirties and 1940s.[101] By virtue of his logic, his choice of language, and the fact that he acknowledges his indebtedness elsewhere, Foucault's talk seems to have been strongly influenced by Bataille, though as it is an unauthorised annotation of a lecture, there are no references to qualify this conjecture. Foucault's central idea resonates with Breton's designation of a 'zone of agitation that lies on the borders of the poetic and the real', and with Artaud's notion of theatre as non-illusory. The spaces Foucault describes are heterogeneous zones: real places that stand apart from the social order:

> There are […] probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.[102]

Foucault distinguishes heterotopias from utopias, saying utopias are, 'sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. By contrast, heterotopias exist in real space. Foucault says: 'I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror.'[103] A link between Foucault's ideas and those of Lacan's is evident here when Foucault speaks of the mirror as a utopia – a space where the subject reconstitutes itself, insofar as we see ourselves where we are absent – *and* as a heterotopia:

> …in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy […] I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this

[101] Foucault, op cit.
[102] ibid.
[103] ibid.

> respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[104]

Foucault's formulation of the simultaneous mythic and real contestation of space resounds strongly with the Surrealists' installation practice, which created not abstracted or removed environments, but arenas in which audiences were activated and attuned to real conditions.

> We might imagine a sort of systematic description – I do not say a science because the term is too galvanized now – that would, in a given society, take as its object the study, analysis, description, and 'reading' (as some like to say nowadays) of these different spaces, of these other places. As a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live, this description could be called heterotopology.[105]

Unlike traditional art gallery experiences constructed with the aim of formal harmony, the Surrealist exhibitions sought not to present society in a perfected form, but offered provisional and often aesthetically unstable and awkward situations which distil the conditions of a convoluted and unresolved subjectivity. The *Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme* of 1959 presented a more sombre and troubling aspect than *Surrealism in 1947*, though it too had its utopian, feminised and even uterine atmospherics. It presented a more pointedly 'heterotopic' *mis en scene* that referred to the pressing political issues of its day, particularly the Algerian situation, and here I wish to suggest that it gestures toward a kind of post-colonial position.

***Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme* (EROS) 1959–1960 & *Manifeste 121*, 1960**

The Algerian War of independence sank France into a national crisis that lasted for eight years. It began with the formation of the National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale, FLN) in 1954, which united a number of smaller independence organisations.[106] The action was of a highly complex nature, amounting to terrorism

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[104] ibid.
[105] ibid.
[106] *Encyclopedia of African History* (London: Routledge, 2004) s.v. 'Algeria: War of Independence, 1954 – 1962,' http://www.credoreference.com/entry/routafricanhistory/algeria_war_of_independence_1954_1962; William B. Cohen, 'The Algerian War and the Revision of France's Overseas

as much as militarism. Two rival Algerian nationalist movements (the Front de Libération Nationale, and the Mouvement national algérien, or MNA) fought each other, as well as opposing France, using guerrilla tactics. Algerian women were instrumental in the struggles, in a guerrilla capacity or assisting the guerrillas. Amongst the numerous reported atrocities were reports of women being tortured and raped. The guerrilla action spilled into neighbouring African countries and into Europe. Algerian units based in neighbouring Arab countries ran weapons and supplies across the borders. The FLN used a London-based Moroccan diplomat to coordinate sending arms and funds over the Western Algerian border and the Tunisian border. The FLN and MNA engaged in acts of terror on French soil in the so-called 'café wars.'[107] By the early 1960s, French intellectuals and students were acting as 'suitcase carriers,' transporting funds via Switzerland to the FLN.[108] Some of the urban women who participated in the nationalist struggle were young, middle-class graduates of French *lycées*.[109]

The atrocious and complex aspects of the Algerian war are yet to be thoroughly assimilated as a historical chapter, as new personal testaments and fresh revelations of abuses continue to surface even today. At the time, general French opinion on the war was divided, as it was too amongst intellectuals. It was perceived as a dirty war, as torture was used on all sides. In assuming their responses to the Algerian War, confronted by the ethical and theoretical dilemmas of contemplating violence as a political weapon, the Surrealists and the Existentialists found much common ground in the 1950s, through accommodations on both sides.[110] Jonathan Eburne describes how, given the nature of the violence being used, those on the left in the 1950s had to negotiate their moral stance over whether to support the colonial insurrection in the name of independence.[111] The Surrealists took the line that France was enacting state-

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Mission,' *French Colonial History* 4 (2003), 227 – 239.

[107] Francis Fytton, 'War in the 18th Arrondissement,' Paris Letter, *The London Magazine* 1, no. 9 (December 1961). <http://www.poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record.asp?id=10378>

[108] Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 72.

[109] Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994).

[110] Other contemporary issues brought the Existentialists and Surrealists into alignment, along with other leftists, mainly affairs in the Soviet bloc. In 1947 Merleau-Ponty published his work on Stalinist state terror, sharpening the debate around Soviet Communism in a way that validated the Surrealists' firmly held view. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem*, trans. John O'Neill (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

[111] Jonathan P. Eburne , 'Antihumanism and Terror: Surrealism, Theory, and the Postwar Left,' *Yale French Studies*, no. 109, *Surrealism and Its Others* (2006), 39 – 51.

endorsed terror on a subjugated population and, in view of the power differential, it was appropriate to support the insurgents. Eburne makes these observations:

> Surrealist thinking of the 1950s […] shared with existentialism and [the] anticolonialism [of figures like Aimé Césaire and Franz Fanon] a theoretical project that strove to assimilate the spiritual or intellectual liberation promised by avant-gardism with the practical liberation of insurrectional politics. Yet it sought to do this in ways that avoided the formalism, and thus the systematic violence, of 'totalitarian' ideological platforms, whether communist, fascist, or even humanist. In particular, the surrealist movement's post-World War II debates with existentialism, as well as with its own theoretical and 'philosophical' tendencies, were especially sensitive to the distinctions – or the lack thereof – between leftist revolutionary violence and murderous crime. Surrealism deliberately and concertedly abandoned the traditional cultural position of avant-gardism, instead positioning itself within the broader, antihumanist framework of leftist theory.[112]

Eburne makes the point that the Surrealists did not set out to define or construct an ideological platform on the Algerian war. Rather, they funnelled the issue through ethical debate and sought to shift the dominant definition of the violence away from that of a war waged at a national level, by depicting it instead as an instance of state-endorsed terror inflicted upon an indigenous population. Notwithstanding the fact that they ran a deliberately non-ideological line, their stance was overtly political: over years tracts, several articles and poems were printed; speeches were made; links were established between the Surrealists and other intellectuals. Latterly, they staged the EROS exhibition.

In December 1954 the Surrealists joined a committee set up to oppose the Algerian war, the Comité de Lutte Contre Répression Coloniale, founded by the anarchist George Fontenis. In 1956 they produced a manifesto, *Au Tour des livrées sanglantes* which, amongst other issues, demanded an immediate cease-fire in Algeria. Durozoi notes that at this time the group was waging war on what they saw as complementary fronts: antifascism, anti-colonialism and de-Stalinization.[113] In 1956, in the first edition of the Surrealist review *Le Surréalisme, même*, Breton's editorial essay gave honour and support to those battling colonial oppression, and other contributors also wrote about colonialism. The Surrealists also contributed articles to other publications, denouncing the war in numerous statements.[114]

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[112] Eburne, 43.

[113] *Au Tour des livrées sanglantes*, 1956, in Jean-Louis Bédouin, *Vingt ans de surréalise 1939–1959* (Paris: Denoël, 1961). For the Surrealists the burning issues of the day were Kruschev's official condemnation of Stalin's crimes, events in Poland, the uprising in Hungary, the war in North Africa and the general swing to the right under de Gaul's leadership, which the Surrealists saw as fascistic.

[114] Their contributions included some to the journal *Le Quatorze Juillet.* See Mahon p. 144.

Simone de Beauvoir campaigned against the use of torture in the war seizing upon a particular case reported in the press: that of Djamila Boupacha, a militant woman who had been raped with a broken bottle by French army officers in order to elicit a confession from her. Beauvoir co-wrote a book about Boupacha, which gave the war a human face and emphasised that rape is a method of combat.[115] The Surrealists and Picasso took up the issue by creating works of art that referenced Boupacha, and thus Beauvoir and the Surrealists identified the manifest and latent Orientalism in the French rhetoric around the war. Matta executed a painting entitled *La Question Djamila* (of 1957), and in a group work of 1960, *La Grand Tableau antifasciste collectif* (1960), Jean-Jacques Lebel pasted in a fragment about Djamila Boupacha.[116]

In April 1956, Breton delivered a speech, 'For the Defence of Liberty', to an assembly of leftist intellectuals, with a view to mobilising opposition to the French government's military suppression of colonial uprisings in Algeria, and against de Gaulle's incarceration of left-wing French reporters who criticized France's actions.[117] In his speech Breton referred to Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* of 1955, which rails against colonialism as a violent disruption of indigenous culture.[118] He calls Césaire's essay a 'spiritual weapon par excellence.'[119]

On May 13, 1958 the Algerian crisis peaked with a rebellion of the *pieds noirs* (Algerians of European extraction) in Algiers. The rebellion was supported by the army and posed a threat of civil war. The heightened tension signalled the Fourth Republic's loss of traction in Algeria and boosted the resurgence of the French political right, and finally it led to General Charles de Gaulle's return to power in France in June 1958.[120]

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[115] Mahon, 147. Simone De Beauvoir and Giséle Halimi, *Djamila Boupacha* (Paris, Gallimard, 1962) *Djamila Boupacha: The Story of the Torture of a Young Algerian Girl Which Shocked Liberal French Opinion* (translated from the French by Peter Green. New York: Macmillan, 1962).

[116] ibid., 148.

[117] André Breton, Discours du meeting 'Pour la Défense de la Liberté,' Salle de Horticulteurs. Le 20 avril 1956, *Le Surréalisme, même* (3rd trimester, 19560. Cited in Eburne, p. 40.

[118] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (*Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris: Editions Presence Africaine, 1955), translated by Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press: New York and London, 1972).

[119] Breton, op cit., see Eburne p. 40.

[120] *The Reader's Companion to Military History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996);'Algerian War,' <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/rcmh/algerian_war>.

The Surrealists staged the *EROS* exhibition in Paris, held from mid-December 1959 until February 1960 at the Daniel Cordier Gallery on rue Miromesnil. It was conceived by Breton and Duchamp, designed by Duchamp, and co-ordinated by graphic artist Pierre Faucheux. Staged two years after the publication of Bataille's *L'Erotisme*, within the curatorial direction there is a productive convergence of Breton's interests with Bataille's ideas. Breton opened his introductory catalogue essay with a commendation of Bataille's emphasis on eroticism as calling into question the essence of man's being.[121] The Sadean and Bataillan theme was posed as a counter to the public discourse around the Algerian war.

The exhibition emphasised the relationship between Eros and Thanatos, a salacious theme calculated as a provocation in an era when erotic literature and political commentary alike were subject to harsh government censorship – whilst the same conservative government authorised the use of torture and rape in combat. On one hand, the exhibition threw into relief the darkest, most obscene themes of the war: the French army's brutality against Algerian civilians and state-sponsored physical, psychological and sexual torture. On the other hand, the exhibition propounded a sexual ethos without restraint, and thus it was geared to win support for a politicised campaign and also to pose a more general affront to the ascendant right wing conservative values of the day – which had galvanised around the French war effort. More generally still, EROS exemplified liberty in the broadest sense.

Fig. 48. Mimi Parent, *Masculine-Feminine*, 1959, assemblage object made from clothing and the artist's own hair.

In the exhibition Sade was used as 'an emblem of the affirmative force of the libido and as a tragic symbol of the power of the censors and of bourgeois defenders of the

[121] André Breton, 'Avis aux Exposants/Aux Visiteurs,' *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* [catalogue] (Paris, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959), p. 7. See Durozoi p. 591.

state and the family in particular'.[122] To instigate the exhibition, Breton sent out a prospectus to artists, in which he delineated the broad curatorial concept and invited their responses, thus the undertaking was a devised and open-ended production rather than a fully scripted one.

