

Late Surrealist Exhibitions and the Question of the Neo-Avant-Garde

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**Abstract**

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This thesis seeks to extend the critical discussion of Surrealism and its exhibitions into the post-war period, to resist the popular notion that Surrealism died with World War II or with American exile. Two post-war American exhibitions and two post-war French exhibitions of Surrealist art are considered in order to offer a more chronologically complete assessment of the Surrealist movement, whose activities continued into the 1960s. While late Surrealism's claims to social and political relevancy were met with skepticism from critics and scholars, the Surrealist avant-garde continued to develop innovative means to express its utopian project. Late Surrealist exhibitions serve as a case study for understanding the relationship between the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde phases of Modernist art, as they are an important site of interaction

for neo-avant-garde artists, such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Allan Kaprow, and Claes Oldenburg, who would adapt Surrealist practices and participate in these exhibitions.

## Acknowledgements

This project began with a rather surprising photograph of the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* exhibition's interior, where Robert Rauschenberg's combine-painting *Bed* was inexplicitly hung amid a cave-like chamber filled with Surrealist works. The question offered by Professor Patricia Failing--"what is Rauschenberg doing here?"--served as one of the guiding inquiries of this year-long journey.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	v
List of Figures	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter One Theories of the Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde	11
Chapter Two Late Surrealist Exhibitions and the Post-War Surrealist Project	43
Chapter Three Efficacy and the Question of the Neo-Avant-Garde	88
Chapter Four Re-Enacting the Avant-Garde	130
Conclusion	143
Bibliography	157
Figures	

## List of Figures

- Figure 1. Staircase. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 2. Plan for the Room of Superstitions by Frederick Kiesler. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 3. Room of Superstitions, including Joan Miró's *The Rigid Cascade of Superstitions*, David Hare's *Anguished Man*, Roberto Matta's *The Whist*, and Yves Tanguy's *The Ladder Announcing Death*. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 4. Etienne Martin and Frederick Kiesler's *Totem of Religions* with model who wears the false breast from Marcel Duchamp and Enrico Donati's *Please Touch* luxury exhibition catalog. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 5. Frederick Kiesler and *The Anti-Taboo Figure* in the Room of Superstitions. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 6. Labyrinth of Initiations and billiards table. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 7. Labyrinth of Initiations. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 8. Labyrinth of Initiations. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 9. Victor Brauner, *L'Oiseau serpenteur*. Altar in the Labyrinth of Initiations. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 10. “Les Grands Transparents” (The Great Transparent Ones) from André Breton, “De la survivance de certains mythes et de quelques autres mythes en croissance ou en formation” (“On the Survival of Certain Myths and on Some Other Myths in Growth or Formation”), *First Papers of Surrealism*, New York: Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, Inc., 1942, n.p
- Figure 11. Jacques Hérold, *The Great Transparent One*, 1947, plaster and found materials, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 12. Jacques Hérold's *The Great Transparent One*, later cast in bronze.
- Figure 13. Marcel Duchamp and Enrico Donati's *Please Touch* luxury exhibition catalog, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.
- Figure 14. *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.

- Figure 15. Installation shot. Alberto Giacometti's *The Invisible Object* and Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* are visible on the back wall. *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.
- Figure 16. *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.
- Figure 17. William Klein, untitled photograph of Merét Oppenheim's *Cannibal Feast*, *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.
- Figure 18. Installation shot of Merét Oppenheim's *Cannibal Feast* with Jasper Johns' *Target with Plaster Casts* visible in the upper right. *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.
- Figure 19. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.
- Figure 20. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947. Works shown: Gerome Kamrowski, *The Temperature of the Sea, Family*, and *Nude Blonde on a Horse* (all c. 1945); Isamu Noguchi, *The Tortured Earth* (1943); and Wilfredo Lam, *The Eternal Present* (1945) on the ceiling.
- Figure 21. Viewing Wilfredo Lam's *The Eternal Present* (1945) on the ceiling. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.
- Figure 22. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.
- Figure 23. Exhibition design for "Blood Flames" by Frederick Kiesler. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.
- Figure 24. "Circe" from Breton, André, and Marcel Duchamp. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain: D'Arcy Galleries, New York, [1960-61]*. Trans. Julien Levy and Claud Tarnaud. New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960, 7.
- Figure 25. "Beginning of Surrealist Field" from Breton, André, and Marcel Duchamp. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain: D'Arcy Galleries, New York, [1960-61]*. Trans. Julien Levy and Claud Tarnaud. New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960, 5.
- Figure 26. "Maldoror" from Breton, André, and Marcel Duchamp. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain: D'Arcy Galleries, New York, [1960-61]*. Trans. Julien Levy and Claud Tarnaud. New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960, 7.
- Figure 27. Cabinet with live chickens. "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain," D'Arcy Galleries, 1960.
- Figure 28. Exhibition catalog cover. "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain," D'Arcy Galleries, 1960.

- Figure 29. Robert Rauschenberg, *Odalisk*, freestanding combine-painting, 1955-8. Also known as *Odalisque*.
- Figure 30. Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, combine-painting with oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 1955.
- Figure 31. Unknown photographer, *Untitled*, 1958. Robert Rauschenberg in his studio shown with *Bed*, *Odalsik*, *Monogram*, and *Interior*.
- Figure 32. Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, mixed media combine-painting with eagle, 1959.
- Figure 33. Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, encaustic, collage, and plaster casts on canvas, 1955.
- Figure 34. Man Ray, *From a Little Shoe that was Part of It*, photograph, 1937. Reproduced in André Breton's *L'Amour Fou*.
- Figure 35. Robert Rauschenberg, *Music Box*, wood crate with traces of metallic paint, nails, three unattached stones, and feather, 1953.
- Figure 36. Marcel Duchamp, *A bruit secret*, ball of twine between two brass plates, joined by long screws, containing unknown object added by Walter Arensberg.
- Figure 37. Alfred Stieglitz's 1917 photograph of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, porcelain urinal, 1917.
- Figure 38. Marcel Duchamp, *Bottlerack*, galvanized iron, 1960 (replica of 1914 original).
- Figure 39. Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze* (Ballantine cans), bronze and oil paint, 1960.
- Figure 40. Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze* (Savarin can), bronze and oil paint, 1960.
- Figure 41. Jasper Johns, *Target*, Pencil with paintbrush and dry watercolor cakes, wood frame, 1960.
- Figure 42. Allan Kaprow, *An Apple Shrine*, environment, 1960.
- Figure 43. Allan Kaprow, *An Apple Shrine*, environment, 1960.
- Figure 44. Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, environment, 1961.
- Figure 45. Allan Kaprow, *Words*, environment, 1962.
- Figure 46. Allan Kaprow, *Words*, environment, 1962.

- Figure 47. Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, environment for Happening, 1959.
- Figure 48. Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, environment for Happening, 1959.
- Figure 49. Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening, 1960.
- Figure 50. Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening, 1960.
- Figure 51. Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening, 1960.
- Figure 52. Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening with the artist pictured, 1960.
- Figure 53. Claes Oldenburg, *The Store*, installation with the artist pictured, 1961.
- Figure 54. Claes Oldenburg, *The Store*, installation, 1961.

## Introduction

The Surrealist movement came to prominence in Europe in the 1920s and 30s. While conceptualized primarily as a literary movement and a call to social change, Surrealism embraced certain forms of visual art, and visual art became one of the most important public faces of the Surrealist ambition. The avant-garde sensibilities of Surrealism and cultivation of the unexpected encouraged unorthodox methods of displaying this art. Several notable exhibitions populated the 1930s in Western Europe and the United States.<sup>1</sup> The momentum of the Surrealist project was disrupted by the outbreak of World War II, which sent many of its members into exile in America.

The period after World War II is a problematic one for the history of Surrealism. Post-war Surrealism is typically conceived of as a period of decline, which is seen to be a consequence of being uprooted from its seat of prominence in Paris. Surrealism of the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s is largely discounted in critical literature. For the Surrealists, however, exhibitions were an important forum for demonstrating the efficacy of post-war Surrealism. They were a collective expression of the movement's aims and direction. Most scholarly thinking on exhibitions of the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s focuses on outspoken leader André Breton's ambitions to re-establish Surrealism as the forefront of Paris' artistic and intellectual avant-garde; Surrealism's confrontation with its "gravediggers" who maintained that the movement had died; the exhibitions' failed attempt declare the vitality of post-war Surrealism; the various factors that led to this ultimate failure; and Surrealism's descent into obsolescence. Much of the contemporary attitude regarded post-war Surrealism as something apart from the avant-garde

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. exhibitions of the 1930s include: "Newer Super-Realism" at the Wadsworth Atheneum in

movement whose activities led them to produce its first Surrealist manifesto in 1924.<sup>2</sup> A common accusation was that these exhibitions were merely nostalgic for the Surrealists who hoped to return to the provocations of the movement's early years.

However, it seems reductive to think of late Surrealist exhibitions as merely nostalgia or simply as exemplars of historical avant-garde failure. Those who conceived and presented these exhibitions imagined them in dramatically different terms. Members of the Surrealist movement were still promoting their revolutionary project, defending themselves from Surrealism's detractors in public forums, and putting on increasingly ambitious group exhibitions. Major figures of interest are André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Nicolas Calas and architect Frederick Kiesler. These four figures visualized and organized late Surrealist exhibitions as statements of Surrealism's contributions to post-war society.

The Surrealist interest in myth and the occult was most visibly engaged in the post-World War II period and developed as new strategy for demonstrating late Surrealist goals of social and individual revolution. Beginning in the 1920s, Communism and proletariat uprising had been one of the primary means through which Surrealism voiced their political engagement and communicated their goals of social revolution. For the Surrealists, addressing the social conditions of man was a necessary step before the individual or psychic conditions of man could be properly addressed. Due to Surrealism's break from Communism after the Moscow show trials and Stalinism's shifts in communist ideology, though, the movement was faced with the dilemma of how to promote their continued ambition to achieve social transformation and

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<sup>2</sup> The opening line of René Passeron's comprehensive history of Surrealism puts an end cap on "historical Surrealism" after the German invasion of France. Passeron proffers, "The name 'historical Surrealism' is sometimes given to a phenomenon of civilization that, between 1920 and 1940, drastically changed artistic creation in France, and later, throughout the world." Passeron characterizes Surrealism as an important and influential movement, but confines its significance to the two decades before World War II. His introduction does not offer terminology for Surrealism after 1940. Passeron, René. *Surrealism*. Paris: Terrail, 2005.

reconfigure society without the aid of party politics. The Surrealist movement had always vehemently opposed nationalism as a means to unify communities and shape social identity. The appeal of myth, for the Surrealists, was that it offered possibilities combating alienation, inspiring optimism, and achieving social transformation in a manner that did not rely on the problematic rhetoric of partisan political agendas or nationalistic ideologies.

The turn to myth and the occult was, however, generally regarded as ineffective and escapist by critics. The retreat into esoteric knowledge and primitive ritual struck many as a move that ignored actual social circumstances. The exhibitions and Surrealist writings on myth did not convince many critics how myth could be relevant to the social reality and challenges of post-war society or how knowledge of these myths could be applied to everyday life. Despite the poor reception of this strategy, late Surrealism's embrace did involve a retreat from the domains of mass-culture, commercialism, and institutional acceptance of post-war Surrealism--factors that have redeeming qualities that resist many of the failures ascribed to the historical avant-garde.

This discrepancy between reception and intent presents the question of how to conceptualize late Surrealism—as a different animal from its early manifestation or as a continuous movement. The ambiguity in Surrealism's avant-garde status is heightened by the presence of neo-avant-garde artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who also participated in these exhibitions. Does the presence of these artists, often associated with neo-Dada and proto-Pop, represent a transition from avant-garde to neo-avant-garde practices on the part of Surrealism?

To understand the position of late Surrealism within its own history as an avant-garde with revolutionary ambitions, I will discuss four Surrealist group exhibitions that took place after

World War II. Two major American exhibitions of the post-war period were “Blood Flames” and “Surrealist Intrusion into the Enchanter’s Domain,” which took place in New York City in 1947 and 1960 respectively. *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and the *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* or EROS (1959) took place in Paris. The exhibitions sought to present post-war Surrealism as a unified front, continuing and minimizing the rupture of the war, which had been conceived as a dividing point by critics. My thesis will examine what was at stake for Surrealism, in terms of visual strategy and political engagement, in a postwar artistic and intellectual environment shared with Sartrean Existentialism, the French Communist Party, and the New York School.

### **State of Scholarship**

Late Surrealism is understudied for a variety of factors including increasingly indifferent public reception of the movement in its later period and influential scholarly estimations that characterized late Surrealism as simply impotent rehearsals of the movement’s past.

In general there is a disproportionate amount of scholarship directed towards the beginning of the movement and little directed towards the terminus of the Surrealist avant-garde, though increasing interest in Surrealism’s American period indicates that this is changing.<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledgement of late Surrealism’s activities and ambitions have been limited in comparison to scholarship devoted to its foundational years and discussion of late Surrealist exhibitions has

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<sup>3</sup> The critical body of work on Surrealism after the outbreak of World War II has been expanding in recent years, approaching the time period of interest here. Beginning in the late 1980s with museum exhibition and catalog, *The Interpretive Link*, consideration for the ‘exile years’ in the Americas gained currency and then exploded in the mid 1990s with scholars like Dikran Tashjian and Martica Sawin. These accounts employ different perspectives, but generally subscribe to a particular subset of narratives. These narratives are biographical, looking at the New York period as episodes in the artistic and private lives of individual Surrealists; or they probe the relationship of influence between Surrealist emigrés and the new American vanguard of artists, such as Pollock, Rothko Motherwell, Baziotés, Cornell and others; or as the moment where Surrealism weakened and American art began to usurp its authority.

been notably brief. Most literature on Surrealism has privileged its early stages of the 1920s and 1930s, putting its critical and chronological energies towards the foundation of the movement, the proclamations of its manifestos, the development of its visual and literary strategies, the intellectual and artistic climate of interwar Paris, and the conferral of Surrealism's avant-garde status. This early period also constitutes the bulk of the discussion on Surrealist exhibitions and display, with most discussion spanning from just 1936 to 1942. Lewis Kachur, for example, dedicates nearly half of his book on Surrealist exhibitions, *Displaying the Marvelous*, to the 1938 Paris *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* alone. "Blood Flames" and *Le Surréalisme en 1947* are very briefly mentioned as an opportunity to showcase Kiesler's inventiveness as an exhibition designer. Kachur, though, does make a connection between the Surrealists exhibiting in 1959 and the "younger generation of image-makers," categorizing Rauschenberg's *Bed* and John's *Target with Plaster Casts* as a continuation of Surrealism's interest in the erotic encounter. However, the possibility that the neo-avant-garde continued or modified the "environments" of later Surrealist exhibitions is not pursued, nor is the significance of Rauschenberg's and Johns' continuation of Surrealist interests. James Herbert, in *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, also provides a lengthy discussion of this same 1938 exhibition, enmeshed in the ideologies of popular display culture and international expositions. Bruce Altshuler's *The Avant-garde in Exhibition* concludes its discussion of Surrealist exhibitions with the 1938 International Exposition of Surrealism. Martica Sawin recounts the 1947 exhibition at Galerie Maeght with more detail and with attention to the expectations of the show's producers in *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*. However, her critical energies are largely dedicated to the myriad reasons why these exhibitions failed for reasons both internal and external to the movement. Sawin recognizes that the 1947 exhibition was intended to present a

new myth, which Breton and others hoped would demonstrate Surrealism's important contribution to post-war France. Although Sawin's recounting of the dismissive and derisive contemporary reception of the exhibition receives the most attention, her discussion of the expectations of the exhibition's participants illustrates a disconnect which she does not fully explore.

The most extensive investigation of Surrealism after the second World War comes from Ellen Adams's 2007 dissertation, *After the Rain: Surrealism and the Post-World War II Avant-Garde, 1940 – 1950*. Adams thoroughly reconstructs the intellectual climate that Breton and other Surrealists entered when they returned to France in the 1940s. She argues that the Existentialists and French Communist Party defined themselves against Surrealism and stressed their own promises for rebuilding the debilitated social framework by denying the relevancy of Surrealism in post-War France. This text is the most extensive account in English of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, stressing Surrealism's insistence on its own revolutionary potential despite the various rebukes that the postwar climate leveled against it, as well as the manner in which the 1947 exhibition proffered a continued faith in social renewal. While Surrealism's political concerns are tracked beyond 1947 in Adams's dissertation, they take on a predominantly philosophical and literary characterization and cease to consider strategies of visual display. No later exhibitions are considered.

Adams' investigation of later Surrealism in its exhibition ambitions and political manifestations is closely aligned with my own research interests, but my project will be somewhat different in scope. Adams' account, while attempting to chronologically examine Surrealist activities beyond World War II, still regards these late exhibitions and their concerns as an end point. It does not concern itself with any relationship these exhibitions might have had

with the phases of artistic production that were to come next. My project will focus on the American reception of late Surrealism and will look at how strategies of visual display overlapped with neo-avant-garde practice. I believe Adams underestimates the relationship between late Surrealism and new generations of artists that would assert an interest in Surrealist concepts and adopt Surrealist practices.

### **Reconsideration**

Rather than seeing the exhibitions of the 1940s, 50s and 60s as straightforward symptoms of Surrealism's decline, it is worth asking if late Surrealism could still promote any claim to its former revolutionary ambitions or if the avant-garde strategies of early Surrealism were negated in the failed project. In order to see if a more complex understanding of later exhibitions and their critical framework is possible, my study will consider their reception and the exhibitions themselves above and beyond the model of response provided by influential contemporary critics like John Canaday and William Rubin, who felt that these late Surrealist exhibitions were the death throes of the movement, which had ceased its provocations during World War II. An overview of the exhibitions will be followed with a look at their contemporary reception in both Europe in America. These two regions, with their idiosyncratic artistic and intellectual climates, posed different criteria for evaluating the movement's successes and failures in the post-war period. The reception of late Surrealist exhibitions in France was inflected by questions of social and moral re-definition that were preoccupying intellectual circles in post-war France. Surrealism's cultural critiques and political engagement were being evaluated against Existentialist and Communist offerings to a new French society. Exhibitions in the United States were viewed in terms of innovative artistic practice, judged by the quality of the individual work

and paradigms of Modernist visual art. This account of late Surrealist exhibitions will emphasize America's climate of reception in order to provide context for the Surrealist avant-garde's intersection with American neo-avant-garde artists Johns and Rauschenberg.

### **Chronology**

I believe many accounts underestimate the complexities attending the exchange between late Surrealism and new generations of art that would adapt Surrealist strategies of image making. I aim to go beyond this point both chronologically and conceptually, considering exhibitions from 1947 to 1960, expanding late Surrealism's struggle with its avant-garde agendas to a discussion of the interchange between the historical and neo-avant-garde. It is this contested position of Surrealist exhibitions in the post-war era that signals the ambiguous place that late Surrealism has in Modernist models of art history, wherein a pre-war avant-garde persists in the context of the neo-avant-garde's rise to prominence. Late Surrealist exhibitions can be seen as an occasion for dialogue about clashing Modernist models and as emissaries of a more experience-based viewing, which would become a strong force in the neo-avant-garde audiences of the 1950s and 60s.

I also want to address whether the evident neutering of Surrealism in the 1950s and 60s was mitigated by including emerging neo-avant-garde artists like Rauschenberg, Johns, Allan Kaprow, and Claes Oldenburg, which might suggest that instead of becoming mute, the Surrealist project was being actively continued and adapted in the present. It would appear that this collision of "historicized" Surrealism and the next generation posits a more complex relationship between the historical and neo avant-gardes. At the very least this collision begins to dissolve the distinct categorization of historical and neo. This overlap also suggests that the

Surrealists did not view these particular neo-avant-garde artists as hollow, inauthentic echoes of their avant-garde legacy. Incorporating artists like Rauschenberg and Johns into the Surrealist project may recoup a subset of positive qualities for the neo-avant-garde. The manner in which late Surrealist exhibition design invited viewer interaction and resisted straightforward observation of objects by enmeshing artworks in complex environments holds resonance with neo-avant-garde strategies of viewer involvement that are integral to Oldenburg's and Kaprow's environments and Happenings.

In regards to this temporal exchange between the neo-avant-garde and the historical avant-garde, late Surrealist exhibition history will here be viewed through the lens of the critical discussion among Peter Bürger, Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster. Literary critic Peter Bürger's influential text discusses the historical emergence and ultimate failure of the avant-garde, which provides for the emergence of the neo-avant-garde. Bürger's interpretation belongs to a wide field of theories of the avant-garde. Notable within this field are Renato Poggioli's 1968 *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*; Matei Calinescu's discussion of the avant-garde, decadence, kitsch, and postmodernism; and the theorizations of Paul Mann and Richard Sheppard. For the last quarter century, the exchange between Bürger, Buchloh and Foster has arguably become the most influential framework among U.S. art historians for discussing the goals, achievements and differences among late 19th and 20th-century avant-garde activities. These three authors construct the relationship between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde in terms of Modernist chronology, influence and revision. I hope to provide insight into the position of late Surrealism in, what these critics regard as, the transition from historical avant-garde to neo-avant-garde.

The first chapter of this project serves as a critical introduction to dominant theories of the intersection between the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde as proposed by Buchloh, Foster, and Bürger. A summary of their theories provides a framework through which one may evaluate the achievements and failures of late Surrealism, as well as conceptualize the overlap between neo-avant-garde and historical avant-garde strategies. The second chapter considers four late Surrealist exhibitions in order to illuminate the ambiguous place late Surrealism had within its own historical avant-garde legacy. The chapter will explore how these late exhibitions attempted to assert the vitality of post-war Surrealism and how Surrealism's ambitions for social change fared in the post-war environment. Particular attention will be paid to new exhibition strategies centered on myth and the occult, what the stakes were for the principal organizers of these exhibitions, and how Surrealism's evolving relationship with leftist politics and its opposition to high Modernist styles characterized its visual agenda. The third chapter will contrast how the exhibitions were envisioned by proponents of the Surrealist movement and how the exhibitions were received, exploring the resulting tensions. The exhibitions of the late 1950s and early 1960s will be treated as a site of interaction between a new generation of artists and the Surrealists. Neo-avant-garde practices, as exemplified by Rauschenberg and Johns, are traced to where they meet with Surrealist practices. Chapter four asks what this overlap between the neo-avant-garde and historical avant-garde means for the chronological progression of Modernism, as well as how the interaction of the Surrealist historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s revises our understanding of both.

## Chapter 1. Theories of the Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde

The purpose of my study is to extend the critical discussion of Surrealism and its exhibition projects beyond World War II and Surrealism's period of American exile, in order to offer a more chronologically and conceptually complete assessment of the Surrealist movement, whose "official"<sup>4</sup> activities continued into the 1960s. Expanding consideration of Surrealism's activities into an extended chronology entails an engagement with narratives of progression within the history of art. Firstly, within the narrative of Surrealism itself, the dialogue surrounding post-war Surrealist exhibitions<sup>5</sup> directly or indirectly deals with questions of whether this later phase of Surrealism could or should be conceived as a continuation of pre-war Surrealism, forming a continuous movement that was over time consistent in its commitments to altering social consciousness, as the Surrealists maintained in their written declarations throughout. Many historians and critics have placed the end of the movement at a point decades before the Surrealists themselves ceased group activities or retreated from public view.<sup>6</sup> These commentators presume a rupture within Surrealist chronology divided between a foundational early phase and a post-war epilogue that would serve as its foil. This division hinges on the perception of the efficacy of late Surrealism compared to early Surrealism. If there is a

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<sup>4</sup> Here, official refers to organized Surrealist activities that occurred under the auspices of André Breton, Surrealism's self-appointed leader, and his close collaborators. This "official" status will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

<sup>5</sup> This dialogue surrounding post-war Surrealist exhibitions is here treated as the dialogue created by contemporary reception of the exhibitions, the statements of those organizing the Surrealist exhibitions, and later scholarly assessments.

<sup>6</sup> Examples of these commentators include Museum of Modern Art curator William Rubin. He wrote that the first post-War exhibition in Paris, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, had been "the death knell of the movement" in his 1968 exhibition catalog, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage*. René Passeron's comprehensive history, *Surrealism*, ends "historical Surrealism" in 1940. Maurice Nadeau's 1945 *Histoire du surréalisme* claimed that Surrealism ended during World War II. Art historian Martica Sawin, also states that Surrealism had its death throes during the second world war in *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*.

recognizable break within the history of Surrealism, the relationship between the earlier and later developments needs to be examined. My project examines whether Surrealism, by the late 1940s, had been transformed into its own neo-avant-garde by repeating its earlier forms in meaningless nods to its own idealized past, which would indicate a recognizable break within the art historical narrative constructed about Surrealism by its commentators or if late Surrealism was more than an empty shell of its former self.

Secondly, extending the history of Surrealism to its later stages shifts the movement to overlap with other chronologies of Modernism. Official Surrealist activities lasted into the 1960s when other modes of artistic practice were emerging that would come to be categorized as neo-avant-garde. This chronological ambiguity in late Surrealism's avant-garde status is further heightened by the activities of neo-avant-garde artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns who also participated in these post-war Surrealist exhibitions. The Surrealist movement, with its roots in the pre-war historical avant-gardes on the one hand and collaborations with neo-avant-garde artists on the other complicates a history of Modernist progression that has tended to view the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde phases as separate and distinct moments. A critical framework is needed to evaluate the complexities attending the exchange between late Surrealism and new generations of art that would adapt Surrealist strategies of image making. Though the relationship between the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde has been explored within the framework of the avant-garde precedents of Dada and constructivism, the intersection between the Surrealist avant-garde and neo-avant-garde artists working in the 1950s and 60s has not received the same amount of attention. However, the chronological overlap provided opportunities for more direct association between Surrealism and the neo-avant-garde. I will offer a case study of such a relationship by examining Rauschenberg's and Johns' engagement

with late Surrealism, as well as the adaptation of Surrealist installation strategies in the works of neo-avant-garde artists such as Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg.

The dynamics between Surrealism's avant-garde legacy and its interaction with neo-avant-garde art practices in the late 1940s, 50s and 60s has been analyzed in terms of German theorist Peter Bürger's discussion of the historical and neo-avant-garde and with later formulations of avant-garde theory by art historians Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh. These three authors are concerned with how the historical avant-garde relates to the neo-avant-garde and the narratives of progression that best makes sense of that relation. Discussion of the efficacy of a movement conceptualized as an avant-garde and the relative value of its aftermath abuts the work of these three theorists, as does any discussion of the relationship between historical and neo-avant-garde as it frames the history of Modern art.

### **Theories of the Avant-Garde**

There are many complexities in the theories of historical progression advocated by Bürger, Buchloh and Foster, though only a brief overview of their far-reaching arguments can be considered here. An introduction to the key features of this influential field of discussion will help illuminate the main preoccupations of these authors and the main issues relevant to conceptualizing the relationship between the avant-garde and later artists.

German literary theorist Peter Bürger's seminal 1974 text, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, is the nexus of much discussion among art historians about the relationship of the historical avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s.<sup>7</sup> Bürger questions how the avant-gardiste intending to eradicate the currently existing institution of art through the process of sublation

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<sup>7</sup> *Theory of the Avant-garde* was first published in 1974 in German and translated into English in 1984.

manifested itself. He also examines how the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde project modified the category of the "work" of art and, ultimately considers why, in his estimation, the project of the avant-garde failed. Bürger argues for a chronology of Modernism through a Marxist developmental model, which posits a historical basis for the emergence of the historical avant-garde.<sup>8</sup> The avant-garde project was a reaction to the autonomy of art and its characterization as a segregated realm of aesthetic pleasure, which had developed in relation to bourgeois society in the nineteenth century. Art was conceptualized as distinct from everyday life. The resulting isolation of art from society led to the historical avant-garde's critique. Bürger argues that the historical avant-gardes represented a critical response to the social inconsequentiality of autonomous visual art. They sought to attack art as an institution and advance their project of reintegrating art into the praxis of life. These critiques are an identifying characteristic of the historical avant-garde: "The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men."<sup>9</sup> The avant-garde movements demanded that art become practical again, which necessitated challenging the manner that art functioned in society.<sup>10</sup> He explains the historical avant-garde's objectives as "the sublation of art... art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in a changed form."<sup>11</sup> Within the avant-garde vision, autonomous art is attacked and art reintegrated into the praxis of life, where life is transformed by its unity with art.

However, the historical avant-garde's project fails. In Bürger's assessment, the avant-gardes

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<sup>8</sup> Bürger's acknowledged model here is Georg Lukács *History and Class Consciousness* (1923).

<sup>9</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 49.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Bürger cites prewar Futurism, Dada, Constructivism, and Surrealism as examples of the historical avant-garde. Bürger's objective was to formulate a theory of the avant-garde as opposed to a history of individual avant-garde movements.

“profoundly modified the category of the work of art” though they did not destroy it.<sup>12</sup> Instead of destroying the institutions of art, the avant-garde movements ultimately become absorbed into the institution. The distance between art and life was not eliminated.

According to Bürger, the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 60s—movements such as Pop Art and *Nouveau Réalisme*—developed in historical relation to the avant-garde project. For Bürger, the neo-avant-garde proclaimed many of the same goals as the historical avant-garde, but could not lay claim to the fundamental avant-gardiste demand to break down the barriers between art and everyday life, since that project had failed with the historical avant-garde. “Although the neo-avant-gardes proclaim the same goals as the representatives of the historic avant-garde movements to some extent,” Bürger argues, “the demand that art be reintegrated in the praxis of life within the existing society can no longer be seriously made after the failure of the avant-gardiste intentions.”<sup>13</sup> The neo-avant-garde echoes the forms of the historical avant-garde but they are without meaning, “[s]ince now the protest of the historical avant-garde against art as an institution is accepted as *art*, the gesture of protest of the neo-avant-garde becomes inauthentic. Having been shown to be irredeemable, the claim to be protest can no longer be maintained.”<sup>14</sup> This rendered neo-avant-garde art as a “manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever.”<sup>15</sup> For Bürger the neo-avant-garde can adopt the visual, material, or strategic forms of the historical avant-garde, but could not seriously embrace the utopian vision behind the avant-garde intentions after their failure. Neo-avant-garde formal repetition cannot be accompanied by the transgressive meanings ascribed to those forms in the avant-garde era given that, by the 1960s, historical avant-garde practices had been

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 61.

embraced by institutions of high art. However, Bürger implies that the formal repetitions of the neo-avant-garde are characterized by an absence of meaning rather than a shift in meaning from the avant-garde past. In other words, a stovepipe displayed in a museum in the post-avant-garde era is clearly a formal repetition of a Duchampian ready-made. However, the post-avant-garde stovepipe cannot participate in the same institutional critiques and avant-gardiste intentions that Duchamp's ready-mades could. Bürger stresses the absence of avant-gardiste intentions (i.e. meaning) rather than addressing what new meanings the neo-Dada stovepipe has acquired in the post-war context. However, the appearance of the stovepipe in an art museum does demonstrate how institutions of art were changed by the activities of the avant-garde.

Art historians Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster attempt to recoup the neo-avant-garde from Bürger's negative characterization. Both Buchloh and Foster argue that Bürger's conception of the relationship between the historical and neo-avant-gardes is underpinned by notions of the superior original and the inferior copy, which neglects the complexity of this relationship. Buchloh, in his 2003 essay "The Primary Colours for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde" argues that Bürger's assessment of the neo-avant-garde is misguidedly negative and fails to recognize the neo-avant-garde's repetitions as part of an intended effect. "While it is evident that Bürger's model of repetition is infinitely more complex than those which traditionally separate the unique, auratic original from the debased copy," he argues, "it is also evident that Bürger's notion of the 'genuine' original versus the 'fraudulent' copy is still determined by the binary opposition ultimately deriving from the cult of the auratic original."<sup>16</sup> Buchloh argues that it was not the neo-avant-garde's intention to reclaim the past meanings of avant-garde forms in toto. Rather the neo-avant-garde was interested in creating

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, "The Primary Colours for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *Art of the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, eds. Jason Gaiger and Paul Wood (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2003), 99.

new meanings for the new social and artistic contexts of which they were now part.<sup>17</sup> The neo-avant-garde is able to appropriate aspects of the historical avant-garde as a meaningful activity instead of as an act of inferior imitation. For Buchloh the neo-avant-garde's activities *act upon* the historical avant-garde's meaning instead of being simple inheritors of avant-garde forms as they would be in an original and copy model. These neo-avant-garde repetitions are recast through a Freudian model of repetition "that originates in repression and disavowal,"<sup>18</sup> as an event that acts upon the earlier one rather than merely echoing its forms. Rather than the neo-avant-garde's repetitions being "devoid of sense" as they are in Bürger's account, Buchloh finds that this act of repetition itself creates the meaning.<sup>19</sup> For Buchloh the neo-avant-garde acts on the historical avant-garde by dislodging any monolithic, centralized meanings. In this model "the repetitive structure of the neo-avant-garde work, with its apparently identical chromatic, formal, and structural elements, prohibits the perception of an immanent meaning and dislodges this traditional structure. It displaces meaning to the peripheries, shifting it to the level of the syntagma and toward contingency and contextual heteronomous determination."<sup>20</sup> Monochrome paintings by Russian avant-gardiste Kazimir Malevich along with the work of Alexander Rodchenko and Nouveau Réaliste Yves Klein are cited by Buchloh to analyze the very different

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<sup>17</sup> Buchloh emphasizes this point by stating, "The primary function of the neo-avant-garde was not to re-examine this historical body of aesthetic knowledge [of the historical avant-garde], but to provide models of cultural identity and legitimation for the reconstructed (or newly constituted) liberal bourgeois audience of the postwar period. This audience sought a reconstruction of the avant-garde that would fulfill its own needs, and the demystification of aesthetic practice was certainly not among those needs. Neither was the integration of art into social practice, but rather the opposite: the association of art with spectacle. It is in the spectacle that the neo-avant-garde finds its place as the provider of a mythical semblance of radicality, and it is in the spectacle that it can imbue the repetition of its obsolete Modernist strategies with the appearance of credibility." Buchloh, "Primary Colors," 105.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>19</sup> Buchloh states "furthermore I want to ask whether it might not be precisely the process of repetition which constitutes the specific historical "meaning" and "authenticity" of the art production of the neo-avant-garde." Ibid., 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

meanings and strategies ascribed to works that bear remarkable formal and material similarities. It is actually the process of repetition, exemplified by Klein's monochromes, that authenticates the neo-avant-garde work by adapting historical avant-garde forms to the changed context of mass culture and spectacle, which creates new meanings for these forms that are specific to the neo-avant-garde. The neo-avant-garde repetition could even disavow the historical meanings that had been previously established for avant-garde forms through outright contradictions of historical avant-garde intent, which was the case with Klein's invocation of aura and consumption in his blue monotypes as a clear contrast to the demystification of color and artistic production intended by the Russian avant-garde. While the neo-avant-garde is dependent on the meanings, strategies, and modes of reception developed with the historical avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde also opens the historical avant-garde to a revised analysis in Buchloh's model.

Invoking the Freudian notion of trauma, Hal Foster argues in *The Return of the Real* (1996) that the historical and neo-avant-gardes are constituted as “a continual process of protension and retension, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts- in short, in a deferred action that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition.”<sup>21</sup> Foster suggests that the critiques and visual strategies of the historical avant-garde, in the moment of their origin, often fail to signify because they occupy holes in the symbolic order of their time.<sup>22</sup> Akin to a Lacanian model of repetition, the later act does not reproduce the original traumatic event, but instead re-enacts and recodes the trauma. The neo-avant-garde is not a meaningless repetition of the historical avant-garde event, but a critical re-enactment through which the historical avant-garde is comprehended. The re-coding through re-

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<sup>21</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

enaction allows the unreadable moment<sup>23</sup> of the historical avant-garde to become readable. The meaning of the original event only becomes readable, in fact becomes readable for the first time, as Foster argues, through later repetitions existing within a new symbolic order, as in a Lacanian reading of Freudian repetition compulsion.<sup>24</sup> It is the neo-avant-garde that begins a delayed comprehension of the projects of the historical avant-garde, such as critiques of art as an institution. The neo-avant-garde “repetition” enacts the project of the historical avant-garde with creative analysis and then with a deconstructive turn. To use one of Foster’s examples, the Dadaist avant-garde project was to destroy the aesthetic categories of the institution of art by attacking its formal conventions. Duchamp’s ready-mades challenged the autonomy of art by testing the boundaries of art and the everyday with an indifference to aesthetics, while also questioning the concept of the expressive artist. The return of the Dadaist ready-made under the neo-avant-garde gave the ready-made more aesthetic consideration than it had in its Dada manifestations. When Jasper Johns bronzed two beer cans to display at Leo Castelli’s gallery,<sup>25</sup> he re-enacted the Duchampian critique of art as commodity. Johns’ artistic intervention in the form of hand-painted labels adapts the ready-made tradition and reconstructs the Dada past as one of artists with a recognizable “aesthetic.”

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<sup>23</sup> The moment of the historical avant-garde is unreadable because there was no symbolic order through which to comprehend the traumatic event of the historical avant-garde’s critique, such as a Duchampian ready-made. The ready-mades could not have been considered art when they were first created.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 15. Foster’s model has been criticized, on several grounds, including the difficulty of applying a Freudian model of delayed action and repetition to a broad social group rather than to an individual psyche. Bürger responds to Foster’s model: “I consider it objectionable to transfer concepts used by Freud to describe unconscious, psychic events onto historical processes undertaken by conscious, active individuals.” (Peter Bürger, Bettina Brandt, and Daniel Purdy. “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 710).

<sup>25</sup> Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze*, 1960, oil on bronze, collection of the artist.

Particular questions are central to the three critics. Their arguments examine what the repetitions of the neo-avant-garde mean and what the neo-avant-garde's project is in relation to the historical avant-garde's project, since it is not one of straightforward continuity. Foster, Buchloh, and Bürger ask if the meaning of the neo-avant-garde's repetitions has any impact on the meaning of the historical avant-garde or, alternatively, if the historical avant-garde's primary role is to establish the visual and critical vocabulary that the neo-avant-garde will continue to work within and modify. Bürger, Buchloh, and Foster all respond to the critical predicament of placing the avant-garde within a Modernist history, wherein the avant-garde's aim to destroy the institution of art has become assimilated into that institution and into twentieth century art practice. Their models attempt to answer the question posed by art historians Jason Gaiger and Paul Wood: "whether and how art can sustain some form of critical or oppositional challenge to the status quo."<sup>26</sup> The efficacy of the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde is defined through their ability to present this challenge to the institutional status quo, thus providing criteria for judging the failure of such movements.

Bürger, Buchloh, and Foster agree that the neo-avant-garde is characterized by repetitions of the historical avant-garde and that the historical avant-garde is defined by its critiques of art's institutions, the role of the author, and its pursuit of everyday materials and experience as a means to integrate art into social practice. Their primary differences lie in how and whether they attribute value to the neo-avant-garde and how this value shapes the neo-avant-garde's relationship with the historical avant-garde. The concept of value and the characterization of the interaction of these theorists with each other are intertwined. Foster and Buchloh assign more efficacy and value to the neo-avant-garde because they posit a more active relationship between

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<sup>26</sup> Jason Gaiger and Paul Wood, *Art of the Twentieth Century: A Reader*, (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2003), 55.

the historical and neo-avant-gardes, where the neo-avant-garde impacts our understanding of the earlier phase. Bürger's description of the neo-avant-garde is scant, but is characterized as a purposeless revival in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Buchloh argues that neo-avant-garde reformulations were concerned with meeting the needs of its contemporary social reality and could not present the same challenges, as they were not responding to the same status quo as the historical avant-garde. Foster feels that neo-avant-garde repetitions are the first to comprehend the historical avant-garde's challenge and allow meaning to be affixed to the forms shared by both the historical and neo-avant-gardes.

These characterizations of the neo-avant-garde are related to another fundamental difference. Since the relative value of the neo-avant-garde in relation to the historical avant-garde is predicated on how deeply these phases of Modern art are thought to interact with one another, this interaction impacts accounts of Modernist progression. As Bürger perceives the neo-avant-garde as replicating forms of the earlier avant-garde without acting upon the avant-garde itself, his narrative is one of passive progression and a clear separation between the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde. Bürger argues for a chronology of Modernism through a Marxist developmental model that creates a trajectory from the conceptualization of art's autonomy in the later eighteenth century to the primacy of the historical avant-garde's critique of art's institutionalization, to the neo-avant-garde decline—a Modernist progression crippled by the failures of the historical avant-garde. Foster attempts to complicate this model, as does Buchloh. Though by different avenues, Buchloh and Foster muddy the clear chronological separation between the neo and historical avant-garde, rejecting the notion that avant-garde point of origin remains safely untouched in the past while the neo-avant-garde impotently echoes its forms. Both suggest that the neo-avant-garde has the potential to retroactively define the historical

avant-garde and begin to upset particular sets of values associated with stages of a Modernist history often conceived as progression and regression.

### **Bürger's Revised Current View: A Response to Foster and Buchloh**

In 2010's "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: an Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*," which followed 26 years after *Theory of the Avant-Garde*'s translation into English, Bürger seeks to revise his characterization of the neo-avant-garde and to clarify his thesis on the failure of the avant-garde. The characterization of the neo-avant-garde situation, for Bürger, is conditioned by the failure of the historic avant-garde. The post-avant-garde is condemned to repetition rather than continuation because the historical avant-garde had failed, causing a permanent shift in the discourse surrounding the shared forms of the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde.<sup>27</sup> This claim made Bürger's thesis about the failed avant-garde project and its afterlife in the post-avant-garde one of the most important theses in his theoretical formulation and one of the most contested. The circumstances of these failures receive more attention from Bürger after Foster and Buchloh's critiques. In Bürger's 2010 article, the historical avant-garde's failure is attributed to three factors. Firstly, there is "the failure of the desired reintroduction of art into the praxis of life."<sup>28</sup> The two most discussed factors are "the recognition of [the avant-garde's] manifestations by the art institution, that is, their canonization as milestones in the development of art in Modernity"<sup>29</sup> and "the false actualization of their

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<sup>27</sup> These shared forms could be material forms, such as the forms of salon painting or the use of mass art; strategic forms, as in the gesture of presenting a manufactured object or the use of chance; or visual forms as in the form of collage.

<sup>28</sup> Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 2010, 704-5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 705.

utopian project in the aestheticization of everyday life.”<sup>30</sup> The acceptance of the avant-garde milestones within institutions that promote aesthetic pleasure inverts the avant-garde interest in everyday life by making the everyday aesthetic.

The apparent impotence of the historical avant-garde’s critiques is softened in Bürger’s revised account by stressing the avant-garde’s utopianism. Failure is not meant to be equated with insignificance:

Measured against their goals and the hopes that they carried, all revolutions have failed: this fact does not lessen their historical significance. But it is precisely in its extravagance that the project of the avant-garde serves as an indispensable corrective to a society foundering in its pursuit of egoistical goals. This project was by no means conceptualized as purely aesthetic but also, at least for the surrealists, as moral.<sup>31</sup>

Thus according to Bürger, the very utopianism of the avant-garde ensured that their aims would never be fully achieved. He notes that “all revolutions have failed.”<sup>32</sup> Moral, aesthetic, and even social transformations were weighty objectives that created a constant deferment of their accomplishment. Nevertheless, even if these avant-garde objectives were never wholly realized, the attempts to realize them did serve an important “corrective” social function. In keeping with his partial redemption of avant-garde failure, Bürger distances himself from the perception that the historical avant-garde’s attacks on the institution of art were completely ineffectual and that the autonomy of art remained unchanged. “While the principle of autonomy did indeed demonstrate an astounding resistance,” he states, “this was only possible because the institution opened itself to the manifestations as well as the discourse of the avant-garde and made them its

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Though Bürger himself does not provide an example of “the aestheticization of everyday life,” his concept may be understood through the example of an album cover that employs Surrealistic imagery similar to that of Dalí or Rene Magritte. Advertisements and magazine layouts too begin to take on the appearance of surreal collages, but no longer have the jarring effect that they once did under Surrealism. Thus, through the influences of the culture industry, everyday life begins to look more like art by treating avant-garde techniques as an aesthetic.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 700.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 700.

own.”<sup>33</sup> The avant-garde did indeed transform the institution of art by virtue of the fact that it was accommodated within the institutional narrative of great artists and historical movements. Not only were artistic activities intended as a challenge to art and its institutions later accepted by those same institutions as art, but these challenges have also come to structure the discourse of these institutions. For Bürger, “the discourse of the institution is molded by the avant-gardes to a degree that no one could have predicted.”<sup>34</sup> Shock and rupture become a valid and influential manner of making and assessing art in the post-war period, while the avant-garde models make idealist aesthetics appear suspect. This leads to the paradox of the avant-garde’s failure for Bürger, wherein “the failure of the avant-garde utopia of the unification of art and life coincides with the avant-garde’s overwhelming success within the art institution.”<sup>35</sup> The historical avant-garde’s institutional success is thus a mark of its failure. But even if the avant-garde did not oust the structures promoting autonomous art, it did succeed in revising them.

Bürger sharpens the connection between *Theory of the Avant-Garde*’s theses on the institution of art’s resistance to the avant-garde attack and the moment when artistic means become freely available and are no longer confined to an evolution of stylistic norms. Both of these conditions are associated with the failure of the historical avant-garde and circumscribe the neo-avant-garde project. The institutionalization of the avant-garde, marking its failure, enables this freedom of artistic means. Now legitimized as aesthetic and artistic means, avant-garde visual practices including shock and rupture are adopted by neo-avant-gardists as well as the culture industry.

