Terra Incognita: Surrealism and the Pacific Region

Anthony White

In the Surrealist Map of the World published in 1929, France had virtually disappeared, the United States of America did not exist and the Pacific Ocean was at the centre of the world. This imaginary geography reflected the surrealists’ anti-colonial stance and their valorisation of art from countries beyond the territorial boundaries of Europe. In addition, surrealism in its heyday was received with surprising alacrity by artists, photographers and poets in countries as diverse as Japan, Mexico and Australia, and traces of surrealist influence are to be found in much contemporary work in these countries today. Scholarship, however, has largely neglected the role of the Pacific region in the development and dissemination of surrealism. This special issue of Papers of Surrealism seeks to redress that imbalance by exploring how the central concerns of the European surrealist movement, including the relationship between art, psychoanalysis and sexuality, were transformed through cultural interchange with the diverse cultures of the Pacific. The issue aims to shed light on the historical transmission of surrealist thought from Europe to the Pacific, and the ongoing dialogue with surrealist art and ideas in work being produced in the Pacific region. At the same time, the issue investigates a range of concerns that have remained relatively marginal within the study of international surrealism, including cross-cultural interaction, same-sex desire, and the relationship between creativity and mental health.

The issue had its origins in a 2006 symposium held at the University of Melbourne, ‘Terra Incognita: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Sexuality in the Pacific Region,’ which brought together scholars from several countries including Australia, New Zealand, USA, Japan, Indonesia and the United Kingdom. The symposium featured scholars of surrealist art such as Dawn Ades and David Lomas from the UK alongside several art historians, cinema historians, museum curators and critics working in the Pacific region. This publication is directly related to that symposium, in that all the essays had their origin in papers presented at that event. In what follows, I will introduce the essays presented in this issue by briefly setting out the historiography of the relationship between surrealism and the Pacific region. I will then discuss the content of the original symposium, which contained papers dealing with a broader range of cultures than appear in this issue of Papers of Surrealism. Lastly, I will tie together the strands of thought presented in the essays published here.

Surrealism and the Pacific

The Pacific region was both the inspiration for, and host to, ideas and practices that emerged from within European surrealism in the twentieth century. The Pacific region is defined for the purposes of this publication as including those countries bordering on the Pacific Ocean.
(sometimes referred to as the Pacific Rim, and incorporating Japan and the Pacific coasts of the USA and Latin America) and those countries wholly within it (including Australia, New Guinea and New Zealand, and the islands of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia). Although the surrealists had a keen interest in art from all over the world, including African sculpture and artefacts from the Americas, the surrealist map shows that the Pacific region was of especial interest; New Guinea and the tiny Bismarck Archipelago, for example, are disproportionately large in surface area compared to Europe. Indeed, as Louise Tythacott documents in her book _Surrealism and the Exotic_, a recent account of the surrealists’ engagement with non-western cultures, many of the writers and artists in the group collected masks, reliefs and figures from Oceanic and Pacific Rim cultures. André Breton, Louis Aragon, Wolfgang Paalen and Max Ernst owned examples of work from Papua New Guinea, The Solomon Islands, Easter Island and the Northwest Coast of the USA. The profound significance of these objects to the Surrealist movement was made explicit by Breton when he commented that ‘the development of Surrealism at the outset is inseparable from the power to seduce and fascinate that Oceanic art possessed in our eyes.’

The surrealists organised exhibitions of these objects, such as the 1926 _Tableaux de Man Ray et Objets des Iles_ held at the Galerie Surréaliste in Paris which juxtaposed a retrospective of Ray’s work with a number of work by artists from Pacific region countries, including Hawaii, New Guinea and Easter Island. Max Ernst drew upon art collected from the region for inspiration in creating his own work, such as _The Beautiful Gardener_ which includes a figure decorated with Marquesan-style tattoos.

Very few of the surrealists actually travelled to the region, and their understandings of Pacific cultures were largely based on received ideas about ‘primitive’ cultures and poetic imagining inspired by the objects they collected. Breton, for example, praised Oceanic art for being at once ‘celestial’ and ‘primordial.’ Nevertheless, Paul Eluard did travel briefly to the region, as Robert McNab records in his recent book _Ghost Ships: A Surrealist Love Triangle_. Eluard visited Tahiti before moving on to Vietnam and Cambodia in the company of his wife, Gala Eluard and Max Ernst. The other surrealist who visited the Pacific was Jacques Viot who travelled through Polynesia in the mid 1920s and regularly sent back artefacts to France. As Tythacott concludes, although the surrealists’ understanding of Pacific cultures was limited, ‘their actions at least inscribed the imagery of the Pacific archipelago for the very first time on to the terrain of twentieth-century Western art.’ They were also vehemently opposed to the violent brutality of the colonial history which had left its mark on every country in the Pacific.

This interest in the Pacific on the part of the surrealists has been reciprocated in several of the countries in the region, as this issue of _Papers of Surrealism_ documents. In this, countries in the Pacific were no different to other world cultures. Surrealism, of all the avant-garde movements, had the most pronounced international reception of all the European historical avant-gardes. Its influence became truly global around the middle of the last century, due to the
attention paid by members of the surrealist group to art and literature in countries outside Europe, and the enormous impact of surrealism in cultural realms of broad circulation, such as design and advertising. In spite of this extraordinary dissemination, the majority of studies of surrealism being published today are still dedicated to well-known figures working in France and Belgium where the movement had its origins. Beyond this, there are a number of studies which examine the dissemination and development of surrealism in other countries, such as Ida Rodriguez-Prampolini’s *El surrealismo y el arte fantástico de México* (1969), Petr Kral’s *Le Surréalisme en Tchécoslovaquie* (1983), Dickran Tashjian’s *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920-1950* (1995) or Michel Remy’s *Surrealism in Britain* (1999). With some notable exceptions, there are very few studies devoted exclusively to the development of surrealism in countries in the Pacific.

And yet, the presence of surrealism has undeniably been strong in the region. For example, as John Clark has related, in Japan during the early 1930s there were a number of artists practicing in a surrealist manner, including Tôgô Seiji, and Okamoto Tarô, the latter of which exhibited his painting *Wounded Arm* in the International Exhibition of Surrealism in Paris in 1938.\(^\text{11}\) In Australia during the 1940s, as has been documented in a number of studies, including an important essay by Christopher Chapman, several artists directly engaged with surrealist ideas, including Albert Tucker, Peter Purves-Smith and, most notably, James Gleeson, who delivered a lecture titled ‘The Necessity for Surrealism’ to the Contemporary Art Society in 1941.\(^\text{12}\) In New Zealand, as in Japan and Australia, surrealism also had an impact; the 1940s work of Gordon Walters, for example, reveals affinities with the work of Yves Tanguy.\(^\text{13}\) In more recent times, as Rob Goodfellow has argued, the Indonesian artist Bramantyo can be described using surrealist techniques and devices.\(^\text{14}\) These are just a few of the many countries in the region which can be said to have felt the influence of surrealism within the domain of the visual arts.

The continuing legacy of the contact between European surrealism and the Pacific on countries in that region has been profound. A valorisation of the art of Pacific cultures on the part of the European surrealists, while mostly of art considered ‘primitive’ and not of artists working in a western manner, has led to an opening of global interest in the art of those cultures and a recognition of their aesthetic, if not always their cultural, worth. Increased contact with art and ideas emerging from Europe on the part of artists working in the Pacific region has led to a vibrant cultural exchange involving the nomadic movement of concepts, artists and objects between a large number of regions and countries. An enduring, identifiably surrealist language of the incongruous, the uncanny and the disjunctive has emerged in contemporary art produced in the region, exemplified by, to take just one example among countless others, the grotesque, psycho-sexual rebuses of the Chilean-born Australian artist Juan Davila.\(^\text{15}\)
**Terra Incognita in Melbourne**

The symposium organized in Melbourne in 2006 set out to document, explore and analyse that legacy. To encompass the richness of the symposium from which the essays in this issue were drawn, I will briefly summarise below the papers delivered by those speakers whose work, for various reasons, does not appear in the issue, before moving on to discuss the publication itself.

Professor Dawn Ades, who was present by video link, presented a tour of the themes and the artworks in *Underground Surrealism: Picasso, Miró, Masson and the Vision of Georges Bataille*, an exhibition she had recently curated at the Hayward Gallery in London. By discussing key works of the surrealist movement through the lens of the dissident surrealist writer Georges Bataille, Ades provided a survey of some of the ideas and visual techniques that would draw surrealism and the Pacific together.

Christine Dixon delivered a paper titled ‘Max Ernst’s collection in the National Gallery of Australia’ documenting Ernst’s collection of ‘tribal’ art held at that institution, where Dixon works as the Senior Curator for International Painting and Sculpture. The collection, which was bequeathed to Ernst’s widow Dorothea Tanning, contains 96 works of African, American and Oceanic sculptures, and a few textiles. In her paper Dixon focused on the Oceanic works and examined them in the light of the artist’s aesthetic tastes, the knowledge of the cultures that the artist had, and their influence on his artistic practice.

Kyoko Jimbo, Curator, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, spoke on the topic of ‘Toshiko Okanoue: Surrealism in Japan and the World of Collage.’ In her paper she traced the influence of surrealism in Japan from the latter half of the 1930s up to the outbreak of World War Two in the Pacific. Focusing on the medium of collage Jimbo discussed the work of Toshiko Okanoue, who was active for a period in the 1950s, and who drew her inspiration from the works of Max Ernst.

Martinus Dwi Marianto, Director of the Program Pascasarjana, ISI Yogyakarta, gave a paper titled ‘Surrealism in Yogyakarta.’ In it he discussed several artists in Indonesia whose work demonstrates connections to European surrealism. As he argued, a unique brand of surrealism has emerged and flourished in Yogyakarta, one of the main cities in Indonesia and a home for many artists coming from across that country. In his paper Marianto considered the relationship between individual artists’ works and the power structures of modern day Indonesia, arguing that for some Indonesian artists surrealism is a refuge from an often unbearable socio-cultural context.

**The Papers of Surrealism special issue**

The essays collected here, which record the movement of people and ideas between Europe and the Pacific, demonstrate how ideas central to surrealism bore fruit in several countries in the region in ways that the original founders of the movement never envisaged. The contributions investigate several different media including painting, sculpture, drawing, film, photography,
installation and literature, and examine the work of several artists and writers living and working in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America from the 1930s to the present day. Some of the papers record physical movements of individuals between Europe and the Pacific; the New Zealand artist Len Lye visited London and also made an extended trip through the South Pacific Islands, the Czech-born artist Dusan Marek spent time in New Guinea and New Britain before settling in Sydney; the Australian artist James Gleeson visited England, Holland, France (where he met Breton), and Italy while developing his surrealist painting style. Other contributions to the issue deal with a more abstract idea of travel, such as the study of the major release film *King Kong* which takes its viewers on an imaginary journey to an unknown Pacific island, a place of dark imaginings produced in a Hollywood studio. Yet other essays focusing on the work of artists based in Australia deal with what can be described an inward journey, similar to that favoured by the French surrealists, whether in Pat Brassington’s uncanny photographic excursions into the human psyche, Ivor Francis’s painting *Schizophrenia*, or Graeme Doyle’s demonic self-portraits.

The issue opens with two essays which document the work of artists who travelled through and studied the cultures of the Pacific. Tyler Cann’s ‘Surreal Sight Seer: Len Lye and Surrealism,’ discusses the New Zealand-born artist Len Lye’s ambivalent relationship to surrealism in England in the years around the 1936 International Surrealist Exhibition. As Cann relates, Lye went on an extended trip to the South Pacific Islands, lived in Samoa, and closely studied Polynesian, Maori, Papuan, African and Australian indigenous art. This experience, combined with Lye’s particular (mis)reading of the notion of animism outlined in Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, informed his understanding of art as the externalisation of a body image. Cann concludes that a break in Lye’s practice in 1935, with his development of direct film techniques, marks Lye’s transition from a morphological or thematic surrealism to another, distinct mode of practice reliant on gesture and movement. Stephen Mould’s essay ‘Dusan Marek, a Land-locked Czech Surrealist in the Antipodes,’ examines the Czech-born artist Dusan Marek, looking at his flight from his homeland and his journey to Australia and subsequently to the heart of the surrealist world, New Britain. Mould discusses both Marek’s background in Czechoslovakia and his work in Australia and the Pacific region. He argues that Marek achieved a fusion between the style he had developed as a student in Prague, and the visual richness and variety of the Australian landscape, informed and refined by his own philosophical and metaphysical preoccupations. Mould also presents Marek’s little known work as a film-maker.

The subsequent essay, Barbara Creed’s ‘The Unheimlich Pacific of Popular Film: Surreal Geography and the Darwinian Sublime,’ discusses representations of the Pacific region in Hollywood film. Creed examines *The Island of Lost Souls* (1933) and *King Kong* (1933), films which offered a fantastic range of monstrous beasts – human and animal alike. She argues that since the publication of Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839) and *On the Origin of Species*
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(1859), the popular view of the Pacific, already seen as a place of inversions and marvellous monstrosities, had come to incorporate an unheimlich dimension based on fears of nature, atavism and degeneration. Novelists such as H.G. Wells and Jules Verne portrayed the Pacific as a surreal place of uncharted islands, subterranean worlds, ruined temples and unheimlich creatures. As Creed maintains, the Pacific became an imaginary place – Europe's unheimlich other – where the forces of devolution, fate and randomness held sway, and cinema and literature depicted the Pacific as an unheimlich and surreal space.

The following two essays in the issue are monographic studies of the work of Australian artists who were deeply concerned with issues of sexuality and psychoanalytic theory. In ‘James Gleeson’s Desiring Production’ David Lomas discusses the work of the Australian surrealist artist James Gleeson. In contrast to the majority of studies of Gleeson which overlook the artist’s sexuality, Lomas’ paper argues that the visual image of the dream landscape pioneered by the European surrealists enabled the artist to give voice to same-sex desires under generally prevailing conditions of homophobia in Australia. Lomas first analyses Gleeson’s work of the 1940s and 1950s, arguing that a surrealist idiom drawn from close readings of Freud allowed the artist to simultaneously give vent to and censor same-sex desire. In the second part of the essay, Lomas moves to discuss the apocalyptic/sublime tenor of much of Gleeson’s painting in the 1980s which he connects with the moral panic which accompanied the unfolding of the AIDS epidemic in that decade. In ‘A Surrealist Impulse in Contemporary Australian Photography,’ Anne Marsh considers the ways in which the work of the Australian artist Pat Brassington engages with a surrealist legacy. Analysing how the artist explores the body and sexuality in a range of works, Marsh looks at the ways in which Brassington’s photographs, which explore a surreal lexicon of imagery that is in turn abject, hauntingly strange, hideous, and banal, can be analysed from a psychoanalytic perspective, drawing on the writings of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek.

The final two essays, also dealing with the work of Australian artists, investigate the experience of mental illness through a surrealist lens. Ken Wach’s essay ‘Ivor Francis’s Schizophrenia of 1943’ looks at a single work, Schizophrenia, painted by the Australian artist Ivor Francis in 1943. In the first essay to extensively analyse this important surrealist work, Wach argues that Francis’s painting is Australia’s first major painting with a defined mental illness as its thematic subject, and is an example of a ‘transposed’ surrealism, a surrealism expressed with Australian inflections and intonations. As Wach shows, various surrealist attributes resonate in Francis’s important painting, which was influenced by Reg Ellery’s psychological texts, and the work well illustrates the pervasive influence of surrealist aesthetic principles in Australia. In the last contribution to the issue, titled ‘Graeme Doyle, The Cunningham Dax Collection and Surrealist Discourse,’ Anthony White focuses on the work of Graeme Doyle, an artist, poet and performer living and working in Melbourne whose work appears in the Cunningham Dax
Collection: Art, Creativity and Education in Mental Health in that city. The essay examines the conceptual frameworks provided for the interpretation of artworks by people with experience of mental illness by the discipline of psychiatry and the work of the French surrealists. As White argues, Doyle’s work suggests the needs for a new set of interpretive strategies and insights that relativise both the psychiatric and surrealist discourse about art and mental health.

The issue in its entirety is a testament to the significant presence of surrealist ideas and practices in the countries of the Pacific region, and explores how the European origins of the movement were substantially transformed in contact with environments very far both geographically, culturally and intellectually from that where the movement had its foundation. One of the most significant themes to emerge in the selection of essays presented here is the part-acceptance, and part-rejection, of elements of the surrealist legacy among artists working in the region. The individuals studied in these essays were not passive receptors for, but active readers of, the ideas of the group which formed around André Breton in the 1920s in Paris. It is to be hoped that this publication is the first of many further studies that continue to deepen our understanding of the considerable role played by Pacific region artists, writers and filmmakers in disseminating and transforming the global culture of surrealism.

This publication, and the 2006 symposium where the essays had their first public airing, would not have been possible without the support and assistance of several individuals and organisations. The Melbourne symposium formed part of a broader project titled ‘Terra Incognita: Surrealism and the Pacific Region’ undertaken jointly by the University of Melbourne and the AHRC Research Centre for Studies of Surrealism and its Legacies. The project had its origins in discussion that took place in 2005 when David Lomas visited the University of Melbourne courtesy of a Faculty of Arts Visiting Scholar Award. The project was generously funded by a Collaborative Research Grant, a Community and Cultural Relations Committee Grant, both awarded by the University of Melbourne, and was also supported by that University’s School of Art History, Cinema, Classics and Archaeology. The University of Manchester also generously gave assistance to the project. The symposium was supported by the AHRC Research Centre for Studies of Surrealism and its Legacies and by the Cunningham Dax Collection: Art, Creativity and Education in Mental Health. The symposium was ably guided by the diligent and inspired efforts of Jarrod Rawlins in Melbourne and Samantha Lackey in Manchester, and by the design expertise of Kevin March.

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1 Variétés: revue mensuelle illustrée de l’esprit contemporain, June 1929, Special issue, ‘Le Surréalisme en 1929.’


6 Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 139.

7 McNab, *Ghost Ships*.

8 Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 146.


Dusan Marek: a Landlocked Czech Surrealist in the Antipodes

Stephen Mould

Abstract
Dusan Marek was born in 1926 in Bitouchov, a small village in Northern Bohemia. His elder brother, Voitre, a sculptor, introduced the young Dusan to surrealist art, which made such an impression on him that at the age of thirteen he declared himself a surrealist. Marek went on to study at the Prague School of Fine Arts, where he graduated in 1948. After the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in 1948, both Dusan and Voitre fled their homeland on political grounds, escaping to Germany and eventually settled in Australia. Marek continued to be a committed surrealist until his death in 1993. He was active as a painter, filmmaker, jewellery maker and sculptor, as well as a teacher of painting and film. Working for much of his life in relative isolation, Marek is a unique and neglected figure in Australian art history. He spent his formative years surrounded by the rich array of Czech cultural life which was in ferment during the 1930s and 1940s, in particular the Prague School of Surrealism. He arrived in Australia at a time when modernism and surrealism in particular were not easily accepted by the arts establishment. In spite of this, he retained his commitment to surrealism and over the years gradually achieved a fusion between the style he had developed as a student in Prague, and the visual richness and variety of the Australian landscape, informed and refined by his own philosophical and metaphysical preoccupations.

Lacunae
Scant biographical material has been published about Dusan Marek.1 His formative years up until fleeing Czechoslovakia in 1948 have been preserved in only the sketchiest detail. The earliest surviving paintings by Marek were thought to have been two works which he painted in the refugee camp in Dillenberg, Germany in 1948, The Voyage and The Birth of Love.2 Both these works were painted on wooden panels which Marek appropriated in the camp – they were in fact the slats of his bed. Over the last two years I have begun to unearth works by Marek which pre-date 1948, works in private collections in the Czech Republic and the USA. Works such as Refinement through Music, c.1946 [fig. 1.], show the influence of the Poetist movement which flourished in Prague in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as Marek’s lifelong concern with using painting to express a metaphysical or philosophical point of view. Nearly 60 years after acquiring this painting, the owner still recalled Marek’s commentary on its meaning:

The two trees represent a person’s daily life. People are refined by the fantastic birds depicted, as every life is in fact fantastic. When people are exposed to music (represented by the large bird), their souls become enhanced (thus the golden crown). As people return to ordinary life, the musical enhancement gradually fades away (the golden crown falls from their heads).3
Other works of this period unearthed include paintings of a harlequin and other *commedia dell’arte* figures which are painted very much in the style of Dusan’s teacher, František Tichý. Tichý’s influence is also apparent in a number of observational drypoint etchings. The discovery of these works, as well as the process of tracking down friends and relatives - witnesses to Marek’s life during the 1930s and 1940s - constitutes the beginning of a process of filling in the many gaps in his life and art. Already many significant figures in Marek’s life are dead, leaving areas which are likely to remain open to speculation. Another aspect of this research has been the chance discovery of many early works by Dusan’s brother Voitre. It has become clear that Voitre was a significant influence and mentor upon his younger brother as well as being an important artist in his own right. Given the close relationship of the two brothers throughout their years in Czechoslovakia, the fact that they fled their homeland and travelled to Australia together, and their closeness during the early years in Australia, the works of Voitre make an interesting comparison with those of Dusan. A great champion of his brother’s creative gift, this portrait sculpture of Dusan made in 1946 by Voitre, survives in a photograph from Voitre’s Prague Atelier [fig. 2].
Fig. 2: Voitre Marek, *Bust of Dusan Marek*, 1946. Sculpture, dimensions unknown. Photograph made in 1946 in atelier of Voitre Marek, Prague. Original sculpture lost.
The Surrealist Map of the World – a speculation

According to Daniel Thomas, Marek was widely read in the writings of André Breton, though he was not a follower of the extremist surrealist writer Georges Bataille. During his Prague years virtually all of the major surrealist texts would have been available to him in Czech as they were translated very soon after they appeared in French. It is intriguing to ponder just how widely Marek may have read surrealist texts of the period and whether he was aware of the 1929 Surrealist Map of the World, which placed New Britain (Papua and New Guinea) in the centre of the world. It is impossible to ascertain, but we can surely wonder whether this map was in Marek's mind in 1948, as he waited in the Dillenberg camp to decide where his new domicile would be. France and Canada as well as Australia were possibilities for resettlement. Not only did Marek decide to settle in Australia, but in 1954 he moved to Port Moresby, New Guinea, eventually settling in Rabaul, New Britain, where he stayed for five years. He is, as far as I have been able to ascertain, the only surrealist artist to undertake such an extended odyssey in New Guinea.

Both Australia and the south East Asian region held an interest for Marek as exotic paradises where ‘primitive’ indigenous artefacts and art were produced. But there remains the possibility that the decision to move to Australia was governed by some arcane surrealist principal in Marek’s mind. It would be consistent with Marek’s unbending, lifelong devotion to surrealism that he followed surrealist texts and principles in the charting of his life, though it is impossible to definitively prove that this was the case.

Marek’s journey into terra incognita

Dusan and his brother Voitre travelled to Australia in 1948 by ship, the SS Charleton Sovereign, a long and arduous voyage compounded by the ship running into engine trouble, and needing to spend unscheduled time in several ports – particularly Gibraltar, where they were delayed by several weeks. This voyage and its attendant delays resulted in a number of memorable artworks by both Voitre and Dusan. These include their best known works, and the only works which have ever been on permanent public display.

At the time of writing, the Art Gallery of South Australia has on permanent display Dusan’s monumental two-sided painting, Equator and Perpetuum Mobile. Equator was created as a celebration of the crossing of the equator, on 12th October 1948, accompanied by the distribution of a ration of pineapple juice served to the passengers. It was created using paints and materials that Dusan had preserved from his time in the Dillenberg Refugee Camp, as well as supplies given to him by the ship’s crew. The support for this work is a wooden gaming table, which was stripped of its felt covering. Two oil paintings by Voitre Marek also hang in this gallery and make an interesting comparison with Dusan’s painting Gibraltar, a two-sided work also completed on board ship, which is part of the Agapitos/Wilson Collection of Surrealist Art.

A number of supporting materials which would further illuminate the voyage on board the Charleton Sovereign remain unpublished: sketches, many in private hands; letters between
Marek family members; and a notebook which was begun by Dusan in Dillenberg, and which he continued on board the Charleton Sovereign containing diary entries, observational drawings and other important material. Damaged during Marek’s stay in New Guinea, the Notebook (1948) is in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, awaiting restoration and translation from the Czech.

Arrival in Australia
The Charleton Sovereign docked at Sydney on October 29th 1948, and the Marek brothers were transferred to the Immigration and Training Centre at Bathurst, New South Wales. A drawing in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, People stript of Pritentions [sic] is possibly the first drawing Dusan made in Australia.7 The title suggests his interest in indigenous peoples and cultures, and the annotation ‘communicating vessels’ (in Czech) appended to the drawing relates to the amorphic figures depicted, their arms culminating in orifices. The figures seem to be communicating with their surroundings at some primal level of consciousness. Another annotation reads ‘first reaction to Gibraltar in new environment of Australia,’ implying that Marek is concerned with tracing some deep capillaries of correspondence between the various lands and cultures he has encountered on his journey to Australia.

In Bathurst Voitre was reunited with his fiancée, Vera Podperova, who had travelled to Australia in another ship. During the voyage Dusan had met Helena Jakubova, who would in time become his wife. The question of where to settle in Australia had to be confronted, and on asking for advice from an administrator in the camp, Adelaide was recommended, enthusiastically described as the ‘City of Churches.’ Thinking that Adelaide must in some way resemble Prague, the Mareks elected to move there. Dusan was on a contract to work for the South Australian Government for two years, and took a job with SA Railways. After a few weeks, both brothers found themselves able to negotiate with their skills as jewellers, and found employment with Sheppard’s Jewellers in Adelaide. The area of Czechoslovakia where they spent their childhoods had been a centre for the making of jewellery, a skill that both brothers had acquired while studying at their local art and craft school in Turnov, Czechoslovakia. The making of jewellery was to sustain them both financially for a number of years.

Adelaide
Both Dusan and Voitre began exhibiting shortly after moving to Adelaide in December 1948. They made an explosive impact upon the arts community. There had simply been nothing exhibited in Adelaide to prepare viewers for the works Dusan was exhibiting, and the views he expressed in the press tended to alienate people, who were generally looking to art for reassurance of their middle-class values. This is what Dusan had to say in a press interview from 1949:

Art cannot speak through nice social forms. It must not fear to speak
plainly. I do not want people to come to my exhibitions and look with the appreciative eyes of oxen. I want my pictures to make people think and try and see things as I see them.  

He even took out advertising space in the Adelaide Advertiser where he proclaimed:

Man is not privacy.
Break the mirror to see who I am.
Empty yourself to see what you are.  

Both brothers took part in a 1949 exhibition organised by the Adelaide branch of the Contemporary Art Society. This exhibition was groundbreaking in that it included a number of Indian paintings and naive artworks. In addition, the Contemporary Art Society committee had visited the Woodside Migrant camp in the Adelaide Hills and collected a number of works by European artists who were living there. In spite of the eclecticism of the exhibition, two works by Dusan were declared obscene, causing considerable controversy and speculation in the press. It has never been fully resolved whether the works were banned at the selection stage and later displayed, or whether they were completely withdrawn. There have been various explanations for the scandal – faction fighting within the Contemporary Art Society, the fact that the works were not framed, the presence of nudity in the works (particularly Equator). Whatever the cause and final resolution, this hostility towards Marek’s work, from committee members as well as from the press had a lasting effect on him, and it became clear to both brothers at this time that they would not be able to sustain careers and earn their living as artists in Adelaide.

Marek can hardly have realised the unfortunate timing of his entry into the Adelaide art world. He had missed the forward-looking and heady days of the early 1940s when the original Contemporary Art Society had been formed by artists such as Douglas Roberts, David Dallwitz, Ivor Francis, Jeffrey Smart and Ruth Tuck. Their first exhibition in 1942 included a number of works displaying surrealist tendencies and although the exhibition was controversial, the artists themselves, united by the experience, considered it to have been a success. By 1949, when the Mareks began exhibiting, the climate had altered considerably. A combination of the Ern Malley Affair and the William Dobell trial in 1944 had resulted in a swing towards extreme conservatism in the Adelaide art world, and Australia in general. Nor did it help to be a migrant, with an imperfect command of English. To complete the anathema, proclaiming oneself a surrealist in the post-war climate of Australia was tantamount to openly professing a belief in communism. Ironically therefore, by declaring himself a surrealist, Dusan was linking himself to the same communist regime that had caused him to flee his homeland in search of freedom. In anger, he left Adelaide in 1951, spending a period in Tasmania, but soon moving to Sydney, where he lived until 1954. This initial contact with the Australian arts community left scars that Marek carried for the rest of his life. As Bernice Murphy wrote:
Even the first timorous signs of sympathy from later champions of his work ... did little to mollify the effects of that early run in with the withering, jingoistic narrowness of vision inevitably rampant in Australia after a war, a depression and isolation from Europe.\textsuperscript{10}

Although a number of Dusan’s works which were criticised in these early exhibitions are today among his most admired, an examination of the works created immediately after his arrival in Australia reveal a number of deeper causes behind his failure to find an immediate place in post-war Australian art. Many of his works deal with war, the denial of individual liberty, and contain an exhortation to self-examination and change. His painting \textit{Equator} incorporates a text – ‘Break the mirror to see who I am,’ a challenge few members of the art-loving public were ready to respond to. It is possible at this distance only to imagine the kinds of traumas the Mareks may have been exposed to, not only as refugees escaping from post-war Czechoslovakia, but also as Czechs living under the Nazi regime during World War Two. Although no documentary material survives which could illuminate these issues, the works produced by Dusan certainly give rise to speculation about his experiences during World War Two, and the traumatic effects of fleeing his homeland. In an obituary for Marek written in 1993, Margaret Boynes noted that:

\ldots people living in Australia had been spared the appalling firsthand experiences of war and destruction but the group of artists who came to Adelaide between 1947 and 1955 sought to bring an energy charge into this passivity. The incoming artists found the communication gaps difficult to bridge, even when welcomed by enlightened artists of the calibre of Ruth Tuck. Lesser artists in the community failed to understand the surrealist idiom and its application to the harrowing experiences of the 30’s and 40’s.\textsuperscript{11}

A further dichotomy is presented in the works created shortly after Marek arrived in Australia. He already had an established style and iconography, a personal blend of Czech baroque and gothic art and architecture, Eastern European folk art and the artistic movements that fermented in Czechoslovakia from the end of the nineteenth century, in particular poetism and surrealism. Marek might have remained a Czech surrealist in exile, painting nostalgic works throughout his life, evoking the land and culture he had been forced to flee. While these themes remain an element in his work, Marek also fell in love with, and was endlessly fascinated by, the Australian landscape and the coastline – something which his homeland lacked.

\textit{On the Beach} (1949) is a painting that highlights this duality, which took Marek a number of years to resolve.\textsuperscript{12} This painting is a reminiscence of a summer’s day on Glenelg beach in Adelaide. A realistic face to the right side of the painting depicts the artist’s wife, Helena, sitting beneath clouds and a passing rain shower. Amorphic forms inhabit the beach, while a pair of upturned feet depicts a hapless surfer. The frame of the painting provides a further dimension. The loins of the creature painted on the frame seem to be giving birth to the painting itself, while a studio lamp is apparently illuminating the picture, imbuing the work with...
something of a voyeuristic quality, and pointing to Marek's later work in three-dimensional assemblages and film. A work of power and virtuosity, it is perhaps Marek's first attempt to incorporate his own surrealist vocabulary with the Australian land(sea)scape. Against the multiplicity of surrealist devices, however, the background remains undeveloped; although a seaside setting is clearly depicted, it could be almost anywhere. The metamorphosis of Marek's surrealist iconography and the landscapes and natural formations of Australia did not reach a full resolution until his return from New Guinea in 1959.

**Sydney**

Shortly after arriving in Sydney in 1951, Dusan and his wife, Helena made the acquaintance of Rosaleen Norton, and as a result found living quarters in her building in Brougham Street, Kings Cross. In interviews Dusan recounts the bohemian community which resided in this building, a world of eccentrics and colourful characters.\(^{13}\) Dusan earned his living by making jewellery, and in their tiny flat he continued to draw and paint – the cramped circumstances of his life at this time accounts for the relatively small scale of many of his works.

It was during this period that Marek acquired a small movie camera and began to experiment with film-making.\(^{14}\) The two films he completed during this period are among the earliest avant-garde films made in Australia and abound in surrealist elements. *Light of Darkness* (1952) was filmed in colour and consists of a series of visionary scenes loosely tied together by a story which revolves around a wizard-like figure who creates a large egg, which turns up in subsequent scenes.\(^{15}\) Blocks of apartments, reminiscent of central European cities hover above the streetscape, where one encounters an Australian-style corner shop advertising Peter's ice cream. A pair of cut-out kangaroos perform a quirky dance; an apparently chance encounter between a man and a woman lead to the final scene of the film, where they meet on a beach, the colour scheme of which resembles a painting by Jeffrey Smart. The man has metamorphosed into a sexually charged, striped animal. Within the space of five minutes, an extraordinarily rich array of images flashes past in a stream of consciousness-like procession. Created with minimal materials, under primitive conditions, this film demonstrates Marek's ability 'to create something from nothing,' to be endlessly inventive with a minimum of means.\(^{16}\) It also demonstrates the conflict in his work - his established European, surrealist style attempting to merge with the many new visual stimuli he found in Australia. The second film, *Fisherman's Holiday* (1952) is a frankly nostalgic look backwards to his homeland.\(^{17}\) It is set on a bridge in a medieval European town, bearing a strong resemblance to the Charles Bridge in Prague. The storyline, laced with black humour, has a man fishing from the bridge, swinging his line and catching a passing cyclist, whose head he decides to use as bait. A friend appears, with a bottle of wine, and the nude female statue which was on the bridge is now replaced by the cyclist.

Marek only held one painting exhibition during this period in Sydney, a solo exhibition with the short-lived Mack Gallery, in Pitt Street, Sydney. Over fifty works were displayed, including paintings, drawings, sculpture, a three-dimensional assemblage and jewellery. A
newspaper article of the period characterises Marek as an Australian Salvador Dalí, posing with a sculpture and a Sydney fashion model.\textsuperscript{18} The exhibition however was not well received in the press, for instance by the critic Paul Haefliger, who was a supporter of the Sydney Charm School of painters which flourished at that time.\textsuperscript{19}

The lack of interest in Marek’s was certainly a factor in him quitting Sydney and moving to New Guinea. However Marek seems to have also had a deep, lingering attraction to New Guinea and in 1953 had made an abortive attempt to sail there in a hollowed out log.\textsuperscript{20} He travelled with two friends to Cooktown, heading to New Guinea, and from there to find Shangri-La. Owing to an injury sustained in an accident, the trip was abandoned. Marek finally left Sydney in March 1954 and travelled to Port Moresby.

\textbf{Into the epicentre of the Surrealist Map}

Marek remained in Port Moresby for six months, then moved to Rabaul, New Britain, remaining there until 1959. The reasons for departing Sydney are unclear, but a number of paintings and drawings testify to his interest in so-called primitive art and artefacts, an interest that began during his student years in Prague. On arriving in Port Moresby, Marek held an Exhibition of Surrealistic Painting in the local Red Cross Hall. It must have been one of the strangest events ever held there, but drew many members of the local émigré community. Marek brought to New Guinea his entire studio of paintings, drawings and sculpture from Sydney, which he proceeded to display. Ironically, his journey to the centre of the surrealist map destroyed or damaged much of his artwork. Most of the works painted before 1954 show the effects of the extreme humidity encountered in New Britain. In addition, when the Mareks departed Port Moresby, a crate of paintings was left behind on the docks, and subjected to storms and excessive humidity. Many works had to be discarded. Most of the paintings sustained some form of damage, and even realistic observational drawings were strangely transformed by the climate.\textsuperscript{21}

Marek’s own attitude to the damage his works sustained is a little unclear. He maintained a lifelong fascination with the way different materials react with one another – an interest that possibly stems from his time as a refugee when he had to find ways to create with whatever was available. But there was also a mystical side of him that believed objects had a life of their own and that unseen cosmic processes were at work beneath what we are able to perceive on the surface.

During his time in Australia he continued to have ‘chance’ encounters with materials, working with unorthodox materials in an unorthodox manner. He executed a painting on a brick, and another on the underside of a drawer in the house of friends where he was staying – waiting patiently until the owners discovered his work. During the 1960s he regularly painted on aluminium sheets, and old used printer’s plates, where the existing engraving contributes to the overall form and texture of the painting. He also worked extensively in the unusual medium of charcoal on canvas or calico. His interest and delight in the chance ways that
different materials reacted to different surfaces was a form of automatism, a means of subjugating his own will and leaving part of the course of a painting’s evolution to chance.

Marek’s 1951 painting *Ego* suffered severe damage in New Guinea, and was later sold to the Art Gallery of New South Wales by the artist on the condition that it not be restored. The reason was given in a letter to the gallery, written by Helena Marek in 1998:

I know that Dusan did not want it restored……..Dusan’s attitude was determined by his surrealistic pleasure in the transitory nature of art works.

The journey to the centre of the surrealist map proved to be a nadir. In addition to his artworks being damaged, Marek’s creative activity reached an impasse. During the five years Marek remained in New Guinea, he completed only a handful of observational drawings of coastal scenes and a solitary painting (*Rabaul*). Paradoxically, when Marek entered the epicentre of surrealism’s reconfigured world, his creative spark faltered. With the exception of a short film, Marek completed no major works during his time in New Guinea, and this period marks a significant fallow period in comparison to the constant need to work and create that marks the rest of his adult life. By way of comparison, Dusan’s brother Voitre spent a similar period away from civilisation during the 1950s, when he left Adelaide and went to live on Kangaroo Island, working as a lighthouse keeper. This period in isolation resulted in a number of intensely personal drawings in a surrealist style executed on out-of-date photographic paper – a cheap and available medium for him. A representative selection of these drawings is held in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

For five years, Dusan photographed and filmed the natives in their villages, counted the trees on a coconut plantation so the owner could obtain a bank loan and assembled a collection of native art. He also worked on coastal copra boats as an engineer - a career for which he had no training and was helped out by the natives who painted the engine different colours to assist him in his labours. Marek’s reasons for remaining in New Guinea for so long are not known, but it seems that this was a happy time for him as well as a necessary period of reflection and regeneration.

**Return to Australia**

Marek returned to Australia in 1959 and became the caretaker at the Kym Bonython Gallery in North Adelaide. He had time to concentrate on creative work, and the opportunity to meet a variety of artists, breaking the pattern of creative isolation which had been the case in New Guinea. The period spanning the 1960s was one of intense growth and activity. He began to work in a style that was a merging of his own surrealist iconography with abstraction and abstract expressionism. The fallow period in New Guinea had led to a new clarity of vision. His new works were first exhibited at the Bonython Gallery in 1963. Many of the works from this period are painted either on aluminium sheets, or on old printer’s plates – the existing engraving being incorporated as an element in the picture. Perhaps as a result of the damage his works suffered in the tropics of New Guinea, Marek began to paint works which
incorporated a patina of age into their form. A number of works from this period look aged, or distressed, having been conceived to look as though they are in various states of deterioration.

During the New Guinea years Marek had continued to experiment with film. In addition to making a number of purely documentary films, he had completed a surrealist/cubist-style film, *The Nightmare*. Shot in colour, the work incorporates wooden puppets made by Marek, with costumes made by his wife. As well as the original print of the film, the puppets are in the collection of the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra. In 1956, Marek made a brief visit to Adelaide, where he completed a short animated film, *Spaceman Number One*. Although of only two and a half minutes duration, this was Marek's first use of two-dimensional cut-out animation and was the precursor of an intense period of involvement with animated film during the early 1960s.

Marek produced a series of animated films which brought him with much recognition and a number of awards, including a Gold Medal at the Australian Film Awards in 1963, for *Adam and Eve*, as well as international awards at festivals in Vancouver, Venice and Chicago. As a result of his success as a filmmaker, Marek was invited in 1963 to join the staff of Fontana Films, a Sydney-based company which employed a number of Czech émigrés. Marek was provided with a studio and a salary. Apart from a fairly light workload making some TV commercials and animations, he was free to continue his creative work using the resources of the Fontana Studio. During this time Marek embarked upon his most ambitious film project to date, a full-length surrealist feature film entitled *Cobweb without a Parachute*. Marek’s own précis gives some idea of the scope of the film:

Today uniformity, convention, hypocrisy, hatred and other habit-forming pressures provide the dominant recipe for life. Man is becoming deprived of the vital experience of beauty and of the natural processes of love. Reason, imagination, the importance of living and even his true identity becomes unknown to him. This film unfolds the problem facing every person on earth, the problem within himself, the fight between the conscious and the sub-conscious mind. It is a document of the human mind. Through this quiet and savage conflict we experience the sub-consciousness as it gains new strength that enables man to realise the excitement of living. To free man from being conditioned, to be able to enjoy life fully, to experience life and nature without prejudice.

*Cobweb* is essentially a self-portrait, a seventy-minute surrealist monodrama where Marek reflects on his life and world, pursued by a creature that represents his sub-conscious. This highly virtuosic film would, if it had been completed, hold a claim to being Marek’s magnum opus. Unfortunately a dispute between Marek and his employers broke out about the ownership of the film. The uncut negative was seized by Fontana, and all that remains today is a black and white work print, lacking the dissolves and superimpositions that Marek had planned. The break with Fontana films and the loss of a final version of *Cobweb* resulted in a creative crisis for Marek, which he attempted to resolve by beginning a series of charcoal
drawings – large scale works executed on canvas or calico, mostly black and white, but some incorporating colour.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1969 Marek returned to Adelaide and settled in Bridgewater, a semi-rural area in the Adelaide Hills. He lived in an isolated farmhouse (a painting of the period, \textit{The End of}...
Radbone Road, depicts Marek's vision of his surroundings) and continued to paint, living an almost subsistence existence on the farm. Interest in his work grew among the local community and he held a number of exhibitions both in Adelaide and the Adelaide Hills. The largest scale exhibition was held at 'Manoah' in 1971. This historic house had been restored by the third Marek brother, Eugene, who had migrated to Australia in 1949. Among the plush restored Victorian interiors, nearly 100 of Marek's surreal paintings loomed, punctuated by several sculptures by Voitre. It was during this time that the Art Gallery of South Australia finally acquired a work by Marek, *Equator* (1948), leading to Marek's dry comment:

> You see how far I have progressed in the estimation of this country after living and painting here for a quarter of a century.  

Another important work from this period was the feature film *And the Word was Made Flesh* (1971), a surrealist drama made in collaboration with students from Flinders University. The film operates in a dream, or stream of consciousness state, and explores similar autobiographical issues to those that had surfaced in *Cobweb*.

Marek's peripatetic existence continued with a move to Tasmania in 1973. He took up a position at the University of Hobart, at the invitation of Udo Sellbach, lecturing in painting and film. He made his home and created a studio in Margate, a rural area not far from Hobart where he continued to paint and draw. Marek's intense love of nature had begun to be increasingly reflected in his works of the 1960s and 1970s, and the incorporation of the Australian landscape becomes increasingly refined in his work. During the 1960s in Adelaide he had grown to love the Coorong, near Adelaide, where he often went to paint and draw and commune with nature, floating rather than swimming in the ocean. Floating in the ocean became a means to meditate upon floating in time and in space. He used to spend hours in the sea, listening to the rocks and waves, communicating with the voices of nature. The love of nature and his relatively isolated lifestyle went hand in hand with an exploration into philosophy and mysticism. In addition to the writings of Jung and Freud, the writings of P. D. Ouspensky and his concept of the fourth dimension began to preoccupy him, as did the works of the English metaphysical poets and the philosopher Spinoza, and scientific works about volcanos, which held a mysterious fascination for him.

By the time he was living in Tasmania, Marek's paintings had developed into a metaphysical enquiry into the nature of the universe, man's relation to nature, and to time, and the existence of unseen dimensions that can be sensed in everyday consciousness. His style continued to develop in the direction of abstraction, accompanied as ever by surrealist motifs, and references to the Australian landscape. In addition to paintings and drawings, Marek produced a number of three-dimensional works, returning to a form he had abandoned in the 1950s. Works such as *Four-Dimensional Drama without Words* and *Book 27, Chapter MCMLXXV* are fine examples of Marek's preoccupation with space and time, and his use of three-dimensional assemblages as a midpoint between painting and film.
In 1977 Marek was awarded a Fellowship in Creative Arts at the Australian National University, Canberra, which led to an extended period spent in Canberra, a city he had little affection for. His works become increasingly symbolic and mystical, with some evidence of an interest in minimal and Pop art. Indulging in extremes, he completed a series of miniature paintings, *Fables*, alongside a number of works on a monumental scale, incorporating automatism and chance techniques. In response to Marek's Australian National University Exhibition, critic Sasha Grishin wrote an enthusiastic review, and looking back on the work of this period after Marek's death, Grishin wrote with similar interest:

In his later work there is a purity of style that seems to chart the course of the unconscious as related to ideas of psychic automatism as a path through which to explore and liberate the creative unconscious, an idea that was cherished by many of the early Surrealists. Dusan's drawings, assemblages of found objects and penetrating films like Adam and Eve of 1962, represented something of a lone voice in their celebration of the purity of automatism and while many of the Australian artists illustrated the surrealist experience, Dusan Marek lived it.33

In 1979 Marek made a study tour of Europe and America. He dared not visit his homeland, fearing arrest, or reprisals for fleeing the Communists in 1948. It was his first visit to Europe for 30 years.

While Marek was a devoted and inspiring teacher, his years in an academic environment were not without difficulty. His strong ideas about teaching, and his idealistic notions of responsibility did not always sit easily with the demands of a bureaucratic university situation. In addition Marek's health began to decline. He suffered three heart attacks during his years in Tasmania. In spite of considerable teaching responsibilities, the time in Hobart had been one of astonishing creativity and long-awaited recognition. Feeling at an impasse with teaching constrictions and the bureaucratic environment, Marek decided in 1981 to retire from teaching and return to Adelaide. He made his feelings clear in an interview:

I feel it is time to start all over again. I want to feel fresh for a while in a new place. Working in an institution for that length of time is like a slow suicide, like being in a concentration camp. One has to be stubborn not to be persuaded by anything sweet and anything that would make me stay, because it is so easy to fall for a pattern of life.34

En route to Adelaide, Marek made a further trip to Europe, visiting France, Spain and Italy. This was a painting tour, and Marek worked in St Cyr in France, where he stayed with artist Salvador Palle and also in Spello, in Italy, where he stayed with Orlando Tisato. Marek returned to Australia with a considerable folio of drawings and large paintings.

Marek returned to the Adelaide Hills, establishing a studio in Eden Hills. The domestic peace and tranquillity he found there was tempered by increasing health problems, leading to a long period of dialysis and an unsuccessful cataract operation. In 1984 he created a large series entitled ‘Homage to the Sun’ comprising over fifty works. These paintings were a response to the disastrous bushfires in the Adelaide Hills in that year. Another series
followed in 1990 – ‘Eye of the Heart,’ which was begun following a return home from hospital. Into the flat planes of colour which again show an influence of Pop art, Marek incorporates his immediate world, shrunken by ill health – trees, flowers and creatures he could see in the garden he had made, as well as references to the female form. Marek had a constant need to express himself through his art, and he remained prolific until the end of his life. In his final years we find works which are recapitulations of old themes – he looks back at his days in Papua and New Guinea, creating nostalgic memories of a place which had in the meantime been destroyed by volcanic activity. He also remained alert to events in the world around him, and the guns, canons and destruction depicted in several of the final works is a response to Marek’s horror and outrage at the wars in the Gulf, Somalia and Yugoslavia. He reworked themes of some of his early paintings, and he also charted with cold, almost surgical precision the degeneration of his body, and the attendant operations that he underwent in his final years. He retained his artistic powers to the very end, and was still at work on a canvas three days before his death. A self-proclaimed surrealist at the age of thirteen, Marek carried that talisman until his death at the age of 67 in 1993.

Posthumous

Dusan Marek died on the eve of belated recognition. His works were included in the landmark exhibition held at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, *Surrealism, Revolution by Night*, which opened in March 1993. There were two posters made for this exhibition – one was of *Le Viol* by René Magritte, a surrealist whom Marek admired greatly. The other poster depicted *Perpetuum Mobile* by Marek. Marek was to have been a guest at the opening of the exhibition, but he died the night before the official opening. His wife Helena called to inform the gallery that Marek would not be able to attend. The lady she spoke to tried to connect Helena with a recorded message. Helena responded that she did not wish to speak to a recorded message about the death of her husband. The surrealist irony that pursued Dusan throughout his life was not quite extinguished. The catalogue for this exhibition brought Marek’s work under new scrutiny and included illustrations of five seminal works of the late 1940s. However it failed to comment upon Marek’s significance as a European trained artist active as a surrealist in the South Pacific region for over 40 years. Another exhibition held at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra in 1997 - *The Europeans* - marginalises Marek’s position, mentioning only his work as a jeweller, which is confirmed to a single paragraph. The short entry asserts that Marek never exhibited his jewellery after 1950, when critics ignored his work in a Melbourne exhibition, though surviving catalogues indicate that he exhibited jewellery in exhibitions in 1953 and 1954. The National Gallery of Australia hold an important collection of sketches and drawings which date from 1948 to the mid 1950s, whose significance, chronology and relation to large scale paintings awaits full exploration.

After his death, Marek’s studio in Eden Hills remained undisturbed for several years. It contained a wealth of paintings from all periods of the artist’s life as well as sketches,
drawings, films and supporting material. When the artist’s widow needed to move to other accommodation she was overwhelmed by the problem of how to deal with the enormous collection Marek had left behind. At this time James Agapitos and Ray Wilson were beginning to create their collection of Australian Surrealist Art, and had already purchased several seminal works from Helena. They agreed to purchase all of the paintings and drawings in the studio to disseminate them amongst Australian galleries both national and regional. Marek's films and supporting material (including story boards, puppets and cameras) were donated to the National Film and Screen Archive, Canberra. Much of his personal archive and collection of ephemera was donated to the library of the National Gallery of Victoria.

Several hundred paintings and drawings were donated by James Agapitos and James Wilson to a number of galleries throughout Australia. This has resulted in the preservation of these works, but has also dispersed Marek's works over many regional collections, making it difficult to assemble significant works for display and critical comment. Marek was active in such a wide range of disciplines that the notion of a fully comprehensive retrospective of his work remains beyond the scope and resources of most galleries. The last significant survey of Marek's oeuvre remains the Project 10 exhibition, held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1975. Marek tended to sell works whenever there was demand or interest, resulting in a number of important gallery-quality works ending up in private hands. The present writer has located over 500 works by Marek in both private and public hands, and it is clear that in order to fully realise the breadth of Marek's work and its overall quality and significance, a catalogue raisonné is required.

While many of Marek's finest paintings remain all but inaccessible, the issues surrounding his films are even more critical. The original prints remain in the possession of the National Film and Screen Archive, in urgent need of restoration and publishing. The question of an appropriate resolution to the unfinished nature of Cobweb without a Parachute, and an appropriate proposal for its restoration and publication remains unresolved.

Compounding the problem of creating an accurate record of Marek's oeuvre is the fact that his own studio records are eccentric and often contradictory. Marek had a habit of giving one title to several paintings, often a number of years apart. There are conflicting records as to the dating of his works, and a number of works in public collections seem to have been given mandatory dates without reference to Marek's studio catalogue, giving rise to considerable chronological and stylistic confusion.

The question of Marek's ultimate significance as an Australian surrealist remains open. In view of the high quality of his work across a number of disciplines, he appears to have been undeservedly neglected and marginalised. It must be noted, however that Marek had no interest in the commercial art world, believing that his work would ultimately speak for itself. Self-promotion was not his way, and he had no interest in making concessions to public taste. Surviving colleagues and close friends speak of a mask that Marek operated
behind, possibly a ploy to enable him to create the space for him to concentrate on his creative concerns, protected and supported by his wife Helena.

Clues to Marek the man can be detected in his work, and a lingering nostalgia for his homeland permeates much of his output. After his death, his widow returned his ashes to Czechoslovakia and placed them in an area of the Bohemian Forest where Marek always spoke fondly of having played as a child, a gesture which provides a clue to Marek’s tragic position as an émigré. In many ways it could be conjectured that Dusan Marek was a man lost between two worlds, who turned in upon himself to try and resolve the split which the events of the twentieth century had forced upon him. He remains however, an important, unique and colourful figure in Australian art, and it is hoped that an increasing interest in the influence of surrealism upon Australian artists may lead to a reassessment of Marek, who had imbibed the spirit of the early surrealists at its source and who went on to create his own unique concoction of surrealism within the Australian experience.

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1 The only publication dedicated solely to the art of Dusan Marek is Bernice Murphy’s monograph, Dusan Marek, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, 1979. This was published to coincide with an important and wide ranging survey of Marek’s work at the Macquarie Galleries that year.

2 Dusan Marek, Birth of Love, 1948, oil on wooden panel, 16.2 x 73.8 cm. The Voyage, 1948, oil on wooden panel, 12.0 x 72.8 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Both these works are illustrated in the catalogue for Surrealism, Revolution by Night, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1993.

3 Email to the author, 12 May 2006.

4 Daniel Thomas, Dusan Marek, Seeing the World, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, 1993.

5 Dusan Marek, Equator, 12th October 1948, on board SS Charleton Sovereign, the Equator, oil and enamel on discarded gaming table, 121.7 x 91.2 cm. Perpetuum Mobile, 1948, on board SS Charleton Sovereign, oil and enamel on discarded gaming table, 121.7 x 91.2 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. This work is illustrated in Surrealism, Revolution by Night.

6 Voitre Marek, My Gibraltar, 1948, on board SS Charleton Sovereign, oil on wood panel, 29.0 x 20.5 cm. Gibraltar IRO, 1948, on board SS Charleton Sovereign, oil on wood panel, 29.0 x 20.5 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Dusan Marek, Gibraltar, 1948, on board SS Charleton Sovereign, oil and enamel on two-sided wooden panel, 28.5 x 51.5 cm. Agapitos/Wilson Collection of Surrealist Art, Sydney. This work is illustrated in Jane Hylton, Adelaide Angries, South Australian painting of the 1940s, Art Gallery Board of South Australia, Adelaide, 1989. Dusan Marek, Program, 1948-49, oil and enamel on two-sided wooden panel, 28.5 x 20.5 cm, Agapitos/Wilson Collection of Surrealist Art, Sydney. This work is illustrated in the above-mentioned Adelaide Angries, South Australian painting of the 1940s. The Agapitos/Wilson Collection of Surrealist Art contains a number of seminal works by Dusan Marek painted during the early period of the artist’s exile from Czechoslovakia. The collection of works executed between 1948 and 1953 has played an important part of a

7 Dusan Marek, *People stripped of pretensions (sic)/First reaction to Gibraltar in New Environment of Australia*, Sydney, 1948, pen and ink, ink wash on paper mounted on card, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra [Ac. No. 95.369].

8 *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1949.

9 *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, September, 1949 (exact date unknown).

10 Bernice Murphy, article in *Project 10* broadsheet, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1976, 1.

11 Margaret King Boynes, Obituary of Dusan Marek, written for the Adelaide *Advertiser*, 1993, typescript held in the research library of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (exact publication details unknown).

12 Dusan Marek, *On the Beach*, 1949, oil and pencil on wood, 38.5 x 50.0 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. This work is illustrated in *Surrealism, Revolution by Night*.

13 *The Mercury* (Hobart), 25<sup>th</sup> September 1981, article entitled ‘Moving on but Never Running.’

14 Much of the information presented here comes from articles and papers by Arthur Cantrill, the principle commentator on Marek’s films. See Arthur Cantrill, *A Surrealist Film Practice – the Animated Films of Dusan Marek*, 2007, unpublished manuscript. See also Cantrills *Filmnotes*, #81/82, 1996.


16 This quotation comes from Marek’s unpublished 1948 Notebook, archives of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

17 Dusan Marek, *Fisherman’s Holiday*, 1952, Sydney, black and white, 2 mins 45 secs. Original print with National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.


19 Paul Haefliger, ‘Dusan Marek,’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 1953.


21 There are a series of observational drawings made in New Guinea which show the disconcerting effects of the climate there. They are in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, and have the following accession numbers: NGA 95.360; NGA 95.374; NGA 95.373; NGA 95.359; NGA 95.361; NGA 95.362.

22 Dusan Marek, *Ego*, 1951-52, oil on canvas, 39 x 41.5 cm, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

23 Dusan Marek, *Rabaul*, 1956, oil on board, 33.5 x 45.5 cm, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth.

24 Dusan Marek, *The Nightmare* (also known as *The Magician*), 1956, Rabaul, colour, 6 mins 38 secs. Original print with National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.