In response to Breton's invitation, many of the individual artworks, including *Masculine-Feminine*, the work of Mimi Parent pictured above, subverted notions of rational, authoritative patriarchal society. At face value, like Parent's, many of the works did not have a political pitch, but in the orchestrated context of the exhibition, they addressed the social constrictions that the Surrealists saw as supportive of the violence of colonialism. The war, Mahon writes, 'undermined the official ideology of the French Republic which saw France as *une et indivisible*', and artists voiced their dissent against the ways in which conservative values were, again, masking the horrors of a colonial war. In the press, Algeria was predominantly presented as feminised threat to French cultural hegemony and so the Surrealists emphasised the gendered nature of that commentary.[123] At the same time, they presented a feminised space that was powerful and energised. Aspects of the exhibition included a vaginal passageway, which 'sighed' by virtue of a recorded sound track of groans and moans:

> The visitor entered the exhibition through a 'Love grotto' – a dark, cavernous tunnel that led into a warm and comforting rose-coloured chamber. Here the ceiling, designed by Duchamp, rhythmically breathed in and out by means of hidden air pumps, and the floor was covered by a layer of sand. This led to another space, with stalagmite- and stalactite-like forms in green velvet, in which the sound of orgasmic sighs, recorded by Radovan Ivsic, and the fragrance of perfume by Houbigant, aptly called 'Flatterie', filled the air'. [124]

In connection with the exhibition, in the apartment of Egyptian Surrealist poet Joyce Mansour, the Canadian surrealist Jean Benoît gave a performance, entitled *The Execution of the Testament of the Marquis de Sade*, which took the form of a shamanistic rite of initiation involving a sort of striptease using a quasi s'tribal' costume.[125] It was conceived of as a rite, a purging of pathos and of all ties to nation, family, and religion through symbolic evocation, historical vindication, and self-mutilation in a secret ceremony for a selected audience. During the action, Breton read aloud from the testament of Sade, and Benoît finished the piece by raising a hot

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[122] Carolyn J. Dean, cited in Mahon, 152.
[123] Mahon, 143.
[124] ibid., 285.
[125] Jean Benoît (b. 1922, Quebec), from Montreal, Benoît settled in Paris in 1948 and joined the Surrealists in 1959.

branding iron to his chest and burning the word ‘Sade’ into his flesh, whereby Robert Matta spontaneously stepped forward and thrust the hot iron onto his chest too.[126]

DANS LE CADRE DE
L'EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE DU SURRÉALISME
GALERIE DANIEL CORDIER DÉCEMBRE 1959 JANVIER 1960

LE 2 DÉCEMBRE 1959 A 22 HEURES
POUR LE CXLVe ANNIVERSAIRE DE SA MORT
NOUS VOUS CONVIONS A ASSISTER A L'

EXÉCUTION DU TESTAMENT
DU MARQUIS DE SADE

PAR JEAN BENOÎT

QUI SERA CÉLÉBRÉE
CHEZ MADAME JOYCE MANSOUR
1 AVENUE DU MARÉCHAL MAUNOURY PARIS XVIe

SPECTACLE PRIVÉ, SUR PRÉSENTATION DE CETTE CARTE NOMINALE, EXCLUSIVEMENT.

Jean Benoît

Figs. 49 & 50. Jean Benoît, *Invitation to the Testament of the Marquis de Sade,* December 2nd, 1959; Benoît in costume for his performance. Photo by Gilles Ehrman.

The labyrinthine and experiential logic of Surrealist installation and exhibition design offered a situation for a provisional aesthetics, to allude to or to provoke doubt, anxiety and desire. Bataille posits that eroticism entails a breaking down of the established patterns of the regulated social order. Erotic stirrings, he thinks, are always excessive to the social order and, in their excess, they are terrifying and threaten the order of our individualism: in dissembling our bounded individuality, our erotic stirrings remind us of death. According to Bataille the purpose of poetry, and by extension art, is the same as that of eroticism: to promote a fusion of separate objects. By extension, through referencing Foucault’s meditations on ‘other places’, we can conceive of an exhibition as a space of alterity where repressed desires, at cultural and individual levels, might be unleashed and social and political reality might be considered anew.

In 1960 the Surrealists instigated a petition in support of Algerian independence, *Déclaration sur le droit à l’insoumission dans la guerre d’Algérie* (*Declaration on the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War),* usually simply referred to as *Manifeste des 121 (Manifesto of the 121)* in reference to the sum of its signatories. The publication of the tract was scheduled for the day before the trial of a group called the Jeanson network, who were ‘suitcase carriers’ apprehended trafficking for the Algerians. The group’s prime mover, Francis Jeansen, was a philosopher and former protégé of Sartre’s. He and his students had transported suitcases filled with

[126] ibid.

money from Algerian workers in France across the border to Swiss banks. The funds were intended to buy weapons for the independence fighters. Members of the group had been arrested and were to go on trial on September 6, 1960, and in April Jeanson held a press conference to broadcast his political position.

Preeminent young Surrealists, Jean Schuster[127] and Dionys Mascolo[128] decided to write a declaration in support of those who were actively involved in support of the Algerians – like Jeanson – and those who refused to take up arms against Algerian independence. They sent their draft to other Surrealists (including Breton and Gérard Legrand) and to Maurice Blanchot. The finalised manifesto was signed by all Surrealists who were French nationals – along with Blanchot, Sartre, Beauvoir, Leiris, Maurice Nadeau, André Masson, and other prominent French artists and writers, many of whom had at some time or another moved in the orbit of Surrealism.[129]

Legally, the manifesto's words amounted to treason. 'French militarism,' it read, 'has managed to restore torture and to make it once again practically an institution in Europe.' The petitioners opposed French military conscription for the Algerian war, and supported the growing French tendency for conscientious objection to fighting against the Algerians. It declared 'We respect and we justify the conduct of Frenchmen who believe it their duty to bring aid and protection to oppressed Algerians in the name of the people of France.' The statement concluded that 'the cause of the Algerian people, who are contributing in a decisive manner to destroying the colonial system, is the cause of all free men.'[130]

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[127] Jean Schuster (1929 – 1995) a leading light in post-war Surrealism, who joined the Parisian group in 1948 and was active with post-war Surrealist periodicals. On Breton's death he took leadership of the Parisian group, but internal disputes lead him to call the group to a close.

[128] Dionys Mascolo (1916 – 1997) French writer, intellectual, and political activist.

[129] Non-French Surrealists were advised not to sign, as to do so they would risk deportation. Sometimes the Surrealists' instigation and authorship of this momentous document is elided in general histories, and attributed to existentialist intellectuals, yet there is no question that Schuster and Mascolo were behind the first draft in the spring of 1960, and Blanchot was responsible for early revisions. See Pierre, *Tracts, Tome II*, pp. 205 – 208 and editorial commentary pp. 393 – 394. See also Polizzotti, pp. 601 – 603; Durozoi, pp. 592 – 594. Mahon reports that 'the tract was drawn up by Dionys Mascolo and Jean Schuster, Maurice Blanchot made modifications, and the final version was agreed on at a meeting between Breton, Schuster, Mascolo and Claude Roy.' See Mahon p. 145.

[130] *Manifest 121*, in Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (eds) *Surrealism Against The Current : Tracts And Declarations*, London: Pluto Press, 2001.

Government censors stopped the presses of one journal that was due to publish the manifesto, and another, Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes*, was published with two blank pages to signal its absence. However, the manifesto was published on 6 September 1960 in the magazine *Vérité-Liberté*, and in the *New York Post*, on September 14, 1960. The impact of the petition snowballed and it provoked debate in the press and prompted the government to issue media blacklists. The French government put in place heavy penalties for those calling for insubordination and enforced legal sentences for mutiny and insubordination by civil servants, many of whom paid no heed and were sacked.[131] A general strike ensued, and the government did not recover from the political instability.

The series of political events that followed the *Manifesto 121* exemplify the power of the manifesto form when its timeliness is well judged. Of all the Surrealist manifestos, it was *Manifesto 121* which had the most direct political impact.

Of all the so-called avant-garde movements, it was Surrealism that staged and problematised the eroticism and psychological trauma of the colonial encounter from the perspective of the metropolitan Western subject, and provided a set of means for colonialised subjects to express and explode their condition. On the part of the Surrealists, it was not an intellectual quest to construct or theorise their exploits – which were roundly mocked and rejected at the time – but an experiment, a wager, with the sociability of the exhibition experience, and what could be effected through the combination of objects to create a social situation. The type of spaces they created were a radical move away from museological and beaux-art gallery exhibitions that served to extol and commemorate hide bound cultural values. Moreover, their curatorial process – in their formulation of the exhibition as an accumulation of independently conceived but collaboratively produced parts – was a new model that prefigured contemporary curatorial practice in which a curator operates much as a dramaturge. Beholden to the Surrealists exploits in the 1940s and Fifties are today's international contemporary art exhibitions, and indeed contemporary art spaces themselves, which have the power to function for publicly presenting as-yet-unformulated discourse, and providing a form of moral and social vigilance on the edge of politics.

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[131] Lawrence S. Wittner, 'Intellectuals, Algeria, and Vietnam,' <http://www.lewrockwell.com/wittner/wittner18.html>

Perhaps one of the best known encapsulations of similar ideas today is Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics', under the banner of which he speaks of art as a social interstice: a gap in social relations, which may operate as a critical juncture within the overall social system. Bourriaud identifies what he sees as possibilities for exchange 'other than those that prevail within the system.'[132] In emphasising art of a collaborative nature, and tracing many key points through the last several decades in art to account for tendencies in the art of the 1990s, Bourriaud refers to Duchamp's essay of 'The Creative Act' of 1957, and to Bataille. Bourriaud describes the type of proximity and temporality constructed by exhibition spaces – which are compressed, public and shared – as distinct from the private consumption patterns that are imposed by books and television and the univocal imagery of theatre and film, in which discussion from the audience cannot take place until after the event. The stakes for art that Bourriaud sets forth owe a great deal to those that emerged with the Surrealist's exploits, and his conception of this *topos,* where imagining and contestation may occur, explodes the polarised Marxist notion of a spatial ordering that falls into either 'street' or 'salon'. He argues, 'Art is a site that produces a specific sociability; what status this space has within the range of "states of encounter" proposed by the *Polis* remains to be seen' and he asks, How can art that is centred on the production of such modes of conviviality succeed in relaunching the modern project of emancipation as we contemplate it? How does it allow us to define new cultural and political goals?[133] Claire Bishop has more recently answered this sort of ethical question with a Lacanian response, arguing that to guard against the orthodoxy of formulism, socially engaged art should emerge out of the desire of the artist.[134] Her position accords with that of Breton's in 1947, when he wrote, 'I think surrealism has not deviated from the first prescription of its program, which is to preserve *the potential of visual arts for constant self-renewal so as to express human desire in its unceasing fluctuation.*'[135] The next chapter takes up some Australian examples of such a *modus operandi.*

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[132] Nicolas Bourriaud, in Claire Bishop (ed), *Participation* (London: Whitechapel, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006): excerpts from *Esthétique relationelle* (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 1998), translated by David Macey, 2006.

[133] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Wood with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002).

[134] Jennifer Roche and Claire Bishop 'Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop by Jennifer Roche,' Community Arts Reading Room website: <http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/07/socially_engage.php>

[135] André Breton, 'Surrealist Comet,' in *Free Reign* (*La Clé des champs*, 1953), translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 91.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Australian Art

Appropriation, Détournement & the Repressed of History

> With the greatest examples of the past in mind, we confidently deny that the art of a period might consist of the pure and simple imitation of its surface manifestation …What surrealism sets out to do, by contrast, is to express its *latent content*… the way for us to explore the secret depths of history that disappear beneath the web of events.
>
> – André Breton[1]

> In the end surrealism cannot be considered purely as a style. It is a state of mind whose intensity and aggressive force must go to the point of modifying the course of its expression (it is not surrealism if expression is limited to the habitual platitude of language). It is also a state of mind which reaches towards unification; in which, through this union, an existence beyond the self is experienced as a *spiritual authority* in whose name it is possible to speak.
>
> – Georges Bataille[2]

With important qualifications, it can be said of Imants Tillers, Gordon Bennett and Tracey Moffatt that they have a common concern with the Australian postcolonial condition. Each has been the subject of a major retrospective exhibition, and their works have received a good deal of critical attention for three or four decades.[3] What is more, their practices have dramatised aspects of Australia's past that are not adequately charted by its official history: the trauma of violent European invasion and the suppression of native populations; early European settlers' experiences of exile, isolation and alienation from the land; the post-war waves of mass migration and the racist reception of many of those 'new Australians'.

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[1] André Breton. *Free Rein* (*La Clé des champs*, 1953), translated by Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 13.

[2] Georges Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, edited, translated and introduced by Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1994), 55.

[3] In recent years, each of the selected artists has been the subject of a major monographic exhibition: *Tracey Moffatt*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 17 December 2003 – 29 February 2004. *Imants Tillers, One World, Many Visions*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 14 July–16 October 2006. *Gordon Bennett*, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Federation Square, 6 Sep 2007 – 16 Jan, 2007.

In the foregoing chapters I have made the claim that Surrealist signification has specific value for portraying the latent content of culture and the repressed of history. My particular aim has been to show the purposefulness of Surrealism's heterogeneity in relation to anti-colonialism, and to demonstrate how its anticolonialism was manifest not only in explicit political tracts, but also within various modes of visual and poetic exploration. In doing so I have avoided trying to argue that Surrealism offers something like an anti– or 'post-colonial aesthetic'. Rather, I have sought to show that Surrealism offers various means for signifying latent or repressed aspects of social reality, past and present. In this chapter I wish to bring these observations to bear on the works of the three particular artists I have named, within a broader context of Australian contemporary art. My focus is on how the visual arts stage confrontations with Australia's past and its ghosts within the present, and describe my country's contemporary cultural diversity and its accompanying anxieties.

While Aboriginality is a vital theme in the work of Moffatt and Bennett, and more lately Tillers, their address is more general. Each in their way has attempted to work outside the limits of a strict identity politics. The prism of Surrealist anti-colonialism and the way it opens onto a broader terrain of heterogeneity enables different valencies of their projects to come into focus at the same time. I argue that the impassioned nature of these artists' expressivity does not conform to a brand of cool iconoclastic postmodernism. Their various employments of appropriation, collage-montage and détournement permit them to reference a traumatic register of experience, and I argue that their praxis perpetuates not so much a Surrealist 'aesthetic' in terms of visual style, but a Surrealist poetics and historiography.[4] This designation, I will suggest, can add a dimension to our understanding of these artists' works, that cannot be adequately described through designations such as 'postmodernist' or 'post-colonialist', at least not as these are usually conceived.

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[4] My observations about Surrealist historiography are indebted to a number of sources, Margaret Cohen's book *Profane Illumination, Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) is a groundbreaking work that draws connections between the historiography of major theorists, Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, and Surrealism via Walter Benjamin. Celia Lendis applied the idea of a Surrealist historiography to an analysis of Sarah Island, the site of a former Van Diemen's Land penal colony, abandoned to nature. Celia Lendis, *Where the Repressed Returns: Sarah Island – Tasmania's Colonial Other* (unpublished Honours thesis, University of Tasmania, 2004). I am also indebted to Ian McLean's work in general, and to his numerous studies of Gordon Bennett. McLean does not employ the designation 'Surrealist historiography' but his considerations of postmodern/postcolonial historiography, particularly in relation to Bennett, have been instrumental in my thinking.

