

Simon Baker
Surrealism, History
and Revolution



PETER LANG

This book is a new account of the surrealist movement in France between the two world wars. It examines the uses that surrealist artists and writers made of ideas and images associated with the French Revolution, describing a complex relationship between surrealism's avant-garde revolt and its powerful sense of history and heritage. Focusing on both texts and images by key figures such as Louis Aragon, Georges Bataille, Jacques-André Boiffard, André Breton, Robert Desnos, Max Ernst, Max Morise, and Man Ray, this book situates surrealist material in the wider context of the literary and visual arts of the period through the theme of revolution. It raises important questions about the politics of representing French history, literary and political memorial spaces, monumental representations of the past and critical responses to them, imaginary portraiture and revolutionary spectatorship. The study shows that a full understanding of surrealism requires a detailed account of its attitude to revolution, and that understanding this surrealist concept of revolution means accounting for the complex historical imagination at its heart.

Simon Baker is Lecturer in Art History at the University of Nottingham and an editor of the *Oxford Art Journal*. He writes on surrealism, photography and contemporary art. In 2006 he co-curated the exhibition *Undercover Surrealism* at the Hayward Gallery.

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Introduction

Surrealism, history and revolution

How could Breton's revolutionary attitude ever be anything other than a swindle? [...] nothing is ever changed by a great big soft strumpet armed with a gift-wrapped library of dreams (Georges Bataille).¹

The 1917 English translation of Auguste Cabanès's compendium of French historical curiosities, *Le Cabinet Secret de l'Histoire*, was entitled 'The secret cabinet of history, peeped into by a doctor'.² Doctor Cabanès was a medical historian, a quintessentially late nineteenth-century man of letters whose authority was drawn from his experience as a practising doctor. The diagnostic tone of his earlier work *La Santé des Grands Hommes* (*The Health of Great Men*) offered an alternative vision of history as a series of hitherto unsuspected ailments.³ In *Le Cabinet Secret de l'Histoire*, the qualified status of the peeping historian is just as vital. Cabanès lists intriguing possibilities about the disease that had afflicted Marat, recalls the activities of one of Robespierre's doctors and digresses through diverse examples of medical ephemera peripheral to 'serious' historical moments.⁴

This book and its contents might also be understood as a secret cabinet of history, constructed through selective research but tending deliberately towards the obscure, the forgotten and the unpalatable.

- 1 G. Bataille, 'The Castrated Lion', Bataille's contribution to the pamphlet 'Un Cadavre' (1929), G. Bataille, *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, M. Richardson (ed., trans.), London and New York, 1994, p.29.
- 2 A. Cabanès, *The Secret Cabinet of History, Peeped into by a Doctor*, trans., W.C. Costello, Paris, 1917. A Cabanès, *Le Cabinet Secret de l'histoire*, préface par V. Sardou, Paris, 1897.
- 3 Cabanès, *La Santé des Grands Hommes: études médico-historiques*, Paris, 1892. See also, Cabanès, *Médecins et Gens de Lettres*, Paris, 1892.
- 4 Cabanès, *Secret Cabinet*, p147 on Marat. See also, Cabanès, *Marat Inconnu: L'homme privé, le Médecin, le Savant*, Paris, 1891.

Surrealism's own secret cabinet, it will be argued, was not curated or assembled by a single author. It resulted from a gradual agglomeration of the diverging, often conflicting interests of individuals working both for and against the surrealist movement.⁵ To demonstrate the extent to which surrealism was predicated upon this complex negotiation of the past – a process of selection, preservation, display, provocation and response – it is essential that a powerful historical focus dominate this analysis. Selecting, or rather, succumbing to, the seductive power of the French Revolution, however, offers far more than the obvious ideological identifications and coincidences. The discourse around the historiography of the French Revolution has developed in such a way that it has become an ideal point of entry into the study of the way in which all histories are constructed, maintained and culturally assimilated. The aim here, therefore, is to reveal something about the nature of surrealist representations, both textual and visual, through an exploration of structural and thematic identifications with the discourse surrounding the French Revolution. In so doing, the existence of a logic and purpose in surrealist attitudes to the past will be established, moving beyond notions of ambivalent or disinterested processes of selection, towards an emphatic assertion of surrealism's revolutionary potential.

This methodology, which situates surrealism in relation to the French Revolution as a means of facilitating their mutual apprehension, has implications for the way in which both are understood as historical phenomena: surrealism, it will be argued, has as much to tell us about the discourse surrounding the Revolution, as that same discourse can reveal about surrealism. This approach, which follows a series of historical trajectories from 1789–1793 through the nineteenth century, to the years between the two World Wars, also serves to situate surrealism firmly within the historical context of the France of the Third Republic (1871–1940). That is to say that as well as considering the context of Paris as a revolutionary location, surrealist

5 This 'all-inclusive' view of surrealism is indebted to the attitude taken by Dawn Ades in assembling the 1978 exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, which incorporated (or re-incorporated) Bataille's perspective in the form of the magazine *Documents* where many ex- and anti- surrealists published.

attitudes and ideological positions are mapped onto the appropriate historical and political landscapes.

One starting point for this book is an engagement with an influential strand in existing literature on the subject, which presents surrealism through the historical spectatorship associated with Walter Benjamin's essay, 'Surrealism – The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia'.⁶ It is no coincidence that holding up Benjamin's retroactive lens, Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* and André Breton's *Nadja* inevitably appear favourably through it. To many late twentieth-century critics, it could be argued, *Nadja*, in particular, has come to represent surrealism in a fundamental way. While recognising a debt to this theoretical formulation, upon which this project cannot help but be contingent, the influence of Benjamin's 'last snapshot' is only one possible point of departure. The perspective offered here, which remains topographically, historically and ideologically *local*, reveals and revives a mode of historical spectatorship fundamental to surrealist thought in all its diverse forms, and has critical implications for assessing surrealism as a revolutionary movement.⁷

The first chapter, 'Surrealism and history' examines surrealist visions and representations of history, analysing the way in which visions of the Revolution surfaced in surrealist publications, drawing particularly on texts by René Crevel, Robert Desnos and Max Morise. Chapter two, '*La Révolution surréaliste* – the surrealist revolution' constructs a historiography of the French Revolution over the lifetime of the Third Republic, covering accounts of the Terror produced for a variety of sources influential for the surrealists: republican histories, school text-books and avant-garde political critiques. Chapter three, 'Tales from the crypt / a surrealist pantheon' explores the surrealists' attitudes towards the space of memory and construction of a rev-

6 W. Benjamin, 'Surrealism – The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' in W. Benjamin, *Reflections*, trans., E. Jephcott, New York, 1978.

7 Benjamin begins his essay on surrealism by describing his status as a German observer 'acquainted with the crisis of the intelligentsia', which could be taken as an admission that there may be avenues of surrealism that he might not be able to explore, or perhaps, specifically French models of revolution that he might not easily understand. W. Benjamin, 'Surrealism', p.177.

olutionary past, through its strategic assemblies of pantheons of 'great men'. Chapter four, 'Statuophobie! Surrealism and iconoclasm in the Bronze Age' concerns the monumental representation of history and 'great men' in the streets of Paris through surrealist critiques of statuary and civic sculpture. Although the principal focus here is Robert Desnos and Jacques-André Boiffard's work for the magazine *Documents*, photographs by Pierre Jahan and photomontages by Constantinesco are also set in the context of surrealism. Chapter five, 'The unacceptable face of the French Revolution' looks in detail at a single 'great man', through the example of the establishment of the Marquis de Sade as a revolutionary precursor to the surrealist movement. Sade's reputation and portrait-likeness are the central issues in a detailed analysis of works by Guillaume Apollinaire, Georges Bataille, and Man Ray. The concluding chapter, 'Surrealism in the streets' explores the discourse on the formulation and effectiveness of the revolutionary crowd, along with the implication of this concept for surrealist collective action, focusing on the political moment that inspired 'Contre-Attaque' a group that brought Bataille and Breton together for the first time.

This book, following the model of the secret cabinet of curiosities, reveals what is central to surrealism by moving from well-known texts and images, towards the obscure and over-looked; suggesting possibilities, rather than explaining them away. For surrealism to thrive, the door of its own secret cabinet must permanently be left ajar. As Bataille, put it: 'Today the books are in order on the shelves and the paintings adorn the walls. That is why I can say that the great surrealism is beginning'.⁸

8 Bataille, 'On the Subject of Slumbers', *Troisième convoi*, No.2, 1946, trans. M. Richardson, *The Absence of Myth*, p.51.

Chapter One Surrealism and history

On May 5th 1925, anniversary of the opening of the estates general and of the death of Napoleon, la Révolution surréaliste explose (*L'Europe Nouvelle*).¹

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx describes an uncomfortable relationship between past and present, between man-made histories and current circumstances, suggesting that: 'The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the minds of the living'.² The nightmare clearly held sway over the author of the bizarre historical analogy attributed to the journal *L'Europe Nouvelle* in *la Révolution surréaliste* 2, January 1925. The short text was one of many press extracts regarding surrealism republished in the journal, but it is likely to have been authored, rather than found, by a member of the surrealist group. The analogy between revolutions is, after all, noteworthy for an unlikely prescience: the alignment between the convocation of the estates general in 1789 (the birth of the French Revolution), the death of Napoleon in 1821 and the 'explosion' of the surrealist revolution on 5 May 1925, having not yet come to pass in the January of that year. The pressure to comply with such illustrious historical precedents seems (predictably) to have inspired a surrealist day of inertia, which is to say that nothing of historical consequence to the surrealist movement has been recorded.³

The following December, however, Paul Eluard took a leaf from the same book to illustrate his text 'D.A.F. de Sade, fantastic and

1 'Le 5 mai 1925, anniversaire de l'ouverture des États Généraux et de la mort de Napoleon éclate la Révolution surréaliste.' *La Révolution surréaliste* 2, 15 January 1925, p.29.

2 K. Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', *Surveys from Exile*, London, 1973, pp.146-7.

3 In accounts like Maurice Nadeau's *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1958.

revolutionary writer'.⁴ Eluard reproduced a tear-off diary page for 26 September, indicating the anniversary of the 'decree modifying the organisation of the military academy of St. Cyr', but more importantly, the celebration of Saint Justine's Day: an ironic acknowledgment of Sade's 1791 novel.⁵ Surrealism, it would seem, encouraged identifications with historically contested and potentially divisive commemorations of France's revolutionary past.⁶ This was true prior to the birth of *la Révolution surréaliste* in 1924, and continued to be the case until the movement unravelled as a collective entity at the outbreak of war in 1939. From Robert Desnos's 'approval that the magnificent obelisk [of the Place de la Concorde] had been replaced by an adorable guillotine' to the 'magnificent light' that André Breton imagined at the Place Vendôme, 'at the time the Column fell'.⁷ Surrealism insistently picked at the faltering consensus not to remember the societal amnesia with which such monumental spaces were synonymous.⁸

4 Robert Desnos makes a similar gesture in *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, in which a diary page for Monday 12th January was reproduced, indicating the feast of Saint Arcade and 'l'enterrement de Victor Noir tué par le prince Bonaparte est suivi de 200,000 parisiens.' R. Desnos, *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, 1927, M.-C. Dumas (ed.), *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1999, p.331.

5 *La Révolution surréaliste* 8, December 1926, p.8.

6 If the text is from *L'Europe Nouvelle* and is accurately quoted, then the identification with revolutionary precedent is remarkable, but ambiguous and quite possibly intended to belittle the surrealist journal. The two events associated with 5th May conflict in terms of their revolutionary valence and importance: although it was an important date, it is not usually celebrated, preference being shown to the swearing of the tennis court oath. The death of Napoleon is similarly obtuse, as Napoleon was a spent force by the time of his death in captivity in 1821 and had little dramatic effect on the country as a whole. Possibly therefore, the 'explosion' of the surrealist revolution was damnation by faint praise: there is also the alternative reading of the bursting/exploding of surrealism suggesting its destruction.

7 R. Desnos, *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, trans. T. Hale, London, 1993, p.121. A. Breton, *Nadja*, trans. R. Howard, New York, 1960, pp.14-15.

8 The site of the execution of Louis XVI had been the topic of much concern over the best way to mediate its revolutionary significance. The proposal to re-name the place 'concorde' was part of this conciliatory agenda, and was recognised as such long before Bataille's intervention. The Vendôme Column, by contrast,

In the remarkable book *Profane Illumination* Margaret Cohen gives a compelling account of Breton's *Nadja* with 'Guide Bleu' in hand, locking Breton's contrived perambulations into their relevant historical contexts.⁹ Cohen singles out *Nadja* as a key point of entry for the critical study of surrealist representations, and her work offers a vital commentary on Breton's best-known work. In a footnote concerning the genesis of Breton's alleged 'melancholia', Cohen plays down the influence of the surrealist's war-time medical experiences, suggesting instead that it derived from 'his ambivalent relation to the tradition of "revolution"'.¹⁰ Hal Foster, by contrast, begins his equally influential take on surrealism, *Compulsive Beauty*, with an account of the genesis of what he terms Breton's 'psychic ambivalence' that insists upon the shocking impact of a specific episode from Breton's war-time experiences.¹¹ Foster describes a situation in which a shell-shocked soldier related to the young Breton, then working as an army psychiatrist, his conviction that the War was an elaborately staged sham in which all the participants were actors deployed to maintain one vast illusion. For Foster, Breton's ambivalence produces 'a provocative ambiguity in artistic practice and cultural politics alike': the revolutionary call for 'a new declaration of the rights of man' on the cover of the first issue of *la Révolution surréaliste* is explained in Foster's account by Breton's oblique claim that 'Freud is Hegelian in me'.¹² Foster subjects the problematic issue of revolutionary history to

was restored after the defeat of the Commune in 1871, and Napoleon's statue replaced at its summit, reversing and rendering invisible what was perhaps the Commune's greatest symbolic achievement.

9 M. Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, California, 1993, pp.77-119.

10 *Ibid.*, p.81.

11 H. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1993, p.17.

12 *Ibid.*, p.16. The call for a new declaration of the rights of man appeared on the cover of the first issue of *la Révolution surréaliste*, December 1924, but was taken from a text by Louis Aragon called 'Une vague des rêves', published in the journal *Commerce* earlier in the same year.

the dialectic of analysis: never straightforward psychoanalysis, but a more demanding (albeit less invasive) procedure.¹³

For both Foster and Cohen, sources of ambivalence are situated in the past, recent and distant respectively, while in the critical present it is Walter Benjamin (rather than revolution or war) that haunts Breton. Allowing for the fact that Benjamin's paradigm of memory is not Freudian, Cohen nevertheless sees the Paris of the French Revolution, where 'Robespierre knotted his tie on the morning of 9 Thermidor', as an immanent psychological force.¹⁴ Foster, for his part, traces the anxiety that proximity to 'auratic' places generated in Breton.¹⁵ In both cases, Benjamin's notion of involuntary memory frames Breton's textual (and tactical) deployment of objects and places in the city of Paris.¹⁶ However, in spite of (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, because of) the success of these critical accounts of the eruption of history in the surrealist narrative, this introductory chapter will consider the case for an alternative analysis of the relationship between surrealism and history. It is not that Benjamin is irrelevant to an understanding of this relationship, rather that the surrealism that Benjamin identifies in his essay 'Surrealism - Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia' has too easily become enshrined in works like *Nadja* and *Paris Peasant* (as opposed to inhabiting the discursive spaces surrounding these texts). There are exceptions of course, but in the light of the material with which this book is concerned, any reading of surrealism through Benjamin would seem pre-mature, resulting in a form of discursive critique which over-determines, and thus limits, its own potential.¹⁷ Rather than address the rhetoric of surrealism's 'outmoded', this book concerns

13 Foster is concerned to situate the 'Marxian', 'Freudian' and 'Hegelian' components of surrealist thought, particularly in 'Bretonian' surrealism, *Compulsive Beauty*, pp.13-17.

14 Cohen quotes from a 1924 Paris 'Guide Bleu' (a tourist guidebook), *Profane Illumination*, p.85.

15 Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, p.198.

16 Ibid., pp.193-208. Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, pp.77-86.

17 An important exception in this context is Jack Spector's account of 'the politics of dream and the dream of politics': J. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919/1939: The Gold of Time*, Cambridge, 1997, pp.42-69 and pp.79-80.

itself with the distant past (the French Revolution), and the distance of this past (through its representation), the better to situate surrealism within its immediate political and cultural contexts.

* * *

The French Revolution gave rise to the nightmare that Marx envisaged in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Napoleon Bonaparte's 1799 'coup', returning to haunt the France of 1851 and inspiring one of Marx's most enduring aphorisms: 'Hegel says somewhere that all great historic facts and personages occur twice, He forgot to add: "Once as tragedy, and again as farce"'.¹⁸ The surrealist revolution, however, was no more a farcical recurrence of the first French Revolution than 1830, 1848 or 1871: certain surrealists even deny that their revolution ever took place.¹⁹ What is undeniable, however, is that the work started in 1789 was unfinished in 1924 when *la Révolution surréaliste* 'exploded' onto the scene. The surrealists might dream of a new declaration of the rights of man but the 'Camelots du Roi' (the hardcore monarchist wing of the *Action Française*), could muster a sizable force in the streets of the capital.²⁰ Marx's 'tradition of the dead generations' fermented by a radicalised education system, and

18 Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire,' p.1.

19 A. Thirion, *Revolutionaries without Revolution*, trans. J. Neugroschel, London, 1975. G. Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the prefix Sur in the words Surhomme and Surrealist', A. Stoekl (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, Minnesota, 1985. See also: J. Spector, 'In the Service of Which Revolution? An Aborted Incarnation of the Dream: Marxism and Surrealism', *Surrealist Art and Writing*, pp.70-94; and H. Lewis 'The Revolutionary Legacy,' *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism*, New York, 1988, pp.161-75.

20 Pascal Ory and Jean-François Sirinelli detail the dominance of the French Right after the First World War, describing a corresponding lack of any leftist youth movement with the equivalent power and visibility of *Action Française*. As they put it 'le mouvement de Charles Maurras règne en maître au Quartier Latin' at the time *la Révolution surréaliste* was published: P. Ory and J.-F. Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, Paris, 1986, pp.80-3. See also G. Lichtheim, *Europe in the 20th Century*, London, 1972, pp.28-40.

inflicted with a 'sacred' union of church and state, sanctioned the mass slaughter of a generation of young Frenchmen in the trenches. Indeed, the failure of French intellectuals to reconcile the revolutionary tradition with the pressures and aftermath of the First World War described in detail by Kenneth Silver, is a recurrent theme of this book.²¹ Having acknowledged the reluctance to ally patriotism with the successful defense of the republic during the revolution, a renewed resistance to the influence of Rousseau, Silver draws attention to Maurice Denis, writing in 1915: 'Revolutionary prejudices, the excesses of individualism, the love of paradox, the fetishism of the unexpected and the original – all the blemishes on our art are also the blemishes on French society.'²²

Surrealism, it could be argued, was founded upon perceptions of the failure that Silver describes, and was most effective as a militant force when addressing the near-hysteria associated with revolutionary rhetoric in the war years that Denis manifests. 'Revolutionary prejudices' along with 'the excesses of individualism, the love of paradox, the fetishism of the unexpected and the original' could (and should) be seen as a de-facto agenda for an avant-garde movement determined to blow apart the shallow masquerade of French society that the previous generation had cherished.²³ As Breton put it in 1924; 'the vilest comedians of this age were Anatole France's associates, let us never forgive him for adorning his smiling inertia with the colours of the Revolution'.²⁴ It is precisely this context, the cause, rather than effect, of Breton's encounter with shell-shock, that points towards the need

21 K. Silver, *Esprit de Corps, The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925*, London, 1989, p.196.

22 *Ibid.*, p.197.

23 C. Green, *Cubism and its Enemies*, New Haven and London, 1987, pp.243–98.

24 Breton's contribution to 'Un Cadavre' in 1924: this translation from M. Jean, *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, New York, 1980, p.129. Breton was probably referring to France's *Les Dieux Ont Soif (The Gods Are Thirsty)*, a fictional account of the revolution, widely available in the 1920s and 1930s: A. France, *Les Dieux Ont Soif* (32nd edition), Paris, 1932.

for a surrealist account of history: a powerful, driving concept, unfocused perhaps, but at odds with any aura of ambivalence.²⁵

It is only recently that Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* has belatedly been published, in a form close to that intended by its author.²⁶ Now that *all* the books are on the shelves, to borrow Bataille's phrase, the extent to which Benjamin's vast, rambling work resembles the constellation that constitutes surrealist history is astounding. Although Benjamin's project is just that; a project, and surrealism is nothing more than a belated, critical and curatorial attempt at drawing together incompatible but inseparable texts and images, the historical perspectives that they offer are uncannily similar. Beyond Benjamin's enchanted pedestrian and his card-file archive, beyond even the enlightened surrealist *flâneur* of the 'Last Snapshot' (and all the implications for understanding surrealist culture revealed by it), is an altogether less deliberate surrealist project, a secret cabinet of history: a disordered, anomalous, fascinating, often misleading phenomenon. Setting Benjamin's vicarious stroll through the arcades in opposition to the secrets of the curiosity cabinet conjures up the inherent contradiction between the fascinated but detached passer-by and the compulsively focused, passionately engaged connoisseur.²⁷

These apparently contradictory modes of viewing can be resolved by an analogy with the flea-market searches for surrealist 'found

25 Denis Hollier has written on the issue of historical and political ambivalence in relation to Georges Bataille and The College of Sociology in 'On equivocation between literature and politics', *Absent Without Leave*, trans. C. Porter, Harvard, 1997, pp.76–93.

26 W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, R. Tiedemann (ed.), trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999.

27 This juxtaposition of modes of spectatorship is raised by Jack Spector, although in the context of his argument he does not introduce their contradictory natures, *Surrealist Art and Writing*, pp.79–80. However, in his essay, 'The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the avant-garde', *Art History*, Vol.24, No.3, June 2001, pp.401–44, Frederick Schwartz sets out a complex relationship between 'expert' and 'distracted' viewers with reference to typography. While the expert and the connoisseur are not exactly equivalent, Schwartz's analysis does underline the importance of spectatorship to Benjamin's notion of the avant-garde. See also F. Schwartz, *Blind Spots*, New Haven and London, 2005.

objects': strolling, dis-interested surrealists locate perfect emblems of their searches and then invest them with meaning on the basis of their 'found' status.²⁸ This book, by contrast, will allow the selected, scrutinised, objects of attention to problematise this apparently acceptable solution. Georges Bataille recognised the implications of this emphasis on perception, even as Breton sought analogies for its representation: 'Whenever one has recourse to images', he insisted 'most often peremptory and provocative ones, borrowed from the most concrete of contradictions, it is reality on the material order [...] that comes into play'.²⁹

This critical assessment of the importance of materialism (albeit of entirely another order), lies at the heart of what Cohen calls 'Gothic Marxism' where Benjamin's ideological concerns unfold in tandem with Breton's.³⁰ This exploration of the efficacy of historical materialism, remains, however, fundamentally at odds with, and in advance of, most surrealist conceptions of revolutionary history.³¹ Perhaps for the simple reason that as a 'German observer', Benjamin's theory of revolution was always expressed philosophically, whereas for the Parisian surrealist, Breton no less than any other, revolution was an

28 Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, pp.36–8. The episode that Foster describes takes place in Breton's 1937 book *L'amour fou* (*Mad Love*) and forms the basis of a lengthy discussion by Margaret Cohen entitled 'The Question of Modern Materialism', *Profane Illumination*, pp.131–45.

29 G. Bataille, 'The "Old Mole" and the prefix Sur in the words Surhomme and Surrealist', pp.35–6. Neil Cox identifies a further twist in this relationship, citing a letter from Benjamin to Adorno criticising Bataille's historical vision in 'The Obelisk' of 1938, and referring to the spectatorship that Bataille's text requires: N. Cox, 'A Painting by Antoine Caron and the Surrealist Revolution', forthcoming in the on-line journal *Papers of Surrealism*.

30 Cohen's introduction explores this intriguing idea, while maintaining biographical distance between the two writers, *Profane Illumination*, pp.1–15.

31 Therese Lichtenstein has drawn attention to the way in which Benjamin's understanding of a 'critical progressive nostalgia' might be employed in the discussion of the work of Hans Bellmer, drawing on the work of Frederic Jameson. It is critical to Lichtenstein's analysis, however, that this recuperative historical vision is set against the background of Bellmer's attitude to Nazi culture, rather than in relation to the contemporary surrealist agenda: T. Lichtenstein, *Behind Closed Doors: The Art of Hans Bellmer*, California, 2001, pp.150–2.

immanent, practical possibility: the mediation of history at street-level. Breton's flea-marketry is characteristically illuminating in this regard: his 1937 book *L'amour fou*, which contains what has become the definitive origin story of the found object, is itself a series of historical revisions, or returns to the history of surrealism. Breton revisits 'convulsive beauty' (among other surrealist concepts) two years after a film called *Mad Love* hit the screens of American cinemas.³² The 1935 film, starring Peter Lorre as a mad surgeon who grafts the hands of a patricidal maniac onto the stumps of a concert pianist, consists of a bizarre and often uncomfortable melange of surrealist imagery, right down to Brassai-style close-ups of carnivorous plants. Although it is unwise to argue for anything more than a superficial relationship between the film and book, perhaps Breton's urge to consolidate surrealism's agenda *a posteriori*, playing up the 'rag-picker as revolutionary' could be seen as a tactical retracing of lost steps.³³

* * *

If Benjamin can be usefully engaged to explore the relationship between surrealism and history, then it must be a different Benjamin to the one described thus far, and the inter-relation of the three key elements (surrealism, history and Benjamin) must be re-conceived. It is a central paradox of the critical relationship between Walter Benjamin and surrealism's histories that in order to view the latter

32 Breton composed the texts published as *L'amour fou* between 1933 and 1935, and is therefore unlikely to have known of the film. The film would, however, have been written and produced during this same time period, and its release before Breton's book, perhaps timed to coincide with the 1936 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism', exhibition at MoMA in New York, may have exerted some pressure on Breton.

33 Marguerite Bonnet points out that Breton had wished to publish *Nadja*, *Communicating Vessels* and *Mad Love* in a single volume, certainly consolidating his own position in relation to surrealism's development since the re-edition of the manifestos in 1929: Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol.1, Paris, 1988, p.1560.

through the ideological lens of the former, it is necessary to turn away from the more obvious account of 'Surrealism – The Last Snapshot' and towards the vertiginous philosophical historiography of the 'Theses on the Concept of History'.³⁴ Neil Cox demonstrates the affinity between Benjamin's 'Theses' and surrealism's view of its relationship to the past, discussing the importance of Antoine Caron's painting *Massacre under the Triumvirate* to Michel Leiris writing in the magazine *Documents*.³⁵ Cox describes 'surrealism [...] redeeming French history in its own image', and invokes Benjamin's 'Thesis XIV':

History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history.³⁶

Benjamin's time 'filled by the presence of the now' (or 'now-time' as it is also translated) returns to the French Revolution as the archetype for historiographical misrepresentations and misconceptions, and it is *this* aspect of Benjamin's historical vision that is closest to the fractured historiography implicit in surrealism. Michael Löwy puts it slightly differently, but the essential point made in relation to surrealism is nonetheless relevant, describing Benjamin's 'conception of history as open process'.³⁷ Löwy's reading is of the 'Theses' as a desperate attempt, under the terminal pressure of historical events, to engage the effectiveness of historical vision, offers an intriguing corollary to the surrealist historical imagination:

34 Benjamin, 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', *Reflections*, trans. E. Jephcott, New York, 1978.

35 M. Leiris, 'A Painting by Antoine Caron', *Documents* 7, 1929; See also, N. Cox, 'Sacrifices' in S. Baker and D. Ades, *Undercover Surrealism: Georges Bataille and Documents*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2006, pp.106–16.

36 Cox, 'A Painting by Antoine Caron' p.8. Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1939), *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, London, 1973, p.253.

37 M. Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of history'*, London and New York, 2005, p.105.

The 1940 Theses represent a kind of philosophical manifesto, in the form of dialectical images and allegories rather than abstract syllogisms, for the *opening up of history*: That is, for a conception of the historical process that opens up onto a dizzying field of possibilities, a vast branching structure of alternatives, without, however, falling into the illusion of absolute liberty: the 'objective conditions' are also conditions of possibility.³⁸

The 'opening up of history' described here offers a point of contact between Benjamin and surrealism that is also a fault-line; the flaw that connects them. Although Margaret Cohen justifies Benjamin's use-value with respect to Breton's surrealism by suggesting that in *Nadja*: 'Breton explores the possibility of writing surrealist historiography by applying a Freudian paradigm of memory to collective events', the question of whether Breton set out to write, or even inadvertently wrote, a surrealist historiography, remains unclear: its presumed existence being heavily predicated upon a particular evocation of Benjamin's spectral presence.³⁹ This prompts a question of the nest of boxes in which Breton sits within Benjamin within Cohen: if not a Benjaminian reading of *Nadja*, what *would* a surrealist historiography look like? The boundaries of surrealist historiography, the 'dizzying field' suggested by Löwy, can only be defined discursively: by opening up and moving around the likely limits of its competence; allowing it to emerge and to consolidate its topography in the process.

* * *

Introducing the 1929 re-edition of the *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, published to coincide with the second, André Breton already felt the weight of history upon his shoulders. A mere five years after the initial declaration, the surrealist group had changed almost beyond recognition. The ideological expediency of calling for a new declaration of the rights of man, marshalling 'the revolution in the service of the surrealist adventure' as Albert Camus would later observe, was

38 *Ibid.*, p.107.

39 Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, p.80.

increasingly divisive.⁴⁰ Acrimony threatened to send any chance of a consensus over the history of the surrealist revolution the way of its eighteenth-century predecessor, and Breton at least, was fully aware that controversial events live on in the controversy surrounding their passage into discourse. Having insisted upon ruthlessly 'correcting' the way in which posterity would view ex-members of the surrealist movement who he felt had betrayed him, Breton suggested, with no little irony, that: 'it would take all the vanity of the scientific spirit, the totally puerile nature of the need to recount, which we owe to the post-facto attentions of history'.⁴¹

Leaving aside the issue of Breton's own vanity and the nature of his reprisals against recent friends, we are afforded an insight into Breton's historical conscience.⁴² If the vanity of history lay in its positivist pretensions towards science, the irresistible need to calculate and measure the past, then surrealism should certainly have sought to disrupt, or at least to intervene in, the smooth running of that operation. Looking back, Breton seems to suggest that the past might better be envisaged as a haphazard collage of official documents such as that used for the cover of *la Révolution surréaliste* in 1925 (Figure 1). Dates, and momentous historical events might well surface arbitrarily, like the forgotten commemorative associations of Eluard's diary-page or the stunning announcement of the 'End of the Christian Era' in April 1925 (Figure 2).⁴³ The image has a myriad of perspectival associations: an Atget-esque photograph characteristically

- 40 A. Camus, *L'Homme Révolté*, Paris, 1951, p.125: Camus's text on surrealism and revolt 'La Poésie Révolté', is seldom mentioned in English language criticism as it was edited out of the translation which was published as *The Rebel*.
- 41 'Il y faudrait toute la vanité de l'esprit scientifique, toute la puérilité de ce besoin de recul, qui nous vaut les âpres ménagements de l'histoire' Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris, 1963, p.9.
- 42 *The Second Manifesto*, which originally appeared in *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, 15 December 1929, contains a series of 'avant' and 'après' quotes, crudely comparing the opinions of Robert Desnos, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Georges Limbour, Jacques Baron and Roger Vitrac, before and after leaving Breton's group: Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, pp.151-7.
- 43 *La Révolution surréaliste* 3, April 1925.

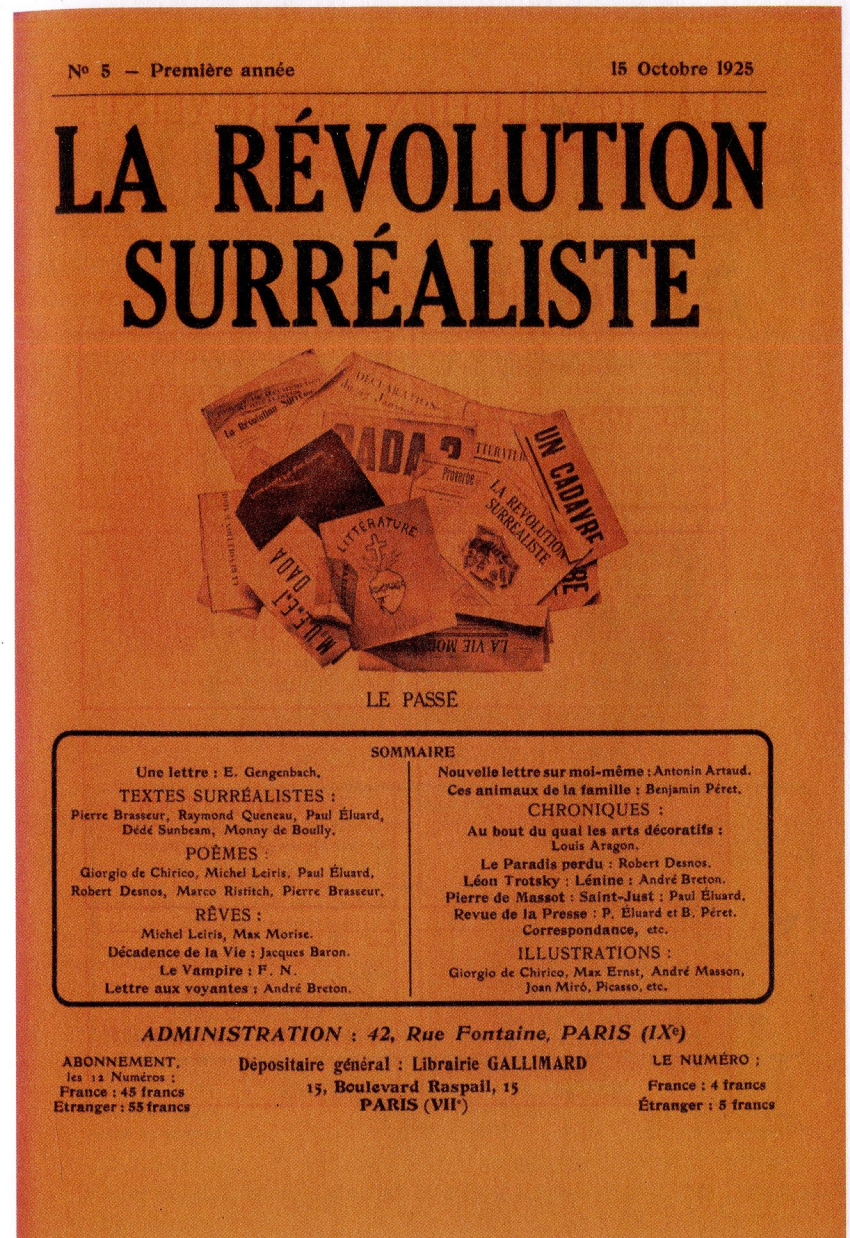


Fig 1: 'Le Passé', *la Révolution surréaliste* 5, 15 October 1925

LA RÉVOLUTION SURREALISTE



1925 : FIN DE L'ÈRE CHRÉTIENNE

SOMMAIRE

L'Europe et l'Asie : Théodore Lessing.
Pamphlet contre Jérusalem : Robert Desnos.
Descriptions d'une révolte prochaine :
Robert Desnos.

La revendication du plaisir :
Jacques Baron et Michel Leiris.

Rêves :

Rêves d'enfants : Max Morise, Antonin Artaud,
Paul Éluard, Pierre Naville, Raymond Queneau,
J.-A. Boiffard.

Illustrations : Giorgio de Chirico, Paul Klee,
André Masson, Man Ray, Dédé Sunbeam.

ADRESSE AU PAPE, ADRESSE AU DALAI-LAMA
LÉTRE AUX MÉDECINS CHEFS DES ASILES DE FOUS

Glossaire : Michel Leiris.

L'amour des heures : Benjamin Péret,
Décadence de la vie : Jacques Baron.

La suppression de l'esclavage : Paul Éluard.

L'activité du Bureau de Recherches :
Antonin Artaud.

Textes surréalistes :

D. L., Max Morise.

12 phrases de réveil : Maurice Béchet.

Beaux-arts : Pierre Naville

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conflating the timeless tragedy evoked by the 'pieta' with jarring indications of modern life, superimposed upon, and thereby revealing the commercial reality of the *saint-sulpiceries* behind the glass.⁴⁴ Perhaps the history of the surrealist movement that Breton claimed as the most appropriate was the very thing he most feared. Resistance after all, is itself a form of historical perspective: one that cannot adequately be explained through the concept of ambivalence. Confounding the Hollywood summary offered to posterity as 'Mad Love' necessitated a chaotic, pre-positivist miasma, an anti-history of surrealism, with all the requisite omissions, mis-directions and confused reflections.

* * *

Max Morise had attempted to subvert or, it might be more accurate to say, re-orient historical analysis in an introduction to *la Révolution surréaliste* 11, entitled 'Itinéraire du Temps, de la préhistoire à nos jours'.⁴⁵ Morise's itinerary is a short illustrated text describing the direction in which history moves; from the prehistoric age, through the classical world, to medieval France, then enlightenment, Revolution, the nineteenth century, past 1928 and forward to the year 2000 (Figure 3). History, as Morise describes it, moves not only forward, through time, but geographically, beginning in the Massif Central, after which it gets lost in Asia, meanders west to Greece, then 'changing direction only once, it finally points to Paris'. This development is further complicated by a series of compass directions that Morise stipulates between 800 and 2000, even though most of the events described take place in and around Paris. The three fragments of time-line that illustrate the text can be re-assembled using these compass directions, leaving the viewer with a bizarre graph-like

44 'Saint-sulpiceries' is a term denoting kitsch religious objects, or reproductions of works of art, so-called after the Church of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, where such things were sold.

45 'Itinerary of Time from prehistory to the present day' *la Révolution surréaliste* 11, March 1928, pp.1-3.

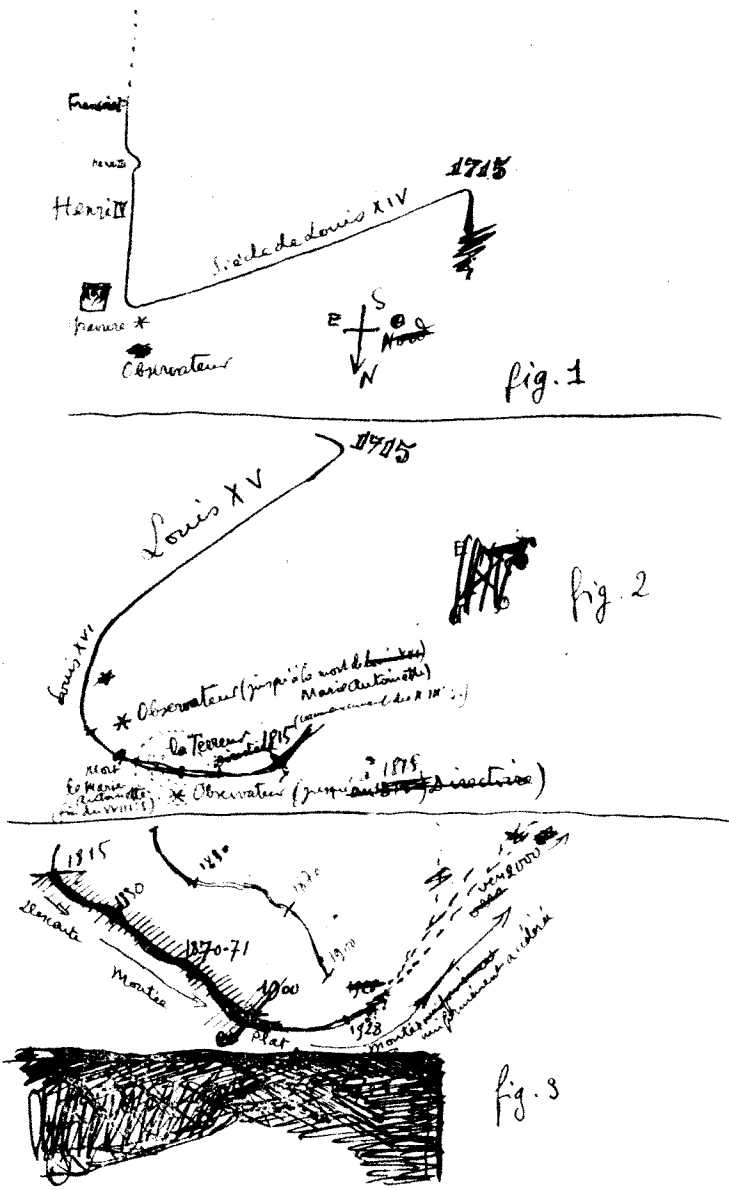


Fig 3: Max Morise, 'Itinéraire du Temps', *la Révolution surréaliste* 11, 15 March 1928, p.2

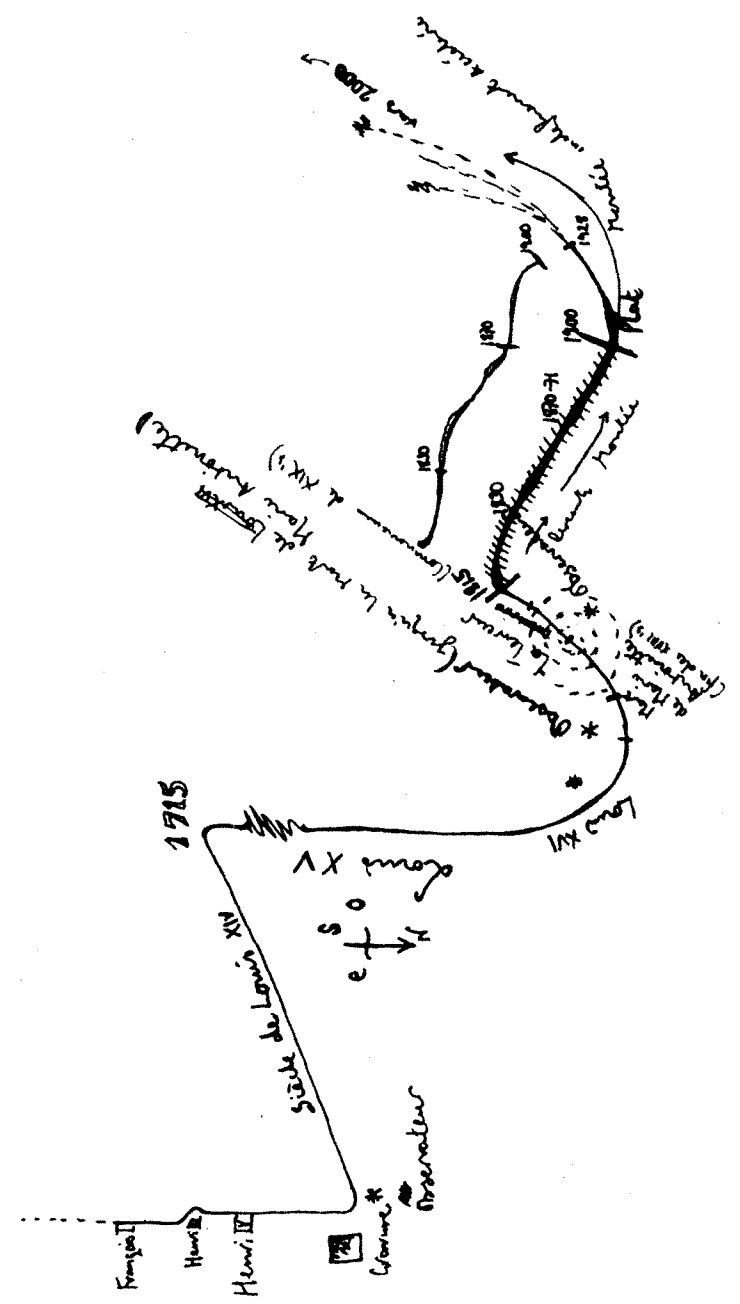


Fig 4: Timeline for Max Morise's 'Itinéraire du Temps', re-aligned according to the compass directions (produced by the author)

progression of historical events (Figure 4).⁴⁶ Throughout, Morise is resolutely visual in his account, seemingly more interested in where the 'observer' should be in order to see history than in the events that might be seen:

The observer must leave the lofty position that he has had up to now, contemplating the line as the crow flies, to take up a post at ground level, next to the bend that marks the beginning of the thirteenth-century, as shown in figure 1.⁴⁷

This observation point is marked clearly in relation to the time-line itself and is increasingly important as events are described more specifically after 1715:

This date passed, the line resumes the direction that it had before the century of Louis XIV but, for the best view, the observer must transport himself to the end of the eighteenth century, that's to say, to the death of Marie Antoinette. Starting with Louis XVI the line begins to describe a curve to the left (the direction of the march of time) and furthermore, as it opens out, the relief intervenes, it is no longer traced on a surface plane; it passes into a form of basin whose bottom is occupied by the Terror. The nineteenth century begins in 1815. To see it you must be placed on the same line as Time, at the point 1900, where I was born, or strictly speaking in fact, 1928.⁴⁸

The diagram is even more precise, pointing out the necessary position of the observer with little stars 'until the death of Marie Antoinette' and then up to 1815, the latter placed within the depression representing the Terror. Both observing positions, had, however, previously been labelled differently: the eighteenth century had been due to end with the death of Louis XVI, and the nineteenth century to begin at the end of the Directory. Whichever chronological markers are used, the Terror itself constitutes a historical abyss or lacuna. Morise's

46 The complete time line can be re-assembled by using the compasses the Morise indicated on his figures and following the directions described in the text. This reconstruction was produced for a previously published essay: S. Baker, 'The thinking man and the femme sans tête: collective perception and self representation', *RES* 38, Harvard, Fall 2001.

47 *La Révolution surréaliste* 11, March 1928, p.1 (see appendix).

48 Ibid. (see appendix).

Terror occupies the time between the death of Marie Antoinette and the start of the Directory two years later, the end of the royal family and the end of the Revolution: the principal effects of moving the goalposts being that Morise extends the Revolution to include the spectacle associated with the death of Marie Antoinette, and consigns Napoleon to the eighteenth-century. In both the fragmentary, original version and the 'corrected' time-line, the Terror and the period of the surrealist revolution echo one another in shape. After one hundred years of descent, only enlightened 'with an unexpected twilight by the development of Romanticism', time is once again illuminated by a 'brilliant light' in 1928. The helter-skelter of visual analogies is concluded with the thought that time 'tends to lose itself in the infinity of space. After the year 2000, there is nothing'.⁴⁹

Morise's ruminations on the relevance of events in the revolutionary calendar are illuminating in their own right, but the sub-text of their expression is also relevant: the scribbled alternatives, especially seen in the context of the reconstructed time-line, highlight the deliberately disruptive, chaotic and idiosyncratic appearance of Morise's work, harking back to the doodle-covered blotting pads stolen from the Council of Ministers by Louis Aragon for *la Révolution surréaliste* in 1926.⁵⁰ Morise's evidently hurried analysis even reprises Aragon's revolutionary justice: 'the shadow of the guillotine above the blotters'.⁵¹ In both cases, the distrust that Breton indicates with the management of events, the mechanism of posterity, is brought to the surface. But although both Aragon and Morise read the Revolution in terms of its implications for the present, Morise addresses a very specific vision of the way in which revolutionary history was understood at the time. The following extract is taken from Peter Kropotkin's 1909 book, *The Great French Revolution*:

49 'étant donné qu'elle tend à se perdre dans l'infini de l'espace. Au delà de l'an 2000, il n'y a rien.' Ibid.

50 L. Aragon, 'Les Buvards du Conseil des Ministres', *la Révolution surréaliste* 6, March 1926, pp.15-17.

51 'O guerres coloniales, vos perspectives napoléoniennes. L'ombre de la guillotine au-dessus des Buvards.' Ibid., p.15.

If we represent the slow progress of a period of evolution by a line drawn on paper, we shall see this line gradually though slowly rising. Then there comes a Revolution, and the line makes a sudden leap upwards. In England the line would be represented as rising to the Puritan Republic of Cromwell; in France it rises to the *Sans-culotte* Republic of 1793. However, at this height progress cannot be maintained: all the hostile forces league together against it, and the Republic goes down. Our line, after having reached that height, drops. Reaction follows. For the political life of France the line drops very low indeed, but by degrees it rises again, and when peace is restored in 1815 in France, and in 1688 in England – both countries are found to have attained a level much higher than they were prior to their Revolutions. After that, evolution is resumed: our line again begins to rise slowly: but, besides taking place on a very much higher level, the rising of the line will in nearly every case be also much more rapid than before the period of disturbance. This is the law of human progress, and also a law of individual progress. The more recent history of France confirms this very law by showing how it was necessary to pass through the Commune to arrive at the Third Republic.⁵²

The principle difference between Kropotkin's anarchist rhetoric of necessity and progress and Morise's absurdly repetitive variation on the theme, is in the importance attributed by Morise to perception: the agency of historical spectatorship. Kropotkin's line rises and falls, while for Morise, it is the observer who swoops down from his bird's eye vantage point to follow history at ground level before climbing to the next viewpoint. The idea of the emphatically underscored 'platform' at the year 1900 was taken up by René Crevel in the following issue of *la Révolution surréaliste* to describe 'Le Point de Vue du Capitaine'.⁵³ Crevel's historical pastiche begins with Saint-Just justifying the removal of the king's head and ends with Jean Jaurès justifying the predicament in which Alfred Dreyfus found himself. The point of view indicated in the title is both that of Dreyfus (a viewpoint that Jaurès refuses to look from) and the militarism associated with French nationalism that Crevel traces back to the Revolution:

52 P. Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, trans. N.F. Dryhurst (2 vols), London, 1909, Vol.II, p.576.

53 'The Point of View of the Captain' *La Révolution surréaliste* 12, December 1929, p.40.

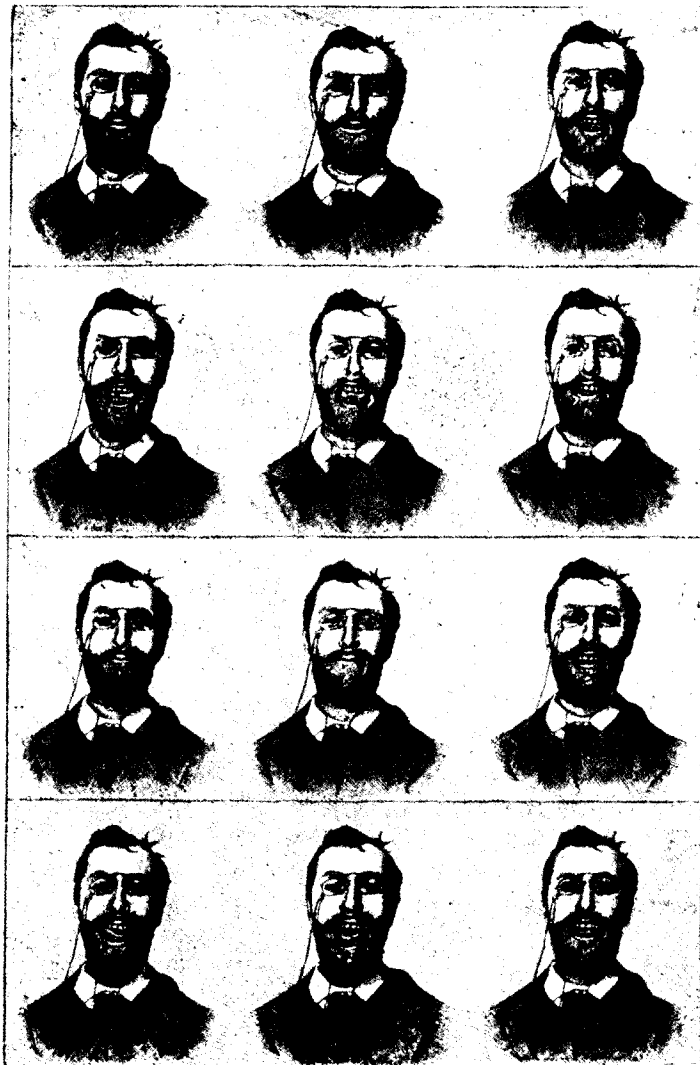
For a Saint Just, there were alas, never ending bands of Girondin orators and fricasées of blue stockings (with deformed thighs) in the style of Madame Roland. With the dust of their consciences shaken like that from old tapestries, this nasty bunch will make a negative sun, staining the pure, bloody, aurora borealis grey. The crime of these pretend revolutionaries who give blackmail a belated so-called humanity, would be to allow the wars of the Empire, for the want of saving a few individuals from the guillotine. Indeed, the young Bonaparte had the itch, and scratching it gave him the idea for the Italy campaign. *Il caracole, au pont d'Arcole*. We got the epic.⁵⁴

Crevel's historical satire sits comfortably between the gestures of Aragon and Morise, reflecting a deeply ironic attitude to the Third Republic that Kropotkin had (somehow) understood as necessitating the Commune. Antagonism to the state, voiced through explicit associations between the state and its military, was a central tenet of surrealist ideology.⁵⁵ In the single issue of *la Révolution surréaliste* (No.12, 1929) in which Crevel's text appeared were many contributions along similar lines. 'La Prière du Soldat' was unsigned but shows telling traces of Aragon, recalling; 'the time when Poincaré, the French vampire and Clemenceau, old like a leper, hideous grave-diggers of millions of bodies indulged in a sinister duel to see who would be first to bury the other'.⁵⁶ The text was illustrated with an example of 'phonoscopic' photography, a fore-runner to film, which seems to show twelve images of a laughing bearded man, but is actually a freeze-frame montage of Albert Londe singing 'Vive la France' as the subtitle indicates (Figure 5). The ironic reference to jingoistic inanity also refers back to an earlier image by Max Ernst, reproduced in the journal over the same sub-title, where unmistakably pre-war bourgeois silhouette-figures with top-hats and frock-coats,

54 Ibid. (see appendix).

55 R.S. Short, 'The Politics of Surrealism', *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.1, No.2, 1966, pp.3–25. H. Lewis, *Dada Turns Red*, chapter two, 'The Negation of Negation: Surrealist Revolt 1920–1925', pp.17–36; and J. Spector, *Surrealist Art and Writing*, chapters two and three, 'The Politics of Dream and the Dream of Politics', pp.42–69, and 'In the Service of Which Revolution?' pp.70–94.

56 'The Soldier's Prayer', *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, December 1929, pp.21–2 (see appendix).



VIVE LA FRANCE (*au phonoscope*)

Fig 5: 'Vive La France (au phonoscope)', *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, 15 December 1929, p.21

bury bodies in a stark landscape.⁵⁷ Issue 12 also contained Marcel Fourier's text 'Police, Haut les Mains' and a series of poems by Benjamin Péret entitled 'Je Ne Mange Pas Ce Pain-Là', which made less than complimentary references to Adolphe Thiers and Poincaré and savagely attacking patriotism and gratitude to the fallen dead.⁵⁸ This antipathy to all things military came to a head soon after when Georges Sadoul sent a vitriolic postcard to the head of the Saint-Cyr military academy and ended up in jail.⁵⁹ A series of imaginary 'campaigns' were listed on the sort of card that soldiers sent home, tracing the direction of Sadoul's anger; beginning at the brothel, passing via the Arc du Triomphe, and ending up in the bed of Madame Foch, wife of the war hero. The message was similarly unequivocal:

You can go eat shit, with your fancy white gloves you dirty Saint-Cyrien. DOWN WITH YOUR SHAKO PLUME. We'll kick you out and hang you high, clip your Marshall Joffre's tail, the master of your young years, fuck off you dismal Cyr, you dirty little creep. Signed, the Unknown Soldier. THE UNKNOWN BELGIAN SOLDIER.⁶⁰

This militant anti-military agenda was of increasing importance as the surrealist movement sought to define its political situation, but it was also a powerful element of the revolutionary rhetoric that surrealist artists and writers deployed. The problematic tension between the war-time patriotism of the Union Sacré (despised by the surrealists) and the power of revolutionary identifications, led to situations like Emile-Joseph Duval's persecution (and execution) for publishing the radical pacifist journal *Bonnet Rouge* during the war.⁶¹ After the war, those who had identified with the revolutionary rhetoric of the *Bonnet*

57 *La Révolution surréaliste* 5, October 1925, p.3.

58 'Police Hands Up!' and 'I won't eat any of that bread', *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, December 1929, pp.51-2.

59 Thirion, *Revolutionaries Without Revolution*, pp.200-1.

60 *Ibid.*, pp.248-9.

61 Duval was condemned to death on 15th May 1918 and executed on 17th July of the same year. Miguel Almeréyda, another of the editors of the *Bonnet Rouge* is believed to have been 'suicidé', in connection with the *Bonnet Rouge* affair: C. Bellanger, J. Godechot, P. Guirat and F. Terron (eds), *Histoire Générale de la Presse Française, Vol. 3 (1871-1940)*, Paris, 1972, pp.439-41.

Rouge saw Duval as a martyr, senselessly killed by the state and his name and that of his journal appeared on an early list of pre-surrealist Paris Dada heroes in 1921.⁶²

* * *

I have always despised those revolutionaries who, satisfied with having put a tricolor in place of a white flag, live in tranquility, decorated by the new state, pensioned by the new government. No, for a revolutionary there is only one possible regime: THE REVOLUTION, that's to say THE TERROR. Only the guillotine can, with dark cuts, lighten that crowd of adversaries who stand against us. Ah, to raise the sympathetic machine of our deliverance in a public square at long last: she has waited too long to finish this scum.⁶³

Desnos's call for the Terror is one of a series of identifications that the poet made with revolutionary history, an explicit and provocative use of the historical pit that Morise placed so emphatically on his own 'itinerary'.⁶⁴ The call for the return of an impatient guillotine, whilst identifiably revolutionary by any standard, was, however, fraught with ideological problems in France in 1925. Drawing attention to the debate around the historical significance of appeals to the Terror, the guillotine and Robespierre, it is also vital that the ways Desnos brought such historical material into the service of surrealism's revolutionary activity are accurately accounted for. Desnos's strategy, it is clear, was absolutely in tune with surrealism's development as an effective avant-garde. As Louis Aragon perceptively observed in 1923:

62 Duval (Bonnet Rouge) is number 18 on the list of 'Premiers' from the results of the *Liquidation*, questionnaire published on the back cover of *Littérature*, No.18, March 1921: see chapter three.

63 Desnos, 'Description d'une révolte prochaine' ('Description of the next revolt'), *la Révolution surréaliste* 3, April 1925, p.26 (see appendix).

64 As Dawn Ades points out; 'The years 1924-1927 are marked by a gradual recognition of the need to define and anchor their notion of revolution within a more precise political context. Their terms of reference to begin with were limited to the French Revolution (particularly 1793, the year of the Terror), and the Commune of 1871.' D. Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, London, 1978, p.195.

It is in the light of a poetic image that everything becomes possible once again, and we decided to put it into action: Following a custom which was dear to others like us, we returned to the comparison of our intellectual state with that of the French Revolution. It was a matter of preparing and suddenly imposing the Terror. Everything happened like this, so if the Revolution took place we had to be at its head. And anyway, we decided not to wait for ninety-three, but to have the Terror right away: in '89.⁶⁵

Desnos's 'Description d'une révolte prochaine' in which he calls for revolution, unequivocally disregards 1789 in favour of 1793 but it is the Third Republic, the 'new state' of the generation of Jaurès, wickedly lampooned in Crevel's Dreyfus sketch and a host of other surrealist texts, that motivates and validates such 'terrorist' rhetoric.⁶⁶ Above all, it is the stifling, rational Republic, so keen to pave over its revolutionary heritage, that Desnos addresses, devastating the fragile process of remembrance.⁶⁷ Desnos's engagement with revolutionary history is drawn from, and directed towards the irrational, both in terms of subject matter and the form of evocation, and yet, paradoxically perhaps, remains fundamentally pragmatic, even utilitarian. In 1938, Georges Bataille identified and expounded upon the strategy that Desnos's attitude to the 'poetic images' of revolutionary history also reveals, setting out his own polemic on the repressive efficacy of monumental representation:

65 M. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, Paris, 1993, p.249 (see appendix).

66 The word 'terrorism' should be sparingly, especially in the light of Jean Paulhan's influential literary critique, *Les fleurs de tarbes ou la terreur dans les lettres*, which identifies 'the terror' and literary 'terrorism' in a particularly idiosyncratic sense. Paulhan did not consider that surrealist poets or writers fell within this characterisation and was not interested in the historical period 1793-1794: J. Paulhan, *Les fleurs de tarbes ou la terreur dans les lettres*, Paris, 1941.

67 This disruptive argument with the politics of memory was undoubtedly heightened by French military activity in Morocco immediately following the First World War, which Desnos experienced first hand as a young soldier, serving in the 13eme régiment de Tirailleurs Algériens, in Morocco, 1921-1922: M.-C. Dumas (ed.), *Oeuvres*, Paris, 1999, p.1357. Robert Short details surrealist animosity to later colonial conflicts in 'The Politics of Surrealism'. See also; M. Nadeau, 'la guerre du maroc,' *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1958, pp.91-8.

The obscurity of a 'mystery' comes from images that a kind of lucid dream borrows from the realm of the crowd, sometimes bringing to light what the guilty conscience has pushed back into the shadows, sometimes highlighting figures that are routinely *ignored*. From Louis XVI's guillotine to the obelisk, a spatial arrangement is formed on the PUBLIC SQUARE, in other words, on all the public squares of the 'civilized world' whose historical charm and monumental appearance prevail over everything else.⁶⁸

Desnos's particular engagement with the Revolution began in childhood, but even his earliest memory of its influence is of very different order to that offered by poets of the previous generation. Paul Valéry, for example, was still able to connect directly to the revolutionary past when writing on 'Degas and the Revolution' in *Degas, Danse, Dessin*.⁶⁹ When he was four or five years old, Degas remembered visiting Madame Le Bas, the widow of a Jacobin member of the Convention.⁷⁰ Noticing portraits of Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint-Just in the entrance hall, his mother asked 'why do you still keep the heads of those monsters?' prompting the memorable reply, 'hush yourself Celestine, they are saints'.⁷¹ For Degas, the Revolution was only a generation away, and for Valéry, Degas' reminiscences offered a route to this heritage, which was discreet, direct and entirely rational.⁷²

Desnos's earliest memories, and the uses to which they were put, differ significantly, as one might expect, given their provenance and the circumstances surrounding their recollection. Freud's formulation of memory as an inherently distorted, collage-like screen, warped by

68 G. Bataille, 'The Obelisk', *Visions of Excess*, p.213.

69 P. Valéry, *Degas, Danse, Dessin*, Paris, 1938.

70 Valéry fails to mention the fact that 'La Veuve La Bas' was one of the most famous survivors and defenders of the Jacobin Revolution: the historian Richard Cobb talks about Le Bas in the same breath as Buonarroti describing her as 'the originator of the Robespierrieste myth and the founder of the cult of Saint-Maximilien'. R. Cobb, *The French and their Revolution*, D. Gilmour (ed.), London, 1998, p.212.

71 P. Valéry, *Degas, Danse, Dessin*, pp.42-3 (see appendix).

72 Benjamin's interest in Paul Valéry who he says 'was among those interested in the special functioning of psychic mechanisms under present-day conditions' was founded on the latter's interest in the working of memory: Leo Bersani compares Benjamin with Freud in this context in 'Boundaries of Time and Being', L. Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, Harvard, 1990.

distant, traumatic events turned the presumed distance, accuracy and objectivity of discreet memories into matters of representation rather than fact.⁷³ In Desnos's 'Confession d'un enfant du siècle', published in *la Révolution surréaliste* 6, in 1926, the Revolution resurfaces onto its screen through the romanticism of the nineteenth century:

Hugo dominated my childhood [...] the last echoes of the Dreyfus affair, the snatches of knowing conversations, the number ninety-three, the name of Robespierre, which reunited my two forenames Robert and Pierre, permitting me to imagine a revolutionary republic for which I fought on the barricades of armchairs and stools.⁷⁴

Here, the Revolution cuts through the recent past upon which it had previously depended for support. Just as the reconstructed traumas that Freud disentangled from fragmentary recurrences reveal the source of the problem: Robespierre, the maligned architect of the Terror, turns Victor Hugo's horror of 1793 on its head.⁷⁵ This is a childhood memory opened out, cast as representative of the memorial process of a generation, fore-grounding Desnos's later 'involuntary' and 'arbitrary' identifications with revolutionary characters and rhetoric. The analogy between Desnos' memory of history and Freud's characterisation of 'screen memories' draws history itself toward the process of analysis, which the historiography of the French Revolution tacitly confirms with its endless repressions.

In the publication of a 'waking dream séance' in the journal *Littérature* in October 1922, Desnos's involuntary response to the question 'where are you?' was 'Robespierre', followed by 'a multitude, Robespierre, ROBESPIERRE',⁷⁶ The incorruptible also resurfaced in many of Desnos's surrealist texts, including two of the

73 S. Freud, 'Screen Memories' (1898), J. Strachey (ed.), *Standard Edition Vol.III*, London, 1955, pp.301-22.

74 'Confession of a child of the century', *la Révolution surréaliste* 6, March 1926, cited in Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes 1922-1930*, M.-C. Dumas (ed.), Paris, 1978, p.236 (see appendix).

75 V. Hugo, *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, Paris, 1874.

76 Desnos, *Littérature* n.s. 5, October 1922, p.152: it is notable that Desnos also refers to Toussaint L'Ouverture, the Haitian revolutionary leader, in the same session.

earliest pantheons describing figures important to the movement. 1922 found him lying alongside the young surrealists in Desnos's 'cimetière de la Sémillante', while a year later, in 'Comme Il Fait Beau', Robespierre appeared in a monkey-filled family tree alongside Marat, Sade, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Hegel and many others.⁷⁷ Robespierre was drawn further into the debate surrounding surrealist ideology when Desnos cited his 'sublime phrase', 'Those who deny the immortality of the soul surrender justice' in *la Révolution surréaliste* 2, 1925.⁷⁸ Desnos then reprised the maxim in issue 4 in an early version of an extract from *La Liberté ou L'Amour (Liberty or Love)* entitled 'The Bay of Hunger', conflating Robespierre's words with those that had inaugurated *la Révolution surréaliste* in 1924: 'Just as the absolute monarchy was overturned in 1789, in 1925 we must pull down absolute divinity [...] We must draw up a new declaration of the rights of the soul.'⁷⁹ The declaration of the rights of the soul (l'âme), stands in for the rights of man (l'homme) in a subtle substitution that only works in the original language and where the pendant motif 'et du citoyen' (and the citizen) is omitted.⁸⁰

Desnos's consistent and nuanced use of revolutionary imagery, also evident in his 1924 book *Deuil pour Deuil (Mourning for mourning)*, culminated in the publication of *La Liberté ou L'Amour* in 1927.⁸¹ The title itself is a play on the declaration of revolutionary

77 'La Cimetière de la Semillante' *Pénalités de l'enfer ou les Nouvelles Hébrides* (1922), pp.102-3, 'Comme Il Fait Beau', *Littérature* n.s. 9, February/March 1923, p.160.

78 'Ceux qui nient l'immortalité de l'âme se rendent justice': 'Muraille de chêne', *la Révolution surréaliste* 2, January 1925, p.22.

79 'De même qu'en 1789 la monarchie absolue fut renversée, il faut en 1925 abattre la divinité absolue... Il faut rédiger la Déclaration des droits de l'âme.' Desnos, 'La Baie de Faim' (The Bay of Hunger), *la Révolution surréaliste* 4, July 1925, p.18.

80 The surrealists' omission of citizen from their own call to arms, is revealing, although less than surprising: references to 'citoyen' were associated with the more extreme republicanism of the Third Republic, and thus with the previous political generation.

81 Desnos, *Deuil pour Deuil*: 'écoutez! Des tambours et des cris, le roulement funeste d'une puissante auto presagent la Revolution prochaine. Des hommes seront guillotines, les drapeaux s'envoleront comme des cigognes mais d'in-

faith 'la liberté ou la mort' (liberty or death) and the narrative moves effortlessly through time, culminating in the presence of the protagonist, Corsaire Sanglot at the execution of Louis XVI. The text recalls the moment on the scaffold when Louis attempted to address the crowd only to be drowned out by the drummers. Desnos gives the order to deprive the king of his voice in the title of the chapter: 'Roll, Drums of Santerre!':

The 21st of January was drawing to a close. Louis XVI mounted the steps of the guillotine. At the moment Corsair Sanglot emerged from the Rue Royale into the Place de la Concorde, noting with approval that the magnificent obelisk had been replaced by an adorable guillotine, a company of drummers with their white leather baldricks were lining up in a row against the wall of the terrace of the Tuileries while Jean Santerre, their commander, mounted on a dock-tailed and crop-eared horse endowed with an abundant mane, surveyed the spectacle of the crowd gathered round the engine of retribution watching Louis XVI climb the steps like an automaton and closely observing every gesture of the executioner and his assistants who, by means of a nonetheless simple act, were about to transform the 21st of January into one of the most memorable days ever, a day which gave rise to so much passion, a day whose anniversary does not so much celebrate its memory as recall to the living that it was then that an event took place which would alter the course of the world, a day on which the curtain has not yet fallen, despite the almanacs and all the unnecessary alterations in the calendar.⁸²

Desnos represents living history, unfolding even as it collapses. The scene is relayed in minute detail by an eyewitness who emerges into a Place de la Concorde that did not yet exist and sees a guillotine that had long since been replaced.⁸³ And yet this most momentous unfolding of events is most important for its ability to 'recall to the living' the fact that the Revolution has not yet ended. 21 January 1793 had even survived the destruction of time itself, in the form of the

guillotinales femmes, décevront, laisseront songeurs au haut des estrades sanglantes les sympathiques, les pensifs bourreaux'. Desnos, *Oeuvres*, M.-C. Dumas (ed.), Paris, 1999, p.200.