26 The Bonython Gallery exhibition presented 42 paintings which Marek had painted since returning to Australia in 1959.

27 Dusan Marek, *Spaceman Number One*, 1956, Adelaide, colour, 2 mins 22 secs. Original print with National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.
The animated films produced during this period are: *8 Nursery Rhymes*, 1959–60, Adelaide, colour, animated, 16 mins; *Adam and Eve*, 1962, Adelaide, colour, animated, 10 mins; *The Magic Trumpet*, 1962, Adelaide, colour, animated, 8 mins; *Windmills*, 1963, Adelaide, colour, animated, 7 mins. This film uses animated children's drawings and was made in collaboration with Adelaide school children. All the original prints for these works are with the National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

Notable examples include: *Absit Invidia*, Sydney, 1968, charcoal on calico, 102.4 x 127 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; *The Explorer*, Sydney 1968, charcoal and pencil on canvas, 90.3 x 104.3 cm, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; *Noah*, Adelaide, 1969, charcoal on canvas, 95 x 95 cm, private collection (illustrated in Nancy Benko, *Art and Artists of South Australia*, Hyde Park Press, Adelaide, 1969).


Dusan Marek, *And the Word was made Flesh*, 1971, Adelaide, black and white, 70 mins. Original print with National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

Dusan Marek, *Four-Dimensional Drama Without Words*, Margate, Tasmania, 1975. Three-dimensional, two-sided painting, mixed media, overall dimensions: 18.4 x 42.9 x 8 cm, private collection. Illustrated in Murphy, *Dusan Marek. Book 27, Chapter MCMLXXV*, Margate, Tasmania, 1975. Oil and assemblage on two hinged panels, 114 x 94 cm overall, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

Sasha Grishin and Myra McIntyre (eds), *The Australian National University Art Collection, Selected Works*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1997.

Dusan Marek, unpublished Notebook of 1948, archives of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Interview with Helena Marek by the author, November 2005.

The Unheimlich Pacific of Popular Film: Surreal Geography and the Darwinian Sublime

Barbara Creed

The Imagination is one of the highest prerogatives of man. By this factor he unites, independently of the will, former images and ideas, and thus creates brilliant and novel results…

Charles Darwin seems a rather unlikely figure to bring into a discussion of surrealism, film and the Pacific. The epitome of a respectable Victorian gentleman, Darwin was a scientist and family man: well connected, solid and upright. Like the surrealist René Magritte, Charles Darwin’s external image of respectability and conformism belied the impact of his radical ideas and achievements. In fact, Darwin was so anxious about causing a controversy and upsetting the religious beliefs of Emma, his wife - and about possibly even causing her social ostracism - that he kept the manuscript of his theory of natural selection in a cupboard under the stairs for fifteen years with instructions to Emma, in the event of his death, to secure its publication as he believed it would represent ‘a considerable step in science.’ He was not wrong. As Margot Norris and others have convincingly argued, the revolution in ideas initiated by Darwin’s theory of natural selection made possible many of the great radical achievements of the twentieth century:

Freud was made possible by Darwin, as was Surrealist art and thought. Darwin’s Nature does not imitate Surrealism; Surrealism expresses the ruptures in conventional ways of thinking about the world inaugurated by Darwin’s discoveries.

Darwin’s theory of natural selection destroyed the belief that man occupied a privileged place in the universe and instead located him along with all other animal species as a part of the natural world and subject to the same laws of selection and survival that regulated the lives of all other living things. ‘In the world he proposed there was no crucial explanatory function for God, nor indeed was there any special place assigned to the human in his argument.’ Darwinian theory has had profound implications for narrative. ‘God is abolished along with the fiction of the subject as the origin of the text.’ Luis Buñuel, the surrealist filmmaker, said that when he read The Origin of Species his whole life took ‘a sharp turn.’ ‘Reading Darwin’s The Origin of Species was so dazzling that I lost what little faith I had left.’ Buñuel’s entire film career could be seen as an exploration of the death of God and the fiction of the rational subject. In The Descent of Man, Darwin went further, explicitly abolishing the major differences between the human species and the higher animals including differences in physiology, emotions and morality. Darwin’s anti-anthropocentrism is one of the most radical aspects of his work. ‘It is absurd to talk of one animal
being higher than another,’ he wrote in his notebook, ‘People often talk of the wonderful event of intellectual Man appearing – the appearance of insects with other senses is more wonderful.’ Lautréamont, a literary precursor of surrealism, was strongly influenced by Darwin. He saw ‘literature and art as an attempt to confront, perhaps to solve, the “problem” that man, the “sublime ape,” finds himself in the finite world and yet innately seeks after the infinite.’ As Norris convincingly argues, the Darwinian revolution resulted in, ‘a subversive interrogation of the anthropocentric premises of Western philosophy and art…’

In his research, Darwin developed a special rapport with the non-human world and paid attention to the smallest, most minute, seemingly inconsequential aspects of plants, insects and animals, even imitating their actions and habits. He was interested not in nature’s so-called ‘grand plan’ but rather in variations and differences, absences and inter-relationships. He saw all aspects of life as entangled – one with the other. One of Darwin’s most famous metaphors is of life as an ‘entangled bank.’ The art of Max Ernst, who in his early years was influenced by the evolutionist Ernst Haeckel, explores compulsively the way in which human and animal, human and plant life, are enmeshed. This is particularly true of his Loplop paintings in which Ernst adopts the identity of a bird-headed man, and of his ‘The Entire City’ series: ‘Ernst assaults one’s Platonic notions of form as something unified, ideal, permanent, and normative by inserting into his representations the Darwinian disruptions of form: time, mutability, variability, and chance.’

Darwin, whose writings profoundly influenced Sigmund Freud, was also interested in dreams and the unconscious – particularly the possible unconscious behaviour of animals and plants as an explanation for the appearance of variations in members of species. He even recorded his own dreams and attempted to analyse their meaning. It appears he found some of his nocturnal adventures very disturbing. ‘Insanity, he wrote in his “M” notebook, must be very like a dream.’ Darwin also recorded the bizarre. Stanley Hyman relishes what he sees as the ‘odd surrealist scenes’ in The Descent of Man: ‘The sexuality of the lower animals in the Descent is wildly surreal. A cast-off cuttlefish tentacle goes off on its own and mates with the female;’ ‘Mr Verreaux of Australia, with a female butterfly in his pocket, pursued amorously by a crowd of several hundred male butterflies.’ Darwin was also fascinated by hybrids and variations in species, which of course was the foundation stone of his theory. He records instances of individuals whose bodies were completely covered in hair, women with supernumerary mammae, and men whose breasts secreted milk.

Darwin’s connection to surrealism lies in a number of conceptual areas, central to his theory of natural selection, that were taken up by surrealists who did not necessarily see themselves as directly influenced by his work. The surrealists, however, lived in an age so impregnated with Darwinian theories, ideas and perceptions which had so dramatically disrupted traditional ways of thinking, that it was virtually impossible to think outside them. Darwin’s influence on surrealist thought, however, was also quite specific and includes the following: a
fascination with change and metamorphosis and the interconnectedness of human and animal; an attraction to the uncanny side of human experience in relation to the familiar (human) becoming unfamiliar (merging with the animal, nature, a common ancestor); a belief in the workings of chance and randomness in life; a belief that all life in a religious sense was without meaning; an interest in dreams and the unconscious; and a fascination with collecting found objects and the relationship of material things to the human. Although Darwin was enraptured by the marvellous scenes he encountered on his voyages, his theory of natural selection with its focus on life and death, chance, entropy and dissolution, embraces what Hal Foster has described as the dark side of surrealism – the uncanny, the death drive and the compulsion to repeat.\footnote{15}

Darwin’s adventures in the Pacific took him to the Galapagos Islands, the Cocos Islands, Tahiti, New Guinea, and Australia. Like the surrealists, Darwin believed that travel to other lands would free the imagination, and for Darwin this is exactly what happened. In his journeying Darwin encountered ‘primitive’ peoples, dense jungles and forests, strange animals and life forms, vast seas, Pacific islands, and vistas of great beauty and also of great foreboding. He saw everything, human and animal, as connected. He was overwhelmingly drawn to the animal and the ‘primitive’ and he collected thousands of objects, strange specimens from distant lands, not unlike the found objects of the surrealists. He wondered if creatures living on desert islands might not have been cast ashore from other lands. His voyages on The Beagle inspired a craze for travel and publications, with ‘the romance of The Beagle’s travels in the far south and the Fuegian project capturing Victorian imaginations far and wide.’\footnote{16} This resulted in ‘a flood of personal journals and “incidents of travel”.’\footnote{17} A strange and possibly unexpected consequence of the Darwinian revolution in ideas was that it led - in the popular imaginary - to the creation of the Pacific as a surreal space for the exploration of subversive and uncanny ideas.

In the Surrealist Map of the World published in 1929, France had all but disappeared and the Pacific Ocean was at the centre of the world. The surrealists were fascinated by the idea of the Pacific which represented a faraway exotic location, a refuge, a place to seek the marvellous, to make new beginnings, to encounter other cultures. Robert McNab has written a fascinating account of the love affair between the surrealists and travel. In their determination to encounter the marvellous the surrealists hoped that by ‘loosening the grip reason had on the way things were done’ they would ‘replace its rationales with instinct… They were determined to listen to la bouche d’ombre, the Voice in the Dark.’\footnote{18} One way to do this was through travel, embarking symbolically on journeys of the imagination as well as actual journeys across France and around the world. According to McNab, the first surrealists were gripped by travel fever. ‘Surrealism arrived suitcase in hand. Travel shaped it and remained one of its favourite themes.’\footnote{19} The surrealists saw travel as a means to achieving a state of dépaysement. The word literally means being ‘outside your own country, but its meaning also encompasses exile and disorientation, and
has both a geographical and a psychological sense. Dépaysement was infinitely preferable to living a life governed by forces of the known, rational and familiar world.

Some surrealists left France altogether, bound for distant horizons. McNab traces their various journeys around the globe: Robert Desnos went to the Caribbean, Benjamin Péret travelled up the Amazon, André Breton went to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and André Malraux and his wife, Clara, set out for Indochina. In March 1924, Paul Eluard, a co-founder of the surrealist movement, caught a French steamer, the SS Antinous, bound for Indochina via Tahiti. According to McNab he was depressed because his wife, Gala, had become seriously involved with his best friend Ernst. The following year Gala and Ernst followed Eluard across the Pacific. The surrealists who then followed Eluard into the Pacific were Jacques Viot, Emile Savitry and Georges Malkine - the voyage of the latter was inspired by the MGM film, White Shadows in the South Seas, directed by Willard Van Dyke in 1928. There, on islands such as Tahiti, the surrealists met filmmakers such as F. W. Murnau and Robert Flaherty, who co-directed Tabu (1931). McNab states that the voyages of the surrealists were stimulated by the movies they saw as well as by the books of Jack London and Joseph Conrad, particularly Heart of Darkness, with its Darwinian focus on ‘the indifference of nature to humanity.’

The makers of popular fiction films also turned to the Pacific. From 1895 onwards they took their cameras to the four corners of the globe, recording strange lands and exotic sights to bring back home and screen to astonished spectators. As film developed as an art form, directors turned not just to tales of adventure but also to tales of fantasy and horror, many of which were explicitly Darwinian. What we find in these early films is a strange intersection of surrealist and Darwinian themes and motifs. These films, many of which were made again and again, included The Mysterious Island (1929, 1961), The Lost World (1925, 1960, 1993, The Lost World – Jurassic Park, 1997), Treasure Island, (1934, 1950, 1972, 1990) The Island of Lost Souls (1933, The Island of Dr Moreau, 1977, 1996) and King Kong (1933, 1976, 2005). A number of these films were based on novels written by authors who had been strongly influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution. These included Jules Verne (1828-1905), Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875-1950) and H.G. Wells. (1866-1946). The filmmakers used the device of the traveller or explorer to take their readers on voyages into the heart of the Pacific where - like Darwin before them - they came face to face with ‘primitive’ peoples, exotic landscapes, and strange surreal creatures who had been caught in an evolutionary time-warp. Since the publication of Darwin’s Voyage of the Beagle (1839) and On the Origin of Species (1859), the popular view of the Pacific - already seen as a place of inversions and marvellous monstrosities - came to incorporate an unheimlich dimension based on fears of nature, atavism and degeneration.

Darwin’s theories prepared the ground for a range of new and subversive ideas that led, in many films and books, to the creation of a post-Darwinian Pacific as a place where human and
animal merged through ritual, desire and death. Novelists and filmmakers explored the dark side of Darwinian theory: a world full of competitors, marked by the struggle of individuals against individuals, species against species; a world full of great beauty and terror; and a world governed entirely by chance. Darwin’s revolutionary theory signalled the death of God. If God was dead, who was to take his place in the Pacific paradise? The Island of Lost Souls (1932), based on H.G. Wells’ tale of horror, produces the Frankensteinian scientist Dr Moreau as the monstrous demi-god. Obsessed with creating human forms from the animal, Dr Moreau experiments in vivisection in order to explore the workings of evolution. His experiments all fail as the ‘stubborn beast flesh’ grows back in every instance. Moreau holds the power of life and death over the surreal monstrosities he has created. The hero, a shipwrecked sailor called Edward Parker, falls in love with Lota, a panther-woman, raising the controversial issue of bestiality. Moreau wants her to mate with a human to see what will happen. Moreau’s Pacific island becomes a place beyond the borderlines of civilisation where the forces of devolution, fate and cruelty hold sway.

Cruelty is also a dominant motif in The Most Dangerous Game (1932), which transforms an idyllic Pacific island into a horrifying place ruled by the Darwinian motifs of survival of the fittest and the indifferent workings of randomness and chance. Based on a novel by Richard Connell, it tells the story of Count Zaroff, a Sadean monster. Zaroff has created his own world on a Pacific Island where he entertains guests and shipwrecked sailors. He sends them out into the woods where he hunts them down like animals. If they can survive his sadistic game for twenty-four hours, he sets them free.

Creatures at the limit of the human and the animal also feature strongly in these films. Jules Verne’s fantasy tale The Mysterious Island (1874) was made into a film in 1929 and again in 1961. It relates the adventures of a group of soldiers from the American Civil War who escape in a balloon and crash-land on an unchartered Pacific island that is inhabited by surreal creatures of vast proportions. With its castaway, Ayrton, who lives like a wild creature and a domesticated orangutan, named Jupiter, the tale is clearly Darwinian in focus. Edgar Rice Burroughs was another important writer influenced by Darwinian ideas. He explored the figure of an ape-man in his classic Tarzan tales and also wrote a series set in the Pacific called The Land That Time Forgot, Out of Time’s Abyss and The People That Time Forgot (all of 1918). Burroughs creates a fantasy land called Caprona, set in the distant reaches of the South Pacific. In the interior of Caprona is a vast waterway called Caspak, a place where evolution appears to have come to a standstill. Here a collection of strange, surreal prehistoric animals dominate. The further away from the mouth of the river the more advanced, in evolutionary terms, are the species of animal and plant. At the furthest point, the creatures turn into apes and then humans. Some of these creatures, the Wieroo, are bird-people or winged humans not unlike Ernst’s birdman. Travelling through Caspak is tantamount to a short evolutionary journey through time.
From this brief survey we can see that the mysterious waters of the Pacific have offered a fantastic range of monstrous beasts – human and animal alike. These films are set on isolated Pacific Islands where time appears to have stopped, literally or symbolically, to allow for the surreal creation either of human/animal hybrids or for bizarre relations between the human and animal. There are also Darwinian images of human-animal hybrids, prehistoric monsters, apemen, impenetrable jungles and an indifferent nature. Surrealist motifs and images which intersect with many of the Darwinian themes include the voyage into the unknown, ‘primitive’ worlds, the power of the irrational, the horror of metamorphosis, a sense of dépaysement, and ‘mad love,’ l’amour fou. These tales adopt Darwinian themes of evolution and devolution, metamorphosis, the struggle to survive and the role of chance in human endeavour.

An exploration of the Darwinian surreal is only possible because events are set on Pacific islands that are ‘out of time,’ islands where travellers and castaways experience the strange uncanny underside of the Pacific. Portrayed as a place of uncharted islands, subterranean worlds, ruined temples and hybrid creatures, the surreal Pacific becomes Europe’s unheimlich other where the Darwinian forces of devolution, fate and randomness hold sway. With its storehold of special effects, the cinema was the one art form that could capture both the Darwinian and the surreal with its ability to bring to life with great realism images of lost worlds, human-animal hybrids and prehistoric monsters. In addition, the cinema could create images of metamorphosis, and play with scale in order to create surreal juxtapositions; it could also collapse the passage of time between past, present and future. If Darwin’s radical writings gave rise to a host of strange and uncanny tales set in the Pacific, the cinema was the machine capable of bringing these to life.

King Kong
The film that most powerfully combines Darwinian and surrealist motifs is King Kong (Merian Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933). In its exploration of the nature of Lautréamont’s ‘divine ape,’ King Kong examines Darwinian disruptions of form. Directed by Cooper & Shoedsack, King Kong reveals the close relationship between surrealist and Darwinian discourses and their mutual focus on the Pacific as a place of exoticism, ‘primitiveness,’ taboo and entanglement. The surrealist Jean Ferry was drawn to the technological achievements of the film, particularly the fact that Kong was an automaton. Writing about the film in Minotaure in 1934, he argued that much of the viewer’s pleasure arose from watching Kong move on screen, creating an ‘acute sensation’ of the unheimlich or uncanny. He claimed that ‘the presence of automata and trickery’ makes the whole film deeply ‘poetic.’ Darwin’s own descriptions of evolutionary change are sometimes poetic and magical, particularly, for example, his account of the possible metamorphosis of a swimming black bear into a whale.
King Kong tells the story of a party of explorers, including a woman, searching for a monstrous beast said to inhabit an uncharted Pacific island known to sailors as Skull Island. Having found their destination, the travellers encounter a terrifying world - a 'primitive' people, human sacrifice and the monstrous ape, Kong, whom the islanders worship as a god. When Kong sights the white woman, whom the islanders have captured and offered to him as a human sacrifice, he seizes her and takes her back to his cave. Jean Ferry praised the film because of its erotic depiction of the theme of bestiality and amour fou:

... in the last analysis why does King Kong carry off this white woman instead of devouring her, why does he tear off her clothes then sniff their perfume, why does he defend her against the other monsters, why does he pursue her when she is ravished by him . . . why does he let himself be gunned down by aeroplanes to keep her? As one of my neighbours said: 'In any case he can’t do anything with her.' That remains to be seen.23

The film’s eroticism is conveyed not through a phallic threat of penetration (clearly impossible to show) but through touch and scent – a kind of animal erotics. Bestiality was of course a taboo topic in 1933 but one the filmmakers were able to disguise by outwardly focussing on the narrative’s elements of fantasy and adventure. Another reason the filmmakers were able to get away with so much was that the events were set in a faraway imaginary place – a Pacific island.

When Darwin abolished all clear distinctions between human and animal, he raised the possibility of devolution. The fear that the human race might ‘slip back’ into primitivism is voiced in the film by Denham, the leader of the expedition. In describing the island’s vast wall designed to protect the inhabitants from Kong, he says the wall was: ‘built so long ago the people who live there have slipped back, forgotten the higher civilisation that built it’ (my emphasis). King Kong appears to be set in an evolutionary time warp, thus creating a context in which a bizarre form of sexual selection comes to the fore.

The phantasy of a relationship between woman and ape pre-exists King Kong. It was given concrete expression in Emmanuel Frémiet’s controversial sculpture of 1887, Gorilla Carrying off a Woman. Max Ernst refers to this taboo union in his 1924 painting Woman, Old Man and Flower in which the old man, who has an ape-like face, nurses a naked woman in his arms. King Kong creates a space for the spectator to consider the history of our evolutionary past and the possibility of union rather than separation between human and animal. The film’s exploration of the Darwinian themes of devolution and sexual selection allows for a subversive questioning of the anthropocentric bases of the conventional love story. This strategy also allows the animal, Kong himself, to speak in his own voice, to express his desire for the forbidden woman and for the possibility of a union between human and animal other.

The film’s portrayal of the hidden city - the temple set in the dark recesses of the jungle - is of particular interest because it represents a series of bizarre, even surreal, entanglements.
The very existence of the walled city, now inhabited by a ‘primitive’ people, suggests that it had been built long ago by a superior civilisation and that as the latter devolved, the city fell into ruin. Strangely enough this concept of devolution is literally and symbolically true in relation to both the inhabitants of the island and the elaborate film set itself. As McNab points out:

The ruined city in the jungles of *King Kong* is an image of great complexity...being in fact the ancient capital of Judaea, Jerusalem, but a Jerusalem abandoned an overwhelmed by rainforest. This bizarre creation was the result of decisions taken by RKO studios, which produced Kong, to distress the set they had originally built for Cecil B De Mille’s *King of Kings* (1926), and then smother it in jungle...Thus the world of *King of Kings* doubled as *King Kong’s* lost jungle domain.24

McNab also draws an interesting parallel between the ruined city of *King Kong* and Ernst’s ruined city series. The former was entangled by jungle ‘much as Ernst's ruined city was smothered by him.’ The painting by Ernst that most effectively and powerfully conveys a Darwinian sense of entanglement is his 1936 *Joie de vivre* with its web of tropical vines and convoluted, coiled plants. The painting also captures the same sense of nightmarish impenetrability that distinguishes Skull Island. A key influence on Ernst was the evolutionary theorist Haeckel, also known as ‘Darwin’s bulldog’ because of his fierce defence of evolutionary theory. The surrealists, particularly Ernst, were fascinated by Haeckel’s stunning biological illustrations of evolutionary processes that were surreal and hallucinatory in the extreme. The walled city of Skull Island, Judea, King Kong, Darwin, Ernst, Haeckel – all come together in a surreal tale of unexpected interconnections.

‘Entanglement’ is a particularly appropriate word to describe what lies at the heart of the unheimlich Pacific. Darwin used the word ‘entanglement’ in his writings to describe the lush and intertwined forms of nature. On the final page of *The Origin of Species* he wrote:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.25

The role of decay, degradation, dissolution and death was not lost on Darwin who, as Gillian Beer writes, saw the law of Extinction as absolutely crucial to reproduction, growth and life.26 He also wrote in *The Origin of Species*:

We behold the face of nature bright with gladness, we often see superabundance of food; we do not see, or we forget that the birds which are idly singing round us mostly live on insects or seeds, and are thus constantly destroying life.27

Darwin frequently reminds us that the glorious earth is also alive with worms and death and that one species is entangled with another. The word ‘entangle,’ which undermines the possibility of
coherence and transparency, necessarily implies a sense of disorder, of restriction, of something being interlinked, entrapped, snarled or caught up. To entangle is often to merge or enmesh opposites, to render the familiar unfamiliar. In this context the Darwinian world becomes quintessentially uncanny: life is entangled with death, nature with culture, man with woman, human with animal. Entanglement denies order, clarity, simplicity, and transparency. Entanglement captures what is at stake in the Darwinian surreal and in the uncanny horror films of the Pacific.


5 Norris, Beasts of the Modern Imagination, 26.


7 Browne, Charles Darwin, Voyaging, 373.


9 Norris, Beasts of the Modern Imagination, 5.

10 Norris, Beasts of the Modern Imagination, 16.


12 Browne, Charles Darwin, Voyaging, 384.


14 Hyman, The Tangled Bank, 48.


16 Browne, Charles Darwin, Voyaging, 417.

17 Browne, Charles Darwin, Voyaging, 419.


23 Ferry, ‘Concerning King Kong,’ 107.

24 McNab, *Ghost Ships*, 68.


Barbara Creed is a graduate of Monash and La Trobe Universities. Her doctoral thesis was on the cinema of horror, feminism and psychoanalysis. This was published as *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993) and has been republished five times. Her areas of research include contemporary film, surrealism, feminist and psychoanalytic theory and the impact of Darwinian theory on the cinema. She has recently published *Media Matrix: Sexing the New Reality* (Allen & Unwin, 2003) and *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror & the Primal Uncanny* (Melbourne University Press, 2005). She is currently writing a new book entitled *The Darwinian Screen: the Evolution of Film Theory*. She has also co-edited the anthologies *Body Trade* (2001) and *Don’t Shoot Darling* (1987). Her articles have been translated into various foreign languages including Swedish, Italian, Russian, Japanese and German. She has been invited to speak at the Universities of Oxford, Paris, UCLA, Frankfurt, Lancaster, Hawaii, Hanoi and the Freud Institute, London. She is on a number of international editorial boards and acts as a Reader for various international publishing houses and journals. She is an international assessor for the Australian Research Council. Barbara is an active figure in the film community as a film reviewer, speaker and writer. She has served on the Boards of Writers Week, the Melbourne International Film Festival and the Victorian College of the Arts School of Film and Television.
james gleeson’s desiring production

David Lomas

‘The omnipotence of desire is surrealism’s sole act of faith.’

surrealism’s ‘use value’

With some justification surrealism hasn’t been thought of as offering a very propitious milieu for anyone who did not subscribe to the ideology of heterosexual love. The virulence of its leader in denouncing same-sex sexuality is notorious, and has been assumed to stand for the movement as a whole. Although there were some exceptions to the general intolerance of homosexuality, as shown by the inclusion of certain members in the French surrealist group, in the main it was only as surrealism moved away from Breton’s control, in the far-flung places where it took root in the 1930s, that the potential surrealism offered to gay and lesbian artists and writers had a chance to be realised. Reversing usual perceptions of cultural centre and cultural periphery, and the expectation that as surrealism moved away from France the radical impulse that gave birth to it would be progressively diluted, in this one instance one finds exactly the opposite. Surrealism was liberated from the constraints Breton imposed upon it and freed to serve a different kind of emancipatory agenda. While the general issue of surrealism and sexuality has been well aired, by contrast the topic of surrealism and same-sex desire has been largely neglected. In order to redress the situation it is necessary that surrealist studies respond to the globalising imperatives of a new art history and refocus attention upon the reception of surrealism in England, the USA, Australia, and elsewhere.

James Gleeson is Australia’s best-known and still living surrealist, his work the subject of a major retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2004. Surrealism reputedly had an avid but short-lived reception in Australia. Gleeson’s involvement with surrealism, however, has been sustained across more than six decades. What first drew him to the movement when it reached the Antipodes at the end of the 1930s? And what did surrealism offer that it was able to nurture a lifetime of artistic and literary production? To date, the majority of commentators on Gleeson have located the importance of the surrealist example in his adoption of automatic and aleatory techniques and shied away from more contentious issues of desire and sexuality. The present article will track desire and the problematics of its representation as a core, unifying thread running throughout Gleeson’s oeuvre. Its point of departure is the assertion of André Breton that: ‘The omnipotence of desire is surrealism’s sole act of faith’ - something that I regard as axiomatic for Gleeson as well.

This article explores the hypothesis that surrealism afforded a cultural space against a backdrop of severe, unremitting oppression within which a non-normative desire could be
represented, albeit in the coded language of the manifest dream. In these circumstances, dissimulation was closely connected with surrealism’s use value. Adoption of the surrealist-psychoanalytic dream model, according to which the dream is the disguised expression of an unconscious wish, had an obvious utility, allowing illicit desires to be both avowed and concealed at one and the same time. Comments by Gleeson confirm his awareness that the apparent bizarreness of surrealist imagery was a necessary disguise. Looking at some of his own images, he asks rhetorically: ‘Are themes such as these intended to cover over the glimpses of the unconscious that may have subliminally appeared? Are they masks contrived to mislead?’

Were I to define my method in what follows it will be - to quote and, at the same time, travesty Breton - ‘to show the precautions and the ruses which desire, in search of its object, employs as it wavers in preconscious waters, and, once this object is discovered, the means (so far stupefying) it uses to reveal it through consciousness.’

Surrealism furnished a visual language that permitted psychosexual states to be registered and articulated where few other such avenues were available in an environment that was largely hostile to the expression of feelings by men. This was undoubtedly a factor in the appeal of surrealism to Australian artists besides Gleeson: Herbert McClintock and Albert Tucker for example. It is notable that Gleeson singled out works by both of these artists for comment in his 1940 manifesto, ‘What is Surrealism?’ Anguish and ambivalence with regard to sexuality are very salient in Gleeson’s earliest works in a surrealist vein: restraint, suffocation, and wounding are recurrent motifs [fig. 1]. Bodies are encased in leaden constrictive moulds, an eloquent pictorial metaphor for a societal straitjacket. A poem from 1944 that is replete with similar tortured
and confused, violent imagery is tellingly addressed: ‘To the Institute for the Molestation of Variants from the Normal.’ The furious and irrational concatenation of stream of consciousness imagery conveys anger and bewilderment in a poem whose title aligns it with the spirit of accusatory tracts the surrealists aimed at directors of mental asylums and such like. Cooption of the rhetorical form of the manifesto supplies Gleeson with a language of struggle to counteract these stifling restrictions. In ‘What is Surrealism?’ the surrealist promise of freedom is expressed as a deliverance of the imagination from the fetters of reason, a theme familiar enough from Breton’s *Manifesto of Surrealism*, but translating, one senses, in Gleeson’s case a more diffuse desire for liberation. His next tract, ‘The Necessity of Surrealism’ (1941), proclaims ‘Do not commit suicide, for surrealism has been born,’ a message that should be ‘cried in the night to a desperate civilisation.’ Pieced together with the sub-text composed of his lived experience, these images and polemics convey some inkling of the desperate hopes Gleeson placed in surrealism.

Although surrealism was first and foremost a literary movement, the response of Anglophone artists was oftentimes limited to what they could see, and only later to what became available to be read in English. For Gleeson, this consisted of Breton’s *What is Surrealism?*, Salvador Dalí’s *Conquest of the Irrational*, and it is likely also to have included works by David Gascoyne and Herbert Read, since the Australian uptake of surrealism followed upon, and was to a great extent mediated by, surrealist reception in Britain. Certain aspects of surrealism were accessible and could be readily appropriated without requiring a deep understanding of the movement or its aims: techniques of collage and decalcomania; the uses of juxtaposition, myth and metamorphosis; but also a nuanced iconography of eroticism. The fact that Gleeson read French only to a limited degree would have shielded him from Breton’s denunciation of pederasts. He may have been persuaded instead by Herbert Read’s contention that the surrealists were not in the least intolerant:

On the subject of homosexuality, for example (a subject which the evening papers do not mention, though it is one of the most acute questions of the day), the surrealists are not in the least prejudiced; they recognise that inversion is an abnormal condition due to a certain psychological or physiological predisposition for which the individual is in no way responsible. But they protest when such individuals form a sodality or freemasonry for the purpose of imposing their special ethos upon the social and intellectual life of the day. It leads to an intolerance for women which is certainly no part of the surrealist creed.

Read protests too much - and betrays a common prejudice, namely the belief that homosexuals take advantage of their clandestine status to forge networks. The fact that he felt compelled to address the topic at all, in an essay written in the context of the 1936 International Exhibition that officially launched surrealism in Britain, indicates the sensitivity of the issue and its significance for the British movement. The topic is woefully under-researched, but clearly this was a factor in the attraction of surrealism for the poet Gascoyne, and artists John Banting, Edward Burra and
Francis Bacon, all of whom gravitate towards European avant-gardism, often mixing surrealism with German influences. Berlin was a beacon for many gays and lesbians in the inter-war years, more liberal than other capitals and a source of literature and magazines.\textsuperscript{12}

Bernard Smith’s \textit{Place, Taste and Tradition} (1945) was hugely significant in establishing the parameters within which Gleeson’s work has been understood since by Australian art history. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that Smith was a partisan in the split between surrealism and social realism, the two main rival currents in modern art at that moment. An erstwhile surrealist, Smith - following a course that, he notes, the French surrealist Louis Aragon had taken - switched sides and was now the advocate of politically committed social realist art, which he considered to be the only progressive alternative.\textsuperscript{13} Other commentators have followed Smith in his opinion that surrealism in Australia was essentially a short-lived reaction to the wartime turmoil. This is a commonplace in discussions of Gleeson’s turn to surrealism, which absolves the writer from facing other more delicate matters, but has the disadvantage of failing to explain why his commitment to surrealism continued unwaveringly for the more than six decades since 1945. At the time of writing, Smith detected encouraging signs that Gleeson was on the point of renouncing surrealism!

Smith cannot be blamed that his definition of the political does not include sexuality as a site of oppression or of a legitimate struggle for emancipation.\textsuperscript{14} Probably no one did in Australia at that point. With hindsight, however, the lack of any awareness of sexuality as an issue for the artists he writes about is a serious limitation. Smith surely misinterprets William Dobell’s sensuous depiction of youthful labouring bodies when he contrives to portray him as an ardent social realist. For easily understandable reasons, the route of identification with the working class advocated by Smith was foreclosed to Dobell, as much as to Gleeson. Far from being an endearing portrait of a working class larrikin, Dobell’s iconic \textit{Billy Boy} (1943) is the epitome of everything Dobell detests. Brian Penton, editor of the \textit{Daily Telegraph}, incisively observed: ‘[Dobell] has created a symbol of a mindless mountain of coarse flesh, with the depthless eyes of a suspicious but cowardly animal, thin, mean, sensual mouth, coarse, insensitive hands - all assembled in a pose of smug and ignorant arrogance.’\textsuperscript{15} And, he might have added, the mind of this creature was assuredly a cesspit of bigotry and prejudice.

One must consider that Gleeson’s choices as he navigated a route through the avant-garde options available at the time were influenced by his sexuality. He had more in common with a persistent strand of late symbolism than he did with gritty social realism. The conjugation of surrealism with aspects of aestheticism and fin-de-siècle symbolism, styles culturally coded as over-refined, decadent or even perverse, skewed it in a direction arguably more amenable to the expression of his desire. Exotically jewel-encrusted bodies, and ambiguous narrative scenarios blending eroticism with violence, betoken a debt to Gustave Moreau, a symbolist artist venerated by the surrealists as a precursor. On the other hand, Gleeson conspicuously eschewed an
Australianised version of surrealism promulgated by a group of Melbourne-based artists. Painting at Heidi on the suburban outskirts of Melbourne, Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale, the most prominent among them, concocted an outback existentialism that tapped into a familiar roll call of male stereotypes: the bushranger, digger, explorer, and sportsman. The myth bore little reality for an overwhelmingly urban populace, however that did nothing to diminish its efficacy at a time of resurgent cultural nationalism. In time, and with Kenneth Clark’s influential patronage, Nolan’s touristic vision of Australia came to be packaged for consumption at home and abroad. Elwyn Lynn’s monograph, *Sydney Nolan-Australia*, unproblematically replicates this elision [fig. 2]. Gleeson remarked skeptically that these Melbourne artists gave surrealism a badge of citizenship by slotting it into ‘our history, our myths and legends.’ The evident coolness in his relations with them, despite overlapping interests, doubtless reflects his perception of difference, a concealed stigma that denied him that badge of belonging. Gleeson paints without trace of an Aussie accent. I shall argue hereunder that it makes sense to think of his European-leaning art in terms of a notion of exile - ironical at a time when Australia prided itself as a desirable refuge for artists and others fleeing war-torn Europe.

![Fig. 2: Elwyn Lynn. *Sidney Nolan - Australia*. Sydney: Bay Books, 1979.](image)

The use value of surrealism has to be understood against a backdrop of rampant homophobia that renders more surprising the spirit of optimism emanating from Gleeson’s work. In what follows, his oeuvre is mapped under a periodisation that broadly parallels the vicissitudes of gay experience. Gary Wotherspoon, in his valuable history of Sydney’s gay urban sub-culture, argues that during the inter-war years a degree of exceptionalism was granted to bohemian artists and writers, from which those who were also homosexual benefited. Wartime, which
coincides with the arrival of surrealism, was contradictory in its effects for these groups. The influx of large numbers of American GIs wrenched Australians out of a pre-lapsarian innocence, exposing many for the first time to modern sexual mores. On the other hand, the conditions of wartime meant that the conservative ideal of a protective, warrior male muscled out any alternative constructions of masculinity. The next two decades, the 1950s and 1960s, were a time of economic affluence and political conservatism in Australia with paranoia and heightened discrimination. The counterpart to the manufactured fear of the ‘red under the bed’ was the even more monstrous phantasm of sodomites between the sheets. Homosexual panic was writ large. Wotherspoon documents the use of entrapment by Sydney police to combat the threat of perversion with the names of those netted in police crackdowns on homosexual ‘crimes’ and then dragged through the courts being regularly reported in the press.\textsuperscript{19} The second part of the article will be concerned with Gleeson’s work in the 1980s, a decade in which AIDS threatened to turn back whatever gains had been made in the 1970s, irrevocably altering the conditions of possibility for the representation of homoerotic desire.

\textbf{the dali example}

Into the stultifying climate of interwar Australia in 1939 parachuted Salvador Dalí whose picture \textit{Memory of the Child-Woman} (1932) was one of the few genuinely contemporary works displayed in the 1939 Herald Exhibition of Contemporary French and British Art.\textsuperscript{20} It was following the \textit{succès de scandale} of the International Exhibition of Surrealism at the Burlington Galleries in London in 1936, where Dalí famously delivered a lecture wearing a diving suit, that the existence of surrealism began to be noticed in Australia.\textsuperscript{21} Its reception was thus very delayed and, as was the case in the US, Dalí was the most recognisable public face of the movement despite already having been excluded by Breton as a renegade. These factors are germane to assessing Gleeson’s response to surrealism. The brief biography that introduces ‘What is Surrealism?’, probably scripted by the artist himself, describes his immediate seduction by Dalí: ‘As soon as he saw reproductions of pictures by Salvador Dalí, he realised that he was en rapport with the ideas of that European surrealist, and since then he has deliberately developed his style along those lines.’\textsuperscript{22} Early on, Gleeson acquired a copy of Dalí’s \textit{Conquest of the Irrational} (1935), which contains a representative sample of works, reproduced in black and white on a small scale, as well as an important essay. Remarks by Gleeson indicate that it was not the Spaniard’s painting style that mainly appealed to him however. The importance of Dalí’s example must have lain elsewhere.\textsuperscript{23}

One presumes that Gleeson was not oblivious to the eroticism so outrageously flaunted by Dalí, who espoused a surrealism of the polymorphously perverse. This latter was a dissident version of the surrealist cult of love at odds with the Bretonian orthodoxy and a challenge to the dominant heterosexism. In a short text on love (‘L’Amour,’ 1930) Dalí declared: ‘I would like to
make clear that, in love, I attach a special value to everything generally labelled perversion and vice. I consider perversion and vice to be the most revolutionary forms of thought and activity, the way that I consider love as the only attitude worthy of man’s life.\textsuperscript{24} Significantly, one of Dalí’s main supporters among the surrealists was René Crevel, the only openly homosexual member of the group to be tolerated by Breton. Though strenuously denying that he was homosexual, Dalí was aware of the contentious nature of the anal eroticism in works of his such as \textit{The Lugubrious Game} (1929), remarking that: ‘I was authorised to represent sexual organs, but not anal fantasies. Any anus was taken in very bad part. They rather liked lesbians, but not pederasts.’\textsuperscript{25}

An informal but revealing group photograph [fig. 3] shows Dalí with hands in coat pockets hanging back, sheepish and reticent, while Breton’s body language, directed towards Crevel who stands opposite, is forceful, macho, and expostulatory. On the occasion of his show trial and attempted exclusion from the group, Dalí protested that were he to dream of sodomising the surrealist leader he would feel compelled to paint it the next day. The point he was making ostensibly was about his refusal to censor the unconscious drives, but Dalí knowingly exploited Breton’s prudishness to turn the situation to his advantage. Breton predictably was livid with rage; the other surrealists erupted in laughter and the united front against Dalí collapsed. It requires no great stretch of imagination to understand the impact of Dalí’s example on a young Australian artist seeking to come to terms with chaotic and unruly sexual feelings in a repressive society that in the 1940s was still trapped in an Edwardian time warp.

A volatile combination of guilt, shame and shameless flouting of sexual taboos are a hallmark of the works Dalí produced around the time he joined surrealism. Perversity is openly paraded under cover of an \textit{apparent} observance of the prohibition; typically, this is presented within an Oedipal scenario where the son makes a sham display of ritual obeisance to paternal authority. In the lurid frontispiece for Breton’s and Paul Eluard’s \textit{L’Immaculée Conception} (1930)
[fig. 4], the son, wracked by guilt, buries his head in shame while simultaneously enjoying the most lubricious fantasies. A Sadean woman with a crucifix cut out of her clothing to display the breasts and crotch stands astride the guilt-ridden son whose anguished hands cover his face. The repressed desire returns in the very place of the crucifix as the symbol of religious and moral law. It is likely that Dalí was familiar with an etching of the Temptation of St. Anthony by the Belgian symbolist, Félicien Rops, where a voluptuous naked woman replaces Christ on the cross [fig. 5]. This notorious image is discussed in Freud’s ‘Gradiva’ case study as an illustration of the relationship between repression and the return of the repressed. Freud remarks that: ‘It is precisely what was chosen as the instrument of repression…that becomes the vehicle for the return: in and behind the repressing force, what is repressed proves itself victor in the end.’ The thematic of repressed desires triumphing over repression lies at the crux of surrealism and may even be the most important lesson Gleeson learnt from Dalí.

![Fig. 4: Salvador Dalí. Frontispiece to André Breton and Paul Eluard, L’Immaculée conception (Paris: Éd. surréalistes, 1930).](image1)

![Fig. 5: Félicien Rops. The Temptation of Saint Anthony. Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, Brussels.](image2)

In 1946, Dalí, along with Leonora Carrington, Max Ernst, Paul Delvaux and seven other artists, was invited to submit a painting on the subject of the temptation of St. Anthony for a competition in the US. The winning entry, selected by a panel of judges consisting of Alfred Barr, Marcel Duchamp and Sidney Janis, would feature in a movie directed by Albert Lewin based on the novel of Guy de Maupassant, The Private Affairs of Bel Ami. The entries in the competition, which Max Ernst won, were dispatched on a tour of the US and Europe that lasted into 1947. It must have been on his trip to Europe in 1948 that Gleeson acquired the catalogue of this show that illustrates all of the works. Though he would have narrowly missed seeing the show, this
did not prevent him becoming a converted disciple of the saint whose depiction in art and literature, most famously by Gustave Flaubert, offers a pretext to represent lustful desires, though rarely so flagrantly as by Rops.

In 1949, after his return to Australia, Gleeson produced at least one variant of the temptation of St. Anthony.29 One might conjecture that the theme of an isolated hermit, alone in the desert, racked by violent sexual fantasies and self-doubt was one that resonated with Gleeson's own predicament.30 A comparison of Gleeson's interpretation of the subject with Dalí's is instructive.31 The gaunt and naked saint is similar in both works. But whereas the baroque visions that assail Dalí's Anthony appear in a cinematic space of projection in front of him, Gleeson's are placed behind him - firmly in his head, as it were. They take the form of a paranoiac double image: a seething mass of writhing, mostly male bodies make up the shape of a figure. The mechanism of projection as described by Freud entails the suppression of an internal perception that returns in a distorted form from the outside. The example Freud gives in the Schreber case is the statement: 'I (a man) love him (a man)' which undergoes a number of permutations. The repressed wish is first of all denied, in the form 'I do not love him - I hate him,' and then projected out of the subject: 'I do not love him - I hate him, because HE PERSECUTES ME.'32 The latter corresponds to the hallucinations that terrorise St Anthony in the traditional artistic iconography of Bosch and other Northern artists. The value of Freud's analysis of Schreber's paranoiac delusions lies in the supposed homoerotic nature of the repressed desire. The seething mass of nubile male flesh by which Gleeson’s saint is tempted thus traces the persecutory delusion back to its unconscious origins. The subject of temptation is one that Gleeson takes up again in 1959, and Grünwald's famous Temptation of Saint Anthony in the Isenheim altarpiece is alluded to in Gleeson’s painting post-1983, but the iconographical structure of outlawed desire seen in relation to a repressing or oppressive (social) agency is more generally applicable to his oeuvre.

For both artists, titles are a carefully pondered addition to the image. Writing is also an activity of importance in its own right for Gleeson as much as for Dalí. Though he is less funny than Dalí, Gleeson writes elegantly and produced surrealist poetry as well as two manifestoes of Australian surrealism. Dalí’s polemical essay, Conquest of the Irrational (1935) was an evident source of inspiration for many of the sentiments in the latter, which rail against the nefarious effects of rationalism blamed for causing the war in Europe. Dalí’s other writings from this period are also well represented in Gleeson’s library. He possessed copies of The Secret Life of Salvador Dali (1942), the novel Hidden Faces (1947), and Dalí’s treatise on painting, the 50 Secrets of Magical Craftsmanship (1948). Of interest here is the recurrent Dalinian motif of the secret and what this would have meant to Gleeson. After all, the phenomenon of a secret (inner) life, a hidden face, is a situation with which he must have been intimately acquainted. The
paradox of the secret in Dalí is that it is openly proclaimed to the world: that must have struck Gleeson as a liberating idea. \(^{33}\)

Gleeson courted self-exposure in early works that are overtly autobiographical, such as Coagulations on the Maintenance of Identity (1942), a picture that invites comparison with Dali’s confessional First Days of Spring (1930). Neither artist makes any secret of their sexual anxieties. Dali's influence is also betrayed in the evocation of the artist as a young boy within the disjunctive temporality of the image, which telescopes past and present, with the difference that whereas Dali always portrays the father and diminutive son as a pair, Gleeson, whose father died when he was aged three, is alone. Gleeson soon retreats from the raw and frank emotion of these pictures, which pick up on the expressionist current in Australian painting - a position fraught with danger - towards a more coded style of representation, and a tactful deflection of personal meaning in his comments about his works. The role accorded to childhood is a function of the shared interest of Gleeson and Dali in psychoanalysis. \(^{34}\) Gleeson may have been in part following in the footsteps of Dalí who flaunts stock Freudian themes and symbols; the evidence shows that he was avidly assimilating psychoanalysis at very much the same moment as he was responding to surrealism. It is notable that both artists were drawn to the beach as a landscape redolent of their childhood, and as a locus for the staging of unconscious desires and fantasies.

For Dalí:

The rocks and beaches of Cadaques [...] were the unique protagonists on whose mineral impassiveness, day after day, I projected all the accumulated and chronically unsatisfied tension of my erotic and sentimental life. \(^{35}\)

Gleeson regarded the beach as a line of contact between the rational and irrational (he equates the sea with the unconscious). Like Dali, it is imbued with memories of early childhood wading in rock pools on the beach at Gosford north of Sydney. As a marginal or peripheral site, the marking of a boundary, we might surmise that the coastline is also specially invested for Gleeson as a metaphor of his own marginal identity and peripheral sexuality. The 'littoral' is a location that Gleeson perforce inhabits. An early picture was entitled We Inhabit the Corrosive Littoral of Habit (1940). Another series of collages in the 1970s has the equally redolent title, Signals from the Perimeter. The privileging of the littoral by Gleeson marks out his difference from Drysdale and Nolan, artists for whom the 'centre' is freighted with existential and symbolic import as the locus of a mythic Australian-ness.

Principles of the Ritual of Homicide (1939), an early picture by Gleeson, integrates his reading of Freud’s Totem and Taboo (1938) and possibly also Moses and Monotheism with a Dali-infused surrealist imagery. Though not altogether successful in pictorial terms, it is highly significant for its linkage of the destruction of the father with the liberation of unconscious desire. Gleeson’s comments about the picture are worth quoting in full:
In my own *Principles of the Ritual of Homocide*, I have made an attempt to express the universal struggle for the liberation of the individual will. Man wishes to be free to imprint his own will upon his environment, but at the same time there is the conflicting instinct of submission to a stronger will than his own — the will of the father or, in the political sense, of the ‘leader,’ or dictator. To achieve the freedom of his will, man must metaphorically murder the father, but he can do so only as a climax to a terrific mental struggle…At such a time the relaxed supervision of the ego permits the subconscious to flood the mind with images from past experiences, and with those more enigmatic visions that are rooted in the racial memory.³⁶

Dali, of course, often paraphrased Freud’s remark in *Moses and Monotheism* that: ‘A hero is someone who has had the courage to rebel against the father and has in the end victoriously overcome him.’ The Oedipal struggle of the son against the despotic father is a salient motif in his painting of the classic surrealist phase. As a counterpart to his advocacy of a polymorphously perverse (‘pre-oedipal’) subject position there is a disparagement of the paternal imago whom Dali mocks and humiliates, for example in *Memory of the Child-Woman* by representing the father with breasts that make him appear ridiculous. For Gleeson, the absence of the father is equated with his symbolic murder, an event that releases the ego from domination by a punitive super-ego and initiates the free play of desiring production.

Due to vagaries in the Australian reception of modernism, by the time Gleeson was absorbing surrealist influences from Dali, he himself had moved on and was busy promoting a return to Renaissance art and the traditional craft of painting. The concluding pages of *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali* in 1942 are a harbinger of this trend; *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship* in 1948 was its apotheosis. Gleeson owned both of these books as well as a 1946 edition of the autobiography of the Italian Renaissance artist Benvenuto Cellini with illustrations by Dali. An elision of these two contradictory moments of Dali’s career, the surrealist and the classical, may have licensed a peculiar mix of surrealism and Old Master influences that is so characteristic of Gleeson’s painting. It is evident that on occasion he drew his inspiration directly from late Dali. The upper section of Gleeson’s *The Trap* (Rockhampton Art Gallery; 1971) seems to derive from *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubicus)*, one of the most widely reproduced works by Dali from the 1950s. Painted in a fastidious manner that emulates Spanish religious painting, the body of Christ, modelled by the athletic Hollywood stuntman Russ Saunders, hovers in front of a cross that was based on a geometric figure known as a hypercube. Gleeson has deliberately chosen this work in preference to numerous others where the naked Gala dominates the composition. In his adaptation of the motif, the male nudes writhe free from thawing ice cubes.³⁷ According to Dali, the propulsive force that keeps bodies afloat in *Crucifixion (Corpus Hypercubicus)* and other works of similar ilk is produced by the sublimation of libidinal energy.³⁸ The soaring male figures that leave curious jet trails behind them in works by Gleeson such as the triptych, *Clouds of Witness* (1966), embody an exultantly liberated desire.
Gleeson can be thought of as an anamorphic viewer, insofar as he responds to surrealism from a vantage point that is peripheral, culturally, geographically, and psychically. The anamorphosis is a form of distortion of geometric perspective that was a source of Dalí’s typical soft forms. In Dalí’s wake, it was also the subject of an influential theorisation by Jacques Lacan. The most famous historical example of anamorphosis is Hans Holbein’s Ambassadors in the National Gallery, London. From a normal viewing position directly in front of this work, the anamorphosis appears as a nondescript elongated shape at the centre of the composition. It is only when one peers at the canvas awry, from a skewed position near the edge of the frame that this stain suddenly comes into focus as a skull; something that is equivalent to a blind spot in the image becomes visible only when one vacates the normative viewing position. As Lacan insists, these viewing positions are the prerogative of a subject whose desires are organised by vision: ‘the subject in question’, he states, ‘is not that of reflexive consciousness, but that of desire.’

For our purposes, a hetero-normative subjectivity can be regarded as correlative of geometric perspective. This subject represses (scotomises) the anamorphosis that constitutes a threat to its coherence. Were it allowed to come into focus, the formless stain would disorganise the visual field, and along with it the supposition of a world arranged to be seen from a single, normative viewpoint. What I designate as the anamorphic viewer would be the subjective counterpart of a de-repression. Viewing surrealism from afar was thus not wholly a disadvantage for Gleeson: it gave him latitude to actualise certain potentials of surrealist thought and imagery that probably would not have been the case had he been part of the French surrealist group.

dreaming of italy
Gleeson dreamt of escaping to Europe, though the realisation of his wish had to be postponed due to the outbreak of war. He eventually set off in 1948 on a grand tour starting in England, that took him to Holland, Paris (where he met Breton), and on to Italy where he remained for three months, filling sketchbooks with drawings and notations as he went. Painted in Australia following his return, Italy (1951) is a complex, dream-like evocation of an Italian square in ruins and partially flooded [fig. 6]. As with a dream, the manifest content of the picture is a somewhat confusing combination of disjointed elements. A statue that could be Michelangelo’s David, a popular gay icon, lies broken at the edge of a stream. The eye travels across the torso to the middle ground where an ambiguous scenario, a scene of seduction quite possibly, is taking place. The picture is an amalgam of influences, the most obvious being Giorgio de Chirico who was the main inspiration behind surrealist dream painting. A gouache by de Chirico belonging to an acquaintance was left in Gleeson’s safekeeping during the war years. Italy may be regarded as a redeployment, through a gender substitution, of the typical Chirico-esque formula of a female sculptural fragment - often surprisingly animate, eroticised even - posed against the architectural backdrop of a collonaded piazza [fig. 7]. What Gleeson retains from de Chirico is perhaps also
the concept of ‘enigma,’ a key term in his metaphysical art, signalled in the titles de Chirico gave to many of the works. The specifically surrealist inflexion that Gleeson gives to the enigma is to connect it with sexual desire and identity. Another influence comes from the collages of Max Ernst. While staying in London, Gleeson acquired a copy of Ernst’s collage novel *Une Semaine de bonté* (1934) from the bookshop at E.L.T. Mesen’s London Gallery. In one of the images in this book, a young woman asleep dreams on, undisturbed by water that floods the bedroom lapping at the edges of her bed.

A marginal note on Gleeson’s heavily annotated copy of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is an accurate paraphrase of the Freudian model of the dream. It states: ‘The dream is the (disguised) expression of a (repressed) wish.’ Distortion is a stratagem employed by the unconscious wish to bypass a censorship that contrives to prevent it from becoming conscious. The resultant dream, according to Freud, is a compromise between these two opposed psychical currents, the unconscious wish and an opposite tendency, which ‘exercises a censorship upon this dream-wish and, by the use of that censorship, forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish.’ Dreams are devious as well as deviant. Gleeson soon realized that the painting of dreams could function in a like manner, paying respect to the censorship while giving
vent to unlawful desires. In an interview, he points to the possible utility of the surrealist-psychoanalytic equation of dream with picture under circumstances of actual censorship.⁴⁴ What he terms the 'bizarriees' in his painting, 'can be interpreted as disguises hiding the wish fulfillment in a psychologically necessary way.'⁴⁵ One must, I believe, ascribe to the female presence in Italy the function of an alibi, diverting attention from the main axis of desire, which runs into the picture at an oblique tangent defined by the prostrate body of the toppled down statue. It is evident from a worked up oil study that the female figures were added at a late stage, almost as an afterthought.

Gleeson at this time was avidly reading whatever Freud he could lay his hands on. He owned two different copies of Freud's Leonardo case study, an essay adored by the surrealists; one of them, acquired abroad, accompanied him on his travels through Europe.⁴⁶ Not only is it Freud's most extended piece of writing about art, the Leonardo case study is also a beautiful object lesson in the omnipotence of desire. ‘We cannot imagine the mental life of any human being in the formation of which sexual desire in the broadest sense - libido - did not have its share’ Freud remarks at one juncture.⁴⁷ Desire is the wellspring of Leonardo’s astonishing creativity; not just any desire, but an ideal (sublimated) homosexual libido. One strongly suspects that Freud’s account of the genesis of Leonardo’s homosexuality was of more than passing interest to Gleeson. The factors he adduces relate mainly to early childhood. As an illegitimate child, Leonardo was raised initially by his mother, Caterina, until such time as his father, a notary, married whereupon Leonardo moved to the household of his father and stepmother. Thus, in the formative early years of his life, Leonardo was fatherless, while the bond to his mother, in the absence of any hindrance, became inordinately strong. When, inevitably, Leonardo was forced to relinquish the mother whom he loved so exclusively, rather than give her up he identifies himself with her. He then proceeds to love other boys as his mother once loved him. Thus, writes Freud, Leonardo became a homosexual. The memory of the blissful infantile relationship to his mother is preserved in the famously enigmatic smile of the Mona Lisa. The situation of having a mother but no father facilitated Leonardo’s identification with the Christ child, Freud claims, and in his reading of the Virgin, Saint Anne with the Christ Child he argues that Leonardo’s two mothers, his biological mother and stepmother, are fused with each other ‘like badly condensed dream-figures.’⁴⁸

The circumstances of Gleeson’s childhood and upbringing were not altogether dissimilar. After the death of his father from influenza when Gleeson was just three years old, his mother moved in with her oldest sister and husband. He was raised in a predominantly female milieu where the main carers were his mother and various relatives. Gleeson was introduced to oil painting by a female cousin. Like Leonardo, in a sense, Gleeson had more than one mother but no father. Through his attentive reading of Freud’s case study, he perhaps hoped to discover a clue to solving the enigma of his own sexuality. The narcissus myth, key to Freud’s explanation of
Leonardo’s homosexuality, is evoked in the foreground of Italy by the torso half-submerged at the water’s edge. The split between a chaste, withdrawn maternal imago and a castrative femme fatale seems also to derive from Freud’s analysis. Freud’s contention that for Leonardo the question of origins was a more than usually intractable riddle or enigma must have been something very familiar to Gleeson. Notwithstanding the many criticisms that have been levelled at this essay, for Gleeson it would have given him access to a Renaissance where for once a gay man was centre-stage, and shown that homosexuality is compatible with the highest cultural achievements.49 How different to his own society where homosexual ‘perverts’ so-called were despised and routinely dragged through the courts and humiliated!