In Australia, the ethnic diversity of the nation is not reflected in what we might call its 'social imaginary' and neither by its main political and cultural institutions: various social commentators have pointed to the need to redress this and to create meaning and new social forms to better reflect the reality. As a settler country – part of the Commonwealth and attached to Britain by dint of its status as a constitutional monarchy – Australia is occasionally included in the category 'postcolonial' that attaches to nations that decolonized in the decade that followed World War II. For describing the lasting effects of the colonial encounter for Indigenous peoples in Australia post-colonial discourse has some utility: it can provide a way of countering the colonial myth in which the violent conflict between black and white is elided from history. However, there has been opposition, perhaps especially from Indigenous critics, to considering Indigenous Australia as 'postcolonial'. Post-colonial discourse may also elide the other layers of ethnic difference in Australian society (or elsewhere for that matter). Though lately it has fallen from favour, the rhetoric of multiculturalism has been a valuable descriptor as well as the basis of applied social policy.

Under the Whitlam Labor Government in the early 1970s, Australia adopted multiculturalism as its official policy, as distinct from the former policy of assimilation that applied in the period immediately after the Second World War. The Opposition, led by Malcolm Fraser, supported the platform of multiculturalism and the Liberal Coalition Government elected in 1975 fully embraced and developed it. Practically, the policy involved the introduction and development of welfare and education services for migrants and, apart from equal opportunity and access to services, one of its guiding principles was the recognition of migrants' cultures of origin and the freedom of Australian citizens to maintain their cultural identity.[5] Along with its practical measures, the policy embodied the positive value of cultural difference as something to be respected and appreciated thus, at least in principle, it overturned the homogenising principle of Anglicising assimilationism.

From my own childhood perspective, as a second generation Australian born in the early 1960s, the 1970s was a decade of appreciable attitudinal change towards people like me. A pressure to conform that had been palpable at school was eased. It was,

[5] These principles of tolerance and incorporation of other cultures into Australian society were embodied in the 1978 Galbally report, *Migrant Services and Programs*, references and interviews relating to it can be found at <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/history/timeline/period/Multiculturalism-in-Practice/screen/2.The-Galbally-Strategy-for-migrant-settlement>.

however, replaced by the pressure of other people's curiosity and an expectation that I should offer an account for my own cultural difference, rather than to alter or conceal it.

Today the Australian population is diverse. Indigenous peoples comprise an estimated 2.4 percent of it.[6] Over a quarter of Australians were born overseas and, according to 2008 figures, twenty-four percent of the population are children of migrants. Though the majority of the migrant population was born in Britain, the proportion has decreased and since the 1980s more than half of the net migration to Australia has been from Asian and Middle Eastern countries.[7] ABS figures for 2008 showed that apart from Britain, the other major groups of immigrants come from New Zealand (495,000), China (314,100), India (239,000) and Italy (222,000).[8] The ethnic diversity demonstrated in these statistics is not reflected in Australia's national institutions nor in the way it represents itself in the mainstream media or more broadly: the 'social imaginary' remains overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic, a hangover of previous policy directives. This lack of a public conceptualisation of the country's population diversity projects, as well as reflects, unequal power relations. If people believe that Australia is as it appears on *Neighbours,* then the chances of creating a just society are necessarily diminished.

Sneja Gunew has commented on the fact that Australia's self-definition, presented internally and externally, is not sufficiently infused with a perception of its demographic diversity. She notes too that in recent decades the idea of multiculturalism – which galvanized social change in the Whitlam era and after, has fallen into disrepute and disuse, overtaken by the more popular construct 'postcolonialism'. The demise of multiculturalism has been the subject of some other penetrating scholarship, which demonstrates the programmatic dismantling of multiculturalism as policy and rhetoric.[9] Gunew cautions that there is a tendency for

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[6] This figure is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for 2001, in which the census count of indigenous Australians is boosted slightly to adjust for an undercount believed to have occurred. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population characteristics: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 2001, 15. About 53% of Australia's indigenous population is concentrated in two states, New South Wales and Queensland and that Indigenous peoples constitute 28.8% of the total population of the Northern Territory. <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/Social_Justice/statistics/index.html#fn17>

[7] ibid.

[8] ABS media release, July 28, 2008. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbytitle/35A203AB6DD3CA0BCA257600002314F7?OpenDocument>

[9] A full discussion of the vicissitudes of the policy of multiculturalism is provided by Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts, in 'Australian Multiculturalism: Its Rise and Demise',

discussions to be couched in *either* the terms of 'postcolonialism' *or* 'multi-culturalism', and these constructs can obstruct or obscure each other.[10] She writes,

> Questions of cultural difference and nationalism, for example, have been bundled under the umbrella of postcolonialism. There has been a burgeoning of academic courses and conferences dealing 'belatedly' with Australia's legacy of oppression toward its indigenous peoples. Cynics could argue that in effect this absolves non-Aboriginal Australians from having to analyse Australia's neo-colonialism, its internal colonisations, or the many other ways in which power relations operate unequally in this country. Consideration of one kind of history produces an even greater amnesia regarding other histories, including post-war migration histories.

Gunew counsels us to consider the issue of national cultural symbolism as a pressing issue. She continues:

> Australians continue to seek national unities, coherent narratives of the nation. They are still embroiled in arguments over whether to treat linguistic and cultural diversity as anything other than a set of sociological problems that supply convenient scapegoats for the current malaise and provide imperatives to close the traditional ranks. [...] Yet if Australians consign the need for a continued analysis of multiculturalism to the sidelines, they run the risk of losing the momentum that allowed Australia in the Whitlam era to take the lead in acknowledging its hybrid population and all it entails. Furthermore, far from averting divisiveness (as the opponents of multiculturalism constantly argue), such neglect would compound it. The necessary theoretical work on this subject is hardly encouraged within Australia, where multicultural studies (insofar as they exist), remain the daggy cousins of radical chic postcolonialism.[11]

Sneja Gunew's writings approach the idea I have referred to as the 'social imaginary': the relations and imagery that we erect around geopolitical reality. She

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Refereed paper presented to the Australasian Political Studies Association Conference University of Tasmania, Hobart 29 September – 1 October 2003, at <http://www.utas.edu.au/government/APSA/GalliganRoberts.pdf>. Galligan and Roberts outline the Assimilation policy of Australia in the immediate postwar period: 'The basic idea was that, as soon as practicable, migrants should become part of the Australian way of life and be treated in the same way as other Australians. That would entail getting a job, finding a house, settling into the local community and eventually becoming Australian citizens. Migrants could apply to become citizens, under the terms of the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948*, once they had lived in Australia five years and could speak English. Becoming a citizen entailed taking a pledge of allegiance and loyalty at a special ceremony held in a local community.'(no page ref.) The authors go on to discuss the limits of the effectiveness of the policy, due to factors such as the cultural insularity of Anglo-Australia, limited recognition of foreign qualifications, and the congregation of migrants to centres where cheap accommodation could be found. Few 'New Australians' became citizens in the 1950s and even in the 1960s only about half of those eligible applied for citizenship. The uptake of citizenship rose dramatically in the 1970s, Galligan and Roberts argue the political strength of ethnic communities was recognised institutionally in the formation of the Ethnic Affairs advisory councils at national and state levels. Multiculturalism was launched as an official policy to promote appreciation of ethnic diversity, buttressed by anti-discrimination legislation.

[10] Sneja Gunew, 'Multicultural Differences: Canada, USA, Australia', at <faculty.arts.ubc.ca/sgunew/MCMULTI.HTM>. Sneja Gunew is Professor of English & Women's Studies, University of British Columbia, Canada, and has lived and taught in Australia.

[11] ibid.

suggests that we create spectral spaces that are discursive or mythic formations.[12] In discussing the non-dialogue and selective representations that can occur between conflicting discourses of multiculturalism and post-colonialism, her focus is trained on her own realm of literary studies. In the visual arts in Australia however, there *have* been some meaningful crossovers between the concerns described by these different types of rhetoric, which perhaps points to the particular value of a non-discursive poetics as a means for critiquing and revivifying the 'social imaginary'. At this juncture I wish to open my discussion on appropriation art, détournement and Surrealist poetics in Australia.

Since the mid Seventies, appropriation principles have informed art practices that confront aspects of Australia's provincial condition: its cultural complexity as a convict-settler nation with a violent colonial past and marginalised Indigenous peoples. As well, using aggressive forms of appropriation, artists have addressed later historical waves of migration. I wish to argue that the play of representational contestation that has occurred through appropriation art can only be partly accounted for by the dominant brand of postmodernist discourse that surfaced in the 1980s, with its emphasis on *de*constructive quotation and 'death of the author'. Surrealism has a constructive, as well as a deconstructive impetus, and by referencing it we can bring to the fore aspects of postmodern theory which privilege the idea of desire as an engine of social change: in other words, we may foreground precisely the components of postmodernism which have come to us primarily through Lyotard and Foucault and which owe much to Surrealism.

There is not a strong lineage between the uptake of Surrealism in Australia in the 1930s and 40s and the vital strain of appropriation art that emerged here in the 1970s and developed in the 1980s and later, as there were many intervening influences. The uptake of Surrealism here contrasts with its adoption in Mexico, for example, where its importation the 1940s was swiftly incorporated into an anti-colonial imaginary and counter-memory that incorporated traditional modes of expression.[13] In Australia in the Thirties and Forties, there emerged a European settler modernism which drew on Surrealism and not until the 1980s was there a fusion between European and

[12] These themes are elaborated in Sneja Gunew, *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions Of Multiculturalisms* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[13] The theme of counter-memory and imagination in Mexican and Latino performance, and the influence of Surrealism, runs through an anthology of essays edited by Coco Fusco, *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

Indigenous Australian modes of expression. Yet earlier Australian episodes demonstrate that quotation and misquotation, masquerade and fraud have been factors in Australian art and literary history that strongly reflect Australia's sense of geographic distance and cultural marginality.

Australia did not launch an organised movement of Surrealist adherents.[14] Rather, Surrealist energies were broadly disseminated in Australia in the late Thirties and 1940s, in the wake of the 1936 exhibition in London, and much in the same spirit as Alfred Barr had framed Surrealism for New York audiences in 1937: as a modernist style. Prominent Australian artists incorporated Surrealist aspects into their work, often blending Surrealist-inspired forms with a gestural, expressionistic painterly style.[15]

The injection of Surrealism seems to have permitted the expression of extreme anxieties, giving license to artists of European extraction to present a troubled image of a haunted Australian land, and one that contrasts markedly with the heroics of the rolling landscapes of pastoral paintings which supported a positive settler narrative.[16] This was a generation of artists referring to not only to their distant relation to the rest of the world; they gestured obliquely or overtly to the violence and misery buried within the history of their own place and their sense of imprisonment or oppression in the land, a theme apparent in Nineteenth Century Australian fiction.

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[14] A number of notable Australian artists explored Surrealist ideas and methods. Max Dupain showed an early interest in the photography of Man Ray; the painter James Gleeson firmly identified himself as a Surrealist; the Czech Surrealist Dusan Marek lived mainly in Australia from 1948 – by all accounts he struggled terribly with the parochialism of the place. Other prominent artists were influenced by aspects of Surrealism, among them the sculptor Robert Klippel, and painters Arthur Boyd, Russell Drysdale, Joy Hester, Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Peter Purves Smith and Albert Tucker. They did not comprise a concerted movement of adherents.

[15] The writer and critic Bruce James has had a hand in building a collection of Australian Surrealism for the Sydney collectors James Agapitos and Ray Wilson, and produced a book about it. See Bruce James, *Australian Surrealism: The Agapitos/Wilson Collection* (Roseville, New South Wales: Beagle Press, 2003). Janine Burke wrote an interpretive review of the book, outlining the conditions of distance and derivativeness that mark the reception and dissemination of stylistic influences in Australia, see Janine Burke, 'Australian Surrealism: The Agapitos/Wilson Collection, Art Gallery of South Australia,' Adelaide, 25 July – 12 October 2003 and toured nationally, *Papers of Surrealism*, issue 2, Summer 2004, <http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal2/acrobat_files/burke_review>

[16] In 2007 the National Gallery of Australia nationally toured an exhibition entitled *Ocean to Outback: Australian Landscape Painting 1850–1950*, curated by National Gallery Director, Ron Radford. My viewing of the exhibition informed the drafting of parts of this chapter.

In such painterly works executed in the 1940s and 1950s, there are numerous allusions to the repressed aspect of the nation's identity, as well as attempts to mythologise European settler stories, as in Sidney Nolan's famous Ned Kelly series. His lesser known painting of 1947, *Mrs Fraser*, depicts a legendary shipwrecked English woman who was kept alive by Aborigines until her rescue by a convict. Nolan shows her naked, bestial and imprisoned. *Burke at Cooper's Creek*, of 1950, is one of a series of four paintings about the ill-fated explorers Burke and Wills' expedition in which nineteen men attempted to cross the continent. The painting encapsulates a sense of mystique and beauty as well as power and hostility in the landscape.

Figs. 51 & 52. Sidney Nolan, *Mrs Fraser*, 1947. Ripolin enamel on hardboard 66.2 x 107cm, Queensland Art Gallery.
Sidney Nolan, *Burke at Cooper's Creek*, 1950, oil and enamel paint on composition board, 121.5 x 152 cm, National Gallery of Australia.