In Bürger’s view, the avant-gardists broke with the progression of Modernist continuity by taking up past, anti-Modernist material forms, such as those of salon paintings and mass art,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 705-6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 705.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

to provoke "attitudinal changes in the recipient" rather than creating a work of art meant to last into posterity.<sup>36</sup> However, after the avant-garde was institutionalized, the employment of outdated material forms that had been taboo under the Modernist project of continuity<sup>37</sup> no longer held their provocative qualities. The use of these outdated material forms became legitimated by the institution and internal to neo and post-avant-garde artistic practice. The significance of these forms to the avant-garde had relied on their outlier status. In a post-avant-garde world, these forms become legitimate artistic means. The avant-garde, therefore, had unintentionally laid the groundwork for "what would later be characterized as postmodernism: the possibility of a reappropriation of all past artistic materials."<sup>38</sup> Bürger does make a specific point that the historical avant-garde's intention was never to transform the institutions of high art by having their avant-garde strategies legitimized by the institution and recognized as aesthetic possibilities. Though the avant-garde's institutionalization had the ultimate effect of separating past artistic materials from the social critique that the use of these materials had once enabled, this separation allowed the neo-avant-garde to utilize these past material forms as artistic means. The historical avant-garde did not intend for this separation of past material forms and critique. For them, these past material forms offered critique *because* they were outside of the institution.

Bürger also responds to his detractors on the subject of his construction of history, which they claim to be teleological and devaluing that which is furthest from the center.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to Foster and Buchloh, he claims that he is not attached to a singular point of origin in the past.

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<sup>36</sup> Bürger cites as examples, veristic "salon painting in the case of the surrealists" and "the material of trivial and mass art (the collages of Max Ernst)." Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 706.

<sup>37</sup> That concept of Modernist continuity is based on the progressive evolution of distinct visual styles and artistic techniques.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> In this case, the neo-avant-garde is furthest from the center of the historical avant-garde's initial rupture.

Bürger denies Foster's charge that he treats the avant-garde as if it were an absolute origin.

Bürger says he treats the avant-garde as a response to, and subsequent break with, earlier stages of autonomous art and aestheticism. If the avant-garde project was to sublimate the institution of art and release its aesthetic potential into everyday life, the institution had already demonstrated its resistance to this project by conceptualizing the historical avant-garde provocation as a "work" that could be understood within the domain of discrete aesthetics. This institutional resistance and re-integration of the historical avant-garde project into the realm of aesthetics provided for the historical emergence of the neo-avant-garde. The resiliency of the institution had changed the social context of avant-garde action and form, and after a certain point, the neo-avant-garde's social context could no longer be one of crisis or revolution.<sup>40</sup> For Bürger, the neo-avant-garde's employment of avant-garde forms could not hope to sublimate art and life because the historical avant-garde had already failed to do so. Bürger further argues that Buchloh merely reverses the hierarchy he accuses *Theory of the Avant-Garde* of creating. He maintains that Buchloh devalues the avant-garde, and Duchamp in particular, in order to see the neo-avant-garde and its institutional critiques as an accomplishment.<sup>41</sup>

Bürger also answers the accusations of "residual evolutionism" wherein "history is both punctual and final"<sup>42</sup> made by Foster. Foster's reading of Bürger finds fault in a conceptualization of historical progression where the full significance of an artwork or aesthetic shift is evident "in its first moment of appearance, and it happens once and for all, so that any elaboration [by the neo-avant-garde] can only be a rehearsal."<sup>43</sup> This critique of Bürger's "residual evolutionism" underpins Foster's own point about the acts of the historical avant-garde

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 705.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 708.

<sup>42</sup> Foster, *Return of the Real*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

being bound up with deferred action, where the neo-avant-garde continually reconstructs the avant-garde past through its interventions. For Foster, the significance of avant-garde rupture is not fixed in the moment of its creation; he rejects a historical point of origin in favor of a process of continual re-enactment. Bürger, however, wants to distinguish deferred action, which he finds valid, from Freud's model of repetition. For Bürger, repetition compulsion is not a viable art-historical model because, in the Freudian sense, the individual unconsciously repeats an act, but is unaware of the prototype (the original act). The neo-avant-gardes, in contrast, were clearly aware of the avant-garde, and thus conscious of the prototypical act they repeat. The neo-avant-garde repetition, he argues, is neither unconscious nor compulsive. In the case of the neo-avant-gardes, Bürger says "we are dealing, rather, with a conscious resumption within a different context."<sup>44</sup>

Bürger also takes issue with the conception of the historical avant-garde as traumatic and Foster's conclusion that the avant-garde operated within a hole in the symbolic order of its time. Bürger argues that this trauma model "locates the decisive event in the act of repetition rather than at the origin of the traumatic fixation,"<sup>45</sup> which allows Foster to privilege the neo-avant-garde. A true rupture in the symbolic order, Bürger argues, would have helped achieve one of the avant-garde's aims to generate a crisis of consciousness. The fact that this crisis did not happen is evidence that the historical avant-garde project of rupture failed.

Rather than relying upon unconscious, compulsive repetition and conscious resumption as historical models Bürger draws upon a third process, his own concept of the return. With the process of the return "a later event illuminates a previous one, without there being a

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<sup>44</sup> Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 710.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 711.

demonstrable continuity between them.”<sup>46</sup> Here Bürger invokes Walter Benjamin’s concept of the “constellation,” in which one event makes another legible in a new manner. The second event is not a repetition, because, he says “it possesses its own context of emergence, which illuminates the first.”<sup>47</sup> An example of such a return according to Bürger are the utopian protests of May 1968, which had illuminated the political and social goals of Surrealism and made it legible in a way that it had not been before. Though Surrealism had been legible before 1968,<sup>48</sup> the return to its project allows the avant-garde’s meaning to shift. Though he indicates that the utopia of 1968 illuminates the utopia of the 1920s, Bürger is not explicit about how this later legibility differs from the legibility the avant-garde had when it first emerged historically. However, in Bürger’s concept of the return, the later event allows an earlier context of emergence to be understood in a new way. The circumstances of the first event can be read differently, providing a different sort of legibility.<sup>49</sup> The principal issue for Bürger is that this example of the protests of 1968 is a case of active, conscious revival rather than unconscious, naive repetition. He maintains that because the context allowing for the rupture of avant-garde practice has been fundamentally changed by the subsequent institutionalization of these practices, the neo-avant-garde could no longer link their artistic practices with transgression.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> He contests Foster’s claim that the avant-garde had been a hole in the symbolic order and remained largely incomprehensible until later repetitions. Though not a Surrealist insider, George Bataille, for example, produced texts that “testify to the legibility of the surrealist message in the 1920s.” Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> “While the historical avant-gardes could rightly consider the social context of their actions to be one of crisis, if not revolution, and could draw from this realization the energy to design the utopian project of sublating the institution of art, this no longer applied to the neo-avant-gardes of the 1950s and 1960s. The aesthetic context had also changed in the meantime. While the historical avant-gardes could still connect their practices with a claim to transgression, this is no longer the case for the neo-avant-gardes, given that avant-garde practices had in the meantime been incorporated by the institution.” Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde,” 712.

### **Models for Theoretical Structures of the Avant-Garde**

The avant-garde is confined to a specific historic moment. Bürger defines the historical avant-garde as particular to Dadaism, early Surrealism, Italian Futurism, and the Russian avant-garde after the October revolution. A common feature to all of these movements is that they “do not reject individual artistic techniques and procedures of earlier art but reject that art in its entirety, thus bringing about a radical break with tradition.”<sup>51</sup> Bürger, Buchloh and Foster rely upon Dada and subsequent reincarnation of neo-Dada as prime models for their theoretical structures defining the relationship between the historical and neo-avant-gardes. Bürger’s most famous example is that of Duchampian ready-mades and a "contemporary" stovepipe exhibited in the museum. Foster also favors Duchampian practice. For him, Jasper Johns and Arman continue Duchamp’s ready-made legacy. Buchloh and Foster’s accounts also cite Russian constructivism and its repetitions as a model for neo-avant-garde’s formal repetition and re-enactment of the historical avant-garde. Buchloh illustrates his argument by comparing monochromes by Malevich and Yves Klein. Foster identifies Robert Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Robert Ryman, and Ad Reinhardt with the neo-avant-garde for their reinventions of monochrome painting. Thus for these critics Duchampian ready-mades, constructivist and post World War II monochrome painting are the principal exemplars of the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde respectively. Surrealism is consistently identified as one of the avant-gardes that the theoretical structures of these three critics encompass, but it is not explicitly explored as a model in any of these accounts.

My project will shift these theoretical models of the historical and neo-avant-gardes to address Surrealism more specifically. While acknowledging early Surrealism’s status as a

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 102, fn. 4.

historical avant-garde, these theorists do not explore the specifics of Bretonian Surrealism as a transgressive exemplar of historical avant-garde critique. Hal Foster has stated that his own “model of the avant-garde is too partial and canonical, but [he offers] it as a theoretical case study only, to be tested on other practices.”<sup>52</sup> I intend to use Surrealism as just such a case study and to test these theories on the practices of European Surrealism’s last era.

### **The Roles, Achievements, and Failures of Surrealism as a Phase of the Historical Avant-Garde**

Foster, Buchloh and Bürger each offer a few observations about Surrealism as a phase of the historical avant-garde. The roles and achievements specific to the Surrealist avant-garde as well as reasons for its failure are discussed in terms of political and visual efficacy, which for these theorists are related conditions. A summary of Buchloh, Foster, and Bürger’s positions on Surrealism’s roles and achievements includes Surrealism’s displacing the authority of tradition by establishing a counter-canon, creating a crisis of rational existence, resistance to nationalism, providing for the availability of new artistic means, and challenging formalist Modernism by unraveling categories of medium and genre.

Bürger describes the roles shared by all avant-gardes as challenging the institutions of art, reintegrating art and life, and freeing artistic means from the discrete realm of aesthetics in an effort to remove obstacles which prevent art’s social efficacy. The avant-garde’s role is determined by its aims: “The unification of art and life intended by the avant-garde can only be achieved if it succeeds in liberating aesthetic potential from the institutional constraints which block its social effectiveness.” In other words: “the attack on the institution of art is the condition

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<sup>52</sup> Foster, *Return of the Real*, 8.

for the possible realization of a utopia in which art and life are united.”<sup>53</sup> For Surrealism specifically, this affront included establishing a counter-canon of authors, artists, and their works.<sup>54</sup> The movement resisted the hegemony of tradition, which claimed to define taste and experience. The notion of tradition was an integral part of the institution and supported a form of aesthetics that kept art and everyday life as separate modes of experience. “Rather than a break with tradition,” Bürger states, “what we find in surrealism is a displacement of the weight allotted to tradition.”<sup>55</sup> Surrealism’s valuation of non-Western art, automatism, naive art, and unorthodox literary figures like the Marquis de Sade was intended as a challenge to the authority of tradition just as it was intended to redeem these artists and works as vehicles of psychic potency.

Bürger also attributes a moral dimension to Surrealism’s attack on the institution of art. According to Bürger, Salvador Dalí had sought to attack the institution through an attack on “society’s dominant reality principle, which forms the counterpart of the art institution and makes it possible. Art can be institutionalized as autonomous, as a field exempted from the principle of moral responsibility, only to the extent that bourgeois society is ideally subject to these same principles of morality and responsibility.”<sup>56</sup> A goal of Surrealism was to trigger a “crisis of consciousness.”<sup>57</sup> If art could be autonomous and if bourgeois reality is subject to moral responsibility, this meant that art was not required to be morally responsible. By discrediting bourgeois rationalism, morality, and the “real world,” Dalí created an aura of irresponsibility and amorality that extended beyond the artwork. Through his paranoiac-critical

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<sup>53</sup> Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde,” 696.

<sup>54</sup> This counter-canon included authors such as Isidore Ducasse, Alfred Jarry, Raymond Roussel, and the painter Archimboldo. Bürger notes that it is difficult to recognize the full effect of this counter-canon today because these authors have since become part of the mainstream canon.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*,” 704.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 702.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

method and anti-rational imagery, he cast suspicion on society's belief in its own moral rectitude and facility for conscious control.

While directly engaging with Bürger about the historical avant-garde in "The Primary Colours for the Second Time," Buchloh does not comment on Surrealism or indicate what the achievement or failure of the movement might be.<sup>58</sup> In a later discussion with the scholars associated with the journal *October*, he does note that Surrealism's resistance to nationalism through a new concept of subjectivity was a significant part of its success as an avant-garde. Buchloh states that "in Surrealism a post-nation-state identity was put forward on the basis of radically emancipatory psychoanalytic models of subject-formation. These contested national identity as violently as a politically class-bound model of subject-formation did in the context of the Soviet avant-garde."<sup>59</sup> Surrealism was able to advance forms of expression that were not defined by the dominant political models of identity, which were inconsistent with the Surrealist call for social upheaval.

Surrealism's achievements were visual as well as political. For Bürger, one of the achievements of the avant-garde was that a wide range of techniques, procedures, and style could serve as artistic means, even those outcast by Modernism's endorsement of historically determined stylistic principles. Acceptance by Modernists of a historically evolving stylistic principle had previously limited the use and meanings of these techniques, procedures, and styles to particular historical moments, artistic schools, and visual contexts. Ernst's collages challenged this historical principle by incorporating the visual language of 19<sup>th</sup>-century mass-culture advertisements and illustrations. His intervention pried this imagery from a historically

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<sup>58</sup> However, in his review of Bürger's book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Buchloh disputes Bürger's view of Dalí's transgressive position. Benjamin Buchloh, "Theorizing the Avant-Garde," *Art in America* 72 (Nov 1984), p 20.

<sup>59</sup> Hal Foster and others, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 327.

conditioned notion of style, placed firmly within the last century's popular culture, and re-presented the imagery as a means to bring about uncanny juxtapositions that were foreign to their original historical context. Dalí revived the practices of salon painting to simulate the effects of hallucinations. This use of an outmoded or displaced visual language as artistic means also subordinated the style of the work to its intended effect. Surrealism accomplished this rupture by rejecting the very idea of style. According to Bürger, there was “no such thing as a dadaist or surrealist style. What did happen is that these movements liquidated the possibility of a period style when they raised to a principle the availability of the artistic means of past periods. Not until there is universal availability does the category of artistic means become a general one.”<sup>60</sup> Surrealism had revived established techniques of image making, like those from popular advertisements or salon painting, and utilized them in a way that had little to do with the meanings those artistic means cultivated through their historical development and within the narrative of stylistic progression. Artistic devices were valued only as a means to an end: creating a psychic reaction in the viewer. Bürger also notes that this kind of freedom of artistic means destroyed the possibility that “a given school [of artistic style] can present itself with the claim to universal validity” and negated “the possibility of positing [certain] aesthetic norms as valid ones.”<sup>61</sup> This practice draws analysis of avant-garde works away from a “normative analysis” based on aesthetics and pulls analysis towards a discussion of function and social effect, since the function of choosing artistic means is to produce a social and psychic effect.<sup>62</sup> The work of art is “subordinated to the project of revolutionizing living conditions and thus loses its aura and its illusion of metaphysical being in equal measure.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 697.

Surrealism in particular conceived of the work of art as part of the larger project of exposing and redefining man's relationship to the world. Bürger asserts Surrealism's general position on the work through reference to Breton: "the work...is for Breton a side issue, one which makes recognizable a certain relationship to the world—nothing more but also nothing less (*"on publie pour chercher des hommes, et rien de plus"* he writes in *La confession dédaigneuse*)." The work was valued for its utility in illuminating certain relationships with the world rather than illuminating the legitimacy of aesthetic concerns. Instead of being fully significant in itself, the Surrealist work is a means to gather awareness around the conditions of man, which can be accessed through the work of art.

Surrealism also questioned the categories of the art object.<sup>64</sup> One of the movement's achievements was that it provided a counterpoint to concepts of Modernism in painting and sculpture. Bürger points out that Surrealism was "relatively inattentive to the imperatives of form and mostly indifferent to the laws of genre,"<sup>65</sup> which sat uneasily with formalist accounts of Modernism founded on the evolution of abstraction from Cubism to Abstract Expressionism. Surrealist visual practice also ran counter to institutional insistence on recognizable categories of artistic production such as painting and sculpture. Surrealist objects often blurred these tidy distinctions.<sup>66</sup> Even its two-dimensional art pushed against traditional conceptions of painting's

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<sup>64</sup> Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1993), xv.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>66</sup> Mixed-media objects such as Dalí's *Scatalogical Object Functioning Symbolically* (1931) or Joseph Cornell assemblages are an obvious example of Surrealist works that disregarded distinctions between genre and media that were important to Modernism. The Surrealist parlor game, *Exquisite Corpse*, relied on collaborative creation and free association that muddled concepts of authorship. Surrealist poem-objects combined the literary genre with visual expression and often had poet and artist working together. Works like Meret Oppenheim's 1936 *Object* and Man Ray's *Gift* of 1921 openly incorporate mass-produced objects that are then modified by their creators. A cup, saucer, and spoon are covered with fur in Oppenheim's case, while Man Ray adhered tacks to a common clothes iron. These acts obscured the hand of the artist and complicated the distinction between sculpture and everyday object. Victor Brauner's

production by treating it “as an art suspended between automatist gesture and oneiric depiction.”<sup>67</sup> However, Foster asserts that Surrealism did not present the same challenges to formalism as Dada and constructivism.<sup>68</sup>

## Failure

Like all avant-gardes in Bürgerian theory, Surrealism failed because it was absorbed by the institution of art. Bürger suggests that Surrealism was aware of the danger of becoming institutionalized and that the "occultation" of Surrealism was a strategy to prevent the movement from being incorporated into the institution.<sup>69</sup> This occultation strategy is related by Bürger to Surrealism's role in establishing a counter-canon and highlighting the moral irresponsibility of autonomous art by cultivating irrationality. Embracing the anti-rational and the uncanonized realm of myth displaced tradition and allowed Surrealism to endorse categories of experience that were antagonistic to the Enlightenment values of European institutions. Though invocation of myth and the occult slowed Surrealism's assimilation by art institutions,<sup>70</sup> it could not prevent it. Surrealism saw the “false actualization of their utopian project in the aestheticization of everyday life.”<sup>71</sup> The techniques developed by the Surrealist avant-garde like jarring illogical juxtaposition in collage and montage became absorbed into popular culture and everyday life.

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*Wolf Table* was conceived as a painting and then again as a sculpture, signaling that medium was not central to the message.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xii. Surrealist painting had provided an alternative to formalist Modernism but, according to Foster, was seen as too kitschy, literary, or elitist to have much appeal to the neo-avant-garde who largely chose Dada and constructivism as their models. The kitschy Surrealist-era paintings of Francis Picabia were soon to become influential models for the so-called postmodernist vanguard.

<sup>69</sup> Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde,” 705.

<sup>70</sup> This may partially account for why the late phase of Surrealism that dealt most heavily with the occult has received less attention from museums, the art market, and the critical establishment than earlier periods of Surrealism.

<sup>71</sup> Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde,” 705.

However, these techniques were absorbed as a recognizable visual language deprived of social consequentiality and instead associated with exciting visual presentation that could be applied to popular imagery and commodities. A collapse of art and life had occurred, but in the form of the everyday being subject to the same logic of aesthetics that governed the institution of art.

Related to Bürger's point that the sheer ambitiousness of the avant-garde's project and utopian vision meant that these projects could never be actualized, he believes that Surrealism ultimately had to recognize its failure in these terms. "Some avant-gardists understood very well that their project would in all likelihood never be actualized (Breton, for this very reason, conceives of surrealist actions as an interminable preparation for an event that is continually deferred into the future)."<sup>72</sup> Overall, Bürger's analysis of Surrealism's political failings remains confined to the realm of unattainable utopian ambitions.

Buchloh believes the failure of the historical avant-gardes should not be registered in primarily artistic terms, an approach he identifies as one of Bürger's missteps, but instead this failure should be recognized in political and historical terms.<sup>73</sup> For Buchloh Surrealism's failure was bound up with its inability to assess World War II's rupture. Surrealism's adherence to the unconscious realm was obstinate and out of touch with a society grappling with tragic events, and finally, like other avant-gardes, Surrealism failed to maintain the adequate distance from mass culture that would sustain their critique.<sup>74</sup> These factors, according to Buchloh, provide the backdrop for Surrealism's elision from early accounts of American and post-war art. One of the chief reasons provided for this perceived irrelevancy was that Surrealism's response to the new historical situation was not sufficiently tragic. Buchloh ascribes a "radicality of the point of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, *Neo-Avant-Garde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000), xxiv.

<sup>74</sup> Dalí's embrace of spectacle and the commercial realms of design and decorative arts lends itself to Buchloh's observation of the avant-garde critique and its assimilation into mass culture.

departure” belonging to those artists, namely American Abstract Expressionists, who felt that pre-war culture was destroyed and irreparably lost.<sup>75</sup> As will be seen in **chapter three**, Breton and the Late Surrealist movement tried to minimize this rupture with pre-war culture and promoted their pre-war agendas of social and psychic revolution as relevant to post-war life. There is a sense that for Buchloh, Surrealism’s refusal to admit how drastically the cultural situation had been redefined by wartime events and its insistence on continuity with its own pre-war formulations were signs of its obsolescence. For other artists, the war and Holocaust had obliterated the cultural baggage of artistic tradition since pre-war life seemed unfathomably distant, strange, and inaccessible.<sup>76</sup> Their belief in total rupture enabled radical and innovative artistic approaches. Surrealism’s reluctance to start anew, caused by misjudging this chasm between the pre and post-war, according to Buchloh, meant that Surrealism could not reclaim the radicality that was central to their status as an avant-garde. Surrealism’s reliance on the unconscious as a revolutionary force also flounders for Buchloh in the post-war environment. While explaining why Surrealism failed to gain traction with artists in the post-war period, Buchloh provides a narrative about Surrealist decline that had been in circulation since the late 1940s:<sup>77</sup> “Surrealist indulgence in the unconscious was no longer valid after the trauma of World War II and the Holocaust.”<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the avant-garde’s project was irrevocably undermined when the destructive force of nationalism, laid bare by World War II, had clearly outweighed

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<sup>75</sup> Foster and others, *Art Since 1900*, 320. In the early and mid 1940s, however, many of the Abstract Expressionists were deeply affected by Carl Jung's conception of the unconscious, not only in relation to the creative process, but also as an explanation for the evils of WWII. The Surrealists' explorations of the occult and the connections they sought with the spiritual roots of First Nations peoples during the period of American exile suggests their recognition of pre-war culture's irreparable loss.

<sup>76</sup> However, this response to tragedy also mirrors the circumstances under which Surrealism developed after WWI.

<sup>77</sup> For discussion of the critical legacy of connecting Surrealism’s irrelevance to the rupture of WWII and the holocaust, the see chapter three.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 320

any transformative power that pursuing the unconscious held. However, Surrealism's strong opposition to nationalism was the product of the artists' visceral responses to World War I and the opposition occurred after World War II.

Though not specifically about Surrealism, Buchloh identifies one of the principal failings of the avant-garde, which occurred between 1933 and 1945, as their inability to maintain the boundaries between "avant-garde culture and the mass-cultural public sphere."<sup>79</sup> Those boundaries had broken down, thus collapsing the avant-garde with what it had hoped to critique. Buchloh claims that the neo-avant-garde seemed to reconstruct those boundaries, but this project failed too. The failure of Surrealism was that it could not keep a critical distance from the mass culture it hoped to transcend and was instead infiltrated by that which it sought to critique. Similarly, subject-formation based on the unconscious, the means by which Surrealism hoped to achieve this transcendence, seemed impotent to Buchloh in the face of traumatized post-war reality.

Foster feels that Bürger defines Surrealism's failure as the "failure to reconcile subjective transgression and social revolution."<sup>80</sup> He too adopts these two poles to discuss Surrealism's failure. One of the downfalls of Bretonian Surrealism was that its rhetoric about breaking down social, moral and even aesthetic barriers often reinforced those barriers in actuality. Speaking of

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<sup>79</sup> Buchloh derives this concept of art's resistance to mass culture and Modernism's protest against society from Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno. Buchloh's pessimism in regard to the possibility of agency in the light of the spectacle and the beginnings of late capitalism is inherited from the Frankfurt School. However, historical avant-garde did not necessarily conceptualize the divide between high and mass culture in the same terms that Adorno did. Breton and his Surrealist colleagues searched the commercial stalls along the Seine for Surrealist objects. Dadaists and Surrealists like Max Ernst utilized images from mass culture for their collages. Popular film heroes, like Fantômas and Charlie Chaplin, were embraced by the Surrealists too. In an earlier era, the Italian Futurists derived techniques from popular night club performances and commercial advertising. Thus the dynamic between high and low in avant-garde culture may be more nuanced than Buchloh suggests.

<sup>80</sup> Foster, *Return of the Real*, 13. Here Foster alludes to Surrealism's challenge in terms outlined in Walter Benjamin's influential 1929 essay, "The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligensia."

Surrealism's strategy of using the abject to test sublimation, for example, Foster states that "often Breton and company did act like juvenile victims who provoked the paternal law as if to ensure that it was still there- at best a neurotic plea for punishment, at worst in a paranoid demand for order."<sup>81</sup>

Surrealism's successes in Foster's estimation have to do with breaching the clean categories and imperatives important to the institution and dominant narratives of Modernity. Surrealism's failure is that these challenges to the dominant order often reinforced that order rather than destroying it. For Buchloh, Surrealism's successes and failure are historically and politically conditioned. The failure is defined as the avant-garde project's collapse into mass culture, eliminating the critical distance important for Surrealism's critique of bourgeois society. Also, Surrealism's insistence on continuity with its own past no longer made sense in a society irrevocably changed by the events surrounding World War II. For Bürger, Surrealism's successes and failures are about artistic means and the effectiveness of challenges to the institution.

### **Historical Narratives and Questions of Efficacy**

In my analysis, the primary focus is on two key aspects of these theorists' work. The first of these is Bürger's three phases of historical development as outlined in his 1972 study. His discussion of temporality and the progression of artistic phases is important to this study as it addresses chronologically overlapping models of the historical and neo-avant-gardes. To recap: the three phases are (1) bourgeois art as a domain of autonomous pleasure, (2) the historical avant-garde's rejection of this autonomy, and (3) the repetition of historical avant-garde forms in the neo-avant-garde. These phases involve concepts of time and repetition which are important for assessing late Surrealism's position within the progression of Modernism and late

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 159.

Surrealism's relationship with the repetitions of the neo-avant-garde. As each phase is conceptualized as a reaction to the previous one, where a movement is placed within this progression of historical developments has a good deal to say about that movement's objectives and achievements. Each phase has its particularized field of roles, successes, and failures.

Late Surrealism occupies an ambiguous place within this succession of historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde phases. The Surrealists participating in post-war exhibitions were vocal about late Surrealism's continuity with the earlier phase of Surrealism that serves as the three theorists' definition of the historical avant-garde. At the same time, many critics were insisting that the Surrealist historical avant-garde had died and that post-war Surrealism was something distinct from and inferior to historical Surrealism. Narratives of historical progression with its temporal aspects and valuations are a necessary part of assessing whether late Surrealism was considered a part of the historical avant-garde, whose characteristics were defined by the objectives of early Surrealism. Alternatively, these criteria of historical progression help assess whether late Surrealism had greater affinities with the neo-avant-garde, which was emerging as the last Surrealist exhibitions were being produced and was defined by repetition of avant-garde forms despite its observable break with the avant-garde tradition.

The second key aspect important to my analysis is the issue of efficacy stemming from Foster's, Buchloh's, and Bürger's critical discussion. These theorists are preoccupied with political and social efficacy in debating the relative merits of the historical and neo-avant-gardes, which colors their accounts of historical progression. Efficacy is often the dividing line between avant-garde ambition and inferior repetition. It is with the failure of the avant-garde that the phase of the neo-avant-garde emerges in Bürger's account. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of the *constellation*, wherein unrelated historical events are linked by a sudden flash of

their significant commonalities, Bürger develops his concept of the "return" to explain the relationship between the historical and neo-avant-gardes. In a "return" the neo-avant-garde emerges through its own historical context, which is distinct from the circumstances through which the historical avant-garde developed. The neo-avant-garde self-consciously "illuminates" the earlier historical avant-garde event through an acknowledgement of their shared concerns or shared fate despite their chronological separation.<sup>82</sup> Buchloh and Foster give the neo-avant-garde efficacy that it does not have in Bürger's theory of historical development and later responses, by theorizing a more dynamic exchange between historical phases. For Foster and Buchloh, the neo-avant-garde reclaims efficacy by acting upon the historical avant-garde's meanings and modifying our understanding of them. This conception of reclamation provides a framework for re-thinking the objectives and accomplishments of late Surrealist visual art. Surrealism's avant-garde ambitions necessarily take on political dimensions that are dependent on their effectiveness. If the Bürgerian failure of Surrealism, as a historical avant-garde, was that it was, in Foster's words, never able to "reconcile subjective transgression and social revolution,"<sup>83</sup> then Surrealism's later formulations would be seriously hindered by the successive disappointments of Stalinist communism. Surrealism's alliance with communist politics in the 1920s and 30s had been an important means of communicating the movement's dedication to social revolution and when Surrealism later broke with communism, the means by which it could facilitate social liberation were called into question. The success of Surrealism's visual program depended largely on stirring psychological effects in the bourgeois viewer through principles of shock, juxtaposition, the uncanny, and the fetish. Within this critical framework late Surrealism's efficacy in these political and visual aspects determines its status as an avant-garde, characterized

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<sup>82</sup> Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 711-712.

<sup>83</sup> Foster, *Return of the Real*, 13.

by valid critiques of bourgeois art and culture, and how its particular historical moment is to be characterized within the narratives of Modernist progression.

Bürger, Foster, and Buchloh's discussions establish a critical framework for re-evaluating late Surrealism's temporal exchange with the neo-avant-garde and the historical avant-garde. My study within this framework will consider late Surrealist visual art at the exclusion of Surrealist literary endeavors. This project will focus on collective expressions of the Surrealist movement's potential in the form of group exhibitions rather than focusing on individual works in order to track the progression of Surrealism as an artistic movement. By concentrating on late Surrealist exhibitions this study will attempt to chart the position of the Surrealist movement as a whole along the chronological progression from the historical avant-garde to neo-avant-garde. Profiling the organizers of the exhibitions also allows us to work with a centralized conception of the exhibitions rather than the artistic pursuits of the individual artists and their varied responses to the Surrealist project.

To better gauge the efficacy of late Surrealism, its proposed achievements, as voiced through group exhibitions and statements of their organizers, will be measured against trends in the reception of these exhibitions. By reading the ambitions of post-war Surrealism against a largely negative critical and public reception of these exhibitions— a reception that often contested late Surrealism's position as an avant-garde movement with truly revolutionary aims— I will consider the ambiguity as to whether late Surrealism should be identified as a forward-looking movement, confronting new challenges with evolving attitudes toward art and display, or as a backward-looking movement, crippled by nostalgia for its more successful avant-garde past.

## Chapter 2. Late Surrealist Exhibitions and the Post-War Surrealist Project

This account of late Surrealist exhibitions looks at the exhibition design of four shows, which were directly sanctioned by authorities within the Surrealist movement, along with their contemporary reception in the form of exhibition reviews. Major Surrealist exhibitions took place in Paris after World War II, including *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* (1959) in Paris. Two significant exhibitions were also held in New York, 1947's "Blood Flames" and 1960's "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain."

To talk of an "official" status for these exhibitions becomes complicated by several factors. "Official" exhibitions presuppose an "official" Surrealism. Most accounts of the Surrealist movement focus on the group of artists, writers, and intellectuals that gathered around André Breton in Paris. However, Surrealism extended beyond Breton and his followers. Begun in Paris as an offshoot of Parisian Dada, Surrealism soon became an international movement with largely autonomous centers of Surrealist activities, which operated independently from Breton's group. Active Surrealist groups were located in England, Latin America, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia among other places. Surrealism, as a movement, was heavily defined by its collective activities such as café meetings, group manifestos, and exhibitions. Parisian Surrealism had the most visible group activities with its high output of written tracts, manifestos, and infamous excommunications, and membership fluctuation that came to define the ambitions of the movement in the eyes of the public. Breton's prominent place in the Parisian intellectual community afforded him a platform for conspicuously vocalizing the tenets of the Surrealist group he led. There were also those Surrealists who splintered from Breton's Surrealist group and persisted in their activities. Georges Bataille is a notable example of those who still regarded

themselves as operating within Surrealism,<sup>84</sup> but pursued a vision of Surrealism distinct from Breton's. Frequently, there were artists and thinkers whose outlooks were compatible with Surrealism and whose careers intersected with the movement at various points, but did not consider themselves to be members of the group. This is the case with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, as we will see later.

The notion of "official" Surrealist activities becomes complicated from a chronological standpoint as well. It becomes difficult to say when the Parisian Surrealists ceased functioning as an official group, capable of conferring "official" status to exhibitions. Breton's death commonly serves as the endpoint of the prominent sect of Surrealism that he helmed for decades. His death in 1966 cast serious doubts about whether the Parisian-based Surrealist movement should continue, though debate on this issue persisted for a few years afterwards. Jean Schuster, one of the most important members of post-war Parisian Surrealism, announced publicly in 1969 that pursuing collective Surrealist activities would be impossible. The French group ceased their habit of daily café meetings in 1969,<sup>85</sup> dissolving the activity that had been essential to maintaining Surrealism's group dynamics.

The four late Surrealist exhibitions considered in this study take place before Breton's death and within his purview and that of the figures associated with Parisian Surrealism. It is important for this study to treat the faction of Surrealism that still considered itself a cohesive group with defined narratives about its avant-garde ambitions in order to conceptualize the relationship between the avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde. For this reason, I focus on those

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<sup>84</sup> Bataille famously called himself "surrealism's old enemy from within," referring to his role as dissident to Bretonian Surrealism.

<sup>85</sup> Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski, *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*, (London: Pluto, 2001), 5.

group exhibitions that were sanctioned by Breton, even if he was not directly involved in their execution.<sup>86</sup>

The organizers of these exhibitions were major artistic and intellectual figures, though they were not all necessarily Surrealists themselves. Marcel Duchamp never identified himself as a Surrealist, nor as a card-carrying member of any movement. However, he was the chief organizer for the “Surrealist Intrusion into the Enchanters’ Domain” exhibition in 1960 and co-organized 1959’s *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* with Breton. Breton had a good deal of deference for the older Duchamp and trusted his opinions. Whereas Breton felt sufficient ownership of these exhibitions—enough to be outraged by Salvador Dalí’s inclusion in “Surrealist Intrusion into the Enchanter’s Domain”<sup>87</sup>—the autonomy he afforded Duchamp when organizing these two Surrealist exhibitions signaled his confidence in the compatibility of his own vision with Duchamp’s. Breton’s confidence in Duchamp also translated into the appointment of Frederick Kiesler, whom Duchamp recommended, to design “Blood Flames” and *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Kiesler was friendly with the Surrealists during the war years in New York, but had been associated with several other avant-garde groups in Europe and was committed to his own goals of innovating architecture. Nicolas Calas, who organized “Blood Flames,” was an important figure in the group of Parisian Surrealists exiled in America. Calas worked on periodicals that promoted Surrealism’s presence in America, such as *View* and *VVV*,<sup>88</sup> which Breton also contributed to and kept close editorial control of in the case of *VVV*. Breton and Calas were involved in the same project of promoting “official” Surrealism and operated relatively harmoniously in the same circle during the 1940s. Though he was later criticized by

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<sup>86</sup> Breton was directly involved in planning *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and had sent the participating artists invitations to exhibit.

<sup>87</sup> Gérard Durozoi, *History of the Surrealist Movement*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 592.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 657.

Breton and eventually broke away from the group, Calas identified himself as a Surrealist and was an active member of the movement during this post-war period, writing a “Surrealist Dictionary,” creating a late Surrealist manifesto, and contributing to affiliated periodicals. Despite their various degrees of linkage with “official” Surrealism, the visions of these main organizing figures in post-war Surrealist exhibitions were aligned with Breton’s current goals for the Surrealist revolution.

The aims and stakes for the exhibitions' organizers are also important for understanding, not only why these projects were undertaken, but also how the Surrealist movement conceived of itself in the years beyond World War II. The presentation of an immersive experience for the audience, consistent with earlier Surrealist aims to stir a disquieting reaction within the viewer, were traits of all four exhibitions. Aside from creating unorthodox installations, late Surrealist exhibitions carried messages about the movement's international influence and continued adaptation to the present day. In shifting post-war intellectual and political contexts, these exhibitions were tasked with combating, either explicitly or implicitly, the notion that Surrealism was a historicized moment between the World Wars by emphasizing the movement's current achievements and its relevancy for the future. There was often a discrepancy between the intentions of the organizers of these exhibitions, who thought they were effective statements about the continued viability of their artistic and political revolution, and a large portion of the critical establishment who felt that the Surrealist movement had exhausted its potential and had become a parody of itself. The oft-conflicting narratives that emerge from contemporary critical reception and the aims of the Surrealist organizers form the backdrop for a conversation about how efficacy should be defined in an avant-garde movement.

## European Exhibitions

The Paris exhibitions *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* (1959), as well as their reception, were involved with the changing political and intellectual scene in France. The French Communist party and Existentialism had filled the void created by the Surrealists departure to America during the war.<sup>89</sup> The Surrealist revolution claimed to be a preparation for social and political upheaval, and for this reason Surrealism was very much embroiled in these post-war debates about how the social structure and individual psyche within society should be re-conceptualized. Sartrean existentialism struggled to reconcile history and morality. Communism promised to combat both alienation and the legacy of Fascism by upsetting class divisions. Surrealism offered the concept of the “new myth” to create a new community unified by a common belief that was not based on nationalism, rationalism, or positivism. Breton had called for the occultation of Surrealism in 1929 with the *Second Manifesto*. His interest in myth, magic and the occult was intensified during his period of American exile and the period immediately following the war. Breton’s encounters with Hopi<sup>90</sup> and Voodoo rituals during this American period left a great impression on him. After the war these experiences caused him to seek a regeneration of society through myths, such as “The Great Transparent Ones.” *Le Surréalisme en 1947* was the most direct expression of Breton’s, and hence Surrealism’s preoccupation with the occult. One of the goals of the exhibition was to create a new mythology, and through the various stages of initiation these myths could be revealed to the visitor.

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<sup>89</sup> This phenomenon of French Communists' and Existentialists' domination of the French post-war intellectual domain is explained by Martica Sawin’s chapter “Paris, 1945-1947: In the Time of Lean Cows” in *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1995).

<sup>90</sup> Breton also amassed a large personal collection of Hopi kachina dolls and masks.

### *Le Surréalisme en 1947*

*Le Surréalisme en 1947* was the first major post-war Surrealist exhibition in France and took place at Galerie Maeght in Paris. It was organized around themes of superstition, the occult, primitivism, and myth. A carefully planned progression led the viewer through the Room of Superstitions, The Rain Room, and the Labyrinth of Initiations. The concept of the exhibition was developed by André Breton as part of Surrealism's grand return to France and was executed by Marcel Duchamp and Frederick Kiesler. Kiesler had made a name for himself by designing innovative avant-garde environments for art and theater.<sup>91</sup> With this in mind, Breton invited Kiesler to design, with some assistance from Duchamp, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*'s elaborate exhibition space.<sup>92</sup> Marcel Duchamp contributed ideas for the Room of Superstitions and Labyrinth of Initiations.

The exhibition brought together 88 artists from 24 countries, resulting in an international statement.<sup>93</sup> Duchamp had conceived of the section "Surrealists despite themselves," which was to feature paintings from the seventeenth and eighteenth century thought to have been created in a Surrealist vein, though not self-consciously so.<sup>94</sup> This would have extended Surrealism's foundations, giving legitimacy to the claim that Surrealism was a state of mind rather than something confined to a particular historical moment or place. The idea that Surrealism belonged

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<sup>91</sup> Frederick Kiesler had been associated with the De Stijl movement among others before becoming involved with Surrealism. Kiesler is best known in the United States for the dramatically designed Surrealist gallery in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century venue, which has been seen as an important precursor to ambitious contemporary exhibitions.

<sup>92</sup> Duchamp introduced architect Frederick Kiesler to Breton in the 1940s.

<sup>93</sup> Caroline Cros, *Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Vivian Rehberg (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2006), 105.

<sup>94</sup> Cros, 104. Hieronymus Bosch, Giuseppe Archimboldo, and William Blake were to be included. Images of these works were printed in the exhibition catalog, though they did not appear in the exhibition.

to a particular moment that had in the opinion of many, already passed, was a central concern for Breton and others within Surrealism. However, the "Surrealists despite themselves" sections and the grouping of artists who "had ceased to gravitate in the movement's orbit" were never realized.<sup>95</sup> A surrealist meal in a Surrealist kitchen was envisioned to provide physical and spiritual replenishment for the visitor-initiate.<sup>96</sup> This meal was also never actualized, but speaks to the heightened sense of viewer engagement present in the exhibition's conception.

The artworks and their various spaces were set up to lead the visitor through stages simulating the successive steps needed to acquire "knowledge." This particular form of knowing, conceived in relation to the archetypal and occult, was meant to underpin a new myth for French society. The exhibition design's emphasis on ritual and irrationality along with writings published to accompany the exhibition advanced the longstanding Surrealist mantra that Western society's insistence on reason had destroyed man's ability to experience the marvelous and appreciate the mysterious operations of chance. Breton envisioned an exhibition that was in accord with "a primordial concern to retrace successive stages of an initiation; the passage from one room to the next will imply graduation."<sup>97</sup> The various environments and the artworks gathered together under their experiential guises was meant to elicit a certain consciousness of self and to extend the model of ritual and superstition as a means of navigating the world.

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<sup>95</sup> The "Surrealists despite themselves" were intended to accompany those artists who "had ceased to gravitate in the movement's orbit," i.e. those who had abandoned or been dispelled from Breton's Surrealist band. The concept of "Surrealists despite themselves" can be traced to the initial 1924 manifesto of Surrealism, where Breton lists historical figures ranging from Uccello to Sade whose work, at times, could "pass for Surrealism."

<sup>96</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros: 1938-1968* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 130.

<sup>97</sup> André Breton and Marcel Duchamp. *Le Surréalisme En 1947: Exposition Internationale Du Surréalisme* (Paris: Maeght, 1947)

The first stage was a passageway. Twenty-one steps appeared as dust jackets of books that corresponded to the 21 major arcana of tarot,<sup>98</sup> which allowed one to access the main spaces of Galerie Maeght [figure 1]. The authors represented many of the forefathers of Surrealism such as Ducasse, Rousseau, Fourier, Baudelaire, Sade, and Apollinaire. Abstract concepts from tarot were mapped onto the literary works, giving them an archetypal resonance. The act of ascending the emphatically symbolic staircase heightened the sense that the visitor was entering a different plane of experience.

The Room of Superstitions was a large area at the top of these literary stairs. It was conceived as a space where the visitor had to overcome their superstitions before she could enter the other rooms. This first room of the installation acted as a gateway. It was a space "which opens the theoretical cycle of ordeals, must complete the synthesis of the principal existing superstitions and oblige one to overcome them in order to continue the visit of the exhibition."<sup>99</sup> Kiesler's plan for the space shows a double parabolic structure, whose curving forms emphasized a continuity of space and enfolded the contents of the room into an uncanny realm of vastness and confinement [figure 2]. Black curtains attached to floor and ceiling functioned as walls to create a sense of shapelessness.<sup>100</sup> Lighter curved forms arced across the ceiling and descended to the floor [figure 3]. In his catalog essay Jean Arp described the room as a large egg that simultaneously produced a sense of "encroaching anxiety" and surrounded the viewer "like in the bosom of his mother."<sup>101</sup> Kiesler's emphasis on the "unity in which the Painting-Sculpture-

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Breton's invitation letter, quoted in Durozoi, 466

<sup>100</sup> Cynthia Goodman, "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," *Frederick Kiesler*, ed. Lisa Philips (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in Association with W.W. Norton, 1989), 73.

<sup>101</sup> Jean Arp, "L'oeuf de Kiesler et la Salles des Superstitions," *Cahiers d'Art* 22 (1947): 283, 281.

Architecture components metamorphose one into the other"<sup>102</sup> blurred the lines between artwork and environment, enveloping the visitor and the works on display. Some of these curtain walls had small holes that looked into interior spaces, which created a peephole effect. Max Ernst's *Euclide* was only visible through one of these holes.<sup>103</sup> Sculpture and painting reiterated the concept of superstition with references to totemism and quasi-ethnographic imagery [figures 3, 4, 5].<sup>104</sup> The visitor was then led to the next stage of "initiation." A curving thread in all the rooms visually unified the entire exhibition<sup>105</sup> and facilitated passage from one room to the next.

Duchamp conceived of a wall of colored rain that fell from the ceiling and obscured the spaces that lay beyond it. The curtains of rain fell onto special draining boards and complemented artificial grass lying nearby.<sup>106</sup> This Rain Room was meant to suggest ritualistic purification and renewal.<sup>107</sup> Behind this there lay a billiard table where visitors could play,<sup>108</sup> completing another step of induction through ritualized play. The next room featured twelve octagonal recesses that each housed an altar that was reminiscent of pagan or voodoo cults.<sup>109</sup> This was the Labyrinth of Initiations designed by Breton [figures 6, 7, 8, 9].<sup>110</sup> Each altar corresponded to a sign from the zodiac and enshrined an object that could be endowed with a mythical life or represented a Surrealist mythical being.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, 134.

<sup>103</sup> Mahon, 124.

