Surrealism, Occultism and Politics

In Search of the Marvellous

Edited by
Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou,
and Daniel Zamani

Routledge

Surrealism, Occultism and Politics

This volume examines the relationship between occultism and Surrealism, specifically exploring the reception and appropriation of occult thought, motifs, tropes and techniques by surrealist artists and writers in Europe and the Americas from the 1920s through the 1960s. Its central focus is the specific use of occultism as a site of political and social resistance, ideological contestation, subversion and revolution. Additional focus is placed on the ways occultism was implicated in surrealist discourses on identity, gender, sexuality, utopianism and radicalism.

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Cover image: Leonora Carrington, *Are you really Syrious?*, 1953. Oil on three-ply. Collection of Miguel S. Escobedo. © 2017 Estate of Leonora Carrington, c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2017.

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Donna Roberts is an Art Historian and scholar of Surrealism who has taught in universities and art schools in the UK, Mexico and Finland. Her PhD from the University of Essex was on the relations between the ideas of the Grand Jeu and the painting of the Czech artist Josef Šíma. Her main areas of publication have subsequently focussed on various aspects of the writings of the Grand Jeu group, Czech Surrealism, the writings of Roger Caillois, surrealist periodicals and the theme of Surrealism and nature. Her post-doctoral work at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Mexico City, was on the theme of Surrealism, evolutionary theory and psycho-biology, and she is currently completing a book titled *"A Feeling for Nature": Surrealism, from Natural History to Ecology*.

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artist Rita Kernn-Larsen. She contributed research and text to exhibition catalogues, museum guidebooks and academic publications, and wrote the catalogue on the Hannelore B. and Rudolph B. Schulhof Collection of Art after 1945, bequeathed to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in 2012.

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Daniel Zamani received his PhD in History of Art from the University of Cambridge. Funded by a Doctoral Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council together with a Trinity College Graduate Scholarship, his thesis discussed the role of medieval tropes within the gradual 'occultation' of the surrealist movement, focussing on the work of André Breton. At the Department of History of Art, Dan was also highly active in teaching, supervising courses on Medieval Art, Art Theory and Criticism and Dada and Surrealism, as well as spearheading two major international conferences on the relationship between art and esotericism. He has written several essays for the *Encyclopedia of Surrealism* (Bloomsbury, 2018), is a co-editor of the anthology *Surrealism, Occultism and Politics: In Search of the Marvellous* (Routledge, 2017) and a regular contributor to the *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, including entries on Winifred Nicholson, Samuel Palmer and Glyn Warren Philpot. In January 2015, Dan was appointed Assistant Curator of Modern Art at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, where he currently co-curates a major show on the artistic dialogue between Pierre Bonnard and Henri Matisse. A full list of Dan's publications and research projects can be found on https://cambridge.academia.edu/DanielZamani.

Introduction

In Search of the Marvellous

*Tessel M. Bauduin, Victoria Ferentinou
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From November 28, 1960 to January 14, 1961, the D'Arcy Galleries in New York showcased one of the major International Surrealist Exhibitions, which had been central to the increasing impact of the movement's artistic and cultural ideas across the globe.[1] Organised by Surrealism's founder and chief theoretician André Breton (1896–1966) and his colleague Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), the show was titled *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain*, and incorporated themes of mythology and magic. In lieu of a preface, the catalogue featured a historical chart that looked to the publication of Isidore Ducasse's *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868–1869) as the beginning of the 'surrealist field', but ultimately located the movement's origins in the domains of Graeco-Latin, Celtic as well as Germanic and Slavonic mythology and folklore (Figure I.1).[2] Inspired by the exhibition's location in New York, the document is perhaps best appreciated as a satirical take on the schematic diagram of avant-gardist affiliation, which had been drawn up by Museum of Modern Art Director Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and famously featured on the back of the catalogue cover of the museum's 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*. In a powerful rejection of this formalist vision of the history of art, Breton and Duchamp presented Surrealism as arising out of an eclectic array of mythological, esoteric and spiritual currents – or such is implied by the sorceresses and magicians named.

In its thematic emphasis on heterodox spirituality, the show reiterated a collective allegiance to esoteric and occult themes that had already been programmatically advanced in André Breton's *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* of 1929, and its much quoted call for "THE PROFOUND, THE VERITABLE OCCULTATION OF SURREALISM."[3] Here, Breton metaphorically framed the movement's core ambition as the search for a 'supreme point', where the dualities of Cartesian rationalism would cease to be perceived as contradictions, and combined an interest in the concept of total social and cultural transformation with a lengthy panegyric to the fourteenth-century Parisian alchemist Nicolas Flamel. A document that had begun with reiterating the movement's violent onslaught on the bourgeois values of family, church and state thus culminated with an emphatic turn towards occult philosophy and a keen identification of Surrealism itself with the lofty goals of medieval alchemy:

> I would appreciate your noting the remarkable analogy, insofar as their goals are concerned, between the Surrealist efforts and those of the alchemists: the philosopher's stone is nothing more or less than that which was to enable man's imagination to take a stunning revenge on all things, which brings us once again, after centuries of the mind's domestication and insane resignation to liberate once and for all the imagination by the "long, immense, reasoned derangement of the senses."[4]

LEGENDS   HISTORY

GREEK AND   CELTIC   GERMAN AND   (First century A.C.)
ROMAN   SLAVONIC
                  (Scotland?)   (Siberian seers   SIMON MAGUS
                                and Scythic
                                deities?)
CIRCE   MERLIN
(Homer)   (Gaelic Bards)

                 [Arturian
                 Romance]   [the anti-sexual
                                                      Gnostics ~
                                                      the licencious Gnostics]

                                 MELUSINE
[ALCINE: in   (Jehan d'Arras, XIVth.)
Orlando Furioso
(by Ariosto), is sister of MORGANE]
                                 KLINGSOR ←----
                 [Islamic   (Wolfram Von
                 influence?]   Eschenbaum, XIVth.)
ARMIDE
(Torquato Tasso)

           [through Ariel,   (Richard Wagner,
           name of a   read by Ducasse
           Jewish angel]   : cf. Lohengrin)
           PROSPERO
           (Shakespeare)

Beginning of   MALDOROR
Surrealist Field   (Ducasse, XIXth century)
                                                      (Guillaume
                                                      Apollinaire)

Figure I.1 Anon., "Beginning of Surrealist Field," 1960. In Breton and Duchamp, eds., *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* (New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960): 5.

The fact that Breton's call for the occultation of the movement went far beyond a spurious, superficial flirtation with the irrational is evidenced by the holdings of his private library collection, which included an impressive amount of literature on the occult tradition as well as the related fields of mythology, magic, primitivism, parapsychology and the fantastic. Indeed, the nine-volume catalogue that accompanied the 2003 auction sale of Breton's estate lists over 200 titles on these subjects, including esoteric classics by writers such as Raymond Lully (1232–1315), Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), Robert Fludd (1574–1637), Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875); popular interwar studies on occultism and alchemy by scholars such as Oswald Wirth (1860–1943), Émile-Jules Grillot de Givry (1874–1929) and Fulcanelli (fl. 1920s); anthropological, ethnographic and psychoanalytical research on primitivism, myth and the sacred in the work of such influential thinkers such as Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), Marcel

Mauss (1872–1950), James Frazer (1854–1941) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939); as well as lengthy studies on occult and alchemical motifs in the work of romantic and symbolist writers such as Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772–1801), Ludwig Achim von Arnim (1781–1831), Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse, 1846–1870) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891) – all of them considered important forefathers of the surrealist enterprise.[5] As Marc Eigeldinger has noted, Breton's knowledge was thus nourished by a highly eclectic range of source material, ultimately complicating any straightforward definition of what he and other surrealist artists and writers would have exactly understood by the closely related notions of 'occultism' and 'esotericism'; both useful, if rather vague umbrella terms for a wide variety of spiritual currents and belief systems, many of which are not easily compatible.[6]

Etymologically, the term occultism derives from the Latin verb *occulere*, meaning "to hide," "to cover over" or "to conceal," its past participle designating anything that exists in reality, but is usually hidden from sight.[7] Already by the first half of the seventeenth century, English scholars employed the adjective occult to designate "those ancient and medieval reputed sciences, held to involve the knowledge or use of a secret and mysterious nature."[8] In French, use of the neologism *l'occultisme* is first documented in Jean-Baptiste de Randonvilliers's *Dictionnaire des mots nouveaux* of 1842. However, its widespread popularization was largely due to its embrace by Éliphas Lévi – a socialist sympathizer, self-styled magus and spearheader of the mid-nineteenth-century occult movement whose influential 1856 treatise *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* presented a highly syncretic system of esoteric doctrines.[9]

As Alex Owen has extensively documented, by the end of the nineteenth century the term 'occultism' effectively resisted precise definition. However, the diverse currents associated with or identified as occultism were nonetheless united by their shared belief in the existence of a hidden reality that lay beyond the world of our senses, searching for an expansion of consciousness through accessing and manipulating the hidden powers of the universe.[10] In this volume, we accept Owen's definition of the occult as an alternative form of spirituality that both rejected the dogmatism of institutional religion and the ideals of rationality and reason at the very heart of the Enlightenment project, in combination with the understanding of occultism as a *modern* phenomenon.[11] Indeed, as has been well documented, much of occultism was driven by a conscious rejection of what Max Weber has influentially identified as "the disenchantment of the world" – a term he employed to designate the gradual replacement of any higher moral or metaphysical ideals by the capitalist values of rationalization, mechanisation and quantification.[12] In line with these considerations, David Allen Harvey's monograph *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (2005) framed the occult as a discourse that primarily addressed the search for a more meaningful place for human existence within a society increasingly experiencing their surroundings as alienating. As he argues, occultism

> was not an atavistic and antirational rejection of modernity, but rather a quest to push the frontiers of knowledge to the limits of the universe; its spirit was not obscurantist, but rather Faustian, seeking knowledge of the invisible world beyond the perception of the senses.[13]

Much recent scholarship has emphasised the modernity of the occult, as it pertained to nineteenth-century movements such as Spiritualism, for instance, as well as the centrality of magic to a broad range of modern artistic currents, to whose genesis an engagement with heterodox spirituality was central.[14] As we argue throughout this volume, the potentially 'Faustian' and radical ramifications of modern engagement with the occult are particularly pertinent in the case of the surrealist movement, as its members constituted what Alyce Mahon eloquently describes as a generation "reared on rationalism," but simultaneously "exposed to a counter-cultural fascination with the occult and its creative powers."[15] Indeed, while Breton himself resolutely rejected the belief in the existence of any supernatural forces as such, the surrealists were inevitably drawn to the occult as a discourse through which to explore tropes of the imagination, the irrational and the unconscious. Indeed, Breton always held onto a vision of the surreal as an elusive category that resided within, and not beyond, the material here and now. Consequently, he advocated "a particular philosophy of immanence according to which surreality will reside in reality itself, will be neither superior nor exterior to it …, because the container shall be also the contained."[16] In his 1945 novel, *Arcane 17*, Breton was at pains to distance the work's emphatic recourse to occult symbolism from an embrace of the supernatural as such, writing that:

> Esotericism, with all due reservations about its basic principle, at least has the immense advantage of maintaining in a dynamic state the system of comparison, boundless in scope, available to man, which allows him to make connections linking objects that appear to be the farthest apart and partially unveils to him the mechanism of universal symbolism.[17]

Sarane Alexandrian and others have pointed out that such explicit references to esoteric thought noticeably increased in Breton's work from the end of the 1920s onwards,[18] constituting a development that would further intensify in the wake of the Second World War and the traumatic experience of the French Occupation. However, in this volume we consider the 'occultation of Surrealism' not as a concisely described, singular event, but rather as a gradual, dynamic process – one that would reach its apex in the politically contentious climate of the post-war period, but whose origins had ultimately predated the birth of Surrealism as a coherently organised avant-garde movement, such as it was announced with the publication of Breton's *Manifeste du surréalisme* in October 1924. Indeed, as further explored in Claudie Massicotte's contribution to this volume, a poetic engagement with parapsychology and psychical research had already played a significant role during the so-called "period of sleeps" (*époque des sommeils*) of the early 1920s – the time of feverish experimentation with phenomena such as hypnotic sleep, automatic writing and mediumistic trance states. Such experiments were evocatively described in texts such as Breton's "Entrée des mediums" (1922) and Louis Aragon's "Une vague de rêves" (1924), and marked the quintessential backdrop to the gradual demise of Paris Dada and the simultaneous formation of the proto-surrealist group.[19]

Surrealism shared much of Dada's iconoclastic rejection of the contemporary status quo, but enmeshed its forerunner's one-dimensional nihilism with a powerful belief in the possibility of change and renewal – both on the plane of individual consciousness and on a more collective, societal level. It was precisely within this context of Surrealism's radical, even, utopic search for a complete remaking of Western European society that the key esoteric concept of constant metamorphosis provided

a powerfully symbolic blueprint. As we will see, the metaphoric language of alchemy, in particular, was frequently drawn upon, since themes of transformation, renewal, rebirth and the regeneration of man lie at the very heart of its wider discourse.

Further, Breton and his fellow surrealists clearly embraced a psychological reading of the alchemical search for gold as an occluded metaphor for psychic individuation, symbolically expressed by the alchemist's key task to transform raw matter (*prima materia*) into higher states of purification; in other words, spiritual alchemy, as distinct from laboratory alchemy. Further, Breton also admired the recourse to gendered, emphatically sexual metaphors, as alchemical treatises describe the production of the Philosopher's Stone as the androgynous union of Philosophic Mercury and Philosophic Sulphur, cast as the wedding and subsequent copulation (*coniunctio oppositorum* or *nuptiae chymicae*) of male and female elements, the sun and the moon, king and queen.[20] In "Du surréalisme en ces œuvres vives" (1955), Breton articulated the central role of the result of this union, the hermaphrodite or androgyne, noting that "[i]t is essential, here more than anywhere else, to undertake the reconstruction of the *primordial Androgyne* that all traditions tell us of, and its supremely desirable, and *tangible*, reconstruction within ourselves."[21]

Surrealism and the Occult: A Historiography

Among Breton's early critics, the first to foreground his creative dialogue with occult and alchemical themes, and the Western esoteric tradition in general was Michel Carrouges, who dedicated one of the chapters in his ground-breaking 1950 monograph to the theme of "Esoterism [sic] and Surrealism."[22] Carrouges highlighted Breton's extensive reading in the field of Western esotericism and foregrounded the occult implications of the surrealist search for a 'supreme point'. With specific reference to Breton's appreciation of esoteric analogy and symbolic correspondences, he convincingly framed the metaphor as an ultimately secularised borrowing from the esoteric concept of "As above, so below" and presented it as "the cornerstone of the surrealist cosmology."[23]

In *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (1971), Anna Balakian equally affirmed the central role of the occult to Breton's surrealist project. Unlike Carrouges, however, she specifically highlighted the role of Éliphas Lévi, the aforementioned nineteenth-century magus and occult philosopher, whose writings exerted a central influence on Breton's later work.[24] In his writings, Lévi championed magic as a power that was based on an analogical appreciation of the universe, and considered the values of 'Humanity', 'Justice' and 'Solidarity' as key to peaceful social cohesion, even as he pre-empted a surrealist understanding of woman as an inherently magical being, equipped "with the sacerdotal power to intervene in tragic circumstances and to transform anguish into ecstasy."[25] As Balakian observes:

> A more permanent influence of occult philosophy was the importance attributed to woman by Éliphas Lévi (…). Woman, whose elements are fire and water in the hermetic cult, is said to be in closer contact with the motive-transforming agents of the universe. To love then is to be through her closer to magical power (…). We shall see how Breton and a number of the other surrealists were to fashion their philosophy of love, distinguishing between the amateurs of libertinage and those of love in the hermetic sense, in which the sexual act had a sacred significance.[26]

Other studies published since the 1980s have extended Carrouges's and Balakian's predominantly positive assessment of Breton's interest in the occult: The second yearbook of the French Surrealism-dedicated series *Mélusine* was focussed on the occultation of Surrealism under the editorship of Henri Béhar;[27] Nadia Choucha in *Surrealism and the Occult* (1992) attempted to chart Surrealism's interest in this domain through a focus on a range of case studies, but nearly turned the movement into an occult current in the process;[28] while Celia Rabinovitch's 2002 monograph *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros and the Occult in Modern Art* brought together the "historical" and the "experiential or phenomenological" frames of reference to examine the surrealist movement from the vantage point of both artistic expression and religious experience.[29]

A number of scholars have recently turned to the investigation of individual writers and artists and their engagement with esotericism and occultism as potent sources of poetic and artistic inspiration. M. E. Warlick, who is also a contributor to this volume, has devoted several studies to Max Ernst (1891–1976) and his interest in hermetic philosophy, notably her 2001 monograph *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth*.[30] David Hopkins has equally explored Ernst's use of hermetic tropes and convincingly related these to the interest in esotericism and occultism, underpinning the work of his colleague, Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968).[31] Further studies by Yiannis Toumazis and John F. Moffitt have focussed exclusively on Duchamp, while Verena Kuni dedicated a monograph to the occult and alchemical implications of the work of Victor Brauner (1903–1966).[32] Finally, Tessel M. Bauduin's *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (2014) looked at the broader circle of artists, writers and intellectuals who worked in the closer orbit of the French surrealist group between the early 1920s and the late 1950s, and situated their occult concerns within the broader ramifications of modern occulture.[33]

Due to the growing interest in women artists since the 1980s, a number of important studies have been published on female surrealists' involvement with the occult, for whom esoteric tropes often functioned as a way of exploring issues of identity, femininity and the body. In her ground-breaking monograph *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985), Whitney Chadwick was the first to devote an entire chapter to the use of esotericism in the work of women surrealists, making a powerful case for the proto-feminist implications of their turn to esotericism, magic and alchemy.[34] In her 2007 doctoral thesis on the role of androgyny and the Goddess in the work of Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), Remedios Varo (1908–1963) and Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988), Victoria Ferentinou explored such considerations in much greater detail, duly emphasising these artists' dialogical response to masculinist models of creativity, authorship and sexuality, and locating their textual and visual oeuvre in the context of Surrealism's appropriation of such discursive loci.[35] Since the 1970s, studies on individual women artists have also proliferated: Several articles and essays have been devoted to Leonora Carrington by feminist scholars such as Chadwick, Gloria Feman Orenstein, Janice Helland, Alyce Mahon and Teresa Arcq, while Susan L. Aberth (another contributor to this volume) published the first monograph on her deployment of alchemical tropes in 2004.[36] Similarly, Janet Kaplan and, more recently, Teresa Arcq have explored repercussions of occult and magical themes in the life and work of Carrington's colleague and friend, the Spanish-born artist and writer Remedios Varo, to whose interest in witchcraft and paganism another chapter of this

anthology is dedicated.[37] British-born artist and writer Ithell Colquhoun, possibly the only surrealist who was actually personally involved in occult practices, also attracted the attention of scholars: Eric Ratcliffe published the first monograph on the artist in 2007, while other scholars have written essays on her interweaving of occult and surrealist tropes, including Ferentinou, Mark S. Morrisson and Richard Shillitoe.[38]

The present volume extends this positive assessment of the surrealist engagement with the occult, as it aims to counter the often hostile reaction, which this aspect of the movement had provoked from many of its contemporary critics. Maurice Nadeau's influential *Histoire du surréalisme* (1945), for instance, had proclaimed the death of the movement as a historically relevant force, and highlighted Breton's interest in "the creation of a new kind of mysticism" as a key factor in the supposed failure of the surrealist enterprise.[39] Mirroring this sentiment, Henri Lefebvre's three-volume *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947) chided Breton's interest in tropes of the marvellous and the supernatural as an infantile 'escapism', and vociferously rejected what he regarded as the surrealists' "concerted attack … against everyday life and human reality."[40] In 1948, Jean-Paul Sartre added to the effort to hasten Surrealism's passing into the dustbin of interwar history, when he declared the surrealists to be "bourgeois intellectuals," and accused the movement of "quietism and permanent violence," further finding it to have the "ambiguous aspect of literary chapel, spiritual college, church, and secret society";[41] the latter of these invectives is a clear referral to the *Collège de Sociologie* around dissident surrealist Georges Bataille (1897–1962), for whom a contemporary reactivation of mythology and the sacred was inseparable from a new form of radical politics, as Vivienne Brough-Evans further explores in her contribution to this volume.[42]

As should be emphasized from the beginning, these negative criticisms were levelled against the surrealists at a time when French society was still traumatised by the experience of the Second World War, the dramatic impact of which made the surrealists' unwavering championing of tropes of myth, utopia and desire understandably appear to many as an insult to the social realities of the time.[43] Further, this was also a period when fascist explorations of occultism and mythology were avidly discussed in left-wing circles, leading to a widespread and one-dimensional identification of occultism and esotericism with a quintessentially atavistic and politically dangerous interest.[44] The longevity of this view is perhaps nowhere more stridently reflected than in Jean Clair's controversial monograph *Du surréalisme considéré dans ses rapports au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes* (2003), the provocative title alone testifying to its highly polemical nature.[45] Here, Clair foregrounded the well-documented role of occult symbolism in fascist propaganda in order to present the surrealists' fascination with these themes as irrefutable evidence of their political impotence as a self-proclaimed movement of resistance.[46] As further explored in Daniel Zamani's contribution to this volume, such accusations completely ignore the complex reasons for which Breton and many of his fellow surrealists intensified their interest in occultism during the end of the 1930s, and the specifically anti-fascist ends for which they were mobilised.[47]

In a marked counterpoint to the above-mentioned studies, a number of recent monographs have helped to considerably revise our understanding of the surrealists' interest in the occult as a key ingredient of their revolutionary agenda. For instance, in her 2011 publication *Alchemy in Contemporary Art*, Urszula Szulakowska convincingly challenged "the serious objection that an interest in magic automatically assumes

right-wing political sympathies," pointing out that "there has always existed a close link between political liberalism and an interest in magic, alternative religions and mysticism."[48] Consequently, she squarely located the surrealists' embrace of these themes within the liberalising, left-leaning and predominantly socialist associations of the French occult revival and its avant-gardist heirs.[49] Artists and writers such as Breton, Szulakowska argues, "have never been concerned with the alchemical discourse for its own sake," but rather "discovered in alchemy an expedient strategy facilitating their own political programme," effectively employing "the alchemical discourse in the promotion of radical liberal, or even leftist, political convictions."[50] Patrick Lepetit's *Le Surréalisme: parcours souterrain* equally championed Breton's dialogue with esoteric themes as an intrinsic feature of his emphatically libertarian, politically progressive stance.[51] Finally, Bauduin considered the cataclysmic role of the Second World War, emphasising how Breton's more profound engagement with ideas of alchemical renewal had emphatically political resonances in a period that was marked by the social realities of terror, exile and war.[52]

Revisiting the 'Occultation of Surrealism': The Marvellous and the Occult as Political Tools

As already noted, this volume has been primarily motivated by the editors' conviction that this revisionist tendency needed to be advanced further, and that expanding scholarship in the field of Surrealism and the occult should be reflected in an anthology that duly considers diverse positions within this field. While significant attention has been paid to the esoteric and occult ramifications of French Surrealism in general, and the work and thought of André Breton in particular, there are no monographs or anthologies on this topic that embrace a more expansive view of Surrealism, both in terms of its transnational politics and with regard to its long history, from the turbulent beginnings in Paris Dada right through to the post-war period. To this end, the book brings together contributions on both iconic artists and writers and lesser known players in the intellectual and artistic orbit of the movement, all of whom drew on occultism and magic for their very own, avant-gardist ends.

Certainly, Breton's call for the 'occultation of Surrealism' may have been a welcome incentive for many artists and writers, who already harboured an interest in this field. Conversely, there can be no doubt that Breton's appropriation of the occult was similarly nourished by a critical dialogue with many of his contemporaries, whose own engagement was in some ways determined by questions of gender, nation and culture as well as their specific location within the long history of the surrealist movement. In this framing, through a collective and pluralistic lens, we follow an appreciation of Surrealism, not as an authoritarian, dogmatic group, but as a dynamic, constantly shifting enterprise that was characterised by internal dialogue and exchange – a movement that was "always a place of encounter open to all possibilities" as well as "an elective community established by a shared sense of mystic vocation," as Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski have noted.[53]

Throughout this volume, we acknowledge that a dialogue with the occult was central to the surrealists' overarching search for the marvellous or *merveilleux* – a key concept of surrealist theory that may best be understood as the destabilizing incursion of the surreal within the fabric of everyday life, and which Hal Foster identified as essential to the "medievalist aspect of surrealism, its fascination with magic and

alchemy, with mad love and analogical thought."[54] Etymologically, the origins of the term *merveilleux* can be traced back to the Latin verb *mirare*, meaning both "to be astonished" and "to look with bewilderment." Its appropriation into French common vocabulary during the eleventh century was accompanied by the emergence of the closely related noun *merveille* (lat. *mirabilia*), denoting any object or circumstance likely to produce feelings of admiration, wonder and astonishment. In the *Grand Robert de la langue française* (1985), the concept is therefore defined with particular emphasis on its disturbing effects: "Whatever is marvellous (…) effects an impression of bewonderment and estrangement, generally due to unlikely events (…) which indicate the existence of a world that escapes the laws of nature."[55] Key aspects of the surrealist marvellous, notably its uncanny potential and feelings of estrangement, are therefore rooted in the concept's complex connotations.

In pre-surrealist literature, the marvellous remained typically linked to themes of occultism and enchantment, with a number of commonplace tropes functioning as more or less clichéd motifs in an anti-realist tradition of fiction. Significantly, however, nineteenth-century debates about the marvellous expanded its original, more literary connotations, and instead placed its theoretical impact within the contested terrain of neo-occultist as well as psychological discourses. For example, in his 1860 study *Histoire du merveilleux dans les temps modernes*, Louis Figuier described the marvellous in anthropological terms as an innate human search for spiritualist powers. Tracing the existence of the concept from ancient rites of divination through to neo-occult practices and parapsychological experimentation, Figuier maintained that its main function was to provide a psychological arena of comfort, which permitted the mentally fragile to find a place of shelter from the rational demands of everyday experience.[56]

Ultimately, the surrealist recourse to the marvellous benefitted from the term's vague definition, exploiting its associations with occultism, superstition and a sense of estrangement from the real. As a gap in signification, whose causes usually remain unexplained, the Bretonian marvellous aims, like its medieval progenitor, to produce a break in discursive thinking. Significantly, however, this sense of a *dépaysement* is not an end in itself, but functions as a shock that aims to catapult the mind into a higher sphere of receptivity. In his occult account *Nadja*, 1928, Breton foregrounded this notion of the marvellous, as he presented a vision of contemporary Parisian experience that remained tinged with allusions to magic and alchemy, consistently concentrating on "petrifying coincidences," "sudden parallels" and "peculiar reflexes" that scientific rationalism could never fully account for.[57] In an embrace of the esoteric theory of correspondences, Breton ultimately abandons himself to the "fury of symbols" and the "demon of analogy," and eventually realizes that human existence is best understood as a hieroglyphic space in constant need of decipherment:

> Perhaps life need to be deciphered like a cryptogram. Secret staircases, frames from which the paintings quickly slip aside …, button which must be indirectly pressed to make an entire room move sideways ort vertically, or immediately change all of its furnishings; we may imagine the mind's great adventure as a journey of this sort to the paradise of pitfalls.[58]

Duly considering occultism's relation to other aspects of the 'marvellous,' including tropes of mythology, enchantment and the irrational, this volume brings together research by well-established scholars in the field and early career researchers, offering

a rich and variegated cross section of contemporary scholarly engagement with Surrealism and the occult. In terms of chronology, these discussions range from the beginnings of the movement in 1920s France through to its legacies in post-World War II Europe and the Americas, always considering the varying cultural and historical contexts within which the occult was mobilised. Throughout, the volume's primary focus is the specific use-value of the occult as a site of political and social resistance, ideological contestation, subversion and revolution; in other words, the many ways in which the occult became utilised as a powerful weapon within the surrealists' counter-cultural politics, and was reconceptualised as a key tool in their aspiration to transform the world, both poetically and socially. To this end, our understanding of the word 'politics' follows the historical understanding of the revolutionary avant-gardes themselves, for whom wider social and cultural change needed to be effectuated beyond the confines of party politics, and for whom any project of truly radical change demanded a concept of 'total' revolution as opposed to the focus on exclusively political and economic factors as espoused by orthodox strands of Marxist thought.

Indeed, as Raymond Spiteri has emphasised, "surrealism existed in the contested space between culture and politics," and it is the way surrealist artistic practice "registers each impasse" that "a new configuration of the political in surrealism" is brought forth.[59] In this volume, we accept 'politics' as a broader concept in line with its reconceptualization within Surrealism. Thus, for our purposes in this anthology, 'politics' and 'political action' encompass not only strategies to affect material change within society, but any artistic tropes and strategies deployed to negotiate, question, deconstruct or rewrite discourses pertinent to issues of identity and individual transformation. In other words, one should not lose sight of the fact that the surrealist reconfiguration of politics pertains to the prospect of social revolution as much as to the revolution of the mind by means of a poetic and artistic engagement conceptualised as a social practice of emancipatory potential.

That the occult became an integral part of this politically radical, avant-gardist vision is certainly no coincidence; historically, it often offered a platform for individuals or groups who pursued a counter-cultural programme of personal change and self-fulfilment, or who envisaged a thorough transformation of society and the political realm. Weaving together the idea of psychical and political revolution as filtered through Marxist theory, Surrealism strategically revalorised cultural forms drawn from the occult that were subversive to mainstream culture, its Enlightenment, progressivism ideals and capitalist substructure. This anti-modernist strategy entailed what could be described as 'occult politics': the surrealist politicising of occult tropes for socially subversive or revolutionary purposes. Thus the extent to which artists operating within or in the orbit of the surrealist movement responded to the confluence of politics and the occult in text, image and film, exploring in particular the critical dialogue enacted either in the form of expansions to, or of deviations and departures from Bretonian Surrealism, is investigated in this volume. The objective is to meaningfully expand the on-going debate about the 'occultation of Surrealism' by proposing that the movement turned to the occult as a potentially potent site of revolution, subversion, radicalism and utopian politics, and we thereby challenge the view that recourse to occultism was a nihilistic and escapist return to primitivism and religion.

Discussion of the Contributions

The first part of this anthology, titled "Alternative Modes of Knowledge," foregrounds the surrealists' appreciation of the occult as an alternative discourse to science and religion, and one that aimed to facilitate an exploration of man and the universe above and beyond what Breton famously rejected as the "sentinels of common sense."[60] Claudie Massicotte opens this section with a discussion of surrealist automatism and its debt to spiritualist séance practices. Throughout, she argues that we need to appreciate the surrealists' exploration of the 'creative unconscious' beyond the limitations of Freudian psychoanalysis and acknowledge how Breton and his colleagues also owed a considerable debt to the psychical research of writers such as Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920), Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901) and William James (1842–1910). Massicotte's specific focus lies in the role of spiritualist mediums as powerful role models for surrealist investigations of automatic procedures. Central to this was Breton's fascination with the Swiss medium Hélène Smith (1861–1929), whose trance states and poetic utterances were famously explored in Flournoy's 1900 study *From India to the Planet Mars* and whom the surrealists hailed as the "muse of automatic writing." As Massicotte insists, the surrealists rejected the idea of an external spirit world associated with spiritualist mediumship, but it was notably through an engagement with mediumistic powers that the surrealists were able to explore highly complex modalities of the unconscious, which extended far beyond the production of symptoms and their controversial framing within psychoanalytic discourses.

The poetic engagement with a violent and potentially dangerous creative power also underpins Donna Roberts's discussion of the Parisian avant-garde group Le Grand Jeu in Chapter 2. Similar to their surrealist contemporaries, members of the Grand Jeu such as René Daumal (1908–1944), Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (1907–1943) and Roger Vailland (1907–1965) developed a marked interest in magic and the occult, soon embarking on a form of initiatory journey that saw them engaged in experiments with automatic creations, somnambulism, extrasensory perception and collective dreaming. Like the surrealists, the Grand Jeu was concerned with enlarging the parameters of reality and exploring the apparent contradictions between the experiential certainty of what William James termed 'ineffable' experiences and the methodological restrictions of empirical science. Roberts's specific focus is the group's methodical and wide-ranging exploration of tropes of mysticism, revolt and self-dissolution. Revisiting the movement's interest in mystical philosophy, she analyses the group's approach to the sacred in relation to questions of selfhood, negation and transgression, and convincingly argues for a marked continuity with Dada and Surrealism through a shared focus on the issue of revolt. More specifically, she demonstrates how the Grand Jeu developed the notion of adolescent revolt into a complex philosophical system, which opposed the economic, individualistic and social constraints of the adult world with an anthropologically-influenced view based on a permanent state of collective liminality that is best understood within its wider preoccupation for a reactivation of sacred forces in contemporary individual as well as collective consciousness.

In Chapter 3, M. E. Warlick continues the exploration of Surrealism and parapsychology through a discussion of the life and work of Dr. Charlotte Wolff (1897–1986) – a German-born physician and writer whose fortuitous encounter with the surrealists in 1930s Paris played a significant role in the development of her career.

As Warlick demonstrates, Wolff's article "Psychic Revelations of the Hand," published in the surrealist periodical *Minotaure* in 1935, provides an opportunity to explore palmistry as another esoteric field that intersected with the surrealists' investigations of alternative paths to unlocking the unconscious. Sketching in her early studies of philosophy and medicine, Warlick considers the eclectic influences on Wolff's system of hand reading, drawing on a broad range of contemporary sources as well as Wolff's later writings. Although Wolff herself insisted on the scientific foundations of her analyses, and developed her system based on empirical experimentation as well as medical and psychiatric studies, her work also dialogued with the prominent role of palmistry within neo-occult discourses, and there can be no doubt that the surrealists appreciated her work within the context of their own broad explorations of diverse esoteric fields as well as much more poetic understanding of psychoanalysis. Warlick proposes to introduce the hand reading system Wolff presented within the wider contexts of this volume, and to place it within the broader context of historical palmistry. Much like Massicotte's analysis of the *époque des sommeils* and its eclectic mixing of occult, parapsychological and psychoanalytic elements, Warlick's discussion testifies the often deeply ambivalent relationship between esotericism and rational science, as well as the surrealists' daring exploration of esotericism and psychoanalysis as twin paths of unlocking the depths of the unconscious self.

In Chapter 4, Vivienne Brough-Evans shifts the focus of attention from the core group around Breton to the so-called 'dissident' Surrealism around Georges Bataille, a writer and intellectual who famously described himself as Surrealism's "enemy from within." Crucially for our aims in this anthology, Bataille was central to an increasingly political interest in a reactivation of tropes of occultism, mythology and the sacred, a key preoccupation that found outward expression in ventures such as the journal and concomitant secret society Acéphale, as well as the Collège de Sociologie, founded by Bataille and Roger Caillois (1913–1978) in 1937. In her discussion, Brough-Evans focusses on the perceived emancipatory potential of Bataillean theories of the sacred, foregrounding his notoriously complex notion of 'occulted un-knowing' and its relationship to a negation of authority. However, rather than simply reiterating this conflation of occultism, myth and politics within Bataille's work of the 1940s, she draws on these theoretical tools as a screen through which to revisit the occult politics of two later surrealist texts that show close affinities with Bataillean ideals: the 1968 drama *Ceasornicăria Taus*, written by Gellu Naum (1915–2001) in Communist-era Romania; and *El Siglo de las Luces* (1962), a historical novel conceived of in Cuba by Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980). Weaving in both of these writers' appropriation of surrealist textual and political strategies, Brough-Evans demonstrates that their texts parallel Bataillean forms of occulted un-knowing, not least by drawing upon traditional occult symbolism and alchemical metaphors, respectively deployed as a powerful critique of a repressive communist present and a colonial past of violence and exploitation.

The second part of the anthology continues this exploration of the occult as political discourse through a specific focus on the increasingly prominent role of mythology and magic to the surrealist project of the 1940s. In Chapter 5, Daniel Zamani offers a close reading of Breton's *Arcane 17*. Written during the most brutal year of the Second World War, the book is titled after the tarot game's so-called Star card, expressing faith in youth and hope in renewal. Eschewing any form of linear narrative, the work mixes the genres of a love poem, travel journal and political pamphlet,

interwoven with alchemical metaphors and discursive references to a range of myth-ological narratives. In his analysis of the novel, Zamani's focus lies on Breton's turn to an emphatically feminised mythology, notably his championing of the medieval water-sprite Melusina as a powerful redeemer after the war. While a number of fem-inist critics have attacked the work's essentialist framing of woman as related to the realms of myth, desire and natural renewal, Zamani contextualises Breton's twin turn to tropes of myth and femininity within the contemporary abuse of mythology in Fascist discourses, and their gendered, emphatically masculinist ramifications. Ac-cordingly, Zamani locates *Arcane 17*'s mythic politics within the broader context of both the surrealist search for a new myth aimed at social cohesion and transnational dialogue, and the contemporary context of Fascism's violently nationalist cult of the male warrior-hero. Sketching in Breton's admiration of Bataille's Collège de Sociology and reiterating his increasingly political interest in myth making from the late 1930s onwards, Zamani argues that we need to appreciate *Arcane 17* as much on political as on poetic grounds, and demonstrates that the novel may best be considered as Breton's most ambitious attempt to create an anti-Fascist *mythopoesis* of the modern, geared towards peace, liberty and the redeeming potential of metamorphosis.

The combined threads of revolutionary politics, the redeeming power of a new myth and their relation to surrealist art underpins Kristoffer Noheden's discussion of Wilhelm Freddie (1909–1995), a Danish artist and filmmaker who gravitated towards Surrealism from the end of the 1920s onwards. Indeed, as Noheden emphasises, it was as a direct consequence of his participation at the occultism-focussed 1947 In-ternational Surrealist Exhibition in Paris that Freddie entered what he described as his 'esoteric period', replete with explicit references to alchemy, myth and the esoteric tradition. Such preoccupations prominently come to the fore in two experimental short films, which Freddie directed in 1949 and 1950, respectively titled *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* (*Det definitive afslag påanmodningen om et kys*) and *Eaten Horizons* (*Spiste horisonter*), realised with the aid of the filmmaker Jørgen Roos. As Noheden argues, both works evidence that Freddie embraced Surrealism's change in direction towards the experiential creation of a new mythology, as evi-denced by the artist's other ventures of the time such as his co-organisation of the hitherto much neglected 1949 exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation: Expo Aleby* in Stockholm, and his 1950 radio talk, "Why Do I Paint?" Squarely contextualizing Freddie's post-war works within the broader development of the movement's project of artistic and spiritual renewal after the war, Noheden proposes a reading of these works, which convincingly foregrounds their presumed function of a new myth as a harbinger of utopian plenitude, channelled as a force of renewal against the repression of the time.

In Chapter 7, Gavin Parkinson problematizes some of the tensions and contradic-tions that the surrealist turn to a mythology of the modern entailed, predicated on a discussion of Antonin Artaud (1896–1908) – the French writer, film maker and theatre director who was loosely aligned with Breton and the surrealists from the beginning of the 1920s onwards. In 1947, Artaud published *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*, in which he glowingly discussed Van Gogh's life and work in esoteric terms. In his exploration of this book and Artaud's writing of it, Parkinson exposes the long and ambivalent shadow cast by the long-awaited 'occultation' of Surrealism. Reviewing the history of Artaud's relation to Surrealism in his troubled life as well as in his writing, Parkinson brings to light an esoteric, self-confessedly

occultist Artaud – one that is markedly at odds with the Artaud formulated in French theory from 1950s critics such as Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault and others. In his analysis, Parkinson highlights the role of Artaud's essay "Shit to the Spirit" (1947), which was spurred by the abovementioned exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and in which Artaud was vociferous in his denouncement of magic as an alternative means of understanding the world, thereby creating a new breach between himself and the increasingly esoteric Surrealism of Breton and others. Disenchanted by both magic and Surrealism but not able to fully disengage himself from either, Artaud's Van Gogh monograph provided an occultist reading of his art, and its transformative intent that was markedly different from Breton's, offering a materialist theory of enchantment in a rhetoric tilted towards scepticism, and thus positing a rich and meaningful counterpoint to his colleague's much more idealist take on enchantment.

In Chapter 8, Gražina Subelytė rounds off the section's focus on mythology and magic with a discussion of the Swiss-born surrealist Kurt Seligmann (1900–1962), who played a key role in the movement's increasing 'occultation' during the 1940s period in exile. Seligmann's interest in magic and ritualism can be traced back to his childhood memories of his native town's carnival, a pageant based on pagan and seasonal rites with fantastically spectral figures that would populate his later visual output well into the post-war period. Seligmann joined the surrealist movement in 1934, participating, among other manifestations, at the 1938 landmark show *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at the Wildenstein Gallery. At the outbreak of World War II, he arrived in the United States, where he became a highly respected authority on the history of magic. In New York, Seligmann took part in all central surrealist activities, contributing numerous essays to journals associated with the movement such as *View* and *VVV*, and participated in the 1942 exhibitions *Artists in Exile* and *First Papers of Surrealism*. As Subelytė demonstrates, Seligmann was central to the ever-closer rapprochement between Surrealism and magic during the critical period in exile, while ventures such as his 1948 account *The History of Magic* went hand in hand with a more emphatically occult iconography pervading his own artistic output. Ostracised by Breton over a rather trivial argument in 1943, Seligmann was virtually cut off from any official surrealist manifestations of the post-war period. His vital influence on the movement's esoteric proclivities has long been neglected in dominant histories of the movement. Purveying his life and work through the dual lens of Surrealism and the occult, Subelytė's essay aims to revisit his central impact on the 'occultation' of the movement, foregrounding his creative appropriation of the occult.

This anthology's third part deals with female artists who moved in the orbit of Surrealism, and examines their appropriation of occult tropes, themes and motifs in text, image and film from a gendered perspective. In Chapter 9, Victoria Ferentinou problematizes the complex questions surrounding the gender politics concerning the mythical construct of the 'Goddess' and the theory of matriarchy, concentrating on British surrealists Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988) and Leonora Carrington (1917–2011). Focussing on selected works from the 1940s and early 1950s, Ferentinou explores the different ways in which Colquhoun and Carrington reconstructed, or fabricated, a matrifocal history to counter masculinist models of creativity and subjectivity. Both artists were familiar with nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories, anthropological and otherwise, concerning matriarchy as an early stage in humankind's development in which women prevailed socially and politically, all of which fed into the discursive construct of an all-powerful Goddess. They were also familiar with various

occult and (neo-)pagan sources in which women were deemed powerful, creative and spiritual beings. Ferentinou locates their oeuvre within contemporary esoteric and surrealist discourses on woman as a transformative agent and traces occult sources, themes and topoi in Colquhoun's *The Goose of Hermogenes* (1961), among other works, as well as in several of Carrington's paintings and writings, including *The Hearing Trumpet* (1976). The close analysis of these examples shows how the two artists developed Goddess iconographies in the post-war period within cultural environments that promoted the efficacy of occult and related discourses for feminist and political ends. Ferentinou argues that Colquhoun and Carrington identified a liberating potential in Goddess imagery, thus developing a holistic and integrative vision that recognises the social use-value of the myth of matriarchy, not only for the empowerment of women, but also for the healing of the planet and its inhabitants. As Ferentinou concludes, both Colquhoun and Carrington can be seen as important precursors of the revisionist tendencies of the feminist spirituality and eco-spiritual movements of the late 1960s and the 1970s.

Carrington and Colquhoun's omnivorous fascination with occult, (neo-)pagan, and anthropological sources is matched by the interests of Remedios Varo (1908–1963), a close friend of Carrington. In Chapter 10, María José González Madrid sets out to explore a previously understudied dimension of Varo's practice: her interest in, knowledge of and integration of witchcraft into her iconography. The starting point of Gonzalez's discussion is a letter Varo wrote to Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, as a response to his *Witchcraft Today* (1954). This chapter ties together earlier topics touched upon in this volume: the key position of magic – of which witchcraft was often perceived as the 'feminine', uncultured pendant – as specific worldview and practice in Surrealism, the surrealist conflation of the woman-muse with the witch and the perception of witchcraft as feminine, as well as the empowering potential of the image of the witch for artists, female and otherwise. Closely analysing the iconography of several of Varo's paintings, Gonzalez provides an alternative reading of several of its enigmatic figures – often identified as alchemists or mages – as a counterpart to the (male) surrealist magician. This feminine model, Gonzalez shows, acknowledged the artist's own creative and transformative capacities, even as it subverted the long tradition distinguishing between magic and witchcraft as paths of knowledge based upon class and gender.

A similar appropriation of magic to inform a specifically gendered and idiosyncratic art practice is discussed by Judith Noble in her chapter on the artist and film-maker Maya Deren (1917–1961). Deren always rejected the label 'surrealist'; at the same time, Surrealism's fomenting role to her artistic development is undeniable. Examining Deren's relationship with Surrealism as well as the role that magic and occultism played in her work, Noble shows that Deren's exposure to the work of the surrealist émigré artists in New York, and her simultaneous personal commitment to esoteric ideas and practice fuelled a unique personal form of filmmaking. As with Carrington and Colquhoun, Deren can be considered a forerunner for later feminist developments, in this case feminist film practice of the 1970s and 1980s. Examining a trilogy of films from the early 1940s as well as the unfinished *Witch's Cradle* (1943), Noble traces the artist's deep exploration and cinematographic deployment of the occult and the magical. It becomes clear that Surrealism, in which at that time myth, magic and the occult generally had become central to its poetic-political agenda, functioned as a

means of liberation for this artist, enabling her to create works investigating magic as a transformative and emancipatory trope in her exploration of subjectivity.

The volume closes with Chapter 12, in which Susan Aberth explores five relatively little-known American female artists who were more or less influenced by Surrealism and whose work prefigures the New Age movement: Sylvia Fein (*1919), Gertrude Abercrombie (1909–1977), Gerrie Gutmann (1921–1969), Juanita Guccione (1904–1999) and Marjorie Cameron (1922–1995), all of them absent from broader histories of the surrealist movement. Aberth situates these artists' twin turn to occult and gendered tropes between the legacy of earlier surrealist women artists, such as Leonor Fini (1907–1996), Carrington and Varo, and the eventual dawn of New Age spirituality. As she argues, following Ilene Forth, key words such as 'liberation', 'empowerment', 'self-discovery' and 'self-healing' were central to the artwork produced by these women who interweaved feminism, spirituality and Surrealism in their imagery. Despite the divergences among the artists discussed, Aberth identifies certain commonalities, the most significant being "their shared portrayal of women in possession of mysterious powers; ranging from playful send-ups of tarot cards, to somnambulant journeying through nocturnal landscapes, to disguised and not-so disguised self-portrayals as seer and sorceress." Much like the other contributors to this section, Aberth highlights the proto-feminist spirit underpinning the language of occultism utilised by the aforementioned artists who wished to set themselves apart from the mainstream art world, and extended strategies that were unorthodox and rebellious as "meaningful heralds of the New Age in all its unorthodox and subversive power."

As all chapters of this volume demonstrate, the occult contributed to the formulation of the surrealist discourses on the social revolution and the emancipation of the mind in diverse ways, spanning the period from the 1920s to the 1960s and beyond. Yet, there are still many aspects of this interface that remain largely unexplored, obscuring our knowledge of this still marginalised dimension of Surrealism. Rather than being the definitive word on 'the occultation of Surrealism' and the part it played in shaping artists' lives as much as their works, we hope that this volume will take the discussion to the next level, opening it up for even further fruitful explorations of the topic. The aim of the volume is to highlight the significance of an interdisciplinary and transnational perspective to the complex relationship between Surrealism, occultism and politics that would afford us new insights into the creative possibilities the occult offered to poets, artists and intellectuals who moved in the orbit of Surrealism, always in dialogue with its revolutionary tropes and liberating strategies.[61]

Notes

1 André Breton et al., eds., *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* (New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960).
2 Breton et al., *Surrealist Intrusion*, 5.
3 In the text, Breton accentuated this call for the 'occultation' of the movement by spelling the entire sentence in capital letters. Subsequent references to the term will ignore this typography for reasons of readability. André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" [1930], in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 178.
4 Breton, "Second Manifesto," 174–75.

5 *André Breton: 42 rue Fontaine*, vol. 2 ('Livres, I') (Paris: Calmels Cohen, 2003), 177–253. For an extensive discussion of occult and alchemical literature that influenced the surrealists, and especially Max Ernst, in the formative years of the movement, see M. E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 18–33.

6 Marc Eigeldinger, "Poésie et langage alchimique chez André Breton," in *Mélusine*, vol. 2 ('Occulte-Occultation'), ed. Henri Béhar (Lausanne: l'Age d'Homme, 1981), 31–32.

7 Wouter Hanegraaff, "Occult/Occultism," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 884–89, 884.

8 Mircea Eliade, "The Occult and the Modern World," in idem, *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 48.

9 Hanegraaff, "Occult/Occultism," 884.

10 Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 129. Scholars of the occult generally agree that there is a recognisable tradition of esoteric philosophy within Western European history, at least in the Renaissance and early modern period. In perhaps the most influential framing of the field, Antoine Faivre has interpreted occultism and esotericism as largely synonymous terms that refer to a 'system of thought' centred on four 'fundamental elements': firstly, the idea of universal, symbolic *correspondences*, as expressed in the hermetic doctrine of "As above, so below;" secondly, the idea of *living nature*, according to which the entire cosmos is a single, dynamic organism; thirdly, the catalytic role of *imagination and meditations* as the subject's central tools in accessing higher spiritual powers; and, finally, an *experience of transmutation* that accompanies the initiate's engagement with occult practice and thought; see Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 11–14. Faivre's thesis has since come under severe criticism. For a brief introduction to broader debates about terminology, see notably Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3–5; for sustained criticism, see Kennet Granholm, *Dark Enlightenment: The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts of Contemporary Esoteric Magic* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 14–18.

11 Hanegraaff, "Occult/Occultism," 888.

12 Max Weber, "Science as Vocation" [1918], in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth and Charles Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 155. For an important analysis and deconstruction of Weber's disenchantment thesis, see Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

13 David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 9.

14 Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); Leigh Wilson, *Modernism and Magic. Experiments with Spiritualism, Theosophy and the Occult* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

15 Alyce Mahon, "The Search for a New Dimension: Surrealism and Magic," in *The Meanings of Magic: From the Bible to Buffalo Bill*, ed. Amy Wygant (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006), 222.

16 André Breton, "What is Surrealism?" [1934], in *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (London: Pluto Press, 1978), 126.

17 André Breton, *Arcanum 17* [1945], trans. Zack Rogow and with an introduction by Anna Balakian (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 17.

18 Sarane Alexandrian, *André Breton par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), 90.

19 Christine Pouget, "L'attrait de la parapsychologie ou la tentation expérimentale," in *Mélusine*, vol. 2, ed. Henri Béhar, 70–97; André Breton, "The Mediums Enter" [1922], in *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 742–45; Louis Aragon, "A Wave of Dreams" [1924], *Papers of Surrealism* 1

(Winter 2003): 1–13. Consulted online on 15 January 2014: www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal1/acrobat_files/deMuth.pdf.

20 Jean Snitzer Schoenfeld, "André Breton, Alchemist," *The French Review* 57, no. 4 (March 1984): 500. Some hermetic treatises reinforce these gendered equations through complimenting the male alchemist or *hermetic artifex* with a female companion, the so-called *soror mystica*.

21 André Breton, "On Surrealism in its Living Works" (1955), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 301–02.

22 Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism* [1950], trans. Maura Prendergast (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 10–66.

23 Carrouges, *André Breton*, 11.

24 Anna Balakian, *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 35.

25 Balakian, *André Breton*, 38.

26 Ibid., 38–39.

27 Béhar, ed., *Mélusine*, vol. 2.

28 Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1992).

29 Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros and the Occult in Modern Art* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2002).

30 Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*.

31 David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

32 Verena Kuni, *Victor Brauner: der Künstler als Seher, Magier und Alchimist: Untersuchungen zum malerischen und plastischen Werk, 1940–1947* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995); Yiannis Toumazis, *Marcel Duchamp: artiste androgyne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de Paris de Ouest, 2013); John F. Moffitt, *Alchemist of the Avant-Garde: The Case of Marcel Duchamp* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

33 Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014).

34 Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 181–218.

35 Victoria Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists and Hermetic Imagery: Androgyny and the Feminine Principle in the Work of Ithell Colquhoun, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo* (PhD diss., University of Essex, 2007). See also Victoria Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism," *Aries* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 103–30.

36 Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Reclaiming the Great Mother: A Feminist Journey to Madness and Back in Search of a Goddess Heritage," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 45–70; Whitney Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: An Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness," *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1986): 36–42; Janice Helland, "Surrealism and Esoteric Feminism in the Paintings of Leonora Carrington," *Revue d'Art Canadienne* 16, no. 1 (1989): 53–61; Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Hampshire and Burlington: Lund Humphries, 2004); Teresa Arcq, "Mirrors of the Marvellous: Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo," in *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, eds. Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead and Teresa Arcq (Chichester: Pallant House Gallery, 2010), 106–07; Teresa Arcq, "World Made of Magic," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, ed. Seán Kissane (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 16–41; Alyce Mahon, "She Who Revealed: The Celtic Goddess in the Art of Leonora Carrington," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, ed. Seán Kissane (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art), 126–53. More sources in Chapter 9.

37 Janet A. Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys. The Art and Life of Remedios Varo* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988); Teresa Arcq, ed., *Five Keys to the Secret World of Remedios Varo* (Mexico City: Artes de México, 2008); see also Chapter 10.

38 Victoria Ferentinou, "Ithell Colquhoun, Surrealism and the Occult," *Papers of Surrealism* 9 (Spring 2011): 1–24; Richard Shillitoe, *Ithell Colquhoun: Magician Born of Nature* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Enterprises, 2009); Mark S. Morrison, "Ithell Colquhoun and

Occult Surrealism in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain and Ireland," *Modernism/modernity* 21, no. 3 (2014): 587–616.

39 Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* [1945], trans. Richard Howard (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 104.

40 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1 [1947], trans. John Moore (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 115.

41 Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* [1947], ed. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen & Co., 1967), 180, 182, 187.

42 Denis Hollier, ed., *The College of Sociology (1937–39)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

43 Sarah Wilson, "Paris Post War: In Search of the Absolute," in *Paris Post War: Art and Existentialism 1945–55*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 25–52; Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 173–75.

44 Ellen E. Adams, "After the Rain: Surrealism and the Post-World War II Avant-garde, 1940–1950" (PhD diss., New York University, 2007), 72. Well known and quite pertinent here is, for instance, Theodor W Adorno, "Theses Against Occultism," in *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 1994), 172–80.

45 Jean Clair, *Du surréalisme considéré dans ses rapports au totalitarisme et aux tables tournantes* (Paris: Mille et une nuits et Fondation du 2 mars, 2003).

46 Clair, *Du surréalisme*, 31.

47 On this topic, see also Daniel Zamani, "In Search of the Holy Grail – Medieval Tropes and the Occultation of Surrealism in the Work of Andre Breton, ca. 1928–1957" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2017), Chapter 2.

48 Urszula Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 3.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Patrick Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism: Origins, Magic, and Secret Societies* (2012), trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester and Toronto: Inner Traditions, 2014), 3.

52 Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 190, 192.

53 Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski, eds., *Surrealism against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London and Sterlin: Pluto, 2001), 8.

54 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1993), 19.

55 Pierre Robert, ed., *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*, vol. 6 (Paris: Le Robert, 1985), 390. Translation by the authors.

56 Louis Figuier, *Histoire du merveilleux dans les temps modernes*, 4 vols. (Paris: Librairie de L. Fachette et Cie, 1860).

57 André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960) 19.

58 Ibid., 112.

59 Raymond Spiteri, "Surrealism and the Question of Politics, 1925–1939," in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Malden, MA and Oxford: Willey-Blackwell, 2016), 110–30.

60 André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" [1924], in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 10.

61 Some parts of this introduction are based on sections of Daniel Zamani's PhD dissertation, "In Search of the Holy Grail."

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Part I

Alternative Modes of Knowledge

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1 Spiritual Surrealists

Séances, Automatism, and the Creative Unconscious

Claudie Massicotte

In 1896, a Geneva medium named Hélène Smith (Élise Catherine Müller, 1861–1929) perceived in trance the words from an inhabitant of Mars, "michma michtmon mimini mimatchineg,"[1] that her audience dutifully transcribed. These Martian words marked the beginning of a series of occult experiences that allegedly transported her to the Red Planet. In her state of trance, she produced foreign conversations, a new alphabet, and paintings of the Martian surroundings that captured the imagination of her audience. In addition to these Martian travels, Smith developed what the psychiatrist and psychical researcher Théodore Flournoy (1854–1920) famously came to call "romances of the subliminal imagination."[2] In mediumistic trance, Smith believed to retrieve memories of her past lives as a Hindu princess and as Queen Marie-Antoinette. Akin to the many other mediums who developed extraordinary powers as Spiritualism emerged in Europe and America through the second half of the nineteenth century, Smith perceived herself travelling in her astral body to faraway countries and brought back the voices, images, and languages of the characters she met.[3] Soon, her trance communications became veritable laboratories for the discovery and analysis of the unconscious as reputed authors attempted to interpret her experiences in secular terms.[4]

Today, Smith's Martian travels may appear to be nothing more than eccentric practices at the margins of modernity. However, as John Warne Monroe notes,

> [t]he inauguration of what the psychologist Théodore Flournoy would later call Smith's 'Martian Cycle' could fit quite comfortably in the anecdotal canon. Much as the tumult that welcomed the *Sacre du Printemps* in 1913 symbolized the beginning of a new kind of music, so the debut of the Martian language revealed the possibilities of a new kind of subjectivity.[5]

Indeed, Smith's trance creations profoundly affected the works of pioneering authors in the burgeoning fields of psychoanalysis and psychology at the turn of the century. With their discussions, a new kind of subject – distorted, multiple, and excessively creative – was born.

Almost ten years after Smith's death, an exhibition held in Paris introduced André Breton to many of her paintings and drawings.[6] Breton considered Smith "by far the richest" of all mediums, and he reproduced a number of her creations in his 1933 essay "The Automatic Message."[7] Well aware of the scientific and psychological discourses on Smith, Breton read Flournoy's lengthy narrative and interpretation of her séances and came to draw on these performances as a model with which to

unveil the limits and risks of subjectivity. Before his encounter with Smith, Breton and his group had already conducted a series of experiments in "psychic automatism," aimed at creating art without "any control exercised by reason [and] exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern"[8] that drew upon Spiritualist practices. Notably, the surrealists' "period of sleeping fits," which revealed powerful mediumistic power in Robert Desnos (1900–1945), had reproduced many of the motifs encountered in Smith's and other mediums' séances.

While neither Smith's séances nor Flournoy's writings directly influenced the early surrealists – Breton encountered Smith's artistic creation after the publication of the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) – this chapter suggests that the medium's trance performances present a parallel model of subjectivity that illuminates the excessive, dangerously powerful creativity of automatic discourse. Indeed, Flournoy's study of Smith interpreted the unconscious, or subliminal self, as a reservoir of extraordinary capacities. In his observations of Smith's trance, for instance, Flournoy argued that the unconscious was "mythopoetic," an essentially creative force that could produce endlessly without the subject's will.[9] Similarly, the surrealists' performances of automatism uncovered an unconscious that extended far beyond the productions of symptoms and functioned as a source of prodigious creativity. Yet, such views of the psyche were becoming (and continue to be) obliterated from the canon of depth psychology. Taking seriously the performances of mediumistic trance creativity, this chapter proposes that automatism brought back to life important questions about both the limits and possibilities of authorial agency.

The Life and Mind of Hélène Smith

The Spiritualist movement emerged in the United States in 1848, when two young American sisters, Kate and Margaret Fox, claimed to communicate with the spirit of a murdered man in their house in Hydesville, New York. To the bemusement of local visitors, the spirit appeared to answer the sisters' questions through various amounts of knocks on the furniture. The sisters' séances rapidly gained attention in the surrounding areas, and the expressions "dancing-tables" and "spirit-rapping" soon entered the popular press to describe such new modalities of communication. In 1852, now famous across America, the sisters founded the Spiritualist Church, and the new movement grew rapidly on an international scale: It reached England and Germany in 1852 and France in 1853.[10] As new mediums discovered their powers, table turning was soon replaced with other communication devices, including the planchette, the Ouija board, and mediums' own voices and bodies through practices of automatic writing and trance speaking. The movement remained popular through the century and, after a short decline, rose through the aftermath of the First World War.[11]

Élise Catherine Müller, yet to become the renowned Hélène Smith, discovered her mediumistic abilities in 1892, when she was in her early thirties. Two years later, Théodore Flournoy, Chair of Experimental Psychology at the University of Geneva, joined her circle and observed her trance experiences until 1900. It is in his work *From India to the Planet Mars* (1900) that Müller acquired the pseudonym that made her famous across the ocean. While Flournoy never accepted Smith's trance performances as evidence of Spiritualist claims, he brought notoriety to the medium by discussing her séances with some of the most highly regarded scientists of his

day. Reproducing the medium's communications, *From India* demonstrated how this "beautiful woman about thirty years of age, tall, vigorous, of a fresh, healthy complexion," as Flournoy described her, invented some wonderfully complex poems and stories in unknown languages that greatly impressed the artistic and scientific community of Geneva.[12]

Under the observation of Flournoy, Smith described in trance the recollected memories of her past lives, in which she was incarnated as an eleventh-century Hindu princess and as Queen Marie-Antoinette. Smith also believed that while she was entranced she could travel in her astral body to the planet Mars from where she brought foreign visions and conversations. Smith created stories and drawings of the scenes she professed to have witnessed (Plate I). She also spoke in what she believed were Sanskrit and Martian, and even created an alphabet and translations of the latter language (Figure 1.1).

Flournoy, who was deeply impressed by her creations, brought the linguist and then leading Sanskrit expert Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) to analyse the languages.

Figure 1.1 Hélène Smith, *Martian alphabet*, 1898. In Théodore Flournoy, *Des Indes à la planète Mars* (Genève: Eggiman, 1900): 215.

Tzvetan Todorov wrote on the medium many years later and commented with surprise on the passion of the former linguist for the case:

> The analysis of the Hindu language seems to impassion Saussure to a degree that is hard to imagine. He takes great care to comment on the language productions of Miss Smith, attends mediumistic séances, and suggests possible interpretations of her case. So the chapter written by Flournoy dealing with the Hindu language is half composed of extracts from the letters of Saussure.[13]

Through his study of Smith, Flournoy came to conceive of mediumistic communications as manifestations of the unconscious. As Sonu Shamdasani explains, Flournoy emphasised, among the principal functions of the unconscious, "its creative activity … and its play tendency."[14] Indeed, for Flournoy, "Play … enables a level of creativity that has been lost" since childhood, but that could be retrieved through the performance of trance.[15] Thus, Smith's trance personalities, romances of previous lives, and languages were interpreted as remarkable acts of unconscious creativity that also liberated her play tendencies. Unsurprisingly, Flournoy's interpretation did not please the Spiritualists' circles in which Smith began acquiring increasing fame. In a text entitled *Autour "Des Indes à la Planète Mars,"* published anonymously in 1901, one incredulous Spiritualist remarked:

> I would be curious to know in what way the subliminal explanation is more normal than the spiritual explanation. For indeed, a subliminal … which has promptness, finesse, a surprisingly delicate and exquisite flair … a remarkably calm and pondered imagination, attached to the real and the probable, a wonderfully talented and prodigiously fertile subconscious… such a subliminal seems to me, at the very least, as much an occult, implausible explanation, as the one advocated and accepted by Spiritualists.[16]

Smith also rejected Flournoy's theories, and, in the years following his publication, their divergent views led to the end of their collaboration.

Between 1903 and 1915, Smith's beliefs developed into a new form of creativity. She took lessons in painting shortly after the publication of Flournoy's work and began to form large tableaux representing the visions she received from her spiritual guide, now considered to be Jesus Christ. These large panel paintings depicted life-size figures from the New Testament. Although she signed the paintings under her birth name, Élise Müller, she never considered herself the true creator and thus never brought herself to sell them. Waldemar Deonna (1880–1959), an art historian and Professor at the University of Geneva as well as Director of the *Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Genève* between 1920 and 1951, produced a study of these paintings in a 1932 book, *De la planète Mars en Terre Sainte*, in which he also reproduced many of her creations.[17]

Hélène Smith and the Psychological Tradition

From India to the Planet Mars was published on 4 November 1899 (although usually the publication year is given as 1900), the exact same day Sigmund Freud's magnum opus *The Interpretation of Dreams* was published. While the latter text first went

relatively unnoticed, selling little and reaching only a certain number of interested specialists (in the six years following its publication, Freud's book sold only 351 copies),[18] it has become today a cornerstone in the development of theories of the unconscious. *From India to the Planet Mars*, for its part, immediately created a stir in both the popular and scientific press, bringing attention to the author's claims.[19] Yet, his conception of the unconscious – and its integration under a theory of subjectivity – has now been largely forgotten.

Today, *From India* is cited almost only by historians of psychology – and most often solely as a bizarre but fascinating text reminding readers of the historical relations between depth psychology and occult practices. In this sense, historian of psychoanalysis Elizabeth Roudinesco considers the work "a nice book, which should one day be the object of a film."[20] Yet, she adds that *From India to the Planet Mars* and *The Interpretation of Dreams* offer highly unequal contributions to the history of psychology. She writes: "Freud tells the same stories as Flournoy, but in a different language, a language coming from the crepuscle, a new language." As for Flournoy, he "seems to be sitting between two centuries, one side on the epistemological and Romanesque tradition of the nineteenth century, and the other side on the moving ground of the twentieth century, toward which he looks desperately." Moreover, "At the opposite of Freud," Roudinesco adds, "Flournoy … is not an innovator, but a magnetizer *à l'ancienne*."[21]

As Roudinesco's words illustrate, Flournoy's interest in the occult has led to the portrayal of his psychological theories as nothing more than regrettable reflections of an emerging science that could not yet detach itself from its predecessors (i.e. magnetism and psychical research), a separation that alone could lead to its validation.[22] Yet, such a historical narrative – framing the progress of psychiatry and the development of depth psychology through a sudden abandonment of interest in occult phenomena and an absolute rupture marked by the emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis – silences the complex movements and discoveries of the unconscious from the mid-nineteenth century to the interwar period.[23] Indeed, by the turn of the century, many psychiatrists and psychopathologists, including Flournoy, turned to Spiritualism to understand hidden layers of the psyche. For instance, in the late 1880s, while British philologist and psychical researcher F. W. H. Myers (1843–1901) and American psychiatrist William James (1842–1910) developed understandings of consciousness through their studies of spiritual mediums among the Society for Psychical Research, the French psychiatrist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893) medicalised hypnosis at the Parisian Salpétrière hospital after discovering many similarities between his hysterical patients and Spiritualist mediums.[24] By the 1890s, Pierre Janet (1859–1947), who had studied the telepathic abilities of a psychic medium named Léonie during his doctorate, explored automatic writing among institutionalised hysterics and even developed experiments with this Spiritualist mode of communication that led to the creation of multiple personalities under trance.[25] Further, despite Roudinesco's claim that Freud invented "a new language," the father of psychoanalysis was himself fascinated with the telepathic abilities proclaimed by many mediums.[26] By the first decades of the twentieth century, Freud – like the magnetizers *à l'ancienne* – visited various psychics with his disciple Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933), and even conducted his own experiments in thought-transference.[27]

Akin to Flournoy, depth psychologists from Janet to Freud were deeply intrigued by and preoccupied with séance manifestations and made use of Spiritualist methods to

formulate new theories of the mind. As Roudinesco's commentary echoes, however, these manifestations were soon regarded as unworthy of scientific investigation. Indeed, as increasing revelations of frauds and scandals tainted the fields of Spiritualism and psychical research, the credibility of scientific experiments on séances severely suffered. Official psychiatric and proto-psychoanalytical knowledge thus began to separate itself, not only from the study of alleged supra-normal faculties among gifted Spiritualists, but also, more generally, from any study conducted upon mediums.[28] Many authors, like Janet, chose to abandon all inquiries into occult faculties of the mind and to relegate them to the now autonomous discipline of psychical research.

   This separation, however, had an important consequence for modern understandings of the unconscious. As Julia Gyimesi rightly remarks, once the medium was excluded from psychological research, a symptomatic view of the unconscious soon "gained the victory over other theories of the unconscious."[29] Indeed, the unconscious portrayed within the *doxa* of depth psychology became far removed from the dangerously creative, highly powerful, and mysterious subliminal self that the psychiatrists' and psychical researchers' experimental studies with mediums had claimed to uncover. Thus, once Janet had abandoned his experiments with Léonie and reframed his understanding of the unconscious through the manifestations displayed by his hysterical patients, he came to see very little creativity, power, or marvel in the manifestations of the unconscious. Regarding his hysterics' automatic productions, he wrote: "The poor patients whom I studied had no genius; the phenomena which had become subconscious in them were very simple, and in others formed part of personal consciousness without exciting any admiration."[30] The marvellously creative subliminal discovered by Flournoy through the performances of Smith – with its "promptness, finesse, [and] a surprisingly delicate and exquisite flair"[31] – thus soon became as foreign to depth psychology as it had once been to Spiritualism.

Surrealist Explorations of the Occult

Various authors have considered Breton's automatist investigations through semi-Spiritualist and parapsychological practices as a slightly embarrassing illustration of his scientific naiveté and a demonstration of his misunderstanding of contemporaneous theories of the unconscious. Jean Clair, for instance, noted that "[t]he unconscious that André Breton evokes and that permits him to give, so he believes, a theoretical, if not scientific, foundation to automatic writing … is an unconscious which, however, on the date of 1920, has become archaic, obsolete."[32] This view echoed the reflections of Jean-Louis Houdebine, whose 1971 *Tel Quel* article examined the "misunderstanding of psychoanalysis in surrealist discourse."[33] As Roudinesco notes, Houdebine saw in Freudian psychoanalysis a radical break from earlier conceptions of the unconscious that derived from psychical and occult research. For him, Breton's "mystico-poetic eclecticism" failed to recognise such advances in resorting to unfounded, obsolete views of subjectivity through his use of occult experiments.[34]

   A more nuanced view of the psychological tradition, however, might suggest that Breton's automatic discourses entailed serious research into the modalities of unconscious creativity. As the *doxa* of depth psychology in interwar France – largely fashioned by Janet's theories – developed a restrictive view of the unconscious through its symptomatic manifestations, Breton and his group devised a series of experiments with pseudo-Spiritualist practices that aimed to retrieve the mysterious creative

faculties of the psyche.[35] These experiments, aimed at "systematically exploring the unconscious," formed an important moment in the history of the unconscious, now recuperated as both a destructive *and* creative force.[36] Breton thus joined the symptomatic and mythopoetic traditions of the unconscious.

As the majority of psychical researchers, psychiatrists, and psychopathologists who studied trance communications before him, Breton did not believe in spiritual possession. Indeed, he claimed repeatedly that he did not believe in such communications and found the mediums' attachment to the Spiritualist hypothesis "unfortunate." Already in 1922, he declared:

> It goes without saying that at no time, starting with the day we agreed to try these experiments, have we ever adopted the spiritualist view point. As far as I am concerned, I absolutely refuse to admit that any communication whatsoever can exist between the living and the dead.[37]

However, as an important part of the psychological tradition that preceded him, he saw in experiences of trance and automatic writing an important access to the unconscious. Breton thus largely rejected the newly formed division between occult practices and the study of the unconscious, as he saw in the practices of Spiritualism and psychical research a powerful illustration of yet ill-understood forms of creativity. While Breton reclaimed this disappearing investigative tradition, however, he did so by adopting for himself the positions of both the medium and his or her psychological interpreter. This partial identification with the figure of the medium participated in Breton's opposition to the institutional violence of modern psychiatry.[38]

Breton's first systematic experiments with hidden faculties of the mind occurred in the spring of 1919. That year, he and his colleague Philippe Soupault (1897–1990) created what he would later champion as the "first purely surrealist work."[39] *The Magnetic Fields*, written through automatic writing in six consecutive days, indeed became a turning point for the French surrealist movement, whose members increasingly resorted to writing techniques aimed at liberating inhibited forces of creativity. Years later, Breton remembered these experiences in sharp contrast to Janet's perception of hysterical automatism, remembering that:

> all of a sudden, I found, quite by accident, beautiful phrases, phrases such as I had never written … and there were still more coming… It was as though some vein had burst within me, one word followed another, found its proper place … my pencil could not keep up with them, and yet I went as fast as I could, my hand in constant motion, I did not lose a minute. The sentences continued to well up within me. I was pregnant with my own subject.[40]

In the following years, Breton continued to experiment with this emerging subject – creating through highly different rhythms than the conscious self – as he explored the creative possibilities of trance states. Some of these experiments were reported in the 1922 text "The Mediums Enter," which proposed the first definition of Surrealism as "a certain psychic automatism that corresponds rather well to the dream state, a state that is currently very hard to delimit."[41] "The Mediums Enter" presented the surrealists' inquiries into this dream state as it recounted episodes of the group's 'period of sleeping-fits.' In settings meant to reproduce the Spiritualist séance, members of the

group began to experience phenomena of trance, somnambulism, and dual personality. The text presented the trance communications of members of the group during the séances, whose regular sitters included Breton, Max Morise (1900–1973), Paul Éluard (1895–1952), Max Ernst (1891–1976), René Crevel (1900–1935), Benjamin Péret (1899–1959), and Robert Desnos. Of these, however, only the latter three had been able to fall into a somnambulistic state or, as Breton put it, "to fall asleep."[42]

Crevel had been the first member to introduce the group to séances, after he himself had been initiated by a medium named Madame Dante. On the evening of 25 September 1922, he held a séance with Breton, Desnos, and Morise, during which he rapidly fell into a hypnotic slumber and uttered "a kind of defense or indictment that was not copied down at the time."[43] On the following evening, Desnos, Morise, and Breton conducted a second séance, and this time Desnos, entranced, began compulsively scratching the tabletop. When Crevel suggested that such an attitude might reveal a desire to write, a pencil and paper were placed in Desnos's vicinity and a second phase of automatism emerged in which members of the group began to produce original stories, writings, and drawings under trance. Soon, Crevel began to recount stories of a woman accused of murdering her husband through a "declamatory diction, interspersed with sighs, sometimes transforming into a kind of song," and Péret began to predict the future and make swimming motions on the séance table.[44] However, none could surpass the creativity of Desnos, whose spontaneous artistic productions enthralled the group. Breton recounted that, following such productions, "the most self-assured among us [stood] confused, trembling with gratitude and fear, losing their composure before the marvel."[45] In successive séances, Desnos claimed to establish contact with Marcel Duchamp's female alter ego, Rrose Sélavy, and rapidly created poetic phrases and images that, while reminding the surrealists of the artist's inventive style, fascinated the group for its own originality. Years later, in the partly autobiographical account *Nadja* (1928), Breton recalled:

> Once again, now, I see Robert Desnos at the period those of us who knew it called the [*sleeping-fits*]. He 'dozes' but he writes, he talks. It is evening, in my studio over the Cabaret du Ciel …. And Desnos continues seeing what I do not see …. He borrows the personality of the most singular man … Marcel Duchamp…. What in Duchamp seemed most inimitable through some mysterious 'plays on words' (Rrose Sélavy) can be found in Desnos in all its purity and suddenly assumes an extraordinary resonance. Those who have not seen his pencil set on paper – without the slightest hesitation and with an astonishing speed – … cannot conceive of everything involved in their creation at the time, of the absolutely oracular value they assumed.[46]

Just as Smith had found herself incapable of learning languages while awake, but produced wonderfully inventive linguistic systems, alphabets, and translations while in trance, Desnos was, Breton remarked, "as incapable as the rest of us" to produce such fabulous creations outside the séances.[47] The performance of trance, however, provided him access to a powerful, mysterious form of creativity. As such, before the break with Desnos, Breton could claim that the latter had come closest to realising the surrealist ideal of creativity.[48] However, the state of trance soon also revealed the destructive, symptomatic forces of the unconscious, constantly threatening the

subject with its own dissolution. Remembering the compulsive dangers of the sleeping fits, Aragon wrote about the sleepers in 1924:

> [They] live only for these moments of oblivion, when they talk with the lights out, without consciousness, like drowning men in the open air. These moments multiply by the day. They want to spend more and more time in oblivion. When told what they have uttered they are intoxicated by their own words. They fall into trances everywhere…. Those who submit themselves to these incessant experiments endure a constant state of appalling agitation, become increasingly manic.[49]

The surrealist somnambulists began to lose weight, they entered sleeping states more often, and they became increasingly difficult to awaken. Breton remarked that Desnos would

> just go off, even in the middle of a meal. What was more, it was harder and harder to wake him by the usual methods. One evening, I absolutely couldn't … and I had to go out and get a doctor.[50]

In early 1923, Breton put an end to the sleeping fits after an episode of trance nearly led to the mediums' deaths. As Ruth Brandon reveals, in a succession of events that echoes the stories of mass hysteria so common in the previous century, the surrealists discovered the menacing powers of trance:

> On one astonishing occasion … a large party of guests was invited to a grand house belonging to Marie de la Hire, a friend of Picabia's. The rooms were cavernous and dimly lit, and before long ten or more of the guests were entranced, sleepwalking, gesticulating, uttering strange prophecies. At about two in the morning, Breton suddenly realized that a number of them had disappeared [and] finally discovered them in some dark anteroom, where they were trying to hang themselves from the coat hooks. They had plenty of rope …. Crevel was one of them, it was apparently he who had put the idea into their heads.[51]

Although Breton remained cautious in his following investigations of the unconscious, he never abandoned his fascination for psychical research and Spiritualist practices. Published five years after his "Letter to Seers," the 1930 *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, for instance, linked surrealist art specifically with Spiritualist practices and proclaimed the artistic value of the latter.[52] He demanded,

> once again, that we submit ourselves to the mediums who do exist, albeit no doubt in very small numbers, and that we subordinate our interest – which ought not to be overestimated – of what we are doing to the interest which the first of their messages offers.[53]

In this work, Breton also defended the possibility of telepathy, a phenomenon encountered among mediums that had fascinated researchers from Myers to Freud. Akin to Flournoy, Breton thus claimed to discover hidden functions of the mind through experiments with play, trance, and creativity. It was another surrealist experiment – the

collective game of *cadavre exquis* – which, he claimed, provided evidence of "a strange possibility of thought, that of its *pooling*."[54]

As for Smith herself, Breton's first public reference to the medium appeared in *Nadja*. The latter book included a note reflecting his fascination for the medium and connected her to the eponymous work's heroine. Breton remarked that Nadja had had the impression of having participated in "Poisson Soluble" in "a scene whose precise meaning … I have never been able to determine and whose characters are as alien, their agitation as enigmatic as possible … and even … played the – if anything obscure – part of Hélène."[55] The note concerning Smith began with this "obscure" name and connected it to Nadja and other mediums' precognitive forms of knowledge:

> I have never known personally any woman of this name …. Yet Madame Sacco, clairvoyante, 3 Rue des Usines, who has never been mistaken about me, assured me early this year that my mind was greatly preoccupied with a 'Hélène.' Is this why, some time after this period, I was so greatly interested in everything concerning Hélène Smith?…'Hélène, c'est moi,' Nadja used to say.[56]

In the following years, an exhibition held in Paris and a book by Waldemar Deonna on Smith's artistic works introduced Breton to many of her creations.[57] In the 1933 essay "The Automatic Message," published in the surrealist journal *Minotaure*, Breton introduced her as "the prolific Elise Muller, who became famous under the pseudonym Helene Smith."[58] He found himself so enthralled by her creations that he even identified her as the muse of Surrealism and considered her "by far the richest of all" cases of mediumship.[59] Further, Breton reproduced many of her creations in the article, alongside those of other mediums as well as 'naïve' (or folk) art. Breton remained enthralled by the medium in the following years: He identified her as a "celebrated medium, painter and inventor of languages"[60] in the *Abbreviated Dictionary of Surrealism* (1938), written with Éluard, and he celebrated her in the 1940 Jeu de Marseilles. Created just before Breton's and other surrealists' exile from fascist-controlled France, this game of cards included new court cards replacing the hierarchical King, Queen, and Jack with the characters of Genius, Siren, and Magus. The suits reflected the four major preoccupations with themes of Love (Flame), Dream (Star), Revolution (Wheel), and Knowledge (Lock). Smith appeared in the latter suit and symbolised its Siren, next to Hegel as its Genius and Paracelsus as its Magus.[61] Breton further reiterated Smith's long-lasting influence in his 1952 *Entretiens*.[62]

Although Breton's encounter with Smith emerged after he had begun to develop the surrealist project, this extraordinary medium and the fascination she invoked can thus illuminate the group's previous investigations into the possibilities of automatic discourse. The surrealists' spontaneous productions of language had indeed enlightened a dangerous, yet highly creative, subjectivity in excess that would have found powerful confirmation through Flournoy's analytic vocabulary. In her recent study of Smith's inter-planetary languages, Marina Yagello explains:

> What distinguishes the glossolalist from someone speaking an ordinary language is that he or she isn't the person speaking. The relationship to the person is missing. There is no I standing at the source of the utterance … In glossolalia there is certainly an ego at the centre, but it is a non-linguistic ego … unlike the I of the linguistic system.[63]

More powerfully than any other medium, Smith provided a model for the dissolution of the self-transparent locutor as the centre of discourse, a dissolution that the surrealists had themselves experienced through the performances of the automatic body. Smith's romances and linguistic systems had thus introduced, like Freudian discoveries of the unconscious, a profound threat to the transparent cogito. But Smith's séances, akin to the surrealists' experiments, additionally emphasised the creative, playful modalities of "a wonderfully talented and prodigiously fertile subconscious."[64] Smith could thus reveal, for Breton, an important, yet mysterious, form of knowledge regarding the secrets of creativity.

Conclusion: Breton, Smith, and the Automatic Artist

In recent years, various scholars have disputed the intellectual influences behind the surrealists' automatism. In a seminal article, Jean Starobinski suggested that, despite Breton's repeated acknowledgement of Freud, the surrealists' concept of psychic automatism derived primarily from Janet's understanding of psychic automatism and Myers's theory of the "subliminal self."[65] Starobinski notably found support in the 1933 essay "The Automatic Message," where – along with Smith – Breton acknowledged the influence of Myers upon the surrealist undertaking. Placing Myers's discoveries besides those of James and Flournoy, he wrote:

> I continue to think that, in spite of unfortunately widespread ignorance of his work, we remain more indebted than we generally believe to what William James so aptly called the gothic psychiatry of F.W.H. Myers, and the ensuing admirable explorations of Théodore Flournoy of a completely new and passionately interesting world.[66]

Starobinski's conclusions, however, were later rejected by Marguerite Bonnet, who demonstrated, through an in-depth study of Breton's notebooks and manuscripts, that the author had followed an erroneous chronology. Noting that Breton never acknowledged the influence of Janet and that he only discovered the works of Myers in 1925, she argued that it is Freud's theories that provided the surrealists with the decisive impulse towards the discovery of automatism as key to the unconscious.[67]

While Bonnet is certainly right to recognise the importance of Freud at the origins of Surrealism, she fails to appreciate the complexity of an author's intellectual context. Indeed, as Bertrand Méheust argues, Bonnet's article acts

> as if the influences of a writer could be limited to those he or she recognized in writing; as if Freud's thought was itself exempt of the magnetico-hypnotic-spiritist traditions; as if one could attribute to chance the fact that the sleeping fits coincided exactly with the apogee of French psychical research.[68]

Thus, although Breton only discovered Myers in 1925 and Smith in the late 1920s, the surrealists' experiments with automatism cannot be fully understood outside of the context of Spiritualism and the infatuation of scientists, artists, and psychologists for its revelation of a dangerously creative unconscious.

Similarly, although Smith was not, chronologically, at the origins of Breton's creations, her trance practices can nonetheless help shed light on the artistic productions of

automatism. Particularly, Flournoy's theorisation of a fabulously imaginative unconscious, derived directly from her automatic imagination, can help to frame a deeper understanding of the surrealist movement rather than single attention to now dominant models of depth psychology. In a post face to the 1983 French edition of *From India to the Planet Mars*, Mireille Cifali remarked that most depth psychologists, including Freud, uncovered an unconscious "marked by the effects of censure, of disguise, and of its link to the symptom." Conversely, Flournoy, she added "[was] for his part more sensitive to the intricacies that link the unconscious to artistic creation."[69]

To this day, as historian of psychology Henri Ellenberger explains:

> we seldom hear of the mythopoetic unconscious. What psychoanalysts call fantasies represent a minute part of mythopoetic manifestations. We have lost sight of the importance of this terrible power—a power that fathered epidemics of demonism, collective psychoses among witches, revelations of Spiritualists.… Unfortunately, neither Freud nor Jung became aware of the role of the mythopoetic unconscious.[70]

Through his use of Spiritualist practices, Breton hoped to reclaim those creative faculties of the unconscious that were increasingly being relegated to the margins of psychology. Thus, the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* proclaimed:

> Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition or fancy: forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices.[71]

Although he may not have encountered Smith's trance performances before the writing of *Nadja*, this "richest" of all mediums presented through her paintings, romances, and languages precisely those marvellous unconscious faculties that Breton wished to elaborate.

