

Plastic / Explosive: Claude Cahun and the Politics of Becoming Otherwise

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Abstract

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Plastic / Explosive: Claude Cahun and the Politics of Becoming Otherwise is the first full-length English-language treatment of the long-neglected political work of Claude Cahun, a French Surrealist writer and activist most famously known as an avant-garde photographer active in the 1920s but who later formed a powerful anti-Nazi resistance movement on the Channel Island of Jersey in the 1940s with her collaborator Suzanne Malherbe, dubbing themselves “the Nameless Soldiers.” They fought the Nazis with what they called Surrealist “weapons of chance,” mounting a devastating campaign against the German soldiers that sought to confuse and demoralize them, fomenting revolt in the Nazi camp. While contemporary Anglophone scholarship is focused almost exclusively on Cahun’s self-portraits, I argue that Cahun’s most important contribution to our present moment lies in her radical rethinking of the place of the artist and avant-garde aesthetics in revolutionary political struggles, a theme that runs throughout her literary work of the 1920s, her political work with the Surrealists in the 1930s, and her

resistance activities against the Nazis during the 1940s. The study, then, is oriented around two central questions: what can be the role of the artist in radical political struggles? And what part might an avant-garde aesthetic have to play in them?

The first part of the dissertation, “A Multiple Always,” investigates by turns Cahun’s radical rethinking of the link between avant-garde art and revolutionary politics throughout the 1920s, her political work with André Breton and the Surrealists in the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires in 1932 and 1933, her polemics with Louis Aragon during the “Aragon Affair” in 1933 and 1934, her complete disillusionment with bureaucratic Communist politics during the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture in 1935, and her decisive intellectual engagement with Breton and Georges Bataille in *Contre-Attaque* in 1935 and 1936. The second part, “The Nameless Soldiers and their Friends,” turns to Cahun’s resistance work against the Nazis on the island of Jersey between 1940 and 1944, showing how her resistance movement was at once the culmination and transfiguration of her literary and political work from 1925 to 1940, a movement that explicitly operated at the intersection of avant-garde art and radical politics and intentionally blurred the line between them. By the end of the work, I hope not to have answered conclusively the twin questions guiding the study—what can be the role of the avant-garde artist in radical political change? And what part can an avant-garde aesthetic itself have to play?—but to have provided the reader with a new way of approaching them through the life and work of Claude Cahun, giving Cahun her due as one of the most powerful and innovative thinkers who worked and fought at the intersection of these problems.

A Note on References

I use a simplified reference system in this dissertation. The original French for each translation I give from Claude Cahun's work is available in the endnotes, as are all bibliographical references. Endnote citations give the author's name and page number(s) and refer to a list of entries in the works cited. For two works by the same author I give the author's name and year of publication of the relevant text, and for two works published in the same year by the same writer I give the author's name and a shortened form of the title. The endnotes are purely documentary, and all exposition and digression has been kept to the main body of the text.

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Unknown for so long, it seemed that this Cahun had been given a second life.

There is another Cahun, however, much less familiar to English-speaking audiences, and one who is only now beginning to come into full view. This Cahun was a radical revolutionary and anti-fascist militant, one who joined the Surrealists as the threat of European fascism was on the rise in order to put herself at the service of its political interventions. This Cahun worked alongside André Breton in the *Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires* (AEAR) in 1932 and 1933, attempting to retheorize the place of avant-garde aesthetics in social and cultural change. One of only two women who appear in the minutes kept by the organization, this Cahun doggedly attacked the presumptions of the Soviet ideologues who claimed that poetry had no other function in politics than to encourage the adoption of Russian socialism and membership in the French Communist Party. This Cahun also, in 1935, helped found *Contre-Attaque*—the “combat union of revolutionary intellectuals”—alongside Breton and Georges Bataille, hosting many of the group’s meetings at her house and tirelessly rethinking with them poetry’s place in radical politics outside of the strictures of Soviet bureaucracy. It was also this Cahun who, when the Nazis invaded Jersey in 1940, mounted a devastating resistance movement against them, using “weapons of chance” against the visceral threat of imprisonment and death. Often overshadowed by the first Cahun in the critical literature, it is this second Cahun, the revolutionary political theorist and anti-Nazi resistance fighter, who is the focus of this work.