<sup>104</sup> The most notable of these include Kiesler's *Anti-Taboo Figure*, Kiesler's collaborative sculpture *Totem of Religions* with its combination of trans-cultural religious symbols, and Joan Miró's painting *The Rigid Cascade of Superstitions* with its abstract forms meant to symbolize superstitions. For a discussion of totemism and the ethnographic in the Room of Superstitions see Alyce Mahon's *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros: 1938-1968*.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Cros, 105.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Mahon, 126.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

Attention to the irrationality of the marvelous and chance, along with an ennoblement of "primitive" thinking, had been a major thread of Surrealist theory since the early days of the movement, but the preoccupation now took on a mythical cast. The "occultation" of Surrealism and its interest in myth was not particular to the post-war years either, though these concepts did find their fullest visual expression in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. Myth was not a literary preoccupation, but was understood by the Surrealists as a means of creating community and as essential to the structure of society. Surrealism as a means to social myth was first suggested in 1935 in the preface to *Political Position of Surrealism*.<sup>112</sup> In 1942 Breton asked, "What should one think of the postulate 'there is no society without social myth'?" and "in what measure can we choose to adopt and *impose*, a myth fostering the society that we judge to be desirable?"<sup>113</sup> Breton's proposal to consciously choose and propagate myth for the kind of social transformation that had been central to the Surrealist revolution was taken even further when the Surrealists created a myth of their own. One such "new myth" promoted by *Le Surréalisme en 1947* was the Great Transparents. The Great Transparents were beings suspended between existence and nonexistence, visibility and invisibility, that were only revealed to initiates or those whose embrace of irrationality opened them up to this sort of mythical encounter. Breton introduced the Great Transparents as strange creatures and superior to human kind, suggesting a world beyond human preoccupations:

Man is perhaps not the centre, the cynosure of the universe. One can go so far as to believe that there exist above him, on the animal scale, beings whose behavior is as strange to him as his may be to the mayfly or the whale. Nothing necessarily stands in the way of these creatures' being able to completely escape man's sensory system of references through a camouflage of whatever sort one cares to imagine, though the possibility of such a camouflage is posited only by the theory of forms and the study of

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<sup>112</sup> Ellen Adams, "After the Rain: Surrealism and the Post-World War II Avant-garde, 1940-1950" (PhD diss., NYU Institute of Fine Arts, 2007), 67-68.

<sup>113</sup> André Breton, "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto... Or Not," *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 287-288.

mimetic animals...it would not be impossible, in the course of a vast work over which the most daring sort of induction should never cease to preside, to approximate the structure and the constitution of such hypothetical beings (which mysteriously reveal themselves to us when we are afraid and when we are conscious of the workings of chance) to the point where they become credible.<sup>114</sup>

These mythic creatures are beyond human control. Like all of the new myths, the Great Transparents mediated between humans and the natural world. They also operate in a hypothetical state that transcends the rational. Even observation of the Great Transparents is limited to occasions where rationality is eroded: in moments of fear or chance when the world becomes unpredictable.

The Surrealists propagated this new myth of the Great Transparents through art and text. The concept for The Great Transparents had first been visually presented as a montage in a section of 1942's "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition catalog, entitled *De la survivance de certains mythes et de quelques autres mythes en croissance ou en formation*.<sup>115</sup> The montage featured an engraving of Jupiter and the winds,<sup>116</sup> a quote from Guy de Maupassant's *La Horla* which tells of a man haunted by a an invisible or transparent creature, and David Hare's photographic *brûlage* of a woman's body transformed into flame [figure 10].

A visual approximation of these mythic creatures in the form of Jacques Hérold's sculpture "Great Transparent One" was displayed prominently in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* before the altars to occult objects and mystical beings [figures 11, 12]. Hérold's geometric figure was originally intended to be made out of transparent plastic or glass to mimic the transparency of the "hypothetical beings,<sup>117</sup>" though realizing this objective was prevented by the expense of these

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>115</sup> Nikolaj Lübecker, *Community, Myth and Recognition in Twentieth-century French Literature and Thought* (London: Continuum, 2009), 53.

<sup>116</sup> An engraving based on a 16th or 17th century work by German doctor and alchemist Michael Maier.

<sup>117</sup> The sculpture was produced in plaster for the 1947 exhibition and then later cast in bronze.

materials in post-war Europe. The sculpture's hard forms expressed the harsh, brutalized character of the post-war world. Its belly contained a convex mirror, crystals made up its teeth and there were celestial allusions in the form of a crescent and star on its chest. At over six feet tall, the sculpture had an imposing presence on the visitor. Two eggs on a plate were presented to this *Great Transparent One* as an offering during the exhibition,<sup>118</sup> treating the sculpture as a kind of idol and showing reverence to the Great Transparent One's regenerative powers.<sup>119</sup> It also primed the viewer for the altars that appeared just beyond in the ritualistic Labyrinth of Initiations. Breton's vision for a new myth, as indicated in this visual display, sought to change the foundations of society through occultism and esoteric magic, and the social dimension of myth, instead of through conventional political means.

### ***Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme***

The *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* was devoted to the concept of Eros. Often referred to simply as EROS, the exhibition opened December 15, 1959 at Galerie Daniel Cordier in Paris. Breton and Duchamp were the principal organizers. The Surrealists sent many enthusiastic responses to Breton's suggestion of Eros as a theme.<sup>120</sup> Breton declared in the exhibition catalog that life's contradictions were to be seized by art and build upon the foundations of Eros, "a privileged place, a theater of initiations and prohibitions, where the deepest processes of life play themselves out."<sup>121</sup> The show featured nearly 80 participants from 19 countries.<sup>122</sup> The main room, designed by Duchamp, had a distinct tactile and bodily presence. The walls and ceiling were covered in a rosy-colored fabric that bulged in biomorphic

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<sup>118</sup> Mahon, 124.

<sup>119</sup> The eggs and a lump of coal held in the figure's hand are also allusions to alchemy.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 149, 152.

<sup>121</sup> André Breton quoted in Mahon, 152.

<sup>122</sup> Durozoi, 590.

undulations [figures 14, 15]. Concealed air pumps gave the sensation of the room's rhythmic breathing by pushing air in and out of the space between the ceiling and its pink covering.<sup>123</sup> The visual, tactile and auditory cues of the space simulated the visitor's presence inside a feminine body. The floor was covered in thick sand, which also contributed to the sense of disorientation. A green velvet "grotto" followed with the smell of perfume and the recorded noises of lovers sighing<sup>124</sup> and four actresses repeating "Je t' aime."<sup>125</sup> As with "Blood Flames" (1947), paintings were suspended from the ceiling and sloped downwards from the wall so that their surfaces loomed over the viewer. Stalactite and stalagmite forms populated the passageway.<sup>126</sup> The third space had a more intimate scale and was covered in black velvet. A reliquary wall interrupted the black velvet and its niches displayed Surrealist objects.<sup>127</sup> Merét Oppenheim's elaborate "Cannibal Feast" served as *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme's* culmination. On opening night a woman laid completely still on a dining table and acted as the platter for the evening's culinary fare. Her face was painted gold and her torso was covered with sweet and savory fare until the guests' appetites slowly revealed her naked body as the food was consumed. A mannequin replaced the young woman after opening night and is pictured in William Klein's photograph of the tribalistic gathering, made even more bizarre by the presence of three high-fashion models [figure 17].

The space and its artworks combined the erotic, fetishistic, and shamanic rituals based on those of non-Western societies. This amalgam resulted in a complex play that was both revelatory and hyperbolic. As art historian Alyce Mahon has said, "Its *mise-en-scène* denied any 'safe' distance between the spectator and the erotic. It led the viewer into a gallery space which

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<sup>123</sup> Mahon, 159.

<sup>124</sup> Durozoi, 590.

<sup>125</sup> Mahon, 159.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Durozoi, 590.

had all the hallmarks of a striptease (with soft music, sweet smells, and fetishes), but which then began to subvert that controlled environment by threatening motifs, such as cannibalism, Sadism, and masochism."<sup>128</sup> This tension between excitation and the anxiety of transgression, suspended the viewer in an atmosphere where they were meant to confront their desires.

Another significant feature of this exhibition was a separate section for new work, where Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1959) and Jasper John's *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955) were shown. The presence of these two artists is somewhat surprising. Johns and Rauschenberg were never official members of the Surrealist group, but became involved with Surrealist exhibitions in the late 1950s. Their participation marks a point of transition and interaction between the Surrealist avant-garde and artists associated with critic Peter Bürger's influential concept of the "neo-avant-garde." Inclusion of artists such as Rauschenberg and Johns is often cynically seen as a failed attempt to freshen an increasingly irrelevant movement, but can also be seen as another instance of "Surrealists despite themselves."

Almost immediately critics and viewers called the efficacy of these European exhibitions into question. The group exhibitions, whose understanding was bounded by the infamous group dynamics of Bretonian Surrealism, presented a singular statement on the Surrealist movement to the public. The Surrealist period after World War II had been generally regarded as a last gasp of the movement, despite André Breton's fervent ambitions to reclaim Surrealism's position in France.<sup>129</sup> These ambitions were problematized by a variety of different factors. The burgeoning

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<sup>128</sup> Mahon, 153-154.

<sup>129</sup> Some notable examples of this belief in Surrealism's disintegration can be found in William Rubin's *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1968), which called *Le Surréalisme en 1947* "the death knell of the movement;" Martica Sawin's *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*; Mark Polizzotti's biography, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (1st Black Widow Press Ed., Rev. & Updated ed. Boston, MA: Black Widow, 2009); Gérard Durozoi's *History of the Surrealist Movement*; Lewis Kachur's discussion of the 1959 Eros

influence of Existentialism in the Parisian intellectual scene overtook the position of relevancy that Surrealism had held in the interwar period. There was resentment over major Surrealist figures like Breton having spent the war years from the relative safety of America, while their countrymen dealt with the successive shocks of Nazi occupation, collaboration, and its aftermath. Exemplary in this regard was Tristan Tzara, a former Surrealist and current member of the communist intelligentsia, who criticized Surrealist's absence from occupied France during the war.<sup>130</sup> In a 1947 lecture at the Sorbonne, he decried post-war Surrealism's lack of commitment to (Stalinist) Communism as counterrevolutionary and inconsistent with early Surrealism's initial political stance.<sup>131</sup> Tzara declared succinctly, "History has passed Surrealism by."<sup>132</sup> Many of Surrealism's key figures from the 1920s, 30s and early 40s had since departed from the group, weakening the perceived quality or notoriety of Surrealism's artistic production.

French author Maurice Nadeau felt able to publish a conclusive and comprehensive *History of Surrealism* in 1945, effectively ending the movement in that year and considering any subsequent activity as irrelevant to Surrealism's history. Leaders of the movement, however, organized these later exhibitions to convey the continued vitality of Surrealism. The exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* at Galerie Maeght, in their view, was intended to be a triumphant

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exhibition in *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001); not to mention the numerous accounts of the Surrealism that omit the movement's activities after World War II. Contemporary reviews from *Les Lettres françaises*, *Les Nouvelles Littérature*, and the *New York Times* also echo the fading of the movement if not its termination.

<sup>130</sup> Rubin, 196, f.n. 119.

<sup>131</sup> Former Surrealists such as Tzara, Paul Éluard and Lois Aragon were supporters of Stalinism, and hoped that it would rebuild French society. Breton rejected Stalinism, which led to a series of ruptures within Surrealism as well as Breton's infamous outburst with Tzara at the Sorbonne, where Breton heckled Tzara from the audience, rushed to stage to defiantly drink Tzara's glass of water, and led a faction of the audience out of the lecture hall.

<sup>132</sup> Polizzotti, 491.

homecoming for the main contingent of Surrealism returning from America and an opportunity to prove the critics wrong. Breton campaigned extensively against the “gravediggers” as he called them, insisting that Surrealism in late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was very much alive. Surrealism’s critics, he often publicly declared, had been employing the same grim rhetoric of decline and imminent death since the 1930s. Breton was preoccupied with maintaining Surrealism’s historical avant-garde status into the 50s and 60s, though most historians and critics had begun to classify it according to the negative characteristics of the Bürgerian neo-avant-garde.<sup>133</sup> Late Surrealist exhibitions were often charged with being nostalgic through visual nods to past exhibition designs and more explicitly in exhibition catalogs that reproduced photographs and descriptions of earlier exhibitions, as well as with the prominent display of work from the 1920s and 1930s, which appeared to overshadow more contemporary work. The nostalgia of these late exhibitions was also seen as commemorating the potential of Surrealism at its zenith and a eulogy for its revolutionary aims as part of a bygone age. Within the European context, Surrealism’s political and social leanings, as expressed through these exhibitions were prominently considered.

The 1947 exhibition and Breton’s return to the Parisian intellectual scene met with a primarily negative reaction. Many saw the preoccupation with mysticism as escapist and a negation of Surrealism’s revolutionary potential. *La Main à Plume* and *Surréalistes Révolutionnaires*, whose members had continued Surrealist activities in Paris during and immediately after the war, protested outside of the gallery, critiquing the exhibition as regressive,

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<sup>133</sup> These negative characteristics of the Bürgerian neo-avant-garde include the institutionalization of Surrealist art, a compromise of earlier revolutionary aims by political conservatism, the softening of its critiques, and a rehearsal of Surrealism’s earlier visual forms but with a cessation of Surrealism’s ability to shock and disrupt.

and circulating a condemning broadside.<sup>134</sup> These young artists and writers proclaimed that the exhibition “represented the surrealism of 947, not 1947.” Sartrean criticism at this time denigrated Surrealist activities as politically unengaged, giving lip service to revolution without addressing the proletariat. Sartre attacked Surrealism’s avant-garde status by refuting Surrealism’s claims of antagonism towards the bourgeois, its claims to autonomy, and by denying that its worth was not being determined by use value or commercialism. Critics affiliated with the French Communist party derided the exhibition as well. Art critic Marie-Louise Barron, for example, characterized the Surrealists as late for a war in the title of her review of the exhibition for *Les Lettres françaises*. The reception of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* illustrates that, in post-war France, Surrealism’s turn away from communism was the stamp of its irrelevance.

However, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Surrealism was still politically engaged, most visibly with its declarations against the French-Algerian war.<sup>135</sup> For the 1959 *Exposition*

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<sup>134</sup> *La Main à Plume* was a neo-Surrealist group based in occupied Paris that promoted Surrealism during war time. This group of artists and writers included Victor Brauner, Oscar Dominguez, Paul Eluard and Jacques Hérold. *La Main à Plume* published surrealist literature despite the strict censorship of periodicals and was also active in the resistance movement. Many members defied Breton’s interdiction against involvement in party politics and joined the Communist party. The group’s dedication to Surrealist ideals and to the French resistance came at great risk. Eight members of this small group were killed as a direct consequence of the war, either in combat or exterminated in the camps.

The *Surréalistes Révolutionnaires* was another group that identified as both Surrealist and communist, but was active in the post-war period in France. Many former *La Main à Plume* became part of *Surréalistes Révolutionnaires*. The group was begun by Christian Dotremont and Jean Seeger’s texts, which insisted that Communism was essential for the revolution.

<sup>135</sup> Mahon, 143-147.

Breton opposed French colonialism in the *Manifesto of the 121* concerning the Algerian conflict. Breton also expressed his solidarity with the French Anarchist Federation. In 1952, he wrote that “it was in the black mirror of anarchism that surrealism first recognized itself.” Georges Fontenis, the French libertarian communist militant and Serge Ninn, another French anarchist collaborated with Breton and Benjamin Peret in articles and other publications. Breton contributed a weekly column to the anarchist publication *Le Libertaire* beginning in 1951. He also supported the anarchist movement as the Anarchist Federation transformed into the

*Internationale du Surréalisme*, the theme of eroticism was employed, as it had been a central theme for Surrealism since the early days of the movement. Thus it served as a rallying point for long-standing members of the movement and new Surrealist affiliates. The exhibition's suggestive content, interest in the taboos associated with sexuality, and characteristic dismissal of traditional morality was intended as an affront to the deepening conservatism and entrenchment of bourgeois values signaled by Charles de Gaulle's election to the French presidency.<sup>136</sup> Eros was treated as a kind of sociological force that both tested shared social boundaries through an interplay of transgression and taboo and encouraged a life-affirming retreat into a kind of primal essence. According to the exhibition's motto, Eros was "a privileged place, a theatre of initiations and prohibitions, where the deepest processes of life play themselves out."<sup>137</sup> As in many Surrealist productions of the past, the concept of Eros was associated with the liberation of inhibitions kept in check by civilized culture and a liberation that extended to social fulfillment and enhanced creativity.<sup>138</sup>

During the end of the 1950s, Surrealism was coexisting with artistic practices that would be associated with the neo-avant-garde. Yves Klein and Arman, for example, were beginning to exhibit in Paris. 1960 would see their project named *Nouveau Réalisme* by critic Pierre Restany. Their "accumulations" and "voids" garnered significant attention and announced the presence of the neo-avant-garde in the Parisian art scene. Tachism was also in vogue. Tachism absorbed Surrealist automatist approaches while concepts of fetishism were being incorporated into

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Libertarian Communist Federation, during a period of intense government repression. Nick Heath, "1919-1950: The Politics of Surrealism," *Libcom* (2006). <http://libcom.org/history/1919-1950-the-politics-of-surrealism>.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>137</sup> André Breton, "Avis aux Exposants/ Aux Visiteurs," *Eros*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Mahon, 15.

*Nouveau Réalisme*. During this period Surrealism was still publishing periodicals and recruiting new young artists.<sup>139</sup>

## Late Surrealist Exhibitions in the United States

### Blood Flames

In the same year as *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, “Blood Flames” was organized in New York by art critic Nicolas Calas in an effort to continue the momentum of Surrealist influence in America after the war. Calas was a Greek author, curator, and member of Surrealism whose fluency in English placed him at Breton’s side in America. However, Calas later criticized Breton’s mythic pursuits and waning political fervor as escapism. Architect Frederick Kiesler also designed this show. The show at Hugo Gallery was small, comparatively, to *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. It only featured eight artists.<sup>140</sup> Much of the contemporary reception gave attention to the unconventional display rather than the artworks themselves. Kiesler transformed the space with bands of paint and text linking works of art and architecture, pulling attention towards paintings displayed on the wall, ceiling, and propped between the wall and floor. These bands of light color descended from over the heads of the visitor and down the dark walls to approach the artworks at oblique angles [figure 20]. Matta’s large *Grave Situation* was hung lopsided in a corner with its right edge touching the wall and ceiling and its left side dangling in space with the help of strings extending from the ceiling [figures 19, 22]<sup>141</sup> Wilfredo Lam’s painting *Le Présent Eternel* was enclosed by a white net tent and hung perpendicular to the ceiling [figure 21]. A

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<sup>139</sup> Sarah Wilson, “Paris in the 1960s: Towards the Barricades of the Latin Quarter,” *Paris: Capital of the Arts*, ed. Sarah Wilson (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), 332.

<sup>140</sup> These artists were David Hare, Arshile Gorky, Matta, Isamu Noguchi, Jeanne Reynal, Jerome Kamrowski, Wilfredo Lam, and Helen Philips.

<sup>141</sup> Goodman, 70.

chair was placed in the small, but delicate, enclosure so that the visitor could gaze comfortably and privately at the ceiling. The intimate viewing space for *Le Présent Eternel* reminded some of an old-fashioned peep-show.<sup>142</sup> The canvases that were propped along the floor had their unusual, angled position highlighted by a thin stripe of color on the wall that indicated the painting's contact with the wall and a larger swath around their resting place on the ground.

### **Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain**

The last “official”<sup>143</sup> International Exposition of Surrealism was “Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter’s Domain.” It was held at the D’Arcy galleries in New York City at the end of 1960. Breton and Duchamp collaborated on the exhibition with Duchamp spearheading the installation and exhibition catalog. Each artist’s work had a small flag next to it to indicate the artist’s nationality, again emphasizing the international dimension of late Surrealism.<sup>144</sup>

Duchamp described the exhibition to Breton, who had remained in Paris. Duchamp's letter lists various aspects of "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter’s Domain" as:

Opening only: a fortune-teller (professional, who has been taken up the whole evening).  
 Permanently: 3 white hens (alive) in a cupboard made into a hen house; a ray of sunshine at sunrise (or sunset); a reel of tape recorded specially with a little girl doing painful exercises on the piano in the house next door; a tarot card (Arcane 17) projected onto the ceiling; a hosepipe nonchalantly snaking its way through the entire gallery; electric train set in a shop window in the street; ... 4 clocks (one in each room) all showing different times; a pair of fire dogs with some wood slightly burnt without chimney; a 1900-style typewriter; a large pharmacy jar (green, red, yellow); the tobacconists' sign (carrot)

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<sup>142</sup> Judith Kaye Reed, “Kiesler, the Tent Maker, Does Modern Decor,” *Art Digest* 21, March 15, 1947.

<sup>143</sup> “Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters’ Domain” (1960) was the last international exposition to be endorsed by André Breton and thus fall under the official jurisdiction of mainstream Surrealism’s self-appointed leader.

<sup>144</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Jill Taylor (Ghent: Ludion, 2000), 371.

outside; cigarette packets stuck onto a window inside; clocking on machine like at a factory entrance.<sup>145</sup>

The Surrealist interest in irrational juxtaposition appears to dominate the *mise-en-scene* of the exhibition and the show continued many of the same themes as *Le Surréalisme en 1947*. These themes included explorations of myths and the occult. Associations among myths, sorcerers, artworks, alchemical objects, and literary personalities, among others, were solidified in discrete diagrams in the exhibition catalog "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain." For example, the five-cell "synoptic table"<sup>146</sup> focused on Circe lists her alchemical object as an opal and her "Site" as "Panama (the Lair of the Golden Scarab)." Hans Baldung, Francisco Goya, Giorgio de Chirico, and Piero di Cosimo are Circe's associated artists and Guillaume Apollinaire and Giorgio Baffo are among her poets. Ambrosio and the supernatural Matilda from Matthew Gregory Lewis' gothic novel *The Monk* were the affiliated couple [figure 24]. This was a conspicuously literary formulation of magic and mysticism, but also cast the transformative powers of magic into the Surrealist "domain" of art and literature.

These diagrams were accompanied by a brief explanation of each "Enchanter," an allusion to his or her power in poetry, and two representative images. The sorcerers referenced in the catalog's pages and upon the exhibition's altars are separated, through another diagram, into those of legend and those of history. The origins and influences of these sorcerers are traced in a flow chart to the authors Ducasse and Apollinaire, who had for some time been claimed as part of Surrealism's pre-history [figure 25]. A line labeled "Beginning of Surrealist Field" marks the point of contact between the three literary figures, pulled into Surrealist orbit, and the sorcerers. The lineage between Surrealism and these authors had already found visual expression in *Le*

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Referred to as such by Marcel Duchamp in a letter to André Breton. Duchamp, *Affectionately, Marcel*, 368.

*Surréalisme en 1947*'s literary staircase. Thus the Surrealists claimed magical and transformative capacities for themselves.

The New York exhibitions were received primarily as a point of contact with advanced European art, which was viewed in relation to developing American artistic practices. In the United States, painting was the principal medium through which the public and critics understood Surrealism. More specifically, veristic painting was perceived to be the pinnacle of Surrealist artistic practice for American audiences. The combination of inviting verism and Surrealism's often-subversive outlook supported the impression that Surrealist painting's intention was to solicit shock and outrage. America was distanced from the cultural and political climate in Europe that gave context for Surrealism's more revolutionary ambitions.<sup>147</sup> In the United States, Surrealism was seen to be a movement centered around "artistic high jinks."<sup>148</sup> This phenomenon was not unrelated to the disproportionate amount of attention that America paid to Dalí, whose 1935 talk at Museum of Modern Art and 1936 *Time* magazine cover left a large impression on the country, as well as his flamboyant personality and the extravagant spectacles that kept him in the eye of the American media.<sup>149</sup> In contrast, there was relatively little awareness of or interest in literary Surrealism.

Major Surrealist exhibitions U.S. exhibitions of the 1930s included *Newer Super-Realism* at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1931, which was shown again as *Surrealism Paintings, Drawings and Photographs* at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932. Solo exhibitions of Surrealist artists were also staples of the Julian Levy Gallery. The same gallery held Max Ernst's *Surrealiste* exhibition in 1932, the 1934 one-man shows of Dalí paintings and Alberto

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<sup>147</sup> Surrealism's affiliation with communist politics was obviously problematic for its American audience.

<sup>148</sup> John Canaday, "Surrealistic Sanity," *Time Magazine*. no. 24 (1960, Dec 12): 83.

<sup>149</sup> Durozoi, 394. Dalí's "Dream of Venus" pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair was a media sensation with its extravagant decor and live "mermaids."

Giacometti sculpture, and Dalí was exhibited again in 1936 and 1939. Joan Miró regularly had one-man exhibitions at Pierre Matisse Gallery from 1936 to 1941. *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* was curated at the Museum of Modern Art by Alfred Barr in 1936. A major Surrealist-produced exhibition took place in 1942. *First Papers of Surrealism* at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion featured Duchamp's "mile of string" installation and has been regarded as an influential innovation in exhibition design. The dramatically designed Surrealist gallery in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century venue opened in 1942 and served as a small Surrealist museum in Manhattan until 1947. Guggenheim's private collection of Surrealist painting and sculpture was installed by Kiesler on adjustable arms protruding from curved walls. The Art of this Century gallery also featured a permanent gallery of abstract art by artists not directly associated with Surrealism.

America in the 1950s and 60s saw a transition from high Modernist abstraction, pioneered by Jackson Pollock and the New York school, to "neo-Dada" and the forerunners of Pop art.<sup>150</sup> Artists like Johns "saw the familiar role of the visionary artist [in high Modernism] as one more support for a complacent, self-congratulatory high culture and, by extension,

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<sup>150</sup> Many art historians and critics have commented on the broad shift in visual art culture in the U.S. in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their discussions involve the various strategic efforts to belittle Modernist conceptions during this time and turn the attention of artists to "non-art" or life. There is a wide spectrum of writings on this shift, such as: David Hopkins, "Duchamp's Legacy: The Rauschenberg-Johns Axis" *After Modern Art: 1945-2000* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000); Irving Sandler, "Circa 1960: A Change in Sensibility," *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978); Kim Levin, *Beyond Modernism: Essays on Art from the '70s and '80s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Russell Ferguson, ed. *Hand Painted Pop: American Art in Transition 1955-62* (LA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1993); Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983); Brian Wallis, ed. *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (NY: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994); Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1972); Harold Rosenberg, "On the De-Definition of Art," *The De-Definition of Art* (NY: Horizon Press, 1972); Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

stultifying social conformity sweetened by consumer dreams.”<sup>151</sup> Young artists moved away from the ideals of aesthetic autonomy and formalism that characterized the New York school of painters. Self-revelatory artistic processes that declared the sovereignty of the artist were being challenged by procedures of chance, found materials, and other artistic methods that rejected the inner psychology of the artist as an explanation for aesthetics. This shift is perhaps most succinctly signaled by Rauschenberg’s creation of a new work of art by erasing a drawing by Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning. Neo-avant-gardiste Allan Kaprow acknowledged Jackson Pollock’s embrace of unusual material and incorporating movement and expansion into painting. However, Kaprow would take these new possibilities as an opportunity to leave painting behind and create Happenings.<sup>152</sup> Pop art’s embrace of industrial and consumer culture also opposed to the focus on private experience and romanticized isolation characteristic of the New York School.

For mainstream American critics, the New York art scene by the 1960s was dominated by two aesthetics: non-representational color-field paintings, which had grown out of the Modernist legacy of Abstract Expressionism, exemplified by abstractionists Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler on the one hand, and Pop art and art associated with “neo-Dada,” including Rauschenberg, Warhol, and Johns on the other.<sup>153</sup>

During this period, Duchamp was also being rediscovered and a generation of young artists was being exposed to his oeuvre. Robert Motherwell’s 1951 anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets*, spread awareness of Duchamp’s avant-garde activities. Duchamp had his first museum retrospective in 1963 at the Pasadena Museum of Art. The California retrospective was

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<sup>151</sup> Thomas E. Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 9.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

the first opportunity for Americans to see a comprehensive collection of the artist's work who would come to influence many figures associated with the neo-avant-garde.<sup>154</sup> Knowledge of Duchamp's work was also being disseminated by Richard Hamilton, the artist who had been part of Britain's Independent Group. Richard Hamilton spent years studying Duchamp's *The Green Box* and ultimately collaborated with art historian George Heard Hamilton to create the first complete typographical version of Duchamp's extensive notes on the work in 1960.<sup>155</sup> Duchamp's irreverent artistic output and clear rejection of formalism became a touchstone for young American artists seeking alternatives to high Modernism.

The critical establishment was initially unable to recognize pop art and its precursors as harbingers of a major shift in art. Despite the tenacity of the Abstract Expressionist model of high Modernism, the new art from neo-Dada and Pop artists was gaining traction. Johns had his first one-man show at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958, with Rauschenberg's preceding a few years earlier. Four works from Johns' show at Leo Castelli Gallery sold to the Museum of Modern Art, validating neo-avant-garde visual practices.<sup>156</sup> Abstract Expressionism had "suddenly begun to look grandiose and hollow to an increasing number of viewers."<sup>157</sup>

This shift from high Modernist paradigms to neo-avant-garde ones also provides context for dismissal of Rauschenberg and Johns offerings in "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain" as "repulsive." This verdict was offered by the influential art critic of *The New York Times*, John Canaday. Canaday also dismissed the artist that these neo-Dada and Pop artists would designate as their progenitor. He called Duchamp the "Leonardo of the Age of Despair," both recognizing Duchamp as a generative figure—a new Leonardo—and bemoaning the new

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 16.

era of artistic response he had provided for. This response echoes the view of major Modernist critic Clement Greenberg, who attributed the renewed interest in Duchamp as an appeal to the facile. Canaday, like Greenberg, saw but failed to recognize the significance of new, noteworthy artistic strategies that were emerging in reaction to Modernist conceptions of art.

### **Key Players in Late Surrealist Exhibitions**

André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and architect Frederick Kiesler, shaped late Surrealist exhibitions on both a visual and ideological level. These principal organizers continued to mount visible and elaborate shows to promote Surrealism. Each had particularized ambitions for the exhibitions, but largely remained dedicated to the ideas of social and artistic transformation possible within the avant-garde sensibility. Breton, Duchamp, Kiesler and the participating artists did not see the exhibitions of the late 1940s, 50s and 60s as the decline of a once-strong movement, but rather saw the exhibitions as viable contributions to their avant-garde legacy, meant to continue the movement into the future. For them, The Surrealist revolution was still in progress, confronting new challenges posed by late capitalist cultural institutions.

### **Breton**

The 1947 exhibition at Galerie Maeght opened in the midst of an ongoing debate about the efficacy of Surrealism and the role it would play, if any, in post-war society. One of Breton's primary aims was to assert that World War II and American exile, while disrupting so many other aspects of life, had not disrupted the integrity of the movement. *Le Surréalisme en 1947* was to be a testament to this. "Surrealist Comet" was an essay written by Breton to coincide with

the 1947 exhibition, explaining the role of Surrealism and of a new myth after the war. Themes of unity, vigor, and wholeness are emphasized:

What we want to know is whether surrealism, as a mental discipline chosen by a small number of individuals scattered all over the world, has withstood that disaster and whether it was greatly disrupted by it; whether, from the most to the least affected areas of the world, the reactions within surrealism were quite different from one another; and finally, how surrealism as a whole has come out of that ordeal, to what extent the disturbing events we have just experienced have affected its unity and vigor”<sup>158</sup>

The international character of the movement along with the diversity of response to the surreal mindset is cited as a sign of reinvigoration. However, Breton is careful to emphasize that this diversity of individual artistic response contributes to the unity of Surrealism, rather than compromising the movement's unity. The movement is not only intact, but extends "surrealism, as a mental discipline" as an unchanging tenet that unifies Surrealism in 1947 with pre-war Surrealism.

The exhibitions themselves were discussed in terms of the originality of late Surrealist formulations. Breton underscored the freshness of the 1947 Paris exhibition, with works “produced over the last few years.”<sup>159</sup> The invitation letter asking artists and exhibitors to participate conveyed the intention to “*transcend previous accomplishments*”<sup>160</sup> rather than imitate the forms of early Surrealism. This transcendence was a consequence of the "new myth" and the myth's manifestation was to be achieved through "the increasingly perfect union of poetry and art.”<sup>161</sup>

Dispelling notions of Surrealism's stagnation was critical for Breton. Surrealists, even through the 1950s and 1960s, were vocally opposed to the historicization of their movement and

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<sup>158</sup> André Breton, "Surrealist Comet," *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 93-94.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

the art world's insistence on casting a retrospective look on surrealist activities. Breton had been decrying this phenomenon for decades and promoted narratives of Surrealism's vitality. One of the most vehement attacks came in 1964's "Confronting the Liquidators." Twenty-five Surrealists signed this document including Breton, Jean Schuster, Toyen, Mimi Parent, Jean Benoît, and Adrien Dax. That year former Surrealist Patrick Waldberg organized the exhibition *Surréalisme* at the Galerie Charpentier, stressing Surrealism as a historical phenomenon with the high point of the movement in the past, while largely ignoring contemporary surrealist achievements. The declaration was issued on the night of the show's private viewing. The group objected most vehemently to the exhibition's having made a retrospective out of a revolution. "This time it is surrealism as a whole they seek to 'short-circuit' under the pretty spiteful pretext of 'celebrating' its fortieth anniversary."<sup>162</sup> This stance echoed earlier declarations by the group that Surrealism was an ongoing revolution whose activities would continue to be relevant until its revolutionary objectives had been achieved. "Confronting the Liquidators" compares Waldberg's retrospective exhibition to the organization of a ceremony to celebrate the French revolution by those who later betrayed its revolutionary ideals. However, Breton and other Surrealist members insisted "the Thermidor of surrealism has not taken place."<sup>163</sup> Attempts to nullify Surrealism's claim to ongoing revolutionary potential by memorializing and returning to a conservative assessment of the movement's potential were to be continually resisted. This was another manner in which Surrealism hoped to circumvent institutionalization. Insisting on Surrealism's continued activities in the present day prevented a solidification of Surrealism's past.

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<sup>162</sup> André Breton and others, "Confronting the Liquidators," *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations*. eds. Michael Richardson and Krzysztof Fijałkowski (London: Pluto, 2001), 54.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

Like Frederick Kiesler in displays for “Blood Flames,” Breton railed against the commercialization of art. In “Surrealist Comet” he underlines the argument that artistic freedom is limited by the financial demands and fashions of the art market. Under these conditions, innovative painters cease to innovate in order to create art that is marketable and other artists imitate critically regarded artists to appeal to the market. Commodification creates stagnation and promotes unoriginality.<sup>164</sup> Surrealism's appeal was its originality and "freshness." The quality of Surrealist art," Breton stressed, "had not been compromised by financial pressures or desire for financial gain."<sup>165</sup> Here Breton's rejection of art's commercialization reiterates one of the fundamental reactions of the Bürgerian concept of the avant-garde against the earlier phase of autonomous art. Both react to and reject the kind of art that is defined by the forces of the bourgeois art market. However, Breton highlights the bourgeois conception of commercial art as stifling originality and artistic freedom, while the Bürgerian avant-garde emphasized how the bourgeois conception of art prevented art from being integrated into the praxis of life.

Breton also critiqued the Communist interdiction “of anything that is not state-controlled academic art.”<sup>166</sup> This ideologically prescribed style was another limitation of artistic freedom. He reiterates an early Surrealist tenet wherein the criteria for accomplishment in Surrealist art is not aesthetic criteria.<sup>167</sup> That which determined a Surrealist work is “the spirit in which it is conceived.”<sup>168</sup> Producing imaginative art for outlandish and unconventional spaces, like in Surrealist exhibitions of the late 40s, 50s, and 60s, was an expression of the creative liberties that Surrealists like Breton held dear. This privileging individual and artistic freedom over political

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<sup>164</sup> Breton, “Surrealist Comet,” 90.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

ideology, however, was often seen as a way to sidestep late Surrealism's lack of practical political engagement.<sup>169</sup>

Breton made a distinction between political allegiance and a desire to rebuild society. Surrealism was not beholden to a particular political ideology, but believed in individual freedom as a new basis for society. The transformation of social conditions, to be sure, was a necessary step for this complete individual freedom. Breton stated in an important 1951 interview that Surrealism had not abandoned its social concerns out of solipsism.

As Surrealism never stopped looking toward Lautréamont and Rimbaud, it's clear to us that the world's real torment lies in the human condition, even more than in the social condition of individuals. Be that as it may, this social condition, which was totally arbitrary and inequitous [sic] (in twentieth-century France, for example), acted as a screen between man and his true problems—a screen that we therefore needed first and foremost to pierce.<sup>170</sup>

In Breton's view after WWII, human liberation was more than the sum of social conditions. The psychic dimension, long the realm of Surrealism, was still paramount. This is why literature and myth were still relevant revolutionary means for Breton. Rather than being the ultimate goal, rebuilding social conditions would allow man to confront the true obstacles to liberation, wherein the psychological element was still imperative.

The new social structure that would facilitate liberation and re-growth was presented as the "new myth" featured prominently in late Surrealist exhibitions. "We have merely aimed," Breton wrote in the *Le Surréalisme en 1947* catalogue, "in the narrow limits of this exhibition, and by means as it were of a spiritual 'parade,' to give an entirely external glimpse of what such

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<sup>169</sup> This lack of direct political engagement had caused several public dismissals of late Surrealism's efficacy. Critiques by Tzara and Sartre are two notable examples.

<sup>170</sup> André Breton, Radio Interview with André Parinaud "A Major Doubt: Doesn't the Emancipation of the Mind First Require Man's Social Liberation? The Communist Party's Welcome," 1951, *André Breton, Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism*, trans. and intro. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1993), 97. (Originally published Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952).

a myth might be.” Myth was also used to potentially combat the alienation in Modern life and to close a gap between art and life. Insistence on irrationality in exhibits and in the Surrealist "discipline" confronted a Modern society based on rationalism, a Modern society which had been ruptured by the social conflicts of the 20th century. Reliance on the concept of "new myth" allowed Breton to continue the promise of social change when Surrealism's relationship with Communism had soured. Emphasis on ritual and mysticism could entice the viewer to rethink the psychic foundations of their society:

Even if, by having the aspirant to knowledge- the visitor in this case- face a cycle of ordeals (reduced practically to a minimum), the only result would be to induce him to let his mind muse over what, throughout the ages, can be strange and disturbing about certain individual and collective modes of behavior, we would already be satisfied that we were on the right track.<sup>171</sup>

Breton expected reprobation from the exhibitions' focus on myth and ritual, yet he remained convinced that myth was a powerful vehicle for rethinking the individual's place in society.

1942's "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibit had already begun to play with montages of myths in the catalog. The page dedicated to the Great Transparents stressed images on the verge of becoming, with reference to alchemy and the powerful entity of Jupiter being unleashed out into the world with a mass of swirling wind, and David Hare's photograph suspended between physical and metaphysical existence [figure 10].<sup>172</sup> The incorporation of myth and occult knowledge continued through *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, its layout mimicking ritual initiation and presenting the Great Transparents and reappears in "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain." Just as the 1942 and 1947 exhibitions presented the "new myth" of the Great Transparents, "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain" presented the "Modern enchanter"

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<sup>171</sup> André Breton, "Before the Curtain," *Free Rein*, trans. Michel Parmentier and Jacqueline d'Amboise (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, originally published as *La Clé des champs* (Paris: Éditions du Sagittaire, 1953)), 85.

<sup>172</sup> Lübecker, 62.

Maldoror created by poet Isidore Ducasse [figure 26]. Throughout these various manifestations, there is conscious effort to incorporate myth and the occult back into contemporary life. The Modern enchanter Maldoror, the new myth of the Great Transparents envisioned by the painter Matta and Breton, and the ritualistic activities engrossing the contemporary viewer in *EROS* and *Le Surréalisme en 1947*<sup>173</sup> all declared that Surrealist myths were not to be treated as anecdotal knowledge of a distant time or space. Myth was being generated in Modern life.

By evoking myth, the Surrealists chose a pervasive but unorthodox means of understanding human existence and the need for change. They chose an anti-rational means that had been repressed by Amero-European civilization. As Nikolaj Lübecker points out, myth was an established thread in 20th-century French thought, but primarily through sociological and anthropological models which attempted to submit myth to a rationalist discourse, content to observe and categorize, but not participate in myth as believers do.<sup>174</sup> Surrealist sentiments about myth were voiced in *View* magazine. Myth “was alive so long as men believe in them. Out of them come new deeds, new realities, because myth is creative.” Magic was “the means of approaching the unknown by other ways than those of science and religion.”<sup>175</sup> It is clear that Surrealist attention to myths is the act of believing in the mythic possibilities they provide or accepting the plausibility of an awesome unknown, rather than merely understanding the mechanisms of myth through objective scrutiny.

It can be argued that it was precisely this awesome unknown that French society was confronting in the aftermath of World War II. From Breton’s perspective, the potential that mythic and esoteric knowledge held for shaping new realities allowed for the potential reshaping

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<sup>173</sup> With the *EROS* exhibition and *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, visitors could not simply observe representations of myth, but became complicit in the rituals by virtue of traveling through the exhibition space.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>175</sup> Kurt Seligmann, “Magic and the Arts,” *View* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1946): 15-17.

of social reality. It may seem that the development of myths had very little to do with social or political upheaval, but there was a current in twentieth-century French intellectual life that strongly associated myth with revolutionary politics.<sup>176</sup> Georges Sorel's influential text *Reflections on Violence*, published in 1908, claimed that myth could shape the social sphere by shaping the potential of the individual, gathering the conscious and unconscious ideas that are formless within the individual and dis-unified within the community. Myth was a means to revolution for Sorel.<sup>177</sup> He discusses myth specifically in relation to Marxism and socialism, which reinforced the political dimension of myth that was manifest in his conception of mythic potential. Myth becomes a mobilizing image in the violence that would reignite the class struggle necessary to social revolution.<sup>178</sup> Breton, like Sorel, believed that the "truth" of myth was irrelevant in terms of its efficacy.<sup>179</sup> Myth still has the ability to create unity regardless of whether the content of the myth ever becomes directly observable. The particular form of the myth was not central for Breton either, as long as it provided a mobilizing image for a new community of free individuals.<sup>180</sup>

Despite Breton's faith in the transformative social power of myth, the mythological constellation he created ultimately undermined his project. As Lübecker has said, "Breton brings together a high number of heterogeneous myths and thereby creates an effect of erosion: a

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<sup>176</sup> Though distanced from Bretonian Surrealism for some years, Georges Bataille was also thinking and writing about the social dimension of myth. He declared in 1947 that the absence of myth was the truest myth. Society's misguided insistence that they no longer needed myth and should suppress myth with rationalism was the symptom of a discontented Modern society that needed the mediating powers of myth as its foundation. While Bataille agreed with Bretonian Surrealism that myth was necessary for creating new communities, he did not agree that manufacturing of new myths was effective because new myths cannot generate true social significance. Rather it is the desire for myth that takes on social significance for Bataille.

<sup>177</sup> Lübecker, 10.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

desacralization of the mythical. It could therefore be argued that Breton's work is so eclectic that it tends to become literature rather than myth."<sup>181</sup>

Breton was aware of how potentially problematic it was to combine myth and politics in the context of World War II. During a 1942 public lecture at Yale University, he attempts to disentangle the social potential of myths from Fascism:

Believe me, not one single moment do I forget that *there is* Hitler and with him, supporting the most hideous racial persecutions, the revival of certain myths which appear to be of Germanic origin and which are incompatible with the harmonious development of humanity.<sup>182</sup>

Breton was careful to make distinctions between the abuses of myth, which he charged Hitler with, and the social potential of myth as a re-enforcement of community.<sup>183</sup> He also rejected the absence of myth as a solution. Breton suggests in a 1948 interview that the absence of any strong mythic foundation for society in France had prevented any real opposition to the Germans.<sup>184</sup> The absence of myth impacts the individual and the social body of which they are part, as "a lack of myth... amounts to an impoverished psyche and a severance of ethical founding, it leads to nihilism."<sup>185</sup> Without the ethical foundation of myth, French society had become skeptical and indifferent according to Breton, which meant it could not challenge the unified front of misdirected myth. The lack of mythical-ethical foundation left the French exposed to the false mythical thinking of the Nazis.<sup>186</sup> To this he proposed a new interest in socially harmonious myths and ones free from nationalist undertones. The Surrealists were disposed to blame the tragedies of Fascism on the alienation inherent in rationalist society and the misuse of

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 56.

This critique of being excessively literary was a critique often circulated about the Surrealist project in general.

<sup>182</sup> André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes vol III*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999.

<sup>183</sup> Lübecker, 85.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 67.

community-mobilizing myths. Like Sorel, Breton felt that myth surpasses rationality and that this is what gave it part of its power.<sup>187</sup>

In summary, Breton's narrative after World War II was that Surrealism is still invested in social and artistic liberation by rejecting the limitations on artistic freedom that attend art objects becoming part of the commodity exchange, dictated by use value, and the limitations on artistic expression that come with subordination to a single political cause. Breton embraced the occult as an alternative to political ideology. Myth, for him, could combat alienation, nihilism, and impoverished ethics by asserting that there is a common knowledge which unifies a group of free individuals. His primary objectives with late Surrealist exhibitions were to communicate that the movement was still alive, evolving, and presenting new avenues to reshape human understanding and achieve human liberation.

### **Kiesler**

Frederick Kiesler gave visual form to the goals of late Surrealism through his global approach to art, space, and experience within his inventive exhibition environments. As an architect and exhibition designer who had been working with avant-garde circles since the 1920s, Kiesler had defined ideas about exhibitions as spaces and as an interface between art and those that view it. His concerns centered around transforming exhibitions into environments that sought unity among art, architecture and the viewer. Kiesler's approach to display and the interface between art and viewer also took issue with consumerist sensibilities applied to artworks when this consumerist sensibility promoted an anti-social distance between art and life.