Notes

1 Théodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages* [1900], trans. Sonu Shamdasani (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 95.
2 Ibid., 15.
3 On the emergence of modern Spiritualism in America in the mid-nineteenth century, see Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and Robert Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
4 See Frank Dumont, *A History of Personality Psychology: Theory, Science, and Research from Hellenism to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 41–42; Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 316–18; and Sonu Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène: Théodore Flournoy and the Genesis of the Subliminal Self," in *From India to Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages* [1900], ed. Théodore Flournoy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), xi–li.

5   John Warne Monroe, "The Way We Believe Now: Modernity and the Occult," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* 2, no. 1 (2007): 68–78, 68.

6   Allison Morehead, "Symbolism, Mediumship and the 'Study of the Soul That Has Constituted Itself as a Positivist Science'," *RACAR* 34, no. 1 (2009): 77–85.

7   André Breton, "The Automatic Message" [1933], in André Breton, Paul Éluard and Philippe Soupault, *The Automatic Message, The Magnetic Fields, The Immaculate Conception*, trans. Antony Melville (London: Atlas Press, 1997), 20.

8   André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

9   Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène," l–li.

10 In Europe, the writings of Allan Kardec (1804–1869) – notably the 1857 *Spirits Book* and the 1861 *Mediums Book* – formed a doctrine for the interpretation of spiritual communications, which became known as Spiritism, and which differed from American Spiritualism. For the purpose of this chapter, I employ the term Spiritualism to encompass, more largely, all movements that sought and believed in communications with the spirits.

11 On the Spiritualist movement in France, see M. Brady Brower, *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France* (Springfield: The University of Illinois Press, 2010); Sofie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism to Psychical Research and Metaphysics in France, 1853–1931* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); and Bertrand Méheust, *Somnambulisme et Médiumnité*, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 1999).

12 Flournoy, *From India*, 9.

13 Tzvetan Todorov, "L'Étrange Cas de Mlle Smith," *Romanic Review* 63, no. 2 (1972): 84

> L'analyse de la langue hindoue semble passionner Saussure à un degré qu'on a du mal à imaginer. Il prend le plus grand soin à commenter les productions linguistiques de Mlle Smith, il assiste aux séances médiumniques et suggère des interprétations possibles de son cas. De sorte que le chapitre de Flournoy qui traite de la langue hindoue est à moitié composé par des extraits des lettres de Saussure.

For contemporaneous studies of the language, see also Victor Henry, *Le Language martien: étude analytique de la genèse d'une langue dans un cas de glossolalie* (Paris: Maissonneuve, 1901) and Théodore Flournoy, *Nouvelles Observations sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie*, Archives de Psychologie 1 (Geneva: C. Eggimann, 1902). For a contemporary study, see Daniel Rosenberg, "Speaking Martian," *Cabinet* 1 (2001), accessed October 9, 2015, http://cabinetmagazine.org/Issues/1/I_Martian.php. Many of Smith's drawings, along with those of other mediums from Victor Hugo to Leon Petitjean, are reproduced in *Entrée des Médiums: Spiritisme et Art de Hugo à Breton*, eds. Gérard Audinet et al. (Paris: Paris Musées, 2012).

14 Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène," xxv.

15 Ibid.

16 Quoted in Mireille Cifali, to *Des Indes à la planète Mars* [1900], ed. Théodore Flournoy (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983) 372–77

> Je serais pourtant curieux de savoir en quoi l'explication par le subliminal est plus normale que l'explication par l'esprit… Car enfin, un subliminal… qui a de la promptitude, de la finesse, un flair étonnamment exquis et délicat… une imagination remarquablement calme, pondérée, attachée au réel et au vraisemblable; une subconscience merveilleusement douée et prodigieusement féconde… un tel subliminal me paraît d'une explication, pour le moins, aussi occulte, aussi invraisemblable que celle défendue et admise par les spirites.

17 See Waldemar Deonna, *De la planète Mars en Terre sainte. Art et subconscient, Un médium peintre: Hélène Smith* (Paris: De Boccard, 1932).

18 James Strachey, introduction to "The Interpretation of Dreams" [1900], by Sigmund Freud, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 4, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), xx.

19 Flournoy notably had an important influence on Swiss psychologist C. G. Jung (1875–1961), and later became part of the rift between him and Freud. On this influence, see Francis

Xavier Charet, *Spiritualism and the Foundation of C. G. Jung's Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) and Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène."

20 Elisabeth Roudinesco, "Des Martiens dans la tête," *Matin*, (October 11, 1983): 26 ["un beau livre qui devrait faire un jour l'objet d'un film."].

21 Ibid. ["Freud raconte les mêmes histoires que Flournoy, mais dans une autre langue, une langue venue du crépuscule, une langue nouvelle," and "il semble assis le cul entre deux siècles, une fesse dans la tradition épistémologique et romanesque du XIXe siècle, une autre dans ce sol mouvant du XXe siècle vers lequel il regarde désespérément… À l'opposé de Freud, Flournoy … n'est pas un novateur, mais un magnétiseur à l'ancienne."].

22 Flournoy was certainly influenced by the writings of psychical researchers. On this note, see Robert C. Le Clair, ed., *The Letters of William James* (Madison, Milwaukee, and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966); Shamdasani, "Encountering Hélène."

23 See Ellenberger's erudite study *The Discovery of the Unconscious*, which, rejecting the more common "Freudocentric" perspective, has brought to light the complex relations between dynamic psychiatry, the forerunner of depth psychology, and occultism and Spiritualism in Europe, the UK, and the US from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

24 See Jean-Martin Charcot, "Spiritualism and Hysteria," in *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System; Delivered at the Infirmary of La Salpetière*, ed. and trans. Ruth Harris (New York: Routledge, 2014), 196–206.

25 See Pierre Janet, *The Mental State of Hystericals: A Study of Mental Stigmata and Mental Accidents* [1892] (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 1901). For a description of his studies with Léonie, see also Jules Eisenbud, *Paranormal Foreknowledge: Problems and Perplexities* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1982).

26 On Ferenczi's approach to the occult, see Nandor Fodor, "Sándor Ferenczi's Psychic Adventures," *International Journal of Parapsyhology* 3 (1961): 49–63.

27 On these experiments, see Ernst Jones, "Occultism," in *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3 (New York: Basic Books, 1961), 375–407. On Freud, Spiritualism, and telepathy, see Claudie Massicotte, "Psychical Transmissions: Freud, Spiritualism and the Occult," *Psychoanalytic Dialogue* 24 (2014): 88–102.

28 On this separation, see Deborah J. Coon, "Testing the Limits of Sense and Science: American Experimental Psychologists Combat Spiritualism," *American Psychologist*, 47, no. 2 (1992): 143–51; James P. Keeley "Subliminal Promptings: Psychoanalytic Theory and the Society for Psychical Research," *American Imago* 58 (2001): 767–91; and Françoise Parot, "Le Bannissement des esprits: naissance d'une frontière institutionnelle entre spiritisme et psychologie," *Revue de Synthèse* 3–4 (1994): 417–43.

29 Júlia Gyimesi, "The Problem of Demarcation: Psychoanalysis and the Occult," *American Imago* 66 (2009): 468. In France, experimental explorations of the psyche and its hidden faculties were relegated to the IMI (Institut Metaphsyique International), established in 1919 under the direction of Gustave Geley (1860–1924).

30 Quoted in Alexandra Baccopoulos-Viau, "Automatism, Surrealism and the Making of French Psychopathology: the Case of Pierre Janet," *History of Psychiatry* 23, no. 3 (2012): 267.

31 Quoted in Cifali, postface to *Des Indes*, 372. ["de la promptitude, de la finesse, un flair étonnamment exquis et délicat."].

32 Jean Clair, "Le Surréalisme entre spiritisme et totalitarisme. Contribution à une historie de l'insensé," *Mille neuf cent* 1, no. 21 (2003): 79 ["l'inconscient qu'évoque André Breton et qui lui permet de donner, croit-il, une assise théorique, sinon scientifique, à l'écriture automatique … est un inconscient cependant qui, à la date de 1920, est devenu archaïque et périmé."]. Clair's work on Surrealism has been the object of polemical debates in French media following his publication of "Le Surréalisme et la démoralisation de l'Occident" in *Le Monde* in 2001. In it, Clair rejected what he considered a critical impunity accorded to the surrealists and condemned, following the attacks of September 11th, the anti-Western and anti-American stance he retrieved from surrealist works. In 2002, several artists, writers, and scholars gathered a collection of "pro-surrealist" responses to Clair's article. See Malek Abbou et al., *Jean Clair ou la misère intellectuelle francaise* (Paris: Association des amis de Benjamin Péret, 2002).

33 This translates the original title of the article. See Jean-Louis Houdebine, "Méconnaissance de la psychanalyse dans le discours surréaliste," *Tel Quel* 46 (Summer 1971): 67–82.

34 Ibid., 72. See also the article's critical discussion in David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 66–69.

35 On the French psychological *doxa*, Pierre Janet's symptomatic conception of the unconscious, and Breton's refusal of this limiting view, see Bacopoulos-Viau, "Automatism, Surrealism," 260. Here, the latter demonstrates that by 1919, Janet had stripped "his system of the 'marvellous' (*merveilleux*) [and] removed the potential from seeing in automatic manifestations of the mind a source of exalted creativity, a move which Breton found regrettable."

36 André Breton, "For Dada" [1920], in *The Lost Steps* [1924], trans. Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 54.

37 André Breton, "The Mediums Enter" [1922], ibid., 92.

38 As Roudinesco demonstrates, this identification notably occurs through Nadja, who, as will later be made clear, is herself identified with Smith ("in the manner of Hélène Smith" Nadja believed that "she had lived in the past under the reign of Marie Antoinette," Roudinesco reminds us). After noting the institutionalisation of Nadja to the Vaucluse asylum, Breton declares his "contempt … for psychiatry, its rituals and works" and concludes that "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or it will not be." Through this identification, Roudinesco argues, "the Madwoman" allowed Breton to "attain his desire to write and to achieve that convulsive beauty of which he dreamed." See Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co.: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925–1985*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27.

39 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 35.

40 Ibid., 22–23.

41 Breton, "The Mediums Enter," 91.

42 Ibid., 95.

43 Ibid., 92. Through the terms "hypnotic slumber" and "sleeping fits," the surrealists both reaffirmed the distinction between their and spiritualist practices of automatic writing (the former refusing the spiritual hypothesis), and alluded to traditions of somnambulism in France. Notably, through the writings of Allan Kardec, practices of mediumship had indeed been largely understood, in France, in continuity with phenomena of mesmerism, hypnotism, and somnambulism. See Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural*; Brower, *Unruly Spirits*, and Méheust, *Somnambulisme et Mediumnité*.

44 Breton, "The Mediums Enter," 92, 95.

45 Ibid., 26.

46 André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], trans. Richard Howard and with an introduction by Mark Polizzotti (London: Penguin, 1999), 31–32.

47 Quoted in Ruth Brandon, *Surreal Lives: The Surrealists 1917–1945* (New York: Grove Press, 1999), 205.

48 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 29.

49 Louis Aragon, "A Wave of Dreams" [1924], trans. Susan de Muth, *Papers of Surrealism* 1 (2013): 6.

50 André Breton and André Parinaud, *Entretiens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 91.

51 Brandon, *Surreal Lives*, 206.

52 André Breton, "Letter to Seers" [1922], in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969),195–204.

53 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 179.

54 Ibid.

55 Breton, *Nadja*, 79.

56 Ibid., 79–80.

57 See Morehead, "Symbolism, Mediumship," 77.

58 Breton, "The Automatic Message," 20.

59 Ibid. On the female medium as muse of surrealism, see also Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

60 André Breton and Paul Éluard, eds., *Dictionnaire abrégé du Surréalisme* [1938] (Paris: José Corti, 1991), 25.

61 On the *Jeu de Marseille*, see Claudia Mesch, "Serious Play: Games and Early Twentieth-Century Modernism," in *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play and Twentieth-Century*

Art, ed. David Getsy (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 65–68, and Horace Brockington, "Creative Occupation: Collaborative Artistic Practices in Europe, 1937–1943," in *Artistic Bedfellows: Histories, Theories and Conversations in Collaborative Art Practices*, ed. Holly Crawfiord (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 40–42.

62 Breton and Parinaud, *Entretiens*, 76.
63 Marina Yaguello, *Lunatic Lovers of Language: Imaginary Languages and Their Inventors*, trans. Catherine Slater (London: Athlone, 1991), 96.
64 See note 17 above.
65 See Jean Starobinski, "Freud, Breton, Myers," *L'Arc* 34 (1968): 87–96.
66 André Breton, "The Automatic Message," 17.
67 See Marguerite Bonnet, *André Breton: Naissance de l'aventure surréaliste* (Paris: José Corti, 1975).
68 Bertrand Méheust, "Annexes," in *Art spirite, médiumnique, visionnaire: message d'outre-monde* (Paris: Hoebeke, 1999), 159

comme si les influences subies par un écrivain… ce limitaient à celles qu'il a bien voulu reconnaître par écrit. Comme si la pensée freudienne elle-même n'était pas tributaire de la fermentation magnéto-hypnotico-spirite. Comme si l'on pouvait attribuer au hasard le fait que l'époque décisive des sommeils coïncide exactement avec l'apogée de la méta-psychique française.

69 Cifali, postface to Flournoy, *Des Indes*, 374 ["marqué davantage par les effets de la censure, du déguisement et de son lien avec le symptôme;" "est par contre plus sensible aux achèvements qui lient l'inconscient à la création artistique"].
70 Henri F. Ellenberger, "Freud in Perspective: A Conversation with Henri F. Ellenberger," *Psychology Today* (March 1973), 56.
71 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 10.

2 The Vertiginous Pursuit of the Grand Jeu

Experimental Metaphysics, Paramnesia, and Creative Involution

Donna Roberts

The Grand Jeu (literally translated "The Great Game") was a group of artists, poets, and writers that published an eponymous periodical in Paris between 1928 and 1930. Its core members were the poets René Daumal (1908–1944) and Roger Gilbert-Lecomte (1907–1943), poet and essayist André Rolland de Renéville (1903–1962), theorist of poetry and mysticism, writer, and journalist Roger Vailland (1907–1965), and the Czech painter Josef Šíma (1891–1971). The themes of the three issues of *Le Grand Jeu* reflected the group's key interest in tropes related to revolt, poetic experience, and myth, and each issue contained contributions from artists, writers, and poets associated with the surrealist milieu, including Robert Desnos (1900–1945), Michel Leiris (1901–1990), George Ribemont-Dessaignes (1884–1974), and André Masson (1896–1987). Although they shared numerous creative and experimental interests, the Grand Jeu received significant criticism from the surrealist group, largely for their focus on traditional thought and metaphysics, and after a period of internal tension, the movement disbanded in 1932.[1] Photographer Artür Harfaux (1906–1995) and graphic artist Maurice Henry (1907–1984) joined the surrealist group; Daumal followed his interest in traditional thought and briefly became a student of the Gurdjieffian guru Alexandre de Salzmann (1874–1934); and Gilbert-Lecomte published a critically acclaimed volume of poetry before declining into heroin addiction.

The Grand Jeu's identification with Eastern thought, in particular Hindu non-dualistic philosophy, is one defining feature of the group that distinguishes it from Surrealism. Although Breton made occasional paeans to the "Orient," proclaiming, for instance, its "symbolic value" in the closing paragraph of "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality" (1924), his references are never directly in relation to Indian thought.[2] Daumal, on the contrary, clearly asserts the connection of the Grand Jeu to India, writing in their journal: "The essential pattern of my thought, of our thought, of thought is inscribed [...] in the sacred books of India."[3] According to Roger Caillois (1913–1978), a friend of Gilbert-Lecomte while growing up in Reims, the title of the group and periodical originated in an admiration for Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), and was chosen for the allusion to India, significant because at the heart of the Grand Jeu's ideas lies an identification with Hindu philosophy: "The whole philosophy of the Grand Jeu was an Indian philosophy."[4]

Caillois attests to how Daumal learned Sanskrit as a teenager, reading the Upanishads and the source literature of Hindu philosophy, while Gilbert-Lecomte was familiar with scholarly studies by René Guénon (1886–1951), including *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* (1921) and *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta* (1925).[5] In the first issue of *Le Grand Jeu*, Gilbert-Lecomte

claims his group's affinity with Guénon's ideas, stating that "the tradition to which he aligns himself is the only one that we recognize."[6] Daumal, who became an expert on Hindu sacred poetics and non-dualistic philosophy, would follow Guénon's criticism of the analytical bias of occidental civilisation, deriding what he called the "fat-fingered Occident," incapable of grasping the subtleties of Oriental metaphysics and mythological thought.[7] Although Kipling's "great game" referred to colonial espionage, specifically in India, according to Caillois the title of the group and its periodical was primarily chosen because espionage "symbolically signified metaphysical research."[8] The Grand Jeu would define this research as "experimental metaphysics": the pursuit of states of being that were felt to surpass spatio-temporal limits, and the experience of what might normally only be comprehended through metaphysical logic, such as the play between multiplicity and unity, a sense of discontinuous time, or the encounter of the finite (self) with the infinite. Hence, this chapter will first focus on the early development of the Grand Jeu in Reims, where Daumal, Gilbert-Lecomte and their friends became absorbed in an idiosyncratic mix of late romantic and symbolist poetics, Hindu philosophy, metaphysics, and experimental behaviour, before turning to a closer discussion of the various influences on the group – from the traditional thought of René Guénon, to non-Freudian psychological theories and Bergsonian metaphysics – and how it can be understood in relation to the philosophical and political position of the surrealist group at the time. In closing, in line with the paradoxical character of the Grand Jeu, I will turn to an opening, sketching out a possibly fruitful new perspective on the Grand Jeu by outlining how the group's thought can be approached from a Deleuzian angle.

Simplisme and the Origins of the Grand Jeu

Drawing attention to the Grand Jeu as an initiatory society fixated with death and inner experience, Michel Camus (1929–2003) has compared the group to Georges Bataille's *Acéphale* collective of the 1930s.[9] The background to this initiatory character originated in the early 1920s when Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte were growing up in Reims. As adolescents, they formed a group called "Les Phrères simplistes" (Plate II) alongside their school friends Roger Vailland, Robert Meyrat, and Pierre Minet. *Simplisme* was intended as a talisman against the impending threat of adulthood (logic, utility, death of play and the imagination, etc.), and it was during this period that Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte became absorbed in a discourse of psychology, Bergsonism, metaphysics, Hindu, and Occidental mysticism.[10] It was as part of this young group that the future members of the Grand Jeu would develop their experimental metaphysics, seeking out methods of forging an experiential link between apparently irreconcilable dualities: the visible and the invisible, dream and waking, life and death, and individual and inter-subjective consciousness. Immersed in Oriental non-dualistic philosophy, parapsychology (particularly experiments in "para-optics" or extra-sensory perception), romantic poetry, and occult thought, the *Simplistes* experimented with drugs, trances, somnambulism, mediumism, collectively induced states of depersonalisation, self-effacement, and "doubling," or multiple personality. A text about Daumal's experimentation in para-optics was even published in the proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research.[11]

   A number of the experimental ideas discussed by the young group can be traced directly to various late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources, such as

the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859–1941), the work of theorists related to the pre-Freudian school of psychology, such as Théodule Ribot (1839–1916) and Pierre Janet (1859–1947), and the spiritualist writings of Frederick Myers (1843–1901), as well as the romantic works of Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855). These include *paramnesia* (false or impersonal memories); *depersonalisation*, or states of dissociation from a coherent self; and the idea of dreams as a form of transpersonal memory. Daumal would later publish texts in *Le Grand Jeu* in which he narrated accounts of his *Simpliste* experiments with drugs and somnambulism.[12] One essay, "The First Revelation of Experimental Metaphysics: The Un-relatable Experience," is an account of an altered state of consciousness induced by inhaling carbon tetrachloride the *Simplistes* kept to preserve insects. It relates Daumal's experiences of self-dissolution in a manner that accords with William James's definition in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) of the apparent "ineffability" of such experiences.[13] "I was," writes Daumal of his experience of self-loss, "nothing more than a very simple vicious circle,"[14] suggesting a relation between such "ineffable" experiences and the spiral motif printed on the cover of *Le Grand Jeu* (Figure 2.1), to which we will return below.

Influenced by their readings of mystical texts, and late romantic and Orphic poetry, the *Simplistes* pursued an imperative to defy normative notions of coherent subjectivity through the Rimbaldian maxim of "I is another." According to Olivier
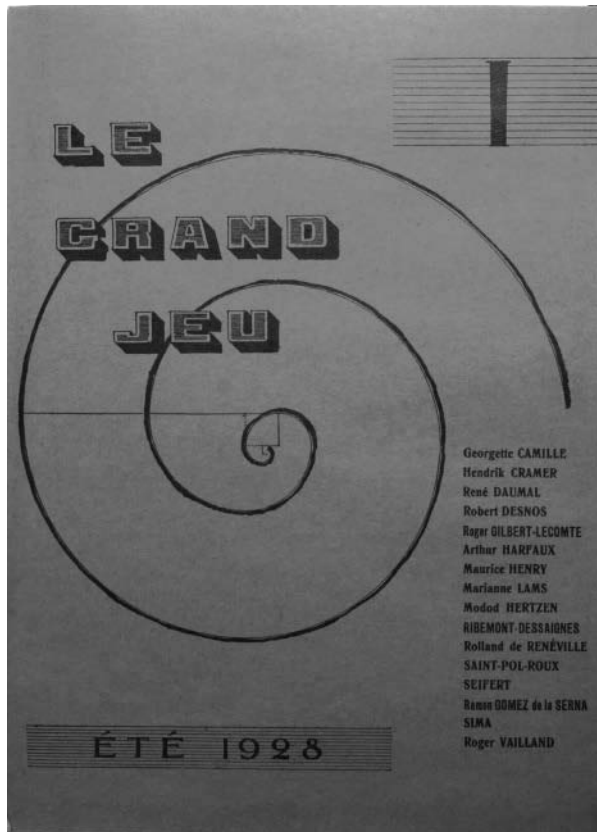

Figure 2.1 Josef Šíma, Cover of *Le Grand Jeu*, 1928. Author's own copy.

Penot-Lacassagne and Emmanuel Rubio, the Grand Jeu took from Rimbaud the idea of a method based on "illuminations; voluntary hallucinations, intoxication [and a] merciless war against the 'real'."[15] Essentially, they saw their experimental metaphysics as a continuation of the work of Rimbaud, to whom the second issue of *Le Grand Jeu* was dedicated in 1929. In his famous "Lettre du voyant" of 1871 (re-published in the periodical), Rimbaud had described the task of the poet as that of a visionary (*voyant*) or seer: "The poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational disordering of all the senses."[16] Gilbert-Lecomte and Daumal would consciously adopt Rimbaud's model of the accursed visionary, experimentally seeking intense states of being and rejecting fixed notions of the self.

Poetry, Metaphysics, and the Surrealist "Point"

With their Rimbaldian research, the Grand Jeu pursued the experience of self-dissolution, sometimes with an end to written expression, sometimes as an end in itself. Gilbert-Lecomte would define the goal of this research in terms borrowed directly from Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930), as the "total recuperation of the psychic life of man by the vertiginous descent into the self, the systematic illumination of hidden places, the progressive obscuring of other places, the perpetual advance into the full zone of prohibition."[17] This "vertiginous descent" was symbolised by the logo printed aforementioned on the cover of *Le Grand Jeu* (Figure 2.1). Designed by Šíma, the spiral resembling the golden section reflected the Grand Jeu's poetic and metaphysical identification with the relation between the micro and macrocosm; expressing what symbolist poet and critic Stéphane Mallarmé (Étienne Mallarmé, 1842–1898) referred to in his poem *Igitur* as the "marine and stellar complexity" of morphological resemblances.[18] The spiral also implied the process of poetic depersonalisation associated with Mallarmé's work, particularly the identification with the image of the *katabatic* descent into an underworld found recurrently in Orphic poetry. The Grand Jeu's spiral and its movement of internal descent further hints at the legacy of Mallarmé's poetry for the Grand Jeu, which exemplifies the apogee of the mystical logic of poetic experience as theorised by Renéville: "At the moment when the poet and the mystic meet, at the zero point wherein the claims of all affirmation and all negation cease, the antinomy of contrary realities is effaced through their insight."[19] Mallarmé's Igitur descends at midnight, gradually losing all sense of self within a spiral motion, passing out of present time and entering the *durée* of the "immemorial race" of ancient poets: "Igitur descends the stairs of the human mind, goes to the depths of things" where "the former place of the hour's fall is immobilized in a narcotic calm of the pure *self*, long dreamed-of."[20]

The late romantic metaphysics characteristic of Mallarmé's poetry is reflected in Gilbert-Lecomte's own writing, particularly his collection of poems *La Vie l'amour la mort le vide et le vent / Life Love Death Void and Wind*. First published in 1934 with a foreword by Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), this collection exemplifies Gilbert-Lecomte's use of analogy, the play between micro and macrocosm, poetic paradox, the blurring of contraries, and the slippage of an apparently distinct subject along with the dissolution of distinct objects. The achievement of this state of harmonious immobilisation was not, however, a merely poetic trope for Gilbert-Lecomte, but was a principle to be achieved within life itself. According to the first historian of the Grand Jeu, Michel Random, Gilbert-Lecomte "accepted the voluntary asceticism of his own

dissolution,"[21] and, aided by the use of heroin, which he referred to as "a means of slow suicide,"[22] committed himself to what Random has called "a barely imaginable hallucinatory state, which nevertheless possessed an incontestably lived reality."[23] Gilbert-Lecomte would refer to the attainment of this Igitur-like point as the lived experience of the metaphysical notion of the *punctum stans*, the absolute synthesis of contraries, of which he wrote in the first issue of *Le Grand Jeu*: "Desperately, towards the dead point, the immobile point of his own vibrating interior, the 'punctum stans' of old metaphysics, the absolute star where there only exists the fervent state of a being who has lost his self."[24]

If in his *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton theorised Surrealism through the Hegelian logic of the synthesis of contraries, Gilbert-Lecomte and Daumal pursued this "point" as an experiential reality. Defining themselves as "serious players," they declared their motto in the first issue of *Le Grand Jeu* as "he who loses wins, as it is a question of losing oneself."[25] It is probably no coincidence that after the formative influence of the Grand Jeu's thought (particularly the notion of self-abandonment) that Caillois would seek to classify a form of risk-taking games as *Ilinx*: a word he relates in the Greek language to whirlpool and vertigo – again recalling the spiral symbol on the cover of *Le Grand Jeu*. Echoing the Grand Jeu's experimental pursuits of loss, Caillois described *Ilinx* as "based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consists of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."[26] Sadly, the Grand Jeu's serious play with vertiginous descent and experimental metaphysics would follow the fatal pattern of *Ilinx*: Gilbert-Lecomte died in 1943 of a tetanus infection resulting from his heroin addiction, and Daumal died the following year from lung damage partly caused by excessive drug inhalation as a youth.

Paramnesia and Experimental Metaphysics Beyond the Pleasure Principle

The issue of death – of experiencing it, defying it, or going beyond it – was an obsession of Gilbert-Lecomte and Daumal. Their poetic texts are replete with reveries on the "void," which Renéville related to the powerful poetic and metaphysical pull of what he called the "torment of the infinite."[27] According to Random, it was fundamentally the idea of death that lay at the basis of all their experimental pursuits: "It is from [the idea of death] that they formulated their experimental metaphysics, the central pivot of the Grand Jeu: the recognition of death … and the beyond, the possibility of a non-death or the continuity of the spirit."[28] Gilbert-Lecomte's writings frequently expressed a will to remove himself entirely from the world of action; to live what he called in his essay on intoxicating substances, "Mr. Morphine, Public Poisoner," a state of "death-within-life."[29] With reference to this moribund form of revolt, Alain Trouvé has defined Gilbert-Lecomte's method as a form of "vertiginous suicide across diverse forms of experimentation."[30] Gilbert-Lecomte closely courted death, and developed an idea of a death instinct that followed Freud's logic in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920); drawing together images and ideas from evolutionary biology, metaphysics, and mysticism to define the ultimate process of life as a *return* to a state of non-differentiation: "leave oneself, universalize oneself, until one has rediscovered the integrity of one's primordial unity."[31] Picking up on the fusion of metaphysics and evolutionary biology in what Gilbert-Lecomte called the

logic of "mystical involution,"[32] Caillois defined this logic of "return" as an inverse Bergsonism: "In a falsely Bergsonian language (Bergson believed in an *ascent*), he exalted the return to non-differentiation."[33]

Gilbert-Lecomte's inversion of Bergson's *élan vital* reflects the influence on his thinking of theories of psychic regression. He considered the processes of the creative imagination as necessarily regressive, representing a creative involution of the developmental direction of the mind. With reference to Ernst Haeckel's biogenetic law, Gilbert-Lecomte defined this development, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, through analogous binaries: non-differentiated to differentiated, child to adult, primitive to civilised, and mythical to rational.[34] He thus adapted the prevalent interest in primitivism through an evolutionary model, imagining a form of regression further back than the ancestral model of the primitive to the phylogenetic pre-natal: to "the primitive life of protoplasm."[35] It is probably as a student of medicine in Reims that Gilbert-Lecomte picked up on certain theories of psychic regression circulating in France in the 1920s that historian of psychobiology Frank Sulloway has identified as derived from specific evolutionary sources: "In France … notions of *dissolution*, *involution*, and *regression*, found in the writings of numerous contemporary neurologists and psychologists, were probably derived from the combined influence of [Herbert] Spencer, [Hughlings] Jackson, and the French psychiatrist J. Moreau."[36] Such psychological theories were published in numerous journals of the era, such as the *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique* (established by Janet), *La Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, and *La Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* (established by Ribot). As a contemporary journal, *La Revue philosophique* in particular, reflects the syncretic interests of the Grand Jeu. A quick survey of texts through the 1920s, when the review was edited by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939), reveals an eclectic array of articles on themes highly relevant for the Grand Jeu, such as psychology and metaphysics, the question of immortality, the pathology of the imagination, art and sainthood, mystic experience and poetry, the metaphysical basis of relativity, Hermes Trismegistus, Giordano Bruno, and Novalis's poetry and magic, to name a few prominent themes.

Many of the theories contained in such reviews find an echo in Gilbert-Lecomte's writings, most notably his elaboration on the theory of paramnesia: a delusion of memory much discussed by Ribot and Bergson. Gilbert-Lecomte adopted the term to develop a creative theory based on regression and pre-natal memories; what Ribot had described in his *Diseases of Memory* (1882) as a form of false memory, the confusion of perception and recollection, and the "exaltation of memory."[37] This notion of memory as impersonal and pre-natal represented for the Grand Jeu the privileged psychical state of visionaries capable of bypassing the personal limits of the mind and accessing a form of cosmic consciousness. Access to this form of memory, they maintained, requires a complete detachment from the self:

> He who has emptied his consciousness of all the images of our false world, which is not a closed vessel, can draw into himself, plucked from the suction of the void, other images arising from beyond the space in which he breathes or the time in which his heart beats; immemorial memories or blinding prophesies attained by a cold, anguished quest.[38]

In many ways, Gilbert-Lecomte's understanding of the creative imagination as a form of exalted memory aligns his thinking with the romantic tradition, particularly

that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), Thomas de Quincey (1785–1859), and Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), whose use of opiates as part of the poetic experience of reverie was also pursued by Gilbert-Lecomte. In characteristically syncretic fashion, Gilbert-Lecomte fuses this romantic notion of an immemorial memory with evolutionary theory, drawing, as Caillois observed, on Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1907) and theory of memory as entirely preserved, not only within the individual mind, but also within the evolutionary record. Further to Caillois's observation, Gilbert-Lecomte also inverts Bergson's utilitarian theory of memory into a notion of the creative imagination that is implicitly a form of pathological memory. Bergson proposed that there exists a thin veil that separates conscious from unconscious memories, and although the totality of recollections remains ready to be awakened by associations, consciousness – or what Bergson calls "attention to life"[39] – only allows those memories through that are *useful* for action in the present:

> The cerebral mechanism is arranged just so as to drive back into the unconscious almost the whole of this past, and to admit beyond the threshold only that which can cast light on the present situation or further the action now being prepared – in short, only that which can give *useful* work.[40]

For Gilbert-Lecomte, cultivating inattention to life, and suppressing what Janet called "the function of the real,"[41] enabled an opening of the floodgates of memory that awoke the creative state of paramnesia.

According to Deleuze-scholar Christian Kerslake, both Bergson and Janet, with their utilitarian theory of memory, proposed that pathology was not caused by the repression of memories (as Freud supposed) but rather by an *excess* of memories that disabled attention to the present: "what makes one ill is not the repression of particular noxious memories, but the state of dissociation from present activity."[42] Kerslake includes the theories of Ribot and Janet in what he refers to as "pathologies of time" within pre-Freudian models of the unconscious.[43] Gilbert-Lecomte's creative theory of paramnesia as a retreat from action into a form of reverie that bypasses the self can thus be understood in terms of a mix of such "pathologies of time" along with romantic and metaphysical theories of memory, such as the Platonic notion of *anamnesis*, as discussed in *Meno* and *Phaedo*.[44] This cultivation of depersonalization, inattention to life, and altered states of subjectivity can be likened to Breton's and Philippe Soupault's earlier experimentation with states of receptivity as part of the process of automatic writing, discussed in Claudie Massicotte's contribution to this volume. Both required a heightened form of receptivity, but for the Grand Jeu, the implications were directly related to the ascetic process of self-negation: making "a void of the self."[45] Furthermore, rather than bypassing conscious control, as with the surrealist model of automatism, Gilbert-Lecomte looked to a model familiar from esotericism and romanticism in which the individual mind itself was bypassed in order to access an impersonal memory, akin to what Richard Noll has called a "cosmic memory bank," with reference to comparable ideas found in Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's Theosophy.[46] Kerslake notes that the idea that the past is preserved in its entirety was "something of an occult obsession in *fin-de-siècle* Europe,"[47] as well as being the defining feature of what he calls Bergson's "gothic philosophy of memory."[48] Gilbert-Lecomte closely follows this evocative theoretical over-determination, intertwining ideas from evolutionary biology, psychology, and esotericism into a theory of creative involution.

Formlessness and the Philosophy of Participation

While a concern with experimental metaphysics and mystical notions of self-negation clearly distinguished the Grand Jeu from the surrealists, certain ambitions of the group were not entirely distinct from Surrealism. These were expressed in a similar defiance of positivism and the technological image of progress, and with similar interests in dreams, myths, poetic experiences, Hegelian dialectics, and the "primitive mentality." Writing in the first issue of *Le Grand Jeu*, Daumal declared: "Man wanted to affirm his existence apart from humanity, and in so doing he became subject … to the pride that froze his spirit in the single-minded affirmation of the self."[49] In many ways Daumal's rejection of the fixed, individualistic Occidental concept of the self ran parallel to a similar rejection by Bataille and Leiris who, in the periodical *Documents*, similarly expressed a concern with participatory modes of being, metamorphosis, and the displacement of fixed forms leading to the displacement of self.

Like Bataille and Breton, the Grand Jeu entirely rejected the Comtean view of progress, which held that scientific thinking had surpassed religious and "primitive" thought; which could only re-emerge as an atavism in the midst of progressive civilization or as a sign of less scientifically developed peoples.[50] "The history of what is called human progress," wrote Renéville, "seems really a struggle engaged against the spirit of participation."[51] From this spirit arises "the revelations of poets, the illuminations of mystics, those dreamers of every order for whom speculations are confined to the oral tradition, the Hermetic language, and secret symbols."[52] Again useful in clarifying the Grand Jeu's ideas, Caillois defined the notion of participation as key to the Grand Jeu's thinking, noting how it was based on an interest "in everything that went against the principle of non-contradiction."[53] The Grand Jeu thus adopted Lévy-Bruhl's notion of "mystical participation" as a means to syncretizing modes of thought that represented non-dualistic dynamics, such as the poetic, "primitive," mystical, and oneiric. These modes of thought, as argued by Lévy-Bruhl, Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) and William James (1842–1910), far from being surpassed by positivism, represented a fundamental tendency of thought, which, for the Grand Jeu, expressed an essential human longing to dissolve the apparent boundaries of individuation.

In visual terms, the Grand Jeu's philosophy of participation was developed most vividly by Josef Šíma, whose portrait of Gilbert-Lecomte (Plate III) reflects the poet's desired slippage of individuation and his ideas on the transitory and unfixed nature of personality: He appears to be dissolving or, to use a Deleuzian term, "becoming imperceptible,"[54] and diffusing beyond the boundaries of his own bodily form. Šíma's portrait represents Gilbert-Lecomte's poetic-mystical persona and the process of detachment he pursued – from himself and the world of stable forms – which he defined in an essay on Šíma, published in *Documents* in 1930, as "the slow delivery from the multiple to the unique, the detachment from the perceptible."[55] Šíma's 1928 painting from the era of the Grand Jeu, *Midi* (Figure 2.2), reflects the group's metaphysical ideas through the depiction of a landscape populated by various elements of nature – trees, rocks, fields, clouds – appearing to uproot and float away, merging together, dissolving, and losing their distinct form. This feature of Šíma's painting can be interpreted as another aspect of the Grand Jeu's Bergsonism, reflected in a concern for temporal fluctuations and becomings rather than static form and fixity. We forget, wrote Bergson in *Creative Evolution*, "that the very permanence of … form is only

Figure 2.2 Josef Šíma, *Midi*, 1928. Oil on canvas. Musée des beaux-arts de la ville de Reims. Photo: © C. Devleeschauwer.

the outline of a movement. At times, however, in a fleeting vision, the invisible breath that bears them is materialized before our very eyes."[56]

It is notable that at the same time as Bataille was pursuing the idea of the *informe* or formless in the periodical *Documents*, the Grand Jeu were following their own philosophy of formlessness, which they developed from a conflation of Bergsonism, mysticism, and romantic poetics. The Grand Jeu's sense of formlessness, however, quite opposed to Bataille's, reflected a distinct idealism, being based on the logic of mysticism developed in French romantic poetry and exemplified in Mallarmé's view of the phenomenal world as merely "vain forms of matter" that could be stripped away to reveal the noumenal essence.[57] For Gilbert-Lecomte, the philosophy of participation worked against individuation – of personalities, ideas, and forms – and returned everything to an ontological similitude, envisioned as a metaphysical ecology of the unique as the source of multiplicity: "Everything participates in everything. Separated appearances all draw on the same root. Thus, all action upon one part reacts upon the whole and all its parts."[58] As part of their philosophy of participation, a denial of individuated forms was based on the will to escape the limits of fixity, which the Grand Jeu articulated both through ascetic mystical detachment and the destabilizing of fixed subject-object relations. This latter point was expressed in terms of romantic poetics, which Renéville defined as being based on a dialectical fusion of subject

and object: "the suppression of the object, retraced step by step to its essence, brings about the disappearance of the subject," leading to "their mutual fusion in a seamless vacuity."[59] While the Grand Jeu often defined this process in terms of a harmonious synthesis, or nullification of the self, it was also considered a fundamental disordering or delirium that overwhelms and dissipates the subject and the world of apparently distinct forms, expressed thus by Roger Vailland: "The forms that one believes immutable begin to live and to metamorphose with ever-greater speed. *Participations* are multiplied in the universe of 'distinct things.' The individual cracks: an immense flux lifts man up and carries him away."[60]

Politics and Mystical Revolt

In some ways, the tone and focus of the periodical *Le Grand Jeu* resembles certain aspects of the early issues of *La Révolution surréaliste*, particularly those edited by Antonin Artaud, who befriended Daumal in the early 1930s and shared the Grand Jeu's interests in Oriental philosophy, theatre, and mysticism. Like Artaud's texts in *La Révolution surréaliste*, the writings in *Le Grand Jeu* combined a spirit of revolt with the language of mysticism and a broad identification with the Orient. The direct relation of the Grand Jeu to politics has long been a cause for contention, especially given the sharp divide that was exposed between the group and the more politically coherent surrealists after Renéville refused to support Louis Aragon's (1897–1982) controversial poem *Red Front* in 1932, leading to the disbanding of the Grand Jeu in November of that year. This is not to say, however, that the Grand Jeu's position was not political in the broad sense, by which I mean in the sense that Hugo Ball's (1886–1927) contribution to Zürich Dada was political, for example. Like Ball, Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte developed a critique based on negation, principally informed by a syncretic model of mysticism. This was expressed by both parties as a rejection of social institutions and orthodox authorities, and on the renunciation of the self, or ego. "[M]odern mysticism," wrote Ball in 1917, "relates to the ego. We cannot get away from it."[61] It goes without saying that Deleuze and Guattari were not the first to associate the ego with the ills of Western capitalism. Ball and his colleagues in Zürich Dada made such a connection, and the Grand Jeu maintained this critique.

  This alignment with Ball reflects a fundamental distinction between the principles of the Grand Jeu and those of Surrealism. If the surrealists developed a platform for internationalism based upon psychoanalysis and the universal necessities of desire and the imagination, then, like Ball, Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte conceived of a universalism through the power of the word, the renunciation of self, immersion in traditional thought, and what Ball called a "flight to the fundamental."[62] Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte published an article in the second issue of *Le Grand Jeu* that defined the group's underlying principle of "dogma-breaking," making a clear identification between the critical character of their thought in relation to social institutions, scientific and moral authority and the destabilizing relation of mysticism to religious orthodoxy. Like Ball, they understood the political potential in the voice of outsiders and dissenters, devoting, for example, two and a half pages of the third issue of *Le Grand Jeu* to a narrative on the execution of Giordano Bruno for "daring" to challenge dogma, alongside quotations from Bruno's *Cause, Principle, and Unity* (1584).[63]

In terms of the contemporary response to the Grand Jeu's platform of negation, the group was bolstered by initial support from the future leader of the Czech surrealist group, Karel Teige (1900–1951), through Šíma's connections to the Czech avant-garde in Prague. In a review of 1930, Teige described the Grand Jeu as "a contestation of rationalist civilization, a destruction of all its values."[64] Teige was responding to the theme of revolt in the first issue of *Le Grand Jeu*, which included the essays "The Necessity of Revolt" by Maurice Henry, "The Force of Renunciation" by Gilbert-Lecomte, and "Freedom without Hope" by Daumal, who defined the Grand Jeu's position through the apparently paradoxical terms of revolt and renunciation: "The act of renunciation is not accomplished once and for all, but is a perpetual sacrifice of revolt."[65]

Daumal's language combines dadaist rhetoric resonant of Ball with terms suggestive of the dynamic concept of self in Oriental philosophy and the ascetic practices of mystics – although quite at odds with the quietism often associated with them:

> Man and society must constantly be on the point of exploding, must constantly renounce this explosion, must always refuse to stop at defined form... Renunciation is an incessant destruction of all the shells that the individual seeks to put on.[66]

Despite the emphatic message of revolt, however, the Grand Jeu's interest in metaphysics and mysticism drew great suspicion from the surrealist group. Although Breton and Aragon led the surrealists' hostility to the Grand Jeu, their keenest opponent was the politically militant André Thirion (1907–2001), who, at the time of the rue du Château meeting in March 1929, denounced the Grand Jeu as "deep-sleep-desperados," "hopeless pessimists," and "reclining revolutionaries."[67] In 1978, Maurice Nadeau (1911–2013), one of the few historians of Surrealism to have even mentioned the Grand Jeu, echoed such criticism, locating the group as stuck in an outmoded *fin-de-siècle* relation between literature and esotericism:

> It seemed that these young men were keeping too easily within the bounds the surrealists had already left behind. There was too much talk of "mysticism," too much frequentation of the great mystics, the great Initiates, too much Plato-Hegel-Buddha-Christ-Balzac-Rimbaud-and-Saint-Pol-Roux. They were, in short, still too close to literature.[68]

Various studies of the Grand Jeu have traced the ambiguous relationship between the group and its surrealist contemporaries, and while there exist some clear affinities, the Grand Jeu seem very much out of place within the critical history of Surrealism, if looked at in terms of the perspectives that have dominated research interests since the 1980s, such as psychoanalysis, ethnography, materialism, and sexuality. However, despite Breton's suspicions of the Grand Jeu in the late 1920s, his interests in the 1940s in the dialectical and poetic logic inherent to occultism and esotericism would realign him with the earlier interests of the Grand Jeu, particularly with the group's interest in the relations between romantic and modern poetry and the occult tradition, notably theorized by Renéville in his publications *Rimbaud le voyant* (1929) and *L'Expérience poétique* (1938). In an unpublished review titled "Situation of André Breton" (c. 1948), written long after the demise of the Grand Jeu but entirely in keeping with the group's position, Renéville responded to the publication of Breton's

Arcane 17 (1945) with a rather arch review.[69] On the one hand, he praised Breton's grasp of the relations between poetry and the occult, writing:

> He could not fail to recognize, as his great predecessors did, the kinship that existed between the discoveries revealed by poetic experience and those ancient principles, springing from the pre-logical mentality, of which occultism had gathered the vestiges and which appeared as a true summary of the psychic structure of man.[70]

Yet, while applauding Breton's recognition of the non-dualistic, analogical basis of both poetry and esotericism, Renéville barbs his praise, reminding Breton that *Arcane 17* reflects some of the same interests for which the surrealists were very quick to condemn the Grand Jeu.

Better late than never is Renéville's slightly sharp message as he relates what he sees as the relatively slow developments in Breton's understanding of esoteric logic and its psychological significance, as well as his antipathy to Guénon's traditionalist thinking. Breton, he writes, initially displayed an "almost complete ignorance of traditional philosophy, the significance of which he only began to have an inkling around the time of the *Second Manifesto*," and "because of the anti-mystical and anti-religious prejudices that animated him … could only temporarily resist the recognition of a spiritual kinship between his conclusions and those of esotericism."[71] Renéville's response to Breton, after the deaths of Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte, thus represents a significant vindication of the Grand Jeu's interests in occultism and esotericism already some twenty years before the publication of *Arcane 17.*

Although so much of the Grand Jeu's thinking was determined by the identification with Hindu philosophy and traditional thought, the group's understanding of the relation between modern poetry and the occult was strongly guided by Renéville's expertise in this area already in the 1920s. Renéville's *Rimbaud le voyant* impressed Breton and Aragon so much that they invited him to collaborate on *La Révolution surréaliste*, and it was clear that Renéville's understanding of the links between poetry and the occult was more advanced than that of the surrealists at this time.[72] His essay "The Elaboration of a Method: A Propos the Letter of the Seer," published in the second issue of *Le Grand Jeu*, outlines the Grand Jeu's syncretic view of the non-dualistic metaphysics behind occidental poetry and Hindu mysticism, which, Renéville argues, first entered Occidental thinking through the influence of Orphism, and is exemplified in the position of self-negation behind Rimbaud's poetry. Although Renéville's writings on the relation of Rimbaud's poetry to mysticism and the occult were of interest to Breton in the late 1920s, particularly because of the significance he imparted to poetic intuition, the Grand Jeu's insistence on syncretizing occidental poetry and occult traditions with Hindu mysticism represented an entirely different angle to that developed by Breton in the 1940s.

Although there did exist certain confluences of interest, then, the tensions between the Grand Jeu and Surrealism are not so easily resolved. Both the confluences and differences should be considered in the context of the heightened political orientation of Surrealism in the late 1920s, particularly concerning the debates around the issue of idealism and materialism reflected in Breton's *Second Manifesto*. The direction of Surrealism at this time seemed irrevocably hostile to the concerns of the Grand Jeu, whose politics of negation appeared at odds with more direct forms of political action.

According to Olivier Penot-Lacassagne and Emmanuel Rubio, much of the criticism of the Grand Jeu has arisen from its paradoxical character, particularly relating to the apparently irreconcilable issue of revolution and mysticism. "How to understand the Grand Jeu outside of its paradoxes?" they ask, when its members were associated with the most seemingly opposed ideas: "revolution and revelation, Marxism and mysticism, exaltation and negation, and the most diverse forms of Hermeticism."[73] To an extent, though, the paradoxes of the Grand Jeu reflect a broader issue within French thought of the era, particularly concerning the appeal of mysticism to a generation of secular, alienated, and heterodox radicals. At issue was the apparent conflict between the privatization of mystical experience and the sacred, as opposed to a more actively political mode of collective engagement, as reflected in the writings of Bataille, Caillois, and Simone Weil (1909–1943), for example.[74]

In Closing: A Deleuzian Re-Framing of the Grand Jeu

Continuous with the paradoxical character of the Grand Jeu, this chapter will close with an opening. While histories of the Grand Jeu have often tried to legitimize the group's ideas in relation to Surrealism, other perspectives can be constructed, for example, through more recent critical attention to Deleuze's re-appraisal of areas of thought essential to the Grand Jeu, such as metaphysics, non-Freudian psychologies, evolutionary biology, theories of memory, and the occult. With a view to developing new perspectives on the Grand Jeu, a Deleuzian discourse might enable us to bridge the group's syncretic theoretical over-determinations, experimentalism, and self-negating attitude of revolt with Deleuze's experimental-syncretic method, theory of becoming, and anti-capitalist revolt. The political significance of the surrealist milieu, in general, took on a renewed clarity during and after the events of May 1968, providing a critical dimension to how Surrealism offered modes of creativity, intensity of experience, and collective endeavour that opposed the capitalist model of productivity, temporality and individuated selfhood. It is no coincidence that the first study of the Grand Jeu was made by Michel Random in 1968. The Grand Jeu's refusal of these models – epitomized by the group's name – might profitably be viewed in the light of this reappraisal of the broader ambitions within the surrealist milieu alongside the developments in the thought of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, of a refusal to consent to the hegemonies of reason, individualism, nationalism, and utilitarianism that would seek to instrumentalize all time, thought, personality, sexual and psychological functioning.

Relations between the thinking of the Grand Jeu and Deleuze can be traced to numerous mutual influences, including a shared correlation (after Janet) of mysticism and pathological forms of subjectivity and a grounding in Bergson's philosophy. The Grand Jeu's quest to experience a sense of the "eternal," the "infinite," or the "absolute" follows an imperative of Bergson's, crucial to Deleuze, that philosophy "should be an effort to go beyond the human condition"; notably, as Keith Ansell Pearson defines it, by an "ambition to restore the Absolute or the Whole as the legitimate 'object' of thought's quest."[75] Similarities can also be traced to a confluence of sources, interests and methods: notably to theories of pathology, mysticism, and the work of philosophical "heretics" (such as Giordano Bruno and Jakob Böhme), and to a highly syncretic method of pulling them all together. If Deleuze was drawn to a syncretic method because it supported his attempts to refute the dismal implications

of a psychoanalysis bogged down in the mire of biological reductionism, then the Grand Jeu were already attempting to work through such problems in the 1920s; refusing the limitations of psychoanalytic models of individual consciousness or unconsciousness and looking rather to impersonal (mediumistic or mystical) models of selfhood, psychic energy and memory, and generally renouncing any notion of the fixity or coherency of the subject as part of a revolt against any demands of utilitarian or self-interested necessity. Through a wildly syncretic approach to thinking and a depersonalized concept of the self, the Grand Jeu can be said to have developed their own form of schizoanalysis before the fact. At his most proto-Deleuzean, for example, Gilbert-Lecomte would write:

> The human personality is a geometric locus of multiple, parallel consciences, an infinity of spaces parallel to our own, an intuition of simultaneous dramas, experienced in an infinity of diverse plans, their fragmentary reflections and echoes, fugitive and separated, being the very discontinuity of consciousness.[76]

The renunciation of self and the constant disaggregation of the personality pursued by Gilbert-Lecomte and Daumal as part of their dual critique of revolt and renunciation can therefore be seen as a precursor to Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, which was conceived as "the constant destructive task of disintegrating the normal ego."[77]

In distinction to the surrealists, the Grand Jeu followed a line of development in psychology that Henri Ellenberger defined in his *Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970) as representing a separate trajectory in the development of psychology to that of Freud's; one which includes the work of Ribot, Bergson, Janet, and the somnambulist model of psychical researchers like Charles Richet (1850–1935). Christian Kerslake's discussion of this trajectory of psychology in his analysis of its influence on Deleuze can offer an insight into the non-surrealist context of the Grand Jeu's ideas. Writing about Deleuze's bypassing of Freud's pessimistic biological over-determinations of the psyche, Kerslake has noted how the tradition that Deleuze turns to belongs to an apparently "weird 'spiritualist' interregnum" in the development of the Darwinist influences on psychology, which despite its immense appeal at the time, rests as an anomaly on the historical fringes of psychoanalysis. "If this tradition evokes any associations for the English-speaking reader today," Kerslake observes, "it is with a peculiar lost Victorian and Edwardian world, a world in which journals of psychology and philosophy were filled with cases and analyses of mediums, somnambulism, hypnosis and spiritualistic phenomena."[78]

Although initially influential on the surrealists' formulation of automatism, Breton soon abandoned the thought associated with this "interregnal epoch," and yet to a large extent it is through the perspective of this abandoned historical trajectory, with its evocative mix of psychology and occultism, that the Grand Jeu can best be understood. The Grand Jeu's resistance to a reductive materialism within psychology, science, philosophy, and political culture was infused by a spirit of inquiry fundamental to this epoch. Alongside this, they developed the radical sense of mysticism that Hugo Ball had previously introduced into Dada as an anti-orthodox force based on a self-denying, universalizing experience capable of negating social, moral, political, and scientific dogmas. It is only really through the fluidity of such ideas during this epoch that the Grand Jeu can be understood in distinction to Surrealism. If looked at in terms of the historical reality of this "interregnum," we see that the Grand Jeu's

ideas are rooted in an intellectual and scientific culture that was hugely significant in the 1920s, and the influence of which has subsequently been re-awoken by Deleuze's enormously creative plundering of heteroclite genealogies of psychoanalysis and philosophy, which very much follows the precedent set by both Surrealism and the Grand Jeu with their creative and unorthodox models of inquiry.

Notes

1 The meaning of traditional thought and metaphysics for the Grand Jeu could be elaborated upon at length. In brief, however, the tradition to which the Grand Jeu refers relates to what occultist René Guénon called "perennial philosophy." By this, Guénon refers to the argument that, at its basis, all religious thought shares in the same metaphysical principle of a transcendent unity behind the multiplicity of phenomena. This syncretic view (much contested within religious studies and anthropology) can be found throughout his writings, and is expressed thus in *La Crise du monde moderne* (1927):

> The true traditional spirit, in whatever form it appears, is everywhere and always the same at heart; its diverse forms, especially adapted to various circumstances of time and place, are only the expressions of a single and identical truth; … fundamental unity under their apparent multiplicity.

See René Guénon, *La Crise du monde moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 57. The Grand Jeu's comprehension of metaphysics also relates to their Bergsonian tendencies, in particular their view of the insufficiency of analytical thought for grasping the fluid character of experience and selfhood. Their insistence upon referring to metaphysics sharply divided them from the surrealists, who had, by the late 1920s, developed a rejection of metaphysics (as speculative thought) according to Marxist critique. The Grand Jeu, however, did not accept the Marxist premise that metaphysics is not grounded in experience, and, through reference to Bergson, Giordano Bruno and Baruch Spinoza, insist upon an immanent relation between multiplicity and unity, to be explored through what they called "experimental metaphysics."

2 André Breton, "Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality" [1924], in *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York et al.: Pathfinder, 1978), 28.

3 René Daumal, "Encore sur les livres de René Guénon," *Le Grand Jeu* 2 (1929): 73. Breton's view of Guénon was at best ambivalent. In a 1953 text titled "René Guénon Judged by Surrealism," Breton associates Guénon's criticism of the modern world with that of Surrealism and yet states that Surrealism avoids Guénon "as much for the reactionary that he is on the social plane as for the blind deprecator of Freud that he is proving to be." He does, however, praise Guénon in the following terms: "Surrealism honours nonetheless this great solitary adventurer who rejects faith for knowledge, opposes deliverance to salvation, and salvages metaphysical thought from the ruins of religion that cover it." Quoted in Kathleen Ferrick Rosenblatt, *René Daumal: The Life and Work of a Mystic Guide* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1999), 106.

4 Roger Caillois, "Les Jeunes Gens de Reims," *Europe* 782–83 (June–July 1994): 121.

5 Ibid.

6 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "La Crise du monde moderne," *Le Grand Jeu* 1 (1928): 52.

7 Emmanuel Rubio, "Le Grand Jeu et le sens de l'histoire," in *Le Grand Jeu en mouvement*, eds. Olivier Penot-Lacassagne and Emmanuel Rubio (Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'homme, 2006), 25.

8 Caillois, "Les Jeunes Gens", 120. There is a specific tenor to the Grand Jeu's use of the term "metaphysics" which refers back to Guénon. Guénon distinguished his use of the term "metaphysics" from that understood in the West as a specific branch of philosophy, and defined metaphysics in 1921 as "essentially the knowledge of the Universal [or] the knowledge of principles belonging to the universal order" (René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* [Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2012], 71). Guénon posits metaphysics as the opposite of science, emphasizing that the metaphysical is *not* merely that of which science has failed to take cognizance but, rather, pertains to that

which lies outside the scope of science. This anti-scientism is a crucial element within the Grand Jeu's identification with metaphysics. Science necessarily proceeds by making distinctions within the realm of multiplicity, whereas for Guénon the object of metaphysics is indivisible, it is "one in its essence" (73). Gilbert-Lecomte's polysemic allusions to totality, unity, and indivisibility refer back to this specific metaphysical frame of thought.

 9 Michel Camus, "L'Acéphalité ou la religion de la mort," in *Acéphale* (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1995), ii.

10 Frequently, Gilbert-Lecomte seems to refer to "metaphysics" and "mysticism" as interchangeable terms. This again can be traced back to the influence of Guénon and Bergson, particularly in relation to their, albeit distinct, views on the role of "intuition" within metaphysical and mystical thought and experience. Guénon saw traditional metaphysics ("the knowledge of the Universal") as leading to a core dynamic between the individual and the universal, which he believed to be common to all authentic religions and providing the dynamic of mystical experience; a view to which the Grand Jeu adhered. The connecting of mysticism and metaphysics was also central to Bergson's work in the late 1920s. Bergson's most pronounced interchange between mysticism and metaphysics appears in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), in which he writes of the historical merging of occidental metaphysics and oriental mysticism (intuitive, Orphic thought) in the work of the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus, arguing that this combination again needs addressing in the modern (overly analytical) age. In his analysis of *Two Sources*, A. W. Moore concludes that "Bergson is committed to casting the metaphysician in the role of the mystic." See A. W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 423. Bergson, then, can be seen to have reconfigured the metaphysician in the guise of the mystic: intuitive, empathetic, having a strong sense of the connection of the individual to the whole, of profane to sacred time (*durée*), and with intuitive access to the *élan vital*, the creative effort of the entirety of life. Gilbert-Lecomte's frequent conflation of the mystical and metaphysical runs parallel to Bergson's secular reconfiguration of intuition as a function of modern metaphysics.

11 Theodore Besterman, "René Daumal; Paris," *Proceedings for the Society of Psychical Research*, London, 38 (1928/29): 476–79. The Simplistes were led in such experiments by their philosophy tutor, René Maublanc, who had been a student of Jules Romaines, author of *La Vision extra-rétinienne et le sens paroptique* (1920) and theorist of Unanimism. This theory, based on the surpassing of the individual through collective and simultaneous thought and behavior, was clearly of great influence on Daumal and Gilbert-Lecomte. See Yvonne Duplessis, "La Vision extra-rétenienne," *L'Originel* 7 (December 1978–January 1979): 40–42.

12 René Daumal, "Nerval la Nyctalope," *Le Grand Jeu* 3 (1930): 19–31, and "La Première Révélation de la métaphysique expérimentale: une expérience inénarrable," *Le Grand Jeu* 4 (1932): 1–5 (unpublished proof). For English translations see "Nerval the Nyctalope" and "Asphyxiation and Absurd Evidence", in René Daumal, *The Powers of the Word: Selected Essays and Notes 1927–1943*, ed. and trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1991), 38–50 and 66–70.

13 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 371.

14 Daumal, *Powers of the Word*, 68.

15 Olivier Penot-Lacassagne and Emmanuel Rubio, "Le Grand Jeu en mouvement," in Penot-Lacassagne and Rubio, *Le Grand Jeu*, 7.

16 Arthur Rimbaud, *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters, a Bilingual Edition*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 377.

17 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 234. Hereafter I shall refer to this as *OC*.

18 Stéphane Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, trans. Mary Ann Caws (New York: New Directions Books, 1982), 92.

19 André Rolland de Renéville, *L'Expérience poétique* (Neuchâtel: A La Baconnerie, 1948), 108.

20 Mallarmé, *Selected Poetry*, 91–93.

21 Michel Random, "Méditations sur Le Grand Jeu," *Europe* 782–783 (June–July 1994): 9.

22 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "Monsieur Morphée, empoisonneur public" [1930], in *OC*, 128.

23 See note 21 above.

24 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "La Force des renoncements," *Le Grand Jeu* 1 (1928): 13.

25 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "Avant-Propos," *Le Grand Jeu* 1 (1928): 13.

26 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* [1961], trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 23.

27 Renéville, *L'Expérience*, 93.

28 Michel Random, *Le Grand Jeu: Essai* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1970), 161.

29 Gilbert-Lecomte, *OC*, 120.

30 Alain Trouvé, "Grand Jeu/folie: l'équation Gilbert-Lecomte," in Penot-Lacassagne and Rubio, *Le Grand Jeu*, 137.

31 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "L'Univers des mythes: l'horrible révélation … la seule," *Le Grand Jeu* 3 (1930): 8.

32 Gilbert-Lecomte, *OC*, 217.

33 See note 4 above.

34 Ernst Haeckel, *Die generelle Morphologie der Organismen*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1866).

35 Gilbert-Lecomte, *OC*, 189.

36 Frank J. Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 272.

37 Théodule Ribot, *Diseases of Memory: An Essay in Positive Psychology* [1881], trans. William Huntingdon Smith (London: K. Paul Trench, 1882), 175.

38 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "Après Rimbaud la mort des arts," *Le Grand Jeu* 2 (1929): 31.

39 Henri Bergson, "Memory of the Present and False Recognition," in *Mind Energy*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1975), 147.

40 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* [1907], trans. Arthur Mitchell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1998), 5.

41 Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 354.

42 Christian Kerslake, *Deleuze and the Unconscious* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 50.

43 Ibid., 5.

44 The idea of *anamnesis* was of wide interest in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, psychology, and studies of memory. Its influence is evident, for example, in Baudelaire's poem *La Vie antérieur*e (published in *Les Fleurs du mal*, 1857), extensively in the work of Marcel Proust, and was at least of metaphorical significance for the model of the psychoanalytic process for both Freud and Jung. Gilles Deleuze also refers to the idea in relation to Bergson's thoughts on memory. See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 59 and 126.

45 Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, "Avant propos," *Le Grand Jeu* 1 (1928): 2.

46 Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 64–66.

47 Kerslake, *Deleuze*, 24.

48 Ibid., 17.

49 Daumal, *The Powers of the Word*, 3.

50 See Auguste Comte, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy* [1830], trans. Frederick Ferre (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co. Inc., 1988).

51 André Rolland de Renéville, "La Poésie et l'occultisme" [c.1930], in *Sciences maudites et poètes maudits*, ed. Patrik Kremer (L'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue: Le Bois d'Orion, 1997), 199. This previously unpublished short text was probably written as a homage to the historian of astrology, Paul Choisnard, who died in February 1930. Choisnard's 1926 publication, *La Chaîne des harmonies ou la spirale dans la nature* (The Chain of Harmonies or the Spiral in Nature), is a possible source of influence upon the choice of the spiral image on the cover of Le Grand Jeu.

52 Renéville, *L'Expérience*, 199.

53 Caillois, "Les Jeunes Gens," 121.

54 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 187.

55 Gilbert-Lecomte, *OC*, 140.
56 Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 128.
57 Thomas A. Williams, *Mallarmé and the Language of Mysticism* (Savannah, GA: Williams & Co., 1994), 13.
58 Gilbert-Lecomte, *OC*, 243.
59 Renéville, *L'Expérience*, 48–49.
60 Roger Vailland, "La Bestialité de Montherlant," *Le Grand Jeu* 1 (1928): 50.
61 Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, trans. Ann Raimes (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), 13.
62 Ibid., 207.
63 Daumal, "A Propos d'un jugement inédit de Victor Cousin sur Giordano Bruno: Quand on ose dire," *Le Grand Jeu* 3 (1930): 88–90.
64 Alain and Odette Virmaux, "Une Revue 'esotérico-métaphysique'?" *L'Europe* 782–83 (June–July 1994): 24.
65 Daumal, *The Powers of the Word*, 4–5.
66 Ibid., 5.
67 *Variétés* (June 1929): xx.
68 Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* [1945], trans. Richard Howard (Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), 157.
69 Renéville, *Sciences maudites*, 207–35. On the deployment of occult tropes in *Arcane 17*, see also Daniel Zamani's contribution to this volume.
70 Renéville, *Sciences maudites*, 224.
71 Ibid., 227.
72 See Random, *Le Grand Jeu*, 50–57.
73 See note 15 above.
74 One of the schisms that emerged within the College of Sociology, for example, was between Caillois's insistence upon the prioritizing of collective and public over individual and closed cultish experience, which he came to associate with Bataille's Acéphale group. See Claudine Frank's introduction to Caillois' "Dionysian Virtues" in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 155–59. See also Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Re-Thinking the Political: The Sacred, Aesthetic Politics, and the Collège de Sociologie* (Montreal, QC, London and Ithaca, NY: McGill Queen's University Press, 2011). In 1943 Jean-Paul Sartre famously published in *Cahiers du sud* a damning review of Bataille's *Inner Experience*, titled "Un Nouveau mystique" (A New Mystic), in which he archly condemned what he read as Bataille's solipsistic retreat from political engagement. Alexander Irwin has addressed Sartre's criticism while looking more closely at the nuanced relations between mysticism and politics in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly the model of the affective power of the embodied text, which Bataille and Weil adapted from mystical writing. Irwin defends and contextualizes their work as a response to the total collapse of political, moral, and religious orthodoxies, and the redundancy of notions of duty, virtue, and virile action, writing:

> Bataille and Weil were not alone in the 1930s in appealing to religious language as a means of stretching and revitalizing apparently moribund categories of political debate and ethical action. The originality of Bataille's and Weil's effort lay in their construction of themselves as sacred figures independent of all religious and political orthodoxies: figures whose sacrality contested hierarchical power rather than legitimating it and seeking to appropriate its prestige.

See Alexander Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil and the Politics of the Sacred* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 215.
75 Keith Ansell Pearson, "Beyond the Human Condition: An Introduction to Deleuze's Lecture Course," *Substance*, 36, no. 3 (2007): 10.
76 Gilbert-Lecomte, *OC*, 201.
77 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* [1972], trans. Robert Hurley et al (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 362.
78 Kerslake, *Deleuze*, 6.

3 Palmistry as Portraiture

Dr. Charlotte Wolff and the Surrealists

M. E. Warlick

In 1935, Dr. Charlotte Wolff (1897–1986) published an article in the French surrealist journal *Minotaure* (1933–1939), entitled "The Psychic Revelations of the Hand," in which she summarized her system of reading hands as a means of determining human psychology (Figure 3.1).[1] She then analyzed the hands of several notable artists and writers, including André Breton (1896–1966), Paul Éluard (1895–1952), and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1962), whose palm prints she reproduced in the article (Figure 3.2). Having recently escaped to France from Nazi Germany where she had been licensed as a physician, Wolff had to rely on her more recently initiated study of hand analysis to make a living. In two autobiographies, Wolff recounted the significant events of her life that led to her scientific studies of the human hand.[2] Her fortuitous encounter with the surrealists helped to establish her reputation in France and contributed to the growth of an impressive artistic and aristocratic clientele. As this chapter will demonstrate, Wolff often insisted on the scientific rigor of her analyses, developed from modern medical and psychoanalytic theories. For the surrealists, who placed her insights more within their concepts of feminine clairvoyance, Wolff's work revealed the human subconscious, mirroring their own interests in both psychoanalysis and occultism, as well as their wish to expand an investigation of human nature beyond the confines of scientific proscription.[3]

Wolff's reception by the surrealists provides an interesting case in terms of the perceived clairvoyant abilities of women. As explored in more detail in Chapter 1, surrealist experiments with séances and other occult activities stretch back to the early 1920s, during the so-called *époque des sommeils*, when artists and writers such as Benjamin Péret (1899–1959), René Crevel (1900–1935), and Robert Desnos (1900–1945) became especially adept at entering trance states at their own volition. Breton had praised Desnos's abilities in his article "The Mediums Enter" (1922), while later essays connected these abilities more specifically to women, including Breton's "Letter to Seers" (1925), Antonin Artaud's "Lettre à la voyante" ("Letter to a Seer", 1926), and Louis Aragon's "Éntrée des succubes" ("Enter the Succubi", 1926). In his 1928 account *Nadja*, Breton related several incidents where the book's heroine appears as a clairvoyant, and he reproduced a photograph of the medium Madame Sacco, who apparently conducted mediumistic sessions for several members of the group.[4] As a woman, Wolff seemed to reinforce a gendered affinity to clairvoyance, and yet, these expectations were complicated by the fact that she dressed as a man and lived openly as a lesbian. The boundaries between scientific and occult classifications of her work were further complicated by the fact that she often incorporated concepts of traditional palmistry within her own, allegedly scientific, system of reading hands.

LES
RÉVÉLATIONS PSYCHIQUES DE LA MAIN

Par le DOCTEUR LOTTE WOLFF

La chirognomie est la connaissance méthodique des formes de la main, des doigts, des monts, du réseau de lignes et des signes accidentels.

La chirognomie traditionnelle se sert d'une terminologie symbolique empruntée à l'astrologie. Elle caractérise les doigts par le nom et les attributs des divinités mythologiques. C'est ainsi que Jupiter (l'index) représente le pouvoir, la réputation, le talent organisateur et le sens familial; Saturne (le médius) la connaissance objective du monde et la conscience; Apollon (l'annulaire) la chance et le talent artistique; Mercure (l'auriculaire) le talent diplomatique et l'habileté manuelle. Le pouce symbolise la personnalité et le niveau spirituel et moral du sujet.

Les Monts situés sous les quatre doigts sont complétés par les Monts de Mars et de Lune qui forment *le bord extérieur ou frappeur* de la main et par le Mont de Vénus qui enveloppe la phalange inférieure du pouce. Le Mont de Mars est le siège de l'agressivité et de la résistance, au sens physique et psychique; le Mont de Lune, le foyer de la fantaisie, des rêves, de la tendance à l'aventure, au voyage. Le Mont de Vénus contient la vitalité, la puissance sexuelle.

La ligne de vie, bordant le Mont de Vénus, confirme les attributs de ce dernier et nous donne une indication sur la durée de la vie du sujet.

La ligne de tête jaillit de la même source, sinon tout près de la ligne de vie. Elle débouche le plus souvent dans la plaine de Mars (espace du creux de la main). Elle nous renseigne sur les facultés intellectuelles de même que sur l'état nerveux de l'individu.

La ligne de cœur qui se dirige dans le sens opposé de la précédente, exprime l'état psychique et les fonctions physiques du cœur.

La ligne de destinée forme l'axe central de la main et détermine l'individu en tant qu'être social.

Les lignes de chance et d'intuition sont suffisamment caractérisées par leur nom. La ligne de santé nous informe spécialement sur la fonction intestinale. L'Anneau de Vénus donne une image du comportement érotique du sujet et de la sublimation de sa sexualité[1].

LES ZONES DE L'INTÉRIEUR DE LA MAIN

En considérant la main, comme projection de la personnalité, nous l'avons divisée en deux systèmes. Nous nous sommes écartés de la tradition chirognomique en élaborant notre terminologie propre d'après les notions de la psychologie de C. G. Jung et de W. James. Notre premier schéma qui réduit le mécanisme des réactions à sa formule la plus simple, a été établi d'après les données du chirologue Mangin-Balthazar, qui divise la main en trois zones horizontales.

Notre second schéma reproduit exactement notre propre conception (excepté la notion de la zone imagino-sensorielle, men-

1. Voyez l'explication des lignes du schéma n° III, à la fin de l'article.

tionnée déjà par Mangin-Balthazar). Cette conception représente la personnalité dans ses trois comportements fondamentaux :

1. La personnalité dans ses rapports avec le Moi et la Conscience;
2. dans ses rapports avec la Collectivité;
3. dans ses rapports avec l'Inconscient.

Dans notre schéma de zones horizontales, la première zone s'étend de la racine de la main jusqu'à une ligne idéale allant de la racine du pouce au *bord frappeur* de la main. Cette zone comprend les réactions instinctives :

1. le Mont de Vénus, siège des instincts sexuels et sensuels;
2. une portion de la plaine de Mars, siège des instincts de défense;
3. le Mont de Lune, siège de l'Inconscient.

La seconde zone s'étend jusqu'à la ligne de cœur. Elle représente les réactions sensitives et comprend la sphère du sentiment (l'espace entre la ligne de cœur et la ligne de tête) et la sphère de l'altruisme.

La troisième zone entre la ligne de cœur et la racine des doigts est celle de la force des émotions. Les émotions diffèrent du sentiment en ce sens qu'elles sont inconcevables sans réflexe physiologique.

La sphère émotionnelle et la sphère instinctive se distinguent l'une de l'autre par le fait que la première se manifeste dans la sensibilité et la perception, la seconde dans la motilité. Les parties émotionnelles et instinctives de la personnalité sont-elles l'une et l'autre également développées, les fonctions animales de la personnalité prédomineront sur celles de l'esprit et de la volonté. Nous sommes alors en présence d'un individu de structure psychique primitive.

La zone du collectif est-elle au contraire la plus développée des trois, le sujet sera doué d'une réceptivité affinée : nous avons alors à faire à une personnalité de structure complexe.

LES ZONES VERTICALES

Nous diviserons maintenant la main en trois zones verticales. La première comprend le mont de Vénus avec le pouce, le Mont de Jupiter avec l'index, doigt de la subjectivité. Nous les nommerons la sphère du Moi.

La seconde zone est celle que parcourt la ligne de destinée de la ligne de la main au Mont de Saturne, zone à laquelle appartient également Saturne doigt de l'objectivité. Dans cet espace, nous lisons le comportement collectif de l'homme.

La troisième zone comprend presque tout le Mont de Lune, les Monts de Mars, de Mercure et d'Apollon, ainsi que le *bord frappeur* de la main. C'est la sphère imagino-sensorielle où se meuvent les forces du Soi, forces de l'Inconscient individuel et de l'Inconscient ancestral. Apollon (ou le doigt de l'art) et Mercure (doigt de la sensualité) appartiennent encore à cette sphère.

Figure 3.1 Dr. Lotte Wolff, "Les révélations psychiques de la main," *Minotaure* 6 (Winter, 1935): 38.

Source: Photo from facsimile edition published by Arno Press, 1968.

This chapter will examine Wolff's life and her work, including her time in Paris from May 1933 to October 1936, demonstrating how her embrace of palmistry showed significant parallels to the surrealists' championing of occultism and parapsychology. While she consulted both historic and contemporary theories of palmistry, Wolff relied primarily on her own observations to develop her theories of hand analysis. Her theories evolved over time as a result of having examined thousands of hands, ranging from artists, writers, and celebrities to the mentally ill. In spite of her insistence in her autobiographies that she was neither a clairvoyant nor a palmist, she

PAUL ELUARD

Ce qu'il y a de frappant dans cette main, c'est l'écartement des doigts Jupiter et Saturne qui révèle une mentalité révolutionnaire. L'originalité de la pensée de caractère polémique et critique est signalée par un îlot dans la ligne de tête de la main gauche. Le sens de l'harmonie et du rythme est représenté par les doigts bien axés, et le sens des paradis artificiels par une ligne transversale profonde sur le mont de la Lune. Un érotisme sublimé et transposé sur le plan poétique est indiqué par l'anneau de Vénus (voyez la main gauche).

MARCEL DUCHAMP

Duchamp ne peut s'appliquer exclusivement à un seul talent, car il en a un trop grand nombre. Nous ne considérons que ceux de l'écrivain et du stratège né. Son intuition et son sens d'orientation l'emportent encore sur son intelligence déjà considérable. Voyez la ligne d'intuition fortement marquée. Son besoin de liberté dans les formes de pensée et de vie est d'ordre primordial. Voyez le grand espace entre Jupiter et Saturne et entre Apollon et Mercure. Mains d'un stratège de grand style : voyez le petit triangle sur le mont de Jupiter.

Figure 3.2 Dr. Lotte Wolff, "Les révélations psychiques de la main," *Minotaure* 6 (Winter, 1935): 44.
Source: Photo from facsimile edition published by Arno Press, 1968.

also related some of her own occult experiences that tend to blur the lines between science and the psychic aspects of her work, and thus provide greater insight into the varieties of surrealist occultism and their reception of Wolff's work as divination.[5] Her later resistance to these labels may have stemmed from the fact that after 1952, when she was once again allowed to practice medicine in England, she wished to emphasize her professional credentials rather than embrace the role as a clairvoyant that had dominated her association with the surrealists.

Early Years

Wolff was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Riesenburg (today: Prabuty) in West Prussia, about two hours from the larger city of Danzig, where her family moved when she was about thirteen. When she was sixteen, she experienced a powerful event that she later recorded in both of her autobiographies.[6] One morning while walking to school, Wolff remembered, she suddenly stopped and was filled with a sense of immense happiness and omniscience, as she seemed to be levitating and growing larger. Between her eyebrows, she felt the growth of a bluish crystal that turned into an amethyst, which allegedly signaled the birth of her creative spirit. She claimed never to have read any esoteric literature at that time, nor to have heard about the "third eye" of mystical insight before. While she acknowledged that the endocrinal surges of puberty may have had something to do with the phenomenon, she was certain that physical or psychological explanations were inadequate to account for her experience of a flow of "cosmic" energy throughout her body that made her feel one with the universe. From that moment, Wolff felt, her creative talents were released. Consequently, it was in the wake of this crucial experience that she began to read the philosophy of Plato, Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Further, she also immersed herself in the romantic writings of poets such as Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), Franz Brentano (1838–1917), and Nikolaus Lenau (1802–1850), and began to write poetry.[7] Poetry would remain her life's passion, written primarily for herself, but sometimes shared with friends.[8]

In May 1920, she left Danzig for her first year at the University of Freiburg, where she pursued a medical degree with classes in Physiology and Chemistry. Wolff also attended philosophy lectures, most notably taking seminars with both Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976).[9] In her second year, she moved to Königsberg, Kant's former university town, where she continued classes in Biology, Zoology, and Botany. Her scientific education would provide not only the necessary foundation for her medical degree, but also contributed to the scientific nature of her later research into the human hand. A soured love affair sent her after two terms to the University of Tübingen, which she chose for its association with Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), and K. W. F. Schlegel (1772–1829). The university was also renowned for its medical school. Ernst Kretschmer (1888–1964) was Head of the Department of Psychiatry there, and his association of human body types to personality traits in his *Körperbau und Charakter* (Build and Character, 1921), would influence Wolff's later theories concerning the psychological implications of the size, structure, and proportions of the hand.[10] The medical faculty was also very strong, but after two terms she decided to move again, this time to Berlin.

There, Wolff became good friends with Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) and his wife Dora (1890–1964). Walter encouraged her love of literature, and her later detailed descriptions of her walks through Berlin have been analyzed by Anke Gleber as an example of the *flânerie* of the "New Woman."[11] Walter was such a strong supporter of Wolff that he traveled to Danzig to persuade her parents to let her continue her medical studies when money became tight. Dora, in turn, convinced a Dutch doctor to give Wolff a stipend, enabling her to remain at the university. Wolff passed her medical exams in 1924, and, after a year of hospital residency, she began work at the Allgemeine Krankenkassen Berlin, a social services clinic focused on women's and

family medicine. In 1928, she wrote her thesis for the M.D. degree on the prenatal services delivered at the clinic.[12] While her medical training laid the basic foundation for her later research into hand analysis, her general practice residency had convinced her that working with the sick and dying was not her preference. Instead, Wolff decided to focus on psychological counseling.

In 1931, she attended a lecture by therapist Julius Spier (1887–1942), and soon joined his class, aimed at physicians, in which he used hand analysis to identify indications of health and personality. Spier had worked in a trading company for many years, but developed a strong personal interest in chirology. He underwent analysis with C. G. Jung (1875–1961) in Zurich between 1926 and 1928, and after Jung encouraged him to pursue palmistry as a career, he began to offer classes.[13] Because of his strong intuitive abilities, Wolff was convinced of the potential of his methods. That same year, a friend warned her that it had become dangerous for her to work in a birth control clinic because she was Jewish, and so she became Head of the Institute for Electro-Physical Therapy. She stated that she had never previously experienced anti-Semitism except for one strange encounter in a restaurant in Tübingen, where she had been refused service.[14] But the climate in Germany was darkening. In March 1933, Wolff lost her job. In May, Gestapo officers searched her apartment, convinced that she was a spy. As she was being interrogated, another officer recognized her as his wife's doctor and let her go. Soon thereafter, she acquired a passport and took a train to Paris.[15]

Paris and the Surrealists

These details of Wolff's education and medical practice are necessary to establish why she insisted so strongly that she was not a clairvoyant or a palmist. She obtained documents to remain in France, although the government would not let her practice medicine without repeating a full course of medical studies. With limited funds, she decided that she would pursue her study of the human hand professionally. She stated: "I found myself working to find a rational basis and method of hand-interpretation which should make chirology a new branch of psychological knowledge, as chemistry once developed from the obscurities of alchemy."[16] This statement suggests that she may have had some knowledge of twentieth-century-revisionist opinions of alchemy as a source of early chemistry by historians of science. Breton similarly thought of such practices as not anti-scientific, but as an alternative type of science that was not yet embraced institutionally.

Helen Hessel, wife of the German writer Franz, aided Wolff's transition to life in France. They had been friends in Berlin, where Franz was instrumental in publishing some of Wolff's poems and translations. Helen was working in Paris as a fashion correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Soon they were living together on *Le Boulevard Brune*, not far from the studio of Ernst and Frédéric Bartholdi's *The Lion of Belfort*, a sculpture emblematic of the increasingly troubled political relationship between France and Germany.[17] Helen introduced Wolff to many of her most important clients, including Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) and his wife Maria (m. 1915–1955), whom they visited in the south of France that summer. Maria soon adopted Wolff as one of her protégées. Through Helen, Wolff also met Baladine Klossowska (1886–1969) and her two sons, Pierre Klossowski (1905–2001) and Balthus (1908–2001), and it was Pierre who took her to the office of Tériade (Stratis

Eleftheriades, 1889–1983), publisher of *Minotaure,* where many of the surrealists had gathered. She took special note of Breton and Paul Éluard (1859–1952), and thereafter often saw them socially with their wives. Ernst, Man Ray (1890–1976), and Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) were also in attendance.[18]

She met other authors and artists who were not surrealists, but who moved in the movement's wider intellectual and artistic orbit. Of those, she was especially impressed by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944) and by André Derain (1880–1954), for his fascination with medicine and for his intellectual inquiry into the occult, which notably included divinatory practices.[19] Helen also later introduced Wolff to Duchamp and Mary Reynolds, whom she also visited on several occasions. It is clear, therefore, that she was well acquainted with many of the personalities whose hands she analyzed and published in the *Minotaure* article. Skeptics might claim that her assessments of their talents were based more on her knowledge of their personalities and achievements than what she saw in their palms. Wolff would acknowledge that during her time in Paris, she was still formulating her theories, and the article reflected that early time in her practice. Dr. Henri Wallon, Professor at *L'École des Hautes Études*, the Collège de France, and superintendent of a hospital for the mentally ill, and endocrinologist Dr. Gilbert Robin gave her the opportunities to study the hands of their patients, which broadened the base of her research subjects in France.[20]

As has been well documented, the hand is a well-known motif in surrealist art, generally interpreted with Freudian sexual implications.[21] In *Nadja* (1928), Breton illustrated a bronze glove, given to him in exchange for a blue suede glove whose appearance on a woman's hand had provoked strong erotic feelings.[22] Another illustration, supposedly drawn by Nadja (Léona Delcourt) herself, shows her self-portrait rising from a glove.[23] The glove serves as the soft, vaginal sheath for the more masculine hand, which is often severed in surrealist art to represent the fear of castration or other psychological anxieties. Luis Buñuel (1900–1983) and Dalí represented masculine sexual anxiety in their film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) by a hand covered with ants caught in a door. Similarly, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) placed a glove within a more threatening environment in his relief sculpture entitled *Composition with Glove* (1932).[24] Prior to Wolff's arrival in Paris, surrealist representations of palmistry can also be found in a variety of contexts. In Man Ray's film, *L'Étoile de mer* (1928), for instance, two hands are shown palms up, with the major lines marked in black. Both hands contain a semicircle drawn between the index and little fingers, called the Ring of Venus, typically interpreted as a sign of erotic disposition. The hands belonged to the actress, artist, and cabaret performer Alice Prin (Kiki de Montparnasse, 1901–1953), who was Man Ray's lover at the time. Interpretations of the many surrealist images of hands and gloves vary among its artists and within the contexts that these images appear, but the pervasiveness of the motif must have contributed to the surrealists' interest in Wolff's research, while she also offered an interesting position in terms of new developments within occult and parapsychological experimentation.

