

Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Interest in the Occult

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Camelia Darie

School of Arts, Histories and Cultures
Art History and Visual Studies Department

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Abstract of the thesis *Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Interest in the Occult* submitted to the University of Manchester by Camelia Dana Darie for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, Art History and Visual Studies Department, 21 May 2012:

My research on Victor Brauner's work in the first two decades of his affiliation with the Surrealist group in Paris re-establishes the role played by the Romanian Jewish artist in the definition of automatic Surrealist procedures of painting and mixed-technique objects that relied upon a new and unconventional understanding of the occult.

In the three chapters of this study of Victor Brauner's work in the 1930s and early 1940s, I analyse key notions, such as the fantastic, animal magnetism, and the occult practices of art making in a Surrealist context. The fantastic is discussed in the first chapter of the thesis from a literary perspective with political connotations in Surrealism, which resulted from a debate engaged in nineteenth-century French literature on the issue of the marvellous versus the fantastic. Due to the Surrealists' interest in the fantastic a new category emerged, the fantastic art, which is examined in this first chapter in connection with Brauner's artworks in the 1930s. The incursion into the fantastic, with focus on the premonition of the painter's left eye loss in his artworks of the 1930s is completed with an approach to spiritualism that had a revival at the time. The second chapter of the thesis investigates the doctrine of animal magnetism and the state of magnetic somnambulism in eighteenth-century scholarship and shows how this experimentation had influenced the development of a new branch of the science, metapsychics or psychical research at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth one. I take into account and demonstrate that these outdated and modern domains of enquiry into the unknown and beyond reality were appealing to Surrealists, in particular to Brauner, due to their research into unconscious processes of the mind. I argue that through the attainment of a condition similar to the one of the somnambulist in sessions of magnetic sleep, the Surrealists aimed to generate automatic procedures of painting and object making. In the third chapter of the thesis I discuss Victor Brauner's technique of drawing with a candle, or *le cirage*, as an automatic procedure of art developed in connection with the occult. This final part of the thesis makes also manifest the association of Brauner's artworks in the early 1940s with practices of the occult in the near and centuries before past.

Declaration:

No part of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this at any other university or other institute of learning.

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To Bucura

The Author: At The University of Manchester she had studied Surrealism with Professor David Lomas and learnt from the research experience of Professor Mark Crinson. Prior to her research work in the UK she was the recipient of a Rome Prize Fellowship in Art History at the Accademia di Romania in Rome, Italy. She studied Early and High Renaissance Art in the Duchy of Mantua and published Italian Contemporary Art exhibition catalogue essays at the Art Gallery of the Accademia. She follows her interests in Surrealist concepts that informed the development of the Contemporary Art scene as well as in obscure predecessors of the Surrealists. Her first piece on Victor Brauner in the form of a book chapter appears in a 2012 publication of Cambridge Scholars Publishing: L. Cleaver & A. Lepine (eds), *Gothic Legacies: Four Centuries of Tradition and Innovation in Art and Architecture*. Her contribution to the volume is entitled ‘Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Claim on *fantastique noir* Imagery.’

Introduction

This study of Victor Brauner's (1903-1966) artworks in his Surrealist period of creation has emerged from a profound discontent with the perception of the artist in the scholarly literature. The interest that has been given to his work has encompassed his entire career, and has registered the successive styles of the artist, as if these were generated autonomously within his oeuvre. This has minimised the chances of securing a firm position for the Romanian Jewish artist as a key practitioner of Surrealism in broader accounts of the art history of the twentieth century. Within the artwork of Victor Brauner the changes that took place were the result of a slow evolution of his technique in connection with and contrast to other artistic movements. Brauner's participation in art groups testifies to a playful disposition of the painter, which led him to constantly engage with other artists and poets. This also explains his appreciation of Pablo Picasso's work, one that varied dramatically throughout time as well.¹ Brauner's attraction to the changeable work of the Spaniard continued even after the apex of Brauner's affiliation to Surrealism, in the mid-1950s, when the two artists worked together at the Madoura pottery factory in Vallauris, France.² Due to Brauner's different styles during his lifelong career, there is a tendency in the French-language literature on the subject to favour the last period of creation and to build up Brauner's reputation as a singular artist

¹ The first comparison between Brauner's work and Picasso's appeared in Alain Jouffroy, *Brauner*, (Paris: Georges Fall, Musée de Poche, 1959), p. 12.

² Victor Brauner joined in March 1953 the stimulating entourage of Picasso in Vallauris, and realized astonishing examples of Madoura ceramic plates and pottery that are bearing his unmistakable linear, at the time, style. *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, introduction by Susan Davidson, foreword by Parker Tyler, essays by Didier Semin, Margaret Montagne, Bradford Epley, catalogue of the exhibition 'Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs' at The Menil Collection, Houston, 12th of October 2001–6th of January 2002 (Houston, Texas: The Menil Collection in association with Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001), p. 158.

who had displayed an unusual array of themes in his artwork and had witnessed a number of strange events at a personal level. In the English-language scholarship his contribution to Surrealism is acknowledged in the groundbreaking exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Revisited*, and more recently analysed in a substantial work on Surrealism and the aftermath of the movement in post-war art.³ Nevertheless, the responses that the painter offered to the objectives and practices of Surrealism have never been addressed in an English-language study, especially not one that aims to integrate his artwork in a larger frame of Surrealist thinking informed by the occult.

My contribution to the research on Victor Brauner's work investigates the role played by the artist in the 1930s and early 1940s in defining automatism and the Surrealist object, both of which relied upon a new and unconventional understanding of the occult. The etymology of the term shows its derivation from the Latin *ob*, over, before, and *calere*, in secondary form *celare*, hide, conceal, that resulted in the form *occultus*, hidden, concealed, secret, obscure.⁴ The Latin word was applied in the Middle Ages to physical sciences and designated the properties of bodies that are not apparent upon mere inspection, nor deducible from what is so apparent, but discoverable only by experimentation. By *occult science* or *philosophy* was meant simply experimental science. An *occult* quality was understood to be simply one that was made apparent only upon experimentation, but that in that way was made as plain and clear as any other quality, and was no more mysterious. The 1890 edition of the *Century Dictionary: An Encyclopaedic Lexicon of the English Language* registered a popular ignorance that attributed, on account of superstition, the occult science to magic. In the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* the *occult* regained its connection with those 'ancient and medieval reputed sciences (or their modern representatives) held to involve the knowledge or use of agencies of a secret and mysterious nature (such as magic, alchemy, astrology,

³ Dawn Ades (ed.), *Dada and Surrealism Revisited*, with an introduction by David Sylvester and a supplementary essay by Elizabeth Cowling, catalogue of the exhibition 'Dada and Surrealism Revisited' held at the Hayward Gallery, London, 11th of January–27th of March 1978 (London: Arts Council of Great Britain), 1978; Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

⁴ William Dwight Whitney (ed.), *The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopaedic Lexicon of the English Language*, vols. I-VI (New York: The Century Co. and London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890), vol. IV, p. 4073.

theosophy, and others).⁵ A revival of occult practices associated with a proliferation of hermetic orders and esoteric societies characterised the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. In his book *Modern Alchemy*, Mark Morrisson dissociated this cryptic understanding of the occult from the advance of sciences like physics at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶ Surrealism has been related to the influence of nineteenth century hermetic writers such as Éliphas Lévi and his *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*⁷ (*Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*) in *Surrealism and the Occult* by Nadia Choucha.⁸ She discussed in her study Kandinsky's interest in relationships between art and theosophy, Picasso's artworks in connection with alchemy, and Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst's art as an experience imbued with shamanism. Victor Brauner is not mentioned in this account of widespread practices of the occult among artists, even though inscriptions and symbols connected with the domain appeared at the beginning of the 1940s in his work. From my position on the subject I discern in Victor Brauner's works from the 1930s to the early 1940s an approach to the occult that brings him closer to a scientific investigation of the domain. Metapsychics and the suggestion of a psychological fourth dimension in his artworks of the period are indicators of an interest in the invisible order of existence that Breton articulated in *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else* (1942). The only work to date that relates Surrealist artworks to an associated concern, that of Relativity's temporal fourth dimension in the physics of the time is *Surrealism, Art, and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology* (2008) by Gavin Parkinson.⁹ The author delineates his area of research in 'Relativity and quanta' by acknowledging the Surrealist exploration of the

⁵ J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, XX vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), vol. X, p. 680.

⁶ Mark Morrisson, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007);

⁷ Éliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (Paris; Londres; New York: G. Baillière: H. Baillière: H. Baillière Brothers, 1861); Éliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*, translated and with a preface by Arthur Edward Waite (London: G. Redway, 1896).

⁸ Nadia Choucha, *Surrealism and the Occult* (Oxford: Mandrake, 1991).

⁹ Gavin Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art, and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum Mechanics, Epistemology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

occult as an example of ‘pseudo-physics’ that is posited outside the scope of his book.¹⁰ Confronted with these new tasks in writing the art history of Victor Brauner’s work in a Surrealist context my research has re-addressed primary sources – manuscripts in the Victor Brauner Archives at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and theoretical texts by André Breton that appeared in books or in Surrealist periodicals of the time such as *La Révolution surréaliste*, *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, *Minotaure* and *VVV*. I have scrutinised the artwork of Victor Brauner in the period in order to shed a new light on paintings such as *Self-portrait* (1931), *Mediterranean Landscape* (1932), *Death of the Moon (Mort de la lune)* (1932), *The Orator (L’Orateur)* (1932), *Kabyline in Movement (Kabyline en mouvement)* (1933), *We Are Betrayed (Nous sommes trahis)* (1934), *Portrait of André Breton* (1934), *Fascination* (1939), *The Wolf – Table (Le Loup – table)* (1939, 1947) in the 1930s and mixed technique objects like *Image of the uncreated real (Image du réel incréé)* (1943), *Portrait of Novalis* (1943), *The Ideal Man* (1943) or encaustics such as *The Passage (Le Passage)* (1945) in the early 1940s. Some of these works have been individually analysed in current scholarship, but their importance in the constitution of a sustained examination of the occult in Surrealism in the 1930s has been almost entirely overlooked. These works entered André Breton’s collection soon after their completion or remained in the collection of Victor Brauner until his death, and this charges them with special meaning in the creation of the artist. The preoccupation with the occult that permeated the activities of the entire Surrealist group in Paris imposed the limits of the research. Other Surrealist artists that are taken into account in this discussion of Victor Brauner’s artworks in the period are Salvador Dalí and his *Illumined Pleasures* (1929), *Invisible Lion, Horse, Sleeping woman (Invisible Sleeping woman, Horse, Lion or Paranoiac Horse Woman)* (1930), and *The Invisible Man* (1929-33) artworks, Yves Tanguy with *Il faisait ce qu’il voulait* (1927) and *Maman, papa est blessé!* (1927), and Joan Miró and his work *Peinture (Tête)* (1927), also in the André Breton Collection at the time.

¹⁰ ‘I decided to limit myself solely to an examination of the reception of new developments in the physical sciences by the Surrealists and their friends. Because of the subject matter I was dealing with, I often came into contact with pataphysics, alchemy and the (non-Einsteinian) fourth dimension within the context of Surrealism during the course of my research. But I decided to deal with those only in the forms in which they emerged in the main line of my inquiry; that is, strictly through their interplay with Relativity and quanta. A study of Surrealism and ‘pseudo-physics’ would give that wide-ranging subject the attention it deserves.’ in Gavin Parkinson, *Surrealism, Art, and Modern Science*, p. 2.

In the recent English-language literature on Surrealism the involvement of Victor Brauner in occult practices has been recognised by Alyce Mahon in *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968*. She discusses the role of magic in the achievement of *Object of Counter Bewitchment (Objet de contre-empoûtement)* (1943), one of the objects in the series completed by Brauner at the Celliers de Rousset.¹¹ In this thesis I approach the series of mixed-technique objects from the perspective of the *Image of the uncreated real (Image du réel incréé)* (1943) and *Portrait of Novalis (Portrait de Novalis)* (1943). Apart from reading these objects in connection with Brauner's new technique of painting, *le cirage*, I consider them as magical compositions that fulfilled the role of generating beauty and cohesion in a world devastated by the war. With the exception of *Codex of a Face (Codex d'un visage)* (1962) and examples from the *Mythologies* (1965) series, my interpretation of Brauner's work ceases at this point of maximum employment of the occult properties of matter in an artwork. The 'Surrealism in 1947' exhibition at Galerie Maeght in Paris is not addressed in this study of the Romanian Jewish artist because of the new public stance of Surrealism in post-war France as this would lead research on paths that exceed the argument of this thesis. Nevertheless, one of Victor Brauner's artworks in the exhibition, *The Wolf – Table (Le Loup – table)* (1939, 1947), is discussed in connection with concepts like animal magnetism and automatism that are treated in the thesis as manifestations of the occult that shape the form of an artwork. In her book, Alyce Mahon perceptively recalled and analysed the intricate structure of the 1947 exhibition as imagined by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. She stressed the Surrealist reliance on myth and magic in the conception of the show and recognised the objective of regeneration and rebirth through initiation that the Surrealists envisaged in a shattered French society.¹²

The thesis aims to demonstrate that the Surrealist appreciation of the occult defied superstition and any restrictive use of a predetermined collection of symbols and practices in the interest of members of the group, but reconnected with the alchemical objectives of maintaining equilibrium between the micro- and macrocosm. The Surrealists turned to methods of investigation into the unknown such as animal magnetism and psychical research, which were active at the beginning of the twentieth century. The present study aims in this

¹¹ Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968*, p. 98.

¹² Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968*, pp. 118-9.

regard to draw scholarly attention to Victor Brauner's formation in Romania prior to his Parisian involvement in the Surrealist movement. That the artist – similar to other Surrealists like Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró – focused on the most important objective of Surrealism, the one that envisaged transformation at the level of the perception of reality, and consequently social change, is shown in the thesis through the employment of subversive Surrealist concepts in Brauner's work. Hence the option for *the fantastic* to the detriment of *the marvellous*, and a revival of the Gothic novel imagery; the development of an automatic technique of painting, *le cirage*, in accordance with previous attempts at challenging the reality of the physical world in Surrealist artworks such as *fumage*, *grattage*, *frottage*, and *decalcomania*; and the making of objects that had the function of maintaining coherence between the inner and outer universe of the artist during his Second World War hideaway in the Hautes-Alpes in France.

Victor Brauner has been considered a member of the Surrealist group in Paris, but one external to the nucleus of the movement that inevitably comprised André Breton and his fluctuant relationships to artists and poets like Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst or Benjamin Péret and Paul Éluard. After he settled in Paris in 1930, Victor Brauner met the Surrealists through the mediation of Yves Tanguy, the fellow Surrealist whom he befriended due to the immediate vicinity of their studios in Montparnasse, rue du Moulin Vert. Victor Brauner became a regular of the Surrealists' meetings at the Place Blanche café and officially joined the Surrealist group in Paris in 1932. From the point of view of art history the moment came too late for the artist to be considered a founder member of the Parisian group and consequently Victor Brauner was labelled as a second generation Surrealist artist.

Born to a Romanian Jewish family in the northeast region of Romania, in Piatra-Neamtz city, in 1903, Victor Brauner evinced very early, during childhood, an inclination toward painting. After long periods of time spent abroad, in Hamburg (1907-10) and Vienna (1912-14), the family settled in Bucharest and the young Brauner enrolled in 1919 in the School of Fine Arts in the capital of Romania. The social and political conditions in the Kingdom of Romania, which reunited with Transylvania, Bukovina, and Bessarabia in 1918, gave rise to ultra-nationalist political parties such as the National-Christian Defence League and the National Fascist Movement that envisaged anti-Semitic programmes of action in the early 1920s.



Fig. 1 *Balcik Landscape I (Peisaj din Balcik I)*, 1922-24, oil on canvas, 33,65 x 49,53 cm, Federation of Jewish Communities, Bucharest, Romania.

It included support for the introduction of a Jewish quota in higher education institutions, a demand that reached a deadlock with the government in the negotiations that ensued from a nationalist students' strike in 1923. In reaction to the internal political climate, the intellectuals with progressive views launched a cultural offensive that materialised in the foundation of several avant-garde periodicals in the years 1923 to 1924: *Contimporanul (The Contemporary)*, established in 1923 by the poet Ion Vinea; *Integral*, set up in March 1924 and co-edited by the architect and painter M. H. Maxy and the poet Ilarie Voronca in Bucharest, the poet Benjamin Fondane in Paris and the poet Claude Sernet in Pavia; and *PUNCT (POINT)*, a bi-weekly founded by the poets Stephan Roll and Scarlat Callimachi in November 1924.

Victor Brauner contributed illustrations to *Integral* for ten of the fifteen issues until publication ceased in April 1928, and to *POINT* for eleven of the sixteen issues until it concluded in March 1925. The painter founded in October 1924, together with friends, the

poets Voronca and Roll, a short-lived, but influential one-issue avant-garde periodical *75HP* – a reference to engine horsepower, in the vein of the Italian Futurists – that contained the ‘*Pictopoesia*’ (*Pictopoetry*) manifesto. Brauner provided to the manifesto a Cubist composition with Dada accents and Constructivist influence and to the overall publication a mix of artworks in an eclectic style. The artist was given his first one-man exhibition, between 26th October and 15th November 1924, at the notable *Sala Mozart (Mozart Gallery)*, *Sindicatul Artelor frumoase (The Syndicate of Fine Arts)* in Bucharest. In December 1924 the prestigious *The Contemporary Society* that published a journal of the same name organised the first international exhibition that secured the presence of works by Paul Klee, Kurt Schwitters, Jean Arp, Constantin Brâncusi, Hans Richter and others at the same *Mozart Gallery* in Bucharest. Victor Brauner participated in the exhibition as one of the artists in the Romanian selection that accompanied the celebrated international invitees.



Fig. 2 *Portrait of Marcel Janco*, 1924, ink on paper, 25 x 15 cm, Collection of Michael Ilk, Germany.

The themes found in Brauner's work at this stage of his career combined the everyday life of revolutionary youth such as *Factory Girl* (1923) and *Arson at the Credit Bank* (1923), as well as an enthusiasm for portraiture that continued throughout his lifetime.¹³ In a drawing like *Portrait of Marcel Janco* (1924), Brauner exhibited appreciation of the Futurist techniques at work in the European avant-garde of the time, while in the *Factory Girl* oil painting, for example, his style is closer to French Cubism in the monochrome palette and vibration of the volumes in the foreground with abrupt passages between the figure and the urban landscape in the surroundings.

The artist moved to Paris at the beginning of 1925 for a first period of two years in the cultural capital of Europe, but remained active in the Romanian avant-garde of the mid 1920s and contributed artwork to *unu* (*One*), the first periodical of Surrealist orientation in Bucharest. Founded in April 1928 around the personality of the poet Sasa Panã, *One* lasted until December 1932 and obtained the collaboration of Romanian avant-garde writers like Ilarie Voronca, Stephan Roll, Geo Bogza, Urmuz and Mihail Cosma, and painters such as Victor Brauner, M. H. Maxy, Jacques Hérold and Jules Perahim. André Breton is mentioned in the inaugural statement of *One* along with Marinetti, Tzara, Brancusi and Ribemont-Dessaignes in a crisscross of references that gave the publication its unique character. The periodical published in Romanian in 1931 *La Peinture au défi* (1930) by Louis Aragon – in several instalments – and *L'Union libre* (1931) by André Breton – in the September issue of the same year – as a result of Sasa Panã's research trip to Paris in the summer. The editorial board of *One* magazine received in 1932 other works by Breton: *Misère de la poésie*, *Paillasse*, and *Fin de l'affaire Aragon*.

After living in Paris from 1925 to 1927, the style of Victor Brauner's work evolved and changed by absorbing a Surrealist influence that was not evident in his personal relationships, but in the areas of interest that his painting manifested. All Cubist references disappeared and a biomorphic compartmentalization of composition resembling Miró's *The Tilled Field* (1923-4) was developed in works like *Plants and Animals* (1928) (private collection), and *Untitled* (1929) (Galerie Drieseitel, Cologne).

¹³ The following account of Victor Brauner's work in the 1920s has its source in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (eds.), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 531-557.



Fig. 3 *Factory Girl*, 1923, oil on canvas, 75 x 50,8 cm, Art Museum, Tulcea, Romania.

The subject matter of these oil paintings lost any realistic touch and a disturbing atmosphere insinuates itself into the artwork in spite of the light shades of colours used by the artist. Brauner continued to exploit the benefits of the grisaille palette that he acquired in the previous phase of the development of his painting and introduced a balance between different tones of complementary colours, especially green and red. In each of the paintings discussed here the scenery of growing forms that includes human and animal representation is revealed in a suggestive moonlight. The perception of an overall lustrous illumination is accentuated by a frightened cat that gazes into the presumptive darkness that opens beyond the frame of the

painting in both *Plants and Animals* and *Untitled*. The crepuscular animal that indicates the inscrutable world of the night, as well as patches of murkiness that take hold of the internal space of representation, are the intermediate stages of Brauner's work in transition to a more disturbing Surrealist composition. Informed of the Surrealist technical apparatus in Paris the artist had returned to an aspect that characterized his childhood and youth, and proved decisive at the subsequent encounter with the Surrealists: his father's acquaintance with spiritualism and the séances that took place in their house, which engaged in a secret way the interest of the future painter. This detail of personal history is sometimes referred to in the art historical writings on Victor Brauner's work, but has never been thoroughly researched.¹⁴ It is this gap that my contribution to the exegesis on Victor Brauner's paintings in the 1930s aims to fulfil in the first instance.

The Surrealists experimented with hypnosis in the early 1920s, especially in late 1922, in the so-called Period of Sleeps. The conclusions they drew from sessions of automatic writing, resembling those conducted in a scientific environment with mediums that attempted to establish a connection with the spirit world, influenced Breton's formulation of Surrealist automatism in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924. In setting the objectives of the Surrealist enterprise Breton supported the experimentation in a literary context that aimed to unleash the unknown capabilities or potentialities of the mind. This is also relevant to Victor Brauner's *Self-Portrait* in 1931 because of its troubled subject matter that had become a real fact of life for the painter in a matter of years. The perspective from which I consider this piece as central in the investigation of the artist's work takes into account the materialization of the unconscious activity of the mind in the subject-matter of the painting in spite of its laden oil technique.

Victor Brauner himself had placed the 1931 *Self-Portrait* in a series of premonitions that constitutes 'The "Brauner" Case' file gathered by the artist in late 1938.¹⁵ The interpretation of the event on the evening of the twenty-seventh to twenty-eighth of August of 1938 had received attention in the following year in a Surrealist context. Pierre Mabille wrote the article 'The Eye of the Painter', published in the last double issue of *Minotaure* periodical

¹⁴ Margaret Montagne, 'The Myth of the Double' in *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, p. 45.

¹⁵ *Manuscrits-cahiers et carnets de Victor Brauner*, Victor Brauner Archives, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de documentation et de recherche du Musée national d'art moderne, Paris.

in May 1939, in which he approached the violent episode in Brauner's life from a psychoanalytical perspective combined with a scientific explanation of the possibility of foretelling such events in one's life.¹⁶ The non-Euclidean interpretation of the universe that Mabile offers in support of his attempt to understand Brauner's incident matches Agrippa von Nettesheim's take on Divination or prediction of future events in 1510, in the *Book I of Occult Philosophy*. The opinion of the astrologer is important in our account of Victor Brauner's work in the 1930s and early 1940s insofar as the occult is understood in relation to his paintings and objects in a manner that defies any dilettantism, but relies on authoritative studies of the matter. Astrology in itself was regarded by André Breton, the chief theoretician of Surrealism, as a worthwhile subject of study that should be revisited in modern times. Breton identified a convergence of objectives between Surrealism and astrology, among the controversial branches of the science in the past, and Surrealism and metapsychics – a new science founded by the physiologist Charles Richet in 1921 in the attempt to offer a rational understanding of such phenomena as premonitions, thought transfer and spirit materialisations – at the present time, when the poet affirmed the necessity of 'the veritable occultation of Surrealism' in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929):

Je demande l'occultation profonde, véritable du surréalisme. [...] je pense qu'il y aurait tout intérêt à ce que nous pussions une reconnaissance sérieuse du côté de ces sciences à divers égards aujourd'hui complètement décriées que sont l'astrologie, entre toutes les anciennes, la métapsychique (spécialement en ce qui concerne l'étude de la cryptesthésie) parmi les modernes.¹⁷

The proximity to astrology is evident in the Surrealist understanding of imagination as a process that includes premonition or foretelling the future in the artwork, in the absence of a conscious involvement of the artist or the poet in question. In the *Book I of Occult Philosophy*, Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) described in anticipation to the Surrealist quest for the occult, the difference between any productions of idle imagination and the results of a perception of future events that he defines as Divination. In the chapters on Divination of the

¹⁶ Pierre Mabile, 'L'œil du peintre,' *Minotaure*, nos 12-3, May 1939, p. 53-6.

¹⁷ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* [1929] in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 821. André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 178.

Book I, the physician and counsellor to Charles the Fifth, emperor of Germany, detailed the two different states of mind that are favourable to a knowledge of the future: the dream that encloses in its unfolding a premonition, and the melancholic disposition of a person that may lead to divination while awake.¹⁸ In the vision of von Nettesheim, the mind becomes, in these situations, the site or the receptacle of ‘the celestial influences’ that allow to the subject a revelation of the development of events in the future. A comparable equilibrium between parts in the human being and the universe is established in order to perceive ‘the occult qualities’ of the phenomena that surround us. Von Nettesheim rejects any control of forecast situations, but supports the exercise of these faculties of the human through an enhancement of the awareness of the individual’s relation to his surroundings.¹⁹

In the other case of divination – when predictions are made in a state of sleeplessness – the imagination is presented with compositions that a subject without any previous academic education would automatically reproduce. The variant of an automatic drawing that the astrologer describes in examples taken from painting and architecture, enables him to equate the condition of the seer to the one of a performer of various arts. That von Nettesheim admits that the mind ‘becomes – in this case – the seat of inferior spirits’²⁰ that ‘portend to us future

¹⁸ ‘I call that a Dream here, which is caused by the Celestiall influences in the phantastick spirit, mind, or body, being all well disposed. The rule of interpreting this is found amongst Astrologers, in that part which is wrote concerning questions; but yet that is not sufficient, because these kind of Dreams come by use to divers men after a divers manner, according to the divers quality, and dispositions of the phantastick spirit: wherefore there cannot be given one common rule to all for the interpretation of Dreams.’ Chap. LIX ‘Of Divination by Dreams’ in Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Book I of Occult Philosophy* (London: Gregory Moule, 1650), p. 131.

¹⁹ ‘For these vertues having much form, and little matter, can do very much; but an Elementary vertue, because it hath more materiality requires much matter for its acting. And they are called occult qualities, because their Causes lie hid, and mans intellect cannot in any way reach, and find them out. Wherefore Philosophers have attained to the greatest part of them by long experience, rather then by the search of reason.’ Chap. X ‘Of the occult Vertues of things,’ *Book I of Occult Philosophy*, p. 24.

²⁰ They say therefore, when the mind is forced with a melancholy humor, nothing moderating the power of the body, and passing beyond the bonds of the members, is wholly carried into imagination, and doth suddenly becomes a seat for inferior spirits, by whom it oftentimes receives wonderfull wayes, and forms of manuall Arts. So we see that any most ignorant man doth presently become an excellent painter, or contrivers of building, and to become a master in anysuch Art.’ Chap. LX. ‘Of Madness, and Divinations which are made when men are

things, then they shew those things which belong to the disturbing of the Elements,' is of great importance to the hypothesis of a Surrealist belief in a spirit world. It opens up discussion about the acceptance of such a statement in a Surrealist context and the evolution of the issue in the first two decades of Surrealism between the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) and the final section on 'The Great Transparent Ones' in *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else* (1942).

André Breton expressed the Surrealist preoccupation with the occult in the major texts that formulated the objectives of the movement and assisted its development. For this reason the relationship established between Victor Brauner and the theoretician of Surrealism was extremely important for the artist and is of particular interest to my study of his work in the period of time that encompassed the 1930s and 1940s. When the painter joined the Surrealist group in Paris at the beginning of the 1930s he had the experience of séances practised in the Brauner family house in Piatra-Neamtz and Bucharest, Romania. It was not only the intimate knowledge of spiritualism that prepared the artist for his midway encounter on the subject with the Surrealists. A unique case of investigation into apparition- like phenomena emerged onto the Romanian academic scene at the end of the nineteenth century. The artwork of Victor Brauner registered this influence from an early stage of its development and it is the singular nature of the episode in his native Romania that has passed un-researched in the literature on the artist that the thesis analyses in a subsection of the first part of it.

The understanding of the occult in its three-faceted enquiry into the existence of a spirit world – in connection with *the fantastic* notion in the literature of the nineteenth century, in the experimentalism of psychic phenomena at the turn of the twentieth century, and in its magic function in history that reveals an existing link between art and human existence – resurfaced in the Surrealist milieu of the first half of the twentieth century and has shaped the structure of this thesis on Victor Brauner's work in the 1930s and 1940s.

This account of the artist's artworks in the period has emerged from a study of the historiography of the Surrealist movement. It combines various methodologies of investigating the Surrealist artwork that have developed from the eclectic system of references set forth in the theoretical and critical writings of André Breton. An important part of the thesis relies on

awake, and of the power of a Melancholy humor,' by which Spirits are sometimes induced into mens bodies, *Book I of Occult Philosophy*, p. 134.

the influence of German Idealism on Surrealism and, consequently, mobilises Romantic theories of the perception of the object in art and literature. The psychoanalytical approach of Victor Brauner's work is tempered with nineteenth century literary theory of the concept of *the fantastic* that witnessed resurgence among the Surrealists. Obscure branches of the science like metapsychics and psychical research are examined in relation to animal magnetism in order to demonstrate that Surrealist automatism is rooted in compartments of knowledge decreed as 'pseudo-science.' An interpretation of Surrealist automatic drawing that acknowledges the importance of the new graphic method in the science is documented in the article 'Modest Recording Instruments': Science, Surrealism and Visuality' by David Lomas.²¹ He shows that the graphic method employed in experimental psychology and clinical medicine at the end of the nineteenth century had become by the time of Surrealists a visual idiom of large circulation.²² Examples from Duchamp, Ernst, Masson and Dalí's work are discussed in this study of automatist line, attempting to integrate a temporal dimension into a static, visual medium through reference to the graphic trace in a scientific milieu. Lomas notices that the automatic drawing that has its starting point in the unconscious conforms to a psychoanalytical reading of mental functions expressed by Freud: a sum of affect, which has the characteristics of a quantity, is discernable during these processes, though the researchers have no means of measuring it.²³

In the investigation of the occult in Victor Brauner's work in the 1930s and early 1940s automatism is analysed in relation to the state of magnetic somnambulism and later on to the automatic technique of painting, *le cirage*. The thesis has three distinct parts that match the preoccupation with the occult of Victor Brauner. The first one takes the concept of *the fantastic* as a vehicle of investigation into the Romantic French, German and English literatures that influenced each other prior to the Surrealist time, while integrating Brauner's predilection for *the fantastic*. The second part explores previous attempts of a positivistic approach to such elusive phenomena as the sixth sense and the theory of animal magnetism that provided the base for the psychic research of the early twentieth century. The third part details the Surrealist answer to the challenge posed by the occult in the world of the arts and

²¹ David Lomas, 'Modest Recording Instruments': Science, Surrealism and Visuality,' *Art History*, vol. 27, no. 4, September 2004, pp. 627-650.

²² David Lomas, 'Modest Recording Instruments': Science, Surrealism and Visuality,' p. 641.

²³ David Lomas, 'Modest Recording Instruments': Science, Surrealism and Visuality,' p. 644.

the impact the Surrealists believed that the occult has on real life. While each chapter maintains a strong theoretical frame of thought, it equally focuses on Victor Brauner's works of art. My approach is to keep artworks and theory in dialogue, while acknowledging the fact that neither one of them is dominant over the other.

The first chapter of this in-depth study of Victor Brauner's works in the 1930s and 1940s questions the notion of *the fantastic* in the Surrealist understanding of the term that informed the development of the painter's work from the inception of his relationship with Surrealism. *The fantastic* evolved in the Surrealist context of art and literature of the 1930s and emerged as a key notion in the manifesto-lecture 'Limits not frontiers of Surrealism' that Breton delivered in June 1936, in London, in connection with the *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the New Burlington Galleries. At the time André Breton linked *the fantastic* to the envisaged social change that the Surrealists tirelessly professed. For this reason, my enquiry into the domain of *the fantastic* will return at the outset to the notion of *the fantastic* in the context of nineteenth-century French literature. It will reveal the interdependence between French, German, and English literatures, with emphasis placed on a minor genre of literary production: the *roman noir* or Gothic novel. The importance given to a secondary genre of literature influenced by popular culture raises the question of how its content appealed to nineteenth century writers engaged in the defence of *the marvellous* against *the fantastic*. The present study will show that, in the context of German Romantic literature translations in French at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Parisian media involved such well-known names of French and English literatures as Sir Walter Scott and Charles Nodier in an argument that developed on the disadvantages and benefits of using the mechanism of *the marvellous* or of *the fantastic* in literature. Research into the story line of tales in the collections assembled in previous centuries, *Histoires, ou Contes du temps passé* by Charles Perrault, or created in the guise of fables in the oral tradition, *Smarra, ou les démons de la nuit* or *Trilby* (1822) by Charles Nodier, and *Contes fantastiques* by E.T.A. Hoffmann as noticeable examples in the period, highlighted a popular belief in the existence of 'elementary spirits' that cross the boundary between reality and fiction and this belief was assimilated into high culture by the start of the nineteenth century. The Surrealist acquaintance with the evolution of *the fantastic* terminology is illustrated in the first chapter of the thesis with two incidents in the real life of André Breton and Victor Brauner that were prefigured in their work and

consequently interpreted as instances of premonition. Breton associated the encounter with Jacqueline Lamba in 1934 with the plot of the *contes de fées*, and stated in 1936 that *the fantastic* points to events beyond the fringes of art and literature, to the reality of life and history; while Brauner formulated a discourse on *the fantastic* in late 1941, in the aftermath of the loss of his left eye in 1938. The painter's work at the time explicitly figured ethereal beings in pieces like *The Anemone* (1938) (Collection of Francesco Pellizzi), *At Dusk* (1938) (private collection), and *Fascination* (1939) (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art). In order to place the investigation of Brauner's work in relation to *the fantastic* in this chapter, I will examine the possibilities of linking his painting of the mid 1930s with spiritualism. That the painter assisted at séances during his youth in Romania is alluded to in the literature on Victor Brauner.²⁴ My study aims at unearthing his experience of the subject in his native country, particularly through instances of spiritualism in the 1890s in Bucharest and Câmpina (Romania). I will examine the painter's experience of the unique experiments in the Romanian academic environment, and how these had an influence upon the further development of his work in the Surrealist context of the 1930s and 1940s. The identification of oil paintings with a spiritualist theme realised in the period immediately prior to Brauner's first one-man exhibition in Paris, at the Galerie Pierre, in December 1934, has led to research into the state of magnetic somnambulism characteristic of the mediums that accomplished at the turn of the twentieth century the task of inducing spirit materialisations in séances monitored in a scientific milieu.

The second chapter of the thesis describes the familiar universe – to the Surrealists – of metapsychics, a new branch of science set up in the 1920s by the French physiologist Charles Richet, who continued experiments into the occult initiated in London with the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research in the 1880s. From the activities pursued by notable figures of the Society like Sir William Crookes, Edmund Gurney, Frank Podmore, and Frederic Myers, the work of the last-mentioned has been selected for analysis as he developed a theory of the self that incorporated features of the subject under magnetic sleep such as automatic

²⁴ Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, Éditions Filipacchi, 1990), note 18, p. 88.

writing, telepathy and telaesthesia.²⁵ Because of the interest in these alternate states of consciousness manifested by the Surrealists, in this chapter of the work is presented the inception of academic research on an elusive property of the human body known as animal magnetism in the medical literature of the eighteenth century. It is animal magnetism, dubbed by Friedrich Mesmer in *Précis Historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-animal* (1781), which was considered to give rise to such human phenomena as premonitions and telepathy. As alluded to before, it proved important to reveal available sources on animal magnetism as the Surrealists made reference to somnambulism – André Breton, in particular, in the introduction to *Contes bizarres* by Achim von Arnim republished in 1933 – and experimented with the aim of achieving a dreamlike state of creation for works of art and literature. The main work by Victor Brauner discussed in this chapter is *The Ideal Man* (1943), a mixed technique object and quintessential piece in his entire production that encodes in the handwriting of the painter references to the valuation of animal magnetism.

The use made of eighteenth century treatises on animal magnetism and the consequent reiteration of concerns with the functioning of the mind in metapsychics will prepare the reader for an accessible reading of the Surrealist techniques examined in the third chapter of the thesis in connection with Victor Brauner's work in the 1940s. From the profusion of strategies employed by the Surrealists in short-circuiting the learned paths of knowledge, in this chapter are considered the automatic techniques that indicate the assimilation of the Surrealist artist to the condition of the somnambulist while in search of the composition and means of rendering the experience in Surrealist images. The chapter relies on Breton's 1935 essay 'Surrealist Situation on the Object or Situation of the Surrealist Object' in which the poet summoned up the contribution of painters Max Ernst (and *frottage*), Salvador Dalí (and the paranoiac-critical method), and Marcel Duchamp (and the ready-made) to 'the recognition of the real and the assertion that the real is all-powerful' and invited more techniques to be added to the apparatus of Surrealism.²⁶ The chapter demonstrates that Brauner's method of drawing with a candle, known as *cirage*, and achieved in 1943 is to be read in this respect. Through a

²⁵ Frederic Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, 2 vols. (London: Longmans & Co., 1903).

²⁶ André Breton, 'Surrealist Situation on the Object' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 271.

concerted interpretation of works by Joan Miró, (*Peinture (Tête)*, 1927), Salvador Dalí, (*The Invisible Man*, 1929-33), and Victor Brauner, (*Image of the uncreated real*, 1943), I register the preoccupation of the Surrealists with the occult that is discernible in the way in which they constructed and orchestrated the inner space of representation in an artwork. I will also argue that the concept of ‘determinism of the void’ expressed by Roger Caillois in his ‘Systématisation et détermination’ article of 1934, supported the effort of the Surrealists in attaining the occult structure of things in the universe and through the attempt of their artwork to break and modify the established order of society.

Previous studies on Victor Brauner’s work centred on his troubled existence as a result of various waves of anti-Semitism that he faced combined with the precariousness of the artist’s condition before he met his first patrons, Dominique and John de Menil, in the late 1940s. Brauner’s first exhibition in New York in April 1947 at the Julien Levy Gallery favoured the artist’s entrance onto the American scene, though it was through the mediation of the Alexander Iolas Gallery, one of several that specialised in Surrealism, that the first Brauner productions were acquired for the De Menil Collection in Houston. The succession of solo exhibitions and Brauner’s inclusion in collective ones that retained the interest of media and collectors in Surrealist art prevented in-depth analyses of the work of the painter in the specialised literature.

Nevertheless, the De Menil Collection in Houston offered, between October 2001 and January 2002, the most complete retrospective of Victor Brauner’s work accompanied by an exhibition catalogue, *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, which included notable contributions to the exegesis of the art production.²⁷ French specialists in recent times on Victor Brauner’s work authored two of the exhibition catalogue essays: Didier Semin, ‘Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Movement,’ and Margaret Montagne, ‘The Myth of the Double.’ But the literature in English on the subject continues to lack pertinent studies that approach the artist’s work from the perspective of a monograph or of a comparative examination that endeavours to integrate his achievements in the overall production of Surrealism.

²⁷ *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, introduction by Susan Davidson, foreword by Parker Tyler, essays by Didier Semin, Margaret Montagne, Bradford Epley (Houston, Texas: The Menil Collection in association with Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001), p. 25.

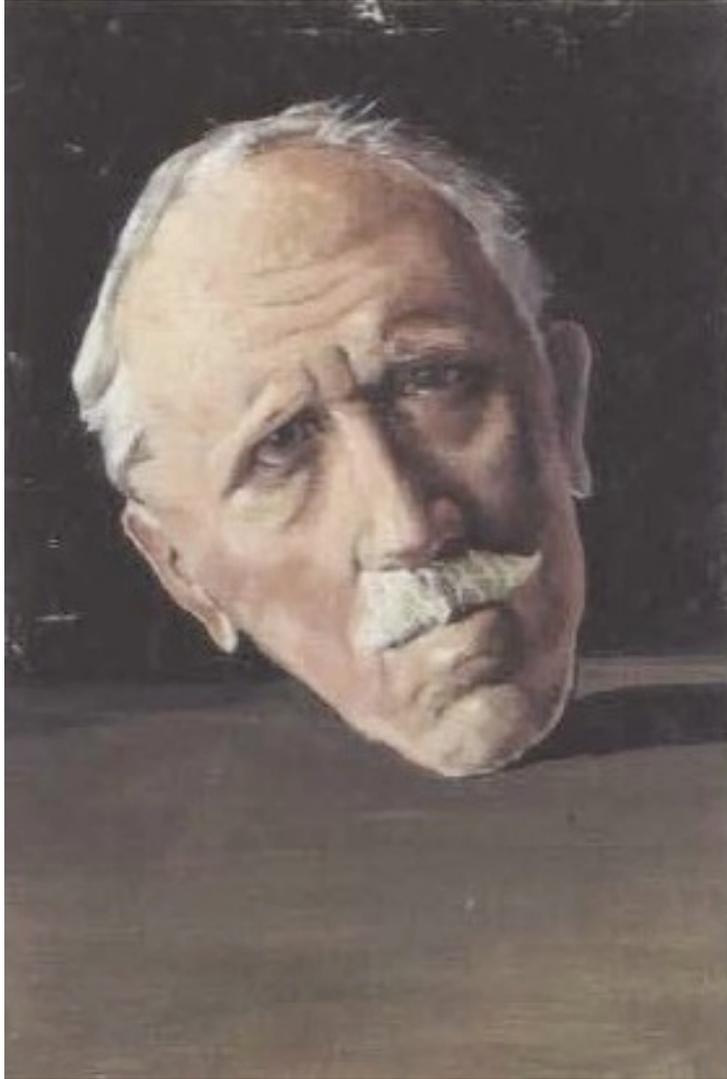


Fig. 4 *Portrait of Herman Brauner*, 1938, oil on canvas, 23 x 34,4 cm, Theodor Brauner Collection

In the French account of the art production of Victor Brauner three monographs have been written with the intention of making accessible a body of artworks that encompassed a lifetime period of creation with various changes in the personal style of the artist. Didier Semin published in French in 1990 a thorough survey of Victor Brauner's work that identified the main themes in the work of the artist and their development across his work.²⁸ It is revealing of the state of Brauner's work scholarship in French the fact that writers that were close friends of the artist conceived the other two previous monographic studies. The first

²⁸ Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux-Filipacchi, 1990).

monograph, *Victor Brauner, l'illuminateur*, appeared in 1954 under the signature of Sarane Alexandrian, a late member of French Surrealism, expelled from the movement in November 1948 on account of dissident activities with Victor Brauner, as the leader of the fraction, and new members of the group such as Bouvet, Jouffroy, Rodanski, and Tarnaud. *Victor Brauner: l'illuminateur* is the result of an intimate knowledge of the work that transformed the familiarity with the artist into an opportunity of reaffirming in the mid-1950s the poetical stands of the Surrealist movement and makes known familiarity with the artist.²⁹ In 1959 Alain Jouffroy, a promising art critic in the circle of Brauner's faithful friends, who recognised the influence of the artist upon his formation as an art specialist, presented the work of Victor Brauner with the insight into the significance of it onto the French artistic scene in his *Brauner* monograph:

C'est pourquoi il importe par-dessus tout de défendre et d'expliquer les artistes qui ont réussi à mener plus loin que d'autres cette conquête de l'inexprimé, et à jeter un pont entre ce qui est réel et ce qui ne l'est pas encore. Victor Brauner est de ceux-la.³⁰

'The triumph over the inexpressible' that guided the advance of Victor Brauner in the mastery of his art has been the touchstone of my own enquiry into the themes of somnambulism and occult symbolism that underpinned the work of the Romanian Jewish artist. While Brauner was an accomplished painter, he rejected a mimetic representation of reality in artwork, and used accurate details in accordance with standards of a pictorial reproduction in art only to destabilize the composition and question the ultimate essence of the art object. See, for example, the portrait of the painter's father, realised in 1938: *Portrait of Herman Brauner* (Theodor Brauner Collection). Far from maintaining a high interest in the changes that occurred in the life of Victor Brauner – and avoiding the constraints of a monographic study – my approach to the work of the artist is set to enlighten the reader about his Surrealist connections.

²⁹ Sarane Alexandrian, *Victor Brauner, l'illuminateur* (Paris: Editions Cahiers d'art, 1954).

³⁰ Alain Jouffroy, *Brauner* (Paris: Georges Fall, Musée de Poche, 1959), p. 8.

Chapter One

The *Fantastic* and its Genealogy in a Surrealist Milieu

‘Vous aimerez ma peinture parce que son monde inconnu est peuplé de somnambules, [...] et toute une population fantastique’

Victor Brauner

Victor Brauner has been described by critics in recent scholarship as ‘a painter of the fantastic.’³¹ In appreciations of the work of the Romanian Jewish artist who officially joined the Surrealist group in Paris in 1932 analysts have relied heavily on his elaborate imagery, but have failed to recognise a larger frame for discussion at the beginning of the twentieth century in French art and literature, the issue of *the marvellous* versus *the fantastic*. This chapter will endeavour to establish the reasoning behind the painter’s option for *the fantastic* rather than *the marvellous*, an issue constantly debated in Surrealist milieu.³² The preoccupation with

³¹ Didier Semin, ‘Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Movement’ in *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, catalogue of the exhibition at The Menil Collection, Houston, October 12, 2001 – January 6, 2002 (Houston, Texas: The Menil Collection in association with Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2001), p. 25.

³² André Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme* [followed by] *Poisson soluble* (Paris: Éd. du Sagittaire, 1924); Roger Caillois, ‘Systématisation et détermination’ in *Documents 34*, ‘Intervention surréaliste’ issue, July 1934, Brussels. ‘Letter to André Breton (27 December 1934)’ in *The edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 84-6; André Breton, ‘Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism,’ in *Surrealism*, ed. and introduction by Herbert Read (London: Faber and Faber, 1936); André Breton, ‘Le Merveilleux contre le mystère’ in *Minotaure*, no 9, 15 October 1936, pp. 25-31; Pierre Mabille, *Le Miroir du merveilleux*, with seven original drawings by André Masson (Paris: Éd. du Sagittaire, 1940); Pierre Mabille, *Le Merveilleux*, frontispiece by Victor

distinguishing between *le merveilleux* and *le fantastique* irrupted onto the French literary scene at the beginning of the nineteenth century when translations of contemporary German literature were published at H. Balzac publishing house, and the Renduel publishing house in Paris.³³

That German Romanticism had an influence upon the self-definition of Surrealism is well known and needs no general demonstration. What I envisage here is to determine the Romantic paths through which the Surrealists found their way as they investigated the content of the most recessed layers of the mind and its relationship with what is commonly perceived as reality. This chapter establishes that the two concepts of *the marvellous* and *the fantastic* that are followed up in their evolution from the perspective of a Surrealist takeover and development of their meaning in art and literature have occupied a distinctive place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century German literature. While in French literature the *fantasy* genre that based its production on the concoctions of imagination evolved steadfastly into the genre of *rêverie*, the German literature developed the *fantastic* genre through an insidious French influence, the novel *Le Diable amoureux* (1772) by Jacques Cazotte, in particular, on the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Fantasiestücke* (1814). It was the penchant for the supernatural that characterised both writers' creativeness and explained their recourse to the anonymous tales of popular culture that recalled the intervention of unknown and uncontrollable entities in the human existence. The chapter explores the configuration of a minor genre, the *Gothic novel*, in French, German and English literature, because through this literary style it was considered that literature has the possibility of suggesting and revealing the working of 'fantastic beings' to humankind. The Surrealist case studies that I use in order to situate Brauner's and Breton's work in the tradition of these accounts are Brauner's depiction with a lacerated left eye in advance of the 1938 incident and Breton's foreseen encounter with

Brauner, hors texte by Jacques Hérold (Paris: Les Éditions des Quatre Vents, 1946); Pierre Mabilbe, *Le Miroir du merveilleux*, introduction by André Breton (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1962) ; Roger Caillois, 'Le Fantastique naturel' in *Cases d'un échiquier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 61-73.

³³ E.T.A. Hoffmann's first novel translated into French *L'Archet du baron de B.* appeared in May 1828 in the first issue of the review *Le Gymnase* edited by H. Balzac publishing house. Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France: de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: José Corti, 1962[1951]), p. 158. The first short stories collection *Contes fantastiques* by E.T.A. Hoffmann was published at the E. Renduel publishing house in December 1829.

Jacqueline Lamba in 1934. Breton had integrated into his writings a rather obscure interest in the English version of Romanticism in literature, in *the Gothic novel, the novel of terror and wonder* or *le roman noir* like *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Lewis, and *The Castle of Otranto* (1767) by Horace Walpole.³⁴ His preoccupation stemmed from a rigorous knowledge of German Romanticism that informed his definition of *objective chance* (*hasard objectif*) theory in Surrealism.

The passages on *le roman noir* in Breton's work favoured the Surrealist concern with the occult, in which domain Brauner was one of the individuals who undertook his own research. He had been acquainted with spiritualist phenomena since his youth spent in Romania and abroad, in Vienna. During this time the painter's father employed his mediumistic abilities in séances that took place in their house. In addition, a singular case of spiritualism in Romania at the turn of the twentieth century, that one of Julia Hasdeu, the daughter of the prominent philologist Bogdan Petriceicu-Hasdeu, had influenced Victor Brauner's work. This chapter will consider the series of paintings which prefigured the loss of sight of the painter's left eye in 1938, something which acquired a significance in relation to what Brauner identified as the presence of *the fantastic* in his work, and will also trace the ways in which Romanian spiritualist ideas were inscribed in Brauner's work executed in the early 1930s and during the second World War. The painter avowed his artistic intentions in a statement written in Marseille in 1941 while anxiously awaiting an American visa in order to leave Vichy France. The piece, entitled *On Fantastic: I. In Painting; II. At Theatre*, appeared in the third-fourth double issue of the American Surrealist periodical *VVV* in March 1943. It contributed to the debate on *the marvellous* and *the fantastic* in a Surrealist milieu, and emphasized as late as the early 1940s the characteristics of *the fantastic* in the work by Victor Brauner.

Indeed, *the fantastic* in its relation to the occult was a constant feature of Brauner's work throughout the 1930s. The chapter displays an analysis of the role of *the fantastic* in the shaping of a Surrealist preoccupation with the occult, from the first mention of *the fantastic* in the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* to the application of the term in curatorial practices that

³⁴ Horace Walpole, *Le Château d'Otrante, histoire gothique* (Amsterdam, Paris: Prault le jeune, 1767). *The Castle of Otranto: A Story*, translated by William Marshal, Gent., from the original Italian of Onuphrio Muralto [Horace Walpole] (London: Tho. Lownds, 1765 [i.e. 1764])

enhanced the meaning attributed to it. The change in the Surrealist discourse on *the fantastic* coincided with the dissemination of Surrealism through the *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the New Burlington Galleries in London, in June – July 1936, and the show *Fantastic art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in December 1936 – January 1937. Brauner's participation in these exhibitions is discussed in connection with his first show in Paris at Galerie Pierre in December 1934, when he already presented works belonging to the semantic field of *the fantastic*.

I. The French dispute of *the marvellous* against *the fantastic*

a. *The fantastic* in nineteenth-century French literature

When in the inaugural *Manifesto of Surrealism* Breton associated the *marvellous* with the universal enchantment of storytelling, he also hinted at a controversial equation of *the fantastic* with the real as perceived through the far less well-understood mechanism of the imagination. The fantastic was to be bound into the Surrealist investigation of the relation of the unconscious to the real. The fantastic was also understood as an anticipation of the actual unfolding of events, and instances of premonition were incorporated in the artwork of Surrealists that both Brauner and Breton revealed and commented upon. The fantastic acquired in the subject's consciousness the characteristic of the unavoidable, and it was seen to favour the contemplation of other orders of existence that may intervene in human life. Because of the previous evolution of *the fantastic* in French, German, and English literature, an account of nineteenth century literary criticism is useful in order to distinguish the term from the close-related field of *the marvellous*.

Breton's inclusion of discussion of *the fantastic* in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* could have resulted from his awareness of a long-term controversy that had started in French literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The appearance of E.T.A. Hoffmann's work in French translation in the second decade of the nineteenth century had mobilized writers to reassess the issue of *the marvellous* versus *the fantastic* in literature.

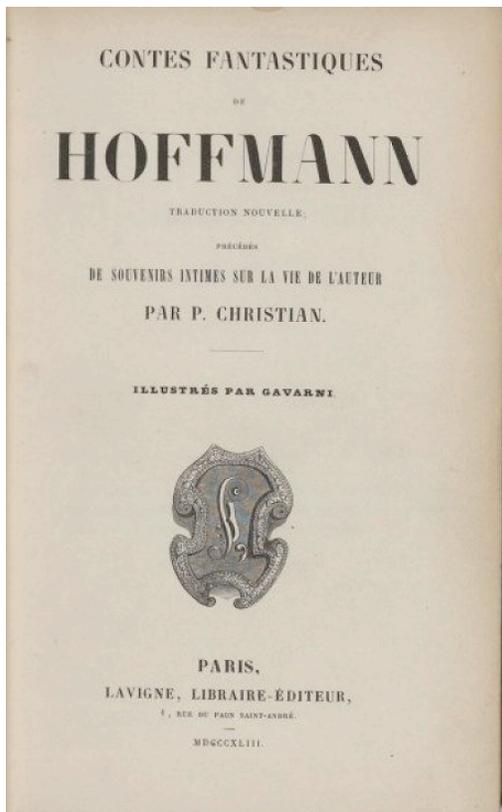


Fig. 1.1 Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, *Contes fantastiques*, Paris: Lavigne, 1843.

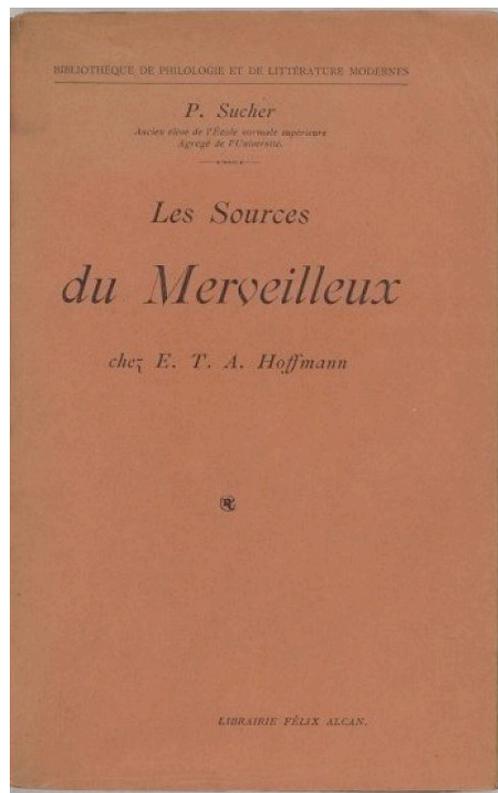


Fig. 1.2 Paul Sucher, *Les sources du merveilleux chez E. T. A. Hoffmann*, Paris: F. Alcan, 1912.

The library of André Breton gives evidence that he was acquainted with the dispute since he owned two works by or in relation to E.T.A. Hoffmann, which were crucial to the debate. These were a copy of the 1843 edition of Hoffmann's *Contes fantastiques* and a study from 1912 on the sources of the marvellous in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann.³⁵

In order to discover the French origins of the Surrealist preoccupation with *le fantastique* and *le merveilleux*, we need to look back to the beginnings of the nineteenth century and to the figure of Charles Nodier, a writer who may be accurately described as a book-maniac. He was given this name by the *Paris ou le Livre des Cent-et-Un* periodical in 1831, after he published his novel, *Le Bibliomane*. Nodier (1780-1844) was an erudite writer and book collector, a sensitive observer of his time's changes. He wrote an article on the issue

³⁵ Laurence Calmels and Cyrille Cohen (eds), *André Breton: 42, rue Fontaine: Livres I*; auction catalogue, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, 7-8-9 April 2003 (Paris: Calmels-Cohen, 2003). See also Jeremy Robert Stubbs, *The Surrealists' Ideal Library: With Special Reference to the Work of André Breton*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990.

of the fantastic, published in November 1830 in the *Revue de Paris* under the title of ‘Du Fantastique en littérature.’³⁶ His insightful commentaries used examples from French and German, as well as English and Italian writers, and related their specific national characteristics. The article continued a literary debate on the issue of *the marvellous* versus *the fantastic*, which took place in the periodicals of the time. These discussions extended over the next couple of years and encouraged the assimilation of fantastic literature into France through translations of German contemporary writings.

In an attempt to sensitize the French audience to German Romantic literature, the journalists of *Le Globe* magazine, Jean-Jacques Ampère and Duvergier de Hauranne, launched a campaign for an everyday marvellous, a marvellous that was ‘vrai et vivant’ (“veridical and alive”) as described in recent German literature.³⁷ In their demand they noted the introduction of a condition of veracity in the description of *the marvellous* in literature that weakened its literary meaning and prompted the intervention of other writers in the debate. Literary exchanges had taken place between *Le Globe* magazine and the *Revue de Paris*. Engaged in the dispute was Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), who had identified the fantastic genre in literature in relation to German contemporary writing. Scott’s evaluation of recent German literature had resulted in his article ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman’ published in the *Revue de Paris* of April 1829. The articles in *Le Globe* coincided with the publication, in December 1829, of *Fantastic Tales* by E.T.A. Hoffmann at the Renduel publishing house in Paris. The choice of the title for Hoffmann’s collection of short stories referred to Scott’s article.³⁸ Pierre-Georges Castex speculated in *Le Conte fantastique en France (The Fantastic Tale in France)* that Walter Scott might have written the article in response to Jean-Jacques Ampère’s estimation of Scott’s work published in *Le Globe* of August 1828. Scott considered that Ampère made an unacceptable comparison by equating him with a writer practically unknown in the French literary scene: Hoffmann.³⁹ Ampère discerned marks of a more developed

³⁶ Charles Nodier, *Oeuvres de Charles Nodier*, 12 vols., vol. 5 ‘Romans, contes et nouvelles: Rêveries’ (Paris: E. Renduel, 1832-1837).

³⁷ *Le Globe* (December 1829).

³⁸ Walter Scott, ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman’, *Revue de Paris* (April 1829), pp. 25-33.

³⁹ Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France: de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: José Corti, 1st 1951, 1962), p. 46.

ability to portray clearly ‘the most fantastic figures’ in the literature signed by Hoffmann.⁴⁰ Hoffmann’s first novel to be translated into French - *L’Archet du baron de B.* - had appeared several months earlier, in May 1828, in the first issue of the review *Le Gymnase* published by the H. Balzac publishing house.⁴¹ In his article Scott was highly critical of Hoffmann’s work, which he regarded as belonging to a low-ranked genre in literature: *the fantastic*.

The media campaign that split the contenders into promoters of *the marvellous* and enthusiasts of *the fantastic* had not been settled by the time of the Surrealists and this is how they inherited the issue. The dismissal of *the fantastic* in the final paragraph of *On the Marvellous in the Novel* situated Walter Scott on the side of *the marvellous* in the press of the time, but this assignment does not reflect the subtle distinction made by the writer in his article. Scott had not contrasted *the marvellous* with *the fantastic*, but aligned them into a progression that took into account the imaginative abilities of the writer. In pursuing the effect of *the marvellous*, which often meant the suspension or alteration of physical laws, the writer used “supernatural interventions” in his plot. Yet it was advisable for such an artifice to be limited since “the imagination should be stimulated without ever being entirely gratified”.⁴² In compliance with the demands of an insatiable imagination, Scott condemned the fantastic genre of German Romantic literature and placed at its forefront the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann.⁴³

Contes fantastiques by E.T.A. Hoffmann was intended to constitute the first volume of a French edition of the complete works of Hoffmann. Prior to publication, Loeve-Weimar, the translator, who was one of the promoters of his work in France, was faced with the dilemma of the appropriate title in French for the original German of *Fantasiestücke*.⁴⁴ Translated as *Contes fantastiques*, it marked the emergence of the idea of *le fantastique* as different from *fantaisies (fantasies)*. As remarked by Jean Ricci, Hoffmann’s French biographer in 1947, the compound of ‘fantastic’, as a derivative of fantasy and ‘tale’ or ‘story’ gave rise to a new

⁴⁰ *Le Globe*, August 1828.

⁴¹ Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le Conte fantastique en France*, p. 158.

⁴² ‘[...] l’imagination doit être stimulée sans jamais être complètement satisfaite’, Walter Scott, ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman,’ p. 27.

⁴³ André Breton owned copies of Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, *Contes fantastiques* (Paris, 1843), and Paul Sucher, *Les sources du merveilleux chez E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Paris, 1912).

⁴⁴ E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier* (Leipzig, 1814).

manner in French literature.⁴⁵ He pointed out that reducing the meaning of the German term implied a different evolution was to be found in the German literary milieu of Romanticism than the type of invention that was known and termed ‘fantasy’ in French literature. Loeve-Weimars might therefore have decided to present Hoffmann’s *Fantasiestücke* as *Contes fantastiques* to distinguish it from the French type of storytelling of earlier centuries that had led to the genre of *rêveries* (*fantasies*), and also to tie it to the recent definition, made by Walter Scott, of German fantastic literature. In spite of the fact that Scott denied Hoffmann’s relevance to French literature in his article, in December of the same year he contributed the introduction to *Contes fantastiques* published in French. Opposing Scott’s criticism, Loeve-Weimars argued for Hoffmann’s originality and, by putting into circulation a derivative of the term *fantasy*, *the fantastic*, the translator introduced a new genre to the French reader.

The central themes of *Contes fantastiques* by E. T. A. Hoffmann were apparition-like phenomena similar to those found in novels like *Smarra, ou les démons de la nuit* (1821) or *Trilby* (1822) by Charles Nodier. In November 1830 Nodier published in *Revue de Paris* the article ‘Du Fantastique en littérature’ (‘On the Fantastic in literature’) that attempted to uncover the origins of the concept. He recognized the end of the eighteenth century as the time when ‘De ce moment, le fantastique fit irruption sur toutes les voies qui conduisent la sensation à l’intelligence.’⁴⁶ The overlap between literature and experimental psychology as expressed by Nodier would become characteristic of Surrealist interdisciplinary research as well. We can assume that Nodier’s article on *the fantastic* was a critical response to Walter Scott’s intervention on the issue of *the marvellous* in the same periodical in April 1829, and it might also have been part of the promotional campaign for *Contes fantastiques*. The writer had sensed time’s readjustments and he gave a historical overview of the presence of *the fantastic* in popular culture, in traditions of storytelling, as well as in the writing of highly cultivated representatives of contemporary literature. Scott had already made reference to *Deutsche Sagen* collected by the Grimm brothers as an example to illustrate the intervention of the supernatural as a manifestation of *the marvellous* in the everyday life of common people.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Jean-F.-A. Ricci, *E. T. A. Hoffmann, l’homme et l’œuvre* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1947).

⁴⁶ Charles Nodier, ‘Du fantastique en littérature,’ in *Œuvres de Charles Nodier*, vol. 5, « Rêveries », reprint of the 1832-1837 Paris edn. (Geneva, 1968), p. 105.

⁴⁷ Walter Scott, ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman,’ *Revue de Paris* (April 1829).

Scott was a promoter of the idea of a marvellous attained through the popular culture of storytelling and a cyclic return of legends that have been perpetuated through its means.⁴⁸

As for the stylistic qualities of these chronicles, as an experienced writer, Scott primarily reproached them for their dry narration. The importance that Scott attached to myths or legends resided in the power with which they enable us to reconstruct the customs of a people from their content and the overall boundaries within which a specific society had developed from references to landmarks. Another feature identified by Scott with regard to folk tales consisted in the absence of particularities of style due to their oral transmission. In practice, this characteristic gives rise to uncountable versions of the same story. The storytellers secure the story line while adding and suppressing details of location. In this way, community cohesion is consolidated. Nevertheless, regardless of their spoken language, fantasy is a defining factor by which the individuality of a larger group is affirmed by affiliation to the same store of scenarios. In addition, states Scott, folk tales are designed to encapsulate historical truth beneath their confabulated line of story. Moreover, in terms of historical benefit, the accuracy of legends in relating past events place them in a more trusted position than that of an officially accepted document.⁴⁹ Guided by the general characteristics of the plot, suggests Scott, stories, which had been diffused in various countries, could have a common source of propagation. People from Jutland and Finland, Italy or Spain circulate fantastic narratives that indicate the same level of knowledge at a certain point in time. Their popular culture nowadays makes this common heritage apparent.⁵⁰

In his article, Nodier distinguished the presence of *the fantastic* in the popular culture of storytelling, which challenged what Walter Scott had said in his article about the presence of remnants of *the marvellous* in the structure of legends circulated among people. His comparative study had taken on the national characteristic of various European literatures, with an emphasis on those of France and Germany. Nodier related French literature to the

⁴⁸ 'C'est cependant sous un autre point de vue que nous désirons considérer ces recueils de traditions populaires, en étudiant la manière dont elles emploient le merveilleux et le surnaturel comme composition.' Walter Scott, 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman,' *Revue de Paris* (April 1829), p. 31.

⁴⁹ 'Il se mêle, en général, quelques vérités à toutes les fables et à toutes les exagérations des légendes orales, qui viennent fréquemment confirmer ou réfuter les récits incomplets de quelque vieille chronique.' W. Scott, *Du Merveilleux*, 1829, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Walter Scott, *Du Merveilleux*, 1829, p. 30.

centralisation of a society that favoured a literary taste imposed by voices of authority in the field. To the French situation in literature he opposed German literature, which, he maintained, responded to a more democratic system of work selection. In other words, literary works that entered German patrimony had been selected based on their popularity. This fact had allowed the discerning of an ingenious constitution of the mind for the Germans. On this basis Nodier argued that Germany was higher placed than other European countries on a constituted hierarchy of free nations. The main concern of Nodier and his peers seems to have been related to a collapse in terms of spiritual concerns in life. Representatives of British and French literatures like Walter Scott, Lamartine, Hugo, or Byron were taken into account by Nodier, who argued that their work was still preoccupied with the attainment of an ideal component in the life of their characters. Nodier stressed that a relationship is desirable and, if possible, maintained between the spiritual aspects of existence and the mundane rhythms of it.