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<sup>187</sup> Many other intellectuals disagreed with this assessment of myth and politics. Instead, they attributed the rise of Fascism to irrationality and a kind of mass hysteria perpetuated by carefully maintained fictions, to which myth seemed uncomfortably akin.

Kiesler's architectural and design philosophies stressed an expanding environment where natural forces and physical bodies could find a harmonious coordination.<sup>188</sup> One of Kiesler's guiding principles, developed in the 1930s, was Correalism, which he defined as "an investigation into the laws of inter-relationships of natural and man-made organisms."<sup>189</sup> Correalism posited an integral relationship between the object and its environment.<sup>190</sup> He felt that the present moment required unity in which painting, sculpture, and architecture could be "transformed into each another."<sup>191</sup> Kiesler also saw this alliance between art and architecture as an important facet of social consciousness. The "Blood Flames" show announcement contained the motto "We the inheritors of chaos, must be the architects of a new unity" that was also signed by Kiesler.<sup>192</sup> In his text "Magic Architecture and the Hall of Superstitions," written in conjunction with *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Kiesler reiterated his notion of Correalism employed in the exhibition's Room of Superstitions. He wrote of the perception of five senses as an important dimension of Correalism because sense perception connected to one's "psychic needs."<sup>193</sup> The Room of Superstitions, which he designed, appealed to the senses to create a heightened sense of somatic engagement from the viewer, eliciting a response that was not simply the detached, impersonal scrutiny typically reserved for art viewing. Curving, canvas walls that undulated in a slight breeze provided a tactile element. The small hole in the canvas walls, through which the viewer peered to see Ernst's painting, *Euclid*, gave particular expression to optical sensations. The sound of falling water emanated from the Rain Room next door.

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<sup>188</sup> For an extended discussion of Kiesler's philosophies, especially "Correalism" and "biotechnique," see Michael S. Sgan-Cohen's "Frederick Kiesler: Artist, Architect, Visionary: A Study of his Work and Writing" (PhD diss., City U of New York, 1989).

<sup>189</sup> Frederick Kiesler, "On Correalism and Biotechnique: Definition and Test of a New Approach to Building Design," *Architectural Record*, 86 (September 1939), p 738.

<sup>190</sup> Goodman, 58.

<sup>191</sup> Sgan-Cohen, 482.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 494.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

The architect's participation in Surrealist exhibitions was an attempt to move away from traditional modes of viewing art in exhibitions, which tended to visually isolate art objects from one another and where meaning is conceived as specific to the individual object. It was important for Kiesler that all elements be integrated into the same experience, rather than experienced individually. Kiesler's design philosophy, featuring a continuous flow of spaces, one into the next,<sup>194</sup> is a consistent feature of the Surrealist exhibitions created with his collaboration. In "Blood Flames" design elements such as bands of paint along the walls, ceilings, and floors unified the space and the objects within it, disrupting boundaries between rooms and in *Surréalisme en 1947* skeins of thread were used to the same effect. The double parabolic structure of the Room of Superstitions controverted the rectilinear space of Galerie Maeght. Kiesler's plan for the room shows a looping, fluid expanse [figure 2]. The space ultimately featured an egg-shaped cave made of canvas and rigging, that enveloped visitors.<sup>195</sup>

Kiesler also hoped for more immediacy in the viewer's relationship to objects. He had a convention of hanging two-dimensional works unframed and at unusual angles. This strategy is shown in the 1947 installation shots of "Blood Flames" where bare canvases by Gerome Kamrowski lean obliquely against the wall and dangle from a point between the walls and ceiling, while Wilfredo Lam's *The Eternal Present* acts as a canopy above [figure 20]. Frames were omitted because they separated the work from life and from the viewer. Kiesler stated in 1942:

Today the framed painting on the wall has become a decorative cipher without life and meaning, or else, to the more susceptible observer, an object of interest existing in a world distinct from his. Its frame is at once symbol and agent of an artificial duality of "vision" and "reality," or "image" and "environment," a plastic barrier across which man looks from the world he inhabits to the alien world in which the work of art has its being.

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<sup>194</sup> Goodman, 57.

<sup>195</sup> Sgan-Cohen, 488.

That barrier must be dissolved: the frame, today reduced to an arbitrary rigidity, must regain its architectural spatial significance.<sup>196</sup>

By displaying art without frames and projecting from the walls at non-standard angles, Kiesler's designs hoped to shatter the association of the artwork as a remote, artificial world. He also speaks of the collapse between image and environment, vision and reality, which resonates with the avant-garde demand that art be reintegrated with everyday life.

Kiesler created specific strategies to resist the commodification and commercialization of artworks. This resistance is made evident in a 1947 *New York World-Telegraph* review. Journalist Judith Kaye Reed begins with a sardonic acknowledgment of "Blood Flames" unusual hanging, as related to viewing as a form of commodification. Reed complains that, "if you like your pictures hung on the wall at about eye level, so you can see them easily and under conditions approximating the artist's when the works were being painted, you're conventional-minded. commercial. bourgeois."<sup>197</sup> She states that Kiesler informed her, upon her visit, "Hang your pictures that way and they might as well be commercial wares lined up for sale in a shop... or so many expensive objects displayed to attest your solvency."<sup>198</sup> Kiesler suggests here that when artworks are equated to luxury products the revolutionary or transgressive possibilities of art are neutralized. The manner in which Kiesler hung works at unconventional heights, shrouded them in fabric, or fastened them to the ceiling disrupted the display aesthetics that he associated with bourgeois consumerism.<sup>199</sup> His exhibition space emphasized the totality of

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<sup>196</sup> Frederick Kiesler, "Press Release Relating to the Architectural Aspects of the Gallery," *Art of this Century Gallery*, 1942, typescript, Kiesler Estate Archives, 3.

<sup>197</sup> Judith Kaye Reed, "Pictures on Ceilings," *New York World-Telegraph*, (March 8, 1947): 6.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Frederick Kiesler was quite familiar with the mechanics of display in bourgeois consumerism. He had created several window displays for Saks Fifth Avenue and even wrote a book on the subject, entitled *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*. For a discussion of

display. Kiesler presented artworks as parts of an immersive collective experience, which makes the viewer conscious of their own relationship to the space, to the artworks, and the impression generated by the unified elements of the exhibition, rather than isolating artworks as objects offered for individual scrutiny and, ultimately, possession. With these practices Kiesler sought to reclaim the impact of Surrealist art from an art market that nudged Surrealism closer and closer to the institutional through the commercialism of its artistic products.

### **Duchamp**

Marcel Duchamp was also visualizing Surrealism in this late period and, importantly, forming connections with younger American artists who would take up Surrealist and Duchampian themes. The ambitions of Duchamp vis-à-vis the Surrealist exhibitions he helped coordinate are more difficult to define. Duchamp adhered to his infamous stance of indifference in regards to Surrealist ambitions and his participation in the shows. He was never an official member of Surrealist movement nor did he sign any of their tracts, despite attending café meetings and being involved in various Surrealist activities.<sup>200</sup> He maintained that he helped with the planning of exhibitions and sale of other artists' work because he was simply asked to do so and found no reason to refuse these requests. His custom was to oblige others, whom he respected, out of a sense of friendship. "I was doing it for friendship. It wasn't my idea," Duchamp relayed, "and then it was a good thing to help artists to be seen somewhere. It was

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Kiesler's window displays see Goodman, "The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques," *Frederick Kiesler*.

<sup>200</sup> Duchamp said that he "had been borrowed from the ordinary world by the Surrealists" and that he had brought them "ideas which weren't anti-surrealist, but which weren't Surrealist either." Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Trans. Ron Padgett. (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 81.

more camaraderie than anything else."<sup>201</sup> Though Duchamp here refers specifically to administrating and collecting works for the *Société Anonyme*, this logic can be extended to his organization of Surrealist exhibitions, which he discussed in his personal correspondences in a frank, business-like manner, without the language of personal investment in the project itself.<sup>202</sup> Duchamp himself never acknowledged any personal<sup>203</sup> nor specific ideological motivations for his activities as an arts promoter. When discussing his involvement with *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, he is very matter of fact, speaking only of his requests for various elements in the exhibition, like the billiard tables, and whether they were executed.<sup>204</sup>

Perhaps as a result of this stance of detachment, Duchamp did not shrink from seeing late Surrealism in a historicizing light. He placed Surrealist painting along a sort of chronological and qualitative divide between "old Surrealism" and then "its followers, around 1940"<sup>205</sup> Duchamp approved of "old" Surrealism's "main" painters, Max Ernst, René Magritte, and Dali. However, he "didn't always like the way [some Surrealist painters] adopted whatever came along, that is, abstraction," which diverged from "what was already an old Surrealism."<sup>206</sup> In the late 1960s, Duchamp perceived a shift in Surrealism, into what could almost be called eras, one serving as the "old," the historical, and aside from a preference for the paintings of "old Surrealism," Duchamp implies that early Surrealism had primacy, in the sense of both establishing the parameters of the Surrealist project and as being an important origin point. Those artists working

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<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 58. *Société Anonyme* was an organization founded by collector Katherine Dreier that formed an important collection of Modern art and also sponsored lectures and concerts. Members included Duchamp, Man Ray, Wassily Kandinsky, and Alexander Archipenko.

<sup>202</sup> For Duchamp's written correspondence concerning exhibition plans, see *Affectionately, Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*.

<sup>203</sup> That is outside of personal favors done out of friendship.

<sup>204</sup> Cabanne and Duchamp, 86.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

in the 1940s and beyond were followers, inheriting the Surrealist state of mind from their forbearers, but in a manner that made it visibly different to Duchamp.<sup>207</sup>

Though he says early Surrealism is visibly different from late Surrealism, Duchamp also talked about the survival of Surrealism instead of its failure. He said in an interview with Pierre Cabanne, "Fundamentally, the reason Surrealism survived is that it wasn't a school of painting. It isn't a school of visual art, like the others. It isn't an ordinary 'ism,' because it goes as far as philosophy, sociology, literature, etc."<sup>208</sup> For Duchamp, what sustained Surrealism was that it was more of a behavior or a state of mind<sup>209</sup> rather than a movement concerned with the particular stylistic objectives or questions of representation characteristic of an "ism." Surrealism's accomplishments were not solely visual, but in the attitude of the maker. One of Surrealism's virtues, in Duchamp's opinion was that went beyond the "retinal."<sup>210</sup> Its ultimate intentions transcended the retinal concept of visual art towards questions of existence, society, and the presence of art within them.

Duchamp also had great esteem for the Surrealist movement and its "official" leader, with whom he often collaborated. His close relationship with Breton kept Duchamp abreast of the movement's agenda. After Breton's death, Duchamp gave his thoughts on Breton to a reporter: "I have never known a man who had a greater capacity for love, a greater power for loving the greatness of life, and you don't understand anything about his hatreds if you don't realize that he acted in this way to protect the very quality of his love for life, for the marvelous in life...Breton

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<sup>207</sup> That is, with adoption of abstraction. Duchamp's chronology seems to ignore the Surrealist abstractions that Miro, Tanguy, and Masson were creating by 1926-7, in the period of "old" Surrealism.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> A simplification of Duchamp's concept of the "retinal" is as a term applied to a type of painting that is concerned with sensuous appeal over ideological or intellectual function. Duchamp's use of the term "retinal" comes close to the idea of painterly.

loved like a heart beats. He was a lover of love in a world that believes in prostitution." When the reporter then asked, and what of Surrealism? Duchamp answered, "For me it was the incarnation of the most beautiful dream in the world."<sup>211</sup> Though Duchamp avoided direct affiliation with Surrealism, he endorsed its project and was a significant proponent of its survival into the 1960s. He also contributed to the survival of the movement by serving as a bridge between the established avant-garde and a younger generation of American artists that would combine certain Surrealist sensibilities with new artistic procedures.

### **Calas**

Nicolas Calas was a talented Greek poet and critic who moved to Paris 1934 and became involved with the Surrealist group. He was welcomed by Breton as an important young protégé.<sup>212</sup> Calas wrote Surrealist-inspired poetry, but also penned tracts that directly comment on the movement such as 1940's "Surrealist Dictionary" and "Towards a Third Surrealist Manifesto."<sup>213</sup> Relocating to New York in the 1940s, he became an important player in American Surrealism. It was there in 1947 that Calas organized "Blood Flames" with Kiesler in addition to writing the exhibition's catalog.

In an essay included in this exhibition catalogue, Calas echoes many of Kiesler's sentiments about the fusion of painting, sculpture, and architecture as a means of transformation and engagement with the visitor. "What finally counts," for Calas, "is the relationship that is to be established between the works of artists and the spectators." This prioritized relationship between art and individual is not just about creating a novel experience. The transformed

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<sup>211</sup> Robert Lebel, "Marcel Duchamp and André Breton," *Marcel Duchamp* eds. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Knystan McShine (NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 140.

<sup>212</sup> Sawin, 151.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

environment is meant to have a lasting impact on inner state of the individual. Here “pictures, statues, spectators are carried by a colorbow into new situations which are to serve as starting point for our own personal metamorphosis.” The Surrealist exhibition was ideally a catalyst for refashioning the self by confronting the psychic potentiality of Surrealist art with enhanced engagement. Kiesler’s unusual display of Surrealist art, for Calas, was in opposition to the ordered and stagnant atmosphere of the museum.<sup>214</sup> This domestication of art by virtue of being within the institution of art also associated artwork with luxury objects available for conspicuous consumption, according to Calas.<sup>215</sup> He recognizes Kiesler’s challenge to art’s commercialization as an important facet of “Blood Flames.” Placing clear emphasis on the disorienting capacity of Surrealist art in the exhibition’s layout and reforming the way in which the visitor interacts with art by virtue of being in this transformed environment, offered resistance, in his view, to the institutionalization of that art.

Calas shared Breton’s distaste for the subordination of art to the advancement of ideology. In the “Blood Flames” exhibition catalog, he declares that “opposition to ‘programmatic’ painting must be absolute, regardless of whether the program of the artist be political, religious, scientific or literary.”<sup>216</sup> Calas reiterated the Surrealist imperative to artistic freedom and its ability to mediate between individualism and the larger world.<sup>217</sup> While dismissing ideologically derived art, Calas did believe that art needed a social function: “It does not follow, however, that because the artist is forever seeking to emancipate himself that he wills to be irresponsible, as the behavior of some individual artists and some group of artists

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<sup>214</sup> Calas, *Bloodflames 1947* (New York: Hugo Gallery, 1947), 16.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>217</sup> “The artist oscillates perpetually between the extraversion of magic and the introversion of freedom.” *Ibid.*, 6.

suggests.”<sup>218</sup> Artists and their art are still charged with social responsibility even in the midst of great artistic freedom.

In regards to the social value of art, Calas felt that effective art reanimates the individual dulled by Modern life. “The search of the primitive, so characteristic of our epoch, is a symptom of the artist's vigorous reaction to the disruptive effect mechanization has had upon spiritual life.”<sup>219</sup> He associates this view with artists who value the primitive over the traditional European artistic models advanced by the institution of art. Calas states that artists are better off knowing the “differences between the various schools of the Seppik River of New Guinea than to understand the oppositions between the Italian tribes of the Renaissance.” The Surrealist movement had a longstanding interest in “primitive” art that was consistent with its predilection for displacing the weight of tradition through an artistic counter-canon. Surrealism often evoked the “primitive” consciousness as a model of psychic liberation. This stance is strongly implied in Calas’ endorsement of the value of art in the contemporary age of mechanization.

Though the cultural contexts in which these exhibitions were received differed in Paris and New York, these four exhibitions presented the message that Surrealism was continuing its political and artistic project into the post-war period through a program of undeniable visual extravagance and provocation. Asserting the movement’s vigor was a central priority for Breton after World War II, once Surrealism’s efficacy was being routinely questioned. Breton’s views established a basic position for late Surrealism, which saw other major figures engaged with the movement stress innovation and relevancy to late capitalist society in late Surrealist exhibitions. Breton, Calas, and Kiesler in particular claimed that Surrealist art still had a transformative power that was capable of renewing individual subjectivity and reforming broader cultural

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 5.

attitudes. 1947's revival of myth allowed life to be experienced in a new way and sought to reinforce community through the process of initiation. Myth was believed to have a political and an ethical function that conformed to earlier Surrealist calls for revolution. The post-war exhibitions attempted to resist the institutionalization of the movement as a whole, which threatened to absolve its revolutionary potential, in addition to resisting art's commercialization. The rhetoric surrounding these exhibitions, provided by their key organizers, advanced artistic freedom as an ideal, just as the exhibitions' experimental appearance and opposition to the white cube aesthetic declared that Surrealist art was not intended for detached aesthetic consideration.

### Chapter 3. Efficacy and the Question of the Neo-Avant-Garde

Several themes reoccur throughout the contemporary reception of late Surrealist exhibitions. Agedness was a ubiquitous trope. Though amassing nearly half a century of avant-garde activities was certainly a rare accomplishment for any movement, this idea of age was typically associated with decline. A crucial aspect of this contemporary reception is the pronounced division between Surrealism of the past and the Surrealism of the present. This division allowed for an evaluation of the two eras that always favored early Surrealism. As with Canaday's 1960 review of "Surrealist Intrusion into the Enchanters' Domain," the talent was seen to be in old Surrealism and not in the newer exemplars. Reviews often centered on the idea of shock value as an important quality of Surrealism, raising the question of whether late Surrealism still had any left. A portion of the reviews suggested that Surrealist themes and imagery seemed absurd without this shock. In this sense, the exhibitions had been reduced to spectacle. Critics who had largely linked Surrealism's avant-garde status to its capacity to shock now declared that nothing was able to shock viewers after the war years and revelations of fascist atrocities, thus rendering avant-garde strategies ineffectual. In the view of Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde, these criticisms point to the failure of the Surrealist "historical avant-garde." In his view late Surrealism's critiques of bourgeois society were, in fact, muted.

The focus in this study is on critical reception in the United States. An in-depth account of late Surrealism's European reception, which was preoccupied with determining Surrealism's place in the post-war French intellectual scene dominated by Communism and Existentialism, is a topic that merits study on its own.<sup>220</sup> The European response to post-war Surrealist exhibitions

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<sup>220</sup> Focusing on the American reception of late Surrealism and the development of the neo-avant-garde in the United States will be necessarily limiting to those artists working in post-war Europe who adopted and modified elements of Surrealist practice.

summarized in this thesis is included here as a means to compare and contrast responses in the United States. The particular concerns and judgments within the American reception of late Surrealist exhibitions also sets the stage for the emergence of the American neo-avant-garde artists, including Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, who participated in these Surrealist exhibitions themselves and those neo-avant-garde artists who would take up Surrealist-influenced approach to environment. American reception of late Surrealism and the development of the neo-avant-garde in the United States will shape the context in which neo-avant-gardistes Johns and Rauschenberg, who provide a direct link with Surrealist activities, operate in the avant-garde framework.

The reception in the United States had a different take on efficacy than the reception in Paris. The American audience was concerned primarily with the preeminence of painting and how Surrealist painting's quality fared according to the painterly techniques and abstractionist principles of mid-twentieth century Modernism. Even though late Surrealist painting, like that of Matta and Lam, employed variations of abstraction that was deemed to be the future of American painting, the late Surrealist work was judged by some critics to be derivative, reinforcing the schism between pre and post-WWII Surrealism. Parisian reviews, in contrast, judged late Surrealism's offerings in terms of the social and political possibilities they presented. They were also quite sensitive to the challenges these exhibitions presented to bourgeois viewers (or not). Both Paris and New York seemed to agree that contemporary audiences were desensitized to Surrealism's well-known approach to shock and absurdity, depriving late Surrealism of its immediacy.

## Reception of Late Surrealist Exhibitions in the United States

Contemporary reception of post-World War II Surrealist exhibitions in the United States was preoccupied with how current offerings compared to the successes of inter-war Surrealism and typically pointed up a perceived decline, including related claims about the movement's relegation to the historical past and its status as an institution. Narratives of age and decline were common tropes in late Surrealist exhibition reviews in America. A 1960's *Time Magazine* review of "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain" by critic John Canaday, for example, referred to André Breton's Surrealists as "a dogged group of followers."<sup>221</sup> The high points of the exhibition were equated with Surrealism's past rather than its present. For Canaday, the passage of time had not nullified his assessment that the best of Surrealism's members were good artists. "Last week it was the old masters who stole the show," the review declares, making special example of works by Yves Tanguy, Francis Picabia, Richard Oelze, Max Ernst, Man Ray, and Giorgio de Chirico, while "[a]mong the younger artists, none were equal in quality."<sup>222</sup> The younger exhibiting artists deemed inferior include Arshile Gorky, Matta, David Hare, Jeanne Raynal, Jean Benoit, and Mimi Parent. Johns' and Rauschenberg's offerings, as noted previously, were singled out as "repulsive." Tellingly, for an avant-garde without aesthetic preoccupations and whose objectives with visual art were to create certain psychological effects within the viewer, here "quality" seems to refer to something quite close to aesthetic success.

The review gives a somewhat contradictory account of the efficacy of "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain" and, by extension, the movement's efficacy. Canaday

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<sup>221</sup> John Canaday, "Surrealistic Sanity," *Time Magazine*, no. 24, December 12 1960, 83.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

declares, "there is life of a sort in the old movement yet."<sup>223</sup> However, it seems that this "life" is attributed to the work of older Surrealists and older Surrealist artworks still maintaining an impact on the viewer, as well as the overall spectacle of the exhibition space with its live chickens, snaking hoses, and hanging bicycles. Quoting Duchamp, Canaday suggests that the movement is at its end with a scattering of individuals, but this demise is somewhat softened by the fact that the older Surrealist members "know how to laugh at themselves."<sup>224</sup> Though not stated directly, Canaday suggests that the continuation of Surrealism has seen some of its central principles compromised: namely irrationality and an elevation of the marvelous. Another 1960 review by Canaday, "Surrealistic Sanity," presents as one of the original aims of the Surrealist movement the pursuit of the marvelous, facilitated by openness to mental states beyond rational control. Yet he finds that, "in a world so inured to artistic high jinks, much of the marvelous is gone."<sup>225</sup> This assessment left little optimism for the efficacy of an avant-garde that had proclaimed the marvelous as a form of poetic liberation.

The institutionalization of Surrealism also becomes bound up with the dichotomy between past and present Surrealist art. Attempts to exhibit late Surrealism reveal the movement's stagnation--a movement no longer innovating or evolving. For Canaday, the exhibition casts a nostalgic, backward look towards what is a now distinct, recognizable oeuvre; in other words, towards the historical. Under a heading labeled "Past Recaptured" John Canaday in "Nostalgia and the Forward Look," concludes that the effect of the 1960 exhibition, "in view

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Canaday relates, "Some years ago, Marcel Duchamp himself said: "Movements begin as a group formation and end with the scattering of individuals." Yet the exhibit showed something else about the old timers. What once seemed sick now seems strangely sane: the surrealists were wild but seldom undisciplined, and with their hoses, their hens and their bicycles, they knew how to laugh at themselves." John Canaday, "Nostalgia and the Forward Look," *New York Times*, December 4 1960, X21.

<sup>225</sup> Canaday, "Surrealistic Sanity," 83.

of surrealism's now lengthy past, is nostalgic- traditional rather than innovational."<sup>226</sup> Once again, "Old line surrealism" is thought to stand up quite well and even though the novelty value of Surrealist works has worn off, they are at the very least, "interesting as art-historical curiosa."<sup>227</sup> What used to be shocking is now in the domain of art history. Surrealism moves towards the institutional.

Canaday seems aware of Surrealism's antagonism of bourgeois sensibilities and its history of using strategies such as shock and evocations of the marvelous to confront these sensibilities. However, he misses the underlying motivations for these strategies—to provoke certain attitudinal changes in the recipient—and misjudges shock and antagonism as the ultimate effect rather than as a means to produce these attitudinal changes. Additionally, his focus on artistic quality of Surrealism's "old masters" as opposed to the "repulsive" work of younger artists seems to be based on an understanding of Modernism centered upon the progressive evolution of abstraction and painterly technique. Canaday's critical criteria apparently could not accommodate the important shift from high Modernism to the pre-post-Modernism indicated by Johns and Rauschenberg's work.

Canaday was not alone among U.S. critics in placing more weight on artistic technique than on assessing Surrealism's continued pursuit of artistic and social revolution. *Art Digest's* review of the same exhibition curiously eliminates any reference to Surrealism in its description of the exhibition or introduction to the artists. Instead the article chooses to assess the art primarily in terms of abstraction. Hare's sculpture, according to critic Judith Kaye Reed, "adapts Picasso's multiple viewpoint to sculpture." A "very-much abstracted nude" represents Arshile

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<sup>226</sup> Canaday, "Nostalgia and the Forward Look," X21.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

Gorky's painting, while Jeanne Raynal and Helen Philips offer a "glowing abstract design" and "gleaming abstract sculptures" respectively.<sup>228</sup>

In general, there was an avoidance of the stated goals of Surrealism and the underlying philosophies of the exhibitions in the American reception of this show. This reaction was also accompanied by a pronounced frustration with how difficult it was to focus one's attention on the individual artworks. The act of embedding artwork in complex spaces instead of arranged at eye level on clean gallery walls, was of course part of a calculated effect on the part of the exhibition organizers, but was at times poorly received by an audience who wanted to be immersed in the stylistic language of individual paintings. This response was typified by the *ARTnews* review of "Blood Flames," which noted Frederick Kiesler's "exuberant and incoherent" installation, concluding that the exhibition "succeeded in protecting paintings from spectators."<sup>229</sup> This observation is consistent with art critic Judith Kaye Reed's indignant *New York World-Telegram* response to the unconventional placement of paintings within the space, where, to Kiesler's chagrin, she literally disrupts the exhibition layout to physically adjust paintings to her own preferred viewing arrangement.<sup>230</sup> Reed's insistence on traditional wall-to-spectator views of painting obscured the motivations for Kiesler's installation: his message of harmonious utopianism and his critique of consumerism.

Reed believes that the decor steals the show from the artists, but interestingly feels like the setting does not change the experience of these paintings. Reed finds that "what is surprising about this novel installation is the proof it offers that many of the pictures look much the same when viewed lop-sided or otherwise, which may or may not be considered a triumph for

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<sup>228</sup> Judith Kaye Reed, "Kiesler the Tent-Maker, Does Modern Decor," *Art Digest* 21, (March 15, 1947): 15.

<sup>229</sup> "Bloodflames," *ARTnews* 46, no 2 (April 1947): 45.

<sup>230</sup> Judith Kaye Reed, "Pictures on the Ceiling," *New York World-Telegram*, March 8, 1947, 6.

Kiesler.” One imagines that Kiesler would not consider Reed’s assessment a triumph. To see pictures as one usually sees them, as discrete, alien worlds offered up for visual pleasure, was in direct conflict with Kiesler’s attitudes on art and architecture. Kiesler’s ambitions for the installation were consistent with the larger project of the Bürgerian avant-garde, which rejected the autonomous domain of art and desired to dissolve the boundaries between art and life.

Although Reed's and Canaday’s readings fail to recognize a shift in how objects were intended to be viewed and how the exhibitions were intended to be experienced, other critics were more perceptive. Perhaps a consequence of being an artist himself, Ad Reinhardt was sympathetic enough to Kiesler’s and Nicolas Calas’ professed goals to repeatedly quote from their catalog essays, unironically weaving their discussion of magic, unity, and fusion into his *PM* newspaper review. More importantly, he was also sensitive to the way the arrangement of the works in space altered the view, not so much preventing access to the artworks, but carefully manipulating the way the viewer experiences the works. He also recognized that the art in this particular environment presents a total experience, rather than just isolated works in a strange setting. Reinhardt pointed out that the “rich variety of materials and structures [contributed] to the total ‘magical’ spell. Displayed at different levels, angles and projections, the art objects forces the spectator into a particular point-of-view.” Reinhardt did not find this forced perspective frustrating, like many other reviewers, but intuited that the installation created a more engaged experience for the viewer where the artworks and the setting worked together to “make the onlooker a psychological part of the picture.”<sup>231</sup> However, Reinhardt’s evaluation of the “total magical spell” in relation to Surrealist ventures into the occult and utopian integration of art, space, and human experience was atypical of the American reception.

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<sup>231</sup> Ad Reinhardt, “Neo-Surrealists Take Over a Gallery,” *PM*, March 11, 1947, 10.

In the American context, as noted above, late Surrealism is routinely judged to be less efficacious than its earlier days. The terms of this assessment, however, derive primarily from the history of Modern painting rather than the goals of the historical avant-garde. Artistic quality or style was, after all, beside the point in terms of the revolutionary goals of the Surrealist avant-garde. These criteria, though, seemed to matter a fair amount to the American audience accustomed to considering Surrealism primarily as a movement in painting rather than seeing its visual art as one component of a larger revolutionary project. Compromised efficacy also seems to arise from the shock value of Surrealism falling flat. For many American critics Surrealist irreverence was now a clichéd institutional definition of the movement.

### **Reception of Late Surrealist Exhibitions in Europe**

The European context for the critical reception of Surrealist exhibitions of the 1940s and 50s also stressed age and fatigue of the movement. Late Surrealism's critiques of conservative middle-class values were perceived to be ineffectual. The extreme spectacle of Surrealist exhibitions had made them palatable to the bourgeois audience the Surrealists claimed to despise. Unlike the American audience's preoccupation with the exhibitions' incoherency and a continual frustration with the unreadability of Surrealist art, the Parisian reception understood the exhibitions as total statements on the movement's direction.

Reviewers of the 1959 EROS exhibition repeated the narrative of Surrealism's age. Jean-Jacques Lévêque's 1960 *L'Information* review of EROS, for example, chided, "Here is an exhibition which gives away an old spirit of thirty years... Eroticism seen by Surrealism does not surpass the level of the bazaar side-passage, of the psychiatrist's office, of the little hell of the

well-heeled man."<sup>232</sup> Earlier in a review of *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Bernard Dorival called the exhibition "a spectacle for families."<sup>233</sup> As these comments indicate, in Paris, late Surrealism's ability to generate controversy had been diminished enough to be appropriate for province-dwellers and its exhibitions could have been recommended by even the most conservative priest for their vacation trip to Paris.

While most reviews commented on the provocative quality of the exhibition environments, they also struck many as circus-like. For the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* Yvonne Hagen wrote that visitors to the EROS exhibition are given "a glittering sight with distractions, jokes and side-shows that will amaze, astound and shock them like a trip through the ghost tunnel at Luna Park." In her account, Hagen continues the familiar trope of division between the Surrealism of the past and that of the decidedly inferior present. She wrote that the 1959 show was a "revival of Surrealism" rather than simply Surrealism itself, and that this "revival" was "no longer an attraction to major talent."<sup>234</sup> There were those reviews that did find *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* shocking, however, dismissing the show as simple vulgarity or threats to dearly held notions of morality and French identity.<sup>235</sup> *La Nouvelle Revue française* called the show "vulgar pornography" and *Libération* found that the immoral Surrealists were tarnishing the name of art.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Jean-Jacques Lévêque, review of EROS, *L'Information*, 1 (Jan 1960): 188.

<sup>233</sup> Bernard Dorival, "Fantômes du surréalisme," *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, no. 1037 (July 17, 1947): 1. "C'est un spectacle pour familles, que l'abbé Bethléem recommanderait lui-même." Abbé Bethlehem was a conservative priest who attracted widespread attention in the 1920s when he was fined by the Paris police court for publicly destroying magazines and publications that he deemed pornographic.

<sup>234</sup> Yvonne Hagen, "Surrealists' Eroticism," *New York Herald Tribune*, December, 1959, np.

<sup>235</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros: 1938-1968* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 169.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

Unlike the American context, the Parisians found the relative success or failure of the exhibition to be linked to Surrealism's political stance and the new possibilities the movement offered to society. Critics affiliated with the French Communist party critiqued *Le Surréalisme en 1947* for being visually and socially ineffectual. The concept of myth appeared an inadequate substitute for mobilizing the proletariat. Art critic Marie-Louise Barron panned the 1947 exhibition for *Les Lettres françaises* as being out of step with post-war France.<sup>237</sup> She claimed that for all its extravagance the exhibition was without surprise or humor.

Surrealism's social and revolutionary efficacy was redeemed for others. Camille Bourniquel felt that post-war Surrealism had something valuable to offer, as it "invented new paths to knowledge, new modes of thinking, feeling and expression for all men." He also locates Surrealism's revolutionary potential in its longevity:

Denier of models, [Surrealism] created another, denier of genres, it in the end returned to genres. Its chaos was too lucidly organized to conceal the promise of a future order; too healthy also to kill prodigious germinal forces. And it is really in that that it proved itself to be the most authentically revolutionary: capable of putting in place that which it destroyed.<sup>238</sup>

In this critic's view, Surrealism's anarchic streak was able to form a new model, due to its sustained project and coherent narrative. The Europeans were also willing to conceptualize these exhibitions as unified statements of Surrealist intent, taking the environment, art, theme and the elevation of experience as part of the whole. Gaëtan Picon identified 1947's Surrealism as ruled by "the fascination with an absolute spirituality, a sort of angelic temptation, an extremely avid idealism."<sup>239</sup> Armand Hoog found value in the *Le Surréalisme en 1947* because it inspired a

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<sup>237</sup>Marie-Louise Barron, "Surréalisme 1947: En retard d'une guerre comme l'État-Major," *Les Lettres françaises* 7, no. 165 (July 18, 1947): 2.

<sup>238</sup>Camille Bourniquel, "Magie, Surréalisme, et liberté," *Esprit* 16, no. 139 (November 1947): 775–782.

<sup>239</sup>Gaëtan Picon, "Le Surréalisme et l'espoir," *La Gazette des lettres* (June 28, 1947): 9. "Ce qui domine le surréalisme c'est la fascination d'une spiritualité absolue, une

proximity to the sacred that was part of Breton and Duchamp's plan for individual and collective regeneration through myth. Hoog recounts that he "walked through the initiatory chapels mounted by Breton and Marcel Duchamp close to the Hall of Superstition. These chapels are not without beauty. More than once their somber and glowing strangeness embraces the heart, and one is quite close to the sentiment of the sacred. I say: quite close."<sup>240</sup> Hoog suggests that the show furthered its stated goals of initiation and revelation by virtue of his proximity to the sentiment of the sacred, though not the sacred itself.

As this overview suggests, by the 1950s European and American critics and curators regarded Surrealism as an institution—a movement whose "moment" seemed confined to a span of historical time between the World Wars and was able to look back on itself—rather than convincingly assert an avant-garde project immersed in the present. While the "new myth" purported a Surrealist future that could reshape social reality, the argument resonated as esoteric and escapist for much of the French intellectual scene. In a Bürgerian sense, critical reception indicates that late Surrealism was beginning to transform into its opposite—rehashing its earlier forms with the promise of revolution and sharp critique, though unable to keep these promises and thus taking on the characteristics of the neo-avant-garde.

The tension that seems to emerge from nearly all contemporary reception and scholarly discussions of these later exhibitions is that the exhibitions were either historicizing, putting the end cap on the Surrealism of the 1920s, 30s, and early 40s, or that they expressed the continued viability and relevancy of later Surrealism. While the continuity of the movement (its still

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sorte de tentation angélique, un idéalisme extrême avide...[Surrealism] croit que l'existence humaine a des possibilités merveilleuses et illimitées."

<sup>240</sup> Armand Hoog, "Permanence du Surréalisme," *La Nef* 33 (August 1947): 121.

"Je me suis promené dans les chapelles initiatiques montées par Breton et Marcel Duchamp auprès de la Salle de superstition. Ces chapelles ne sont pas sans beauté. Plus d'une fois leur étrangeté sombre et rutilante étreint le Coeur. Et l'on est tout près du sentiment du sacré. Je dis: tout près."

applicable status as an avant-garde movement) was a motivating agenda for the organizers of these shows, the art and its display also seemed to conjure up many of the qualities that would be negatively associated with the neo-avant-garde, illustrating that the ambitions of Surrealism and its ability for provocation had been disrupted. From this perspective, late Surrealism had, essentially, lost claim to its historical avant-garde status and its original ambitions were now defunct. It remains to be examined whether Surrealism, by the late 1940s, had in fact been transformed into its own neo-avant-garde by repeating its earlier forms in meaningless nods to its own idealized past. The Surrealist avant-garde, by the 1950s and 60s, was also in the midst of a meaningful overlap with developing modes of artistic production that offered new resistances to high Modernism in the form of the neo-avant-garde.

### **“Neo-Dada” in the United States**

In America, the term “neo-Dada”<sup>241</sup> was initially associated with the assemblage art of artists like Richard Stankewicz, Jasper Johns, Jean Follet and Robert Rauschenberg that developed as an alternative to Abstract Expressionism’s painterly concerns.<sup>242</sup> Many of the so-called neo-Dadaists were influenced by the ideas of Duchamp and the American composer John Cage.<sup>243</sup> This younger generation’s appropriation of found materials and detritus provided a medium without inherent aesthetic value, which invited comparisons with Dada and Duchampian

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<sup>241</sup> “Neo-Dada” was understood as a pejorative term in the 1950s

<sup>242</sup> See Irving Sandler’s “Assemblage: Stankewicz, Chamberlain, di Suvero, and Other Junk Sculptors” in *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). See also Catherine Craft’s 2012 *An Audience of Artists: Dada, Neo-Dada and the Emergence of Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) for the development of neo-Dada and assemblage art in relation to then dominant paradigms of Abstract Expressionism.

<sup>243</sup> Sandler, *The New York School*, x.

ready-mades. Neo-Dada was characterized as “disrespect for aesthetic boundaries”<sup>244</sup> and typically incorporated what were regarded as non-art materials. Neo-Dada art avoided the nihilist spirit of Dada, however.<sup>245</sup> Dada had pioneered the anti-aesthetic in collage and ready-made formats, which had been “thrown into the public’s face in a spirit of defiance.”<sup>246</sup> Neo-Dada practitioners generally had art training and careerist ambitions, which lent certain formal considerations to their work even as they embraced means of working outside of dominant artistic tendencies. Neo-Dada became a term used to identify works in which the viewer detected “ambivalent attitudes towards art, creativity and originality vis-à-vis the recent past.”<sup>247</sup>

The concept of Neo-Dada is based primarily on Duchamp’s precedents. While Marcel Duchamp is typically associated with the Dada movement, as noted in chapter two, he collaborated with André Breton on many Surrealist activities into the 1960s. Those that followed Duchamp’s model in the 1950s and 60s might be considered more generally as neo-avant-garde artists since Duchamp’s artistic activities extended beyond Dada to Surrealism. Environments and Happenings, promoted by Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg, among others, transitioned painting into actions and complicated the divisions between art and life. While the neo-avant-garde encompassed a wide range of artistic and performative practices, two exemplars of the neo-avant-garde’s relationship with Surrealism will be considered here. The neo-avant-garde artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who had exhibited with the Surrealists and are often associated with “neo-Dada” function as a bridge to the historical avant-gardes. Neo-Dada, the neo-avant-garde, and late Surrealism all converge in the careers of Johns, Rauschenberg and

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<sup>244</sup> David Hopkins, "Blurring Boundaries: Pop Art, Fluxus, and their Effects." *After Modern Art: 1945-2000* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 47.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>247</sup> Craft, 11.

Duchamp in the 1950s and 1960s. The younger artists were typically placed in the category of neo-Dada, when they began to gain notoriety during this period. However, their closest contact with Duchamp occurred while he was most invested in the late Surrealist project. Identifying Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg as neo-avant-garde accommodates their influences from Duchampian tradition of the ready-made, associated with Dada, and also from Duchamp's engagement with Surrealist themes.

### **Johns, Rauschenberg and "neo-Dada" in the 1950s**

In the U.S. the term "Neo-Dada" was first coined by Robert Rosenblum in a 1957 exhibition review for a show at Leo Castelli's gallery, which featured Rauschenberg and Johns.<sup>248</sup> The term was coined in relation to Johns' pictorial resonances with Duchamp's ready-mades. Rosenblum wrote, "Take Jasper Johns' work, ... which is as hard to explain as in its unsettling power as the reasonable illogicalities of a Duchamp ready-made. Is it blasphemous or respectful, simple-minded or recondite. One suspects here a vital neo-Dada spirit."<sup>249</sup>

Rauschenberg and Johns are also typically positioned as precursors to 1960s Pop art.<sup>250</sup> Neo-Dada and Pop art are Bürger's prime models of the neo-avant-garde. In Bürger's account

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<sup>248</sup> Hopkins, "Duchamp's Legacy," 247, f.n. 12.

<sup>249</sup> Paul B. Franklin, "Between Art and Life, Art as Life: A Chronology of the Lives and Work of Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg," *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, eds. Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (Philadelphia Museum of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 319.

<sup>250</sup> Both used familiar, mass-produced imagery. Their practices opened aesthetic and procedural possibilities for the Pop art generation that would begin to dominate the American art scene in the 1960s. Rauschenberg's practice of gleaning imagery from newspapers, magazines and illustrations, treating them with detachment and detachment, would give rise to the "cool impersonality" and the subject matter of Pop. His practice of silkscreening of photographic and commercially available imagery onto his work would resonate with Andy Warhol's and Roy

the Duchampian ready-made and the neo-avant-garde adaptation of the Duchampian ready-made (specifically the example of an exhibited stovepipe) continues to modify the category of “artwork,” but participates in the absorption of Dada’s project into institution of art and neutralizes its critiques. The neo-Dada object—Jasper Johns’ painted bronze beer cans, for example, affirms rather than negates the object as an authored, artistic creation.<sup>251</sup> Pop art exploited this freedom of artistic means, the liberation of which was one of the historical avant-garde’s achievements and especially characteristic of the Surrealist avant-garde.<sup>252</sup> The linkage between Rauschenberg, Johns and Pop art, as well as their neo-Dada affiliation, places their work squarely within the Bürgerian mechanism of neo-avant-garde repetition. Their work was seen to repeat the forms of the avant-garde, particularly the ready-made, and employed the free use of artistic means developed through the historical avant-garde, particularly the revival of collaged mass-culture imagery that Pop art would employ in its practices.<sup>253</sup>

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Lichtenstein’s Pop presentation of mass culture. Rauschenberg appropriated this silk-screen technique from Warhol. For further links between Rauschenberg, Johns, and Pop art see: Hopkins, David. “Blurring Boundaries: Pop Art, Fluxus, and their Effects.” *After Modern Art: 1945-2000*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.

<sup>251</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 52.

<sup>252</sup> Peter Bürger, Bettina Brandt, and Daniel Purdy. “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,” *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 706.

<sup>253</sup> It is significant to the critical discussion of the neo-avant-garde that Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were first seen as neo-Dada artists, although it is now apparent that their relationship to the historical past and the Pop future is more complex than it first appeared in the 1950s and 1960s. The painterly surfaces of these two artists are inconsistent with the impersonality of Pop art, even if these painterly marks are made ironically. Regarding Johns, Rauschenberg, and neo-Dada, it is now more difficult to maintain this clear categorization of their work as neo-Dada, as neither were nihilists. Rauschenberg claimed to be working in the gap between art and life instead of trying to unite art and life as the avant-gardists were.

While Johns and Rauschenberg are often categorized as neo-Dada and proto-Pop,<sup>254</sup> there is another avant-garde model these artists were bound up with. Their participation in Surrealist exhibitions would suggest compatible strategies and practices for those on both sides of the historical and neo-avant-garde paradigm. Johns' *Target with Plaster Casts* and two works by Rauschenberg, *Bed* and *Odalisk*, were on view at the 1959 EROS (*Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme*) exhibition.<sup>255</sup> The two painters were invited to participate in EROS by Daniel Cordier, who had connections in New York<sup>256</sup> and Duchamp's intervention secured their inclusion in the exhibition.<sup>257</sup> *Target with Plaster Casts* and *Bed* were displayed again in 1960's "Surrealist Intrusion into the Enchanter's Domain." Duchamp gravitated towards these two artists, sensing an affinity with his own sensibilities and the significant themes of late Surrealism. The inclusion of these neo-avant-garde artists in late Surrealist exhibitions speaks to a direct and literal interchange between the historical and neo-avant-garde work.

Duchamp's relationship with a younger generation of artists has been rightly characterized as influential. In the late 1950's critics began to codify a Duchampian influence in the works of Johns and Rauschenberg and began referring to their art as "Neo-Dada."<sup>258</sup> However, this Dada model neglects many of Duchamp's later creative endeavors, as has been shown in chapter 2, while also neglecting Johns and Rauschenberg's willingness to be identified with Surrealism. While Duchamp is regarded as a prototypical Dadaist until his death, he actively collaborated with Breton and promoted the Surrealist project in the 1920s and after the war. He designed the glass doors for Breton's Galerie Gravidia in 1937, which featured the outline of a couple greeting

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<sup>254</sup> Hal Foster's *The Return of the Real* identifies these two artists as neo-Dada along with a great deal of their critical reception.

<sup>255</sup> Franklin, 324.

<sup>256</sup> Mahon, 161.

<sup>257</sup> Franklin, 324.