82 *Ibid.*, p.121.

83 The present day place de la Concorde was the place Louis XVI before the revolution, and then the place de la République at the time of the king's death: the Egyptian obelisk was placed in the centre during the nineteenth century.

revolutionary calendar to offer the death of the king for the liberty of the people. The central theme of liberty within *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, identifies a cause that all the surrealists agreed still needed fighting for, and its publication, against the background of protests about its anti-Catholic and pornographic content, suggested that in the years since the revolution, some liberties had been under attack: a fact which also served to justify identifications with the Marquis de Sade as another victim of the suppression of hard-won revolutionary freedoms during the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ Desnos renders such inspiring revolutionary material visible by focusing on precisely those aspects of the Revolution that had been hidden from view, insisting that its history falls somewhere between what we elect to remember and what we are able to imagine:

Hidden behind the trunks and pine-needles, he observes the mass guillotining of the Terror. It is a procession of the admired and despised. The executioner holds up the severed head again and again with exactly the same gesture every time. Ridiculous heads of aristocrats, heads of lovers full of their love, heads of women heroically sentenced to death. But, love and hate, can they inspire other acts? A paper balloon drifts lightly over the theatre of revolution, The Marquis de Sade places his face next to that of Robespierre. Their two profiles stand out against the red lunette of the guillotine and Corsair Sanglot admires this medallion for a moment.⁸⁵

The medallion that Desnos sees through the window of the guillotine is perhaps the most effective and emblematic of all surrealist representations of the Revolution.⁸⁶ It is an image which foregrounds vision, perspective and perception. Yet the inconceivable, irrational meeting of Robespierre and Sade on the scaffold betrays an under-

84 See the 'Declaration of January 27th 1925' in M. Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1958, p.44. For the critical climate around the time of its publication see Desnos, *Oeuvres*, pp.314–15, p.1360, and Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, p.223: entry 9.95 describes an original edition of the book with an appendix containing the pages originally censored.

85 Desnos, *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, p.122.

86 Desnos may have been inspired by the cover of George Bataille's unpublished novel *W.C.*, which is reputed to have consisted of a drawing of an eye looking through the 'window' of a guillotine: the design was completed in 1926 but never published. See Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p.x.

lying logic, manifest within the text by the symbolic framing of the two least acceptable human faces of the revolution by the 'machine of retribution'.⁸⁷ Desnos's engagement with revolutionary history can be seen to be fundamentally poetic, situated upon a resolutely irrational trajectory and yet remains grounded in a very rational, almost utilitarian conception of the way in which history can and should be used.⁸⁸ The two-tiered structure of Desnos's text relates precisely to, or could even, I would suggest, be mapped directly onto, the concerns that Breton expressed about nineteenth-century, scientific, positivist histories. H. Stuart Hughes has suggested that 'the repetitive, the irrational, the quasi-instinctual [...] substratum of history' falls outside the competence of historical thought, but the model that Desnos's texts reveal is one where this substratum of historical consciousness pierces the present in a concerted and above all effective manner: truly the '*opening up of history*' that Michel Löwy attributes to Benjamin.⁸⁹ It is Friedrich Nietzsche, however, rather than Benjamin who offers the most considered classification of history in these terms in his essay *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, in which he divides history into three categories.⁹⁰ For Nietzsche, histories are either; antiquarian (archival attempts to preserve); monumental (didactic but stultifying); or critical (working against an apathetic acceptance of the status-quo).⁹¹ Michel Foucault

87 Desnos's 'medallion' could also be seen as a composite response to the 'two-faced antique' mask that Victor Hugo dramatically attributes to Collot d'Herbois in *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*: the device described the contradictory nature of a man who sent 'Robespierre to the Scaffold and Marat to the Panthéon [...] and demanded the death penalty for everyone whilst carrying a medal of the martyred Louis XVI.' V. Hugo, *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, Paris, 1874, Vol.1, p.296.

88 As H. Stuart Hughes has observed in relation to philosophical thought: 'The question of rationality is the crucial one, in defining their attitude towards reason [...] thinkers of the earlier twentieth century were obliged to walk the edge of a razor.' H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Re-Orientations of European Social Thought 1890–1930*, New York, 1961, p.430.

89 *Ibid.*, p.6.

90 F. Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. P. Preuss, Cambridge, 1980.

91 *Ibid.*, pp.14–19.

characterises Nietzsche's concept of critical history, which he calls 'effective history' in the following terms:

Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature [...] it will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.⁹²

The apparently involuntary re-surfacing of revolutionary events, characters, and sensibilities (that Desnos characterises as 'rediscovering the language of the *Père Duchesne*') were in fact nothing less than the most efficacious marshalling of 'the revolution in the service of the surrealist adventure'.⁹³ The surrealist poet's knowledge of the theatre of revolution, its overarching themes, and internal dialogues, was not made for understanding: it was made for cutting.

The same surrealist-inspired sensibility, it could also be argued, lies at the heart of Bataille's ruminations on the process of repression and release of historical material, articulated around the increasingly symbolic obelisk in the place de la Concorde. Desnos's texts lead directly to Bataille's, with the Nietzschean historicism described by Foucault somewhere along the way.⁹⁴ Bataille's 'art of vertiginous replications' might offer the observer the illusion of being 'everywhere in history', but in topographical terms, he remains rooted to the spot, pre-occupied with resolving the riddle of the obelisk that Desnos had replaced in *La Liberté ou L'amour* ten years previously.⁹⁵

92 M. Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', D.F. Bouchard (ed., trans.), *language, counter-memory, practice*, Ithaca and London, 1977, p.154. Foucault's suggestion that knowledge is not made for understanding, but rather for cutting, is offered another alibi the 'slits in time' that Hal Foster discusses in *Complusive Beauty* in relation to Breton.

93 'Ah! retrouver le langage du "Père Duchesne"', Desnos, 'Description d'une révolte prochaine', *la Révolution surréaliste* 3, April 1925, p.26. A. Camus, *L'Homme Révolté*, Paris, 1951, p.125.

94 Nietzsche's influence upon Bataille is too broad a subject to broach in this discussion. See D. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, and Sylvère Lotringer's introduction to G. Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. B. Boone, New York and London, 2004, pp.vii-xiv.

95 L. Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, Harvard, 1990, p.120. Susan Rubin Suleiman discusses Bersani's approach in 'Bataille in the Street: The search for

Let us say [Foucault writes] that history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the *monuments* of the past, to transform them into *documents*, and to lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say. In our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*.⁹⁶

Surrealism, as this book demonstrates, was deeply concerned with the transformation of documents into monuments, with the workings of history as a memorial space: the resulting representations, what we might call 'involuntary monuments', bequeathed facetiously to posterity, are therefore of critical significance. Surrealist history, to borrow Foucault's description, is concerned with monuments that 'say in silence something other than what they actually say'.

By 1938, Bataille was able to argue forcefully that a monument such as the Luxor Obelisk is only effective in terms of the regicide that it might accidentally reveal, in spite of the history of 'concorde' that it was intended to represent at its site.⁹⁷ Furthermore, for Bataille, the Obelisk is a necessary part of this revelatory process, its very blandness allowing the guillotine to cast its shadow from 1793 to the present. 'Where monuments that had clearly affirmed principles were razed,' he says, indicating a counter-example such as the Bastille, 'the obelisk remains only so long as the sovereign authority and command it symbolizes do not become conscious'.⁹⁸ The efficacy of the obelisk lies in its ability to impose a rational repression without revealing the repetitive, irrational, quasi-instinctual substratum of history that it is intended to conceal. If nobody knows why it is there, the argument goes, following the logic of Nietzsche's 'monumental history', nobody will insist that it is removed. Bataille concludes that only conquering time itself will shatter the consensual amnesia that allows such monu-

virility in the 1930s', C. Bailey Gill (ed.), *Bataille, Writing the Sacred*, London, 1995, pp.26-45.

96 Foucault, 'Introduction', *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, cited in J. Revel and L. Hunt (eds), *Histories, French Constructions of the Past*, New York, 1995, p.207.

97 'To the extent that the obelisk is now, with all its dead grandeur, recognised, it no longer facilitates the flight of consciousness; it focuses the attention on the guillotine.' G. Bataille, 'The Obelisk', *Visions of Excess*, p.221.

98 *Ibid.*, pp.220-1.

mental forms to function.⁹⁹ In a 'Proposition', written in January 1937, coinciding with the anniversary of the execution of Louis XVI, he wrote: 'Because of the Revolution, divine authority ceases to found power; authority no longer belongs to God, but to time, whose free exuberance puts kings to death.'¹⁰⁰ In a declaration on time, the tense is worth attention; the free exuberance of time still puts kings to death; ten years after Desnos gave the order to commute the condemned king's last words.

Max Ernst's collage novel *Une Semaine de Bonté*, produced in 1933, offers an analogy for Bataille's principle of the free exuberance of time, working paste, redundant histories, outmoded fictions, and outdated reportage into a truly effective representation of the revolutionary present.¹⁰¹ In the first of two images that make explicit references to the French Revolution, the revolutionary guillotine (replete with soldiers and wicker basket) is resurrected under the auspices of the Third Republic (Figure 6). The executioner proudly displaying his top-hat, while in the foreground stands a lion-headed figure, with bared neck and tied hands, next to go to the scaffold. The second image, on the following page, unites these collage-figures into a fearsome whole, as a now tiger-headed, but still frock-coated and medal-wearing executioner holds up the severed head of his victim next to the window of the guillotine (Figure 7). The dripping head, with features exaggerated in a stereotypical pastiche of Jewish features, evokes the infamous murderer Troppman, and is held 'sous les griffes du Tigre' (in the claws of the 'tiger', Georges Clemenceau's,

99 'And what is fearlessly conquered – no longer in a duel where the death of the hero is risked against that of the monster, in exchange for an indifferent duration – is not an isolated creature; it is the very void and the vertiginous fall, it is TIME.' *Ibid.*, p.222.

100 Bataille, 'Propositions', *Visions of Excess*, p.200.

101 This representational potential was recognised in 1930, in Louis Aragon's essay on collage, *Le Peinture au Defi*, translated as 'The Challenge to Painting', in P. Hulten (ed.), trans. M. Palmer and N. Cole, *The Surrealists Look at Art*, California, 1990.

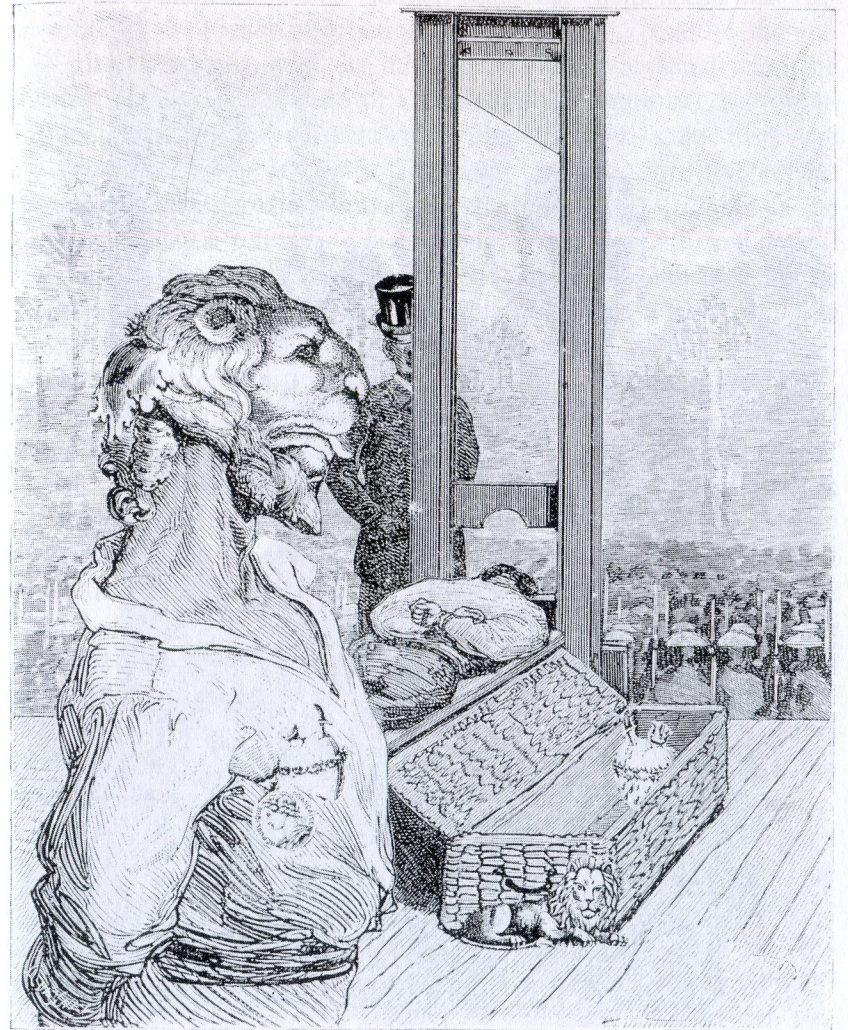


Fig 6: Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1934, plate 31, p33,
© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006



Fig 7: Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1934, plate 32, p34,
© ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006

nickname at the time).¹⁰² Clemenceau and Troppman complete the thematic cycle that Ernst begins with 'The Lion of Belfort', a controversial symbol of Franco-German relations. Clemenceau was responsible for the French negotiations at the treaty of Versailles and was thus also associated with the punitive retribution exacted upon the German people for the sake of French pride. Troppman, the Jewish criminal, signifies the outsider: widely blamed in antisemitic discourse for crime and disorder since Dreyfus. The Lion of Belfort, the 'example' or theme which threads together the chapter containing the guillotine images, refers to a huge monument carved into the natural rock in the town of Belfort in Eastern France, the site of a heroic defence of French soil against the German army. At a time when the rise of fascism was leading artists and writers to rethink their perceptions of national histories and identities, discounting the simplifications and rationalisations of didactic realism as nails in the coffin of active spectatorship, Ernst turned to two of the most unequivocal of French monuments: the guillotine and the Lion of Belfort. But although representing the relationship between a lost revolutionary past and politically divisive, nationalist present, Ernst chose an emphatically local, contextually contingent set of images. Although highly effective, it bluntly declares that as a collage, it, like the constituent historical narratives from which it was assembled, is necessarily a paper-thin construction.

Ernst's carefully and self-consciously constructed image plays tricks on the eye, right down to the almost invisible head-shaped area of cross-hatching in the lower right hand corner. This black mark, something like a smudged thumb-print, refuses to disappear, and refuses to admit properly to being a part of the collage process. *Une Semaine de Bonté* appeared as a series of pamphlets, and yet even the original collage refuses to reveal the logic behind its presence; whether it was a part of the original image, or a later addition, a part

102 L. Barthou, 'Sous les Griffes du Tigre,' *Les Annales*, 15 December 1929, pp.543-5. For an image of Troppmann, see M. Heine, *Recueil de Confessions et Observations Psycho-Sexuelles, tirés de la littérature médicale et présentés avec un avant propos* (c.1935), Paris, 1957, pp.144-5: 'Masque mortuaire de Troppmann, Pederaste assassin.'

of the past or a trace of the present. It is precisely what is wrong with the picture that animates it, driving it provocatively toward the viewer, threatening a revelation that never occurs.

Bataille allows that the obelisk might remain in the place de la Concorde only if it perpetually threatens to disturb, to wrench the passer-by into consciousness. Walter Benjamin's own description of the power of historical imagery, set out in his 'Theoretics of Knowledge' confirms that perhaps the most effective and revolutionary activity might also be one of reception.¹⁰³ Or more importantly perhaps, for surrealism's cabinet of curiosities, one of recognition:

It isn't that the past casts its light on the present or the present casts its light on the past: rather, an image is that in which the past and the present moment flash into a constellation. In other words: image is dialectic at a standstill [...] The image that is read, I mean the image at the moment of recognition, bears to the highest degree the stamp of the critical, dangerous impulse that lies at the source of all reading.¹⁰⁴

Returning to Benjamin at this point completes the trajectory from 'The Last Snapshot' to 'Theses on the Concept of History': from the surrealists' historical snapshots to the revolutionary moment opening up at the heart of history.¹⁰⁵ Following Desnos from Breton to Bataille brings us back in an instant at the guillotine around which so much seems to have revolved: Desnos's 'paper balloon drifts lightly over the theatre of revolution' once more.

In 1938, when Bataille wrote his essay on the obelisk, he was involved in the organisation of the College of Sociology, giving many

103 Fred Schwartz, describes the 'revolutionary viewer' in relation to Benjamin's earlier text 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility', relating 'distracted apperception', to a critical approach and expert position: 'The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde', p.401.

104 Benjamin, 'Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress', *Philosophical Forum* 15, Nos.1-2, Winter 1983-1984, p.8.

105 According to Margaret Cohen her project is situated 'under the aegis of rescue as conceptualised in Konvolut N rather than the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' because the urgency regulating [her] project does not approach the terrifying pressure of Fascism leading Benjamin to re-articulate the flash of historical recuperation in 1940.' Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, p.10.

lectures alongside Michel Leiris, Roger Caillois and Pierre Klossowski, among others. The College was, as Denis Hollier has noted, deeply concerned with the operation of history in the face of fascism.¹⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, whose concerns seemed to have shadowed those of surrealism for many years, was a regular member of the audience and Hollier correctly insists upon his influence. The many points of contact between Bataille's 'Obelisk' and Benjamin's 'Theses' and 'Theoretics of Knowledge', attest to the proximity in which the texts were written and the issue of recognition, ties Benjamin to Bataille in the most direct terms.¹⁰⁷ Hollier's wry observation on the form that this influence took could stand as a general comment upon Benjamin's place in the surrealist order of things. 'Benjamin's frequentation contributes a lot to the aura of the College', Hollier suggests, 'But is it because of his presence - or because this presence went unnoticed? Benjamin was there and no one recognized him.'¹⁰⁸ This is the nature of the difficult, obtuse, but nonetheless essential character of Benjamin's place in the history of surrealism.

106 D. Hollier (ed.), *The College of Sociology 1937-1939*, trans. B. Wing, Minnesota, 1988, pp.viii-xxix.

107 'To the extent that the obelisk is now, with all its dead grandeur, *recognised*, it no longer facilitates the flight of consciousness; it focuses the attention on the guillotine': the emphasis is Bataille's, Bataille, 'The Obelisk', *Visions of Excess*, p.221.

108 D. Hollier (ed.), *The College of Sociology*, p.xxi.

Chapter Two

La Révolution surréaliste – the surrealist revolution

La République sera conservatrice ou elle ne sera pas (Adolphe Thiers)¹

La Beauté sera CONVULSIVE ou ne sera pas (André Breton).²

On 15th October 1923, Albert Mathiez, a professor of History at the University of Dijon, appeared at the Club de Faubourg in Paris, a popular venue renowned for lively debates and theatrical performances, to deliver a eulogy entitled 'Une figure de la Révolution; Robespierre.'³ The episode in itself is unremarkable, although a historian of Mathiez's reputation, who had only recently edited a prestigious new edition of Jean Jaurès' *Histoire Socialiste*, might have been used to lecturing in more salubrious surroundings. What is remarkable is that Mathiez, a committed left-wing intellectual and respected authority on the French Revolution should have been deputising for Robert Desnos, a twenty-three year old, little-known poet, at that time associated with the avant-garde literary journal *Littérature*, a platform for Dada poets and writers in Paris. The circumstances which brought Mathiez and Desnos into synchronous orbit in 1923 mark the unlikely intersection of the three terms central to this book: surrealism, history and revolution.

Mathiez's lecture was the result of a missed appointment, an appointment which Desnos, along with his collaborators Louis Aragon, André Breton and Paul Eluard, should perhaps have kept. It was not however, the first incursion that Mathiez had made into the world of avant-garde Parisian literature. In March of the same year, 1923, he had written to the journal *Littérature* to congratulate Desnos on

1 F. Goguel, *La Politique des Partis sous la IIIe République*, 4eme édition, Paris, 1957, p.54.

2 A. Breton, *Nadja*, Paris, 1963.

3 M.-C. Dumas, *Robert Desnos ou L'Exploration des Limites*, Paris, 1980, p.55.

stepping forward to defend the reputation of Maximilien Robespierre.⁴ The letter, addressed 'Citoyen' and sitting uncomfortably beneath a text attributed to the Marquis de Mirabeau, is evidence of the coming together of two worlds around arguably the most contentious figure in French revolutionary history. Its appearance, it could be argued, is indicative of the way that surrealism would proceed in matters of heritage, history and memory. While scholars like Mathiez gave their whole lives over to the rehabilitation of 'unacceptable' historical figures, surrealism redressed the balance using the confrontational tactics that Aragon (a past master) described as 'scandal, my pasture'.⁵

The scandal in question here began with what Desnos considered a 'particularly odious' article on Robespierre and Marat in *Le Gaulois*, written by Weiland Mayr. Desnos was so incensed that he tracked the author down, slapped him across the face and challenged him to appear at the Club de Faubourg to defend himself in a public debate.⁶ This intervention is doubly remarkable in that the article, although directed at the reputation of Robespierre, was in fact directed primarily at Mathiez. Mayr was concerned about the recent appointment of Philippe Sagnac to the prestigious chair of history of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne, an event that he interpreted as a defeat for the 'Robespierristes' who had supported Mathiez for the post and who, he said, were now 'in mourning'.⁷ It was however the initial slap in the name of Robespierre that earned Desnos a warm vote of thanks from Mathiez ('for the slap in the face given to Robespierre's insulter'), but despite such encouragement, the threatened confrontation between Mayr and Desnos was not to be.⁸ The date for the debate came and went, allowing Mathiez to step into the breach some

4 *Littérature*, Nouvelle Series, No.10, May 1923, p.9.

5 L. Aragon, 'Scandal Ma Pature', *Littérature*, Nouvelle Series, No.10, May 1923, pp.10-13.

6 Dumas, *Robert Desnos ou L'Exploration des Limites*, p.54. See also R. Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes 1922-1930*, Dumas (ed.), Paris, 1978, p.267.

7 J. Friguglietti, *Albert Mathiez: Historien Révolutionnaire 1874-1932*, trans. M.-F. Pernot, Paris, 1974, pp.149-50.

8 'toutes nos félicitations pour la gifle dont il a cinglé le visage de l'insulteur de Robespierre', *ibid.*, p.528.

six months later, the words of Gracchus Babeuf no doubt ringing in his ears: 'to revive Robespierre is to revive all the active patriots of the republic, and with them the people!'⁹

Robert Pierre Desnos, was, at least in part, motivated by his nominal identification with *Robes-pierre* but this does not explain Desnos's inclusion of Marat in his complaint against Mayr, or the act of casual violence that he seemed prepared to commit in his hero's defence.¹⁰ What would become the trademarked 'surrealist slap' (uncannily like, but not to be confused with, the more bourgeois challenge to a duel), was usually reserved for serious matters of artistic malpractice like bad theatre. Neither does any account of Desnos' identification with Robespierre, who had recently resurfaced alongside many of Desnos's contemporary heroes in his 'cimetière de la Sémillante' (Figure 25, Chapter 3), take into account the startling coincidence of the period of the poet's increasing fascination with his eighteenth-century namesake and Albert Mathiez's hard-fought historical 'rehabilitation' of Robespierre as a heroic revolutionary figure.¹¹ As Mathiez himself wrote in 1924:

The central figure of [my] work is Robespierre; not an imaginary Robespierre, the blood-stained puppet of thermidorian fabrication, but the real Robespierre, a just and clear-sighted statesman who lived but for the good of his country.¹²

What is at stake here, however, is whether the provocative nature of Desnos's intervention puts pressure on the comparatively gentle sedimentation of historical revisionism or whether in fact the reverse is

9 A. Mathiez, 'Babeuf and Robespierre' (May 1917), *The Fall of Robespierre and other Essays*, trans., London 1927, p.249. The original date is important as between May 1917 and 1927 when the collection was edited, Mathiez had seen first the October Revolution in Russia and then the failure of the French left (S.F.I.O.) to join the Third International at Tours in 1920.

10 Dumas, *Robert Desnos ou L'Exploration des Limites*, pp.54-5. Desnos made his own use of this equation in his 'Confession d'une enfant du siècle', *la Révolution surréaliste* 6, March 1926.

11 Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides*, pp.102-3, see also, Desnos, *Oeuvres*, Dumas (ed.), Paris, 1999, pp.106-7 and 118-19.

12 Mathiez, *The Fall of Robespierre and other Essays*, p.ix; the introduction is dated Dijon 1924.

true, and the radical nature of Mathiez's revisionist rhetoric mitigates Desnos's action in advance, preparing their mutual enemy for an ineffectual slap. How, in other words, might we understand Desnos's attitudes to revolutionary rhetoric in the light of the discourse around revolutionary historiography in the France of the Third Republic? If we accept that saying anything about Robespierre (even 'my name sounds similar to his') in the 1920s was bound up in, and a contribution towards, the on-going process of the re-signification of the French Revolution (particularly Jacobinism and the Terror), then the first priority for understanding surrealist attitudes to Revolution must be an account of this process.¹³ What follows here, then, is an attempt to chart this terrain, first through the historiography of the Revolution in the Third Republic, then an account of the representation of these histories in contexts relevant to the formation of surrealist revolutionary thought.

* * *

Reading the French Revolution as an on-going concern, a constellation of notional concepts (facts, events, causes, effects) suspended in the discourse of historiography has become something of a convention in itself.¹⁴ In some ways, the French Revolution is the terrain *par*

13 Although Robespierre is the focus of this chapter, there were also a number of startling evocations of the figure of Saint Just by surrealist writers. Pierre de Massot, who had written an account of the 'pre-revolutionary' Parisian prefect Etienne Marcel (d.1358) for *La Révolution Surréaliste* 7 in 1926 (pp.24–5), had previously written a book entitled *Saint-Just ou le Divin bourreau*, which Paul Eluard reviewed in *La Révolution Surréaliste* 5, 1925, p.29. Mona Ozouf has noted the strange attraction of Saint-Just for literary avant-gardes in France; see F. Furet and M. Ozouf, *Acteurs, Dictionnaire Critique de la Révolution Française*, Paris, 1992, p.273.

14 See for example: A. Cobban, *Historians and the Causes of the French Revolution*, London, 1946; J. Godechot, *Un jury pour la Révolution*, Paris, 1974; F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. E. Forster, Cambridge and Paris, 1981; A. Soboul, trans. A.A. Knutson, New York, 1988; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise*, London and New York, 1990; P. Nora (ed.) *Les Lieux de Mémoire, I,II,III* (7 vols), Paris, 1984–1992.

excellence for discussions of the ways in which history has been and continues to be constructed.¹⁵ Throughout the nineteenth century and as well into the twentieth, the history of the French Revolution has been relentlessly told and re-told, packaged and re-packaged, sold and re-sold from points all along the political spectrum. As early as 1873, Elie Sorin's populist *Histoire de la République Française*, concluded each chapter of revolutionary history with brief excerpts from other historians describing the same events, so that Sorin's audience might witness this phenomenon for themselves.¹⁶ A century later the historian Jacques Godechot described this cabal of interested parties as a 'Jury for the Revolution': a knowingly inappropriate label applied by an exasperated foreman.¹⁷ Such histories of the Revolution are usually divided by the political soubriquets which the Revolution itself was seen to have set in irrevocable opposition. The republican tradition, traced back to the writings of Joseph Barnave during the Revolution, consists of the histories of Etienne Cabet (1839), Alphonse de Lamartine (1848), Louis Blanc (1847–1862) but perhaps most famously Jules Michelet (1847–1853) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1856). Meanwhile the opposing tradition, traced back beyond the Restoration, encompasses incensed Catholics, monarchists and bourgeois reactionaries from the Abbé Barruel (1797–1799) and François Mignet (1824) to the post-Commune heavyweight Hippolyte Taine (1876).¹⁸

The Third Republic, however, which Thiers had insisted upon being intrinsically conservative in 1871 (as the quote beginning this chapter makes clear), gradually saw an increase in the influence of the politics of the so-called 'radical' left, the symbolic manifestation of which was the first celebration of a rejuvenated 14th of July in 1880. But as Christian Amalvi has described, this event was less a cele-

15 J. Revel, Introduction to *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, J. Revel and L. Hunt (eds), trans. A. Goldhammer, New York, 1995, pp.5–14.

16 E. Sorin, *Histoire de la République Française* (avant-propos par Jules Claretie), Paris, 1873.

17 Godechot, *Un jury pour la Révolution*.

18 The dates in brackets correspond to the publication of histories of the French Revolution by each author.

bration of popular insurrection than a means of negotiating and pacifying revolutionary history.¹⁹ What was, in essence, still a very reluctantly *republican* republic may have appeared no longer to fear the Revolution and to have embraced the principles of 1789, but the subject remained deeply divisive. In order to rationalise such divisions, the nominally radical but actually deeply conservative Third Republic settled down to wait for François-Alphonse Aulard to complete the superhuman task of editing and publishing *all* the relevant official documents pertaining to the Revolution, to produce a 'scientific' history which would settle the debate once and for all.²⁰

Aulard's project was securely grounded in this contemporary political climate, and was oriented towards potentially verifiable political truths rather than controversial conflicting accounts of popular actions. By looking in depth at the transcribed proceedings of the Legislative Assembly and the Convention, Aulard built up a comprehensive picture of a political reality behind the dramatic and (from a republican perspective at least) romantic events usually described. Aulard was thus fundamentally in tune with the republicanism espoused by the 'radical' politics of the time, playing down the myth of excessive violence by pointing to the political pressures involved in safeguarding the principles enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Aulard's *Histoire Politique de la Révolution Française* (1901) was undoubtedly aimed at a wide audience, initially having been published in cheap, collectable one franc 'fascicules'. It was perhaps unfortunate, then, that it emerged in tandem with the first volumes of Jean Jaurès's vast *Histoire Socialiste* (1901–1904), which dealt with the Revolution. Jaurès, a popular socialist politician, used a two year absence from public office to produce his own longwinded but eminently more readable and ideologically relevant account by returning to the eyewitness perspective of Barnave. Jaures's book

19 C. Amalvi, 'Bastille Day', *Realms of Memory Vol.III Symbols*, P. Nora (ed.), trans. A. Goldhammer, New York, 1992, pp.117–59.

20 A. Aulard, *Les Orateurs de la Constituante, de la Législative, et de la Convention* (3 vols), Paris, 1882–1886. Aulard, *La Société de Jacobins. Recueil de documents* (6 vols), Paris, 1889–1897. Aulard, *Recueil des actes du Comité de Salut public* (21 vols), Paris 1889–1911.

evidently aimed at a slightly wealthier reader than Aulard's, was comprehensive, richly illustrated, and full of dramatic citations from a wide variety of revolutionary publications.²¹ These sources, which included Marat's *L'Ami du Peuple*, and Hébert's incendiary *Le Père Duchesne* made Aulard's cautious 'political history' look very dry indeed.

In terms of their relative degrees of influence, however, it is important to note that Aulard had also been responsible for the account of the revolution in Ernest Lavisse's recently revised history textbooks produced for use in schools.²² Changes to the curriculum were made following an 'Arrête Ministeriel' of January 1894, which stipulated that history taught in schools should 'contribute to the development of heart-felt patriotic sentiments'.²³ The first history textbook to be designed under this ideological framework was jointly authored by Aulard and Antonin Debidour (the Inspector-General of Public Education), who was responsible for everything within the volume *other* than the history of the Revolution.²⁴ Aulard (and those who later updated his text) consequently presented the Revolution in what were relatively militant terms for a new generation of republican children who were to be instructed in the 'science' of citizenship and informed about the positive aspects of their revolutionary heritage. This is of interest because the men who would launch *la Révolution surréaliste* in 1924 with a call to bring about 'a new declaration of the

21 For a discussion of Jaurès' use of images see *Jean Jaurès Illustrer la Révolution*, Cahier Jaurès No.1, Actes et colloque de Castres, November 1989; essays by T. Gretton and M. Vovelle.

22 A. Aulard and A. Debidour. *Histoire de France (cours moyen) à la usage des écoles primaires et des classes élémentaires des lycées et collèges*, Paris, 1895. This version was updated by other authors in 1902 and 1905 along the same guidelines; see M. Ozouf, 'La Révolution à l'école', *L'école de la France: Essais sur la Révolution, l'utopie et l'enseignement*, Paris, 1984, p.235. Also, P. Nora, 'Lavisse, The Nation's Teacher', *Realms of Memory II, Traditions*, P. Nora (ed.), trans. A. Goldhammer, New York, 1997, pp.169–70.

23 C. Plomion, *Histoire de France, Cours moyen: depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, Paris 1897 and 1902. On the specific theme of patriotism see also M. Ozouf, 'Le thème du patriotisme dans les manuels primaires,' *L'école de la France*, pp.185–213.

24 Aulard and Debidour, *Histoire de France*.

rights of man' would have been the first generation to matriculate under an increasingly confident republican education regime in which an illustrated version hung in many classrooms (Figure 8).

There are obvious precedents for such a backward glance at the soon-to-be avant-gardists' schoolbooks: Molly Nesbit, for example, has been instrumental in drawing attention to the direct relationship between early twentieth-century avant-garde practice and educational strategies instigated by the Third Republic in relation to the work of Marcel Duchamp.²⁵ Jack Spector, on the other hand, has described surrealist aesthetic and philosophical attempts at 'breaking the institutional codes' that privileged rationalism, Cartesian logic and the social order, above freedom of expression.²⁶ a call to social conformity that can, perhaps, be traced back to the paranoid rhetoric of Thiers' assertion that the Republic be conservative or simply *not be*. Such accounts of the relationship between the French education system at the turn of the century and avant-garde ideology between the wars suggest that a historiographical account of the Revolution during the Third Republic would be incomplete without a consideration of the way in which it was taught. In effect what is required is an account of the changing nature of revolutionary history, theory and imagination, over a period bounded at one end by the publication of Aulard and Jaurès' histories of the revolution (the start of the school careers of many future surrealists), and at the other by the outbreak of World War Two, the end of surrealism as a radical 'movement' and the end of an era in revolutionary historiography. This period, broadly speaking between 1900 and 1940, includes the first major publications by historians like Albert Mathiez and Georges Lefebvre, but must also be seen in the context that the works of Aulard and Jaurès provide.²⁷

- 25 M. Nesbit, 'Ready-Made Originals,' *October* 37, Summer 1986, pp.53-64, and *Their Common Sense*, London, 2000.
- 26 J. Spector, 'Breaking the Institutional Codes', *Surrealist Art and Writing 1919/1939*, Cambridge, 1997, pp.22-41.
- 27 Mathiez, *La Révolution Française*, Paris, 1922 and G. Lefebvre, *Les Paysans du nord pendant la Révolution*, Paris, 1924. Georges Lefebvre's groundbreaking 1789 was not published until 1939 but Lefebvre was active and influential in journals during the period.



Fig 8: Charles Fournigault, 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen', 1905

Let us say more precisely [says Albert Soboul, that there is] a progressive tradition of revolutionary historiography, from Michelet to Lefebvre, passing through Jaurès, Aulard, and Mathiez, and whatever may have been the shades of difference among these men – the only tradition which, in its principled progression, has been and remains scientific.²⁸

It is a central premise of this study that the blossoming of this progressive scientific tradition, outlined by H. Stuart Hughes, produced an involuntary reflex, of which dada and surrealism were critical manifestations.²⁹ Neither is it a coincidence that this reflex was initially manifest in the journal *Littérature* around 1920, the date, which Régis Debray has suggested, is the end of the 'cycle universitaire' and the beginning of the 'cycle éditorial' in the French intellectual tradition.³⁰

However, rather than giving a general account of the impact and force of this historical tradition on the nascent surrealist movement, it is perhaps more practical and indeed effective to restrict discussion to a single, common elements in both intellectual traditions. The precise nature of the relationship between radical literary avant-gardes and those responsible for producing revolutionary histories can be best explained by looking at one episode and the images associated with it: 'The Revolution' as Robert Desnos wrote in *la Révolution surréaliste*, 'that is to say, The Terror'.³¹

28 A. Soboul, *Understanding the French Revolution*, p.257.

29 H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: the reorientation of European social thought 1890–1930*, London, 1967.

30 P. Ory and J.-F. Sirinelli, *Les Intellectuels en France de l'Affaire Dreyfus à nos jours*, Paris, 1986, p.30.

31 Desnos, 'Description d'une Révolte Prochaine', *La Révolution Surréaliste* 3, April 1925, p.26.

'History' as Thomas Carlyle was among the first to acknowledge 'in dealing with this Reign of Terror, has had her own difficulties. While the Phenomenon continued in its primary state, as mere "Horrors of the French Revolution," there was an abundance to be said and shrieked'.³² By the time Aulard reached 10 August 1792 in his *Histoire Politique*, however, the shrieking had subsided and in its place was a complex argument about whether or not the 'phenomenon' had in fact been a system. Aulard's introduction to the most emotive of revolutionary subjects does not begin, as might be expected, with a vivid historical account based upon documentary evidence.³³ Instead, Aulard sets out a complex ideological argument, directed, as Robert Gildea points out, against Edgar Quinet's view of the Terror: in other words, historiography before history.³⁴

Aulard eschews the 'horrors' of the guillotine in favour of an epistemological debate about why it might be better to describe the Terror as a regime rather than a system, whether it was any use as a description of a means of government, and when therefore, the 'official' Terror commenced. To understand what the Terror was, Aulard suggests, we must look to the law of 23 ventôse, year II, the contravention of any aspect of which designated the guilty party as an enemy of the people: an offence punishable by death. The law itself is explained in terms of dire necessity under the threat of war from the monarchies of Europe. It had the primary function of making examples of those who acted against the people but also the secondary, less palatable function of silencing the enemies of Robespierre. Aulard suggests that Robespierre perfected the Terror as a 'means of revolutionary government' to the detriment of both Danton,

32 T. Carlyle, *The French Revolution. A History*, London, 1837, p.284.

33 Aulard, *Histoire Politique de la Révolution Française* (10 fascicules), Paris, 1901, pp.357–66.

34 R. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.41.

whom Aulard championed as the exemplary revolutionary figure, and the Revolution as a whole.³⁵

Jean Jaurès on the other hand, illustrates the unfolding drama and provides portraits of the key players. Marat, Robespierre, and the 'Veritable Guillotine Ordinaire' punctuate a text which never strays far from the emotional effect of the events described (Figures 9 and 10):

There was a magnificent illusion of concorde [...] heralding the next great divisions for everyone. The death of Louis XVI had raised revolutionary passions [...] some began to say that that guillotine was a solution and that it hadn't exhausted its pacifying virtue with the king's death. It was in February that the jacobins heard without protest, the sinister words, 'the national razor must take a walk through France'.³⁶

The poetic metaphor of the 'illusion of concorde' surrounding the death of the king, a subtle reference to the name given to the site of the king's execution, would be reprised by Georges Bataille nearly thirty years later.³⁷ It is tempting to suggest a direct link, and to wonder whether, had Bataille read the passage, he might also have found a place for Jaurès's evocative re-institution of the phrase 'national razor' as well. Jaurès was concerned with the political efficacy of violence and the necessary resolution of ends and means, wishing to preserve the Revolution as an indivisible 'bloc' (to use Georges Clemenceau's contemporary term).³⁸ Jaurès's cautious attitude to revolutionary violence can be seen as having been motivated in part at least by his constant references to the revolution in terms of contemporary socialist politics. As Jaurès's critic Georges Sorel

35 Aulard, *Histoire Politique de la Révolution Française*, p.366. For a response to this idea see G. LeBon, *The Psychology of Revolution*, trans. B. Miall, London and Leipzig, 1913, p.215. LeBon cites Albert Sorel: 'Before it became a system it was a means of government, and the system was only invented to justify the means.'

36 J. Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste, Tome IV, La Convention II*, Paris, 1901–1904, p.999 (see appendix).

37 G. Bataille, 'The Obelisk', *Visions of Excess*, A. Stoekl (ed.), Minnesota, 1996, pp.213–22.

38 Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.40.



Fig 9: 'Robespierre a l'age de 24 ans', Jean Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste, Tome IV, La Convention II*, Paris, c.1901, p.997, Courtesy of the Department of History of Art, University College London

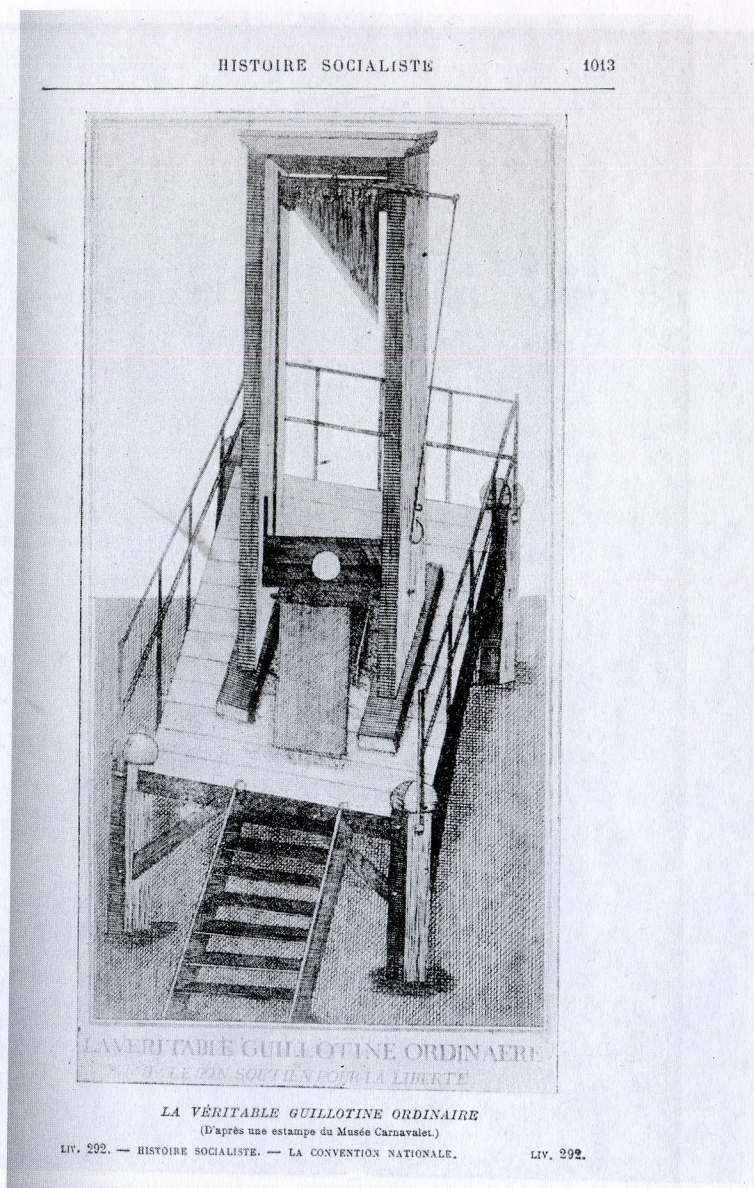


Fig 10: 'La Véritable Guillotine Ordinaire', Jean Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste*, Tome IV, *La Convention II*, Paris, c.1901, p.1013, Courtesy of the Department of History of Art, University College London

put it: 'It seems to me that Jaurès himself, when writing the *Histoire Socialiste* of '93, thought more than once of the teachings which this past, a thousand times dead, might yield to him for the conduct of the present.'³⁹

Sorel, who described Jaurès's book as 'tedious' and admitted to not having had the patience to read it, was writing from a contradictory political perspective. But in spite, or perhaps as a result of, his reticence to engage with the narrative Jaurès offered, Sorel saw the problem at the heart of Jaurès's attitude to the Terror:

For a long time I had reckoned that Jaurès would be capable of every ferocity against the vanquished; I saw that I had not been mistaken; but I should not have thought that he was capable of so much platitude: in his eyes the vanquished are always in the wrong, and victory fascinates our great defender of external justice so much that he is ready to consent to every proscription demanded of him: 'Revolutions' he says, [quoting Jaurès] 'claim from a man the most frightful sacrifices, not only of his rest, not only of his life, but of human tenderness and pity'.⁴⁰

Jaurès and other 'purveyors of the guillotine' as Sorel described them, had long been associated with the most negative characterisations of authoritarian revolutionary violence.

'The Supreme Argument' proposed by *Le Chambard Socialiste* in 1894, fits into a long line of negative stereotypes involving guillotine imagery and Third Republic Jacobinism (Figure 11).⁴¹ Elsewhere, a striking design from a series by Adolphe Willette pictures a naked, spread-eagled madame guillotine captioned 'I am holy democracy [...] I await my lovers.' Above, an old street light, inscribed '93' conjures echoes of the mob cry 'à la lanterne!' and the swift, careless justice of the street (Figure 12). In the distance, a barely disguised Panthéon links the aspirations of the Third Republic with the crimes of the First, staining the hands of Victor Hugo (who had been placed in the Panthéon alongside Voltaire and Rousseau in 1885)

39 G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E. Hume, New York, 1941, p.101.

40 Ibid., p.119.

41 See C. Amalvi, 'Bastille Day', pp.128–9, on the use of the phrase 'à la lanterne' by opponents of republicanism during the 1880s and 1890s.



Fig 11: 'Suprême Argument ?...', *Le Chambard Socialiste*, 10 February 1894, © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. F.misc.367



Fig 12: Willette, 'Je suis la Sainte Démocratie : J'attends mes Amants', *Courier Français*, Paris, 29 January 1888

with the blood of the victims of the Terror.⁴² This image, produced in 1888, several years before that of *Le Chambard Socialiste*, is redolent of a moment when dramatic warnings about the radical new republic were calculated to inspire fear in the conservative population. Such rhetoric was tempered by counter-memories of the violence of state authority witnessed during the suppression of the Commune.

In November 1901, the satirical revue *L'Assiette au Beurre*, produced a special issue on state violence as retribution under the title 'Vengeances Sociales' (Figure 13). The artist, Jouve, relies heavily on guillotine imagery, transposing the most potent totem of revolutionary 'justice' into contemporary political debate. 'Is it really necessary that the justice of men ends up in a mass grave?' A question directed towards a white bearded judge who is guillotining his own arm in the midst of a heap of corpses (Figure 14). Georges Sorel's syndicalist rhetoric retraces the argument about violence and the state that runs through these images, balancing the fear of genuine popular uprising with the certainty of a responsive, violent retribution which the state would then justify as necessary by historical example: 'Their efforts will only result in the maintenance of those ideas about the State which provoked the bloody acts of '93, whilst the idea of a class war, on the contrary, tends to refine the conception of violence.'⁴³

Both Aulard's obfuscatory sidestep and Jaurès' positive but relatively timid recourse to the language of self-sacrifice and necessity can be seen as tactical responses to the overwhelming influence of the post-Commune analysis of the relationship between the Revolution and the Terror associated with Hippolyte Taine.⁴⁴ As the British historian Alfred Cobban put it:

42 This tactic would be revived by Max Ernst in his collage series *Une Semaine de Bonté*, in which guillotine imagery is juxtaposed with Third Republic characters wearing republican medals (see Figures 6, 7 and 39). Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté*, Paris, 1934, pp.33–4.

43 Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, p.122.

44 T. Zeldin, *France 1848–1945, Volume I, Ambition, Love and Politics*, Oxford, 1973, p.744. See also George Rudé, *Robespierre, Portrait of a Revolutionary Democrat*, London, 1975, pp.72–3.

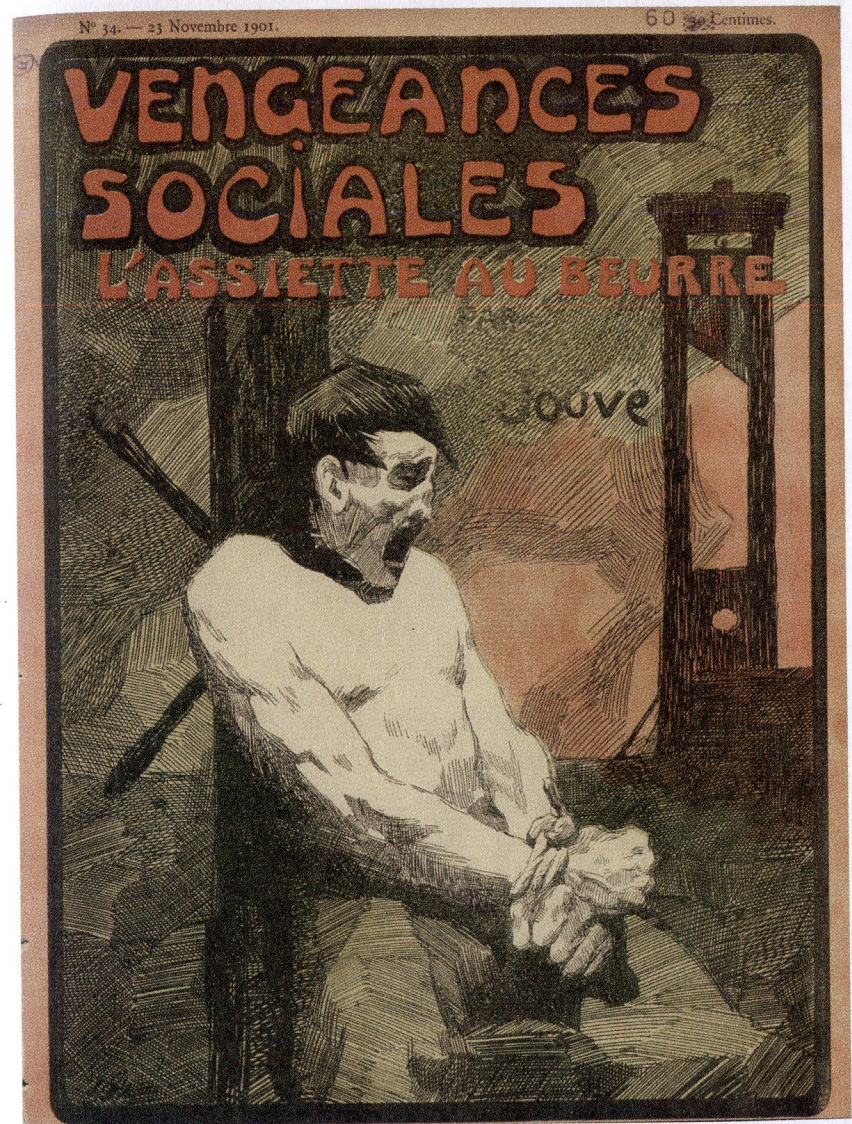


Fig 13: Jouve, 'Vengeances Sociales', *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No.34, 23 November 1901



Fig 14: Jouve, 'L'Œuvre. Est-il nécessaire que la justice des hommes aboutisse au charnier?', *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No.34, 23 November 1901, p.518

In the first place he [Taine] realised that the revolution was accompanied throughout by the terror, and that this was not an accidental but an essential and inseparable element in it. [Furthermore] he found the source of revolutionary terrorism in a state of mind, in that spirit of criticism and destruction which was born of the abstract and universalising *raison raisonnée*.⁴⁵

Taine was also well known as the author of the proto-psychological text *De L'Intelligence*, which was highly influential and which a close follower, Gustave LeBon, integrated with his critique of the Revolution in his own *Psychology of Revolution*. In his discussion of the Terror, LeBon, cites Emile Ollivier, a one time 'republican' and later minister to Napoleon III, to characterise it as 'a Jacquerie, a regularised pillage, the vastest enterprise of theft that any association of criminals has ever organised'.⁴⁶ However, in his consideration of the 'Hesitations of recent Historians of the Revolution', LeBon draws attention to a curious admission by the right-wing historian Louis Madelin: 'Today, I find it even more difficult to form a brief judgement. Causes, facts, and consequences seem to me to be still extremely debatable subjects.'⁴⁷ LeBon then continues by turning to the question of the 'defenders of the Revolution,' (by which he means Aulard), who he says 'justify every act of violence [...] pleading extenuating circumstances', a point which he illustrates with an extract from the historian's account of the terror from his (Aulard's) 'history of France for the use of schools':

Blood flowed in waves; there were acts of injustice and crimes which were useless from the point of view of national defence, and odious. But men had lost their heads in the tempest, and, harassed by a thousand dangers, the patriots struck out in their rage.⁴⁸

LeBon's disingenuous use of this text is calculated to rouse the sensibilities of his bourgeois (and particularly Catholic) readership, by implicating the 'jacobin' Aulard in the corruption of their children via the 'maitresse jacobine' in the classroom. This was a reference to a

45 Cobban, *Historians and the Causes of the French Revolution*, p.19.

46 G. LeBon, *The Psychology of Revolution*, p.215.

47 Ibid., p.131.

48 Ibid.

bizarre controversy known as the 'war of the textbooks' that culminated in children being ordered by their own parents *not* to read the authorised histories of the Revolution provided by their schools.

* * *

A significant and wide-spread effect on the population as a whole, of the process of the separation of church and state in France between 1902 and 1905 was the suspension of the rights of religious 'congregations' who ran Catholic schools, to operate within the law.⁴⁹ This heavy-handed suppression of the rights of Catholic parents to see their children educated in accordance with their faith was further exacerbated by the inexorable 'laicisation' of the public schools to the point where by 1905, it was claimed, the name of God had been expurgated from all state textbooks.⁵⁰ As Debidour had intimated in 1895, in an account of the progress of public education towards Ernest Lavisse's vision of a universally 'free, obligatory and *laïque*' system: 'religion has its place in church and not at school, and the school-master doesn't have the duties of a priest'.⁵¹ However, rather than putting an end to Catholic education, which was believed to be of a higher quality and was subsequently popular with bourgeois parents, the prolonged crisis consolidated Catholic support. Up to that point, public, lay schools had used the 'cours moyen' which followed Aulard's 1895 account of the Revolution, and Catholic schools had produced their own histories compatible with their religious and

49 The law prohibiting congregations to teach was passed on 7 July 1904 but was the final stage in a process which had begun in earnest with Emile Combes attempt to close the same schools in the summer of 1902: C. Lelièvre, *Histoires des Institutions Scolaires 1789-1989*; Poitiers, 1990, pp.100-3. Goguel, *La Politique des Partis sous la IIIème République*, Paris, 1957, pp.124-5. See also C. Langlois, 'Catholics and Seculars'.

50 J. Freyssinet-Dominjon, *Les Manuels de l'école libre 1882-1959. Travaux et recherches de science politique*, Paris, 1959, p.75.

51 'parce que la religion a sa place à l'église et non à l'école et que l'instituteur ne doit pas avoir la charge d'un prêtre', Aulard and Debidour, *Histoire de France*, p.243.

political ideologies.⁵² Increased scrutiny and the publicity surrounding the 1905 law formally separating church and state meant that differences of opinion over the ways in which history was being taught became a schism between republicans who believed that Catholic texts were unpatriotic, and Catholics who believed that the lay texts were contrary to basic Catholic doctrine.

Another *L'Assiette au Beurre* image, this time from 1909, sums up republican fears about Catholic attitudes neatly, as indoctrinated 'Camelots du Roy' attempt to displace the Republic (Figure 15). In his annotated compendium, *L'Anti-Cléricalisme en France*, René Rémond reproduces examples of popular antagonism to the church during this period ranging from songs like 'La Marseillaise Anticléricale' to witty polemics like 'L'église sanglante'. Most relevant to the issue of education is a 'catéchisme anticlérical', which parodies the call and response form of Catholic liturgy but also the anti-republican indoctrination of the catholic youth.⁵³ A comparison of two contemporaneous textbooks sheds light on this mutual suspicion and what became known as the 'guerre des manuels' or war of the textbooks, in which priests and schoolmasters became frontline troops (Figure 16).⁵⁴

Students using Charles Plomion's state-approved 1902 edition of the *Histoire de France* were offered a glowing image of their republican heritage in which the figure of The Republic was depicted both on the cover (as a beacon of enlightenment) and in a reassuring

52 One of the central tenets of Catholic education being that it was a preparation for further education rather than simply a universal and sufficient general education. The limited and consequently limiting nature of the state 'cours élémentaire' and 'cours moyen' as merely basic knowledge for a mass audience has been recounted by Claude Lelièvre, *Histoires des Institutions Scolaires*, pp.107-43. This fact is evident from the study of the school books themselves, which vary considerably in quality and range. In the examples held in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the *Histoire de France* by the Catholic Abbé Pierre Gagnol was by far the most comprehensive textbook, in scope and detail, despite its partisan agenda.

53 R. Rémond, *L'Anti-cléricalisme en France de 1815 à nos jours*, Paris, 1976, pp.208-16.

54 Lelièvre, *Histoires des Institutions Scolaires*, p.103.

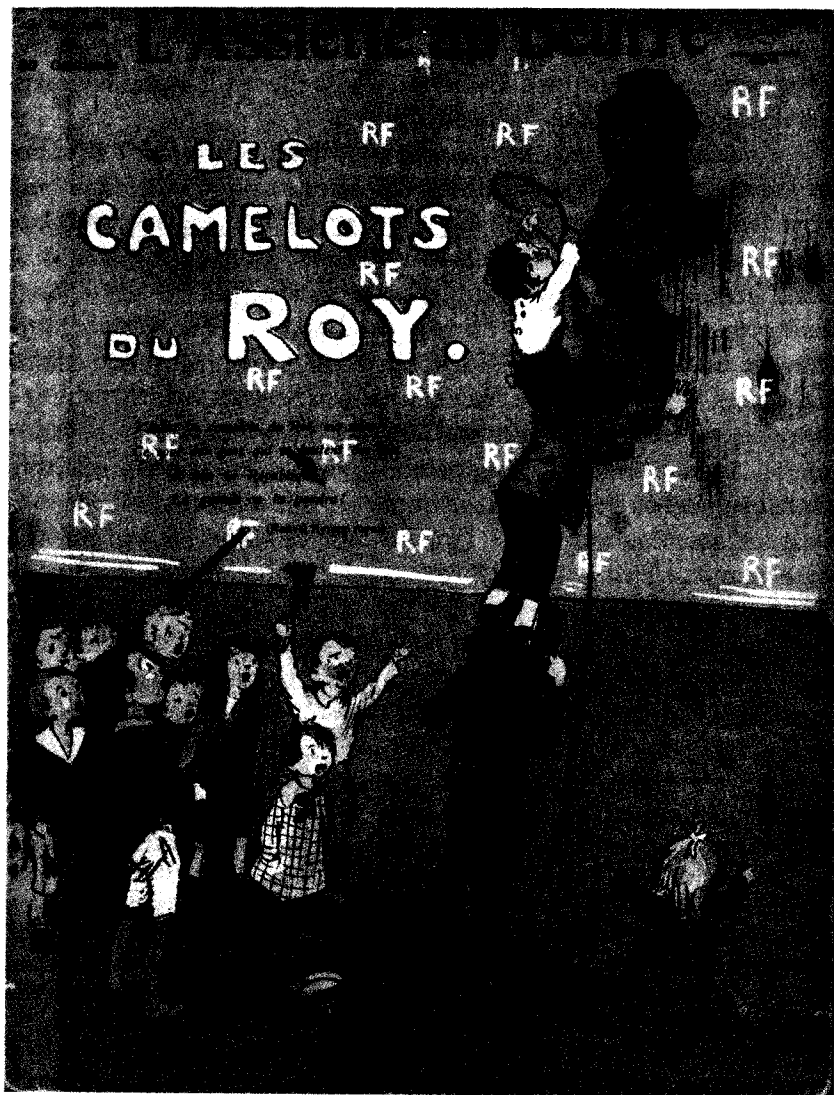


Fig 15: 'Les Camelots du Roy', *L'Assiette au Beurre*, No.417, 27 March 1909

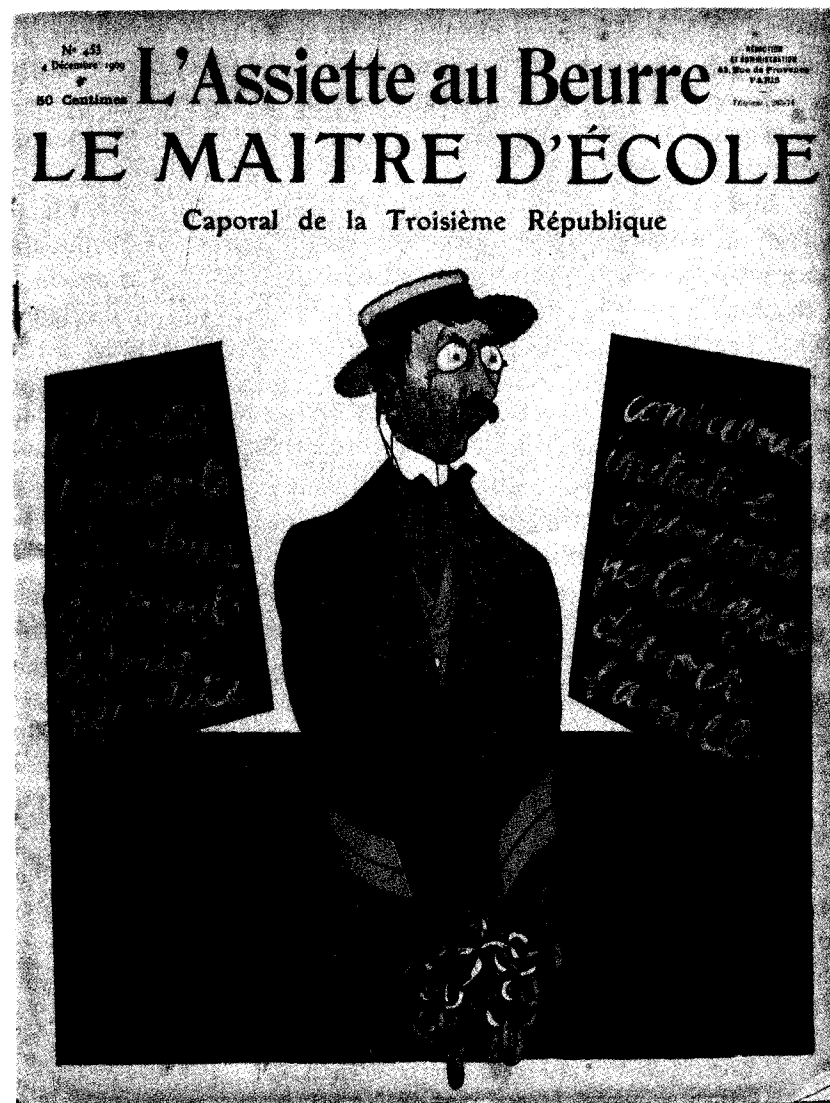


Fig 16: Gir, 'Le maitre d'école, Caporal de la Troisième République',
L'Assiette au Beurre, No.453, 1 December 1909

vision of the 'France of Today' inside (Figure 17).⁵⁵ This second image, the final illustration in the book, offers a synthesis of contrasting aspects of national identity: to the left, the *ancien régime* is indicated by the towers of Notre Dame and medieval weaponry, while to the right, the modern colonial Republic is represented by the Panthéon and the globe: the Republic stands proudly in the foreground holding a huge tricolor flag.

In stark contrast, Abbé Gagnol's 1902 *Histoire de France*, which would have been used by Catholic contemporaries of Plomion's students, begins with a sentimental image of Joan of Arc and provides a shocking corrective to the republican vision of the Republic (Figure 18).⁵⁶ The fresh-faced vision of liberty has been substituted for a terrifying old hag with the snake-hair of the Medusa and a serpent coiled around her sagging body. At her feet lay a pile of objects symbolising both monarchy and church, which she is about to consign to the flames. In the background a temple burns while at the foot of a guillotine, a clearly visible executioner holds up a severed head. What is perhaps an unremarkable post-thermidorean caricature assumes a new power in the context of young, impressionable minds. Given the vast ideological abyss between these two competing visions of the Republic it is no surprise that supporters of each sought to prevent the use of the other.

In 1909, the cardinals, archbishops and bishops of the Catholic Church in France published a list of twelve history books 'offensive to Christian Values' and reminded parents of their obligations to safeguard their children's moral and religious well being.⁵⁷ Parents were asked to ensure that their children boycott history lessons in which the proscribed books were used, either by removing the child from the school or instructing them not to recite certain parts of their history lessons.⁵⁸ The language and imagery of the Revolution was a major

55 C. Plomion, *Histoire de France*, front cover and p.307.

56 P. Gagnol, *Histoire de France*, Paris, 1902, p.441.

57 J. Freyssinet-Dominjon, *Les Manuels de l'école libre*, p.36. Lelièvre, *Histoires des Institutions Scolaires*, pp.104-5.

58 Lelièvre, *Histoires des Institutions Scolaires*, p.105. R.N. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.117.



La France d'aujourd'hui.

Fig 17: Chövin, 'La France d'aujourd'hui', Ch. Plomion, *Histoire de France, cours moyen*, Paris, c.1902, p.307

du 1^{er} prairial. — Les Jacobins de la rue étaient furieux. Ils firent entendre des menaces, essayèrent de



La République.

(Gravure du XVIII^e siècle. — Musée Carnavalet.)

ouvrir leurs clubs, se livrèrent à des manifestations huyantes. Mais les honnêtes gens étaient décidés à résister aux *buveurs de sang*. Plusieurs centaines de jeunes gens de bonne famille, qu'on appela tantôt les *musca-*

Fig 18: 'La République, (Gravure du XVIIIe siècle – Musée Carnavalet)',
Abbé P. Gagnol, *Histoire de France*, Paris 1902, p.441.
Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France

bone of contention, with words like 'peuple' (the people) being replaced by 'les révoltés' (revolters) or 'les insurgés' (insurgents).⁵⁹ As Mona Ozouf has shown, illustrations of key concepts such as 'before and after' contrasts between the *ancien régime* and revolutionary France, were also keenly contested.⁶⁰ Aulard's original textbook, for example, starting from the basis of the 'zenith and decadence of royalty', suggests that 'the French Revolution came about through the faults of Louis XIV and Louis XV' and described the taking of the Bastille as a justified popular reaction to despotism.⁶¹ Abbé Gagnol on the other hand, having described the Bastille (rather controversially) as 'very soft' and (more accurately) 'almost completely empty', concentrates not on the action itself but on the reaction of Louis XVI repeating and glossing a famous anecdote: 'On hearing of the taking of the Bastille, Louis XVI cried, "so it's a revolt then?" – "No sire," replied the Duc del la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, "it's a revolution." More than a revolution, it was anarchy'.⁶²

The most controversial subject was, inevitably, the Terror, just as it had been in histories written for adult audiences, although in the textbooks, unsurprisingly perhaps, images were deployed to maximum effect. Abbé Gagnol's sentimental appeal for pity for the victims of religious persecution was evoked by the reproduction of engravings like 'La messe sous la Terreur' (Mass during the Terror) in which a cowering family celebrate a secret mass in an attic. This was then set in context by the evocation of the Jacobin 'men of blood', illustrated with a terrifying image of a predatory 'Jacobin septembriseur' bearing a pistol marked 'death', a knife marked 'fraternité' and in a note of irony presumably lost on the children but not their parents, a 'certificate of civism'.⁶³

59 Freyssinet-Dominjon, *Les Manuels de l'école libre*, op. cit., p.191.

60 Mona Ozouf, 'La Révolution à L'école,' *L'école de la France*, p.234.

61 Aulard and Debidour, *Histoire de France*, p.116.

62 'En apprenant la prise de la Bastille, Louis XVI s'écria: "c'est donc une révolte? – Non, sire, répondit le duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, c'est une révolution." Plus qu'une révolution, c'était l'anarchie.' Gagnol, *Histoire de France*, p.404.

63 Ibid., p.424. The idea of the roving 'septembriseur' (a reference to the September massacres) was clearly a powerful one. In 1967 a former surrealist,

In stark contrast, the account of the Terror offered by Aulard and his followers is noteworthy more for its reassuring blandness than the evocation of drama.⁶⁴ There are, however, some tell tale ideological markers, once again orchestrated through the use of images. The death of Louis XVI, for example, in Aulard and Debidour's textbook, begins a series of illustrated pages that culminates in the fall of Robespierre.⁶⁵ The necessity of the king's death is implicitly suggested by the pronounced martial presence at his execution where mounted soldiers at the foot of the scaffold seem ready to dash off and defend the country. This idea is then reinforced by the dramatic death of Bara on horseback on the facing page, leaving the student-reader with a simple dilemma between sympathy for either a treasonous king or a child soldier. The section headed 'the Terror' is also slightly disingenuous in that it is primarily concerned with Charlotte Corday's assassination of Marat and with the 'thousand dangers' that faced the republic from within and without in 1793.⁶⁶ There then follows the passage about men 'losing their heads' in the heat of the moment which Gustave LeBon found so offensive, but this too is mitigated in dramatic effect by the unequivocal description of the Terror as 'revolutionary government': a long way from anarchy, jacquerie or tyranny. It is also intriguing that the illustrations move directly from the death of Bara, to the death of Marat, to the arrest of Robespierre. Rather than being depicted standing accused in the convention, or trying to escape from a window, as is usually the case, Robespierre is depicted laid out on a table and so he too seems potentially 'martyred' (especially in the context offered by the preceding Bara and Marat images).

Later editions of Aulard and Debidour's pioneering textbook (revised by Plomion in 1902 and 1903, then Guiot and Mane in 1904, 1906 and 1911), shift the emphasis of culpability, and increasingly identify Robespierre as the primary agent of the Terror, which they

Pierre de Massot entitled a memoir about the movement's leader, *André Breton ou Le Septembriseur*, Paris, 1967.

64 In this way Aulard conforms to the thesis offered by Mona Ozouf in 'Thermidor ou le travail de l'oubli', *L'école de la France*, pp.91-108.