Among the class of typical dreams, in The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud reports one in which the dreamer appears naked and is watched by a group of onlookers.50 The formula is applicable to Gleeson’s dream painting but with one major proviso. The naked figure standing bolt upright in the mid-ground of Italy, facing away from us so that its exact identity is concealed, we readily accept as a stand-in for the artist. He participates in an exchange that entails watching but also being looked at. Additionally, in the case of a painting, one has to imagine the dream turned outwards, so that spectators take the place of the group of onlookers. Dreams of nakedness are reproductions of a childhood fantasy in which the child appears naked before one or more of its parents. They fulfil a wish to exhibit: ‘Thus dreams of being naked are dreams of exhibiting,’ writes Freud - a notion that obviously resonates with Gleeson’s choice of vocation as a painter. The exhibitionism of the child is devoid of shame, but when the wish recurs in adulthood having undergone repression it occasions an acute embarrassment in the dreamer. The child’s original indifference to the state of nakedness is preserved but is displaced onto the group of onlookers: ‘The embarrassment of the dreamer and the indifference of the onlookers offer us, when taken together, a contradiction of the kind that is so common in dreams.’51 Freud doesn’t fail to notice the analogy with the biblical Paradise, where mankind was naked and without shame until the moment of his expulsion, when shame and anxiety awoke and sexual life and the toil of cultural life began. But, he reassures us, ‘we can regain this Paradise every night in our dreams.’52 The heroic nudity of the Italian Renaissance seems to have permitted Gleeson to sidestep the vigilant censorship of the surrounding culture, and so return to that original Paradise of unabashed male nakedness.

The time Gleeson spent in Italy was a revelation and the picture that recalled it was a watershed, setting his aesthetic compass for the next twenty years or more. The isolated male nude, generally of the beefcake variety, on a background generated by the technique of decalcomania, became a recognisable trademark [fig. 8].53 Italy was the first picture for which Gleeson’s long-time partner, Frank O’Keefe, posed as a model (they were introduced in 1949). It, and countless other ‘little Franks’ that followed, thus hover indeterminately between generic images of male nudity, according to a publicly sanctioned high art discourse, and a defiant avowal
of love for a specific individual. The latter alternative throws into relief the circumlocution and symptomatic avoidance that governs the official presentation of Gleeson. The 2004 exhibition catalogue, for example, buries a passing reference to his partner in the biographical outline but the main catalogue essays obliterate all trace of the relationship.\textsuperscript{54} The evident embarrassment of the onlookers makes up for an absence of shame on the part of the dreamer, a neat reversal of the typical dream as described by Freud.

![Image of Icarus](image.png)

Fig. 8: James Gleeson. \textit{Icarus}. c.1960. Oil on board, 20.5 x 14 cms.

The time Gleeson spent in the churches and museums of Europe in 1948 equipped him with a reservoir of imagery that he has drawn upon ever since. ‘It’s all there, no visual experience is ever lost; it can be forgotten, it might never be dredged out, but it’s all stored in the reservoir of the mind and memory,’ he commented.\textsuperscript{55} In addition to the memory store constituted by his artist’s notebooks, Gleeson countered the tyranny of distance by amassing an extensive art library, a personal \textit{musée imaginaire}. With north Sydney his permanent base, Gleeson became a virtual exile in European art, which offered a refuge ring-fenced from censure by the prevailing cultural cringe. The subjects in his works see Gleeson ranging widely and eruditely within art history. As a student, he made a copy of \textit{And the Sea Gave Up the Dead Which Were In It} (Tate Britain; 1892) by Frederic Leighton, a leading light of the Aesthetic Movement. Illustrating a passage from the Book of Revelations, this Victorian potboiler is charged with an upward surging, almost erotic energy.\textsuperscript{56} It was the source of a motif that recurs in a number of later pictures by Gleeson of a male figure buried in the earth struggling to free itself, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, a biblical subject transformed into a kind of Blakean allegory of awakening sexual consciousness.\textsuperscript{57} Biblical narratives afforded him a handy vehicle for the exploration of desire, as
if to confirm Freud’s contention that when the repressed returns it does so in the place of the repression. Gleeson’s *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1953) is a case in point. The textual source is an obscurely enigmatic passage from Genesis 32: 24, ‘And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day’ - a description of a religious conversion experience plainly amenable to being read otherwise. Wrestling is a stock homoerotic subject but Gleeson’s pastiche of a Claudean landscape places the work beyond reproach within the culturally sanctioned spaces of high art. Michelangelo’s *Victory* (Palazzo Vecchio, Florence) is another source for wrestling motifs. Gleeson owned a copy of a Charlton lecture by art historian Johannes Wilde about this particular sculpture, which is quoted in the right-hand panel of his triptych *Tristran and Isolde* (1952); the statuesque nude reclining on a rock in the mid-ground of *Italy* appears also to be a paraphrase. Predictably, the Antique *Wrestlers* (Florence, Uffizi) are the butt of a ribald joke in several later collages.

**the quill and swordplay of satire**

![William Dobell. Portrait of an Artist (Joshua Smith). 1943. Oil on canvas, 107 x 76 cms. Destroyed.](image)

What followed for Gleeson was a period in which painting was eclipsed by his prolific writing. This included a regular column as a newspaper critic. He continued to write poetry and was the author of a history of Australian art as well as monographs on artist friends, most notably perhaps *William Dobell* (1964) in the Thames & Hudson ‘World of Art’ series. The dust cover states that ‘No one is better qualified to survey Dobell’s life and work than James Gleeson, the well known Australian artist and art critic and also a personal friend of Dobell.’ After Dobell died in 1970, Gleeson was appointed director of the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation in 1971 and compiled a
catalogue of the artist’s estate drawings. He delivered the inaugural Dobell memorial lecture at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1977. He has thus been instrumental in shaping Dobell’s posthumous reputation, just as in more recent years he has crafted his own legacy through generous bequests to public collections.

In 1944, Dobell was at the centre of the most celebrated controversy in the history of Australian art. Two disgruntled artists contested the award of the Archibald Prize, a prestigious annual portraiture competition, for Dobell’s portrait of fellow artist Joshua Smith [fig. 9]. In court, it was argued that a portrait must resemble the person whereas the work in question satirically distorted and exaggerated the sitter’s features - ‘a pictorial defamation of character’ was how an expert witness for the plaintiffs described it. The press, for whom the skirmish was a welcome relief from wartime reporting, gave the four-day trial wide coverage. Histories of Australian art have portrayed the event as the backlash of a conservative establishment against the moderns, though some have detected the whiff of a homosexual witch-hunt in the viciousness with which Dobell was pursued. With hindsight, the action against Dobell can be seen as equivalent to the Whistler and Wilde trials wrapped into one.

Seized upon by his adversaries, caricature is a key to Dobell’s queerness. The caricatural line deviates from the normal as it searches out the essence of an individual; it is intrinsically bent. The caricaturist accentuates difference and thus risks causing affront to a society that demanded conformity. Dobell’s portrait of Smith, recognized in court as depicting a sensitive artist type, couldn’t have diverged more sharply from the images of masculinity that circulated with heightened visibility during wartime. The wistful expression, delicate, sparrow limbs, and elongated hands might have been easily construed as effeminate or unmanly. The contrast with the hulking frame and bear paws of Billy Boy, Dobell’s other entry, is marked. Smith is the sort of character, in fact, whom Billy Boy might well have branded a poof. Was their dim recognition of this a factor in why Smith’s parents implored Dobell so insistently to part with the picture, which he refused to do fearing they would destroy it? Dobell ennobles his sitters through art historical allusions (in this respect he is like Gleeson), yet the irrepressible tendency to caricature exerts a subversive drag away from staid traditionalism. It is as if two sides of his personality, one craving for social acceptance and the other rebelling against the self-denial that entailed, are constantly at war within his work.

In his writings on the artist, Gleeson adroitly skirts the issue of Dobell’s sexuality, which remained a closely guarded secret during his lifetime. Even as he lingers over the sensuous treatment of male subjects, the overtly homoerotic Sleeping Greek (1936) for instance, his prose is tactfully tight-lipped. However, the repeated stress on Dobell’s extreme ‘sensitivity’ cries out to be decoded. Gleeson writes:
Dobell, the artist, … was able to protect himself with the swordplay of satire…he used satire to keep the sight from reaching a mortal part. It was as protective as a moat to a castle or a quill to a porcupine.\

An entire chapter is devoted to the trial episode. Gleeson cites extensively from court transcripts revealing Dobell’s painfully drawn out cross-examination by hectoring and inquisitorial counsel. And he details its ruinous effects upon Dobell’s health and career. In the aftermath he suffered a debilitating attack of eczema; he also virtually stopped painting for several years and became a semi-recluse living in the provincial mining town of Newcastle. Though the award of the prize to Dobell was upheld, it was a pyrrhic victory and a lesson that the forces of reaction could not easily be vanquished. The very public exposure of a fellow artist whose sexuality was in all probability known to Gleeson must have taught him an object lesson at an early, formative stage in his career and underlined his determination to stay out of the glare of public controversy.

Another arresting passage in the book concerns Dobell’s The Dead Landlord (1936), ‘a strange and disturbing picture’ that was based on a real incident. The picture also served as a starting-point for a ‘brilliant and imaginative’ play by Patrick White, The Ham Funeral (1947). White met Dobell in Sydney and they talked about the picture. Beneath Gleeson’s tight-lipped reporting of the facts, one is left to wonder what meanings and shared understandings might have circulated in conversations between Gleeson, Dobell and White. Dobell was living in London at the time in a house owned by a cabinetmaker and his wife. He was summoned by the landlady, in a frantic state after the landlord had slumped from his habitual chair to the floor, stone dead. Dobell - who had never touched a dead body before - and the landlady between them manhandled the landlord’s corpulent frame onto the marital bed and laid it out. Afterwards, the landlady, in a state of shock, sat at a mirror in the bedroom in the presence of the body absent-mindedly brushing her hair. In Dobell’s picture, the relative bulk of the landlady and landlord are reversed; he is stretched out horizontally while she stands naked with her back to the viewer. He emits a phosphorous glow and is already a shrunken ghost of his living self. Dobell uses his satirist’s brush to cut the dead patriarch down to size, cruelly exaggerating the height of his jagged lower jaw and placing at the summit of his rounded belly a delicate bow in his pyjama cord - a displaced metonym for the now quiescent appendage. The landlady on the other hand bulges with Rubensian fleshiness and erotic energy that his death has somehow unleashed.

White’s play frames the scene in a spare plot whose main protagonists are the landlord, his wife (Alma Lusty) and the lodger, a young man. The landlady repeatedly refers to the young man by the name she had given to her only child who died in infancy, a Freudian slip that underlines the Oedipal triangulation of the plot. The landlord is sullen and uncouth: a putrefying ‘mound of uncommunicative flesh’ in the young man’s words. White’s play is premised on an antithesis between the young man, a sensitive poet type, who can be understood as a proxy for the author, and the landlord Will Lusty, a grotesque caricature of a normative hetero-masculinity.
His authority as symbolic patriarch is further mocked and eroded by the wounding revelation that he did not father the landlady’s one child. There is no suggestion that the landlady had any active part in her husband’s death, though it is intimated that she may on occasion have wished him dead, reflecting casually: ‘Oo ‘asn’t done a murder…once or twice…in their imagination?’ The actual death scene adheres closely to the real incident as related by Dobell. In the immediate aftermath of his demise, the landlady and the young man experience an odd cathartic feeling of elation and there is an incestuous episode in which she - Mrs Lusty - attempts to seduce the young man who fends her off, disgusted. ‘I’m damned if I’ll wear the landlord’s old glove!’ he cries out as he struggles free of her suffocating embrace. The landlady determines there will be a ham funeral and dispatches the young man to summon the relatives. At the funeral wake everyone stuffs him- or herself with ham, a kind of grotesque totem meal in which the hated primal father is devoured in effigy. The death and destruction of the symbolic father is not so much an oedipal as an anti-oedipal motif. The play ends with the young man moving out, apparently cured of his neurotic incapacity to act by the landlord’s death. White’s play draws out the emotional ambivalences lurking in Dobell’s ‘strange and disturbing’ picture, to which we may infer Gleeson also was attuned.

Fig. 10: James Gleeson. Soirée Apocalyptica. 1984. Oil on canvas, 173 x 230 cms. Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
apocalypse now

In August 1983, Gleeson embarked on the production of a distinctively new body of work in a remarkable creative outpouring that has continued virtually unabated up to the present, now comprising more than 400 paintings. Paintings in this justly celebrated ‘late’ manner are larger and more abstract than anything he had produced hitherto, and despite the rebarbative nature of their imagery, proved far more acceptable to public institutions and collectors than the small-scale pictures of the male nude with inescapable homoerotic connotations that had been his staple up until that point [fig. 10]. Indeed, it is probable that without the transformation that occurred in the 1980s Gleeson would not have attained the reputation that he now has as, in the eyes of some, Australia’s greatest living painter. Scarcely a public collection exists that, through a combination of the artist’s generosity and purchases, does not now have at least one of Gleeson’s works. The crowning moment of the belated institutional recognition was the retrospective he was granted in 2004 at Australia’s two ‘national’ galleries, in Melbourne and Canberra.

Explanations for Gleeson’s new departure in 1983 are several and over-determined: it has been noted frequently by the artist and others that he relinquished a number of demanding public commitments in 1982, retiring in order to return full-time to painting. Significantly, his close association with the Watters Gallery in Sydney also began around this time. However such factors are largely extraneous to the question of how and why the manner in which he chose to paint altered so drastically. (Though it is clear from talking to his dealer that he did not wholly approve of the formulaic ‘little Franks’ that were Gleeson’s dominant mode before 1983, he denied ever influencing the artist with his opinions.) Here I propose one possible explanation, exploring in an admittedly speculative vein a connection between the apocalyptic and sublime tenor of Gleeson’s surrealist painting in the 1980s with the unfolding AIDS epidemic in that decade. In doing so, I will be questioning the assumptions that generally go along with the notion of a ‘late’ style, in particular the tendency to abstract the work from any meaningful relation to specific artistic, social or political contexts.

Sydney, where Gleeson lives, was at the epicentre of the AIDS epidemic in Australia. The city has a large metropolitan gay community similar to groups among whom the disease was first detected in the US in 1981. Australia’s first reported case was diagnosed in a Sydney man in 1982, though the information was not publicly disclosed until May 5, 1983. Prior to that, there had been only sparse reports in the media of a new mystery illness affecting homosexuals in the US, however from mid-1983 AIDS coverage escalated, and rapidly became the medical story of the decade. As more was known about the disease, alarm only increased. The suspected viral agent was discovered in 1984 and antibody tests for infected status soon followed. These showed a long latency period during which a carrier could unwittingly pass on the lethal contagion to others. Once a person was infected there was little that could be done to halt the progress of a disease where mortality rates approached 100 percent, prompting novelist Will Self’s
description of AIDS in his recent novel Dorian as a cellular Auschwitz.\(^{66}\) Invisibility, combined with an infinite capacity to replicate and spread certain death, marked out AIDS during the first decade.\(^{67}\)

From the outset, the disease was firmly linked in the public mind with homosexuality. Initially, it received the sobriquet of the ‘gay plague,’ which stuck long after it became evident that other groups were affected. It has been remarked with reference to Australian newspapers that more was written about homosexuality in the first five years of the epidemic than in the previous 100 years. The homosexual lifestyle and attendant sexual practices were placed under a harsh media spotlight. Homosexuality emerged from the closet to which mainstream Australian opinion had consigned it, but in a ghastly dance of death. On the basis of a sample of Sydney gay and bisexual men, a taskforce established by the Federal government estimated the number of men in that city infected with the virus at anywhere between 20 and 50,000. Announced publicly in January 1985, it foretold an impending holocaust in Sydney’s gay community. When in 1987-88 the government shifted the emphasis of preventive education to the dangers of heterosexual transmission, it did not dislodge the perception that AIDS in Australia was principally a disease of gays.\(^{68}\) (Indeed, the campaign rebounded in the form of accusations that government policy had been hijacked by a militant gay lobby almost as devious as the virus itself that wanted to increase resources by spuriously portraying AIDS as a hazard to the general community.) The persecution of gays markedly increased in the 1980s, threatening to turn back whatever gains had been made in the previous decade. In Sydney, the Mardi Gras, an annual parade and festive celebration of gay rights, was targeted for its unseemliness. In 1985, the populist New South Wales premier, Neville Wran, introduced draconian legislation for the compulsory notification of HIV positivity, a move opposed by medical experts that trampled on the civil rights of an embattled minority in order to assuage the concerns of a presumptively heterosexual electorate. Ambiguity in the medical terminology of suspected cases, it is plausibly argued, turned victims of the disease into suspects; in three of the states, sexual acts between men were still illegal so that illness was tantamount to an admission of guilt, while the description of certain categories of the afflicted, children and haemophiliacs, as innocent victims, conveyed the inference that others, notably gays and IV drug users, were not.

My concern is with an AIDS imaginary, manifested in media reactions to the unfolding calamity, that shared features of an aesthetic discourse of the sublime; and with a possible relationship between this AIDS imaginary and Gleeson’s painting in the same period where the sublime is the dominant mode. The sublime, according to Edmund Burke, whose A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful of 1757 is the most useful account for my purposes, is a paradoxical species of ‘delight in terror’ brought about by the contemplation of things that are infinitely vast. Burke stipulates that in order to produce a feeling of delight, which he defined as a state of relative pleasure due to the removal of pain, terror must
be modulated by being experienced from a position of safety: ‘Terror is a passion which…produces delight [only] when it does not press too close,’ he writes. And furthermore, for Burke, who allows that great calamities can be a source of the sublime, ‘It is absolutely necessary my life should be out of any imminent hazard before I can take a delight in the sufferings of others, real or imaginary, or indeed in any thing else from any cause whatsoever.’ Terror experienced vicariously from a safe vantage corresponds to the situation of a mainstream audience to whom the mass media coverage of AIDS was in the main directed. The implied reader or viewer in most instances was not someone who was either a victim or potentially so; they were always other. It is relevant to note the operative terms danger and safety in Burke’s analytic of the sublime; this was mirrored in AIDS discourse in emerging definitions of risky versus safe sex.

Fig. 11: Scientific American, vol. 259, no 4, October 1988. ‘What Science Knows About AIDS.’

A convergence with the sublime as a mode of mainstream aesthetic consumption is well shown by the so-called iceberg advert that aired in UK cinemas in 1987 as part of the government’s AIDS prevention campaign. The iceberg advert simply but effectively tapped into the cultural savvy of a cinema-going public, familiar with Hollywood disaster movies, to indicate a catastrophe just about to happen. The idea is that what one sees is just the tip of the iceberg. In Burke’s judgment, obscurity and lack of visual clarity, especially when combined with vastness of scale, conduces to an experience of the sublime. Sublimity is a quality associated with things that are boundless, infinite, and so exceed our capacity to visualise them. Kant, concurring with Burke on this matter, writes: ‘the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness.’
for Burke himself, ‘When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes.’ Another aspect of AIDS media coverage in the first decade, that recalls Kant’s mathematical sublime, was the series of direly apocalyptic forecasts of numbers of deaths and resultant impact on national health systems and economies. A special issue of Scientific American in 1988 called ‘What Science Knows About AIDS’ [fig. 11] contained a graph showing that the cumulative caseload worldwide was doubling every six months, an exponential rate of increase that was set to continue. ‘To things of great dimensions,’ writes Burke, ‘if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater.’

AIDS was thus constituted by the Australian mass media as sublime, and, ironically for a lethal contagion, as a mode of vicarious enjoyment. Burke, in his remarkably disabused account of human sympathy, reflects that: ‘There is no spectacle we so eagerly pursue, as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity; so that whether the misfortune is before our eyes, or whether they are turned back to it in history, it always touches with delight.’ Before reacting with outrage to such a callous suggestion, it is worth recalling that the Australian public’s sympathy for the marginal groups most severely hit by AIDS did have its limits. Neil Blewett, Federal Minister for Health during this period, recounts tellingly: ‘It was, I suspect, only partly a joke when a state ministerial colleague commented to me, “Look, mate, there are no votes in buggers, druggies and prozzies!”’ Well-known queer basher, the Reverend Fred Nile of the Festival for Light (elected as a New South Wales MP on the strength of his opinions), advocated the quarantining of all homosexuals as a response to the epidemic, a sort of Christian fundamentalist version of the Final Solution.

**the rose and the (retro)virus**

What evidence is there for these circumstances having impinged upon Gleeson? One might better ask how he could have avoided being affected. First of all, we have his remark about the rose and the virus uttered in 1986 at the height of the media and public frenzy over AIDS and repeated again almost verbatim on two other occasions as recently as 2003, as if by repeating himself he hoped eventually to be heard. ‘A rose and a virus are equally parts of nature,’ he said. ‘They are just bits of the cosmos.’ Gleeson made this comment by way of justifying the element of ugliness that an interviewer saw as posing an obstacle to the public’s ready enjoyment of the new works. The conversation was not framed in terms of the beautiful and the sublime, though it is tempting to relate Gleeson’s antithesis of rose and virus to these aesthetic categories. Beauty, which Burke allies with love as a socialised coding of desire, is equivalent to the rose. The sublime, on the other hand, pertains to pain and danger, threats to the self-preservation instincts, of which the greatest threat plainly is death. Translated into the psychoanalytic terms that Gleeson knew well, it represents a beyond of the pleasure principle and in opposition to the
cloyingly conventional symbol of the rose, the (retro-) virus conjures a dangerously un-socialised, perverse desire - at root, Leo Bersani argues, augmented by the fearful spectre of passive anal sex.77 Interestingly, Burke’s evocation of desire in its naked instinctual form, as distinct from its conventional cloaking with the beautiful, converges asymptotically with the sublime. He writes: ‘The passion caused by beauty, which I call love, is different from desire, though desire may sometimes operate along with it; but it is to this latter that we must attribute…violent and tempestuous passions.’78

Apart from the immediate topical reference of the viral analogy, it ought to be recalled that Gleeson’s father had died in the influenza epidemic that followed WW1. It is now believed that Spanish flu, as it was known, was caused by a virulent strain of avian influenza that transferred to humans. Upwards of 25 million people worldwide succumbed to the illness in a space of about six months, including, as the artist later learned, Guillaume Apollinaire, who had coined the word surrealism. Gleeson was only three years old when his father died, leaving him to be raised by his mother and an aunt. Through his reading of Freud’s Leonardo case, as we saw, Gleeson probably accepted the father’s absence as a critical factor in his own psychosexual development. He might therefore have connected the event of his father’s death due to a virus - a chance occurrence, but one fateful for his later orientation - with another virus that was selectively killing off queers. Other remarks by Gleeson in interviews around this time allude to a prevailing mood of ominous portent that we are led to understand conditioned his painting, a climate of foreboding reflected in the choice of titles. The title of one of the earliest works in his new manner is taken from some lines of W.H. Auden’s poem The Witnesses (1932-34) that had stuck in his mind after he read them many years ago: ‘The sky is darkening like a stain; / Something is going to fall like rain, / And it won’t be flowers.’ Destruction typically is imagined as raining down from the heavens, especially so in the case of an illness that many at the time regarded as divine retribution. Gleeson also makes some quite telling remarks about El Greco’s View of Toledo, a picture he incorporates as a visual quotation in the background of several of his 1980s pictures. The artist notes that this work with its disquietingly electric atmosphere was painted as heretics were being burnt under the Spanish Inquisition, a climate of sinister oppression indirectly registered by El Greco in what Gleeson regards as the greatest landscape painting of all time. ‘I felt the world today is in a predicament not unlike that,’ he adds laconically.79 For heretical religious beliefs we could arguably substitute a minority sexual orientation.

Gleeson is a painter and poet, not a polemicist. For reasons as much generational as anything else, it is not surprising that his work had little in common with the kind of art explicitly confronting the AIDS crisis that was exhibited in a groundbreaking show curated at the Australian National Gallery in Canberra in 1993.80 In Gleeson’s case we have rather to read between the lines, and must accept that our hypotheses are only that. It might be objected that although he was Sydney-based and therefore situated close to the eye of the cyclone, Gleeson was not
personally at risk; the whirlwind could have passed over the night sky leaving him to awaken at the end of the 1980s unscathed and his art wholly unaffected. My belief that this was not so depends in part on the conflation of AIDS with homosexuality per se, an equation of death and desire in which Gleeson was ineluctably implicated.

The 1980s and more recent pictures are for the most part set beside the seashore. Their immediate inspiration was rock pools at Perigian beach in Queensland where Gleeson took his summer holidays in the early 1980s but they also draw upon cherished memories of the beach at Terrigal near Gosford where he grew up. As noted before, this liminal site is especially invested for Gleeson, a topographical margin that indexes his own subjective marginality and peripheral sexuality. It is a setting, at once physical and psychical, for what appears like the smouldering aftermath of some untold disaster, strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of a shipwreck or plane crash: a sort of apocalypse now. A picture in the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery is titled Soirée apocalyptica, while Preparations at Patmos, arguably the most impressive of the 1980s pictures, references the Book of Revelations, written by St. John the Evangelist whose vision of the apocalypse came to him as he slept in a cave on the Greek island of Patmos. The sky and clouds in these compositions congeal to form nightmarish visions that assail the beholder, reinterpreting a visual iconography of the apocalypse with which we can assume Gleeson was
It is probable, for instance, that he knew Albrecht Dürer's famous series of engravings of *The Apocalypse of St. John* (1496-98) [fig. 12]. William Blake and Gustave Doré, sources of inspiration for Gleeson and material for his collages at different moments, both illustrated the biblical Apocalypse.

Gleeson remarked upon the importance of J. M. W. Turner for his late work, an obvious source for the sublime landscape component. He also refers in several pictures to Arnold Böcklin’s *Isle of the Dead* (1883), a cult image of fin-de-siècle decadence whose title resonates curiously with alarmist newspaper headlines when AIDS first reached the island continent. The black empty silhouettes of cypresses and craggy outcrops, and petrified stillness, seem to have inspired in Gleeson an interest in the expressive possibilities of negative shapes. For Burke, all privations - among which he names ‘Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude, and Silence’ - are terrible and consequently productive of the sublime. From the latter half of the 1980s Gleeson began integrating collage fragments culled from various sources into the charcoal preparatory drawings that precede the pictures. Kolenberg and Ryan, curators of the exhibition *James Gleeson: Drawings for Paintings*, consider these collage elements to be chosen solely for their textures, however I see something more than that in the frequent inclusion of photomicrographs of insect eyes and limbs. These magnified images contribute to the ambiguity of scale that is an important aspect of the finished paintings. For Burke, the sublime pertained chiefly to things that are infinitely large; the iconography of AIDS conversely has taught us to recognise an awesome power of the infinitesimally small.

The picture that I have painted of a more than incidental relation to a set of circumstances that arose at a precisely datable moment in the early 1980s is complicated by the fact that the sketches upon which the pictures in Gleeson's new manner are based can be shown to antedate them. Kolenberg and Ryan state that: 'Having built up a body of drawings since 1977, Gleeson turned to them in his search for studies suitable for paintings. This explains why some drawings precede some paintings by several years.' Were it correct, and luckily it’s not, their analysis would stand to invalidate my argument because the drawings, of which the paintings are fairly exact transcriptions, could in principle have been executed before AIDS had appeared. In fact, the key transitional drawings depicting the rock pools that are the inspiration for the majority of the pictures produced since 1983 were not done until the summer of 1982-83, and again the following year when Gleeson took his annual holidays on the Queensland coast. From 1977 through 1979, Gleeson made an extensive series of drawings on biblical and classical narrative subjects marked by a frank eroticism and violence that is without parallel in his oeuvre. It is evident that he was responding chiefly to Picasso, whose death in 1973 was followed by a wave of reassessments, in particular the distorted, metamorphic iconography of the late 1930s, such as the polypoid *Dream and Lie of Franco*. This is the only aspect of the 1970s drawings that feeds into the 1980s pictures where a propensity for metamorphosis permits molluscs, anemones,
conch shells and so forth to be read simultaneously as human flesh - for those with eyes to see, these pictures are awash with an orgiastic profusion of orifices, sphincters, penises and bodily part objects of all description. An unstoppable capacity for mutation and metamorphosis, these monstrous attributes of the AIDS virus are uncannily replicated by Gleeson’s surrealist painting.

**on Gleeson’s abjection**

The sublime, as noted earlier, is dependent upon the subject maintaining a safe distance from the putative source of danger. This distanced delight in terror I proposed as the dominant mode of mass media packaging and presentation of AIDS. In Gleeson, on the other hand, one finds an unstable oscillation that is partly a product of ambiguity of scale and viewing distance between a sublime distancing - the Turner-esque deep vistas - and an uneasy, visceral over-proximity. His painting constantly risks toppling over from sublime terror into the merely horrible and gruesome.

Burke asserts that ‘when danger and pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible.’ For Kant, as for Burke, disgust is aroused when the object of our contemplation presses too close, when representation fails to keep it at arm’s length. Kant allows that things that normally would be ugly or displeasing were they encountered in nature - ‘Furies, diseases, devastations of war, and the like’ - can be fitting, even beautiful, subjects for art. However, our enjoyment is abolished, he says, when ‘the object is represented as insisting, as it were, upon our enjoying it, while we still set our face against it’; in that circumstance, ‘the artificial representation of the object is no longer distinguishable from the nature of the object itself in our sensation.’

G. E. Lessing’s famous essay on the Laocoön contains some pertinent observations on the subject of disgust that perhaps had a bearing upon Kant. He likewise sees in disgust a short-circuiting of representation (‘Feelings of disgust are always real and never imitations’) and associates disgust principally with the senses of taste, smell, and touch where there is direct physical contiguity with the object producing the sensation. Sight, which maintains a safe distance, only produces disgust indirectly by recalling the repugnance caused by the object to our senses of taste, smell or touch.

The ugliness discerned by the critic cannot be attributed to any momentary lapse in good taste on Gleeson’s part, nor to a lack of felicity or skill. Instead, I would argue that it is subjectively determined and structurally integral to the work. It reflects the inherent ambiguity of his position as both exempted from any immediate risk of AIDS and yet, as a gay man, implicated by the ‘epidemic of signification’ that surrounded it. AIDS intensified an already existing abjection of homosexuality. Journalistic accounts of the transmission of the virus, while purporting to be clinical or neutral, were invariably tinged with disgust. The bodily fluids - blood or semen - that pass the virus from one body to another, the greater or lesser porosity of oral or anal mucosa to the deadly virus, the body’s immune defences infiltrated and finally overwhelmed, the emaciation and stigmata (KS, herpes) that mark the inexorable progression: these words and pictures
relayed incessantly by the media conjured up a terrifying phantasmagoria of horror. The notorious Grim Reaper advert shown on prime time Australian TV in 1987 personified AIDS in a ghoulish figure who many took to be an HIV-infected man, portrayed as a threat to the fundamental unit of social life, the bourgeois family. For those who by the mere fact of their sexual preferences were crudely conflated with a lethal contagion, it was impossible to look upon the unfolding calamity with equanimity. It was to recognise oneself (and one’s desires) in the monstrous and in abjection.

In Gleeson’s case, it would be more accurate to speak of a resurgence of apocalyptic and abject subject matter in the 1980s rather than their first appearance. It is possible that The Sower (1944) and The Citadel (1945), works that respond to the horrors of war, reflect an influence of New Apocalypticism, an English literary movement that gained a following in Australia. The chief Australian exponent of New Apocalypticism was the Adelaide-based surrealist, Ivor Francis. A mood of apocalyptic despair is also evinced in Albert Tucker’s The Futile City, the subject of a lengthy commentary in Gleeson’s 1940 essay ‘What is Surrealism?’ Of undoubted importance for the strand of abjection in Gleeson’s work was his encounter with a text by a key surrealist

Fig. 13: James Gleeson. The Citadel. 1945. Oil on composition board, 182.5 x 122 cms. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
precursor, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, published in 1869 under a pseudonym by Isidore Ducasse (alias le Comte de Lautréamont), an obscure author who was largely forgotten until rediscovered by the surrealists. It is difficult to convey, except in Ducasse’s own trenchant prose, the visceral character of the imagery that positively brims over in this extraordinary book; nor the affinity with the gothic excess of Gleeson’s pictorial imagination, as epitomised by *The Citadel* [fig. 13] and again in his work of the 1980s:

I am filthy. Lice gnaw at me. Swine, when they look at me, vomit. The scabs and sores of leprosy have scaled off my skin, which is coated with yellowish pus. I know not river water nor the clouds’ dew. From my nape, as from a dungheap, an enormous toadstool with umbelliferous peduncles sprouts. Seated on a shapeless chunk of furniture, I have not moved a limb for four centuries. My feet have taken root in the soil forming a sort of perennial vegetation - not yet quite plant-like though no longer flesh - as far as my belly, and filled with vile parasites. My heart, however, is still beating. But how could it beat if the decay and effluvia of my carcass (I dare say body) did not abundantly feed it?

Who is speaking here? We must at least entertain the possibility of an elision between the artist or writer (Ducasse) and this narrative ‘I’ - the possibility that he himself may be speaking from the impossible place of the ab-ject (meaning ‘to cast out’, ‘to expel’). My contention is that Gleeson similarly identifies with this position of a radically excluded subject - both during the 1940s when wartime paranoia heightened the abjection of homosexuality, and once more in the 1980s when fears of hideous decay and death-infected life were inevitable corollaries of a pervasive cultural equation of death and homoerotic desire. The nightmarish facial disfigurement that dominated *The Citadel* returns once again in the upper left corner of *Soirée Apocalyptica*, a work where an imaginative sense of bodily dissolution is powerfully conveyed.

The collapse of the sublime into the unmitigated horror of abjection is manifested as a viscous miasma filling and occluding the pictorial space. It swallows up the human body. Forms have the blubbery consistency of jellyfish, the sliminess of molluscs. Boundaries are leaky. Patches of colour, running a full gamut from livid pink flesh, to the pallor of deathliness, though to the garish, overripe hues of putrefaction, seep into and contaminate one another. Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, remarks pertinently that the abject is ‘death infecting life.’ Are we to regard Gleeson’s grandiose vision of universal liquefaction, so redolent of Lautréamont’s ‘kingdom of viscosity,’ as devoid of any external reference, as a gratuitous product of artistic licence? Or, rather, as the creation of a powerful metonym for the dreadful virus that put lives on hold, and simultaneously transformed the terms in which desire and the body were imaginable?

**the unpresentable**

In concluding, I wish to return briefly to the omnipotence of desire that I claimed as an abiding article of Gleeson’s surrealist faith. It is abundantly obvious that surrealism, notwithstanding what
is known of the attitudes of its leader, André Breton, offered Gleeson a sanctuary and a visual iconography attuned to personal concerns with identity and sexuality - a lifeline that kept him afloat in a hostile sea of intolerance. But what of desire in the 1980s and beyond? The quasi-abstraction of the late period is applauded by Gleeson’s most ardent supporters, for whom it eclipses the scandal of homosexuality represented by his output in the 1960s and 1970s, allowing them to proclaim instead a universality that the designation of great artist supposedly demands. My own view is that the late work does not represent any abandonment or backtracking on Gleeson’s part, though it does register the altered conditions of possibility for the representation of homosexual desire brought about by AIDS. The sublime can help us to appreciate how this can be so. In two articles, both of them published in the early 1980s, Jean-François Lyotard expounds a reading of the avant-garde that hinges upon the sublime. Lyotard proposes a crisis of representability in modernity wherein the task of painting becomes ‘to present the fact that the unpresentable exists.’ His analysis entails a particular slant on the sublime that privileges Kant’s concept of a negative presentation of the infinite. Kant, he notes, cites ‘formlessness, the absence of form’ and ‘abstraction’ as possible indices to the un-presentable. Hence, painting that addresses itself to this problematic will renounce figurative representation. It is probably no more than a coincidence that Lyotard propounds this idea just as Gleeson was about to make his own turn to the sublime, a transition that in his case was inflected by the circumstances I have described. For Gleeson, in the era of AIDS, the un-presentable object of which art affords a negative presentation in the guise of formlessness or abstraction, is desire itself. While appearing to jettison the human figure that had dominated his oeuvre until the 1980s, he nevertheless remains faithful to the original impulse that drew him to surrealism.

The first part of this article arose from a lecture at the University of Melbourne in August 2004. The second was presented at the conference, ‘Terra Incognita: Surrealism and the Pacific,’ at Melbourne University in September 2006. I am grateful to Anthony White for the invitation to speak on both occasions.

1 André Breton, What is Surrealism?, translated by David Gascoyne (London: Faber and Faber, 1936 [1934]).


3 The explanation for this neglect lies in the historiography of surrealist studies. A first generation of scholars were overtly hagiographic in their piety towards Breton and uncritical of, or simply blind to, problems of surrealist eroticism. Xavière Gauthier’s Surréalisme et sexualité (1971),
signalled the start of a new wave of scholarship inspired by feminism which pushed to the forefront the treatment of the body and sexuality and drew attention to the plight of women artists in the movement. The situation of male homosexual artists and writers, whose marginality was in some respects analogous to that of women, was not, however, a concern of these authors. The one main exception to the blanket silence on the gay and lesbian issue has been in writing about Claude Cahun, albeit largely within a biographical perspective. The continued prestige of feminist approaches, or alternatively the October group’s avoidance of sexuality, has meant that surrealist studies has been tardy in responding to queer theory and to a growing body of historical writing on homosexuality. A forthcoming study by the author, Dawn Ades, and Jonathan Katz aims to redress this situation.


5 This project was formulated to counter an oppressive silence regarding a desire that ‘dare not speak its name’ that I saw as complicit with a still prevalent homophobia in Australia.

6 James Gleeson interview. In Renee Free, James Gleeson: Images from the Shadows (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996), 44


8 A Comment no. 18 (January 1944), n.p.

9 James Gleeson, ‘What is Surrealism?’ Art in Australia (November 25th, 1940), 27-30. One presumes that Gleeson had access to David Gascoyne’s 1936 English translation of André Breton’s expository essay, Qu’est-ce que le surréalisme? (1934).


11 Herbert Read et al., Surrealism (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 85.


13 Bernard Smith, Place, Taste and Tradition (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1945).

14 Smith considers Gleeson’s and surrealism’s preoccupation with the individual psyche to be indulgent and politically retrograde. ‘What links Gleeson with the Surrealists is the spirit of defeatism and pessimism….In this respect, he is part of that cultural tradition, among whom Eliot and Joyce may be numbered, who have seen in the destruction of a system of social relations the destruction of civilization itself.’ Smith, Place, Taste and Tradition, 215.

15 Daily Telegraph, February 1, 1944.

16 See Geoffrey Serle, ‘The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism,’ Meanjin 24 (1965): 149-58. Serle comments that ‘after the war the digger joined the bushman as a second national stereotype or idealised Australian type.’ He documents the hijacking of the digger legend by conservative elements that press-ganged it into the service of a right-wing version of Australian nationalism. Writing in the Menzies era, he remarks that ‘the R.S.L remains today, for example, in its rigid attitude on White Australia, a major bulwark of right-wing conservatism.’

17 Interview with Lou Klepac, November 1986. In James Gleeson, Landscape Out of Nature (Sydney: Beagle Press, 1987). Contrasting outward-looking Sydney, Gleeson remarked that ‘its artists are more likely to think of themselves as part of an international community.’


Gleeson, ‘What is Surrealism?’, 27.

In early photographs Gleeson cuts a dapper figure. He actually looks rather like Dalí as a young man before he acquired the trademark pronged moustache.

Salvador Dalí, *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, edited and translated by Haim Finkelstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 191. Dalí was vindicated in his opinion by the first of Freud’s *Three Essays on Sexuality*, concerning sexual aberrations. Freud remarks that the most repulsive perversions are equivalent to an idealisation of the sexual instinct. And, ironically echoing the Bretonian surrealist faith in the omnipotence of desire, he writes: ‘The omnipotence of love is perhaps never more strongly proved than in such of its aberrations as these.’ Sigmund Freud, ‘Three Essays on Sexuality’ (1905), in *Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 7 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), 75.

Clinging to ‘his illusory surrealism of a polymorphous pervert,’ Dalí claimed he met with the same moral strictures from the surrealists as with his own family: ‘They tolerated to a certain extent my scatological elements…Blood they allowed me. I could add a little bit of shit. But shit on its own was not allowed. I was authorised to represent the sexual organs, but not anal fantasies. Any anus was taken in very bad part.’ Salvador Dalí, *Diary of a Genius* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1966).


The winning entry by Max Ernst employs the decalcomania technique of which Gleeson would subsequently make extensive use.

The American catalogue, which Gleeson owned, states that the exhibition would be travelling until the end of 1947. Also in his library is a flyer from the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels where the competition entries were shown from June 1947. Gleeson could have seen this show if for some reason it had over-run. He certainly had the opportunity to see plenty of Flemish and other examples, as well as Grunewald’s Isenheim altarpiece in Colmar. He also had a copy of Gustave Flaubert’s *Temptation of St. Anthony*.

Agapitos/Wilson collection. A group of drawn studies in the Art Gallery of New South Wales (134.1993) appear to be for a different work that may not have been executed. The sheet includes this written description by Gleeson: ‘St. Anthony at the base of a swirling funnel of terrifically distorted human, organic and rock forms - like looking down into the vortex of a maelstrom.’

The *Temptation of St. Anthony* was the subject of a picture by Sidney Nolan in 1952 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne). The accent of his version is upon the strangeness of the Australian landscape and its wildlife, seemingly descended from Bosch, with the ascetic saint in the desert a stand-in for the artist.


Ross Moore in ‘A Certain Homosexual Salience,’ analyses Gleeson with reference to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s epistemology of the closet. Arguably, this is less applicable to Gleeson than to some other artists of his generation, such as Dobell. In Gleeson’s case, it is more a question of an open secret that he never sought to deny.

This is borne out by the list of works by Freud and the dates of the respective editions in his personal library. By contrast, the conspicuous absence of any Jung puts paid to certain fanciful interpretations of his work. The following information is extracted from a catalogue compiled by Shar Jones: Leonardo da Vinci: a Psychosexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence (1932); New introductory lectures on psycho-analysis (1937); The Psychopathology of Everyday Life (1938); Totem and Taboo (1938); The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud (1938); Civilization, War and Death: Selections from Three Works (1939); Moses and Montheism (1940); Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1942); The Future of an Illusion (1943); Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1945); Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety (1945); The Interpretation of Dreams (1945); An Autobiographical Study (1946); The Ego and the Id (1947); Leonardo da Vinci: A Study in Psychosexuality (1947).


James Gleeson, ‘What is Surrealism?,’ Art in Australia, no. 81, November 25th, 1940, 30.

Gleeson’s explanation of The Trap is couched in terms of the sensuous body’s escape from the restrictions imposed by reason and logic, the five nudes entrapped within the cubes representing the five senses. See his interview with Renee Free in James Gleeson. Images From the Shadows, 39.

From their reading of the Leonardo case (discussed below), Gleeson and Dalí would both have been aware of Freud’s view of sublimated energy as desexualised homosexual libido.


The experience of the queer subject is split between these two incommensurable positionings, one valorised by the dominant straight culture as the only position from which the world shall be intelligible.

A page from one of these notebooks lists his travel itinerary:
22.12.47 - 2.1.48 England Stays at Budleigh Salterton
7.5.48 - 10.5.48 - Paris Meets André Breton.

For more on the implications of the concept of enigma, see Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, Caravaggio’s Secrets (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). Bersani and Dutoit invoke the notion of an ‘enigmatic signifier’ that is constitutive of the unconscious, desire and subjectivity. They argue that Caravaggio stages this psychoanalytic conception of the subject. By way of a critique of attempts to pin down the artist as homosexual, their account emphasises an unknowable, unfathomable dimension that his painting gestures towards. It may well be fruitful to think about Gleeson’s work in like terms - terms that are moreover consonant with his own resistance to reductive labelling. As discussed below, the enigma is a prominent theme in Freud’s presentation of Leonardo.


Interview with Renee Free, in James Gleeson: Images from the Shadows (Craftsman House, 1993), 43.


Gleeson’s guides to the Italian Renaissance also included Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds, critics allied with the Aesthetic Movement who preceded Freud in the path outlined here.

Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 340-45.

Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 341.

Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, 343.

Physical culture magazines were evidently a source of his imagery. Kenneth Dutton, The Perfectable Body: The Western Ideal of Physical Development (London: Cassell, 1995), refers to publications in which bodybuilding was a pretext for erotic delectation as ‘transitional’ between early homoerotic photography and overtly gay magazines of the 1970s and later.

See James Gleeson, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2004.

James Gleeson interview with Joe Eisenberg (22.7.98).

Revelation 20, 13: ‘And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done.’

See, for example, Siamese Moon (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; 1952) and Clouds of Witness (Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; 1966).

This putative agenda was explored in a 2001 exhibition at the University of Newcastle’s School of Fine Arts Gallery, Painting Men: A Different Perspective on Dobell. Curator Ross Woodrow concludes that: ‘What held the press interested over four days of hearing was the potential[ly] scandalous relationship between Dobell and Smith.’

James Gleeson, William Dobell (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), 47. On page 43, he writes: ‘Gifted with a rare and sparkling sense of humour that prevents him from indulging in the luxuries of self-pity he is none the less endowed with a sensitivity so acute that it almost wrecked his career on a number of occasions.’ The euphemistic references to Dobell’s sensitivity are all that Gleeson will permit himself.

Gleeson, William Dobell, 54, 55.


The 2004 Gleeson retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria identified Reef, completed on 24 August 1983, as the first painting of the late series.
63 See Wotherspoon, ‘City of the Plain.’


65 Before the advent of HAART, median survival after diagnosis of AIDS was only 9.2 months. The preceding period of HIV infection averaged between 9 and 10 years.

66 Will Self’s novel updates for our own times Oscar Wilde’s fable, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891). A consideration of the latter’s relevance for Gleeson is beyond the scope of the present study. An analysis of themes of secrecy, concealment and revelation in Wilde’s novel would be illuminating with regard to Gleeson. A whole Pandora’s box of unavowable desires lies beneath Wilde’s formalist dictum: ‘To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim.’

67 There are valid reasons for considering the first decade separately. The introduction of protease inhibitors in 1995-96 led to the perception that the epidemic was over. However, Douglas Crimp contends that even prior to that - as early as 1989 - there was a pervasive repression of AIDS in society at large and especially among groups most affected. He argues that the fear instilled by AIDS was so great people looked for ways to actively repress it. It thus became newly invisible. See ‘The Melancholia of AIDS: interview with Douglas Crimp,’ Art Journal (winter 2003).

68 Only 6.5 percent of the 10,653 Australians infected with HIV by mid-1993 contracted it by heterosexual transmission.


70 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 48.


72 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 58-9.

73 Twenty-five years into the epidemic, the cumulative death toll from AIDS had surpassed 25 million worldwide.

74 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 46.

75 Neil Blewett, AIDS in Australia: The Primitive Years, Reflections on Australia’s Policy Response to the AIDS Epidemic, Australian Health Policy Institute at the University of Sydney, 2003/07.

76 I suspect that a literary allusion lies behind this phrase but have been unable to track one down. Ken Wach suggested to me as a possible source Max Harris’s poem ‘The Pelvic Rose’ published in the first issue of Angry Penguins.

77 See Leo Bersani, ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’, in AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism, edited by Douglas Crimp (Boston, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988). The associative links death-rectum-desire are spelt out by Bersani in what became one of the foundational texts of queer theory.

78 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 91.

79 Hendrik Kolenberg and Anne Ryan, James Gleeson: Drawings for Paintings, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2003, 75.


81 Gleeson uses the term littoral meaning ‘of or on the shore of the sea.’ A series of collages from the mid-1970s titled Signals from the Perimeter reference this peripheral site of enunciation.

82 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, 71.
Photomicrographs were a novel source of inspiration for numerous artists in the inter-war period. Gleeson acquired W. Watson-Baker’s book *The World Beneath the Microscope* (1935) early on and evidence of his interest in such material can be found in collages produced in the 1970s.

Kolenberg and Ryan, *James Gleeson: Drawings for Paintings*.

The earliest of these pads contains sixteen charcoal drawings dated 25.12.82 to 1.1.83 - Gleeson was not given to waste the normally fallow period between Christmas and New Year.

Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 40.


Gleeson scholars have inexplicably failed to notice the crucial importance of this source. Gleeson possessed a 1943 English translation of *Les Chants de Maldoror* and when I met with him he spoke with great animation about it. As an avid reader of this proto-surrealist text, it is unlikely that Gleeson would have overlooked the numerous instances of homoeroticism that Breton so conveniently ignores, nor the examples of hate speech that, in his hyperbolic efforts to outrage the reader, Lautréamont gives vent to:

O incomparable pederasts, not for me to hurl insults at your great degradation; not for me to cast scorn on your infundibuliform anus. It is enough that the shameful and almost incurable diseases which beset you bring with them their inevitable punishment.

In the AIDS virus’s wake, it was commonplace and acceptable in Australia to express sentiments like this.


Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3, notes the derivation of cadaver from *cadere*, ‘to fall.’ This indicates what is at stake, as I see it, in the collapse of the sublime into a state of brute abjection.

On this point, I find myself in agreement with Simon Watney, for whom ‘AIDS is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for pleasure,’ Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1987), 9.

Lou Klepac, guest curator of the 2004 retrospective, is reported as saying: ‘I don’t want to parade Jim as a homosexual painter...The male nude is a symbol of the beauty and energy of the human body, and for quite a while Gleeson painted pictures inspired by the male nude, some marvellous pictures. But then he transcended all that and went beyond that, which is when he began painting pictures which are for everyone,’ *Melbourne Community Voice*, 26th November 2004, 16.


Kant writes: ‘For the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into mind by that very inadequacy itself which does not admit of sensuous presentation,’ *Critique of Judgement*, 92.
David Lomas is Reader in Art History at the University of Manchester and co-director of the AHRC Research Centre for Studies of Surrealism and its Legacies. He has published widely on surrealism, including *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity* (Yale University Press, 2000). He is co-curating a forthcoming major loan exhibition, *Subversive Spaces*, at the Whitworth Art Gallery (spring 2009) that will explore legacies of surrealism within contemporary art.
A Surrealist Impulse in Contemporary Australian Photography

Anne Marsh

Pat Brassington’s photographs began to receive critical attention in the 1980s when photographic theory and criticism was experiencing a renaissance. Her work spoke loudly in a postmodern culture that deconstructed notions of the original and authenticity, interrogated the epistemology of the gaze and the stereotypes of feminine sexuality. Her use of found photographs, collage and digital manipulation marked her clearly as an artist who engaged with the reproducibility and performativity of the medium. Brassington is part of a generation of post-feminist artists who followed on from the breakthroughs made by Cindy Sherman in the US and Mary Kelly in the UK. Although Brassington does not photograph herself exclusively, she does embrace a performative approach to photography, which is used to situate an uncanny female presence. Like Mary Kelly, she is interested in psychoanalysis and how the subject is inscribed in language, although Brassington’s work does not have the same political compulsion.

Performative approaches to photography are ubiquitous in contemporary work, much of which has a surreal impulse as well as drawing on performance art actions. Rebecca Horn’s Arm Extensions (1970) and Louise Bourgeois’s Costume for A Banquet (1978) are early examples. This practice continues with artists such as Yasumasa Morimura who, like Cindy Sherman, uses his own body to act out multiple personae. Anna Gaskell’s series By Proxy (1999) explores fantasy and real-life stories to present a sinister and seductive picture of a nurse who murdered her young patients. There is a surreal edge to this narrative in Gaskell’s series, which has something in common with Pat Brassington’s exploration of the dark underside of lived experience. But Brassington’s work is more abstract and difficult to pin down since the narrative is always confounded for the viewer. Writing about her work in 2004, she said:

I have long been interested in psychoanalysis and have been intrigued also by strategies used by some Surrealists. If I add these influences to my own life experience I come as close as I can to providing a rationale for my images of fantasy.1

In most of her ‘artist’s statements’ and the rare interviews in press, Brassington mentions her engagement with both surrealism and psychoanalysis.2 But there is no allegiance, no endorsement, no salute to the father. Everything is troubled in one way or another: from horror imagery that is violent and abject, through the hauntingly strange and uncanny, to the hideous, the hilarious and the banal. Brassington interrogates and extrapolates on the psychoanalytic in extreme ways: orifices exhale, threaten and protrude; the feminine is hysteric, phallic, powerful; the father is demented, perverted (the père-version of the father) and menacingly psychotic.3
If Brassington is informed by psychoanalysis it is more likely through the veil of Georges Bataille and André Breton rather than the canon of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. All the surrealists were concerned with the dream and the real and convergences that would propel a ‘sur-real’ result but they emphasised different processes. For Breton, automatism and automatic writing or drawing were fundamental to surrealism and provided a
way to tap the unconscious. He argued that: ‘any form of expression in which automatism does not at least advance undercover runs the grave risk of moving out of the surrealist orbit.’ Breton was enthralled by the kinds of associations that arose through automatism and believed that this gave rise to what Rosalind Krauss has called a ‘rhythmic unity.’ Krauss argues that this is ‘akin to what Freud called the oceanic feeling – the infantile, libidinal domain of pleasure not yet constrained by civilisation and its discontents.’ In contrast, Bataille prioritised the nightmare rather than the dream: what was excluded, devalued, ugly, bestial and excessive was used to investigate subjectivity and desire and to critique European society after the First World War. The hindsight of history allows Pat Brassington to plunder the surrealist archive so that in her work we see the influence of both Breton and the more renegade approach of Bataille. In *Lisp*, for example, a child’s face emerges from a watery or uterine space as if caught in a dream [fig. 1.]. A pink flower lies on her lips creating a delicate silence. In *The Gift* and *In my Father’s House*, discussed below, the dark side of the unconscious is foregrounded and the viewer enters into nightmarish territory [figs. 2 and 3].

Feminists have often critiqued Brassington’s work with reference to Julia Kristeva’s thesis about the subversive potential of the pre-Oedipal space and experience where the abject is a threat to the social order. The abject is what spills out from the body and cannot be contained: tears, vomit, sexual excretions, blood. It is characterised by the body seeping from its own containment (the skin), and tumbling into the social world unannounced. The abject body creates a kind of awe and fear in the viewer and as such has a radical edge in representation. Like the pre-Oedipal space before language, the abject threatens to topple polite social conventions. But, like the surrealists, Brassington interacts with psychoanalytic experience rather than adhering to any particular school of thought. As an artist aware of feminist art criticism, she undercuts the misogyny sometimes associated with the surrealists’ representations of feminine sexuality and their romantic notion of the female muse who was invariably fetishised through male desire. In her work sex, sexuality, desire and the sensual are evoked in a series of bizarre *mise-en-scènes* that present flashes and glimpses of dream-like states. These invoke hysteria and psychosis but do so by looking at fears, fantasies and traumas with a gaze that is importantly awry. This skewed perspective on the psychosexual landscape allows the artist to become a kind of conjurer. In an exhibition catalogue of 1989, the artist quoted Bataille:

Now the average man knows that he must become aware of the things which repel him most violently. . . Those things which repel man most violently are part of his own nature.

The troubled psyches of men and women recur in Brassington’s work, and sometimes this encounter is filtered through images circulating in the public domain, such as film stills, while at other times the artist uses found images from amateur family albums, sometimes her own. This scavenging of images then undergoes a surrealist treatment as they
are cut, sliced, doubled, damaged and re-contextualised. Like Breton and Bataille, Brassington is concerned to create juxtapositions and uncertainties between images that will open a space for the troubled unconscious to be represented. Her early work (c.1986-94) takes cinema, especially the horror and science fiction genres, as an archive of images that can be mined. These are then arranged alongside a host of other images which may be taken from high art, the nineteenth-century medical archive, the natural history museum, and the family album. Brassington acts as a kind of miner bird, an eclectic thief who traverses borders and takes what she fancies. She is also a postmodern scavenger of found images, an appropriationist, and a teaser who constructs visual puzzles to which there are no correct answers.

