

## Devouring Surrealism: Tarsila do Amaral's *Abaporu*

**Michele Greet**

Various scholars have suggested a contiguity or affinity between Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral's iconic painting *Abaporu* (1928) and surrealism; none have engaged in an in-depth analysis of her actual relationship with surrealism, however. This close reading of *Abaporu* will demonstrate that Amaral deliberately and systematically engaged with the tenets and formal languages of surrealism. Her engagement was not one of pure emulation; instead she turned the surrealists' penchant for satire and desire to disrupt hierarchical schema back on itself, parodying the images and ideas put forth by the movement to create a counter modernism. Amaral's sardonic appropriation of surrealism's formal languages and subversive strategies was the very factor that made *Abaporu* the catalyst of the anthropophagite Movement.

On 11 January 1928 the Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral presented a painting to her husband, the writer and intellectual Oswald de Andrade, for his birthday. Amaral described the painting, which Andrade would later entitle *Abaporu* (Fig. 1), or 'person who eats,' as: 'a monstrous figure, with enormous feet planted on the Brazilian earth next to a cactus.'<sup>1</sup> Scholars have long acknowledged *Abaporu* as a crucial work in Amaral's career as well as an icon of early twentieth-century Latin American art. The painting marked the beginning of her anthropophagite phase, a period from about 1928 until 1930 during which Amaral departed from the densely packed compositions of urban São Paulo and the Brazilian countryside that characterized her Pau-Brasil period to paint scenes of one or two isolated figures in lush tropical dreamscapes.<sup>2</sup> Despite the dream-like quality of these pictures, Amaral's engagement with surrealism in *Abaporu* (and the other paintings of the period), while occasionally acknowledged, has not been fully interrogated. Various scholars have suggested a contiguity or affinity with surrealism during this period; I argue, however, that Amaral's sardonic appropriation of surrealism's formal languages and subversive strategies was the very factor that made *Abaporu* the catalyst of the anthropophagite movement.<sup>3</sup> My discussion goes beyond an examination of visual affinity to examine precisely how Amaral engaged with surrealism to move her art in a new direction and the significant impact her new vision had on the formulation of the anthropophagite movement. While I am not arguing that Amaral's paintings held sway over European artists closely associated with surrealist poet André Breton, her sophisticated engagement with surrealism's precepts indicates the fluidity, transmutability and relevance of surrealist intellectual and aesthetic practices for artists across disciplines, geographies, and time periods.





Fig. 1. Tarsila do Amaral, *Abaporu* (originally exhibited as *Nu*), 1928, oil on canvas, 83 x 73 cm, Museo de Arte Latinoamericana de Buenos Aires, Fundación Costanini.

Surrealism was the one movement that Amaral chose to deny in constructing her artistic trajectory and has therefore been downplayed in the scholarship on the artist. This deliberate disavowal suggests that there was a great deal at stake in admitting knowledge of and engagement with surrealism. As the 1920s and Amaral's career progressed, creating nationalist modernisms became a marker of artistic independence and avant-garde status. To admit to European influence was to admit to a lack of cultural authenticity. Thus, in describing their sources, it became increasingly likely that artists would deny the transnational and transhemispheric circulation of ideas and proclaim national or regional sources of their inspiration. They deployed European constructs of primitivism strategically as a marker of cultural difference, while maintaining or simply allowing critics to assert that this primitivism was inherent. The importance of declaring aesthetic independence became the cultural equivalent of disavowing colonialism and influenced the critical assessment of modern artists for generations, obfuscating discussions of their actual participation in circuits of intellectual exchange. My hope here is to shift the discussion back toward an examination of cross-cultural interaction by examining Amaral's selective appropriation and sardonic



contestation of surrealism as a strategy for creating a hybrid modernism that challenged traditional aesthetic and cultural hierarchies.

In 1967 the Brazilian art historian Aracy Amaral (a distant family relation to the artist) wrote an article entitled 'The Surreal in Tarsila' [O Surreal em Tarsila] — but more aptly titled 'The Lack of Surreal in Tarsila'— in which she argues: 'Contrary to what it seems, never was there any intentionality or surrealist research on the part of the artist throughout her entire career.'<sup>4</sup> Aracy Amaral claims the fantastic or bizarre incongruities in Tarsila do Amaral's work stemmed from the experience of such things in her childhood.<sup>5</sup> Even though the European surrealists were interested in the innocence of the child's mind, Aracy Amaral declares Tarsila do Amaral's use of childhood memories a unique occurrence unrelated to developments in Europe. For her Brazilian artists were actually 'immune to surrealism as a philosophy of artistic expression and all its implications as a "school."<sup>6</sup> While Aracy Amaral would later revise her opinion of Tarsila do Amaral's relationship to surrealism, she would still insist that 'magical or unconscious elements are minor characteristics of Tarsila do Amaral's pictorial work, and are linked more to *antropofagismo* than to the surreal.'<sup>7</sup> The issue here, however, is that the anthropophagite movement itself, with *Abaporu* as its harbinger, engaged in a sophisticated re-appropriation and critique of surrealist ideas and methods.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Oswald de Andrade made explicit the connection in 1929 stating:

Let us not forget that surrealism is one of the best pre-Anthropophagist movements. The liberation of man as such through the discourse of the unconscious and through turbulent personal manifestations was without a doubt one of the most thrilling spectacles for the heart of any Anthropophagist who in these last few years has accompanied the despair of civilized man... After Surrealism, only Anthropophagy.<sup>9</sup>

The subsequent denial of a connection to surrealism, both by the artists themselves and the scholars who wrote about them, therefore seems strategic. While surrealism was certainly not Amaral's only source during this period, its blatant absence from serious consideration deserves further investigation. Because of André Breton's tendency to designate certain Latin American artists as surrealists (i.e. Frida Kahlo or Rufino Tamayo), a proclamation which denied these artists agency, many Latin American artists (and some European artists) and the critics who promoted them downplayed or rejected outright any debt to or engagement with surrealism.<sup>10</sup> Writers such as the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier declared 'the marvellous' an innate Latin American characteristic, present long before the surrealists' 'discovery' of the region.<sup>11</sup> Such a claim served to assert Latin America's cultural autonomy in the face of foreign influences. While resisting Breton's imperious declarations was certainly warranted, the literature on Latin American artists, especially in the post-war period, has characteristically avoided determining the particularities of an artist's actual connection to surrealism.

Tarsila do Amaral's personal motives for disavowing surrealism seem to stem from a desire to construct an artistic trajectory that demonstrates her progression from dependence on foreign ideas to independence. In the 1930s she wrote extensively about the arts, penning articles on cubism, Ferdinand Léger, André Lhote, Constantin Brancusi, Robert Delaunay and Henri Rousseau, all of which were important influences early in her career. But she never wrote about surrealism despite her clear



involvement with the movement's precepts. Rather, she positioned cubism as a launching pad from which sprung the impetus for a more specifically 'Brazilian' art: 'cubism, or rather modern art, gave artists a creative conscience and spirit of freedom.'<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging a debt to surrealism in 1928 would have meant conceding that she had not fully disengaged from European sources, and that she had not succeeded in creating a purely Brazilian art, when her Brazilian supporters and many French critics claimed she had. Additionally, because there were significantly more negative responses to her 1928 exhibition, where her exploration of surrealism was most evident, than her 1926 show with its exploration of cubism and Léger's machine aesthetic, she may have decided to promote through her writings an interpretation of her work that negated surrealist influence.

Because of Aracy Amaral's declaration and Tarsila do Amaral's own disavowal of the movement, few scholars writing after the 1960s have engaged in an in-depth analysis of her actual relationship to surrealism. Icleia Maria Borsa Cattani argues, for example, that Amaral painted dream-like worlds in works such as *Venice* (1923) and *A Cuca* (The Bogeyman, 1924) (Fig. 2) before the advent of surrealism, and therefore could not have been significantly influenced by the movement.<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 2. Tarsila do Amaral, *A Cuca* (The Bogeyman), 1924, oil on canvas, 73 x 100 cm, Musée de Grenoble, Grenoble, France.

But one could argue, on the contrary, that because her work echoed certain aspects of the movement's aesthetic, she began to explore further its theoretical framework as it gained prominence in the Parisian art world. Additionally, Sônia Salztein insists that because of the presence of 'irony and constructive



intelligence' in her paintings, they could not possibly stem from a surrealist exploration of the unconscious.<sup>14</sup> While clearly not manifestations of automatism, as I will demonstrate, Amaral's paintings do appropriate and subtly challenge the branch of surrealism that engaged in carefully constructed ironic inversions of bourgeois social norms by presenting an imagined 'primitive' world as an archetypal model of unrestrained creative expression.

One of the few authors who acknowledges the connection between Amaral's work and surrealism is Maria José Justino.<sup>15</sup> While recognizing a parallel, Justino does not examine the intricacies of Amaral's exploration of surrealism. The following close reading of *Abaporu* will demonstrate that Amaral deliberately and systematically engaged with the tenets and formal languages of surrealism, not to the exclusion of other sources, but much more seriously than has previously been acknowledged. Amaral never joined the surrealist group; rather she engaged with the group's ideas from a critical distance, selectively appropriating certain surrealist images and strategies. Her engagement was not one of pure emulation, however; instead she turned the surrealists' penchant for satire and desire to disrupt hierarchical schema back on itself, parodying the images and ideas put forth by the movement to create a counter modernism that turned European forms into the servants of the Brazilian vanguard.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Amaral's Parisian Exhibitions***

Amaral had lived in Paris at various intervals during the 1920s, studying first at the Académie Julian and later with Lhote and Léger. For several years she maintained a studio in Montmartre that became a gathering place for the Brazilian intelligentsia and European avant-garde alike.<sup>17</sup> She held her first individual exhibition in Paris in June of 1926 at the Galerie Percier on the famous Rue de la Boétie, which included paintings such as *The Railway Station* of 1925 (Fig. 3).<sup>18</sup> In 1927 she returned to São Paulo to focus all her efforts on preparing for her second individual exhibition that would take place in Paris in the summer of 1928, also at the Galerie Percier. While her 1926 exhibition had been well received, critics identified her work closely with that of her teacher, Léger.<sup>19</sup> Georges Rémon stated for example: 'Without detracting from her native grace, she aims for a powerful expression in her works that is meditated by the simple and vigorous quality that Léger has employed in his recent paintings and drawings.'<sup>20</sup> And Raymond Cogniat asserted: 'It is true that right now Mademoiselle Tarsila is very influenced by Léger. But she knows how to bring to her compositions a very strong personal note that stems from sensitivity and finesse, however.'<sup>21</sup> For her 1928 show she realized that she needed to do something different to distinguish her work from that of her mentor. As a means to deviate from her obvious affiliation with Léger, Amaral began a selective exploration of surrealism, the most prominent avant-garde movement in Paris at the time, in preparation for her solo exhibition the following year.





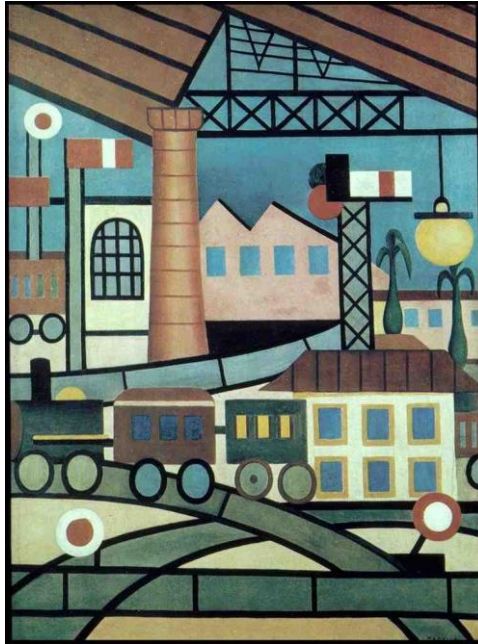


Fig. 3. Tarsila do Amaral, *The Railway Station*, 1925, oil on canvas, 84.5 x 65 cm, Rubens Taufic Schahin Collection, São Paulo.

Amaral spent little time in Paris before her second show opened on 18 June 1928. She arrived in March after having spent the previous eighteen months in Brazil preparing, and left soon after the exhibition closed on 2 July. This was a moment in Brazil when an emerging bourgeois class began challenging the prerogative of the agrarian aristocracy, to which Amaral belonged. In the face of this shifting class structure, rather than continuing to depict urban vitality and rural charm, by co-opting aspects of surrealism's visual lexicon she began to create timeless myths that in their strangeness and indecipherability belie the uncertainty of the moment and question the rigidity of traditional hierarchies of social and cultural value.<sup>22</sup> The exhibition included only twelve paintings, all of which Amaral completed in 1927 and early 1928, and demonstrated a definitive shift in style.<sup>23</sup> Whereas Amaral composed many of the works in her 1926 exhibition, whether urban scenes or the Brazilian countryside, with densely packed geometric shapes and a smattering of figures, by 1927 she had begun to simplify her compositions. With the exception of *Pastoral* and *Nu* (*Abaporu* was exhibited as *Nu* in Paris; the implications of this will be discussed below), there are no figures present in her paintings and plants seem to take on an anthropomorphic quality in paintings such as *Manacá* (Fig. 4, Princess Flower), *Paysage* (Landscape), and *Lac* (Lake) to make up for the absence of people.<sup>24</sup> She eschewed the urban scene entirely, creating instead otherworldly landscapes like *Marine* (Fig. 5), in lush contrasting colours, and in most of the paintings she focused on a single element, isolated in the centre of the composition as in *L'Oeuf* (The Egg), *Sommeil* (Sleep), *Les Colonnes* (The Columns) and *La Voûte* (Fig. 6, The Archway). *La Voûte*, in particular, seems to be a direct reference to similar archways in early paintings by Giorgio de Chirico, whose metaphysical paintings were highly admired by the surrealists and featured in *La Révolution surréaliste*, to which Amaral almost certainly had access as will be discussed below.





Fig. 4. Tarsila do Amaral, *Manacá* (Princess Flower), 1927, oil on canvas, 76 x 63.5 cm, Simão Mendel Guss Collection, São Paulo.

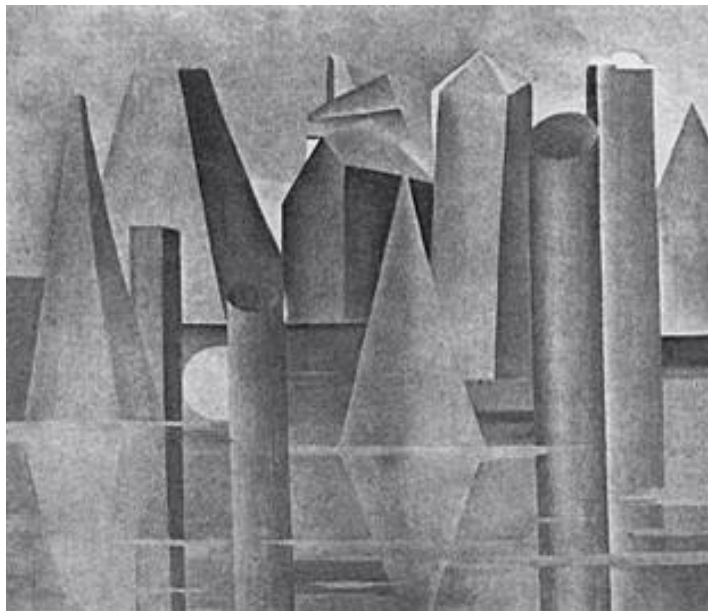


Fig. 5. Tarsila do Amaral, *Calmness I* (originally exhibited as *Marine*), 1928, oil on canvas, current location unknown. Reproduced in Tarsila do Amaral Catalogue Raisonné <http://www.base7.com.br/tarsila>

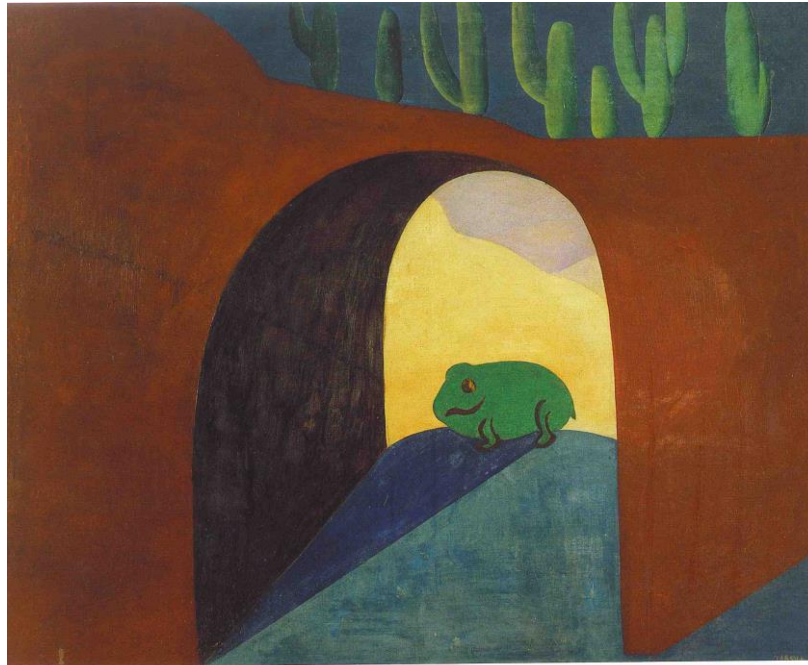


Fig. 6. Tarsila do Amaral, *The Toad* (originally exhibited as *La Voûte*), 1928, oil on canvas, 50.5 x 60.5 cm, Museu de Arte Brasileira – Faap, São Paulo.

While none of the critics who reviewed the 1928 exhibition specifically mentioned surrealism, they did comment on her deliberate avoidance of the real, which can be understood as figures or scenes that could potentially exist as opposed to the invented, incongruous, or fantastic images Amaral painted. Charensol called Amaral an 'extremely gifted colourist who would benefit from not avoiding the domain of the real so much.'<sup>25</sup> And according to G. J. Gros: 'Mme Tarsila had strange visions in her country that stem from, I dare say, an impressive unrealism.'<sup>26</sup> Raymond Cogniat, the art critic for *La Revue de l'Amérique Latine*, goes further in his assessment of Amaral's work:

She offered us, in the decorative way an artist does, a very picturesque place for her fantasy to take place. The evolution of the artist proceeded in this way: promises became certitudes and as her conception became more assured, the author felt more freedom, escaping without hesitation from reality. In this exhibition, most of the paintings are pure imagination; even if a detail is borrowed from reality (a tree, a plant, an animal), it is so stylized, reduced to its most basic shape, that it evokes a creation. All these elements are regrouped in a new order often evocative of a theatrical set and constituting a peculiar world with new connections, and unexpected perspectives.<sup>27</sup>

Cogniat's conclusion that Amaral's paintings, through a regrouping or rearrangement of familiar forms, create new unexpected worlds, describes one aspect of the surrealists' project.

Rather than specifically delineating her European sources as they did for her 1926 exhibition, other critics rooted their assessment of the artist's work in how they perceived it to relate to her national identity. This critical shift in the interpretation of Amaral's work may have contributed to her decision not to acknowledge surrealism as an influence. For example, the critic for the *Cahiers d'art* wrote:





Mme Tarsilla [sic] is a young Brazilian. That fact is important. Indeed, ordinarily we maintain that modern art is universal, and that it follows one sole rule, that its forms and expressions should be identical. This assertion is far too absolute. If modern art, whether it be painting, sculpture or architecture, is a phenomenon with universally accepted characteristics, it is no less true that it is characterized by influences specific to each country as well as by the personality of the artist.

Therefore Tarsilla brings to modern painting her sensibility as well as the experiences of her country. Her painting is impregnated with the Indian spirit....

Tarsilla, after having been intoxicated by the Impressionist movement, came to Europe to study painting with Léger and Lhote. We wanted to see in her manner of painting what was innate in her and what Impressionism threatened to destroy. Thanks to her estrangement from Brazil, Tarsilla was able to better realize the considerable importance that the indigenous element played in her country and that she has introduced in her painting with her own unique sensibility.

*We hope that western influences will no longer hinder an effort that seems to us to be fortuitously oriented.*<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, in 'Tarsila et l'Antropophagie,' printed in *La Presse*, Waldemar George credits Amaral's paintings with revealing aspects of Brazilian thought:

America, that ethnic entity, still holds surprises for us. If Madame Tarsila's exhibition revealed to us an authentic artist, who combined her acute sense of colour with a taste for a fine technique, this crafted and precise technique of which Léger is the father, she also made known to us certain tendencies in contemporary Brazilian thought. Brazil, following Mexico's example, rebels against the domination of the West in the spiritual realm. After having driven out the invader, they wish to liberate themselves from the spiritual tutelage of Europe.<sup>29</sup>

By lauding her 'Brazilianness' and 'authenticity,' this estimation of her work establishes a trajectory from artistic dependence to independence. While she had certainly developed a unique personal style by 1928, the primacy of this reading has precluded a more nuanced discussion of the sources she did engage and the manner in which she transformed them.

Amaral, now a mature artist with previous experience exhibiting in Paris, was skilled at positioning her own reception and most likely advocated this revised interpretation of her work. Moreover, her Parisian reviewers were not alone in impelling her to renounce foreign influence. Ever since 1923 Mario de Andrade, a Brazilian writer and friend of Amaral's, had been inciting her to abandon Paris for the virgin forests of Brazil: 'Tarsila, Tarsila, turn to your true self. Abandon Gris and Lhote, agents of decrepit criticisms and decadent aesthesis? Abandon Paris! Tarsila! Tarsila! Come to the virgin woods, where there is no Negro art, nor gentle brooks. There is Virgin Woods.'<sup>30</sup>

*The Negress* (1923), which I will discuss below, was her first such effort, leading to an intensified exploration of 'Brazilianness' in the years that followed. As a foreigner living abroad, Amaral would have been exposed to the European avant-garde's fascination with the exotic and the 'primitive,' which combined with Andrade's appeal, awakened in her an acute interest in Brazilian culture. In 1924, she and a group of colleagues embarked on a trip to Brazil's historic colonial towns in the state of Minas Gerais in search of artistic inspiration. For Amaral, this experience opened her eyes to the creative potential of Brazil's African and indigenous heritage; consequently she focused on painted works that engaged the



European discourse on the 'primitive,' many of which were included in her individual exhibition in Paris in 1926.

Whereas Parisian artists and intellectuals appropriated the notion of primitivism from foreign cultures with which they were not familiar, Amaral—despite her upper-class background—claimed (and critics willingly conceded) a certain privileged access to indigenous or Afro-Brazilian cultures because of her national identity, positioning herself as an authority on the subject. As Herkenhoff argues, primitivism is what gave her legitimacy in Paris.<sup>31</sup> But hers was a strategic primitivism that stemmed primarily from an exploration of how these forms were deployed as a cultural inversion by the European avant-garde, such as Léger, Brancusi, Picasso and Rousseau, rather than some sort of lived or even intellectual connection to native cultures indigenous to Brazil.<sup>32</sup> By 1928, she began deliberately avoiding acknowledgment of European influence, despite her explicit exploration of surrealism, in a conscious effort to reinforce her 'authenticity' in the eyes of the Parisian public. Because she transformed and redeployed her surrealist sources in a more subtle and sophisticated way than her appropriation of Léger's style, however, many Parisian critics also tended to ignore those aspects of her work that referenced Parisian avant-garde forms because for them conceding influence or artistic dialogue sullied their quest to identify cultural authenticity.

While some reviewers were satisfied with constructing the artist as a cultural 'primitive,' her choice of frames seemed to simultaneously draw attention to and disrupt this classification, and therefore undermine an interpretation of her work as merely pandering to a European fascination with the 'primitive.' Amaral had commissioned Pierre-Emile Legrain (1889-1929), a cutting-edge designer working in an Art Deco style, to make the frames for her 1926 exhibition and used him again for her exhibition in 1928. Legrain, who was known for his innovative work as a bookbinder and furniture designer, designed for two wealthy Parisian patrons, Jacques Ducet, a couturier, and Jeanne Tachard, a milliner, who both owned extensive collections of African objects that inspired Legrain's creations.<sup>33</sup> The frames he made for Amaral's paintings, most of which are now lost, incorporated an eclectic range of unconventional materials including lizard skin, parchment paper, shards of mirrored glass, corrugated cardboard, and leather, enhancing the unusual themes in the paintings they enclosed.<sup>34</sup> As Amaral asserted, Legrain used 'anything that, by its material or form, was a complement, an extension of the painting.'<sup>35</sup> Legrain's Art Deco frames seemed to mock Parisian audiences' desire to comprehend Amaral's work in terms of her national identity, however, because while they occasionally hinted at the 'exotic' in their use of materials like lizard skin, their whimsy and materiality made the viewer acutely aware of the constructed nature of the paintings. Whereas critics such as Raymond Cogniat appreciated the wit and playfulness in her choice of frames (Fig. 7) - 'Madame Tarsila presents us with a fantasy that is not lacking in humour. The very amusing frames by Pierre Legrain, with their unexpected construction, add to the canvases by Madame Tarsila,'<sup>36</sup> - others found them confusing, and referred to these constructions as 'tableaux-objets' [painting-objects].<sup>37</sup> This label was not meant as a compliment. This sense of confusion suggests that Amaral had transgressed a pictorial convention, a convention that the surrealists would also challenge in



their invention of the surrealist object. Were these works paintings or sculptures or something else entirely? How was one to enter fully into the fantasy when disrupted by such a tangible and deliberately garish border? And what exactly was the relationship between picture and frame? The choice of frame thus collapses or renders indecipherable traditional classificatory structures and challenges the viewer's comprehension of her paintings as 'authentic' expressions of Brazilianness.



Fig. 7. Pierre-Emile Legrain, original frame for *Abaporu*, 1928, lost. Reproduced in Amaral, Aracy A. *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*. São Paulo: Editora 34: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2003.

Significantly, the most unfavourable reviews focused on *Abaporu*, which seems to have been a centrepiece to the 1928 exhibition. It was one of three paintings featured in the exhibition brochure and was reproduced twice in different reviews of the show.<sup>38</sup> The painting depicts a colossal seated nude of ambiguous gender. Propped on a bent knee, one arm supports the figure's slightly inclined diminutive head, while the other hangs loosely by its side in a pose reminiscent of Rodin's *The Thinker* (c. 1880).



With its diminutive head, the image subverts Rodin's emphasis on intellectual contemplation, however. By drastically distorting the figure's anatomical proportions, Amaral makes the foot as the focal point of the composition instead. As if performing an exaggerated exercise in illusionistic foreshortening, Amaral painted the foot and hand closest to the bottom edge of the canvas much larger than the head and arm near the top of the frame. Instead of creating the illusion of deep space, Amaral offers a disconcerting effect. Since she rendered the figure in profile, parallel to the picture plane, the viewer expects the upper and lower body to be rendered in similar proportion. Reducing the size of the head and upper torso creates the illusion that the figure is of great size and that the viewer is looking up at it from below. In other words, we are compelled to enter the picture at the base, at ground level.

While Amaral executed the painting with extreme painterly clarity, the figure's gender, age, and race are not immediately apparent. This strangely distorted figure sits on a green mound against a cerulean sky, which indicates that the scene is outdoors in a natural setting. No signs of modern life appear to situate the figure in time or place. There are only two other elements in the composition. The first is a large green anthropomorphic cactus with two outstretched branches painted in the same slick brushwork as the figure. Its erect posture and extended 'arms' render it more animated than the languorous seated nude, thereby disrupting a clear delineation between human and vegetal forms. The second element is a luminous yellow circle. While Amaral would later describe the cactus as 'exploding with an absurd flower,' the circular form is so ambiguously positioned that it remains unclear if it is connected to the cactus or floats in space.<sup>39</sup> Given its central location and placement against a bright blue sky, the perfectly round yellow disk could also be interpreted as a sun. Yet Amaral undermines this reading because she disregards traditional conventions for rendering the directionality of illumination. The yellow circle hangs over the upper left side of the cactus, but the plant is lit from a source outside the picture plane to the right. The figure, too, appears to be illuminated from the front, rather than in silhouette as would be the case if the sun were actually shining down on the figure from behind. Its light seems to be circumscribed by its own contour line, unable to permeate the surrounding atmosphere. Thus, the form fluctuates between absurd flower and tropical sun, suggesting both possibilities yet not decisively conjuring either.

Critics were rightly perplexed, unable to clearly identify the figure in the painting or make sense of its contradictory signs. The journal *Les Echos des industries d'art* reproduced *Abaporu* with the caption 'This full-length portrait [this is a deliberate play on words; 'full-length portrait' in French translates literally as 'portrait on foot'], by Tarsila, on view at the Galerie Percier, what a beautiful advertisement for a pedicure.'<sup>40</sup> On the one hand, this cursory treatment that was not even accompanied by a review of the show mocks the painting by equating its visual strategy with advertising's calculated employment of simple exaggerated forms. Yet, on the other hand, it recognizes something in the painting that elevates the foot, separates it from common associations of the foot with baseness, through the aesthetic operation of the pedicure. While the author clearly does not take the painting seriously, dismissing it as a joke, he (the writer was most likely male) fails to realize that it is perhaps on the level of satire of





European constructs of the 'primitive' that this painting functions best. And with Amaral's painting they got what amounted to a caricature of their own primitivist fantasies, which like surrealism's reshuffled cultural hierarchies, sought a de-centred perspective that critiqued European ethnocentrism. While the surrealists frequently deployed parody and uncanny juxtapositions as a means to undermine bourgeois values, Amaral's work appropriates the surrealist penchant for satire to mimic and thereby reformulate conventional constructions of gender, race, (as will be discussed below) and primitivism.

Another review that also reproduced *Abaporu* appeared in the *Journal du peuple*. Here the reviewer expresses his absolute disdain of the painting and avant-garde art in general. The review, entitled 'Enough, Enough!', proceeds to attack the incomprehensibility of the avant-garde, asking in the caption under *Abaporu* whether the painting was 'Art or a practical joke?'<sup>41</sup> Significantly, the author patently categorizes the work as avant-garde and it is with the subversive and at times sardonic stance assumed by avant-garde artists that he takes offence. For him, avant-garde art is that which dupes the public: 'They mock us a little more everyday under the pretext of avant-garde art.'<sup>42</sup> For him this art is not worth the effort to try to understand, because it has no substance.<sup>43</sup> Potential buyers are 'suckers' and avant-garde art is nothing but 'absurdity.'<sup>44</sup> He goes on: 'The author of the painting reproduced here [Amaral] passes as and attains [avant-garde status] without effort. Why name the author? Except that it is distressing that respectable galleries participate in this game.'<sup>45</sup> These negative reviews indicate that critics, perhaps rightly, felt they were somehow the butt of an inside joke that they could not comprehend. While these critics aimed to ridicule the painting, singling out *Abaporu* for negative comment indicates that Amaral had achieved with this image the kind of notoriety and public confusion that marked so much avant-garde production. It was this subversive quality in *Abaporu* that had led Andrade to designate it as the ideal emblem of the anthropophagite movement.

### *Abaporu and Antropofagia*

While there is no obvious content in Amaral's painting that explicitly references cannibalism, by naming it *Abaporu*, Oswald de Andrade articulated a connection between the image and the conceptual project of intellectual cannibalism.<sup>46</sup> The word 'Abaporu' means 'person who eats' in the language of the Tupi, an indigenous tribe from the Brazilian Amazon who captured their enemies and killed them in anthropophagic rituals rather than slaying them in battle. Inspired by Amaral's painting, Andrade devised a full-fledged theory of cannibalism or anthropophagy, which he published in the form of a manifesto (Fig. 8), *Manifesto Antropófago* (Anthropophagite Manifesto) in May of 1928; he subsequently dedicated an avant-garde journal to the theme.<sup>47</sup> It is unclear exactly when Andrade came up with the title for the painting, however. As mentioned above, it was exhibited in Paris simply as *Nu*, and the caption under the line drawing of the work that illustrated the publication of the Anthropophagite Manifesto simply reads 'desenho de Tarcila 1928' [Drawing by Tarsila, 1928]. It is possible, therefore, that the title was not



determined until after Amaral's Paris exhibition as a means to harness the subversive potential the piece garnered in Paris.

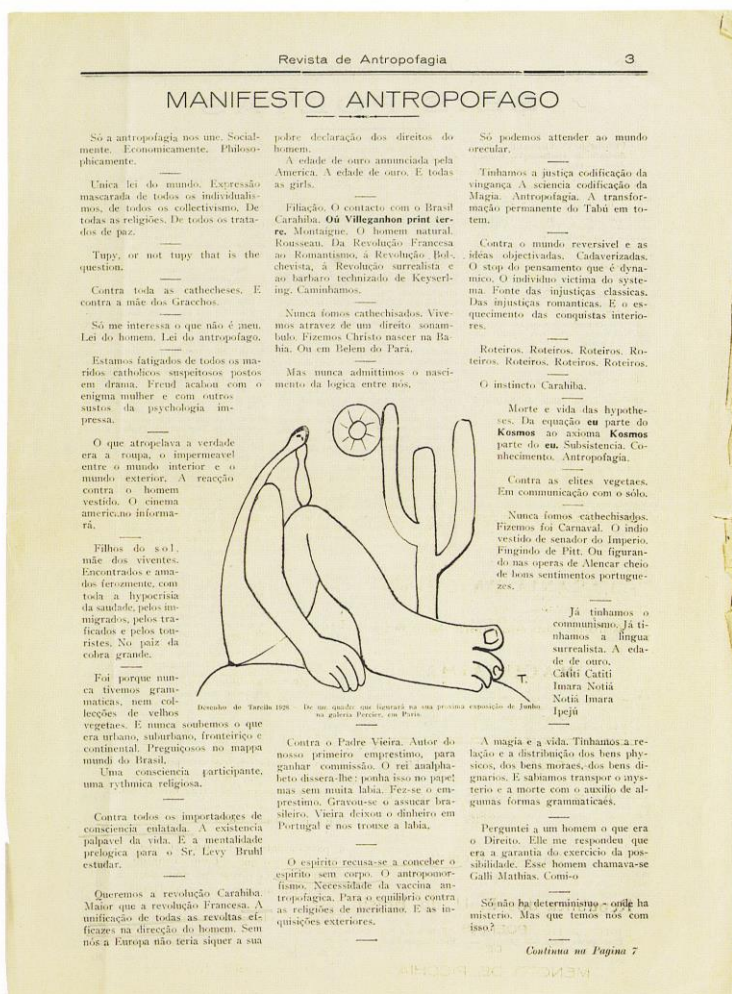


Fig. 8. Oswald de Andrade; line drawing Tarsila do Amaral, *Manifesto Antropófago* (Anthropophagite Manifesto), 1928, 38 x 27.8 cm, *Revista de Antropofagia*, Biblioteca José & Guita Mindlin.

Because Andrade named the painting, scholars often present it as merely an illustration of his avant-garde literary ideas rather than the result of an intense dialogue between a writer and an artist. Indeed, according to Paulo Herkenhoff, Oswald de Andrade articulated the theory behind Amaral's paintings in Paris in 1923 and later in São Paulo and not the other way around.<sup>48</sup> While this argument holds more weight in relation to her Pau-Brasil paintings and *The Negress* in particular, as Herkenhoff has aptly demonstrated, I contend that *Abaporu* marked a shift in the intellectual dynamic between Amaral and Andrade. While Andrade's text certainly stemmed from 'a long process, in Brazil, of searching for cultural autonomy in the face of hegemonic models,' Amaral created a unique visual manifestation of these ideas in *Abaporu* before Andrade wrote the manifesto that launched the anthropophagite movement.<sup>49</sup> With *Abaporu* as its emblem, the movement's importance in Brazil only intensified over time,



becoming 'a strategy of cultural emancipation' and a tool for artists and scholars in negotiating cultural difference.<sup>50</sup> The following discussion of some of the key tenets of the Anthropophagite Movement and its provocative engagement with the European avant-garde will facilitate identifying the specifics of Amaral's contribution.

While Amaral's painting and Andrade's notion of *Antropofagia* are an obvious nod to Francis Picabia's infamous 'Manifeste cannibale dada' (1920) and short-lived journal *Cannibale*, they endow these ideas with new meaning through the process of appropriation.<sup>51</sup> Picabia's journal included contributions by many of the future surrealists including Louis Aragon, Breton, and Paul Eluard, and a common interest in the metaphoric possibilities of cannibalism can be traced to these early collaborations. As Dawn Ades points out, 'One of its [Dada's] central modes of opposition was parody: cultural cannibalism par excellence.'<sup>52</sup> It is this aspect of Picabia's cannibalism that Amaral and Andrade co-opted. They turned the Dada construct of cannibalism back on itself, creating a parody of a parody as a means to contest European constructs of the primitive. Whereas Dada proffered a European strategy for undermining bourgeois culture from within, anthropophagy shifts this critique to the margins.<sup>53</sup>

This notion of margins or periphery is problematic when applied to the work of Brazilian avant-garde intellectuals, however. The European concept of the 'primitive' sets up a binary between European civilization and its 'other.' And in the eyes of many Europeans Brazil constituted just such an 'Other.' But Amaral and Andrade were upper class intellectuals of European descent, with extensive European education, not Indians from the Amazon. Indeed, the couple only had very limited familiarity with Brazil's ethnic minorities.<sup>54</sup> They were thus caught in the middle, neither European enough nor native enough to represent either side of this imagined cultural binary. To participate in European avant-garde activities, they had to confront this contradiction. But as ex-patriots of a post-colonial nation they were uniquely positioned to employ the rhetoric of modernist primitivism to critique the very circumstances of its formation.