65 Aulard and Debidour, *Histoire de France*, pp.146-51.

66 *Ibid.*, p.149.

consistently describe as 'odious', following Aulard's example.⁶⁷ A student exercise suggested by Guiot and Mane is perhaps the most telling: 'Who profited from the Terror?' – the answer is a simple one for the student, as almost every person mentioned in connection with the Terror *other* than Robespierre is identified as having been executed on his orders.⁶⁸

In the light of this comparison, it seems evident that Catholic parents sought to withhold what were in effect very subtle and carefully constructed histories of the Revolution in the absence of the potentially terrifying accounts of the same events that the Church considered acceptable. It is however tempting to imagine such strictures against revolutionary history and the Terror as an unbearable taboo for curious and impressionable pupils who might find the idea of blood-thirsty Jacobins more seductive than repellent. As republican textbooks developed, from Aulard's in 1895 to the later edition by Guiot and Mane in 1911, the figure of Robespierre seems to have become a kind of fire-break with which republicans sought to limit the damage which the Terror did to the concept of the Revolution. Mathiez then, might well have been worried about the reputation of Robespierre during this period, as he was identified as culpable for the Terror by both sides of the political spectrum.⁶⁹ In such circumstances, although both moderate republican and Catholic parents sought to cordon off the Terror as a historical terrain from their children (perhaps as a means of keeping the debate around the more recent

67 Plomion, *Histoire de France*, Paris, 1902 (also 1903), pp.222-3. J. Guiot and F. Mane, *Histoire de France depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, cours élémentaire des écoles primaires, 3e édition*, Paris, 1904 (also 1906 and 1911 editions), pp.224-6.

68 J. Guiot and F. Mane, *Histoire de France* (1904), p.226.

69 Frédéric Chauvaud describes a similar process in Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel de XIXe siècle*, some thirty years earlier. Although the terror is described as inherently part of the ancien regime tradition, Robespierre is identified as having perpetrated this 'un-republican' tyranny, isolating both it and him from the positive republican tradition. Frédéric Chauvaud, 'Le cheminement posthume de la Révolution: les emblèmes du patrimoine républicain dans le Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle de Pierre Larousse', *Le XIXe siècle et la Révolution Française*, Paris, 1989, pp.359-62.

suppression and massacre of the Communards permanently off the agenda), the repression was almost certain to backfire. Somewhere in Paris a young Robert Pierre Desnos was learning and dreaming about the Revolution: 'that is to say, the Terror!'

* * *

The restrictive measures and counter-measures of the 'war of the textbooks' may appear to have been motivated by entrenched political and religious convictions but the phenomenon should not be seen in isolation. The sensitivity to revolutionary rhetoric should also be seen in the context of the increasingly turbulent political situation in France, explored in its most abstract form by Georges Sorel in his 1906 book *Reflections on Violence*. By 1909, the Confédération Générale du Travail had a membership of almost one million, and was led by Blanquists and anarchists increasingly sympathetic to Sorel's position of radical opposition to the conciliatory socialism of Jaurès.⁷⁰ As Robert Gildea has pointed out, the threat to the Republic was no longer Catholicism but the general strike and the militancy of a newly energised working class.⁷¹ If Taine's analysis that there might in fact be a 'revolutionary state of mind' were to be considered seriously, then both organised anarchist and syndicalist tactics had to be explained away without recourse to the rhetoric of the Terror. As indeed did the apparently random acts of violence associated with the tactics of the 'reprise individuelle' associated with the tragic and heroic anarchism of marginal groups such as the Bonnot Gang. Widely regarded as having invented the get-away car c.1911, the Bonnot Gang glossed the violent appropriation of bourgeois property and attacks on the police with a veneer of political rhetoric.⁷² Perhaps this is why Gustave LeBon preferred Emile Ollivier's vision of the Terror as organised 'jacquerie' to Aulard's vision of patriots striking out in rage: unprincipled organised chaos seemed less threatening than pro-

70 Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, Vol.3, London, 1965, p.69.

71 Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.117.

72 R. Parry, *The Bonnot Gang*, London, 1987.

grammatic violence, arising, albeit in the heat of the moment, from the passionate pursuit of an ideal.

When the anarchist Peter Kropotkin turned to the Terror in *The Great French Revolution*, it was with a profound sense of the routinisation of horror. The author, who was also looking back to the recent suppression of the 1905 uprising in Russia, was concerned with the practical effects, rather than the intended political function, of the Terror, which he discussed with particular reference to the guillotine. Kropotkin evokes this most potent symbol of state sponsored violence in a way reminiscent of the visual rhetoric of *L'Assiette au Beurre*:

The people of Paris soon sickened with the horror of seeing the procession of tumbrils carrying the condemned to the foot of the guillotine, where it was as much as five executioners could do to empty them every day [...] The sympathies of the working people were now turned to the victims of the guillotine all the more because those stuck down belonged chiefly to the poorer classes [...]. One thing is certain; each new 'batch' of this kind hastened the fall of the Jacobin Government. The Terror had ceased to terrorise, a thing which statesmen cannot understand.⁷³

Kropotkin's work is important in the context of the relative positions of Jaurès and Sorel. Jaurès, as George Lichtheim describes, was widely regarded as representing 'Durkheim and the whole corps of academic sociologists and quasi-official moralists who were busy inculcating the new *laiciste* ideology of Science and Progress' while Sorel 'distrusted Jaurès precisely because he was a product of the école normale'.⁷⁴ This anti-intellectual aspect of the anarchist and syndicalist traditions is re-iterated in Kropotkin's assertion that that which 'the people' experienced, statesmen could not understand; which is to say, they were incapable of comprehension, rather than unwilling or ignorant.

Implicit in this statement, in the rhetorical exegeses of Aulard, and in the 1824 pages which Jaurès dedicated to the period between January 1793 and July 1794, was a powerful tendency to identify a

73 P. Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, trans. N.F. Dryhurst, 2 vols, London, 1909, pp.560-1. The French edition, *La Grande Révolution 1789-1793* (2 vols), was published in Paris in the same year.

74 G. Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France*, New York, 1966, p.30.

handful of such 'statesmen' with the Terror, and above all to personally implicate Robespierre.⁷⁵ A cynic might interpret this reductive logic as just a further refinement of the argument in favour of suppressing the Terror itself: limiting the terror to the evil genius of a single Jacobin extremist cast the whole episode in stark but confusing contrast with the more recent Paris Commune. Albert Mathiez's attempt to rehabilitate Robespierre must be seen in the context of this evacuation of meaning from the Terror which had allowed even the word Jacobin to slip from its historical moorings and drift into a whirlpool of twentieth-century political innuendo.⁷⁶

When Mathiez wrote about the Terror, he lambasted Aulard for his single minded (but politically sensitive), defamation of Robespierre in favour of Danton.⁷⁷ Mathiez, who became a committed communist, believed that the Revolution could only correctly be understood as an indivisible bloc. As well as accepting that the 'great' Danton might have been less than one hundred per cent honest, this also meant accounting, rather than apologising for, Robespierre's 'terrorism'. A position he explained in the following terms: 'The basis of popular government in time of revolution is at the same time virtue and terror, the virtue without which terror is disastrous, the terror without which virtue is powerless.'⁷⁸

Unlike Jaurès, whom he greatly admired, Mathiez believed that the creation of Robespierre as a scapegoat and the subsequent aversion to engaging critically with the terror had resulted in a historiographical myopia. Mathiez's terms of reference were also contemporary: as an initial supporter and then later vociferous critic of

75 Mathiez describes Robespierre, Couthon and Saint-Just as the 'triumvirate' although he does so in such a fashion as to imply the dangers of such characterisations. Mathiez, *Girondins et Montagnards*, Paris, 1930, p.110.

76 M. Ozouf, "'Jacobin' fortunes et infortunes d'un mot", *L'école de la France*, pp.74-90.

77 Mathiez, *Danton et la Paix*, Paris, 1919, pp.iii-viii. Mathiez, *The Fall of Robespierre and other Essays*, pp.84-90. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.42.

78 'Le ressort du gouvernement populaire en Révolution est à la fois la vertu et la terreur, la vertu sans laquelle la terreur est funeste, la terreur sans laquelle la vertu est impuissante.' Mathiez, 'La Terreur, instrument de la politique sociale des robespierristes', *Girondins et Montagnards*, p.118.

the '*Union Sacrée*' during the First World War, Mathiez increasingly identified Robespierre's policies as having been more in tune with the national interest in time of crisis. As the body count increased, a leader in tune with the concerns of the working classes seemed preferable to an unassailable coalition of bourgeois vested interests.⁷⁹ What is more, while he initially resisted overly superficial analogies between the French and Russian Revolutions, Mathiez was quite willing to engage with the language and rhetoric of violent class struggle, concluding one essay characteristically; 'terrorist dictatorship, is what we call today the dictatorship of the proletariat'.⁸⁰

Although by 1929, Mathiez was able to say (with no little irony) that Robespierre was '*à la mode*', in fact, an oversimplified conflation of Robespierre and Lenin threatened to undermine his lifetime's project.⁸¹ It is true that Mathiez himself made much of the relationship between the two. In his 1920 pamphlet '*Le bolchivisme et le jacobinisme*', he even went as far as to describe Lenin as 'the Robespierre who succeeded' but this did little to clarify Robespierre's relationship to, or indeed culpability for, the Terror.⁸² The prisms of 1905 and 1917 did, however, give vision in France to an ideological re-interpretation of Marxism along revolutionary lines. Both Lenin and Trotsky confirmed this evaluation in their own analyses of events in

79 J. Friguglietti, *Albert Mathiez*, pp.109-41.

80 'la dictature terroriste, qui s'appelle aujourd'hui la dictature du prolétariat,' Mathiez, 'La Terreur, instrument de la politique sociale des robespierristes,' *Girondins et Montagnards*, p.136. Surrealist responses to the events in Russia could therefore perhaps be understood through their vociferous but oblique references to the French Revolution. Calls for the Terror, such as the one made by Desnos, could certainly have been interpreted in terms of their contemporary analogue in the years before surrealism was drawn into direct support of the French Communist Party. See for example, H. Lewis, *Dada Turns Red, The Politics of Surrealism*, Edinburgh, 1988 and R. Short, 'The Politics of Surrealism, 1920-1936,' *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.1, No.2, 1966.

81 Mathiez, 'le Neuf Thermidor de M. Barthou,' *Girondins et Montagnards*, p.201. Robert Wohl, *French Communism in the Making 1921-1924*, Stanford, 1966, p.510. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p.49.

82 Mathiez, *Le bolshevisme et le jacobinisme*, Librairie de L'Humanité, Paris, 1920. See also Friguglietti, *Albert Mathiez*, pp.164-5.

Russia by referring to parallels with French history.⁸³ More symbolically, statues were raised to Robespierre and Danton in Petrograd at a time, it should be noted, when Mathiez and his supporters had recently lost the argument for raising a statue to Robespierre in Paris.⁸⁴ Eric Hobsbawm offers a convincing account of the symbiotic relationship between the Russian revolutionaries' identification with the French Revolution and the French willingness to accommodate recent events in their own historical tradition:

The stamp of Jacobin authenticity, on the other hand, was given to the Bolsheviks by the most authoritative source; the Société des Etudes Robespierriennes, which sent the young Revolution the warmest greetings, in the hope that 'it would find, to lead it, Robespierres and Saint-Justs capable of safeguarding it against the double danger of weakness and exaggeration'.⁸⁵

However, in a short summary article written in 1928 entitled 'La Violence at la Révolution Française', Aulard, now retired, sought to play down revisions of French revolutionary history made with one eye on recent events in 'Moscow and elsewhere' as he put it.⁸⁶ Although he had been among the first to read contemporary events in Russia in terms of French history, Aulard had kept what Mathiez called a 'contemptuous and prudent silence' since 1917.⁸⁷ Having mistakenly predicted the success of the February uprising in Russia by analogy with French precedent, Aulard had good reason to be suspicious of the collapse of one Revolution into another.⁸⁸ For at the heart of this collapse and perhaps overshadowed by it, was a renewed

83 E. Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise*, pp.49–50.

84 Friguglietti, *Albert Mathiez* op. cit., pp.150–1. Russian Revolutionary celebrations also drew on French precedents.

85 Hobsbawm, *Echoes of the Marseillaise*, pp.52–3.

86 Aulard, 'La Violence et la Révolution', *Extraits et Leçons sur la Révolution Française*, Paris, 1928, p.14.

87 Mathiez, *Girondins et Montagnards*, p.vii.

88 Robert Wohl discussed the interventions of Aulard and Mathiez in the debate surrounding the Russian Revolution, noting that in a lecture given in March 1917, Aulard misread the direction of the February 1917 events by making analogies with the French Revolution, *French Communism in the Making*, p.510. See Also, J. Friguglietti, *Albert Mathiez*, chapter 5, pp.143–82.

interest in a longstanding tradition of uniquely French communism replete with a powerful element of popular, armed insurrection. This alternative configuration of the relationship between the contemporary politics of the extreme left and the Revolution, traced its line back through the Commune, to Auguste Blanqui, Filippo Buonarrotti and thus to Gracchus Babeuf and the 1796 'conspiracy of the equals'.⁸⁹

It was not until our day [as Mathiez put it, in a 1917 essay on Babeuf] when the traditions of the revolution are lost, and especially since 1870, with the invasion of Marxism, that French democrats and socialists, or certain of them at least, have let themselves be misled by tendentious theses, political rather than historical, and have ceased to understand the Robespierre whom their forbearers admired.⁹⁰

It is no coincidence that a revived interest in the 'lost tradition' of French Communism, which very subtly diminished the central importance of Marx as a theoretician and the reality of the Bolshevik situation, occurred alongside the return to 'fashion' of Robespierre. In part, the way was paved by Mathiez himself, who sought to re-integrate Babeuf and Buonarrotti into his revised assessment of thermidorean politics.⁹¹ His essay outlining Babeuf's political theories suggested considerable areas of agreement with policies that Robespierre had wished to implement had not his career been cut short. Babeuf, who like Sade, spent much of the Terror insulated (but unlike Sade, never isolated), in prison, is portrayed by Mathiez as the unfulfilled promise of the Revolution. 'Babeuf' Mathiez insists, 'didn't shelter his communism behind the great name of Robespierre'.⁹² And therein lies a problem that has since exercised generations of historians: whether Babeuf ever, in fact, reached a principled

89 Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: Studies on Labour and Politics in France 1830–1981*, Oxford, 1986, pp.13–16.

90 Mathiez, 'Babeuf and Robespierre', p.249.

91 Ibid. See also: Mathiez, 'Notes inédites de Blanqui sur Robespierre', *Girondins et Montagnards*, pp.220–38.

92 Mathiez, 'Babeuf and Robespierre', p.232. Mathiez, *Le Bolchevisme et le Jacobinisme*, Paris, 1920.

or political position which could accurately be described as 'communist'.⁹³

Mathiez thought not, seeing Babeuf's communism as 'accessory' to his political program but others, including Taine, had already formed contrary opinions based upon the relationship between the demands of the 'égaux' as Babeuf's followers were called, and the way in which they were to be imposed upon the population. The key text for an analysis of Babeuf was, from Taine's time until Mathiez's, Buonarotti's 1828 *Conspiracy of the Equals*. The lack of accessible, reliable information on Babeuf, as late as 1931 is evident in the complaint of the surrealist Georges Sadoul in his article 'L'insurrection armée' in which he claimed that 'there has been a conspiracy of silence over the conspiracy of the equals'.⁹⁴ Commenting on a 1922 pamphlet by Maurice Dommanget, Sadoul laments the lack of a re-edition of Buonarotti's work and gives a few brief quotations lifted from it.⁹⁵ He also notes that in 1931, the Third Republic had seized a text by the pseudonymous 'A. Neuberg' called *L'insurrection armée* (the inspiration for Sadoul's title) and imprisoned the publisher, suggesting that the French state sought to withhold instructions for insurrections from its proletariat.

It is striking, in the light of this complaint, that only months prior to its publication, Sadoul's contemporaries at *La Critique Sociale*, a journal of left wing 'ideas and books' edited by Boris Souvarine (and a regular outlet for surrealists formerly associated with Georges Bataille's magazine *Documents*), had published precisely such a

93 P. Bessand-Massenet's 1926 account of *Babeuf et le Parti Communiste en 1796*, Paris, 1926, did little more than confirm the popular misconception of a line of descent from Grenelle, 1796 to Moscow 1917.

94 *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 4, Paris, December 1931, pp.30-1.

95 M. Dommanget, *Babeuf et la conjuration des égaux*, Paris, 1922. Dommanget's pamphlet was published by 'editions' *L'humanité* which Sadoul had earlier described as the 'only revolutionary journal' in *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, December 1929, p.45, and who had also been responsible for Mathiez's 1920 pamphlet *Le bolchevisme et le jacobinisme*.

text.⁹⁶ A reconnaissance mission to the Bibliothèque Nationale yielded a manuscript by Blanqui entitled 'Instructions pour une reprise d'armes'.⁹⁷ A very brief introduction about the text, including Marx and Engels' concession that 'insurrection is an art', dated the manuscript to 1869, so that what follows reads as a practical manual for would-be Communards. Blanqui's text is a concise solution to Sadoul's problem, blending stirring rhetoric with practical advice, including a diagram showing the precise constituents of a barricade, instructive maps of how best to deploy these tactical obstructions, and even a ready-to-use 'proclamation to the army' (Figure 19).

In the next issue but one, however, *La Critique Sociale* published a scathing revue of *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, pointedly omitting the last five words of its title, and focusing for the most part on Sadoul's article.⁹⁸ Aside from mis-naming Buonarotti's book, Sadoul is accused of failing to visit a library, with the result that he was unaware of the existence of the 1869, and therefore most influential, edition of Buonarotti's text. Sadoul's poetic evocation of a 'conspiracy of silence' surrounding Babeuf and Buonarotti is replaced in this critique by a 'conspiracy of ignorance' on the part of what *La Critique Sociale's* anonymous reviewer calls 'pseudo-prolétariennes'.

This pointed criticism of surrealism's revolutionary credibility marks a point of conclusion: a delicate balance between thinking Revolution and the concrete construction of barricades. The situation that allowed Albert Mathiez to stand in for Robert Desnos in 1923 could never conceivably have recurred in 1932. The political schisms surrounding the surrealist movement's attempts to adopt a satisfactory orthodox (or unorthodox) communist position between 1927 and 1934 have since become legendary. Politically motivated surrealists who might perhaps have remembered Desnos's fixation with Robespierre (but who had certainly heard nothing more of Albert Mathiez), were now writing for *La Critique Sociale*, a journal that conscientiously

96 Denis Hollier gives a lively account of Sadoul's uneasy relationship with what he called 'Souvarine's aperiodical revue' in the 'Marginalia' for *The College of Sociology*, Minnesota, 1988, pp.368-9.

97 *La Critique Sociale*, No.3, Paris, October 1931, pp.108-18.

98 *La Critique Sociale*, No.5, Paris, March 1932, p.238.

BARRICADE RÉGULIÈRE.

La barricade complète consiste dans un rempart et sa contre-garde ou couvre-face.

Le rempart est en pavés maçonné au plâtre, large d'un mètre, haut de trois, encastré par des extrémités dans les murs de façade des maisons.

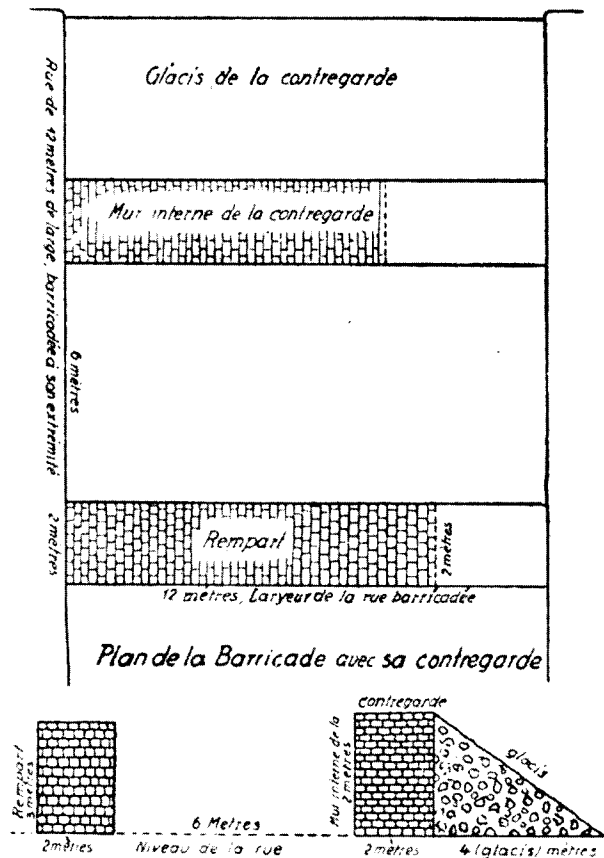


Fig 19: Auguste Blanqui, 'Barricade Régulière', *La Critique Sociale*, No.3, October 1931, p.113

reviewed and summarised each issue of the *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*. The final issue of *La Critique Sociale* from March 1934 is indicative of the way in which previously distinct spheres of interest now occupied common ground: in spite of, rather than as a result of surrealist interventions. The journal included a section of Georges Bataille's essay 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', a piece by Maurice Dommanget on Blanqui, and although it was then two years since his death, an account of an essay by Mathiez on government under the Directory.⁹⁹

Although for the sake of this book, it is critical that the distance between surrealism and the French Revolution be recognised and respected, their histories, it could be argued, should never have parted. The axis running between Desnos's identification with Robespierre in 1922 and the serious attention given to Babeuf ten years later, stretches back to the classroom of the 'maitresse jacobine' in 1905, and beyond. It also reaches forward, to Babeuf's presence in a 1934 'surrealist pantheon' and to Man Ray's portrait busts of Sade, built from the stones of the Bastille. It is in fact something rather beautiful: a surrealist historiography of the French Revolution, and as André Breton insisted: '*La beauté sera convulsive, ou ne sera pas*'.¹⁰⁰

99 *La Critique Sociale*, No.11, Paris, March 1934, pp.206-11, pp.233-45 and p.255.

100 Breton, *Nadja*, p.160.

Chapter Three

Tales from the crypt / a surrealist pantheon

In Paris, on 4th April 1791, two days after the death of Mirabeau, the Constituent Assembly ratified a decree proposing that the church of Ste-Geneviève be transformed into a Panthéon as a memorial to the great men of the Revolution. The following day, Marat had this to say of the decision:

I shall not dwell here on the ridiculous spectacle of an assembly of vile and inept low-lives setting themselves up as judges of immortality. How can they be so stupid as to believe that the present generation, much less the future races of mankind, will subscribe to their pronouncements?¹

The 'ami du peuple', an arguably popular voice in the context of revolutionary publishing, saw the Panthéon as a transparent testimony to flawed judgement and had little confidence in what it might mean for future generations. This scepticism may have seemed well founded for almost a century until in 1885, the Third French Republic permanently restored the revolutionary character of the Panthéon with an elaborate ceremony to receive the remains of Victor Hugo. This event however, was clearly intended to resurrect a more literary tradition that began on 11 July 1791 with the addition of the remains of Voltaire and which had then been reinforced by the 'pantheonisation' of Jean-Jacques Rousseau two years later. It is characteristic of the history of the monument that Marat himself should also have been given the 'honours' of the Panthéon regardless of his scorn for the idea. And while Marat's journalistic protest was not enough to save him from a place in a posterity chosen by his 'vile and inept' peers, it

1 J.P. Marat, *L'Ami du peuple*, 5 April 1791, cited in M. Ozouf, 'The Panthéon: The Ecole Normale of the Dead', P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory III* (trans. A. Goldhammer), New York, 1998, p.342.

does perhaps contrast the resistance of the word of the author with the unpredictable way that he might be remembered.

It is with the idea of a literary pantheon and the problematic notion of the writer as a 'great man remembered by a grateful nation', that this chapter will approach Paris in the 1920s and the emergence of surrealism. In 1920, on the official occasion marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Third Republic, the preserved heart of Léon Gambetta, hero of the siege of Paris in 1870, re-activated the Panthéon once more. Four years later there was a great public ceremony to inter the remains of Jean Jaurès. Primarily a socialist politician, Jaurès had been assassinated following his open advocacy of pacifism in 1914 but he was also (as described in Chapter two), the author of an important and popular socialist history of the French Revolution. With hindsight, these events assume an oblique significance as the backdrop against which the surrealist 'revolution' was underway. Louis Aragon, André Breton, Robert Desnos, Paul Eluard and Philippe Soupault, who would become the centre of the surrealist group, produced their first journal quite literally under the shadow of the Panthéon and continually fought to challenge notions of who should inhabit its imaginary literary counterpart. Today, their success might best be seen in the status and availability of works by Rimbaud, Sade and Isidore Ducasse, the self-styled 'Comte de Lautréamont', in both French and English editions.

On the very last page of Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*, Mervyn, the 'hero' of the final chapter, suffers a demise as appropriate and as unlikely as any in literary fiction. In the context of the work as a whole, Mervyn could be described as the epitome of the beleaguered protagonist, subject to every imaginative whim or misfortune that the author's controlling mind can conjure up.² Mervyn's death can therefore be seen to both contain and predict the trajectory along which literature approaches posterity. In Lautréamont's text this trajectory is defined through both time and space by its articulation among the monumental structures of nineteenth-century Paris: 'It is not as far as

2 It has been noted that Mervyn also symbolises or literally, 'embodies' the traditional romantic novel. P. Knight, introduction to Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, trans. P. Knight, London, 1978, p.21.

you think' Lautréamont suggests, 'from the Rue de la Paix to the Place du Panthéon'.³

After a rope has been lowered from the top of the Vendôme Column, tied to Mervyn's feet and carefully counterweighted, the unfortunate victim is swung murderously across the Parisian skyline. A 'golden-haired corsair' at the top of the column lets out the rope gradually until he is forced to let go altogether, propelling Mervyn through the air 'like a comet'. Lautréamont continues the story as follows:

In the course of his parabola, the condemned youth cleaves the atmosphere of the left bank, goes past it by virtue of the impulsive force which I suppose to be infinite, and his body strikes the Dome of the Panthéon, while the rope coils itself partly around the upper wall of the immense cupola. On its spherical and convex surface, which resembles an orange only in its form, one can, at any hour of the day, see a dried skeleton hanging.⁴

Lautréamont's work is thus brutally terminated in a calculated but finally arbitrary collision with the exterior of the Panthéon, an edifice which had come to symbolise both successful and failed attempts at enshrining political and literary ideals. The author self-consciously fails to force Mervyn into the Panthéon and by implication predicts his work remaining outside the literary pantheon forever. Yet with heavy irony he draws attention to its visceral remainder. The bones of the project are hung out to dry, or perhaps to rot on the dome of the building containing the remains of Voltaire and Rousseau. While the tombs of these venerable *grands hommes* are closed, hidden from the public of the second empire, Mervyn's skeleton lingers on as a permanent reminder to the students of the Latin Quarter. As Lautréamont indignantly demands: 'go see for yourself, if you do not believe me'.⁵

The Hôtel des Grands Hommes, 9 Place du Panthéon, was André Breton's address for a time between 1918 and 1920. When in 1928, he began *Nadja*, which would become his best known surrealist work, he returned to this address to begin his narrative: 'My point of departure'

3 Ibid., p.242.

4 Ibid., p.245.

5 Ibid.

he states, 'will be the Hôtel des Grands Hommes, Place du Panthéon'.⁶ Breton however, neglects to mention his 'coincidental' return to the site of the symbolic execution that ends *Chants de Maldoror*. Lautréamont, the only surrealist precursor who would survive the rigors of Breton's petulant relationship with the past, remains a somewhat spectral presence.⁷ Neither does Breton mention the Panthéon itself, inviting his photographer Jacques-André Boiffard and thus the reader to turn their backs on the building and face the Hôtel des Grands Hommes (Figure 20).⁸ Recalling his time living at the hotel, discussing pointedly the 'great men' whom he had known in the early days of Paris Dada, Breton looks not at the Panthéon but at 'the skull of Jean-Jacques Rousseau [...] whose statue [he] could see from behind and two or three stories below'.⁹ It is important to note in relation to Boiffard's accompanying photograph, that while the photographer stood within the grounds of the Panthéon, marked by the iron railings in the foreground, Rousseau is stranded in no-man's-land, fenced-in on an island halfway between the Panthéon and the Hôtel. Jean-Jacques was, it seems, insecurely located. For although he was one of the few *grands hommes* readily identified with the Panthéon during the Third Republic, as late as 1897, republicans wishing to 'see for themselves' had succeeded in getting his sarcophagus opened to check that his ashes had survived the Restoration.¹⁰ This intervention could be seen as symptomatic of the Third Republic's attempt, under the watchful eyes of 'scientific' historians, to locate and accumulate

6 Ibid., p.23.

7 Breton retained only Lautréamont as an ideal 'ancestor' on the grounds that he had left no 'questionable trace', in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. Turning his back on Rimbaud and Sade in a passage in which he rejected even the idea of the ancestors he had proposed in the *First Manifesto*. A. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver and H.R. Lane, Michigan, 1972, p.126 and pp.26-7.

8 Breton, *Nadja*, plate 1, op. cit., p.21. Boiffard took many of the original photographs for the 1928 book but was not given the same status as Man Ray or Henri Manuel whose contributions are specifically acknowledged. For more on this, and the differences with the 1963 version, see I. Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, Manchester, 2002, pp.48-67.

9 Breton, *Nadja*, p.27.

10 J.-F. Chanet, *Les Grands Hommes du Panthéon*, Paris, 1996, p.9.

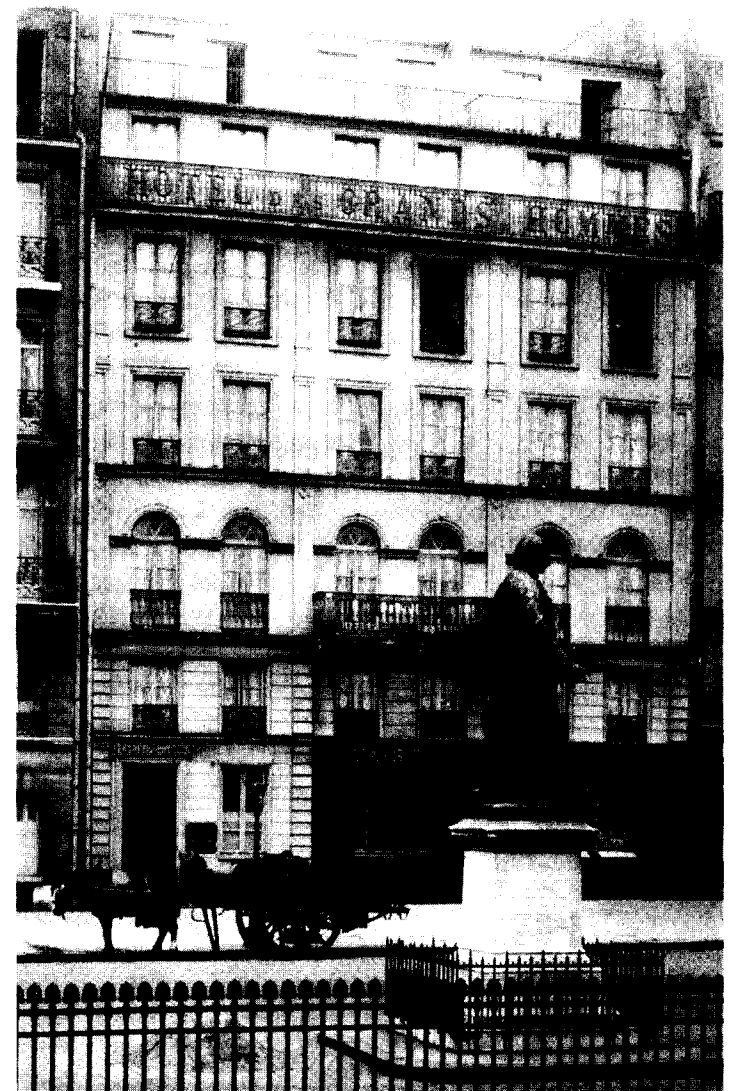


Photo J.-A. Boiffard.

Je prendrai pour point de départ
l'Hôtel des Grands Hommes... page 22

Fig 20: Jacques-André Boiffard, photograph for André Breton, *Nadja*, plate 1, 'je prendrai pour point de départ l'hôtel des Grandes Hommes', Gallimard, Paris 1963. Reproduced by kind permission of Editions GALLIMARD

evidence of a posterity which had been bequeathed to it. If so, then what better point of departure than the Panthéon itself, an edifice inaugurated by the founders of the First Republic to inspire the possibility of just such a revolutionary future from which it might be fondly remembered.¹¹

The period between the end of Lautréamont's highly influential work and Breton's literary 'departure' encompasses not only the political cataclysm of the repression of the Commune but the rebirth of a sense of revolutionary heritage expressed through the return of the Panthéon to its idealistic origins.¹² In 1869, when Mervyn's body struck the dome of the Panthéon it would actually still have been known as the church of Ste-Geneviève, patron saint of Paris, as it had been before the Revolution, throughout the Restoration, and First and Second Empires. Neither was it as conspicuous a literary edifice as it was by 1918 when Breton remembers avoiding it in favour of Rousseau's statue. Between 1870 and 1918, the Panthéon had its literary roots enhanced by the massive popular support for the transference of the mortal remains of Victor Hugo to the Panthéon in 1885 and then the more controversial addition of Emile Zola in 1908. Indeed, these 'pantheonisations' occurred at a time when, the whole concept of *grands hommes* was itself undergoing a steady shift towards a literary paradigm.¹³

Breton's focus on the Hôtel des Grands Hommes, seen in the context of his return to Paris after the war in 1918 and its initial status as the official address for the publication of the journal *Littérature*, is

- 11 The original revolutionary concept was that both present and future generations would enter the Panthéon and quietly contemplate the qualities of those who had given their lives to the revolution, and in turn be inspired to follow such exemplary fore-bearers.
- 12 Breton refers to the Commune earlier in *Nadja* with a reference to the fall of the Vendôme Column. Breton, *Nadja*, p.15.
- 13 Between 1920 and 1927, the years of Breton's 'absence' from the Hôtel des Grands Hommes, the French nation also honoured two political 'martyrs', placing only the heart of Leon Gambetta and then the whole remains of Jean Jaurès in the Panthéon in 1920 and 1924 respectively. However, although both have heavy political connotations, Jaurès' *Histoire Socialiste*, offers an additional literary nuance.

implicitly ironic.¹⁴ He and many of the 'Dadas' lived a semi-transient existence, moving from one cheap hotel to another. Although it was usually out of financial necessity, for the wealthier among them this kind of libertarian lifestyle stood as a rejection of the expectations of their bourgeois origins. As Louis Aragon put it in *Paris Peasant*: 'such hotels for transients of various kinds are rather pleasant to live in: an atmosphere of freedom reigns in them'.¹⁵ Indeed, Aragon accords the cheap Parisian hotel a kind of mythic modernity as places through which people pass without leaving traces: Francis Picabia, who could definitely have afforded better, he says, likes 'the fact that shoes are never to be seen outside the bedroom doors'.¹⁶ Unlike the Panthéon, with its pompous declaration of gratitude 'aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante',¹⁷ the cheap hotel made few demands on the would-be great man; transience confounding posterity with supreme indifference.

In *Paris Peasant*, Louis Aragon engages the notion of transience through the highly evocative term 'frisson' which appears, disappears and reappears throughout the narrative. This fugitive concept is central to the complex relationship between places and their meaning which the shared topographical location of the Panthéon and the Hôtel des Grands Hommes seems to problematise.¹⁸ The success of the former '*lieu de memoire*' is measured by the way that it generates remembrance from its accumulation of remains. The latter, '*lieu d'oublier*' measures its success by removing all traces of those that have passed through. Both are public places forever in the process of becoming.

- 14 The address given for *Littérature* was 9, Place du Panthéon, the full address of the hotel. It is possible that Breton wished to avoid giving the impression that it was produced in a hotel, and that it had no offices.
- 15 L. Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. S.W. Taylor, Boston, 1994, p.16.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 The inscription over the portico, translates roughly as 'To the great men from the grateful country' or 'To the great men that the country recognizes'.
- 18 Aragon uses the word 'frisson', throughout *Paris Peasant* and in many ways the word drives the text, from the thematic set up at the start with the description of the Passage de l'Opera just as it is about to be demolished.

It does not follow from such a comparison that the Panthéon guaranteed a peaceful stay to its long term residents. Mirabeau, to give a well known example, was secretly spirited from his chamber in the crypt to make room for Marat. Later, he too was evicted; his coffin apparently propped open in the streets like a market barrow, while his remains were scattered in the gutter.¹⁹ These ruptures in the smooth fabric of remembrance are intrinsic to the feelings engendered in Robert Desnos, writing in 1922:

But already the Panthéon opened up before us. Ministers, wearing the white aprons of barmen sold the limbs of the great men. The head of Hoche was valued at 3f50. The English acquired the entrails of Victor Hugo at a knock down price and the genitals of Sadi Carnot were the object of unbelievable bidding between multicoloured homosexuals and M. Nobel.²⁰

Desnos's reference to the bodies of great men is telling. In spite of the fact that Hoche was not buried in the Panthéon, his name was associated with the divisive political atmosphere that surrounded the Third Republic's reanimation of the concept. In 1889 his family formally refused permission to transfer his ashes to the Panthéon during a centenary ceremony on the grounds that he could not comfortably rest in peace alongside the remains of Lazare Carnot who was due to be interred on the same day.²¹ Desnos also recalls Lautréamont's insistence on material remains, in this case the remains of a bankrupt republic which is butchering and selling off the bodies of its worthless military, literary and political icons to whoever is willing to pay. Desnos arrives at the Panthéon after the war and his own sub-

19 M.K. Deming, 'Le Panthéon Révolutionnaire', in *Le Panthéon Symbole des Révolutions*, Paris, 1989, p.142. Although this narrative of Marat's 'depantheonisation' is well known, Auguste Cabanès suggests that Marat was actually re-buried in the cimetière des Clercs, close to the Panthéon. Cabanès attributes the story of the scattering of remains to a series of attacks on images of Marat that took place throughout the city in February 1795. In the rue Montmartre for example, an effigy of Marat was burned and the ashes scattered in the street. A. Cabanès, *Marat Inconnu*, Paris, 1891, pp.256-9.

20 R. Desnos, 'Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides', 1922, in *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes 1922-1930*, Paris, 1989, p.65 (see appendix).

21 M. Ozouf, 'The Panthéon: The Ecole Normale of the Dead', p.343.

sequent military service, to find memory being mutilated, posterity hacked up into cheap souvenirs. The sale however, although an outrageous revision of the actual movement of remains, is entirely lacking the ideological zeal of those who had exhumed Marat. Rather, it is the nonchalant mercantilism of the street trader who can't be bothered to hold out for a higher price.

Desnos's brief but bitterly incisive scenario opens up the Panthéon as crypt, a violated repository of national remains, drawing attention to the division of space that the Panthéon articulated at that time: an empty edifice above a sealed tomb. The origins of this division lay in an initial resistance to the population of the interior with statues of *grands hommes* in the manner of Westminster Abbey or Saint Paul's Cathedral. Indeed, as early as 1792 it was proposed that an empty pedestal occupy the pride of place, an inspirational gesture that would reflect the possibility for future greatness.²² In fact, statuary was installed but always to acknowledge the general, never the specific.²³ As Mona Ozouf has made clear, the inhabitants of the tomb below were chosen for the principles that they could add to the collective void above.²⁴

Taken as a single edifice, the national space intended to engender consensus and inclusion held a well earned but unacknowledged reputation for exclusions and violent expulsions. In effect, the Panthéon worked through the accumulation of ideological capital above, creamed from the remains of those who passed into or out of the crypt below. Indifference to the Panthéon by radical writers in Paris between the wars, epitomised by Breton's calculated focus on the Hôtel de Grands Hommes and Desnos's vicious parody, can be seen as a measure of the way in which this process was beginning to fail.²⁵ New

22 Ch. Chaisneau, 'Le Panthéon Français', Dijon 1792, cited in V.N. Jouffre and H. Champollion, *The Panthéon*, Paris, 1996, p.15. See also Mona Ozouf, 'The Panthéon: The Ecole Normale of the Dead', p.339.

23 V.N. Jouffre and H. Champollion, *The Panthéon*, pp.19-24.

24 Ozouf, 'The Panthéon: The Ecole Normale of the Dead', pp.325-47.

25 The idea of indifference as a statement is interesting in part at least because Ozouf sees it as relevant that the revolutionaries of the '68 uprising 'ignored' the Pantheon. It is curious that during a period when two 'pantheonisations'

additions were unable to compete with the eloquence of Lautreámont's throw-away gesture. A tangible and potentially powerful revolutionary heritage had been smothered beneath meaningless mediocrity and endless compromise. In 1906, the Third Republic sought to remind a sceptical public of their obligations whilst inside the Panthéon by the installation of a suitably inspiring sculpture at the main entrance to the building. Popular contemplation was to be finally and clumsily proposed by Rodin's *Thinker*, huddled on the steps like a man locked out of his own house.

* * *

Atget's 1924 photograph suggests the spectral physical presence of the Panthéon, hidden among the disappearing streets of 'vieux Paris' (Figure 21). In the foreground, a St Raphael advertisement brings a tiny slice of modernity to an otherwise outmoded space. While it may be an oversimplification to see the building as bound up specifically with pre-war Paris or even the optimism of the Third Republic before Dreyfus, the very concept of a literary pantheon and the certainties it entailed were associated with a moment that had passed. The republic that had glorified Hugo had prosecuted Dreyfus and those on the left who had condemned the assassination of Jean Jaurès had supported the carnage of trench warfare against Germany.²⁶ These historical moments could be seen as the limits of a broad moral and political impasse between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries in France, which too many literary figures totally

occurred (Gambetta and Jaures), a movement which went out of its way to attack displays of civic and national pride failed to make any comment.

26 For a full and critically engaged account of this phenomenon, see Robert Gildea, *The Past in French History*, New Haven and London, 1994, especially chapter 7, 'Bridging the Revolution', pp.299-339.

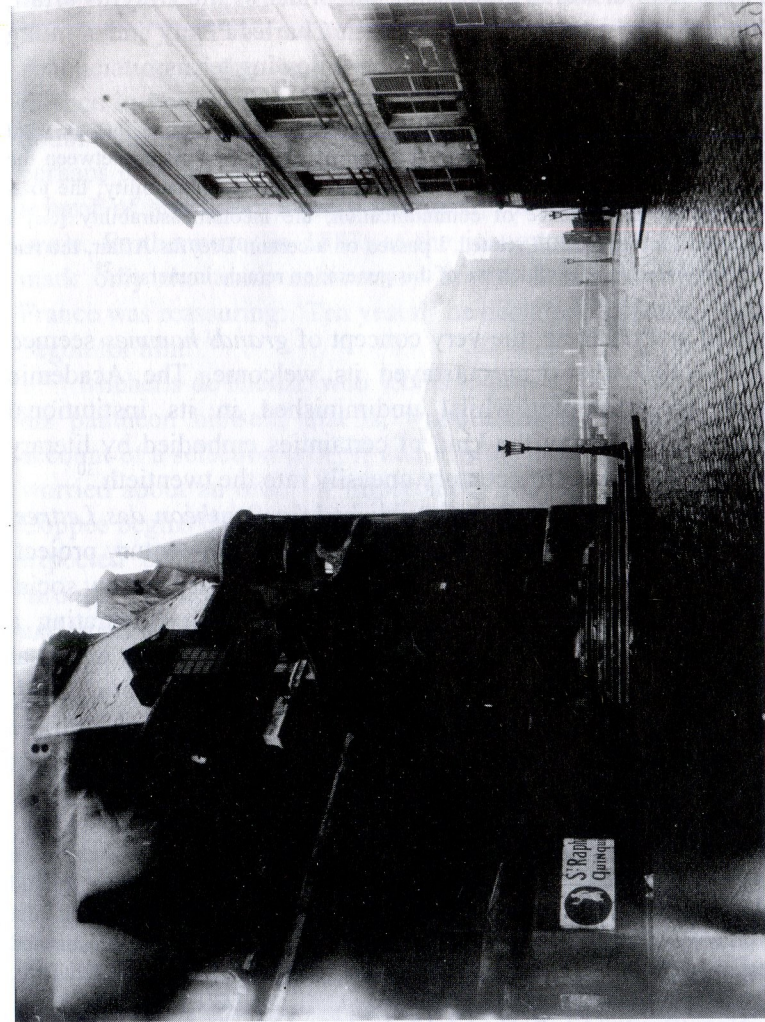


Fig 21: Eugène Atget, 'Un coin de la rue de la Montagne Ste. Geneviève', 1924,
© Phototheque des Musées de la Ville de Paris

failed to negotiate.²⁷ This profound sense of historical dis-continuity, characterised by Pierre Nora in relation to the concept of 'generational memory' was described even before the cataclysmic boundary defined by the First World War.²⁸ Discussing the effect of the Dreyfus affair, Nora brings to light an interview between Charles Péguy and a young student, Péguy describes the affair in the following terms:

I have never understood as clearly as I did then, in a flash, an instant, what history was; and the unbridgeable gulf that exists, that opens up between the real event and the historical one; the absolute, total incompatibility; the total strangeness; the absence of communication; the incommensurability [...] I narrated, I pronounced, I related, I passed on a certain Dreyfus Affair, the real Dreyfus Affair [...] in which we of this generation remain immersed.²⁹

Discredited and obsolete, the very concept of *grands hommes* seemed mired in a time that had outstayed its welcome. The Académie Française, for example, whilst undiminished in its institutional importance, would carry the kind of certainties embodied by literary pantheons in the nineteenth century uneasily into the twentieth.³⁰

In 1893, Michelis de Rienzi published *Le Panthéon des Lettres, des Sciences et des Arts*, a quintessentially nineteenth-century project. Essentially a who's who of notables, chosen from a very narrow social milieu, it was notable for the fact that rather than celebrating a pantheon of the past, it created one in the present and thus aimed at forming one for the future. De Rienzi's *Littérateurs, Poètes, Philosophes, Romanciers, Savants* and *Hommes d'Etat* included both the living and the recently deceased. Mixing a few of the accepted great

27 See for example, George Lichtheim's introduction to *Europe in the 20th Century*, in which the author maintains that the twentieth century should properly be considered to have started, to all intents and purposes, with the First World War. His series of technological, philosophical, scientific, artistic and literary accounts all fit together to emphasise this point of view. G. Lichtheim, *Europe in the 20th Century*, London, 1972.

28 P. Nora 'Generation', P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory I*, trans. A. Goldhammer, New York and London, 1996, pp.499-531.

29 Ibid., p.523.

30 M. Fumaroli, 'La Coupole', P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory II*, trans. A. Goldhammer, New York and London, 1997, pp.249-306.

men of the day with the kind of mediocre intellectuals that were seen as having infected the Panthéon and were swiftly overwhelming the parks and squares of Paris.³¹ The 'great' French novelist and critic Anatole France featured within the pantheon itself (described as '*Un Gentleman*') and also wrote the preface.³² In an echo of Marat's 1791 denunciation of the Panthéon, France stated; 'I have no great confidence in posterity. It is made by men and that is reason enough to doubt its wisdom.'³³ The characteristically self-righteous France was perhaps unaware of the irony of his own remarks; he had in fact been a juror of an earlier literary pantheon, the 1876 *Parnasse contemporain*. Furthermore, in 1887, at the inauguration of a monument to mark only the tenth anniversary of the death of Adolphe Thiers, France was reassuring: 'Ten years!' he declared, 'posterity has already begun for him.'³⁴

Michelis de Rienzi, who seems to have chosen the inhabitants of his pantheon himself, that is, without the aid of a jury, gave no account of a selection process and appears not to have been especially worried about an order of importance. The right wing poet François Coppée begins the list which meanders arbitrarily through some of the expected candidates, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Delacroix and then on through a collection of relatively obscure chemists, mathematicians and 'men of letters'.³⁵

Of less importance however, than who is or isn't included in Rienzi's pantheon is the idea behind the project itself. In 1893, the

31 For example, the concerns voiced about 'statuomanie' or the raising of statues to people unworthy of the honour, the subject of chapter four of this book.

32 M. de Rienzi, *Le Panthéon des Lettres, des Sciences et des Arts (profils contemporaine avec une lettre-preface par Anatole France)*, Paris, 1893, p.17.

33 'Je n'ai pas grande confiance dans la postérité. Elle est faite d'hommes, et c'est une suffisante raison pour douter sa sagesse.' Anatole France's preface, *ibid.*, p.ii (author's translation).

34 A. France, *On Life and Letters, First Series*, trans. A.W. Evans, London and New York, 1922.

35 The second guessing of posterity is particularly evident here in the descriptions and tributes which were accorded in 1893 (pre-Dreyfus) with respect to the actions of the same individuals during the affair itself. Coppée is a fine example; a poet who earned the lasting disgust of the surrealists for his right-wing political sympathies.

pantheon is given over entirely to the world of intellectual life. There is no sense of sacrifice or heroism beyond the implication that one deserved to belong to a certain peer group. The literary pantheon is founded on recognition itself rather than gratitude and recognition was amplified by association: the surprising juxtapositions of Rienzi's pantheon compensate any omissions that posterity may have cared to make. It is a register of the diligent as much as the brilliant and it is no surprise that it totally failed to anticipate the political events that would render it irrelevant.³⁶ The nineteenth-century idea of a pantheon which aspired to educate a liberal republic by the example that rationalism and morality were more valuable than faith and heroism was terminally undermined by its own logic. Writers and poets who had seemed to epitomise republican *grands hommes* in 1893 had used their considerable reputations to promote Catholicism, anti-semitism, monarchism and war. If both the literary nature of the Panthéon as edifice and the pantheonistic nature of the literary establishment can be seen to have converged during the Third Republic then it was to their mutual discredit.

* * *

Although the Panthéon itself seems to have engendered ambivalence in early surrealist writers, the concept of the literary pantheon was at the heart of their concerns. Indifference towards the space of memory is balanced by a paradoxical enthusiasm for its content and so if such a thing as a surrealist pantheon were to exist it might best be described in the terms of Pierre Bourdieu's essay 'The Kabyle House or the world reversed'.³⁷ Beginning with the suggestion that 'Man is the lamp of the outside, woman the lamp of the inside', the Kabyle House is described through a series of binary oppositions as a self-evidently dialectical space. To understand the social organisation of space along the lines of ideological investment is to open up an analytical pos-

36 Desnos, 'Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides', pp.102-3.

37 P. Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960*, trans. R. Nice, Cambridge and New York, 1979, pp.133-53.

sibility in which the Panthéon as '*lieu*', in both the physical and conceptual senses could be deployed to reveal the tensions experienced during the establishment of a revolutionary literary discourse.

The opposition between the house and the men's assembly, between private life and public life, or, if you will, between the full light of day and the secrecy of night, corresponds exactly to the opposition between the dark, nocturnal, lower part of the house and the noble, brightly lit, upper part. The opposition between the external world and the house only takes on its full significance when it is seen that one of the terms of this relation, i.e., the house, is itself divided in accordance with the same principles that oppose it to the other term.³⁸

The implication here is that rather than seeing a pantheon as an isolated space of memory, posterity, and recognition constructed in opposition to forgetting, obscurity and mis-recognition, it is the space itself that articulates this very opposition. A pantheon exists conceptually in the spaces between these principles and this in turn is physically represented by the symbolic coexistence of light and dark, mind and body within the Panthéon itself. Rather than looking for a pantheon as a positive space, deliberately brought into being, it should be understood as a negative space, occupying what Michel de Certeau refers to as a 'discourse structured by a missing presence'.³⁹ In this instance, a void at the heart of surrealism, constructed over the bare bones of the past: a space forced in to being by endless movement around its perimeter.

It should also be noted in this context that the clear gender polarity within Bourdieu's analysis has a crucial analogy with the organisation of surrealist thought. Although it is quite beyond the scope of this study to address this concept in detail, it is important to remember that discussions of pantheons and *grands hommes* remained predicated upon the exclusion of women during the period in question.⁴⁰ In a well-known collage, the faces of the male members of

38 Ibid., p.142.

39 M. de Certeau, 'History and Mysticism', trans. A. Goldhammer, in J. Revel and L. Hunt (eds), *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, New York, 1999, p.440.

40 See for example, Mary-Ann Caws, 'Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art', in S.R. Suleiman (ed.), *The Female Body in*

the surrealist movement are arranged around an image of their anarchist heroine Germaine Berton (see Figure 80, Chapter Six). 'Woman', identified within the collage by the words of Baudelaire as 'the being who casts the greatest shadow or projects the greatest light in our dreams' is undoubtedly the 'lamp of the inside'.⁴¹ As a means of control and restriction however, the unconscious is only the preserve of the woman to the extent that a fenced in nature reserve is the preserve of an endangered species. Women do not take their own places within surrealism's pantheon, they are placed there with mock gravitas: a ten-franc tourist's candle in the Sacré-Coeur.

The concept of a surrealist pantheon follows the model that Bourdieu suggests, emerging between garrulous gestures against the *grands hommes* of the day and the tentative often painful way in which surrealism constructed its own heritage. To 'reverse' the literary world, surrealism, in its first incarnation as 'Paris Dada' c.1919–1923, would disavow the concept of recognition, promoting confusion and outrage. Louis Aragon's 'Y a-t-il encore des gens qui s'amuse dans la vie?' is exemplary, listing a series of 'great' men who apparently 'amuse themselves' in Aragon's opinion and who are therefore worthy of the critical attention of the Dada movement (Figure 22).⁴² A similar list compiled by Tristan Tzara is more equivocal; 'La Seule Expression de l'Homme Moderne', also from 1920, is both deliberately confused and confusing.⁴³ A roll call of figures admired by Tzara (including Aragon, Breton, Soupault and

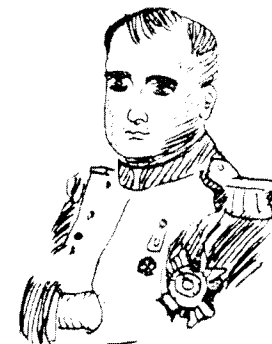
Western Culture, Boston, 1985; W. Chadwick, *Woman Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, London, 1985, and R. Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Women in Surrealism*, Nebraska, 1996.

41 *La Révolution Surréaliste* 1, Paris, December 1924. This and other well known collages of the group are considered briefly in chapter six of this book. For a fuller discussion of this image and the way in which the surrealist movement produced collective self-representations see S. Baker, 'The thinking man and the femme sans tête: collective perception and self representation', *RES* 38, Harvard, Fall 2000.

42 *Littérature* 17, December 1920, p.1.

43 The pamphlet, produced in January 1920, is reproduced in Y. Poupard-Lieusson, and M. Sanouillet (eds), *Documents Dada*, Geneva, 1974, fig. 6, p.23.

**Y A-T-IL
ENCORE
DES GENS
QUI
S'AMUSENT
DANS
LA VIE ?**



MM.

Binet-Valmer, Rabindranath Tagore, André Salmon, André Brulé, André Gide, Gustave Téry, Max Jacob, Charles Sancerme, Léon Bailby, Georges Courteline, Maxime Gorki, Romain Rolland, Paul Capellani, André Lhôte, Paul Dardé, Henri de Régnier, F. T. Marinetti, Henri Matisse, Henry Marx, André Paisant, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, Alexandre Duval, Robert de Souza, Maurice Magre, Marcel Lherbier, Georges Casella, Henri Céard, Frédéric Masson, Jacques Copeau, Pierpont Morgan, Paul Dermée, André Colomer, Maurice de Waleffe, Charles Maurras, Raphaël Duflos, Pierre Benoît, Fernand Divoire, Henri Ghéon, Anatole France, Pierre Decourcelle, André Suarès, Pierre Albert-Birot, Francis de Croisset, Marcel Boulanger, Sacha Guitry, Albert Thibaudet, le Docteur Cabanès, Louis Barthou, Jean Bastia, le soldat inconnu, etc.

**S'EN DONNENT
À CŒUR-JOIE.**

LOUIS ARAGON.

Fig 22: Louis Aragon, 'Y a-t-il encore des gens qui s'amuse dans la vie?'
Littérature 17, Paris, December 1920

other Dadas) is peppered with irritants such as Georges Clemenceau, a co-author of the treaty of Versailles, who almost certainly did not 'adhérer au Mouvement Dada' as Tzara suggested. Such facetious gestures do not construct literary pantheons so much as suggest a terrain onto which the outline of a pantheon might be superimposed. Tzara's effort, heralding his arrival in Paris in 1920, exemplifies a whole series of pamphlets and texts published in and around the journal *Littérature* which originated in the bars and hotels frequented by a rowdy group of aspiring 'agent-provocateurs'.⁴⁴ Michel Sanouillet's encyclopaedic reconstruction of this period, *Dada à Paris*, describes interminable opinion forming discussions and games, replete with drink-stained questionnaires often filled out on restaurant stationary.⁴⁵ These 'tribunals of Dada safety', which Louis Aragon would later recall had little in common with their notorious revolutionary ancestors.⁴⁶ Although both suffered accusations of alcohol

44 See for example (in chronological order): Francis Picabia, *Construction Moléculaire*, 391 No.8, February 1919; Francis Picabia, *Mouvement Dada*, also 1919, reproduced in D. Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, London, 1978, p.157; Tristan Tzara, 'Salon Dada', June 1921, reproduced in Y. Poupard-Lieusson, and M. Sanouillet (eds), *Documents Dada*, Geneva 1974, p.62; Francis Picabia, *L'Oeil Cacodylate*, Autumn 1921; F. Picabia, 'Plus de Cubisme', March 1922; Louis Aragon, 'Projet d'histoire de Littérature Contemporaine', *Littérature* 4, *Nouvelle Series*, pp.3-6. Elizabeth Cowling discusses the way in which such lists could be used to determine attitudes within the group in her essay 'An Other Culture' in D. Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, p.435.

45 M. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, Paris, 1965. See the collection of 'scores' from questionnaires undertaken at this time, pp.648-56, the 'enquêtes chiffrées' reproduced on pp.595-603, all date from this period.

46 'At that time there was a tribunal of Dada safety, and by no stretch of the imagination could one have foreseen that the reign of Terror would one day lead to the Directoire with its games, its fops and its split skirts.' Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.58. The stereotypical characterisation of revolutionary tribunals as drunken, incompetent travesties of justice were a product of the post-Thermidorian agenda to discredit revolutionary institutions such as the Tribunals of Public Safety. Aragon's comment therefore duplicates the retrospective judgement inherent in the historical trope of the revolutionary tribunal. For a further discussion of revolutionary justice see Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the*

fuelled malevolence, judgements made in the name of Dada were often transparently arbitrary, and accusations requisitely groundless.

In two of the most notable cases: 'Liquidation', published in *Littérature* 18, March 1921 and the 'trial' of the writer Maurice Barrès, from later in the same year, every effort was made by the participants to sabotage the process through which the desired results were to be obtained. The discourse on the efficacy of judgement and value of posterity, evident in these early examples, remained at the heart of surrealism, becoming increasingly visible as the need to account for 'the movement' and its achievements increased.⁴⁷

Liquidation (which literally translates as 'elimination') began with the drawing up of a list of 191 names. They are presented in *Littérature* in alphabetical order, but rough drafts of similar lists suggest that this may have been 'corrected' for publication after the scores had been given.⁴⁸ The range of names is extremely diverse. All current members of the Dada circle are included, as are leading avant-garde and mainstream writers of the day. This means that Breton, Aragon, Tzara et al., rub shoulders with such notables as Apollinaire (recently deceased), Maurice Barrès, Arthur Cravan, Anatole France, André Gide, Henri de Régnier, Paul Valéry, and Walt Whitman. There are a huge number of deceased literary figures; Baudelaire, Byron, Dante, Ducasse, Flaubert, Laclous, Gerard de Nerval, Molière, Poe, Proust, Restif de la Bretonne, Rimbaud, Shakespeare, Sade, and Zola, to name a few. There are also a fair number of philosophers and 'great thinkers' both living and dead; Bergson, Freud, Hegel, Homer, Ibsen, Jean Jaurès, Kant, Lenin, Nietzsche, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Saint Augustine, Schopenhauer and Trotsky. There are also many artists, musicians and also an eclectic mixture of historical and mythical

Terror, trans. C. Miller, London, 1989, or B.M. Shapiro, *Revolutionary Justice in Paris 1789-1790*, Cambridge, 1993.

47 'Liquidation' appeared in *Littérature* 18, Paris, March 1921, pp.1-7 and p.24. The 'trial' took place in May 1921. For a full account and a transcript of proceedings see Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, pp.264-77 and 632-46. See also D. Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, p.165 and Philippe Audoin 'Le Surréalisme et le Jeu', F. Alquié (ed.), *Le Surréalisme: Entretiens Dirigés par F. Alquié*, Paris, 1968, pp.455-85.

48 Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, pp.648-56.

figures including Fatty (a Dada pseudonym), Jesus Christ, Landru (the celebrated French blue-beard), Marat, Marcus Aurelius, Robespierre, Napoleon, and the Unknown Soldier. Another small and distinguished group consists of author-less books or images such as the Bible, the Thousand and One Nights and the man who produces advertisements for 'Pink Pills'. 'One need wait no longer to find famous names in *Littérature*', the authors declared sarcastically in the text accompanying the survey, 'wanting to finish with all this glory, we thought it best to get together to determine who merited their eulogies'.⁴⁹

The procedure for giving scores was referred to as a 'système scolaire' and was indeed that used in lycées and colleges at the time. The mark for each of the 191 names was to be given between -25 and 20, -25 showing the 'greatest aversion' and 0 'absolute indifference'. Breton later added that 20 was to connote 'unconditional devotion of heart and mind'.⁵⁰ The introduction to *Liquidation* acknowledges that this system is 'ridiculous', presumably for schools and Dada experiments alike, but makes the claim that it is the simplest way of demonstrating their point (or in fact points) of view.⁵¹

Liquidation (it was claimed) was intended 'not to grade, but to degrade' as the introductory rhetoric asserted, a degradation extending to the very idea and practice of creating such literary pantheons.⁵² Despite Breton's wishes to the contrary, Tristan Tzara and others absolutely refused to give honest or even relevant 'grades' to the figures listed. Tzara gave almost everyone the lowest possible score of -25, whilst Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes gave out his marks according to an undisclosed method of chance.⁵³ However, the resulting

49 'On ne s'attendait plus à trouver des noms célèbres dans Littérature. Mais, voulant en finir avec toute cette gloire, nous avons cru bon de nous réunir pour décerner à chacun les éloges qu'il mérite.' *Littérature* 18, p.1.

50 M. Polizzotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton*, London, 1995, p.151.

51 Philippe Audoin has suggested that the game enabled shared negative tensions to become 'manifest' in a way totally in tune with the surrealists' later adherence to the principles of 'hazard-objectif', 'Le Surréalisme et le Jeu', p.458.

52 *Littérature* 18, p.1.

53 Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, pp.280-2. Tzara's intervention has the paradoxical effect that although he sought to ruin the 'game', his few expressed preferences

list of '*Premiers et Derniers*' and their scores suggests that there was considerably more agreement over those to be eliminated than those to be revered (Figure 23). The 'résultats du tableau de tête', the head of the list of heads in more than one sense, contain few surprises; the top twenty names contain seven of the eleven judges, with Breton in the lead, already commanding the 'unconditional devotion' of his peers. The principle guiding lights of the movement are present; Rimbaud, Ducasse, Apollinaire, and Jacques Vaché, evidently because Tzara had given them more lukewarm scores than for others. There are however several surprise inclusions, not least that of Charlie Chaplin whose adoption by the French avant-garde ensured that he was ranked in third place despite the fact that he was not included on the original list from which the ranks were compiled.⁵⁴ The success of the (presumably unknown) advertiser who created adverts for 'Pink Pills' is notable, as is a small group of obscure novelists at the bottom of the top twenty; Sade, Swift and Laclous. More surprising perhaps is the survival of radical politics through this deliberately shallow and vain process (in both senses of the word). The presence of the anarchist martyr and bank-robber Jules Bonnot, of 'The Bonnot Gang' and the publisher Emile-Joseph Duval, executed for his involvement in publishing the pacifist *Bonnet Rouge* during the First World War, offers a positive and redemptive vision of the discussion of fame and its relationship to infamy. On the other hand, the *grands hommes* universally despised, Anatole France, Maréchal Foch, Charles Maurras, Auguste Rodin, the inhabitants of the Panthéon itself (Voltaire, Zola) and particularly the Unknown Soldier, represent the values circumscribing the vilification and prejudice underlying judgements made in both the judicial and the literary spheres. This 'revolutionary tribunal', formed to judge as a means of disposal and to degrade itself in the process, naturally concludes with the juxtaposition of literary eclecticism and popular politics.

are visible in the end result as they were among the only figures not to have been scored inordinately low.

54 It seems likely that his name was added and a score concocted to give him the place that Soupault (who is credited with having edited the table) saw fit.

Les Premiers et les Derniers

(résultats du tableau de tête)

| | | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|---------|
| 1 | André Breton | 16,85 | Henri de Régnier | - 22,90 |
| 2 | Philippe Soupault | 16,30 | Anatole France | - 18,00 |
| 3 | Charlie Chaplin | 16,09 | Maréchal Foch | - 17,45 |
| 4 | Arthur Rimbaud | 15,95 | Stuart Mill | - 17,36 |
| 5 | Paul Eluard | 15,10 | Romain Rolland | - 16,54 |
| 6 | Isidore Ducasse | 14,27 | Paul Fort | - 16,27 |
| 7 | Louis Aragon | 14,10 | Louis Pasteur | - 16,00 |
| 8 | Tristan Tzara | 13,30 | Auguste Rodin | - 15,63 |
| 9 | Alfred Jarry | 13,09 | Soldat inconnu | - 15,27 |
| 10 | Jacques Rigaut | 13,00 | Voltaire | - 14,90 |
| 11 | Georges Ribemont-Dessalguès | 12,50 | Charles Maurras | - 14,63 |
| 12 | Guillaume Apollinaire | 12,45 | Max Linder | - 14,36 |
| 13 | Arp | 12,18 | Henry Bernstein | - 14,18 |
| 14 | Jacques Vaché | 11,90 | Alphonse de Lamartine | - 14,09 |
| 15 | Piutes Pink (rédaet. des réclames) | 11,45 | Alfred de Musset | - 14,00 |
| 16 | Marquis de Sade | 11,27 | Guynemer | - 13,68 |
| 17 | Jonathan Swift | 11,09 | Emile Zola | - 13,45 |
| 18 | Duval (Bonnet rouge) | 10,45 | Pierre Albert-Birot | - 13,18 |
| 19 | Bonnot | 10,36 | Marc-Aurèle | - 13,09 |
| 20 | Laclos | 10,00 | Francis Jammes | |

Le Gérant: PHILIPPE SOUPAULT

Fig 23: 'Liquidation – Les Premiers et les Derniers – résultats du tableau du tête',
Littérature 18, Paris, March 1921

The débâcle surrounding the 'trial' of Maurice Barrès, a respected, but increasingly nationalist *homme de lettres* confirms the status of judgement as intrinsic to surrealist attempts at self-definition. The event itself, took place in the Hall of Learned Societies, rue Danton, on Friday 13th May 1921, with prices charged for admission.⁵⁵ A mock court was put in session, with Breton as president and 'twelve spectators' as jurors, with the sole intention of finding Barrès guilty of an 'offence against the safety of the spirit'. This was to become increasingly apparent, as the defence, Aragon and Soupault, were more antagonistic toward their client than the prosecution. Barrès was not present for the proceedings and appeared (as so many victims of revolutionary violence) in effigy only; a wooden mannequin took his place. The identification with French revolutionary practice is most evident in the charge being against the 'safety' of the spirit, evoking the first Committee of Public Safety and associations with the Terror.⁵⁶ The re-interpretation of Dada 'outrage' under the weight of the history of so-called popular justice in Paris casts judgement itself in a new light. The idea of legitimacy and opinion resting with the select few was upturned so that the select few argued on the side of Revolution rather than the *status quo*. As Aragon perceptively observed in his own analogy between literature and the Terror: if there was to be a Revolution they wanted to be at its head, '93 right away, in '89.

These gestures and many others like them were concerned not with building and filling a pantheon but with attacking the very processes of recognition that made one possible. Even lists of the unashamedly self-promoting Paris Dada group were periodically

55 See Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, pp.264–77 and pp.632–46 for facsimiles of documents relating to the trial.

56 The original Committee of Public Safety was set up in early 1793 but became prominent and increasingly powerful under the direction of the 'triumvirate', Robespierre, Couthon and Saint-Just. It is associated with Robespierre's alleged dictatorship during the Terror and second only in terms of its direct responsibility for sending people to the guillotine, to Fouquier-Tinville's Revolutionary Tribunal, which eventually sentenced Robespierre himself to death. See L. Madelin, *The French Revolution*, trans., London, 1933, pp.329–30, and 353–63.