The surrealists' involvement with various occult fields had been growing throughout the 1920s, culminating with Breton's references to alchemy and his call for the "occultation of surrealism" in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930), in which he also demanded an experimental embrace of occult practices that lay outside the field of scientific prescription.[25] One particularly influential publication was Émile-Jules Grillot de Givry's *Le musée des sorciers, mages et alchimistes* (1929), an illustrated

history of occult practices and imagery that many of the surrealists used as a resource. It contained a chapter on "Chiromancy," explaining the traditional approaches to analyzing the hand, and also illustrating diagrams of the palms that had appeared in earlier publications, including Barthélemy Coclès's *Physiognomonia* (1533), André Corvo's *L'Art de chyromance* (c. 1545), Jean d'Indagine's *Chiromance* (1549), Robert Fludd's *Utriusque Cosmi Historia* (1619) and Jean-Baptiste Belot's *Oeuvres* (1646). Diagrams reproduced from these books indicated the major lines and planetary associations to the fingers and mounts within the palm.[26] Grillot de Givry also included drawings of the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte and his first wife, Joséphine, from Mlle Lenormand's *Mémoires historiques et secrets de l'impératrice Joséphine* (1827), lending evidence that the hands of famous people were also of interest in traditional palmistry. Prints of Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* (1594) and two additional *Fortune Tellers* by David Teniers (ca. 1630–1650) in Grillot's *Musée* provided examples of the negative light in which female palm readers had been typically portrayed in the history of art. This historical association with fraudulent female palm readers may have been another reason that Wolff wanted to distance herself from that tradition, while the book's inclusion of palm reading may have influenced the surrealists' decision to dedicate one of *Minotaure*'s articles to the revival and appropriation of that ancient technique.

Throughout the later nineteenth century, occult and scientific studies of the hand continued. A pioneer was the early nineteenth-century chirologist, Captain Casimir d'Arpentigny (1791–1864), who had studied Renaissance texts on palmistry. He developed a more systematic study of the morphology, or chirognomy, of the hand and fingers to analyze the hands of famous people of his acquaintance. His contemporary, A. A. Desbarrolles (1801–1886), helped to popularize a continuing interest in palmistry in his *Les Mystères de la main*: *révélés et expliqués* (1858), a book influenced by the Cabalistic theories of Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875). Wolff would reference both d'Arpentigny and Desbarrolles while associating the thumb's length and its shape to willpower in her book *The Human Hand* (1942).[27]

Wolff also acknowledged the significant influences of Dr. Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869) and Dr. Nicolas Vaschide (1874–1907).[28] Carus, personal physician to the King of Saxony in the mid-nineteenth century, wrote *Über Grund und Bedeutung der verschiedenen Formen der Hand* (About the Reason and the Meaning of the different Shapes of the Hand, 1846) and *Symbolik der menschlichen Gestalt* (The Symbolism of the Human Body, 1853). Vaschide, author of *Essai sur la Psychologie de la main* (1909),[29] reviewed the history of chirology, examined hands depicted in works of art, explored the developing science of fingerprint analysis, and offered evidence of medical pathology seen in the deformation of hands. Wolff also credits John Bulwer's *Chirologia or the Natural Language of the Hand* (1644).[30] Bulwer (1606–1656) was the inventor of sign language for the deaf, although Wolff clarifies that her interest in gestures was more as revelations of the subconscious found in involuntary gestures of the hand. She emphasized that the shape, medical condition, degree of flexibility, and tension of the hand were all important indicators of a person's health and psychological state. She stated that the crease lines "that gypsies and fortune-tellers use as the medium of their clairvoyance" could only be interpreted in the context of the physical features of the hand.[31] It is clear that she was consulting a wide variety of medical and esoteric sources as her theories developed.

As briefly outlined above, Wolff's article in *Minotaure* appeared at a time when the surrealists were increasingly attuned to occult as well as parapsychological

experimentation. More importantly, the journal itself was marked by an emphatically interdisciplinary outlook that clearly reflected the group's avant-gardist stance, their interest in anthropology, psychology, as well as science, and whose various considerations of myth and magic showed the group's wish to propagate knowledge in these still marginalized domains. In the *Minotaure* article, Wolff builds from the old planetary associations of palmistry, illustrated by the hand at the bottom of the first page (Figure 1, here reproduced as Figure 3.1) – a system that would have fascinated Breton and his fellow surrealists, for whom the idea of analogical correspondences was so central to their appreciation of the occult. In her text, Wolff adopts the terminology of traditional chirognomy, describing fingers and mounts with their planetary associations. In general, the fingers relate to the seven ancient planets in the following order: Jupiter (index) represents power, reputation, and feelings for the family; Saturn (middle) provides objective knowledge about the world; the Sun, or Apollo (ring) indicates luck and artistic talent; and Mercury (little), the planet of communication, lends diplomatic talent and manual dexterity. The thumb symbolizes the personality and the subject's spiritual and moral outlook.[32] The remaining ancient planets rule parts of the palm. The fleshy eminence below the thumb is the Mount of Venus, indicating vitality and sexual power. On the lower and outer edge of the palm is the Mount of the Moon, an area closely related to dreams, fantasy, adventure, and travel. The Mount of Mars indicates aggression and resistance, both in a physical and psychic sense. Wolff places it on the outer edge of the hand above the Mount of the Moon.[33]

The major lines of the hand include the life-line, which encircles the Mount of Venus around the thumb. The head-line begins under the index finger close to the origin of the life-line, and it extends horizontally across the middle of the hand. When it dips down into the Mount of the Moon, it indicates strong connections to the imagination. The heart line begins at the outer edge of the hand and usually ends somewhere between the middle and index finger. Some hands contain a horizontal line down the middle of the hand, although this is the most variable of all major lines. In traditional palmistry, it represented the line of destiny. Wolff interpreted it as a line revealing a person's ability to adapt to social convention, or the super-ego, and she found it often missing or very fragmentary in the many patients suffering from mental illness whose hands she also analyzed later in her career.[34]

Wolff then describes horizontal and vertical zones of the hand.[35] She adapted the horizontal zones from Henri Mangin Balthazar who had drawn parallels between chirology and modern psychology.[36] Top to bottom, they are the emotional, the sensitive, and the instinctual (Wolff's Figure 3.1). There are also three vertical zones: the egocentric relating to consciousness and the self, the collective in the center of the hand, and the imaginative, relating to the unconscious on the outer edge.[37] These horizontal zones relate more closely to the theories of Jung and William James (1842–1910). Her citing of Jung is a rather unusual tribute to him within surrealist circles at this time.[38] As has been mentioned, she had undergone Jungian analysis during her last four months in Germany, and her analyst had suggested another Jungian with whom Wolff continued her sessions during her first months in Paris. Wolff decided that the two analysts were more helpful than the analysis, and she soon ended the sessions.[39] She was exposed to Freudian theories thereafter, but claimed to have remained an outsider from conventional analysis, preferring to develop her own theories.[40]

Wolff also describes three basic overall shapes of the hand. The collective type describes a person who might sublimate his or her own personality for more communal
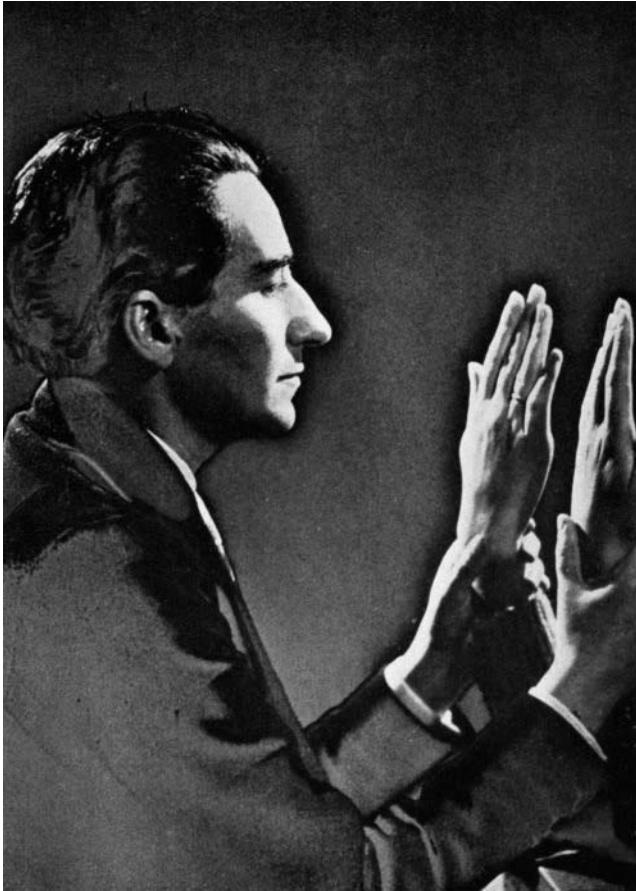
Figure 3.3 Man Ray, *Dr. Charlotte Wolff*, c. 1935.
© Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris 2017. Photo: Charlotte Wolff, *Hindsight* (London: Quartet Books, 1980), between pp. 152–53.

interactions. The second is the imaginative, unconscious type, those who are strongly influenced by unconscious forces in his or her personality. While such a person can be very imaginative and gifted, they also have a tendency to suffer from phobias. For the egocentric type, material needs to predominate. There may be a prevalence of pride, but also an independence of thought and the absolute will to accomplish goals.[41] Wolff continued to analyze the hands of several authors and writers whose handprints she reproduced on the following pages, including André Gide (1869–1951), Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), Derain, Breton, Huxley, De Saint-Exupéry, Éluard, and Duchamp. Elsewhere she describes her method for making her prints:

> I use the following technique: I spread a small quantity of Vaseline or skin cream over the palm and fingers, and press the greased hand on a piece of thin smooth paper superimposed on a rubber pad which has a slight mound in the middle corresponding to the hollow of the palm. This makes what might be called a grease

print, and in order to make the pattern visible, it is necessary to shake a black powder (copper oxide) on to the paper. The result is a reproduction of the lines of the hand which has only to be fixed like a charcoal drawing to form a more or less permanent record.[42]

It should be noted that this method produces a direct print, so that the hand on the right is the right hand, and the hand on the left is the left hand. This is the opposite of an intaglio printing process, which reverses the engraved image. Of particular interest here are Wolff's readings of the three surrealists. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, she found Breton to be a creator and revealer and focused on the poet's imaginative powers. As she interpreted his palm, he shared the same simplicity of lines as did Derain, whose palm prints were reproduced on the same page. For Wolff, Breton's creative ability was evident in his intuitive imagination. She saw a great triangle on the left hand, formed by the line of intuition and the line of destiny beneath the fingers of Mercury and Saturn and connected to the line of the heart. It indicated his aspirations to establish an objective law of aesthetics.[43]

Wolff found Éluard's hand striking in the spacing of the fingers of Jupiter and Saturn, which, according to her, revealed a revolutionary mentality (Figure 3.2). The originality of his thought had a polemical and critical character, indicated by an island in the head-line of the left hand. The sense of harmony and rhythm is represented in the fingers being well oriented, and his longing for an artificial paradise was indicated by a deep transverse line on the Mount of the Moon. She found a sublime and transposed eroticism on the poetic plane indicated by the Ring of Venus on the left hand, aptly paying homage to Éluard's rising status as one of the most celebrated French love poets of his age.[44]

Wolff determined that Duchamp (Figure 3.2) could not apply himself exclusively to a single talent, because he had too many. She considered only those of the writer and of the born strategist. She noted that the line of intuition was strongly marked. His need of freedom in the forms of thought and of life was of a primordial order. She pointed out the large space between the fingers of Jupiter and Saturn and between Apollo and Mercury. This indicated the hands of a strategist of a grand style and his success by the little triangle on the Mount of Jupiter.[45] Although Wolff herself may not have been aware of their use of the hand as a motif, her work certainly inspired several of the surrealists to incorporate hands with lines into their iconographic vocabulary.[46]

In the fall of 1935, Wolff made a short visit to London to visit Maria and Aldous Huxley, who again facilitated introductions to many influential clients.[47] One of the most memorable encounters was with the formidable Virginia Woolf (1882–1941). In their second meeting at Woolf's home, they had a long conversation about Freudian psychiatry.[48] Wolff had begun to write her *Studies in Hand-Reading* in Paris, expanding on the theories set out in her *Minotaure* article and incorporating material gathered in London. In the preface, Huxley compares her to a medieval *scryer* in which the hand is analogous to the crystal, "on which the scryer concentrates so as to put himself into the appropriate state of consciousness for seeing into another mind."[49]

In terms of Wolff's dialogue with the French surrealists, it is interesting to note that she included as a frontispiece to that book a solarized portrait photograph taken by Man Ray, while she examined the backs of a sitter's two hands (Figure 3.3).[50]

The image created an aura around her, while also demonstrating the importance she placed on the shape and size of the hands and fingers. In that book, she further elaborated on her readings of Breton, Éluard, and Duchamp, as well as the palm prints of other surrealists: René Crevel (1900–1935), Ernst, Balthus, Man Ray, and Antonin Artaud (1896–1948). Woolf's prints are included,[51] as well as several anonymous sitters and other clients in London.

London

Convinced by Dr. Henri Wallon that a war between France and Germany was inevitable, Wolff moved to London permanently in October 1936. Julian Huxley arranged for her to study primates at the London Zoo, and several physicians, including Dr. Emanuel Miller, Dr. William Stephenson, and Dr. C. Earle all helped her get access to their medical patients, thus testifying to her increasingly accepted status in the field. Her psychological research continued, as did her professional work as a reader of hands, resulting in several later books and numerous articles in scientific journals.[52] As a German national, she was not allowed to leave London during the war, but weathered its privations and bombings with alternating experiences of anti-Semitism and human kindness. She never completely felt at home in England, preferring the openness and friendships of her friends in France, but she was sincerely grateful for having been accepted as a citizen in 1947. In 1952, she regained the right to practice medicine, and from that time onward, she abandoned her research on hand analysis.[53]

   Examining her theories and interpretations, a reader can find some rather uncritical acceptances of the class, gender, and racial stereotypes of her day,[54] but she always insisted that she was applying rigorous scientific standards to her analysis of the hands she examined. She drew a distinction between clairvoyance and intuition, a skill shared by the best doctors and psychoanalysts:

> The psychology of the hand is, like medicine, an art as well as a science, and accordingly intuition plays a part in it. But intuition must not be confused with clairvoyance. Intuition may be defined as the instantaneous synthesis below the level of consciousness of observed details leading to the formation of judgments, only the results rising into consciousness. There is nothing supernatural about it.[55]

Wolff noted in her later autobiographies the disquiet she felt when reading the hands of rich and famous people. She felt as if she were often playing a part by emphasizing the more sensational aspects of her encounters. She explained the strain involved in "applying subconscious intuitive forces,"[56] suggesting that during her readings she depended less on a purely rational analysis and used what might be perceived as clairvoyance. She delivered much of what she revealed to a sitter during a reading very spontaneously, and often could not remember what she had said, even when clients told her afterward how meaningful her observations had been for them. One of her clients in London remembered a telling incident after a reading in 1937:

> At the end of the consultation, you were so exhausted that I had to take your arm and lead you to your bed. You had come out of a trance, dead to the world.' I [Charlotte Wolff] had not remembered this incident, but it fitted well into the pattern of my ideas.[57]

Her relationship to occultism is thus more nuanced. She certainly understood many of the standard interpretations offered by traditional methods of palmistry, especially when they aligned with her own scientific observations. She claimed that her associations with other kinds of esoteric activities were minimal, despite the rather mystical experience of growing an amethyst middle-eye in Danzig. As a young woman, she had attended a lecture by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), although she was more impressed by the man than by his theories. She certainly engaged in popular occult activities: interpreting the future on New Year's Eve as a teenager by throwing melted lead into cold water with her friends Lisa and Grischa; conducting séances in Paris with Helen Hessel and her son Paul; and "almost" believing in astrology because she was a Libra and had always experienced a balance between good and bad influences in her life.[58] On the other hand, even though many of her friends in Paris and in London were followers of G. I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949), she was so repulsed by his physical appearance seeing him in a Paris café that she decided never to meet him. She later failed an E. S. P. test given to her by Dr. Seoul at University College, London.[59]

Closing Remarks

The last three decades of her life, Wolff remained remarkably productive, particularly in her research into sexology.[60] Her early medical work with women's medicine in Berlin had led her to conduct research with prostitutes in the 1920s. After she published her first autobiography, *On the Way to Myself* (1969), with its frank discussions of her lesbian lifestyle and love affairs with women, she began to research lesbianism for her next book, *Love Between Women* (1971).[61] With the help of the Albany Trust, she interviewed over 100 lesbians to learn of their personal and professional lives. Wolff's interviews confirmed her developing theories concerning the relationship between female homosexuality and bisexuality, which eventually led to another book, *Bisexuality*: *A Study* (1977). She reviewed the psychoanalytic theories of Jung, Melanie Klein (1882–1960), Freud, and others, while also providing a historical account of mythic and biological theories of bisexuality. Wolff stated that in her "own definition, bisexuality is the root of human sexuality, and the matrix of all bio-psychical reactions, be they passive or active."[62] This belief would prove to be controversial among many feminists, although these studies would bring her a wider audience, especially as translations of her works appeared in Germany.[63] Although her original interest in these topics were born of both personal experience and her medical curiosity, the growth of feminism during this decade brought her in closer contact with a variety of activist groups. She would visit Berlin in 1978 and 1979 to meet with feminist groups, trips that helped her finally make peace with her German past.[64] Prior to those travels, a young Berlin woman, Birgit Benitz, had read *Love Between Women* (1971) and Wolff's fictional novel *An Older Love* (1976),[65] and began sending her books by the famous German sexologist, Magnus Hirschfeld. Wolff had not met Hirschfeld when she worked at the family planning clinic in Berlin in the 1920s, but certainly knew of his long battles against the famous Paragraph 175, a German law against male homosexuality. She began a dedicated study of his work that resulted in her final book, his biography.[66]

Overall, Wolff's *Minotaure* article, and her time with the surrealists in Paris, provides an interesting case study in the light of her ambivalent relationship to occultism

and her insistence that her work had a stronger connection to rational science. She clearly understood the dilemma:

> Patients look upon psychiatrists as wizards rather than physicians – conjurers who can and will put things right for them ….
>
> The attitude of the patient before he meets the psychiatrist is determined by his longing for an ideal father or mother, and even for more than that. The psychiatrist, in addition to playing this parental role, is expected to be the Great Teacher, a dream-like image which is both ancient and primitive. It is closely linked with that of the poet-prophets and the priestesses of ancient Greece, through whom Apollo spoke in oracles. These priestesses were an instrument of purest intuition; in a trance-like state they foretold, in cryptic terms, future happenings. The priestesses were virgins; and it seems to me significant that the God chose the woman as the messenger of his intention and will. I take this to mean that the feminine side, *in men and women alike* [author's emphasis] was believed to be the nearer to the source of wisdom.
>
> The Roman priests, too, were fortune-tellers. They told the future by auguries – the flights of birds, the appearance of birds' entrails, and so on. The Roman priests were inferior to the Pythias of Delphi, but they demonstrate how intuitive powers can operate in different degrees and in low as well as in high forms. The high often develops from the low: Socrates and Plato were supreme philosophers but they worked in the same field as the soothsayers, and they are known to have believed in fortune-telling.[67]

This quotation reiterates the complexities of her position as a trained physician who wanted her explorations of the human hand to be understood as serious science. Her flight from Nazi Germany had left her without a means of support in France, but working as a psychologist, she could combine her medical knowledge of the human hand with information gained from her extensive readings of traditional sources on palmistry to analyze the hands of her many famous clients. If, at times, she felt that she was playing a role expected of her by those who wanted to believe in her psychic powers and clairvoyance, she certainly possessed what she defined as a deep intuitive sense of her subjects. Her work would not have been so well received had she not delivered readings that unveiled the psychological truths of those people who sought her insights, and it is undoubtedly in this light that her meeting with the surrealists was a fertile encounter.

Although Wolff's connection to Surrealism was of short duration, the article in *Minotaure* certainly shows that they held her in high esteem. The surrealists found that her work mirrored their own interests in psychoanalysis and esotericism. Despite all of her insistence on scientific rigor, it was inevitable that the surrealists would welcome her work as occult insight. Her readings of surrealist hands, in particular, in context with the inclusion of palmistry in Grillot de Givry's *Musée des Sorciers*, elevated her to the role of seer, and served to add chirology, and by extension palmistry, to the occult disciplines that played a role in their quest to find alternative paths to the unconscious mind. Further, while Wolff herself eventually abandoned an active professional interest in the discipline, her article certainly helped to further cement the singular role of the hand within the movement's occult iconography and also

foreshadowed the greater role that an exploration of divinatory practices would play in later surrealist publications, ranging from contributions to journals such as *View* and *VVV* to occult studies such as Kurt Seligmann's *The Mirror of Magic* (1948) or Breton's own magisterial account in *L'Art magique* (1957). In a perhaps distant memory of their encounter with Wolff, Breton and Duchamp eventually prefaced their catalogue to the 1960/1961 exhibition *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* with solarized photographs of their respective palms, placing the entire show and its occult proclivities under the powerful sign of chiromancy.

Notes

1 Dr. Charlotte Wolff, "Les Révélations psychiques de la main," *Minotaure* 6 (Winter 1935): 38–44. An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Conference of the Society for Literature, Science and the Arts (SLSA) in Kitchener, Ontario, in September 2011.

2 Charlotte Wolff, *On the Way to Myself* (London: Methuen, 1969), and Charlotte Wolff, *Hindsight*: *An Autobiography* (London: Quartet Books, 1980). Although these books cover some of the same events and time periods, both contain details that inflect the other account.

3 She credits first Pierre Klossowski and then André Breton as her most ardent supporters, and through them she became known to the other surrealists. Wolff, *Hindsight*, 123.

4 A photograph of Robert Desnos apparently emerging from a trance was also included. André Breton, *Nadja* [1928], trans. Richard Howard and with an introduction by Mark Polizzotti (London: Penguin, 1960), 81, 33. See also M. E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2001), 91–93, and Patrick Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism: Origins, Magic, and Secret Societies*, trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014), on "Surrealism and Divination," 116–41.

5 André Breton to Charlotte Wolff [January 7, 1936], quoted in Pierre-Jacques Pernuit, *La Divination par les lignes de la mains dans l'art surréaliste* (MA diss., Université 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, 2013–2014), 66 ["J'ai rendu grace toujours advantage à votre faculté de divination."].

6 Wolff, *On the Way*, 35–37; and Wolff, *Hindsight*, 32–33.

7 Wolff, *On the Way*, 38–39.

8 In Berlin, Franz Hessel, editor of the magazine *Vers und Prosa*, published some of her poems and their translations of poems by Baudelaire (8, 1924). Wolff mentions their discussions in *Hindsight*, 71.

9 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 52–54.

10 Ibid., 61; Ernst Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter: Untersuchungen zum Konstitutionsproblem und zur Lehre von den Temperamenten* (Berlin: Springer, 1921). Several subsequent editions were published in the 1920s.

11 Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 190–213. Gleber considers Wolff in light of other Weimar women walkers and writers, including Irmgard Keun (1905–1982). When Wolff returns to Berlin in the late 1970s, she revisits many of the Berlin streets that she wandered in the 1920s, and records her impressions of the changes, which Gleber discusses as "Retrospective Flanerie," 208–13.

12 Charlotte Wolff, *Die Fürsorge für die Familie im Rahmen der Schwangerenberatung der Ambulatorien des Verbandes der Berliner Krankenkassen* (Charlottenburg: Gebrüder Hoffmann, 1928).

13 The astrologer Manfred Magg gathered biographical details from Spier's son, www.handlesen.de/index.php/en/palmistry/palmistry-and-horoscope-basics#AnkerSpier (accessed 12 April, 2017). Spier and Jung undoubtedly kept in touch as Jung wrote the introduction to Julius Spier, *The Hands of Children* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1944), xv–xvi.

14 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 62–63.

15 Wolff, *On the Way*, 225–27; and Wolff, *Hindsight*, 70, 99–111.

16 Ibid., 75–76.

17 Ibid., 70. Wolff draws a parallel between her scientific approach to hand reading and chemistry's indebtedness to alchemy at a time when the surrealists' interest in this "obscure" science was growing. That same summer, Max Ernst created collages for the first chapter, "The Lion of Belfort," in his alchemical novel, *Une Semaine de Bonté*. See Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 120–24.

18 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 122–33.

19 Wolff, *On the Way*, 78–79.

20 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 117–18.

21 Kirsten H. Powell, "Hands-On Surrealism," *Art History*, 20, no. 4 (December 1997): 516–33.

22 Breton, *Nadja*, 56–57.

23 Ibid., 120.

24 Paris, Musée Picasso. Although she met Picasso, he never agreed to have her read his hands.

25 Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy*, 61–104.

26 Émile-Jules Grillot de Givry, *Le Musée des sorciers, mages, et alchimistes* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1929), 284–304.

27 Charlotte Wolff, *The Human Hand* (London: Methuen and Co, 1942), 80. She did not mention Julien Leclercq, *Le caractère et la main* (Paris: F. Juven, 1908), who likewise analyzed the hands of famous people, including James McNeil Whistler.

28 Wolff, *The Human Hand*, 5–6.

29 See Dr. Charlotte Wolff, *A Psychology of Gesture*, trans. Anne Tennant (London: Methuen and Co., 1945), 2nd ed. (1948), 7.

30 Ibid., 2.

31 Wolff, *The Human Hand*, 117, and bibliography, 193–98. In addition to Kretschmer, she also credits Freiburg Professor Adolf Friedemann's article "Handbau und Psychosis," for the importance of studying the entire hand.

32 Wolff, "Révélations psychiques," 38.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 It is unclear how Wolff encountered Henri Mangin-Balthazar's theories. He published *La main, miroir du destin* (Paris: F. Sorlot, 1939), and she may have read earlier publications.

37 Wolff, "Révélations psychiques," 38–39.

38 In her *Studies in Hand-Reading*, Wolff adds Freudian theory as another important influence. The first edition was translated by Olive M. Cook (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936). The second edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937) is cited here, 6.

39 Although in the *Minotaure* article she explains the horizontal zone in the middle of the hand followed Jung's ideas of shared psychic content, she later claimed that she never agreed with his concept of the "collective subconscious." See Wolff, *On the Way*, 26, 182–83.

40 Ibid., 183. She states,

> I was particularly taken with the Neo-Freudian idea and practice of sympathetic participation …. However, I remained a 'wild' analyst, an outsider, who used her experience and intuition, her participation and her general psychological knowledge in the first place, and took on Freudian colours in the second place.

41 Wolff, "Révélations psychiques," 39–40.

42 Wolff, *The Human Hand*, 7. In *Hindsight*, she says she used copper dioxide, 281. Both are stable oxides of copper.

43 Wolff, "Révélations psychiques," 42.

44 Ibid., 44.

45 Ibid.

46 Pernuit explores in greater depth the subsequent influence Wolff had on the works of surrealist artists and writers, particularly the collaborative *Les Mains libres* (1936) of Man Ray and Paul Éluard, and Man Ray's photographs of Méret Oppenheim, entitled *Erotique voilée* (1933), in which her body is inked as if to make a print. See *La Divination*, 73–88.

47 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 143.

48 Wolff, *On the Way,* 86–89. She elaborated on their discussion in *Hindsight*, 144–48. Sybille Bedford recalled that Wolff had seen madness, and even suicide, in Virginia's hands, although Wolff did not remember breaching her confidentiality. Joan Schenkar, *Truly Wilde* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 258.

49 Wolff, *Studies in Hand-Reading*, x. Because Huxley compares her to a male scryer, he does not seem to assign a specific gender to the ability to read palms intuitively.

50 Wolff later reproduced this photograph and another taken by Man Ray in *Hindsight*, between 152 and 53. Pernuit compares the second photograph to one of Julius Spier, ca. 1930 (his Figure 28) in which Spier is also seated reading a palm.

51 Wolff, *Studies in Hand-Reading*, 88–90.

52 Later books by Wolff include *The Human Hand* (1942), *A Psychology of Gesture* (1945), *The Hand in Psychological Diagnosis* (1951), all published in London by Methuen and Co. Articles include (1937): "The Form and Dermatoglyphs of the Hands and Feet of Certain Anthropoid Apes," and (1938): "A Comparative Study of the Form and Dermatoglyphs of the Extremities of Primates," both published in the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London.* She co-authored with H. R. Rollin (1942), "The Hands of Mongolian Imbeciles in Relation to their Three Personality Groups," in the *Journal of Mental Science* and authored (1944), "The Hand of the Mental Defective," both in the *British Journal of Medical Psychology.* Full citations are included in the bibliography.

53 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 201–03.

54 For example, in *The Human Hand*, 25, she states,

> The German anthropologist Rudolf Martin observed that the thumb and the index finger of an unborn Negro child are considerably shorter than those of a European unborn child, and also that adult Negroes have smaller thumbs than white men. As power of consciousness is more highly developed in Europeans than in Negroes, the anatomical difference tallied with the psychological significance of the thumb.

55 Ibid., 6.

56 Wolff, *On the Way*, 84.

57 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 160. The meeting took place in 1957 when the anonymous author (Gladys Parish Huntington) gifted Wolff with her recently published novel *Madame Solario* (London: Heinemann, 1956). She recalled that Wolff had encouraged her to begin writing during their session twenty years prior.

58 Wolff, *On the Way*, 93–97.

59 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 43, 136, 181, 159.

60 Ibid., 215–31.

61 Charlotte Wolff, *Love between Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), which also appeared in German translation.

62 Charlotte Wolff, *Bisexuality: A Study* (London: Quartet Books. 1970), 1.

63 Scholarly interest in her work, both as a Jewish woman and as a lesbian, continues to grow. See Claudia Rappold, *Charlotte Wolff (1897–1986), Ärztin, Psychotherapeutin, Wissenschaftlerin, und Schriftstellerin* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2005) and Toni Brennan and Peter Hegarty, "Charlotte Wolff and Lesbian History: Reconfiguring Liminality in Exile," *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 14, no. 4 (2010): 338–58.

64 Wolff, *Hindsight*, 250–308. See also, Christa Wolf and Charlotte Wolff, *Ja, unsere Kreise berühren sich* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2004), which includes letters between the two women.

65 Charlotte Wolff, *An Older Love* (London: Quartet Books, 1976).

66 Charlotte Wolff, *Magnus Hirschfeld* (London: Quartet Books, 1986).

67 Wolff, *On the Way*, 187–88.

4   Occulted Un-Knowing

Bataillean Approaches to the Sacred in Gellu Naum's *Ceasornicăria Taus* and Alejo Carpentier's *El Siglo de las Luces*

Vivienne Brough-Evans

Analogical Dialectics and the Ambiguous Invisible

> The dialectic had antecedents other than Heraclitus, Plato, or Fichte. It is linked even more essentially to currents of thought such as Gnosticism, Neoplatonic mysticism, and to philosophical phantoms such as Meister Eckhart, the Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa, and Jakob Boehme.[1]

After meeting André Breton (1896–1966) and operating on the fringes of the surrealist group, Georges Bataille (1897–1962) positioned his work alongside Surrealism, famously calling himself the movement's "enemy *from within*."[2] There were a number of surrealists, both in France and within the international surrealist movement, who also did not fit neatly inside the Bretonian-led model of Surrealism, and their histories and works are vital to a full understanding of the movements' impact, its political agenda and its use of occultism. Specifically, here, I will be considering three peripheral figures who demonstrate an interest in the sacred. The connections between esoteric experiences and exoteric forms of revolutions come to the fore in Bataille's theories and the literary works of the Central European surrealist Gellu Naum (1915–2001) and postcolonial 'dissident' surrealist Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980), each of who present a surrealist-orientated treatment of dialectical ambiguity.[3] Naum's drama *Ceasornicăria Taus* (1966) and Carpentier's novel *El Siglo de las Luces* (1962) provide the textual illustrations of this proposal.[4] The first represents esoteric coding as oblique political commentary, and the second represents the esoteric bedrock of real politics in the past to discuss the present. All three writers found inspiration in Paris, which was centre stage in a vibrant, global artistic outpouring, and, as Malcolm Bradbury eloquently put, "tended to become the supra-city of Modernism, drawing in Russian émigrés, Dadaists from Zürich…. [I]t became, both in its chaos and its continuity, the ideal cosmopolitan city, cultured, tolerant, feverish and active, radical but contained."[5] Here, Surrealism flourished and in turn influenced many national literatures as it was carried across the world.

As has been extensively documented, Bataille's theories provide an excellent accompaniment to the study of 'orthodox' surrealist thought and explicate some of its most radical implications. In 1929, following conflicts in the Parisian surrealist group, a largely ex-surrealist faction formed around Bataille and published *Un Cadavre* (1930), a vitriolic riposte to Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930) that largely focussed on a rejection of its supposedly idealist ramifications.[6] During

their four decades of association, Bataille and Breton expressed a range of accordance with each another, giving rise to a unique surrealist dialogue in which notions of occultism, mythology and the sacred all played a vital role.

Bataille's other interwar projects were carried out alongside ex-surrealists and left-wing intellectuals, and included the journal *Documents* (1929–1931) whose strategies of cultural collaging have been termed "ethnographic surrealism" by James Clifford, and the journal and secret society *Acéphale* (1936–1939), created in reaction against the expansion of Fascist power in Europe and dedicated to the elaboration of a new mythology of the modern.[7] Contemporary to *Acéphale*, Bataille and the former surrealist Roger Caillois (1913–1978) opened the Collège de Sociologie (1937–1939), their founding note signed jointly with Georges Ambrosino, Pierre Klossowski, Pierre Libra and Jules Monnerot.[8] As a sociological extension of Surrealism's dialectical concerns, the Collège considered desire and the destruction of mental boundaries leading to revolution as generative forces, achieved via a "sacred sociology" focussed on "points of coincidence" between "individual psychology," "the social" and "revolutions."[9] The Collège closed after only two years due to the onset of the Second World War as well as on-going internal disagreements. However, many of the concerns discussed within its sessions fed directly into Bataille's subsequent works, permeating texts such as *Inner Experience* (1943) and *Method of Meditation* (1947), where sacred forces continued to be of vital importance.[10]

As the Collège's sacred-sociological expression of surrealist liberty in the 1930s turned in the 1940s to Bataille's focus on an inner liberty, a new terminology emerged. Bataille describes this inner liberty by using Socrates' "two famous maxims: 'Know yourself' and 'I know but one thing, that I know nothing'…. The first is the principle of inner experience and the second that of nonknowledge, on which this experience rests."[11] The first is an interchangeable term with that of the "*extreme limit of the possible*" and "meditation."[12] Bataille identifies inner experience not as a communion with a deity, but with the unknown: "[a] perceptible step is made if we substitute the unknown for the notion of this infinite exterior being."[13] To interrogate "the limits of being," "[t]he mind can resort to more powerful spells, like modifications of the physiological state."[14] Here, I argue, resides the analogical dialectic that connects esoteric (inner) experiences and exoteric revolution via a shared mode of perception, which will be detailed below using examples from both Naum's and Carpentier's literary prose.

To question the 'limits of being', Bataille, through various forms of what will here be termed a strategy of occulted un-knowing, considered the unknown in relation to myth, inner experience and meditation, in ways that are similar to what R. B. Elder identifies as "the alchemical idea that we need to empty our selves so that we can be filled with an other."[15] Such experiences with the unknown or alchemical other have comparable events in all sacred realities. For example, in the mystery-tradition it is termed 'demortalising',[16] a term I will use in a comparativist sense here to denote various ways in which the limits of conscious being are transgressed through the complimentary act of emptying the self and experience of something "wholly other."[17] Consideration of these ancient traditions, which utilise types of demortalising, is necessary, since Bataille considered just such ambiguous experiences of going-beyond-ordinary-being towards occulted un-knowing and placed them in a tradition of dialectical thinking, as noted above. It is again the political implication of such ideas that critics identify, and to which Bataille contributes, as in Mircea Eliade's observation that: "From Baudelaire and Verlain, Lautréamont and Rimbaud… to André

Breton and his disciples, all these artists utilized the occult as a powerful weapon in their rebellion against the bourgeois establishment and its ideology."[18]

Both the surrealist's 'supreme point' or 'short-circuits' and Bataillean forms of occulted un-knowing, likened to sacred demortalising here, appeal to aspects related to the occult in order to attain liberty.[19] Each utilise the dialectic in its analogical sense so that it contains ambiguity. The same ambiguity that in Plato's dialectic occurs when a thing is at once both "one and infinite" and approaches "real being,"[20] as the Neoplatonic, Gnostic Jakob Boehme's (1575–1624) "Yes and No," which influenced Romanticism, and which in Walter Benjamin's analogical dialectic is termed "a dream image."[21] Such connections are further supported by Bataille's readings of Plato, which were influenced by his early mentor, the 'mystically' inclined philosopher Lev Shestov.[22] Bataille was drawn to this analogical dialectic in which, in Plato, "ambiguity shifts the focus... to the relationships between the objects in the mind of the viewer, and it is from these relationships that new meanings may be derived from the compositions."[23] Understanding the prehistory of the analogical dialectic, which is central in occult discourses, is vital to understanding the surrealist search for alternative modes of knowledge. Here, ambiguity offers a supreme moment of (non) contradiction which, in halting empirical or discursive logic, is creative of analogical mythical thought central to Surrealism. Bataille's consideration of sacred ambiguity, like surrealist ambiguity, finds its focus in dialectics. It is this type of dialectical thought, connecting the invisible with the material, that Bataille's theories explicate through the lived experience of myth, inner experience and meditation.

The critic Peter Connor has importantly highlighted the political implications of such dialectical thinking:

> Why is it so important for Bataille that philosophy acknowledge its mystical foundations? For many reasons, amongst which we might begin with the following: because mysticism provides the missing link in philosophy's chain of reasoning that might allow for the possibility of revolution.[24]

For Bataille, the analogical dialectic present in his expressions of demortalising experiences serves to connect esoteric experience to exoteric revolution via "the operation in which thought stops the movement that subordinates it, and laughing – or, abandoning itself to some other sovereign effusion – identifies itself with the rupture of those bonds that subordinate it."[25]

As I intend to demonstrate in this chapter, such experiences offer a particularly suitable screen through which to read a number of surrealist prose works, which share close proximity with Bataille's acceptation of sacred Surrealism and dialectical ambiguity. As aforementioned, two writers who extended Surrealism's exposition of dialectical ambiguity in these ways are Gellu Naum and Alejo Carpentier. Even though their texts differ stylistically, and Naum is more of a radical surrealist and Carpentier a dissenting surrealist, the two texts fruitfully demonstrate how experiences akin to a comparativist sacred demortalising and alchemical emptying, connects the 'limits of being' to the unknown.

Naum's Dialectic of Life and Death

> Divine, which is to say, it denies the law of reason.[26]
> [M]an is divine (sacred), but he is not supremely so, since he is real.[27]

Gellu Naum's play *Ceasornicăria Taus* (1966) and Alejo Carpentier's *El Siglo de las Luces* (1962) both offer a creative as well as political expression of the sacred, which can be read fruitfully through Bataillean articulation of demortalising experiences. Both works have long been neglected in Anglophone surrealist studies, but belong to the movement's wider international arena, which benefits from comparative readings that acknowledge how the surrealist dialogue between politics and the occult changed in differing geographies. Consideration of Naum's writing is vital, not only to appreciate the necessarily covert links he makes between politics and the occult in his communist-era work, but also because his radical extension of surrealist theory is part of a wider regional discourse of personal and political repression in Central and Eastern European Surrealism.

In East-Central Europe, generally both Dada and Surrealism had an influence upon national literatures and vice versa.[28] In 1938, the Romanian-born poet Naum travelled to Paris, together with Ghérasim Luca (1913–1994), to pursue doctoral studies focussed on the medieval French theologian and philosopher Pierre Abelard (1079–1142) at the Sorbonne.[29] Naum spent much of his Parisian sojourn at the Bibliothèque Nationale reading alchemical treatises, as well as associating with other Romanian and French writers, such as Victor Brauner (1903–1966), Jacques Hérold (1910–1987), Luca, Pierre Mabille (1904–1952) and Benjamin Péret (1899–1959).[30] There is no indication that this included Bataille's circle, although the city's cultural climate was by then thoroughly permeated by the impact of Surrealism, including ventures such as Bataille's Collège de Sociologie. As such, the comparison drawn between the two figures rests primarily in any similarities between their ideas, which may in part result from the fact that Naum, like Bataille, was a medievalist by training. With the onset of the Second World War, both Naum and Luca returned to Romania, and, in 1940, co-founded the Romanian surrealist group alongside Virgil Teodorescu (1909–1987), Paul Păun (1915–1994) and, later, Dolfi Trost (1916–1966). The right-wing censorship that had held sway in Romania before the war gave way to a liberal period in which the Romanian surrealist group's descant public activities flourished. In the late 1940s, however, this was adumbrated by Soviet Communism, as was the case with many other avant-garde and politically radical ventures in the region.

At their height, the vibrant Romanian group dialogued with, but also questioned, the direction of the surrealist enterprise in Paris.[31] Many of their works were published in French, however, Naum can often be left out of the charting of this group's history as a result of his resistance to writing in French. Later, during communist rule, many intellectuals and artists, including Luca, Trost and Păun, chose to leave Romania. Due to family commitments, Naum remained, just as he remained a dedicated and lifelong surrealist, albeit heavily censored in his published work during the four decades of communist rule. In 1966, Naum published the disorientating surrealist play *Taus*, written during the early years of Nicolae Ceaușescu's restrictive Soviet-style communist rule – a rule characterised by oppressive censorship that relaxed briefly from 1964 to 1971, and that only ended with the 1989 revolution, culminating in Ceaușescu's execution amidst accusations of political crimes and genocide. For the majority of Naum's life, Communism provided the defining context for his surrealist expression, and there is an allusive subtext of dissidence seeping through *Taus*, expressed in veiled references to the violence of political rule contained within examples of gunfire and murder between lovers and complex occult symbolism signalling alternative forms of knowledge.[32] Naum's writing stands out for his effective use of experiences that are akin to sacred demortalising, revealing the analogical dialectic

of life and death, fusing the real and the invisible in ways that can be explored further in relation to Bataillean heterology.[33]

Like all of Naum's works, *Taus* powerfully transmits his sense of humour and excellent command of the absurd, set in tension with a philosophically complex, cryptographic use of cross-references, symbolism and elusive allusions. The play contains two acts, a 'profane act' and a 'sacred act', within which the different characters in the drama exhibit an unusual fluidity, and one is initially unclear as to their status as dead or living. Rather than disturbing the action of the play, this is delightfully disorientating, and serves to question the fixedness of one's preconceptions as life and death are figured as co-present in the unknown. This confusion or re-fusion continues in the stage layout, as the main stage (serving as the interior of Taus Watch repair shop, and for parts of the sacred act as the cathedral) is inset "toward the back at the same level [by] two smaller stages with curtains drawn," which open and close to reveal past or present vignettes mixing time and space in ways similar to that of memory.[34] In this short play, there are seven main characters: Taus the shopkeeper, Klaus the customer, Maus and his lover Melanie, her twin-soul the Angel, her father Papus and his future wife Mrs. Burma, who murdered her unfaithful former husband Cocles. The abstract nature of *Taus* is furthered as the main characters also play the marginal characters of the diver Cocles, Mrs. Klaus, a Priest and an unseen Tiger, among others.

The play begins as Taus opens his shop at 8 o'clock. Maus, who is already sitting inside, has been waiting for two years to bid Taus farewell before leaving for New Zealand.[35] This unusual time lapse is normalised, as is the presence of ghosts, in this surrealist play, which takes the audience on a journey into the unknown realm peopled by the living and the dead. A customer, Klaus, who becomes an immediate friend to Taus, enters the shop but cannot remember his own name, a matter resolved when he finds his business card stating, "Klaus, Architect."[36] After the first of many unusual conversations, this one about altering the speed of time, a third man, Papus, enters and asks if they would like to see nude photographs. This offends Taus and Klaus, and so Papus leaves. The clock strikes 8 again; Taus closes the shop and the Angel, who belongs to Taus, appears to serve drinks to them. Taus speaks proudly of owning the Angel and a 'black market' tiger. Then Klaus introduces Mrs. Klaus with whom he seems to have a mediumistic relationship, channelling her and waking when she sleeps, as indicated by the stage direction: "*She sits in the armchair and falls asleep. Klaus gets up and becomes himself again.*"[37]

In the remainder of this first profane act, the characters meet and become attracted to one another, mainly with the character Mrs. Burma. Mrs. Burma is introduced on the right-hand inset stage during a seaside vignette detailing the past.[38] Melanie is introduced on the left-hand inset stage where she sits in a cafe with her father, Papus, and her twin-soul, the Angel.[39] The narrative drive of the play is provided by young lovers Melanie and Maus, whose prefigured meeting is accompanied by alchemical images of fire, red "bloodied snows," a "salamander" and a "bull."[40] The latter is evocative of fire veneration in the Mystery-tradition of Mithraism, from which the term demortalising arises to highlight the relation of emptying and receptivity in the analogical dialectic, a fire also reflected in Naum's 1968 poetry collection *Athanor*, the name of the alchemical furnace. At the end of the act, Melanie and Maus run away together.[41]

In the beginning of the sacred act, the young lovers take refuge in a cathedral where they intend to marry. A Gregorian Mass begins in this act and plays intermittently

until the curtain falls. Changes in lighting on the main stage indicate the shift in setting from the cathedral to the watch repair shop. The action contrasts the young lovers' despair with talk of dreams, desire and Taus's philosophising about love. On the two inset stages Naum introduces further scenes of discord between the different sets of lovers: on the left-hand stage there is a bed on the sidewalk on which the widow Burma and the Angel sit, a fact that is met with censure from Klaus on the main stage, and, later, from her ghostly former-husband in the right-hand stage who, after the Angel shoots him, is replaced by the convalescing Papus.[42] The dramatic apogee of the sacred act occurs in a central scene, augured by pathetic fallacy and a rising Mass, as the characters on the main, left and right stages speak concurrently, creating a cacophony. After calm is restored, and amidst the lovers' various machinations, the ghostly diver arrives on the main stage to deliver a message to Taus about love as scientifically recomposed rays. The message is immediately followed by a mythological vignette on Atlas in which two women "put the globe into Atlas' arms," then are enticed away by a Centaur, played respectively by Papus, Mrs. Burma, Melanie and Maus. The women at first feel they cannot leave Atlas until the "Centaur thrusts a dagger into his chest," causing Atlas to throw the globe upwards and then fly off after it.[43] This mythic interlude shows the change of female affection from Atlas (the paternal figure played by Papus) to the Centaur (the lover figure played by Maus). This transfer of affections hints at a real political subtext in which a transfer of power should occur, from the paternal 'care' of the contemporary Romanian government to the people. The remainder of the act elaborates views on love in greater detail. The various tribulations to love continue as Mrs. Burma is unfaithful to her fiancé, Papus, with Klaus, then shoots the Angel, and Melanie and Maus part. At the end of the sacred act there is a continuation of the ghost diver's message on love and scientific explanation of the "recomposed ray." This message further explicates Taus's earlier description of a philosophy of demortalising love through the concepts of the twin-soul referenced in "the Zohar," and works by "Plato" and "Aristophanes."[44]

Naum's naming of male characters appears to carry further occult undertones. Firstly, Maus potentially alludes to Marcel Mauss who taught classes on myth at the Sorbonne during Naum's time there. Similarly, Papus recalls the author of *The Tarot of the Bohemians* (1889), a pseudonym for the occultist Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), who briefly joined the French chapter of Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society. This connection is strengthened by Cocles's comment that he "has been dead for only sixty-five years."[45] In this vein, Klaus, the husband who seems to mediumistically channel his dead wife, could recall Klaus from "The Ensouled Violin," a tale of occult animation of the object collated in 1890 by Blavatsky.[46] In Naum's play, Klaus's occult mediumistic animation is humorously normalised, and the dead are charged with jobs as night watchwomen or messengers from the other side, which further erodes the division separating the dead and the living. Carpentier, as I will show, similarly affects such a surrealist relationship between the real and marvellous in *Explosion* as he enmeshes his historico-political novel with symbolic allusions to alchemy and mysticism.

It is perhaps the clockmaker Taus, however, whose name carries the greatest occult significance. For Tau is an esoteric symbol in Kabbalistic, Gnostic and Neoplatonic thought, presented by a Greek or Hebrew letter:[47]

> [M]anifest on the temporal plane with the in/temporal experience of death...
> *tau* opens a path that illumines the juxtaposition of truth and death, which

underscores that truth is most fully disclosed in the inevitable eventuality of the singular (non)event of death — the moment that is always never the same.[48]

Tau, as truth revealed in death, is an expression of a literal demortalising, but also a figurative demortalising, in experiences that serve to change the material via regeneration into the "*noetic* or *pneumatic*."[49] Bataille's theoretical works offer a way to interpret such features in surrealist production, for as he details, in sacred realities the object of exchange is one of the material for the immaterial. It is not a monetary exchange, but a gift, a sacrificial, spiritual, inner experience intended for self-mastery (the Socratic "Know yourself"), evident in occult traditions that embrace non-knowledge (the Socratic "I know but one thing, that I know nothing") and that Surrealism considered tragically repressed by an increasingly empirical society.[50] Bataille's works that examines these forms of occulted un-knowing serve to extend surrealist considerations of alchemical and occult (non)knowledge as an access to liberty and revolutionary thought, which identifies with "the rupture of those bonds that subordinate."[51]

It is Naum's grasp of medieval scholasticism and the concept of Tau, perhaps, that lends his surrealist, ghostly absence-presences and alchemical symbolism their ontological complexity. Bataille too evokes this understanding in his various discussions on self-loss leading to the unknown and when he states that "spirits are mythical … spirits that depend on a body, like those of men, and the autonomous spirits of the supreme being, of animals, of dead people, and so on."[52] In sacred thought, Tau also relates to the Kabbalah/Qabalah tree trunk balancing male and female in androgynous forces, or life and death in liminal forces, and climbed via a figurative demortalising.[53] This is the occult, sacred path that goes all the way up from microcosm to macrocosm, figured in the symbolic ascent of the tree. In Naum's play, this demortalising occurs as the living and dead interact, akin to an alchemical self-emptying leading to an experience of another, and the Platonic "training for dying" to see the "one-and-the-many."[54]

Indeed, in Naum's fiction *Medium* (1945), which the critic Petre Răileanu describes as "mix[ing] dream, automatic writing, and alchemical narrative" with "allusions to the myth of Isis and Osiris," Naum clearly reflects this occult understanding when he writes: "The tree is luminous and I climb up it to hide …. *I'm certain* that I won't be seen since I'm in the light and they are in the dark."[55] A dark in which, Răileanu adds: "[d]isintegration and dispersal correspond to the magisterium of black, *nigredum*. The operations that follow, the intensifying fire and the tree of light, are elements of the magisterium. The Work is at the stage of purification and sublimation."[56] Alchemically it is matter converted by fire to illuminate the unknown, a demortalising cycle the tarot's High Priestess (II) also represents, as with the Tau and the Torah, she sits between the black and white pillars of negation and affirmation in esoteric meditation of the analogical dialectic. Tau as a symbol of truth-death, balancing opposing forces via an ascent or alchemical transmutation, reveals the analogical dialectic presented in many sacred realities. This is an intuition Naum attests to, as Valery Oisteanu notes: "[i]n his words 'the Alchemist of unacceptable existence,' Naum was preparing himself for a state of ghostliness before dying, as expressed with his statement: 'We wish to reincarnate without dying beforehand'."[57]

In *Taus*, it is love that provides the basis for the dialectical exchanges between the dead and the living, male and female, the occult context and political subtext of the play. This dialectical engagement is aptly represented in two images of dual

forces: the first an image of philosophical-occult knowledge, which Naum analogises to a second image of scientific-empirical knowledge. The philosophical image is of a twin-soul explicitly referred to in Naum's play thus:

> TAUS: Have you read the Zohar?... It's written that before descending into this world, each soul is part of an animate mystery. After descending, they split in two, bringing life to two different bodies: a man and a woman.... Plato made Aristophanes.... In the beginning of all beginnings, our nature was different than it is now.[58]

The scientific image details an energy ray which by reflection and refraction separates into twin-rays and can recompose again into one. The entropy (inertia) that exists between twin-rays is used within *Taus* to indicate that something is wrong with love (this analogically reiterates the philosophical twin-soul which is less effective when separate than together):

> DIVER [delivering Taus a message from the dead Kubich or, as we learn, an unknown other]: In the case where two coherent rays appear from a ray through reflection and refraction, we find that their total entropy is greater than that of the initial ray; ... one of the two rays is determined in all the details of its oscillation by the other: it is not statistically independent of the other.... [T]he core of the problem was... the dependence linked univocally to it, between the energy, frequency and entropy of radiation.[59]

Naum's reference to the Kabbalistic text, the *Zohar* and Aristophanes's speech from Plato's *Symposium*, detailing the animate mystery of the twin-soul, recalls the surrealist representation of alchemical marriage, which releases powerful forces, famously inscribed in the visual semiotics of the tarot Star in Breton's *Arcanum 17* (1945). Just as the twin-soul re-joins in the "animate mystery," Naum highlights resistances or imbalances impeding such sacred re-union in the living, dead or angelic couplings in *Taus*, as relationships become unfaithful, murderous or simply fail. The myth of the twin-soul utilises dialectics to reveal something wholly other, and "different than it is now," and is a further example of sacred demortalisation illustrated in *Taus* through the meeting of life and death, experiences in which, following Bataille's Collège lecture "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," "the sky, the earth, and the subject successively collapse."[60] This arcane, ambiguous, invisible twin-soul expresses the dialectic at the heart of occult and sacred thought, illustrating both the Platonic "one and infinite," and the Neoplatonic, Gnostic "Yes and No" of Jakob Boehme. Similarly, the dependence/entropy of two "not statistically independent" rays is resolved with the re-joining of the scientific rays, which, when placed alongside the philosophical knowledge of the soul outlined by Naum's character Taus, serves to compose an analogical dialectic fusing alternative and empirical knowledge to release new meanings.

   Naum's liberating surrealist subject in *Taus* is thus love, which is impeded by control and poverty, indicated through the murders of Cocles and the Angel plus the young lovers' destitution, which covertly echoes the loss of freedom, state violence and poverty in 1960s communist Romania. In Naum's play, the twin-soul is therefore not reunited, and love is shown in a conflicted aspect. Nonetheless, Naum does present a sacred, philosophical and scientific theory of the mediation between the twin forces

of female and male, entropy and energy, through mythic demortalising experiences described in Plato and the *Zohar*'s esoteric exegesis of Tau, a death-truth which, in the Kabbalistic tree, balances energies. Naum's presentation sets love at its surrealist centre, as the force that can create and destroy, bring death or life, and relate the two. In Taus's surreal clock shop, "it's always eight" o'clock and the living, dead and Angelic characters interact and discuss time, desire, the demortalising twin-soul and love.[61] Here, death, ghosts and occult references are part of a (sur)reality shaped by a logic explicated here in terms of occulted un-knowing. All of these are expressed through a dialogue on strange topics, which are presented as both humorous and philosophically complex. Naum's use of occult symbolism, whether viewed as parodic irony or playful seriousness, ultimately reveals a dialectic consideration of "reincarnat[ing] without dying," an alternative knowledge echoing the transubstantiation of the material to noetic or pneumatic in alchemy, showing liberating thought to be the bind that ties overt occult and covert political discourses together in Naum's play *Taus*.

Carpentier's Rights of Man

> On the whole the king represents a dynamic concentration of all the impulses socially animating individuals.[62]

The Hispanic American and Caribbean postcolonial region proved to be fertile ground for Surrealism in many ways.[63] Positioned within this broader cultural use and reshaping of surrealist ideas is Alejo Carpentier's novel *El Siglo de las Luces* (1962), written by a man who was directly involved in the 'dissident' circle around Bataille, and who would later draw on this influence to shape an intriguing dialogue about regional history, politics and myth. The son of French and Russian parents, Carpentier was raised in Cuba, and as a young man was jailed in the 1920s for political activity against the Machado regime.[64] In 1928, he escaped to Paris, using Robert Desnos's papers, and there became involved in surrealist circles, joining the group around Bataille and contributing to both *Documents* and *Un Cadavre*. Throughout his time in Paris, and after, Carpentier carried out extensive research on the colonial history of Latin America.[65] With the outbreak of the Second World War, he returned to Latin America: first to Cuba, then in 1945 to Venezuela from which vantage point he later viewed the rise of armed resistance against Fulgencio Batista's Cuban dictatorship. He returned to Cuba in 1959, after the success of the Cuban Revolution, and took a role in Fidel Castro's new Cuban government, later moving to a diplomatic post in France.

Although no clear evidence attests that Carpentier attended the Collège de Sociologie or read Bataille's later works, his earlier collaboration with the dissident surrealists suggests a more literal connection to Bataillean ideas than the figurative one present within Naum's writing and thought.[66] Study of Carpentier's work is vital, not only because of the sacred links he makes between the esoteric and exoteric in his prose, but also for its contribution to an understanding of Surrealism in postcolonial regions, where elements of occultism and myth were used within a markedly different cultural and historical context.

In 1948, Carpentier developed the concept of *lo real maravilloso*, which "arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle)," "presupposes faith" and precipitates a demortalising "exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme

state."[67] The *real maravilloso* involved some conscious comparison with Breton's own elusive concept of the *merveilleux*.[68] Studies on Surrealism variously describe the *merveilleux*, one applicable explanation being that: "[a]s a consistent materialist, Breton tries to show that space, time and the principle of causality are identical in dreams to what they are in reality, i.e., laws of objective forms of existence, and not properties of our mind."[69] In a 1963 interview, Carpentier outlined their main difference as being 'historic research': "it was, in all this, a marvelous historicity that was what in my opinion surrealism lacked."[70] Carpentier extended and adapted surrealist theory to shape *lo real maravilloso*, which itself participated in a wider Hispanic American and Caribbean literary discourse on the real in the 1940s, that led to Latin American magical realism. The critic Gerald Martin determines that much work of this period, including Carpentier's own *real maravilloso*, would be more accurately described as "mythical realism,"[71] thereby hitting right to the core of the concept and to the dissident surrealist view of myth, which he adapted. Carpentier wrote *Explosion* in the 1950s, first in Venezuela and then in Cuba, following the Cuban Revolution. This was a pivotal period in the development of Carpentier's political concerns, which had begun with his imprisonment in the 1920s, a historical and biographical context vital for understanding *Explosion*. Here, Carpentier looks to an earlier revolution in the Caribbean, thereby indicating the way in which his life and writing are informed by an engagement with colonial history and also postcolonial Cuban politics.

The novel is a realist, historical romance written from a Caribbean perspective and charts events of the 1789 French Revolution until the 1809 Spanish War of Independence. Throughout, Carpentier eschews a glorious retelling of history from either side. Instead, he offers a political narrative, which as Roberto González-Echevarría defines, is set "within a period of socio-historical transformation that signals the end of colonial rule and the beginning of the wars of independence in Latin America,"[72] liberation movements the surrealists so strongly sided with. Carpentier's treatment of the subject matter founded "a subgenre of historical writing in the Caribbean that deals specifically with the problems of modernity issuing from the eighteenth century."[73] Although stylistically the historical realism of *Explosion* and timeless disorientation of *Taus* directly contrast, as do the socio-political contexts of their production, Bataillean forms of occulted un-knowing lie at the heart of both of these works' enmeshment of the occult and the political.

In *Explosion*, there are four protagonists: the three cousins Esteban, Sofia and Carlos, who are children of wealthy Spanish colonists in Cuba, and the French political revolutionary Victor Hugues. The cousins live in Havana, and during the mourning period for their father/uncle, Victor befriends them and quickly becomes indispensible. As a result of his involvement in Freemasonry, Victor and his comrade Dr. Ogé are forced to flee Havana when the Spanish government issues their arrest warrant.[74] Esteban and Sofia accompany the fleeing men, and due to the outbreak of a revolution against colonial law in Port-au-Prince (soon to be Haiti), Sofia and Ogé disembark, leaving Victor and Esteban to sail on alone to France.[75] After joining in the Parisian celebrations following the French Revolution, Victor, now a Jacobin activist, secures Esteban a posting in a remote border town, translating "revolutionary literature for Spain."[76] From here, Esteban travels to Guadeloupe with Victor who, having risen through the ranks of the Republic, is now commissioned with bringing the revolution to the Caribbean.[77]

In this sweeping historical romance, Carpentier charts Esteban's disillusionment with Victor's abuse of revolutionary power, expressed in his violent treatment of

Caribbean colonial subjects; violence not unlike that enacted by Batista in 1950s Cuba, as Carpentier wrote *Explosion*. The horrific implications of this abuse seem to escape Victor, who was, "so completely given over to politics that [he] shied away from a critical examination of the facts…, faithful to the verge of fanaticism."[78] The veracious historical details provided by Carpentier indicate his extensive research, "based on documents consulted by the author in Guadeloupe and in the libraries of Barbados" and others, detailed in Carpentier's historical note appending the novel.[79] This note details that Victor Hugues was a historical figure who governed in the colonies during the revolutionary period, describing him as "wavering, mean and even cynical."[80] From this point in *Explosion*, Carpentier's portrayal of Hugues indicates his lust for power and wealth. Rather than a liberating abolition of slavery, he brings the guillotine, mandatory work and profiteering, followed by violent re-enforcement of slavery: "the inauguration of the Great Terror on the island. The guillotine functioned ceaselessly in the Place de la Victoire."[81] When Victor becomes aware of Esteban's censure, he assigns him a clerk's post on a profiteering ship in the region. Eventually Esteban leaves Victor and returns to Cuba where he is jailed for revolutionary activities and deported to Spain. Sofia, who becomes Victor's mistress after she is widowed, also leaves him following his cruelties towards slaves. In Spain she petitions for and attains Esteban's release, and the novel closes as Esteban and Sofia die fighting in the streets of Madrid, following the Napoleonic invasion of 1808.

At first glance, the historical realism that shapes *Explosion* may seem to offer little in terms of a distinctly 'surrealist' agenda. However, as we will see, Carpentier ultimately presents a surrealist *trompe-l'œil* that engages with many themes that run parallel to those explored by the Collège and Bataille. Most significantly for my purposes here, there is a proliferation of experiences in *Explosion* that can be described as demortalising, and that show a close kinship to Bataille's framing of notions, such as meditation, inner experience and the unknown. In addition, there is a complex consideration of the historical cycle of active and passive forces at work in the unfolding of a revolution, notions considered extensively by the Collège's exploration of social forces.[82] As a writer imprisoned for expressing his political beliefs in 1920s Cuba, a 'dissident' and advocate of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Carpentier can claim a committed interest in Caribbean independence struggles, which he diligently researched for this novel. One of Carpentier's characters specifically points out that French revolutionary forces are but one instance in the longer history of revolutionary activity, "the everlasting Great Escape," by Caribbean colonial subjects since colonial power began.[83] Here, Carpentier highlights the wider historic-political context of each phase of revolution.

The revolutionary forces are indicated when Esteban hears the news of the King's capture, which "was such a tremendous and new idea that the words 'King' and 'arrest' refused to be coupled together." Experiencing the social release resulting from such events, "Esteban felt as if he had been dropped into a huge carnival…. The Revolution had infused new life into the streets…. [He was] proud of the title 'Foreigner, friend of Liberty', which everyone bestowed on him."[84] In the novel, Carpentier focussed on the lengths to which revolutionary leaders like Victor are willing to distort the 'rights of man' in order to hold onto forces effected by the death of the king – a notion of swelling and uncontrollable forces that were key to the Collège's theories of revolutionary fervour discussed here in relation to the Collège lectures "Power" and "Sorcerer's Apprentice." Furthermore, there is the related slide in the novel between

the *real* political death of Louis XVI, and, I argue, a *maravilloso* sub-textual consideration of the myth of the death of the king and the transfer of power. In the lecture "Power" Bataille, citing James George Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890), discusses that if "the order of things is disrupted despite royal action, the king can be put to death." This 'death', detailing the transfer of power to another, becomes subject matter for 'myth and legend', thereby showing how historical events are connected to sacred ritual and myth.[85] During the French Revolution, the myth of the death of the King did in fact become historical again, which, as such, fulfils the criteria of Carpentier's *maravilloso* becoming *real* in a marvellous historicity, as literally "myth... becomes *being*" in a community.[86] In the novel, the French Revolution affects the transference of power from the King to the Republic and its ministers in the colonies. This is a particularly telling consideration given its point of production, which is suggestive of a contemporary take on revolution via a historical mirror image.

How this historicity becomes part of the marvellous is indicated by Bataille's comment that:

> [t]he necessity for reversal is so important that it had, at one time, its consecration: there is no constitution of society which does not have on the other hand, the challenging of its foundations; rituals show it.... *the putting to death of kings indicate this.*[87]

Esteban's final rejection of Victor effects a second enactment of this ritual. The portrayal of the injustices Victor enacts also reveals such mythico-historical reversal to be a necessary process; a reversal that refuses servility, embraces non-knowledge and inaugurates an ascent toward inner experience. Bataille endorsed that "[c]onceptual reason and magical (mythical, analogical) reason are different ways of thinking about the world that are equally valid," and similarly Naum's blending of the myth of love and science of bifurcated dependence, like Carpentier's interpenetration of history and mythic knowledge create a surrealist dialectical ambiguity mediating the two.[88]

Alongside the *real maravilloso* consideration of power in the novel, direct references to the occult emerge, first in relation to Victor's colleague Dr. Ogé, who is described as a half "coloured" man from San Domingo.[89] Although the historical note does not detail this, Carpentier has modelled Ogé, like Victor, on a real historical figure: Jacques Ogé, the brother of Vincent Ogé who led the 1790 Ogé Revolution, in what became Haiti in 1804, over the matter of civil rights for free men of colour, which precipitated the 1791–1804 slave revolution leading to the earliest independent nation in the region. True to this historical dimension, Carpentier depicts Ogé landing in Haiti in 1790, just after hostilities have broken out, and learning of his brother "Vincent's" fate.[90] Dr. Ogé's occultism emerges early in the novel when he cures Esteban's life-threatening asthma before they flee Cuba. Ogé provides a cure (where other doctors have failed) by locating, beyond Esteban's bedroom window, a herb that was poisoning him. Ogé's explanation that plants can steal human strength by suffocation or anaemia, "seemed to Sofia just like the lore of a necromancer.... 'Witchcraft!'"[91] The doctor is further given epithets such as "magician" and "charlatan" but it is granted that "for all that he had accomplished a miracle."[92]

As such, Ogé seems to extol the core features of Carpentier's *real maravilloso*, which aside from a marvellous historicity, demonstrates miracle, faith and a demortalising extreme state.[93] Esteban, thus liberated by 'necromancy', experiences a

symbolic death of the self, ultimately leading to mystical rebirth akin to Bataille's references of "dying to this life," discussed by Eliade and Naum's "reincarnat[ing] without dying."[94] The revolutionary Ogé, unlike Victor, evinces faith in other occult and 'spiritualist' beliefs, referencing "Bible myths" in terms derived from the "Cabbala and from Platonism," and detailing "a state of Orphic clairvoyance in women… often fulfilled with terrifying accuracy."[95] What is clear is that, for the doctor, *spiritual liberty* and *socio-political liberty* are interwoven as "an ideal of equality and harmony," thus highlighting the close dialogue between occult and political motifs.[96] As Esteban witnesses the increasing corruption of power in revolution, he also chooses to balance sacred-personal and socio-political liberty in the analogical dialectic of history (*real*) and myth (*maravilloso*).

In Guadeloupe, Esteban experiences a further demortalising experience when he is climbing a tree:

> [H]e began to ascend towards the crown of the tree, up a sort of spiral staircase [toward an intuition of] St. Hippolytus… "a Jacob's ladder, at whose summit is the Lord." The great symbols of the Tau, the Cross of St Andrew, the Brazen Serpent, the Anchor and the Ladder, were implicit in every tree.[97]

This *real maravilloso* alteration of reality is expressed by Esteban when he places the material tree in a series of comparativist symbols of ascent towards sacred knowledge, which includes the Tau discussed above. Esteban encounters another spiral image with occult overtones when exploring the Caribbean seashore, and experiences "an exaltation very like a state of lucid intoxication…. outside time and space. *Te deum*… [while c]ontemplating a [conch shell]."[98] This experience of the non-anthropocentric *unknown*[99] exactly replicates the sacred extreme state, faith and miracle of *lo real maravilloso*.[100] A decoding of this is given by Juan Cirlot's description of the sacred meaning of the logarithmic spiral:

> By virtue of its significance in connexion with creation, with movement and progressive development, the spiral is an attribute of power… spiral movements… may be regarded as figures intended to induce a state of ecstasy and to enable man to escape from the material world and to enter the beyond, through the 'hole' symbolised by the mystic Centre.[101]

The *real*, material, discursive spiral and tree as occult symbols of empowerment and ascent provide *maravilloso* experiences of un-knowing that access the immaterial and mythic unknown. The second spiral symbol through which Esteban gains an inner experience also serves to reinforce the wider consideration of myth and history in the novel. The shell image intertextually recalls "The Call of the Conch Shells" from Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of this World* (1948), a call that heralded the start of the 1791 'Haitian' slave revolution against colonial rule. Here, the spiral symbolises ecstasy, ascent *and* liberation gained in the successful revolution affected by a necessary reversal of power. The actual Haitian revolution is also Carpentier's subject matter in *Kingdom*, but, as aforementioned, in *Explosion*, he places it in the greater historical cycle of revolutions against colonialism and symbolically relates it to the myth of the death of the king. The ontological intuition realised by Esteban during these acts of demortalising contrasts with his increasing disillusionment with the injustices of the

Republic, and like the tarot Hierophant (card 5), he faces the task of mediating between the letter of the law and the aim of liberty.

A further use of occult symbolism comes to the fore in the novel via the differing natures of the three male protagonists: Carlos, the musician and sedentary figure; Esteban, the theoretician; and, finally, Victor, the man of action and political application. Such an observation is also endorsed by the critics Roberto González-Echevarría and Steven Hanley, who discuss Carpentier's male triumvirate allied to the female Sofia, as indicative of occult thought, delineating tripartite man as "spiritual, animal, and material" and made complete by female 'wisdom'.[102] This constellation finds a distinct parallel in Bataille's aforementioned Collège presentation "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (1938), in which he details a specialists' ontology of either 'science', 'politics' or 'art', and a preferable demortalising *being* which unifies the three parts through chance's flames of "hope and fear" and "*living* myth" to gain a "*total* existence."[103] Representing a form of analogical dialectics, such heterogeneous beings of *myth* have access to a "'Secret'…. *undisclosable* mysterious element," "either knowledge of magic or technical knowledge…. or the knowledge of particular myths" and engage with the deregulating forces of 'death' and 'ecstasy'.[104] A being not unlike Plato's philosopher-king in the *Republic*, whose demortalising cave ascent simile, indicates the use of dialectics to balance three "rational," "spirited" and "appetitive" parts in the self and the socio-political arena.[105] In this tradition of occult analogical dialectics, an ambiguous tension exists between myth and reality, much as is evident in Bataille, Naum and Carpentier's surrealist expressions.

In *Explosion*, Carpentier reveals that such experiences connect individuals to real social structures, and catalyse revolution. This can be seen again as the novel closes with Esteban and Sophia's death. Read through such sacred symbolism, this details man's fusion with female wisdom, evocative of the aforementioned male-female fusion in Breton's *Arcanum 17*. Commenting on the occult-political connections this raises, González-Echevarría interprets this death as the cyclical, mythical "marriage bond that will bring forth a rebirth of history, for it must be remembered that Spain's war of independence set off the Latin American wars of independence and the birth of the new republics."[106] In such resonances, Carpentier, from his own postcolonial position, like Bataille, questions "the absolute separateness of philosophy and mysticism in the modern era," and confirms the dialectical occulted philosophy of the 'ancients'.[107] Throughout the novel, Carpentier thus combines art, politics and science to speak of Caribbean and American history during the French Revolution – themes that would have had undoubted political gravitas during the build-up and culmination of the Cuban Revolution, which Carpentier lived through while writing *Explosion in a Cathedral*.

Exo – Eso – Exo

As I have argued throughout, in both texts occult symbols accompany or instigate experiences of the unknown at the limits of being, and these experiences serve to effect, or allude to, a wider expression of the political sphere. Gellu Naum and Alejo Carpentier's surrealist literature details experiences akin to Bataille's forms of occulted un-knowing, respectively drawn upon as a commentary on the contemporary experience of communist and postcolonial repression of liberty. These experiences are consistently described through recourse to traditional occult symbolism, such as

fire, the Tau, spirits, tree, shell and spirals, much of which can be explicated by using a comparativist acceptation of the concept of sacred demortalising, in which the fracture to logic caused by the ambiguity of the analogical dialectic connects mystical, esoteric experiences and revolutionary, exoteric forms. Such relations appear in Naum's rendering of the realm of Tau (death-truth) interacting with the living through precognitions of love, *nigredum* and alchemical fire. Here, the surreal alteration of reality presents the dialectic of Plato's myth of the twin-soul and its scientific expression as a twin-ray, which if separated causes a problematic dependence, a point that alludes to a sub-textual discourse on the enforced dependence of the Romanian people on the communist government. Meanwhile, in Carpentier's *Explosion*, the analogical dialectic appears in the relation of myth and history. In the novel, this close connection between the occult and politics is shown to dissolve as the Republic rejects its occult Freemasonry, Neoplatonic origins and re-enacts earlier colonial and social abuses of liberty and power in the Caribbean. However, Esteban's experiences of occulted un-knowing, which relate his treetop ascent to tau, cross, snake, shell and spiral, as well as Ogé's abilities, perpetuate this occult belief in self-mastery and liberation – beliefs that signal a constituted reversal of the bonds that bind us, reversals located also at the heart of political liberation, as indicated by the shell's connection between an extreme state and the call for revolution, from inner to outer liberty. Through these demortalising points of (non)contradiction, where mysticism-philosophy, death-life and myth-history meet to reveal the ambiguous invisible component of the analogical dialectic, these writers serve to extend Surrealism's focus upon the dialectical tension between reason and alternative knowledge.

The point connecting *eso* to *exo* is also symbolised by the tarot's Sorcerer (I), High Priestess (II) or Hierophant (V). In the tension created between reason and an alternative mode of knowledge, in a Bataillean strategy of occulted un-knowing, alchemical 'emptying' to fill with 'an other' or sacred demortalising, a revolutionary impetus can be found. Such ideas permeate the Collège's consideration of dialectical ambiguity in sacred sociology: relating regulation and deregulation; singular *being* and tripartite *being* animated by myth; and 'points of coincidence' between individual psychology and social organisation 'in command of its revolutions.' This consideration is cyclic, moving from inner illumination to external exposition and back again. In later works, such as *Inner Experience* and *Meditation*, Bataille considered the *being* of myth in relation to experiences in which the material body and discursive reason (also termed 'project') is a starting point for an inner experience, in which we "emerge through project from the realm of project."[108] This understanding of the material world as an access to something wholly other was consistently given special meaning in Bataille's work, in a going-beyond-of-being characterised in the terms inner experience, meditation, non-knowledge and the unknown, that extends the consideration of dialectics leading from "Heraclitus, Plato, or Fichte" to "Gnosticism, Neoplatonic mysticism," "Eckhart," "Nicholas of Cusa," from "Boehme" to Romanticism and French Surrealism.[109]

In Bataille's *total being* animated by myth, Naum's spirits, Tau, twin-soul and scientific twin-ray, or Carpentier's spiral representations of the experiential unknown and fused three-fold man, there is visible an experience of occulted un-knowing gained through the material that speaks of restricted liberty, abuses of power and political revolution. Reading Bataille's theories, Naum's *Taus* and Carpentier's *Explosion* through the concepts of sacred demortalisation and occulted un-knowing,

it is possible to see how these surrealist writers engage with the rutilant history of dialectical thought. It serves to show how they extended the surrealist consideration of alternative modes of knowledge to further expose the mechanics of revolution as "the operation in which thought stops the movement that subordinates it."[110] Here, this esoteric experience of the red fire of revolution or chance turns black matter to a sacred illumination of the invisible unknown.

Notes

1 Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 109, hereafter GB *VE*.

2 Georges Bataille, "Method of Meditation" [1946], *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, ed. Stuart Kendall, trans. Michelle and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 77, hereafter GB "MM". Further references to *Nonknowledge* are hereafter labelled as GB *NK*.

3 "Esoteric," in this context, means the intangible, intractable and unknowable inner experience, and the sort of sacred knowledge that is revelatory, initiatory [*gnosis*], not the "strictly historical perspective" as defined in early modern Western esotericism. See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism," accessed October 16, 2016, www.esoteric.msu.edu/Hanegraaff.html. This is enacted using a specific reading of Bataille's oeuvre, deemphasising the sexual components in favour of its consideration of sacred forces.

4 Gellu Naum, "The Taus Watch Repair Shop: A Statistical Comedy in Two Acts" [1966], trans. Allan Graubard and Sasha Vlad with Valery Oisteanu, *Hyperion* 9, no. 2 (Autumn 2015): 179–239, hereafter *HFA*; Alejo Carpentier, *Explosion in a Cathedral* [1962], trans. John Sturrock (New York: Harper and Row, 1979). This is enacted using literary prose, primarily because it is under-discussed in surrealist studies, but could similarly be applied to surrealist poetry or art, in which the sacred is represented coherently, by specialists in art history, poetry or regional studies.

5 Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930* (London: Penguin, 1991), 103.

6 See Raymond Spiteri, "Surrealism and the Question of Politics, 1925–1939," in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 110–30.

7 James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (October 1981): 539–64. On the misuse of philosophy by Fascism, see Georges Bataille, "Nietzsche and Fascists," *Acéphale* 2 (January 1937).

8 Georges Ambrosino et al., "Note on the Foundation of a College of Sociology," *Acéphale* 1 (July 1937), reprinted in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5. See notes in Hollier for the complex founding of the Collège and the participation of these various figures.

9 Ambrosino et al., "Foundation," 5. For the "sacred as regulation" and "infraction," see Roger Caillois, "Festival," in Hollier, *College of Sociology*, 301.

10 Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience* [1943], trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), hereafter GB *IE*.

11 GB *NK*, 11.

12 GB "MM," 93–94.

13 GB *NK*, 16.

14 GB *NK*, 16, see also *IE* and "MM."

15 R. Bruce Elder, *DADA, Surrealism, and the Cinematic Effect* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013), 490.

16 S. Angus, *The Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 319; Mircea Eliade, *Man and the Sacred* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 152. Eliade was familiar with the Collège's work and contributed to

Bataille's later journal *Critique*; Bataille cited Eliade's works and helped him relocate to post-war Paris, as noted by Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 141.

17 Rudolf Otto's term *ganz andere* [wholly other], is discussed by Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 10.

18 Eliade, quoted in Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult in Modern Art* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 2002), 64.

19 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 123, 161.

20 Plato, *Republic*, 524–25, 537.

21 Benjamin attended Collège presentations, and in 1940 entrusted Bataille with his seminal notes for *The Arcades Project*, when fleeing France as the Nazi army advanced. For parallels between Plato and Benjamin's dialectic, see Giorgio Agamben, "Nymphs" [2007], in *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, eds. Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell (California: Stanford University Press, 2011). Such parallels are suggestive of a shared use of analogical dialectics, not an exact concurrence of ideas.

22 Peter Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 28–29. Bataille comments on Shestov's influence upon his reading of Plato in GB *NK*, 154.

23 John Shannon Hendrix, *Platonic Architectonics* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), 232.

24 Peter Conner, "Mysticism and Morality in Georges Bataille," *Assemblage* 20 (April 1993): 30.

25 GB "MM," 91.

26 Georges Bataille, *Tears of Eros* [1961], trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), 71.

27 Bataille, *Theory of Religion* [1948], trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 37; hereafter GB *TR*.

28 See Marcel Cornis–Pope and John Neubauer, eds., *History of the Literary Cultures of East–Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004).

29 "A tradition of including magic among the practical sciences did develop, and was adopted by the school of Abelard," Corinne J. Saunders, *Magic and the Supernatural in Medieval English Romance* (Suffolk: Brewer, 2010), 104.

30 Sebastian Reichmann, "Here & Now (from the Other Side)," trans. Paul McRandle, *HFA*, 42.

31 For example Ghérasim Luca and Dolfi Trost in *Dialectique de la dialectique* (1945, *The Dialectic of Dialectic*) criticised the overshadowing of Surrealism's objective insights by aestheticism.

32 *Taus*, 211–12.

33 Bataille's heterology considers the reintegration of excluded elements and thereby offers a theoretical model of the surrealist discourse on exclusion and inclusion. Hollier defines it as "the theory of that which theory expels … What unites men? The things that repel them," Hollier, "Foreword," in *College*, xvi, xix.

34 *Taus*, 181.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 182.

37 Ibid., 184.

38 Ibis., 187.

39 Ibid., 188.

40 Ibid., 201.

41 Ibid., 207.

42 Ibid., 214–18.

43 Ibid., 227–28.

44 Ibid., 214–15, 232–33, 236.

45 Ibid., 238.

46 Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and William Quan Judge, *Occult Tales* (Bombay: International Book House, 1947), 116–47.

47 The Romanian avant-garde contained many descendants of Hasidic Jews, specialists in the mystical Kabbalah, including Luca.

48 Elliot Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Time, Truth, and Death* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2006), xiv, 168.

49 Angus, *Quests*, 319.

50 Stuart Kendall observes that "[i]n October and November 1927 Bataille borrowed a series of books by and about Heraclitus, Greek metaphysics, and Nietzsche and Greek thought from the Bibliothèque nationale." See *OC* 12, 567; *Georges Bataille* (London: Reaktion, 2007), 216–17, Note 6.

51 GB "MM," 91.

52 GB *TR*, 36–37.

53 Similarly Hermetic "symbolism derived from the Platonic Bodies used to represent the invisible … long since adopted by the alchemist philosophers" includes use of the Greek Tau tripled. Jennifer N. Wunder, *Keats, Hermeticism and the Secret Societies* (London: Routledge, 2016), 42.

54 Plato, *Phaedo*, 67E; *Statesman*, 16D.

55 *Medium* remains unavailable in English translation, cited here by Petre Răileanu, "Poetry and Alchemy," trans. Paul McRandle, *HFA* 29, 30–31.

56 Răileanu, "Alchemy," *HFA* 30–31.

57 Valery Oisteanu, "Gellu Naum: Surreal-Shaman of Romania," *HFA* 12, citing Naum.

58 *Taus*, 214–15.

59 Ibid., 225–27, 238.

60 Bataille, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" [1938], in Hollier, *College*, 23, Note 8, 13–15, hereafter GB "SA"; GB "MM," 78.

61 *Taus*, 187.

62 Bataille and Caillois, "Power," in Hollier, *College*, 130, hereafter GB-RC "Power."

63 Melanie Nicholson, *Surrealism in Latin American Literature: Searching for Breton's Ghost* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2013) offers an Anglophone study on Hispanic American surrealist literature. On Francophone Caribbean writing, see *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. and trans. Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 1996). Also see Dawn Ades's various works on Latin American surrealist art history.

64 Grupo Minorista manifesto (1927) criticised the regime and US involvement in Cuba, Mexico and Nicaragua, Vicky Unruh, *Latin American Vanguards: The Art of Contentious Encounters* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 14.

65 For a list of some of Carpentier's sources, see *Alejo Carpentier: 45 años de trabajo intellectual* (Havana, 1966), 10–11. Roberto González-Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 38, 226, Note 27.

66 Amongst Bataille's papers held at the Bibiothèque Nationale de France is correspondence with Carpentier, spanning the period of writing *Explosion*, indicating a continued connection.

67 Alejo Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America" [1967, revised 1948 prologue], in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 85–86.

68 Alejo Carpentier, "Lo real maravilloso de America" [Marvellous American Reality], *El Nacional*, April 8, 1948. See article series in *Nacional*. Carpentier's positioning is part of a wider critical debate regarding surrealist 'primitivism' and its complexities which can only be gestured toward here.

69 Jean-Pierre Morel, "Breton and Freud," *Diacritics* 2, no. 2 (1972): 19, quoted in González-Echevarría, *Pilgrim*, 121, Note 43.

70 Alejo Carpentier, interview, quoted in Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos, "The 'Epic Novel': Charismatic Nationalism and the Avant-Garde in Latin America," *Cultural Critique* 49 (Autumn, 2001): 67.

71 Gerald Martin, "Latin American Narrative since c. 1920," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America,* ed. Leslie Bethell, vol.10, Latin America since 1930: Ideas, Culture, and Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 161–62, 165.