Whereas Dada provided a model of sardonic disruption, the surrealists' inversion of cultural binaries and anti-colonialist endeavours were a much more specific means of challenging social and ethnographic hierarchies.<sup>55</sup> Employing these models as a point of departure, anthropophagy does not just reverse cultural polarities but, rather, through parody and an incessant collapsing of categorical distinctions defies the very notion of an 'other.' As Ana Maria Belluzzo asserts: 'To cannibalize the foundations of other cultures is for Andrade a ritual preparation: he appropriates in order to re-signify, passing onto the opposite paradigm that which is in the original source.'<sup>56</sup> In devouring the European, the cannibal simultaneously destroys and embodies the sacred enemy.<sup>57</sup>

For Andrade anthropophagy was a metaphor for the violent consumption, digestion, and in some cases defecation of European modernism by Brazilian intellectuals. It also implied the deliberate embrace of the 'primitive' aspects of Brazilian culture as a means to counter the restrictive nature of European civilization and continued imposition of European ideas onto its former colonies. At the same time the notion of anthropophagy was meant to engage European audiences, parodying their notions of



primitivism and stereotypical vision of non-European cultures to call these ideas into question and proffer a Brazilian alternative.<sup>58</sup> This parody also takes as its object surrealism's attempts at cultural inversions, however.<sup>59</sup>

Engaging and challenging the European avant-garde was central to Andrade's project as was the translatability and accessibility of his ideas to a transnational audience. Whereas various scholars have discussed the role of the Brazilian context in shaping Andrade's vision, my goal here is to focus on the intricacies of transatlantic dialogue.<sup>60</sup> While his journal was published in Brazil, Andrade vigorously promoted his theory of anthropophagy in Europe, taking advantage of the press coverage of Amaral's 1928 exhibition to mount a small publicity campaign and to participate in several provocative interviews that were published in Parisian journals.<sup>61</sup> Art critic Waldemar George, in the same article in which he reviewed Amaral's show, interviewed Andrade, drawing attention to his campaign and making sure Parisian readers understood the difference between European notions of cannibalism and Andrade's theory of anthropophagy:

M de Andrade does not aspire to return to paganism, nor even to a natural life. But he wants to liberate certain features of local and native civilization ... M de Andrade is therefore attempting a veritable national rectification. He fights within Christian doctrine and Latinism, the signs of servitude. Whether he is right or wrong, we think that it is worthwhile to draw attention to his campaign ... M de Andrade, who likes paradoxes, makes use of it [anthropophagy] as a slogan! He defends this ancestral custom. Ancient Brazilians were not at all partial to human flesh. If they killed some elite adversary, they shared his body among members of their tribe. Two or three thousand people took part in the festivities. That is to say their meal was entirely theoretical. The absorption of the flesh of the enemy tended to transform the taboo being into totem and to impregnate one with his most intimate virtues. The significance of anthropophagy is therefore purely mystical. Will M Oswald de Andrade's original thesis find followers in Paris?<sup>62</sup>

And in the French journal *Nouvelles littéraires* Andrade further explained the contents of his manifesto:

What is anthropophagy? The act of devouring the sacred enemy so that his virtues pass on to us. A communion. We absorb the *Taboo* to transform it into *Totem*: the sacred enemy must be transformed into a friend. Frazer, Freud, gave the *Taboo* a meaning that I am correcting ... Freud locates sexual instinct at the centre of human activity; I oppose him because sexuality is one of the most characteristic forms of the anthropophagite instinct.<sup>63</sup>

Andrade was, of course, making direct reference to Freud's book *Totem and Taboo*, published in 1913, which posited a connection between the so-called 'primitive' mind, incest and forms of psychological neuroses found in civilized Western societies. What is interesting here is that Andrade specifically challenges Freud in this passage. He is not deferring to Freud's interpretation, but rather offering a revised version of his own, one that replaces the centrality of sexuality in the human psyche with the notion of anthropophagy or consumption of the sacred enemy. In this way Andrade not only inserts himself into the European philosophical and intellectual dialogue, but also appropriates and rectifies the hypotheses of one of its key thinkers in a manner that is not unlike the theory of anthropophagy that he





proposes. Freud, of course, was also an extremely influential figure for the surrealists and by contesting Freud Andrade was also engaging and challenging surrealism. Under the auspices of surrealism, cannibalism became a metaphor for sexual hunger, the yearning to consume like the female mantis, the object of one's desire.<sup>64</sup> For Andrade, however, the foregrounding of sexual desire in the surrealist project is a misinterpretation of the notion of the taboo, a falsehood Andrade sets out to amend.

Amaral's *Abaporu*, with its appropriation and subsequent re-signification of Freudian constructs of sexuality, served as a visual model for Andrade's correction in his manifesto of Freud's theories. Just one year before Amaral painted the picture, in 1927, Freud had published his article on fetishism—a text that had a major impact on the surrealists. Freud defined the fetish as a non-genital object that acts as a substitute for the absent maternal phallus, yet carries with it the fear of castration. According to Freud, fetishism develops out of a refusal to accept sexual difference and emerges at a moment of heightened anxiety when 'the conflict between dependence on and independence from the mother is most intense.'<sup>65</sup> In Amaral's painting the comical preponderance of phallic forms, the engorged toe (an archetypal Freudian fetish), the small bulbous head, the smooth fleshy forms of the figure's limbs, and the erect three-pronged cactus clearly suggest fetish objects. Yet like the surrealists often did, she deploys the fetish in a playful and satirical manner in *Abaporu*, poking fun at indiscriminate application of Freud's ideas across cultural and gender divides.<sup>66</sup> Since the gender of the central figure is indecipherable, these phallic forms generate confusion, undermining the clarity of Freud's theory of sexual development. Is *Abaporu* a phallic woman, an emasculated man, or a maternal figure, surrounded by signs of her deficiency? The inert *Abaporu*, like Adam in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, lingers in a state of semi-arousal just before a fervent cultural awakening. Rather than signifying repressed human sexuality, the numerous phallic forms in *Abaporu* seem to suggest the former potency of the indigenous peoples in the pre-colonial world; the associated castration anxiety thus becomes a metaphor for Europe's loss of power over its colonial progeny as the Americas reawaken to their cultural heritage. The creation of fetish objects, at a moment when 'the conflict between dependence on and independence from the mother [country or colonial power] is most intense' therefore obliterates the emasculation of colonial rule and the legacies of colonialism.<sup>67</sup>

Whereas Freud defines the fetish in specifically sexual terms, since the eighteenth century, the term also had been used to describe the religious practices of African tribes who worshipped material objects believed to be endowed with divine or magical powers.<sup>68</sup> By the 1920s, African fetish objects were sought after collector's items in Europe and would certainly have been familiar to Amaral and Andrade. Amaral also conjures this notion of the fetish as an object possessing spiritual powers in *Abaporu*, thereby setting the precedent for Andrade's theory of anthropophagy and the consumption of the sacred enemy.<sup>69</sup> As a conflation of the notions of the Freudian and the primitive fetish, *Abaporu* is the sacred enemy endowed with phallic power, reborn with all the virtues of modernity, while simultaneously flaunting the 'native character' that has come to stand in for Brazilian-ness. It is only through an engagement with Freud and the notion of the fetish that Amaral is able to confront these constructs, re-interpreting them to



reveal certain fallacies and gendered and cultural assumptions inherent in their design. The painting's complex visual strategy served as the theoretical platform for Andrade's more overt challenge to Freud in the Anthropophagite Manifesto.

### *Devouring Man Ray and Miró*

Since Amaral was not a member of the surrealist group and did not have regular contact with its members, her means of access would have been through selected observation and appropriation. Through a close engagement with specific visual sources Amaral therefore approximated and reinterpreted both the visual and the conceptual project of surrealism. But she did not merely copy imagery that appealed to her; rather she cannibalized her sources, digesting their underlying concept and structure, absorbing their sacred essence to create something new: anthropophagy.

While in Paris Amaral had various surrealist contacts. She was friendly with Giorgio de Chirico, whom the surrealists greatly admired, and knew the surrealists Breton and Benjamin Péret.<sup>70</sup> In 1927 Rio de Janeiro's *O Jornal*, published an interview with Blaise Cendrars, an avant-garde poet and Amaral's good friend and confidant, where he singled out surrealism as the most important European avant-garde movement: 'In my opinion the surrealists ... are the only ones who really count.'<sup>71</sup> His proclaimed admiration for surrealism may also have influenced Amaral's decision to explore visual manifestations of the movement as she prepared for her exhibition in Paris in 1928.<sup>72</sup>

The most striking evidence of her exploration of surrealism is the affinity between several works that she painted in early 1928 and images reproduced in the surrealist journal *La Révolution surréaliste* in the October issue of 1927. While Amaral returned to São Paulo in August of 1926 and did not travel to Paris again until March of 1928, given all her Parisian contacts and the transatlantic circulation of European publications, it is almost certain that she had access to the journal. In 1925 Péret became chief editor of *La Révolution surréaliste*. Significantly, Péret had a direct connection to the Brazilian ex-patriot community in Paris. He was married to Elsie Houston, a Brazilian singer who frequently performed the works of the Brazilian avant-garde composer Heitor Villa Lobos. And it was at Villa Lobos's Paris apartment that Amaral and Oswald first met Péret and they all frequented the same circles in Paris.<sup>73</sup> Thus, Péret may have sent Amaral or Andrade *La Révolution surréaliste* directly.

In the October issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* a photograph by Man Ray as well as a reproduction of a painting by Joan Miró appeared, which both bear remarkable resemblance to two paintings by Amaral included in her 1928 exhibition. The untitled photograph by Man Ray (Fig. 9) in *La Révolution surréaliste* appears as an illustration for Breton's article, continued from previous issues, 'Le surréalisme et le peinture.' While not labelled as such, the photograph is a still from Man Ray's recent film *Emak Bakia* (Fig. 10). While Breton alludes to cinematographic images in his article, he never specifically mentions the film from which the photograph originated. Arranged as a sequence of fantastic non-



narrative images, the film employs the devices of moving lights, reflective and shiny surfaces, and variable focus.<sup>74</sup> The still depicts a grouping of wooden geometric forms stacked and lit in such a way that at first glance they appear to be resting on a reflective surface. Upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that the objects' base is close to the bottom edge of the frame and that Man Ray created the illusion of a reflection by aligning and illuminating the break-lines between the blocks in such a way that the bottom blocks appear to be elongated reflections of the shapes placed on top of them. In the still, these forms, usually used in compositional exercises, become a picture in their own right. The shapes, which in relation to one another assume an anthropomorphic quality, seem to occupy a bizarre otherworldly landscape. Interestingly, in the film the still image is the culmination of a sequence in which the blocks are progressively stacked to form towers. Thus it is quite obvious that they do not rest on a reflective surface. Nevertheless, double entendre was certainly one of Man Ray's objectives in his production of *Emak Bakia*.<sup>75</sup> Yet in this case, it is in the journal, where the still stands alone out of sequence, rather than in the film that the photograph becomes more ambiguous and the illusion of a reflective surface emerges. This effect is most likely exaggerated in the fuzzy reproduction in *La Révolution surréaliste*.<sup>76</sup> Man Ray's uncanny ability to re-frame objects through photography, thereby freeing them from their intended purpose and allowing them to assume new meanings and relationships, most likely appealed to the surrealists and inspired their inclusion of the photograph in the journal.



Fig. 9. *La Révolution Surréaliste*. Paris: Gallimard, 3:9-10, (Oct. 1, 1927): 42 with Man Ray, *Emak Bakia*, 1926, film still.

Fig. 10. Man Ray, *Emak Bakia*, 1926, film still.



In 1928 Amaral painted *Calmness I* (exhibited as *Marine* (Fig. 5) in Paris).<sup>77</sup> The visual affinity between Man Ray's photograph and this painting is so striking that I believe the photograph to have been her source. Since *Emak Bakia* premiered in Paris in November of 1926, Amaral was most likely not familiar with the film because she had returned to São Paulo in August of that year. Thus, her experience of the image could only have been through the somewhat fuzzy reproduction in *La Révolution surréaliste*. What remains unclear is whether Amaral was deliberately making explicit the metamorphosis from stacked blocks to reflective surface suggested in Man Ray's photograph, or whether she simply transcribed what she saw into paint. Whether or not she perceived the shifting possible readings of the original, her painting no longer embodies the ambiguity of Man Ray's photograph, but rather makes concrete the hint of a reflective surface as a depiction of an actual body of water, from which protrude massive monoliths in the form of cylinders, pyramids, and obelisks set against a backdrop of solid trapezoidal cliffs. While the regularity of the geometric formations implies that they are machine-made, like in Man Ray's still the environment in Amaral's painting, with its complete lack of animal or vegetal forms, suggests a petrified futuristic city. By situating the machine-made elements in a tranquil ocean in *Calmness I* Amaral has transformed Man Ray's interior still life into an outdoor scene, evocative, perhaps of Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay with its distinctive mountainous geography on a calm day. On its own *Calmness I* could be understood as a passing fascination with and manipulation of Man Ray's photographed objects. Paired with her interest in a work by Miró in that same issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, however, Amaral's exploration of Man Ray indicates an intentional probing of surrealist technique.

The visual affinity between Joan Miró's painting *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird* (Fig. 11) and *Abaporu* is immediately apparent. In this case, Amaral surpasses an exploration and transformation of the formal qualities of the image, as she did with Man Ray, to employ some of the surrealists' ideas about classificatory ambiguity and engage more specifically with the surrealists' conceptual project.



Fig. 11. Joan Miró, *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, 1926, oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.





*Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird* was painted in 1926 and reproduced the following year in *La Révolution surréaliste*. About Miró Breton wrote in 'Surrealism and Painting': 'No one else has the same ability to bring together the incompatible, and to disrupt calmly what we do not dare even hope to see disrupted.'<sup>78</sup> In Miró's painting the central figure has been reduced to a continuous outline of a diminutive head, body, and a single bulbous foot. As in *Abaporu*, the foot is oversized in comparison to the rest of the body. Its toes are splayed apart as if rooted in the yellow earth and, oddly, the two largest toes, are in the centre of the foot rather than the big toe's typical location. This disconcerting reordering of the toes focuses attention on these swollen appendages and the phallic body they support. The continuous outline suggests that Miró drew the figure in a single stroke, rather than through a laborious working and reworking of form.<sup>79</sup> This strange image is set against a flat green sky, black water, and yellow sand, a colour palette very similar to that employed by Amaral in *Abaporu*. Since Miró's painting was reproduced in black and white and was not exhibited until May of 1928 at the Galerie Georges Bernheim & cie, four months after Amaral had completed *Abaporu*, she could not have seen Miró's work in person. Her interpretation of colour, while clearly her own in this case, perhaps indicates a broader knowledge of Miró's work from her previous trip to Paris in 1925 or 1926.<sup>80</sup> Since Amaral owned a surrealist work by Miró, which was later sold for financial reasons, she clearly had an interest in the artist.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the apparent unpremeditated quality of *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, exaggerated pedal forms appeared in various other works by Miró during this period.<sup>82</sup> This repeated exploration of the exaggerated bulbous foot as a protagonist became Miró's strategy for subverting traditional hierarchies of value, a concern that would preoccupy the surrealists throughout the next decade. It is this aspect of the picture that Amaral appropriated in *Abaporu*. The exaggerated foot and toe in *Abaporu* emulate the primal quality evident in Miró's painting. In its solidity and baseness the foot in Miró's composition assumes greater importance than the intellect. Without this support, the body would topple over and could never remain upright. By exaggerating its form, Miró ensures that what has been overlooked or typically lies beneath now captures the viewer's attention, thereby subverting expected hierarchies of meaning. This formula most likely appealed to Amaral, an artist grappling with how to both engage in and challenge European constructs of primitivism.

Miró's painting, *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird*, also had a broad impact on other artists associated with surrealism. Bataille's article 'Le Gros orteil' (The Big Toe), Boiffard's photographs of big toes published in *Documents* (Fig. 12), and Dalí's 1928 Bather series (Fig. 13) all share an affinity with the same painting that intrigued Amaral. The coalescence of these images around Miró's 1926 picture indicates the power of this painting to instigate further visual dialogues surrounding the issues of cultural hierarchies and norms. Whereas Bataille (via Boiffard) and Dalí chose to underscore the grotesque qualities of the big toe, Amaral transformed the appendage to tap into its subversive potential in a different way. In a moment of prescience, she disavows Bataille's and Dalí's delight with the abject and taboo, sanitizing their notion of humanity's baseness through the sleek machine-age aesthetic of purism. Amaral's composition is simple and balanced, her lines are clean and precise, and the surface is highly



finished. There is nothing putrid about Amaral's image, no dirt, no corns, no hair, no perverse sexuality, no signs of labour or even aging. The skin is clean and sleek and the toenails well manicured. As mentioned previously, one review of the painting when it was exhibited in Paris would mockingly referred to it as an advertisement for a pedicure.<sup>83</sup> The enlarged foot becomes a thing of idealized beauty, an icon of the earthbound, anti-rational, 'primitive' soul. Or as Oswald de Andrade wrote in the *Anthropophagite Manifesto*, the figure represents 'the permanent transformation of taboo into totem.'<sup>84</sup> In other words she reverses the European notion of the abject primitive and, through the action of cleansing and purifying, creates a new vision of the Brazilian 'primitive' — one that collapses the sordid and pure, the primordial and the modern in an image of convulsive beauty.



Fig. 12. Jacques-André Boiffard, *Big Toe, feminine subject, 24 years old*, 1929, photograph, *Documents*, 6, 1929.

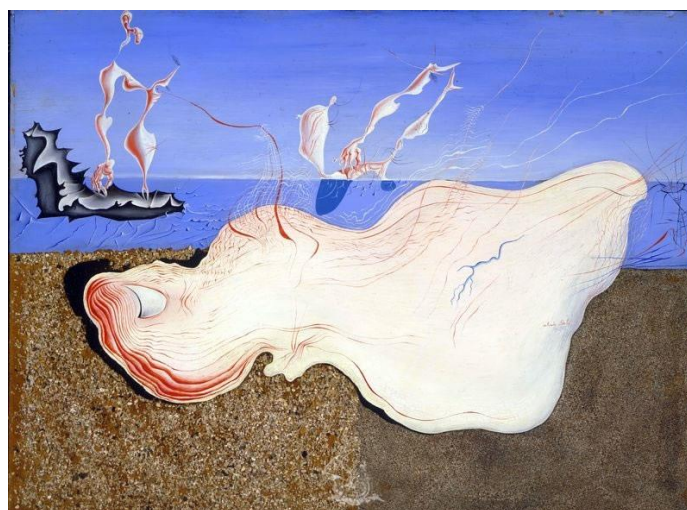


Fig. 13. Salvador Dalí, *Bathers*, ca. 1928, oil and collage on panel, 52 x 71.7 cm, The Salvador Dalí Museum, St. Petersburg, Florida.

### Gender and Racial Ambiguity in *The Negress*, *Abaporu*, and *Antropofagia*

Following Amaral's artistic trajectory reveals that *Abaporu* is at the apex of her exploration of classificatory ambiguity, a strategy central to the surrealist movement. While Amaral began establishing classificatory ambiguities in her work prior to the advent of surrealism, her intensification of this strategy in the late 1920s indicates that this surrealist practice most likely served to sanction or reinforce a course on which she had already embarked. As defined by Breton the aesthetic of convulsive beauty — the uncontrolled fusion of apparent opposites into one another in such a way as to embody both extremes without subsuming either — was at the core of surrealist production and served as a mechanism for transgressing traditional boundaries and expected classifications.<sup>85</sup> Convulsive beauty required the transformation of the ordinary into the poetic to create an exhilarating strangeness aimed to shake the viewer out of his or her visual or cultural complacency and undisputed acceptance of established norms. By drawing on divergent visual and literary sources from both sides of the Atlantic, Amaral's conceptual project in *Abaporu* echoes Breton's notion of convulsive beauty. Simultaneously, however, Amaral's exploration of classificatory ambiguity may also be a symptom of her own equivocal status as an upper class Brazilian woman in Paris, who was faced with reconciling her cosmopolitan aspirations with expectations of primitivism.

Whereas, most scholars refer to the figure in *Abaporu* as male, it is only through a comparative reading with two other paintings by the artist that they could have come to this conclusion. In isolation, the figure cannot be identified as male or female since the right arm obscures the breast area and the bent knee obscures the genital area. The hair could either be viewed as cut in a short masculine style or pulled back in a neat chignon as Amaral often wore her own. When the painting was first exhibited in Paris it was simply entitled *Nu* (Nude), a title which in itself suggests a female model. Furthermore, given the propensity of artists such as Picasso to depict monumental female nudes in the art of the 1920s, and the lack of male nudes, the figure would most likely have been read as female.<sup>86</sup> In fact, one reviewer inquires derisively whether the painting was a portrait of the artist.<sup>87</sup> But for the most part, audiences were most likely uncertain of the figure's gender. It was only after Amaral painted *Antropofagia* (Fig. 14, Anthropophagy) in 1929 that critics began identifying the figure as male.<sup>88</sup> In the original conception of *Abaporu*, Amaral probably intended the figure to be androgynous, thereby confounding straightforward readings of gender.





Fig. 14. Tarsila do Amaral, *Antropofagia*, 1929, oil on canvas, 126 x 142 cm, Fundação José e Paulina Nemirovsky collection, São Paulo

In *Antropofagia*, painted one year after *Abaporu*, Amaral pairs two figures from previous paintings: *The Negress* (Fig. 15) of 1923 and *Abaporu*. While the figures clearly resemble those in her earlier compositions, she has made several changes to her initial model. The single cactus in *Abaporu* is now part of a lush tropical forest of anthropomorphic vegetation, replacing the flat geometric background of *The Negress*. She has eliminated all facial features from both figures, painting the heads as small orbs on top of massive torsos. Gone are the characteristically large lips, prominent flat nose and almond shaped eyes of *The Negress*, who can now only be identified by her single oversized breast and the banana leaf behind her head—a detail that is almost abstract in *The Negress*. In her re-conceptualization of the figure from *Abaporu*, other details have also been eliminated such as hair and toenails. In *Antropofagia* Amaral painted the figure in reverse with the left arm outstretched so that it is now evident that there are no breasts. By pairing the figure from *Abaporu* with the obviously female form — at least upon casual examination — from *The Negress*, almost all gender ambiguity is erased. Seated with their legs intimately intertwined with one leg suggestively placed under *The Negress's* large pendulous breast, these two anonymous beings can be read as a primordial couple, a sort of Amazonian Adam and Eve. The deliberate clarity of this picture seems to bring to a close the period of artistic experimentation that led up to the 1928 exhibition in Paris. But in 1928 *Antropofagia* did not exist as an interpretive key. The identification of the figure from *Abaporu* as male can therefore only be constructed in hindsight, by reading the triumvirate of paintings, *The Negress*, *Abaporu*, and *Antropofagia*, as a related series. Exhibited in Paris prior to the execution of *Antropofagia*, the figure in *Abaporu* would have been of indeterminate gender and, as we have seen, disconcerting for viewers.





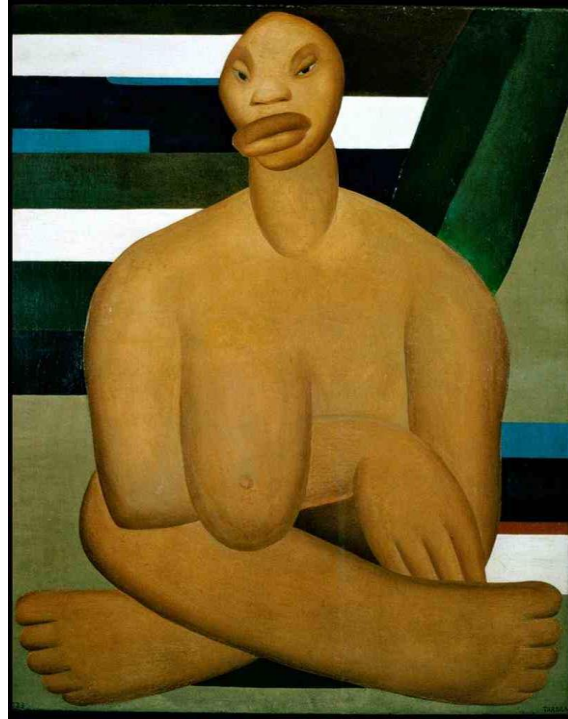


Fig. 15. Tarsila do Amaral, *The Negress*, 1923, oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo collection.

While *Abaporu* was her first such overtly ambiguous picture, Amaral had begun to question traditional gender and racial distinctions in *The Negress*. Although it is possible that a second breast is hidden behind the figure's hand, or in the case of *Antropofagia*, behind her partner's knee, the hand seems to occupy an empty space rather than compressing a fleshy form, suggesting that she only has one breast. Furthermore, in *Antropofagia* the breast seems to have grown and now covers more than half of the chest area, indicating that a second breast is most likely absent. A preliminary drawing for *Antropofagia* (Fig. 16) confirms this conjecture. The single-breasted female is a reference to the Greek myth about a tribe of all-female warriors called Amazons who either cut or burned off their right breast so they could more easily handle a bow or spear in battle. While the Amazons were definitively female, they possessed certain traditionally male characteristics. The Greek story of the Amazons relates directly to Brazilian identity because, according to legend, during a battle in the region with the Tapuya jungle tribe in what is now Brazil, the Spanish conquistador Francisco de Orellana observed women of the tribe fighting alongside the men. He therefore named the entire region *Amazonas*. The single-breasted female in *The Negress*—even though Amaral depicts her with the left not the right breast missing—would evoke stories of Amazons were circulating among the Brazilian avant-garde in the 1920s and their metaphorical implications. Thus while the figure in *The Negress* appears definitively female and the title indicates she is a woman, her single breast suggests a latent masculinity that could disrupt straightforward classification of gender. This collapsing of expected categories became more pronounced in Amaral's work in 1928.



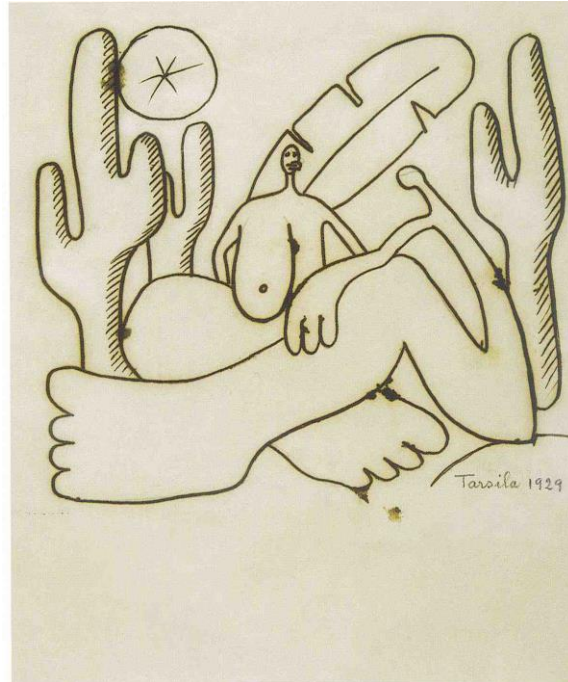


Fig. 16. Tarsila do Amaral, *Antropofagia*, 1929, study in sepia on paper, 23 x 19.5 cm, Gilberto Chateaubriand Bandeira de Mello Collection, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro.

Not coincidentally, during this period Mario de Andrade was writing his novel *Macunaíma* that was published in 1928.<sup>89</sup> In the story the protagonist, Macunaíma, falls in love with an Amazon named Ci: 'By her withered right breast he saw at once that she was an Amazon, one of that tribe of women living without any men on the shores of the lake called Mirror of the Moon, fed by the river Nhamundá. She was Ci, Mother of the Forest.'<sup>90</sup> The general theme of the Amazon woman of course suggests correlation to the *Negress*. Connections to *Abaporu* are more nuanced. The story continues with an account of Macunaíma and Ci's violent first encounter:

Macunaíma was getting the worst of it. He took a punch that made his nose bleed, and he had a deep gash in his buttocks from the trident. The Amazon hadn't even the tiniest scratch, while with each blow she struck she drew more blood from the hero, who was letting out such dreadful roars that the birds shrank in terror. At last, getting the wind up from being outmatched by this female warrior, the hero turned and fled, calling to his brothers, 'Help! Help! I'm killing her.'<sup>91</sup>

The description of Macunaíma's gash on his buttocks and his sense of being overpowered indicate emasculation, both physical and psychological, and relate to the notion of castration anxiety discussed above in relation to *Abaporu*. Similarly, one subtext in the novel is the emasculation indigenous subjects experienced as a result of colonization.

K. David Jackson reveals yet another connection between Macunaíma and *Abaporu*. In the story, when Macunaíma and his brothers Jiguê and Manaape travel to São Paulo in search of Ci's magic amulet, they come across a pond shaped like a gigantic foot. According to Jackson, 'The saint's gigantic



foot, ironically, finds an unexpected ally in the cannibalistic metaphor of Amaral's *Abaporu*, whose enormous foot symbolized being in nature.<sup>92</sup> But I am not so sure that this ally was unexpected. It seems, rather, given the various connections demonstrated above, that Amaral and Mario de Andrade were participating in a mutual dialogue that would enrich both of their work of the period.

Amaral also consistently looked outside the Brazilian context for inspiration. Paulo Herkenhoff has suggested that Amaral's obscuring of gender distinctions in *Abaporu* derived from her knowledge Brancusi's sculpture. According to Herkenhoff the phallic form of *Abaporu* relates to *Princess X* (Fig. 17) of 1916 by Brancusi in the way its forms resist any clear reading.<sup>93</sup> Title notwithstanding, a clear identification of gender in *Princess X*, like in *Abaporu*, is not immediately possible. Consequently, *Princess X* caused quite a scandal at the Salon des Independants in 1920 because it could so obviously be read as a phallus, despite Brancusi's adamant denial of this interpretation.<sup>94</sup> According to Christopher Green, 'it combined utterly opposed possible meanings, the ideal and the erotic, "Woman reduced to her essence" and a phallus in a state of semi-arousal.'<sup>95</sup>



Fig. 17. Constantin Brancusi, *Princess X*, 1916, polished bronze, limestone block 61.7 x 40.5 x 22.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Green goes on to assert that Brancusi 'must surely have been aware of its capacity to shock by double-entendre, since the piece had already been removed once by the police from public exhibition in Paris: in



1916, from a wartime exhibition organized by André Salmon, his Salon d'Antin.<sup>96</sup> According to Herkenhoff, Amaral transferred Brancusi's aptitude for ambiguity to her own work.<sup>97</sup> While Amaral was known to have associated with Brancusi, and was certainly influenced by his work in the past, there was a twelve-year gap between the *Princess X* and *Abaporu*. Given Amaral's continued engagement with the latest intellectual currents, *Abaporu* also partakes of a broader circulation of ideas in the late 1920s, which had its origins with Brancusi, but also began to incorporate the surrealists' penchant for destabilizing gender categories, and as I argued above, specific surrealist formal sources — Miró's *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird* — that are visually more similar to *Abaporu* than *Princess X*.<sup>98</sup>

In 1923, however, Amaral's connection to Brancusi was explicit. As has been mentioned by numerous scholars, *The Negress* exhibits a strong link to Brancusi's *White Negress* made in the same year as Amaral's painting. In her reduction of form to essential elements, smoothness of texture, and condensation of 'Africanness' to prominent lips and a single exaggerated breast — a symbol of sexuality, fertility, and a primitive libidinous nature — Amaral is clearly emulating Brancusi. The comparison is even more poignant in her choice to avoid dark pigmentation as an indicator of racial difference, as was the standard artistic convention in early twentieth-century Europe.<sup>99</sup> In Brancusi's case, the title highlights this contradiction. How can a 'Negress' be white? If darker skin complexion is no longer an indicator of 'Africanness,' what characteristics stand in for this feature? The stereotypically large lips and hairdo contrast with Brancusi's choice of white marble, exacerbating the sense of racial confusion. Similarly, Amaral ignores presumptions that skin pigmentation is an indicator of race in *The Negress*. Her decision to depict the woman with skin tones closer to those of a mulatta or mixed-race woman, a reference to the racial mixing of her native Brazil, introduces a sense of ambiguity into the reading of race. While her facial features and bulbous contours point directly to culturally constructed conventions of rendering 'Africanness,' her skin tone does not match early twentieth-century notions of dark skin pigmentation as an indicator of racial otherness that the painting's title *The Negress* would cause the viewer to expect. Amaral was certainly cognizant of the complex cultural implications associated with skin colour circulating in Paris in the 1920s: 'I remember the black Prince Tovalu [Prince Kojo Tovalu-Houenou, 1887-1936], whom Cendrars introduced to us. Tovalu was a sought-after fetish in all the avant-garde artistic circles. Very black, and with the correct traces of Aryan ancestry, very perfumed, he dressed with Parisian elegance.'<sup>100</sup> Her reference to Tovalu as a fetish suggests a keen self-awareness in her probing of racial and sexual categories and resonates with her exploration of fetishism in *Abaporu*.<sup>101</sup> Whereas overt signs of the figure's 'primitive' nature supersede subtle ambiguities of race and gender in *The Negress*, making the picture—at least upon cursory examination—correspond to Parisian expectations when it was shown in 1926, by 1928, Amaral allowed ambiguity to become *Abaporu*'s identifying characteristic.

Whereas Brancusi's eschewing of racial categories responded to a European context in which recent colonial conquests in Africa sparked a simultaneous fear and fascination with the so-called 'primitive,' Amaral's work takes into account Brazil's three centuries of colonial rule and racial mixing. Not surprisingly, this racial ambiguity also shows up in *Macunaíma*. According to Luís Madureira: 'the main





character's identity resides in his difference. (Indeed, equally convincing cases can be made for his white, black, and "Indian" identifications.) Thus, as the characterless "symbol" of a nation bereft of character, *Macunaíma* is at once (and discontinuously) an alien and a native.<sup>102</sup> This notion of Brazil as a post-colonial 'nation bereft of character' presented by Andrade contradicts the Parisian demand for authentic expressions of national or racial identity experienced by Amaral, inspiring a shift in her artistic strategy. In *Abaporu*, an image of captivating incongruity, she convulsively combined sources from both sides of the Atlantic to create a disjunctive composition, which undermined her audience's confidence in their cultural perspective. *Abaporu* therefore functions as a destabilizing mechanism, a challenge to the rigid classificatory mechanisms in 1920s Paris that insisted on the purity of racial categories.

Mario de Andrade articulated just how this recombination of sources took place. In describing his creative process, he admits to outright plagiarism: 'I copied everyone ... I confess that I copied, sometimes verbatim ... Not only did I copy the ethnographers and the Amerindian texts, [but] I included entire sentences ... from Portuguese colonial chroniclers ... Finally ... I copied Brazil, at least insofar as I was interested in satirizing Brazil through Brazil itself.'<sup>103</sup> Like Andrade, Amaral plagiarized European primitivism, as well as stylistic traits from myriad modernist artists. This strategy challenged the primacy of modernist originality as a measure of artistic success and instead posits a model more akin to post-modern appropriation for understanding Latin American artists' negotiation of place in the international art world. Through the practice of appropriation, Amaral turns the images she borrows back on themselves, creating a sardonic palimpsest of modernist tendencies deeply unsettling to her audience.

In conclusion, Amaral's exploration of surrealism entailed a critical engagement with the movement's precepts, in particular its emphasis on overturning traditional hierarchies of social and cultural value. *Abaporu* is not just a facsimile of surrealist thought; by appropriating and transforming select surrealist images and strategies Amaral usurped European authority over the notion of the 'primitive' and defined it in her own terms in *Abaporu*. Whereas the surrealists attempted to transcend European bourgeois culture from within, Amaral enters into the surrealists' philosophical debates over artistic hierarchies, fetishism, classificatory ambiguity and cultural primitivism, from the point of view of an artist whose culture was increasingly the subject of French primitivist fantasies. Though an astute parody and appropriation of the visual rhetoric of surrealism, combined with a selective mingling and re-signifying of other transatlantic sources, Amaral created *Abaporu*, the painting that would launch the anthropophagite movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine. 'figura monstruosa, de pés enormes plantados no chão brasileiro ao lado de um cactus.' *Diário de S. Paulo*, 28 March 1943. Cited in Aracy A Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2003, 280.



<sup>2</sup> According to Amaral, 'The Anthropophagite movement of 1928 had its origins in my canvas *Abaporu*, cannibal.' Tarsila do Amaral, 'Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagite Paintings,' *Revista Anual do Salão de Maio*, São Paulo, 1939, 31-35. Translated in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, Fundación Juan March, Madrid, 2009, 32.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars who suggest a connection to surrealism include Icleia Maria Borsa Cattani, 'Myths and Anthropophagy: The Painting of Tarsila do Amaral,' Annateresa Fabris, Felipe Chaimovich, Lisette Lagnado, Luiz Camillo Osorio, *History and (in) movement; Historia y (en) movimiento*. 1 ed. Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, 2008, v. 2, 61-71. And Cattani, 'Places of Modernism in Brazil' in *Brazil: Body & Soul*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, 2001, 385.

<sup>4</sup> 'Contrariamente ao que possa parecer, nunca houve por parte da artista, no decorrer de toda sua carreira, qualquer intencionalidade de pesquisa surrealista.' Aracy A. Amaral, 'O Surreal em Tarsila,' in *Mirante das Artes, São Paulo: Perspectiva*, June 1967, 24. Prior to the publication of Amaral's article, in 1953, Sérgio Milliet acknowledged the importance of surrealism to Amaral's work and the creation of *Abaporu*, stating: 'This last [surrealism] would soon predominate in Tarsila's work and would lead to the painting entitled *Abaporu*, which would begin the Anthropophagite movement.' But he, like later scholars, did not examine the intricacies of the connection. *Tarsila do Amaral*, Coleção Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Artistas Brasileiros Contemporâneos, no. 4 Ed. Domus, São Paulo, November, 1953. Translated in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, 228. In her 1975 (revised in 1986 and 2003) publication on Amaral, Aracy Amaral noted that, in a 1929 announcement about the arrival of the surrealist poet Benjamin Péret to Brazil, the *Diário de S. Paulo* specifically called surrealism a direct precursor to *antropofagia*. 'Peret' *Diário de S. Paulo*, 17 March 1929. Cited in Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 287. She downplayed this connection.

<sup>5</sup> Tarsila offered this interpretation of *Abaporu* in an interview for *Veja*, 23 February 1972, from which Aracy Amaral's ideas most likely derived. 'It had to be a memory or something like that from when we were children on the farm. At that time we had a comfortable relationship with the servants, those blacks who worked for us on the farm, after dinner they gathered the children to tell ghost stories. They told of ghosts who were in the walls of the house, I was very frightened, I heard them, they were there: suddenly from an opening an arm would fall, then a leg, and we never waited for the head to fall, we opened the door running because we didn't want to see the whole ghost fall. Who knows, perhaps, *Abaporu* stems from this experience? [Devia ser uma lembrança psíquica ou qualquer coisa assim e me lembrei de quando nos éramos crianças na fazenda. Naquele tempo tinha muita facilidade de empregadas, aquelas pretas que trabalhavam para nós na fazenda, depois do jantar elas reuniam a criançada para contar historias de assombração, iam contando da assombração que estava no forro da casa, eu tinha muito medo, a gente ficava ouvindo, elas diziam: daqui a pouco da abertura vai cair um braço, vai cair uma perna e nunca esperávamos cair a cabeça, abríamos a porta correndo e nem queríamos saber de ver cair a assombração inteira. Quem sabe o 'Aba-Puru' é um reflexo disto?]' Cited in Nádia Battella Gotlib, *Tarsila do Amaral: A Modernista* Editora, SENAC, São Paulo, 1998, 144. Or in another instance Amaral explains *Abaporu* as the result of the return of subconscious memories from childhood. Sônia Salzstein, *Imaginários Singulares: 19a Bienal de São Paulo, de 02 de Outubro a 13 de Dezembro de 1987*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, 1987, 13.

<sup>6</sup> 'o artista brasileiro em geral é imune, em grau maior ou menor, ao surrealismo como filosofia de expressão artística, com todas as suas implicações de 'escola.'" Amaral, 'O Surreal em Tarsila,' 24.

<sup>7</sup> 'O elemento mágico, o inconsciente, não seriam apenas uma característica da obra pictórica de Tarsila, mas ligaria ao antropofagismo o surreal.' Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 287. For a full discussion see 282-288.

<sup>8</sup> Nunes discusses the connection between surrealism and Andrade's Anthropophagite Manifesto. Benedito Nunes, 'Anthropophagisme et surréalisme,' in *Surréalisme Périphérique: Actes du colloque Portugal, Québec, Amérique Latine, un surréalisme périphérique?*, ed. Luís de Moura, Sobral Université de Montréal, Montréal, 1984, 174-79. Herkenhoff briefly mentions this connection as well, but does not go



into detail in 'Tarsila: deux et unique,' in Elza Ajzenberg et al., *Tarsila do Amaral: Peintre Brésilienne à Paris 1923-1929*, Imago Escritório de Arte, Rio de Janeiro, 2005, 41. In his dissertation Jackson acknowledges that Andrade's novel *Serafim Ponte Grande* (1933) 'has some Surrealist qualities in the expression without restraint of imagination and the subconscious. The novel thus approaches the 'convulsive beauty' of automatic psychic revelations, which is part of the *Manifeste du Surréalisme* of 1924.' K. David Jackson, 'Vanguardist Prose in Oswald De Andrade.' Ph.D., University of Wisconsin, 1973, 120. And Gotlib notes that those associated with the *Revista de Antropofagia* were reading Breton and Freud as well as Maigne, Rousseau, Lévy-Brühl, Marx, Keyserling and others. Gotlib, *Tarsila Do Amaral*, 149. So while there is a great deal of consensus on the correlation, little work had been done to elaborate the nuances of this relationship.