In the 1940s there were attempts by artists like Margaret Preston to bring a modernist, progressive and positive sense of the rural and urban landscape into being, through reference to Aboriginal symbolism, as well as the art of China and other Asian cultures, and by depicting indigenous plant and animal forms according to modernist design qualities. These tendencies have been appropriated and subjected to a mode of détournement by Imants Tillers and Gordon Bennett. Issues of national or cultural identity have often played out scandalously and aggressively in Australian art, as though a sense of fraudulence and suspicion lies at the very heart of the national psyche, and an element of controversy has attached to the works of these contemporary artists. As I describe below, in Tracey Moffatt's work she often explicitly takes up the motif of a menacing Australian landscape and its embattled, marginalised inhabitants, sometimes through appropriating tropes from painting and film and making over their poetics in an exaggerated style.

Postmodernism in Australia

Describing postmodern appropriation in 1996 with regard to the New York art scene, Hal Foster cited the mid Eighties as a point in time in which artworks began to assume ironic distance from their own traditions. He writes, 'entire genres and mediums (like abstraction and painting) were reduced to static signs that then stood as if out of time.'[17] Art such as 'neo-geo' developed out of appropriation art, and re-appropriated it only to mock it. Foster argues that the line quickly became blurred between deconstruction and complicity.[18] Writing in the 1990s, Foster acknowledged the New York parochialism of his perspective, and I would say that his assessment of the appropriation art of the Eighties has less application to Australia, though by the 1980s in Australia numerous artists *were* practicing an art form like that Foster described – perhaps some of the iconoclastic works that Paul Taylor was promoting in Melbourne, described by Anne Marsh as 'cool post-pop conceptualism' fit Foster's description.[19] Yet, by contrast to that mode, much of the Australian appropriation art in the 1980s (which had its roots in the 1970s) is anything but de-historicising or cool. Rather, it is driven by desire and a commitment to change. What is more, I would argue, the engine of such art making is a desire not for ironic distance but for inclusion, connection, reparation and convergence, *as well as* outright social and political critique. I will offer some examples of these tendencies to illustrate my point.

Of all the examples of appropriation art that arose in Australia in the 1970s the Pupunya-Tula Western Desert painting of the early 1970s, which erupted into the national consciousness in the 1980s, is surely the most radical form. The Western Desert painters' incorporation of stylised, edited versions of their traditional designs into a static painterly plane, as well as their very use of acrylic paint on a mobile support, has been widely acknowledged as a mode of appropriation. The early works sometimes showed sacred objects, and some of these found their way into the marketplace to be viewed by the uninitiated, prompting criticism of the Papunya artists by other Indigenous people. Fred Myers discusses the struggles that the

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[17] Foster, op cit., 99.
[18] ibid., 101.
[19] Anne Marsh, 'Stepping I (A Feminist Context)', an essay based on paper was delivered as part of *Double Vision: Art, Feminism and the Body*, a forum at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney held in conjunction with Julie Rrap's retrospective exhibition, Body Double, 30 August 2007—28 January 2008. <http://www.cacsa.org.au/cvapsa/2007/11_bs_36_4/BS_36_4marsh.pdf>

Papunya Tula enterprise met in its first decade. Over the 1970s, a few government agencies arose for the purpose of the wholesale and retail of Aboriginal artefacts, but the boom years did not occur until the 1980s.[20] Myers' account demonstrates the artists' strong sense of mission and the high cultural value they placed on their work, which underscores that the paintings were primarily a mode of intercultural communication and not merely a market driven venture. In the 1980s the category of 'Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art' truly emerged and was legitimated by curatorial vision, inclusion in public collections and significant private collections, and entered the national consciousness.[21]

Other examples of appropriation demonstrate politicised aspects with commonalities with the three artists under scrutiny. In 1974, the Chilean born artist Juan Davila arrived in Australia to escape the Pinochet regime, bringing with him, as Shane Carmody wrote, 'a Latin American understanding of the post-colonial and the fragility of independence in the face of superpower politics.'[22] He did not take long to train his criticality on Australia's politics of exclusion, and to begin quoting local symbols in his work. His attitude and method were soon embedded here as a vociferous line of political and cultural critique, and his persona embraced a performative element.[23] Another example of a performative and politicised practice is that of Julie Rrap (then Julie Brown-Rrap), who made work that comprised montages of her own photographed figure. In the 1982 work *Disclosures*, and in *Persona and Shadow* of 1984, Rrap framed her own body within the canon of art history. She engaged appropriation and masquerade in the installations *Thief's Journal* of 1985–

[20] Fred R. Myers, 'In Sacred Trust: Building the Papunya Tula Market', in Perkins, H. and Fink, H., (eds), *Papunya Tula Genesus and Genius* (Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales and Papunya Tula Artsist, 2000), 235 – 245.

[21] Myers recounts how the painting movement spread from Papunya to other centres, including Yuendumu, Balgo and Fitzroy Crossing. In 1980, the Australia National Gallery in Canberra acquired Mick Wallangkarri Tjakamarra's *Honey Ant Dreaming*, of 1973, its first purchase of an Aboriginal acrylic painting. From this point, national collections made significant purchases and Western Desert painting boomed. Andrew Crocker became 'company secretary' of Papunya Tula and brought with him a commercial emphasis. Crocker, Anthony Wallis, along with Billy Stockman Tjapaltjarri and Charlie Tjapangtari toured the US in 1981, with the *Aboriginal Artists of Australia* exhibition which also went on to the British Museum. Robert Holmes à Court bought twenty-six paintings, and Australian public sector organizations began to add Papunya Tula works to their collections. The major Paris exhibition *d'Un Autre Continent: l'Australie, le rêve et le reel* (*Another Continent: Australia, the Dream and the Reality*) curated by Suzanne Pagé was held in 1983, which was a significant introduction of contemporary indigenous painting to an international audience.

[22] Shane Carmody, Room Brochure, State Library of Victoria Cowan Gallery, 'Juan Davila: The Artist as Historian' at http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/programs/exhibitions/cowen/davila-room-brochure.html.

[23] Roger Benjamin and Guy Brett, *Juan Davila*, with writings by Juan Davila (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2006).

86 and *Secret Strategies/Ideal Spaces* of 1987. The latter referenced modern masters as a way of deconstructing the canon of art history from a feminist perspective. Anne Marsh makes a strong point of contrast, saying that '[t]hese were not straight appropriations in the manner of the American artist Sherrie Levine—rather, Rrap used mixed media works where painting and photography collided'.[24] According to a collage-montage logic, Rrap attempted to 'dismantle the master narrative of the Western canon', as Marsh puts it.[25] She also strove to do so by inserting herself into it: acts of assertion and insertion, to ameliorate the deficiencies of the past through substitution, insinuated a presence on a social register. Imants Tillers' output in the mid 1970s was also programmatic in this field of socially critical appropriation art. We turn now to his work.

Imants Tillers

Throughout the Eighties, much of the commentary about Imants Tillers' work, including his own analyses of it, was filtered through the prevailing postmodernist discourse. Nonetheless, some of his referents were Duchamp and de Chirico, so a Surrealist influence was never elided. Hindsight enables us to gain a tighter grip on the stakes of Tillers' project, especially via the major survey exhibition of his work staged at the National Gallery of Australia in 2006.[26] In his mode of cross-referencing, Tillers does not ironically deny traditions. Against some respected critical interpretations, I would venture to say that while his processes have been understood to lead to a radical deconstruction of authorship, what actually occurs in Tillers' work is but a dislocation or détournement and his authorial imprint is a strong transformer. His acts of appropriation invariably involve apparent alterations of the source material and loaded juxtapositions.[27] Much of the logic of Tillers' practice carries a strong sense of the artist's subjectivity, albeit that of a subject on trial, as it were. A personal imaginary functions as a projection of a social imaginary and the weight of Tillers' own extensive commentary and elucidation reinforces the authorial address of the works themselves.

Imants Tillers was born in Australia to Latvian parents in 1950, and in the 1980s

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[24] Marsh op cit., 251.
[25] ibid.
[26] *Imants Tillers, One World Many Visions*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra 14 July – 16 October 2006, catalogue: Deborah Hart, (ed). *Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions*. (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006).
[27] Graham Coulter-Smith, 'Imants Tillers: Inventing Postmodern Appropriation' <www.shermangalleries.com.au/artists.../tillers/nature.html>.

drawing on his own family's experience, he made works that refer to the cohort of post-war second generation Australians. The post-war period in Australia was marked by a policy of sponsored mass migration. In 1947, the Australian population was just under seven million, and about one person in ten had been born overseas – three quarters of them in Britain or Ireland.[28] While Australia was an independent nation from 1901, it did not have its own citizenship until 1948. Prior to that, Australians, including Indigenous Australians, were British subjects. British immigrants received preferential treatment in relation to accommodation and employment, but in instituting the mass migration scheme in 1945, under Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley, the immigration minister Arthur Calwell actively sought non-British European migrants, though effectively continuing the 'white Australia policy'.[29] European immigrants faced harsh conditions and were confronted with a settlement policy based on assimilation. Assimilation called for immigrants to learn English, become 'new Australians', and adopt the norms of Anglophone Australia.

Graham Coulter-Smith observes that Tillers' appropriations in the 1970s *prefigured* the mainstream discourse on postmodernism and began before postmodern appropriation art was a dominant international style.[30] Tillers drew from a desire to assert and insert his displaced European identity within the locality of his birth – Australia, but early in his career his avowed aim was to transcend locality altogether, a stated intention that was to rebound. His appropriation through the 1980s sifts personal issues through a set of social concerns, using imagery generally sourced as reproductions.[31] He drew on his intimate familial association with Europe, as well as

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[28] <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Timeline-Commentary/id/7.Mass-migration>

[29] The 'White Australia Policy' refers to an immigration ethos first enshrined in *The Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, which imposed an English language dictation test as a criterion for entry. It was described as an act 'to place certain restrictions on immigration and to provide for the removal from the Commonwealth of prohibited immigrants'. In 1949 Minister Holt's decision to allow eight-hundred non-European refugees to stay and Japanese war brides to be admitted, was the first step towards a non-discriminatory immigration policy. Two later watersheds were the March 1966 abolition of the White Australian Policy, and measures taken by the Whitlam Government to discard race as a factor in immigration eligibility. See <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/08abolition.htm.>

[30] Graham Coulter-Smith, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers: Appropriation En Abyme*, 1971-2001 (Southampton: Fine Art Research Centre, Southampton Institute, 2002).

[31] Peter Hill wrote, 'Through the middle of the '80s, art was split by two movements that were so different from each other that it was hopeless to look for commonalities. Except for one artist. Forget about anyone in Cologne, New York or Amsterdam. In Australia, Imants Tillers struck gold in both halves of that decade. First he was a painter, second he was an appropriationist. It was as simple and as complex as that.' See Peter Hill, 'The timing is appropriate', review article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10, 2003, http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/05/09/1052280430342.htm

a broader and more cerebral engagement with contemporary European culture.

As early as 1974, Coulter-Smith points out, Tillers was already concerned to confront and explode the condition of Australia's provincialism in his work. As a point of reference Tillers specifically cited Terry Smith's essay of that year, 'The Provincialism Problem'.[32] In his work *Conversations with the Bride*, 1974–75, Tillers juxtaposes Heysen's *Summer*, of 1909, with fragments from Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, of 1915–25. Thus he pits the provincialism of the landscape tradition in white Australian art history with the cosmopolitan radicalism of Duchamp.[33]

For *Heart of the Wood* of 1985, Tillers repainted Anselm Kiefer's *Germany's Spiritual Heroes* of 1973, in which Kiefer inscribed the names of his selection of a pantheon of Germanic heroes in a setting that refers to the attic of the wooden schoolhouse of his childhood.[34] Born in 1945, Kiefer identifies himself with modern Germany, and his oeuvre forges a mythic connection between his personal biography and Germany's national history. His works re-appropriate national symbolism and refer to specific episodes and heroes. In so doing, Kiefer explores the uses and abuses of such iconography, dwelling on Nazism, the Shoah, and collective guilt in the aftermath of the Second World War. In *Heart of the Wood*, Tillers inserted tags of *his* own personal memory and identity, with tropes of Australian modernism.

Tillers recounts that in the construction of the painting he inscribed his name in letters taken from a book of Latvian fairytales that featured in his childhood. In the corner, he copied a work from the self-conscious Australian modernist Margaret Preston: *Still Life with Eucalyptus Blossom*. Tillers' mimicry of Keifer's heroic, monumental and seamless work is in part a tribute to the German painter's mode of adapted history painting. Kiefer makes the production of the historical canvas not a platform for militaristic triumphalism, but an arena for acknowledgement, restitution, mourning and self-reflection.

[32] Terry Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Artforum* (Sept. 1974), 54 – 9.
[33] Coulter-Smith, op cit.
[34] Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1987).

Fig. 53. Imants Tillers, *Heart of the Wood*, 1985. Oilstick, oil, synthetic polymer paint, 338 canvas boards, nos. 5002 – 5339, 280 x 648 cm, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

Fig. 54. Anselm Kiefer, *Germany's Spiritual Heroes* (*Deutschlands Geisteshelden*), 1973. Oil and charcoal on burlap mounted on canvas 306 x 680 cm.

Tillers' copy has leached the original image of some of its expressionist bravura and grandiosity. His version is fragmentary and his cross-referencing of the Kiefer with Margaret Preston's still life is poignant. Posthumously, Preston received a fair measure of criticism for her own referencing of Aboriginal symbolism, but perhaps her maligned, modest earlier attempt to find a national symbolism is not so very different from Kiefer's widely-lauded heroic project. By making this juxtaposition then, Tillers might be seen to problematise Kiefer's grand appropriation project, or to elevate or 'absolve' Preston, or to do both.