72 González-Echevarría, *Pilgrim*, 233.

73 Paul B. Miller, *Elusive Origins: The Enlightenment in the Modern Caribbean Historical Imagination* (Charlottesville, VA: Virginia University Press, 2010), 31.
74 *Explosion*, 72.
75 Ibid., 88.
76 Ibid., 101.
77 Ibid., 114.
78 Ibid., 145.
79 Ibid., 350–51.
80 Ibid., 351.
81 Ibid., 151–52.
82 See also essays on Hitler, Democracy, the Army in Hollier, *College*.
83 *Explosion*, 232.
84 Ibid., 89, 93–94.
85 GB-RC "Power," 130–32.
86 GB "SA," 22.
87 GB *IE*, 90.
88 Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London: Routledge, 1994), 124–28.
89 *Explosion*, 43.
90 Ibid., 87.
91 Ibid., 44.
92 Ibid., 46.
93 Carpentier, "Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism*, 85–86.
94 GB *LE*, 26, Note 8.
95 *Explosion*, 104–105, 79, 85.
96 Ibid., 79.
97 Ibid., 161–62.
98 Ibid., 174–80.
99 On Carpentier's shift from an anthropocentric to a bio/eco-centric alteration of reality, see George Handley, "The Postcolonial Ecology of the New World Baroque," in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 126.
100 Carpentier, "Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism*, 85–86.
101 Juan Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* [1958], trans. Jack Sage (New York: Dover, 1971), 306.
102 Gnosticism in Steven Hanley, "Explosion in a Cathedral," *Mester* 29, no. 1 (2000): 29, 31–32; Kabbalism in González-Echevarría, *Pilgrim*, 237–38, 240–42.
103 GB "SA," XII–XIII, Note 1.
104 Caillois-Bataille, "Brotherhoods, Orders, Secret Societies, Churches," in Hollier, *College*, 150–56.
105 See the cave ascent simile in Plato, *Republic*, 53. If one part dominates, imbalance occurs psychologically or socially as here the micro-macrocosmic relations are one; *Republic*, 441, 473, 537, VIII.
106 González-Echevarría, *Pilgrim*, 231.
107 Connor, *Bataille*, 30–31.
108 GB *IE*, 46.
109 GB *VE*, 109.
110 GB "MM," 91, 96.

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Part II

Myth, Magic and the Search for Re-Enchantment

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5   Melusina Triumphant

Matriarchy and the Politics of Anti-Fascist Mythmaking in André Breton's *Arcane 17* (1945)

Daniel Zamani[1]

On 25 May 1945, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) wrote an enthusiastic letter to André Breton (1896–1966), congratulating him on his latest literary achievement, *Arcane 17*. "It is still under the influence of my initial emotion that I am expressing my admiration to you," he explained, describing the work as "the perfect balance between literary form, philosophic reasoning and poetic inspiration. The three elements play with each other and interlace like luminous light rays traversing a crystal."[2] These metaphors were well chosen, for both the crystal's transparency and the power of light to dissipate darkness were key images in Breton's novel, written in 1944 during his exile in North America and powerfully expressing his faith in spiritual renewal after the war. The book's title refers to the seventeenth major arcanum of the traditional tarot deck, the so-called Star card, which denotes hope and resurrection and features the image of a young mother goddess as an icon of kindness and loving nature.[3] Against the socio-political realities of the French occupation, Breton emphatically denounces the idea that the "military Moloch" could ever vanquish the surrealist watchwords of poetry, liberty and love.[4] On the contrary, throughout *Arcane 17* he adopts an essentially mythic worldview in which the notion of history is expressed in terms of a continuous fight between darkness and light, destruction and future renewal. As Breton explains with regard to the horrors of the Second World War:

> Yes, the highest thoughts, the greatest sentiments can undergo a collective decline and the human heart can also break and books can age and all things must, on the outside, die, but a power that is not at all supernatural makes death itself the basis for renewal. To begin with, it guarantees all the exchanges that make sure nothing precious is lost internally and that, through its obscure metamorphoses from season to season, the butterfly again puts on its exalted colours.[5]

Breton worked on the novel for a period of three months (20 August – 20 October 1944), during a vacation on the Gaspé Peninsula on the northern shores of Canada. The impressions of this journey, particularly the natural beauty of Bonaventura Island and its magnificent bird colony, provided an important backdrop for the work's emphasis on nature and cosmic harmony. The Percé Rock, a gigantic sheer rock formation, pierced by a prominent, window-like arch, is one of the most important metaphors in Breton's account, described as a "very effective shield against the madness of the moment."[6] In the numerous birds resting on the cliff's outer edges, Breton perceived an ideal mirror image to the bed-like rock formation, using this superimposition of

organic and inorganic rhythms to introduce the metaphor of universal analogies interconnecting the novel's disjunctive parts.

Stylistically, *Arcane 17* defies literary convention, effortlessly combining the genres of a love poem, travel journal and political pamphlet with folkloristic legends, dream narration and theoretical musings on the nature of poetry and its relationship to socio-political action. The work's narrative structure thus follows the basic model of Breton's previous novels – *Nadja* (1928), *Les Vases communicants* (1932) and *L'Amour fou* (1937) – adhering to, and radicalising, the attack on the rigid conventions of the *roman à these* that he had so forcefully advocated in the *Manifeste du surréalisme* of 1924. But while his Parisian trilogy of novels had taken the metropolitan cityscape as a backdrop for the encounter with the surrealist marvellous, *Arcane 17* rejects the revolutionary potential of the city in favour of an "*isolated* setting," combining a new fascination with natural powers and the seasonal cycle with a heightened emphasis on magic and esotericism.[7]

Within a highly idiosyncratic combination of myths, legends and folktales from a diversity of cultures and periods, Breton accords a pivotal role to the medieval fairy-woman Melusina, whose legendary fate functions as one of the novel's most important intra-texts. But, in stark contrast to her former function in medieval narratives, where the siren is eventually banished from intervention in the human world, Breton here revises her legend and idiosyncratically envisions her triumphant return as a peace-bringing redemptress after the war: "Melusina…, she's the one I invoke, she's the only one I can see who could redeem this savage epoch."[8] Identifying Melusina with his real-life partner and later wife, Elisa Claro-Bindhoff, the Egyptian fertility goddess Isis and the female personification of hope on the tarot deck's aforementioned Star card, Breton postulates "the idea of *the salvation of the earth by woman*" as the only means of establishing a peaceful new society, setting up a decisive contrast between what he considers the patriarchal values of country, family and religion, and the matriarchal characteristics of love, liberty and human equality:

> I, myself, see only one solution: the time has come to value the ideas of woman at the expense of those of man, whose bankruptcy is coming to pass fairly tumultuously today. It is artists, in particular, who must … maximize the importance of everything that stands out in the feminine world view in contrast to the masculine, to build on woman's resources, to exalt… all that distinguishes her from man in terms of modes of appreciation and volition.[9]

Faced with the realities of exile and war, Breton thus dramatised his surrealist vision of woman as goddess and salvific heroine, the book emerging as his "most extended meditation yet on the place of woman in society."[10] In scholarly discussions of the novel, this dramatic glorification of femininity has emerged as a highly controversial issue, reflecting broader debates about Breton's gender politics and the extent to which the surrealist 'cult' of woman should be deemed as essentialist and patriarchal or else as having offered a positive avenue for the construction of new models of femininity outside of bourgeois conventions. In her 1949 study *Le Deuxième Sexe*, for instance, Simone de Beauvoir resolutely rejected *Arcane 17*'s continued celebration of woman as an indispensable mediatrix, arguing that the adulation of her as a powerful goddess figure is ultimately undercut by her simultaneous construction as a passive object of desire.[11] Whitney Chadwick also sees *Arcane 17* as indicative of Breton's

incapability to leave behind a romantic vision of woman. In particular, she resolutely rejects Melusina's intimate links to the *femme-enfant* stereotype as a narrative strategy in which the female subject is once again turned into an ultimately powerless, abstract ideal.[12]

Other scholars have given a dramatically different assessment of Breton's turn to Melusina, astutely highlighting the novel's emphasis on empowering visions of femininity and regarding the text as indicative of a staunchly proto-feminist stance. In her 1998 anthology on *Surrealist Women*, for instance, Penelope Rosemont convincingly argues that *Arcane 17* was "the first surrealist work to take on specifically feminist themes," a claim she sees evidenced by Breton's nascent interest in the radical feminism of nineteenth-century socialists such as Flora Tristan (1803–1844) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837).[13] Urszula Szulakowska corroborates this viewpoint by observing how Breton's works from the 1940s replaced a more passive vision of woman as mediums and clairvoyant by a new and empowering "concept of female consciousness as an active and positive force."[14] She also insists that Breton's interpretation of the Star card itself symbolises the surrealists' hope that "the reign of patriarchy was in the process of being replaced by the superior values of female consciousness."[15]

Here, I adopt and extend previous assertions that the text aims at "nothing short of a revolution of the traditional male-female hierarchy," by further situating Breton's turn to the fairy-woman within the broader context of his search for a new myth, and especially one that was dedicated to the project of radical social and cultural transformation.[16] As I aim to demonstrate, Breton's mythic call for female emancipation – as encapsulated by the return of Melusina – cannot be adequately assessed in complete isolation from the contemporary use of myth in German fascism, in which nationalist ideals of heroism, hegemonic power and racial purity were frequently constructed through an emphatically gendered, quintessentially masculinist rhetoric, a tendency the surrealists were stridently opposed to. As has been well documented, Nazi Germany's search for Aryan superiority, in particular, was heavily centred on the mythic figure of the male warrior-hero, to whose "armoured body" the feminine principle presented a dangerous threat of contamination.[17] Artworks such as Arno Breker's 1939 sculpture *Readiness* visually encapsulated these gendered equations between idealised masculinity and the healthy nation state, providing a tangible blueprint for the central fascist ideal of the 'new man'.[18] In this cultic celebration of the male, fascist propaganda heavily relied on pseudo-anthropological re-readings of Germany's heroic past. The medieval epic *Das Nibelungenlied*, for instance, soon became the focal point of masculinist Freikorps rhetoric, in which the work's evocation of Germanic warrior heroes was celebrated as a literary crystallisation of the nation's essential character.[19]

As the historian Peter Davies has further shown, it was precisely in this emphatically gendered context of dominant myths of masculinity that literary evocations of the mythic feminine became invested with counter-cultural use-value, leading art historians such as Hal Foster and Alyce Mahon to investigate how the surrealists' own increasingly politicised interest in femininity was also a direct response to the fascist adulation of the male body.[20] I will draw on such a political reading of myth and femininity during the Second World War to argue for a revised vision of the Melusina theme in *Arcane 17*. By applying a historically contextual approach to the novel, I aim to demonstrate that Breton's turn to the twin-themes of myth and matriarchy represented by no means a misogynist marginalisation of woman, but exploited the notion

of female 'Otherness' for subversive effect, deliberately appropriating and inverting the fascist male/female hierarchy. It is in light of Breton's insistence on the *archetypal* and *collective* potential of the great goddess motif, that I regard his turn to Melusina as synonymous with the surrealists' political war-time agenda, positing a radical pacifism against the fascist ideals of racial and national dominance. As Breton himself powerfully argued with an explicit reference to Nazi Germany's contemporary cult of Aryan warrior gods:

> Faced with the conflict which is at present shaking the world, even the most recalcitrant minds are beginning to admit the vital necessity of a myth which can be set up in opposition to that of Odin and various other belligerent gods. Consequently it is of the greatest possible interest at the present time to study how myths are born and propagate themselves, since this involves a problem of infrastructure the resolution of which must surely be essential in determining the possibilities of future stability in the world.[21]

Breton's internationalist war-time agenda thus also steered a provocatively different course from contemporary resistance poetry in occupied France, whose patriotic rhetoric and nationalist conservatism were advocated by former surrealist colleagues such as Louis Aragon (1897–1982), René Char (1907–1988) and Paul Éluard (1895–1952). In her study of French resistance poetry during the Second World War, Esther Rowlands has thus rightly emphasised that many scholars unjustly tend to ignore the surrealists' counter-cultural as well as staunchly pacifist stance during this period of fascist expansion, misleadingly pitting the *engagé* character of resistance poetry against the supposedly escapist fantasies of a regressive surrealist camp.[22] In giving prominence to the political use-value of myth and femininity during the Second World War, I aim to firmly relocate *Arcane 17* within a counter-cultural discourse of resistance and to situate the work's recourse to themes of alchemy and renewal as a meaningful part of the surrealists' wider concern to create an anti-fascist mythopoesis of the modern. In the first part of this chapter, I therefore focus more generally on the wider context of Surrealism, mythology and anti-fascist mythmaking in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Building upon these considerations, I then revisit *Arcane 17*'s twin exploration of mythology and alchemical symbolism, focussing throughout on the ideal of the eternal feminine and its symbolic reconfiguration as a life-giving, redemptive and ultimately healing power.

Surrealism, Politics and Anti-Fascist Mythmaking

Of course, a certain interest in the imaginative and iconographic potential of mythology had underpinned the artistic and literary productions of Surrealism from the very beginning of the movement in 1920s France. Works such as Breton's *Nadja* (1928) or Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926), for instance, had explored the possibility of creating a "mythology of the modern," while artists such as André Masson (1896–1987), Joan Miró (1893–1983), Max Ernst (1891–1976) and Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) appropriated elements of mythic stories in the cultivation of a personal artistic mythology, often read through an emphatically psychoanalytical lens.[23] Fuelled by burgeoning research in the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and ethnography, myth held a central place in the cultural politics of interwar France and

its pervasive influence on members of the surrealist avant-garde was made manifest in the pages of periodicals such as *Documents* (1929–1931), *Minotaure* (1933–1939) and *Acéphale* (1936–1939), in all of which an engagement with primitivism, myth and the sacred played a pivotal role.

Surrealist interest in myth nonetheless acquired greater political urgency from the mid-1930s onwards, when left-wing intellectuals began to increasingly identify its central place in fascist propaganda: in perhaps the most dramatic use of myth for political purposes, Nazi Germany had succeeded in implementing an ultranationalist mythology, using elements of traditional symbolism, ritualised performances and monumental architecture in the pervasive construction of a new, *völkisch* identity.[24] Scholars such as Jennifer Mundy have therefore insisted on the fact that it was within this political context that surrealists such as Breton began to rethink the correlation between mythology and social governance in more earnest, and to fully investigate "the role of myth in binding society together."[25] Indeed, Michael Löwy has explicitly emphasised this deeply political nature of surrealist interest in mythology, convincingly framing it as a potent attack against "the sinister perversion of myth in German fascism" as well as "its abuse as national symbol or racial heritage."[26]

Breton himself explicitly outlined this new centrality of myth in his 1937 essay "Limites non-frontières du surréalisme," written a few months after the International Surrealist Exhibition in London. In line with the explicitly anti-nationalist title, Breton here turned to the increasing presence of international contributors at the 1936 show to highlight the movement's transnational politics and to reiterate its vociferous rejection of "the *miserable* nationalisms of France and Germany," prophetically warning that the two countries were "ready again like dogs to tear each other's people to pieces."[27] In light of this political situation, Breton championed the search for a new, collective mythology, hoping that a shared language of mythic dimension would prove a successful weapon against the resurfacing of expansionist foreign policies. This, he added, could best be assembled in eclectic fashion from "the scattered elements … which proceed from the oldest and strongest tradition," thus effectively embracing references to Europe's cultural legacy for new, avant-gardist purposes.[28] "No attempt at intimidation will cause us to renounce this self-allotted task," Breton emphasised, "which, as we have already made clear, is the elaboration of the collective myth belonging to our period."[29]

Certainly, after the outbreak of the Second World War the search for a new myth was uppermost on Breton's mind, while a dramatic dichotomisation between negative myths of warfare and destruction and positive myths of healing and rebirth played a vital role in this development.[30] The pre-eminent place of mythology in Breton's work in exile was, for instance, clearly reflected in *Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non* (1942). Here, Breton rhetorically posed the questions "[C]an a society exist without a social myth?" and "[T]o what extent can we choose or adopt and *impose* a social myth which we judge desirable?"[31] Embracing a view of myth as key to social cohesion, the text lent an unprecedented historical gravitas to the role of a new 'social myth' and enlisted a range of the "boldest and most lucid" thinkers of the day as potential allies in its creation, including Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Roger Caillois (1913–1978), Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), Max Ernst, Pierre Mabille (1904–1952), Benjamin Péret (1899–1955) and Kurt Seligmann (1900–1962) – all of them writers and artists who shared Breton's fascination with occultism, mythology and alchemy.[32]

Breton's reference to Bataille and Caillois was particularly significant here, since it served to establish an oblique link with the earlier activities of the so-called Collège de Sociologie, whose experimental foray into the domains of myth, ritual and sacred authority had foreshadowed some of Breton's most urgent contemporary preoccupations. Co-founded by Bataille and Caillois in 1937, this research society represented an important network of left-wing writers and intellectuals, whose members envisioned themselves as a 'moral community' committed to exploring "all manifestations of social experience in which the presence of the sacred is clear."[33] Under the banner of a "sacred sociology," they put particular emphasis on the role of myth as a "communifying value" and speculated about its reactivation in contemporary society as a way of opposing social fragmentation. A central impetus to the work of the group was a conviction that parliamentary democracies lacked the necessary unity to oppose the success of fascist movements in binding different social strata together, leading it to theorise notions of authority, power and myth in direct relation to the imminent risk of fascist aggression.[34]

Mythology, and its relationship to contemporary society, also underpinned Breton's contribution to the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, which he co-organised with Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and that opened in October 1942 at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in New York.[35] In line with Breton's view of myth as a discourse that could map a new direction for the surrealist avant-garde, his main contribution to the exhibition's catalogue consisted of a ludic text/image collage, titled "De la survivance de certains mythes et de quelques autres mythes en croissance ou en formation." Here, Breton presented fifteen myths from different cultures and periods (both negative and positive) and analogically associated them with literary and visual works from a range of different media, advancing chronologically from the myth of the primitive 'Golden Age' to the new myth of "The Great Transparent Ones," conceived of in Breton's aforementioned "Prolégomènes". Other positive myths that Breton highlighted notably evolved around themes of regeneration and rebirth, including the alchemical myth of the Philosopher's Stone, which symbolises the conquest of eternal life and the power of metamorphosis; the hermetic trope of the alchemical androgyne, which expresses the fusion of male and female opposites into a higher, synthetic union; and the medieval myth of the Holy Grail, an icon of redemption, regeneration and the quest for ultimate knowledge.

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, not everyone in Breton's intellectual orbit agreed that his turn to modern mythmaking had any kind of emancipatory potential. Indeed, many members of the New York intelligentsia were overtly alarmed by the surrealists' search for a mythology of the modern, essentially foreshadowing central arguments of the more widespread post-war "ban on myth" that marked works such as Ernst Cassirer's *The Myth of the State* (1946) or Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (begun in 1952).[36] One of the most interesting responses to "Prolégomènes" was provided by the Marxist cultural critic Harold Rosenberg (1906–1978) in an essay published in a 1942 issue of the avant-garde journal *View*, a publication that had otherwise been exceptionally supportive of the surrealist *émigré* circle. Titled "Breton – A Dialogue," the text took the form of an imaginary conversation between three "left-wing intellectuals" (Rem, Shem and Hem), who are invited to discuss the advantages and limitations of Breton's suggestions for a new social myth.[37]

Hem is here figured as a naïve supporter of Breton's position on myth, wholeheartedly embracing his opinion that "We need a new myth and a new communion" and championing processes of initiation and re-sacralisation as the only viable means of

"remaking the world."[38] Clearly, reiterating the Collège de Sociologie's vision of a "total myth by which all societies are held together,"[39] he regards the political situation of the war as a time that makes the search for an "all-embracing myth" a vital imperative: "Our struggle is to find a liberating myth to oppose to the enslaving myth of the fascists and to the emptiness and petty insincerity of the liberals."[40] Hem's blind enthusiasm for myth, ritual and initiation is countered by Rem, whose belief in scientific positivism and party politics make him the very anti-thesis of Breton's path of resistance. Arguing that the "desire for a new myth is reactionary" as well as "anti-scientific," Rem calls for a complete deconstruction of all mythical thinking ("To be free, man must be free of all myths")[41] and wholeheartedly condemns the contemporary use of mythology for any kind of political purposes:

> Better get rid of these mystifications – myths, initiations, rites, both positive and negative – and devote yourselves to the science of practical politics, to everyday affairs: the military victory of the democratic nations today, social reforms to-morrow and the day after.[42]

Although Rosenberg's imaginary dialogue forestalled a conclusion to the debate, the essay reflected the extent to which myth had become a hotly debated topic in American left-wing circles, and Breton would have almost certainly been infuriated by the implied escapism of his position and the simultaneous call for 'practical politics' as opposed to his alleged 'mystifications' of political and material relations. Another critic who voiced a similar scepticism vis-à-vis Breton's search for a new social myth was *View*'s editor, the avant-garde poet and novelist Charles Henri Ford (1908–2002). In his editorial for a 1943 issue of the journal, he argued that poetry and art should play a vital role in confronting the "devaluation of human life" that marked the slaughter in the trenches and exhorted artists and writers to strive for the exceptional.[43] However, while Ford generally embraced the surrealists' stance that "the artist should be considered as a contemporary magician," he, too, vehemently rejected any kind of contemporary myth-making as fatally atavistic.[44] In a statement that recalled the central argument of Rosenberg's fictional character of Rem, Ford clearly aimed to distance the journal from any interest in myth as pertaining to questions of politics and power:

> If we are against myths of unquestionable historic significance, be they pagan or Christian, we are naturally still more violently opposed to degenerate forms of myth which some suggest ought to inspire us in the present or immediate future, such as the Hitlerian adaptation of the theory of the chosen race …. To escapism through myth, the creators oppose imagination and insight …. Seers, we are for the magic view of life.[45]

Breton himself meanwhile returned to the same crucial relation between mythology and politics in his lecture "Situation du surréalisme entre les deux guerres," given on 10 December 1942 at Yale University and subsequently printed in the third volume of *VVV*. Indeed, in a perhaps deliberate defence against critics such as Rosenberg and Ford, Breton began his speech by highlighting his keen awareness of the political realities of the day:

> Not for one moment do I forget that Hitler *exists* and, through him, underlying the most unforgivable racial persecutions, the revival of certain myths … that

are incompatible with the harmonious development of mankind; that Mussolini *exists* and, with the Italian brand of fascism, a hideous pruritus that requires a white brush …. Their will to dominate the world and the servitude that would be the result for us … make us accept … the law of the jungle.[46]

However, while Breton thus agreed with the necessity of military action, he nonetheless insisted that liberation from fascist rule was not enough. Instead, Breton maintained, Western society had to confront the wider moral and cultural deficiencies that had allowed the outbreak of another world war in the first place, warning that "men are quite deluded when they hope to cure themselves of their erroneous conceptions by means of shells and firebombs" alone.[47]

Arcane 17 as an Anti-Fascist Mythopoesis

As we will see, Breton's vital distinction between the momentary concept of liberation from fascist rule, and a more total experience of liberty as such would also be central to his poetic stance in *Arcane 17*. In keeping with his own verdict that modern poets should not be afraid to turn "the scattered elements … which proceed from the oldest and strongest tradition,"[48] Breton, here, draws on eclectic references to figures from Egyptian, Graeco-Latin, Celtic and Christian mythology, giving particular prominence to a new pantheon of female goddesses who incarnate the values of regeneration and spiritual rebirth. The most poetic, as well as the most complex, of Breton's four prose novels, the work lacks any kind of linear narrative, instead combining longer prose sequences with poetic passages and heavily relying on ancient iconography and esoteric symbolism in conveying its central message of faith in youth and renewal. Formally, the use of poetic analogy is central to the work's structure, as repetitions and analogical relationships give formal coherence to the otherwise spontaneous, erratic mode of narration. Indeed, the entire work has a deliberately coded, cryptographic dimension and a sound knowledge of alchemical symbolism and mythological narratives, in particular, is required for a thorough comprehension of the text.[49]

Throughout *Arcane 17*, Breton draws on tropes of occultism, magic and the reformist writings of nineteenth-century Socialism as guiding vectors in a poetic musing on the possibilities of social change, while his continued interest in revolution and anarchy is combined with a primary concern with social cohesion and pacifist politics. Alchemical symbols of transformation permeate this text, which upholds the values of optimism, courage and faith in renewal at a time when writers in occupied France typically turned to themes of despair and tragedy in their own response to the horrors of the war. Breton's own search for social transformation was meanwhile placed under the triad of poetry, liberty and love – values that are seen as central to any meaningful reconstruction beyond the immediate need of 'liberation' from fascist rule.[50] Of these three, love is arguably the pre-eminent value in Breton's work, the writing of which was notably inspired by his chance encounter with Elisa Claro, whom Breton had met in December 1943 and whose intervention in his own life is poetically placed under the sign of "*extraordinary rescues*."[51] Already, on 8 March 1944, in a letter to Patrick Walberg, he announced his intention to "write a book about arcanum 17 … taking as model a woman [he] loved."[52] In the final work, the circumstances of their meeting are cast in the form of a love declaration, equating

their encounter with the experience of spiritual rebirth: "Before I met you I'd known misfortune, despair. Before I met you, come on, those words mean nothing."[53]

Significantly, however, Breton's interest in the theme of salvation through woman ultimately goes far beyond his personal experiences with Elisa: proceeding from her figure, the novel generates a range of mythical heroines, all of whom are related through the force of analogy, and outline Breton's hope that womankind will be able to lead civilisation out of the darkness and brutality of the war. Undoubtedly, the most important of these is the figure of Melusina, a water-sprite whose legend was first recorded in Jean d'Arras' chivalric romance *La Noble Histoire de Lusignan* (ca. 1393). Cursed to transform herself into a serpent-woman every Saturday, Melusina can only gain a mortal soul by the love and trust of a human husband, who can never see her during her monstrous transformation. When she meets the young nobleman Raymondin, she presents herself as a benign redemptress, and their supernatural alliance soon leads to his astonishing rise to social and political power, Melusina herself leading their flourishing court in the Poitou to an era of justice, well being and prosperity.

However, despite Melusina's function as a source of justice, well being and wealth, her positive, powerful workings are ultimately thwarted by the shortcomings of her male peers. Incited to jealousy by his scheming brother, Raymondin secretly observes Melusina during her weekly bath and later accuses her of an inhuman origin, thereby breaking the magical taboo that would have secured her a human soul. Instead of exacting revenge on her oath-breaking husband, Melusina grants him two magical rings to protect him in the absence of her own shielding power. With a loud scream, she transforms herself into a dragon that is doomed to wander the world as a spirit of the air, while her courtly following laments her departure as the likely end to a period of perfect happiness.[54]

In *Arcane 17*, Breton revives Melusina's legend, unexpectedly introducing her character in the second part of the novel. Typographically accentuated by the use of capital letters, the half-sentence "MELUSINA AFTER THE SCREAM" indicates her return after the expulsion from the castle of Lusignan, drawing attention to the moment of her demonisation and victimisation. Throughout his descriptions of Melusina's supernatural body, he emphatically focusses on themes of movement and hybridity, thus extending the medieval legend's emphasis on Melusina's poly-corporeality and simultaneously evoking a hybrid being in continuous transmutation and change: "Because Melusina, before and after her metamorphosis, *is* Melusina."[55] Appearing around hills, trees and lakes, flying through the air, swimming, dancing, coiling, twisting and jumping, the fairy-woman again defies all elementary boundaries, emphatically linked to the primordial realm of nature and cosmic creation. Breton also moves beyond the evocation of her marvellous tail – a sign of her chthonic and aquatic nature – and imagines a body that is not only serpentine, but partakes in all natural resources at once, becoming a living emblem of boundless regeneration and thus highlighting her original function as a mother goddess and fertility fairy:

> Melusina below the bust is gilded by all the reflections of the sun off the fall foliage. The snakes of her legs dance to the beat of the tambourine, the fish of her legs dive… and the birds of her legs drape her with airy netting. Melusina with lower joints of broken stones or aquatic plants or the down of a nest, she's the one invoke, she's the only one I can see who could redeem this savage epoch.[56]

Despite Melusina's majestic re-appearance as a powerful goddess figure, Breton combines her new function as a modern redemptress with her original role as an eventual victim. More specifically, he repeatedly emphasises Melusina's scream to express emotions of loss and distress, drawing on the parallels between her legendary separation from her husband and children to project similar real life experiences in both his and Elisa's recent life, the notions of separation and exile undoubtedly being the strongest points of identification.[57] Conversely, it is in Breton's personal experience of re-found love that he locates his optimistic faith in a return of the totemic mermaid-figure. *Arcane 17* thus proposes a sequel to the tragic ending of the medieval legend, imagining a second scream of reversal and renewal, in which the novel's Manichean emphasis on darkness and light finds paradigmatic expression: "Melusina rescued, Melusina before the scream that will announce her return …. Melusina at the instant of her second scream."[58]

In drawing attention to Melusina's innocence and her expulsion from civilisation through "male despotism," Breton mobilises the gendered confrontation of the original legend in a proto-feminist reading of the myth. Simultaneously, the symbolic disempowerment of the fairy-woman figures as point of departure for a sustained musing on the place of woman in contemporary society, where her state of servitude and despondency is equated with the shortcomings of patriarchal oppression: "Woman deprived of her human base, legend has it, by the impatience and jealousy of man."[59] Certainly, Breton's explicit emphasis on the role of woman in modern society here reflects his increasing fascination with nineteenth-century Romantic Socialist writers, many of who are duly referenced throughout the account. These include, notably, the French socialist reformer Père Enfantin (Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin, 1796–1864), who advocated for the replacement of traditional marriage by a new system of 'free love'; the socialist activist Flora Tristan (1803–1844), who was one of the most important forerunners of modern feminism and an early champion of workers' unions; and the political philosopher Charles Fourier (1772–1837), whose "giant socialist utopia" placed central emphasis on the liberation of the passions, and whom Breton later listed as one of the three "great emancipators of desire" alongside Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814).[60]

Fourier's contribution to the brand of 'utopian socialism' that preceded the so-called 'scientific socialism' of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) was to be of particular importance to Breton's work over the following two decades, constituting, as Donald LaCoss has rightly emphasised, "an integral part of the form and content of the movement's post-war radical politics."[61] Credited with having invented the term *féminisme* in 1837, Fourier's utopian writings had powerfully foreshadowed the surrealists' central emphasis on desire and the necessity to give free rein to libidinal impulses. Inspired by writers of the 'occult revival', such as the occult philosopher Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875), Fourier used the term civilisation in a pejorative sense, and advocated the return to a more primitive and Edenic state in which both men and women should be free to pursue any form of sexual preference deemed pleasurable, according to the central law of "passionate attraction."[62] It follows that Fourier was a particularly vociferous supporter of female emancipation, challenging the socio-political policing of female sexuality and calling for a fundamental revision of gender hierarchies.[63]

Breton's championing of Fourier's political ideals preceded work on *Arcane 17*, as evidenced by the prominent inclusion of the writer in his *Anthologie de l'humour*

noir, written in 1940 in Marseille.[64] Here, Breton's chapter on Fourier was based on an impressive bibliography of mid-nineteenth-century primary sources and defended his fantastical, often wildly bizarre writings against accusations of political escapism and daydreaming. More specifically, Breton strategically highlighted Marx's and Engels's great esteem of Fourier's social utopia, and quoted his interest in "the absolute need 'to refashion human understanding and forget everything we have learned.'"[65] Further, Breton also noted how Fourier's notoriously complex *Théorie des quatres mouvements* (1808/1848) ultimately dealt with "the boldest plans for social transformation" and the extent to which Fourier's cosmology had borrowed central elements of analogy and correspondence from the occult tradition.[66]

In 1945, Breton's perusal of Fourier's collected works (in a five-volume edition published by Librairie societaire in 1846) significantly advanced his immersion into socialist utopian ideals, ultimately resulting in his *Ode à Charles Fourier* – a long and complex prose poem that Breton composed during a trip through the American Southwest, combining references to Fourier's work with more poetic passages inspired by his exposure to the ragged landscape of Arizona and the native tribal cultures.[67] Expressly written to rescue this writer from cultural oblivion, Breton, here, outlined Fourier's crucial relevance to contemporary social debates.[68] Three years later, in a 1948 interview, Breton reiterated this position, explicitly highlighting Fourier's work as one possible means to arrive at "the potential establishment of a new myth on which we could base a durable cohesion."[69]

Myth, Matriarchy and the Trope of the Goddess

In *Gentlemen and Amazons* (2011), Cynthia Eller has noted Fourier's central role in later feminist debates, arguing that it was his unique blend of primitivism, hermetic ideas and gender equality that could tempt one to describe him as "the founder of matriarchal myth," in which an Edenic vision of sexual and economic freedom is pitted against a contemporary status quo identified with capitalist patriarchy.[70] In *Arcane 17*, Breton's direct linking between woman's servitude and the catastrophe of the Second World War indicates the extent to which he not only embraced Fourier's general connection between the 'woman's question' and the progress of human civilisation, but also turned to the fields of mythic femininity and goddess worship as a site of ideological contestation. Indeed, it is primarily in this respect that Breton aimed to mobilise the gendered implications of the myth of Melusina for political effect, drawing on her as a symbolic figure for female emancipation, social progress and reconstruction after the war:

> I say that the time is past when we can be satisfied on this point by mere whims, by more or less shameful concessions; instead, those of us in the arts must pronounce ourselves unequivocally against man and for woman, bring man down from a position of power which, it has been sufficiently demonstrated, he has misused, restore this power to the hands of woman, dismiss of all man's plea so long as woman has not yet succeeded in taking back her fair share of that power, not only in art but in life.[71]

Critics of *Arcane 17* have invariably noted the importance of Melusina's unjust banishment, but there has been little effort to identify more precise reasons for her unique

role throughout the narrative. However, if we look at some aspects of the medieval source material, we can better appreciate Melusina's unique suitability to Breton's poetic project in exile. Indeed, a short excursus can enlighten us about three very specific aspects that would have made her an ideal role model for Breton's search for a new myth of healing, initiation and rebirth. These are, in particular, Melusina's central association with regeneration, reform and reconstruction (both natural and cultural); her continuous function as a female role model of ethical and moral superiority (outlining Breton's image of women as superior ethical guides); and, perhaps most importantly, her outstanding and highly unusual position as a ruler and judge (constantly transgressing gendered role expectations and assuming positions of power that patriarchal societies would typically regard as an exclusively male prerogative).

As medievalist scholars have well documented, the fairy-woman's links to the chthonic and aquatic world are accentuated throughout the legend, thus providing an ideal meta-text for *Arcane 17*'s emphasis on cosmic harmony and elementary renewal. Stridently in line with Breton's vision of woman as a being who is "in providential communication with nature's elemental forces,"[72] Melusina's paradigmatic alliance with water is indicated both by her weekly bath and by her symbolic association with the magical Fountain of Thirst – water here alluding to the life-giving "primordial matter" and constituting, according to Pierre Gallais, "an inventory of nature: feminine, maternal, beneficial, salutary."[73] For Françoise Clier-Colombani, the motif of the bath also points to an ultimately primeval ritual associated with lunar goddesses, highlighting Melusina's secret nature as a "spirit derived from the mother-goddess associated with fertility, prosperity and immortality, symbol … of life eternally reborn."[74] Such associations with divine femininity, and the key role of fertility and abundance, are also evidenced by Melusina's prosperous offspring and her function as ancestor of a noble and powerful lineage, roles that Jacques Le Goff has influentially identified as that of a 'mother' and a 'pioneer'.[75]

Throughout the legend, Melusina's biological productivity is further mirrored by her avid activity as a builder, and lengthy descriptions are dedicated to the uncanny speed of her constructions. Indeed, throughout the narrative Melusina is aligned with building and economic growth, erecting churches, castles and bridges, and often appearing at the head of her work force. Significantly, Melusina's civilising activity consists to a large extent of the transformation of hitherto barren areas into agrarian land, her inventive transformation of nature into culture being continuously praised as acts of social improvement. In folio 3v of the Limbourg brothers' medieval book of hours *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Melusina's gold-coloured dragon body hovers over the family's main castle, the oldest and symbolically most important of the fairy-woman's legendary constructions. Prominently set against a luxurious backdrop of ultramarine-blue sky, she guards over a primordial realm of rural fertility. Religious historians, such as Jean Markale, have argued that Melusina's expulsion from human society should also be interpreted as a mythic reflection of the perceived progression from matriarchy to patriarchy, symbolically expressed through the "satanisation" of a formerly powerful, female goddess figure.[76]

Arcane 17's identification of Melusina with Elisa and the tarot deck's personification of hope and rebirth suggests that Breton firmly embraced this interpretation of her as a literary condensation of the "eternal feminine," a supernatural totem-figure of edifying, regenerative and redeeming potential. As a liminal figure that signified a challenge to the patriarchal status quo, Melusina appeared as an ideal role model for

a surrealist vision of woman as an agent of revolutionary transformation. And as a legend that articulates a vision of ideal female rulership, the story's deeply symbolic nature represented a powerfully symbolic expression for the tragic consequences of female disempowerment, allowing Breton to employ Melusina's return as a potent metaphor for socio-political resistance and change.

Melusina's Sisters: Isis and the Star Card's Goddess Figure

In *Arcane 17*, Breton further underscores Melusina's power of healing, illumination and rebirth by associating her with the Egyptian mother goddess Isis, whose myth is interwoven with that of the Star card, and whose fantastic powers of regeneration and occult protection function as the vital meta-text of the last part of the novel.[77] In Egyptian mythology, Isis is the most powerful of all deities and presides over the annual flooding of the river Nile. Identified by her tiara in the form of a throne, she not only personifies just and ideal rulership, but is also associated with notions of healing, enchantment and the protection of the weak and the poor.[78] In *Arcane 17*, Breton's description of the goddess alludes to the most famous of Egyptian myths: according to this story, Isis and her husband Osiris govern the world in a state of perfect harmony, until Osiris's brother Set kills him by cutting his body into fourteen pieces. In the ensuing interregnum, Isis reassembles all of these body parts with the single exception of his phallus.[79] Putting the parts of her dead husband together, Isis uses her magical cunning to create a new phallus out of clay, temporarily reviving Osiris and conceiving a son, the triumphant sun god Horus. As Breton notes: "Not even Egypt could have conceived a more admirable myth of conception."[80]

During Horus' childhood, Isis repeatedly saves her son from Set's violent prosecution, often using her knowledge of magic and healing to protect him. At the end of the myth, Horus has reached adolescence and mother and son jointly vanquish Set, thereby ending the temporary rule of chaos and destruction and restoring the natural balance of the world. As Michel Tardieu points out, Isis thus not only "heals bodies and consoles hearts," but also functions (much like Melusina) as "the universal ruler, the mistress of the three worlds, celestial, terrestrial and subterranean."[81] In *Arcane 17*, Breton poetically evokes the deity as a sublimely beautiful goddess of mysteries, "her admirable body… covered by a veil woven from stars and fastened with a moon over the junction of her thighs," while her head is crowned by a "tiara in the shape of snakes and grains."[82] Further imagining Isis's protection of the land of Egypt, Breton casts her as benign enchantress, applying perfumed balms to the body of her dead husband:

> The papyrus launch carries the goddess over all seas. But, do what she will, the adored body of he who was her brother and spouse will no longer flash before her eyes with its sovereign poise. She is condemned to reassemble the fourteen scattered pieces of that body that was the seat of infinite beauty and wisdom …. Trembling, I'm witness to the sublime artifice possessing the means to carry out the enigmatic, inviolable law: what has been disassembled into fourteen pieces must be reassembled fourteen times.[83]

Suzanne Lamy has noted that Breton's linking of Melusina and Isis is likely to have been inspired by the work of Lévi, whose *Histoire de la Magie* (1860) identified the

two figures as avatars of the same goddess figure, "signifying the flux of things and the analogical alliance of opposites in the manifestation of all occult forces of nature."[84] To this, I would add that alchemical readings of the myth went as far back as the seventeenth century, when natural philosophers undertaking serious study of alchemy, such as Michael Maier, identified Osiris and his sister-wife as the incestuous couple of the *coniunctio oppositorum*, respectively representing the black solar king and white lunar goddess, whose child is the perfect androgyne.[85] Indeed, just as Isis uses the 'debris' of Osiris' body to create the sun god Horus, so do alchemical treatises cast the birth of the son/new king out of the mutilated body of the father/old king, thereby mirroring Breton's alchemical vision of darkness as the creator of light, death and the basis for resurrection. Breton certainly refers to such readings of Osiris as a giver of life *through* death, when he quotes Lévi's famous incantation: "*Osiris is a black god*,"[86] allegedly signifying the highest initiation into Egyptian mystery cults, and constituting, according to Breton, "dark words more radiant than onyx!"[87]

Throughout, Breton's text thus dialogued with several avatars of the great goddess figure, constantly evoking female deities who undercut patriarchal assumptions and signify the capacity of renewal.[88] In his 1995 study, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art*, Robert Belton nonetheless reads Breton's surrealist project as reflecting deeply entrenched patriarchal structures.[89] Certainly, discussions of the goddess theme in *Arcane 17* are problematised by Breton's simultaneous interest in the figure of the child-woman or *femme-enfant*, who appears as one of Melusina's other key incarnations:

> Melusina at the instant of her second scream: she sprang off her globeless haunches, her belly is the whole of August harvest, her torso bursts into fireworks from her arched back.... And under the landslide of her tarnished hair all the distinctive features of the child-woman take shape, that distinctive type that has always fascinated poets because time on her has no hold.[90]

Scholars such as Sonia Assa, for instance, have taken this turn to the child-woman as an image that undercuts Breton's discursive calls for female emancipation, seeing the metaphor as evidence for an ultimately misogynist infantilisation of woman.[91]

But while she, and Pascaline Mourier-Casile before her, is certainly right in objecting to the term's paternalistic tinge,[92] Henri Béhar rightly reminds us that the myth of the *femme-enfant* needs to be read against Breton's positive view of childhood. As was the case with many other surrealists, he saw the stage of life before adulthood as an age yet unfettered by the "prison of logic," and as such ideally suited to combat and transform the "stagnant pond of outdated dogmas" he associates with modern, rationalised society.[93] More important is the extent to which the symbolic empowerment of the *femme-enfant* also reinforces *Arcane 17*'s specific onslaught on a 'male' psychology of nationalism and war as well as the surrealists' more general attack on a conservative bourgeois vision of the adult male as a figure of authority and moral arbiter: "I choose the figure of the child-woman not in order to oppose her to other women," Breton writes, "but because in her and in her alone exists in a state of absolute transparency the other prism that... male despotism must try to prevent at all costs."[94] Breton's continued quest for a revolutionary reconstruction outside the existing framework is thus inseparable from the essentialist gender rhetoric so central to *Arcane 17*. Indeed, in many ways the notion of the child-woman might

best be regarded as a kind of cultural and ethical ideal to be emulated ("Who will give the living spectre back to the childwoman"),[95] transforming her into a gendered counter-model to a male-defined, adult psychology of war, dominance and despotism.

Further, we also must appreciate that Breton's dramatic dichotomisation between a contemporary, repressive patriarchy and the quest for a phase of female empowerment ultimately followed an already well-established discourse in the history of political thought, where mythic theories of matriarchal organisation had long been perceived as a serious challenge to a male-defined, socio-political status quo.[96] In *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), for instance, the German anthropologist Johann Jakob Bachofen had argued for the existence of a primordial phase of matriarchy before the advent of male-centred power structures. Identifying this primitive period of gynocracy with the cultic worship of the fertilising great mother goddess, Bachofen mobilised myth as a central proof for his thesis, framing the ancient battle between the victorious sun god Apollo and the serpentine monster Python as emblematic expression of deep-seated cultural changes, symbolising the move from a natural, female and earth-bound order to a rationalist, male one. Significantly, Bachofen frequently described this new, patriarchal principle in explicitly negative terms. Where the period of matriarchy had represented a time of "equal rights for women" and was marked by "universal freedom and equality," the patriarchal order was individual and restricted, based on social rivalry, power and punishment.[97]

Bachofen's vision of matriarchy proved enormously influential in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses, ranging from the reception of his theories in anthropological writings such as James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) to Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytical formation of the "Great Mother" archetype. Chadwick has further highlighted that ideas of archaic matriarchy were avidly discussed in surrealist circles as early as the mid-1930s onwards, when André Masson (1896–1987) drew on Bachofen's ideas in his own artistic turn to myths of a chthonic and telluric nature, and engaged them as potent prototypes in his pictorial explorations of the 'eternal feminine'. As Chadwick rightly appreciates, Bachofen's emphatic insistence that matriarchy was an "entirely natural view of sexual relations" was, indeed, explosive in its concomitant conclusion that patriarchy was not a god-given, natural state of political organisation, but a mere construct – and hence reversible.[98]

Early socialist thinkers such as Engels, for instance, were quick to perceive the ideological advantages of Bachofen's mother-right theory, powerfully foreshadowing a surrealist conflation of ancient matriarchy and utopian renewal. They, too, advocated a vision of matriarchy as the original social order, whose values of freedom and liberty became corrupted and superseded by the twin phenomena of slavery and private ownership, the rise of the paternal household allegedly equalling the "world historical defeat of the female sex."[99] In his 1884 publication, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats*, a text owned as well as frequently referred to by Breton, Engels specifically highlights Bachofen's model of matriarchy as a kind of primitive Communism (*Urkommunismus*) – a utopian counter-model to bourgeois capitalism that could effectively be placed in the service of a socialist revolution. Significantly, Engels also notes that despite the prevalent patriarchal order of the ancient Greeks, the importance of "the goddess in their mythology… refers to an earlier period, when the position of women was freer and more respected."[100]

It is perhaps unsurprising that these politically heated discourses about the natural hierarchy of sexual power-relations reached a climax during the rise of fascist power,

when National Socialism aimed to ideologically anchor its quest for Aryan superiority in the mythic image of the powerful, male soldier, to whose strength and purity the feminine, hybrid and foreign presented a dangerous threat of contamination.[101] Pseudo-anthropological studies, such as Otto Höfler's *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen* (*Secret Cultic Sects of the Germanic Peoples*, 1934), had radically attacked the pan-European expansion of Bachofen's ideas, paving the way for a *völkisch-kultisch* re-interpretation of a racially pure, emphatically male-centred European past – a view which was to culminate in Hans Friedrich Blunck's *Urväter Saga* (*Saga of the Primal Fathers*, 1934). Alfred Rosenberg, a key figure in the ideological formation of the "Fascist body," seized upon this trend of masculinist *Freikorps* rhetoric. In *Der Mythus des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, 1930), he vehemently rejected the idea of a matriarchal primal past as a dangerous threat to racial purity and order, defaming contemporary feminism's literary, artistic and anthropological propagations of the chthonic and maternal as a perfidious enterprise.[102]

In *Arcane 17*, Breton's implicit linking of goddess worship, matriarchy and alchemical renewal finds a symbolic focal-point in the visual semiotics of the Star card, to whose detailed interpretation lengthy passages are dedicated. Beyond its central signification of hope and rebirth, the card is also associated with a broad spectrum of other ideals, which made it a perfect icon for Breton's poetic and social concerns at the time, ranging from the moral qualities of "courage," "kindness" and "compassion" to the esoteric notions of "faith in destiny," "occult protection" and "astral influences."[103] At the centre of the card lies the image of a naked young goddess, the last and most powerful of Melusina's many alter egos. Kneeling in front of a pond, her body bridges the realms of water and land, both of which she fertilises through never-ending streams of water and fire that spring forth from two urns in her outstretched hands. Through the traditional identification of these chalices as respectively silver (lunar/female) and gold (solar/male), the card also points at the alchemical theme of the *coniunctio*, thus reinforcing Lévi's interpretation of Melusina as the "fairy of analogical alliance."[104] In *Le Tarot des imagiers du Moyen Âge* (1927) – a text owned by Breton alongside a great many other studies on the occult implications of tarot symbolism – Oswald Wirth specifically emphasised the Star card's association with the image of the great mother goddess, writing that:

> The young maid in arcana 17, she, too, seems to be an incarnation of the great feminine divinity whom our ancestors have adored. She is the personification of earthly life in what is winning and charming about it; she is kind Nature, merciful and beautiful, the mother who is eternally young, who becomes the lover of the living.[105]

In *Arcane 17*, Breton's interpretation of the Star card further reinforces the work's dialogue with the trope of the goddess as well as his more general search for an emancipatory mythology of the modern. Going beyond a static explication of the image, Breton dramatises its importance by casting it in the form of an animated dream vision that pierces the last part of the novel in four episodic sequences. Inspired by its symbolic association with "Night and its mysteries" and "Sleep and its revelations,"[106] the card first surfaces as nothing more than a dark window or frame, but is gradually inhabited by various symbols of hope and regeneration, "penetrated little by little by

a brightness spread out in a garland."[107] As the "black cube" is further illuminated, Breton identifies its upper stars as alchemical symbols of the sun and the moon, noting that the five lower ones represent the planets of ancient mythology. In the final image, the septenary is overshadowed by the more climactic light of the morning star, which obliterates all other heavenly bodies in its majesty and splendour.[108]

In Breton's esoteric exegesis, the morning star thus reveals itself as the ultimate key to knowledge, the reference to Sirius highlighting its mythic role as a herald of the sun god Osiris, while its Roman association with the figure of Venus simultaneously associates it with the theme of divine femininity and erotic desire. A further layer of meaning spirals out of these various associations, as the light piercing the darkness also reveals itself as Lucifer, the angel of rebellion whose fall is said to have created the liberating triad of love, liberty and hope. In line with Breton's vision of Melusina as a quintessential agent of redemption and transformation, it is the light caused by revolution that first illuminates the young *verseuse du matin*, allowing the dreaming poet to intuit her dual function as harbinger of both love and rebellion.

> [A] young woman is revealed, nude, kneeling by the side of a pond, and with her right hand she spills into the pond the contents of a golden urn, while her left hand empties onto the earth an equally inexhaustible silver urn. Alongside that woman who, beyond Melusina, is Eve and now is all womankind, the leaves of an acacia rustle to the right while to the left a butterfly flutters on a bloom.[109]

Breton's emphasis on water and its powers of renewal are metaphorically linked to the rise of new ideas, as the two streams are personified and outline their mission of social transformation in two superbly poetic soliloquies. The left-hand stream of fire represents "the incessant bubbling of dissident ideas," the "bleak pond" being an image of stagnation and "dogmas that have met their end," but that can be endowed with the "power to glimmer with a new dream" through Melusina's fertilising powers.[110] Metaphors of movement and dynamism dominate the soliloquy of this stream, the final image of the 'whirlpool' associating it with Elisa's glance, which was identified with the very same image of dramatic movement. To this renewal of stagnant water through fire, Breton adds the healing power of water, as the right-hand stream joins "the earth which loves" it in a quest to bring forth eternal new life. Consolidating Melusina's function as builder and pioneer, the stream looks to the need for a new morality and the will to leave behind the scars of the war. Continuing Breton's use of natural as well as specifically alchemical imagery, it states:

> I obey the freshness of water, capable of erecting its palace of mirrors in one drop and I'm heading for the earth which loves me, for the earth which couldn't fulfil the seed's promise without me…. And ideas would also cease to be fertile at the moment when man would no longer irrigate them with all that nature can individually instil in him in the way of clarity, mobility, generosity, and freshness of view point.[111]

In the manuscript version for Elisa, Breton accentuated this importance of tarot symbolism through a two-fold inclusion of the Star card, both versions of which derived from the *Tarot de Marseille*. Simultaneously, the original 1945 edition was illustrated with four modern tarot designs by the Chilean-born surrealist Roberto Matta (1911–2002), who shared Breton's fascination with magic. Indeed, just one year prior to

the writing of *Arcane 17*, Charles Duits had published an essay in *VVV,* outlining a new system of divination as jointly proposed by Matta and Leonora Carrington.[112] In a 1944 essay on the artist, Breton consequently applauded this increasing turn to occult themes, providing numerous references to alchemy and concluding with the esoteric verdict that "it is probably Matta who is on the surest path to the attainment of the supreme secret: fire's dominion."[113] Alongside the imperative Star card, Matta's designs for *Arcane 17* were dedicated to three other arcana that allude to notions of journeying and hardship, but also salvation: "The Moon," which is associated with "voyages," "navigation" and "long and difficult research;"[114] "The Lover," which embodies the values of "desire," "aspiration" and "formulated will;"[115] and, perhaps most tellingly, "The Chariot," which symbolises "triumph," "steadfastness," "discernment in reconciliation" as well as "peace-bringing and civilizing harmony."[116]

In Conclusion

Breton's turn to an emphatically feminised mythology, overlaid with allusions to alchemy and the occult, must ultimately be seen as linked to his libertarian as well as staunchly pacifist politics, cementing his position as a "perpetual revolutionary whose chosen field of action was located beyond politics in the ordinary sense," to borrow Michel Beaujour's eloquent description.[117] As a direct response to the horrors of the Second World War, *Arcane 17* championed a language of alchemical renewal as a way of expressing the need to spiritually reawaken contemporary society. In this, Breton remained true to the political faith in the communifying power of mythology and the sacred that had been at the very heart of the intellectual debates surrounding Bataille's and Caillois' Collège de Sociologie. Simultaneously, the highly orchestrated abuse of mythology in fascist ideology had not diminished, but rather fuelled, Breton's conviction that a healthy society also needed a desirable social myth, as texts such as "Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non" or "Situation du surréalisme entre les deux guerres" clearly evidence. If, at the outbreak of the Second World War, Breton had announced the need for the creation of a new mythology that could respond to that of 'Odin' and of other war-loving gods with a powerful counter-myth, *Arcane 17* proposed a number of themes that he regarded as ideally suited for this project, all of which ultimately converged in a vision of the feminine principle as a site of healing and creative rebirth.

Dramatised by *Arcane 17*'s symbolic title, Breton uses the Star card's central goddess figure as the quixotic focal point for his emphatically positive framing of the feminine, idiosyncratically equating her with Melusina, Elisa, Isis and all of woman-kind. Breton's vision of woman as a marvellous 'Other' thus certainly remained entrenched within a highly romantic tradition, emphatically overlaid with, and mediated by, references to occultism, myth and the literary tradition. Yet, Breton's turn to the mythic feminine ultimately aimed to mobilise this sexual difference for subversive effect, employing a socio-political gender rhetoric to argue for a feminisation of social values. Indeed, when viewed against the specific backdrop of Surrealism's contemporary search for an emancipatory mythology of the modern, Breton's turn to themes of feminine spirituality, matriarchy and alchemical renewal must be appreciated as much on political as on poetic grounds. Evoked as a response to the "unprecedented ideological confusion" of the day,[118] the return of the medieval fairy-woman powerfully symbolised Breton's unwavering belief in metamorphosis, change and renewal, thus acting as the perfect point of departure for his much sought-after mythopoesis of the modern.[119]

Notes

1 I am deeply grateful to my former PhD supervisor Alyce Mahon for her careful reading and helpful comments on the thesis chapter, which formed the base for this essay.

2 Claude Lévi-Strauss to André Breton [May 25, 1945], in Agnès Anglivièl de la Beaumelle et al., *André Breton: La Beauté Convulsive* (Paris: Museé National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1991), 187.

3 As will be discussed later on, Breton would have been familiar with the card's occultist association with divine femininity and the cult of the mother goddess through his reading of Oswald Wirth's 1926 publication *Le Tarot des imagiers du Moyen Âge*, where these associations were particularly emphasised.

4 André Breton, *Arcanum 17* [1945], trans. Zack Rogow and with an introduction by Anna Balakian (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 55.

5 Ibid., 104.

6 Ibid., 35.

7 As already mentioned in the introduction, Breton used loaded expressions such as 'esotericism', 'occultism' and 'magic' almost interchangeably, so that contemporary attempts at untangling these terms do not guarantee a precise framing of his understanding of these terms. In general, his engagement with the occult was primarily focused on a vision of universal analogies and correspondences, which are key to both *Arcane 17*'s content and structure. A specific role is also played by alchemical metaphors related to transformation, as has been explored in some detail by Suzanne Lamy. For an excellent discussion of the more general exploration of tropes of occultism and esotericism in the novel, see notably Tessel Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 148–56.

8 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 82.

9 Ibid., 69 and 80.

10 Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), 523.

11 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* [1949], trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage, 1997), 267.

12 Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* [1985] (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 65.

13 Penelope Rosemont, ed, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (Austin: Athlone Press, 1998), xliii.

14 Urszula Szulakowska, *Alchemy in Contemporary Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 93.

15 Ibid., 37.

16 Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 123.

17 For an influential analysis of the cult of idealised masculinity in fascist and proto-fascist Germany, see Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1 ("Women, floods, bodies, history") [1977], trans. Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1987).

18 J. A. Mangan, for instance, rightly highlights how Breker's mythologised and heroic vision of the male nude epitomised "the sculptured idealization of the New Nazi Superman …, whose steely will was made flesh through iron muscle, cold expression, calm gaze," see J. A. Mangan, "The Potent Image and the Permanent Prometheus," in *Shaping the Superman: Fascist Body as Political Icon – Aryan Fascism* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 1999), 13.

19 Susanne Frembs, *Nibelungenlied und Nationalgedanke nach Neunzehnhundert: Über den Umgang der Deutschen mit ihrem „Nationalepos"* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2001).

20 Peter Davies, *Myth, Matriarchy and Modernity: Johann Jakob Bachofen in German Culture, 1860–1945* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 389. Both Foster and Mahon have investigated Surrealism's anti-fascist body politic with regard to Hans Bellmer's doll sculptures, where the feminine is primarily poised as a threatening, uncanny power. See Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 101–23; Alyce Mahon, "Hans Bellmer's Libidinal Politics," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*,

ed. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 24–66. Mahon has further insisted on the counter-cultural implications of femininity within the context of the International Surrealism Exhibitions in Paris in 1938 and 1947, showing how they responded to the war by staging a distinctly feminine, maternal environment as respectively dark and threatening, and creative and protective; see Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 23–64 and 143–72. In line with Breton's increasing focus on myths of healing and rebirth, my own analysis will here be linked to the second of these modes.

21 André Breton, "Autodidacts called 'Naives'" [1942], in *Surrealism and Painting* [1928/65], trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston, MA: MFI publications, 2002), 293.

22 Esther Rowlands, *Redefining Resistance: The Poetic Wartime Discourses of Francis Ponge, Benjamin Péret, Henri Michaux and Antonin Artaud* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2014), 14. A case in point for this rejection of Surrealism are Pierre Seghers' *La Résistance et ses poètes: France, 1940–1945* (Paris: Seghers, 1974) as well as Ian Higgins, ed., *Anthology of Second World War French Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1982), in which he rejects the surrealists' continued allegiance to myth and the irrational as "wooly-mindedness" and elitist "self-trumpeting," 20.

23 For a general discussion of mythology in surrealist art and literature, see, notably, Whitney Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting, 1929–39* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron and Yves Vadé, eds, *Pensée mythique et surréalisme* (Paris: Lachenal and Ritter, 1996). Chadwick astutely highlights that early approaches to mythology remained specifically indebted to Sigmund Freud's writings on the field, particularly as presented in his 1913 collection of essays on *Totem and Taboo*. There, Freud defines myths as stories that reflected primitive man's forbidden fears and desires, thus becoming a collective mirror image to the night-dream in an individual's psyche. It was largely this supposedly unconscious element that drew surrealist artists to appropriate myth as another discourse apt to explore the irrational. Chadwick nonetheless notes that the 1930s saw a growing shift away from a stale Freudian application towards a greater interest in the 'collective' potential of myth as explored by French anthropologists of the Durkheimian School. As we will see, *Arcane 17*'s interest in myth, too, is strongly curbed towards its function as a communifying value.

24 Erich Kahler, "The Persistence of Myth," *Chimera 5* (Spring 1946): 9.

25 Jennifer Mundy, "Shades of Darkness: Mythology and Surrealism," in *Salvador Dalí: A Mythology*, ed. Dawn Ades and Fiona Bradley (London: Tate Gallery, 1998), 126.

26 Michael Löwy, *Morning Star: Surrealism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 13.

27 André Breton, "Limits Not Frontiers of Surrealism" [1937], in *What is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 159.

28 Ibid., 159.

29 Ibid., 157.

30 Nikolaj Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition in Twentieth-Century French Literature and Thought* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 52.

31 André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto or Not" [1942], in *What is Surrealism?*, 213.

32 Breton, "Prolegomena," 213.

33 Georges Ambrosino, Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, Pierre Klossowski, Pierre Libra and Jules Monnerot, "Notes on the Foundation of the College of Sociology" (March 1936), in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, ed. Denis Hollier, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 5.

34 Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, "A Left Sacred or a Sacred Left? The Collège de Sociologie, Fascism, and Political Culture in Interwar France," *South Central Review*, 23, no. 1 ("Fascism, Nazism: Cultural Legacies of Reaction"), Spring 2006, 40–41.

35 Overall, the show presented work by nearly fifty international participants and was thus instrumental in giving a platform to the new émigré artists. Its *pièce de resistance* was an installation by Duchamp that consisted of miles of white twine strung across the gallery room, both acting as a visual barrier and evoking mythical associations with the labyrinth of the Minotaur and Ariadne's thread. In an insightful discussion, T. J. Demos has

documented how one of the exhibition's crucial contexts was the experience of exile, displacement and 'homelessness', Duchamp's labyrinth itself addressing the notion of dislocation as well as the idea of myth as a site that should effectuate the hoped-for "return to a habitable world." See T. J. Demos, "Duchamp's Labyrinth: *First Papers of Surrealism*, 1942," *October* 97 (Summer 2001): 94–95.

36 For a concise discussion of Surrealism within the post-war debate on myth, see Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition*, 52–53.

37 Harold Rosenberg, "Breton – A Dialogue," *View* 2, no. 2 (1942): n. p.

38 Rosenberg, "Breton," n. p.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Charles Henri Ford, "View's Point," *View* 2, no. 3 (June 1943): 5.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid. The fact that this debate should have been played out in *View* is significant in that the journal had played a crucial role in introducing the émigré surrealists to a broader American audience, featuring, amongst others, a longer interview with Breton in March 1941 as well as a special issue dedicated to Ernst in April 1942.

46 Breton, *Free Rein*, 52–53.

47 Ibid., 53.

48 Breton, "Prolegomena," 159.

49 Pascaline Mourier-Casile, *André Breton: explorateur de la mère-moire: trois lectures d'*Arcane 17*, texte palimpseste* (Paris: PUF, 1986). See notably Suzanne Lamy, *André Breton: Hermétisme et Poésie dans Arcane 17* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1977), 67–170.

50 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 38.

51 Ibid., 90–91.

52 André Breton to Patrick Waldberg, 8 March 1943, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, xxvii ["écrire un livre autour de l'arcane 17 (…) en prenant comme modèle une dame qu'(il) aimait"].

53 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 46.

54 Jean d'Arras, *Melusine; or, The Noble History of Lusignan* (1393), ed., trans. and with and introduction by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 192.

55 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 82.

56 Ibid., 82.

57 Balakian, Anna E., *André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 204–05.

58 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 82–83.

59 Ibid., 82.

60 André Breton, "Interview with Claudine Chonez," in *Conversations*, 322.

61 Ibid., 322. Donald LaCoss, "Attacks of the Fantastic," in Spiteri and LaCoss, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, 267–99; and Emmanuel Rubio, "Fourier, Charles," in Béhar, *Dictionnaire*, 428–31.

62 Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* [1808/48], ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Ian Patterson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 15–7.

63 Charles Fourier, "Degradation of Women in Civilization" [1808], in Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen, eds, *Women, the Family and Freedom: the Debate in Documents, 1750–1880* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 41.

64 André Breton, "Charles Fourier," in *Anthology of Black Humour* [1940], trans. Mark Polizzotti (San Francisco, CA: City Light Books, 1997), 39–52.

65 Breton, *Anthology*, 40.

66 Ibid., 40.

67 Polizzotti, *Revolution*, 528–29.

68 André Breton, *Ode à Charles Fourier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

69 André Breton, "Interview with Jean Duché" (1948), in *Conversations*, 207.

70 Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861–1900* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2011), 31.

71 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 81.

72 Ibid., 82.

73 Pierre Gallais, *La Fée à la fontaine et à l'arbre: un archetype du conte merveilleux et du récit courtois* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), 9 ['matière primordiale'; 'un résumé de Nature: féminine, maternelle, bénéfique, salutaire'].

74 Francoise Clier-Colombani, *La Fée Mélusine au moyen âge: images, mythes et symboles* (Paris: Le Leopard d'or, 1991), 56.

75 Jacques Le Goff, "Melusina: Mother and Pioneer" [1977], in *Time, Work and Culture in the Middle Ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 220.

76 Jean Markale, *Mélusine* (Paris: Éditions Retz, 1983), 72.

77 Marc Eigeldinger, "Structures mythiques d'*Arcane 17*," in *Lumière du mythe* (Paris: PUF, 1983), 197–220.

78 Elizabeth A. McCabe, *An Examination of the Isis Cult with Preliminary Exploration into New Testament Studies* (Lanham and Plymouth: University Press of America, 2008), 21–23.

79 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 114.

80 Ibid., 111.

81 Michel Tardieu, "Isis the Magician, in Greek and Coptic Papyruses," in Yves Bonnefoy, ed, *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*, trans. Wendy Doniger (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 255.

82 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 112.

83 Ibid., 114.

84 Lamy, *Hermétisme et Poésie*, 95. Éliphas Lévi, *The History of Magic* (1860), trans. Arthur Edward Waite (London: Rider, 1913), 233.

85 Karin Figala, "Newton's Alchemy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Newton*, ed.- I. Bernard Cohen and George E. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 376–77.

86 Breton, *Arcanum 17,* 118.

87 Ibid., 118.

88 Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 31.

89 Robert Belton, *Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 16.

90 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 83.

91 Sonia Assa, "Telle que je me vois en toi: le mythe de la femme-enfant dans *Arcane 17*," *Modern Language Studies*, 20, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 31–32.

92 Mourier-Casile, *Breton: explorateur de la mère-moire*, 91.

93 Henri Béhar, ed, *Dictionnaire André Breton* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2012), 669.

94 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 86.

95 Ibid., 85.

96 Angela Lampe, "Größter Schatten oder größtes Licht. Surrealistische Frauenentwürfe zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit," in *Die Unheimliche Frau. Weiblichkeit im Surrealismus* (Heidelberg: Edition Braus, 2001), 36.

97 Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 118 and 80.

98 Chadwick, *Myth in Surrealist Painting*, 32–33. It is certainly interesting that Breton explored such tropes of matriarchy and the goddess more earnestly at a time when women artists became an increasingly important force within the surrealist movement, many of which shared or even prefigured an interest in these themes. For an illuminating analysis of the role of matriarchy and the goddess in the oeuvre of Leonora Carrington and Ithell Colquhoun, see Victoria Ferentinou's contribution to this volume.

99 Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Familiy, Private Property and the State* [1884], trans. Alick West (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 87.

100 Ibid., 97.

101 See Davies, *Bachofen*, chap. 10.
102 Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts* [1930] (Munich: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1933), 38.
103 Wirth, *Tarot*, 136. In addition to more general studies on the occult, Breton also owned five monographs that were exclusively dedicated to the history and meaning of tarot symbolism, among them Oswald Wirth's *Le Tarot des Imagiers du Moyen Âge* (1927). Additionally, Breton also benefitted from the advice of the Swiss-born surrealist painter Kurt Seligmann, who had moved to the United States in 1939 and amassed an impressive collection of esoteric writings, the importance of which is discussed at some length in Grazina Subelyte's contribution to this volume. On the request of Breton, he put together a twenty-four-page dossier of notes about the Star card, including its interpretation by scholars such as Antoine Court de Gébelin and Oswald Wirth, as well lengthy explanations about the image's relation to goddess figures such as Isis and Melusina (Kurt Seligmann, "Notes for *Arcane 17*," "Fonds André Breton," Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, BRT 98).
104 Lévi, *History of Magic*, 233.
105 Wirth, *Tarot*, 133.
106 Ibid., 136.
107 Breton, *Arcanum 17,* 88.
108 Ibid., 89–90.
109 Ibid., 90.
110 Ibid., 88.
111 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 101–02.
112 Charles Duits, "Le jour est une attaque," *VVV* 2–3 (1943): n. p.
113 André Breton, "The pearl is marred, in my eyes" [1944], in *Surrealism and Painting*, 188.
114 Wirth, *Tarot*, 140.
115 Ibid., 87.
116 Ibid., 92.
117 Michel Beaujour, "André Breton (1896–1966)," in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006), 459.
118 Breton, *Arcanum 17*.
119 d'Arras, *Melusine*, 192.

6   Esotericism and Surrealist Cinema
Wilhelm Freddie's Films and the New Myth

Kristoffer Noheden

In 1949 and 1950, the Danish artist Wilhelm Freddie (1909–1995) directed two short films: *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* (*Det definitive afslag på anmodningen om et kys*, 1949) and *Eaten Horizons* (*Spiste horisonter*, 1950; Figure 6.1). Freddie's foray into film followed upon his participation in the large exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* in Paris. In conjunction with this show, André Breton announced a change in direction for Surrealism towards the search for a new myth, which was intimately bound up with his increased immersion in magic and esotericism.[1] Freddie's participation in the exhibition had such a strong effect on the artist that he entered what he described as his 'esoteric period'.[2] In "Why Do I Paint?", a talk he gave on Danish radio in 1950, he explicates Surrealism's new-found concerns and situates his own practice directly in this context. He states: "Recently I have turned my attention to more esoteric phenomena. In my paintings, sculptures and films made with Jørgen Roos I have concentrated my efforts on creating an organism which is receptive to mythological life."[3] Freddie's two short films are also intimately bound up with Surrealism's turn to myth and magic in the post-war era. In this Chapter, I situate *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* in the context of Surrealism's change in direction, as well as in the context of Freddie's other transnational activities at the time. Of central importance is the exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation*, which was organised by Freddie together with the Swedish artist Gösta Kriland (1917–1989) at Expo Aleby in Stockholm in 1949, extending the concerns behind *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.

Earlier scholarship on Freddie's films has pointed out that they are inseparable from his turn to esotericism.[4] However, it has overlooked some vital aspects of the visual allusions to esotericism in *Eaten Horizons*. Freddie's films also seem to diverge considerably from some of the central aims of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, even as they are embedded in its wider esoteric concerns. As further explored by Daniel Zamani's contribution to this volume, Breton's contemporaneous search for a new myth was intimately bound up with his aims at fostering a new sensibility, which he hoped could lead society away from the disaster of the recently ended Second World War.[5] It was also permeated with a utopianism incurred by his reading of the nineteenth-century socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837). Freddie underwent a similar development. As shall be shown, before the war he had emerged as a renegade provocateur, upsetting the Danish establishment with overtly erotic elements as well as political affronts in his art. In "Why Do I Paint?", in contrast, Freddie echoes Breton's post-war stance when he explains that the surrealists are presented with the task of bringing into the

Figure 6.1 Wilhelm Freddie and Jørgen Roos, *Eaten Horizons*, 1949. Film still. 35 mm film.

light the dormant forces of myth and magic in art. But, he states, it is not enough to recover them: the surrealists need to direct them and put them in the service of a more wholesome society, one that has the potential to cure modern humanity's rootlessness by providing an intimate contact with the world through the channelling of his desires.[6] Revolutionary politics and "the critique of the modern picture of the world" can be joined, Freddie hopes, in "a myth that will replace the doomed myths by which contemporary man lives, and which threaten to destroy him."[7] Here, then, Freddie indicates that there is a profound political valence to Surrealism's turn to myth and magic, but this, it seems, is a politics that is bound up with Breton's recent valorisation of 'total freethinking', as opposed to what he saw as Marxism's descent into suffocating dogmatism. This freethinking, for Breton, enabled the surrealists to explore new means, in the form of myth, magic, and initiation, to effect revolutionary political ends.[8] Similarly, Freddie describes how immersion in "occult sciences such as alchemy, magic, and astrology which were earlier regarded as superstitions" has provided the surrealists with "an insight into the great interconnectedness of things, just as psychological studies of the magical spells and rituals of certain historical and primitive tribes have revealed their common nature and made them accessible paths into the depths of the soul."[9] Here, politics, primitivism, and esotericism are intimately fused, crystallising into a complex of revolutionary potential, which is ultimately directed towards mending a traumatised society.

Surrealism's overall engagement with esotericism has been the subject of an increasing amount of scholarly scrutiny.[10] In the context of this Chapter, I will restrict myself to some rudimentary remarks. To begin with, esotericism is hardly a self-explanatory term in itself. The concept is often treated as being equivalent with Western esotericism, a scholarly construct and umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of currents, including hermeticism, alchemy, astrology, and magic, which deviate from mainstream religion and science.[11] Wouter Hanegraaff argues that what unites these currents, more than anything, is their status of 'rejected knowledge' in

Western culture.[12] Freddie's plea for 'occult sciences' to be regarded as more than 'superstitions' indicates that Surrealism's way of approaching esotericism is like excavating modes of knowledge expelled from Western culture's self-understanding. His very notion of 'occult sciences', however, also points to the fact that post-war Surrealism, more than anything, was in the throes of nineteenth-century occultism and its positing of intricate links between alchemy, astrology, and magic.[13] As Breton clearly stated, Surrealism was never in a position of 'fideism' with regards to esotericism; rather, it subsumed its incursions into these polyvalent territories under its own goals.[14] That is not least apparent when it comes to the frequent surrealist conflation of esotericism and primitivism. Whereas many esoteric currents have tended to look towards the East for ancient wisdom, Surrealism, inspired by ethnography and psychoanalysis, has rather looked to so-called 'primitive' cultures for insights into lost modes of knowing and being.[15] Like many other avant-garde currents, Surrealism then romanticised the primordial remnants detectable in 'primitive' people's art and culture, but they did so with, as Amanda Stansell argues, an increasingly subtle understanding of the perils of Eurocentrism.[16] *Le Surréalisme en 1947* is in itself an example of the surrealist entanglement of primitivism and esotericism. At different points, the exhibition alluded to the tarot, totemism, astrology, and 'pagan' altars; we will encounter similar conflations in relation to Freddie. At the core of Surrealism's turn to esotericism, then, is an inventive playfulness that cares little for the systematic compatibility of wildly divergent phenomena, and a desperate conviction that the recovery of these strands of knowledge may hold a profound potential for upheaval.

This is the overall approach to esotericism that informs Freddie's outlook, too. As attempts at creating organisms that are receptive to mythological life, Freddie's films might be expected to express an interconnectedness of the constructive kind that he describes in his theoretical propositions. But if there is a revelation of the soul's depths in Freddie's films, these hardly appear as benign places. I close this Chapter with a discussion of the apparent tension between Breton's and Freddie's hope for a benign, utopian potential of myth and magic, and Freddie's depiction in his films of dark rituals, grotesque corporeality, and the crepuscular recesses of the imagination. I suggest that these aspects of the films do not so much contradict the ideals behind the surrealist new myth, but rather complement them.

Wilhelm Freddie

Freddie's forays into film are intimately related with his earlier activities as a painter and artist working with sculptures, objects, and photography.[17] Born in 1909, Freddie was drawn to Surrealism in the early 1930s. He soon established himself as one of Denmark's most prominent modern artists, but, in line with the overall scandalous nature of Surrealism in the interwar period, his work also seemed to effortlessly provoke outrage.[18] In a 1935 review, the Swedish modern artist Gösta Adrian-Nilsson (1884–1965) described him as "a fanatic, an anarchist with bombs in his pocket."[19] Freddie seems to have happily subscribed to this image of himself throughout his career. In a 1946 letter to his friend Steen Colding, he gleefully exclaims: "long live the anarchistic-pornographic revolution," with regard to the consternated reactions of a gallery owner faced with his work.[20] By that point, Freddie's activities had long caused hostile reactions, both in Denmark and abroad. His contributions to the 1936 international surrealist exhibition in London did not make it past customs, due to their

perceived pornographic content. In Denmark, his object *Sexparalysappeal* (1936), one of his best-known works, was likewise confiscated due to its pornographic appearance.[21] Freddie also employed his erotomania against the threat of burgeoning Nazism and fascism. His 1936 painting, *Meditation on the Anti-Nazi Love*, displays a contorted and naked couple embracing in the lower right-hand corner, while a parodic Hitler-like figure stands pompously far off in the background.[22] The Danish establishment considered Freddie's surrealist critique of Nazism a nuisance, and the artist a bothersome troublemaker. Come the German invasion of Denmark, the hostilities escalated and eventually led to outright threats on Freddie's life.[23] In 1944, the situation had become so dire that he had to escape to Sweden with his wife and son. They eventually ended up in Stockholm, where Freddie gained valuable support from friends and gallery owners.[24]

Between the end of the war and 1950, Freddie divided his time between Stockholm and Copenhagen. In the spring of 1947, Freddie received a letter of invitation from Breton to participate in the upcoming exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. In the letter, Breton explains the aim of the exhibition to draw up the contours of a new myth, but he also provides a detailed outline of its execution and its structure as a passage of initiation into the surrealist myth.[25] Freddie was particularly enthused with Breton's plan for twelve altars, each of which would be dedicated to a being with a potential for mythical life; he swiftly responded with a suggestion for a design for the sixth altar, with the theme of the Secretary Bird.[26] But Freddie's reply apparently went missing and never reached Breton. Instead, the altar was claimed by the Romanian artist Victor Brauner (1903–1966), and Freddie had to settle for contributing with a few paintings.[27] Attending the exhibition in the summer of 1947, the Danish artist struck a deep friendship with Brauner, which was prefigured, as it were, by their attraction to the same altar. He also befriended Jacques Hérold (1910–1987), another Romanian surrealist in exile. This multiple exposure to Surrealism's turn to myth and magic made Freddie enter his 'esoteric period'. Mythological and magical references had been present in Freddie's art before, but this new period saw a veritable influx of esoteric and mythological allusions and motifs in his paintings and objects.[28] While Freddie had already a decade ago considered some of his objects to have a magic effect, he was now, in Rolf Læssøe's words, "under the influence of such initiatic religious directions or forms of thought as astrology and alchemy."[29] Freddie also adopted the surrealist conviction that a new myth was a necessary means to heal a war-torn society. In "Why Do I Paint?", he discusses the properties of the magic art he sought to create in suggestive terms. Referencing Vincent Van Gogh (1853–1890), Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), and Arnold Böcklin (1827–1901), Freddie intimates that this magic depends on the employment of esoteric symbolism and has a strong experiential dimension, replete with sensory bewilderment.[30] Parts of his argument appear almost as an embryonic version of what Breton a few years later was to sketch out as a subterranean lineage of magic art in his late book *L'Art magique*.[31]

Whereas Freddie in the interwar period had taken provocative stances against Nazism and fascism, his work during his esoteric period is shorter on explicitly political satire. Instead, he adhered to Surrealism's attempts to reconsider politics in a more freethinking manner, riddled with a more timeless and anarchistic utopianism, and receptive to myth and esotericism.[32] Now, he sought to counter the disasters of the war and contribute to the healing of the world through creating a magic art that ostensibly acted as a harbinger of a more integral human relation with the world.

This took its most pointed expression in Freddie's appeal to an esoteric experience of interconnectedness, which echoes Breton's reformulation of surrealist poetics in terms of analogies and correspondences.[33] While Freddie now assumed a more benign and constructive stance than before the war, his irreverent eroticism and oppositional black humour remained intact.[34] His films are replete with these seeming contradictions. In the following, I will first discuss *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* in relation to the *Expo Aleby* exhibition, and examine some of the ways in which the film appears as an example of the new surrealist ideal of magic art. I will then proceed to discuss *Eaten Horizons* as a further and more complex attempt at creating a form of magic art, with more overt references to occultist imagery.

The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss at Surrealistisk Manifestation

Freddie and Jørgen Roos (1922–98) made *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* under sparse conditions in Freddie's apartment in Copenhagen.[35] Roos suggested that they should base the film on Freddie's eponymous 1940 mixed media artwork, which consists of a wooden panel on which five circles in a row each depict a woman's red lips opening and then closing, in an exaggerated and contorted manner, against a succession of backgrounds of shifting natural scenery.[36] A remediation of sorts, then, the film version of *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* is just under one and a half minutes. Its first part replicates the motif of the original work: a woman's painted lips are shown against a stylised landscape in a close-up that is masked to the shape of a circle. The film intercuts still images of collages, where photographs of the lips are pasted onto a painted background, with moving images, where the mouth protrudes from a hole in an organic-looking surrounding material. Still and moving lips alike twist into a series of grimaces; the mouth opens up like a fleshy cavity in the scenery. This first sequence gives way to a second one. A single take shows Freddie's own moustached face in an extreme close-up. He looks nervous and high-strung, and his eyes dart maniacally, almost rotating in their sockets. An off-screen blood-curdling scream and what sounds like curse words in Danish can be heard, and then the film is over.

   The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss premiered in March 1949 in conjunction with the exhibition *Surrealistisk manifestation*. Freddie arranged *Surrealistisk manifestation* at Anders Alebys Antikvariat, a second-hand bookshop and art gallery in central Stockholm, together with the Swedish artist Gösta Kriland (1917–1989), of the surrealist-oriented Imaginisterna group, and in collaboration with the exiled Estonian-born poet and critic Ilmar Laaban (1921–2000).[37] Among the participants were Freddie's friends Brauner and Hérold, together with their fellow surrealists Jean Arp (1886–1966), Max Ernst (1891–1976), and Yves Tanguy (1900–55), and the Imaginisterna members C. O. Hultén (1916–2015), Max Walter Svanberg (19–1994), and Gudrun Åhlberg-Kriland (1921–2104). *Surrealistisk manifestation* continued the ideas espoused in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, but had an extended focus on the object. The slim, stapled exhibition catalogue features a programmatic essay by Laaban, in which he explicates Surrealism's then current position. Laaban situates the entire exhibition in the context of the movement's change in direction, and delineates the surrealist ambition to create a myth as a reaction against the bankruptcy of Christianity and the dried-out destructive myths of Western society.[38] Significantly, for both

the exhibition and Freddie's films, he also discusses a related change in the function of the surrealist object. The symbolically functioning object of the 1930s has now been replaced with the magically functioning object, Laaban explains; the latter is meant to transmit a psychic energy that allows it to interfere in the relationship between the human and the world.[39] Laaban's essay, then, posits the exhibition to be precisely the kind of political intervention in mythical life that Freddie would soon afterwards discuss in "Why Do I Paint?" The rest of the catalogue essays further enhance this politicising of myth and magic. Among them, the Swedish art critic Gunnar Hellman fiercely proclaims that: "art ought to be a punch in the face," while the British surrealist Simon Watson Taylor (1923–2005) invokes the anarchist method of 'direct action'.[40]

By including *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* in *Surrealistisk manifestation*, Freddie posited the film as part of his wider attempts at exploring the magical and mythical potential of art, with all its political ramifications. The narratively and visually sparse *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* may be seen to engage with these ambitions in two related ways. The film can be compared with Freddie's and Kriland's collaborative *Erotototemistic Object* (1949), which was on display at the show. The object is telling for the artists' incorporation of both eroticism and a characteristic surrealist appeal to the 'primitive', here in the form of the 'totem', in their exploration of the magic capacity of objects.[41] The object is provided with two rudimentary hands that seemingly signal its coming-to-life through a promise or threat of tactile interaction – possibly a poke, a touch, or an embrace – with the spectator. *Erotototemistic Object* hence positions itself as an interaction between the human body and the surrounding world, a facilitator of an experiential magic that closes the gap between reality and imagination. It signals the vibrant life of the artwork, which is in line with the poet Yves Bonnefoy's (1923–2016) contribution to the *Le Surréalisme en 1947* catalogue, in which he called for artworks to become living entities, magical interventions in material life.[42]

There is also an element of experiential magic in the film's disjunctive, bodily, and uncomfortable depiction of correspondences. In his 1951 essay, "As in a Wood," Breton lauds the film medium precisely for its capacity to trigger "the mechanism of correspondences."[43] But whereas Breton suggests that this potential stems from film's capacity for editing and montage, Freddie employs different strategies. He lets the movements of the tongue and the temporal unfolding of seasonal changes anchor the body and the surrounding world in a rhythmical relationship. In that way, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* suggests a magical connection, a correspondence, between the rhythms of the body and those of nature. *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* thus approaches the notion, so prevalent in esotericism, that there is a bond between microcosm and macrocosm, which means that they are intimately connected to each other and mutually affect one another. But if there is such a bond in Freddie's film, the depiction is far from harmonious. The grotesque nature of the mouth combined with the alterations between moving images and inserted collages undercut any tendencies towards an unequivocally benign relationship between the human and the natural world. With its darkly humorous confusion of the human and the world, *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* resonates with Walter Benjamin's idea of Surrealism as a state of 'profane illumination', which, in the words of Janine Mileaf, "describes the merging of the self with the world through a dialectical intoxication that is both terrifying and exhilarating."[44] Surrealists have indeed long seen the imagination as a means to blur the distinction between subject and object,

to resolve, in the words of poet Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), "the antinomy of self and other and that of the Ego and the World."[45] Freddie's film pertains to such an ambition. The drama of the cosmos and the everyday that plays out in the film, however, does not exactly replicate Freddie's holistic view of the capacities held by the surrealist myth. The relation that *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* posits between the human and the world is rather fraught with a dark eroticism and a black humour, the roots of which seem to stretch down into the murkier waters of the unconscious. As we will see, this tension is even more pronounced in *Eaten Horizons*.