<sup>258</sup> Hopkins, "Duchamp's Legacy," 47. Breton's tract on Duchamp first appeared as "Phare de La Mariée" in *Minotaure* 2, no. 6 (Winter 1935) 45- 49.

visitors to the gallery of Surrealist artworks.<sup>259</sup> Breton, in turn, had published a major essay on Duchamp's *Large Glass* and notes on *Green Box* in 1935, which would appear in the journal *Minotaure*.<sup>260</sup> The older artist also solicited advertisements for and served as the editorial advisor for the Surrealist periodical *VVV*.<sup>261</sup>

Duchamp showed his work in Surrealist exhibitions and with greater frequency than he did in Dada exhibitions during his lifetime. He contributed a mannequin to the street of mannequins inhabiting 1938's *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at Galerie Beaux-Arts as well as the infamous bags of coal that hung from the ceiling and shed coal dust onto the visitors. He presented his own work in the same Surrealist exhibitions that featured Johns and Rauschenberg. Duchamp's self-portrait, *With My Tongue in My Cheek* (1959), for example, was displayed in the EROS exhibition of the same year.<sup>262</sup> In "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain" Duchamp hung his ready-made *Pharmacie* and *Coin de chasteté* in the same room with Johns' and Rauschenberg's work.<sup>263</sup> Partly because Duchamp's collaboration with Surrealism became more pronounced during the oft-ignored era of late Surrealism, Duchamp has been principally characterized as a Dada figure. As Duchamp is typically subject to this categorization and Johns and Rauschenberg emulated certain Duchampian attitudes and gestures in their work, the latter have been characterized as neo-Dada. This strictly neo-Dada characterization, however, has largely overshadowed the Surrealist leanings of their work. Surrealist affiliations with chance, illogical juxtaposition, and eroticism--qualities also familiar to Duchamp's work--can also be found in their production.

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<sup>259</sup> Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2001), 26.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>262</sup> Franklin, 324.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

Johns and Rauschenberg first met in 1954. Duchamp made his first visit to Johns' and Rauschenberg's New York studios, when he accompanied Nicolas Calas there in January 1959.<sup>264</sup> Duchamp was both artistically and personally significant to Johns and Rauschenberg. From this point forward, their personal and professional contact would gradually become a friendship, one that included composer Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham. Their continued contact afforded the neo-avant-gardistes direct access to Duchamp's ideas. Rauschenberg and Johns were very impressed with Duchamp. Before being introduced to Duchamp, they had gone to the Philadelphia Museum of Art to see the Duchamp collection and were especially interested in *The Large Glass*.<sup>265</sup> The younger artists also collected Duchamp's work. Jasper Johns obtained *Female Fig Leaf*, *Moulin à café* and *Green Box* for his collection, while Rauschenberg had *Bottlerack* [figure 38] and *Green Box*.<sup>266</sup>

Cage had been familiar with Duchamp's work since the late 1920s, eventually forming a friendship with the older artist. Cage became connected with Rauschenberg through the 1952 Happening at Black Mountain College, which Cage organized.<sup>267</sup> He would ultimately befriend Rauschenberg and Johns, mediating the social and artistic affiliations between Duchamp and these younger artists.<sup>268</sup> Cage's own practices shared the use of chance as a viable artistic means

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<sup>264</sup> Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle, "Openness and Grace," *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, eds. Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (Philadelphia Museum of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 20.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Franklin, 326, 342.

<sup>267</sup> Rauschenberg's painting was incorporated into the Happening, which also included dancing piano playing, poetry read from a ladder, a phonograph, film images, and a short lecture by Cage.

<sup>268</sup> The relationship between Johns, Rauschenberg, Duchamp and Cage has received generations of scholarly attention. For a small sample of the scholarship devoted to this topic: Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art* (New York: Viking Press, 1962); Basualdo, Carlos and Erica F. Battle. *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*. Eds. Basualdo and Battle. Philadelphia Museum of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012; as well as the previously noted texts

with Duchampian practice. The two were invested in blurring the divisions between art and life; ready-mades in the case of Duchamp and compositions like *4'33"* in Cage's case. Both felt an antipathy for the notion of artist as genius, challenging romantic models of artistic creation.<sup>269</sup> However, Cage's interpretation of Duchampian practice would offer a slightly altered understanding of these themes to Johns and Rauschenberg. As Irving Sandler has described, Cage's affirmation of society and life as it currently existed was opposed to Duchamp's subversive tone and cultural critiques.<sup>270</sup> Cage believed that art's purpose was "an affirmation of life- not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and let it act of its own accord."<sup>271</sup> Duchamp's radical skepticism was offset by Cage's study of Zen Buddhism, which allowed Cage to wield a positive acceptance of what his environment provided in the way of experience. Both Dada and Zen philosophy shared an interest in the role of chance and appreciation for the experience of everyday life, even if their ultimate aims were different.<sup>272</sup> It is through Cage that Johns and Rauschenberg processed Duchamp, lending the "neo-Dadaists" an attitude that was more revelatory than iconoclastic.<sup>273</sup> Through Cage's positive cast Rauschenberg and Johns were able

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by Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*; Catherine Craft, *An Audience of Artists: Dada, Neo-Dada and the Emergence of Abstract Expressionism*.

<sup>269</sup> Sandler, *The New York School*, 164.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>271</sup> Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors*, 75.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> Cage's mediation between Duchamp and the practices of Rauschenberg and Duchamp is a rich topic that cannot be fully explored here. This is also true of the role played by dancer, choreographer, and Cage's partner, Merce Cunningham, in this exchange. See Irving Sandler's "The Duchamp-Cage Aesthetic," *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1978) for a more comprehensive analysis of these topics, as well as the previously noted texts by Calvin Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors: The Heretical Courtship in Modern Art*; Catherine Craft, *An Audience of Artists: Dada, Neo-Dada*

to embrace precedents that forsook authorial control and Modernist aesthetics as a means towards new channels of artistic expression. This approach differed from Duchamp's more iconoclastic take, which was about eradicating aesthetic taste in order to critique the assumptions and principles that underpinning romantic views of artistic expression.

### **The Neo-Avant-Garde contribution to the Historical Avant-Garde**

Hal Foster has argued that the avant-garde project can only be comprehended through the neo-avant-gardes repetition. He asks if “rather than cancel the project of the historical avant-garde, might the neo-avant-garde comprehend it for the first time?”<sup>274</sup> For Foster the historical avant-garde's meaning was not fixed in its moment of origin, as “the avant-garde work is never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments.”<sup>275</sup> The historical avant-garde's meaning is constructed through later artistic and critical interventions. In this way, the neo-avant-garde's critical re-enactment reconstructs the avant-garde past. These returns are part of Foster's problematic theory of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*). The concept that the historical avant-garde was initially unreadable because it was traumatic and a hole in the symbolic order of its time, has been critiqued by Bürger for mapping unconscious processes to a group of conscious individuals, as has already been noted. This conception of the historical avant-garde's unreadability also fails to account for historical avant-gardes like Surrealism, which was quite proficient at establishing its own narratives through years of manifestos and written elucidations of the Surrealist avant-garde project. Even if the first emergence of the historical avant-garde

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*and the Emergence of Abstract Expressionism*; and Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle. *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*.

<sup>274</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996), 15.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

was not a symbolic rupture, however, the neo-avant-garde did play an important role in constructing a framework for comprehending the historical avant-garde project through the neo-avant-garde's artistic interventions.

This much is evident when Foster asks if Duchamp appeared as "Duchamp" in the first instance of his appearance. He objects that Duchamp "is often presented as full born from his own forehead"<sup>276</sup> instead of appearing as "Duchamp" through a series of artistic and critical responses. These artistic and critical responses serve as the neo-avant-garde's contribution to the historical avant-garde. As Foster observes, Duchamp's legacy was not always readily apparent. In 1971 Greenberg noted the sudden attention Duchamp had begun to receive and negatively identifies it as "the appeal of the facile."<sup>277</sup> This wave of interest, which can be read as the establishment of a critical appraisal of Duchamp's work, occurred some decades after Duchamp allegedly ceased his artistic production. Johns, Rauschenberg and Cage were instrumental in constructing the critical dialogue about Duchamp, which was only solidifying only in the 1960s.<sup>278</sup> Their efforts, along with those of Pop-artist Richard Hamilton, established Duchamp's reputation in the United States. As Reinaldo Laddaga has argued that it was partly through Johns, Rauschenberg, Cage, and Cunningham's readings of Duchamp that these later artists understood the position of their own works in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. It is also through these readings of Duchamp, made to carve out a space for their own work, that they created a singular, defined image of the avant-gardiste from his heterogeneous oeuvre, since the canonical image of Duchamp was still being constructed into the 1970s. The narrative provided by artists of the 1950s and 60s was then adopted by a small number of critics, curators, and art historians, who in

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>277</sup> Reinaldo Laddaga, "Introduction," *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, eds. Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (Philadelphia Museum of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 39.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

turn created a critical framework for Duchamp through their writings.<sup>279</sup> Rauschenberg's and Johns' turn to found objects and assemblage art would help solidify Duchamp's ready-mades as the pinnacle of his avant-garde achievements.

However, Duchamp spent the last three decades of his life actively involved in late Surrealism. His participation in Surrealism was primarily as an organizer: planning exhibitions, contributing exhibition designs, putting together catalogs, and serving as an important mediator between European Surrealism and influential figures in the American art scene. Though Duchamp helped organize and design many Parisian Surrealist exhibitions, Breton relied heavily on Duchamp to facilitate Surrealist activities in America.<sup>280</sup> Duchamp's participation in late Surrealism often centered on temporary manifestations like exhibitions, which may have caused his involvement with Surrealists to be largely overlooked. He shared thematic interests with the Surrealists as well. Eroticism had always been a preoccupation in his work—perhaps the most well-known example being the mechanics of desire played out in the *Large Glass* by the bride and the bachelors—but it was also a major direction of his later oeuvre. Duchamp's last work, *Étant donnés*, or the *Pair of Aprons* Duchamp created for the deluxe edition of 1959's Eros exhibition catalog, are prime examples of Duchamp's later engagement with eroticism.<sup>281</sup> This preoccupation was quite in harmony with Duchamp's associations with Surrealism. The link between Johns, Rauschenberg and Duchamp was not just a neo-Dada affinity with Duchamp's ready-mades. The three artists shared a mutual appreciation for the forces of Eros. The bodily experiences of Eros, which were certainly a factor in Johns' and Rauschenberg's personal

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Breton had refused to learn English during his exile in America. This made it difficult for Breton to maintain the same control over Surrealism's exhibition logistics and publicity that he had enjoyed in France. Duchamp, on the other hand, was relatively well connected with American art critics, dealers, curators, artists, and others orbiting the American art world.

<sup>281</sup> *Pair of Aprons* (1959) featured squares of tartan squares with flaps, out of which peeked a patch of fur and a stuffed fabric tube, signifying male and female genitalia.

association, played out in their artistic practice in the form of both hetero- and homosexual desire.<sup>282</sup>

One of the contemporary criticisms of late Surrealism was that it had not been able to attract new, young talent to its ranks. However, Rauschenberg and Johns who belonged to a new generation of sensibilities, found a prominent place in late Surrealist group shows. Duchamp's role was pivotal in facilitating links between late Surrealism and a younger generation of artists. He was able to form connections within the American art scene that Breton could not, due to language skills and differences in agenda. Breton was concerned with maintaining Surrealism's reputation and visibility, while Duchamp's peripheral status within Surrealism made him more open to work that was not yet considered part of the Surrealist order. Duchamp recognized affinities between this younger generation and Surrealist practices. He also recognized affinities between his own work and Rauschenberg's and Johns' projects. For this reason, and because he respected them as artists, Duchamp suggested that Johns and Rauschenberg be included in the 1959 and 1960 Surrealist exhibitions. Duchamp acknowledged his role as mentor and supporter of these two artists, as he would do for others working in America and Europe. In an interview with Alain Jouffroy, Duchamp admits "I like them [Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg] a lot... Besides, they are remarkably intelligent. It is a pleasure to see them, to talk with them, to have an exchange."<sup>283</sup>

The gravity of Duchamp's role in Rauschenberg's and John's self-framing as artists is evident in their repeated engagements with his work. Rauschenberg and Johns, both independently and in collaboration with Merce Cunningham, executed several pieces in homage

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<sup>282</sup> Rauschenberg incorporated suggestive imagery of nude and naked women in his combines (*Odalisk* is but one example) and the homoerotic subtext of Rauschenberg's allusions to Ganymede in 1959's *Canyon* is well noted. Johns' interest in Eros is expressed in his plaster casts of body parts.

<sup>283</sup> Franklin, 332.

to Duchamp. Rauschenberg would later inscribe his large combine *Wager* (1957-1959) with a sentence from the English translation of Duchamp's *Green Box*.<sup>284</sup> 1961 saw a combine dedicated to Duchamp and his wife, *Trophy II (for Teeny and Marcel Duchamp)*.<sup>285</sup> *Music Box* (1953), a wooden crate with spikes and nails protruding through the interior, had distinct affinities with Duchamp's *A bruit secret* [figures 35, 36]. Small stones placed inside Rauschenberg's work made noise when the box was shaken. *A bruit secret* also made much of its noise-making element. A ball of twine, containing a small object only known to Walter Arensberg,<sup>286</sup> was pressed between two brass plates. When shaken, the secret object rattled inside, but preserved its mystery. Rauschenberg acknowledged, "I was thinking of Duchamp when I made that [*Music Box*]." Duchamp, for his part, recognized the similarity too. The older artist visited Rauschenberg's show at Stable Gallery and was intrigued by Rauschenberg's box. After picking up *Music Box* and turning it over, Duchamp says, "I think I've heard that song."<sup>287</sup> Johns created a collage titled *M.D.* modeled after Duchamp's *Self-Portrait in Profile* (1957).<sup>288</sup> Johns' major homage to Duchamp came with 1964's *According to What?* which includes a hidden rendering of Duchamp's self-portrait on a reversed canvas attached to the painting's left corner. Cunningham created a dance homage to Duchamp, *Walkaround Time*, which was first performed in 1968 at the Buffalo Festival of the Arts Today. Johns designed the set for the dance after Duchamp's *Large Glass* with Duchamp's blessing.<sup>289</sup> These homages, among others, clearly assert Duchamp's influence on Rauschenberg and Johns, but also demonstrate

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<sup>284</sup> Basualdo and Battle, 21.

<sup>285</sup> Franklin, 328.

<sup>286</sup> Arensberg was a major collector of Duchamp's work and also a friend to the artist. After Duchamp had completed the twine and metal components of *A bruit secret*, he instructed Arensberg to insert a small object and not to inform anyone of the object's identity. Not even Duchamp knew what the collaborative ready-made contained.

<sup>287</sup> Franklin, 313.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

Duchamp's awareness of how these artists were working within and stretching the dialogue of this work.

Duchamp also appreciated the alternatives Johns and Rauschenberg provided to the then dominant paradigm of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>290</sup> The older artist had long held disdain for the kind of "retinal" art that the Abstract Expressionism movement cultivated. Johns and Rauschenberg rejected a Greenbergian opticality that was manifest in Abstract Expressionism. *Bed*, for example, features the kind of painted gestures that were an important part of Abstract Expressionism's vocabulary. However, the piece ultimately resisted New York School opticality through the visual impenetrability of the surface and the incorporation of found materials, which countered Greenberg's injunctions about the purity and self-referentiality of painting.

Duchamp approved of his role as a mentor-figure for younger artists:

I suppose every young generation needs a prototype.<sup>291</sup> In this case, I play that role. I'm delighted to. But it doesn't mean any more than that. There's no glaring resemblance between what I've done and what they are doing now. Furthermore, I did as few things as possible, which isn't like the current attitude of making as many as you can, in order to make as much money as possible.

Looking at what the young people are doing now, some people thought that I had had ideas somewhat similar to theirs and, consequently, we felt good about each other. But that's all.<sup>292</sup>

While Duchamp did not feel there is an evident correspondence between his work and the new generation as there might be in a "school" of Duchamp, he does agree that there is a relationship present. This relationship was forged from similar sensibilities and ideas rather than the visual form the artworks took. In Duchamp's view the work of these young artists go beyond simple

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<sup>290</sup> Basualdo and Battle, 20.

<sup>291</sup> In the discussion surrounding this quote, Duchamp refers to "Pop artists" including Arman and Tinguley, "Op artists," Martial Rayasse, and Andrew Spoorri, who likely comprise the "young generation" that he plays prototype to. Later on Duchamp discusses Happenings and John Cage in terms of creative projects he feels an affinity for.

<sup>292</sup> Pierre Cabanne and Marcel Duchamp, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York: Viking Press, 1971), 95.

repetitions or copies. The shared ideas between Duchamp, Rauschenberg, and Johns can be viewed within the microcosm of late Surrealist exhibitions as their shared interests often intersected with those of Surrealism.

### **Rauschenberg, Johns and the Surrealist project**

There are affinities between the work Rauschenberg and Johns displayed in late Surrealist exhibitions and the larger Surrealist project that preceded their participation. Both of Rauschenberg's exhibited works, *Odalisk* and *Bed*, have oneiric connotations that respond to Surrealist interest in the unconscious and dream state as a means to reach beyond the rational. *Odalisk's* towering imagery springs from a pillow at the base, which acts as a font for the imaginative juxtapositions of the collaged monolith and its crowning chicken [figure 29]. *Bed* can be a site of dreaming as well as a site of eroticism [figure 30]. Dream and its attendant possibilities first became a primary focus for Surrealism in the 1920s<sup>293</sup> when Freudian theory gained traction with the group, which aspired to liberate the realm of the unconscious for revolutionary purposes.

### **Eroticism**

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<sup>293</sup> Jennifer Mundy, "Letters of Desire," *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, eds. Vincent Gille, Dawn Ades, and Jennifer Mundy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), 11.

Eroticism was an essential part of the Surrealist lexicon of transgressive and liberatory themes.<sup>294</sup> Eros was, of course, paramount to the 1959 Paris exhibition with its fetishes and amorous sighing. Rauschenberg's large combine *Bed* was placed next to Alberto Giacometti's sculpture *The Invisible Object* [figure 15], which André Breton had identified with desire: "the desire to love and be loved."<sup>295</sup> *Bed* treats its surface as a site of erotic encounter. A framed assemblage of bedding, including a quilt with its top edge haphazardly turned down, suggests the presence of a body that is now absent. The bed's neatness, emphasized by the frame's rigid rectangularity and right angles, was disheveled by an unseen event. The whiteness of the sheets and the quilt's regular geometric pattern is interrupted by the active skeins of splashed and dripped paint that act as indexical marks of the movement that had coursed over its surface. As David Hopkins and Helen Molesworth<sup>296</sup> point out, the dripping and pooling pigment becomes equated with bodily fluids within this discourse of the body and Eros. *Bed* inflected eroticism with abjection, which was another favored Surrealist practice. There are both erotic and scatological associations with stained sheets. Rauschenberg has said of his artistic rendition of *Bed*, "I think mine is like a bouquet of some of the most beautiful moments in bed."<sup>297</sup> His statement reinforces a view of eroticism that embodies both beauty and transgression, often combined in the Surrealist sensibility. Rauschenberg also continues the Surrealist trope of

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<sup>294</sup> For an in-depth discussion of eroticism and desire as Surrealist themes, see Jennifer Mundy's expansive *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* to accompany the eponymous exhibition at London's Tate Gallery.

<sup>295</sup> André Breton, *Mad Love*. Quoted in Janine A. Mileaf, *Please Touch: Dada and Surrealist Objects after the Ready-made* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College, 2010), 106.

<sup>296</sup> Helen Molesworth, "Before Bed," *October*, no. 63 (Winter 1993).

<sup>297</sup> Rosetta Brooks, "Rauschenberg: Round the Block Once or Twice," *Modern Painters* (December 2005/January 2006): 75.

associating eroticism with violence or bodily fragmentation.<sup>298</sup> Contemporary critics noted that *Bed* appeared as if it were the site of a murder.<sup>299</sup> *Odalisk* visualized eroticism by covering its flat surfaces with images from soft-porn magazines and reproductions of erotic paintings by Titian and Picot, along with a nude drawing made in collaboration with Rauschenberg's ex-wife. Charles Stuckey has also noted the "subtle sexual resonance" in *Odalisk* created by the wooden furniture leg's insertion into the pillow at its base.<sup>300</sup>

The eroticism of Jasper Johns' *Target with Plaster Casts* stems primarily from the three-dimensional body parts that contrast with the titular target's graphic flatness [figure 33]. Nine cast body parts including a breast and a penis are lined up for visual scrutiny in small display boxes at the top of the canvas. The boxes' flipped lids invoke a dynamic of revelation and concealment consistent with peep-shows.<sup>301</sup> *Target with Plaster Casts*'s placement within EROS's exhibition space heightened its erotic overtones. The piece was situated above the cannibal feast, as is visible in a photograph of the exhibition taken during the cannibal ceremony [figure 18]. Three couples dressed in formal attire ate from a live model stretched across a dining table. The woman lay completely still, with eyes closed, while the meal was gradually devoured. The eroticism of this tableau is evident, but as Alyce Mahon has noted, this eroticism was not purely titillating. The spectator had to face alternating impulses "to gaze at the woman, to

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<sup>298</sup> Examples include the severed and reconstituted bodies in Hans Bellmer's dolls and erotic drawings, Raoul Ubac's photographs from the 1930s, and the Surrealist preoccupation with the Marquis de Sade.

<sup>299</sup> Hopkins, "Duchamp's Legacy," 45.

<sup>300</sup> Charles Stuckey, "Minutiae and Rauschenberg's Combine Mode," *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, ed. Paul Schimmel (LA: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2005), 218.

<sup>301</sup> It is worth noting that this peep-show dynamic had previously found its way into late Surrealist exhibitions with the curtained, private viewing space in "Blood Flames" and the artworks in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* that were meant to be viewed through holes cut in the canvas wall. Johns' *Target with Plaster Casts* also demands a voyeuristic performance where each cast body part is revealed by peeking under a small wooden door.

identify with her, or to join in a tribalistic ceremony.”<sup>302</sup> Feelings of desire or fascination were repulsed and enhanced by a pervading sense of violation. The photograph of the ritual captures a male participant’s knife and fork pressed against food and flesh. The model’s naked form was revealed as she was cannibalized. Her complete passivity adds to the discomfort. She is both visually consumed and symbolically consumed as the sensual ritual escalates. The act of eating from the naked woman or observing such an act casts some of its erotic tension, tinged with violation onto *Target with Plaster Casts*. The work’s casts of body parts were menacingly placed above concentric circles that resemble a shooting target, echoing themes of sensuality, the body, and threats of symbolic violence that characterized its setting in the cannibal feast.

Visual juxtaposition of unrelated objects is one of the hallmarks of Surrealist art as Pierre Reverdy explained in *Nord-Sud* in the March 1918 edition: “The image is a pure creation of the mind. It is not born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more distant and true the relationship between the two realities, the stronger the image will be- the more emotional power and poetic reality it will have.” Surrealist collage, non-narrative film, and veristic painting all relied on unexpected juxtapositions to create meaning and cultivate effects of shock and the uncanny with the collision of disparate elements.

Rauschenberg followed this Surrealist interest in surprise and juxtaposition. While irrational juxtaposition was a practice cultivated in earlier avant-gardes such as Dada,<sup>303</sup> Surrealism developed its own perspective on the effects of surprise and juxtaposition. Dada had used such incongruous effects to subvert bourgeois rationalism by distorting familiar contexts and portraying the absurdity of the external world. The Surrealists used juxtaposition and

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<sup>302</sup> Mahon, 166.

<sup>303</sup> Dada and Futurist precedents pre-dated the birth of Surrealism. Max Ernst created photo collages during his Cologne Dada period, as did Hannah Hoch within Berlin Dada. The Dada strategy of bringing together distant realities was appropriated from pre-war Italian Futurism.

surprise to inspire and evoke the marvelous. Ducasse's infamous phrase, which became a motto of sorts for the Surrealists, finds beauty in "the chance meeting of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table." Rauschenberg used juxtaposition for more poetic ends, which was consistent with Surrealism's concept of the unexpected as an expression of the fantastic collision of chance and fate. Rauschenberg's work included imagery sourced from art history, popular culture, amateur photographs, found objects, and detritus. The artist had a habit of scouring his neighborhood on trash day for interesting elements that would find their way into his creative projects.<sup>304</sup> *Odalisk* features a scavenged wooden box with lightbulb, balanced on top of a decorated post and pillow and topped with a taxidermy fowl. Found images covered the surface of this assemblage. The work combined images of Francois Edouard Picot's *Amour et Psyché*, a photographic reproduction of female nude, a baseball player, a comic strip, and image of a snarling hound. None of these elements was at home with the other, but rather reveled in their heterogeneity and the viewer's impulse to form connections between these incongruous parts. 1959's *Canyon* has been read as a visual musing on the myth of Ganymede, as has been previously noted, where the god Zeus abducts the beautiful boy by taking the form of an eagle. This map of associations is worked out through the various metaphoric layers, which are created by juxtaposing a photograph of Rauschenberg's infant son, a stuffed eagle which stands for the transfigured god, and a pillow suspended by rope which mimics the malleability of flesh and whose position within the composition alludes to a captive suspended from the eagle's flying form.<sup>305</sup> Evoking a Surrealist rather than Dadaist understanding of juxtaposition, the incongruity

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<sup>304</sup> Brooks, 71. Rauschenberg's practice of scavenging materials closely approximated those of Dadaist Kurt Schwitters, who formed compositions out of found materials, printed ephemera, and detritus that sometimes took the form of huge sculptural constructions.

<sup>305</sup> Kenneth Bendiner provides the most assertive formulations of this metaphoric reading in his essay "Robert Rauschenberg's 'Canyon'" in Roni Feinstein's *Robert Rauschenberg: The Silkscreen Paintings 1962-1964* (NY: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990).

serves to foreground the unexpected and create poetic revelations. For Rauschenberg, juxtaposition created a field of surprises. When talking about encountering the various bits that he would collect in his combines, Rauschenberg observed, “The object’s uniqueness was what fed my curiosity. They didn’t have a choice but to become something else and you very quickly get a world of surprises.”<sup>306</sup> The importance of surprise recalls the shock of unexpected associations created by Surrealist juxtapositions.

The dynamics of surprise also play out in the chance encounter and the ability of chance itself to overturn expectations. Chance allowed for illogical relationships and unforeseen experiences. Dada utilized chance techniques to undermine authorial expression and control. The concept of chance had various formulations in the Surrealist oeuvre, such as the chance encounter, lucky find, and the notion of objective chance, which upset paradigms of order and rationality that the Surrealists felt were impediments to psychic and social liberation. For Bürger, the basic pattern of objective chance in Surrealist thinking is as follows: “because they [the occurrences] have one or more characteristics in common, two events are brought into relation with one another.”<sup>307</sup> Chance’s very unpredictability was a means of artistic expression. Its creative power is exemplified in the encounter, which initiates Breton’s novel *Nadja*. Breton’s unexpected meeting and spontaneous affair with a distraught young woman enables a poetic fervor, wherein places and objects generate associations whose poetic power is amplified by the very tenuousness of those associations. The fortuitously found Surrealist object derived its poetic power from its ability to surprise the finder, who juxtaposed a newly perceived object and the moment of discovery to reveal new significances. Surrealism conceived of surprise as “the chance encounter and the ‘*trouvaille*’ or lucky find spotted on a walk outdoors or amidst the

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<sup>306</sup> Brooks, 71.

<sup>307</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 65.

detritus of the flea market: these sorts of chance occurrence, by virtue of their apparently fortuitous, accidental character, bypass one's consciousness and intentionality, thereby giving access to an otherwise inaccessible reality."<sup>308</sup> One such chance find is the slipper-spoon discussed in Breton's *L'Amour Fou*. The object was discovered by Breton and Giacommetti in 1934 at the Saint-Ouen flea market.<sup>309</sup> The spoon appears out of the myriad stalls of Saint-Ouen as something both random and foreordained--a fortuitous reemergence.<sup>310</sup> Breton had previously been intrigued by the phrase *le cendrier Cendrillon* (Cinderella ashtray), but had subsequently forgotten it.<sup>311</sup> The spoon [figure 34] seems to respond to this phrase, with a tiny slipper that serves as a rest and the domestic utility of its shallow bowl. The form of the spoon with its arching mid piece mimics the shape of a slipper. It is the very act recovering, by chance, a physical reminder of the nonsensical phrase, lost and reclaimed, whose uncertain significance had lodged somewhere in Breton's unconscious. The found object, extended by chance, is valued for the object's ability to inspire such unexpected associations. The Surrealist valuing of surprise and juxtaposition for its ability to bring about unexpected revelations corresponds with Rauschenberg's forays on trash days to find objects that surprised him and could be combined in unexpected ways that were foreign to their original function. The found object is at once a chance encounter and a fortuitous reemergence.

For Bürger, objective chance was a major transgressive strategy for the Surrealist avant-garde. He locates this transgression as "starting from the experience that a society organized on the basis of a means-ends rationality increasingly restricts the individual's scope," wherein "the

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<sup>308</sup> Margaret Iversen, *Chance* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2010), 20.

<sup>309</sup> Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1993), 36-37.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>311</sup> Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 40.

Surrealists attempt to discover elements of the unpredictable in everyday life.”<sup>312</sup> Maintaining the purposelessness of chance—the inability to seize the meaning behind chance events—enables a protest against means-ends rationality.<sup>313</sup> The transgressive potential of chance and the related concepts of illogical juxtaposition and the found object can also be seen as an attempt to reintroduce art into the praxis of life. The incorporation of chance into artistic production signaled a relinquishment of authorial control and means-ends attitudes towards artistic production. It marked the devaluing of traditional aesthetics since final appearance could not be determined before the act of creation, nor could its meaning.<sup>314</sup> Juxtaposition and the re-contextualization of found objects also marked a move away from stable meanings. Potent visual statements could be created from everyday materials and events. Once chance became a major vehicle for artistic production, it was no longer necessary to think of the artist as a member of a specially trained, uniquely gifted subset of the population set apart from the rest of society. Realigning artistic practice with the operations of objective chance meant reuniting art and everyday life.

Neo-avant-garde artists such as Rauschenberg and Johns were recognized by Duchamp as having a reverence for particular Surrealist concepts. The two younger artists were expanding Surrealist practices into new visual territory and marked a delayed discovery of Surrealist offerings. Instead of pursuing the conventionally understood practices of Surrealism, such as the unconscious or the uncanny, these two figures of the neo-avant-garde fashioned surprise, illogical juxtaposition and eroticism as the grounds for their affiliation. The overlap between Surrealist avant-garde practices and the neo-avant-garde could also call into question the framework that the institution of art and the critical establishment were constructing for

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<sup>312</sup> Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 65.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>314</sup> Cage valued chance operations for many of the same reasons.

Surrealism. The neo-avant-garde intervention had the ability to revise the defined and widely broadcast narrative that the historical avant-garde had generated in their in their “initial moments.” Surrealism surely already had its own established meta-narrative, thanks to Breton and other Surrealist writers, which was directing institutional discourse around Surrealism's early period. The presence of neo-avant-garde practices in late Surrealist exhibitions mitigated against a certain kind of institutionalization for “historical” Surrealism. Johns and Rauschenberg’s participation indicated that the movement was still able to attract ambitious, young artists even when most critics determined that late Surrealism was in a lamentable decline and unable to regenerate itself. The neo-avant-garde re-enactment regenerated Surrealist practices even if it modified them. Even if they did not have the same Surrealist commitments to reconciling consciousness with the unconscious that motivated Breton, Johns’ and Rauschenberg’s adaptation of Surrealist themes, such as eroticism, irrationality, and surprise juxtapositions announces that these themes were still vital avenues of artistic exploration.

The neo-avant-garde re-enactment provided a number of curious inversions of Surrealist and Duchampian themes that unsettled the complete solidification of those concepts. Duchamp’s quintessential Dada trope was to take a mass-produced, ready-made object and inject it into the context of art. Johns’ *Target* from 1960 takes art and turns it into a ready-made [figure 41]. Johns’ signature target composition is left blank and resembles a page from a coloring book page. The included watercolor cakes and a brush enable an unknown collaborator to complete the image. The signature, “Jasper Johns and \_\_\_\_\_” heightened this sense of a ready-made art object.

Like Duchamp’s ready-mades, the presence of *Target*’s signature invokes the importance of authorship, which contrasts with the signature's placement on an object that denies authorial

control through utility and commonplace appearance. By suggesting that his contribution was incomplete, Johns achieves something of Duchamp's ironic testing of authorship and originality. However, Johns' work belongs to the world of art. Duchamp had chosen his ready-mades with complete aesthetic indifference, promoting neither bad taste nor good taste. Johns' ready-made art object displays his personal affinity for the concentric target pattern and primary colors that are common to his more painterly works.

This strategy of treating art as a ready-made was not completely unprecedented in Duchamp's oeuvre. He had once suggested using a Rembrandt painting for an ironing board, creating a "reciprocal ready-made." Duchamp's reciprocal ready-made prescribes the destruction of the aesthetic object as it serves a commonplace, utilitarian function. However, Duchamp's discourse of ready-mades and reciprocal ready-mades centered around the total elimination of aesthetic considerations. Johns' intervention into the ready-made genre with works such as *Target* shifts away from Duchamp's destruction of aesthetics and begins to reorient the ready-made discourse back to questions of art and the artist, while still retaining Duchamp as an important precursor. *Target* does not deny its status as an aesthetic object and instead depends on its identification as a work of art. Johns' mediation poses the Duchampian ready-made as an anarchic gesture that widens the category of art rather than a gesture that sought to destroy aesthetics. Through Johns, Duchamp is understood to have broadened the range of artistic practices to include the everyday and to have provided for the relinquishment of complete control over an object. In Johns' case this object, despite the absence of artistic control, is still considered to be an artistic product and, by invoking Duchamp as an important precedent, asks that Duchamp's objects be considered similarly as artistic products. The neo-avant-garde's role,

in the case of Johns and Rauschenberg, was to solidify certain meanings of the historical avant-garde and destabilize others.

### **Juxtaposing the artistic projects of Johns, Rauschenberg and Duchamp**

Johns and Rauschenberg's work employed the rhetoric of the every day and the ready-made, but these artists did not always emulate the completely impersonal nature of Duchamp's ready-mades. Duchamp's stance of "visual indifference" to aesthetic considerations, his "complete anesthesia" characterized his ready-made production.<sup>315</sup> Rauschenberg's work in particular does not pursue the formalist aesthetics common to Modernist art, but a certain aesthetic is certainly at play in Rauschenberg's mark-making and the constellations of arranged imagery. Johns created textured color fields out of combinations of pigment, wax, and collaged newsprint whose dappled qualities with visible drips and smears comprise painterly surfaces that are conspicuously made by the artist's hand.

Johns and Rauschenberg rendered the Duchampian ready-made genre aesthetic. Treating Duchamp's ready-mades as a visual phenomenon able to be emulated produced this effect of aestheticization. Johns and Rauschenberg made Duchamp's ready-made recognizable as a genre of artistic commentary through their later adoption of ready-made objects as part of their own artistic project.<sup>316</sup> Johns and Rauschenberg treated the painterly brushstroke as ready-made, wherein an established sign of personal expression can be manufactured. The surfaces of Johns' works like *Target with Plaster Casts* had the appearance of a gesture painting. However, Johns'

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<sup>315</sup> Marcel Duchamp, "APROPOS of 'READY-MADES'" *Art and Artists* 1, no. 4 (July 1966), 47.

<sup>316</sup> Johns and Rauschenberg treated the painterly brushstroke as ready-made, wherein an established sign of personal expression can be manufactured. Robert Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II*, for example, utilized expressive, gestural strokes and paint splashes often associated with Abstract Expressionism and, by presenting two nearly identical compositions, suggest that these marks can be manufactured.

meticulous and systematic application of layer upon layer of encaustic denied the expressive qualities of the artist's strokes and approached the mechanical.<sup>317</sup> Robert Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II*, for example, utilized expressive, gestural strokes and paint splashes often associated with Abstract Expressionism and, by presenting two nearly identical compositions, suggest that these marks can be manufactured. Rauschenberg treated paint and color, often associated with personal expression and taste, as a ready-made. He bought unlabeled, surplus paint, which prevented him from knowing beforehand what colors he was selecting and negated opportunities for making aesthetic choices. Rauschenberg also did not mix colors on the surface of his work on a palette, retaining the ready-made hue of the manufactured paint.<sup>318</sup> The artist related his attitudes towards the pre-made material as a limit against his personal taste, stating that "the only organization, choice, or discipline was that I had to use some of all of it [the purchased batch of unlabeled paints] and I wouldn't buy any more paint until I'd used that up."<sup>319</sup>

The neo-avant-gardists also rendered Duchamp aesthetic by moving his project back towards the domain of art. Johns does not choose to present his ale cans or Savarin coffee tin as mass-produced objects, nor would this have been a particularly effective move given the growing acceptance of Duchamp's work. Instead Johns duplicates the manufactured prototype in the media of fine art and presents them as *Painted Bronzes*. The ale cans and coffee tins are cast in bronze and then hand painted to simulate the machine-made Ballantine and Savarin logos [figures 39, 40]. This restores some of the aura of the maker that Duchamp had tried to elude in his original gesture. Johns and Rauschenberg took the strategy of taking the everyday and

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<sup>317</sup> Irving Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up after Artists: A Memoir* (NY: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 253.

<sup>318</sup> Branden Joseph and Robert Rauschenberg. *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-avant-garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003), 106.

<sup>319</sup> Robert Rauschenberg quoted in Joseph, *Random Order*, 106.

injecting it into the institution of art from Duchamp. However, they reclaimed this practice for art and established a new aesthetic.

Duchamp, Rauschenberg, and Johns clearly shared an interest in everyday images and materials. The distance between the things of everyday life and rarified art objects became the source and the subject of their work.<sup>320</sup> This allowed the three artists to explore the boundary between art and non-art. Johns' imagery of the everyday—beer cans, targets, a coffee can filled with paintbrushes, lightbulbs—are all part of our common vocabulary, immured in everyday thingness. John Cage has said that “the things that [Johns’] work has represented...are very close to the thingness of the everyday world. Those are not, as it were, ideas of his, but ideas of all of us.”<sup>321</sup> The scattered, common-place information of newspaper clippings and found photographic images were pronounced in *Odalisk* and Rauschenberg's slightly later work. His habit of scouring his neighborhood on trash day for art materials furthered his commitment to the poetry of the everyday. Like Duchamp, Rauschenberg's scavenging cast the artist's role as an act of selecting rather than one of pre-meditated conceptualization. The younger artist stated that he wanted something other than what he could make himself.<sup>322</sup> For Rauschenberg though, selecting objects would be the first step in the process of creation and not the final one.

### **Other Artists, Other Intersections**

There are intersections of the neo-avant-garde and the avant-garde project advanced by late Surrealist exhibitions, wherein the design and conceptualization of the exhibitions themselves had an important exchange with neo-avant-garde expression. Even if they are not

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<sup>320</sup> Basualdo and Battle, 20.

<sup>321</sup> John Cage, “In Conversation with Joan Retallack, October 22, 1991,” *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, eds. Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (Philadelphia Museum of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 236.

<sup>322</sup> Brooks, 71.

generally acknowledged as such, Allan Kaprow's and Claes Oldenburg's *Environments and Happenings*<sup>323</sup> are evidence of the continued viability of particular Surrealist preoccupations and strategies.<sup>324</sup> *Environments*, a precursor of installation art,<sup>325</sup> continued the immersive environments that had become the preferred method of late Surrealist display, which had stressed the integration of the exhibited content with the exhibition space and the viewer's perception. These intersections can only be sketched briefly here and can be explored at length in another study.

Just as Surrealist exhibitions had facilitated particular activities like ritualized play or appealed to the different senses through sound, smell, and highly tactile surroundings to accompany artwork, Kaprow's work prioritized the viewer's multisensory experience. His 1960 Environment *An Apple Shrine* covered the walls and floor of Judson gallery with newspapers, which made noise as the viewer moved through the maze-like space [figures 42, 42]. *Yard* of 1961 directed participants to clamber over piles of tires [figure 44]. The participation of the gallery-goer was intensified in *Words* of 1962 at Smolin Gallery in New York City. Participants were encouraged to write text on sheets of paper, which were then added to the walls and partitions that were already covered in words [Figures 45, 46]. The visitor moved through various spaces to add, observe or even change these texts by turning a roller.<sup>326</sup> The appearance of this environment is continually altered by the presence of the visitor who leaves traces of her

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<sup>323</sup> Other artists associated with Happenings or "live art" include Red Grooms, Jim Dine, and Robert Whitman.

<sup>324</sup> Kaprow acknowledged that *Environments* come out of assemblage art, creating another intersection with Rauschenberg and Johns. It is also worth noting that Robert Rauschenberg was also involved in performance art as evidenced, for example, by his 1963 production of *Pelican*, performed with Rauschenberg on roller skates with two other dancers in a Washington skating rink.

<sup>325</sup> Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: the Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), xi-xii

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

interventions. The auditory atmosphere also responded to the activities of the visitor-participant, who was able to select records to play on phonographs within the space. The viewer is required to complete the piece<sup>327</sup>—their participation becomes part of the performance and their presence activates the installation.

Oldenburg, the Swiss-born artist and sculptor, was another neo-avant-gardist orchestrating Happenings in the American art scene. One of his most well-known fusions of Happening and Environment was 1960's *The Street*, where large cardboard cut-outs in the form of caricatures, urban debris, and scorched forms covered the walls of Judson Memorial Church basement [figure 49, 50, 51, 52].<sup>328</sup> Monthly performances took place in conjunction with Oldenburg's installation.<sup>329</sup> *The Store* (1962) was a simulated shop front on New York City's East Side, where Oldenburg sold plaster objects molded into household objects and food, displaying his artistic wares as mercantile commodities [figure 53, 54]. This environment culminated in a series of theatrical Happenings entitled *Store Days I* and *II* in 1962, involving dancers and a muslin sailboat. Duchamp attended Oldenburg's Store Days performance in 1962. Oldenburg's debts to Surrealism are being increasingly acknowledged, as exemplified by the Menil Collection's 2012 exhibition, "Claes Oldenburg: Strange Eggs," featuring Oldenburg's series of Surrealist-inspired collages from the late 1950s.<sup>330</sup> In her review of the Museum of Modern Art's 2013 exhibition reevaluating Oldenburg's interaction with neo-Dada, Pop art, Art Brut, and Installation art, art critic Valery Oisteanu notes that Oldenburg was "a compulsive hoarder who collected antiques

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>328</sup> Thomas E. Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 34.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>330</sup> Art critic Joseph Campana recognizes Surrealism's influence on Oldenburg in his review of the "Strange Eggs" exhibition, "Menil's Subdued Claes Oldenburg Exhibit Raises Questions About Surrealism and Beauty," *Culturemap Houston* (September 30, 2012) accessed May 30, 2013, [www.houston.culturemap.com/news/entertainment/09-30-12-07-10-no-stranger-to-the-strange-menils-claes-Oldenburg-exhibit-is-a-good-egg/](http://www.houston.culturemap.com/news/entertainment/09-30-12-07-10-no-stranger-to-the-strange-menils-claes-Oldenburg-exhibit-is-a-good-egg/)

with a purpose and vision, creating an altar of quasi-surrealistic, Duchampian household objects."<sup>331</sup> In addition to affinities between individual objects, Oldenburg's Happenings and transformed spaces, like Kaprow's, continued concepts of viewer interaction developed in late Surrealist exhibitions.

Late Surrealist exhibition design invited viewer interaction through various means, including the installation of billiard tables and waterfalls within an exhibition space, presenting a gallery visit as a series of experiential steps through which the viewer acquires knowledge, and asking viewers to observe artworks through small curtain holes. Aside from the latter peek-a-boo set ups, artworks were often hung or leaned in unusual places that did not allow for traditional or optimal viewing. The Surrealist habit of problematizing the visitor's view of art objects in exhibition spaces forced a more intentioned interaction between object and viewer, who had to stoop, crane, peer through holes or otherwise exert effort to see objects. Late Surrealist exhibitions can be seen as emissaries of more experience-based viewing, which would become a strong force in neo-avant-garde expression in the 1950s and 60s.

The Cannibal Feast from the 1959 EROS exhibition, furthermore, can be seen as a kind of Happening, where the full impact of the work came from the ritualized interaction between the dinner-participants and the woman subsumed into the dinner party setting. The mannequins became stand-ins for the original event. In 1959, the same year the EROS exhibition opened, Allan Kaprow staged *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* in New York City [figures 47, 48]. Visitors to the Reuben Gallery were asked to become participants in events that combined environment and

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<sup>331</sup> Valery Oisteanu, "Claes Oldenburg: The Street and The Store and Mouse Museum/ Ray Gun Wing," *The Brooklyn Rail* (2013) accessed May 30, 2013, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/05/artseen/claes-oldenburg-the-street-and-the-store-and-mouse-museumray-gun-wing>.

performance in a kind of live art.<sup>332</sup> The viewer engagement present in Surrealist exhibitions is heightened with Kaprow's Happening, as visitors were asked to perform particular roles specified by the artist in order to create the work.

Happenings and Environments continued some forms of avant-garde critique common to the Surrealist project. Performance art, like Happenings, was an affront to the institution of art. The work of art was an event, not an object. More specifically the work of art was an experience. They were fleeting experiences, which made it difficult to capture and preserve, and by extension, institutionalize. Performance art worked against the commodification of art, since it could not be bought or sold. Kaprow asserted that his project was about blurring art and life.

Happenings also responded to an important shift in Surrealist installations, where the total environment and the experience of that environment became the central focus. Late Surrealist exhibitions did not regard the art object as a singular entity capable of encapsulating Surrealist inquiry in isolation, as these exhibitions placed tremendous emphasis on total experience. This emphasis on total experience is reflected in Kiesler's rhetoric of integrated environments joining art and architecture. Acquiring knowledge in *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, meant traversing spaces, experiencing successive symbolic stages of the exhibition, and being immersed in the simulated ritual. That occult knowledge could not be achieved by observing isolated objects. Within late Surrealist exhibitions, the locus of meaning shifts from that of the individual object to meaning imparted through environment and context. As Kaprow's work of the 1950s and early 1960s indicates, this shift from object to environment in late Surrealist exhibitions would have important repercussions for installation art and Happenings.