Plastic / Explosive: Claude Cahun and the Politics of Becoming Otherwise has two distinct but related aims: first, and most ambitiously, it hopes to help recover the long-neglected literary and political work of Claude Cahun for an English-speaking audience. While Cahun’s photographs have been commented on extensively in Anglophone scholarship, her later literary theorizing and political activism have been almost totally ignored. This is a shame, for Cahun

was not only one of the most original Surrealist writers and thinkers of her time but also one of the only avant-garde artists who stood their ground in the face of the Nazi catastrophe, committing themselves bodily to resisting its aggression. While Surrealism had struggled throughout the 1920s and 1930s to find its place in the world of revolutionary politics, Cahun was one of the only artists to actually deploy avant-garde art as a weapon in the fight against fascism. The first ambition of this study, then, is to not only give a comprehensive account of the daring Surrealist resistance movement of Claude Cahun but also to describe and draw a line through Cahun's artistic work in the 1920s, her theoretical and political work in the 1930s, and her resistance work in the 1940s, demonstrating that Cahun's movement was the culmination and transfiguration of her lifelong engagement with avant-garde ideas and aesthetics. Simply put, the pragmatic aim of this study is to help recover the theoretical work and political activism of this unknown heroine for the Anglophone world.

The second aim of the dissertation is more theoretical but perhaps more urgent in the face of the present historical moment, hoping to shed light on two related questions that have always been at the forefront of the historical avant-garde and its commentators, past and present: what can be the role of the avant-garde artist in radical political struggles? And what part in them might an avant-garde aesthetic have to play? Looking back at the history of Surrealism, one is struck by the theoretical power with which the Surrealists confronted the second question in the 1920s and 1930s in publications like *La Révolution surréaliste* and *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* and the impotence with which their individual efforts were met during World War II in response to the first. A large share of the Surrealists' theoretical activity in the 1930s had been devoted to finding a détente or alliance between Surrealist aesthetics and the instauration of global communism, but the outbreak of the war had forced almost every major French Surrealist

to flight. A survey of the wartime fortunes of the thinkers and artists most closely aligned with Surrealism reveals a movement in disarray: think of Walter Benjamin barely escaping Paris a day before the Nazis marched through the city's gates in 1940, of André Breton's clandestine flight to the United States in 1941, of Robert Desnos' capture by the Gestapo after years of underground resistance work in 1944. After the war, Tristan Tzara roundly condemned Surrealism for having been of no practical use in the concrete struggle against the Nazis: for all its theoretical innovations, he said, it had had no part to play on the battlefield, had exposed itself as superfluous precisely at the moment when it should have been capable of fighting for that other life, that elsewhere existence that had so obsessed Breton years before.⁴ While Tzara was careful not to blame those individual Surrealists who made the decision to quit France at the start of the hostilities, he was quick to point out the existential powerlessness of Surrealism itself for those who had remained:

It is far from my intention to blame anyone who left France at the time of the Occupation. But one must note that Surrealism was absent from the preoccupations of those who remained because it was of no help to them on the emotional plane, nor in their comportment before the Nazis, nor, on the practical level, of the battle to be undertaken between them.⁵

Looking back at the Surrealists who remained in France during the Occupation, Tzara seems right: Desnos' writings for the French Resistance contained few traces of that avant-garde aesthetic he had been so instrumental in formulating and championing throughout the 1920s, and even Paul Éluard's great wartime ode to *Liberté*, copies of which were dropped by the thousands by English airships over occupied France, looked more at home in the world of Louis Aragon's Communist propaganda than it did in the dreamlike Paris of his earlier *Le Paysan de Paris*. For all the courage these individual Surrealists marshalled in the face of the Nazi menace, Surrealism itself seemed to have been definitively absent from the fight.

This makes Tzara's omission of the remarkable wartime legacy of Claude Cahun all the more surprising, and one wonders whether his decision was a conscious one rooted in bad faith or was made simply out of ignorance; for of all the Surrealists, it was Cahun who had found a way to turn the tenets of Surrealism into a unique weapon against the German forces, fighting bravely for almost half a decade with her partner Suzanne Malherbe on the occupied island of Jersey under the banner of "the Nameless Soldiers and their friends," deploying the oblique, suggestive, emotional repertoire of Surrealism in propaganda tracts and art installations that aimed at gutting the Nazis emotionally and spiritually. The Nameless Soldiers were so successful that the occupying forces on Jersey became convinced that an international conspiracy of Communists had infiltrated their ranks, and historians of wartime resistance have called Cahun's movement "the only long-term political opposition to Nazism by women in the islands."⁶ What makes Cahun's movement so remarkable from both an art-historical and a theoretical point of view is the way it provides such clear answers to the two guiding questions of this study: not only can the avant-garde artist participate directly in radical political struggles—the resistance work of Desnos and Éluard made that clear enough—but an avant-garde aesthetic can itself become the basis for a powerful suite of tactics that aims to combat the opposition on the terrain of subjectivity and sensibility, widening the fight from the external field of physical conflict to the internal field of emotional and symbolic combat.