'spiked' with those (like Clemenceau), to whom the movement was anathema.⁵⁷ This, too, followed in a worthy Dada tradition (expounded and expanded at every opportunity) against the unspoken right of *grands hommes* to universal respect. Such respect was, of course, the opportunity cost of the obscurity into which deceased 'Premiers' like Lautréamont, Rimbaud and Sade had been banished. This idea would also be raised by Louis Aragon in his questionnaire 'Who are the best unrecognised novelists and poets from 1895 to 1914?' in which the most effectively 'obscured' writers (Lautréamont, Jarry, Nouveau, Apollinaire and Saint-Pol-Roux) were 'rescued' by the intervention of ten signatories.⁵⁸

Anatole France, the 'gentleman' narrowly beaten to the top of the bottom of the *Liquidation* list was perceived even by his own supporters as an anachronistic remainder of the past living in the present. Jacques Roujon's *La Vie et les opinions D'Anatole France* admits at the outset that the 'majestic' author embodied the intellectual riches of the nineteenth century. However, writing in 1923, Roujon is distinctly uncomfortable with the political appropriation of France's legacy by the monarchist ideologue Charles Maurras.⁵⁹ This is perhaps further evidence of the generational gulf that Charles Péguy attributed to the Dreyfus affair.⁶⁰ Like Alphonse Daudet (who is said to have prepared the text for the plinth of his own monument before he died), France seemed to have had little confidence in the reliability of posterity.⁶¹ While alive he concentrated his efforts on the preservation of his own reputation for the future, sometimes at the expense

57 For example, Tristan Tzara's 1920 pamphlet 'La seule expression de l'homme moderne'.

58 *L'éclair*, 23 September 1923, J. Pierre (ed.), *Tracts Surréalistes et Déclarations Collectives 1922-1939*, Tome I, Paris, 1980, p.11.

59 J. Roujon, *La Vie et les Opinions d'Anatole France*, Paris, 1925, pp.2-3.

60 Henri Dubief, described France's failure as follows; 'by his momentary rally to the communist cause [he] became the butt both of surrealists for his decadent classicism and communists for his bourgeois idealism'. P. Bernard and H. Dubief, *The Decline of the Third Republic 1914-1938*, trans. A. Forster, Cambridge, 1985.

61 M. Agulhon, 'La 'statuomanie' et l'histoire', *Histoire Vagabonde I: Ethnologie et Politique dans la France Contemporaine*, Paris, 1988, p.169.

of others: in 1876, for example, he had vetoed Stephan Mallarmé's inclusion in the *Parnasse Contemporain*.⁶²

In 1927 when Paul Valéry accepted the chair vacated by France at the Académie Française, the long time advocate of Mallarmé redressed the balance with a controversially critical lecture addressing France's hunger for a place in posterity. It was with a backward glance to the surrealist group that he said 'It is the curse of great men [...] that their fame allows them a second death: they die first as men, then as great men.'⁶³ The reference was to the acerbic attack on France which the surrealists had perpetrated upon hearing news of his death in 1924; an event that, they clearly felt, had been accompanied by a disproportionate display of public grief. 'Un Cadavre' as their pamphlet was titled, became infamous for its bare-faced invective. The surrealists titled their contributions unequivocally, promising texts of withering wit and personal affront in equal measure: 'THE ERROR; AN OLD MAN LIKE ALL THE REST; WE'RE NOT IN IT FOR THE DOUGH; ANATOLE FRANCE OR THE GILDED MEDIOCRITY; BURIAL NOT ALLOWED; HAVE YOU EVER SLAPPED A DEAD MAN?'⁶⁴

Let us remember [wrote Breton] that that vilest comedians of this age were Anatole France's associates, and let us never forgive him for adorning his smiling inertia with the colours of the Revolution. To put away his corpse, let, if you will, one of these boxes along the quays of the Seine be emptied of these old books 'he loved so much', and let the whole thing be thrown into the river. Dead, this man must no longer produce dust.⁶⁵

Looking at an image of France at work in 1904, surrounded by religious artefacts and the trappings of *ancien régime* wealth, there is

62 M. Jean, *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, New York, 1980, p.129.

63 Paul Valéry, *Collected Works Volume 11, 'Occasions'*, trans. R. Shattuck and F. Brown, London, 1970, 'Reception Address to the French Academy', p.15.

64 'L'ERREUR, UN VIEILLARD COMME LES AUTRES, NE NOUS LA FAITES PAS A L'OSSEILLE, REFUS D'INHUMER, AVEZ-VOUS DÉJÀ GIFLÉ UN MORT?' For a full transcript see J. Pierre (ed.), *Tracts Surréalistes et Déclarations Collectives 1922-1939*, Tome I, Paris 1980, pp.18-25 and 373-9.

65 Jean (ed., trans.), *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, p.129.

a palpable sense of dust (Figure 24). The sunlight batters its way through it, the rich carpet and tapestries are thick with it. Even the face of the 'great man' seems coated in a fine white powder echoed by that which has already settled on the death mask before him. In his furious diatribe *Treatise on Style*, Louis Aragon claimed: 'I cannot open a book or speak to a man, without being literally covered with the thick dust that drops from brains and doormats alike'.⁶⁶ Aragon evokes a past that could not be contained, a perpetual levelling of redundant thought and the repositories of street-dirt. It is not the 'secular dust' which his colleague Robert Desnos describes clogging up the world of finance (a million fragments of business ledgers), but Catholic dust, with all that this suggests: holy relics, crumbling statues and the fine silt of ancient inscriptions.⁶⁷ In sharp contrast to his attackers, collectively pronouncing on the redundancy of the present in a cheap hotel or crowded bar, Anatole France seems to have embalmed himself, frozen in contemplation of his possible place in a future past. Halfway between Jeremy Bentham and Miss Havisham sits the last nineteenth-century auto-icon whose proper place would always be alone at his desk, in his cell, covered in a thick layer of dust.⁶⁸

In the reversed world of Dada justice, France could not be allowed to rest in peace. As Marcel Duchamp maintained: 'The dead should not be permitted to be so much stronger than the living. We must learn to forget the past, to live our own lives in our own times.'⁶⁹ Neither must the errors of the past be addressed in the terms of those that made them. Bringing lost poets from the darkness of obscurity would after all simply be a re-animation of the very process of judgement, appropriation and exclusion that had allowed Anatole France to 'introduce' Sade as acceptable and Paul Claudel to

66 Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, trans. A. Waters, Nebraska, 1991, p.58.

67 Desnos, *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, p.87.

68 Jeremy Bentham was the philosopher and social theorist who founded University College London and stipulated that his body be preserved as an 'auto-icon'. It remains in the cloisters of the college to this day and is wheeled out to attend college meetings once a year.

69 'A Complete Reversal of Opinions by Marcel Duchamp, *Iconoclast*', *Arts and Decoration*, v/II, September 1915, p.428.



Fig 24: P. Boyer, 'M. Anatole France', photograph for *Le Théâtre*, Paris, April 1904

'rehabilitate' Rimbaud as a good French Catholic.⁷⁰ Tristan Tzara put it most clearly:

It is true that Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud and many other poets had to pay for the right to survive in the conscience of men with their deaths. Must it be thought that, in the current climate, a double death is necessary, that of the poet and that of his time, otherwise that conscience manifests itself in the form of a belated rehabilitation?⁷¹

The argument against the *grand homme* is not simply his survival into the present but the anachronistic survival of his time. It was history which must be dispatched if posterity was to be re-directed along a revolutionary route. In a much quoted essay on surrealism, Georges Bataille outlined a critique of this tendency, beginning with Marx; 'in history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life'.⁷² Against the backdrop of a bitter dispute with André Breton over the direction of surrealism, Bataille argued against the possibility of a straightforward collapse of pre-existing bourgeois moral values and what he called 'the intellectual edifice' that supported them; a category which would certainly have included figures like Péguy, Barrès and France. What follows could be read as a direct comment on the *Un Cadavre* episode

70 France produced an introduction to Sade's '*Dorci, ou la Bizarrierie du sort*', in 1881, which is only acknowledged 'AF' in which he tries to suggest that '*Dorci*' shows a 'good side' of Sade. Aragon was particularly critical of his criticism of both the fact and context of France's involvement in the publication of Sade in *Treatise on Style*. Paul Claudel's work on Rimbaud in the twenties attempted to represent him as being emphatically French and Catholic and was consequently vilified by the surrealists who sent an 'open letter' to Claudel (then Ambassador to Japan) in 1925. Aragon is most trenchant in his criticism in *Treatise on Style*: 'such is the fucked-upness of facts that it is possible to speak of Rimbaud's success' (p.31). There were also demonstrations in 1927 when a statue of Rimbaud was proposed and Claudel was blamed for having rendered him a 'safe' subject. See 'Permettez!' M. Jean, *The Autobiography of Surrealism*, pp.142-6.

71 Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p.11 (see appendix).

72 G. Bataille, 'The Old Mole and the Prefix "Sur" in the Words Surhomme and Surrealist', A. Stoekl (ed.), *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, Minnesota, 1985, p.32.

and the rationale behind the 'revolutionary' revolt against such *grands hommes*:

For quite some time, all thinking that has not undermined this dilapidated edifice has immediately taken on its demeanour of senile trickery and comical smugness. But it is useless to insist here on the bankruptcy of bourgeois culture, on the necessity of destroying one day even its memory, and beginning to establish a new basis for mental agitation.⁷³

* * *

If surrealism's revolutionary agenda began with attempts to eliminate the pre-existing fixtures and fittings of the literary pantheon, then this occurred in tandem with the self-conscious elaboration of an instant ancestry, which had hitherto been obscured. Among the first attempts at collating past heroes, several stand out for their ambivalence and absolute refusal of history in favour of literature. When the past was summoned into the service of the present, it was paradoxically done so under the assertion of its absolute modernity.

Robert Desnos was among the first to assemble a pan-historical collective in what he called the 'cimetière de la Sémillante' in his 1922 text *Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides*.⁷⁴ Part calligram and part collage (and predicting the format of the 1924 collage of the surrealists surrounding Germaine Berton) the cemetery was supposed to contain the dead passengers of the 'Sémillante'; a vessel which had been 'lost with all hands on the reefs of the bloody islands' (Figure 25).⁷⁵ The source for Desnos's watery grave is a short story in

73 Ibid., p.11.

74 Louis Aragon also recalls an early list of influences compiled by André Breton in 1919, although it had none of the formal organisation of Desnos's 'cimetière'. Breton simply listed eleven names; 'ceux que j'aime encore', as follows, 'Rimbaud, Derain, Lautréamont, Reverdy, Braque, Aragon, Picasso, Vaché, Matisse, Jarry, Marie Laurencin.' Aragon, *Lautréamont et nous*, Toulouse, 1992, p.45.

75 'C'est ici la cimetière des passagers de la sémillante, perdue corps et bien sur les récifs des îles sanguinaires.' Desnos, 'Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides', pp.102-3.

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ici repose André Breton | ici repose Simone Breton | ici repose Louis Aragon | ici repose Jacques Baron | ici repose René Crevel |
| ici repose Max Morise | ici repose Drieu la Rochelle | ici repose Philippe Soupault | ici repose Georges Auric | ici repose Roger Vitrac |
| ici repose Miss Flowers | ici reposera Robert Desnos | ici repose Georges Limbou | ici repose Francis Picabia | ici repose Jules Mary |
| ici repose Baignoire | | | | ici repose G.R.D. |
| | FOSSE COMMUNE ici reposent | | | |
| ici repose Verdure | Isidore Ducasse – Arthur Rimbaud Alfred Jarry – Guillaume Apollinaire Jacques Vaché – Gérard de Nerval Eugène Sue – Baudelaire Germain Nouveau et d'autres | | | ici repose Pablo Picasso. |
| ici repose Paul Éluard | | | | ici repose Giorgio de Chirico |
| ici repose Benjamin Péret | | | | ici repose Derain. |
| ici repose Tristan Tzara | ici reposent les deux Josephson | ici repose Suzanne de L. de K. ? | ici repose Théodore Fraenkel | ici repose Georges Braque |
| ici repose Nazimova | ici repose Dieu | ici repose Rirette Maitrejean | ici repose Gustave Aymard | ici repose quelqu'un. |
| ici repose May Woodson | ici repose Robespierre | ici repose Reverdy. | ici repose l'archiduc Rodolphe de Habsbourg | ici repose l'aéronaute André. |

Le cimetière de la « Sémillante »

Fig 25: Robert Desnos, 'Le cimetière de la Sémillante', from *Pénalités de l'enfer ou Nouvelles Hébrides*, 1922. M.-C. Dumas, (ed.), *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes 1922–1930*, Gallimard, Paris, 1978, p.103. © Editions GALLIMARD

Alphonse Daudet's *Lettres de mon Moulin*, a popular school text. Daudet's dramatically titled narrative 'L'agonie de la sémillante' tells the tale of a ship mysteriously lost at sea and the tragic death of the 600 soldiers who had been aboard.⁷⁶ Daudet's tale begins with an emotional visit to the graveyard where a stone marks the place that the lost bodies of the soldiers would have occupied. In Desnos's version, rows of tiny neat squares, like the aerial plan of a cemetery are arranged around a central communal grave containing the remains of Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Baudelaire and others.⁷⁷ Each individual 'plot' read 'Here lies...' and then the name of a 'spirited' twentieth-century figure. Some were living in 1922 like Breton, Aragon, Picasso, and de Chirico, while others like Robespierre were long dead but enjoying a recent revival.⁷⁸ Although Desnos's cemetery-pantheon also contained women, Simone Breton, May Woodson and 'Miss Flowers' can not really be said to represent any more than whimsical additions to an exclusively male preserve. In places such as this, the inclusion of women seems divorced from the kind of intellectual or creative stature accorded to the men present.⁷⁹ United in death, the 'spirited' point not only to the failure of the present, which has killed off the next generation of creative minds but to the failure

- 76 The likelihood of Daudet's text as the source is consolidated by the fact that the story preceding 'L'Agonie de la Sémillante' in *Lettres de mon Moulin* is entitled 'Le Phare des Sanguinaires' and thus offers a source for the 'bloody islands' where Desnos says that his ship was lost. A. Daudet, *Lettres de mon Moulin, choisi et annoté par Marc Ceppi*, London, 1914. The Desnos scholar Marie-Claire Dumas, in conversation with the author, also agreed with this source.
- 77 There are three existent versions of the design, two early sketches having been recently reproduced in Desnos, *Oeuvres*, M.-C. Dumas (ed.), pp.118–19.
- 78 Robespierre was, as described in Chapter two, in the process of being 'rehabilitated' by the left-wing historian Albert Mathiez. A letter from Mathiez to Desnos acknowledging Desnos' support of Robespierre appeared in *Littérature, New Series 10*, May 1923, p.9. It is notable that Robespierre moved from a place in the communal grave with Saint-Just, to his own 'plot' alongside the surrealists between the draft and final versions.
- 79 Desnos's preliminary versions of the cemetery offer insight into the selection process but none seem to privilege women to any greater degree than the final version.

of history to represent the past. In placing the communal grave at the centre of his imaginary cemetery, Desnos offers a critique of the pantheon concept couched in its own terms. In Parisian cemeteries communal graves were the resting places of the forgotten, the poor, the undesirable or the victims of the guillotine and were usually located in a distant corner or walled annexe.⁸⁰

In 1923, after a series of disagreements between André Breton and founder members Tristan Tzara and Francis Picabia over the direction of the Paris Dada group, *Littérature* featured its first and last comprehensive literary pantheon (Figure 26). 'Erutarettil' quite literally reflected the present direction of the group in the terms of an imagined past.⁸¹ This field of names, printed across two pages, oscillating between foreground and distance is one in which size is everything and proximity loaded with meaning. Sade towers over Marat as across the page the obscure stand out and the great recede into the distance. The idea of a hierarchical ranking or listing has been flattened out, levelled into a form of topography. This certainly looks like a traditional attempt at an account of the past, but in the context of the journal as a whole, this gesture is fraught with irony, innuendo and damnation by faint praise.⁸² Collage, the representational analogy for memory described by Freud, places each element on a screen, erasing

80 J. Hillairet, *Les 200 Cimetières du Vieux Paris*, Paris, 1958.

81 *Littérature* 11/12, *Nouvelles Series*, Paris, October 1923, pp.24-5, 'Erutarettil' is simply *Littérature* spelled in reverse.

82 A variation on this theme is the typographic collage used on the 1922 manifesto 'Plus de Cubisme' produced by Francis Picabia. The text reflects Picabia's disenchantment with the direction that Tzara and Breton were taking the movement and appeals to 'amateurs' and 'snobs' not to trust political speculation as a means of Dada expression. Picabia produced a design to accompany the text, which divides a list of names by means of a thick black line in the shape of a rectangle. The Dada names are scattered inside the rectangle around a central cross, finished with *fleur-de-lys*. Patrolling the borders to this space are the 'outsiders'; André Gide, Barrès, Henri de Régner and other names that feature in the previous lists. The end result looks something like a fishpond (an analogy generated by a large hook in the accompanying text) evoking the Dada groups' pointless, repetitive and limited activity. The pamphlet is reproduced in Y. Poupard-Lieusson, and M. Sanouillet (eds), *Documents Dada*, Geneva, 1974, pp.80-1.

ERUTA RETTIL

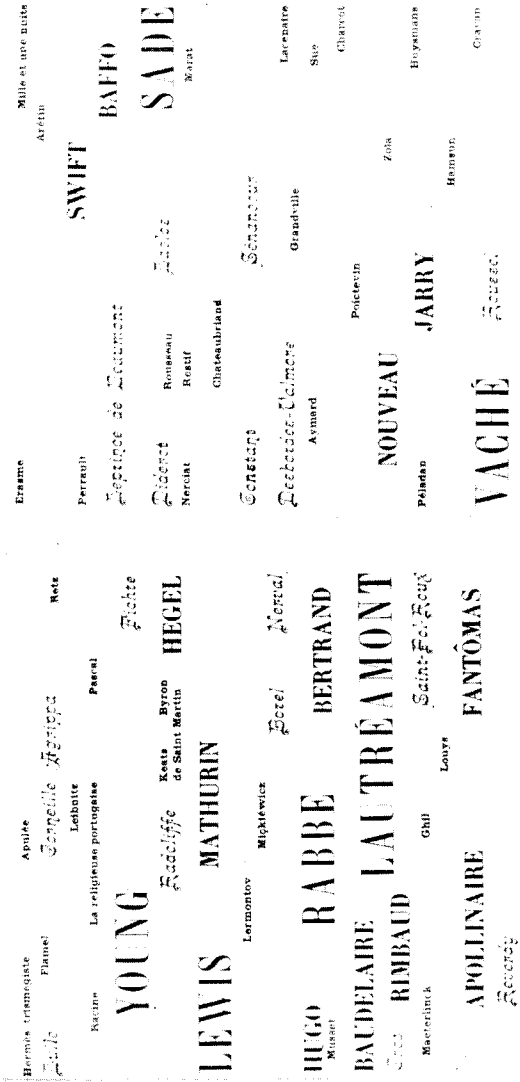


Fig 26: 'Erutarettil' (*Littérature* written backwards), word collage/calligram in *Littérature New Series* 11/12, Paris, October 1923

time and distance in favour of the apparently irrational relationship which disguised long repressed beliefs and desires: the arbitrary nature of posterity revealed through word association.⁸³

Breton would cement this path from past to present in 1924 with his *First Manifesto of Surrealism*, returning to the same field from which to pick his players: 'Swift is Surrealist in malice, Sade is Surrealist in sadism, Chateaubriand is Surrealist in exoticism, Constant is Surrealist in politics, Hugo is Surrealist when he isn't stupid'.⁸⁴ The list goes on, each name split from its identity by surrealism's intervention. Breton's dysfunctional child latches on to lapses in character, mistakes, historical anomalies: 'Kant's absent-mindedness regarding women, Pasteur's absentmindedness about grapes, Curie's absentmindedness with respect to vehicles' until once again the point is reached where recognition is no longer an issue.⁸⁵ It is not that Breton is disinterested in the past, on the contrary; rather that he develops a vision of history as a cabinet of curiosities. At this early stage, before the urban rag-picker that remembers the beginning of *Nadja*, Breton's eclectic appropriations of historical minutiae unfold indignantly. Rather than articulate a political, much less a historical view of the past, Breton constructs a past from literary anecdote. Pierre Nora has described an equivalent tension between memory and history, coining the term 'alienated memory' to describe the way in which institutionalised histories and memories fail as memory for the individual.

The whole dynamic of our relation to the past is shaped by the subtle interplay between the inaccessible and the non-existent. If the old ideal was to represent the past, the new ideal is to create a representation of it. Resurrection, no matter how complete, implied a careful manipulation of light and shadow to create an illusion of perspective with an eye to the present purposes.⁸⁶

83 S. Freud, *Screen Memories* (1898), Standard Edition, Vol.III, trans. J. Strachey, London, 1955, pp.301-22.

84 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp.26-7.

85 *Ibid.*, p.47.

86 P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History', *Realms of Memory I*, p.12.

Imagine an 'inaccessible' Panthéon and its 'non-existent' surrealist counterpart. Nora's terms reprise Bourdieu's language of light and shadow but only to describe representation, manipulation and illusion. According to Nora, the historical archive has become suspect. The faith in the scientific rigour of history collapsed into the realisation that evidence is only ever a 'trace' which can be built into new constructions of the past, contributing to the inevitable 'acceleration of history'.⁸⁷ At every stage of Breton's manifesto 'the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France' the acceptable past according to posterity, is opposed by restlessness, movement, advancement and transience; for the impatient surrealist, history can never accelerate fast enough.

* * *

In order to set out the way in which an imaginary surrealist pantheon might be understood it has been necessary to trace passages of time between distinct historical points. There was for example, the period between 1869 when Lautréamont ended his *Chants de Maldoror* on the dome of the Panthéon and 1918 when André Breton discovered Lautréamont and began his own literary career living opposite the same monument.⁸⁸ This passage of time encompassed the generational impasse effected by the Dreyfus affair, and then the trauma of the First World War. There was also the passage of time between Breton leaving the Hôtel des Grands Hommes in 1920 and his return to it as the site where his surrealist novel *Nadja* would begin in 1928. This passage of time encompassed the birth of Paris Dada and its transformation into the surrealist movement. The use of the phrase 'passage of time' to describe these periods is deliberate: 'passage' implies the navigable nature of time and therefore the idea that it may be blocked. Such passages of time are important not because they contain

87 *Ibid.*, p.1. Nora begins the series *Lieux de Memoire* (Realms of Memory) with these words.

88 For a retrospective account of this early period (written in the late 1960s), see Louis Aragon's, *Lautréamont et nous*, Toulouse, 1992.

change but precisely because they point to the impossibility of change where posterity is concerned. They begin to betray the shadow of a pantheon, not in the sense that it always existed and changed through time but in as much as movement back and forward reveals the inevitability of its existence.

Efforts to eliminate the past and claim shared values, retraced the very same passages of time. Introducing Max Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 têtes*, Breton described 'slits in time' reminiscent of Freud's essay 'Screen Memories', calling to mind the 'illusion of true recognition' through the description of instances 'where former lives, actual lives, future lives melt together in one life'.⁸⁹ For Hal Foster, such 'slits in time' function evocatively, calling to mind Walter Benjamin's *Theoretic of Knowledge* in which as Foster puts it, the 'image is dialectic at a standstill'.⁹⁰ However, the passages in time suggested here more like indices of perpetual movement than distinct but dialectically related moments: less stoppages than slippages.⁹¹ Returning (once again) to the 'parlour games' at the birth of the movement of which *Liquidation* was just one, returning to them as a historical moment, Louis Aragon recognised this peculiar fact:

I have always observed that these supposedly innocent occupations left enduring traces in those who indulged in them and that, after all, such people got their real pleasure, despite their denials, out of this havoc and its unpredictable repercussions. A tang of disaster hovered in the air, bathing life, tingling life with its hue: all the *modernity* of these times, this whole function of duration assumed an accent that was soon to seem curious and, in a sense, inexplicable (italics in original).⁹²

Traces, repercussions and duration characterise this time as a period in which modernity is conjured from an apparently arbitrary engagement with the past.

89 Forward to Max Ernst's *La Femme 100 têtes*, this translation is in H. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1993, p.168 and footnote, p.280.

90 Ibid., p.280.

91 Ibid., p.168.

92 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.131.

One final passage of time separates these words (written in 1924) from an image produced ten years later. In the intervening years, only Lautréamont would comfortably retain any kind of credibility as a surrealist 'ancestor'. In an increasingly dogmatic environment, Rimbaud's alleged Catholicism and Sade's alleged 'counterrevolutionary acts' would disqualify them in Breton's eyes and at the same time pave the way for their mainstream rehabilitation.⁹³ The much vaunted 'modernity' which allowed surrealist journals to publish old and forgotten texts by these authors, was gradually undermined by sustained historical research. This phenomenon is evidenced in the conflict between Sade as a historical character and Sade as a literary construct attached to the surrealist movement.⁹⁴ Lautréamont survived, Breton allowed, only as a result of his absolute and irreversible disappearance, one which would prevent such a return:

I would like to make it very clear that in my opinion it is necessary to hold the cult of men in deep distrust, however great they may seemingly be. With one exception – Lautréamont – I do not see a single one of them who has not left some questionable trace in his wake.⁹⁵

The surrealist movement ended (to all intents and purposes) when so many declamatory gestures, arguments and counter-arguments concluded that a pantheon was both impossible and undesirable: this vibrant discourse had however already resulted in the creation of just such a thing. In 1934, 'Louis' (Jean) Scutenaire, a Belgian surrealist, assembled his '*Pêle Mêle de Scutenaire*' perhaps the most enduring surrealist pantheon, not by including those still considered 'in' in 1934, but by generously including all those that had passed through

93 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp.126–7.

94 The way in which Sade's historical disappearance was a condition of his return as representation is discussed in Chapter five of this book. This dogmatic environment extended to the publication of lists headed 'Lisez/Ne Lisez Pas' in 1931, an example is reproduced in D. Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, p.456.

95 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p.127.

LE
PÊLE-MÊLE
de
SCUTENAIRE



Fig 27: Jean (Louis) Scutenaire, 'Le Pêle-Mêle de Scutenaire' (also known as 'From Marat to the Bonnot Gang... The Surrealist Pantheon'), *Documents* 34, Brussels, 1934

previously (Figure 27).⁹⁶ Marat to the Bonnot Gang, via Gracchus Babeuf, Sade, Hegel, Freud, Lenin, Rimbaud, Jacques Vache and Artaud, until Aragon and Breton (who had become bitter political enemies by 1934) are reunited around the divisive figure of Lenin. Scutenaire updated the surrealist pantheon just as in Paris today, a rejuvenated Panthéon 'allows' visitors to find all the names of those who have passed into, through and even out of its crypt. Although Scutenaire's 'homage' is unsubtle, uncharacteristically blunt in both form and function, there is a formal sense in which the past serves as a frame for the present: the long dead, disappeared and disaffected lend a nostalgic sense of purpose to those huddled at the centre. Scutenaire's pantheon, for all its heavy handed rhetoric retains much of what is vital to the concept. The figures of the past have been torn (or cut) from their roots to constitute something greater than the sum of their parts. Posterity has been acknowledged as a series of changing relationships, which collage, an arbitrary form of representation *par excellence*, is best placed to represent. The very idea of a 'pêle mêle' as pantheon stands as an articulate prediction of Mona Ozouf's criticism that the Panthéon itself consists of little more than a 'parade of the arbitrary'.⁹⁷

In a little less than a generation, the surrealist movement that had begun as an all out attack on posterity had produced what Aragon had self-consciously predicted; its very own 'mythology of the modern'.⁹⁸ In 1930, André Breton himself had been dragged from a group collage, dressed in a crown of thorns and his own words appended as a memorial that Anatole France for one may have found fitting: 'Dead, this man must no longer produce dust' (Figure 28). Ignoring the building that Lautréamont's skeletal remains could not penetrate, surrealism began with the crypt and then started dragging bodies out into the streets: 'go see for yourself, if you do not believe me'.

96 Robert Short gives the alternative title 'From Marat to the Bonnot Gang - The Surrealist Pantheon', R. Short, *Dada and Surrealism*, London, 1980, p.60.

97 Ozouf, 'The Panthéon: The Ecole Normale of the Dead', p.156.

98 This is the title of the introduction to Aragon's *Paris Peasant*.

UN CADAVRE

*Il ne faut plus que mort cet
homme fasse de la poussière.*

André BRETON (*Un Cadavre*, 1924.)

PAPOLOGIE D'ANDRÉ BRETON

La deuxième impulsion du Surreal-
isme n'est pas une révolution, elle
est une révolte.
Elle ne fait que révéler dans le genre
humain, dans l'homme, le point de vue
qui est le point de vue de la mort.
C'est un acte de révolte, un acte de révolte
surrealiste le plus simple, le plus facile,
le plus facile que l'on puisse imaginer.
Mais l'insupportable Breton serait sans
doute le plus grand des révoltés, le plus
grand des révoltés de la littérature.
C'est un acte de révolte, le plus simple,
le plus facile, le plus facile que l'on
puisse imaginer. Mais l'insupportable
Breton serait sans doute le plus grand
des révoltés, le plus grand des révoltés
de la littérature.



AUTO-PROPHÉTIE

MORT D'UN MONSIEUR

Il ne faut plus que mort cet
homme fasse de la poussière.
Il ne faut plus que mort cet
homme fasse de la poussière.
Il ne faut plus que mort cet
homme fasse de la poussière.
Il ne faut plus que mort cet
homme fasse de la poussière.

Fig 28: 'Un Cadavre', photograph altered by Jacques-André Boiffard,
Georges Bataille and others, Paris, c.1929-1930

Chapter Four Statuophobia! Surrealism and iconoclasm in the Bronze Age

Part One When bronze was like ink...

The introduction to Louis Aragon's 1928 *Treatise on Style* is subtitled 'The Fate of La Fontaine' and contains a shooting gallery within which the author permits himself the pleasure of carefully arranging his targets. After an initial cautionary tale equating literature and excrement, which warns of letting such 'eminently French matter slip through our fingers', Aragon proceeds with a strategy which he perfected in his surrealist texts: the systematic reduction of his subject matter to its lowest common denominator.¹

The 'treatise', however, goes much further than the author's previous attacks on bourgeois taste, and as the title suggests, contains in its very style, incontrovertible proof of its efficacy. It is the way Aragon makes his case that raises the argument above petty questions concerning the legitimacy of examples, or the difference between right and wrong. Within this highly seductive text, people and things cease to be themselves, borrowing a little from André Breton's likening of people to their attributes *through* surrealism; Swift (for example) is 'surrealist in malice'.² Aragon, however, has no intention of singling out qualities or attributes, insisting instead upon a base matter to which all literary substance eventually reverts. This 'dung', as he calls it, will be dealt with by an ever present, pan-historical race of stableboys:

1 L. Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, trans. A. Waters, Nebraska, 1991, pp.7-10.
2 A. Breton, 'First Manifesto of Surrealism', *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans., R. Seaver and H. Lane, Michigan, 1969, pp.26-7.

André Gide is neither a stableboy nor a clown but a fucking bore. In fact he thinks he is Goethe. That is, he would like to be funny. Baron Seillières is not funny. He thinks he is Nietzsche. Henri Brémond thinks he is Fénelon. He is funny. Fénelon did not think he was Henri Brémond and did not try to be funny. I like him more than Goethe. He had great respect for love. Goethe is a stableboy. André Gide wants to resemble a stableboy!³

Aragon's logic is powerful because despite its obvious absurdity it is complete. The names mentioned cease to function as anything other than markers within a process that has swallowed them whole: a process aimed at the debunking of criticism's reliance on simulacra and resemblance. Goethe is a stableboy, Gide thinks he is Goethe so Gide wants to resemble a stableboy. Along the way, Seillières, Nietzsche, Brémond and Fénelon are drawn into this process of substitution, the formation of inadequate resemblances. All are rendered ridiculous by the pointless way in which they adopt the ambitions and even the guises of equally disreputable precursors. The whole elaborate house of cards teeters perpetually on the verge of collapse.

Aragon conjures an image of debased equals producing a depressing surplus of redundant production purely for their own satisfaction, a critical observation supported through an analogy with the logic of raising statues in the city of Paris:

A statue of the Countess of Noailles will be raised on Boulevard Haussman as soon as the Paris municipal council has at long last realised that this lady is an incurable fool. Baron Seillières will never get a statue in Paris. He will get one in the Oise region. Henri Brémond will get a cenotaph. All this bronze seed, yet poor Noailles will get only a bas-relief made of bread-crumbs. *You too can have your very own statue: a basically Parisian little game.*⁴

This passage picks up on the dubious relationship between statuary and literary greatness, which Aragon had initially introduced in relation to the statue of Shakespeare 'raised on the Boulevard Haussman the day the Paris municipal council realised that he was the father of the idea of the clown'.⁵ However, the proliferation of statues,

3 Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, pp.8-9.

4 *Ibid.*, p.9.

5 *Ibid.*, p.8.

the 'basically Parisian little game' that Aragon describes was a far more concrete phenomenon than any corresponding abundance of stableboys or clowns that he might have identified in the world of literature. That the erection of statues should be used to expose and characterise the poverty of literature should be seen as indicative of Aragon's sensitivity to the uniquely Parisian phenomena '*statuomanie*' (statuomania) and '*statuophobie*' (statuephobia), the spirit, if not the historical detail of which, he had outlined in 1926 in *Paris Peasant*:

And what will become of humanity on that fast approaching day when the population of statues will have grown to such huge proportions in town and country alike that it will scarcely be possible to make one's way along the streets choked with statues, across the fields of poses? [...] Humanity will perish from statuomania, that's what.⁶

Although the unlikely survival of humanity puts pay to Aragon's prophecy, the marvellous possibility of 'fields of poses' was a reality in the Paris of the Third Republic and the acknowledgement of this fact demands an exploration of the phenomena of statuomania and statuephobia in the specific and corrosive context of surrealism. The images, objects, texts and events that bind these concepts to surrealist thought in the late 1920s and early 1930s occupy an obscure and as yet unexplored territory, with Aragon's suggestive polemic forming part of a body of material that includes photography by Eugène Atget, Jacques-André Boiffard and Pierre Jahan, texts by Robert Desnos and Marcel Sauvage, and a striking set of collages by an artist known as 'Constantinesco'.

This chapter starts with an outline of the historical phenomenon of statuomania, both prior to Aragon's reference, and as it has most recently been described, setting the scene for an exploration of some well-known surrealist texts and images concerning statuary. Central to this account is a detailed analysis of Robert Desnos's 1930 essay 'Pygmalion and the Sphinx' focusing on the relationship between Boiffard's photographs and Desnos's text, as well as their cumulative

6 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. S.W. Taylor, Boston, 1994, p.152.

critical effect.⁷ In this way, the monumental notion of the surrealist *grand homme*, raised in the previous chapter through the idea of the pantheon, is re-considered in terms of the way that this category might be represented: or, more accurately, how representation itself might fail in the production of a monumental past. There then follows a critique of the iconoclastic efficacy of various manifestations of what might be called surrealist 'statuephobia', detailing the political, ideological and aesthetic grounds for such interventions, and questioning their status as 'attacks'. This surrealist tour of Parisian monuments then concludes by describing the fate of many of the statues that had been the most frequent targets for surrealist attention, and explain the paradox that they are now most clearly visible through a surrealist lens.

* * *

We enter Aragon's fields of poses in 1911 with Gustave Pessard, a historian specialising in the history of Paris, member of the illustrious Société des Amis des Monuments de Paris, and author of *Statuomanie Parisienne – étude critique sur l'abus des statues*.⁸ The word 'statuomanie' had been in use since 1879, but Pessard was the first to move beyond vague journalistic complaints about the proliferation of statues in the city, and towards a systematic account of the phenomenon.⁹ In addition to Pessard's statistical analysis, *Statuomanie Parisienne* contains an *avant-propos* on the current rules for raising and locating statues by a municipal councillor named Le Corbeiller, and a *post-*

7 *Documents* 1, 1930, pp.32–9.

8 Pessard also produced the comprehensive *Nouveau Dictionnaire Historique de Paris*, Paris, 1904.

9 Maurice Agulhon locates the first use of the word in a supplement to Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle*, produced between 1880 and 1890: 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire,' (1978), M. Agulhon, *Histoire Vagabonde I, Ethnologie et politique dans la France contemporaine*, Paris, 1988, p.138. Jean Adhémar has suggested that the source for Larousse was a newspaper article in *Le Voleur*, 17th October 1879: 'Les statues parisiennes des grands hommes', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, LXXXIII, March 1974, pp.149–52.

propos by Raymond Strauss tackling aesthetic and artistic issues. In the main body of the text, Pessard claims that there were 335 statues included in funerary monuments in cemeteries, 325 allegorical or mythological figures in the squares and avenues, 180 figures in the façades of the Louvre and the Hôtel de Ville and a further 74 proposed statues awaiting completion, making nearly 900 in total. To consolidate this almost unbelievable assertion Pessard produced a list, in alphabetical order, of all 478 of the statues representing *grands homes*: describing where they might be found and in some cases where multiple different monuments to the same individuals were located. Although it seems certain that Pessard was deliberately alarmist in his calculations, even counting statues which had only been proposed, and may never have seen the light of day, subsequent studies suggest that he was correct in detecting a dramatically rising tide of statuary in the city. In fact, six times as many statues had been erected in Paris between 1870 and 1911 as had been raised between 1800 and 1870; a leap from around twenty-five in the first seventy years of the nineteenth century to nearly 150 during the Third Republic.¹⁰

Pessard's pamphlet, however, was not only aimed at alerting the people of Paris to the sheer number of statues appearing in recent years, but to changes in the choices of subject matter; away from the traditionally heroic and towards the didactic representation of republican virtues. Pessard gave a statistical breakdown of the types of figures most recently represented: forty-eight Poets, forty-seven Writers, thirty-nine Painters, twenty-three Architects, nineteen Composers, twelve Politicians, twelve Sculptors.¹¹ Statuomania, the profusion of inappropriate (for which we might read 'republican') statues, was described as an aggressive urban blight threatening to overwhelm the city centre. Often, however, although Pessard appears to be making a reasonable point, the hyperbole is faintly ludicrous, confusing inani-

10 These figures were calculated by Jacques Lanfranchi in his thesis *Les Statues de Paris*, Paris I, 1979, p9. See also J. Adhémar, 'Les statues parisiennes des grands hommes'.

11 G. Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne – étude critique sur l'abus des statues*, Paris, 1911 pp.56–7.

mate objects and their real-life subject matter, and blurring the line between statues and the figures they represent: 'How did Shakespeare come to be on the boulevard Haussman? Henry Becque on the pavement of Villiers avenue? And Rodin's Thinker on the steps of the Pantheon? Why three statues of Alfred de Musset? How many Victor Hugo's must we have?'¹²

Shakespeare obviously had nothing to do with the statue signifying his presence on the Boulevard Haussman and yet its existence is offered as evidence of an incomprehensible logic. The effect of the passage is to evoke an almost tangible threat posed by the statues, as if they possessed ideas or itineraries of their own; the potential for movement even. The propensity of statues to move mysteriously around the streets of Paris was never more evident than with Alfred de Musset, who, as June Hargrove describes, departed his prominent plinth at the Théâtre-Française for a more secluded resting-place in the Parc Monceau.¹³ Were there really three Alfred de Musset's or did it just seem that way?¹⁴

The authorities responsible for such matters were represented within Pessard's critique by Le Corbeiller, the municipal councillor who had the misfortune to be dealing with statuomania while Dujardin-Baumetz, the uncontested 'champion of inaugurations' was secretary of state for the arts (1906–1913).¹⁵ In his *avant-propos*, Le Corbeiller applauds Pessard's encyclopaedic list-making as clear evidence of statuomania, admitting that 'there are indeed "issues with statues"', which he describes as follows: they should be works of art, they should represent figures of incontestable celebrity and they should blend harmoniously with the environment. Having accepted

12 Ibid., p.13 (see appendix).

13 J. Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris, an Open Air Pantheon: The History of Statues to Great Men*, Antwerp, 1989, p.175:

14 I am grateful to Dr Ladislav Kesner of the Castle Museum in Prague for relating the story of Jerome K Jerome's visit to Prague in which he became lost and seemed to continually encounter the same equestrian statue of Wenceslaus: it later transpired that five models of the monument had been positioned in different parts of the city in order to select a final location.

15 M. Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire,' p.140–7. See also: R. Dujardin-Baumetz, *Discours prononcés de 1905–1911*, Paris, 1913.

that these conditions are seldom met, Le Corbeiller suggests some potential solutions, the most intriguing of which was the relocation of surplus statues to the 'fortifications': the derelict green belt encircling the city of Paris.¹⁶ The fact that (presumably) the most outspoken of city councillors could conceive of nothing more radical than the centrifugal re-distribution of statues from centre to periphery gives an indication of the entrenched attitudes regarding civic monuments: when there were too many Victor Hugo's in the centre, they would simply start placing them in the suburbs.

The idea of the streets and parks being choked with statues, 'fields of poses' as Aragon put it, had been a popular and on-going concern in the press in the years before the war. In 1905 a critic had written 'our streets, our public places, our squares, are destined to become the annexes of our necropolis'.¹⁷ There were suggestions in 1911 of an 'invasion' of statues, of being 'buried under [a] throng of celebrities' and of 'all sorts of monuments [...] scattered over our streets and squares'. Most evocative of any of these critical interventions, however, catalogued by June Hargrove, is a comment made by René Bazin, a member the Académie Française, who wrote in 1911, that 'in the Third Republic bronze is like ink, too much flows'.¹⁸ Tying the increase in statuary to the burgeoning literary field brings to mind both Aragon's original equation of statue and bankrupt *littérateurs* and the statistical pedantry of Pessard's pamphlet. At the intersection of these ideas, statuomania confirms its character as a historical phenomenon tied inextricably to a certain time and place: 'a basically Parisian little game'.¹⁹

Perhaps the most eloquent contribution to the statuomania debate at the time, however, comprised few words, drawing instead upon photographic evidence. In 1913, two years after Pessard's pamphlet, the popular journal *L'Illustration* published an article entitled 'Les Statues de Paris', which set out to ask whether there were in fact too

16 Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne*, pp.5–6, 'avant-propos par conseiller municipal Le Corbeiller'.

17 *L'Éclair*, 29 février, 1905.

18 Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, pp.255–9.

19 Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, p.9.

LES STATUES DE PARIS

Il est périodiquement question des statues qui ornent les places et les avenues de Paris, et, à plusieurs reprises, de nos vives campagnes ont été menées contre les services compétents de la Ville, accusés ou à un reproche d'insouciance, ou de négligence, ou de dédain, dans d'insupportables proportions. Les honneurs des édifices publics en ont été victimes.

Il faut donc essayer de faire, beaucoup de statues. Mais y en a-t-il trop ? Sur ce point, on a dit souvent, lors des incertitudes. Des listes ont été publiées, qui témoignent d'une information un peu limitée et superficielle, notamment, par interception, des monuments égarés en projet, et, dans, même, les comptes n'ont pas atteint de recueillir les fonds recouvrés. C'est pourquoi il nous a paru intéressant d'établir une nomenclature précise des statues parisiennes, en même temps que d'en reproduire l'image, et d'en dresser ainsi une sorte de catalogue complet, exhaustif, et, nécessairement, inédit : cet inventaire s'est fait, en effet, administrativement, et les pages que nous donnons ici constituent une collection photographique que jamais, pas plus que nous-mêmes, nous n'avons eu le loisir ou le temps de réunir.

La manière dont a été compilée cette liste appelle quelques observations. Elle ne donne pas une nomenclature de statues, mais une nomenclature de statues, à ceux qui y cherchent, par exemple, la statue de généraux qui désigne, au côté de la rue de Rivoli, le pavillon de Rohan, ou les trois vives personnages dont les figures sont distribuées sur la façade de l'Hôtel de Ville. Toutes les statues sont indiquées par leur nom, et qu'on ne saurait supprimer sans entraver l'harmonie de l'édifice dont elles font partie, ou, du moins, sans nuire à son caractère. Et la liste ne comprend que celles qui, se dressant sur la voie publique ou dans les lieux de prome-

nade, pourraient être déplacées sans avoir inévitablement pour l'esthétique. Elle exclut, d'autre part, les statues uniquement décoratives ou de caractère symbolique. C'est ainsi qu'elle ne fait état ni des fontaines de la place du Théâtre Français, ni des Heures de Franco dans sa place de la Louvre, pas plus que du César de Rodin placé devant le Panthéon ou du Troisième de la République de Duboué qui se dresse dans la Seine. Et l'on n'y trouve pas davantage les « Villes » de la place de la Concorde, les quatre « Heures » de la fontaine Lavoisier, ou « l'Europe, l'Asie et l'Afrique » qui surmontent le faîte de l'église de la Trinité.

Des réserves indiquées, il est ainsi de dénombrer les statues d'hommes et de femmes illustres, ou simplement notables, que possède Paris. Nous avons groupé ici 179 statues, mais, si l'on tient compte de ce fait que certains monuments sont consacrés à plusieurs personnages, on arrive au total de 187 effigies, — en faisant figures, bien entendu, dans la liste, les deux destinées au dôme, celle de Le Miroir, égarée, au printemps passé, dans le Jardin de l'Inde, et celle du général Danzas, prise et grand-père des deux célèbres écrivains, qui, en leur compagnie, sont l'ancienne place Malesherbes, l'ancienne place des Trois-Denis.

Le chiffre que nous donnons n'apparaît sans doute pas excessif : 179 statues réparties dans les vingt arrondissements ne représentent qu'une moyenne d'un peu plus de 2 par quartier. Encore convient-il de remarquer que les parcs, à eux seuls, en absorbent une bonne part, qu'au Luxembourg, par exemple, on en recense 18 au Jardin des Plantes 6, au Parc Monceau 3. On peut donc, avec raison, prétendre contre la légende, si répandue, qu'il y a trop de statues à Paris.



Fig 29: René Millaud, photographs for 'Les Statues de Paris', *L'Illustration*, No.3692, Paris, 29 November 1913, p.414



Fig 30: René Millaud, photographs for 'Les Statues de Paris', *L'Illustration*, No.3692, Paris, 29 November 1913, p.415

many statues in the city. Having cast doubt on some of Pessard's methods and statistics, the article presents a tacit but highly persuasive answer to the question: a photographic inventory of 179 statues from the twenty central arrondissements, spread over five pages of the journal (Figures 29 and 30).²⁰ The text suggests that although there may seem to be a large number in total, they are, in fact, scattered in the various quarters of the city, in parks and secluded spaces. The photographs confirm this moderate stance. The photographer, René Millaud, produced an invaluable archive of Parisian statuary, capturing styles, types of plinth, the locations of the statues and even images of the public 'appreciating' them. In spite of the tiny size of the reproduced photographs, crammed forty-two to a page, Millaud shows evidence of considerable style and sensitivity to his task. Each image is carefully composed and in some cases, even offers a comment on the subject of the statue. The article suggests distinctions between what it calls 'illustrious' and 'notorious' figures, made on barely concealed political lines, and Millaud's photographs leave little doubt as to which is which. Prestigious but conservative statues in central locations, such as Joan of Arc and Molière, are proudly displayed and sometimes surrounded by onlookers (Figure 31). In stark contrast, the more controversial Chevalier de la Barre is undermined by a shabby canvas backdrop, and Jean Baffier's Marat looks thoroughly dejected, bathing in a quiet corner of the Parc des Buttes Chaumont (Figures 32 and 33).

The use of photography also throws up a dichotomy with respect to the existence of statuemia. While demonstrating the fact that there are indeed many statues in the city, the article implies that it is only taken as a set that there seem to be too many. The abstract formulation 'all the statues in Paris' is an imaginary phenomenon, which as the text details, neither the Hôtel de Ville nor the ministry of Beaux Arts felt the need to monitor. In order to prove the point, their photographer, Millaud had to spend days walking around the city to photograph them all. As a *set*, the photographs could therefore be said to function against the objects that they depict, generating a sense of abundance verging on superfluity. However, this abundance exists

20 *L'Illustration*, No.3692, 29 November 1913, pp.414-18.



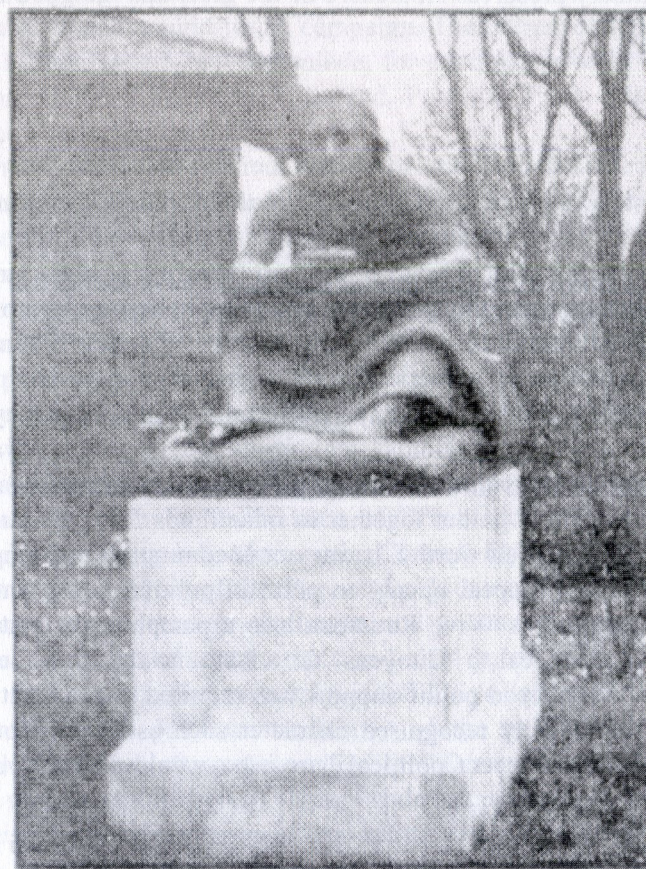
MOLIÈRE
Rue de Richelieu.

Fig 31: René Millaud, 'Molière, Rue de Richelieu', detail from 'Les Statues de Paris', *L'Illustration*, No.3692, Paris, 29 November 1913, p.414



CHEVALIER DE LA BARRE
Rue Lamarck.

Fig 32: René Millaud, 'Chevalier de la Barre, Rue Lamarck', detail from 'Les Statues de Paris', *L'Illustration*, No.3692, Paris, 29 November 1913, p.418



MARAT
Parc des Buttes-Chaumont.

Fig 33: René Millaud, 'Marat, Parc des Buttes-Chaumont', detail from 'Les Statues de Paris', *L'Illustration*, No.3692, Paris, 29 November 1913, p.418

only in the assembled photographic archive, doubling for the way in which statuary preserves an archive of the great and the good in plain view.

* * *

Both Gustave Pessard's assertion of the threat posed by statuomania and *L'Illustration's* placatory inventory engaged with the administrative issues underlying the problem. Placing a statue in Paris during the notoriously beurocratic Third Republic was by no means simple. The rules of the game were complex and totally divorced the initial commissioning process from the installation of the end result.²¹ Although the state funded many public monuments, either by competition or through the salon system, up to 75% of statuary was paid for by public subscription.²² Groups of businessmen, politicians and civic leaders would gather together to raise funds for a monument to someone that they felt worthy. It was not uncommon, for example, for such petitions to appeal openly to partisan political sentiments with declarations such as 'Vive Rousseau!' on a pamphlet for a statue to Danton, or an appeal to 'Citoyens' for a statue to the Chevalier de la Barre.²³ If widespread public support was required, the subject would have to be a widely recognised character such as Hugo, Rousseau, Joan of Arc or a recent political hero who would arouse sympathy

21 See: Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire', J. Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, and J. Hargrove, 'Les Statues de Paris,' trans. M. Chatenet, in P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Memoire II, La Nation*, Paris, 1993, pp.1855-86. See also T. Burollet, 'Le dépôt des sculptures de la ville de Paris', *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, LXXXIII, Paris, March 1974, pp.113-24.

22 J. Lanfranchi, *Les Statues de Paris*, p.203 and C. Chevillot, 'Le Socle', A. Pigeot and P. Durey (eds), *La Sculpture Français au XIX siecle*, Paris, 1986, p.248.

23 Archives Nationales, F21/4856, dossier Chevalier de la Barre. There is a reproduction of the pamphlet in Neil McWilliam, 'Monuments, Martyrdom, and the Politics of Religion in the French Third Republic,' *Art Bulletin*, LXXVII, No.2, June 1983, p.193.

(like the assassinated president Sadi Carnot).²⁴ Another technique was to enlist a large number of well-known (and preferably wealthy) supporters to add weight to the campaign. The correspondence of the 'Amis Littéraires' of Paul Déroulède, for example, reveals that their members included President Millerand, Poincaré, Foch, Pétain, Barthou and Sarah Bernhardt.²⁵

Once funds were secured, a sculptor was then employed to carry out the commission and only then was the municipal council approached to accept the statue and allocate a site, although a specific locale or at least arrondissement was usually requested. This two-stage process meant that from an artistic point of view, the sculptor was unable to create a statue sympathetic to the surroundings. The municipal council was responsible for finding an aesthetically sympathetic site and had the potential to limit or exploit the impact of a statue by choosing the location.²⁶ The 'Amis Littéraires de Paul Déroulède' mentioned above, had for example, great hopes of a prominent location for their statue of Déroulède and requested the Tuileries, the Champs de Mars or the Champs Elysées as 'suitable'.²⁷ However, the archives of the Bureau des Monuments in Paris reveal that those responsible for finding a site encountered stiff political resistance from both literary critics and local bureaucrats, and it took nearly ten years to find a suitably inoffensive (obscure) location.²⁸ Responses in the press are indicative of the partisan atmosphere. Journalists on the left were horrified that Déroulède would be honoured with a statue before Zola, while on the right, the Action Française, reversed the comparison, asking why a site had been found

24 C. Martinet, 'Mécanisme de Choix,' A. Pigeot and P. Durey (eds), *La Sculpture Français au XIX siecle*, Paris, 1986, pp.216-56.

25 Archives Nationales, F21/4855, Dossier Déroulède.

26 Le Corbeiller stated that the statue must be in harmony with its environment but didn't mention that this was the responsibility of the body of which he was a part. Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne*, p.6.

27 Archives Nationales, F21/4855, Dossier Déroulède: a letter from the president of the 'Amis' to the President of the municipal council, 24 January 1923.

28 The 4eme arrondissement flatly refused to take the monument according to a report in *L'Echo de Paris*, 25 January 1923: Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Déroulède.

for a *proposed* statue of Zola while no-one find a location for the *completed* statue of Déroulède.²⁹

Maurice Agulhon's seminal 1978 essay 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire' discusses statuomania in retrospect, as an historical phenomenon brought about by this bureaucratic process.³⁰ It is notable, however, that the analytical distinctions that Agulhon employs to reveal links between the process and the unfortunate result, replicate the distinct concerns of the three authors of Pessard's 1911 pamphlet. Le Corbeiller set out guidelines for the locations of statues, which Agulhon describes (in the streets and parks rather than cemeteries and churches) as ideologically determined. The choice of who to 'statuefier' (literally 'statueify'), which Pessard had noted was changing significantly in 1911, Agulhon attributes to political considerations.³¹ He also follows the author of Pessard's post-propos, Raymond Strass, in characterising the alleged aesthetic shortcomings of the results not in terms of the poverty of talent but as the inevitable result of such unprecedented political and ideological investment in statuary.³²

Agulhon locates the origins of statuomania in the ideological aspirations for public works of art under the newly established Third Republic, which he associates with the revolutionary tradition of 1789 and 1830. That is to say, optimistic, pedagogic administrations following conservative, authoritarian regimes.³³ The *procès-verbal* (proceedings) of the municipal council from the 1880s and 1890s in the Archives Nationales confirms this conjecture unequivocally: as the councillors discuss the renaming of streets – another concurrent phenomenon, politically motivated substitutions are common. 'I pro-

pose the name Rue Danton, for the Rue Bonaparte' is a typical, if heavy-handed suggestion.³⁴ Although the first statues raised to inaugurate and consolidate republican power were calculated to be politically conservative (the very first being Frémiet's *Joan of Arc* in 1874), a quiet revolution was taking place in the ideological use of statuary in the streets of Paris.³⁵ As René Millaud's project for *L'Illustration* confirms, throughout the city, formulaic, rather bland statues of respected, politically conservative figures were being placed in prominent locations and sharing an almost uncanny resemblance as 'monumental' representations of *grands hommes*. Their plinths, garments, poses, and expressions blend into an anaemic whole, which has best been described as: 'grand-homme-en-complet-veston-sur-socle-géométrique-avec-dame-en-peignoir-qui-lui-tend-une-palme', or 'great man in long jacket on geometric pedestal with woman in dressing gown offering him a palm leaf'.³⁶ Catherine Chevillot has suggested that this aesthetic consistency constituted a rhetorical red light to the passer-by, in her words: 'attention, ici grand homme français!'³⁷ Although the cumulative effect was the invisibility of statues described at the time by Robert Musil.³⁸ This dichotomy, of supposedly arresting individual objects, which collectively or cumulatively diminish in significance, is of course reproduced exactly in Millaud's photographic archive.

Politically conciliatory choices, coupled with the espousal of intellectual civic virtues could not hide the fact that statuary was being used in an unprecedented fashion. The raising of statues to recently

29 *L'Action Française*, 10 January 1923, and *L'Humanité*, 29 January 1923: Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Déroulède.

30 Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire': first published in *Ethnologie Française*, VIII, 1, 1978. See M. Agulhon, *Histoire Vagabonde*, Paris, 1988.

31 *Ibid.*, pp.142–3.

32 This approach is a considerable advance on Louis Réau's description of a crisis in taste and restraint by those who should have known better: *Les Monuments Detruits de L'Art Français*, Paris, 1959, Vol.II, pp.258–9. More recent work on the subject, notably June Hargrove's, provides much needed detail but remain indebted to Agulhon's disciplined theoretical approach.

33 Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire,' pp.139–40.

34 'Je propose pour le rue Bonaparte le nom de rue Danton': Archives Nationales, F/1eI/169, Procès-verbal de conseil municipal de Paris, 17 juin 1885, p.841.

35 For a discussion of the republican assimilation of the figure of Joan of Arc, see A. Boime, *Hollow Icons: The Politics of Sculpture in Nineteenth Century France*, Ohio and London, 1987.

36 T. Dufrêne, *Monument and Modernité à Paris: Art, Espace public et enjeux de mémoire 1891–1996*, Paris, 1996: Dufrêne attributes this label to Crebulier/Agulhon, p.25.

37 A. Pigeot and P. Durey (eds), *La Sculpture Française au XIXe siècle*, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 1986, C. Chevillot, 'Le Socle', p.249.

38 R. Musil, 'Monuments' in *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, trans. P. Wortsman, New York, 2006, pp.64–8.

deceased political figures, in the open air, which councillor Le Corbeiller had specifically described as undesirable, was a new phenomenon encouraged by the subscription system.³⁹ Agulhon has argued that prior to 1870, such images were reserved for cemeteries and private funeral monuments so criticisms of streets filled with dead celebrities, becoming in effect 'annexes of the necropolis' are understandable.⁴⁰ Also, the central spaces in the city that some of the statues occupied drew attention to figures like Chappe (inventor of the aerial telegraph) on the Boulevard Saint-Germain, or Pelletier and Caventou (chemists) on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, who would otherwise have descended into the relative obscurity of the *Petit Larousse Illustré*.

As the type of public figures selected changed, as Pessard noted, the *grands hommes* immortalised were more likely to be literary figures, humanists, scientists or inventors than military leaders, but the statues remained consistent in their stylistic appearance. If anything, rather than becoming smaller and more low-key, perhaps to reflect the relative merit of the subject, they became ever larger, more bombastic and grandiose. One aspect of the stylistic development of public statuary was the inexorable increase in the size of pedestals. Often designed by architects rather than sculptors, they soon transcended the function of raising the *grand homme* from street level to become complex works in their own rights.⁴¹

After the relatively cautious initial wave of public statuary in the Third Republic came the high-point of politically controversial statuary, what Pessard called 'politico-statuomania', which began in earnest after 1889.⁴² It was between then and the outbreak of the First World War that political battles were waged through the tactical deployment of statuary: a giant chess game arbitrated and facilitated

39 Le Corbeiller cites a law passed in 1904 which restricted the raising of a statue to a recently deceased political figure to ten years after their death: Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne*, pp.5-6.

40 Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire', p.145.

41 C. Chevillot, 'Le Socle'.

42 See F. Goguel, *La Politique des partis sous la IIIe République*, Paris, 1957, pp.66-7: Goguel attributes this change to both the defeat of the right-wing Boulangiste uprising and consequent republican electoral majority.

by the municipal council.⁴³ The battle lines were drawn in favour of the ascendant republican regime no longer reticent to employ its revolutionary heritage, and further emboldened in its espousal of republican values by the treachery of the right epitomised by first the Boulanger and later the Dreyfus 'affairs'. Proposals swiftly accumulated for statues that epitomised specific republican virtues, with obvious choices such as Gambetta (1888), Rousseau (1889), and La Fontaine (1891) accompanied by marginal and politically sensitive figures such as Etienne Dolet (1889), Marat and Danton (1891) and even a Robespierre in the Tuileries (1911).⁴⁴

This may seem like a rather pedestrian rehearsal of Parisian political history but in order to understand the political implications of later surrealist interventions in this field, some background is required on the statues that they selected as worthy of attention. In 1906, for example, the inauguration of the highly controversial statue of the Chevalier de la Barre took place in the Azais square in Montmartre (Figure 32). The Chevalier, who according to Voltaire, was burned at the stake for refusing to salute a religious procession, was deemed worthy of a memorial by radical left-wing subscribers to 'The International Free Thought Federation': their hero depicted tied to the stake with a quotation from Voltaire at his feet.⁴⁵ This blunt political statement was reinforced by its location immediately outside the basilica of Sacré-Coeur (which itself performed the ideological function of erasing a site of Communard resistance).⁴⁶ The statue

43 Chris Green describes the considerable public response to one of the most celebrated and self-evidently triumphant results of this process, Jules Dalou's 'Triumph of the Republic', located in the centre of the Place de la Nation, locating this monumental image in the context of the Great Exhibition of 1900: C. Green, *Art in France 1900-1940*, New Haven and London, 2001, p.1, pp.4-14.

44 Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne*, p.52.

45 For an account of the origins and responses to this statue see N. McWilliam, 'Monuments, Martyrdom, and the Politics of Religion in the French Third Republic', *Art Bulletin*, June 1995, Vol.LXXVII, No., pp.186-206.

46 R.N. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, New Haven and London, 1994, pp.219-21.



Si je dis qu'à Paris la statue d'Etienne Dolet, place Maubert, m'a toujours tout ensemble attiré et causé un insupportable malaise... page 23

Fig 34: Photograph of the statue of Etienne Dolet, collection Georges SIROT, plate 3 of the 1963 re-edition of *Nadja* by André Breton, Gallimard, Paris, 1963, Reproduced by kind permission, Editions GALLIMARD

proved both controversial and unpopular, as it seemed to undermine the conciliatory agenda of its far larger and more commanding neighbour. Indeed, even twelve years after the inauguration of the monument, a distraught grandfather wrote to complain about the obvious sectarian symbolism inherent in its location, or as he put it the 'rapport with the monument that it is destined to counter-balance'.⁴⁷

Another relevant example is the statue of Etienne Dolet, which occupied the Place Maubert in various forms from 1889 onwards (Figure 34).⁴⁸ Dolet was another radical republican ancestor, condemned to death by the King in 1546 for publishing prohibited books. In common with the Chevalier de la Barre, Dolet was revived as a republican martyr in the Third Republic. His monument bore the inscription 'a victim of royal and religious intolerance', and was correctly interpreted at the time as an attack on the Catholic, monarchist right.⁴⁹ Henri 'Le Douanier' Rousseau's 1907 painting *The Representatives of the Foreign Powers Coming to Salute the Republic as a Sign of Peace*, confirms this perception of the iconography of the monument. Rousseau, whose political imagery often drew upon well-known symbols, confers a ritual importance upon the Dolet statue as a totem around which children dance as the red-bonneted figure of liberty presides over an imaginary ceremony near by.⁵⁰

However, although such open republican triumphalism was clearly unacceptable to those with opposing political views, what was criticised as a republican 'craze to glorify mediocrity' also extended to the right. In the instance of Etienne Dolet, Catholic subscribers wished to place a compensatory figure in the (already crowded) Place

47 Archives Nationales, F21/4856, Dossier Chevalier de la Barre: Letter from Paul Vivien to the Minister for Instruction Publique et Beaux Arts, February 1919.

48 June Hargrove provides an image of a make-shift version of the statue put in place prior to the inauguration: J. Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, p.186.

49 J. Hargrove, *Les Statues de Paris*, pp.1866-7. See also the 'Dossier à Etienne Dolet' in the Bureau des Monuments, Paris, which details the controversy over the statue.

50 T. Dufrière, *Monument and Modernité à Paris*, p.22.

Fig 35: J. Belon, 'Les Deux Buchers', (The two stakes), from *L'Intransigeant*, No.7,385, 3 October 1900



Maubert to cancel out or at least stare down Dolet, as a contemporary cartoon entitled 'The Two Stakes' confirms (Figure 35).⁵¹

This partisan deployment of statuary did nothing, however, to foster affection for the statues themselves, as the descriptions of Dolet as an 'offence against French art' and Déroulède as a 'new crime against the beauty of Paris' make clear.⁵² Pessard's ally Raymond Strauss was unsparing in his criticisms of 'rotten' artists whose pandering to council officials and selfish disinterest in reaching 'Olympian heights' cursed the streets.⁵³ Unsubtle political rhetoric and unimaginative sculptors resulted in the inevitable criticism that statues were raised to satisfy the vanities of the living rather than out of respect for the dead.⁵⁴ Far from being aesthetic objects representing noble deeds and virtues, the statues themselves were simply the bronze remainders of political and ideological agendas, which both motorists and pedestrians were finding it increasingly difficult to avoid.

It is no surprise then, that there was a *volte-face* in regard to statuary between 1870 and 1914, which meant that it was just as fashionable to deprecate monuments at the end of the period, as it had been to raise money for them at the beginning.⁵⁵ Gustave Pessard's alarmist description of the phenomenon of statuomania, in stark contrast to the measured attitude of *L'Illustration*, could be said to display a creeping 'statuephobia'. Statuephobia can, however, be seen to have been more powerful than either lame journalistic complaints about the ruined beauty of the city-centre or the popular recognition that there simply wasn't room for a 'pantheon of the crossroads' in the age of the motor car.⁵⁶ In fact, the photographs that Millaud produced for *L'Illustration* are remarkable for the way in which they produce a sense of surplus statuary: what may have seemed reasonable on its

51 Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, p.142. N. McWilliam, 'Monuments, Martyrdom', p.188.

52 Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Etienne Dolet and Dossier Déroulède: *L'Oeuvre*, 8 May 1920.

53 R. Strauss, in Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne*, pp.60-1.

54 Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire', p.140.

55 Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, p.259.

56 Agulhon, 'La "statuomanie" et l'histoire', p.170.

own assumed a different, perhaps even threatening aspect as part of a set of 179. If Agulhon's arguments about the ideological roots and effects of statuomania are to be believed, then it was nothing less than a freak by-product of an attempt to rationalise the installation of works of art in public places: returning us to the structure of Pessard's 1911 pamphlet in which the rules for raising statues introduce their alarming results and conclude with the organic description of statues as the 'poisonous mushrooms of the Parisian fauna', evoking the fantastic stealth of silent nocturnal installations.⁵⁷ The very possibility that a carefully regulated bureaucratic process could lead directly to something called statuephobia is almost too marvellous to be true: a Republican didactic experiment as out of hand as the magicians apprentice. What is more, however, between the publication of Pessard's pamphlet in 1911 and Agulhon's 1978 essay, most of the statues mentioned thus far were either removed or destroyed. Today, just as *L'Illustration* had suggested in 1913, statuomania is not a problem in the streets of Paris, and statuephobia persists as a purely imaginary phenomenon induced by photographic and literary archives.

* * *

The unnamed statue that delivers 'The Statue's Speech' in Louis Aragon's *Paris Peasant* begins with a rallying call: 'Fusillades! For fifty years now I've been waiting for the fusillades. It is high time that all these moving, laughing people who trickle through the landscape where I am forever frozen should be plugged with lead.'⁵⁸ Aragon's memorial figure is violently impatient, bored with the endless ebb and flow, the 'futile movements of crowds', scornful of the 'great abstract delirium' called psychology and the 'town councillors infatuated with [the] theatrical, lifeless art' of statuary.⁵⁹ Central to this diatribe, articulated by an inanimate object, is the idea of a monument as a

57 Strauss, in Pessard, *Statuomanie Parisienne*, p.60.

58 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.154.

59 Ibid., pp.154-5.

repository of collective memory, which the statue itself finds to be worthless.⁶⁰ The statue calls for the destruction of the very concept that it unhappily embodies: 'you never ask yourselves, you whose hair floats lightly on your heads, what your phantom witnesses on their plinths engraved with famous names think of your trickeries'.⁶¹

The choice of 'statuefied' *grand homme* to voice a critique of the psychological investment in the past is illuminating and vital.⁶² The isolated, pontificating statue stands in stark contrast to the busy, vibrant space of the Passage de l'Opéra, for which Aragon takes up the pen on the eve of its demolition. In Aragon's text, the statue (as an object in the world) is deprived of any specific cultural meaning or investment above and beyond an evidently bankrupt sense in which a statue functions as a hierarchical marker, very much like 'attention, ici grand homme français'. These self-confessed 'vagrant idols' punctuate streets and parks giving rhythm to a huge nostalgia, which, as Aragon puts it, 'blends the inanimate with the more subtle forms of life'.⁶³ Walter Benjamin's notion of 'involuntary memory' is often evoked in relation to the surrealist responses to such nuances off the urban fabric.⁶⁴ For Aragon, however, the possible anxiety of 'involuntary memories' resurfacing is smothered or suffocated by the apathy of the flesh and blood population of the city towards their bronze counterparts. From the viewpoint that Aragon adopts, a city populated with statues will never be the haunted space that André Breton and later Walter Benjamin describe. As long as the 'fetishists of the public highway' prevail, it will always fail to suggest anything at

60 Aragon is also re-stating his rejection of the way in which the notion of the *grands hommes* operates, as set out in 'Les Buvards du Conseil des Ministres', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, 6 March 1926, p.15. In this earlier example he describes government ministers as 'future bronzes' who are prisoners of the process that raises them onto pedestals.