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<sup>332</sup> RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art from Futurism to the Present*, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 128.

## Chapter 4. Re-Enacting the Avant-Garde

For this study the progression of the historical avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde asks for an understanding of late Surrealism's relationship with early Surrealism and with the later neo-avant-garde. There is a pronounced tendency in contemporary and later critical responses to see late Surrealism as distinct from the supposedly more efficacious interwar years. This widespread reaction would seem to parallel Peter Bürger's reading of the historical and neo-avant-gardes in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* where there is an obvious separation between these two phases, though late Surrealism cannot be a neo-avant-garde by Bürger's definition. The neo-avant-garde emerges through its own historical context even as it reacts to the precedent of the historical avant-garde. To conceive of the historical avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde as clearly separated from one another, however, neglects those historical contexts which allowed for their very direct interaction: the neo-avant-garde presence in Surrealist exhibitions and Robert Rauschenberg's and Jasper Johns' friendship with Marcel Duchamp, for example, which permitted a direct exchange of ideas. Though lack of vitality and inability to achieve its goals of social transformation were part of contemporary and later critical reception, late Surrealism did prove to be an important site of interaction with a younger generation of artists who would rise to prominence in the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

When many contemporary assessments of late Surrealist exhibitions identified them as hollow spectacles that were inconsistent with the ambitions of the Surrealist movement, a normative division was being formed between the accomplishments of earlier Surrealism and its late years. The critical literature on Surrealism that would appear some years later--beginning already in the late 1960s--maintained this division apparent in the contemporary reception. The schism between early and late Surrealism was accompanied with appraisals, where early

Surrealism was more efficacious than late. Early Surrealism was said to be more vital and offer more potent critiques of art as an institution and the society in which it existed. Rather than considering the movement as a continuous span, narratives from later critical scholarship on Surrealism not only emulate the partition between eras of the movement drawn by contemporary reception, but also preserve much of its evaluative criteria. Common features in both cases are late Surrealism's outright decline, its lack of vitality, its insignificance when compared to early Surrealism, its inability to shock as part of this decline, and its not being able to adequately address the political and social upheavals of its time.

A crucial element of narratives of separation and decline was a focus on the endpoint of Surrealism as an avant-garde, and not just as a movement. Members of Surrealism, however, were still active long after critics declared the movement's obsolescence. At stake was Surrealism's identification as a seat for progressive and innovative art. What was conceived as decline in contemporary reception became the death of the movement in later scholarship. The omission of late Surrealism in many accounts of the movement would seem to implicitly consider Surrealism of the 40s through 60s as something separate from Surrealism itself. This separation also treats late Surrealism as irrelevant to the history of the avant-garde. This later criticism has been more decisive in identifying the termination of the movement. As noted in chapter two, curator William Rubin was able to write in 1968 that the first post-War exhibition in Paris, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, had been "the death knell of the movement."<sup>333</sup> This judgment was made in the catalog of the first major Surrealist retrospective in the United States, "Dada, Surrealism, and their Heritage" which was held at New York's Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition evidenced the absorption of interwar Surrealism by the institutions of high art. René

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<sup>333</sup> William Stanley Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art; Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Greenwich, Conn., 1968), 176.

Passeron's 2005 comprehensive history of Surrealism puts an end cap on "historical Surrealism" in 1940, after the German invasion of France. Passeron proffers, "The name 'historical Surrealism' is sometimes given to a phenomenon of civilization that, between 1920 and 1940, drastically changed artistic creation in France, and later, throughout the world."<sup>334</sup> He characterizes Surrealism as an important and influential movement, but confines its significance to the two decades before World War II. The narrative of Surrealism's decline is evident in the text's organization. The chapters considering Surrealism between 1920 and 1940 are titled "The Ascension," "Plenitude," and "Expansion," while those recounting Surrealism after 1940 imply a slow withering with "Dispersion," "Persistence," and "The Final Split." Maurice Nadeau's 1945 *Histoire du surréalisme* claimed that Surrealism had died with World War II, as noted previously.<sup>335</sup> These accounts of dwindling and termination midway through official Surrealist activities echo the language of those contemporary critics that were willing to declare the end of Surrealism as early as 1947.

Like Nadeau, Passeron, and Rubin, art historian Martica Sawin identifies late Surrealism as a dying movement. The introduction of *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* begins, "Surrealism was born out of the traumas of the First World War and suffered its death throes during the Second."<sup>336</sup> Sawin discusses the 1947 exhibition at Galerie Maeght, but her critical energies are largely dedicated to the myriad reasons why this exhibition failed, and by extension all subsequent exhibitions, for reasons both internal and external to the movement. The 1947 show was simply, "A dramatic but unsuccessful comeback."<sup>337</sup> Sawin acknowledges that

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<sup>334</sup> René Passeron, *Surrealism* (Paris: Terrail, 2005), 9.

<sup>335</sup> Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros: 1938-1968* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 107.

<sup>336</sup> Martica Sawin, *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1995), vi.

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 409.

the exhibition intended to present a new myth, which Breton and others hoped would demonstrate Surrealism's important contribution to post-war France, though Sawin's recounting of the dismissive and derisive contemporary reception of the exhibition receives the most attention. The critiques presented by the contemporary reception are recast as Sawin's assessment of Surrealism's conclusion. Agreeing with figures like John Canaday, she states that post-war Surrealism no longer claimed avant-garde status and the movement, despite its continuing exhibitions, had ended by 1947. "If the 1938 exhibition had marked the end of Surrealism's avant-garde phase, the 1947 show may be seen as putting a close to Surrealism's coda as it was played out during the war years."<sup>338</sup> For Sawin, 1947's Surrealism had irretrievably lost its disorienting power, irreverence, and the urgency that springs from world teetering on the brink of political upheaval. To reinforce the irrelevance of a movement that would not accept its own death, she rehearses narratives common to 1947 Parisian commentary. "What power was there to Duchamp's curtain of rain for a public that knew of the millions herded to their death in the 'showers'?"<sup>339</sup> This statement echoes a 1947 *Time's* Paris review, which asserted that there could not be any more Surrealist shock "after the gas chambers"<sup>340</sup> Surrealism's potency remained in the past.

Surrealism's efficacy in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, while the movement was still producing exhibitions, was defined in both the European and American contexts in terms of the quality of Surrealist artistic production and the exhibitions' ability to shock. The movement was seen as institutionalized and predictable. The later critical reception of the exhibitions defined efficacy through Surrealism's ability to maintain the optimism of its early days in the face of a new intellectual climate of the post-war period. The movement's capacity to transform existence or

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> *Time's* Paris review of 1947 quoted in Sawin, 398.

transcend rationalism could no longer be entertained as a serious question. This transformation appeared more rhetorical than achievable. For Passeron Surrealism's "desire to 'change life' became progressively more pessimistic and libertarian, and was finally reduced to *l'amour fou* (wild love), tied up with the freedom of Eros"<sup>341</sup> after World War II. Sawin sees Surrealist failure in the inability to make a new myth resonate. Late Surrealism, in her view, failed to offer a viable response to the social and political climate of its day. The Surrealists no longer had the "power to disorient"<sup>342</sup> She also puts special importance on the cohesion of the Surrealism's group dynamics. For her, the dispersion of Surrealism's members in the war and the departure of many key figures were symptomatic of Surrealism's decline.

As this study illustrates, however, the movement had not ended tidily with World War II, as these canonical narratives would suggest. There was a chronological overlap with the emerging art movements of the 50s and 60s. By denying legitimacy and vitality to late Surrealism's avant-garde project, these accounts also dismiss that period of overlap that illuminates the next phase of post-war artistic production.

This overlap with new post-war artists suggests that the Surrealists did not view these particular neo-avant-garde artists as hollow, inauthentic echoes of their avant-garde legacy. The Surrealists found resonances between the neo-avant-garde work with their project. This brings us again to the question of the relationship of the avant-garde and the generation of younger artists who were categorized as neo-avant-garde. There is a relationship between the Surrealist avant-garde and later artists that became designated as the neo-avant-garde. However, this relationship was not based on the repetition of forms. Surrealism did not have an identifiable style. There was a wide range of mediums and visual appearances used in service of its utopian vision. Surrealist

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<sup>341</sup> Passeron, 9.

<sup>342</sup> Sawin, 401.

art was centered on the pursuit of ideas and effects. The relationship between Surrealism and the neo-avant-garde artists is about continued concepts rather than repeated forms. In Benjamin Buchloh's citation of the re-emergence of monochrome painting, where the link between historical and neo-avant-garde is formal (along with the conceptual posturing associated with the adoption of this form) while the neo-avant-garde profoundly modifies the meanings of that form. In the case of Surrealism, in contrast, it is the concepts and set of practices utilized in Surrealist artistic projects that provide a link for the neo-avant-garde. Perhaps this is why the concept of neo-Surrealism has not gained any critical traction—because there was no identifiable Surrealist style, only a network of concerns and practices. While Surrealism was in opposition to high Modernism, this opposition took the form of a declared indifference to aesthetic concerns rather than the cultivation of particular subset of formal responses to Modernism. Thus there was not a set of Surrealist forms or a Surrealist aesthetic for the neo-avant-garde to repeat. Rauschenberg and Johns continued the Surrealist interest in eroticism, chance, and juxtaposition in order to distance themselves from sublime aesthetics in art and revise the role of artist. Surrealist investment in viewer experience and approach to exhibition design reappear in Allan Kaprow's and Claes Oldenburg's environments.

This desire to bring art closer to everyday life was part of an avant-garde commitment and inspired by Surrealist critiques of art's autonomy. The critique of art's autonomy also extended to the role of the artist and his faculties. "By renouncing the idea of autonomy," Bürger notes, "the artist also gives up his special social position and thereby his claim to genius. (That this surrender is admittedly ambivalent is not surprising in light of the utopian character of the avant-garde project, an ambivalence that becomes evident in a figure like André Breton.)"<sup>343</sup> Group exhibitions were conceived as creations designed to illuminate relationships with the world—

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., 696.

knowledge acquired through ritual, the forbidden knowledge of the occult, the social unification through myth and the powers of transgression and liberation associated with Eros— rather than glorify the individualized productions of idiosyncratic artists. The shift of meaning from individual objects to the total environment de-emphasized the individual artist and placed revolutionary capabilities within the realm of collective expression rather than as the exclusive domain of the individual genius. This goal encouraged the Surrealists and the neo-avant-garde artists who took them as precedents to adopt practices that relinquished or problematized authorial control.

Bürger, Buchloh, and Hal Foster continue these narratives of vitality and efficacy begun with the contemporary exhibition reception of Surrealism and use these tropes to construct their narratives of Modernist progression. Bürger defines efficacy as the ability to sustain avant-gardiste intentions to reintegrate art into the praxis of life and to attack art as an institution, which relied on the autonomous status of art. Avant-garde art had to resist institutionalization. If the paradox of the failure of the avant-garde, for Bürger, is its artistic success and the acceptance of its provocations in the institution as works of art, this late period of Surrealism arguably escapes this failure to a notable degree. Bürger finds the Surrealist avant-garde to be “highly conscious of the danger of being incorporated into the institution (which is why Breton, in his second manifesto, suggests an occultation of surrealism, a self-imposed retreat from the public sphere).”<sup>344</sup> This strategy may account for the little explored success of post-war Surrealism. The movement’s retreat into the mythic and the occult to resist institutionalization turned out to be much more effective than related practices developed by Surrealism in the interwar period. Museum collections are most heavily invested in the narratives of interwar Surrealism. There have not been any high-profile exhibitions that favor the works of post-war Surrealism over the

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<sup>344</sup> Bürger, “Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde,” 705.

more prominent early phase. The critical literature on Surrealism is also heavily skewed towards early Surrealism and even Surrealism's encounter with America, with relatively little on the post-war era and its occult leanings. While occult Surrealism was a means of retreating from those narratives about Surrealism that were already becoming standardized and solidified within the critical establishment—narratives about exploring the unconscious, dream, shock, the fantastic, and the uncanny—the later occult phase appears to have pushed the later history of the movement further into institutional irrelevancy.

Using myth and the occult as a means to reform society essentially sidestepped contemporary politics, and post-war Surrealism is typically interpreted as esoteric, escapist, and morally suspect. The contemporary reception of these exhibitions suggests that the turn to the occult further marginalized Surrealism, at least in the European context. Since Surrealism was no longer seen as politically engaged it was becoming increasingly discounted as unable to fulfill its own revolutionary rhetoric. Political critics like Buchloh who partly attributed Surrealism's weakness to its rejection of the reality principle, did not find value in late Surrealism's foray into myth, as it was one more rejection of the realities of Modern life.

Though the historical avant-garde project did ultimately fail, late Surrealism was still pursuing agendas that were consistent with avant-garde critiques of autonomous art with varying degrees of success. Choosing imaginative installation as a privileged means of communicating Surrealism's agenda made it more difficult to institutionalize this expression. The focus on installation was arguably more important than the individual works subsumed into the larger environment, challenging the category of the work of art. The process of institutional recognition was made easier when the avant-garde manifestations took the form of already established forms of autonomous art, such as painting and sculpture. The American audience perceived Surrealist

expression primarily in terms of veristic painting partly because painting was an already familiar category. By shifting meaning to a larger environment, which addressed the physical presence of the viewer, late Surrealism could present a visual experience that was treated as the central “work,” but not yet recognized as art.

Bürger discusses the avant-garde modification of the category “work.” Avant-garde provocations to the public make reference to the category of “work.” They present “works” that participate in preconceptions of the work of art that are already established by the institution. Duchamp’s *Fountain*, for example, is signed to acknowledge the importance of the author-function and the originality of the individual work to the institution of art, which in this case produces the fruitful tension between the category “work” and the mass-produced object. The avant-garde provocations are addressed to the social institutions of art even as the social institutions are brought seriously into question. *Fountain*, by virtue of being offered for exhibition, exposes the institution’s ideological investment in authorship, originality, and detached aesthetic pleasure. The category of “the work” could not be liquidated, according to Bürger, but the avant-garde work could attempt to liquidate “art that is split off from the praxis of life.”<sup>345</sup> The avant-garde’s challenge to the category of “work” did not negate works of art, and the institution of art resisted this attack by treating the avant-garde provocation as a work of art, though the institution’s category of the “work” was altered through this accommodation.<sup>346</sup> However, he notes, the neo-avant-garde revives the category of “work” by using the historical avant-garde’s procedures of anti-artistic intent for the creation of artistic products.<sup>347</sup> Even though Rauschenberg and Johns utilized the anti-artistic gestures of the ready-made or Surrealist

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<sup>345</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 56.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

objective chance, they also made objects that declared themselves to be works of art. Their works often incorporated painted canvases or treated found objects as a canvas-like surface for two-dimensional imagery. They incorporated artistic techniques associated with the painterly tradition, like Johns' mottled all-over surfaces and Rauschenberg's gestural markings. Bürger argues that the neo-avant-garde's revival of the work of art still makes "art recognizable as an institution"<sup>348</sup> and should not be taken as a complete negation of the avant-garde's intentions. Neither the avant-garde nor the neo-avant-garde could liquidate the category of art that was separate from the praxis of life. However, the neo-avant-garde does make the autonomy of the institution of art evident and provides for the continued possibility of calling the institution and the category of the "work" into question. In Bürger's theory, the neo-avant-garde cannot reclaim the social effects of the historical avant-garde's provocations, but can continue to provide resistances to the institutional discourses that they now participate in.

However, as we have seen Duchamp's incorporation into the institution was facilitated by Johns' and Rauschenberg's neo-avant-garde activities. Their citation of particular aspects of Duchamp's artistic production processed Duchamp's project as works of art and not just as an instance of avant-garde critique. The endorsement of common, manufactured materials, a desire to work within the space between art and life, and the utilization of ordinary experience to critique the mechanisms of hierarchy sustaining traditional assumptions about high and low culture become dominant manners of thinking about Duchamp's works as art by virtue of being qualities shared by the work of artists such as Rauschenberg and Johns. Duchamp's anti-art gesture of the ready-made derived its social effects from the non-art origins of its materials and the ready-made's antagonism to institutional preoccupations. By posing themselves as heavily influenced by Duchamp, Rauschenberg and Johns' art helped construct the framework through

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

which Duchamp's production can be understood as art. Rather than an unconscious repetition of avant-garde forms, Johns and Rauschenberg were actively participating in the dialogue surrounding Duchamp. Rauschenberg admitted that he finds Duchamp and his work to be "a constant inspiration" and Johns was declared to be Duchamp's son during the former's visit to Tokyo.<sup>349</sup> This awareness presents a model of the neo-avant-garde characterized by conscious commentary on precedents established by the historical avant-gardes.

Johns' and Rauschenberg's assertion of their shared qualities with avant-garde precedents helped to frame a new lineage for Duchamp, but these neo-avant-garde artists, along with Alan Kaprow, did comparatively little to frame a legacy for Surrealism. Duchamp became "Duchamp" through the revised assessment of his artistic statements by the neo-avant-garde, or rather, through viewing his statements *as* artistic. For these younger artists, Duchamp provided a convenient figure through which to contextualize their own preoccupation with the everyday and their complications of aesthetic principles, though these precedents were not the exclusive territory of Duchamp. Partially through the interventions of the neo-avant-garde, "Duchamp" became the supreme Dadaist. Though Duchamp's personal contact with Dada activities was brief and occurred primarily in Paris when Parisian Dada was shifting into the beginnings of Parisian Surrealism, his critiques of the institution of art became regarded as the epitome of the Dada attitude.<sup>350</sup> Duchamp's partnership with late Surrealism has been undervalued, but is arguably more direct and long lasting than Duchamp's partnership with Dada. Since Duchamp was the medium through which neo-avant-garde artists like Johns, Rauschenberg, and even Kaprow

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<sup>349</sup> Paul B. Franklin, "Between Art and Life, Art as Life: A Chronology of the Lives and Work of Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg," *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp*, eds. Carlos Basualdo and Erica F. Battle (Philadelphia Museum of Art. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 356.

<sup>350</sup> Treating Duchamp as the supreme Dadaist also obscures the pronounced political objectives of Dada activities in Zurich or Berlin.

engaged with historical avant-garde practice, his recognition as a Dada or Surrealist figure does much to shift our characterization of the neo-avant-garde.

Duchamp was not a member of Surrealism or any major Dada group, as has been previously mentioned, although his work did intersect with Dada critiques. Foster's and Bürger's concepts of historical avant-garde institutional critiques are clearly modeled on Duchamp's ready-mades. Duchamp himself recognized the failure of the ready-mades, squaring with Bürger's notion of historical avant-garde failure. Though they were intended as a provocation, Duchamp observed that they soon became regarded as art. The ready-mades, which are often associated with Duchamp's Dada affiliations, are only a small segment of Duchamp's early oeuvre. In contrast, Duchamp's preoccupation with Eros was longstanding and was the inspiration for much of his production. His last work, *Étant Donnés*, which served as the culmination of his decades-long career, was very much concerned with eroticism. This continued interest in Eros arguable characterizes Duchamp as a neo-Surrealist in his later years. Duchamp's chronology also spans the time period from the historical avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde phases. If his historical identity is not exclusively Dada and opens to other historical phases of the avant-garde, Duchamp's relationships with the neo-avant-garde become more complicated.

Though Rauschenberg and Johns exhibited with the Surrealists and Kaprow's Environments have strong parallels with Surrealism's novel approach to the exhibition space, these connections with Surrealism were not revealed in their own discussions of their work. This may have to do with the general attitude towards Surrealism during the 1950s and 60s. The omission of Surrealism as an important precedent of for the neo-avant-garde project is, I think, a telling parallel to the critical dismissal of Surrealism's late phase. Johns, Rauschenberg, and Kaprow had the strongest ties to this later period of Surrealism. Given post-war Surrealism's

largely negative reception, which continued well past the 1960s, drawing attention to their chronological and conceptual overlap with the Surrealist avant-garde would have done relatively little to validate these neo-avant-garde manifestations as efficacious artistic practices. However, Rauschenberg and Johns did much to enrich late Surrealist visual presentations. Discounting the influence of late Surrealism and Duchamp's role as mediator denies an important, though alternative narrative of historical and neo-avant-garde interaction.

## Conclusion

This thesis seeks to fill gaps in Surrealist scholarship by giving an extended look into late Surrealism and its exhibitions. One objective in analyzing the late Surrealist project is to resist the popular notion that Surrealism died with WWII. While late Surrealism's claims to social and political relevancy were met with skepticism from prominent quarters, the Surrealist avant-garde continued to develop innovative means to express its utopian project. The exhibitions themselves and the attitudes of their organizers demonstrate a persistent belief in the relationship between art and revolutionizing the social conditions of man. This faith in art's social power and social responsibility often took the form of political engagement or challenges to capitalism's tendency to distance art from life experience.

For the Surrealists, post-war Surrealist exhibitions were an important means of establishing continuity with earlier avant-garde phases. The post-war exhibitions were also a significant venue for promoting a new vision for Surrealism's artistic and social endeavors that would attract ambitious artists. The largely negative contemporary reception of late Surrealist exhibitions developed particularized narratives of decline that have continued in Surrealist scholarship. The narrative of Surrealism's decline aligns with Peter Bürger's account of the failures of the neo-avant-garde. For Bürger, the neo-avant-garde artistic manifestations took on the character of "works."<sup>351</sup> The neo-avant-garde's "deployment of procedures and artistic materials [developed in the utopian project of the historical avant-garde] that were designed to transcend the institution of art" are then deployed for "internal aesthetic purposes."<sup>352</sup> This assessment corresponds to the American response to Surrealist exhibitions, where Surrealist

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<sup>351</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 58.

<sup>352</sup> Peter Bürger, Bettina Brandt, and Daniel Purdy. "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde: An Attempt to Answer Certain Critics of *Theory of the Avant-Garde*," *New Literary History* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 713.

achievements were regarded as a subset of modernist visual practices rooted in the tradition of painting rather than regarded as a diverse set of practices developed to produce psychological effects independent of aesthetic considerations. U.S. reception of late Surrealist exhibitions typically considered their offerings in terms of individual works of art subject to aesthetic judgments. One of the primary qualities of the neo-avant-garde is its propensity to institutionalize the avant-garde as "art" regardless of the conscious intentions of those neo-avant-garde artists, recasting avant-garde practices as autonomous art.<sup>353</sup> As critics and reviewers began to consider Surrealism as a recognizable visual language of a "work," Surrealism was deprived of its social consequentiality. Late Surrealism saw its concerns increasingly described as aesthetic rather than moral or political.

Although André Breton was preoccupied with maintaining Surrealism's historical avant-garde status into the 1950s and 60s, the movement's shifting political position caused many onlookers to re-classify late Surrealism according to the negative characteristics of the Bürgerian neo-avant-garde. These negative characteristics include the compromise of earlier revolutionary aims, which, in the case of late Surrealism, was attributed to its political conservatism. Political conservatism--namely post-war Surrealism's retreat from communist politics and reliance on the occult as a means of social engagement--was seen to soften Surrealism's critiques and resulted in a rehearsal of its earlier visual forms, but with a cessation of Surrealism's ability to shock and disrupt.

Once avant-garde statements and visual practices become institutionalized, their forms and challenges to the progression of modern art were no longer provocative for Bürger, since these had been legitimized by the institution. One of the negative qualities of the neo-avant-garde was that their use of avant-garde practices could no longer be linked to transgression since its context

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<sup>353</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 58.

of rupture had been changed by its acceptance into the institution of art.<sup>354</sup> The idea that late Surrealism could no longer lay claim to transgression was already present in the contemporary reception of post-war exhibitions. In public perception, Surrealism's dominant transgressive strategy was shock. Many contemporary reviews noted that there was absurdity in these late Surrealist manifestations, but no shock. Some negative reviews noted that contemporary audiences were virtually immune to shock in this era. Others noted that even bourgeois audiences, whom Surrealism had habitually critiqued, would be comfortable within these exhibition spaces.<sup>355</sup> In Europe, where the social and political dimensions of Surrealism were more closely considered, Surrealism's philosophy of *épater le bourgeois* was falling flat for audiences. Surrealism's agedness was linked to its inability to adequately challenge the bourgeois audience who had become familiar with the movement over the decades. The Parisian reception especially stressed the notion of spectacle in relation to the post-war Surrealist exhibitions. That is to say, these exhibitions were seen as visually opulent and momentarily dramatic, but ultimately without substance and nothing more than an amusement. These contemporary narratives align with Bürger's view of the neo-avant-garde by suggesting that Surrealism's familiarity had rendered its strategies cliché and that its powers of provocation were muted due to the acceptance of Surrealist visual practices as recognizable visual forms.

Attention paid to the agedness of the movement and its most well-known members was a common feature of contemporary writings on these exhibitions. Late Surrealism was routinely judged in relation to early Surrealism. Examples of Surrealism's historical accomplishments were placed in opposition to the charge of inferiority often laid against all of Surrealism's

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<sup>354</sup> Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 712.

<sup>355</sup> The appeal of Surrealist art to the very audience it wished to challenge also invokes Bürger's idea that the historical avant-garde failed and the neo-avant-garde emerged when the historical avant-garde was no longer able to maintain enough distance between its manifestations and what it sought to critique, reaffirming the autonomy of art.

contemporary offerings. These contemporary narratives of decline broke the Surrealist movement into distinct, historical phases. A corresponding chronological model of avant-garde phases, determined by their relative efficacy, would come to be one of Bürger's chief preoccupations.

Surrealism's longevity was atypical of historical avant-gardes, officially spanning four decades. Also atypical is its chronological overlap with the neo-avant-garde. Dada, for example, was concluding in the mid-1920s and in 1957 the term "neo-Dada" started to be applied to contemporary artists, marking a separation of approximately three and a half decades between historical and neo. Surrealism's distinctive chronology allowed historical avant-garde artists to exhibit together with neo-avant-garde artists and enabled the movement to participate in the context of the 1950s and 60s as neo-avant-garde practices were emerging.

This overlap confuses Bürger's chronological model where pre-avant-garde, historical avant-garde, and neo-avant-garde phases must remain relatively distinct, since he conceptualizes each phase as a response to the previous phase. Hal Foster and Benjamin Buchloh too conceptualize the historical avant-garde and neo-avant-garde as responding to different social and artistic contexts, which imply a chronological separation. Late Surrealism and the first wave of the American neo-avant-garde were arguably unfolding in the same social and artistic contexts due to their chronological simultaneity. The synchronicity demonstrated by late Surrealism and the neo-avant-garde also complicates the Bürgerian conception wherein the historical avant-garde's failure needs to be complete in order to provide for the freedom of artistic means necessary for the neo-avant-garde's development.<sup>356</sup> While late Surrealism was generally

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<sup>356</sup> Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 705.

For Bürger, the complete institutionalization of the historical avant-garde is both the criterion for the avant-garde's failure and a necessary step for freeing artistic means and providing legitimate visual practices for neo-avant-gardists: "With the failure of the utopian project of transcending

regarded as a decline, its failure as an avant-garde was by no means absolute during its overlap with the neo-avant-garde. On the contrary, Robert Rauschenberg's and Jasper Johns' participation in and compatibility with the late Surrealist project show the vitality of Surrealist concerns and practices rather than their absolute failure. It is also noteworthy that Bürger's criteria of institutionalization as a condition of historical avant-garde failure and necessary precursor to the development of neo-avant-garde artistic practices was far less characteristic of late Surrealism, as has been argued here, than it was for the movement's earlier phase. Thus the conceptual break theorized by Bürger, conditioned by institutional acceptance, and chronological break necessary for distancing the historical and neo-avant-gardes, appears less applicable to the situation of Surrealism.

Narratives of decline have obscured what was innovative about late Surrealism. In the post-war period Surrealists generated a new view of social efficacy, which was related to Sorelian views of the social and political role of myth. For Georges Sorel and Breton, myth gained its power from its ability to transcend Enlightenment rationality, to which the Surrealists attributed many societal ills, simultaneously shaping social consciousness for political mobilization. Myth was a way for late Surrealism to remain socially engaged while still embracing the individual and artistic freedoms that were central to its utopian project. In Breton's view and that of many other Surrealists, French Communism's turn to Stalinism restricted these freedoms, which necessitated "official" Surrealism's break with communist politics. As Surrealism's early engagement with Marxist thinking as a means of social change now appeared to be a dead end, other forms of social re-organization had to be pursued. Another alternative form of social

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the institution, the practice of a recourse to material forms that were outdated or rendered taboo by modernism fundamentally changed its significance. A practice that aimed to have an extra-artistic impact turned into a practice internal to the institution and to art. In admitting avant-gardist products as works of art, the institution of art simultaneously legitimates a treatment of outdated material that was previously inadmissible."

engagement was Breton's active post-war support of French anarchism. The promotion of myth and support of anarchism were consistent with Surrealism's longstanding commitment to freedom of the imagination and the movement's goal of facilitating a crisis in consciousness.

For the Surrealists, myth had the potential to form a community without nationalism or rationalism, which were highly suspect in Surrealist estimations. Surrealism's resistance to nationalism forms one of its principal successes, according to Buchloh. Surrealism's "new myth" promised that social upheaval was possible without politically determined models of identity. However, one of the failures of Surrealism, for Buchloh, was that its pursuit of the unconscious was invalidated in the post-war period that demanded radical cultural responses. Surrealism had misjudged the rupture caused by World War II, for him, and failed to address transformed post-war reality.

This assessment seemed to ring true for many critics of these post-war exhibitions. Surrealism's attempts to form a new subjectivity through myth and the occult registered as largely irresponsible and escapist, as was pointed out by Nicolas Calas. Late Surrealism had failed to provide political or moral responses to the post-war situation that had equal resonance with those of Communism or Existentialism. It seems that archaic myths, magic, and primitive rituals did not provide obvious connections to the plight of modern society for contemporary audiences. For peripheral Surrealist groups like *La Main à Plume* and *Surréalistes Révolutionnaires*, Surrealism's embrace of myth, directed towards the occult, was regarded as an avoidance of the very real political issues of the present moment. The occult leanings read as irrelevant anachronism. In their view, direct political engagement through party politics was the appropriate response to post-war reality.

However, "official" Surrealism regarded the upheaval of World War II--the Fascist misuse of myth, the evident dangers of nationalism, and the crisis of Enlightenment values-- as an important point of historical intervention where mankind had the opportunity to rebuild its social and moral foundations. "New myth" and, to some extent, anarchism, extended an opportunity to re-configure society without principles of nationalism, rationalism or the nihilism resulting from the absence of myth-- which World War II had denigrated in the Surrealist view. Countering Buchloh's critique of Surrealism's mistaken post-war pursuit of the unconscious, these approaches were not geared at the unconscious directly. As Breton had stated in his 1951 interview with André Parinaud, post-war Surrealism recognized that political and social concerns needed to be addressed before individual psychic freedom could be seriously approached.

Late Surrealism's preoccupation with myth and the occult also presented resistance to another failure of the historical avant-garde cited by Buchloh: the disappearing boundaries between the mass-culture and avant-garde spheres, collapsing the avant-garde with what it had hoped to critique. While Surrealist principles of shock were being accepted by the bourgeois audience that Surrealism had sought to critique, embracing the occult presented a form of Surrealism that was still very much at odds with popular attitudes and mass-culture interests. For Bürger, historical avant-garde failure was caused by its utopian project being absorbed by the institution of art. The turn to the occult does coincide with a phase of Surrealism that has proved the most resistant to institutionalization.

These exhibitions did offer something quite innovative in terms of exhibition design—the exhibitions created total environments that directly engaged the viewer, valuing the environment's ability to stress particular Surrealist interests and posit a more direct engagement between avant-garde art and its audience. The exhibitions were an invitation to an experience.

This approach encountered some resistance from critics who wanted to view Surrealist expression in the confines of the individual object and those who found the exhibition design to be an appeal to base spectacle. Rather than promoting a detached scrutiny of visual phenomena, these aspects of exhibition design heralded an era of pronounced viewer interaction and an expanded definition of what could be considered artistic expression that would come to characterize the neo-avant-garde works such as those of Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg.

Neo-avant-gardists Rauschenberg and Johns accepted Surrealist themes as valid visual expression and continued these practices in a new era of artistic practice. Like the Surrealists, Johns and Rauschenberg used irrational juxtaposition to propose poetic relationships between disparate images. Eroticism was an important shared theme. The erotic encounter implied by Rauschenberg's *Bed*, to use one example, was inflected by a quintessentially Surrealist interest in both the liberation of eroticism and eroticism's transgressive associations with violence and bodily abjection. The work Johns displayed in the late Surrealist exhibitions presented a combination of eroticism and surprise through revealed and concealed body parts. These neo-avant-garde artists also regarded the use of surprise as a valid artistic technique. Surprise achieved through juxtaposition and objective chance were hallmarks of Surrealist production. Rauschenberg and Johns adapted the avant-garde project embraced by Surrealism and figures like Duchamp by devaluing traditional aesthetics and employing chance and surprise to complicate traditional ideas of authorship.

Since Surrealism was a movement without a recognizable aesthetic, the break between early and late periods, which have come to characterize the movement's chronology, cannot be observed with a shift in visual appearance or style. Without visual criteria, the distinction between phases within the history of Surrealism is considered here in terms of efficacy.

Providing a fresh look at the post-WWII achievements and struggles of Surrealism allows for a new assessment of its evolution as an avant-garde movement. Treating this late phase of Surrealist activity as worthy of consideration within the Modernist conception of avant-garde production also recognizes it as a phase important for the progression from the historical avant-garde to the neo-avant-garde. The chronological overlap between the Surrealist avant-garde and the American neo-avant-garde considered here revises narratives of Modernist progression that exclude the Surrealist contribution to neo-avant-garde practices. The lack of observable Surrealist visual style signals that these neo-avant-garde continuations must be conceptual rather than formal. These continuations of the Surrealist avant-garde practice by the neo-avant-garde took the form of artistic practices based on irrational juxtaposition, complications of aesthetic norms and authorship, as well as an interest in the everyday and in eroticism.

Marcel Duchamp has to be reclaimed as a Surrealist figure to establish the neo-avant-garde's connection to Surrealism in the United States. Duchamp's engagement with Surrealism was at least equally as substantial as his engagement with the Dada movement. He was heavily involved with both early and late Surrealism. He participated in or facilitated many Surrealist activities including Surrealist journals, arranging sales of Surrealist objects, presenting his work in Surrealist exhibitions, contributing images for Surrealist publications, and supporting Breton's Galerie Gravidia in the 1930s among others. Duchamp's own work shared similar concerns with Surrealist work, including chance, irrational juxtaposition, eroticism and a desire to privilege everyday experience over aesthetics.<sup>357</sup> Duchamp was making significant contributions to

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<sup>357</sup> Dada and Surrealism did have common techniques and goals, including a rejection of aesthetics, distaste for autonomous art, attacks on bourgeois sensibilities and a predilection for techniques involving chance, juxtaposition, automatism, collaboration, and refusal of typical authorial roles. While Duchamp, Surrealism, and even Dada were involved in institutional critique, a necessary distinction between Duchamp and the Surrealist project arises. While

Surrealist exhibitions before the post-war period, most notably in installations for 1938's *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* and 1942's "First Papers of Surrealism" before his integral roles in organizing *Le Surréalisme en 1947* and 1960's "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanter's Domain" that have been analyzed here. Duchamp had a demonstrated admiration for the movement and a close relationship with Surrealism's figurehead, André Breton, who devoted his significant literary energies to Duchamp's work and its place within Surrealist thinking. Having been strongly allied with Surrealism in the last decades of his career, Duchamp was very important for giving visual and ideological form to late Surrealist exhibitions. He was an important link to the neo-avant-garde, drawing figures like Rauschenberg and Johns into Surrealism's orbit and acting as a progenitor. The Surrealists recognized Johns' and Rauschenberg's neo-avant-garde contribution as compatible with their avant-garde project through Duchamp's intervention and prominently integrated Johns' and Rauschenberg's work into Surrealist group exhibitions. This interaction between the Surrealism and younger artists like Johns and Rauschenberg is significant in that the historical avant-garde practice and neo-avant-garde re-enactment is acted out within the same historical moment. Rauschenberg and Johns offer contemporaneous adaptations of avant-garde issues developed within official Surrealism and by figures like Duchamp.

Within Foster's model of Modernist progression the historical avant-garde is only comprehended for the first time through the neo-avant-garde's re-enactment. This relationship between avant-garde phases best illuminates the neo-avant-garde's role in creating the figure of "Duchamp." Here, John Cage, Rauschenberg, Johns and others constructed a dominant narrative of Duchamp's work through their own artistic interventions several decades after the elder artist

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Surrealism was interested in attacks against the institution as part of a larger social and political vision, Duchamp was arguably interested in institutional critique for its own sake.

had claimed to stop making art. Before a critical consensus had been reached on Duchamp or his value as an avant-garde figure, the neo-avant-garde cited his influence in certain aspects of their neo-avant-garde project, thereby forming an artistic legacy for Duchamp from their own particularized perspectives on artistic production. Foster sees this interaction as “a continual process of protension and retension, a complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts- in short, in a deferred action that throws over any simple scheme of before and after, cause and effect, origin and repetition.”<sup>358</sup> That these historical narratives, generated by neo-avant-garde intervention had an impact on the avant-garde discourse sustains Foster's conception of the potential entwinement of historical and neo-avant-garde manifestations.

However, Foster also argues that the neo-avant-garde's ability to confer meaning onto earlier avant-garde practices is possible because the historical avant-garde fails to signify in its first appearance, as it occupies a hole in the symbolic order, which the neo-avant-garde later recodes and re-integrates into the symbolic order. It becomes much more difficult to argue for this phenomenon with Surrealism. Neo-avant-garde artists like Rauschenberg and Johns did not re-construct an image for Surrealism like they did for "Duchamp." Even though Johns and Rauschenberg encountered Duchamp during his period of closest collaboration with the Surrealists, the image that the neo-avant-gardists created of Duchamp was particularly structured around his ready-mades and has come to identify Duchamp as a prime Dadaist. Also it is hard to argue that Surrealism was initially unreadable and required the neo-avant-garde to make it readable. Historically, Surrealism had been quite assertive about its own narratives through the extensive writings on the movement generated by its members and its strict group discipline.

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<sup>358</sup> Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1996), 29.

Though the more active interaction between the historical and neo-avant-gardes is apt in the case of Surrealism and the American neo-avant-garde, Foster's conception of Lacanian trauma and repetition as a model for this interaction is problematic. In traumatic repetition the deferred action is an unconscious act. The historical avant-garde is posed as the original trauma that the neo-avant-garde re-enacts without conscious recognition. Bürger rightly points out that this model fails to account for the historical circumstances of these different phases, where the neo-avant-garde was conscious of avant-garde precursors even if its activities were a deferred action. For Bürger, neo-avant-garde practice is an active, conscious revival of the historical avant-garde, rather than naive or unconscious repetition. This point is substantiated by the careers of Rauschenberg, Johns, Duchamp and late Surrealism, which converged in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>359</sup> Johns and Rauschenberg's participation in two Surrealist exhibitions certainly demonstrates a conscious awareness of avant-garde precedents and resonances with their own artistic projects. Rauschenberg and Johns were keenly aware of Duchamp and his influence on their work, executing pieces that were acknowledged homages to Duchamp and had an extensive personal relationship with him.<sup>360</sup> In his revised account, Bürger advances his concept of the return to explain the neo-avant-garde's conscious resumption of the historical avant-garde project, where "a later event illuminates a previous one, without there being a demonstrable continuity between them."<sup>361</sup> Like the U.S. neo-avant-garde, which developed a break with the formalist concerns of American art, "the second event, which possesses its own context of

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<sup>359</sup> This chronological convergence of the Surrealist avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde also begins to complicate Buchloh's model of their interaction, which stresses radically different historical contexts for the emergence of the historical- and neo-avant-gardes. Since the audience's of each phase of the avant-garde demand different forms of legitimation due to their different contexts, the possibility of a clear overlap in audience, cultural identity conditioned by historical context, and chronology is not provided for.

<sup>360</sup> Kaprow too acknowledged Duchamp as an important precursor whose project had resonances with his own.

<sup>361</sup> Peter Bürger, "Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," 711.

emergence, illuminates the first."<sup>362</sup> Within this concept of the Bürgerian return, characterized as an illumination, the neo-avant-garde is not completely responsible for constructing the historical avant-garde's meaning. As has been demonstrated here with the American neo-avant-garde's relationship with late Surrealism and then Duchamp, the neo-avant-garde does have this capacity but it is not universally applied. While Buchloh and Foster's models initially posited the more active relationship between the historical and neo-avant-gardes that is reflected in the case studies provided here, Bürger's revised view of return allows for the chronological overlap and conscious interaction characteristic of the American neo-avant-garde's interaction with the major figures of late Surrealism.

In a brief study such as this one there are those topics that are necessarily pursued at the expense of others. Late Surrealist exhibitions and their impact on subsequent artistic practices is a rich subject that offers many prospects for future research. The focus of this study has been on forms of collective expression capable of asserting the position of the Surrealist movement within the post-war period. However, the perspectives of individual exhibiting artists on the project of late Surrealism, including myth, Eros, and Surrealism's political engagement have yet to be considered. The connection between late Surrealism's conceptions of the entire exhibition space as a unit, rather than being concerned with a group of distinct elements, and neo-avant-garde Happenings and environments has only been sketched here. This connection can be expanded through a more detailed analysis of Kaprow's and Oldenburg's projects from the 1950s and 60s as well as those Happenings created by artists such as Jim Dine and Robert Rauschenberg. Areas for future exploration also include an extended look into the political and intellectual climate in Europe, which impacted the reception of late Surrealist exhibitions in Paris. Questions about late Surrealism's political engagement were raised by French Communists

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

and the development of Existentialism, while these groups partially defined their project in contrast to Surrealism and their concerns colored much of the contemporary response to Surrealist exhibitions. André Breton's support for French anarchist groups in the 1950s has not yet been considered a serious rebuttal to contemporary accusations of Surrealism's social inconsequentiality. Developing the post-war Parisian context for Surrealism also extends possibilities for discussing the movement's interaction with European neo-avant-garde artists in future projects.

By focusing on the intersection between the American neo-avant-garde and the major currents of post-war Surrealist exhibitions, this thesis has offered an alternative narrative for the Surrealist avant-garde that regards late Surrealism as a significant phase of the Surrealist project. Here the successes and failures of late Surrealism have been reassessed through the context of post-war group exhibitions, which have often been ignored or related as straightforward decline. Analyzing the interaction between the Surrealist movement and neo-avant-garde artists of the 1950s and 60s within the context of post-war Surrealist exhibitions has revised dominant conceptions of historical and neo-avant-garde as chronologically distinct episodes in Modern art.