Indeed, long before forming the Nameless Soldiers, Cahun had been singularly concerned with rethinking the connection between avant-garde aesthetics and radical politics, and her literary and theoretical work of the 1920s and especially the 1930s takes this relationship as its central problem. By the time she was forced to put her ideas to the test on the very real battlefield of Jersey, Cahun had already equipped herself with a radical reformulation of what part writing

could play in reconfiguring the regimes of sensibility upon which all politics are based, rethinking at the same time the responsibility of the avant-garde artist in fomenting revolutionary social and political change. While she further developed her ideas in the 1930s in the context of her alliance with Surrealism and its political maneuvering first within the AEAR and later in the more radical organization of Contre-Attaque, Cahun had already developed her own unique approach to the twin questions of our study. While the second half of this work looks at the way Cahun turned her avant-garde aesthetic into a weapon against the Nazis, the first traces the development of Cahun's own ideas as she elaborated them in her literary, theoretical, and political works from the 1920s and 1930s, demonstrating the lines of continuity that link Cahun's earlier endeavors to her later resistance work against the Nazis and showing them to be of an intellectual and artistic piece.

Before giving an exposition of the key ideas and positions Cahun developed in response to the guiding questions of our study, and precisely because her life and work is now almost totally unknown in the English-speaking world, I would like to give the reader a brief overview of Cahun's career that focuses especially on her literary and political activity from the 1920s to the 1940s. "Claude Cahun" was born Lucy Renée Mathilde Schwob on October 25, 1894 in Nantes, France, to Maurice Schwob, brother of the famous Symbolist writer Marcel Schwob. Growing up in this privileged atmosphere held certain advantages for Lucy, not least of which were access to an excellent education, numberless books, and the notoriety that the name of her father and uncle provided. In 1909 she met Suzanne Malherbe, soon to become her lover, partner, artistic collaborator and, through a twist of fate in 1917, when Cahun's widowed father married Malherbe's mother, her step-sister. An intellectually precocious student, Cahun studied in Nantes, Surrey, and Oxford before she started writing fashion journalism for her father's review *Le Phare*

de la Loire in 1913. In 1914 she published a suite of poems entitled *Vues et Visions* under the pseudonym of “Claude Courlis” in the prestigious *Mercure de France*, which had been co-founded by her uncle Marcel. Around this same time, and in collaboration with Malherbe, she composed the book-length *Les Jeux uraniens* that presented a lengthy meditation on friendship and homosexuality and in which she debuted the *nom de plume* “Claude Cahun,” embracing a first name that announced her “gender indeterminacy” and a surname that, in the wake of the Dreyfus Affair, was unmistakably and provocatively Jewish.⁷ In 1918 she enrolled at the Sorbonne, contributed to the Nantes review *La Gerbe* as both Claude Cahun and “Daniel Douglas,” and started frequenting readings at the bookshops of Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier. She met Philippe Soupault at Monnier’s La Maison des Amis des Livres the following year, and he invited her to collaborate on the then-forthcoming first issue of *Littérature*. Her native shyness, however, precluded her from participating in the nascent Surrealist movement: “I excused myself,” she said, “alleging my incompetence.”⁸ Still, she maintained close contact with the avant-garde art world of Paris throughout the 1920s and would become especially close to Desnos, Henri Michaux, and René Crevel. Impressed with Cahun’s literary efforts, Monnier solicited an autobiography from her, asking Cahun to write her “confession.” Initially perturbed by the request but intent on subverting what she saw as an outworn genre, Cahun took up the challenge for the greater part of the 1920s and published in 1929 the monumental anti-autobiography *Aveux non avenues*. For all the formal and stylistic innovation presented in the book, the critical reception of it by the literary establishment oscillated between outrage and negligence, and this rejection directly precipitated Cahun’s alliance with Surrealism in the 1930s.

Depressed by the critical reaction to *Aveux non avenues* but determined not to let her literary talents languish in obscurity, Cahun joined Surrealism in 1932 in order to “to participate

in the experiences of this group that had attracted me more than any other” and “to achieve through the intervention of this collective effort the universe that I believed I carried in me.”⁹ She introduced herself to Breton through the intermediary of Jacques Viot in April 1932 and immediately set about putting her ideas in the service of Surrealism’s burgeoning interest in Communist politics. In the fall of 1932, Cahun, Breton, and the rest of the Surrealists joined the AEAR in an attempt to find a rapprochement between the tenets of Surrealism and the practical demands of revolutionary political struggle. While the recent defection of Louis Aragon from the ranks of Surrealism to the elevated position of Soviet ideologue had strained the relationship between France’s artistic and political avant-gardes, the Surrealists were initially welcomed into the organization with open arms. The relationship between the French Communist Party and the Surrealists would grow increasingly hostile—the Communists found the Surrealists too “bourgeois” while the Surrealists found the Communists too bureaucratic—but Cahun used her time in the AEAR to draft a report on the situation of revolutionary poetry as it related to concrete politics. She expanded the pamphlet in 1933 and published it in 1934 as *Les Paris sont ouverts*. This remarkable short work outlines Cahun’s theory of engaged avant-garde poetry vis-à-vis revolutionary politics and was praised by Breton in the highest terms: “Nothing seems to me to be more lucid, more inexorable, more moving than this testimony. What we are defending has never been clearer, has never been set higher.”¹⁰