<sup>9</sup> Cunhambebinho (pseudonym used by both Oswald de Andrade and Oswaldo Costa), 'Péret,' *Diário de São Paulo*, 17 March 1929 reprinted and translated in *Review: Latin American Literature and Arts*, 51, Fall 1995, 69.

<sup>10</sup> Breton first refers to Kahlo as a surrealist in André Breton, *Frida Kahlo*, New York, Julien Levy Gallery, 1938. In 1950 Breton wrote an essay on Tamayo's surrealism that was later reprinted in Breton, André. "Rufino Tamayo." In *André Breton, Antología (1913-1966)*, México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1982, 302-303. This tendency to declare autonomy from surrealism was exacerbated after the 'Art of the Fantastic' exhibition in 1987 at the Indianapolis Museum of Art that proclaimed a vague notion of the 'fantastic' as a defining characteristic of Latin American art.

<sup>11</sup> Luis M. Castañeda, 'Surrealism and National Identity in Mexico: Changing Perceptions, 1940-1968,' *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 3, no. 1, 2009, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Tarsila do Amaral, 'Trends in Modern Art' *Diário de São Paulo*, 21 July 1937. Translated in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila Do Amaral*, 217.

<sup>13</sup> Borsa Cattani, 'Myths and Anthropophagy: The Painting of Tarsila do Amaral,' 66.

<sup>14</sup> Sônia Salzstein, 'Tarsila's Audacity' in Paulo Herkenhoff and Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo, *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo: 3 De Outubro a 13 de Dezembro de 1998*, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, 1998, 367.

<sup>15</sup> 'I believe that Tarsila's meeting with de Chirico, Breton and others was more than a mere relationship between people, as stated by Aracy Amaral, but rather a conscious and remarkable artistic relationship.' Maria José Justino, *O Banquete Canibal: A Modernidade em Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973) = The Cannibal Feast: Modernity in Tarsila do Amaral*, Série Pesquisa 62, Editora UFPR, Curitiba, Paraná, Brasil, 2002, 160. Nádia Battelle Gotlib also acknowledges Tarsila's connection to surrealism, referring to the artist's use of curving lines that recede into infinite space, vegetal, human, and monster forms, disturbing effects, and sense of mystery in her work. Gotlib, *Tarsila Do Amaral*, p. 146. Additionally, Jackson briefly makes this connection K. David Jackson, 'Three Glad Races: Primitivism and Ethnicity in Brazilian Modernist Literature,' *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 2, April 1994, 100.

<sup>16</sup> Madureira makes this claim in relation to the Anthropophagite Manifesto, but it applies equally to *Abaporu*. Luís Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature*, New World Studies, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, 2005, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Musée national d'art moderne (France) and Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), *Art d'Amérique Latine, 1911-1968*. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1992, 94-99. According to Mário Carelli: 'In Tarsila's studio on the rue Hégésippe Moreau in Montmartre, not only Brazilians got together, but also all the artistic avant-garde of Paris for typical Brazilian meals: Feijoada, made of bacuri, pinga, corn husk cigarettes were available to provide an exotic feeling...The first echelon: Cendrars, Fernand Léger, Jules Supervielle, Brancusi, Robert Delaunay, Vollard, Rolf de Maré, Darius



Milhaud, the black prince Kojo Tovalou (Cendrars les Nègres)...the ravishing Tarsila dressed by Poiret, heiress of an agricultural dynasty, gives a monkey to Léger, assuming without a complex, her 'Brazilianess.' [ 'Dans l'atelier de Tarsila, rue Hégésippe Moreau, à Montmartre, se réunissaient non seulement les Brésiliens mais encore tout l'avant-garde artistique parisienne pour les déjeuner typiques : 'Feijoada, composé de bacuri, pinga, cigarettes de paille de maïs étaient indispensables pour donner la note exotique...Premier échelon : Cendrars, Fernand Léger, Jules Supervielle, Brancusi, Robert Delaunay, Vollard, Rolf de Maré, Darius Milhaud, le prince noir Kojo Tovalou (Cendrars les Nègres)...La ravissante Tarsila, habillée par Poiret, héritière d'une dynasties de planteurs, offre un singe à Leger, assumant sans complexe sa 'brésilianité.' ]

<sup>18</sup> Amaral was in Paris from June 1920-June 1922; February-December 1923; September 1924-March 1925; December 1925-August 1926; March-July 1928; 1931. Oswald de Andrade was also in Paris for an extended stay in 1923 and in 1925-1926. The Galerie Percier was owned by André Level, a colleague of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Other artists who exhibited at the Galerie Percier included Naum Gabo, Joaquín Torres-García and Alexander Calder. Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 228-29. For an excellent discussion of Amaral's previous visits to Paris see Paulo Herkenhoff, 'Tarsila: deux et unique.'

<sup>19</sup> Amaral briefly studied with Léger in 1923. That fall she and Oswald attended the Ballet Suédois's performance of *La Création du monde*, a piece inspired by Blaise Cendrars' *Anthologie nègre* (1921), with costumes by Léger. Aracy A. Amaral, 'Oswald de Andrade and Brazilian Modernism: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Avant-Garde Visual Arts in the Twenties,' in *One Hundred Years of Invention: Centenário de Oswald de Andrade*, ed. K. David Jackson, Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese/Abaporu Press, Austin, 1992, 161. Amaral gives the date of November 1924, but the ballet actually opened in October of 1923. For more about the ballet see Fernand Léger, Musée national Fernand Léger (France), and Réunion des musées nationaux (France), *Fernand Léger et le spectacle: 30 juin-2 octobre 1995, Musée National Fernand Léger, Biot, Alpes-Maritimes*. Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris, 1995, 21.

<sup>20</sup> 'Sans rien aliéner de sa grâce native, elle vise à exprimer en force des ouvrages médités avec cet accent plein et vigoureux que Léger a mis dans ses peintures et ses dessins les plus récents.' Georges Rémon, 'Galerie Percier' *La Renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe* 6 June 1926, 368.

<sup>21</sup> 'Il est certain qu'actuellement Mlle Tarsila est très influencée par Fernand Léger. Mais elle sait cependant apporter dans ses réalisations une note fort personnelle, faite de sensibilité et de finesse.' Raymond Cogniat, 'La vie artistique: Exposition Tarsila,' *Revue de l'Amérique Latine* 12: 56, 1 August 1926, 159.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of class structure in Brazil see Borsa Cattani, 'Myths and Anthropophagy: The Painting of Tarsila do Amaral,' 64.

<sup>23</sup> Paintings in the exhibition included: *Paysage, Manacá, Les Bateaux, Pastorale, Sommeil, Le Parc, La Voûte, Nu, Marine, L'Oeuf, Les Colonnes*, and *Lac*. Galerie Percier (Paris, France), *Tarsila 'du 18 juin au 2 juillet 1928'*, Galerie Percier, Paris, 1928.

<sup>24</sup> I have included all the original French titles here for reference.

<sup>25</sup> 'coloriste extrêmement douée qui gagnerait à ne point trop s'évader du domaine du réel.' Charenzol, 'Les Expositions' *L'Art Vivant*, 1 July 1928, 526.

<sup>26</sup> 'Mme Tarsila teve em seu país visões estranhas e de um irrealismo—se ousa escrever—impressionante.' G. J. Gros, *Paris-Midi*, 27 June 1928. Cited in Portuguese in Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 293.

<sup>27</sup> 'Elle offrait au sens décoratif de l'artiste un moyen plein de pittoresque dans lequel sa fantaisie se trouvait plus à son aise. L'évolution de l'artiste s'est fait en ce sens, les promesses sont devenues des certitudes et à mesure que la conception devenait plus assurée, l'auteur, se sentant plus libre, échappait



sans cesse un peu plus à la réalité. A l'exposition actuelle, la plupart des toiles sont de pure imagination ; même si l'en emprunte un détail à la réalité (un arbre, une plante, un animal), celui-ci est tellement stylisé, ramené à sa valeur de simple volume, que cela équivaut à une création. Tous ces éléments sont alors regroupés dans un ordre nouveau assez souvent évocateur de décors de théâtre et constituant un monde particulier avec des rapports nouveaux, des perspectives inattendues. ' Raymond Cogniat, 'La vie artistique: Deux peintres brésiliens: Mme Tarsila, M Monteiro,' *Revue de l'Amérique Latine* 16:80, 1 August 1928, 158. An article on the Tupi-Guaranis Indians of Brazil directly preceded Cogniat's review.

<sup>28</sup> 'Mme Tarsilla est une jeune Brésilienne. Cela a de l'importance. En effet, d'ordinaire on soutient que l'art moderne est universel, qu'il suit une seule règle, que ses formes et ses expressions doivent être identiques. Cette affirmation est par trop absolue. Si l'art moderne, que ce soit la peinture, la sculpture ou l'architecture, se présente comme un phénomène à caractères universellement admis, il n'en est pas moins vrai qu'il se caractérise par les influences particulières de chaque pays et par l'influence qu'exerce la personnalité de l'artiste.

Ainsi Tarsilla apporte dans la peinture moderne sa sensibilité et de plus les expériences de son pays.

Sa peinture est imprégnée de l'esprit indien...

Tarsilla après avoir été intoxiquée par le mouvement impressionniste, est venue en Europe étudier la peinture avec Léger et Lhote. On a voulu voir dans sa manière de peindre que lui était innée et que l'impressionnisme menaçait de détruire. Grâce à son éloignement du Brésil, Tarsilla [sic.] a pu se rendre mieux compte de l'importance considérable qu'avait joué dans son pays l'élément indien qu'elle a introduit depuis dans sa peinture selon les données de sa sensibilité.

*Espérons que les influences occidentales ne viendront plus entraver un effort qui semble heureusement orienté.* ' Italics are mine. 'Les Expositions,' *Cahiers d'Art* 3: 5-6, 1928, 262.

<sup>29</sup> 'le Brésil, à la suite du Mexique, s'insurge contre la domination de l'Occident dans le domaine de l'esprit. Après avoir chassé l'envahisseur, il souhaite s'affranchir de la tutelle spirituelle de l'Europe. ' Waldemar George, 'Tarsila et l'anthropophagie,' 2.

<sup>30</sup> 'Tarsila, Tarsila, volta para dentro de ti mesma. Abandona o Gris e o Lhote, empresários de criticismos decrépitos e de estesias decadentes! Abandona Paris! Tarsila! Tarsila! Vem para a mata-virgem, onde não há arte negra, onde não há também arroyos gentis.' Letter from Mário de Andrade to Tarsila do Amaral 15 November 1923. Mário de Andrade, *Correspondência Mário de Andrade & Tarsila do Amaral*, Edusp, IEB, São Paulo, 1999, 79. This passage was translated in Justino, *O Banquete Canibal*, 148.

<sup>31</sup> As Paulo Herkenhoff suggests: 'The Black provides a new service to the rural aristocracy: his/her legitimacy at the Sorbonne and in the Parisian environment.' [le Noir rend un nouveau service à l'aristocratie rurale: sa légitimité à la Sorbonne et dans le milieu parisien.] Herkenhoff, 'Tarsila: deux et unique,' 24.

<sup>32</sup> Herkenhoff calls this 'second hand primitivism.' Herkenhoff, 'Tarsila: deux et unique,' 27. Other authors have attempted to deem Amaral's primitivism 'authentic' because of her acquaintance with black servants in her youth, but this assertion ignores the social distance her upper class status would have established. Justino, *O Banquete Canibal*, 133.

<sup>33</sup> It was perhaps through her connection to the fashion industry that Amaral came in contact with Legrain and asked him to collaborate on her exhibitions. Pierre Legrain and National Museum of African Art (USA), *African Forms in the Furniture of Pierre Legrain*, National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC, 1998, 5. Amaral's first sale of a painting in Paris was *Nègre Adorant* to Mme Tachard for five thousand francs. Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 247.

<sup>34</sup> Aracy Amaral, 'Tarsila Revisited' in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Tarsila do Amaral, 'From the Banks of the Nile to the Modern Book' *Diário de São Paulo*, 8 September 1936. Translated in Ibid., 215.





<sup>36</sup> 'Mme Tarsila nous apporte une fantaisie non exempte d'humeur. De très amusants cadres de Pierre Legrain ajoutent leurs constructions imprévues aux toiles de Mme Tarsila. ' Cogniat, 'La vie artistique: Deux peintres brésiliens: Mme Tarsila, M Monteiro,' 158.

<sup>37</sup> 'The paintings are confused with the frames by Legrain.' ['Les peintures se confondent avec les cadres de Legrain. '] *L'Intransigeant*, 26 June 1928. Cited in Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 295.

<sup>38</sup> Only one other review of the exhibition included an illustration other than *Abaporu*. André Warnod, 'Tarsila' *Comoedia*, 24 June 1928 reproduced *Paysage*.

<sup>39</sup> 'explodindo numa flor absurda' Amaral, 'O Surreal em Tarsila,' 24.

<sup>40</sup> 'Ce portrait en pied, par Tarsila, exposé à la Galerie Percier, quelle belle enseigne pour un pédicure !' 'Echos et nouvelles,' *Les Echos des industries d'art*, June 1928, 37.

<sup>41</sup> 'Art ou fumisterie ? ' A.B., 'Assez, assez!' *Journal du peuple*, 24 June 1928, 3. Thank you to Jessica Fripp, University of Michigan, for retrieving this article for me from the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

<sup>42</sup> 'On se moque chaque jour un peu plus de nous sous prétexte d'art avant-garde. ' Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> 'Mais qu'on ne nous fasse pas perdre plus longtemps notre temps à comprendre ce à quoi il n'y a rien à comprendre.' [But we should not waste much of our time trying to understand that which is incomprehensible.] Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> A.B. employs the colloquialism 'gobeurs' or and 'loufoquerie' in his description. Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> 'L'auteur du tableau que nous reproduisons semble y atteindre sans effort. Pourquoi le nommer ? Mais il est navrant que des galeries respectables se prêtent à ce jeu. ' Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> 'Oswald de Andrade and Raul Bopp—who wrote the famous poem *Cobra Norato* [1929]—were both shaken when they saw *Abaporu* and spent a long time looking at it. Both very imaginative, they felt that an important intellectual movement could come of this.' Amaral, 'Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagite Paintings.' Translated in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> The *Revista de Antropofagia* came out on 1 May 1928 and was edited by Alcântara Machado until Feb. 1929. The second edition was part of the weekly journal *Diário de S. Paulo* from Mar. –Aug. 1929. The manifesto was published in the first issue. In a description of Andrade's writing in the manifesto K. David Jackson notes the connection between Andrade's technique and surrealist automatism: 'The particular qualities of this avant-garde prose include short, dense sentences dominated by each word's expressiveness. The writing is elliptical, full of images which treat reality with poetic techniques—suggestion, allusion, metaphor, simile, pun, onomatopoeia. The use of syntactic alterations and neologisms in a collage of images achieves style of poetry in prose, based on free association of ideas and images.' Jackson, 'Vanguardist Prose in Oswald De Andrade,' 24.

<sup>48</sup> Herkenhoff, 'Tarsila: deux et unique,' 50.

<sup>49</sup> 'un long processus, au Brésil, de recherché d'autonomie culturelle face aux modeles hégémoniques,' Ibid. 41.

<sup>50</sup> Anthropophagy was a theme of the 1998 São Paulo Bienal. Herkenhoff and Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo, *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo*, 36.



<sup>51</sup> Francis Picabia, 'Manifeste cannibale Dada' *Dadaphone* 7, March 1920, 3, 4, 7. Translated in William A Camfield, *Francis Picabia His Art, Life, and Times*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1979, 140-41.

<sup>52</sup> Dawn Ades, 'The Anthropophagic Dimensions of Dada and Surrealism' in Herkenhoff and Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo, *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo*, 243.

<sup>53</sup> As K. David Jackson contends the cannibal represents 'an aggressive symbol capable of subverting the primitivism then in vogue in Europe, in order to rewrite colonial history and invert the relationship between centre and periphery.' Jackson, 'Three Glad Races,' 91.

<sup>54</sup> Jackson, 'Three Glad Races,' 106-107. See also Borsa Cattani, 'Places of Modernism in Brazil' in *Brazil: Body & Soul*, 385.

<sup>55</sup> As Carole Sweeney argues, by the interwar years, avant-garde modernisms were engaged in 'fracturing of hierarchical binaries and opposed the dominant fictions that kept in place a dynamics of centre and periphery.' Carole Sweeney, *From Fetish to Subject: Race, Modernism, and Primitivism, 1919-1935*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2004, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ana Maria Belluzzo, 'Transpositions,' in Herkenhoff and Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo, *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo*, p. 77. Or Jackson explains it this way: 'The manifesto follows a disorienting method of inversion, incorporation, and metamorphosis, by which any entity can become its other by subjection to the cannibalistic metaphor of ingestion, symbiosis, and change.' Jackson, 'Three Glad Races,' 91

<sup>57</sup> As Jackson contends: 'The symbolic meal is gratifying yet ultimately ambiguous, since it represents both overcoming and becoming European.' Ibid. 93.

<sup>58</sup> Or according to Jorge Schwartz: 'The cultural exercise of anthropophagy, although it's a metaphorical concept extracted from anthropology, saw parody as one of its critical primary elements.' ['O exercício cultural da antropofagia, embora seja um conceito metafórico extraído da antropologia, viu na paródia um dos elementos críticos primordiais.'] Jorge Schwartz, 'Um Brasil em Tom Menor: Pau-Brasil e Antropofagia,' *Revista de Crítica Literária Latinoamericana* 24, no. 47, January 1, 1998, 63.

<sup>59</sup> As Benedito Nunes contends: 'sometimes the reader of the 1928 Manifesto in the *Revista Antropofagia* cannot escape from the impression that he is confronted with a carnivalesque parody of surrealism.' 'Quelquefois le lecteur du Manifeste de 1928 ou de la Revue d'Anthropophagie ne peut pas échapper à l'impression qu'il est devant une parodie carnavalesque du surréalisme.' Nunes, 'Anthropophagisme et surréalisme,' 179.

<sup>60</sup> Various scholars offer theoretical analyses of anthropophagy. See Jackson, 'Three Glad Races,' 89-112; Madureira, 'Lapses in Taste' in *Cannibal Modernities*, 21-51; Nunes, 'Anthropophagisme et surréalisme,' 159-179; Schwartz, 'Um Brasil em Tom Menor,' 53-65.

<sup>61</sup> See notes 27 and 28 for Andrade's interviews. One of the few authors to make the connection between the cannibalist themes in European avant-garde literature in the 1920s (Marinetti's *Il Negro*, Picabia's *Cannibale*, and such themes in the writing of Apollinaire and Cendrars) and Andrade's Anthropophagite Manifesto was the Brazilian philosopher Benedito Nunes in 'O Modernismo e as vanguarda' (Acerca do Canibalismo Literário II), Suplemento Literário do Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 3 May 1969. Cited in Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 284.

<sup>62</sup> 'M de Andrade ne prétend pas sans doute revenir au paganisme, ni même à la vie naturelle. Mais il veut dégager les constantes d'une civilisation locale et autochtone... M de Andrade poursuit donc un effort de véritable redressement national. Il combat dans la doctrine chrétienne et dans le latinisme les marques d'une servitude. Qu'il ait tort ou raison, nous pensions que sa campagne valait d'être signalée... M de Andrade, qui aime les paradoxes, s'en sert comme d'un mot d'ordre ! Il défend cette coutume



ancestrale. Les Brésiliens anciens n'étaient point friands de chair humaine. S'ils tuaient quelque d'adversaire d'élite, ils partageaient son corps entre ses membres d'une tribu. Deux ou trois mille personnes prenaient part au festin. C'est dire que leur repas était tout théorique. L'absorption de la chair de l'ennemi tendait à transformer l'être tabou en totem et à s'imprégner de ses vertus intimes. La signification de l'anthropophagie est donc purement mystique. La thèse originale de M Oswald de Andrade trouvera-t-elle des adeptes à Paris ?' Waldemar George, 'Tarsila et l'Anthropophagie' *La Presse*, Paris, 5 July 1928, 2. Thank you to Jessica Fripp, University of Michigan, for retrieving this article for me from the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

<sup>63</sup> 'Qu'est-ce que l'anthropophagie? Le fait de dévorer l'ennemi vaincu pour que ses vertus passent en nous. Une communion. Nous absorbons le *Tabou* pour le transformer en *Totem* : l'ennemi sacré qu'il faut transformer en ami. Frazer, Freud, ont donné au *Tabou* une signification que je corrige...Freud place l'instinct sexuel au centre de l'activité humaine ; je lui oppose l'instinct anthropophagique dont la sexualité est l'une des formes les plus caractéristiques. 'Oswald de Andrade interviewed by Nino Frank, 'Malles et Valises: Sao Paulo-Paris, Oswald de Andrade' *Nouvelles littéraires, artistiques et scientifiques*, 14 July 1928. Page numbers not available.

<sup>64</sup> Ades 'The Anthropophagic dimensions of dada and surrealism,' 244.

<sup>65</sup> Donald B. Kuspit, *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Postmodern Art*, Contemporary artists and their critics, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, 151.

<sup>66</sup> See Dawn Ades 'Fetishism: Surrealism's Job' in *Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire*, South Bank Centre, London, 1995, 85.

<sup>67</sup> Kuspit, *Signs of Psyche in Modern and Postmodern Art*, 151.

<sup>68</sup> William Pietz, 'Fetish,' in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, New ed., Oxford History of Art, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, 110.

<sup>69</sup> Jackson also interprets the painting in this way: 'The painting's excess stems from the incongruity of its juxtapositions, whatever historical and cultural antecedents may justify them; for the viewer, this creates an effect of ethnographic surrealism, as a modernist icon is transformed into a fetish that infiltrates and dominates both imagination and society.' Jackson, 'Three Glad Races,' 100.

<sup>70</sup> Amaral, 'O Surreal em Tarsila,' 24-45. She owned two paintings by de Chirico, one of which was *L'énigme d'une journée* now in the Museu de Arts Contemporâneo de São Paulo. Juan Manuel Bonet, 'A 'Quest' for Tarsila' in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, 84. From October 1924 until April 1925 (Amaral was in Paris from September 1924 until February of 1925) the surrealists ran the Central Bureau for Surrealist Research (Bureau central de recherches surrealists), on the rue de Grenelle, where the public could go to find out about surrealism. While she never mentions visiting the bureau, she was most likely aware of its existence.

<sup>71</sup> 'Em minha opinião os surrealistas... são os únicos que contam verdadeiramente.' Interview with Blaise Cendrars and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, 'Conversando con Blaise Cendrars' *O Jornal*, Rio de Janeiro (23 September 1927). Cited in Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 273. In her introduction to *Complete Postcards from the Americas* Monique Chefdor claims that Cendrars went to Brazil because he was disgruntled with the 'dictatorial turn that literature took in Paris with emerging surrealism.' Blaise Cendrars, *Complete Postcards from the Americas: Poems of Road and Sea*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976, 17. This is not at all the tone of his interview in Brazil, however. I am inclined to believe that Cendrars' disenchantment with surrealism emerged closer to 1929 and the publication of the second manifesto, with its thinning of the ranks, rather than before his trip to Brazil.



<sup>72</sup> Later, according to Amaral, the surrealists would attack Cendrars, which may have influenced her decision to disavow any relationship to the trend in loyalty to her friend. Tarsila do Amaral 'Blaise Cendrars,' *Diário de São Paulo*, 28 July 1943. Translated in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila Do Amaral*, 37.

<sup>73</sup> In early 1929 Péret moved with Houston to Brazil and lived there until 1931.

<sup>74</sup> Edward A. Aiken, 'Emak Bakia' Reconsidered,' *Art Journal* 43, no. 3, Autumn 1983, 240.

<sup>75</sup> According to Aiken, 'Emak Bakia is carefully crafted to present a series of images that intentionally lend themselves to multiple readings.' Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> For more on Many Ray and photography see Jane Livingston, 'Man Ray and Surrealist Photography,' in Rosalind E Krauss, *L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism*, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1985, 128.

<sup>77</sup> Amaral painted a second version of the painting, *Calmness II*, the following year.

<sup>78</sup> André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, MFA Publications, Boston, 2002, 38-40. Originally published in 1928.

<sup>79</sup> While Miró most likely drew the contour of the figure as a continuous line, he was known to make preliminary drawings. So this painting is probably not a true example what the surrealists deemed automatism. Yet, in his discussion of Miró in *Surrealism and Painting* Breton refers specifically to the 'pure automatism' of Miró's paintings, which may have led to later misinterpretations of his work. Ibid., 36.

<sup>80</sup> Miró made *Person Throwing a Stone at a Bird* in Montroig between August and December of 1926. Carolyn Lanchner and Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), *Joan Miró*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1993, 56-57. Amaral left Paris for Brazil in August of 1926, so it was virtually impossible that she saw the picture in person. Miró's work was included in one exhibition in late 1925 that Amaral could have visited: 'L'Art d'aujourd'hui,' Galerie de la Ville L'Evêque (rue de la Ville l'Evêque), 30 November-December 1925. She may also have visited his studio in Paris.

<sup>81</sup> Amaral owned 'A painting from Picasso's hermetic phase, a famous Eiffel Tower by Delaunay, a Dadaist painting by Picabia, a surrealist painting by Miró, a constructivist painting by Kabatze (Russian), a wooden *Carlito* by Fernand Léger, and a painting by Léger.' ['un quadro da fase hermética de Picasso, a celebre *Torre Eiffel*, de Delaunay, um quadro dadaísta de Picabia, um quadro surrealista de Miró, um quadro construtivista de Kabatze (russo), o *Carlito* de madeira de Fernand Léger, mais um quadro de Léger.']. 'Exposição Tarsila do Amaral,' *Correio Paulistano*, 25 September 1929. Cited in Amaral, *Tarsila: Sua obra e seu tempo*, 328.

<sup>82</sup> In 1925 Miró painted *The Statue*, which included a toenail and knifelike leg hairs, in 1928 he illustrated a book of poems by Lise Hirtz entitled *Il était une petite pie* (There once was a little foot), and to the December 1929 issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, he submitted another drawing of a foot-person, who now has a bulbous hand that reaches for its floating ribbon-like companion. As Rosalind Krauss points out, around 1930 Miró filled entire notebooks with images of this part of the body. For more on Bataille and Miró see Rosalind Krauss, 'Michel, Bataille et moi,' *October* 68, Spring 1994, 18.

<sup>83</sup> 'belle enseigne pour un pédicure ! 'Echos et nouvelles,' 37.

<sup>84</sup> Oswald de Andrade and Leslie Bary, 'Cannibalist Manifesto,' *Latin American Literary Review* 19, no. 38, December 1991, 40.



<sup>85</sup> Breton first expounded this theory in the concluding paragraphs of his novel *Nadja* (1928) and later elaborated on it in *L'amour fou* (1937). This definition stems from Rosalind E. Krauss, *L'Amour Fou: Photography & Surrealism*. Washington, D.C, Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1985, 31.

<sup>86</sup> As Romy Golan points out, there were numerous exhibitions on the theme of the nude in the early 1920s, including 'Exposition du nu féminin de Ingres à nos jours' curated by Louis Vauxelles for the Galerie Style, 'Peintres du nu' at the Galeria Devambez, 'Peintres du nu' curated by Elie Faure for the Galerie Crès, and the Galerie Marcel Bernheim held a show entitled 'Le nu féminin.' Also in 1924, Francis Carco published his book *Le nu dans la peinture moderne (1863-1920)*. Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995, 18-21.

<sup>87</sup> 'Est-ce le portrait de l'auteur?' A.B., 'Assez, Assez!,' 3.

<sup>88</sup> *Antropofagia* has been compared to Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863), in both the arrangement of the figures and its deliberately provocative nature, indicating that Amaral maintained her practice of appropriating and reinterpreting European sources for both their formal and symbolic properties. <http://www.memoriaviva.org.br/default.asp?id=1&mnu=1&ACT=5&content=1691> No author indicated. Article is a review of Aracy A Amaral, *Tarsila Viajante Viajera*, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, 2008.

<sup>89</sup> Nádia Battelle Gotlib even asserts the protagonist, Macunaíma, inspired Amaral's work of the period. Gotlib, *Tarsila Do Amaral*, 144.

<sup>90</sup> Mário de Andrade, *Macunaíma*, Random House, New York, 1984, 16. Originally published in Portuguese in 1928.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, 'Three Glad Races,' 97.

<sup>93</sup> Herkenhoff, 'Tarsila: deux et unique,' 27.

<sup>94</sup> Christopher Green, *Art in France: 1900-1940*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2000, 255.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-57.

<sup>97</sup> We know that Amaral knew of the scandal *Princesse X* caused because she discusses it specifically in her article on Brancusi: 'In his drive to achieve primitive purity he carved the head of Princess Popescu [actually *Princess X*] in front of the model then went about simplifying it and arrived at the limits of expression. He sent it to one of several salons in Paris, I think to that of the Indépendents, and when the bust was exhibited a committee of art-world figures demanded that the work be removed for the good of morality, claiming that, by reason of its extremely simplified form it aroused obscene thoughts.' Tarsila do Amaral, 'Brancusi' *Diário de São Paulo*, 6 May 1936. Translated in Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, 210.

<sup>98</sup> See Dawn Ades, 'Surrealism, Male-Female,' Tate Modern (Gallery) and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2001, 171-201 for a discussion of this destabilization of gender categories in Duchamp's masquerade as Rose Sélavy, Man Ray's photographs of phallic women, and Claude Cahun's cross dressing.

<sup>99</sup> For a discussion of racial codes in modern art see Alastair Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2004, 163-191. As Alastair Wright contends in his





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discussion of Matisse's *Blue Nude*, such images 'scramble pictorial codes, mixing the visual signs by which painting typically marked race,' 168.

<sup>100</sup> Fundación Juan March, *Tarsila do Amaral*, 49. Originally published as 'Memories of Paris' (1952).

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of nineteenth-century racial theories see Wright, *Matisse and the Subject of Modernism*, 174.

<sup>102</sup> Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 86. Quoted from title page of novel's [*Macunaíma*] second edition in 1938.

Michele Greet is Associate Professor of modern Latin American and European art at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. With the support of a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship (2012–13), she wrote the scholarly monograph, *Transatlantic Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris between the Wars, 1918-1939*, which is forthcoming with Yale University Press. In addition to the book, she is curating a major traveling exhibition on this topic with the American Federation of Arts. She is also the author of *Beyond National Identity: Pictorial Indigenism as a Modernist Strategy in Andean Art, 1920-1960* (2009), part of the Penn State University Press's Refiguring Modernism Series. She has lectured widely on modern Latin American art and published articles in national and international journals including the *Journal for Surrealism and the Americas*, *Arteloge*, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* and *Brújula*.



## Double Deceptions: Salvador Dalí's Stereoscopic Paintings and the Influence of Gerrit Dou

Jonathan Wallis

The Dutch painter Gerrit Dou is considered central to Salvador Dalí's interest in stereoscopy during the 1970s. In this essay, I contend that Dalí serendipitously misperceived a stereoscopic endeavour in Dou's work based on available art historical sources that led to his own innovative double paintings. Dalí's stereoscopic images, especially those incorporating incongruent subjects, derive in part from this misreading of Dou's artistic motivations and explore the potential of binocular rivalry to force mind/eye relationships into active and unnatural determinations of reality through illusion. Steeped in themes of doubling, the stereoscopic paintings further the artist's challenge to traditional painterly perception pursued previously through his paranoiac-critical method and contribute to the legacy of the 'double' in Dalí's art, biography and personal mythology.

Salvador Dalí's encounter with the work of the Dutch Baroque artist, Gerrit Dou (1613-1675) in the late 1960s and early 1970s played an essential role in the realisation of his innovative stereoscopic paintings. Inspired by a self-proclaimed 'discovery' of unacknowledged stereoscopic experimentation in the Dutch artist's oeuvre, Dalí transformed a decade-long curiosity with photographic stereoscopic effects into a rigorous painterly pursuit that persisted for a decade. Although Dou's position as an important catalyst for Dalí's stereoscopic work is widely recognised, a critical assessment of the extent of the Dutch artist's influence and the art historical accuracy of Dalí's revelations has not been undertaken. In this essay, I suggest that close examination of the visual resources available about Dou in the 1960s and 1970s, coupled with recent scholarship on the Dutch artist's life and work, demonstrate that Dalí serendipitously misinterpreted a stereoscopic endeavour that led to his own productive optical experiments during the 1970s. Guided by this misconstrued precedent, the artist produced double-paintings in the 1970s that reflect his exposure to Dou's work, including potential misreadings that may have contributed to his attempts at surpassing standardised stereopsis to toy with the disruption of comfortable optical synthesis in binocular vision. The result of these examples is a visual discord suggestive of a psychic condition reminiscent of, but distinct from, the paranoiac-critical method that further supports the artist's lifelong pursuit of the 'perfect simulacrum'.<sup>1</sup> Invented by the physicist Sir Charles Wheatstone in the 1830s, stereoscopic images provide the optical experience of an image in relief by presenting a scene to each eye from slightly differing perspectives.<sup>2</sup> By angling mirrors, altering focal distance, or crossing the eyes, binocular fusion results in stereopsis - depth perception - although in the case of a stereoscopic image the illusion of depth perception is incomplete because the accommodation of focus is never truly resolved. In 1961, decades after his departure from surrealism, Dalí took an interest in stereoscopy after he experienced its effects in postcards that employed the Fresnel lens system.<sup>3</sup> According to the artist's close friend Robert Descharnes, after his initial contact with the postcards Dalí began to experiment with the use of photographs viewed through a stereoscope with mirrors and employed Roger de Montebello (brother of Philippe) who successfully created a revised version of Wheatstone's original stereoscope for the artist.<sup>4</sup> Although these postcards sparked



the artist's curiosity, it was not until a decade later after exposure to the work of Gerrit Dou that he began to read scientific documents on stereoscopy and experiment in earnest to produce stereoscopic paintings.<sup>5</sup>

In order to achieve an illusionistic effect, Dalí worked out the appropriate perspective differential through photographs that were then projected on to canvases, and along with the aid of a Fresnel lens produced 'twinned paintings' that served as the images for his stereoscopic experiences.<sup>6</sup> Famously describing his surrealist imagery as 'hand-painted dream photographs,' acknowledging their verism and the fact that they were to be conceived as 'documentations' of psychic activity, Dalí's experiments and technical knowledge allowed his stereoscopic paintings to conjure 'real' illusions within the experience of stereoptic depth perception. These new works manifested a similar verism and psychic presence for the artist, who described them as 'photography in three dimensions and in colour of the superfine images of concrete irrationality, entirely made by hand,' and labelled them examples of 'metaphysical hyperrealism.'<sup>7</sup>

Dalí's stereoscopic paintings took liberties with his photographic reproductions, and complicated relations of scale and perspective took centre stage and dominated as illusionistic spectacles, overshadowing 'irrational' content that appears, if anything, gimmicky and contrived. For example, in *Dalí Lifting the Skin of the Mediterranean Sea to Show Gala the Birth of Venus* (1977), a landscape of disparate scales, proportions and dream-like subject matter exists in a stereoscopic context. No longer bound by photographic limitations, Dalí presents the act of lifting the skin of the sea as a stereoptic illusionistic 'trick' (a subject he represented in perspectival two-dimensional illusions in the early 1950s and 1960s).<sup>8</sup> This emphasis on 'metaphysically hyperreal' depictions of illusionistic space is also present in *Dalí's Hand Drawing Back the Golden Fleece in the Form of a Cloud to Show Gala the Dawn, Completely Nude, Very, Very Far Away Behind the Sun* (1977), where he performs the illusionistic feat of 'breaking through the physical horizon,' complicating levels of illusionism and deception with regard to human perception.<sup>9</sup> In order to achieve these painterly effects that moved beyond the photographic record, Dalí might have either combined different sets of stereoscopic photographs into painted composites or measured the images on each of the paired canvases to achieve a close approximation of the exact differentials necessary for the optical effect to occur.<sup>10</sup> However lacklustre the content, Dalí was able nevertheless to produce painterly illusions that broke through the measure of the observable by providing the necessary optical information and binocular program to advance an illusionistic reality.

## Double Vision

Dalí had a lifelong fascination with illusionism that began early in his childhood. In an oft cited passage in his autobiography, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942) he describes viewing an 'optical theatre' while at the residence of his schoolmaster in Figueres, Señor Esteban Traytor Colomer.<sup>11</sup> This toy version of a stereopticon was the artist's first of several encounters with optical phenomena before entering the surrealist group.<sup>12</sup> As Sophie Matthiesson outlines in the exhibition catalogue for the retrospective at the



National Gallery of Victoria, Australia in 2009, Dalí's interest in three-dimensional illusionism influenced his itinerary during a trip to Paris in April 1926 with his aunt and sister.<sup>13</sup> Only two months before his expulsion from the Madrid Academy of Art, Dalí's destinations included Versailles, The Musée Grévin, and the studio of Picasso, and in all three cases interest in illusionism was among the principal reasons for the visits. As Dalí later recalled, a portion of his attraction to Picasso's analytic cubist work was that it captured 'the three dimensions of Velázquez.'<sup>14</sup> Both Versailles and the Musée Grévin contain, as Matthiesson points out, rooms with mirror effects, something the artist would again take seriously as an artistic interest during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>15</sup>

Dalí's inventiveness with optical illusions and anamorphosis during his association with surrealism is well documented, most notably by Dawn Ades and Peter C. Sutton in the catalogue, *Dalí's Optical Illusions*, for the exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1999. Ades cites Dalí's attempt to overcome the persistent virtual nature of phantoms of the psyche as leading to 'one of the most sustained investigations into the relationship between vision, perception, and representation in the twentieth century.'<sup>16</sup> As Ades describes, this ironic yet telling aspect of his artistic program focused on a desire not to create the illusion of reality, but rather the reality of illusions.<sup>17</sup>

The myth of the 'double' or the 'twin' in Dalí's biography and art is well established, beginning with the now almost legendary tale of his older brother, also named Salvador, who remained a constant phantom presence during the artist's formative years through parental nostalgia.<sup>18</sup> Artistically, as early as 1931 Dalí began signing his works of art 'Gala/Dalí' as an expression of his unity with his wife, who he claimed provided the necessary inspiration, temperance and catalyst for his artistic personality and creativity. This pattern of 'twinning' in Dalí's surrealist work, first identified by Fiona Bradley, provides an early example of the artist's interest in the fusion of pairs and he proceeded to associate Gala/Dalí with a wide-range of mythological and art historical female/male pairings: the couple in Jean-François Millet's *Angelus*, William Jensen's Norbert Hanold/Gradiva, Helen and Pollux, Castor and Pollux, and Narcissus and his reflection and/or sister.<sup>19</sup> Dalí may have also pursued twinings in the context of nuclear mysticism, with Gala as Virgin and Dalí as 'newborn' Son, as well as self-portrait twinings through surrogate objects with iconographic associations to Christian redemption and resurrection.<sup>20</sup> Building on this evidence, it may be that Dalí's persistent desire to seek a structural language of associative character-pairs through paranoiac content influenced his later interest in stereoscopy, where binocular fusion performs the perceptual reconciliation of two images into a three-dimensional illusionistic optical singularity. This connection between 'doubling' in Dalí's surrealist work and his later stereoscopic paintings was first suggested by Ades, who remarked that the artist's 1937 painting, *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, as well as a series of double images in his Mae West Room in the Dalí Theatre and Museum in Figueres, Spain, may be early indications of his interest in the presentation of identical pairings and optical fusion.<sup>21</sup> The latter work is particularly germane since it achieves the exact opposite effect of the later stereoscopic work - transforming a three-dimensional space into the illusion of a two dimensional image, further complicated by the transcription of the objects into the impression of the face of Mae West.<sup>22</sup>



Beginning in the early 1930s, Dalí extended his illusionistic capabilities by incorporating anamorphosis into his hyperrealistic paintings of dreamscapes and personal psychic dramas, and also inventing the paranoiac-critical method, where unstable visual information served as a means to, as he claimed, spontaneously explain 'the irrational knowledge born of delirious associations by giving a critical interpretation of the phenomenon.'<sup>23</sup> This controlled simulation of a paranoiac state allowed Dalí, according to Ades and Bradley, to destabilise 'the interpretation of visual clues' and reinterpret objects whose identity was already conventionally established.<sup>24</sup> But to present these paranoiac experiences in an observable visual representation took considerable artistic talent and skill, as the Wadsworth exhibition and catalogue revealed.