61 Ibid., p.155.

62 For a discussion of the phenomenon of giving voices to statues see K. Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, Ithaca and London, 1992.

63 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.154.

64 See M. Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, California 1993, pp.77-86, and H. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, MIT, 1993, pp.193-208.

all beyond a gentle and reassuring 'nostalgia': the superficial cityscape crammed with 'monuments haunted by tourists' that Philippe Soupault describes in *The Last Nights of Paris*.⁶⁵

In 1927, a year after the publication of *Paris Peasant*, a group of surrealists, possibly organised by Aragon, produced and signed an open letter entitled '*Permettez!*'⁶⁶ It was addressed to the 'Representatives of the Department of Ardennes, the Mayor and Aldermen of Charleville and the President of the Society of Poets of the Ardennes' and concerned the re-erection of a monument to Rimbaud in his native town: the bronze bust of the poet that had decorated Charleville having been destroyed by the Germans during the Great War. Pursuing Aragon's idea that the 'statuefied' may not approve of their bronze reincarnations, *Permettez* also gives a voice to the (proposed) monument, using Rimbaud's own words on a variety of subjects (such as the people of his home town, France, the army and the church), to reveal the self-serving hypocrisy of those placing Rimbaud on a pedestal. The surrealists' conclusion to this collage of Rimbaud's sentiments echoes the cry for 'fusillades' in 'The Statue's Speech':

The statue that is unveiled today will perhaps undergo the same fate as the preceding one, removed by the Germans and used for making shells to demolish your station square, or remove to nothingness the museum where an ignoble exploitation of his glory is being prepared.⁶⁷

The authors of *Permettez* also allude here to the tendency for bronze monuments to be melted down during times of conflict dating back to the French Revolution and beyond. It is perhaps a unique irony that

65 P. Soupault, *Last Nights of Paris*, trans. W.C. Williams, Cambridge, 1992: after-word entitled 'William Carlos Williams in Paris by day and by night', pp.177-8.

66 J. Pierre (ed.), *Tracts Surréalistes et Déclarations Collectives 1922-1939*, Paris, 1980, pp.84-8. In his commentary to the letter, José Pierre notes that there is some uncertainty about who directed the collaboration but that it was certainly a collective effort: Maurice Nadeau suggested Raymond Queneau (this was endorsed by a manuscript exhibited in 1956), while André Thirion suggested Aragon as the 'author', with Rimbaud's citations proposed by Breton and Eluard.

67 Translation: M. Jean, *Autobiography of Surrealism*, New York, 1980, p.146.

statues cast in bronze (for reasons of both longevity and prestige), permanently embody the possibility that they existed in, and could revert to, a molten state. The specific charge that Rimbaud may be turned into shells is among the many uses to which bronze may have been put by an occupying force.⁶⁸ What is striking here, however, is the way in which memory and memorial curdle in the surrealist critique. Once again it is the absence of accurate or appropriate memory that the memorial remembers, and Rimbaud's words settle unpalatably on the nostalgic affirmation of a 'Charleville Rimbaud' that only ever existed as a bronze bust.

Such radical resistance to official memorials can be traced back to a strong revolutionary tradition in which marginal or factional political heroes and martyrs were reclaimed or withheld by those who sought to preserve their 'real' memories.⁶⁹ The surrealist complaint, however, is not just against a specific inadequate monument but against the civic statue or portrait bust as memorial genres. The surrealists' suggestion of 'ignoble exploitation' is redolent of the criticism of that earlier generation of statuephobes who felt that statues were increasingly being raised 'more to the glory of the living than the dead'. Taking this point of view to its logical conclusion, any critical engagement with memorial statuary would have to contend with the 'pantheon of the crossroads' not as straightforward representations of a monumental past, but as unwelcome aesthetic displays of the values of the present. The statue is an object discredited not by its outmoded style, or mediocre subject matter (although these factors may contribute) but by the manipulative and exploitative ideology supporting its very existence: as Philippe Soupault put it in 1928, 'statues that receive gold medals at the salon and adorn public squares [look] useless, motionless and out of date'.⁷⁰ All of which suggests something within surrealism closer to a militant statuephobia than ambivalence towards public monuments and historical spaces.

68 This is the most likely reason that the first bust of Rimbaud was removed.

69 Revolutionary examples could include Marat, Danton, Babeuf, Saint-Just or even Robespierre: See Chapters two and five of this book.

70 P. Soupault, *Last Nights of Paris*, pp.1-2.

Much has been made of André Breton's 'discomfort' before the statue of Etienne Dolet in *Nadja*.⁷¹ At the time of Breton's writing, the statue was thirty-eight years old and had been a focus of republican commemoration for at least twenty years.⁷² The pre-1940 'archive' image of Dolet which Breton used for the 1963 re-edition of *Nadja* shows a large pile of laurel wreaths at the base of the pedestal; evidence of continued memorial patronage (Figure 34).⁷³ Margaret Cohen keenly recounts the 'insurrectional history' of the Place Maubert in which Dolet was situated, the 'power' of which so affected Breton, referring to the following passage from *Nadja*:⁷⁴

I must insist, lastly, that such accidents of thought not be reduced to their *unjust* proportion as *faits-divers*, random episodes, so that when I say, for instance, that the statue of Etienne Dolet on its plinth in the Place Maubert in Paris has always fascinated me and induced unbearable discomfort, it will not immediately be supposed that I am merely ready for psychoanalysis.⁷⁵

Needless to say, it is the statue, on its plinth, which attracts and upsets Breton but only in the context of explaining the way in which accidents and distractions may 'cast a shadow across' and confuse his authorial narrative. In Breton's text, Dolet is isolated as a prompt for an 'anomaly or lacuna' that may cause narrative to fail.⁷⁶ This failure is doubled by the contrary feelings that Breton suggests the statue may elicit and further complicated by the proximity of the phrase '*unjust proportions*' to the 'statue of Etienne Dolet on its plinth in the Place Maubert'. Accounting for the occasional and unavoidable failure of memory and narrative, Breton pointedly selects a monumental *faits-divers* around which to arrange his floral tribute.

71 M. Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, pp.86-9.

72 Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Etienne Dolet.

73 Breton, *Nadja*, Paris, 1963, plate 3.

74 Cohen, *Profane Illumination*, p.87.

75 Breton, *Nadja*, trans. R. Howard, New York, 1960, p.24.

76 *Ibid.*, pp.23-4.

Aragon had also noted 'Etienne Dolet's broken chain in the Place Maubert' in the diatribe against monumental statuary that immediately preceded 'The Statue's Speech' in *Paris Peasant*.⁷⁷ The passage contains another direct link to *Nadja* in the evocation of the statue of Jean-Jacques Rousseau at the Place du Panthéon (Figure 20). The *grand homme* that Breton would look down upon from his hotel window is singled out by Aragon's general description of statues as 'useless: in their flannelette dressing gowns', a thinly veiled reference to Rousseau's peculiar 'period' garments which goes on to conclude that 'the simulacra of modern times derive from the very inoffensiveness of this garb, a magical power unknown to Ephesus or Angkor'.⁷⁸

For Aragon, the most worrying aspect of this possible seduction lies in the uses to which 'secret religions' will put these 'new idols' (perhaps the unthinking appreciation of tourists that offended Soupault).⁷⁹ Just as the apparently illegible Dolet had formed a focus for republican groups, and as a result perhaps, qualified itself as an 'offence against French art', Aragon notes that an 'imprecatory rite has grown up around the incredible Gambetta, of the Cour du Carrousel'.⁸⁰ Jean-Paul Aubé's vast monument to Gambetta in the Tuileries gardens was not far short of a ziggurat, with a quite 'incredible' concrete centre-piece; half-plinth, half-obelisk. The figure of Gambetta, hero of the 1870 siege of Paris, formed a small part of the narrative scene around the base of the monument, which was totally overwhelmed by an allegorical sculpture at the top. Even stranger, however, was the vast monumental version of the balloon in which Gambetta had made his escape that crowned Bartholdi's 'Monument to the National Defense' at the Porte des Ternes, where, Aragon asserts, he saw 'a long procession of people dressed in white who had

77 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, pp.151-3.

78 *Ibid.*, p.152: Ephesus and Angkor are ancient sites famous for their sculptural antiquities.

79 Soupault, *Last Nights of Paris*.

80 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.153. See also Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Etienne Dolet.

been sacrificing doves'.⁸¹ While references to Gambetta, Dolet, or even Admiral Nelson ('witness of a nation's hysteria') may harbour political undertones, it is the discussion of Paul Déroulède that draws Aragon into his most forthright criticism of Parisian idolatry:

To say nothing of the convulsionaries besieging the Strasbourg monument! You might remember, if you are old enough, the already decomposed corpse that this gang used to trundle along in a motorcar, draped in his cape, to the Place de la Concorde every year. By juxtaposing the green and mouldering Déroulède to the majestic stone figure, they insulted life through the agency of this despicable human shape.⁸²

The Strasbourg monument to which Aragon refers is one of the statues representing the regions of France on the Place de la Concorde, which became a rallying point for nationalists after the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.⁸³ Until his death in 1914, Paul Déroulède was president of the 'Ligues des Patriotes' at the vanguard of calls for the return of the region. The aged poet is certainly the 'already decomposed corpse' that Aragon describes, deliberately confusing the 'real-life' caped-crusader with his 'green and mouldering' statue. In a complex play on the animate/inanimate, alive/dead axes, Aragon describes Déroulède as having been already dead when he was alive, perhaps indicating that the poet died *as a poet* when he gave his life over to politics. While this may seem ironic in the light of Aragon's surrealist future, what is more startling and certainly more prescient, is Aragon's characterisation of Déroulède as a tarnished statue in advance of the eventual appearance of such a monument to the poet in 1927. Aragon's complaint revolves around the 'living' but statue-like poet

81 The balloon was known locally as the 'monument aux colombophiles' or monument of the dove fanciers: note by S.W. Taylor, in Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.208.

82 *Ibid.*, p.153.

83 Gildea, *The Past in French History*, p121. Déroulède was also described 'dancing on a plinth' in Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes' contribution to the 'trial' of Maurice Barrès in 1922, in which the defendant in accused of similarly jingoistic passions: Facsimile of 'L'Affaire Barrès', p.29, M. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p.637.

as an insult to life by comparison with the 'majestic' stone figure of Strasbourg, which of course was only an abstract personification.

The 1927 statue of Déroulède, which had been made of stone, was the subject of a serious attack in November 1933: a crowd of about twenty people gathered around the monument as four men removed the raised left fist of the statue and then attempted to remove the head.⁸⁴ As a result, the artist responsible, Paul Landowski was asked to replace the statue in bronze, a substance more resistant to attack but also more likely to turn 'green and mouldering' and thus uncannily fulfil Aragon's prediction. The raised clenched fist of the original was suspected of having had been an unbearable nationalist provocation and Landowski was asked to open it into an inoffensive cheery salute in the bronze replacement, which survives today in the place Ferdinand-Brunot (Figure 36).⁸⁵

However effectively Aragon conflates political and artistic criticism, once again it is the failure of statuary to *represent* that constitutes its most remarkable quality. As if to underline this fact, Aragon disingenuously 'mistakes' monuments to pioneering motorists Leon Serpollet and Panhard-Levassor as 'sporting statues' and refers ironically to the 'apotheosis' of Chappe.⁸⁶ Where Breton sees a narrative dilemma, Aragon sees seduction and enchantment, but both take the opportunity to describe the *distance* between representation and interpretation: 'Thus magic erects its black symbols in the centre of thoroughfares, and the simple-minded passer-by contemplates them and congratulates himself on the sculptor's skill, and starts talking about the *rendering* of artistic emotion.'⁸⁷ Although Breton included

84 Police report to the conservateur of the Ville de Paris, 14 November 1933: Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Déroulède.

85 Letter from Landowski to the Directeur des Beaux Arts, 17 March 1934: Bureau des Monuments, Dossier Déroulède.

86 Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, p.153.

87 *Ibid.* Aragon's choice of 'le rendu' or 'rendering' may be important if he was aware of the English double meaning in which rendering connotes the finishing of a stone surface. 'Interpretation' is another possible alternative in English: Aragon, *Le Paysan de Paris*, Paris, 1953, p.189.



Fig 36: Monument to Paul Déroulède in the Square Henri Bergson, Paris, as it appears today (author's photograph)

photographs of the statue of Etienne Dolet in both versions of *Nadja*, and despite Aragon's parodic account of the seductive appearance and contemporary 'uses' of statuary, there remains the question of the way in which the statues may have functioned for either author as aesthetic objects. If the discourse surrounding monumental representations offers evidence of a critical distance between sculpture and statuary in the avant-garde environment in which the surrealists were writing then this distance must be measured and accounted for.⁸⁸

This same distance, it could be argued, was the span bridging Aragon's street-level diatribe against statuary in 1926 and the *beaux-arts* surrealism of the magazine *Minotaure*, which dedicated page upon page to Brassai's photographs of sculptors' studios in 1933.⁸⁹ Aragon's scorn towards 'the rendering of artistic emotion' in 1926 may well have been intended as an acknowledgement of the perceived failure of Rodin's 'expressive' answer to the problem of public statuary but it doesn't necessarily follow that the *Minotaure* pictorial, which set Aristide Maillol's statuary alongside sculpture by Brancusi and Giacometti, offered an acceptable alternative.⁹⁰ The change in surrealist attitudes could be explained away by the obvious difference in contexts, or the way, in which, as Rosalind Krauss has described, photography was increasingly implicated in the production of a coherent surrealist 'vision'.⁹¹

The relationship between sculpture and photography during this period however, also follows another trajectory. Turning away from the aesthetic and towards an interest in the material aspect of the 'rendering of artistic emotion', surrealist photography conspired with textual interventions to disturb the accepted way in which sculptures

88 See J. Wood, *Close Encounters: The Sculptors Studio in the Age of the Camera*, Leeds, 2001, for important material on this debate.

89 *Minotaure* 1, 1933, pp.15-29.

90 *Minotaure* 3/4, 1933, pp.39-53, also Brassai and Dali's 'involuntary sculptures' on p.68 and Man Ray's photographs of statuary for Dali's 'De La Beauté Terrifiante et Comestible', pp.69-75.

91 R. Krauss, 'The photographic conditions of surrealism', *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1984.

and particularly statues, function as representations.⁹² Léon Cognié's recourse to double-take naturalism for his 1929 statue of Georges Clemenceau was seen as a prime target for ridicule: Cognié reproduced Clemenceau's famous war-time review of the troops by placing his subject not on a pedestal but a large flat boulder, complete with coat and scarf blowing in the wind. This bronze replica of a well-known photograph was presumably intended to evoke Clemenceau's presence at all future parades on the Champs Elysées, but as far as offering a strategy for the re-invigoration of public statuary goes, it was nothing short of a monumental dead-end. In the short essay 'Dieu-Table-Cuvette' ('God-Table-Spoon'), which was also published in *Minotaure*, Maurice Raynal draws attention to the failure of such conventional images to communicate as works of art. In his view, it is the imperfection or raw nature of good sculpture, which permits an active engagement on the part of the spectator: an engagement represented in the article through the use of over-indulgent photographs. Raynal invokes Jean-Jacques Rousseau to suggest that formulaic statuary is infected by social convention: 'the child is born pure, it is society that corrupts him [...] It is the same with the work of sculpture'.⁹³ Turning away from such assertions of the power of self-expression and the validity of attempts to produce increasingly 'life-like' simulacra, Tristan Tzara offered his own solution. Given the opportunity to 'correct' Cognié's statue of Clemenceau, Tzara proposed transforming the statue into an assisted readymade with the instructions: 'place around the statue, thousands of sheep in bronze, including one in camembert'.⁹⁴

92 This issue of the intervention of photography within the sculptural process is of greater importance than I can effectively discuss in the present context. See S. Baker, 'Psychologie des Foules: Surrealism and the Impossible Object', B. Taylor (ed.), *Sculpture and Psychoanalysis*, Aldershot, 2006, pp.33–52; and Alex Potts' discussion of the role of photography in producing the aesthetic conditions implicit in the works of Giacometti and Brancusi, in A. Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, New Haven and London, 2001, pp.106–18.

93 M. Raynal, 'Dieu-Table-Cuvette', *Minotaure* 3/4, p.40. For a new translation of this text, see J. Wood, D. Hulks and A. Potts (eds), *Modern Sculpture Reader*, Leeds, 2007, pp.109–12.

94 *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 6, May 1933, p.19.

Such suggestions occurred in close proximity to a number of painted surrealist works in which bland, non-specific *grands hommes* on plinths appeared, the best known being Giorgio de Chirico's *The Enigma of a Day* and Salvador Dali's *The Lugubrious Game*.⁹⁵ This simultaneous use and abuse of statuary hardly presents a contradiction, after all, Aragon, Breton and Tzara need not necessarily have shared the views or tastes of painters like de Chirico or Dali. It is however relevant to point out that where critical reactions to such images are available, the prevailing influence of the 'Parisian little game' is evident. Take, for example, the responses to de Chirico's *The Enigma of a Day* reproduced in *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* in 1933:

Q: Where is the sea?

A: behind the statue: In the porticoes: Very near, behind the first spectator: Ten miles away behind the chimneys.

Q: Where would a phantom appear?

A: In the second arcade. It is the gory phantom of a woman: It would appear suddenly from under the stone behind the statue.

Q: Where would one make love?

A: Inside the plinth of the statue: On the plinth of the statue. Under the porticoes at right: Standing in the middle of the square, regardless of the two personages, who are dead.

Q: Where would one defecate?

A: In the statue's right hand: On the stone exactly: On the statue's right foot: On the stone at left.

Q: Whom does the statue represent?

A: Lincoln: The father: A disciple of Cavour: A furniture mover, famous in the country: Benjamin Franklin: The inventor of decalcomania: A celebrated inventor in matters of baking.⁹⁶

The statue is treated not as a privileged aesthetic object but as an architectural device, a piece of civic furniture, or perhaps, a found object as inconsequential as any random thing that de Chirico might have chosen. In stark contrast to the fracturing of the statue in

95 This answer was part of 'the possibilities of embellishment of a town', which appeared in the same issue as the inquiry on *The Enigma of a Day*; *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* 6, May 1933.

96 Translation: M. Jean, *Autobiography of Surrealism*, pp.298–301.

surrealist collages, where, as Elsa Adamowicz has described, it is broken down into disjointed bodily components; here the statue maintains its formal integrity but loses its monumental representational value.⁹⁷ What such examples suggest is that in order to chart the 'critical distance' between statuary and surrealist attitudes towards them, it may be necessary to pursue a rather obtuse angle of enquiry. Rather than tracing the sculptural tradition, even as it tends to the radical limit of the ready-made, it is to the photography of sculpture and particularly of the ready-made that we should turn: to Alfred Steiglitz's famous photograph of Duchamp's *Fountain* rather than the 'Fountain' itself: (or to take a more relevant example), to Man Ray's photograph of Breton slouching in front of *The Enigma of a Day* rather than the painting or the objects it depicts (Figure 37).⁹⁸

* * *

Statues in the streets of Paris 'found' by the surrealists, may be best thought of as 'assisted ready-mades', assisted either by word, image, or both: following the logic of the 'involuntary sculptures' photographed Brassai and subtitled by Dali for *Minotaure* (Figure 38). Statues could be targeted and transformed into what could be called (mindful of the complaint of Aragon's unwilling statue,) 'involuntary monuments'. However, these critical interventions were less likely to add to, or assist, the monument than to act as a form of conceptual degradation. The word 'intervention' is among the better critical terms for what are sometimes problematically described as the surrealists'

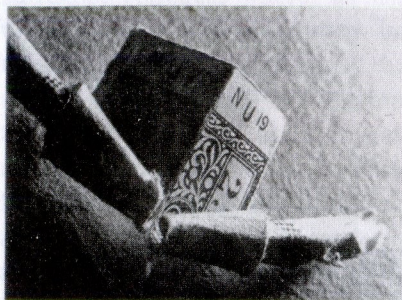
97 E. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image*, Cambridge, 1998, chapter seven: 'The future of statues'.

98 David Hopkins draws attention to the possibility of 'reading' Steiglitz's image as a work in its own right in 'Questioning Dada's Potency: Picabia's La Sainte Vierge and the Dialogue with Duchamp', *Art History*, Vol.15, No.3, September 1992. See also Paul B. Franklin, 'Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp's Fountain and the Art of Queer Art History', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol.23, No.1, Spring 2000.

André BRETON



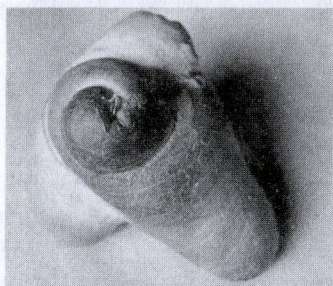
Fig 37: Man Ray, André Breton lying in front of *Enigma of a Day* by Giorgio de Chirico, *Documents 34*, Brussels, 1934, p.73. © Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006



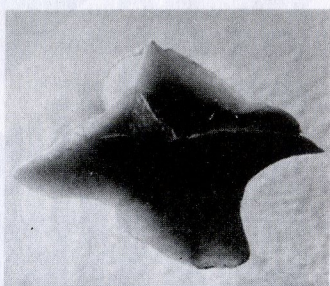
BILLET D'AUTOMES ROULÉ "SYMBIOTIQUEMENT", FORME TRÈS RARE D'AUTOMATISME MORPHOLOGIQUE AVEC GÈRES EVIDENTS DE STÉRÉOTYPE.



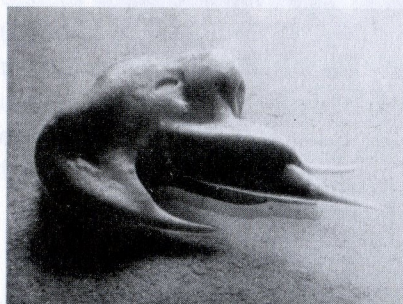
NUMÉRO D'AUTOMES ROULÉ, TROUVÉ DANS LA POCHE DE VESTON D'UN BUREAUCRATE MOYEN (CRÉDIT LYONNAIS), CARACTÉRISTIQUES LES PLUS FRÉQUENTES DE "MODERN'STYLE".



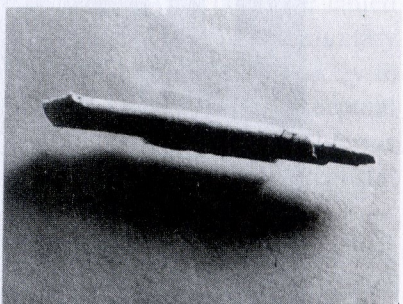
LE PAIN ORNEMENTAL ET "MODERN'STYLE" ÉCHAPPE À LA STÉRÉOTYPÉ MOLE.



MORCEAU DE SAVON PRÉSENTANT DES FORMES AUTOMATIQUES "MODERN'STYLE" TROUVÉ DANS UN LAVABO.



LE HASARD MORPHOLOGIQUE DU DENTIFRICE REPANDU N'ÉCHAPPE PAS À LA STÉRÉOTYPÉ FINE ET ORNEMENTALE.



ENROULEMENT ÉLÉMENTAIRE OBTENU CHEZ UN "DÉBILE MENTAL".

SCULPTURES INVOLONTAIRES

Fig 38: Brassai, 'Sculptures involontaires', *Minotaure*, No.3/4, 1933, p.68

iconoclastic attacks.⁹⁹ The example of this is 'On certain possibilities for the irrational embellishment of a town,' published in the journal *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* in 1933.¹⁰⁰ A list of 31 monuments was compiled and surrealist respondents gave suggestions for how to improve them. These proposals ranged from minor alterations to wholesale destruction, but most settled for the addition of a provocatively placed 'woman' (apparently enjoying the expressive autonomy equivalent to that of a statue) or resorted to blunt scatological humour.

Among the statues included were the Chevalier de la Barre, Claude Chappe, Camille Desmoulins, Gambetta, Henri IV, Victor Hugo, Joan of Arc, Louis XIV and Alfred de Musset. For Musset, Breton suggested that a 'woman will place her hand in his mouth, on hitting his arse his eyes will light up'. Eluard opted for 'a gilded bronze turd' to be placed on the head of Joan of Arc (the darling of 'patriots' like Déroulède) adding that 'a rudely sculpted phallus' should be placed in her mouth. Camille Desmoulins, meanwhile, should be installed in a metro station where 'a mechanism would make him punch the tickets and close the barriers': a rational, even utilitarian 'embellishment' adding use-value to an otherwise redundant piece of urban furniture.

The disdain for most of the statues was quite apparent, although the notorious Chevalier de la Barre seemed the most popular, probably in recognition of services rendered shocking the devout. Breton suggested that it should be left as it was, adding that a 'beautiful woman will come each day to perform admirable poses beside him'. Tzara concurred: 'Leave it in its place. It is the only statue which should have the right to bear its own name' while Benjamin Péret suggested aggrandisement: 'Reconstruct it one hundred times bigger

99 Elsa Adamowicz uses both words, although in the context of the collages that she is discussing the word 'iconoclasm' perfectly describes what happens, at least to the *images* of the statues, which are cut up or dismembered: E. Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage*, pp.163-4.

100 *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 5/6, 1933, pp.18-19.

in glass, it will be placed at the top of a very high tower. Luminous at night'.¹⁰¹

In a key discussion of the subject, Dario Gamboni posits the term 'metaphorical iconoclasm' to account for the surrealists' interventions, and it will become clearer during the course of the following argument whether these interventions were forms of attack and how effective they may have been. Gamboni has also suggested that such 'embellishments' follow the logic of Louis Réau's claim that statue-mania turned the statues themselves into a form of civic vandalism; too many tasteless ornaments ruining a beautiful city.¹⁰² This certainly coincides with the view offered by Paul Eluard in his conclusion to the embellishment experiment in 1933:

Towns suffer too much from the fear of space. Their inhabitants, to combat this agoraphobia, have raised all these monuments and statues without caring at all whether they fit in with everyday life. Monuments are either deserted, stupid, useless, or consecrated to the most infamous superstitions, to the worst work. Apart from rare exceptions, their ugliness dismays, cretinises, disfigures those who contemplate them. Statues, almost always of derisory or ill-fated individuals, are on their plinths, which raise them above any possibility of intervention in human affairs and vice versa. They rot while walking.¹⁰³

Eluard's assessment of the bankrupt nature of statuary and the way in which it 'cretinises' the viewer sits slightly unhappily alongside the obvious preference shown to the 'rare exceptions' like the Chevalier de la Barre. Indeed, it may be fair to say that the process of selection upon which the assisted ready-made is premised takes on a distinctly political dimension when applied to statuary. Surrealism's statue-phobia is not just a response to an empty form of artistic expression, but an engagement with objects already ideologically overburdened. What is at stake is whether Tristan Tzara's suggestion for the replica of the Lion of Belfort in Paris ('Pierce it with an enormous rod and

101 Translations from the catalogue *Transform the World*, P. Hulten (ed.), Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1969, which also includes photomontages by Stuart Wise based upon the surrealists' suggestions.

102 D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, p.226.

103 *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 6, May 1933, pp.22-3 (see appendix).



Fig 39: Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté*, 1934, plate 33, p.35.

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roast it to flames of bronze') wasn't in fact an entirely rational (as opposed to irrational) response to a symbol of blatant military triumphalism: and whether, therefore, the first day of Max Ernst's *La Semaine de Bonté*, comprising many collage versions of the Lion, were similarly motivated (Figure 39). However, given the fate of many of the statues singled out for surrealist 'embellishment' perhaps the Lion of Belfort should be considered very fortunate to have survived the 'assistance' of surrealism.

* * *

Part Two Pygmalion and the sphinx

I have no other setting for my actions than the public squares
(Robert Desnos).¹⁰⁴

Robert Desnos produced the article 'Pygmalion and the Sphinx' for George Bataille's journal *Documents* in January 1930.¹⁰⁵ Jacques-André Boiffard, who had broken with Breton's surrealist group shortly before Desnos, took the five photographs that accompany the text.¹⁰⁶ The status of Boiffard's work within the article itself is uncertain: did Desnos write the text in response to the images, or did he give the photographer a list of monuments that he wished to

104 R. Desnos, *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, trans. T. Hale, London, 1993, p.104.

105 *Documents* 1, January 1930, pp.32-9. All translations from Desnos's text are my own, although I am grateful for the generous assistance of both Mary-Ann Caws and Caroline Hancock with some terminological decisions. For a complete, annotated translation of Desnos's essay see S. Baker, 'Base-metal materialism', *Papers of Surrealism*: online journal for the study of surrealism and its legacies, *Documents* special issue, 2007.

106 M.-C. Dumas, *Robert Desnos ou L'Exploration Des Limites*, Paris, 1980, chapter six.

include?¹⁰⁷ Certainly, the twin names of the title occur elsewhere in Desnos's work. As well as Ovid's mythical character, 'Pygmalion' was the name of a Parisian department store that Desnos would later recall describing an incident from his youth.¹⁰⁸ More importantly, an unpublished dream narrative from 1927 details an encounter between Desnos and an 'impenetrable' Sphinx, which takes place in the street. He is addressed by the terrifying creature who poses a question and then immediately becomes mute and still as though turned (or perhaps returned) to stone.¹⁰⁹ The synthetic coupling of Pygmalion and the Sphinx in the title also suggests a dark variation on the original story, which is usually referred to (both in Ovid and when depicted visually) as the story of Pygmalion and Galatea.¹¹⁰ Perhaps Desnos means to suggest that Pygmalion, who he describes as a 'clumsy magician' has mistakenly sculpted, fallen in love with and brought to life, not a beautiful young woman, but a terrifying and deadly Sphinx. All of which might be taken to suggest that statues pose a deadly riddle to those foolish enough to bring them into the world or (as the legend of the Sphinx suggests), to any passer-by.¹¹¹

In her contribution to the landmark exhibition catalogue *L'Amour fou: photography and surrealism*, Dawn Ades highlights Boiffard's input in the collaboration with Desnos, suggesting that his photographs 'emphasise the paradoxical role of the pedestal, sabotaging the strenuous efforts of the sculptor to make his work as

107 Marie-Claire Dumas (in conversation with the author) suggested that Bataille may have suggested the topic or facilitated the collaboration in some way: this is confirmed by what little is known of the way *Documents* was run. See D. Ades and S. Baker, *Undercover Surrealism*, London, 2006.

108 *Robert Desnos, Oeuvres*, M.-C. Dumas (ed.), Paris, 1999, p.1268: a diary entry 21 February 1944 in which Desnos remembers the shop 'A Pygmalion' which had since disappeared.

109 Bibliothèque Litteraire Jacques Doucet: Manuscript DSN 207, 1 March 1927. The Sphinx motif also appears in an early sketch/fragment of *La Liberté ou L'Amour*, which was published in *La Révolution surréaliste* 4, July 1925, pp.16-19 as 'La Baie de la Faim'.

110 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. M. Innes, London, 1955, pp.231-2.

111 G. Roheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, trans. R. Money-Kyrle, New York, 1974, pp.1-9.

“lifelike” as possible’.¹¹² They are thus a cut above what Ades characterises as the ‘dumb’ photographs that Boiffard had produced to illustrate Breton’s *Nadja*, which properly function as accompaniments to the text. This tentative suggestion of Boiffard’s aesthetic and collaborative development, is however, more compelling when drawn into the context of the shift in attitude towards statues as aesthetic objects that took place in surrealist journals between 1928 and 1933. The critical status of *Documents* as the site of publication in relation to ‘mainstream’ surrealism is relevant in this case in terms of the difference that Ades first identified as separating Boiffard’s work for each: ‘If Boiffard’s photographs in *Nadja* bear witness to a certain “immaterialism”, those for *Documents* support and emphasize a materialism that particularly offended Bataille’s rival, Breton.’¹¹³ Despite the distinct ideological platform, Boiffard and Desnos, the co-authors of image and text in ‘Pygmalion and the Sphinx’ pursue the debate around the aesthetic value of civic statuary through what might be described as a kind of ‘materialist statuephobia’. Here, for example, is Desnos:

The presence of earth is manifest with greatest power in the branch of sculpture known as statuary. The weight of bronze, marble or granite adds to that of the corpse, which a statue purportedly perpetuates, or the burden of the rotten brains of allegory.¹¹⁴

In a clever visual paradox, these lines are ‘illustrated’ by Boiffard’s photograph of the ‘Monument de la Défense Nationale, par Bartholdi at the Porte des Ternes’ (Figure 40). This bizarre monument (which Aragon had described facetiously as the site of ceremonial dove sacrifices) consisted of a huge balloon ‘rising’ from the centre of a cluster of bronze figures, all perched on a large geometric pedestal. Time, and the subsequent destruction of the actual monument tend to suggest a ‘marvellous’ aspect to Boiffard’s photograph: today’s

112 D. Ades, ‘Photography and the Surrealist Text’, R. Krauss and J. Livingstone (eds), *L’amour fou*, London, 1986, p.165.

113 Ibid. For a detailed comparative discussion of Boiffard’s work in each context see I. Walker, *City Gorged with Dreams*, Manchester, 2002, pp.48–67.

114 *Documents 1*, 1930, p.33 (see appendix).



Monument de la Défense Nationale, par A. Bartholdi (Porte des Ternes). — Photo J.-A. Boiffard.

Fig 40: Jacques-André Boiffard, ‘Monument de la Défense Nationale, par A. Bartholdi (Porte des Ternes)’, *Documents 1*, 1930, p.34

viewers, unaware of the bizarre extent that Third Republic statuary had reached, might be forgiven for reading the image as a photograph of a balloon rising from behind the row of houses and ‘coincidentally’ furnishing the group of figures with a means of escape. It is here that Boiffard’s photograph lends itself to the construction of a seductive alternative reality. The monument is reproduced as its own uncanny other: a material contradiction in which a stone balloon rises above a row of houses and bronze recedes into the distance, giving ground to the outstanding drama of the pedestal.

This tendency is equally evident if Boiffard’s photograph of Coysevox’s Louis XIV (Figure 41) is compared with the 1913 version taken by René Millaud for *L’Illustration* (Figure 42). Boiffard has moved to the right of Millaud’s position to take his photograph, so that buildings, rather than sky, form the backdrop to the statue. Boiffard is also further away from the statue and his vantage point diminishes the monument, which seems equal in height to the neighbouring lamp post, despite the fact that in Millaud’s image Louis XIV’s horse towers over it. As with the photograph of the Ternes Balloon, Boiffard emphasises the base. It is striking that in the Millaud image, the bronze figure seems to stand out from the background, whereas Boiffard isolates the blank, white form of the pedestal, rendering it strangely incongruous. Millaud’s photographs, it has been suggested, work on two levels. En masse they offer evidence of a possible surplus of statues, but as individual images they accord each monument a degree of decorum. At the very worst, they render the individual works guilty by association with the set. Boiffard’s photographs on the other hand, seem aimed *directly* at the individual works but obstinately refuse to represent them as monumental forms. Both representational strategies should, however, be seen in the context of Roberts Musil’s idea of the ‘invisibility’ of civic sculpture.¹¹⁵ If statues like Coysevox’s Louis XIV were ignored on a daily basis, Millaud was simply rendering them visible. With Boiffard however, the

115 Hans Haacke recently used the example of the ‘equestrian statue’ as exactly the kind of monument which quickly becomes invisible to the general population in a lecture on his *Der Bevölkerung* project for the Reichstag in Berlin, see *The Oxford Art Journal*, Vol.24, No.2, Autumn 2001.



Statue de Louis XIV, par Coysevox (Place des Victoires). — Photo J.-A. Boiffard.

Fig 41: Jacques-André Boiffard, ‘Statue de Louis XIV, par Coysevox (Place des Victoires)’, *Documents* 1, 1930, p.40



LOUIS XIV
Place des Victoires.

Phot. René Millaud.

Fig 42: René Millaud, 'Louis XIV, Place des Victoires', detail from 'Les Statues de Paris', *L'Illustration*, No.3692, Paris, 29 November 1913, p.414

statue is 'found', only to be diminished, or even cancelled out, by the photographer's focus, suggesting that while such statues may be a matter of fact, they do not stand up to scrutiny.

Desnos's text, meanwhile, is concerned with the 'admirable' aim of statues that 'depict something which is less than figurable'.¹¹⁶ Referring to the balloon but also to the 'Monument à Leon Serpollet' (Figure 43), Desnos describes the un-figurable directly in terms of what such monuments purport to represent: 'the dust when the wind sweeps it, a balloon when it tries to rise in spite of constraints'.¹¹⁷ In both cases, it is the material quality of representation that is most vital, particularly where the material in question is in a state of transition:

Bronze is sonorous, the veins of marble are real veins [...]. The nature of matter is once again called into question, and forced with such a question we must silence ourselves [...] Who knows if one day if a hurricane will sweep the cloud of dust of the car crash at the place Saint-Ferdinand, if the bronze balloon of the porte des Ternes won't take formidable flight, at daybreak, in an air of dismay? Listen. The ropes sing, the metal pigeons coo, the cheers leave the throats of bronze with a sound akin to that of the tocsin.¹¹⁸

The notion of statues coming to life, essentially living up to the promise offered mythically by the Pygmalion myth, sets a thematic counterpoint to Boiffard's images which seem by contrast to drain the life from the sculpture, returning aesthetic objects as objects and nothing more. Indeed, the 'M. de la Palisse' to whom Desnos refers in the very first line of his text, was none other than the source of the French phrase '*un lapalissade*'. This modern conflation of 'une vérité de La Palice', meaning 'something so obvious as to be unworthy of mention' is doubly fitting in this sense. The phrase was born when a soldier reputedly said of the recently deceased M. de La Palice 'fifteen minutes before he died he was still alive'.¹¹⁹ The black humour at the

116 *Documents* 1, 1930, p.38 (see appendix).

117 *Ibid.*

118 *Ibid.* (see appendix).

119 Desnos begins 'M. de la Palisse lui-même serait mon avis...' *ibid.*, p.33. I am grateful to Marie-Claire Dumas for this suggestion. See C. Augé (ed.) *Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustré*, Paris, 1935, p.1483, entry on Jacques de Chabannes, seigneur de La Palice.



Monument à Léon Serpollet, 1858-1937. (Place Saint-Ferdinand). — Photo J.-A. Boiffard.

Fig 43: Jacques-André Boiffard, 'Monument à Léon Serpollet, 1858-1907, (Place Saint-Ferdinand)', *Documents* 1, 1930, p.37



Statue par E. Christophe, 1876 (Jardin des Tuileries). — Photo J.-A. Boiffard.

Fig 44: Jacques-André Boiffard, 'Statue par E. Christophe, 1976, (Jardin des Tuileries)', *Documents* 1, 1930, p.39

meeting point between life and death is apposite when directed toward statues whose lifelike qualities are also their most obviously ridiculous. The paradox is brought full circle within the text itself, when Desnos asks:

Who can explain to me why the Jules Simon of the Madeleine, the Musset of the Porte-Maillot and the Louis XIV of the Place des Victoires are moving? Why the Napoleon of the Vendôme Column is endowed with a peculiar life? Why is the Etienne Dolet of the Place Maub' a con, while the chevalier de la Barre at Montmartre is endowed with the powers usually given to dangerous symbols?¹²⁰

The answer offered by Desnos is that it is a question of the pedestal, the 'shut shack' as he calls it: an analysis tacitly confirmed by Boiffard's damning photographic evidence. The huge plinths beneath the statues of Chappe, Louis XIV and the Ternes Balloon are a stark and brilliant white, beneath bronze figures disappearing into shadow.¹²¹ The monument to Serpollet is all plinth: a makeshift support for a bronze conclusion destined never to arrive. Desnos's critique harks back to the complaints of Gustave Pessard; figures dwarfed by their pedestals, directed to inappropriate squares, taking over the city. The inclusion of an incongruous photograph of a nymph in the Jardin des Tuileries also hinges on the plinth; recalling Atget's haunting photographs of Parisian parks, whose classical figures are punctuated by empty plinths, suggestive of both expected arrivals and recent departures (Figure 44). Desnos's observation that a statue might be 'not, or almost not, of the pedestal', leads to the accusation that statues were somehow too alive. Having previously written on Atget's work, Desnos was no doubt aware of the mysterious power of photography to animate the inanimate.¹²² Atget's forgotten statues are carelessly discarded objects: overtaken, or reclaimed, by nature, they remain, paradoxically, the only signs of life: as Desnos puts it:

120 *Documents* 1, 1930, p.33 (see appendix).

121 Dawn Aedes also suggests this 'Photography and the Surrealist Text', p.165.

122 See 'Emile Adget' (*sic*), in R. Desnos, *Nouvelles Hébrides et autres textes 1922-1930*, M.-C. Dumas (ed.), pp.435-6. The text dates from around 1929 and concerns a recent catalogue of Atget's work produced by Berenice Abbott and Pierre Mac Orlan.

Statues are among all kinds of clothes abandoned in a forest: The first vagabond to come along puts them on, the first genius to come along embodies them [...] if he's not too 'tight'. This mysterious humanisation of fakes illustrates better than any other means, the fate of statues.¹²³

* * *

In 1932, Marcel Sauvage, at one time associated with the Paris Dada group and best known at the time for his recent biography of Josephine Baker, derived an elaborate fictional endgame from concerns over the 'mysterious humanisation of fakes'.¹²⁴ Sauvage developed Aragon's dire warning that humanity would perish from statue-mania, beginning with an image lifted directly from the conclusion to 'Pygmalion and the Sphinx'.¹²⁵ The very first pages of the novel *La Fin de Paris ou la révolte des statues*, concern the balloon of the Ternes monument, its ropes apparently still 'singing' from Desnos's description two years earlier:

at the place Galliéni, the stone balloon of the monument to the aeronauts of 1870-71, had broken its moorings and climbed gently, lolling from side to side, above the crowds, the traffic and the houses. Two tons of stone, like a child's balloon, in the Paris sky.¹²⁶

This unscheduled departure begins a truly fantastic tale, which sees the city of Paris taken over, and the human population held to ransom, by hordes of disgruntled statues that have come to life. The narrative

123 *Documents*, 1, 1930, p.33 (see appendix). It is possible here that Desnos is making reference to a painting by Victor Brauner, which dates from the same year as Desnos' text. The painting, entitled *Sur Les Lieux*, and now in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, depicts a number of soft 'personages', which seem to be halfway between statues and mannequins which hang from trees on coat-hangers.

124 Sauvage is mentioned as having been at the 'Trial' of Maurice Barrès in 1921 and also signed the Dada Congress of Paris in 1922: M. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, Paris, 1980, p.270 and p.346. See also M. Sauvage, *Voyages et Aventures de Josephine Baker*, Paris, 1931.

125 M. Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris ou la Révolte des Statues*, Paris, 1932.

126 *Ibid.*, p.12 (see appendix).

is illustrated with a series of photographs and bizarre photomontages attributed to an unknown artist referred to as 'Constantinesco'. A 'photo' of the Ternes balloon soaring past the Eiffel Tower is presented among a series of 'War of the World' style newspaper extracts in which Sauvage describes the way in which various Parisian newspapers covered the story (Figure 45).¹²⁷

The theme, as Kenneth Gross describes in *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, has had many literary precedents, but perhaps the most relevant contemporaneous example is the comedy *Les Statues en Goulette*.¹²⁸ In this tale, the statues of Paris come down from their pedestals at night, get drunk and fail to find the correct pedestals at dawn because the names of the streets have all been changed: references to two real-life Parisian phenomena: the tendency of statues to 'appear' in new locations and the re-naming of streets. In 1923, by contrast, the film-maker René Clair reversed this idea in *Paris qui Dort*, where it was the population of Paris that became immobile: millions of 'life-like' statues deployed in the streets by night. Another film, which played on this theme was Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*, released in 1932, the same year as Sauvage's book. Here, the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea is revitalised in the studio of an artist by the appearance of a mysterious mouth on an abstract depiction of a face. The artist is horrified when this mouth is transferred from the canvas to his hand and he rids himself of it by sneaking up on a statue of a female figure in his studio and transferring the mouth onto it. This gives a voice to the statue, which then torments the artist, leading the narrator to ask 'is it not mad to awaken statues so suddenly after their age-long sleep?'¹²⁹

127 *L'Intran* (*L'Intransigent*), for example, a respectable right-wing newspaper presents a before and after photograph with leader columns by prominent commentators, the far-right *Action Française*, sees symbolism of the end of the republic, and the cautious *Petit Parisien* gives an account of the event, followed by an informative history of the monument.

128 Hargrove, *The Statues of Paris*, p.201.

129 K. Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, pp.11–12.

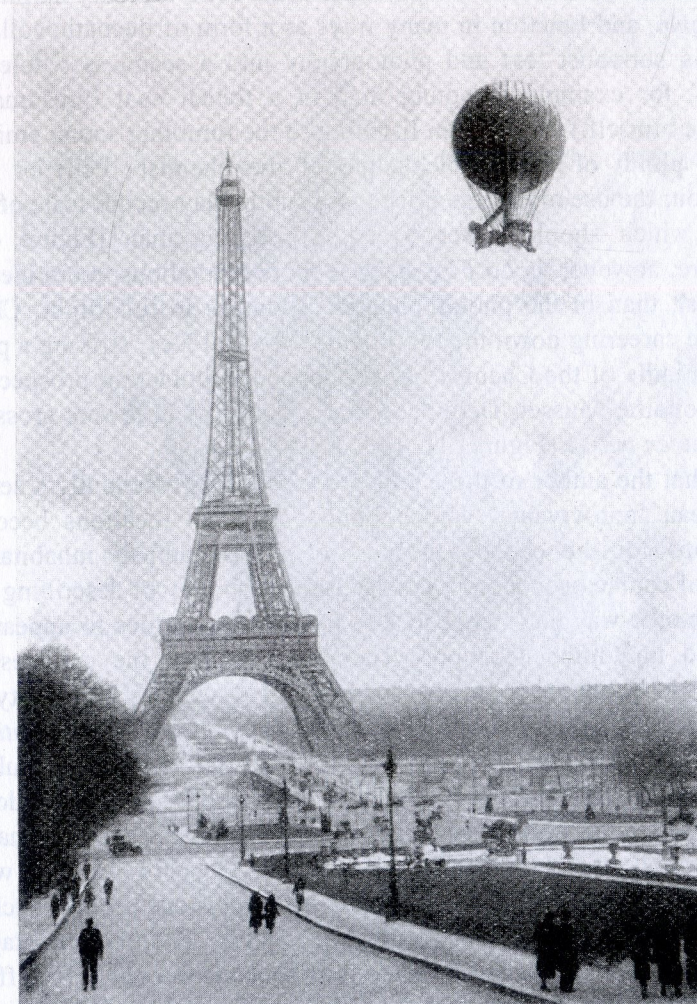


Photo: Constantinesco.

Le ballon de pierre vira...

Fig 45: Constantinesco, 'Le ballon de pierre vira...', Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris ou la révolte des statues*, Paris, 1932, plate 2

The images that bring Marcel Sauvage's novel to life are, however, far more effective than either these extra-ordinary narratives or his own, and function in many ways as a form of thematic collage, blending surrealist text and photography into a seamless whole. In plate 5, for example, a young man in a trench coat (presumably Sauvage himself,) can be seen listening to the rumbling sound emitted by the plinth of the double statue of the chemists Pelletier and Caventou; the use of collage effecting a subtle play on the scale of the statue, which should tower over the listening man (Figure 46). Nowhere, however, is *La Fin de Paris* more marvellous, more ideally surrealist, than in the photomontages of statues in full flight; Charlemagne careering down the rue Royale, Marshal Ney, striking a pose in the middle of the Champs Elysées, or the intimidating prospect of Ney, Voltaire, Musset, Déroulède and a horde of followers crossing the Seine *en masse* (Figures 47, 48 and 49).

What the author of these collages presents is essentially a series of tableau 'non-vivants' where familiar Parisian locations become backdrops for the endless gestures of its 'statuefied' inhabitants. Which of course, may simply have been another way of describing the status quo; it was not inconceivable for familiar statues to appear in new and unfamiliar locations. The description of the collages as 'photos' has another resonance, which underlines this possibility in their appeal to the aesthetic of illustrated weeklies like *L'Illustration*. In such publications, large photographs of individuals or public gatherings were usually hand finished, with artists adding shadows behind the figures or other details to enhance the quality of the image. The 'photos' of Charlemagne and Marshal Ney are finished with similar shadows beneath their feet: the same illusions used to anchor real-life Parisians to the streets in news reports. The photomontages therefore oscillate uneasily between pure fantasy, the reductive effect of Boiffard's photography, and the unfailing logic of M. de la Palisse. 'En avant' cries Déroulède, sandwiched between two painted mannequins, a sly joke at the expense of Sarah Bernhardt and the poet's other female 'Amis Littéraires' (Figure 50). The nature of his revolt is perfectly natural, however, as every line of the poet's 'Chants du soldat' inscribed on the plinth of his statue begins with that phrase:



Photo Constantinesco.

...aux écoutes devant le monument de Pelletier et Caventou.

Fig 46: Constantinesco, 'aux écoutes devant le monument de Pelletier et Caventou', Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris*, Paris, 1932, plate 5



Photo Constantinesco.

Charlemagne attendait dans la rue Royale...

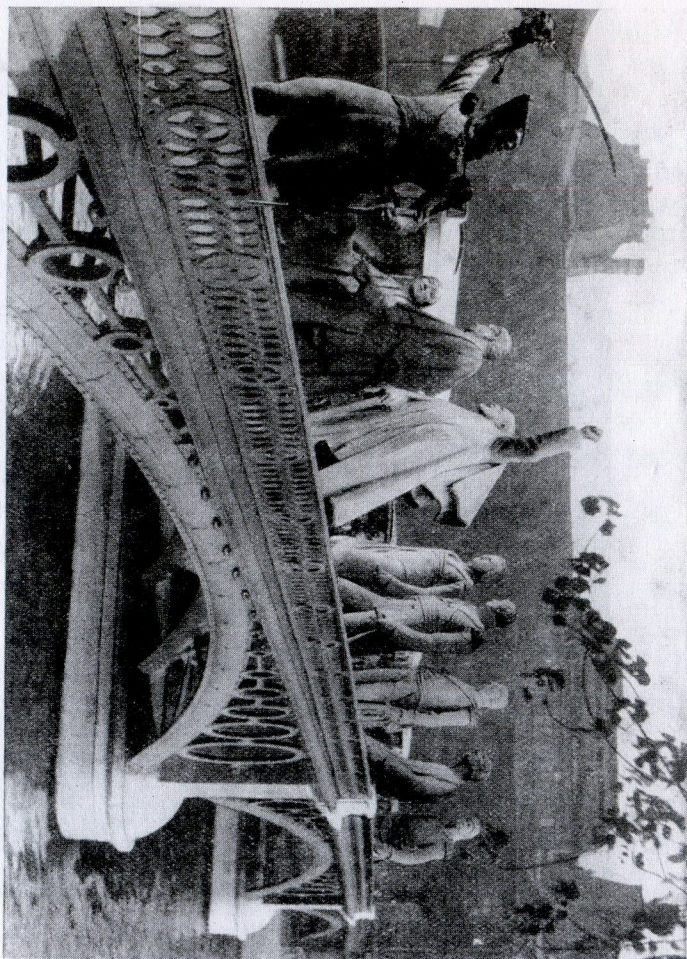
Fig 47: Constantinesco, 'Charlemagne attendait dans la rue Royale...', Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris*, Paris, 1932, plate 7



Photo Constantinesco.

Le maréchal Ney descendait les Champs-Elysées.

Fig 48: Constantinesco, 'Le maréchal Ney descendait les Champs-Elysées', Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris*, Paris, 1932, plate 10



La première colonne d'attaque venant du Louvre. Photo Constantinesco.

Fig 49: Constantinesco, 'Le première colonne d'attaque venant du Louvre',
Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris*, Paris, 1932, plate 11



Photo Constantinesco.

En avant! cria Déroulède.

Fig 50: Constantinesco, 'En avant! cria Déroulède', Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris*,
Paris, 1932, plate 9

the poet's words are returned to his inanimate doppelgänger and Aragon's description of an imaginary past becomes an alternative imagined future.

* * *

It is no coincidence that Sauvage, having borrowed the opening image of his book from Desnos, begins the third section of his book with a quote from Aragon, and includes montages that engage directly with surrealist attitudes. It was, after all, Aragon who first recognised a fundamental truth about the manipulation of facts inherent to collage in his 1930 essay 'The Challenge to Painting':

The rapport born of the negation of the real by the marvellous is always essentially ethical in character, and the marvellous is always the materialisation of a moral symbol in violent opposition to the morals of the world in which it surges forth.¹³⁰

However, the relationship between 'Pygmalion and the Sphinx' and *La Fin de Paris* is far stronger than the latter simply being a collage of the text and images in the former. Constantinesco's photomontages bring us back to Boiffard's photographs with a new understanding of the statue as a found object, or collage element, set in context by the photographer. In an effort to reveal the material truth of statues as objects in the world, Boiffard's photographs 'materialise' the statues as merely symbolising statuary in a way analogous with Aragon's account of collage; through a 'rapport born of negation of the real by the marvellous'. In his text, Desnos describes the situation by emphasising the relationship between the material fact of the pedestal, and the bronze that it supports:

Erecting a likeness of a being who was alive onto a pedestal is equivalent to raising them to the rank of god and these days this kind of enterprise in never

130 Aragon, 'The Challenge to Painting', P. Hulten (ed.), trans. M. Palmer and N. Cole, *The Surrealists Look at Art*, California, 1990.

justified. While the allegory of bronze situates itself as metaphor, as image, as poetic fiction.¹³¹

Here, Desnos signals the dichotomy between the object, and what it is intended to represent, concluding that despite the 'danger of describing nature' there are always physical or metaphorical interventions which might return the statue to some useful poetic function and bring it back to life. He imagines 'being able to carve on their plinths two names surrounded by a heart and pierced by an arrow'; the departure of a huge stone balloon; a monumental advertisement (a porphyry Cadum baby in a granite bath); or statues of everyday objects like bottles, wheelbarrows or rolling marbles. In his search for a poetic form of statuary, Desnos appears to have imagined the future of civic sculpture freed of its material commitment to the physical and hierarchical weight of stone and bronze. Having uncannily predicted the work of Claes Oldenberg, by expressing the desire for monumentally huge household utensils, Desnos returns to the issue of material: 'When we raise a statue to X-rays,' he suggests 'we will force sculpture to discover a correct and unexpected mode of expression'.¹³²

'Pygmalion and the Sphinx' thus manifests its statuophobia in explicitly materialist terms. Having issued the challenge to a bankrupt means of expression, it is the ability of the new medium to reveal the material qualities of the old that constitutes its triumph. This is absolutely in keeping with the dialectical critique favoured by Bataille in *Documents*: the objects 'found' and selected reveal their own problems and yield their own solutions, while remaining fundamentally unchanged. Desnos evokes the stubborn persistence of statues, the objects of his enquiry, in the final line of the text. Boiffard's photograph of a 'majestic' bronze Louis XIV on the following page acts as a coda to Desnos's conclusion; 'in spite of everything,

131 *Documents* 1, 1930, p.36 (see appendix).

132 'Et quand nous serons à élever une statue au rayon X force sera au sculpteur de découvrir un mode d'expression correct et inattendu.' *Ibid.*, footnote, p.38.



Statue de Chappe, par G. Farcy, 1893 (Carrefour du boulevard Raspail et du boulevard Saint-Germain). — Photo J.-A. Boiffard.

Fig 51: Jacques-André Boiffard, 'Statue de Chappe, par G. Farcy, 1893 (Carrefour du boulevard Raspail et du boulevard Saint Germain)', *Documents* 1, 1930, p.35

they exist, they shine, they rule, they overcome the eyes, the lively eyes of our best loved'.¹³³

This nod towards posterity raises the spectre of the effect of all this statuephobia. Having started in mainstream journalism it spread first to surrealist, then Desnos's counter-surrealist, and finally Sauvage's surrealist-inspired, forays into the fields of poses. Could the objects of this collective attention really survive the endless taunts? What should be made of the fact that so few of the statues mentioned thus far remain intact? With the exception of the militant attack on the stone Déroulède in 1933, they were removed during the German occupation of Paris between 1941 and 1943. One hundred and thirty statues were destroyed after the Maréchal de France issued a call to reclaim metals useful for agriculture and industry.¹³⁴ So in a chilling reminder of the surrealist pamphlet 'Permettez!' (which suggested that the bust of Rimbaud be melted down and made into artillery shells for the Germans), the city of Paris was asked to sacrifice its *grands hommes* for much the same reason. What remains of this chapter will attempt to explain the link between surrealist 'interventions' in the world of statuary and the material consequences for the statues targeted.

Claude Chappe, inventor of the aerial telegraph featured in René Millaud's 1913 'archive' of Parisian statuary thirteen years before Louis Aragon described his 'apotheosis' in *Paris Peasant*. Aragon was then followed by Boiffard in 1930, whose photographic account of the statue, situated as it was, in relation to Desnos's text, drew attention to its large pyramid of a base and seemed to lose the bronze figure in a cluster of lamp-posts (Figure 51). In 1932, Constantinesco returned to the idea of apotheosis with a steeply angled photograph that eliminated the pedestal completely and brought the statue back to life for Marcel Sauvage's 'révolte des statues' (Figure 52). The following year, the collective wit of the surrealist group was brought to bear on the monument in their suggestions for the embellishment of

133 'Mais, en dépit de tout, ils existent, ils brillent, ils règnent, ils triomphent les yeux, les yeux vivants de notre bien aimée.' *Ibid.*, p.38.

134 Y. Bizardel, 'Les Statues Parisiennes Fondues Sous L'Occupation' *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, LXXXIII, March 1974, pp.129-48.



Photo Constantinesco.

Le télégraphe optique de Chappe émettait un étrange pétitement.

Fig 52: Constantinesco, 'Le télégraphe optique de Chappe émettait un étrange pétitement', Marcel Sauvage, *La Fin de Paris*, Paris, 1932, plate 6

the city of Paris in *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. Chappe survived several proposals, including the idea that 'pieces of meat, ham, and sausages' be hung from the telegraph and the bronze figure be painted in 'natural colours'.¹³⁵ The great irony, however, is that today, the pages of *Documents* are the best place to see the statue, and it is only through articles and books on surrealism that the figure of Chappe retains his memorial. As one of the statues removed from the streets of Paris during World War Two, it was unceremoniously melted down to satisfy the demand for reusable metal. The photographer Pierre Jahan took what is certainly the last photograph of the bronze figure of Chappe as it lay in a factory yard awaiting its return to a molten state (Figure 53).¹³⁶

The once popular statue of Etienne Dolet, focal point for republican sentiments, also suffered a similar fate, following appearances in texts by Aragon, Breton and Desnos. Tourists wishing to experience Breton's 'discomfort' will find nothing left of the statue. Even though the plinth, with its bas-relief telling the story of Dolet's demise, survived the wartime melting pot, it too was finally removed in the 1970s after a number of people drove into or fell over it. Despite continued pressure to replace the statue, neither it (nor, to be honest, much of the Place Maub') remain today and it too is best known through the pages of *Nadja*.¹³⁷ The fantastic 'Balloon des Ternes', site of Aragon's dove sacrifice, was removed along with the Place des Ternes itself, the area today constituting the entrance to La Defense.¹³⁸ This absolute disappearance has, however, become instrumental in casting doubt over the plausibility of Boiffard's photograph: this lack of material remains also belatedly assists Desnos' idea (depicted by Constantinesco), of the balloon floating off into the

135 *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 5/6, May 1933, pp.18–20.

136 P. Jahan and J. Cocteau, *La Mort et Les Statues*, Paris, 1946, pp.32–3.

137 There were continued calls to replace the statue of Dolet but although the plinth survived until 1972, a particularly nasty accident in 1971 resulted in legal proceedings, hastening its departure: Bureau Des Monuments, Dossier Dolet.

138 The name 'La Defense' refers to the area of the city which became synonymous with the event of the defense of Paris in 1870–1871, due in part to the temporary existence of the monument: Bartholdi's monument might therefore be said to have 'become' an entire area of the city.



Fig 53: Pierre Jahan, 'Chappe', *La Mort et les Statues*, Paris, 1946, plate 10.
 Reproduced courtesy of Pierre Jahan's Estate – Roger Viollet



Fig 54: Pierre Jahan, 'Soldats de Cléopâtre', *La Mort et les Statues*, Paris 1946,
 plate 16. Reproduced courtesy of Pierre Jahan's Estate – Roger-Viollet

sky.¹³⁹ And far from being ‘embellished’ or enlarged, the Chevalier de la Barre suffered a second sacrifice at the hands of authority. Its removal and destruction, although no doubt a great relief to those who had always considered its very location a religious affront, were doubly unfortunate as the most consistent surrealist suggestion for its future was simply to ‘leave it where it was’.

Like so many of these acts of apparent war-time ‘necessity’, there was in fact a political agenda being played out in the choices of which statues were to be removed. It is notable for example, that the huge monument to Gambetta was demolished despite its proportionately low bronze content, while the huge central group in Dalou’s ‘Triumph of the Republic’ at the place de la Nation was spared even though it consisted entirely of bronze. It was presumably felt that the occupiers and their French collaborators must show some regard for the heritage of the city, although the extent and way in which this was manifested is illuminating. While it may have been a step too far to destroy a huge symbol of the Republic, the huge alligators, which had previously encircled the main group of figures were removed and melted down (Figure 54). The irony here is that in terms of the allegorical symbolism of the monument, the alligators represented the dangers encircling the French Republic, of which Germany had undoubtedly been the greatest since the monument’s inauguration (Figure 55). Today, the vast sculpture stands in the centre of a roundabout and the fugitive allegorical group appears to be looking to the Republic for guidance and for protection from nothing more dangerous than heavy traffic.

It is implicit in the careful analysis of the destruction of the statues of *grands hommes* set out by Yvon Bizardel, that the newly empowered French right sought to cleanse or purify the streets of the encumbrances of Republican statuary:

Only ‘incontestable national glories’ were respected, not Voltaire, nor Diderot, so of course, the masters of the hour sought to use the occasion to settle old

139 The photograph of the event itself has become a staple image in histories of the Civil War of 1870–1871.



Fig 55: Postcard of Dalou’s ‘Triumph of the Republic’, Place de la Nation, prior to 1940

scores; they had their eye on the chevalier de la Barre, on Louis Blanc and on many others as well as finishing once and for all with Zola.¹⁴⁰

Bizardel is careful to emphasise the fact that those selecting the statues to be destroyed were French people working with the Vichy regime and made their choices along long-held national political lines. The chess game strategy for partisan statuary ended in a humiliating check-mate of republican ideology: Rousseau was removed from outside the Pantheon, Etienne Dolet left the place Maubert, and Marat disappeared from the Buttes Chaumont along with countless others, while Joan of Arc, Louis XIV, Napoleon and even Paul Déroulède were allowed to remain. The self-evident political agenda behind the removal of Parisian statuary has, however, been retrospectively conflated with the perceived aesthetic shortcomings of the objects themselves. Louis Réau for example, suggests a positive aspect to the German occupiers' request for metal, which 'rid us of a number of bronze effigies that did little to honour the capital city of modern art. It was the only service that, without intending it, the invaders rendered Paris'.¹⁴¹ Réau, however, is keen to emphasise the agency of the 'German invaders' in the process and draws attention away from the undeniable French involvement in the process of selection. Réau further suggests that no Parisian had cried at the disappearance of Chappe and that a similar lack of regret accompanied the removal of the 'pathetic' statue of Shakespeare, concluding, in fact that the good work had been left unfinished:

there are still too many left, and one wishes for a severe purification of the Republican effigies that spoil – rather than embellish – the flower beds of the Tuileries, of the Jardin de Luxembourg, or of the Parc Monceau.¹⁴²

This somewhat hysterical proposal for the continuation of the 'good work' of the German occupation is an illuminating coda to the phenomenon of statuemia and suggests an appropriate alternative per-

140 Y. Bizardel, 'Les Statues Parisiennes Fondues', p.130 (see appendix).

141 L. Réau, *Les Monuments Détruits de l'Art Français*, Paris, 1959, Vol.2, p.258 (see appendix).

142 *Ibid.*, p.259 (see appendix).

spective on the surrealist attitude to statuary. Réau suggests that a statue like Chappe was popularly understood as 'exemplary' bad statuary, whose presence could only retrospectively be explained as an embarrassing lapse in taste, attributable to outdated republican ideals. The surrealists' persistent returns to that same statue may therefore have been intended to force the issue of a monument that had come to stand for the failure of monumental forms. This possibility also suggests that far from surrealists engaging in bourgeois dismay at the lamentable quality of civic statuary, they were in fact seeking to preserve something genuinely marvellous. Attaching pertinent, irreverent humour to monuments that were usually ignored was an assault on notions of taste and propriety of the kind espoused by Réau; the conceptual equivalent of building a folly. Their interventions constituted a sublime triumph of irrational signification, which cast the statue itself as a material remainder and left its iconography free to pursue alternative avenues.

It is also relevant to note that although Réau's book *Les Monuments Détruits de l'Art Française* is an account of 'lost objects' in the history of French culture, the section on statuemia suggests that the loss or 'destruction' occurred when the statues were introduced, rather than when they were later removed. The great crime, for Réau, was the 'embellishment' and the consequent loss of the aesthetic integrity of the city of Paris: a disaster that could only be remedied by removing the statues and thereby re-purifying the space. Because Réau saw the statues as 'carbuncles' on the face of the city, the surrealists' interventions can only accurately be described as iconoclastic if they were aimed at the city of Paris rather than its statuary.¹⁴³ Presumably, for Réau, any attack on a statue in Paris which awoke Parisians from the apathetic day-dream of republican bad taste was of benefit to the city as a whole. Furthermore, if Réau is to be believed, it is doubly misleading to see the surrealists' attacks as having been of any consequence when their 'embellishments' only added to the 'damage' that the statues had already inflicted on the city.

Dario Gamboni uses the term 'metaphorical iconoclasm' to cover the surrealists' irrational embellishments, epitomised by the imaginary

143 D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, p.226.

sausages hung from Chappe's telegraph. This highly elastic term would seem to describe something that stands for iconoclasm, taking the place of a physical attack. However, as Réau's reactionary attitude confirms, the ability of a statue to adequately represent its intended subject relies upon respect for the monumental terms in which this representation takes place. Surrealist interventions, which free the statue from its obligations to perform as a traditional monument could be said to prevent it from completing its most basic task.

If readers of *Documents*, familiar with Aragon's *Paris Peasant*, were confronted with Boiffard's photograph of the Ternes balloon they may no longer have been able to see a monument to the Defense of Paris. In its place they may have found a marvellous, redundant totem before which, no doubt, doves were regularly sacrificed. Such metaphorical attacks might render the monument completely void, leaving it there as a reminder of its pathetic failure to hold on to its own meaning. In his essay on the obelisk on the Place de la Concorde, Georges Bataille argues that this is far more serious than physically removing it and allowing it to survive conceptually intact through collective nostalgia: 'Where monuments that had clearly affirmed principles were razed', he says, and he means razed to the ground, removed like the Bastille, 'the obelisk remains, so long as the sovereign authority and command it symbolises do not become conscious'.¹⁴⁴ In other words, very bland monuments, which look vaguely monumental but don't reveal their ideological contingency, survive physical destruction on the implicit understanding that their representational capacity might falter at any time. This is not to suggest that Gamboni is mistaken in attributing an iconoclastic motivation to the surrealists' gestures. But for examples such as Chappe or Etienne Dolet, their metaphorical attacks had the paradoxical effect of *preserving*, what Réau called 'impure and regrettable' bronze effigies way past the rational deadline imposed by the German occupation.

In view of the variety of tactics and techniques deployed by various surrealist writers and photographers, the surrealist agenda should be understood *through* the idea of 'metaphorical iconoclasm'

144 G. Bataille, 'The Obelisk', *Visions of Excess*, A. Stoekl (ed.), Minnesota, 1985, p.221.

rather than being simply described as such. Furthermore, for 'Pygmalion and the Sphinx' in particular, what is offered is a form of attack on the process of metaphor and allegory arranged around a series of objects, rather than a metaphorical attack on those objects. This idea relates directly to Desnos's suggestion that 'the allegory of bronze situates itself as metaphor'.¹⁴⁵ This seemingly opaque remark actually constitutes the core of Desnos's argument; it is without doubt the *allegory of bronze* rather than an allegory, which happens to be made of bronze to which Desnos refers. In divorcing metaphor and allegory from the iconography of the object, Desnos makes a critical point:

Nothing, in fact, is more contrary to the idea of divinity than this kind of sham. The best example, I recall, was the use Eisenstein made of a crude crucifix in the 'Battleship Potemkin'. But nothing is more loaded with mystery, underhand power and activity than this.¹⁴⁶

What is at stake is the power of statuary to refer to anything past its material form or the redundancy of its iconography. Where 'involuntary sculptures' evidenced a perceived over-investment in material forms, 'involuntary monuments' reveal a gaping flaw in aesthetic conventions. The power of reference is collapsed (or at least deferred) until their very existence becomes tainted with the embarrassment of an overstayed welcome: Bronze melts into the background, white stone evaporates in the sunlight, and Boiffard captures this dereliction of duty in black and white:

We wouldn't want statues to have anything other than secondary importance [...] But are marble, porphyry, granite and bronze insensible? Don't they enjoy

145 *Documents* 1, 1930, p.36.