For all the theoretical effervescence of Cahun’s work and of the Surrealists more generally during this time, the increasingly menacing political situation in France necessitated a more radical response to the encroaching fascist threat. In the fall of 1935, Cahun, Breton, and Georges Bataille formed Contre-Attaque, “the combat union of revolutionary intellectuals,” in order to continue their theoretical and political activity outside of the strictures of bureaucratic

Communism. While the organization would dissolve in the summer of the following year, Cahun spent her time there expanding the conclusions she had drawn in *Les Paris sont ouverts*, using the charged political situation on the continent to further elaborate her ideas on the revolutionary possibilities of avant-garde artists and aesthetics. The rest of the decade saw Cahun continuing to militate for a kind of politically engaged Surrealism while collaborating further with different currents within the movement, working alongside Breton and the members of the British Surrealist Group to organize the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936 and producing a set of photographs for Lise Deharme's children's book *Le Cœur de pic* in 1937. Despite this frenetic artistic activity, the stifling atmosphere of fascism and anti-Semitism in France wore heavily on Cahun, and she and Malherbe resolved to leave Paris for the Channel Island of Jersey, installing themselves there definitively in 1938.

While the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 had alarmed Cahun, Jersey seemed far enough from the hostilities to be something of a safe haven, having been a protectorate of the English crown since medieval times. This dream was shattered in the early summer of 1940 when Winston Churchill and his war council decided to leave the Channel Islands undefended—they were much closer to the continent than to Britain and were thus of relatively little strategic value—and privately declared Jersey an “open island.” The government of Jersey attempted to evacuate as many citizens as were willing, but Cahun decided to stay her ground. She would not have long to wait—the Nazis executed a surprise bombing campaign on the 28th of June that decimated the main port of Jersey and killed dozens of islanders. Enraged by this unannounced aggression, Cahun planned a violent revolt and began to practice her marksmanship with a pair of revolvers that had been given to her by her uncle Marcel. Malherbe eventually convinced her that a frontal assault was tantamount to suicide; there must be another way, they thought, to

combat the Nazi menace.

Cahun and Malherbe settled on the idea of forming a resistance movement whose organization, tactics, and strategies were drawn from the ideas Cahun had elaborated throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Christening their resistance movement “the Nameless Soldiers and their comrades,” Cahun and Malherbe produced thousands of anti-Nazi propaganda tracts that addressed the combatants individually, deploying a Surrealist aesthetic that made the soldiers question the overall aims of the Nazi leadership and of their own place within the war’s diabolical tableau. Their goal was to foment revolt within the German ranks and provoke the soldiers to rebel against their officers, subverting the Nazi war machine from the inside. Although the two *résistantes* were eventually arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, they found comfort in the number of German soldiers jailed with them in the Nazi prison; not only had their propaganda provoked some of the soldiers to question the aims of the war and their own bellicose values, but it had *worked*, and here were the defectors to prove it. Cahun and Malherbe were eventually found guilty of “spiritual warfare” by a Nazi tribunal and sentenced to death in the fall of 1944. They anxiously awaited the execution of their sentence in solitary confinement; only Germany’s shifting military fortunes saved them from certain death. The Nazi leadership considered them so dangerous that they were the last prisoners allowed to leave the prison. They were finally released on the 8th of May, 1945, just fifteen minutes before the continent-wide broadcast of Churchill’s famous “this is your victory!” speech. The two returned home together, and Cahun would spend the remaining nine years of her life writing about her resistance work in incredible and minute detail before passing away in 1954—though not before being awarded the *Médaille d’argent de la reconnaissance française* by the French government in 1951 for her remarkable—and remarkably singular—wartime activities.

While the bulk of this work is taken up with giving a thorough exposition of Cahun's radical ideas surrounding the intersection of subjectivity, avant-garde art, and revolutionary politics, I would like to equip the reader beforehand with a sense of the overall architecture of her literary and political philosophy. In this section I will use a handful of contemporary critical concepts in order to better frame Cahun's ideas for the reader approaching them for the first time, but I would like to note that the majority of the work, in line with the first goal of the study, gives pride of place to Cahun's own descriptions of her concepts as they appear in her writings, tracking their elaboration and extension through her various theoretical and literary works from the 1920s to her engagement with the Nazis in the 1940s. Precisely to the extent that Cahun's ideas are now so little known in the Anglophone world, I find it methodologically important to allow the reader to confront them in the precise language and concrete intellectual milieu in which they were first created. As I will discuss in the first chapter, the dominant tendency in the Anglophone academy has been to subject Cahun's work to a kind of misleading *overtheorization*, reading it through interpretive frames that would have been foreign to her and which miss the peculiar texture and unique power of her own conceptual formulations.