The solo exhibition titled *Eight Easy Pieces* (1986) is an example of Brassington using the archives of cinema and high art to create ensembles of images that appear as if moments of terror, ecstasy and pain have been sliced out of context. Most writers who have written about this work have interpreted it through the screen of psychoanalysis. But Brassington’s work slides around theoretical positions and is always difficult to pin down. There is no doubt that the artist has a thorough knowledge of psychoanalysis, but her work questions the theoretical canon, both from the position of woman (the one who in Lacanian theory does not exist) and from the position of the artist who is also free to play the maverick and make trouble through imagery.

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**Fig. 2:** Pat Brassington, *The Gift*, 1986, eleven silver gelatin prints, 140 x 220 cm (overall dimensions). Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne and Criterion Gallery Hobart.
Images from *Eight Easy Pieces*, like many of Brassington’s works, can be read awry, and it is this aspect of her work that makes it both compelling and timeless. In *The Gift*, for example, black and white reproductions of late Renaissance paintings showing ‘The Man of Sorrows’ are appropriated into the set of a modern horror movie where Christ displays his open wounds after his resurrection, with one image showing Christ’s finger probing the wound, perhaps to appease doubting Thomas [fig. 2]. The three images of Christ make up the vertical fulcrum of the display cutting the eight other (easy) pieces to form a horizontal cross, fallen on its side. Christ’s cropped torso is flanked by a three-quarter view of a woman’s face sliced off at the left eye with blood pouring from a wound off screen. The woman has her other eye closed, and her mouth is open, but she doesn’t appear to be screaming. She could be already dead and lying on the ground. However, seen vertically in Brassington’s grid, the woman could also be in a state of ecstasy. Her face is repeated twice, as is the adjacent image of half of a man’s face, one a mirror flip. He looks up in awe, but is he actually frightened? A bright light shines from above him as he stares upon the unknown, suggesting the presence of an unseen UFO. Four other images make up the fallen cross. Three dark-almost black-pictures of fields of cacti at night appear at first glance to be either lines, rivulets of water or light, or prickly tears for the man of sorrows. But before we get too complacent about the ecstasy of religious sorrow, the final image, completing the sliced eight, is the quarter face of a ghoul who looks into the deathly constellation. Looking quizzically through one bulging eye he unveils the fantasy; acting as the maverick onlooker he presents an irreverent humour. Talking about these works in 1986, Brassington said that they ‘are pitched just off the verge of normality into those dense patches where, mediated by our phantasms, our fears peer back at us.’

Looking closely at *The Gift*, we can see how Brassington uses the tools of the film director with a keen eye on an experimental, avant-garde method, which slices and cuts up narrative sequences to make montages which operate, at their best, as a mark of resistance to conventional language. Every viewer will put the images together in different ways, and in the end the experience may be exhausting and frustrating since the images resist our desire for closure. These collated images are like triggers that tempt our fears. If they represent anything specific it is the movement of desire captured by the glance, a desire that is forever circular and certain never to be satisfied. This is what draws us in: the postponement of satisfaction, which is the mechanism of desire’s becoming. The example of *The Gift* and my interpretation of it show how Brassington traps the gaze (and the desire) of the viewer. Just when we have developed a story, it collapses upon itself, in this case through the eye of a ghoul who lusts after the dead to feed upon them.

Social taboo, and the uncanny, fantasy, voyeurism and desire are all conceptual fissures that run through Brassington’s work. But, being an artist, she is able to use these ideas wilfully and irreverently. She is quick to embrace Freud’s idea that the unconscious can never be represented, something that intrigued the surrealists. However, Freud argued, it can be glimpsed momentarily in jokes, dreams and slips of the tongue. Brassington mines this
idea in an attempt to show us what is usually unseen in our daily lives. After the mid-1990s she concentrated almost exclusively on this aspect of lived experience, trying to give us a glimpse of what is unsaid and unseen. These included moments in dreams, the punch line of a joke that may miss its mark, and images that push the boundaries of the normal, bordering on the phantasmagorical.

Brassington's work often draws on images from her own family album but it is rarely autobiographical and never self-expressive. However, some of the works appear to deal more explicitly with the artist's own psychosocial construction and personal experience than others. *In my Father's House* (1992 version) is a mixed media work consisting of three doors hung on frames that open onto large digitally manipulated photographs [fig. 3]. Two of the images show a monumental close up of the back of a naked body and they stand on either side of an image of a child, appropriated from an 1881 issue of the London-based *Art Journal*, according to the artist's recollection. This figure seems to be airborne and flies through a domestic interior, while Brassington has added a small inset black and white image of another child on a walk through a suburban laneway. The female figure to the left looks away from the viewer: she is cropped below her ears and at her buttocks, her left arm folded over her stomach, and she looks into the same domestic space, like a witness. Another small inset image sits to her
left, showing a colourful spray of roses. The final image shows the arched back of a male figure with the skeletal structure of the spine clearly visible. This back takes up almost all of the frame. Inset on the right hand side is an image cropped from a nineteenth-century medical book showing an erect pink tongue emerging from a mouth with the figure number from the original source still visible. The tongue is swollen or injured, and it may have been surgically stitched. As it stands erect on the male figure’s back the reference to the phallus is prominent.

Fig. 4: Pat Brassington, *In my Father’s House*, 2004, detail, door measurement 200 x 100cm. Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne and Criterion Gallery Hobart.

In the second version of *In my Father’s House* (2004) the figures are the same but the viewer encounters the doors ajar rather than wide open and must open the doors to see the photographs. The inset image of the tongue recurs on the back of the male but the female
figure now has a pink seashell covering her left shoulder. The child has a pink teddy bear (or gingerbread man) over her heart. The bear is propped in the corner of a room and seems to have been made out of minced meat. I can see an eyeball and a pair of snarling teeth in the head and neck region. The digital rendering has created scarring which seems to pierce the flesh, as if this is a kind of voodoo doll [fig. 4].

The sequence of images in both versions is fanciful, with a strong undercurrent of menace made more obvious in the second. The teddy bear figure is grotesque and points to some horrible violence lurking in the fairytale image of the illustrated child. Barbara Creed has suggested that the installation points to the violation of the female. To me the images are also about repression; what is left unsaid but runs throughout the family structure. This is certainly a theme that recurs throughout Brassington’s work and is a dominant subject in In my Mother’s House, where the female figure appears as if she were an hysteric from one of Jean-Martin Charcot’s late nineteenth-century seminars at the Salpêtrière clinic [fig. 5]. There are two figures in the mother’s house: one a young female figure who stares out of the picture but beyond the viewer clearly in another state of mind. The other is a phallicised depiction of a young boy’s neck that references Man Ray’s famous Anatomies of c.1930. Between the girl and the boy is a pillow which belonged to Brassington’s mother and recurs in other sequences. To the left of the hysteric girl is a reproduction landscape scene hanging on a wallpapered wall.

Fig. 5: Pat Brassington, In my Mother’s House, 1994, four silver gelatin prints 52 x 142cm (overall dimensions). Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne and Criterion Gallery Hobart.

Kyla McFarlane has argued lucidly that much of Brassington’s work is a ‘feminine diagnosis of discontent, often directed at the father.’ However there is also discontent directed at the mother, the feminine construct itself and the structure of the Oedipal, patriarchal family. McFarlane is careful to use the term ‘the father’ to indicate the language of psychoanalysis where the term is used to designate the symbolic order, language and social law. Women also speak in the name of the father; in fact everyone who avoids psychosis
enters into the prison house of language where that which cannot be spoken – the pre-Oedipal, the Real, the unconscious – is repressed. Although the installations that refer to Brassington’s own family are drawn from her own experience they speak loudly to a wider agenda, specifically sexuality in the family structure. *In my Mother’s House* is a signature work in many respects as it predicts what will follow. Here the hysterical girl child is alienated from the powerful yet deformed phallic mother by a pillow that could be used to smother the child. But the symptom, the hysteria, is everywhere, even in the wallpaper which frames the ‘natural’ landscape. There is a sense of airlessness and an intensity between the two female figures which suggests that all is not well in the house of the mother.

At the heart of these installations is a desire to unveil the Real, to get to the bottom of things. This is what makes Brassington’s works tremble with a kind of unspoken violence. The could-be smothering mother, the perhaps tyrannical father and the hysterical child inhabit these pictures. But none of these things can be represented, and if they were it would be via a conventional narrative, a Hollywood storyboard. This is not what Brassington wants to convey. Her methodology is more radical than that. She wants to hint at the unrepresentable, hoping that it will come forward in the imagination of the viewer. For the most part she is successful, but it is only in her nurturing of doubt that she is able to get us, the viewer, to imagine what is not said. Like Slavoj Žižek she probably agrees that: ‘in our unconscious, in the real of our desires, we are all murderers.’ Writing about the uncanny in Hollywood films, Žižek says:

> …the uncanny gaze . . . subverts the border between life and death, since it belongs to a dead object (corpse, doll), which nonetheless possesses a gaze of melancholic expressiveness.

Freud’s notion of the uncanny is exploited in much of Brassington’s imagery, as here what is homely and familiar becomes unhomely, unfamiliar, strange. The uncanny haunts the everyday and is sometimes experienced as a sense of unease, a kind of déjà-vu when we sense that we have seen this or been here before. This feeling of history repeating itself is intimately tied up with imaginary/psychic memory which is incomplete and fragmented, full of lost images and repressed fears. This kind of imagery circulates in the cultural imaginary and comes alive in art, literature and film. Brassington operates as a kind of archaeologist of the uncanny, picking over the ruins of conscious life and lived experience to find something beneath the surface which excites fear.

An uncanny aspect runs through much of Brassington’s work. In *Pond*, the images are presented as evidence, as if they belonged to a police investigation of a crime that is difficult to establish. The twelve images that make up the series are close-ups of objects that have been submerged in water, ordinary things that in a sodden and drowned state take on an extraordinary sexual effect. However, *Pond* is also playful and clearly references the Surrealist photographer Man Ray who pictured a man’s hat from above, shot to resemble a woman’s vulva (*Untitled*, 1933). The uncanny is often associated with things that are dead...
that appear to be alive. Freud gives the example of dolls and ghosts, and we could easily add the dummy and the mannequin. These are inanimate things which act as doubles and stand-ins for the body or psyche. Our fear is that these things will become animate and take on a life of their own. These sorts of 'things' recur throughout Brassington's work. In fact her method of producing imagery is often repetitious and the return of the repressed image or scene haunts the work.

Fig. 6: Pat Brassington, *This is not the right way home*, 2003, pigment print, 75 x 58cm. Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne and Criterion Gallery Hobart.
Many writers have emphasised Brassington’s focus on the feminine and the female body.\textsuperscript{20} It is certainly the case that there is a thorough exploration of sexuality, but the gender positions are often blurred. Brassington is also engaged with repetition as a psychoanalytic device and prefers the ambiguity of sexual positions and identities. The boundaries of the body are often made fluid in her images: things appear where they shouldn’t, bits penetrate each other in strange ways and fluids are interchangeable. \textit{Boucher} (2001), for instance, is a disturbing image of body parts. In the upper left a fragment of the pubis (or is it underarm hair?), peeks into the picture. Two legs squeeze together, or an arm squeezes against the chest to create a channel between them. A phallic object, probably a finger, penetrates the flesh in an unsuspected place. It is this probe that pierces into the body that is abject and uncanny. The body is pink and soft but the fleshy probe is an alien object, a cancerous growth made pretty. \textit{Boucher} is a horrible image but it also resonates with a dark humour. The viewer knows that it is constructed but this knowledge is not settling. \textit{This is not the right way home} is even more unsettling [fig. 6]. Here the body is pink and flabby and bathed in a painterly shimmer, while the torso has a growth protruding from the neck area, like an enlarged post-operative hole for breathing directly into the larynx. The figure is ghostly and otherworldly, deformed in the flatness of its torso and by its decapitated head. It could easily be a ghost.

Brassington plays with horror; she delights in finding images and cutting them up, then putting them together in ways that create a kind of psychological puzzle for the viewer. Everything is unnatural, and a madness runs wild throughout the work. Here the artist tempts the unconscious and sets traps for the gaze. She says that in the process of selecting and re-making images she tries to stop short of any resolution, remaining decisively indecisive, saying again and again what they are not. In relation to this, several writers have warned against any type of psychoanalytic interpretation of Brassington’s work.\textsuperscript{21} Edward Colless says it best when he argues that: ‘To decode the patterns of the correspondences as if they were symbolic would [be] like trying to psychoanalyse the window of a tumble dryer.’\textsuperscript{22} Venturing into the visual world of the abject, the opened body, the oozing wound, is dangerous. However, the territory has been mined by many artists, most notably the surrealists, and more recently the directors of horror movies. Brassington knows this territory well and she works to distort the borders of the abject and the unknown by enticing the medium to act up. In her own words, she says:

Too much digging into one’s motivation runs counter to free flowing spontaneity, but I do seem to be attracted to the enigmatic. When morphing an image I baulk prior to resolution and prefer to leave it hovering in uncertainty. Our visual brain endlessly seeks resolution and hence the real exerts a magnetic attraction. My aim is to use this gravitas to spin off towards other possibilities.\textsuperscript{23}


6 Krauss, 'The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism,' 95.


8 In the conventions of psychoanalysis, the child travels from a pre-Oedipal state (before language) into an ego identity which is contained and made possible by language. As the two year old experiences a tantrum, screaming incomprehensibly about what she wants, the adult says speak to me: say what you want. This is the socialising mechanism of all societies and what allows us to communicate. In so doing we leave the pre-Oedipal state behind and repress the fears of the imaginary realm albeit unsuccessfully. These fears return in dreams.


10 See for example Moore, Indecent Exposures, 141-144, and McDonald, Erotic Ambiguities, 180-186.

11 When I was corresponding with Pat Brassington about this project she told me that when she produced Eight Easy Pieces she had her brother’s death in mind. This puts a particularly poignant and personal emphasis on the ‘man of sorrows.’


13 Žižek says desire is circular; it is the postponement of satisfaction, Looking Awry, 11.


Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 16.


See Marsh, ‘Pat Brassington: Uncanny Witness.’


Pat Brassington, artist’s statement published in *Supernatural Artificial*, 12.

Anne Marsh is Associate Professor of Theory in the Faculty of Art & Design at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research areas include: photography, performance art, feminism, postmodernism and psychoanalysis. She is author of *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australian, 1969-1992* (Oxford University Press, 1993) and *The Darkroom: Photography and the Theatre of Desire* (Macmillan, 2003). Prior to joining the Faculty of Art & Design in 2005, Marsh was Associate Professor in Visual Culture on the Clayton Campus. She has also taught at the University of Melbourne and RMIT. A prolific writer and commentator, she has published widely in edited collections, art magazines and journals and has written numerous exhibition catalogues. Her essays have been translated into French, German and Spanish. Her writings on Brassington include the monograph *Pat Brassington: This is not a photograph*, Quintus, an imprint of the University of Tasmania, 2006.
Ivor Francis’s *Schizophrenia* of 1943: Australia’s First Psychological Painting

Ken Wach

Abstract

The oil painting *Schizophrenia* was completed by the English-born artist Ivor Francis (1906-1993) in 1943 at his studio-home in the outer suburb of Prospect in Adelaide in South Australia. The painting has not been analysed or explained in any extended way and it has attracted no academic publication or extended research. However, detailed examination has revealed that it is an aesthetic *tour de force* that well illustrates, not only the place, but also the pervasive influence of Surrealist aesthetic principles transposed into Australia. Ivor Francis’s painting *Schizophrenia* is Australia’s first painting with a defined mental illness as its thematic subject.

So, in the schizophrenic, morbid mental changes ferment within the brain, before any sign of derangement is discernible in the patient’s conduct or speech. They are the evil flowers which flourish in the inturned garden of the soul in a profusion of pathologic production. ... At first much of the foliage may be deceptive, seeming to possess the shape, colour and odour of normal blossoms; but before long the characteristics of the fatal flora are manifest - the fungus of fantasy climbs over the branches of reason and the deadly nightshade of apathy chokes the graceful tendrils of the emotions. ... His mind becomes ingrown. (Reg Ellery, 1941)¹

The work *Schizophrenia* was painted by the artist Ivor Francis in 1943 at his studio-home in the outer suburb of Prospect in Adelaide in South Australia.² The painting’s conception corresponded with the culmination of a highly formative period in Francis’s life. It was a time during which Francis completed several years of teaching in the Outback in South Australia’s remote Eyre Peninsula, completed art studies at the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts in Adelaide, participated in four group exhibitions and met Max Harris, one of the most formidable minds in Adelaide.³ It also was a period during which Francis was introduced to many of surrealism’s artistic tenets and aesthetic theories.

The painting *Schizophrenia*, accomplished as it is, has attracted little attention since its perceptive purchase by the Art Gallery of South Australia on Wednesday 8 August, 1945 - five years before Francis’s first solo exhibition and five years before his second public purchase by the Castlemaine Art Gallery in Victoria. In the fifty-nine years since its purchase, the painting *Schizophrenia* has been exhibited in only eight major exhibitions⁴ and illustrated in six major publications.⁵ The painting has not been analysed or explained in any extended way and attracted no academic paper and no extended research.⁶ Furthermore, it is not discussed in depth in any monograph, nor has it elicited detailed mention in surveys of Australian art in general or of the period. However, during the last twenty years, lucid comments by Richard Haese,⁷ Terry Smith,⁸ Jane Hylton⁹ and Christopher Chapman¹⁰ have given this hitherto neglected painting some belated prominence. This is most evident in Jane Hylton’s 1987 retrospective entitled *Ivor Francis: an Adelaide Modernist* and her touring exhibition of 1989 entitled *Adelaide Angries, South Australian Painting of the 1940s*.¹¹
Ivor Francis’s painting *Schizophrenia* of 1943 warrants serious consideration and deserves historical rehabilitation [fig. 1]. The painting is overlooked in scholarly discussions of Australian Modernism, despite the fact that its iconographical examination reveals much about surrealist sources and approaches in Australia. Broadly, Francis’s painting *Schizophrenia* speaks of a transposed surrealism, a surrealism expressed with Australian inflections and intonations.

Fig. 1: Ivor Francis, *Schizophrenia*, 1943, Adelaide, oil on canvas, 82.5 x 62.2 cm, Elder Bequest Fund 1945, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide [0.1297].
The painting *Schizophrenia* was first exhibited in Adelaide in 1945, and consists of a vertical rectangular oil on canvas measuring 82.5 by 62.2 centimetres - one of Francis’s largest early works. The oil painting is even in surface texture and application and shows no visible evidence of later additions or pentimento that may have indicated any change of approach or theme. There are no extant drawings, sketches, photographs or preliminary works for the painting and, most curiously, the painting is not given even a brief mention in Francis’s unpublished diary *Journal of Ivor Pengelly Francis, Photographer’s Apprentice, Farm-hand, Schoolteacher, Artist, Critic. Begun Sat. 23rd. October 1944.* Likewise, the painting does not elicit any comment in Francis’s extensively documented unpublished autobiography *Goodbye to the City of Dreams: An Autobiography* or the thirty-nine issues of his later publication *Ivor’s Art Review* of 1956 to 1960. These oversights are quite surprising considering the painting’s importance and the fact that it was Francis’s first public purchase – that this purchase was made by the local and prestigious Art Gallery of South Australia, makes these unexplained omissions even more perplexing. Furthermore, the painting is largely unrelated to Francis’s earlier paintings and quite unlike most of his later works. The painting’s specific theme is not returned to in Francis’s later paintings and as such, it remains unique in his considerable artistic output during the next fifty years.

The painting portrays, in its lower region, the trephined section of a human head; the brain is revealed showing a large crevice from which emanates a large spiral, which curves clockwise and ends in a brick wall in the upper right, around which are grouped various amorphous forms. Next to this wall, an organic sprout is bent back and its tip arcs upward to pierce the brain in the centre of the painting. To the left of centre of the painting may be seen part of a bottle, stopped with a cork, within which is contained a hybrid creature whose growth is constrained by the bottle, but whose tail emanates from the lower left of the brain. The upper left shows two female-like forms in biomorphic distortion and in the background of these figures is a phantom-like form, which seems to reach for the bottle through a section interlaced with random lines. The whole painting is cut by four diagonal wooden shafts with metal barbs that point to various sections of the trephination. The work’s title, *Schizophrenia,* obviously suggests the psychological theme of the work and the painting presents a complex set of images that attempt to give symbolic content and pictorial form to aspects of the mental illness that forms its principal subject. The psychological content of the painting is highlighted in Ivor Francis’s own description of the painting’s meaning in its official archival registration form, at the time of its purchase by the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide in 1945:

‘Schizophrenia’ is a work symbolic of frustration. It has been described by an eminent pathologist as the scourge of our present era. Its origin is said to lie in the faulty upbringing of the modern child, and arises out of his inability to adjust himself to the complex social and economic conditions of our age, which confront him at maturity. Seeking escape from reality, his first fatal step leads him to turn inwards on himself into the pleasant but tragic realm of fantasy and make-believe - the gateway to dreaded *dementia praecox.* To the artist this was the malady of the world itself in 1943.
Francis’s pithy summation of the painting’s content and his artistic aim give us pause to reflect. The subject of the statement’s first sentence is obviously Francis’s painting, yet the subject of the second sentence is the illness of schizophrenia. This unintentional grammatical slip hints at the painting’s medico-social source – tellingly, of the five sentences only one refers to the painting. Furthermore, the statement’s use of the phrase ‘dementia praecox,’ the Latinate term for schizophrenia, the use of loaded terms and phrases such as ‘symbolic of frustration,’ ‘escape from reality,’ ‘turn inwards,’ ‘fantasy’ and ‘make-believe,’ the causal linking of mental illness and social life and its psychologically diagnostic tone are most unusual. Very few, if any, Australian artists were using or thinking of their work in these terms as early as 1943. Certainly, none were producing paintings based upon these or related ideas until 1944 and 1945.

Investigation has revealed that the painting’s registration statement is based upon Reg Ellery’s text of the time entitled Schizophrenia: The Cinderella of Psychiatry, which was published in 1941 by John Reed and Max Harris. Moreover, not only the registration statement but also the actual painting is connected with Ellery’s text. The connection is never hinted at or publicly admitted in any publication or interview. Reg Ellery, most probably the unnamed ‘eminent pathologist’ of the Francis’s registration statement, was a practising psychiatrist and consultant to the Women’s Hospital and the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne, who was later called to act as an expert witness in defence of Max Harris in the infamous Ern Malley case of 1944. In 1990, forty-seven years after the painting of Schizophrenia, Francis eventually freely admitted the connection with Ellery in an unpublished interview:

Ken Wach: Can you recall anyone at the time in the 40s reading works on mental illness and art of the insane? For example, I’m thinking of the Vegetative Eye and I’m thinking of poetry by Max Harris, but also works like yours, the one called Investigation, Scientific and Otherwise, of Matter without Form. Now, that work would seem to indicate some knowledge of mental states and mental conditions. For the 40s, that would have been quite exceptional. Where did your information come from?

Ivor Francis: Well that’s Schizophrenia, that is. Yes, that's another one. Well, that came from Dr. Emery's [sic, Ellery’s] book Schizophrenia: The Scourge of Modern Civilization. Yes, well now - I don't know who put me onto that book but schizophrenia was quite a problem in those days as it still is, and I actually came in contact with a case - a girl who committed suicide - and so I was really particularly interested, and Emery’s [sic] book, rather strange old-fashioned sort of writing - he'd start each chapter with a verse of poetry you know - but he did write very graphically and he went right through describing the shock treatment and so on. So that inspired Schizophrenia - yes, I think I was interested in that sort of thing.

The above admission contains a revealing mistake, besides the lapse regarding the author’s surname. Francis calls Ellery’s book Schizophrenia: The Scourge of Modern Civilization – it is in fact, Schizophrenia: The Cinderella of Psychiatry – thus not only confirming the literary source for the inspiration of his painting, but also, through a conflation of titles, its chapter called ‘The Scourge of Schizophrenia.’ The much-respected Ellery lived in the affluent Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn and was said to hold Melbourne’s largest private collection of books – reputedly of 10,000 volumes. Curiously, in his registration
statement Francis refers to an ‘eminent pathologist’ rather than a psychiatrist – this is most probably a confusion on Francis’s part or it is occasioned by his later recollection in 1945 of the preponderant use of pathological terms and imagery in Ellery’s 1941 text – death, disease, decay, decadence and the like. Francis first met Harris, the co-publisher of Ellery’s text, in Adelaide in 1940 and the mentally interactive connections between Francis as an inquiring artist, Harris as an inspiring intellectual and Ellery as an investigative clinician prompted much of the psychological tone of Francis’s contemporaneous paintings. Significantly, the painting *Schizophrenia* of 1943 is the first of these.\(^{24}\)

As noted above, the third chapter in Ellery’s 1941 text *Schizophrenia: The Cinderella of Psychiatry* is entitled ‘The Scourge of Schizophrenia’ and, in general, it gives a cogent, highly sympathetic and literary interpretation of the mental illness of schizophrenia, the condition that was first described and defined by the German psychologist Eugen Bleuler in 1911. Significantly, Ellery’s account of the symptoms of schizophrenia in 1941 is almost paraphrased in Francis’s 1945 outline for the Art Gallery of South Australia. Passages such as the following point to a conceptual connection between the form and content of Francis’s painting and the ideas and aims of Ellery’s text:

> The child who thus grows up with an increasing number of faulty habit reactions is heading for a breakdown of the schizophrenic type.\(^{25}\) …the child’s mind turns inward and begins to shun the harsh and menacing reality full of terrors and insurmountable problems for the soft beguiling realm of fantasy.\(^{26}\)

Furthermore, Ellery’s consistent linking of the illness of schizophrenia with the problems of contemporary society is echoed in the last sentence of Francis’s registration statement. Even a cursory investigation of Ellery’s eloquently expressed book *Schizophrenia: The Cinderella of Psychiatry*, offers up the source for many of Francis’s subsequent images and intentions in his painting *Schizophrenia*. For instance, in Ellery’s text, the mental illness of schizophrenia is described as being located in the brain, rather than elsewhere in the body and the individual suffering from its effects is portrayed as being in the grip of somatic effects brought on by non-somatic causes - both of which were radical ideas at the time. As in Francis’s painting, in Ellery’s text the individual is seen as being tormented by external barbs. In Ellery’s book the schizophrenic is described as suffering from hallucinations, which are usually auditory, hence the depiction of the spiral cochlea of the inner ear in Francis’s painting:

> Except in the rare cases of true paranoia and some of the simplest reactions, hallucinations, particularly the auditory type, characterize practically the whole schizophrenic reaction. They vary from the faintest whisper of opprobrium to the menacing voices of malevolent objurgations. Subconscious guilt is projected into the derogatory remarks, which harass the schizophrenic patient. His inmost secrets appear to become audible. With obsessional persistence, tantalizing voices put bad words into his mind and goad him to do that which he abhors, so that his conduct, though seemingly erratic, may be a logical reaction to his hallucinations.\(^{27}\)
There is also, in Ellery’s book, the analogical observation that latent schizophrenia is like a slowly germinating seed that is yet to show its perverse growth:

The onset of a schizophrenic psychosis may be likened to the germination of a seed in the ground. Invisible growth takes place beneath the soil for varying periods of time before the first shoot bursts through to the light.  

This sprouting growth is eventually turned back in repression to mar, scar or wound the healthy development of the individual:

Sooner or later, just as the first tiny shoot pokes through the earth, the morbid idea becomes visible in conversation or conduct ... As the growth of the seed is determined by the soil, so too is the growth of a morbid idea dependent upon the type of mind in which it has germinated. So, in the schizophrenic, morbid mental changes ferment within the brain, before any sign of derangement is discernible in the patient’s conduct or speech. They are the evil flowers which flourish in the inturned garden of the soul in a profusion of pathologic production ... At first much of the foliage may be deceptive, seeming to possess the shape, colour and odour of normal blossoms; but before long the characteristics of the fatal flora are manifest - the fungus of fantasy climbs over the branches of reason and the deadly nightshade of apathy chokes the graceful tendrils of the emotions. ... His mind becomes ingrown.

These unhealthy activities, choked emotion and mental wounds then find escapist expression in the unaccountability of daydreams and delusional fantasies:

Common to the whole schizophrenic group is the tendency to morbid projection wherein the patient’s actions or wishes are attributed to the will of others ... in a like manner, over compensation in face of mental or physical inferiority leads to the elaboration of grandiose delusions.

The afflicted individual then often finds solace in the attractive and blunting effects of alcoholism, which further add to the development of delusions and a lack of healthy organic growth:

Individuals with a schizophrenic orientation may over-indulge in alcohol; and because the symptoms of alcoholism tend to obscure the more subtle mental changes of schizophrenia, the physician may be misled in his diagnosis.

The world of external reason, the solid brick wall, cannot be breached and self-expression and proper inner growth becomes disturbed, perverted or subverted:

Thought is illogical and unrelated to action. Feeling is disproportionate to the stimulus. Actions are erratic ... Conversation tends to become incoherent: odd words are used and sentences are coloured by the patients’ musings. Emotional reactions may become disturbed and distorted. Speech and feeling are no longer in tune.

Francis seemed fall in with the tenor of all this and his thoughts in the early 1940s managed to coalesce Ellery, Harris and something else.
As interesting and as laudable as all these imagist and lexical connections undoubtedly are, if this was all there was in Francis's painting the work would be marred by an overtly literary transcription into the visual, as is unfortunately common in surrealism. If this really were the case, then we would perhaps be justified in thinking that Francis's surrealism was somewhat straining after effect and sedulous rather than inspired. However, this misgiving aside, the painting's formal qualities and its regionalist application of surrealist principles belie these suspicious and throw further light upon its more extended sources and breadth of sophistication.

Depictions of the human head, usually in a sectional or transparent form, are not uncommon in surrealist art. These depictions usually show the brain as a repository of images, thoughts and mental events - no doubt in deference to the theories of Sigmund Freud. André Breton, the leader of the European surrealists, himself is not immune from this pictorial treatment. The often reproduced and celebrated work Portrait of André Breton, by his surrealist friend André Masson, shows a double portrait, by night and by day, with attributes such as a diamond and a central portion of the people he has known. The phoenix to the upper right and the sun to the upper left in this work are included to give an indication of Breton's transforming and regenerative intellect. The British surrealist Roland Penrose's painting The Conquest of Air of 1939, showing a opened-out human head, is also but one of a series of works of this type. Francis's painting Schizophrenia sits comfortably within this company, at least in its general categorisation. Of related and supporting interest are the often depicted instances of mental turmoil in surrealism. These are sometimes reminiscent of dadaist collages, but more often are made up of an Arcimboldo-like compaction of images and occasionally of a convoluted figurative composition. Penrose's paintings Artifact of 1937 and his Man Wrestling with his Thoughts of 1939 are both instructive in this regard. All of these four works, in a small way, illustrate the abiding interest the surrealists had in depictions of mental functioning and emphasize the importance that they placed upon the role of subjective thought. This was a stress that guided and crowded their imaginations since the publication of Breton's important essay 'Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality' in 1927 with its epistemological emphasis and enquiry.

If we return to the contemporaneous works of Ivor Francis and view his painting Investigation, Scientific and Otherwise of Matter without Form of 1943, we see a depiction of an almost subterranean scene with transparent and interpenetrating forms being pointed to by a seated and gowned figure, to the left, in the traditional pose of the philosopher. Below him, in the centre of the almost monochromatic painting, two people reminiscent of Salvador Dalí's figures are seen - one walking towards the light outside, the other running back to the confines of the interior. This painting by Francis, executed in the same year as his Schizophrenia, is obviously a depiction of the famous Plato's Cave metaphor of the nature of reality and our sensory perception of it and it heralds Francis's own quickening interest in psychological and metaphysical themes. Of secondary, though important, interest is the central image of transparent forms and shapes, probably representing the plethora of the
shadows of life on the inside of the cave. These fractured images, both in Francis’ *Investigation, Scientific and Otherwise of Matter without Form* of 1943 and his *Schizophrenia* of 1943, bear a striking similarly to André Masson’s works of the 1920s, with their late Cubist interest in transparency and overlapping or interpenetrating forms, as later analysed by the American art historian Winthrop Judkins in his unpublished study of 1956. Masson’s painting *Dead Man* of 1926, shown in London and reproduced in most English journals at the time and his *Man* of 1925, which was originally bought by the French writer Georges Bataille, both exemplify this formal interest. Of particular interest in this latter work is the appearance of a vaguely female form in the top left corner. This shape is the forerunner of the figure in the top left section in Masson’s famous painting *Four Elements* of 1924, which was originally bought by Breton and hence much illustrated in journals and various publications. This form was of great moment for the young Salvador Dalí. For example, the bent figure surfaces in many of his paintings of the 1930s, most clearly in his *Illumined Pleasures* of 1929 where, as Dawn Ades, Whitney Chadwick and Ian Gibson have shown, it appears as an indication of Dalí’s shame and remorse.

Francis’ knowledge of Dalí’s work and aesthetic ideas was quite extensive, despite Adelaide’s isolation. Francis freely admits the influence of secondary sources such as books and reproductions:

We got all our inspiration from such prints and books, as we were able to pick up from overseas. You belonged to the school that followed Cezanne or the one that followed Picasso or the school that followed, well you name it, and we were all that way. I suppose I had a sort of sneaking feeling for Salvador Dalí. He intrigued me. And Jacqueline Hick had a strong leaning towards Daumier and David Dallwitz. Of course, towards Picasso and these were the people whom we admired and, I suppose, that’s why we weren’t really tremendously into the Australian thing. Those overseas people became our masters, whereas in Melbourne, and, I suppose, more so in Sydney, there was a tendency for students to admire their teachers. ... We thought Surrealism was the sort of thing Salvador Dalí did. And then, it all started to filter through after the War and we read about it, but I was the only one who was a Surrealist. ... It was, I think, Max Harris who had a big part in it really.

Immediately after the Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art in 1939, he became even more familiar with Dalí’s work in detail through reproductions of paintings spawned by the furore over his work in general and in that exhibition in particular. Dalí’s bent human figure then, not surprisingly, finds itself repeated, without much distortion of form or intent, in the top centre of Francis’s work *Schizophrenia*, where it is meant to indicate the shame felt by those afflicted with schizophrenia. The figure’s head touches the wall and its biomorphic shape and position leave us little doubt of its distant source in Masson and Dalí’s earlier works. Francis’s knowledge and admiration of Dalí’s work may be further underpinned by the visual characteristics and composition of his painting *Venus Reborn* of 1946:

Ken Wach: What about that work of yours Venus Reborn - and your Schizophrenia - they’re very surrealistic works. Can you remember what sources you would have drawn on - personal, literary, aesthetic - sources?
Ivor Francis: Well, Venus Reborn, I think shows the influence of Salvador Dalí. But, Botticelli could have been just as important.\

The biomorphic skull in this work especially echoes Dalí’s forms, more obviously those in his painting Atmospheric Skull of 1934. The hills in the background of this work by Dalí take on an anthropomorphic form resembling the breasts of a recumbent woman, a form also repeated more obviously in Francis’s Anstey’s Hill of 1946. In this painting, the breasts with the nipple suggested by a tree, mimics certain works of Dalí’s where mountain ranges, well known in Spain for their anthropomorphic shape, are often used. This is most evident in the background of Dalí’s little known painting Enigma of Hitler of 1939, where the nipple on the breast is suggested by a castle at the peak of the mountain range.

Another enticing similarity which also indicates Francis’s extensive knowledge of surrealist paintings is provided by the brick wall in the upper right of his painting Schizophrenia. The brick wall acts as a barrier to the exterior world, a reminder of reason and logic and of the materiality of the world beyond internalised thought. This function of the image of the brick wall is variously shared amongst the surrealists. In the work of René Magritte especially, and in Penrose and Ernst also, we find the wall acting as a foil, or as a field upon which to place semantic or imagist conundrums - generally the wall, usually of brick, acts in surrealism as a reliable and recurrent metonym standing for an irrefutable and external reality.

By 1943, surrealist principles were well known and they became the subject of considerable and often virulent debate, especially in Melbourne and Adelaide. There are many sources for this seminal knowledge. The Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art that opened at the Melbourne Town Hall on Monday 16 October 1939 was, of course, of great importance especially considering the controversy it engendered about various aspects of liberalism and modernism. This exhibition traveled to Sydney, but not to Adelaide, though the controversy was reported in many easily available magazines and newspapers including the Adelaide News, which gave it some breathless pre-publicity on Friday 18 August 1939. London too was abuzz with surrealism in the late 1930s and 1940s, especially after the highly successful International Surrealist Exhibition held at the New Burlington Galleries from Thursday 11 June to Saturday 4 July in 1936. This highly successful exhibition, organized by Penrose with Breton, Dalí and Paul Eluard in attendance, displayed almost 400 surrealist works created by sixty-eight artists who represented fourteen nationalities. Twenty-three artists in this exhibition were British and the subsequent publication of a dual language (English-French) anthology and a series of relevant lectures, did much to spread the surrealist aesthetic amongst the intelligentsia and the English public at large. The resultant publicity, indeed notoriety, augured well for the success of Alfred Barr’s subsequent Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and Julien Levy’s surrealism exhibition at his gallery, both of which were shown in New York in 1936. These three major exhibitions in 1936, one in London and two in New York, together with their various publications, related lectures and newspaper and radio reports firmly cemented the place of surrealism within the English-speaking world. A total of fourteen further
exhibitions, in London alone, between 1936 and 1942, only added to surrealism's indelible cultural impact.

Surrealism's literary and scientistic aspects gave it a currency not available to most artistic movements and they gave it a respectability that masked, at least in Britain, its anti-bourgeois and anarchist origins. British surrealists were quick to ally surrealism with their native romanticism and Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shakespeare and Blake were quickly, perhaps hastily, enlisted in the surrealists' constant appeals to, and invocations of, literary and intellectual authority. Australians then, as perhaps never before, were eager to respond to intellectual stimulus from the Mother Country. James Cant, the Adelaide artist who had exhibited with the British surrealists, most notably at the Mayor Gallery in London in 1935 was, amongst others, also an important source of information upon his return to Australia in 1939. From as early as 1932 the literary journal This Quarter was available to the reader of English - this indispensable source, mostly translated by Jacob Bronowski and Samuel Beckett, was for many their first introduction to surrealists' interest in mental functions and their aberrations. In 1936, this exposure to surrealist concerns was complemented by the publication of magazines such as the London Bulletin, the publication of David Gascoyne's concise work A Short Survey of Surrealism, and Herbert Read's anthology Surrealism, with its important and influential introduction. All of this interest, controversy and activity seemed acknowledged by the later publication of essays by André Breton and André Masson in the journal Art in Australia in 1941 and 1942. The further burst of contemporaneous publications of letters, poems and articles by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Herbert Read, Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, Cyril Connolly, Edmund Wilson, Charles Henri Ford, Kenneth Burke, William James, Aldous Huxley and other luminaries in 'little' and special issue magazines and journals, Australian or otherwise, only added to the flood of information about surrealism in English.

The Australian incorporation of surrealism, no doubt, owes much to its British heritage and to the general climate of Anglophilia in the 1930s, as well as to the numerous expatriate Australians in London in the late 1930s and 1940s. At the time, in Britain, surrealism was promoted as an intellectual and artistic movement that was blithely unconcerned with conventional behaviour and morality, with the strictures of humanist tradition and with the oppressive orders of classical formalism. Herbert Read, a highly influential member of the surrealists group in London, consistently argued that contemporary standards of conventionality were based upon intellectual concepts that suppressed growth and dynamism and that were often inextricably connected to particular class values, class properties and to a seemingly irredeemable social oppression. According to Read, what was needed to rectify this, was an unshackled and liberating freedom of thought; a liberation that sought new parallels and new metaphors for a post-Freudian age.

As noted above, the Adelaide intellectual Max Harris first met Ivor Francis in 1940 and it was the nineteen-year-old Harris who introduced the thirty-four-year-old Francis to surrealist aesthetic theories and texts. At the time, surrealist theoretical writings on art and
the social and aesthetic responsibilities of the artist were readily available and by 1942 they could easily be supplemented by the contents of Harris’s bookshop, Mary Martin, and of course by the various papers in The Angry Penguins, the journal he founded with Donald Kerr in 1940 in Adelaide. In addition, to this the University of Adelaide, where Harris was a student from 1939 to 1941, was surprisingly well equipped with Freud’s works in English. The Workers’ Education Association which eventually became the University of Adelaide’s campus bookshop, ordered texts remarkably quickly. For example, Freud’s text *Introduction to Psychology* was published in 1922 and available in Adelaide in the same year; his book *Totem and Taboo*, translated into English in 1919, was available in Adelaide in 1921 and his *New Introductory Lectures* of 1933 was on the University campus three years later in 1936.

The collection of the State Library of South Australia in Adelaide was also remarkably well stocked, with four of Freud’s publications bought between 1922 and 1924, all of them within two years of release. The precocious and redoubtable intellect of Max Harris would have spared little time in availing itself of the available literary information thus supplementing his burgeoning knowledge of the British surrealists of the 1940s. Max Harris and John Reed’s publication in Melbourne of the avant-garde journal *Angry Penguins* in 1943 onwards, and the publication of Harris’ book *The Vegetative Eye* in the same year, only confirmed his pre-eminent status in the intellectual circles of his time. He was both mentor and guide to many Adelaide artists; his writing and criticism, his espousal of liberalism and radicalism and his questioning of cultural isolationism and Australia’s home-spun thematic identity, was of especial importance, at least until the lamentable Ern Malley hoax of 1944.62

Much of the content of this formative literary and cultural background was complemented by Francis’s fifty-three-year friendship with Mary Packer Harris, an Adelaide artist of Quaker persuasion, who wrote the books *Art, The Torch of Life* in 1946 and *The Cosmic Rhythm of Art and Literature* in 1948.63 Mary Harris, who was no relation of the younger Max Harris, graduated from Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland in 1913 and taught at the School of Arts and Crafts in central Adelaide from 1922 to 1953 and was one of the group of artists that formed the Contemporary Art Society there in 1942.64 Mary Harris championed Francis’s work and influenced his choice of aesthetic direction soon after they first met in 1928, when he enrolled in her art classes. She later also included his paintings in Adelaide’s first public showing of ‘Modern Art,’ the Testament of Beauty exhibition of 1939.65 Mary Harris must have made quite an impression on Francis as her personalised teaching and art instruction are even reflected in some of the pious and socially conscious tones of his subsequent publication *Art Lessons for the RAAF* of 1944.66 Mary Harris’s Quaker-based social conscience and more spiritual personal inclinations also had their impact and prompted some of the subsequent questioning directions of the inquisitive mind of the then twenty-two-year-old Francis.67

The International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936 was, as previously noted, of great importance as well; its art and theory were well supported, especially by Herbert Read, Cyril Connolly and John Betjeman. It was patronised by well-known collectors such as Roland Penrose and Edward James - patronage that seemed to sponsor a rapid flow of
anthologies. One such excellent anthology is of particular interest at this juncture. In 1936, Herbert Read edited a collection of four significant essays under the title *Surrealism*; it was published by Faber and Faber and was very widely disseminated, in two editions, throughout the English-speaking world. This anthology, with an extended introduction by Read, also contains essays on theory, poetry and literature by André Breton, Hugh Sykes-Davies, Paul Eluard and George Hugnet. As such, this well-illustrated book supplied a rare insight into surrealist aesthetics and there is little doubt that Francis was well acquainted with the publication and its content, since a copy of the original edition of 1936 remained on his lounge room bookshelf until his death in 1994.\(^6\) The 1936 edition book jacket of this publication, which was also reproduced in the subsequent edition, shows a collage by Roland Penrose, the chief organizer of the International Surrealist Exhibition in London. The cover shows the image of an eye above a bisected nautilus shell, which terminates at a wall, with a key part submerged in a wall of bricks [fig. 2]. The purpose of this seemingly strange composition is clear: Penrose’s collage of images was intended to illustrate the beauty inherent upon the unlocking of the barriers of logic and rationality.

![Cover of Herbert Read (ed.), *Surrealism*, Faber and Faber, London, 1936.](image)

Penrose’s book cover illustration to Read’s 1936 anthology provides a remarkable insight: when turned upon its side, the image of this collage presents an overarching similarity to the main image, the spiral cochlea, in Francis’s *Schizophrenia*. The imagist connection between Francis’s 1943 painting and Penrose’s collage of 1936 is even more irresistible when we remind ourselves that the word cochlea is the Latin word for a shell. Thus, what we are presented with in Ivor Francis’s hitherto neglected painting *Schizophrenia*, is a complex recombination of analogues projected upon the imagist screen of the mind - these images,
defined by the lambent light of surrealist theory, form a repository of half-remembered details recollected from subconscious thoughts and intuitions. They are not so much a case of Wordsworth’s ‘emotions recollected in tranquility’ but more of images recollected in tranquility. In Francis’s mind, these transposed images and their tumbling associations were harnessed to serve a new purpose. These were re-applied images that, for Francis in Australia in the 1940s, had a personalised and localised resonance. In Francis’s imagination, Penrose’s forms and Ellery’s words seesawed in new harmony and the activity pointed to new connections. The fact that Francis’s painting is not based upon drawings, sketches or preliminary works and shows no pentimento, only confirms the flashing brilliance of these iconographic connections. The resultant reconfigured images, in Francis’s case, found an original outlet in a newly developed medico-literary surrealist iconography in Australian art – an iconography developed in different conditions and a different location. In a larger sense, the painting Schizophrenia also parallels and emulates the British, but not the French, surrealists’ method of pictorial generation in that it recombines and synthesises a priori images that are intended to give a reflection of psychological reality.  

All of these surrealist attributes resonate in Francis’s important painting Schizophrenia. This painting, doubtless propelled by the content of Ellery’s psychological text and mindful of Max Harris’s expositions, is an aesthetic tour de force that well illustrates, not only the place, but also the pervasive influence of surrealist aesthetic principles transposed into Australia. Given all of this, Ivor Francis’s painting Schizophrenia is Australia’s first major painting with a defined mental illness as its thematic subject.

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1 Ellery Reg S., Schizophrenia: The Cinderella of Psychiatry, Reed and Harris, Adelaide, 1941, 54-55, 59, 60.

2 Ivor Pengelly Francis was born in Uckfield, Sussex, England on Tuesday 13 March in 1906 and died in Adelaide, South Australia on Tuesday 9 November 1993. Ivor Francis’s obituary appears in The Advertiser newspaper in Adelaide: Anon., ‘Angry Penguin held true to style,’ Advertiser, Adelaide, South Australia, Wednesday 10 November 1993. Francis’s father was a Welshman from the town of Haverford in Wales and his mother (née Wheatley) came from Devonshire, England. Francis left England for Australia on Tuesday 15 January 1924 at the age of seventeen on the ship ‘Moreton Bay’ arriving on Tuesday 19 February 1924. Soon after, he gained employment with Charlie Inkster of the Elliston firm on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia and repaid his Barwell Scheme ship passage costs in ten months. Francis’s parents followed and left England in mid 1925. Francis’s mother and his sisters eventually left South Australia for Sydney in 1942. Ivor Francis had two sisters: Audrey Florence Francis who worked as a reporter for The Sydney Daily Telegraph and Vera Eleanor Francis who worked for Frank Johnson, a publisher in Sydney. Francis entered into a teacher training course in Adelaide in 1925 at the Adelaide Teachers’ College on a scholarship from the Education Department of South Australia. In 1928, he attended drawing classes at the South Australia School of Arts and Crafts in North Terrace in Adelaide and studied under Marie Tuck, Mary P. Harris, Jessamine Buxton, Leslie Wilkie and Louis McCubbin. In 1929, Francis taught at the Jamestown Primary School in Jamestown, South Australia and in 1930 he was transferred to teach at Prospect Primary School under Max Gerlach at Prospect in South Australia.
Francis married Ethel Louisa Eileen Saunders at St. Margaret’s Church in Woodville on Friday 21 January 1921. The pair remained childless. Francis’s early married life was spent at 5 Labrina Avenue, Prospect, Adelaide, South Australia; he later designed and moved to a self-built home/studio: ‘Hill-Rothviele’ (anagram: Ethel/Ivor), on Piccadilly Road, Crafers, South Australia – a small rural outer suburb about twenty kilometres South-East of Adelaide. Later, Francis became very prominent in Adelaide’s artistic circles as a designer, painter, exhibition organizer, teacher, critic and broadcaster. Francis also organized the 1943 Anti-Fascist Exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society in Adelaide and was a regular reviewer for the Adelaide News from 1944 to 1956, the Sunday Mail from 1965 to 1974 and The Advertiser in Adelaide from 1974 to 1977. Francis also self-published and distributed the thirty-nine numbers of the monthly publication Ivor’s Art Review from 1956 to 1960 and was the Supervisor of Education for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) from 1948 to 1968.

Ivor Francis received the Australian Federal Government Australian Council Emeritus Award for Services to the Arts in 1987. Francis also held the following teaching positions: 1925-1944: Primary Branch of the South Australian Education department; 1944-1947: Art Master: Adelaide Technical High School (School of Mines and Industries) now Institute of Technology (1947); 1948-1968: Supervisor of Education (South Australia) with the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC).

Francis is represented with paintings in the following collections: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. South Australia; Castlemaine Art Gallery, Castlemaine, Victoria; Margaret Carnegie Collection, Melbourne, Victoria; Benko Collection, Adelaide, South Australia; Goodwood Boys Technical High School, Adelaide, South Australia; Nailsworth Girls Technical High School, Adelaide, South Australia; Gareth Samson Collection, Melbourne, Victoria; Agapitos/Wilson Collection, Sydney, New South Wales and the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Victoria.

3 Max Harris, the South Australian poet, critic and intellectual, was born in the Adelaide suburb of Henley Beach in 1921 and educated at the prestigious St Peter's College, where he won twenty-one academic awards including the Tennyson Medal. He went onto the University of Adelaide in 1939 where he turned out equally brilliant performances. After the Ern Malley scandal, he turned to poetry, journalism and commentary – he later wrote a much respected weekly column for The Australian newspaper. He received the Order of Australia award for services to literature in 1989 and the Distinguished Alumni Award of the University of Adelaide Alumni Association in 1993. He died of prostate cancer in Adelaide in January 1995.

4 The eight exhibitions in chronological order of showings are:
(ii) Aspects of Australian Surrealism, Naracoorte Art Gallery and Contemporary Art Society of Australia, South Australia, October 31-November 18, 1976, catalogue number 3.
(iii) 50 Years of South Australian Art, Myers, South Australia, Pty. Ltd., Adelaide, South Australia, 1978, catalogue number 16.
(v) Ivor Francis: An Adelaide Modernist: Sixty Years of Painting, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, 3 July 1987-30 August 1987, catalogue number 23.


6 See: Francis, Ivor, Biographical Cuttings (Dynix Bib: 28339935), Petherick Reading Room, National Library of Australia, Canberra.


13 Francis, Ivor, *Schizophrenia*, 1943, oil on canvas, signed and dated lower right ‘Francis l/43,’ 82.5 cm. x 62.2 cm., Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Elders Bequest Fund Purchase, 1945.

14 Francis, Ivor, *Journal of Ivor Pengelly Francis, Photographer’s Apprentice, Farm-hand, Schoolteacher, Artist, Critic. Begun Sat. 23rd. October, 1944*, unpublished and unfinished autobiographical manuscript held at the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Ivor Francis Bequest.

15 Francis, Ivor, *Goodbye to the City of Dreams: An Autobiography*, unpublished autobiographical manuscript held at the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Ivor Francis Bequest.

During a 1990 interview with the author, Ivor Francis seemed most reluctant to discuss the painting *Schizophrenia* in any detail and seemed to deflect any questions or move onto another subject. See: Unpublished transcript of a personal interview with the author recorded at Ivor Francis’s home at Crafers in Adelaide, South Australia, 25 January 1990 (possession of the author; verbatim unpublished transcript lodged in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia).

The painting is quite different from Francis’s other paintings – in size, colour, theme, imagery and composition. This observation may be gauged by the content of the following two survey exhibitions of Ivor Francis’s paintings: Nodrum, Charles, *Ivor Francis Survey*, Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria, 1988 and Hylton, Jane, *Ivor Francis: An Adelaide Modernist: Sixty Years of Painting*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, 1987.


Dr. Reg S. Ellery, of 20 Fordeham Road, Hawthorn, Victoria, was called to act as an expert witness in the Ern Malley case in Adelaide, South Australia, on Sunday 27 August 1944.

Unpublished transcript of a personal interview with the author recorded at Ivor Francis’s home at Crafers in Adelaide, South Australia, 25 January 1990 (possession of the author; verbatim unpublished transcript lodged in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia).


Unpublished transcript of a personal interview with the author recorded at Ivor Francis’s home at Crafers in Adelaide, South Australia, 25 January 1990. (possession of the author; verbatim unpublished transcript lodged in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia). See appendix I a) and b) below.


See appendix I c) below.
34 Masson André, *Portrait of André Breton*, Ink on paper, 1941, 48.5 cm. x 62.5 cm., Masson Collection, Paris, France.


39 Francis, Ivor, *Investigation, Scientific and Otherwise of Matter without Form*, oil on canvas, 69 cm. x 94 cm., 1943, Agapitos/Wilson Collection, Sydney, New South Wales.


41 Masson, André, *The Dead Man*, oil on canvas, 1926, 92 cm. x 60 cm., Private Collection, Paris, France.

42 Masson, André, *Man*, oil on canvas, 1925, 100 cm. x 65.2 cm., Mr. and Mrs. Joseph R. Shapiro Collection, Oak Park, Illinois, USA.

43 Masson, André, *The Four Elements*, oil on canvas, 1924, 73 cm. x 59.5 cm., Private Collection, Paris, France.

44 Dalí, Salvador, *Illumined Pleasures*, oil on wood panel, 1929, 23.5 cm. x 34.5 cm., Museum of Modern Art, New York, Collection of Harriet and Sidney Janis.

45 The most cogent and extensive case for this interpretative observation is made by Ian Gibson in his following studies: Gibson, Ian, ‘Salvador Dalí: The Catalan Background,’ in Salvador Dalí: The Early Years, ed. Michael Raeburn, London, The South Bank Centre and The Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, Brighton and Lund Humphries, 1994, 49-64; Gibson, Ian, *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dalí*, London, Faber and Faber, 1997. A similar position is held by Dawn Ades and Whitney Chadwick. See the following scholarly studies and related commentaries:


46 Unpublished transcript of a personal interview with the author recorded at Ivor Francis’s home at Crafers in Adelaide, South Australia, 25 January 1990 (possession of the author;
More than seventy years later it is difficult to fully appreciate the surprising scale of public interest in Dalí’s almost embarrassingly overt commercialisation, loquacious promotion and extroverted self-serving aggrandisement. There was a voluminous amount of easily available popular and secondary source English language information on the notorious paintings of Salvador Dalí, in bookshops, newsagents, Mechanics’ Institutes, tertiary institution libraries and public libraries. This popular material was often anonymously written and internationally syndicated out for publication in other newspapers and British and American journals and magazines, particularly those such as Time, Vogue, The Studio, Vanity Fair, Esquire, Harper’s Bazaar, Look, Click, London Bulletin, Art Digest, Town and Country and Life, all of which had large international circulations. These internationally available publications often, in turn, gave rise to a further spread of information in newspapers and radio programs and prompted discussions in Australian clubs, societies, special interest groups, art schools and universities. All of this activity not only reflected the broad extent of cultural exchange but also further disseminated interest in surrealism during this formative period in the development Australian late Modernism. It must be pointed out that an unusually high number of these reports were published on 1 April (April Fool’s Day); a factor which not only confirmed Dalí’s zany notoriety but also unexpectedly ensured the spread of information about him and the movement to which he belonged. Scanning the extensive list of publications devoted to Dalí between 1932 and 1943, the date of Francis’s Schizophrenia, dispels any doubt about the broad scale of this popular interest and its social spread. See the bibliography in Appendix II.

Francis, Ivor, Venus Reborn, oil on canvas, 1946, 57 cm. x 69.5 cm., South Australian Government Grant 1977, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia.

Unpublished transcript of a personal interview with the author recorded at Ivor Francis’s home at Crafers in Adelaide, South Australia, 25 January 1990 (possession of the author; verbatim unpublished transcript lodged in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia).