Heart of the Wood takes Tillers' customary format: he has taken Kiefer's image and transposed it from the large-scale burlap support to portable, canvasboard panels. These, by their nature, confer a provisional, adaptive modularity and the potential to be reconfigured, harkening to the collage/montage/assemblage logic of the source imagery. Tillers writes: 'While the existing body of work (which is also a body of

knowledge) determines to some degree what comes next, there is always within this system openness to chance, to serendipity, to coincidence and the possibility of new directions and unexpected interventions.[35]

The time was ripe for Tillers. *Heart of the Wood* was among the works that represented Australia at the 42nd Venice Biennale in 1986. But in 1985 he also painted *The Nine Shots*. This was not his first appropriation of Aboriginal imagery, but it quickly became notorious. Before discussing that painting and its ramifications, I will return to the emergence of contemporary Aboriginal art and its institutional framework.

Tillers + Jagamara + Bennett: Appropriation and Collaboration

In the Eighties, Fred Myers argues, government purchases of Aboriginal art were driven by recognition of a shift in the national imaginary 'which embraced Aboriginal culture as part of Australia', and he acknowledges that this was a construction supported by those in politics and cultural production.[36] Nick Waterlow was appointed director for the 1979 Biennale of Sydney, entitled *European Dialogue*, in which he included Aboriginal art in the Biennale for the first time.[37] Under Waterlow's direction the Biennale became a platform for constructing and considering alternative historical narratives and since 1979 indigenous art has been an important element in the Biennale's global address.

In 1985, the Pupunya artist Michael Jagamara Nelson was commissioned to design the mosaic for the new Parliament House forecourt in Canberra.[38] The mosaic connotes a meeting place, but the commission and design, which incorporate traditional motifs, were not without debate and, at the very same time, a parallel

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[35] Imants Tillers, *Land beyond goodbye*, exhibition catalogue, Sydney: Sherman Galleries, 2005, n.p, quoted in Howard Morphy, op cit. <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/Tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=5#_edn11>

[36] Myers, op cit., 242

[37] Nicholas Waterlow (1941 – 2009), British-born Australian art curator who moved to Australian in 1977. Appointed Director of the 1979 Biennale of Sydney, he was artistic director for the Biennale in 1986 (*Origins, Originality + Beyond*) and 1988 (*From the Southern Cross: A View of World Art c1940 – 1988*). Each of these was groundbreaking in reorienting the perception of Australia in a global context and for positioning Aboriginal art within a decentred global perspective.

[38] This commissioned work was accompanied by controversy over the use of tribal imagery. See Vivien Johnson, *Michael Jagamara Nelson* (Sydney: Crafstman House, 1997), 70 – 75.

drama about appropriation unfolded in Australian art in the mid-Eighties. The new Parliament House, pictured here alongside a contemporaneous work, *The Aboriginal Memorial*, was opened in 1988.

The 1988 Biennale of Sydney coincided with the bicentennial of white settlement in Australia and included *The Aboriginal Memorial*, comprising two hundred grave markers from Arnhem Land. Considered in tandem, these two works represent a celebratory forward-looking sentiment (which can also be seen as the co-option of Aboriginal symbolism within a European power construct), and the insertion of Aboriginal history into the narrative of Australia's past. In both cases, Aboriginal art inscribes the Indigenous presence in the national consciousness.

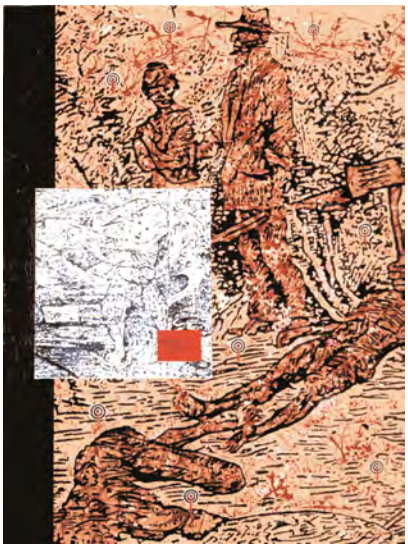
Figs. 55 & 56. Australia's Parliament House, Canberra, designed by architects Richard Thorp and Romaldo Giurgola, showing the forecourt mosaic designed by Michael Nelson Jagamara. Approx 90,000 hand-guillotined granite pieces in seven different colours.
Ramingining Artists, Ramingining, Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia
The Aboriginal Memorial, 1987–88. Natural pigments on wood, height (irreg) 327cm h. National Gallery of Australia.

In 1984, Michael Jagamara Nelson painted *Five Stories*, masterfully fusing various Dreaming sites and journeys into one complex pictorial space. Imants Tillers replicated sections of his *Five Stories* in his work of 1985, *The Nine Shots* which also drew on the German artist Georg Baselitz's painting of 1966, *Forward Wind. The Nine Shots* was not exhibited, but it was reproduced in the catalogue for the 1986 Sydney Biennale, curated by Nick Waterlow (the work displayed was *Lost, lost, lost* of 1985).

Despite Tillers' earlier protestations about locality not being a worthy concern, through his appropriation of Jagamara's *Five Stories* he inserted the land into his field of consideration. The whiff of scandal, the complex implications for appropriation of Aboriginal symbolism, and the discussion that revolved around these issues, were addressed on the occasion of Tillers' major retrospective in 2006, in an essay by Howard Morphy: 'Impossible to Ignore: Imants Tillers' Response to

Aboriginal Art'.[39] Tillers had not simply exposed himself to accusations of breaching Nelson's personal moral rights as an artist (just as he was also in breach of Baselitz's copyright), but by not observing Aboriginal protocols he had used commonly held cultural material for which he had not gained permission to access.[40]

A major reprisal for *The Nine Shots* was Gordon Bennett's now famous riposte, *The nine ricochets (Fall down black fella, jump up white fella)* of 1990, with which he won the prestigious Moët et Chandon Art Prize. *The Nine Shots* was a turning point in Tillers' career, as was *The nine ricochets* in Bennett's.



Figs. 57 & 58. Imants Tillers, *The Nine Shots* 1985
Synthetic polymer paint, oilstick. 91 canvas boards, nos. 7215 – 7305, installation 330 x 266 cm. Collection of the artist.
Gordon Bennett, *The Nine Ricochets (Fall Down White Fella, Jump Up Black Fella)*, 1990
Oil and acrylic on canvas and canvas boards, 220x182 cm. Private collection.

As Howard Morphy has said, these two works have been discussed in tandem, 'to the point where they often become identified with each other in peoples' minds'.[41] Such is the power of Bennett's act of counter-appropriation: to implicate Tillers in a dialogue in which he no longer calls all the shots, and into which repressed content forcefully erupts.

Already, before Bennett's gesture became public, Tillers had become aware of Aboriginal protocol and discussed the issue face-to-face with Jagamara at the 1986 Sydney Biennale.[42] Tillers went on to collaborate with Michael Jagamara Nelson and with Gordon Bennett, both of whom at different points in time have faced

[39] Howard Morphy, 'Impossible to ignore: Imants Tillers' response to Aboriginal art', http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/Tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=5#_edn11
[40] ibid.
[41] Morphy, op cit.
[42] ibid.

controversy over *their* respective appropriations and renditions of Aboriginal cultural property. In appearance there has been no change in Tillers' practice of using pre-existing images by other artists but, for the most part, straightforward appropriation-as-theft has given way to compliance with cultural procedure and to collaboration. This complexity recalls Walter Benjamin's statement:

> An author who has carefully thought about the conditions of production today... will never be concerned with the products alone, but always, at the same time, with the means of production. In other words, his products must possess an organising function besides and before their character as finished works.[43]

Morphy carefully avoids drawing pre-emptive conclusions about the place of Aboriginal art in Tillers' work, and makes it clear that he does not consider that Tillers' current practice has 'resolved' issues of appropriation and incorporation: these problematics are part and parcel of Tillers' 'work in progress', a theme of the survey exhibition. I believe they are in keeping with a Surrealist aspect of it, in which appropriation has a scandalous element. The same can be said of Gordon Bennett's practice, which continues to work through a series of complex experiments with appropriation as its means. In the works of both men, and in Moffatt's too, it becomes quite apparent that the performative, contingent and inherently political nature of appropriation does not present a problem that can be solved; rather, it is a set of problematics that can be almost endlessly renegotiated.

At an early point in Bennett's career he was already using appropriation as his primary methodology, and by the 1990s he had produced an exorbitant corpus. Driven in part by a personal identity crisis spawned by his recognition, as a teenager, of his mother's Aboriginality, Bennett's was an urgent project to contribute to a paradigm shift and contribute to a change in cultural relations in Australia. As commentators have noted, Bennett's critical stance toward Tillers must have drawn from his own recent lesson in appropriating Aboriginal symbolism and bearing the brunt of criticism from the traditional owners of the design.[44]

For a student painting, *Perpetual motion machine,* 1989, Bennett had appropriated a Mimi spirit figure by Maningrida artist Crusoe Kuningbal. In June 1989 Bennett travelled to Maningrida to apologise.[45] He said at the time,

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[43] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso 1992), 98.
[44] McLean, op cit, 93; Gellatly, op cit., pp.12 and 120.
[45] Gellatly, op cit., pp.12 and 120.

> I won't be appropriating any more Aboriginal images because I now more fully understand the situation. You have to understand my position of having no designs or images or stories on which to draw to assert my Aboriginality. In just three generations that heritage has been lost to me…[46]

Ian McLean writes that Bennett realized that his excuse was poor, saying, 'It did not justify his appropriation of Aboriginal art, it misrepresented his own aesthetic aspirations, and was not the reason for his initial appropriation.'[47]

Fig. 59. Imants Tillers, *Pataphysical man,* 1984.
Painting synthetic polymer paint, charcoal and pencil on 168 canvas boards 304 x 532 cm overall.

While Bennett's title *The nine ricochets* clearly refers to *The Nine Shots*, the content of his work actually quotes Tillers' *Pataphysical man* of 1984, which itself quotes a work by the Latvian artist Janis Jaunsudrabins.[48] Centrally placed in *Pataphysical man* is Jaunsudrabins' folksy figure, who seems to be running scared, battling high winds and negotiating a field of shards.[49] Bennett replicates this figure on canvas boards, and these are overlaid onto to a larger canvas. The canvas quotes a section of a woodcut entitled *Queensland Squatters Dispersing Aborigines*, a print used as the frontispiece to A.J. Vogan's book, *The Black Police*. It was also reproduced in Bruce

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[46] Gordon Bennett, quoted in Bob Lingard, 'A Kind of History Painting', p. 42., in Gellatly, p.120, footnote 23.
[47] McLean, 93.
[48] Morphy, op cit.
[49] The Art Gallery of New South Wales website notes that *Pataphysical man* 'was one of the key works in the exhibition *An Australian Accent*, shown at PS1 in New York in 1984, in which Tillers exhibited alongside Mike Parr and Ken Unsworth. This exhibition attracted critical acclaim with *Pataphysical man* being singled out as embodying contemporary appropriation strategies. In this painting the large figure is derived from Giorgio de Chirico's 'The archaeologists' of 1926–27. De Chirico's habit of recycling his own imagery and his style of classicism which stood outside more prevalent art developments fascinated Tillers. Other image sources within 'Pataphysical man' include Latvian children's books and the handprints found in Aboriginal rock art'. <http://collection.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/results.do?id=147258&db>

Elder's book, *Blood on the Wattle*, which was Bennett's source.[50] Terry Smith notes that Bennett has refrained from reworking an explicitly violent narrative section of the image, which depicts an Aboriginal woman pleading for her life and the life of her child, surrounded by the dead bodies of her tribesmen:

> A white squatter reaches for another bullet and a black policeman raises an axe. In *The Nine Ricochets* we see the axe itself raised, the hand obliterating the head of one Aboriginal man, while below a body is decapitated by the lower edge of the picture. Behind a man – white, Aboriginal? – leads off a young woman. Although no violence is directly shown, bloody murder and violation pervade the scene.[51]

In Bennett's excerpt, most of the action has been removed. Selected elements of the original composition stand, economically implying a slaying of Aborigines by colonialists. Emulating Tillers' pictorial spaces, the image is flattened, and the picture plane is punctuated with the nine ricochet holes. Kelly Gallatly offers this interpretation of the work:

> [T]he nine bleeding roundels (both cultural sites, targets, bullet holes and wounds) in *The nine ricochets* leave us in no doubt as to Gordon Bennett's interpretation of Tillers' use of indigenous art at this time. A direct correlation is established in this work between the events of the violent backdrop, Imants Tillers' work, and the appropriative practice that its presence signals.[52]

I am not convinced that Bennett's work gives us such a proscribed response to Tillers. I do not think that it does force the singular reading that Tillers' appropriation is tantamount to colonialism. Bennett offers various correspondences between the two main pictorial elements. The Jaunsudrabins/Tillers fleeing figure under siege corresponds to the figure of the Aboriginal woman it overlaps. The third element overlaid, the red rectangle with the impossible three-pronged shape is a rebus. It poses a question that cannot quite be framed *as* a question: an aporia then. I would like to offer the speculation that this rebus refers to the structure of appropriation itself. Appropriation has a central irresolvable problematic, connected to the notion of *blood and soil*, the German expression coined in late 19th century national Romanticism with its pre-fascist ideology.