The comparison of the articles on *the marvellous* by Walter Scott and *the fantastic* by Charles Nodier reveals the fact that both writers had designated popular tales to the category in use in their articles regardless of these productions' capacity to embody historical truth in their story line. For Nodier the introduction of *the fantastic* genre in French literature was a necessary option that would accommodate the influence of popular culture on high literature, while for Scott the category of *the marvellous* was still a viable one that maintained its capacity to convince the public. Consequently, the intervention of the supernatural in the accounts of fantastic literature was considered plausible by Nodier, although Scott had signalled the fantastic genre's excessive nature and artificial construction that made it inadequate for the presence of the supernatural in its creations.

b. The fortunes of the *Contes de Fées* (1697) by Charles Perrault

In the previous sub-section on *the fantastic* in nineteenth century French literature we mentioned the difficulty of deciding how to translate Hoffmann's title *Fantasiestücke* for the collection of short stories that entered the French literary scene in December 1829. By opting for the title of *Contes fantastiques*, the translator Loeve-Weimars, had established a new context for works of this genre, separating them from the French tradition of 'fantasy' creation

in the *rêveries*. Using the term *conte*, or *tale*, in association with *the fantastic*, could have also been influenced by Walter Scott's categorization of the French type of narrative, *contes de fées*, as within the genre of fantastic literature. In the article 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman' in the *Revue de Paris* of April 1829, Scott had listed *les contes de fées* in the same class with 'les contes orientaux,' although, he separated *les contes de fées* from other tales in French popular culture, and considered English *fairy tales* an inappropriate equivalent for them. He based his distinction on the essence of the French *fée*. This particular entity, a creature of unearthly provenance, is able to bring either misfortune or celestial happiness into the life of humans. The *fée*'s deceitful character drove Scott to equate it to 'un esprit élémentaire.'⁵¹ This apparition-like persona had already entered the cultivated scene of French literature in 1772 with the *Diable amoureux* by Jacques Cazotte.⁵² Walter Scott mentioned Cazotte's creation in the article 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman.' From the work of contemporary French writers, such as Nodier and de la Motte-Fouqué, he selected two novels that would embody the preoccupation with elementary spirits. The story line unfolded by the Baron Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué in his novel *Undine (Ondine)* allowed the heroine, a naiad, to keep up an existence 'as *real* as possible to a fantastic being.'⁵³

In his attempt to establish a lineage of *the fantastic* in French literature, Walter Scott had situated *Undine*'s character in the eponymous novel by Baron de la Motte-Fouqué at the opposite pole of behaviour to that of the dominant figure in the emblematic novel by Jacques Cazotte, *Le Diable amoureux*. Charles Nodier had also used a variant of Cazotte's prototype of the evil woman in *Trilby*. Scott drew this distinction in concluding his critical account of fantastic literature, as he endeavoured to set distinctions between the marvellous and the bizarre characterised by its awkward components of parody and the burlesque. These were the main elements that Scott criticised in addressing fantastic production in literature. The writers who followed this literary path were accused of exhausting the very source of imagination. In Scott's view, the German Romantic way of thinking offered the backdrop on which such

⁵¹ Walter Scott, *Du Merveilleux*, 1829, p. 29.

⁵² Jacques Cazotte, *Le Diable amoureux. Nouvelle espagnole* (Naples [i.e. Paris: Le Jay, 1772). Max Milner, *Le Diable dans la littérature française: de Cazotte à Baudelaire, 1722-1861*, 2 vols (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1960).

⁵³ Walter Scott, 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman,' p. 33. Italics in the original French text. Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, *Undine* (1811).

tendency towards *the fantastic* had developed under the French influence of de la Motte-Fouqué and Nodier and consequently was to be made responsible for the contemporary popularization of the fantastic genre in French literature.⁵⁴

In his response to Scott, Charles Nodier published ‘Du Fantastique en littérature’ in the *Revue de Paris* of November 1830. He reversed the pejorative use of *the fantastic* in connection with Romantic literature: ‘Il ne faut donc pas tant crier contre le romantique et contre le fantastique,’ states Nodier in the first paragraphs of his study.⁵⁵ As Scott assigned the *contes de fées* to the fantastic genre, Nodier also took them into account through discussion of Charles Perrault. Perrault (1628-1703) was the first established writer to collect and rewrite fairy stories. He published three of the tales between 1691 and 1694, which included *Peau d’âne* in 1694. In 1697 the public could read under his signature a collection of tales: *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités*.⁵⁶ All Perrault’s revised tales of popular extraction went to press in 1781 under the generic title of *Contes*.

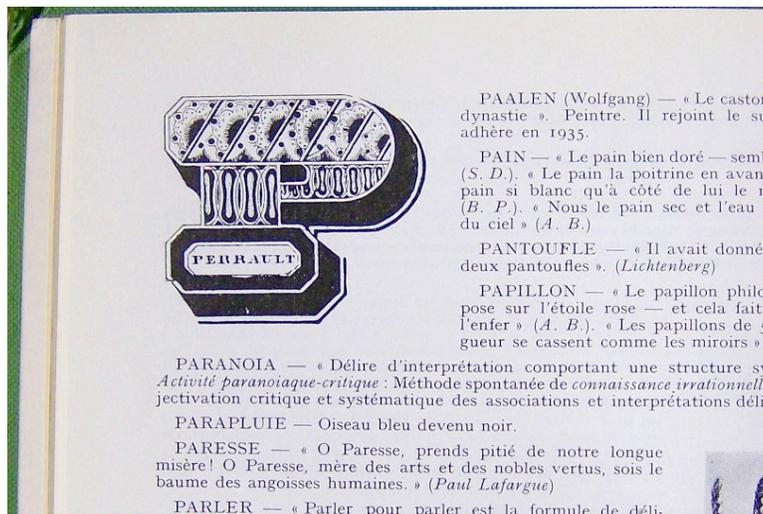


Fig. 1.3 André Breton, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon (eds), *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1980, [1938]).

⁵⁴ ‘[...] ici l’imagination ne s’arrête que lorsque elle est épuisée.’, W. Scott, 1829, ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman,’ p. 33. Jean Baptiste Baronian, *Panorama de la littérature fantastique de langue française: Des Origines à demain* (Tournai: Renaissance du livre, 2000).

⁵⁵ Charles Nodier, ‘Du Fantastique en littérature,’ in *Œuvres de Charles Nodier*, V, « Rêveries », (Geneve: Slatkine Reprints, Reprint of Paris edition, 1832-1837, 1968), p. 79.

⁵⁶ Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* (Paris: Barbin, 1697).

The collection comprised established stories like *Barbe-bleue*, *Le Chat botté*, *Cendrillon*, or *La Belle au bois dormant*. Disagreeing with the Orientalists and Walter Scott, Nodier claimed that these stories belong to ancient Gaul and its people.⁵⁷ As we saw, in his article Scott had distinguished between the French *contes de fées* and other popular tales to be found in the heritage of various cultures, and supported the academic hypothesis of their common origin in Oriental tales.⁵⁸ The seventeenth century collection of *contes de fées* by Charles Perrault was regarded by Nodier as a ‘chef-d’œuvre ingénu de naturel et d’imagination.’ He had predicted that it would have a long-lasting influence upon generations and more than two centuries later in a surprising way we recognise its subtle influence in the *Abridged Dictionary of Surrealism*.⁵⁹ Perrault’s name is inscribed the lace of a vignette-letter at the head of the section ‘P’. The Surrealists referred to Perrault and the meaning of the *contes de fées* in French literature because of the hidden correspondence between the significance of events in real life and the content of artwork that they themselves made visible in their creations. Two cases in the work of Breton and Brauner are discussed in the following two sub-sections of this chapter.

c. *The fantastic in Surrealism*

More than a century after the French literary dispute in *Le Globe* and *Revue de Paris*, the distinction between *the marvellous* and *the fantastic* was still troublesome. The Surrealists inherited the controversial issue as part of the field of investigation into the unconscious that started to characterise their activity. Over the years, the prevalence of *the fantastic* increased in Surrealist milieu and it was in this context that *the fantastic* came to be applied to the realm of the arts.

When Breton identified in the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, “*the hate of the marvellous* which rages in certain men”, he assumed a position in favour of *the marvellous* that concurred with Scott’s stance on the issue.⁶⁰ Scott explained that the human propensity for *the marvellous* is based on belief in the existence of “an unknown world of which forms and

⁵⁷ Nodier, ‘Du Fantastique en littérature,’ p. 98.

⁵⁸ Walter Scott, ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman,’ 1829, p. 29.

⁵⁹ André Breton, *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1980, 1st 1938).

⁶⁰ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p.14.

inhabitants we can not perceive due to the imperfection of our senses”.⁶¹ More confidently, Breton asserted that he believed “in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak”.⁶² For both writers *the marvellous* intersected with the everyday life of human beings. Breton revealed examples of such interdependence in correlation with his own existence in *Nadja* and *L'Amour fou*.

The discussion of *the marvellous* “in the realm of literature” determined Breton to comment on the Gothic novel *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis, published in London in 1796. Breton asserted the presence of *the marvellous* in literary productions of a genre that had been ranked as minor in importance in the history of the novel, i.e. the Gothic novel. By extension, *the marvellous* was to be retraceable in “anything that involves storytelling.”⁶³ For Breton, Lewis’ *The Monk* illustrated the characteristics of *the marvellous*. The “unprecedented pride” that underlines the main characters’ acts in this example of the *roman noir* of the eighteenth century was a condition that favoured the emergence of the marvellous in the novel. Breton also discerned a “passion for eternity” in relation to this precondition of existence of the marvellous. His appreciation of the novel connected with the exalting effect exerted “only upon that part of the mind which aspires to leave the earth.”⁶⁴ The attributes that Breton distinguished as regards the novel’s characters enabled them to act free of “all temporal constraints,” but at the same time ensured the novel’s denouement in the punishment of Ambrosio, the monk. The plot reveals in previous occurrences the intervention of fantastic beings that are unconditionally credited in the book, as Breton noticed. He linked the presence of *the marvellous* in *The Monk* to the acceptance of otherworldly existences. “Ghosts play a logical role, since the critical mind does not seize them in order to dispute them”.⁶⁵ At this point in the *Manifesto* Breton added the note on *the fantastic* that installed a continuum between *the fantastic* and the reality of the physical world:

⁶¹ Walter Scott, ‘Du Merveilleux dans le roman’, p. 26.

⁶² André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 14.

⁶³ ‘In the realm of literature, only the marvellous is capable of fecundating works which belong to an inferior category such as the novel, and generally speaking, anything that involves storytelling.’ in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p.15.

Ce qu'il y a d'admirable dans le fantastique, c'est qu'il n'y a plus de fantastique: il n'y a plus que le réel.⁶⁶

Such a paradoxical statement deprived *the fantastic* of all inherent literary attributes and redefined the extent of the real perceived by the human mind. In the same section of the *Manifesto*, Breton treated Lewis' novel in terms not only of the *fantastic* but also the *marvellous*. The assertive tone of the paragraph has encouraged critics - Marguerite Bonnet with the contribution of Philippe Bernier, Étienne-Alain Hubert and José Pierre for the first volume of Breton's *Complete Works* - to emphasize his indecisiveness regarding either one of the novel's qualifiers. Moreover, they have affirmed that Breton was unable to differentiate between the two terms, *the marvellous* and *the fantastic*, used in the *Manifesto*. Also there is no current scholarship on Surrealism that acknowledges that the two terms have had an entwined evolution, acquiring distinct meaning before being re-circulated by the Surrealists. In the above-mentioned edition of Breton's work the critics maintained that the poet distinguished *the fantastic* from *the marvellous* only in 1962 in the 'Drawbridge' preface to *Mirror of the Marvellous* by Pierre Mabilille and that happened in order to reject the term altogether on the grounds of its fictional character.⁶⁷ If they noticed Breton's reiteration of *the fantastic* in his "Limits not-frontiers of Surrealism" essay, no attention has been given to the theme of *the fantastic* in connection with the Surrealist objective of social change, something that Breton further developed in the June 1936 lecture given at the first *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the New Burlington Galleries in London. In the first *Manifesto* Breton relied on a quote from Novalis in order to explain the concept of "the ideal quantity of events with which it [the mind] is entrusted".⁶⁸ Novalis argued that the ideal train of events is constantly deflected through the intervention of men and circumstances. As a result, the

⁶⁶ André Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme,' *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 320. 'What is admirable about *the fantastic* is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real.' André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p.15.

⁶⁷ André Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme,' *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), note 4. Breton précise dans « Limites non-frontières du surréalisme » ce qui à ses yeux rattache le fantastique au réel : le fantastique exprime le contenu latent d'une époque, son « fond historique secret ». Merveilleux et fantastique ne sont pas distingués dans le *Manifeste* ; cette distinction apparaît en 1962 dans « Pont-levis » (art. cité), où le fantastique est rejeté du côté de la fiction, au bénéfice du merveilleux, « extrême pointe du mouvement vital », p. 1350.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

outcome of major social and political changes becomes distorted: “Thus it was with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism, we got Lutheranism”.⁶⁹ Therefore, in the inaugural *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton only announced that the mind’s response to the incongruities of the Surrealist images seemed to attest “that the mind is ripe for something more than the benign joys it allows itself in general”.⁷⁰ Years later, in the 1936 conference in London, he asserted the existence of a disparity between the reality of social change and its ideal configuration that is addressed in literature and art through the employment of *the fantastic*. He identified the gap that exists between the manifest content of a period and its *latent content*, and reminded the audience of the insightful comments on the Gothic novel and French Revolution made by the Marquis de Sade. In the same way, argued Breton, Surrealism embarked on the task of expressing the *latent content* of the age rather than its *manifest* one. In their quest, the Surrealists redefined *the fantastic*:

Le « fantastique » qu’exclut de la manière la plus radicale l’application d’un mot d’ordre tel que celui de réalisme socialiste, et auquel ne cesse de faire appel le surréalisme, constitue à nos yeux, par excellence, la clé qui permet d’explorer ce contenu latent, le moyen de toucher ce fond historique secret qui disparaît derrière la trame des événements.⁷¹

In the afterword to a multi-authored collection of Surrealist tales, *The Myth of the World*, Michael Richardson discussed Breton’s position on *the fantastic* in relation to *the marvellous* in Surrealist contexts. While *the marvellous*’ domain exists beyond the frame of the realist model that Surrealism contested, *the fantastic* makes concessions to it that are evident in the lack of any challenge to the validity of “its claims to represent reality”.⁷²

⁶⁹ Quote from Novalis in André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 39.

⁷¹ André Breton, ‘Limites non-frontières du surréalisme,’ in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 665. ‘*The fantastic* [...] to which surrealism never ceases to appeal, constitutes in our view the supreme key to this latent content, the means of fathoming the secret depths of history which disappear beneath a maze of events.’ André Breton, ‘Limits Not Frontiers of Surrealism,’ in *What is Surrealism?: selected writings of André Breton*, Franklin Rosemont (ed.) (New York; London: Pathfinder Press, 1978), p. 155; first published as ‘Limites non-frontières du surréalisme’ in *Nouvelle Revue Française*, (February, 1937).

⁷² Michael Richardson (ed.), *The Dedalus Book of Surrealism*, vol. 2–*The Myth of the World* (Sawtry, 1994), p. 276; see also Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London, 1981).

Richardson's analysis from a literary perspective on the issue is complemented here with the assumption that the Surrealists believed in the admixture of otherworldly creatures in human activities.

Breton had incorporated into the 1924 *Manifesto of Surrealism* references to the domain investigated by Charles Richet in his 1922 *Treatise of Metapsychics*. The French physiologist offered a scientific approach to hundreds of instances of thought transfer, premonitory dreams, and spirit materialisations that preoccupied academia in France and England. He often acknowledged in his treatise the contributions of his predecessors, Sir William Crooke and Frederick Myers, the latter a distinguished member of the Society for Psychical Research in London, founded in 1882. The Surrealists were not insensitive to such concerns, as I will examine later in this chapter as well as in the following one in relation to Victor Brauner's work in the 1930s and early 1940s. The exploration of metapsychics was a characteristic of Surrealist activities that connected the movement to the occult practices aimed in the first decades of the twentieth century at proving non-corporeal being.

It was only in 1942 that Breton explicitly advanced in *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not* the possibility of the existence on the animal scale, and above the human rank, of entities that maintain the characteristics of corporeality in a completely different system of coordinates. He described them in the last section of the manifesto *The Great Transparent Ones (Les Grands Transparents)* as beings capable of eluding the five well-known human senses.⁷³ The situations in which such life forms "reveal themselves to us" are, in Breton's view, the states of great fears or the mysterious circumstances in which we recognise the mechanism of chance at work in our life.

The relationship that was established in a Surrealist context between the dominion of *the fantastic* and the *roman noir* imagery is exemplified with Victor Brauner's 1933 *Kabyline in Movement* painting. The artist depicted in the central part of the piece a figure cloaked in a black suit that refers to the main character in Lewis' *The Monk*. Ambrosio confronts the viewer as a ghostly presence brought into being through séances that are alluded to by the representation of an armchair wrapped in the accumulation of an ectoplasm. On the chessboard-like pavement of *Kabyline in Movement* are scattered clues that direct the viewer's

⁷³ André Breton, 'Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not,' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor, 1969), p. 293.

attention to *The Monk* novel. The chalice and the light green imprint on one of the dark squares of the chessboard suggest the Eucharist of the Catholic tradition, an index to the religious environment in which the story line of *The Monk* develops.



Fig. 1.4 *Kabyline in Movement (Kabyline en mouvement)*, 1933, oil on canvas, 91 x 63 cm, private collection.

A young woman's figure in profile is seen kneeling down in a background scene reproduced within the painting. Another face in profile can be distinguished superimposed on the lower part of the body of Antonia, 'the devoted prey' of the abbot. These elements recall the monk's first attempt to assault the young woman in her own bedroom, a plan that had been hastily

overturned by her mother's arrival. This unexpected visitor and Elvira's resolution to unmask the abbot concludes with his first crime, Antonia's mother.⁷⁴ As the monk's ghost gazes at the viewer in Brauner's rendering of the story, another element hints at the act of rape and murder of Antonia in the vaults of St. Clare convent in Madrid.⁷⁵ The painter delineated a stiff bare foot that breaks into the main section of the painting from beneath the pavement in an allusion to the last hours of life of the young woman. Victor Brauner's option of representing the monk as a ghost introduced the perception of a four-dimensional universe in his work.⁷⁶ There is at least another work in Brauner's creation, *Death of the Moon* (1932), in which the painter embedded references to *The Monk* novel, as I will later on demonstrate. In addition, instances of *the fantastic* in the Surrealist acceptance of the term in Brauner's work are analysed in the same subsection of this chapter on the influence of the *roman noir* imagery on Surrealism.

When *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, which had originally been published in 1928, was reprinted in 1945 by Brentano's in New York in a substantially revised form along with Breton's contributions to the exhibitions that had taken place in the meantime, the image of the drawing of a mathematical object accompanied the article 'Crise de l'objet' initially published in *Cahiers d'art* of May 1936. It had the following caption: '*Objet mathématique: Intersection de deux surfaces du genre de la double vis Saint-Gilles*' and the original had been displayed in May 1936 at an exhibition of Surrealist objects in the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* at Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris. In the article, Breton justified the selection of mathematical objects for the show through a parallel that he drew between the new scientific approach to reality and the poetical one described in Surrealism. He maintained that with the ascertainment

⁷⁴ 'Turning round suddenly, with one hand he grasped Elvira's throat so as to prevent her continuing her clamour, and with the other, dashing her violently upon ground, he dragged her towards the bed. Confused by this unexpected attack, she scarcely had power to strive at forcing herself from his grasp: while the monk, snatching the pillow from beneath her daughter's head, covering with it Elvira's face, and pressing his knee upon her stomach with all his strength, endeavoured to put an end to her existence. He succeeded but too well.' Matthew Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* (3 vols, London: J. Bell, 1796), vol. 3, p. 43.

⁷⁵ 'The difficulty of colouring Antonia's unexpected return to life, after her supposed death and public interment, was the only point which kept him irresolute.' *The Monk*, vol. 3, pp. 194-214.

⁷⁶ For an analysis of the relationship established between Surrealism and the fourth dimension in the physics of the time see Gavin Parkinson *Surrealism, Art, and Modern Science: Relativity, Quantum mechanics, Epistemology* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 177-200.

of non-Euclidian geometry, the limits between 'déjà vu and the visible' are to be re-assessed in art.⁷⁷

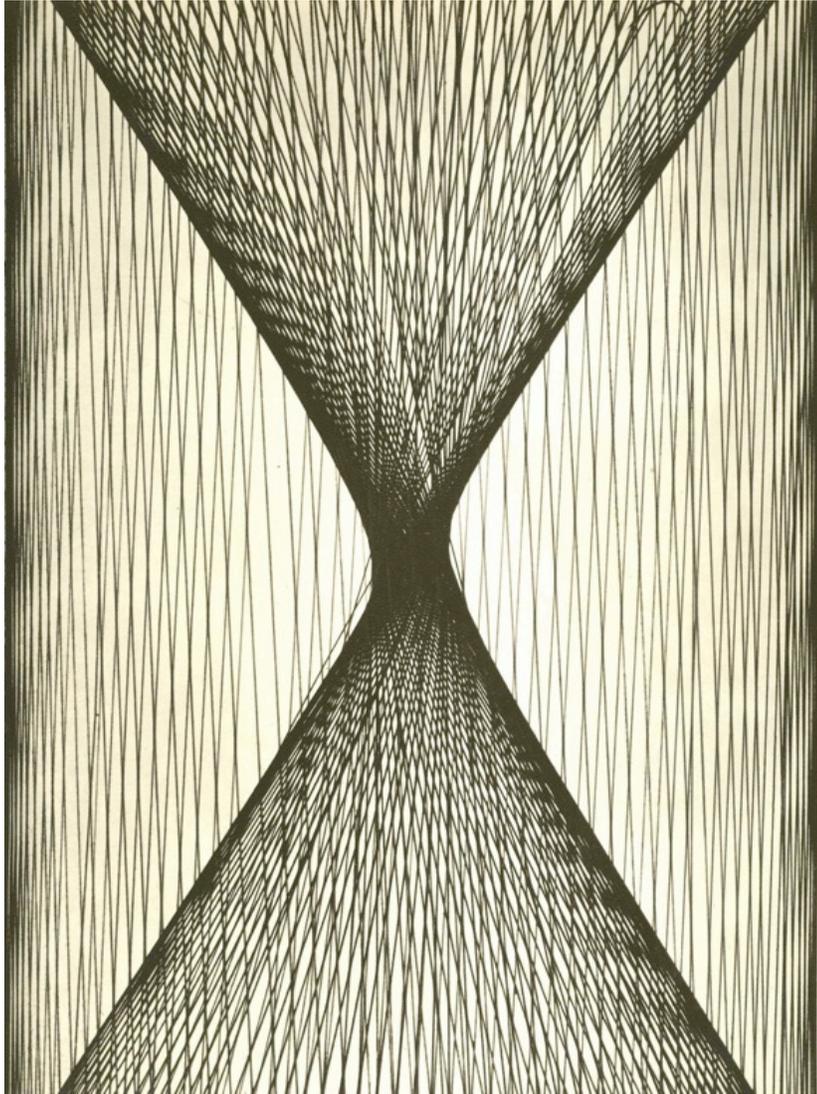


Fig. 1.5 *Mathematical Object: Intersection of Two Saint-Gilles Type Double Thread Surfaces*,⁷⁸ exhibited at the *Exposition Surréaliste d'objets* at the Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris, May 1936.

⁷⁷ 'Au besoin impérieux de « déconcrétiser » les diverses géométries pour libérer en tous sens les recherches et permettre la coordination ultérieure des résultats obtenus, se superpose rigoureusement le besoin de rompre en art les barrières qui séparent le déjà vu du visible, le communément éprouvé de l'éprouvable, etc. La pensée scientifique et la pensée artistique modernes présentent bien à cet égard la même structure : le réel, trop longtemps confondu avec le donné, pour l'une comme pour l'autre s'étoile dans toutes les directions du possible et tend à ne faire qu'un avec lui.' André Breton, 'Crise de l'objet,' in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 276.

Both fields of investigation were confronted with an expansion of the domain of the real beyond previously assigned boundaries that would explain in Breton's view a coordination of efforts in science as well as in art. In this context, the obscure area of 'the intersection of two Saint-Gilles type double thread surfaces' is perhaps indicative of the introduction of a fourth element in a three-dimensional system of representation for the mathematical object. Indeed, Breton commented on the association of mathematical objects with natural objects, irrational objects, ready-mades and so on in the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* in May 1936. He conveyed, in a way that complements this heterogeneous selection, the Surrealist readiness for 'lifting the ban' on objects that 'might exist beyond' our perception of habitual, daily objects.⁷⁹

Testifying to the constant Surrealist interest in mathematical objects,⁸⁰ Alfred H. Barr Jr., advised by André Breton in Paris, included them in the Surrealist section of the *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition in New York at the Museum of Modern Art, in December 1936-January 1937. Barr had taken into account Breton's position expressed in his 'Crisis of the Object' article and associated 'mathematical models' with Surrealist objects in the introduction he had written for the exhibition catalogue, but stated that they raise

⁷⁸ The caption mirrors the one in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor; introduced by Mark Polizzotti (Boston, Mass.: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2002[1972]).

⁷⁹ 'De même que voisinent dès maintenant, sur les tables des instituts mathématiques du monde entier, des objets construits, les uns sur des données euclidiennes, les autres sur des données non-euclidiennes, d'aspect également troublant pour le profane, objets qui n'en entretiennent pas moins dans l'espace tel que nous le concevons généralement les relations les plus passionnantes, les plus équivoques, les objets qui prennent place dans le cadre de l'exposition surréaliste de mai 1936* sont avant tout de nature à lever l'interdit résultant de la répétition accablante de ceux qui tombent journellement sous nos sens et nous engagent à tenir tout ce qui pourrait être en dehors d'eux pour illusoire.' *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 279. For a discussion of Breton's stance on 'Crisis of the object' and the exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton see Briony Fer, David Batchelor, Paul Wood, *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1993), pp. 221-231.

⁸⁰ On mathematical models and the Surrealist fascination by them see Gavin Parkinson *Surrealism, Art, and Modern Science*, pp. 72-88.

‘psychological interest’ due to their functioning on the level of the ‘bizarre, dreamlike, absurd, uncanny, enigmatic.’⁸¹

In the recent scholarship on *the marvellous* in Surrealism, *the fantastic* has been treated only in a subsidiary position in spite of the 1936-7 American show that established a clear relationship between Surrealism and fantastic art. The uncanny is related to *the marvellous* in a Freudian interpretation of the term. Hal Foster has offered in his book *Compulsive Beauty* a rigorous analysis of the concept of *the marvellous* in Surrealism from the point of view of the uncanny, or of ‘a concern with events in which repressed material returns in ways that disrupt unitary identity, aesthetic norms, and social order.’⁸² Even though he acknowledged that the Surrealists were not familiar with the concept, he maintained that they often experienced the uncanny and resisted it as the term’s implications came into conflict with the Surrealist ‘faith in love and liberation.’⁸³ For Foster ‘the marvellous *is* the uncanny.’⁸⁴ He carries on in his book with the identification of *the marvellous* with the convulsive beauty that reveals the uncanny confusion between animate and inanimate states in such themes related to Surrealist imagery as Romantic ruins and modern mannequins, or with objective chance and the found object that function, in each case, as a ‘reminder of the compulsion to repeat.’ As convulsive beauty and objective chance involve shock, *the marvellous*, too, connotes a traumatic experience, in Foster’s psychoanalytical interpretation of the term. An example of objective chance is the encounter between Jacqueline Lamba and André Breton, alluded to in the ‘*La Beauté sera convulsive*’ article of 1934. Foster presented it as an episode through which Breton endeavoured ‘to think objective chance in terms of unique love rather than deathly repetition.’⁸⁵ In contrast to his previous relationships described in *L’Amour fou*, states Foster, the poet maintained in the case of Lamba an ambiguous position, which permitted a re-orientation of his desire towards the ends of love and life. However, even this attempt is to be listed in the ‘search for the lost object’ that, for Foster, ‘is the surrealist quest par excellence.’

⁸¹ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., introduction to the exhibition catalogue Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1947[1936]), p. 12.

⁸² Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press 1993), p. xvii.

⁸³ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. xviii.

⁸⁴ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 20 (the Italics are used in the original text).

⁸⁵ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 35.

This is a quest that he considers ‘as impossible as it is compulsive: not only is each new object a substitute for the lost one, but the lost object is a fantasy, a simulacrum.’⁸⁶

The encounter with Jacqueline Lamba represents in Foster’s view a significant episode in interpreting the poet’s sexuality, whereas I am reading it as an instance of premonition in Breton’s work that connects his poetry to nineteenth century fantastic literature, and also to the enquiry into automatic writing that I will discuss in association with animal magnetism as an aspect of the occult investigation in Surrealism.



Fig. 1.6 Jacqueline Lamba, photograph by André Rogi, in *Minotaure*, no 7, 10 June 1935, p. 48.

The popular genre of the *contes de fées* in French literary tradition continued to be of high interest to Surrealists as indicated by Breton’s use of Jacqueline Lamba’s nickname, *Undine* – a female spirit inhabiting water, in the article ‘*La Beauté sera convulsive*’ published in the fifth issue of *Minotaure*, in 1934. Her byname connects us back to the perception of the *contes de fées*’ subject matter in French literary criticism. As in the case of legends and myths classified in the category of *the fantastic* on account of the kernel of truth they contain, the *contes de fées* entered the same class of *the fantastic* because of the primordial entities to which they referred. The presumption of an order of existence separated from the human distinguished *contes de fées* from other popular tales.

Undine entered Breton’s life in the late spring of 1934. The poet recalled a year later, in the seventh issue of *Minotaure*, the string of events that surrounded his encounter with a

⁸⁶ Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p. 36.

young graduate in fine art, Jacqueline Lamba. Breton titled the article after a poem he had written in 1923: *Tournesol*. While he interpreted the poem as a premonition of the night walk in Paris they would take on their first meeting, other things, more ordinary in his life were also unrelated to this encounter. Shortly before being introduced to each other on 29th May 1934, Breton confided his '*La Beauté sera convulsive*' essay to the *Minotaure*'s editorial board. Then he waited for the extraordinary to happen to him, the fact of the encounter with Jacqueline Lamba might have brought to the text an ironical coda. If Breton had anticipated a common life event, he had done so in order to superimpose on it a particular arrangement of the planets to which he referred at the end of '*La Beauté sera convulsive*'. 'A concealment' of Venus by the Moon occurred on the tenth of April 1934. Jacqueline Lamba was employed at the time doing a diving performance. The co-workers nicknamed her Ondine. Whether her being addressed like this has had anything in common with the fictitious character in de la Motte-Fouqué's novel *Ondine (Undine)* cannot be proved, but it implies a reference to a fantastic universe nurtured at popular level. During that morning the team was rehearsing for the evening show. They would have lunch together afterwards. Breton had supposedly overheard them calling Jacqueline by this name. Her answer stripped the magic of the name and won Breton's appraisal. She dismantled the word into its components, and entirely focused attention on the act of eating:

Comme je cherchais à situer cette jeune femme, en la circonstance si bien inspirée, la voix du plongeur, soudain : 'Ici, l'Ondine !' et la réponse exquise, enfantine, à peine soupirée, parfaite : 'Ah oui, on le fait ici, l'On dîne !' Est-il plus touchante scène ? Je me le demandais le soir encore, en écoutant les artistes du théâtre de l'Atelier massacrer une pièce de John Ford.⁸⁷

'*La Nuit du tournesol*' article in *Minotaure* was accompanied by *Undine*'s picture in her underwater performance (reproduced above). It depicted Jacqueline Lamba, the recent wife of André Breton, in a snapshot taken from the aquatic show in which she participated at the time as a professional swimmer. Seen through water, this nude representation of the young artist referred to as *Undine* in his previous article of 1934, epitomised the interchange of reality and imagination for the theoretician of *the fantastic* in connection with the real in the *Manifesto* of 1924. In reproducing Jacqueline Lamba's image in the frontispiece of the article

⁸⁷ André Breton, '*La Beauté sera convulsive*,' in *Minotaure*, no 5, 1934, pp. 9-16, p. 16.

that bore the same title with the 1923 poem *La Nuit du tournesol*, Breton supported not only the interpretation of the poem as a prescient piece of their encounter – a life instance attained by artistic means that focused the attention of the reader on the mechanism of imagination – but also the comparison of the episode now included in Surrealist imagery with other examples of *fantastic* literature.

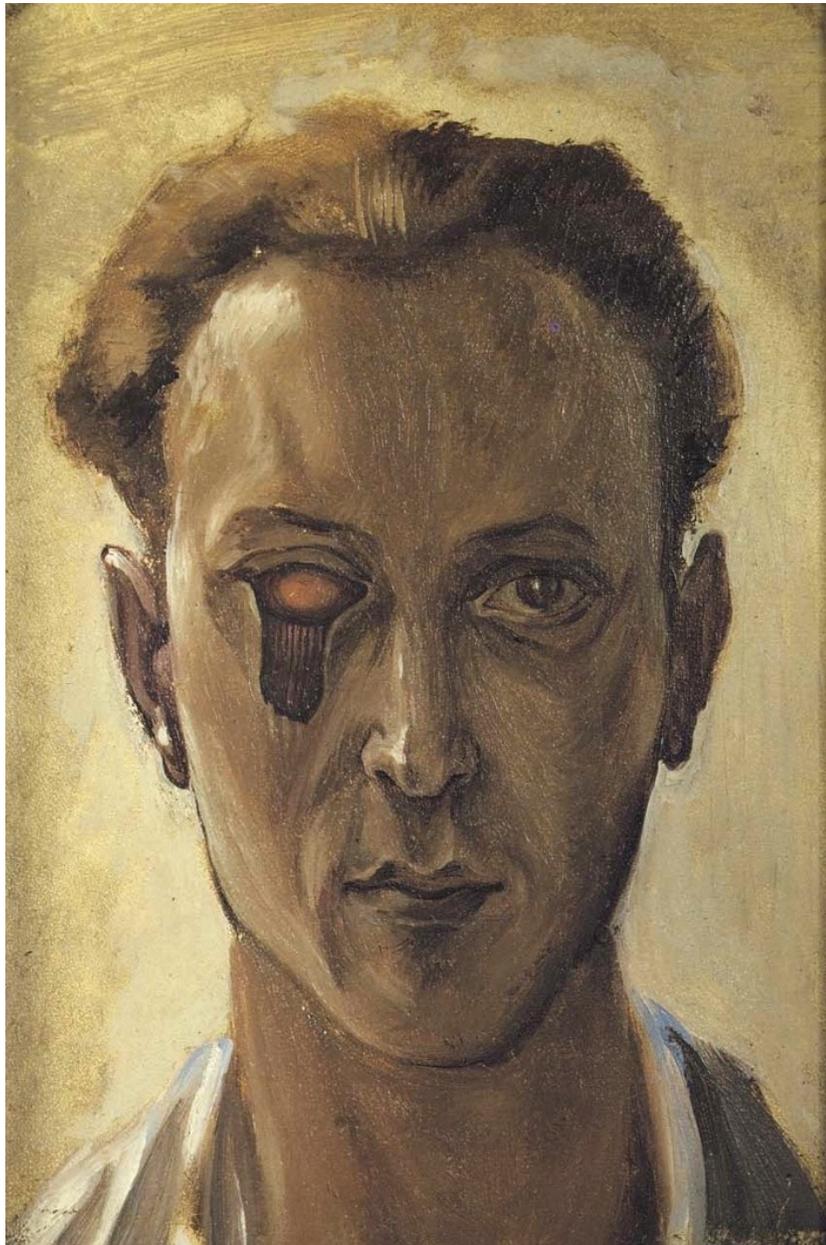


Fig. 1.7 *Self-portrait*, 1931, oil on canvas, 22 x 16,2 cm, gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner, Musée d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

d. Brauner's history of the eye

In Breton's perception of the encounter with Jacqueline Lamba the poet associated the young woman with the representation of an undine in *fantastic* literature. The interplay between reality and imagination in a series of artwork by Victor Brauner in the 1930s was a less favourable experience that entered, particularly because of this reason, the inventory of fantastic themes in Surrealist milieu. Similar to André Breton's forecast of the encounter with Jacqueline in the poem of 1923, the premonition of Victor Brauner's left eye loss took shape in the *Self-portrait* of 1931.

The painter lost the sight of his left eye on a hot summer evening in 1938 when he stepped into the trajectory of flying glass that hit his head and cut open his left eye. This would have been just an unfortunate episode if the painter had not depicted himself in 1931 with the same wounded eye.

The instance of a painting depicting a future condition that deeply affected his vision had troubled Brauner in the aftermath of the event. He assembled a file of evidence - the only one constituted by the artist in the profusion of written material preserved in the Brauner Archive at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. Brauner was intent on rationalising the many occurrences that had been manifested in his painting for such a long time, and finally erupted into the reality of his ordinary life. The dossier comprises nine manuscripts to which Brauner added a cutting from a newspaper dated July 1938. Whether he had written these pieces in Paris in 1938 or only at Les Celliers-de-Rousset in 1944, as some of them indicate, is uncertain.⁸⁸ In spite of the fact that Brauner was giving an exhaustive frame to all of the reported episodes he concludes his dossier in an invocatory vein to real and imaginary friends:

Novalis, Clemens Brentano, Hölderlin, André Breton, Bettina et tous mes amis, des pays divers, des contrées lointaines ceux qui ont le goût de l'inexplicable et de l'extraordinaire, [venez] me voir, me demander de [vous] raconter en détail, de regarder mes tableaux dessins et d'essayer de lire en eux les destinées poétiques.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Victor Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948: les archives de Victor Brauner au Musée national d'art moderne* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2005), p. 30.

⁸⁹ Victor Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948*, p. 40.

The Romantic constellation of the poets who had inscribed a destiny in their work represents along with André Breton a lineage in which succession the painter had placed his own experience of the eye loss. It was only by association with the astonishing turns of fate of these individuals that Brauner could present the amassing of facts that converged in the loss of sight in his left eye. Pierre Mabile, a medical practitioner, made an evaluation of the incident in the article 'L'œil du peintre' that appeared in the double issue of *Minotaure*, in May 1939. The first half of the paper is concerned with the results of an incomplete session of psychoanalysis applied to the painter in relation to the obsessive return of enucleated eyeballs in his work at the beginning of the 1930s. Mabile insisted that Brauner had manifested since childhood an irrepressible curiosity about the act of seeing. The family exacerbated the child's excessive nature by threatening him with warning that the eye would fall out of head if he witnessed unsuitable scenes for his age. Mabile read Brauner's recollection not only as a family episode, but also in connection with a religious image: the supreme authority of the Mosaic belief, which represented the eye as capable of a multiple scrutiny of the world. If Brauner had been preoccupied with the weaving scenarios to escape this overwhelming control, his adult compositions in which enucleated eyeballs seem to have a self-sufficient existence, detached from the body but nevertheless alive, can be regarded as a proof of it. Mabile expressed a correlative theme: a self-punishment complex could have started to develop in early childhood and was not overcome in the adult.⁹⁰

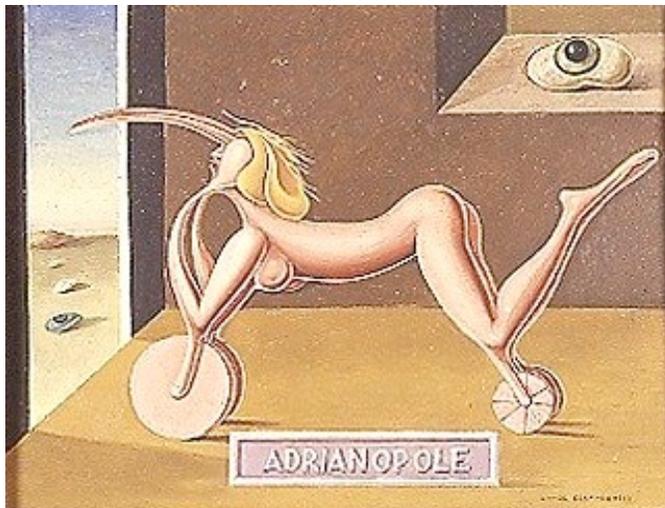


Fig. 1.8 *Légèrement chaude ou Adrianopole*, 1937, oil on board, 13 x 17 cm, private collection.

⁹⁰ Pierre Mabile, 'L'œil du peintre,' *Minotaure*, nos. 12-13, May 1939, pp. 53-56, p. 54.

In the second half of his paper, Mabille used Brauner's case to illustrate the revolutionary aim of Surrealist action. He dismissed any mystical connotation to Brauner's injury and its related occurrence in his previous work. Instead, he presented Brauner's ability to gain access to future events in his life as an instance of a general characteristic of humankind. The painter was to be praised for unconsciously developing it, which brought to the surface in his work a future condition of himself. In opposition to a system of belief that cultivated fear against an uncontrollable domain linked to the imagination, Brauner's work proved that he was in contact with 'the pivotal event' that would change his approach to life. A new perspective on the perception of time and space was the reasoning behind Mabille's understanding of Brauner's prefigured loss of sight of his left eye. The surmounting of the Euclidean perception of the world was posited on the assumption of a continually changing universe. Psychologically, we still harbour a compartmentalised perception of time and space. The human mind clings to this theme that recurs in philosophy and also at the level of public conduct. The invariance in the moral code of a society triggers what is perceived to be the restless attitude of the individual who ignores the Euclidean reading of the physical world:

Des phénomènes comme ceux qui viennent d'être rapportés ici invitent au contraire à transformer au plus vite les opinions classiques concernant les rapports de l'homme et du milieu. Ces conceptions, l'actuelle tragédie sociale en signe la faillite, les faits de notre vie personnelle en font apparaître l'insuffisance et, donc, l'erreur. Les barrières qui, pour notre intelligence séparent les parties de l'espace comme elles divisent la suite du temps, accusent leur caractère artificiel, elles doivent être abattues; tel est le sens de notre action révolutionnaire.⁹¹

The revolutionary objective of the Surrealist determination to redefine relations within society was based on a non-Euclidean approach to the world. In science it started to prevail at the end of the 1930s and Mabille asserted that attention should focus beyond the visible aspects of material world, on energy and its unceasingly interplay between one manifestation and another. If research is pursued in this direction the first achievements of this science could not be denied:

⁹¹ Pierre Mabille, 'L'œil du peintre,' *Minotaure*, p. 55.

Ces modes de pensée, les sciences abstraites les utilisent déjà, mais la timidité, l'inertie craintive nous empêchent de les mettre au service de la connaissance de la vie humaine quotidienne.⁹²

The Surrealists embarked on a journey of unravelling the principle that governs the flow of energy within the macrocosm, and decides upon actions to be taken within the human sphere. As the second term of the macro-microcosm relationship was regarded as falling under the incidence of the newly emerged branches of scientific approach such as psychoanalysis that fought to gain acceptance as such, the Surrealists' effort was often considered to touch upon pseudoscience. Artists and poets who assumed methods of investigation characteristic to the Surrealist movement were forced by events in their personal life to admit the imagination's capacity to prefigure them in the so-called fictional realm of the arts. The two well-known examples circulated by 1939 were André Breton's chance encounter, in his version with Jacqueline Lamba, and Victor Brauner's stepping into the trajectory of flying glass that would deprive him of the sight of his left eye. Pierre Mabille acknowledged at least the Surrealists' endeavour to constitute a vast documentation of such issues in the absence of any scientific reasoning for them.

In the dossier gathered on the lost eye, Victor Brauner listed a handful of such occurrences in addition to the 1931 self-portrait that bore the mark of the late evening in August 1938. If in the *Autoportrait* of 1931 the viewer, who was in the first instance the painter himself, is presented with the blunt truth of the eye's injury, the other paintings that had been read by Brauner in connection with the incident fragmentarily displayed details that would cast light on the circumstances in which it actually happened. In *Paysage méditerranéen* of 1932 the painter had represented a couple in the foreground of the work. Their posture is strikingly evoking a sacrificial offering to which the nakedness of the figures adds significant importance. They are both resting their left hand on a rock next to the painter in a kneeling position, while the right hand of the woman arches over the man's chest and touches his corresponding hand in a union that seems to expose the heart of Victor Brauner. A mirroring effect in the defacement of the left and right eye of the two personages enhances the subsequent reading of the painting as a premonition of the painter's eye loss. The woman and the man have both an eye speared with a cane, though the floating position of the woman and

⁹² *Ibid.*

her representation with a red sclera of the slashed eye suggests a swift adjustment of the viewer to a symbolic level of the scene with no other reference to reality except the painter's external appearance. At a close look, each of the other three human silhouettes placed on or near to the promontory are not simple elements in the composition, but disquieted presences due to their unusual representation in bizarre attitudes: one seated, the back to the viewer, holds to a hook fastened to the edge; another one in outline, over which the painter superimposed the materialisation of a spiritualist encounter, hovers close to the bank that retreats in the background of the picture; finally, at the very end of the ridge, the tranquil look of a passerby is short-circuited in this familiar instance by an incongruous trajectory of the shadow of the figure that instead of being cast on the rock, encircles it. Instead of being perceived as products of imagination, these figures are distributed in the landscape with a suggestion of temporal development of the subject matter that gives rhythm to the composition and reminds the viewer of the scientific attempts at the beginning of the twentieth century such as metapsychics that aimed to demonstrate the manifestation of a spirit world in the tri-dimensional universe. Apart from the representation of the painter in the foreground of the composition with a damaged eye that mirrors the injury of the female figure – another possible apparition in the economy of the painting, while the mirror effect will be repeated once again in the reality of the painter's live – a hidden detail in the painting was to become meaningful to Victor Brauner only on the night of twenty-eighth of August 1938. On that night, during a tense argument with someone in the group, the painter Oscar Dominguez threw the glass that would cause Brauner to rely on monocular vision from that moment on. In *Paysage méditerranéen* the male nude in the foreground refers to the painter. The high forehead and the skull's shape, which is like a 'seed' as his close friend, the poet René Char, noted, are undeniable.⁹³ Brauner had represented himself with a pierced left eye that relates the picture to the self-portrait of 1931. Additional information about the event of 1938 is provided by the initial 'D' that floats on the wooden shaft of a pike that is stuck into the male figure's left eye. The initial letter coincided with Dominguez's name, the agent of Victor Brauner's blindness in the left eye. Brauner spoke about *Autoportrait* and *Paysage méditerranéen*, along with other episodes, in a draft letter to Louis Carré, the art dealer at homonym gallery in Paris. The draft is undated, but must have been written after Pierre Mabilille's article in *Minotaure* of May 1939

⁹³ René Char, *Fureur et mystère: Poèmes*, Paris: Gallimard, 1948, p. 82.

since the painter refers to Mabile's interpretation of the incident. Brauner envisaged his artwork as being 'prefigured without consciously prefiguring it' (the major turn in his life), as a unique occurrence in the history of art. It encouraged the painter to title his dossier '*Le cas Victor Brauner*':

C'est ainsi que j'ai prédit, prévu, sans prédire et sans prévoir consciemment un évènement de tout gravité pour moi : mais aussi unique dans l'histoire de l'art.⁹⁴



Fig. 1.9 *Mediterranean Landscape*, 1932; oil on canvas, 65 x 80,5 cm, gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Brauner himself probably deleted the passage that immediately follows, in which he maintained that there was a lack of understanding about the processes of the mind through which such events can surface into one's consciousness. His implication was that only future

⁹⁴ Victor Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948*, p. 40.

generations would be able to gain understanding of it in a scientific way, Mabilie's explanation and Brauner's own effort to shed light on the various circumstances that preceded and configured the event were insufficient to clarify the case. Was this an affirmation from within the Surrealist group that processes of the mind as imagination could be submitted to a consciously directed research with a view to breaking its mechanism into controllable steps of predicting and changing progression of events in time?

Il n'y a pas pour le moment aucune explication satisfaisante, d'ailleurs il n'en faut pas, plus tard les intéressés vont s'acharner sur cet événement épouvantable et extraordinaire.⁹⁵

e. *Du fantastique: I En peinture – II Au théâtre*

The rationalisation of the loss of his eye prompted in Brauner's activity a more theoretical approach to his artwork. In the autumn of 1941 the painter was recovering from a precarious health condition at Clinique Paradis in Marseille and used the time there to make the first notes of what would become the future text *Du fantastique*. Brauner jotted them down on the night of fifteenth to sixteenth November 1941. At a later stage, he assigned the attributes that characterise his work a numerical order. A hesitant statement 'You should like my painting' followed by forty-one subordinate clauses that describe the qualities of Brauner's work became a wishful projection, an imperative one, 'You would like my painting,' in the printed version of *Du fantastique* in the New-York published double issue of *VVV* in March 1943. Likewise, to the first attributive line written in his diary, now in the Special Collections at Centre Pompidou in Paris, the painter assigned the final spot in the enumeration that appeared in *VVV*:

Parce qu'elle est surréaliste, elle a franchi toutes les frontières professionnelles et picturales, englobant en elle les plus hautes valeurs morales de l'homme.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Victor Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948*, p. 40.

⁹⁶ *Manuscrits-cahiers et carnets de Victor Brauner: Carnet havane à spirale*. – Marseille: [s.n.], [2.11.1941-debut 1942], Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre de documentation et de recherche du Musée national d'art moderne, Paris.

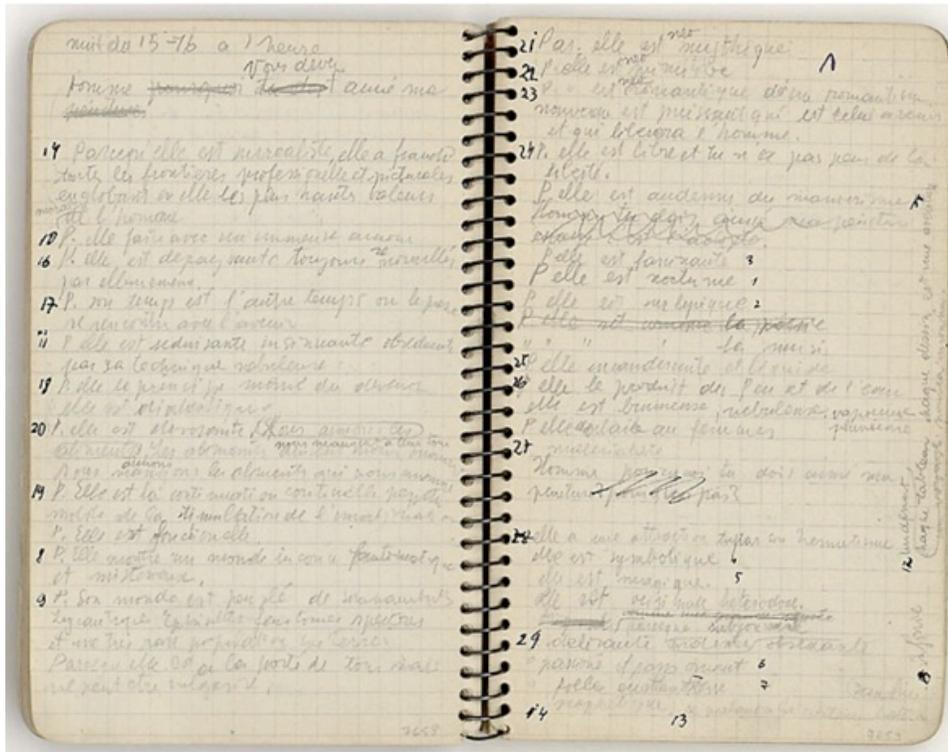


Fig. 1.10 *Carnet havane au spirale* (2.11.1941 – beginning 1942) in Victor Brauner Archives, Kandinsky Library, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

It was the Surrealist aspect of his work that provided the opportunity for transcending different specialised fields of investigation of the real. Brauner elaborated on this first subordinate clause, while preparing it to conclude the text on *Du fantastique: I En peinture*:

Parce qu'elle est surréaliste, assimilant les plus grandes conquêtes physiques, chimiques, physiologiques, psychologiques, psychanalytiques et de toute la science en développement, et qu'elle a franchi toutes les frontières conventionnelles, englobant en elle les plus hautes valeurs éthiques de l'homme.⁹⁷

The painter gives an appropriate importance to the advances being registered in natural science. He situates art production, his own in particular, in relationship to scientific approach to phenomena of life. It is not surprising that the editors of *VVV* in New York, André Breton

⁹⁷ Victor Brauner, 'Du fantastique: I En peinture – II Au théâtre,' *VVV*, nos 3-4, March-April 1943, p. 75.

and Marcel Duchamp, were selecting an image from the *Journal of Applied Physics* to accompany Brauner's contribution to the double issue of the magazine in March 1943.

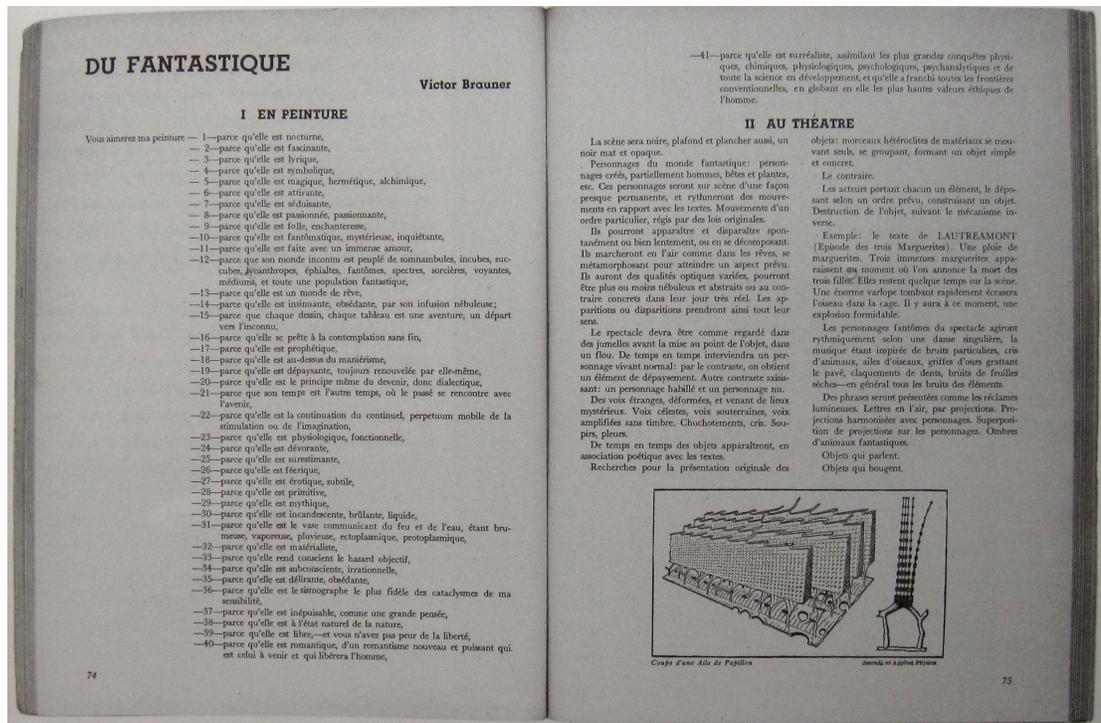


Fig. 1.11 'Du fantastique: I En peinture – II Au théâtre' ('The Fantastic: I In Painting – II At the Theatre') in *VVV* (New York), nos 3-4, March-April 1943, pp. 74-5, Victor Brauner Library, Brauner Archives, Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris.

As he refined the text of *Du fantastique* in his 1941 diary, Brauner registers a description of the how his work aimed to bring clarity through representation. Once again it would be the world beyond 'la frontière noire de la réalité' that the painter envisaged.⁹⁸ He suggests that his work is revealing of the deepest content of the mind through the functioning of the imagination. His understanding of *the fantastic* was not different from the preceding Romantic inquiry in this domain.

In the final text printed in 1943 in *VVV* Brauner detailed on the ethereal world of his painting:

⁹⁸ Quote from *Manuscrits-cahiers et carnets de Victor Brauner: Carnet havane à spirale*. – Marseille: [s.n.], [2.11.1941-debut 1942], Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Paris. The syntagm has been absorbed in *Victor Brauner: Ses frontières noires*, catalogue of the exhibition at Alexander Iolas Gallery (New York: A. Iolas, 1970).

‘Vous aimerez ma peinture parce que son monde inconnu est peuplé de somnambules, incubes, succubes, lycanthropes, éphialtès, fantômes, spectres, sorcières, voyantes, mediums, et toute une population fantastique.’⁹⁹

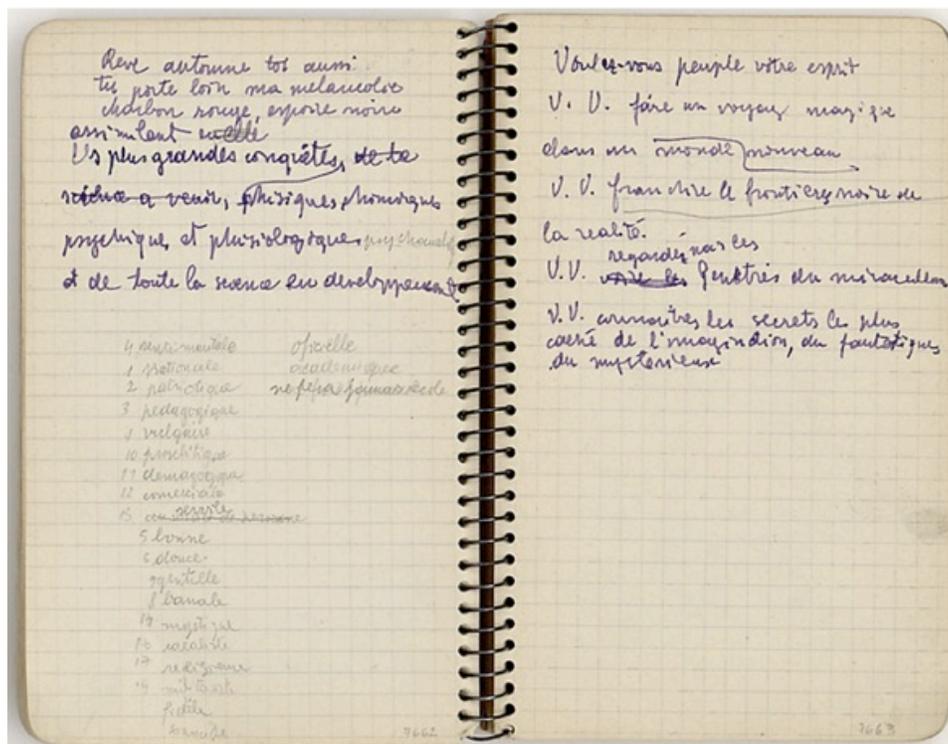


Fig. 1.12 *Carnet havane au spirale* (2.11.1941 – beginning 1942) in Victor Brauner Archives, Kandinsky Library, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

The account of the loss of the eye rendered in the dossier shows a belief, confirmed for the painter by actual fact, in the power of painting to absorb everyday life's content and to reflect upon its unfolding. The painter writes down things in the documentation on the eye's loss, but as soon as his position in interpreting them is affirmed a process of psychological concealment emerges. The pen's movements start to obliterate words, though leaving them readable, in opposition to the painting, which had taken on an independent evolution, going beyond the painter's control. Moreover, Brauner states that his painting turned against its creator:

⁹⁹ Victor Brauner, 'Du fantastique: I En peinture – II Au théâtre,' p. 75.

Je vais vous raconter l'effroyable et miraculeuse histoire par laquelle j'ai perdu mon l'œil gauche. Cette perte originale et dramatique qui est le plus bouleversant évènement de ma vie a été peinte par moi des années avant que cela m'arrive, et on ne connaît aucun exemple analogue dans l'histoire. (Ma peinture s'est montrée ~~violente~~ contre moi, et maintenant je porte sa marque ineffaçable au visage.)¹⁰⁰

If Brauner described his painting as being populated by incubi, succubae, phantoms, and spectres in the statement published in *VVV*, it is likely that the existence of such entities was not entirely perceived as a product of his imagination. An enduring opinion on the subject flickered in the painter's mind on the night of twenty-eighth of August 1938. While he is recounting the events of that night in the dossier '*Le cas*' *Victor Brauner*, he was confronted with the idea that his left eye 'has been taken away from him':

Alors il se produisit ceci : le soir [du] 28 Août 1938 vers minuit et demi dans un accident tout à fait insignifiant et où je n'étais même pas le protagoniste, à la suite d'un terrible choc à la tête, mon œil gauche m'a été enlevé, avec une rapidité impossible à expliquer même en reconstituant les faits. Comme je n'attachais naturellement avant cet évènement aucune importance laissant mon inspiration inconsciente se développer librement, je me rendais compte par la suite seulement de la quantité énorme des documents ayant trait à ma brèche capitale me rendant cyclope pour le reste de ma vie, et aussi des évènements s'y rapportant se multipliant autour de moi.¹⁰¹

The fantastic has already been related to Surrealist art on occasion of the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in December 1936 – January 1937. Alfred H. Barr Jr., the then director of the museum was presenting to the American public a comprehensive collection of Surrealist works whose effect on the viewer was enhanced by their being displayed as a culmination to a historical section encompassing European and American art of the last five centuries. The joint attribute of the exhibition's selection was *the fantastic*. This was the first time that *the fantastic* had been associated with the field of visual arts. Barr hesitated between variants of the title for the exhibition. They included *Painters of the Marvellous* or *Painters of the Irrational* before deciding in favour of

¹⁰⁰ Victor Brauner, *Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948*, p. 33.

¹⁰¹ Victor Brauner, Camille Morando, Sylvie Patry (eds.), *Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948 : les archives de Victor Brauner au Musée national d'art moderne* (Paris: Centre Pompidou; Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2005), p. 34.

Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.¹⁰² His uncertainty about the heading of the exhibition was most likely due to his knowledge of the nineteenth century controversy of *the marvellous* versus *the fantastic* in literature. The director of MoMA was acquainted with the way in which one of the terms was treated in the detriment of the other in the Surrealist writings. Barr's decision to opt for *the fantastic* coined a new term, 'fantastic art,' that would be taken up in the 1950s and 1960s in a series of books by authors of Surrealist formation such as *L'Art magique*¹⁰³ by André Breton and *Au Cœur du fantastique*¹⁰⁴ by Roger Caillois. Marcel Brion reiterated the syntagm in 1961 with his book *Art fantastique*.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, it was the French art milieu in which *the fantastic* resurfaced in the 1950s. The exhibition that mirrored Barr's *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* in France was *Bosch, Goya et le fantastique*¹⁰⁶ in 1957 at the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Bordeaux.

In the introduction that Barr wrote for the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition in 1936 a distinction is drawn between *the fantastic* attained in the art of the Baroque and Renaissance period and its possible equivalent in Surrealist artwork. Barr suggested that the critic should refrain from any parallel until further research into the 'Surrealist aesthetic' had been developed. In fact he denied the continuity between the Surrealist inquiry and the objectives of 'the art of the past' on display in *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. He seemed to retain only the similarities in the technique employed by the artists of the past and those in the modern period:

These resemblances, however startling, may prove to be superficial or merely technical in character rather than psychological. The study of the art of the past in the light of Surrealist aesthetic is only just beginning. Genuine analogies may exist but they must be kept tentative until our knowledge of the states of mind of, say, Bosch or Bracelli has been increased by systematic research and comparison.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² André Breton, *Œuvres complètes* vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), p. XLVIII.

¹⁰³ André Breton, Gérard Legrand, *L'Art magique* (Paris: Club français du livre, 1957).

¹⁰⁴ Roger Caillois, *Au Cœur du fantastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

¹⁰⁵ Marcel Brion, *Art fantastique* (Paris: A. Michel, 1961).

¹⁰⁶ Gilberte Martin-Méry (ed.), *Bosch, Goya et le fantastique*, catalogue of an exhibition held at Musée des Beaux-arts in Bordeaux, 20 May-31 July 1957, with a foreword by Jacques Chaban-Delmas and an introduction by Marcel Brion (Bordeaux: Musée des Beaux-arts, 1957).

¹⁰⁷ Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, p. 7.

In spite of expressing a need for method and efficiency in the investigation of *the fantastic*, Barr defines the term in contrast to logic and reason and acknowledges its presence in the collective heritage of popular culture. His account is concerned with the European art from the Renaissance onward, but the referential point is the art of the Middle Age as a period in which *the fantastic* flourished in ‘its scenes of Hell, and the Apocalypse, its circumstantial illustrations of holy miracles and occult marvels.’¹⁰⁸ Though no example of anonymous medieval art was part of the display, Barr considered Bosch the epitome of the time and had selected his work for the exhibition. Bosch was also evaluated as a link between Surrealists and fantastic art due to his original vision that had transformed traditional art.¹⁰⁹ For the technical devices common to Renaissance and the seventeenth-century art as well as to the Surrealists, Barr exemplified in the exhibition the double-image, the composite image, distorted perspective, and the isolation of anatomical components in the image. In conclusion, he insisted on the new dynamic of *the fantastic* in Surrealism and stated that a Surrealist ‘aesthetic of *the fantastic*, hypnogogic and anti-rational’ has been established and urged the art criticism’s world to reassess art history from this recent and particular point of view.¹¹⁰

Victor Brauner started to examine soon after his accident the numerable instances in his work that depicted events in advance and which concluded with the loss of his eye in 1938. The occasion would have confirmed to Alfred Barr that exploration of the ‘state of mind’ of the old masters would have been desirable in the case of the Surrealists too. Victor Brauner’s presence in the 1936 exhibition in New York was controversial if related to the limits imposed to the selection by Alfred Barr. He stated that ‘no document from such rich fields as spiritualism, astrology, magic, alchemy and other occult sciences’ could be included.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, the work by Victor Brauner in the show, *Kabyline en mouvement* of 1933, shared strong affinities with the domain of spiritualism mentioned by Barr.

When Roger Caillois defined *the fantastic* in the sub-section ‘Fantastique naturel’ of *Cases d’un échiquier*, his description of the domain to which the term applies excluded those

¹⁰⁸ Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *A Brief Guide to the Exhibition of Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, January 1937 reprinted as the introduction to Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, p. 13.