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Figure 1.  
Staircase. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

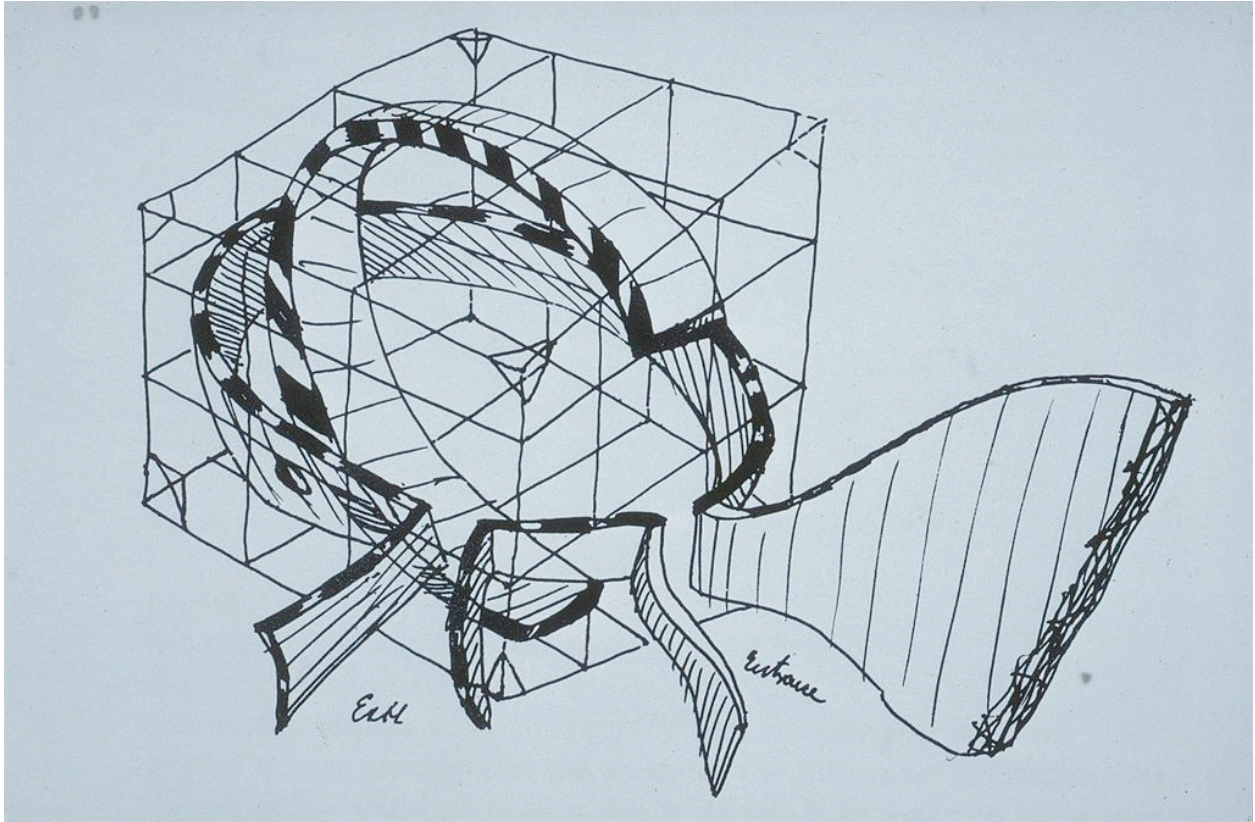


Figure 2.  
Plan for the Room of Superstitions by Frederick Kiesler. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

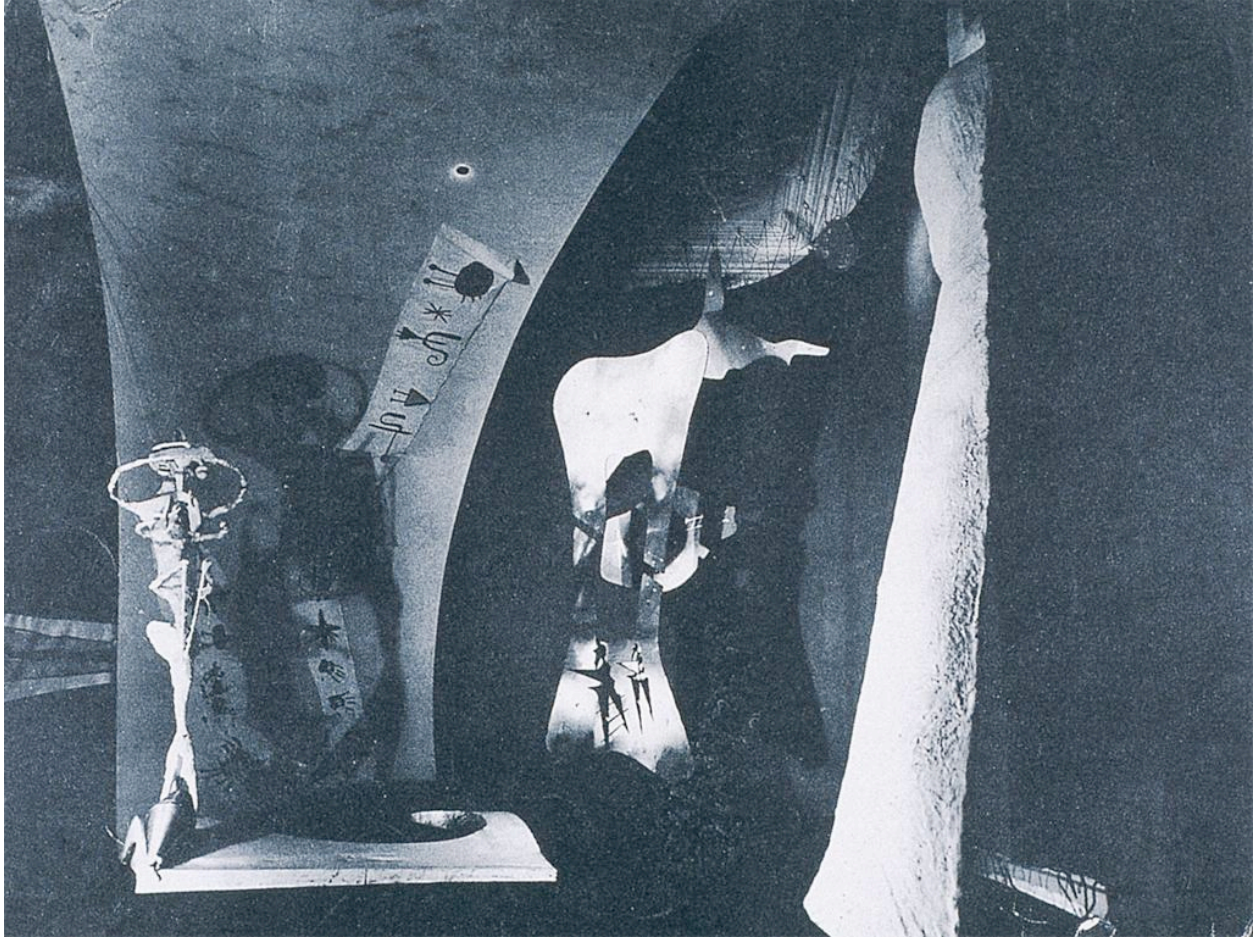


Figure 3.  
Room of Superstitions, including Joan Miró's *The Rigid Cascade of Superstitions*, David Hare's *Anguished Man*, Roberto Matta's *The Whist*, and Yves Tanguy's *The Ladder Announcing Death*. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

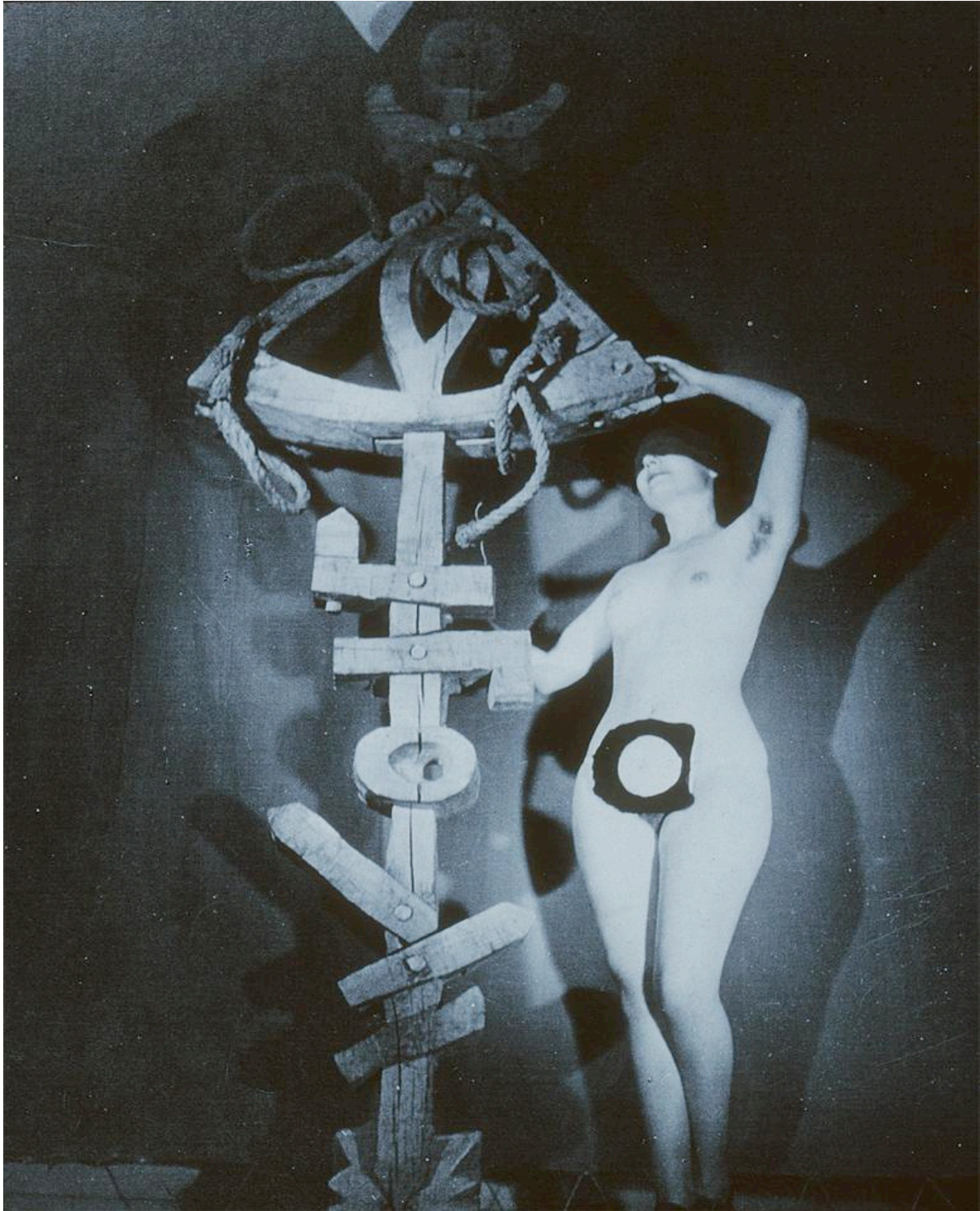


Figure 4.  
Etienne Martin and Frederick Kiesler's *Totem of Religions* with model who wears the false breast from Marcel Duchamp and Enrico Donati's *Please Touch* luxury exhibition catalog. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.



Figure 5.  
Frederick Kiesler and *The Anti-Taboo Figure* in the Room of Superstitions. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

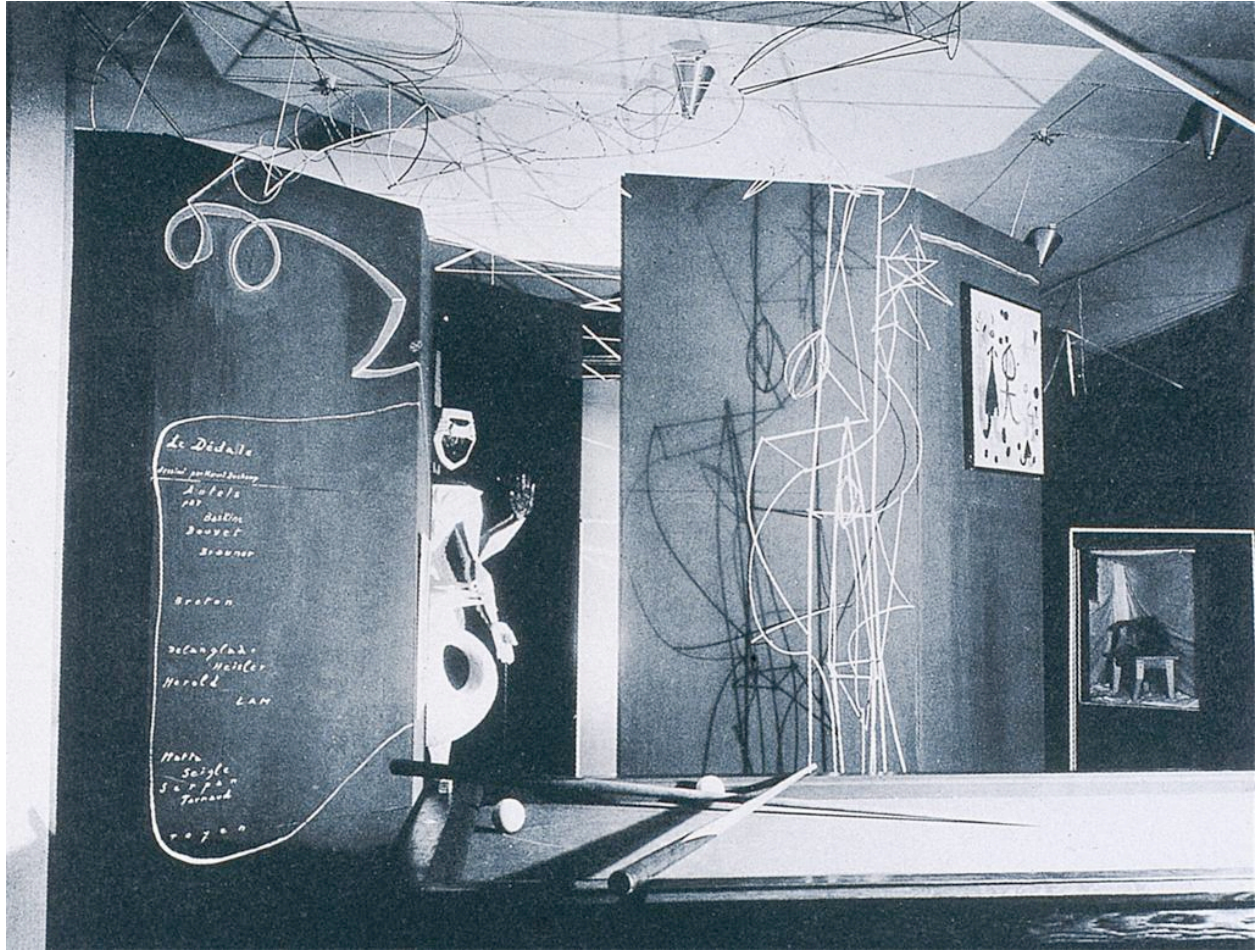


Figure 6.  
Labyrinth of Initiations and billiards table. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

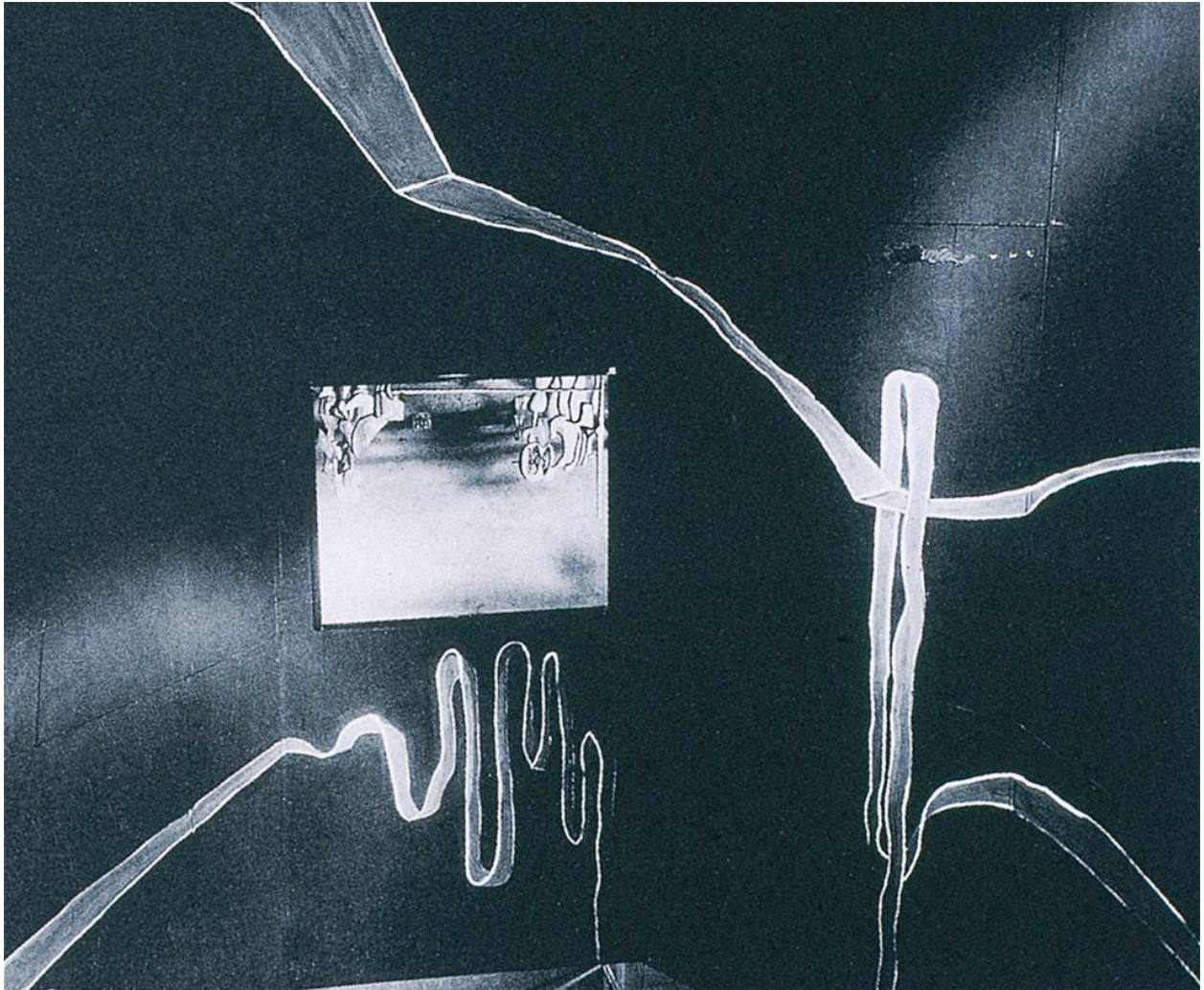


Figure 7.  
Labyrinth of Initiations. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

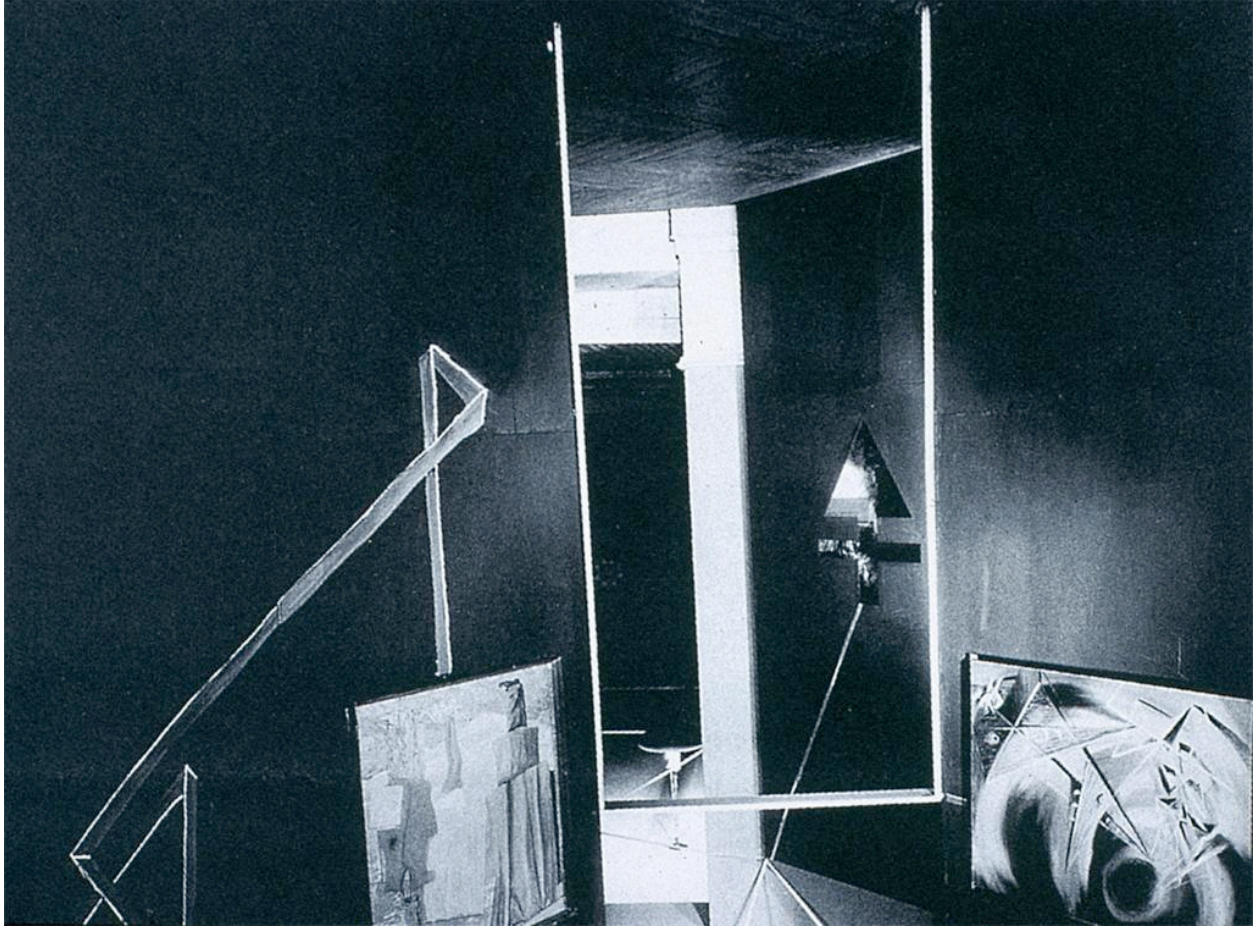


Figure 8.  
Labyrinth of Initiations. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

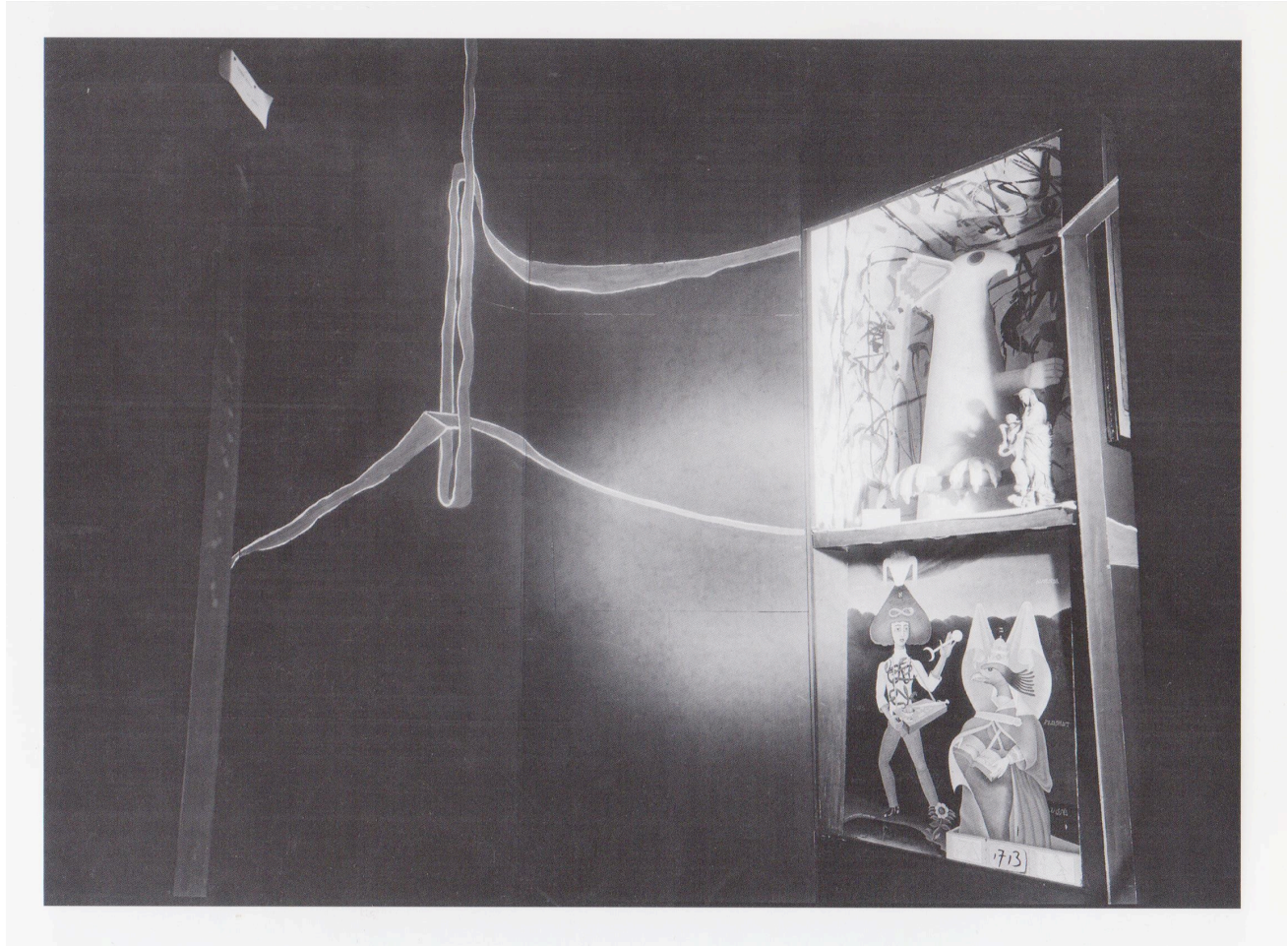
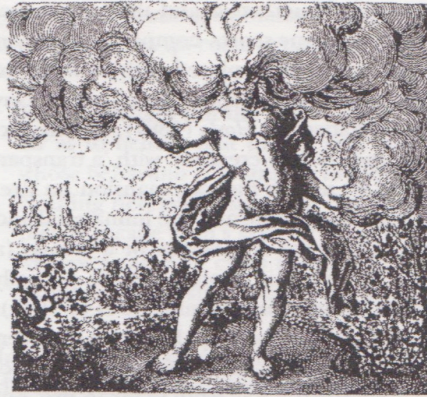


Figure 9.  
Victor Brauner, *L'Oiseau serpenteur*. Altar in the Labyrinth of Initiations. *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.



Il est venu, le . . . le . . . comment  
se nomme-t-il . . . le . . . le . . . il  
me semble qu'il me crie son nom et  
je ne l'entends pas . . . le . . . oui  
. . . il le crie. J'écoute . . . je ne  
peux pas . . . répète . . . le . . .  
Horla . . . J'ai entendu . . . le Hor-  
la . . . c'est lui . . . le Horla . . .  
il est venu. . .

(Guy de Maupassant)

*LES GRANDS  
TRANSPARENTS*

David Hare:  
*Hidden fundamental*



End of the notes on myths

**FIGURE 2.3** André Breton, *Les grands transparents*, 1942, from *De la survivance de certains mythes et de quelques autres mythes en croissance ou en formation* (Hare's *Hidden Fundamental* is reproduced courtesy of Mark Borghi Fine Art, New York).

Figure 10.  
“Les Grands Transparents” (The Great Transparent Ones) from André Breton, “De la survivance de certains mythes et de quelques autres mythes en croissance ou en formation” (“On the Survival of Certain Myths and on Some Other Myths in Growth or Formation”), *First Papers of Surrealism*, New York: Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, Inc., 1942, n.p

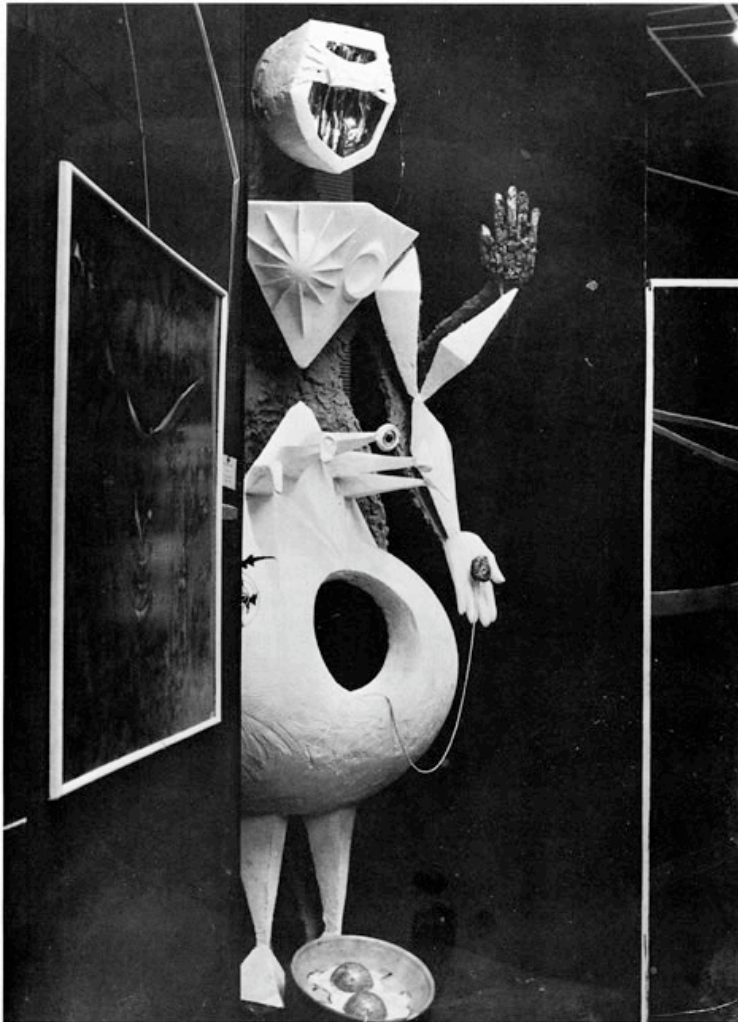


Figure 11.  
Jacques Hérold, *The Great Transparent One*, 1947, plaster and found materials, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.

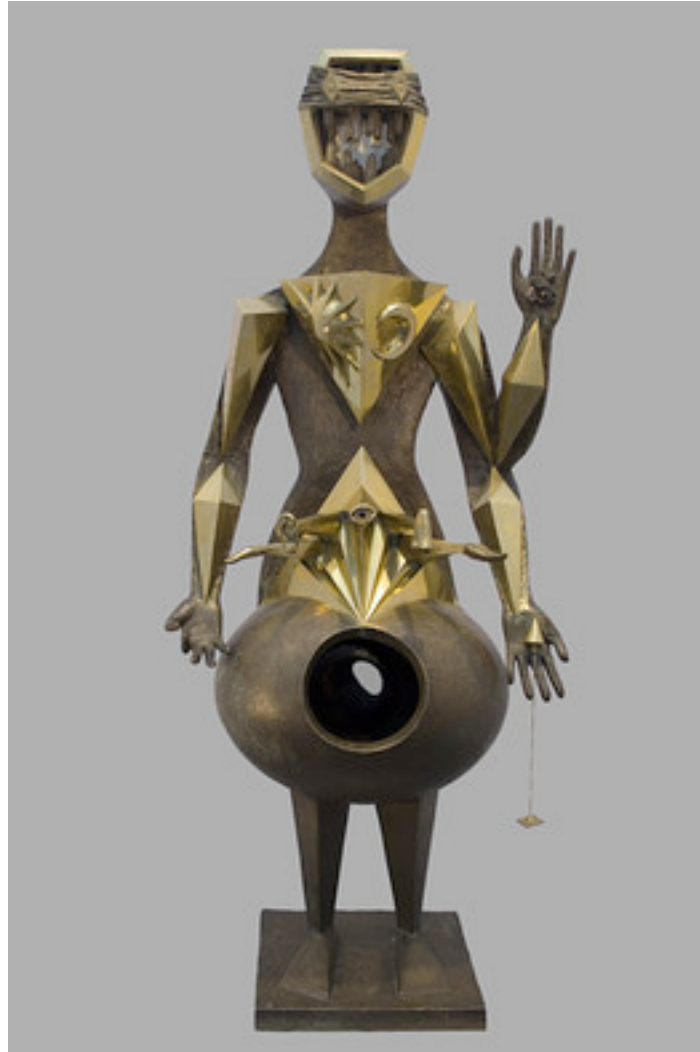


Figure 12.  
Jacques Hérold's *The Great Transparent One*, later cast in bronze.

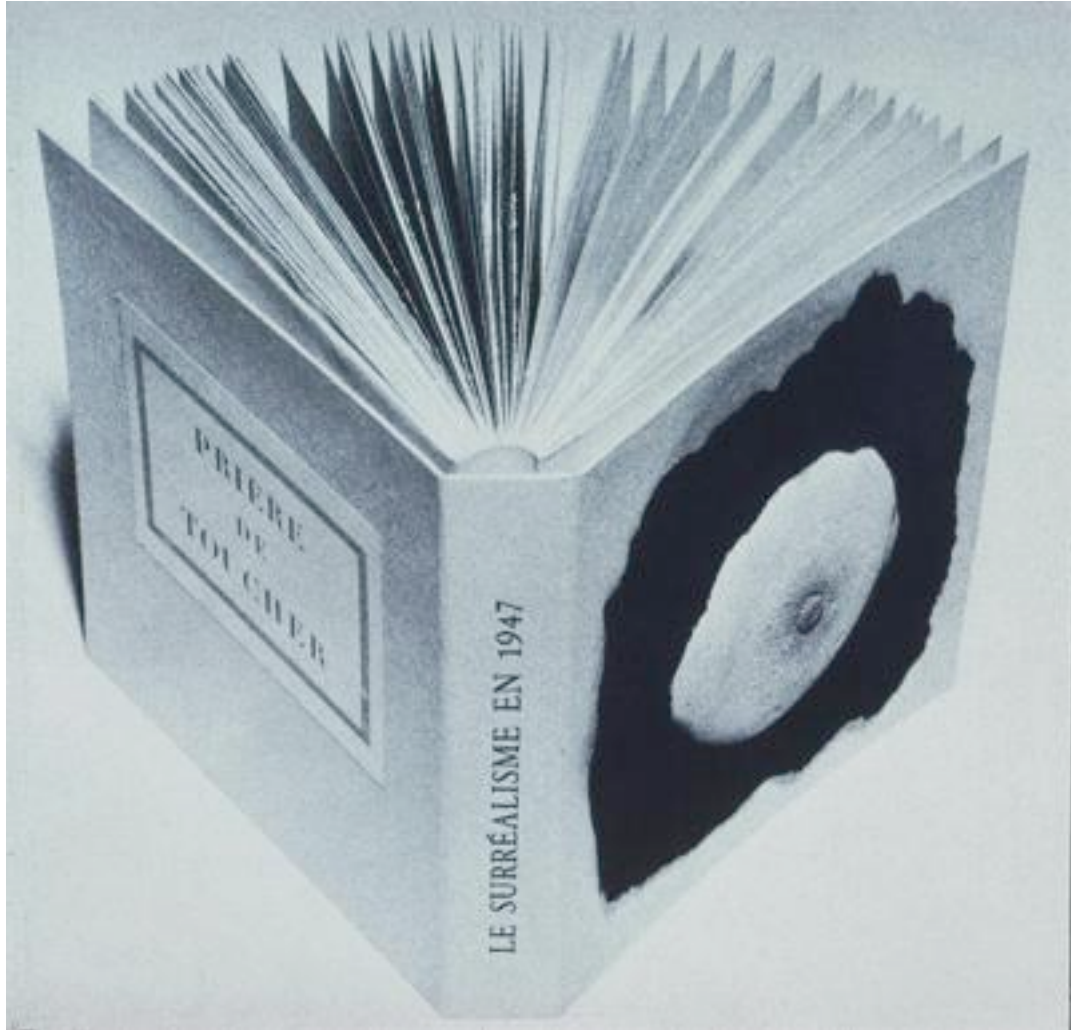


Figure 13.  
Marcel Duchamp and Enrico Donati's *Please Touch* luxury exhibition catalog, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Galerie Maeght, 1947.



Figure 14.  
*Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.



Figure 15.  
Installation shot. Alberto Giacometti's *The Invisible Object* and Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* are visible on the back wall. *Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.

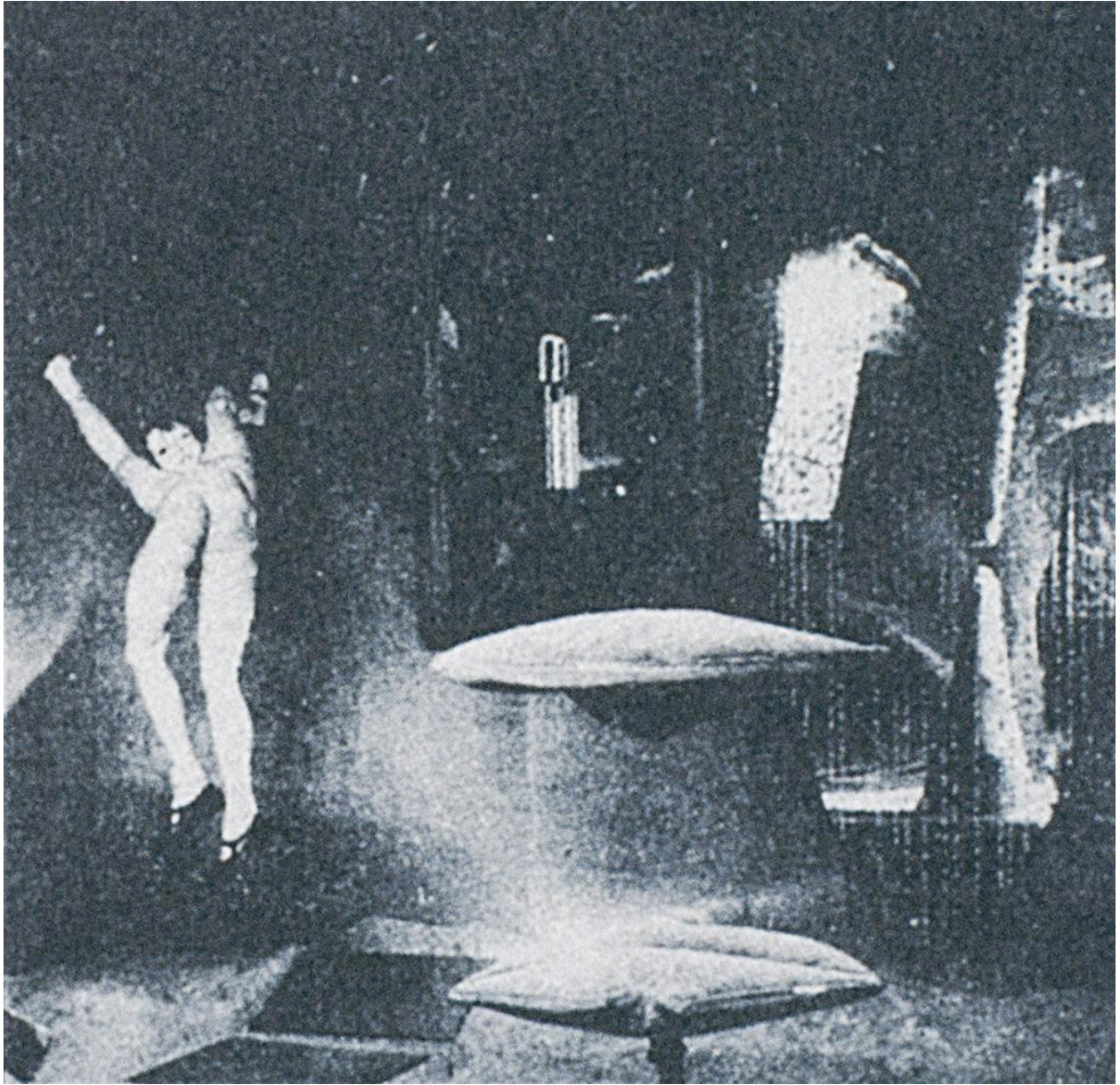


Figure 16.  
*Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.



Figure 17.  
William Klein, untitled photograph of Merét Oppenheim's *Cannibal Feast*, *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.



Figure 18.  
Installation shot of Merét Oppenheim's *Cannibal Feast* with Jasper Johns' *Target with Plaster Casts* visible in the upper right. *Exposition InteRnatiOnale du Surréalisme*, Galerie Daniel Cordier, 1959-1960.



Figure 19.  
"Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.



Figure 20.

"Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947. Works shown: Gerome Kamrowski, *The Temperature of the Sea*, *Family*, and *Nude Blonde on a Horse* (all c. 1945); Isamu Noguchi, *The Tortured Earth* (1943); and Wilfredo Lam, *The Eternal Present* (1945) on the ceiling.



Figure 21.  
Viewing Wilfredo Lam's *The Eternal Present* (1945) on the ceiling. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.

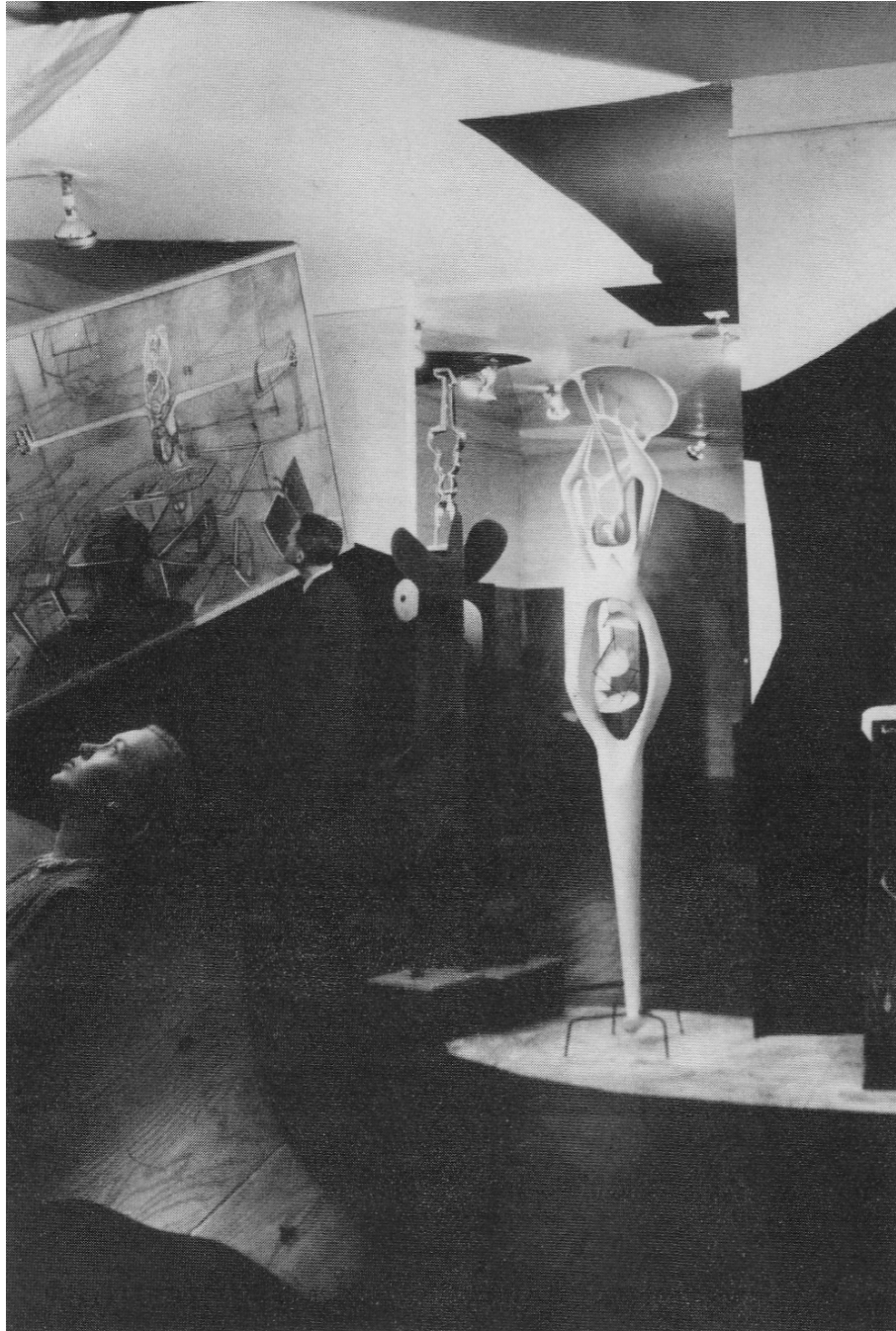


Figure 22.  
"Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.

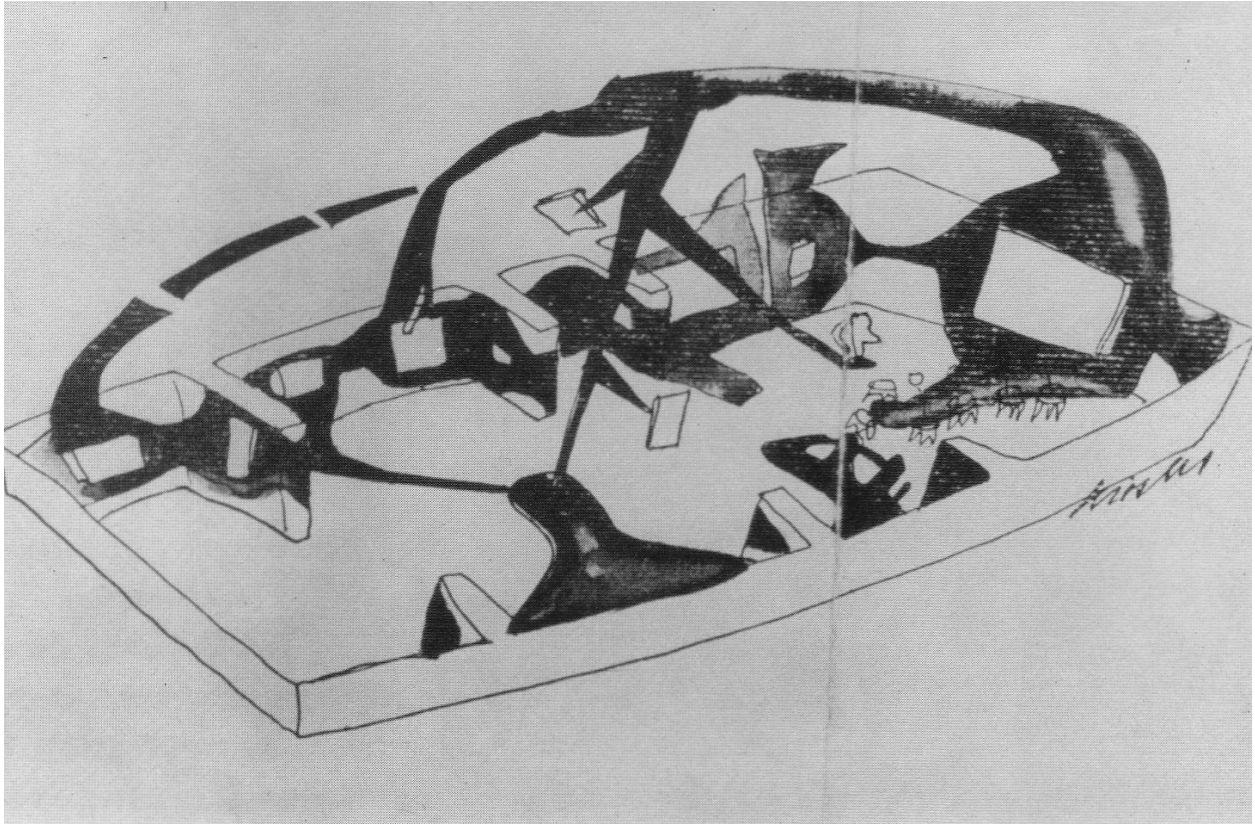


Figure 23.  
Exhibition design for "Blood Flames" by Frederick Kiesler. "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, 1947.