Pataphysical man followed Tillers' statement 'Locality Fails', which posed a challenge to the idea of geographic specificity in art. But, as noted, *Pataphysical man* quotes from a Latvian painter. Bennett has seized this to underscore the aspect of

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[50] Kelly Gellatly, *Gordon Bennett* (Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2007), 121, footnote 28.
[51] Terry Smith, 'Australia's Anxiety', quoted in Gellatly, op cit., 121, footnote 28.
[52] Gellatly, op cit., 13

Tillers' nationality within the painting.[53] Morphy comments,

> Tillers' art apparently challenged identities based on locality, removed images from their cultural contexts, and juxtaposed them with images from other places and times. After all, the very title – 'Locality Fails' – of his reflexive critique of contemporary art, almost his manifesto, written in 1982 can be taken as a challenge to Aboriginal art or at least to some people's hope for Aboriginal art.[54]

Tillers was trying to move beyond local conditions and towards a very broad network of correspondences using a global repertoire – drawing upon the ideas of Duchamp and de Chirico and other artists, and against the concept of blood and soil – notions of genealogy and homeland which celebrate the relationship of a people to the land that breeds and sustains them. On one hand Bennett's gesture calls Tillers to account for the culturally and geographically specific nature of the source materials he has used in his appropriation. From this perspective, indeed Bennett imposes an Aboriginal ethics of reading onto Tillers' work, and thus Bennett implicates Tillers in a politics of vision that troubles the apparent distance of the latter's stance. On the other hand, it is significant that *The nine ricochets* quotes the troubled little fleeing figure in *Pataphysical Man*, and we should not rule out the idea that Bennett himself identifies with this figure. In this telling, I don't wish to argue that Bennett's was the principle critical voice responding to Tillers at the time, nor that Bennett was cognisant of all the ramifications of his gesture. In *The nine ricochets*, for Bennett the problematic of place and belonging is not related to an idealisation of home, but a picturing of constant flight and indeterminacy. For Bennett, no less than Tillers, the logic of 'emplacement' is by no means certain.

Tillers received criticism from a number of quarters, aside from Bennett. It has been quite roundly discussed, not least by Tillers' himself, that as consequences of the fallout from *The Nine Shots* Tillers' critical distance was altered, his practice became engaged in collaboration as well as appropriation, and his art became increasingly 'emplaced'. He settled in the Monaro district, and ironically entitled an article on his work 'When locality prevails' to signal his reconsideration (though not a denial) of his earlier written statement, and a recognition of the change of platform that had taken place in his art practice.[55] He increasingly took up collaborative projects, and developed a personal relationship with Michael Jagamara Nelson working with him at the Campfire Group in Brisbane. Together they have produced works such as *Nature speaks: Y (possum dreaming)* from 2001. In this work, visible signs are the

[53] Imants Tillers, 'Locality Fails,' *Art and Text*, No. 6 (Winter, 1982), 51 – 60.
[54] Morphy, op cit.
[55] ibid.

word HORIZON from a cigarette packet, a phrase of Mallarmé's, and two symbols – for lightning and for possum – from the Walbiri lexicon, are interpolated by Jagamara.[56]

Fig. 60. Imants Tillers, Michael Jagamara Nelson, *Nature speaks: Y (possum dreaming)* 2001 synthetic polymer paint and gouache, 16 canvas boards, nos. 69425 – 69440, 101.6 x 142.2 cm.

Tillers has gone on to reference other Aboriginal painters by observing protocols for gaining permission to quote cultural material.[57] However, in *Nature speaks* the inclusion of Mallarmé's phrase, 'a throw of the dice will never abolish chance', might allude to the fact that quotation necessarily includes a wager on a random element, and that 'lifting' from another's work, whether sanctioned or not, can have consequences beyond intention. In 1993 Tillers invited Gordon Bennett to make a collaborative work with him for the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane. Tillers' component comprised a painting inspired by de Chirico's work *Greetings of a distant friend* of 1916.[58] Bennett's component was ambivalent: it included excerpts from the faxed correspondence between himself and Tillers – in which he demures from the invitation to collaborate, an appropriation of Tillers' stack of canvasboards, and adaptations of Tillers' Chirico-inspired work.[59] In the faxed correspondence, Bennett makes reference to the earlier controversial work, *The nine ricochets* and the image of the Latvian figure in Tillers' *Pataphysical man* that Bennett himself had re-

[56] Deborah Hart, 'A Work in Progress' catalogue essay, *One World, Many Visions*, National Gallery of Australia, <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/TILLERS/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=1>

[57] Simon Wright, 'Some other ways: Michael Nelson Jagamara and the Campfire Group 85–97,' in Michael Eather (ed.), *Shoosh!: the History of the Campfire Group* (Fortitude Valley: Institute of Modern Art, 2005).

[58] Hart, op cit.

[59] I am indebted to one of my thesis examiners for pointing out that Bennett's response to Tillers was not an agreement to collaborate.

appropriated, noting that he had kept it close to him for years, for use at the right time. The appropriations, counter appropriations and détournements by Tillers and Bennett dramatised the issue of appropriation and its potential for reassignment and slippage. They contributed to a broader critical dialogue that was underway, over the use of Aboriginal Australian material as it was being addressed in the legal system.[60] Though contestation of the appropriation of Indigenous cultural material has occurred in this country for decades, and the legal wrangling has been well documented, the gaffs made by Bennett and Tillers staged the tensions not only between traditional ownership of knowledge and Western copyright, but between traditional ownership and postmodern appropriation practice, with the result that both artists have adjusted their manner of appropriation to observe Indigenous protocols and to embrace collaborative practice, yet each continues to push the boundaries of protocol.

Gordon Bennett + John Citizen

Ian McLean describes Gordon Bennett as a 'reluctant postmodernist' who 'remains an existentialist at heart'.[61] Elsewhere, he elucidates Bennett's claim to be a history painter:

> It might seem reasonable to infer that Bennett means to be a modern day historiographer tracing contemporary events, not an academic history painter intent on replaying the ennobling virtues of the Ancient Greek. However Bennett's historiography is ambiguous. Despite his claim to be a history painter, Bennett wants to undo the hold of the usual stories told by modern historians. He is interested in what Australia's historians do not say, in what they leave out – or more exactly, in mapping what might be called, after Jung, the shadow of Aboriginality in Australian historiography.[62]

McLean identifies that Bennett's historiography is, 'a psychoanalytical deconstruction designed to trace the unconscious of Australian identity.'[63] McLean goes on to say, 'like the traditional history painter he proclaims a history of ideas over mimesis; ideas which stage the possibility of redemption. In "questioning the ways our own history defines us" [Bennett's words], he claims to be seeking "the art

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[60] Indigenous artists have been pursuing their rights at least since the Reserve Bank of Australia breached the copyright of David Malangi when it used his design on the one dollar note in 1966. Terri Janke 'Guarding ground: a vision for a National Indigenous Cultural Authority', Wentworth lecture 2008, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, at <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/exhibitions/wentworth/Janke_21Aug08.rtf.>

[61] McLean, 77 – 8.

[62] ibid., 70.

[63] ibid., 70.

of the beautiful life or the ancient notion of noble existence"'.[64] McLean argues that although Bennett underwent a turn to deconstruction in the latter half of 1988, he refused to leave behind metaphysical and phenomenological issues.[65] Distinguishing between Bennett's practice and a more hard and fast form of postmodernism, McLean enumerates:

> First, he appropriates for instrumental not epistemological purposes. That is, he has clear socio/historical objectives in mind. Second, his appropriations draw attention to the textual and ideological objections and content of his critique. Third, when Bennett appropriates, he also seeks to counter its deliberate semiological estrangements with an existential search for an interior metaphysical meaning. Appropriation, which strips meaning from things, and its opposite existential reclamation of meaning, combine as the chiaroscuro of Bennett's art.[66]

Instrumentality notwithstanding, McLean goes on to underscore the semiological undermining at play in Bennett's appropriation, identifying Bennett's will to disclose and unleash the repressed:

> If, on one hand, Bennett's appropriations expose the ideologies at work in Western art by severing the contents of its images from the structures which orchestrate this content, at a deeper level he rearticulates his appropriations into another system of meaning – here one which lends presence to that which has been repressed by the order of Western picture making in non-Aboriginal Australian art.[67]

McLean's close discussion of the pictorial evidence and references to the testimony of the artist puts his analysis beyond dispute. Nonetheless, as Bennett's work carries such strong psychosocial resonance, an urgency of reclamation for meaning and a type of utopianism (in his reference to the beautiful life and noble existence), there is value in augmenting McLean's analytical frame. Despite the studious manner with which Bennett assembled appropriated stylistic notation in his works in the 1990s, much of it emanates burning emotion. This is not to deny strategic, cerebral composition or theoretical (or philosophical) impetus, but to observe that the works resonate with grief and anger, and this is not confined to the early more expressionistic works nor to those with a clear autobiographical or confessional edge – though these declare the personal stakes of Bennett's oeuvre. A close examination of the psychological register is perhaps most appropriate for the works that spill out of Bennett's painterly oeuvre. I think by examining them through the lens of Surrealism, these in particular can be illuminated. In 1993–94 there are some

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[64] ibid., 71.
[65] ibid., 78.
[66] ibid., 78.
[67] ibid., 92 – 3.

examples of works that eschew the broad canvas of history painting, in two different directions.

The *Home Sweet Home Series* (1993–94) offers us a different key to the psychological aspect of Bennett's project, portraying as it does a mundane suburban field of psychological damage, not via quotations from the mass media or art history, but personal recollections. These works are black humour indeed. On paper, paired graphic images and short statements comprise a ghastly, sad, but very funny memoire about life in the Brisbane suburbs, written in Bennett's own hand and signed and dated. Each statement begins, 'Please excuse me, I don't mean to offend', to introduce a heartfelt recollection about child abuse, racism, domestic violence. These include an embarrassing account of a shameful, squeamishly hilarious evening of entertainments with Bennett and his friends: masturbation games, performing 'brown eyes' and shouting obscenities at girls from car windows. Here we are dealing with the confessional, psychological *page* of life as it is lived, not the wide heroic *canvas* that addresses political inequality and historical distortion – yet the theme is the same: cycles of violence. Understandably, the sustained nature of a practice that works through these cycles forced a crisis or at least a hiatus for Bennett, and an attempt to re-establish a point of distance. At the very same time, Bennett made two installation works in which one of his leitmotifs, the mirror, makes its reappearance.[68]

Fig. 61. Gordon Bennett, *Mirror Line*, 1993. Mixed media, site specific installation, University of Melbourne.

Again, McLean's reading of this installation is acute. McLean describes how, using

[68] McLean says, 'The mirror is the enduring emblem of Bennett's work, and was only absent from his work during his most insistent postmodernist phase, between the second half of 1989 and early 1991. It returns, as I have indicated, during his residency in France…', p. 114.

some of the 'most prized works' in the University of Melbourne's collection, Bennett configured the mirror tiles on the floor to act as a 'hinge' between the binary of Aboriginal and European Australia, staging 'a psychological mirror world' which exceeds any stark binary structure:

> Inserted into and between the binary display on the walls, the mirror on the floor becomes an inverted space in which a new subject becomes possible.[…] This is not simply a decentring process. Rather Bennett not only retained the iconic remnants of colonialist discourse (e.g. the nineteenth century lithographs), he polished them to give them their full effect, so that when he opened each to its other, juxtaposing them according to their acute binary formations, the mirror line shimmered with a third presence, a double reflection, a palimpsest of colonizer and colonized – the postcolonial subject. Put simply, Bennett's critical purpose is to recirculate repressed memories until the postcolonial subject becomes a possibility.[69]

This phantasmagoria extends, and presents a culmination of, Surrealist praxis.[70] The moment which, as McLean describes, signals a third presence, is a Lacanian mirror-phase moment in which a projected subjectivity is formed that does not yet have its basis in the embodied moment. In Benjaminian terms, this ghost of the future is produced by the ideological products of the past: there is no postcolonial subject – not yet, but the recirculation of the apparitions of the past through commodities or cultural products (lined up here in two orders) can point us to such a subject. Benjamin's recuperative approach to the phantasmagoria relies on a Marxist conception of commodity fetishism. As McLean forcibly analyses, in this work of Bennett's and his oeuvre generally, Bennett gestures toward the postcolonial subject as a narcissistic reflectivity.

It might seem surprising that Bennett followed his 1993–94 installations works with the John Citizen and abstractionist projects. Bennett's works just discussed correspond to a point in the mid 1990s, at which time Gellatly recounts, '[He] came to feel that he was in an untenable position', pigeonholed as an Aboriginal artist. He began to refuse to include his work in 'Aboriginal' art exhibitions, and took up the alter ego John Citizen. Gellatly quotes him as saying in 1999, 'Yes, I am using John Citizen increasingly. Some may see it as a clever appropriation of the Australian 'everyman' but I see it more as a reappropriation of myself which has been othered to the point where I can't identify with "Gordon Bennett" the Aboriginal (life as an adjective is exasperating)'.[71] Bennett discusses his move from his postcolonial project of about fifteen years duration, to his move to abstraction from about 2000, in

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[69] ibid.

[70] Following the argument presented in Chapter Six, the space Bennett configures in *Mirror Line* is heterotopic, in Foucauldian terms, see pp. 203–205.