Considering that Dalí again pursued sustained and intense research and work on optical illusionism decades later, it is worth asking what relationship Dalí's paranoiac-critical method and its emphasis on multivalent imagery might have to the production of the stereoscopic paintings in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>25</sup> Such unstable and fluctuating visual fields in his paranoiac works present viewers with an experience of reality suggestive of not just illusion but also delusion - where a subjective psychic process is channelled to viewers visually by a sophisticated painterly language that disrupts the security of perceived subject matter. Through use of overlapping, the exploitation of the edges of forms, positive and negative space, and shifts from light to dark, Dalí creates illusionistic effects that, as Marc LaFountain describes in *Dalí and Postmodernism*, 'do not together make anything in particular, even though they appear to do so (e.g., a "face"),' and thus comprise 'Phantom meanings.'<sup>26</sup>

The importance of the paranoiac-critical method to this paper lies in its representational strategy that provides the optical catalyst for a delusional experience. Visual evidence in Dalí's later stereoscopic work demonstrates an artistic attempt (only moderately successful) to further exploit the painterly ability to conjure optical illusions beyond a standard stereoscopic effect. Based on a misconstrued precedent in Dou's work, I suggest that Dalí may have intended to provoke contradictory spatial illusions simultaneously rather than in continual flux. Although reminiscent of the paranoiac-critical method, this later approach is more optical than critical, focusing on a sensory experience of multivalent visual imagery without the subsequent stage of self-critical analysis, and thus only partially mirroring its earlier surrealist manifestation. Dalí's progression towards 'delusional' stereoscopy is supported by the fact that he was already actively seeking new optical effects in his paintings that would facilitate paranoiac experiences for viewers in the late 1960s. In a reprint of his 1969 *Art News* article, 'De Kooning's 300,000,000 birthday,' on 31 August 1971, Dalí discusses his famous painting *The Hallucinogenic Toreador* (1969-70), indicating that it was his initial attempt to produce a structure of repetitive imagery with connections to optical phenomena and his paranoiac-critical method: 'I have used accumulations of an obsessive single image such as the Venus de Milo to obtain an hallucinogenic structure able to provoke for the spectator any kind of concrete image. This work is the first optical application of my paranoiac-critical method.'<sup>27</sup>

Whether due to a lack of success with his stereoscopic experiments, deficiency of his earlier critical drive, or the result of his growing obsession with René Thom's work on catastrophe theory and his return





to religious and artistic precedents in the 1980s, at present there is no substantial evidence to suggest Dalí intended to incorporate a self-reflective, analytic stage in these later paintings. Nevertheless, these examples provide an important chronological bookend to the continued presence of doubling/twinning in Dalí's art and biography and offer a glimpse into a fascinating optically-based psychic experiment that remained, unfortunately, underdeveloped and unfinished.

## Dalí and Dou

In a commonly cited anecdote, Dalí gained a renewed interest in stereoscopy after observing the work of the Dutch Baroque painter, Gerrit Dou, during a visit to Paris in 1969. With his then companion Amanda Lear, Dalí attended an exhibition of Dou's work at the Petit Palais and Lear, after later reviewing a book on the artist, remarked with curiosity about his penchant for producing 'close, but not identical, copies of his works.'<sup>28</sup> Intrigued, Dalí suggested that Dou might have experimented with stereoscopy, stating that no one 'had ever noticed this before because no two of his paintings had ever been exhibited side by side.'<sup>29</sup> According to Antonio Pitxot, Dalí noticed that two paintings by Dou, entitled *The Mousetrap*, differed only slightly in their dimensions and therefore deduced that the Dutch artist did indeed intend the two paintings as a binocular exercise in stereopsis.<sup>30</sup> Proceeding to investigate the relationship of Dou's 'close copies' in earnest, Dalí claimed the Dutchman as 'the first stereoscopic painter.'<sup>31</sup> Lear and Dalí most likely reviewed Dou's work in Wilhelm Martin's 1913 text, *Gerard Dou: des meisters Gemälde*, the only source available that presented the mousetrap paintings together (the book is also preserved in Dalí's personal collection).<sup>32</sup> It is important to recognise that to this day no firm scholarly evidence exists that Dou engaged in stereoscopic pursuits.<sup>33</sup> It should be noted, however, that a great deal of interest in optics and the microscope took place in Holland during his lifetime, and Dou addressed themes of artistic illusion and deception in the subject matter of his paintings.<sup>34</sup> Dalí's misperception likely resulted from the formatting of Dou's images in Martin's text. The book contains eight pairings of paintings on adjacent pages with identical titles, (including *Mousetrap*), identical visual subjects and only slightly differing dimensions (Figs. 1 and 2).



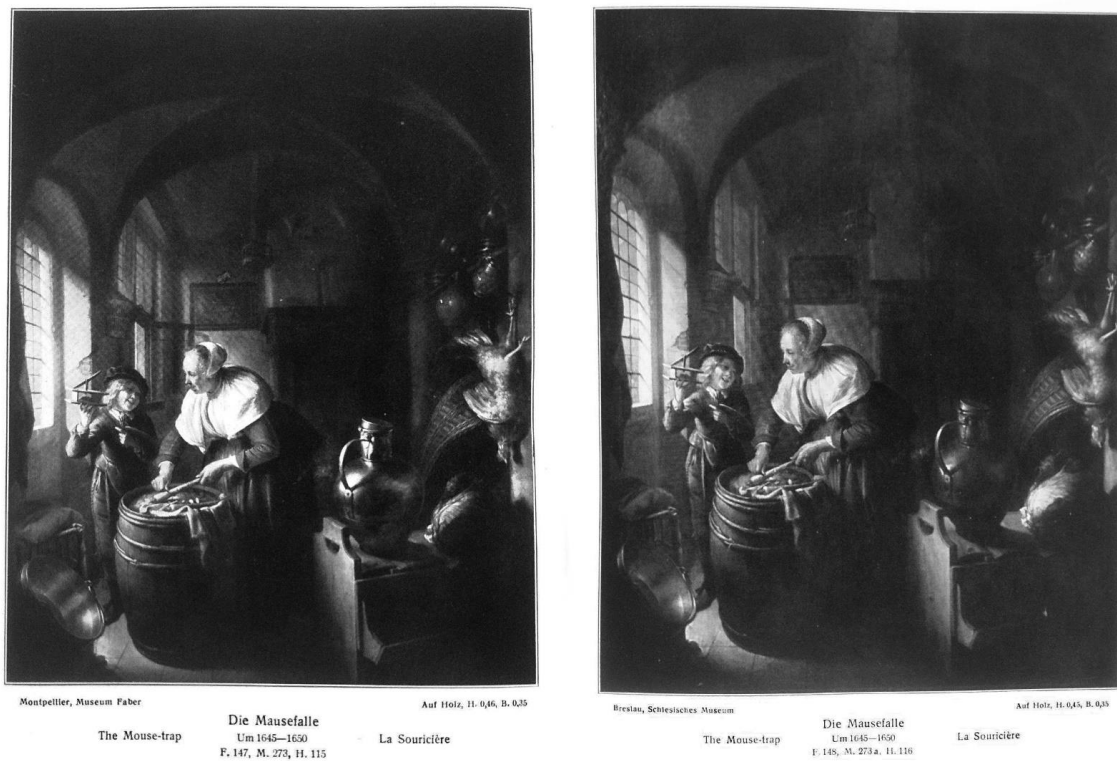


Fig. 1: Photograph of two-page spread in Wilhelm Martin's *Gerard Dou: des meisters Gemälde* (1913), displaying two versions of *Die Mausefalle* c. 1645-1650. (Photo: author)



Fig. 2: Series of collaged double-page spreads of Dou's paintings in Martin's text, 2012, (Photo, collage: author).

It is likely Dalí misperceived their display next to one another in the text as further reinforcement of his initial assumption about Dou and stereoscopy. As Ronni Baer, a leading Dou scholar, points out, it is now recognised that one of the two mousetrap paintings bore a false signature, and although many of his compositions are known in more than one version it was extremely rare for Dou to copy himself.<sup>35</sup> At the time however, Dalí and Lear were not privy to this information and the misattributions would have suggested that Dou made numerous close copies with varying dimensions. How interesting that Dalí began an endeavour that would occupy a portion of his painterly production for almost a decade based on the probable assumption that Dou was practicing stereoscopic experiments, deduced from the placement of nearly identical works in a published text with slightly varying dimensions. With his considerable enthusiasm for 'doubling' and his exposure to the Fresnel postcards a decade earlier, along with the close dimensional aspects of the reproduced paintings in Martin's text, such an encounter and conclusion could be easily reached, despite what we now know about Dou's work.

The earliest surviving example of Dalí working in a stereoscopic format after his exposure to the Fresnel lens in 1961 is a watercolour entitled, *Patient Lovers (Stereoscopic Face in the Ampurdan Plain)*, 1970 that contains slightly incongruent imagery.<sup>36</sup> Depicting two slightly different paranoiac faces on single sheet of paper, the work is most likely a prototype for the separate stereoscopic paintings that follow and suggests that Dalí may have been experimenting with less complicated sketches before facilitating the stereoscopic viewing process through more complicated mechanical devices. More likely, *Patient Lovers* is a rudimentary approach to stereopsis where the simple placement of a finger in front of the eyes aligned at the seam between the two images produces a crude three-dimensional effect. If *Patient Lovers* was produced late in 1970, it may be that Dalí's interest in Dou and stereoscopy was rekindled by his subsequent exposure to the artist's paintings when he attended the opening of his first European retrospective exhibition in Holland on 21 November 1970 at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam.<sup>37</sup>

Considering Dalí's penchant for re-formulating and re-interpreting Old Master works of art throughout his career, Dou's reputation for incredible detail and tightness of painting may have also attracted the artist's attention and led to additional influence beyond the stereoscopic assumption. Compositional and subjective references to one of Dou's most well-known works in the collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen appear in a painting Dalí made not long after his visit to the Netherlands.<sup>38</sup> *Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalised by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors* (1972-73) is strikingly similar to Dou's *A Young Woman at her Toilet* (1667), sharing not only a sequence of figures 'looking' at one another through the presence of a mirror but also an angled rather than direct room construction, a typical Baroque element.<sup>39</sup> (Figs. 3 and 4). It is worth noting that the two chairs in Dou's painting, positioned perpendicular to one another, are fused into one compositional 'track' in Dalí's work. This is fascinating, as it presents another twist on the stereoscopic concept through a compositional metaphor: Dalí produces two paintings of similar composition with a fusion of two lines of sight from a potential artistic precedent. Additionally, the canvas in front of Dalí



'doubles' as a second, sequential mirror in the 'track' and the position of both figures, parallel to the window of his studio, echoes the position of the empty chair in Dou's painting. Interestingly, Dalí portrays himself 'at work' in paintings during this decade more often than any other time in his career. This could be linked to the popular Dutch Baroque convention of depicting the 'artist in the studio,' especially considering his specific interest in Dou's work and longstanding enthusiasm for the work of Johannes Vermeer (especially prominent in the 1930s and 1950s). The viewer's position behind the artist in the aforementioned Dalí painting is almost certainly a nod to Vermeer's famous example, *The Art of Painting* (c. 1666-1673).



Fig. 3: Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalised by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors, 1972-73, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm (in two components, unfinished), Fundación Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueras.







Fig. 4: *A Young Woman at her Toilet*, 1667, Oil on panel, 75.5 x 58, Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.



While the influence of the Dutch Baroque on Dalí's stereoscopic work is usually cited through his specific exposure to Gerrit Dou at the end of the 1960s, the artist did have earlier direct contact with Netherlandish art. He and Gala visited the Netherlands in 1962 for two days and their trip included stops at Mauritshuis to observe Vermeer's *View of Delft*, c. 1660-1661, the Museum Het Prinsenhof, the tomb of Antoni van Leeuwenhoek at the Old Church and the site where Vermeer painted his famous panorama.<sup>40</sup> The visit to Leeuwenhoek's tomb is especially interesting, as he is widely recognised for his experiments and advancements in microbiology and pioneering use of the telescope, an indication that Dalí's enthusiasm for optics remained potent after the initial encounter with the Fresnel lens postcards. In *The World of Salvador Dalí*, published the same year, Dalí mentions the convex mirror in his bedroom at Port Lligat as related to Vermeer, declaring a connection between two of the sites he visited during his trip: 'The fabulous mirror with which it is said that Vermeer observed his world reflected in order to paint it must have existed, as at the same period in the same city of Delft there existed the first microscopes invented by Leeuwenhoek.'<sup>41</sup> The landscape, history, and culture of the Netherlands were also inspirational: 'The country, the light, the way Vermeer painted it. And Delft itself: well, that's exactly like Port Lligat, my town on the Costa Brava, the place where I live. No, the Netherlands is beautiful. I would like to have an exhibition here some day, who knows - but that will probably take some effort.'<sup>42</sup>

### Subjective Incongruence and Binocular Rivalry

Unfortunately, a significant portion of Dalí's subject matter during the 1960s had turned away from intensely surrealist or even earnest religious content to more self-laudatory images displaying the artist 'in action,' often showcasing his painterly talents and celebrating his continued dedication to Gala as his primary subject and muse, usually through a smattering of subject matter re-hashed from previous decades. But while the more standard stereoscopic examples may fail to inspire in content, evidence suggests that Dalí intended even greater optical outcomes and here the previous references to the paranoiac-critical method and 'doubling' return as relevant precedents. In a series of stereoscopic paintings from the 1970s, Dalí employed varying palettes and depicted different, but closely associated scenes in each of the two paintings involved in stereopsis. The artist's ultimate destination with this endeavour is unknown (and may have been something he too did not grasp). One possibility is that he was toying with the mind's response to conflicted visual information in the stereoscopic act, hoping that it might fuse two non-identical images into a wholly new, synthesised product, perceived but not tangible. As Elliott King notes, this was the case with Dalí's stereoscopic colour experimentation where he advanced on the process of optical colour mixture, employing a perceptual 'palette' where two colours could blend optically to form a new colour when each painting 'mixed' through stereopsis.<sup>43</sup> In her 1985 autobiography, *My Life with Dalí*, Amanda Lear recalls that Dalí spoke of this effect: 'Do you realise that one can create colours which don't exist, colour which the brain is only imagining? You paint a sky in blue-grey tones on the right and on the left you paint the same





thing using pale-pink and apricot shades. These two skies superimpose in your brain and you see a viable image of an extraordinary amethyst and eau-de-Nil tint which does not exist.<sup>44</sup> King locates evidence of this process in works such as *Battle in the Clouds*, 1979 where Dalí 'imposes' two tones, blue and yellow, through dual painted images and also identifies the effect in the view out the window in *Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalised by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors*, 1972-73.<sup>45</sup>

Several of Dalí's stereoscopic works from the later 1970s also experiment with incongruent subject matter, including *Patient Lovers*, *The Chair*, 1975 and *Battle in the Clouds*, 1979. It may be that by presenting non-identical design elements in each painting Dalí wished the mind to do 'battle' between two available possibilities and fluctuate unresolved between them in a psychically active, three-dimensional illusionistic version of what occurred paranoiacally via a two-dimensional surface in his earlier surrealist examples. But that would run contrary to the essential program of stereoscopic experience. It therefore is more likely and more interesting to consider that Dalí was striving to produce distinctly new content through a process similar to that of his stereo-based optical colour mixtures, where two separate three-dimensional illusions provide visual information for viewers to produce a new fusion-subject perceived by the psyche without a tangible counterpart. It is curious to note that Martin's text reproduces additional paired paintings that, while nearly identical, contain overtly visible variations not unlike those in Dalí's more incongruent stereoscopic works. It may be that these additional sets of images, viewed by Dalí in Martin's book on Dou additionally inspired his later experiments (Fig. 5). These pages in Martin's book also recall the paranoiac pairing of imagery and structural design of Dalí's famous reproduction included in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* in 1931, titled 'Communication: paranoiac face' (Fig. 6). Even though this earlier visual juxtaposition served to demonstrate the delusional interpretation of the original image by the artist, one based on a snapshot of an African village and the other (importantly here) a close approximation by Dalí informed by his recent observation of cubist paintings by Picasso, their vertical placement is prototypical of these later stereoscopic double-paintings where two paired images with slight variations in visible subjects disrupt facile optical synthesis.<sup>46</sup>



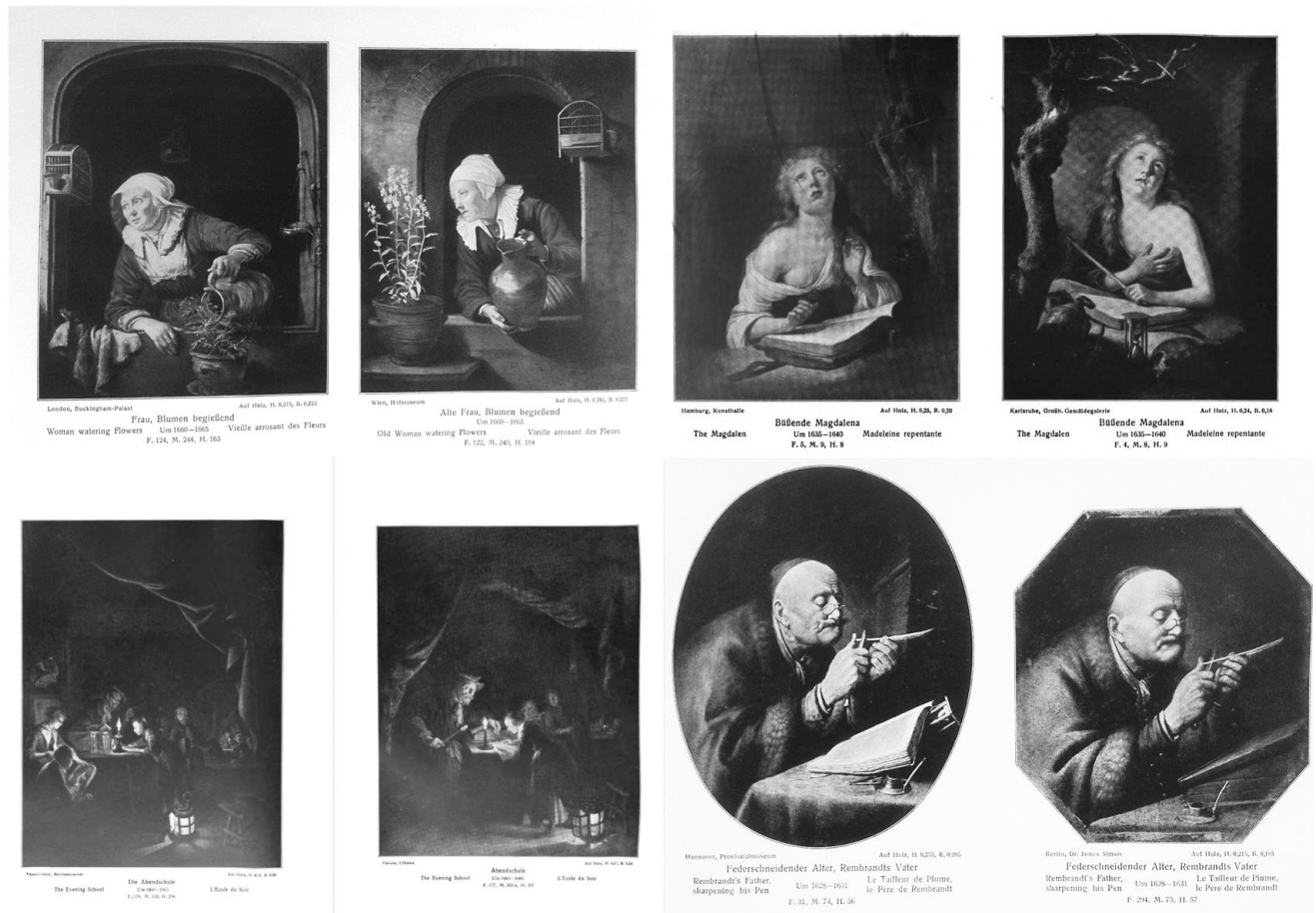
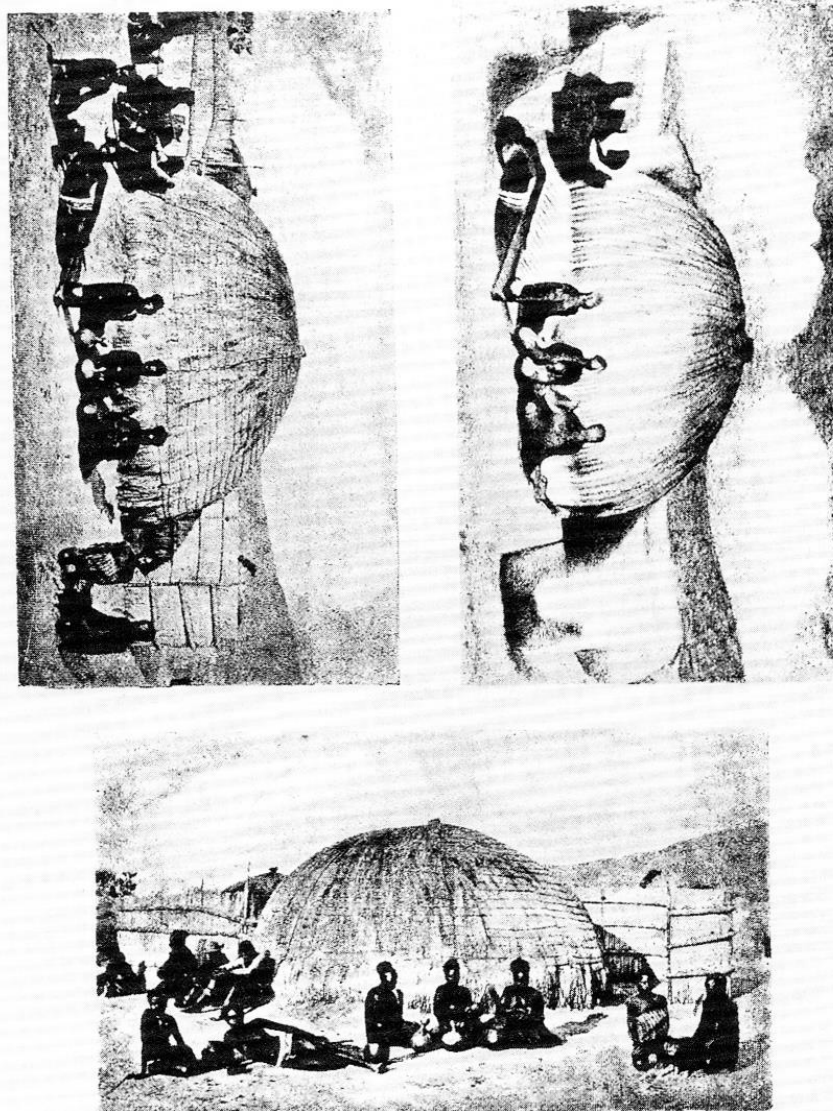


Fig. 5: Collage of double-page spreads in Martin's text with incongruent subject matter, 2012 (Photo, collage: author).



COMMUNICATION : Visage paranoïaque.

A la suite d'une étude, au cours de laquelle m'avait obsédé une longue réflexion sur les visages de Picasso et particulièrement ceux de l'époque noire, je cherche une adresse dans un tas de papiers et suis soudain frappé par la reproduction d'un visage que je crois de Picasso, visage absolument inconnu.

Tout à coup, ce visage s'efface et je me rends compte de l'illusion (?). L'analyse de l'image paranoïaque en question me vaut de retrouver, par une interprétation symbolique, toutes les idées qui avaient précédé la vision du visage.

André Breton avait interprété ce visage comme étant celui de Sade, ce qui correspondait à une toute particulière préoccupation de Breton quant à Sade.

Dans les cheveux du visage en question Breton voyait une perruque poudrée, alors que moi je voyais un fragment de toile non peinte, comme il est fréquent dans le style picassien.

Salvador DALÍ

Fig. 6. 'Communication: paranoiac face,' *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, December 1931, no. 3, Paris.

The most interesting example of this tactic is *Athens is Burning! The School of Athens and the Fire In the Borgo*, 1979-1980 one of the last stereoscopic paintings Dalí produced (Fig. 7). The two paintings share a general design based on the curving arches of the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican where both frescoes by Raphael are originally located. Dalí painted the general figural compositions of these two works



into his right and left paintings, rendering them with less detail and speckled by Divisionist brushstrokes that transcribe Raphael's original versions into confusing art historical stylistic anachronisms. Ades suggests that these 'confetti' colours may harken back to Senor Traite's optical theatre which Dalí described as containing 'varied iridescences'.<sup>47</sup>

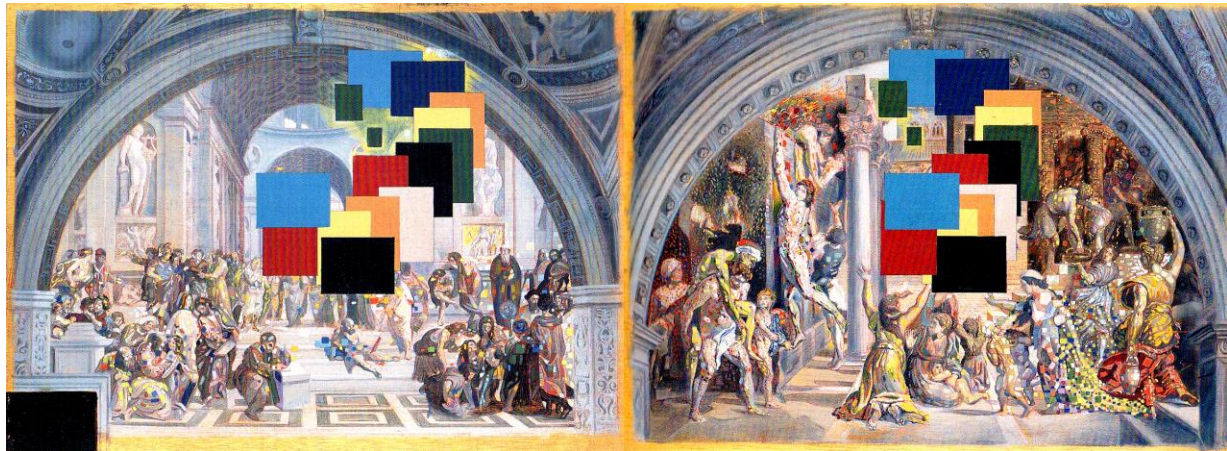


Fig. 7. *Athens is Burning! The School of Athens and the Fire In the Borgo*, 1979-1980, oil on panel, 32.2 x 43.1 cm (in two components), Fundación Gala-Salvador Dalí, Figueras.

Imposed onto these representational scenes are a series of layered rectangular opaque planes of colour slightly modified in each painting based on the stereoscopic differentials required for binocular vision.<sup>48</sup> What makes this work so intriguing is not just the incongruent aspects of each image that cause a perceptual discord in the stereoptic experience, but also the fact that it presents three legacies of painterly illusion since the Renaissance within this experience: linear perspective in Raphael's two frescoes, pointillism and its later evolution into the 'push/pull' of pure colours à la Hans Hofmann, and the introduction of stereopsis by Dalí. These three illusionistic 'codes' (to appropriate E.H. Gombrich's terminology) force a complicated optical tension while also imposing incongruent subject matter where, as Ades states, the 'classical harmony of the School of Athens fresco, a vision of the wise and learned in conversation is interrupted dramatically by the fresco of the Fire in the Borgo'.<sup>49</sup> David Lomas has identified Dalí's penchant for 'simulation and the simulacral' and his willingness to 'embrace simulation at the expense of authenticity' in his art and his personality and in this circumstance the artist appears to play the game one more time.<sup>50</sup> Illusion is simulation, and with each successive phase of artistic 'code' we draw, historically, that much further away from a facile and secure Modernist relation between copy/original or illusion/reality and that much closer to the introduction of a hyperreal simulation that questions or undermines this relationship. Or, put in more general terms, Dalí's painting is a prescient art historical concession to the eventual conditions of post-structuralism brought forth through sensory play. The fact that this stereoscopic experience is painted, and not photographic, distances it that much further from an 'authentic' referent, and it is made especially difficult by the fact that what is presented is not rationally conceivable within tangible observation.



To further complicate the matter, the Raphael frescoes are re-painted by Dalí and therefore several stages removed from the 'original'; this remoteness from referents is something Lomas posits as a common *modus operandi* of the artist.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, in hindsight Dalí's misperception that Dou created stereoscopic work is also symptomatic of this condition, albeit abstractly, since the work responds to an original that never actually existed.

## Conclusion

To suggest that Dalí was 'misled' by art historical inaccuracies and design decisions reflected in the layout of a monograph would be too strong an accusation. Rather, working with the historical and primary materials available at the time, the artist produced a plausible theory based partly on scientific and art historical knowledge and partly on his typical 'Dalínian' paranoiac process of approaching the visible. Even if the artist had found out that his hypothesis was 'inaccurate' it is doubtful he would have recanted. As he declared in *Ten Recipes for Immortality* (1973), 'Mistakes are almost always of a sacred nature. Never try to correct them. Rationalize them, understand them thoroughly. After that it will be possible for you to sublimate them.'<sup>52</sup> As stated earlier in this essay, Dalí's final destination with his stereoscopic paintings that perform disruptive perceptual exercises is not entirely clear. Yet, his attempts are an impressive exploration of the potential of binocular rivalry to force mind/eye relationships into an active and unnatural determination of reality through illusion. Beyond the influence of Gerrit Dou and Dutch Baroque art generally that spurred his stereoscopic interest into these painterly actions, the late optical work contributes another layer to the legacy of the 'double' in Dalí's art, biography and personal mythology. 'You're well aware,' the artist declared to Alain Bosquet in 1969, 'that the profound structure of my personality is binary: I'm double-headed and twofold. There are two Dalís ...'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Lomas, 'Simulacra and the Order of Mimesis in Salvador Dalí and Glenn Brown,' *Persistence and Memory: New Critical Perspectives on Dalí at the Centennial*, Bompiani Press, St. Petersburg, FL, 2004, 202.

<sup>2</sup> Sophie Matthiesson, 'Optical Experiments: Stereoscopy,' *Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2009, 295.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí*, Switzerland, S.A. Lausanne, 1962, 407.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.



<sup>5</sup> Ibid. In the 1960s-1970s Dalí collected and experimented with a wide range of 3D equipment, from simple red/green polarised glasses to stereoscopes (many of these remain scattered throughout his home and studio at Port Lligat), and also pioneered the artistic use of holography. I would like to thank Elliott King for first bringing this latter visual evidence to my attention.

<sup>6</sup> Elliott King, 'Dalí after 1940,' *Salvador Dalí: The Late Work*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010, 47 and Matthiesson, 295.

<sup>7</sup> The first comment is cited in Robert Descharnes, *Salvador Dalí*, trans., Eleanor R. Morse, New York, Abradale Press, 1993, 168. The term 'metaphysical hyperrealism' is quoted in Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí*, 410. In December 1973, Dalí wrote an article for the newspaper *La Vanguardia* where he claimed that the highest praise possible for his paintings was the exclamation, 'It looks like a photograph but it's better than a photograph.' *Dalí*, ed., Dawn Ades, Philadelphia, Rizzoli, Inc., 2005, 535.

<sup>8</sup> See *Dalí at the Age of Six, when he Thought he was a Girl, Lifting the Skin of the Water to see a Dog Sleeping in the Shade of the Sea*, 1950 and *Hercules Lifts the Skin of the Sea and Stops Venus for an Instant from Making Love*, 1963. Descharnes discusses a similar 'trick' in *Dalí's Hand Drawing Back the Golden Fleece in the Form of a Cloud to Show Gala the Dawn, Completely Nude, Very, Very Far Away Behind the Sun* (1977), 403.

<sup>9</sup> Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí*, 407.

<sup>10</sup> Matthiesson notes that the artist 'rigged up a Fresnel lens into which he could see as he painted the two nearly identical scenes.' Matthiesson, 295.

<sup>11</sup> Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1993, 41.

<sup>12</sup> For a full account of these endeavors, see *Dalí's Optical Illusions*, ed., Dawn Ades, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Matthiesson, 279.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Originally quoted in the Introduction to Holograms conceived by Dalí, M. Knoedler and Co., New York, 7 April - 13 May 1972, title page.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ades, *Dalí's Optical Illusions*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, David Lomas points out that Dalí was himself a simulacrum, since his brother (the original) was no longer present. Lomas, 204.

<sup>19</sup> See Fiona Bradley, 'Dalí as Mythmaker: The Tragic Myth of Millet's Angelus,' 12-29 and 'Gala Dalí: The Eternal Feminine,' 54-77, Dawn Ades and Fiona Bradley, *Salvador Dalí: A Mythology*, London, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998. William Jeffett recently explored doubles in Dalí's art practice, especially in terms of constructed identities (public and private). See William Jeffett, *Dalí Doubled: From Surrealism to the Self: a new critical view of Dalí*, St. Petersburg FL, Dalí Museum, 2010. Additionally, David Lomas makes a number of fascinating observations about Dalí and doubling (see note #1).

<sup>20</sup> See Jonathan Wallis, 'Holy Toledo!: Salvador Dalí's paranoiac-critical mysticism and the Life of St. John of the Cross,' *The Dalí Renaissance*, ed., Michael Taylor, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, 37-52.

<sup>21</sup> Ades, *Dalí's Optical Illusions*, 14.





<sup>22</sup> Dalí first conceived the general idea for this illusionistic puzzle in a two-dimensional work in gouache on newspaper dating 1934-34, and the concept was later transcribed into a three-dimensional installation at the Dalí Theatre Museum by the Catalan architect Oscar Tusquets under the artist's supervision. Eric Shanes, *The Life and Masterworks of Salvador Dalí*, New York, Parkstone Press International, 2010, 156.

<sup>23</sup> Salvador Dalí, *Maniac Eyeball: The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dalí*, London, Creation Books, 2004, 150-51.

<sup>24</sup> Dawn Ades and Fiona Bradley, *Salvador Dalí: A Mythology*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, 9 and 16.

<sup>25</sup> It would be wrong to suggest that Dalí relinquished interest in painting with illusionistic impulses in the interim decades, as is evident in his continued exploration of perspective, sacred geometry and trompe l'oeil. Additionally, the artist's 'paranoiac-critical mysticism' during the 1950s maintained an interest in optical illusion, albeit generated (according to the artist) from mystical/divine inspiration. See Wallis, 'Holy Toledo!', 2008. However, his earlier surrealist pursuits and stereoscopic endeavours are linked by a mutual attempt to surpass what is visually presented (in the literal sense).

<sup>26</sup> Marc J. LaFountain, *Dalí and Postmodernism: This is Not an Essence*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997, xii-xiii. See also Lomas, 'Simulacra and the Order of Mimesis,' (note #1).

<sup>27</sup> Dalí, ed., Ades, 2004, 532-533. Interestingly, Dalí's article also makes reference to the microscope.

<sup>28</sup> Amanda Lear, *My Life with Dalí*, London, Virgin Books, Ltd, 1985, 200. The phrase included in quotations derives from Matthiesson, 'Optical Experiments: Stereoscopy,' 295.

<sup>29</sup> Lear, *My Life with Dalí*, 200.

<sup>30</sup> In a conversation with Montse Aguer, Antonio Pitxot stated, 'Dalí was convinced that this was not simply a copy, but that the two pictures were intended to be viewed together. Their corresponding differential of 12 to 15 cm is the focal distance of a pair of binoculars.' 'Dalí's Permanent Provocation,' Antonio Pitxot in conversation with Montse Aguer, in Ades, *Dalí's Optical Illusions*, 63.

<sup>31</sup> The discussion of 'close copies' takes place in Lear, 201. Dalí's declaration of Dou as the first stereoscopic painter is quoted in Elliott King, 'Dalí after 1940,' *Salvador Dalí: The Late Work*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010, 46. It originally appeared in Luis Romero, *Salvador Dalí*, Secaucus, New Jersey, Chartwell Books, Inc., 1975, 160.

<sup>32</sup> Wilhelm Martin, *Gerard Dou: des meisters Gemälde in 247 abbildungen*, Klassiker der Kunst, Stuttgart, 1913. A digital copy of Martin's text can be viewed through the Hath Trust Digital Library: <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015014058559;view=2up;seq=8>

Ian Gibson recounts Amanda Lear's description of the events leading to Dalí's determination that Dou was experimenting with stereoscopy. Ian Gibson, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997, 592-593. Gibson suggests that the painting Lear and Dalí observed at the Petit Palais could be *Maid servant at Window*, based on the fact that it contains a golden 'ewer' (Lear and Dalí use the term 'water jug') similar to the one Lear describes seeing in a painting by Dou in the exhibition. Lear states, 'I was particularly taken by a very realistic still-life, in the centre of which a golden water jug brilliantly reflected the light on its polished metal surface.' Amanda Lear, *My Life with Dalí*, Beaufort Books, 1986, 199. As Lear notes (and Gibson also recounts), a book on Dou purchased at a bookshop on the rue du Mont-Thabor after the exhibition failed to contain the image. (Lear 200) Two important pieces of evidence emerge that are worth brief elaboration. First, Gibson turns to Dalí's Gowan's Art Books (his collection kept from his childhood) to locate a possible match for the painting at the Petit Palais. Indeed, *Maid servant at Window* contains a golden ewer, but Lear describes the work as a 'very realistic still-life,' rather than a genre painting. *Maid servant at Window* depicts a woman emptying a water jug out of the window of a domestic interior. Also worth noting is that the golden water jug in *Maid servant at Window* is not positioned at the centre of the composition. While these facts are not enough to call the identification into doubt, Lear



additionally notes that the painting they observed at the exhibition was not in the book, yet it contained 'a great many of his pictures' that were painted twice. She goes on to state of the numerous paired paintings that there 'was one in Leningrad, for example, which was almost an exact replica of one in Holland.' Martin's text contains, as I have written in this essay, many examples of nearly identical works, including a set of nearly identical paintings of a nude woman, entitled *Naked Woman*, that are labelled as St. Petersburg and Leiden, respectively. (See Martin, 142) Martin's text also includes two versions of *Maid-servant at Window* on the same page as paired subjects (Martin, 121), and while that also steers the identification away from that painting, the text does contain a painting with a water jug as a central component of a still-life (Martin, 145). Although in Martin's text it is simply entitled, *Still Life* (1663), the painting is often labelled '*The Silver Ewer*.' Despite the title's emphasis on silver, rather than gold, the ewer depicted is the central subject of the painting and its surface contains much gold ornament. If, based on the painting's striking visual similarities to her description, it is the one Lear described seeing it does present an inconsistency with the above argument.