Occult Iconography in *Eaten Horizons*

Eaten Horizons was made under considerably better conditions than *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss*. Now, the production company Cimbria Films in Copenhagen put their studio and materials at Freddie and Roos' disposal.[46] With its three and a half minutes, *Eaten Horizons* is almost twice as long as its predecessor, and considerably more complex in terms of its narrative. Freddie and Roos also utilise camera movement, crosscutting, interior and exterior locations, and even a brief sequence of stop-motion animation. The scenography may be sparse, but the film is dense with poetic juxtapositions, bodily and material transformations, and a playful but convoluted symbolism, of both esoteric and mock-religious gravity. The soundtrack, too, is more complex than in the preceding film; its jarring sounds, including occasional bursts of music, alternately work with and disrupt the rich visuals. Groaning and chanting voices intermittently contribute to create a ritualistic atmosphere, but their grainy and thick sonority renders it impossible to make out more than a few specific words.

   The credits announce that *Eaten Horizons* is "a film about love and its annihilation in complete happiness." The film is divided into two sections. Following the credits, it opens on a medium close-up of a woman with her arms stretched out, fettered to a wall with strips of paper or cloth. In a close-up, a hand with two signs painted on it traces two circles and a triangle in a puddle of glistening black fluid. The hand having wiped out the symbols, the second sequence begins as a dissolve leads to a room with two filthy-looking men, seated and talking amongst themselves. One of them raises a glass with an unspecified drink. The camera tilts and reveals that the other man has one bare, and dirty, foot placed on a loaf of bread lying on the floor. In a centred close-up, a sharp light illuminates the bread until, suddenly, it disappears, leaving the man's foot suspended in mid-air. A dissolve takes us to an empty street, where a cut reveals a broad, dark, tripartite door, stained with a fluid that the commentary reveals to be dog piss.[47] The door is ajar, and the camera pans slowly to the right. In the darkness inside, the bread lies illuminated on the floor. A cut follows, to the bread lying on an ornate silver platter, before another cut shows it between the breasts of a naked woman, whose torso is shown at an angle. With the camera placed in the position of her head, two illuminated white rectangles appear over her raised knees. Next, the two men approach the woman and remove the bread from her chest. They roll her over onto her stomach, and proceed to lift a surgically precise rectangle of skin from her back. Underneath it, a substance appears which resembles lava, excrements, or mincemeat bubbles, as if boiling. Using teaspoons, the two men solemnly eat the substance. When they are finished, one of them pulls up his right sleeve and reaches down into the hole in the woman's back, from which he pulls out the loaf of

bread. A jarring cut follows to what looks like a narrow white room or the inside of a box. A ball bounces frantically, and suddenly the faces of several children appear, collaged onto the side and back walls. After a fade to black, the loaf of bread comes into view through a dissolve. Stop-motion animated, it rotates slightly jerkily in a medium close-up; after a cut to an extreme close-up, it opens in half, and the substance from the woman's back pours out of it.

Michael Richardson remarks that reflections on *Eaten Horizons* can hardly explain the experience of watching it, nor "dispel its mystery."[48] To Steen Colding's question whether Freddie is "making an appeal to what is most profound within us, or is he making fun of us," he replies that Freddie's films rather ought to be considered to be nonsensical and overflowing with meaning at the same time.[49] J. H. Matthews' more categorical proposition that any interpretation of the film would be as valid as any other is, however, exaggerated.[50] It is certainly possible to extract more precise meaning from parts of *Eaten Horizons*; what they are not likely to do, however, is to gel into a coherent whole. In "Why Do I Paint?", Freddie proclaims: "I want to be a priest in a temple where there is no altar, no god, no sinners and no saints, but where the gospel will be a constant proclamation of the divine in man."[51] The surrealist film critic Robert Benayoun describes *Eaten Horizons* in similar terms, as "an operation of high magic, a sublime rite of which Freddie has made himself the masked priest."[52] There is indeed a particularly ritualistic atmosphere in *Eaten Horizons*, which emanates precisely from Freddie's irreverent play with religious as well as esoteric allusions. There is, however, nothing here resembling any fixed doctrine; instead, the effect is a taunting sense of meaning, at once profound and silly.

The Magic Circle and the Tarot

The first sequence in *Eaten Horizons* employs occult iconography in its conjuring of a mysterious ritual. The editing, cutting between the decorated hand that draws a circle in the black fluid and the woman fastened to the wall and opening her eyes, creates a link between these so that the actions of the hand seem to be what causes the woman's eyes to open. This first sequence in the film is visually sparse, but it contains two symbolically charged esoteric references. Combined, these do much to clarify Freddie's employment of esotericism towards the construction of a new myth.

In his commentary, Freddie describes the geometrical pattern that takes shape in the puddle of black liquid, in a typically poetic but vague way, as "the magic sign, which is the picture of torture – and of delight."[53] Similar geometrical figures feature prominently in Freddie's paintings during his esoteric period. Laaban describes their function to be to focus and intensify the artworks' magical and erotic energies.[54] This function rhymes well with the erotic ritual that is *Eaten Horizons*, too. But here, what Laaban calls the "lethal geometry" of Freddie's figures does not just act as an agent of concentration of desire.[55] As Freddie's description of the pattern as a 'magic sign' suggests, it is also a more specific esoteric reference. We can glean its nature by turning to one of the French surrealists' most important sources of knowledge about earlier esotericism, the nineteenth-century occultist Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875).[56] One of Lévi's most important works is the two-volume *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1854–1856), translated into English as *Transcendental Magic*, where the author pursues a synthesis of several esoteric currents in order to form his own occultist doctrine.[57] From the 1940s onwards, Breton

referred on several occasions to both this tome and Lévi's similarly eclectic *History of Magic* (1860).[58] The 'magic sign' in *Eaten Horizons* strongly resembles an illustration of a Goetic magic circle, which is featured in *Transcendental Magic*.[59] The version in *Eaten Horizons* is admittedly stylised and simplified in comparison, an inevitable effect, most likely, of it being traced in a viscous fluid, with all that this entails in lack of precision and detail. Crucially, though, it retains the central feature of two circles enclosing a triangle. Freddie's written commentary supports this identification of the symbolic meaning of the geometrical pattern. Following the aforementioned reference to the magic sign, he evokes "BAEL, ASTAROTH, FORAS!"[60] Richardson argues that Freddie here calls on pre-Christian fertility gods, but the iconographic and textual context indicates that, rather, he references demons.[61] While Bael and Astaroth are indeed the names of two Canaanite gods of fertility, they are also prominent names in demonology.[62] So is, crucially, Foras, or Forras. If we take all three names into account, it then seems evident that Freddie is actually appealing to them in their demonic guise, as it is described in the *Goetia*. The Goetic magic circle is intended to enable the magician to call on demons, and the demons the *Goetia* lists all have specific capacities that can be drawn on.[63] Hence, in *Eaten Horizons*, the magic circle appears to be intended to call forth the demons listed in the commentary. Freddie, however, is not likely to have intended this ritual to actually help him enlist the aid of demons. Instead, the reference to Goetic magic fulfils an arguably polyvalent function, as a general evocation of occult powers and as a more specifically surrealist call for a liberation of the imagination; as much is suggested if we turn to the hand that draws the magic circle.

Læssøe and Richardson both claim that the two signs drawn on the hand are a scorpion and a sun.[64] Closer inspection, however, reveals that the stylised animal cannot reasonably be a scorpion, since it lacks a tail. In fact, it looks more like a crayfish. And once we realise that, the 'sun' accompanying the crayfish is more likely to be a depiction of a moon. For the crayfish is an important element in the tarot card the Moon, at the bottom of which it crawls out of the murky water, while the moon itself is often depicted with prominent rays similar to those that emanate from the celestial body on the hand in *Eaten Horizons*. Together, the two signs on the hand then form a reference to the tarot Moon card, the eighteenth card in the tarot's Major Arcana. Freddie's commentary once again supports this interpretation, since he writes that the ritual enacted by the tarot-painted hand refers to an act of bringing the woman closer to the moon.[65] According to the occultist Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942), the Moon card signifies the life of the imagination as it is set apart from the guiding spirit.[66] The crayfish is central here: it scuttles up from the dank waters as a manifestation of unleashed unconscious forces that threaten to erupt and destroy order and reason; the moon itself symbolises mere reflected light, as opposed to the sun's own luminosity. In Lévi's occultism, the Moon card and the Goetic magic circle pertain to similar dark forces. If the transgressive elements in *Eaten Horizons* – such as the act of love depicted as a cannibalistic rite – result from the initial ritual, they are dependent on the Moon card and the magic circle.

That would indicate that Freddie employs his esoteric references irreverently, in opposition to Lévi's occultism. For Lévi, the imagination needs to be guarded to ensure that it does not beget disastrous consequences. "To preserve ourselves against evil influences, the first condition is therefore to forbid excitement to the imagination," he writes.[67] It is easy to see why a mischievous surrealist like Freddie, indeed

Surrealism overall, would turn the signifiers of an excited imagination against such a strict doctrine. Nevertheless, Freddie's appeal to demons and the Moon card does not just oppose Lévi's metaphysical distinction between good and evil forms of the imagination. It also means that *Eaten Horizons* relates in an uneasy and troubling way to the surrealist search for a new myth, and that it contributes to its formation in a way that departs in significant ways from the ideals put forward by Breton. Freddie's reference to the tarot indeed diverges notably from the benign and healing qualities often ascribed to it in Surrealism at the time. In *Arcanum 17* (1945), Breton makes the Star card emblematic for the healing and rebirth he envisions for the war-torn world.[68] In his 1947 painting *The Surrealist*, Brauner transforms the Magician, the first card of the major arcana, into a figure that, as Daniel Zamani puts it, is "an almost utopian display of cosmic harmony."[69] *Eaten Horizons*, however, does not so much contradict as intervenes in the surrealist probing of a new myth. For if the film undeniably negates Lévi's caution against the excitement of the imagination, there are more complicated aspects of its seemingly fraught relation with the immediate post-war surrealist ideas of art as a means towards a utopian rebirth, including those espoused by Freddie himself.

A Non-Moses Morality

We can approach some further aspects of the problem regarding the relation between the monstrous imagination and the constructive aims of post-war Surrealism if we turn to the scholar of the history of esotericism Antoine Faivre and his discussion of Surrealism's relation to the esoteric *vis imaginativa*. In Faivre's words, the *vis imaginativa* can be "understood as an ability to act upon Nature," and the term hence designates the esoteric conviction that the primacy of the imagination renders it a way towards altering the world through new imaginative conceptualisations.[70] Referencing Breton's writings, Faivre comes to the conclusion that, on the one hand, the surrealist beliefs that "the imaginary is that which tends to become real" and that analogy can restore lost connections with the world, compare favourably with the *vis imaginativa*. But on the other hand, he points out that Surrealism's lack of the earlier esotericists' adherence to a fixed religious myth puts them at a critical distance from the esoteric view of the imagination. The esotericists Faivre references, and this applies just as well to Lévi, adhere to an idiosyncratic interpretation of Christianity, and they distinguish between two kinds of imagination: "the true, creative in the noble sense, which creates works but can also call forth things magically, and the false, the inauthentic and sterile that is sometimes capable of begetting real and concrete monsters."[71] In this sense, the *vis imaginativa* partially builds on deeply ingrained Western fears of the negative powers of the imagination.[72] In line with Lévi's earlier quoted caution, the imagination, as Faivre describes their understanding of it, ought not to be liberated, but rather constrained and cultivated according to moral dictates.

The surrealist attitude is, however, somewhat more complicated than Faivre's demarcation suggests. While Faivre is certainly right in claiming that Surrealism lacks grounding in a pre-established myth, the new myth it sought to cultivate in the post-war era is nevertheless built on strong moral convictions. The surrealist myth can rather be posited as a counter-moral that, unlike the Christian esotericists that Faivre discusses, seeks to dispense with religious morality in order to create what the 1947 tract "Inaugural Rupture" describes as a "non-Moses morality."[73] Such a moral

underpinning cannot least be seen in Breton's *Arcanum 17*, in which he appeals for the reversal of the poles of Western culture, so that magic may be privileged over science, intuition over reason, woman over man.[74] He then also taps into the overall sense that, as Marco Pasi describes, 'the occult' may be revolutionary since it opposes the reigning order and offers "sometimes radically alternative ways of conceiving society, politics, and the self."[75] Here, Surrealism and the occult join hands in their attempts to destabilise conformist thought and behaviour, and to explore new venues for the creative imagination. In its artistic practice, Surrealism also has a gleeful penchant for calling forth monsters through the imagination – for examples of that, we do not need to look further than to the assemblage of pianos and rotting donkeys pulled by priests that form one of the centrepieces in Luis Buñuel's (1900–1983) and Salvador Dalí's (1904–1989) *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), to the animal-headed creatures that enchant and disturb Ernst's collages, or to Hans Bellmer's (1902–1975) libidinal reconfigurations of the body in the various iterations of his *Pouppée*. Alongside Freddie's films, these examples suggest that the surrealist liberation of the imagination is by definition integral, and transcends the distinction between the monstrous and the marvellous – here, the monstrous *is* the marvellous.[76] That did not stop with the horrors of the war, no matter how much the surrealists sought to direct healing powers through the attempt to form a new myth.

My point here is that even if the surrealists believed the new myth to be a possible way towards a renewal and rebirth under the sign of more wholesome values, they nevertheless perceived a necessity to give the imagination free rein. Even the imagination's monstrous products could work towards this new myth. We need to make a distinction between programmatic expressions of the intended effect of the new myth, and the artistic investigations of its contours, as it was carried out in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and as Freddie continued to do in his films. And when it comes to the question of love, Breton himself, in his *Conversations* with André Parinaud, clarifies that the surrealist exaltation of love always recognises the necessary dialectic between purity and perversion, and that "it's this dialectical process that made Sade's genius shine for them like a black sun."[77] If love were only to stay in the high domains, Breton says, it would become 'rarefied'. He continues:

> Such a flame's admirable, blinding light must not be allowed to conceal what it feeds on, the deep mine shafts criss-crossed by hellish currents, which nonetheless permit us to extract its substance – a substance that must continue to fuel this flame if we don't want it to go out. It's because Surrealism started from this viewpoint that it has made such an effort to lift the taboos that bar us from freely treating the sexual world, and *all* of the sexual world, perversions included.[78]

In the light of Breton's statement, *Eaten Horizons* may be construed as a myth of the unfettered imagination and its relationship with eroticism, which it fuels by imagining new constellations of desire. But the surrealist new myth does not merely work through such narrative crystallisations. It is also intended to foster a certain sensibility. The surrealist new myth was bound up with the increased focus on analogies and correspondences in Breton's thought at the time, hence the rebirth the surrealists sought for society can be understood to also be intended to unleash analogical thinking. Here, esotericism was inspirational for its innate reliance on correspondences and, with it, new experiential structures. Insight in the interconnectedness of all things, then, may well have a utopian potential, but for a surrealist like Freddie, it arises through an

engagement with the imagination in its cruel and coarse as well as its benign capacities. *The Definite Rejection of a Request for a Kiss* and *Eaten Horizons* are the most direct extensions to the film medium of the surrealist change in direction towards myth and magic. Freddie utilises the film medium in order to present a particularly complex life of the artwork, in which movement and sound contribute to a ritualistic atmosphere that is both erotic and esoteric. The films' political provenance is far less explicit, but as we have seen, their very invocation of correspondences between the human and the surrounding world, and of a myth of the unfettered imagination, tie in with Surrealism's freethinking approach to politics at the time.

Notes

 1 André Breton, "Projet initial," in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, eds. André Breton and Marcel Duchamps (Paris: Galerie Maeght, 1947), 135.
 2 Rolf Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie* (Copenhagen: Fogtdal, 1996), 139.
 3 Wilhelm Freddie, "Why Do I Paint? [Broadcast in 1950]," in *Wilhelm Freddie: Stick the Fork in Your Eye!*, eds. Sven Bjerkhof et al. (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2009), 248.
 4 Michael Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," in Bjerkhof et al., *Wilhelm Freddie*, 146; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159–60.
 5 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 287–88.
 6 Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 246.
 7 Ibid., 246–47.
 8 André Breton, "Surrealist Comet" [1947], in *Free Rein* [1953], trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 95. Italics removed.
 9 Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 248.
10 See Tessel Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2014); Gavin Parkinson, *Futures of Surrealism: Myth, Science Fiction and Fantastic Art in France 1936–1969* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015); Patrick Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism: Origins, Magic, and Secret Societies* [2012], trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2014).
11 See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Esotericism," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff with Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek, and Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 33–34.
12 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 233–39.
13 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Notion of 'Occult Sciences' in the Wake of the Enlightenment," in *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, eds. Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Renko Geffarth, and Markus Meumann (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 73–95.
14 André Breton, *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* [1952], trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 229.
15 Evan Maurer, "Dada and Surrealism," in *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. William Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 535–93; Parkinson, *Futures of Surrealism*, 85.
16 Amanda Stansell, "Surrealist Racial Politics at the Borders of 'Reason': Whiteness, Primitivism and Négritude," in *Surrealism, Politics and Culture*, eds. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).
17 For overviews, see Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*; and Bjerkhof et al., *Wilhelm Freddie*.
18 See Mikkel Bolt, "Freddie's Avant-Garde Strategies," in Bjerkhof et al., *Wilhelm Freddie*, 124–35.
19 Gösta Adrian-Nilsson, "Kubism – Surrealism," in *Wilhelm Freddie och Sverige*, ed. Folke Lalander (Norrköping: Norrköpings konstmuseum, 1986), 17 ["en fanatiker, en anarkist, med bomber i fickan".].

20 Birger Raben-Skov, Mette Houlberg Rung, and Dorthe Aagesen, "Biography," in Bjerkhof et al., *Wilhelm Freddie*, 219.
21 Rune Gade, "All That We Do Not Know," in Bjerkhof et al., *Wilhelm Freddie*, 116–19.
22 Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 69–70.
23 Ibid., 118–20.
24 See ibid., 126–37; Palle Schmidt, *Wilhelm Freddie – den evige oprører* (Copenhagen: Chr. Ericsens forlag, 1976), 38–41.
25 Parts of the letter are published as Breton, "Projet initial." For the entire letter, see Breton, "Lettre d'invitations aux participants," accessed September 24, 2015, www.andrebreton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100837330.
26 Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 141.
27 Ibid.
28 Aagesen, "Stick the Fork in Your Eye," 33; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 143.
29 Ibid., 139.
30 Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 244.
31 André Breton with Gérard Legrand, *L'Art magique* [1957] (Paris: Editions Phébus, 1991).
32 See Breton, *Free Rein*, 95–96.
33 Ibid., 104–107, 240.
34 See José Pierre, "Wilhelm Freddie ou le triomphe de l'humour noir," in *Freddie*, ed. Birger Raben-Skov (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 1989), 24–66.
35 Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
36 Raben-Skov et al., "Biography," 219.
37 See Ragnar von Holten, *Surrealismen i svensk konst* (Stockholm: Sveriges allmänna konstförening, 1969), 126–28; Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 151–59.
38 Ilmar Laaban, [no title], in *Surrealistisk manifestation: Expo Aleby*, Stockholm, 1949, n. p.
39 Ibid.
40 Gunnar Hellman, [no title], in *Surrealistisk manifestation*, n. p; Simon Watson Taylor, "Ett stänk intellektuellt blod," in *Surrealistisk manifestation*, n. p.
41 See Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 156.
42 Yves Bonnefoy, "Donner à vivre," in Breton and Duchamp, *Le Surréalisme*, 66. See also Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 143–45.
43 Breton, *Free Rein*, 238, 240.
44 Walter Benjamin, *Reflections Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 2007), 177–92; Janine Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects After the Readymade* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 154.
45 Aimé Césaire, "Poetry and Knowledge," in *Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean*, ed. Michael Richardson, trans. Richardson and Krzysztof Fijalkowski (London: Verso, 1996), 140.
46 Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 159.
47 Freddie, "Eaten Horizons: A Film," in *Wilhelm Freddie*, ed. Steen Colding (Copenhagen: Bjerregård-Jensen, 1962), 96.
48 Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 146.
49 Ibid.
50 J. H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1971), 122.
51 Freddie, "Why Do I Paint?," 245.
52 Robert Benayoun, "Une Boulimie de l'absolu," in Colding, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 73.
53 Freddie, "Eaten Horizons," 96.
54 Laaban, "Den tidige Freddie," in Lalander, *Wilhelm Freddie och Sverige*, 9.
55 Ibid., 11 ["livsfarliga geometri"].
56 See Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult*, 183–84.
57 See Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), 141*ff*.
58 See André Breton, *Arcanum 17* [1945], trans. Zack Rogow and with an introduction by Anna Balakian (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004), 118–19; Breton, *L'Art magique*, 34.

59 Eliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual* [1854/56], trans. Arthur Edward Waite (London: George Redway, 1896), 299.

60 Freddie, "Eaten Horizons," 96.

61 Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 145.

62 See *The Goetia: The Lesser Key of Solomon the King; Clavicula Salomonis Regis*, ed. Samuel Lidell MacGregor Mathers (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1997).

63 Ibid., 27–66.

64 Læssøe, *Wilhelm Freddie*, 162; Richardson, "The Density of a Smile," 144. Læssøe only mentions the scorpion.

65 Freddie, "Eaten Horizons," 96.

66 Arthur Edward Waite, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* [1911] (Mineola: Dover, 2005), 70.

67 Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*, 333.

68 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 131–32. See also Daniel Zamani's discussion of *Arcanum 17* and its deployment of tarot symbolism in his contribution to this volume.

69 Daniel Zamani, "The Magician Triumphant: Occultism and Political Resistance in Victor Brauner's *Le Surréaliste* (1947)," *Abraxas. International Journal of Esoteric Studies*, special issue 1 (Summer 2013): 108.

70 Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rohne (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 99.

71 Ibid., 124.

72 See Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

73 Adolphe Acker et al., "Inaugural Rupture," in *Surrealism against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, ed. and trans. Richardson and Fijalkowski (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 48.

74 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 80–81.

75 Marco Pasi, "Coming Forth by Night," in *Options with Nostrils*, ed. Alexis Vaillant (Berlin: Sternberg, 2010), 105–06.

76 The marvellous is a central but often vaguely defined concept within Surrealism. For a discussion of the marvellous with particular reference to the esoterically informed surrealist Pierre Mabille, see Kristoffer Noheden, "Leonora Carrington, Surrealism, and Initiation: Symbolic Death and Rebirth in *Little Francis* and *Down Below*," *Correspondences* 2, no. 1 (2014): 51–53.

77 Breton, *Conversations*, 11.

78 Ibid.

Plate I Hélène Smith, *Martian Landscape*, 1896–1899. Drawing. Bibliothèque de Genève. Ms. fr. 7843/3, plate 2.
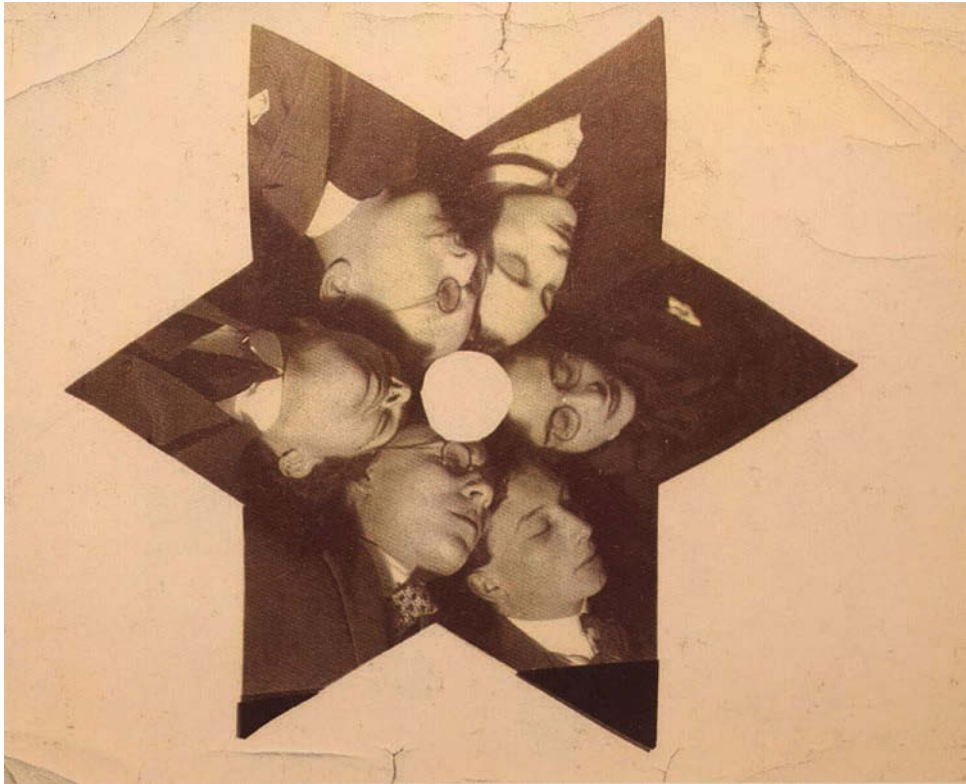
Plate II Anon., *Les Phrères simplistes*, 1924. Fonds Roger Vailland. Médiathèque Elisabeth and Roger Vailland, Bourg-en-Bresse.

Plate III Josef Šíma, *Portrait of Roger Gilbert-Lecomte*, 1929. Oil on canvas. Musée des beaux-arts de la ville de Reims.

Photo: © C. Devleeschauwer.

Plate IV Antonin Artaud, *Paule aux ferrets*, 24 May 1947. Lead graphite and coloured chalk on paper. Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Plate V Kurt Seligmann, *Vanity of the Ancestors*, 1940–1943. Oil on panel. Private Collection, courtesy Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco. © 2017 The Seligmann Center at the Orange County Citizens Foundation.

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Plate VI Kurt Seligmann, *L'Alchimie de la peinture*, 1955. Oil on canvas. Collection of Amy and Eric Huck. © 2017 The Seligmann Center at the Orange County Citizens Foundation.
Photo: © Nicholas Pishvanov.

Plate VII Ithell Colquhoun, *Scylla*, 1938. Oil on canvas. Tate Modern, London. © Samaritans, © Noise Abatement Society & © Spire Healthcare, 2017.
Photo: © Tate, London 2017.

Plate VIII Leonora Carrington, *Are You Really Syrious?*, 1953. Oil on three-ply. Collection of Miguel S. Escobedo © 2017 Estate of Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
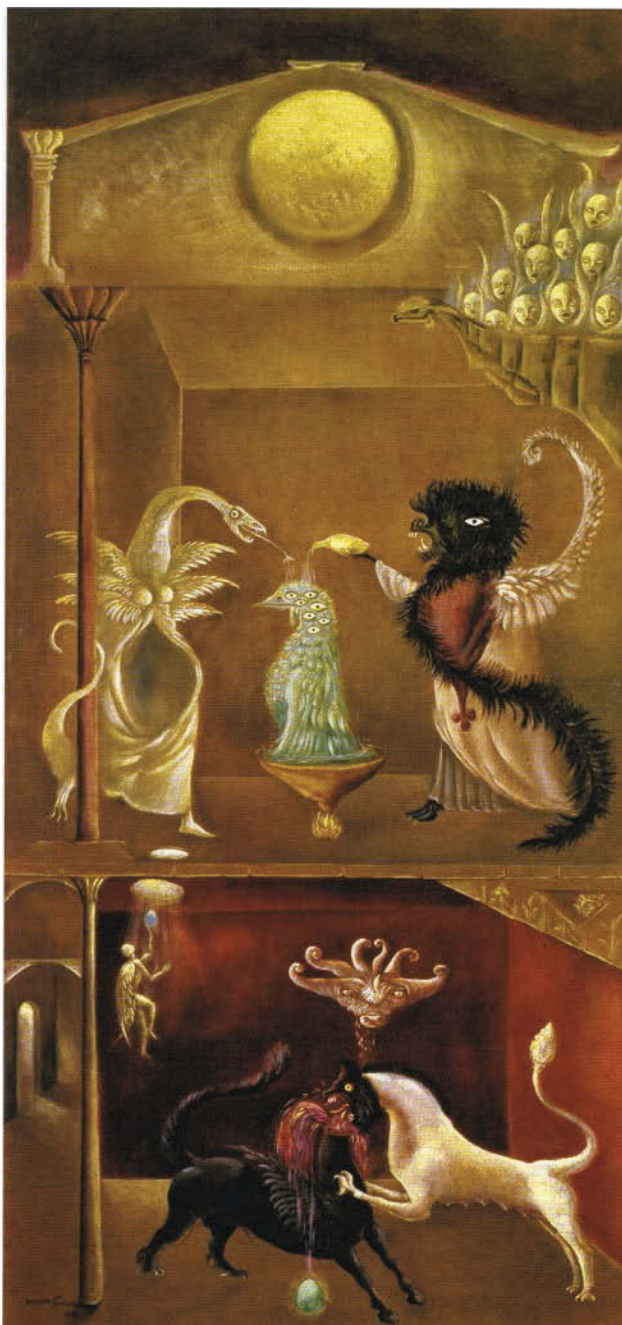
Plate IX Leonora Carrington, *Sacrament at Minos*, 1954. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.
© 2017 Estate of Leonora Carrington / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

Plate X Remedios Varo, *Creation of the Birds*, 1957. Oil on masonite. Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City. © The Estate of Remedios Varo.

Source: *Remedios Varo. Catálogo razonado / Catalogue raisonné*, edited by Walter Gruen and Ricardo Ovalle, México: Era, 2008.

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Plate XI Remedios Varo, *Harmony (Suggestive Self-Portrait)*, 1956. Oil on masonite. Private Collection. © The Estate of Remedios Varo.

Source: *Remedios Varo. Catálogo razonado / Catalogue raisonné*, edited by Walter Gruen and Ricardo Ovalle, México: Era, 2008.

Plate XII Remedios Varo, *Witch going to the Sabbath*, 1957. Mixed media on paper. Private
Collection. © The Estate of Remedios Varo.
Source: *Remedios Varo. Catálogo razonado / Catalogue raisonné*, edited by Walter Gruen and Ricardo
Ovalle, México: Era, 2008.

Plate XIII Sylvia Fein, *The Lady Magician*, 1954. Egg tempera on masonite. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison, lent by the artist and William Scheuber (4.2005.11).

Plate XIV Gerrie Gutmann, *The Theft*, 1952. Casein on masonite. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of David and Jeanne Carlson. © Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Collection David & Jeanne Carlson, Rancho Mirage, CA.
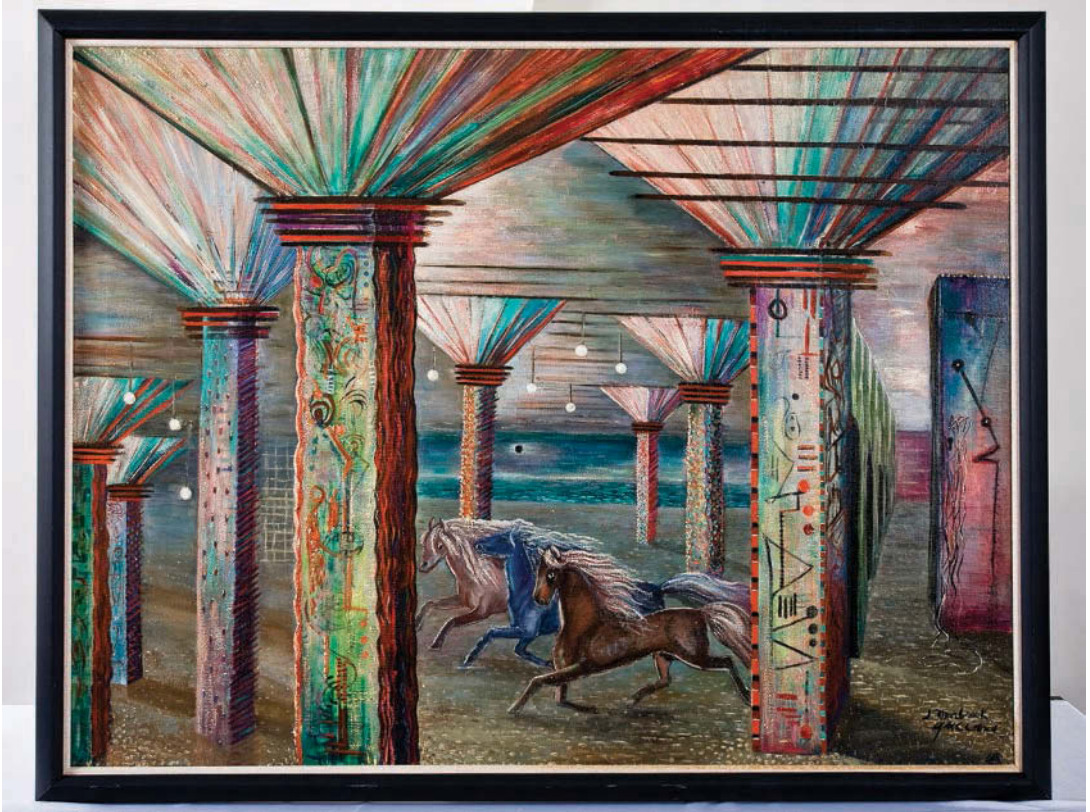
Plate XV Juanita Guccione, *The Race*, c. 1951. Oil on canvas. © Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco.

Plate XVI Marjorie Cameron, *Untitled*, n.d. Coloured pencil on paper. Marjorie Cameron Foundation, Los Angeles.

7 Disenchanted Ground, or Antonin Artaud, Vincent van Gogh and Magic in 1947

Gavin Parkinson

In his book *L'Art magique* (1957), André Breton called Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) "the type of magician 'who fails' in spite of the splendour of his wheat fields and skies baked from the same enamel."[1] He went on to lament that, however maladroit, van Gogh's magical practice had not enticed early twentieth-century artists to follow the example of that artist's generation into 'magic art' – the Fauves were merely decorative 'incompetents'.[2] Van Gogh's 'failure' was evident to Breton in all but a handful of paintings such as the almost cartoonishly metaphorical *Gauguin's Chair* (1888) (Figure 7.1), and acutely so in the stubborn miserabilism that his work disclosed: "the interminable and sorrowful vibration of his vision," as he called it, that came from his powerlessness to "transform and annul traumas" through his art, by contrast with the magical capacity of Paul Gauguin's painting to achieve precisely that.[3] On this point, Breton was declaring a difference from Alfred Jarry (1873–1907) whose novel, *Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician*, had identified van Gogh as nothing less than a modern alchemist.[4]

   The spread of van Gogh's popularity in the twentieth century had surely been assisted by the acclaim heaped by Surrealism on the art of the insane in stark contrast with the crude scepticism van Gogh's work had earlier received from contemporaries such as Paul Signac (1863–1935), for its supposedly symptomatic betrayal of the pitiable mental state of its creator.[5] However, Breton's harsh verdict that van Gogh had "made the high walls of appearance collapse before him" then been unable "to survey the beyond of their ruins" – a conclusion obviously reached through negative comparison with the mentally ill artists he admired – had already been answered ten years earlier by his former surrealist comrade Antonin Artaud (1896–1948) in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*, in which the artist is spoken of glowingly in esoteric terms.[6] This was the ardent tract of 1947 that Breton himself would describe in an interview two years after *L'Art magique* as Artaud's "*hyperlucid* work, the incontestable masterpiece" of his writing life.[7] Artaud's book was written over the period during which Breton and the surrealists were preparing the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, dedicated to magic and esotericism, and it was shaped partly by Artaud's opposition to that event. Breton must have been aware of this but never mentioned it, and it has escaped commentators on Artaud and Surrealism to this day. In this chapter, I trace the ambivalent shadow cast across *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* by the long-awaited 'occultation' of Surrealism.

Figure 7.1 Vincent van Gogh, *Gauguin's Chair*, 1888. Oil on canvas. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. © Vincent van Gogh Foundation.

Re-enchanting Artaud

On 25 May 1946, the very day Breton arrived back at the port of Le Havre following his enforced stay in America during the Second World War, Artaud was relocated to the Hospice d'Ivry in Paris from the asylum of Paraire in Rodez in the south of France. Artaud had been kept there since February 1943, undergoing over fifty sessions of appalling electro-shock treatment following his mental collapse in September 1937, also in Le Havre, and previous internment in three psychiatric institutions.[8]

After a long silence by Breton from the moment of Artaud's confinement, the two met up at the beginning of June 1946. Artaud's renewed correspondence with Breton of the time already served up the theme of *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* where it states: "It is a fact that I am anti-social, but is that society's fault or mine [*sic*]."[9] Breton agreed to give an address in a tribute event for Artaud on 7 June 1946, only a few days after his return to Paris, at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt.[10] He did not

mention these various coincidences of time and place, but he must have noticed their correspondence with his theory of "convulsive beauty" as set out in *Mad Love* (1937), for it was one of that theory's three conditions, namely "magic-circumstantial," denoting a meaningful encounter, which marked the reawakening of Breton's relations with Artaud. However, it was its exact opposite – a missed encounter, on the theoretical plane in this case – that would soon bring two quite differently struck chords of disenchantment to Artaud's appraisals of post-war Surrealism on the one hand, and the art of van Gogh on the other, and I will trace their affinity here.

Keen to rekindle interest in Surrealism in Paris after five years away, Breton reminded his audience at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt of Artaud's brief passage through Surrealism at its beginnings in the mid-1920s. He went on to confess that in his own memory of that time, "it is the personality of Antonin Artaud that stands out in its dark magnificence" and to admit that Artaud could claim sole responsibility for the third issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, which "among all the other issues, is the one that reaches the highest phosphorescent point."[11] That was not to say that Artaud was the most surrealist of the surrealists, even though Artaud himself had declared as much in a letter back in 1924; in fact, Breton regretted the lack of restraint espoused in that number of the journal.[12]

Not long after that incendiary publication, Artaud had stated his not unrelated indifference to the politics of the surrealists. Some of the group began to turn towards Communism in 1925 through reflection on the question of colonialism, and subsequent alliances took place between *La Révolution surréaliste* and the pro-communist magazine and group *Clarté* as well as *L'Humanité*, the review of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF).[13] Although they moved further in the direction of Communism towards the end of that year, the surrealists did not join the PCF with the exception of Pierre Naville (1904–1993), who contended that the surrealist revolution of the mind was unattainable prior to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and insisted that the surrealists clarify their priorities.[14] Breton responded late in 1926 in the well-known text "In Self-Defense," refusing to see a separation between the revolution of the mind being plotted by Surrealism and the one in society being prepared by Communism.[15] However, Artaud did see a distinction, breaking with the surrealists at the beginning of the series of decisive meetings in November and December with the *Clarté* group that would end in the adherence of several of the surrealists to the PCF in 1926/27. For him, revolt was apolitical, "individual and spiritual," not collective and social.[16] He was attacked for his troubles in the surrealist tract *Au grand jour* in May 1927 (to which he responded the following month on the basis that "all the exacerbation of our quarrel revolves around the word 'Revolution'"),[17] and for good measure by Breton in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930) for "looking for lucre and notoriety" by dabbling in commercial film and theatre.[18]

Artaud's interest in Buddhism and especially the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or *Bardo Thodol* went back to his time with the surrealists. Furthermore, in his response to *Au grand jour*, Artaud had said "Surrealism was never anything else than a new sort of magic to me," continuing "[l]et the occult's thick walls crumble down once and for all on these incapable gabblers."[19] Beyond this, his earliest full expression of a curiosity about esotericism can be found in "Witchcraft and the Cinema" of about 1928, which imagines a "whole occult life" made available by the cinema where images "probe … for hitherto unused possibilities in the depths of the mind."[20] However, he only began reading consistently on Gnosticism, Eastern mysticism and religion, occultism,

alchemy and magic around 1933 at the time of writing *Heliogabalus or the Crowned Anarchist* (1934). Although he remained critical in the 1930s of the movement's adoption of politics, Artaud understood the *idea* of Surrealism positively and retrospectively through his reading of such sources while viewing its on-going political involvement with the movement Contre-attaque led by Georges Bataille (1897–1962) as further evidence of its regression.[21]

This interpretation is manifested in his Mexico City lecture, "Surréalisme et revolution" of 26 February 1936, given early in his stay in Mexico, which took place from February through October that year, and also in one of the texts he wrote in August on the sculptor Luis Ortiz Monasterio:

> [T]he mystery of Surrealism … has been a hidden mystique. A new genre of occultism, and like every hidden mystique it is expressed allegorically … To reconnect with the secret of things, Surrealism had opened a path. Like the Unknown God of the Cabirian Mysteries, like the Aïn Souph [Ein Sof or Ayn Sof], the living hole of abysses in the Kabbalah, as for the Nothing, the Void, the Non-Being devourer of nothingness of the ancient Brahmas and Vedas, we can say of Surrealism what it is not, but in order to say what it is we must employ approximations and images. It resuscitates, by a kind of incantation in the void, the spirit of the ancient allegories.[22]
>
> Surrealism seeks a higher reality and, to attain it, destroys temporary forms in quest of what in the language of the ancient Vedas is called the *Non-Manifested* … Imbeciles have called the Surrealist movement destructive. It is undoubtedly destructive of transitory and imperfect forms, but this is because it is looking beyond forms for the occult and magical presence of a fascinating reality.[23]

Artaud had written letters destined for France's Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Education to say he was planning the trip to Mexico because it "offers a perfect example of primitive civilisations with a magic spirit,"[24] comparing in the second of these "the secret of Mexican high magic" with the work of contemporary artists in Europe,[25] and he had published while on what he imagined to be the potential to revive the "magic soul of the ancient Mexican people" in "Les Forces occultes du Mexique."[26]

Artaud had received continued support from some surrealists after his break with the group, and his relationship with Breton had been resumed in late 1936 after an unplanned encounter. This renewed contact took place by letter and postcard, through which he also corresponded with Jacqueline Lamba (1910–93), who was then Breton's wife. In 1937, Artaud was instructed in the use of the tarot by the Catalan artist Manuel Cano de Castro (1891–1959), and this information was used in the last text he published before his internment, *The New Revelations of Being* (1937), where apocalyptic events were prophesied at a moment in European history when they were expected anyway.[27] Artaud sent Breton a copy – it was perhaps motivated by Artaud's reading of the episodes of divination recorded in *Mad Love*, which had appeared at the beginning of that year – and continued his correspondence with Lamba up to and beyond the moment he was incarcerated in September.[28] This followed his disastrous post-Mexico journey in August to the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland in possession of what he believed was a magic cane once belonging to Saint Patrick, a trip taken with the idea, as Susan Sontag put it, of "exploring or confirming his magic powers."[29]

This esoteric, self-confessedly occultist Artaud is quite dissimilar to the one formulated in the texts of French theory from the 1950s in which the post-surrealist writings of *The Theatre and its Double* (1931–6) are given pre-eminence. In 1956, in the wake of the zero degree writing or literature of 'erasure' of Samuel Beckett and the Nouveau Roman, Maurice Blanchot had already borne witness in *La Nouvelle revue française* to the "infinite proliferation of emptiness" of Artaud's texts,[30] but it was only with Michel Foucault's *History of Madness* (1961), where those writings are compared with the last ones of Friedrich Nietzsche and van Gogh's "last visions" – a comparison with the painter that Foucault took from Artaud himself – that the process of his restoration in France began in earnest.[31] He soon became extensively reintroduced to French intellectuals and their audience through the theory and culture review *Tel Quel* where "Shit to the Spirit" (1947), Artaud's attack on all intellectual, philosophical, religious and political schools, systems and tendencies including Surrealism, Marxism, Platonism and, by then, Kabbalah and Hermeticism, had already appeared in the third issue of autumn 1960, charging mind or consciousness with being "propped up by the most filthy kind of magic."[32] As I am going to demonstrate, that text was spurred by the forthcoming exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. The primacy given in *Tel Quel* to such later attacks by Artaud on esotericism, generally, and magic, specifically, already shows a different emphasis in the periodical to Surrealism, which had continued to prioritise and explore indefatigably those areas of knowledge right up to that day in its major manifestation in Paris, the *Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme* of 1959–60, titled *EROS*.

In the writings from the early 1960s by Foucault, and in *Tel Quel* and *Critique*, as in the slightly later ones they inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, emphasis is placed on the ways in which Artaud's behaviour, thought and inscription, in which the very possibility of representation is always at issue, impact our understanding of the subject by its examination of its limits and unity: the constraints of its language, writing, body and reason.[33] Although Jacques Derrida alluded briefly at one remove to the Gnostic content of Artaud's writings in "La Parole soufflé" (1965), in his reference to the demiurge, that theme is diverted from consideration of its broader occultist context (and so from a surrealist one) in Artaud's epistemology by Derrida's consideration of it as a metaphor, once again, for the self, and his conclusion that "the metaphor of myself is my dispossession within language."[34] Yet in *The Theatre and its Double*, Artaud demanded:

> We ought to consider staging from the angle of magic and enchantment, not as reflecting a script, the mere projection of actual doubles arising from writing, but as the fiery projection of all the objective results of gestures, words, sounds, music or their combinations…. a playwright who uses nothing but words is not needed and must give way to specialists in objective, animated enchantment.[35]

Indeed, Artaud had probably become interested in Gnosticism in the first place because of "a central collapse of the mind" that he attempted to represent in his early poetry, identifying it with "something that is destroying my thinking," which was subsequently less articulated than disarticulating in his writing.[36]

In that period of writing on Artaud, only Susan Sontag posed his Gnosticism in relation to Surrealism, seeing it as evidence of a "specific type of religious sensibility," and in direct contradiction with the positive and optimistic Bretonian version of

Surrealism in which the quest for improvement for and of the human race through Marxism or collective forms of anarchism insisted, in its emphasis on social harmony and justice, on limits that Artaud could never have tolerated.[37] This goes as much for the post-war Artaud of the 1940s as the one that read intensively on magic in the early 1930s. However, Sontag ignored how much his attitude towards magic had soured by the time he emerged from Rodez in 1946, and ironically, as we will see, this created a new breach between himself and an increasingly esoteric Surrealism. This is important to comprehend because the most recent scholarly work on *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* gives no evaluation of Surrealism's role in the formation of that text, yet it was from the other side of this rupture, disenchanted by both Surrealism and magic, but unable or unwilling to disengage himself fully from either, that Artaud wrote on van Gogh in 1947.[38]

Challenges and Provocations: Van Gogh, Artaud and Breton

At the end of 1946, while Artaud was organising his *Oeuvres complètes* for Gallimard, writing new poems and texts and preparing the 'comeback' performance to be called *Histoire vécue d'Artaud-Mômo. Tête à tête par Antonin Artaud, avec 3 poèmes déclamés par l'auteur,* held on 13 January 1947 at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, he received an invitation to write on van Gogh from his friend, the gallery owner and dealer Pierre Loeb, who had longstanding links with surrealists, Picasso and other artists. Artaud was too distracted by his current projects to comply, but decided to do so when Loeb made the same request again by letter after the Vieux-Colombier event. Using the exhibition *Vincent van Gogh* at the Musée de l'Orangerie to take place from 24 January till 15 March 1947 as a pretext, Loeb also enclosed a cutting from *Arts* of an extract from the book by the psychiatrist François-Joachim Beer, *Du demon de Van Gogh* (1945) (Figure 7.2).[39] Sent into a fit of rage at the 'official' diagnosis recorded there of the 'madness' of van Gogh's paintings as understood through his symptoms, and of the artist himself as a schizophrenic as read out of his physiognomy, Artaud immediately made notes towards a rebuttal (his text would open by confronting head on the alleged madness of van Gogh marked by Beer as supposedly revealed in the artist's behaviour), and agreed to Loeb's commission with little knowledge of the artist's oeuvre even though he had alluded to van Gogh in recent writings.[40]

Artaud was able to gain some familiarity with van Gogh's painting through a visit on 2 February to the Orangerie exhibition with his friend Paule Thévenin. This was the largest display of the artist's work since the massive one of June through October of 1937, listing 226 works (missed by Artaud because it coincided with his absence from Paris and subsequent incarceration), which took place within the confines of the Exposition Internationale. The Orangerie event a decade later listed 172 works in all media and meant Artaud could see paintings from every period of van Gogh's life. Even though his extremely sensitive condition did not allow an extensive perusal, he left in an excited state and immediately set about writing the text that would become *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society.* Jogging his memory with two illustrated books, the large-scale, mainly black and white volume *Vincent van Gogh* (1937) and the compact, almost entirely black and white survey *Van Gogh* of 1941, Artaud worked over the initial fragments in a partly improvised way from 8 February till 3 March, while Thévenin read aloud to him from a volume of the letters to Theo.[41] Excerpts from *Van Gogh* appeared in *Combat* in May, and it was published on or around 15 December 1947.[42]

Figure 7.2 François-Joachim Beer, "Sa folie?", in: *Arts*, no. 104, 31 (January 1947): 8.

Through the first part of the period of the writing of *Van Gogh*, Artaud had entered into an acrimonious exchange with Breton that began immediately after performing *Histoire vécue d'Artaud-Mômo* (there is a letter to Breton dated the day after the event), which was fanned by the on-going plans for Surrealism's own comeback performance that year.[43] This was *Le Surréalisme en 1947* to be held at the Galerie Maeght from 7 July till 30 September 1947, which advertised the centrality of esotericism to the movement in the post-war period through what Breton fatefully called its "initiatory" setting.[44] The visitor climbed stairs decorated with twenty-one painted spines of books important to the surrealists, corresponding to the major arcana of the tarot (minus one), leading to a sequence of heavily designed and ambiently lit rooms. First there was an upper space of works by established surrealist artists, then a Hall of Superstitions conceived by Marcel Duchamp and realised by Frederick Kiesler (1809–1965) including tribal artefacts and work by Max Ernst (1891–1976), Kiesler, Joan Miró (1893–1983), Yves Tanguy (1900–1955) and others, which was followed by a 'purification' room of falling water containing a billiard table, leading on finally to what is now the best remembered space of the exhibition in which the surrealist aspiration to supplant Christianity with a new myth was conveyed by means of twelve pagan altars (Figure 7.3) by various surrealists corresponding to the signs of the zodiac and inspired by characters in modern art and literature (taken from Breton's "Great Invisibles," the Comte de Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror* (1869),
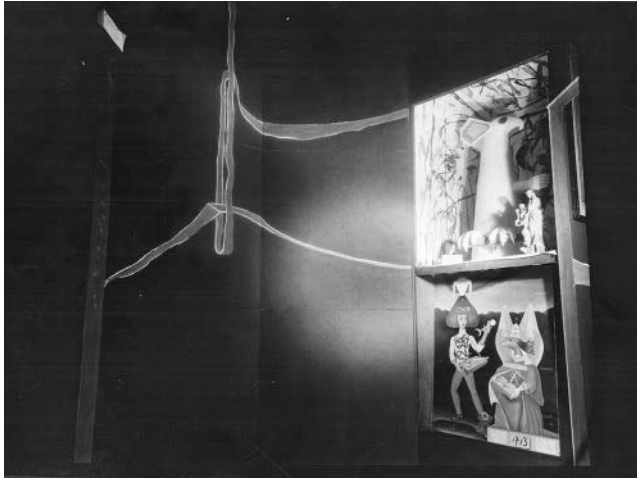
Figure 7.3 Willy Maywald, Photograph of Victor Brauner's altar taken on the occasion of the exhibition "Le Surréalisme en 1947, Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme" at the Galerie Maeght, Paris.

Duchamp's *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* or *Large Glass* (1915–1923), Ernst's personal mythology and so on).[45]

Naturally, Artaud had received from Breton the standard letter of invitation to participate in the exhibition, and one can imagine how his writing since the classic surrealist texts of 1925 *Umbilical Limbo* and *Nerve Scales* could have been represented in the conception of the Hall of Superstitions and the room of altars.[46] However, that invitation coincided with Breton's tactless statement made to Artaud that he was "hostile" towards the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier performance, and his verdict that it showed Artaud had "remain[ed] a man of the theatre."[47] This remark showed Breton's continued resistance since the days of Dada to what he felt was the trivialisation through theatricalisation of ideas and discourse; in fact, during his tribute-lecture on Artaud at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt the previous year, he had spoken of being "somewhat troubled by this new tendency, which I am discovering, to track with a circus spotlight – or to tolerate as much – some of those intellectual investigations that we used to believe were best conducted in twilight."[48] Breton's lament had its source in the *Second Manifesto*, and it constitutes a direct line to Surrealism's current preoccupations with occultism since Breton had requested there that surrealists and their contemporaries:

> stop showing off smugly in public and appearing behind the footlights. The approval of the public is to be avoided like the plague. It is absolutely essential to keep the public from *entering* if one wishes to avoid confusion. I will add that the public must be kept panting in expectation at the gate by a system of challenges and provocations.
>   I ASK FOR THE PROFOUND, THE VERITABLE OCCULTATION OF SURREALISM.[49]

This was a task, which, presumably, Breton now believed would be sustained by the offer of 'initiation' at the 1947 exhibition – a public event entirely concerned with displaying the limits of its audience's inclusion. The issue of the level of public involvement in intellectual discourse was perhaps brought up again at the 1946 tribute because of (or at least meant to include) Jean-Paul Sartre's (1905–1980) use of the stage and the novel as media for expounding his ideas since his *No Exit* had debuted in 1944 at the same Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier as Artaud's performance (Breton had glancingly questioned the limits of Sartre's idea of 'engagement' at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt).[50] It probably did not help that the supposedly intransigent Artaud was beginning the orchestration of his own reception through the arrangement of his manuscripts for the canonical *Oeuvres complètes* to be published by Gallimard.

Partly as a result of Breton's lack of tact, no doubt, his ethical ambivalence became the object of exposure and attack in the volley of letters meant for him written by Artaud that coincided precisely with the period of writing *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* in 1947 and the initial publication in May of extracts from that text.[51] Refusing participation in the Galerie Maeght exhibition, they bear witness to what was now Artaud's professed loathing of magic and his protestations against Surrealism's new direction, showing a remarkable re-radicalisation of his thought since the 1930s, beyond the constraints of even the forgotten, arcane, humiliated or discarded areas of knowledge associated with Gnosticism, occultism and magic. Defending his performance as an attack on its own parameters that only just stopped short of assault on the bourgeois patrons of the theatre, the first of Artaud's letters of about 28 February turned to Breton's invitation with the same aim of attacking the regulatory co-ordinates of the proposed surrealist manifestation:

> But how after that, André Breton, and after having reproached me for appearing in a theatre, can you invite me to participate in an exhibition, in an art gallery, hyper-chic, ultra-flourishing, loud, capitalistic (even if it had its funds in a communist bank) and where all demonstration can only have now the stylised, limited, closed, fixed character of a tentative art ….
>
> the objects on display are put in a box (in a coffin) or in show-windows, in incubators, that's no longer life;
>
> all the snobs meet there like, alas! at the Orangerie they met before van Gogh who deserved a much different night.
>
> For there is nothing that brings down to earth the cosmography, the hydrography, the demography, the science of eclipses, of the equinoxes and the seasons as does a painting by van Gogh.
>
> No, I can absolutely not participate in an exhibition, and especially in a gallery,
>
> all the more so because there is one last thing in your project that lifted me from my seat in horror.
>
> This parallelism of the Surrealist activity with occultism and magic. – I no longer believe in any notion, science or knowledge and especially not in a hidden science.[52]

Artaud went on to display a seemingly limitless obduracy in the face of the classificatory procedure that constituted the organisational principle of the surrealist exhibition, borrowing from orthodox science like astronomy as well as 'accursed sciences' such as astrology, which were all one to Artaud:

I have my own idea of birth, of life, of death, of reality, and even of destiny, and I do not allow any others imposed on me or even suggested to me,

for I do not participate in any of the general ideas through which I could have with any other man than myself the opportunity to meet myself.

You have therefore separated this exhibition into 15 rooms, with an altar in each one, modelled, you say, on those of Voodoo or Indian cults.

and representing the 15 degrees or stages of an integral initiation.

It is here that my entire physiology rebels for I do not see that there is anything in the world to which one can be *initiated*.

…there is no universal reality, no absolute to be known, and to which one must be led, that is to say, initiated.[53]

Artaud sustained his repudiation of esotericism and specifically 'initiation' in correspondence that ran parallel to the one with Breton.[54] In these terms of absolute refusal, he showed himself a Gnostic of the most extreme kind, suffering "metaphysical anxiety and acute psychological distress," as Sontag sketches the experience of the Gnostic, "the sense of being abandoned, of being an alien, of being possessed by demonic powers which prey on the human spirit in a cosmos vacated by the divine."[55]

This feeling was not a new one for Artaud, but after Rodez, his once-held optimism about cinema revealing an occult life, or about Surrealism or any other esoteric 'system' looking "beyond forms for the occult and magical presence of a fascinating reality," as we saw him put it in one of the texts he wrote in Mexico, was forgone, and this is what he told Breton:

No, there is no occultism and no magic, no obscure science, no hidden secret, no unrevealed truth, but there is the bewildering psychological dissimilation of all the tartuffes of the bourgeois infamy, of alFl those who ultimately had Villon, Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, and above all Gérard de Nerval, van Gogh, Nietzsche, Lautréamont….

but there are *spells*, obscene ritual spellbinding manoeuvres periodically set up against consciousnesses in which all of society participates…[56]

The final part of his letter to Breton, as I have quoted it here, was in keeping with the opinion given in the text "Insanity and Black Magic," which was read out at the performance at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier.[57] Artaud referred there to the promotion of "the most sinister and debauched magic" by doctors in their administration of electro-shock treatment, dispatching patients into the state of 'non-self' that Artaud called "Bardo" after the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (now referred to by him as an "idiotic book"): "Bardo is death," he wrote, "and **death is only a state of black magic which has not existed long.**"[58] This new attitude towards magic, in which the individual becomes subject to its power, was partly formed through his incarceration and apparently confirmed by his disenchantment with Surrealism at the time of the 1947 exhibition, and this is the notion of magic that fed into the contemporarily written *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*.

Disenchanting Van Gogh

In that book, Artaud did indeed place the alleged madness and actual suicide of van Gogh in a context that leads to such a perception, treatment and outcome as denoted

by the title of the piece. However, unlike the 1960s milieu of French writers (and as Sontag reminds us), his estimation at the outset that "it is not man but the world which has become abnormal" is less of a social critique than a judgement on a cosmic malevolence.[59] Although he regarded van Gogh as a visionary in the same way he did those of his usual litany, consisting of Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), Gérard de Nerval (1808–1855), Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) and so on – and primarily, of course, himself – Artaud's idea of them falling foul of "bourgeois inertia" has nothing to do with ideology or false consciousness, but rather bewitchment of and by the bourgeoisie, which is therefore beyond the analysis, let alone the cure, of Marxism.[60] His paranoid reading of van Gogh's fate as an artist and person moves between two levels in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*, then, portraying a prophetic victim of a bourgeoisie that practised 'civic magic' upon those it "wanted to prevent from uttering certain unbearable truths" and a bourgeoisie that was itself in the grip of a universal tormentor:[61]

> Besides the minor spells of country sorcerers, there are the great sessions of worldwide spell-casting in which all alerted consciousness participates periodically.
> Thus on the occasion of a war, a revolution, or a social upheaval still in the bud, the collective consciousness is questioned and questions itself, and makes its judgement.
> This consciousness may also be aroused and called forth spontaneously in connection with certain particularly striking individual cases.
> Thus there were collective magic spells in connection with Baudelaire, Poe, Gérard de Nerval, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Hölderlin, Coleridge,
> and also in connection with van Gogh.[62]
>
> and he did not commit suicide in a fit of madness, in dread of not
> succeeding.
> on the contrary, he had just succeeded, and discovered what he was and who he was, when the collective consciousness of society, to punish him for escaping from its clutches,
> suicided him.
> And this happened to van Gogh the way this always generally happens, during an orgy, a mass, an absolution, or some other rite of consecration, possession, succubation or incubation.
> Thus is wormed its way into his body,
> this society
> absolved,
> consecrated,
> sanctified
> and possessed,
> erased in him the supernatural consciousness he had just achieved, and, like an inundation of black crows in the fibres of his internal tree,
> overwhelmed him with one final surge...[63]

Van Gogh's *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890) (Figure 7.4) closed the 1947 exhibition and its catalogue, and Artaud partook in the common misunderstanding that it was the artist's last painting. For that reason it took a central place in Artaud's thinking and his
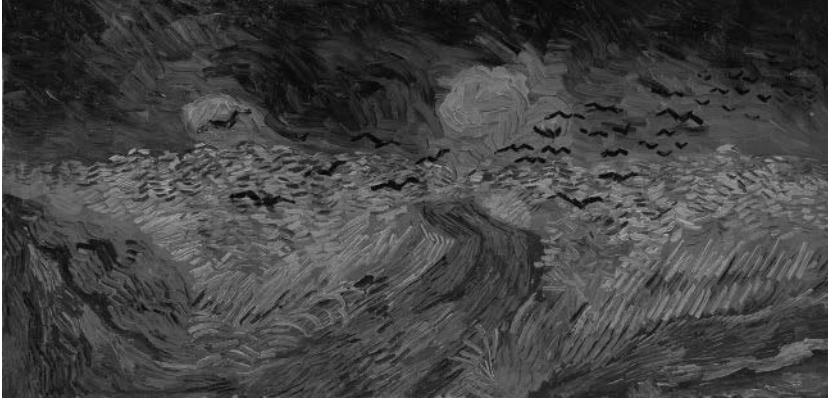
Figure 7.4 Vincent van Gogh, *Wheatfield with Crows*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. © Vincent van Gogh Foundation.

book, as in the movement of the second passage I quote here. The animism suggested by the image of van Gogh's "internal tree" was carried by Artaud from that painting across the oeuvre, which, he thought, depicted "things of inert nature as if in the throes of convulsions."[64] His language is close enough to Breton's theory of convulsive beauty for us to begin to comprehend Breton's high opinion of Artaud's *Van Gogh*.

In fact, while the internal contradictions in Artaud's book are obviously the outcome of a refusal of mere consistency, which has led his followers to compare him to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), they show clearly enough how much Surrealism and magic kept their hold on its author. This is only confirmed by the vehemence of Artaud's attack in both the letters he sent to Breton in the period, which repeat much of the content of the first one as I sketched it in above as well as whole sections of *Van Gogh*.[65] In his writings after Rodez and his letters of protest to Breton against Surrealism's current orientation and on-going exhibition plans, Artaud claimed repeatedly to have acquired "a terrible horror for all that concerns magic, occultism, hermeticism, esotericism, astrology, etc., etc.,"[66] and to "not believe that there is an occult world or something hidden in the world" because he believed those things are really the unfaceable things of this world.[67] However, that did not prevent him from assessing van Gogh in the same way that he had Surrealism while he was in Mexico in 1936, investing the artist with both alchemical powers (as Jarry had done and as Albert Aurier had viewed his art metaphorically in the earliest article on van Gogh) and occultist ones[68] – as though he were writing on Ernst – by describing his transformation of the "sordid simplicity" of everyday life into:

these kinds of organ peals, these fireworks, these atmospheric epiphanies, in short, this 'Great Work' of a sempiternal and untimely transmutation.

These crows painted two days before his death did not, any more than his other paintings, open the door for him to a certain posthumous glory, but they do open to painterly painting, or rather to unpainted nature, the secret door to a possible beyond, to a possible permanent reality, through the door opened by van Gogh to an enigmatic and sinister beyond.[69]

Although the language sounds familiar, his difference with the surrealists and with his own earlier, metaphorical understanding of the occult is shown where Artaud understood its forces not to be 'hidden' or displaced in some way, but to manifest in whoever was prepared to stare them down through art or writing. That is why he now praised van Gogh's occult realism over the *metamorphic* transmutational Surrealism of artist seers such as Ernst, Victor Brauner (1903–1966) and André Masson (1896–1987) with whom Breton had implicitly compared Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) ten years earlier in *Mad Love*.[70]

When understood in this way, Artaud's occultist reading of van Gogh's art reaches theoretical consonance with the one that would be arrived at by Breton a few years later in *L'Art magique* in the sense of its transformative intent, even as the two diverge insofar as Breton came to view van Gogh as a 'failed magician' due to the sorrow he thought his work imparted; his "depreciation of reality in place of its exaltation," as he would have put it under the rubric of 'miserabilism', the latter rapture being achievable through a prophetic and elevated mythic vision.[71] Naturally, then, when Artaud was stirred to compare van Gogh with Gauguin following his viewing at the Orangerie of *Gauguin's Chair*, which Breton would advance in *L'Art magique* as one of the artist's few successes (and Georges Bataille had read as van Gogh's representation of Gauguin as his ego ideal),[72] Gauguin came out second best for exactly the same reasons that would ensure he found favour in Surrealism over the next few years:

> I believe that Gauguin thought that the artist must look for symbol, for myth, must enlarge the things of life to the magnitude of myth,
>
> whereas van Gogh thought that one must know how to deduce myth from the most ordinary things of life.
>
> In which I think he was bloody well right.
>
> For reality is frighteningly superior to all fiction, all fable, all divinity, all surreality.
>
> All you need is the genius to know how to interpret it.
>
> Which no painter before poor van Gogh had done,
>
> which no painter will ever do again,
>
> for I believe that this time,
>
> today, in fact,
>
> right now,
>
> in this month of February 1947,
>
> reality itself,
>
> the myth of reality itself, mythic reality itself, is in the process of becoming flesh.[73]

Breton's appreciation of Gauguin had commenced in the year or two after he read this. He went on to call Gauguin's art 'magic' in his earliest remarks on the artist in a 1950 interview, which was confirmed in *L'Art magique* as though that book was spurred by the arrival of the surrealist Gauguin at the beginning of the decade.[74] It was this purpose for art that Artaud refuted with what he saw as van Gogh's encounter with the occult as reality itself and not fathomed 'behind' it and reproduced metaphorically in the garb of 'reality'.

That other reality – the one of Gauguin's paintings *Vision of the Sermon (Jacob Wrestling with the Angel)* (1888) and *The Loss of Virginity* (1890) – was reached through what van Gogh called 'abstraction' or not working from a model. It was what Surrealism assiduously advocated from the 1920s in the primacy it gave the

imagination but had been shunned by van Gogh in the late 1880s as "enchanted ground" in spite of his admiration for Gauguin's achievements.[75] And it was, indeed, a work of disenchantment that Artaud attempted on various fronts in 1947, in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* and in the enmity he voiced on the subject of Surrealism's attraction to magic and its testimony in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*.

That endeavour was furthered through the drawings he showed at the Galerie Pierre to reinforce his antagonism, which appeared under the title *Portraits et dessins par Antonin Artaud*, and was held on 4–20 July 1947 to coincide with the launch of the surrealists' event. The brief presentation titled "The Human Face" that Artaud gave to open his exhibit demonstrates that van Gogh was still at the front of his thoughts; as the master portraitist, here, whom he opposes to abstract art and, we can infer, 'bourgeois' Surrealism.[76] This small display showcased Artaud's use of image and text in his coloured drawings, which he had been working on since January 1945 while he was still in Rodez.[77] The sketchbook, study-like appearance of the earlier drawings had given way to the portraits and more finished ones that were executed at Ivry-sur-Seine, and these were shown together at the Galerie Pierre[78] (Figure 7.5).
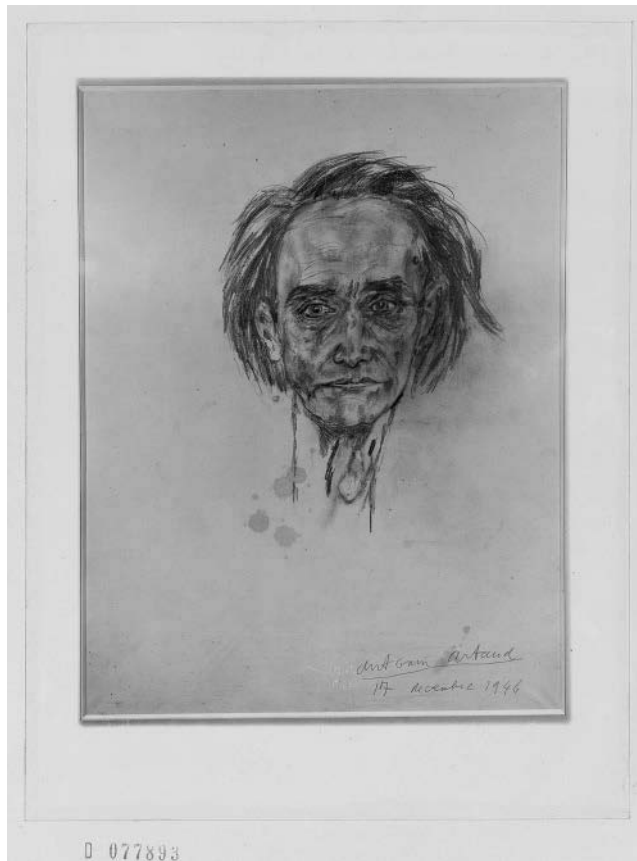
Figure 7.5 Antonin Artaud, *Self-Portrait*, 24 June 1947. Pencil and coloured chalk on paper. Private collection.

Photo: © Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Philippe Migeat. © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2017.

Borne on calculatedly poor quality paper, often punctured, sometimes burnt and re-sembling more the *art brut* admired by Surrealism than anything by the movement's artists and still less the meticulous, dense, calligraphic landscapes accomplished by van Gogh, their purpose was one of spell-casting, which was the last thread connect-ing Artaud to magic in the way I have presented it here; as a means, that is, of defense against 'civic magic'.[79] This was manifested in the wordplay surrounding the portrait of Thévenin titled *Paule aux ferrets* (1947) (Plate IV) – "Je mets ma/fille en sentinelle/elle est fidèle/car Ophélie s'est levée tard" – drawn soon after the first excerpts from *Van Gogh* appeared in print and interpreted recently by Natacha Allet as "magic, strictly speaking, establish[ing] a pact of fidelity and love: bewitching."[80]

Conclusion

This belief in the powers of an object, representation and/or an incantation to effect action-at-a-distance might be one of the best-known ways by which magic has been traditionally understood, but it was manifested in Artaud's post-Rodez thinking as a kind of last resort when his larger confidence in magic as an alternative means of understanding the world had disappeared.[81] It is impossible to view the raw, nervy, under-skilled stabs and loops of pencil, crayon and chalk of these late drawings with-out recalling Artaud's illness and experiences during the Second World War, which gives them the air of a hard won achievement that must have resonated with those who had survived the German occupation. In this, and in their zigzag between the enchanted ground of Surrealism and the disenchanted terrain of realism, they bond with the equally hard won yet disjointed attempts in *Van Gogh* to give what we might call a materialist theory of the occult.[82]

In its rhetorical tilt towards scepticism in spite of the residue of Surrealism and magic, as well as a paranoid occultist Gnosticism I have traced in *Van Gogh*, Artaud's late-period writing was more in tune with the times than that of surrealists' past and present. For it was also in 1947 that (without mention of Artaud) Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), Sartre and Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) launched attacks on the move-ment from positions informed by Marxism (Lefebvre and Tzara were members of the PCF at the time).[83] Along with the remarkable success of *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society*, which was awarded the Prix Sainte-Beuve in 1948, and Artaud's death that year, an increasing disenchantment *of* his work began then that culminated in the 1960s writings I alluded to in this chapter, alongside the disenchantment *with* Surrealism, which vehemently held on to a vision of magic as an emancipatory and empowering discourse.

Notes

1 See André Breton with Gérard Legrand, *L'Art magique* [1957] (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 1991), 237–38 ["(L)e type du magician 'qui échoue' malgré la splendour de ses blés et de ses ciels cuits du même émails"].
2 Breton, *L'Art magique*, 235 ["(I)ncompétent"].
3 Ibid., 238 ["(L)a vibration interminable et douloureuse de son regard," "métamorphose et annule les traumatismes"].
4 See the reference to this in André Breton's "Alfred Jarry as Precursor and Initiator" [1951], in *Free Rein* [1953], trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 252.

5 For the private remark of 1894 made in his journal about van Gogh as "n'est intéressant que par son côté phénomène fou … et dont les seuls tableaux intéressants sont ceux faits au moment de sa maladie, à Arles," see Paul Signac, "Extraits du journal inédit de Paul Signac, 1: 1894–1895," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 91, no. 36 (1949): 104.

6 Breton, *L'Art magique*, 238 ["(F)ait s'effondrer devant lui des murailles d'apparences sans jamais survoler l'au-delà de leurs ruines"].

7 André Breton, "Sur Antonin Artaud" [1959], in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 983 ["[L]'ouvrage *hyperlucide*, le chef-d'œuvre incontestable"].

8 Mark Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, revised and updated (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009), 483; Isabelle Cahn, "Van Gogh/Artaud: Les suicidés de la société," in *Van Gogh/Artaud: Le suicidé de la société*, ed. Isabelle Cahn (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2014), 15.

9 Antonin Artaud, "À André Breton [Letter of 2 June 1946]," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 14(i) (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 138 ["Que je sois antisocial est un fait, mais est-ce la faute de la société ou la mienne (*sic*)"].

10 See the diary entries of June 1 and 3 June, 1946 and the partial account of the June 7 event in Jacques Prevel, *En compagnie d'Antonin Artaud* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 16–19, 20–23.

11 André Breton, "A Tribute to Antonin Artaud" [1946], *Free Rein*, 77–79, 78.

12 Antonin Artaud, "À madame Toulouse [Letter of October 1924]," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1(ii) (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 112 ["J'ai fait connaissance avec tous les dadas qui voudraient bien m'englober dans leur dernier bateau Surréaliste, mais rien à faire. Je suis beaucoup trop surréaliste pour cela"].

13 Carole Reynaud Paligot, *Parcours politique des surréalistes 1919–1969* [2001] (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010), 56–62.

14 Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement* [1997], trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 132–34.

15 André Breton, "In Self-Defense" [1926], in *Break of Day* [1934], trans. Mark Polizzotti and Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 22–39, 34–35.

16 Reynaud Paligot, *Parcours*, 63 ["[I]ndividuelle et spirituelle"].

17 André Breton, Louis Aragon and Paul Éluard, "Au grand jour" [1927], in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 929, Note 1; Antonin Artaud, "In the Dark or The Surrealist Bluff" [1927], in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, trans. Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968), 192, Note 1.

18 André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" [1930], in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 130.

19 Artaud, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 195.

20 Antonin Artaud, "Witchcraft and the Cinema" [ca. 1928], in *Collected Works*, vol. 3, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), 66.

21 Antonin Artaud, "Surréalisme et révolution," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 171–73.

22 Quoted in Patrick Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism: Origins, Magic, and Secret Societies* [2012], trans. Jon E. Graham (Rochester, VT and Toronto: Inner Traditions, 2014), 38 (translation modified significantly and augmented with the opening phrase "[L]e mystère du Surréalisme … a été une mystique cachée. Un occultisme d'un nouveau genre, et comme toute mystique cachée elle s'est exprimée allégoriquement …," Artaud, *Œuvres*, vol. 8, 173). Artaud meant here the pre-classical, Greek mystery cult of the Cabeiri centred on Thebes and the islands of Lemnos and Samothrace, which eventually spread throughout the Classical world. For a discussion of Artaud's reference to Kabbalah in this passage, see Lepetit, *Esoteric Secrets*, 38–39.

23 Quoted in Lepetit, *Esoteric Secrets*, 39.

24 Antonin Artaud, "Au Ministre des Affaires étrangères" [August 1935], *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8, 343 ["[O]ffre un exemple parfait des civilisations primitives d'esprit magique"].

25 Antonin Artaud, "Au Ministre de l'Éducation nationale?" [August 1935], *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8, 345 ["[L]e secret de la haute magie mexicaine"].

26 Antonin Artaud, "Les Forces occultes du Mexique" [1936], *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8, 283 ["l'âme magique des anciens peuples mexicains"].

27 Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 449; Julia F. Costich, *Antonin Artaud* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1978), 58; Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993), 89–90. Antonin Artaud, "The New Revelations of Being" [1937], trans. David Rattray, *Artaud Anthology*, ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1965), 84–99.

28 See the testimony of Artaud's contact with Breton and Lamba in Barber, *Antonin Artaud*, 89, 94. Two letters to Breton of July 30 and September 14, 1937 (the religious mania of the second, in particular, showing Artaud's mental disarray) can be found in Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 400–403; 405–410. The letters from Artaud to both from May to late September 1937 are reproduced in Artaud, *Œuvres complètes*, 7, 221–22, 228–29, 231–32, 235–37, 238–39, 240–43, 253, 254, 258–59, 260–62, 265–69, 272–73, 286–93, 296–97, 299.

29 Susan Sontag, "Artaud" [1973/1976] in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, xvii–lix, xlv.

30 See Maurice Blanchot, "Artaud" [1956], in *The Book to Come* [1959], trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 34–40, 38.

31 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* [1961], ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 28 (in fact, every time he is mentioned in this book by Foucault, van Gogh is triangulated with Artaud and Nietzsche, who together are said to create a problem for those seeking to demarcate madness and reason).

32 Antonin Artaud, "Shit to the Spirit" [1947], trans. Jack Hirschman, *Artaud Anthology*, 111.

33 See, for instance, the inarticulate, schizophrenic and mythic "body without organs" (derived from Artaud's 1947 radio play *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*) first imagined in Gilles Deleuze, "Thirteenth Series of the Schizophrenic and the Little Girl," in *Logic and Sense* [1969], ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 82–93. The body without organs and Artaud himself – the first "present[ing] its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier … utter[ing] only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound," the second "[breaking] down the wall of the signifier" and "decoding the flows of desire," in *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* – have a pivotal role in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1972], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), 9, 135.

34 Jacques Derrida, "La Parole soufflée" [1965], in *Writing and Difference* [1967], trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 169–95, 182.

35 Antonin Artaud, "The Theatre and its Double" [1931–36], *Collected Works*, vol. 4, trans. Victor Corti (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), 55.

36 Antonin Artaud, "Antonin Artaud to Jacques Rivière [letter of 29 January 1924]," trans. Bernard Frechtman, *Artaud Anthology*, 10–12, 10, 11.

37 See the discussion by Sontag in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, xlv–liii.

38 I am referring to the Musée d'Orsay exhibition of 2014: Cahn, *Van Gogh/Artaud: Le suicidé de la société*.

39 The brief article was embedded in a group of responses to the exhibition François-Joachim Beer, "Sa folie?," *Arts* 104 (31 January 1947): 8.

40 Cahn in *Van Gogh/Artaud*, 16.

41 Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 13 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 305.

42 Antonin Artaud, "On peut vivre pour l'infini: Van Gogh vu par Antonin Artaud," *Combat* 876 (2 May 1947): 2.

43 Antonin Artaud, "À André Breton [letter of 14 January 1947]," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 14(i), 152–56.

44 André Breton, "Before the Curtain" [1947], in *Free Rein*, 80–87, 85.

45 For a lengthier explanation of the relationship of myth to the altars, see André Breton, "Surrealist Comet" [1947], *Free Rein*, 88–97, 95–96. For a description by a sympathetic contemporary, see Pierre Guerre, "L'Exposition internationale du surréalisme," *Cahiers du sud* 34, no. 284 (1947): 677–81. More recently, interpretive accounts have been given by Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, 466–72; Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 116–32; and Tessel

M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 161–73.

46 For these important surrealist texts, see Antonin Artaud, "Umbilical Limbo" and "Nerve Scales," in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 49–65, 69–86. An extract from Breton's letter can be found at the back of the exhibition catalogue: André Breton, "Projet initial," *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris: Pierre à Feu, 1947), 135–38.

47 For his fixation on the terms used by Breton, see the correspondence of about 28 February 1947: Antonin Artaud, "Letter to André Breton by Antonin Artaud" [1947], trans. Clayton Eshleman, *Sparrow* 23 (August 1974): n. p.

48 Breton, *Free Rein*, 77.

49 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 177–78 (translation slightly modified).

50 Marie-Françoise Christout, Noelle Guibert and Daniele Pauly, *Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier 1913–1993* (Paris: Institut Française d'Architecture, 1993), 126–27; Breton, *Free Rein*, 78.

51 One writer on *Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society* quotes from Artaud's letters to Breton in his footnotes but does not affirm a clear connection between the two as I am doing here, nor to my knowledge has any previous text on Artaud's book: Jacques Sojcher, "Le Jugement et la répétition (Autour de *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*)," *Obliques* 10/11 ("Antonin Artaud," 1976): 165, Notes 7 and 9.

52 Artaud, "Letter to André Breton," n. p. It seems that this letter never actually reached Breton but was diverted somehow and published in *Samedi-soir* to Artaud's great indignation; Breton refused to sign the "lettre d'invectives" prepared for that publication by Artaud: Prevel, *En compagnie d'Antonin Artaud*, 135–36.

53 Artaud, "Letter to André Breton," n. p.

54 For the vilification of the "books of hermetic scholarship used by the forever insatiable ignorance of the so-called 'Initiates'," and the remark about the "kennel of initiates" in the post-Rodez text mauling "the cock-and-bull stew known as the Kabbalah" that is closely related to the earlier mentioned "Shit to the Spirit," see Antonin Artaud, "Letter against the Kabbalah" [1947], trans. David Rattray, *Artaud Anthology*, 113–23, 115, 117, 113 (translation slightly modified).

55 Sontag in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, xlv.

56 Artaud, "Letter to André Breton," n. p.

57 The text is dated 12 January 1948 in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 532; however, see the eyewitness testimony of its recital at the event by Artaud's friend Jacques Prevel in Barber, *Antonin Artaud*, 137.

58 Antonin Artaud, "Insanity and Black Magic" [1947], in *Selected Writings*, 529–33, 530, 531, 533 (Artaud's bold lettering).

59 Antonin Artaud, "Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society" [1947], in *Selected Writings*, 483–512.

60 Ibid., 483.

61 Ibid., 486, 485.

62 Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 486.

63 Ibid., 487.

64 Ibid., 488.

65 Five letters of February–May 1947 are collected as Antonin Artaud, "Lettres à André Breton," *L'Éphémère* 8 (Winter 1968): 3–53.

66 Letter of 28 February (this is a follow-up letter to the one I quoted from above, written the same day), in Artaud, "Lettres à André Breton," 23 ["[U]ne épouvantable horreur pour tout ce qui touche à la magie, à l'occultisme, à l'herrmétisme, à l'ésotérisme, à l'astrologie, etc., etc."].

67 Artaud, "Letter to André Breton," n. p.

68 G. Albert Aurier, "Les Isolés: Vincent van Gogh," *Mercure de France* 1, no. 1 (January 1890): 24–29.

69 Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 489 (translation modified). Also see the remarks in this text about the 'sensation of occult strangeness' given off by van Gogh's painting, especially the one of his sleeping quarters: "[o]ccult, too, his bedroom, so charmingly rural," Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 500, 501.

70 See my "Greengrocer, Bricklayer or Seer? Surrealist Cézanne," in *Modernist Games: Cézanne and His Card Players*, ed. Satish Padiyar (London: The Courtauld Institute of

Art, 2013), 69–99, available via http://courtauld.ac.uk/research/courtauld-books-online/modernist-games-cezanne-and-his-card-players (accessed 12 April, 2017).

71 André Breton, "Away with Miserabilism!" [1956], in *Surrealism and Painting* [1965], trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 348.

72 Georges Bataille, "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent van Gogh" [1930], in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, ed. Allan Stoekl, trans. Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 61–72, 65–66.

73 Artaud, *Selected Writings*, 491.

74 André Breton, "Interview with J.-L. Bédouin and P. Demarne (for the Radio Programme *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* July 1950)," in *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* [1952], trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 236 ["… you'll note that magic [in Gauguin's painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* of 1897–98] – for that's what it's about – here asserts its supreme potency, that it stands as the great overseer"].

75 Letter to Émile Bernard of about 26 November 1889, in Vincent van Gogh, *The Letters: The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition, Vol. 5: Saint-Rémy-Auvers 1889–1890*, eds. Leo Jansen, Hans Luijten and Nienke Bakker (London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009), letter 822, 148

> When Gauguin was in Arles, I once or twice allowed myself to be led into abstraction, as you know … and at that time abstraction seemed an attractive route to me. But that's enchanted ground – my good fellow – and one soon finds oneself up against a wall.

76 Antonin Artaud, "The Human Face" [1947], trans. Jack Hirschman, *Artaud Anthology*, 229–34.

77 Natacha Allet, "Les Dessins cruels d'Antonin Artaud: rythmes et traces," in *Van Gogh/Artaud*, 63–76, 64.

78 For precise dating of the late drawings, see *Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper*, ed. Margit Rowell (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996).

79 Artaud's little drawings on burnt scraps of schoolbook paper called "grisgris" date back to 1938, the year after the advent of the *sorts* or 'spells,' drawn and coloured figures meant to resist ordinary compositional and spatial constraints: Antonin Artaud, *50 Spells to Murder Magic* [2004], ed. Évelyne Grossman, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London, New York, and Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2008), vii.