[71] Gordon Bennett in an interview with Terry Smith, 27 March 19997, as recorded in Terry Smith's 'Australia's Anxiety', p. 21, in Gellatly, 18.

an interview with Bill Wright. Says Bennett,

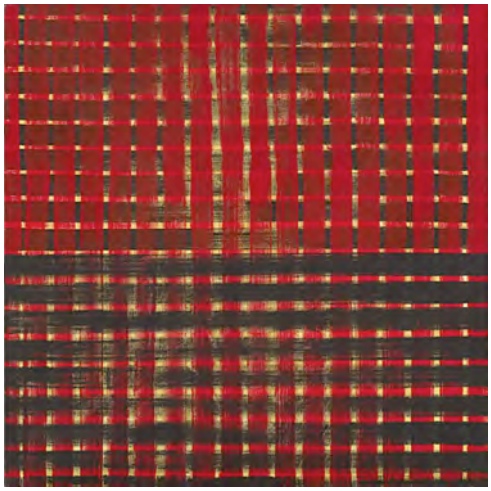
> There are a number of reasons why I began painting abstract paintings that focused on 'overt visual phenomena' as opposed to 'explicit visual content'. One reason is that I felt I had gone as far as I could with the postcolonial project I was working through. This culminated in the *Notes to Basquiat* series in 2003. The content of the work was getting to me emotionally. So, painting in an overtly "abstract" manner was a way to go silent on the issues involved and yet still keep painting. [72]

In the interview Bennett discusses his options as lying between political content or abstraction, but what emerges is a cloven practice, *almost* split between the abstraction of the now 'silent' yet ever-studious Gordon Bennett, and the brash work of 'John Citizen' which, far from avoiding politicized content, continues the postcolonial project but in a cryptic and apparently cynical vein. The two 'oeuvres' are openly cross-referenced as John Citizen quotes Gordon Bennett.

In one branch of his parallel practice, Gordon Bennett makes art about art. Or, rather, perhaps he makes art about *hibernation in art*. He says,

> I've never been one to make art about art before. There was always some sense of social engagement. I needed to change direction … at least for a while. Art about art seems appropriate for the time being. The *Stripe* series of abstract paintings represents a kind of freedom for me as an artist.[73]

In the other branch of the practice, John Citizen's pictorial style is stark and Popist. Where the two 'oeuvres' cross, they mark out a curiously critical zone.



Figs. 62 & 63. John Citizen, *Interior (Tribal rug)* 2007. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 152 x 152 cm. Private collection, Brisbane.
Gordon Bennett, *Number nine*, 2004. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 152 x 152 cm, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

[72] Bennett in conversation with Bill Wright, in Gellatly, 97.
[73] Gordon Bennett, 'Conversation – Bill Wright talks to Gordon Bennett,' p. 97, quoted on <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/gordonbennett/education/05.html>, f.n 17.

It is questionable to what extent the maverick Citizen can be held to account. He appropriates without seeking permission. He is cruder and ruder than Gordon Bennett. He doesn't say, 'Please excuse me…' and he strikes out at the present without seeming to laboriously deconstruct the past: but he doesn't need to, as he can simply quote the dutiful Gordon Bennett. *Interior (Tribal rug)* 2007 is one in a series of slick still lifes through which Citizen depicts a sort of updated Howard Arkleyan cum John Howard cum Harvey Norman interior decoration disaster. It is an aspirational-suburban, *mis en abyme,* multi-referential nightmare. The Aboriginal rug on the floor may refer to the Vietnamese Carpet Case variety;[74] the furniture might be imitation Ikea; the paintings on the wall are by Gordon Bennett ('neo-abstractionist') and John Citizen ('Pop-ist').

Norman Bryson made a sharp distinction between history or *anecdotal* painting and traditional *still life*, and his point of discrimination helps me to identify what I find so chilling and repugnant about the apparently bland John Citizen interiors, which can be construed as still lifes. Bryson wrote that a still life is 'the world minus its narrative or, better, the world minus its capacity for generating narrative interest.' Narrative structures engage with processes of change, but still life, he says, 'pitches itself at the level of material existence where nothing exceptional occurs: there is wholesale eviction of the Event.'[75] Gordon Bennett's deconstructive works of the 1990s, which operated as history paintings, offered the viewer the energy of the artist's insurrection. There was solace in that: their message at its most general was that *here is a possibility for dissent*. In stark contrast, with a nasty jolt the John Citizen paintings depict a terrifying level of material existence where, in Bryson's words, *nothing exceptional occurs.*

The collisions Citizen orchestrates between different realities seem premeditated, not the least bit random. To approach the psychoanalytical bases of the 'John Citizen'

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[74] The Vietnamese carpet case of 1994 is a landmark in the legal protection of Aboriginal art. 'After a 14-day trial, three Aboriginal artists and the estates of five other deceased Aboriginal artists were awarded damages totaling $188 640 for infringements of their copyright. The action was taken in response to the activities of the Perth-based Indofurn (known as Beechrow at the time of the infringement), which imported carpets from Vietnam and sold them in Australia for as much as $4 000. The works of prominent Aboriginal artists, living and dead, were reproduced on the carpets.' http://ab-ed.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/go/aboriginal-art/protecting-australian-indigenous-art/case-studies-of-copying-and-appropriation/case-study-4-the-carpets-case

[75] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London, Reaktion Books, 1990), 60 and 61.

project, we need to refer to two interconnected aspects: the drive energy that evidently powers the prolific and feisty practice of Gordon Bennett, and the logic of the formal combinatory arrangements that Citizen effects. By elaborating upon the psychoanalytical aspect of his practice(s) we can look to continuities between the apparently 'politicised' work of the 1990s (and earlier), and the apparently 'cynical' 'post-postcolonial' work. Much of the John Citizen work locates the contemporary domestic sphere and its décor as its target.

Bennett has made it common knowledge that prior to going to art college he underwent analysis.[76] He had to confront the idea that, prior to his teenage years, he had not known of his Aboriginality, yet his life was structured by a racist society. Two works, which, to my knowledge, have received little critical commentary, permit the general connections I would like to draw between Bennett's oeuvre in his own name in its entirety, and John Citizen's. These are assemblages that incorporate wall works and furniture, and which forge a network of connections between the domestic, social and political realms. I will relate my discussion mainly to *Self portrait (Ancestor figure)*, 1992.

It comprises a three-drawer 'duchess,' a chest of drawers-cum-dressing-table with a mirror, a piece of Australian vernacular furniture of the 1920s. Stencilled on the drawers in white are the words 'self', 'history' and 'other'. It sits on a paper grid held in place by large silver painted stones. On the wall surrounding the mirror are eighteen small, framed images, rectangular and oval: some are family photographs in black and white or sepia, depicting light and dark skinned people. The other images are small watercolours, three resembling Malevich constructivist works, and two depicting flying black putti.

The various elements of *Self portrait (Ancestor figure)* are roughly contemporaneous: The 1920s Australian furniture is the same vintage as Russian Constructivism, and some of the photographs seem to be of that era. The pictures suggest genealogies: familial and artistic. The drawers marked *self*, *history* and *culture* suggest not just inheritance but agency. Amongst the images, the strange little putti are enigmatic. They give at least a glimpse of the possibility for ascension, but they may just as well point to missionary constriction.

[76] Bennett has made more than one mention of his psychoanalysis. See Gellatly p. 104.

Figs. 64 & 65. Gordon Bennett, *Self portrait (Ancestor figures)*, 1992. Chest of drawers, watercolour, photocopies, lead, rocks, masking tape; Gordon Bennett, *Self portrait (Schism)*, 1992, *History painting (Burn and scatter)*, *History painting (Excuse my language)*. Synthetic polymer and vinyl paint on canvas, dressing table. Holmes á Court collection.

The partner piece is another assemblage, entitled *Self portrait (Schism)*, of 1992. As its title proclaims, this work is not layered, but divided. It comprises a two-drawer dressing-table each drawer inscribed 'self' and 'other'. A 'shadow' of white paint sweeps the side of the dressing table obscuring nearly half of the circular mirror, which also bears another Constructivist styled motif. At either side of the mirror hang Malevich-style cruciform paintings entitled *History painting (Burn and scatter)* and *History painting* (*Excuse my language*), which bear racist taunts in red text.

Through their style and vintage, these objects have the effect of 'returning our look', according to the logic of the Surrealist Uncanny. The pieces of furniture were once commonplace, fairly plain, with relatively cheap pressed-metal drawer-pulls of a derivative 'art nouveau' style: the low end of the Australian arts and crafts movement, and the type of furniture that people of Bennett's generation grew up with, which, at the time, would have been outmoded and perhaps considered second-rate. Since then, they have gained caché and nostalgic appeal, in the normal course of the way we fetishise objects of the not-so-distant past. To my mind, as well as connecting to *Mirror Line*, these two installation works connect in a different way to Bennett's *Home décor* series of the latter 1990s. The *Home décor* works spin a (paranoiac) web of connections between aspects of mainly 1920s modernism: 'darkie' motifs in advertising, blues music, de Stijl, Margaret Preston, Bennett's own works and, by association, Australiana and the Arts and Crafts movement and, by further association, Art déco. Taken together, these motifs comprise a matrix, a type of aesthetic 'complex': a 'colonial moderne'.

Fig. 66. Gordon Bennett, *Home décor (Algebra) Ocean*, 1998
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 182.5 x 365 cm.

The culminating work of the series, *Home décor (Algebra) Ocean*, of 1998, draws a maelstrom of interconnections, with a central *mis en abyme* of self-quotation of *Possession Island* of 1991 and of some contemporaneous *Notes to Basquiat*. *Algebra* was a grand finale to Bennett's self-described postcolonial project, in which everything is connected to everything else in a paranoid structure. From the excess of *Home décor* to the sparer *Interiors* of John Citizen, the link is the décor. The high level of tension continues, acutely, hinting precisely to an ongoing level of repression in an oppressive, acquisitive and anxious era.

Tracey Moffatt

Tracey Moffatt's critical purpose can be described in exactly the terms used by McLean to encapsulates Bennett's: *to recirculate repressed memories until the postcolonial subject becomes a possibility*, however the psycho-social mechanisms operating in her work are different. Moffatt's moves are not so much narcissistic or paranoiac as anaclitic, and in them we see more overtly libidinal dramas.[77]

The reception afforded the works of Tracey Moffatt has been different from that given to Gordon Bennett's. Commentators have a tendency to list her themes. Plot and character are absent from her work (which puts it in relation to Breton's repudiation of Dostoevsky's realist narrative fiction in the *First Manifesto*). Rather, theme, style and media are points of fixity. Moffatt deals in *scenarios* and *tropes* that approach myth, but do not arrive at it. We can draw a connection here with the

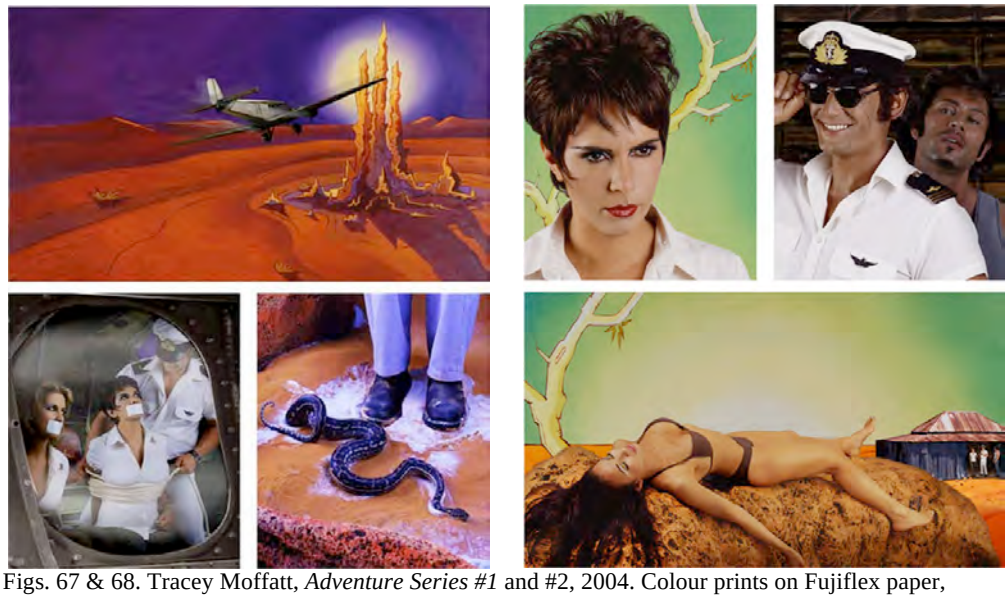
[77] The distinction is Freudian. An anaclitic relationship is strongly object-driven.

organization of Aragon's non-novel *Paysan de paris* of 1926. No plot, no characters, some localities – the Passage de l'Opera, Parc Buttes Chaumont and a *habitus*: social behaviours that occur in given spaces, like the handkerchief shop that fronts the brothel in the Passage; the suspension bridge that serves as a lovers' leap in the Park. Similarly, in Moffatt's works there aren't characters either, but *types*; there isn't scenery but *scenography*. We are presented with ample opportunities to superimpose our own memories, embarrassments and traumas onto these. Unlike Gordon Bennett, Moffatt has given very little away. In interviews she is reticent. Though she has been public property for years, the bare biographical facts have not been embellished: *Aboriginal child adopted by working class white family, raised on tv and comics; refuses to be classified as Aboriginal artist. Makes guest appearances in her own work.* There is celebrity persona, but no confessional.