¹¹¹ Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, p. 7.

areas, including spiritualism, that Barr deemed as incompatible with the objectives of the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. Caillois argued that the existence of *the fantastic* confirms a systematic universe in which the inflexible principles of physics, astronomy and chemistry dismiss any possible wonder that ultimately characterises the enchanted world of *the marvellous*.¹¹² ‘As opposed to the marvellous,’ *the fantastic* infringes natural laws that appear to be unbreakable, but through its manifestations, *the fantastic* could not be considered ‘natural’ either. Confronted, for a short time, with the contemplation of a ‘mysterious power,’ a *supernatural* one, that intervenes in nature, the writer assigns *the fantastic* to the mind’s inventions. He concludes that as long as *the fantastic* cannot be attested as part of the ‘known universe,’ it ought to be confined to the imagination:

Il suit que, dans une telle perspective, le fantastique ne saurait jamais être « naturel », puisqu’il est présenté, au contraire, comme l’accroc inadmissible qui est fait à la nature par une puissance mystérieuse, tenue très précisément pour *supernaturelle*. Il faut qu’il soit *imaginaire*, c’est-à-dire invention délibérée de l’esprit, qui la connaît pour telle. Aussi le fantastique ne peut-il *exister* à proprement parler: faire partie de la nature, de l’univers attesté.¹¹³

For Caillois the changeable world of ‘metamorphoses and miracles’ is specific, in his view, to *the marvellous*, which is entirely lodged in the real. Caillois defined a ‘natural fantastic’ that he had previously outlined in interventions on the theme in *La Mante religieuse* (1935), *Méduse et Cie* (1958), *Au Cœur du fantastique* (1965), and *Images, images* (1966). He related the ‘natural fantastic’ to ‘uncommon-privileged elements in the universe,’¹¹⁴ such as animals with morphology so bizarre that they seem more utterly imaginary than the mythological hybrid beasts. If these elements are ‘guarantors for lyrical emotion and poetic image, at the same time,’ the exceptions that Caillois identified in the mineral kingdom and in

¹¹² ‘Par opposition au féérique ou au merveilleux qui impliquent un monde d’enchantelements, de métamorphoses et de miracles continuels, où tout est, à chaque instant, possible, le fantastique suppose, je crois, la reconnaissance d’un univers ordonné où règnent les lois immuables de la physique, de l’astronomie, de la chimie, où les mêmes causes produisent les mêmes effets et d’où, par conséquent, le moindre miracle est exclu. Le fantastique apparaît alors comme la rupture d’un ordre naturel, tenu pour imperturbable.’ Roger Caillois, ‘Fantastique naturel,’ in *Cases d’un échiquier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 60. ‘The Natural Fantastic,’ in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, p. 349.

¹¹³ Roger Caillois, ‘Fantastique naturel,’ in *Cases d’un échiquier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 60, in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, p. 349.

¹¹⁴ Roger Caillois, *Cases d’un échiquier*, p. 62.

the kingdom of the living bring us closer to the understanding of *the fantastic* conveyed by Victor Brauner. For the Romanian Jewish artist an entire fantastic population made up of ‘incubi, succubae, Éphialtès, phantoms,’ and ‘spectres’ is revealed through his painting.¹¹⁵ In naming different orders of the invisible world Brauner maintained a belief in the existence of such entities, whereas Caillois treated the presumption of ‘spectre, resuscitated ghost’ with the caution of the scientific approach. He expressed the possibility of spirit materialisation only to compare it to the unforeseeable occurrence of finding an abnormal number and disposition of sides in a crystal. If this latter case will intrigue only the experts in mineralogy, stated Caillois, the event of a ghost crossing the boundaries of the living challenges the structure of a well-organised universe and is regarded as ‘the unacceptable par excellence’. In the ‘Fantastique naturel’ section this is the only passage that refers to spirit materialisation and the writer dismisses altogether such a prospect:

Or quel ordre existe-t-il dans l’univers minéral, sauf celui, trop savant, de la géométrie des cristaux ? D’ailleurs, dans un cristal une cassure n’est jamais qu’un accident qui détruit sans rien nier. Les macles, loin de contredire les lois, leur obéissent méticuleusement. La rencontre d’une impossibilité véritable, comme serait par exemple une aiguille de quartz à sept pans, ne ferait frémir qu’un minéralogues. Au contraire, avec l’avènement de la vie, on voit bien où est située la barrière que nul « revenant » ne saurait franchir sans provoquer l’angoisse et la peur. Le spectre, l’ombre ressuscitée constitue alors l’inacceptable par excellence.¹¹⁶

In contrast to Caillois and supporting Brauner’s conception of *the fantastic*, Breton asserted in *Le Merveilleux contre le mystère* that the poet’s ability to let himself be guided by ‘an urgent, clairvoyant sense’ makes him responsible for revealing ‘the unknown’ and its intervention in the working of the universe.¹¹⁷ The poet, and the artist in general, abandons ‘the critical intelligence of his actions’ because he or she also partakes in the process and, ‘La

¹¹⁵ Victor Brauner, ‘Du fantastique: I En peinture – II Au théâtre,’ p. 75.

¹¹⁶ Roger Caillois, *Cases d’un échiquier*, p. 68. The text appeared in English translation in *The Edge of Surrealism*, p. 354.

¹¹⁷ ‘Cette coulée verbale, longtemps mal contenue, prend tout à coup un aspect torrentiel. Abandonnées les rênes du sens commun, une autre espèce de sens pressant, divinatoire, guide l’homme vers où il veut aller sans le savoir. Toujours plus loin ! Dans cette direction de l’inconnu, il faut qu’il consente à se laisser porter plutôt qu’il ne se porte.’ André Breton, ‘Le Merveilleux contre le mystère,’ in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 656.

lucidité est la grande ennemie de la révélation.’ stated Breton.¹¹⁸ The praise for combining subconscious activity of the mind with a practice of the occult that excluded any use of hollow symbolism¹¹⁹ situated Breton at the opposite side of approaching the issue. The poet reflected upon the singularity of the artist’s work and his view contrasted, once again, with that of his former Surrealist member. He considered ‘visions, hallucinations’ and the wrongly conceived ‘daredevilry’ of the poet as ways of investigation into the making of the world that makes distinct the artist’s contribution to human knowledge:

Il est frappant que l’apport d’un grand poète ne représente le plus souvent pour ses contemporains que visions, hallucinations auditives et autres casse-cou. Plus frappant encore que des phénomènes optiques, acoustiques généraux viennent rectifier ensuite à son profit, souvent d’une manière éclatante, cette sorte de jugement.¹²⁰

II. The lure of Spiritualism

a. Brauner’s first exhibition in Paris at the Galerie Pierre in December 1934

The etymology of ‘the fantastic’ intersects with that of ‘a phantasm.’ ‘The fantastic’ has its source word in Greek *phantastikós*, and has developed from *phantázein* to make visible, present to (or as to) the eye, and *phantázesthai* to imagine, have visions, both derivatives of Hellenistic Greek *phantós* visible, from ancient Greek *phan-*, stem of *phaínein* to show, cause to appear, bright to light. One of the two terms that has been traced on this line of derivation, *phantázein*, to present to the eye, has led, through the Latin *phantasma* ghost, apparition, in

¹¹⁸ ‘Le mystère recherché pour lui-même, introduit volontairement – à toute force – dans l’art comme dans la vie, non seulement ne saurait être que d’un prix dérisoire, mais encore apparaît comme l’aveu d’une faiblesse, d’une défaillance.’ André Breton, ‘Le Merveilleux contre le mystère,’ p. 658.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ André Breton, ‘Le Merveilleux contre le mystère,’ p. 656.

post-classical Latin also mental image, to ‘phantasm.’¹²¹ It is necessary to give the precise meaning of the word ‘phantasm’ that is to be considered useful in connection with issues discussed in the chapter on the fantastic. And that is that of ‘a ghost’ or a ‘spectre.’



Fig. 1.13 *We Are Betrayed* (*Nous sommes trahis*), 1934, oil on canvas, 97 x 130 cm, private collection, former André Breton Collection.

There are paintings in Brauner’s work of the 1930s whose representational space is crossed by ghostly presences. The artist had registered the alteration of life’s parameters that would suggest them there. Or are they only art products, the result of their author’s imagination? We begin this section of the chapter on the fantastic with the claim that two of Brauner’s paintings from 1934, *Portrait d’André Breton* and *Nous sommes trahis*, are to be seen in connection from the point of view of a unified representational space in the eye and mind of the viewer. In *Nous sommes trahis*, we are confronted with two perspectives that

¹²¹ J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, XX vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) vol. V, p. 721; vol. XI, p. 658.

intersect with each other in one cross-section that constitutes the inner space of the painting. The unusual treatment of perspective in *We Are Betrayed* prevents the eye 'from seeing' beyond the classical cube of representation. What we see is enclosed in a system of screens that blocks vision in the background. Each of them characterises one of the two cubes of the represented perspectives. In each of the two scenes an episode from a different story is taking place that suggests a convergence within the painting of phenomena that unfold on different levels of time and space. *Nous sommes trahis* evokes a ghostly presence within the picture that alters its characteristics of an interior scene. Brauner depicted it with the detachment of a witness to spiritualist practice.

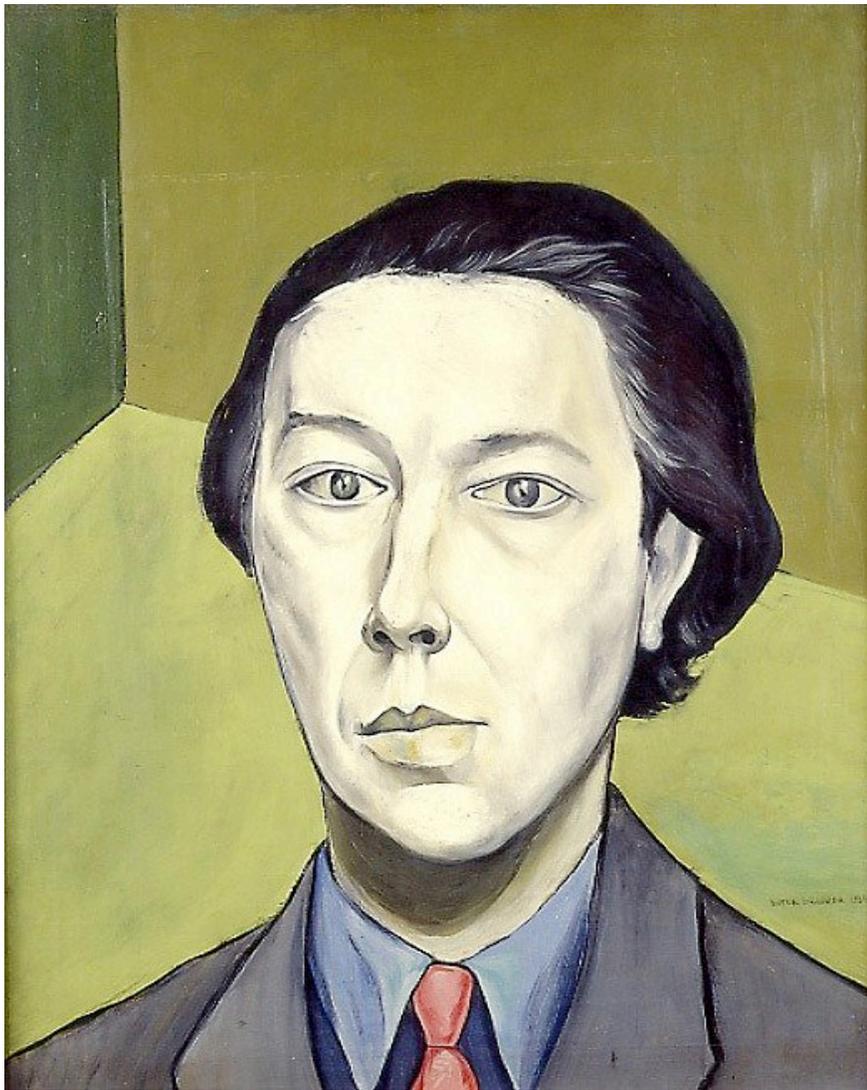


Fig. 1.14 *Portrait of André Breton*, 1934, oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm, Musée de la ville de Paris, former André Breton Collection.

A contrasting illumination of the left side of the painting supports a reading of the scene as an apparition-like phenomenon. Under unforeseen circumstances, common objects humorously gather to suggest a ghostly presence in the otherwise peaceful interior scene. Brauner depicted it with the composed detachment of a witness to spiritualist practice in a way that recalls Richet's description of ectoplasms in *Treatise of Metapsychics*. A first stage in the formation of ectoplasms is the invisible aggregation of unknown forces that seem to stem from 'the actual body' of the medium. They produce the mechanical actions associated with spiritualism (i.e. the common floating of the séance table and other movements with undetected sources).¹²² Brauner had figured in *We Are Betrayed* a variant of this in the articulation he draws between a hanger, a hat-mould and boots-stretchers that suggest a seated person in the armchair.

A similar mood is evoked in *Portrait of André Breton*, in which we are confronted with the image of the writer in the stunning foreground of the painting. No shadow of the figure lingers in the space behind it. Or else the cut of the figure has been done from a standing point far above the outline cast on the floor. In the left upper corner of the painting Brauner represented the convergence of three of the planes of the pictorial cube suggested by the room in which the figure sits or stands. A state of unease is induced in the viewer by this left upper corner that reminds us that spirit materializations take place in poorly lit rooms. Moreover, adds Richet in the *Treatise*, a corner of the scene under scrutiny always remains in shadow.¹²³

The spiritualistic atmosphere of composition in both *We Are Betrayed* and *Portrait of André Breton* is emphasised by the illumination of the scenes described. In the particular way in which the light is cast and the colour shaded we read the elements that unify and at the same time divide the representational space of each painting. The light green colour of the floor in the background of *Portrait of André Breton* is correspondingly mirrored in the left side of the foreground in *We Are Betrayed*. The fluorescence of the confined space in the work as well as of the room that contains the figure in *Portrait of André Breton* suggests a space continuum between the two works. Moreover, the incidence of light on the left upper corner of the scene in *Portrait of André Breton* allows us to imagine sliding the portrait and superimposing it on the left side of the composition in *We Are Betrayed*. This suggestive interplay between

¹²² Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 611.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

paintings might have been the reason for a suppression that took place within the composition of *Portrait of André Breton*. At some point in time the disquieting left upper corner went hidden under a massive framework that left imprints in the paint layer of the work.

If Brauner had chosen in 1934 to represent a split séance that could be reassembled through a cinematic process common to both paintings, we can infer that the painter had read with great interest the article by Maurice Heine that appeared in the same year in *Minotaure* and established a connection between the category of *the fantastic* and the evolution of the *roman noir* in English and French literature.



Fig. 1.15 *The Luminous Larva (Le ver luisant)*, 1933, oil on canvas, 50 x 61 cm; gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

All that we can rely on in interpreting these two artworks in connection regards Breton's testimony on the influence of Brauner's work upon his inner self in 1934. On 28th of

November 1934 Breton finished a text for Brauner's first one-man show in Paris. The exhibition was taking place between 7th and 23rd of December at the Galerie Pierre in Paris and *Portrait d'André Breton* and *Nous sommes trahis* were on display along with other examples of Brauner's preoccupation with occultism like *The Luminous larva* (1933) and *Pivot of the thirst* (1934).

In 1986 an important part of Victor Brauner's work entered the collections of Réunion des musées nationaux through a bequest of Jacqueline Victor-Brauner. The 1934 exhibition catalogue lies among other works in the painter's library at Pompidou Centre in Paris. The introduction that Breton had written for Brauner's exhibition at Galerie Pierre was reprinted in the 1945 edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*.¹²⁴ Breton had titled *White rose bunch* the contribution he had made to the exhibition catalogue. The title were allegedly words he heard in a dream he had the night before writing the essay. Breton recognised in his dream the voice as that of Victor Hugo. The nineteenth century writer had restored his memory and a line from a forgotten poem of his own erupted in Breton's unconscious mind. The analogy between the writer's and the painter's forename make the choice for Victor Hugo, stated Breton. The overall setting of the dream related by Breton suggests a séance attended when asleep. A voice transfer characteristic to a séance occurred. Through the figure of citizen Bonnet, a contemporary case at the time in the news, the voice of Victor Hugo had reached Breton:

Botte rose blanche tel est le vers sur la fraîcheur ou le parfum duquel, en rêve, la nuit dernière, attirait mon attention Victor Hugo, un Victor Hugo ressemblant fort à ce Bonnet, inculpé de l'assassinat d'une foraine, qui passe actuellement en jugement.¹²⁵

Bonnet has been on trial in the days preceding the writing of the essay for Brauner's exhibition. His intrusion into Breton's activity of the mind while he was asleep has taken on the slight homonymy of the two men's surnames: Bonnet and Brauner. The remnants of daily activity when browsing through the newspaper at a time when on focus was the Bonnet affair

¹²⁴ André Breton, 'Botte rose blanche' in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 121-2.

¹²⁵ 'White rose bunch goes the verse, and it was Victor Hugo who was drawing my attention to its freshness or perfume, last night – in my dreams, a Victor Hugo who looked remarkably like the man Bonnet who is on trial at the moment for the murder of a female fairground attendant.' André Breton, 'White rose bunch' in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), p. 121.

combined with the homonymy element resurfaced in the night. We cannot dismiss the possibility that the content of the dream reported by Breton was invented in order to bridge the references that could not be conciliated in relation to Brauner's work. Heavily relying on the processes that had taken place at the level of the unconscious, Breton's introduction to the exhibition catalogue maintained at the same time a strong reference to the occult as regards Brauner's work. If Breton wanted to accommodate the occult aspect discernible in Brauner's work with a more psychoanalytical approach to it, this was irreconcilable with the development of psychoanalytical ideas. In Freud's perspective, occult phenomena could not be mixed with psychoanalysis in attempting to understand the processes taking place at the deepest layers of the mind.

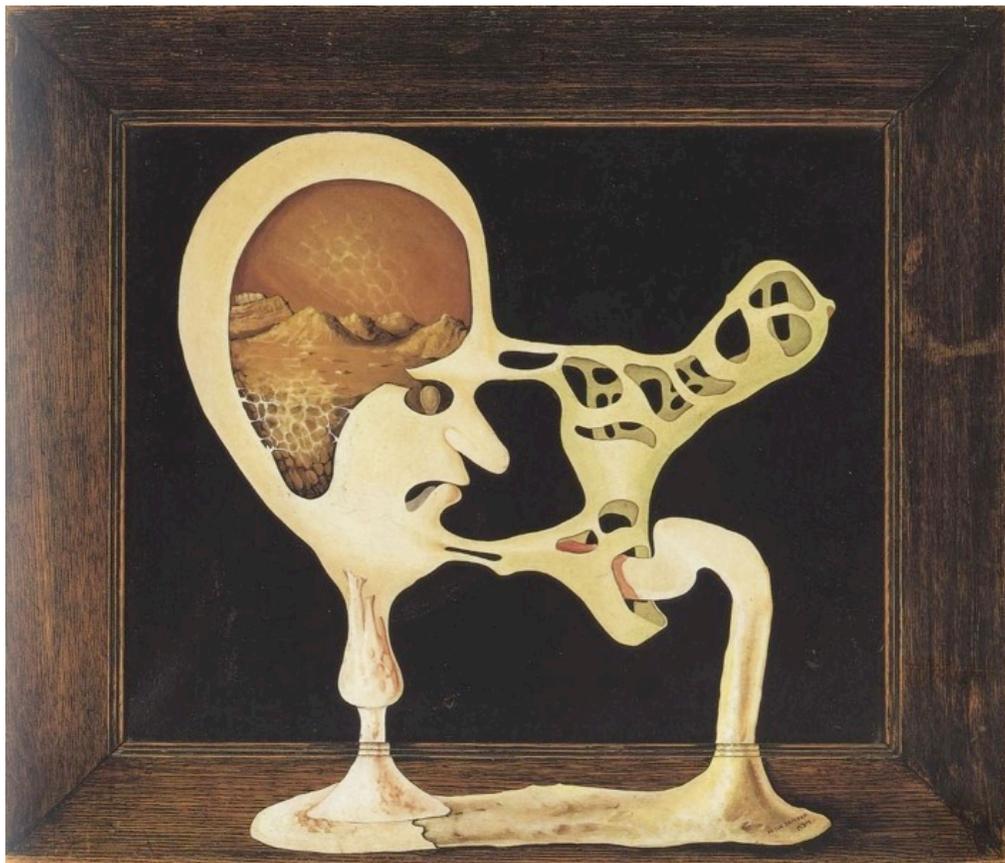


Fig. 1.16 *Pivot of the Thirst (Pivot de la soif)*, 1934; oil on canvas with painted frame, 50.8 x 59 cm; private collection.

In the book *Surrealism and the Sacred* of 2003, Celia Rabinovitch¹²⁶ refers to the Occult Revival in Vienna of late nineteenth century and to the fact that Freud might have been influenced at the beginning of his work by this interest that has surfaced in the public sphere. Rabinovitch relies on a 1970s detailed account of the influence of the occult that spread throughout Europe and in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, *The Occult Establishment* (1976), in which James Webb looked at the re-emergence and spread of the occult at the turn of the twentieth century and devoted a chapter to the interrelation between Freud and the occult practitioners of the time.¹²⁷ Freud admitted the inference in the 1921 essay *Psychoanalysis and Telepathy* and the occultists also apparently expressed their interest in the research conducted by the Viennese physician:

To this day, psychoanalysis is regarded as savouring of mysticism, and its unconscious is looked on as one of those things between heaven and earth which philosophy refuses to dream of. The numerous suggestions made to us by occultists that we should cooperate with them show that they would like to treat us as half belonging to them and that they count on our support against the pressure of exact authority. [...] Alliance and cooperation between analysts and occultists might thus appear both plausible and promising.¹²⁸

Yet Freud's initial interest developed into a strong aversion as his investigations into the unconscious developed and psychoanalysis established itself as a science. Jung recalls in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* that Freud had asked him 'never to abandon the sexual theory. That is the most essential thing of all. You see, we must make a dogma of it, an unshakable bulwark.' A perplexed Jung questioned him: 'A bulwark – against what?' Freud answered 'Against the black tide of mud – and here he hesitated for a moment, then added – of occultism.'¹²⁹ In spite of the warning, Freud's disciple deserted the ranks in a quest for a collective unconscious, by which he would later explain the formation of myths based on his theory of archetypes. This way of approaching the inner functioning of the mind proved a

¹²⁶ Celia Rabinovitch, *Surrealism and the Sacred: Power, Eros, and the Occult in Modern Art* (Boulder, Colo.; Oxford: Westview, 2003), p. 125.

¹²⁷ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1976), p. 371-87.

¹²⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Psychoanalysis and Telepathy,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18 (London: 1955), p. 18.

¹²⁹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Aniela Jaffé (ed.), translated by Richard and Clara Winston (London: Collins and Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 147-48.

better match for Brauner's own preoccupation with a layer of thinking that gives rise to the same sequence of images regardless the individual's affiliation to one culture or another. He valued in the 'primitivism'¹³⁰ that marked his work throughout the 1950s, a period of creation that coincided with his 'estrangement from Surrealism,' Jung's contribution to a collective unconscious of humankind.¹³¹ Five titles by Jung are to be found in the library of the painter preserved in the Special Collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and may be significant that there is no book by Freud there.¹³²

b. *White rose bunch*: Breton's psychoanalytical approach to Brauner's work

In the effervescent years of the 1930s the surrealists weren't concerned with defining methods of investigation of the unconscious that would be coherent in their terms. Consequently, in Breton's essay for Brauner's exhibition in December 1934 a mingling of references to the psychoanalytical approach to the work as well as to spiritualist phenomena to which the iconography leads can be discerned. Before explicitly bringing Freud's theories to bear upon Brauner's work, Breton gives inevitable attention to the phrase he had chosen as the article's heading. Over the next few years, this quote from Victor Hugo's forgotten poem, *White rose bunch*, would be associated with Brauner's name. Fulfilling the function of a nickname, it

¹³⁰ Didier Semin, "Victor Brauner and the Surrealist Movement," in *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, p. 39.

¹³¹ Victor Brauner, « J'ai l'impression que, poussé par des forces très mystérieuses devant ce monde anarchique de la raison et des éthiques rigoureuses, je me trouve devant une espèce d'exhibitionnisme généreux, où j'assume involontairement le jeu extravagant de l'archaïsme permanent auquel je crois, qui existe en substrat, à la base (...) », « Tout en composant devant nous un de ses tableaux, Victor Brauner nous révèle la force étrange qui le pousse à peindre », interview with Alain Jouffroy in *Connaissance des Arts*, no 107, January 1961, republished in Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, Éditions Filipacchi, 1990), p. 117.

¹³² Among the five titles signed by Jung in Brauner's library, even the editions are from early 1950s and 1960s when the painter adopted a more synthetic style in tune with his thematic on primordial themes, two works can be selected because of their particular interest on the myth: *Métamorphoses de l'amé et ses symboles* (Genève: Librairie de l'Université, 1953) and *Un mythe moderne: des "signes du ciel"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961).

designated Brauner in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* of 1938¹³³ - It became a Surrealist practice to assume such a 'nickname' and all of the Surrealists in the *Dictionnaire* are denoted by a specific construction. The origin of Brauner's is explicated in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue in 1934. Breton's words read:

Comme je m'étais endormi en songeant à Victor Brauner et aux quelques mots de présentation qu'exigeait de moi la très prochaine exposition de ses toiles, je pense que *Botte rose blanche* exprime synthétiquement le goût que je puis avoir de celles-ci (la légère altération auditive: Brauner - Bonnet, et la persistance du prénom: Victor, permettent à elles seules l'identification). Ce qui m'enchanté ce matin est de garder intacte la sensation de plaisir que me causa ce vers, extrait savamment par Hugo d'un long poème que j'ai oublié.¹³⁴

The association that Breton makes between a work of art, in particular a painting that would address the viewer's subjectivity by means of vision, and a different and unexpected sense, the smell, recalls the Romantic theory of correspondences. The influence of Baudelaire's work upon Breton's definition of the path taken by Surrealism represented a pinnacle that he will recognize and bring into discussion, in the mid 1940s, in his conferences in Haiti. Breton will refer to the theory of correspondences in direct relation to Baudelaire's poem *Correspondences*. Moreover, he based a new technique of painting, *le cirage*, developed in the early 1940s, on the theory of correspondences. The fact that in 1934, two years after Brauner's official membership of the Surrealist group in Paris, Breton suggested a complementary sense besides vision to reinforce his reaction when faced with Brauner's work which gives evidence to the position that Brauner's work fulfilled from the beginning in

¹³³ André Breton, Paul Eluard (eds), *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (Paris: José Corti, 1980[1938]), p. 73. It was originally published by Galerie des beaux-arts in 1938 to accompany an international exhibition on surrealism.

¹³⁴ André Breton, '*Botte rose blanche*' in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 121, and English translation 'Since I had fallen asleep thinking about Victor Brauner and the few words of introduction I was due to provide for his forthcoming exhibition, I think that *White rose bunch* expresses synthetically the taste I have acquired for his paintings (the slight resemblance between the sounds Brauner Bonnet, and the persistence of the first name, Victor, are sufficient in themselves to provide the pattern of identification). What delights me this morning is the realization that I have retained intact the sensation of pleasure that was afforded me by this verse borrowed deliberately by Hugo from some long poem, which I have forgotten.' in *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 121.

Surrealist preoccupations as well as to the status Brauner rapidly acquired in the alignment of the Surrealist group.

The persistence when he had woken up of a pleasurable sensation provoked by means of the declaimed verse, *White rose bunch*, brings the discussion to the subject of hallucinations involving various senses of the human body. Breton reported that the words recited to him from a forgotten poem were capable of bringing about the sensation produced by a scented white rose bunch.

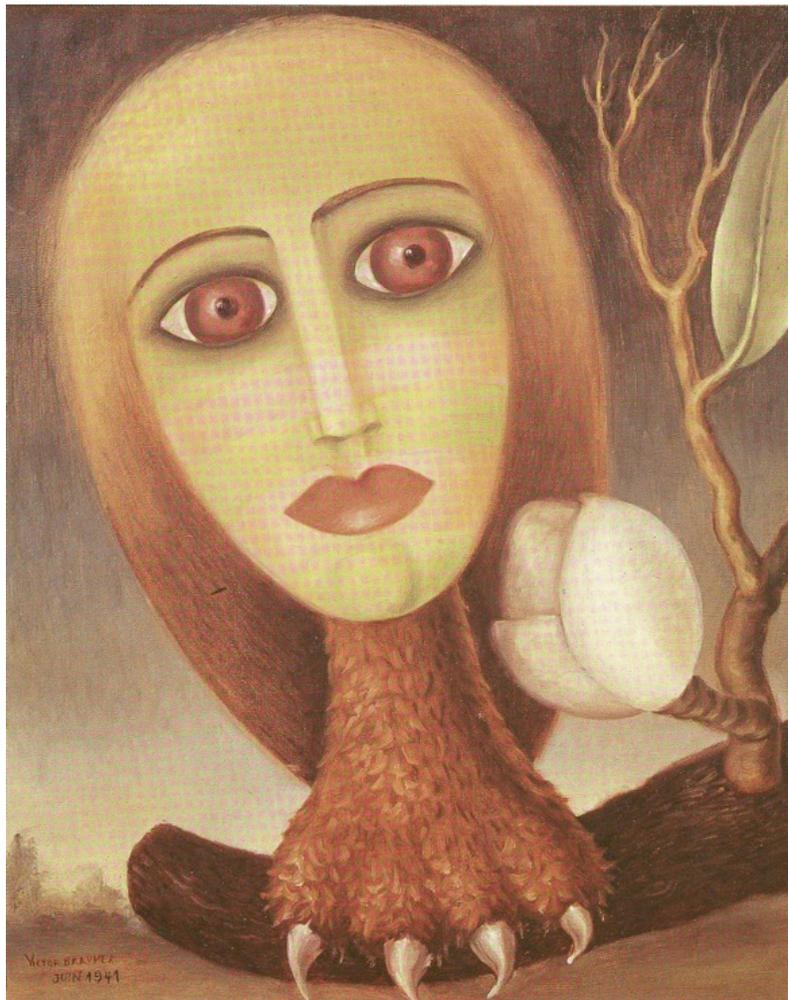


Fig. 1.17 *Chimera (Chimère)*, 1941 oil on canvas, private collection.

The poet recalled the perfume of white roses dispersed in his dream and his ability to smell it. In the psychological climate of the epoch this was a common instance of olfactive hallucination. In *Le Surréalisme et le rêve*, the study devoted to the relationship established

between the surrealism and the dream, Sarane Alexandrian drew attention to the influence exerted by the work of Alfred Maury upon psychoanalysis, and surrealism as well. Freud and Breton, in their instance as the leading figure of both, were well informed about Maury's research. Maury, a nineteenth century precursor in the domain of interpreting dreams, had written *Le Sommeil et les rêves* in 1861 based on self-observation. He associated the dream with a 'délire passager' to which we are constantly exposed. Maury believed that the sleeper's consciousness is intermittently disrupted by dreams that have the same origin as manifestations of the pathological condition of the mind. It was a difference of degree that Maury discerned between the dream and pathology. His major contribution to the psychological approach to the dream was the description of what he had coined as 'hypnagogic hallucinations.' They could occur in the state of half-consciousness that immediately precedes falling asleep or comes shortly after awaking. Hypnagogic hallucinations are usually images, but can also be perceived as 'fantastic sensations' in the terminology applied to them by Maury.¹³⁵ The latter instance is the one to which Breton refers while describing the lasting sensation produced by the aroma of white roses in the morning following the night of his dream related to Brauner's painting.

Nevertheless, he indicates Freud and his studies in the domain of inner perception in connection with disturbances of the senses. Because the state of consciousness is maintained during these periods of time, Breton was able to recall a sensation experienced by means of the imagination. Maury's work *Le Sommeil et les rêves* of 1861 consolidated its author's Parisian reputation as a psychologist. When Freud was introduced to a French audience in 1911, recollects Alexandrian, his work was described in connection with Maury's investigation into the domain of the dream.¹³⁶ Breton brings contemporaneous research led by Freud to bear upon his reading of Brauner's work. Once more, Breton confesses to a strong psychological reaction at his encounter with the painting. He concedes that it took place at the level of the unconscious. Consequently, Brauner's work acquires in Breton's case the property of changing his level of 'force énergétique.'

¹³⁵ 'Ces images, ces sensations fantastiques se produisent au moment où le sommeil nous gagne, ou quand nous ne sommes qu'imparfaitement réveillés.' Alfred Maury, *Le Sommeil et les rêves: Études psychologiques sur ces phénomènes* (Paris: Didier et Cie, 1878, [1861]), p. 240.

¹³⁶ Alexandrian, *Le Surréalisme et le rêve*, p. 25.

Cette sensation est le type même de celles que fournit, dans les états troubles de la conscience, la perception interne et sur l'importance desquelles Freud a vivement insisté. Elle me donne la mesure du pouvoir inconscient que peut exercer sur moi l'œuvre de Brauner. Cette œuvre est donc de nature à provoquer en moi une modification appréciable de la force énergétique.¹³⁷

The modification in the energy level that Breton perceives in contact with Brauner's work has its source in the mechanism of the imagination that can be triggered by a painting or generally speaking, by a work of art. The viewer's imagination responds to the materialised images or objects attained by the artist in the process of embodying his or her visions. In Brauner's case, his painting up to 1934 proves that the painter had by then reached an unlimited reservoir of images hovering between the physical world and the world of the beyond. Breton recognized this ability of Brauner's to capture images that are highly Surrealist from one point of view, but on the other hand pertain to the occult. Brauner entered the Surrealist group in Paris imbued with the type of imagination that Breton identifies as 'unchained' at the level of constructing an image. The painter devoted his work to the application of imagination in a way that was furthermore more excessive than the other approaches undertaken by his friends and colleagues, the Surrealists:

L'imagination chez Brauner est violemment déchaînée; elle brûle et tord les filières par lesquelles le surréalisme même est tenté parfois de la faire passer, à des fins systématiques d'ailleurs admissibles.¹³⁸

The next point issue raised by Breton in his presentation concerns its characterisation by the epithet 'fantomatique' or 'ghostly', to use the literal English translation. In spite of this

¹³⁷ André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 121. For English translation see André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 121. 'This sensation, which is absolutely typical of those provided by man's inner perception at times when the conscience is disturbed, and the importance of which has been emphasized by Freud, demonstrates the extent of the unconscious power that Brauner's work is capable of exercising over me. His work thus has the capacity to induce in me a perceptible alteration in the level of my kinetic energy.'

¹³⁸ André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, pp 121-2, translated into English in *Surrealism and Painting*, pp 121-2. 'With Brauner, the imagination is unleashed with brutal force, scorching and wrenching the very ties through which surrealism is sometimes tempted to thread it, but for systematic reasons that are in fact perfectly permissible.'

fact, the 2002 English version of Breton's text opted for a less suggestive and more ambiguous meaning of the word, i.e. 'phantasmal.'¹³⁹ The ghostly attribute came in tandem with the hieratic one in order to define the painting of the Romanian Jewish artist. Breton implied that these elements are a consequence of the overall automatic characteristic of the work. In the early 1940s, hidden away in a remote village in the Hautes-Alpes, at Les Celliers de Rousset, Brauner incorporated the automatic element discerned by Breton in his earlier work into a new technique of painting that used beeswax and a dichotomous system of revealing the image. The painter named this procedure *le cirage*, probably echoing one of the best known of Surrealist techniques: *le frottage*. Applying it to his work in the 1940s made manifest the same concern of the painter as in his works from the 1930s with the embodiment of creatures that lead a complementary existence in the world of the *au-delà*.¹⁴⁰

In 1934 Breton had drawn attention to this particular type of representation that in time became Brauner's hallmark:

Le hiératique, le fantomatique et l'automatique qui se les disputent ne sont pas pour nous faire oublier la grande et primitive inquiétude dont ils sont issus : le désir et la peur président en effet, excellence, au jeu qu'ils mènent avec nous, dans le cercle visuel très inquiétant où l'apparition lutte crépusculairement avec l'apparence. Il s'agit de savoir à chaque seconde qui l'emportera de l'instinct sexuel et de l'instinct de mort. La peinture remarquablement libre de Brauner nous fait assister, peut-être comme aucune autre, à ce combat singulier.¹⁴¹

Breton wrote an account of Victor Brauner's work in December 1934 for the first exhibition that the painter was given in Paris at Galerie Pierre. The theoretician of Surrealism

¹³⁹ André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, translated by Simon Watson Taylor; introduced by Mark Polizzotti (Boston Mass.: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2002).

¹⁴⁰ The *au-delà* expression as a reference to the other world already occurred in Baudelaire's poetry such as *Le Poison, Le Voyage*, 'aux rives de la mort.' See Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Claude Pichois (ed.), (2 vols, Paris: Gallimard, 1975-6).

¹⁴¹ André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p 122, translated in English in *Surrealism and Painting*, p 122. 'The hieratic, phantasmal and automatic elements jostling each other for supremacy should not allow us to forget the great and primitive disquiet from which they have emerged. In fact, it is essentially desire and fear that preside over the game they are playing out in our presence, in that extremely disquieting visual arena in which *apparition* does twilight battle with *appearance*. We are concerned each second to know whether the sexual instinct or the death instinct will triumph. Brauner's remarkably free art grants us almost unexampled facilities to witness this strange conflict.'

immediately discerned the potential of the Romanian Jewish artist and supported the interplay between reality and imagination in his work, only that the imagination in the case in discussion applied to a different kind of reality, the one of the apparition-like phenomena, that for Surrealists was a cogent argument. Breton attributed three qualifiers to the work of Victor Brauner that recollected the main registers of perception on which it functions: it is hieratic as it mobilises concepts and meanings that remain hidden at a superficial reading; it refers to the spirit world as the poet used the ‘fantomatique (‘spectral’ or ghostly)’ appellation instead of the ‘fantasmal’ one that appeared in English translation; and makes use of automatic techniques that Breton associated with the painter’s work in 1934.

f. The tomb of Julia Hasdeu in Bucharest

The world of the beyond was a constant reference point in the work of the Romanian Jewish artist. In an effort to decode his compositions in painting or three-dimensional space, recent critics, notably Didier Semin in his 1990 monograph on Brauner’s work, has taken into account his formation years as an artist in Bucharest. Brauner started to manifest a compelling attraction to painting at a very early stage of modelling his personality. As soon as his interest had arisen, it was combined with a propensity towards occult phenomena. His father’s belief in Spiritualism and the séances that took place in their house must have left their mark on young Brauner’s imagination. Therefore, it shouldn’t surprise us to note that Brauner pursued self-taught painting lessons in the Bellu cemetery of Bucharest, while still a teenager, in 1916, when he had reached the age of thirteen.¹⁴² The hermetic symbols engraved by the Romanian linguist Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu in 1891 on a sepulchre given to his daughter, the young poetess Julia Hasdeu, had taken hold of Brauner’s attention long before his enrolment in the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest. His attendance at the courses of this institution began in 1919, but in a climate of mounting European anti-Semitism that Romania experienced in its own political spheres, he was expelled in 1921 for allegedly nonconformist behaviour.

¹⁴² Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux-Filipacchi, 1990), p. 20.

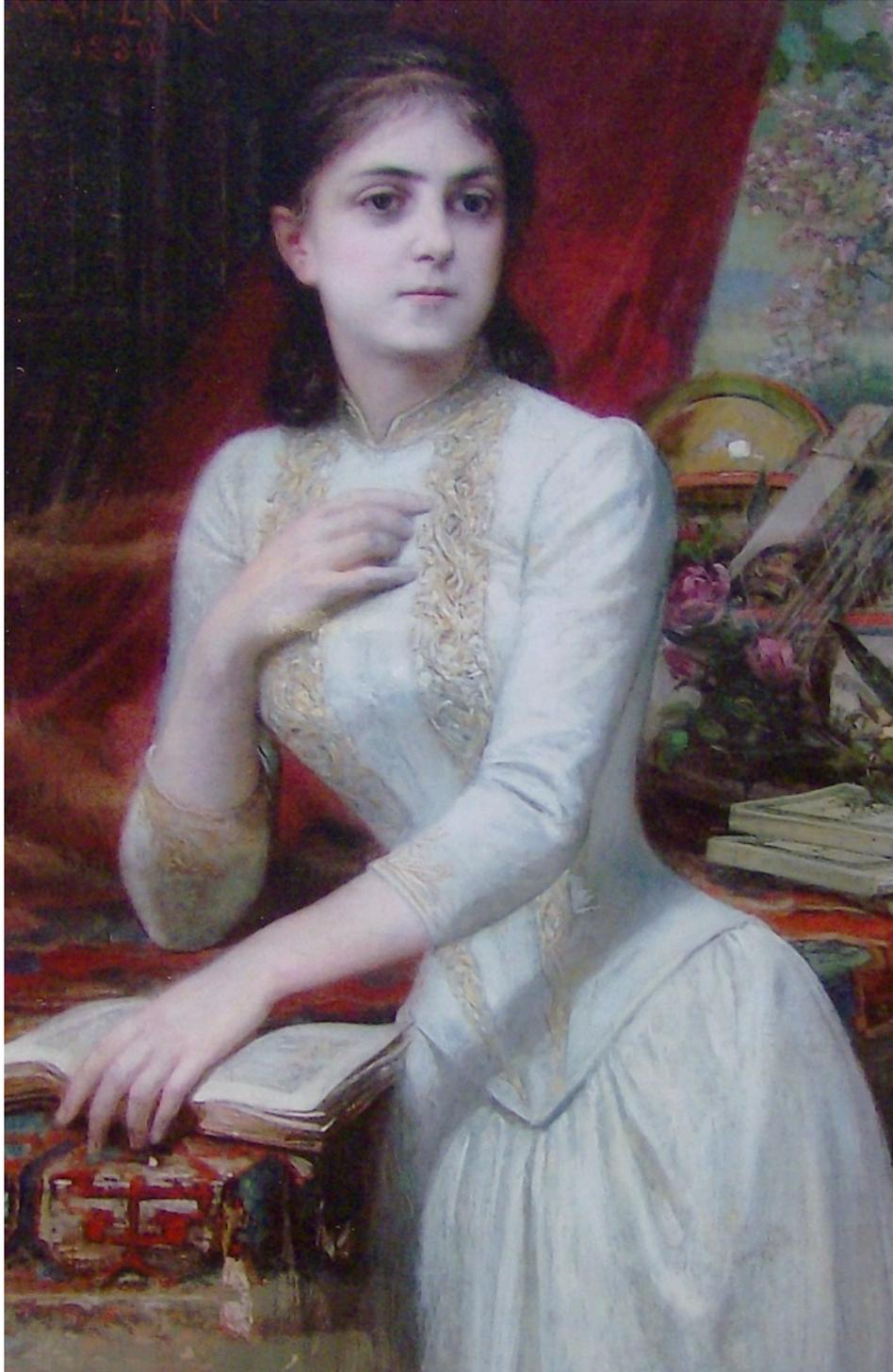


Fig. 1.18 Diogène Maillard, *Julia Hasdeu*, 1889, B. P. Hasdeu Collection, Câmpina, Romania.

The early encounters with the signs carved on the tomb of Julia Hasdeu will latter recur in the replica he would give to them in his own painting *Paysage méditerranéen* of 1932.

Meanwhile, Brauner's investigations into the realm of the occult advanced, although it is likely that the episode of the young Romanian poetess had left an indelible trace on his consciousness of the *au-delà* phenomena as it is documented in two portraits of Julia Hasdeu realised in the early 1940s: *Head of a Woman with Bridge on the Hair (Tête de femme avec pont sur la tête)* (1942) and *The Passage (Le Passage)* (1945).

Her father, Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu, was a distinguished linguist in the nineteenth century Romanian cultural establishment. An enduring presence in public affairs, he became director of the State Archives in 1876. At the time of embarking on the first comprehensive study of sixteenth century popular tales in Romanian, *Words of the Ancestors (Cuvinte den bătrâni)*, he was also appointed professor of philology at the University of Bucharest.

In the first volume of this monumental work, published in 1878, Hasdeu tried to recover the evolution of Romanian language from public and private documents, dated between 1550-1600, which he reprinted with extensive annotations. The second volume published in 1879 was devoted to a reprint in Latin transliteration of a *codex* of apocryphal stories. A priest in a village from Alba county of Transylvania transcribed the collection of hagiographies and apocalyptic tales, known as *Codex Sturdzanus*, between 1580 and 1619. Hasdeu used the *codex* as basic material for his abundant erudite work in the philological studies added to the volume.

His daughter, Julia, was one of the most remarkable minds of her time. At the age of sixteen she became the first Romanian female student to attend the courses of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at Sorbonne in Paris. Her literary works *Bougeons d'avril (Buds of April)*, *Chevalerie (Knighthood)* and *Théâtre: Légendes et contes (Theatre: Legends and tales)* were published posthumously by the Hachette publishing house in Paris. Two years after studying at Sorbonne she was afflicted with tuberculosis, and died months later in the same year, 1888. Unwilling to lose contact with his daughter Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu engaged in mediumistic experiences. One day about six months after his daughter's death, he traced automatically, as he asserted, a few words from the world of *au-delà*. He recognized in them Julia's handwriting and was convinced that it was a contact with the beyond world. He spent the rest of his life in communion with Julia's soul which he unceasingly conjured up.

His academic application drove him to keep a record of the séances in which he participated. The collected reports are preserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy in

Bucharest. Between 1891 and 1892, Hasdeu wrote *Sic cogito*, his philosophical approach to Spiritualism. In spite of all of the written evidence, if we can take them in consideration as such, his actions under the guidance of Julia's spirit are far more surprising.¹⁴³ The tomb in the Bellu cemetery in Bucharest was built between 1889 and 1891 following transmitted messages from the world of the au-delà. Hasdeu often fulfilled the office of medium for these messages. Victor Brauner had seen the tomb in 1916.¹⁴⁴ By then it had become the mausoleum of the Hasdeu family, and it would have been recent history as Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu passed away in 1907. A detail in the tomb's architecture had drawn Brauner's attention. The young artist seems to have engraved it in his memory and in the 1940s while taking refuge in the Hautes-Alpes, he revisited it in few studies.

In order to enter Julia Hasdeu's burial chamber in Bucharest, the visitor has to descend a ten-step ladder whose second half could be folded up and fastened like a medieval *pont-levis*.¹⁴⁵ Brauner used this detail in works from the 1940s that give no reference in the title to the identity of the woman represented in them. By comparison with the portrait (1889) by Diogène Maillard in the B. P. Hasdeu Collection, in Câmpina, we can ascertain that Brauner represented Julia Hasdeu in the two portraits of the early 1940s. As he often represented women with fantastic creatures entwined in their coiffures, the version of an adolescent bearing a bridge on her forehead or high above her hairstyle has been overlooked. The structure of the bridge in Brauner's variants comprises three to five pillars over which runs a semicircular balustrade. These elements could refer to the mobile section of the ladder for the tomb in the Bellu cemetery. Equally, Brauner evokes the features of Julia Hasdeu in *Le Passage* of 1945, and in the related drawings from the 1940s, recognisable from the portrait made of her by Maillard, her painting teacher in Paris. The portrait has been reproduced above. It depicts the daughter of the academic in a Romantic interior scene of reading, but surprised and pointing herself with the index of her right hand as if she has just been called from outside of the representational space.

¹⁴³ Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu, *Sic Cogito: Ce e viata? – Ce e moartea? – Ce e omul? (Sic cogito: What is life? – What is death? – What is the man?)*, Bucuresti: Administratia 'Revista nouă,' 1892.

¹⁴⁴ Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁵ Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu, *Sic Cogito: Ce e viata? – Ce e moartea? – Ce e omul? (Sic cogito: What is life? – What is death? – What is the man?)*, Ionel I. Oprisan (ed.) (Bucuresti: Vestala, 2007), p. 136.

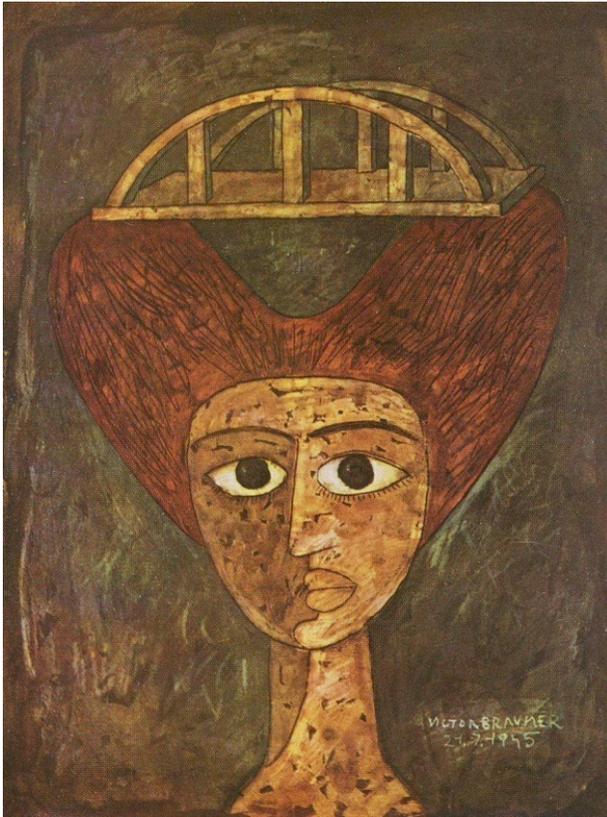


Fig. 1.19 *The Passage (Le Passage)*, 1945, encaustic, 65 x 50 cm, private collection.



Fig. 1.20 *Head of a Woman with Bridge on the Hair (Tête de femme avec pont sur la tête)*, 1942, drawing, private collection.

The painting is dated 1889 – the following year to the death of Julia Hasdeu. The subject matter of the artwork as well as the white dress in which she is draped in is a sufficient suggestion to the tragic event. The posture of the young woman engages the entire body in a spiral movement that might suggest that even in the familiar surroundings of her room she is prospecting for an existence in a dimension of reality that goes beyond the limits of representation. It reminds the viewer that Julia Hasdeu passed away after an agonising year 1888. Victor Brauner could have seen the portrait by Diogène Maillard and almost certain had visited the crypt in Bellu cemetery as the esoteric symbols displayed in the far background of *Mediterranean Landscape* (1932) are reproduced from the burial room for Julia Hasdeu in Bucharest. The painter referred again to the tomb in 1942 in a preparatory drawing for *Le Passage* (1945).



Fig. 1.21 Front door of the Hasdeu house in Câmpina, Romania.

Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu, the father of Julia, engrossed in séances after the death of his daughter had constructed the tomb in Bucharest and house in Câmpina under the alleged guidance of Julia. He used a drawbridge to descend into the tomb that Brauner recalled in *Le Passage* as a means of access to the burial place, but also as a metaphor for a journey into the spirit world that might have been understood, in the first place, by Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu too. A gap opens between the two worlds and a living person should bridge it – through mediumistic qualities displayed by the academic in the subsequent years of psychical

experiments – in order to get contact with the beyond world. Victor Brauner represented the mobile part of the set of steps either laid on the forehead of the young woman identified as Julia Hasdeu in the drawing of 1942 – based on her even disposition and melancholic regard in Diogène Maillard’s painting – or supported by a beehive hairdo in *Le Passage* of 1945. The incongruous encounter between a hairstyle and a drawbridge alludes to the Surrealist use of the free association process of thinking that in this particular case has one of the referents in the architectural detail of the tomb in Bucharest.

The scholar who meticulously collected documents in archaic Romanian in order to trace their linguistic transformations focused all of his attention after his daughter’s death on the world of the beyond. He progressively renounced all of his public responsibilities in the capital for a life in a house built for the living and the dead. His perseverance in recording documents had led him to constitute an archive of spiritualist phenomena.¹⁴⁶ Sketches of the architectural plan of the house he had built between 1893 and 1896 in Câmpina, a small town on the route from Bucharest to the Carpathian Mountains, as well as details of the sculpture pieces in situ, can be found in this archive.¹⁴⁷

The house has been designed for regular séances to take place there. Consequently, a room with the walls painted deep blue, almost black, known as *camera obscura* served as a meeting point for séances. Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu installed a camera in the room with the scope of documenting the presence of the spirit of his beloved daughter at the séances that he presided as a medium. No other conspicuous evidences have been obtained except the records of luminous glows on the sensitive photographic paper. An internal sequence of elements – from the labyrinth on the ceiling of the central tower of the building to inside doors made of iron railings – was displayed to canalise energies from the beyond. The ghost of Julia Hasdeu has purportedly been seen in the room, which has no means of communication between it and the adjacent room except for a circular, window-like, aperture. A fragment of the initial frescoed walls – repainted in 1962-64 – survived in the actual decoration of the *camera*

¹⁴⁶ Bogdan-Petriceicu Hasdeu, *Arhiva spiritistă (Spiritualist Archive)*, 4 vols, is stored in the Special Collections of the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, Romania.

¹⁴⁷ Jenica Tabacu, ‘Simboluri încifrate în arhitectura castelului Julia Hasdeu și mausoleul familiei,’ *Revista nouă (The New Review)* founded by B.P.Hasdeu in 1887), July-August 2004, http://dochia.bravepages.com/revista_noua/4Simboluri.htm

obscura at the *B.P.Hasdeu* Memorial Museum in Câmpina.¹⁴⁸ It depicts high above the opening in the wall the profile of a young woman with a stylish beehive hairdo that strikes the viewer due to its resemblance to Victor Brauner's bust of the figure in *Le Passage* of 1945.



Fig. 1.22 View of the room for séances in the house now the *B.P.Hasdeu* Memorial Museum in Câmpina, Romania.

The occult events surrounding Hasdeu family between 1889 and 1907 were probably common knowledge and well known to the young Victor Brauner. His father was a convinced Spiritualist and he had used a stay in Vienna to develop his knowledge of occult practices. The young painter reported séances in their house at which he furtively assisted¹⁴⁹ and this

¹⁴⁸ Jenica Tabacu, *Amurgul demiurgului: Ultimii ani de viata ai lui B.P.Hasdeu (The Twilight of the Demiurge: The Final Years of B. P. Hasdeu's Life)*, Bucuresti: Saeculum Vizual, 2007, pp. 181-82.

¹⁴⁹ « – Parmi vos souvenirs d'enfance, je crois que vous avez le souvenir de séances de spiritisme ? – Oui, mes parents faisaient du spiritisme, et alors, ce qui est frappant c'est que dans cette petite ville très lointaine où les hivers sont longs, les gens se réunissaient et ils

experience can be seen to have influenced his later paintings, especially those works from the 1930s in which representational space seems to be crossed by presences from the other world.

III. Surrealist appeal to *le roman noir*

a. Caillois' *Lettre à André Breton* of December 1934

Brauner's presence on the Parisian scene and his participation in collective exhibitions that promoted Surrealism internationally and at home, led in 1934 to his first solo exhibition in Paris at Galerie Pierre. His works were on display from seventh to twenty-third of December 1934. Several days after the exhibition closed, André Breton and Roger Caillois have had an evening conversation during which the situation of Surrealism emerged as a disputed subject. The meeting concluded in positions so divergent that Caillois the next day wrote a letter to Breton. Dated twenty-seventh of December 1934, this was published by Caillois in *Procès intellectuel de l'art* of 1935.¹⁵⁰ Caillois reproached Breton with a dualistic stance by which he was anchoring Surrealism in modalities of investigation that are far too opposed to one another: research, on one hand, with the intellectual *satisfactions* brought about by it, and poetry that the leading figure of the movement would not abandon due to its rewardingly outcomes:

Recently, the types of gratification I encountered while reading *Point du jour* made me definitively resign myself to seeing you with a foot in both camps: research and poetry

arrivaient à faire des choses extraordinaires. Nous, comme enfants, on regardait par le trou de la serrure, et par exemple, mon père qui était un chef, qui arrivait à hypnotiser, à mettre en léthargie un homme qui ne sait ni lire ni écrire, était une espèce de personnage hagar, comme cela, moi je l'ai vu se lever en l'air et j'ai vu que ce personnage qui n'a jamais su de sa vie, mon père lui disait : tu es Caruso et il chantait. Tu es ceci, et il s'identifier avec le personnage le plus extraordinaire historiquement. (...) », Françoise Dumayet in interview with Victor Brauner, *Terre des Arts*, 1961 republished in Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner*, note 18, p. 88.

¹⁵⁰ Roger Caillois, *Procès intellectuel de l'art: exposé des motifs* (Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1935). Reprinted in *Approches de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp 35-8.

(I am putting it crudely, of course, with no concern for nuance or overlap). After all, it was quite understandable – and considering your intellectual approach from the outset, I am tempted to write: it was all too understandable (meaning that Surrealism stems from a literary milieu) - that you should be inclined to strike an equal balance between the *satisfactions* offered by the first and the *jouissances* [pleasures] offered by the second, to use the two words arising almost simultaneously to our lips last night.¹⁵¹

Caillois preferred to situate Breton on the side of art in the attempt to avoid the ambiguous position discerned in the attitude of the poet. ‘So you are definitely on the side of intuition, poetry, and art – and of their privileges. Must I tell you that I prefer this kind of commitment to ambiguity?’ Breton was assigned a stance that would place Caillois’ definition of his own position at the opposite pole of approaching the irrational by means of scientific research.¹⁵² It was the effort of understanding the irrational that Caillois posited as the ultimate task of his own enterprise, as well as that of the Surrealists from whom he now felt disengaged, as he expressed in the letter he had written to Breton. Caillois refused to encounter the irrational in situations in which its presence would be based only on a preconceived act of belief. He claimed that irrational phenomena should also conform to a logical explanation. They cannot escape reason. The impossibility approaching them in a scientific manner illustrated the failure of a system that proved it was not ready to deal with the aleatory:

I want the irrational to be continuously overdetermined, like the structure of coral; it must combine into one single system everything that until now has been systematically excluded by a mode of reason that is still incomplete.¹⁵³

Caillois’ subsequent reference to Gaston Bachelard’s ‘new science of *why not* [*pour-quoi pas*],’ detailed in *Le Nouvel Esprit scientifique* of 1934, introduced the issue of the

¹⁵¹ Roger Caillois, *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, Claudine Frank (ed.) (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 84. The word given in square brackets exists in the English translation of the text.

¹⁵² « Il y aurait évidemment un énorme intérêt poétique à *isoler* ce résidu irrationnel. Mais pratiquement l’opération se révèle extrêmement délicate. Seul l’emploi simultané de méthodes différentes permettra per la comparaison des résultats d’arriver à quelque certitude. Malgré un certain manque de mise au point, les questionnaires surréalistes sont à considérer comme un première moyen d’investigation.’ Roger Caillois, ‘Spécification de la poésie,’ *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, no 5, May 1933. Reprinted in *Approches de l’imaginaire*, p. 16.

¹⁵³ *The Edge of Surrealism*, p. 85.

marvellous among the subjects of interest to science.¹⁵⁴ ‘Here we have a form of the Marvellous that does not fear knowledge but, on the contrary, thrives on it,’ states Caillois. The marvellous tended to be conflated with the irrational in the letter of Caillois to Breton. Caillois justified his withdrawal from the Surrealist group with his refusal to accept the emphasis placed by some of the people within the Surrealist group on the latter attitude:

And so I shall refrain from taking part in discussions where (unless I forced myself to be obliging) my outlook would be demoralising at best and irritating at worst – in any case, undesirable. Likewise, for me, it is just as intolerable (to say the least) to be compromised by the activities of Victor Brauner or Georges Hugnet, for example; or by the biographical poetry that is becoming prominent in Surrealist writing (poems by Maurice Heine about Sade, by Hugnet about Onan, by you, by Eluard, and by various others about Violette Nozières; even Rosey’s poem – epic poem – about you).¹⁵⁵

Victor Brauner was mentioned as being among those persons with whose activity or writing Caillois so strongly disagreed and possibly Brauner’s exhibition, which had just closed played a part in Caillois’ judgement of the painter’s work. Or else Brauner’s ‘activities’ in the 1930s in Paris involved much more than painting, and were well known in the Surrealist milieu. It could be the fact that Caillois’s reference to ‘Brauner’s activities’ was an indication of disapproval of his interest in the spiritualism and the Occult.

In this letter Caillois stressed the situation in which Surrealism found itself in 1934: an heterogeneous movement that absorbed far too many individual preoccupations for it not to give rise to ‘mutual concessions, if not repressions.’ In this climate Caillois’ decision to leave the Surrealist group seemed to have been reached through an inner necessity and desire for accuracy: ‘Nobody believes in intransigence or rigour any more,’ says Caillois almost concluding his letter. Nevertheless, he maintained his external support to Surrealist inquiry that converged with his own on ‘the technical study of the imagination,’ which he avows as being one of the subjects brought up in the discussion during his meeting with Breton.

Breton had recently treated the Romantic origins of research into the *modus operandi* of the imagination in the introduction he had written, in 1933, to the second French edition of

¹⁵⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *Le Nouvel esprit scientifique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1946), p. 126.

¹⁵⁵ *The Edge of Surrealism*, p. 86.

the *Contes bizarres* by Achim von Arnim.¹⁵⁶ Part of his text has been published as an article, *Centenaire d'Arnim*, printed in the sixth issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, in May 1933. Through the mediation of Xavier Léon's second volume to *Fichte et son temps* that appeared in 1927, Breton had referred to Fichte's 1880–1811 unit of lectures *Les Données de la Conscience* (*The Givens of the Consciousness*) at the University of Berlin. During these lectures the philosopher had detailed the three-stage process of perceiving the objects of outside reality in close relationship to one's subjectivity. The analysis of sensation had permitted him to discern a shift in the process of representation due to the intervention of the imagination in the process of configuring *the object*.¹⁵⁷ In this article, Breton would start to develop his understanding of *the object* on a broader literary and artistic scale that would lead to his own theory on the *Surrealist object*.¹⁵⁸ Originating the *Surrealist object* in the Romantic tradition, Breton secured its definition on psychoanalytical grounds in the lectures *Surrealist Situation of the Object* in Prague in 1935, and *Limites non-frontières du surréalisme* in London at the International Surrealist Exhibition at New Burlington Galleries in 1936.

Despite the complaint made by Caillois, it is striking that Victor Brauner agreed with him about the importance of research to the Surrealist enterprise. In an interview with Pierre Mazars, on the twenty-first of January 1965, Brauner maintained that research-based inquiry had always characterised the movement of Surrealism and he uses the same term 'rigour,' as employed by Caillois to describe the activity of Surrealist movement. If Caillois had reproached Breton and the movement with 'no rigour,' decades later Brauner assigned 'a high degree of rigour' to the research conducted by Surrealists. In addition, Brauner stressed the attribute of placing the Surrealist research on the course of promoting understanding of dream related processes. For him painting was one of many variables through which Surrealism exerted its scientific approach to human inner activities that can be related to imagination:

C'est un mouvement qui a apporté beaucoup sur le plan de la rigueur, de la connaissance onirique. Mais qu'on ne dise pas que je suis un peintre surréaliste. Et il

¹⁵⁶ Achim von Arnim, *Contes bizarres* (Paris: Éditions des Cahiers libres, 1933).

¹⁵⁷ Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, t. II, 2nd part (Paris: Armand Colin, 1927), p. 162.

¹⁵⁸ The Surrealist object is extensively analysed in two sub-sections of the third chapter of the thesis.

n'y a pas une « peinture surréaliste »; ça n'existe pas ! Il y a eu seulement un certaine peinture qui correspondait aux recherches des surréalistes.¹⁵⁹

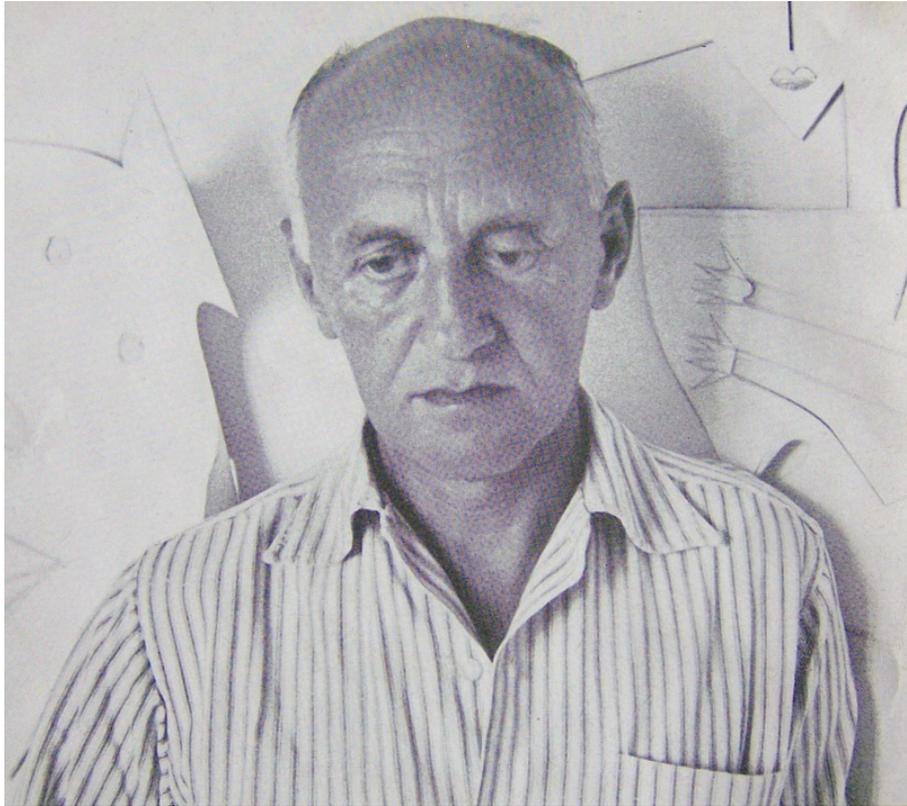


Fig. 1.23 *Victor Brauner*, photograph in the exhibition catalogue at the Galleria del Naviglio, Milano, 1958.

Despite the concerns of Caillois regarding the Surrealist understanding of the irrational and his doubts about Brauner, in the late 1950s and at the beginning of 1960s Caillois wrote extensively on *the fantastic* in a book-length study on fantastic art, *Au Cœur du fantastique*.¹⁶⁰ The introductory piece *Images, images*, to the third volume *Obliques* of the *Approches de l'Imaginaire*, took into account the development of *the fantastic* in popular culture.¹⁶¹ He would include the work of the Romanian Jewish artist in his *Au Cœur du fantastique*.

¹⁵⁹ Victor Brauner in 'Victor Brauner, peintre surréaliste,' interview with Pierre Mazars in *Le Figaro littéraire*, January 21, 1965.

¹⁶⁰ Roger Caillois, *Au Cœur du fantastique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

¹⁶¹ Roger Caillois, *Obliques* (Montpellier: Éditions Fata Morgana, 1967).

b. 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir' in 1934

Maurice Heine, 'the correspondent member of Surrealism,'¹⁶² who was also the revered editor of de Sade's work,¹⁶³ in 1934 wrote about the often-overlooked illustrations of the *roman noir* genre in French and English literature. The article 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir' appeared in the fifth issue of the *Minotaure* periodical. Heine's interest in surveying the main titles of the English *novel of terror and wonder* genre was aroused particularly by the illustrations that accompanied the storyline. Always included as a frontispiece, this illustration used engraving procedures like etching and aquatint but also chisel and *manière noire*. Being the work of either well-known or forgotten artists, the resulting prints complemented the work of writers such as Anne Radcliffe or others at times when the writer's talent, claimed Heine, failed to promptly stimulate the imagination of the reader. 'Le tempérament de l'artiste compte seul: le texte n'est qu'un prétexte,' concluded the critic.¹⁶⁴ He advanced the nomenclature of *surrromantiques* for the artists who undertook these illustrations. Based on the characteristics of the image, Heine applied four denominations to their work: the *gothique noir*, the *fantastique noir*, the *réalisme noir*, and the *burlesque noir*. The essential attributes of the composition were carefully described in order to permit clear distinctions between styles. The writing of Horace Walpole and Clara Reeve that have set the beginnings of the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century English literature was connected with the category of the *gothique noir* in which the medieval revival in the arts determined a theatrical setting of the illustration.¹⁶⁵ Heine derived the category of the *fantastique noir* from the one of the *gothique noir* in which he maintained that the elements of the marvellous discernible in the *gothique noir* illustrations resurfaced in a different context: the backdrop was a French Restoration décor which erased any reference to the Dark Age. Moreover, the ghosts and apparition-like phenomena that had

¹⁶² *The Edge of Surrealism*, p. 86.