80 Allet in Cahn, *Van Gogh/Artaud*, 74 ["(P)roprement magique, établit un pacte de fidélité et d'amour, ensorcelant"].

81 Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* [1902], trans. Robert Brain (London and New York: Routledge, 1972), 15; and Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo" [1913], *The Origins of Religion*, ed. Albert Dickson, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 138.

82 For a similar if under-explained claim made about Surrealism itself as "a kind of occultomaterialism" (in the sense, seemingly, that "matter is the basis of the Great Work"), see Michel Carrouges, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism* [1950], trans. Maura Prendergast (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 49. I am grateful to Will Atkin for reminding me of this phrase.

83 For the accusation that Surrealism intended to "belittle the real in favour of the magical and the marvellous" in a "concerted attack directed against everyday life and human reality," see Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1 [1947], trans. John Moore (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 110. Tzara's lecture at the Sorbonne on March 17, 1947 (attended by Artaud) was famously interrupted by Breton and published the following year: Tristan Tzara, *Le Surréalisme et l'après-guerre* (Paris: Les Éditions Nagel, 1948); see Prevel, *En compagnie d'Antonin Artaud*, 113–14. Sartre's broadside accusing Surrealism of ineffectual political posing and carrying the notorious statement "[t]hey were the proclaimers of catastrophe in the time of the fat cows: in the time of the lean cows they have nothing more to say," viewed the "pretty lollipop of the 1947 exhibition" as irrelevant to "a new ideology" after the war, "which permits man to live." See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Situation of the Writer in 1947" [1947–48], in *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen & Co., 1967), 146, 223.

8 Kurt Seligmann, Surrealism and the Occult

Gražina Subelytė

In the disconcerted political environment between the two World Wars, the surrealists increasingly embraced magic, alchemy and the occult as a potent way of challenging the prevailing values in society. For them, magic was a transformative power that provided fuel for the imagination and thus facilitated the vision of a new world order. Such a viewpoint was emphatically championed by the Swiss-born artist and occult scholar Kurt Leopold Seligmann (1900–1962), who played a key role in providing a bridge between occultism and the activities of the movement. However, Seligmann's academic research on the occult, his intellectual contribution to Surrealism as well as the occult and esoteric ramifications of his own visual idiom, infused with carnivalesque, heraldic, magical and alchemical associations, have long been neglected in scholarly studies on the movement, urgently calling for more research and examination. In this chapter, I will therefore trace repercussions of the occult in Seligmann's written and visual work, considered within the broader context of the surrealists' artistic and political ambition of re-enchanting a disenchanted, modern world. To substantiate my argument, I will analyse specific images and texts, focussing throughout on Seligmann's creative appropriation of esoteric ideas.

Seligmann's Background and Early Influences

In order to shed light on Seligmann's preoccupation with magic,[1] it is pertinent to trace some of its sources back to his childhood, and the political and military circumstances that lurked in the background since his formative years. Seligmann was born in the Swiss town of Basel at the turn of the twentieth century, which marked the widespread pan-European 'occult revival'. Basel's traditions and cultural heritage would always remain embedded in his psyche and provide powerful stimuli for his later engagement with themes of magic and war. In a 1935 interview, Seligmann reminisced:

> My entire childhood was impregnated by the ancient ideal of the Soldier of Fortune which … has left an indelible mark on Basel. The heraldic ensigns, the armour, the halyards, the drapery, the ribbons, all this anachronistic attire was very much alive for me …. I always hear … the deafening sound of … drums that are reserved for Carnival Day. …. It is in the culture of my natal city to which my subconscious always travels whenever I begin one of my compositions, whether abstract or imaginative.[2]

Through the carnival of Basel and the work of the Swiss Renaissance master Urs Graf (1485–1527/28), Seligmann was exposed to the local heraldic tradition. Graf's

pictures abounded in soldiers and the political rhetoric of the day, derived from his work as a soldier of fortune. Battlefield scenes with hybrid and demonic personages by other German and Swiss medieval and Renaissance painters and printmakers such as Hans Baldung Grien (ca. 1484–1545) and Niklaus Manuel Deutsch (ca. 1484–1530) were also accessible to Seligmann. He employed comparably charged subject matters in his art, depicting knights and ghostlike figures engaged in combat. Seligmann was a teenager when the First World War took place, and early on he felt the impending Fascist threat. Even before Hitler came to power in Germany, he commenced compiling a scrapbook of images pertaining to the rising military threat to Europe, commenting in it: "How soon will the next war come, for it certainly will?"[3] The political backdrop of war thus shaped Seligmann's thought, eventually radicalising his turn to magic and myth as a psychological escape. His earliest extant work, a linocut he made at the age of 12, portrayed a head of a Roman soldier set in profile.[4] Ghastly figures performing ritualistic dances, such as the danse macabre, related to the history and carnival of Basel, also found echo in his early iconography. Additionally, as a child he absorbed his father's puppet shows and the films by Georges Méliès (1861–1938), a pioneer 'cinemagician' whose eclectic juxtapositions of elements and innovative trick-cutting were admired by the surrealists.[5]

Seligmann moved to Paris in 1929 and became an official member of the surrealist group in 1934. The impact of André Breton upon his thought is noteworthy, as Seligmann's future undertakings would be emphatically shaped by the path Breton had indicated in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1930) and its famous calling for "THE PROFOUND, THE VERITABLE OCCULTATION OF SURREALISM."[6] Like other surrealists, Seligmann read Émile-Jules Grillot de Givry's (1874–1929) *Le Musée des sorciers, mages et alchimistes* (1929) soon after its publication. In addition to its prolific number of magical illustrations, it included reproductions of works by early Renaissance artists such as Baldung and Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516), who also exerted an influence on Seligmann's own iconography.

Seligmann's early engagement with the occult was also evidenced by his contribution to the 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, for which he created a mannequin with an egg perforated by a sword. Lewis Kachur suggests that Seligmann seemed to allude to the alchemical allegory of the Philosopher's Egg,[7] derived from Michael Maier's (1568–1622) *Atalanta Fugiens* (1617), in which Mars, assisted by Vulcan, strikes an egg with his sword to symbolise fire penetrating the alchemical vessel – an iconographic idiom that the surrealists may have well associated with sexual implications.

Influenced by the surrealist fascination with the spiritual and magical symbolism embedded in the indigenous objects, Seligmann and his wife Arlette visited the Northwest Coast of British Columbia, Canada, to study the culture of the Tsimshian nation. In 1938, they spent the summer there *in situ*, investigating the art and life of the natives. "During my stay [there]," wrote Seligmann, "I realized that in these primitive societies magic is almost the exclusive impulse given to creativeness."[8] The 'totemic meaning' of Northwest Coast mythology clearly captivated him, as was made explicit in his contribution to the last issue of *Minotaure*, published in May 1939. There, Seligmann recorded a conversation he had with a Tsimshian, in which he drew parallels between European and Indian myths as well as between totemism and the European tradition of heraldry, a comparative approach that was in keeping with the surrealists' own strategies of cultural collaging.[9]

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Seligmann was the first European surrealist to arrive in the United States, where he remained until his death. Having settled in New York, fluent in English, he helped many of his fellow artists, including Breton, by arranging visas and affidavits, which they needed to escape from war-tormented Europe. In August 1940, Breton wrote to him: "After a lengthy discussion with Pierre Mabille, we concluded that [Surrealism's] work can best be carried out where you are."[10] In New York, Seligmann took part in all major surrealist activities, contributing works to the 1942 landmark exhibitions *Artists in Exile* and *First Papers of Surrealism*, and publishing articles on magic and the occult in the journals *VVV* and *View*, both of which championed the surrealist *émigré* circle. Together with Breton and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), Seligmann may thus well be considered the third crucial force behind the group's core undertakings. Following his earlier acquisition of Grillot de Givry's aforementioned *Musée des sorciers*, Seligmann continued to collect rare books on magic and the occult, and could soon boast to possess one of the best stacked private libraries on these subjects. In the 1940s, Seligmann also worked on a lengthy book project, titled *The Mirror of Magic: A History of Magic in the Western World* that was eventually published by Pantheon Books in New York in 1948. As we will see in the following discussion, the esotericism of his own iconography strengthened and developed in tandem with these undertakings.

Seligmann and the Occult Tradition

The books in Seligmann's library and the letters he exchanged with rare book dealers in Europe and the U.S. offer a portrait of the artist as a studious bibliophile, adamant to find even the scarcest extant books on the occult tradition. His final collection was comprised of about 240 of such volumes, dating back to the sixteenth century, and twice as many reference books.[11] They were marked by a bookplate designed by him, embellished with magical symbols. In terms of content, the library can only be described as encyclopaedic, spanning a wide spectrum of topics on the occult sciences, magic, alchemy, the Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism, astrology, chiromancy, witchcraft, demonology and spirits, the evil eye and related subjects. Publications on folklore (especially German), 'primitivism' and comparative religion also figured substantially.

As can be expected, Seligmann's library included a wide range of classic books and treatises on alchemy and the occult. The authors included the Middle Ages and Renaissance hermeticists and alchemists Albertus Magnus (1193–1280), Nicolas Flamel (1330–1418), Johannes Trithemius (1462–1516), Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), Paracelsus (1493–1541), John Dee (1527–1608), Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615), Heinrich Khunrath (ca. 1560–1605), Michael Maier and Robert Fludd (1574–1637); the eighteenth-century occult writers Georg von Welling (1655–1727) and Ebenezer Sibly (1751-ca. 1799); popular books by nineteenth-century occultists and occult writers such as Papus (Gérard Encausse; 1865–1916), Jules Michelet (1798–1874), Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant; 1810–1875), Fulcanelli (1839–1953) and Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942); twentieth-century esoteric authors including Lynn Thorndike (1882–1965) and Robert Amadou (1924–2006); as well as writings by fellow surrealists such as Pierre Mabille (1904–1952).

Books on witchcraft, demonology, ghosts and spirits included standard titles such as the so-called *Malleus Maleficarum* (1928 edition), a treatise on witchcraft by Heinrich Kraemer and Johann Sprenger written in ca. 1486 and studies by the

demonologists Pierre Le Loyer (1550–1634) and Nicholas Rémy (1530–1616). Such publications might have influenced the spectral and ghostly quality of personages populating Seligmann's paintings. Furthermore, he collected original grimoires, including *Le Dragon Rouge* and Waite's *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898), in which the author, who was a leader of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in England, discussed eminent grimoires and provided an overview of ritual magic. This reflected Seligmann's keen interest in magical rituals, possibly as transformative and emancipatory events for their participants.

An author of utmost importance for Seligmann was Paracelsus (1493–1541), as in a 1957 interview Seligmann elaborated that he became interested in magic through his texts.[12] Paracelsus was an influential Swiss-German physician, alchemist and astrologer in early modern Europe, who allegedly studied and taught at the University of Basel. Among others, Seligmann owned his *Prognostications* (1536), *Astronomia Magna* (1571), *Opera omnia* (1658) and *Œuvres complètes* (1913–14). Paracelsus based his understanding of the cosmos in chemistry and alchemy, positing that all matter was united (an idea mirroring the tenets of Northwest Coast and Singhalese mythology that Seligmann had learnt). Paracelsus perceived the human body as a microcosm aligned in harmony with the macrocosm of the universe. He established alchemical and planetary analogies and correspondences between organs and functions of the body and the outside world, articulated in the hermetic proverb "as above, so below."[13] The system of correspondences, a central notion of the Western esoteric tradition also discussed by Agrippa, Fludd and others, remained a vital theme in Seligmann's thought and writing.

Seligmann's interest in magic and myth also developed thanks to his personal friendship with Mabille, with whom he maintained a correspondence during the War. Mabille's anthology *Le Miroir du merveilleux* (1940), prefaced by Breton, was part of Seligmann's library. The publication focussed on magic, myth and the marvellous, and traced the manifestations of the marvellous through a distinctly cross-cultural viewpoint. Mabille gathered excerpts from over eighty-seven texts, from ancient mythology to surrealist texts. The book was structured into seven chapters, with the number seven having alchemical and esoteric symbolism. Mabille's work must have without a doubt influenced Seligmann's adaptation and turn to similar magic and myth related themes in his own work.

On the whole, the scope and eclecticism of Seligmann's library point to the emphasis on the past and miscellaneous esoteric topics as a source of interest, inspiration and influence. Much like Breton and many of his other surrealist colleagues, Seligmann pursued sources that provided an alternative avenue to the horrid reality facing the world then. Books, treatises and manuscripts tracing traditions of magic and myth allowed him to access the realms of knowledge that were beyond what was visible to the human eye, hiding in the invisible realm of the psyche and the imagination. Seligmann was evidently interested in trespassing the limits of the established modes of recognition. In his unpublished lecture notes "On Magic," he wrote: "The fulfilment that magic promises is before all one within the realms of the psyche. Like dreams it realizes desires and in freeing the soul … from the oppressions that may beleaguer it, it releases forces, creative powers within us."[14] Ultimately, for Seligmann, magic attained a liberating, 'Faustian' perspective of rebirth and renewal.[15] Eventually, in the same lecture notes he elaborated that only magic was able to offer an artist such a liberating stimulus: "The magical world is literally that of the artist."[16] In addition,

he recognised the significance that myths held for artists: "Myths and legends have from time immemorial inspired the artist. They contain and express a constant psychological truth. And they lend themselves generously to free associations and interpretations."[17]

Seligmann and Surrealism in Exile

Seligmann's growing knowledge of occult ideas prominently figured in print. In 1940, he published the essay "Terrestrial Sun" in the surrealist anthology included in *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, edited by James Laughlin. It became Seligmann's first piece broaching the subject of the occult directly and discussing the esoteric current of hermeticism. In the nearly four-page-long text, he described hermeticism positively, underlining that "in turning the mind away from theological speculations, [hermeticism] gave it back its freedom,"[18] while earlier in the essay he noted that revolt was man's 'finest privilege'.[19] Published about a year after the start of the war, the essay stressed the empowering character of esoteric traditions in a tumultuous era. In line with surrealist thought, Seligmann thus emphasised the pre-eminence of one's inner, psychological world, championing the idea of man as the model of the universe and noting that "[t]he Hermetic conceives himself as a microscopic replica of the universe. Man … should look within himself, to discover new correlations."[20]

Seligmann's other articles on magic and the occult were published in the aforementioned journals *View* and *VVV*, and dealt with a wide range of esoteric themes. His curiosity about the human psyche and the theory of correspondences, for instance, was made apparent in his article "Magic Circles," published in the February/March 1942 issue of *View*. In it, he discussed correspondences in the sense that "each attitude of the body expresses a different cosmic force and the slightest motion will unleash its consequences in the world above."[21] Further, Seligmann stressed the potent psychic nature of every action, and related it to an alchemical process in its ability to transform and change the order of the universe. Comparing the roles of alchemists and magicians with that of an artist, he noted:

> In vain do we seek to investigate the nature of the occult forces … at work in the act of artistic creation. The artist himself does not master them. He is subjected to them just as a medium experiences the trance…. His work will be a microcosmic counterpart of the universe created in unity…. The creative work of the artist is perhaps also a magic act, whose purpose is to recognize the soul of the world and to create through this knowledge in the same manner as a magician who creates disturbance by means of a few scribbled signs.[22]

To accompany the article and to illustrate the latter proposition, Seligmann included a chart of magic signs for good and evil spirits attributed to Agrippa, "employed for conjuring the forces of the invisible world."[23] A couple other articles by Seligmann that appeared around this time did not deal with occult-related topics directly, but were still enlightening in terms of the effect that the contemporary military and political conflicts must have had on Seligmann and society at large. One of them was a short article titled "An Eye for a Tooth," published in the October/November 1941 issue of *View*, in which Seligmann dealt with the topic of anguish, calling for the need of its expression in art: "This projection of our anguish is necessary for our psychic health and

our survival," he proclaimed. "Our anguish will be expressed in our work alone."[24] Another article alluding to the same political havoc was "It's Easy to Criticize," in the May 1942 issue of *View*. It dealt with the critique of the painter's working methods. In it, when mentioning the walls of the artist's studio, Seligmann observed the difficult climate of the day: "in our epoch of air attacks these four walls may crumble, they do not secure meditation and protection anymore from a world of indifference."[25]

A month later, Seligmann returned to handling occult and magic related themes more directly, with the ever-present theme of war always notable in the background. In "The Evil Eye," from the June 1942 issue of *VVV*, he wrote about the myth of the evil eye, a compelling symbol of fascination. He laid out its attributes and described its perception throughout history. At the time when the War was raging in Europe, Seligmann made a reference to battles by drawing on Guido Panciroli's book *Notitia Dignitatum* (1608), a survey of the later Roman Empire and the heraldry of its army. In Seligmann's words, the book "reproduces a series of amulets which protect against the evil eye to which the soldier is exposed in battle…. The various corps of the Roman army were distinguished by these blazons which were attached to the shields."[26]

For number 2–3 of *VVV*, published in March 1943, Seligmann provided translations of the "Prognostication by Paracelsus." The article spread over eight pages and included five illustrations. He translated into English selections from Paracelsus's 1536 original Latin edition of prognostications, of which he owned a copy. Before these, he outlined his own perspective on Paracelsus's prophecies and added quotations from other publications by the writer, further substantiating his claims. Above all, Seligmann accentuated the vital role of the imagination, noting that for Paracelsus "prophesy requires imagination and faith in nature."[27] By emphasising the importance of the human psyche in foretelling, he presented Paracelsus as a precursor to Surrealism. In the article, he also quoted from Paracelsus's book *De Virtute Imaginativa* (1590), which dealt with the imaginative power and proclaimed that "[m]an *is* mind; he is what he thinks [and] if he thinks war, then he will cause war."[28]

In the articles that Seligmann wrote after "Prognostication by Paracelsus," he further asserted his unwavering belief in the above-discussed notions of correspondences and unity. An excellent example is his contribution to the December 1944 issue of *View*. It was titled "Microcosmological Chart of Man" and was accompanied by an annotated drawing. In this paragraph-long discussion, he argued from an anthropocentric perspective about an analogy existing between the man and the universe in their parallel aim to create based on an impulse:

> Like the universe which creates and maintains, and draws from itself its creative impulse, thus man is cause and effect altogether. In this sense we may call him a microcosm. And analogists could draw connecting lines between man and the universe.[29]

The drawing depicted a figure resembling an artist standing in front of the canvas placed on an easel, engaged in an act of creation. Seligmann's emphasis on the analogy between the work of the surrealist artist and that of the magical workings of the universe based on correspondences is made ever more unquestionable. In a similar vein, Seligmann alluded that the artist's labour can be compared to the alchemist's in the articles "The Heritage of the Accursed" in the December 1945 issue of *View* and "Magic and the Arts," in *View's* October 1946 issue.

There can be no doubt about the fact that Seligmann's many erudite articles were read by and exerted an influence on many of his surrealist colleagues. In New York, he additionally acted as an important mentor for them on the topic of occultism. For instance, Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), whom he had met in Paris, became a close friend. The two artists maintained a correspondence and Carrington relied on Seligmann's knowledge of the occult for advice and inspiration.[30] Similarly, his writings also influenced the work of Carrington's close friend, the Spanish-born surrealist painter Remedios Varo (1908–1963).[31] Breton himself also recognised his expertise and often turned to him to improve his own knowledge. During this time in exile in the U.S., Breton was increasingly embracing esotericism, and his discussions with Seligmann may have played a major part in this. Seligmann once noted, "[f]rom my conversations with the surrealist leader I could gather the attraction which magic exerts upon him."[32] He also provided Breton with documents about Arcanum 17, the traditional tarot deck's so-called Star card, about the story of Isis and Osiris, and about number symbolism. All of these provided central background information for Breton's most esoteric book, *Arcanum 17*, written in 1944. In it, Breton provided his most poetic manifesto for a revival of mythology and magic and delineated his hope for an alchemical post-war renewal. As further discussed in Daniel Zamani's contribution to this volume, central to this project was an idealised and emphatically occult vision of woman as a gateway to spiritual purification, a notion Seligmann keenly shared as I will discuss below.[33]

As indicated earlier, alongside magic, the surrealists also looked to myth as one potential way to effectuate a spiritual rebirth. Yearning to create such a new myth defined by an all-encompassing change, they turned to the legacy of antiquity. As Breton asserted, "Insofar as Surrealism aims at creating a collective myth, it must endeavour to bring together the scattered elements of that myth, beginning with those that proceed from the oldest and strongest tradition."[34] The response to this call is demonstrated by an article on the myth of Oedipus, "Oedipus and the Forbidden Fruit," written by Seligmann for the March 1944 issue of *View*. However, it was above all his participation at the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition (14 October-7 November 1942) at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in Manhattan that reflected his keen interest in myth. The guiding thread of the exhibition was mythology, a choice grounded in the wish to show that when the War was raging, the search for a liberating myth was a primary concern for the surrealists, as they sought to counteract contemporary Fascist myth-making with positive counter-myths. The exhibition catalogue also abounded with esoteric imagery, and it is likely that Seligmann played a role in its conception.

Further, the catalogue also reproduced two works by Seligmann. One of them was his painting *The Therpistrites* (1940), which depicts figures engaged in what appears to be a medieval carnival dance, evocative of Seligmann's childhood memories of Basel. The faceless figures are set in a dim, undecipherable space, inducing a sensation of terror. The second work, *Fin de l'automobile* (1942), was included in the catalogue's earlier section prepared by Breton. In it, he presented fifteen myths from different periods and cultures, and by analogy associated them with works of art. Seligmann's piece, depicting a creature made of machinery parts, standing in a human pose, was associated with the myth of *l'homme artificiel*. Faust's quote "Que vois-je remuer autour de ce gibet?" ("What do I see stirring around this gibbet?") accompanied the image, invoking the sense of the deathly scene when Faust saw a corpse hanging around a gibbet. Faust's phrase reinforces not only the negative connotations

associated with the myth, as the artificial man renders all human life redundant, but also the drastic and deadly atmosphere of the War.

The final myth in Breton's contribution to the catalogue was dedicated to the Great Transparent Ones, invisible mythical beings introduced in his 1942 text "Prolegomena to a Third Surrealist Manifesto, or Not." Breton suggested that these beings, fulfilling the hope for change and rebirth, manifested themselves to humans at times of danger. Seligmann's adherence and indebtedness to Breton's ideas is evinced by his execution of the painting *Melusine and the Great Transparents* in 1943, the year following the exhibition. In it, by deploying his swirling 'cyclonic' forms, which recall geological formations and which I will discuss below, Seligmann interpreted these creatures and the myth of the medieval fairy-woman Melusine, to which Breton referred in the exhibition and in *Arcanum 17*.

Among other joint projects with surrealists related to the occult, in January 1943 Seligmann collaborated with Breton and Duchamp on a window installation publicising the demonologist's Denis de Rougemont's (1906–1985) book *La part du diable* (1942) at Brentano's bookstore in New York. The room functioned as a public signifier of the surrealists' fascination with all aspects of esotericism, including the devil, vampires and the tarot. Duchamp hung open umbrellas from the ceilings, as imitations of bat wings, possibly referencing vampires, while Seligmann painted diabolical symbols on the installation's backdrop. They included the tarot card related to the devil and portraits of demons, which were later reproduced in the chapter on black magic in his book *The Mirror of Magic*. Taken together, all of these contributions demonstrate both the width and the depth of Seligmann's interest in and knowledge of myths, magic and their history, and establish his expertise on these subjects. At the same time, his partaking reflects the more general turn of the surrealist movement towards myth and magic as sites of introspection as well as means of healing in the face of trauma, terror and ideological instability.

Pleine Marge

Seligmann's artistic appreciation of the occult had been signalled by yet another important collaboration with Breton. This concerned the publication of Breton's lengthy poem *Pleine marge* by the Nierendorf Gallery, New York, in 1943, for which he had asked Seligmann to create an accompanying etching (Figure 8.1).[35] Here, Seligmann complements the occult references appearing in Breton's poem, while the inclusion of '1713' — numbers that Breton considered anagrams of his initials — are a clear homage to Breton as a kind of modern artist-magician himself. The etching brought together elements from astrology, the tarot and the Kabbalah, and featured the traditional occult motif of the magic circle as used in ritual practice. Written in Latin around the edge of the circle are the words "Lucifer, my friend and servant." Since in his book *The Mirror of Magic* Seligmann wrote a chapter on black magic, these words might be interpreted as an invocation of black magic. On the other hand, both Seligmann and Breton were influenced by nineteenth-century Romantic lore, in which Lucifer was championed as a tragic revolutionary figure. Indeed, as discussed by Anna Balakian, the surrealists appropriated Lucifer as an icon of defiance against the socio-political status quo, and it is likely that Seligmann referred to this vision of Satan as a heroic revolutionary hero, too. Among other elements in the etching *Pleine marge*, the letters in between the spokes of the wheel probably reference the names
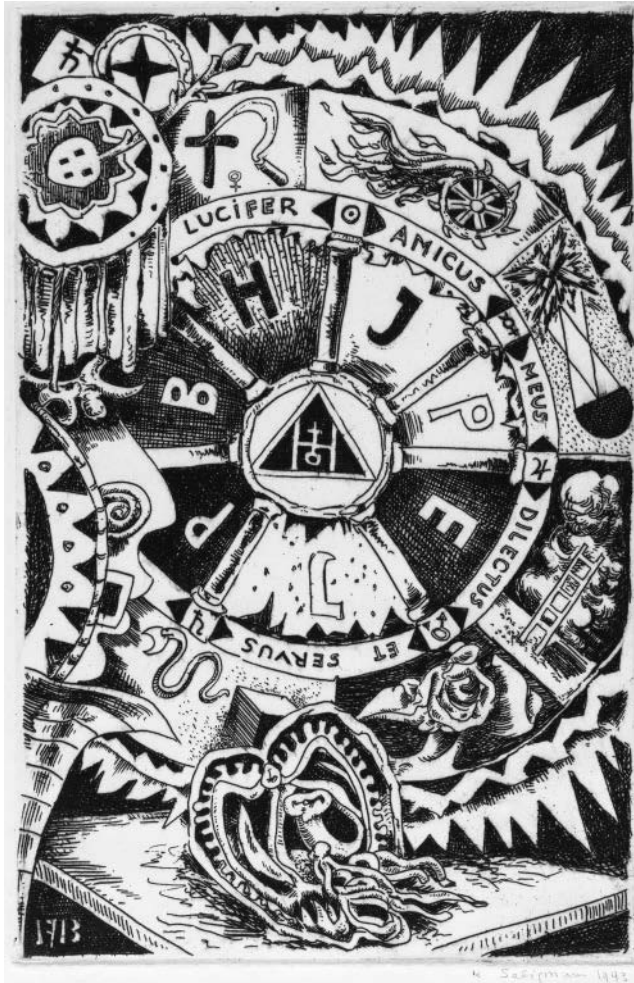
Figure 8.1 Kurt Seligmann, untitled etching accompanying André Breton's poem "Pleine marge," 1943. Published by Nierendorf Gallery, New York, 1943. © 2017 The Seligmann Center at the Orange County Citizens Foundation.

of archangels. It is likely that these angels are from the white magic tradition, as in the chapter on black magic Seligmann refers to "holy angels of white magic," which however, "could be misused for the blackest kind of sorcery."[36] The wheel motif may further be a reference to one of the suits designed for the surrealist deck of cards known as the *Jeu de Marseille*, in which the wheel stood as an icon of revolution, associated with the three figures of Paracelsus, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) and the Swiss medium and surrealist muse Hélène Smith (Élise Muller; 1861–1929). Moreover, the wheel symbol also often appeared more generally in Seligmann's paintings and graphic art, perhaps as a hint to his surrealist as well as occultist inclinations.

The Mirror of Magic

Seligmann's entire research and collaborations, his ethnographic explorations, his acquisition of a comprehensive library and subsequent writings on magic and the occult all culminated in *The Mirror of Magic* (1948), the manuscript he completed in late 1945. The enormous appeal of this venture was reflected by the fact that it was translated into several languages, and was later reprinted under the title *The History of Magic* (1952) and as *Magic, Supernaturalism and Religion* (1968).[37] The publication's aim, in Seligmann's own words, was "to present to the general reader a condensed account of the magical ideas and operations in the civilized Western world."[38] Over 480 pages in length, the book explored topics such as alchemy, Gnosticism, witchcraft, the Kabbalah, black magic and astrology, and was abundantly illustrated. The flyer announcing the publication explicitly noted that it came to fruition "in a unique, visual approach" and that "[n]o other book on magic has stressed the pictorial and aesthetic element as this one does. A wealth of illustrations (overall as many as 250) make it truly a 'mirror' of magic." Undoubtedly, an artist-oriented approach that he adopted in his articles was also at the forefront of his book. "As an artist," wrote Seligmann, "I was concerned with the aesthetic value of magic and its influence upon man's creative imagination. The relics of ancient peoples indicate that religio-magical beliefs have given a great impulse to artistic activities."[39] Given the validity of magic in a creative process, he concluded that it should not be relegated to the past, but rather be considered as an integral part of the present. In his own words, "hardly one among us can say that he is entirely free of magical thought or action," – an assessment Breton and many other surrealists would have eagerly subscribed to at the time.[40]

Furthermore, as in his articles, the notion of the unity of all substance in the cosmos and their analogies and correspondences were at the heart of Seligmann's publication. "The presuppositions of high magic: 'All is contained in All' and 'All is One' are the basis of my … book," he explained.[41] His approach was thus perfect in keeping with the surrealist collective appreciation of magic as a transformative power defying convention and providing an unusual way to stimulate the mind and seek knowledge. In the conclusion to his magisterial account, these notions were thus duly emphasized:

> Magical operations … permitted men … to overcome the oppression of hostile reality…. Magic was a stimulus to thinking. It freed man from fears, endowed him with a feeling of his power to control the world, sharpened his capacity to imagine, and kept awake his dreams of higher achievement.[42]

This quote mirrors the surrealist approach to magic as a powerfully emancipatory discourse in antagonistic times, which Seligmann calls here 'hostile reality'. For him, the tormented state of the world was to be combated by using magic to set the mind free from any confinement or limits that held it back from exploring its full potential. Hence, while Surrealism is never directly brought up in the book, Seligmann must have perceived the publication as a fundamentally surrealist undertaking. He drew on Breton's *Second Manifesto* where the latter, as noted earlier, called for the occultation of Surrealism. In a script from 1944, Seligmann made a direct reference to the manifesto: "works on alchemy … and … their irrational assemblage of disparate

things … fill a certain need, and are to some extent connected with Surrealist tendencies (Breton, 2nd Manifesto of Surrealism; Nicolas Flamel)."[43] Furthermore, in 1946, Seligmann drafted a letter to Breton, in which he revealed that he thought of Breton often while writing his book; above all, when he was completing the chapter on the Chemical Wedding. In this draft letter, Seligmann specifically stressed that that particular chapter was inspired by Breton.[44]

The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz (1616) was a treatise by the German theologian Johann Valentin Andréae (1586–1654) that became a founding document of the Rosicrucians, an alleged group of mystics claiming to possess esoteric wisdom and devoted to the study and practice of the occult. *The Chemical Wedding* is the allegory of a seven-stage alchemical process, during which the male (the king) and the female (the queen) qualities are joined, symbolised in the myth of the androgyne.[45] The book was considered a standard text of mystic language by the surrealists as they were "appropriating alchemical language as a rhetorical device."[46] Seligmann also described it in a highly positive manner: "a unique piece of writing. In it, we travel through a hermetic wonderland."[47] He further noted:

> *The Chemical Wedding* satisfied man's longing for the marvellous, for the continuation of childhood dreams…. The Rosicrucian [game's]… motive was true magic…. Magic symbolized man's power over the material world, the belief that through thought and action he could ascend into realms where all men were brothers. … Rosicrucians met their fellow men not on elevated intellectual planes but in the mysterious hall of the common human psyche.[48]

In his quest to emphasise the superiority of magic, pitting it against the brutality of the War, Seligmann devoted a whole chapter to the figure of Isis, accompanied by two illustrations. She, too, was key in the context of Surrealism's fixation on occultism and healing in a world marked by death. It is possible that his reading of both Novalis (1772–1801) and Mabille influenced his embrace of the myth of Isis, as the goddess was central to their work. Mabille included this myth in *Le Miroir du merveilleux*'s chapter "Crossing Through Death," where her unique powers of healing and occult protection are emphasised. In Egyptian mythology, Isis is a supreme deity of magic, who resurrected her murdered husband Osiris from the dead. Seligmann described how powerful this myth was for him:

> The great goddess evokes gentleness, maternal constancy, devotion to husband, fertility and grace of woman. She fosters everything born, everything that grows. Her tears swell the waters of the Nile which, overflowing, fertilize the earth. Restored by the grieving Isis, Osiris … rose again.[49]

Seligmann drew on the renowned Egyptian myths, outlining the importance of Isis's female generative capability, describing her as a perfect icon to symbolise a spiritual and physical renewal, and thus championing the goddess as a site of rebirth in much the same way as many women artists of the period were beginning to do.[50] Seligmann pronounced Isis the greatest of all mythological goddesses; she was a guardian of life itself: "Isis towered above them all … it was *life* that Isis loved and protected."[51]

Unmistakably, in the waning days of the War, Seligmann, like Breton, embraced the redeeming feminine force as an antidote to masculine rationality. As Breton had written in *Arcanum 17*, the war had made it imperative to reject the prevalence of male ideas that were misused and led to atrocities, and embrace instead the female counterpart.[52]

Isis was indeed a major character in *Arcanum 17*, where she functioned as a powerful icon of redemption and restoration. Here, Breton described her in terms that recall the female figure of the titular tarot Star card, which also symbolised hope and regeneration. It might not be a coincidence that in 1944, the same year that Breton wrote *Arcanum 17*, Seligmann painted *Isis* (Figure 8.2). The work demonstrates Seligmann's pervasive interest in her myth, and in femininity more generally. Although faceless,

Figure 8.2 Kurt Seligmann, *Isis*, 1944. Oil on canvas. Private Collection, courtesy Weinstein Gallery, San Francisco. © 2017 The Seligmann Center at the Orange County Citizens Foundation.

Photo: Nicholas Pishvanov.

she resembles, in her form, rather closely, the depiction of Isis as given by Athanasius Kircher in *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652), that was illustrated in Seligmann's chapter on Isis. Here, Seligmann portrays the goddess in light and bright colours, emphasising her life-giving function and depicting her as an all-powerful creature reigning above the world. In line with a surrealist vision of woman as related to natural forces, she seems to be composed of cosmic, geological and biological components. They are, to some extent, in the process of becoming, and in flux, metaphorically echoing the regenerative force of Isis herself. It is possible that Seligmann was alluding to his and the surrealists' general interest in the cosmic unity of all matter, as Isis united death with life, and the three worlds: earthly, celestial and subterranean.[53] Subsequently, in his book, Seligmann specifically stressed the universal and unifying symbolism related to the cult of Isis:

> Four essences … are Fire, Water, Earth, and Air. However, there is a fifth essence, or quintessence, which permeates everything above in the stars and below upon earth. It is the world soul-spirit which animates all bodies. … The ancient goddesses of growth and vegetation, like Isis, were nothing more to the alchemist than the emblems of the quintessence, the generative power….[54]

In this passage, Seligmann made a reference to other goddesses. Later in his book, when discussing alchemy, he also extended such universal value to women in general: "a woman is the alchemist's symbol of nature. He follows her tracks, which lead to perfection."[55] Given the importance it ascribed to magic, mythology and the psychic realm, *The Mirror of Magic* confirmed and solidified Seligmann's position as an expert on these subjects. Carrington, who firmly embraced a reactivation of mythology and magic herself, enthusiastically read Seligmann's plea for the occult. In a letter she wrote from Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1948, she congratulated him in warmest terms, writing: "I have just come to the end of your beautiful book … I was much moved and touched by the scrupulous honesty with which you treated the subject… without any attempt at mystification which seems to be the vulgar habit."[56] It is also interesting to note that Breton's *L'Art magique* was published in 1957, the year after the French edition of Seligmann's book came out, as Seligmann's publication might have influenced Breton's own writings.

While Seligmann's interest in myth and magic was markedly academic, for the launch of his book, on 8 May 1948, he threw a party in his Bryant Park studio, where he playfully experimented with magical procedures. As we can see in a photograph taken on that occasion (Figure 8.3), he stands in the centre of a magic circle, inscribed with names of the archangels and accompanied by his artist colleague Enrico Donati (1909–2008). Seligmann and Donati here seem to enact a sixteenth-century ritual devised by occult experimenters Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelly, concerning the summoning of the dead, mentioned in Seligmann's book.[57] Among other objects placed in the circle was Donati's sculpture *Fist* (1946), depicting a clenched fist with two eyes of different colours (one blue, while the other black) sprawling from the palm, perhaps as an allusion to the evil eye that so fascinated Seligmann. That evening, Seligmann also marked moles onto a guest's face and shoulder, demonstrating the art of divination. Once again, he drew direct references from his book, where the principal moles on the human body were also illustrated in a lengthy chapter on divination.

Figure 8.3 Bernard Hoffman, Photograph of a "Magic Evening" ("Soirée Seligmann") in Kurt Seligmann's New York studio, 1948. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Seligmann Center at the Orange County Citizens Foundation.

Seligmann's Occult Iconography

With respect to the relation of his art to his interest in magic, Seligmann tended to contradict himself. In 1946 he claimed: "[m]y interest in 'Black Magic' is quite apart from all this."[58] However, two years before that he wrote:"[d]oubtless, my liking for [occult] books is connected with my person, and thus directly or indirectly with my painting."[59] What remains beyond doubt is that many of his images originated in his library, as their titles and motifs were related to the subject matter of his books, including witches, sorceresses, the Sabbath, initiation and exorcism. In these cases, he portrayed magical themes directly, but many of his other works reflected a more subtle and disguised engagement with magic through subjects such as carnival, heraldry as well as depictions of frightening skeletal personages performing ritualistic dances or engaged in battles.

The unity of all matter so central to the surrealist turn to magic was also a defining element of the medieval carnival tradition: permeated by the spirit of reversal, it grotesquely mixes dualities and opposites, and becomes a way of recreating a cosmic union that Seligmann intensely advocated. As the anthropologist Roberto DaMatta noted: "inversion or reversal unites what is normally separate."[60] Seligmann applied this spirit in his works such as *Superbia* (n.d.), opening it to multiple meanings and interpretations: "Is it a man with a mask? Or a stylized rooster? Or a caricature of the old allegory so dear to the Middle-Ages? Or all in one? Probably!"[61] Similarly, medieval heraldic figures and apparitions played a prominent role in Seligmann's *œuvre*.

Their magical connotations represented his desire to conquer the anxiety he felt in the face of war and doom. In "An Eye for a Tooth," Seligmann listed what he called "the stereotypes of anguish" one ought to use in art to get rid of anguish, including such motifs as "phantom apparition, massacre … motionless soldiers, execution, collapse, faceless heads…."[62] Undoubtedly, such ghastly figures were evocative of the detrimental impact of war and Fascism on humanity. The painting *Vanity of the Ancestors* (1940–1943) (Plate V), made when the Second World War was at its peak, is a prime example of such imagery. It depicts fragmented figures, resembling knights, possibly engaged in a fight on a desolate landscape or a stage. They are faceless, deprived of identity, but their presence is felt vividly. As discussed by Stephan Hauser, referencing Seligmann's own interpretation, the absence of faces suggests 'social shame',[63] but also the fact that the faces are supposed to absorb the anxiety felt by the viewer.[64] The dark gloomy background that dominated his works in the late 1930s and early 1940s is here replaced by greener shades with positive overtones — possibly as a reflection of the untouched American nature that "is virginal … untouched by the ghosts of past cultures," and which became a marked source of inspiration for many of the exiled surrealists during the 1940s.[65]

Given my aims in this chapter, it is particularly significant that the heraldic symbols in works such as *Vanity of the Ancestors* also take on a specifically magical, apotropaic and cathartic meaning.[66] Seligmann emphasised the symbolic meaning of his heraldic elements and costumes himself: "Rather than as historical elements, these things should be seen as psychological symbols," he explained. "I seek… in looking at these strange and irrational draperies and figures, a confirmation from the exterior of my state of mind."[67] As a consequence, such symbolism seems to allude to the desire to ward off the terror caused by global conflict, but in *Vanity of the Ancestors*, a hint of hope is felt when compared to the darker works, such as the key composition *Sabbath Phantoms* (1939), the last work Seligmann produced before leaving Europe permanently for the U.S. In it, he depicted a group of figures in a state of utter bewilderment, each about to run off in a different direction, while another larger figure on the left gazes into the distance as if sensing upcoming destruction. Seligmann specifically connected the painting with "political and intellectual reaction,"[68] implicitly associating it with the impending war. Peter Selz compared his visions to Francisco de Goya's (1746–1828) similarly foreboding iconography, writing that: "Goya, upon experiencing the Napoleonic invasion of his country, painted monsters, as did Seligmann, recalling the bloodbath of the First World War and witnessing the Second."[69]

Also, the art historian Meyer Schapiro, who was a close friend of Seligmann's, stressed the importance of the twentieth-century political havoc in understanding his work, positing that Seligmann's primary influence was not a medieval, but rather a decidedly contemporary one:

> [Seligmann] did not start from this heritage of late medieval art. … He approached it gradually… an attraction induced … by the catastrophes of the late '30s and early '40s…. The disasters of war and peace were a discouraging … background for his personal anxieties. His art then was an authentic reaction to the state of world, which he lived in feeling and imagination. The old art, too, belonged to a period of turmoil, wars and revolts, a moment of decay of the old and of bitter struggles for the new.[70]

It is evident that Seligmann perceived the disasters of war with great clarity, and consequently employed magically laden connotations as an outlet for his political fears. Another example of this artistic stance was the collaborative project *Impossible Landscapes* (1944), a portfolio of eleven drawings that he made to accompany a book of poems by the American writer Nat Herz (1920–1964), all echoing the angst of the war. In the publication of this project, Barbara J. Bloemink noted: "*Impossible Landscapes* carries within it the lament of their two generations: the inevitability of death, the desolation of the present, and a deeply imbedded anxiety over an uncertain future."[71] The importance of heraldry, permeated by the spirit of fear and grief, was also noted by Breton in 1941:

> Seligmann, who has passed through a phase of this heraldic symbolism … moved on to explore all the phosphorescent phenomena of the "night" of the Middle Ages. From these researches he has extracted pure forms of human suffering and energy. … This medieval "night"… he pours out for us, diffusing over the whole ground the glowing quality of moss and nautilus … he reduces all scenes to a single occult region.[72]

In his quote, Breton designated how Seligmann's iconography eventually morphed into his series of 'cyclonic' works, executed in the early 1940s and described by Breton as "a single occult region." These paintings were created by projecting fractured glass onto paper or canvas by tracing the unexpected patterns that appeared. The forms thus engendered recall spinning tornados, released into the atmosphere by an uncontrollable force, like the actions of humanity, and moving unpredictably in all directions. The shapes also form parts of bodies and landscapes, suggesting the occult notion of a singular substance animating the universe. According to Meyer Schapiro, the iconography of these paintings was, indeed, a direct result of Seligmann's exposure to the occult:

> The rocks, plants, clouds, human bodies, weapons and dress, formed of mysterious wrappings or of a crystalline matter … all seem to be of the same exotic substance and suggest one another. It is possible that [Seligmann] was led to the idea of single unifying stuff through his reading of alchemists' books. … There is in that hermetic semblance… [a] search for unity.[73]

Later in his life, Seligmann painted more explicitly alchemically themed works. As in his writings, he associated some of them with the artist's labour. A case in point is his painting *L'Alchimie de la peinture* (1955) (Plate VI) that references the artist as an alchemist or magician. Seligmann depicts the figure, possibly a painter, in a mysterious and elevated manner, like a magician, while the work's title alludes to the process of painting as an alchemical act of transformation, a distinctly magical procedure. In his book's chapter on alchemy, Seligmann stressed this perceived similarity between alchemy and art: "It is not difficult why alchemy is called art — it relied upon imagination as well as upon manual dexterity," he there noted.[74]

In the 1950s, Seligmann's works above all mirrored the fact that he and his wife Arlette had retreated to their farm in Sugar Loaf, New York, becoming ever more immersed in nature. His lyrical visions of metamorphic flowers and plants resembled alchemical visions. He wrote:

The universe is in harmony, and its multiplicity brought into One by a mysterious law. Is it not the painter's task to express the marvellous manifoldness of nature through the variety of forms he depicts? And does he not, following the laws which he sees in the universe, strive to bring all these forms into one organic whole?[75]

Overall, it is therefore the magical undercurrents of Seligmann's works that are unmistakably evident, especially through the symbolism of carnival and heraldry, and the magical and alchemical idea of the unity of all matter that underpinned them.

Conclusion

While Seligmann considered himself to act independently from any movement, it is evident that his thoughts on magic and myth not only ran in tandem, but also cross-fertilised with that of the surrealists, especially Breton, and would continue to do so even after the latter expelled him from the group due to a trivial argument arising over the correct interpretation of a tarot card. Following this argument in 1943, he bluntly told Seligmann that he would not be included in any future surrealist exhibitions, and later, in *L'Art magique* he did not even mention Seligmann's name once.[76] After the war, Breton followed suit on his threat by excluding Seligmann from exhibitions related to magic and the occult, to which the latter would have been an ideal contributor. For example, Seligmann did not participate in the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition at the Maeght Gallery in Paris. Similarly, in 1960/61, Seligmann was not included in the *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* exhibition at the D'Arcy Galleries in New York, the last official International Surrealist Exhibition, to which mythology and magic were central. As the contemporary art critic Murdock Pemberton noted: "To leave Seligmann out is comparable to trying to build an arch without a keystone."[77] It is telling and it probably must have been not by accident that Seligmann's "Verified Transcript from the Register of Death" noted "Surrealist Painter," rather than merely painter, as his occupation.[78] It may be partially due to this schism with Breton and undeserved exclusion from major surrealist platforms that Seligmann's contribution to the collective "occultation of Surrealism" has remained seriously under-researched, calling for urgent reassessment and further examination.[79]

Notes

1 With regard to Kurt Seligmann's personal definition of magic, the following words from his lecture typescript "On Magic" are enlightening: "If you expect … a definition of magic I must disappoint you…. [K]nowing the colossal age of magic, you can imagine the manifold aspects … [it] has assumed…. It is the character of magic to be mysterious and I cannot but be mysterious when speaking about it. … Magic operation is the application, the practical use of wisdom … acquired in contemplation of the inner self and of nature…. Magic endeavours to explain every phenomenon in life, in nature, in the invisible world. Omnia in Omnibus, all is contained in all and all is one." Kurt Seligmann Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 3–4.
2 Seligmann in Henri Héraut, "Artistes d'aujourd'hui: Kurt Seligmann, peintre d'avant-garde," *Sud* 8, no. 126 (April 15, 1935): 28ff.

3 Seligmann's scrapbook, Beinecke.
4 Stephan Hauser, "Kurt Seligmann as Draftsman," *Drawing* 16, no. 6 (March–April 1995): 123.
5 Kurt Seligmann to Pierre Courthion [January 18, 1946], Beinecke.
6 André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 178.
7 Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous. Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and the Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 53.
8 Kurt Seligmann, "The Magical Stimulus," Beinecke.
9 For such a comparative approach to mythology and culture within surrealist approaches to 'primitivism', see notably James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, no. 4 (October 1981): 539–64; for more information on Seligmann's travels to British Columbia and interest in totemism, see Celia Rabinovitch, "Surrealism Through the Mirror of Magic," accessed September 15, 2015, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/surrealismandmagic/essay.html.
10 André Breton to Kurt Seligmann [August 10, 1940], Beinecke.
11 In 1962, Seligmann's library of books on magic was purchased by the Cornell University. In addition, see his library cards in the Kurt Seligmann Papers at the Beinecke.
12 André Bourin interview with Seligmann, "La magie dans un miroir," *Nouvelles Littéraires* (May 2, 1957): n. p.
13 For a wider discussion of Paracelsus's system of correspondences, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus: Essential Readings* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1999).
14 Seligmann, "On Magic," 8, Beinecke.
15 Seligmann acquired von Welling's *Opus Mago-Cabbalisticum et Theosophicum* (1735) that most probably was the text of forbidden knowledge that enticed the imagination of the magician Faust in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1794–1832) play *Faust* (1808).
16 Seligmann, "On Magic," 8.
17 Kurt Seligmann, "My Mythology." In *Kurt Seligmann. Recent Paintings* (New York: Fine Arts Associates, 1960), 12 pages.
18 Kurt Seligmann, "Terrestrial Sun," in *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, ed. James Laughlin (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1940), 537.
19 Ibid., 536.
20 Ibid., 537.
21 Kurt Seligmann, "Magic Circles," *View* 1, nos. 11–12 (February–March 1942): 3.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Kurt Seligmann, "An Eye for a Tooth," *View* 1, nos. 7–8 (October–November 1941): 3.
25 Kurt Seligmann, "It's Easy to Criticize," *View* 2, no. 2 (May 1942): 109.
26 Kurt Seligmann, "The Evil Eye," *VVV* 1 (June 1942): 47.
27 Kurt Seligmann, "Prognostication by Paracelsus," *VVV* 2–3 (March 1943): 96.
28 Ibid.
29 Kurt Seligmann, "Microcosmological Chart of Man," *View* 4, no. 4 (December 1944): 129.
30 Susan L. Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004), 66.
31 Patrick Lepetit, *The Esoteric Secrets of Surrealism: Origins, Magic, and Secret Societies* [2012], trans. John E. Graham (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2014), 284.
32 Seligmann, "The Magical Stimulus," 7.
33 André Breton, *Arcanum 17* [1945], trans. Zack Rogow and with an introduction by Anna Balakian (Copenhagen and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2004). For Seligmann, see *The Mirror of Magic: A History of Magic in the Western World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), 72–76.
34 André Breton, "Non National Boundaries of Surrealism" [1937], in *Free Rein* [1953], trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 17.
35 *Surrealism and Magic*, accessed September 27, 2015, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/surrealismandmagic.

36 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 305.
37 The French edition of Seligmann's book (1956) was post-faced by the occult specialist Robert Amadou, who knew Breton, and at times attended surrealist meetings. Amadou, too, identified magic with analogy.
38 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 21.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 481.
41 Seligmann, interviewed by J. J. Sweeney, "Eleven Europeans in America," *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 13, nos. 4–5 (1946): 11.
42 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 483.
43 Seligmann, untitled typescript (1944), 4, Beinecke.
44 Seligmann, draft letter to Breton [April–May? 1946], reproduced in "Kurt Seligmann textes, entretiens, peintures," ed. Hauser, *Pleine Marge* 22 (December 1995): 114.
45 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 444.
46 Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 187.
47 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 443.
48 Ibid., 447–48.
49 Ibid., 72.
50 See, for example, Victoria Ferentinou's chapter in this anthology.
51 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 72. Italics is Seligmann's emphasis.
52 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 24.
53 Michel Tardieu, "Isis the Magician, in Greek and Coptic Papyruses," in *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*, ed. Yves Bonnefoy, trans. Wendy Doniger (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 255.
54 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 142.
55 Ibid., 190.
56 Leonor Carrington to Kurt Seligmann [Mexico 1948], Beinecke.
57 *Surrealism and Magic*, accessed September 27, 2015, http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/surrealismandmagic.
58 Seligmann, "Eleven …", 11.
59 Kurt Seligmann, untitled typescript, 4.
60 Roberto DaMatta, *Carnivals, Rogues and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma*, trans. John Drury (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 56.
61 Kurt Seligmann, "The Meaning," n. p., Beinecke.
62 Seligmann, "An Eye for a Tooth," 3.
63 Hauser, "Draftsman," 123.
64 Ibid. Hauser refers to Max Raphael, art historian and friend of Seligmann, who in 1943 wrote about the apotropaic references in Seligmann's imagery.
65 Seligmann, "Eleven …," 12.
66 Hauser, "Draftsman," 123–26.
67 Seligmann, untitled typescript, 1–5.
68 Seligmann, "Eleven …," 10–11.
69 Peter Selz, "The Painter & The Alchemist," in *Kurt Seligmann: First Message from the Spirit World of the Object* (San Francisco, CA: Weinstein Gallery, 2015), 8.
70 Meyer Schapiro, *Kurt Seligmann – The Early Years* (New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1964).
71 Barbara J. Bloemink, "Disasters of War," in *The Impossible Landscapes of Nat Herz and Kurt Seligmann* (New York: Privately printed, 1999), xviii.
72 Breton, "Artistic Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism" (1941), in *Art of This Century: Objects, Drawings, Photographs, Paintings, Sculpture, Collages, 1910 to 1942*, ed. Peggy Guggenheim (New York: Art of This Century & Art Aid Corporation, 1942), 25–26.
73 Schapiro, *Seligmann*.
74 Seligmann, *Mirror*, 146.
75 Kurt Seligmann, "Magic and the Arts," *View* 7, no. 1 (October 1946): 17.
76 Yet, Seligmann maintained friendships with other surrealists. For example, in fall 1945 he attended evenings in the apartment of the art dealer Julien Levy, together with Duchamp,

Ernst and Dorothea Tanning, where they discussed their experiences in magic and options for producing a magic-themed exhibition. See Hauser, *Kurt Seligmann, 1900–1962: Leben und Werk* (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG Verlag, 1997), 270.

77 Murdock Pemberton to Kurt Seligmann [December 9, 1960], Beinecke.

78 "Verified Transcript from the Register of Death," The Williamson Law Book Co., Rochester, N.Y. 14609, The Seligmann Center Archives, Sugar Loaf, New York.

79 This chapter is the first outcome of my PhD on Kurt Seligmann and magic under the supervision of Gavin Parkinson at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Throughout this project, I have extensively researched material from and belonging to Seligmann at the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and Seligmann's personal library of books on magic and the occult at the Cornell University Library, Rare and Manuscript Collections.

Part III

Female Artists, Gender and the Occult

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9   The Quest for the Goddess

Matriarchy, Surrealism and Gender Politics in the Work of Ithell Colquhoun and Leonora Carrington

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> [A] true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of all Living, the ancient power of fright and lust – the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death.[1]

In 1948, British author and poet Robert Graves (1895–1985) published *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* in which he claimed that poetic mythmaking is connected to the cult of the Triple Goddess and her son-consort. He further posited matriarchy as the earliest form of social order and celebrated the 'Goddess' as all-powerful and as a muse.[2] Graves's identification of matriarchy with goddess worship struck a chord with several women artists and authors who were active in the middle of the twentieth century. The British-born painter and writer Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), for instance, famously argued that reading *The White Goddess* proved "the greatest revelation of her life;"[3] similarly, the British painter, author and occultist Ithell Colquhoun (1906–1988) also evoked the Goddess in her occult novel *Goose of Hermogenes* (1961) as early as the 1940s, and later dedicated a series of automatic drawings as well as the poetic collection *Grimoire of the Entangled Thicket* (1973) to "the White Goddess at a time when wasteful technology is threatening the plant-life (and with it all organic life) of earth and the waters."[4]

The image of the Goddess has been an inspiration for art and poetry since the nineteenth century and was prevalent in the context of Surrealism's revision and deployment of neo-romantic discourses on pre-modern and indigenous cultures.[5] Several women intellectuals and artists, in particular, turned to the formulation of a matrifocal history to subvert and/or rewrite creation myths, especially in the late 1960s and the 1970s, when feminist spirituality rose in prominence. Both Carrington and Colquhoun can be seen as important precursors to this current. The two women's interest in matriarchy was significantly fostered and shaped in the 1940s and 1950s under the influence of contemporary literature on the Goddess. Their knowledge of witchcraft and occultism, such as H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophy, also exerted a certain influence. Moreover, Celtic folklore and mythology, which abounds in goddess figures, entered the work of both women who traced their heritage to Celtic roots and were acquainted with the modernist Celtic revival. In other words, a bricolage of theories and practices bestowing power to women exerted an influence on them long before the late 1960s and was utilised as a means by which to call for women's self-awareness and for eco-enchantment. In this chapter, I shall therefore explore the gender politics of the two women's appropriation of the matriarchal discourse, and

investigate the ways they re-constructed the image of the Goddess in selected texts and images from the 1940s and early 1950s, when surrealist interest in magic and the occult reached its height.[6]

Reviving the Goddess: Anthropology, Archaeology, Folklore and the Occult

Surrealist poetry and art teem with powerful otherworldly women whose forces are simultaneously exalted and feared. The proliferation of neo-romantic ideas about womanhood within artistic circles was partly predicated upon the flourishing of archaeological and anthropological discourses in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. A historicist approach to the human past unearthed the possibility that the earliest form of social development was matriarchal, that is that women ruled over men in prehistory. This theory was first proposed by the Swiss jurist and historian of Roman law Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887), whose influential 1861 publication *Das Mutterrecht* claimed that social organisation progressed from widespread promiscuity and uncontrolled hetaerism (a tellurian or Aphroditean phase) to a stage in which women ruled society and controlled the ownership of children and property (a lunar or Demetrian phase), to, finally, a solar phase (Dionysian and Apollonian) in which mother-right was replaced by conjugal father-right, and men gained the political upper hand.[7]

Bachofen's argument was initially discredited, but soon won wide acceptance and consequently exerted a powerful impact on his contemporaries, only to be subsequently rejected outright by scholars in the second half of the twentieth century.[8] *Das Mutterrecht* is also thought to have been influential among the surrealists, although it is not certain how many actually read it. It is, however, likely that they knew this startling new theory through Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), who pays tribute to Bachofen as the initiator of the matriarchal argument in his *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats* (1884).[9] Another source available to the surrealists was the monumental compendium *The Golden Bough* (1890–1915; abridged 1922), composed by British anthropologist James Frazer (1854–1941). In this widely influential work, Frazer discerned the motif of the Great Mother and her lover/son in what he called the "substantially … identical" myths of the Syrian Aphrodite (or Astarte) and Adonis, the Phrygian Cybele and Attis and the Egyptian Isis and Osiris.[10] Frazer further suggested that in Athens and Rome female kinship and an epoch of mother-right must have preceded male kinship.[11]

Both Colquhoun and Carrington were familiar with Frazer's work even as they were exposed to other sources. For example, British archaeologist Arthur Evans (1851–1941), who discovered the Palace of Minos in Crete, attributed the numerous images of female deities to "the same Great Mother with her Child or Consort whose worship under various names and titles extended over a large part of Asia Minor and the Syrian regions beyond."[12] Evans regarded these images as testimony of the pre-eminence of women in matriarchal Minoan society. Likewise, British classicist Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928) elaborated in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903) on the transition from the primitive matriarchal goddesses to the patriarchal Olympian gods, who "victoriously took over … the cult of the Earth-Mother and the Earth-Maidens."[13] Both Colquhoun and Carrington were familiar with these studies that were regarded as significant contributions to Greek

archaeology at the time. *The Position of Woman in Primitive Society: A Study of the Matriarchy* (1914) by British suffragist and journalist Catherine Gasquoine Hartley (1866–1928) is another relevant book, owned by Colquhoun and likely known to Carrington. Hartley discussed Bachofen's thesis on mother-right and investigated the custom of tracing descent through the mother in contemporary primitive societies, ancient and modern civilisation, folklore and mythology.

The theme of the powerful Goddess was carried further in the mid-twentieth century by Graves, son of the Irish Literary Revival writer Alfred Perceval Graves (1846–1931), in his ground-breaking, but disputed, publication *The White Goddess* (1948). This work appealed to women surrealists, prominently among them, Colquhoun and Carrington. Graves summarised the evolution of "the Great Goddess in her poetic or incantatory character" as the Triple Muse of Sky, Earth and Underworld, whose power, he claimed, had been reduced throughout the centuries as a result of the importation of patriarchy into Europe from the East.[14] For Graves, the diminishing power of the all-prevailing Goddess is manifested in the appearance of the Thunder-Child Zeus, which marked the transition to a patriarchal phase.[15] This change resulted in the compartmentalisation of the supreme female deity into minor divinities.[16] Graves further suggested that Gaelic language in Ireland and some parts of Britain was based on tree-alphabets connected to a thirteen-month calendar that originated in Celtic culture and to the cult of the Great Goddess. *The White Goddess*, which has been described as "the last product of the Irish Literary Revival,"[17] indisputably provided the link between matriarchy, the myth of the Great Goddess and Celtic spirituality for both Carrington and Colquhoun.[18]

The matriarchal postulate was central to the aforementioned works and contributed to a re-conceptualisation of gender roles and woman's position within culture. It is not mere coincidence that such a theory seemed a useful tool in the hands of socialists and feminists struggling for women's emancipation in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Yet, two antithetical discourses were dominant within the broader discussion of matriarchy and goddess worship, which were not always helpful in women's campaigns. The product of the authors' European context, these discourses reflected the conflict between different constructions of gender identities on the eve of the feminist movement. The first was based on an evolutionist account of humankind's social development from an inferior, supposedly (un)civilised woman-centred society to a superior civilised male-dominated one. In this schema women were identified with indigenous and ancient cultures and their magical thinking. The other discourse saw social development as a sort of a fall from an originally paradisiacal locus in which happiness, peace and equality prevailed under the supervision of women, to a revengeful, barbarous patriarchy. In this case woman was to be redeemed so that society would be restored to its original, Edenic, matriarchal state.[19]

This utopian vision also underscored André Breton's thought, especially from the 1940s, as evidenced by texts such as *Arcane 17* (1945), and is found in the work of both Colquhoun and Carrington in the post-war era. Indeed, in the 1940s Breton turned to Romanticism and early nineteenth-century French Utopian Socialism to re-fabricate his myth of womanhood.[20] Romantic socialists like Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin (1796–1864), Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and the Saint-Simonians believed in the moral and spiritual mission of women. The early socialist-feminist Flora Tristan (1803–1844) adopted the image of the redeeming woman or female messiah as one of her symbols of social regeneration.[21] Breton was equally attracted by the

notion of woman as a transformative cultural agent, and, concurring with early social reformists, embraced the utopian idea that the salvation of the earth rests in woman's hands.[22] Breton's allegorising of the transformative powers of women was further rooted in occultism, and most specifically Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant, 1810–1875). Lévi expanded the utopian socialist idea of the redeeming woman and the occult notion of woman's transformative force as the principle of love and intelligence in the world in his *La Mère de Dieu* (1844).[23] In his occult writings, such as *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (1856), he equally ascribed woman a vital role as the passive and uniting principle that, through their fusion, transmutes the active and initiative force of man into wisdom.[24]

These boundless feminine potentials may account for the surrealists' obsession with woman as the intermediary with nature and the unconscious, and for their longing for the union with the beloved. Significantly, female procreative power served as a potent metaphor for "the creative process that worked through the energy of the unconscious with its capacity for symbolic transformation of the world"[25] and, by extension, artistic creativity itself.[26] As a result, woman was bound up with the realm of the imagination, often personifying the limitless forces of the unconscious, which artists should 'tame' for their purposes.[27] In devising such an allegory, Breton had also derived from Jules Michelet's (1798–1874) *La Sorcière* (1862) the idea of woman as "a witch by nature,"[28] endowed with unique creative gifts and a revolutionary power.[29] Michelet's words prefigure the surrealist conception of the female as muse, clairvoyant, and possessor of boundless creative forces at the service of the Bretonian project of social transformation.

Although both Colquhoun and Carrington were more or less familiar with Lévi's treatises and Michelet's rewriting of the witch as a charismatic yet subversive social rebel, they refashioned their image of the Goddess and their matriarchal visions through other avenues that were peculiar to British occultism but not particularly favoured in surrealist discourses in France. Modern Theosophy, not an exclusively British phenomenon, but an internationalist movement with strong presence in England, is an example: founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), the Theosophical Society was among the first occult organisations to admit women on an equal footing. Not surprisingly, it was also associated with suffragist campaigns and feminist political culture in England as early as the late nineteenth century, as Joy Dixon has documented.[30] Blavatsky rewrote the history of world religions and of myths, restoring mother goddesses to a place of prominence. Driven by her anti-Catholicism, she went so far as to suggest the association of the Virgin Mother with the fertility goddesses of antiquity and moon-worship as the basis of Christianity.[31]

Blavatsky's revival of pagan goddesses found resonance in another occult organisation founded in Britain in 1888, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. One of its founders, Samuel Liddell (MacGregor) Mathers (1854–1918) and his wife, Moina Bergson-Mathers (1865–1928), established the cult of the Egyptian deity Isis in Paris where they explored what they termed the Egyptian mysteries.[32] Colquhoun, who was knowledgeable about the Golden Dawn,[33] argues in her biographical account of Mathers, *Sword of Wisdom* (1975), that Mathers selected "Isis from the Egyptian pantheon for a cult-revival" because she represented "the Great Mother of all the pantheons."[34] Former Golden Dawn members, Dion Fortune (Violet Firth, 1890–1946) and Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) also incorporated potent female figures into their magical systems and believed in the redemptive power of women, although in diverging

ways.[35] Fortune, for example, fictionalised women's forces when she wrote that "[a]ll women are Isis, and Isis are all Women" in her novella *The Sea Priestess* (1938).[36]

Apart from occultism, it was witchcraft, in particular, that informed the work of both artists. The history of modern witchcraft can be traced back to British Egyptologist Margaret Murray (1863–1963) who in *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921) claimed that medieval witchcraft was actually a survival of an ancient pagan fertility religion that flourished in the British Isles and worshipped the Mother Goddess and a male Horned God. The idea of witchcraft as tied up with ancient rituals and a powerful Goddess found embodiment in the work of British writer Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964) who, in 1939, created the religious movement known as Wicca, borrowing material from Murray, British occultism and archaeological and anthropological studies. Gardner reiterated the thesis on witchcraft as an 'Old Religion' and also argued that the infamous Sabbaths were actually pagan rites in which the Mother Goddess was venerated.[37]

Both Carrington and Colquhoun were acquainted with most of these publications. Colquhoun, in particular, owned copies of the aforementioned studies – Blavatsky's theosophical writings, texts by Mathers, Crowley and Fortune and works by Murray and Gardner – thus showing a sustained interest in the scholarly exploration of goddess figures. She met Gardner personally in 1954 at Castletown on the Isle of Man, making notes about their conversations that gave her first-hand knowledge of Gardnerian Wicca. Colquhoun identifies the female deity worshipped in witchcraft as "the favourite" one among practitioners and defines her as "the Moon in her Hecate aspect, the 'White Goddess' or Triple Goddess of Robert Graves almost."[38] Carrington, whose library has unfortunately not been properly researched to this day, is reported to have organised weekly meetings at her house where she supervised discussions about world myths surrounding the Goddess since the 1950s.[39] Along with fellow surrealist artists Remedios Varo (1908–1963) and Kati Horna (1912–2000), she further experimented in Mexico with the healing and transformative qualities of elixirs, potions, food and stones.[40] Carrington knew Gardner's work and translated *Witchcraft Today* (1954) for Varo, as further explored in Maria-José Gonzalez's contribution to this volume. She was also acquainted with the ideas propounded by Blavatsky, Crowley and Fortune.[41] As late as the 1970s, Carrington humorously evoked the holy horns of the consecration of the Goddess and identified herself with a witch in her conversations with American scholar Gloria Feman Orenstein.[42]

As has been briefly sketched out, the image of the Goddess was a polyvalent construct that was constantly in the process of revision by anthropologists, archaeologists, occultists and magicians from the nineteenth century onward. Goddess worship was often equated with matriarchy, while witchcraft was seen as a survival of goddess worship as much as a form of rebellion and resistance against institutionalised, patriarchal religion. Both Colquhoun and Carrington were aware of a range of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discursive practices that produced the myth of the Goddess as a category that entailed quite different, and often emancipatory, ideas on power relations, gender roles and social meanings. The question is how the two women weaved together these different strands of thought and practice, engaging themselves in a kind of revisionist mythmaking in which the Goddess proved an image that could empower women artists. I will first explore Colquhoun's case, whose work shows a subtly gendered deployment of this image, and then turn to Carrington, whose concurrent engagement with this iconography is more overtly politicised.

Ithell Colquhoun

> It had come to me again, that dream; … that she was not dead, that it was strange how anyone could think so, how could the idea have arisen?… [S]he had been away for a while – there had been no longer separation than that. There she was, smiling as in life;…. My true ancestor, the alchemists' white woman, lunar progenitrix….[43]

In her most famous novel, *The Goose of Hermogenes* (1961), written from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, Colquhoun identifies her heroine as a descendant of the Mother Goddess. This sort of identification is rooted in neo-pagan and witchcraft discourses in which each woman is identified with the Goddess herself and, by extension, with the cosmos.[44] As contemporary feminist writer and activist Starhawk (Miriam Simos) claimed, the Goddess "is reality, the manifest deity, omnipresent in all of life, in each of us."[45] Equally, Colquhoun considered nature as a living organism filled with female powers. The work she produced prior to her involvement with Surrealism in 1937 is a testimony of her attraction for natural forms.[46] The automatic paintings and texts she created while she was affiliated with the surrealist group in London (1938–1940), and, after her expulsion by its leading figure E. L. T. Mesens (1903–1971), in the early 1940s, further testify to her appreciation of nature as the locus of creative energy and as controlled by female forces.[47]

As early as the 1930s, Colquhoun confessed that she was a "natural Animist" and did not believe in a deity or a supreme being.[48] Over the years she showed a growing interest in female divinities, and especially Isis. Following the teachings of MacGregor Mathers, Colquhoun describes her as the manifestation of the Divine Mother, claiming Isis to be

> the moon as Queen of Heaven but also the earth and its corn, nourisher of mankind – both Iesod and Malkuth on the Tree of Life. Archetype of mother, sister and wife … the Great Goddess of all the pantheons, Mother Nature herself – Binah but also Ain Soph Aur, the all-pervading and all-producing.[49]

Colquhoun researched various traditions revering goddess figures.[50] Most importantly, she was initiated into occult sects that endorsed female sacrality and actually involved women in rituals: in the 1950s she joined Aleister Crowley's Ordo Templi Orientis (1952) and was admitted to Kenneth Grant's New Isis Lodge (1955); in the 1960s she was engaged in ceremonies conducted by the Druid Order that sustained a holistic understanding of nature and celebrated female deities, and the title of deaconess of the Ancient Celtic Church was conferred upon her; in 1977 she joined the Fellowship of Isis and was ordained as a Priestess of the Egyptian goddess. The Fellowship of Isis was founded by clergyman Laurence Durbin-Robertson (1920–1994) and his sister Olivia, cousins of Robert Graves, as well as Durbin-Robertson's wife Pamela, and set as its scope to promote awareness of the Goddess on an international level.

The memorandum of Colquhoun's ordination informs the reader that she offered incense to Isis "in token of her occult works and writings amongst which is *Goose of Hermogenes*, *Grimoire of the Entangled Thicket* and *Sword of Wisdom*." She further offered flowers to the Goddess Parvati, consort of Shiva in Hinduism, and artworks, such as *Scylla* (1938), to the Goddess Dana, the Irish mother Goddess of the Tuatha

Dé Danann.[51] As thus evidenced, Colquhoun dedicated her works to the goddesses of various spiritual traditions, interweaving paganism, Celtic spirituality and Hinduism. The works Colquhoun dedicated are informed by her hybrid spirituality in decisive ways, thereby moulding a polymorphous image of the sacred female.

Scylla (1938) (Plate VII), in particular, is an artistic example of what Colquhoun considered 'feminine symbols' evoking the interrelationship between nature, women and fertility goddesses. The painting portrays two towering rocks emerging from the seawater, almost joined at their obtuse tops and thus forming an oval-shaped gap. Through their aperture, a boat's conic prow appears, pointing to its direction towards the narrow strait. As Colquhoun herself reveals, this image "was suggested by what I could see of myself in a bath – this with the change of scale due to 'alienation of sensation' became rocks and seaweed."[52] The painting is therefore a double image, a pictorial pun reflecting her influence by Surrealism, and, most specifically, by Salvador Dalí's paranoiac-critical method: the rocks, like naked legs up to the knees, are marked with veins, the seaweed may be unmistakably identified with pubic hair and the boat might be taken as a phallic symbol.[53]

Leaning on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Colquhoun describes Scylla as "the nymph changed first into sea monster, then into rocks on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina and reputed dangerous to mariners."[54] Colquhoun freely adapted the story and consciously assumed Scylla's monstrous nature and threatening role, therefore becoming Scylla herself. Moreover, the uncontrollable power of the monstrous woman – both a harbinger of death and devourer of men – is transferred onto Colquhoun's lower body, thus putting forward the link between death and sexuality. This double allegiance to creation/death was traditionally assigned to the mother goddesses described by Frazer, and was also manifest in the surrealist image of woman.[55] Colquhoun puts emphasis on the monstrous character of her female body and configures the mythical Scylla as powerful and relentless. This is enhanced by the double image of her rocks-thighs, which can be read as two conjoined penises that are ultimately transformed into an open vulva, a dialogical response to Surrealism's eroticisation of the female body.[56] The metamorphosis of a phallic landscape into a vaginal space provides an example of what Barbara Rose calls "vaginal iconology" – an imagery whose primary function is the assault on the dominance of the phallus in Freudian sexual theory.[57] In *Scylla*, Colquhoun thus cogently recreates her vaginal landscape to evoke the power of a vitalistic nature and deconstruct masculinist notions of the female sexual body as monstrous through what Luce Irigaray calls "imitative mimicry."[58]

Colquhoun moved away from mimicry in the 1940s, when she still worked in the orbit of Surrealism but remained alienated from her British colleagues owing to her occult preoccupations.[59] She then broke new ground, conflating a diversity of occult and spiritual designations with unconscious fabrications in paintings such as *Dance of the Nine Opals* (1942) (Figure 9.1), produced automatically and "directly from the unconscious,"[60] but also indebted to goddess worship. In this painting, nine stones are animated by the energy of the earth, which is manifested as a tree-like beam of light emerging from it.[61] The stones are arranged cyclically around the beam and connected through a complex web of rays with earth's centre, the blossom-like sprouts of the beam and one another. Colquhoun wrote a text to provide an interpretation of her work that "is built from several impacted strata of material and meaning."[62] Although she gives several potential readings, it is interesting to note that she reads these stones as "the nine Maidens," a druidic stone-circle near Cornwall that
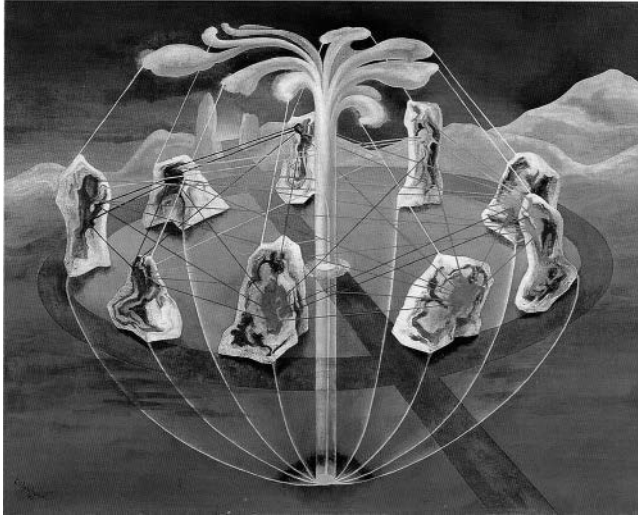
Figure 9.1 Ithell Colquhoun, *Dance of the Nine Opals*, 1942. Oil on canvas. Private collection. © Samaritans. © Noise Abatement Society & © Spire Healthcare.

comprises "girls turned to stone for dancing on (at) the Sabbat [*sic*]" and "restored to natural shape," only if they are "embraced at midnight when the moon is full."[63] Linked with the Sabbath, these girls are identified as witches. Further substantiating this connection, Colquhoun sees the ritual stone-circle as "a psychic zone" of the landscape and as "one of its fountains out of Hecate."[64] Hecate, connected to witchcraft, fertility and the lunar aspect of the Mother Goddess, is highly significant in this respect since she is also recognised as the body of the earth and its chthonic energies.[65] Blending paganism, witchcraft, Cornish folklore and Celtic spirituality, Colquhoun therefore creates an artwork that evokes the chthonic power of women, nature, and the earth as a powerful goddess. As in *Scylla*, this is another occasion in which enchanted women are meaningfully configured as stones and the surrealist theme of the 'magical' animation of the inanimate matter is played out.

Colquhoun's notion of animistic nature is more explicitly pronounced in her travel books *The Crying of the Wind: Ireland* (1955) and especially *The Living Stones: Cornwall* (1957). In both of these works, she sets out on a journey to retrace the history of the landscape and uncover what she considers its inner, psychic life, hidden in what she calls "the animist's Trinity": rocks, wells and trees.[66] In her search, she also discovers holy places, chapels and ancient shrines; strong evidence, in her opinion, of the profound life forces immersed in the Cornish and Irish countryside. Very importantly, she also expresses her own deeply personal identification with the landscape: "I am identified with every leaf and pebble, and any threatened hurt to the wilderness of the valley seems to me like a rape."[67] Colquhoun thus reiterates that the physical realm is an extension of herself, considering any harmful act against it as a violation against a living organism. This displays her viewpoint on woman's communication with a pantheistic nature, but also discloses an ecological sensibility in many ways ahead of her time.

A similar line of thought underpins *Goose of Hermogenes* in which Colquhoun explores, through writing, aspects of the goddess discourse also touched upon in her pictorial imagery. The novel recounts the unnamed heroine's journey to an island to visit her alchemist uncle at his castle, chronicling her extraordinary adventures in a way that blurs the lines between dream-like fantasy and reality. The story, told from the heroine's perspective, has been interpreted as an alchemical allegory of the author's transubstantiation into an androgynous, powerful self, and is exemplary of the feminist appropriation of an occult vocabulary to illustrate a quest towards self-consciousness and creativity.[68] Yet, very significantly, Celtic and Greco-Roman myths filtered through occultism and witchcraft, the matriarchal postulate and pre-scientific, vitalistic epistemologies of nature also inform the narrative, lending further insights into Colquhoun's eclectic and multiform representation of the Goddess. Crucial to this is the invocation to the sacred female that marks an essential stage in the heroine's transformation and spurs a quest that involves both an exploration of nature and subjectivity. This twofold objective can be framed within the surrealist encounter with nature that involved a perception of the natural world as "continuous with the human mind" and as "a reflection of desire, the imagination and instinctual life."[69]

It is in "Putrefaction," the fifth of the novel's twelve chapters corresponding to stages in the alchemical Great Work, that the heroine starts to unravel her relationship with the divine feminine. In the course of the narrative, she recognises the Mother Goddess as an ancestor and encounters her various manifestations: the alchemists' Nature, the White Goddess, Virgin Mary, a Byzantine Empress, an unnamed mystic and Eve, who are all closely intertwined through their access to knowledge and wisdom. The chapter ends with a lamentation set within an apple orchard that recalls the Garden of Eden, in an ambiguous re-visioning of sacred figurations of the feminine, and a mourning for the death of the Goddess and her expulsion from the spiritual realm by patriarchal monotheistic religions.[70]

If "Putrefaction" can be construed as an acknowledgement of the divine feminine and her various figurations, then the chapter "Cibation" is an account of the search for the goddess Vellanserga. Vellanserga, whose name recalls an estate in Cornwall rather than a divinity, assumes multifarious disguises: she is both earth and sea goddess, mother and warrior, maiden and crone and worshipped as a pagan deity and a saint.[71] Her all-encompassing power, the heroine informs us, is, however, diminished and her sanctuary/chapel ruined. Her past glory is more illustratively evidenced by the ruins of her statue, which the heroine describes with awe: "Immediately before me rises a tall figure, a great woman, full Hesper…. She is the type of the hero woman … debased long since as Britannia, but stemming from the ancient line of foundered Atlantis."[72] This process of 'debasement' alludes to the fate of several powerful goddesses who were degraded into minor deities – a claim put forward by matriarchy exponents, and especially Graves in *The White Goddess*. Colquhoun parallels this debasement to a literal death, further placing Vellanserga's petrified sisters "in a sea-Valhalla"[73] that is the realm of the dead in Norse mythology.

The theme of petrification/sleep/death again recurs in "Cibation," shedding more light on Colquhoun's paintings explored in this chapter. Meaningfully, Colquhoun relates the story of the "stone maidens" who "wake and dance" on the anniversary of Vellanserga's feast, establishing a link between Vellanserga, the White Goddess, and the Goddess of Wicca and of Celtic folklore. She also explicitly ascribes the animation of the inanimate world to the regenerative powers of the Goddess. The Goddess, as

nature, is imbued with life forces, but it is during the ritual feast of her devotees that she "struggles to awake."[74] Yet, Vellanserga remains dormant and static, and as the heroine confesses: "I cannot but search for her everywhere; and I find her in the land's own long memory."[75] Vellanserga is explicitly identified with earth, its waters and vegetation, and later in the narrative seen as wild nature explored by colonists who trespass upon her passive body.[76]

Colquhoun purposefully describes nature as an immobilised being immersed in a deep sleep, an image that touches upon the historical and social constitution of the female body and nature as matter to be conquered. It is through this image that she provides the incentive to think differently and call for a re-awakening of women's powers. This message is expressed at the end of the chapter where the heroine claims: "The east is wanting the pelvic arch, the white egg-cell, the lampichor."[77] The East as the location of the rising sun signifies regeneration, which is effected through the power of the womb, encoded in the aforementioned symbols, all related to the character of the Goddess as source of life and spiritual growth.[78] A similar idea is reiterated at the very end of the novel: after her escape from her uncle's mansion, the heroine, exhilarated, reaches the top of a hill from where she could see the "the first auroral glow."[79] This ending affirms the interpretation of Colquhoun's alchemical myth as an allegory for woman's self-realisation and underscores that the rebirth of a powerful female self is made feasible through the knowledge and insight of female divine power.

Ultimately, Colquhoun's narrative discloses her eclectic appropriation of the matriarchal discourse and related myths on the once all-pervading Goddess who is now confined within the boundaries of the physical world. In line with her paintings, the earth is reconfigured as the body of the Goddess, a notion that questions the patriarchal view that the divine transcends the earth, the body and nature.[80] Colquhoun thus distances herself from the dualistic approach of Judaism and Christianity, which, in her view, stripped the physical realm from its spiritual dimension, devaluing it as pure matter. She also challenges the Cartesian division of humans from nature: following Neopaganism, Wicca, Celtic spirituality and goddess mythology, she re-envisions the natural world as a physical-spiritual totality, as an organic and sacred space inhabited by invisible forces, and meaningfully positions woman in communion with it. Most importantly, it is through the search for the Goddess that woman discovers her inner powers and uncovers "the supersensual life" of nature.[81] Situated in opposition to both institutionalised religion and positivist science, Colquhoun re-enchants the body, woman and nature in an attempt to reclaim knowledge and power, but also raise awareness of the technological destruction and pollution of the environment, prefiguring the concerns of ecofeminism from the 1960s onwards.

As will be shown, this perspective was shared by Carrington, whom Colquhoun did not know personally but whose text "The Bird Superior: Max Ernst," originally published in Charles Henri Ford's review *View* (1 April 1942), she had encountered in the surrealist section of *New Road 1943*. Compiled by Colquhoun's husband at the time, the Russian-Italian surrealist Toni del Renzio (1915–2007), the literary review showed the latter's allegiance to the surrealists' recourse to occult tropes in the early 1940s, by including texts that weaved together the ideas of revolution, a new mythopoeia and social subversion. Although not directly exchanging ideas with Carrington, Colquhoun was aware of the ways other women surrealists appropriated occult iconographies in their art, perhaps recognising in Carrington a kindred spirit.