As I see it, Cahun's literary and political corpus revolves around three key ideas or networks of concepts that consistently try to rethink the relationship between avant-garde artists and aesthetics in relation to the practice of revolutionary politics. From her early writings for literary revues to *Aveux non avenues* and *Les Paris sont ouverts* through her work in *Contre-Attaque* and beyond, Cahun's writings take as their dynamic starting point an interrogation of the following ideas: they try to rethink subjectivity and its relationship to the transformational power of a particular kind of avant-garde writing; they try to resituate this kind of avant-garde writing in its relation to radical political struggles; and they try to remake the image of the avant-garde

artist herself, seeing her not as a solitary creator of artworks but as a kind of revolutionary participant in the ongoing transformation of the regimes of sensibility upon which all politics are based. While the present study will follow the elaboration of each of these ideas separately and chronologically, situating them in the particular social, political, and intellectual contexts of their creation and deployment, it should be noted that these concerns run through every period of Cahun's theorizing like invariant fault lines; what might be presented as discrete stages or steps in the itinerary of Cahun's intellectual journey should be understood not as the continual flight to new concepts but as the perpetual return to and enrichment of older ones. By perpetually reformulating and reworking her previous concepts, Cahun's system attains a remarkable degree of intellectual consistency, poetic richness, and existential utility.

In order to understand the singularity of Cahun's ideas on the interface between avant-garde art and radical politics, we must look first at the particular way she came to see the notion of subjectivity in the early 1920s in response to the concept of *bovarysme* elaborated by the Symbolist writer Jules de Gaultier. This intellectual encounter was decisive in shaping Cahun's understanding of the character of the writer and reader of avant-garde literature and remained at the conceptual core of her political engagements throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In *Le Bovarysme*, Gaultier defines the concept simply as the imaginative ability to "conceive oneself otherwise" and the allied existential power to "become otherwise." These definitions or possibilities rely on a view of subjectivity that sees it not as a self-identical and accomplished *thing* but as an ever-changing and endlessly plastic *ensemble*. The "self" is not a coherent or stable entity but is understood by Gaultier as a network of drives, affects, desires, memories, and psychological processes. Cahun would put it more poetically, extending Rimbaud's famous formula: "The 'I' is another – a multiple always."¹¹ In this sense one's "subjectivity" refers to a

particular subjective arrangement or constellation—an ensemble—that can, Gaultier maintains, be reconfigured or rearranged by the subject themselves.

Gaultier argues that at the heart of every subjective arrangement lies an inherent and foundational power of metamorphosis and self-transformation. The ensemble that we are, he says, is fundamentally *plastic*. Contemporary philosopher Catherine Malabou defines the plastic as that which can give form, receive form, and, as with a plastic explosive, destroy form.¹² Gaultier's formulation of the structure of subjectivity preserves all three forms of plasticity within itself: It is fundamentally molded by forces coming from outside, but it can also give itself form through the imaginative projection and realization of new existential configurations. The power of metamorphosis promised by *bovarysme* is achieved when a subject not only imaginatively conceives of a new subjective arrangement but also brings it into being on the terrain of everyday life; one must not only imagine new existential constellations, Gaultier says, but live them, realize them. To the extent that a subject harnesses this positive power of human metamorphosis and gains the ability to reshape her own configurations of subjectivity and sensibility, she simultaneously deforms given structures of subjectivity or regimes of sensibility that might have been imposed upon her, with or without her awareness, by the larger social, political, cultural, and economic forces in which she finds herself. Thus comes into view the third definition of plasticity as the explosive refusal of subjective form; every instance of the power of self-transformation is simultaneously a moment in which the larger social and political forces that have a hold on our subjectivities violently lose their purchase or are radically deformed. This facet of plasticity constitutes “an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model.”¹³ Embedded within Gaultier's concept of *bovarysme* is thus a latent political function—the exercise of *bovarysme* destroys or explodes normalized

existential patterns, freeing up the subject to “become otherwise.”

One of Cahun’s most important theoretical innovations is to tie Gaultier’s concept of self-transformation or existential metamorphosis to her own reformulation of the role and task of avant-garde writing. By the time of *Aveux non avenus*, Cahun had come to see writing as a powerful vehicle for the expression of the writer’s bovarysme. Instead of using writing to reflect or interrogate a given self, she would instead propose that avant-garde writing is most effective when it allows the writer and reader to *transform themselves*. For both reader and writer, a work written in this bovaryc mode can be a powerful vector of what Foucault called *trans-subjectivation*. Cahun’s aesthetic can effect “a break or change within the self,” allowing those who engage with it to chart “a trajectory from self to self.”¹⁴ Malabou elaborates that this movement of trans-subjectivation is “a kind of transformation which would sublimate the difference between the self and itself, which would create, produce a new self as a result of the opposition between two forms at work in the self.”¹⁵ Cahun’s *Aveux non avenus* or “disavowed confessions” does not seek to uncover her “real” self but to take stock of her current subjective arrangement and find new imaginative lines of flight through which to transform it. To the extent that the writer engages in this play of self-transformation through the medium of avant-garde writing, Cahun argues, she opens up an imaginative space in which the reader can do the same. The goal of this form of writing is what we might call, again following Foucault, *ethopoetic*, incessantly engaged in “making ethos, producing ethos, changing, transforming ethos, the individual’s way of being, his mode of existence.”¹⁶ And again, insofar as this mode of writing enables a reader to get outside of their socially-conditioned structures of subjectivity and sensibility, it necessarily shifts the regime of sensibility upon which hegemonic politics are formed and maintained.