¹⁶³ Apart from the appreciation of Heine in Surrealist context, Bataille had voiced in absence his esteem for Heine: 'There is something bleak, so hard to accept, about the fact that Maurice Heine has today stopped living.' Bataille's biographer, Michel Surya, advanced the thought that with Heine's passing away in 1940 Bataille had lost 'one of his links with Sade.' Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: An Intellectual Biography*, translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (London: Verso, 2002), p. 276.

¹⁶⁴ Maurice Heine, 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir,' *Minotaure*, no 5, 1934, p. 2.

¹⁶⁵ André Breton's collection of *roman noir* included a copy of the 1798 edition of Horace Walpole, *Le Château d'Otrante, histoire gothique* (Paris: Rochette, 1798).

characterised the *roman noir* of the Restoration period became the mark of the *fantastique noir* illustration. A characteristic that the painting of Victor Brauner in the 1930s shared with the illustration of the *roman noir* beside the equilibrium of the composition that appeared either in works that depicted an interior scene or in those that made reference to a landscape. The aim of following the evolution of the *roman noir* illustration up to the 1930s consists in comparing the two different mediums of expression in art in order to reveal affinities between them and to integrate Victor Brauner's work in the practice of *the fantastic* in visual arts.

Almost half of the images reproduced in the article were sourced from the *roman noir* collection owned by André Breton in 1934. At that time Breton's library included the 1797 French edition of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. The novel had won a well-deserved popularity to its author since 1796 when Joseph Bell first published it in London. Walter Scott (1771-1832), who appreciated Matthew Lewis (1775-1818) and befriended him, acknowledged the novel's widespread influence: '*The Monk* was so highly popular that it seemed to create an epoch in our literature.'¹⁶⁶

Breton's reference to Lewis' work in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924 reflected the general opinion about it throughout the nineteenth century. A reaction to the rationalism of the century, the *novel of terror and wonder* or the *gothic novel* has been regarded as a pre-Romantic enactment of the concern with the inner realities of the mind. The irrational side of the mind had manifested its drive in torments that are devastating the characters and are usually projected in correspondingly dramatic scenery. In the symbolic system of the novel, a shift could occur between the metaphorical and the literal sense of the events. The sharply cut edges of the mountains and the abysses beneath that appear at the beginning of the novel in the dream of some of the personages mirror the real appearance of the Spanish landscape in which the monk's punishment occurs at the end of the novel. The reader is gradually suffused with a feeling of amazement during this episode of levitation. Ambrosio, the monk, is abducted by powerful and unknown forces, hovers through the air so that he can reach his motherland, Spain, where he is released from the zenith to the rocks beneath in a characteristic turnabout of the *novel of terror and wonder* genre.

¹⁶⁶ Walter Scott, 'Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad,' in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1902).



Fig. 1.24 *The Punishment of the Monk (Le châtimeur du moine)*, frontispiece for *The Monk (Le Moine)* by Matthew Gregory Lewis (Paris, an V, 1797, 3 vol. in-12), André Breton Collection in 1934.¹⁶⁷

The engraving of the punishment of the monk has been reproduced in the article that Maurice Heine wrote for the fifth issue of *Minotaure* in 1934. As frontispiece to one of the three volumes of the French edition of Lewis' *The Monk*, the engraving was taken into account from the perspective of the *fantastique noir* type of illustration. Heine referred to Breton's copy of the Parisian edition of *The Monk* of 1797 for the 'The Punishment of the monk' engraving reproduced in 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir' article. In the genealogy of *the fantastic* that we are intent to trace here in connection to the Surrealist group and its environs we can notice Breton's use of *the fantastic* as regards Lewis' *The Monk* novel in the *Manifesto*

¹⁶⁷ The caption mirrors the original caption of the engraving in *Minotaure*, no 5, 1934, p. 3.

of *Surrealism* of 1924 as well as Heine's reference to *the fantastic* from the point of view of the qualities of the image that is associated to the text of the same novel written by Lewis. The re-emergence of *the fantastic* ten years after Breton's *Manifesto* in the article signed by Heine in 1934 could support the idea of a common interest as regards *le fantastique* in Surrealist context. Caillois had already recognized the affinities existing in 1934 between Heine and the Surrealist group.¹⁶⁸

Maurice Heine had also delineated *le réalisme noir* of the image from *le fantastique noir* characteristic of the illustration for *le roman noir*. The intervention of fantastic beings in human existence is no longer represented in visual terms, as materialization in coordinates of time and space, but rather through the influence exerted upon human behaviour. The setting of the scene has been actualised to a French Restoration interior as well as the fashion exhibited in the dress. Nevertheless, bewildered characters are acting as if receiving commands from the world of the beyond:

Parallèlement à la conception fantastique et parfois à son encontre, le *réalisme noir* tente de provoquer le frisson de terreur, non plus par la mise en scène d'êtres surnaturels, mais par l'évocation de forces invisibles auxquelles obéissent des personnages égarés.¹⁶⁹

A suggestive engraving from the 1815 edition of *Les Capucins ou le Secret du cabinet noir* by Madame de Méré at Bibliothèque Nationale de France was chosen as well to accompany the article 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir.' The image was considered to be representative of the *réalisme noir* of the illustration for *le roman noir*. A woman in high motion crosses an empty room that coincides with the pictorial cube represented in the engraving. The receding lines of the gridded floor suggest a perspective that appears to have its convergent point situated far beyond the left side end of the image. A wide open door is depicted on the right side of the composition. It has been performed as an opening towards the presupposed opacity that surrounds the pictorial cube of the engraving. The opening functions as a hint to the subject matter of the image. Under strange circumstances that support Heine's classification of the image in the category of the *réalisme noir* of the illustration for *le roman*

¹⁶⁸ *The Edge of Surrealism*, p. 86.

¹⁶⁹ Maurice Heine, 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir,' *Minotaure*, no 5, 1934, p. 3.

noir a female figure is dragged to the darkness beyond the open door into the unknown territories. Her face and body is rendered in a three-quarter stance that follows the lines of the perspective of the room represented in the engraving. The illusory hands that are leading her through the open door of the composition suggest a second perspective within the image. The incipient second perspective of the image tends to tear apart the cohesion of the representational space and support a development of the events on an elusive fourth-dimension.



Fig. 1.25 Frontispiece for *The Capuchins or The Secret of the Cabinet Noir* (*Les Capucins, ou le Secret du cabinet noir*), de Mme de Méré (Paris, 1815).

In 1934 Victor Brauner's preoccupations with the occult and its related phenomena were recognised by his fellows Surrealists. The painter had probably found Heine's article in *Minotaure* of fifteenth of May of interest. The categories of the *fantastique noir* and *réalisme noir* applied to the illustration of the Gothic novel were exemplified with reproductions of engravings from the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Victor Brauner could have been acquainted with this illustration. Works that are prior to 1934 display motifs that can be read in connection with the engraving for the Gothic novel.

The artist completed in 1934 two paintings that I previously analysed as interrelated: *Nous sommes trahis* and *Portrait d'André Breton*. Both works entered the then André Breton Collection. The canvas of *Nous sommes trahis* displays in the lower right corner a dedication: 'À André Breton Victor Brauner 1934.'¹⁷⁰ The other painting in the established relation, *Portrait d'André Breton*, can be retraced in the poet's art collection.

The composition of the engraving for the frontispiece to *Les Capucins ou le Secret du cabinet noir* that Maurice Heine had reproduced in 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir' could have influenced Brauner's play with the composition of *Nous sommes trahis* and *Portrait d'André Breton*. A combination of two different viewpoints from which the scene is depicted in *Portrait d'André Breton* meets the composition of the engraving. There are again two complementary viewpoints from which the subject matter is defined in *Nous sommes trahis*.

Breton is represented in a three-quarter portrait that recalls the stance of the character in the interior scene of the engraving. In contradiction with the perspective from which Breton's figure is rendered in emphasized foreground, the perspective upon the empty room behind him has its vanishing point on the upper left side of the painting. I have earlier suggested the possibility of the upper left side of *Portrait d'André Breton* to be seen as an invitation launched to the viewer to follow the receding lines of the floor into the floor of *Nous sommes trahis*. The subject matter of *Nous sommes trahis* is an alleged apparition phenomenon during a séance practice to which give evidence the table with an opened drawer surmounted by an attentive animal in the near centre-right position of the painting. A cast light over the left

¹⁷⁰ Laurence Calmels and Cyrille Cohen (eds), *André Breton: 42, rue Fontaine: Tableaux modernes sculptures, estampes, tableaux anciens*; auction catalogue, Paris, Drouot-Richelieu, 14-15 April 2003, Paris: CalmelsCohen, 2003, p. 130.

side of the image reveals a gathering of ordinary things under the seemingly influence of an unearthly presence.



Fig. 1.26 *Eminence of the Air (Prestige de l'air)*, 1934, oil on canvas, 146 x 113.5 cm; gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

These objects are wooden crafted, and their form supports the presumption of a bourgeois ambiance of living in Brauner's *Nous sommes trahis*. The invisible articulation of a coat hanger, a moulded shape for a hat, and the inner forms of high boots, combined with a red-cushioned chair, suggest an immaterial configuration within the parameters of the painting. The fleeting light that breaks into the composition and conflicts with the room's perspective reveals this unusual presence within the representational space. The viewer is lured to read the wooden assemblage as a spiritualist phenomenon. Seen from the perspective of the mesmerised dog within the composition, the armchair and its particular assemblage cast the shadow of a sat person in a cosy interior. The same attentive dog in a frontal posture this time is represented in *Seduction of the air* (1934) inviting the viewer to the reading of several paintings in the same vein of representation.

The influence of the illustration of the Gothic novel upon the Surrealist work of Victor Brauner can be discerned in another painting from the 1930s, the *Death of the Moon*. The analysis of the work that was completed in 1932 discloses a motif influenced by one of the engravings for the French edition of Lewis' *The Monk* of 1797. Brauner displayed in *Mort de la lune* an episode with a flying person that could bring back the image of the levitation of the monk in the final chapter of Lewis' novel. Propelled by the wind and holding an umbrella a dandy-like character is floating above the horizon in the *Death of the Moon* painting. The desert-like backdrop, a characteristic shared in the early 1930s with the work of his friend Tanguy, suggests the abysses of the Romantic engraving for *The Monk*.

The painting *Death of the Moon* was in the artist's possession during his lifetime. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner inherited it and after her death the work entered de Menil Collection in Houston, Texas. Dominique and John de Menil come in contact with Victor Brauner's work in the late 1940s. Brauner exhibited for the first time on American soil in April 1947 at Julien Levy Gallery in New York. The De Menils could have seen the exhibition, though Dominique de Menil who recalled the beginnings of their relationship with Brauner was unsure about this episode. The exclusive galleries in New York that promoted Surrealism in the 1940s were the Julien Levy Gallery and Peggy Guggenheim's *Art of This Century* Gallery. In the late 1940s both of them concluded activity. The art dealer that filled the gap for Surrealist work on the American scene was Alexander Iolas. In a conversation with Deborah

Veldes in 1992 Dominique de Menil indicated Iolas and his gallery as the starting point of their collection of Victor Brauner's work.



Fig. 1.27 *Death of the Moon (Mort de la lune)*, 1932, oil on canvas, 60,96 x 49 cm, Dominique and John de Menil Collection, Houston, Texas.

Dominique de Menil became Brauner's first patron and a close friendship developed over the years between the painter and the member of the Schlumberger family. In the late 1940s

Alexander Iolas who was promoting Brauner's work in the United States approached De Menils as results from Dominique de Menil's statement:

'Oh, I don't know ... He [Brauner] was recognized by a few people ... certainly Duchamp knew of him, Breton, and the minute Iolas adopted him as one of his painters, we knew him.'¹⁷¹

In the following years Brauner's work enriched the De Menils' art collection. The relation through an art dealer changed when Dominique and John de Menil visited the artist in his studio in Paris. A direct exchange has been established between the artist and his patrons. The De Menils acquired much of Brauner's work. In 1988 the last two paintings from the legacy of Jacqueline-Victor Brauner entered the De Menil Collection:¹⁷² *Mort de la lune* and *La porte I*. They were early Surrealist works that closed the circle of Brauner-De Menils relationship.

Several reasons can be suggested for the *Death of the Moon*'s persistence in the art collection of Victor Brauner. The reference to the representative title of the Gothic novel that Breton promoted in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924 was counterbalanced by the importance acquired by the work in retrospect to the painter's loss of sight of the left eye. That the *roman noir*'s imagery was debated in Surrealist contexts is proven by Brauner's work of 1932 and the Heine's article 'Promenade à travers le Roman noir' of 1934. Nevertheless, Brauner's interpretation of the frontispiece of *The Monk* is a parody of the abduction of the monk. The character is now floating with the help of an umbrella that replicates the batwings of the daemon in the engraving of 1797. To the humorous comment on the monk's levitation Brauner added a mention of his savage conduct. The painter displayed in the middle section of the composition a black suit powered by the energies of a green phantom. On the chest of the presumptive revenant a severed head is horridly gleaming. The apparition may refer to the scene of violent repression that concludes the enchantment of Ambrosio, the monk, with the image of Antonia. The combination of beauty and modesty that defines Antonia's character

¹⁷¹ Dominique de Menil, audio taped conversation with Deborah Velders, 21st October 1992, Menil Archives, referred to in Susan Davidson, *Introduction: 'Vivifying Presence'* in *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs* (Houston, Tex.: The Menil Collection, 2001), p. 12.

¹⁷² *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, p. 17, note 34.

renders her vulnerable to ‘his lustful delirium.’¹⁷³ Emma McEvoy suggested in the introduction to 1995 edition of *The Monk* that Matthew Lewis had eroticized the moral qualities of Antonia. The innocent character of Antonia is described by contrast with the promiscuous one of Matilda. The interpretation supported by McEvoy reassessed the critical reception of the novel. Samuel Coleridge examined soon after *The Monk*’s publication in 1796 the impact of the storyline upon the contemporaneous reader. The article appeared in *Critical Review* and stressed the novel’s visual attributes. The young author of the novel, Matthew Lewis, was praised for his capacity to act so powerfully upon the imagination of the reader. Coleridge emphasised that Lewis’ inventiveness had transformed Matilda’s ‘shameless harlotry,’ and Antonia’s ‘trembling innocence’ in ‘vehicles of the most voluptuous images.’¹⁷⁴ The popular dissemination of the novel led the author to be nicknamed after its title. Lewis was called ‘the monk’ and his sexuality was identified with the troubled sexuality of Ambrosio. The main character in the novel manifested an exquisite taste in art as result of repressed sexual drives. He had caught once by reflection in a mirror the nude image of Antonia. Her corporeality is effaced in the mirrored image and conflated with the pose of the Venus of Medici. Nevertheless, Ambrosio’s imagination cannot overcome the bodily residue of her image and in consequence Antonia is perceived as threatening his physical integrity. In addition, the corporeal condition of Antonia brings into play issues of decay and death that reflect upon the elusiveness of his desire. Ambrosio’s lucidity as regards his condition is comparable with de Sade’s oscillation between the image of pure woman and the inevitable frustration of its realization. The impossibility to complete sublimation of his unleashed desires had torn the monk apart and the final chapter of their relationship results in destruction of the woman’s image in the mind through rape. Her physical concealment by the consequent murder would only seal their entwined destinies in the consciousness of the reader.

¹⁷³ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* (3 volumes, London: J. Bell, 1796), vol. 3, p. 199.

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Coleridge, *Four Anonymous Reviews* (Bowles A Wiltshire Parson, 1926).



Fig. 1.28 Benvenuto Cellini, *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, 1545-53, bronze cast, Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence, Italy.

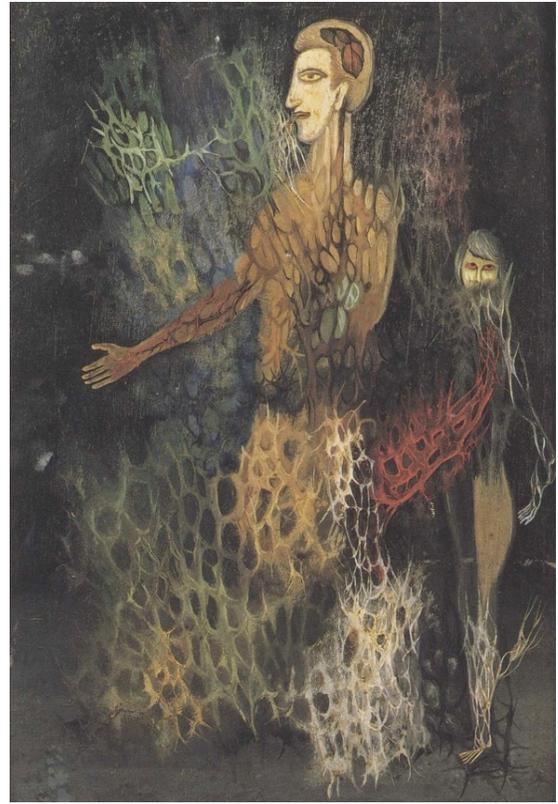


Fig. 1.29 Victor Brauner, « *Les siècles reculaient comme des ouragans* », 1932, oil on cardboard, 27 x 19 cm, gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner, Musée d'Art Moderne de St Étienne.

The image of Ambrosio and Antonia could have haunted Brauner's imagination. He might have represented them by conflation with the classical theme of Perseus and the Medusa. Two paintings from 1932 – *Death of the Moon* (*Mort de la lune*) and “*The centuries regressed as hurricanes*” (« *Les siècles reculaient comme des ouragans* ») – bear a resemblance to the depiction of the Greek myth. Brauner had used the connection between the male and female figure that establishes a sequential arrangement of the two in the composition. In “*The centuries regressed as hurricanes*” the foreground of the picture is invaded by a congregation of tissue-like structures that mould into the shape of a man with a raised hand followed closely by a wicked feminine figure. She points a red-eye look at the viewer while her presupposed left hand is covered in the same amassed structure that recalls the ectoplasm of séances and suggests the temporal dimension of the painting. A significant detail of the picture – a see-through image of the skull exposes the inner content of the head of the figure – conveys the subject matter of it: the evil presence that may be personified in the painting is unattainable in physical terms as the aloft hand of the male figure suggests, but it could be attained through the functioning of the mind. “*The centuries regressed as hurricanes*” may be related to *Death of the Moon* (1932), but also to *Perseus with the Head of Medusa* (1545-53) by Benvenuto Cellini, the latter a representation of the myth in a recurring version in which the uplifted head of the Medusa displays similar features to the ones of the hero himself, Perseus. In the *Death of the Moon* painting Brauner had chosen to make a reference to the ancient fiction by placing a severed head over the upper part of the hovering black suit in middle of the composition. In his version of the myth, and by conflation with the storyline of *The Monk* novel by Matthew Lewis, the head has girlish features that allude to the innocence of the Antonia's character.

The *Death of the Moon* painting acquired a high significance in accounts foreseeing of Brauner's loss of sight in the left eye. The work was completed in 1932, but only the chain of events on a late summer evening in 1938 infused it with personal meaning for the painter. If we are interpreting the *Death of the Moon* from the perspective of the eye's loss, the painting finds its place in a series of works and events that gathered in time around the violent chance encounter with a glass. The works in the series depict various male figures, including him, with an injured or eviscerated left eye. The central figure in the *Death of the Moon* alludes to the latter variant. The well-dressed personage that holds on to an umbrella – with a canopy that

recalls the membranous batwings of the evil spirit in the frontispiece for the Parisian edition of Lewis' *The Monk* – is directing a partially hollowed gaze to the viewer. His canotier is fitted for a walk, but his feet are elevated in balance with the rest of the body in flight. This posture gives a humorous meaning to the scene and compensates for the otherwise gruesome aspects of the work.

Throughout the 1930s the work of Victor Brauner evolved towards a representation of spiritualistic phenomena. This progressive change within his work became conspicuous to the leader of Surrealists and theoretician of the movement. André Breton had dedicated to Victor Brauner a distinct paragraph in the article he had written for the double issue of *Minotaure* in 1939. The twelfth-thirteenth copy of *Minotaure* displayed Breton's view with regard to 'the most recent tendencies in Surrealist painting.' Under the sign of a return to automatism that Breton claimed was fully operational fifteen years after the *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Brauner had found his place on the path of investigating a fourth dimensional space. Breton suggested that Brauner's work performed a mental transition to the fourth level of the universe:

Durant cette dernière période et spécialement depuis l'accident dont Pierre Mabillet révèle d'autre part les déterminations insolites, Brauner a produit quelques-unes de ses toiles les plus inspirées, Chez lui, le passage à la quatrième dimension tend à s'opérer sur le plan non plus physique, mais psychique. Il est attendu de la confrontation d'états normaux avec des états seconds, d'états seconds avec d'autres états seconds, etc., étant admis que la scène la plus bouleversante d'un « roman noir » moderne pourrait être constituée par la rencontre d'une somnambule et d'une souris d'hôtel dans un couloir. Du point où Brauner s'est posté en observateur idéal d'une telle rencontre, le grand humour et le grand amour échangent leurs plus longues étincelles.¹⁷⁵

The reference to the *roman noir* concluded a long-term preoccupation of Breton, and Brauner as well, with a genre of literature that originated in English culture. It had its influence upon French literature of the nineteenth century in a way that aroused the interest of Surrealists. They had chosen to reconnect to its tradition and to promote the same ideals embedded in the storyline of the main titles of the *roman noir*.

¹⁷⁵ André Breton, 'Des tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste' in *Minotaure*, nos. 12-3, 12 May 1939, pp. 16-7, p. 17. In English translation in André Breton, 'The most recent tendencies in Surrealist painting,' in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), p. 149.

c. The International Surrealist Exhibition at the New Burlington Galleries in London

After the *Surrealist Exhibition of Objects* in Paris at Galerie Charles Ratton, in May 1936, the Surrealists were ready to promote their ideas worldwide in exhibitions of major impact. In June and July 1936 followed the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London that functioned well in preparation for the American show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York: *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* between December 1936 and January 1937.¹⁷⁶ This final section of the chapter on *the fantastic* in relation to Victor Brauner's work in the 1930s explores the application that Brauner and the Surrealists, Breton in particular in the intervention at the New Burlington Galleries in London, had given to the *roman noir* thematic in the project of social change that they assiduously envisaged at the time.

In the summer of 1936, between eleventh of June and fourth of July, the New Burlington Galleries in London received a large amount of Surrealist work, internationally sourced, that was displayed in tandem with ethnographic material and a subsection on Surrealist object in the *International Surrealist Exhibition*. Herbert Read, who had a central role in organizing the exhibition, began promoting Surrealism in England through writing and exercising his managerial skills. He also wrote the introduction to the exhibition catalogue which was accompanied by Breton's preface that highlighted the aims of the movement. If Breton had the position as theoretician within the Surrealist group, Read contributed one of the first critical accounts on Surrealism. Read saw it in comparison with other similar tendencies throughout the history of art, literature, and philosophical inquiry, and aligned Surrealism, which became Superrealism in his rendering of the term, with Romantic concerns in thought and art. The artists that manifested this tendency were inclined to give pre-eminence in their work to themes based on imagination to the detriment of order and rationality. They stood against 'the art of the intellect, the so-called classical art,' which 'is carefully preserved in museums and academies, where it remains dusty and dead, and for ever unappreciated.'¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion of both exhibitions see Christoph Grunenberg, *The Politics of Presentation: Museums, Galleries, and Exhibitions in New York, 1929-1947*, Ph.D Thesis: University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1994.

¹⁷⁷ Herbert Read, Introduction to the *International Surrealist Exhibition* (Thursday, June 11th to Saturday, July 4th, 1936), exhibition catalogue (London: New Burlington Galleries, 1936), p. 12.

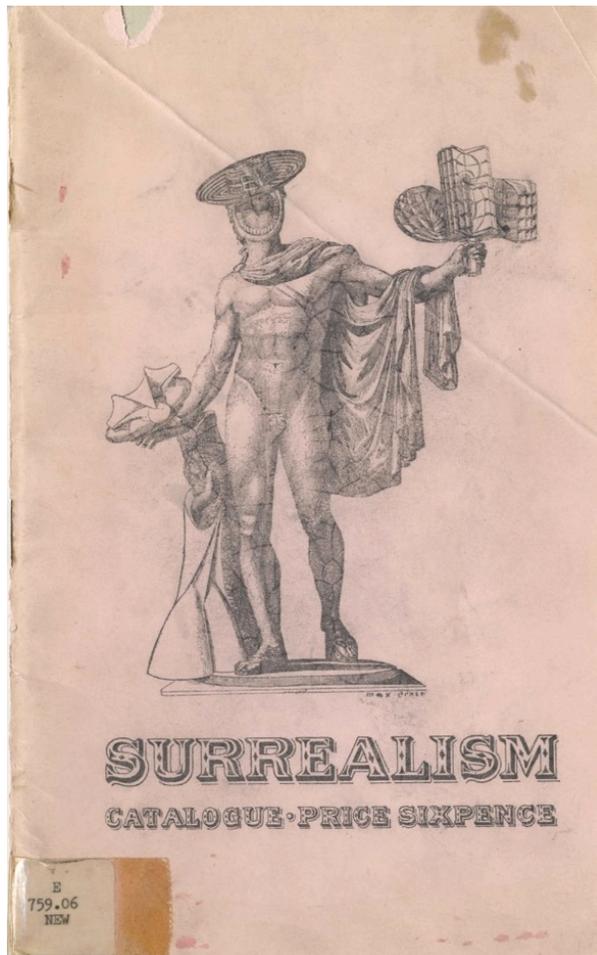


Fig. 1.30 *International Surrealist Exhibition*, cover of the exhibition catalogue, New Burlington Galleries, London, 1936.

Max Ernst's engraving that had been chosen for the cover of the catalogue was explicit in this regard. Through Ernst's collage treatment the figure of a neoclassical Apollonian nude has had replaced the place of the intellect with a maze, while the jaw of the open mouth was extended over the face and almost revealed to the viewer the entrails of the figure. We presume that the cracks made visible on the nineteenth century statue could have been echoed in one of the two paintings by which Brauner's work was represented in the exhibition, which were *Kabyline in Movement* (which I discussed in relation to gothic novel), and the *Fall of Marble* – the latter painting was not reproduced in the exhibition catalogue and no work with this title in any subsequent bibliography of Brauner's work leave space to speculation. We can assume that *marble* has been used metonymically for *neoclassical statuary* and Brauner's

work had made the same comment about classical art as Ernst's collage on the cover of the exhibition catalogue.

The Surrealist exhibition in London was accompanied by a series of lectures delivered by notable figures of the movement who came over from Paris. André Breton, Paul Eluard and Salvador Dalí undertook the tasks of spokesmen for Surrealism. Herbert Read and Hugh Sykes Davies joined their contributions in promoting Surrealism in England. The talks started with André Breton's presentation *Limites Non-frontières du surréalisme*, which was scheduled for the first days of the *International Surrealist Exhibition*, on 16th of June 1936. It was slightly retouched over the summer as result of international political upheaval and published in the collection of articles titled *Surrealism* by Faber and Faber in London. Herbert Read provided a lengthily introductory essay on Surrealism and also edited the collection, which comprised of extensive reproductions of Surrealist work, and Paul Eluard, Georges Hugnet and Hugh Sykes Davies signed the other essays, making it a book that was constituted as a 1936 document of the Surrealist movement.

In *Limites Non-frontières du surréalisme* André Breton assessed the importance of the exhibition in London and situated it at the peak of the embodiment of Surrealist concerns in art and literature. By 1936 Surrealism had spread its influence over as many as fourteen different countries, all of which were represented in the artwork exhibited in London. It seemed that the aim of the artists that embarked on the Surrealist approach to reality was to direct one's attention to the inherent contradictions existing within whatever society:

Ces antinomies demandent à ce qu'on s'emploie à les lever parce qu'elles sont ressenties cruellement, comme impliquant elles aussi une servitude, mais plus profonde, plus définitive que la servitude temporelle et que cette souffrance, pas plus que l'autre, ne doit trouver l'homme résigné.¹⁷⁸

Breton either strongly disagreed with *socialist realism* at its inception in the art of the twentieth century because of imposing the external conditions of living of the common people upon the artist's conception of the artwork or accepted the *gothic novel* genre that flourished at the end of the eighteenth century in English literature as a projection into the imaginary of the

¹⁷⁸ André Breton, 'Limites non-frontières du surréalisme,' pp. 664-5. In English in André Breton, 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism,' in *Surrealism*, ed. and introduction by Herbert Read (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 105.

resistance to violent confrontations within a class system. As a result of this position, he stated in the London conference that Surrealism embarked on expressing the *latent content* of an age, rather than its *manifest* one. Neither the system of a newly achieved political and social order in the Soviet Union nor the more enduring one in Britain praised for its valuing of tradition could bring into actuality the ultimate essence of the events that characterised in each case their particular configuration of society. Breton described the domain of *the fantastic* as being the only one capable to connect with the latent stratum of a historical period. As result of this interdependence, which Breton revealed in the *Limits not frontiers of Surrealism* conference in London, Surrealism never ceased to rely on *the fantastic* for attaining to,

[...] ce fond historique secret qui disparaît derrière la trame des événements. C'est seulement à l'approche du fantastique, en ce point où la raison humaine perd son contrôle, qu'a toutes chances de se traduire l'émotion la plus profonde de l'être, émotion inapte à se projeter dans le cadre du monde réel et qui n'a d'autre issue, dans sa précipitation même, que de répondre à la sollicitation éternelle des symboles et des mythes.¹⁷⁹

The European conjuncture referred to in the 1936 talk eventually led to the conflagration of the Second World War. England failed to fulfil the role of the impartial arbitrator envisaged by Breton in his intervention in London. Throughout Europe people fell once again prey to various nationalisms topped by the case of the German one. From exile to both Americas some of the Surrealists continued to preach the initial precepts of human solidarity on which their movement set foundations. Soon after his arrival in New York in the spring of 1941 Breton aimed to release a periodical that would be the framework through which the Surrealist ideas would have a chance to pervade American culture. In spite of his early planning, the first issue of *VVV* was published in June 1942. In the statement that appeared in the frontispiece of the review Breton reiterated some of the points expressed in *Limits not frontiers of Surrealism* in London. Even so, he effaced the reference to *the fantastic* that he professed in his previous conference. What he maintained as a goal of the Surrealist action was the disclosure of the significance of the myths that are continuously created beneath the cloak of everyday life:

¹⁷⁹ André Breton, 'Limites non-frontières du surréalisme,' p. 665; in English translation in André Breton, *Surrealism*, p.106.

Vers une vue totale VVV qui traduise toutes les réactions de l'éternel sur l'actuel, du psychique sur le physique et rende compte du mythe en formation sous le *voile* des événements.¹⁸⁰

Breton had previously drawn attention to a case in this particular question. The fortunes of the *roman noir* recalled in 1936 to the audience in London were a living proof of the change that occurred throughout Europe under the influence of the French Revolution. The literary genre of the *roman noir* that originated in the English Gothic novel at the end of the eighteenth century had a widespread influence on European literatures. Breton discerned the disruptive consequence of works like *The Monk* of Matthew Lewis and *Melmoth the Wanderer* of Charles Maturin (1782-1824) in the first writings of Hugo or Balzac. In addition, Breton marked the role played by the Marquis de Sade in establishing the connection between the rise of the *roman noir* and the distressing outcomes of the French Revolution.

In the same time with the Surrealist effort of revivifying the presence of less known writers in the French literature, Maurice Heine dedicated the main part of his work to the end of editing de Sade's writings. In 1933 he published in *Nouvelle revue française* an article that drew on de Sade's discussion of the *roman noir* in the critical essay *Idée sur les romans* that introduced in 1800 a collection of the Marquis' works titled *Les Crimes de l'amour, nouvelles héroïques et tragiques*.¹⁸¹ As at the time Breton and Heine were in close relationship it is not surprising that Breton had used Heine's articles on *le roman noir* in his conference in London in 1936.

De Sade acknowledged the unconventionality of the English novel a few years after its most influential title's release. In his critical judgment of the newly emerged genre of the Gothic novel *The Monk* by Matthew Lewis was placed in the privileged position in which we will find it in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924:

Peut-être devrions nous analyser ici ces romans nouveaux, dont le sortilège et la fantasmagorie composent a peu près tout le mérite, en plaçant a leur tête *le Moine*,

¹⁸⁰ André Breton, 'Declaration VVV' in VVV, no. 1, June 1942, New York, reprinted in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 727.

¹⁸¹ Maurice Heine, 'Le Marquis de Sade et le Roman noir,' *Nouvelle revue française*, no. 239, 1933, Paris.

supérieur, sous tous les rapports, aux bizarres élans de la brillante imagination de Radcliffe; mais cette dissertation serait trop longue, convenons seulement que ce genre, quoi qu'on puisse dire, n'est assurément pas sans mérite; il devenait le fruit indispensable des secousses révolutionnaires, dont l'Europe entière se ressentait.¹⁸²

The leap at the imaginary twists of fate of the characters in the *roman noir* genre compensated in de Sade's view for the torments that the European reader experienced in everyday life as a consequence of the revolutionary changes that spread over the continent:

Pour qui connaissait tous les malheurs dont les méchants peuvent accabler les hommes, le roman devenait aussi difficile à faire que monotone à lire ; il n'y avait point d'individu qui n'eût plus éprouvé d'infortunes en quatre ou cinq ans que n'en pouvait peindre en un siècle le plus fameux romancier de la littérature ; il fallait donc appeler l'enfer à son secours pour se composer des titres à l'intérêt, et trouver dans le pays des chimères, ce qu'on savait couramment en ne fouillant que l'histoire de l'homme dans cet âge de fer.¹⁸³

In Breton's re-reading of de Sade he had recourse to Freudian theories for an explanation of the Gothic novel. He balanced the historical conditions that favoured the emergence of the *roman noir* with 'the confused feelings' provoked by the unprecedented events at the end of the eighteenth century. Nostalgia and terror were the words that ruled the epoch. For Breton 'the pleasure principle has never avenged itself more obviously upon the principle of reality.'¹⁸⁴ The ruin depicted 'on the backdrop' of the Gothic novel became the mark of a disintegrated social order. The materialisation of 'beings of pure temptation' as characters that stage a new play indicated the re-enactment of life after the hecatomb of Revolution. The violence by which Eros re-entered the scene compensated for the ravages brought about by Thanatos. The death drive that caused destruction has been assimilated to an instinct of conservation based on a Freudian reading of the ancient myth of self-generating life on the earth.

Breton seized on the occasion of discussing the widespread influence of the *roman noir* at the beginning of nineteenth-century as a chance to redefine the status of the contemporary artwork. Either literary or visual, a work of art should suffuse us with 'the freshness of the

¹⁸² Marquis de Sade, *Idée sur les romans* (Bordeaux: Ducros, 1970), p. 52.

¹⁸³ Marquis de Sade, *Idée sur les romans*, p. 53.

¹⁸⁴ André Breton, *Surrealism*, p.108.

emotions of childhood,' stated Breton. For this impassioned response to occur the viewer should be confronted with a parallel reality that does not mirror the events in the immediate human existence. Because the actual structure of any form of a society seems to divert perception from the 'mental "Domain of Arnheim" which is *objective chance*,'¹⁸⁵ the Surrealists constituted themselves in a group that aimed to attain to this undercurrent of history and eventually to become able to exert their influence upon it:

Aucune tentative d'intimidation ne nous fera renoncer à la tâche que nous nous sommes assignée e qui est, avons-nous déjà précisé, l'élaboration du *mythe collectif* propre à notre époque au même titre que, bon gré mal gré, le genre « noire » doit être considéré comme pathognomonique du grand trouble social qui s'empare de l'Europe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle.¹⁸⁶

The discredit upon the *roman noir* genre by the time of Breton's revisiting it in the context of the international political configuration of 1936 has been exploited by the poet with the aim to reconnect with a revolutionary tradition. For the 1936 collection of studies on Surrealism, edited by Herbert Read in London, Breton amended his conference *Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism* delivered in conjunction with the Surrealist Exhibition in London. While Surrealist artworks were on display at New Burlington Galleries, the social and political scene in France had registered new convulsions. The events escalated as result of the late spring elections, which brought to power the Front Populaire – a left-wing party not particularly supported by the thinkers of a social reform. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1936, French workers were increasingly taking possession of the factories in which they worked. This simple fact determined Leon Trotsky to affirm that 'the French Revolution has begun' and it should get to completion. His words echoed in the version of the London conference that Breton updated for its publication in the book *Surrealism* of 1936.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ André Breton, 'Limites non-frontières du surréalisme,' p. 664.

¹⁸⁶ André Breton, 'Limites non-frontières du surréalisme,' p. 667. 'No attempt at intimidation will cause us to abandon this self-allotted task, which, as we have already made clear, is the elaboration of the *collective myth* belonging to our period in the same way that, whether we like it or not, the style of the 'roman noir' may be considered as pathognomonic of the great social troubles in which Europe was enveloped at the end of the eighteenth century.' André Breton, *Surrealism*, p.109.

¹⁸⁷ 'The International Surrealist Exhibition opened and was enjoying its success at the very moment when the French workers, employing for the first time tactics quite unpremeditated on



Fig. 1.31 *The Orator (L'Orateur)*, 1932, oil on canvas, 54 x 65 cm, gift of Mrs. Jacqueline Victor-Brauner, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

In 1935, Victor Brauner briefly joined the Communist Party that was clandestinely operating in Romania. Due to disagreement with the line of decisions taken in Moscow at the time he had revoked his membership in the same year.¹⁸⁸ The 1930s were turbulent times in the Romanian society. Since 1930, when Brauner installed himself for the second sojourn in

their part, were forcibly occupying the factories and, as a direct result of the simultaneous adoption of this attitude, were everywhere triumphant in their principal demands. [...] the force with which it gives the lie to those who, since the war, have never tired of denying the militancy of the French proletariat, and finally the precedent which it creates – a precedent destined to give concrete evidence to the bourgeoisie that its reign is drawing to an end – these are enough to make the clear-sighted observer realise that ‘the French Revolution has begun’.

André Breton, *Surrealism*, p. 96.

¹⁸⁸ *Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, p.153.

Paris, until 1935, when he returned to his native country for a couple of years, the Romanian political scene had been characterised by mounting anti-Semitism associated with an increasing nationalism fuelled under the leadership of the National Christian Defence Party. Brauner's painting in Paris sarcastically alluded to the changes in disposition of a society that only recently learned the democratic mechanism of exercising the power. *The Orator* of 1932, for instance, exposes the demagogic discourse of the then political elite in Romania. The moustachioed central figure of the painting dominates the scene in the foreground, but in the same time draws attention to the background of it through the strange and telling relationship in which the incongruous elements of the figure engage the tops of the mountains schematically represented in the distant landscape. The composition is divided between the left and right part of the scene in order to suggest two different systems of reference within the same space of the painting. On the right side of the painting Brauner represented a symbolic white horse that is entering the scene, a fragment of the composition that he replicated in the frame hanging over the transversal of the wooden structure that replaced the torso of the man that embodies the speaker. The reference that the painter makes to a manoeuvred speech of the politician – we are invited to read him as such due to the suit he possesses and exhibits on the podium on which he performs – is enhanced by the Romanian flag that the marionette-like figure holds in his upraised left hand. On the other half of the painting Brauner represented a group of revolted people that are counterbalanced by the white horse on this side of the composition that epitomized the ideal of a society. The ways in which Victor Brauner exposed the void of the political discourse and placed the severed head, as if impaled not only on a rod, but also high above the horizon so that the demagogue's head could be seen in the mountain scenery, demonstrates the painter's ability to use interchangeable elements of reality and imagination in one of the examples of the successful employment of *the fantastic* in art.

As in Brauner's *The Orator*, the possibility that a chain of events that marked the political reality of a society would be distorted through an intervention that was out of human reach was indirectly expressed by Breton in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1924. He drew attention to a statement by Novalis that dealt with a belief in a series of events that run in orders of existence belonging to parallel universes: the common reality perceived by everyone and the ideal configuration of a society. By human mediation and chance occurrence that prefigures the *objective chance* examined in *Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism* of 1936, the

ideal map for the development of events is constantly distorted with the arrival of new and different episodes that constitute history:

N'oublions pas que, selon la formule de Novalis, « il y a des séries idéales d'événements qui courent parallèlement avec les réelles. Les hommes et les circonstances, en général, modifient le train idéal des événements, en sorte qu'il semble imparfait; et leurs conséquences aussi sont également imparfaites. C'est ainsi qu'il en fut de la Réformation ; au lieu du Protestantisme est arrivé le Luthérianisme ».¹⁸⁹

The slippage in the political scene and the social action that accompanied it was one of the reasons that determined Breton to re-affirm in 1936 the Surrealist objective of mythopoeia. The articulation of a *collective myth* belonging to their time became a key task of the Surrealists. *The fantastic* remained 'the supreme key' to attain the *latent content* of an age, 'the means of fathoming the secret depths of history which disappear beneath a maze of events.'¹⁹⁰

Victor Brauner constantly engaged with the political context of his time and his creative works are aggressive responses to injustice and commodity-oriented society. For example, *L'Étrange cas de Monsieur K.* (1934) that opened the show at Galerie Pierre in December 1934, represented for Breton an outspoken criticism of bourgeois society. In the catalogue to the exhibition, he compared the overweight, moustachioed character that is obsessively repeated in scenes of sexual abuse and flattering displays of decorations to the legendary *Ubu* of Alfred Jarry. Breton identified the social charge of Victor Brauner's painting in the following words:

Ne fût-ce que par là, cette peinture pourrait prétendre à la plus haute valeur sociale. Je dis qu'elle nous dédommagerait à elle seule, sur le plan social, de l'outrecuidance d'une prétendue peinture de propagande révolutionnaire (petite sortie d'usine avec faucille et marteau dans le ciel). La peinture de Brauner est armée et, en marge de ce qui s'y déroule manifestement, s'exalte toujours le dernier épisode d'un combat de rues, dont il faut que toutes les puissances d'asservissement humain sortent domptées.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ André Breton, 'Manifeste du surréalisme,' *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 339. André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1969), p. 39. See also Michel Carrouges, *André Breton et les données fondamentales du Surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971[1950]).

¹⁹⁰ André Breton, *Surrealism*, p. 106.

¹⁹¹ André Breton, 'Botte rose blanche' in *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, p. 122.

Chapter Two

Animal Magnetism Revisited

‘Mais cette vue de l’avenir, cet instinct anticipé, cette faculté que nous découvrons dans le Somnambule’

Tardy de Montravel

This chapter investigates animal magnetism from the perspective of Surrealist enquiries into this outdated domain of study in the 1930s, with particular consideration directed at Victor Brauner’s artwork in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In his *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme-Animal* (1779), Doctor Mesmer defined animal magnetism as a characteristic of living entities. He attempted to unveil and scientifically probe a physical property of the human and animal that is comparable with a property of inanimate matter: the capacity to generate magnetic fields that can influence other magnetic fields at immediate range or at great distance.¹⁹² Active on the nervous system in a way that induces the state of magnetic somnambulism, this ability of the human body has been used to explain phenomena such as premonition, telepathy, and cryptesthesia, the latter responsible for perception of objects at a distance. Medical literature of the eighteenth century failed in convincing the academia of the time of these phenomena, and consequently was labelled as pseudoscience. The Surrealists, through the writing of André Breton and the artwork of Victor Brauner and Max Ernst, reintroduced animal magnetism in their sphere of interest. The specific work by

¹⁹² *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme-Animal par M. Mesmer, Docteur en Médecine de la Faculté de Vienne* (Paris: P. Fr. Didot, le jeune, 1779) reprinted in Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-animal*, London, 1781, p. 3.

Victor Brauner that displays an inscription related to animal magnetism is *The Ideal Man* (1943), a mixed technique three-dimensional piece in the collections of Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Artworks associated with the theme can also be identified in Brauner's late 1930s work, such as *College of the Invisible* (*Collège de l'invisible*) (1939), *Heron of Alexandria* (*Héron d'Alexandrie*) (1939), *Fascination* (1939), *Psychological Space* (*Espace psychologique*), and *The Wolf - Table* (*Le Loup – table*) (1939, 1947) (all in the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris).

In the first section of the first part of the chapter I analyse the emergence of the theme of animal magnetism in Surrealism with the introduction written by Breton in 1933 for the new edition of *Contes bizarres* by Achim von Arnim. A new version of the collection of short stories by the German writer, the volume displayed on the cover a colour drawing by Valentine Hugo, one of the few female artists in the group. The composition is an interpretation of a magnetic sleep session, with André Breton fulfilling the role of the magnetiser as he hovers wrapped up in flames and pointing an incandescent baguette at the contorted female figure in the typical hysterical arch. The reprint of *Contes bizarres* provided the opportunity to reconnect with Romantic investigation into a delicate subject. Von Arnim, the author, was a physicist himself. He joined, around 1800, the circle of another physicist in Jena, Johann Ritter, who directed his experiments with magnetic somnambulism towards demonstrating the connection between the phenomena of electricity and the automatic activity of the human body.

The doctrine of animal magnetism is explicated in the next two sections of this part of the chapter in terms of medical research in the second half of the eighteenth century. I present the theory formulated by Franz Anton Mesmer in 1781, in *Précis Historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-animal*, and developed by Marquis de Puységur in 1784, in *Détail des cures opérées à Buzançy, près Soissons, par le magnétisme animal* and Tardy de Montravel in 1787, in *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*. The elusiveness of 'the agent,' or 'the fluid,' on which Mesmer based his theory with respect to the interaction between individuals explains this detour into the literature on animal magnetism. The principles of animal magnetism resulted from sessions of induced magnetic somnambulism in which the magnetised person, or the patient, has an active role in foreseeing the remedy and the end of cure. Nonetheless, because of inconsistent evidence as regards the nature of 'the universal

agent' and the connection established between magnetiser and magnetised person, experiments in induced somnambulism had shifted abruptly in the nineteenth century. They concentrated on cases of ordinary somnambulism that revealed the inner capabilities of the human. Psychological studies had investigated the partition of the self in the attempt to understand the somnambulist's clairvoyance, whereas psychical research had monitored spirit materialisations produced while in a trance.

In the last part of the chapter I discuss the representation of the somnambulist in the work of Victor Brauner in the late 1930s and early 1940s. I consider the emblematic figure of *The Ideal Man* (1943) as the apogee to the evolution of this theme in the painter's work. In the piece he balanced references to animal magnetism with those deduced from psychical research at the beginning of the twentieth century. Here I rely upon the alternate-consciousness paradigm described by Frederic Myers in his treatise *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) for my interpretation of this work. The composition is also a confirmation of the artist's acquaintance with psychical research in the French environment in the aftermath of the foundation of the Society for Psychical Research in London. Doctor Charles Richet established metapsychics in Paris in 1921, and the term was mentioned for the first time in a Surrealist context in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929), though the Surrealists participated in sessions of magnetic sleeping in 1922. The exploration of psychical research in Surrealism, and Brauner's work in particular, contributed to the development of automatic techniques of painting that I analyse in relation to the occult in the next chapter of the thesis.

I. Magnetic Somnambulism

In 1933 André Breton published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, a fragment from his introduction to *Contes bizarres* by Achim von Arnim. The launch in the same year of the *Contes bizarres* at Éditions des Cahiers libres in Paris reprinted the first French edition of 1856 published by Michel Lévy frères. The original volume had a preface signed by the renowned writer Théophile Gautier, whose son had done the translation. The 1933 edition

meant that it had a second contemporaneous introduction in which Breton expressed his interest in Arnim's writing.

The main issues that Breton raised in discussing Arnim's work pointed to research on animal magnetism conducted by the group gathered around the figure of the physicist Johann Ritter (1776-1810) in Jena and the philosophical system developed by Johann Fichte (1762-1814) in Jena and Berlin at the end of the eighteenth century and in the years that immediately followed the start of the nineteenth century.

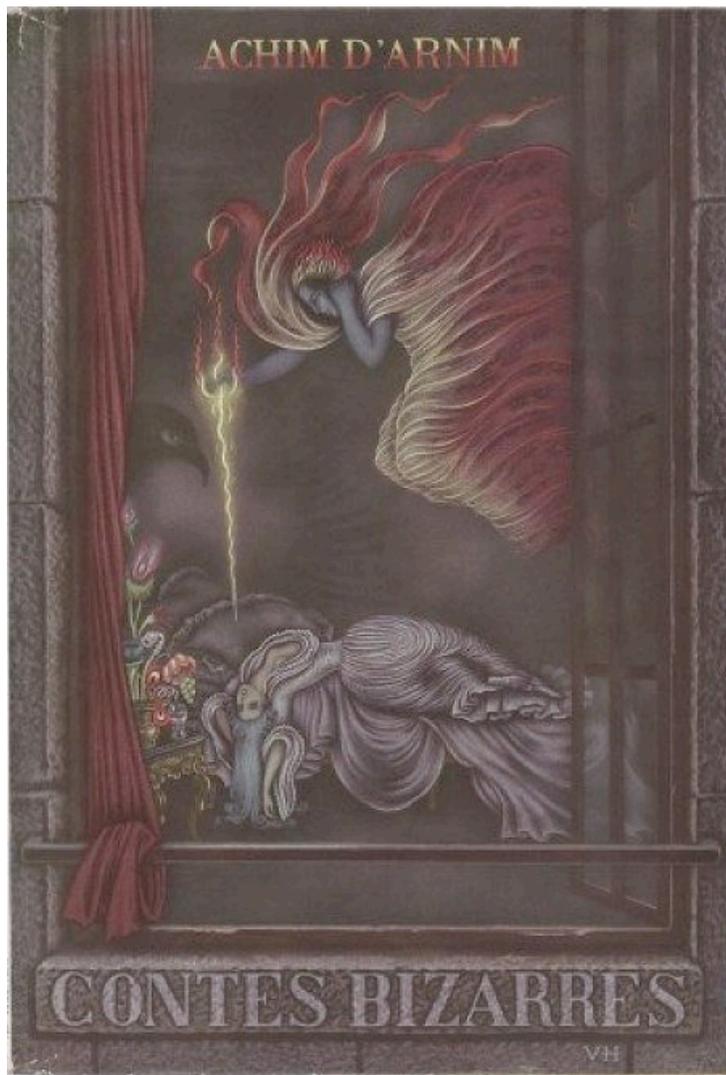


Fig. 2.1 Achim von Arnim, *Contes bizarres*, Paris: Éditions des Cahiers libres, 1933. Cover illustration by Valentine Hugo.

It is apparent that Breton's preference for Arnim's writing converged with the interest in the scientific milieu in which the literary work emerged and by which it was influenced. The re-edition prompted the acknowledgement of a Surrealist concern with a current of opinion that developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century based on experiments in animal magnetism.

Brauner's work from the beginning of the 1930s to the mid-1940s provides an exemplary example of the preoccupation of the Surrealists with the palpable consequences of such a phenomenon. Animal magnetism is detectable at a more general level than the doctrine established by Doctor Mesmer at the end of the eighteenth century. The Surrealists enlarged its application to literature and the visual arts. A subsidiary state of animal magnetism, magnetic somnambulism, was mirrored in the common condition of somnambulism, and fired up imagination at the beginning of the twentieth century. It had become a widespread subject of wonder by the 1920s and merged in French popular culture with the theme of the clairvoyant or fortune-teller. Brauner employed the sleepwalker motif in several of his works of the time. The following sections will be concerned with the evidence of the painter's acquaintance with the subject of animal magnetism.

a. The eighteenth to nineteenth-century experimentalism in Breton's article 'Centenaire d'Arnim'

In *Centenaire d'Arnim*, the article published in 1933 in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, Breton indicates the scientific backdrop against which Achim von Arnim's literary productions took contour. The research led in Jena by the physicist Johann Wilhelm Ritter constitutes one of the issues discussed by Breton. Ritter launched into a series of experiments that involved electricity with the intention of prove the recently reported phenomena of animal magnetism. The group that surrounded Ritter in his observations included Achim von Arnim (1781-1831). Von Arnim was a physicist by formation, who had studied mathematics and physics at the University of Göttingen. One of the earliest writings of the young author had dealt with experiments in the field of electricity: *Essai de théorie des Phénomènes de l'Electricité*. The 1779 treatise *A curious collection of experiments to be performed on the*

electrical machines by Ribright and Son gives an overview of the scientific environment of the time. A contemporaneous interest in the phenomenon of animal magnetism prompted Ritter to delineate his space of investigation. He asserted that when taking up research on animal magnetism one leaves the sphere of consciousness, subordinated to will. The territory that one enters is the one of automatic activity, where a reversed order governs, and the organism re-assumes an inorganic condition of being.

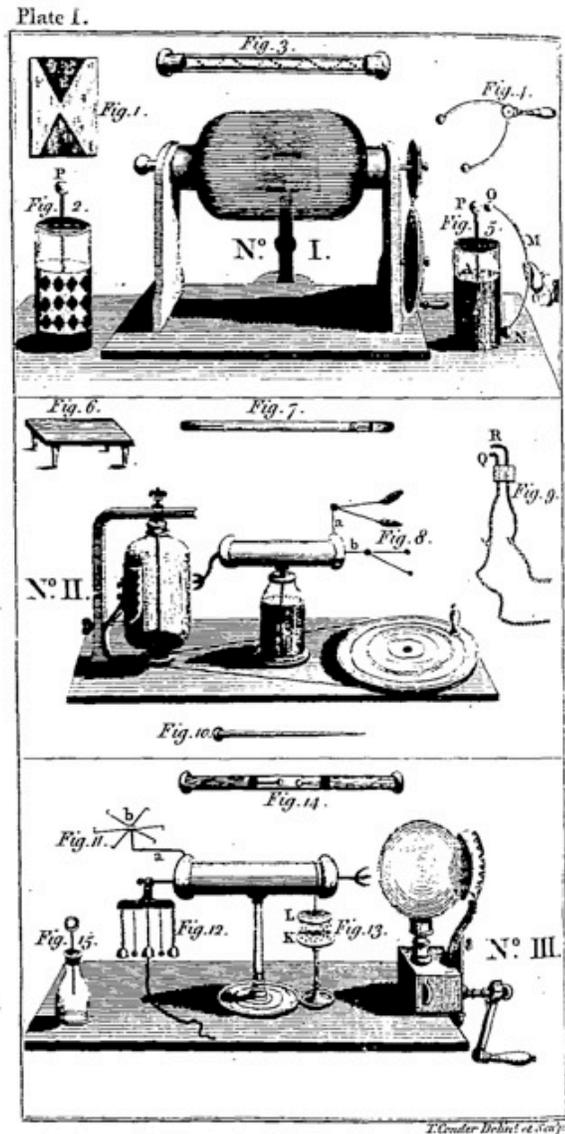


Fig. 2.2 George Ribright and Son, *A Curious Collection of Experiments to be Performed on the Electrical Machines*, London, 1779. Frontispiece.

The body subjected to these circumstances reveals at the same time the mechanism of two worlds in conjunction.¹⁹³ Ritter's interest in the mind's activity under sleep urged him to claim that the human being is transformed, while asleep, into a 'veritable magician.' By means of sleep's property to submerge the body into the cosmic order, potentially all-powerful at the level of physical configuration, the human being regains abilities that are lost during the waking period. Ritter's preoccupation with kabbalah had informed such view of the construction of the world.

Breton used the reference to automatic activity in *Centenaire d'Arnim* to ignite discussion about the perception of the object and the related definition of the subject, which will be analysed in later in the following chapter of this thesis.

Here, we will succinctly indicate that knowledge made possible through experiments on electricity in physics and changes in the philosophical system of the time were assimilated into the doctrine of animal magnetism. The unity of the subject in the perception of the inner or outer world had undergone a destabilising process, which was a mark of the Romantic spell in literature and art. The Surrealists reconnected to a stream of thought that had become an undercurrent by the turn of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, for them it still had promise. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw two different directions in the evolution in German philosophy. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) advocated his view in *Science of Knowledge* (1794), while Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling (1775-1854), his former disciple, took an opposite stance, and voiced what would become his thesis in the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797). While both thinkers championed the principle of subject-object identity, they had divergent views about the understanding of the 'I' in relation to nature in

¹⁹³ 'Avec le magnétisme animal, on quitte le domaine du libre arbitre pour passer entièrement dans celui de la non-liberté, ou dans lequel le corps organique se comporte à nouveau comme [s'il était] inorganique, révélant cependant ainsi le mystère de l'un et de l'autre.' Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Fragments posthumes tirés des papiers d'un jeune physicien: Vade-mecum à l'usage des amis de la nature*, trans. Claude Maillard (Paris: Premières Pierres, 2001), p. 201. Breton quotes Ritter's work *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers. Ein Taschenbuch für die Freunde der Natur* (Heidelberg, 1810) in *Centenaire d'Arnim*, p. 5. In Breton's version of the four hundred seventy-seven entry of *Fragmente* we read: 'Dans le magnétisme animal, dit-il [Ritter], on quitte le domaine de la conscience volontaire pour entrer dans celui de l'activité automatique, dans la région où le corps organique se comporte de nouveau comme un être inorganique et ainsi nous révèle les secrets des deux mondes à la fois [Breton's italics].'

each system of thought they advanced. For Fichte, the subject remained irreducible to a naturalistic explanation of being, whereas for Schelling the intelligence was contemplated as the higher manifestation of nature. On the hierarchical description of nature, in Schelling's view, minerals, plants and animals are disposed according to their degrees of organisation and development of attractive and repulsive force.¹⁹⁴ Fichte agreed with Schelling and ascribed a drive or striving to act, and to be acted on, to everything in nature. Nevertheless, he denied that this drive indicates a form of consciousness within nature, as the rationality of nature is something that we attribute to it, and not something that nature possesses within itself. Schelling contended that the starting point of Fichte's system of thought is wrong, because it was based on subjectivity of the 'I,' and stated that philosophy must begin from pure being itself, which is the indifferent meeting point of the ideal and the real, the subjective and the objective.¹⁹⁵ In Schelling's view, the ego is the highest potency of the universe as a whole, and not the first principle itself as Fichte supposed. The opposition between their views incited vivid discussions, and forced the protagonists continually to redefine their positions.

Ritter, who was quoted in Breton's article, placed himself on the side of the opponents of Schelling's 'philosophy of nature.' By vividly discrediting Schelling's work and having it classified as a mere chapter of physics that failed in its attempt to become a philosophy,¹⁹⁶ Ritter became the key figure around which gathered a group of intellectuals that included von Arnim. The experiments conducted at Ritter's country house in the environs of Jena were in tune with those performed across Europe by 1800.¹⁹⁷ They attested to a widespread interest in the doctrine of animal magnetism professed by Doctor Mesmer and his followers.

¹⁹⁴ Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivity, 1781-1801* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 495.

¹⁹⁵ Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 504.

¹⁹⁶ 'Ritter ne voulant voir dans le système de Schelling « qu'un fragment de la Physique » et dans son auteur, incapable d'être « un philosophe par excellence: un philosophe chimiste », rien de plus qu'« un philosophe électricien ». André Breton quotes Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, in 'Centenaire d'Arnim,' p. 6.

¹⁹⁷ Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Key Texts of Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810) on the Science and Art of Nature*, translations and essays by Jocelyn Holland (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), p. 537.

b. Mesmer and the doctrine of animal magnetism

Regarded with incredulity if not dismissal in the Viennese academic world, Franz Anton Mesmer transferred to Paris at the beginning of 1778. Here he continued his efforts to try to involve the scientists of the time in the theory in which he believed and on which he extensively published. In 1781 with a *Précis historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-animal* he unveiled a chronological chart of the actions he undertook in order to make widely known and available to medicine a phenomenon that, he claimed, has a general application in nature.¹⁹⁸ Mesmer relied on principles and major examples then provided by sciences, medicine and astronomy in particular. His first attempt in devising the theory of animal magnetism entered the academia in 1766 with his dissertation *De l'influence des Planètes sur le corps humain* at the University of Vienna. After research on current data that would prove the existence of such a phenomenon he was left with 'less a doctrine to accept than a system to analyse.'¹⁹⁹ In the following years he dedicated his practice to the pursuit of evidence i.e. to spectacular cures, which would demonstrate the bold statements he had made. The method was developed with the aim of restoring the body in various cases of disorder to a condition of health. The process took place under the effect of natural mechanisms of defence of the body that were activated in the presence of the magnetiser – Mesmer himself – and consequently were developed with the use of magnets in the attempt to give a solid scientific base to his method. This was probably the reason for Mesmer's expressed ambition to be perceived as a physicist in the French academic world rather than as a physician:

Je rejetai ce moyen comme peu fait pour convaincre gens à qui la science ne donne pas la faculté d'apprécier par le raisonnement le mérite d'expériences telles que les miennes. J'ajoutai au surplus, que lorsque je m'étois déterminé à fuir les lieux de ma

¹⁹⁸ 'Le *Magnétisme-animal* est un rapprochement de deux sciences connues, l'*astronomie* & la *médecine*. C'est moins une découverte nouvelle qu'une application de faits aperçus depuis long-temps à des besoins sentis de tous les temps. Par cette expression *magnétisme-animal*, je désigne donc une de ces opérations universelles de la *nature*, donc l'action, déterminée sur nos nerfs, offre à l'art *un moyen universel* de guérir et de préserver les hommes [Mesmer's highlights].' Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-animal*, Londres, 1781, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ '[...] il on résulteroit moins une doctrine à recevoir qu'un système à examiner.' Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 1.

naissance à raison des dégouts que m'avoit fait éprouver le traitement heureux de maladies très-graves, ce n'avoit pas été pour m'exposer ailleurs à des désagréments de la même espèce ; [...] qu'il entroit dans mes projets de connoître la France, l'Angleterre, l'Hollande, &c. d'établir des relations avec les Savants de ces divers lieux, de leur prouver l'existence d'une vérité physique inconnue, & même d'en constater à leur yeux l'utilité par des expériences sans pareil ; [...] que désirant en un mot me faire connoître en Physicien & non en Médecin, je devois uniquement agir en Physicien, jusqu'à ce que les circonstances me permissent de faire mieux.²⁰⁰



Fig. 2.3 Philip Astley, *Natural Magic or, Physical Amusements Revealed*, London, 1785. Frontispiece.

²⁰⁰ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, pp. 35-6.

In communication with the Académie des Sciences and La Société Royale de Médecine in Paris, Mesmer emphasised the discovery of a fundamental principle at work in the physical world, which he was bringing to the attention of scientists. In response to the theory he advanced he was asked to perform the cure of chronic illness in some of the most desperate cases, which led to his activity being taken for charlatanism. He asserted, indeed, that dependent on the property of animal magnetism, the stages that led to the illness within the human body could be reversed. Mesmer based his reasoning on the observation that ‘it is in the course of nature to slowly restore something that she herself had ruined.’²⁰¹

In *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme-animal* published in Paris, in 1779, Mesmer gave an account of his method. Since the time of his dissertation at the University of Vienna in 1766 he avowed to have taken into consideration a by then well-known principle of the influence of celestial bodies upon ‘the planet we inhabit.’

This belief was grounded in the law of universal gravitation that had been constantly defeated in public experiments like those rendered in *Natural Magic* by Philip Astley in 1785. Similar to the way that planets influence each other on their orbits in the universe, the Earth witnesses an alternate activity in the movement of the sea with the tide or in the air masses that form in the atmosphere under the attraction of the Moon and the Sun. These spheres that gravitate on their path in the blue of the sky must exert an influence on the constitutive parts of each and every life form as well. Mesmer’s contribution to the extension of the universal law of attraction at the level of the microcosm was to identify the presence of ‘an agent,’ in his formulation, which mediates the exchange between the outer and inner world.²⁰²

²⁰¹ ‘En général il doit venir à bout de toutes les maladies, pourvu que les ressources de la nature ne soit pas entièrement épuisées, & que la patience soit à côté du remède ; car il est dans la marche de la nature de rétablir lentement ce qu’elle a miné.’ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 62.

²⁰² ‘C’est ainsi que l’harmonie des corps organisés, une fois troublée, doit éprouver les incertitudes de ma première supposition, si elle n’est rappelée & déterminée par l’agent général dont je reconnois l’existence. Lui seul peut rétablir cette harmonie dans l’état naturel.’ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 80.



M É M O I R E

POUR SERVIR A L'HISTOIRE

DE LA JONGLERIE,

DANS LEQUEL ON DÉMONTRE

LES PHÉNOMÈNES

DU MESMÉRISME.

NOUVELLE ÉDITION,

Précédée d'une Lettre sur le Secret de M. Mesmer,

AVEC FIGURES.

PAR M. RETZ, Médecin ordinaire du Roi, servant par quartier, ancien Médecin des Hôpitaux de la Marine.

On y a joint une Réponse au Mémoire qui parolt ici pour la première fois.

A P A R I S,

Chez GASTELIER, Libraire, Parvis Notre-Dame,

N^o. 15.

1 7 8 4

Fig. 2.4 Noël Retz, Frontispiece and title page for *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la jonglerie dans lequel on démontre les phénomènes du mesmérisme*, London, 1784.

The elusive nature of the agent imposed on Mesmer limits in how he could describe it and he could only say that it was 'a fluid,' i.e. a substance of neither gas nor liquid consistency, capable of permeating matter of any kind.²⁰³ That gave ammunition to detractors of magnetic somnambulism, who accused Mesmer of playing with words and censured him in publications like Retz's *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de la jonglerie dans lequel on démontre les phénomènes du mesmérisme* in 1784. Mesmer maintained that the 'direct action' of 'the agent' onto the mainly nervous system of the animated was discernible through significant modulations of the characteristics of the body:

²⁰³ 'J'avançois d'après les principes connus de l'attraction universelle, constatée par les observations qui nous apprennent que les planètes s'affectent mutuellement dans leurs orbites, & que la Lune & le Soleil causent & dirigent sur notre globe le flux & le reflux de la mer, ainsi que dans l'atmosphère; j'avançois, dis-je, que ces sphères exercent aussi une action directe sur toutes les parties constitutives des corps animés, particulièrement sur le système nerveux, moyennant un fluide qui pénètre tout.' Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 78.

Je déterminois cette action par l'intension et la rémission des propriétés de la matière & des corps organisés, telles que sont la gravité, la cohésion, l'élasticité, l'irritabilité, l'électricité.²⁰⁴

**PRÉCIS
HISTORIQUE
DES FAITS RELATIFS
A U
MAGNÉTISME-ANIMAL**

JUSQUES EN AVRIL 1781.

Par M. MESMER, Docteur en Médecine de la Faculté de Vienne.

OUVRAGE TRADUIT DE L'ALLEMAND.



A LONDRES.

M. DCC. LXXXI.



Fig. 2.5 Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique des faits relatifs au Magnétisme-animal* (*Historical Summary of the Facts Related to Animal Magnetism*), London, 1781.