146 *Ibid.*, p.33 (see appendix). The scene to which Desnos refer here occurs during the sailors' revolt. A bearded cleric attempts to appeal to the superstition of a sailor attacking him by holding up a shining metal crucifix. The sailor is momentarily taken in but then the cleric, who starts pounding the crucifix menacingly into his hand, lunges for the sailor: the metal crucifix flies out of his hand, becoming embedded in the deck. The ornate, metal crucifix is thus revealed by Eisenstein as having been a weapon all along. Desnos also alludes to the way powerful symbols may be betrayed by their materiality.

any life? Bronze is sonorous. The veins of marble are real veins [...] We don't want statues to be anything else [...] This phrase returns against its author.¹⁴⁷

Desnos's insistence on the materiality of statuary and the paucity of its representational capacity illuminates another series of images that exploit this same concept: photographs taken by Pierre Jahan in occupied Paris immediately before the statues were melted down, that also concern the 'bronze-ness' of the statues as much as their original subjects. There is, nonetheless, a marked contrast between Boiffard's involuntary monuments and Pierre Jahan's aestheticised remains. For if Jahan's work tells us anything about Boiffard's deadpan counterpoints to Desnos materialist statuephobia, it is that intense focus upon the object of critical interest erodes even as it preserves.

* * *

In his autobiographical text *Objectif*, Jahan recalls the conditions under which the photographs for his 1946 project *La Mort et les Statues* were produced.¹⁴⁸ Jahan reprints the declaration from the *Journal Officiel* of October 1941 in which the call for 'métaux constituants' (constituent metals) was made, describing Diderot and Voltaire as the first 'victims' of the scandalous 'kidnapping' of Parisian monuments.¹⁴⁹ Having been alerted, in the winter of the same year, to the location of the depot where the 'fondue' was taking place, Jahan was granted access by the workmen and allowed to take his pictures in peace. The short passage is illuminated by cursory but pointed adjectives. 'On a freezing winter morning [...] overcast, ferrous, dawn sky, I had to use my last few, irreplaceable flash bulbs for most of the pictures.'¹⁵⁰ Jahan's memoir of the event thus begins by calling to mind notions of sacrifice, loss and regret: in time of war,

147 Ibid., p.38 (see appendix).

148 P. Jahan, *Objectif*, Paris, 1994.

149 Ibid., p.19.

150 'Par un matin glacial d'hiver...ciel couvert, petit jour et ferraille, je dus pour la plupart des clichés utiliser mes dernières, et introuvables lampes flash.' Ibid., p.20.

the photographer braves an icy dawn to lavish the last of his flash-bulbs on a pile of twisted scrap metal. These statues, which had previously plagued the city, were now treasures, impossible to replace, noble in their last precious moments. Jahan is equally emotive in his reflections after the war had ended, extending analogies of senseless waste as far as possible: 'The war finished and I could hardly bear to show these photos, images of a totally abstract, surrealist horror, which were eclipsed by what we learned of the concentration camps.'¹⁵¹

The resulting book can thus be accurately cast as an allegory about the occupation, played out over the tragic demise of the bronze inhabitants of the city of Paris.¹⁵² This unintentional and posthumous confirmation of Desnos's idea of an 'allegory of bronze' completes the cycle of that began with René Millaud's 'archive' and once again, a set of photographs, brought into focus by a text, is called upon to rescue statuary from an ignominious public myopia. In Jahan's version, the photographs are accompanied by short epitaphs written by Jean Cocteau. This, for example, accompanies Condorcet (Figure 56):

I think of what the king said of the body of the duc de Guise, crushed, insulted, sprayed with mud, Condorcet grows in his torture. His left hand won't leave the books taken from my old school. He lies side by side with his death.¹⁵³

It's a resounding paradox that while Boiffard's photographs of monuments seem to drain the life from them, Jahan returns like an overzealous funeral director, to wring the last drops of sentiment from the crumpled metal. Cocteau too, dwells on the accidental effects of the process, on the chance encounters between the doomed figures and other objects unfortunate enough to be made from re-usable metals. Here for example, is what he says of the 'Jardinier' (Figure 57): 'Louis XV's gardiner, fallen without having lost his three-cornered hat, eternally watches the little steel flower, the only vegetation in our

151 'La guerre terminée je n'avais guère envie de montrer ces photos, images d'une horreur toute abstraite et surréaliste qui s'effaçait devant celles que nous connûmes alors des camps de concentration.' Ibid., p.21.

152 P. Jahan and J. Cocteau, *La Mort et Les Statues*.

153 Ibid., p.24 (see appendix).



Fig 56: Pierre Jahan, 'Condorcet', *La Mort et les Statues*, Paris, 1946, plate 6.
Reproduced courtesy of Pierre Jahan's Estate – Roger Viollet



Fig 57: Pierre Jahan, 'Jardinier', *La Mort et les Statues*, Paris, 1946, plate 9.
Reproduced courtesy of Pierre Jahan's Estate – Roger Viollet



Fig 58: Pierre Jahan, 'Monsieur Thiers', *La Mort et les Statues*, Paris 1946, plate 17.
Reproduced courtesy of Pierre Jahan's Estate – Roger-Viollet



Fig 59: Pierre Jahan, 'Vide', *La Mort et les Statues*, Paris, 1946, plate 19.
Reproduced courtesy of Pierre Jahan's Estate – Roger-Viollet

flower beds'.¹⁵⁴ The poet is also keen to re-insert these hitherto invisible and forgotten objects back into a historical context, resulting in another strange paradox: statues which had been ignored or vilified *in situ* are celebrated, inaugurated as part of the city's heritage on the occasion of their destruction. This hypocrisy is most evident in the facetious school-room scene concocted for an amazing image of the statue of Adolphe Thiers (Figure 58):

To the question 'Give an account of the 1870 siege' a young girl in a class where Alain Fournier was the teacher, responded: 'In 1870, Gambetta left Paris as a captive in a balloon'. Observe the voyage of M. Thiers.¹⁵⁵

The indignity of Thiers's 'voyage' is multiplied by the unfortunate presence of the bowed bronze head wedged between his knees. Such accidental juxtapositions were a common place in the wreckage of the scrap-yard where the statues of many *grands hommes* ended their days. Without the pedestals on which they depended for ideological support, and the well-ordered squares which signalled their status, the statues of Paris were reduced from bronze allegories to an allegory of bronze.

Jahan's images of the giant alligators from Dalou's 'Triumph of the Republic' have become well known but the less dramatic images, less legible as photographs are perhaps more powerful (Figure 59). Thiers sits uncomfortably on his side in a mangled heap of metal sheeting at the base of the photograph. Above his head a mass of bases, legs, and half-seen figures emerge and recede between the diagonals of the overhead crane and half-buried railway sleepers. Perhaps Desnos was uncannily when he described the statues themselves as merely 'accessories'. For Thiers and so many of the products of statuomania it was the allegory of bronze that elicited a sentimental and suitably patriotic response. The rules of this 'basically Parisian little game' suggest that the fate of La Fontaine was no different. He, too, survived the idolatry of literary celebrity and surrealist attacks on

154 'Ce JARDINER Louis XV, tombé sans perdre son tricorne, observe éternellement la petit fleur d'acier, seule végétation de nos plates-bandes.' *Ibid.*, p.30.

155 *Ibid.*, p.46 (see appendix).

the process of monumental representation that came with it, to join Diderot, Voltaire and Hugo in the national melting pot:

And the author of this article stops at this precise point. Because everything must be started afresh, must be contradicted, redone to start again, contradict, redo anew. The great cycle is achieved and re-starts. Perhaps it never existed?¹⁵⁶

156 *Documents* 1, 1930, p.38 (see appendix).

Chapter Five

The unacceptable face of the French Revolution

The subject of this chapter, its 'unacceptable face', is the Marquis de Sade. If this seems more like an admission than a declaration of intent, then it is an acknowledgement of the difficulty of discussing Sade in any context. Consider, for example, the reservations expressed by Otto Flake in 1930:

I did not embark upon this study of the life and work of the Marquis de Sade without some qualms. It was not the consciousness of lacking qualifications that worried me, for one need be neither doctor nor psychiatrist to illuminate this theme. Rather it seemed that today, when the demand for a biography has called into being what amounts to a special industry, the motive of one who singles out for examination one of the most unpleasant individuals in history might well be suspect.¹

Otto Flake was in fact a doctor and he would presumably therefore have been considered immune from the moral risks that studying Sade was thought to entail.² Flake's qualms, however, were well-founded, suggesting that we should remain suspicious of any motives for singling Sade out (including our own). In the context of Georges Bataille's suggestion that 'to admire de Sade is to diminish the force of his ideas', both motive and response implicate the critic in the construction of a volatile subject.³ If Bataille was correct, then Sade

- 1 O. Flake, *The Marquis de Sade with a postscript on Restif de la Bretonne*, trans. E. Crankshaw, London, 1931, p.5. This book was translated into French by Pierre Klossowski in 1933 and is likely therefore to have been influential in directing his approach to Sade during the 1930s.
- 2 Geoffrey Gorer noted of Sade's work, as late as 1934 that: 'The British Museum contains some of his books, but un-catalogued and under bonds and seals which, I am told, require the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and two other trustees to be loosed.' G. Gorer, *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*, London, 1934, p.255.
- 3 G. Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. M. Dalwood, London, 1987, p.179.

should be admired endlessly: a scene in Madame Tussaud's perhaps (next to Sweeney Todd), where visitors could see Sade endlessly repeating his crimes. The dilemma is this: in order to reduce the power of the wholly unacceptable is it better to shroud it in myth, or reveal it for what it is?

The case of Algernon Swinburne is instructive in this regard. The poet championed Sade faithfully as his true precursor based only on his reputation, the prohibitions surrounding the supposed demonic influence of the 'monstre-auteur' having denied him access to any of his hero's works.⁴ Finally able to borrow a copy of *Justine or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, Swinburne noted his reaction (Figure 60):

At first, I quite expected to add another to the gifted author's list of victims; I really thought I must have died or split open or choked with laughing. I never laughed so much in my life: I couldn't have stopped to save the said life. I went from the text to the illustrations and back again, till I literally doubled up and fell down with laughter.⁵

In stark contrast, in the 1996 book *Forbidden Knowledge*, Roger Shattuck asks whether, in the light of Sade's hold over the susceptible criminal minds of Ian Brady and Ted Bundy, we might not reconsider the nature of the threat that he poses.⁶ The ethical questions that Sade raises are, however, indicative of the constructive nature of interpretation. Writing about Sade, admiring Sade, in the 1920s and 1930s, the 'special industry' that Otto Flake described, fulfilled a demand, or more accurately a desire, that requires scrutiny. We might, after all,

4 Sade's designation by Restif de la Bretonne in 1797: G. Gorer, *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*, p.19.

5 J. Mitchell 'Swinburne – The Disappointed Protagonist', *Yale French Studies* 35, December 1965, p.83: the excerpt is from a letter dated August 1862 to Richard Monckton-Milnes, from whom Swinburne had borrowed the book.

6 R. Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge – From Prometheus to Pornography*, New York, 1996: chapter 7, 'The Divine Marquis – The Moors Murders Case and Ted Bundy's Sermon', pp.256–68.

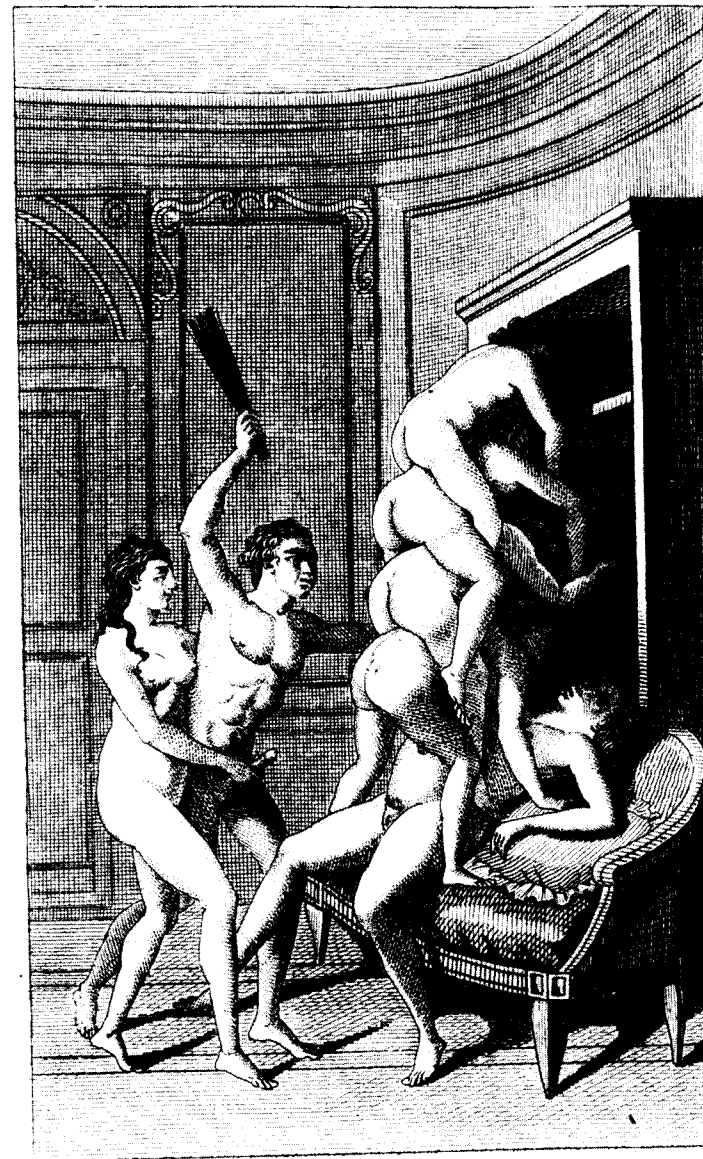


Fig 60: *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*, en Hollande (Paris), 1797, Tome X, p.224. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. PC27.a.37

just as easily find ourselves laughing with Swinburne as screaming with Sade.⁷

* * *

The surrealist pantheon produced in 1934 by Jean Scutenaire (Figure 27) suggests not only ideological identifications and attachments, but alludes to a cryptic physiognomy of revolutionary spirit.⁸ If, as it was believed at the turn of the twentieth century, it was possible to see epilepsy or criminality in the faces of patients and suspects through empirical photographic 'evidence', then what common denominator might be visible in the faces of the men assembled under the symptom 'surrealism'?⁹ From Marat (top left) to the Bonnot Gang (along the bottom) this superstitious belief in the appearance of martyrs betrays an expectation (however deluded) of the perennial danger of insurrection.¹⁰ The image recalls the attitude of Octave Garnier, anarchist, armed robber and firm believer in the '*reprise individuelle*'. On the run in 1912, he left a note for the head of the Paris forensic team: 'Bertillon, you nutter, bung on your glasses and watch out.'¹¹

- 7 'Dali Screams with Sade' was George Bataille's original title for his essay that was published as 'The Lugubrious Game' in *Documents* 7, 1929. See Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, Paris 1970, p.113.
- 8 The work was originally entitled 'Le Pêle-Mêle de Scutenaire', and appeared in the Belgian surrealist review *Documents* 34, Bruxelles, 1934, p.50.
- 9 See for example, William Alexander's, *The Face of the Epileptic*, in Sander Gilman 'The Image of the Hysteric', S. Gilman, H. King, R. Porter, G.S. Rousseau, E. Showalter, *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, California, 1993, p.381.
- 10 Robert Short gives the title 'From Marat to the Bonnot Gang – the Surrealist Pantheon': R. Short, *Dada and Surrealism*, London, 1980, p.66.
- 11 'The Bonnot Gang'; Jules Bonnot, Victor Kibalchich, Raymond Callemain, Eduard Carouy, Jean de Boe, Octave Garnier, Marie Vuillemin, André Soudy and René Valet, were a group of bank-robbers active in and around Paris in between 1909 and 1912. They were credited with inventing the get-away car, and achieved martyr-like status with a final and tragic gun battle after which surviving members were guillotined, attracting sympathy and support from Left-wing journalists. Richard Parry, *The Bonnot Gang*, London, 1987. The quote from Garnier is on p.111.

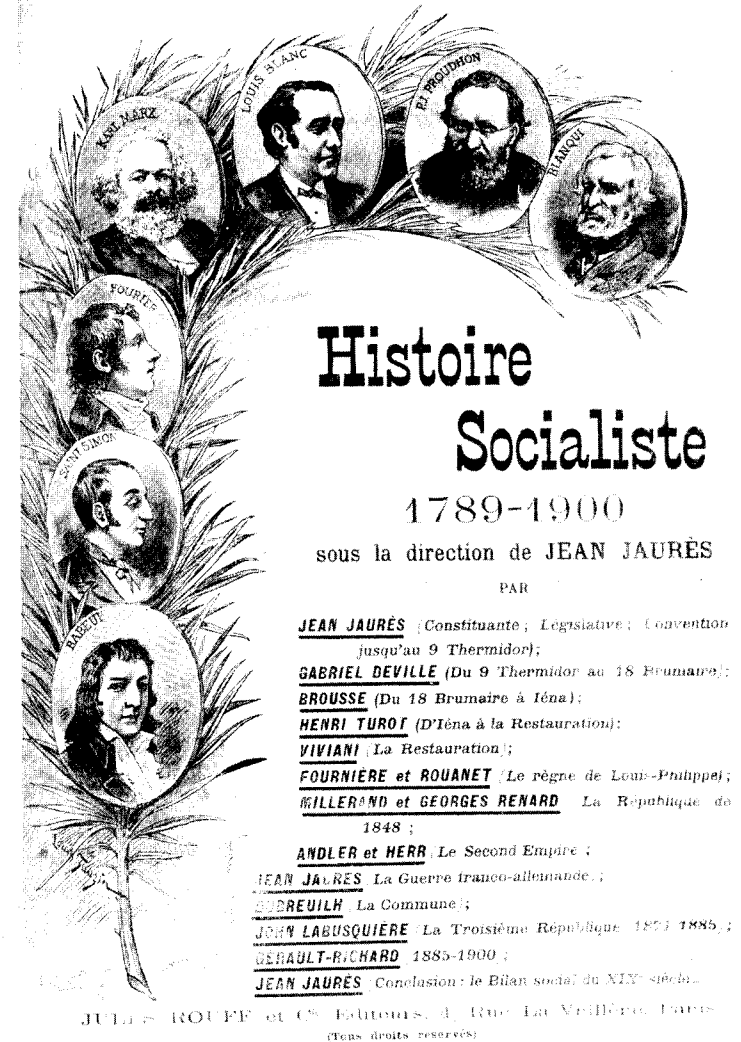


Fig 61: Frontispiece to Jean Jaurès *Histoire Socialiste, Vol. I, La Constituante*, Paris, 1901. Courtesy of the Department of History of Art, University College London

The sense of revolutionary heritage evoked by Scutenaire confounds André Breton's statement in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* that 'There is nothing more sterile, in the final analysis, than [the] perpetual interrogation of the dead.' Breton qualified this attitude with a series of examples, including the suggestion that Sade committed 'a counterrevolutionary act' before concluding that 'in questions of revolt, none of us should need ancestors'.¹² Of course, facetiously positing the 'implausible' circumstance that Sade acted against the Revolution actually presumes a revolutionary reputation under construction. Just as the ancestors that Breton feels he no longer needs frame his denial of them, icons of the past serve as a frame for the present in Scutenaire's surrealist pantheon: Hegel, Marx, Lenin and, it seems, some conspicuous French revolutionary connections. Marat, as usual, dying in his bath: a washed out reproduction of the friend of the people. Gracchus Babeuf, the first revolutionary communist, snipped from a more conventional family tree in Jean Jaurès' *Histoire Socialiste* (Figure 61). The Marquis de Sade, surrounded by brawny satyrs waving snakes, performs an accidental (and even camp) parody of André Breton's own 'visionary' look.

Sade was still, however, in 1934, very much the unacceptable face of the French Revolution, a figure whose political and moral ambiguity was occluded in equal measure by the vitriolic force of his rhetoric and the lack of an accurate portrait likeness. In looking for the perfect revolutionary forefather around whom to arrange their antagonisms, various individuals within the surrealist movement found a man who had only the semblance of a biography and the crudest parody of a resemblance.¹³ Few had read his books and fewer had

12 A. Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. R. Seaver, Michigan, 1972, p.126.

13 The first complete biography was produced by Gilbert Lely from notes collected by Maurice Heine and was published in 1952: Lely, *Vie du marquis de Sade, avec un examen de ses ouvrages* (2 vols), Paris, 1952. It followed closely Lely's *D.-A.-F. de Sade*, Paris, 1948, and continued the tradition established by Guillaume Apollinaire's *L'Oeuvre du marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1909. There was a steady increase in sympathy for Sade, which accompanied his rehabilitation, but it coincided only chronologically with the surrealist movement. It is not acceptable to assume, as both Roger Shattuck and Laurence

tried to understand them, and yet he had recently published after a hundred year delay, arguably the most challenging text in the history of French literature: *The 120 Days of Sodom or the School of Libertinage*.¹⁴ At this time, Sade existed in the form of a pit, an open sewer into which ideas were periodically discarded for later recycling. Yet this existence furnished a position from which to speak, of incarceration, alienation, misrepresentation, and even erasure, that coincided precisely with that of a libertarian avant-garde seeking an instant identity. The way in which the surrealists deployed Sade also consolidated an ideological model linking violent personal revolt to popular insurrection and political revolution. However, in the half-light that preceded the explosion of academic study in the 1950s and 1960s there was much at stake for those seeking to engage with Sade.¹⁵ Every representation was both a form of production, which

Bongie have recently, that surrealism was in any way to blame for the results of the void they were working in. The notion of the positive 'rehabilitation' of Sade that Carolyn J. Dean describes was anathema to many (although not all) surrealists. See, Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge*; L.L. Bongie, *Sade*, Chicago and London, 1998; C.J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures*, Cornell, 1992, pp.162-70. See also Neil Cox, 'Critique of Pure Desire, or When the Surrealists were Right,' J. Mundy (ed.), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, London, 2001.

14 *Les 120 Journées de Sodome ou l'Ecole du Libertinage*, was published by Maurice Heine from the original manuscript in 3 volumes, between 1931 and 1935: *Les 120 Journées de Sodome ou l'Ecole du Libertinage. Texte établi sur le manuscrit original autographe par Maurice Heine* (3 vols) Paris 1931-1935. A previous version published in Germany by Eugen Dühren (Iwan Bloch), was full of errors but had a great impact on the medical, as opposed to the literary, world: *Les 120 Journées de Sodome ou l'Ecole du Libertinage, par le Marquis de Sade. Publié pour la première fois d'après le manuscrit original, avec des annotations scientifiques, par le Docteur Eugen Dühren*, Paris, 1904. This contrast in reception reflects the change, due in great part to Apollinaire and the surrealists, in the way that Sade was understood between 1904 and 1935.

15 The critical 'position statements' of the 1950s and 1960s common in the study of Sade, were driven in large part by the translations of extracts, and then whole works into English, which required explanatory essays. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's 1951-1952 essay 'Faut-il brûler Sade?' from *Les Temps Modernes*, was used to introduce a collection of extracts published in England as Simone de Beauvoir, *The Marquis de Sade*, London, 1962. In the United

changed the way that he would be seen, and a form of consumption, a manipulation of his use-value. These 'transactions' therefore reveal much about the relationship between surrealism and history, an axis usually drawn between the poetic notion of myth and hard-line historical materialism. The deliberate ambivalence of what can only hesitantly be described as a kind of commemoration suggests an analogy with George Bataille's theorising of monuments as the means of negotiating history as political capital.¹⁶ The monument, for Bataille, presents a smooth, bland, but fragile surface, which continually threatens to fail; revealing all the more poignantly that which it was designed to conceal. In searching for a way to characterise Sade that would relate him to both his origins and his destination, this chapter will suggest that the Bastille (that original icon of the Revolution) assumed a monumental significance. Itself a blank space, the subject of an intentional erasure, it corresponded on both a practical and symbolic level with that which it was intended to repress, and which it seemed unable to contain. Surrealism, Sade and the Revolution hold one another off in a suspension, which will be explored here through

States the same process accompanied the ground-breaking translations of *Justine*, *Juliette* and *The 120 Days of Sodom* by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver. Each edition included major essays by French thinkers. *Justine*, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, and *Other Writings*, New York, 1965, included both Jean Paulhan's 1946 essay 'The Marquis de Sade and his Accomplice' and Maurice Blanchot's 1949 essay 'Sade'. *The 120 Days of Sodom and other writings*, New York, 1966, included a translation of de Beauvoir's 'Must we burn Sade?' and Pierre Klossowski's 'Nature as Destructive Principle' which was based upon a 1947 essay for a French edition of Sade's work. This period also saw the original publication of essays on Sade in Georges Bataille's final work, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. P. Connor, New York, 1988, and Roland Barthes's *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. R. Miller, London, 1976.

16 Bataille, 'Architecture' (1929), *Oeuvres Complètes* I, pp.171-2: 'L'Obélisque' (1938), *Ibid.*, p.502, and 'Le paradoxe de la mort et la Pyramide', 1957, *Oeuvres Complètes* VIII, p.518. See also D. Hollier, *Against Architecture*, *The Writings of Georges Bataille*, trans. B. Wing, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1992.

the transactional notions of portraiture and monumental representation. As Louis Aragon put it in 1928: 'The influence and power of a mind can be measured by the number of stupidities it inspires.'¹⁷

* * *

Edgar Allan Poe begins his classic gothic tale *The Pit and the Pendulum* with a 'quatrain composed for the gates of a market to be erected upon the site of the Jacobin Club house at Paris':

Here the wicked mob, unappeased,
Long cherished a hatred of innocent blood.
Now that the fatherland is saved, and the cave of death demolished,
Where grim death has been, life and health appear.¹⁸

The French Revolution produced a number of similar ideologically motivated erasures. The destruction of statues and buildings is the subject of a fascinating discourse on the re-significations effected by iconoclasm, while the practice of renaming streets, public spaces and even towns, to suit the revolutionary agenda, is well known.¹⁹ There were truly outstanding examples of the lengths to which the Jacobin revolutionaries wished to go, particularly in the punishment of counter-revolutionary uprisings: 'Not merely were federalist buildings to be pulled down. Marseille itself was to disappear from the map. The place was henceforth to be known as Sansnom, "the town without

17 L. Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, trans. A. Waters, Nebraska, 1991, p.36: this extract concludes a section that makes numerous links between the French Revolution and the present.

18 E.A. Poe, 'The Pit And the Pendulum', *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, London, 1996, p.239.

19 D. Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art*, London, 1997, pp.13-39. R. Wrigley, 'Breaking the Code: interpreting French Revolutionary Iconoclasm' in A. Yarrington and K. Everest (eds), *Reflections of Revolution*, London and New York, 1993, pp.182-95. R. Clay, 'Saint-Sulpice de Paris: art, politics, and sacred space in revolutionary Paris 1789-1795', *Object*, No.1, London, October 1998. See also S. Boldrick and R. Clay (eds), *Iconoclasm: contested objects, contested terms*, Aldershot, 2007.

a name".²⁰ Likewise, the Bastille, a long-hated symbol of feudal despotism in the centre of the Faubourg St Antoine, a radical revolutionary section of Paris, was torn down, or more accurately 'un-built', following the taking of the ancient fortress on 14th July 1789.²¹ This anniversary is now the most acceptable of the revolutionary calendar, having been celebrated consistently since 1880 (although under the original proviso that what was actually being commemorated was not the famous uprising, but the less obvious anniversary of the first Fête de la Fédération, first observed on 14th July 1790).²² The official celebration thus suggests a mutual concession not to remember 'the mob' whilst nevertheless celebrating the liberty that its actions achieved. Perhaps as a result of the caché that surrounds Bastille Day, present-day visitors to the Bastille are sometimes disappointed that all that remains of the bête-noire of the revolutionary crowd are a column and a few plaques in the pavement.²³ But the idea of the 'cave of death' which lurks beneath the levelled and re-built public space is powerful and alluring, as Poe's quatrain makes clear. There were no acts of bloody violence or torture in the Jacobin Club, but if post-thermidorean accounts are to be believed, it was there that the Terror was conceived and its proponents applauded.²⁴ There is the suggestion here of a level at which a building can be so polluted by the actions, or in this case, thoughts, propounded within it that only an absolute destruction and appropriate rebuilding (epitomised by 'the health and life of the market') can appease posterity.

20 J. M. Thompson, *The French Revolution*, Oxford, 1947, p.405.

21 The lengthy process of the demolition of the Bastille began on 16 July 1789 but was not completed until 6 February 1790. J. Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille, July 14th 1789*, trans. J. Stewart, London, 1970, p.264.

22 R. Gildea, *The Past in French History*, New Haven and London, 1994, p.39.

23 A memorable example being the visit paid to the site by Grant Mitchell, the wife beating character in the British soap-opera *Eastenders*. Hoping to find the same kind of dungeons and gothic torture chambers that the revolutionary crowd presumed existed in 1789, and not knowing that the great historical landmark had been demolished, he remarked 'is that it?'

24 See Mona Ozouf's essay on the word jacobin in this context: M. Ozouf, "'Jacobin": fortunes et infortunes d'un mot', *L'école de la France*, Paris, 1984.

The muting, or covering over, of the Jacobin club with the apparently innocuous; the manufacture of souvenirs from the fallen stones of the Bastille; the renaming of the sacrificial site of the king's execution 'Concorde'; it is to George Bataille's notion of the monument that these examples allude: public monuments that despite (or because of) their prominence, somehow contain unspeakable or unrepresentable histories:

There was some difficulty in finding an appropriate symbol for the Place de la Concorde, where the images of royalty and the Revolution had proven powerless. But it was contrary to the majesty of the site to leave an empty space, and agreement was reached on a monolith brought back from Egypt. Seldom has a gesture of this type been more successful; the apparently meaningless image imposed its calm grandeur and its pacifying power on a location that always threatened to recall the worst.²⁵

The meaninglessness of the obelisk is betrayed in Bataille's view by the enormity of that which it tries to hide. Failing to pacify a location that 'always threatened to recall the worst', the monument, rather than covering over, achieving 'concorde', acts as a catalyst for repressed memory. At the moment of recognition, the obelisk focuses attention on, and reveals, the absent guillotine. The ramifications of Bataille's theory are profound, as Denis Hollier explores in *Against Architecture* (a book originally published in French as *La Prise de la Concorde*).²⁶ The model of historical repression and eruption that Bataille suggests is dependent not on a balanced resolution (of the therapeutic kind enacted through psycho-analysis) but its opposite: 'the spectacle only changes', he says of the obelisk, 'when the lantern of a madman projects its absurd light on stone'.²⁷

For Bataille, the revolutionary site is always beneath the monument, waiting for this moment of (insane) recognition. The choice of how to remember the Revolution is therefore an odd mixture of accepting the banalities of Bastille Day and admiring the perverse

25 Bataille, 'The Obelisk', *Visions of Excess*, A. Stoekl (ed.), Minnesota, 1985, p.221.

26 D. Hollier, *La Prise de la Concorde*, Paris, 1974.

27 *Ibid.*, p.221.

ability of the Place de la Concorde to inadvertently betray itself. It is this theoretical framework that offers the most appropriate context for a consideration of the importance of the revolutionary character of the Marquis de Sade to members of the surrealist group, and in particular, his association with the Bastille.

* * *

It is important to acknowledge the fact that Sade's inculcation into the surrealist pantheon occurred in spite of, or even perhaps as a result of, the lack of an authoritative biography, which did not appear until 1952.²⁸ The twenty-year period 1919–1939, covering the key publications *Littérature, la Révolution surréaliste, Documents, le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* and *Minotaure*, therefore corresponds with the formulation of an identity in the absence of fact. This period was also distinctive in that the leading biographical authorities on Sade, Maurice Heine and Gilbert Lely, operated on the edges of surrealist activity and can be considered as having both influenced surrealist thought and been influenced by it.²⁹ It will become clear that in this atmosphere, Sade was nothing more or less than a condensation of ideas about who he might have been, and it is therefore as a representation rather than an individual that he must be considered at this time. The way that Sade entered surrealist thought reflects this fact. He is, after all, first 'seen' through the eyes of poets: Petrus Borel, Swinburne and Apollinaire.³⁰ Implicit, too, was the idea of Sade's invisibility, the almost spectral way in which he lay behind

28 G. Lely, *The Life of the Marquis de Sade*, trans. A. Brown, London, 1961.

29 For more on Maurice Heine see Neil Cox 'La Mort posthume: Maurice Heine and the poetics of decay', *Art History*, Vol.23, No.3, September 2000.

30 G. Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1909. In *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 3, December 1931, pp.34–5, there are extracts under the heading; 'SADE VU: 1. par le génie des poètes:' with quotes from Petrus Borel's *Madame Putiphar* (1839), and a text on Sade by Swinburne dated December 1862. Sade is also seen 'par l'orifice d'un vagin' in a second, shorter text on the same page.

literature (as a writer), behind medicine (as a sadist), and behind history (as a revolutionary).

Calling upon Sade's revolutionary record was a crucial factor in re-establishing an identity for the writer discreet from both the unacceptable sexual scandals for which he was famous during the *ancien régime*, and the diagnosis of the pathological monster that science derived from his recently published writings.³¹ For the surrealists, however, Sade's very notoriety was unacceptable. The 'revolutionary period', from his release in 1790 to his re-incarceration under Napoleon in 1800 gives a brief window of ten years in which Sade survived the Terror and the reprisals that followed, through an unbelievable series of near misses.³² Sade's actions during this period, and the debate over his affiliation during the Revolution have already been carefully detailed. In *Sade: A Biographical Essay*, for example, Laurence Bongie includes a chapter on the subject, appropriately titled 'His Finest Lie'.³³ Sade was himself clearly circumspect on the issue

31 There is a correspondence between Sade's libertine activity, which all took place before the Revolution (the affairs of Jeanne Testard (1763), Rose Keller (1768), the Cantharides (1772)) and his political career during the Revolution. Sade was emphatically reduced to a medical curiosity under the influence of Richard Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), and then by the works of the medical 'experts' on Sade that flourished after the discovery of *The 120 Days of Sodom*, which was later described as the 'first Psychopathia Sexualis'. See for example, A. Cabanès, 'La prétendue Folie de Marquis de Sade', *Le Cabinet Secret de l'Histoire*, Paris, 1900, pp.259–320. Eugen Dühren (Dr Iwan Bloch), *Le Marquis de Sade et son Temps*, Paris, 1901. Octave Uzanne, preface to E. Dühren, 'L'idée de Sadisme et L'Érotologie scientifique'. Dr Jacobus X, *Le Marquis de Sade et son Oeuvre, devant la Science médicale et la Littérature moderne*, Paris, 1901. Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. iii, *Analysis of the Sexual Impulse: Love and Pain: The Sexual Impulse in Women*, Philadelphia, 1913, pp.105–9. Montague Summers, 'The Marquis de Sade, a Study in Allogagnia', *The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology*, No.1, London, 1920.

32 See N. Cox, 'Marat/Sade/Picasso', *Art History*, Vol.17, No.3, pp.383–417, in which it the author describes how Sade only escaped the guillotine because Marat mistakenly ordered the execution of the Marquis de la Salle in his place.

33 L. Bongie, *Sade*, pp.221–34. See also M. Lever, *Marquis de Sade*, trans. A. Goldhammer, London, 1995, chapter 20, 'The Grand Illusion', p.388.

of allegiance and gives little away when, writing to his lawyer, he states:

I am an anti-jacobite [Jacobin]; indeed, I have a mortal hatred of them; I adore the King, but I detest the old abuses; I like many articles of the constitution but others sicken me [...] So what am I? An aristocrat or a democrat? You tell me, dear lawyer, if you please, since I, for one, have not the faintest idea.³⁴

The alternative construction of Sade as a revolutionary hero began with the earliest twentieth-century accounts of his life and work, but it can be summed up by Paul Eluard's 1926 essay title, 'D.A.F. de Sade, fanstastic and revolutionary writer'.³⁵ Indeed, the convention of referring to the erstwhile 'divine marquis' as D.A.F. de Sade, reflects the revolutionary context that required a *ci-devant* noble such as Sade to either abandon or conceal his aristocratic title.³⁶ This practice was continued by René Char and Man Ray who each produced a 'Homage to D.A.F. de Sade' and Bataille in 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade'.³⁷ In fact, however, Sade never fully rejected his title, using it or ignoring it as a matter of practicality rather than principle.³⁸

The description of Sade as a revolutionary was clearly intended not only to refer to historical circumstance, but to allude to the creative revolution that he was retrospectively credited with beginning in terms of expression and sexuality. Founded in part at least upon the misconception that he was imprisoned 'for his beliefs' rather than his actions, this idea has since too easily been compressed into the concept of literary transgression with reference to erotic works

- 34 A letter from Sade to his secretary Gaufridy from 1792, L. Bongie, *Sade*, p.231.
35 *La Révolution surréaliste* 8, December 1926, included the calendar page for 26 September, St. Justine's Day.
36 Sade was continually listed as an emigré in Marseille and often used the name Louis Sade in Paris. He was listed and revealed in *Jacques-Antoine Dulaure's Collection de la listes des ci-devant ducs, marquis, comtes, barons, etc.*, in 1790.
37 R. Char and Man Ray's 'hommages' are both in *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 2, October 1930. G Bataille, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade – an open letter to my current comrades', (c.1929–1930), *Visions of Excess*, pp.91–102.
38 L. Bongie, *Sade*, p.233.

produced by Aragon and Bataille (among others) in the late 1920s.³⁹ The revolution/transgression axis was, however, also complicated by association with the political upheavals of the age in which the works were written, particularly the partisan political climate in and around the surrealist movement after the publication of Breton's *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1929.⁴⁰

Sade, it could be argued, became lodged between the causes and effects of the French Revolution such that each became unthinkable without the other and debate centred around whether Sade represented the worst abuses of the *ancien régime* or whether he was trying to represent them critically.⁴¹ In fact, Sade seems to have been uniquely placed to represent all aspects of the French revolutionary spectrum simultaneously: a libertine aristocrat but also a victim of despotism; secretary of the 'section des Piques' during the revolution but later a victim of the Terror, which he survived only to be imprisoned under the Consulate. In every sense, Sade experienced the vicissitudes of the French Revolution, leaving the lasting impression that he was involved without any obvious sense of how or why. Bataille later made an obtuse reference to this ambiguous quality in an essay on Sade in his 1957 book *Literature and Evil*:

Sade's life and work are indeed connected with historical events, but in the strangest possible way. The sense of revolution is not 'given' in his ideas: if there is any connection it is more like that between the uneven components of

- 39 M. Foucault, 'Preface to Transgression', D.F. Doucard (ed.), *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, trans. D. Bouchard and S. Simon, Ithaca and New York, 1977.
40 Breton's claim that Sade 'committed a counter-revolutionary act' in the *Second Manifesto*, is clearly a reference to the climate of mistrust in which it was written. Breton's reference evokes the tests of 'civism' common during the revolution in which citizens were called upon to prove their worth and revolutionary fervour, despite the self-evidently un-testable nature of most such assertions; it is an interesting irony that only 'vanquiers de la Bastille' were exempted from this practice as they were thought to be beyond reproach.
41 Carolyn J. Dean gives an excellent account of this debate in *The Self and Its Pleasures*, Ithaca and London, 1992, chapter 7, pp.127–70.

some unfinished figure – between a ruin and some rock, or between the night and silence.⁴²

This uncanny sense of an almost arcane connection between Sade and revolution, as if through some theoretical synthesis each might be able to complete the other, is reflected not only in Sade's reanimation for the surrealist cause, but in the serious and concerted way in which this happened, particularly through the run of *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* (1930–1933).⁴³ The publication of Sade's previously unpublished texts in the most politically self-conscious surrealist journal followed directly Sade's 'participation' in a polemical exchange between Bataille and André Breton which culminated in Breton accusing Bataille of being an 'excremental philosopher', and Bataille writing his appropriately scatological essay 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade'.⁴⁴ Their argument is fascinating because it not only sets out the terms of Sade's induction into the surrealist pantheon, but indicates the way that he had endured the nineteenth century as a revolutionary curiosity. The story at the heart of the matter is told by Bataille in *Documents* 3, published in June 1929, where he describes 'the disconcerting gesture of the marquis de Sade, locked up with madmen, who had the most beautiful roses brought to him only to pluck off their petals and toss them into a ditch filled with liquid manure'.⁴⁵ Breton's response in the *Second Manifesto* was to contrast a reconstruction of the poetic integrity of the revolutionary martyr

42 Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, trans. A. Hamilton, London and New York, 1990.

43 The following texts and articles were published in *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*: René Char, 'Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade', No.2, p.6; Maurice Heine, 'Actualité de Sade', No.2, p.3 and No.5, p.4; Letters to Abel Hernant and Louis Bunuel, No.2, p.4 and No.3, p.12. Also 'Lettre Inédite du Marquis de Sade', No.2, p.3; *Les Infortunes de la Vertu* (fragment), No.2, p.6; 'Pensée inédite de D.A.F. de Sade', No.4, p.1; There were also Man Ray's images: 'Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade', No.2, p.37 and 'Monument à D.A.F. de Sade', No.5, p.59.

44 Breton makes this accusation in 'The Second Manifesto of Surrealisme', *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, December 1929, p.17. Bataille's text is subtitled – 'An Open Letter to my current comrades' and dates from 1929/1930, see notes by A. Stoekl, in Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, p.260.

45 *Ibid.*, p.14.

with Bataille's relative lack of credibility: 'for this act of protest to lose its extraordinary significance' he suggests 'it suffices that it be told not by a man who spent twenty seven years of his life in prison but by a staid librarian'.⁴⁶

The genesis of the story at the heart of this dispute is, however, far less familiar than either Breton's or Bataille's uses of it. The anecdote of Sade and the roses is mentioned by Apollinaire, but began, as he notes, in an article by the phrenologist and bibliophile Victorien Sardou.⁴⁷ Although he published the story in 1902, Sardou relates having heard it from an old gardener in Bicêtre Hospital (where Sade had been imprisoned for a time) nearly fifty years earlier. The Sade scholar Charles Dawes has, quite reasonably, drawn attention to the absurdity of a story that makes its first appearance ninety years after it was alleged to have happened.⁴⁸ This dubious sequence of events is paradigmatic of literature on Sade, which throughout the nineteenth century tended to believe the worst or, worse still, believe everything, whether it was likely or not, which was said of him. The nineteenth-century construction of Sade, the deadly 'monster-author' whose books could cause epilepsy, progressed in tandem with the history of the Revolution itself, like its insane relative locked in the attic.⁴⁹

Seen in retrospect, Sade's afterlife was almost as turbulent as his first. He entered public life with a series of libertine scandals beginning in the 1760s with the 'Rose Keller affair', became a professional man of letters and revolutionary in the 1790s, but was regarded as little more than a judicial curiosity by the time of his death in 1814. By 1834, however, twenty years after his death, Restoration

46 Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', *la Révolution surréaliste*, p.17.

47 G. Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.13. Sardou's story first appeared in the *Chronique Médicale* on 15 December 1902.

48 These notes are in pencil in the margin of the University of London Library copy of an English translation of Flake's book, the notes are dated 1931 and signed CRD. Charles Dawes own book on Sade was first published in 1927.

49 Jules Janin makes the claims about the potentially terrible effects of reading Sade in *Le Marquis de Sade, avec La vérité sur les deux procès criminels du Marquis de Sade par le Bibliophile Jacob*, Paris, 1834, p.19. See also Mitchell, 'Swinburne', *Yale French Studies* 35, December 1965, p.81.

reaction had created the reputation of the demonic monster-author, although by 1883, this threat had been reduced to a symptom of sexual deviance, the product of a diseased mind.⁵⁰ Following the discovery of a lost work (*The 120 Days of Sodom*) in 1904, Sade was named the first Krafft-Ebing, the precursor of Freud.⁵¹ And then, finally (for the surrealists at least) he was reconstructed as a revolutionary writer in 1909 under the eclectic authority of Apollinaire. Sade therefore shares his history with that of the French Revolution, or more specifically, with the Jacobin Revolution under Robespierre (the repressed Terror described in Chapter two): both were born of the *ancien regime* and yet have been described as its nemesis; both suffered under the Directory and were demonised during the Restoration; both were exonerated only to be repressed under the guise of explanation when science and history joined forces at the turn of the century and both enjoyed a belated return to fashion under the careful guidance of left-wing intellectuals.⁵²

The provocative and over-simple conflation 'Sade is the Revolution' is flawed at many levels but it does signal the process through which, in the nineteenth century, partisan histories and scientific revisionism affected the ways in which Sade was represented.⁵³ This is important because the failure of both history and science to account adequately for Sade even as late as 1940 was a key factor in the surrealist drive to retrieve and represent him. There may even be a case to be made for the fact that Sade's troubling identification with

50 The reference here is to the date of the first publication of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, in which the author deals with Sadism as a medical condition, complete with examples taken from life. In a later edition, Ebing welcomes a very thorough study of sadism, completed by a Dr Marciat, and published in the *Bibliothèque de Criminologie*, Paris, 1899: R. v. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, trans. F.J. Rebinan from the twelfth German edition, New York, 1906.

51 'One hundred years before Krafft-Ebing he compiled the first *Psychopathia Sexualis*', M. Summers, 'The Marquis de Sade, a Study in Algolagnia', p.21.

52 The parallel here is between Maurice Heine and Albert Mathiez, both of whom were involved in radical left-wing politics in the 1920s: the former 'rehabilitated' Sade, and the latter Robespierre.

53 M. Lever, *Marquis de Sade*, trans. A. Goldhammer, London, 1993, p.388.

the Revolution and the Terror allowed surrealists to deal with deeply historical issues under the guise of literature: in effect to engage both the Revolution and its interpretation without direct recourse to political history. This might explain the continued interest in Sade through periods of turmoil within the movement, and the way in which he was often deployed tactically (as with the polemic between Breton and Bataille). This role, however, was anything but an easy way out for Sade. There is no reason to believe, as has been suggested, that the various surrealist attitudes were aimed at excusing or exonerating Sade.⁵⁴ As Denis Hollier insists: 'To keep Sade from becoming literature as usual was one of Surrealism's fundamental moral imperatives. He wasn't liberated from the Bastille in order to be imprisoned in the Pléiade.'⁵⁵ This equation of Sade with the Bastille (upon which this study is also founded) is only one factor in his revolutionary representation, and stands alongside the equally suggestive link between Sade and Marat carefully exposed by Neil Cox in relation to Picasso's images of Charlotte Corday.⁵⁶ The idea of the Bastille is unique, however, in that it is one consistent thread exploited by all who wish to show Sade in a revolutionary context, from Sade himself writing during his own lifetime, through the nineteenth century, through surrealism and to the present day.

* * *

And the Bastille trembles...

and the den nam'd Horror held a man

Chain'd hand and foot, round his neck an iron band, bound to the impregnable wall.

54 This argument was put forward by Carolyn J. Dean in *The Self and Its Pleasures* and convincingly challenged by Neil Cox in the 'Critique of Pure Desire,' J. Mundy (ed.), *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*.

55 Hollier, 'Surrealist Precipitates', *October* 69, Cambridge, Mass. and London, Summer 1994, p.112.

56 N. Cox, 'Marat/Sade/Picasso'.

In his soul was the serpent coil'd round his heart, hid from the light, as in a cleft rock:

And the man was confin'd for a writing prophetic.⁵⁷

This extract from William Blake's poem *The French Revolution* was used to introduce Geoffrey Gorer's 1934 book *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*.⁵⁸ There is no direct claim that Blake was aware of the 'prophet' who had occupied the Bastille when he wrote the poem in 1791, and the format of the poem suggests an allegorical rather than personal basis for the occupants of the towers and dens that Blake names. The Bastille was, however, well known in the eighteenth century for its role in the policing of seditious and pornographic writing.⁵⁹ In addition to the fact that it was used as an archive to store confiscated materials, the records of the numbers of prisoners held in the Bastille have been used to measure the scale of the production of erotic literature.⁶⁰ This task was made relatively easy by the frequent use of so-called *lettres de cachét* to imprison such offenders, a notoriously despotic form of arrest warrant issued by the King, but also exploited by aristocratic families to protect errant relatives from the law.⁶¹ Sade brought these two issues into an ironic synthesis, as, having been imprisoned in the Bastille by a *lettre de cachét* at the request of his family, he then set about producing erotic literature from his cell. This link between Sade's writing and his imprisonment is clear and unequivocal and it has often been suggested that his imprisonment was in fact a causal factor in his creativity.⁶²

Sade's attraction to the surrealist movement was undoubtedly enhanced by what was perceived as an imaginative response to the

57 W. Blake, *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, G. Keynes (ed.), London, 1966, pp.134-48.

58 G. Gorer, *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*, p.25.

59 J.-M. Goulemot, *Forbidden Texts: Erotic Literature and its Readers in Eighteenth Century France*, trans. J. Simpson, Oxford, 1994, pp.10-16.

60 *Ibid.*, p.13.

61 F. Funck-Bretano, *Les Lettres de Cachet 1659-1789*, Paris, 1903.

62 This idea appears frequently throughout literature on Sade, from Paul Eluard's 1926 'fantastic and revolutionary writer', to Pierre Klossowski's *Sade Mon Prochain*, Paris, 1947, but is perhaps best set out by Roland Barthes in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*.

loss of personal freedom. As Maurice Heine put it: 'No sooner did Sade start writing than the Bastille turned into the "tower of liberty".'⁶³ However, it should be noted that despite the connotations of restriction and personal sacrifice, which Sade wilfully disseminated from his cell, conditions were actually relatively good, with inmates allowed their own food and furniture, and Sade, as was customary, was allowed a substantial library.

Sade subtitled his 1795 publication *Aline et Valcour ou le Roman Philosophe*, 'written in the Bastille a year before the French Revolution,' having withdrawn 'by Citizen S***' which appeared on the 1793 version.⁶⁴ The effect was calculated to give a sense that the author (who wished to preserve his anonymity) was a true republican who had been a victim of the injustices of the *ancien regime*. However, arguably the most powerful link between Sade and work produced in the Bastille was uncovered posthumously with the publication in 1904 of the manuscript of *The 120 Days of Sodom*.⁶⁵ This text is inextricably linked with the Bastille, as it was judged by Sade to have been his most important work, the loss of which allegedly caused him to weep 'tears of blood' following his removal from the Bastille to another prison at Charenton.⁶⁶ The terrible nature of the events detailed in the book have played a great part in enriching the reputations of both Sade and the Bastille (the site of the book's conception) forming an imaginary bond between the two. The narrative, which takes place in an elaborate torture chamber in the fictional castle of Silling, sets the horrific deeds within the narrative context of a self-imposed imprisonment.⁶⁷ The equation between

63 M. Heine, *Le Marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1950, pp.64. This is a pun on the location of Sade's cell, which was located on the second floor of the tower known as 'Liberty' on account of the occupants rights to walk on the ramparts.

64 P. Fraxi, *Index Librorum Prohibitum*, New York, 1962, p.30.

65 First published for the Club des Bibliophiles in Paris in 1904 by Eugene Duhren (Dr Iwan Bloch), the translation from the manuscript was very poor and only two hundred copies were printed. This version was superseded by Maurice Heine's much improved 3 volume version published from 1931-1935.

66 Bataille repeated this statement in *Literature and Evil*, p.109, pp.127-8.

67 Marquis de Sade, *The 120 Days of Sodom and other writings*, trans. A. Wainhouse and R. Seaver, New York, 1966.

Sade, Silling and the Bastille, creates a link between the impenetrable walls of a gothic fortress and the uncontrollable excess of the libertine in search of satisfaction, which draws the building into a complicit relationship with its inhabitants. This relationship is then completed by the implication that it was the frustration and injustice of imprisonment in the Bastille that caused Sade to write the things he did. As Albert Camus puts it in *The Rebel*: 'In fact he is alone, imprisoned in a blood-stained Bastille, entirely constructed around a still unsatisfied, and hence undirected, desire for pleasure.'⁶⁸

* * *

On the 2nd of July, [Sade] had the brilliant idea of using as a sort of megaphone a long tin pipe, funnel shaped at one end, which was supplied to him for emptying his slops into the cesspool, through which he shouted several times out of his window which looked out onto the Rue St Antoine, that they were going to slaughter all the prisoners in the Bastille, and that those outside should come and deliver them. He also threw papers out of the window, which gave details of the tortures to which the prisoners were being subjected.⁶⁹

Sade spent five years in the Bastille between 1784 and 1789, although it could be argued that he was not securely located in the Bastille until the first years of the twentieth century. In two key texts on Sade, published only three years apart, a shift occurred, away from the nineteenth-century attitudes to Sade, which had limited him to either the 'secret cabinet' of historical curiosity or to medical diagnosis.⁷⁰ The first was Henri d'Almeras's 1906 book, *Le Marquis de Sade, L'homme et L'écrivain*, which sought to provide a social and historical context for Sade's work.⁷¹ D'Almeras adds little to the understanding of Sade's writing, and perhaps as a result his book is often ignored,

68 A. Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. A. Bower, London, 1996, p.41.

69 C.R. Dawes, *The Marquis de Sade, his life and works*, London, 1927, p.56.

70 These two tendencies coincide in Sade's appearance in the *Secret Cabinet of History* of Dr Auguste Cabanès, whose works were popular at the turn of the last century.

71 Henri d'Almeras, *Le Marquis de Sade, L'homme et l'écrivain (D'après des documents inédites)*, Paris, 1906.

but he does spend three valuable chapters on the description, history and routine of Sade's most famous prison. The book is well illustrated too, containing an eighteenth-century plan of the Bastille, a reproduction of Hubert Robert's well-known painting of the storming of the Bastille, and a caricature entitled 'Living Hell, or the Bastille' (Figure 62).⁷² The book's frontispiece refers to the same subject, albeit in an indirect manner. 'Le marquis de Sade' is given the caption 'after an engraving from the Restoration' and has been given the date 1829 (Figure 63).⁷³ This date is however by no means certain, as the caption could simply indicate that it was based on an earlier engraving.

D'Almeras also gives a careful account of the legendary event that would seal Sade's revolutionary status, and which would become central to his subsequent 'use-value'. On 2nd July, he claims, Sade shouted from the ramparts of the Bastille, causing such a disturbance in the already turbulent Faubourg St Antoine, that the governor of the Prison, de Launay, recommended that Sade be transferred to Char-enton: this was undertaken a day or two later, on 3rd or 4th July.⁷⁴ The point of this assertion was to quash the suggestion (attributed by d'Almeras to Restif de la Bretonne) that Sade was present at the fall of the Bastille, and the popular but mistaken assumption, which Sade was happy to perpetuate, that he was somehow instrumental in its downfall. The 'man with the long white beard carried in triumph after the taking of the Bastille' was not Sade, d'Almeras insists, and goes on to list a number of similar shortcomings in the accuracy of Restif's

72 d'Almeras uses many of the same images that were used to illustrate Albert Savine's *La vie à la Bastille – Souvenirs d'un prisonnier*, Paris, 1905. The comparison is intriguing, as Savine's book is a very sympathetic edition of Constantin de Renneville's time in the prison under the ancien regime. d'Almeras could therefore be said to have intervened in the production of Sade's reputation by casting him in the same light as more reputable victims of royal despotism like de Renneville. It is also notable that both books were produced in cheap relatively 'popular' editions. A. Savine (ed.), *La vie à la Bastille, Souvenirs d'un prisonnier*, Paris, 1908.

73 C.J. Dean suggests this date, *The Self and Its Pleasures*, p.155.

74 d'Almeras, *Le Marquis de Sade*, p.209.



Caricature de la Bastille.

Fig 62: Caricature de la Bastille 'L'Enfer des Vivans ou la Bastille', Henri d'Almeras, *Le Marquis de Sade, L'homme et l'écrivain*, Paris, 1906, pp.288-9



Le marquis de Sade.
(D'après une gravure de la Restauration.)

Fig 63: 'Le marquis de Sade (D'après une gravure de la Restauration)', frontispiece to Henri d'Almeras, *Le Marquis de Sade, L'homme et l'écrivain*, Paris, 1906

account of Sade's life.⁷⁵ The knowledge that the Bastille was known to have housed Sade, coupled with the triumphant release of a small number of long term (but largely unknown) inmates seems, however, to have lent credence to this rumour. The confusion was further exacerbated by the presence at the scene of the Marquis de la Salle, who was later mistakenly executed following a similar mix up between the two names.⁷⁶ The story gained currency in the nineteenth century with the publication of the memoirs of an ever increasing number of witnesses to the fall of the Bastille, like Barras, who claims to have been seen the rescued prisoners being brought out and 'heard named the too celebrated Marquis de Sade'.⁷⁷

Although d'Almeras's book was an important contribution to the writing on Sade at the turn of the century, it was by no means as influential in the surrealist context, as Guillaume Apollinaire's 1909 contribution *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*.⁷⁸ As part of a series based on the dubious concept of the 'Masters of Love' in which Apollinaire was to introduce key writers of forbidden erotic masterpieces from the 'Enfer' section of the Bibliothèque Nationale, its importance cannot be overstated. Sade was treated in this context, perhaps for the first time, purely as an author and intellectual, a decision justified by Apollinaire on the grounds of his 'modernity'. Although he credited some of the previous authorities on Sade such as d'Almeras, Apollinaire was quick to point out that a biography had still yet to be written, and did not pretend to have attempted the task.⁷⁹ In the light of this declaration, his introductory comments assume a great significance, presenting Sade's character through a few well-chosen examples of reported (or imagined) appearance and behaviour.

75 Ibid., pp.267-8: Restif talks about Sade in *Les Nuits de Paris ou Le Spectateur Nocturne*, London (Paris), 1788-1793, Vol.2, p.529, p.539 and Vol.16, p.2569.

76 This possibility was first suggested by Gilbert Lely, *The Life of the Marquis de Sade*, p.355. See also Neil Cox, 'Marat/Sade/Picasso'.

77 This quote from Barras is cited by C.R. Dawes, *The Marquis de Sade*, p.57.

78 G. Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*.

79 Apollinaire considered the work of Paul Ginisty, Eugene Duhren, Dr Cabanès, Jacobus X and d'Almeras as useful but acknowledges that the 'complete biography of the Marquis de Sade has yet to be written', *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.2.

Apollinaire's rather erratic, but nevertheless essentially scholarly introduction also poses a question that would reverberate throughout later perceptions of Sade: 'did the Marquis de Sade cause the storming of the Bastille?' Apollinaire accepts that Sade was certainly removed from the Bastille prior to 14th July but he suggests that this does not necessarily disprove the hypothesis that he caused its downfall:

It's not impossible [he says] that it was the calls of the marquis de Sade, the papers that he threw from his window, in which he gave details of the tortures to which the prisoners in the chateau were being subjected, that, exerting their influence on already excited spirits, determined the popular uprising, finally provoking the taking of the old fortress.⁸⁰

Apollinaire further suggests that Sade began to stir up trouble precisely because he realised that the Revolution was imminent: a lively interpretation of the prison governor's report on Sade's behaviour. All that happened, in fact, was that Sade had complained about restrictions to his rights to walk about on an outdoor platform, imposed as a result of both military activity in the fortress and Sade's volatile and uncontrollable temper.⁸¹ Apollinaire therefore colludes with Sade in painting a basically selfish act in the light of revolutionary self-sacrifice: an intervention, which, it could be argued, profoundly changed the way that Sade would be seen in the twentieth century and provides further impetus for the prophecy with which Apollinaire launched Sade's revival:

It seems that the hour has come for the ideas ripened in the infamous atmosphere of the 'enfens' of libraries, and this man who counted for nothing during the nineteenth century may well dominate the twentieth.⁸²

The artificial and highly imaginative link between Sade and the fall of the Bastille gained momentum in the late 1920s under the strangest possible influence. Sade, in publishing terms at least, a true contemporary of the surrealist movement, spoke for himself, with publication of 'Actualités' by Maurice Heine in *le Surréalisme au service*

80 Ibid., p.5 (see appendix).

81 Lever, *Marquis de Sade*, p.339.

82 *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.17 (see appendix).

de la Révolution and more importantly in some ways, the *Correspondance inédite du marquis de Sade*, which was published by Paul Bourdin in 1929.⁸³ Bourdin, who is credited with solving the moral dilemma surrounding his subject by buying but never reading Sade's works, published letters that confirmed what Sade and his proponents wished to believe about his part in the fall of the Bastille.⁸⁴ In a variety of examples, Sade explains how he summoned 'meetings' with the people from his cell, persuaded the garrison to side with the people, and most remarkably, claimed to have directly caused the walls to fall down (what could be termed Sade's 'Joshua complex').⁸⁵ In fact however, later research, and a degree of common sense, suggest that such references were cynical efforts to bolster his republican credibility. The following example is however truly remarkable, as Sade seeks to save his family chateau from destruction by making direct claims about his most outstanding patriotic 'achievement':

If one single stone of the house which I own in your area is removed, I shall take it to your brethren the Jacobins in Paris and request to have it inscribed with these words: 'A stone of the house of the man who made those of the Bastille fall and which the friends of the constitution tore from the dwelling of the most ill-fated of the victims of the tyranny of the kings. Passers-by, include this outrage in the history of human inconsistency.'⁸⁶

* * *

The urge to plunder and dismantle the great houses of the aristocracy, which Sade feared, began, symbolically at least, with the licensed demolition of the Bastille by Palloy. One of the original *vanquiers*

- 83 P. Bourdin, *Correspondance inédite du marquis de Sade, de ses proches et de ses familiers*, Paris, 1929.
- 84 'he (Bourdin) cannot even mention a list of de Sade's books without suggesting that he has bought but not read them'. G. Gorer, *The Revolutionary Ideas of the Marquis de Sade*, p.69.
- 85 Bataille was clearly greatly influenced by Bourdin's book and made a selection of letters where Sade protests his revolutionary credibility as notes to the section on Sade in *Literature and Evil*.
- 86 Lely, *The Life of the Marquis de Sade*, p.335.

(literally the 'vanquishers of the Bastille') Palloy was an enterprising builder who had previously offered to remove the ancient fortress, which was seen as a monument to a past age long before 14th July 1789.⁸⁷ Historians often assert that there were emotional rather than strategic reasons behind the revolutionary attack on the Bastille, and, in a 1929 essay, Georges Bataille also recognises the great symbolic importance of its destruction:⁸⁸

Great monuments rise up like dams, opposing a logic of majesty and authority to all unquiet elements; it is in the form of cathedrals and palaces that Church and State speak to and impose silence upon the crowds. Indeed, monuments obviously inspire good social behaviour and often even genuine fear. The fall of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of things. The mass movement is difficult to explain otherwise than by popular hostility towards monuments which are their veritable masters.⁸⁹

Sade was of course absent from the Bastille on 14th July 1789, and so in many ways he missed his own finest hour. This 'absence' was however retrospectively determined by the way in which first Apollinaire, and then Bataille, insisted upon the coincidence of Sade's personal revolt on the 2nd and the mass insurrection on the 14th. The power of the story lies not so much in its verity, or even its possibility, but in the conversion of the individual gesture to mass revolutionary effect: the 'madman' who illuminates the monument for the crowd, revealing its true purpose and urging its destruction. The sleeping mass is woken with a jolt by something hidden deep inside, confined under lock and key. This can be seen clearly in Bataille's use of the story, to which he first referred in a text for *Documents* 7, December 1929, which was originally to have been called 'Dali Screams with Sade'.⁹⁰

- 87 J. Godechot, *The Taking of the Bastille*, pp.263-6.
- 88 See for example, Jean Jaurès, *Histoire Socialiste*, Vol.1, Paris, 1901, pp.262-3. P. Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution*, trans. N.F. Dryhurst, London, 1911, p.79. Also, G. Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, Oxford, 1959, p.54.
- 89 Bataille, 'Architecture', *Documents* 2, May 1929, trans. I. White, in Bataille, *Encyclopedia Acephalica*, London, 1995, p.35.
- 90 Bataille, 'Dali hurle avec Sade' Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes I*, pp.211-16.

A few days before July 14, 1789, the Marquis de Sade, for years doomed to rage in his cell in the Bastille, excited the crowd around the prison by screaming insanely into the pipe that was used to carry off his filthy water – an insane cry that was doubtless the most far-reaching ever to strain a larynx. This scream is reported historically as follows: ‘People of Paris,’ shouted Sade, ‘they are killing the prisoners!’ Practically the scream of an old *rentière* with her throat slashed at night in a suburb. It is known that Governor Launay, justifiably frightened by the riot that was starting to explode, had the frenzied prisoner transferred to another prison; this however did not prevent his head, only a few hours later, from terrifying the town on the end of a pike.⁹¹

Bataille takes some liberties in his account, compressing the time-scale of events to move Sade’s scream closer to the fall of the Bastille and de Launay’s decapitation. The ten days between Sade’s transfer and the fourteenth become merely ‘a few hours’, and Sade’s revolutionary efficacy is assured. This deliberate mistake is repeated nearly thirty years later in *Literature and Evil*. ‘We know that Sade harangued the crowd the day before the insurrection’, Bataille insists, before going on to suggest that Sade created a ‘misunderstanding’ upon which the storming of the Bastille was predicated.⁹² This imaginative interpretation of events is not as far from the truth as it seems. Contemporary accounts of the taking of the Bastille suggest that there was in fact an element of misunderstanding that led to the battle.⁹³ The people assembled below could not, it seems, hear the soldiers on the eighty-foot-high ramparts and took their hand signals to keep back as an invitation to enter. The garrison firing on the people, and the consequent storming of the Bastille occurred, it would seem, for the want of a louder cry. Bataille sees the event, its commemoration, and Sade’s injection of chance, as heavily symbolic: ‘This popular sovereignty, which is both turbulent and rebellious, is as irresistible as a cry. There is no better symbol of festivity than the insurrectional destruction of a prison.’⁹⁴

91 Bataille, ‘The Lugubrious Game’, *Visions of Excess*, p.28.

92 Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p.108.

93 Godechot; ‘five depositions of witnesses of storming of the Bastille’; *The Taking of the Bastille*, pp.277–321.

94 Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p.107.

There is little doubt whose cry the crowd cannot resist, and the character of this cry was critical to Bataille. It is no surprise that Sade’s shout from the ramparts, which had also been described as ‘a superhuman voice’ by Flake, becomes an ‘insane scream’ for the purposes of Bataille’s text.⁹⁵ He continues ‘to account for the excessive nature of this scream’ with reference to Rose Keller, who had accused Sade of inflicting terrible cruelties upon her in a deposition discovered by Maurice Heine.⁹⁶ Bataille describes the scene as follows:

The young woman recounts that, after being tortured with a whip, she tried to move, with her tears and entreaties, a man both so pleasing and so evil; and as she invoked everything in the world that was saintly and touching, Sade suddenly gone wild and hearing nothing, let out horrifying and perfectly nauseating screams.⁹⁷

Sade’s cry for help and the frenzied isolation of his orgasm are brought together in a telling synthesis, which also effects an obliteration. Bataille suggests, but stops short of stating, that the will to stir up insurrection, and the pleasure that accompanies sexual release, are one and the same thing. Sade’s incarceration in the Bastille has generated a catalytic cry for help, a powerful communiqué, which is cast by Bataille as a result of his sexual frustration. A personal articulation of pain and anger is then drawn out to meet the symbolic mass destruction of a monument. The woman (Rose Keller) vanishes, the Bastille falls, the scream remains: *The 120 Days of Sodom*, which disappeared during the storming of the Bastille, becomes one of the ‘imperishable monuments of the past’.⁹⁸ This lost work perpetuates the ‘cry’ from within the Bastille, if not actually a monument, then at least a monumental gesture, in which Sade set out the consequences of the loss of liberty. Following this logic to its conclusion suggests a revolutionary potential within Sade’s work, which thoroughly im-

95 Flake, *The Marquis de Sade*, p.146.

96 Bataille acknowledges Heine’s assistance in the notes to the article reproduced in *Visions of Excess*, p.30.

97 Bataille, ‘The Lugubrious Game’, p.28.

98 Sade’s phrase cited by Bataille in *Literature and Evil*, p.109.

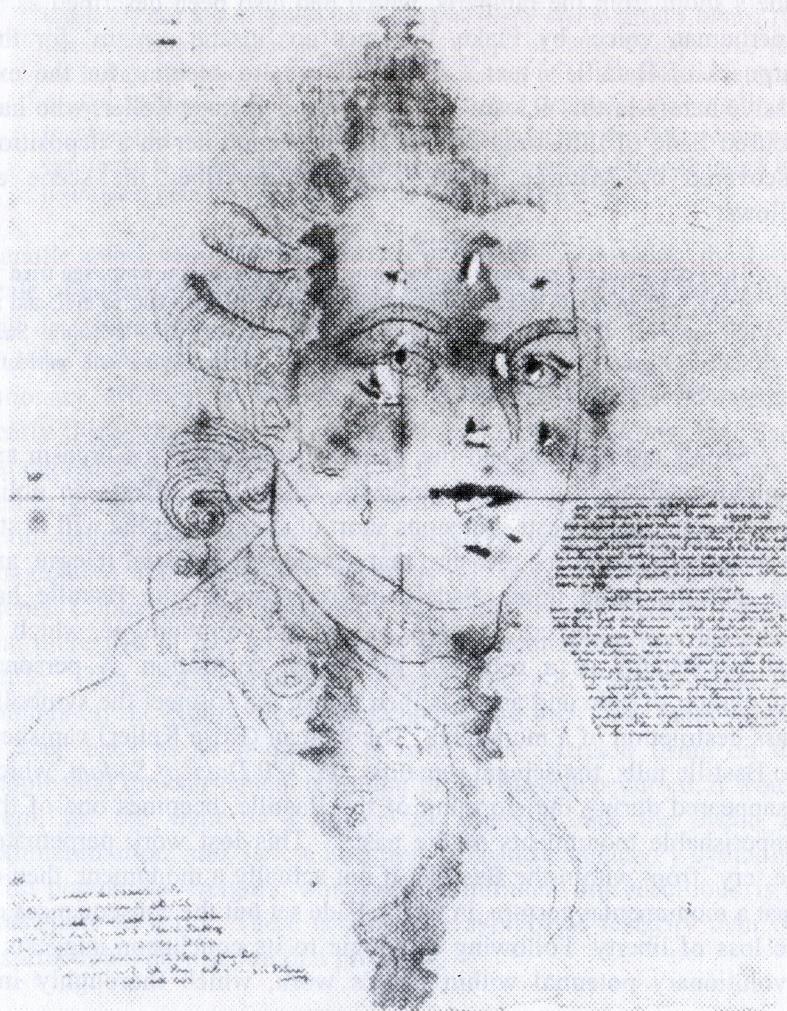


Fig 64: 'Portrait de Lefèvre, lacéré et taché de sang par le marquis, avec légendes injurieuses de sa main', M. Camus (ed.) *Les Cahiers Obliques 1*, January–March 1980, p.7

plicates both the prison and its part in the disappearance of his greatest text: As Bataille puts it: 'Instead of liberating its author, the mob at the Bastille lost the manuscript which was the first expression of the full horror of liberty.'⁹⁹

With Sade, it seems, there is always a series of erasures and disappearances, that extend in this instance, from the destruction of the monument, even to loss of that which its destruction was supposed to reveal. Sade is always beyond representation for Bataille, because nothing is ever adequate to the task of showing the unbelievable way that he continued to disappear. The strange relationship that Bataille posits between Sade and historical events may be seen in this way. To illustrate the entry on Sade in his later book *Tears of Eros*, Bataille chose not a depiction of the Bastille but a photograph of Sade's derelict Vaucluse chateau.¹⁰⁰

* * *

For Sade [...] we see at last that, as subject, it is in his disappearance that he signs, things having reached their term. Unbelievably, Sade disappears without anything, even less than in the case of Shakespeare, remaining of his image, after in his will he had ordered that a thicket efface even the trace upon the stone of a name that would seal his destiny.¹⁰¹

In his essay 'Kant with Sade', Jacques Lacan acknowledges the unbelievable lack of an image to append to the works that Sade left behind. For Lacan, it is the disappearance that Sade effects that marks him out. The reference to the well-known last lines of Sade's will, in which he orders acorns be strewn over his unmarked grave, emphasises the agency that Sade is supposed to have exerted in his own erasure. Recently, a startling image has come to light which compounds this sense of a vengeful, purposeful excoriation: a sketched portrait of a 'Monsieur Lefèvre' which Sade allegedly lacerated and

99 Ibid., p.108.

100 Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. P. Connor, San Francisco, 1989, p.138.