<sup>33</sup> I would like to thank Ronni Baer for providing me with this fact via email correspondence, 18 April 2010. In addition, it is worth noting that Elliott King has expressed similar doubts about the validity of Dou's supposed experimentation with stereoscopy. See Catalog entry no. 247 in *Dalí*, ed., Dawn Ades, Philadelphia, Rizzoli, Inc., 2005, 414.

<sup>34</sup> See for example, Gerrit Dou's painting, *The Quack*, 1652. Collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

<sup>35</sup> See note 33. The copy that bore a false signature (Breslau, Wroclaw) was lost during WWII.

<sup>36</sup> According to Robert Descharnes, Dalí's 1946 cover for *Vogue's* Christmas issue is a stereoscopic image. This presents a curious and intriguing intrusion to the chronology outlined in this essay. There is little doubt that the symmetrical (and slightly variable) imagery in the cover is established to induce a stereoscopic effect, creating a woman's face. Why the artist was led to create this image at this time remains uncertain.

<sup>37</sup> Félix Fanés, *Dalí and Mass Culture*, Figueres, Fundación Gala-Salvador Dalí, 2004, 482. I would like to thank Lewis Kachur for this information. In addition, photographs in the appendix illustrate Dalí observing Dutch Old Master paintings by Pieter Paul Rubens. My thanks to Helmy Frank, Library, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen for identifying the paintings.

<sup>38</sup> *The Lady at Her Dressing Table* was, and still is, in the collection of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen where Dalí's own exhibition was staged, and he could have viewed the painting during the November 1970 visit.

<sup>39</sup> Prior to this period, Dalí generally preferred more direct, frontal views into interiors with less dynamic spatial effects.

<sup>40</sup> An appendix added to the catalog *Dalí and Mass Culture* by the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen entitled, *Dalí in Holland* includes a section labelled, 'It's all Dalí' that contains this information. Fanés, *Dalí and Mass Culture*, 463. Again, I would like to thank Lewis Kachur for providing this important biographical information.

<sup>41</sup> Descharnes, *The World of Salvador Dalí*, 105.

<sup>42</sup> Fanés, *Dalí and Mass Culture*, 463.

<sup>43</sup> King, *Salvador Dalí: The Late Work*, 47.

<sup>44</sup> Lear, *My Life with Dalí*, 201.

<sup>45</sup> King, *Salvador Dalí: The Late Work*, 47. This process also appears in the works, *The Sleeping Smoker*, *Gala's Foot*, 1974, *The Chair* 1976 and *The Eye of the Angelus*, 1978. It should also be noted that



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King recognizes the incongruent subject matter of this work as well. Michael Scroggins also explores the effects of binocular rivalry in these paintings in his essay, 'Binocular Rivalry and Luster.' See: <https://michaelscroggins.wordpress.com/explorations-in-stereoscopic-imaging/retinal-rivalry-and-luster/>

<sup>46</sup> Ades, Dalí's Optical Illusions, 25. Also worth noting is the fact that during the 1960s and 1970s when he was at work on his stereoscopic endeavours, Dalí produced work in two-dimensions that resolved dual identities, such as Mao Marilyn, a fusion facial portrait combining Marilyn Monroe and Chairman Mao Zedong that ran on the cover of Vogue magazine (1971-72), and Velázquez to Hippy-Dalí (undated). The resolution of dual identities might be argued present in paintings such as *The Angelus of Gala*, 1935 and *Dalí from the Back Painting Gala from the Back Eternalized by Six Virtual Corneas Provisionally Reflected in Six Real Mirrors*, 1972-73.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 184. Scroggins identifies the tension between optical fusion and rivalry: '*In Athens Is Burning! The School of Athens and the Fire in the Borgo* (1979-1980), Dalí incorporated both simple stereoscopic rendering with the floating rectangles and extreme binocular rivalry with his modified versions of the Raphael paintings *The School of Athens* (1509-1510) and *The Fire in the Borgo* (1514). The binocular rivalry makes it difficult to free view as the eye is continuously drawn across the scene in an attempt to fixate upon disparate points thus breaking the stereoscopic fusion created by the floating rectangles.' See note # 45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. For a discussion of 'codes' see the chapter, 'From Light to Paint' in E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: a Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Lomas, 'Simulacra and the Order of Mimesis,' 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>52</sup> Salvador Dalí, *Dix Recettes d'Immortalité*, Audouin-Descharnes, Paris, 1973.

<sup>53</sup> Alain Bosquet, *Conversations with Dalí*, New York, E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1969, 15.

Jonathan Wallis is Associate Professor of Art History and Curatorial Studies and Chair of Liberal Arts at Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia, PA. His current research is focused in two areas: Salvador Dalí's post-surrealist iconography and the ethics of socially engaged art practices 1980-present.



## Surrealism and Everyday Magic in the 1950s: Between the Paranormal and 'Fantastic Realism'

Gavin Parkinson

Recently associated by art historians with Nouveau Réalisme, 'fantastic realism' is examined in this article by observing initially surrealism's closeness to the *Revue métapsychique* in the fifties then to Robert Amadou (who was the most active and innovative theorist of parapsychology in the post war period), alongside its distance from the early theory of the 'everyday' of Henri Lefebvre. With reference to Amadou's now-forgotten journal *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, which showcased surrealist art under the sign of 'fantastic realism,' it goes on to track the surrealist roots of the implausibly successful volume of strange facts and outlandish theories by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians* (1960) within the context of the 'return of the fantastic' in French art and literature in the fifties.

Surrealism was battered from all sides immediately after the Second World War. Terminated implicitly as an active force in art, culture, and politics by the very project of Maurice Nadeau's *History of Surrealism* (1945) and explicitly so in Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), it found itself up against a French Communist Party in the ascendancy politically and culturally, assisted partly through its Stalinist review *Les Lettres françaises* under the direction of Louis Aragon. For many too young to know at first hand of its pre-war deeds, the focus of the 1947 International Exhibition of Surrealism on superstition, magic, and the occult came as a revelation and successfully heralded the movement's return to non-clandestine activity in Paris.<sup>1</sup> However, the event was met by the usual bad press and, more damagingly, by Jean-Paul Sartre's broadside in 'Situation of the Writer in 1947,' in which surrealism was well and truly consigned to irrelevance if not the past.<sup>2</sup> In her giddy 1960 memoir, Simone de Beauvoir would deny any influence of surrealism on her and Sartre whilst conceding 'it had impregnated the very air we breathed.'<sup>3</sup>

Although surrealism's heyday was and still is preserved by historians in the aspic of the 1920s and 1930s, the movement continued as an active force from the 1940s through the 1950s and was deeply involved in the debate on 'fantastic realism,' among many others, as de Beauvoir wrote those words. Recently, Kaira M. Cabañas has associated fantastic realism with Nouveau Réalisme, arguing that Pierre Restany's promotion of 'an allegory of faith about the future reintegration of man through technology,' in his theorization of the new French avant-garde movement in the early sixties, was identical with the agenda of fantastic realism as projected through the pages of the journal *Planète* (1961-8).<sup>4</sup> To this, she adds that Restany's naïve idea of the aim of his Nouveau Réaliste artists, given in his often repeated phrase as the 'passionate adventure of the real perceived in itself and not through the prism of conceptual or imaginative transcription,'<sup>5</sup> was 'isomorphic to the model of direct perception first set forth by [Louis] Pauwels and [Jacques] Bergier in *Le Matin des magiciens* [1960],' the book that inspired *Planète* and had its very source in the concept of fantastic realism.<sup>6</sup> However, it was artists who had been historically linked primarily with surrealism, such as Alexander Calder, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Leonor Fini, René Magritte, Joan Miró, and Kurt Seligmann, who had the most luck in being given serious treatment in *Planète*, often by Restany himself, oddly; and they along with near-surrealists Paul



Delvaux and Félix Labisse are represented there far more often than Nouveaux Réalistes under the rubric of fantastic realism.<sup>7</sup>

The reason for this lies partly in the importance of surrealism for *The Morning of the Magicians* in the first place, in which fantastic realism is defined by means of an acknowledgement of and withdrawal from the movement that is typical of chief raconteur Pauwels:

Though dissimilar in many ways, Bergier and I worked closely and happily together during five years of study and speculation, arriving at a point of view which I believe is novel and rich in its possibilities. This was how the Surrealists worked thirty years ago. But unlike them we were exploring not the regions of sleep and the unconscious but their very opposites: the regions of ultraconsciousness and the 'awakened state.' We call our point of view *fantastic realism*. It has nothing to do with the bizarre, the exotic, the merely picturesque. There was no attempt on our part to escape the times in which we live. We were not interested in the 'outer suburbs' of reality: on the contrary we have tried to take up a position at its very hub. There alone, we believe the fantastic is to be discovered – and not a fantastic leading to escapism but rather to a deeper participation in life.<sup>8</sup>

This means that fantastic realism has nothing to do with fantasy in the literary sense but with phenomena that lie just behind, beneath, or to one side of reality as we live and experience it most of the time and as we have come to understand it, and only *seem* fantastic when charged in the currency of this knowledge. Already hinting at a taste for the paranormal and occult that would shape much of *The Morning of the Magicians* and *Planète*, Pauwels' definition points back to an alternative fifties context to that of Cabañas' 'technique' through which we can understand fantastic realism. The intention of this article is to contribute to recent scholarship that has begun to assess the significance of surrealism in the fifties and sixties by clarifying that context, which was formed between surrealism, the paranormal, and the return of the fantastic in French art and literature.

### Parapsychology in the Fifties: *Médium* and the *Revue Métapsychique*

The coming together of these cultural and intellectual currents is evident in *Médium: Communication surréaliste*, when gold-plated modernist Henry James gets a surrealist makeover at the hands of Robert Benayoun, which was given in the light of the recent French translation of James' 'The Friends of the Friends.'<sup>9</sup> Benayoun argues that James' early life – including experiences of hallucination, the tutelage of a father who was a devotee of the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, then a follower of the utopian socialist and surrealist precursor Charles Fourier, and a crushing bereavement in the death of his young cousin Mary ('Minnie') Temple – engendered in him a '*sense of lost time*' and a taste for the supernatural to cope with his feeling of loss.<sup>10</sup> He insists that all of the supernatural tales of James 'are an eternal confrontation with himself: Henry James was his own phantom, he haunted himself perpetually.'<sup>11</sup> The opening lines of *Nadja* (1928) are recalled irresistibly here, where André Breton responds to his own question '[w]ho am I?' by speculating that 'perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I "haunt,"' and even going on to remark that the significance of his image of the ghost might be that it is 'the finite representation of a torment that may be eternal.'<sup>12</sup> James' supernatural stories appeared routinely in collections of fantastic fiction and it was in that context that Louis Vax made



the pertinent point in his *L'art et la littérature fantastique* (1960) that along with James, 'his brother William and his sister Alice were preoccupied with manifestations of the beyond.'<sup>13</sup> Benayoun's surrealist reading of James in *Médium*, then, was made possible by the relationship forged between the fantastic, supernatural, and myth, most recently in Breton's *Great Invisibles* (1942), and historically in Breton's 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism' of 1936-7, and the much disparaged, much misunderstood association of surrealism with spiritualism in the 1920s.<sup>14</sup>

A token of the increasing visibility of the fantastic in France from the fifties, Benayoun's text also marks the emphatic return to prominence in France of research into such extra-scientific phenomena as mediumism, spiritualism, clairvoyance, telekinesis, extra-sensory perception, and telepathy under the term 'parapsychology.' According to Grégory Gutierrez, social disorder, politics, and war brought a complete halt to research into psychic phenomena in Europe for most of the 1930s and 1940s,<sup>15</sup> whilst Christine Pouget notes that Breton himself did not use the term '*métapsychique*' between 1933 and 1952.<sup>16</sup> The main publication in France and reading matter for Breton as he was mulling over the ideas that eventually went into the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), the *Revue Métapsychique* was interrupted in 1940 whilst the activities of the foremost institutional body, the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI, created in 1919 by Charles Richet), ceased under the Occupation, as Nazi fascination with the occult gave the field a bad name.<sup>17</sup> In the eyes of scientists and rationalists it had never had a particularly good one, of course, and further scorn was poured on psychic research in France in the postwar period even as the *Revue Métapsychique* restarted in 1948 by bringing to its readers the studies of ESP carried out by Louisa and Joseph Banks Rhine at the laboratory of parapsychology set up at Duke University in North Carolina in 1934.<sup>18</sup> From this point until 1970, American parapsychology would form the leading edge of the discipline, and because it was also adopted in France, the new parapsychology came into conflict with the old prewar *métapsychique*, whilst coming into greater harmony with surrealism.<sup>19</sup>

Typically, surrealism's awareness of and contribution to parapsychology in this postwar period are far less well known than its explorations of the twenties, even though they are unequivocally flagged in the title of *Médium*. It was also there that the new surrealist game 'L'Un dans l'autre' was announced, in which a single player thinks of an object, person or event whilst the other players collectively choose an object, which they reveal to the single player who must then describe it in terms that conjure up his or her own object until the other players guess it. In his first essay on the new game, Breton pointed out the extraordinary frequency with which the group guessed correctly the individual player's object – three hundred games, three hundred successes – and he was led to consult the parapsychologist Jean Bruno about the possibility of the occurrence of some kind of phenomenon akin to telepathy in action.<sup>20</sup> Further exchanges with Bruno in the surrealist periodical in which the parapsychologist compared the events recorded in Breton's first essay with the conclusions of the Rhines, overlap with surrealist interest in the *Revue Métapsychique*,<sup>21</sup> which included in its special issue 'Art et Métapsychique' of January-February 1954 the important article by Bruno 'André Breton et la magie quotidienne.'<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 1)





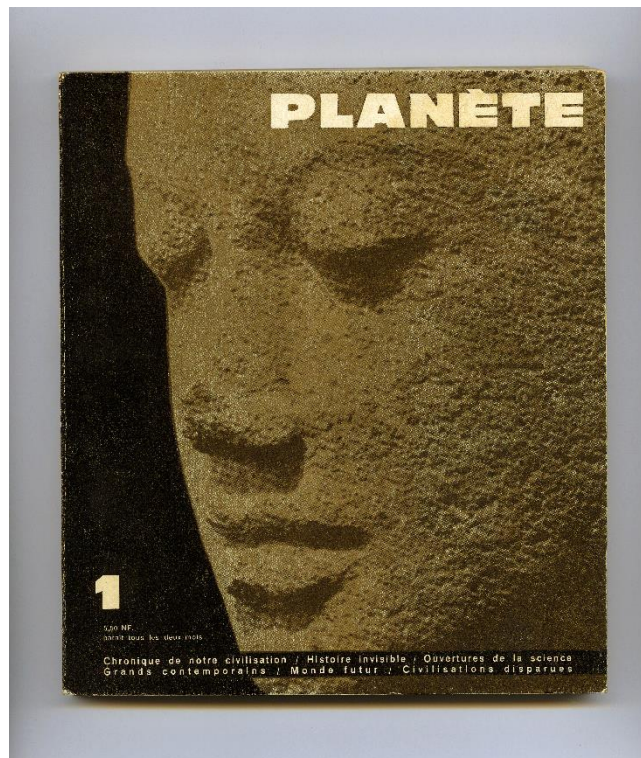


Fig. 1: *Planète*, no. 1 (1961).

Summarizing episodes recorded in Breton's writings that could be classed as paranormal, it was prompted, no doubt, by the history of surrealism given by Breton in the radio interviews of 1952 and the recent appearance of his collection *La Clé des Champs* (1953), enthusiastically endorsed in the same issue of the *Revue Métapsychique* by Robert Amadou who proclaimed him 'one of the greatest living writers.'<sup>23</sup>

### Parapsychology and Everyday Magic

The figure of Amadou allows us to move towards a demonstration of how surrealism's involvement in such exchanges joined with the return of the fantastic in the fifties and how it connected fatally with that of fantastic realism at the beginning of the sixties. After a PhD in Paris on the eighteenth century philosopher Louis Claude de Saint-Martin and a stint teaching at Yale University, Amadou had begun to publish in the *Revue Métapsychique* in 1951, using a theoretical language close to that of surrealism.<sup>24</sup> He soon repositioned the journal under his editorship, using it and the many colloquia and conferences he organized in the fifties to promote the American research of the Rhines.<sup>25</sup> He gave the fullest exposition in French of their work in his comprehensive history and analysis *La parapsychologie* of 1954 (where the section on surrealism views the movement as closer to the literature of occultism than the science of parapsychology), of which Breton owned not one but two copies. In fact, Breton owned all of Amadou's books of the fifties and had turned to his 1950 volume *L'Occultisme* for support in his first essay on 'L'Un dans l'autre' in *Médium*, and would again in seeking to define 'magic art' partly



with reference to the 'dialogue magique' he saw in that game.<sup>26</sup> If surrealism was close to the *Revue Métapsychique* for some of the fifties, then Breton knew and particularly admired Amadou, the editor of the periodical for part of that decade and the most active and innovative theorist of parapsychology in France throughout it.

Amadou was a sceptic from the outset, whose impatience with the vagueness and ambiguity of the prewar approach to psychic phenomena led him to resign from the editorship of the *Revue Métapsychique* at the end of 1954 and set up a new journal in 1955 titled *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, in which surrealism immediately received extensive attention. (Fig. 2)

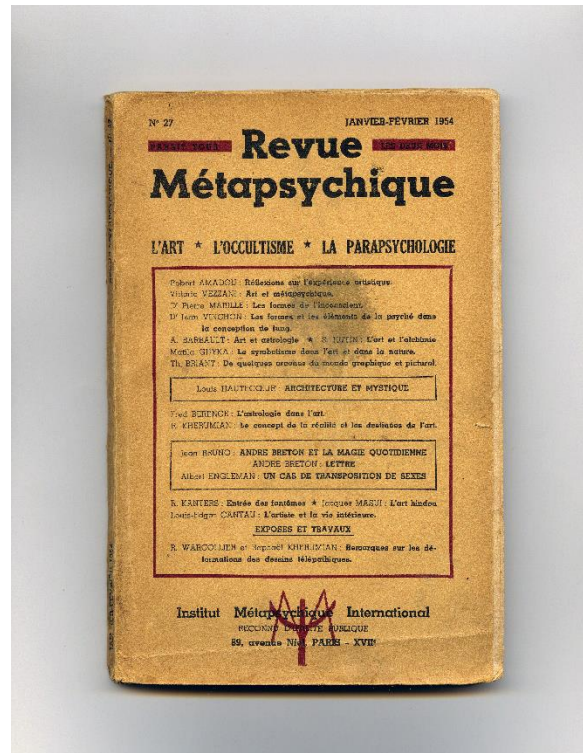


Fig. 2: *Revue Métapsychique* (1954).

Issued bimonthly, it straddled the overlap between the fantastic and paranormal as adeptly as surrealism itself in the fifties. This inclination is registered initially in the journal's title, of course, evoking not only the association of the alchemist Nicolas Flamel with the church of Saint-Jacques-de-la-Boucherie through the bit still standing, the late mediaeval Tour Saint-Jacques (in the fourth arrondissement), but also the presence of the tower as a surrealist icon. The tower appeared 'swaying/Like a sunflower,' in Breton's 1923 poem 'Sunflower,'<sup>27</sup> as a staging post in the evening walk taken by Breton on 29 May 1934 with his future wife Jacqueline Lamba, recounted in *Mad Love* in 1937 (an encounter believed by Breton to be predestined in that poem),<sup>28</sup> and in other incidents of 'objective chance' that could in this new period be called 'paranormal,' as recorded by Breton in *Arcanum* 17 (1944/1947), and recently recalled by Jean Bruno as exemplary of the *magie quotidienne* in his article on Breton in the *Revue Métapsychique*.<sup>29</sup>



Breton would return to and revive the idea of 'everyday magic' in the article he offered Amadou for the first number of *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, which lists in diary mode a series of coincidences over the course of a fortnight in late February and early March 1955.<sup>30</sup> These examples of everyday magic come across on this evidence as fairly regular occurrences in Breton's life. However, where some explanation of comparable occurrences took place in *Mad Love* under the theory of objective chance, Breton did not seek to fathom meaning in the incidents described here, only citing them in an evidential fashion under the putatively self-explanatory title 'Magie quotidienne.' His increasing attachment to parapsychology in the fifties and treatment of the everyday, here, bear stark contrast with and remarkable resistance to contemporary writing in France. This is the case not only for sponsors of science fiction in that decade such as the writer and musician Boris Vian, who professed a 'perfect horror' of parapsychology and categorized it under a definition of the fantastic that distanced it from science fiction, and included phantoms and vampires,<sup>31</sup> but more notably Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* published eight years earlier.<sup>32</sup>

Comparison of Breton's everyday with Lefebvre is irresistible, especially given Lefebvre's offensive against surrealism's fundamental premises in his book, which the postwar surrealists must have read, and the slapdash inclination today towards reducing the differences between the two. Written in 1945 though only published in 1947 – dates corresponding precisely with those of the respective reissues of Breton's *Mad Love* by Gallimard and *Arcanum 17* by Sagittaire – the flint-hard materialism of the *Critique of Everyday Life* could not be further from surrealism's concurrent exploration of the paranormal, astrology, alchemy, and the occult. Indeed, surrealism was obviously the formative target of Lefebvre's theory judging from the attack in the opening pages of the first edition, rising slowly but surely towards the poetico-theoretical writings of Breton and Louis Aragon, even as it points to the 'little corpse' of the movement they founded.<sup>33</sup> Carried by a tone of disgust at the poetic (metaphorical, analogical, magical) view of the world as seen from the immediate postwar period and best represented by surrealism, it maintains that such a view was inherited by the twentieth century from the nineteenth, in the absence of any dialectic:

*Under the banner of the marvellous, nineteenth-century literature mounted a sustained attack on everyday life which has continued unabated up to the present day. The aim is to demote it, to discredit it. Although the duality between the marvelous and everyday is just as painful as the duality between action and dream, the real and the ideal ... nineteenth-century man seemed to ignore this, and continued obstinately to belittle real life, the world 'as it is.'*<sup>34</sup>

Romanticism is posited as the root cause of this malaise, whilst 'nineteenth-century man' turns out to be Baudelaire, mainly, who is accused by Lefebvre of 'an excess of intellectualism, a cerebralism, an over-excitement of the mind whereby he tried to *think* the everyday world of the senses instead of merely perceiving it.'<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, it is protested that Rimbaud, another of surrealism's occultist precursors according to Amadou, 'poeticizes the real by directly seeing one thing in the place of another,' taking us to the front door of surrealism (across the threshold represented by the Comte de Lautréamont), which is, of course, where we were heading all along.<sup>36</sup>

Far from accessing a fuller, 'magic' reality, as was its stated hope, by exploring the unconscious analogizing procedures and intercommunicative potential of the mind through psychoanalysis and,



heaven forbid, parapsychology, surrealism aimed to 'belittle the real in favour of the magical and the marvellous,' in Lefebvre's opinion, in a 'concerted attack directed against everyday life and human reality.'<sup>37</sup> As well as charging the surrealists with supporting their overinflated ambitions with 'simple-minded Hegelianism,'<sup>38</sup> Lefebvre accuses them of pilfering their '*nouveau merveilleux*'<sup>39</sup> from Baudelaire and Rimbaud (it was neither new nor marvellous) whilst merely sprinkling it with psychoanalysis and Bergsonism (sic), and condemns their superstitious perambulations, specifically Breton's description in *Mad Love* of his attempt to divine his unconscious and fortunes in love through the use of playing cards.<sup>40</sup>

Typical of the opportunistic rough handling of surrealism in France following its absence during the Second World War and disarray immediately after it, Lefebvre's polemic is blinded by its own vitriol, as the author himself would soon admit.<sup>41</sup> He even edited the passage from *Mad Love* quoted at length in the *Critique of Everyday Life* to make it seem as though Breton was indulging in idle fortune-telling speculation, or 'old wives' tales' as Lefebvre put it.<sup>42</sup> Opening *Mad Love*, we find that Lefebvre selected from the third, 'magic-circumstantial' part of the discussion of 'convulsive beauty,' containing an early theory of what became 'everyday magic,' in which Breton avers that 'the thing revealed' appears as 'a solution, which, by its very nature, could not come to us along ordinary logical paths,' continuing as follows:

Everyday life [La vie quotidienne] abounds, moreover, in just this sort of small discovery, where there is frequently an element of apparent gratuitousness, very probably a function of our provisional incomprehension, discoveries that seem to me not in the least unimportant. I am profoundly persuaded that any perception registered in the most involuntary way – for example, that of a series of words pronounced off-stage – bears in itself the solution, symbolic or other, of a problem you have with yourself.<sup>43</sup>

Concerned in the subsequent paragraph with desire and the role of games in plumbing an individual subjectivity to better understand its aims – essentially he is proposing an act of provocation directed via game-playing at the unconscious (not to mention, in a different way, at orthodox science) to force it to yield its forms in the world – Breton begins the relevant passage quoted by Lefebvre by stating his thesis: '[w]hat attracts me in such a manner of seeing is that, as far as the eye can see, it recreates desire.'<sup>44</sup> However, this was left out when the paragraph was quoted in Lefebvre's *Critique* and with it went the perfectly rational explanation for Breton's circumvention of 'ordinary logical paths.' Lefebvre's strategic editing and caustic reception of surrealism, presented under a pose of no-nonsense rationalism, therefore misunderstood or refused to accommodate Breton's curiosity as to how the *magie quotidienne*, as he soon came to call it, could help fathom the fuller potential of the mind, which refused to discount peculiar events, encounters, and concurrences as meaningless coincidence.

Given Robert Amadou's definition of parapsychology as a 'scientific discipline' and insistence upon its difference from the old *métapsychique* on those grounds, it seems odd at first that Breton's contribution to the first number of *La Tour Saint-Jacques* is more 'poetic' than scientific, eschewing any experimental aspiration or explanatory aim as was attempted in *Mad Love*;<sup>45</sup> this is especially so when we consider his word 'magic' in the wake of Bruno's use of it – a term and subject Breton was brooding over at the time as he hesitated to begin writing *L'Art magique* – against Christine Pouget's statement that parapsychology 'wanted to free itself from all metaphysical, spiritualist or magic implications.'<sup>46</sup>



Yet *La Tour Saint-Jacques* was pitched more broadly than the *Revue Métapsychique* towards 'the investigation of the unknown,' to which the historian, the artist, and the poet were invited to contribute.<sup>47</sup> To that extent, the journal was invested with Amadou's own literary and historical culture, and for that reason, too, surrealism figures abundantly in it. In this first number, there are contributions by alchemy specialist and surrealist fellow-traveler René Alleau on a mediaeval Book of Hours once owned by Jean Lallemand Le Jeune;<sup>48</sup> a brief eulogy to the Paris night by Lise Deharme (who had been Breton's acquaintance since 1924 and was the 'lady of the glove' in *Nadja*);<sup>49</sup> and a lengthy and predictably adoring review essay by Robert Kanters of new books on or by Breton, avowing surrealism's 'current vitality and its importance in the evolution of thought over the last thirty years.'<sup>50</sup> This was an upbeat appraisal that would have been inconceivable without some reservations in philosophical, literary, or artistic circles of the fifties, even though surrealism had made a fuller contribution to those fields historically than it had to the scholarship on the paranormal and the occult.

### The Return of the Fantastic in France and its Theory

In this first issue of *La Tour Saint-Jacques* we also see the paranormal and occult come fully into contact with the fantastic, pointing sideways to surrealism and forwards to fantastic realism. Breton himself had opened the way for this association, initially in the famous footnote in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), '[w]hat is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real,' then subsequently in the related, extended discussion of the fantastic in the mid thirties in 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism.'<sup>51</sup> However, it was only in the fifties that surrealism's relationship with the fantastic became fully remarked and analysed because this was the decade that saw the beginning of an increase of art exhibitions and books in Europe and especially in France concerned with the fantastic, which continued into the sixties.<sup>52</sup> According to Clio Mitchell, the trend began in art in 1954, 'when the Venice Biennale chose "fantastic art" as its theme, making Surrealism its special feature.'<sup>53</sup> Mitchell does not mean by this that the particular union of fantastic art and surrealism dominated the Biennale itself, even though the Belgian pavilion was given over to the theme, but that the centrality to modern art of historic surrealism (Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, René Magritte, Joan Miró, and others who were attached to the movement and widely exhibited in the twenties and thirties) was fully recognised at the event that year.

Mitchell cites also the major exhibition of May-July 1957 held in Bordeaux, 'Bosch, Goya et le fantastique,' which was rounded out by surrealist paintings as though they were primary manifestations of the modern fantastic (alongside the art of the heavily represented Odilon Redon). By then, the critic, novelist, and authority on the fantastic, Marcel Brion had commissioned Breton's survey *L'Art magique* (1957) as part of the series 'Formes de l'art' for the Club Français du Livre,<sup>54</sup> later authoring his own volume *Art fantastique* (1961), and he contributed a preface to the Bordeaux catalogue where Breton is listed along with the exhibiting surrealist artists in the acknowledgements.<sup>55</sup> Surrealism's leader had become viewed as one of the major living exponents of the fantastic: Pierre-Georges Castex dedicated a copy of his 1951 anthology *Le conte fantastique en France* to him as 'the author of *Nadja*, the master





of the contemporary French fantastic,' whilst Brion inscribed Breton's copy of *Art fantastique* to the 'Master of the World of Mysteries.'<sup>56</sup> Yet Breton's contribution to the new vogue for the fantastic in that decade came about partly by default, since the slowly cooked *L'Art magique* had been commissioned as early as 1953 but would appear only in the year of the Bordeaux exhibition, giving Brion the chance to become something of an authority on the genre alongside his author during the long wait for the manuscript. In that interval, for instance, he published a full study on Leonor Fini (and an extract from it in *La Tour Saint-Jacques*), one surrealist artist whose part-animal, part-human figures and robed, seer-like women won particular favour among connoisseurs of the fantastic (Fig. 3).<sup>57</sup>

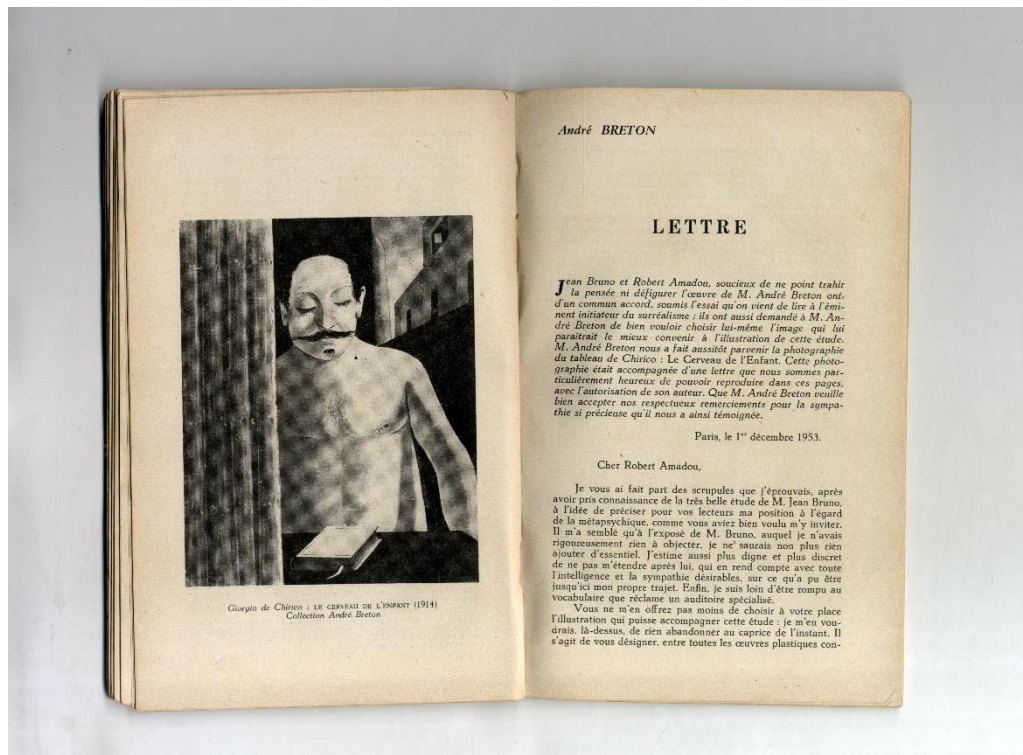


Fig. 3: From *Revue Métapsychique* (1954).

The surveys on magic art and fantastic art by Breton and Brion featured in the rundown of studies reviewed in 1965 in *Planète*, the magazine of fantastic realism, by art critic and promoter of Nouveau Réalisme Pierre Restany, announcing rather belatedly that 'L'art fantastique est à la mode,' which also included the historical work by the Lithuanian art historian Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Le Moyen Age fantastique: antiquités et exotismes dans l'art gothique* (1955) among several others.<sup>58</sup> As well as acknowledging the greater interest in non-canonical modern art that had been on the increase since Jean Dubuffet set up the Compagnie de l'Art brut in 1948, this cultural current is no doubt linked to other factors peculiar to the fifties, virtually coinciding with the beginning of *soucoupisme* (UFO spotting), the arrival of Anglo-American science fiction in France, and the space race.<sup>59</sup> Brion states as much in the catalogue of 'Bosch, Goya et le fantastique' where his train of thought moves immediately from the intimations of microbiology he sees in the art of Dalí, Ernst, and Yves Tanguy to his declaration: 'the curiosity directed towards the habitability of other planets has also given rise to new forms of the





fantastic, which must not be ignored, in the invention of prodigious beings who could live on Jupiter, Mars, the Moon or Saturn.<sup>60</sup> He would go on to make a direct link a few years later between the 'possible worlds' of Tanguy, Miró, and Paul Klee, and those of Cyrano de Bergerac, H.G. Wells, and H.P. Lovecraft, alongside the illustrators of their stories and those of science fiction.<sup>61</sup>

From the beginning of the boom in Anglo-American science fiction in France, publishers emphasised the fantastic in the titles they gave to the first series' devoted to the genre such as 'Les Horizons fantastiques' at Le Sillage (1949-54) and 'Le Rayon fantastique' jointly administered by Hachette and Gallimard (1951-64), whilst the comparable though French author-dominated 'Anticipation' (1951-97), based at Fleuve Noir, specialised in the paranormal from that decade.<sup>62</sup> For anthologies and studies of both avant-garde and more traditional literature, too, the fifties through the sixties constitute an era in which the fantastic thrived, often close to surrealism. Robert Benayoun's article on Henry James came about because James' novella 'The Friends of the Friends' (1896) was first published in French translation by Éditions Arcanes, set up and run from 1952-4 by Éric Losfeld, 'the Surrealist publisher par excellence' in the phrase of Gérard Durozoi, in the series 'L'Imagination Poétique'.<sup>63</sup> This was overseen at Arcanes by Henri Parisot, who was a surrealist in the mid-thirties and sympathizer thereafter but who is best known to scholars of surrealism for his discovery of the fourteen-year-old child prodigy Gisèle Prassinos, and as the figure who is standing second from the left in the widely reproduced, heavily posed photograph by Man Ray of surrealists reverentially heeding her recital (Fig. 4). Even though it was dedicated to earlier writers, Parisot's 'L'Imagination Poétique' planned a 'limited eclecticism,' so to speak, that bridged surrealism and the fantastic, publishing or promising to publish obvious surrealist precursors such as Heinrich von Kleist, Gérard de Nerval, and Lewis Carroll, alongside writers of the supernatural fantastic like Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Machen, and James.

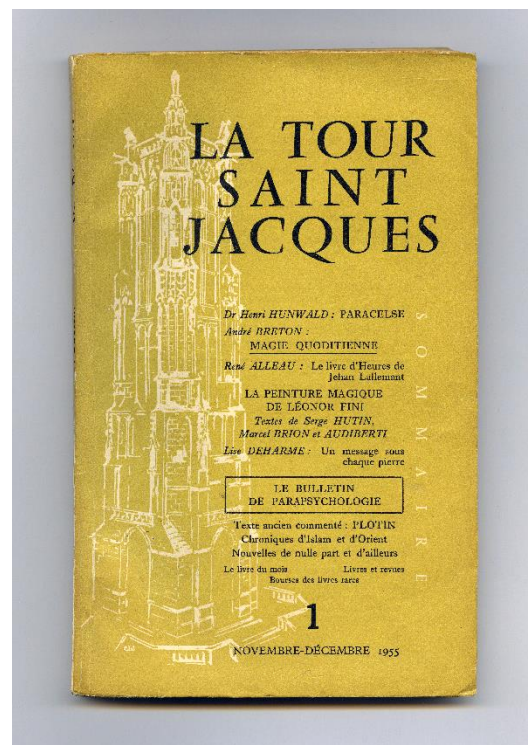


Fig. 4: *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, no. 1, 1955.