Cahun brings this notion of transformative writing to her work with the Surrealists in the beginning of the 1930s and explicitly politicizes it in *Les Paris sont ouverts*, in which she argues that truly revolutionary writing or poetry must not foreclose or dictate the becoming of the reader, as does narrowly propagandistic poetry, but open them up to existential and affective transformation through an oblique aesthetic that takes aim squarely at their sensibility. This form of poetry is not instructive but suggestive; it requires the active collaboration of the reader in order to achieve any political effect at all. Louis Aragon, Cahun's colleague in the AEAR, had argued that poetry could only be considered truly revolutionary if it took on a realist cast and dictated to the proletariat the actions and feelings required to instantiate global communism. Cahun's pamphlet is a direct assault on Aragon's view; for Cahun, any poetry that attempts a frontal attack on the reader will always fail, for the poet can never foresee the reader's potential reactions to a poem. Only an ambiguous and Surrealist aesthetic could sneak through the backdoor of the reader's sensibility, making them "go it alone and take one step further than they would like."¹⁷ The poem's form would have to be plastic enough to catalyze a variety of potential reactions, its content ambiguous enough to remain open to a variety of potential interpretations. While this form of revolutionary writing would necessarily be more open and playful than the kind consecrated by Aragon and the Soviet ideologues, Cahun maintained that it also had to bring the reader's bovarysme into play, giving them the ability to rethink and reshape their own structures of sensibility and subjectivity. Instead of leaving social and political transformation to the paid-up poets of the Revolution, Cahun maintained that any reader could be transformed by her kind of radical writing if they consented to "discover how poetry plays and how to play its game"; for this, she said, their collaboration was indispensable.¹⁸

While Breton and the other Surrealists praised the work upon its publication, Cahun saw

that it did not go far enough. The fascist riots that swept through Paris in the winter of 1934 and nearly toppled the French government demonstrated to the Surrealists that the political threat they had been confronting theoretically was now at their doorstep, and working with the Communists to combat it had proven fruitless and untenable. The failure of the AEAR provoked Breton, Cahun, and Bataille to work together under the auspices of a new organization, Contre-Attaque, in which Cahun further elaborated the idea of revolutionary, transformational poetry that she had first announced in *Les Paris sont ouverts*. Now she turned her attention explicitly to the responsibility of the avant-garde artist in shifting and recomposing those shared worlds of sense and meaning which form the basis of the political. The revolutionary artist must now not only produce poetry or writing that attempts to shift the sensibility of the individual reader, but must go a step further and live out their own radical commitments on the terrain of political life, must theoretically and existentially “prefigure the highest aims of the Revolution, keep these aims alive.”¹⁹ We can make an analogy here with the ideas of Jacques Rancière: If every political formation attempts to define and perpetuate “an organizational system of coordinates that establishes a distribution of the sensible or a law that divides the community into groups, social positions, or functions,” it is precisely up to the radical artist to interrupt “the distribution of the sensible by supplementing it with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community, thereby modifying the very aesthetico-political field of possibility.”²⁰ Cahun argues that the avant-garde artist has the responsibility to ensure this perpetual redistribution or reconfiguration of the sensible, fighting against those political regimes that attempt to forestall or exclude the revolutionary becoming of the individual and of the community. The artist’s most radical political task, then, is to “reconfigure the communal distribution of the sensible.”²¹ As Rancière would put it, their writings and their lives have to become “configurations of

experience that [can] create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity.”²² Protecting and fomenting this kind of perpetual insurrection in thought, meaning, and value, in the sensible itself, Cahun said, was the highest political function of the avant-garde artist: the universal insurrection they create “will be permanent or will not be viable.”²³