Dali, Salvador, The Enigma of Hitler, oil on canvas, no/date, circa 1939; estimates of dates vary from 1932 to 1938, 79.5 cm. x 53.6 cm., Ex. Gala/Dalí Collection, Paris; now in the National Collection of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia de Madrid, Madrid, Spain.


53 The controversy surrounding Dalí’s painting and surrealism was fuelled by numerous comments in the Australian Press. The following lists the main published articles: Anon., Adelaide News, 18 August 1939, illustrated after p. 9; Anon., ‘Town Hall Transformed as Art Gallery: Costly Pictures for Exhibition Move In,’ Herald, Melbourne, 14 October 1939, 7; Anon., ‘Modern Artists 18. Dali: Paints Visions That Storm his Mind,’ Herald, Melbourne, 30 October 1939, 6; Art in Australia, 15 November 1939, illustrated p. 39; Anon., ‘Modern Artists 3. Dali: Paints Visions that Storm his Mind,’ Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 15 November 1939, 6; Anon., ‘No This Isn’t Dali,’ Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 28 November 1939, 6; Anon., ‘“The Only Difference between Me and a Lunatic is that I am Sane?,” Salvador Dali. What Sydney Thinks of him,’ Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 29 November 1939, 6; Lindsay, ‘Norman Lindsay On Dalí’s Surrealism,’ Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 1 December 1939, 6; John Young, ‘Dalí’s Picture,’ Daily Telegraph, Sydney, 9 December 1939, 6; Lionel Lindsay, Addled Art, Sydney, Australia, Angus and Robertson, 1942, 34 ff. This listing was compiled by Steven Miller, Archivist at the Research Library at the Art Gallery of New South Wales – used with permission.

54 Breton, André (ed.), This Quarter: Surrealist Number, Vol. v, No. 1, 1932.

55 This is particularly evident in André Breton’s paper ‘Surrealism and Madness,’ This Quarter: Surrealist Number, 101 ff.


58 Read, Herbert (ed.), Surrealism, Faber and Faber, London, 1936.

59 Breton, André, ‘Originality and Liberty,’ Art in Australia, No. 4, 1 December 1941, 11-17.

60 Masson, André, ‘Life and Liberty,’ Art in Australia, No. 5, 1 March 1942, 11-17.

61 Francis’s debt to the ideas and influence of Max Harris is acknowledged in the following unpublished manuscript of his autobiography: Francis, Ivor, ‘Goodbye to the City of Dreams’, unpublished manuscript held by the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, 213-218, Ivor Francis Bequest. This debt is also acknowledged in the unpublished transcript of a personal interview with the author recorded at Ivor Francis’s home at Crafers in Adelaide, South Australia, 25 January 1990 (possession of the author; verbatim unpublished transcript lodged in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia).

62 The controversial Ern Malley hoax and its effects are the subjects of the following study: Heyward, Michael, The Ern Malley Affair, St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1993.
Mary Packer Harris’s life and work are the subjects of a very rare and modest five page booklet publication: Biven, Rachel, *Mary Packer Harris, 1891-1978*, Walkerville, Walkerville Town Council, 1986, u. p. A copy is held in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia.

Besides Ivor Francis’s paintings the 1939 exhibition in Adelaide also showed the works of the following South Australian artists: David Dallwitz, Douglas Roberts, Victor Adolfsson, Jeffrey Smart, Jacqueline Hick, Ruth Tuck, Kenneth Lamacraft, Jean Lowe, John Welsh, Helen Mackintosh, Ruby Henty, Violet Buttrose, Margaret Bevan, Robert Mansell and those of Mary Packer Harris herself.

Francis, Ivor, *Art Lessons for the RAAF*, Melbourne, Department of Defence, 1944. Some of these now rare irregular issue brochures are held in the Research Library and Archives of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Ivor Francis Bequest.

See appendix I d) below.

Confirmed through casual conversation with Ivor Francis and observation by the author.

The original French surrealists’ process of pictorial generation or imagist thought generally tends to be *a posteriori* – it is not thought out and then transcribed and much more automatic, ‘passive’ and emergent in procedure than most British surrealism – which, by and large, already knows what it is looking for. This slightly over bold assertion would rightly be the subject of another study.

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Ken Wach taught at the University of Melbourne and was the Head of the School of Creative Arts. He is now a Principal Research Fellow at the same institution. He is the author of sixty publications including the following: *Salvador Dali: Masterpieces from the Collection of the Salvador Dali Museum*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1996; ‘Subjectivity Incorporated: The Surrealist Vignette in the Photography of Max Dupain,’ Heather Johnson and Deborah Malor (Eds.) *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Sydney, Art Association of Australia and New Zealand, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000, pp. 107-130 and ‘Pablo Picasso’s “Weeping Woman” of 1937’; ‘René Magritte’s “In Praise of Dialectics” of 1937’; ‘Balthus’ “Nude with a Cat” of 1949’; *European Masterpieces: Six Centuries of Painting from the National Gallery of Victoria*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 2002, nos. 83, 84 and 87.
Appendix I: Excerpts from an unpublished interview between Ken Wach and Ivor Francis, 25 January 1990

a)

Ken Wach: That's quite a new subject matter in Australian art - for people to be interested in mental illness for a subject for painting.

Ivor Francis: Quite new. Yes! There was also a lot of interest at that time, more sort of academic interest, in psychotic art and I remember being asked to review a book which I did, for The News on psychotic art, which had photographs of demented people and I was very disturbed by that book. See there are certain things I don't like. I don't like interest in mental matters which mean that we more or less sort of hold up for exhibition people who are something which they are to be pitied for. I think to talk about psychotic art for artists is an unhealthy sort of thing. To write a textbook on psychotic art for doctors - that's okay - must do that - but not to make a spectacle of them. Emery's [sic, Ellery's] book was very sympathetic and it would have been a book that would have given a lot of hope to people who were either like that themselves or who knew someone who was like it. But to show these poor demented creatures and how they suffered, of course it was interesting in some ways, it was all right from a psychological point of view, to show that when people draw certain things, when they're in a state like that, to show that it comes out in their drawings and their paintings. That's of interest to psychologists. And there was an interest at the time in that. There's a fellow who lives not very far from me here, who is an art teacher and, I think, a bit queer himself anyway, who for a while got himself a job teaching subnormal children. He used to plague me by dropping in here with an armful of pictures and flop them all down all over the floor. He was so excited and enthusiastic about them as he explained to me: 'Now this child's work, now he's drawn that. You know what? His grandmother is really a murderess,' and that sort of thing. I like genuine art, but I don't think that's genuine.

b)

IF: Well, Max had, I think, probably a bigger influence on me than anybody else did. Max had the ability somehow to really get me going - to inspire me. I just loved, and still love, Max’s way of thinking. Mind you, I hardly ever understand what he was saying. Most people can’t. But it all sounded good and so I waited on his every word and it was Max who influenced me the most - I suppose that he flattered me a bit. He used to give me the titles of all my pictures - he was always able to find titles - I couldn’t. And I used to ask him ‘What should I call this one, Max?’ And, so, it was Max who decided everything about apocalyptic painters. And, then, when I became an art critic, it was Max who suggested, my nom de plume should be ‘Apocalypt.’ And, of course, it was David Dallwitz who coined his famous tongue twister ‘an apoplectic apocalyptic.’ Having fed me that idea, Max started to feed me with Freud.

KW: Max Harris did?

IF: Yes, I could never understand a word.

KW: Was that in the 40s?

IF: That would be in the 40s.

KW: That’s very early.

IF: Yes, he took me out - I used to go and visit Max occasionally. He used to invite me to his home. He had the ceilings of his den covered with prints he’d probably pinched from art books in the University Library or Public Library and I remember he had these big thick volumes of Freud you see. He wanted me to take them away and read them and I said to Max, ‘No, look Max, I’d much rather
you read them and then tell me all about them, I like hearing you talk about them.'

KW: That would have been quite exceptional at that time - in the early 1940's - for someone to be reading Freud. He was only just out of his teens then.

IF: Oh, he would have been in his early 20s. Yes, that's right, about 24 [Harris was nineteen years old in 1940]. Yes, it's exceptional isn't it? And, of course, his book *Vegetative Eye* - which got such a slamming - but I got terrific material out of that. It really inspired me, you know I just lapped it up, I loved every bit of it - such imagination! Yes it's an important book isn't it? Yes. And so there you are again, you see. With his poetry, it was the same thing. It's rather strange that both Doug and I painted a picture on his Rose. That's right. Doug [Douglas Dallwitz] called his *The Pelvic Rose* - I didn't do that. But, Max Harris - I don't know why he should have been such an inspiration for me, but he was. ... Max used to tell me the sort of things I needed to know. I only needed to know enough to get inspired and I was quite happy to let Max do that.

c)

KW: That *Schizophrenia* work of yours which was bought by the Gallery - the first one of yours that they bought - that's obviously a very important work for you and it has elements in it that indicate quite a knowledge of schizophrenia and it was done in '43 - so you must have read that work very well [Ellery's text] - like 'The Ear,' 'The Wall,' etc. Are there any things that you can say about it that would clear up your source of knowledge and the general feeling of that work. I mean even the spears in it are very reminiscent of Max Ernst and the idea that there's a location in the brain; that there's something wrong with the brain. Jane [Jane Hylton, Curator of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia] says that good thoughts germinate from the brain and go out and in and are blocked by the wall. I would have thought it has to do with hearing.

IF: Well, there is an ear in the picture. Yes, there's an ear in the picture and in the background you've got a bottle you see, she doesn't mention that.

KW: And you've got a female form inside the bottle and you've got grotesque figures and the brick wall indicates perhaps the closed-in world of the schizophrenic.

IF: It is, yes, it is up against a brick wall! Yes, up against a brick wall literally.

KW: And that round tube I always thought of as being somewhat like the inner workings of the ear - the eustachian tube. Is that accurate in your mind?

IF: It could be - I think the corked-up bottle would be symbolic of the frustration, of being 'bottled-up' to use the term. It's all very corny, really.

KW: Well it's metaphoric really.

IF: Yes!

KW: What about the woman in the bottle - there's a sort of female shape in there, from my memory, I think.

IF: Well I'm not quite sure about that, she might be a woman who was frustrated - I don't know, but you see, don't forget that everybody talked me into it - they told me I'm a Surrealist, and so why fight against it? [Francis here changed the subject abruptly and started talking about the Black Hole Theory]

d)

KW: Ivor, what about Mary P. Harris? You mentioned that she had mystical, spiritual, leanings and from my memory, she was a Quaker. What sort of mystical, spiritual, beliefs did she have? Were they based on a philosopher, a religion? Did you read anything of Bergson or Nietzsche or Rimbaud or people like that? Nothing much has been said about Mary Harris's beliefs like that, not according to my reading anyway.
IF: I think Mary Harris too, being a mystic, appealed to me because I had an empathy for it. These two [Max Harris and Mary P. Harris] influenced me much. I was not interested in ‘schools’ or ‘mainstreams.’ She [Mary P. Harris] had, I think, a strong religious basis, because at her lectures she used to go into a state of ecstasy at times. She’d go into ecstasy, for instance, when she’d got on to William Blake and she’d just go ‘Oooh.’ And she had a very deep empathy for the French Impressionists and Expressionists. I don’t know why. I think it arose from Mary's admiration for guts and the ability to survive and succeed. At heart she was a pragmatist – ‘put your trust in God and keep your powder dry.’ Anyhow, Mary was a bit like that. I sometimes used to sort of doubt her sincerity. But, she was really very sincere from a mystical point of view.

KW: She would have been very inspiring though, in the Art School, to young students.

IF: She was tremendously inspiring, yes! And it was rather funny because honestly and truly, I mean, if some of the people whom she used to talk about in Adelaide were to hear what she said I’m quite sure it would have been Mary who would have been in the dock all the time instead of Max Harris, you know. She was dreadful the way she would make fun of people, in the Adelaide Establishment! She’d really give them tongue whippings in her lectures you know - all in the good cause of Christian pragmatism!

KW: It would be hard to get away with it today, wouldn’t it?

IF: Yes. And, of course, then came the time when she wrote her last [in fact, her second last] book In One Splendour Spun [1970]. She wanted me to write the foreword. So I was very honoured and she gave me to understand that this book - I think she even says it in the foreword - she says that it’s really an autobiography about her teaching days. So I was quite happy. I said yes, I’d write it, gladly, because I thought well, wonderful. Mary's experiences of her teaching days and all that sort of thing. Then one day a Quaker friend of hers, a chap, came around with a parcel. He handed it to me. It was Mary's manuscript. Well, I read her book which gave me the absolute horrors. I thought well, I'm certainly not going to put my name to a foreword praising it - I'll be dragged to Court! [at this point, Francis gesticulated wildly and had a look of terror on his face – as though recalling Max Harris's experiences in Court over the Ern Malley scandal in 1944]. She slanderously mentioned a number of people by name. She told terrible stories, which I since have discovered were true, which are well known now to be true and so I was a bit wrong there. She told all about the Atom Bombs in the Woomera warheads [British Atomic Bomb tests in the 1950s]. How she was able to get her information I don’t know! She had all this information and yet it was all wrong - as far as I was concerned. But, of course, it’s now shown that it wasn’t wrong. Anyway, I was terribly upset at that - I really was.
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Desiring to be Led Astray

Emma Cocker

Abstract
This essay proposes to explore the practice of following as a tactical legacy of surrealist errance, by examining a range of contemporary art practices in relation to their surrealist precursors. Using the critical connections between André Breton’s text Nadja, and Sophie Calle’s project Suite Vénitienne as a point of conceptual departure, the intention is to suggest that the act of following has the capacity to draw together a number of divergent concerns or theoretical positions in relation to the notions of doubling or mirroring; mimicry, simulation and camouflage; and as such can be understood as the location or conceptual site where a host of surrealist ideas are buried, and whose ghosts persist to haunt.

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal … but to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling.¹

The desire to be led astray or to ‘lose oneself in a city’ emerges as a craving for the unknown, the unfamiliar, or the strange in both oneself and one’s surroundings. It is an impulse evident in the gesture of following another, for this is an action that promises to transform the banal reality of everyday encounter with sexually charged or libidinal potency. Seeking to dissolve the boundary between self and other, as well as that which might differentiate the body from its environment, the performative act of following has the capacity to draw together a number of divergent concerns or theoretical positions in relation to notions of doubling or mirroring; as well as those of mimicry, simulation and camouflage. Such ideas can be evidenced at play in a range of contemporary artistic practices, but might also have their roots in, or can be traced back to, surrealism. Using the errant meander inherent in following another’s steps as a central motif, my intention is to assert that the surrealist practice of errance, as much as the concepts of objective chance and the informe, can be seen as a critical strategy and influence behind the contemporary interest in and legacy of surrealism.² By making connections between key moments of surrealist errance and more recent interest in acts of wandering - in artistic practices from the late 1950s onwards and especially in connection to contemporary art - my focus will be to examine how a range of surrealist preoccupations are articulated within these different artistic strategies. Furthermore, by extending existing arguments, I intend to propose that the notion of following and the idea of being led can be viewed as a specific tactical legacy of surrealism’s aimless wandering. The desire to be led astray evident in recent artistic practices can thus be understood as a pivotal concept through which to articulate an alternative lineage of surrealist influence whereby the ephemeral and performative gesture or trace of errance may be granted a more enduring afterlife.
In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (2006), cultural historian Rebecca Solnit weaves a rich conceptual tapestry of literary and cultural references from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1845) to Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), in order to suggest that the desire to lose oneself is marked by the quest for ‘voluptuous surrender,’ of a giving over to or immersion in the present. She argues that ‘to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable of “being” in uncertainty and mystery.’ The desire for being lost or for losing oneself anticipates the discovery of the unexpected or unaccustomed at the heart of reality: it affects a transformative blow in which the everyday might be seen with fresh eyes. As Thoreau suggests:

> Not till we are completely lost, or turned around - for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost - do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.

This sense of abandonment and the relinquishing of moral or rational cognition is a primary drive at play in the surrealist practice of psychic automatism, a central strategy employed within surrealism through which to express the functioning of the unconscious through automatically produced textual, visual and performative means. Employing techniques and procedures appropriated or borrowed from psychoanalysis, spiritualism and from children’s games, the function of psychic automatism was to attempt to bypass the conscious self and thus disrupt the normative or perceived order of reality, revealing a psychical layer of existence or latency beneath the veneer of lived experience and visual appearances. The process of psychic automatism was propelled from an imaginative universe into the public realm through the practice of *errance* or aimless wandering which became strategically adopted in 1924 when André Breton, Louis Aragon, Max Morise and Roger Vitrac set off on foot from Blois (a town chosen randomly) and wandered haphazardly for several days in order to ‘encourage the eruption of unconscious images into consciously perceived space.’ The ‘aim’ of surrealist *errance* was to somehow dislodge the glaze of self-delusion; to puncture the surface of what was consciously ‘seen’ to allow dreamlike revelations to emerge in the cracks and fissures between the different layers of reality. Though essentially a transitory and performative gesture, the practice of *errance* is textually inscribed or documented in the way that it underpins the conceptual narrative structure of numerous surrealist texts. For example, André Breton’s autobiographical novel, *Nadja* (1928) relays an account of his brief relationship with a woman who seemed to be the embodiment of the drifting spirit. The text follows the random interactions between Breton and Nadja, and the dissolution or disruption of the different psychological layers of existence occurring as a
consequence of their encounter. Nadja epitomised ‘the wandering soul’ for Breton, who was initially fascinated by her submission to chance and by the perpetual state of errance to which her existence claimed. She became emblematic of his desire to escape the rational: her physical and mental wanderings were seen to embody a kind of automatism, which Breton employed as though she were a planchette scoring the surface of the city with chance or psychic inscriptions. For Louis Aragon, errance was a means to release a ‘sense of the marvellous’ from within reality, which had been cloaked in a ‘delirium of interpretation’; or buried beneath the constructs or illusions of he ‘who advances into the world’s habits with an increasing ease, who rids himself progressively of the taste and texture of the unthought-of.’ The gesture of aimless wandering, which underpins the structure of his novel Le Paysan de Paris (1924-26), served to reveal the hidden or latent reality; for according to Aragon, ‘New myths spring up beneath each step we take ... a mythology ravels and unravels.’ The practice of errance might also be seen at play in the ‘wanderings, strange sights and encounters’ of Philippe Soupault’s novel Last Nights in Paris (1928) where the enigmatic character of Georgette provides the focus for a multitude of searches and acts of following or surveillance through which an alternative version of Paris could be experienced. The act of following another serves to distance the familiar and the known, such that a fresh and perhaps more critical vantage point may be developed through this psychologically displaced perspective. The sense of distance experienced by feeling disoriented, subjects the commonplace or unnoticed elements of one’s habitual environment to scrutiny equivalent to that of the stranger’s glance. For example, as the characters in Soupault’s text, ‘were pursuing or, more exactly, tracking Georgette, [they] saw Paris for the first time. It was surely not the same city. It lifted itself above the mists, rotating like the earth on its axis, more feminine than usual.’

Whilst the immediate provenance for surrealist errance can be found in the process of automatic writing - such as that employed in the project Magnetic Fields (1920) by Breton and Soupault - reference to other literary and artistic examples is useful here in order to begin to differentiate between potential readings of this form of aimless wandering, and to identify the focus that will later become central to my argument. Certainly the idea of aimless wandering is by no means unique to surrealism and it can be seen to underpin a range of preceding and subsequent artistic, literary and cultural practices. In one sense errance can be understood as part of a tradition of spatial navigation and urban geography; an act of wandering through the newly burgeoning city space that follows in the footsteps of Charles Baudelaire’s flâneur; Edgar Allan Poe’s The Man of the Crowd (1850), or is echoed in the writing of Walter Benjamin, whose reflections on the city have subsequently informed a critical interpretation of surrealist practice. Such practices have been framed by a later discourse that asserts the critical value of the pedestrian experience of the city, as both a politically resistant and playfully disruptive gesture. For Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), walking is read as a tactic for
challenging the dominance of the map or grid. Analogous to the speech act, it carries the possibility of breathing life or enunciation into the dead text of the map, of introducing a temporal beat or narrative into the abstract spatial grid of the city space.14

Certeau’s analysis of the connection between the practice of textual and pedestrian wandering has been adopted by some historians as a filter through which to return with alternative readings to moments of the past. For some, the haphazard spatial and temporal organisation of Man Ray’s Atget Album (1926), for example, can be understood as having been arranged or selected through a form of dérive akin to what Certeau describes as the ‘pedestrian enunciation’ of a city space; and can thus be seen to operate according to the principles of errance.15 Man Ray’s album re-presented a selected number of photographs by Eugène Atget whose documentary images captured the process of an old Paris disappearing, as a new cityscape emerged.16 Man Ray edited and re-framed a partial and seemingly arbitrary collection of Atget’s images within the covers of his own album; where the curatorial selection or rejection of images is seen by some historians to echo the way in which a pedestrian itinerary articulates a partial and individualised ‘reading’ of the city. As Certeau asserts:

The walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else … He thus makes a selection … whether by making choices among the signifiers of the spatial ‘language’ or by displacing them through the use he makes of them. He condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance and composes with others spatial ‘turns of phrase’ that are ‘rare,’ ‘accidental’ or ‘illegitimate.’17

Man Ray can thus be seen to have wandered through the Parisian streets as they were portrayed within Atget’s oeuvre: in this two-dimensional rendering of the city he is presented as having lingered over certain ‘scenes’; bypassed others. Performed as both a physical and curatorial or textual gesture, the act of wandering introduces a form of ‘spacing’ which functions to disrupt the logic of one order in favour of another.18 Certeau describes this gesture of spacing and selection as the procedure of ‘asyndeton’; ‘a process of “opening gaps in the spatial continuum” and “retaining only selected parts of it”.’19 These ideas can be traced through into subsequent practices which share the gesture of aimless wandering. The Situationists’ illustration/diagram The Naked City (1957) also ruptures the continuity of the city represented as map by presenting only fragments and partial references that are separated by gaps and blank areas. Abandoning the spatial approximations and distances of the map, Guy Debord’s illustration The Naked City focused on zones and pockets of interaction or ‘hubs’ of social activity, which were linked together by what Debord described as ‘turntables’ that facilitated a range of potential direction and possibility. It provided a visual diagram of the dynamic of the Situationists’ primary tactic, the dérive (drift or drifting) that reflected the pedestrian’s experience, that of the everyday
user of the city. The Situationists’ dérive extended the practice of errance not least in relation to its subversive possibilities as a form of play or political disruption. It was used to demonstrate a ‘critical attitude toward the hegemonic scopic regime of modernity,’ whereby the idea of blindness (in aimless or purposeless wandering) was advocated as a way to ‘subvert the rationality of pure visuality.’

The Situationists’ navigation of the city space aimed to employ maps as sites of narrative and of individual itinerary rather than as tools of ‘universal knowledge.’ Rather than offering the panoptic or the utopic overview of the landscape which is characteristic of the conventional geographer’s interest in mapping, users of The Naked City were freed from a dictated sense of navigation and proximity, and could for themselves experience, ‘the sudden change of atmosphere in a street, the sharp division of a city into one of distinct psychological climates.’

Returning once more to Certeau, the users of this map were encouraged to explore and contribute to the experiential or performed space of the Naked City, rather than passively travel through the city rendered as place, which was the static and immutable city defined within conventional cartography. The gesture of both literally and metaphorically tearing up the map presented an act of both resistance and recuperation. The performed dérive in both the errant play of purposeless footfall or in the casual drift through the archives (as in Man Ray’s album) operated as the rhythm or pulse which set about the stirrings of hidden or repressed realities; where, as Certeau asserts, ‘A migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.’

Alongside the notion of a resistant form of pedestrianism or spatial ‘enunciation’ these practices can also be interpreted as part of a tradition where geographical navigation echoes, encourages or is equated to specific psychological experiences or states of mind. A precedent for both the surrealists’ and Situationists’ use of and interest in alternative forms of mapping and topographical description is found in La Carte du Tendre, which made an appearance in the first volume of Madeleine de Scudéry’s novel Clélie (1654), and used the metaphor of a journey to chart the possible trajectories of a love affair. Representational of the emotional or psychological landscape of the author’s sexual imagination, the map might be seen as anticipating certain surrealist preoccupations by suggesting the latent presence of a bubbling, libidinal set of drives and desires beneath the surface of what is ordinarily seen or perceived. A connection between surrealism and La Carte du Tendre is made by Ian Walker, where he suggests that: ‘The physical geography of Paris is replaced by an affective topography, superimposing a sort of carte du tendre over the actual city. Or, to project forward, Nadja can be seen as an exemplification of “psycho-geography.”’

Tactics for the alteration or defamiliarisation of the city through the gesture of wandering emerged within surrealism, where the wanderer was required to forfeit habitual forms of navigation in favour of a more psychological engagement with space and their surroundings.
Nocturnal wandering, or alternatively the following of another’s footsteps can be seen as specific models of errance, through which to de-stabilise or blur the line between self and one’s environment. The subversive or deviant possibilities of ‘nightwalking,’ long associated with the ‘threat’ of unrestrained drives and desires - debauchery, social disruption, criminality and prostitution - were recuperated within surrealism as a process of making the familiar strange. The creative or imaginative potential of nightwalking emerges in the eighteenth century in novels such as Nicolas Restif de La Bretonne’s Les Nuits de Paris (1788) and Le Paysan Perverti (1775), whose descriptions of nocturnal wandering and urban nightwalking might be seen as directly influencing Louis Aragon’s Paysan de Paris and the manner in which nightwalking became adopting within surrealist errance. For Rosalind Krauss, the image of the surrealist nightwalker, ‘like the shadow that is cast, [is] of a different order: dissolved in darkness, approaching the condition of the fluid and impalpable.’ Here, it becomes possible to identify the potential of a third reading for errance, where certain forms of wandering seem intent on affecting a form of declassification or the blurring of distinct boundaries. In the act of nightwalking, for example, the individual dissolves into the city’s shadows and becomes indistinguishable from darkness. Alternatively the gesture of following creates a blur of a more corporeal or existential kind.

The act of following another is a specific method or tactic that can be witnessed at play in the surrealist examples cited earlier, where in each text it is possible to trace a ‘relationship,’ however fragile, between a follower and a person followed. By examining a range of contemporary art practices in relation to their surrealist precursors, my aim to suggest that the act of following itself has the capacity to draw together a number of divergent concerns or theoretical positions in relation to the notions of doubling or mirroring, mimicry, simulation and camouflage; and as such can be understood as the location or conceptual site where a host of surrealist ideas are buried, and whose ghosts persist to haunt. Whilst there is some argument that the lasting legacy of the performative and ephemeral experiences of errance have been ‘collapse(d) or eclipsed by objective chance,’ a distinct trace of aimless drifting can still be seen to linger beneath the surface of more contemporary practices, not least in relation to its subversive possibilities as a form of play or disruption. Rather than trying to present an exhaustive overview of the act of wandering as practice, I am proposing to focus on examples which relate to or result from the gesture of following another (or another’s instruction), or which demonstrate the desire to be wilfully (mis)led. The intention here is to highlight specific moments when this form of errance appears to enjoy something of a resurgence, which might be explicitly witnessed in various conceptual or political practices of the late 1960s, or expressed more implicitly within the layering of imaginative, historical and real space in the work of many contemporary artists.
Fig 1: Vito Acconci, *Following Piece ‘Street Works IV,’* Architectural League of New York; Oct 3-25, 1969; New York City, various locations. Activity; 23 days, varying times each day. Courtesy of the Acconci Studio.

Though arguably differing in political intent to their immediate Situationist precedents, a form of wandering dérive or drift and the concept of depaysement are echoed in various conceptual practices of the 1960s and 1970s, in both durational performances and propositions for alternative modes of cartography.\(^{34}\) In Vito Acconci’s *Following Piece* (1969), for example, the sense of following or being led was explicitly employed as a specific tactic of wandering: the artist selected a random passer-by in the street and then followed them until they disappeared into a private building [fig. 1]. As with earlier moments of dérive, the work served to disturb the usual boundaries and conventions of the city space - such as the division between public and private - in order to create a sense of a psychologically charged urban experience, which ruptured or suspended normative patterns of behaviour. The notion of following is played out in a different manner in Bas Jan Ader’s planned trilogy of actions *In Search of the Miraculous,* where the artist proposed a series of seemingly irresolvable or abstract searches in different locations. The first part of this serial quest - *In Search of the Miraculous, (One Night in Los Angeles)* (1973) - took the form of a series of black and white photographic images documenting his nocturnal journey from the Hollywood hills down to the Pacific Ocean [fig. 2]. The images were accompanied by handwritten lyrics from the Coasters’ 1957 song *Searchin’*; which evoke the relentless pursuit of a lost love. Phrases such as ‘Gonna find her’ used for the ninth and tenth images of the series strangely and playfully recalled the tone of surrealist wandering, motivated as it often was by the search for some elusive female figure. The anticipated third part of Ader’s series would repeat the action in Amsterdam, following the significantly more ambitious second part of the series, in which he intended to cross the Atlantic in his one-man yacht, *Ocean Wave,* a journey he never completed. Here Ader traded an urban dérive in favour of a voyage that was performed closer to the paradigm of the ‘wandering tragic hero on a quest for the sublime.’\(^{35}\) Certain critics have asserted that Ader was in fact attempting to critically explore the rhetoric of the romantic quest,
through what could be described as a conceptual experiment that borrowed the ‘quest narrative’ as a set of found instructions or the rules of a game. The romantic model of wandering is then followed such that it might be interrogated, inhabited or appropriated; even rescued and ‘restored as true experience.’ The act of following is adopted as a tactic for being led astray, or as a gesture of critical re-inscription through which to recoup the latent value of the original act.

Fig. 2: Bas Jan Ader, *In Search of the Miraculous - One night in Los Angeles*, 1973. Courtesy of Bas Jan Ader Collection, Patrick Painter Editions, Vancouver, Canada and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

Contemporary artist Tacita Dean extends this tradition, for her practice is also one of resuscitation and rescue, where forgotten or unfulfilled narratives from the past serve as the impetus for a quest in which she can be seen as a wanderer piecing together fragments of history that lurk beneath the surface of reality, re-tracing the footsteps of another in search perhaps of alternative endings or missing clues. It is the breaks and pauses in lived experience, or the moments of failure and abandonment that motivate her meandering ‘journeys.’ The story of Donald Crowhurst’s doomed sailing endeavour during the 1968 *Golden Globe Race* serves as one such ‘unfulfilled beginning’ that is claimed by Dean as a site to excavate. Crowhurst, an
unprepared and faltering sailor, was desperate to be the first to complete a solo non-stop voyage around the world. His attempts proved futile and his tale instead represents the subsequent collapse of the dream, in which he disappeared at sea leaving only a series of faked and incoherent log entries. Dean takes this as the conceptual starting point for a series of journeys and voyages of her own in which she initiates a filmic following in someone else’s footsteps, a meticulous re-treading of Crowhurst’s fated journey in works such as Disappearance at Sea I and II (1996 and 1997) and Teignmouth Electron (1999) [fig. 3].

Hal Foster suggests that Dean is compelled to search for objects that ‘serve as found arks of lost moments in which the here-and-now of the work functions as a possible portal between an unfinished past and a reopened present.’ Hers is a process of ‘uncharted research’ to uncover the specific histories that exist under the surface of a place: a form of archaeological dig through space and time. This sense of psychologically charged geography suggests the
potential for a slippery and fluid relationship between past, present and future where the different temporal layers are no longer held in place, but promise to erupt or subside forming new configurations and juxtapositions. The present is simultaneously saturated with traces of moments that have now passed by and with the nascent stirrings of what is still to come. This sense of latency also underpins Walter Benjamin’s descriptions of the sense of the ‘scene of a crime’ within Eugène Atget’s images; of the simultaneously historic and prophetic in his photographic oeuvre, which according to Annette Michelson is an articulation of the ‘sense of imminence of occurrences past or still to come.’\textsuperscript{40} Reverberating as an echo in Dean’s practice, the notion of immanence alludes to a liminal or threshold condition where temporal or spatial anchors are lost and where ‘time is suspended: we are between times.’\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{image1}
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{image2}
\caption{Figs. 4 and 5: Effie Paleologou, from the series \textit{Mean City}, 1993-1999, C-print, 160 x 110cm. Courtesy of the artist and Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London, and Rut Blees Luxemburg, \textit{Nach Innen/In Deeper} 1999, C-print, 150 x 180cm. Courtesy of the artist and Union Gallery, London.}
\end{figure}

This sense of imminence might also seen in the eerie nocturnal cityscapes of contemporary photographers such as Rut Blees Luxemburg and Effie Paleologou, whose photographs record a trace of their somnambulist wanderings or operate as witness to, and evidence of, other nightwalkers.\textsuperscript{42} Effie Paleologou’s \textit{Mean City} series (1993-1999) is a collection of photographs that she produced during some of her insomniac wanderings in an unfamiliar city, which conjure forth the psychological dream-state of the sleepwalk. She often frames a single character in her images; isolated figures in the urban landscape that seem to offer an ambiguous sense of both reassurance and threat [fig. 4]. Her work presents a sense of psychological limbo in which the roles of victim and voyeur begin to bleed or blur. It is unclear whether the artist is following her framed protagonists or is being followed by them. An equivalent psychological disjuncture takes place in Rut Blees Luxemburg’s \textit{Liebeslied} series where disused carpark spaces or emptied out streets are presented as a vacant stage where possible encounters may yet, or have already, taken place. Her use of extreme long exposure forces the collapse of durational time where the strategic play of the resulting technical glitch - reciprocity failure - causes a crisis in the tonal register enabling forms to slip free from their usual associative colours.
and take on unfamiliar hues. Images such as Nach Innen/In Deeper (1999) capture the absent trace of the human body: they resonate with the sense of recently felt presence. The barely visible footprints that linger in an inky stairwell seem caught at the moment that they are beginning to fade; as though the trembling pavements had palpably quivered in response to the nightwalker’s hesitant tread [fig. 5]. Each artist seems drawn to places of encounter that are passed through on the way to somewhere else; spaces such as staircases or doors. Such zones might function in a similar way to the threshold motif of the road, which has been described as ‘the place where the spatial and temporal paths of the most diverse people intersect; it is both a point of new departures and the locus where events find their denouements.’

The threshold space has been marked with a particular significance within earlier episodes of wandering, as well as in other surrealist contexts. For his entry for ‘Threshold’ in Georges Bataille’s Critical Dictionary, Marcel Griaule suggested that: ‘The threshold is the node which separates two opposing worlds ... to cross a threshold is thus to traverse a zone of danger where invisible but real battles are fought out.’ Walter Benjamin’s use of the term ‘revolving door’ as ‘the field ... against which a meaningful action takes place – the act of passage from one space to another – without fixed and stable references,’ also encapsulates a sense of the threshold space. The ‘revolving door’ might share conceptual similarities with Guy Debord’s ‘turntables’ or hubs in The Naked City, or may even seem analogous to the moment in L’Amour fou where Breton’s flea market discovery of/by the slipper-spoon object functions as a double-headed arrow, pointing simultaneously back to an originary trigger or repressed thought awaiting recognition, and forward in the prophetic gesture of future interpretation still to gather form.

Spaces and objects that are transitional or threshold-like resonate both with the traces or footprints of those that have already passed through, as well as with an anticipatory sense of future interactions. As with skin that has been touched, space might be charged with both a sense of erotic memory and of the palpable desire for encounters still to be experienced. In these examples, the photographic record leads a double life, for it operates as both witness to and documentary evidence of the past, yet it also remains sufficiently open to allow imaginative gaps for the projection of individual narratives. Ian Walker returns to the idea of the photograph as a ‘scene of the crime’ in order to differentiate between Benjamin’s emphasis that something has happened on this site, and Annette Michelson’s suggestion that it might instead function as, ‘the stage where something will or could happen. The photograph itself presents only a moment of time, from which the spectator can in imagination move forward or backward.’ For Walker the photograph mirrors the properties of the empty street that ‘makes us feel that what has happened there, or will happen there, is unpredictable in its particularity, and thus unknowable.’

Janet Cardiff maximizes the potential of both the photograph and the empty street in a series of audio pieces, which fuse sound, spoken narrative and documentary evidence with ‘real’ experiences of the city. Working with George Bures Miller, her work employs binaural audio
recording technology in order to create a disorienting soundtrack narrative, which sonically merges with ambient external sounds of the city. Listening to headphones whilst undertaking a narrated ‘tour’ of the public realm, an audience for Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller’s work is invited to immerse themselves in visual and audio experiences that form complex layers or (con)fusions of imaginative and real space; overwriting the everyday with moments of chance encounters, strange happenings, and coincidental occurrences. In The Missing Voice (Case Study B) (1999) Cardiff constructs a loose narrative about a woman who wishes to ‘become lost,’ or to disappear from her own life. Beginning in the crime section of the Whitechapel library, the audience is then led on a disorienting journey through the literary and historical layers of East London’s facts and fictions. Similarly in the work, Her Long Black Hair (2004), participants are equipped with an audio soundtrack that interweaves a stream of narrative with ambient binaurally recorded noise; and are provided with a number of photographs that operate as evidentiary anchors to the unfolding journey [fig. 6].

Creating a spatial and temporal equivalent to Benjamin’s ‘scene of the crime,’ the audience is led wilfully to abandon responsibility for their own direction and instead occupy an uneasy position where identification oscillates between that of victim and perpetrator, between that of pursuer and the pursued. Wholly dependent upon the sound recording for instruction and orientation, Cardiff and Bures Miller’s audience temporarily hand over the control for their own actions, and are drawn hypnotically into the swarming flux of the crowd and toward the multitude possibilities of the street. The work creates the conditions in which it is the audience members, rather than the artist, that ‘lose themselves’ in the footsteps of another and submit themselves to the abandon of being led.

Fig. 6: Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, Her Long Black Hair, 2004.
The act of following and being led is a central strategy for Sophie Calle, whose practice is thread through with moments of shadowing and mimicry, and of espionage and disguise in which her individual identity is perpetually cloaked in the thin veil of performance. For Yve-Alain Bois the strategy of ‘proxy’ or acting in another’s place within Calle’s practice:

…undermines the foundations of her ‘person’ to create a ‘delirium of pretense,’ all these Penelopean constructions of identity endlessly discarded as soon as they threaten to solidify, all this proliferation of ever more elaborate masks.  

Though Calle might be ‘seen’ as a mistress of disguise and of mimesis, her practice might instead reflect the desire not to be seen at all, to become invisible or to lose herself in ‘voluptuous surrender’: to create perhaps a delirium of the present as opposed to one of pretence. For example in the work Where are the Angels?, a request is issued to solicit a complicit stranger who might offer instructions or a clue to follow. A repeated action at another’s request creates a perpetual performative present, a Sisyphean eternity in which any reflection upon one’s past or any projection forward into one’s future becomes a redundant gesture. In later work she abandons the request and simply, repeatedly ‘followed strangers on the street. For the pleasure of following them, not because they particularly interested [her].’ Whilst in other work Calle can be seen to abandon responsibility for her actions by submitting to another’s instruction or will, it is in Suite Vénitienne that a sustained mimetic practice emerges from the action of following in another’s footsteps. Suite Vénitienne began with a chance encounter when Calle was introduced to a man (Henri B.) whom she had previously followed. During the course of their conversation
Henri B. disclosed that he was planning to take a trip to Venice; a journey that Calle then decided to follow. Calle proposed to track the initially unwitting Henri B., thereby declaring him the subject of her relentless gaze and camera lens [fig. 7]. She thus borrows or hijacks his itinerary as a means for pleasurable disorientation, for the ‘pleasure of following,’ echoing the manner in which Breton inhabited Nadja’s footsteps.

*Suite Vénitienne* is a pertinent inheritor of surrealist practice, for it shares significant formal and conceptual links with Breton’s *Nadja*. In both Breton’s text and Calle’s practice, the ‘act of following’ can be seen as the conceptual site for drawing together or confronting a number of divergent surrealist and post-surrealist concerns. Strategies of following might be explored in relation to the nature of the reciprocal relationship between the ‘follower’ and ‘followed,’ which has both the capacity to be reversed and to then overturn the more accepted ‘master’ narratives of surrealist writers. The act of doubling, mirroring, shadowing and of mimicry can also be argued to affect a process of (psychological) deliquescence in which the boundaries of the self become porous, and the differentiation between figure and ground, between the body and the environment appear disturbed. Undoubtedly a more difficult or inquisitive articulation of the various relationships and roles at play within errance are explored within Calle’s artistic practice, and it will be through exploring *Suite Vénitienne* in relation to Breton’s *Nadja*, that a wider legacy of surrealist errance will be discussed.

Breton’s *Nadja* and Calle’s *Suite Vénitienne* share a fascinating range of properties and strategies. Whilst they offer a phenomenologically different experience for the respective reader or viewer, on a practical level *Nadja* and *Suite Vénitienne* share the same strategies of ‘authentication.’ Both accounts are evidenced through the use of photographs and other documentary devices such as central autobiographical references - the inclusion of the names of real people and locations which precisely situate the work in a real city - and the diary format which in both cases rejects any superfluous account in favour of a more clinical style of writing. In both *Nadja* and *Suite Vénitienne*, text and image interweave in order for the latter to authenticate the claims made or to act as witness: ‘inevitably, as a narrative begins to flow, “the place” becomes “the place where”’. Jean Baudrillard suggests that in *Suite Vénitienne* the image comes to represent the idea that ‘Here, at this time, at that place, in that light, there was someone.’ Personal preoccupations and emotive concerns determine the locations that are represented. Though *Nadja* and *Suite Vénitienne* take place in established European tourist locations (in Paris and Venice respectively), their narratives and meandering journeys seem to avoid the well-known landmarks of the guidebook, but instead ‘constitute a sort of “anti-guide book”’, where, according to Ian Walker:

Sites are not chosen because they are the sites ‘one must see’; rather they are included because of what happened in these places … A private city has been created within the public
space, occupying the same space, but differently, more intensely.\footnote{59}

However their alternative landmarks, now designated with personal significance, are returned to with touristic insistence. Both Breton and Calle return to ‘wander back over the routes’\footnote{60} undertaken within preceding narratives, retracing their own pathways in those places where they had previously been tracing the footsteps of another. This gesture sets in place a form of infinite mirroring in which the repeatedly reflected original becomes remote and loses its meaning as the copies develop their own disembodied and abstract reality, serving only to construct a labyrinth of actions to be endlessly replayed.\footnote{61}

Calle in \textit{Suite Vénitienne} takes photographs of the sites visited, whilst Breton in \textit{Nadja} wanted ‘to provide a photographic image of them taken at the special angle from which I myself had looked at them.’\footnote{62} Within each there is the sense of building obsession in the act of following, not only in relation to the person followed but also in relation to the rules of the game operating within the action itself. Breton’s text arguably reflects a real romantic liaison whereas Calle’s is a conceptual strategy without initial amorous motive. Both Breton and Calle appropriate or repeat the actions of chosen individuals who appear to function less as ‘real people’ than phantoms; ghostly beacons that are followed in search of more elusive fantasies. There is a resistance on the part of both Calle and Breton to fix the experience in the flesh, in the real physical world for, as Baudrillard suggests:

\begin{quote}
The encounter is always too true, too excessive, indiscreet …
Quite different is the secret (and following someone is equivalent to the secret in the space of a city, as allusion is equivalent to the secret in speech, or the déja-vu, the déja-vécu is equivalent to the secret in time), which is a blind passion.\footnote{63}
\end{quote}

Indeed Breton omits details of his corporeal encounter with Nadja one night in an out-of-town hotel.\footnote{64} For him it marks the end of the game, where he asks, ‘Can it be that this desperate pursuit comes to an end here?’\footnote{65} Here, his quest performs to a non-teleological, process-based or performative agenda, fuelled by the pleasure of pursuit and by the search itself rather than by its outcome. As Breton claims, it is a ‘pursuit of what I do not know, but pursuit, in order to set working all the artifices of intellectual seduction.’\footnote{66} Calle shares this sentiment when she says of Henri B., ‘Finding him may throw everything into confusion, may precipitate the end … I’m afraid of meeting up with him: I’m afraid that the encounter might be commonplace.’\footnote{67} Both \textit{Nadja} and \textit{Suite Vénitienne} are thus marked by the properties of a game or pursuit, an artificial structure or framework in which certain encounters are desirable, others less so. They both exhibit the inherent (il)logic of rules written and codes that may not be broken, for as Baudrillard asserts:
This game, as any other game, has its basic rule: Nothing was to happen, not one event that might establish any contact or a relationship between them. This is the price of seduction. The secret must not be broken, at the risk of the story’s falling into banality.

According to some cultural theorists games are marked by particular properties, or a degree of autonomy that separates or isolates them from the everyday. For Johan Huizinga, play is ‘accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and consciousness that it is different from ordinary life,’ whilst Roger Caillois asserts that it is performed according to the characteristics of ‘liberty, convention, suspension of reality, and delimitation of space and time.’ Play should involve a free or voluntary pursuit where playing is not obligatory; it should remain uncertain, unproductive, ‘an occasion of pure waste,’ and must be governed by rules or understood as make-believe. For Caillois:

…the game’s domain is therefore a restricted, closed, protected universe: a pure space. The confused and intricate laws of ordinary life are replaced, in this fixed space and for this given time, by precise, arbitrary, unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game.

He suggests that the process of the game can divided into the four specific categories of *agôn* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo), which may be performed according to the characteristics of either *paidia* (exuberance and turbulence) or *ludus* (control and discipline). Within the practice of *mimicry* he asserts that:

The rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell … which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself.

*Nadja* and *Suite Vénitienne* reflect the rules of the game inherent in the act of mimicry or simulation. However the form of mimicry evident in the act of following centres upon the tension or gap between the pursuer and the person pursued, which must be maintained in order to resist collision or closure. The question of power and control initially seem more privileged towards the author, or the originator of the game/text. Calle tracks an unwitting Henri B., who becomes the subject/victim of her relentless gaze and camera lens, whilst Breton follows in Nadja’s wake through back alleys and psychological landscapes, appropriating her journeys into liminal states. Baudrillard argues that the repetition or following of another is an act of both seduction and disappearance; where the individual’s original objective is (willingly) distracted or erased at the
insistence of the double. To follow is thus to rob another of their itinerary; it presents a form of existential kidnap where the other’s pathway is usurped or stolen as a guise through which to play out realities other than one’s own. However the notion of the double offers a dual threat. The act of repetition harbours the mirrored possibility of reciprocal theft, where the process of following – that is the possession or inhabitation of another’s imprint - has the capacity to be overturned or reversed. Baudrillard suggests, in fact, that the more violent moments within acts of following are:

…where the followed person, seized by a sudden inspiration, turns round, making an about-face like a cornered beast. The system reverses itself immediately, and the follower becomes the followed … But, of course, shadowing implies this surprise, the possibility of reversal is necessary to it, one must follow in order to be followed.75

...Fig. 8: Sophie Calle, Suite Vénitienne © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2007. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris/Miami; Arndt & Partner, Berlin/Zurich; Koyanagi, Tokyo; Gallery Paula Cooper, New York.

It is this threat of reciprocity that Calle acknowledges as a ‘dread (that) is taking hold of me: he recognized me, he’s following me, he knows.’76 Later when she has been discovered by Henri B., she remarks on how ‘he’s hiding his surprise, his desire to be master of the situation, as if, in fact, I had been the unconscious victim of his game, his itineraries, his schedules’ [fig. 8].77
Whilst it would seem that the power and control of the game rests with the follower and not with the person followed, as Baudrillard suggests there is an interesting tension or complexity within this model. McDonough also reflects on this 'libidinal tangle in which pursuer and pursued los(e) their clear polarities’ when drawing connections between Acconci's Following Piece (1969) and Poe's The Man of the Crowd. Poe’s tale follows one man’s irrational pursuit of a stranger, of an unknown man, ‘whose physiognomy, glimpsed for a split second, has entranced him’ and for whom ‘curiosity has become a fatal, irresistible passion.’ McDonough suggests that in the act of mirroring, the two become indistinguishable, and citing Michel Butor asserts that they are, ‘at bottom identical. The second places his steps in the footprints of the first who remains unaware of him, although the former is without knowing it the initiator, the guide of the second.’ The followed/follower relationship may be viewed as though a moebius strip, or even as a variant of Benjamin’s ‘revolving door,’ in which the promise of reversal, overturn, or being caught is always present, as roles can be switched and joker cards played. The act of following or inhabiting another’s footprint might then give way to the feeling of one’s own space becoming inhabited by the gestures of the other; for in the end the act of possession is a reciprocal gesture where one might as easily become possessed. Mimicry of another is thus transformed into an eerie and involuntary ventriloquism.

Issues of motive and intention are put into question as ‘acts of following’ blur into ‘acts of being led’; where the person followed is self-consciously leading the unwitting follower. The pathway or direction of another might be ripe for appropriating (as though it were a found object), however the question of decision and power is again overturned for, as Hal Foster suggests, ‘the surrealist object selects the subject: he [sic] is always already marked by it.’ For Foster, the search is a form of Freudian compulsion-repetition, closely connected to the idea of the uncanny and the death drive. What Breton considers as the liberating processes of objective chance or sudden encounters are, within this reading, simply acts of repetition in which a traumatic experience is subconsciously replayed rather than recollected, or where the lost object is perpetually sought but never found. For Foster this signals an endless and relentless pursuit that is ‘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.’ Less a vessel to be filled by the parasitic intentions of the follower, it could be argued that the found object or person followed already asserts a psychological hold, or mesmeric hex that must be obeyed. However rather than suggesting that the acts of following present in both Nadja and Suite Vénitienne are somehow an articulation of Foster’s psychoanalytical interpretation of objective chance - in which the search for the other person stands as a ‘failed refinding of the lost object,’ or takes place at the insistent beckon of the repressed awaiting return - it is possible to assert an alternative reading which focuses instead upon the wilful fragmentation and disintegration of the self inherent in the gesture of following or being followed.
The blind wandering inherent in the act of following another’s steps might be seen as an equivalent to the Minotaur’s endless, disoriented search of the labyrinth; a creature that for Rosalind Krauss, ‘having lost his reason - his head - is another avatar of the informe.’ Viewed according to this model, the follower/followed relationship becomes a site of precarious tension, where the city takes the form of a labyrinth providing equal scope for concealment and capture. Calle says, ‘I see myself at the labyrinth’s gate, ready to get lost in the city and in this story.’ In his account of Paris, Benjamin characterises the city as a labyrinth emerging at the intersection of reflective surfaces in which internal and external spaces are collapsed, and their boundaries blurred. For Krauss, infinite mirroring is experienced as the ‘space of the abyss itself – of man [sic] captured in a hall of mirrors, in a constantly bifurcating field of representation.’ The city’s repeated mirroring creates a kaleidoscopic environment of reflected and refracted realities, of infinite copies and of limitless hollow encounters. For Baudrillard, being followed offers the hollow ‘feeling of being reflected without knowing it.’ He suggests that ‘to follow’ is to absent yourself in the mirror image of another. To copy or mirror another is a seductive yet vacuous act. In the act of borrowing another’s intentions and in the retracing of their steps, all original meaning or intent is somehow lost or refuses to translate. Calle is seen to be ‘lost … in the other’s traces,’ whilst Breton articulates the feeling of haunting when he asks:

Who am I? If this once I were to rely on a proverb, then perhaps everything would amount to knowing whom I ‘haunt’ … Perhaps my life is nothing but an image of this kind; perhaps I am doomed to retrace my steps under the illusion that I am exploring, doomed to try and learn what I should simply recognize, learning a mere fraction of what I have forgotten.

The tracing of another’s tread could then appear fueled by the longing to absolve all responsibility for the self in the shape of the other. Following demands the abandonment of form in favour of a mode of invisibility or formlessness. The dissolving of the self or body evident in the chameleon gesture of mirroring another can also be played out in relation to the idea of becoming a shadow, which for Krauss is ‘approaching the condition of the fluid and impalpable.’ The shadow (and the ‘follower’) typically only has meaning in relation to something else: they function through a wholly dependent existence that cannot be separated nor detached from its anchor. According to Denis Hollier the cast shadow is:

…the very exemplar of a non-displaceable sign: rigorously contemporary with the object it doubles, it is simultaneous, non-detachable, and because of this, without exchange-value. It is only cast on the spot, without the possibility of a proxy. With it, the relation of sign to the thing signified escapes the metaphor of the separation of body and soul: a cast shadow is a sign that doesn’t survive.
However, Hollier goes on to suggest that in certain kinds of visual representation this assertion is challenged, enabling a moment of both liberation and horror as the ‘cast shadow gains iconic autonomy; it is separated and liberated from the object that causes it.’\(^9\) He describes this phenomenon within surrealism as the transformation of the shadow from index into icon where it ‘enters the realm of ambiguity and survives its cause, its referent ... shifting from causality to resemblance, from metonymy to metaphor, these doubles, in addition to being the effect of their cause, merge with it in order to resemble a third thing.’\(^9\) The detached shadow becomes a kind of autonomous ‘ghosting’ that is no longer existentially or indexically anchored to the original referent, merely held by some unwritten contractual bind.

So too, those who follow occupy the space of the ‘third thing’ or chimera, for in becoming the shadow they momentarily inhabit a hybrid zone that has the properties of both themselves and the subject followed. Operating in this liminal mode of existence, the boundaries between self and other, and those between the body and the environment become blurred or cancelled out. For Baudrillard:

> To follow the other is to take charge of his itinerary ... It is to play the mythical role of the shadow ... it is to relieve him of that existential burden, the responsibility for his own life. Simultaneously, she who follows is herself relieved of responsibility for her own life as she follows blindly in the footsteps of the other. A wonderful reciprocity exists in the cancellation of each existence, in the cancellation of each subject’s tenuous position as a subject.\(^9\)

The desire to lose oneself can thus be read as the longing for the willed collapse of the boundaries that demarcate the limits of the body and of fixed notions of form. The follower must adopt a degree of camouflage or disguise to prevent him- or herself from being seen. All internal preoccupations must be abandoned in the pursuit of the other. In *Suite Vénitienne*, Calle not only follows but also imitates the actions of Henri B. She duplicates his actions as he photographs his surroundings. In this act of imitation the original intent has been replaced or overwritten by the motive of mimicry. Meaning is lost and the resulting images slip anchor. The process of mimicry or ‘becoming another’ thus effects a crisis of ‘distinction’ and differentiation; a categorical slur or disturbance at the boundaries of form and of classification. Camouflage is a desire to ‘blend into the background’: it is a form of existential osmosis.\(^9\)

Roger Caillois’ analysis of mimicry presents an interesting frame through which to explore the complex and contradictory motives that underpin it. In his analysis of animal mimicry in ‘Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,’ he reflects on how the motive for mimesis and camouflage might be understood, not as a desire for survival, but as model of involuntary deliquescence or psychosis. He challenges the Darwinian account of mimicry as an adaptive
method of survival, and instead proposes that the act of repetition inherent in mimesis represents a catastrophic blow for the individual resulting in a form of 'convulsive possession.' As such the persistence of mimesis might be understood according to what Krauss has described as a:

…peculiarly psychotic yielding to the call of ‘space’… a failure to maintain to the boundaries between inside and outside, between, that is, figure and ground. A slackening of the contours of its own integrity, of its self-possession … the body collapses, deliquesces, doubles the space around it in order to be possessed by its own surrounds. It is this possession that produces a double that is in effect an effacement of the figure. Ground on ground.

Affecting a categorical slur, the process of mimicry or camouflage blurs the boundaries of form and fixed classification. The act of following another can similarly be viewed as a ‘slackening of the contours of its (one’s) integrity’; a gesture of mimicry resulting not from the desire for survival, but from being seduced by the ‘call of space.’ When Calle initiates a practice of mimicry, her pursuit is resolutely absent of purposeful motive. It is fueled by the pleasure of following for following’s sake, by the desire of momentarily losing herself in the actions of another. In the act of following, the expression of the informe breaks free from the frame and assumes a performative presence. The gesture of following causes a kind of psychological brûlage or disintegration, where echoing Caillous’ analysis of animal mimicry, the edges of self become blurred and fuse with those of the other. In the process of concealment the body is seen to dissolve into the surrounding space. This experience of mimesis for Caillous can be read as analogous to that of the schizophrenic:

To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis. It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. And he invents spaces of which he is ‘the convulsive possession.’