Like Losfeld, Parisot was an important and devoted figure among the surrealists, supporting their cause especially after the war as editor of the journal *Les Quatre Vents* (nine issues, 1945-47), and he was eager to bring out their work in the series 'Collection "l'Âge d'Or"' of the same years, published through Fontaine alongside the works of surrealist precursors (Lewis Carroll, Jonathan Swift), pre-surrealists (Giorgio de Chirico, Francis Picabia), and ex-surrealists (Antonin Artaud, Tristan Tzara, and many others). Revived a few times, finally under Parisot by Flammarion between 1964 and 1992 (although Parisot died in 1979) when each book had a cover by Max Ernst, 'Collection "l'Âge d'Or"' had a more emphatic brief to mix the surrealist and fantastic. Parisot's own edited compilation *Les Poètes hallucinés: Anthologie de la Poésie fantastique* (1966) was included in the series, containing poems by William Blake, Friedrich Hölderlin, de Nerval, Poe, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Alfred Jarry as well as other nineteenth century poets less firmly bracketed with surrealism, and rounded out by contributions from Paul Éluard, Breton, Benjamin Péret, and Henri Michaux.<sup>64</sup> This was another attempt, then, to figure surrealism or more precisely surrealist *practice* as a contemporary enunciation of the fantastic, confirmed in Parisot's definition of its causality (rather than its effect) in his flowery introduction to the book where it is apparently wedged somewhere between poetic analogy and automatic writing: '[t]o bring about the fantastic in our sense, it is necessary and it suffices that there is a successful evocation of that secret reality, of that *surreality*, which is assumed to lie behind appearances ... and is revealed to us only in a piecemeal way and under certain fortuitous conditions that go hand-in-hand on rare occasions with the power to write.'<sup>65</sup>

Poe is perhaps the only one of Parisot's poets who comes close to the definition of the fantastic given by ex-surrealist Roger Caillois, who was as busy publishing on the literary fantastic in the fifties and sixties as he was on fantastic art. The so-called second volume of his *Anthologie du fantastique* (1966) appeared in the same year as Parisot's collection (though this is an edited, supplemented, and reorganised adaptation of the first one), pushed out through a major publisher probably to exploit the vogue for the fantastic announced by Restany in *Planète* the year before.<sup>66</sup> It appeared without the preface carried by the earlier 1958 version in which Caillois had written of the fantastic as a manifestation of the supernatural that induces terror, a violent eruption in the real that for this reason was quite dissimilar to the world of the marvellous, which possessed a harmonious, non-contradictory otherness.<sup>67</sup> Tzvetan Todorov's classic structuralist study of the fantastic of 1970 emerged from this strand of publishing, though it dismissed the emphasis laid on terror or fear by both Caillois and H.P. Lovecraft, arguing for three conditions of the genre: a reader hesitating between natural or supernatural explanations of the phenomena described, an unreliable character in the work (often) filling this role of vacillation, and reader rejection of 'allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations.'<sup>68</sup>

No wonder there was no room for surrealism alongside the Gothic novel and Henry James in Todorov's study, even though the marvellous and uncanny are compared there: its art and writing might well have met the conditions of the fantastic outlined by the book – hence the opportunity taken by writers elsewhere of attaching the definition of the fantastic-as-supernatural to it – but surrealism's own theoretical position consistently defies the supernatural as an end in itself. This is evident in Breton's reading of the 'remarkable film' *Berkeley Square* (1933) in 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism' at



exactly the time of his reflections on love, chance, and time that eventually went into *Mad Love*.<sup>69</sup> Although the film seems to be about the time travel from 1933 to 1784 of the melancholy, scholarly, socially well-attached American named Peter Standish in his inherited residence (a house, not a castle as Breton imagined) in Berkeley Square in the West End of London, Breton saw the escapade taking place not in some 'beyond' or separate temporal dimension, and certainly not under the gaze of 'God,' as we might gather from Helen's remarks at the close of the film. For Breton, its action occurs in the mind of Peter Standish. The characters are 'hallucinations' brought about by his delirium 'enabling him to solve the problem of his present behaviour, a most difficult sentimental problem,' by which Breton presumably means that Standish's disturbed demeanour was the outcome of an unconscious disinclination to marry his fiancée Marjorie, which is successfully prevented in the end by his love for Helen in what he took to be 1784.<sup>70</sup>

### From the Surreal Fantastic to Fantastic Realism

Breton's own longstanding rejection of spiritualism and mere manifestations of the supernatural (as opposed to the latencies therein; that is, what such phenomena expressed of the human mind) made scientifically contoured parapsychology attractive to him. Yet Amadou's appeal to rigour and experiment was not necessarily held to in the contributions made to the definition of fantastic art by the first number of *La Tour Saint-Jacques*. It was this slippage that meant surrealist art and ideas loosely understood could breed fantastic realism, and we see this take place in articles that take up the central part of the periodical under the general section heading 'La peinture magique de Leonor Fini,' where surrealist painting along with Fini's art is triangulated with the fantastic and paranormal.

Occult specialist and future advocate of the 'ancient astronaut hypothesis,' Serge Hutin, indicated characteristics of the Renaissance play in Fini's work, focusing on its 'meticulous technique' and rejecting the negative epithet 'academicism' used for it by some art critics, whilst designating her painting both fantastic and surreal on the basis of its precise delineation of implausible subject matter, qualities he said it shared with Salvador Dalí's (Fig. 5).<sup>71</sup> More to the point of the paranormal, Hutin made the unlikely or let us say exaggerated claim that Fini like Dalí painted whilst in a 'mediumistic "trance,"' and that her work manifested the archetypes of Carl Jung's collective unconscious, spontaneously turned out onto the canvas. Notwithstanding Hutin's dubious use of Jung's notion of the archetype, which he agrees is a mythological image that appears in contemporary (not Renaissance) garb, his theoretical bricolage makes the link between the paranormal and surrealism with reference to the reflections on genius, mysticism, poetry, and science recently carried out by early parapsychologist George Nugent Merle Tyrrell, to which Hutin adds the notion of a "'supra-conscience'" possessed by the painter.<sup>72</sup> He claims further support for Fini's spontaneous channelling of unconscious material with reference to the discussion of cryptesthesia in the article on telepathic drawings by René Warcollier and Raphaël Kherumian that had appeared the previous year in the increasingly well-thumbed 'Surrealist' issue of the *Revue Métapsychique*.<sup>73</sup>



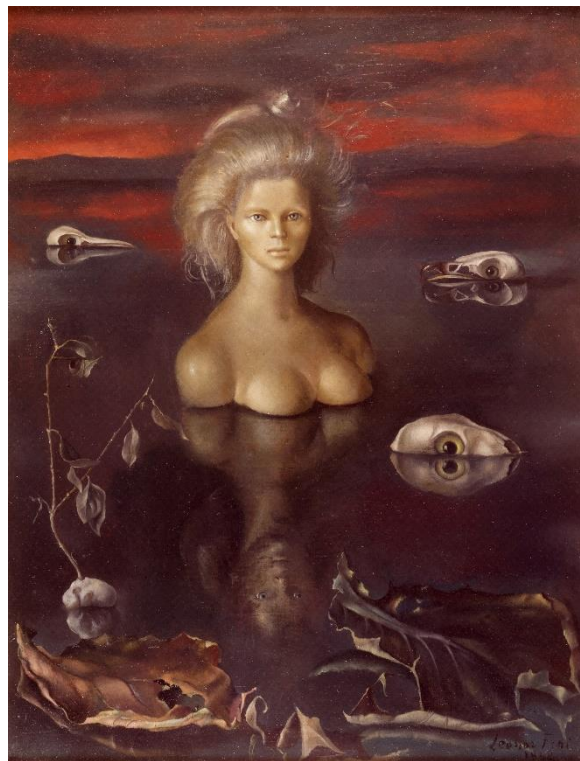


Fig. 5: Leonor Fini, *Le Bout du monde*, 1948, oil on canvas, 35 x 28 cm. Private collection. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2015/Scala, Florence

However, the more relevant essay in this first 1955 number of *La Tour Saint-Jacques* for my prehistory and surrealist contextualisation of fantastic realism in the fifties is an extract from the forthcoming book on Fini by Breton's friend, the author Marcel Brion, concerned with the current proliferation of fantastic art.<sup>74</sup> It appears under the title 'Le réalisme fantastique,' a term that was just beginning to circulate with a particular usage but was evoked here specifically for Fini's painting, whilst touching on surrealist art generally. Brion's writing on Fini is important because it forms the foundation for the argument he put forward in the catalogue of 'Bosch, Goya et le fantastique' two years later, and it would be recycled yet again in his book *Art fantastique* in 1961 where he writes of Tanguy and Miró (adding, here, Ernst and Willi Baumeister) as creators of "possible worlds" alongside Paul Klee.<sup>75</sup> However, here in *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, Brion wrote specifically of 'fantastic painting' as a kind of divination, in a manner appropriate to Amadou's journal and obviously close to Hutin:

In the fantastic art of today, certain currents are apparent that blend with the multi-dimensional perspectives of possible worlds. The oracular rocks of Max Ernst, the plasmas of Miró, swarming with magic vibrations, the post-diluvial plains of Tanguy where new life struggles to take form, the vibrant glyphs of Baumeister, all belong to these other dimensions, which intersect with ours only at the moment at which their image is placed in our field of vision.<sup>76</sup>

Fini is discussed in the second half of Brion's article in terms similar to those used of poetry by Henri Parisot, as an artist able to reproduce the 'reality of the invisible, of the imperceptible,' and, alongside the art of Edvard Munch and the illustrations of upcoming surrealist favourite Alfred Kubin, her work is



defined as 'fantastic realism.'<sup>77</sup> In this way surrealist art was virtually or actually caught up in these early uses of the term in the pages of *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, in which 'fantastic realism' is obviously meant to denote a visionary art in the context of a growing interest in the fantastic in the fifties and the definition of surrealism within some quarter of it.

Brion was dismissive of science fiction in connection with fantastic realism, referring to it as the '[s]mall change of fantastic lyricism for mediocre minds,' yet one of those mediocrities, Jacques Bergier, sat on the editorial board of the journal along with René Alleau, Michael Carrouges, Robert Kanters, and others, and seems even to have been a co-founder with his friend Amadou, who would later write his obituary.<sup>78</sup> Interviewed by Jean-Louis Bédouin about the seamier side of George Gurdjieff's teaching in *Médium* the previous year, Bergier was known to the surrealists and credited by them in the brief biography that accompanied the interview as 'co-editor of the review *Fiction*,' the science fiction magazine for which he also acted as book reviewer for most of the fifties.<sup>79</sup> Later in the decade, in addition to his contributions to *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, Bergier collaborated with his fellow editor-in-chief, Alain Dorémieux, on a Fortean column in *Fiction* titled 'Aux frontières du possible' that was largely made up of newspaper clippings of the peculiar and strange and was identical to the one titled 'Les nouvelles de nulle part et d'ailleurs' that ran in *La Tour Saint-Jacques* from the first number onwards.<sup>80</sup> Together with Bergier's essay in *Fiction* in February 1959, titled 'Pour un réalisme fantastique,'<sup>81</sup> these columns presaged his full theoretical and exegetic treatment of fantastic realism with the journalist Louis Pauwels in late 1960 in the form of the notorious and incredibly successful *Le Matin des magiciens: Introduction au réalisme fantastique*, which led in turn to the equally successful *Planète*.<sup>82</sup>

Conceived, 'researched,' and written over a five year period by Bergier and Pauwels, *The Morning of the Magicians* comprises a jumble of freely connected ideas drawn from areas of knowledge that had equally attracted surrealism, including modern physics, alchemy, esotericism, parapsychology, and speculative history and science. The inquiries of the duo were also fed by Charles Fort's writings and the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft, whose ancient astronaut hypothesis composes the central plank of their book in the overestimation of one author, whilst Bergier's passion for science fiction and apparent belief in its predictive faculty meant that it was deposited alongside more experimental areas of research in *The Morning of the Magicians*, blurring the line ever more enthusiastically between fact and fiction.<sup>83</sup> The authors became even more famous or notorious when their book was translated in America in 1963 and Britain in 1964,<sup>84</sup> between which dates the immensely popular spin off magazine, *Planète*, gave a happy home to crackpot theories of every hue long before the internet came along, acting as an outlet for contributors to *La Tour Saint-Jacques* such as Atlantis historian and seeker of 'fantastic civilizations' Serge Hutin and renegade scientist and UFO spotter Aimé Michel.<sup>85</sup> Together, the book and magazine promoted a fantastic realism that was in direct competition with surrealism as the sixties began, yet on some points uncomfortably close to it, and even, as we have seen, enabled by surrealism in many ways. The surrealists would later concede this; specifically, it was José Pierre, whose surrealist loyalties go unmentioned by Kaira M. Cabañas even though he was one of the foremost members of the Paris group as well as one of the main critics of Nouveau Réalisme,<sup>86</sup> who gathered the dossier on *Planète* in 1965 and accused the magazine of 'shamelessly pillaging the conquests of surrealism and the hypotheses of André Breton.'<sup>87</sup>



By getting involved in debates that extended surrealism in the direction of the paranormal and fantastic, then, an era that began as far back as the mid-thirties in 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism' (which remained his lengthiest discussion of the fantastic), Breton got more than he bargained for and like the surrealists as a whole, soon responded to distance the movement from the outlandish speculations of *The Morning of the Magicians*. One aspect of this was Breton's alteration of his understanding of the category of the fantastic from the one he had advanced in the twenties and thirties, due partly to the new currency the term was attracting among writers and critics in Paris. While there had been no difference between the marvellous and the fantastic in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*,<sup>88</sup> Breton had separated the two entirely by the time of his memorial essay on Pierre Mabillet of 1962.<sup>89</sup> There he opted for setting the marvellous 'in opposition to "the fantastic," which, unfortunately,' he wrote, 'our contemporaries tend more and more to use as its replacement,' complaining that the problem with the modern fantastic was that it 'nearly always falls under the order of inconsequential fiction.'<sup>90</sup>

It is not entirely clear what fiction Breton was disparaging here; it could well have been that branch of the fantastic called science fiction, which had gained a large audience in France over the preceding ten years but attracted about as much attention from Breton as the American pulp and weird fiction that was typified by the stories of Lovecraft and was now widespread in and even indigenous to France and even admired by some surrealists. Yet all such fiction was promoted and defended by *The Morning of the Magicians* and *Planète* under the rubric of 'fantastic realism,' and it was this form of the fantastic that the surrealists would spend the best part of the sixties trying to sink, steering clear of parapsychology, too, in that decade, to reinforce that aim.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippe Audoin, *Les Surréalistes*, Paris: Édition de Seuil, 1973/1995, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Situation of the Writer in 1947' [1948], *What is Literature?* trans. Bernard Frechtman, London: Methuen & Co., 1967, 123-220.

<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life* [1960], trans. Peter Green, London: André Deutsch and Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1962, 259.

<sup>4</sup> Kaira M. Cabañas, *The Myth of Nouveau Réalisme: Art and the Performative in Postwar France*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013, 29.

<sup>5</sup> 'passionnante aventure du réel perçu en soi et non à travers le prisme de la transcription conceptuelle ou imaginative,' Pierre Restany, *Un manifeste de la nouvelle peinture: Les nouveaux réalistes*, Paris: Éditions Planète, 1968, 204-05, 204.

<sup>6</sup> Cabañas, *Myth of Nouveau Réalisme*, 24. Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians: Secret Societies, Conspiracies, and Vanished Civilizations* [1960], trans. Rollo Myers, Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Restany, 'Alexandre Calder: Le sculpteur du mouvement' (exhibition review), *Planète*, no. 24, September-October 1965, 181-2; Louis Pauwels, 'Dalí, tel qu'au-delà de lui-même il faut le voir' (exhibition review), *Planète*, no. 21, March-April 1965, 146-7; Patrick Waldberg, 'Max Ernst et les machinations de la nuit,' *Planète*, no. 22, May-June 1965, 91-4; Henri Guiguonnat, 'L'univers magique





de Leonor Fini,' *Planète*, no. 41, July-August 1968, 117-27; Pierre Restany, 'Le domaine enchanté de Magritte,' *Planète*, no. 31, November-December 1966, 24-33; Jacques Mousseau, 'Un peintre magique: Kurt Seligmann' (exhibition review), *Planète*, no. 16, May-June 1964, 156-7.

<sup>8</sup> Pauwels and Bergier, *Morning of the Magicians*, xxvi-xxvii (translation slightly amended).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Benayoun, 'L'oeil spectral,' *Médium: Communication surréaliste*, no. 3, May 1954, 16; Henry James, *Les Amis des Amis* [1896], trans. Marie Canavaggia, Paris: Éditions Arcanes, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> 'sens du temps perdu,' Benayoun, 'L'oeil spectral,' 16.

<sup>11</sup> 'sont une éternelle confrontation avec lui-même: Henry James fut son proper fantôme, il se hanta perpétuellement,' Benayoun, 'L'oeil spectral,' 16.

<sup>12</sup> André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], trans. Richard Howard, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1960, 11-12.

<sup>13</sup> 'Henry James, son frère William et sa sœur Alice ont été préoccupés par les manifestations de l'au-delà,' Louis Vax, *L'art et la littérature fantastique*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960, 95.

<sup>14</sup> André Breton, 'Nonnational Boundaries of Surrealism' [1936-7], *Free Rein* [1953], trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, 7-18.

<sup>15</sup> Grégory Gutierrez and Nicolas Maillard, *Les aventuriers de l'esprit: Une histoire de la parapsychologie*, Paris: Presses du Châtelet, 2005, 307.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Pouget, 'La séduction de l'irrationnel,' Marc Saporta (ed.), *André Breton ou le surréalisme même*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 163-71, 164. Also see the remarks in Christine Pouget, 'L'attrait de la parapsychologie ou la tentation expérimentale,' Henri Béhar (ed.), *Mélusine*, no. 2 ('Occulte-Occultation'), Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1981, 70-97, 73.

<sup>17</sup> Gutierrez and Maillard, *Les aventuriers de l'esprit*, 308.

<sup>18</sup> Gutierrez and Maillard, *Les aventuriers de l'esprit*, 309. For the Rhines, see John Beloff, *Parapsychology: A Concise History*, London: The Athlone Press, 1993, 125-51.

<sup>19</sup> Gutierrez and Maillard, *Les aventuriers de l'esprit*, 309.

<sup>20</sup> André Breton, 'L'Un dans l'autre,' *Médium: Communication surréaliste*, no. 2, February 1954, 17-19, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Bruno, 'Une Lettre de Jean Bruno,' *Médium: Communication surréaliste*, no. 3, May 1954, 57-8. Bruno refers to Rhine's *La Double Puissance de l'Esprit*, which was the 1952 French translation of Joseph Banks Rhine, *The Reach of the Mind*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1948.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Bruno, 'André Breton et la magie quotidienne,' *Revue Métapsychique*, no. 27, January-February 1954, 97-121.

<sup>23</sup> 'un des plus grands écrivains vivants,' Robert Amadou, review of André Breton, *La Clé des Champs* (1953), *Revue Métapsychique*, no. 27, January-February 1954, 175-6, 176.

<sup>24</sup> 'la métapsychique a permis et permettra plus encore un élargissement de la notion de réalité,' Robert Amadou, 'Occultisme et Métapsychique (I),' *Revue Métapsychique*, no. 13, January-February-March 1951, 12-19.

<sup>25</sup> Gutierrez and Maillard, *Les aventuriers de l'esprit*, 313.

<sup>26</sup> Breton, 'L'Un dans l'autre,' 17; André Breton, *L'Art magique* [1957], Paris: Éditions Phébus/Adam Biro, 1991, 28, 42.



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<sup>27</sup> André Breton, *Mad Love* [1937], trans. Mary Ann Caws, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1987, 47.

<sup>28</sup> Breton, *Mad Love*, 43-53.

<sup>29</sup> Bruno, 'André Breton et la magie quotidienne,' 101-02. See the sequence of coincidences of 1947 related to the Tour Saint-Jacques recounted in André Breton, *Arcanum 17* [1944/1947], trans. Zack Rogow, Toronto: Coach House Press, 1994, 117-23. And see the reference to 'the inspired Tour Saint-Jacques,' in André Breton, *Communicating Vessels* [1932], trans. Mary Ann Caws and Geoffrey T. Harris, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 98 (translation modified).

<sup>30</sup> André Breton, 'Magie quotidienne,' *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, no. 1, November-December 1955, 19-31.

<sup>31</sup> Pierre Kast and Boris Vian, 'Pierre Kast et Boris Vian s'entretiennent de la science-fiction' [1958], *Cinéma Science fiction*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1978, 179-201, 180-81.

<sup>32</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I* [1947], trans. John Moore, London and New York: Verso, 1991.

<sup>33</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 105.

<sup>35</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 108.

<sup>36</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 109.

<sup>37</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 110.

<sup>38</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 113.

<sup>39</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Lefebvre's regret at the tone of his assessment – '[t]he author was carried away by his polemic, and consequently his point of view was one-sided' – and admission that surrealism had some value after all, even though that lay not in its curiosity about magic, parapsychology, and the occult but in its 'scorn for the prosaic bourgeois world, its radical rebellion,' appears among the footnotes of the lengthy forward added to the 1958 second edition of the *Critique*, which pushes the anti-surrealism section from the opening back into the central part of subsequent editions of the book and makes it less obvious to contemporary readers that the author's thesis was formed in reaction to the movement, Lefebvre, *Critique*, 261, n. 49.

<sup>42</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Breton, *Mad Love*, 15 (translation modified).

<sup>44</sup> Breton, *Mad Love*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> See Robert Amadou, 'Une lettre de M. Robert Amadou: Métaphysique et parapsychology,' *Revue Métapsychique*, vol. 1, no. 5, July 1957, 33-4, 34.

<sup>46</sup> 'se veut dégagée de toute implication métaphysique, spiritualiste ou magique,' Pouget, 'L'attrait de la parapsychology ou la tentation expérimentale,' Béhar (ed.), *Mélusine*, no. 2 ('Occulte-Occultation'), 71.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Amadou, 'Au lecteur,' *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, no. 1, November-December 1955, 1-4, 2.



Alleau, 'Commentaires sur le livre d'Heures de Jehan Lallemand,' 32-38.

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<sup>49</sup> Lise Deharme, 'Un message sous chaque pierre,' 59-63.

<sup>50</sup> 'vitalité présente et son importance dans l'évolution de la pensée depuis trente ans,' Robert Kanter, 'Réflexions sur le surréalisme: A propos de la réédition de quelques œuvres d'André Breton,' 110-12, 110.

<sup>51</sup> André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' [1924], *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972, 1-47, 15.

<sup>52</sup> The evidence I present here close to surrealism extends by a few years the assertion of one writer who claimed in 1981, '[d]epuis une vingtaine d'années, un renouveau d'intérêt pour la littérature fantastique a suscité de nombreux ouvrages critiques,' Margaret Simpson Maurin, *L'univers fantastique de Marcel Brion*, Paris: Librairie A.-G. Nizet, 1981, 17 (though the author herself immediately qualifies her statement by referring to Pierre-Georges Castex' prescient study *Le conte fantastique en France* of 1951). For an account of the persistence of surrealism largely through its intersection with the fantastic in the fifties, see Michel Carrouges, 'Le Surréalisme mort ou vif?' *Monde Nouveau*, Year 8, no. 55, 1952, 61-6.

<sup>53</sup> Clio Mitchell, 'Secrets de l'art magique surréaliste': *Magic and the Myth of the Artist-Magician in Surrealist Aesthetic Theory and Practice*, unpublished PhD thesis, The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1994, 39.

<sup>54</sup> Breton, *L'Art magique*, 8, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Bordeaux: VII<sup>e</sup> Exposition Internationale de Bordeaux, Marcel Brion, 'Préfaces,' *Bosch, Goya et le fantastique*, 1957, xvii-xxxi.

<sup>56</sup> 'l'auteur de *Nadja*, au maître du fantastique français contemporain,' Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastique en France: de Nodier à Maupassant*, Paris: José Corti, 1951. See <http://www.andrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100132771> (accessed 20 December 2012); also see Marcel Brion's 'Maître du Monde des Mystères' at <http://www.andrebretton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100363001> (accessed 13 April 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Marcel Brion, *Leonor Fini et son œuvre*, Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1955.

<sup>58</sup> Pierre Restany, 'Le fantastique explore l'invisible: Les grands livres,' *Planète*, no. 25, November-December 1965, 173-4.

<sup>59</sup> This article is part of a fuller contextualisation of fifties and sixties surrealism that takes place in my forthcoming book, *Futures of Surrealism: Myth, Science Fiction and Fantastic Art in France, 1936-69*.

<sup>60</sup> 'la curiosité qui se porte vers l'habitabilité des autres planètes a suscité aussi de nouvelles formes de fantastique, qui ne doivent pas être ignorées, dans l'invention des êtres prodigieux qui pourraient vivre sur Jupiter, Mars, la Lune ou Saturne,' Brion in Bordeaux, *Bosch, Goya et le fantastique*, xxvi.

<sup>61</sup> Marcel Brion, *Art fantastique*, Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1961, 172.

<sup>62</sup> Anita Torres, *La Science-Fiction Française: Auteurs et amateurs d'un genre littéraire*, Paris and Montreal: L'Harmattan, 1997, 109.

<sup>63</sup> Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* [1997], trans. Alison Anderson, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 525.

<sup>64</sup> Henri Parisot (ed.), *Les Poètes hallucinés: Anthologie de la Poésie fantastique*, trans. Henri Parisot, Pierre Jean Jouve, Paul Cazin, Paris: Flammarion, 1966.

<sup>65</sup> 'Pour qu'il y ait fantastique, à notre sens, il faut et il suffit qu'il y ait évocation réussie de cette réalité secrète, de cette *surréalité* que l'on suppose tapie derrière les apparences ... et ne se révélant à nous



que par bribes et dans certaines conditions fortuites allant rarement de pair avec la faculté d'écrire,' Parisot (ed.), *Les Poètes hallucinés*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> Roger Caillois (ed.), *Anthologie du fantastique*, vol. II, Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

<sup>67</sup> Roger Caillois (ed.), *Anthologie du fantastique*, vol. I, Paris: Le club français du livre, 1958, 3-4.

<sup>68</sup> Tzevtan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* [1970], trans. Richard Howard, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975, 33. H.P. Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' [1927/1933-4], *Collected Essays, Volume 2: Literary Criticism*, ed. S.T. Joshi, New York: Hippocampus Press, 2004, 82-135.

<sup>69</sup> Breton, *Free Rein*, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Breton, *Free Rein*, 16.

<sup>71</sup> 'technique minutieuse,' Serge Hutin, 'Fantastique et surréalité,' *La Tour Saint-Jacques*, no. 1, November-December 1955, 39-46, 40.

<sup>72</sup> Hutin, 'Fantastique et surréalité,' 41; see G.M.N. Tyrrell, *The Personality of Man: New Facts and their Significance*, London: Pelican, 1947, 30-43. Also see Amadou, 'Réflexions sur l'expérience artistique,' 6.

<sup>73</sup> René Warcollier and Raphaël Kherumian, 'Remarques sur les déformations des dessins télépathiques,' *Revue Métapsychique*, no. 27, January-February 1954, 149-54. In fact, Hutin's article on Fini also introduces alchemy into the mix and is an extension of his piece in the same issue of the *Revue Métapsychique* on art and alchemy to which René Alleau objected in *Médium*, see René Alleau, 'Psychanalyse et alchimie,' *Médium: Communication surréaliste*, no. 3, May 1954, 43-4.

<sup>74</sup> Marcel Brion, 'Le réalisme fantastique,' 47-54. This text makes up the first half of Brion, *Leonor Fini*, n.p.

<sup>75</sup> Brion, 'Le réalisme fantastique,' 50; Brion, *Art fantastique*, 173.

<sup>76</sup> 'Dans la peinture fantastique d'aujourd'hui certains courants se sont dessinés s'enfonçant dans les perspectives multi-dimensionnelles des mondes possibles. Les roches oraculaires de Max Ernst, les plasmas de Miró, grouillants de vibrions magiques, les plaines post-diluviales de Tanguy où peine à se former une nouvelle vie, les glyphes vibrants de Baumeister appartiennent à ces autres dimensions qui ne recoupent les nôtres, qu'au moment où leurs images s'installent dans notre champ de vision,' Brion, 'Le réalisme fantastique,' 50.

<sup>77</sup> 'réalité de l'invisible, de l'imperceptible,' Brion, 'Le réalisme fantastique,' 51.

<sup>78</sup> 'Menue monnaie du lyrisme fantastique pour cerveaux moyens,' Brion, 'Le réalisme fantastique,' 47. See Serge Caillet, 'Jacques Bergier et l'alchimie,' Claudine Brelet (ed.), *Jacques Bergier, Une légende... un mythe: hommages*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010, 29-46, 30-31.

<sup>79</sup> Jean-Louis Bédouin, 'Qui fut M. Gurdjieff? Interview de Jacques Bergier,' *Médium: Communication surréaliste*, no. 3, May 1954, 19-21, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Jacques Bergier, 'Les nouvelles de nulle part et d'ailleurs,' 97-9.

<sup>81</sup> Jacques Bergier, 'Pour un réalisme fantastique,' *Fiction*, Year 7, no. 63, February 1959, 141-2.

<sup>82</sup> Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *Le Matin des magiciens: Introduction au réalisme fantastique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

<sup>83</sup> Jason Colavito, *The Cult of Alien Gods: H.P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture*, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2005, 137.



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<sup>84</sup> Translated in Britain as Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Dawn of Magic* [1960], trans. Rollo Myers, London: Anthony Gibbs & Phillips Ltd., 1963.

<sup>85</sup> Serge Hutin, *Alien Races and Fantastic Civilizations*, New York: Berkley, 1975; Aimé Michel, *Lueurs sur les soucoupes volantes*, Paris: Mame, 1954.

<sup>86</sup> Cabañas, *The Myth of Nouveau Réalisme*, 25-6. See Robert Benayoun and José Pierre, 'Alchimie de l'objet, cabotinage du déchet,' *La Brèche: Action surréaliste*, no. 2, May 1962, 49-54.

<sup>87</sup> 'pillant sans vergogne les conquêtes du surréalisme et les hypothèses d'André Breton,' José Pierre, *Les fausses cartes transparentes de Planète*, Paris: Le Petit Écrasons, 1965, 13.

<sup>88</sup> See the comments by Marguerite Bonnet in André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1988, 1350.

<sup>89</sup> André Breton, 'Drawbridges' [1962], Pierre Mabilie, *Mirror of the Marvelous: The Classic Surrealist Work on Myth* [1940/1962], trans. Jody Gladding, Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1998, vii-xv, xv; André Breton, 'Pont-levis,' *La Brèche: Action surréaliste*, no. 3, September 1962, 13-21.

<sup>90</sup> Breton, 'Drawbridges,' xv. For the near equivalence of the terms 'marvellous' and 'fantastic' in surrealism in the 1920s, see Henri Béhar, 'Le merveilleux dans le discours surréaliste, essai de terminologie,' Claude Letellier and Nathalie Limat-Letellier (eds.), *Mélusine*, no. 20 ('Merveilleux et surréalisme'), Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 2000, 15-29.

Gavin Parkinson is Senior Lecturer in European Modernism at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London. He lectures and writes on European and American art and culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His books are *Futures of Surrealism: Myth, Science Fiction and Fantastic Art in France 1936-1969* (Yale University Press 2015); *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology* (Yale University Press 2008); and *The Duchamp Book* (Tate Publishing 2008). In addition, Gavin edited the collection *Surrealism, Science Fiction and Comics* (Liverpool University Press 2015). He has just completed a book on the surrealist reception of late nineteenth-century art, titled *Enchanted Ground: André Breton, Modernism and the Surrealist Appraisal of Fin de Siècle Painting*.



## Between the Readymade and the Marvellous: Mike Nelson and the Postmodern Politics of Aura

Clare O'Dowd

The British artist Mike Nelson has become well known for his large-scale, labyrinthine installation works. Nelson's carefully constructed environments have been widely categorised as a kind of contemporary surrealist practice, drawing on the surrealist idea of found objects as an intermediary with the unconscious. However, Nelson refers to his installations as 'faked readymades,' a term which suggests an allegiance to Duchamp's use of mass-produced objects. These two ideas, the surrealist object and the Duchampian readymade, share a basis in the political: the modern, or postmodern, politics of aura. Drawing on the work of Walter Benjamin, Ulrich Beck and Jean Baudrillard, this article will examine the ideas of reflexivity and revolution that underpin some of Nelson's best known installations.

For more than twenty years now, British sculptor Mike Nelson has been carefully constructing large-scale installations which transform architectural remains into immersive and unsettling labyrinths. Multiple rooms and corridors are filled with suggestive objects and ephemera; these physical traces of an invented population build up into a loose narrative which the viewer is obliged to complete. Nelson's environments have been described as a kind of contemporary surrealist practice, drawing on the surrealist idea of found objects as an intermediary with the unconscious.<sup>1</sup> However, Nelson's own description of his work uses the term 'faked readymade,' alluding instead both to Duchamp's use of mass-produced objects, and, more importantly, to the idea that the spaces he creates are unequivocally a fiction.

I wish to explore the space between these two poles, between the surrealist notion of the marvellous, as evoked through the chance finding of a particular object, and Nelson's idea of the 'faked readymade': a fictional construction which uses the viewer's own associations to complete a narrative. Both of these ideas are rooted in an interrogation of the object as commodity, and their common themes of the outmoded, the unconscious and the fictitious can be resolved in the political: the modern, or postmodern, politics of aura. Using Walter Benjamin's writings from the 1930s on objects and aura, and Jean Baudrillard's contemporary theories of sign-value and simulacra, this article will make the case that both approaches are equally relevant to an understanding of the sociological and political use of found objects within Nelson's work. More recent sociological theories found in the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck provide a basis for the simultaneous invocation of a Marxist, modernist theoretical analysis alongside a postmodern, semiological methodology. Like the surrealist object and the 'faked readymade,' both approaches take the notion of the commodity as their starting point, but importantly, Benjamin's earlier ideas about aura and the value of objects have not been eclipsed by contemporary theories. In this case, the legacy of surrealism that is found within Nelson's work becomes less about a revolutionary encounter with the outmoded objects of the recent past, and more about a reflexive confrontation with the detritus of a dystopian present.

In 2007, Nelson was commissioned by the New York arts organisation Creative Time to create an installation within the abandoned Essex Street Market building, on the corner of Essex and Delancey Street in New York's East Side.<sup>2</sup> The market was one of the largest spaces that Nelson had ever had





access to, and its condition of abandonment and decay made it an exceedingly apt location for this particular strand of Nelson's practice. In terms of its physical form, the market hall that formed the basis of *A Psychic Vacuum* was a 15,000sqft space, some of which contained the remnants of its former designation but most of which was, according to Nelson, empty of everything apart from rats.<sup>3</sup> Its meaning as place had been in flux for many years. As a market hall it had apparently never been terribly successful, and it had lain empty for 17 years, a blot on the landscape of increasing gentrification that now pervades the Lower East Side of New York.

There are four market halls in this area, including the one that Nelson took over at the corner of Essex Street and Delancey Street, and another corresponding one on Essex Street, which had been reconfigured in the late 1990s as a gourmet grocers' market. The market halls had been built in the 1940s under the jurisdiction of Mayor Fiorello H LaGuardia as part of a plan to reduce congestion due to street trading on the streets of Manhattan, and have historically been regarded as local landmarks.<sup>4</sup> As former hubs of local commerce and enterprise, the market halls' deterioration can certainly be interpreted as part of the general decay of small businesses and local commercial concerns which occurred during the latter years of the twentieth century, when the decline of local trade during the 1970s and 80s was precipitated by increasing numbers of larger supermarkets and more convenient forms of multi-purpose retail outlet.

Towards the end of its life, the market had been home to an increasingly esoteric collection of enterprises, including bars, tattoo parlours, clairvoyants and spiritualist mediums. Entrance to the market hall was gained through a disused Chinese restaurant, which Nelson in fact left exactly as he found it, mould and all. The rest of the market hall consisted of smaller spaces and walkways, a labyrinthine structure which Nelson took full advantage of. Although the market hall itself was 15,000sq ft, the individual spaces that Nelson created were small: sometimes intimate, but often claustrophobic.

Nelson chose the contents of these spaces carefully, scouring the flea markets and junkyards of New York and its surrounding areas to ensure that each room conjured up a particular scenario. Sometimes there is an obvious implication, as in the tiny room with the bare brick walls which contains only a selection of baseball bats and a crumpled strait-jacket. Likewise, a room strewn with voodoo paraphernalia: piles of wing feathers, wishbones, dolls and crucifixes; or the veterans' bar, with its red, white and blue bunting, battered cigarette advertisements and ancient cash register. Other rooms were disturbing because the chains of association resulting from the objects were more opaque: why might a scratcher tattooist be collecting Desert Storm trading cards from the first Gulf War? And reading *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*? The stories of these previous inhabitants, each of a different register within a constellation of different belief systems, are suggestive of a search for meaning and identity not only on a personal level but also in much broader social and political terms.

## Invoking Place

These ideas have been the subject of Nelson's work on many previous occasions, and *The Coral Reef* (2001), the work that *A Psychic Vacuum* was based upon, dealt with precisely this notion, that of the



vulnerability of both personal and group identities under capitalism. Now owned by Tate, *The Coral Reef* was first installed at Matt's Gallery in London in 2000, and gained Nelson his first Turner Prize nomination. The work consisted of a series of fifteen rooms, each one representing a different cultural identity or belief system and each taking the form of a reception or waiting room. These liminal spaces, filled with the detritus of their fictional occupants, represented the delicate life forms inhabiting the coral reef of the work's title, fighting for their own existence beneath oceanic social and economic structures. The groups that were more invoked than represented within the work took a variety of forms, including evangelical Christians, biker gangs, heroin users, Islamic mini-cab operators, Mexican Marxist revolutionaries and Aleister Crowley-obsessed black magicians.<sup>5</sup> The objects within each space were suggestive of different cultural identities, but the structure of the installation meant that, inevitably, what might be hidden behind the receptions and waiting areas was equally as evocative.

Within *The Coral Reef*, the system that the fictional occupants were struggling within was primarily an economic one, and the identities that Nelson invoked were those that could be seen as particularly marginalised in both social and economic terms. *A Psychic Vacuum*, however, marked a shift from exploring the effects of an economic structure to an ideological one, and the spaces in this particular installation became suggestive of a similar set of belief systems but with a subtly different inference. Rather than groups that were socially oppressed or marginalised in the United Kingdom, these spaces represented what Nelson saw as bubbling under the surface of America: war veterans, fundamentalist Christians, conspiracy theorists, unregulated tattoo parlours, voodoo practitioners, and torture chambers. The shift in location, from the UK to the United States, is significant in this regard, because both of these installations reflect particular cultures at particular moments in time, and Nelson has put specific emphasis on certain distinct characteristics of each: the highlighting of economically marginalised groups in the UK giving way in the later installation to a focus on the religious and spiritual consequences of the neo-conservative ideological structure which was so prominent during the Bush years. These consequences were two-fold, leading to both a marginalisation of many religious groups, Muslims in particular, and a sudden rise in numbers of people turning to fundamentalist forms of Christianity as well as other more nebulous spiritual practices. The previous occupants of the Essex Street market hall that Nelson was about to take over seemed to resonate with this particular response to such ideology: invoking a search for spirituality and personal meaning through such expedients as tattooing, black magic or alcohol.

The fact that these particular groups had been effectively forced out of the market by the prevailing economic and political systems is indicative of their fragility under the homogenising conditions of late modernity. In his study of modernity and its relation to the self, Anthony Giddens sums up the impact of capitalism and commodification on modern social life as follows:

The capitalist market, with its 'imperatives' of continuous expansion, attacks tradition. The spread of capitalism places large sectors (although by no means all) of social reproduction in the hands of markets for products and labour. Markets operate without regard to pre-established forms of behaviour, which for the most part represent obstacles to the creation of unfettered exchange. In the period of high modernity, capitalistic enterprise increasingly seeks to shape consumption as well as monopolise the conditions of production. From the beginning, markets promote individualism in the sense that they stress individual rights and responsibilities, but at first this phenomenon mainly concerns the freedom of contract and mobility intrinsic to capitalistic



employment. Later, however, individualism becomes extended to the sphere of consumption, the designation of individual wants becoming basic to the continuity of the system. Market governed freedom of individual choice becomes an enveloping framework of individual self-expression.<sup>6</sup>

"Suffice to affirm", writes Giddens, "that capitalism is one of the main institutional dimensions of modernity, and that the capitalist accumulation process represents one of the prime driving forces behind modern institutions as a whole."<sup>7</sup> The alienating effects of the impersonal, abstract institutions of late capitalism are pervasive, affecting all aspects of life, including financial organisations, scientific and medical experts, insurance and utilities companies, and the justice system. The lack of autonomy and control perceived by individuals in the face of these apparently unaccountable and intangible organisations, the standardised patterns of consumption engendered through advertising and so on, and the levels of inequality and marginalisation generated by the capitalist system's unequal distribution of resources, all create an environment in which the notion of identity itself becomes precarious and uncertain. Freedom of choice as consumers is by no means commensurate with freedom as an individual: as Giddens and others argue, it is quite the opposite. Individual identities are mediated through consumption, rather than through genuine agency.