101 J. Lacan, 'Kant with Sade', trans. J.B. Swenson Jr., *October* 51, Winter 1989, p.66.

then Rorschach-stained with his own blood (Figure 64). Lacan, for his part, makes a flattering comparison between Sade and Shakespeare, whose portrait survives, but is disputed as the product of a seventeenth-century physiognomic formula rather than actual likeness. A formula that says 'this is what a genius should look like – white, male, high forehead, beard, intense gaze'.¹⁰² This concept, however, assumes an ironic slant when considered in relation to nineteenth-century images of Sade, who has to represent a perverse or corrupted variation of the same formula. Sade's face must convey not only perversion, but the ability to pervert, an active, threatening form of degeneracy. Such images are the result, as Richard Brilliant has suggested, of a desire on the part of the reader to 'see' the voice behind the text, or to adopt Lacan's perspective, to identify the (imaginary) point of enunciation.¹⁰³ Between his death and the final emergence of what is believed to be an accurate portrait likeness of a young Sade in the 1970s there were only ever imaginary portraits of Sade: those in the nineteenth century conjured up to vilify him or those that the surrealists produced in homage.

In the hiatus suggested by temporary loss of Sade's face, it is worthwhile exploring exactly how portraits are constituted, and how, therefore, their imaginary counterparts might function. Recent analyses of the nature and function of the portrait have isolated the notion of a transaction at work between painter, sitter and observer, which takes place, as Harry Berger suggests, 'in a purely fictional field'.¹⁰⁴ What a portrait image pretends to portray or reflect, he

102 For a discussion of portraits of William Shakespeare see David Piper, *The English Face*, London, 1993, pp.58–60 and T. Cooper, M. Pointon et al., *Searching for Shakespeare*, London, 2006.

103 R. Brilliant, *Portraiture*, London, 1991, pp.7–21.

104 H. Berger Jr., 'Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture', *Representations* 46, California, Spring 1994. Berger has also published a book from which this essay is taken, *Fictions of the Pose: Rembrandt against the Italian Renaissance, California*, 2000. Although Berger is exclusively concerned with early modern portraiture, his interest is raising the status of the sitter in the transaction that he sets up and describes suggests that his work has profound implications for the study of portraiture in later periods.

maintains, 'is in fact something that it constitutes'.¹⁰⁵ This transaction has been identified and expounded through instances where it breaks down, and in this way predicates itself on a psychoanalytical model which insists, as David Lomas adds, 'on the intersubjective relation of self and other in generating the portrait image'.¹⁰⁶ Robert Lubar also makes striking use of Berger's theory of the constitutive nature of this transaction in his discussion of Picasso's *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, where a crucial distinction is made between intersubjective relation (between the self and other) and an internal dialogue within the mind of the artist.¹⁰⁷ Here Lubar states that, 'the diachronic transaction about which Berger speaks might best be understood as an intra-subjective discourse that is formalised in representation', which arises directly as a result of the failure of the artist to 'recognise' the sitter.¹⁰⁸ This notion of intrasubjectivity casts the portrait image at both the moments of production and reception as the result of an internal cognitive process and thus suggests the possibility that portraits function along the imaginary axis.¹⁰⁹ This theoretical context throws out the unlikely conclusion that an imaginary portrait, as the product of a transaction that demands rather than admits foundation on an

105 Berger Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, p.175.

106 D. Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity*, New Haven and London, 2000, p.187.

107 R.S. Lubar, 'Unmasking Pablo's Gertrude: Queer Desire and the Subject of Portraiture', *Art Bulletin*, Vol.LXXIX, No.1, March 1997, pp.57–84.

108 *Ibid.*, p.63.

109 David Lomas explains this in great detail with respect to the Lacan's L-schema; 'Marcoussis's vibrantly naturalistic likeness of Miró, which portrays him as though gazing at himself in a mirror – as the coherent, specular subject – belongs to the Lacanian order of the Imaginary.' Lomas however, takes the idea further, suggesting that in the case where an artist intervenes in a portrait of himself painted by another artists, the result might well function along the symbolic axis, cutting across that of the imaginary. For the purposes of this essay, it is enough to accept the logic of Lomas's approach, while admitting the self-evident differences between the examples concerned. D. Lomas, *The Haunted Self*, p.207.

absence, is in a peculiar way paradigmatic of any such attempt at representation.¹¹⁰

In the instance of a portrait of Sade, whose face is *a priori* unknown, the intersubjective transaction (between artist and sitter) which should occur is a theoretical impossibility. What remains is an intrasubjective process (within the artist) that is formalised through representation. The resulting image cannot therefore be thought of as an icon; 'a sign that denotes by resemblance', in Lubar's terminology, but does qualify as an index of the act of portrayal. An imaginary portrait of Sade therefore constitutes an indexical sign devoid of a referent: it refers to the act of making an image and the pressures exerted therein. The lack of what Lubar calls 'resistance' on the part of the sitter further invalidates this transaction: for an imaginary portrait there is no 'sitter' in the conventional sense. As, in fact, does the intervention of the archive at the point of production, pre-empting the tendency of archives to corrupt reception, which Berger identifies as one of the 'key failures' of conventional art historical methodology.¹¹¹ Put simply: art historians are experts at reading what they know into what they see. The radical conclusion implied here is that everything that can be read from the end result must relate to the circumstances surrounding its production (rather than some notional physical reality). The imaginary portrait with the archive as its sitter emerges as Michel Foucault predicts, between texts:

The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of

110 Berger treats this idea in great detail in his recent book in a chapter entitled 'Lacan on the Narcissism of Orthopsychic Desire'. Berger Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, pp.155-69.

111 Berger gives a lengthy critique of the tendency of art historians to use archival material to 'read' portraits, using what is known about a sitter to understand representations of that sitter, particularly with respect to physiognomy: 'The Face as Index of the Mind: Art Historians and the Physiognomic Fallacy'. Berger Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, pp.107-17.

repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is a phenomenon of the library.¹¹²

In this definition of the imaginary, Foucault bridges the notion of identity with process: it grows 'among signs' without positing an absent referent. The series of imaginary portraits of Sade can be couched in these terms, being both an articulation of current ideas about Sade (a form of moral barometer) and an acknowledgement of the desire for his image. This is all the more intriguing in that it is accepted that the desired image is in fact false and therefore that it represents only a desire, which it cannot adequately satisfy. There is however, another critical element to the problem, best explained by Richard Brilliant, who questions:

the common assumption, perhaps most strongly engendered by portraits, that there is some substratum of mimetic representation underlying the purported resemblance between the original and the work of art, especially because the sign function of the portrait is so strong that it seems to be some form of substitution for the original.¹¹³

The fact that none of Sade's so-called imaginary portraits were the result of a sitting, and therefore cannot be thought of as a likeness has given rise to a theory that they were all in fact based upon an original portrait or medallion which has been lost in the mists of time. This corresponds to a belief in what Lacan called the 'unbelievable' lack of an image. The idea of the portrait being a version of the original is directly founded upon the idea that this original would have resembled Sade. The loss of a likeness has been displaced through time to the loss of an original, and rather than being dismissed as irrelevant, the images that have taken the place of this lost likeness are discussed in terms of their quality as portraits. In a resounding paradox, images constructed with no basis in likeness are used collectively to suggest a likeness of which they are inadequate copies.

112 Foucault, 'Fantasia of the Library', D.F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. D. Fouchard and S. Simon, Ithaca and London, 1977, p.90.

113 R. Brilliant, *Portraiture*, p.40.

This can be seen by a close look at the three nineteenth-century portraits that have survived. It is difficult in the light of the conflicting views that have been expressed about these images to definitively place them in chronological order. Opinions vary as to which of the first two is the basis for the other, or whether either of them relates to another lost original. The first, proceeding iconographically, rather than by given dates, would be the medallion used in 1834 as the frontispiece to a pamphlet by Jules Janin (Figure 65).¹¹⁴ Described as from the collection of 'M. de la Porte', this poor quality engraving clearly mimics a portrait miniature in appearance, right down to the sheen on the frame. It is presented unproblematically as '*Le Marquis de Sade*' but does not conform to any recorded descriptions of its subject who is usually described as handsome, fair-haired and full faced.¹¹⁵ In fact, given the assumption that the 'sitter' is in his early twenties he does not even appear correctly dressed for a marquis in 1760s France. He seems instead to resemble a nineteenth-century poet or writer like Byron, whose scandalous behaviour is contemporaneous with the image. Carolyn Dean has suggested this image as a retrospective incarnation of the dissipated soul of the *fin de siècle* – 'refined and elegant but impotent, weary, and prey to his own weakness'.¹¹⁶ She also sees signs of homosexuality in his rather ineffectual pose. This suggestion, which is subtly suggested by the image itself, shows the interference of moral judgement of the artist on the character of the 'sitter'. In the context of the damning text that it was produced to illustrate, the image sets up a blank but decidedly negative surface from which conclusions can be drawn. Or rather, it allows itself to illustrate a range of negative possibilities. This image only really achieves its meaning when Janin begins to make claims for the powerful and perverse nature of his subject's texts.¹¹⁷ He is

114 J. Janin, *Le Marquis de Sade (La vérité sur les deux procès criminel du Marquis de Sade par le bibliophile Jacob)*, Paris, 1834. Apollinaire believed the date of this pamphlet to be inaccurate, possibly having been published later, G. Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.7.

115 Lely, *The Life of the Marquis de Sade*, pp.48–51.

116 C.J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures*, p.155.

117 Janin, *Le Marquis de Sade*, pp.18–19.



LE MARQUIS DE SADE.

De la collection de M. de la Porte.

Fig 65: 'Le Marquis de Sade (de la collection de M. de la Porte)', frontispiece to Jules Janin, *Le Marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1834.
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branded as dangerous, immoral and seductive, characteristics which coincide with Janin's opinion of both homosexuals and Jacobins: 'O, that worthy couple, Sade and Robespierre.'¹¹⁸

The second version would be that used to illustrate books by Paul Ginisty in 1901 and then, as we have already seen, Henri d'Almeras in 1906 (Figure 63).¹¹⁹ It shows Sade in a portrait oval, with satyrs either side, a cat-o-nine-tails and jesters hat in place of a crest, with a panel below showing him writing in prison. It has been suggested that this portrait originated in the 1820s as a 'clever pastiche from a composite miniature' and has been independently dated 1829.¹²⁰ This would suggest that it preceded the 1834 frontispiece portrait. Apollinaire, however, believed that although it was produced during the Restoration, it was based upon, rather than the basis for, the simpler version.¹²¹ Unlike d'Almeras who presents it as a portrait, Apollinaire calls it a '*Portrait Fantaisiste*', a fantastic or whimsical portrait, marking a fundamental shift in emphasis. The unbelievable nature of the overall theme of the image is underpinned by a serious (and presumably deliberate) chronological inaccuracy: for when Sade was in his twenties and thirties he had in fact written nothing of note and there should have been an older, fatter Sade portrayed below.¹²² The iconography tying this image to the Bastille as originally set out by d'Almeras (who was more interested in the prison than the writing),

118 Ibid., p.14, quoted and translated by M. Lever, *Marquis de Sade*, p.388.

119 P. Ginisty, *La Marquise de Sade*, Paris, 1901.

120 Montague Summers, describes it as the former, in 'The Marquis de Sade, A Study in Algolagnia', p.5. Carolyn Dean suggests the latter date *The Self and Its Pleasures*, p.155.

121 Although the simpler version may have appeared after the more complex one, it might have preceded it iconographically, positing a lost original version on which both were based. Apollinaire seems to shy away from this prospect, describing both as 'fantaisiste' and the Restoration version as 'faux, naturellement'. G. Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.7.

122 Sade was born in 1749 and although he wrote sporadically during his various terms in prison, he did not begin to write in earnest until the late 1770s and did not see anything published until *Justine* in 1791.

is, however, perhaps less remarkable than its continual recycling for use throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹²³

The third and undoubtedly most bombastic image is that which seems originally to have been used as the frontispiece for the 1866 edition of the *Correspondance de Mme Gourdan*, a popular account of the life of an eighteenth-century courtesan (Figure 66).¹²⁴ It was this vision of Sade that took his place in Scutenaire's surrealist 'pantheon', probably as a result of its reproduction by Apollinaire in *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*. Apollinaire, who considered this image 'ridiculous', no doubt saw it as redolent of the nineteenth-century prejudices that he was attempting to overturn.¹²⁵ It is important to note, however, that at this time, no matter how ridiculous Apollinaire felt the image to be, it was one of the only examples available and had to be used if the author were to be represented. In many ways, though, it is also a

123 Carolyn Dean points out the discrepancy between the man gazing out of the portrait and the man writing. For Dean, this difference is accounted for by implicit association with the two satyrs, the one on the left tender and thoughtful like the imprisoned scribe, while the one on the right appears rather more sinister. The suggested result is an ambiguity that subtly insists that the two sides of Sade are inseparable. I would not challenge this reading as a possibility but would suggest the overriding aim of the image is to locate its subject within a historical and circumstantial context. The gaze out of the central portrait image is determined and far-reaching, while the figure below continues to express himself in spite of his situation. In many ways the portrait suggests a resilience and fortitude, which is amplified by the narrative conceit of the panel below. The reference to the scene of Sade's writing takes the place of an inscription and thus 'explains' the image rather more directly than the satyrs or the cat-o-nine-tails and jester's hat, which decorate it. C.J. Dean, *The Self and Its Pleasures*, p.155.

124 G. Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.7; *The Correspondance de Madame Gourdan, Dite la Comtesse*, was first published in Paris in 1784 but was continually re-issued, including an edition introduced by Octave Uzanne (who also wrote on Sade), in 1883. The book includes some discussion of the Rose Keller affair and it is in this context that the 'fantastic' portrait of Sade appears in the 1866 edition. *Correspondance de Madame Gourdan, Dite la Petite Comtesse*, Bruxelles, 1883.

125 Apollinaire describes the Gourdan image as 'ridiculous' and 'as false as the others', perceptively casting aspersions over the whole set of images: *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, p.7.



PORTRAIT FANTAISISTE DU MARQUIS DE SADE

par H. BIBERSTEIN

(D'après la reproduction publiée en frontispice de la
Correspondance de Mme Gourdan, Edition 1866)

Fig 66: 'Portrait Fantaisiste du Marquis de Sade par H. Biberstein
(D'après le reproduction publiée en frontispice de la *Correspondance
de Mme Gourdan*, Edition 1866)'. Reproduced in G.
Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1909, plate 4

genuinely interesting image, and one that has endured well as a representation of Sade seen through the lens of outrage. The central figure, taken once again from the 'original' medallion, has been liberated from the frame but denied any physical presence. Almost impossible to read in any logical sense, other perhaps than as a form of caricature, this 'fantastic portrait' is far in excess of even the most lurid accounts of Sade's life and works. Like the many analogies to the devil and Gilles de Retz, this vision hints at something supernatural rather than immoral or psychologically degraded about its subject, locating him in the pan-historical category 'evil'. Sade seems to be suffering the consequences of his imagination, doomed like some martyred saint to burn before the demons that haunt him. This is, however, also a curious fantasy in which Sade, though explicitly condemned, is implicitly devoid of any fault, the 'murderous victim' which Paul Eluard would later imagine: the devils and snakes could just as easily be punishing as influencing the object of their attention.¹²⁶

Sade's unbelievable disappearance occurred, it would seem, at the expense of an excessive imaginary presence, more powerful and convincing than any authentic portrait likeness. The mixture of the knowledge that this is not the true face of the sitter and that the artist may well have been working from an adversarial textual basis builds an excessive and overwhelming argument against Sade that nevertheless admits grounds for leeway. The implication being, that giving him a face and judging that face (or in fact making that face itself a form of judgement) works like an execution in effigy. Sade survives his own death and the harsh treatment of posterity because unbelievably, his true face and with it the reality of his character, have escaped altogether. This is doubly effective because as Lacan points out, it was Sade that directed this highly effective disappearance in the first place, disallowing any kind of future relationship with an unfriendly eye: desire for the lost original locates him beyond the gaze. Sade slips into the imaginary not as a means of identification in the

126 Paul Eluard, 'Poetic Evidence', in P. Hulten (ed.), *The Surrealists Look at Art*, trans. M. Palmer and N. Cole, California 1990, p.31.

Lacanian sense but as a spectral absence that, in Foucault's words, 'is born and takes shape in the interval between books'.¹²⁷

* * *

Between the texts in which first Apollinaire and later Breton, Eluard, and Bataille tied Sade to his revolutionary destiny, there were always attempts to represent him visually. In addition to the re-use of the nineteenth-century examples already mentioned, there are two significant examples that fall chronologically between Apollinaire's book and the birth of the surrealist movement. The first is a series of images produced to illustrate a text by the polemicist Louis Morin during the First World War. *Comment le Docteur Boche, pour justifier à l'avance les infamies allemandes, accusait de sadisme sanglant, les français de général et les Parisiens en particulier*, was a jingoistic attack on the 1904 publication of *The 120 Days of Sodom* by Eugen Duhren (Dr Iwan Bloch).¹²⁸ Morin clearly believed the text had been fabricated by the 'Bosch Doctor' and attributed to Sade, a French writer, as a way of defaming the French people. The illustrations are striking and seek to represent the corrosive effects of the kind of literature that Morin felt to be a pollutant in French literary culture. Drawing Sade into a debate about national heritage has ironic implications in the light of later surrealist attempts to reverse the fortunes of Sade's reputation *without* allowing him to unproblematically assume a place in the national literary pantheon of the 'pléiades'. A second, more oblique example also, coincidentally produced in 1918, is a drawing by Francis Picabia, entitled *Cantharides*. Part of Picabia's series of machine portraits which includes Alfred Steiglitz as a camera (*Ici Steiglitz, Foi et Amour*), *Cantharides* shows an extending mechanical 'organ' and includes the words 'ardeur' and 'parties': almost certainly references to the so-called

127 Foucault, 'Fantasia of the Library', p.90.

128 *How the Bosch doctor, to justify German infamies in advance, accused the French in general and Parisians in particular, of bloody Sadism*, Paris, 1918.

'*partie des Cantharides*' in 1772 for which Sade was found guilty of poisoning and sodomy, and executed in effigy.¹²⁹

The most notable significant early twentieth century images, however, are the imaginary portraits produced by Man Ray from 1936 onwards, which take the principle of the archive as portrait to produce Sade from the perspective of surrealism.¹³⁰ This series of portraits can be seen as a memorial process, or transaction with posterity, on the part of Man Ray, an artist whose role had often been to illustrate the collective thoughts of the surrealist group. Foucault posits a kind of equivalent for the process and effect of this transaction between Man Ray, Sade and surrealism (artist, sitter and archive): 'a true image is (now) a product of learning: it derives from words spoken in the past, exact recensions, the amassing of minute facts, monuments reduced to infinitesimal fragments, and the reproductions of reproductions'.¹³¹

Man Ray took some part in the initial debate surrounding Sade, producing two images for *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. In 1930, immediately following the fall-out over Breton's *Second Manifesto*, Man Ray produced his *Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade*, and then a *Monument à D.A.F. de Sade* in 1933 (Figure 67).¹³² Both appear to be based, to an extent at least, upon illustrations to Sade's books, and thus, arguably, illustrate the fictional construct 'sadism' rather than Sade as an author.¹³³ These illustrations, usually cheap woodcuts or engravings, are often overlooked, perhaps because of

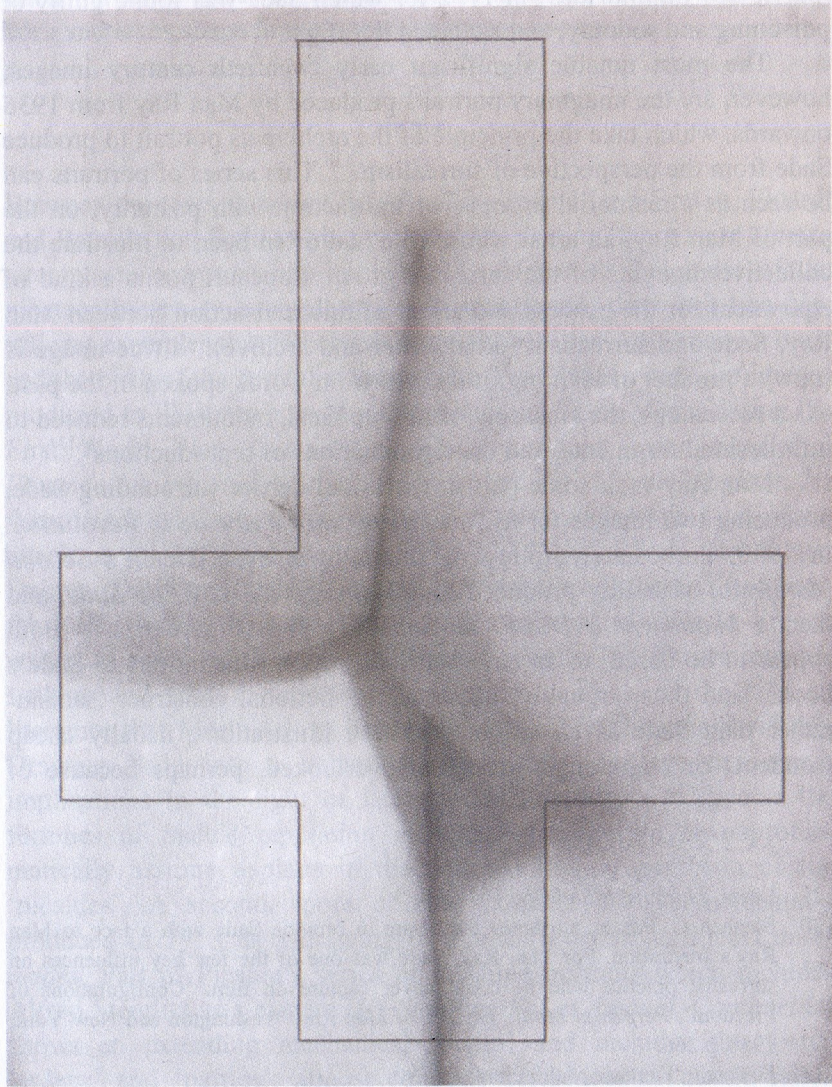
129 Lever, *Marquis de Sade*, pp.197-200.

130 Stephen C. Foster, attributes the desire to provide Sade with a face to Man Ray's frustration. For Man Ray, Sade was one of the few key influences on surrealist practice who he could never capture on film: 'Configurations of Freedom', *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, Washington and New York, 1988, p.266.

131 Foucault, 'Fantasia of the Library', p.90.

132 Both appeared in *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, No.2, p.27 and No.5, p.59 respectively. I refer to these works only in passing as I discuss them in detail in 'The thinking man and the femme sans tête; collective perception and self-representation', *RES 38*, Harvard, Fall 2001.

133 David Bate describes this phenomenon as surrealism's 'Sadean Eye', D. Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, London and New York, 2004, pp.145-71.



MAN RAY. — Monument à D. A. F. de Sade

Fig 67: Man Ray, 'Monument à D.A.F. de Sade', *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 5, 1933. © Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006

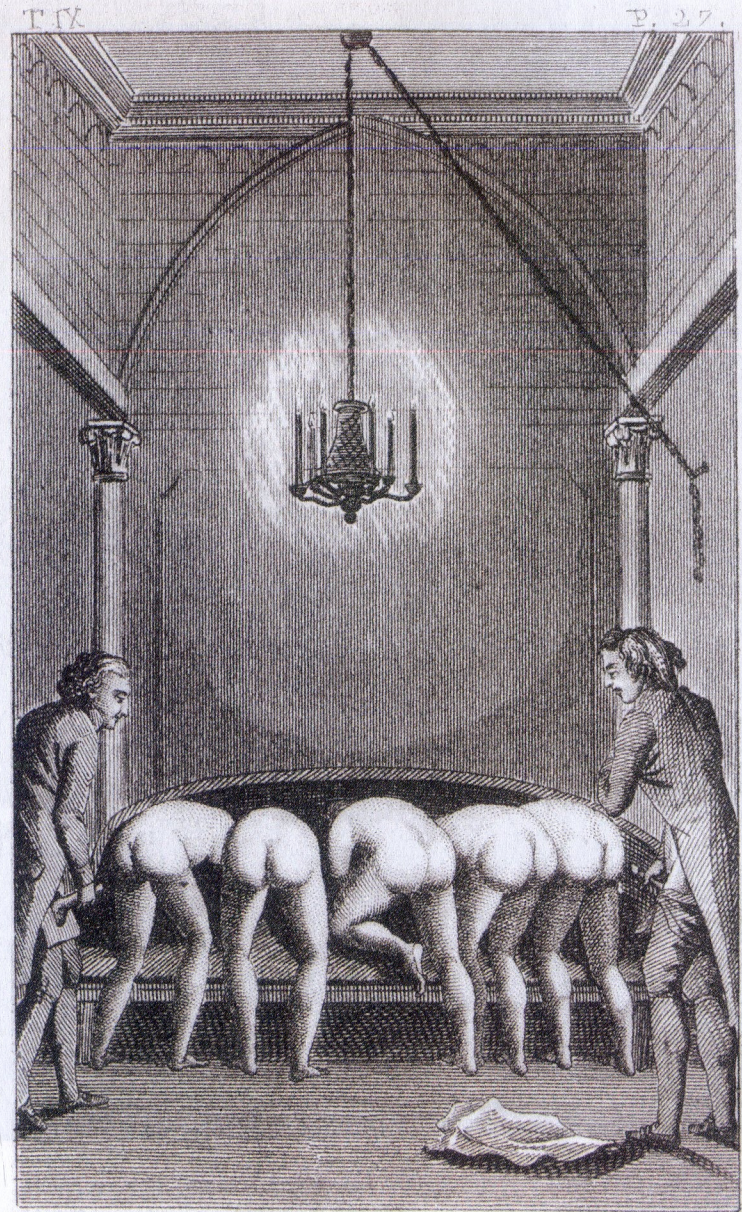
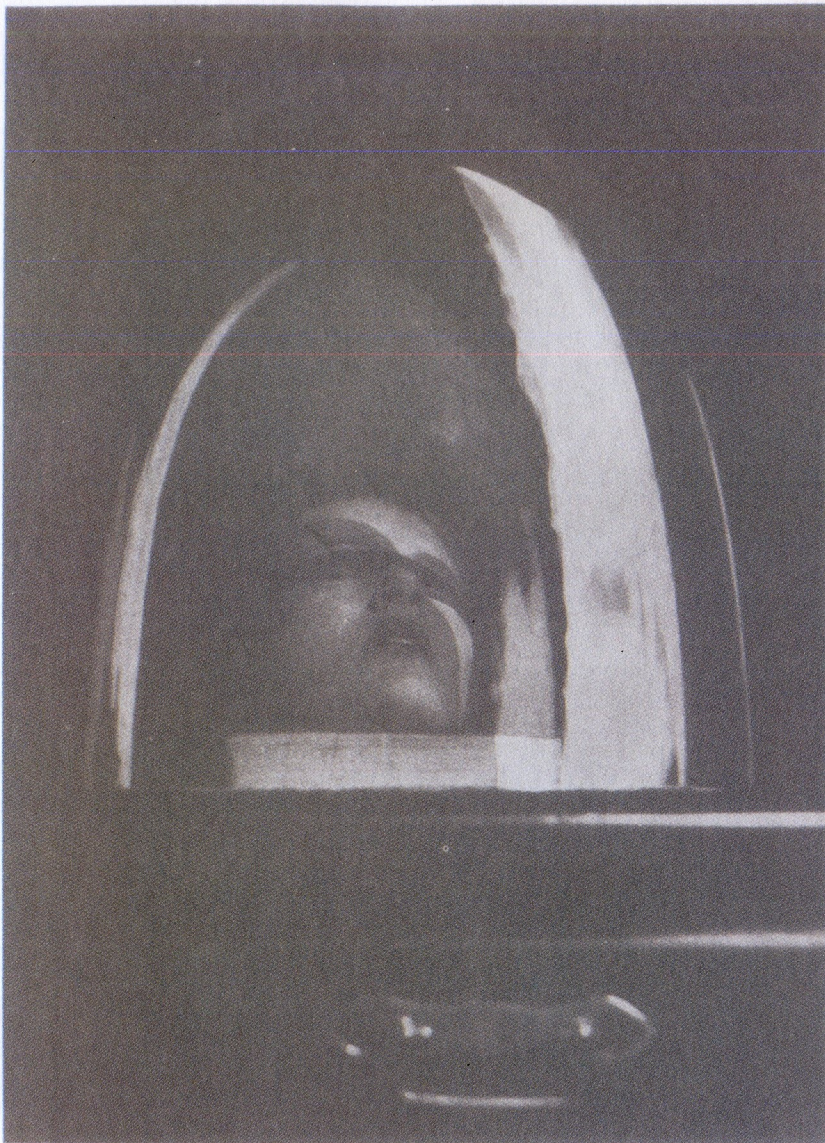


Fig 68: *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*, en Hollande, (Paris) 1797, Tome IX, p.37. © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. PC27.a.37



MAN RAY. — Hommage à D. A. F. de Sade.

Fig 69: Man Ray, 'Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade', Man Ray, *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution 2*, 1930. © Man RayTrust/ ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006

their deadpan editions.¹³⁴ They do however, as even Swinburne admitted, form an integral part of the narrative, visualising the increasingly complex permutations of kissing, licking and penetration (Figure 68).¹³⁵ The buttocks offered to the viewer or one of the performers is a recurring theme and one that had clearly been of interest to Man Ray.¹³⁶ It is no coincidence that Man Ray continued to develop the image, using the *Monument* as a binding for his own copy of *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The obvious evocation of Sade's revolutionary opposition to religion is, however, tempered by Man Ray's unsettling humour: by the time you realise that this may or may not be a man or a woman, seen from behind, you have already read the 'sadistic' intention through the inverted cross.

The 1930 *Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade*, relates to an illustration for a scene in *Aline et Valcour* which Apollinaire had reproduced, a connotation reinforced by Man Ray's later painting of the same name (Figures 69, 70 and 71).¹³⁷ These images function by suggesting acts of cruelty in Sade's name that he never specifically imagined or enacted himself: they are *like* Sade, to borrow a phrase 'surrealist in sadism'.¹³⁸ In a way therefore, Man Ray's identification with Sade is less to celebrate his precursor than to use his reputation to excuse or mitigate imaginary cruelties that he wished to represent. As a set of

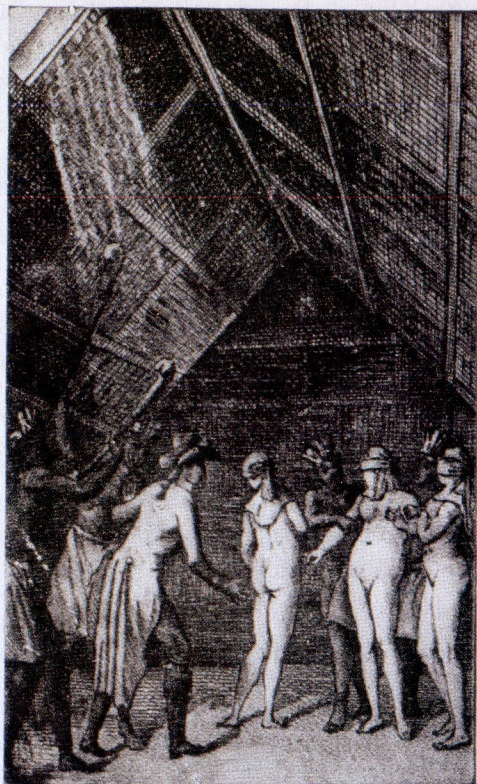
134 The British Library holds several illustrated copies of Sade's works; *Justine ou les Malheurs de la Vertu*, en Hollande (Paris), 1791. *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu, Suivie de l'histoire de Juliette; sa soeur*, en Hollande (Paris), 1797; *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir, ouvrage posthume de l'auteur de Justine*, a Londres, 1795; in this last edition the engravings have been hand coloured so that the genitalia (of both sexes) is a very vivid pink. These editions were probably printed in Paris but marked 'en hollande' or 'a Londres' to avoid detection by the police (my thanks to David Bindman for pointing this out).

135 Satish Padiyar discusses this theme with respect to David's *Leonidas at the Pass of Thermopylae*, in 'Sade/David', *Art History*, Vol.23, No.3, September 2000, pp.365–95.

136 For a psychoanalytic account of these images, and other related works by Man Ray, see D. Bate, *Photography and Surrealism*, pp.162–71.

137 The idea of binding the eyes is also brought out in a 1947 object produced by Man Ray entitled *Bookbinding*, which draws the 'hommage' photograph closer to the illustration.

138 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, pp.26–7.



L'EXAMEN DES FEMMES
POUR LE SÉRAIL DU ROI DE BUTUA
(Aline et Valcour)

Fig 70: 'L'Examin des Femmes pour le Séraïl du Roi de Butua', from *Aline et Valcour ou le Roman Philosophe*, reproduced in Guillaume Apollinaire, *L'Oeuvre du Marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1909, plate 6



Fig 71: Man Ray, *Aline et Valcour*, 1950, oil on canvas.

© Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006 / Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library

representations, they conform to the idea of worshipping Sade that Bataille found so offensive, but fail to deliver the obedience of the acolyte, taking the master's name in vain perhaps. As Bataille predicted they 'diminish the force' of Sade's ideas through the production of a kind of 'sadist' shorthand: a self-contained articulation of a link between sexuality and violence that Sade was seen to have epitomised.¹³⁹ The formal structure of Man Ray's *Monument* crystallises this fact. The viewer looks through the fame of the present onto the object in the past but this frame then disappears, smuggling Man Ray's obsessions into the archives of Sade's reputation.

Between 1936 and 1940, however, Man Ray produced four rather curious imaginary portraits of Sade. This series was completed by a sculptural coda in 1971 with all five portraying Sade in relation to the Bastille.¹⁴⁰ Sade's identity is thus secured through the portrait convention of a sitter's 'attribute' just like his jailer, Governor de Launay who is usually represented with the Bastille glowering ominously behind him, a reminder that the event most readily associated with it, was also the occasion of his decapitation.

The Bastille itself left a blank at the site, a chronic lack of focus, replaced symbolically by 'Bastille Day': moving the location neatly from space to time. In setting out to portray Sade, tying him inextricably to a fixed place and time, Man Ray was engaged in the construction and representation of a special kind of monument. This had to stand for both Sade and his disappearance (the most important thing about his life), at the same time: both the way that he was seen, and the way that he was not. This monument, in fact, must act like Bataille's pyramid, the most sophisticated of tombs; 'the pyramid'

139 Bataille talks at length about the way in which Sade has been 'used' and the effect that this has had in 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade'. Here I would only briefly like to re-iterate a point that Bataille made consistently, from the use-value essay c.1930, in 1957 in *The Blue of Noon*, trans. P. Facey, London, 1983, p.68, and in *Eroticism*, from the same year and from where the above citation originates.

140 Man Ray, *Les Mains Libres, illustrés par les poèmes de Paul Eluard*, Paris 1937, pp.174 and 177; *Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade*, oil on canvas, 1938, *Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade*, oil on canvas, 1940, *Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade*, bronze, 1971.

according to Bataille, 'is not only the most lasting monument, it is also the equivalent both of the monument and of the monument's absence, of a passage and of obliterated traces, of being and the absence of being'.¹⁴¹

Only one form of monument could represent this paradox. In turning to portraiture, something he knew well, Man Ray found an analogy for the problem. Sade's revolutionary presence was invoked for a public relations exercise in France in the context of the recent fracture of the 'Sade' faction of the surrealist collective 'Contre-Attaque', which had briefly united Breton and Bataille.¹⁴² Furthermore, this appeal to Sade's revolutionary heritage occurred against the backdrop of the celebrations of Bastille Day in 1935 and 1936 in which huge portraits of Marat and Robespierre decorated the Place de la Bastille in Paris.¹⁴³ The desire for the Sade's face also persisted. Paul Eluard had only recently reminded an audience in London of its continued absence:¹⁴⁴

No portrait of the Marquis de Sade exists. It is significant that neither do we have one of Lautreamont. The faces of these two fantastic and revolutionary writers, the most desperately audacious who ever lived, are immersed in the darkness of time.¹⁴⁵

141 Bataille, 'Le Paradoxe de la mort et la pyramide', *Critique*, No.74, July 1953, p.639, cited in Hollier, *Against Architecture*, trans. B. Wing, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1990, p.170.

142 R.S. Short, 'Contre-attaque', F. Alquié (ed.), *Le Surréalisme: Entretiens dirigés par F. Alquié*, Paris, 1968, pp.144-65.

143 The huge demonstrations were in support of the Popular Front, who marshalled French revolutionary heritage in their cause: the emphatic re-iteration of Sade's importance to the surrealists were in a sense motivated by this opportunistic manipulation of the 'use-value' of the Revolution. For a further discussion of the popular front demonstrations see C. Amalvi, 'Bastille Day' pp.145-8; J. Danos and M. Gibelin, *June '36: Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France*, trans. P. Fysh and C. Bourry, London and Chicago, 1986; S. Dell, *The Image of the Popular Front*, Basingstoke and New York, 2007.

144 In 1939, Jean Desbordes, an associate of Maurice Heine, also acknowledged this fact with his book *Le Vrai Visage du Marquis de Sade*, Paris, 1939.

145 P. Eluard, 'Poetic Evidence', p.30.

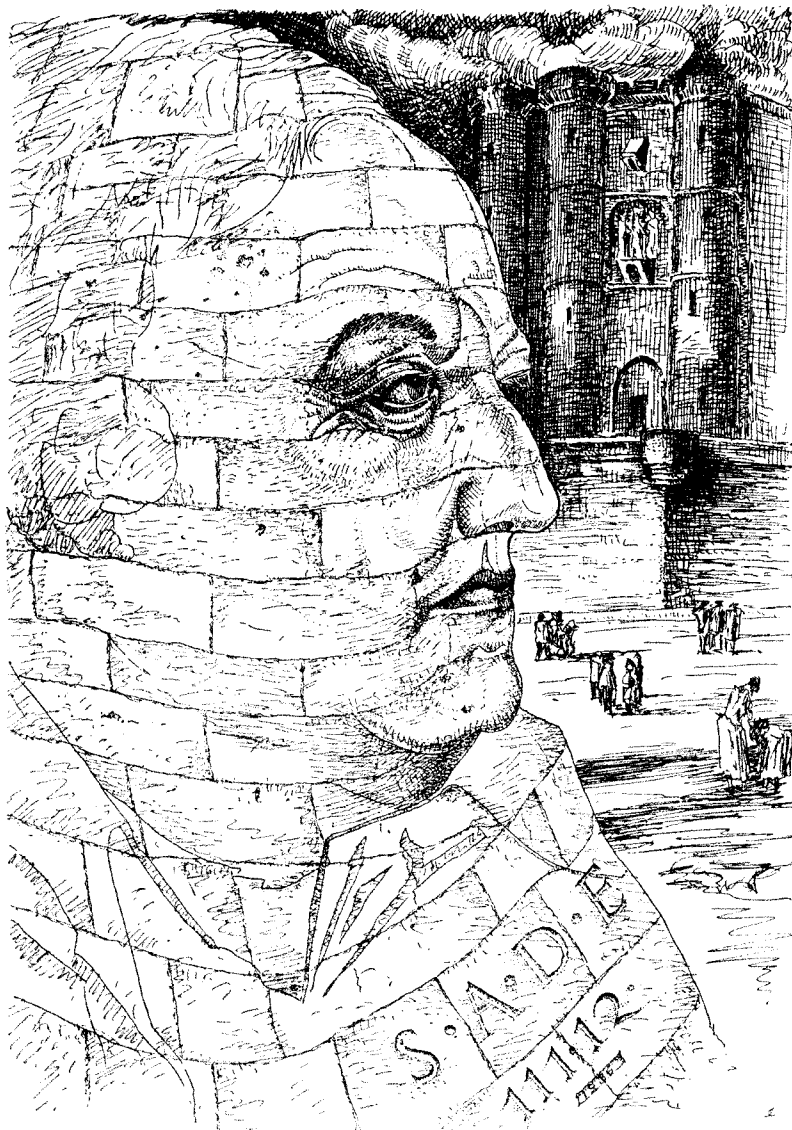


Fig 72: Man Ray, 'Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade', *Les Mains Libres*, Paris 1937, p.174. © Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006 / © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. 11482m32

The idea of pulling an image of Sade from the darkness relied upon the paradox that he was always both present and absent. Furthermore, in terms of portraiture, it had to be imaginary: Sade was the one sitter whose face would insist upon the lack of a face.

Paul Eluard and Man Ray spent the summer of 1936 travelling around the south of France collaborating on a project called *Les Mains Libres* (*Free Hands*), a book of drawings by Man Ray which Eluard 'illustrated' with poems. There are two images of Sade in a section called 'portraits' at the end of the book as well as a hugely magnified 'detail' of his eye. The first portrait is accompanied by Eluard as follows: 'There is no known portrait of the marquis de Sade, fantastic and revolutionary writer' (Figure 72).¹⁴⁶ It shows a huge stately face built in courses of stone, which looks benevolently across the picture plain. The letters S A D E appear etched in the stone like those on an ancient monument. In the background looms the Bastille, which although rather ominous in proportions, is calm beneath a clouded sky with clusters of people standing idly beneath its outer walls. As with all his subsequent depictions of this subject, Man Ray takes a reverse view of the Bastille to that usually shown, giving a view of the Bastille from below the outer walls or Bastion, which makes it seem taller and presumably more threatening. It also avoids the standard view given in illustrations of the storming of the Bastille, which include the barracks and houses surrounding the gate.¹⁴⁷ The second version of this image, also from *Les Mains Libres*, has an altogether more troubled aura. Sade's face is outlined harshly; the nose longer and courses of stone more visible. The letters by contrast are faint, almost as if they had faded away. The Bastille is taller, and darker; flames (echoed in Sade's hairline), rise from within the slender towers of the fortress and an array of defenders bristle behind the outer wall. Eluard's caption runs as follows:

146 'On ne connaît aucun portrait du marquis de Sade, écrivain fantastique et révolutionnaire.' P. Eluard, *Les Mains Libres*, Paris, 1937, p.175.

147 Man Ray's choice of view is intriguing as it is one usually associated with pre-revolutionary images of the Bastille, such as those in the books by Henri d'Almeras and Albert Savine, images of the storming of the Bastille almost always depict the entrance at which the action took place.

Written almost entirely in prison, Sade's work seems forever in disgrace and banned. The price that must be paid for its appearance in the light of day is the disappearance of a world where stupidity and cowardice bring with them all our misery.¹⁴⁸

Man Ray used a combination of the two versions as a basis for the best known of his imaginary portraits (Figure 73). Completed in 1938, this work in oil has come to be seen as Man Ray's definitive attempt at the subject, which he subtitled with part of the last sentence of Sade's will.¹⁴⁹ It is, however, difficult to take the confusing juxtaposition of rock hard virility and rosebud lips entirely seriously. Man Ray, it seems, is returning Sade through the eyes of Swinburne: 'In the midst of this rowdy imperial epic we see a blasted head flashing, a massive chest crossed by lightning, the phallus-man, an august and cynical profile grimacing like a ghastly and sublime Titan.'¹⁵⁰

Man Ray's 1940 version of the subject was produced to commemorate the bi-centennial of Sade's birth and is usually reproduced in black and white, perhaps due to its lurid green colouring (Figure 74). Here, Man Ray adds an intriguing historical detail in showing behind Sade, not the storming of the Bastille, but its demo-

148 'Presque entièrement écrite en prison, l'oeuvre de Sade semble à jamais honnie et interdite. Son apparition au grand jour est au prix de la disparition d'un monde où la bêtise et la lâcheté entraînent toutes les misères.' P. Eluard, *Les Mains Libres*, p.177.

149 'the traces of my tomb will disappear from the surface of the earth, as I hope, my memory will vanish from the memory of men' (trans. A. Hamilton), Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, p.109. Man Ray neglects the very last line (as do Bataille and Lacan): 'save for the tiny band of those who were kind enough to be fond of me to the end and of whom I carry a very warm memory to the grave'.

150 'Au milieu de toute cette bruyante épopée impériale, on voit en flamboyant cette tête foudroyée, cette vaste poitrine sillonnée d'éclairs, l'homme-phallus, profil auguste et cynique, grimace de titan épouvantable et sublime.' Algernon Charles Swinburne, décembre 1862, *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 3, p.34. The appearance of the Swinburne extract in this journal makes its influence on the iconography of Man Ray's series of imaginary portraits impossible to ignore.



Fig 73: Man Ray, *Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade*, 1938, oil on canvas.

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Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library

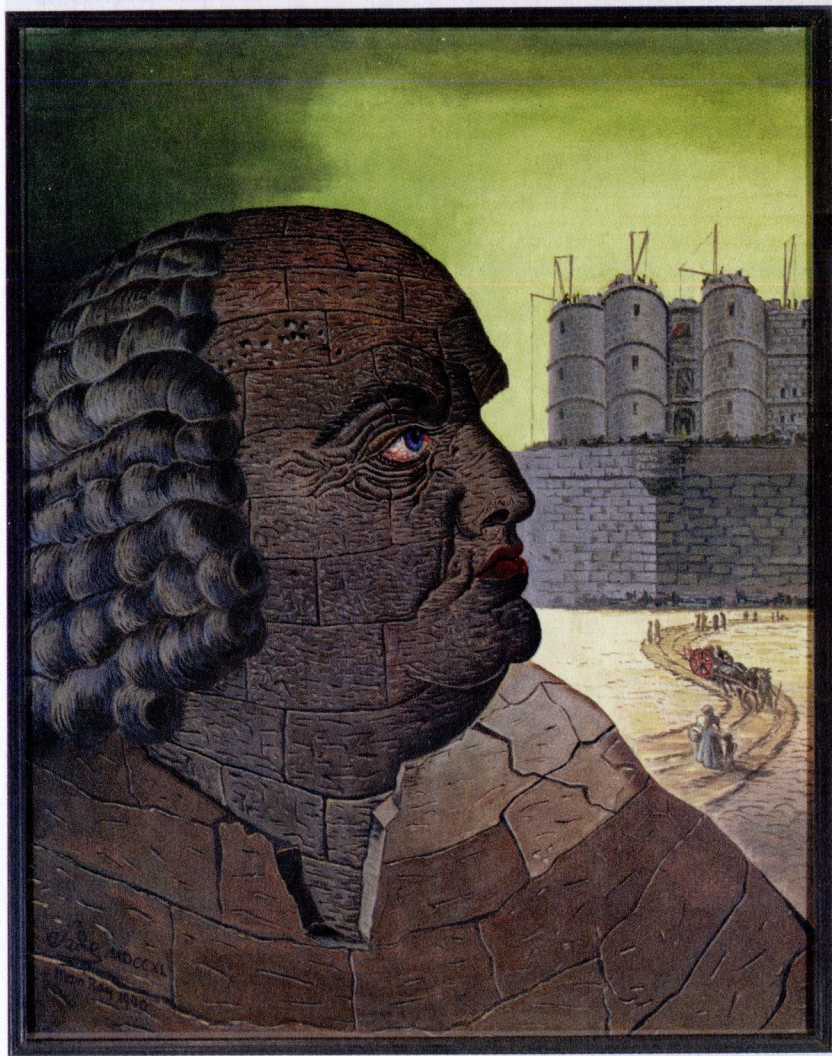


Fig 74: Man Ray, *Imaginary Portrait of D.A.F. de Sade*, 1940, oil on canvas.

© Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006 /
Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library

lition.¹⁵¹ It remains unclear whether or not Man Ray saw an illustration of this event or merely painted it as he imagined it to have happened. Images from the revolutionary period do not usually include cranes or pulleys, which were certainly used, but rather opt for more emotive scenes where the men on the towers literally ‘tear down’ the walls from the top down. This detail, considered in the wider context of the series as a whole suggests that at the very least Man Ray was aware that stones from the Bastille were taken away as souvenirs to be re-used (as indeed does the inclusion of a wagon leaving the site). Usually these stones were included in new structures such as bridges or arches but sometimes they were carved into scale replicas of the Bastille. These souvenir models of the erased fortress, hewn from its own bricks were sent to each region of France as so-called ‘apostles of liberty’. In a sense then, the Bastille was not simply cremated but its ashes scattered on the winds. What is remarkable, however, in the juxtaposition of this event with the foreground image, is the confirmation of an idea only suggested in the previous versions of the same subject: namely, the creation of a monument to Sade built from the stones of the Bastille. Building Sade from the Bastille completes the series of associations absolutely: Sade is the Revolution or more accurately, he is the absence of its most absent monument: the Bastille.

What is at stake here is the idea that to represent Sade, to account for him adequately, his disappearance (and its threat) must also be evident.¹⁵² Sade’s liberty is achieved at the cost that his teachings may periodically rise to the surface, and that surrealism will find an alibi for a misogynistic equation of sex and violence. Sade vanished without trace, without even an image, so how would anyone recognise his ghost? It is tempting to look for signs of likeness in Sade’s face, traces of Eluard, Duchamp, even Man Ray himself, but these faces are

151 D. Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, London, 1986, p.314.

152 Roger Shattuck proposes a similar analogy for the 1938 portrait. ‘As the stones of the Bastille were looted and reused in hundreds of other structures, Sade’s teachings will ‘disappear’ into the subconscious musings of mankind.’ Roger Shattuck, ‘Gender and Perversion in No-Man’s Land’, *Perpetual Motif: The Art of Man Ray*, p.327.

not even like each other, much less an original model. Man Ray's sitter does conform to some assumed truths, he is old, fat, and aristocratic, a parody of Louis the Last, but this accuracy is false comfort. The portrait transaction has been coerced into idle speculation.¹⁵³ The minor similarities and differences between the images, which have nothing to do with accuracy or likeness, suggest the importance of the creative process over and above the end result. This process ends as Sade's imaginary likeness gains weight, becomes 'like' through the process of proliferation, this apostle of liberty built from the scattered stones of the Bastille fulfils the paradox that assures his revolutionary potential. A final vision of Sade, one of the last photographs that Man Ray ever took, includes his 1971 bronze bust of Sade, which has been placed on a ready-made pedestal and is attended and adored by unthinking puppets (Figure 75).¹⁵⁴

Unbelievably, it was only after the complete rehabilitation of Sade as a literary figure that an image surfaced that is now believed to represent a very young Sade (Figure 76).¹⁵⁵ It seemed at long last that the desire for an image was to be satisfied. The charcoal profile is believed to have been drawn by Charles-Amédée-Philippe Van Loo sometime in the early 1760s. It shows a handsome, almost delicate young man, with a bow in his powdered wig and a silk necktie. Whether this was a study for a work in oil, or a copy of a Van Loo painting by a female admirer, is not known.¹⁵⁶ What *is* certain is that this likeness of Sade is profoundly unsatisfying as his image. So much

153 However, recent attempts to deal with the issue of Sade's 'true face' have been far less successful. In the Hollywood film *Quills* (2000), the actor Geoffrey Rush played a grey-haired but still acceptably handsome and athletically lithe, Sade. In France, by comparison, in the film *Sade* (2000), the title role was played by the French actor Daniel Auteuil, who was not only thin, but tanned, and more than acceptably handsome.

154 The photograph appeared in the French photography journal *Photo* in 1977, and was released on the occasion of Man Ray's recent death among 'ses inédits anciens et récents', *Photo*, No.112, January 1977, p.56. The pedestal is a 'Duchamp' bottle-rack.

155 The image was first published in a special issue on Sade of the magazine *Obliques*, No.12-13, Paris, 1977.

156 Lely posits this theory, *The Marquis de Sade*, pp.48-51.



Fig 75: Man Ray, 'Sade et les mannequins', Photo Magazine, Paris, 1976.
© Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006



Fig 76: Charles Amedée Philippe Van Loo, 'Portrait of young marquis de Sade', c.1760 (present whereabouts unknown), reproduced in *Obliques: Sade*, Paris, 1977, p.140

so that for an edition of Maurice Lever's biography of Sade, the publisher preferred to commission an oil on canvas 'look-a-like' of the 'lost original' based on the imaginary (inaccurate but wicked looking) nineteenth-century medallion.¹⁵⁷

And what distinguishes a society in the West that - relatively speaking - is a free society, is the fact that it is not a society in which the individual is a whole, but a society in which the individual is a part of a whole.

The introduction to this book described the necessity of moving beyond the vision of surrealism that has been previously available through an engagement with the forms of historical speculation that determined the ideological and representational strategies adopted by the surrealist movement. In the first instance, this entailed an explanation of what a surrealist vision of history, or a surrealist historiography, might be. The next step was to consider how these phenomena could be explained with reference to the political preferences of academic historians and the representation of the French Revolution for educational purposes. It was against this background that the particular construction of revolutionary heroes and villains, and their identification with the concept of grand narratives were developed, and these separate but related arguments were put forward. The first explored the possibility and potential character of a surrealist method; the second concerned monumental representation and the tension between material form and iconography; the third analysed the monumental construction of Sade as a grand hero for surrealism's revolutionary purposes. This methodology inevitably resulted in multiple movements back and forth through time, text, archive and image, generating a particular form of historical speculation: a revolutionary vision of surrealism.

The introductory chapter also raised the issue of spectatorship with reference to a particular view of surrealism, which was discussed

157 This version was produced for the cover of the 1995 Flamingo books, paperback edition of the English translation of Maurice Lever's *Marquis de Sade*.

Chapter Six

Surrealism in the streets

And what distinguishes a society is the fact that – radically differentiating it from a crowd, which is formed by the inter-attraction of similar individuals – it is a whole limited by individuals forming a whole that is different from a crowd (Georges Bataille).¹

The introduction to this book described the necessity of moving beyond the vision of surrealism that has been previously available through an engagement with the forms of historical spectatorship that determined the ideological directions and representational strategies adopted by the surrealist movement. In the first instance, this entailed an exploration of what a surrealist vision of history, or a surrealist historiography, might be. The next step was to consider how these phenomena could be explained with reference to the political pressures on academic historians and the representation of the French Revolution for educational purposes. It was against this background, the partisan construction of revolutionary heroes and villains, that surrealist identifications with the concept of *grands hommes* were developed, and three separate but related arguments were put forward: the first explored the possibility and potential character of a surrealist pantheon; the second concerned monumental representation and the tension between material form and iconography; the third analysed the monumental construction of Sade as a *grand homme* for surrealism's revolutionary pantheon. This methodology inevitably resulted in multiple movements back and forth, through time, text, archive and image, generating its own distinct form of historical spectatorship: a revolutionary vision of surrealism.

The introductory chapter also raised the issue of spectatorship with reference to a particular view of surrealism, which was described

¹ G. Bataille, 'The Moral Meaning of Sociology', *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, trans. M. Richardson, London and New York, 1994, p.111.

as having been organised through a series of lenses. This perspective on surrealism could be described, in compressed terms, as having been seen through Benjamin's Baudelairian reading of Breton. To conclude, I would like to turn the camera back on itself, figuratively speaking, and consider those doing the looking; reversing, rather than refining, the concept of focus. The examples explored thus far have been drawn from various sources associated with surrealism. Some, like the texts produced by Aragon or Desnos for *la Révolution surréaliste*, can be situated at the heart of the movement, while others, such as critical texts by Bataille, or the anonymous collages accompanying Marcel Sauvage's *La Fin de Paris*, can at best be described as peripheral interventions in surrealist culture. The intention behind broadening the scope of the material considered in this way, often privileging the images that influenced surrealism, rather than those produced by it, was to attempt to reveal surrealism's intrinsically fragmented and contradictory nature.² The initial analogy suggested for the character of surrealism's disorganised but highly selective focus was the nineteenth-century paradigm of the secret cabinet of curiosities, and the way that the group assembled around these 'curiosities' can also be seen as having been securely anchored in the final years of the nineteenth-century. This final chapter of this book will approach issues of collective perspective and focus through the idea of the surrealist crowd. In so doing, the aim is to tie the discourse on surrealist spectatorship to the issue of effective action.

As the introductory discussion of the critical influence of Walter Benjamin implied, a surrealist historiography constructed from the interventions of those orbiting the revolutionary core of surrealism would be incomplete without some discussion of the efficacy and implications of surrealism in action. The trajectory which began with an analogy between surrealist history and *The Arcades Project* ends in both the last, and the most predictable place that one would expect to

2 It is vital, in this context, that Dawn Ades's decision to bring *Documents*, and other peripheral journals into the discourse on surrealism in the exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* be fully acknowledged. This moment in the late 1970s, which highlighted the production of journals brought the study of surrealism forward by an incalculable degree.

find a discourse on the effectiveness of revolutionary theory: the street.

* * *

The guided tour begins with the prolific eighteenth-century author Restif de la Bretonne, but not because he offers a revolutionary precedent for surrealism's many literary perambulations.³ Instead, he introduces the idea of a spectator who distinguished himself from any given crowd whilst insisting that he must be allowed to disappear in to it at will. Restif is, therefore, a pre-modern spectator, before Baudelaire and so Breton and so Benjamin and so on (Figure 77).

Nicolas Restif de la Bretonne was undoubtedly the first literary 'Paris Peasant', whose footsteps Aragon, Breton, Soupault, Boiffard, Brassai, Man Ray and even Benjamin, retraced.⁴ Indeed, Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris (Paris Peasant)* unites the titles of Retif's *Paysan Perversis*, with *Les Nuits de Paris*, and Aragon alludes to the surrealists' interest in Restif in an introduction to his book. Commenting on the surrealists' search for a new form of literary expression, he writes:

I was writing this novel-that-was-not-a-novel, or at least I thought of myself as writing it, to demoralize my [surrealist] friends, who were so busy proclaiming themselves the mortal enemies of the novel in every form, while still indulging in reading matter such as Lewis's *The Monk* or Restif de la Bretonne.⁵

3 I have consistently used the spelling 'Restif' although 'Retif' is sometimes used. Frantz Funck-Bretano, for example, suggests Retif as the 'correct' spelling in his 1928 biography *Retif de la Bretonne*, noting that the correct pronunciation is in fact 'Reti.' Nicolas Retif de la Bretonne, *Les nuits révolutionnaires 1789-1793* (edition established by F. Funck-Bretano in 1909), Paris, 1989.

4 Restif's extensive *Nuits de Paris* were well known, particularly to Aragon, though probably through the 1909 Funck-Bretano edition of *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires*.

5 L. Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. S. Watson-Taylor, London, 1971, p.13.



Fig 77: Binet, 'Le Hibou-spectateur', Frontispiece to Nicholas Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits de Paris*, Paris 1788 (this image reproduced from *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires*, Paris, 1909)

Often literally *incredible*, Restif's *Nuits de Paris* recount the visions, both real and imagined, of a furtive but always engaged 'Owl-Spectator'.⁶ This street-wise night-walker, with a tri-cornered hat whose feather plumes metamorphose into the bird after which he is named, is attributed razor sharp, 360 degree night-vision. If anything takes place on the Parisian streets, this is the man who will see and report it to his reader. The original series of the *Nuits de Paris* stretched to sixteen volumes and covered perambulations, observations and indiscretions from the city stretching from 1785 to 1794.⁷ Indeed, Restif was the source of many of the most outrageous and therefore persistent rumours concerning the misdeeds of the marquis de Sade.⁸ However, at the heart of Restif's literary vision (for it is undoubtedly in the conception rather than the execution that his originality lies) is an overwhelming interest in the issue of spectatorship. Restif's witness is emphatically situated in terms of his class, gender, political insight (or lack there-of) and most importantly perhaps, in his precise locale. The images produced to illustrate Restif's text bear out this concern. Here, for example, he can be seen

- 6 The 'Hibou-spectateur' is introduced as the frontispiece to the 1788 edition of the *Nuits de Paris* and reprised for the volumes dealing with the revolution. Vol.16, published in 1794 was entitled, *Les Nuits de Paris ou Le Hibou spectateur*. Restif introduces the image of his narrator as follows: 'Le Hibou-spectateur, marchant la nuit dans les rues de la Capitale: On voit au dessus de la tête, voler le Hibou. Et dans les rues un enlèvement des Filles; des voleurs qui crochetent une porte; le Guet-à-cheval, et le Guet-à-pied; que des choses à voir, lorsque tons les yeux "sont fermes"'. Tome I, p.2.
- 7 N. Restif de la Bretonne (not acknowledged), *Les Nuits de Paris ou Le Spectateur Nocturne*, à Londres, 1788 (16 vols, published between 1788 and 1794). The final two volumes are sometimes published as *La Semaine Nocturne*, Paris, 1794.
- 8 See for example, *Les Nuits de Paris*, Tome Sixième – Onzième partie, II, CXCIV, Nuit 2569; 'Suite de la Femme Dissequée.' Sade is described as Le C-de-S** (as he had been in nights CXVIII, CXIX and II-CLII), and accused of having imprisoned a jeune-fille in a dissecting theatre. The incident 'reported' is that of Rose Keller, whom Sade did indeed subject to acts of considerable cruelty but who escaped and raised the alarm in the local village. Restif's dramatic embellishments can be seen as among the first attempts to make Sade the 'monstre-auteur' in the nineteenth century (see Chapter five).

on the left of the image, in his trademark hat and cape, comfortably 'blending in', taking his place among a crowd of onlookers during a rowdy game of billiards (Figure 78).

Restif's extensive reports from the revolutionary period 1789–1793 were edited and published in 1909 by the historian Frantz Funck-Bretano, under the title *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires des Nuits de Paris*.⁹ The edition included a remarkable print that had accompanied the original entry for the execution of Charlotte Corday in the final of Restif's sixteen volumes (Figure 79). This highly significant revolutionary event is presented to Restif's reader as a complex interplay of looks, stares and glances; the structure of spectatorship within the image, carefully constructed to offer a specific vision of the event. The crowd, of which the reader could be a part, consists entirely of women, with the exception of a centrally placed figure in a hat, the 'owl-spectator' himself. At the left of the assembled group, a woman with an emphatically stout forearm gestures towards the platform on which the drama is unfolding, her cry indicated by fine lines in front of her mouth. All eyes (including ours) are fixed on the two figures on the scaffold, but primarily attention is drawn to Charlotte Corday, who occupies the centre of the design. As the executioner removes her shawl, the better to expose her neck, Corday stares vacantly over the heads of the crowd and into the distance. Her calm, resolved expression and the skyward direction of her gaze might indicate that she is at peace with herself, expecting to join the heavenly host as a reward for dispatching Marat (as opposed to suffering eternal torment for cold-blooded murder). Arguably the most striking gaze, however, is that of the executioner, who focuses intently on the neck that he has been employed to sever, rather than the garment that he is removing in order to do so. His look falls somewhere between lecherous desire and professional scrutiny but in either case, it suggests that he will 'have his way' with the object of his attention.¹⁰ Corday's fate is enacted

9 Bretano was a right-wing historian of the French Revolution who produced major research on the *Lettres de Cachet* under the *ancien régime* and edited the prestigious but conservative *National History of France*, which was widely available and translated into English between the wars.

10 I am grateful to Tom Gretton for suggesting the double-entendre at work here.



Fig 78: Binet, 'Le Spectateur nocturne au "billard des yeux"', Nicholas Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires*, Paris, 1909, p.44



Fig 79: 'Exécution de Charlotte Corday, le 17 juillet 1793', Nicholas Restif de la Bretonne, *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires*, Paris, 1909, p.171

in that gaze even before it takes place, and this is confirmed by the presence of the waiting crowd. However, the most remarkable aspect of the image is the second 'vision', which is offered directly to the viewer, in an eighteenth-century conceit usually reserved for religious miracles.¹¹ In a specially hatched gap in the clouds, directly above Corday, we see the executioner once again. Here, however, he is holding Corday's still dripping severed head and seems to be slapping her on the cheek. This narrative is projected into the realm of the imagination: but whether we are being given a glimpse of the intent behind the executioner's gaze or seeing a collective wish that has risen, steam-like, from the assembled minds of the crowd, remains uncertain.

The 'owl-narrator' is circumspect about this astonishing sight in the corresponding text. 'The executioner slapped her severed head', he says, simply, 'he was punished and put in prison. It's not up to the executor to change the sentence'.¹² Although it is not always clear from Restif's text whether the more outrageous events described actually took place, the tale of the executioner's slap was well known at the time.¹³ In fact, it seems in this instance that Restif even played down the truly 'miraculous' part of the story; namely the widespread rumour that Corday's severed head was seen to blush in response to the injustice. This would perhaps explain the quasi-religious location of the slapping executioner in the clouds above the heads of the watching crowd in the accompanying print. The omission of the apocryphal blush is set in context by Restif's characteristically partisan attitude to Corday, who he says 'deserved death' for her crime,

11 Such miraculous prints usually date from before the revolution but as Richard Clay has recently argued with respect to confraternity prints, were also produced during the revolution and such iconography was well used and understood throughout the revolutionary period. See chapter 3, R. Clay, *Signs of Power, Iconoclasm in Paris 1789-1795*, Ph.D Thesis, University of London, 1999.

12 'Le bourreau soufletta sa tête séparée. In en fut puni et mis en prison. Ce n'est pas à l'exécuteur à rien ajouter à la sentence.' *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires*, p.172.

13 For an account of this apocryphal story see Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, trans. C. Miller, London, 1989, p.115.

which had inspired the horror of the entire city.¹⁴ However, Restif also provides the reader with further insight into the relationship between the crowd and the spectacle:

Where will this century of amazons end? [he asks] Isn't it enough that a woman assassin is the most fearsome of monsters? O Women, who want to be men, and you *hommelettes* who cheer them on, the crime of Marie-Anne-Charlotte is yours, as much as her own.¹⁵

The expectant crowd is not only a possible source of imaginary retribution but this crowd of women, one of whom, true to Restif's accusation, is in the process of 'cheering Corday on', are attributed indirect responsibility for the death of Marat, a crime that the libidinous executioner would too-enthusiastically avenge. The muscled arm and heavy-set features of the '*hommelette*' who is cheering on the proceedings, are in stark contrast to the refined, intentionally alluring fragility of Corday. Indeed, Daniel Arasse describes Corday as having been keen to have her portrait recorded as a contribution to the study of the physiognomy of criminals (in mitigation, of course).¹⁶ Restif's account highlights what Arasse calls the 'informative capacity' of the guillotine, or more precisely, the informative capacity of the specular situation that revolved around it. The unfortunate implication of Restif's anomalous presence in the crowd, indicated through his gender, is the author's consequent identification with the lecherous executioner, whose unacceptable intervention in the meting out of justice lay at the heart of the anecdote which inspired the image. Restif, it seems, is more interested in his place in revolutionary society than his place in the crowd, but can only effectively communicate the former through an articulation of the latter. As Bataille specified in the quote at the outset of this chapter, society could only be identified as 'a whole limited by individuals forming a whole that is *different* from a crowd'.

14 Restif's partisan attitude was not optional for a book published before Thermidor, 1794.

15 *Les Nuits Révolutionnaires*, p.172 (see appendix).