This sense of ‘convulsive possession’ may also be read in relation to other theoretical arguments developed by Caillous, not least in connection to his previously cited analysis of games and play. In his later writing in Man, Play and Games (1958), Caillous in fact refutes his earlier analysis of mimicry, redeeming or redefining it as a strategic method of ludus; as a category of play alongside agôn, alea and ilinx. Whilst his descriptions of animal mimicry might seem to offer the closest analogy to his definition of the category of ‘simulation’; other categories of play also demonstrate the desire for psychological deliquescence and loss of self; or alternatively
propose the disruption of a moral order or the yearning for disorder and destruction through drives which would normally be repressed.\textsuperscript{101} Caillois refers to a variety of approaches or ‘transports’ which seek to establish ‘a disorder that may take organic or psychological form’ by using the term \textit{ilinx}, which is the ‘Greek term for whirlpool, from which is also derived the Greek word for vertigo (ilingos).’\textsuperscript{102} Akin, in some senses, to the earlier descriptions of the psychological convulsion resulting from mimicry, \textit{ilinx} is:

\begin{quote}
...based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consists of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Here, through Caillois’ analysis, it is possible to assert that the Bataillean notion of the \textit{informe} is at play in both the practices of mimicry and \textit{ilinx}, for both perform an operation of deliquescence or categorical slippage, respectively through the collapse of boundaries between self and other, body and ground; or else through the gesture of falling, gyration, or the sense of ‘panic and hypnosis … attained by paroxysm of frenetic, contagious, and shared rotation,’\textsuperscript{104} which might be read as analogous to the category of ‘horizontality’ within the condition of the \textit{informe}.\textsuperscript{105}

Acts of following seem to hover between descriptions of \textit{mimicry} and \textit{ilinx}, for they embody the desire to lose oneself through ‘convulsive possession,’ or as Solnit describes, through the ‘voluptuous surrender’ to the present or to another’s will.\textsuperscript{106} The tracing of another’s tread is fueled by the fatalistic pleasure in absolving all responsibility for the self in the echo of the other: it is the desire ‘to escape from the outline of the self.’ Baudrillard equates this ecstatic moment with the image of the swooning woman when he says, ‘Nothing is more beautiful, since swooning is at once the experience of overwhelming pleasure and the escape from pleasure, a seduction and an escape from seduction.’\textsuperscript{107} Once again, an image of perpetual oscillation is drawn in which categorical definitions are refuted and the notion of any fixed motive is put into question: the promise of pleasure is replaced by that of escape; the follower becomes the person followed; the mirror returns an eternal echo of itself.

Acts of following and being led can be articulated within a lineage of surrealist \textit{errance}, as strategies of absolving individual purpose or concrete motive, and enabling a form of ‘aimless wandering.’ By the end of the 1920s it has been suggested that surrealist \textit{errance} ‘had been eclipsed by the theory of “objective chance,” just as its psychoanalytical basis, in Pierre Janet’s automatism, had been replaced by Freudian theory.’\textsuperscript{108} This changing intellectual context might be argued to echo the wider cultural shift identified by Caillois in relation to play and games in which the primacy of the combination of \textit{ilinx} and \textit{mimicry} are inevitably repressed and sublimated during a process of civilization, and become substituted or replaced by the predominance of the \textit{agôn-alea} pairing of competition and chance.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed as surrealism evolved from early
experimental practices into a movement informed by a series of manifestos, the initial turbulence and transience of the surrealist gesture of errance was superseded by other strategies. However it is still possible to articulate a strong lineage of practices that resurrect and rework the vertiginous drift of aimless wandering.

The notion of following has the potential to evoke a complex range of other surrealist concerns and preoccupations and as such might perform a resuscitative function, enabling the practice of errance to be recontextualised as a critical surrealist tactic and re-evaluated through a wider interpretation and legacy. Rather than simply a practice or strategy within a broader vocabulary of automatism, errance can be seen as the location or conceptual site where diverse positions are tested out. Operating in the ‘third space’ between the Bretonian concept of ‘objective chance’ and the ‘swooning’ sense of convulsive beauty, and the Bataillean informe as articulated in Caillois’ analysis of mimicry as a mode of formal disintegration and temporal play, the practice of following another can be identified as the conceptual location where a host of surrealist ideas are buried and whose ghosts persist to haunt. By exploring the conceptual echoes between Breton’s Nadja and Calle’s Suite Vénitienne, the notion of following can be positioned within a paradigm of both criticality and compulsion; where it can be articulated as a mimetic form of both playful inhabitation and of involuntary and reciprocal possession.


2 The practice of surrealist errance has been returned to and discussed by many historians, notably by Rosalind Krauss in connection to photography’s relationship to surrealism, for example in ‘Nightwalkers,’ Art Journal, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 1981), 33-38; Ian Walker in City Gorged with Dreams: Surrealism and Documentary Photography in Interwar Paris, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002); and by Susan Laxton in Paris as Gameboard, Man Ray’s Atgets, (Columbia University, New York, 2002).

3 Solnit, A Field Guide to Getting Lost, 6.


5 See Alastair Brotchie and Mel Gooding (eds), A Book of Surrealist Games, (Redstone, Boston and London, 1995), for a comprehensive account of a range of Surrealist games, strategies and procedures.

6 Laxton, Paris as Gameboard, 11. This particular example may however have been preceded by Le Voyage Magique of 1923, in which the same four protagonists undertook a series of journeys to places picked at random, referenced in Brotchie and Gooding, A Book of Surrealist Games, 162.

7 Sometimes referred to as an ‘indicator’ or ‘pointer,’ a planchette is a device used during a séance as a tool of inscription through which spirit voices communicate in a form of automatic writing. A contemporary parallel for this analogy might be found in Paul Auster’s novel New York Trilogy, in the City of Glass, where the urban wandering of the character of Stillman traces out
cryptic textual inscriptions onto the city’s pavements which are subsequently ‘read’ by Quinn, a
detective who has been following and recording from a distance. See Paul Auster, *New York
Trilogy* (Faber and Faber, London, 1987), especially 58-72.


10 Philippe Soupault, *Last Nights of Paris* (1928), trans. William Carlos Williams (Full Court Press,
Cambridge, 1992), 70.


12 Purposeless wandering also functions as part of the narrative structure of diverse examples
within folklore and mythology, ranging from the Christian legend of the Wandering Jew through to
wider references. The Chinese, for example, use the ‘word yeou to designate idling and games in
space, especially kite-flying, and also great flights of fancy, mystic journeys of shamans, and the
Barash (University of Illinois Press, Chicago, 2001), 185. A drifting or an episodic, open-ended
narrative is at play in the genre of the picaresque and neo-picaresque novel which relies on a
‘triad of interconnected elements: the ambiguous figure of the pícaro, the temporal and spatial
framework of the road and the capricious unpredictability of chance,’ Ilana Shiloh, *Paul Auster
and the Postmodern Quest* (Peter Lang Press, 2002), 2. A more popular and contemporary
interpretation of aimless wandering might be seen as operational within the recent phenomenon
of the Paris-originating practice of *parkour* (free running) where the architecture of the city
becomes an assault course upon which the *traceur* (a participant of *parkour*) attempts to perform,
guided in part by the notion of ‘escape’ and unrestricted by conventional modes of navigation.

13 For example, see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (1927), trans. Howard Eiland and
Kevin McLaughlin (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999). For further accounts
and historical accounts of flânerie see Keith Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur* (Routledge, London and
New York, 1994); Chris Jenks, ‘Watching your step: the history and practice of the flâneur,’ in

14 Certeau asserts that ‘The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to
language or to the statements uttered. At its most elementary level, it has a triple “enunciative”
function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian
(just as the speaker appropriates or takes on language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just
as the speech act is an acoustic acting out of language); and implies relations among
differentiated positions,’ *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (University of
California Press, 1984), 98. Earlier writers and theorists have also made the connection between
the city and a text, and the act of walking and reading. In the late nineteenth century the German
flâneur, Ludwig Börne, suggested that ‘Paris is to be called an unfolded book, wandering through
its streets means reading,’ in ‘Schilderungen aus Berlin’ in *Sämtliche Schriften* Vol. 2., eds Inge
and Peter Rippman (Melzer, Dreieich, 1977), 34 cited in Anke Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk*,

15 See Laxton *Paris as Gameboard*.

16 Laxton notes how, ‘Working to record a Paris disappearing before the inexorable press of
gentrification, he [Atget] photographed the city is such a way that his archive, including the seven
albums of images that he produced as book prototypes, reads effectively as a series of
systematic, prosaic topographies of Paris,’ *Paris as Gameboard*, 2.


18 Extending the analogy between spatial play and the speech act, this sense of spacing might be
viewed as form of syntax. Krauss, for example, discusses the syntax of the photographic image;
the sense of temporal and spatial operations played out at the heart of the surrealist photography
and particularly within Man Ray’s oeuvre, in ‘The photographic conditions of Surrealism,’ *October*, Vol. 19 (Winter, 1981), 21. Krauss’s spacing might be understood as a result of cropping and framing which separates the fragment from the whole; as an internal form of spacing generated by ‘solarization or the use of found frames to interrupt or displace segments of reality’ (‘The photographic conditions of Surrealism,’ 31); or as a gesture of photomontage, a juxtaposition of image with image, or image with drawing, or image with text. She says ‘Spacing is the indication of a break in the simultaneous experience of the real, a rupture that issues into sequence … a rupture in the continuous fabric of reality’ (‘The photographic conditions of Surrealism,’ 31).


20 McDonough, ‘Situationist Space,’ 73.

21 McDonough, ‘Situationist Space,’ 74.

22 The Situationists’ navigation of the city space perhaps reinstates the primacy of the ‘tour’ above the ‘map.’ Certeau discusses the historical trajectory through which the format of the map develops, charting its shift in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries from a form of ‘tour’ - less a ‘geographical map’ as a ‘history book’ which emphasised actions or acknowledged the journeys which have brought it into being - to a more autonomous totalizing ‘map’ which ‘colonizes space; it eliminates little by little the pictorial figurations of the practices that produce it,’ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 121.


24 Certeau differentiates between the notion of place and space, suggesting that the former is marked by the stability and fixity of the map, whilst the latter: ‘…is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities … In short, space is a practiced place,’ *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.


26 McDonough makes the connection between *La Carte du Tendre* and the Situationists’ *The Naked City*, *Situationist Space*, 60.

27 Krauss makes this connection explicit as she explores the psychological unfolding of a particular journey across Paris in the central section of Breton’s later text, *L’Amour fou*, where each stage of the journey is indicative of a shift or intensification of emotional resonance, ‘Nightwalkers,’ 34.

28 Walker, ‘Nadja - A Voluntary Banality?’ in *City Gorged with Dreams*, 53.


30 This influence may be further evidenced in Aragon’s title, *Le Paysan de Paris*, that appears to conflate elements of Restif de La Bretonne’s *Les Nuits de Paris* and *Le Paysan Perverti*.

31 Krauss, ‘Nightwalkers,’ 34. Krauss is specifically discussing an image of the poet and nightwalker Léon-Paul Fargue, produced by Brassai in 1933.

32 McDonough notes how the term ‘depay sément’ is often found in early Situationist writings on the dérive, where he suggests it means ‘taken out of one’s element’ or misled, ‘Situationist Space,’ 73.

Peter Wollen discusses the shared interest in ‘mapping’ in relation to both Situationist and conceptual practices in ‘Mappings: Situationists and/or Conceptualists,’ in Michael Newman and Jon Bird (eds), Rewriting Conceptual Art (Reaktion, London, 1999). See also McDonough, ‘The crimes of the flâneur,’ October, Vol. 102 (Fall 2002), 101-122, who identifies surrealist practice within three pivotal incarnations of flânerie. My essay will however focus specifically on the legacy of errance rather than on the practice of flânerie more generally, looking towards contemporary strategies that reflect or share a particular surrealist agenda or surrealist preoccupations.


Verwoert, In Search of the Miraculous, 5.


Dean’s work Disappearance at Sea I and II (1996 and 1997) could also be viewed as ‘following’ on from Ader’s In Search of the Miraculous (1975). Ader’s attempted solo crossing of the Atlantic in a small sailing boat, ended in his own ‘disappearance at sea,’ like that of Crowhurst. Verwoert notes how a copy of the book The Strange Last Voyage of Donald Crowhurst by Nicholas Tomalin and Ron Hall, was reputed to have been found in Ader’s locker, and also highlights a further connection to Arthur Craven, a figure celebrated within surrealist circles, who was last seen in 1920 heading for the Gulf of Mexico in a small vessel, In Search of the Miraculous.

Foster, ‘An archival impulse,’ 15.


Michelson, ‘Dr Crase and Mr Claire,’ 42, cited in Walker, City Gorged with Dreams, 61.

A connection between the work of Rut Blees Luxemburg and Effie Paleologou was made in the exhibition We are No Longer Ourselves (The Gallery, Stratford-upon-Avon, Site Gallery, Sheffield, and Turnpike Gallery, Leigh, 2001), which drew reference from Virginia Woolf’s text ‘Street haunting: a London adventure,’ in The Death of the Moth and Other Essays (Readers Union/Hogarth Press, London, 1942) to suggest that their practices could be argued to echo the manner of the flâneuse. The fascination with the transformative possibilities of light, in particular within Rut Blees Luxemburg’s practice, might recall the writing of Emma Von Niendorf, whose early accounts of female flânerie in Aus dem heutigen Paris (Out of Recent Paris, 1854) share this obsession with the phenomenon of illumination. This particular example of female flânerie is noted in Gleber, The Art of Taking a Walk, 12.

Shiloh, Paul Auster and the Postmodern Quest, 2. Shiloh goes on to discuss how Bakhtin, in The Dialogic Imagination, develops the term chronotope, which in Greek means ‘time-space,’ and dwells in particular on the chronotope of the open road, which according to Bakhtin is especially appropriate for portraying events governed by chance, Paul Auster and the Postmodern Quest, 92-98.


Krauss, ‘Nightwalkers,’ 34.


Walker, City Gorged with Dreams, 100. The oscillation between the urban stroller as detective and as criminal is explored by McDonough in ‘The crimes of the flâneur’, who suggests the possibility of two contradictory interpretations of the flâneur in relation to Benjamin’s assertion.
that: 'Not matter what trail the flâneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime.'

Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 55.

49 There is an interesting correlation here between Janet Cardiff’s use of images and André Breton’s use of photographs by Jacques-André Boiffard in *Nadja*, which were similarly employed, it has been argued, to ‘authenticate’ his quasi-autobiographical narrative. Walter Benjamin argues that the photographs function as ‘illustrations of a trashy novel’ in ‘Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia,’ *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Harcourt Brace, New York, 1978), 183. See also Walker, ‘Nadja – a voluntary banality?’ in *City Gorged with Dreams*, for further analysis of the relationship between the text and image in *Nadja*.


51 See Bois, ‘Paper tigress,’ 35, for a full account of a particular response to Calle’s question ‘Where are the angels?’


53 *Suite Vénitienne* was initiated in 1980. It was originally exhibited in 1983 as a presentation text, 55 black and white photographs, 23 texts and 3 maps of variable dimensions; with a subsequent artist’s book collaboration published in 1988, where Calle’s texts and images were brought into dialogue with the text ‘Please follow me’ by Jean Baudrillard, which establishes a particular interpretative context through which to consider the work. This paper is based on the 1988 publication, *Suite Vénitienne/Please Follow Me*.

54 Calle, *Suite Vénitienne/Please Follow Me*, 2.

55 The predominance of examples by contemporary women artists who are employing tactics of following within their work is significant, for it could be viewed as an attempt to reverse or resist the conventions of a practice which has historically been notable for its problematic relationship to women, who remain typically absent within accounts of *errance* or are often represented in the form of the prostitute. Alternatively, adopting this model might be regarded as a redemptive gesture that seeks to reclaim or recoup the practice or at least a more complex female role within it. For wider cultural accounts of a female presence within the practice of flânerie see Janet Wolff, ‘The invisible flâneuse: women and the literature of modernity,’ *Theory, Culture and Society*, II–III, 1985, 37–46; Alex Hughes, ‘The City and the Female Autograph,’ in Sheringham (ed.), *Parisian Fields*, 115–132; and Gleber, *The Art of Taking a Walk*, especially Part Four: ‘Female flanerie,’ 171–213.

56 There is already a significant body of writing and research that exists in relation to Breton’s text *Nadja*. See for example Margaret Cohen, ‘Qui suis-je? Nadja’s haunting subject,’ in *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (University of California Press, 1993); Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*; Briony Fer, ‘Surrealism, myth and psychoanalysis,’ in David Batchelor (ed.), *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art Between the Wars* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993) and Walker, ‘Nadja – A voluntary banality?’ in *City Gorged with Dreams*. My intent is to explore *Nadja* through the filter of contemporary art, and especially in connection to Sophie Calle’s practice as a way of perhaps recouping or resurrecting alternative interpretations and readings within the surrealist text.

57 Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, 55.

58 Jean Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ in Calle, *Suite Vénitienne/Please Follow Me*, 78.


60 Calle, *Suite Vénitienne/Please Follow Me*, 5.
For Krauss the gesture of copying or doubling also performs a destructive blow, which ‘produces the formal rhythm of spacing - the two-step that banishes the unitary condition of the moment, that creates within the moment an experience of fission ... The double is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original. It comes after the first, and in this following, it can only exist as a figure, or image. But in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first.’ Krauss, 'The photographic conditions of Surrealism,' 25.


Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 84.

Mark Polizzotti describes the erasure or ‘stylistic amendment’ that took place in 1963 when Breton revisited the manuscript and removed the reference to the night he and Nadja spent together in Saint-Germaine (in his introduction to Breton, *Nadja*, xxii.)

Breton, *Nadja*, 108.

Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 84.


Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 5-6. For a full list of the characteristics of play see 9-10.


Simulation was also a modification of the practice of automatic writing found for example, in André Breton and Paul Eluard’s *The Immaculate Conception* (1930), where ‘instead of assuming a passive or “receptive” frame of mind, one can with practice assume an active mental state not one’s own. Given this mental set - for instance, that of a delirious mental “illness” – one attempts to write from within it,’ Brotchie and Gooding, *A Book of Surrealist Games*, 22.

Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 81. This paragraph seems to find an echo in Jacques Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994), where he speaks of the inevitable reciprocity of possession: ‘Is not to possess a spectre to be possessed by it, possessed period? To capture it, is that not to be captivated by it?’ cited by Jan Verwoert in his paper ‘Apropos Appropriation, why stealing images feels different today,’ Tate Triennial 2006, http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/triennial/essay-apropos.shtm.

Calle, *Suite Vénitienne/Please Follow Me*, 9.

Calle, *Suite Vénitienne/Please Follow Me*, 50.


Michel Butor, *Histoire extraordinaire: essai sur un rêve de Baudelaire* (Gallimard, Paris, 1961) 33, cited in McDonough, ‘The crimes of the flâneur,’ 106. Craig Douglas Dworkin suggests that Acconci’s following must still operate in relation to the role of desire for ‘the two figures ... have meaning (follower and followed) only in relation to each other,’ in Dworkin, ‘Fugitive signs,’ *October*, Vol. 95 (Winter 2001), 108, cited in McDonough, ‘The crimes of the flâneur,’ 110. This analysis would also seem to draw a connection to the earlier tale of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story where in this case the central character is plagued by the presence of a double.
81 Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 236.

82 Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 36. 'In the compulsion operative in objective chance, the subject repeats a traumatic experience, whether actual or fantasmatic, exogenous or endogenous, that he does not recall. He repeats it because he cannot recall it: repetition occurs due to repression, in lieu of recollection. This is why each repetition in objective chance seems fortuitous yet foreordained, determined by present circumstances yet governed by some “daemonic” force at work,’ Foster, 1993, 30, citing Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachey (New York, 1961), 29.

83 Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, xix.


86 Krauss, ‘Nightwalkers,’ 38.

87 Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 77.

88 Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 78.

89 Breton, *Nadja*, 11-12.

90 Krauss, ‘Nightwalkers,’ 34.

91 Denis Hollier, ‘Surrealist precipitates: shadows don’t cast shadows,’ *October*, Vol. 69 (Summer, 1994), 114.

92 Hollier, ‘Surrealist precipitates,’ 118.

93 Hollier, ‘Surrealist precipitates,’ 118.

94 Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 79.


97 Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1994), 155. An interesting though tangential extension of these ideas may be found in Theodor Adorno’s writing, where he discusses the notion of aesthetic sublimation, the identification between a subject and an artwork whereby the subject becomes absorbed by the work. He argues that: ‘Prior to total administration, the subject who viewed, heard or read a work was to lose himself, forget himself, extinguish himself in the artwork. The identification carried out by the subject was ideally not that of making the artwork like himself, but rather that of making himself like the artwork,’ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, eds Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (The Athlone Press, London, 1997), 17.


99 Here the notion of ‘convulsive possession’ also reconnects the practice of mimicry back to Breton and his concept of ‘convulsive beauty,’ which is introduced in the final pages of *Nadja*, and expanded upon in *L’Amour fou*, where simulation or mimicry might be read as being characteristic of the category of the ‘veiled-erotic.’ See Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, for a critical analysis of
Breton’s concept of convulsive beauty in terms of the categories of ‘veiled-erotic,’ ‘fixed-explosive’ and ‘marvellous circumstantial.’

100 In a footnote to Man, Play and Games, Caillois states that his earlier study ‘treats the problem with a perspective that today seems fantastic to me. Indeed I no longer view mimetism as a disturbance of space perception and a tendency to return to the inanimate, but rather, as herein proposed, as the insect equivalent to games of simulation,’ 177-8. However, it is interesting that the ‘disturbance of space perception’ persists in the form of games within other categories of play that demonstrate the desire for the sense of psychological deliquescence and loss of self or alternatively a disruption of a moral order. In all forms of play there is also the risk of ‘corruption’ that might threaten to blur the boundaries between the game and ‘real life’ and return play to its chaotic and primal origins.

101 Caillois discusses the practice of simulation in relation to the role of the mask and masquerade within the festival or shamanistic ritual. In the ritual, says Caillois, ‘All is acting. All is also vertigo, ecstasy, trance, convulsions, and, for the efficient, loss of consciousness and finally amnesia.’ Man, Play and Games, 91.

102 Methods of ilinx include screaming as loud as one can, the tightrope, falling or being projected into space, rapid rotation, sliding, speeding, acceleration of movement, separately or in combination with gyrating movement. Man, Play and Games, 23.

103 Caillois suggests that: ‘The disturbance that provokes vertigo is commonly sought for its own sake’ providing examples such as when Dervishes seek ecstasy by whirling about to the increasing rhythm of music,’ Man, Play and Games, 23.

104 Caillois, Man, Play and Games, 23.

105 Horizontality, base materialism, entropy and pulse, are the four categories of informe suggested by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois in Formless: A Users’ Guide (Zone Books, 2000).


107 Baudrillard, ‘Please follow me,’ 86.


109 Caillois argues that: ‘each time that an advanced culture succeeds in emerging from the chaotic original, a palpable repression of the powers of vertigo and simulation is verified. They lose their traditional dominance, are pushed to the periphery of public life, reduced to roles that become more and more modern and intermittent, if not clandestine and guilty or are relegated to the limited and regulated domain of games and fiction where they afford men the same eternal satisfactions, but in sublimated form, serving as an escape from boredom or work and entailing neither madness nor delirium’, Man, Play and Games, 97. This assertion is mirrored by Laxton in ‘Paris as Gameboard,’ where she suggests that the practice of automatism and errance has been absorbed into the wider practice of surrealist games.

Emma Cocker is a Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University and co-editor of the series of publications Transmission: Speaking and Listening (Volumes 3-5), a collaboration between Site Gallery and Sheffield Hallam University. She has contributed to numerous conferences including Location, Location, Location: British Art Show 6 symposium, Nottingham (2006); Public Space/Professional Space, British Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2005); Telling Stories: Theories and Criticism, Loughborough University of Art and Design (2007) and Psi #13 Happening/Performance/Event, New York University (2007). She is currently working on an ongoing research project entitled Not Yet There, which explores how irresolution, uncertainty, disorientation and the process of ‘getting lost’ can be discussed as critical conditions of artistic practice, and understood as part of a wider interdisciplinary framework or cultural language.
Graeme Doyle, The Cunningham Dax Collection and Surrealist Discourse

Anthony White

In this paper I will discuss the interpretation of art by people with experience of mental illness. I begin by examining two approaches, one which emerges from within the discipline of psychiatry and the other from the work of French surrealists. I point out the benefits and limitations of both before moving to discuss the paintings and drawings of Graeme Doyle, an artist, poet and performer whose work forms part of the Cunningham Dax Collection of Art, Creativity and Education in Mental Health located in Melbourne, Australia. The question I will pose is as follows: could the work of an artist such as Graeme Doyle suggest a new set of interpretive strategies and insights that relativise the existing discourse about art and mental health?

The discipline of psychiatry has long taken an interest in art works produced by individuals with experience of mental illness. However, it was only during the 19th century that significant advances were made in the understanding of such material. A common approach among early researchers was to analyse the works through a system of taxonomic classification, whereby they were categorised on the basis of the mental illness they referred to. This approach, which viewed the art as completely outside the realm of normal or common experience, had a lasting legacy into the 20th century. Hans Prinzhorn, for example, in his 1922 text *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, argued that

> The schizophrenic… is detached from humanity, and by definition is neither willing nor able to re-establish contact with it… We sense in our pictures the complete autistic isolation and the gruesome solipsism that far exceeds the limits of psychopathic alienation…

Prinzhorn was a pioneer in that he avoided reading the works as the direct expression of illness. Nevertheless, by asserting that there were essential, identifiable features of art by people with mental illness he presumed that the most relevant context for understanding the art was the distorted, inner world of the author’s mind rather than other factors such as a work’s social or historical context. This approach, which saw the art as evidence of a deficiency in the creator, also went against any interpretation that such works possessed artistic autonomy.

Although some medical professionals put forward alternatives to this approach, such ideas continued to inform many psychiatric discussions of art after World War II. In his 1953 book *Experimental Studies in Psychiatric Art*, the then Chairman of the Victorian Mental Hygiene Authority, E. Cunningham Dax, maintained that ‘the same syndromes are seen in the paintings as in the clinical examinations, as for instance… the characteristic disorder of thought in
schizophrenia. Dax’s attitude was manifest in the original display of his collection of works produced by patients in psychiatric hospitals in categories according to the mental illness of the author. As Dax has argued, he was interested ‘merely in the painting as an expression of the particular sort of illness.’ Many years have passed since the inception of the Dax collection, which is now housed under the auspices of the Mental Health Research Institute of Victoria. The collection, which has responded to more recent thinking about the display of this art and has repudiated an exclusive focus on psychiatric interpretation, now exhibits the multiple dimensions of creative work. This is reflected in the exhibition space, where the display is divided into two groups:

The Cunningham Dax Collection considers the first group as ‘therapeutic art’ and views them with a primarily clinical emphasis. Artistic merit may be considered with other aspects of the work. The second group of works is viewed primarily as art with clinical considerations being considered with other aspects of the work.

Several works by the Melbourne artist Graeme Doyle, whose work I discuss below, are currently exhibited in the latter section of the gallery, including a work of 2001 titled Grockles Sitting on his Putt Putt Putty [fig. 1].

Fig. 1: Graeme Doyle, Grockles Sitting On His Putt Putt Putty, digital print of original drawing reworked with correction fluid and ink on paper, 39 x 26.5 cm, c. 2001, Cunningham Dax Collection, Parkville. Courtesy of the artist.
The staff at the Dax collection are to be commended for renovating their curatorial approach, in particular for their recent efforts to mount temporary exhibitions of individual artists. Nevertheless, a potential difficulty with the current division of the permanent collection is in suggesting that while the artistic and the clinical do overlap, ideally they are best kept separate. A remaining difficulty is raised by the collection’s supporting didactic material. The website argues that:

Viewers should regard the works as giving them a privileged insight into the world of people suffering from mental illnesses and should not diminish their creative efforts by treating the works as bizarre or simply as a source of fascination.

I argue, on the contrary, that it is precisely because some of these works are bizarre and fascinating that they have status as creative works, and in turn, can give insight into the artist’s experience of mental illness. How else, we might ask, can we look at Graeme Doyle’s works, many of which represent faces undergoing what appears to be a diabolical process of transformation? As the artist himself is well aware, these images are ‘very disturbing.' For all of its important insights, the psychiatric model - insofar as it is manifest in the permanent display of the Cunningham Dax Collection at the time of writing - has its limitations as an approach to this art.

An alternative model is provided by the French surrealist movement, which saw creative works by people with mental illness as art to be praised and imitated. In 1924, Max Morise typically argued: ‘Let us admire the lunatics… who manage to impart fixity to their most fleeting visions, in the same way the man dedicated to Surrealism tends to do…’ Certain artists within the surrealist group appropriated the work of those with mental illness. Max Ernst knew the Prinzhorn collection and brought a copy of Prinzhorn’s book, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, to Paris as a present for Paul Eluard in 1922. His *Oedipus* of 1924 shows evidence of borrowings from August Natterer’s *Miraculous Shepherd*, a work dated prior to 1919 and held in the Prinzhorn Collection. Through such efforts, the surrealists were entering into a debate with the psychiatric establishment in France. As Adam Jolles argues in his 1998 article ‘Paranoiac Pictures and Delusional Discourse,’ the surrealists opposed the ‘constitutionalist’ paradigm in contemporary psychiatry, which saw irrational behaviour as irrefutable proof of illness, by positing madness as ‘a nexus of symbols.’ By simulating observable symptoms of illness in their own work through the use of chemicals or sleep deprivation, the surrealists challenged the link between madness and psychological deficiency. Some surrealists even argued that art and literature by people with mental illness has an element of deliberate refusal within it. Antonin Artaud argued as follows: ‘what is an authentic madman? It is a man who preferred to become mad, in the socially accepted sense of the word, rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honour.'
The position of certain individuals among the surrealists was problematic. As Roger Cardinal argues, although André Breton encouraged artists to imitate the irrationality he saw in the work of people with mental illness, he also believed that ‘the surrealist creator was expected not to flounder about as an object of delirium but to retain the poise of the stable subject.’ In other words, Breton looked at the experience of madness from a safe distance. Furthermore, as psychiatric studies and personal accounts of people with mental illness demonstrate, an individual experiencing psychosis is rarely in a position to freely choose their delusions and hallucinations.

In spite of these problems, the value of the surrealist experiment has been in breaking down the absolute boundary between the mentally ill and the non-mentally ill. Within the surrealist group there was a talented individual, Artaud, who was later diagnosed with a mental illness, and the surrealists’ work has helped us to acknowledge that among the work of individuals suffering from various forms of mental illness most deploy skills familiar to those judged sane. A corollary of this, and a factor that is rarely considered in the literature on this subject, is the influence artistic movements such as surrealism have had on the work produced by individuals experiencing mental illness. It is to this influence that I will now turn in my discussion of Graeme Doyle.

Graeme Doyle was born in 1947 in Melbourne. He is a regularly exhibiting artist who is represented in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia and has two degrees in Fine Art from the Phillip Institute of Technology. As a young man he was admitted to the Larundel psychiatric hospital in Bundoora. Doyle’s experience of mental illness, which included a diagnosis of schizophrenia, has caused the artist a great deal of suffering. In several interviews and written texts he stresses the formidable personal difficulty of that experience. Although he emphasises the down side of psychiatric drugs prescribed to cure him, Doyle also argues that these are what enable him to continue to produce art.

A recurrent theme in Doyle’s work is the self-portrait. In these extraordinary and often chilling works, the artist’s head is distorted and takes on all kinds of monstrous shapes, seemingly oscillating between a face and a series of unrecognisable objects, so that the identity of the figure is fractured irreparably. Such work is certainly amenable to analysis from a psychiatric perspective. Doyle speaks about these works as a way of ‘exorcising demons,’ strongly suggesting that they speak to a therapeutic process related to the experience of mental illness. We might take this as a cue to articulate what they reveal about the experience of mental illness, for example the bizarre delusions, prominent hallucinations, incoherent thinking and inappropriate emotional response clinically associated with schizophrenia. In what follows I propose to go down a different path by connecting these works to surrealism. This is not because that movement had a privileged insight into the actual experience of mental illness. Rather, I argue that if Doyle’s work has anything at all to tell us about the experience of mental illness, it needs to
be understood within the artistic tradition of surrealism. In interviews Doyle quotes the work of Australian painters Sidney Nolan and Albert Tucker as major influences, particularly for their use of colour. These artists had, in turn, been significantly affected by the European surrealist heritage. Furthermore, in speaking of the French surrealist painters and poets, Doyle recently commented that he feels so close to their work that he ‘could have been one of them.’

Fig. 2: Graeme Doyle, *Hairy Harry the Happy Head*, digital print of original drawing reworked with correction fluid and ink on paper, 39 x 26.5 cm, c. 2001, Cunningham Dax Collection, Parkville. Courtesy of the artist.
Hairy Harry the Happy Head is an undated drawing in the Cunningham Dax Collection [fig 2]. To create this work the artist digitally reproduced and enlarged one of his own ink drawings, placed a reversed transparency of the work over the original, copied it again, and then added further black ink lines and white correction pen to highlight, transform or diminish certain areas. At a technical level the work is simultaneously a reproduced image and an original image, machine-made and man-made, both multiple and unique. The place where this is most immediately visible is in the original frame created during the process of scanning the drawing, a frame which Doyle has subsequently broken in his later additions of ink marks. At the level of visible subject matter, the work shows a seemingly endless proliferation of faces. We can identify at least eight beings, from the cat-like growling face at the bottom, to the chipmunk face between the same two eyes, the human face on the larger face’s nose, and the more mysterious abstract faces in the upper regions.

Identity is suspect in this work at both the level of technique and of subject matter. The work has an ambiguous identity, prompting us to question whether it is more properly considered a drawing, print, or photograph, and the portrait in the image has an uncontrollable quality of proliferation. The identity of this work, with its endless possible permutations, redounds upon the viewer. This troubling of identity in the image is not something invented by Doyle but can be observed in the work of surrealist artists. As David Lomas has pointed out in The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity, through various techniques including automatism and simulation, and through exploring the uncanny and abjection, Joan Miró, Max Ernst and Salvador Dalí dispensed with the traditional language of self. As Lomas puts it, the surrealists ‘succeeded in radically challenging and destabilising the dominant forms of Western subjectivity.’

One of several methods of producing this effect was the technique of ‘tracing,’ where the artist created a work by elaborating on the traces inadvertently left on a piece of paper by previously sketched images. By mechanically re-appropriating elements of his own drawing through this tracing method in preparing his famous 1925 picture The Birth of the World, Miró exhibited an understanding of authorial presence similar to that later put forward by Jacques Derrida – as absence. Similarly in Doyle, the reversing, doubling, re-inscribing and cancelling of his own photographically reproduced work relativises the idea of the authorial subject’s presence, scattering it across space and time – misaligning the trace by doubling in space, deranging the origin of the trace by doubling it in time.

The most striking affinity between Doyle and Miró is in the latter’s Self-Portrait of 1937-60. In this work, Miró traced a large scale self-portrait, which had been produced by looking into a concave mirror which distorted and magnified the face’s features, and then later drew over it with a thick graffitoed line. As Lomas comments, this embodies Georges Bataille’s notion of the ‘familiar dissolving into the strange, and ourselves with it.’ Doyle’s drawn and traced self-portraits exhibit a similarly alienated and defamiliarised conception of individual identity. Doyle’s
concept of the self is also expressed in his poetry: 'A man is like an argument not backed up by any proof.' Identity, the artist points out, is a product of language, of continual re-inscription, something that exists in and through time. There is no mathematical equation wherein subjectivity exists in a steady state, valid for eternity.

Rembrandt and Rave, another series by Doyle, was exhibited in the 2006 show For Matthew and Others: Journeys With Schizophrenia held in Sydney, where works by people with mental illness were displayed alongside the work of Australian artists such as Albert Tucker with no reported experience of such illness. This curatorial decision, although controversial, was particularly fitting in Doyle’s case, not only because he cites Tucker as an artistic influence but also because Doyle exhibited there his own surrealist-inspired, investigative study of the artistic tradition of the self-portrait. In Rembrandt and Rave Doyle digitally photographed, enlarged, and traced over by hand with ink and correction pen a series of self-portrait etchings by Rembrandt [fig. 3].

How are we to understand this re-inscription of the famous Dutch artist’s work? Rembrandt’s works seem to possess a striking naturalism. In the Self-Portrait with Angry Expression of 1630, we appear to see the identity of the artist laid bare, not only due to the simplicity of the garment, the unruliness of the hair, but also the apparently frank expression of
anger on the face indicated by glowering eyes and pressed lips. All this is achieved in a technique which looks hasty and unfinished, closer to an artist of the nineteenth or twentieth century than of the artist’s own time. When we investigate further, however, it is clear that these works cannot be viewed through the lens of modern understandings of self-picturing. As Ernst van der Wetering argues, these works were certainly perceived by contemporary viewers as portraits of the famous artist, but also to some degree as anonymous ‘tronies’ or heads embodying allegorical meanings such as bellicosity, piety, youth, and so on. The etchings were also intended to be used as studies of emotions that could be used in future paintings, as we see when we compare Rembrandt’s etching *Self Portrait Open Mouthed* with the painting *Self Portrait as a Beggar* of 1630. When one of Rembrandt’s pupils passed this technique onto his own students, he advised them to compose self portraits imitating the emotional state of one of their intended figures: “thus must one reshape oneself entirely into an actor… in front of a mirror, being both exhibitor and beholder.” In other words, we shouldn’t see these works as private moments of unmediated expression but rather as an instance of mimicry intended to inhabit the space of an other in a later composition.

Through his re-working of these images the Melbourne artist reveals an intriguing dimension of Rembrandt’s portraits. Doyle has expressed enormous respect for Rembrandt’s work, and describes the artist as a genius with a colossal intellect and a profound sense of humanity. At the same time, he insists that his own reworkings of Rembrandt are neither a homage to, nor cannibalisation of, the earlier artist’s work. Rather, he describes his *Rembrandt and Rave* series as informed by a spirit of playfulness, an instance of ‘using’ another artist’s work. Exploiting the tension that exists in Rembrandt’s self-portraits, that between their direct presentation of the author’s subjectivity and their mask-like quality of mimicry, Doyle has copied, resized and inscribed the etchings of Rembrandt, using the ‘found’ template of the Rembrandt original as the basis for his own elaboration. In the process, the image becomes a Rembrandt-Doyle. The seventeenth-century artist’s image is doubled and transformed, becoming other to itself. But Doyle has not changed or made over Rembrandt in his own image; rather he has revealed an otherwise hidden dimension of Rembrandt’s work – the production of an image of self that is not-itself.

In another work from the series *Rembrandt and Rave*, the image of Rembrandt taken from the *Angry Expression* portrait has been reversed, copied, elaborated and drawn over once again with ink and correction pen [fig. 4]. This split subjectivity renders the figure of Rembrandt, like that of Doyle, as double. Both are artists in the here and now; both are alienated, murdered by finitude. The works they produce will be subject to the eyes of others, read by others, and open to alterity. This knowledge allows Doyle to suspend Rembrandt and himself in a movement between past and present, presence and absence. In so doing, he refutes the notion of subject as
origin. He reveals in this work that artists are bound to a play between presence and the alienation of belatedness, a situation that none are in a position to control.

Fig. 4: Graeme Doyle, *Rembrandt and Rave*, correction pen and ink on digital laser copy (of artist’s own drawing) 30 x 42.2 cm, 2006, collection of the artist. Courtesy of the artist.
Thomas Szasz argues that the currently prevailing concepts of genius and madness closely resemble each other, except in one important respect: individuals in the former category are presumed to have full control over their minds and those in the latter are viewed as out of control. One of my intentions in this essay has been to demonstrate that this opposition, which continues to structure the debate on art and mental illness today, is in urgent need of deconstruction. The insights of Doyle, in particular, demonstrate that this polarity in prevailing theories of the mind no longer holds. One of the principal ideas behind the surrealists’ exploration of automatism, and their interest in the experience of mental illness, was to demonstrate that no individual is in full control of their thoughts, words and works. In so doing they shattered the distinction between sane and insane art. The power of Doyle’s work is that it continues this work of de-definition, and the point of my argument has been that we must re-think such distinctions before we attempt to move any further in understanding the work of those who experience mental illness, and the relationship between ‘madness’ and creativity.


3 See Mark Gisbourne, ‘French Clinical Psychiatry and the Art of the Untrained Mentally Ill,’ in Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr., eds, The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1994), 236. See also Inge Jadi, ‘Points of View – Perspectives – Horizons,’ in Beyond Reason - Art and Psychosis: Works from the Prinzhorn Collection (London: The South Bank Centre, 1996), 31. An early exception to this tendency within psychiatric discourse was the work of Marcel Reja, whose L’art chez les fous of 1907 evaluated works according to aesthetic criteria. As David Lomas has argued, Reja’s approach ‘was not easily reconciled with the institutional power and authority wielded by psychiatrists,’ and accordingly Reja’s pioneering efforts are to some extent the exception that proves the rule about psychiatrists and art. David Lomas, The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 62.


8 I refer in particular to the exhibition Outside In: An Exhibition and Short Film Featuring Graeme Doyle and Renee Sutton held at the University of Melbourne’s George Paton Gallery in 2006. See


10 Graeme Doyle, quoted in Carrie Kennedy, *Collected Thoughts: Graeme Doyle*, DVD (Parkville: Cunningham Dax Collection, 2006).


12 Cardinal, ‘Surrealism and the Paradigm of the Creative Subject,’ 105.


15 Cardinal, ‘Surrealism and the Paradigm of the Creative Subject,’ 97.

16 ‘Once you cross that line into the nether world of mental illness, it’s extremely painful.’ Quoted in ‘Pictures of Mental Health,’ *Melbourne Yarra Leader*, May 20 (2002), 6.

17 ‘He has been on and off medication…. sometimes enduring terrible side effects.’ See Rachel Kleinman, ‘In a Better Headspace,’ *Melbourne Yarra Leader*, May 19 (2003), 12; Kennedy, *Collected Thoughts*, DVD.

18 Kennedy, *Collected Thoughts*, DVD.


20 Kennedy, *Collected Thoughts*, DVD.

21 Personal communication, 18 September, 2007.


24 Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, 201. We could also compare this to André Breton’s idea of identity, in which the author is alienated from his or her own textual products. As Kendall Johnson argues ‘Breton’s subject becomes a shuttlecock, batted between the cause and effect of the author and the text.’ See Johnson, ‘Haunting Transcendence: The Strategy of Ghosts in Bataille and Breton,’ *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Autumn 1999), 347-370.
25 This line is taken from the poem 'Like a clown in a mirror his heart is for his own' by Graeme Doyle, which accompanies Grockles Sitting on His Putt Putt Putty (2001) at the Cunningham Dax Collection, Parkville.

26 See For Matthew and Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2006).


29 Personal communication, 18 September 2007.

30 See the reproductions of works from this series in For Matthew, 52, 72, cat. no. 125.


Anthony White is a Lecturer in Art History at The University of Melbourne where he teaches the history of European and American modern art and conducts research in Italian modernism, American post-war art, 19th century French painting and the relationship between art and mental illness. He has published several articles in the peer-reviewed journals Grey Room, The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, and The Art Bulletin of Victoria. From 2000-2002, while Curator of International Painting and Sculpture at the National Gallery of Australia, he curated and wrote catalogues for several major exhibitions of American art including Jackson Pollock’s Blue Poles (2002). From 2004-06 he was a co-editor of The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, the journal of record for art history in Australia. In 2005 he was a Visiting Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University, and in 2006 was appointed Ailsa Mellon Bruce Visiting Senior Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. He was awarded an Australian Research Council Linkage Project Grant for 2007-2009.
On The Necessity of Wonder

Silke Dettmers

How to explain an artwork to a committee.

The importance of not knowing. Wunderkammern and curiosity cabinets. Some thoughts on the real, the surreal and the contemporary surreal. The aspirations of words and the difficulties with ‘proof.’ Heterotopias. Questions rather than answers.

fig. 1

A blacked out seminar room, the end of a long ‘Research Review’ day. I have just shown a myriad of slides, the record of a recent exhibition. Then, out of the dark, a voice asks: ‘Do you think you have you achieved what you set out to achieve?’

A simple enough enquiry, put kindly enough. Yet, it floors me. I see no way of answering it.

Puzzled, I struggle to address the question in the only way I know: and that is to show even more images - this time of plans/sketches of work that I could have made, might still make, have discarded, possibly will come back to… - a poor response, I fear.
Stuck in a dark classroom on a bright sun-filled day, I am asked to account for my art - after all, these days, successful research equates funds.

*

I leave college that night feeling quite inadequate.
Six weeks later; and the question regarding my ‘achievement’ has not gone away.
I discover kindred spirits:

The French curator Vincent Gille writes about the dilemmas of the (re)presentation of surrealism and surrealist works: ‘Nothing is more difficult […] than to give a true image of surrealism, to respect the scope of its debates, to keep its “borderless” limits clear, to reinstate it in all of its deviations, its contradictions, in all the density of its artistic, social and political interroga
tions. Nothing is more difficult than not to lose track en route of the pole towards which the compass points, not to restrict the open field of word or action, and to keep the door to the marvellous wide open.’

Gille speaks about a very specific art historical/curatorial problem here, within the setting of ‘the museum.’ But one could also read his observation as a succinct and vivid description of the creative process and the frustrations of documenting it. ‘For it is not knowledge that needs to be transmitted, but an experience.’

*

An early encounter with the marvellous.
Children are taught not to stare (or point). Staring - gawping, goggling - is considered bad manners, particularly when it takes place in public places and concerns other people. Staring, however is a spontaneous expression of surprise, and as such not ‘improper.’ It is a response to ‘difference’ in the world; children stare at what is too big too small or what is of different shape, form, surface, texture, smell. Children often don’t yet have the words to describe or ask. Parents/teachers don’t have time or the intention or ability to explain the world to them. Sometimes what the world presents is so complex that words are not enough. Staring is taking in what is outside. Staring is the beginning of getting to know the world. Staring is starting to make sense of the world.

One of my very first memories concerns staring.
I grew up in the provinces. This was the decade after World War Two. My parents lived on the outskirts of a town, soon to become a city, where newly built houses met fields. At the end of the road, which was ‘un-finished,’ was a small grocery store. My parents lived for the first four years of their marriage in Achtermoehlen (‘behind the mills’), and my mother must have used this shop on a daily basis. But I recall only one visit - that was when I met the man without legs. It was dark in the grocer’s shop.

The light from a window must have sent a sideways beam to point to the man, the man who was shorter than me, a four-year-old child: his body finished where his legs should have
started. In my minds eye I still see the dark red piece of wood, on castors – a kind of skateboard - that carried this ‘half man.’

My mother then would have pulled my arm tightly towards her, she would have bent down and (possibly under her breath) would have told me not to stare. Later, out of earshot, she would have tried to explain how such mutilations were a result of war. What I really wanted to know though, but now did not dare to ask anymore, concerned the man’s remaining bodily functions, the eating and the... I can’t vouch for the conversation with my mother fifty years later, I have to imagine it; what I am piecing together here is a very probable dialogue for an otherwise silent scene.

But what I do know with certainty, is what I saw: the joining of a man to a piece of wood. Thereafter, nothing was strange anymore.

The small and the large, the incongruous, paradoxical and outright false are now central to my own artistic practice. My work physically probes gravity and often looks as if held up only by hope. I thus feel protective about the strange and the marvellous and actually believe in the necessity of wonder; perhaps more so now, because as an artist and teacher, my life has inadvertently become bound up with institutions, the very places that have exiled wonder.

The institutional mistrust of wonder has deep roots:

René Descartes states ‘What we commonly call being astonished […] is an excess of wonder which can never be otherwise than bad.’ David Hume, a century after Descartes, described
wonder as ‘the hallmark of the ignorant and the barbarous.’ Knowledge, for him, is proven by proof; and experience has to be fail-safe and repeatable. In Of Miracles Hume writes ‘A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as full proof of the future existence of that event.’

Wonder has no opposite and it thus jars with the idea of proof. Wonder, ‘the first of all passions’ prioritizes the senses, it is populated by images, it is non-judgmental and non-hierarchical; wonder is a state before words and reason - all of which drives it to the margins of academic credibility. Wonder, in method and spirit, is the antithesis of the institution.

As an artist and academic I ask myself: How empirical and rational is the creative process? How infallible can my sculptures ever be? What are my achievements?

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On not knowing.

The currency of universities and academies is knowledge. A knowledge that, in the west, is closely related to reason, proof and the elimination of uncertainty and doubt. However, in the pre-Enlightenment period, knowledge was not assumed to be free of uncertainty. Indeed, wonder was defined primarily in its didactic sense, ‘as a form of learning - an intermediate, highly particular state akin to a sort of suspension of the mind between ignorance and enlightenment that marks the end of unknowing and the beginning of knowing.’ A state of mind all artists recognize and are familiar with.

The initial embrace of uncertainty (and the subsequent loss of wonder) can be traced in the story of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European Wunderkammer. The early ‘chambers of wonder’ later evolved into the elaborate, excessive curiosity cabinets, which in turn laid the ground for the birth of the Encyclopaedia (which unavoidably leads one to the ongoing ‘project’ of Google and Wikipedia). Of particular interest to me are the physical—
visual changes in the display of the objects of curiosity, which can be read as signifiers of the development of the idea of knowledge itself.

I want to introduce the *Wunderkammer* as a useful thinking model through which to view the difficulties artists have with institutions and notions of ‘proof.’ Much can be learnt too, from the decline of the curiosity cabinets, which are tied in with the vanishing of wonder as an academic entity.

I imagine the discovery of the Americas akin to man landing on moon in 1969. The world gained another dimension.

![Image](image.png)

*fig. 4*

Europe around 1500 was caught between awe and explanation. The world, as it was described by divine law, was about to unfold and expand through travel, trade and the military subjugation of unknown territories.

Travellers brought back astonishing tales from their expeditions, and - as ‘proof’ one suspects – equally perplexing, foreign objects, never seen before and not understood. Characterised by their strangeness as much as by their rarity, these surprising objects were accumulated in the houses of the rich and powerful, the curious and the eccentric. The early *Kunst- und Wunderkammern*, as they became known, had little interest in order and categorisation. Their chief concern was showing off the richness and diversity of the ‘new’ universe. Their interest was authenticity and spectacle. Hanging from ceilings and protruding from walls, these objects of awe were formed into theatrical displays, becoming objects of amazement - divine/natural objects living side by side with objects/inventions crafted by men: stuffed crocodiles next to Indian canoes, corals and gigantic shells next to exotic woodcarvings, seedpods, spears, pickled body parts (animal and human), the skeleton of a mermaid… and almost certainly an ostrich egg. The visitor found himself at the centre of this ‘stage of wonder,’ the objects around him performing a ‘surround sound’ of otherness.
Of coal sacks, coffee and toy trains.

(A detour to the modern Wunderkammer.)

The ‘overwhelming’ qualities of not knowing can be feared or enjoyed. The surrealists certainly opted for the latter. Activating the spaces between incongruous objects so to evoke the marvellous, Max Ernst, Man Ray and Salvador Dalí would have had a field day at Ole Worm’s Copenhagen Wormianum Museum. The disorientating theatricality of the installation and absence of a system of presentation of the early Wunderkammern would, without doubt, also have delighted Marcel Duchamp, who curated several spectacular and perplexing surrealist exhibitions (which included, on one occasion, hundreds of coal sacks being suspended from ornate gallery ceilings).

There are contemporary examples of artists’ Wunderkammern, most recently Grayson Perry’s 2006 exhibition The Charms of Lincolnshire, and the far more ambitious Thinking Aloud, created in 1998 by Richard Wentworth: the latter a profusion/universe of objects/curiosa displayed in a seemingly ad hoc, dadaist fashion. Thinking Aloud talked about the ‘thing-ness’ of the world, and showed visitors how objects talk to each other when placed in spatial proximity; it demonstrated the relationship we have to things, whether that is objects we make, manipulate, or are given (by nature). As an exhibition it was promptly criticised by some for its supposed slackness of curation. With its lack of apparent system/academic apparatus it indeed left ample space for the viewer to make unorthodox links; the show lived by a ‘dangerous’ - and intellectually thrilling - absence of pedagogy; unlike most museums there was no restraining order placed on the thinking of the public.

David Wilson goes one step further. His Los Angeles Museum of Jurassic Technology is a work of installation art as well as a philosophical tractate. Described as ‘a temple to doubt’ it deliberately sets out to pull the carpet away from underneath the explanation and confirmation of the world that we may expect from the museum as a cultural/educational institution.

Other modern Wunderkammern spring to mind: Joseph Beuys’ vitrines, Susan Hiller’s From the Freud Museum (1991-97); Ilya Kabakov’s The Palace of Projects (2000) or the more personal, intimate chambers of wonders by Louise Bourgeois, such as the Red Rooms (1994).

Jannis Kounellis’ 2005 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford, contained a condensed, ‘museum-inside-a-museum’ version of the artist’s key metaphors compressed into one marvellous room of magical, inexplicable objects: displayed on a rough stage were bags of coal next to toy trains trapped in plaster cubes; a metal sunflower lit by a real gas flame; a roll of lead on the metal carcass of a bed; and, etched into my mind in this Chirico-esque staging, an outsized white porcelain so up dish with a live goldfish swimming in it - an ominous steel butcher’s knife resting on the rim of the plate. The room was suffused with the smell of coffee and coal, the gas flame hissing at regular intervals its industrial breath.
It can of course be argued that the Renaissance collections of *curiosa* and twentieth/twenty-first-century interest in the marvellous cannot be aligned quite so easily just by their shared sensibility for wonder; in each case the grounds for the appreciation of wonder being separated so evidently by the gulf of cultural history. When proposing the ‘Wunderkammer as thinking model’ I am considering wonder as method, rather than an outcome; a method that does not just produce a single ‘achievement’, but opens up a multitude of possibilities.

As *terra incognita* became *terra cognita* the nature of the ‘chambers of wonders’ changed, *Wunderkammern* became curiosity cabinets, the transition characterised by awe giving way to proto-scientific inquiry.

The very existence of the incredible objects from distant worlds had ‘brought into question the centrality of Europe and the primacy of its culture,’ amplifying the hunger for explanation. Driven by an urgent curiosity, the ambition of these new collections was high: to create a model replica of the universe. And they were compromised from the start: not only was this essentially an infinite project, but it was a goal that had to be accomplished in the confines of the often cramped spaces of the Renaissance collectors’ and scholars’ *studiolo*. This was no mean feat, as, with the emergence of a market in strange, foreign objects had come another aspiration: the completeness of a collection became as much a value as ‘rarity’ had been previously.

One could look upon the seventeenth-century collections as an attempt to both open the mind and as a way of controlling the inflow of ‘newness,’ the unexplained and exotic. Most
noticeable to the eye was the sense of order that started to replace the hodgepodge arrangements of the early days. Boxes and shelves were introduced, displays became labelled. Whilst once the ostrich egg had sat next to a rock of lapis lazuli and a bottled eel, it now was housed with other eggs, possibly organized by size, and quite possibly in a separate room (‘Naturalia’) away from e.g. mechanical models and mathematical instruments (‘Mechanics and Physics’). Shelves became chests of drawers, which, on opening, revealed further drawers that - like Russian dolls - contained more boxes, which themselves were partitioned again... There are records of two extravagant Italian cupboards containing no fewer than 4554 drawers... All this systematisation very much reflected the move of intellectual inquiry away from the visible appearance of the world, and towards its internal workings, which were to be proven by increasingly empirical methods.11

![](image)

**fig. 6**

The ostrich egg – a staple in all collections from the start – is a fertile symbol of creativity and ‘otherness’ in one; an apt example too in the context of this essay, which attempts to position the artwork within the institution. I will be using it to trace the story of the Wunderkammer further.

Isolated from the crocodiles and placed amongst fellow egg specimens – the white, blue, green, and speckled ones, the minuscule, the oblong, the pointed and the one black one – our ostrich egg now was ready to be catalogued in Latin (*ovum struthhio camelus*). An artist was employed to describe it in a fine woodcut and the image was included in an illustrated catalogue. Printed and distributed to the courts and libraries throughout Europe, this document drew an even greater number of visitors - travelling scholars and enthusiasts - to the already famous collection.

Rarity has a short lifespan. With the market in exotica fast expanding, by 1650 the ostrich egg was no longer a sensation. After a period at the back of a drawer, and already out of sight, it eventually fell foul of a ‘review of resources’ and was exchanged for a more spectacular item. However, no one much lamented its disappearance from view, as the egg had been depicted
so convincingly in the catalogue - perfect proof of its existence in the universe. Then a silversmith, who saw a chance to revive its status, came to the rescue, furnishing the ostrich egg with silver wings and a neck and placing it on a bed of corals and semi-precious stones. No longer valued for itself, the egg was transformed into a dazzling swan; its purpose no longer to arouse wonder but to demonstrate the skill and versatility of the craftsman. An unmissable object of desire for the rich connoisseur, it was quickly bought to join a collection of similar precious and sparkling objects, making the curiosity cabinet it now belonged to more priceless and important than its neighbouring collections. The ‘Egg-Swan’ was housed in a special drawer inside an ebony cabinet inlaid with mother of pearl and rubies, the rhetoric of its home obliterating it almost entirely.