This quest to mitigate what Giddens describes as 'the looming threat of personal meaninglessness' underlies an increasing commodification of the 'project of the self' - Giddens' term for the individual's formation and continuity of self-identity - to the extent that consumption becomes a substitute for genuine development of self, experience becomes mediated and commodified, and overwhelming choice results in powerlessness.<sup>8</sup> Sociologist Ulrich Beck expands on the reasons behind this threat to self-identity:

Opportunities, dangers, biographical uncertainties that were earlier predefined within the family association, the village community, or by recourse to the rules of social estates or classes, must now be perceived, interpreted, decided and processed by individuals themselves. The consequences – opportunities and burdens alike – are shifted onto individuals who, naturally, in the face of the complexity of social interconnections, are often unable to take the necessary decisions in a properly founded way, by considering interests, morality and consequences.<sup>9</sup>

The predefined ways that people have traditionally used to identify themselves are no longer tenable, Beck argues. Within the logic of what he terms 'reflexive modernity,' the onus is entirely upon individuals to create their own biographies, without recourse to traditional ties of blood or geographical proximity. Identity becomes a matter of choice, a series of decisions. As well as the increased commodification of personal identity that Giddens observes, there also emerges the necessity to choose one's community: becoming part of a group on a voluntarist basis, and creating one's own networks within that community, whether that be attending a church, supporting a sports team, joining an internet forum or social networking site, going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings or watching live bands. Even employment does not offer the identity-forming safety net that it once did. The old presuppositions become questionable, as patterns of employment become fragmented and the collective moulding of individual behaviour no longer holds true: as Beck remarks, the old idea that, by knowing that someone was a Siemens apprentice, you also knew the things he said, the way he dressed and enjoyed himself, what he read and how he voted no longer applies.<sup>10</sup>

The act of joining such a community, whether it be a biker gang or an evangelical church,



distinguishes its members on the one hand as part of one particular group, and on the other as distinct from other social groups. It simultaneously unites and isolates. In the case of Nelson's installation, the invocation of these communities fulfils a similar, if rather more one-sided, function, serving largely to isolate the viewer rather than present any sort of social unity. The particularities of the installation pertain, of course, to fictional members, and although everything within the installation is real, the unseen owners of the detritus and the invisible occupants of the spaces are not. The systems that they operate within exist though, and the particular identifying clues that Nelson leaves as to the cultural, religious or social allegiances of the departed *dramatis personae* are equally tangible, and are deliberately engaged to form chains of association in the mind of the viewer. When walking through Nelson's installation, the viewer is confronted by a series of possible stories and scenarios, but these are deliberately arranged in order to maximise an aura of abandonment.

The viewer is not privy to any explanatory texts; rather they are cast adrift into a fictional space which is not only immediately alien to their own world, but contains remnants of unseen occupants who are deliberately invoked as alien to the viewer. Having a reasonable idea of his audience, Nelson consciously tries to make his spaces appear as far removed from the gallery-goers who will view them as he possibly can, whilst still leaving recognisable physical clues as to the potential identity of their occupants. Despite knowing what the market hall was, and being able to accurately identify the cultural identities being suggested within, the viewer is not allowed the privilege of knowing what the space is now, or who precisely was here. The overriding message is that "This is not your world, and you do not belong here".

### The Faked Readymade

The use of found objects is a particularly prominent aspect of many of Nelson's larger installations. Nelson is often compared to the German artist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948), whose own labyrinthine architectural construction, the *Merzbau* (c1927-37) was filled with mementoes and ephemera, and grew to take over a large part of his home.<sup>11</sup> Schwitters was an avid collector who was always on the lookout for items that might be of use to him, and lost no opportunity to avail himself of anything that could be incorporated into his work. Unlike Schwitters, Nelson is not a collector, and does not keep a supply of suitable items in readiness. In response to the question of collecting, Nelson admitted that he used to be a hoarder to a certain extent, until it became depressing to keep returning to similar objects no matter where in the world he was looking.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of where he was, certain objects held a certain fascination for him, and he would seek these out almost unconsciously until he became fed up of replaying the same story each time and the compulsion to repeat became too much for him. The advent of a young family also meant that there simply was not the space to keep a large quantity of ephemera just in case, and so it became more practical and more effective to find items specifically for each installation.

The sourcing and acquiring of these objects takes up large chunks of the timetable for such works, and the larger the piece the more time is spent collecting items to fill it. Although several hundred



square feet of *A Psychic Vacuum* were filled with sand, the rest of the installation contained hundreds of carefully chosen objects. For each installation, the items that fill it are sourced locally, and are selected with a particular aim in mind. In order for the installation to have the greatest resonance with its situation and location, Nelson immerses himself in the area in which he is working:

I normally make them to reflect that particular city, to be relevant to that place where they're being built. But then the very fact that ones like that are being built within that city, out of that city, what I'm making that work out of is the by-products of that city. So it's going to reflect it by the nature of the stuff. And of course you look at the city, you spend time in the city, you drive round the city, drive round the rough areas, go to the salvage yards and the builders yards, you get a certain vision. You don't get a tourist's view of the city.<sup>13</sup>

It is within these peripheral urban areas that Nelson searches for his material, looking for what he describes as a 'vernacular' view of his location.<sup>14</sup> Finding objects that have the kind of qualities Nelson is looking for - a certain patina, a suggestion of time spent, or an aura of used-ness - hints at a certain paradox, because Nelson is searching for objects with a sense of authenticity in order to create what is essentially a work of fiction. He does not precisely conform to the Duchampian anti-aesthetic gesture of the readymade, although his own description of his work often uses the term 'faked readymade.' Nor, despite many commentators' insistence on his classification as a practitioner of contemporary surrealism, does Nelson exactly operate within the surrealist parameters of the *objet trouvé*, or found object.<sup>15</sup> Rather than elevating an object discovered by chance to the status of an artwork, Nelson's search for objects is not a random journey in search of the marvellous, but a specific and targeted operation that seeks out a particular class of object which potentially has a story to tell. His practice lies somewhere between the Dadaist gesture of the readymade, a mass-produced object which is chosen by the artist on the basis of its lack of aesthetic criteria and uniqueness, and the surrealist gesture of the *objet trouvé*, a found object which has both distinctive aesthetic potential and a perceptible affective charge for the finder.

For Nelson, the objects cannot be too distinctive: no one would recognise them. Conversely, they cannot be untouched by human hands: purely mass-produced objects would bear no trace of human contact. The objects must be suggestive, recognisable, authentic. The objects must allow the chains of association that the installation depends upon.

Nelson's work owes a substantial debt to Schwitters, and the labyrinthine structure of many of Nelson's larger works has led to direct comparisons with Schwitters and the *Merzbau*, for example in the catalogue to the 2006 exhibition, *A Secret Service*.<sup>16</sup> But the ephemeral, object-filled nature of their works is certainly a more interesting aspect, and one which highlights the differences between their practices more than the similarities. The objects that Schwitters chose to fill the *Merzbau* with were more often than not chosen because of their resonance with a particular person, place or event that was important (or unimportant) to him.<sup>17</sup> While working on the construction between approximately 1927 and 1937, one of the principal motivating forces behind Schwitters' method was the idea that by keeping a collection of representative objects safe, Schwitters was somehow preserving the presence of people who were being physically erased from his life due to the effects of war, exile and death: the inclusion of his eldest son's death mask, which remained visible in the *Merzbau* for years, is the paradigmatic example of this.<sup>18</sup>



One could compare this preservation of presence, of the aura of inhabitation, with the work of Soviet-born artist Ilya Kabakov (1933-), and the way that Kabakov's environments are deliberately designed to maintain this notion of the life within them: the eponymous character from Kabakov's *Man who flew into space from his apartment* (1988) might return at any moment, for example. Although a comparison with Kabakov is entirely reasonable, Nelson's installations have the opposite effect. They are designed to foreground the absence of any inhabitants, and to emphasise the notion of abandonment and loss. It is largely because of the particular aura of the objects that he uses that Nelson is able to invoke this powerful atmosphere of desolation within his work, manipulating their apparent authenticity and suggested provenance to impart the nagging suspicion that they once belonged to someone, that they were not long since used, and that they were possibly very recently abandoned.

### The Politics of Aura

This paradoxical attitude towards objects is very difficult to resolve. The objects are real, but what they produce is a fiction. This fiction may take the form of a space that we can recognise or interpret, but it is a fiction nonetheless. It could exist, but does not. In order to achieve this fiction, the objects Nelson uses must have a manifest sense of 'realness' for them to function within the installation: they must have an aura. We are aware, for instance, that there is no tattooist in the Essex Street Market who collects Desert Storm trading cards. However, someone did collect those cards, and put them in an album and looked after them for nearly a decade. We know that there is no group of war veterans who drink in a bar strung with stars and stripes bunting, wiping their shoes on a doormat that reads 'Forget 911, Dial 357.' The doormat has been well used by someone, though.

The notion of aura was theorised very effectively by Walter Benjamin, most notably in his 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" but more forcefully in his later essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", which was first published in 1939. I wish to examine these at some length in order to shed light on the way in which Nelson's use of objects can be read as a socio-political response to what Benjamin describes as the disintegration of aura.

In the first essay, Benjamin deals with the question of authenticity, and the problem that the infinite reproducibility of artworks in an age of mechanical reproduction leaves them uncoupled from their place in time and space, free-floating without any of the substantive connections to what Benjamin calls the "domain of tradition".<sup>19</sup> Benjamin's description refers to objects which are removed from their social or religious context, the sorts of cult in which art objects had their origins and where their use value was primarily determined. Authenticity, for Benjamin, cannot be reproduced. Authenticity is related to the history of the object, the changes that have happened to it and affected its condition over the years, its different owners and its journey through time and space to where it happens to be now. To remove these markers of human contact from an object is to lose the aura that the authentic, historically and socially embedded object retains.

Benjamin is somewhat ambivalent about mechanical reproduction in his earlier text, seeing it as potentially liberating. Phrases such as "[F]or the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction





emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual"<sup>20</sup> would seem to suggest that Benjamin is in favour of this emancipation, and indeed also of the revolutionary potential of photography and film.<sup>21</sup> Although Benjamin's colleague Theodor Adorno was not entirely convinced by his discussion of the decline of aura within "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", maintaining that Benjamin's discussion of political artworks did not go far enough in elaborating what Adorno saw as its inherently dialectical nature, he was in complete agreement with Benjamin's general thesis; that the "disenchantment of art" was part of the "dialectical self-dissolution of myth", in other words, the emancipation from ritual and the decline of cult-value that Benjamin had identified.<sup>22</sup>

However, in his later essay, Benjamin is far less equivocal about the loss of aura that he and Baudelaire each articulate. Benjamin here connects aura more specifically to memory, using Proust's notion of *memoire involontaire*, or involuntary memory, a recollection of the past which is tied to a material object or sensation:<sup>23</sup> "If we designate as aura the associations which, at home in the *memoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception, then its analogue in the case of a utilitarian object is the experience which has left traces of the practised hand."<sup>24</sup> He continues later:

Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.<sup>25</sup>

Aura then is part of a reciprocal relationship, whereby the object we invest with such a quality is able to reflect traces of memory, experience and human contact back at us when we look at it. Our expectations of the object are fulfilled by virtue of its correspondence with not only our own experience but the traces of experiences of others. In his response to this later essay, Adorno is in agreement with Benjamin's formulation, and identifies the associations of which Benjamin writes with the moment of human labour which is lost, or more accurately, forgotten, in the process of reification:

Is not the aura invariably a trace of a forgotten human moment in the thing, and is it not directly connected, precisely by virtue of this forgetting, with what you call 'experience'? One might even go so far as to regard the experiential ground which underlies the speculations of idealist thought as an attempt to retain this trace – and to retain it precisely in those things which have now become alien.<sup>26</sup>

In his original description of the commodity, Marx argued that objects have *value* as commodities in terms of their economic relationship to other objects. The physical form of the object and the social relations and forms of labour which produced it are entirely obscured by the capacity of the object to function within a system of market exchange, and this system requires it to have use-value (the physical properties of an object which allow it to satisfy a material need) and exchange value (the quantitative relationship of one use-value to another).<sup>27</sup> As soon as an object is deemed to have an exchange value – as soon as it becomes a commodity – it becomes abstracted from both its useful characteristics and the useful labour which produced it. Reification, in this case the process by which the social significance of an object is replaced by its commodity value, means that the traces of labour, in terms of production or usage, are obliterated, and the total alienation of its use-value leads to the disintegration of aura that Benjamin describes. For Adorno, this idea of reification is fundamental to Benjamin's discussion, and



the relationship between sensory experience, conscious experience and the 'forgetting' of reification should be central to any critique of the loss of aura: "For all reification is forgetting. Objects become purely thing-like the moment they retained for us without the continued presence of their other aspects; when something of them has been forgotten."<sup>28</sup> For an object to become thing-like means that it has ceased to be part of a system of beliefs or values; that it is regarded purely as a commodity and that it effectively no longer has a history. Reification results in us losing our relationship to objects, just as they lose their relationship to us. If the 'human moment' inherent in an object is forgotten, and it no longer retains the capacity to provoke any *memoire involontaire*, it becomes, spatially and temporally, placeless.

This loss of aura is, as Benjamin notes, a high price to pay: "[Baudelaire] indicated the price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had: the disintegration of aura in the experience of shock."<sup>29</sup> There can be no doubt that Benjamin and Baudelaire were right, that the disintegration of this reciprocal relationship with the world around us is an enormous and profound loss. Again, the fate of aura in the face of capitalism can be seen as part of the wider disintegration that Beck reflects upon. This loss of aura goes hand-in-hand with the disembedding of objects from their contexts without their subsequent re-embedding: precisely the process that Beck identifies as constituting the second, reflexive modernity, as the foundations of social coexistence are undone and not replaced.<sup>30</sup>

The failure of objects to meet our expectations in terms of a correspondence to our own personal sphere of experience, memory and, at bottom, identity can be seen as analogous to this process, whereby the components which allow us to form our identity are no longer given to us: society fails to meet our expectations, and self-identity is now endlessly reproducible and open to interpretation and commodification, just like any mechanically reproduced artwork, photograph or object. Authenticity, in Benjamin's terms, is irretrievably lost.

Nelson is arguably responding to this disintegration by choosing objects that specifically demonstrate the traces of the human beings who have made, used, prayed with, communicated through or collected these items. Like the doormat, or the trading cards, the objects are easily recognisable signifiers, telling open-ended and indeterminate stories depending upon who is looking at them, like Benjamin's *profane illumination*: "a materialistic, anthropological inspiration, to which hashish, opium or whatever else can give an introductory lesson. (But a dangerous one, and the religious lesson is stricter.)"<sup>31</sup> Benjamin was writing in 1929 about surrealism, and the shock of the profane illumination that accompanies the sorts of discoveries that the surrealists were making; the revolutionary potential of the unconscious, of desire, intoxication, coincidence, accident and the past. He describes the surrealists' relationship to the material traces of the recent past in terms of this kind of sudden and shocking revelation:

[Breton] was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded", in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos, the objects that have begun to be extinct, grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them. The relation of these things to revolution – no one can have a more exact concept of it than these authors. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism. ... Breton and Nadja are the lovers who convert everything that we have experienced on mournful railway



journeys (railways are beginning to age), on Godforsaken Sunday afternoons in the proletarian quarters of the great cities, in the first glance through the rain-blurred window of a new apartment, into revolutionary experience, if not action. They bring the immense forces of "atmosphere" concealed in these things to the point of explosion.<sup>32</sup>

The sort of inspiration which the surrealists took from the outmoded and destitute things which could be unearthed in the city looms large within Nelson's work. Less archaeological than anthropological, the surrealists used objects to inspire experiences, to overturn the bourgeois rationality of their everyday lives and to couple the remarkable workings of the inner self with the prosaic banalities of the outside world. But as Benjamin observes, this process was inherently political, and not simply historical.<sup>33</sup>

### Revolution versus Reflexivity

Nelson does not invoke experience in the same literal and direct way as the surrealists, but he is equally attuned to the revelations that can be produced by 'destitute' objects and places, to borrow Benjamin's phrase. Surrealism's romanticism is certainly not discernible within Nelson's work, which is less about a search for the marvellous than a search for the banal; finding everyday objects which clearly have a history, but which, as Benjamin describes, invoke 'revolutionary' experience, if not action. I would argue that in Nelson's case, what is provoked is not necessarily revolutionary, but is a reflexive response which enables viewers to confront their world and its systems on an individual level, provoking critical and creative engagement. Whether it provokes revolutionary action is, however, debatable.

Unlike Benjamin and the surrealists, Nelson is less than positive about any real potential for change, but is unequivocal about what he would like the viewer to experience:

It might be a combination of colours or objects or the structure, but you're constantly being coerced, nudged. It's not like you're being told, it's not didactic that it's meaning this or that, and you're seeing this, but it's a kind of moulding of your whole psyche, your state of mind, that somehow leads you to a certain conclusion or a certain territory.<sup>34</sup>

Thus Nelson's work can certainly be said to insert objects back into systems: carefully chosen objects which retain Adorno's 'forgotten human moment,' reinstated into a carefully constructed narrative which ultimately suggests the religious, political or social community system from which it may have originated. This does not mean, however, that the objects are de-reified, or rescued from their status as commodities. There remains instead a different register of value, and rather than use or exchange value, the objects are embedded within an alternative system where their value is determined by their capacity to function as signs rather than commodities. These objects are still consumed, but rather than existing as a function of needs, they refer to social objectives and social order.<sup>35</sup>

For Marx, the physical, material nature of an object has no relation to its nature as a commodity. It does not matter what the commodity is; the most important aspect of its existence is its relationship to other commodities. Within these relationships between commodities there is a substitution, whereby the products of labour reflect social relations and the social processes of labour:



It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>36</sup>

In Marx's formulation, and later for Adorno, social relations are consistently mediated through objects.<sup>37</sup> Taking this idea to its logical conclusion, Jean Baudrillard proposes a new category of value which is located in the sphere of consumption rather than production. According to Baudrillard's critique of Marx's theory of the commodity, use-value is no longer a consideration, and has been replaced with 'sign-value': in other words, what sort of meaning, prestige or social status the object conveys rather than how useful it is. Sign-value does not answer a material need, nor is it a function of purely economic relations. Instead, objects become codes to convey difference and distinction, and, importantly, social control. Rather than simply analysing the commodity in terms of use-value or exchange value, Baudrillard argues, the sign-value of objects must be accounted for politically, sociologically and semiologically within particular systems of meaning. As Baudrillard writes:

Through objects a stratified society speaks, and if, like the mass media, objects seem to speak to everyone, it is in order to keep everyone in a certain place. In short, under the rubric of objects, under the seal of private property, it is always a continual social process of value which leads the way.<sup>38</sup>

Within Baudrillard's argument, objects become markers of difference, and ownership of commodities becomes a code which constrains and governs social values in relation to other signs. Social hierarchies and memberships are described and identified through consumption of objects. Baudrillard writes that objects exist within a vicious circle: in objects, we identify a social category which has already been described partly on the basis of these objects.<sup>39</sup> By acknowledging the status of objects within the systems that they have come from, and the social process of value that is speaking through them, Nelson can circumvent the 'forgetting' that is engendered by the process of reification, invoking in his viewers a *memoire involontaire* of the physical, social and political relationship that takes place between people and objects, and of the fragility of the identities that are predicated upon those relationships.

In the case of Nelson's installations though, these relationships are fake, and this circumvention of the 'forgetting' of reification is provoked by the mechanics of the installation. The installation itself questions the notion of authenticity through its production of a fictitious environment, knowledge of which is suspended as the viewer enters the space in order to allow for an 'authentic' experience. Nelson's description of these spaces as 'faked readymades' bears a striking resemblance to what Baudrillard refers to as simulacrum: the *hyperreal*; not a copy of reality but a reality in their own right.<sup>40</sup> Nelson's installations are not based upon 'real' spaces. Instead they are simulacrum; models of places, places that do not exist but that could, possibly, exist: symbols of reality which go beyond reality, suggestive of places that we know can exist outside the installation, real in themselves but also copies of nothing: the copy without original.<sup>41</sup>

That there is no authentic, original 'reality' to hinge one's experience upon is undoubtedly true



in the case of Nelson's work: the installations refer obliquely to individuals or groups who are simply not there, and the objects within his environments are deliberately chosen to form these chains of associations that lead the viewer to accept the paradoxical reality of the fictional space. Nelson describes this particular mode of experience as akin to reading a book, whereby one knows full well that one is entering into the realm of fiction, but as he describes: "Somewhere along the line you make a pact with the space. You agree to go along with it."<sup>42</sup> However, I would argue that the experience goes beyond this, and is more like Baudrillard's description of the danger of simulation: "Simulation is infinitely more dangerous [than violence or transgression] because it always leaves open to supposition that, above and beyond its object, *law and order themselves might be nothing but simulation*."<sup>43</sup> In other words, all that society produces is the hyperreal, and reality itself is short-circuited and duplicated through signs, becoming nothing but a simulation itself. Although Nelson acknowledges the paradox of this situation in terms of how his work functions, as the physical manifestation of something that does not exist, he goes out of his way to create the model of a possible reality and to make certain that it sits between the two poles of original and fake.

The transition between an object chosen for its aura, or its semblance of authenticity, and an object chosen for its sign-value, is an uneasy one, but Nelson's work depends upon these two factors, and the resulting ambiguity is crucial. The work hinges not only upon the fact that these two very different readings of an object can co-exist in a single artwork, but that the viewer is able to recognise and interpret both. The sign-value of the objects in Nelson's installations depends upon their aura, and vice versa: the authenticity of the objects within the fake environment becomes a function of their sign-value, which is in turn a function of their familiarity, creating a symbol of something which might exist beyond the confines of the installation itself. Interpreting and understanding this relationship requires a specific and reflexive response on the part of the viewer.

The question of what the viewer brings to such an installation is an important one, and Nelson argues that although he may strive to act as a catalyst in order to guide the viewer down a certain path, it is the viewer's own 'ghosts,' as he puts it, that will truly inhabit the space. In practice, this depends on the viewer's ability to think reflexively about their own position and what they bring to the work in terms of their own beliefs, prejudices and politics. Nelson's work demands a certain level of critical engagement on the part of the viewer: Ralph Rugoff, now director of the Hayward Gallery, described Nelson's work as "designed to strategically entangle us in the task of fleshing out narrative vectors and constructing the work's potential meanings".<sup>44</sup>

This task of thinking reflexively, filling in the blanks from one's own sphere of experience and arriving in the particular territory that Nelson is suggesting, may not be something that necessarily happens whilst one is actually within the installation itself. It is an ongoing process, and one that requires continued dialogue with the work long after one has left it. Although actually interpreting the work whilst occupying it requires a certain level of self-awareness, it is the operation involved in remembering the work that promotes a greater degree of reflexivity. As Nelson describes:

I think you could just go around, walk around and soak it up, and it just goes in. I've always thought that works like that are best read in retrospect, so that you have a memory of it that you went through, and those memories are mixed with real memories. And then there's a confusion. I've had people asking me about rooms I never built, because they've remembered them, and



somehow annexed them in their mind at a later date, and so the thing grows.<sup>45</sup>

Provoking such uncertainty about what was part of the installation and what was not is, to an extent, a deliberate tactic, just like the use of doubled rooms and familiar objects which are included purely to disorientate the viewer. But again, this uncertainty is contingent, and is part of the reflexive response which is different for every viewer.

My understanding of reflexivity in this sociological sense is borrowed from Ulrich Beck. Reflexivity in Beck's terms does not simply mean self-reflection, or thinking about one's position, but rather self-confrontation: not simply an increase in knowledge or understanding of the world around us and its systems, but a direct and conscious engagement with the consequences of that world and those systems.<sup>46</sup> In order to fill in the blanks of Nelson's installations, such self-confrontation is a necessary step: the consequences of a particular ideological or economic system being laid out in the form of fictional possibilities, for example.

For Beck, reflexivity is in part a way of dealing with loss: loss of tradition, loss of community, loss of identity, loss of certainty. Although these losses add up to a disembedding of the former social, moral and political certitudes of industrial modernity, Beck does not see this as necessarily being a negative step. Maintaining that the gradual erosion of traditional models of social categories is not replaced simply by a void, Beck argues that in fact the re-embedding of the disintegrated structures of industrial society requires new and potentially positive interdependences, often on a global level.<sup>47</sup> New, creative models of the welfare state, education, labour markets and so on are required to deal with this new, 'reflexive,' modernity. Nelson's work is undoubtedly more suggestive of the loss than its solutions, and although both are essentially sounding the call to reflexivity, Beck's relentless optimism for the future is not reflected in Nelson's dystopian view of the present.

Whilst Nelson's contemporary practice arguably has affinities with certain key surrealist themes, the revolutionary aims of surrealism have given way to a more confrontational and explicitly sociological framework. Instead, Nelson works secure in the knowledge that, as even Beck admits, there will be no revolution.<sup>48</sup> In this contemporary context, surrealism's fascination with the outmoded and destitute objects of the recent past has been supplanted with a certain morbid conjecture at the destitute objects of the dystopian present. The desire to free the unconscious mind has become a desperate urge to confront knowledge of which we are, already, horribly conscious. As one anonymous *Time Out* reviewer put it: "Such gestures are meant to tell us something about ourselves. Too bad it's something we already knew."<sup>49</sup> Arguably, this is what Nelson is striving for. The installations create a system of carefully manipulated paradoxes, in which the viewer's role in both the artwork and the wider world are put into question. Oscillating imperceptibly between the placeless and the rooted, reality and fiction, original and fake, Nelson's work sits comfortably, or rather uncomfortably, within a world of radical uncertainty.





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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Claire Bishop's trajectory of installation art, which begins with surrealist exhibition strategies and ends with Nelson: Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, London, Tate, 2004, 6-47, and also Peter Eleey, 'Ungranted Wishes' from *A Psychic Vacuum*, exhibition catalogue, New York, Creative Time, September 8 – October 28 2007. Sean O'Hagan's article on *A Psychic Vacuum* repeatedly uses the word surreal to describe Nelson's work and methods: see 'Lost in Space,' *The Observer*, September 23 2007, accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/sep/23/art>

<sup>2</sup> For images and a virtual tour of *A Psychic Vacuum*, visit Creative Time's website at <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2007/nelson/>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with the artist, July 6<sup>th</sup> 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the complex political and social history of these markets, see Suzanne Wasserman's excellent article, 'The Good Old Days of Poverty: Merchants and the Battle Over Pushcart Peddling on the Lower East Side,' *Business and Economic History*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Winter 1998: 330-339.

<sup>5</sup> I use the term 'invoke,' borrowed from Nelson, throughout this analysis. Rather than evoking, or calling to mind, he uses it to describe a kind of magical summoning of experience, atmosphere or aura, and it refers to the particular type of encounter he tries to create in his installations. Images of *A Coral Reef* can be viewed on Tate's website at <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/nelson-the-coral-reef-t12859>

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997, 197.

<sup>7</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, 196-201.

<sup>9</sup> Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, London, Sage, 2001, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, xxiv.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *A Secret Service: Art, Compulsion, Concealment*, Hayward Gallery Touring Exhibition in collaboration with the Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle: 17 September – 11 November 2006: Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, 27 January – 15 April 2007: De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea, 5 May – 29 July 2007, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with the artist.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the artist.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the artist.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Peter Eleey, 'Ungranted Wishes.'

<sup>16</sup> Roger Cardinal, Claire Carolin and Richard Grayson, *A Secret Service: Art, Compulsion, Concealment*, London, Hayward Gallery, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> See Kurt Schwitters, 'Ich und meine Ziele,' translated by Eugene Jolas, reprinted in Kurt Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk, Band 5: Manifeste und kritische Prosa*, edited by Friedhelm Lach, Munich, Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005, 423-4.

<sup>18</sup> John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1985, 159.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' (1936) in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zorn, London, Pimlico, 1999 (211-235), 214-5.



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- <sup>20</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 218
- <sup>21</sup> Benjamin 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 218, 224-5
- <sup>22</sup> Letter from Adorno to Benjamin, March 18 1936, *Adorno and Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940*, trans. Henri Lonitz, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999, 127-8.
- <sup>23</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' (1939) in *Illuminations*, 1999 (152-190), 154-5.
- <sup>24</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' 182.
- <sup>25</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' 184.
- <sup>26</sup> Letter from Adorno to Benjamin, February 29 1940, *Correspondence*, 322.
- <sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, translated by Ben Fowkes, London, Penguin, 1976, 125-128.
- <sup>28</sup> Letter from Adorno to Benjamin, February 29 1940, *Correspondence*, 321.
- <sup>29</sup> Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,' 190.
- <sup>30</sup> Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, xxii, 22.
- <sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' (1929) in *Reflections*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott, New York, Schocken Books, 1986 (177-192), 179.
- <sup>32</sup> Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' 181-2.
- <sup>33</sup> Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' 182.
- <sup>34</sup> Interview with the artist.
- <sup>35</sup> See discussion of 'sign objects' in Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, New York, Telos Press, 1981, 38.
- <sup>36</sup> Marx, *Capital*, 165.
- <sup>37</sup> See especially 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming, London, Verso, 1997, 120-167.
- <sup>38</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 38.
- <sup>39</sup> Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 35.
- <sup>40</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1994, 1.
- <sup>41</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1-7.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with the artist.
- <sup>43</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 20, original italics.
- <sup>44</sup> Ralph Rugoff, "The Pumpkin Palace" in Mike Nelson, *Between a Formula and a Code*, London, Koenig Books, 2005, 38.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with the artist.
- <sup>46</sup> Ulrich Beck. Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, Cambridge, Polity Press,



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1994, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Beck, Giddens and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Beck, Giddens and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization*, 2-3.

<sup>49</sup> 'Review: Mike Nelson's "A Psychic Vacuum,"' *Time Out, New York*, Issue 625, September 20-26 2007, accessed at <http://newyork.timeout.com/articles/art/22485/mike-nelson-a-psychic-vacuum>

Clare O'Dowd is a lecturer in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Manchester. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary sculpture, with a particular focus on the relationship between installation art and architecture.



**Please Touch: Dada & Surrealist Objects After the Readymade.** By Janine Mileaf, University Press of New England, Lebanon NH, 2010, 296 pp., ISBN: 978-1-58465-882-5 (hardback)

Taking its inspiration from Marcel Duchamp and Enrico Donati's single-breasted book jacket, provocatively inscribed with the invitation 'prière de toucher,' Janine Mileaf's study explores one of the lesser-addressed senses – touch – in relation to the art objects of dada, surrealism and beyond.<sup>1</sup> As Martin Jay set out to undermine the centrality of vision in Western culture, so Mileaf offers touch as an underappreciated yet fundamental avant-garde concern.<sup>2</sup> Though the readymade has been a longstanding subject of academic discussion, Mileaf shines new light on this concept, demonstrating that although the readymade is associated historically with Duchamp, its legacy concerns much more than the world's most famous urinal. *Please Touch* offers tactility as 'an alternative to a distanced and totalizing visual approach to art,' as well as a 'coalescence of a newly valued intersubjectivity within the avant-garde' (3). Mileaf's work is not only novel for its focus on tactility, but also the depth in which it investigates the readymade's twentieth-century progeny. The book is structured chronologically, beginning with Duchamp and his work's affiliation with Man Ray's readymade objects, branching out into connections with André Breton's found objects, then addressing the wider legacy of the readymade, including Joseph Cornell's sandboxes as alternative realisations of Duchamp's portable, miniaturised conversions of his original works. Mileaf argues that these artists have induced an important and enduring shift towards a tactile approach to art and culture, which culminates in Valie Export's *Touch Cinema* (1968). This final example cements the reciprocity of tactile interactions as a complete breakdown of the traditional art gallery setting.

Having opened her text with the avant-garde catalogue that implicates the viewer in its own tactile mischief, Mileaf takes us directly to the source in a discussion of Duchamp's original readymades. Her novel approach to the mundane objects selected by Duchamp elucidates his interest in taste and corporeality. The emphasis on taste offers an instructive crossover with touch, as the former is dependent on the latter, which adds a complexity to the selection of objects that Duchamp proclaimed to be straightforward and toward which he apparently felt indifferent. Through the breaking down of these claims, Mileaf reveals Duchamp's consistent desire to both represent and critique the commodity and eroticism. Furthermore, she identifies detailed and personal histories behind the readymades that belie their neutrality. Mileaf argues that a full understanding of the implications of readymades such as *Bottlerack* (1914) has been delayed, and through her discussion we revisit and revise their tactile (and gustatory) significance. The author implies that an entirely different analysis of these works is to be had and, in so doing, changes the contemporary view of these art-historical objects. Mileaf later reinforces her opposition to the readymade as disinterested through an account of Duchamp's own interaction with his work, and a discussion of later artists such as Jasper Johns, whose meticulously painted objects such as *Painted Bronze (ale cans)* (1960) wink at their predecessor while undermining Duchamp's best intentions. Indeed, as Mileaf notes, these objects are 'anything but readymade' (191).

Continuing her depiction of the erotic potential of and intentions behind the readymades, Mileaf evokes the violence and reciprocity of physical contact in the work of Man Ray. Again choosing art objects that



are well-represented in the literature of dada and surrealism, Mileaf draws out new elements of corporeality and the senses from these familiar works, defamiliarising and re-sensitising what we might – to use Duchamp’s term – call ‘assisted readymades,’ primarily by insisting on their threatening nature. As she undermines Duchamp’s politics of indifference, so too does Mileaf demonstrate that Man Ray’s use of ‘the language of narrative to attempt to curtail the multiple effects of a work of art’ ultimately fails, since the elaborate stories he constructs around his objects do not succeed in containing them (57). Taking Man Ray’s ephemeral relationship with the avant-garde into consideration, however, we cannot help but wonder if this represents not a failure but a deliberately constructed ambiguity. This is an ambiguity that the book profits from by exploiting the confessional tone taken by Man Ray in his depiction of his own experiences of violence in his *Self-Portrait* (1963) where he describes his sado-masochistic enjoyment of brutality and deviance. Mileaf’s foregrounding of this tension sheds light on a side of this artist that is not normally discussed, which introduces an element of discomfort in the reader: something that is undeniably tactile in its own right.

Extending both her undermining of Duchamp’s indifference and her highlighting of eroticism in the works of Man Ray, Mileaf goes on to underline André Breton’s almost fetishistic process of selecting objects at the *marchés aux puces* in Paris. Through a designation of Breton as ‘tactile flâneur,’ the author connects the creation of surrealist objects to both the context of the flea market and the methods of the ragpicker, which mine the hidden value of the unwanted. Mileaf contributes a romanticised back-story to the ragpicker, adding a layer of sentiment to the apparent chance juxtapositions of surrealist art. Paralleling its contents, the chapter wanders through a history of the tradition of the *objet trouvé*, meandering back to a discussion of the senses while highlighting that ‘Breton did not specify touch’ (95). This momentary disconnect does not, however, detract from the book’s central aim: after all, even the ‘derangement of the senses’ is multisensory.<sup>3</sup> Through the example of Breton, Mileaf instead draws the discussion into the psychological relations between artist and object. Indeed, she comments that Breton himself dismissed the possibility of indifference as claimed by Duchamp. We might further wonder whether this was Breton excusing the failure of his ‘automatic writing’ to ever remain fully spontaneous and unadulterated by the editing hand.

The fourth chapter maintains an interest in the surrealist juxtaposition of objects, this time through the exhibition setting. Through this chapter Mileaf begins to highlight the political ambition of surrealism, articulated in the journal *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930-33). Although the journal presented Parisian colonial exhibitions bluntly – through photographs and brief captions – and without the need for either explanation or ideological input, Mileaf presents several occasions on which the surrealists objected to such exhibitions, including their own event, *L’exposition anti-impérialiste: La vérité sur les colonies* (1931), co-run with the French Communist Party (PCF). The chapter does not shy away from criticism of such events, noting an underlying fetishisation of the exotic within surrealism itself, evidenced by the ownership and later sale of ‘tribal art’ by members of the surrealist movement. Mileaf reconciles these two sides by noting that ‘the apparent selling-out of the movement does not necessarily spell the evacuation of revolutionary and transgressive potential’ (134). This tangential section is brought back round to the book’s theme through implicating the audience in tactile object



relations, particularly through the notion of perceptual deception. Duchamp rejoins her discussion as his *Why not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* (1921) is raised as exemplary of this tactile trickery, both through its deceptive weight and the gustatory consequences of the realisation that the sugar cubes are in fact made of marble.

*Please Touch's* final chapter takes us from the artwork in a room to the artwork in a box, in the form of the sandboxes of Joseph Cornell and the miniature exhibition space of Duchamp's *Box in a Valise* (1966). Mileaf describes the way in which the sandbox works of Cornell manipulate memory, designating in this method 'a tactile notion of interactive art – akin in its force to Breton's theory of objective chance' (160), and highlights their invitation to play with and experience art. The author notes that Cornell draws upon a thematic of the sea, which of course comes with its own multisensory specifications, including smell and taste through the substance of salt, as well as the (imagined) tactility of sand. Mileaf brings the discussion of the surrealist object full-circle as she compares Cornell's sandboxes to Hans/Jean Arp's 'flotsam and jetsam' assemblages, unique in their inclusion 'in the realm of the surrealist object' (167) as both Dada and non-readymade. Accordingly, the author further links Cornell's sandboxes back to Duchamp's *Large Glass* and *Bicycle Wheel* (1915-23; 1913), through their shared mesmerising qualities. Finally, Mileaf discusses Cornell's dossier named *GC 44* (1944-70), a meandering list of objects reminiscent both of Breton's *flâneries* and of Dada cut-up poems. However, despite this shared aesthetic lineage, the way in which this dossier is described weakens its case as a successor of the readymades, particularly through its focus on genuine nostalgia: something that the original readymades eschewed in favour of bold statements of disconnected nonsense and abstraction.

Although Mileaf presents a novel approach to aging works that rejuvenates the subject by re-focusing visual arts through a tactile lens, this re-centring is not always entirely convincing; despite an inevitable dominance of the visual, the works notably call upon *multiple* senses, and a mixed or disrupted sensory experience. Substitution of touch for sight seems just that: a simple switch for one sense by another. Moreover, the focus on touch thins out as the book progresses: the first three chapters respond in a clear and useful manner to the author's aims, but the fourth and fifth begin to drift into other areas, 'losing touch,' as it were, with the central thematic structure. The fourth chapter, dedicated to surrealist politics of exhibition, in particular explores more the ideological aims of the group as a whole and less about the tactile qualities of the composition of their exhibitions. Mileaf states in her opening sentence of the book's conclusion that 'this book has been about the ways in which things make us want to touch them' (189): something that the fourth (and to some extent, the fifth) chapter fail to do. Nonetheless, allowing for tangential sections prevents the text becoming derivative or forced, which may have become the case had this admittedly 'lesser' sense been insisted upon throughout.