Cahun was already equipped with this theoretical armature when the Nazis invaded Jersey in 1940, and it formed the basis of her resistance movement of the Nameless Soldiers. What is most striking to me about Cahun’s ideas is how utterly effective they were on the battlefield of Nazi-occupied territory. Not only did they give her a coherent aesthetic which she used to produce thousands upon thousands of anti-fascist tracts, poems, collages, installations, and sculptures, but they also provided her with a way to think about the overall aims of her movement and of its practical organization. The aim of the resistance, as Cahun saw it, was to force the German soldiers to rethink the Nazi regime of sensibility that had captured and conditioned their subjectivities, and the nameless weapons Cahun deployed against them used oblique, suggestive, Surrealist tactics to bring them to their own conclusions about the true stakes of the war. The organization of the movement, Cahun realized, had to be formless, headless; there were no meetings, no leaders, and anyone who felt moved by a particular piece of propaganda could join the resistance simply by performing their own act of rebellion and signing it as “the Nameless Soldier.” The Nameless Soldiers created a leaderless, metamorphic political organization that engaged in clandestine and “intermittent acts of political subjectivization that reconfigure[d] the communal distribution of the sensible,” realizing on the terrain of the battlefield that perpetual insurrection in value and sensibility so central to Cahun’s intellectual and political world.²⁴ And however unique and revolutionary her ideas might seem in theory, one is forced to admit—contra Tzara—that they were remarkably powerful and effective in practice.

The Nameless Soldiers and their Surrealist weapons destabilized and confused the Nazi leadership, making them paranoid and hesitant; internal acts of sabotage in the German camp became increasingly common, proliferating mysteriously; anti-Nazi tracts were sprouting up in the most unlikely places on the island, blooming in its graveyards, amusement parks, and marketplaces, as well as on the barbed-wire fences that surrounded the Nazis' encampments; and German defectors were being imprisoned or shot for openly rebelling against their superiors—and all this a direct or indirect consequence of Cahun's resistance activities. Perhaps no other artist has shown so clearly and viscerally the power of avant-garde art and ideas in fighting for radical social and political change; and perhaps no other artist has been so effective in wielding it.

For the sake of readability and clarity the present work has been divided into two parts and six chapters, with each chapter centered around a particular work in Cahun's oeuvre or a particular moment in her intellectual and political trajectory. The first part, "A Multiple Always," investigates by turns Cahun's radical rethinking of the link between art and politics throughout the 1920s, her work with the Surrealists in the AEAR in 1932 and 1933, her polemics with Louis Aragon during the "Aragon Affair" in 1933 and 1934, her complete disillusionment with bureaucratic Communist politics during the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture in 1935, and her decisive intellectual engagement with Breton and Bataille in *Contre-Attaque* in 1935 and 1936. The second part, "The Nameless Soldiers and their Friends," turns to Cahun's resistance work against the Nazis on the island of Jersey between 1940 and 1944, showing how her resistance movement was at once the culmination and transfiguration of her literary and political work from 1925 to 1940, a movement that explicitly operated at the intersection of avant-garde art and radical politics and intentionally blurred the line between them.

Chapter 1, “The Unknown Heroine,” traces the Anglophone reception history of Cahun from the rediscovery of her work in the 1990s to the present day, demonstrating that her contemporary reception as a queer photographer was conditioned by the complete inaccessibility of the majority of her literary and political writings, most of which remained unpublished until 2002 and remain untranslated into English at the time of this writing. Taking as my point of departure the fact that Cahun understood herself primarily as a writer, not as a photographer, I turn to her literary and theoretical work of the 1920s. I argue that Cahun's entire artistic and political project in the 1930s and 1940s was conditioned by her intellectual encounter in the 1920s with the work of the Symbolist writer Jules de Gaultier and in particular with his key concept of bovarysme. Cahun will enshrine this concept at the center of her rethinking of avant-garde writing: writing becomes for her the means by which the writer and reader can engage in the bovaryc project of rethinking and reforming their own subjectivities. Writing is no longer about reflecting the world realistically or transfiguring it poetically, but about transforming the subjective constellation of the reader and the writer and, through them, the larger social and political worlds of which they form a part.

Chapter 2, “The Stiletto of Poetry,” investigates the way Cahun politicized this conception of transformative writing in her work with the Surrealists in the AEAR. Spurred by the specter of fascism to find a way to put her new ideas about avant-garde aesthetics into political practice, Cahun wrote *Les Paris sont ouverts* to address the specifically political uses of her transformative Surrealist aesthetic. There she argues that the political function of avant-garde poetry and writing lies in the way it engages the reader not on the terrain of reason or rationality but on the terrain of feeling and imagination; to the extent that an oblique, suggestive, esoteric poetry can enter the backdoor of a reader's sensibility and provoke them into rethinking and

reforming their own existential constellation, it opens up onto a kind of molecular revolution in political sense and meaning, a kind of bottom-up revolution in regimes of sensibility.

Chapter 3, “The Perpetual Insurrection,” looks at how Cahun re-elaborated and extended these ideas about the political function of avant-garde aesthetics in the new organizational context of Contre-Attaque, the anti-fascist intellectual association co-founded by Breton and Bataille. Cahun was instrumental in Contre-Attaque’s creation and took a particularly active role in it, but her contributions to it have been obscured or forgotten. The looming threat of international war provoked Cahun into further radicalizing her ideas: now the avant-garde artist must not only infiltrate the sensibility of the other, but also, and more fundamentally, help produce and protect a collective universe of values that would be capable of confronting the visceral threat of fascism both ideologically and existentially. The rest of the chapter takes us from the dissolution of Contre-Attaque to Cahun and Malherbe’s installation on the Channel Island of Jersey in 1938.