The intensification or diminution of qualities that identify organised dynamic matter, such as elasticity, irritability, conduction of electricity or response to gravitation, without forgetting the coherence of parts into a whole, are attributable to the action of heavenly bodies,

²⁰⁴ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 78.

the Earth included, in Mesmer's view. In this context he defined animal magnetism as the property of an animal organism to respond to the action of celestial bodies:

Je nommois la propriété du corps animal, qui le rend susceptible de l'action des corps célestes & de la terre, Magnétisme-Animal; j'expliquoi par ce Magnétisme, les révolutions périodiques que nous remarquons dans le sexe, & généralement celles que les Médecins de tous les temps & de tout les pays ont observées dans les maladies.²⁰⁵

In *Lettre le 5 Janvier 1775, à un Médecin étranger* Mesmer announced that he had discovered an analogy between the reaction of the organism when being exposed to an electric field or to the action of a naturally magnetized mineral, magnetite, or any other magnet, and that obtained by enhancing the natural power of the animal magnetism of the human body. As 'the agent' of exercising the animal magnetism property of the body is magnetic in essence, Mesmer described it for its resemblance to charged particles of electricity. Excerpts from the *Letter to a Foreigner Medical Doctor* of 1775 as well as from *Memoir on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism* of 1779 were published in the *Historical Summary of Facts related to Animal Magnetism* of 1781.

The interest that we find in the twenty-seven sentences formulated on animal magnetism in the *Memoir* connects with the development of the doctrine through the experiments he undertook, which were at the same time cures, and in the writings of the notable followers of Mesmer: the physician A. A. Tardy de Montravel (17..-17..)(Pseudonym), and the Marquis de Puységur, A. M. Jacques de Chastenet (1751-1825). Because of the importance that both of them had given to magnetic somnambulism, a subsidiary state of mind derived from the application of animal magnetism, we need to focus on Mesmer's statements in the *Memoir*. Mesmer has not publicly admitted the phenomenon of magnetic sleep until 1799 in the next opus *Mémoire de F. A. Mesmer, docteur en médecine, sur ses découvertes* published by Fuchs in Paris.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, in 1779 he described animal magnetism through a set of characteristics that might have been observed in experiences that involved magnetic somnambulism as well:

²⁰⁵ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 79.

²⁰⁶ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Mémoire de F. A. Mesmer, docteur en médecine, sur ses découvertes* (Paris: Pierre Maumus, 1826[1799]).

Propositions.

11. L'action et la vertu du magnétisme-animal, ainsi caractérisées, peuvent être communiquées à d'autres corps animés & inanimés. Les uns & les autres en sont cependant plus ou moins susceptibles.

12. Cette action et cette vertu peuvent être renforcées & propagées par ces mêmes corps.

13. On observe à l'expérience l'écoulement d'une matière dont la subtilité pénètre tout les corps sans perdre notablement de son activité.

14. Son action a lieu à une distance éloignée, sans le secours d'aucun corps intermédiaire.

15. Elle est augmentée & réfléchiée par les glaces comme la lumière.

16. Elle est communiquée, propagée, & augmentée par le son.

17. Cette vertu magnétique peut être accumulée, concentrée, & transportée.

18. J'ai dit que les corps animés n'en étoient pas également susceptibles : il en est même, quoique très-rares, qui ont une propriété si opposée, que leur seule présence détruit tous les effets de ce Magnétisme dans les autres corps.

19. Cette vertu opposée pénètre aussi tous les corps ; elle peut être également communiquée, propagée, accumulée, concentrée & transportée, réfléchiée par les glaces, & propagée par le son ; ce qui constitue, non-seulement une privation, mais une vertu opposée positive.²⁰⁷

Mesmer's depiction of animal magnetism encouraged followers to carry out experiments drawing upon his discovery. Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur, attempted a cure based on the method to as many as of those who lived on the land he owned at Buzancy as he could.²⁰⁸ He reported the experiences in the account he published in 1784 that served along with Mesmer's, as the starting point for the work of another physician, Tardy de Montravel. In 1785 he took into consideration precisely the secondary state of magnetic sleep implied by Mesmer's method of treatment. *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* was published in London and related phenomena that were quite surprising not least for the author himself.

In the thirteenth entry in the row of clauses that described animal magnetism in Mesmer's *Memoir* of 1779 we are confronted with the claim of an ineffable substance

²⁰⁷ Franz Anton Mesmer, Excerpt from *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme-animal* published in *Précis Historique*, p. 84.

²⁰⁸ A. M. Jacques de Chastenet, Marquis de Puységur, *Détail des cures opérées à Buzancy, près de Soissons par le magnétisme animal* (Soissons: [s.n.], 1784). See also Marquis de Puységur, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire et à l'établissement du magnétisme animal* (Paris: Dentu, 1820 [1784]) and Marquis de Puységur, *Un Somnambule désordonné: Journal du traitement magnétique du jeune Hébert*, Jean-Pierre Peter (ed.) (Le Plessis-Robinson: Institut Synthélabo pour le progrès de la connaissance, 1999).

‘observed upon experiment’ that flows continuously throughout matter without changing its properties in a noticeable way.

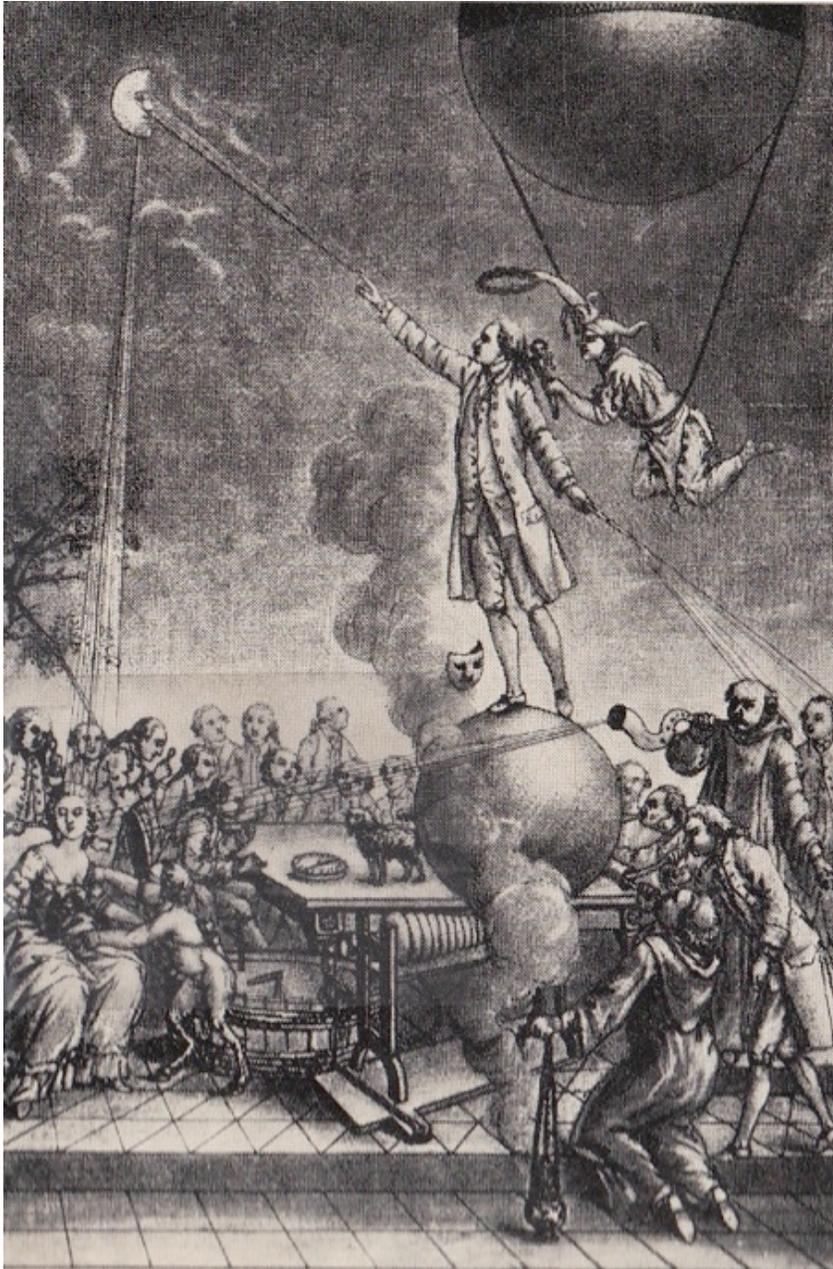


Fig. 2.6 Jean-Jacques Paulet, *L'Antimagnétisme, ou Origine, progrès, décadence, renouvellement et réfutation du magnétisme animal*, London, 1784. Illustration to the Third Section: Practical Side, p. 113.

An engraving used as the frontispiece to the third section, the practical side in the book *L'Antimagnétisme* by Jean-Jacques Paulet, published in 1784, offers a mocking description of

the unseen substance. Nevertheless, in 1785 Tardy de Montravel expanded on the statement of a magnetic flow in the universe. In *Essay on the Theory of Magnetic Somnambulism* he recounted the experience he had while applying the precepts of animal magnetism in the cure of ‘Mademoiselle N.’ The magnetised person, in a state of induced magnetic somnambulism, responded to the questions asked by her magnetiser and detailed her perception of a ‘fluid’ of magnetic origin. Because of detecting its presence in the animal realm, Mesmer had firstly separated this ‘agent’ from the electric phenomena associated with it in the mineral kingdom. The description of ‘animal magnetism’ would make him famous in this way. In the lexicon employed by Montravel this ‘fluid’ was identified with one of the four elemental forces, the fire, ‘mainly because of its considerable affinity with water.’²⁰⁹ Montravel gave a detailed account of Mademoiselle N’s answers under magnetic sleep. Once asleep, which parallels the state of hypnosis, the magnetised person can engage in dialogue with her or his magnetiser. Montravel therefore questioned his magnetised subject about the nature of the substance that lies at the core of the doctrine of animal magnetism. Mademoiselle N indicated the sight of a magmatic-like circulation of matter between herself and her magnetiser. While bent over her knee and passing his hands over this part of her body, as the aim of the magnetic sessions is to restore the smooth flow of the ‘fluid’ within the body and in connection to the outside world, Mademoiselle N apprehended a glowing mass of material that surrounded his head and gave her a ventral discomfort:

Ma malade se trouvoit avoir le genre nerveux tellement irritable, que dès le premier jour où elle fut Somnambule, elle put voir très-distinctement le fluide. Ce fuit elle qu’il m’en fit apercevoir... J’avois la tête baissée devant son estomac tandis que je la magnétisois sur les genoux. Vos cheveux, me dit-elle en me repoussent vivement, me paroissent être autant de fils d’or brillants, qui me chargent trop & me fatiguent lorsque vous approchez votre tête. J’ai cependant le plus grand plaisir à les voir ; & c’est un fort beau spectacle.

Je lui présentai pour lors une baguette ordinaire d’acier, ma malade en vit sortir le fluide, comme une colonne d’or, pétillante d’étincelles brillantes. Je quittai la baguette, & lui présentai seulement mon pouce, elle en vit également sortir le fluide, mais en moindre quantité. J’essayai successivement & l’un après l’autre tous mes doigts ; l’index & le petit doigt donnoient du fluide, mais en beaucoup moindre quantité que

²⁰⁹ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* (London: 1787), p. 1.

n'en donnoit le pouce ; l'annulaire en donnoit encore moins ; enfin le *medium* n'en donnoit pas du tout.²¹⁰

When Mesmer ascertained the existence of animal magnetism he formulated one of its characteristics by analogy with electricity. 'This magnetic principle,' said Mesmer in reference to its material appearance 'could be accumulated and concentrated similar to electric fluid.'²¹¹ But unlike the latter's exclusively physical nature, we deduce from the fourteenth entry that animal magnetic fluid could 'travel' long distances without the need of a palpable container. 'Its action is effective at a faraway location, without the intervention of any other intermediate device,' states Mesmer.²¹² If the founder of the doctrine does not give details about the source of his observations, Montravel's account of the cure of Mademoiselle N is abundant in descriptions of the established bond between the magnetised person and her magnetiser. Montravel elaborates on the meticulous notes that he kept from the case in his attempt to provide a theory of the phenomenon that is associated with animal magnetism.

c. The sixth sense in *Précis Historique des faits relatifs au magnétisme-animal* by Franz Mesmer and *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* by Tardy de Montravel

In the analysis of animal magnetism a sixth sense has been promulgated in order to explain the phenomena of telepathy, cryptesthesia, and clairvoyance that accompany the state of magnetic somnambulism. Because this sixth sense has been described in the literature on animal magnetism through visual analogies and terminology that are similar to the ones employed in Surrealist techniques of writing and painting that had recourse to automatism, we explore such passages in this section of the chapter in advance of a discussion of Victor Brauner's artwork in connection with animal magnetism.

Both Mesmer and Montravel acknowledged a sixth sense that becomes apparent through the application of animal magnetism, but the academic community constantly

²¹⁰ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai*, pp. xxvii-xviii. The italics are by the eighteenth-century author.

²¹¹ Franz Anton Mesmer, Excerpt from *Lettre le 5 Janvier 1775, à un Médecin étranger* published in *Précis Historique*, p. 82.

²¹² Franz Anton Mesmer, Excerpt from *Mémoire sur la découverte du Magnétisme-animal* published in *Précis Historique*, p. 84.

requested that Mesmer to provide ‘a theory of the doctrine’ he professed. He responded in the *Précis historique* of 1781:

Comme c’est par conviction, & non par amour-propre, que je suis entraîné à reconnoître l’inutilité & même le danger d’une pareille tentative, je desirois fort pouvoir en établir les preuves avec ordre, clarté & précision; mais l’objet que je traite, échappe à l’expression positive. Il ne me reste, pour me faire entendre, que des images, des comparaisons, des approximations.²¹³

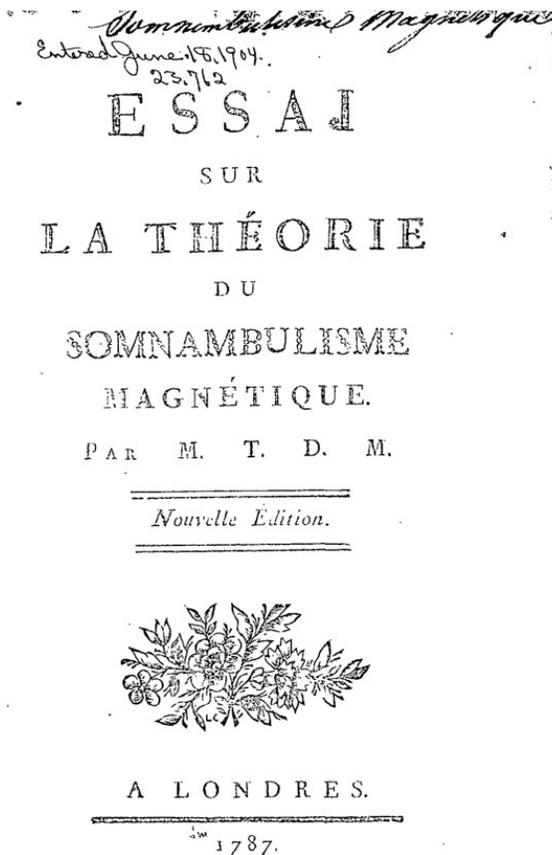
If the exploration of animal magnetism discloses a sixth sense of the human, it has to be considered ‘artificial’ by comparison with the other five senses and in relation to the way in which the microscope was perceived in the science of the time. In a telling footnote to the text Mesmer asserted an innovative understanding of the senses and the relationships established between them. In fact he conceived the existence of only one sense, of touch, all other faculties, of hearing, sight, smell and taste, being envisaged as extensions of it:

L’ouïe, la vue, l’odorat & le goût : ne sont que des extensions du tact, en sorte qu’il n’y a qu’un sens. Cependant, on en compte cinq en s’attachant aux différences sensibles. On doit convenir que le microscope est à l’œil ce que l’œil est au toucher, une extension de l’organe. Cette idée ne peut être trop abstraite que pour des âmes de personnes peu familiarisées avec le langage des Sciences.²¹⁴

The presupposition of a sixth sense resurfaced in the *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* by Tardy de Montravel in 1785. In his turn, Montravel gave pre-eminence to the sense of touch in the set of the five senses involved in establishing a connection with the external world. Moreover, he states that it is through the sense of touch that the judgments reached through the exercise of the other four senses are adjusted and the errors into which they are often led are rectified. But this common sense approach to the matter would remain unsatisfactory if we ignore the sixth sense, believed Montravel.

²¹³ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 24.

²¹⁴ Franz Anton Mesmer, *Précis Historique*, p. 25.



ESSAI
SUR
LA THÉORIE
DU
SOMNAMBULISME
MAGNÉTIQUE.

LE fluide que M. Mesmer appelle fluide magnétique animal, & que par plusieurs raisons, surtout pour sa grande affinité avec l'eau, je crois n'être autre chose que le feu élémentaire (1), est une substance extrêmement subtile & élastique qui pénètre tous les corps.

L'essence de ce fluide, sa propriété essentielle est le mouvement, & c'est lui qui le communique à tout, dans la nature.

A

Fig. 2.7 Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* (*Essay on the Theory of Magnetic Somnambulism*), London, 1787. Title page and first page of a 1787 printed copy.

He defines this as interior touch, a sense that 'spreads throughout the interior of the body' in a similar way to which 'ordinary touch' exerts its function at the level of 'the envelope' or the skin. The somnambulist 'doesn't see the interior of the body, but *touches it*,' states Montravel.²¹⁵ The faculty of 'seeing' the internal disposition of the body allows the somnambulist to perceive the interior of the body of the magnetizer as well, and, in addition,

²¹⁵ 'Le Somnambule magnétique touche intérieurement la partie malade, sans toucher celles qui ne le sont pas; de la même manière qu'un homme qui a une plaie extérieure dans une partie quelconque de son corps, sent le mal que lui fait cette plaie, sans faire aucune attention à tout les autres parties qui ne sont pas malades.' Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, pp. 21-22.

the one of any other being encountered. Relying on the conception of an attuned body to the surroundings, Montravel observes that the somnambulist's attention is drawn to any deviation from the equilibrium between macro- and microcosm. He or she focuses on the body part that has a discordant functioning in relation to 'the machine,' as Montravel used to call the soma.

The meaning attached to inner touch sense allowed Tardy de Montravel to introduce the concept of body as a harmoniously constituted ensemble - the somnambulist estimates the health condition of the body by checking the interdependent parts in the system. Montravel uses an analogy between the working together of instruments in a musical performance and the functioning of the organism. Just as 'l'oreille juste' discerns any dissonance resulting from playing an instrument off-key, the somnambulist is sensitive to the malfunction displayed in any part of the body:

Toutes les parties de son corps, qui se trouvent être en bon état, ne font point, sur son âme, une impression particulière & propre à réveiller son attention. Il n'en voit alors que l'ensemble & l'harmonie, de même que dans un concert de plusieurs instruments parfaitement d'accord, l'oreille entend l'ensemble de l'harmonie, elle s'y accoutume sans être affectée du son d'un instrument plus que d'un autre ; [...].²¹⁶

Since the somnambulist employs the sixth sense of the body that is made manifest under magnetic sleep, Montravel is convinced that him or her can be used as an 'instrument' in favour of humankind. In the foreword he wrote to the *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* he detailed on the magnetised person's ability to survey the inner part of the living at the request of his or her magnetiser.²¹⁷ But popular disbelief, based on the lack of information about the scarce number of relations established between the magnetised person and his or her magnetiser, contributed to the discredit brought upon animal magnetism.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 23.

²¹⁷ 'Convaincu qu'un Somnambule entre nos mains peut bien être employé à l'avantage des autres hommes ; que c'est un instrument dont nous pouvons nous servir pour le bien de l'humanité ; je n'ai jamais cru cependant qu'il fût permit de le faire à son détriment, ni de risquer de désorganiser la machine, pour l'utilité des autres.' Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. xxv.

²¹⁸ 'Voilà ce qui rendra toujours la pratique du Magnétisme très pénible, & ce qui retardera peut-être encore long-temps, les progrès de cette découverte sublime: quelques Magnétiseurs bien intentionnés produiront de temps en temps d'excellens effets; ils guériront d'une manière, comme miraculeuse, un petit nombre de malades; mais il faudra des siècles peut-être pour voir

One of the viewpoints that constantly returned in Montravel's writing is illustrated in the option of assimilating the sixth sense of the somnambulist to an instinct that automatically leads him or her to ultimate truths in the present or future time:

C'est dans ce sens que je considère d'abord le Somnambule magnétique, c'est l'instinct chez lui qui agit : c'est lui qui voit, qui sent, qui touche tout les parties de la machine : c'est lui qui s'aidant ensuite des facultés de l'âme, pressent son état futur comme un effet, non pas deviné, mais nécessaire & déjà marqué dans l'état actuel.²¹⁹

The prediction of the future condition of the somnambulist is, in Montravel's view, an estimate of the current situation of the being through the employment of the sixth sense. It necessarily develops into the new one forecasted because its directions of evolution are detectable in the present state of the person. Moreover, he claimed that the somnambulist never fails to recognise what is beneficial or detrimental to him or her in the immediate surroundings.²²⁰ Montravel rejects any suggestion of divination in the exercise of the sixth sense under magnetic sleep. Nevertheless, he noticed the common perception of the somnambulist as a sorcerer or sorceress, but only to discarded it and emphasises the unconscious activity of the somnambulist's mind and the urge that drives him or her towards accurate information:

On ne regardera plus par un abus ridicule des mots, le Somnambule comme un sorcier, ni ses annonces comme des prédictions, ses pressensations comme des divinations ; les gens qui dans la vue de tourner en ridicule le Magnétisme, font tous ces quiproquo, voudroient nous faire trouver des miracles, dans le Somnambulisme ; je ne vois, au contraire, chez le Somnambule qu'un instinct admirable à la vérité, mais purement machinal.²²¹

ce moyen, si simple en lui-même devenir généralement utile a tous les hommes.' Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 80.

²¹⁹ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, pp 28-9.

²²⁰ 'J'ai eu beaucoup d'autres occasions de reconnoître la sureté de cet instinct, qui désigne aux Somnambules, sans jamais les tromper, tout ce qui peut leur être nuisible ou nécessaire.' Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 74.

²²¹ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique* (London: 1787 [1785]), p. 36-7.

When Mesmer acknowledged somnambulism in his *Mémoire*, he accepted the existence of the phenomenon and disagreed with the popular belief that explained it in connection with divination, spells, magic, etc. Mesmer argued that somnambulism was misunderstood and passed off as black magic instead of being analysed as a result of natural processes that are still obscure and neglected:

‘En observent ces phénomènes, en réfléchissant sur la facilité avec laquelle les erreurs naissent, se multiplient et se succèdent, personne ne pourra méconnaître la source des opinions sur les oracles, les inspirations, les sybilles, les prophéties, les divinations, les sortilèges, la magie, la démonurgie des anciens ; et de nos jours, sur les possessions et les convulsions. Quoique ces différentes opinions paraissent aussi absurdes qu’extravagantes, elles ne portent pas tout-à-fait sur des chimères ; tout n’y est point prestige ; elles sont souvent les résultats de l’observation de certains phénomènes de la nature, qui, faute de lumière ou de bonne foi, ont été successivement défigurés ; enveloppés ou mystérieusement cachés. Je puis prouver aujourd’hui que ce qu’il y a toujours eu de vrai dans les faits dont il s’agit, doit être rapporté à la même cause, et qu’ils ne doivent être considérés que comme autant de modifications de l’état appelé *somnambulisme*.’²²²

The assertion of a sixth sense was made possible through the discovery and application of animal magnetism, maintained Montravel in support of the doctrine professed by Mesmer. In spite of the fact that it became manifest in sessions of induced magnetic somnambulism, the sixth sense was regarded as a general characteristic of humankind. It would explain chance-driven human relationships such as sympathy, antipathy, or platonic love. Animal magnetism was to establish its place among the scientific achievements of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It was initially considered a branch of physics applied to medicine, but its long-term influence is detectable in the development of modern psychological studies. The employment of hypnosis in the latter domain of study can be related to the state of magnetic somnambulism.

When Tardy de Montravel drew his conclusions on magnetic somnambulism and the sixth sense, he described a far-reaching implication of animal magnetism. He stated that the evidence of the unusual sense gives rise to the idea of congruence of parts - ‘au moral, comme au physique’ - in the system that is the human being. Moreover, through the application of the

²²² Franz Anton Mesmer, *Mémoire de F. A. Mesmer, docteur en médecine, sur ses découvertes* (Paris: Pierre Maumus, 1826[1799]), pp. 54-6.

sixth sense the harmony between macrocosm and microcosm is maintained.²²³ For Montravel, this human faculty confirms the spiritual essence of the being, and at the same time provides grounds for the material component of such an ethereal being. In the discovery of animal magnetism Montravel sees the confirmation of a ‘universal agent’ to be found in all existence, whereas in the state of magnetic somnambulism he reads the validation of the mystical powers of the individual:

Mais cette vue de l’avenir, cet instinct anticipé, cette faculté que nous découvrons dans le Somnambule, & par laquelle comparant son état présent avec les effets que doit produire le remède qu’il y applique ; combinant dans l’avenir l’action de ce remède avec la résistance du mal, il peut prévoir, avec la dernière précision, quel sera son état physique dans un temps donné ; cette faculté, dis-je, ne peut appartenir à la machine seule ; &, je le répète, bien loin que la découverte du Magnétisme ait fourni des armes au matérialisme, comme plusieurs l’ont prétendu ; si la spiritualité de l’âme avoit besoin de nouvelles preuves, le Somnambulisme magnétique, au contraire, nous fourniroit une lumière à laquelle les matérialistes les plus décidés ne pourroient se refuser.²²⁴

The information gathered on animal magnetism supported the idea of relationships established between human beings or between nature and human beings at the level of energy in the universe. The assimilation of the somnambulist to an instrument able to detect changes in a ‘universal agent’ had re-emerged in the perception of the unconscious that the Surrealists exhibited in their own attempt to explain the artistic process through automatic mechanisms of painting and object making. A thought reading or a communion of thought between members of the Surrealist group engaged in the play of the *exquisite corpse*,²²⁵ for example, is comparable to the one established between the magnetiser and the magnetised person in magnetic experiments at the end of the eighteenth century.

²²³ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 19.

²²⁴ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, pp. 37-8.

²²⁵ On the *exquisite corpse* and Surrealism see Arturo Schwarz (ed.), *Le Cadavre exquis, son exaltation: The Exquisite Corpse, Its Exaltation*, exhibition catalogue of an exhibition held at Galleria Schwarz, Milan, 5-28 February 1975 (Milano: Galleria Schwarz, 1975); Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, Davis Schneiderman and Tom Denlinger (eds.), *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press; Chesham, 2009).

II. *L'Homme idéal* (1943) by Victor Brauner

Animal magnetism and the sixth sense are referred to in Victor Brauner's work in the mid-1930s and then again in the late 1930s and at the beginning of the 1940s. The somnambulist's figure becomes one of the typical features of Victor Brauner's work in these periods of his creation. It intersects other pictorial motifs, such as the medium at the highest point of a séance, or the animal-object metamorphosis. The subject matter is recognisable in *College of the Invisible* (*Collège de l'invisible*) (1939), *Heron of Alexandria* (*Héron d'Alexandrie*) (1939), *Fascination* (1939), *The Wolf - Table* (*Le Loup – table*) (1939, 1947), and *The Ideal Man* (*L'Homme idéal*) (1943).

The somnambulist first appeared in the guise of a woman that holds a mirror in Brauner's contribution to a *cadavre exquis* in 1934. The theme developed relatively late in his work and emerged as an autonomous motif at the beginning of the 1940s. This section of the thesis endeavours to chart an assimilation of the somnambulist's subject into Brauner's work in the aftermath of the event that led to the left eye loss of the painter on a summer night in August 1938.

Angry and astonished by fatality, Victor Brauner put together the file, '*Le cas*' Brauner, to document the apprehension he had about the tragic episode years before it actually happened. The conflation I am suggesting of the theme of the sleepwalker in the early 1940s of Brauner's work and the preoccupation for self-representation ante-1938 relies on the understanding of the state of somnambulism that I detailed from the viewpoint of animal magnetism. According to eighteenth century accounts about magnetic somnambulism, the sleepwalker under magnetic sleep is able to indicate the course of his or her own recovery in an appropriate way and correctly estimate when it will be completed. This fact supported a widespread understanding of animal magnetism as a sort of magic inquiry into the future of a person with the prediction of events that would influence his or her own fate.

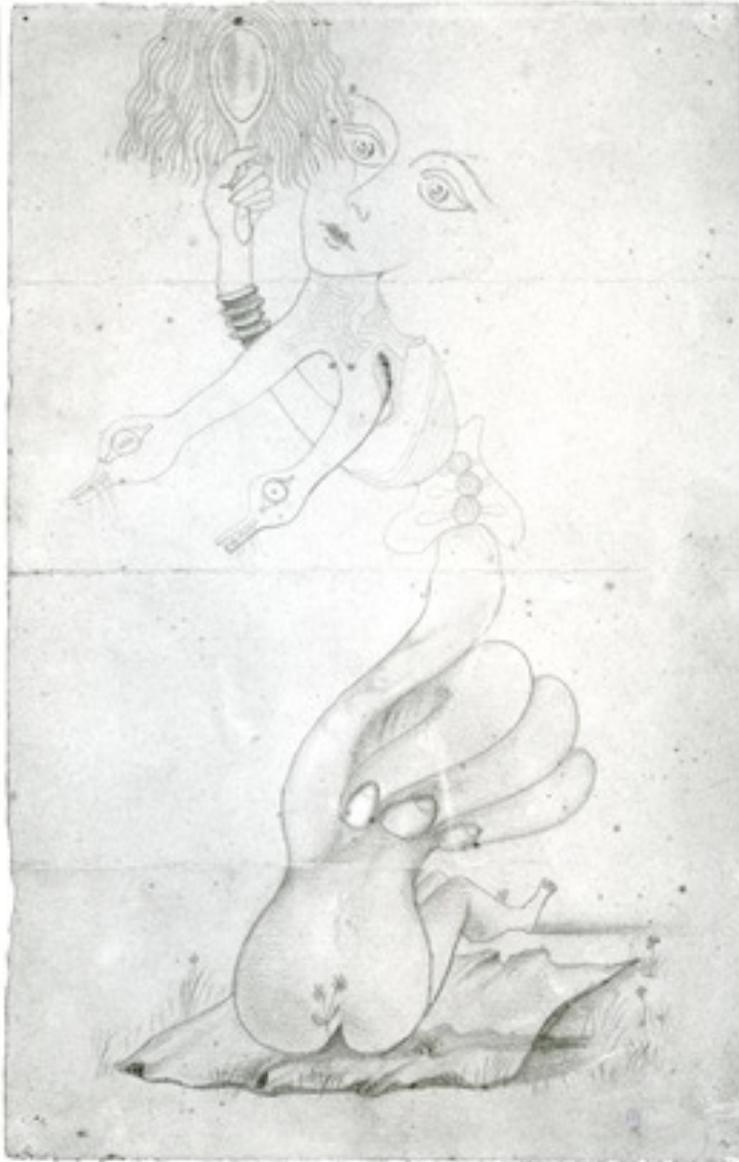


Fig. 2.8 Victor Brauner, André Breton, Jacques Hérold, Jeannette Tanguy, Yves Tanguy, *Figure Cadavre exquis*, 1934, pencil on paper, 25.6 x 16.5 cm, Kay Sage Tanguy Bequest, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The Surrealists were seemingly unaffected by the reputation of pseudoscience applied to animal magnetism and enquired into automatism – largely adopted as the base for the development of Surrealist techniques – with the same open-mindedness manifested by the founder and disciples of the doctrine of animal magnetism. Previously unnoticed by Surrealist scholars, Victor Brauner embedded in one of his artworks (*The Ideal Man*, 1943) a handwritten note that indicates his knowledge of the sixth sense of the somnambulist.

a. The *clear vision* of the somnambulist

The work by Victor Brauner that includes references to animal magnetism is *The Ideal Man* (*L'Homme idéal*) of 1943. An emblematic figure is depicted through a succession of enclosures that suggest more an object with encased elements than a coherent articulation of anatomical segments in the tradition of Renaissance drawing. In spite of a similitude of title with Da Vinci's diagram, *The Ideal Man* by Victor Brauner reflects a perception of the human in accordance with Montravel's views set out in the *Essay*, in which magnetic somnambulism confirms a tripartite structure of the human:

Ce sixième sens est cependant matériel, & c'est ce qui me fait regarder l'homme étant composé de trois parties bien distinctes : l'homme intellectuel, immatériel qui est l'âme : l'homme intérieur, le sixième sens, l'instinct, & si l'on pouvoit parler ainsi, l'âme matérielle : & enfin l'homme purement matériel, ou le corps tel qu'on l'a connu jusqu'à ce jour ; c'est-à-dire, la machine agissant au moyen des cinq sens connus.²²⁶

Montravel's conception of an *interior man* (*l'homme intérieur*) in connection with the issue of animal magnetism was frequently discussed in the literature on the subject, until the second decade of the nineteenth century. In a way that has not been revealed in the recent research on Surrealism I am asserting here that this literature entered the sphere of interests of the Surrealists and constituted one of their favourite subjects of discussion.²²⁷

While developing a painting technique that made use of wax, a substance that had been exposed to the influence of the 'universal agent' or 'the fluid' in Montravel's experiments, Victor Brauner approached the theme of *l'homme intérieur* in *The Ideal Man* of 1943, as well

²²⁶ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 19. 'This sixth sense is therefore material, and makes me conceive of the human as being composed of three distinct parts: the intellectual human being, immaterial, which is the spirit; the inner human being, the sixth sense, the instinct, and if we could say so, the material spirit; and finally, the exclusively material human being, or the body as it has been known till now, that is, the device powered by means of the five well-known senses.'

²²⁷ André Breton, 'Centenaire d'Arnim,' p. 5.

as in a series of works he undertook from the beginning of the 1940s. Victor Brauner concluded *The Ideal Man* in 1943.



Fig. 2.9 *The Ideal Man* (detail), 1943, wax and ink drawings on papier collé on wood panel, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

The piece displays a mixed technique reminiscent of the assemblages or boxes of the same time, which were years spent in hiding in the Hautes Alpes. A new material entered into Brauner's repertoire: the beeswax, locally sourced in the hamlet of Les Celliers de Rousset. By handling of a burning candle, Brauner allowed melted wax to build up on the wooden panel of the artwork's surface. We are eager to understand the repetitive movements through which Brauner described the succession of compartments in the composition of *The Ideal Man* as a variant of automatic writing. A more common sample of automatic writing is encapsulated in the top chamber of the figure. The scribbles are accompanied by a profile with ectoplasm depicted in the middle and lower right section of the recess. Each compartment of the subdivided figure contains references to one of the main functions of the body. The small adjacent cells appear to be separated but also reconnected through a system of beeswax vessels.



Fig. 2.10 *The Ideal Man*, 1943, wax and ink drawings on papier collé on wood panel, 37 x 16,5 cm, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

The question to be asked here concerns *The Ideal Man*'s significance in the overall status of Brauner's work. In the heraldic figure depicted in *The Ideal Man* in mixed technique Brauner placed at the level of the stomach an inscription that reads: *Clear vision*. We remark that Montravel noticed in his essay on magnetic somnambulism that the somnambulist claims *to see* the interior of his or her own body through a sense that has its location at the height of the stomach.²²⁸

When Breton commented on Surrealist painting in the double issue of *Minotaure* in May 1939 he associated the work of Victor Brauner to a cinematic description of 'an encounter between a somnambulist and a female hotel-thief in a corridor.' Simon Watson Taylor's translation in *Surrealism and Painting*²²⁹ has missed the additional connotations of the wordplay in French on the expression *souris d'hôtel*. Apart from being a pun for a female hotel-thief, the phrase conveys meaning in the primary sense of word components: if the theoretician of Surrealism related a mouse to the image of the somnambulist it could have been a clue to alert readers familiar with issues on animal magnetism and the eighteenth century material on the subject.

Montravel mentions in his *Essay on the Theory of Magnetic Somnambulism* that a somnambulist instinctively recoils in the proximity of a rat. The eighteenth-century French text, however, is rather ambiguous at this point. It describes a situation in which the somnambulist 'sees' nothing from the exterior of the body but 'la rate' ('the spleen'). The French 'la rate' is the homophone of the English 'the rat' and the fact that Montravel's study was published in London in 1785 may explain the misspelling. In addition, the entire context of the paragraph suggests the perception of an object that is outside of the human body. Its unique status in the phenomena that surrounds the somnambulist fuelled the derision of contemporaries:

Cette explication répond à la mauvaise plaisanterie de quelques-uns, qui croient dire beaucoup, en demandant pourquoi le Somnambule qui voit la rate, par exemple, ne voit pas encore mieux toutes les autres parties extérieures du corps, plus apparentes que la rate. Si cette partie extérieure est en harmonie avec toutes les autres, si elle renvoie à l'âme l'impression qu'elle doit naturellement lui renvoyer, pourquoi le Somnambule la

²²⁸ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 20

²²⁹ André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, translated from the French by Simon Watson Taylor (London: Macdonald and Co., 2002[1972]), p. 149.

verroit-il plutôt que tout le reste de l'ensemble? Mais si la rate est malade, si cette partie discorde, si les impressions que l'âme en reçoit sont différentes de celles qu'elle a coutume d'en recevoir; c'est alors sur cette partie que le Somnambule doit porter & réunir son attention toute entière.²³⁰

Detractors of magnetic somnambulism have used the incident to contest the state of deep sleep of the magnetised person. Nevertheless, the physician persists: it is the same disequilibrium within the functioning of the body that renders the somnambulist responsive to it – the rat could be sick and the somnambulist will draw back from approaching it. In Breton's scenario in the *Minotaure* – of an encounter that seems to mimic the one described by Tardy de Montravel in *Essay on the Theory of Magnetic Somnambulism* – Brauner will take the place of an observer of the scene:

Du point où Brauner s'est posté en observateur idéal 'une telle rencontre, le grand humour et le grand amour échangent leur plus longues étincelles.'²³¹

The poet associated these two different responses to animal magnetism with the artworks of Victor Brauner in 1939. Thus the viewer's reception of the work is prefigured: it will either provoke a comic reaction due to a conspicuous sense of humour that the artist made manifest, or it will anticipate a sense of communion in love.

Animal magnetism and the state of magnetic somnambulism were constant subject matter for Victor Brauner in this period. In 1939 he completed *Fascination*, but also *College of the Invisible (Collège de l'invisible)*, *Heron of Alexandria (Héron d'Alexandrie)*, *Psychological Space (Espace psychologique)*, and *The Wolf - Table (Le Loup – table)*.

²³⁰ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 23.

²³¹ André Breton, 'Des Tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste' in *Minotaure*, nos. 12-13, 12 May 1939, pp 16-7, p.17. 'From the point where Brauner has installed himself as the ideal observer of such an encounter, great humour and great love exchange their longest sparks.' André Breton, 'The most recent tendencies in Surrealist painting,' in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), p. 149.

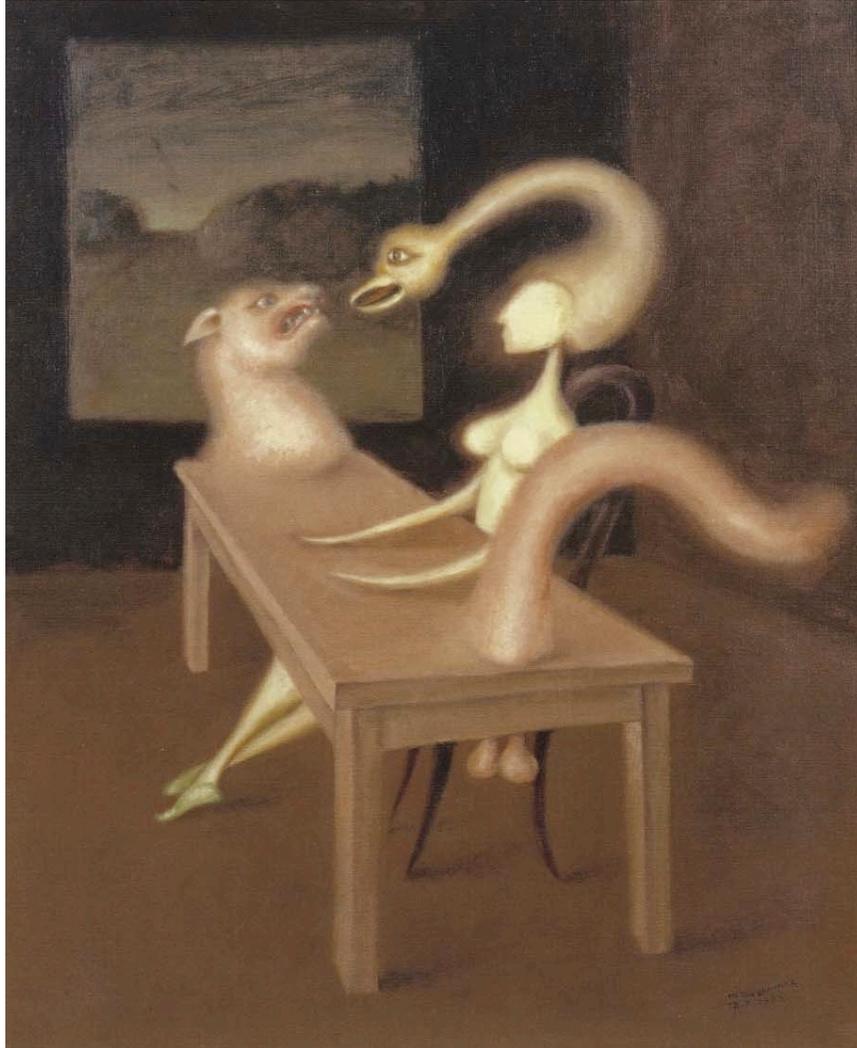


Fig. 2.11 *Fascination*, 1939, oil on canvas, 65 x 55 cm, private collection.

The painter depicted in *Fascination* the somnambulist engaged in a session of magnetic somnambulism. A dark room surrounds the female character that is seated at a table. Her profile displays no glaring eye as she lays her arms on the table's surface. This feature of the main figure in the composition is an indication of the subject matter of the painting that does not take place in the realm of the visible. Inanimate objects metamorphose into wild beings as they witness the unleashed inner powers of the somnambulist. Her hair transforms into the upper part of a bird's body, the beak wide open, and its eye staring into the darkness beyond the represented scene. The bird contorts its neck crying out in the air towards the wolf's head barking back at it. The beast takes shape out of the planked table top, with the head and tail above the table and genitals below it. These last components of the animal are placed in the

composition in such a way that they suggest together with the breast of the naked somnambulist the formation of the alchemical androgynous figure within the artwork. With this element it can be suggested that Victor Brauner's work in the late 1930s makes a working connection between animal magnetism and magnetic somnambulism, and combines these with the representation of occult symbolism.



Fig. 2.12 *The Wolf – Table (Le Loup – table)*, 1939, 1947, wood and elements of a stuffed fox, 54 x 57 x 28.5 cm, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Victor Brauner selected the hybrid wolf-table from the composition of the *Fascination* and *Psychological Space* paintings, both created in the same year 1939, and completed a three-dimensional work. *The Wolf – Table* consisted of a wooden table with two of the legs transformed into the wolf's paws and stuffed animal elements articulated to the structure. The

piece went missing during the Second World War period when the artist was in hiding, and he re-assembled the work for the *International Surrealist Exhibition* at Galerie Maeght in July 1947. André Breton contributed his last text on the work of Victor Brauner in July 1946:

Victor Brauner seul alors a *tablé* sur la peur et il l'a fait au moyen de la table que l'on sait (*Espace psychologique*, 1939) hurlant derrière elle à la mort et se prévalent de bourses génitales bien remplies. Cette période de son œuvre nous apporte le témoignage incontestablement le plus lucide de cette époque, elle seule est tout appréhension du temps qui va venir, de loin elle doit passer pour la plus historiquement *située*.²³²

The poet identified the period of the *Fascination* and *Psychological Space* paintings in Victor Brauner's creation as one that had anticipated the death and terror of the Second World War through a subject matter that induced intense fear in the viewer. Breton read the agreement between the artwork and the political context of the period as supporting the historical truth revealed through the painter's work. His view is in consonance with the opinion I have earlier expressed about the influence of animal magnetism on Victor Brauner's work. Didier Semin has interpreted the authoritarian stance of the half-animal half-object wolf that in Breton's reading 'se prévalent de bourses génitales bien remplies' in terms of the role played by sexuality in the painter's work. In his *Victor Brauner* monograph Semin discussed *Le Loup – table* in the same group of paintings that comprised the series *Onomatomania of Victor ∞* (*Onomatomanie de Victor ∞*) (1949) and *Reverie (Rêverie)* (1964).²³³ These last works mentioned under the sign of 'Braunerian Eros' are saturated with sexual drive that results from a hyperbolic and sensuous employment of male and female genitalia in their compositions.

b. Frederic Myers and the Society for Psychical Research in London

Animal magnetism returned constantly to the path of clarifying psychological processes of the human beings. Adam Crabtree has followed the development of psychotherapy from the

²³² André Breton, 'Entre chien et loup...' in *Surréalisme et peinture*, pp. 125-6.

²³³ Didier Semin, *Victor Brauner*, p. 197.

discovery of animal magnetism and its additionally induced state of magnetic sleep, and in *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* of 1993 he redefined the parameters of a discipline that owed its evolution to a newly established relationship between the sick person and his or her psychologist. Crabtree asserted that a paradigm change had occurred in the approach to mental disturbances with the introduction of the investigation into animal magnetism related phenomena. This area in the history of modern psychology has been left largely unexplored even though it had provided innumerable reports of successful treatments during the nineteenth century. *From Mesmer to Freud* re-writes this history from the innovative point of view of recuperating the archived material on animal magnetism at various stages of the incursion into the domain of the unconscious activity of the mind. Crabtree maintains that the acknowledgment of magnetic sleep or artificially induced somnambulism had favoured the installation of a new paradigm that allowed for mental disruptions to be interpreted as having their cause in the inner, mainly unconscious, activity of the mind. The alternate-consciousness paradigm had replaced the intrusion paradigm that ascribed the uncontrolled manifestations of the mind to an intervention from the au-delà or spirit world as well as the organic model that had come full circle on physiological breakdowns.

With Crabtree's book we get into the historiography of decoding the psychological processes that are mobilised in the unusual conditions of the functioning of the mind. For example, the unique nature of the relationship established between the somnambulist and his or her magnetizer is explained through a state of consciousness that is different from the waking condition of the subject. James Braid, the Manchester physician who was a sceptical reader of animal magnetism, attributed the uncommon knowledge of the somnambulist under magnetic sleep to a state of mind that can be reached through hypnotism. The process dubbed by Braid was interpreted in a psychological key only and assured in his view the success of the cure.²³⁴ Latter on, the subject under magnetic sleep was perceived as expressing a consciousness that is quite different from the one that is manifest while awake. This duality in the perception of the realities of the inner and outer worlds led to a description of phenomena

²³⁴ Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 161.

that qualified the subject to acquire a double consciousness.²³⁵ Pierre Janet investigated cases of double consciousness in the 1880s; his analysis was indifferent to whether they were spontaneous or artificially induced. The alternate-consciousness paradigm of the functioning of the mind was furthermore supported through the research conducted on automatism, in particular automatic writing, by Frederic Myers.²³⁶

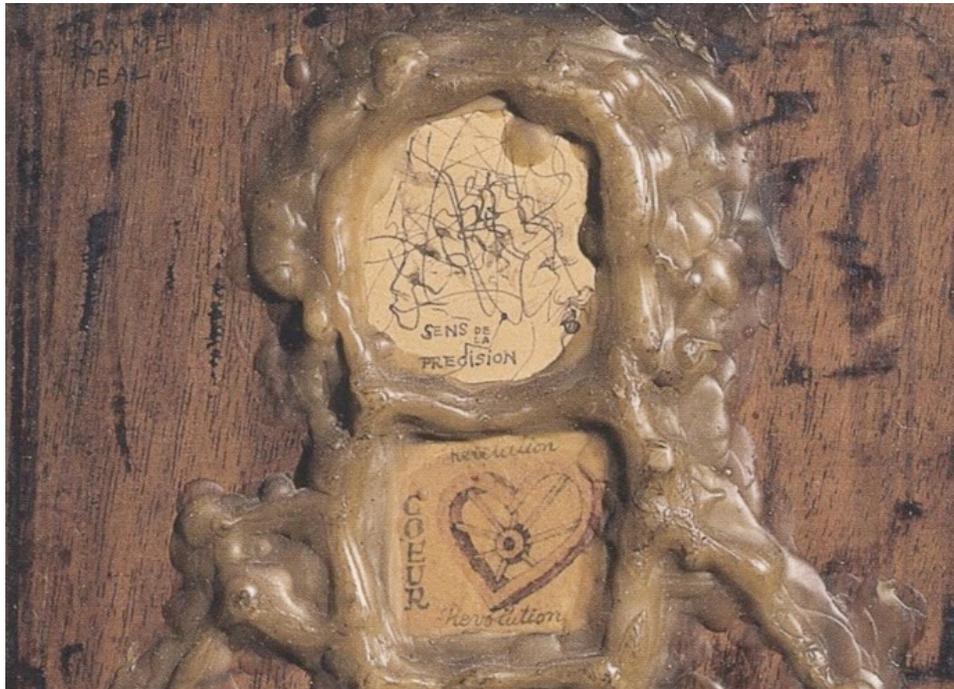


Fig. 2.13 *The Ideal Man* (detail), 1943, wax and ink drawings on papier collé on wood panel, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

In Brauner's work, *The Ideal Man*, a five-compartment figure suggests a comment on animal magnetism and its influence at the turn of the century on the advance of psychological studies. Meaningless scribbles in the compartment of brain activities underline the drive to precision suggested by the inscription 'sense of precision' ('sens de la précision.') and bring into focus Myers' writings on automatism, while alluding to Richet's studies on psychic

²³⁵ Alfred Binet, *On Double Consciousness: Experimental Psychological Studies* (Chicago, The Open Court, 1890). See also Alfred Binet, *La Psychologie du raisonnement: recherches expérimentales par l'hypnotisme*, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1886, and Alfred Binet and Charles Féré, *Le Magnétisme animal*, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1887.

²³⁶ Frederic Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (New York, N. Y.: Longmans, Green and Co., 1954 [1903]), 2 vols., vol. 1, p. 222.

phenomena due to the profile and the ectoplasm depicted nearby. Each division involved in the construction of the figure contains ink drawings realised with reference to the functions of human body. The organism is schematically represented in small adjacent boxes separated by drain-like vessels filled with beeswax. The scribble in the top compartment as well as the profile with ectoplasm in the same area of the artwork support our presumption of Brauner's acquaintance with psychological studies on double consciousness in France and England at the turn of the twentieth century.

Frederic Myers explained in a study posthumously published in 1903 that human consciousness expands far beyond the limits of the 'conscious Self' of human personality. He preferred to define this reference term of the human as the 'empirical' or 'supraliminal' Self. A further deep human consciousness exists, states Myers, from which the part accessed through the empirical self represents a mere section. It remains throughout the earthly existence of the human in a latent condition, with the potential of being activated in states of trance, ecstasy, or somnambulism. The motor automatisms that convey a message through movements of the limbs or the hand as automatic writing or as telepathy are connected to the same area of human consciousness. Myers acknowledges that we all use a metaphorical language in order to express our own perception of 'different streams of "awareness"' within the functioning of the mind. Expressions such as "'fringes" of ordinary consciousness' or "'marginal" associations' as well as "currents of low intensity" had entered a common dictionary in the attempt to deal with the mental activity of the human.

The ideas that Myers put forward in 1901 while writing *Human Personality* had their origin in an article published in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* in London in January 1887. At the time, Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney were joint Honorary Secretaries of the Society's Literary Committee, and their task was to collect evidence that would support 'the thesis that a communication can take place from mind to mind by some agency not that of the recognised organs of sense.'²³⁷ Inheriting the discontinuous and almost ineffective tradition of the early adepts of Mesmer's doctrine on animal magnetism, the Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882. It had its promoters in the person of William Fletcher Barrett and Henry Sidgwick, the latter becoming its first president as well. Myers summarized the purpose of their enterprise in the introduction to *Human Personality*:

²³⁷ Frederic Myers, *Human Personality*, p. 8.

For what seemed needful was an inquiry of quite other scope than the mere analysis of historical documents, or of the origins of any alleged revelation in the past. It must be an inquiry resting primarily, as all scientific inquiries in the stricter sense now must rest, upon objective facts actually observable, upon experiments we can repeat to-day, and which we may hope to carry further to-morrow. It must be an inquiry based, to use an old term, on the uniformitarian hypothesis; on the presumption, that is to say, that *if a spiritual world exists, and if that world has at any epoch been manifest or even discoverable, then it ought to be manifest or discoverable now.*²³⁸

The reason for believing in the possibility of a spiritual world resides in the mental activity that is discernable on the “fringes” of human consciousness. The dynamism that characterised psychological studies in France and England at the end of the nineteenth century is marked by Myers’ contribution to the advancement of the theory of double consciousness. He identified a threshold of consciousness that functions in a similar way to a limit ‘above which sensation or thought must rise before it can enter into our conscious life.’ Nevertheless, beneath this threshold, maintains Myers, a hidden psychical life takes place with sensations, thoughts, and feelings as strong and definite as those that emerge into the supraliminal flow of consciousness. We usually perceive changes occurring in the positive zone of a graph that would include the threshold of consciousness at the neutral point of convergence between unconscious and conscious human acts. We think of ourselves being located in this supraliminal area and we have dismissed the initial vague signs of an unconscious activity of the mind: the indistinct sensations classified in the category of the subliminal because of our failure to individuate them in recognisable sensations, pure and simple. Myers’ suggestion is to extend the dominion of the subliminal to intra-marginal life in an attempt to describe thoughts and feelings that linger beneath the threshold of consciousness. For Myers, ‘these submerged thoughts and emotions’ possess characteristics constantly associated with conscious life. The fact of dwelling under the threshold of everyday life consciousness does not diminish the sharpness with which they are coming into being. For this reason Myers advances the hypothesis of a secondary consciousness, subliminal or ultra-marginal, that would support the actions of an apparently different but coherent entity or being, the subliminal Self:

²³⁸ Frederic Myers, *Human Personality*, p. 7 (Italics in the original text).

Perceiving further that this conscious life beneath the threshold or beyond the margin seems to be no discontinuous or intermittent thing; that not only are these isolated subliminal processes comparable with isolated supraliminal processes (as when a problem is solved by some unknown procedure in a dream), but that there also is a continuous subliminal chain of memory (or more chains than one) involving just that kind of individual and persistent revival of old impressions, and response to new ones, which we commonly call a Self, I find it permissible and convenient to speak of subliminal Selves, or more briefly of a subliminal Self. I do not indeed by using this term assume that there are two correlative and parallel selves existing always within each of us. Rather I mean by the subliminal Self that part of the Self which is commonly subliminal; and I conceive that there may be, not only co-operations between these quasi-independent trains of thought, but also upheavals and alternations of personality of many kinds, so that what was once below the surface may for a time, or permanently, rise above it. And I conceive also that no Self of which we can here have cognisance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger Self, revealed in a fashion at once shifting and limited through an organism not so framed as to afford it full manifestation.²³⁹

The ascertainment of a subliminal Self was intended to mark the subversion of the control exerted by the empirical or supraliminal Self over human consciousness. It was understood as prevailing in certain situations that would give rise to actions coordinated by a secondary consciousness. The subliminal and supraliminal selves would never act concomitantly, but in a rather magic interplay. A further point stressed by Frederic Myers was that the human Self, in either of its manifestations, is a mere fragment of ‘a larger Self’ that is unable to reveal its true nature because of the limitations of the organism. This last viewpoint, as expressed in *Human Personality*, seems to have been congruent with the objectives of the Society for Psychical Research established in London in 1882.

c. Myers, Richet, and the dawn of a new science: Metapsychics

The theory expressed by Myers in *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* was received with scepticism in the academia of the time that attributed automatism and other related phenomena characteristic of the state of magnetic somnambulism to a mental condition: hysteria. This last section of the chapter analyses the shift of focus at the end of the

²³⁹ Frederic Myers, *Human Personality*, pp. 14-5.

nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth from the investigation of the mind in sessions of magnetic somnambulism to the examination of séances presided over by a medium, another instance of the somnambulist. The objective of these séances was to summon invisible entities to materialise in a three-dimensional system of coordinates and to inspect and photographically record these materialisations. The branch of science developed from these experiments was called psychical research in London and metapsychics in Paris. This subsection of the thesis explores these unconventional ways of perceiving science at the turn of the twentieth century and their influence on the art of the time. i.e. Symbolism, which continued in Surrealism as I will show in the first part of the next chapter of the thesis.

The double consciousness theory endorsed by Myers' writings from its inaugural article of January 1887 in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* was confronted with peer criticism in the pages of the same publication. A close examination of the hypothesis of a secondary consciousness was detailed in the eleventh volume of *Proceedings* in the article 'Subliminal Self or Unconscious Cerebration' by A. H. Pierce, of Harvard University. Pierce asserted that double consciousness theory was reliant on the study of hysteria, an argument that in essence contradicted Myers. He advanced a case of observation of hysteria in which movements that are not coordinated by a so-called primary consciousness and sensations that cannot be explained through the habitual path of perception take place. For Pierce, these hysterical phenomena are analogous to the incoherent excitement in the actions of animals, which have been deprived of the control exerted by cerebral hemispheres. Because of the similitude of situations, it is doubtful that the movements and sensations ascribed by Myers and others to a secondary consciousness can be related to any of the conscious processes at all, Pierce stated convincingly.²⁴⁰ The inference he drew that mental activities are dependent on cortical coordination was in turn criticised by a colleague of Myers in the Society for Psychical Research in London who wrote an article in favour of double consciousness theory in the same volume of the *Proceedings*. Frank Podmore, who contributed along with Myers to the preparation of *Phantasms of the Living*,²⁴¹ argued that Pierce's reasoning was faulty because it attempted to explain the functioning of the mind exclusively on a material or physical basis.

²⁴⁰ A. H. Pierce, 'Subliminal Self or Unconscious Cerebration,' *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. XI, pp. 317-325.

²⁴¹ Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, 2 vols (London: Society for Psychical Research, 1886).

He claimed that even though ‘the two sets may indeed be diverse aspects of the same fact,’ we have to regard them as separate and treat them individually in order to understand them thoroughly. If there is no doubt about mental occurrences, which for Podmore are discernable in different states of consciousness, being accompanied by physical modifications, we cannot deduce an interchangeable knowledge that can be applied to both domains of the human.²⁴² ‘The physical explanation cannot be substituted for the mental one,’ stated the advocate of psychical research.

The Society for Psychical Research in London had to define among its objectives the aim of opposing another current of opinion that became widely debated towards the end of the nineteenth century: the hypothesis of spirit-intervention in the elucidation of mental phenomena that defy any logic. Telepathy and telaesthesia – the perception of thoughts at distance and of remote scenes or objects without the intervention of the commonly recognised organs of sense – were included in this category. Frederic Myers, who proposed the theory of a secondary consciousness in response to phenomena such as telepathy and telaesthesia, acknowledged the assumption of spirit-intervention in human activities but only to delimit his own theory in relation to it. The proponents of spirit-guidance theory, which included Alfred Russel Wallace – a disciple of Charles Darwin involved in the propagation of natural selection based on the species’ tendency to develop varieties of its own –, had vigorously dismissed Myers’ theory of a subliminal self. His theory was perceived as a ‘gratuitous and cumbrous hypothesis.’ At the opposite end of the issue stood a more nuanced position, that of Frederic Myers himself. If he didn’t overtly reject the possibility that agencies other than the mind he had studied could have an influence on human behaviour, he nevertheless pointed out the importance of the possible existence of a secondary consciousness in whose absence one is left with no other choice than to return to the spiritualist version of explaining the incomprehensible as simply what was still unknown. In *Human Personality* Myers stated that the two irreconcilable points of view might be not antagonistic in their essence. He suggested that each method should emphasize the other’s purport in order to allow space for new investigations:

²⁴² Frank Podmore, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. XI, pp. 325-332.

And my conception of a subliminal self will thus appear, not as an extravagant and needless, but as a limiting and rationalising hypothesis, when it is applied to phenomena which at first sight suggest Mr. Wallace's extremer view, but which I explain by the action of the man's own spirit, without invoking spirits external to himself. I do not indeed say that the explanation here suggested is applicable in all cases, or to the complete exclusion of the spirit-hypothesis. On the contrary, the one view gives support to the other. For these faculties of distant communication exist none the less, even though we should refer them to our own subliminal selves. We can, in that case, affect each other at a distance, telepathically; - and if our incarnate spirits can act thus in at least apparent independence of the fleshly body, the presumption is strong that other spirits may exist independently of the body, and may affect us in similar manner.²⁴³

The distinction Myers offered for the subliminal self in comparison with a spiritual conception of the human being, and consequently with a superior order of existence, testifies to a common belief in 'disincarnate spirits' that also populated Wallace's idea of an external world of volition.²⁴⁴ The experiments that originally generated such a viewpoint were concerned with thought reading between the somnambulist and his or her magnetiser in sessions of magnetic somnambulism. Situations that didn't involve the condition of induced magnetic sleep had been noticed in which the occurrence of the same phenomena was witnessed in telepathy and telaesthesia. But, in contrast to the adepts of animal magnetism theory and spirit-intervention hypothesis, Myers ascribed them to the activity of a subliminal self that could exceed the control imposed by a supraliminal self. The configuration of the theory of double consciousness does in fact recall other attempts of classifying the functioning of the mind. It displays similarities with Montravel's theory of magnetic somnambulism. In a conclusive remark of his *Essay*, Montravel extrapolates the results of the practice of magnetic sleep. He reflects upon a tripartite constitution of the human that allocates the attributes of coordinating the unconscious activities of the mind to the inner being or *l'homme intérieur*. Its description in a rather axiomatic paragraph quoted in the previous subsection of this chapter and combined with the information given on the sixth sense, mirrors Myers' future perception of the subliminal self.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Frederic Myers, *Human Personality*, p. 16.

²⁴⁴ Alfred Russel Wallace, *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism: Three Essays*, London: James Burns 1875, p. 52.

²⁴⁵ Tardy de Montravel, *Essai sur la théorie du somnambulisme magnétique*, p. 19.

The materialisation of the contact established with the spirit world or the ectoplasm was well documented in *Traité de métapsychique* by Charles Richet (1850-1935), in which Myers was often cited as a reliable witness of cases of materialisation with powerful mediums. The *Treatise* was in fact dedicated to William Crookes and Frederic Myers. Richet had himself taken part in experiments that envisioned a world beyond our classical time-space frame of existence. As the temptation to offer material evidence of a spirit world may have driven clairvoyants to fake the results of séances, the researchers imposed strict conditions of setting at the meetings they attended. Only in these specific circumstances was Charles Richet confident about reporting the outcome of an experiment with a person who had manifested psychic abilities. He recommended gathering of photographic proofs of such a rare phenomenon, as he genuinely believed in its possible occurrence:

De fait, la seule preuve objective, décisive, c'est de pouvoir, alors qu'on est absolument certain qu'aucune personne étrangère n'a pu s'introduire dans la salle des séances, voir, toucher, surtout photographier simultanément le médium et la soi-disant apparition. Rares, rarissimes, sont les expériences de ce genre. Donc, il serait désirable qu'on en produisît quelques-unes encore ; mais, malheureusement, la matérialisation est un phénomène exceptionnel que bien peu de médiums sont en état de présenter avec assez de netteté et d'intensité pour qu'on puisse obtenir sur le même cliché le médium et son fantôme.²⁴⁶

The period of time that elapsed between the publication of *Phantasms of the Living* in 1886 and *Traité de métapsychique* in 1922 had registered a proliferation of photographic material related to psychic phenomena. Charles Richet was familiar to portfolios constituted on the subject of materialisation or ectoplasm by Albert von Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929) in Germany or Juliette Alexandre-Bissou (1861-1956) in France.

Schrenck-Notzing was probably the first observer who succeeded in giving evidence to the phenomenon of ectoplasm during experiments conducted with the medium Stanislaw P. (Popielka). In 1913, he was able to record three hundred sixty images in one session and four hundred in another, the last account suggesting that the camera ran for about twenty seconds, according to technical devices available at the time. He noticed that the blaze of the arc light used during recording had visibly diminished the powers of the medium.

²⁴⁶ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1923[1922]), p. 606.



Fig. 2.14 Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *The Ectoplasmic Veil is Reabsorbed into the Mouth of the Medium Stanislawa P.*, 25 June 1913, twenty gelatin silver prints mounted on card, 3x3 cm approx. (each), Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany.

A close circle of mediums was used over the first two decades of the twentieth century in experiments intended to set the foundations of a new science, metapsychics, as Charles Richet, the 1913 Nobel Prize laureate in physiology–medicine, named it. Marthe Béraud alias Eva C. and Eusapia Palladino were highly monitored mediums, on whose performances Richet based his description of the ectoplasms he had witnessed. The process of materialisation was characterised by a slow weaving of tissues that could start even with a congregation of forces around the habitual table of a séance.

In the conditions of poorly lighted rooms as the experiments with mediums almost all the time required, Richet noticed that a corner of the scene always remains in the shade. That spot of darkness challenged the scientific approach to what could possibly have generated the chain of events that may conclude with an apparition or one of its intermediate stages of manifestation as ectoplasms. Richet's belief was that the phenomenon of materialisation represented a mechanical projection brought into existence with the help of the body of the clairvoyant. When Eusapia Palladino, the medium who had been used for decades within the circle of psychical research enthusiasts at Cambridge, came to preside over such an experiment in Paris at the invitation of Camille Flammarion, the audience split into participants in the séance and observers of it. The photograph by Mairet, at the meeting that took place in Rue Cassini on the twenty-fifth of November 1898, documents the preoccupation of the right side of the beholders with the monitoring of the event. The hands and feet of the medium are highly scrutinised, as well as her overall posture. This happens to such a degree that one of the observers clasped her feet with his feet.



Fig. 2.15 H. Mairet, *Séance with Eusapia Palladino at the Home of Camille Flammarion, Rue Cassini, 25 November 1898*, gelatin silver print, 22.2x28.3 cm, Société Astronomique de France, Fonds Camille Flammarion. Reproduced in *The Perfect Medium*, 2005.