*‘All found objects are essentially out of place, testifying to discontinued narratives and uneasy relocations.’ In turning the ‘strange’ ostrich egg into the familiar swan we forfeit the chance for ‘estrangement…[to become]…an instrument by which to renew our perception.’ Tidying up, physically and conceptually, the uneasy displays of the old *Wunderkammern* through establishing increasingly refined taxonomies, meant shrinking the imaginative space of and between the objects, and with it went surprise and poetry: no more horned and winged, mythical creatures, no hybrids of plant and animal. Thankfully, at least some of the strangest specimens escaped the intellectual cleansing of the Enlightenment: a tree impaled by the antlers of deer that then grew around it is still on exhibition in Schloss Ansbach, Austria; and the famous cherry stone from the Dresden Kunstkammer which was carved with 30 miniscule heads also survived.

fig.7

Wentworth calls the space between objects ‘resonance,’ ‘the way certain things seem to chime.’ He reminds us: ‘Resonance and association are amongst the least explicable aspects of our lives, but we’d never make a move without them. There are some mythic stories in the history of science, celebrating such moments of recognition: Harry Koto’s understanding of Carbon 60 for example, was accelerated by his fond memories of
Buckminster Fuller’s dome structures, which he’d first seen as a young man.\textsuperscript{14} Essentially, though, Wentworth sides with a less utilitarian view of art. Reflecting on the breadth of creative impulses he refers to an (imaginary) patent office: ‘A proposal enters the patent office and becomes definite. You can imagine a patent office for art, where ideas are registered, experiences logged - but it wouldn’t be art.’\textsuperscript{15}

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\textbf{fig. 8}

By the early eighteenth century enclosed display cabinets had been introduced, often glass fronted. ‘Admirative joy gave way to autopsic glee.’ Celeste Olaquiaga, rightly, describes this shift as a fundamental one; these cabinets ‘adding a layer of concealment and distance to what until then had been presented as an integral part of the viewer’s universe.’ The visitor that once had been enveloped in wonders had now become one that satisfied his/her curiosity at one remove; ‘they [now] stood facing the cabinets, their frontality signalling that being integral to the universe had become second to looking at it,’ thus leaving behind the sensual, three-dimensional experience of the learning of old. ‘This particular mode of display unwittingly lays the ground for the fully-developed scientific vision that, abandoning all interest in surfaces, will study natural history from outside in.’\textsuperscript{16}

The later eighteenth-century curiosity cabinets - whilst remaining persistent in their desire to create an inventory of the world - provide, architecturally, a sense of linear continuity; Olaquiaga observes that this is a very twentieth-century concept, and she adds that the display of collections like the Bonnier Collection ‘read like pages of an open book.’

The transformation from object to word is now nearly complete.

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The trouble with words. (Are artists allergic to words?)
No. But they fear that words - like the reflection on the glass of the display cabinets - obscure the view of the object itself. Locked up and anaesthetised, the precious creation was robbed of its scent and replaced by the library.

It is the linear, ordered qualities of language that confound the artist. A sentence ‘points,’ it has a beginning and an end, it deals in finality. It sits there, tidy, in black on white; it is not uncertain, it has no doubt.

Artists deal with questions rather than answers. With the advent of surrealism, ‘a painting or a sculpture or collage became less an object to be looked at than a question. [...] Art became less an access to meaning than a barrier to it, one which none the less held out the promise of interpretation.’

Interpretation, particularly in academia, predominantly comes in the form of words.

The British sculptor Phyllida Barlow is vehement about words in relationship to visual arts: ‘Looking, I think is a slow burn [...] Words are quicker.’ In a conversation with Alison Wilding, a fellow sculptor, she says: ‘But what of understanding, of being understood? Understanding what? Why should art be ‘understood’ (and what does ‘understanding’ mean in this context)? That over-used word ‘experience’ is a catch-all, and too limp and pathetic. Yet it is the significant word because it allows for imagination and speculation, which I believe the non-visual qualities of sculpture depend upon…’ And: ‘...sculpture does not conform to an ordered process of looking: look, then think, then understand: 1+1 = 2. Sculpture is a 1+1 = 3 experience.’

(I myself am tempted to describe it as a 1+1=3 to the power of three experience).

Art baffles. You can never be sure about a white square on a white square, or you may feel helpless in the surround-world of an installation. If artists feel discomfort with words, so do many viewers when looking at an image. One of the legacies of the Enlightenment is that it has made us suspicious of images; we cannot entertain the absence of a finite explanation for long. William Mueller, writing about mathematics puts it like this: ‘Now, in the post Enlightenment, the loss of certainty feels like the result of some sort of guilty excess, and there is an air of contrition surrounding every attempt to re-establish the Cartesian course.’

Words present themselves as the perfect tool to ease the unease in the face of images. Writing about artworks sanitises our encounter with art. (One could note here the necessity that museums feel to provide extensive didactic comment in each exhibition room; resulting in visitors often investing more time in the explanations of the artwork than with the artwork itself.) Words, in their tidy linearity, can finish the artwork off for us. This is art without the irritation of not knowing. Words are not just quicker, they also are safer.

Words are portable and we are used to them attaching themselves to all human activity and experience. Their superiority over the image appears to be proven by this very flexibility.

But image and word live in parallel, yet separate hemispheres.
‘Sculpture is that oddball thing that can side-step language - this is why it frustrates writers.’

This statement by Alison Wilding is infused with admirable confidence; as such it contrasts with the experience of many artists who only feel acute loss, a reduction of their practice, and a sense of exclusion when their work becomes transcribed into words; this even when writing about their own work. Phyllida Barlow observes: ‘The feeling I get from these descriptions is like lying. Telling what the work is about, or what it refers to, creates a separate, rival object, which does not equate with what is there, and can become enhanced with glamour and expectation, something words are so capable of doing, and which the task of looking and remembering, is not.’

There are no Eureka moments in the visual arts. Making artworks starts with an ‘irritation’ that demands to be resolved; and it finishes with another ‘irritation,’ a different one from the one that kicked off the creative process. In this way every artwork is already the critique of its predecessor, and as such artistic ‘knowledge’ remains continuously incomplete. Making art is a process of overlapping questions; as such it is driven mostly internally, lacking any of the intentionality of the typical laboratory experiment. ‘Answers’ are temporary points of reflection on the way. ‘We relish incompleteness, because it signifies that something still lies ahead.’

The future of the creative process in the visual arts is, theoretically, indeterminate and infinite. It is impossible to represent it in the boxes of a flowchart, the application form of a funding body or the balance sheet of an institution.

I find echoes of this difficulty with closure described in an article by Tom Barone. Barone, an educationalist, does not see it as a problem solely of the (liberal) arts. He takes issue with
reducing uncertainty about the truthfulness and usefulness of knowledge’ for the purpose of
closure, and reminds his readers of the impossibility of final closure even in the most
traditional form of scientific research. Whilst acknowledging the psychological need we have
for certainty and assurance, he calls attention to the parallel drive in human inquiry, the
‘proclivity to endow features of our experience with more than one single meaning.’ The
methods quoted – known through, but not restricted to postmodern discourse - are described
as playful and exploratory; the overriding aim is not to produce ‘true data’ and closure, but to
create an ongoing multi-voiced conversation. Barone tellingly calls this approach to research
more artistic than scientific. Moreover, by quoting Michael Baldwin he draws
attention to how
much traditional academic research can learn from artistic practice: ‘The purpose of art is to
lay bare the questions that were concealed by answers.’

In his 2005 book Art Practice as Research, Graeme Sullivan points out, like Barone - and in
the spirit of Baldwin - that the nature of the artistic inquiry takes the form of a quest; and that
this is at odds with the goal of conventional academic research which is concerned with
delivering an explanation. Sullivan makes a passionate case for knowledge residing in the
artwork itself and he demonstrates his claim in great detail. Knowledge is produced through
the very making of art, he argues, not just through the critiquing of its results by theorists.

Despite wide acknowledgement that traditional academic inquiry ‘do[es] not accommodate the
whole range in which humans engage with issues, ideas, theories and information,’ the
Enlightenment suspicion of images and the methods of their production remains. The
hierarchy of artists as (pure) makers and writers as the true scholars is still very much alive in
the academy today. As a result, in universities and in arts funding bodies, art practitioners,
compete on a very uneven playing field for both status and resources.

The visual arts can deliver a unique, albeit very different knowledge production. But it can
only do so if institutional expectations and structures, which are currently so dominated by
measuring success, ‘outcomes’ and the question of ‘achievement,’ are re-thought and re-
placed by an art specific intellectual and practical environment.
20 August

An afternoon spent in the Tate Modern’s members’ room reading. Seven and a half densely written pages on the institutionalisation of art education. I struggle with the suggestions made at the end of the article. Does playing this ‘Game within the Game’ - as Beatrice von Bismarck suggests - offer a solution to the problems of conflicting internal and external forces she so convincingly dissects and describes earlier on? There is a whiff of the old idea of the ‘infiltration of the institutions’ - the acceptable route of reformation (rather than revolution) for the left in 1970s Germany. However, here it comes in the guise of the contemporary terminology of self-reflexivity, the instituting of ‘a dynamic through which…[an alternative working context]…constantly recomposes itself.’ I mistrust Bismarck’s ultimately idealistic proposition; it is over-optimistic with respect to the willingness of all parts of the community of the academy to interact with each other. It underestimates, I believe, the power interests and distribution within what is, after all, a government-funded institution. Bismarck’s use of the word ‘game,’ however playfully used here, worries me too – games too easily can be employed to anaesthetise.

After hours of words about art I decide to treat myself to experiencing art again. On the fifth floor of the Tate, in a beautiful moment of synchronicity, I walk straight into a screening of Gary Hill’s video Remarks in Colour and find myself spellbound: a young girl (Hill’s daughter) is reading out aloud from Wittgenstein’s Remarks on Colour. Forty-three minutes in one unedited stretch. Quite obviously very bright, and fluent for her age, she reads whole passages with seeming understanding of the text; but in other places she struggles with the words and their pronunciation: ‘ir- refu- ata- bel- aly’; ‘marely/ merrily/ merely.’ Despite the visible, absolute dedication to her set task, her intonation, invariably, drills holes into the meaning of what she reads.

I quickly get lost between the disconnected words she is spelling out for me. I look rather than listen. There is the bright red colour of the book, and the blue dress with white flowers (her
favourite?). I study the grey of the background in relationship to the red and the blue (I had walked past three Mondrians on the way in). The screen must be six metres by five metres at least - huge. White numbers are ticking away in the top right hand corner of the screen: ‘44,’ ‘45,’ etc. Counting time? Counting paragraphs? ‘57’ comes with the additional, mysterious words ‘I feel x’ and ‘I observe x.’ The gallery notes try to be helpful: ‘Hill highlights the way that we generally find ourselves somewhere between states of understanding or not understanding something, always in the process of comprehension.’ I am thinking of Vermeer. On my last visit to Amsterdam I spent what must have been three quarters of an hour in front of Woman Reading a Letter, trying to ‘learn by heart’ the colour blue in that painting.

By the time Anastasia Hill reaches ‘67’ she is clearly exhausted: her little shoulders are heaving with the great effort all this costs her. She must be about 10 years old. Did she volunteer for this task? Was she cajoled into appearing in front of the camera? Did she want to please her father? Will she receive praise at the end? Lovely, flawless, Californian skin. She scratches her cheek, her neatly combed, sun-bleached hair now falls across her face. Her body slumps a little more. And I sigh a little with her/for her when, on turning the page, even more words appear to be conquered. On her behalf, I feel temporary relief when something does make sense. I have quickly become her.

‘88,’ she can close the book. She briefly sits up properly.

Cut.

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A postscript.
New York, this year. On a holiday from writing about wonder. I have taken the E train deep into Queens. The lights in the carriage can’t be more than 10 watts at the most. Rush hour. Some way behind me a beggar makes his way through the crowded car - I can hear him rattling coins in a plastic cup long before I see him. My defences go up, I do not want to be approached, I want to stay on my long island of urban anonymity. I turn around and there he is - again - the man with no legs, no ‘skateboard’ this time, but wrenching himself along the wooden floor. His head no higher than my thigh.

fig. 12
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<td>The Log that Devoured the Wire</td>
<td>wood, electric wire</td>
<td>l: 17cm x h: 26cm x d: 9.5cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>origin unknown, purchased Aug 2007</td>
<td>The Universe (Gobstopper)</td>
<td>boiled liquid sugar</td>
<td>l: 5.5cm x h: 5.5cm x d: 5.5cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Government of the GDR, 1961</td>
<td>Berlin Wall, (fragment)</td>
<td>reinforced concrete</td>
<td>l: 2.7cm x h: 6.1cm x d: 2cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Estonia, paleolithic period (?)</td>
<td>Stone within a Stone</td>
<td>aggregate of minerals</td>
<td>l: 2.4cm x h: 3.7cm x d: 1.8cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>anon., found Aug 2004, Canal du Midi, France</td>
<td></td>
<td>carved wood</td>
<td>l: 13.3cm x h: 7.3cm x d: 5.7cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Silke Dettmers, 2007</td>
<td>Lucky Dice</td>
<td>wood</td>
<td>l: 2.9cm x h: 2.9cm x d: 2.9cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes


6 For Carolee Schneemann these questions are gendered. In 1975 she puts her disagreements with American establishment art critics in dialogue form:

‘I HAVE DONE AWAY WITH EMOTION INTUITION INSPIRATION SPONTANEITY [HE SAID…] - - THOSE UNCLEAR TENDENCIES WHICH ARE INFLICTED UPON VIEWERS […]’

‘HE PROTESTED YOU ARE UNABLE TO APPRECIATE THE SYSTEM THE GRID THE NUMERICAL RATIONAL PROCEDURES - THE PYTHAGOREAN CUES […]’

‘I SAW MY FAILINGS WERE WORTHY OF DISMISSAL I’D BE BURIED ALIVE MY WORKS LOST […] HE SAID WE THINK OF YOU AS A DANCER’


8 Apropos staring (and pointing), it is worthwhile to note that even the earliest depictions of Wunderkammern - such as the much reproduced engraving of that of Ferrante Imperato in Naples (1599) – include figures: guides pointing with sticks, and visitors - heads turned upwards - gawping. It is a well-known fact that the owners of collections often employed dwarfs as guides, their exceptional statue creating an additional ‘live’ curiosity factor.


11 Patrick Mauries describes a certain ‘obsessive and indefatigable’ Ulisse Aldrovani (1522-1605), the proud owner of the mentioned cabinets with thousands of drawers -
also professor at Bologna University - who ‘would write notes on scraps of paper and place them in bags, alphabetically arranged, before doggedly re-ordering them once again and gluing them on to sheets. At his death, he left 360 manuscript volumes […]’. In the catalogue of his museum ‘he [even] categorized the visitors to his collection according to their geographical origins and social standing.’ See Patrick Mauries, Cabinets of Curiosities, Thames & Hudson, London, 2002, 150.

13 Wentworth’s notion of ‘resonance’ brings to mind Albert Einstein: ‘The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion, which stands at the cradle of true art and science. Whoever does not know it can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed;’ Einstein quoted in Weschler, Mr Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder, 127.
15 Wentworth, ‘Thoughts on Paper,’ p. 11. This resonates with Gaston Bachelard’s remark, ‘In poetry, non-knowing is a primal condition; if there exists a skill in the writing of poetry, it is in the minor task of associating images.’ Bachelard, The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places, Massachusetts Beacon Press, Boston, 1994, xxxii. See also Bachelard’s warning ‘If we cannot imagine, we cannot foresee,’ The Poetics of Space, xxxiv.
20 Alison Wilding in Barlow, ‘At Sea,’ 90.
21 Barlow, ‘At Sea,’ 87.
24 Barone actually uses a variation of the Baldwin quote in his article which differs slightly from the one stated in this essay: ‘Good art […] is capable of ‘lay[ing] bare questions that have been hidden by the answers.’ ‘Science, Art, and the Predispositions of Educational Researchers,’ 25.
Barone states: 'Most art based researchers do not seek hegemony for our work over any sort of useful science. What we seek is parity.' 'Science, Art, and the Predispositions of Educational Researchers,' 27.

Sullivan, Art Practice as Research, 225.


Gary Hill, Remarks on Colour, 1994, single channel video projection, 43 min, 13 sec; exhibited at Tate Modern, London [viewed 20 August 2006].

Johannes Vermeer, Woman Reading a Letter, c.1662-63, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 39cm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Silke Dettmers is a sculptor. A Senior Lecturer, she teaches at the University College for the Creative Arts, Maidstone. Most recently her work was exhibited in The Wrong End of the Telescope, Three Colts Gallery London (2006), and Through the City, The Nunnery, London (2004). She will show at the London Art Fair in January 2008.
‘The Flowers of Friendship’: Gertrude Stein and Georges Hugnet

Katharine Swarbrick and Jane Goldman

Abstract

Gertrude Stein's work Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded started life as a translation of the poem Enfances by French Surrealist poet, Georges Hugnet. Ever since, literary criticism has emphasised, at many levels, the distance between them. ‘The Flowers of Friendship’ examines recent critical debates on the collaboration between Stein and Hugnet and asks whether there are other ways of thinking about distance and proximity in the case of these two poems. The authors question accepted views on Enfances and Stein’s response to it, opening up the interface between poetics and psychoanalytic theory to explore the collaborative process afresh.

Sexuality, authority and translation are key terms at the core of ongoing analyses of the artistic contribution of Gertrude Stein. One work which brings into focus the significance of all these terms is her poem Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded: Written on a Poem by Georges Hugnet. The historical context in which the publication came about is not without interest in itself, as it frames the well-known dispute between Stein and Hugnet over the question of authorial ownership and the status of Stein’s ‘translation’ of Hugnet’s poem Enfances. Prior to her ‘translation,’ or ‘reflection’ as she terms it, of his work in the summer of 1930, Stein enjoyed a productive and mutually beneficial literary friendship with Hugnet, whom she met in 1927. As poet, artist, publisher and critic, he translated into French and published a number of her texts, including The Making of Americans and Portraits. Following her work on Enfances, Stein objected to appearing as Hugnet’s translator, her name listed beneath his, on the title page in the American journal Pagany, but she intervened too late to stop the publication of the Pagany Edition. So Enfances and her ‘reflection’ on it were published for the first time side by side in Pagany in 1931. But Stein did make the last minute addition in Pagany of a title for her ‘reflection’: Poem Pritten on Pfances of Georges Hugnet, a mocking, punning new heading (‘on Pfances’ is a homonym for Hugnet’s French title, Enfances). Plans for a second edition of the two poems to be published in Paris were aborted, and Stein and Hugnet went their separate ways.

Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded was published separately by Alice Toklas in the Plain Edition series in 1931. Hugnet, who likewise recognised that the ‘reflection’ made no attempt at faithful translation, resorted to publishing his own poem separately in the Editions Cahiers d’art in 1933. Subsequently Pagany’s editor, Richard Johns ‘came to feel that he had printed a poem in French by Georges Hugnet and a completely original piece in English by Gertrude Stein, rather than a translation.’

The relationship between the two poems has nonetheless continued to be the subject of important critical debate. Stein’s adaptation is negatively assessed by critics such as Marianne DeKoven and Richard Bridgman. Bridgman judges that ‘Stein’s version suffers badly in the presence of the original,’ presenting a poor job of translation suggestive of bad
French. On the other hand, Ulla Dydo’s recent detailed analysis of the two works in *Gertrude Stein: The Language that rises,* is a negative assessment rather of Hugnet, arguing that the immature, over-lengthy *Enfances* exasperated Stein and that her irritation is apparent in her transposition of the original. Dydo presents aspects of the personal side of Hugnet and Stein’s friendship to argue how the older, experienced poet becomes annoyed, even scornful, of her young collaborator’s laboured romanticism.

Such evaluations stress the distance between the two works, and the idea that their parallel publication ironically marks a definitive separation from what went before, is highlighted in the discussions of Stein scholars who have come to see *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* as a radical turning point in Stein’s artistic career. Here Stein will understand and access the proactive, parodic voice which unleashes a startling new poetics. The result is an antagonistic rewriting of *Enfances,* specifically at the level of its depiction of a sexuality seen as markedly masculine in nature, which is displaced by Stein’s celebration of lesbian love. Critical appraisals of this kind establish the radical, anti-patriarchal impact of Stein’s work, through the act of eclipsing the original text. KS

**‘The Flowers of Friendship’: Gertrude Stein**

Stein’s poem had a significance within her oeuvre which can be understood without access to Hugnet’s poem. Stein saw *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* as constituting a breakthrough in her poetic technique. It marks a departure from her technique in *Tender Buttons* where ‘I was making poetry but and it seriously troubled me, dimly I knew that nouns made poetry but in prose I no longer needed the help of nouns and in poetry did I need the help of nouns. Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them.’ In *Tender Buttons* Stein had sought to evade a ‘naming’ which we might consider patriarchal inscription (for to name is to claim dominion over, to own): ‘Think of all that early poetry’ she reminds us, ‘think of Homer, think of Chaucer, think of the Bible and you will see what I mean you will really realize that they were drunk with nouns, to name to know how to name earth sea and sky and all that was in them was enough to make them live and love in names, and that is what poetry is.’ In *Tender Buttons* Stein seeks to name without naming. The poem is divided into three parts: ‘Objects,’ ‘Rooms’ and ‘Food.’ It is now argued by feminist criticism that these are references to the feminine; and that Stein’s project is to rescue the feminine from reification; from being the object, named and owned. This interpretation is assisted by recognising that the very title, *Tender Buttons,* refers to the clitoris - the site of autonomous feminine pleasure.

The poem *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,* on the other hand, came about not from Stein’s direct observation of things, objects or people; not from trying to give noun status to what has been suppressed (the feminine), we might gather, but from the attempt to *translate* a poem by a man. She summarises the debacle with Hugnet in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas:*
Georges Hugnet wrote a poem called Enfance. Gertrude Stein offered to translate it for him but instead she wrote a poem about it. This at first pleased Georges Hugnet too much and then did not please him at all. Gertrude Stein then called the poem Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded. Everybody mixed themselves up in all this. The group broke up.6

Here, we learn that afterwards ‘Gertrude Stein was very upset and then consoled herself by telling all-about it in a delightful short story called From Left to Right and which was printed in the London Harper’s Bazaar.’ The story is in fact called ‘Left to Right: A Study in the New Manner, by Gertrude Stein,’ and sports a two line epigraph: ‘Everybody/ Knows all about this Thing ....’ Georges Hugnet appears in it as ‘Arthur William’; Stein is presumably the first person narrator. The title, ‘Left to Right,’ which may refer to the parallel layout of Hugnet’s original poem and Stein’s translation in Pagany, also seems to describe Stein’s precautions, after the row, against meeting with the Hugnet camp in the street: ‘And now before I go out I always look up and down to see that none of them are coming.’7

In her portrait, Henry James, Stein gives a rather cryptic account of the great significance for her of her attempt to translate Hugnet’s poem:

An accident is when a thing happens. A coincidence is when a thing is going to happen and does.

DUET
And so it is not an accident but a coincidence that there is a difference between Shakespeare’s sonnets and Shakespeare’s plays. The coincidence is with Before the Flowers of Friendship faded.8

Before the Flowers of Friendship faded is somehow to embody the distinction between accident and coincidence and between Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays. Stein plays upon this theory throughout Henry James, and titles the refrain a duet. A clearer explanation occurs in her essay, ‘Narration’:

Hitherto I had always been writing, with a concentration of recognition of the thing that was to be existing as my writing as it was being written. And now the recognition was prepared beforehand there it was already recognition a thing I could recognize because it had been recognized before I began my writing, and a very queer thing was happening. ... The words as they came out had a different relation than any words I had hitherto been writing ... I realized that words came out differently if there is no recognition as the words are forming because recognition had already taken place.9

Stein is in the act of translating - not objects, or experience into words - but words into other words. She seems to have had a Saussurean moment: language, she recognises, refers not to the object world, but to itself.

We might also consider the significance for Stein’s poem of classical models of imitation. Traditionally, most (male) poets would try their hand at imitating Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Catullus - as well as paying some homage to the fragmented and elided Sappho. Marcel Proust, in Contre Sainte-Beuve, provides a different model, and one more
contemporaneous with Stein. But Stein, translating a contemporary male poet, writes her own poem *on his* - as her subtitle tells us ('Written on a poem by Georges Hugnet'). This seems to me to constitute a reversal of the classical Delphic tradition, where according to the myth, Apollo, the God of poetry, founded his shrine at Delphi by slaying a terrifying she-dragon, who represents a ‘monstrous’ autonomous femininity, alien to that approved by, and approving of, patriarchy. The feminine associations of Apollo's shrine are erased in later accounts so that Apollo appears to be founding a shrine for the first time, not displacing one he opposes. Women writers, acknowledging and resurrecting the classical *drakaina*, have to negotiate a poetic tradition founded on their own displacement and destruction. The act of inscription, of illumination, may otherwise be simultaneously an act of (self)-erasure and occlusion.

Stein is playfully reversing the patriarchal tradition of the erasure of the feminine, then, by writing on top of Hugnet’s poem, and erasing the masculine origins of her ‘translation’. Yet published alongside Hugnet’s poem, Stein’s erasure is, of course, always and already undone. But this is not the form in which we have come to read Stein’s poem. Presented alone, as *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded*, it may appear a brutal palimpsest in which, we are led to believe, hardly a fragment of Hugnet’s original survives. Its subtitle, ‘Written on a poem by Georges Hugnet,’ boasts the act of erasure, leaving the reader to project an absent, patriarchal text.

In the title, subtitle, and opening lines of the poem published as *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* there seems to be a conflict between grammatical sense, verbal sensuality, free association, rhythm and repetition:

> In the one hundred small places of myself my youth,
> And myself in if it is the use of passion,
> In this in it and in the nights alone
> If the next to night which is indeed not well
> I follow you without it having slept and went.
> Without the pressure of a place with which to come unfolded folds are a pressure and an abusive stain

Are there perhaps here the remains of the persona created in George Hugnet’s poem, now fading, or drowning in Stein’s? Is Stein’s poem ‘following’ or obliterating Hugnet’s with her own ‘abusive stain’? She is gleefully sleeping in his bed, messing up his sheets. In doing so she is leaving her pungent female mark on a surrealist tradition of celebrating male ejaculation, which is exemplified in such works as Marcel Duchamp’s *La Sainte Vierge* and *Fountain*. In the many sections that follow there seems to be a struggle between masculine and feminine discourses and sexualities. There are references to bizarre arrangements or positions: ‘So he says. It is easy to put heads together really. Head to head it is easily done and easily said head to head.’ The rhythm builds up into moments of unison which in context
suggest the interrogation of sexual relations: the questioning of joining two into one in cadences suggestive of merging and splitting. Yet during all this the male seems to be on his way out: ‘He went and came and had to go. No one has had to say he had to go come here to go go there to go go go to come to come to go to go and come and go.’ Is this the masculine ebbing out of a poem about feminine experience? Is this the obliteration of a masculine discourse and the celebration on top of it of lesbian sexuality? This seems to be the position of the final poem which begins by declaring: ‘There are a few here now and the rest can follow a cow.’14 ‘Cow’ in Gertrude Stein’s circles, we now understand, was lesbian slang for orgasm.

In the last lines, added for the revised edition of the poem formerly known as *Poem Pritten on Pfances of Georges Hugnet*, Stein boastfully underscores her writerly imposition by replacing the text (‘Pfances of Georges Hugnet’) with the author himself as the superseded object:

What is my name.
That is the game
Georges Hugnet
By Gertrude Stein.15

She occupies his subjective terrain, disrupting Hugnet’s authorial status. But perhaps her own authority is also undermined by this game. Who is the ‘I’ in the poem? Stein’s subject here seems to be pulling itself free of a masculine subjectivity, to reinscribe and celebrate the feminine over - and on top of - the masculine. But, in this feminist/postmodernist reading of Stein’s text, are we constructing or projecting, in the absence of Hugnet’s poem (in French or in translation), a phantom ‘heterosexist’ and patriarchal version of *Enfances*? Interestingly, Juliana Spahr in introducing a recent reprinting of the *Pagany* edition of the poems in parallel, agrees with this reading, and finds Hugnet’s poem heterosexist:

Stein actively opposes translation’s normative impulse to make another culture discernible and digestible; while Hugnet’s poems are often concerned with heterosexual sex, male genitalia, and onanism, these are all absent in Stein’s poems. … Moments like these, in which the writer/translator is also reader, are radical ones. Such moments, for example, allow Stein to pursue her own political, cultural agenda and to abandon the poems’ heterosexism and replace it with her relationship with Toklas. As she writes, ‘I love my love with an a/ Because she is a queen.’16

Stein’s poem, by virtue of its apparently violent displacement of Hugnet’s work, may be read as an overwhelming and in places authoritarian lesbian text. However, by restoring its encounter with Hugnet’s poem, it may be read differently: as one part of a ‘duet’ as Stein termed it, or a ‘dialogue’ as it has been called since. JG
‘The Flowers of Friendship’: Georges Hugnet

The landmark status accorded to Gertrude Stein’s Poem Pritten on Pfances of George Hugnet, means it has tended to attract greater attention than Enfances, and it is doubtless true that assumptions about Hugnet’s less prominent work are made on the basis of arguments which focus on Stein’s feminist displacement of it. However, recent debate has re-opened the question of the two poems’ interaction with each other. The idea of an ‘intertextual dialogue’ is explored by Barbara Will in her article of 2004 ‘Lost in translation: Stein’s Vichy collaboration,’ which presents Stein’s work as a playful subversion of Hugnet, illustrating the manner in which Stein understands ‘translation’ creatively, as ‘listening’ and ‘talking back.’ In doing so, Will’s analysis shifts away from readings which present Stein’s version as a feminist rewriting, and moves towards questions of language: traditional syntax and referentiality are deconstructed by the open-ended play of the signifier.

Language in Stein’s transposition of Hugnet is likewise the focus of Marjorie Perloff’s ‘Barbed-Wire Entanglements.’ Parody, pastiche and pun hold sway in a text which Perloff presents as exemplifying a shift in modernist poetics instigated by a new adversarial poetics of the early 1930s. Here, says Perloff ‘reference … does not insure mimetic representation. Nothing is taken for granted; nothing is quite what it seems to be.’ Perloff, like Will, is at pains to show that Stein ‘listens’ closely to Hugnet’s text, taking on its explicitly masturbatory references to male sexual arousal and pleasure, but Stein’s text uses such references above all to subvert language, foregrounding the ambiguous play of the signifier as she moves toward a place which ‘precludes reference entirely.’ Meanwhile, the status of Enfances is largely unchanged in these discussions. It remains a less innovative text poetically, and a work which portrays sexuality as firmly under the dominion of a masculine erotics.

What is clear, however, from the critical perspectives explored above, is that these two major strands of analysis, sexual politics and language, which dominate discussions of the Stein/Hugnet collaboration, are not strictly separable. It seems impossible to discuss one without discussing the other. This goes back to a fundamental point about the collaboration between the two poets which has not yet been explicitly made: Stein unleashes a new powerful, decentred poetics by putting into play the signifiers of an original text, which is not just any text, but a poem about sexual discovery and phallic pleasure conveyed in the attitude of revolutionised consciousness which characterises surrealist poetry. This cannot be a coincidence.

What I aim to do in the discussion that follows is to indicate a space where an interface between sexuality and the signifier, the mimetic and the non-mimetic, the masculine and the feminist can be established, and where these terms can interconnect. Only through drawing all these points of interconnection together can we understand better how the ‘translation’ of Stein by Hugnet produced what it did. Let us start by looking at the relation between Hugnet and Stein, with a view to re-examining the former’s alleged heterosexist, patriarchal credentials.
If we return briefly to the historical context in which Stein and Hugnet meet, a context recently illuminated by Ulla Dydo in *Gertrude Stein: The Language that rises*, what emerges is an unusual type of love relationship which is eclipsed by their subsequent quarrel, but is also its cause. The closeness and parting of the two poets is in fact the key to approaching not something that separated them, but something that they had in common. After all, Hugnet, like, Stein, is an avant-garde poet, and an experimenter in the field of sexuality; when Stein approaches his work, something holds her attention and moves her ‘adaptation’ of *Enfances* through a series of poetic transpositions, which, as critics have shown, continually interact with the Hugnet text in latent, playful and elaborate ways. There is an underlying link or insight between the two poets on which this interaction is based, and I would suggest it turns around the notion of recognition, which Stein repeatedly returns to in her insistence on the significance of her ‘translation’ of Hugnet’s poem. What is it that Stein can recognise, because it had already been recognised – in this case, by Georges Hugnet?

In choosing his subject, and in the manner in which he treats it, Hugnet, writing *Enfances* in 1930, shows an affiliation with surrealist ideas that have been in the air since 1924. Hugnet joined the surrealist group in 1932, but was already familiar with key figures associated with the avant-garde at this time, including Pablo Picasso, Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, and Robert Desnos, whose company he had enjoyed since 1920. André Breton’s *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme* published in 1924, undertook to formulate the nature of surrealism by placing at its core the role of the imagination, the dream, the operations of the subconscious mind. Such an emphasis brought the perceived imaginative and irrational propensities of the child into new focus, and childhood became for surrealism, a privileged, exalted state of being.

Informing Breton’s presentation of the surrealist propensities of the mind is his interpretation of the theories and practice of Freudian psychoanalysis which likewise gave new status to childhood. In 1922 Breton began reading the first translations in French of Freud’s *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, texts in which Freud introduces his findings on the significance of the psychical life of children. Here Freud presents the child as expressing more directly, with fewer of the inhibitions of the adult, the unconscious operations which the analyst seeks to uncover, but more significantly, and controversially, he also insists on the presence of sexual drives and feelings in children. This coincidence in the arena of childhood of the irrational and the erotic, make it an exemplary theme for the explorations of the surrealist imagination.

My argument is that even before he joins the surrealist group, Hugnet shares its commitment to eroticism and that this in turn stems from the influence of Freud. But if the instinctual spontaneity of childhood sexuality is to be explored under the aegis of Freud, then the poet must sooner or later be confronted with the psychoanalytic discovery that heterosexual norms and the aims of genital satisfaction are marginalized in infancy in a primary bisexual disposition of the individual. In addition, the child’s original libidinal eclecticism drives it to invest potentially any object or part of the body with erotic significance:
in fact this pregenital organisation of the drives leads Freud to summarise the sexual drives of the infant as polymorphously perverse.21 Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in which these ideas are introduced were published by Gallimard in French translation in 1925. They would have found an avid readership in surrealist circles. In *Enfances*, Hugnet’s poetic exploration, as we shall see, will indeed lead him to an evocation of the primordial bisexuality of the erotic disposition which, because of its association to the child keeps its distance from the issue of homosexuality to which the surrealist group proved so averse. Hugnet will also be unable to avoid evoking a pregenital organisation of the drives, characteristic of infantile sexuality, which focuses in the first instance on oral satisfactions. All these evocations of sexuality certainly connote phallic pleasure as well, provided this phallus is understood, psychoanalytically, as an element of the Freudian concept of the drive, and not as normalised, masculine heterosexism. For all these facets of the erotic will take this work further and further away from the evocation of a heterosexual norm.

From the outset Hugnet evokes *Enfances* as a plural concept: it is a cycle of thirty poems presenting not a singular, univocal instance in memory and time, but a rather a chain of multiple, textual, imaged knots, each attempting to grasp an insurmountable moment, a facet of the organic, oneiric plasticity of the child’s imagination:

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Childhood in wool
in spite of the weeks
childhood in the street
no goodbye no harm done
playing with chance
with the laughing cotton,
compare your naked bodies
childhood in the farmyard
with the birds like dogs
announcing inept thieves
I lived that childhood
and so many others …
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Among this plurality of figures circulates a libidinal current which sexualises the senses, takes in the smell of love and tastes it as ‘vanilla, vanilla.’23 Strongly oral in character, it moves as ‘an insatiable appetite’ culminating in images of ‘milky-mouthed childhood’24 which evoke unmistakably the primordial object of oral desire - the breast. Multiple personifications of the term childhood are sometimes directly apostrophized:

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I’m calling, and my voice goes straight
to where you can hear me. Do you hear me?
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These personifications have a protean fluidity springing from the various nuances of the French term ‘enfance,’ which encompasses in its meanings both infancy and youth, boyhood and girlhood. While it is possible in almost all instances to read the interpellated figure of ‘enfance’ as an allegory of the narrator’s lost youth - one with which he interacts throughout in splendid solitary and masturbatory dialogue - it is also impossible to remain unaware of the regular mutation of this figure, aided by the feminine gender of the term, into a specifically female persona, the narrator’s other childhood, his feminine double; the one whose summoned presence coupled with her hallucinatory intimacy, places her both outside and inside the poet’s own psyche. The metamorphosis of the figure, sustained by apposition in the line, ‘and your childhood, this woman,’ continually evokes a composite figure, androgynous in nature, bisexual in its choice of object, which is given explicit visual representation in the engravings Hugnet selected to illustrate his publication of Enfances in Editions Cahiers d’art - the flowing, receptive and emissive orifices of the figures of Joan Miró. The projection of this feminine other, whilst it is in part absorbed and enveloped by the narrator, introduces nonetheless a potential radical otherness of sexual experience to which we shall return.

Permeated as it is by these kinds of image, the poem intimates at every turn its unconscious knowledge of infantile sexuality. And it is the labile quality of the libidinal drive which Hugnet conveys everywhere in his text that casts a different, more ambiguous and diffuse light on critical readings which emphasise the specifically masculine nature of sexual arousal presented in Enfances. Taking such a salient example as the image ‘masturbation clothes me in your gowns,’ the Freudian reader will find allusions to transvestism as well as to the concept of the fetish due to the garments evoked in this line (‘robes’), the primary sense of which suggests female clothing; female masturbation also figures as a veiled reference of the image, further problematising the supposed orthodoxy of representations of sexuality.

Other highly nuanced aspects of vocabulary and image tend at strategic moments in the text to filter or inflect sexual allusions; the narrator evokes the picture of himself wearing out his body, haphazardly abandoned on red eiderdowns, but the cosy, domestic connotations of the French term greatly deflate the potential sexual abandon of the rest of the image. In a similar procedure the narrator is described, and I paraphrase - coming out the shadows, dressed as he always is, in clothes the colour of vegetables. What do these vegetables suggest? An image of seeding erection? Or a comic trope in which unexpected juxtaposition subverts any serious picture of virile eroticism? Just such an effect is conjured up by the title of the collection of erotic writing by Hugnet, recently published under the title Le Pantalon de la fauvette. If the trousers of ‘pantaloon’ suggest masculine genital obsessions to the reader, the impression is entirely offset by the wearer of the trousers, the ‘fauvette,’ which is a warbler bird.

If we read Hugnet’s Enfances in this manner it becomes a different poem to the one which, according to Ulla Dydo, exasperated Stein with its romanticism. It also presents something other than the straightforward heterosexism with which Juliana Spahr associates it, as it implicitly deflates representations of hegemonic male sexuality at many points. We may
also start to become more aware of explicit themes of anxiety and separation which emphasise the limits of this sexuality at other levels. Here again, Freudian theory can provide a framework which helps to throw into relief the main narrative line of the poem. Freud’s account of sexuality in children is inseparable from his introduction of the Oedipus complex, which describes how the first and most intense love object of the child, the mother, must be given up under the cultural pressures which pronounce her as sexually taboo. The interdiction weighing upon the pursuit of this sexual relationship is supported in the psyche by a punishment envisaged as the threat of castration. Substitutes for the first object must be found, and in a parallel development, the deviancy of the drives is reined in. In his account of pregenital pleasure, Freud describes how the freedom of drives succumbs to the perception of sexual difference and the polymorphous perversity of the child is inhibited and restructured by the normalizing strictures of the genital. At this point the assumption of masculine sexuality, and the pleasures of the substitute object, can only be realised by internalising the threat of castration.33

Under the aegis of Oedipus the sexes are definitively separated, and the erotic life of the maturing self is reduced to the enactment of a failure - failure to retain the pregenital link to an other of the other sex. From a surrealist perspective, the individual has gone astray in terms of his/her erotic spontaneity. This inevitable trajectory is expressed by Hugnet in the following lines:

pleasure died on the way
from one climate to another
and its shadow no longer moves.34

Several verses later he conveys an image of parting where the rigours of conventional emotion deliver the final blow to the intimacy of childhood, with the feminine other who is the poet’s androgynous self:

The path ends in a big landscape
and your jealousy under a brimless hat35

As Hugnet moves into the penultimate stanza, he gives us this image of childhood as a crime over which a queen weeps. It is not impossible to read the concluding verses of Enfances as the reification of a lost plenitude represented as a projection of the poet’s hermaphroditic calling, which he is obliged to renounce in order to assume his genital direction. The polymorphous pleasures of the child presented throughout Enfances remain fundamentally tied to this loss - acquiring through it all their intoxicating, nostalgic power. Taking all these elements of Enfances together, I would propose that Hugnet mobilises the resources of surrealist language to convey a certain type of sexual enjoyment associated with phallic pleasure; for phallic pleasure is certainly everywhere in Enfances
provided it is understood as distinct from the ideas of the rigidly masculine and genital. He then asks Gertrude Stein to ‘translate’ his text – and not by chance. He does so because what he delineates in *Enfances* is not the phallus itself as the dominant sexual organ, but the function of the phallus, which is something different - and this function points to something beyond itself which Stein is asked to recognise.

Freud stresses polymorphous perversity as the primary manifestation of human sexuality and this is taken up by his successor, Jacques Lacan, for whom this polymorphous pleasure is rooted in the function of the phallus. One place we might look for Lacan’s succinct presentation of phallic *jouissance* - to use his term - is in the central chapters (6 and 7) of his Seminar XX, *Encore*, of 1975, where Lacan expounds his thesis of the absence of the sexual relation and where he consequently defines the act of love as ‘the polymorphous perversion of the male in the case of the speaking being’. Yet this phallic *jouissance* is far from unproblematic, nor does it connote mastery or power within the discourse of psychoanalysis; for it is based not on anatomical reality, but on the original, subjective meaning given to the phallus by the child of both sexes on whose own body it is recognised as lacking. In other words, the primacy of the phallus in the unconscious subjectivisation of desire comes about only in its articulation with lack - castration - where it is inscribed not in the domain of anatomy, but in the domain of representation.

Lacan’s presentation of the phallic function in *Encore* then proceeds to address the concept of lack at every conceivable level. Without castration defined as ‘something which says no to the phallic function,’ the male subject cannot take on the woman - except he only believes he does so; ‘what he takes on is the cause of his desire, the cause I have designated as the object a.’ What Lacan means is that phallic *jouissance* reaches only the partial object of the drive and is consigned to the path which the drive takes. It turns back on itself and fades almost instantaneously in a movement destined to highlight the curtailment of phallic enjoyment. It is on this failure of the phallus to reach the other of the other sex that Lacan bases his thesis of what he calls the absence of the sexual relation. The limits of phallic *jouissance* are then underlined by Lacan's delineation of an enjoyment which lies beyond the phallus, and he explicitly links this with the feminine. Despite the designations ‘feminine’ and ‘phallic,’ Lacan makes it clear that both types of *jouissance* are nonetheless open to individuals of either sex, whose subjective position, not gender, determines their experience in this respect.

My argument is that phallic *jouissance*, depicted through the imaginary satisfactions of polymorphous pleasure, is conveyed everywhere in Hugnet’s *Enfances*. An entire scale of masturbatory, fetishised, infantilised excitement is sounded as the poem progresses. The androgynous protagonist is a reminder that phallic *jouissance* is open to masculine and feminine subjects alike, founded as it is in subjective meaning not anatomy. But *Enfances*, having sounded its scale, arrives also at its limits - its articulation with castration – and looks beyond. Beyond lies a *jouissance* of a different quality which Lacan finally comes to in *Encore*.
a supplementary *jouissance* - and it is possible to find allusions to this among the more enigmatic references evoked by Hugnet in *Enfances*. Poem 19 is striking in this respect:

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And your childhood, this woman,
this woman like a woman
and no more and no less,
like a woman that's all
and that's more than a fountain
more than the sea, more and more\(^{38}\)
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Here Hugnet evokes the concept of more – a surplus. And this surplus, this more than a fountain - and fountain is Hugnet's poetic rendering of the phallus - in turn evokes a *jouissance* which goes beyond a visible and finite horizon – the sea. In poem 17, surplus enjoyment is again expressed by Hugnet as sexual knowledge in the form of a song which the allegory of childhood, suggestive as ever of this feminine other, this real or dreamed of sexual partner, teaches the narrator through a subliminal transference of thoughts:

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and I love this song
which I shouldn't have known in my head
if your head had remained on the other side.\(^{39}\)
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Hugnet's song projects a feminine double who remains irreductibly other; and this other connotes a difference pointing away from phallic pleasure as the sole *jouissance* common to both sexes. If we become attuned to the expression of this surplus enjoyment, Stein's interpretation of the poem becomes particularly eloquent and dynamic: as she indicates in her rendering of Hugnet's lines from poem 17 above, 'Head to head it is easily done and easily said head to head in bed.' We could understand her meaning as being that this surplus enjoyment is easy to convey under the right conditions. These conditions entail the deployment of the signifier at a level which frays a path outside the limits of the phallic: as Stein puts it, 'Any pleasure leads to me and I lead them away from pleasure and from me.'\(^{40}\)

Such a reading of Stein demands a heightened awareness of the ways in which language and representation are linked with a sexual thematics in Stein's 'adaptation,' which effects a transposition of the organisation of phallic enjoyment conveyed in *Enfances* into a poetics which will allow this surplus enjoyment to come into its own.

At a linguistic level, Stein pushes poetic language to the limits of signification, producing the startling slippage of syntax and sentence structure whose coherence and direction become apparent once this objective of redrawing the map of sexual possibility becomes apparent. Stein systematically collapses Hugnet's representations of the sexual act, which implicitly, if not directly, evoke the familiar scenario - the heterosexual couple, the heterosexual act, the bed. Where Hugnet's text says:
I like having you like a bad habit
when we’re in bed in your room\textsuperscript{41}

Stein’s replies:

He likes to be with her so he says does he like to be with her
so he says.\textsuperscript{42}

We could envisage the effects of Stein’s occlusion of this central representation of sexuality as what happens when a circulating flow of meanings changes its patterns, the moment the main route - which is to say the dominant, hegemonic form of sexual expression - is blocked off. At this point a hundred rich networks and detours open up around the theme of sexuality and start to be heard in language; sex is nowhere directly represented, but everywhere alluded to; enjoyment no longer takes the phallus as its focal point, but is diffused along the poetic line. Hence sexual symbols (for example a bouquet or house representing the female genitalia; trees, hats mushrooms, representing those of the male) saturate Stein's text but tend, as it were, to lie on the surface of the verse, without being rooted, or organised, in a particular representation. Where Hugnet’s poem says:

Even less would I be the tree in which your repose
used the main fork as two living arms\textsuperscript{43}

Stein’s replies:

A house and a tree a little house and a large tree ...\textsuperscript{44}

What is achieved here by Stein, I would argue, is something that goes beyond an aggressive obliteration of masculine sexuality through lesbian reference and image. What comes into focus is a new proximity between the two writers which reveals a new form of translation. For Stein is not indifferent to the phallic function Hugnet invokes. This function is the starting point for the exploration of a something more, approached at the level of a structural and affective relocation of sexuality by Stein of Hugnet’s intimation of more, which throws into relief a further dimension of sexual enjoyment. When Stein brings together two classic symbols representing the principles of the feminine and masculine, she proposes not an elision of one pole by the other, conventionally the elision of the feminine by the one representative of sexual difference seen as the masculine phallus, but a production of a surplus enjoyment - more - which lies beyond the phallus here evoked as ‘the one’:

And a bouquet makes a woods
A hat makes a man
And any little more is better than
The one.  

This challenge to the notion of one occurs elsewhere:

‘One might be one.
Might one be one.’

This is a sly question Stein asks implicitly throughout, whilst the emphasis on the ‘more’ is everywhere alluded to: ‘And little things do feed a little more than all’; as which were more than the two made it do; ‘That they eat more when many are more there’; ‘So when a little one has more and any one has more and who has more who has more…. And what is Stein aiming above all to convey in the enigmatic lines which challenge the half that is a whole?

It is always just as well
That there is a better bell
Than that with which a half is a whole

Let us bring these lines into relation with Lacan’s presentation of sexuality in Encore, where we find an account in which phallic jouissance is only half the story. Phallic jouissance imposes itself as the sole representative of sexuality precisely because it represents, renders visible, or expresses sexual desire as based on want and lack. But to recognise this organisation of jouissance alone is tantamount to taking the half as a whole - to subscribe to an illusory oneness which the feminine is called upon to support. However, this supplementary jouissance to which the feminine accedes, precludes her disappearance in the fantasy of one phallic sexuality. This is what Lacan argues for in Encore: a feminine jouissance which cannot be absorbed into a phallic economy of enjoyment. If we interpret Stein’s reflection on Hugnet from this Lacanian perspective we can see that Stein’s ‘translation’ retains its feminist credentials. The celebrated complementarity of the sexual relation is overthrown by the experience of more - encore - an ineffable experience whose expression Stein mobilises all the non-mimetic resources of language to convey. What is the response of the masculine subject to this absence of the sexual relation? Lacan suggests that he has the option of becoming the courtly lover; acts of poetry in the place of acts of love are an elegant way of expressing the non-complementarity which is at stake - the absence of the sexual relation. It is this which Hugnet and Stein express with particular trenchancy in their poetic dialogue of 1930. KS
Conclusion

The above study is an attempt to reengage with selected meeting points between the poems of Hugnet and Stein in a way which proposes a new dimension of collaboration between them. This dimension emerges if we put into play theories of sexuality and difference charted by Lacan in his study of the unconscious; for these allow us to examine the interconnection between the play of the signifier and modes of sexuality which both lie at the core of unconscious structures. That Stein resisted the theory of the unconscious and that Hugnet inherited only a limited understanding of the unbounded eclecticism of the sexual drives through his affiliation with surrealism, is a delicious irony in the context of this reading, highlighting that radical autonomy of artistic production which can liberate it so thoroughly from authorial intention and conscious directives.

The potential of this new legacy of Stein and Hugnet’s work is highly significant if we consider the nature of supplementary jouissance as Lacan presents it. For him its nature is inexpressible, unknowable – even perhaps to the subject who experiences it. Yet a study of Stein’s ‘translation,’ not in isolation, but precisely in terms of its uses of, and divergences with, the work of Hugnet, all the same communicates something of this enjoyment for which Lacan could imagine no means of expression. Stein’s work may also prove particularly adept at indicating a sexuality which lies outside phallic definition without producing an essentialising of the feminine, or a mystification of woman as the locus of an ineffable truth. One point seems clear: the space which opens between the poems of Hugnet and Stein contains more than heterosexism and lesbian riposte, more than word play or exasperation, more than parody or cynicism or irony. It contains more and more in the sense of encore. KS

Jane Goldman and Katharine Swarbrick teamed up in 2000 in a project for Salford University's 2001 international conference 'Americans in Paris; Paris in Americans.' Uniting expertise from English and American Studies on the one hand, and French Studies on the other, they began close readings of the duet between Georges Hugnet's Enfances and Gertrude Stein's 'translation' of it. Their findings have prompted them to expand the project into a scholarly edition including a literal translation of Hugnet's poem forthcoming with Carcanet.


7 Stein, ‘Left to Right,’ *Harper’s Bazaar*, September 1931, no. 41, 82. The Hugnet camp (those who took his side in the dispute), Stein conveys simply as a vague, anonymous group in this fictional account of the event.


15 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 30, 60.

16 Spahr in Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ 42.


19 The age difference between Stein and Hugnet, who is only 21 when they meet, is significant in this respect. Hugnet’s somewhat sheltered background and hypochondriac mind-set is worth noting in that both these circumstances undermine the image of Hugnet as an avatar of patriarchal authority. The initial affection between the two is marked. In 1928 Stein sent Hugnet her portrait of him George Hugnet. See Dydo (ed.), *A Stein Reader*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1993, which celebrates his membership of her circle.


22 All references to the poem *Enfances* by Georges Hugnet are taken from Spahr ed, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ 41-60, where it appears side by side with
Stein’s ‘translation.’ These lines, poem 2, are as follows in the original: ‘Enfance dans la laine/ en dépit des semaines,/ enfance dans la rue/ sans adieu et sans mal/ et jouant avec le/ au rire des cotonniers/ comparez vos corps nus./ enfance dans la cour/ avec des oiseaux comme des chiens/ annonçant les voleurs sans talent,/ j’ai vécu cette enfance/ et tant d’autres encore ….,’ 43. The translation is mine.


23 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 9, 48, ‘j’appelle et ma voix va droit,/ où tu m’entends, m’entends-tu?’


26 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 20, 55, ‘édredons.’


28 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 20, 54, ‘Le plaisir mourut en chemin/ d’un climat à un autre/ et son ombre ne bouge plus.’ An interesting biographical note to this image of two climates is the fact that Hugnet (b. 1906) spent his earliest years in Argentina, returning to France in 1913.


32 Spahr in Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ 42.


34 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 23, 55, ‘Le plaisir mourut en chemin/ d’un climat à un autre/ et son ombre ne bouge plus.’ An interesting biographical note to this image of two climates is the fact that Hugnet (b. 1906) spent his earliest years in Argentina, returning to France in 1913.


38 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 19, 54, ‘Et ton enfance, cette femme,/ cette femme comme une femme/ et pas plus et pas moins,/ comme une femme et c’est tout/ et c’est davantage qu’une/ fountain, plus que la mer, plus et plus….’

39 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 17, 53, ‘…et j’aime ce chant/ que je n’aurais pas dû connaître/ dans ma tête/ si ta tête était restée sur l’autre versant.’

40 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 12, 50.

41 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 22, 55, ‘J’aime t’avoir comme une mauvaise habitude/ quand nous sommes couchés dans ta chambre.’

42 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 22, 55.

43 Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 20, 54, ‘Et je serais moins encore cet arbre dont ton repos/ prit la fourche principale pour deux bras vivants….’

44 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 20, 54.

45 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 30, 60.

46 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 19, 53.

47 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 5, 45.

48 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 7, 46.

49 Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 10, 49.
Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 13, 50.

Stein, ‘Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,’ poem 15, 51.


Katharine Swarbrick, Lecturer in French at the University of Edinburgh, is Associate Researcher to The Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research, London, and author of *Lacan and the Uses of Iconoclasm* (Stirling French Studies, 1999). She has published articles on psychoanalysis and the avant-garde in Rodophi’s ‘Avant-Garde:Critical Studies’ series 15 and 20, and is writing a book entitled *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Uses of Madness*. 
Dada East. The Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire by Tom Sandqvist

When Hugo Ball told the story of the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire for the first time only a few months after its opening on 5 February 1916, he was keen to emphasise its international character.¹ He mentioned Emmy Hennings singing in French and Danish, the presence of a Russian balalaika orchestra and also made specific reference to Tristan Tzara reciting poems in Romanian. In his diary Ball described how Tzara had arrived at six o’clock that very evening as part of an ‘Oriental-looking deputation of four little men,’ two of the others being Marcel Janco and his brother George.² Tom Sandqvist speculates as to whether the fourth member of the party was Janco’s other brother, Jules, or the painter Arthur Segal. Whoever it actually was, he implicates them all in the scene and uses their contact with the Cabaret Voltaire to justify his assertion that ‘half of the first Dadaist group was Romanian.’ This is his springboard to an extensive analysis of the connections between Zurich Dada and the Romanian avant-garde of the early twentieth century.

In charting this new territory in Dada historiography, Sandqvist opens up a world that the successive forces of Nazism and Communism did their best to bury without trace. In highly evocative language he conjures up a vision of Bucharest fully deserving its nickname of ‘Little Paris of the Balkans,’ where groups of intellectuals and artists were totally plugged into the major currents in European culture of the day. Although the idea that Tzara and Janco arrived in Switzerland having already begun their artistic and literary careers is not exactly a new one, where Sandqvist’s account differs from previous examinations of Tzara’s early Romanian poems is that he treats them seriously rather than quickly passing over them as derivative juvenilia. More importantly he finds in them elements of something the book finds almost as hard to define as Dada, something we might call Central and East European culture. Ball’s description of the Romanians as ‘oriental’ is telling. Romania was at the nexus of three competing empires: Ottoman, Russian and Austro-Hungarian. Much closer to Istanbul than Rome, Bucharest desperately looked to the Mediterranean but was decidedly on the Black Sea. The five Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire were also five Romanians from Jewish families, caught up in the maelstrom of massive population movements in Eastern Europe and the rise of virulent nationalism and anti-Semitism which left them stateless within a state. The transformation of ‘Samuel Rosenstock’ into ‘Tristan Tzara’ is not treated here as a renunciation of his past, but the product of it.