16 D. Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, pp.141-2.

Playing with the sophistry of Bataille's 'Moral Meaning of Sociology' yields the following formula: 'A crowd, which is formed by the inter-attraction of similar individuals, distinguishes itself from a whole limited by individuals forming a whole that is different from a crowd.' In essence, a crowd sets itself apart by becoming unlike something that defines itself by being unlike a crowd. This speculative societal algebra is based upon mutual incompatibility: a crowd that begins to represent society is no longer a crowd. Perhaps this is why Restif's anti-heroine, Charlotte Corday, was surrounded by women, while the first major image of the surrealist crowd, photographs of the surrealists and those they admired arranged around the assassin-heroine Germaine Berton, consists of a woman surrounded by men (Figure 80).

Germaine Berton had been responsible for commemorating the 130th anniversary of the execution of Louis XVI (21 January 1923), by shooting Marius Plateau, an assistant of the royalist militant Léon Daudet, who she blamed for the assassination of Jean Jaurès.¹⁷ Beyond the narrative conceit that both Berton and Corday had carried out political assassinations for which they were widely applauded in fractious circumstances, lies a deeper point about the visual regime linking the respective representations of their revolutionary supporters. The coherence of surrealist spectatorship, whether expressed visually, defined through adherence to collective principles, or revealed through conflicts over specific objects of interest, was entirely contingent upon the conceptual formulation of its attendant crowd. Bataille implied as much in a retrospective analysis of the characteristics of mainstream surrealism: 'It was André Breton who rightly

17 See R. Heppenstall, *Bluebeard and After: Three Decades of Murder in France*, London, 1972, pp.62-3. The killing can not be regarded as having been very recent and therefore the collage in *la Révolution surréaliste*, December 1924, and Aragon's accompanying text can be seen as a form of commemoration of a significant and historic act.



La femme est l'être qui
projette la plus grande
ombre ou la plus grande
lumière dans nos rêves.
Ch. B.

Fig 80: 'Photographs of the surrealist group and figures they admired arranged around a photograph of Germaine Berton', *la Révolution surréaliste* 1, December 1924



Louis Aragon et André Breton

Photo Man Ray

Fig 81: Man Ray, 'Louis Aragon et André Breton', *Variétés: le Surréalisme en 1929*.
© Man Ray Trust/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London, 2006



Fig 82: 'Photographs of the surrealist group around a reproduction of René Magritte's 'je ne vois pas la...cachet dans la forêt', *la Révolution surréaliste* 12, 15 December 1929

recognized that a poet or a painter does not have the power to say what is in his heart but that an organization or collective body could.¹⁸

Evidence of a centripetal but nevertheless highly exclusive force motivating surrealist activity is abundant, and best explained by considering the context within which many of the principal images of the surrealist crowd emerged. The inherent exclusivity, it should be noted, was not pre-determined along gender lines, but tended to specularise women by an emphasis on the collective gaze of men. Breton's *Nadja*, Desnos's 'Miss Flowers', Eluard's Joan of Arc, even Bataille's Rose Keller, might be singled out for regard or even, as with Germaine Berton, adulation, but they would never slip away from their exposed central positions and into the crowd of onlookers.¹⁹

The Germaine Berton collage, as is well known, marked the birth of the journal *la Révolution surréaliste* in 1924, which also included a collage of three photographs of groups of staring men used on its first front cover. The special surrealist issue of the Belgian revue *Variétés*, published in June 1929, offered the chance to present surrealism to a wider audience, and also contained a fragmented but nevertheless compelling pantheon of surrealist 'activists': a series of strangely sentimental professional portraits runs through the illustrated sections of the journal, and extends, for ideological reasons, to the inclusion of Trotsky and Freud. In this context Man Ray's remarkable double portrait of Breton and Aragon emerges as an object-lesson in purpose, style and intent (Figure 81).²⁰ The foreground to this carefully

18 Bataille, 'Surrealism and how it differs from Existentialism', *The Absence of Myth*, p.60. Bataille frequently asserted the importance of the concept of the crowd to surrealism in his retrospective discussions of the movement. See for example, his reply to Jules Monnerot's *La poésie moderne et le sacré*, 'Surrealism in 1947', *ibid.*, pp.68-9; also 'The Moral Meaning of Sociology', *ibid.*, pp.109-10.

19 In this regard, Mary-Ann Caws's formulation of women in surrealism as 'shot and painted' remains apposite: M.-A. Caws, 'Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art', S.R. Suleiman (ed.), *The Female Body in Western Culture*, Harvard, 1985.

20 The 'pantheon' runs as follows: photographs two to a page, set among other chosen surrealist images: 'Trotsky and Freud (between pp.6-7), Man Ray,

confected solidarity was a letter which Breton had written to 'certain intellectuals of revolutionary tendencies' which was printed, along with the responses received, as an 'avant-propos' to the issue of *Variétés* (appropriately subtitled *le surréalisme en 1929*).²¹ Breton's highly divisive call for unity of purpose had the inevitable result of alienating both current and potential surrealists. Principle non-conformists included the group associated with the journal *Le Grand Jeu*, but also Robert Desnos and George Bataille, whose memorable response to the invitation to join the crowd was, 'too many fucking idealists'.²² The consequent, and now famous image of the surrealists, photographed in an automated booth and framing a painting by Magritte, was produced to coincide with Breton's diatribe against those unwilling to join the group in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism*. Both text and image appeared in *la Révolution surréaliste* 12 in December 1929 (Figure 82).²³

Georges Malkine, Pierre Unik, René Crevel, Raymond Queneau and Benjamin Péret (between pp.14–15), André Thirion, Cora A..., Frédéric Mégret and Georges Sadoul (a single photograph) and Yves Tanguy (between pp.22–3), Paul Nougé and Max Morise (between pp.46–7, 'Louis Aragon and André Breton' (between pp.54–5) *Variétés, Le Surréalisme en 1929*, Bruxelles, June 1929.

- 21 Ibid., pp.I–XXXII. This preface to the issue was printed on different paper and signed AB and LA: it is reproduced in the recent facsimile edition produced by Didier Devillez, Bruxelles, 1994.
- 22 The invitation appears to have been designed to prove unacceptable to the younger editors of *Le Grand Jeu*, Marcel Lecomte, Gilbert Lecomte and Roger Vailland, *ibid.*, pp.iii–vi. The full list of responses from those unable to attend an 'obligatory' meeting at the Bar du Château on 11 March, began with Bataille's 'Beaucoup d'emmerdeurs idéalistes' and ran through both positive and negative responses from Leiris, Miro, Desnos, Morise and many others, *ibid.*, pp.ix–xx.
- 23 I have previously drawn attention to the coincidence between the publication of this image and a collage repeating this format, reproduced to illustrate Bataille's article 'La Figure Humaine' published several months earlier in *Documents* 4, September 1929: 'The thinking man and the femme sans tête', *RES* 38, Fall 2000. David Sylvester suggests that the collage was produced by Magritte, during the autumn of 1929 which at last allows for the possibility that Bataille saw, or heard about, and then lampooned the collage, in advance of its

A little over four years later, in early 1934, the political landscape had changed beyond all recognition. Hitler's totalitarian ambitions were revealed with the burning of the Reichstag in Berlin, and evidence of Stalin's intolerance, confirmed by the flight of Trotsky, polarised politicians and intellectuals on the left. In Paris there was an attempted fascist coup on 6th February and violent pro and anti-fascist reactions in the streets. In the years between 1929 and 1934, surrealism lost Louis Aragon to these circumstances. His chosen path took him away from the avant-garde crowd and back into political society. After accepting total allegiance to the French Communist Party in 1932, Aragon's principle concern was the clear and unequivocal expression of the party line. By 1934, this extended from message to means of expression: the espousal of socialist realism as the only language of the people. It was in this context that Breton issued another 'inquiry on united action'.²⁴ Once again, group portraits accompanied the gesture: Man Ray produced a photomontage entitled *Carrefour*, and Jean Scutenaire produced his 'pêle-mêle' for *Documents* 34, the same journal in which Breton's 'inquiry' was published (Figure 27, see Chapter Three).²⁵ Finally, for the purposes of this brief sketch of the surrealist crowd, comes the remarkable assemblage of crowds within the *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme*, produced by Breton and Eluard in 1938, with the intention of 'abridging' troublesome dissidents like Aragon, Desnos and Leiris out of surrealism altogether.²⁶

publication in *la Révolution surréaliste*: D. Sylvester, 'The great surrealist icon,' *RES* 7/8, Autumn 1984, p.157.

- 24 *Documents* 34, Bruxelles, 1934, pp.5–10.
- 25 Man Ray's chess-board style '*Carrefour*' was not directly related to the publication of *Documents* 34 but that the timing of this additional composite image, in the face of a call for collective action, is significant.
- 26 Breton and Eluard's *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme*, published by José Corti in 1938, is notable for its exclusions and damnation by faint praise: Bataille, who had recently been deeply involved with Breton in *Contre-Attaque* and who had contributed to *Minotaure*, was not included, while Desnos' entry was 'abridged' to a single line (p.9) suggesting that they stopped being surrealist after leaving the main group in 1929. A. Breton and P. Eluard, *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1995.

The centripetal force compelling collectivity described above, was never stronger than in the winter of 1935–1936 when, for the first time, Bataille and Breton laid aside their personal and ideological differences to form a group called 'Contre-Attaque'.²⁷ The relevance of Contre-Attaque, however, goes beyond the importance of its formation as a surrealist crowd.²⁸ As with the surrealists' retrieval of Sade, previous accounts of surrealism have found the absence of images associated with Contre-Attaque problematic.²⁹ In this context, however, the significance of such a low-profile aspect of the history of surrealism lies in an implicit construction of the surrealist spectator that challenged the efficacy of representation itself. In their individual contributions to Contre-Attaque, both Breton and Bataille drew upon contemporary theories of the history and potential of the revolutionary

27 In what remains the key text on Contre-Attaque, Robert Short described the series of meetings which took place between Bataille and Breton in September 1935 to set out the parameters for their joint action; R.S. Short, 'Contre-Attaque', in F. Alquié (ed.), *Entretiens sur le Surréalisme*, Paris, 1968, pp.144–65. The proclamation which appeared as a result 'Contre-Attaque – Union de Lutte des intellectuels révolutionnaires' appeared in Breton's *Position Politique du Surréalisme*, published in 1935. It was signed by Pierre Aimery, Georges Ambrosino, Georges Bataille, Roger Blin, Jacques-André Boiffard, André Breton, Claude Cahun, Jacques Chavy, Jean Dautry, Jean Delmas, Paul Eluard, Maurice Heine, Pierre Klossowski, Henri Pastoureau and Benjamin Péret. A. Breton, *Position Politique du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1971, pp.121–6.

28 Both Short and Henri Dubief describe the remarkable fact of the coming together of the 'souverainiens', who had been associated with Boris Souvarine's *La Critique Sociale* (including Leiris, Jacques Baron and Raymond Queneau) and contributors to *le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. The bitter atmosphere between the two groups was evident in the debate around Blanqui, described in chapter two. See R.S. Short, 'Contre-Attaque', pp.147–8, and H. Dubief, 'Témoignage sur Contre-Attaque (1935–1936)', *Textures*, No.6, Bruxelles, 1970, pp.52–3.

29 Contre-Attaque takes its place in the political histories of Short, Dubief and Helen Lewis but is rarely included in accounts of surrealism that concern the production of images. A notable exception being Steven Harris' recent article linking an object by Claude Cahun, a member of Contre Attaque, made for a group exhibition which took place during this period; S. Harris, 'Coup d'Oeil', *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol.24, No.1, 2001. See also, S. Harris, *Surrealist Art and Thought in the 1930s*, Cambridge, 2004.

crowd, transposing revolutionary rhetoric into effective action by challenging modes of spectatorship. At this singular, brief, and yet fundamental moment in the development of surrealism as a collective venture, the politics of representation descended into the street, offering a choice about the potential of surrealist engagement. The consistently attractive but politically timid *Minotaure* threw the issue of surrealism's collective efficacy into sharp relief: surrealism could either achieve a consensus about the things that its crowd wished to look at (fine art, ethnography, funny post-cards), or it could continue to challenge the presumptions about what it meant to be a crowd. Walter Benjamin made much of surrealism's political potential in his own 'Last Snapshot':

The collective is a body too. And the *physis* that is being organised for it in technology can, through all its political and factual reality, only be produced in that image sphere to which profane illumination initiates us. Only when in technology, body and image so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent commanded by the Communist Manifesto. For the moment only the surrealists have understood its present commands.³⁰

Benjamin, however, despite these sentiments, remained insulated from any such collective or revolutionary discharge by his own rhetorical isolation: it was as a German exile in Paris that he defined his authorial perspective.³¹ The terms of engagement, exemplified by the urge to participate which was fundamental to the members of Contre-Attaque, were predicated upon a refusal of the concept of command, and the very structures holding adherence to any such set of guiding principles in place.³² Moving forward 'in the street', meant a permanent reorientation of perspective towards the point of recognition;

30 W. Benjamin, 'Surrealism', p.192.

31 *Ibid.*, p.177.

32 This is clear in the refusal of Contre-Attaque to submit to any kind of influence from Communist intellectuals after the signing of the Stalin-Laval pact although it was communism as a political institution, rather than in terms of the principles laid out in the Communist Manifesto to which they were opposed.

towards the threat of violence posed by the crowd and away from its spectacular representation.

* * *

The single identifiable image that can be called upon to 'represent' Contre-Attaque is an invitation card produced by Bataille (possibly in collaboration with Breton and Maurice Heine) featuring a schematic drawing of a calf's head on a platter. There are no group photographs of Contre-Attaque members shoulder to shoulder with the workers, no images of the distribution of pamphlets, no-one seen, even from behind, like Restif, taking their place in the revolutionary crowd. In a speech given at a Contre-Attaque meeting entitled, 'Popular Front in the Street', Bataille seems to reject even the possibility of adequately representing popular protest, reminding his audience of the birth of the Popular Front on the Cours de Vincennes, on 12th February 1934, at a march protesting the recent fascist insurgency.³³

Most of us, comrades, were in the street that day. Many of you, no doubt, can remember the huge old bald worker, with a reddish face and heavy white moustache, who walked slowly, one step at a time, in front of that moving human wall, holding high a red flag. It was no longer a procession, or anything purely political; it was the curse of the working people, and not only in its rage, IN ITS IMPOVERISHED MAJESTY, which advanced, made greater by a kind of rending solemnity – by the menace of slaughter still suspended at that moment over all of the crowd.³⁴

33 Simon Dell has recently written on the manipulation of images of workers during the general strikes, which occurred following the victory of the Popular Front in 1936 (and therefore after the collapse of Contre-Attaque). S. Dell, 'Festival and Revolution: the Popular Front in France and the press coverage of the strikes of 1936', *Art History*, Vol.23, No.4, November 2000, pp.599–621. See also, S. Dell, *The Images of the Popular Front*, London and New York, 2007.

34 'Popular Front in the Street', was given as a speech on 24 November 1935, and appears in translation in *Visions of Excess*, pp.161–8. This extract is from p.163 of that edition.

Bataille's cautious recasting of the recent past, acknowledges the fact that Contre-Attaque was formed out of necessity; not in an atmosphere of revolutionary exuberance, but in reaction to the ascendancy of the politics of the Popular Front.³⁵ The Popular Front was itself, as Bataille recalled, formed in response to fascist action in the street, as communists and socialists marched together in a groundbreaking display of unity. From February 1934 onwards, support for the Popular Front grew, despite the unpalatable political compromises made by the participating parties, and Bastille Day 1935 saw unparalleled popular demonstrations in Paris. 500,000 people retraced the steps of 1789, through the 'faubourg Saint-Antoine' to the place de la Bastille, triumphantly reviving the revolutionary site under the watchful eyes of Marat and Robespierre (present in the form of giant portrait posters).³⁶ In the existing accounts of Contre-Attaque, a prevailing comment is the sense of it somehow having been a return to the violent radicalism of the years 1924–1925, to the call for the Terror in the name of the surrealist revolution. Robert Short describes this situation as follows: 'Bataille's ideas [...] found an echo in surrealism, recalling the atmosphere of 1925, when Desnos had imagined "Le Grand Soir" with exhilaration and the re-installation of guillotines in the public squares.'³⁷

But with Robespierre presiding over a politics of optimistic conciliation, the revolutionary rhetoric that had been available to surrealism in 1925 was severely compromised. As has already suggested, the many evocations of the marquis de Sade in this period can

35 For a brief but thorough account of the emergence of the Popular Front see J. Danos and M. Gibelin *June '36 Class Struggle and the Popular Front in France* (trans. P. Fysh and C. Bourry), London and Chicago 1986, pp.29–44; 'The Masses take to the Streets'. For an account of reactions to these events, see Philippe Bernier's notes to 'Trois Interventions d'André Breton à Contre-Attaque', in Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes II* (Pléiade), Paris, 1972, pp.1663–7.

36 J. Danos and M. Gibelin, *June '36*, also C. Amalvi, 'Bastille Day,' in P. Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory III: Symbols*, trans. A. Goldhammer, pp.145–9.

37 'Les idées de Bataille...trouvait un écho quelconque dans le surréalisme rappelaient l'atmosphère de 1925 lorsque Desnos imaginait avec allégresse, "Le Grand Soir" et la réinstallation des guillotines sur les places publiques.' R. Short, 'Contre-Attaque', p.151.

be seen as one strategic means by which surrealism continued to identify with their vision of a revolutionary past. Contre-Attaque, for example, was itself divided along revolutionary lines through a reference to Sade: the section located on the *rive-gauche* was named 'Marat' and larger *rive-droite* group, containing both Bataille and Breton, was named 'Sade'.³⁸ Sade, however, on the whole, remained profoundly unacceptable as point of political identification. His famous revolutionary pamphlet 'Frenchman, one more effort if you would be republicans!' may have been scattered in the streets in the heady days of 1848, but this political Sade had long since been muted and relegated to the politically crippling 'enfer' populated by bibliophiles, quack-doctors and poets.³⁹

It was in September 1935 that Bataille and Breton formally agreed to work together to find an acceptable revolutionary position from which to speak, outside, and in opposition to, the all-encompassing compromise offered by the Popular Front.⁴⁰ In the first speech that he gave to Contre-Attaque, Breton described this 'space' in terms that offered new possibilities for expression to the man in the street:

There is a truly geometric space which must be found, but at Contre-Attaque we think that it is possible to find this geometric space. We think that there is, among a hundred men in the street, one who is disposed to make our current ideas his own, who among all others, is young and willing to triumph at all costs.⁴¹

38 H. Dubief, 'Témoignage sur Contre-Attaque', p.53.

39 The evocation of this 'use-value' of Sade's most stirring revolutionary pamphlet in the streets in 1848 was made by Maurice Heine in his brief outline of his proposed contribution to the *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*. Heine's text, which was to be titled 'L'extrémisme révolutionnaire de Sade' was part of a series of 'Précurseurs de la Révolution morale.' The text is reproduced alongside all the other proposals for the *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque* in M. Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme II, Documents Surréalistes*, Paris, 1948, p.328.

40 For complete list of contributions see Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, pp.585-611; and Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes I, Premiers écrits, 1922-1940*, Paris, pp.379-432.

41 Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, p.589 (see appendix).

The historian Henri Dubief, who had been a member of Contre-Attaque, recalls Bataille's more pragmatic concerns about accessibility. While preparing to print a 'Call to Action' to hand out at a rally in January 1936, the formerly 'staid' librarian, conceded that 'there was no need to use luxury paper for the workers'.⁴² Bataille's ideological appeal to these workers was that the 'defensive' Popular Front had to be transformed into an aggressive Popular Front of 'combat'.⁴³ It was violent engagement, rather than revolutionary geometry, which lay at the heart of Bataille's agenda. This violence, however, had to come directly from the revolutionary crowd: 'The crowds of February 12th '34, of July 14th '35, and February 18th 1936, must become aware of all their strength and sweep aside those who still stand in the way of their domination.'⁴⁴

'Just' violence could only originate within the crowd itself, through what Bataille described as 'organic' means. The principal characteristic of an organic crowd was that it should have no leader and eschew even symbolic associations with leadership.⁴⁵ Bataille had categorically defined his objections to what he called the 'Psychological Structure of Fascism', citing the destructive 'glory' imparted by strong leadership to a mass audience, in response to developments in Nazi Germany in 1933.⁴⁶ Since that time, Colonel de la Roque, the leader of the Croix de Feu, the French fascists responsible for 6th February, had achieved increased visibility and status on the political scene. Bataille challenged this situation in his 'Call to Action' for

42 "'Pas besoin de papier luxe pour les ouvriers," disait-il.' H. Dubief, 'Témoignage sur Contre-Attaque', p.54.

43 This was set out in both the original September resolution (printed in *Breton's Position Politique du Surréalisme*), in 'Vers la Révolution Réelle', and in 'Popular Front in the Street', *Visions of Excess*, p.168.

44 'Les foules du 12 Fevrier '34, du 14 Juilliet '35 et 18 Fevrier '36, doivent prendre conscience de leur toute-puissance et balayer ce qui fait encore obstacle à leur domination.' Bataille, 'Vers la Révolution Réelle', *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*, p.14.

45 *Ibid.*, p.11.

46 Bataille, 'La structure psychologique du fascisme,' *La Critique Sociale* 10, November 1933 and 11, March 1934.

Contre-Attaque, with a tactical return to the 'revolutionary' language of *le Père Duchesne*:

Have the parties lost their heads?
They say not, but they are still afraid of M. de la Rocque
What is M. de la Rocque?
A capitalist, a colonel, and a count,
And what else?
A cunt.⁴⁷

Bataille's oblique reference to the parties 'losing their heads' reflects his consistent caution about what he considered the 'anachronistic' conflation of the revolutionary past and the present. This was due in part to the unacceptable use of revolutionary history by the Popular Front, but more importantly, to his understanding of the inherently problematic relationship of leader to crowd, which clearly had to be resolved if history were not to be repeated. This is evident from the introduction to 'Towards Real Revolution', one of only three texts written for Contre-Attaque to be published during its lifetime. Bataille is unequivocal on the role that the crowned head plays even *after* its removal, suggesting that it may well return to haunt the Revolution:

With or without spilling blood, between them, they knocked off a crowned head. It is necessary to draw attention to the primary and essential role played in these historic violent movements by the heads that they cut off. But when a crowned head plays the role of unifying the insurgent crowds, and when the movement falls apart after the triumph of the insurrection, increasing the turbulence which results from the upheaval, the Revolution is in serious trouble.⁴⁸

Bataille's evocation of the historic role of crowds draws attention to the destructive nature of the symbolism of leadership. The symbolic relationship of head and body in revolutionary rhetoric to which Bataille also refers here, can be traced through an exploration of the head offered by Bataille as the only representative image of Contre-

47 'Les partis ont-ils perdu la tête? Il disent que non, mais M. de la Rocque leur fait peur. Qu'est-ce donc ce M. de la Rocque? Un capitaliste, un colonel, et un comte. Et encore? Un con.' Bataille, 'Appel à l'action', *Oeuvres Complètes I*, p.395.

48 Bataille, *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*, pp.7-8 (see appendix).

Attaque, a single, ephemeral image, yet arguably the most subtle representation of this subject (Figure 83). The Contre-Attaque invitation was deliberately designed to draw attention to the anniversary of the execution of Louis XVI, but not simply to revive the memory of past events. Bataille and his collaborators took the obvious and over-exploited link between the French revolutionary past and current circumstances as the subtext for commemorating the death of the king.⁴⁹ This gesture was then compounded by reference to an obscure historical myth, which both the Popular Front and the French fascists had attempted to use for the purposes of propaganda. The invitation itself, superimposed over the calf's head on a plate, consisted of the following:

CONTRE-ATTAQUE, 21st January 1793 - 21st January 1936, Anniversary of the execution of Louis XVI, Tuesday 21st January 1936 at 9pm, open meeting at Grenier des Augustins, 7, rue des Grands-Augustins. Metro: St. Michel. Object of the meeting: THE 200 FAMILIES, who rest with the justice of the people, Speeches given by: Georges Bataille, André Breton, Maurice Heine.⁵⁰

The symbolic relevance of the '200 Families' in the winter of 1935-1936 reveals the sophisticated analogy at the heart of the invitation through which the decapitation of the king (the removal of the symbolic 'head' of the French people) is drawn into a hotly contested, if slightly paranoid argument about who really 'rules' France. It also by implication, functions as a critique of the way in which a historical narrative can be made to serve more than one master.

The theme of the 'deux cents familles', the two hundred families that were alleged to secretly rule France, can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth-century, but in terms of the politics of the Popular

49 Bataille continued to mark this anniversary in the years following the dissolution of Contre-Attaque.

50 Reproduced in M. Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme II*, p.334 (see appendix).



Fig 83: Georges Bataille, André Breton and Maurice Heine, invitation card to Contre-Attaque meeting, 21 January 1936

Front, the story begins in October 1934.⁵¹ Édouard Daladier, who had been forced out of office by the events in February, addressed the congress of the Radical party at Nantes:

Two hundred families are the mistresses of the French economy, and so French politics. These are the forces that a democratic state must not tolerate; that even Richelieu didn't tolerate in the kingdom of France. The influence of the two hundred families rests on the fiscal system, on transport, on credit. The two hundred families place their representatives in positions of power. They influence public opinion because they control the press.⁵²

Daladier's seemingly paranoid assertion that a secret cabal of two hundred families effectively ran France was deliberately calculated to appeal to the constituency of small, independent, bourgeois voters that supported Radical politicians to defend the citizen against big-business and vested interests. After the coalition of the Popular Front, the myth of the two hundred families achieved a much higher status, becoming an attractive target for the anger and frustration of the working classes: a perfect means of cementing the Popular Front.⁵³ In 1936, after the electoral victory of the Popular Front, Maurice Thorez, the leader of the French Communist Party would declare Bastille Day to be 'the festival of the nation united against the two hundred families'.⁵⁴

During the interval between Daladier's initial speech and the victory of the Popular Front, the two hundred families were put to work by both extremes of the political spectrum. An article in the

51 For a recent, objective account of the history of the 'deux cents familles' see R. Sédillot, *Les Deux Cents Familles* (collections vérités et légendes), Paris, 1988: Sédillot attributes the birth of the 'legend' to Georges Duchêne, a colleague of Prudhon c.1848–1852, who counted 183 people who effectively held power in France in 1869, *ibid.*, p.22.

52 *Ibid.*, p.13 (see appendix).

53 R. Sédillot notes that 'Le thème des "200" vient à point pour cimenter l'union de la gauche', *ibid.*, p.18. The fact was also recognised at the time, as Roger Lannes noted in 1940: 'tous les français rappellent le slogan des "200 familles" qui fut utilisé avec toute de succès par le Front Populaire'. Roger Lannes, *Les deux cents familles ou les maîtres de la France*, Paris, 1940, p.7.

54 Sédillot, *Les Deux Cents Familles*, p.18.

Cahiers des Droits de L'Homme on 14th July 1935, asked whether the Banque de France, the number of whose initial under-writers provided the figure '200', was the next 'Bastille to be taken'.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, *La Flèche*, the publication of the 'Frontist' movement, with which Breton had previously been linked, published a lengthy article on the 'tyranny of money' in which the two hundred families were central.⁵⁶ In addition to this opportunist journalism, there emerged a list (printed on very cheap paper, of which Bataille would no have doubt approved), of *Les Privilégiés de la Banque de France; La Liste des deux cents familles*.⁵⁷ The three-page list was concluded by a blunt political appeal to the 'silent suffering' of the *families* of the workers, whose misery, it suggested, was masterminded by those named above.⁵⁸ Indeed, such was the emotive power that the idea of this secret financial oligarchy was felt to have on the imagination of the people that Jean Renoir was engaged to make a film on the subject, *La Vie Est A Nous*, in the run-up to the 1936 elections and popular magazines like *Le Crapouillot* devoted special issues to the subject (Figure 84).

The reference on the Contre-Attaque invitation should be seen against this background, and also in the context of beliefs about the two hundred families, which were widely held at the time.⁵⁹ First, there was the linking of the number '200' to the founding names of the Banque de France, which the Popular Front pledged to nation-

- 55 *Cahiers des Droits de L'Homme*, 15 July 1935, cit., G. Ollivier, *Les Deux Cents Familles: Encore un coup de la F...-M...!*, Paris, 1943, p.2.
- 56 G. Bergery and F Delaisi, 'Contre le tyrannie de l'argent', *La Flèche*, 1 February 1936. Robert Short notes that in the winter of 1934-1935, Gaston Bergery had approached Breton to act as the literary director for *La Flèche*, 'Contre-Attaque', p.147.
- 57 *Les Privilégiés de la Banque de France - La Liste des deux cents familles*, Hayard, Paris 1935: this pamphlet remains under restricted access in the Bibliothèque Nationale.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p.4. The text is not signed but follows in the blunt rhetorical style of Popular Front propaganda, evoking family, peace and workers' rights, and concluding 'La Paix Sociale régnera sur l'Humanité'.
- 59 *Le Crapouillot's* March 1936 special issue (Figure 84), contains a large pull-out chart suggesting a whole raft of connections between alleged members of the 'families' and various state and private enterprises.



Fig 84: *Le Crapouillot*, special issue on the '200 Families', March 1936

alise.⁶⁰ Secondly, there was the existence of an alternative soubriquet, 'Les Maîtres de la Forge'; a semi-masonic organisation of the most important French and German industrialists. The 'Masters' and the 'Families' were interchangeable concepts, as both had branches in both Germany and France, and were felt to operate with impunity across their borders.⁶¹ They were also seen as having been responsible for both starting and maintaining war in Europe since the 1860s, which had devastated the lives of millions of ordinary people, but been very good for business. Eugène Schneider, for example, who owned no less than 320 businesses in France, including *Le Matin* and *L'Echo de Paris*, was alleged to have sold over 45,000 cannon to twenty-two different nations.⁶² The final and most controversial aspect of contemporary received information on the families was their names.⁶³ The published 'list', and all references to the families focus on the biggest and most powerful industrial employers like the Duponts, Peugeotts, Rothschilds, Schneiders, Schwobs and Wendels, but these accusations were quickly seized upon by the right to revive long-held suspicions about the power enjoyed by Jewish capital in France. Georges Ollivier's explosively titled *Les Deux Cents Familles: Encore un coup de la F...-M...! (The Two Hundred Families: another coup for Free-Masonry)* was published in 1943 by the *Ligue de 'Franc-Catholique'*, but refers exclusively to the events of 1935-

60 Sédillot cites an article by Senator Lesaché from as early as 1933, proposing the recurrence of the same two hundred names in positions of power throughout the history of France. Sédillot however, believed that the number was related to the statutes of the founding of the Banque de France, in which 200 'propriétaires d'actions' were named who passed business through their own families and so increased in financial power throughout the course of the nineteenth century: R. Sédillot, *Les Deux Cents Familles*, pp.30-4 and p.103.

61 Roger Lannes describes the secret committee of the 'maîtres de la forge', concluding that they are the same names as those associated with the 200 families: *Les deux cents familles ou les maîtres de la France*, pp.8-12.

62 *Ibid.*, pp.13-14.

63 The anonymous Popular Front 'list', the pamphlets by Lannes, Ollivier and the book by Sédillot all mention the same names, Lannes in particular makes connections between those in power and those on the lists, such as a link between Baron de Wendel and colonel de la Roque who he describes as a 'faux chef', *Les deux cents familles ou les maîtres de la France*, p.10.

1936.⁶⁴ Basically, a right-wing hate-tract against the alleged 'bol-shevik-jewish alliance' of the Popular Front, it turns the propaganda value of the two hundred families on its head; suggesting that what was known as 'L'État-Major Judéo-Bancaire' was a long-standing arrangement by which Jews governed France.⁶⁵ Evidence of this alternative interpretation of the power and predilections of the families was offered in the improbable form of the electoral victory of Léon Blum.

The problematic adoption of the two hundred families as a totemic target by both right and left between 1935 and 1936 reveals the invitation to commemorate Louis XVI's beheading in a new light.⁶⁶ Given that the stated aim of Contre-Attaque was to resist the parliamentary politics of the Popular Front and challenge the popular allure of fascism, what kind of 'popular justice' was called upon for the two hundred families? To answer this question, it is necessary to turn to the characterisation of the families as the 'masters' who supposedly oppressed the people. Throughout his contributions to Contre-Attaque, Bataille was highly critical of sentimental eulogies to family life beloved by the Popular Front: the image of 'silent suffering' evocatively appended to the list of the names of the two

64 Ollivier's text gives every indication of having been written at that time; referring to 'recent' articles from 1935-1936; those in *La Flèche* and *Les Cahiers de Droits de l'Homme*, which he says are incomplete as they fail to mention the racial origins of the families.

65 See also, Sédillot, *Le Deux Cents Familles*, p.19.

66 Zeev Sternhell's groundbreaking *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, first published in France in 1983, described both the roots and public manifestations of the ideological consistencies between extreme right and left wing politics in France in the 1930s. Sternhell identifies the history of this situation in exclusively French terms, suggesting that to understand fascism in France it is preferable to concentrate upon the developments of left-wing thinkers in the years leading up to the 1914-1918 war, than to the import of Italian or German ideas. Sternhell's analysis is relevant in this context because Bataille's interventions for Contre-Attaque raise the issue of the manipulation of the people by politicians whose alleged ideological differences had not prevented them from resorting to identical forms of propaganda. Z. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left, Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. D. Maisel, Princeton, 1986.

hundred families. Bataille saw the emphasis on 'patrie' and 'famille', rather than fraternity, as the principal reason for the conservatism of the Popular Front, which merely sought to perpetuate the same patriarchal society that formed the basis of fascism.⁶⁷ The paternal relationship, he suggested, was simply a homely version of that between master and slave. This was re-enacted in the street in the way that politicians sought to direct what Bataille preferred to imagine as an 'organic' popular movement.⁶⁸ 'It is clear from now on', he wrote in 'Popular Front in the Street', 'that in order to have confidence in its own resources, the Popular Front must first lose the confidence it currently has in its principal leaders'.⁶⁹ Bataille was clearly optimistic about the ability and potential of a leaderless fraternity to effect radical political action. This optimism, however, was not founded on a romantic or idealistic formulation of the revolutionary crowd but on an informed knowledge of contemporary theories of crowd formation and interaction. It was André Breton, a most unlikely expert on united, undirected action, who introduced the study of crowd psychology to his lectures to the 'Sade' faction of Contre-Attaque in November and December 1935.

* * *

Breton's contributions to Contre-Attaque were of a more demonstratively intellectual nature than those offered by Bataille, but were equally concerned with the immediate question of effective action. In his first lecture for example, Breton attacks the regressive, counter-revolutionary nature of the Popular Front's emphasis on the family, setting it up as a prime target for Contre-Attaque, before moving on to

67 A pamphlet produced by Bataille and Benjamin Péret for the 5th January 1936 'La Patrie et la Famille,' is reproduced in G.Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes I*, p.393. Proposed articles for the *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque* also included 'La Vie de Famille', *ibid.*, p.388.

68 This was also a major element of Bataille's argument in the second installment of his essay 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', published in *La Critique Sociale* following the riots of February 1934.

69 Bataille, 'Popular Front in the Street', *Visions of Excess*, p.166.

discuss the relative theoretical positions of Hegel and Marx on the revolutionary potential of language.⁷⁰ However, Breton's self-conscious frame of reference also extends to the science of collective psychology, developed as a theme during the course of his commitment to Contre-Attaque. In the first lecture he points out the distinction that Freud made between 'natural' and 'artificial' crowds in 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,' in order to suggest a theory of popular 'exaltation' diametrically opposed to the quasi-religious behaviour of the crowd affected by the psychology of Hitlerism.⁷¹

Freud's text, which had been translated and published in French in 1927, offers a commentary on the history of crowd psychology, which turns out to have been a peculiarly French discourse.⁷² Freud begins with the work of Gustave LeBon, whose *Psychologie des Foules* (*Psychology of Crowds*) was still widely regarded as the principal text on the topic.⁷³ LeBon's analysis of the crowd was situated firmly in the tradition of revolutionary history. His later work, *The Psychology of Revolution*, reveals that he often conceived of the

70 Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, pp.586-91.

71 This text appears in the form of a letter written by Breton to Jules Monnerot, which Breton read out to the group, *ibid.*, pp.591-2. It was Monnerot who later prompted Bataille's own ruminations on the collective nature of surrealism in his critique of Monnerot's *La poésie moderne et le sacré*, in 'Surrealism in 1947'.

72 S. Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol.18, 1920-1922, trans. J. Strachey, London, 1955. Breton's references are to 'Psychologie collective et analyse du moi', S. Freud, *Essais de psychanalyse*, trans. S. Jankélévitch, Paris, 1927.

73 G. LeBon, *Psychologie des Foules*, Paris, 1895. Serge Moscovici describes Freud as 'the best disciple of LeBon and Tarde' (a contemporary of LeBon), underlining the huge impact that LeBon's work on crowd psychology had in the first years of the twentieth century. Moscovici describes the huge number of re-iterations of LeBon's work, as equivalent to that of a 'Best-Seller'. S. Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd, A Historical Treatise on Mass Psychology*, trans. J.C. Whitehouse, Cambridge, 1985: 'Who was Gustave LeBon?', pp.49-55, and 'The Best Disciple of LeBon and Tarde: Sigmund Freud', pp.219-88; this chapter of Moscovici's book provides the most detailed available analysis of Freud's 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' and its position in relation to LeBon.

relationship of a crowd to its leader in terms of the Terror. This conception of the Terror, was, as outlined in Chapter two, heavily determined by a post-Commune fear of popular insurrection.⁷⁴ LeBon therefore sought to make considerable claims for the power that leaders were believed to have exerted on crowds, and the consequent effect that this had on the individuals of which it was comprised:⁷⁵

By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized group, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a civilized individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian – that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings.⁷⁶

In his critique of LeBon, Freud points out that while LeBon, perhaps mistakenly, identifies the leader as the source of the ‘fascination’ of the crowd, he fails adequately to explain the process of transformation from a group of free thinking individuals to a crowd.⁷⁷ Freud notes with some surprise that LeBon actually believed crowd psychology to be hypnotic, rather than being *like* hypnotism.⁷⁸ Robert Nye, who has written extensively on the subject, draws attention to LeBon’s idea of the hypnotic state as a ‘collective hallucination’:

The crowd thinks in images, but having lost its ability to distinguish a real (perceived) from an unreal (internal), image, owing to its dream-like torpor, its

74 LeBon, *The Psychology of Revolution*, trans. B. Miall, London and Leipzig, 1913.

75 Freud acknowledges basis of LeBon’s conception of the crowd in his work on the French Revolution in ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’ p.83. Robert Nye attributes this influence to the same atmosphere in which Taine produced *De L’Intelligence* and *Les Origines de la France Contemporaine*; R.A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave LeBon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic*, London and Beverly Hills, 1975, p.29. Moscovici attributes LeBon’s ‘fear of crowds’ to the same influence, *The Age of the Crowd*, pp.79–80.

76 LeBon, from *The Crowd*, cited by S. Freud, ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’, p.77.

77 *Ibid.*, p.81.

78 *Ibid.*, p.76. See also, S. Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd*, pp.81–91; ‘Mass Hypnosis’.

mental functioning is reduced to hallucination. These hallucinations are the unifying foci of any crowd, and spread from individual to individual by ‘imitation’ or ‘mental contagion’ until they universalize themselves.⁷⁹

Freud recasts this mental contagion as ‘suggestibility’ which, he nevertheless believes, was ‘actually an irreducible, primitive phenomenon’, rooted in the libido.⁸⁰ At the same time, Freud evidently had deep misgivings about LeBon, believing him to have been overly influenced by a negative conception of the crowd during the French Revolution.⁸¹ To highlight this basic flaw in LeBon’s approach, Freud posits the existence of the ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ crowds to which Breton referred. Freud’s exemplary artificial crowds were the church and the army: ‘unhomogenous’ groups of people held together by a common relationship to one another structured by their common relationships to a leader or head.⁸² Natural crowds, Freud believes, were motivated by a common identification or bond of love: ‘a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego’.⁸³ Freud also distinguishes between what he called the ‘herd instinct’, and his preferred notion of the ‘primal horde’.⁸⁴ Describing this ‘primal horde’, Freud posits a causal relationship between a familial structure and suggestibility. The definition of ‘suggestion’, the unsatisfactory link from LeBon’s theory is offered as nothing less than; ‘a conviction which is not based upon perception and reasoning but upon an erotic tie’.⁸⁵

79 R. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology*, p.68.

80 S. Freud, ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’, pp.88–92; ‘Suggestion and Libido’. See also S. Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd*, pp.244–51; ‘Crowds and Libido’.

81 The association with the French Revolution is simply and effectively broken by Freud by positing alternative types of crowd which are self-evidently ‘organized’; in this case the church and the army, ‘Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego’, pp.93–9.

82 *Ibid.*, p.94.

83 *Ibid.*, p.116.

84 *Ibid.*, pp.117–28.

85 *Ibid.*, p.128.

Breton refers to this same assertion in his third lecture to *Contre-Attaque* in which he proposes a novel application of Freud's reading of LeBon in order to generate what he calls 'exaltation' in the revolutionary crowd:

'A collective formation,' says Freud, 'is primarily and essentially characterized by the establishment of new affective bonds between the members of the formation.' These affective bonds, he states, unequivocally, are a response to the need to fulfil 'erotic tendencies, which without losing their drive, have deviated from their primitive goals.' In such circumstances, the erotic pull gives way to what Freud calls 'identification' (a phenomenon in which the ego seeks to become like a proposed 'model'.) In his eyes, an effectively motivated crowd is essentially a grouping together of individuals who have come to recognize a common identity, an identity founded upon 'affective' community.⁸⁶

Freud's 'primal horde', however, was predicated upon a patriarchal masculine economy of fathers and sons: an oedipal structure which was ill-fitting, perhaps unexpectedly, for Breton facing the Popular Front. Breton, however, subtly re-casts Freud's theory, positing a second kind of crowd. In place of what he referred to as Freud's 'paternal horde' there was to be a 'fraternal community':

It is actually this second kind of crowd that particularly interests us, it is the driving force of this crowd that we wish to acknowledge. Where we revolutionaries want to go is into the very core of this crowd, a crowd which at the designated hour decapitates kings and gods.⁸⁷

Breton's interest in the 'affective' nature of the identification that this crowd had to make, takes him right back to LeBon, whose evocation of metal contagion, collective hallucination and spontaneous, violent barbarism was exactly what he had in mind: 'That others turn away in horror from this dark image, frees us.'⁸⁸ Returning to LeBon's text with a full understanding of Freud's characterisation of the libidinous drive behind affective identification, Breton constructs a revolutionary theory about the potential of the crowd. Not only is collective action,

86 Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, p.607 (see appendix).

87 Ibid., p.608 (see appendix).

88 'Que d'autres se détournent avec horreur de ce tableau assez sombre, libre à eux', *ibid.*, p.608.

'a marching crowd' effective in the street, but it represents the possibility for a new revolutionary subject founded upon this notion of identification:

'The coincidence of the ego and the ego ideal,' [Breton quotes Freud], 'always produces a sensation of triumph. The feeling of guilt (or inferiority), should perhaps be considered as an expression of the state of tension between the ego and the ideal.' We are incontestably for this triumph in the Freudian sense.⁸⁹

Contre-Attaque was very short lived, surviving only a few months beyond the declarations in which both Bataille and Breton sought to draw the rhetoric of the revolutionary crowd into a debate about the possibility of political action.⁹⁰ But the momentary agreement between Breton and Bataille was remarkable in terms of its scope and implications. Together, they identified the need for a theoretically determined leaderless fraternity, which neither Breton nor Bataille would have been willing or able to direct as it exercised its collective will. Just for that moment, the fascinated and receptive gaze of the fascist mass was opposed by an active, contagious, omnivorous alternative.

Returning to the *Contre-Attaque* invitation as a critique of commemorative re-union clarifies both the problem and the proffered solution. On the 21st of January 1936, the '200 Families' were to be relinquished to the judgement of the crowd. That is to say, the bankrupt, empty gesture indicating a non-existent and unnecessary conceptual head was to be served on a plate. The calf's head, a sacrificial substitute for the absent and persistently powerful head of the king,

89 Ibid., p.609 (see appendix).

90 Robert Short describes the end of *Contre-Attaque* being at the end of May 1936 after an article in *L'Oeuvre* announcing its termination. Short sees some irony in the ensuing wave of support for united popular protest in the form of the general strike, '*Contre-Attaque*', pp.163-5. Henri Dubief, suggests a final, slightly bizarre act of *Contre-Attaque* in September 1936, involving a group of actresses, but to all intents and purposes, the group collapsed in May of that year, Bataille already having begun work on *Acéphale*; H. Dubief, '*Témoignage sur Contre-Attaque*', p.55.

would be offered for collective consumption.⁹¹ The 'masters of the forge', would be identified as a superfluous and unnecessary figure-head which bound the workers as slaves into a prison of their own making for as long as they chose to respond to symbolic authority over effective engagement.⁹² The commemorative aspect of the invitation established that the destruction of an ideal (the monarchy) was more effective than the destruction of its manifestation (Louis XVI). Contre-Attaque offered nothing less than a revolutionary identification of this fact. As Breton suggests, replacing a king with an alternative tyrant, guaranteed that freedom would remain a dream: 'Sade, imprisoned under Robespierre as under Louis XVI'.⁹³

On 16th February 1936, Contre-Attaque descended into the street for the first and only time.⁹⁴ The great irony of the occasion was that the demonstration was organised by the Popular Front to protest the attempted lynching of *their* leader, Léon Blum, by a crowd of monarchists and fascists three days previously. The heavily symbolic march departed from the Panthéon, a shrine to republican values, passed the Place de la Bastille, progressed along the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, a hotbed of revolutionary ferment during the Revolution, and finished at the place de la Nation, around Dalou's monument, to 'The Triumph of the Republic.' Unsurprisingly, Bataille's version of events, which concludes his essay 'Popular Front in the Street', ignores this 'anachronistic' retracing of revolutionary history and concentrates instead upon the crowd:

- 91 René Sédillot notes the existence of a contemporary 'affiche' depicting the head of a top-hatted industrialist with a knife between his teeth with the caption 'two hundred criminals', which he says was based upon an old anti-bolshevik poster. R. Sédillot, *Les Deux Cents Familles*, p.17.
- 92 There is a connection here with a little-known but quite brilliant unpublished essay by Bataille from 1934 called 'Abjection and Miserable Form' which articulates an even more total oppression of the workers by a disinterested sovereign force: my thanks to Sylvère Lotringer for drawing attention to this fact. Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, Paris, 1970, 219–21.
- 93 This was Breton's analogy for the ubiquity of forms in which the limitation of freedom was manifest. Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes II*, p.609.
- 94 R. Short, 'Contre-Attaque', p.159.

After February 16th.

500,000 workers, defied by little cockroaches, invaded the streets and caused an immense uproar.

Comrades, who has the right to lay down the law?

This ALL POWERFUL multitude, this HUMAN OCEAN...

Only this ocean of men in revolt can save the world from the nightmare of impotence and carnage in which it sinks!⁹⁵

With hindsight, it is difficult to see such an account of a popular manifestation of political solidarity as any less problematic than the sentimental vision of 'impoverished majesty' that Bataille wished to resist while remembering the 'red-faced worker' from 1934. It is, however, productive to compare Bataille's dismissals of strategic analogies with the French Revolution and Breton's alternative proposals of 'communal fraternity' to the efforts of Louis Aragon, who subscribed fully to the Popular Front agenda. Although determined to comply with the doctrine of socialist realism, Aragon continued to search for the most appropriate means of representing and encouraging popular protest, shadowing the concerns of his former surrealist colleagues from the other side of the Popular Front.⁹⁶ Aragon participated in the Popular Front just as Restif de la Bretonne had in the Revolution, as a narrator, a storyteller and a man of the crowd. When Max Adereth describes Aragon as, 'both a spectator and an actor in the historical drama of our time', he is referring specifically to Aragon's representation of the Popular Front years in *Le Roman inachevé*.⁹⁷ This autobiographical collection of poems was written in 1956, after Krushev's denunciation of Stalin, and shows Aragon associating himself directly with the crowd, rather than re-

- 95 Although Bataille gave the text as a lecture on 24 November 1935, this postscript to the essay concerning the events of February 1936 was certainly added later. *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque*, No.1, in which it originally appeared, was not published until May 1936, allowing plenty of time for the addition. This translated version of the text is from *Visions of Excess*, p.168.
- 96 A. Kimyongur, *Socialist Realism in Louis Aragon's Le monde réel*, Hull, 1995, pp.9–24.
- 97 M. Adereth, *Elsa Triolet and Louis Aragon, An Introduction to Their Intwoven Lives and Works*, Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter, 1994, p.290.

stating a political message.⁹⁸ In the poem 'Cette vie à nous' (This life is ours), Aragon adopts the position of the operator and narrator of a magic lantern show, projecting four scenes from the life of the Popular Front.⁹⁹ The magic lantern was a sophisticated mode of representation, a display of colour and light produced on both salon walls and barn doors in France since the seventeenth-century.¹⁰⁰ During the Revolution it was a definitively popular medium, produced, like Restif's embellished narratives, by and for 'the people'.¹⁰¹ Without following Aragon too far from the point, his evocation of a theatrical narrative of light, shadow and suspended disbelief offers a challenging corrective to hypnotism, collective hallucination and libidinous exaltation:

It's like an extravaganza
 Today the people are master
 Walking though Paris
 Their flags hanging in windows
 Children sing and sing again
 Bread, peace, freedom.¹⁰²

Perhaps Contre-Attaque missed its calling as a significant chapter in the history of surrealism because it offered nothing spectacular for popular consumption, just a single calf's head on a plate. It remains, however, a pivotal chapter in the history of surrealism's revolutionary crowd and the surrealist crowd's *collective* engagement with revolutionary history. The series of narratives traced between surrealism and the revolution concludes with the failure of Contre-Attaque. The nature of this failure seems, however, to predict or somehow to con-

98 P. Daix, *Aragon*, Paris, 1994, pp.472–80, *Le Roman inachevé*.

99 Aragon, *Le Roman inachevé*, Paris, 1956, pp.194–8. See also, J.-J. Tatin-Gourier, 'La Lanterne Magique: Pluralité des Imaginaires et des Formes d'écriture', L. Garbagnati and M. Gilli (eds), *Bicentenaire de la Révolution Française, Actes du Colloque Internationale*, Vol.15, Paris, 1989, p.6.

100 My thanks to Helen Weston for drawing attention to the importance of magic lanterns in eighteenth-century French culture.

101 J. Goulemot, 'Lanterne et Lampions', *Le Drame de la Vie*, de Retif de la Bretonne', *ibid.*, pp.51–9.

102 Aragon, *Le Roman inachevé*, p.198 (see appendix).

tain the possibilities for future collective action: Contre-Attaque was less of a dead end than a one-way street.

On the one hand, Contre-Attaque insistently implied Bataille's agenda for both *Acéphale* and The College of Sociology: the most important collective ventures with which he would subsequently be associated. Beyond the emergence of Bataille's 'headless' journal in 1936, Contre-Attaque suggested the staking out of the terrain with which Bataille would increasingly be concerned in the face of a second World War. Although The College of Sociology, which ran (briefly) from 1937–1939 was in many respects diametrically opposed to the 'active' political engagement of Contre-Attaque, many of the subjects set out for discussion in the proposals for *Cahiers de Contre-Attaque* re-emerged, tactically recast, in sociological or anthropological terms. The sacred in everyday life, sacred sociology, power, brotherhood, secret societies, festivals, myth, Sade and the Revolution: a summary of interests proposed and discussed in The College of Sociology inaugurates a new era in effective avant-garde engagement. Transcending manifesto commitments and factions in favour of an affective identification of radical concerns in every social sphere, Bataille's dissident (or dissonant) surrealism anticipates both the pragmatic utility of post-structuralist theory and the death of political idealism.

On the other hand, the emphatically libidinous conception of surrealist fraternity evoked by Breton in Contre-Attaque confirmed a series of awkward invitations to exhibitions, *soirées* and dinners where too often the surrealist 'woman' would be the only thing on the menu (Figure 85).¹⁰³ This image of 'surrealism in 1929' appeared in André Thirion's *Revolutionaries without Revolution*, and like Thirion's title itself, it would seem to challenge surrealism's revolutionary credentials. Originally taken for the same issue of *Variétés* in which portrait photographs of the group appeared alongside those of Trotsky and Freud, the pantomime would no doubt have undermined Breton's call to 'intellectuals of revolutionary tendencies' and the picture was not used. It does, however, predict those ubiquitous images of post-

103 A. Thirion, *Revolutionaries Without Revolution*, trans. J. Neugroschel, London, 1975, pp.248–9.

Fig 85: Photograph taken in Le Paradis cabaret on Boulevard de Clichy in 1929 (unattributed), originally intended for *Variétés: le Surréalisme en 1929*



war surrealism where a pained Breton seems doomed to return again and again to the same naked lunch-bearing muse.

Finishing this account of surrealism, history and revolution with *Contre-Attaque* in 1936 is not intended as a dismissal of the subsequent history of the surrealism, but rather, as an acknowledgement of a fundamental change in the conceptual currency of the term. International successes that could totally circumvent surrealist principals and positions, exemplified by the huge Museum of Modern Art survey 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism' in 1937, mark the end of surrealism's contingent relationship with the peculiarly local ideologies and concerns associated with French revolutionary politics. There is also, however, a powerful resonance between this conclusion and contemporary criticisms of Breton's vision for the future of surrealism as a revolutionary force. Perhaps the final word on the subject, then, should go to Desnos, already *persona non grata* by the time the *Variétés* picture was taken and destined not to survive to see the post-war legacies of the surrealist revolution.¹⁰⁴ In his 'Third Surrealist Manifesto', Desnos intuitively returns to the parallels between revolutionary tendencies in the eighteenth century and those in the twentieth. Desnos's damning assessment in 1930 (by which time he was closely associated with Bataille) was that Breton would always find the calf's head impossible to digest, and like the *émigrés* of 1791, would end up holding court in exile:

More bourgeois than anyone, he had the word Revolution on his lips, not because he had it in his heart, but because the morsel was too rich for his feeble gullet to swallow and his delicate stomach had thrown it up. Breton was the type of person who lived for the idea of revolution, not for the act. At the first sign of trouble he would have left for Coblenz.¹⁰⁵

104 Desnos died shortly after the cessation of hostilities in 1945 from typhoid, contracted while interned in Theresienstadt.

105 R. Desnos, 'Troisième Manifeste du Surréalisme', *Nouvelles Hébrides*, p.475 (see appendix).

Appendix

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's own. The original French extracts are listed below. The first number refers to the chapter and the second to the footnote: 1.47 is therefore chapter 1, footnote 47.

1.47

L'observateur doit alors quitter la position très élevée qui lui permettait jusqu'ici de contempler cette ligne à vol d'oiseau, pour prendre un poste au ras du sol à proximité du contour qui marque l'entrée du XVIIIe siècle, comme le montre la figure 1.

1.48

Cette date passée, la ligne reprend la direction qu'elle suivait avant la siècle de Louis XIV, mais, pour la bien voir, l'observateur doit se transporter à la fin du XVIIIe siècle, c'est-à-dire à la mort de Marie-Antoinette (fig.2). A partir de Louis XVI, la ligne commence à décrire une courbe vers la gauche (sens de la marche du Temps) et, en outre, le relief intervenant, elle cesse d'être tracée sur une surface plane; elle passe dans une sorte de cuvette dont le fond est occupé par la Terreur. Le XIXe siècle commence en 1815 (fig.3). Pour l'observer, il faut se placer sur la ligne du Temps même, au point 1900 où j'enais, ou, à la rigueur, au point actuel 1928.

1.54

Pour un Saint-Just, il y a, hélas! plusieurs brochettes de Girondins rhéteurs à n'en plus finir et des fricasées de bas bleus (à défaut de cuisses), style Mme Roland. Avec la poussière des consciences secouées comme des vieux tapis, ce joli monde fera un soleil négatif, pour tacher de gris la pure, la sanglante aurore boréale. Le crime des prétendus révolutionnaires, qui cèdent au chantage d'une tardive soi-disant humanité, sera de permettre, en voulant sauver quelques

individus de la guillotine, les guerres de l'Empire. Dame, le jeune Bonaparte avait la gale, et, de se gratter, ça lui donnait des idées pour la campagne d'Italie. Il caracole, Au pont d'Arcole (he danced on the bridge of Arcole), A nous l'épopée.

1.56

c'était l'époque où Poincaré, le vampire français, et Clémenceau, vieux comme la lèpre, hideux fossoyeurs de millions de corps, se livraient un duel sinistre à qui le premier enterrait l'autre.

1.63

J'ai toujours méprisé ces révolutionnaires qui, pour avoir mis un drapeau tricolore à la place d'un drapeau blanc, s'estimaient satisfaits et vivaient tranquillement, décorés par le nouvel Etat, pensionnés par le nouveau gouvernement. Non, pour un révolutionnaire, il n'y a qu'un régime possible: La Révolution, c'est-à-dire La Terreur....Seule la guillotine peut, par des coupes sombres, éclaircir cette foule d'adversaires auxquels nous nous heurtons. Ah! qu'elle se dresse enfin sur une place publique la sympathique machine de la délivrance. Elle sert depuis trop longtemps aux fins de la crapule.

1.65

C'est à la lumière d'une image poétique que tout redevenait possible, et que nous décidions de passer à l'action: suivant une coutume qui était chère à quelques-uns d'entre nous, nous reprenions la comparaison de notre état intellectuel avec celui de la Révolution française. Il s'agissait de préparer et de décréter soudain la Terreur. Tout se passait comme si, la Révolution survenant, nous en avions la tête. Et d'autre part nous décidions de ne pas attendre quatre-vingt-treize, la Terreur tout de suite: en 89.

1.71

La visite achevée, comme Madame Degas, tenant son fils par la main, se retirait, accompagnée jusqu'à la porte par Madame Le Bas, elle aperçut sur les murs de couloir d'entrée les portraits de Robespierre, de Saint-Just, de Couthon... 'Comment, s'écria-t-elle, vous conservez

toujours les têtes de ces monstres... -Tais-toi, Célestine, c'étaient des saints'.

1.74

Hugo domina mon enfance...Les derniers échos de l'affaire Dreyfus, des bribes de conversations entendues, le chiffre quatre-vingt-treize, le nom de Robespierre qui réunit mes deux prénoms Robert et Pierre, me permettait d'imaginer une République révolutionnaire pour laquelle je me battais sur les barricades de fauteuils et de tabourets.

2.36

C'était une magnifique illusion de concorde,...car tout annonçait de grands et prochains déchirements. La mort de Louis XVI avait exalté la passion révolutionnaire....quelques-uns commençaient à ce dire que la guillotine était une solution, et qu'elle n'avait pas épuisé dans la mort du roi sa vertu pacifiante. C'est en février que les jacobins entendent sans protestation la sinistre parole: 'Il faut promener en France le rasoir nationale'.

3.20

Mais déjà le Panthéon s'ouvrait devant nous. Des ministres en vestons blancs de barman débataient des membres de grands hommes. La tête de Hoche fut adjugée 3 francs 50. Des Anglaises acquièrent les viscères de Victor Hugo à bas prix et le sexe de Sadi Carnot fut l'objet d'enchères inouïes entre des invertis multicolores et M. Nobel.

3.71

C'est vrai que Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud et combien d'autres poètes ont dû payer de leur mort le droit de survivre dans les consciences des hommes. Faut-il croire que, par les temps qui courent, une double mort et nécessaire, celle du poète et celle de son époque, pour que cette conscience se manifeste sous la forme d'un tardive réhabilitation?

4.12

Que vient faire Shakespeare boulevard Haussman? Henry Becque sur un trottoir de l'avenue de Villiers? Et le penseur de Rodin sur les marches du Panthéon? Pourquoi trois statues d'Alfred Musset? Combien Victor Hugo doit-il en avoir?

4.103

Les villes ont beaucoup souffert de l'horreur du vide. Leurs habitants, pour combattre l'agoraphobie, ont élevé partout des monuments et des statues sans se soucier aucunement de les mêler à la vie réelle, quotidienne de l'homme. Les monuments sont, ou déserts, bêtes, inutiles ou consacrés aux plus infâmes superstitions, aux pires besognes. A part des rares exceptions, leur laideur consterne, crétinise, défigure celui qui les contemple. Les statues, presque toujours d'insivides dérisoires ou néfastes, sont sur des socles, ce qui leur enlève toute possibilité d'intervention dans les affaires humaines et réciproquement. Elles pourrissent sur pied.

4.114

Cette présence de la terre se manifeste avec plus de puissance encore dans cette branche de la sculpture qu'est la statuaire. Au poids du bronze, du marbre ou du granit s'ajoute le poids du cadavre qu'une statue prétend perpétuer ou le pesant de cervelle pourrie de l'allégorie.

4.116

Je signale à l'attention, comme une des entreprises les plus baroque et les plus admirables, ces deux statues qui s'attaquent à figurer une chose en ce qu'elle a de moins figurable; la poussière quand le vent la balaie, un ballon quand il s'efforce de s'élever en dépit des entraves.

4.118

Le bronze est sonore. Les veines du marbre sont des vraies veines...La nature de la matière est de nouveau mise en question...Qui sait si un ouragan ne balayera pas un jour le nuage de poussière de l'accident d'auto de la place Saint-Ferdinand, si le ballon de bronze de la porte des Ternes ne prendra pas son essor formidable, à l'aube, dans un ciel

consterne. Ecoutez. Les amares chantent, les pigeons de métal roucoulent, des vivats sortent des gorges de bronze avec un retentissement de tocsin.

4.120

Qui m'expliquera pourquoi le Jules Simon de la Madeleine, le Musset de la Porte-Maillot et le Louis XIV de la Place des Victoires sont émouvants? Pourquoi le Napoléon de la Colonne Vendôme est doué d'une vie singulière? Pourquoi l'Etienne Dolet de la Place Maub', est un attrappe nigaud, tandis que le chevalier de la Barre, à Montmartre, est doué des vertus accordées ordinairement aux symbols dangereux.

4.123

Et les statues sont en quelque sorte des vêtements abandonnés dans une forêt: le premier vagabond venu les revêt, le premier génie venu s'y incarne...s'il n'est pas gêné aux entournures. Cette mystérieuse humanisation des simulacres illustre mieux que toute autre considération le sort des statues.

4.126

sur la place Galliéni, le ballon de pierre du monument des aéronautes de 1870-1871 avait rompu ses amarres et montait doucement, en se dandinant, au-dessus de la foule, de l'emboutillage et des maisons. Deux tonnes de pierre, comme un ballon d'enfant, dans le ciel de Paris.

4.131

Eriger l'effigie d'un être qui fut vivant sur un piédestal équivaut à l'élever au rang de dieu, et, de nos jours, une telle entreprise est moins que jamais légitime. Tandis que l'allégorie de bronze se situe sur le plan de la métaphore, de l'image, de la fiction poétique.

4.140

Seules pouvait être respectées les 'gloires nationales incontestables', pas Voltaire, ni Diderot, bien sûr, car les maîtres de l'heure cherchaient à mettre l'occasion à profit pour régler quelques vieux com-

ptes; ils avaient l'oeil sur le chevalier de La Barre, sur Louis Blanc et sur beaucoup d'autres, et comptaient bien en finir une fois pour toutes avec Zola.

4.141

Nous a débarrassés d'un certain nombre d'effigies en bronze qui faisaient peu d'honneur à la capitale de l'art moderne: c'est la seul service que, sans le vouloir, les envahisseurs aient rendu à Paris.

4.142

Mais il reste encore trop et on souhaiterait une épuration sévère des effigies républicaines qui gâtent, beaucoup plus qu'elles n'embellissent, les parterres des Tuileries, du jardin du Luxembourg ou du Parc Monceau.

4.146

Rien, en effet, n'est plus contraire à l'idée de divinité qu'un tel simulacre. A titre exemplaire, je rappellerai l'usage fait par Eisenstein dans le 'Cuirassé Potemkine' d'un vulgaire crucifix. Mais rien, plus que lui, n'est lourd de mystère, de puissances surnaturelles et d'activité.

4.147

Nous ne voulons pas que les statues soient autre chose que des accessoires...Mais le marbre, le porphyre, le granit, et le bronze sont-ils insensibles? Ne jouissent-ils d'aucune vie? Le bronze est sonore. Les veines du marbre sont de vraies veines,...Nous ne voulons pas que les statues soient autre chose...Cette phrase se retourne contre l'auteur de ces lignes.

4.153

Je pense à ce que le roi disait du cadavre du duc de Guise', Cocteau writes for the mangled statue of Condorcet, 'écrasé, insulté, aspergé de boue, CONDORCET grandit dans les supplices. Sa main gauche ne lâche pas les livres dont sortira mon vieux collègue. Il repose côte à côte avec sa mort.'

4.155

A la question: 'Racontez le siège de 70', une petite fille de la classe don't Alain Fournier était le maître, répondit: 'En 70, Gambetta quitte Paris en ballon captif'. Observez le voyage de M. THIERS.

4.156

Et l'auteur de cet article s'arrête à ce point précis. Car tout est à recommencer, à contredire à refaire pour être recommencé, contredit, refait à nouveau. Le grand cycle s'achève et recommence. Peut-être n'a-t-il jamais existé?

5.80

Il n'est pas impossible que ce soient les appels de marquis de Sade, les papiers qu'il jetait par sa fenêtre, et dans lesquels il donnait des détails sur les tortures auxquelles on aurait soumis les prisonniers dans le château, qui, exerçant quelque influence sur les esprits déjà excités, aient déterminé l'effervescence populaire et provoqué finalement la prise de la vieille forteresse.

5.82

Il semble que l'heure soit venue pour ces idées qui ont mûri dans l'atmosphère infâme des enfers de bibliothèques, et cet homme qui parut ne compter pour rien durant le dix-neuvième siècle pourrait bien dominer le vingtième.

6.15

D'où vient, dans ce siècle d'amazones, n'a-t-elle pas compris qu'une femme assassin est le plus affrayant des monstres? O femmes, qui voulez être hommes, et vous hommelettes qui les y encouragez, le crime de Marie-Anne-Charlotte est le vôtre autant que le sien.

6.41

C'est là un véritable lieu géométrique à trouver, mais, à Contre-Attaque, nous croyons que ce lieu géométrique est trouvable. Nous croyons qu'il existe entre cent un homme de la rue qui est disposé à

faire siennes des thèses à l'heure actuelle qui sont les nôtres que cet homme entre tous est jeune et prêt à faire triompher coûte que coûte.

6.48

Avec ou sans effusion de sang chacune d'entre elles a abattu un tête couronné. Il est nécessaire d'altérer l'attention sur le rôle essentiel et initial joué dans les mouvements historiques violents par les têtes qu'ils ont abattus... Mais lorsqu'une tête couronnée joue son rôle d'unification des foules insurgées, lorsque la divergence des mouvements ne se produit qu'après le triomphe d'insurrection, à la faveur de l'effervescence qui résulte de bouleversement subi, la Révolution s'approfondit.

6.50

CONTRE-ATTAQUE, 21 Janvier 1793 – 21 Janvier 1936, Anniversaire de l'exécution capitale de Louis XVI, Le Mardi 21 Janvier 1936 à 21 heures, réunion ouverte à Grenier des Augustins, 7 rue des Grands-Augustins. Metro: St Michel, Object de la réunion: LES 200 FAMILLES, qui relèvent de la justice du peuple, Prendant la parole: Georges Bataille, André Breton, Maurice Heine.

6.52

Deux Cents familles sont maîtresses de l'économie française et en fait, de la politique française. Ce sont des forces qu'un état démocratique ne devrait pas tolérer, que Richelieu n'eût pas tolérées dans le royaume de France. L'influence des deux cents familles pèse sur le système fiscal, sur les transports, sur le crédit. Les deux cents familles placent au pouvoir leurs délégués. Elles interviennent sur l'opinion publique, car elles contrôlent la presse.

6.86

'Une formation collective, dit Freud, est caractérisée avant tout et essentiellement par l'établissement de nouveaux liens affectifs entre les membres de cette formation', Ces liens affectifs, il est sur ce point très formel répondeur au besoin d'accomplissement de 'tendances érotiques qui, sans rien perdre de leur énergie ont dévié de leurs buts

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primitifs'. Le penchant érotique, en pareil cas cède la place à ce que Freud nomme l' 'identification' (phénomène par lequel le moi cherche à se rendre semblable à ce qu'il s'est proposé comme modèle). La foule agissante se caractérise essentiellement à ses yeux comme un assemblage d'individus ayant réalisé une identification commune, identification fondée sur une communauté affective.

6.87

C'est, en effet, la foule de ce second type qui nous intéresse spécialement, c'est cette foule à qui nous voudrions faire avouer ce qui l'anime. Où nous voulons entrer, nous révolutionnaires, c'est dans l'intimité de cette foule qui décapite à son heure les rois et les dieux.

6.89

'La coïncidence du moi avec l'idéal du moi, produit toujours une sensation de triomphe. Le sentiment de culpabilité (ou d'infériorité) peut être considéré comme l'expression d'un état de tension entre le moi et l'idéal.' Nous sommes incontestablement pour le triomphe au sens freudien

6.102

C'était comme une féerie/Aujourd'hui le peuple est le maître/Il se promène dans Paris/Qui met ses drapeaux aux fenêtres/Enfants chantez et rechantez/Le pain la paix, la liberté.

6.105

Bourgeois plus que personne, il a le mot de Révolution à la bouche, non parce qu'il lui vient du cœur, mais parce que le morceau est trop dur à avaler pour son faible gosier, que son estomac fragile le vomit. Breton est le type de personnage qui vit sur l'idée de révolution et non sur l'acte. Aux premiers troubles, il partira à Coblenze.

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