Leonora Carrington

> The sterile jailors of the cup having banished Her from Her Most Rightful Realm in the Caverns of Her Most Secret Mysteries
>
> > Epona, Barbarus, Hekate. ...
>
> Woe unto the children of earth who worship a trinity of men. Woe unto the Sterile Brothers who have torn the cup from Her keeping.[82]

Although Carrington never met Colquhoun, she was equally fascinated with the potentialities of the goddess trope from early on, an interest scholars did not fail to notice.[83] Just like Colquhoun, Carrington too rejected patriarchal institutionalised religion in favour of the fertility goddesses of ancient cultures, such as the Egyptian Isis or Irish Danu. This is evinced by the pictorial and textual works she produced, especially from the 1940s onwards – after she had fled from Nazi-occupied Europe and found refuge, first in New York, and from 1942 onwards in Mexico. *Down Below* (1944), the account of the mental breakdown Carrington suffered and of her institutionalisation in an asylum in the Spanish town of Santander at the outbreak of the Second World War, is an illustrative example of her first explicit appropriation of goddess mythology for her purposes. It is highly significant that her account entails an inversion, or rewriting, of masculinist narratives and a reconfiguration of madness as a state in which women are afforded an insight into their real powers but are punished for this realisation by a patriarchal society. In her rewriting of mythology, as Katharine Conley rightly observes, Carrington does not take the place of the Virgin Mary because she perceives "the Virgin's lack of real power within Christian hierarchy."[84] Instead, Carrington explicitly identifies herself as part of the Holy Trinity:

> Later, with full lucidity, I would go Down Below, as the third person of the Trinity. .... [T]he father was the planet Cronos, represented by the sign of the planet Saturn.... The son was the Sun and I the Moon, an essential element of the Trinity, with a microscopic knowledge of the earth, its plants and creatures. I knew that Christ was dead and done for, and that I had to take His place, because the Trinity, minus a woman and microscopic knowledge, had become dry and incomplete. ... I was Christ on earth in the person of the Holy Ghost.[85]

Appropriating the persona of the hysteric/witch revered by the surrealists at the time, Carrington, in an act of deconstructive mimicry, and drawing on pagan cults, witchcraft and occultism, revises the Christian Trinity, replacing Christianity's masculine Messiah with herself. Her additional self-identification with the Holy Ghost points to her knowledge of the Gnostic Sophia, the female generative principle of the Trinity which was perceived as the Holy Spirit or Wisdom in Gnosticism.[86] The same line of thought is reiterated in *The Stone Door* (written in the 1940s), where an all-male trinity (European, Chinaman, Jew), emblematic of the patriarchal power of monotheistic religions, excludes women from the creative realm. Yet, the realisation that if "we ignore the door of the womb we shall shrivel and die"[87] resonates throughout the narrative, which carries the hope of regeneration through the liberation of female powers by a male saviour, in what clearly is a parodic reversal of the surrealist heroic quest for the beloved woman.[88] It is in *The Hearing Trumpet*, however, most likely written in the 1950s, that the womb, signified by the cup of the Goddess, the Holy Grail and

the alchemical cauldron/vessel, serves as the object of the heroine's (feminist) quest to reclaim womankind's powers and as a metaphor for the matriarchal subversion of patriarchy.[89]

Carrington's revolutionary ideas can be traced back to her play *Une Chemise de nuit de flanelle* (written in 1945 but published in 1951). The play is indebted to occultism and Celtic mythology, although Carrington mockingly altered the names of mythological characters and their attributes. Thus it can be read as an alchemical allegory of the female appropriation of masculine power in a way similar to Colquhoun's *The Goose of Hermogenes*.[90] The action takes place in a five-storey house where scenes are presented simultaneously. On the ground floor in her shop, Dwyn, the Mother Goddess, sits passively knitting a garment. On the first floor her crippled son, Arawn (magician, divine son), tyrannises both his mother and her maid Prisni (the priestess). The patriarchal figure (Dwyn's husband) is ritually killed by a three-headed being (a manifestation of the Goddess) in the kitchen, the alchemist's athanor wherein all kinds of transmutation take place. His blood, a symbol of the last stage in the alchemical process, is imbibed by Prisni, who functions as a witch representing the Godmother of matriarchal religion. While Prisni is nourished by the vital energy of the sacrificed ruler and gains his power, a black swan, symbolising Dwyn, lays the alchemical egg in the attic. Thus, the ritual sacrifice of the father and the incorporation of his blood in the maid's female body enable the Goddess's transubstantiation into a complete being. The play closes with Dwyn on the first floor embracing her dead husband saying: "Now you are mine; I am the most powerful person in the world."[91] Invigoration of life is apparently the core idea of the play with an emphasis on the transference of patriarchal power to a Mother Goddess, who appears in multiple guises.

In many of the paintings Carrington created in this period, she consciously evoked the power of a multiform Goddess, while she distanced herself from the surrealist image of woman as the alchemical vessel through which man is transformed or redeemed, such as Breton envisioned in *Arcane 17*. Instead, Carrington fabricated a mythological universe wherein enchanted women exercise their magical powers in collaboration with the animal, vegetal and mineral aspects of nature to serve their own specific purposes. Her 1953 painting *Are You Really Syrious?* (Plate VIII), for instance, acknowledges the regenerative powers of the Mother Goddess, either in the form of Isis, Danu or Athena/Minerva, as well as her skill as a weaver: in a ritual setting, very likely a megalithic or Egyptian circular enclosure, a white-clothed winged woman, the Goddess herself, weaves her threads like Dwyn. At the centre, a group of gigantic catlike, prehistoric animals – perhaps her creations – stand poised around the pattern of a rose painted on the floor, a common symbol of the Goddess in Carrington's imagery.[92] Within this circle an abject, black, many-legged creature, reminiscent of Arachne whom furious Athena turned to a spider when the former offended her, performs a ritual dance. Three minute hybrids vividly converse around a pillar on the right corner, perhaps a reference to the tree trunk that enclosed the coffin with the body of dead Osiris and was carved as a pillar in the city of Byblos before Isis sought him out and brought him back to life.[93] The scene is mysteriously lit by a rising Sirius and other astral bodies in the morning sky.

Sirius, playfully alluded to in the title, is the Dog Star, connected to the cult of Isis and signalling the regeneration of Osiris.[94] Isis, on the other hand, signifies the maternal and nurturing aspect of the Goddess of the Near East. According to Plutarch,

Isis and Athena are connected since they are both virgin mothers.[95] Fellow surrealist Kurt Seligmann, whom Carrington befriended in New York in the early 1940s and whose *History of Magic* (1948) she had read, mentions Plutarch's theories on Isis and also includes a woodcut of the goddess by Athanasius Kircher in *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652), in which Minerva is enlisted as one of Isis's names.[96] In Graves's *The White Goddess*, a link is also established between Isis "the golden Moon-cow"[97] and Celtic mother goddesses such as Danu or Brigit, while Gardner connected Isis with the goddess of the witches in *Witchcraft Today* (1954).[98] Carrington mingles together all these associations and constructs a syncretic image of the Mother Goddess as the supreme transformative agent. As in Colquhoun's *Dance of the Nine Opals*, a ritual dance is enacted around a circle and rebirth/animation is in progress through woman's magical powers.

In another example, *Sacrament at Minos* (1954) (Plate IX), Carrington portrays the very moment of a rebirth ritual taking place in a two-storey house flanked by the full moon on the top. The so-called sacrament, a Christian ceremony, is sardonically transformed into a lunar pagan ritual that involves two scenes: on the ground floor the beheading of a winged hybrid bull by a female pregnant animal takes place, while a blue egg drops from the former's neck. On the first floor a white, winged female hybrid, the fertility snake goddess of the Minoan religion, attends the ritual cooking of a multi-eyed, blue, winged creature in a cauldron by a black, male hybrid priest. A blue egg drops from her open belly to an opening on the floor. The motifs of pregnancy, the egg, the feathered bird and the cauldron again all allude to the theme of alchemical renewal and growth, and woman's special role in the process of creation. The killing of the male by the female further signals the female appropriation of masculine power to complete the fertility ceremony, as in *Une Chemise de nuit de flanelle*. The *Sacrament at Minos* can be therefore read as a parody of Christian ecclesiastical ceremonies and a tribute to pagan (here Minoan), Celtic and witchcraft rituals in which the Goddess's contribution to the propagation of life is central in opposition to monotheistic religions. The feathered creature and the egg, allusions to the Philosophers' Stone, may also designate the attainment of personal plenitude for the female subject.

All of these themes come to full bloom in *The Hearing Trumpet*, a novel that can be fruitfully analysed in the light of Carrington's appropriation of Graves's and Gardner's interweaving of goddess worship, witchcraft and matriarchy, and Jesse Weston's revision of the medieval myth of the Holy Grail.[99] A hybrid in terms of genre, the novel can be construed as a textual illustration of the goddess trope and its visual exploration by Carrington in her paintings. The story revolves around the adventures of the 92-year-old crone Marian Leatherby, shortly after her close friend Carmella gives her a hearing trumpet that will provide her with an "auditory faculty" and ultimately functions as an organ of "extra-sensory perception."[100] Marian is sent to an institute for old ladies by her family, where she initiates a psychic communication with the portrait of Dona Rosalinda. A little book given to her by one of the inmates informs Marian that Dona Rosalinda was an abbess and a witch who devoted herself to the worship of the Goddess. She also learns that the witch/nun managed to recover the Holy Grail while aided in her quest by the magical properties of a powerful ointment that belonged to Mary Magdalen, also a devotee of the Goddess.[101] The Grail is significantly reconfigured by Carrington as "the original chalice which held the elixir of life."[102] It belonged to Venus, dropped accidentally into the cavern of Irish horse goddess Epona, and safely kept by the androgynous goddess Barbara in her subterranean

shrine.[103] Then it was stolen by the followers of "the Angry Father God"[104] (initially by the Sidhe tribe and in turn by the Knight Templars).[105] It was Dona Rosalinda that entered the fortress of the patriarchs and recovered the Grail; yet her encounter with "the Horned God," the god of the witches, in the chamber where the Grail was hidden, entailed their sexual mating, causing her to fall pregnant and give birth to "the Feathered Hermaphrodite, Sephirá."[106] The birth of the androgynous creature, a symbol of perfect consummation in esoteric thought, was fatal for the witch/nun, subsequently leading to her death.[107]

It is Marian's reading of Donna Rosalinda's biography that functions as a springboard for a series of subversive events that lay the ground for the process of her self-realisation and empowerment: she and her inmates revolt against Dr. Gambit, the institute's suppressive director, after invoking the Goddess in her epiphany as the Queen Bee through a witches' dance around a pond; a reversal of poles and the beginning of a new ice age occur as a result of male dominated governments pushing "nations to allslaughter"[108] and environmental pollution; the feathered Sephirá is liberated from its prison, the stone Tower, after an earthquake, and sets out to avenge his mother; and Marian enters a tower and descends into a cavern/kitchen, identified as "the Womb of the World,"[109] where she experiences a ritual transformation supervised by her double self. The latter scene marks the culmination of the narrative in which Carrington deploys the theme of regeneration brought forth by the cauldron of Celtic mythology, the Grail of medieval romance and the womb of the Mother Goddess. Marian is killed by her other self, leaps into the cauldron and emerges united with herself, the Queen Bee and the Abbess. Her reflection in a mirror affirms her new, three-faceted identity, a metaphor for the state of self-knowledge and identification with the Goddess and her various manifestations.[110] Marian's transformation is meaningfully cast as an alchemical transmutation with each one of her permutations, symbolising the successive stages of the alchemical process. Her rebirth as a triple-headed female further recalls Graves's triple Goddess who is "woman in her divine character."[111]

As in Colquhoun's *Goose of Hermogenes*, the heroine recognises her inner powers through her identification with a multi-faceted and elusive Goddess; similarly, she acknowledges the destruction of the environment by masculinist, capitalist governments and their abusive power over humans and nature. Yet Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet* is more polemical in its stance, since the heroine and her female colleagues embark upon a "military" expedition to rescue the Grail from the surviving worshippers of the 'Angry Father God', and collectively restore it to the Mother Goddess, so she can return to the planet.[112] Colquhoun's heroine, on the other hand, revolts against her imprisonment and flees on her own; violence plays no role and she peacefully reaches a summit and faces the dawn of a new era, a symbolic reawakening of female potentialities, if not a usurpation of political power. In other words, both artists mingle women's empowerment with the enchantment of the self and with eco-enchantment, yet Carrington stages women's reclamation of their powers in a more transgressive, and also comical, way. For example, wishing to stress the devastating results of patriarchy, Carrington, through the character of Marian, expresses her assertion that a planet peopled with animals will be "an improvement on humanity, which deliberately renounced the Pneuma of the Goddess."[113]

Carrington's novel provides an instructive example of surrealist parody and specifically of a feminised satirical critique of Christianity, patriarchal culture and male

versions of history. In line with surrealist aesthetics, her narrative proceeds from plausible fact to questionable fiction, preventing us from forming a coherent view of unfolding events.[114] However, the unexpected juxtaposition of inconsistent elements and the series of unsettling displacements interrupting the sequence of events amplify Carrington's humour that makes her feminist parody and reversals of meaning even stronger.[115] Carrington explicitly fashions a heterodox, countercultural mythology in which patriarchal order is displaced by matriarchal power. Yet, her revisionist idea of matriarchy does not reverse the agents of power, but entails an alternative mentality that counters the exploitative attitude towards nature and human beings, and embraces "goodwill and love" embodied in the image of the nurturing Goddess.[116] Carrington wittingly rewrites history from a proto-feminist perspective that privileges the possibilities of individual metamorphosis and of the regeneration of nature through the resurrection of the Mother Goddess. She further denounces authority as expressed in the 'hypnotic' power of patriarchy and propounds a 'matriarchal' anarchy, that is humans living freely in nature in harmony with organic life and animals, as more "pleasant and healthy."[117] This is a utopian vision that resonated with the claims and hopes of second wave feminism in the 1960s, showing that this kind of discourse was deemed politically liberating for women at the time.

Women, the Goddess and the Politics of Gender: Becoming Divine

Since the 1970s, Orenstein has demonstrated how women associated with Surrealism sought "to restore the original image of the centrality … of female divinity to art and religion through reclaiming a female creation myth as a viable model for female creativity."[118] This has been corroborated by scholars such as Whitney Chadwick, who argued that women surrealists "forged the first links in the chain that has more recently been used to reconnect contemporary feminist consciousness with its historical and legendary sources."[119] Building on these pioneering studies, I have elsewhere demonstrated that the occult "functioned as a site for subverting patriarchal ideologies and empowering the female self" for women surrealists who appropriated, *inter alia*, the image of the Goddess "as a corrective alternative."[120] Both Colquhoun and Carrington's oeuvre stretches well into the first years of the feminist art movement in which the image of the Goddess was appropriated by artists, representing the female body as a locus of strength, autonomy, spirituality and life-affirming powers.[121] The two artists were forerunners to this movement, further developing their iconographies of the Goddess in the 1960s and 1970s in cultural environments that promoted the efficacy of occult and related discourses for feminist, that is, political, ends.

Yet, the interrelationship between goddess worship and the politics of gender in art made by women is a controversial issue. It is often argued that the identification of woman with nature and figurations not completely human can prove 'thorny' for women artists.[122] From the 1970s onwards, the 'Goddess' attracted the criticism of secularist feminists who saw spirituality as irrelevant in terms of effecting material change in society and its gendered power structures.[123] Opposing such criticism, artists such as Colquhoun and Carrington continued to identify a liberating potential in goddess imagery and recognised matriarchy as a socially useful myth: through their images and texts they formulated a utopian (matriarchal) space in which nature and culture, mind and body, spirituality and politics are not seen as inseparable categories; women are valued as powerful beings capable of creating an egalitarian peaceful

society; and the healing of the planet and its inhabitants is prioritised. This holistic and integrative vision might not be political, strictly speaking, but still entails politics in the form of ideological contestation, critique and subversion of patriarchal tropes in religion, epistemology and art. It is also grounded upon the belief in individual empowerment as a prerequisite for ensuing cultural and social change, a central tenet underlying the surrealist understanding of politics in general. This vision was encapsulated in an alternative mythopoeia focussed on the predominance of a powerfully transformative 'Goddess' as the means to combat masculinism, capitalism, inhumanity and environmental pollution. It is through this mythopoetic process that the two artists revisited the past, correcting the erasures of patriarchal history to put forward a new vision for the future in both image and text.

The way a goddess or the Goddess is envisaged and reconstructed by Colquhoun and Carrington moreover opens up new, proto-feminist interpretations. The Goddess is configured as an ambiguous, polymorphous composite in flux; as a *bricolage* of motifs invested with multiple significations; as the means by which to redress the imbalance caused by Judeo-Christian values, to destabilise "the image of patriarchy as eternal presence"[124] and affirm women's agency. To approach anew Colquhoun and Carrington's textual and pictorial images of goddesses, we can usefully turn to the notion of "becoming divine" by French feminist theorist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray.[125] In her 1993 study, *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray opposed the idea that women should search for a pre-existing goddess – a static, essentialist entity in her view – suggesting instead that women should "engage themselves in the process of constructing a feminine divine."[126] For Irigaray, this process serves as a medium for "the perfection of our subjectivity;"[127] in other words the feminine divine can function as a strategy by which women can deconstruct patriarchal structures, reconstruct a positive model to emulate and realise their own subjectivities. In this light, the trope of identifying oneself with a goddess is not necessarily ontologically essentialist (although some form of essentialising is inevitable in Colquhoun's and Carrington's cultural contexts), since it is a process of becoming in which fixed points collapse and new figurations emerge. The artworks explored in this chapter provide illustrative examples of women surrealists' interweaving of personal and social transformation, at the heart of which lies the female self as the producer of novel, revolutionary myths, countercultural narratives and proto-feminist ideas. If not political in a materialist sense, this re-envisioning still calls for an open-ended refashioning of female identity in highly productive ways that afford us new insights into how women surrealists transformed the historical meanings of occult discourses to redefine gender, power and creativity in a multitude of voices.

Notes

1 Robert Graves, *The White Goddess; A Historic Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1948), 20.
2 In this chapter, the term 'Goddess' is used to designate the notion of the sacred female in myth, spirituality, religion and literature as a discursive, cultural construct. The search for a powerful female divinity associated with the creative cycle, who appeared in several guises (goddesses) in different pre-modern cultures, and whose worship was suppressed by patriarchal, monotheistic religions, was part of twentieth-century matriarchal discourses.
3 Whitney Chadwick, "El Mundo Magico: Leonora Carrington's Enchanted Garden," in *Leonora Carrington: The Mexican Years 1943–1985*, ed. Patricia Draher (San Francisco, CA: The Mexican Museum, 1991), 23.

4 Ithell Colquhoun, *Grimoire of the Entangled Thicket* (Stevenage, Hertfordshire: Ore Publications, 1973), 2.

5 See Victoria Ferentinou, "Women Surrealists and Hermetic Imagery: Androgyny and the Feminine Principle in the Work of Ithell Colquhoun, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo," (PhD diss., University of Essex, 2007), Chapter 9.

6 'Gender politics' is used here to denote not simply power relations but the gendering of practices and art as a social strategy to counter masculinist power structures and narratives.

7 See Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right; Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim, preface by George Boas and introduction by Joseph Campbell (London: Kegan and Paul, 1967).

8 See for example Peter Ucko, *Anthropomorphic Figurines of Predynastic Egypt and Neolithic Crete with Comparative Material from the Prehistoric Near East and Mainland Greece* (London: Andrew Szmidla, 1968).

9 Friedrich Engels, "Preface to the Fourth Edition [1891]," In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Chicago, IL: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1909), 12–26.

10 James Frazer, *The Golden Bough; A Study in Magic and Religion* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Worldsworth Editions, 1993), 393.

11 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 152–58.

12 Arthur Evans, *The Palace of Minos: A Comparative Account of the Successive Stages of the Early Cretan Civilization as Illustrated by the Discoveries at Knossos*, vol. 2, part 2 (London: Macmillan, 1930), 277.

13 Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 319.

14 Graves, *The White Goddess*, 341–46.

15 Ibid., 341–42.

16 Ibid., 345–46.

17 Grevel Lindop, editorial introduction in Graves, *The White Goddess*, xviii.

18 For Carrington's interest in her Celtic roots see Susan Aberth, *Leonora Carrington: Surrealism, Alchemy and Art* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004), 79–94; Seán Kissane, "The Celtic Surrealist," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, ed. Seán Kissane (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 44–70. For Colquhoun's fascination with Celtic spirituality see Eric Ratcliffe, *Ithell Colquhoun: Pioneer Surrealist Artist, Occultist, Writer, and Poet* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2007), passim.

19 Rosemary R. Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 2005), 10, 272.

20 See for example André Breton, *Arcanum 17* [1945], trans. Zack Rogow and with an introduction by Anna Balakian (Copenhagen and Los Angeles, CA: Green Integer, 2004); André Breton, "On Surrealism in its Living Works [1955]," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 300; André Breton, *Entretiens* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1952), 271–72. The impact of matriarchal theory on Breton's vision of femininity as well as his own reception of the goddess trope in *Arcane 17* are discussed at length in Daniel Zamani's contribution to this volume.

21 Margaret Talbot, "An Emancipated Voice: Flora Tristan and Utopian Allegory," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 219–39; Susan Grogan, *Flora Tristan: Life Stories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 186–201.

22 Breton, *Arcanum 17*, 51.

23 See Naomi J. Andrews, "'*La Mère Humanité*:' Femininity in the Romantic Socialism of Pierre Leroux and the Abbé A.-L. Constant," *Journal of the History of the Ideas* 63, no. 4 (October 2002): 697–716; Grogan, *Flora Tristan*, 193, 199.

24 Eliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic; Its Doctrines and Ritual* [1896], translated, annotated and introduced by Arthur Edward Waite (London: Rider and Company, 1958), 39.

25 Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred; Power, Eros and the Occult in Modern Art* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2002), 213.

26 Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 182; Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists*, 98–117.

27 See Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred*, 212–20; Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 27–48.

28 Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière: The Witch of the Middle Ages* [1862], trans. L. J. Trotter (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1863), 1.

29 Michelet, *La Sorcière*, 11.

30 See Joy Dixon, *The Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

31 Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (1877), vol. 2: "Anthropogenesis" (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1960), 96.

32 Mary Katherine Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1995), 46, 207.

33 In the 1930s Colquhoun was a candidate for joining the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn but failed to be accepted.

34 Ithell Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom: MacGregors Mathers and the Golden Dawn* (London: Neville Spearman, 1975), 288.

35 Crowley elaborated on his theory on 'Babalon' or 'the Scarlet Woman,' a manifestation of the Great Mother and consort of the Great Beast, in his *The Book of the Law* in 1904. Fortune weaved together pagan and Celtic elements with the mythology of Atlantis and Avalon.

36 Dion Fortune, *The Sea Priestess* (San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser Books, 2003), 5.

37 See for example Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider, 1954) and *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (London: Aquarian, 1959).

38 See folder 929/5/21/1262, Ithell Colquhoun Collection, Tate Archive, London.

39 Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Leonora Carrington's Visionary Art for the New Age," *Chrysalis* 3 (1978): 68.

40 See Teresa Arcq, "Mirrors of the Marvellous: Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo," in *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, ed. Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead and Teresa Arcq (Chichester: Pallant House Gallery, 2010), 106–07; Remedios Varo, *Cartas, Suenos y Otros*, ed. Isabel Castells (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1997), 80–84.

41 See Teresa Arcq, "World Made of Magic," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, ed. Seán Kissane (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 32. Carrington knew Blavatsky's work through Varo. She was also friendly with the artist and occultist Marjorie Cameron whom she met in 1948 in Mexico. Cameron's husband was a member of Ordo Templi Orientis and she must have shared her knowledge of Crowley's sex magic with Carrington. Carrington is also alleged to have met the Hungarian Gnostic Desidario Lang who acquainted her with the work of Dion Fortune; see Chadwick, "El Mundo Magico," 16; see also Susan Aberth's chapter in this anthology.

42 Terri Geis, "Leonora Carrington in the 1970s: An Interview with Gloria Feman Orenstein," *Nierika* 1, no. 1 (January–June 2012): 18.

43 Ithell Colquhoun, *Goose of Hermogenes* [1961] (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2003), 54.

44 See Janice C. Crosby, *Cauldron of Changes: Feminist Spirituality in Fantastic Fiction* (Jefferson, NC, and London: MacFarland, 2000), 7–29.

45 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), 22.

46 Ithell Colquhoun, *Surrealism: Paintings, Drawings, Collages 1936–76* (Newlyn, Cornwall: Newlyn Orion Galleries, 1976), n. p.; Michel Remy, *Surrealism in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 204.

47 Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists*, 236–38.

48 Colquhoun, *Sword of Wisdom*, 20–21.

49 Ibid., 288.

50 For example Celtic myth and druidism, Wicca, Gnosticism, the Kabbalah, Madame Blavatsky's Theosophy, Aleister Crowley's Thelema.

51 Memorandum of Ithell Colquhoun's Ordination as Priestess of Isis, September 10, 1977 at TGA 929/5/9, Tate Archive, London.

52 Ithell Colquhoun, "Letter of 9 June 1977," in *Surrealism in the Tate Gallery Collection*, eds. Dawn Ades, Michael Sweeney and Joanne Bernstein (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1988), 18.

53 Colquhoun, "Letter of 9 June 1977," 18; Dawn Ades, "Notes on Two Women Surrealist Painters: Eileen Agar and Ithell Colquhoun," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (April 1980): 40.

54 Colquhoun, "Letter of 9 June 1977," 18.

55 For examples see Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists*, 216–33.

56 Ades interprets *Scylla* as a phallic landscape intended to parody the prevailing surrealist erotic imagery. Colquhoun accepts its potential reading as a phallic image but openly interprets *Scylla* as a primarily feminine symbol. See Ades, "Notes on Two Women Surrealist Painters," 40; Ithell Colquhoun, "Letter," *Oxford Art Journal* 4, no. 1 (July 1981): 65.

57 Barbara Rose, "Vaginal Iconology," in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968–2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 575–77.

58 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76–77.

59 Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 210–11, 226.

60 Ithell Colquhoun, "Dance of the Nine Opals" [1942], in Ithell Colquhoun, *I Saw Water: An Occult Novel and Other Selected Writings*, edited, with an introduction and notes by Richard Shillitoe and Mark S. Morrisson (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 165.

61 Number nine carries personal significance since it is Colquhoun's birth number while opal was her birthstone.

62 Colquhoun, "Dance of the Nine Opals," 165.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 See for example Ithell Colquhoun, "Pilgrimage" [1979], in Colquhoun, *I Saw Water*, 166.

66 Ithell Colquhoun, *The Living Stones* (London: Peter Owen, 1957), 47.

67 Ibid., 25.

68 Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists*; Victoria Ferentinou, "Ithell Colquhoun, Surrealism and the Occult," *Papers of Surrealism* 9 (Summer 2011): 1–24; and "The Iconography of Coniunctio Oppositorum: Visual and Verbal Dialogues in Ithell Colquhoun's Oeuvre," in *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*, ed. Peter Forshaw (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 363–96.

69 See Donna Roberts, "Surrealism and Natural History: Nature and the Marvellous in Breton and Caillois," in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Chichester: Willey-Blackwell, 2016), 288.

70 Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists*, 248–51.

71 Colquhoun, *Goose of Hermogenes*, 70–77.

72 Ibid., 73.

73 Ibid., 73.

74 Ibid., 75.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., 75–77.

77 Ibid., 77.

78 Ferentinou, *Women Surrealists*, 256.

79 Ibid., 115.

80 Carol P. Christ, *The Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 1997), 89–91.

81 Colquhoun, "Dance of the Nine Opals," 165.

82 Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1985), 94–95.

83 Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Reclaiming the Great Mother: A Feminist Journey to Madness and Back in Search of a Goddess Heritage," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literature* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 45–70; Whitney Chadwick, "Leonora Carrington: An Evolution of a Feminist Consciousness," *Woman's Art Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1986): 36–42; Janice Helland, "Surrealism and Esoteric Feminism in the Paintings of Leonora Carrington," *Revue d'Art Canadienne* 16, no. 1 (1989): 53–61; Ferentinou,

Women Surrealists, Chapters 10 and 11; Alyce Mahon, "She Who Revealed: The Celtic Goddess in the Art of Leonora Carrington," in *Leonora Carrington: The Celtic Surrealist*, ed. Séan Kissane (Dublin: The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 126–53.

84 Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 70.

85 Leonora Carrington, "Down Below," in *The House of Fear, Notes from Down Below* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1988), 195.

86 Carrington was attracted by the Gnostic tradition and her work reveals her knowledge of Gnostic thought. In a letter dated 23 January 1984 and addressed to the scholar Gloria Feman Orenstein, she considers *The Gnostic Religion* by Hans Jonas, originally published in 1934, as the most important book on the occult; see Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Hermeticism and Surrealism in the Visual Works of Leonora Carrington as a Model for Latin American Symbology," in *Proceedings of the 10th Congress of the International Comparative Association*, vol. 2, ed. Anna Balakian (New York: Garland, 1985), 565–66.

87 Leonora Carrington, *The Stone Door* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 3.

88 Victoria Ferentinou, "Trespassing Boundaries: Liminality, Hybridity and the Quest for Identity in Leonora Carrington's *The Stone Door*," in *Intersections: Women Artists/ Surrealism/Modernism*, ed. Patricia Allmer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 117.

89 Most scholars on good terms with Carrington, such as Susan Aberth and Teresa Arcq, as well as her cousin Joanna Moorhead, agree that *The Hearing Trumpet* was written in the 1950s.

90 Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Manifestations of the Occult in the Art and Literature of Leonora Carrington," in *Literature and the Occult: Essays in Comparative Literature*, ed. Frank Luanne (Arlington, TX: University of Texas Press, 1977), 228–29; Bettina Knapp, "Leonora Carrington's Whimsical Dreamworld: Animals Talk, Children Are Gods, a Black Swan Lays an Orphic Egg," *World Literature Today* 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1977): 525–30.

91 Leonora Carrington, *Une Chemise de nuit de flanelle* (Paris: L'Age d'Or, Librairie des Pas Perdus, 1951), 17.

92 See for example Leonora Carrington, "Commentary," in *Leonora Carrington: A Retrospective Exhibition*, ed. Nita M. Renfrew (New York: Centre for Inter-American Relations, 1976), 23; Aberth, *Leonora Carrington*, 94.

93 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 362–68; Seligmann, *History of Magic*, 61, 63.

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95 Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," in *Moralia 5* in *The Loeb Classical Library 306*, ed. Frank C. Babbit (London and Cambridge: William Heinemann ltd. and Harvard University Press, 1936), 25, 147.

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97 Graves, *The White Goddess*, 337.

98 Gardner, *Witchcraft Today*, 268

99 Jesse L. Weston, *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913).

100 Orenstein, "Manifestations of the Occult," 229.

101 Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, 75.

102 Ibid., 91

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid., 146.

105 Ibid., 75–76.

106 Ibid., 94.

107 Ibid., 98–99.

108 Ibid., 126.

109 Ibid., 137.

110 Ibid., 138.

111 Graves, *The White Goddess*, 430.

112 Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, 157–58.

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114 Renée Riese Hubert, *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism and Partnership* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska University Press, 1994), 136.

115 Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent; Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 177.

116 Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet*, 146.

117 Ibid., 126.

118 Orenstein, "Reclaiming the Great Mother," 48.

119 Chadwick, *Women Artists*, 187.

120 Victoria Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism," *Aries* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 125, 126.

121 Laura Meyer, "Power and Pleasure: Feminist Art Practice and Theory in the United States," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 322; Gloria Feman Orenstein, "The Re-Emergence of the Archetype of the Great Goddess in Art by Contemporary Women," *Heresies* 2, no. 1 (1978): 169.

122 Conley, *Automatic Woman*, 124.

123 For this debate see Robinson, *Feminism-Art-Theory*, 588–640.

124 Crosby, *Cauldron of Changes*, 14.

125 Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gilliam C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 52–72.

126 Sam McBride, "Reconceiving God: Luce Irigaray's 'Divine Women'," in *Divine Aporia: Postmodern Conversations about the Other*, ed. John C. Hawley (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2000), 215.

127 Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 63.

10 "On the True Exercise of Witchcraft" in the Work of Remedios Varo

María José González Madrid

Among the writings of Spanish painter Remedios Varo (1908–1963), there is a letter addressed to a "Dear Mr. Gardner."[1] Scholars of Varo's work have interpreted this epistle as nothing more than a caprice of its author, one of the amusing missives she took such pleasure in writing to people she did not know.[2] In her novel *The Hearing Trumpet*, Varo's colleague and close friend, Leonora Carrington (1917–2011), attributed this same habit to the fictional character of Carmella, whom scholars have rightly identified as Varo's *alter ego*: "her real pleasure in life is writing letters … all over the world to people she has never met."[3] The fictional crone clearly shared Varo's interest in tropes of adventure, play and the absurd. The letter to "Mr. Gardner," although undated, was written in Mexico, where Varo had found refuge in 1941, after the dramatic outbreak of the Second World War and the dispersal of the artists and poets of the surrealist circle in France. Varo writes to Mr. Gardner that her friend "Mrs. Carrington has been kind enough" to translate his book, which had triggered her "great interest."[4] In the letter, she also claims to have capacities that are "beyond the ordinary bounds of common logic."[5] She further describes her research into certain witchcraft practices in Mexico, along with the investigations she carried out with Carrington in search of "the true exercise of witchcraft."[6]

Much of the research on Varo has highlighted her preoccupation with the occult:[7] A disorderly and omnivorous appetite for things magical, including all manner of Western esoteric traditions. Some studies have specifically focussed on these interests,[8] while even the earliest reviews of her work tended to identify the painter as a mage, an alchemist or a sorceress.[9] Indeed, even a superficial glance at her artistic output – especially the paintings made during her Mexican exile – shows her familiarity with the lore of magic, clairvoyance, astrology and alchemy. Varo alluded to a number of occult practices, often identifying them with artistic (music, embroidery) or scientific creativity: A woman playing a hurdy-gurdy provokes the *Magic Flight* (1956); a sorceress in a trance levitates her luminous ball in *Woman with Sphere* (1957); a weird scientist devotes herself to *Creation with Astral Rays* (1955); the *Alchemist* (1955) distils *aqua vitae* in communication with the cosmos; and a group of girls are *Embroidering the Earth's Mantle* (1961).[10] In her paintings "there are mostly women,"[11] who can be identified with feminised versions of the motifs of the alchemist, the magician, the artist, the explorer or the scientist and with the Goddess, "all metaphors of creation and exploration,"[12] whose wisdom and powers had been acknowledged in other historical eras.[13] Like other women surrealist artists, Varo used these figures seeking "the sources of the 'feminine' and 'woman' in epochs and places in which women were believed to have exercised spiritual and psychic powers later repressed under patriarchy."[14]

However, despite her manifest and increasingly well-documented interest in all things occult, existing scholarship has not yet focussed on Varo's specific interest in witchcraft, her knowledge of this practice and its role in her iconography. This chapter will focus on Varo's preoccupation with, and appropriation of, witchcraft imagery in her artwork.[15] For this purpose, her letter to "Mr. Gardner" is an important and explicit testimony to her fascination with witchcraft, which is evidenced in some of her paintings, such as her 1957 *Witch Going to the Sabbath*.

Remedios Varo, Surrealism and the Occult

What differentiates 'witchcraft' from 'magic' is more a matter of associations and attributions than objective, clearly delineated differences in practice. Since the Renaissance, the practice of 'magic' has been predominantly associated with the search for wisdom and knowledge.[16] On the other hand, in the Christian West, witchcraft has largely been viewed as related to the devil. As such, it has been rejected as heretical and framed as a discourse of social disorder and sexual danger.[17] Scholars have highlighted that both the gender of the practitioner and the social class of those who have recourse to demonic services largely determined whether occult dealings were considered 'magic' or 'witchcraft': While the Renaissance mages were considered wise men, offering services to princes and aristocrats,[18] witches – who "don't have a library"[19] – were poor women who assisted with childbirth or prescribed herbs to villagers. French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874) makes reference to this established relationship between women and witchcraft at the beginning of his publication *La Sorcière*, citing the Inquisitor Jakob Sprenger's verdict: "Heresy of witches, not of wizards, one must call it."[20] This book fascinated the surrealists, as did Émile-Jules Grillot de Givry's 1929 publication, *Le Musée des Sorciers, Mages et Alchimistes*, which also emphasised this relationship: "It has been said that there were a thousand witches for one sorcerer,"[21] thus framing witchcraft as an essentially female practice.

Nevertheless, while many of the figures in Varo's paintings are female, they have not been identified as witches, but rather associated with male types such as alchemists or mages due to their association with knowledge and wisdom. The figure in *Creation of the Birds* (1957) (Plate X), for example, has the power to create life through her knowledge of alchemy, music and astrology, as well as artistic practice. Among the various demiurges painted by Varo, this figure is the only painter, and many scholars have identified this image as a self-portrait of the artist. The sorceress or alchemist works alone, absorbed in her task, in an austere and monastic space. She is captured in a state of being transformed to an owl-woman. The owl may allude to the wisdom of Pallas Athena, but might also be recognised as one of the animals that, according to popular tradition, habitually accompany witches.[22] The various elements in the painting have multiple and complex symbolic readings, which point to the painter's broad knowledge of magical lore and practices.[23] With a triangular magnifying glass, the sorceress gathers the light from a star and shines it upon the paper, thus giving life to a bird whose tail she is nearly finished painting. The fine paintbrush with which she works is connected to a strange three-stringed violin hanging from her solar plexus. The owl-woman gathers stellar dust, in a supernatural relationship with the cosmos, which she transforms using an alchemical alembic in the shape of a double egg. But this alchemical transformation does not produce the colours of the *nigredo, albedo* and *rubedo* stages of the alchemical work; it rather produces the three

primary colours that serve as the *materia prima* of the painter's work. At the back of the room, two vessels and the liquid that passes from one to the other suggest the iconography of the Temperance card in the tarot deck's Major Arcana, or André Breton's (1896–1966) *Communicating Vessels* (1933), or perhaps a scientific experiment, thus binding together various of Varo's wide-ranging interests in one image. The other object at the back of the room might also be some sort of alchemical instrument, but it is in fact just an old model coffee roaster; in many of her paintings and writings Varo juxtaposed transcendental elements and quotidian ones with her characteristic sense of humour. The idea that the artist can bring his or her work to life is present in various myths, like those of Pygmalion and Galatea. This creator, however, does not seek to have control over her creation but rather to liberate her creatures.[24]

We know that Varo, like many surrealists, developed an interest in the paranormal during her childhood, and family memories bear witness to the fact that "Remedios filled the halls of her house with wonderfully inventive drawings of fairy-tale characters, especially witches and serpents."[25] Among the works of her youth, a *gouache* has been preserved, representing an old witch chasing after geese. Another painting shows a toothless witch with protruding eyes, a pointed nose and sharpened nails, holding a broom and staring at a sleeping child, typical prey for a witch in traditional accounts.[26] One testimony refers to her childhood fascination with witchcraft: "One day, in secret," Varo wrote to a Hindu to ask for "a mandrake root," a plant associated with both witchcraft and herbal healing, which also figured in the artist's later iconography.[27]

How did a child come to be interested in mandrake roots? It is hard to say, but certainly the figure of the witch plays a prominent role in the Spanish literary, artistic and popular culture in which she grew up. Grillot de Givry wrote, in his comments on the works of the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya (1746–1828), that "l'Espagne a été fort longtemps, et est encore aujourd'hui, un pays de sorcières" ("For a long time Spain has been, and still is today, a country of witches"),[28] and from her childhood Varo probably imbibed a variety of different images of this figure. She surely heard many legends from the village where she was born, Anglès, which tell of witches' power to bring malignant meteorological phenomena upon the peasantry. Indeed *The Cold Winter* (1948), painted many years later in Venezuela (as an advertisement for the Bayer Company), appears to illustrate these tales. It is likely – though we cannot be sure – that her mother passed Basque mythology on to her, fraught with powerful and ambivalent witch figures.[29] She would also probably have been familiar with witches from the Spanish literary classics, such as those described by Cervantes (1547–1616), Lope de Vega (1562–1635) or Francisco de Quevedo (1590–1645), as well as figures such as the brothel owner *La Celestina*, from Fernando de Rojas's (ca. c. 1465/73–1541) classic comedy, who "had six trades, to wit: laundress, perfumer, a master hand at making cosmetics and replacing damaged maidenheads, procuress and something of a witch."[30] We know that Varo keenly admired Goya[31] so we can be certain that she was familiar with his many shadowy representations of witchy scenes. In *The Spell* (1797–1798) (Figure 10.1), the witches are old and ugly women, all gaunt and toothless, with stringy hair. One of them, with an owl over her head, carries a basket full of the dead babies they have stolen in order to suck their blood or offer them to the devil. Another witch reads spells from a grimoire by candlelight, and a third, crowned with bats, is piercing a ragdoll with needles. In the sky, another figure approaches, surrounded by owls and bearing some fleshless bones; the waning

moon sheds a lugubrious light over the scene. Similar activities are being carried out by the women who gather around a great he-goat in *Witches' Sabbath* from 1797/98. In one of his *Caprichos*, Goya includes a witch who feeds upon human creatures, sucking their brains or penis.[32] In all of these cases, witchcraft is attributed to poor, malevolent and grotesque women, and associated with unbridled and unconventional sexual behaviour.

In 1937 Varo moved to Paris, where she frequented many members of the surrealist group at a time when the 'occultation' of the movement was already in full swing. Her interest in magic and the occult was shared by many of her friends there, such as the surrealist artists Oscar Domínguez (1906–1957), Kurt Seligmann (1900–1962) – a scholar of magic who years later wrote *The History of Magic* (1948), which Varo surely would have read – and Victor Brauner (1903–1966), who keenly identified with the trope of the modern artist as magician and alchemist, and with whom Varo also corresponded.[33] Particularly important was her long-term relationship with surrealist poet Benjamin Péret (1899–1959), whom she had met in Spain in 1936, and who shared her interest in magic and myth. While she was involved with the surrealist circle in Paris, Varo must have been aware of Givry's *Le Musée des sorciers, mages et alchimistes* (1929), already mentioned above, a book of particular interest to the visual artists among the surrealist group because of its rich illustration with artworks dating from medieval woodcuts to eighteenth-century paintings representing sorcerers, witches and their rituals. Moreover, in Paris Varo was keenly familiar with *Le Miroir du Merveilleux* (1940), a study by French surrealist Pierre Mabille (1904–1952). In his book, Mabille explores magic through an emphatically cross-cultural lens, keeping with Varo's own highly eclectic interest in the occult.[34] Mabille visited Péret and Varo in Mexico in 1943 and 1944, and he gave a lecture about the marvellous, which he connected with the occult. Thus, Varo not only knew Mabille personally but also had the chance to familiarise herself with his hybrid synthesis of esoteric, mythical and poetic texts and his theory of the marvellous.

It is likely in the context of her exposure to Surrealism that Varo further intensified her particular interest in the figure of the sorceress; the surrealists exalted this sorceress, identifying her with a beautiful and rebellious woman associated with both wisdom and revolution, following Michelet.[35] We cannot know for certain whether Varo read Michelet's book,[36] but it is highly likely that she was familiar with its basic premises, whether through Péret who admired it,[37] or through Carrington, with whom she had also met there, and whom Breton had identified with *La Sorcière* herself in his 1940 *Anthologie de l'humour noir:* "young, beautiful and possessing 'the illuminism of lucid madness'."[38]

Interestingly, Péret also identified Carrington as "a sorceress of our time,"[39] reflecting the surrealist tendency to attribute women with a special relation with occult powers, the mysterious forces of nature and the intuitive realm of the unconscious. It is perhaps hardly surprising that Péret also attributed such powers to his own partner too, although he thought of her more as a charming fairy and benign mediatrix who intervened in his life to announce his release from prison and his impending voyage to Mexico – the country that would provide a safe haven for both of them and for Carrington in the wake of the war and its turbulent aftermath in Europe.[40]

Having already harboured a fascination for magic, witchcraft and ritual, Varo discovered in the syncretic culture of Mexico – with its indigenous rituals and popular witchcraft – a fascinating topos of occult experimentation.[41] It was also in Mexico

Figure 10.1 Francisco de Goya, *The Spell*, 1797–1798. Oil on canvas. Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Madrid.

that she met Carrington again; the two soon developed a strong friendship that was undoubtedly fuelled by their shared attraction to the occult. Among the testimonies of their relationship, two documents clearly attest to their fascination, specifically with witchcraft – Varo's aforementioned letter to Gardner, and Carrington's correspondence with Breton, to whom she wrote about their playful explorations: "Remedios and I, we timidly tried our hands at practical magic, sometimes with palpable results."[42]

It is, however, difficult to ascertain what exactly Carrington was referring to in her rather vague allusions to "witchcraft" and "palpable results," and whether this had to do with "the true exercise of witchcraft," which, according to Varo, both sought for. What is clear is that both artists delighted in magical experimentation and explored the occult through their creative friendship. Carrington was particularly fascinated with magical elixirs and the idea of alchemical transformation, and the two women exchanged ideas for "fantastic remedies," including one spell against the "evil eye."[43]

Varo quite consciously played with the idea of being a sorceress, inviting female friends to her "very humble shack" for strange drinks such as chestnut water and asparagus juice,[44] as well as waking every morning to her self-invented "incantation": Gurnar Kur Kar Kar.[45] Among her writings, one can find strange recipes made with outrageous ingredients in the form of magical formulas "to provoke erotic dreams" or "to make you dream that you are the king of England."[46] Varo also considered certain objects – special stones, shells, quartz crystals and odd pieces of wood – to be charged with magical power, keeping them as talismans,[47] and carry out, with great enthusiasm, experiments combining white fruits resembling eggs and tubes of paint, in the light of the full moon, to conjure good fortune upon the next day's painting.[48]

Her familiarity with the mandrake root is manifested, for instance, in her *gouache* titled *Laboratory* (c. 1948), which represents a human-vegetal figure in the process of metamorphosis, being grown in a flowerpot. The mandrake also appears in her "Proposal for a Theatre Performance," featuring "Leonora [Carrington] and Eva [Sulzer] *melangées*" in the person of Ellen Ramsbottom, an English woman interested in "somno-telepathic phenomena," and Varo herself as Felina Caprino-Mandrágora, a woman with "slight little horns" that disappear when she comes out of her "nightly goat state."[49] In folk tales, as well as in inquisitorial proceedings, cats have long been associated with witches, as have he-goats, mandrakes and nocturnal transformations – a whole series of characters and abilities clearly related to the figure of the witch that Varo takes on for herself through the emphatically occult name Felina Caprino-Mandrágora.[50] As a friend of Varo's recalled: "She liked to think that she was a witch."[51]

Remedios Varo's Letter to Gerald Gardner

Varo's own identification with the witch can be seen in connection to the letter to "Dear Mr. Gardner." While for many years scholars assumed that "Mr. Gardner" was an invented character, a recent study has shown that the missive was addressed to none other than Gerald B. Gardner (1884–1964), a prominent British Wiccan and author of the ground-breaking study *Witchcraft Today* (1954) – a history of the European witch-cult that claimed that the practice had survived on the margins of modern society, and a seminal source for Wicca, a present-day pagan new religious movement cultivated by contemporary witches.[52] In this context, Varo's letter is an important and explicit testimony, not only to her fascination with the figure of the witch, but also to her interest in the real possibility of practising witchcraft.

Gardner begins *Witchcraft Today* by remarking that English witches had spoken to him and authorised him to divulge "much that has never before been made public concerning their beliefs, their rituals and their reasons for what they do; also to emphasise that neither their present beliefs, rituals nor practices are harmful."[53] Gardner claimed to transmit knowledge drawn from wildly disparate sources, including Hebrew or Kabbalistic magic, Irish witchcraft, Christian beliefs, secret rites of the Templars, Celtic legends, *The Golden Bough* by British anthropologist James Frazer (1854–1941), Egyptian cults, Eleusinian Mysteries, Orphic Mysteries, the cult of Dionysus, pre-Columbian Mexican witchcraft and Voodoo practices. This eclectic mix of sorcery and fantastic theories lacked academic credentials, but its varied contents and risqué claims undoubtedly fascinated Varo, whose own artistic vision was characterised by cultural hybridity and the collaging of imagery from different cultures

and magical traditions. Significantly, the mixture of accumulated lore and personal interpretation in Gardner's books was to be fundamental in the spread of Wicca, elements of which would have undoubtedly also fascinated Varo.[54]

Gardner described contemporary witchcraft rituals and put forth the theory that witchcraft is the survival of an ancient matriarchal cult: "The goddess of the witch cult is obviously the Great Mother, the giver of life, incarnate love."[55] We can surmise that if for Carrington reading *The White Goddess* (1948) by Robert Graves had been "the greatest revelation" of her life,[56] she must have read *Witchcraft Today* as a further development of these very same theories, bringing the effort to recover the cult of the Goddess into the present day and thereby putting practical participation within her reach.[57] Reading *Witchcraft Today* excited Varo so much that the artist wrote a letter to Gardner, in which she responds to parts of the book that interest her the most and highlights her own capabilities. For example, she presents herself as having certain gifts of clairvoyance, perhaps as a response to Gardner's assertion that not just anyone can practise witchcraft. She writes: "Personally, I do not think I am endowed with special powers, but rather an ability to see the relation of cause and effect beyond the ordinary limits of common logic."[58]

Gardner had argued that "in Mexico there was a witch cult… which existed from pre-Columbian times."[59] Varo updates his information, giving an account of the "great activity in the terrain of witchcraft" in Mexico, although she identifies this activity with practices limited "to the exercise of medicine or the fabrication of love potions" and remarks that "the custom is to administer *toloache* hidden in a cup of coffee" in order to bring about "a total lack of will."[60] *Toloache* or "devils' herb"[61] is also used in ritual practices as an entheogen for its psychotropic properties. *Witchcraft Today* includes a passage on the consumption of hallucinogenic substances, including peyote in Mexico, so perhaps Varo chose the example of *toloache* to exhibit her knowledge of witches' herbal practices to Gardner.

Varo goes on to comment on some of her other concerns, such as the possibility of "destroying the terrible effects of the hydrogen bomb through certain practices,"[62] also informed by *Witchcraft Today*. Gardner claimed that witches might "perform similar rites to influence the brains of those who may control the Hydrogen Bomb."[63] Gardner refers here to the rites conducted by English witches to influence the minds of the Nazis and avoid the invasion of England. Varo was deeply affected by the use of the atomic bomb, the consequences of which she represents in her painting *Discovery of a Mutant Geologist* (1961), so the possibility of applying witchcraft to prevent its use was of serious interest to her.

In the letter, the painter further claims that she is also able to carry out magical actions that are – in Gardner's words – "useful to the community."[64] Varo explains to Gardner that:

> After long years of experimentation, I have come to be able to conveniently order the small solar systems of the home. I have grasped the interdependence of objects and the need to place them in such a way as to avoid catastrophes or else to suddenly change their position in order to provoke events that are necessary for the common good.[65]

Perhaps Varo highlights this practice as a response to Gardner's argument that in other magical practices[66] devils or spirits were invoked to make events occur, while

witches controlled events with the power of their own minds. In the experiments that Varo describes in her letter "Tribulations of a member of the group *The Observers of the Interdependence of Domestic Objects and their Influence in Everyday Life*,"[67] she uses the powers of the mind to alter events through the mediation of strange domestic objects: A leather armchair, a crocodile skull, her cat or a pipe incrusted with rhinestones.[68]

In a 1956 painting, Varo portrays herself in the midst of this activity. The painting, called *Harmony* (Plate XI), shows an androgynous figure composing music on a peculiar staff. Varo describes it as "[a] staff of metal threads on which all sorts of objects are arranged," such as a leaf, a flower, a turnip or two slips of paper covered in complicated mathematical formulae. Music is not made by striking the metal cords, but rather by "blowing upon the clef that supports the staff."[69] The image of blowing and of the breath of creation has a long iconographic tradition, which enriches our reading of the figure's activity. What is produced is "a music… that is capable of moving nearby things if one desires to use it for this."[70] From the walls emerge figures that collaborate with the artist and represent 'objective chance.' For Breton, calling upon objective chance was "really a question of charms," which might "displace the objects, setting them in strange position relative to each other."[71] However, her objective is transcendent: It is not a matter of summoning an apparition but of "finding the invisible thread that unites all things."[72] To accomplish this, she relies upon the collaboration of objective hazard, which is "connected to the world of causes, and not to the world of phenomena in which we live."[73] In *Suggestive Self-Portrait*, Varo represents herself as a creative artist, scientist and powerful magician who, absorbed in her work, may unleash powers and move the things around her, lending order to the universe and maintaining the harmony between essentially dissimilar things.

The Witch Going to the Sabbath

The work that most powerfully reflects Varo's specific interest in witchcraft is her *Witch Going to the Sabbath* (1957) (Plate XII). The painting was made the very same year as Breton paid homage to medieval witchcraft in his book *L'Art magique* and illustrated this account with traditional imagery of witchcraft. In her composition, Varo represents an isolated female figure, not placed in any specific landscape or architectural space. She has strange proportions, an extraordinarily long neck and very low shoulders. Unlike the witches painted by Goya or those described by Gardner, the figure is not naked but is rather dressed oddly, in a singular cape-like garment, white and of a frothy or feathered texture, done up to the chin with seven buttons. She also sports a grey skirt and dark tights with a pattern of *fleurs de lis*.

The most notable aspect of the figure is her hair: Flamboyant, orange coloured – like the painter's own – starts from a parting in the middle of her head and reaches to her feet, framing her body like a mandorla.[74] The shape of the figure's clothing and the hair suggests the form of vaginal labia, a reference Varo uses in other paintings as well (such as *Harmony*, 1956; *To Be Reborn*, 1960 or *Emerging Light*, 1962). The figure's face is triangular, with the big almond eyes and fine lips characteristic of many of Varo's figures, an allusion to her own features. Two white winged extensions protrude from the forehead of this witch. One foot points right and the other left, forming a right angle, while her left hand reaches up and her right one reaches towards the ground, pointing to the heavens and to the underworld, an implicit reference to

the occult dictum "as above, so below."[75] In her right hand, she holds a strange polyhedron, suggesting architectonic depth – even a door in the back – which sends off luminous rays, perhaps a divinatory 'crystal ball' or a magic lantern to light the dark path towards the place of the Sabbath. On her left side, a bird-like figure with the same winged face and similar hair accompanies the witch.[76] This figure has a long tail of two feathers that plunge into the witch's breast as though on a tortuous path through a deep hole suggesting the heart.[77]

If we hold Varo's witch to be based upon the representations of witches in Goya or those mentioned in Seligmann's and Grillot de Givry's books, the bird-like creature would certainly correspond to one of the little demons that allegedly accompanied witches, helping them in their magical efforts. Not the devil himself, these were rather personal *daemons* belonging to each witch, taking the form of small creatures such as black cats, crows, billy goats, mice, bats, owls or toads. According to prosecuting demonologists, these familiars helped witches in their crimes and had a particularly intimate relationship with them.[78]

From the title of the painting, we know Varo's witch is going to a celebration of the Sabbath, a nocturnal meeting (ostensibly with the devil) held in remote places on full moon nights and solstices, evocatively described in Michelet's *La Sorcière*. Ritual and festive in nature, these Sabbaths allegedly brought together thousands of people, like a country fair or market day. Some investigators in the Early Modern Period consider the Sabbaths to be acts of defiance against private property, sexual orthodoxy and the logic of work regulation.[79] But the sexual details of the Sabbath actually fascinated the Inquisitors, and extant trial records are rife with detailed descriptions of all forms of sexual activity supposedly confessed by those accused of witchcraft.

Varo certainly seems to have been acquainted with stories of Sabbaths and familiars, and she knew that transforming into an animal formed part of witches' ritual preparation for the Sabbath.[80] This idea of a magical metamorphosis was also central to the surrealist interest in the occult and lends us another possible reading of the painting: In this light, the bird described above as 'sinking' its tail into the witch's body could in fact be construed as the witch's alter-ego 'arising' out of her. In this case it would not be a question of a familiar accompanying the witch, but rather the witch herself who is transformed and ready to fly to participate in the Sabbath.[81] In line with Varo's positive reframing of the witch through a proto-feminist lens, this particular figure does not appear to be going to the same kind of fête as the malevolent, grotesque and vicious witches, which appear reproduced in Grillot de Givry's book, as the well-known prints of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) or Hans Baldung Grien (1484–1585), or the terrifying witches that transform themselves into animals in order to fly to the Sabbath as painted by Goya in *Witches' Kitchen* (1797–1798). Rather, she seems to be of a completely different order. Varo's witch is beautiful, with an attractive and sophisticated air, a sharp break from established iconographic conventions, and much closer in spirit to the empowered and self-assured self-portrayals in the guise of the witch that marked the works of some of Varo's female colleagues. Here I refer to Carrington's *The Inn of the Dawn Horse* (1937) or Dorothea Tanning's *Birthday* (1942), in which we again find the central image of a powerful witch accompanied by totemic animals or familiars. Varo and other female surrealists took up the notion of the beautiful and powerful sorceress so admired by their male colleagues, made her an icon of empowerment and

appropriated her to make her part of a female genealogy of resistance to the structures of patriarchal power. Thus they connected "contemporary feminist consciousness with its historical and legendary sources"[82] at the same time as they used the occult as a site of gendered contestation,[83] much as other artists and activists came to do years later.[84]

We might easily imagine that the witch Varo has painted in her own image is on her way, as the painter explains to Gardner, "to looking for facts and data that are still conserved in remote areas and that form part of the true exercise of witchcraft."[85] At the end of her missive, Varo asks for Gardner's advice on a matter that might provide a lead to understanding this "true exercise": In a friend's patio a little mound has formed which gives off smoke, intense heat and lava. Varo describes it as "a small volcano that might at any moment turn into a tremendous threat."[86] For now, she and her friends have found a use for it: "I must say," she continues with humour, "that it is perfect for grilling *chiche-kebab* and *brochettes*."[87] She also confesses that their hope is to include the lava in their magical practices with domestic objects, but that they had not yet been successful in this. Varo says that "the only result to date has been an intense allergy attack suffered by Mrs. Carrington, who put some on her scalp."[88] In an anxious tone, Varo requests Gardner's help in relating to the lava: "I fervently wish to understand it, in order to — if possible — help it in its journey to a world that is less dense, and also to make it understand and participate in our projects."[89]

The disparity of the two artists' stance towards the lava is striking. Carrington applies it to her head like a mysterious ointment, while Varo expresses her goodwill towards it, wishing to understand it and be understood by it. This desire for *sympatheia*, the connection, bond or harmony between similar parts of the cosmos, even when these are not contiguous, is central to Varo's paintings,[90] as even the earliest commentaries on her work in Mexico already perceived. It has been argued, for instance, that Varo creates "a world in which all the objects surrounding the human subject have as much soul as the living being and the living being as much eternal essence as the things that surround it."[91] Her need for a relationship with the lava is characteristic of her search for harmony, knowledge and transcendence – the invisible thread that unites all things. The artist returns to this notion again and again in her writings; in one of her dreams she recounts a visit to some friends who have made an important discovery thanks to their "great spiritual development."[92] Varo remarks with concern, however, that their new ability is only "a personal manifestation of earthly magic with no true relation to the Universe; this apparent spiritual conquest would impede their true development."[93] Varo expresses her concern that she too might go amiss in her search. In her opinion, the lava used as shampoo would be – like the use of *toloache* – a demonstration of mere "earthly magic," whereas by establishing a relation of *sympatheia* with the lava, a "true relation to the Universe" might be consolidated.[94]

Remedios Varo's Witchcraft

Apart from the letter, of which it is not known if it was ever actually sent, we have no information about what relation Varo might have had with Gardner's book and its theories. But we do know that witchcraft was a topic of great interest for her over a long period of time – from the timid experiments in "sorcellerie practique" mentioned by Carrington to the painting *Witch Going to the Sabbath* nearly fifteen years went

by. We might guess, on the basis of the lava story, that Varo was not so much inter-
ested in the ritual aspects of witchcraft – what she called "earthly magic" – as she
was in those elements of the witches' knowledge that might be useful in her search for
understanding and universal harmony.

Another one of Varo's dreams highlights this concern. In the dream, the artist had
been judged "a danger to society," and sentenced to death (as witches or women con-
sidered witches often had been in the past).

> I had discovered an incredibly important secret, something like a part of the
> 'absolute truth.' I do not know how, but powerful people and ruling authorities
> found out that I possessed that secret and considered it extremely dangerous for
> society, since, if it were to be widely known, the whole current social structure
> would collapse. So they captured me and condemned me to death.[95]

In the dream, Varo is frightened, but the executioner tells her: "Wise as you are,
you shouldn't be afraid of death."[96] She realises that she is afraid, not of dying, but
because she has forgotten to do something tremendously important: "I explained to
him that I loved someone, and had to *weave* that person's 'destinies' with my own;
once this weaving had taken place, our destinies would stay united for all eternity."[97]
In her dream it is the conjunction of wisdom and love that allows the painter to over-
come death.

It is Varo's search for what she calls "absolute truth" – the "true relation to the
Universe" or "true development"[98] – that may provide us a key to her interest in
Gardner and what she refers to as "the true exercise of witchcraft." In her search,
Varo drew upon "the most diverse sources, taking from here and from there anything
that seemed to contain genuine wisdom and, above all, reveal the existence of eternal
and universal truths."[99] *Witchcraft Today* would have formed part of the "astonish-
ing range of books"[100] that the painter consulted in her search, together with the *I
Ching*, and works by Pyotr D. Ouspensky, George Gurdjieff,[101] René Daumal, Carl
Jung, Helena Blavatsky, Dion Fortune, Lama Yongden, Meister Eckhart, Serge Hutin,
Hubert Benoit and many others.[102]

In the dream cited above it is knowledge that allows Varo to "transcend herself,"[103]
but also to destroy "the whole current social structure."[104] If Michelet's sorceress rose
up in protest against the injustices of the feudal system, Varo envisions the destruction
of capitalism and patriarchy through the figure of a woman who knows secrets that
make her dangerous to the established order and therefore subject to punishment
(as women accused of using magic or witchcraft had been in the past). Her hope
to destroy capitalism formed part of the radical political transformation the painter
had shared with Péret in Barcelona during the 1936 revolution and later in Paris and
in Mexico.[105] In her zeal to bring down patriarchy, she would join forces with (the
fictional) Marian and Carmella, who, in Carrington's *The Hearing Trumpet*, set off
on an outrageous adventure to return the Grail "to the Goddess (…) so that goodwill
and love can … prevail in the world" (as is also explored by Victoria Ferentinou in
this anthology).[106] Like the protagonists of Carrington's novel, the two artists timidly
delved into witchcraft in a relationship of creative friendship in which "finding oneself
together"[107] went hand in hand with transforming the world.

To 'transform the world' and to 'change life' had been the aspirations of the
Parisian surrealists. On the eve of the Second World War, as a game, and in order

to work through some topics that interested them, they transformed the Marseille Tarot deck, introducing four new suits: 'Dream', 'Knowledge', 'Revolution' and 'Love'. These coincide exactly with the interests that appear in Varo's dream cited above. We might argue then that in her years in Mexico the artist held on to many of the lessons learned together with the surrealists, but she did so – in Susan Suleiman's words – in a double spirit of loyalty and questioning.[108] Varo was also fond of card games of divination, and began to create her own deck using small bits of bone or ivory, making new figures appropriate to her new concerns, like the *Personnage au Ying et Yang*, which formed part of the collection of Breton, or *Tarot Card* (1957), that shows a human figure with a five-pointed star for a face and symbols of infinity on its body. *Witch Going to the Sabbath* might easily have formed part of this new deck.[109] Male surrealists such as Breton, Péret, Ernst and Brauner had identified themselves with the figure of the magician. Varo painted her *Witch Going to the Sabbath* in the same posture as that of The Magician in the tarot deck, thus constructing a feminine model that served to acknowledge the painter's own creative and transformative capacity, while at the same time questioning the long tradition that distinguished between magic and witchcraft as paths of knowledge on the basis of class and gender.

For Varo, as for many surrealist women, magical knowledge "operated as a site of resistance, subversion and empowerment."[110] Anxiousness, curiosity, playfulness and a great sense of humour formed an integral part of her investigations. The artist appropriated both traditional and surrealist witch imagery, opening a dialogue with those images and thereby providing an alternative vision of witchcraft both as a form of knowledge and power and as a means by which to transform the world and herself – the "true exercise of witchcraft."

Notes

1 "Carta 7. Al señor Gardner," in Remedios Varo, *Cartas, sueños y otros textos*, ed. Isabel Castells (Mexico D.F.: Era, 1997), 80–84. This book brings together some of Varo's writings, most of them not published while the painter was alive.

2 Janet A. Kaplan, *Unexpected Journeys. The Art and Life of Remedios Varo* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 89–90.

3 Leonora Carrington, *The Hearing Trumpet* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1985), 4.

4 Varo, "Carta 7," 80. Varo did not speak English. She and Carrington communicated in French.

5 Varo, "Carta 7," 81.

6 Ibid. As the letters are not published in English, all translations are mine.

7 As was the case with other surrealist artists, especially women. See Tessel M. Bauduin, *Surrealism and the Occult: Occultism and Western Esotericism in the Work and Movement of André Breton* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014); Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 181–218.

8 Lourdes Andrade, "Remedios y la alquimia," *México en el Arte* 14 (1986): 66–71; Deborah J. Haynes, "The Art of Remedios Varo: Issues of Gender Ambiguity and Religious Meaning," *Woman's Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1995): 26–32; Lois Parkinson Zamora, "Misticismo mexicano y la obra mágica de Remedios Varo," *Foro hispánico: revista hispánica de Flandes y Holanda* 22 (2002): 57–88; Victoria Ferentinou, "Women Surrealists and Hermetic Imagery: Androgyny and the Feminine Principle in the Work of Ithell Colquhoun, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo" (PhD diss., University of Essex, 2007), 171–89, 287–306; Salomon Grimberg, "Remedios Varo and the Juggler:

Harmony, Balance and Unity," in *Remedios Varo. Catálogo razonado/Catalogue raisonné*, ed. Walter Gruen and Ricardo Ovalle (Mexico D.F.: Era, 2008), 27–31; Teresa Arcq, "Mirrors of the Marvellous: Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo," in *Surreal Friends: Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*, eds. Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead and Teresa Arcq (Chichester: Pallant House, 2010), 98–115; Rosa Rius Gatell, "Armonía y creación en el cosmos de Remedios Varo" and María José González Madrid, "Recetas, pócimas, retortas. Alquimia y creación en la pintura de Remedios Varo," both in *Remedios Varo. Caminos del conocimiento, la creación y el exilio*, eds. María José González Madrid and Rosa Rius Gatell (Madrid: Eutelequia, 2014), 77–97 and 99–119; Ricki O'Rawe, "Remedios Varo's Feminine, Spiritual Quest," in *Preservation, Radicalism, and the Avant-Garde Canon*, eds. Rebecca Ferreboeuf, Fiona Noble and Tara Plunkett (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 111–28.

 9 The Mexican poet Rosario Castellanos dedicated the poem "Metamorphosis of a sorceress" to Varo after her death; in *Poesía no eres tú. Obra poética 1948–1971* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1975), 205. Octavio Paz referred to Varo and Carrington as "two enchanted enchantresses," in Octavio Paz, *Los privilegios de la vista* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989), 394. Edouard Jaguer calls her an "enchantresse" in *Remedios Varo* (Paris: Filipacchi, 1980), 65.

10 Little is known about her years in Europe, but some of her paintings from Barcelona and Paris make reference to these interests: *Ailleurs* (1935), *L'Étoffe des rêves* (1935), *Monument à une voyante* (1935) or *Las almas de los montes* (1938).

11 Roger Caillois, "Inventario de un mundo," in Octavio Paz and Roger Caillois, *Remedios Varo* (Mexico D.F.: Era, 1966), 19.

12 Gloria Feman Orenstein, "The Methodology of the Marvellous," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Foreign Languages* 42, no. 4 (1989): 332.

13 Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", in *Becoming Visible. Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthai and Claudia Koonz (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–64. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973).

14 Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors. Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation," in *Mirror Images. Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1998), 13.

15 I have explored Varo's more general investigation of magic and the occult at length in my PhD dissertation, supervised by Rosa Rius Gatell and Martí Peran. See María José González Madrid, "Surrealismo y saberes mágicos en la obra de Remedios Varo" (PhD diss., University of Barcelona, 2014, accessed February 29, 2016, http://hdl.handle.net/2445/52044).

16 Yves Castan, *Magie et sorcellerie à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1979), 243–64.

17 Moreover, documents written against witchcraft such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* held that the pact between a witch and the devil was sexual in nature. See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch. Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 186–98.

18 Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 156–62.

19 Franco Cardini, *Magia, brujería y superstición en el Occidente medieval* (Barcelona: Península, 1982), 72.

20 Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière* [1862] (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), 2. English translation from *La Sorcière: The Witch of the Middle Ages* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1863), 1.

21 Émile-Jules Grillot de Givry, *Le Musée des Sorciers, Mages et Alchimistes* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1929), 36. English translation from Grillot de Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic & Alchemy* (New York, Dover Publications, 1971), 50 ["On a dit qu'il y avait mille sorcières pour un sorcier"].

22 This relation is very popular in Spanish folklore and literature; see Eva Laura Alberola, *Hechiceros y brujos en la literatura española de los siglos de oro* (Valencia: Universitat Politécnica de Valencia, 2010). It is also popular in classical authors: "Three creatures

only are shown, toad, owl and cat, and these are the inseparable companions of every witch," in Grillot de Givry, *Witchcraft*, 66.

23 Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 181; Victoria Ferentinou "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism," *Aries* 13 (2013): 120–21; González, *Surrealismo*, 430–34.

24 Gloria Feman Orenstein maintains that feminist artists not only help reinterpret the world but that they create new mythical paradigms for Western culture, in *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990), 18–24. See also Estella Lauter, *Women as Mythmakers. Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 79–97.

25 Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 24.

26 Carmen Dolores Manrique Castillo, "Un importante capítulo olvidado de la pintura surrealista: El periodo español de Remedios Varo" (BA diss., Universidad de Barcelona, 1986), 65, 101.

27 Juliana González, "Trasmundo de Remedios Varo," in Paz and Caillois, *Remedios Varo*, 165.

28 Grillot de Givry, *Musée*, 54–55. English translation from *Witchcraft*, 68.

29 In Basque country, witchcraft was associated with a cult of the pre-Christian goddess Mari. Proof of the importance of these myths (at least in the early nineteenth century) is that Michelet dedicated a whole chapter to them in *La Sorcière*.

30 Fernando de Rojas, *The Celestina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 17.

31 Luís Islas García, "Remedios Varo; En pintura me interesa lo místico, lo misterioso," *Novedades* (April 3, 1962): n. p.; Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 200–206.

32 Titled *Sopla*, and numbered 69 in the series.

33 González, *Surrealismo*, 74–82.

34 Pierre Mabille, *Le Merveilleux* (Mexico D.F.: Ediciones Quetzal, 1945).

35 The surrealists' construction of the figure of the witch is a complex one. They relied upon romantic and symbolist sources, as well as upon the books of Michelet, Jules Bois and Grillot de Givry. They were also intrigued by the Danish film *Häxan: Witchcraft through the Ages* (1922) by Benjamin Christensen. See Bauduin, *Surrealism*, 20–22.

36 It does not appear in her personal library in Mexico.

37 Péret includes it in his reading list of a hundred entries that every "honest man should read." See Benjamin Péret, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7 (Paris: Associations des amis de Benjamin Péret/Librairie José Corti, 1995), 147 ["honnête homme se devrait de lire"].

38 André Breton, *Anthology of Black Humor* [1940], (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 335 ["l'illuminisme de la folie lucide"].

39 Benjamin Péret, "Le Jeu de Leonora Carrington," *Arts* (July 10, 1952) ["une sorcière de notre temps"]. Published in Péret, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, 332. The Peruvian surrealist poet César Moro also identified Carrington as a "young sorceress born in the mists of Albion" in his "Nota introductoria a Leonora Carrington," *Las moradas* 5 (April 1948): 177.

40 Péret was imprisoned in Rennes at the beginning of the war. Benjamin Péret, *Le Déshonneur des poetes, précédé de La parole est à Péret* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965), 39–45. Years later Péret would write about the girl-woman and sorceress, associating the latter with misfortune, in "La noyau de la Comète," Preface to *Anthologie de l'amour sublime* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1956) 27–28.

41 Parkinson Zamora, "Misticismo," 69. Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 96.

42 Leonora Carrington to André Breton [August 8, 1943], Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Fonds André Breton, BRT. C 424 ["Remedios et moi nous avons trempús les doigts timidement dans la sorcellerie practique avec résultats parfois palpables [*sic*]".

43 Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 96.

44 "Carta 2. A Juliana González y Mercedes de la Garza," in Varo, *Cartas, sueños*, 70–71.

45 Arcq, "Mirrors," 106.

46 Remedios Varo, "Recetas y consejos para ahuyentar los sueños inoportunos, el insomnio y los desiertos de arenas movedizas bajo la cama, traducidos del árabe por Felina Caprino Mandrágora," in Varo, *Cartas, sueños*, 107–109.

47 Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 92.

48 Juliana González cited in Kaplan, *Unexpected*, 7.

49 "Proyecto para una obra teatral," in Varo, *Cartas, sueños*, 97–106.
50 In a strange case of hermaphroditism, Remedios identifies herself simultaneously with a cat, an animal of the witches, with a male goat, a figure of the devil, and with the mandrake, the flowers of which are hermaphroditic.
51 Testimony of Xabier Lizarraga in *Remedios Varo* (Grenoble: Seven-Doc, 2013). Documentary directed by Tufic Makhlouf Akl and produced by Aube and Oona Elléouët Breton.
52 Arcq, "Mirrors," 106.
53 Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider and Company, 1954), 5.
54 On Wicca, see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
55 Gardner, *Witchcraft,* 24. This hypothesis was put forward in Margaret A. Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe. A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921).
56 Chadwick, *Women Artists*, 186.
57 See the chapter by Victoria Ferentinou in this volume. On Carrington's claim to be a witch herself, see Terry Geis, "Leonora Carrington in the 1970s: An Interview with Gloria Feman Orenstein," *Nierika* 1, no. 18 (2012), accessed February 29, 2016, http://revistas.ibero.mx/arte/index.php?id_volumen=1.
58 Varo, "Carta 7," 81–82.
59 Gardner, *Witchcraft*, 21.
60 The quoted expressions are from the letter to Gardner. Both Michelet and Grillot de Givry dedicated chapters to amorous enchantments and love-potions.
61 *Datura inoxia*, from the mandrake family, deadly nightshade and thorn apple.
62 Varo, "Carta 7," 84.
63 Gardner *Witchcraft*, 104.
64 Gardner, *Witchcraft*, 10.
65 Varo, "Carta 7," 82
66 As "Ritualistic Magic, Kabalistic Magic, Art Magic or Black Magic," in Gardner, *Witchcraft*, 103.
67 Varo, *Cartas, sueños*, 77–80.
68 Varo, "Carta 7," 82.
69 Remedions Varo, "Comments by Remedios Varo on Some of Her Paintings", in *Remedios Varo. Catalogue raisonné*, 114. In Spanish a musical staff is called a *pentagrama*.
70 Ibid.
71 André Breton, *Mad Love* [1937], trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 5.
72 Varo, "Comments by Remedios," 114.
73 Ibid.
74 Hair that might remind us of the heroine of *L'Objet qui rêve II* (1938) by Victor Brauner, which also represented a female figure accompanied by the toad, often associated with witchcraft.
75 Grimberg, "Remedios Varo and the Juggler," 26, 31.
76 In alchemical tradition birds symbolize metamorphosis. See Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York, Dover Publications, 2002), 27.
77 Characters whose bodies open to other spaces are numerous in Varo's works.
78 The male surrealists were fascinated by the succubus, a female demon who visited men at night and maintained sexual relations with them while they slept. Aragon described them as "filles voluptueuses de l'enfer" in "Entrée des succubes," *La Révolution surréaliste* 6 (1926). Also Max Ernst (*Visions du demi-sommeil*) and Robert Desnos (*Journal d'une apparition*) make reference to succubi. The phenomenon was a topic of debate related to masturbation in the *Recherches sur la sexualité*. See Sarane Alexandrian, *Le Surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 169–73.
79 Federici, *Caliban*; Luciano Parinetto, *Streghe e potere: Il capitale e la persecuzione dei diversi* (Milán: Rusconi, 1998).
80 Many characters in Varo's works depict the metamorphosis of a human into an animal.
81 Like Varo's *Flying Owl Woman*, also from 1957.

82 Chadwick, *Women Artists*, 187.
83 Ferentinou "Surrealism," 103–30.
84 For example those who created the French magazine *Sorcières* or the group WITCH, "Women's International Terrorist Conspiration from Hell," in the United States.
85 "Carta 7," 81.
86 "Carta 7," 83.
87 Ibid.
88 "Carta 7," 84.
89 Ibid.
90 Rius Gatell, "Armonia," 83.
91 Ceferino Palencia, "El mundo imaginario de Remedios Varo," *Novedades, México en la cultura*, August 14, 1955, 4.
92 "Sueño 7," in Varo, *Cartas, sueños*, 126.
93 "Sueño 7," 127.
94 Ibid.
95 "Sueño 10," Varo, *Cartas, sueños*, 132–33.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Quoted from "Sueño 7," "Carta 7" and "Sueño 10," respectively.
99 Juliana González, "Remedios Varo's World and Fantasy World," in *Remedios Varo. Catalogue raisonné*, 91.
100 Haynes, "Art of Remedios Varo," 28.
101 Her interest in these readings was not always shared by her old colleagues. Writing from Paris in 1954, Péret responds to a question from Varo, stating that "[a]s for books, the one by Gurdjeff is a joke," in Péret, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, 400 ["Pour les livres, celui de Gurdjieff est une rigolade"].
102 González, "Remedios Varo," 91, and also from the exhibition of Varo's books *Remedios Varo: La dimension del pensamiento* organised by the Museum of Modern Art in Mexico in 2013.
103 Varo quoted in Remedios Varo, *Consejos y recetas de Remedios Varo. Pinturas, manuscritos dibujos* (Monclova, Coahuila: Museo Biblioteca Pape, 1986), 60.
104 Ibid.
105 There is no known documentation of specific political activity by Varo, but there is documentary evidence that point to her interests: In Barcelona she formed part of a circle of politically committed artists like Manuel Viola. She met Péret when the poet arrived in the city to participate in the Spanish Revolution as a representative of the Internationalist Workers Party. They were together in a love relationship for ten years, and remained friends for the rest of their lives. On her activity in Paris, we have a testimony in which Maurice Naudeau recalls Varo's enthusiastic work for *Clé*, the magazine published by the FIARI (International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art). On her years in Mexico we have a photograph of Varo with Natalia Trotsky at the thermal baths in Las Estacas.
106 Carrington, *Hearing*, 146. Carrington said that she wrote the novel in the 1950s; this would mean that she was already familiar with Gardner's book.
107 Linda Nochlin, "Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation," in *Exile and Creativity. Signposts, Travellers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 38.
108 Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Dialogue and Double Allegiance: Some Contemporary Women Artists and the Historical Avant-Garde," in *Mirror Images*, 128–54 and in *Subversive Intent, Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), particularly Chapter 7.
109 From the hand-written annotations on a copy of the catalogue of Varo's exhibit in the Museo de Arte Moderno (Mexico) in 1964, it seems there was at some point a card titled *Witch Going to the Sabbath* at CENIDIAP (Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas, Ciudad de México).
110 Ferentinou, "Surrealism," 109.

11 Clear Dreaming

Maya Deren, Surrealism and Magic

Judith Noble

Ukrainian-born filmmaker Maya Deren (1917–1961) established the avant-garde film movement in the United States in the 1940s. Between 1942 and 1947 she made five short black-and-white films (one unfinished), which revolutionised the language of film and established it as an art form freed from the narrative conventions of mainstream cinema. Deren has been studied extensively as a filmmaker, but almost entirely in relation to the avant-garde and experimental film movements that followed her. However, magic and occultism[1] were at the heart of Deren's practice and remain severely under-researched elements of her artistic vision. In this chapter I consider Deren's 'trilogy' of films-*Meshes Of The Afternoon* (1943), *At Land* (1944) and *Ritual In Transfigured Time* (1946) – together with the unfinished *Witch's Cradle* (1943) in order to examine both Deren's relationship with Surrealism, and the role magic and the occult played in her work. Throughout, I argue that it was Deren's exposure to the work of surrealist artists in New York during the Second World War and her simultaneous commitment to esoteric practice and ideas that enabled her to develop a uniquely personal form of film making that went on to inspire later feminist art and film practice of the 1970s and 1980s. Deren herself always rejected definitions of her work as 'surrealist,' and differences between her films and surrealist cinema should clearly be acknowledged. It is equally obvious, however, that Surrealism profoundly influenced her thinking and that it acted as a potent catalyst for her examination of the occult. I examine the influence that émigré surrealist artists such as Kurt Seligmann (1900–1962), Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) and Max Ernst (1891–1976), had on Deren's work and philosophy, and the ways in which Deren's interest in the occult developed from a theoretical concern to a series of experiential practices which found their expression in her films and her writing.

Deren and the Surrealist Émigré Circle, ca. 1943 to 1946

Deren's interest in magic was evident before she began to make films.[2] In 1939, she worked as secretary and researcher for William Seabrook (1884–1945) on his book *Witchcraft: Its Power in the World Today* (1942). Seabrook was a writer on the occult whose work mixed a sensationalist approach with a genuine interest in research and fieldwork. He had collaborated with occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) and travelled extensively in Africa and the Caribbean, where he investigated and documented traditional forms of magic and spirituality.[3] Seabrook also moved in surrealist circles and contributed essays to Georges Bataille's periodical *Documents* (1929–1931), writing about tropes of fetishism, sexuality and the use of masks. Towards the end of his life he also wrote for the literary and arts magazine *View*, which was exceptionally sympathetic to Surrealism and an important platform for many of the group's members during the 1940s. It is possible

that Deren sought out Seabrook because of her pre-existing interest in the occult, but it would almost certainly be from Seabrook that she first learnt about witchcraft in more detail and encountered the specifically Caribbean and African magical practices.

In 1941 Deren began working with dancer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham (1909–2006).[4] Until this point Deren had had little contact with the art world, but Dunham soon introduced her, not only to dancers and musicians, but also to painters, filmmakers and art collectors. Dunham had studied Voudoun in Haiti and introduced elements of Afro-Caribbean ritual into her dance work. It was through her that Deren was first introduced to Voudoun, which was to become her leading concern in later life. Through her work with Dunham, Deren developed a keen interest in ritual practices in which trance and possession were achieved through dance and drumming.[5] However, whilst Deren was clearly beginning to research possession and Voudoun at this point, the general assumption that the films she made between 1943 and 1946 show a direct and personal influence of Voudoun cannot be valid, since Deren did not visit Haiti until 1947, that is until after all the films under discussion here were made. Although the last of these films, *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, borrows the image of the "widow-bride" from Voudoun iconography, I argue here that it was primarily the Western occult tradition, and, more specifically, witchcraft, that provided the occult content and imagery in Deren's films, and that her contact with the surrealists gave her the knowledge and confidence to fully express her occult ideas.

While working as publicist for Dunham's dance troupe in California in 1942, Deren met and married Sasha Hammid (1907–2004), a Czech-born documentary film maker who had fled the war in Europe to become part of the emphatically transnational New York avant-garde scene that was to become such an important seedbed of aesthetic and literary innovation during the 1940s and 1950s. Deren had been pursuing a career in writing, but through her work with Dunham she had developed a passion for dance, which was to remain with her all her life. However, when Hammid introduced her to film, she discovered a medium she considered better suited to her own artistic and creative interests. It was at this time that she renounced her given name, Eleonora Derenkowsky, and became Maya Deren. Hammid, who had an interest in Indian spirituality, helped her choose the name "Maya," which came from the Hindu goddess of illusion, play and sorcery, and that she felt fitted her path as a film-maker. In re-naming herself, Deren also was following a practice adopted by many occultists before her, including, for instance, Éliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant; 1810–1875), Aleister Crowley (Edward Alexander Crowley; 1875–1947), Dion Fortune (Violet Firth; 1890–1946) and Kenneth Anger (Kenneth Anglemeyer; born 1927). In occult practice, the adoption of a new name often signals the commitment to a spiritual and artistic journey or initiation. By re-naming herself, Deren was thus making a very conscious decision to become an artist working with film, and from this moment on, she deliberately constructed a persona for herself as a modern-day artist-magician. Hammid recalled that at this time Deren was very interested in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and in particular about Tibetan ideas related to visual perception and dreaming. This interest in Tibetan spirituality, albeit in a diluted and ultimately much Westernised form, was common amongst the circle of West Coast artists in which Deren and Hammid lived in 1942. As we will see throughout the following discussion, these notions would also lie at the very heart of her cinematic oeuvre and underpin the structure and content of her films.

Deren and Hammid returned to New York at the beginning of 1943, when Hammid accepted a position directing films for the Office of War Information, and became

immersed in the Greenwich Village arts scene organised around the émigré surrealists, the 57th Street galleries and the avant-garde magazines *View* and *VVV*. Both of these periodicals were central in propagating knowledge about occultism and included topics such as magic, anthropology and children's games, all of which were of interest to Deren.[6] More generally, the city's art scene had been fundamentally transformed and fecundated by the presence of émigré artists and was to become, for a few short years, one of the most important centres of the Western art world. Indeed, as has been noted by scholars such as Martica Sawin and Serge Guilbault, this extraordinary but brief period, which was over by late 1946, profoundly changed American art. It was also precisely in this period that Deren made all of her most important films, and participation in this milieu undoubtedly had a profound influence on her. This vibrant and open-minded art scene provided the perfect audience for Deren's output and allowed her to confidently develop her philosophy and film-making practice in a challenging but rewarding environment, which she certainly relished.

Deren quickly established herself as a key player in the New York art scene. The studio apartment she shared with Hammid at 61 Morton Street soon became a venue for parties and informal screenings of *Meshes Of The Afternoon*, avidly attended by artists and writers. Their circle of friends included writer and film critic Parker Tyler (1904–1974),[7] John Cage (1912–1992) and his wife Xenia Cage (1913–95), architect Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965), critic Leo Lerman (1914–94), writer Anaïs Nin (1903–1977) and artists Ernst, Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012), Roberto Matta (1911–2002), his wife Anne Clark Matta (1914–1997), Seligmann as well as Duchamp. Deren also contributed photographs to *View*, notably a series of images of Duchamp, and advertised her films in the magazine, stating that they had been seen and praised by both André Breton (1896–1966) and Ernst. She also played chess with Duchamp and in 1945 and photographed his and Breton's notorious Lazy Hardware window display for the publication of *Arcane 17* (1945), which dialogued with many of the occult and esoteric themes Deren was exploring at that time.[8]

Figure 11.1 Maya Deren, *Witch's Cradle* (unfinished), 1943. Film still. Film, b/w, 13 mins (approx.). © Anthology Film Archives, New York.