The book is structured around five biographical chapters accorded to the three main protagonists, Janco, Tzara and Segal, and bracketed by a further eight contextual chapters in which a few major themes are worked through. The first is the encounter with modernity. A large amount of space is given over to modern Romanian history, a vivid description of the emergence of Bucharest as a modern city and detail of the economic opportunities of the late
nineteenth and early twentieth century which permitted the rapid rise of a wealthy middle
class. Although sometimes digressive, this material is helpful to readers of this book, such as
me, who are thoroughly unfamiliar with the social and political history of Romania. Sandqvist
does his best to tie it in by arguing that modernity was experienced most powerfully at the
margins, in places where old and new faced each other most dramatically and resulted in a
particularly potent form of modernism. Thus he informs us that at the time, ‘one hour by
automobile from Bucharest, you come upon a village where people live in burrows in the
ground,’ but ‘the ground in which the burrows are dug is owned by a boyar who keeps a
racing stable in Paris.’ It is only fitting that in such circumstances absurdist writing found a
true home.

If Romania was at the margins economically, it was also positioned so geographically,
presenting itself as a Romance culture strangely displaced amongst Slavs, Turks and
Magyars. While looking often to France for inspiration, Bucharest was simply too far away
from the source to become a mere satellite of Parisian modernism. Sandqvist presents an
interesting claim made by the Romanian poet Ion Vinea in 1924 that the Romanian avant-
garde was an ‘export phenomenon’ rather than one ‘imported’ from outside. By suggesting
this through Vinea’s mouth, Sandqvist is able to avoid fruitless discussion concerning the
originality of Romanian modernism and instead highlights important issues concerning
contemporary perceptions. Certainly by the time Vinea was writing, after the First World War
when Romania had established itself as an independent nation with expanded boundaries,
there was definite recognition of its avant-garde on the international stage; many key
networkers, the likes of Theo van Doesburg and Kurt Schwitters, were keen to establish
contacts there. However, Sandqvist also highlights the presence of these kinds of cultural
exchange networks well beforehand using the intense interaction between Romanian writers
such as Alexandru Macedonski and the Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti as an example.
Dada is left hovering somewhere in the middle of this history. We are told twice that Janco
was a ‘spider in the web’ of the avant-garde. Tzara’s networking ability was legendary. At
certain points Sandqvist deploys a centre/periphery model of cultural transformation,
suggesting that its impetus often comes from what happens ‘on the borders of traditional
hegemony.’ Although he never develops the point, one might speculate in this regard on the
‘failure’ of both Tzara and Janco when they made a bid for the centre and tried to make it in
France.

That being a stateless Romanian, assimilated but not a citizen, was a recipe for feeling
dislocated is well and truly portrayed in this book and might have been used more
penetratingly as a means of describing Dada’s polyglot, multivalent character. However, in the
final chapters Sandqvist takes an alternative route and explores a strand in Romanian
modernism that sought solace in its folk traditions and oral peasant culture. Perhaps one of
the book’s most compelling sections gives a rich account of the colinde festival celebrated
around the New Year in certain parts of Romania. Songs and plays were important part of these festivals and so was carnival mummery and masked performance. Sandqvist contrasts Hugo Ball’s stupefied reaction to the costumes Janco devised for the performers at the Cabaret Voltaire to the familiarity that ‘the maker of the grotesque masks and puppets’ had with those he ‘must have known very well from his childhood.’ He then turns his attention to the varieties of Jewish mysticism that flourished in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, such as the Cabala and Hasidism, drawing connections between the approaches to divinity through the annihilation of the ego expressed in these thought systems, and Dada’s rhetorical stances of self denial and paradoxicality.

Often Sandqvist struggles to pin his Romanian context firmly onto Dada practices. Where the reader is presented with lots of fresh, exciting, new material in the former regard, the account of Dada itself is pretty familiar. The same well-trodden sources are used, no doubt through necessity: Ball’s diary, Richard Huelsenbeck and Tzara’s memoirs and the trusty Hans Richter. The one big surprise is the rebranding of Arthur Segal as a Zurich Dadaist, done it seems because he provides the firmest connection between Dada and Jewish mysticism, a link made explicit in his theory of Gleichwertigkeit (‘equivalence’) first published in 1919. However, this is where my most significant criticism of the book lies. In trying to make a case for the Romanian context, Sandqvist sweeps others under the carpet. Segal spent around twenty years in Berlin before moving to Switzerland during the First World War. His concept of equivalence was indebted and deeply connected to Salomo Friedlaender’s notion of ‘creative indifference,’ a theory also highly influential on Raoul Hausmann and Hannah Höch among others. In trying to keep Paris and ‘Dada West’ at arms length, Sandqvist ignores the fact that Berlin could easily be incorporated into his notion of Central and Eastern European culture. Many of the Berlin Dadaists hailed from the city’s eastern hinterlands, such as George Grosz who grew up in Pomerania and Franz Jung who was Silesian. Hausmann was born in Vienna to Hungarian parents and later took Czech nationality. I make this point not to claim a different priority for Dada but to suggest that further research is required to explore how the instability of national and ethnic identities in this part of Europe was manifested in Dada’s incessant questioning of borders, its inherent internationalism and multilingualism. But, as the author points out in his introduction, it requires a bold and determined researcher to overcome the linguistic and bureaucratic challenges to recover this kind of material and Sandqvist must ultimately be applauded for the contribution he has made here to our understanding of those I will always be obliged think of now as ‘the Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire.’

Michael White
University of York

1 Hugo Ball, Cabaret Voltaire, unique issue, 1916, 5.

During the First World War, Spiegelgasse 1 in Zurich’s Niederdorf quarter was the location of the Meyerei, an earthy Dutch restaurant and hostelry with a self-proclaimed reputation for ‘great cosiness’ and ‘first-class wines.’ [fig. 1] Of course, the address is known today for a different reason: for five months from 5 February 1916, the back room, with its rudimentary stage and primitive facilities, also functioned as the venue for the nightly Cabaret Voltaire, known in modernism’s vernacular as the ‘birthplace of Dada.’ As such, Spiegelgasse 1 has become over the years something of a leftfield pilgrimage site, itself one large stony relic – and reliquary – of a distant avant-garde. Back then, the long-suffering landlord, Jan Ephraim, presumably used the cellar beneath the building’s thick medieval walls for storing the ‘first-class wines’ and other liberal quantities of alcohol that were consumed by his customers (a lively mix of locals, student groups and exiles from Europe’s warring countries). Since September 2004, the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ in the Spiegelgasse has been enjoying a second life as a small but dynamic arts venue with performance space (in the original cabaret room), exhibition facilities, shop, informal Dada ‘library’ and café-bar. Its programme of performances, art events, meetings, discussions, symposia and exhibitions is dedicated to Dada and to wider aspects of its putative contemporary offspring. Today, that same wine-cellar below the cabaret space has undergone a temporary transformation. It has become ‘Hugo Ball’s Crypt,’ a subterranean space of (ir)reverent dedication, consecrated in homage
to the founder of the Cabaret Voltaire. This essay reviews this small, unconventional exhibition, *fuga saeculi* – Hugo Ball (13 September 2007 – 29 February 2008) and reflects on the wider implications of its suggestive thesis. It also considers some of the recent events staged in Zurich by the organisers to complement the show.

The exhibition in the Spiegelgasse ‘crypt’ is aptly titled. *Fuga saeculi* refers to the title and Latin motto of Hugo Ball’s edited diaries, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, (‘Flight out of Time’), first published in 1927. But it also resonates as the keynote to an exhibition which foregrounds above all the shifting metaphysical aspects of Ball’s thought, life and work and indulges in the occasional foray into necromancy. Curated by Adrian Notz and with a supporting programme conceived by Bazon Brock and others, *fuga saeculi* hovers somewhere between documentary exhibition and programmatic installation, theoretical exercise and blasphemous hagiography. The exhibition’s rationale is not straightforward biography. Its hermeneutics are more critical, playful and occasionally ironic. The stone walls and arches of the medieval cellar have been specially painted in gold and silver, turning the entire space into a reliquary of sorts [fig. 2]. The crypt is divided into three ‘chapels’ signified by Latin inscriptions on the walls: *communio*, *devotio* and *cultus*. The key exhibits relating to Ball’s life and work are enclosed in a long, low, glass ‘sarcophagus’ projecting into the room before an illuminated ‘shrine’ to Ball. Other niches and cases contain further objects, props and exhibits, but aptly, the coffin-like case is the focal point of the exhibition [fig. 3].
Fig. 3: Hugo Ball’s 'sarcophagus,' Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 2007. Photography: Martin Stollenwerk, Zurich 2007.
Death and the museum

The show itself is intimate, indeed miniscule by the standards of the encyclopaedic Dada exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2005-6 and its subsequent versions in the USA. The majority of the 40 or so exhibits relating to Ball are drawn from the Robert Walser-Archiv in Zurich, augmented by some items from the Kunsthaus Zürich. A second display case houses an intriguing selection of documents and press cuttings. They relate to a pioneering exhibition on Hugo Ball curated by the young Harald Szeemann in Bern in 1957 to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Ball’s death. A vase of dried up sunflowers stands nearby in the crypt in double homage to Ball and to the eminent and much-respected Szeemann, who died in 2005. Szeemann’s interest in Ball grew from a university research paper he wrote on the Freie Zeitung, the paper Ball went to work for in Bern after he disengaged himself from Dada. It also came from Szeemann’s own attraction to the cabaret form as an antidote to traditional theatre. As he recalls, in the 1950s, Ball was relatively little known and his posthumous reputation had stagnated into that of a ‘Catholic thinker and writer.’ The current exhibition in Zurich both revisits and redresses this image of Ball.

It is clearly not the remit of the 21st-century ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ to defer to conventional museological practice. Neither is its task to compete with the Kunsthaus Zürich and other local museums and galleries of art. The exhibition Dada Global at the Kunsthaus in 1994, rich in material though it was, exemplified the perennial problem of exhibiting Dada: confined to the glass case of the museum’s expert culture, the dry, material traces and documents of Dada’s active radicalism are bereft of their medial function. Fuga saeculi does not restore the function, but instead thematises the bereavement. Dada’s artefacts in the museum or archive can be seen as doubly vulnerable – not only are they now the inert remains from what was a purposively dissonant programme of live action, they are also widely subject to classification in accord with a schematically consonant ‘modernism.’ Douglas Crimp prefaces his essay ‘On the Museum’s Ruins’ (1980) with an apt quotation from Theodor Adorno:

The German word museal [museumlike] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are the family sepulchres of works of art.

It strikes me that Fuga saeculi grasps this thorny problem and cheerfully turns it to its own advantage by acknowledging and engaging performatively with both the ‘dead’ and the ‘cultic’ nature of the material traces of Dada – its relics. Seen from this point of view, the otherwise eccentric gesture of placing of Ball’s effects into a glass sarcophagus acquires a sudden, trenchant logic.
Self-evidently, Death is a prominent trope of this exhibition. Even the opening, a midnight vigil of sorts, was timed to coincide with the 80th anniversary on 14 September of Ball’s death. Death is both subtly thematised and less subtly theatricalised. The gothic frisson to the experience of entering, down a flight of steps, Hugo Ball’s ‘crypt,’ right in the bowels of his former place of Dadaist work, is heightened by the discovery of his plaster death mask at the head of the ‘sarcophagus.’ There is obviously some black humour at work here, but there is also poignancy. Ball was just 41 when he died in Sant’Abbondio, in the Ticino, of an aggressive stomach cancer, leaving his wife, Emmy Ball-Hennings (whom he had married in 1920) and step-daughter, Anne-Marie. With the mask in the case are photographs and personal items from his life. Above his ‘head’ are – in frames and on a monitor – the so-called ‘war pictures’ (Kriegsbilder), rarely seen photographs of military and quasi-military manoeuvres from around the world with short, wry inscriptions in Ball’s hand. They have been coupled with well-selected quotations from Die Flucht aus der Zeit. The conscription document or Kriegsbeordnung, dated 14 October 1915, calling him up to report for military service is there (which Ball supposedly tossed into Lake Zurich). Its presence together with the Kriegsbilder highlights the susceptibility of the individual’s fate to the global mobilisations that drive the war. There are photographs of Ball as a smiling child and as an earnest-looking youth. The writer’s mortality and his immortality, at least within the living ‘cult’ of the historical avant-garde, are laid unusually bare here.

A printed postcard bearing his darkly macabre and embittered anti-war poem, Totentanz 1916 (‘Dance of Death 1916’) is also exhibited. The text itself plays on a double inversion of life and death. Not only does it revive the danse macabre tradition of the animate dead dancing to admonish the living for their vanity and remind them of their mortality, but it is also a blackly satirical rendering of a popular marching song, So Leben Wir (‘This is How We Live’). The words are modified and their meaning inverted in the midst of war into a grim soldiers’ chorus So sterben wir (‘This is How We Die’). In an interesting parallel, a caustic drawing by George Grosz appeared under the caption from the same popular song, ‘So leben wir alle Tage!’ in a special issue of the Berlin journal Der Blutige Ernst, published in the aftermath of the war. According to Ball, his Totentanz was performed ‘with the assistance of a revolutionary choir’ on the second night of the Cabaret Voltaire. His letters indicate that Emmy Hennings sang it several times; there is also an atmospheric literary account of her charismatic performance of it in the Cabaret Voltaire, leaving the unnerved audience unsure as to whether applause would be appropriate.

Dada as medium

Accepting that Dada’s medial function is vital involves thinking about Dada less in the habitual terms of resistance, protest and anti-art and more in terms of conduit, agency and of medium in an expanded sense. One of the most thought-provoking aspects of fuga saeculi and its
events programme is the way in which the implications of Dada as ‘medium’ are teased out or emerge in unexpected ways. A striking feature of Ball’s mysticism and religiosity was his profound belief in and concern with the medial power of the word. Throughout his life – before and after his conversion, or ‘reversion’ in 1920 to radical Catholicism – he was preoccupied with the ‘innermost alchemy of the word,’ its metaphysical properties, whether ‘magical’ or sacred. In the midst of his involvement with Dada at the Cabaret Voltaire, Ball wrote:

We have now driven the plasticity of the word to the point where it can barely be surpassed ... We have loaded the word with strengths and energies that have allowed us rediscover the evangelical concept of the ‘word’ (logos) as a magical complex image.

Ball was strongly drawn to asceticism. During his involvement with Dada, his asceticism was most often an aesthetic and theoretical strategy articulating a fundamental ambivalence about the relationship between spirit and matter, the word and the image. But in keeping with his developing and increasingly embittered cultural critique and with his theological consciousness, asceticism also became both that which had been lost, ‘descrated’ (entweihlt) within the culture of Prussian militarism, and that which was now a theological imperative for withdrawal from the contingencies of a dysfunctional earthly life. Ball’s asceticism, complex though it is, is the framework in which many of his ideas about the ‘word’ are formulated. Following his radically devout return to the Catholic faith of his childhood, there are also repeated echoes and modifications in his writings of his earlier irrationalist interest in the ‘magical complex image’ of the ‘word.’ It is there in his preoccupation with ancient gnosticism, with the mystical Latin poets of the Middle Ages, the fifth-century mystic Dionysius Areopagita (also known as pseudo-Denis the Areopagite) and, increasingly, with the divine manifestation of the ‘word.’ ‘That is the meaning of the coming of Christ,’ he wrote in his Byzantinisches Christentum (Byzantine Christianity) of 1923, ‘that the word becomes flesh and man is saved from abstraction.

It should already be clear that fuga saeculi does not claim to provide a comprehensive nor even impartial survey of Ball’s life and work. It would therefore be both churlish and pointless to go looking for too many gaps in its coverage. However, in one respect the exhibition’s partiality (in both senses of the word) can be questioned. Precisely because fuga saeculi foregrounds the metaphysical, emphasising Ball’s mysticism and Catholic religiosity, in my view, it tends to suppress – or at least marginalise – the important political dimensions of his personal and intellectual theology, including his chiliastic and asceticism. Ball repeatedly formulated his critique of German culture, politics and ideology with and through the discourse of faith. His path to conversion and the inflections of his mysticism are only inadequately comprehended without a grasp of, among other things, his persistent quarrel with Luther, articulated most vociferously in his Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz, (‘Critique of the German Intelligentsia’) and his attribution to the Reformation of the roots of modern Germany’s evils. Anson Rabinbach has convincingly diagnosed in Ball’s politics and theology
what he terms ‘inverted nationalism.’ In Ball’s view, German corruption and materialism were protestant (personified by Luther), rational (personified by Hegel), and Prussian (personified by Bismarck). It comes then as no surprise that he envisions salvation in the form of a renunciation of contemporary Germany’s value systems and a ‘return’ to catholic, mystic, German religion. Ball did not mince his words. In 1920 he stated publicly that he saw the re-instatement of religion in Germany as ‘the most important German task of the present and the future, in which all other national tasks are involved.’ In 1918 he was already privately lamenting that Hans Arp did not recognize that ‘German mysticism was anti-state (staatsfeindlich).’ He repeatedly associated his own spiritual experience with questions of the fate of the nation. In his reflections on ‘conversion’ itself, for example, he made clear that, just as personal pain is a pre-requisite for adult conversion, so might the war play an analogous role for a ‘collective,’ national, conversion and ‘return to belief’ (this having preemptively established that it is possible only to speak of conversion in its true sense as conversion to Catholicism).

That said, fuga saeculi does, undoubtedly, encourage a newly nuanced interpretation of Ball’s Dadaism. This is much needed, particularly in the context of Anglo-American histories of Dada, which often note but fail to engage with the implications of Ball’s Christian religiosity. It also signals the vital importance of the dialectic between concepts of ‘spirit’ and the ‘material’ in the German avant-garde. Looking into the glass sarcophagus and seeing the manuscript of the ‘bruitist’ ‘Krippenspiel’ (‘Nativity Play’) performed in the cabaret and the typescript of the ‘First Dadaist Manifesto’ together with Ball’s pass to the Vatican library dated 11 October 1924 and his devotional picture of St. Joseph – ‘arch-father of asceticism’ – casts a new light on the documents and on works more commonly seen within a selective and homogenising ‘Dadaist,’ or indeed museal framework. In the manifesto Ball asks: ‘How does one attain eternal salvation?’ His answer: ‘By saying Dada.’ The inclusion in the display of two editions of Richard Huelsenbeck’s Phantastische Gebete (‘Fantastic Prayers’) raises still further implications for the spiritual and mystical aspects of Zurich Dada and the Dadaist investment in ‘fantastic’ language. It also reminds the visitor of the connections between Zurich and Berlin Dada. In confessional terms, Huelsenbeck can probably be best described as an atheistically inclined Protestant. He is in any case insistent about his ‘antipathy to mysticism.’ As such, the inclusion of his work can be seen as a foil to Ball’s. In conversation with me, curator Adrian Notz made a further point that, if only tangentially, at least three mystical traditions are involved in Zurich Dada – the Jewish (Tzara), the Christian (Ball) and the primitivist-cultic (Huelsenbeck).
Fig. 4: Hugo Ball in cubistic costume, Zurich 1916. Courtesy of Hugo Ball Nachlass/Robert Walser Archiv, Zurich.
With regard to the medial aspect of Ball’s Dadaism, we may call to mind a well-known passage from *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*. Here he describes the experience, in 1916, of reciting his *Verse ohne Worte*, dressed in cubistic costume [fig. 4]:

Everyone was curious. So, because I could not walk as a cylinder, I was carried onto the stage in the dark and began slowly and solemnly:

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gadji beri bimba
glandridi lauli lonni cadori
gadjama bim beri glassala
glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim
blassa gaiassasa tuffm i zimbrabim ...
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The stresses became heavier, the expression intensified in the sharpening of the consonants. [...] Then I noticed that my voice had no other choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, that style of liturgical singing, like that which wails in all the Catholic churches of East and West. [...] For a moment it seemed as if a pale, bewildered young face appeared in my cubistic mask, that half-frightened, half-curious face of a ten-year old boy, trembling and hanging greedily on the words of the priest in the requiems and high masses of his home parish. Then, as I had ordered, the electric light went out and, drenched in sweat, I was carried down off the stage as a magical bishop.26

The quasi-mystical experience Ball describes brings into blasphemous collision the sacred and the secular, the authority of priestly liturgy with the spectral horror and fascination of a childlike subjectivity and the abstractions of a mechanised world. It involves the iconoclasts’ purgative urge and Ball’s own Nietzschean irrationalism.27 But the striking element in this context is Ball’s surrender of his own individual volition: ‘my voice had no other choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation.’ Coming from another writer, this could be dismissed as not much more than an alluring turn of phrase, but given Ball’s concerns, as we have seen, with the word as the medium for ‘energies.’ his concerns for the cleansing and purification of language28 and his deepening involvement with ancient spiritual traditions, the implications of his statement reach beyond a secular and generic ‘automatism.’

Ball’s entry for 18 June 1921 in *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* reads:

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When the word ‘Dada’ came to me [mir begegnete], I was called upon twice by Dionysios [Areopagita]. D.A. – D.A. (Huelsenbeck) wrote about this mystical birth, as did I in earlier notes.)29
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This is Ball’s retrospective formulation, but the idea of the spirit of fifth-century mystic ‘calling’ on Ball with the word – his own doubled acronym – is suggestive. In the context of the avant-garde, séances, mediums, spiritualism, divination and telepathy are all more readily associated with surrealism in Paris than with Dada in Zurich.30 Nonetheless, from the crypt of the 21st-century Cabaret Voltaire, another line of communication with the beyond was recently opened. The organisers of the *fuga saeculi* programme invited Julia Kissina, a Ukrainian
artist, photographer and writer based in Berlin, to lead a ‘press conference,’ in the form of a séance, with Hugo Ball.\textsuperscript{31} In 2006, Kissina founded the ‘Dead Artists’ Society’ (‘Klub der toten Künstler’). She uses a large ouija board with letters of the alphabet, the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and an upturned saucer as the medium to contact the dead artists. Together with others, she has already ‘conferred’ with Marcel Duchamp and Ilya Repin, among other artists. The ‘press conference with Hugo Ball’ was held in the ‘crypt’ on 22 October 2007 and Kissina’s edited film of the proceedings was shown in the Cabaret Voltaire three days later, with the artist in attendance. It currently runs as a continuous video projection in the crypt, where the table used in the séance also stands [fig. 5]. In 1915, shortly before leaving Berlin for Zurich, Ball remarked: ‘It is a mistake to believe in my presence ... If I take a seat at a party, I can see, even from afar, that only a ghost is sitting there.’\textsuperscript{32} The parts of the film I was able to see documented the mediated stirring of Ball’s ‘ghost’ to answer a number of questions from the beyond. Kissina said that she felt Ball was a somewhat reluctant interviewee. Nonetheless, he affirmed that he was responsible for the word ‘Dada.’ He conceded that Tristan Tzara was ‘more important’ for Dada than himself, and he confirmed that the famous photograph showing him dressed in his ‘magical bishop’ cubistic costume was taken in the Cabaret Voltaire and that he wore it there and on at least one other occasion outside the Cabaret.\textsuperscript{33} With a keen sense of the paradox, reflexivity and absurdity that attended to the event, Kissina has given a fitting description of her own procedure as a whole: ‘My works are an attempt at the translation of the unknown into the familiar, the unconscious into the conscious, the common into the uncommon, the serious into the unserious and the other way around.’\textsuperscript{34}

Fig. 5: Table used in Julia Kissina’s ‘Press Conference with Hugo Ball,’ Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 2007.
Until I looked it up, I had not known that the etymological root of the word ‘ouija’ is the French for yes and the German for yes – oui, ja. News to me, it caused a jolt, because of course dada also means ‘yes, yes,’ in Russian and in other Eastern European languages. Given that, furthermore, the word ‘Dada’ was claimed by Huelsenbeck to have been found at random by placing a knife in a French-German dictionary (and in a French- and German-speaking country, among other languages), more symmetries and paradigms abound. At the risk of semiotic overkill, we are left with the realisation that on more than one level, it would not be entirely unreasonable to translate the word ‘dada’ with the word ‘ouija.’

The medial, the spiritualist and the confessional are brought neatly together in another tongue-in-cheek element of the exhibition. Making use of an existing narrow recess in the cellar, Hugo Ball’s crypt includes, under the inscription ‘devotio,’ a confession-box of sorts. To enter, the visitor must push through a set of rudimentary foam curtains. Inside, there is nothing other than a copy of Ball’s Die Flucht aus der Zeit on a string. Insulated in a space that is part padded cell, part confessional, the visitor is invited to ‘commune’ with the spirit of Ball through his words. It is a gimmick, but not without resonance given both the centrality of the ‘word’ in Ball’s theology and the wider thematics of the show. Less successful is the ‘fan-booth’ in another niche, where visitors are invited to inscribe their own thoughts on the paper-lined walls. Still, and appropriately for the chapel dedicated to ‘communio,’ someone had felt moved to reflect on the ineffable nature of Dada: ‘DA und doch nicht DA … aber wo denn?’

Ja Ja to Dada

On 30 October 2007, Hugo Ball received another eminent visitor. From the crypt, Germany’s most celebrated ‘iconoclast’ (as the German press routinely calls him, among other things), artist, filmmaker and dramatist Christoph Schlingensief, telephoned his ageing mother to ask her what ‘Dada’ meant to her. It transpired that the benevolent parent had once recommended Dada to the boy-child Schlingensief, on account of the ‘sound’ (‘Klang’) of the word. A fitting answer, received telephonically in the ‘family sepulchre’ (Adorno) with an ersatz father (Bazon Brock) waiting above. Ball and Schlingensief are hardly kindred spirits. But it is striking that, if in radically different ways, they are both drawn to grapple with, so to re-new, the weighty complex of the German Gesamtkunstwerk. If Ball’s way to the redemption of theatre was through Wassily Kandinsky’s conception of the total work of art, Schlingensief has grasped the German bull directly by the horns with Wagner’s Parsifal at Bayreuth (2004). More prosaically, other momentary echoes of Dada have rung out around Schlingensief. In 1920, John Heartfield and George Grosz published their angry polemic ‘Der Kunstlump’ (‘The Art Scab’) in Berlin in which they declared: ‘The title “artist” is an insult.’ In unwitting assent, one enraged Viennese onlooker at Schlingensief’s controversial action Bitte liebt Österreich (‘Please love Austria,’ 2000) in the capital searched for some time for the
most violent insult she could muster to throw at him before spluttering: ‘Du ... Künstler du!’ (‘You ... artist you!’).  

Schlingensief’s communion with his mother in the crypt was by way of a prelude to an event intriguingly billed as ‘Christoph Schlingensief spricht “Ja”’. The evening was conceived as part of the ‘Passion of Functionality’ (‘Passion der Funktionalität’) section of an extensive programme devised by Bazon Brock, widely known in Germany and beyond for his work as a prolific writer, speaker, teacher and unorthodox theoretician. The exchange between Brock and Schlingensief took place on the tiny stage upstairs in the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ before a good-sized audience. It was conceived as a father-son ‘initiation rite’ of sorts. The premise is suggestive. Given both Ball’s religiosity and Dada’s tendency to blasphemous inversion, we were appropriately confronted with the (un)holy Trinity of Father (Brock), Son (Schlingensief) and Holy Ghost (Ball). As was to be expected, the discussion was far from organic. It lurched and meandered into many surprising territories. I will sketch briefly just some of the routes of the discussion. In my view, they provide some useful stimuli for the way we think about Dada and the possibilities for a critical aesthetics today. It should be noted, however, that this is my own impressionistic rendering only – it is not a ‘transcript.’

The evening could be read in parallel with the fractured narrative of ‘salvation’ that runs through Flight out of Time. Hence, the exchange began with Brock outlining – via Ball – the grim spiritual and intellectual situation in the years immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War. The Church as a site of at least potential resistance was impotent, reduced to what Ball described as a “redemption factory” of little importance. Brock set up broad conceptual parameters for thinking about Ball and the ensuing crisis of intellect that came with war in Europe. A kind of critical paralysis was symptomatic of this crisis. For Brock, the incessant ‘compulsion to confession’ (‘Bekenntniszwang’), or the broader need for ideological co-ordinates, becomes critical at a point at which the individual and wider culture are disenfranchised from ‘logic.’ At that point, irony becomes the refuge for the artist, but offers no lasting healing, only a placebo. In Ball’s case, the crisis involved the impossibility, in the face of the bankruptcy of contemporary culture, of substantive concepts. It is at this moment that the critical subject is faced with his/her own ineffectualness and that the attraction to (in this case religious) conversion, into the void, becomes strongest. Brock’s diagnosis of the situation indeed echoes Ball’s own despair. In the last year of the long war, Ball wrote:

I am beginning to understand why renunciation has become sovereign in Germany, why an agony paralyses the spirits; why the few heads still living fall prey, partly to a fruitless aestheticism, partly to a fatal belief in evolution. Whether we will or not, we succumb to an overpowering system of profanation that is difficult to escape because there is barely any possibility of spiritual and material existence outside of it.
And in the light of Ball’s *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, published in 1919 but begun in Zurich during the war, Brock’s introduction made particular sense: it effectively established the interrelated crises of Enlightenment rationalism on the one hand and the culture of German militarism on the other, two preoccupations that most exerted Ball in the book.

Proceedings lightened over the course of the evening. Schlingensief gave an engaging description of his earliest experiences of his father’s amateur 16mm films. Evidently alive to the creative possibilities of the ‘law of chance’ from an early age, he noted with impish glee the unintended effects that this unreliable medium could produce – from absurd doublings to, best of all, the film accidentally burning up during projection. Some idea of the rhetoric play that characterised parts of the exchange between Brock and Schlingensief can be conveyed by one example. Schlingensief’s reflecting on the process of cutting film, prompted Brock to interject that the ‘first’ cut was that made in the body of Christ by the spear. An absurd doubling of another kind and the dialectic between spirit and matter insinuated itself again.

Schlingensief is clearly aware that a vapid *épater le bourgeois* stance is prone to swift enervation, after which the aspiring provocateur becomes little more than court jester. He and Brock both articulated justified reservations about a contemporary view of Dada (or indeed of Schlingensief’s own public persona) predicated on its prankishness or on the expectation of scandal. Brock argued that Dada is the sensation of the banal and involves a ‘theology of normality.’ For Brock, it was this aspect of Dada among others that the French – André Breton for example – failed to grasp. At this point, the two Germans (on stage in Switzerland, we should remember), rather took their life in their own hands by embarking on a half-mischievous, half-serious discussion about the nature of Swiss politics, ethics and morals that ranged across ‘hollowed out’ mountains to the Matterhorn as a Toblerlone box by way of the extreme exertion expended by the Swiss in order to maintain precisely the ‘normality’ that – in turn – had provided the critical conditions for Dada’s growth in Zurich. With an audience other than the urbane one assembled here, it might have ended very differently.

In the wake of all this, Schlingensief’s final ‘initiation’ was low-key but fittingly wayward. He inscribed a pair of painted and decorated, bastardised life-buoys. Appropriately, their identity as ‘victory garland’ or ‘funereal wreath’ was declared as unfixed. When the Father (Brock) invited the Son (Schlingensief) in the name of Dada, to say ‘ja’ to life and the world, the errant child replied in the words of another deceased channeller of energies – Joseph Beuys: ‘Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee...’

By means of its reassessment of Hugo Ball, the exhibition *fuga saeculi* challenges many popular and habitual ideas about Dada, its mysticism and about this singularly complex individual. Here, Ball’s ‘flight out of time’ and his eremitic withdrawal from profane modernity are probed both for their intellectual origins in the rejection of a mechanistic culture and for
their spiritual motivation to an 'inner departure and breakthrough to the language of God.' 

Christian Bauer led an illuminating and wide-ranging discussion at the cabaret the following night around the phenomenon of the 'sacrificium intellectus' using the cases of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Anselm Kiefer and Botho Strauß as well as Ball as his subjects. For Bauer, 'Dada is symptom, diagnosis and therapy in one common border zone.' ‘The word D.A.-D.A. is made flesh.’ The exhibition and the events at the Cabaret Voltaire opened up many ways of thinking about Dada. Perhaps most lucidly, fuga saeculi surely refutes the statement made by Paul Dermée in Paris in 1920: ‘Dada is an utterly a-religious attitude, like that of the scientist with his eye stuck on his microscope.’

Debbie Lewer
University of Glasgow

1 'Bekannt für grosse Behaglichkeit ... Prima Weine,' as the regular Meyerei advertisements in the Zurich press of 1916 claimed. With the exception of the Adorno passage, all translations in this review from the German are my own. My thanks go to Adrian Notz, Raimund Meyer, Thomas Zacharias, Bazon Brock, Christian Bauer and others who offered generous help, good conversation and a warm welcome in Zurich.

2 Hugo Ball, Die Flucht aus der Zeit, Duncker & Humblot, München and Leipzig, 1927. For an English translation of Die Flucht aus der Zeit (following a later edition from 1946) see John Elderfield ed., Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary by Hugo Ball, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996. A facsimile of the first (German) edition has been generously made available as a pdf document by the exhibition organisers and is available to anyone via the Cabaret Voltaire website at www.cabaretvoltaire.ch. The website also has details of the full, ongoing programme of events and includes information in both German and English. At the time of writing, the first of three planned volumes of the eponymous ‘reader’ – a collection of short essays and critical texts – has been produced by the Cabaret Voltaire (in German).

3 Hugo Ball 1886 bis 1927, curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kleintheater, Kramgasse 6 in Bern, 24-27 September 1957.


6 These date from the period in 1915 when Ball was working in Berlin as an editor, for the periodical Zeit im Bild. See his letter to Käthe Brodnitz of 9 April 1915 in Gerhard Schaub and Ernst Teubner eds, Hugo Ball. Briefe 1904-1927 Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2003, vol. 1, 75-79.

7 These were assembled by Christian Bauer, who also gave a talk at the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ in connection with his research and the exhibition (see below).

Ball, Flucht aus der Zeit, 6 February 1916, 80. The evocative description of Emmy Hennings performing the song and its apparent mesmerising effect on the audience appears in Kurt Guggenheim’s epic semi-autobiographical novel, Alles in Allem, Artemis Verlag, Zürich, 1957, 455-156.

10 This term is used in Bernd Wacker, ‘Einführung’ in Wacker ed., Dionysius DADA Areopagita. Hugo Ball und die Kritik der Moderne, Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn, 1996, 8.


12 Ball, Flucht aus der Zeit, 18 June 1916, 101-2.

13 See Ball, Flucht aus der Zeit, 3 May 1918, 221.

14 While reading a book of these mystic writers, Ball noted: ‘All these poets are ascetics, monks and priests. They despise the flesh and all ballast. This world holds no enchantment for them ... Poetry for them is the ultimate expression of the essence of things and thus is hymn and worship. Their poetry is one of divine names, of mysterious seals, and of spiritual extracts.’ Ball, Flucht aus der Zeit, 21 July 1920, 266.

15 Ball, Byzantinisches Christentum, 107.


17 Hugo Ball, ‘Aufbruch und Wiederaufbau,’ in Hugo Ball, Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit, ed. Hans Burkhard Schlichting, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 273-296, 293.

18 Ball, letter to Emmy Hennings (9-11 April 1918) in Schaub and Teubner eds, Briefe, vol. 1, 252-3, 252.

19 Hugo Ball, ‘Die religiöse Konversion’ (1925) in Ball, Der Künstler und die Zeitkrankheit, 336-376, 342-343.

20 Noteable exceptions are to be found in the exemplary work of the anglophone Germanists Philip Mann, Richard Sheppard and Anson Rabinbach.

21 Ball, Flucht aus der Zeit, 22 June 1921, 296.

22 Hugo Ball, ‘Das erste dadaistische Manifest.’ For a published facsimile see Ernst Teubner ed., Hugo Ball (1886-1986) Leben und Werk, Publica, Berlin, 1986, 155-156. It should be noted that Ball himself regarded this manifesto as an expression of his growing doubts about Dada (Flucht aus der Zeit, 6 August 1916, 108-110). His cynicism is evident in the next line: ‘How does one become famous? By saying Dada.’


24 Elements of these are brought together in the statements by other Zurich Dadaists too. For example, Marcel Janco described the Spiegelgasse Dadaists’ ‘creed’ as ‘our faith in a direct art, a magical, organic, and creative art, like that of primitives and of children.’ Janco in Willy Verkauf ed., Dada: Monograph of a Movement, Wittenborn, London, 1957, 21. It is fitting that the exhibition echoes and affirms the overtly and covertly mystical and religious registers of the book after which it is named. As such, it acts as a counterweight to the argument in Tom Sandqvist, Dada East: The Romanians of the Cabaret Voltaire, MIT Press, Harvard, 2006.
The preceding Dada exhibition at the Cabaret Voltaire, also curated by Adrian Notz, was based on and inspired by Sandqvist’s revisionary thesis.


27 I have discussed in detail the wider implications of iconoclasm for Ball and Dada in a series of research papers, publication forthcoming.

28 See Ball, ‘Das erste dadaistische Manifest,’ recited at the first ‘public’ Dada evening at the Zunfthaus zur Waag, Zurich, 14 July 1916 and *Flucht aus der Zeit*, 24 June 1916, 106.

29 Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, 18 June 1921, 296.

30 In Paris in the early 1920s Robert Desnos went into trances and ventriloquised the spirit of *Rrose Sélavy* (Marcel Duchamp’s alter ego). See also André Breton, ‘Entrées des Médiums,’ in *Littérature*, no. 6, 1 November 1922, 1-16.


32 Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, September 1915, 44.

33 Indeed, several factors make it likely that Ball did perform the *Verse ohne Worte* in costume in the Cabaret and at the First Dada Evening at the Zunfthaus Waag on 14 July 1916.

34 Julia Kissina quoted in Kremser, ‘Rollenspiele,’ 24-5.

35 ‘There and yet not there ... but then where?

36 The film of this exchange and many other clips relating to the Cabaret Voltaire’s recent activities can be viewed at www.rebell.tv.


38 www.schlingensief.com (the incident was caught on film and can be viewed at www.youtube.com).

39 ‘Christoph Schlingensief speaks “Yes”.’


41 The term *Bekenntniszwang* has a particular and difficult resonance in the context of post-Holocaust Germany that is not readily conveyed by the translation.


43 Translating roughly as ‘yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, no [or ‘nah’], no, no, no, no,’ this refers to Beuys’ *Fluxus* concert of 18 December 1968. It has been directly compared to the Dadaist poetry of the Cabaret Voltaire, and to a sermon, though as Brock and others have pointed out, it also involves a more phlegmatic appropriation of local (Rhine-Ruhr area) dialectic habits in conversation. For the former readings see e.g. Martina Dobbe, ‘Sprache als plastischer Prozess,’ in Joseph Beuys. *Zeichen aus dem Braunraum – Auflagenobjekte und grafische Serien*, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, 2005, 25-38.


**Slow Burn: Wolfgang Paalen in Context**

Wolfgang Paalen’s (1905-1959) career fluctuated among various places, states, and incarnations. André Breton deemed him ‘Un homme à la jonction des grands chemins,’ and his paintings’ forms, too, appear constantly at a crossroads: between surrealism and abstraction, embodiment and dissolution, a corpulent biomorphism and an imagery from which the human is singularly evicted. *Starscape; Flight of Mosquitoes; Cosmogon*: these titles alone convey the pith of Paalen’s pictorial universe – a world in flux, coming into being, into presence, but never fixed or firm. A cogent show of nineteen paintings and two drawings at the Frey Norris Gallery (specializing in works by some distinguished surrealist artists, largely women painters), has managed to seize, for a brief moment, some exemplary products of this elusive animal. The modest selection from Paalen’s oeuvre offers a gratifyingly synthetic overview of his contributions to mid-century modernism. Even in the limited number of pictures on view, the striking range of scale and size, material and method, attests to Paalen’s adaptability as a painter. But does his versatility suggest – like the fugitive and shifting forms of his imagery – a certain capriciousness, or else the many manifestations of an unswerving intellectual enterprise?

![Fig. 1: Wolfgang Paalen, *Hamnur Trilogy*, 1947, oil on canvas, 203 x 190 cm (79.9 x 74.8 in), Private Collection, San Francisco. Photograph courtesy Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.](image)
As one of Paalen’s most meticulous expositors, curator Andreas Neufert clearly sympathizes with his subject. The author of a comprehensive catalogue raisonné on the artist, Neufert has delved deep into the biographical and philosophical particulars that inform Paalen’s trajectory as an artist. A figure of truly international stature, the Austrian-born Paalen proved a vital link between the avant-gardes of the early part of the century – including the last Parisian gasp of surrealism – and their subsequent reincarnations in North and South America. As a resident of New York, California, and Mexico during the 1940s, Paalen played a considerable part in introducing avant-garde currents across the Atlantic. Among the first prominent European artists to emigrate to New York City, his exhibitions at the Julian Levy Gallery and the Gallatin Museum of Living Art, along with a major show in Mexico City in 1940, established his presence as a hinge between the old world and the new. His 1942 essay, ‘Farewell to Surrealism,’ signaled his break with Breton’s stagnating dogma, and cemented his influence upon the burgeoning school of New York abstraction. On view here are works from nearly all periods from Paalen’s multifarious career, with the exception of his first pictures from the 1920s (such as his sophisticated still lifes in the style of synthetic cubism) and the mid-1930s (in the vein of the Abstraction-Création group).

Breton once lamented that Paalen referred to his own work as ‘non-figurative’ – a denomination that Breton saw as giving short shrift to the unsung reality of painted half-truths. The ‘interior model’ was, for Breton, the only mark and measure of truth; the empirical veracity of figurative sense, then, counted for very little. He took pleasure in claiming the most unstable and unsteady of images as the bedrocks of surrealist intent, yet insisted that they remain ‘images.’ Utter abstraction did not interest him (he viewed it as counterrevolutionary). Yet here, too, the politics of orthodoxy were contested: to wit Alberto Giacometti’s expulsion from the group in the late 1930s after he returned to sculpting from human models. It is surely Breton’s ambivalence about abstraction that encouraged and sustained the biomorphic, quasi-figurative tendencies that held sway over painting for so much of the 1930s and 1940s.

Paalen was no exception to this, at least through the late 1930s. One of Paalen’s primary anthems – ‘no painting with a subject and no painting without a theme’ – gives a good sense of his studied ambivalence. In his refusal to jettison subject matter tout court, while simultaneously rejecting mimesis, Paalen risked a certain figurative faint-heartedness – a hesitation to sever form from some sort of embodiment, however tenuous (akin, perhaps, to what Clement Greenberg would later call ‘homeless representation’). Neither a return to anecdotal order, nor an embrace of abstraction outright, Paalen’s imagery remained, for at least ten years, in a kind of purgatorial stand-off between figure and pure form. This vacillation produced a number of somewhat derivative works – whether in the vein of Max Ernst’s canvases, Yves Tanguy’s mindscapes, or any number of surrealist fellow travelers from the 1930s evoking partially adumbrated figures in
partially adumbrated landscapes. In other cases, however, it led to some of Paalen’s most incisive, innovative contributions to modernism, particularly his developments of *fumage* to more unapologetically abstract ends. Some notable examples of the latter are on view here.

Fig. 2: Wolfgang Paalen, *Taches Solaires*, 1938, oil/fumage on canvas, 129.5 x 99 cm (51 x 39 in.), Private Collection, Munich. Photograph courtesy Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.
As its name would suggest, the technique of *fumage* employs smoke. *Fumage* performs a kind of stylized violence on its support, whether canvas, cardboard, or paper. Paalen typically passed a burning candle under an overturned, blank surface, blindly recording its ashen residues. After fixing the random traces left by smoke, Paalen would paint over certain areas, emphasizing forms and drawing out latent imagery. The use of unorthodox techniques to create chance imagery was not without precedent in surrealism. Since 1925, Max Ernst had used *frottage*, in which he laid paper over grainy surfaces and rubbed graphite over them to produce a field of random impressions. He then partially edited these forms into semi-recognizable shapes or forms. Oscar Dominguez, too, had further developed the method of *decalcomania* in the mid 1930s, using gouache pressed between two planes to leave a squashed and wrinkled surface, brimming with potential images.

While verbal automatism had been one of the bedrocks of surrealist doctrine since Breton and Philippe Soupault’s *Magnetic Fields* (1919), these methods – following André Masson’s aleatory sand paintings, and even Victor Hugo’s improvised ink washes – sought to grant visual media an equally valid purchase on the unconscious (one more immediate and authentic, say, than the deliberate enigmas of Giorgio de Chirico and his imitators). But the *ex posteriori* editing of this imagery calls into question the ‘purity’ of pictorial automatism – its attempted proximity to ‘pure psychic automatism’ (in Breton’s terms). The questionable uniqueness of Abstract Expressionist genius – which would later spur Robert Rauschenberg’s satirical spoof in his *Factum I* and *Factum II* (1957) – was preceded by similar problems in surrealist automatism. Indeed, the two nearly identical version of Paalen’s *Combat of the Saturnian princes* (*I* and *II*, 1938; not in the present exhibition) could hardly beg this question even more.

That said, Paalen’s *Ciel de pieuvre* (Octopus Sky) still arrests any visitor to this show [fig. 3]. Its hulking figure is at once creepy and lovely, and stands as an excellent representative of Paalen’s mature *fumage* experiments from 1938. By 1937, surrealism could no longer avoid the specter of Fascism and, in Paalen’s work – as in that of so many of his peers – mounting political anxiety becomes metaphorized as a pictorial problem. Like his *Tache Solaires* [fig. 2] of the same year, *Ciel de pieuvre* recalls Max Ernst’s *Angel of Hearth and Home* (1937), a similarly hybrid creature that appears all too human even in its menacing monstrosity. Paalen’s *Untitled (fumage)* of 1940 eschews not only the titular specificity of his large *Ciel de pieuvre* from two years earlier, but also the latter’s recourse to some sort of figure-ground schema. Both canvases are made with oil and *fumage*. But *Ciel de pieuvre* wants it both ways: a transparent improvisation, and a tentacular knot of labored impasto; an automatic image, and one self-consciously wrought into being by hand; a wraith-like shadow unto itself, and a figure substantial enough still to cast, in turn, its own shadow (look at the inky form billowing at the bottom right).
The show’s 1940 *Untitled (fumage)* – in my opinion one of Paalen’s most graceful and striking *fumage* works – is freed from such double duties, in both name and appearance. It pursues only its own forms, forms that have not been redacted into heavy-handed ambivalence. The marriage between oil and smoke here appears more natural, more organic. It is less bent upon convincing us of ‘latent’ figuration. If these strange forms metamorphose – however fleetingly – into something uncannily familiar, they do so less solicitously. By turns lumpy and smooth, gnarled and wispy, the shapes compel attention through the humble beauty of their impermanence and fragility, rather than any portentous teratology. This is not to champion a facile, inexorable march towards abstraction after 1940 (and thereby to diminish any aspect of Paalen’s work that swerved from this tendency). It is, rather, simply to suggest that his work is most convincing when it does not seek to importune us of its strangeness. When Paalen’s hand intervenes less tendentiously, his *fumages* truly come alive. His *Vol de moustiques (Flight of Mosquitoes, 1938)* again imports a rhetoric of nature as a guide to the canvas’s imagery, but the use black and white ink to underscore the *fumage*’s buzzing traces is somewhat clumsy.
Fig. 4: Wolfgang Paalen, *Untitled (Fumage-Encrage)*, 1938, watercolour, gouache, ink, and candlesmoke on cardboard, 62 x 33.2 cm (24.4 x 13.1 in.), Private Collection, San Francisco. Photograph courtesy Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.
L’autoophage (fulgurites), another oil/fumage work from the same year, however, is stunning in its humble simplicity. The work’s dual title here perhaps points to the tension between representation and formal autonomy in Paalen’s oeuvre. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s he grappled with the tension between forms that imitate something else (whether ‘fulgurite’ or other natural elements - animal, vegetable, mineral), and ‘autophagous’ form: form that consumes itself – in other words, an image in which paint is accountable only to paint, not to some extra-material, extra-pictorial metaphor. In this tiny, delicate work of cardboard over wood, the paint and smoke merge subtly, emphasizing the dry transparency of the surface. Of all of Paalen’s fumages included in the show (and perhaps in his oeuvre at large), this work distills most poignantly the essence of smoke as a smoldering trace. With its delicate sfumato (quite literally) of black, white, and shades of gray, L’autoophage (fulgurites) conjures up something of the photograph – of the look of a photograph, without its attendant empirical evidence. Here the roiling surface of other oil-fumage combinations (such as its contemporary Untitled (fumage) of 1938, hanging nearby) is tamed to a slow burn. The work seems almost a snapshot of billowing smoke – stirring up, in turn, a host of visual and semiotic questions. Just as photographic images have been theorized as a direct, indexical traces of light on sensitive paper, so too candle smoke leaves its traces directly upon a surface. In its ascetic simplicity, L’autoophage (fulgurites), sets into motion a playful tension between staged iconicity and immediacy, image and materiality. Here again, the piece seems most chillingly ambivalent because Paalen’s hand in its making is so concealed.

Paalen’s work in the mid-1940s – exemplified in the show’s Les cosmogones (stage) (1943) [fig. 5] and Starscape (1945) – turned with increasing frequency to astral and scientific metaphors. As his various writings attest, Paalen wanted to redress aesthetic capriciousness with pictorial discipline, rooted in more precise theories of space, consciousness, and science. After the literary interludes of surrealism, numerous painters had taken up again the problem of how to update pictorial space after the changes wrought by cubism. Like many of his peers, Paalen drew significant parallels between the ‘the new space’ opened up by early modernism and ‘the new mathematics’ simultaneously being developed in other circles. But it is often precisely where Paalen strives to strike a more technical note that his pronouncements – like his evocations of cosmic spaces – end up seeming more numinous. There is, in his paintings from the 1940s, a good deal of conceptual ebb and flow between hard mathematics and mysticism. In visual terms, the canvases often exceed or fall short of the metaphysics they seek to evoke or embody. In any case, Paalen’s imagery, titles, and writing still tap into a familiar store of modernist tropes: infancy, totemism, the liberating irrationality of nature, mythical archetypes. ‘Nothing will ever be more moving,’ writes Paalen in 1944, ‘than the intimate conversation between man and animal in the totemic dawn.…’ For all of Paalen’s desire to merge art and science, there remains more than a faint whiff of New Age mysticism about his work.
However, unlike many artists of his generation, who expropriated the so-called primitive and the primal with bald – often ignorant – opportunism, Paalen pursued his anthropological and scientific interests seriously. His vocation as a theorist and critic in this regard made him a frequently magnetic organizer of individuals and tendencies. The show is thus fittingly rounded out by the inclusion of texts by Paalen and his contemporaries: catalogue essays by Octavio Paz and José Pierre, original prints of the journal *DYN* (which Paalen founded and edited), and first editions of Paalen’s other writings. It was, in fact, in his role as editor of *DYN* that Paalen left his most lasting mark in the United States. Published in English and French, and widely circulated in New York and Mexican circles, *DYN* emerged as one of the foremost mouthpieces of theory and criticism during World War Two. It presented recent painting by Jackson Pollock, Roberto Matta, and Harry Holtzman alongside extensive essays on the art of the Pacific Northwest and Pre-Columbian sculpture, as well as sophisticated texts by Paalen on the legacy of Cubism and Robert Motherwell on the state of surrealism. Short for τό dynaton – which translates from the Greek as ‘that which is possible’ – the clipped shibboleth ‘DYN’ encapsulated Paalen’s investment in painting as a wellspring of latent possibilities. Like the condensation of the

Fig. 5: Wolfgang Paalen, *Les cosmogones (stage)*, 1943, oil on canvas, 65 x 65 cm (25.6 x 25.6 in.), Private Collection, San Francisco. Photograph courtesy Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.
evocative word dynaton into DYN, Paalen’s art sought to abridge the visible world into something less explicit, and thus more concentrated with lyrical potential and allusion.

Not that this constituted something unprecedented in avant-garde painting. ‘The least fact, for the poet,’ wrote Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917, ‘that is the postulate, the starting point of an unknown immensity in which the flares of multiple significations shine.’ As the tireless assailant of mimesis in art, in favor of pure plasticity and musicality, Apollinaire was among the first to insist upon abstraction as ‘the least fact’ of painting: a basic postulate that condenses and concentrates lyrical possibility. Indeed, was not all of modernism since (at least) the poetic work of Stéphane Mallarmé bound up with the renunciation of the ‘explicit,’ whether of figuration or tonality, of meter or punctuation? Modernism’s endless internecine quibbles flared up around the precise form, as it were, that lyrical vagueness should take. Paalen’s devotion to the ‘non-dimensional vagueness of implicit possibility’ – such as his polemics with Roberto Matta over how pictorial space could evoke such possibilities – forms an important chapter of this modernist narrative. Paalen’s previous presence in the Bay Area, too, finds an appropriate homage here at the Frey Norris. For it was in San Francisco in 1950 that Paalen and three other colleagues launched the short-lived movement Dynaton – a last attempt to revivify the moribund surrealist movement.

While none of his Dynaton images are on view here, we do find some works that immediately followed in the wake of the movement’s quick dissolution. As he continued painting in the 1950s – before committing suicide in Mexico in 1959 – Paalen turned back to some significant luminaries of German modernism. Canvases such as Untitled (fumage) (1953) and Bureau de longitude (1953) evoke the quasi-calligraphic sallies of Paul Klee, while Béatrice perdue (1953) [fig. 6] unmistakably recalls Wassily Kandinsky’s Improvisations and Compositions from 1910 to 1912. Before dedicating themselves unreservedly to more strictly abstract visual economies, both painters (whom Paalen met personally in Europe before he emigrated at the outbreak of World War Two) had negotiated an ambiguous terrain between figuration and abstraction. It is to the latter exercise which Paalen returns here. Rather than manipulating pure form, he deploys black outlines to two simultaneous ends: they serve alternatively as outlines that delimit shapes, or as autonomous, gestural forms in their own right. The rhythmic alternation of horizontal and vertical lines in Bureau de longitude sustains the canvas’s panoramic, lateral unfurling, erecting a skeleton on which Paalen hangs swaths of fleshy color. As when it emerged in Kandinsky’s early canvases, the ambivalence between figuration and pure form appears less as a vague, disembodied organicism, than a controlled examination of how line, plane, and color interact on the picture plane.
With this return to Klee and Kandinsky, Paalen has taken his painting back to the primal scene of modernist abstraction – the eminent precedent to the processes that were occupying painters at mid century. To a certain extent, the stand-off between figuration and abstraction in contemporary works by Pollock, Mark Rothko, William Baziotes, and others represented a latter-day reprisal of events in European painting during the early 1910s. Paalen’s work notes this precedent, insists upon it, while contributing to its development by a younger generation. These 1950s works are less absolute in their renunciation of representation – compared, at least, to the work of painters that Paalen had significantly influenced by this time: Pollock, Clyfford Still, and Robert Motherwell, among others. But these are competent and confident canvases. They push further the dialogue between oil and fumage, linear solidity and colored evanescence. His Untitled gouache from 1954 is a less felicitous revisitation, invoking Kandinsky’s kitschy self-pastiche in which the lyricism of abstraction has been rendered matte and mannered.
Still, Paalen’s work never stagnated for long. *L’enclume* (*The anvil*, 1952) [fig. 7], a massive work on unprimed canvas, reveals that his exploration of pictorial space led him constantly to reappraise his working method. He did not remain stubbornly wedded to experiments with *fumage*, but rather updated his materials and scale; the painting’s looming dimensions and passages of ad hoc coloration clearly respond to contemporary innovations by his peers. This response comes across very much on Paalen’s own, lyrical terms. *L’enclume* evokes the visual vacillations typical of his entire body work: forms that shift between self-sufficient gesture and a figure-ground schema; improvised spontaneity set off against a basic, structural premise; hints of bodies and landscapes, along with shapes unhinged from any anecdotal specificity. But the painting strives to open up the tightly-woven density of his pictures past. *L’enclume* seeks not just to show another space and its possibilities, but also to plunge us in it. Even here, then, where his career ends, we find Paalen at a notable crossroads.

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