The observer with a notepad and pencil in his hands in the far right of the scene recorded at the house of Camille Flammarion in 1898 is Charles Richet. His definition of the ectoplasm in the 1922 *Traité de métapsychique* includes a reference to the episode of table levitation performed by Eusapia Palladino at the time of the photograph.²⁴⁷ For Richet the ectoplasm was the result of a mechanical force that started to manifest its potential under the influence of the medium. There is nothing to prevent the action of the mechanical force that triggers the formation of an ectoplasm being described by analogy with other phenomena that confirm the existence of the principle of reflection in nature: the reversed image in a mirror, or the outcome of life parameters on various instruments of measurement such as a thermometer or a galvanometer. The heat transfer or the low electric currents in the human organism may leave an indisputable trace, whereas a tactile sensation in the aftermath of a contact reported to have taken place at a distance could result in only one explanation. It could mean that in the conditions of a séance an entity from a different order of existence had entered our time-space frame of perception. Richet argued that apparition-like phenomena are supported by recently revealed demonstrations in the field of relativity. The postulates of Einstein had foreseen that matter and energy may be interchangeable and encouraged in this way a positivistic approach to the experience of materialisation:

Après tout, en réfléchissant, l'absurdité ne paraît pas aussi grande qu'on le croirait tout d'abord. Quand je mets la main devant un miroir, l'image de ma main se reflète : réflexion de lumière. Devant un thermomètre, réflexion de chaleur. Devant un galvanomètre, réflexion d'électricité. Il est vrai que devant une balance il n'y a rien. Mais est-il déraisonnable de supposer que cette projection de lumière, de chaleur et d'électricité pourrait être accompagnée d'une projection de force mécanique ? Car c'est bien à cela seul, en définitive, que se ramène le problème. Si la main à distance peut agir sur une balance, ainsi qu'elle agit sur un thermomètre, sur un galvanomètre, sur un miroir, elle pourra, à la personne voisine, donner une sensation de contact. La matérialisation est une projection mécanique. Or déjà nous avons projection de lumière, de chaleur et d'électricité. Ce n'est pas aller très loin que de regarder comme possible, outre ces projections de chaleur, de lumière et d'électricité, une projection de force mécanique. Les mémorables démonstrations d'Einstein viennent établir à quel point l'énergie mécanique se rapproche de l'énergie lumineuse.

²⁴⁷ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 611.

Il faut avoir une âme scientifique assez haute pour admettre que l'inhabituel a droit d'exister.²⁴⁸

In the first decades of the twentieth century the phenomenon of materialisation gained an indisputable status in the artistic circles that were preoccupied with its authenticity.



Fig. 2.16 Albert von Keller, *The Anonymous Medium* «*Lily disgeistes*», 1895, oil on wood, 35 x 28cm, gift from the estate of Dr Oskar A. Müller, Kunsthau Zürich.

The intermediate stages of ectoplasm came to be compared to the steps in the process of art making. A co-founder of the Munich Secession, the Swiss born painter Albert von Keller (1844-1920) described one of the materialisations made visible by Marthe Béraud, alias Eva C., as ‘a creation of unsurpassed beauty in form, drawing and composition, such as only the

²⁴⁸ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, pp. 610-1.

work of a master can show.²⁴⁹ His comments on the artistic qualities of various ectoplasms produced by Eva C. in séances that had taken place between 1909 and 1913, mainly in Paris, but also in Munich and St Jean de Luz, constituted a section of the documentation on the subject by Albert von Schrenck-Notzing in 1914: *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics*.²⁵⁰

Baron von Schrenck-Notzing was a practising physician in Munich interested in the phenomenon of materialisation to the extent that he monitored and collected evidence for microscopic examinations of the tissue related products of a séance. He conducted a joint research with Madame Bisson in Paris on the activity of Eva C while in a hypnotic state. A large amount of photographs of the bewildering episodes of ectoplasm was archived and served them both in publications in France and Germany. Juliette Alexandre-Bisson was the medium's patron in Paris and published the same year 1914 a study on materialisation, *Les Phénomènes de matérialisation*. The work exhibited a remarkable coincidence of title with von Schrenck-Notzing's publication in Munich.²⁵¹ The latter's translation in French in 1925 adapted the title to *Les Phénomènes physiques de la médiumnité* and benefitted from an introduction by Charles Richet.²⁵²

In 1922 Richet himself made use of art terminology in the account of his experience of materialisation in *Traité de métapsychique*. The reference is made again to the medium Marthe Béraud, alias Eva C. It is stated that a pulp-like material exudes from the body of the medium and organises itself in body parts or renders the countenance of a figure. Richet sees the process in a progressive development that might recall art-making techniques. He notices that the circuit of a séance could generally close at incipient stages of a materialisation. It may be

²⁴⁹ Albert Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics* trans. E. E. Fournier d'Albe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Tauber & Co.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1923), p. 272.

²⁵⁰ Albert Freiherrn von Schrenck-Notzing, *Materialisations-Phaenomene, ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der mediumistischen Teleplastie* (München: E. Reinhardt, 1914).

²⁵¹ Juliette-Alexandre Bisson, *Les Phénomènes de matérialisation, étude expérimentale* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1914).

²⁵² Albert de Schrenck-Notzing, *Les Phénomènes physiques de la médiumnité*, translated from the German by E. Longaud, preface by Professor Charles Richet (Paris: Payot, 1925). Albert de Schrenck-Notzing, *La querelle des phénomènes de matérialisation* (Paris: Annales des sciences psychiques, 1914).

only an elaborate preliminary drawing of the intended apparition that could be shown to the audience.



Fig. 2.17 Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, *The medium Eva C. with the Materialisation of a Woman's Face*, 22 November 1911, gelatin silver print, 15,8x12 cm, Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany. Reproduced in *The Perfect Medium*, 2005.



Fig. 2.18 Side view of the previous occurrence with magnification; taken from the cabinet with a hidden camera. Reproduced in Bisson, *Les Phénomènes de matérialisation*, 1921, and von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation*, 1923.

As if the claim of assisting to a materialisation wouldn't have been a motif in itself to raise suspicion, the materialisation of an image instead of an entity in a three-dimension shape, considers Richet, throws discredit upon the enterprise:

C'est une sorte de gelée liquide, pâteuse, qui sort de la bouche de Marthe, ou de sa poitrine, et s'organise peu à peu, acquérant les formes d'un visage, ou d'un membre. J'ai vu, dans de très bonnes conditions de vision, cette pâte fluide se répandre sur mon genou, et peu à peu s'organiser de manière à me montrer un rudiment de radius, de cubitus, de métacarpe, dont je sentais la pression augmenter sur mon genou. En général, les matérialisations sont progressives et commencent par une ébauche : tandis que les formations complètes de formes et de figures vraiment humaines n'ont lieu que plus tard. Au début souvent ces formations sont très imparfaites. Parfois elles n'ont pas de relief, semblant être plutôt des images que des corps, de sorte que, malgré soit, on est tenté de supposer une fraude, puisqu'on a la matérialisation d'une image et non la matérialisation d'un être.²⁵³

A phenomenon of materialisation comes into being in the private space of a cabinet. A curtain would divide the sitting area in two spaces: one designated for the medium and the other one for the witnesses to the event. Beyond the curtain the light is dimmed and in these circumstances one or multiple cameras could be set off to record the phenomenon from within the cabinet and from the sitters' point of view.

A similar production in von Schrenck-Notzing's collection is the image praised by von Keller in a comment on the photographs of materialisation. The example in question is reproduced here and displays the head of a woman in the midst of taking shape out of teleplastic material – the equivalent term to ectoplasm employed by von Keller and von Schrenck-Notzing. The choice of the word, a composite too, denotes their belief in a correspondence between the artistic process and the materialisation session. Albert von Keller may have experienced séances and depicted the anxious nature of the mediums. The enigmatic figure in *The Anonymous Medium "Lily disgeistes"* (1895) has preoccupied the painter's critics. The hypothesis that has been advanced argues for a psychological identification

²⁵³ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 612.

between von Keller and his model.²⁵⁴ The painter cherished the rumour that he had realised some of his paintings in an unconscious or somnambulistic state. When expressing his aesthetic judgement of Eva C.'s materialisations he applied the same principles that would have governed academic painting or sculpture and denied any possibility of a séance resulting in a fraud:

In this case, the fluctuating condition of the fundamental substance, its stages of development, and the soft rounding of the portraits, which is also seen in several sketches, can hardly be imitated. The artistic performances, seen in Eva's productions, are of very various levels, from the highest artistic power down to an amateurish awkwardness. Certain head formations are so convincing, by their originality and their mysterious composition, that they cannot be compared with the works of human technique, and seem to be elementary natural creations of chance.²⁵⁵

The ectoplasm registered at the séance with Eva C. on the twenty-second of November 1911, while Madame Juliette Alexandre-Bisson and Baron von Schrenck-Notzing assisted, is one of the finest creations in this regard. That von Keller attributed them to such a variable provenance as chance speaks of the impossibility of rationalising the events. The face that was revealed at the séance resembles 'a materialisation of an image,' if the observer's viewpoint to the scene is taken into account, but in comparison with a photograph from the cabinet a more accurate depiction of the young woman emerges. It evokes a cinematic portrait in which a three-dimensional form moves shrouded in the gauze of ectoplasmic formations. Von Keller's experience in painting conditions him to avow a creative intelligence that experiments with a new vehicle i.e. the teleplastic material:

Perhaps we have to deal with several attempts to render the same model, which each time is interpreted differently. As the terrestrial artist is constantly engaged in struggling with his material, so in this case there are many indications of great difficulties in the treatment of the teleplastic material.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Gian Casper Bott (ed.), *Albert von Keller: Salons, Séances, Secession*, exhibition catalogue of an exhibition held at Kunsthaus Zürich, 24 April - 4 October 2009 (München: Hirmer, 2009).

²⁵⁵ Albert Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation*, p. 273.

²⁵⁶ Albert Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation*, p. 272.

The section that quoted von Keller's responses to materialisation as a phenomenon in Baron von Schrenck-Notzing's book published in 1914 left untouched the question of the viability of the formations brought about by the medium in a séance. Despite his reputation in the medical research of the beginning of the twentieth century, Charles Richet would not retract from asserting the autonomy of the 'living beings' that he had witnessed from the point of view of psycho-physiological functions. We may recall here Richet's description:

Et je ne perdrai pas mon temps à énumérer les absurdités, presque les impossibilités psycho-physiologiques, de ce phénomène. Un être vivant, une matière vivante qui se forme sous nos yeux, qui a une chaleur propre, une circulation sans doute, une combustion physiologique (comme je l'ai constaté en faisant respirer la forme de Bien-Boa dans un flacon contenant de l'eau de baryte), une sorte de personnalité psychique, puisqu'il a sa volonté distincte de la volonté du médium, en un mot un nouvel être humain apparaissant, c'est le comble du merveilleux !
Et pourtant, le fait existe.²⁵⁷

The enthusiasm for the ectoplasm configuration prompted Richet to have recourse to a term – *the marvellous* – that would have had nothing in common with a scientific approach to the subject. Being referred to as 'the top of the marvellous' one can infer that the ectoplasm is susceptible to be classified into the Surrealist category of *the fantastic* that I examined in the first chapter of the thesis.

This chapter on animal magnetism and its derivatives has described and analysed the rich background from which Surrealist techniques of art making emerged in the 1920s and 1930s and were still of interest for Victor Brauner in the early 1940s. The mixed technique object *The Ideal Man* (1943) by Brauner was the focal point of this chapter. It supported discussions on a three-way interpretation of the abilities of the human being under magnetic sleep: to exhibit a sixth sense that during the heyday of animal magnetism theories was equated with an all-over, and mainly *internal, sense of touch*; to make use of a *second consciousness* that explains phenomena like premonition, telepathy and cryptesthesia; and to facilitate the materialisation of spirit entities in séances at which the somnambulist fulfilled the role of the medium.

²⁵⁷ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 608-9.

Photographic material gathered by Baron von Schrenck-Notzing and Juliette-Alexandre Bisson on psychical research at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century corroborated the eyewitness reports gathered in *Treatise on metapsychics* by Charles Richet. Additionally, it indicated interdependence between research on the subject and the artistic language of the time. This relationship continued to be present in Surrealism and will be analysed in the first part of the next chapter of the thesis.

Chapter Three

Surrealist Techniques of the Occult

‘Où j’erre vaincu par l’ombre’

André Breton

The last part of this thesis takes into account responses to the occult in Surrealist artworks that cover the period between late 1920s and early 1940s. The chapter explores the challenge that the Surrealist artists and poets recognised in the existence of an arcane element in the reality of the visible world and the way in which they aimed to reveal it in their own productions. This concern intensified in Victor Brauner’s work during the years of isolation of the Second World War, but previous attempts to represent the occult in artworks are analysed in the work of Yves Tanguy and Joan Miró in the late 1920s and Salvador Dalí in the late 1920s and early 1930s. My objective in this chapter is to integrate the artwork of the Romanian Jewish artist into the larger propensity for esoteric knowledge in Surrealist milieus that influenced the development of artistic procedures in Surrealism. The chapter relies on the concept of automatism defined by André Breton in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924) and re-addressed in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929), the ‘Surrealist Situation of the Object’ or ‘Situation of the Surrealist Object’ conference in Prague (1935), and ‘The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting’ article in *Minotaure* (1939). It also mobilises theoretical writings like ‘The Givens of Consciousness’ (1880-83) by the German philosopher Johann Fichte that influenced Breton in the perception and interpretation of the Surrealist object. Victor Brauner completed assemblages that correspond to the category of Surrealist object in the early 1940s. These works are related to the painter’s automatic procedure of painting, *le cirage*, which was developed during his wartime refuge in the Hautes-Alpes in France. *Portrait of Novalis* (1943) and *Image of the uncreated real* (1943), two of the mixed

objects from the creation of the period, preserved in glass cases that recall natural history museum display equipment, are examined in the chapter. In the discussion of such compositions the ‘determinism of the void’ concept, originated in Roger Caillois’ article ‘Systématisation et détermination,’ in *Documents 34*, plays an important role, as I will discuss later. The Surrealists and former Surrealists like Caillois at the end of 1934 were manifesting in their writing and artworks a tendency towards defining that ‘other side of reality’ named by Breton in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929). During this study of Victor Brauner’s work in the 1930s and early 1940s I consider how the occult was understood in Surrealist milieus from the perspective of an enquiry into ‘the other side of reality.’ Automatism was employed in painting and object making techniques developed by Surrealists who relied on unconscious processes of the mind in their practice.

In the first part of the chapter I explore the impact of psychical research on the evolution of Surrealism from its beginning in 1924. The exercise of *cadavre exquis* among Surrealists is discussed in the first section. I consider the subject from a stance that I previously detailed in the chapter on animal magnetism in connection with Surrealism and Victor Brauner’s work in particular. I argue that through the game of *cadavre exquis* the Surrealists experimented with the state of magnetic somnambulism and the clairvoyance bestowed on the somnambulist. Victor Brauner’s participation in games of *cadavre exquis* in the early 1930s is analysed in this section of the chapter as part of the Surrealists’ attempt to test the capacity of different members of the group to ‘pool thoughts’ without written or verbal suggestions. Also from psychical research studies derives the hypothesis of an order of existence situated above the human rank on the Darwinian scale of evolution. I explore this presumption in Surrealism in a section of this chapter that endeavours to read the last paragraphs of Breton’s *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else* (1942) in connection with crystallography. I demonstrate that Pasteur’s research into a plane of polarised light, deviated by polyhedrons of organic compounds such as tartrates, had influenced Breton’s conception of ‘The Great Transparent Ones’ in the *Third Manifesto*. The poet’s vision was embraced by Roberto Matta and Victor Brauner as I show in the analysis of Matta’s work *The Great Transparent Ones* (1942) and Matta and Brauner’s composition *A quatre mains de Victor Brauner et Roberto Matta* (1960).

In the second part of this chapter the emphasis is placed on the Surrealist object. Two of the Surrealist techniques of automatic art making, developed by Dalí and Brauner in the 1930s and 1940s, respectively, are interpreted in the context of Breton's pre-definition of the Surrealist object in *Centenaire d'Arnim* (1933). The article appeared as a fragment of the poet's introduction for *Contes bizarres* by Achim von Arnim. In it he discussed the first signs of a character's destabilisation of identity in Romantic literature. Breton asserted that Von Arnim's short stories were linked to a similar change in German Romantic philosophy that continued in Surrealism with the enquiry into subjectivity. This connection between German idealism and Surrealism is addressed in the chapter from the perspective of the Surrealist object in Victor Brauner's work in the early 1940s.

The third part of the chapter focuses initially on the activities of the Surrealist group at Villa Bel Air in Marseille from September 1940 to March 1941. The Surrealist Tarot deck that the Surrealists redesigned during this period of time is analysed giving priority to Victor Brauner's contributions to the 'knowledge suit': Hélène Smith and Hegel. The new structure of the Tarot deck was, by the late 1930s, seen as the expression of a Surrealist wish for a revolutionary society that would break with the conventions of the past. Apart from being one of the figures in the Surrealist Tarot deck, the poet Novalis gained importance in Victor Brauner's creation during the Second World War, as I show in the second section of this chapter. The mixed-technique object *Portrait of Novalis* (1943) is imbued with occult references that correspond to Agrippa von Nettesheim's charts in *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres*, as I will later on demonstrate. This encryption of information in the artworks completed in the solitude of Les Celliers de Rousset is a mark of the preponderance of the occult in the ancient understanding of the term in Victor Brauner's work at the time. The evolution of his art was consistent with André Breton, who had published in 1944 *Arcane 17*.

I. Surrealist interest in psychical research

a. Yves Tanguy's exhibition of 1927

A recurrent preoccupation with the phenomenon of materialisation was apparent in the Surrealist milieu during the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s. It continued to develop

over the following decade and beyond the 1940s as well. While Yves Tanguy and Victor Brauner are representatives of a direction of study in painting that was expressed in the art of the time through a coherent repertoire of elements in connection with the advancement of metapsychics, the work of Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst and René Magritte contains only suggestions of a Surrealist interest in the subject. In the same year in which Richet's *Traité de métapsychique* was published in Paris, André Breton acknowledged the difference between an academic and a spiritualist approach to ectoplasm, cryptesthesia, and other related issues that involved unconscious processes of the mind. In the article 'Entrée des médiums' that appeared in the 1 November 1922 issue of *Littérature* he dissociated the Surrealist stance on the subject under discussion from that of the largely accepted position of the spiritualists:

Il va sans dire qu'à aucun moment, du jour où nous avons consenti à nous prêter à ces expériences, nous n'avons adopté le point de vue spirite. En ce qui me concerne je me refuse formellement à admettre qu'une communication quelconque existe entre les vivants et les morts.²⁵⁸

In indicating a definitive distance from the spiritualist understanding of phenomena such as premonitions, telepathy and apparitions, the Surrealists joined with the point of view of Charles Richet in the conclusion of his *Treatise* of 1921. The famous physiologist declared himself to be bewildered at the unexpected reaction of the spiritualists when confronted with the theories he had advanced regarding a common pool of facts under investigation. Even in a domain that defies human perception, states Richet, he was endeavouring to apply rationalist principles to the study:

Ce qui me trouble davantage, c'est que, dans le camp opposé à celui des sceptiques, je trouverai une opposition très violente. En effet, d'une part, j'ai voulu relater beaucoup des faits surprenants que les spirites admettent, et d'autre part je n'ai pu adopter leur théorie : car j'ai toujours cherché l'explication terre à terre, *rationaliste*, même quand cette explication rationaliste était peu vraisemblable. C'est là que, très franchement, me cause une certaine angoisse.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ André Breton, *Les Pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p.127.

²⁵⁹ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1922,[1921]), p. 782.

The argument made by Richet in favour of a logical explanation of the phenomenon of materialisation prefigured Breton's trenchant assertion in 'Entrée des médiums' that a thought exchange between living beings and the dead could not possibly be accepted. Richet detailed his position in *Traité de métapsychique*. He insisted that it was impossible to conceive of the existence of spirits as intelligent entities that could survive the destruction of the brain. In opposition to the spirit hypothesis Richet advanced a groundbreaking theory with respect to human possibilities of knowledge that remained unknown to current science.²⁶⁰ Dissatisfied with the state of research in the new science he had founded, metapsychics, he expressed his disappointment in 1921: 'nous sommes, dans l'état actuel de notre science, *hors d'état de comprendre*.' This was a reasonable explanation for the massive amount of material presented in the *Treatise on Metapsychics* that was unattainable at the time and remains obscure today. Richet had recourse to concurrent experiments conducted at the Society for Psychical Research in London, but once again the practice defied logic. The names of scientists like William Crooke, Russel Wallace and Oliver Lodge were mentioned in the *Treatise* in an attempt to combat the derision the subject matter encountered in the academia, but Richet recognised that faced with any direct study of phenomena of clairvoyance, movements made without touch, or such unusual manifestations as apparitions, the prevailing attitude of the beholder was the one of incredulity. Laughter was the common response to the challenge posed by questionable issues like these.²⁶¹

Exposure to ridicule was not a deterrent for the Surrealists who engaged in experiments with induced somnambulism.²⁶² They were undaunted in their aim of awakening the unconscious abilities of the mind of the individual. Second sight or clairvoyance was one of the phenomena explored by the Surrealists in the 'period of sleeps' that came soon after Richet's publication of *Traité de métapsychique* in 1921. In spite of participating in sessions of

²⁶⁰ 'C'est que *la personne humaine a des ressources que nous ne connaissons pas, tant matérielles que psychologiques*.' (In italics in the original), Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 782.

²⁶¹ 'Les mouvements sans contacts, la clairvoyance, les fantômes, les prémonitions sont phénomènes tellement inhabituels que nous sommes tout d'abord, quand on nous en parle, portés à en rire. Avant d'avoir étudié, nous rions et nous nions.' Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 783.

²⁶² Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1993), p. 150.

attempted collective hypnosis, Breton, Éluard, Ernst, and Morise were resistant to magnetic sleep.²⁶³ The observation inscribed in the conclusion to ‘Entrée des médiums’ article reminds one of Richet’s discussions of the theory of animal magnetism. He enumerates the various techniques employed in installing the state of hypnosis and questions the existence of a magnetic connection between magnetiser and magnetised person during that period of time:

Et ses manœuvres sont différentes : passes, fixation d’un objet brillant, fixation par le regard, suggestion verbale. L’imitation et la répétition favorisent beaucoup les phénomènes.
Mais est-ce tout ? Avons-nous quelque preuve positive qu’il se dégage une vibration volontaire du corps du magnétiseur, et que par conséquent une force inconnue, qu’on appelle *magnétique*, intervient, qui se transmet à l’individu hypnotisé ?²⁶⁴

Subsequently, Richet compared his previous and present experiences in inducing magnetic sleep with those of other renowned physicians who had acted as magnetisers during their lifetime practice. In his case, as in others, a change had occurred over time in the pattern of the magnetic sessions and they found themselves progressively deprived of the ability to induce hypnosis. He quotes the exasperation of Drs Maingot and Émile Magnin: ‘*Ils faisaient ce qu’ils voulaient*, me disent-ils’ with regard to their subjects’ insubordination to the will of the magnetiser.²⁶⁵ André Breton and the Surrealists unaffected by the state of trance would have identified the phrase in Richet’s account as appropriate to their own behaviour as well.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ ‘Je juge fastidieux d’insister plus longtemps sur le caractère de chaque phénomène et sur les circonstances dans lesquelles nous l’avons vu se produire : Éluard, Ernst, Morise et moi qui, en dépit de toute notre bonne volonté, ne nous sommes pas endormis.’ André Breton, ‘Entrée des médiums’ in *Les Pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969, [1924]), p.130.

²⁶⁴ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 120.

²⁶⁵ ‘Si je pouvais citer mon propre exemple, je dirai que jadis, quand j’opérais moins bien qu’aujourd’hui, je provoquais le sommeil assez facilement, chez maintes personnes même peu sensibles, tandis qu’aujourd’hui je ne puis presque plus jamais chez qui que ce soit provoquer la moindre hypnose. La même observation a été faite par le Dr Maingot et le Dr Émile Magnin, qui ont été de très puissants magnétiseurs... *Ils faisaient ce qu’ils voulaient*, me disent-ils. Et maintenant, quoiqu’ils ne soient pas très âgés, ils s’étonnent d’être presque impuissants à amener l’hypnose profonde.’ Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 121.

²⁶⁶ On photographic material taken during Surrealist experiments with hypnosis see David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris 2004).



Fig. 3.1 Yves Tanguy, *Il faisait ce qu'il voulait*, 1927, oil on canvas, 81,2 x 64,7 cm, Collection Richard S. Zeisler, New York.

In an instance that is probably unique in art history, the phrase was assigned in a slightly modified version, with the pronoun singular, to one of Tanguy's canvases from 1927.

The correspondence between the titles of Yves Tanguy's work, which appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition at the *Galerie surréaliste* in 1927 and the excerpts from Charles Richet's *Treatise on Metapsychics* became the subject of a detailed study by Jennifer Mundy in 1983. The 1927 exhibition gave Tanguy his first opportunity to present an artistic production related to the Surrealist investigation of the unconscious. The additional occult reference of the work could be redeemed from the choice of title of some of the paintings in

the exhibition. Jennifer Mundy has assigned *L'Anneau d'invisibilité*, Tanguy's first published work, untitled, in the previous year in *La Révolution surréaliste*, and *Béломancie* to the later category,²⁶⁷ but she failed to recognise the possible esoteric connotation of the inverted pyramid in *Il faisait ce qu'il voulait*.

At the time of the exhibition, *Il faisait ce qu'il voulait* had already entered André Breton's collection. It is likely that it acquired its title in the process, shared by Breton and Tanguy, of 'searching through texts of psychiatry for statements of patients which we could use as titles for the paintings.'²⁶⁸ Whether Tanguy was misleading the art critic in the interview for *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* in 1946, or had forgotten the details of the period of time he spent with Breton selecting titles for the exhibition catalogue, the account is regarded in the scholarship on Tanguy and Surrealism as an instance of a chance encounter between a written text and a painting in view of collaborative authorship.²⁶⁹

In fact, the majority of the twenty-three paintings on display in 1927 in place of titles had attributed associations of words reminiscent of the vivacious rhythm of a talk. Breton and Tanguy had sourced them from innumerable reports on cryptesthesia in the *Treatise on Metapsychics* by Charles Richet. Telepathy might have been the mechanism through which people received information unavailable through the ordinary senses about scenes and events that took place at a distance *fantastiquement exagérée*, but Richet specified that telepathy is just a particular case of cryptesthesia. For the physiologist cryptesthesia represented knowledge of the real (*connaissance du réel*). In spite of the fact that it operates at the level of the unconscious, humans have the capacity to stimulate cryptesthesia in conjunction with other cognitive processes.²⁷⁰

It is significant that Tanguy's paintings were interpreted in psychical key in advance of the exhibition at the *Galerie surréaliste*. Breton and Tanguy directed their attention to Richet's

²⁶⁷ Jennifer Mundy, 'Tanguy, Titles and Mediums,' *Art History*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 1983, p. 201.

²⁶⁸ J. Sweeney, Interview with Yves Tanguy, *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, vol. 13, nos. 4-5, September 1946, New York, p. 23. Quoted in Jennifer Mundy, 'Tanguy, Titles and Mediums,' p. 201.

²⁶⁹ Jennifer Mundy, 'Tanguy, Titles and Mediums,' p. 201.

²⁷⁰ 'Si, comme nous le croyons, la cryptesthésie est la *connaissance du réel*, alors la pensée humaine, étant une réalité, pourra, est aussi, actionner la cryptesthésie.' Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 790-91.

Treatise in order to make a powerful statement about Surrealist painting. The automatism implied in the process of embedding in words the results of the knowledge of the real was found to be characteristic of the act of painting itself. Sentences in the title and the composition of the painting mirrored each other. In using Richet's *Treatise* as a source book to attest the automatism of the processes of the mind, Breton and Tanguy offered a first attempt to the interpretation of the paintings. It is possible that the manoeuvre was used in a self-ironical attitude as the stance of the critic always in search of an anecdote for the image. Hallucinatory landscapes in which biomorphic structures are randomly disposed on coordinates that allude to a secret geometry of the painting offered an extensive material for interpretation. Details in the composition that justify the choice of the title have been analysed in Jennifer Mundy's article 'Tanguy, Titles and Mediums.'

The exclamation '*Maman, papa est blessé!*' has been retraced to an episode of cryptesthesia in which a dream premonition during the First World War was recounted. As in the case of other titles, only half of the quotation is rendered, leaving the observer who is aware of the *Treatise* the chance to puzzle the story in the elements of the painting. A hairy upstanding formation in the foreground of *Maman, papa est blessé!* was interpreted by Jennifer Mundy with reference to the injured subject of the dream premonition.²⁷¹ In order to distinguish between two different locations in which the members of the family engaged in such a strange dialogue were situated, to the phallic shape in the foreground corresponds a globular form circumscribed by other smaller and variable ones. It is located close to the horizon and has maternal connotations. The protagonist in the automatic session of cryptesthesia, a young boy, becomes identifiable in this way with one of Tanguy's biomorphic notations.

²⁷¹ Jennifer Mundy, 'Tanguy, Titles and Mediums,' *Art History*, vol. 6, no. 2, June 1983, p. 203.



Fig. 3.2 Yves Tanguy, *Maman, papa est blessé!*, 1927, oil on canvas, 92,1 x 73 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In the account of events in Richet's *Treatise*, the statement made in the title of the painting is completed, while the episode enhances the idea that knowledge of the real is possible in the absence of consciousness:

Le capitaine M. ... est frappé, le 27 août 1914, d'une balle en pleine poitrine, et laissé pour mort sur le terrain, vers 23 heures et demie. Or, cette nuit, à la même heure, un de

ses fils, âgé de quinze ans, qui dormait profondément, se lève, va réveiller sa mère, et lui dit: *Maman, papa est blessé, mais il n'est pas mort.*²⁷²

The attitude Tanguy exhibited with regard to the process of painting, one of seclusion and self-containment, combined with the refusal to explain the meaning of his compositions has underlined a conception of the work of art that in itself is sufficient to convey a message to the viewer. Independent of a written account, and evolving into a symbolic order that would gradually lose any connection with the reality of the external world, Tanguy's painting is one of the Surrealists' productions that conforms to Breton's call for the artwork to reflect the artist's 'inner model' of representation. When this precept is connected with a mediumistic clairvoyance, as the interpretation of the work offered by Tanguy and Breton suggests, the implication is that the Surrealist artist aims at the knowledge of the real (*connaissance du réel*) attributed to humankind by Richet, but attained in the limited situations endorsed in the *Treatise*.

Our assumption of a Surrealist artist in search of the knowledge of the real in Richet's sense of the term finds support in Breton's statements in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. Published in 1929 in the twelfth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste*, it reiterated the Surrealist position of gathering the results of psychic activity that characterise 'the passive life of the intelligence.'²⁷³ Automatic writing and dream occurrences were two types of unconscious episodes employed in the enterprise of accessing the most receded layers of the mind. The Surrealists believed in the possibility of artificially reproducing the state of mind that leads to products being able to surpass in visual impact any other results in the field of art and literature. Breton refused to identify them with the outcome of the process of imagination. He advanced an arresting hypothesis: the artwork and writing presented by the Surrealists that made use of automatism and dream accounts would indicate the existence of 'the other side of

²⁷² Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 339.

²⁷³ 'Ces produits de l'activité psychique, aussi distraits que possible de la volonté de signifier, aussi allégés que possible des idées de responsabilité toujours prêtes à agir comme freins, aussi indépendants que possible de tout ce qui n'est pas *la vie passive de l'intelligence*, ces produits que sont l'écriture automatique et les récits de rêves présentent à la fois l'avantage [...] quand il se heurte dans l'ombre aux portes extérieurement fermées de l'« au-delà », de la réalité, de la raison, du génie et de l'amour.' André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* [1929] in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp. 809-10. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 162.

reality’ where all of the love and generosity of humankind resides. In the long footnote added to the revised version of the *Second Manifesto*, Breton enumerated alongside the ‘very direct means’ to ‘the passive life of the intelligence’ some strategies of pure deception that would lead the inquirer to the other side of reality:

Ces moyens très directs, encore une fois à la portée de tous, que nous persistons à mettre en avant dès lors qu’il s’agit, non plus essentiellement de produire des œuvres d’art, mais d’éclairer la partie non révélée et pourtant révélable de notre être où toute beauté, tout amour, toute vertu que nous nous connaissons à peine luit d’une manière intense, ces moyens immédiats ne sont pas les seuls. Il semble, notamment, qu’à l’heure actuelle on puisse beaucoup attendre de certains procédés de déception pure dont l’application à l’art et à la vie aurait pour effet de fixer l’attention non plus sur le réel, ou sur l’imaginaire, mais, comment dire, sur l’*envers du réel*.²⁷⁴

Breton undauntedly relates the mechanisms of surveying the unconscious activity of the mind to a new critical approach towards the work of art and literature. It is through revealing the inner side of the life of the individual that the Surrealists aimed to change the nature of the relationships established between members of a society. The unveiling that took place in Surrealist artworks and writings of ‘the other side of reality’ would not only mean the expression of the repressed thoughts of the individual in an attempt at self-psychoanalysis, but also the projection of a continually needed operation to restore the values of a society based on the human aptitude for unselfishness. In this regard Breton promptly dismisses the degree to which the Surrealist demands would be classified as idealistic. He believes in the capacity of science to dismantle the socially constructed order of a society that encourages duplicitous behaviour:

Un jour viendra où l’on ne se permettra plus d’en user cavalièrement, comme on l’a fait, avec ces preuves palpables d’une existence autre que celle que nous pensons mener.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 810. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 162 (Italics in the original text).

²⁷⁵ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 810. In English translation ‘A day will come when we will no longer allow ourselves to use it in such cavalier fashion, as we have done, with its palpable proofs of an existence other than the one we think we are living.’ in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 163.

b. Psychical research and the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (1929)

Psychical research or metapsychics was mentioned in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* of 1929 as an example of some of the discredited sciences that Breton endeavoured to bring back to public attention. The occasion for its revival came in the context of Breton's demand for the occultation of Surrealism.²⁷⁶ He recommends a consciously undertaken path of submission to mediums' exploration of the world of *au-delà* and the nature of message brought by them. That Breton was aware of the research conducted on the subject of psychical perception in academic environment is testified by his delineation of the Surrealist position at odds with the interest of the scholars as well as with the one of the so-called clairvoyants of the circus stalls:

Rien ne serait moins inutile que d'entreprendre à cet égard de « suivre » certains *sujets*, pris aussi bien dans le monde normal que dans l'autre, et cela dans un esprit qui défie à la fois l'esprit de la baraque foraine et celui du cabinet médical, et soi l'esprit surréaliste en un mot. Le résultat de ces observations devrait être fixé sous une forme naturaliste excluant, bien entendu, au dehors toute poétisation. Je demande, encore une fois, que nous nous effacions devant les médiums qui, bien que sans doute en très petit nombre, *existent* et que nous subordonnions l'intérêt – qu'il ne faut pas grossir – de ce que nous faisons à celui que présente le premier venu de leur messages.²⁷⁷

The practice of a self-effacement characteristic of human personality to which the *Second Manifesto* subscribes included the Surrealist custom of playing various 'jeux de société.' They were used as examples of the capacity of the unconscious thought of a group of people simultaneously to access the same subject matter. Breton defines this newly emerged

²⁷⁶ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 821. First published in the twelfth issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* on the fifteenth of December 1929.

²⁷⁷ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 822. 'Nothing would be less useless in this connection than to try to "follow" certain *subjects*, taken both from the normal world and the other, and to do so in an attitude that defies both the spirit of the sideshow and that of the doctor's office, and is, in a word, the Surrealist attitude. The result of these observations ought to be set down in a naturalistic manner, obviously excluding any exterior poeticizing. I ask, 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 – in what we are doing to the interest which the first of their messages offers.' *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* in André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 179.

possibility as an outcome of the *pooling* characteristic of thought or *mise en commun* of thoughts. Among the techniques of thought pooling, he enumerates the drawing practice of the ‘exquisite corpse’ that aimed to realise a coherent unity of the final artefact from elements successively provided by different participants. But he also mentioned writing experiments that concluded in ‘Surrealist texts obtained simultaneously by several people writing from such to such a time in the same room.’²⁷⁸ In defining things that have not been specified or in predicting events that could result in an uncertain or doubtful situation, the Surrealists maintained a light-hearted attitude in their investigation.



Fig. 3.3 Jacques Hérold, Yves Tanguy, Victor Brauner, *Exquisite Corpse*, ca. 1932, graphite and collage on folded wove paper, 23,7 x 20 cm, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington.

²⁷⁸ André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 178.

As soon as Victor Brauner entered the Surrealist group in Paris he participated in *cadavre exquis* sessions of drawing and collage. The item in the collection of Indiana University Art Museum in Bloomington reminds us of the circumstances in which Brauner joined the Surrealist meetings at the Café du Place Blanche. Both other painters in the joint authorship of *Exquisite Corpse* of about 1932 were close friends of Victor Brauner: Jacques Hérold, his compatriot in Paris, and Yves Tanguy, his studio neighbour there, Hérold took the initial part of the figure that developed into a hermaphrodite with Brauner's concluding contribution to the design, Tanguy realised the middle section of it. Whether Brauner, Tanguy and Hérold were in search of a *meeting ground* for the objectives of the work that each of them exhibited individually at the time, or were challenging the boundaries of Surrealist games, the theme of the exquisite corpse at the Indiana University reveals the characteristics of thought as demanded in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. The slender young figure that had been commenced with a papier collé of a soubrette-like portrait acquires in Hérold's drawing a tallish neck and the features of a half male – half female torso. The two subsequent sections of the game of chance they played added more conflicting gender attributes to the figure. While Tanguy provided the middle section that suggests a possible maternity of the figure, Brauner supported the theme of the hermaphrodite through the addition of an ejaculating phallus. Each of their contributions was in tune with Hérold's starting point that designates the androgynous figure. André Breton extolled the dialogue initiated between participants at Surrealist experiments of the kind i.e. *cadavre exquis*, despite the fact that a pertinent explanation of the occurrence is still obscure and sealed in the unconscious processes of the mind:

Toujours est-il que de très frappants rapports s'établissent de cette manière, que de remarquables analogies se déclarent, qu'un factor inexplicable d'irréfutabilité intervient le plus souvent, et qu'à tout prendre c'est là un des *lieux de rencontres* de plus extraordinaires.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 822 (In italics in the original). 'The fact remains that very striking relationships are established in this manner, that remarkable analogies appear, that an inexplicable factor of irrefutability most often intervenes, and that, in a nutshell this is one of the most extraordinary *meeting grounds*.' André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 179.

Reports of the *mise en commun* capacity of thought in activities that involved Surrealists, as well as their entourage, were exhibited in the Parisian periodical *La Révolution surréaliste*, and in its corresponding publication in the late 1920s in Brussels, *Variétés*. Samples of *cadavre exquis*, both in text and image, appeared dispersed in three groupings in the case of literary production, and as illustration to the various contributions to the ninth-tenth double issue “L’Écriture automatique” of *La Révolution surréaliste* published on the 1 October 1927. *Cadavre exquis* in reproduction from *La Révolution surréaliste* were published in *Variétés* of Brussels in June 1929. The other two accounts that dealt with the unexpected aspects of Surrealist playful demeanour were “Le Dialogue en 1928” and “Jeux surréalistes.” They appeared in the eleventh issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* on 15 March 1928, and the same issue of *Variétés* in June 1929, respectively.

In the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, which was written in the last months of 1929, Breton noticed the latest occurrence of thought transference between himself and a former member of the Surrealist group who had become one of the contributors of *Documents* magazine. Robert Desnos was commissioned to write an article on the legendary figure of Abraham the Jew that would appear in the fifth issue of the periodical in November 1929. About three weeks before its publication, confessed Breton in the *Second Manifesto*, he had finished a passage that revived the fourteenth century episode of Nicolas Flamel receiving the manuscript of Abraham the Jew in the same mysterious circumstances that gave rise to Breton’s annotations. Moreover, two of the three images that illustrated Desnos’ article entitled “Le Mystère d’Abraham juif,” had been commented upon in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. Breton felt compelled to introduce a diary note to the text:

“Il est hors de doute, écrivais-je le 13 novembre, que Desnos et moi, vers la même époque, avons cédé à une préoccupation identique, alors que pourtant nous agissions *en toute indépendance extérieure* l’un de l’autre. Ce serait la peine d’établir que l’un de nous n’a pu être averti plus ou moins opportunément des desseins de l’autre et je crois pouvoir affirmer que le nom d’Abraham Juif n’a jamais été prononcé entre nous.”²⁸⁰

Any suspicions of a consciously induced option for the interpretation of the theme of Abraham the Jew being dismissed, Breton places the astonishment in a consonant work engagement in

²⁸⁰ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, pp. 818-9. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* (in italics in the original), p. 174.

the succession of events that had happened to him and Desnos in the past. For Breton the explanation of a concern expressed in his work associated with the assignment to a previous friend about the same task on which to work resides in the phenomena of telepathy in a similar way to those exhibited in the performances of a medium:

Il n'est rien à quoi j'aie toujours attaché plus de prix qu'à la production de tels phénomènes médianimiques qui vont jusqu'à survivre aux liens affectives. À cet égard je ne suis pas près de changer, je crois l'avoir suffisamment donné à entendre dans *Nadja*.²⁸¹

Breton categorized in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* instances of direct transmission of thought, whether in daily-unexpected circumstances or in the organised conditions of a Surrealist game, among mediumistic phenomena. This fact disclosed Breton's understanding of psychic experiences and epitomised the Surrealist attitude in a domain that by 1930 had merged vertiginously with popular culture.

c. *Peinture (Tête)* (1927) by Joan Miró in the André Breton Collection

From the initial stage of experiments that aimed to reveal the functioning of the mind, Breton and his friends maintained a bridge of expectation towards the unknown that can be reflected into the life of humans. The practice of automatic writing was only one of the mechanisms that precipitated a dialogue with the unknown forces from the beyond. In 1919 Breton became aware of impeccable phrases in their syntax, highly suggestive of a visual quality that arrests his attention moments before falling asleep. In an attempt to generate and capture texts of the same poetical value as those that occurred to him by chance at the approach of sleep, Breton incited Philippe Soupault to participate in a session of automatic writing that developed over a period of time of two months. In a state of half-consciousness that resembled the one that precedes normal sleep, but which I presume was intended to reproduce the stance of a

²⁸¹ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 819. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 174.

somnambulist under magnetic sleep, they jotted down the material that would become *Les Champs magnétiques*.²⁸²



Fig. 3.4 Joan Miró, *Peinture (Tête)*, 1927, oil on canvas, 195 x 130 cm, Wall of André Breton studio, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

²⁸² André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques* (Paris: au Sans pareil, 1920).

André Breton referred to the 1920 experiment in ‘Entrée des médiums,’ an article that was included in the essay collection *Les Pas perdus* in 1924. He recalled an afflux of verbal structures that followed one another in a succession that increased in speed with the passing of time and necessitated the use of abbreviation in order to be faithfully recorded.²⁸³ Breton ascribed high importance to the content of an incoherent discourse in appearance. The utterance of true stories of life scattered throughout an inconsistent material prompted Breton to express the view of a “magical *dictation*” under which a human acts and thoughts take shape:

Nous n’en risquions pas moins, en prêtant même malicieusement l’oreille à une autre voix que celle de notre inconscience, de compromettre dans son essence ce murmure qui se suffit à lui-même, et je pense que c’est ce qui arriva. Jamais plus par la suite, où nous le fîmes sourdre avec le souci de le capter à des fins précises, il ne nous entraîna bien loin. Et pourtant il avait été tel que je n’attends encore de révélation que de lui. Je n’ai jamais cessé d’être persuadé que rien de ce qui se dit ou se fait ne vaut hors de l’obéissance à cette *dictée* magique. Il y a là le secret de l’attraction irrésistible qu’exercent certains êtres dont le seul intérêt est de s’être un jour faits l’écho de ce qu’on est tenté de prendre pour la conscience universelle, ou, si l’on préfère, d’avoir recueilli sans en pénétrer le sens à la rigueur, quelques mots qui tombaient de la « bouche d’ombre ».²⁸⁴

The implacable shadow that Breton hinted at in ‘Entrée des médiums’ shares characteristics with the subject of Joan Miró’s painting in 1927, *Peinture (Tête)*. The work is a piece of large dimensions that entered the André Breton Collection to be displayed on the wall behind his desk in the studio of the apartment in 42 Rue Fontaine in Paris.

²⁸³ On the subject see David Lomas, ‘*Modest recording devices*’: Science, Surrealism and Visuality,’ *Art History*, vol. 27, no. 4, September 2004, pp. 627-650.

²⁸⁴ André Breton, *Les Pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p.125.



Fig. 3.5 *André Breton in his studio*, 42 Rue Fontaine in Paris, 1955; photo by Sabine Weiss.

Breton display the artwork in combinations with a range of works from painting to mixed media that reflected the importance Miró's painting acquired over time in the constitution of the collection. The rhythm of the wall arrangement is determined by the disposition of *Le Double monde* (1919) by Francis Picabia on the immediate left side of it. Having a poster-size appearance, Picabia's picture involved the use of words in its realisation: *bas* and *haut* inscriptions that should indicate the corresponding registers of the artwork were displaced and indicated the opposite direction in agreement with the volatility of message conveyed by Miró's *Tête*. The death's head depicted by the Spaniard has a silky consistency and the translucence that reminds one of the vanishing productions or materializations of the mediums. Moreover, the grimaced expression of a wry smile and the twists of energetic activity that animate the figure suggest a being of non-corporeal provenance.

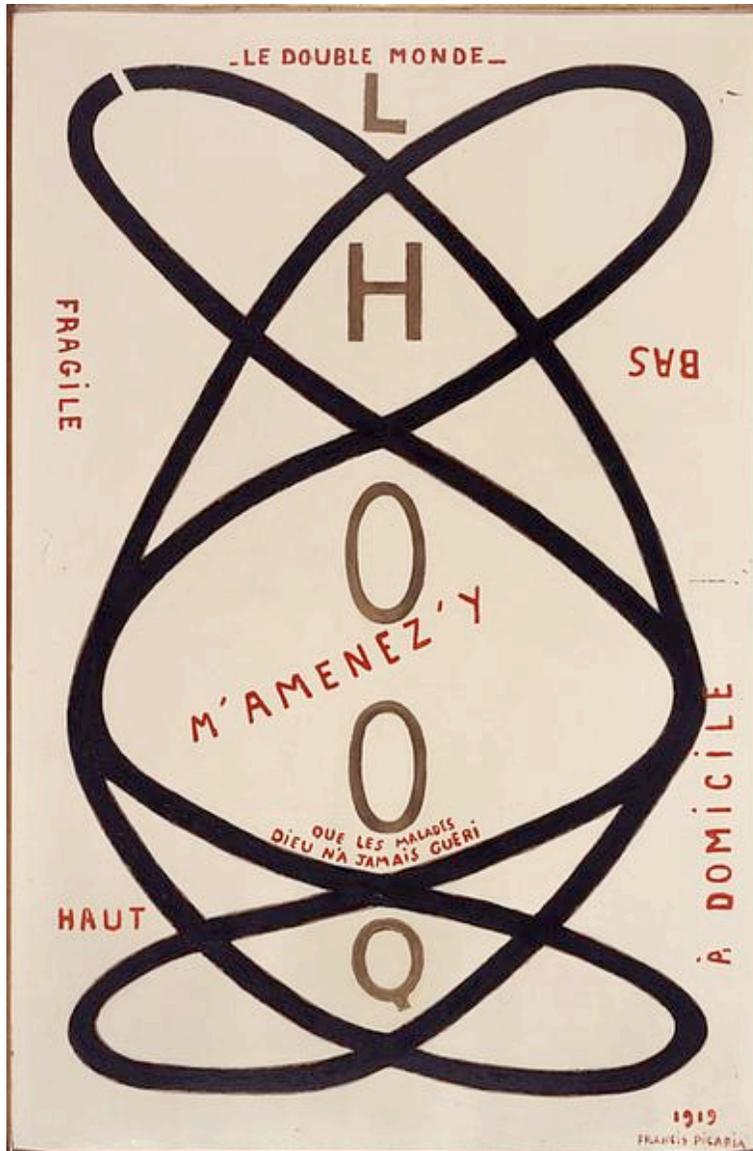


Fig. 3.6 Francis Picabia, *Le Double monde*, 1919, oil on cardboard, 132 x 85 cm, Wall of André Breton studio, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

The *Painting* by Miró in André Breton Collection as well as *The Double World* by Picabia from the previous decade evince the propensity of the Surrealists in the works of the 1920s and at the beginning of the 1930s for metapsychics. The work of Yves Tanguy is another example consistent with the development of the idea of mediumistic phenomena in the 1920s, while Victor Brauner, as a latecomer to Surrealism, would produce many of his paintings on the subject in the early years of the 1930s.

The preoccupation with the unknown connections between everyday life and changes that might occur in the fortune of the individual under the spell of ‘magical *dictation*’ had not faded away during the time spent in exile during the World War II. In an object-poem from 1941 Breton synthesised the unavoidable intervention of the unknown in humans’ lives:

‘these unsettled grounds
and the moon
hung from the abode of my heart
where I wander
defeated by the shadow.’²⁸⁵



Fig. 3.7 André Breton, *Poème-objet*, December 1941, carved wood, framed photograph, toy boxing gloves, and paper mounted on drawing board, 45.8 x 53.2 x 10.9 cm, Kay Sage Tanguy Bequest, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The object alludes in the way it was constructed to the technique of automatic writing in relation to its visual equivalent of *collage* that enhances the laws of free association in thought and creative processes. It is not Breton’s first attempt in the domain of the visual and

²⁸⁵ ‘ces terrains vagues et la lune accrochée à la maison de mon cœur où j’erre vaincu par l’ombre,’ André Breton, *Poème-objet*, December 1941.

for the artists in the environs of Surrealism the practice of realising composite objects was a widespread occupation beginning with the mid-1930s.²⁸⁶

The meaning of Breton's object-poem of December 1941 can be found in the last section of *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else*. Entitled *Les Grands Transparents*, the passage suggests a different order of existence that would surpass the one of humankind. Nevertheless, Breton situates it within animal progression and anticipates a possible understanding of its nature through results attained in the study of mimetic animals²⁸⁷ and from the perspective of *Gestalttheorie*:

L'homme n'est peut-être pas le centre, le *point de mire* de l'univers. On peut se laisser aller à croire qu'il existe au-dessus de lui, dans l'échelle animale, des êtres dont le comportement lui est aussi étranger que le sien peut l'être à l'éphémère ou à la baleine. Rien ne s'oppose nécessairement à ce que ces êtres échappent de façon parfaite à son système de références sensoriel à la faveur d'un camouflage de quelque nature qu'on voudra l'imaginer mais dont la *théorie de la forme* et l'étude des animaux mimétiques posent à elles seules la possibilité.²⁸⁸

The statements that Breton mobilises in support of a hypothesis of diaphanous beings that intervene in human existence are those of a Romantic poet, Novalis, a psychologist and epistemologist, the American physician William James, and the former director of Pasteur Institute, Émile Duclaux, a microbiologist. All of them implied in different contexts that humans might not be in a position of dominance in the macrocosm. Failure to accept this could have been the result of an illusive thought process that fails to recognise the possibility of matter being disposed in shapes that generally elude human perception. Due to an insufficient base for knowledge, the phenomenon cannot be ascertained, but the supposition advanced by Duclaux is that:

²⁸⁶ See *Surrealist Objects and Poems*, catalogue of an exhibition held at the London Gallery, London: London Gallery, 1937; André Breton, *Je vois, j'imagine: Poèmes-objets*, introduction by Octavio Paz; Jean-Michel Goutier (ed.), Paris: Gallimard, 1991; Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁸⁷ On mimicry see Roger Caillois, *Approches de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); Claudine Frank (ed.), *The Edge of Surrealism: a Roger Caillois Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

²⁸⁸ André Breton, *Prolégomènes à un troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p.14.

Autour de nous circulent peut-être des êtres bâtis sur le même plan que nous, mais différents, des hommes, par exemple, dont les albumines seraient droites.²⁸⁹

The concept of right albumin harks back to Louis Pasteur's studies in crystallography. He evidenced a dissymmetry in the disposition of molecules of particular organic acids - tartaric acid, aspartic acid and malic acid - that invests them with the capacity to rotating the plane of polarised light in a similar way to crystals of quartz and other minerals. The latter could be left-handed or right-handed in accordance with the orientation of the geometrical arrangement of atoms in crystal. In the case of organic matter, the structure of molecules presents a hemihedrism - half the number of planes required for the symmetry of a crystal system - left or right, comparable to the disposition of hands that could not be superimposed by translation, but only reflected on an image in a mirror. They would give a rotation of the plane of polarisation of a ray of light in the same direction with the orientation of molecules in the arrangement.

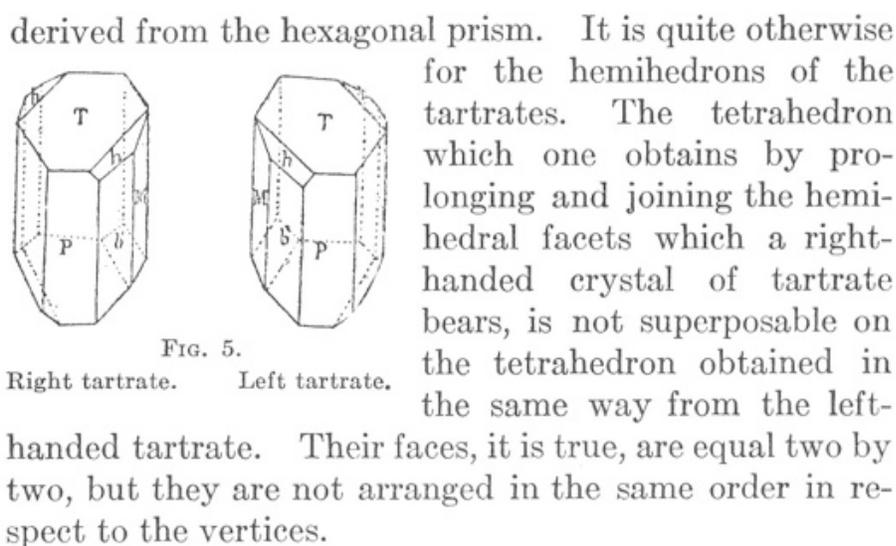


Fig. 3.8 *Right and Left Polyhedrons of Tartrates* in Émile Duclaux, *Pasteur: The History of a Mind* (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders, 1920), p. 24.

Convinced that dissymmetry at atomic level is responsible for components of animal and vegetal origin being able to rotate the polarised light, Pasteur elaborated on the magnetic

²⁸⁹ André Breton quotes Émile Duclaux in *Prolégomènes*, p.15.

properties of the earth and the revolution around its own axis and the sun. He concluded that the earth itself is a dissymmetrical item set in motion on predetermined trajectories that would influence upon its presumed reversed image in a hypothetical mirror. As result, the characteristics of living beings show a dissymmetry at molecular level dependent on that of the earth, which could explain the existence of right-handed substances, for instance, while their left-handed correspondent is generated in the nature as well, but consumed as soon as it is produced. We learn of Pasteur's experiments on the right and left polyhedrons of tartrates from the biography *Pasteur: the history of a mind* that Émile Duclaux published in 1920. Pasteur was greatly excited by the idea of dissymmetry induced to the earth by its own movement, modifying the electro-magnetic field of the earth, and consequently rendering all living beings and mineral constituents dissymmetrical. In Duclaux's words:

Pasteur adopted another view, which however, is not exclusive of the first. Possessed as he was by this novel idea of dissymmetry, he boldly connected the dissymmetry of natural products with the dissymmetry of their source. The earth is round it is true, but he thought, it is only when in a state of repose that it is symmetrical and superposable on itself. As soon as it turns on its axis its image in a glass no longer resembles it, for that turns in a different direction. The sun's rays, which strike and animate a leaf of a plant, no longer have the same direction in the earth and in its image. If there is an electric current circulating in the direction of the equator and presiding over the distribution of magnetism, this current turns also in opposite directions in the earth and its image in the mirror. In short, the earth is a dissymmetrical whole from the point of view of the forces which make it live, it and all that it produces, and it is on this account that, as soon as they have exceeded a certain degree of complexity, the substances which the earth's living creatures produce are dissymmetrical and endowed with a rotary power.²⁹⁰

The interplay between the ways in which a plane of polarised light is oriented according to the arrangement of molecules in left-handed and right-handed substances had inflamed the imagination of Louis Pasteur and his followers. Émile Duclaux, who was writing Pasteur's biography from the point of view of the research he conducted, reported some challenging experiments. The disciple in charge of the institute founded by his illustrious predecessor remembered Pasteur's attempt to crystallise the salts of tartaric acid in the

²⁹⁰ Émile Duclaux, *Pasteur: The History of A Mind* translated by Erwin F. Smith and Florence Hedges; with a foreword by René Dubos (Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders, 1920), p. 30.

presence of a magnetic field that would exert a dissymmetrical action on the scene, or the fanciful effort to make a plant push out shoots in an environment in which the angle of light incidence has been changed from daylight and strictly controlled. The experiments were fruitless, but Duclaux remained an optimist as regards the outcome of such endeavours in the future. It was in this context that Duclaux extrapolated Pasteur's findings of the left-handed and right-handed animal and vegetal constituents as well as quartz crystals and questioned the structure of organisms that would have replaced the albumins in the circulatory system with their opposites.²⁹¹

The challenging hypothesis advanced by Émile Duclaux in *Pasteur: The History of A Mind* is echoed in Breton's conclusion of *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else*. We notice that Breton called on a scientific proof for 'The Great Transparent Ones' that he described in the final section of *Prolegomena* i.e. the right-handed albumin, given that the left-handed protein is found in tissues of common life forms. In the scenario imagined by Pasteur and presented by Duclaux in his book, 'The Great Transparent Ones' provide a variant of the matter that is continuously 'consumed' due to the rotation of the planet.

d. *Les Grands Transparents* (1942)

The Surrealists were fascinated by the geometrical arrangement of units in a crystal and submitted to the esoteric meanings attached to it.²⁹² André Breton had published above the article title "La beauté sera convulsive," in the fifth issue of *Minotaure* of 15 December 1934, a close-up of a small number of randomly disposed crystals on a rough surface. A line in his forthcoming opus *L'Amour fou* accompanied the photograph by Brassai: "La maison que

²⁹¹ 'What kind of world would it be in which one would replace the cellulose and albumen in the actually living cells by their opposites and, to recall to our minds that which we have already gone over, what kind of a world would it be in which the earth should turn around the sun in a direction opposite to that which it now takes, an earth where the electric current which makes of it a magnet should take an opposite direction and where the point of the compass needle which marks the north should mark the south?,' Émile Duclaux, *Pasteur: The History of A Mind*, p. 48.

²⁹² See, for example, a late but fascinating study by Roger Caillois, *L'Écriture des pierres* (Genève: Albert Skira, 1970).

j’habite, ma vie, ce que j’écis.” We assume that by choosing the caption Breton intended to establish a telling analogy between the goal of his work and the metaphoric significance of the crystal shape that the photograph exalts.

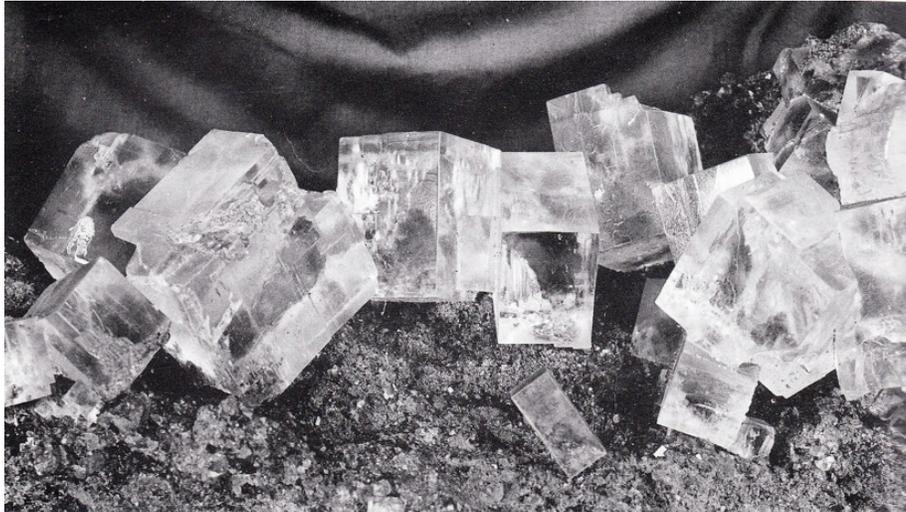


Fig. 3.9 *Crystals*, 1930, photograph by Brassai in *Minotaure*, no 5, 1934.

When *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Else* appeared in French and English translation in the first issue of the American Surrealist periodical *VVV*, in June 1942, Breton resumed his preoccupation with crystallography. This was a branch of science that would provide a logical explanation for the existence of “the grand transparent ones” that the text implied. The seriousness of his assertion is emphasised in the last lines of the introduction to a third manifesto of Surrealism:

Un mythe nouveau ? Ces êtres, faut-il les convaincre qu’ils procèdent du mirage ou leur donner l’occasion de se découvrir ?²⁹³

Breton suggested that humankind might be on the verge of discovering beings that interact with humans and determine changes in history, both at personal and worldwide level. An instance of the kind was presented in the conclusion of *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto or Else* and is recounted in *Ajours III* in the 1947 edition of *Arcane 17*.²⁹⁴ The *Ajours*, a

²⁹³ André Breton, *Prolégomènes*, p.15

²⁹⁴ André Breton, *Arcane 17: Enté d’Ajours* (Paris : Éditions du Sagittaire, 1947).

contraction probably of *mises à jour*, appeared as additional texts to *Arcane 17* in the edition published for the first time in France in 1947. A work of exile, *Arcane 17* is suffused with esoteric meaning announced by its title that makes reference to the seventeenth major Arcanum of the Tarot, the Star. Representation of four major Arcana from the tarot of Marseille deck, in the interpretation of Roberto Matta, embellished the first edition of *Arcane 17* in 1944 at Brentano's in New York. Breton established a dialogue with Matta on the subject of the *grand transparents* at the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942 when he sent him a note with extracts from the work of Novalis, Duclaux, and William James, the same pieces that would be published in *Prolegomena*. Apart from these quotations Breton provided Matta with his comments on the theme that could be retraced in the last section of *Prolegomena* (the document appeared in facsimile in *Matta, Entretiens morphologiques*²⁹⁵).

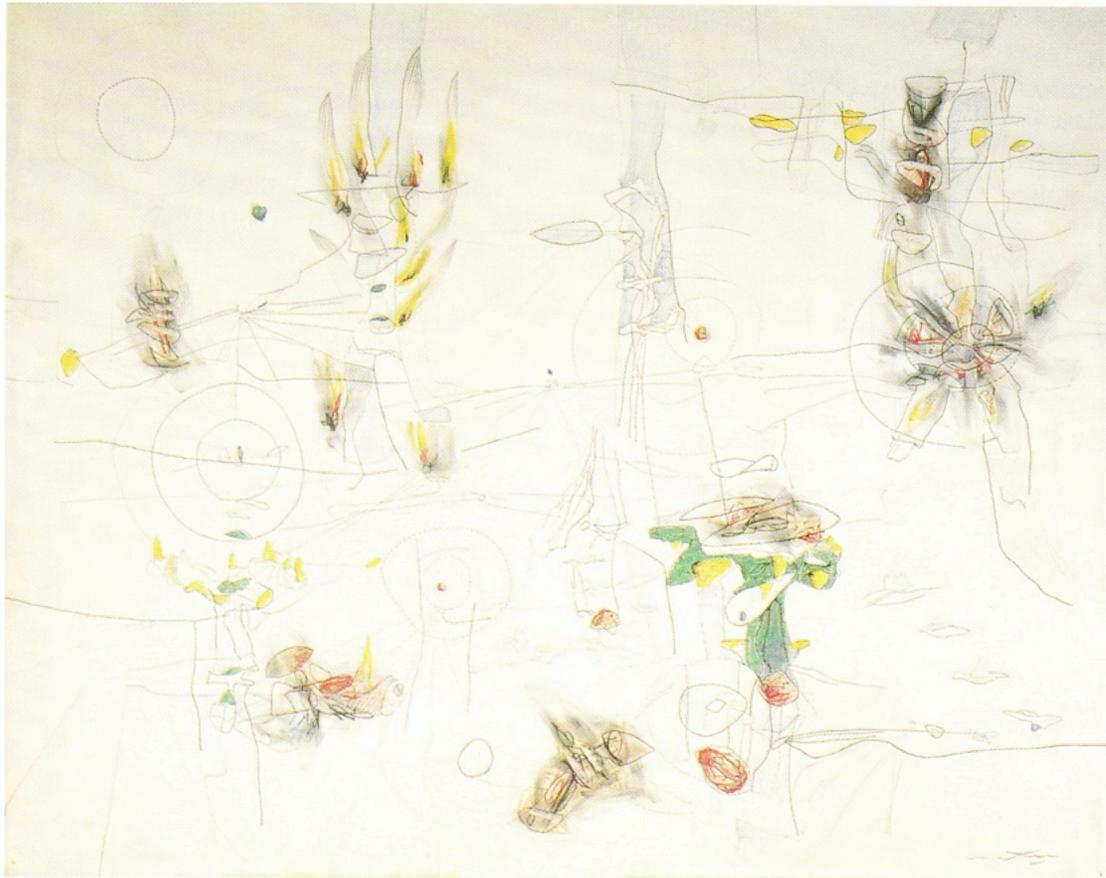


Fig. 3.10 Roberto Matta, *The Great Transparent Ones (Les Grand Transparentes)*, 1942, coloured wax crayon and graphite on paper, 59 x 74 cm, in private collection.

²⁹⁵ Germania Ferrari, *Matta, Entretiens morphologiques, Notebook no 1, 1933-1944* (London and Lugano: Sistan, 1987), p. 228.

During 1942 Matta realised a drawing in coloured wax crayon and graphite entitled *Les Grand Transparents*. The similarity between the caption of Matta's drawing and Breton's title for the last section of *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto or Else*, as well as the fact that the works were conceived about the same time, indicates the artist's inclination for those ethereal entities described in the *Manifesto*. Matta's interest in the possibility of the existence of 'great transparent ones' might be seen in the composition with its multiple focal points that give rhythm to the work through the aggregation of pictorial elements at various intervals. Breton's presumption that in our surroundings exist entities that could be proven through experiments with the rotation of the plane of polarisation of plane-polarised light, is hinted at in the flame-like accents or flashing lights that Matta scattered throughout this non-figurative work. This treatment of the drawing surface became a characteristic of the painter's artwork in the period spent in New York. Moreover, the theme of 'great transparent ones' recurred in a drawing executed in 1960 in partnership with his friend and Surrealist companion Victor Brauner. The intervention of Victor Brauner in the composition of the drawing *For four hands by Victor Brauner and Roberto Matta* (1960) is visible in the centre and centre-right sections of the piece. Brauner enhanced the drawing, which matches the distribution of empty spaces and centres of interest of Matta's drawing *Great Transparent Ones* (1942), with the results of his preference for figuration. Entirely present or partially revealed, entities of great transparency give the scene grace and agility. Brauner's liking for hypothetical entities in human postures is faithful to Duclaux's version quoted by Breton in *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto or Else*. These creatures are 'beings generated on the same level as us, but different, humans, for example, whose albumins are right.'²⁹⁶

If Matta attempted to give a visual equivalent to Breton's tentative description of beings that have replaced the albumin in their circulatory system by its opposite in the first instance, Jacques Halpern related in the spring of 1947 a mysterious encounter with a person

²⁹⁶ 'Les savants eux-mêmes ne contredisent pas tous à cette opinion: « Autour de nous circulent peut-être des êtres bâtis sur le même plan que nous, mais différents, des hommes, par exemple, dont les albumines seraient droites. » Ainsi parle Émile Duclaux, ancien directeur de l'Institut Pasteur (1890-1904).' *Prologomènes* in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.15, and 'Les citations de William James et d'Émile Duclaux proviennent l'une et l'autre de la substantielle étude de Marie Duclaux intitulée « La Pensée de Robert Browning », qui sert de préface aux *Poèmes* de Robert Browning (trad. Paul Alfassa et Gilbert de Voisins, Grasset, « Les Cahiers verts », n° 12, 1922)' in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, p. 1143, note 1.

perceived to be extraneous to the human condition. André Breton reproduced the story in *Ajours III* of *Arcane 17* in 1947. He used it as a pretext for revisiting *Tour Saint-Jacques*, a landmark of errant walking through Paris in both *L'Amour fou* of 1937 and *Nadja* of 1928.²⁹⁷ His companions in the planned trip to the high of *Saint-Jacques* Tower on a Sunday afternoon, the twenty-seventh of April 1947, were two artists of Romanian origin and Jewish descent, Victor Brauner and Jacques Hérold. It is not accidental that Breton shared with Brauner and Hérold the account of the unprecedented meeting of Halpern with an unknown man.