Figure 24.  
"Circe" from Breton, André, and Marcel Duchamp. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain: D'Arcy Galleries, New York, [1960-61]*. Trans. Julien Levy and Claud Tarnaud. New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960, 7.

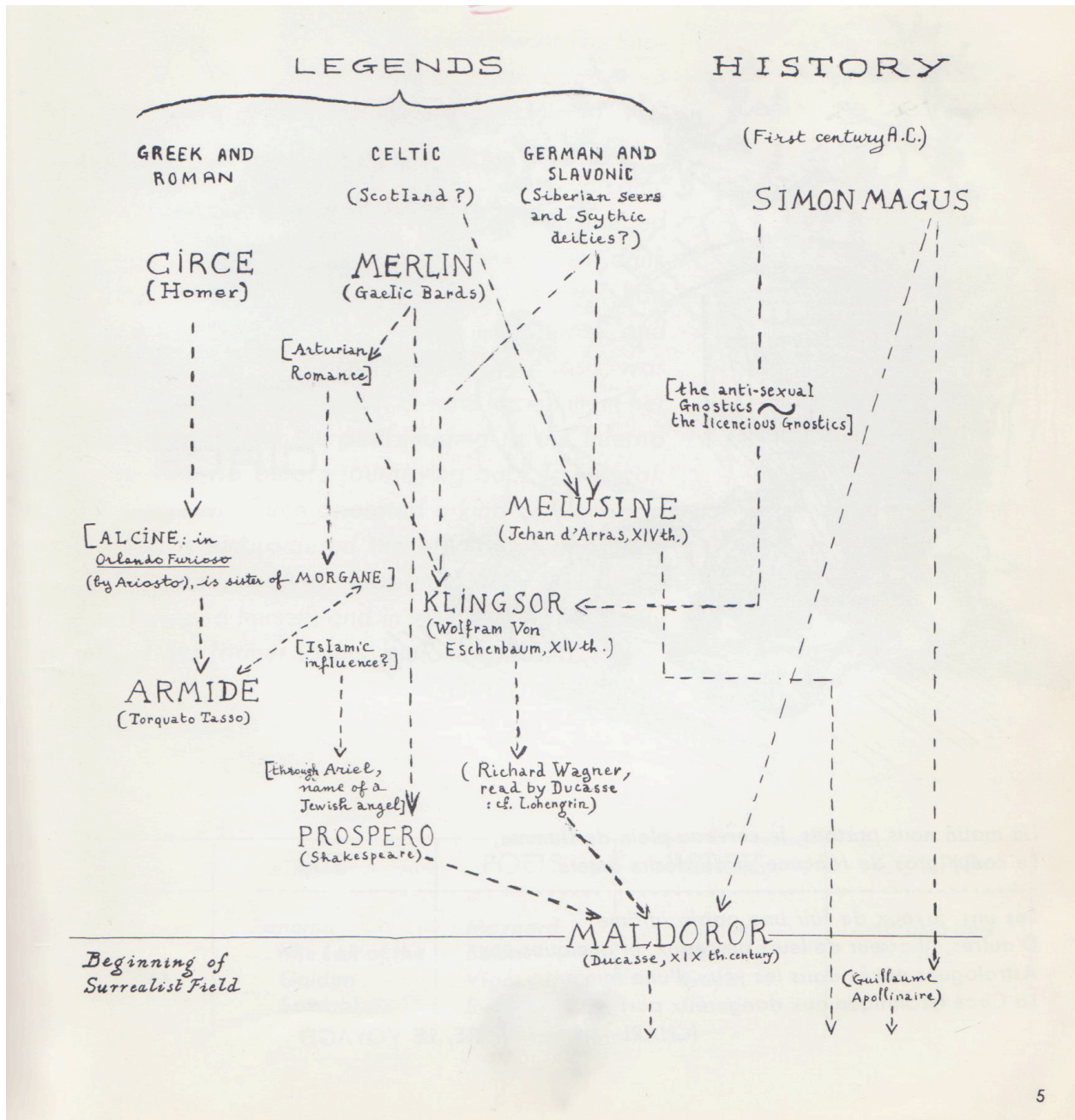


Figure 25. "Beginning of Surrealist Field" from Breton, André, and Marcel Duchamp. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain: D'Arcy Galleries, New York, [1960-61]*. Trans. Julien Levy and Claud Tarnaud. New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960, 5.

## MALDOROR

César-Antéchrist parle: Si  
Lautréamont a vécu l'être, la  
faute en est au son géant de  
l'os de la baleine percutee,  
qui dit: Je suis seul roi. Car  
mes vertèbres ont leur vie,  
leur aspect et leur pensée.  
J'ai moi aussi le premier vécu  
l'être.

(ALFRED JARRY:  
*La Revanche de la Nuit*)



	SITE	POETS	ARTISTS	COUPLE
(OBSIDIAN)	Easter Island	E. Young Sade Maturin Jarry Panizza	Bosch Munch	Jupiter and Sémélé

20

An heir to all those who were fascinated by evil — thus becoming fascinating themselves, and whose features appear in more and more details as one follows the unique thread of the Gothic novels — Maldoror is nevertheless the first and perhaps the only *modern enchanter*. Spokesman of Isodore Ducasse, but only insofar as the latter endeavours all through his work to *become* the Comte de Lautréamont, he is the man with lips of sapphire or sulphur, the man with the "stare of bronze" that nothing can deflect from its unrelenting fixity. Endeavoring to proceed with the erotic conquest of the Universe which he is determined to free once and for all from God, he borrows from the magicians of old their gift for metamorphoses — and becomes a sword-fish, a crab "as great as a vicuna" or even a cricket which, "with its pernicious fluid", threatens the unrepentant optimism of modern civilization. Using vampiric seduction, he is always endeavoring to create other enchanters. To one of his young victims, he offers a ring: "Whenever you turn the ruby around, you will become invisible. Whenever you turn it back to its normal position, you will reappear such as nature made you". This ring, Surrealism has no greater ambition than to accelerate and magnify its playful glitters, in front of which spirit staggers and "flourishing capitals" collapse.



21

Figure 26.  
"Maldoror" from Breton, André, and Marcel Duchamp. *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain: D'Arcy Galleries, New York, [1960-61]*. Trans. Julien Levy and Claud Tarnaud. New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960, 7.



Figure 27.  
Cabinet with live chickens. "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain," D'Arcy Galleries, 1960.

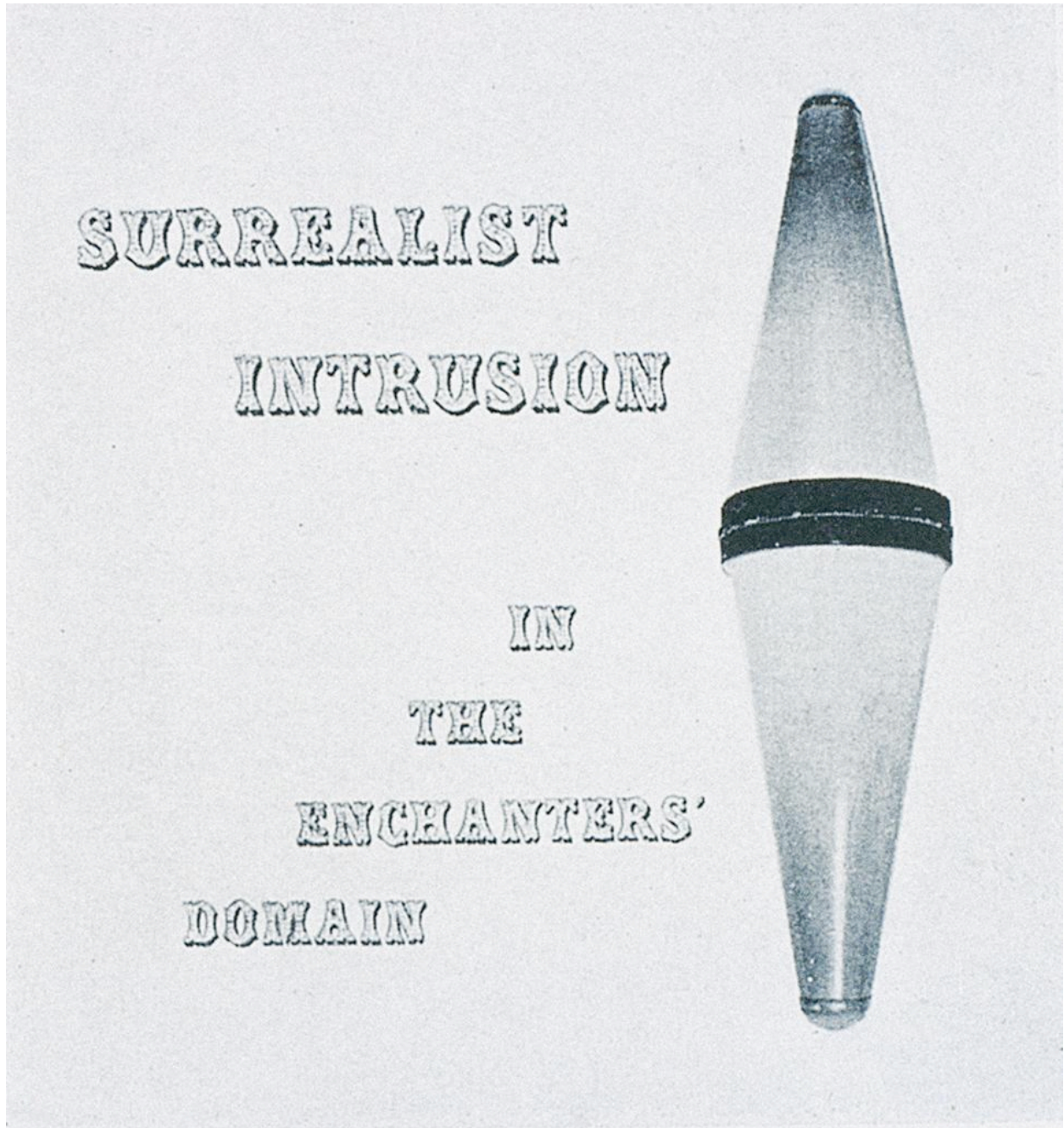


Figure 28.  
Exhibition catalog cover. "Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain," D'Arcy Galleries, 1960.

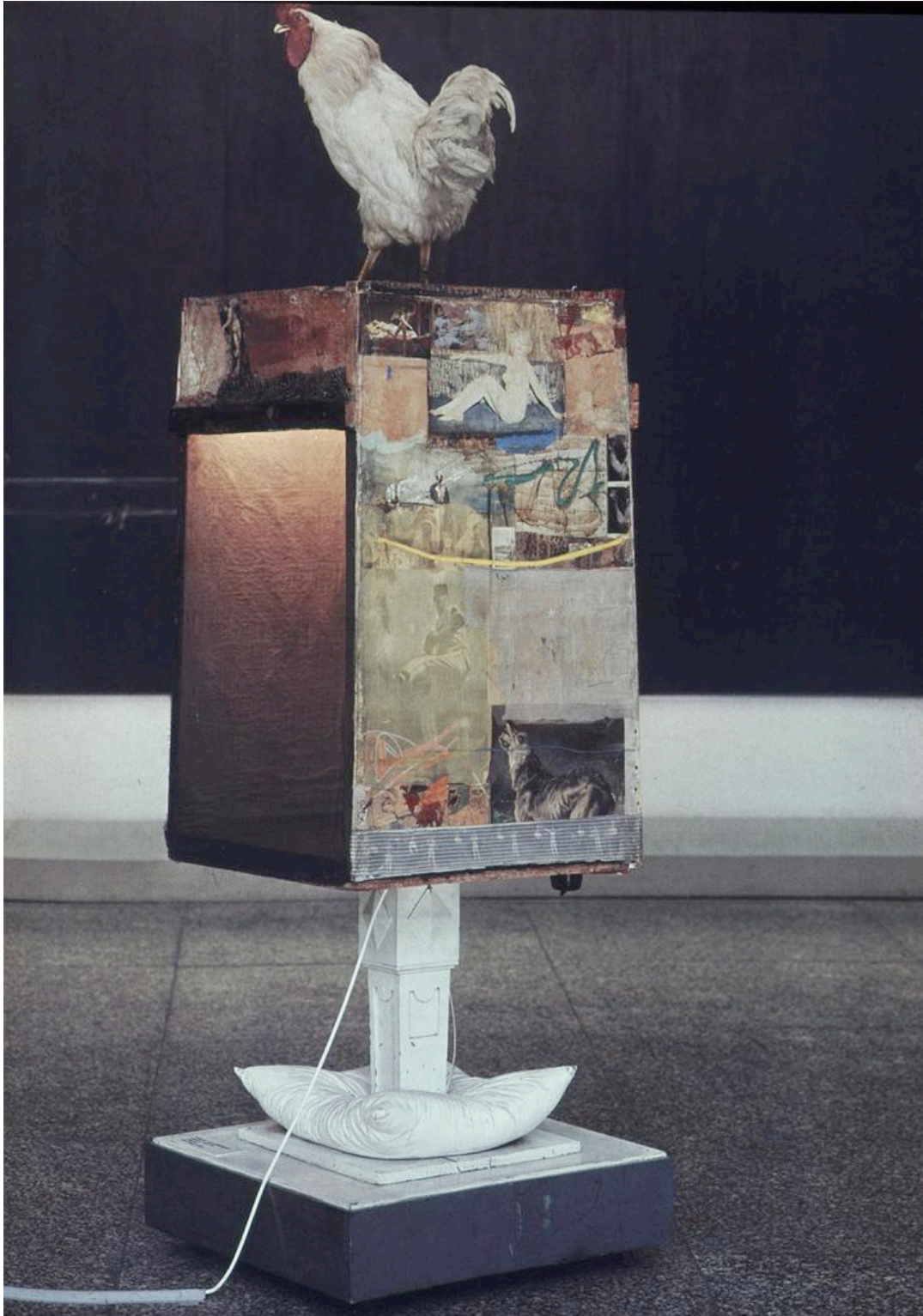


Figure 29.  
Robert Rauschenberg, *Odalisk*, freestanding combine-painting, 1955-8. Also known as *Odalisque*.



Figure 30.  
Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, combine-painting with oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 1955.



Figure 31.  
Unknown photographer, *Untitled*, 1958. Robert Rauschenberg in his studio shown with *Bed*,  
*Odalsik*, *Monogram*, and *Interior*.

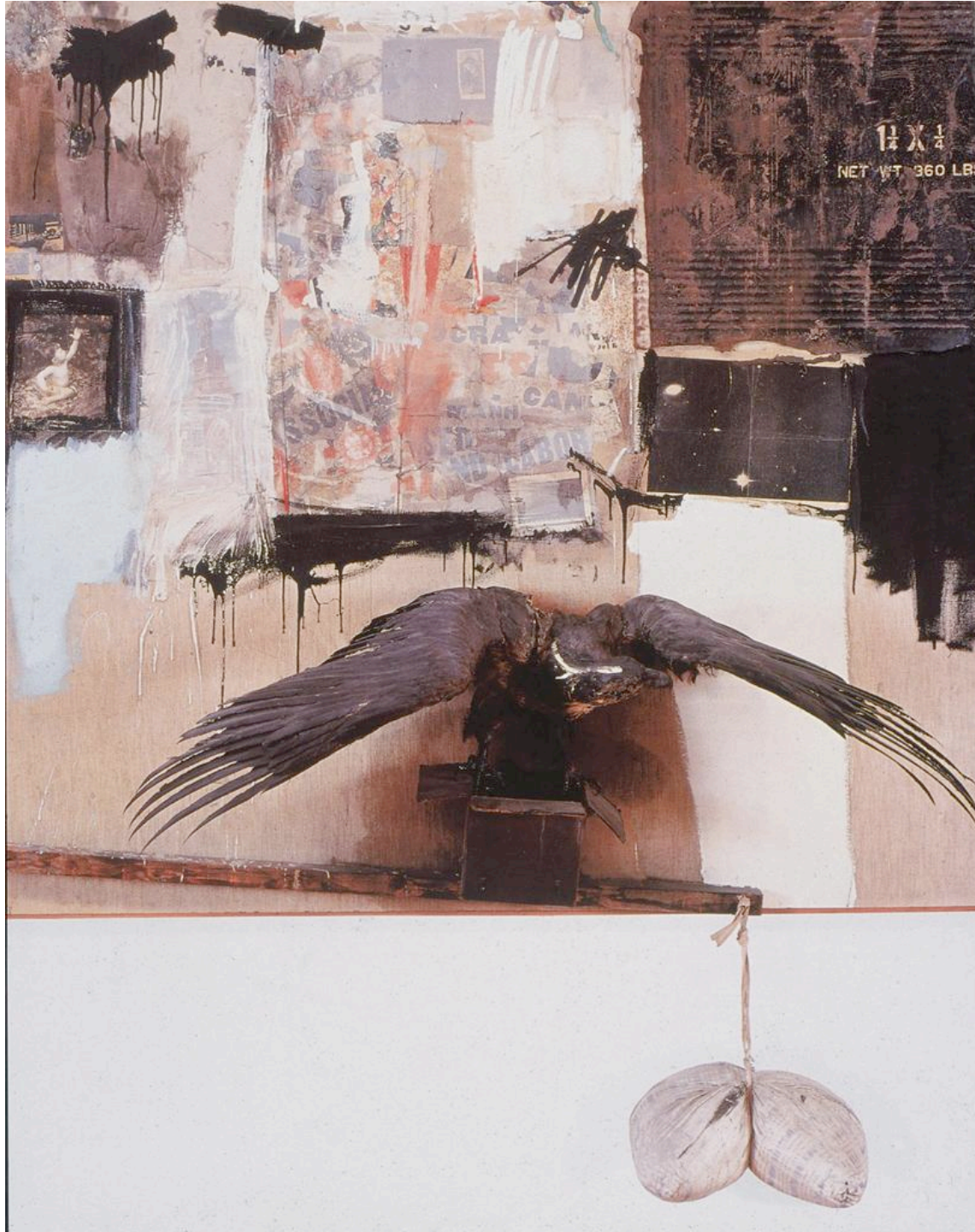


Figure 32.  
Robert Rauschenberg, *Canyon*, mixed media combine-painting with eagle, 1959.



Figure 33.  
Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, encaustic, collage, and plaster casts on canvas, 1955.

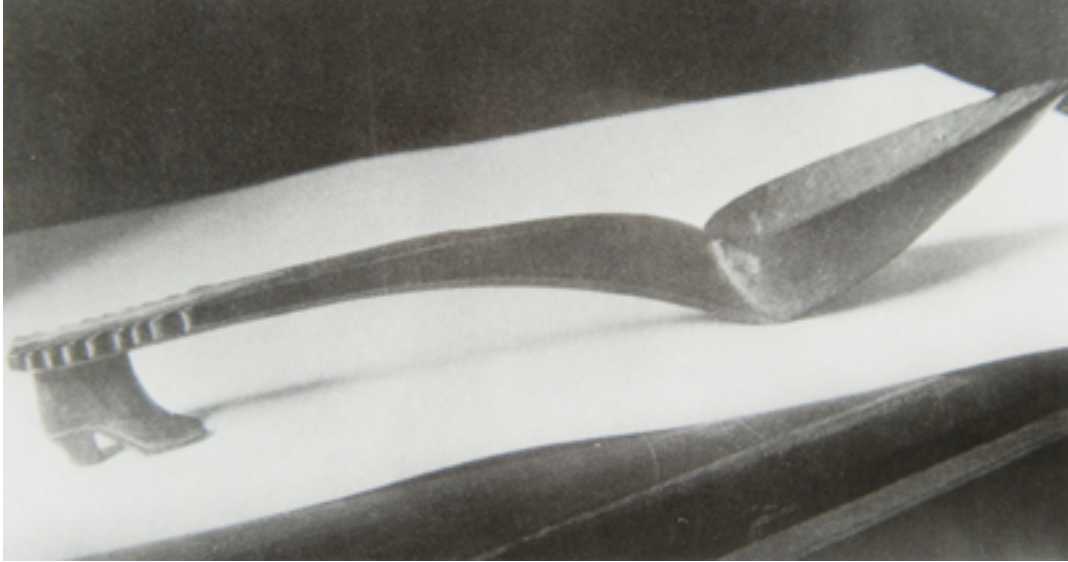


Figure 34.  
Man Ray, *From a Little Shoe that was Part of It*, photograph, 1937. Reproduced in André Breton's *L'Amour Fou*.

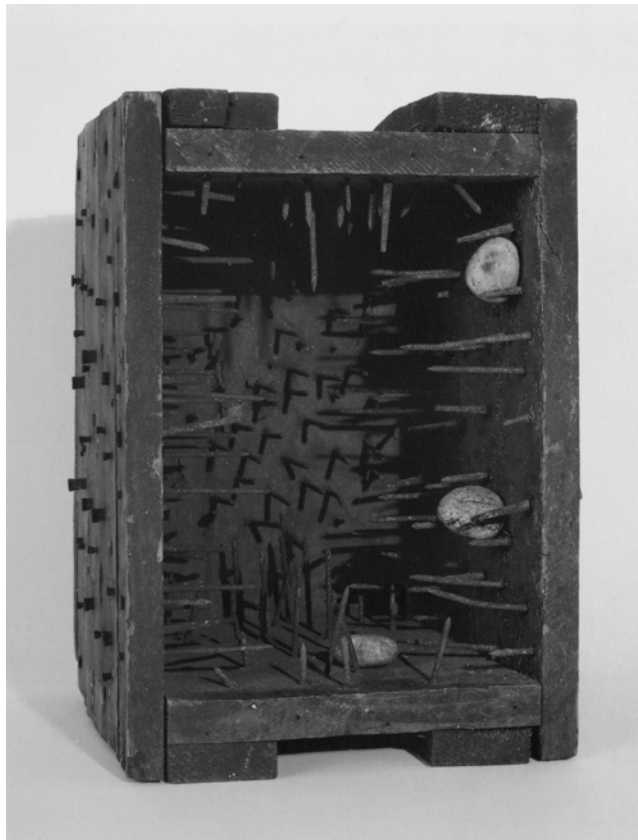


Figure 35.

Robert Rauschenberg, *Music Box*, wood crate with traces of metallic paint, nails, three unattached stones, and feather, 1953.



Figure 36.  
Marcel Duchamp, *A bruit secret*, ball of twine between two brass plates, joined by four screws,  
containing unknown object added by Walter Arensberg, 1916.



Figure 37.  
Alfred Stieglitz's 1917 photograph of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, porcelain urinal, 1917.

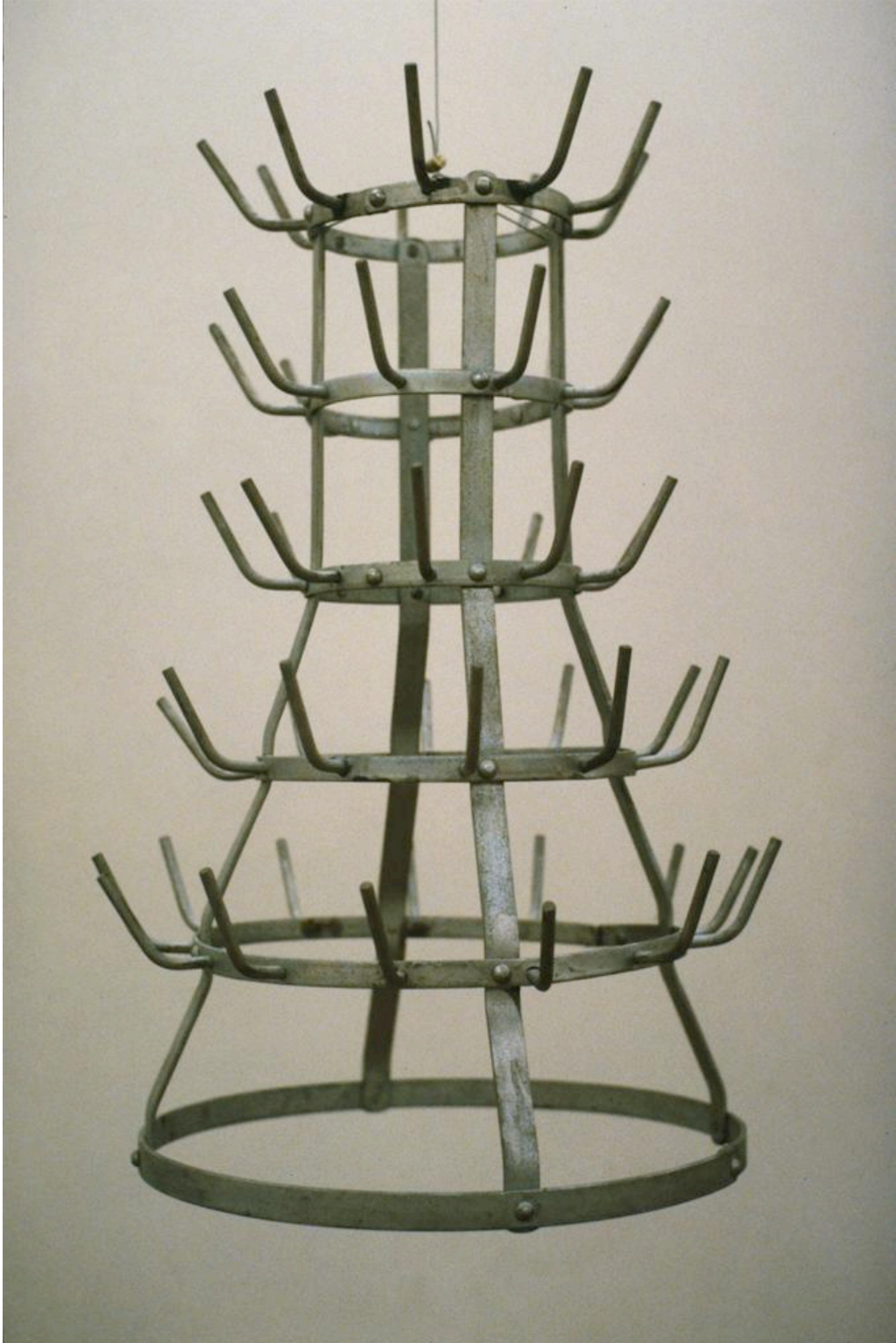


Figure 38.  
Marcel Duchamp, *Bottlerack*, galvanized iron, 1960 (replica of 1914 original).



Figure 39.  
Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze*, bronze and oil paint, 1960.



Figure 40.  
Jasper Johns, *Painted Bronze*, bronze and oil paint, 1960.

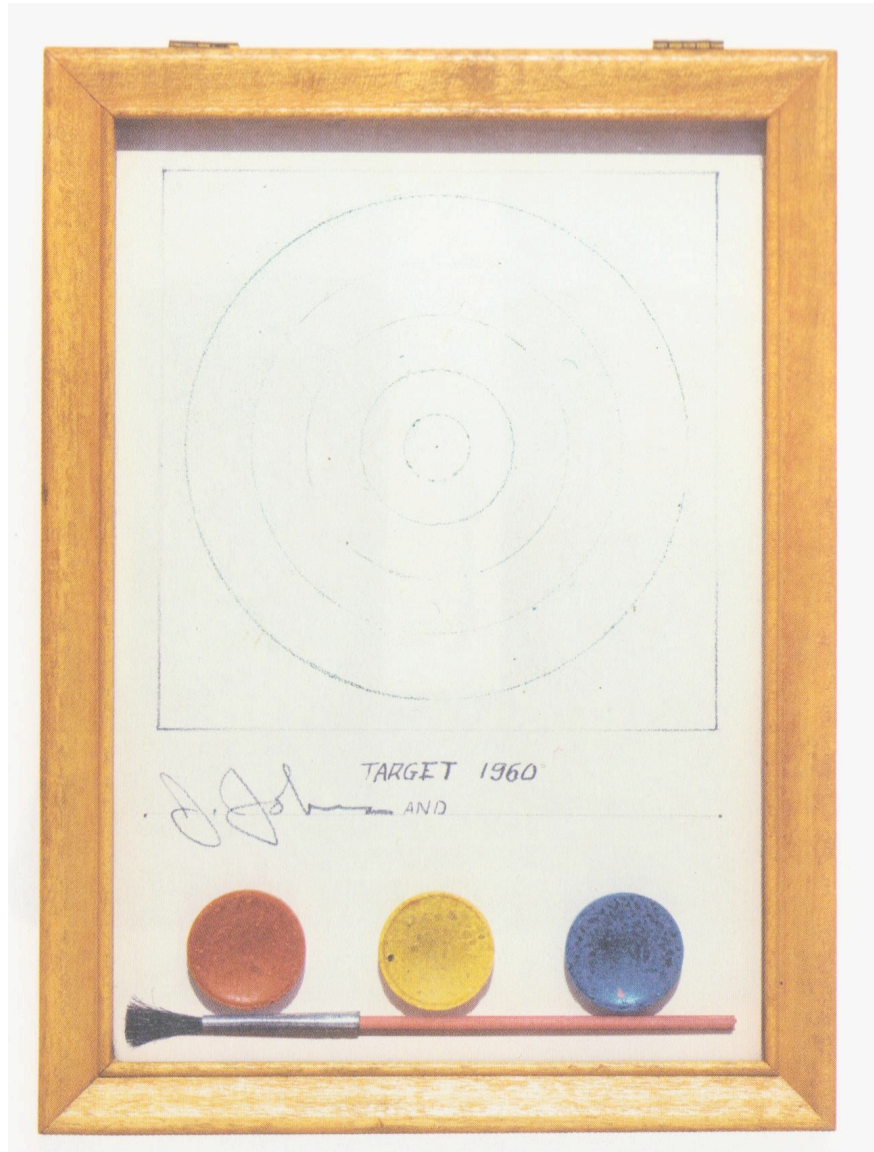


Figure 41.  
Jasper Johns, *Target*, Pencil with paintbrush and dry watercolor cakes, wood frame, 1960.



Figure 42.  
Allan Kaprow, *An Apple Shrine*, environment, 1960.



Figure 43.  
Allan Kaprow, *An Apple Shrine*, environment, 1960.

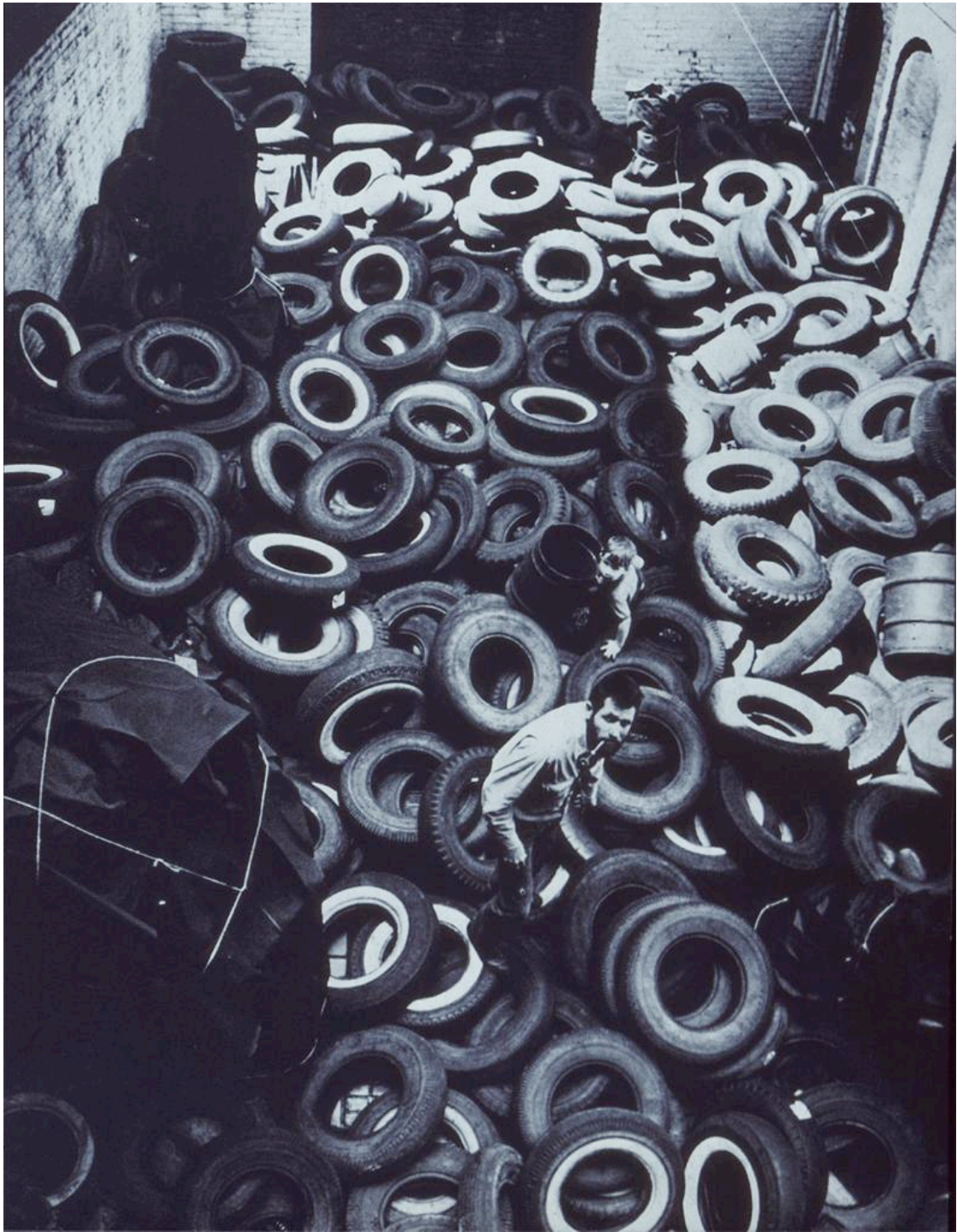


Figure 44.  
Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, environment, 1961.

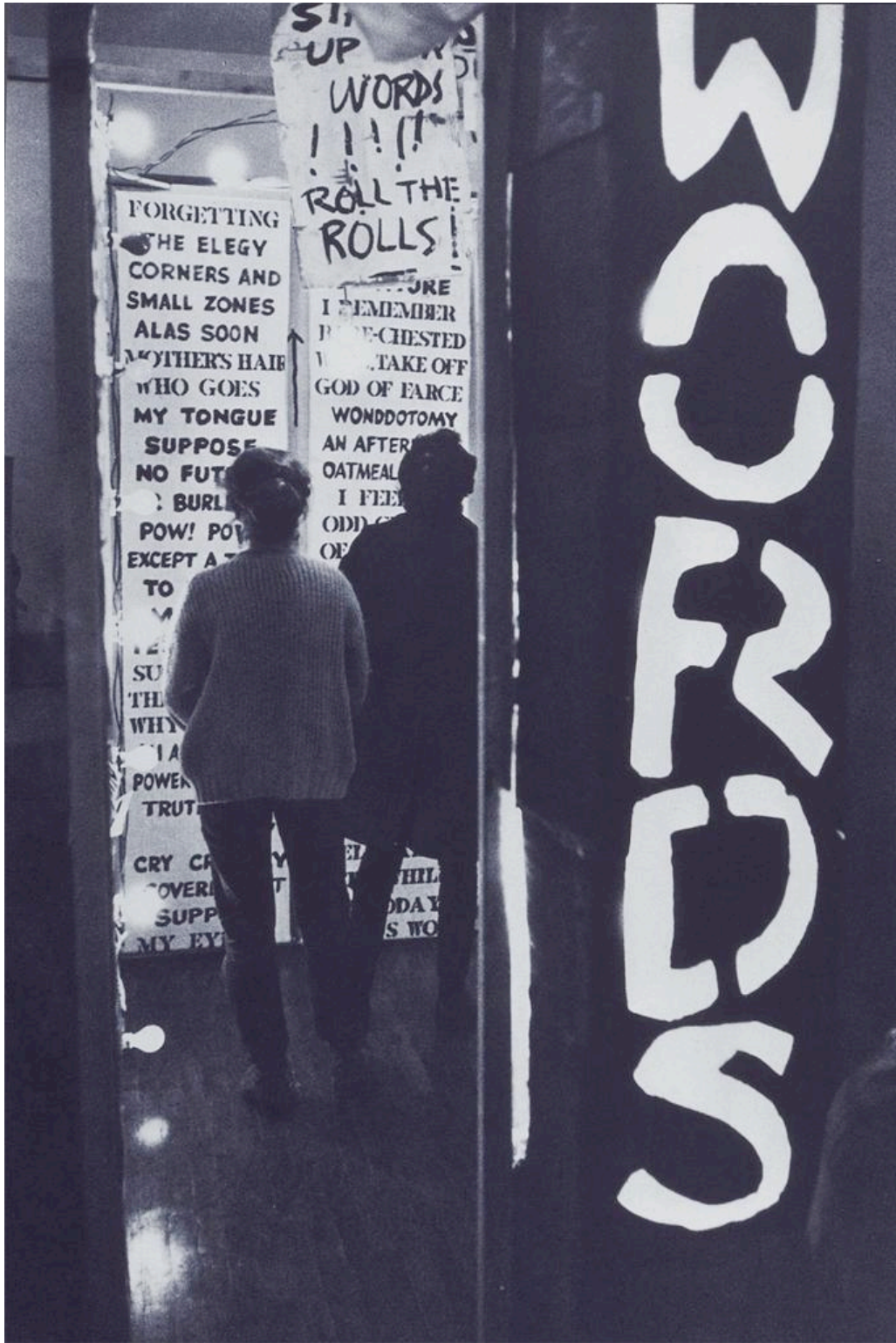


Figure 45.  
Allan Kaprow, *Words, environment*, 1962.



Figure 46.  
Allan Kaprow, *Words*, environment, 1962.

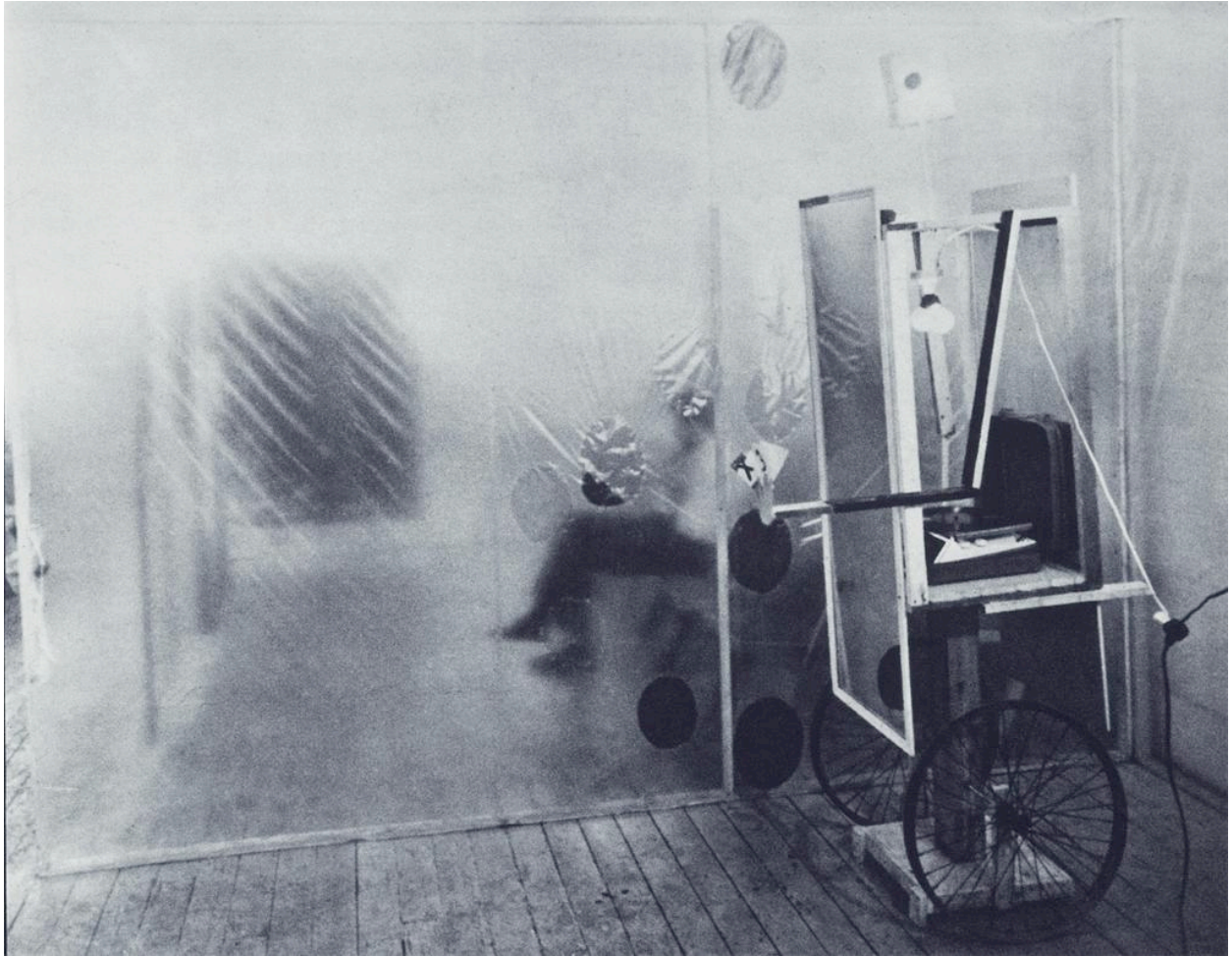


Figure 47.  
Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, environment for Happening, 1959.

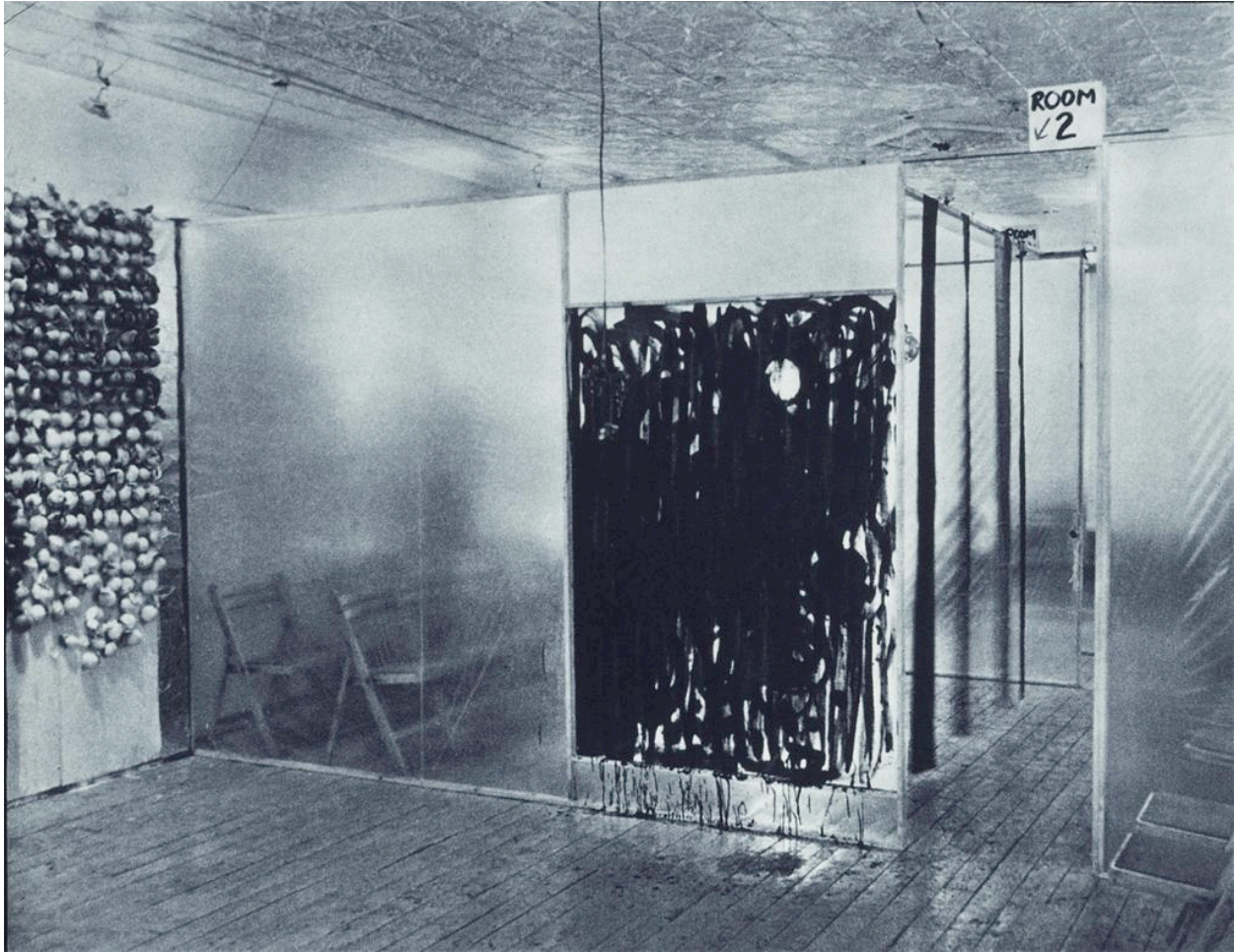


Figure 48.  
Allan Kaprow, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, environment for Happening, 1959.



Figure 49.  
Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening, 1960.



Figure 50.  
Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening, 1960.



Figure 51.  
Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening, 1960.



Figure 52.  
Claes Oldenburg, *The Street*, environment for Happening with the artist pictured, 1960.



Figure 53.  
Claes Oldenburg, *The Store*, installation, 1961.



Figure 54.  
Claes Oldenburg, *The Store*, installation, 1961.