In *Adventure Series* of 2004 (as in the well known work, *Something More*, of 1985) Moffatt appears as a protagonist in the suite of images, and the extreme artifice of the backdrops recalls the high-key set of her landmark work *Night Cries*, of 1989. *Adventure Series* transports me to the after-school television fare of my own childhood, and the barely-concealed sexuality of the hunks who took the heroes' parts in the children's programs like *Skippy* and *The Adventures of the Seaspray*. As her sources, Moffatt credits the 1970s Australian television seafaring show, *The Rovers*, and an adventure comic strip, *The Flying Doctor* series that she read as a child in the Brisbane newspapers. Australian children's entertainment in the 1960s and 1970s had a common primitivist element, usually in the shape of a benign, canny native, who could save the day when technology failed or nature became too wild. *Adventure Series* incorporates all the visible signs of the genre for general viewing in that era, but satirises the character types and forces into sharp relief the fact that these were colonialist narratives. What is more, children's programs notwithstanding, there was an erotics at play in the original versions, and this aspect is ramped up in Moffatt's work.

Elza Adamowicz writes of historical Surrealism, 'The surrealists explore new forms of narrative – partial, elliptical or arrested – which privilege suspense and undecidability, approximating dream narratives and creating the *merveilleux.'* She continues in a vein that, to my mind, describes Moffatt's oeuvre: '"Blue" or "black", surrealist narrative modes parody familiar fictional mechanisms, juggle with stereotypical topoi, favouring the casual over the causal, local epiphanies over

sustained diegetic development.'[78] Moreover, Adamowicz clarifies the effect that Surrealism has in its strategic *perversion* of cliché.



Figs. 67 & 68. Tracey Moffatt, *Adventure Series #1* and #2, 2004. Colour prints on Fujiflex paper, 132 x 114.5 cm.

A strategy of perversion percolates through Moffatt's work: she quite literally perverts – as in exaggeratedly sexualizes – her clichéd character types. Often the effect of this move, as in the case of *Adventure Series*, is to make explicit an erotic register that is incipient within a pre-existing genre. The strategy of perversion is also overt in the highly melodramatic *Laudanum* series of nineteen photogravure images from 1998. As influences for this series Moffatt credits the 1963 film, *The Servant*, directed by Joseph Losey, and the novel *The Story of O*, of 1954, by Pauline Reage.[79] Taking these erotic or pornographic works as starting points, Moffatt's series develops a sado-masochistic colonial erotics.

The eroticised colonialism of *Laudanum* is heightened by the ghostliness of the vintage medium. Discussions of Moffatt's work have tended to focus on the artist's use of her media, and the fact that she blurs the boundaries between cinema, photography and the visual arts. Her use of technology is intimately bound to the content and the anti-colonialist message and time and again her work invokes an interplay between sex, violence and race in a society shaped by colonialism.

[78] Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 98.
[79] *Tracey Moffatt*, catalogue to the exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney: 2005), fifth page (unnumbered).

Fig. 69. Tracey Moffatt, *Laudanum, #4,* 1998.Toned photogravure prints on rag paper 76 × 57cm

In the *Laudanum* series, Moffatt heightens and revitalizes a clichéd seventies Australian gothic aesthetic, and writes it backwards through the medium of photogravure. She invokes the aesthetic of landmark films 1970s films such as *Picnic and Hanging Rock, The Getting of Wisdom, My Brilliant Career* and the television adaptation of *Seven Little Australians*, all of which were adaptations of Nineteenth Century Australian novels. Moffatt recoups the 1970s recuperation of the Nineteenth Century gothic, blending photogravure with 1970s hairstyling and makeup, and introducing a more explicit and troubling eroticism.[80]

Laudanum pictures a feminised topos that is hysterical and violent. All of the films just mentioned and the Victorian novels they are based on share those qualities, but Moffatt ramps it up, and makes the lesbian sexual connotations abundantly clear. In the film of *The Getting of Wisdom* an affair between two schoolgirls is made explicit, whereas it is merely hinted at in the book of 1910.

[80] *Seven Little Australians* written by Ethel Turner and first published in 1894 was adapted to stage and screen early, and made into an ABC television series in 1973. *Picnic and Hanging Rock,* directed by Peter Wier (1975) was made after the 1967 novel by Joan Lindsay. The plotline set in 1900 concerns some schoolgirls who go missing, as though entranced and swallowed by the Australian landscape. At one point in the story an Aboriginal tracker is called in to look for them. *The Getting of Wisdom* is a 1910 novel by Ethel Florence Lindsay Richardson, under the pseudonym Henry Handel Richardson. The 1978 film was directed by Bruce Beresford. The protagonist is a country girl who cannot fit in amongst the staid conventionality of an Australian girls' school. *My Brilliant Career* is a 1910 novel by Miles Franklin, adapted to screen in 1979, in a film directed by Gillian Armstrong.

Figs. 71 – 74. Tracey Moffatt, *Laudanum, #1, #2, #3 and #5*, 1998
Toned photogravure prints on rag paper 76 × 57cm. Edition of 60.

The mystique of Moffatt's subversions, the deconstructing and construction of illusion through referential and technological means, recall Benjamin in 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', where he cites the famous motto from Jules Michelet, 'every epoch dreams the one to follow', which precedes this formulation: 'Corresponding to the form of the new means of production, which in the beginning is still ruled by the form of the old (Marx), are images in the collective consciousness in which the old and new penetrate. These images are wish images; in them the collective seeks both to overcome and to transfigure the immaturity of the social

product and the inadequacies in the social order of production'.[81] Just as Freud had argued that dreams were the 'fulfilment of a wish' in however disguised a form, so, Benjamin claims, everyday life is also permeated by 'wish images.' In these, the desires of the collective are able to find expression, though the forces of production are not sufficiently developed to realise them in reality. The colonial condition and the cycle of violence resulting from internalized racism are given form in Moffatt's works with their recurrent figures of bondage. Her use of a collage principle silences rationalism, often by means of a threatening gesture, a bruise, a scratch, or the violence of mute appearances, and thus she proclaims a collective psychical and corporeal damage. Benjamin wrote:

> The collective is a body, too. And the *physis* that is being organised for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, be produced only in that image space to which profane illuminations initiates us. Only when technology, body and image space interpenetrate so that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*.[82]

For Foucault, it is exactly this *Other*, a part of ourselves that we both repress internally and project externally, into places and landscapes such as prisons, asylums or lazar houses, that defines the underlying truth of society. In Moffatt's work, images are cracked open to reveal what has been repressed by our official histories that have commandeered, classified and elided elements of the past. Moffatt's gestures often assert that landscape and flesh are the subconscious spaces of history's Unconscious. Thus these are the sites where we may dig, where we seek – and can find – our own innermost truth and identity and intimations of possible futures.

Art institutions have had a vital role in the public staging of social issues in Australia. The fact that artists like Tillers, Bennett and Moffatt have been afforded recognition here and elsewhere is testament to the fact that institutionally vaunted art can have strong effects. Not only can it bring a social message to public consideration and place it within a political agenda, it can give shape to a commonly held register of subconscious fears and desires. Vociferous debates have percolated through what we might call 'the art industry' at all levels, demonstrating that the visual arts support a strain of radicalism that runs staunchly against a more mainstream cultural

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[81] Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard UP, 1999) 4 – 5.
[82] Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' (1927), in *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 215.

hegemony. At times, as I have sought to demonstrate, the ‘message’ of such work – based as it is in the desiring subjectivity of the artist – does not operate in a fully intentional or conscious fashion, and here I contend there is great usefulness in bringing a Surrealist lens to it, to read it for its formal poetics and its deep resonances, as well as for its contextual themes, to bring to the fore its historical and critical force.

* * *

CONCLUSION

The Politics of Imperfection

BY and large history has judged Surrealism impatiently, as a series of errors and failures: a project that failed to reconcile art and life, a failed bid to couple revolutionary activism to artistic expression and, more lately, as an unwittingly 'primitivist' bid to construct a non-Western aesthetics. In his reconsideration of Surrealism in the 1940s, Bataille recognised that Surrealism is characterised by its propensity for error and continuation, and in this he saw great power. I do not think he was being perverse for the sake of it. Precisely because it stops short of utopianism, Surrealism provides the coordinates for pursuing a positive future, one that is not preconceived or designed, but negotiated. As such it is not, properly speaking, programmatic. There is no political end in sight, no end of history. Surrealism does not take us to a postmodernist impasse. It places us in a terrain of perpetual trial and error in the negotiation of the political aspects of aesthetic and social terms. Rather than providing us with criteria for accomplishing formal resolution, the Surrealist path pushes toward visualising what cannot yet be seen or experienced.

In this thesis I have sought to take up some common charges of Surrealism's various political failures, and I hope I have achieved an exposition of how very partial these accounts appear today and shown that they need to be reclassified and re-shelved – as standard texts on the subject of Surrealism no longer but as artefacts symptomatic of the longstanding grip of Marxist (or neo-Marxist) narrative, which needs to be

relativised. By contrast to the authoritative texts in Chapter One, I considered latter day cultural studies approaches in Chapter Two that decry the 'primitivism' of Surrealism. These fall short of approaching a post-colonial discourse, in so far as we can draw little or nothing from them about how to proceed toward a future, only a judgement on the past. To paraphrase Bataille on Existentialism, it is not clear what sort of energies such critiques are intended to support. Nonetheless, there seems to be an insistence and urgency to this brand of scholarship, and I entered into a little speculation as to *why* Surrealism is still so comprehensively pilloried and read against its own intentions in the name of 'deconstruction'. While I suppose that Marxist approaches to Surrealism are a symptom of leftist disillusionment *projected onto* Surrealism, repudiations of Surrealism as 'primitivist' arouse a suspicion that this line of attack is itself an expression of a fear of difference: a fear of the implications of genuine encounters across difference, and a fear of confronting the fact that racism persists within us all.

I argued in this thesis that Surrealism provides us with better models for proceeding than those of many of its critics. Another key aspect of Surrealism that Bataille appreciated positively by the early 1940s is that Surrealism is always confronted by its own alterity. By the 1940s Surrealism had accumulated its own hindsight which allows us to theorise its relation to non-Western cultures, as well our own inter-cultural relations. The understanding of this structure of Surrealism cannot be properly appreciated apart from a psychoanalysis: a psychoanalytic logic extended to the social arena. The peculiar and often paradoxical lyricism of Surrealism, at its most volatile and effective, can teeter on an edge between the sublime and the pornographic. This aesthetic register, often very raw and revealing of great cultural dissonance as well as psychic conflict, can encompass love, passion, ecstasy and monstrous violence. The Surrealists took these human emotions and staged them in a fashion that went beyond the individualistic address of Romanticism and into a realm that posited the ongoing importance of *affect* in social life.

By taking a long view of Surrealism, the central chapters (Four to Six), present a picture of the development and propulsion of Surrealism's brand of anti-colonialism and its poetics of alterity from the 1920s until the 1960s. This is a trajectory that is not, to my knowledge, delineated anywhere else, and it is here that I claim the main contribution by this thesis to its field of research. Throughout the development of my argument about anti-colonialism I have underscored the Surrealist position: that

historical transformation cannot be fully effected in political action, and nor can it take place through conscious activity alone. Breton consistently maintained that as well as an eye to the past, political will necessarily requires *leaps of the imagination* to be effective. Historical Surrealism established itself as a movement devoted to exploding established categories and thus it compels the ongoing revivification of human thought and experience beyond what is apparently possible in the present moment. Surrealist praxis entails the creation of conditions that support ontological change by collapsing categorical thinking and courting difference, a theme that has been roundly rehearsed in the thesis, with reference to particular tracts and other statements, and with regard to the play of signification as discussed in relation to selected periodicals and exhibitions. I have sought to provide a picture of Surrealism as ultimately not so much utopian – though utopianism is certainly an important aspect of it at times – but, following Foucault, as offering us means that might best be described as *heterotopic*.

Taking the 'long view' approach has necessarily meant that some material evidence of Surrealism's anti-colonialism has been summarily treated here, and some omitted altogether. In many instances avenues for contextual or related discussion have been relegated to footnotes. My central focus on Breton's primary explication of Surrealism was determined by the data, as his observations and reconsiderations over time and the debates in which he was involved link together various positions (sometimes more sophisticated and forceful than his own) of other Surrealists and 'dissidents'. While I have inflected my narrative by incorporating some eloquent discussions, by Bataille and Leiris for example, such references were rather fleeting and invite further elaboration. The Collège de Sociologie, Contre-Attaque and Acéphale are episodes of the 1930s to which I have given only cursory coverage, but they disclose a great deal more about Surrealist (or para-Surrealist) ideas about the occult, ritual and social psychology – themes closely related to, or inseparable from, Surrealist 'primitivism' in relation to the politics of the day. Similarly, the Martinican periodical *Tropiques* offers numerous statements that specify Surrealism's position in the 1940s with respect to racial oppression and cultural imperialism, and these too I have touched on lightly. To fully draw out the anti-colonial aspects of Surrealism in its theoretical aspect, these textual outputs, along with further extant documents by Bataille and Leiris from the 1950s, demand to be more amply described and analysed

than I have had the space to do in the context of this thesis.[1] These are directions for future research.

My other claim to originality is in the way I have taken up the idea of the Surrealist repressed and demonstrated its utility for analysing contemporary art in the Australian situation. I chose to discuss celebrated artists in the final chapter, but my observations have broader applicability to contemporary art making and curating, not only in this country. Numerous artists now work within a register that projects toward a postcolonial subjectivity. Though we live at a point in history when the colonial age has supposedly long since ended, it is still very much around us and within us. Surrealism put the means at our disposal to negotiate external and internal oppression with passion and intellect.

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[1] Some congruent material is all the more accessible because of the publication of an anthology of Bataille and Leiris's correspondence in translation: *Correspondence: Georges Bataille Michel Leiris*, edited with notes by Louis Yvert with an afterword by Bernard Noël, translated by Liz Heron (orig. Paris: Gallimard, 2004; Calcutta/London/New York: Seagull, 2008).

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