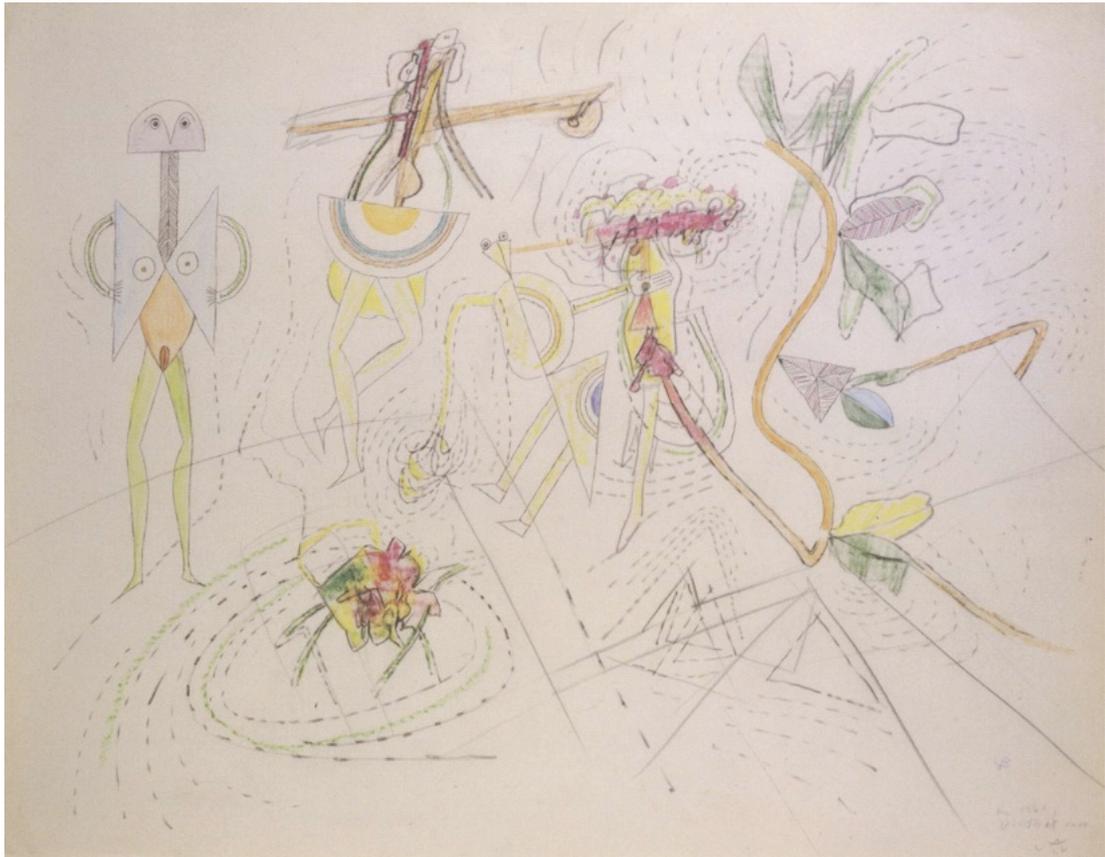


Fig. 3.11 *For four hands* by Victor Brauner and Roberto Matta (*A quatre mains de Victor Brauner et Roberto Matta*), 1960, coloured wax crayon and graphite on paper, 60 x 45 cm, Collection Samy Kinge Gallery.

Both artists had during WWII investigated a mystical side of the experience they had in relation to their art making. In the years that followed the conflict, the work of Jacques Hérold

²⁹⁷ André Breton, *Nadja* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue française, 1928). André Breton, *L'Amour fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937).

exhibited a preoccupation with crystal shapes that Breton found irresistible due to his reaffirmed interest in crystallography. He published an article on the work of the artist entitled 'Jacques Hérold' in which he stated: 'La clé des champs est dans le cristal.'²⁹⁸ The story that Jacques Halpern had told Breton in the spring of 1947 was imbued with Surrealist concepts of objective chance, marvellous and premonitory dreams. Living in *Les Halles* quarter of Paris, the sight of Saint-Jacques Tower became a familiar one that usually would have not caught his eye. Nevertheless, when one day Halpern randomly strolled around the streets near his home the majestic silhouette of *tour Saint-Jacques* imposed itself on his attention. He walked out of the site obsessed with the words '*tour Saint-Jacques*.' Then, when he reached place du Châtelet, he came across a number, twenty-one, written on the bus that was crossing the intersection. At the same time the bell at the *Palais de Justice* marked three o'clock in the afternoon. With all of these mixed elements, Halpern deduced that he had an appointment for the next twenty-first of March, at three o'clock in the afternoon, by the *tour Saint-Jacques*. He sat on the bench opposite the tower, in an empty garden two minutes before three o'clock on the day that has been designated to him in such a puzzling way and witnessed a man dressed in black, who went past him only to return and address him in a colloquial way. The man of indefinite age and blank timbre stated that the faculties of reason, reflection and attention prove to be insufficient in understanding the existence of a being that he himself does not possess:

Le merveilleux. – Attention, réflexion, logique ne me sont de rien. Je ne me possède plus. Je suis, pleinement.

Au cours de la conversation cette phrase pourtant, mieux timbrée que les autres : « Je n'aime pas. Je ne peux aimer ni hommes ni femmes. » (Je pensai, par la suite, à ces dialogues vivants, aux abords du sommeil, dont on retire parfois un lambeau.)²⁹⁹

Breton reproduced Halpern's narrative in *Ajours III*. The unusual interlocutor left an address and invited the painter to continue their conversation. When Halpern finally checked the building at 38, rue Saint-X he recognised the interior of the house from the description he was given, but none of its inhabitants or the receptionist could provide any information

²⁹⁸ André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 204.

²⁹⁹ André Breton, *Arcane 17: enté d'Ajours*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) p. 109.

regarding the man he had met. He concluded his account with a line that expressed uncertainty about the capacities of human beings to encompass every possible kind of physical existence. A hesitation that was not uncommon in the first decades of the twentieth century in France and elsewhere in the medical research environment: ‘Tout voulait qu’il restât pour moi l’inconnu.’³⁰⁰

André Breton linked the personage that appeared to Halpern at a rendez-vous that he himself conjectured to ‘l’homme tout noir’ of the alchemists.³⁰¹ Even the environs of the meeting were favourable to such an apprehension. The Les Halles quarter in the centre of Paris included until the end of the eighteenth century the main graveyard of the city, *Le cimetière des Innocents*. The site was renowned for Andreas Vesalius’ visits during his attendance at the University of Paris for medicine courses between 1533 and 1536. The future famous physician who would change the course of study of human anatomy used to perform dissections in the perimeter of the graveyard. For the Surrealists the images depicted on the inner side of the walls of the enclosure, under the arcade that hosted the tomb of Perenelle and Nicolas Flamel, were of particular interest.

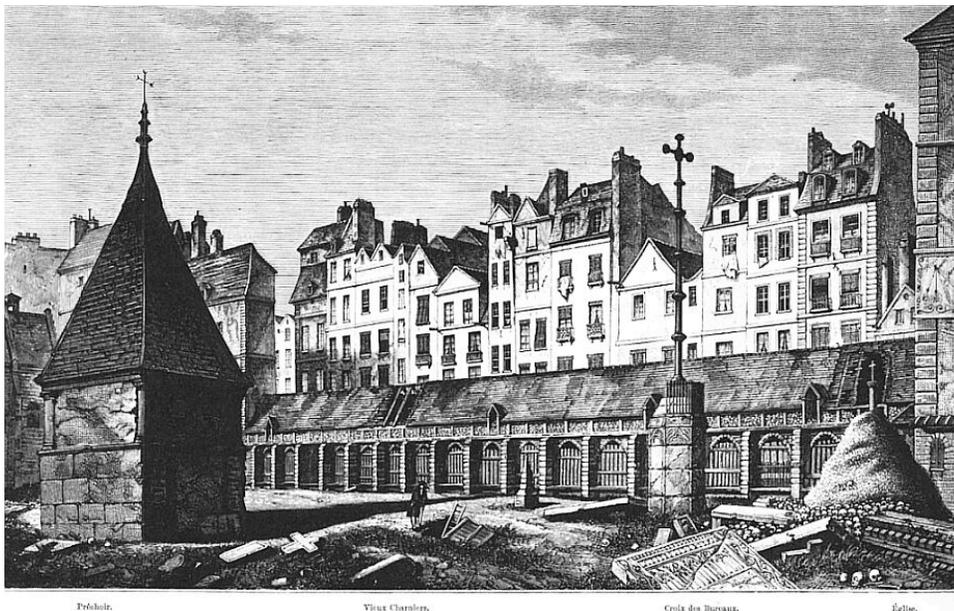


Fig. 3.12 *Le Cimetière des Saints Innocents* or *Le Cimetière des Innocents* (*The Saints Innocents Cemetery*), Paris, undated lithograph

³⁰⁰ André Breton, *Arcane 17*, p. 109.

³⁰¹ See Alfred Maury, *La Magie et l’astrologie dans l’antiquité et au moyen âge: ou Étude sur les superstitions païennes qui se sont perpétuées jusqu’à nos jours* Paris: Didier et Cie, 1864).

The reference to Nicolas Flamel prompted Breton to recall the rumours of a return of the fourteenth century scrivener to the same area of the city in which he had lived.³⁰² After his death in 1418, the fame of Flamel as an accomplished alchemist increased over the centuries. In alchemic treatises he was granted with the discovery of the philosopher's stone, the supreme achievement of the work of the alchemist.³⁰³ The figures that were commissioned for display on the arcades of the Innocents graveyard were charged with esoteric meaning. Flamel himself gives a description of the enterprise. In 1389, he states, he had depicted a 'man all in black' who contemplated the emblematic representations next to him:

J'y ai fait charbonner et peindre grossièrement un homme tout noir qui regarde droitement ces hiéroglyphes.³⁰⁴

Breton makes reference to 'the man all in black' in *Ajours III* to *Arcane 17*.³⁰⁵ And similar to the alchemical process that requires the purification of the 'black stone,' he conflates the man dressed in black with the raven used at this stage of the process.³⁰⁶ On a symbolic level, through 'severing the head of the raven' a toxic, black, liquid spills out of the stone. Unfortunately, from *Les Halles* quarter of a medieval Paris only *la tour Saint-Jacques* survived, situated at a reference point of an imaginary map of occult practices.

II. Surrealist automatism and the situation of the object

a. Fichte's influence on Breton's 'Introduction to *Contes bizarres*' by Achim von Arnim (1933)

³⁰² André Breton, 'Ajours III' in *Arcane 17*, p. 109.

³⁰³ See Éliphas Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (Paris; Londres; New York: G. Baillière: H. Bailliere: H. Baillière Brothers, 1861).

³⁰⁴ Nicolas Flamel, *Écrits alchimiques*, ed. Didier Khan (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993), p. 29.

³⁰⁵ André Breton, 'Ajours III' in *Arcane 17*, p. 110.

³⁰⁶ On similar interpretation of alchemy in Surrealist context see M. E. Warlick, *Max Ernst and Alchemy: A Magician in Search of Myth*, with an introduction by Franklin Rosemont (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2001).

André Breton revealed an error moulded into romantic thought and attributable to Fichtean understanding of the role of thought in the analysis of perception. At the time of writing his introduction Breton acknowledged the decisive influence that sensation has in shaping the outward appearance of the perceived object. Nevertheless, he questioned the three-stage process Fichte described in perceiving things, especially Fichte's emphasis on the last stage that concluded with the object's *externalisation*. Breton is indebted for his Fichtean notes and the quotation of the third stage of this process to Xavier Léon who mediated Fichte's work for French audiences in the 1920s, giving an extensive account of the context in which his life and writing developed. At a certain point in *Fichte et son temps*, Léon presented the core of Fichte's teaching, the course known as 'Les Données de la Conscience' ('The Givens of Consciousness'), which was given at the University of Berlin during the 1880 – 1811 academic year, and resumed in the second term of 1812 – 1813. As a result of a polemic in which his former disciple, Schelling, was engaged, Fichte used these lectures to counteract the reinstatement of the object in itself, something that was a characteristic of the realism professed by his opponents and the proponents of the *Philosophie de la Nature*. Fichte understood that no degree of absolute reality could be attributed, in any possible instance, to the works of nature. From here on and by means of a critique of the given of consciousness, Fichte reasserted his essential findings in *Wissenschaftslehre (Science of Knowledge)* and moved towards demonstrating the overwhelming importance of the subject in the mechanism of imagination. Remaining at the level of the givens of consciousness, we should emphasize - as a preliminary to Breton's critical reading of Fichte - the second phase that characterizes the object's perception: consequent to being affected by a stimulus, the external sense gives rise to a so-called sensation that spreads over space, so states Fichte. The operation provides evidence, maintains Léon, of Fichte's intuition of the subject's ability to undergo division into uncountable states of being from which its capacity for thought reflection springs.³⁰⁷

In his 'Introduction to *Contes bizarres*,' Breton had precisely reproached Fichte for his assignment of objectivity to sensations that involve space development in the process of perception.³⁰⁸ This is the substance of the third stage in the process of perception that

³⁰⁷ Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, t. II, 2nd part (Paris: Armand Colin, 1927), p. 162.

³⁰⁸ 'Subsiste cependant, en pleine lumière, l'erreur grandiose de Fichte qui, ne l'oublions pas, n'est tenue par aucun grand romantique pour une erreur, et qui consiste dans le fait de croire a

concludes with the object's *externalisation*. By ascertaining the interference of thought in the process, Breton was careful to remark that when objects entered into the subject's control they were made dependent on the act of thinking, which in his view is tantamount to denying the existence of the external world. On the matter of consequence, implies Breton, the only consciously adopted attitude should aim to remove thought's dominance over the object in the second phase of the process described by Fichte:

Je ferai remarquer que cette manière de concevoir le monde extérieur, tendant à le faire dépendre de la seule puissance du Moi et équivalant pratiquement à le nier, ouvre un champ très large aux possibilités d'« extériorisation » en même temps qu'elle invite l'esprit à procéder à la *décomposition du mouvement qui le porte à cette extériorisation même*. J'entends par là que l'Objet, conçu comme résultante d'une série d'efforts qui le dégagent progressivement de l'inexistence pour le porter à l'existence, et *vice versa*, ne connaît de fait aucune stabilité entre le réel et l'imaginaire.³⁰⁹

Insofar as the development of sensations into space can be made comparable to a movement towards the object's *externalisation*, its successive stages can be discerned and dismantled through procedures that Breton would recall in the 'Surrealist Situation of the Object' conference delivered in Prague, in March 1935.³¹⁰ In the 'Introduction to *Contes bizarres*' of 1933, the object gains for Breton, while glossing on Fichtean 'Givens of Consciousness,' a new dimension of understanding. Notable here is the capital letter assigned to the word 'Me' that designates the subject, and most importantly the characteristic of reversibility that Breton argues is imposed upon the sequence of changes through which the object gradually takes shape. Breton seems to be suggesting the idea of the object snatched from inexistence to existence and vice versa.³¹¹ The idea of the object's shaping into an

l'« attribution *par la pensée* de l'être (de l'objectivité) à la sensation étendue dans l'espace ».' André Breton, 'Centenaire d'Arnim' (fragment of *Introduction aux « Contes bizarres » d'Achim d'Arnim*), in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 6, May 1933, p. 8.

³⁰⁹ André Breton, *Introduction aux « Contes bizarres » d'Achim d'Arnim*, p. 8 [Italics in the original text].

³¹⁰ For an alternate reading of the Surrealist object see Steven Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s: Art, Politics, and the Psyche* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³¹¹ For Breton, the meaning of the passage from *Fichte et son temps* deepens during the year that separates the text's first publication as the fragment entitled 'Centenaire d'Arnim' in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, in May 1933, and its inclusion in the *Introduction to*

external phenomenon, distinct from the subject's inner realities, is, for Fichte, an unconscious and spontaneous operation. Only when its outcome reaches the level of consciousness, is the object perceived as such, sealed between the confines of a given whose reality cannot be denied.³¹² In Fichte's view of the world the mind is not a passive receptacle or mirror-like reflector of things, but a command-post that organizes information received through processes of thought. In the absence of the mind the idea of the world existing to exercise its own functions is denied. It is through a process of construction of the object, asserts Fichte in his lectures on the 'Givens of Consciousness,' that the picture of the world is repeatedly configured.

Though the mind tends to free itself from those constraints it encounters with each and every sensation submitted, sensations act as limitations upon the mind's tendency towards emancipation. These restrictions give rise to the mind's effort to overcome them through the projections that are external objects.³¹³ The notion of representation emerges at this point in the argument and Fichte deploys it with regards to the subject's involvement in the process of perception. Due to the imagination being taken into account during this process, the freeing of the mind does not develop on the coordinates of a real liberation but merely on those of an ideal one. Authentic release, maintains Fichte, consists in our attempt to improve the influence we exert upon the external world. In order to become effective, our action should consciously aim to re-map our world of knowledge.³¹⁴

'*Contes bizarres*' among other selected texts in the collection *Point du jour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1934). Setting the capital letter for the word 'object' at an earlier stage in the text – the option is not to be found in the version of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* – accounts for Breton's preoccupation with the issue of defining the object from a new, surrealist perspective. By rendering it reversible, Breton exposes the process onto the time coordinate, while its reverse section is deprived, obviously, of unconscious and spontaneous attributes. As a result, by aiming to examine the intermediate stages of the backwards moving chain, the surrealists were committed to visibly recording changes occurred as inner passages in the process of shaping the external object of perception into a work of art.

³¹² 'Il convient d'ajouter que cette construction de l'objet externe est inconsciente et spontanée : de la vient qu'à l'éveil de la conscience l'objet prend pour nous les espèces d'une donnée irréductible, d'une chose.' Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, p. 162.

³¹³ 'Le penchant de la liberté a se réaliser, s'exprimant par une succession de limitations (sensations) et projetant ces limitations qu'elle dépasse sous la forme d'objets extérieurs, telle est l'origine de la *représentation*; [...]' Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, p. 164.

³¹⁴ Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, p. 164.

The final part of ‘Centenaire d’Arnim’ provides evidence of the extent to which Breton relied upon Fichte’s authoritative work. It seems that he had grasped one more opportunity to bring an earlier, romantic, issue to bear upon the Surrealists’ assumed task of revealing the mind’s inner functioning. Were the Surrealists on the way towards justifying their revolutionary aims through a new manner of perceiving the external world? At this stage it is appropriate to question whether the Fichtean flaw Breton signalled in his system of thought was turned to the Surrealists’ advantage when investigating into the domain of the imagination and its related issues.

In our understanding, through Léon’s mediation, one of the main reasons for Fichte’s moving towards the analysis of perception was to discover in the representational system the *modus operandi* of the imagination.³¹⁵ For Breton this interdependence is useful only to undermine the subject’s position by the same treatment that had previously been applied to the object.³¹⁶ From Fichte’s perspective, the subject as well as the object are to be determined solely through an act of thinking. Moreover, Fichte denies the subject’s ability to assert ‘I am,’ in the absence of the mind’s activity that acknowledges through intuition its internal functioning:

Comme celle de l’objet extérieur, l’existence du Moi psychologique est un produit de la pensée universelle ; le Moi psychologique ne peut affirmer le je suis que si a l’intuition de l’activité interne la pensée confère l’être.³¹⁷

Breton’s nuanced reading of this passage leads him to declare that it is possible to subtract the intuition of internal activity of the mind from thought’s action of bestowing the status of being upon the subject. He detects in Arnim’s novel *Les Héritiers du Majorat*, included in the 1933 French edition of *Contes bizarres*, the first instance of resisting the idea of affirming identity based upon an act of thinking:

³¹⁵ ‘en découvrant dans la représentation le mécanisme des opérations de l’imagination,’ Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, p. 162.

³¹⁶ ‘Pour l’un de ces poètes comme pour l’autre [Arnim and Rimbaud], découvrir dans la représentation le mécanisme des opérations de l’imagination et faire dépendre uniquement celle-là de celle-ci n’a, bien entendu, de sens qu’a la condition que le Moi lui-même soit soumis au même régime que l’Objet, qu’une réserve formelle vienne ébranler le « Je suis ».’ André Breton, ‘Centenaire d’Arnim,’ p. 8.

³¹⁷ Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, p. 162.

C'est dans un conte comme *Les Héritiers du Majorat* qu'à ma connaissance pour la première fois tend à s'exprimer un doute radical à l'égard d'une telle affirmation, doute logique qui repose sur la possibilité de soustraire chez l'homme l'intuition de l'activité interne à l'action de la pensée qui confère l'être, doute qui, compte tenu de divers états d'éparpillement du Moi dans l'objet « extérieur » ayant lieu particulièrement dans l'enfance et dans certains délires, entraîne consciemment le trouble général de la notion de personnalité.³¹⁸

Breton recognizes that the attempt to prevent intuition from being controlled through rational thinking might also lead to a subversion of the general notion of personality. He encourages this perspective as long as it resides within the parameters of a consciously undertaken position. This option takes into account various states of the mind as instances of a scattered identity in the 'external' object. Once again Breton identifies one of Fichte's assertions and interprets it. This time he returns to Fichte's observation that the subject's 'I' is scattered in the object during infancy although indistinct from it.³¹⁹ This frame of mind characterizes a child's apprehension of the world exempted from conscious reflection or during states of illness, that Breton equates with specific fits of delirium when the subject's capacity to observe details is affected. Breton claims that there is a possibility of a consciously induced process of scattering the identity of the subject in the 'external' world of objects and cites the experiments involving induced sleepwalking and telepathic phenomena, that took place around 1800 at the country house of Johann Ritter the renowned physicist in Jena, as scientific proof of this.

In the introduction Breton wrote for von Arnim's *Contes bizarres*, the poet addressed the issue of subjectivity in a Romantic context influenced by Fichte's philosophical inquiry displayed in 'The Givens of Consciousness.' The destabilization of the notion of the subject as a characteristic of Romantic literature, such as in the work of Arnim, favoured Surrealist subversive art practices that questioned the perception of the object and emphasised the role assigned to the imagination in the process of bringing this object into being.

³¹⁸ André Breton, 'Centenaire d'Arnim,' p. 8.

³¹⁹ Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps*, pp. 162-3.

b. Determinism of the void in *Surrealist Intervention* (1934)

After research conducted in German Romantic literature and philosophy, André Breton announced in 1935, in a conference held in Prague, the new way of perceiving the object in Surrealism. He recalled previous Surrealist procedures of art making developed through automatism and formulated a theory of the Surrealist object. The importance given to imagination in the process of achieving the art object was exemplified with frottage, decalcomania, and double image representations, as well as the ready-made. These techniques that make use of chance in the artwork's composition are also an expression of the understanding of the occult in Surrealist milieu as I demonstrate and mobilise in my interpretation of Roger Caillois's concept of the 'determinism of the void' expressed in his article 'Systématisation et détermination' (1934).

In the 'Surrealist Situation on the Object or Situation of the Surrealist Object' essay Breton reasserted the Surrealist aim of the artist to attain the coordinates of 'a really visible object,' an object that is part of the material world and contiguous to the appearance of things.³²⁰ In the lecture delivered in Prague, in March 1935, Breton countered the allegation of idealism that once again threatened Surrealism with a historically justified option for a transgression of 'boundaries' that limited the thought and means of expression of antecedent realist artists and writers i.e. the ones who had acted immediately before or possibly at the same time as the Surrealists. In expressing the necessity of erasing the 'limits' imposed on the creative processes of art and writing, Breton affirmed that Surrealism, nevertheless, was descended from the vein of old realism. He remarked that:

[...] à établir qu'à l'issue de cette entreprise ne peut éclater aucune divergence entre le vieux réalisme et lui [surréalisme] quant à la reconnaissance du réel, à l'affirmation de la toute-puissance du réel. Contrairement à ce qu'insinuent certains de ses détracteurs, il est aisé, comme on va voir, de démontrer que, de tous les mouvements spécifiquement intellectuels qui se sont succédé jusqu'à ce jour, il est le seul à s'être

³²⁰ 'However, to the very degree that the Surrealist artist has the privilege of attaining the precision of the definite forms of a really visible object, to the very degree that one must take into account the fact that he is acting directly on the material world, [...].' André Breton, 'Surrealist Situation on the Object' in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 271.

prémuni contre toute velléité de fantaisie idéaliste, le seul à avoir prémédité dans l'art de régler définitivement son compte au « fidéisme ».³²¹

His axiomatic perception of 'the real' requires further investigation. In this respect, the author provides an exemplification of the Surrealist procedures that permit the visualisation of 'the object' through the use of uncharted areas of the mind. The artwork of Dalí, Max Ernst and Duchamp is alluded to in the overview presented in the 'Surrealist Situation on the Object' in 1935. Surrealist art statements in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* and *Minotaure* periodicals as well as in the 'Surrealist Intervention' issue of *Documents 34* document a sustained theoretical enterprise to define the Surrealist approach to the reality of the artwork. In July 1930, in the initial issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, Salvador Dalí launched the interpretation of the art-making process he would later describe as 'a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.'³²² He identified the act through which a double image could be traced within the economy of an artwork from two different perspectives that integrate each other in a flawless double-sided subject matter as the result of the paranoiac activity of the mind:

L'obtention d'une telle image double a été possible grâce à la violence de la pensée paranoïaque qui s'est servie, avec ruse et adresse, de la quantité nécessaire de prétextes, coïncidences, etc., en en profitant pour faire apparaître la deuxième image qui dans ce cas prend la place de l'idée obsédante.

L'image double (dont l'exemple peut être celui de l'image d'un cheval qui est en même temps l'image d'une femme) peut se prolonger, continuant le processus paranoïaque, l'existence d'une autre idée obsédante étant alors suffisante pour qu'une troisième image apparaisse (l'image d'un lion par exemple) et ainsi de suite jusqu'à concurrence d'un nombre d'images limité uniquement par le degré de capacité paranoïaque de la pensée.³²³

³²¹ André Breton, 'Position politique du surréalisme,' in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 489. André Breton, 'Surrealist Situation of the Object,' p. 271-2.

³²² Salvador Dalí, 'Derniers modes d'excitation intellectuelle pour l'été 1934,' *Documents 34*, 'Intervention surréaliste' issue, July 1934, Brussels.

³²³ Salvador Dalí, 'L'Âne pourri,' *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no 1, July 1930, p. 10. Quoted in André Breton, 'Position politique du surréalisme,' pp. 491-2. André Breton, 'Surrealist Situation on the Object,' p. 274.



Fig. 3.14 Salvador Dalí, *Invisible Lion, Horse, Sleeping Woman (Invisible Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion or Paranoiac Horse Woman)*, 1930, oil on canvas, 50.2 x 65.2 cm, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

The latter exists latently with the potential of coming into being at the time of a possible breach in the space-time system of coordinates. Caillois employs an analogy between the interstice described in a randomly collected amount of stones and the space paradigm exploited in scientific research and lyrical thought. He notices the predetermination of the space left open between parts in the above-mentioned example and compares it to the mathematically defined outline of a block that would be fitted in the interval at a certain moment in time. The obvious reasoning supports the new concept of determinism of the void that Caillois introduces in operating the interdependence between the existent and the non-existent world:

Ainsi plusieurs pierres irrégulières assemblées sans soin laissent entre elles un certain vide dont la forme est exactement dessinée de sorte que celle du bloc qui comblerait cet intervalle est à l'avance strictement déterminée, ce déterminisme du creux étant aussi rigoureux que tout autre. Pareillement, il semble qu'une accumulation de représentations convergentes prédétermine tout ou partie des conditions que devra

remplir le contenu de celle dont elles ont besoin pour présenter une cohérence sans fissure. Il s'ensuit que cette dernière existe virtuellement, du fait de l'existence des précédentes, et qu'à la première et contingente sollicitation, passant de la puissance à l'acte, elle s'imposera à la conscience.³²⁵

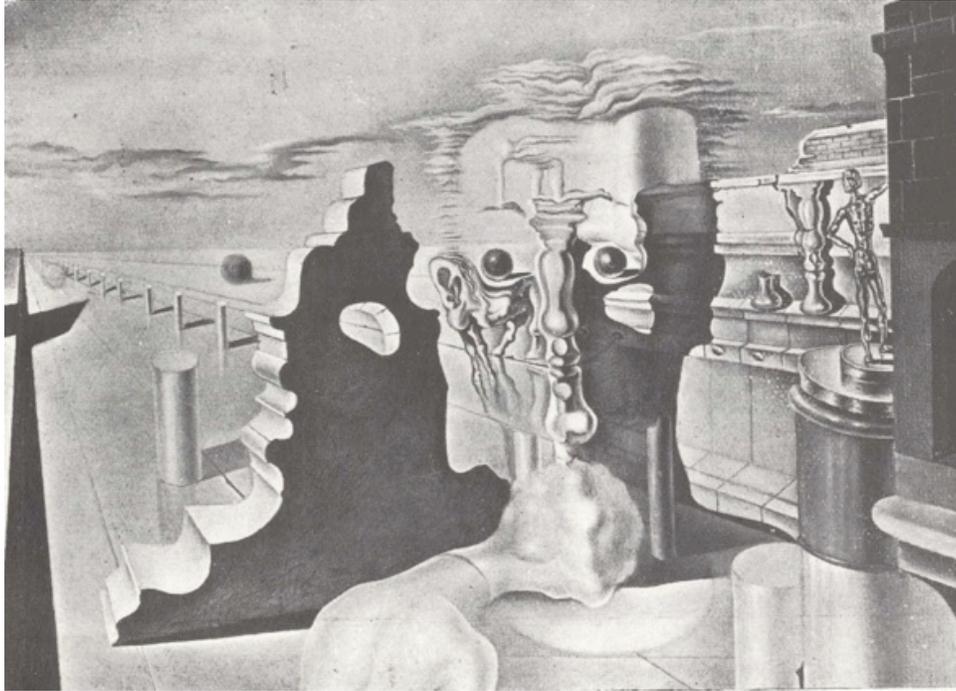


Fig. 3.15 Salvador Dalí, *The Invisible Man*, 1929-33, detail reproduced in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no 1 (July 1930).

The idea of determinism of the void is discernible in explaining the mechanism of lyrical thought too. Caillois advances the hypothesis of a lyrical thought that functions through a number of convergent representations that predetermine at a certain moment in time the next and final configuration that would conclude the display in a flawless coherence. The theorisation Caillois supports with regard to artistic processes could easily describe the motif of *The Invisible Man*, a painting by Salvador Dalí. Beginning work on the piece in 1929, the Spaniard took several years to complete it in 1933. In 1930 a fragment of the painting and a detail of this fragment that unmistakably identifies the theme of the work were reproduced in the first issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*.³²⁶ Dalí contributed 'L'Âne pourri,' a theoretical text to the same issue of the Surrealist publication. His description of the

³²⁵ Roger Caillois, 'Systématisation et détermination,' *Documents 34*, 'Intervention surréaliste' issue. Republished in *Approches de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 21.

³²⁶ *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no 1, July 1930.

paranoiac capacity of thought meets Caillois's future rendering of the processes of lyrical thought.



Fig. 3.16 Salvador Dalí, *The Invisible Man*, 1929-33, oil on canvas, 143 x 81 cm, Vicomte de Noailles Collection, Paris.

A fully detached moulding serves as the profile of a human shape that configured out of the patches of clear blue sky at sunset and phantasmagorical column-like formations. As the subject of the painting, the invisible man emerges in the central right position of the composition, and has a torso defined by the space left in between and the two silhouettes that are reminiscent of Jean-François Millet's main characters in *The Angelus* (1857-9). While the bent figure of the woman appears nude in Dalí's version of the painting, a characteristic

suggested in the male figure as well, the presumed harmony between the beings engaged in prayer is shattered in the allusion to Millet's composition. The disposition in which Dalí represented the couple is similar to Millet's one, but is reversed as though a mirror had captured the image in reflection on the canvas. The painter beheaded both figures and in each case replaced the site of thinking with various modern installations. Instead of a head the woman's back supports a conglomerate of soft structures that mirror among other details of the invisible man its cleverly crafted profile. Consequently, the invisible man's profile and its replica under the porous skin of the female figure are aligned with an emphasis on the submissive position of the woman. Her capacity to internalise the unknown at work in the surrounding universe is contrasted with the apparent blindness of the male figure. A heavy base and several plinths in retreat on top of it have taken the place of the man's head in the couple. The assemblage is crowned with a jewelled statuette whose parts are fashioned into an anthropomorphic stance that reverberates throughout this corner of the painting and overwhelms it.

There is reflective interplay between the invisible man's profile and the adjacent elements of the composition. The spindle-shaped element that concentrates the features of the invisible man in the profile corresponds in two different ways to the cut outs perceived in the fringed structure at the back of his head. Through a rotational movement, the invisible man's profile carves its negative in the wall behind him. On the left edge of the same pierced piece of material the invisible man's profile is seen again, reversed, as though this was the mould from which its form came into being. The orchestrated display of negative and positive images introduces a questioning of the void or the empty space represented in the artwork. Caillois would address the problem that Dalí unmistakably etched in *The Invisible Man* in the 'Systematisation and determination' essay. Furthermore, the artist suggested through an acute perspective that recedes violently into the background that a mathematical order is the origin of creation, both in existence and in human representation. He repeated the swivelling profile of the invisible man in the triglyph element of the entablature of a Doric temple. The frieze vertiginously diminishes towards a unique vanishing point where beams of light and shadow converge in the painting. On the path of the receding frieze three small spheres are exhibited as corresponding to the eyes of the invisible man in representation here and a dispersed one on the way to the horizon. None of these obey in size the rules of accustomed perspective. The

spheres maintain the same dimensions independently of the overall position they achieve in the composition. As result, a disconcerted feature is introduced in depiction while the viewer's eyes adjust to many different scales of representation.

Dalí realises in *The Invisible Man* a double-faced reality in tune with Surrealist precepts that praise the appearance of the existent world in close relationship with the void or with the non-existent. Caillois expresses this belief in 'Surrealist Intervention' of 1934. For him all effort directed towards the apprehension of the visible world targets the moment of suspension of all functions in an environment characterised by movement and correlated variables:

Il semble que tout effort humain de connaissance se réduise à la recherche de l'invariance dans un monde de fluctuations. De fait, j'avouerai quant à moi ne pas pouvoir en rester à la commune antinomie, ne percevant pas de différence appréciable entre le connu et l'inconnu.³²⁷

If the notion of movement pertains to the elements of the unknown at work in the universe, Caillois asserts having no difficulty in integrating it in the economy of a well-adjusted mechanism. He supports the idea that an understanding of the processes that describe macro- and microcosm concludes with the perception of a universe without break between parts. The non-visible parts of it may achieve form in a visible world, or they may exist in latency in the space in between or in the void. Moreover, Caillois extrapolates the announced inference in the field of science to the realm of vision and the other senses. He obliquely refers to the way in which the senses have an influence on the affect and sees the arts as a means to revolutionise the interpretation of the senses' perception. The ultimate goal of the scientific approach to the workings of the surrounding universe is revealed to be a new metaphysical position of humankind:

En somme, il ne s'agit que de traduire le fait que la compréhension se ramène toujours plus ou moins à l'intégration; de ce point de vue, la science parfaite ne serait autre que la conscience effective de la cohérence multiple des éléments de l'univers, aperception qui entraînerait très probablement non seulement de très importantes modifications dans la manière de voir et de sentir (il ne semble pas arbitraire de jouer ici sur le double

³²⁷ Roger Caillois, 'Systématisation et détermination,' *Documents 34*, p. 19.

sens, abstrait et concret, de certains mots) mais encore la possession d'une véritable position morale, sinon métaphysique.³²⁸

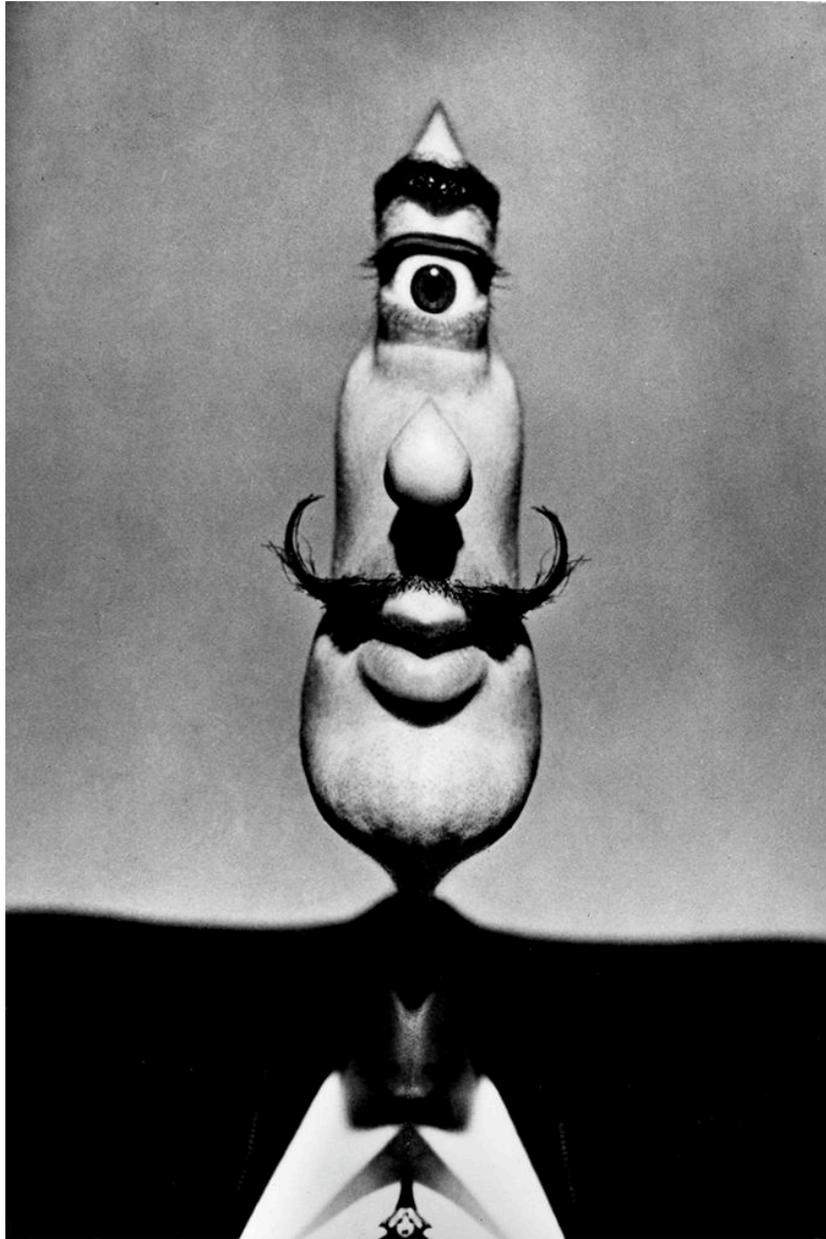


Fig. 3.17 Philippe Halsman, *Salvador Dalí, Spanish Surrealist Painter*, 1954.

Among the photographs in a series realised by Philippe Halsman under the tutelage of Salvador Dalí in 1954 exists one in which the painter's features are collapsed in a strange manner. In the final image a spindle-shaped depiction of Dalí recalls the profile of the elusory

³²⁸ Roger Caillois, 'Systématisation et détermination,' *Documents* 34, p. 20.

man in *The Invisible Man* of his Parisian years. About twenty years after completing the painting, which is in the collection of the Vicomte de Noailles, Dalí returned to the meaning of the void that could be suggested through a work of art.

The plastic form that Dalí has chosen in 1929 and re-interpreted in 1954 fulfils the role of the ideogram attributed to the image or representation by Roger Caillois. The French writer noticed in his Surrealist contribution that lyrical thought is traceable in the instance of figuring an image whose content has been predetermined by innumerable other representations that precede it. In fact, images that fall under the labelling of human creation are due to a drive towards systematisation present at the turning point between the existent and the non-existent worlds. In consequence a primary order that governs all ongoing processes of creation is to be detected in art and literature as well:

Cependant, il faut remarquer que l'exemple du rêve [...] montre que la nécessité d'esprit est capable d'identifier ou d'associer d'elle-même les représentations qu'il lui convient, en sorte qu'on se trouve amené à se demander *si la fonction de pensée lyrique n'est pas dans la vie éveillée de figurer semblablement tel élément qu'il faut quand l'exigence s'en fait sentir*, c'est-à-dire quand de multiples représentations ont déjà surdéterminé son contenu, contenu de ce fait capable de remplir au mieux ce rôle idéogrammatique de systématisation qui lui préexistait et à quoi en dernière analyse son avènement est exclusivement dû.³²⁹

The ideographic role of imagination that Caillois revealed in 'Systématisation et détermination' applies to Victor Brauner's artworks, especially from the early 1940s on when his painting technique changed and he assimilated a new material, the beeswax from Les Celliers de Rousset region, into his painting.³³⁰ In the *Image of the uncreated real (Image du réel incréé)* (1943) that I analyse in detail in the following section of the chapter I expose Brauner's new understanding of the relationship between figure and background in a composition that leads to results that are similar to the ones envisaged through the application of Caillois' *determinism of the void* concept to an artwork. I demonstrate that the *Image of the*

³²⁹ Roger Caillois, 'Systématisation et détermination,' *Documents 34*, p. 21. [Italics in the original text]

³³⁰ On Victor Brauner's paintings conservation issue see Bradford Epley, 'Victor Brauner's Use of Wax' in *Victor Brauner: Surrealist Hieroglyphs*, introduction by Susan Davidson, exhibition catalogue of an exhibition at the Menil Collection, Houston, 12 Oct. 2001 - 6 Jan. 2002 (Houston, Tex.: The Menil Collection in association with Hatje Cantz, 2001), pp. 57-65.

uncreated real object incorporates features of the *cirage* method devised by the painter at the time, and also that this technique provided an instrument of enquiry into the occult in the old-fashioned appreciation of the domain that started to prevail in Surrealism during the Second World War. In the investigation of the *Image of the uncreated real* I consider Brauner's viewpoint as expressed in the letters sent in the 1940s to his friend and Resistance poet René Char and to the art dealers Henriette and André Gomès. Brauner described in these letters the mechanism of imagination in terms that are comparable to the lyrical thought process indicated by Caillois in his 'Systématisation et détermination' article. Overall, the wartime correspondence represents an invaluable source for the painter's artistic objectives.

The concept of the 'determinism of the void' is relevant to Victor Brauner's creation in the early 1960s as well. The interplay between full and empty shapes that distinguished his compositions in the period achieved a high in the series of seven etchings *Codex of a Face* (*Codex d'un Visage*) (1962). Through the modulation of line the artist suggested the world of the visible, of the here, but also the potential of a world to be, if not of the beyond. Brauner made use of line in *Codex of a Face* to characterise separate volumes in space. Multiple images are seen at once as if the painter has brought into being Caillois' 'convergent representations' that are a mark of the 'determinism of the void'. The line returns upon itself and makes readable portraits, in profile or full face, on one and the other side of the plane it delineates. Any unutilised space is banned within the composition and, consequently, the viewer gazes at the interlocking details of human faces. The painter developed this style of his art in the following years in independent objects that made manifest the interchangeable elements of their compositions. *The Orgospoutnik* (*L'Orgospoutnik*) (1965) is part of the heterogeneous series *Mythologies* (Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix, Les Sables d'Olonne).³³¹

³³¹ Didier Ottinger (ed.), *Les Victor Brauner de la Collection de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix*, exhibition catalogue of an exhibition of the Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix des Sables d'Olonne Collection held at the Refectory of the Jacobins, February-April 1991 (Les Sables d'Olonne, 1991).

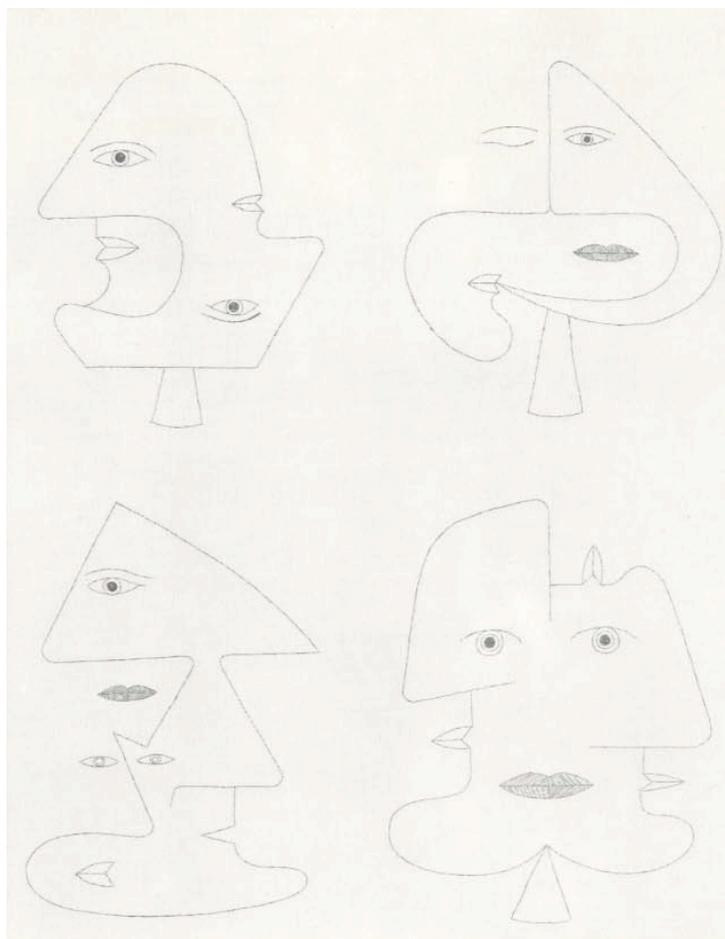


Fig. 3.18 *Codex of a Face (Codex d'un Visage)*, portfolio with seven etchings, 66 x 50 cm, plate VII, 1962.

Among the objects in the series that each includes an area dedicated to painting are: *The Aéroplapla (L'Aéroplapla)*, *The Automoma (L'Automoma)*, *Lost Horizons (Horizons perdus)*, *The Fish on Casters (Le Poisson à roulettes)*, and *The Painting with Four Paws (Le Tableau à quatre pattes)*. The artist employed double reading, positive-negative shapes. The zigzagging line of *Codex of a Face* evolved into a positive-negative pattern of forms that change from one to another and suggest a continuous movement within the artwork. As with pictorial devices used in the composition, the artwork title displays contrasting terms that add burlesque to this incongruous series. The artwork titles are also an index to the subject matter of the work that combines an ironic comment on the twentieth century achievements of technology and the primordial myths of humanity.



Fig. 3.19 *The Orgospoutnik (L'Orgospoutnik)* from *Mythologies* series, 1965, oil on canvas and painted wood, 123,5 x 112,5 cm, Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix, Les Sables d'Olonne.

In *The Orgospoutnik*, for example, references to the 1960s 'orgone boxes' of Wilhelm Reich³³² are made in the context of a depiction of the female-male couple united under the sign of everlasting love. The parody of the Austrian psychoanalyst who emigrated to the USA and attempted to detect and store the sexual energy (the orgone) dispersed throughout the universe, is enhanced with the mention of the Russian satellites launched at the same time.

³³² Didier Ottinger (ed.), *Les Victor Brauner de la Collection de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix*, p. 94.

c. Brauner's automatic procedure of painting: *le cirage*

Victor Brauner did not devise his automatic technique of art making until 1943, yet the artistic climate at the beginning of the 1940s was ripe for the reinterpretation of Surrealist automatism. In the case of the Romanian Jewish artist the employment of a Surrealist procedure of automatic painting was accompanied by the creation of art objects that embedded in their structure references to the occult. This relationship has had an influence upon the definition of *le cirage* technique, as I will later on demonstrate in the interpretation of *Portrait of Novalis* (1943).

In the double issue of *Minotaure* in 1939 that would be its final number the paranoiac activity of the mind traced by Dalí in a double image process of painting found its place among other automatic techniques enumerated by Breton. At the time the main critical voice of Surrealism deplored the remnants of the rational thinking involved in collages, frottages, and paranoiac-based analyses of the image. Following the 1924 call for a Surrealist reality depicted by means of non-intellectual procedures designed merely to replicate it, Breton praised 'the absolute automatism' achieved through newly developed painting techniques. 'Decalcomania without a preconceived object' devised by Oscar Dominguez and 'fumage' elaborated by Wolfgang Paalen were practices that stayed within the parameters set at the beginning of the Surrealist movement. Nevertheless, Breton hailed the perseverance of each member of the Surrealist group in attaining a personal answer to the common demands expressed in the inaugural *Manifesto*. On the other hand, through his statement, Breton expressed the validity of one of the aims of the Surrealists: the achievement of 'absolute automatism:'

La peinture surréaliste, dans ces manifestations de la plus fraîche date chez des hommes assez jeunes pour ne pas avoir, sur le plan artistique, à rendre compte de leurs antécédents personnels, opère un retour marqué à l'*automatisme*. Alors que jusqu'ici une certaine prudence, sinon défiance, avait présidé aux diverses démarches ayant pour objet déclaré de la mettre en avant, c'est seulement quinze ans après le *Manifeste du surréalisme* concluant à la nécessité de sa mise en œuvre passionnée que l'*automatisme absolu* fait son apparition sur le plan plastique. Le « collage », le « frotage » et les premiers produits – les moins spécieux, les plus valables – de l'activité dite « paranoïaque-critique » n'avaient cessé de maintenir une certaine équivoque entre l'involontaire et le volontaire, de faire la plus belle part au raisonnant. Il n'a commencé

à en être autrement qu'avec la « décalcomanie sans objet » de Dominguez et le « fumage » de Paalen. L'un et l'autre de ces artistes, dans leurs travaux ultérieurs et dans l'esprit de leurs dernières démarches, ont gardé toute fidélité à ce qui avait décidé de leur précieuse découverte d'un jour.³³³

Brauner announced the discovery of an automatic method of painting in his correspondence with René Char and André Gomès in August-September 1943. In the presentation he gave to the art dealer, the painter immediately related the procedure to automatism. Even in denomination, Brauner maintained a constant reference to previous Surrealist techniques: frottage, fumage and his own cirage. The latest version of automatism, *le cirage*, derives its name from wax, the main material involved in the realisation of new pieces of work at the beginning of the 1940s. This procedure is also called *drawing with a candle* or *drawing with wax*. As Brauner writes:

Je vais te transmettre et t'entretenir avec une de mes dernières découvertes qui est toute passionnante et qui je crois pour la première fois dans le surréalisme « touche » d'une façon structurelle ces problèmes de l'automatisme:

Dessin à la bougie

(ou dessin à la cire)

(ou « Cirage »)

ceci constitue un texte pour la présentation d'une éventuelle exposition de ces dessins.³³⁴

³³³ André Breton, 'Des tendances les plus récentes de la peinture surréaliste' in *Minotaure*, nos 12-13, May 1939, p. 16. In English translation 'The Most Recent Tendencies in Surrealist Painting,' in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* p. 145.

³³⁴ Letter of Victor Brauner to André Gomès: dated Sunday, on the twelfth of September 1943. Former Collection Henriette and André Gomès. The Gomès Collection was auctioned in Paris, the 17th and 18th of June 1997. All correspondence between Victor Brauner and Henriette and André Gomès entered a private collection of unknown location.

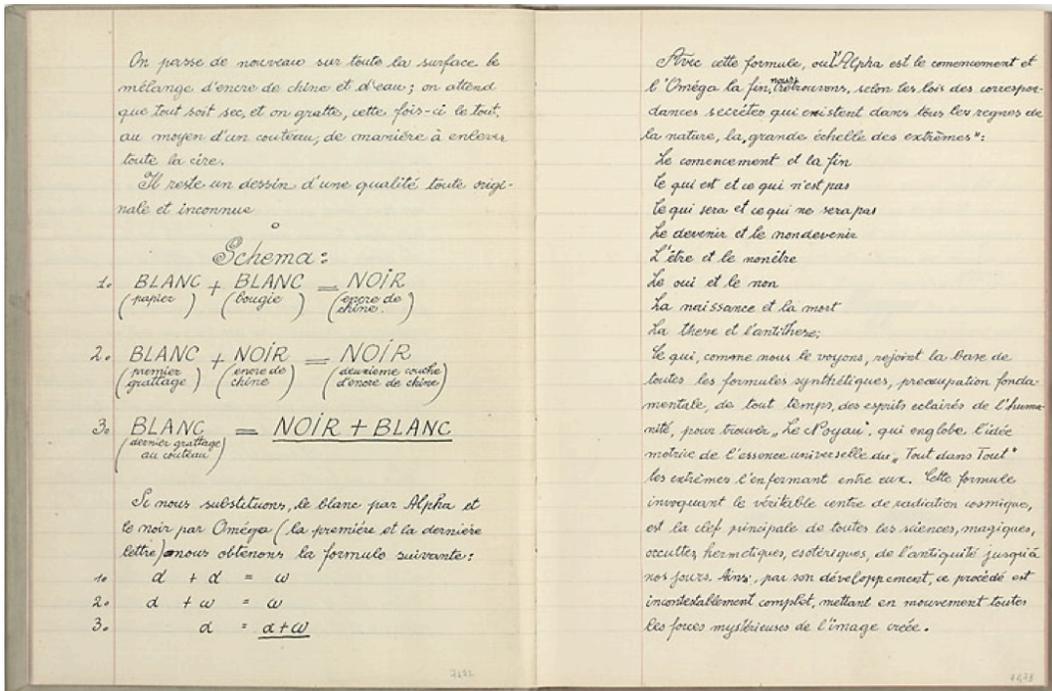
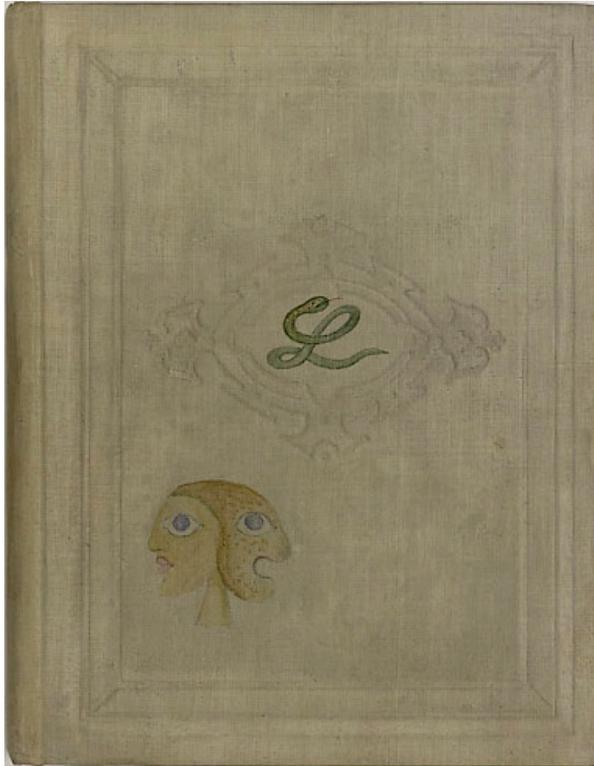


Fig. 3.20 *Carnet toilé écrit 'L'* (1943-1944) in Victor Brauner Archives, Kandinsky Library, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

illustration he gave in his study on magic that the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet encompass between their symbolic limits the metaphorical space of representation for a magical operation.³³⁵ The drawing also indicates the structure of a pentacle, which had the role of protecting the performer from the nefarious influence of the unearthly world. The close association of Victor Brauner's work during the Second World War with the practice of the occult, which mobilises pentacles together with special garments and essences in ceremonies invoking benevolent visions, is a prevailing factor in his Surrealist art production during this period. *Le cirage*, or the procedure of 'drawing with a candle' displays a contrasting progression of steps in achieving the final image that may refer to De Abano's technique of employing opposites – like the beginning and the end, the created and the uncreated – in magical processes. In Brauner's text from 1943 the signifiers black and white, alpha and omega, regain their fundamental role in explaining the configuration of the image:

Juillet 1943
 Dessin à la bougie.
 Procédé :
 Sur une feuille de papier blanc, on frotte librement et avec force une bougie, de manière à y apposer de la cire en abondance.
 On passe ensuite sur toute cette étendue, une couche d'encre de chine délayée dans de l'eau.
 Une fois le liquide séché, on gratte légèrement, avec un objet pointu, le dessin que l'en désire obtenir.
 On passe de nouveau sur toute la surface le mélange d'encre de chine et d'eau; en attend que tout soit sec, et on gratte, cette fois-ci le tout, au moyen d'un couteau, de manière à enlever toute la cire.
 Il reste un dessin d'une qualité toute originale et inconnue.

Schéma:

- | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|---|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | BLANC | + | BLANC | = | NOIR |
| | (papier) | | (bougie) | | (encre de chine) |
| 2. | BLANC | + | NOIR | = | NOIR |
| | (premier | | (encre de | | (deuxième couche d'encre |
| | grattage) | | chine) | | de chine) |
| 3. | BLANC | = | | <u>NOIR</u> | + <u>BLANC</u> |
| | (dernier grattage | | | | |
| | au couteau) | | | | |

³³⁵ Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* (London: Lamb, 1655), p. 87.

Si nous substituons, le blanc par Alpha et le noir par Oméga (la première et la dernière lettre) nous obtenons la formule suivante :

1. α + α = ω
2. α + ω = ω
3. α = $\alpha + \omega$

Avec cette formule, où l'Alpha est le commencement et l'Oméga la fin, nous retrouvons, selon les lois des correspondances secrètes qui existent dans tous les règnes de la nature, la 'grande échelle des extrêmes'.³³⁶

Brauner initially shared the problematic of his work in 1943 with his friend in the French Resistance at the time, the poet René Char. The letter dated on the thirtieth of August 1943, approximately two weeks before that addressed to André Gomès, already disclosed the novelty of the process that Brauner called *cirage*. The painter avowed the unique design of traces of white in the slate mass of pebbles as they were carried along by the currents of the Durance River, especially on the borders of the Celliers de Rousset stream, as the primary source of the technique he invented. A pattern inscribed in the rock through natural forces across centuries challenged Brauner to penetrate its laws and reproduce its mechanism. The result in the work of the artist seemed to have been achieved blindfold.

Brauner collected stones moulded by the river into various shapes and drifted on to its banks. He included a number of them in the series of objects realised concomitant with the theorization of the *drawing with a candle* procedure of painting or incision. The *Image of the uncreated real (Image du réel incréée)* is one of the objects he created in 1943 and preserved, as each of the others, in a display case with glass. The others are *Objet de contre-empoûtement* (1943), *Les Amoureux* (1943), and *Portrait de Novalis* (1943). All of them are in the Collection of Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, as result of bequest of Madame Jacqueline Victor-Brauner.³³⁷

³³⁶ Victor Brauner, *Carnet toilé écru 'L'* (1943-1944) in Victor Brauner Archives, Kandinsky Library, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

³³⁷ See entries in Didier Semin (ed.), *Victor Brauner dans les collections du Musée national d'art moderne*, exhibition catalogue of an exhibition held at Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, from 24 January to 6 May 1996 (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1996) and Dominique Bozo (ed.), *Victor Brauner*, exhibition catalogue of an exhibition held at Musée national d'art moderne, Paris, from 2 June to 25 September 1972 (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1972).



Fig. 3.22 *Image of the Uncreated Real (Image du réel incréé)*, 1943, mixed technique: wax, flint, cord, drawing, and inscription in a wooden box with glass, 28,8 x 18,6 x 6,5 cm, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

In the *Image of the uncreated real* five pieces of stone with the relief of an anthropomorphic figure are disposed into the shape of a walking person. They are fixed in this instance of

human existence by occluding the space between them with warmed wax.³³⁸ Once cold and hard the wax became the background on which the partially submerged figure enacted its role of a passer-by. Brauner points in a letter to René Char, on the twenty-first of September 1943, to the title he intended to give the piece: ‘Image of the world of the non-created reality (Image du monde de la réalité non créé).’ In the end, he inscribed a German phrase that conveyed the meaning of his intention, ‘Bildnis aus der ungeschöpften Wirklichkeit,’ at the base of the work in a completely detached area from the overall support. That part of the work was still suffused with wax from a previous operation that involved a separate case, which was removed afterwards. By placing the writing in a careful calligraphy in the immediate vicinity of the assembled object Brauner was drawing attention to the special relation established between poetry and its written words and the plastic effect of the visual arts. Both processes rely upon the mechanism of the imagination that the painter evoked in his letter to Char. He commented on the formula the poet has found regarding the subject and agreed with its content to the extent of re-writing it to the author:

L’imagination consiste a expulser de la réalité plusieurs personnes incomplètes pour, mettant a contribution les puissances magiques et subversives du désir, obtenir leur retour sous la forme d’une présence entièrement satisfaisante.³³⁹

Imagination is defined as a process of abstraction based on the inner abilities of the artist repeatedly to deny existence to innumerable ‘incomplete beings’ that would appear on the way in the process of painting, writing or any other kind of human creation. The result in a text or artwork would be invested with presence and therefore with the characteristics of being. Victor Brauner emphasizes the unique quality of the final choice of the artist: ‘It is then the inextinguishable uncreated real.’³⁴⁰ The everlasting property of the artwork to gain existence, once pieced together and made visible independently of the will of the artist, is identified in the Ankh symbol attached to the forehead of the figure in *Image of the uncreated real* (1943).

³³⁸ For the use of wax in magical practices see Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, translated from the French by Robert Brain (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1972).

³³⁹ Letter of Victor Brauner to René Char on the twenty-first of September 1943 in the Archives René Char – Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

³⁴⁰ ‘C’est alors l’inextinguible réel incréé.’, Letter of Victor Brauner to René Char on the twenty-first of September 1943.

In the same letter to René Char the painter underlines the new meaning assumed by the word ‘image’ in the construction of the title. It is the ‘uncreated real’ that conditions the ‘image’ to become the opposite of a ‘portrait of the reality itself.’³⁴¹



Fig. 3.23 *Portrait of Novalis (Portrait de Novalis)*, 1943, mixed technique: leather, plaster, wire, wax, Chinese ink and gouache on paper in a wooden box with glass, 21,9 x 15,8 x 7,2 cm, Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

The option for the inscription of the work’s title in the structure of the object itself testifies to an interest in German Romantic literature. As we noted the painter has written in

³⁴¹ ‘J’ai pensé appeler cet objet ‘Image du monde de la réalité noncréé (réel incréé) et non ‘image’ comme le sens portrait de la réalité (même) etc.’, Letter of Victor Brauner to René Char on the twenty-first of September 1943.

high calligraphy ‘Bildnis aus der ungeschöpften Wirklichkeit’ at the base of the artwork. His correspondence to Henriette and André Gomès between December 1942 and April 1944 indicates a return to previous readings of works of German Romantics like Hoffmann and Novalis. The figure of Novalis in particular stimulated the imagination of the painter:

Je me rappelle plutôt des « Hymnes à la Nuit » de Novalis, et je te dis ça, parce que au moment où je lisais Novalis, je fais toutes une série de dessins dédiés à Novalis qui me beaucoup plus impressionner et qui m’a littéralement déclenché l’inspiration, d’ailleurs je considère Novalis beaucoup plus sensationnelle à tous les points de vue. (« Les Hymnes à la Nuit » de Novalis et surtout « Les Fragments », je te dis ça parce que en tant que romantique Allemagne Novalis, très important. As-tu « Les Fragments » de Novalis ? Peut-tu me les envoyer ? Et « Les disciples à Saïs »).³⁴²

In the letter addressed to André Gomès on the twenty-fourth of April 1944 Victor Brauner mentions a series of drawings already achieved on the subject of the work of the German Romantic poet. The letter does not announce completion or the work on one of the assemblages or encased pieces of the period that include the *Portrait of Novalis*. Even undated and unsigned, the work in the collection of Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris, as a result of Madame Jacqueline Victor Brauner’s endowment in 1982, has been dated 1943. It is possible that the offer to ‘illustrate Hoffmann’ expressed by André Gomès in the spring of 1944 – to which Brauner refers in the same letter only to dismiss it on the grounds of a demand for ‘exceptional technical conditions,’ an element to which the painter adds a review of various previous Surrealist editions – set in train the idea of the *Portrait of Novalis*. In the creation of the artist, conserved in the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, a bi-dimensional version of it as a cut out figure, unsigned and undated again, called *Portrait of Novalis – Pentacle*, is dated 1945. The two pieces of work on the subject of Novalis could be dated in our view in a very close interval of time if for no other reason, as both pieces fulfilled a magical function that

³⁴² Letter of Victor Brauner to André Gomès dated: twenty-fourth of April 1944. Former Collection Henriette and André Gomès. The Gomès Collection was auctioned in Paris, the 17th and 18th of June 1997. All correspondence between Victor Brauner and Henriette and André Gomès entered a private collection of unknown location. The material of eighteen letters that came out of a corpus of twenty-six envelopes was published in the appendix to the article Stéphanie Laudicina, ‘Victor Brauner, la création dans la guerre: lettres à Henriette et André Gomès: décembre 1942-mai 1944,’ *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire de l’Art Française*, 1996, pp. 279-305. The quotes I discuss in this chapter of the thesis are sourced from this publication.

would explain the lack of individual marks in their construction i.e. date and signature of the artist, than for the attention given in the composition of each to the presence of a *pentacle*.

Portrait of Novalis contains a disk in the form of a pentacle that supports the ovoid shape of a human skull suggested by two shallow dips moulded in the plaster base and inscribed with the word: *cendre* (*ash*). The reference to the occult significance of a pentacle is obscured in *Portrait of Novalis*, while made visible in the work of the quasi-same heading, in the signifier that the title comprises: *Portrait of Novalis – Pentacle*.