Despite this weakness, Mileaf brings out some previously little-considered aspects of twentieth-century art, and the legacy of the readymade in particular. It would have perhaps been more successful as a narrative had more time been spent exploring the Dada/Neo-Dada relationship, particularly the parodic update of artist-object relations in Johns's practice and the painstaking way in which he 'exaggerated the tactility of his "things"' (191), thereby cementing his own link with the original readymades while testing their very definition. However, this is glossed in the conclusion which devotes a lot of space to





Cornell and his sandboxes. Mileaf concludes that Cornell aimed to 'alter the course of the present through a sensual engagement with the past' (188), something that feels a bit flimsy in comparison with the previous examples, and yet which is put on a level with them. The author reasserts the importance of the tactile in the conclusion, declaring that 'touch establishes art as polymorphous and destabilizing yet provocative and reorienting' (194). Yet one cannot help that by this point in the text, it is too late to resuscitate a theme that began with such conviction. Indeed the conclusion itself is more convincing than the final chapter, noting several different ways in which artists associated with dada and surrealism responded to the notion of touch.

As the author points out, touch is a sense that is difficult to define and thus hard to pin down. This book boldly lays out a response to this problematic means of perception, and is to some extent successful. The text is written in a compelling style that responds very well to the playful nature of the medium and its protagonists. It presents information in an accessible manner and remains relevant to contemporary scholarship on this deliberately difficult period. Mileaf's text is an appealing addition to the vast existing literature on surrealism and makes a useful contribution to analyses of the surrealist object, as well as serving as a resource for those seeking new approaches to the art object more widely. *Please Touch* offers interdisciplinary interest through its engagement with a selection of objects, categories and boundaries that themselves elude ready definition: despite its flaws, the book makes an excellent read.

Elizabeth Benjamin  
University of Birmingham

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<sup>1</sup> Duchamp and Donati created a provocative 3D slip cover to the 1947 Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, a single false (rubber and foam) breast in the centre of the catalogue's front cover. For details see for example:

<http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/softsculpture/Default.cfm?IRN=189001&BioArtistIRN=8663&MnuID=3&ViewID=2>

<sup>2</sup> Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought*, Berkeley CA, Los Angeles CA; London: University of California Press, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> André Breton, 'Surrealist Situation of the Object: Situation of the Surrealist Object' (1935). Trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1969, 263.



**Tiny Surrealism: Salvador Dalí and the aesthetics of the Small.** By Roger Rothman, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 2012, 280pp., ISBN 9780803236493

Roger Rothman's first book details Salvador Dalí's intense preoccupation with 'little things,' a heterogeneous category of objects that ranges from ants and flies to the black heads that punctuate noses and the boogers that stick out of them. The premise is that such 'little things' may offer a privileged entrance into Dalí's works and thus contribute to honing our understanding of his relationships to modernism, surrealism, morals and psychoanalysis. And to a large extent they do. Many scholars had already noted Dalí's insistence on pebbles, hairs, debris, but whereas their remarks have been fugitive, presenting them as the 'little things' they are, Rothman sees them through a magnifying glass, turning them into the pivots of Dalí's subversive strategies. He describes the broken amphora on the foreground of *Mediumnistic-Paranoiac Image* (ca. 1934), curiously resting on the short side of its damaged body, as spoiling the calm stillness of the seascape. The small crack pricks, even threatens; and it does so because of its minuteness. Larger things monopolize our attention; they fill up our eyes and our words. Instead, the small appears only at a secondary moment, enacting a reflection that has the power to undo and subvert the general meaning of the picture. You can probably already guess how Dalí, a provocative spirit, took advantage of the destabilizing power of his 'little things' and Rothman convincingly identifies the works and texts through which he explored such potential. In 1935 Dalí published an article on a photograph of three shopkeepers, but rather than focusing on the figures he concentrated on a minuscule white spool that had fallen out of the store, down the sidewalk, ending at the bottom of the picture. Dalí knows his emphasis is original. He stresses it with self-aggrandizing drama, guiding the reader's gaze with exaggerated precision ('divert your eyes away from the hypnotizing centre ... direct them with caution towards its lower corner'). Introduced by such fanfare, the bobbin becomes a 'cosmic' constellation of multiple analogies and opposite concepts, in Dalí's characteristically open-ended way with meaning. It is on readings such as this one that Rothman constructs his argument. Section after section, his book takes up some traits of the strategies he uncovers. Quietly, it changes the way we perceive Dalí.

The chronological span of the book is conventional, ranging from the mid-twenties to Dalí's break with the surrealists in the late thirties. Yet Rothman justifies it by presenting it as the long formative period in Dalí's relationship to 'little things.' Such focus is thus framed by the publication of the autobiographical *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí* (1942), to which Rothman often returns, and centres around the *Persistence of Memory* (1931), which the book reproduces at the opening of every chapter, together with an epigraphic description of each of the different 'little things' it depicts. The idea duplicates the website MoMA put up in 2008 for its 'Dalí: Painting and Film' show in which its sections need to be accessed through the elements of Dalí's *The First Days of Spring* (1929).<sup>1</sup> Like the explanatory pop-ups of the website, each of Rothman's succinct commentaries is tailored to the theme of the ensuing chapter, thus revealing the contrivance of the operation.

After the first chapter, which illustrates the biographical ground from which Dalí's fascination for 'little things' sprouted, Rothman dedicates each of the other five to one of Dalí's prevailing concerns—paranoia, parasitism, superficiality, submission and anachronism. The succession is roughly chronological and the 'little things' compare in all of them, even if they take up quite different roles.



Sometimes, as in chapter three, they are the leading agents in Dalí's subversive strategy: not only parasites tormenting flaccid creatures, but also paragons for his shrinking panels, splinters in the side of art history. On other occasions, however, their role is more elusive: supplements for reflections that depart from the realm of the small.

Overall, Rothman's considerations expand on the traditional association of 'little things' with 'putrefaction,' which is how scholars such as Felix Fanés have interpreted the buzzing activity of Dalí's ants and flies.<sup>2</sup> But then this book takes some risks. The selection of the art works, which leaves out many important ones, is bold. Within the seventy-eight crisp, large illustrations there is no *The Enigma of William Tell*, no *Metamorphosis of Narcissus*, no mention of *L'Age d'Or*, no surrealist object. *Tiny Surrealism* is then more an update of (a parasite on) the scholarly literature - it makes no claim to comprehensiveness - and Rothman is explicit in his reverence to Dalí scholars, especially Dawn Ades. This is perhaps why we can excuse him for portraying Dalí as uniquely preoccupied with painting. (The book reproduces only one of Dalí's drawing, one print, a bunch of stills from *A Chien Andalou*, and a couple of illustrations of Dalí's articles.)

The emphasis on the pictorial is programmatic. In his 2007 article 'Dalí's inauthenticity,' Rothman had already lamented that scholarship tends to focus on the interpretation of Dalí's symbols and overlook his painting technique. But then his account does not overcome such a shortcoming. Rothman celebrates Dalí's mastery in combining oils, solvents, varnishes and recalls his exacting application of paint. Yet, after finishing the book I did not know much about how Dalí actually worked.

Rothman's goal is less documentary than theoretical. He tries to make Dalí's oeuvre resonate with some discursive strings of contemporary interpretative categories, from today's much-discussed anachronism to Bill Brown's thing theory. Gilles Deleuze's *phantasmata* offer Rothman the platform for an original reading of Dalí's *The Rotting Donkey* as a catalog of simulacra, rather than an expression of paranoia. The book also engages with ideas by Geoffrey Hartman, David Lomas, and especially Kaja Silverman. Yet such a vigorous critical pull occasionally propels the 'little things' out of sight. I'm thinking of chapter five, in which Rothman argues that Dalí developed a distinctive take on sadism, masochism and female identification that set him apart from the other surrealists. There, the 'little things' are squeezed to the margins.

The expression 'little things' (an improvement on Finkelstein's 'small things' that only hair-splitters would probably relish) is taken from Dalí's 1927 'Poema de les cosetes.'<sup>3</sup> Rothman, however, stretches the expression to blanket all of Dalí's minutiae, hammering on the label more insistently than I am doing in this review. The final impression, bolstered by the index where 'ants,' 'flies,' 'sea urchins' are merged under the 'little things' entry, is that Dalí related to them all in the same way. And as each chapter covers a specific temporal segment, the book produces the perhaps involuntary argument that Dalí's relationship with his 'little things' transformed over time in a somewhat uniform way.

Only partially does Rothman overcome such approach by providing an alternative interpretation of an artwork that he discussed before. His rapid prose, which quickly turns corners, certainly serves to challenge the rigid structure of the book. Yet, it also covers a lot of material. Personally, I felt the need



for longer engagements with the images and the texts to deepen many of Rothman's fascinating ideas. I also felt that some interpretations needed more reasoning. I'm not convinced, for instance, that the classical amphora spoils anything in *Mediumnistic-Paranoiac Image*: its conventional associations with the Mediterranean Sea and Roman ships make it an obvious prop for an out-of-time seashore.

I also wonder whether the issue of scale could have been addressed more thoroughly, especially since the book is built on its intrinsic paradox. Although Rothman focuses on Dalí's 'little things,' page after page they loom larger and larger. It is an indication of the success of Rothman's argument that they become so important, but then their magnification is hardly addressed. Such a discussion would have been useful especially since scholars stress that scaling is one of Dalí's crucial operations. The obviously out-of-proportion elements in his paintings - the enormous grasshoppers, the diminutive figurines, too small even when they are in the background, the deformed bodies, with different butt cheeks, whose hands do not match the length of their arms - made Finkelstein recognize that it is through size that Dalí generated new relationships and inverted hierarchies.

Dalí himself elaborated on such a goal, appreciating that his texts operate like deforming lenses. By expanding on details at length while omitting to address what is at the centre of a picture, they transform the meanings of all the elements, entering in a dialectical relationship to the painting. Dalí's texts are indeed crucial not for unearthing the meanings of his artworks, but for contributing to their construction of an alternative, oneiric world, in which contradictions can co-exist. Rothman is well aware that Dalí studied destabilizing powers of scale and provides many examples, such as how the miniature *Portrait of Gala* is monumental whereas *The Great Masturbator* 'is revealed to be a bloated weakling,' how the expression 'anti-geodesic hair' collapses the distance between the intimate and the global, and how Dalí employed the small format to depict 'vast expanses of empty space.' Through these, as well as other cases, he deliberately continues the thinking of Dalí, who once stated that Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* (c1535-1541) was not necessarily greater than Vermeer's much-smaller *Lacemaker* (1669-1670). Yet, inversions such as this one also cast doubts over whether we are still in the presence of 'little things.'

If the power of Dalí's 'little things' remains intact it is because they were set against an equally powerful context that codified them as such. Dalí's contemporaries, even the surrealists, made works that tended to be larger, sometimes much larger. Without such an artistic landscape, Dalí would not find somewhere to hang his tiny, parasitic miniatures. For this reason it would have been useful for Rothman to include and assess the size of some comparative paintings. The copyright fees for twenty-century artworks are often prohibitive, but the book suffers from reproducing only a very small amount of contemporary paintings (two in total, by Miró and de Chirico, plus a photograph by Bellmer and a few photos of works by Dalí and Guimard). Furthermore, Dalí's tiny works—sometimes postcard-small, sometimes even credit-card small—would not be so disruptive unless they did not jar with human scale. Dalí forced his audience to bend their necks, strain their eyes, and draw closer to his works, insouciant of the conventional distance required by galleries and of the general underpinnings that link size and status. It would have been useful to see Rothman engage more directly with these issues, especially as they also informed much of the phenomenological reflections on the role of the body and of cultural



experience, spurred by Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) and Edmund Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* (1931).

Omitting to engage with the scale of the contemporary artistic landscape (of the medium of painting per se) and of the human body deprives readers of one explanation as to why Dalí's tiny works were so groundbreaking. The shortcoming, however, is not so much Rothman's, but of art history as a discipline, which has not developed a set of sophisticated conceptual tools to deal with the issues of scale. There is a problem of language. 'Scale' and 'size' get often mixed up, as Yve-Alain Bois pointed out.<sup>4</sup> Yet such a deficiency has cascaded into other problems of more practical nature. Take the size of the illustrations of *Tiny Surrealism*. As in the case of medieval illuminations, the reproductions sometimes magnify the artworks. The portraits of Gala (figs 29-30), the smallest of Dalí's paintings at roughly 8.5 x 6.5 cm, are actually enlargements. The homogenizing scale of the photographs, however, conceals this peculiarity, making them appear in the same category as Dalí's square-metre *Birth of Liquid Desires* (1931-32). Peter Sutton has revealed how to correct such shortcomings, by reproducing James Thrall Soby's photograph of the 1933 Wadsworth Atheneum show in which *The Persistence of Memory* hangs between much larger works by Gérôme and Kandinsky.<sup>5</sup> Another way would be to photograph the original frame of *Paranoiac-Astral Image*, a sizable wooden box that makes the picture float against a burgundy cloth backing.

Although Dalí's contemporary artistic landscape is mostly evoked through words rather than images, the book argues at length about his relationship to artists of the past. This is perhaps one of the major strengths of *Tiny Surrealism*. Dalí's remarkable art historical knowledge is well known, as is his fondness for Vermeer and Millet. Yet, this book adds to our understanding by presenting Dalí also as a scrupulous student of Ernest Maissonier's 'academic finesse' and Paolo Uccello. Uccello in particular, whom Julius von Schlosser in the 1930s defined as the Renaissance 'semi-artist,' becomes paradigmatic of how Dalí's attention to the marginal shaped also his taste and, overall, the construction of his public persona, but only until he decided to move to the United States and break with the surrealists.<sup>6</sup> As Rothman reminds us, in his autobiography Dalí announced his metamorphosis from master of subversion to peer of the old masters. His work would then engage with Leonardo, Velázquez and Raphael, recasting his once much-loved 'small things' into pictorial trivialities.

Emanuele Lugli  
University of York



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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2008/dali/dali.html>

<sup>2</sup> Felix Fanés, *Salvador Dalí. The Construction of the Image 1925-1930*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press 2007, 68-73.

<sup>3</sup> Haim Finkelstein, *Salvador Dalí's Art and Writing, 1927-1942*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 41. See also Willard Bohn, *Encounters: Surrealist Responses to Film, Art, Poetry and Architecture*, Cranbury, Associated University Presses, 2005, 116-17.

<sup>4</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, MA, and London, The MIT Press, 1990, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Peter C. Sutton 'Artificial Magic' in *Dalí's Optical Illusions*, ed. by Dawn Ades, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in association with New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2000, 30-37.

<sup>6</sup> Julius von Schlosser, *Künstlerprobleme der Frührenaissance*, 3 Vol, Vienna, Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1929-3), Vol. 2 (1933).





**Surrealist Ghostliness.** By Katharine Conley, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 2013, 299 pp., 50 b. & w. illus., £37.00, ISBN: 978-0-8032-2659-3

*...perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I 'haunt.' I must admit that this last word is misleading ... Such a word means much more than it says, makes me, still alive, play a ghostly part...*

– André Breton, *Nadja* 1928<sup>1</sup>

The significance of Breton's introduction to his surrealist novel *Nadja* has mystified reams of translators and commentators since its first publication in 1928. As a modern enchantment and eerie romance it has long bewitched its readers, but a new study shows that the primacy of its message has only recently been received. In *Surrealist Ghostliness* we witness Katharine Conley channelling the Bretonian sense of self-haunting in order to reveal another thematic facet of the surrealist movement's epistemological project. Through eight carefully crafted chapters, in which Conley appears to raid the cabinets of the surrealist imagination (bell jars, Egyptian tombs, museum vitrines, pocket matter, magical talismans and cartographic palimpsests, among many others), a convincing thesis emerges.

The philosophical underpinnings are subtle; Derrida's 'archive fever' and Benjamin's critique of 'aura' are used only when necessary. Salvador Dalí's role is also minor; his writing on art nouveau enabling Brassai's *Involuntary Sculptures* (1933) to come to the fore. The critical strength of *Surrealist Ghostliness* lies in its shrewd elicitation of fringe figures of the movement (Claude Cahun, Lee Miller and Dorothea Tanning), as well as spirited incarnations of its legacies (Francesca Woodman, Pierre Alechinsky and Susan Hiller). For Conley, ghostliness has become a 'phenomenon' of coalescence (15), 'a keystone idea [that] unifies a movement with disparate artistic practices' (19), although it is interesting to note that the majority of surrealist works identified as part of this creative taxonomy are photographs, with five out of the eight chapters focusing on photographers (Man Ray, Miller, Cahun, Woodman and Brassai). While the author notes the transition of her own research interests from poetry and other literary texts towards a greater emphasis on visual material culture, the overall concerns are intermedial and 'necessarily double' (xi). Moreover, there is duality in the temporal dimension of this long-term ghostly enterprise which is both retrospective (i.e. historical) and anticipatory (i.e. contemporary).<sup>2</sup> Conley's emphasis on the optical illusion of anamorphosis functions as an illuminating 'prism' (xiv) with which to re-read the movement.<sup>3</sup> Hans Holbein's well-known portrait *The Ambassadors* (1533) is positioned as an important ancestor to surrealism's doubling of realities due to its inclusion of the iconic, if perplexing, *vanitas* image of an anamorphic skull emblazoned across its foreground. Eighteenth century gothic literature is also highlighted, by Conley, as a primary source in the shaping of surrealism's narrative wing, while the spiritualist movement is surprisingly found to have been repressed in surrealists' definitions of automatism (5). The latter finding is important, and will likely prompt further debate around the complex reception of Theosophy in avant-garde movements during the 1920s.



*Surrealist Ghostliness* is at its most persuasive when reflecting on women's participation in surrealism. For someone who considered life 'more perilous than sinful,' Dorothea Tanning's practice makes for a necessary case study when dwelling on all things ghostly.<sup>4</sup> One of several indispensable insights is the attention Conley devotes to Tanning's novel *Abyss* (1977), subsequently edited and extended as *Chasm: A Weekend* (2004), in reading the 'gothic heroines' (122) of Tanning's visual narratives. In speaking the desires of poltergeist child-women, namely the prophetic protagonist Destina Meridian, Conley narrates related figures in Tanning's prints and paintings, such as the wispy ghost-girl skirting the castle ramparts in the tiny canvas *A Mrs Radcliffe Called Today* (1944). Tanning's soft sculptures, including the anthropomorphic sofa *Rainy Day Canapé* (1970) and the voodoo-like *Pincushion to Serve as a Fetish* (1979), are also given pivotal cameos in terms of the inanimate made animate. What's more, Tanning's swirling nudes of the 1960s onwards may be effectively reassessed under this choreographic light – the 'whirling' (122), 'twirling' (139) motion that Conley traces all over Tanning's oeuvre is compelling, culminating in a 'rapturous pirouette' (142) that feminises but ultimately emancipates the figure of the domestic ghost. Another focal point is the interpretation of Lee Miller's *From the Top of the Great Pyramid* (ca. 1937), a photograph capturing the prism-like shadow of the ancient monument across a deserted, archaeological village (113). The image encapsulates an earlier observation concerning surrealism's paradigmatic shift from psychoanalysis as a methodology towards an increased interest in the social science of ethnography during the 1930s. Indeed, this is the very image that consolidated the notion of 'surrealist ghostliness' for Conley. Here everything becomes self-reflexive; the looming ghost of a gigantic tomb, caught at a particular angle, engulfs the surrounding landscape, prefiguring the fate of all who remain.

Where Breton was concerned that the ghost was 'the finite representation of a torment that may be eternal,' Conley's venture feels more optimistic in spirit.<sup>5</sup> Hers is an endeavour more secular than sacred, and she is not moved to reconsider violent deaths, the melancholy of mourning nor the abjection of the corpse that have already been unearthed elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Rather, this particular rendering of surrealism-at-the-vestiges effectively captures a less immediately graspable perspective on the movement, but one which surely affects us all: the ineffable question of our own mortality. It is imperative that studies of surrealism demonstrate such contemporary relevance in the aftermath of an approach which continues to haunt us.

Catriona McAra

<sup>1</sup> André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Penguin Books, 1999, 11.

<sup>2</sup> See also Katharine Conley, 'Anamorphic Love: The Surrealist Poetry of Desire' in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, ed. Jennifer Mundy, London: Tate Publishing, 2001, 101-118.

<sup>3</sup> The relationship between surrealism and optical devices is further explored in Marion Endt's review of the Werner Nekes exhibition *Eyes, Lies and Illusions* in *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 3, Spring, 2005.



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<sup>4</sup> Dorothea Tanning, *Hail, Delirium! A Catalogue Raisonné of the Artist's Illustrated Books and Prints, 1942-1991*, ed. Roberta Waddell, New York: The New York Public Library, 1992, 89.

<sup>5</sup> Breton, *Nadja*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Hal Foster, 'Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,' *October*, vol. 78, Autumn, 1996, 106-124.



**Mathematics in 20th Century Literature & Art.** By Robert Tubbs, John Hopkins Press, Baltimore 2014, 184 pp., ISBN: 9781421413808 (184 pages, Paperback £19.50, 9 halftones, 10 line drawings) (paperback)

SciArt, the trendy portmanteau announcing all things vaguely connected to science and art, has recently spawned a steady stream of writing, conferences and events. From CERN's (The European Organisation for Nuclear Research) artist in residency programme, Collide@CERN, to the journal *SciArt in America*, specific laboratories such as SymbioticA to numerous commercial galleries, SciArt is the hottest biscuit in town, at least for those parts of the world with enough time on their hands for biscuits. Connected to this movement are popular science books such as Stephen Wilson's *Science + Art* and Arthur I Miller's *Colliding Worlds* and, most recently, Robert Tubbs' slightly more academically marketed volume on mathematics and art in the last century.<sup>1</sup> Making the case for science as art and art as science the scholarly field of SciArt is usually promoted by neither scientists nor artists, but rather a slim field of enablers with expertise in both fields. Robert Tubbs, an associate professor of mathematics at the University of Colorado-Boulder, is both within and outside the boundaries of SciArt, doing provocative boundary work in his role as educator, scientist and art writer. A scientist passionate about art, he has written on these subjects before, and *Mathematics in 20th Century Literature & Art* offers the reader a comprehensive overview of historical examples of artists who turned to abstract scientific ideas.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on art theory, art history and artworks Tubbs utilises his skill for explaining complex mathematical ideas to the lay reader, by providing us with analysis of art throughout the century. The book defies the mythology of the Two Cultures debate, actively smashing together two subjects. In a sense the whole book depends on the Western education system's tendency to keep the arts and sciences apart, although artists and scientists have always worked together. Tubbs fuses these ideas tightly together. It is a challenging book full of theory and mathematics, artists and artworks, researched and conveyed by a passionate science educator. This is a topic that should interest a slim but quickly expanding intersection of the fields of art and science, opening up a new way of analysing art that engages with science. The SciArt junkies will of course find this essential reading as it is one of the first serious attempts to include mathematics in the mix.

Tubbs offers a series of examples of art that deals in the language of mathematics, although it is not quite clear what criteria he uses to select these examples. However, apart from enjoying the intriguing analysis of specific artworks the reader is left wondering how much is Tubbs' own argument, given the extent to which the discussion relies on art theorists. The conclusion is a case in point as Tubbs lets Arthur Danto's famous 'Art World' essay provide the final analysis, without providing much new thinking on the subject.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, the choice of having a 'Looking Ahead' foreshadowing paragraph in all the chapters reveals a problem of structure. In general there is a lot of jumping back and forth in this book, which some readers might find irritating.

As for the examples Tubbs uses it is perhaps the lack of women that is most striking. There are virtually no women in this book, apart from the many mentions of Linda Dalrymple Henderson, and one is left wondering, again, about the rationale informing the selection of examples. Were only white men in the



twentieth-century interested in mathematics and art? Is Tubbs suggesting that women artists are not interested in mathematics or did he simply forget them?

Without suggesting that only art historians can write valid books on art, *Mathematics* does suffer from its eager engagement with ideas that have already been widely rehearsed in the field. Andrew Pickering, Henderson and countless historians of science and art are amongst the scholars who have sparked a new interest in critically examining the landscapes between art and science. Although Tubbs engages with their ideas he does not offer much new material. Henderson's essay on the fourth dimension would still be more essential reading for someone examining the intersections of mathematics and art than Tubbs' rendering of her argument. However, the examples and close mathematical reading Tubbs provides of his examples are where the book really shines, and hint at a new way for scientists to utilise their skills in relation to art works. Again, although this approach is novel and intriguing, art history courses already examine these ideas and I would assume that there are only so many mathematicians who have a practical need for the tools of mathematical art reading that Tubbs produces here. Nevertheless, the ten chapters do offer an interesting taster of how to approach this intersection of creative work.

Each of Tubbs' ten chapters is dedicated to several artists and mathematical principles. The book is perhaps best digested as a series of short, complex essays. In the first chapter surrealism is investigated through geometry and mathematical imagery, with a focus on Man Ray and flat surfaces. The second chapter is dedicated to 'Objects, Axioms and Constraints,' which Tubbs does a good job of explaining but he does not succeed in conveying his passion for mathematics to the reader. If one comes to this book completely new to mathematics, so much time is spent rereading and trying to understand the complexity of the mathematics, that there is little energy left for the art. Arguing for a link between artists such as M.C. Escher, Duchamp and Piet Mondrian's and mathematics is done through long discussions of the latter. In the third chapter Tubbs makes a case for the already well-established link between abstraction in the arts and abstract numbers, especially as regards Mondrian. I fail to see how anything new is being presented here, but appreciate the author's attempt to retell the story from a mathematician's point of view. Chapter four investigates the Möbius strip, infinite numbers and literature. Again, Tubbs mixes mathematical formula with discussion of artistic style, concluding in an interesting connection that might convince some readers and confuse others. Chapter five is one of the strongest, introducing Henderson's important thesis and the fascinating story of the fourth dimension, a mystical field many artists of the mid-twentieth century believed in and were inspired by. Leaning heavily on Henderson's thesis in *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Tubbs echoes her argument that the concepts of the curved spaces of non-Euclidean geometry and the fourth dimension of space were central to the artists and art of the twentieth-century.<sup>4</sup> In chapter six the text takes a turn for the technical again, with a focus on 'Paths, Graphs and Texts,' chapter seven interrogates poetry with theorems and permutations, and in chapter eight Tubbs is busy arguing for the connections between numbers and meaning. In chapter nine randomness, Dada and perfect numbers are tied together. The final chapter examines Danto's 'Artworld' text. At times Tubbs' insight on art and



mathematics is fascinating, and one wishes perhaps that he would concentrate on fewer topics in more detail, especially when it comes to his tendency to generalise about styles of art. I must admit that a lot of the mathematics failed to convince me, because I simply did not understand the material. This is not solely the author's fault, but rather the problem of the distance between the arts and sciences. Nevertheless, Tubbs makes a brave attempt to persuade the reader that this connection matters because it has fostered great art and science for decades.

So who is this book for? Tubbs offers it up to art historians and theorists, in addition to mathematicians. I fear the former would find this old news, but perhaps the field of mathematics would delight in this volume that puts it centre stage. Explaining some of the most canonical male artists of the last century's creativity in terms of science at times proffers an essentialist reading of art that many art historians would perhaps take issue with ideologically. Tubbs emerges as a Brian Cox of physics, passionately arguing for the fascinating field he is situated in. Unfortunately this creates a hierarchy within the book, where the main story is about mathematics inspiring artists, rather than exploring multilateral interconnections. The problem with this type of missionary work is that the author cannot convince those that simply do not see the excitement in the field that he sees. A reader who cares more for the social, cultural or political aspects of art and creativity, would, I fear, give up on this book quite early. There are few or no readings that address questions of social, political and cultural significance here, nor any claims as to why this topic should be important for our respective fields. It is nevertheless essential reading for anyone engaging with SciArt, as much for its weaknesses as its strengths. Tubbs has provided a new way of examining art, inspired by Henderson, the surrealists, Danto, Marcel Duchamp, amongst others, but it is when the author provides insight into the mathematical ideas within particular artworks that we are really treated to new material. Mathematical art history might not be the future of either maths or art, but Tubbs' book is a refreshing, at times both naïve and fascinating, effort in true interdisciplinarity. Thus it is a volume well worth picking up, if you can live with the absence of women of course.

Camilla Mork Rostvik  
PhD candidate  
Art History/Science History  
University of Manchester

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Wilson, *Art +Science, How scientific research and technological innovation are becoming key to 21<sup>st</sup> century aesthetics*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2010; Arthur I. Miller, *Colliding Worlds, How Cutting-Edge Science is Redefining Contemporary Art*, London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Tubbs, *What Is a Number?: Mathematical Concepts and Their Origins*, Baltimore, John Hopkins, 2008;

<sup>3</sup> Arthur Danto, 'The Art World,' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, Issue 19, American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Sixty-First Annual Meeting, 1964, 571-584.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*, Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, first published 1983.





**Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost.** By Melanie Nicholson, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2013, 280p, ISBN: 9781137287793

*Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost* studies the afterlife of Surrealism in Latin America after the movement ended in France with the death of André Breton in 1966. Melanie Nicholson's book is the first scholarly work to succeed in examining how the European paradigm of surrealism travelled to Latin America, and how it was adapted and transformed in different national contexts, specifically Argentina, Chile, Peru and Mexico. Nicholson convincingly demonstrates that 'because surrealism was at the same time an aesthetic and an attitude towards life, it managed to adapt itself surprisingly well in new habitats' (137). This is a study in depth and in breadth, which identifies the many and multiple Latin American generations of writers, poets and artists, whose creative imagination was either influenced or stimulated by surrealist techniques to question the reality of their world.

Part 1 provides an overview of the history and major concepts of surrealism in both Europe and Latin America. The metaphor of the corpse and its afterlife provide the guiding thread with which Nicholson follows the creation and the evolution of surrealism until the Second World War. Notions of montage, juxtaposition, cadavre exquis, automatic writing and oneiric images are examined, first within the French group, and eventually from the perspective of several Latin American *vanguardista* authors with postcolonial sensibilities. After providing a brief history of Breton's movement, from its birth from the ashes of Dada in the 1920s, to Breton's First Manifesto (1924), Nicholson shows how the discovery of psychoanalysis as a vehicle for unlocking the repressed self was key to the evolution of the movement. She also highlights how the Second Manifesto, (1929), marks the internal conflict in the movement generated by Breton's political commitment to the communist party. Nicholson argues against Valentín Fernández's article 'The Failure of Surrealism in Latin America' (2002), by suggesting that Surrealism played a significant role in the development of poetry in Latin America.<sup>1</sup> She identifies two different phases, firstly the period of assimilation of French surrealism by Latin American literary groups from 1928 to 1950, which she explores in Part 2, and secondly, a later period of creative adaptation where Latin American authors distanced themselves from Breton's grip, from 1950 to 1980. Drawing on Breton's metaphor of the Communicating Vessels which presents dream and reality as communicating fluids, Nicholson shows how surrealism functioned as a precursor to magical realism, focusing on the works of Octavio Paz, Cesar Vallejo, Miguel Angel Asturias, and Alejo Carpentier.

Part 2 of *Searching for Breton's Ghost* succeeds remarkably in tracing back entire generations of surrealist groups, as well as networks of influences and encounters across Argentina, Peru, Chile and Mexico. Focusing on the emergence of surrealist groups in Latin American literature from the 1920s to the 1950s, she starts with Aldo Pellegrini's group in Buenos Aires and the two issues of the journal *Que* published in 1938 and 1939. For Nicholson, *Que* was a collective attempt of young men to assert the value of language, not as a tool for communication, but as the mirror of the self, and insofar as it followed a psychoanalytical perspective, *Que* resonated with Breton's Manifestoes. The title *Que*, deprived of the interrogative accent, pointed at the interrogative project of the review, marking its freedom from the



grammatical and linguistic norms that, it argued, limited the meaning of life. In this part, Nicholson provides a convincing close reading of the poem 'Ver' by Adolfo Pellegrini (1952). The study eventually draws attention to Pablo Neruda's group *Mandrágora* and the creation of *poesía negra* (black poetry in the sense of occult poetry) as a specific form of response to Breton's surrealism. Nicholson locates the emergence of *Mandrágora* after the early influence of surrealism in Chile on Huidobro's *creacionista* vanguard movement, which was nonetheless sceptical towards Bretonian surrealism and automatic writing. Publishing the work of a small group in Santiago who fully embraced French surrealism, the seven issues of *Mandrágora* (1938-1943) were characterised by an explicit anti-fascist commitment but also by a strong anti-Neruda rhetoric, since the poet represented the literary establishment. The mandrake plant was very symbolic as well: as a poisonous plant used in magic rituals, with hallucinogenic properties, it could unleash the occult forces of language (*poesía negra*). Nicholson eventually moves her compass towards Peru, focussing on the great political philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui and his journal *Amauta* - meaning 'wise man' in quechua - which contributed to renewing Peruvian intellectual life in the 1930s. Nicholson reminds us that Mariátegui promoted 'lo nuevo' as much as he encouraged the revaluation of Peru's indigenous culture. In the light of the review, some surrealist poets emerged such as Xavier Abril, Cesar Moro and Emilio Adolfo Westphalen. Cesar Vallejo, the most prominent Peruvian poet at the time, had a more ambivalent attitude towards surrealist techniques, which he rejected on the basis that Breton and the Parisian group failed to find valid answers to the human suffering the poet had witnessed in Peru, and across Europe and the Soviet Union. Vallejo's *Autopsia del Superrealismo* in 1930 argued against Breton, asserting that there cannot be any spiritual liberation if there is not, first and foremost, a social and material revolution. Finally, Nicholson examines the two faces of surrealism in Mexico: on one hand, the international surrealists who visited or relocated in Mexico, that is to say non Mexicans who found surrealism in Mexico's history, landscape, colours and indigenous people; on the other hand, Mexico's response to surrealism. Nicholson argues that while the impact of surrealism on Mexican writers was minimal, the impact of Mexico on European surrealism was enormous. She first examines the works of the two main Mexican poets influenced by surrealism: Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, and his *Segundo Sueño* which was modelled on Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*; and Xavier Villaurrutia, and his poem *Nostalgia de la muerte* (1938), in particular. The last part of this section focuses on Antonin Artaud's travels in Mexico in 1936 and his ethnographic surrealism in 'Voyage to the land of the Tarahumaras'; secondly on Breton's visit to Mexico in 1938, his fascination for Mexican everyday life infused with surrealism, and the international exhibition of surrealism that took place in Mexico city in 1940, directed by Cesar Moro and Wolfgang Paalen. Finally, Nicholson examines the surrealist approach and work of the two war exiles in Mexico, Benjamin Péret and Wolfgang Paalen.

Part 3 of the book studies the emergence of a more mature Latin American surrealism from 1950 to 1980 in Argentina, Chile, Peru and Mexico. In Argentina, a new surrealist group gathered around Aldo Pellegrini. Nicholson's argument is that Argentine surrealism did not die in the 1930s but went into a state of dormancy. The generation of the 1940s, marked by the Second World War, was looking for new forms of freedom through poetic creation, and young poets such as Enrique Molina, Francisco



Madriaga, Julio Llinás and Carlos Latorre gathered around the older Pellegrini. Nicholson makes a remarkable contribution to the intellectual history of Latin America by examining the several journals that emerged out of their encounter. The review *Ciclo: arte, literatura y pensamientos modernos* (1948/1949) was co-directed by Elias Piterberg, who rejected French surrealism, while the journal *A partir de cero: revista de poesía y antipoesía* (1952/1956), directed by Enrique Molina, invited many contributors such as Breton, Artaud, Leonora Carrington, and Goeriges Schehadé. *A partir de cero* stood out for its visual content, humorous and ironic drawings and explicit homages to Lautréamont and Rimbaud; clearly in line with French Surrealism; it proclaimed poetry and art to be the way to 'refuse the gloomy conditions of our existence' (145). Pellegrini also published four issues of the journal *Letra y línea: revista de cultura contemporánea* from 1953 to 1954, whose content was more obviously polemical, praising the rupture of cultural conformity and rejecting the blind reverence for the Spanish literary canon and tradition. Lastly, *Boa: cuadernos internacionales de documentación sobre la poesía y el arte de la vanguardia* (1958/1960) was directed by Julio Llinás; it was the most international of all the journals and featured work by painters from Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, France, Italy, Mexico, Poland and Portugal. Nicholson eventually focuses on three major Argentine poets who embraced and brought new blood to surrealism in Latin America: Enrique Molina, Olga Orozco and Alejandra Pizarnik. The search for Breton's ghost then moves to Chile, with the figure of Gonzalo Rojas on the one hand, who embraced lyric, metaphysical and universalising poetry; and the poet Nicanor Parra, on the other hand, whose ironic anti-poetry was politically and socially committed. Nicholson provides us with a very rich and dense analysis of Rojas as *Mandragora's* prodigal son, and with a close analysis of the 1966 poem 'A la salud de André Breton,' an elegy divided into three sections in which the narrative voice refers to Breton in the third person, apostrophises him in the second person and allows him a first-person direct speech as well. The eventual examination of Nicanor Parra as a highly unconventional poet who was interested to some extent in surrealism is another highlight of the book. Nicholson shows that Parra had ambivalent feelings towards surrealism. Antipoetry (antipoesía) is a term coined by Parra as his own way to respond to the revolutionary and linguistic dimension of surrealism. It is close to concrete poetry; words do not perform harmonious rhymes but instead blur the relationships between reality, dream, fantasy and nightmare. Nicholson explores the relationship between antipoetry and surrealism, firstly through the presence of a narrative and dramatic line - the antipoet as a character with a mythic charge, able to witness life around him in all its absurdity; secondly, through the effort towards democratising the poetic creation, following Lautréamont's aphorism that 'Poetry should be made by all.' The last chapter is entirely devoted to Octavio Paz whose work defined the logos as endowed with the magical power to transform reality. After referring to the extensive critical works on the influence of surrealism in Octavio Paz's work, such as Jason Wilson (1979), Evodio Escalante (1997) and Olivia Macel Edelman (2008), Nicholson develops her own approach to Paz's life and work as a 'global' intellectual firmly rooted in its *mexicanidad*.<sup>2</sup> She highlights his journal *Taller* (1938 to 1941) which redefined the social and political role of poetry without publishing any texts from the French surrealists and with a very ambivalent stand towards surrealism. Surrealist techniques were nevertheless key to Paz's exploration of the relationship between poetry and history, which was particularly concerned with the meanings of pre-Columbian history for modern Mexico, as his 1974



essay 'Sobre el surrealismo hispanoamericano: El fin de las habladurías' showed. The use of the present perfect tense in the litany (*surrealismo ha sido...*) proves that, in Paz's view, while the movement belongs to the past, it is nevertheless still valid in the present. Nicholson's thesis is that Paz maintained a lifelong fascination with the connection between poetry and magic, and surrealism represented the modern current of thought that allowed him to bring this connection to light.

*Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost* makes a prominent contribution to Latin American intellectual history and draws unprecedented parallels and connections between multiple surrealist networks across the 20th century in Latin America. The book is a compelling demonstration that Latin America responded to surrealism in multiple forms and that surrealism was indeed an attitude towards life.

Fabienne Viala,  
Department of Hispanic Studies,  
Director of the Yesu Persaud Centre for Caribbean Studies  
University of Warwick

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<sup>1</sup> Valentín Ferdinán, 'El fracaso del surrealismo en América Latina', in *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, Año 28, no. 55, 2002, 73-111.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Wilson, 'Coda: Spanish American Surrealist Poetry,' *Companion to Spanish Surrealism*. Ed. Robert Havard. Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer-Tamesis, 2004, 253-76; Evodio Escalante, 'La vanguardia requisada,' *Fractal* 2, no. 4, January-March 1997, 67-87, <http://www.mxfractal.org/F4escala.html>; Olivia Maciel Edelman, *Surrealismo en la poesía de Xavier Villaurrutia, Octavio Paz, y Luis Cernuda: México (1926-1963)*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008.