Deren's unfinished film *Witch's Cradle* (1943) (Figure 11.1) featured Duchamp and Clark Matta, and was filmed in Peggy Guggenheim's *Art Of This Century* Gallery, designed by Kiesler. Its biomorphic shapes and bizarre furniture had endowed it with a surreal, otherworldly quality akin to that which Deren herself would aim for in her films. *At Land* (1944) featured Cage, Tyler and surrealist poet Philip Lamantia (1927–2005) with other members of the surrealist circle playing extras in a crowd scene. Nin, with whom Deren had a difficult relationship that veered between close friendship and total antagonism, wrote about Deren's films and played a leading role in *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946). Tanning also took part in this film, although her contribution was edited out of the final version. Tanning's husband Ernst, meanwhile, wrote in support of an application Deren made for a Guggenheim Fellowship, while Duchamp acted as a referee on this occasion. Throughout these crucial years of her career, Deren was thus deeply immersed in the society of the surrealists and their circle, closely linked to its members by a myriad of both professional as well as deeply personal ties. In an interview in 1976 Leo Lerman evocatively recalled the intense art scene of those years:

> One Sunday evening, in one little room, my bedroom, there were sitting on the floor: Leger and his mistress, Mondrian, Duchamp, Tchelitchev, Miro, Osip Zadkine…. Schoenberg had come to town and was there. In the front room, sitting on the floor, Tennessee Williams, who was new, and Truman Capote, who was just starting…. You could get old in the ways of Europe without setting a foot off Manhattan Island…. It was the sort of town where you could walk along 40th Street, around 6th Avenue, and you knew pretty well you'd meet André Breton. This was an extraordinary kind of thing, and Maya was part of that world. That's part of what you see in her films.[9]

By the time *Ritual in Transfigured Time* was released in 1946, most of the émigré artists had returned to Europe and the vibrant Greenwich Village scene of the war years had already faded away. In 1946 Deren published her chapbook, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*,[10] which would become one of the key documents of the experimental film movement in the second half of the twentieth century. Deren also wrote widely on film for publications, ranging from the *Village Voice* to amateur cine and women's magazines. In 1947, Deren travelled to Haiti on the first ever Guggenheim Fellowship to be awarded to a filmmaker. While there, she became initiated into Voudoun; one of a number of traditional African animist religions brought to the Caribbean by slaves and modified through contact with both Christianity and Western occultism. Voudoun spiritual practices centre on the practice of magic, and on trance states and possession of individual worshippers by deities or *loa*.[11] This discovery fundamentally changed Deren's spirituality, philosophy and film-making practice. From this point on, she would consider the practice of Voudoun to be the most important aspect of her life. She made two more films, widely considered less successful than her earlier works: *Meditation On Violence* (1947) and *The Very Eye Of Night* (1954), and filmed extensive 'documentary' footage of Voudoun rituals in Haiti, left unedited at the time of her death in 1961.[12] She also wrote a landmark book on Voudoun, titled *The Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, published in 1953,[13] and discussed extensively by scholars of anthropology and comparative religion, including such notable names as Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) and

Joseph Campbell (1904–87). It became a key text in the counterculture, which began to emerge around the time of Deren's death.

Deren's interest in magic and the occult had thus developed during the years 1942–46, and coincided with the period in which the émigré surrealist circle around Breton intensified its avant-gardist engagement with all forms of myth, enchantment and heterodox spirituality. In addition to the knowledge of witchcraft gained during her work with Seabrook and her nascent interest in Voudoun trance and possession, it is clear from both her films and her writing during this period that Deren had a growing knowledge of the Western magical tradition, and especially Qabalah. It is likely that her friendship with Seligmann was particularly instrumental in developing her more detailed knowledge of magic, given that he was at this time already publishing on magic in *View* and elsewhere, and preparing his monograph *The Mirror of Magic* (1948), discussed in Grazina Subelyte's contribution to this volume. It is also noteworthy that Deren's friends conspicuously commented on her commitment to magic and the 'magical' atmosphere of her apartment at that time. When interviewed in 1975, Hammid, for instance, recalled that: "[one] could always feel her ideas about magic and ceremony" and that she had a "natural interest" in the occult.[14] Similarly, Lerman remembered that "[t]here were all sorts of magical objects, which she thought magical, or she *told* you were magical. And you believed her, and while you were there, and she was there, they *were*."[15]

Meshes of the Afternoon was screened informally in Deren and Hammid's apartment in 1943 (at that point it was the only film Deren had completed) to their circle of friends. It was received enthusiastically, and it was perhaps inevitable that it would elicit comparisons with surrealist films, particularly the work of Luis Buñuel (1900–1983) and Salvador Dalí (1904–1989). *Meshes*, like Buñuel and Dalí's films, did not have a sequential narrative and eschewed conventional acting techniques, instead deploying a more oneiric flow of images. Nin was struck by similarities between Deren's work and that of the surrealists and also by Deren's repudiation of this:

> She was making another surrealist film…. The film was original. It was a dream. It had many strange effects which reminded me of Cocteau…. Although that first day we did not agree with her 'theories,' we were captivated by the images. She denied all symbolic meaning (the knife, the faceless figure, the flower, etc.). Her father was a psychiatrist and she had developed a rebellion against all psychological interpretations. She did not acknowledge any link with the surrealists or with Cocteau. We did not insist.[16]

Deren herself, however, resisted comparisons with surrealist cinema, explaining that:

> I distinguish myself strongly from the surrealists although my films have occasionally a superficial resemblance to various surrealist films. For one thing, I am concerned with the *credibility* of the unreal, not the incredibility of the unreal. I am concerned with that point of contact between the unreal and the real, where the unreal manifests itself in reality.[17]

Significantly, Deren also resisted Freudian interpretations of her work, which were often made, not least because it was erroneously assumed by critics that because her father had been a psychiatrist, she would have a psychoanalytic approach to

film making. By 1945 she was forcefully instructing the organisers of film screenings: "… *Under no circumstances are these films to be announced or publicised as Surrealist or Freudian…*"[18]

Deren's refusal to be defined as surrealist was expressed consistently in her writings and conversations with friends. Her key arguments were that her work was very carefully structured and that she was not concerned with the irrational or the spontaneous. Her films were meticulously planned and she had no desire to shock or outrage her audience as Dalí and Buñuel had set out to do in the emphatically sexual *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), or in *L'Âge d'Or* (1930), replete with references to Sadean desire and clearly conceived in the surrealist spirit of 'étaper la bourgeoisie.' Deren also discussed the difference between her work and that of the surrealists at some length in *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film*. There, Deren reiterated her idea that her exquisitely structured approach to film, achieved especially through her unique approach to editing, and which she was by now describing as "classicist," was at complete odds with the approach of Dalí and Buñuel.[19]

Deren's project was fundamentally different in that she was evolving a new language of film. In *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Âge d'Or,* the film-makers deployed the language and forms of silent cinema to subvert narrative, confront the irrational and portray hallucination and sexual fantasy. They manipulated the audience's expectations through use of discontinuous narrative, and revealed the subconscious drives of their characters; but these are films which still have a recognisable relationship to the mainstream cinema of their time.[20] Deren's films, in contrast, owe little to the language of mainstream narrative cinema. Instead, she created a new form of cinematic expression. Her films do have narrative, but Deren consistently subjugates narrative to form and structure. The films are, to use her term, 'choreographed' so that the spectator is affected as much by the pace and rhythm of the film as by its content. From the first film, *Meshes*, it is apparent that Deren is using film in a completely different way than both her predecessors and contemporaries, and with a very different objective. Her films also have almost nothing in common with the mainstream Hollywood cinema of her time.

In terms of working methods, Deren made her films by using the newly available, small and portable Bolex 16mm camera, which enabled her to work in a very fluid way with a small tripod and limited lighting, exploiting the Bolex's turret lenses to create a variety of shots, moving easily between close-ups and wide-angles. In contrast, Bunuel and Dalí had to work with the large, cumbersome cameras of the late 1920s, which meant that their cinematic vocabulary was much more limited. Deren was also able to edit her own work and to develop a film language through a process of editing that was completely original and did not refer to conventional filmic structure. Generally, she tended to reduce certain aspects of conventional film-making, notably *mise en scène* and production design, to a minimal level, partly for economic reasons, but mainly because these aspects were simply far less important to her than form, structure and her concern to portray the inner world of her protagonists and their initiatory journeys, with dream states, and with an associative rather than narrative linking of images. Conventional film story and character structures (all derived essentially from the literary and theatric modes of expression from which narrative film was born) are thus entirely absent in her work and Deren's camera does not 'look' at its female subjects in the manner of mainstream cinema.[21]

Deren's 'Trilogy' and *Witch's Cradle*

Meshes of the Afternoon, At Land and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* are frequently considered a trilogy, and from 1946 onwards, Deren described them in her publicity material as a sequence.[22] Taken together, they form a powerful exploration of the initiatory quest of a female protagonist, portrayed mainly by Deren herself. They are considered here along with the unfinished *Witch's Cradle*, which provides a tantalising insight into Deren's occult ideas and also to her relationship with the New York surrealist scene.

Meshes was completed in 1942, before Deren and Hammid came into contact with the surrealists in New York. It is a very carefully structured film, which describes the initiatory journey of its female protagonist (Deren) through six repeated sequences of events. Each time the sequence is repeated, elements are added or subtly changed to create a shifting perspective. In this ordered, repetitive structure, each sequence begins with a woman turning a key in a lock, opening a door and entering an interior world in which the rules of the everyday do not operate. The opening of the door, signalling a move from the everyday into the imaginal, is a key trope that recurs in both *At Land* and in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, and in each film acquires new layers of occult meaning. In *Meshes*, the initiatory quest of the protagonist begins in her dream world; we see her falling asleep and 'waking' into a dream. In each dream sequence she looks through a window and sees a mysterious black-robed figure with a mirror for a face. She has to negotiate the conflict between the exterior world and that of her dream, and is ultimately destroyed in the waking world by her dream. The film ends with her death by drowning in the waking world. The first stage of many occult initiations is to become ritually dead to one's former life;[23] to an audience versed in the occult (for example the surrealists and their circle, who were essentially the first audience for the film) these meanings of *Meshes* would be obvious, despite their occulted significance. *Meshes* also contains an ambivalent, unsettling portrayal of the protagonist's relationship with a male lover (played here by Hammid), who represents order and everyday reality, and which Deren would return to again in both the subsequent parts of the trilogy. Here, the protagonist in a dream slashes her lover's face with a knife, only for it to turn into a mirror, which subsequently shatters.[24]

This compelling portrayal of the dream and dream logic was achieved through careful structure and editing. Deren's concern with film as an essentially temporal medium is very apparent throughout. In each repetition of the sequence of events, we return to the initial starting point as the protagonist first drops her key and then places it in the lock. Film time and the flow of narrative events are completely disrupted as we return, again and again, to this point and are made to consider the events we have just watched from a different, constantly shifting perspective. Film time is subtly altered in each sequence and our attention is focussed on the symbolic objects we see repeatedly (key, door opening, knife, mirror). In *Meshes*, Deren created a dynamic visual language that owed little to the mainstream cinema of its day or to any preceding avant-gardes. As Anaïs Nin rightly emphasised in a 1946 note related to a screening of the film:

> So much of our experience is translated into images, which neither music nor even painting at times can approximate. Maya Deren … with her faculty for clear dreaming, for extracting the essential from our subconscious flow … accomplishes such a transcription deftly, with a great sense of the significance of the moving picture as a new medium.…[25]

Witch's Cradle (1943) was the first film Deren made in New York and her most overtly occult work in which her close dialogue with Surrealism is fully apparent. In particular, it was Deren's contact with the surrealists that had enabled her to gradually develop her vision of the artist-filmmaker as an inspired magician, and to develop explicitly the more latently occult themes of *Meshes*. The title of this film has a number of meanings. It is a clear reference to Deren's participation in Seabrook's witchcraft 'experiment' of 1939, in which the witch's cradle was a metal frame from which the witch was suspended to induce trance and visions. Although unpleasant, this experience seems to have been a key reference point for Deren in her development as an occultist. Further, it may also refer to witchcraft practices in which malevolent magic is worked by wrapping an image of the intended victim in string and sticking pins in it (also referenced by Seabrook). String, thread and the tying of knots are used extensively in traditional witchcraft where the repetitive actions of wrapping and tying string are used to increase the efficacy of spells.[26] Finally, Witch's Cradle is also the name of a children's game in which a complex arrangement of string is wrapped around the hands and transferred from one player to another. Deren was developing an interest in children's games as a form of ritual at this time. Referring explicitly to Surrealism, Deren wrote of this film in the following terms:

> I was concerned with the impression that surrealistic objects were, in a sense, the cabalistic symbols of the 20th century; for the surrealist artists, like the feudal magicians and witches, were motivated by a desire to deal with the real forces underlying events (the feudal evil spirits are similar to the modern sub-conscious drives) and to discard the validity of surface and apparent causation. The magicians were also concerned with the defiance of normal time (mainly projection into the past and divination of the future) and with normal space (disappearance one place and appearance another, or the familiar broomstick); so also the surrealist painters and poets. And it seemed to me that the camera was peculiarly suited to delineate this form of magic.[27]

In a telling insight into her thought processes and understanding of the occult, Deren also made it clear that she had deliberately used surrealist principles in this film:

> There are times when an artist who may ordinarily work by different principles, will use some aspect of sur-realism … look how, in this film by Maya Deren, the portrait becomes an X-ray also. And how else could one have said, without speaking, that the strings of the mesh in which the girl holds the universe are no more and no less than the projection of her blood – that there is danger in the traffic of veins and arteries. And that in the moment when the heart breaks we learn for certain that it is with the heart that we see the world, and through the blood that we know it.[28]

In terms of the cast, the film features Duchamp and Clark Matta, who poignantly described it as being about "Maya's own ideas of magic."[29] Deren's research notes for the film to include drawings of various ritual magic talismans, notably for Agiel, the Spirit of Saturn, Zazel, the Intelligence of Saturn and Hismael, the Spirit of Jupiter. Deren was using a well-known occult compendium of Renaissance magic, *The Magus* (1801) by Francis Barrett, as her source, and it is also likely that her friend Seligmann

may have contributed to the occult content of the film. *Witch's Cradle* was never fin-ished, ostensibly because Guggenheim would not allow Deren sufficient time to film in the gallery, but it is more likely that Deren felt she had not managed to express her ideas about magic in explicitly filmic terms.

Deren screened a version of the film several times before abandoning it. She left an incomplete series of scenes from the film plus a complete shooting script. The footage contains brief shots of Duchamp playing chess and scenes of Clark Matta in the darkened gallery, interacting with sculptures and installations. Clark Matta has a pentagram enclosed by a circle with the words "The end is my beginning," written endlessly around it drawn on her forehead. This phrase seems to have originated as the epitaph of Mary, Queen of Scots. It is used by T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) in his poem *East Coker* (one of the *Four Quartets* that had been published in New York just before Deren shot the film).[30] While Eliot uses the phrase to refer to the round of the seasons, in occult terms it could be said to refer to the cycle of repeated existence and reincarnation, a concept Western occultism had borrowed from Eastern spiritual traditions, and the idea that time is circular rather than linear, which Deren had ex-pressed so clearly in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, and which she would revisit in both *At Land* and *Ritual in Transfigured Time*. In an interview, Clark Matta recalled that Deren had considered the drawing of this symbol to be a magical act:

> Deren took a long time in drawing the figure on [my] forehead and… as she drew she talked about its significance… – I think that was what the picture intended – some kind of spell. Then there was a little ceremony, and I was supposed to be liberated, because the symbol was wiped off the forehead or something.[31]

Deren was influenced by Duchamp, whose work she greatly admired, and with whom she met up regularly to play chess at this time. In *Anagram*, Deren later wrote ad-miringly of his film *Anemic Cinema* (1926),[32] and Duchamp gave her a small work on glass during the filming of *Witch's Cradle*, which she treasured. Duchamp plays a string game in the opening sequences of the film, and the string then 'comes alive' and travels around his neck and in and out of his clothing. These 'string' images also feature in the sequence of photographs, which Deren contributed to the "Duchamp" edition of *View* magazine in March 1945. Deren strung a web of string around the gallery, probably in homage to Duchamp's 1942 installation, *16 Miles of String*, that he created for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, where themes of mythology and magic had played a central role and where Duchamp's installation had evoked associations with the myth of the labyrinth and the unconscious mind.[33]

At Land (1944) forms the second part of the trilogy and continues where *Meshes* leaves off. It constitutes the next stage in an initiatory journey in which the protagonist (again played by Deren and last seen drowned at the end of *Meshes*) is washed ashore and finds her way through a series of scenarios representing different aspects of human society. In the next stage of her initiatory quest she must negotiate the challenges of the external world using the knowledge gained from the interior one. Here, occult symbol-ism is explored in much greater depth. Chess is, as in *Witch's Cradle*, a central trope. By now, Deren would have shared the surrealists' interest in chess as symbolic of the struggle between fate and predestination and become familiar with the figure of the Queen/Bride that pervades the occult work of both Duchamp and Ernst.[34] In *At Land* a chess piece, the white queen symbolises the self or soul of the protagonist, which she

pursues throughout the film and eventually regains at the end. Deren is here claiming the Bride/Queen identity for her female protagonist. After being washed ashore, the protagonist of *At Land* leaves the beach and finds herself in a grand interior where she crawls the length of a banqueting table, ignored by the diners who smoke and talk, completely oblivious to her presence. At the head of the table a man is playing chess alone. The chess player in this scene is graphic designer Alvin Lustig (1915–1955). Lustig was also a ritual magician, and as with Duchamp in *Witch's Cradle*, is symbolising for Deren the 'artist-magician.' Deren seems to have viewed this role as being without gender, as she also claimed it for herself, and she would later elaborate on it:

> The artist is the magician who, by his perception of the powers and laws of the non-apparent, exercises them on the apparent. In the dimension of the real he creates the manifestation of the apparently non-real … but the phases of magic are two: He must not only discover the hidden, the obscure laws; he must be able to summon them into the realm of the real; he must be able to activate them in the real, and to make them manifest.[35]

As the protagonist watches the chess game, the player leaves the table, and the pieces begin to move of their own volition. The white queen falls from the board. She chases after it, and it leads her through a series of sequences that portray her as an outsider struggling to understand human society and relationships. Eventually she sees two women playing chess by the sea. In an unsettling interaction, she charms them by stroking their hair and speaking some kind of spell, then steals the white queen (her own self) from the board and runs along the liminal space of the tideline, the meeting place of the elements of earth and water, into the far distance. Here, as throughout the trilogy, gender relationships are dealt with in an unsettling and combative way. First and foremost, the protagonist is clearly at odds with all the male figures in the film. She cannot understand them; she tries to run after them but they elude or ignore her, and she finds one (a man lying in bed with only his head visible, whose eyes follow her) disturbing and flees from him. These men are the obstacles she has to overcome in various ways on her continuing initiatory quest. In a certain way then, a critique of female/male relationships underpins all of the three films, with men representing obstacles and threats. This is particularly noticeable in the endings: Men are either powerless to affect the outcome (*Meshes*) or absent entirely (*At Land, Ritual In Transfigured Time*). Each film concludes with the lone female protagonist achieving some form of resolution with 'nature' or the elemental world.

In *At Land*, Deren evolved a unique language of editing that creates a strong rhythm and structure and is essential to the meaning of the film. She deliberately subverts the established grammar of editing used in mainstream cinema so that each scene begins in a place that does not 'fit' with the end of the previous scene. For example, we see the protagonist climbing a large tree on the beach. As her body leaves the top of the frame we see her head appear over the edge of a table in a banqueting hall. This incongruity is repeated throughout the film so that we can never be sure as to where the journey will lead next. The temporal and spatial qualities of the film medium are used to create a purely cinematic form of magic here where the normal rules of time and space have ceased to apply and where our normal perception of time has been supplanted by a different, occult logic, thus forcing us to reconsider how time and space function. It is the actual qualities of the film medium and the ability to confound everyday time and space, which she had been seeking but failed to achieve

in *Witch's Cradle*, that have enabled Deren precisely to make the 'non-apparent' manifest in the 'real', and it is perhaps this discovery that formed her unique contribution to the surrealist discourse on magic. In *At Land*, Deren again used her friends from the art scene. In addition to Lustig, these included Cage, Tyler and Lamantia as well as Hammid. In a programme note, Deren summarised the film as follows:

> Adventure is no longer reserved for heroes and challengers. The universe itself imposes its challenges upon the meek and the brave indiscriminately. One does not so much act upon such a universe as re-act to its volatile variety. Struggling to preserve, in the midst of such relentless metamorphosis a constancy of personal identity.[36]

Overall, *At Land* can be read as a journey from the element of water through earth and air, ending in the endless liminal space of the tideline where earth and water meet. As with *Meshes*, the film ends at a meeting place of water and earth, reminiscent of the alchemical fusion of elementary opposites so celebrated by her surrealist colleagues. There are also conspicuous references to tarot imagery, in particular the trump of 'The Moon' with its occult meaning of the journey of the initiate through all stages of evolution.[37] The door is again another key trope for Deren, signifying this time a means of escape from a world that is trying to trap her. Whereas in *Meshes* she deliberately and repeatedly opens a door to enter a space, here three closed doors that she opens in rapid succession allow her to escape from closed interiors into freedom and the seashore where the film began.

After completing the short dance film, *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945), Deren began work early in 1945 on the film that would eventually become *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1946). In this final part of her trilogy the female protagonist's initiatory quest is completed in a form of sacred marriage, while the three Fates who spin, measure and cut the thread of life are central characters. It is her most elaborate film in which she brought together her concern with what she now referred to as the 'ritualistic' form, complex use of occult symbolism and the use of dance forms to 'choreograph' her works. It features Nin and the professional dancers Rita Christiani (1917–2008) and Frank Westbrook (1909–92) from Dunham's company. The film was originally entitled *Ritual and Ordeal*. Deren's use of the word 'ordeal' is significant here as the concept of an ordeal that the candidate must undergo is central to initiation into many forms of occultism as diverse as Western ritual magic, witchcraft and Voudoun. Deren felt that it was her most important and successful film, and in describing it she would refer specifically to the concepts of ritual, transformation and initiation:

> Thus the elements of the whole derive their meaning from a pattern which they did not themselves consciously create; just as a ritual … fuses all individual elements into a transcendental tribal power toward the achievement of some extraordinary grace. Such efforts are reserved for the accomplishment of some critical metamorphosis, and, above all, for some inversion towards life: the passage from sterile winter into fertile spring; mortality into immortality; the child-son into the man-father; or, as in this film, the widow into the bride.[38]

Ritual was Deren's biggest film; it included a large-scale party and crowd scenes, and again featured friends from the art scene as extras. One of them, Tanning, later recalled: "Peter [Lindamood, another participant] and I cavorted in Central Park one morning at sunrise for Maya Deren making an avant-garde film, which I never saw.

Perhaps it was never finished."[39] *Ritual* is meticulously structured and choreographed. Most of its imagery is drawn from classical mythology, but we also see here the first overt reference to Voudoun in Deren's work in the Widow-Bride character, in which Deren clothes a surrealist 'bride' in a costume reminiscent of both a nun's habit and a Voudoun celebrant. This character is played both by Deren and Christiani (that is by both a white and a black woman). The thread magic of *Witch's Cradle*, of winding and binding, is present again. At the beginning, the Widow-Bride (Christiani), sees one of the Fates (Deren) through an open door, winding a skein of wool. She takes the ball of wool and winds it. Slow motion suggests the otherworldliness of this scene. Another Fate (Nin) holds open a door for the Widow-Bride and ushers her across the threshold into a crowded party. The importance of this moment is signalled by a freeze frame, one of several that Deren uses to signify key moments of transformation. Across the crowded room the Widow-Bride sees a man who is attracted to her. They try to meet, but the carefully choreographed movement of the crowd prevents them from reaching each other. Eventually, on another freeze frame, they meet and touch. The film then cuts to a classical colonnaded exterior where the Widow-Bride and her suitor perform a ritualised dance enactment of the sacred marriage, with the three Fates, now transformed into Graces, dancing behind them. Then the Widow-Bride flees in fear from her suitor. He pursues her but watches helplessly as she runs into the sea. Christiani is transformed into Deren again. Then she sinks beneath the water and becomes Christiani. As she does so the film is printed in negative; the black Widow's costume has become a white bridal gown. She opens her eyes, lifts her veil and marries the sea. This can be seen in qabalistic terms as a return to the sephira Binah, the Dark Supernal Mother, described in occult writing as a great sea from which all lives originate and to which they return at death.[40] Again Deren refuses, as she had done in both *Meshes* and *At Land*, to allow her film to conclude with a union of male and female (offered here, but deliberately rejected). As in both her earlier films, she prefers here to conclude with the identification of a woman with nature, and specifically with the sea. It is thus possible to see this in terms of a proto-feminist re-appropriation of the union of opposites.

Again, the doorway or threshold is a central motif. At the beginning of the film, Christiani is in a darkened space between two lit doorways, outside the world in which most of the film will take place. She sees Deren winding wool through one of the doorways and has to pass through it to reach her. The second Fate stands in darkness at the right of the image, her face illumined by light shining through the door that she holds ajar. This builds on the door symbolism in both *Meshes* and *At Land*. Here, however, the door is neither the entry point into the dream world, nor a means of escape, but rather a liminal place outside normal time and space. Writing of *Meshes*, Deren used the metaphor of a door ajar: "It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through."[41] This image of the door was a crucial symbol for her from the beginning, and in all of these films it is the liminal space of the doorway, the threshold between worlds that is essential to the initiatory quests of her characters.

By the time the film was released in 1946, the surrealists had departed from New York, and the Greenwich Village scene, which had sustained Deren, was shrinking. *Ritual* caused the breaking of her friendship with Nin and led to a bitter feud between them. Nin did not understand Deren's occult objectives and disliked the way in which Deren had depersonalised her characters and made them subservient to the ritual elements of the film.

The Magician and the Witch

In a notebook entry from 1947 Deren wrote of women as witches and specifically referenced the occult myth of the race of Lilith:

> For to see is not simply to see a woman, but it is to see a deviant order *which you may recognise,* since something of the blood of Lilith is in everyone, and you may be 'bewitched' by the vision of the fact that it [the race of Lilith] does survive … and this triumphant recognition may induce you, if you carry enough of Lilith's blood in you, to abandon the normal order and partake of the deviant order when you see that it can sustain life in the person of the surviving deviant…. This is why, essentially, Lilith and witches are thought of rather in catalyst terms, for their sheer existence and presence is effective in the above sense. Witches do not make signals in terms of the codified signs of the normal; they make signs out of the nature of their own order, and these signs are recognized by potential witches, and that recognition (which escapes the normals) seems a mysterious thing….[42]

Despite the centrality of female characters in her films, Deren rarely wrote about gender. This unique passage provides an important clue as to the way in which she thought of herself. In occult mythologies Lilith, the demonised first wife of Adam, is frequently described as the first witch, and accorded the status of a deity in some forms of occultism.[43] Deren describes witches as something universally deviant and other, and equates this deviancy with the 'outsider' role of the artist, which she also claims for herself. However, this specifically feminine description of the witch contrasts starkly with her earlier, and essentially un-gendered, discussion of the artist-magician. Here, Deren identifies herself as deviant, transgressive female and as a witch. A very similar identification with Lilith would later be claimed by surrealist artist Leonor Fini (1907–1966), who also embraced a proto-feminist appropriation of other female mythological characters, including the Sphinx and the witch: "Myself, I know that I belong to the idea of Lilith, the anti-Eve, and that my universe is that of the Spirit."[44] This transgressive witch persona was something that would be adopted politically as well as spiritually by many women who came to Goddess spirituality and paganism via feminism in the late twentieth century.[45] Significantly, Deren's filmic exploration of tropes of witchcraft, initiation and the occult occurred at precisely the same moment as women artists in the intellectual orbit of Surrealism were avidly exploring the very same themes, turning to the occult as a site of empowerment and proto-feminist emancipation. Like Deren in her films, artists such as Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Fini obsessively turned to their own image and cast themselves in scenarios reminiscent of a spiritual journey or quest, informed by their own studies of magic and the occult and replete with a highly gendered, emphatically feminine, iconography. [46]

In Conclusion

Deren died young in 1961, and it is impossible to know how she would have responded to the challenges of feminism. By the time a new generation of women film-makers began to emerge in the late 1970s (myself amongst them), Deren's work had become

largely lost to public view. Some of her films were out of print and the avant-garde had moved in a very different direction after her death. When women artists began to re-discover Deren's work, it was immediately recognised as a key influence and source of inspiration. Film maker Barbara Hammer's experience on discovering Deren's work at film school was typical:

> … [T]oward the end of the course, there appeared on screen the black and white 16mm films of one Maya Deren. Something was radically different. The screen was filled with images that were created from a different sensibility, an aesthetic which I intuitively understood. For the first time, a woman's cinema filled the screen…. I knew then that I would make film.[47]

Women artists responded to Deren's work, not just because she had played a leading role in avant-garde film (a movement which had had few female participants), but also because there were strong parallels between her work and that which women were making in the 1970s and 1980s. Deren's presence in her own work prefigured that of the new generation of film and performance artists[48] for whom the artists' own presence in the work was essential to an exploration of the self. Her deep exploration of the occult and the magical also became a source of inspiration for artists beginning to engage with Goddess spirituality.[49]

Although there are very clear differences between Deren's work and that of the sur-realists, the presence of the group drew Deren into the art world and provided a context in which she could develop as a film-maker. Her contact with the surrealists, and above all with Duchamp, challenged and inspired her, and gave her exploration of the occult and magic new impetus. Surrealism functioned for Deren as it did for other women artists who were involved in the movement: It acted as a catalyst and a means of liberation, which enabled her to make work which explored her own self and her interior world. Deren encountered the movement at a point when the occult and the magical had become central elements of its poetic and political agenda, and when its female members, in particular, were drawn to tropes of the goddess, of nature and of alchemical renewal. Deren enthusiastically espoused this exploration, successfully drawing on many of the surrealists' contemporary concerns in what would become a unique filmic take on magic as a transformative and emancipatory power. As Deren herself stated in 1946: "For more than anything else, cinema consists of the eye for magic – that which perceives and reveals the marvellous in whatsoever it looks upon."[50]

Notes

1 For a useful summary of the problems of defining magic see Owen Davies, *Magic – A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–2. Deren's own definition of magic, as a practice in which the artist-magician journeyed through inner realms and brought back knowledge they made manifest in the everyday world, is therefore the most useful here. This is discussed and quoted throughout this chapter. I have used the term 'occult' to denote Deren's interest in the corpus of material recognised as constituting the Western occult tradition in the early twentieth century, ritual magic and Western forms of witchcraft. The sources of her occult and magical knowledge are also discussed through-out this chapter, as are Deren's 'magical' persona and her use of operative magic in the film *Witch's Cradle* (1943). Deren's involvement in non-Western spirituality (Haitian Voudoun,

for instance) is not considered in great detail here as it essentially post-dates the films that are the subject of my discussion. However, it should be noted that Deren was working before the beginning of meaningful post-colonial discourse. This notwithstanding, in her writing on Voudoun she demonstrates a clear awareness of her privileged political position as a white woman within an Afro-Caribbean culture.

2 See Sasha Hammid interviewed in VeVe Clark et al., *The Legend of Maya Deren* (New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1984), vol. 1, part 1, 406; and Parker Tyler "Letter To Teiji Ito" in *Filmwise 2: Maya Deren*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York, Cinema 16 and Film-makers Cooperative, 1962).

3 For a fuller discussion of Deren's encounters with Seabrook, see Judith Noble, "The Magic of Time and Space – Occultism in the Films of Maya Deren," in *Abraxas. International Journal of Esoteric Studies*, special issue no. 1 (Summer 2013): 116. Seabrook's attempt to get Deren to participate in an S&M ritual for his own gratification was an abject failure.

4 Deren worked as publicist for the Katherine Dunham Dance Troupe from 1941 to 1942 on a West Coast tour of Dunham's production, *Cabin in the Sky*. Dunham was the first choreographer to put African and Caribbean dance together with contemporary Western work and her company was the first to integrate black and white dancers. See Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 1, 306–404.

5 See Maya Deren, *Religious Possession in Dancing*, reprinted in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 1, 477–97.

6 For a good overview of *View*, see *View: Parade of the Avant-Garde 1940–1947*, ed. Charles Henri Ford (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991).

7 Tyler co-edited *View* magazine alongside Charles Henri Ford and would remain one of Deren's closest friends for the rest of her life.

8 See Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 138. On *Arcane 17* and its relation to magic, spirituality and the feminine, see notably Daniel Zamani's contribution to this volume.

9 Ibid., 137.

10 Maya Deren, *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (New York: Alicat, 1946).

11 For detailed personal accounts of the practice of Voudoun, see Maya Deren, *The Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1953) and Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969). For a discussion of the syncretistic aspects of Voudoun and its complex relationship with Western occultism, see Milo Rigaud, *Secrets of Voodoo* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1985). Deren knew Rigaud and practised Voudoun ritual with his partner.

12 This material is available as a documentary compilation entitled *The Divine Horsemen; The Living Gods of Haiti*. The material was edited by others after Deren's death and does not demonstrate the structure and qualities characteristic of Deren's finished works.

13 Deren, *Divine Horsemen*.

14 Anne Clark Matta, quoted in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 132.

15 Leo Lerman quoted in ibid.

16 Anaïs Nin, *The Journals of Anaïs Nin*, vol. 4 (London: Quartet, 1974), 86.

17 Maya Deren, letter to René Renne [January 9, 1946], reprinted in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 361.

18 Maya Deren, "Notice to Director of film screening [undated, ca. 1946]," reprinted in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 402. Deren repeated these instructions to organisers of screenings that her work should on no account be described as either surrealist or Freudian throughout her life. Italics in original.

19 Deren, *Anagram*, 61–68.

20 For a thorough examination of these concerns with the irrational and the subconscious in Dali and Bunuel's films, see Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981).

21 For a discussion of the gendered gaze in cinema see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18.

22 Maya Deren, Programme note for film screening [undated, probably 1946], author's collection.

23 This principle is very widespread and operates in occult traditions as diverse as traditional witchcraft, ritual magic, classical mystery cults and African diaspora spiritualities such as Voudoun and Santeria.

24 A more detailed discussion of this aspect of Deren's work and potential links with other women artists identified with the surrealist circle will be found in my forthcoming study on Deren (Fulgur; projected for 2018).

25 Anaïs Nin, Programme note for screening of Deren's films at Provincetown Playhouse [February 18, 1946], author's collection.

26 For numerous examples of these practices see the collection of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic, Boscastle, Cornwall, UK: www.museumofwitchcraftand magic.co.uk.

27 Maya Deren, programme note [1945], reprinted in *Film Culture 39* (1965): 1–2.

28 Deren, Unpublished note, in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 150.

29 Anne Clark Matta, interview, in Clark et al, *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 152.

30 T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1943).

31 Anne Clark Matta, interview, in Clark et al., *The Legend,* vol. 1, part 2, 406.

32 See Deren, *Anagram*, 145–46.

33 For a full discussion of Duchamp's installation, see T. J. Demos. "Duchamp's Labyrinth: First Papers of Surrealism 1942," in *October* 97 (Summer 2001): 91–119.

34 See for example M. E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

35 Maya Deren, Unpublished note [ca. 1945/46], in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 143. Deren used the 'universal' male pronoun without any intention to specify the male gender throughout her published and unpublished written work; she was writing before the feminist critique of gendered language, which began in the late 1960s, but this can be read awkwardly to contemporary readers. The only extant exception seems to be her note on Lilith and witchcraft, discussed below.

36 Maya Deren, programme note for *At Land* [ca. 1945], author's collection.

37 This quality of the film has been noted by critics. See, for example, Margaret Warwick in *Monthly Film Bulletin* 55 (June 1988): 563.

38 Maya Deren, publicity leaflet: "Films In The Classicist Tradition" [ca. 1946/47], author's collection.

39 Dorothea Tanning, *Between Lives: An Artist and her World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 45. Tanning's contribution did not make it into the final version of the film. She would not have seen the finished film as she and Ernst left New York before it was eventually released in 1946. Other participants included John and Xenia Cage, Parker Tyler and Gore Vidal.

40 See for example Dion Fortune, *The Mystical Qabalah* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1935), and Israel Regardie, ed., *Aleister Crowley's 777 and Other Qabalistic Writings* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1977). I have used the spelling 'Qabalah' throughout to denote the form of magical qabalah used within the Western magical tradition (as practised by Éliphas Lévi, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aleister Crowley et al.) and to distinguish it from the practice of Jewish mysticism and also from a contemporary cult of "Kabbalah," both of which use different spellings.

41 Maya Deren, "Letter to James Card," in P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 22–23.

42 Maya Deren, notebook entry [March 1, 1947], in Clark et al., *The Legend*, vol. 1, part 2, 426.

43 See, amongst many examples, Melissa Harrington, "Loving Lilith," in *Both Sides of Heaven – a Collection of Essays Exploring the Origins, History, Nature and Magical Practices of Angels, Fallen Angels and Demons*, ed. Sorita D'Este (London: Avalonia 2009), 149–60; and Peter Grey, *The Red Goddess* (Dover: Scarlet Imprint, 2007).

44 Xavière Gauthier, *Leonor Fini* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), trans. and quoted in Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 130.

45 See, for example, Zsuzanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (Oakland, CA: Susan B. Anthony Coven, 1982) and Vivianne Crowley, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Age* (London: Element Books, 1989) for two contrasting explorations of this persona.

46 See Chadwick, *Women Artists*, 182–84; and Victoria Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism," *Aries* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 103–30.

47 Barbara Hammer, "Maya Deren and Me," in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 261. Hammer's reaction was very similar to my own experience of first seeing Deren's work in 1980.

48 See, for example, the work of Catherine Elwes, Tina Keane and Yvonne Rainer.

49 See *Heresies*, 5 (Spring 1978, "The Great Goddess"), and *Goddess Shrew* (London: Matriarchy Study Group, London, 1977).

50 Maya Deren, "Magic Is New," *Mademoiselle magazine* (1946), reprinted in *Essential Deren: Collected Writings on Film by Maya Deren*, ed. Bruce McPherson (Kingston: Documentext/McPherson and Company, 2005), 206.

12 Harbingers of the New Age
Surrealism, Women and the Occult in the United States

Susan Aberth

Thanks to a series of pioneering exhibitions and publications executed in the past two decades, we have come to a better understanding of Surrealism's impact on artists in the United States.[1] As various studies have explored, surrealist influence in the United States was at its zenith in the 1940s when European artists and writers sought safe harbor in New York City and contributed to a number of significant shows and catalogs, such as, for instance, the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in 1942, which was organized by André Breton (1896–1966) and Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968).[2] In Paris, women artists had played an important, if not pivotal, role in the movement, but the question of how women artists interested in Surrealism fared in the more conservative United States has not yet been explored in any great depth. Ilene Susan Fort states in her catalogue essay for *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States* (2013), that

> [t]he 1940s was the pinnacle of surrealism in the United States because of the presence of the many exiled members of the movement who introduced the aesthetic to a host of rising young artists. Consequently, many more women experimented with the aesthetic than had done so previously.[3]

And, indeed, considering the numerous artists Fort was able to include in this landmark show, many American women, beyond the by now canonical figures explored in pioneering studies such as Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985), experimented with surrealist ideas and techniques. However, apart from women such as Dorothea Tanning (1910–2012) and Kay Sage (1898–1963), many of these artists remain virtually unknown, their work and legacy urgently requiring more research and examination. In this chapter, I therefore propose to read a number of these figures through the lens of Surrealism, and suggest that their twin turn to both occult and gendered tropes was situated between the legacy of earlier surrealist women artists and the eventual dawn of New Age spirituality.[4]

In her essay, Fort provides a very useful chronology of early US exhibitions that either showcased or included women surrealists. For example, the Julien Levy Gallery in New York showed Leonor Fini (1907–1996) in 1936 and Frida Kahlo (1907–1954) in 1938, and went on to dedicate solo exhibitions to Lee Miller (1907–1977), Mina Loy (1882–1966), Tanning and Sage. Peggy Guggenheim opened her *Art of this Century* gallery in Manhattan in 1942, and, urged on by Duchamp, the very next year presented the *Exhibition of 31 Women*.[5] Aside from Guggenheim, the jury somewhat

ironically consisted exclusively of men and included key founders of Surrealism Breton and Max Ernst (1891–1976), in addition to Duchamp. Among the thirty-one women selected for this show were a number of outstanding talents, hailing from a number of countries: Kahlo, Valentine Hugo (1887–1968), Louise Nevelson (1899–1988), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889–1943), Alice Rahon (1904–87), Jacqueline Lamba (1910–1993), Lee Krasner (1908–1984) and Leonora Carrington (1917–2011). The American surrealists shown were Sage, Loren MacIver (1909–1998), Muriel Streeter Levy (1913–1995) and Tanning – a small but impressive line-up.

This auspicious beginning in exhibiting women artists associated with Surrealism in the US, however, was cut short for a number of reasons. Surrealism, with its emphasis on the irrational and, by the end of the war, with the occult, was not considered part of a scientific and positivist future.[6] For many viewers and critics, the end of World War II provoked a desire for art that was fresh and new, and free of any engagement with wartime trauma and political issues. What is more, the American art scene did not want to be reminded of the intellectual debt they owed to the European émigré community, many of who were surrealists. Abstract Expressionism, clearly indebted to surrealist techniques and ideas, was instead cast as quintessentially American. Further, returning servicemen in the US immediately displaced the jobs given to women during the war, and an aggressive return to traditional gender roles was consequently advocated. Socially, this regressive trend culminated in the 1950s when women's forced return to the domestic sphere was transformed into a fetishized commodity. Both of these issues – the unpopularity of Surrealism and the return to a staunchly patriarchal art world – were complicating factors for female artists working in a surrealist style.

According to Isabelle Dervaux in her introduction to *Surrealism USA* (2005), although Surrealism was deemed old-fashioned in New York City, it remained vital in other parts of the country such as California and Chicago, for instance.[7] Fort emphasizes the continued importance of Surrealism for women artists in particular, stating:

> For women in the United States, surrealism offered a means of liberation and empowerment. In the course of achieving those two conditions they pursued a process of self-discovery and at times underwent self-healing. Their art became their salvation. Unlike the history of the male surrealists, theirs was more one of personal experiences, whether pursued in solitary forays or within the context of a small group or couple.[8]

Fort pairs key words such as 'liberation' and 'empowerment' with 'self-discovery' and 'self-healing' in a way that underlines the conjoining of feminism and spirituality for women working in a surrealist idiom. This will most certainly be true for the artists discussed in this chapter.

Women Artists and the Americas

In Mexico City a core group of women surrealists who had been part of the group in Paris before the war, Rahon, Carrington and Remedios Varo (1908–1963), were able to form a tight-knit community due to the connecting factors of proximity and their émigré status. All of them had opportunities to return to Europe and yet none left Mexico, opting instead for friendship, freedom and new beginnings there. In the US,

the situation was decidedly different. Separated by the great distances between cities, women surrealists in Los Angeles, Chicago and New York had infrequent contact with each other and were unable to unify in meaningful ways. Instead, they often created in isolation or in small groups, having to work against the social grain. Lacking opportunities for dialogue and organization, their artistic trajectory was indeed more one of 'personal experiences.' For many of the women surrealists in the Americas, their wish for 'empowerment' led to the exploration of esoteric themes.[9] Indeed, on several occasions, the concept of 'liberation' was understood as a spiritual pursuit, and if there were any political currents at stake, they inevitably took the expression of a turn toward female emancipation.[10] The 'self-discovery' and 'self-healing,' which Fort rightly speaks of, more often than not, had either an overt occult edge or a vaguely metaphysical feel.

However, we should not too hastily subscribe to Fort's assessments that "[i]nterest in the occult among Americans had increased with the arrival of the exiles."[11] On the contrary, the US has had a long and very distinct involvement with alternative religious practices, often times with women acting as key players. Therefore, Breton and the other exiled male surrealists most certainly did not increase Americans' overall interest in occultism, nor was it the first time that an art movement claimed esoteric goals. New York was full of Freemasons, Rosicrucians, Spiritualists and adherents of other cults and new religious movements who had visual components to their rituals and beliefs. The most famous magician of modern times, Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), for instance, had lived in the US from 1914 to 1919, where for a time he painted and experimented with sex magic in Greenwich Village.[12] Clearly, there were already magical and esoteric milieus, circles and sources present and available in the US many of them replete with transgressive ideas about gender and sexuality.

What the European surrealists did bring to New York, however, was a sense of theatricality, a gift for organization and artistic practices based on magical techniques. All of this lent a certain new cachet and glamor to occultism as a subject, despite its already long presence in the arts in the US. The apex of this type of public spectacle arguably occurred on the evening of 8 May 1948 when Kurt Seligmann (1900–1962) celebrated the launch of his new book, *The Mirror of Magic* (1948), by throwing an elegant party in his Bryant Park studio called the "Magic Evening."[13] On this occasion, Seligmann and the artist Enrico Donati (1909–2008) created a magic circle replete with the names of powerful archangels around its circumference (see also Figure 8.3).[14] It was a slightly tongue-in-cheek re-enactment of the ritual to summon the dead as famously practised by the Renaissance magician Dr. John Dee (1527–1608/09) and his scryer Edward Kelly (1555–1597), an event also illustrated in Seligmann's book.[15] The room was full of New York socialites and celebrities, and Breton would surely have despised such a commercial venture full of showmanship and self-promotion. But Breton was already back in Europe by that time and Seligmann's book, an erudite and impressive piece of scholarship, would subsequently serve as the go-to guide for any artist seeking visual inspiration on the occult for years to come.

Sylvia Fein (*1919), Gertrude Abercrombie (1909–1977), Gerrie Gutmann (1921–1969) and Juanita Guccione (1904–1999) are four relatively little known American artists who identified themselves as surrealists at various times in their career, all of them absent from Chadwick's aforementioned 1985 study, as well as broader histories of the surrealist movement. Indeed, to date there have been no full-length academic studies of their work, nor has their proto-feminist exploration of esoteric and

occult themes garnered the scholarly attention it deserves. Only Marjorie Cameron (1922–1995), the final artist I will discuss here, has recently had a spate of publications on her remarkable body of work.[16] In her visionary role of sorceress and artist, Cameron was the true herald of the New Age and of the role women were to play in it. For, with the exception of Cameron, none of these four women were practising occultists, nor were they necessarily aware of or in any way directly and deeply influenced by the esoteric content of such surrealist artists as Fini, Varo or Carrington. Yet, they were all possessed by a shared tendency toward creating work suffused with the mysterious, and explored a gendered and occult iconography that shows remarkably close parallels to that of their surrealist predecessors. In their paintings, women are often the protagonists in ritualistic scenes, self-portraiture abounds, and a variety of spiritual traditions are hinted at, with woman appearing as being tied to enchantment and the uncanny. Unlike their counterparts in Mexico, who actively experimented with the supernatural, women artists in the US were more reluctant to commit themselves to specific traditions or pathways: Instead, personal freedom was preferred over organized community, and consequently they were often viewed as individual eccentrics and not as members of any one group or movement. As Fort so aptly put it, self-discovery and self-healing took precedence over any truly sustained esoteric study. Thus, their work exudes an aura of spiritual questing, inhabited by the restless energy and pervasive melancholy indicative of long journeys to strange and alien territories.

Sylvia Fein

Sylvia Fein is a good example of an artist who synthesized personal experience with mystical symbols to create figurative canvases chronicling her inner life. Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, she became involved with a Midwestern group of surrealist painters while attending the University of Wisconsin from 1938 to 1942. This group included Gertrude Abercrombie, alongside other painters such as John Wilde (1919–2006) and Marshall Glasier (1902–1988) whose work helped to define a Midwestern surrealist aesthetic. Her 1942/43 painting *The Lady with the White Knight*, executed in egg tempera (an influence from late medieval and early Renaissance painting, which Carrington had also often experimented with), is a portrait of her and her husband William Scheuber. This odd work looks like a cross between an Arthur Rackham fairytale illustration and a medieval-inspired Fini painting: The figures stand in a desolate landscape strewn with macabre and occult signifiers, such as a ram's skull, a beehive and a blasted tree stump. Fein is draped in a wild feline animal skin and accompanied by a cat at her feet, while a crow perches on her husband's shoulder, whose garments sports the emblem of an eye that appears to be taken from either the Odd Fellows or Freemasonry.[17] Both wear short garments meant to represent chainmail but that look more like fragile crochet; the aura of anxiety exuding from the scene, and their expressions may be because soon after their marriage in 1942 Scheuber, a serviceman, was posted to the Pacific. Although this painting shares many features with the magically themed works of Carrington (a fairytale setting, animals, odd robes), what makes it stand apart is a psychological self-awareness that dispels rather than creates illusion. In spite of the fairytale-like background, odd costumes and animal familiars, this painting does not possess the aura of an alternate magical realm. Instead, the male character regards the viewer with a sad expression

and awkward pose, while the female, pouting and lost in dark thoughts, ignores us entirely.

Much of Fein's work contained feminist themes. From 1943 to 1947 she lived near Ajijic, a lakeside village in Mexico renowned for its local artisans and its community of ex-pat artists from the US. There she worked with a local women's cooperative and on a friend's farm so that she could prepare for the 1946–47 Whitney Annual Exhibition in New York where she showed her work alongside surrealists such as Ernst and Roberto Matta (1911–2002), both of who shared her interest in the occult. A painting from 1947 titled *Circe* comically shows the artist in a yellow poncho with horns holding a goat on a leash and surrounded by other creatures. The landscape and river in this work bears an uncanny resemblance to those pictured in Carrington's 1947 composition *The Temptation of St. Anthony* – iconographic parallels that prompt some speculation regarding her influence on Fein.[18]

After Mexico she moved to Northern California, where at ninety-eight years old, she still resides and works. *Lady Magician* of 1954 (Plate XIII) is a playful interpretation of the Magician card from the Major Arcana of the Rider-Waite Tarot deck, painted by the American occultist Pamela Coleman Smith (1871–1951) in 1909. Looking more like a circus entertainer practicing on a rock stage in a field (while stepping in a pile of cow poop!) than an occult adept, her humorous treatment in no way diminishes the subject's deeply magical allure. A lithe Fein (for it is again a self-portrait we are dealing with) sporting vibrant red hair and matching leggings stands at a table, which contains her various 'magical' paraphernalia – crystal vials, gemstone, herbs, a feather and paintbrushes. Her jaunty hat is made of grass; her necklace of beads is made of Mexican jade; and her skimpy top and bare midriff make her look like a burlesque dancer. A pentagram is tattooed between her violet eyes while a crescent moon and stars are visible on her left shoulder. Gemstones, large chunks of rock and birds inexplicably litter the field behind her. In a feminist twist, Fein has drained the Magician card of some of its ponderous masculinity: The magician's traditional 'as above so below' pose of one arm up toward the heavens and the other pointing down to the earth, traditionally signifying his place as the conduit between the celestial and terrestrial realms, has here been conspicuously replaced by a different motion; with a dancer's grace she raises a magic wand in a gesture of conjuration, as clear bubbles form in the sky. In the center a large bubble contains a multi-colored bird that looks like a piece of Mexican folk art from Ajijic. This feminine magician doe not master or dominate nature, but rather plays alongside it.

Gertrude Abercrombie

Also comic, but with a darker sensibility, are the paintings of Gertrude Abercrombie, another important surrealist figure from the Midwest, but one who chose to remain there. Born in 1909 in Austin, Texas, while her parents were performing in a traveling opera company, Abercrombie's itinerant life became stationary with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Her family finally settled in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago in 1916, and Abercrombie remained there until her death in 1977. In the 1930s she was employed by the federal Works Progress Administration, and with her newly acquired financial independence began to befriend artists and Jazz musicians, many of them of African American descent. After her marriage to Robert Livingston in 1940, her Victorian home became a lively center for artists, writers and

musicians, including such luminaries as Dizzy Gillespie and Sonny Rollins. Although her output was prolific and she regularly showed her work at the Art Institute of Chicago, her paintings have not enjoyed wider circulation, and, like the other women discussed in this chapter, would undoubtedly benefit from further art historical scrutiny. A woman, a surrealist and from the Midwest, Abercrombie faced a trifecta of obstacles toward artistic success, and although she was known in Chicago as 'Queen Gertrude,' she was all but invisible elsewhere.

Abercrombie's signature style utilizes a unique visual language that remained remarkably consistent throughout her career. Stock characters and symbols are endlessly recombined, forming a kind of overarching grand narrative spanning her output over several decades. Far from the normative stereotypes one expects from the Midwest of this time period, Abercrombie surprises us with her Gothic imagery and black humor. Her stark and reductive scenes can be formulaic and repetitive, but in compelling ways suggestive of imagery stolen from recurring nightmares and unresolvable dilemmas. Regardless of the size of the canvas, their dramatic compositions and flat spaces appear reminiscent of stage backdrops, perhaps related to the ones seen in childhood in the traveling theater her parents worked in. What gives these works their anxious edge, aside from the black cats, moonlit towers, bare-branched trees and blindfolded figures that are Abercrombie's stock in trade, is the static way they are painted. Figures, mostly female, are caught in frozen theatrical gestures as if in the midst of a dark drama. Like the Masonic stage curtains used for initiations into higher degrees, the story and symbols are unreadable to the uninitiated, but appear ominous and full of latent meaning.

Indecision (ca. 1948) (Figure 12.1) and *The Courtship* (1949) both show a woman in a long pink evening gown with her hands up in a gesture of surrender or worship. The landscapes are nocturnal; there is a body of water, a moon and a tower reminiscent of the melancholy and enigma of de Chirico's painting. In *Indecision* the protagonist, clearly the artist herself, is blindfolded and the empty room she stands in melts away onto a coastline. The moon is full and, as if communicating with the heavenly body, her outstretched gloved hands strike a secret gesture, with a red heart on one of the palms. A white door echoes the white tower, both occult symbols that commonly signify entryways to other realms, thus pointing toward the theme of initiation so central to the art of female surrealist painters. Abercrombie is without a blindfold in *The Courtship*; instead the man facing her, presumably a lover, is masked like a bandit and points a finger at her like a gun. Above his head is a pink cloud that matches her dress.[19] This cloud looks remarkably like an illustration from *Thought Forms*, a book of clairvoyant drawings from 1901 and compiled by second-generation leaders of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934). On their direction, anonymous artists from the Society compiled a series of abstract drawings, which Besant and Leadbeater defined as visualizations of thoughts as they exist in the astral plane. One of the drawings, a pink amorphous form, illustrates "pure affection."[20] Going on the premise that she knew of this book, the implication is that the male figure has feelings for the woman in the pink dress. No pink cloud hangs above her, however. Instead, she holds her hands up as if a crime is being perpetrated upon her. Once again, a surrealistic esoteric scene, replete with the occult symbols of owl, crescent moon and a tower on an island, is used as an ironic commentary on gender relations, if not marriage.

Other works by Abercrombie show lone female figures (always looking like the artist) wandering through flat Midwestern landscapes at night; the bleakness punctuated

by a lone shack or clump of trees. The moon is always present (full or in a waning crescent), an ancient symbol of female power which had strong currency in the work of surrealist women artists. Often there are towers, owls and illumined pathways that suggest sinister outings. Some of the female figures wear crowns and have something of the diva about them (recall her nickname 'Queen Gertrude'). Women levitate, black cats scamper, stairs lead up to nowhere, black gnarled trees twist under the moonlight or hold a hangman's noose – a clear indication of why her neighborhood children would refer to her as 'witch' (she often wore a pointed black hat). In an early *Self-Portrait* (1940), she sits in a dark room next to an open window that reveals a blasted tree under a lone black cloud. As the moonlight streams in and onto the table top, she reaches into a chalice-like fruit bowl to pluck red grapes. Stern and masculine looking under her black hat, with a black and white blouse that makes her look like an escaped convict, the work exudes both melancholy and menace. Grapes have inescapable religious connotations, associated with sacrifice and redemption and their symbolic meaning could not have escaped the artist. A comparison could be made with Carrington's earlier depiction of an unholy banquet, *Meal of Lord Candlestick* (1938), where an infant male child is placed on a platter of grapes. As with Carrington's painting, Abercrombie's grapes have more to do with the witch's Sabbath than a celebration of the Eucharist.

Figure 12.1 Gertrude Abercrombie, *Indecision*, c. 1948. Oil on canvas. University Museum, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

Gerrie Gutmann

Another female American artist who dialogued with both surrealist and occult tropes is Gerrie Gutmann – a Californian-born painter who, despite a life cut tragically short by suicide, left behind a compelling body of macabre work with disguised autobiographical content. In many respects, her haunting visions prefigure today's Gothic subculture sensibilities, giving her paintings a surprisingly contemporary outlook. Gutmann studied at the Stickney Memorial School of Art in Pasadena (1939) with Lorser Feitelson (1898–1978),[21] a post-surrealist who painted in a more abstract hard-edged style.[22] A remarkable *Self-Portrait* (Figure 12.2) by Gutmann, dating from 1940, displays some of the hallmark features of other European surrealist women artists, such as the use of antique costumes, dolls and Bosch-like creatures that also characterized the work of artists such as Fini, Varo and Carrington. In the painting, her dress and the background are cast in a faded and yellowing white, reminiscent of a worn Victorian spirit photograph. With her hands clasped on her lap and her eyes red, she brings to mind a grieving widow or mother (as also indicated by the dolls on the floor). A transparent veil on her head completes that image and her hair is black and piled high in a regal, old-fashioned manner. The room has an abandoned air with cracks in the walls from which sickly vines emerge. A shelf on the wall contains discarded objects, including a seashell. A hairless and cracked porcelain doll sits in the corner, a needle piercing a red felt heart pinned to its dress. Adding to the uncanny atmosphere the doll holds a pair of miniature scissors – open and dangerous looking. A smaller doll lies on the floor beside it, looking eerily like the sitter. To complete this terrifying corner is a very large black scorpion, which the woman is oblivious to as she sits staring straight ahead, utterly divorced from her surroundings. On the woman's lap is a pile of mollusc sea creatures – fleshy, their red interiors surrounded by spikey protuberances, they are unbearably sexual and abject. Their red centers leaking, they leave a pale bloody stain throughout the lower part of her dress. A necklace of them, with a jewelry pendant dangling from the center, encircles her delicate neck. Like a modern Miss Havisham character, she appears disappointed and sexually wounded, a notion that the discarded seashell (a potent symbol of female fertility) aptly underscores.

The Theft (1952) (Plate XIV) is a profoundly disturbing and nightmarish vision, clearly reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch's torments of hell that also fascinated surrealist painters such as Carrington and Varo. Set in what appears to be a crypt, an antlered creature stands in the center, draped in a red robe and green cloak. In her skeletal hands, with their grotesque long fingers, she clutches a tiny coffin covered in cobwebs, clearly that of a child. Her white unseeing eyes, straight out of a contemporary horror film, complete her terrifying countenance. Is this a unique depiction of death, or is it some grisly ghoul? A male figure in the lower left, with the same white unseeing eyes, has a repulsive reptilian bird perched on his arm like a hunting falcon. To the left are three crouching demonic entities, part human part animal, who rise up from the ground alert, like dogs surrounding their prey. In a stack of dry twigs is an empty bird's nest: One bird is dead amongst the cruelly twisted branches and the other falling from the sky wounded, its feathers falling to the ground. The entire scene takes place in an aurora borealis of shimmering color planes, perhaps indicating the hellish realms that these monsters will return to. Gutmann had an unhappy first marriage that ended in divorce in 1945, and her husband received full custody of their son

Figure 12.2 Gerrie Gutmann, *Self-Portrait*, 1940. Coloured pencil on paper. Collection of David and Jeanne Carlson.

after a protracted and bitter custody battle.[23] In this light, *The Theft* may well reflect the emotional devastation she experienced at the loss of her child, and also her rage at the injustice of a patriarchal society. Moreover, there is a hint of madness in the empty stares of these creatures, reminding viewers of inmates in a mental asylum. Needless to say, this preoccupation with death, madness, Bosch-like hybrids and Gothic interiors again has close counterparts in the work of Carrington, Fini, Tanning and other women surrealists.

Juanita Guccione

Worldlier and much more well-traveled than the previous artists discussed, Juanita Guccione hailed from New York and worked and lived there for most of her life.[24] Fiercely resistant to being stylistically labeled, she worked in both abstract and figurative veins that were united in their exploration of spiritual states of mind. Highly independent, she traveled alone to France at the age of 27, and from there went to live for four years in Bou Saâda in French Algeria. Among the Ouled Naïl, a matriarchal Bedouin tribe,[25] she experienced great solidarity with and affection for the women,

who liked her and let her into their confidence. Her son Djelloul Marbrook relays that her experiences living with the Ouled Naïl were the most meaningful of her life. She accompanied the tribe on their trading routes to various towns and oases, traveling on camels across the sands by night to avoid the heat, and her son is convinced that these journeys inspired her poetic nocturnal landscapes.[26] Guccione executed many sensitive portraits, landscapes and cityscapes during her time there that are now in the collection of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Algeria. Spectacularly beautiful and dismissive of convention, Guccione returned to the US in 1935 as a single mother with an illegitimate son, whose father remained in Algeria. Her many paintings of Bou Saâda and its inhabitants were shown at the Brooklyn Museum that same year, where they received much attention in the press – surely a remarkable occurrence for a woman artist in general at the time.[27]

Looking forward, not backward, she immersed herself anew in New York City working with the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) on Post Office murals for the federal Works Progress Administration during the later half of the 1930s. She also studied for seven years with Hans Hofmann (1880–1966), whom she could converse with fluently in German and who thought highly of her work.[28] During the 1940s, she was also in direct contact with the surrealist exile-artists in New York, meeting Breton and many others.[29] While she may not have particularly liked Breton, nor wanted to be part of their group, like many women artists she was drawn to the potentials of Surrealism's pictorial language. Adverse to all forms of authority, a not particularly enthusiastic mother and insistent on her sexual freedom with both male and female partners, Guccione possessed a truly rebellious spirit. Unconcerned with traditional forms of success and deeply suspicious of art dealers, she never received the acclaim she deserved, and that her more socially savvy artist sister, Irene Rice Pereira (1902–1971), did.

Guccione's earlier experiences with the matriarchal Ouled Naïl undoubtedly influenced her many paintings that depict muscular amazon women such as those seen in *Masquerade* (c. 1946).[30] Lounging amicably outside as if after a late-night celebration, masks off but party hats still on, these massive women, accompanied by a Siamese cat, seem lost in reverie under a sky dramatically streaked with pink as dawn slowly arrives. The comfortable way they inhabit their bodies and the tribal sense of camaraderie they exude is a powerful evocation of a lost world before patriarchy. In this way, Guccione is in tune with Carrington's visual explorations of archaic feminine rituals prior to what she considered the misogynist disaster of Christianity. The black sun seen in many of her paintings is a signature emblem for Guccione, hovering in dramatic skies streaked with unearthly colors to create a haunting and mysterious ambience.[31] It can also represent the melancholy of the artist who metaphorically must explore darkness in order to gain greater self-knowledge, or perhaps the transformation of trauma into spiritual growth and life.

In another nocturnal dreamscape, *The Race* (ca. 1951) (Plate XV), horses gallop through an abandoned structure whose pillars are covered with occult glyphs or sigils. These glyphs appear in other paintings, hinting at lost civilizations, temples where these markings are decipherable only to the initiated, or even representative of languages from alien realms. These markings also resemble witch alphabets, used by coven members to communicate in secret. In another painting, *Lions* (1946), two ample nude women wander through a similar space with a pride of friendly lions. The feeling is North African and the spaces reminiscent of Islamic caravansaries used to

store trade goods and lit with oil lamps hanging from long chains. Here, the columns are also decorated with carefully delineated markings, and it might be fruitful to try and identify them in the future.

Gatekeeper (ca. 1948) displays a plethora of gaming equipment, again under a black sun set in an apocalyptic sky. A lone woman turns the roulette wheel while standing on a checkered floor, often seen in esoteric spaces as a symbol of the unification of opposites. This type of floor is also portrayed in paintings by Varo, Carrington and Fini, often signifying a generic sacred space. Masonic and Odd Fellows Lodges use it in ritual spaces to represent duality and the alternating cycles of life (i.e. good and evil). Yet, the checkered floor is also seen in domestic spaces like kitchen floors, and it is perhaps better understood here as a thoughtful appropriation of the sacred into the mundane arena of women's labor. In the painting, the female protagonist stands beside a table strewn with an hourglass, a bouquet of lilies, a clock and other potent symbols of transience. Aside from any personal meaning for the artist,[32] one cannot help but recall the surrealist love of the role of chance and play in artistic production.

Guccione had a life-long interest in esoteric belief systems such as Sufism (inspired by her contact with mystical Islam in Algeria, where she visited a number of Sufi shrines), Theosophy, Rosicrucianism, the Kabbalah, Tarot and astrology. Checkered floors, crosses, orbs of light, stairways and spirals suggest secret codes and access to alternate dimensions. Cosmological configurations such as comet-like flashes, stars, crescent moons and full moons are also ubiquitous. Her work from the 1960s becomes increasingly metaphysical, and in works like *Cosmic Harvest* (1962) and *Vigil* (1983) she creates unique multidimensional spaces intimating processes of spiritual transformation and transcendence. These abstract spaces have no precedent in the work of other surrealist women artists, but instead have a distant relationship to the Theosophical-inspired work of artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944).

The influence of occult books full of magical emblems and historic illustrations on artists is evident in Guccione's work, as it is in the work of other women surrealist artists.[33] For example, she owned a copy of Lewis Spence's 1960 *An Encyclopedia of Occultism*, which features a collection of Gnostic gems or 'Abraxas-stones' on one of its overall frontispiece illustrations pages.[34] In *Don't Be So Sure* (n.d.), Guccione has clearly taken the aggressive masculine image of Abraxas (cock's head, shield, whip, serpent legs) and turned it into a bird-headed woman holding candles lit at both ends instead of weapons, thus feminizing an explicitly masculine symbol. She flies through a stormy night surrounded by zigzagging lightning bolts, astride a phoenix flying toward the sun (although her signature black sun is still visible in the background).

Although her son has confirmed that Guccione attended Theosophical Society meetings in Manhattan, regularly received Rosicrucian newsletters in the mail and had an active interest in the esoteric, she was also secretive about her beliefs and rarely spoke of them. She did have a number of occult books in her library and enjoyed attending public lectures on esoteric issues, but no propensity for joining groups, instead preferring to study on her own. It is therefore difficult to ascribe exact meanings to the symbols in her work, but like the other artists mentioned in this chapter, she was seeking spiritual self-knowledge, and, in my opinion, trying to envision some aspect of the divine feminine. Again, Guccione's time spent with the matriarchal tribe Ouled Naïl, her fierce independence as an artist, her open bisexuality, the monumental self-possessed women in her paintings, all these factors point toward a proto-feminist vision.

Marjorie Cameron

Like Guccione, her contemporary colleague Marjorie Cameron (1922–1995) is difficult to categorize as an artist, and her remarkable achievements have only recently begun to be taken seriously in art-historical research. Never part of any official art group, resolutely counter-cultural in her attitude and beliefs and operating primarily within the area around Los Angeles, there are some compelling reasons to include her in this discussion. First and foremost, Cameron considered her artistic production as a natural component of her magical practices: Her drawings were not mere notations or representations of occult concepts; instead, they functioned as an integral part of spells and invocations, all channeled in trance states directly and allegedly derived from supernatural sources. Like the other artists discussed here, they have pictorial elements that relate to self-discovery, healing and the desire for feminist liberation, but here the images are female centric, sexually explicit and all irrevocably linked to the ideal of empowerment. Although Cameron was probably aware of some of the surrealist women artists, for example Carrington when she spent time in Mexico, her primary identity was not exclusively that of a visual artist, her work constituting a long-neglected bridge between the esoteric and proto-feminist concerns of surrealist women artists and what would become New Age imagery and practice.

A Midwesterner by birth, Cameron arrived in Los Angeles in 1946 where she soon met the rocket engineer Jack Parsons (1914–1952) at his Pasadena mansion. Dubbed 'the Parsonage,' Parson's home drew New Age seekers and magical aficionados, including one of his boarders, the then fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), and later founder of Scientology. Parsons was a co-founder of Caltech's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, as well as a member of the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), and, as Cameron scholar Michael Duncan put it, "a star pupil of Crowley."[35] The OTO was Aleister Crowley's occult order and the Parsonage was home to its Agape Lodge, the only OTO Lodge in the US. Alongside Hubbard, Parson also conducted a magical working in the Mojave Desert in 1946, called 'The Babalon Working' and meant to summon his elemental mate, whom he believed to be Cameron.

Whitney Chadwick and other scholars have written about the role of the muse within Surrealism, critiquing the problematic position it often put the women artists of the movement in. Cameron can be considered an occult muse *par excellence*, thrust into the role without her knowledge or consent, under very strange circumstances, and then left to suffer the consequences of a notoriety that was not of her own making. It is a testament to her occult dedication and latent artistic talent that she managed to survive, with a sense of herself as a magical being and creator, in spite of her often dire financial circumstance. Married to Parsons later in 1946, Cameron, although always a renegade who experienced visions, was thrust into Parsons' belief system and began to see herself as an artist and Thelemite.[36] Allegedly to find her own way, she left in 1947 and moved from Paris to London to Switzerland, ultimately landing in Mexico in 1948 to develop her art. For a time she lived in San Miguel de Allende, a well-known artists' community with a large population of Americans where, according to Michael Duncan, she made the acquaintance of Carrington.[37] Looking at drawings by Cameron such as *Untitled* (1955), one certainly glimpses hints of Carrington's way of merging animal and humans, using descriptive line with amorphous washes, all to create otherworldly apparitions.[38]

In his essay "Beacon in the Darkness: The Transcendental Art of Cameron," Yael Lipschutz asserts that her interest in universal archetypes and mythology was born

from the surrealist current that informed the early period of Abstract Expressionism.[39] Lipschutz goes on to reveal Cameron's fascination with San Miguel as an important seat of the Spanish Inquisition and her interest in the torture of female witches leaving us with this rather disturbing notation: "Delving deeper into magic while in San Miguel, Cameron began practicing what she referred to as 'blood rites'."[40] She returned to Los Angeles and her husband in 1950. Already two years later, however, the couple planned to permanently relocate to Mexico. The reasons for their prospective move have never been clear, and I wonder where she wanted to settle, and most importantly: In proximity to whom? Considering her interests, it is not unreasonable to wonder if she would eventually have left San Miguel with its large ex-pat American population in order to be near Carrington, Varo and the Gurdjieff followers then settling in Mexico City. Whatever the reasons, this plan was tragically suspended the evening before they were to leave when Parsons was killed in an explosion in his own garage laboratory.

Cameron's contribution to late-stage Surrealism, as practised particularly by women in the Americas, involved a combination of adopting a theatrical persona as witch, seer and shaman whose visionary work was channeled through trance, and later on through the taking of drugs (like peyote). Her appearance in Kenneth Anger's 1953 underground film *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* propelled her into the public sphere.[41] There, Cameron starred alongside the infamous diarist and poet Anaïs Nin (1903–1977), who was close to the surrealist émigré circle throughout the 1940s. Nin's costume for her role as the Moon had her in a flesh-colored bodysuit with a silver birdcage around her head. This was highly reminiscent of the mannequin André Masson (1896–1987) had dressed for the 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris that also displayed a birdcage on a woman's head. Cameron's next act was as muse to the Beat artist Wallace Berman (1926–1976), who displayed one of her drawings in 1955 in the window of Books 55, a store in Los Angeles that specialized in esoteric subjects. Two years later this same drawing, *Untitled: Peyote Vision* (1955), was considered so sexually provocative when displayed at Berman's exhibition at Ferus Gallery that the LAPD vice squad shut down the venue. *Peyote Vision* depicts a woman and an alien demonic being having sex, and in its pure erotic power rivals only one other female surrealist, the Czech artist Toyen (Marie Čermínová, 1902–1980), a first generation surrealist who worked in Paris and who was particularly drawn to tropes of sexuality, the fantastic and the macabre.

Cameron's erotic drawings are important because they draw on Crowley's sex-magic ideas, but reverse their power dynamics by making women active designers of, as well as participants in, ritual acts involving their own sexual pleasure, clearly situating her work within the proto-feminist impulses heralded by an earlier generation of women artists in the orbit of Surrealism. In *Peyote Vision*, that pleasure is wild, animalistic and unapologetic, further heightened by the use of the new hallucinogen promoted by Aldus Huxley (1894–1963), whom she heard speak about peyote.[42] An undated drawing (Plate XVI) in blue pencil promotes sex magic in a more subtle way by depicting a supernatural entity squatting with its legs spread, the genital aperture being formed like a dark blue flame emanating energy that flows upward to her torso. The entity is covered in bulbous feathers that mimic the many-breasted Diana of Ephesus, and, like the Triple Goddess, she sports three heads, and in lieu of arms there are lightly drawn wings. This fearsome goddess, whose power is sexually generated, is also related to John Dee's Enochian magic system for communicating with angels.[43]

Another undated drawing titled *Crucified Woman* is less about Christianity and more about sorcery. Reminiscent of Fini's skeleton women, Cameron's figure outstretches her arms as if summoning the four quarters, and her skeletal frame seems electrified by lightening. Blue, white and green mists swirl around her, and she commands the elements to do her bidding – again it is about female magical power and specifically the solitary witch working alone in nature. Cameron is both reminiscent of and yet starkly different from a European surrealist like Fini. Fini's theatrical paintings and personae (replete with 'press' photographs of herself in all manner of sorceress attire) are aristocratic in flavor, full of exquisite, albeit bizarre, detail discernible and savored by an elite and appreciative audience. The complete opposite is true of Cameron – an ex-military servicewoman from the Midwest who came into contact with Jack Parson and his occult circle by accident, bereft after her husbands' violent death. Financially destitute, often homeless, a single mother and experimenting with too many drugs, Cameron worked under the most difficult of conditions. Admired by a small, close circle, but with no real or serious ties to the art world such as those that Fini and others could benefit from, the impetus for Cameron's work came solely from her magical beliefs, which she practised literally on the margins of society.

Concluding Remarks

Fein, Abercrombie, Gutmann and Guccione may have heard of one another, seen some of each other's work and, perhaps, even met (although at this initial point in the research process none of that can be verified). Despite being born roughly within the same time period, with at most a generation between them (Abercrombie and Guccione were born five years apart, while Gutmann, Fein and Cameron were born within three years of each other) they did not form a community in any way, either by physical proximity or ideology, nor did they share exhibition venues. I have discussed them together here because they were women artists working in the US who shared both an affinity for surrealist imagery *and* a marked interest in tropes of occultism, magic and the irrational. Although each artist displayed a unique vision and style, I hope to have shown nonetheless that there were some very important commonalities amongst them: Most significant is undoubtedly their shared portrayal of women in possession of mysterious powers; ranging from playful send-ups of Tarot cards, to somnambulant journeying through nocturnal landscapes, to disguised and not-so disguised self-portrayals as seer and sorceress. In a proto-feminist spirit, they used the language of occultism – with its aura of danger and rebellion – to set themselves apart from the mainstream art world, and thus continued strategies that already underpinned the aesthetic and political vision of artists such as Carrington, Fini or Varo. It was the rebellious nature of Surrealism itself, and the fact that it embraced women artists to a greater degree than other art movement before it, that encouraged them to embark on this journey.

That the final artist discussed, Cameron, worked in Los Angeles is not unimportant, for it would soon turn out to be the birthplace of the New Age movement. Manley P. Hall had his headquarters in Los Feliz, and was becoming increasingly interested in Mexico. The next phase of female generated occult imagery would more explicitly involve 'shamanic' powers. Western occult traditions such as alchemy, ritual magic, Tarot and others would be partially substituted for the traditions of indigenous America. Popular artists in the US would increasingly look to depictions of Native Americans,

like their Spiritualist predecessors with their Indian Guides. Perfectly timed to 1968, Carlos Castaneda's book *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* further popularized the romantic idea of the indigenous shaman healer, using peyote or marijuana as a catalyst to receiving sacred visions. Surrealist explorations into indigenous myths and magical practices were at this point subsumed into the Hippie drug culture and populist notions of spiritual self-empowerment. By the 1970s, all this merged with the feminist movement, and by the late 1970s and early 1980s, was the rediscovery amongst academics of the women artists associated with Surrealism – themselves meaningful heralds of the New Age in all its unorthodox and subversive power.

Notes

1 Significant publications include Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Michael Duncan, ed., *Post Surrealism* (Logan: Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, 2002); Isabelle Dervaux, ed., *Surrealism USA* (Ostfieldern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2005) and most recently Sandra Zalman's *Consuming Surrealism in American Culture: Dissident Modernism* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016).

2 Dervaux states in her introduction to *Surrealism USA* that "The outbreak of World War II marked the beginning of a second phase in the history of surrealism in the United States, as many European artists associated with the movement, including André Breton, came in exile to America." See Dervaux, *Surrealism USA*, 15. She further argues that the "first phase," in the second half of the 1930s, was influenced by Dali's paintings (14). Important for this discussion on occult imagery is Dervaux's claim: "Surrealism's main contribution to the development of American art in the forties was twofold: the technique of automatism and the subject of myth." (16).

3 Ilene Susan Fort, "In the Land of Reinvention: The United States," in *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States* (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2012), 40.

4 The proto-feminist as well as occult proclivities of earlier women surrealists are also discussed in Victoria Ferentinou's and Maria-José Gonzalez's chapters in this anthology.

5 Fort, "In the Land," 36–42.

6 In her 2005 monograph on the surrealist use of the exhibition space, Alyce Mahon dedicated an entire chapter to a discussion of post-war surrealist activity in Paris. She argues that the surrealists' continued interest in myth and magic "was an attempt to address the horrors of the war: they responded to the profanity of war with renewed faith in the power of art (free expression) and the 'sacred' to heal." See Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938–1968* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 108. However, when Breton and Duchamp, upon returning to France after the war, put on the only surrealist exhibition fully dedicated to occultism at the Galerie Maeght in 1947, it received mixed responses. Although it brought renewed attention to the movement from a younger generation, it also alienated both conservative French nationalists and leftist intellectuals who deemed it politically suspect.

7 Dervaux, "Introduction," in Dervaux, *Surrealism USA*, 17.

8 Fort et al., *In Wonderland*, 31.

9 Although the reasons for this are legion, two major ones immediately come to mind: the profession of a greater respect for the divine feminine forces in the universe and a more active involvement for women to participate in their various rites and practices.

10 For an in-depth discussion of this topic see notably Victoria Ferentinou, "Surrealism, Occulture and Gender: Women Artists, Power and Occultism," *Aries* 13 (2013): 109–30.

11 Fort et al., *In Wonderland*, 57.

12 William Breeze, "Caves of Sorcerers: The American Beginnings of Crowley's Art," *Abraxas: International Journal of Esoteric Studies* 3 (2013): 43–54.

13 Seligmann's prominent role within both surrealist and occult discourse in the 1940s US is discussed by Grazina Subelyte in her contribution to this volume.

14 Stephan E. Hauser, *Kurt Seligmann, 1900–1962: Leben und Werk* (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG Verlag, 1997), 272–77.

15 This illustration (Figure 135 in Seligmann's book) is titled "John Dee and Edward Kelly summoning the Dead" and is attributed to an English seventeenth-century engraving. Kurt Seligmann, *The History of Magic* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948). Jesse Bransford has called to my attention that William Kiesel believes this illustration to be misattributed. In actuality it is Edward Kelly with Paul Waring from John Weever's *Funerall Monuments* [1631]. See William J. Kiesel, *Magic Circles in the Grimoire Tradition* (Richmond Vista: *Three Hands Press Occult Monographs* 3, 2012), 18.

16 Michael Duncan, *Cameron* (New York: Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, 2007); Yael Lipschulz, *Cameron: Songs for the Witch Woman* (Santa Monica: Cameron Parsons Foundation; Los Angeles, CA: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2014).

17 San Francisco has long had a very strong Fraternal Organization presence and Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges and their paraphernalia containing 'the all-seeing eye' (one of their primary symbols) are commonplace. In fact, the entire outfit resembles a costume worn by a member of the Scottish Rite, a Masonic order much given to theatrical performances and whose medieval stage wear were available at every thrift and antique store. Fein's adroit appropriation of an occult symbol, as a cipher for her own vigilant waiting and watchfulness for her husband's return, foregrounds her ability to personalize esoteric icons. She took up the theme of the eye again as late as 2010 when she executed a whole series of boldly colored egg tempera on board works featuring this same 'all-seeing' mystic eye. This last time, however, the figure disappears and the eye is set within swirling storms of cosmological abstract shapes. Please see the tunic in Lynne Adele and Bruce Lee Webb, *As Above So Below: Art of the American Fraternal Society, 1850–1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 120.

18 Carrington's influence can also be seen in Fein's 1954 painting *Lady Writing a Love Letter* (Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin).

19 Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought-forms* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1901).

20 Ibid., 40.

21 In 1947, Feitelson wrote a letter of sponsorship for Marjorie Cameron, whom I will discuss below, for the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. Feitelson, an important figure in the Los Angeles art community, appears to have championed a number of women surrealist artists, including his own wife, the painter Helen Lundeberg. See Duncan, *Cameron*, 46.

22 Post-Surrealism was a Southern California movement formed in 1934, its manifesto was written by Lundeberg and Feitelson. Post-Surrealism stressed rationality instead of the irrationality of European Surrealism and was more overtly interested in the sciences. Although Feitelson's work did not use images that distorted reality like Salvador Dalí, for instance, it did employ strategies such as the juxtaposition of objects to create a disorienting and strange mood. See Susan M. Anderson, "Journey into the Sun: California Artists and Surrealism," in *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950*, ed. Paul J. Karlstrom (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1996), 181–210.

23 Fort et al., *In Wonderland*, 44.

24 Guccione began painting as Anita Rice, then changed her name to Juanita Rice, then Juanita Marbrook, and finally to Juanita Guccione after marrying in the mid-1940s. There is currently almost no scholarship on Guccione and the information I have gathered for this chapter was obtained through numerous interviews with her son Djelloul Marbrook between 2013 and 2016 in Germantown, New York.

25 For a good description of the Ouled Naïl and a mention of Guccione and her circle, see Lawrence Morgan, *Flute of Sand: Experiences with the Mysterious Ouled Naïl* (Bristol: Cinnabar, 2001).

26 Interview by the author with Djelloul Marbrook, July 2016.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Juanita Guccione's work is represented by the Weinstein Gallery in San Francisco and can be viewed at either www.weinstein.com/artists/juanita-guccione or at www.juanitaguccione.com.

31 See my essay "Under the Sol Niger" in *Juanita Guccione: Defiant Acts* (Sugar Loaf: Seligmann Center, 2014), 7–10, for a detailed analysis of the alchemical symbolism of the black sun in her paintings.

32 According to Djelloul Marbrook, her father was a gambler who financially ruined the family during her childhood.

33 I gave a talk on this subject as part of the symposium "Surrealist Women in Mexico and the United States" given at the Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City in 2012. I posit that one book in particular, Manley Hall's *Secret Teachings of All Ages* (1928) and its illustrations by Augustus Knapp, had a profound influence on a number of surrealist women artists. This book was readily available in libraries, museum shops and bookstores across the country and is still in print today.

34 A black-and-white illustration titled "Gnostic Gems" is to be found in the series of plates at the front of Lewis Spence, *An Encyclopedia of Occultism* (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1960).

35 Duncan, *Cameron*, 39.

36 In very general terms a Thelemite is an adherent of Aleister Crowley's religion, Thelema, whose tenet is "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the law, love under will."

37 Duncan, *Cameron*, 40.

38 This drawing bears some similarity to a photograph of her taken in Mexico on a wooden horse in front of a church.

39 Lipschutz, *Cameron*, 10.

40 Ibid., 11.

41 She also had a part in Curtis Harrington's *Night Tide* (1961) where she played a mysterious woman in black, almost a parody of herself.

42 Carrington was also deeply impressed by Huxley and heard him speak in Mexico and a group of her paintings deal specifically with the magical powers of peyote. Also, one cannot forget Antonin Artaud's and the Tarahumara Indians of Mexico with whom he lived in 1936 and partook of their peyote rituals (he recorded these peyote experiences in a series of essays collected under the title *D'un voyage au pays des Tarahumaras* (written during his internment at Rodez from 1943 to 1945). It is uncertain if this drawing was instigated by Cameron's own ingestion of peyote, but it is known that she was an avid drug user, particularly after the death of Parsons.

43 Cameron was very interested in Dr. Dee and in 1946 painted a portrait of him. See Lipschutz, *Cameron*, 10.

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