Fig. 3.24 *Portrait of Novalis – Pentacle* (*Portrait pantaculaire de Novalis*), 1945, Chinese ink, gouache and wax on paper, 74,5 x 52,6 cm, Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

The figure in the painted version of *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* is cut out of the cardboard that constitutes the support of the painting itself. The operation also relates the work to the magical function of a pentacle that is to be presented detached from any intruding

influence in the background. *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* bears no title or signature unlike the assembled version of *Portrait of Novalis* (1943). The allegorical interpretation of the Romantic poet was reinstated with a drawing published in the frontispiece to Pierre Mabilie's *Le Merveilleux* edition of 1946.³⁴³ Brauner chose to give in *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* a personal reading of the Abraxas gemstones. These gems fulfilled the role of magical objects or pentacles in the Gnostic tradition of depicting the unity between the created and uncreated universe. The painter reinterpreted the attributes of the figure on an Abraxas stone. In Brauner's version of the pentacle, the figure holds a cat's head and flames in the left and right hand, respectively, and these have replaced the whip and shield, symbols of power and wisdom in the usual Abraxas gemstones.



Fig. 3.25 Abraxas stone, reproduced in *Les vrais talismans, pentacles et cercles* (*The True Talismans, Pentacles and Circles*), manuscript of eighteenth-century French Collection of Antoine-René d'Argenson, Marquis de Paulmy, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris.³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Pierre Mabilie, *Le Merveilleux*, frontispiece by Victor Brauner; hors-texte by Jacques Hérold (Paris: Les Éditions des Quatre Vents, 1946).

³⁴⁴ Reproduced in Maurice Bessy, *A Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural* translated from the French by Margaret Crosland and Alan Daventry (Feltham: Spring Books, 1968), p. 201.

The artist might be referring, through the opposition between the left and right side of the human body, to the complementarities that govern the processes that take place in the sublunary sphere of existence. The association of the constricted pupil of the cat with the nocturnal disposition of the species, and of the flame with the brightness of the sun could suggest a circadian rhythm, which all earthly creation obeys. In addition, Brauner inscribed *Pistis* and *Sophia* on each of the forearms of the figure, ensuring in this way that the emphasis is placed on the polarity of symbols he employed. Indeed, *Pistis Sophia* is a third-century text of great importance to Gnosticism, whose unique manuscript in the collections of the British Museum testifies to the interplay between ancient texts like the *Odes and Psalms of Solomon* from which it largely quotes and the configuration of a Gnostic doctrine of the universe.³⁴⁵ As in the Abraxas gemstones, Victor Brauner relied on the integration of opposites – the well-known *coincidentia oppositorum* principle circulated in Surrealist milieu and retraceable in André Breton's writing³⁴⁶ – in the composition of *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* (1945). The connection that I have established between *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* and *Portrait of Novalis* (1943) is reinforced by Brauner's inscription in drops of coloured wax of the word 'abraxas' on the circumference of the leather shield that he displayed in the assembled object.

The artist had replaced in *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* the rooster's head of the composite figure in a common Abraxas gem with a human profile topped with six different coloured stripes encircled by Ouroboros or the serpent that bites its own tail. As a symbol of eternal recurrence, the Ouroboros also connects Brauner's pentacle to the cyclical process of the alchemical work. The painter suggested the alchemy of the creative process in the wording of the sequence 'attraction'/'explosion'/'effervescence'/'fruit' that is repeated in both artworks of almost the same title: *Portrait of Novalis* and *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle*. In this way the Romantic poet is assimilated to the figure of the alchemist or magician, a change of direction that Brauner will further exploit in *Le Surréaliste (The Surrealist)* (1947) (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice).

³⁴⁵ Rendel Harris, Alphonse Mingana (eds.), *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon* (Manchester: The University Press, 1920) p. 204.

³⁴⁶ André Breton, *Conférences d'Haïti, VI*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 309-11. See also Kathleen Houghton Peters, *Theory of "Correspondances" in the Poetry of Baudelaire*, Manchester: University of Manchester, 1924.

The bands of colour that encircle the figure's head in *Portrait of Novalis - Pentacle* may disclose an association of each colour with a specific planet in the outdated arrangement of the Ptolemaic system of revolving planets, with the earth placed in the centre of the celestial structure. Such a suggestion would also encourage the interpretation of the artwork in cosmological terms and provide one more parallel between it and the assembled piece *Portrait of Novalis*. The scrap of paper in the shape of a crescent moon that Brauner glued over the lower half of the shield in *Portrait of Novalis* functions as the support for the lines that the artist quoted from the first *Hymn to the night* by Novalis. Moreover, the positioning of the crescent moon is reminiscent of an etching reproduced in the Second Book of the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* by Agrippa von Nettesheim.

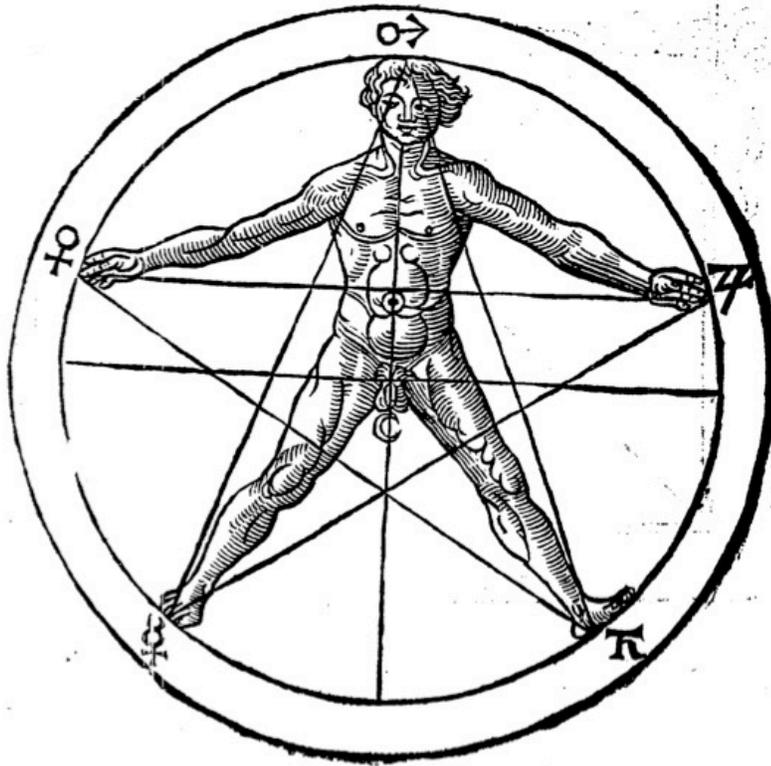


Fig. 3.26 'The Perfect Pentagon' in Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* Book II, 1650

The Renaissance physician expressed in the twenty-seventh chapter of the Second Book a harmonious view of the proportions of the human body and connected them to the influence of the stars on human beings:

In like manner the measures of all the members are proportionate, and consonant both to the parts of the world, and measures of the Archetype, and so agreeing, that there is no member in man which hath not correspondence with some sign, Star, intelligence, divine name [...].³⁴⁷

Whether a metaphorical image or one infused with occult references, the third composition in a series of six etchings depicts the perfect Pentagon obtained through a subdivision of a circle's circumference when the extended limbs of a human figure are inscribed in the circle. On a second circle that encloses the first one are embossed at the height of each of the extremities of the human body the planets' symbols as follows: to the tip of the head – Martis (Mars) emblem; to the right hand – Iovis (Jupiter) sign; to the right leg – Saturni (Saturn) figure; to the left leg – Mercurii (Mercur) mark; and to the left hand Veneris (Venus) crest. The Lunae (Moon) seal is placed in the immediate lower section of the common centre of both circles that corresponds to the groin of the figure.

Von Nettesheim makes no reference in the text of the *Second Book of Occult Philosophy* to the assignment of planets' ideograms to body parts, though if we compare the engraving with the assembled work *Portrait of Novalis* by Victor Brauner a couple of similarities may be revealed. The crescent of the moon cut out of paper in *Portrait of Novalis* is placed in a dominant position in a section of the leathery shield as in the occult diagram of the *Second Book*, while the inscription 'abraxas' on the border of the shield may complement the disposition of planets' symbols in the engraving. The latter analogy relies on the meaning of the word 'abraxas,' a Gnostic term of uncertain etymology that denotes, in accordance with *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, the highest entity in existence from which all creation proceeds.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁷ Second Book, chapter XXVII 'Of the proportion, measure, and Harmony of mans body,' Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* translated out of the Latin into the English by J. F., Second Book, chapter XXVII 'Of the proportion, measure, and Harmony of mans body' (London: Gregory Moule, 1650), pp. 263-64.

³⁴⁸ 'ABRAXAS or ABRASAX (*Αβραξας* or *Αβρασξ*): A term of Gnostic magic, of uncertain etymology. According to Irenæus ("Adversus Hæreses," i. 24, 3-7), the Gnostic Basilides (died about 130) gave the name of Abraxas to the highest Being, who presides over the 364 kingdoms of spirits ($52 \times 7 = 364$), because the numerical value of the letters of this name is equivalent to 365 (a = 1, b = 2, r = 100, a = 1, x = 60, a = 1, s = 200)—i.e., the 364 spirits + the Highest Being Himself.' Cyrus Adler, Isidore Singer (eds.), *The Jewish Encyclopaedia: a descriptive record of the history, religion, literature, and customs of the Jewish people from*

Schema huius præmissæ diuisionis Sphærarum .



Fig. 3.27 Ptolemaic System, diagram in ‘Celestial Orbs in the Latin Middle Ages,’ *Isis*, 1987.³⁴⁹

If Brauner used the word ‘abraxas’ in lieu of the symbols that indicate a relationship between macrocosm and microcosm, he also modified the structure of the Perfect Pentagon by replacing the human body with the plaster ovoid suggestive of an example of mathematical objects included years before, in May 1936, in the Surrealist exhibition at Galerie Charles Ratton in Paris. The ovoid also recalls a human skull through the hollows in its surface. The artist topped this representation of the perishable human condition, a meaning that he

the earliest times to the present day (New York; London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1901), p. 129.

³⁴⁹ Edward Grant, ‘Celestial Orbs in the Latin Middle Ages,’ *Isis*, Vol. 78, No. 2. (Jun., 1987), pp. 152-173.

enhanced through stamping the French word ‘cendre (ash)’ on it, with an emblem once more of occult derivation. ‘The signature of the moon’ is the caption with which the symbol was circulated in the repertoires of amulets and talismans at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Victor Brauner might have extracted this obscure sign, which he treated in a wire format in *Portrait of Novalis*, from the copy of a work by Jean Marquès-Rivière that he owned.³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the way in which Brauner doubled ‘the signature of the moon’ (in Marquès-Rivière’s variant stripped of the external element of enclosure) with an almost full-circle metal piece is more consistent with the symbol of the star *Hagith* reproduced in *Arbatel of Magick* (in the edition of 1665).

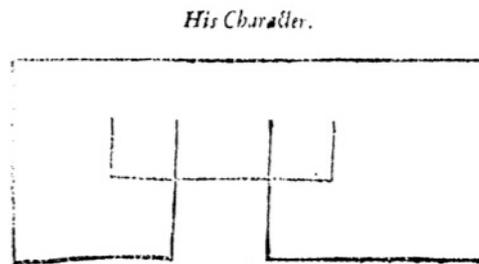


Fig. 3.28 Symbolic device published in 1665 in *Arbatel of Magick*.

In *Arbatel of Magick* or *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Ancients*, an astronomical treatise of unknown authorship that appeared in the same volume with *The Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* by Agrippa von Nettesheim, Hagith represents one of the seven entities in charge of ‘the 186 *Olympick* provinces in the whole Universe.’³⁵¹ Through the employment of its character, Brauner might have aimed to invoke its presence in connection with the Romantic poet, in which case *Portrait of Novalis* becomes charged with magical objectives. In the description that accompanies Hagith’s sign in the *Arbatel of Magick* the author assures the reader that its mediation entails the conversion of metals as the highest point of the alchemical

³⁵⁰ Jean Marquès-Rivière, *Amulettes, talismans et pantacles dans les traditions orientales et occidentales* (Paris: Payot, 1938). On magic in Surrealism see Cléo Charlotte Barbara Mitchell, “*Secrets de l’art magique surréaliste*”: *Magic and the Myth of the Artist-magician in Surrealist Aesthetic Theory and Practice*, Ph.D Thesis: University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1994.

³⁵¹ Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *His Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy; Of Geomancy; Magical Elements of Peter de Abano; Astronomical Geomancy; The Nature of Spirits; Arbatel of Magick* translated into English by Robert Turner (London: J. C., 1665), p. 177.

process. Victor Brauner could have used its symbol in order to make visible the purpose of poetry and painting alike – the acquirement of supreme beauty:

*Hagith governeth Venereous things. He that is dignified with his Character, he maketh very fair, and to be adorned with all beauty. He converteth copper into gold, in a moment, and gold into copper: he giveth Spirits which do faithfully serve those to whom they are addicted.*³⁵²

III. Surrealist Magic

a. Brauner and the Surrealist deck of *Tarot de Marseille*

In divination undertaken with the Tarot de Marseille cards, a pentacle denominates one of the four suits of the Minor Arcana. The other suits in the Royal Arcana are the wand or baton, the cup and sword. Each is subdivided into ace through ten cards and a sequence Court cards of Page, Knight, Queen and King.

As each suit, as well as each exponent of the Court in the series, has been ascribed to one of the fundamental, or alchemical, elements with fire corresponding to wands and the King, water to cups and the Queen, air to swords and the Knight, and earth to pentacles or coins and the Page, the tarot cards were supposedly derived from hermetic study of the Kabbalah.³⁵³ It encoded in its symbolism a system of knowledge transmitted throughout the centuries disguised in the form of a *jeu de société* – a parlour game – with its adjacent values in popular culture. The diffusion of the Tarot de Marseille deck registered a major variant during the French Revolution when the entire system of suits was rejuvenated. The newly achieved Liberties led people in revolutionary times to replace the Queens in their position in the court sequence, while the Kings were removed from the set, and Geniuses were introduced to compensate for them.

³⁵² Arbatel of *Magick*, p. 181.

³⁵³ On Kabbalah see Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, translated by Ralph Manheim; forward by Bernard McGinn (New York: Schocken Books, 1996) and George Sassoon, *The Kabbalah Decoded: A New Translation from the Hebrew of the 'Ancient of Days' Texts of the 'Zohar,'* Rodney Dale (ed.) (London: Duckworth, 1978).

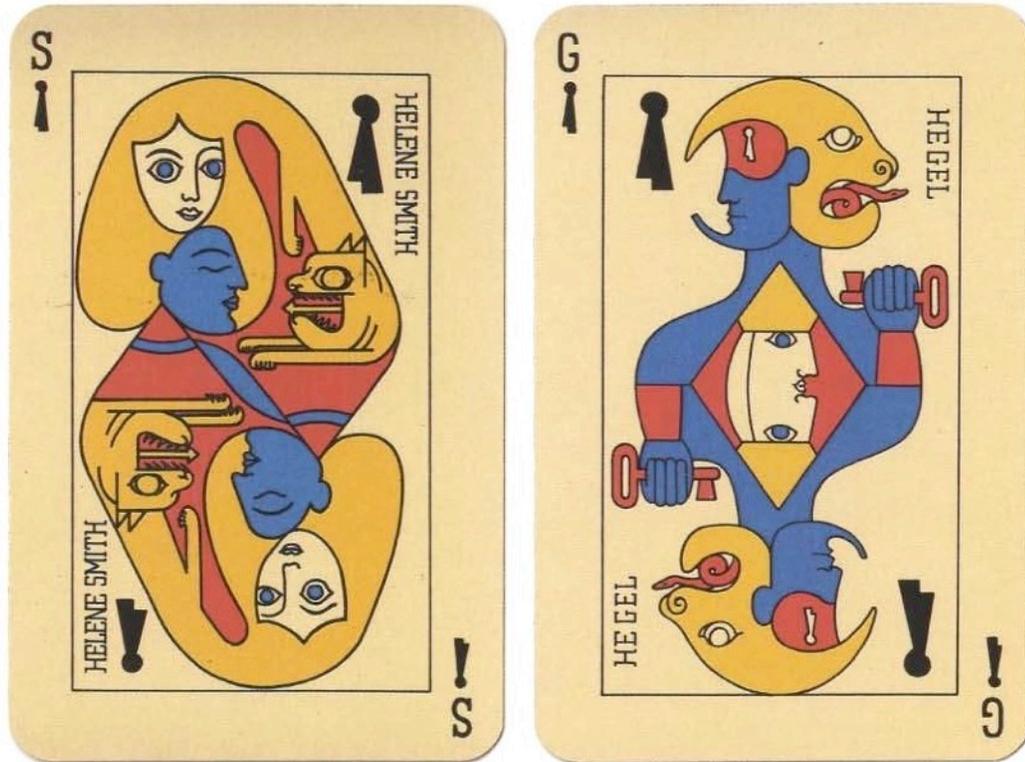


Fig. 3.29 Victor Brauner, *Tarot de Marseille* cards, 1941. Design copied in one session by Robert Delangade. Edited and published by André Dimanche, c. 1983.

André Breton was well aware of the capacity of a parlour game to incorporate social concerns and critical views regarding the principles on which a society is based. Relying on the role assumed by the Tarot cards' symbolism in connection with social upheavals that attested to a multi-century history of the game, he proposed, while in residence at the Villa Bel-Air in Marseilles, a quintessential reshaping of the Tarot de Marseille deck. At the time, the autumn and winter of 1940 through the spring of 1941, the Surrealists met occasionally and resided temporarily at the Villa Bel-Air, as guests of Varian Fry and the American Committee for the Rescue of Intellectuals.³⁵⁴ A tormented period commenced in the life of each of the Surrealists, but they were determined to change the course of history through changes operated in the structure of a parlour game like the Tarot de Marseille. Their attempt was once again a collective act that evinced a spread of magical thinking throughout the group of Surrealists:

³⁵⁴ Varian Fry, *Surrender on Demand*, preface by Warren Christopher (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1996, [1945]).

Au nombre des expériences qui ont pu requérir les surréalistes à Marseille – et desquelles ne sont pas de leur part plus exclus que d’ordinaire le goût de la recherche et la volonté de continuer à interpréter librement le monde – figure en bonne place l’établissement d’un *jeu de cartes* qu’on puisse tenir pour adapté à ce qui nous occupe sur le plan sensible aujourd’hui.³⁵⁵

In the tradition of the French Revolution Tarot deck, Sirens or exceptional fictional or real female figures replaced the Queens in the Surrealist Tarot deck. They were the Portuguese visionary, or Mariana Alcoforado, the presumed author of the seventeenth century epistle *Letters of a Portuguese Nun*, Alice, Lamiel, and the medium Hélène Smith. The Geniuses that led the court cards order, replacing the Kings, were represented by innovative and unprecedented literary figures: Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Sade and Hegel. The court cards of each suit had the Page or Valet [or Jack] dismissed on ethical grounds as the equivalent of the servant and therefore with no role in the new design of the world imagined by the Surrealists. The Magus replaced it. An order dissimilar to that of the society from those presented in previous versions of the Tarot was suggested in the structure of the Surrealist Jeu de Marseille deck. Breton indicated this in *Le Jeu de Marseille*, the article published in the ephemeral Surrealist American periodical *VVV* that accompanied the exhibition of the original Surrealist Jeu de Marseille deck in 1943 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.³⁵⁶ The artists that participated in the realisation of the new Jeu de Marseille were André Masson, Max Ernst, Jacques Hérold, Victor Brauner, Jacqueline Lamba, Wifredo Lam, and Oscar Domínguez, while Breton designed the Paracelsus card in the new Lock suit. The drawing of Père Ubu by Alfred Jarry was used for the joker card. In his article Breton established a new dominance of four modern concerns the Surrealists considered to be essential in our society: love, dream, revolution and knowledge. To each of the new meanings a new symbol was attached: flame for the love, black star for the dream, a red spiral for revolution, and lock for knowledge:

C’est ainsi que nous avons été conduits à adopter, correspondants aux quatre préoccupations modernes que nous tenions pour majeures, quatre nouveaux emblèmes, à savoir:

³⁵⁵ André Breton, ‘Le Jeu de Marseille,’ *Œuvres complètes*, volume III (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 706.

³⁵⁶ André Breton, ‘Le Jeu de Marseille,’ *VVV*, nos 2-3, Mars 1943, pp. 88-90.

Signification : *Emblème :*
 Amour Flamme
 Rêve Étoile (noire)
 Révolution Roue (et sang)
 Connaissance Serrure,
 la hiérarchie, à partir de l'as, se maintenant de la manière suivante :
 Génie – Sirène – Mage – Dix – etc.



Fig. 3.30 André Breton, *Paracelsus*, 1941, drawing, Collection Aube et Oona Ellouët-Breton, Musée Cantini, Marseille. Photo by Jean Bernard.

Fig. 3.31 Victor Brauner, *Hélène Smith*, 1941, drawing, lead and coloured pencil on parchment paper, 27,4 x 18,1 cm, Collection Aube et Oona Ellouët-Breton, Musée Cantini, Marseille. Photo by Jean Sebert.

chacune des figures (de personnage historique ou littéraire) étant celle que d'un commun accord nous avons jugée la plus représentative à la place assignée, soit :

Flamme : Baudelaire, la Religieuse portugaise, Novalis.

Étoile : Lautréamont, Alice, Freud.

Roue : Sade, Lamiel, Pancho Villa.

Serrure : Hegel, Hélène Smith, Paracelse.

Le joker se présente sous les traits d'Ubu, dessiné par Jarry.³⁵⁷

Victor Brauner drew the attributes of the Siren in the guise of the medium Hélène Smith and of the Genius that represented Hegel in the Lock suit or the one of knowledge. Hélène Smith was a central figure in the Surrealist pantheon due to the 1899 publication of *Des Indes à la planète Mars*, a case study of somnambulism with glossolalia written by Théodore Flournoy, Professor of Psychology at the University of Geneva, in response to observations gathered from 1892 about the activities of the medium Hélène Smith.³⁵⁸

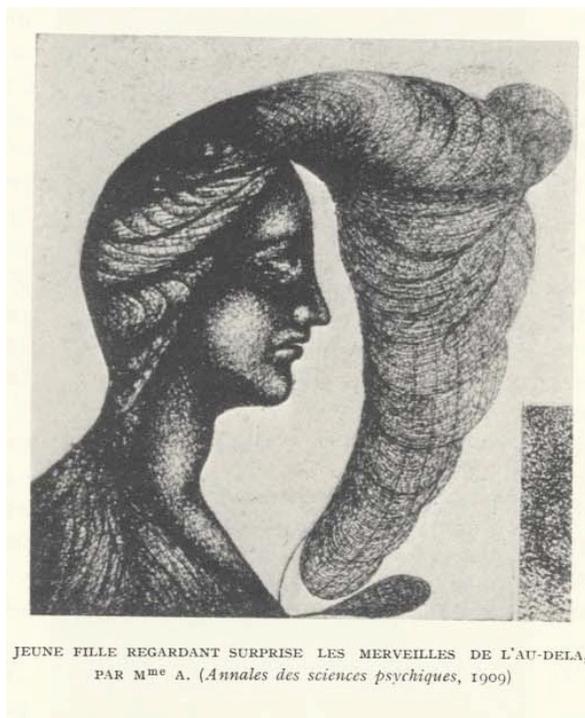


Fig. 3.32 *Jeune Fille regardant surprise les merveilles de l'au-delà* (*Young Girl Gazing in Amazement at the Phenomena of the Other World*) by Madame A., etching reproduced in *Minotaure*, December 1933, after initial publication in *Annales des sciences psychiques* 1909.

³⁵⁷ André Breton, 'Le Jeu de Marseille,' *Œuvres complètes*, volume III, p. 708.

³⁵⁸ Théodore Flournoy, *From India to the Planet Mars: A Study of A Case of Somnambulism with Glossolalia*, translated by Daniel B. Vermilye (New York; London: Harper & brothers, 1900).

The choice of the somnambulist to be represented by Brauner seems to be coherent with the depiction of mediums and séances in the work of the painter in the late 1930s and at the beginning of the 1940s. As mentioned in the previous chapter of the thesis, the image of the somnambulist could be retraced in connection with the episode of a prescient loss of sight in the artist's left eye. The nineteenth century clairvoyant Hélène Smith is represented in the characteristic posture of the medium engrossed in magnetic sleep. A sketch of the Jeu de Marseille card, completed in 1941 by Victor Brauner, entered the Musée Cantini Collection in Marseille in 2003 following a generous endowment of the museum from the Aube et Oona Ellouët-Breton Collection.

In the drawing, as in the final version of the Jeu de Marseille card, Victor Braune opted for doubling the medium's face with a light-coloured replica of it that displays the ecstatic vision of the other world. The medium's hair that gradually changes into a wildcat and the recoiling posture of the animal in the immediate vicinity of the sleepwalker can be related to a 1909 illustration of magnetic sleep in *Annales des sciences psychiques*. André Breton reproduced the *Jeune Fille regardant surprise les merveilles de l'au-delà* etching in the article 'Le Message automatique' published in December 1933 in *Minotaure*.³⁵⁹ In Victor Brauner's interpretation the woolly reversed hairdo of the young woman metamorphosed into a wildcat that reacts against the perception of otherworldly entities.³⁶⁰

b. Truth and electricity in *Portrait of Novalis* (1943) and *The Complete Portrait* (1943)

The eyes closed to surroundings are a feature Brauner employed a couple of years later, in 1943, in *Portrait of Novalis*. A resulting comparison emerges for the condition of the poet and that of the somnambulist able to predict future events in the existence of human beings. The knowledge they possess is related to the unknown abysses of the mind that makes intelligible the metaphor of the night used by Victor Brauner in defining the composition of the mixed technique object. The leather disk in the form of a pentacle that supports the ovoid surmounted

³⁵⁹ André Breton, 'Le Message automatique' in *Minotaure*, nos 3-4, 12 December 1933, p. 62.

³⁶⁰ As in the instances reported in Charles Richet, *Traité de métapsychique*, p. 447.

by ‘the signature of the moon’ is also inscribed with lines from the first *Hymn to the night* by Novalis:

Plus divins que ces étoiles scintillantes nous semblent les yeux infinis que la Nuit a ouverts en nous.

In the 1927 French edition of *Hymnes à la nuit*, the mystical experience of the night continues with a pious homage to ‘the guardian of fortunate Love:’

Ils voient plus lointains de ces innombrables armées; sans avoir besoin de lumière, ils pénètrent les profondeurs d’une âme aimante, ce qui remplit un espace supérieur d’indicible béatitude. Louange à la reine du monde, à la haute annonciatrice des saints univers, à la gardienne du bienheureux Amour!³⁶¹

With the mention that Novalis was chosen by Surrealists to fulfil the role of the Magician as replacement for the Jack in the Flame suit of the Jeu de Marseille deck, we emphasize that Victor Brauner addressed the significance of Love in the suit in the drawing scroll he placed at the bottom of the wooden box that contains the pentacle. In a succession of drawings that displays a three-stage process accompanied by the inscription: ‘attraction – explosion – fruit’ Brauner suggested a love cycle in human life that has affinities with the perception of love in Romantic literature and scientific circles. Johann Wilhelm Ritter detailed in *Fragments from the texts of a young physicist* (1810) a conception of love dependent on phenomena of electricity:

Si le contact organique (= magnétisme animal) est un processus organique-*électrique* et le coït [un processus] organique-*chimique*, il est facile d’appliquer toutes les lois de la chaîne électro-galvanique aux organismes. Une série d’individus en simple contact constituera alors une classe. Mais si, entre deux chaînons d’une chaîne à trois chaînons, l’on établit le processus *chimique* (*coitus*), on a une chaîne organique-galvanique avec coït renforcé. Si l’on répète cette chaîne un grand nombre de fois, il en résulte une pile (magnétique animale) galvanique-organique, avec partout un coït renforcé de façon croissante, et la possibilité, de même que l’eau est différenciée (engrossé) par l’or et

³⁶¹ Novalis, *Journal intime suivi des Hymnes à la Nuit et de Fragments inédits*, translated from the German by G. Claretie and S. Joachim-Chaigneau; introduction by Germaine Claretie (Paris: Stock, Delamain and Boutelleau, 1927), p. 75.

l'or [*sic*], bien qu'elle soit en simple contact avec lui, d'engrosser aussi un individu féminin par simple contact *masculin*.³⁶²

Attraction between individuals is described as a consequence of animal magnetism and is therefore based on interaction between the electromagnetic fields characteristic of human beings and particular to each and every member of a crowd. In the situation Ritter described in the above fragment the operation of a galvanic cell is transferred to the functioning of the human body. The physicist imagines a row of people disposed in an alternate sequence of three individuals with a distinctive element: two of them within each chain form a couple engaged in sexual intercourse. For Ritter physical contact is an electric process transposed at organic level that benefits from the energy released in the midst of a chemical process: coitus. It results in one *organic-galvanic cell* that could be tied up with another one through the intermediate position of a third element, either a feminine or a masculine human being. In the unusual scenario of a human voltaic pile that Ritter calls *animal magnetic* or *organic-galvanic* the possibility of impregnating the feminine element at the simple touch of the masculine one emerges as a conceivable plan in the strictly described circumstances that are analogous with the mass transfer of particles in the electrolytic process.

Through a series of drawings that Brauner completed as part of the *Portrait of Novalis* the painter made manifest the Romantic understanding of love within the scientific circles of Jena and its environs at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We should recall that Ritter and his experiments in magnetic somnambulism were mentioned in Breton's introduction to von Arnim's *Contes bizarres*. In drawing a couple that perform a three-stage act of *attraction – outburst – conclusion* Victor Brauner schematically used anatomical details of the two in the first scene of the process. He deployed the flame metaphor with its changing colour from yellow through orange and deep red hue corresponding to each part of the three-stage process in a suggestion of an increase in the energy level between lovers, a description of attraction and sexual intercourse due to animal magnetism that matches Ritter's view about the relationship between individuals in terms of electricity and chemical reaction. The equal

³⁶² Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Fragments posthumes tirés des papiers d'un jeune physicien: vademecum à l'usage des amis de la nature*, translated by Claude Maillard (Charento: Éd. Premières pierres, 2001), p. 502. Originally published as J. W. Ritter, *Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers: ein Taschenbuch für die Freunde der Natur*, Heidelberg, 1810.

position on which Brauner depicts the two sides of his equation of love partakes also of the Romantic vision of lovers in the role of magnetiser and somnambulist. With a mention regarding their interchangeable status: the magnetiser is at times a somnambulist for the somnambulist who assumes the role of the magnetiser:

On peut pousser plus loin ces considérations en tenant compte de tout ce qui a les mêmes effets que le sommeil, l'amour, par exemple. Là encore, l'on trouve le même abandon de toute volonté, et le même retour d'une autre volonté, nouvelle, plus pure. D'abord, l'on veut l'aimée pour soi-même ; mais il vient un temps où cela cesse et où l'on est sans volonté (résigné), sur quoi l'on ne veut plus que pour l'aimée, et seulement pour l'amour de l'aimée. Là, le magnétisme est en même temps réciproque; les deux parties sont l'une pour l'autre à la fois magnétiseur et somnambule.³⁶³

Another reference to magnetic somnambulism is the suggestion of blindness on the face depicted in *Portrait of Novalis*, the mixed media object of 1943. The hollows in the ovoid that replace the gaze of the figure in the composition make discernible the inner vision of the somnambulist in connection with the stance of the poet in history. Novalis is regarded as a representative of the Romantic core of Surrealism in line with von Arnim's assertion that *We call the sacred poets seers*.³⁶⁴ An imperative expression alluded to in Breton's 'Centenaire d'Arnim'.³⁶⁵ The instance that gave rise to Breton's observation here is a later composition by Arnim, the *Guardians of the Crown* novel of 1817. In the introduction, Arnim balanced the most valuable characteristics of poetry and history. He describes poetical creation as a kind of high form of clairvoyance. His extremely convincing oration *We call the sacred poets seers* is mentioned by Breton. Arnim's comment developed from an interchange between events that characterize the course of history and poetry seen as an act of creation affected by them. He rather strangely compares history to the crystalline, the lens of the eye. The qualities displayed by this lens are sharpness, cleanness and absence of colour, which makes it essential to vision, recalls Arnim. In a metaphorical language he expresses his concerns with the interdependence

³⁶³ Johann Wilhelm Ritter, *Fragments posthumes tirés des papiers d'un jeune physicien: vademecum à l'usage des amis de la nature*, 2001, p. 203.

³⁶⁴ Achim von Arnim, Préface des « Gardiennes de la Couronne » translated by A. Béguin in Albert Béguin ed., *Le Romantisme allemand: Textes et études* (Marseille: Cahiers du Sud, 1947 [1937]), p. 438.

³⁶⁵ André Breton, 'Centenaire d'Arnim' in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, nos 5-6, 15 May 1933, p. 8.

between history and poetry: human interference, states the writer, that tends to alter history's attributes that should be pure and clear, will, at the same time, impede poetry's release to the world. The alternative – and we are encouraged here to think of the potential social influence of the individual – consists in action at historical level with a strenuous effort to get history closer to its condition of pure truth. In this event, assures Arnim, an immediate contact will be established between poetry and history:

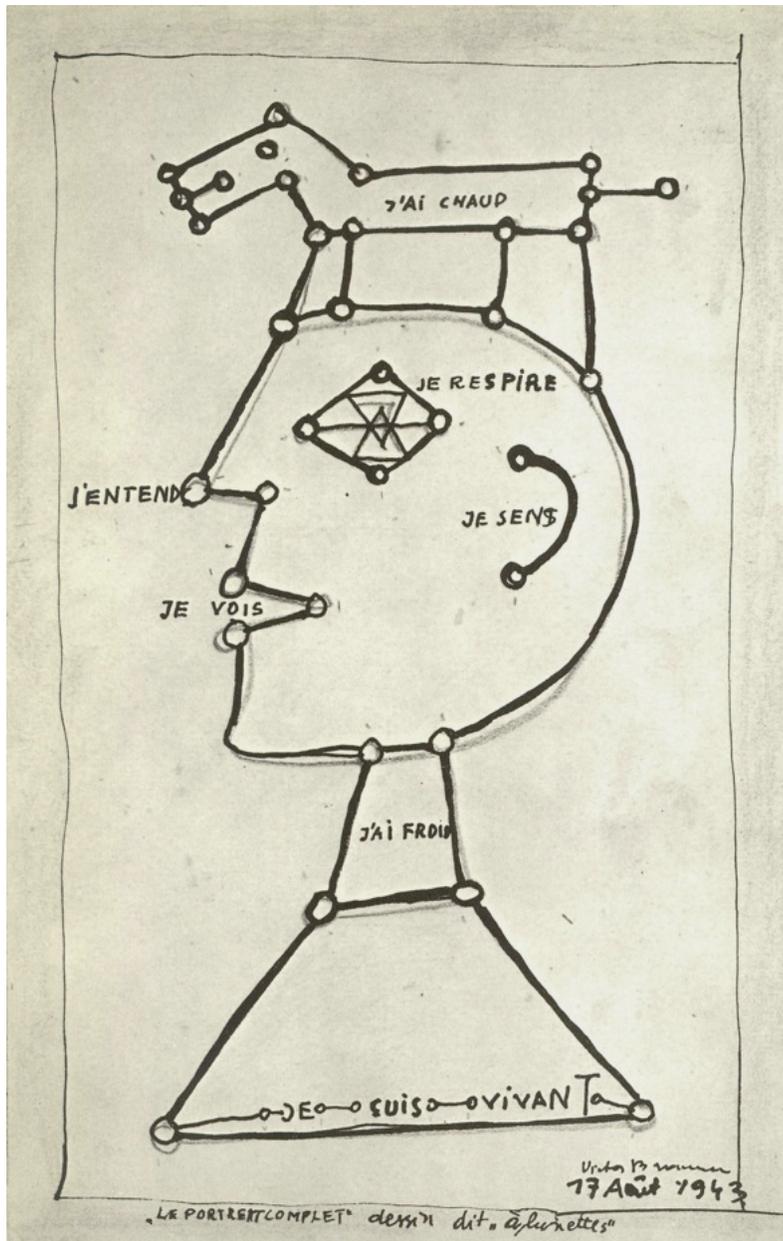


Fig. 3.33 *The Complete Portrait* or Drawing “with Glasses” (*Le Portrait complète dessin dit “à lunettes”*), drawing, 1943, private collection

Nommons voyants les poètes sacrés: nommons voyance d'une espèce supérieure la création poétique: l'histoire peut alors se comparer au cristallin de l'œil, qui ne voit pas par lui-même, mais est indispensable à la vision, pour concentrer la lumière: sa nature est clarté, pureté, absence de couleur. Quiconque offense ces qualités dans l'histoire corrompt également la poésie, qui en doit naître; mais quiconque épure l'histoire jusqu'à en faire la vérité même, donne à la poésie un contact assuré avec le monde.³⁶⁶

In the month that preceded Brauner's avowal of a new painting technique in close relationship with automatism, the painter dated on the seventeenth of August 1943 a drawing entitled *The Complete Portrait* or *Drawing "with Glasses."* The manner in which he deployed two equilateral triangles to intersect with each other and form a symbolic lens of the character's eye might be interpreted in relation to Arnim's metaphor in the introduction to *Guardians of the Crown*. We should remember that Breton expressed a similar quest for truth in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. He warned that while employing automatic procedures of writing and the unassisted adventure into the dreamland of the unconscious for reaching the products that attest a "passive life of the intelligence," one could attain the envisioned truth we elude through self-invented excuses. Breton calls them alibis offered to one's own consciousness in order to dissipate the fear that maybe the existence we live has a different support from the one we might think to know:

Un jour viendra où l'on ne se permettra plus d'en user cavalièrement, comme on l'a fait, avec ces preuves palpables d'une existence autre que celle que nous pensons mener. On s'étonnera alors que, serrant *la vérité* d'aussi près que nous l'avons fait, nous ayons pris soin dans l'ensemble de nous ménager un alibi littéraire ou autre plutôt que, sans savoir nager, de nous jeter à l'eau, sans croire au phénix, d'entrer dans le feu pour atteindre cette vérité.³⁶⁷

Even if Brauner's drawing is titled *The Complete Portrait* and the painter depicted himself in a hilarious composition incorporating written utterances (*J'ai chaud; j'entend; je respire; je sens; j'ai froid; Je suis vivant*), the use of first person suggests a self-portrait

³⁶⁶ Achim von Arnim, 'Préface des « Gardiennes de la Couronne »' in *Le Romantisme allemand*, pp. 438-9.

³⁶⁷ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* [1929] in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp. 810-11. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* translated from the French by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), pp. 162-3.

realised at a time in history when a complete derangement of senses had occurred affecting the human species. In August 1943, when the drawing was complete, the Nazis invasion of Europe was accompanied by the suppression of the Jews, which was known worldwide. Brauner sought refuge at the time in a remote village in the Hautes-Alpes. Confined to Vichy France, his life was under a continual threat. As a result, he looked upon a chaotic world, but his reaction was not to lose the touch of humour attached to a hidden and counterfeited existence: he hears by means of the nose, grasps meaning via the air, sees through the mouth, feels with the help of the ears, and breathes in and out through the eyes. The two equilateral triangles Brauner employed for rendering the ability to see of the personage in the drawing could be imagined as continuing to slide in their interlaced motion until their position corresponded to the Jewish emblem, the Star of David.³⁶⁸ That Brauner might have used the symbol of his ancestry in a triumphant affirmation of life that overturns death projects, or at least with the intent of reversing any malicious influence in the surroundings, is testified in the inscription within the portrait: *I am alive*.

c. The continuum between *the real* and *the imaginary*

Arnim's singular understanding of imagination reinforces the parallel we drew between the Surrealist and Romantic poets and painters, with an emphasis on Brauner's high esteem for the predecessors. Arnim expressed the inauguration of a continuum between the real and the imaginary through the voice of one of his characters in *Gentry by Entailment* (*Die Majoratsherren Les héritiers du majorat*) novel of 1820. Both writings, *Crown Guards* (*Die Kronenwächter*) and *Gentry by Entailment*, were written in the aftermath of Arnim's most prolific creative period. The writer was settled for a time, between 1809 and 1813, in Berlin. This time lapse almost coincides with Fichte's teaching at the University of Berlin when he gave his lectures on the *Givens of the Consciousness*. Arnim left a vivid testimony of his

³⁶⁸ On Jewish studies see Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*, New York; London: Routledge, 1991 and Sander Gilman, *Inscribing the Other*, Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

attendance on the course³⁶⁹ and Breton stressed in the introduction to *Contes bizarres* the importance of Fichte's teaching in Arnim's formation. He based his affirmation on Xavier Léon's mention of Arnim's interest in these lectures.³⁷⁰ The Fichtean orientation in the philosophy of the time is seen as the root of Arnim's conception of an uninterrupted shift between reality and imagination in the perceiving of objects in both the internal and external world. Breton quotes Arnim's *Gentry by Entailment* in the introduction to *Contes bizarres* and 'Centenary of Arnim':

C'est ce qu'exprime fort clairement un des héros de ce livre, l'héritier du Majorat, lorsqu'il déclare: « Je discerne avec peine ce que je vois avec les yeux de la réalité *de ce que voit mon imagination.* »³⁷¹

The concept of imagination was central to the definition of Surrealism. In 1930 in the *Second Manifesto* Breton addressed the process of inspiration from two different viewpoints that endorse either the association with cycles of hallucination or acquaintance with Romantic experiments in electricity and magnetic somnambulism. The same commitment to an objective attitude in the description of inspiration is to be expected from Surrealist artists and poets. Imagination is referred to in Freudian terms as *a precious faculty* that should be dismantled, deprived of its sacred character in a way that alludes to Arnim's assertion in the introduction to *Crown Guards*. The Surrealists aim at an understanding of the mechanism of imagination, but they also exercised strict control on its functioning:

Par ailleurs il [le surréalisme] exige que, par le chemin inverse de celui que nous venons de les voir suivre, ceux qui possèdent, au sens freudien, la « précieuse faculté » dont nous parlons, s'appliquent à étudier sous ce jour le mécanisme complexe entre tous de l'*inspiration* et, à partir du moment où l'on cesse de tenir celle-ci pour une chose sacrée, que, tout à la confiance qu'ils ont en son extraordinaire vertu, ils ne songent qu'à faire tomber ses derniers liens, voire – ce qu'on n'eut jamais encore osé concevoir – à se la soumettre.³⁷²

³⁶⁹ 'Pour plus d'un auditeur, étudiant ou non étudiant, les conférences de Fichte, remplaçaient ce qu'était autrefois la religion de l'Eglise.' Achim von Arnim is quoted in Xavier Léon, *Fichte et son temps* (Paris: A. Colin, 1922-1927) tome III, second part, p. 173.

³⁷⁰ André Breton, 'Centenaire d'Arnim,' p. 6.

³⁷¹ André Breton, 'Centenaire d'Arnim,' p. 8.

³⁷² André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme*, p. 809. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 161.

The instance in which inspiration takes hold of the entire being of the artist or the poet is the one that guides his or her decision upon a particular rational solution to the problem he or she faces to the detriment of any other. A rational attitude mingles with irrational behaviour in the process.³⁷³ Breton envisages his situation as a writer who gives form to a certain idea that is *a given idea* (idée donnée).³⁷⁴ The poet uses the image of a short circuit that is established between the given idea and the formulated one (sa répondante), written in his case. Once again, the comparison between the physical world and the metaphor of electricity used in describing the creative process is evidence of Romantic influence. Breton employs the same metaphor as Ritter when he talked about love: the establishment of an electric circuit between unexpected elements of an assembly. The poet, and the artist in general, is chained to an immortal existence in the period of time in which imagination follows its route and the artwork is produced under the governing *inspiration*:

Nous la reconnaissons sans peine à cette prise de possession totale de notre esprit qui, de loin en loin, empêche que pour tout problème posé nous soyons le jouet d'une solution rationnelle plutôt que d'une autre solution rationnelle, à cette sorte de court circuit qu'elle provoque entre une idée donnée et sa répondante (écrite par exemple). Tout comme dans le monde physique, le court-circuit se produit quand les deux « pôles » de la machine se trouvent réunis par un conducteur de résistance nulle ou trop faible. En poésie, en peinture, le surréalisme a fait l'impossible pour multiplier ces courts-circuits. Il ne tient et il ne tiendra jamais à rien tant qu'à reproduire artificiellement ce moment idéal où l'homme, en proie à une émotion particulière, est soudain empoigné par ce « plus fort que lui » qui le jette, à son corps défendant, dans l'immortel. Lucide, éveillé, c'est avec terreur qu'il sortirait de ce mauvais pas. Le tout est qu'il n'en soit pas libre, qu'il continue à parler tout le temps que dure la

³⁷³ See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*; Vol.19, (1923-1925): 'Ego and the id,' and other works, James Strachey (ed.) in collaboration with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961).

³⁷⁴ 'We can easily recognize it by that total possession of our mind, which at rare intervals, prevents our being, for every problem posed, the plaything of one rational solution rather than some other equally rational solution, by that sort of short circuit it creates between a given idea and a respondent idea (written, for example).' André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, pp. 161-2.

mystérieuse sonnerie: c'est, en effet, par où il cesse de s'appartenir qu'il nous appartient.³⁷⁵

The difference between a Surrealist and a Romantic understanding of inspiration consists in the belief of Surrealists that the moment that projects a human being into the immortal condition via the working of imagination could be artificially reproduced. Breton has no difficulty in contrasting this to the state of hallucination. Although he suggested it in 1930 in the *Second Manifesto*, in 1933 in 'The Automatic Message' Breton avows experiments in automatic writing that led him after prolonged hours of exercise to disconcerting situations characteristic of visual hallucinations as discussed by Pierre Quercy. Quercy analysed visual hallucinations in a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Paris in 1930 in which such phenomena were distinguished from other related psychological experiences: *Études sur l'hallucination. 1. Les philosophes et les mystiques, 2. La clinique*.³⁷⁶ Visual hallucinations were examined in the first volume of the monograph in conjunction with the mystical experiences of a sixteenth century Spanish reformer of the Catholic Church, Saint Teresa of Ávila. Quercy described the "“imaginative” visions' as immediate, effective and inexhaustible, but independent of stimuli from the external world. They are different from common hallucinations intrinsic to a false perception of the environment and therefore classified as erroneous sensations, as well as from mental hallucinations. In order to secure a mystical language and perception of the world Quercy called them Teresian visions.³⁷⁷ Dissatisfied with an absence of information in circulation between disciplines and with misunderstanding of the mystical experience that prevented the Spanish contemplative to participate along with poets

³⁷⁵ André Breton, *Second Manifeste du surréalisme* [1929] in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard 1988) vol. I, p. 809. In English translation in André Breton, *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*, pp. 161-2.

³⁷⁶ Pierre Quercy, *Études sur l'hallucination: 1. Les Philosophes: Théorie de la perception, de l'image et de l'hallucination chez Spinoza, Leibniz, Bergson; Les Mystiques: Sainte Thérèse, ses misères, sa perception de Dieu, ses visions; 2. La clinique*, 2 vols (Paris: F. Alcan, 1930).

³⁷⁷ 'Immédiates, efficaces et inépuisables comme des sensations, mais indépendantes du dehors et maîtresses de l'espace comme des images, les visions «imaginatives» de Thérèse, pour voisines qu'elles soient de nos visions sensorielles, méritent pourtant une place à part et ne sont ni des hallucinations vulgaires, indiscernables des sensations, ni des hallucinations psychiques. Ce sont les hallucinations thérésiennes. (Pierre Quercy 1930)' in Rogelio Luque, José M. Villagrán, 'Teresian Visions' in *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, volume 15, no 3, September 2008, pp. 273-6.

and mediums in the mission of exalting the inner self, Breton concluded 'The Automatic Message' article with a sense of vexation:

Par le seul fait qu'elle voit sa croix de bois se transformer en crucifix de pierres précieuses, et qu'elle tient tout à la fois cette vision pour *imaginative et sensorielle*, Thérèse d'Avila peut passer pour commander cette ligne sur laquelle se situent les médiums et les poètes, Malheureusement ce n'est encore qu'une sainte.³⁷⁸

The role of automatism in a creative process such as that of poetry was one of Breton's main concerns in this article published in *Minotaure* in December 1933.³⁷⁹ He maintained that the writer has no access to visual images that take contour through his or her writing prior to the sheer act of putting down words on paper. A state of *blindness* in the artist is necessary in a way that would be later documented by Brauner in a three-stage procedure of painting: *le cirage*. For Breton it was a matter of listening to something indistinct while being absorbed in the process of writing itself. The perspective he gives on the writing process involves a verbo-auditory automatism at odds with a verbo-visual one. Poetry is issued through either one of two types of automatism, but for Breton visual images arising from reading material which was the result of a verbo-auditory automatism is far more exciting than ones based on verbo-visual automatism:

Toujours en poésie l'automatisme verbo-auditif m'a paru créateur à la lecture des images visuelles les plus exaltantes, jamais l'automatisme verbo-visuel ne m'a paru créateur à la lecture d'images visuelles qui puissent, de loin, leur être comparées. C'est assez dire qu'aujourd'hui comme il y a dix ans, je suis entièrement acquis, je continue à croire aveuglément (aveugle... d'une cécité qui couvre à la fois toutes les

³⁷⁸ André Breton, 'Le Message automatique' in *Minotaure*, nos 3-4, 12 December 1933, p. 65. André Breton, 'The Automatic Message' translated by Anthony Melville in André Breton, Paul Eluard, Philippe Soupault, *The Automatic Message; The Magnetic Fields; The Immaculate Conception* translated by David Gascoyne, Antony Melville & Jon Graham and introduced by David Gascoyne & Antony Melville (London: Atlas, 1997), p. 32.

³⁷⁹ See Laurent Jenny and Thomas Trezise, 'From Breton to Dalí: The Adventures of Automatism' in *October*, vol. 51 (Winter 1989), pp. 105-114, and Katharine Conley, 'Surrealism's Ghostly Automatic Body' in *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 15, no. 3, June 2011, pp. 297-304.

choses visibles) au triomphe, *par l'auditif*, du visuel invérifiable. Il va sans dire que ces déclarations posées, contradictoirement ou non la parole devrait être au peintres.³⁸⁰

Aware of the proximity to and possible intrusion into the visual domain that painters might have regarded his comments on verbo-visual automatism as involving in, Breton refers to a dichotomy between perception and representation. He brings scientific arguments to bear in support of the human ability to perceive an object in more than one circumstance: that is, not just in the presence of the object. *Studies on Hallucination* provides him with material on the identification of the existence of an object with its perception. Pierre Quercy stated this resolution in his thesis and while the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* published in the same year might have been informed by it, it is only in 'The Automatic Message' of 1933 that Breton quotes from *Studies on Hallucination* and comments on its findings. He is confident about maintaining a rather pessimistic view in relation to Quercy's theory: 'the presence and perception of an object' could be acknowledged 'when it is present and perceived, when it is absent and perceived, and when it is neither present nor perceived.'³⁸¹ Breton assigns the difference between individuals in the perception of an object to the spontaneous reaction displayed by each of them in any of the three situations described in the academic account. He suggests an indirect link to the background of the individual that had obliterated an innate capacity for integrating perception and representation into a single faculty of understanding the world. Psychological experiments had proved that children could manifest a propensity towards *eidetic* images when asked to concentrate upon a certain object that is consequently

³⁸⁰ [Italics and comment given in brackets by André Breton] André Breton, 'Le Message automatique' in *Minotaure*, p. 63. 'I have always thought that in poetry verbo-aural automatism was a creative stimulus to reading the most exhilarating visual images, but never that verbo-visual automatism was a creative stimulus to reading visual images which could be distantly compared with its results. Suffice it to say that I am as convinced now as ten years ago, and continue to believe blindly (with a blindness that at the same time nurtures all that is visible) in the triumph, *by means of the aural*, of unverifiable visual images. It goes without saying, that once these statements are set out, however contradictory it sounds, it is the painters we should be listening to.' André Breton, 'The Automatic Message,' in *The Automatic Message; The Magnetic Fields; The Immaculate Conception*, pp. 29-30.

³⁸¹ Pierre Quercy, *Studies on Hallucination*, 1930 in André Breton, 'The Automatic Message,' in *The Automatic Message; The Magnetic Fields; The Immaculate Conception*, p. 31. 'On peut affirmer la présence ou la perception d'un objet quand il est présent et perçu, quand il est absent et perçu, quand il n'est ni présent ni perçu.' André Breton, 'Le Message automatique' in *Minotaure*, p. 63.

withdrawn. This is the conclusion reached by the Marburg school in psychology rooted in the Neo-Kantian directions in philosophy to which Breton alludes in ‘The Automatic Message.’ Instead of forming a blurred replica, in the complementary colours of the object presented, the child tends to retain extremely precise elements of the visual stimulus. But the eidetic image that results is characterised by an endless interchange between parts in the whole. It has to be connected with the ability, which later on becomes forgotten, of seeing and associating things with perception and representation. Breton looked at how this original faculty of humans functioned in children and primitive peoples, arguing that the only way of regaining the state of mind that favours the lost interaction between people and their surroundings is the practice of automatism:

Cet état de grâce, tous ceux qui ont souci de définir la véritable condition humaine, plus ou moins confusément aspirent à le retrouver. Je dis que c’est l’automatisme seul qui y mène. On peut systématiquement, à l’abri de tout délire, travailler à ce que la distinction du subjectif et de l’objectif perde de sa nécessité et de sa valeur.³⁸²

If automatism will efface the differences between the realm of the subjective and that of the objective it will be in the interest of showing that no necessity or additionally attached tenet of value to each of the fields is required to exemplify the deep nature of the human. In pointing to a subject who has been stripped of his or her own subjectivity,³⁸³ Breton endeavoured to describe the human as engaged in the only ascent that counts in terms of defining his or her own development in the earthly condition of being. But this course of action takes place in accordance with the perception of concepts that are stored beyond the possibility the subject has to articulate them in written or spoken language or even to conceive them in the process of rational thinking.

³⁸² André Breton, ‘Le Message automatique’ in *Minotaure*, p. 65. ‘Anyone concerned with defining the reality of the human condition will aspire, with a greater or lesser degree of confusion, to rediscovering this state of grace. I maintain that automatism is the only path that leads there. Without unleashing a storm of delirium one can work systematically to deprive the distinction between subjective and objective of both necessity and value.’ André Breton, ‘The Automatic Message,’ in *The Automatic Message; The Magnetic Fields; The Immaculate Conception*, p. 32.

³⁸³ On Surrealism and subjectivity see David Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2000).



Fig. 3.34 *Victor Brauner 26 May 1936*, front cover drawing to the *Green Notebook*, 1939, Victor Brauner Archives, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Nevertheless, Breton joins his hopes to those of Frederick Myers in the existence of an internal hearing adapted to the reception of signals from structures or representations formed ‘outside articulate language, and reasoned thought.’ It is this that Breton implies can guide the individual in the much sought-after ascension he envisions:

Il y a, disait Myers, une forme d’audition interne [si étrange]... Il existe des ensembles complexes et puissants de conceptions formées au dehors (certains disent au-delà) du langage articulé et de la pensée raisonnée. Il y a une marche, une ascension à travers les

espaces idéaux que certains regardent comme la seule véritable ascension; il y a une architecture que certains regardent comme le seul séjour [...]³⁸⁴

For Breton and Surrealists alike, Brauner avowed the same thing in the line: ‘Pour moi peindre c’est la vie la vraie vie MA VIE,’³⁸⁵ and the scope of their life coincided with the work they realised. Following on from Breton’s essay in December 1933 in *Minotaure*, automatism was the mechanism involved in writing the most common texts the poet produced, and not only those resulted from experiments that favoured chance in their accomplishment and were therefore regarded as experiments in automatic writing. If in his case he talked of a verbo-auditory automatism, he challenged painters at the same time to examine the process of inspiration and provide a theoretical framework for the pursuit they follow, each in a unique way, in the artwork they produce.

Brauner’s response to such a summons is recorded in the *Green notebook*, today in the Victor Brauner Archives at the Centre Georges Pompidou. The notebook’s designation comes from the folded green sheet of paper that Brauner used as a dust cover on which he absentmindedly scribbled the impressions of a female figure. We are inclined to link the meandering contour line of the figure in the red ink drawing to the fine calligraphy of the painter’s name and date on the front cover: 26 May 1936. Brauner might have made the drawing around that time that combines attributes of automatic writing with a suggestion of volume in white overtones, whereas the text in Romanian that he confided to the *Green notebook* was more likely written in the proximity of the date inscribed on the second drawing, in coloured crayons: 27 May 1939.

Stylistic differences may be discerned between the two drawings. The hesitant and twisted line of the almost monochrome drawing in red ink and white chalk that swirls around

³⁸⁴ André Breton, ‘Le Message automatique’ in *Minotaure*, p. 65. ‘Myers wrote that, “There exists a form of (very strange) inner hearing... There are complex, powerful groups of concepts, which are formed outside (some will say beyond) articulate language, and reasoned thought. There is a path, upwards through ideal space, which some see as the only genuine ascent: an architecture which some see as the only place of rest...”’ André Breton, ‘The Automatic Message,’ in *The Automatic Message; The Magnetic Fields; The Immaculate Conception*, p. 32.

³⁸⁵ Taken from the painter’s carved gravestone in Montmartre cemetery, Paris. Victor Brauner and Jacqueline Victor-Brauner’s tomb also exhibits a marble copy of his *Signe* (1945) sculpture.

the memory of a young woman is substituted by a fluid contour that depicts a feminine silhouette of an eerie provenance in a labyrinthine space. She embodies the very nature of the element on which Brauner has based the process of inspiration detailed in the text that precedes the drawing.



Fig. 3.35 *la mi ne mine [to m e me]*, drawing accompanying text in Romanian, 27 May 1939, in the *Green Notebook*, 1939, Victor Brauner Archives, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

As in the text that assigns colour correspondences between the subdivisions of the image and their mental provenance and perception in the process of making the image visible, ample areas of the drawing are shaded in contrasting colour hues:

Nous verrons que dans son développement, l'image est composée d'une sorte de virgules ; on appelle ces atomes de composantes plastiques, « la virgule intro-plasmique ». Les virgules « s'écoulent » fuyant les unes après les autres, en composant et en décomposant continuellement par une alternance légèrement unitaire les images qui se lient par la virgule I. P. avec b. les images cosmico-organiques. Les I. C.-O. servent d'espace ou de fond aux images intra et extra plastiques de couleurs particulièrement foncées, des bruns vers le noir, vers le gris et le vert foncé.³⁸⁶

The drawing concentrates on the visual expression of 'la virgule intro-plasmique.'³⁸⁷

The painter has chosen to present it in the guise of a female presence that retains the red hue of the front cover scribble in the hair rendering of the figure. A flame-like shape of hair reminds us of the inconsistent element that Brauner endeavours to describe in the Romanian text of the *Green notebook*, one of the few documents in the painter's native language preserved at the Pompidou. The *intro-plasmic comma* is in Brauner's view the thinnest constituent of the image that could be manifested in the process of inspiration. The transient character of the element described in the *Green notebook* reminds us of the importance given to automatic techniques of painting in Surrealist milieu. Victor Brauner like other Surrealist painters attempted to expose the very mechanism of imagination that prompts a succession of steps towards the creation of the artwork. Regardless of the fact that the conception of *intro-plasmic comma* antedated the explanation of the *cirage* technique that bears resemblance to occult texts as we have previously seen, the preoccupation with the distribution of colour among various areas of the drawing as well as an implicit connection between them through a suggestion of movement are indications of a comparison made by the artist between the process of painting and the alchemical stages of the work: *nigredo – albedo – citrinitas – rubedo*.³⁸⁸ 'La virgule intro-plasmique' becomes a metaphor of the alchemical process through the black body of the female figure whose white arms are spinning backward only to give rise to a yellow corolla

³⁸⁶ Camille Morando, Sylvie Patry (eds.), *Victor Brauner: Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948 : les archives de Victor Brauner au Musée national d'art moderne* (Paris: Centre Pompidou; Institut national d'histoire de l'art, 2005), p. 45.

³⁸⁷ Victor Brauner, *Green Notebook*, 1939, Victor Brauner Archives, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

³⁸⁸ On the subject see Didier Kahn, Sylvain Matton (eds.), *Alchimie: Art, histoire et mythes: actes du 1er colloque international de la Société d'étude de l'histoire de l'alchimie*, Paris, Collège de France, 14-15-16 March 1991, Paris: S.E.H.A.; Milan: Arché, 1995.

with a deep-red centre that is an expression of the achievement of the great work (*magnum opus*).

Conclusion

The present study of the first two decades of Brauner's affiliation with the Surrealist group in Paris has taken into account the evolution of the artist's work from the perspective of the occult. A notion that defies categorisation, the occult has been approached, in the first instance, in relation to the concept of *the fantastic* in art and literature. This literary term has been linked with the popular belief in a spiritual order of existence that evolved into a widespread preoccupation with the occult under the guise of spiritualism at the turn of the twentieth century. Far from being nurtured in superstition, the Surrealist interest in spiritualism developed in the context of scientific accounts and experiments in psychical research. The thesis has demonstrated that Victor Brauner, and the Surrealists in general – led by André Breton – followed the development of spiritualism in the scientific environment of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were familiar with metapsychics, a new branch of science founded in Paris in response to the activities of the Society for Psychical Research in London. The Surrealist automatic procedures of drawing and painting were influenced by the state of magnetic somnambulism characteristic of the mediums in séances, and those that involved Victor Brauner were the quintessential example for the Surrealists in this regard.

A close examination of the material produced in connection with psychical research has revealed the concern with the nature of the self and the possibility of breaking down its integrity into receding stages of consciousness that would explain the irrational side of the functioning of the mind. But instead of assuming the attributes of randomness, the states of mind that tended towards the irrational proved conducive to foreseeing situations of life without the knowledge of the subjects in question. Even when the thesis addressed the established connection between Surrealist art and psychoanalysis in relation to the art production of the Romanian Jewish painter, the research into the work of Victor Brauner at the time suggested that Romantic paths of reasoning were still at work in his creation as regards

the inner life of the human being; these were also reflected in the theoretical writings of André Breton in the period. For this reason the relationship between the artist and the primary critical work of Surrealism has been highlighted in the interpretation of Victor Brauner's work. An equal attention, directed by the interest in major themes in the work of the painter – such as the somnambulist, the portrait of the Romantic poet Novalis, and the self-portrait – was also given to André Breton's essays and manifestos that steered the advancement of the Surrealist movement.

One of the key notions explored in the thesis as a representative characteristic of the work of Victor Brauner was *the fantastic*. The analysis entailed a comparison between the evolution of *the marvellous* and *the fantastic* in the literature and the arts of the nineteenth century and up to the time of the Surrealists. When Breton identified in the first *Manifesto of Surrealism*, 'the hate of the marvellous which rages in certain men'³⁸⁹ at the time, he assumed a position that was in favour of *the marvellous* and concurred with a previous stance on the issue: the one of the nineteenth century writer, Sir Walter Scott. The latter explained in his 'The marvellous in the novel' essay that the human propensity to *the marvellous* is based on belief in the existence of 'an unknown world of which forms and inhabitants we can not perceive due to the imperfection of our senses.'³⁹⁰ In situating Brauner's work in a Surrealist context we asserted that the painter believed along with Breton 'in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.'³⁹¹ But that the painter was a fervent supporter of *the fantastic* and the ways in which *the fantastic* differs from *the marvellous* was demonstrated in the thesis based on the artist's avowal of professional intentions in a statement written in Marseille in 1941 while awaiting an American visa in order to leave Vichy France. The piece of writing that followed the astonishing event in the life of Victor Brauner in 1938, which caused the loss of sight in his left eye, was entitled *On the Fantastic: I. In Painting; II. At Theatre* and appeared in the third-fourth double issue of the American Surrealist periodical *VVV* in March 1943. Brauner described a population of incubi, succubae, phantoms, and spectres in the text published in the periodical edited by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp,

³⁸⁹ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism* in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p.14.

³⁹⁰ Walter Scott, 'Du Merveilleux dans le roman,' p. 26.

³⁹¹ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 14.

that explained the themes approached in his painting of the time. It is unlikely that such entities were entirely perceived as products of his imagination. The inexplicable train of events during the night of the twenty-eighth of August 1938 that the thesis exploited as a full case of premonition attained through pictorial devices is recounted in the dossier gathered by the artist, 'Le cas' *Victor Brauner*, from the perspective of someone who believed in the existence of unearthly beings that intervene in human life.

The fact that Surrealists believed in a superior order of existence was confirmed in 1942 when Breton explicitly advanced in *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not* the possibility of finding on the animal scale, and above the human level, a division of entities that maintained the characteristics of the corporeal world in a completely different system of coordinates that sometimes intersected with mortal existence. Breton described them in 'The Great Transparent Ones (Les Grands Transparents),' the final section of the manifesto, as beings capable of eluding the five well-known human senses 'through a camouflage of whatever sort one cares to imagine, though the possibility of such a camouflage is posited only by the *theory of forms* and the study of mimetic animals.'³⁹² The situations in which such life forms 'reveal themselves to us' are, in Breton's view, the states of great fears or the mysterious circumstances in which we recognise the mechanism of chance at work in our life.

Breton did not refer to the 'constitution of such hypothetical beings' in the inaugural *Manifesto of Surrealism*, but he did acknowledge that the mind's response to the incongruities of Surrealist images seemed to attest 'that the mind is ripe for something more than the benign joys it allows itself in general.'³⁹³ He merely announced the theme of *the fantastic* in connection with the Surrealist objective of social change, something that would be further developed in June 1936 during his lecture *Limits not-Frontiers of Surrealism* given at the first *International Surrealist Exhibition* at the New Burlington Galleries in London. Victor Brauner enriched the legacy of Surrealist imagery with a series of somnambulists, materialisations, and deserted places. The somnambulist image recurred in the work of other Surrealist painters like Max Ernst, in *Europe after the rain II* (1940-2), and manifested the Surrealist absorption in a

³⁹² André Breton. *Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism or Not*, in *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), p. 293.

³⁹³ André Breton, *Manifesto of Surrealism*, p. 39.

world of '*the great transparent ones*' that may be revealed through psychical research that involved mediums in a state of induced magnetic somnambulism.

The interpretation of Brauner's work from this perspective engendered the analysis of works by other Surrealists. Yves Tanguy's exhibition in 1927 and examples in Miró's and Dalí's art production are discussed as complementary manifestations of the preoccupation with the occult in Surrealist milieu. The thesis demonstrated that Victor Brauner was an important representative of the occult investigation of the real in the arts through the re-enactment of esoteric formulae in the works realised in the early 1940s at Les Celliers-de-Rousset. In these assembled objects Brauner attained an intensity of creative attention to the magical content of the artwork and proved that he and the Surrealists were determined to find new modalities through which to exert their influence upon the reality that surrounded them during the Second World War. Their work, mobilising the activity of the deeper layers of the mind through the mechanism of the imagination, shared strong affinities with previous practices of the occult.

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