Chapter 4, “The Nameless Conspiracy,” describes the organization, tactics, and strategies of the anti-Nazi resistance movement that Cahun and Malherbe formed when the Nazis invaded Jersey in 1940 and which they called “the Nameless Soldiers and their friends.” Each element of Cahun’s movement was drawn from some part of her earlier theoretical and political work. The organization was leaderless and headless, or, as her colleague Bataille would have put it, “acephalic,” presenting itself in its own organization as a counterchallenge to the hierarchical structure of fascism. The resistance’s aims echoed Cahun’s call in Contre-Attaque to create and preserve a perpetual insurrection in sense and value; the Nameless Soldiers insistently asked their German counterparts to interrogate their own feelings, ideas, and values, providing them also with imaginative trajectories by which to escape their Nazi conditioning and join the

nameless ones. I argue that Cahun's resistance movement represented not the refutation of her earlier literary and political theorizing but its remarkable transfiguration and translation into the high-stakes world of the real.

Chapter 5, "The Nameless Weapons," gives a comprehensive analysis of the Surrealist propaganda tracts and art installations Cahun produced to demoralize the German invaders, providing translations and interpretations of the vast majority of the surviving written work, often for the first time in English. The propaganda tracts produced by the Nameless Soldiers deployed the kind of aesthetic Cahun had argued for in *Les Paris sont ouverts*, enriched also by her decade-long encounter with Surrealism, deploying esoteric, oblique strategies to make the German soldiers think for themselves about the possibilities and consequences of the present conflict. The chapter emphasizes above all the way these tracts reflected Cahun's long-standing concerns with the place of the artist and of avant-garde aesthetics in political conflict; her propaganda worked by provoking the German soldiers into interrogating the Nazi regime of sensibility on which they had come to depend, asking them to rethink and recreate the bellicose universe of value that had ensnared them, body and mind.

Chapter 6, "The Spiritual Sharpshooters of Jersey," documents the arrest of Cahun and Malherbe in 1944 by the Gestapo, the time they spent in Nazi prison, the trial in which they were convicted, to their pleasure, of being "spiritual sharpshooters," and the sentence of death that was passed on them. Just barely saved from the execution of this sentence by the reversal and decline of Germany's military fortunes, the chapter ends with Cahun and Malherbe finally free, at their ruined farmhouse, as Cahun reflects once more on the connection between her literary and theoretical work of the 1920s and 1930s and her most recent political experiences. By the end of the work, I hope not to have answered conclusively the twin questions guiding the study—"what

can be the role of the avant-garde artist in radical political change? And what part can an avant-garde aesthetic have to play?"—but to have provided the reader with a new way of approaching them, giving Cahun her due as one of the most powerful and innovative thinkers who worked and fought at the intersection of these problems.

The following chapter traces for the reader the unlikely and near-miraculous recovery of Cahun's photographs and writings in the late 1980s and the early 1990s; it also reviews the Anglophone reception of her work from the beginning of her rediscovery to the time of the present writing, showing how and why the American academy, in particular, has received her primarily as a photographer, when she understood herself to be and was understood by others as a writer. Finally, it investigates Cahun's confrontation with and ultimate assimilation of Gaudier's concept of bovarysme into her own theoretical and aesthetic world, setting the intellectual stage for her more explicitly political work with the Surrealists in the 1930s.

Part I: A Multiple Always

Chapter 1:

The Unknown Heroine

“*But: Cahun? Claude Cahun? Who knows that?*”²⁵

In 1972 Suzanne Malherbe was found dead, apparently by her own hand, in her home on the Channel Island of Jersey. Having left no legal heir, inheriting the estate of what the Jersey locals had known as her step-sister, Lucie Schwob, the contents of her house were soon put up for auction. The collection in her library had raised a few eyebrows—personally-inscribed first editions of Breton’s *Poisson soluble* and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes’ *Frontières humaines*, a handmade, hard-cover *Poupée* book by Hans Bellmer, filled with original photographic prints—but the rest of her effects, including some strange photographs, had been hastily thrown into tea chests and cartons and taken to be sold in lots at the Langlois auction houses at Don Street and Peter Street, Jersey.²⁶ There John Wakeham, a local collector of avant-garde books and photographs, found himself bidding for one of the lots alongside renowned art historian John Berger. Much to his surprise, however, the hammer fell on his side, and he won this collection for what would later be recognized as the pittance of £21. Some papers had fallen from the cartons due to overzealous rummaging by curious auction-goers and had been swept aside, ready for the garbage bin. When Wakeham went to retrieve them, he found in the pile three drawings signed by Henri Michaux. He returned several weeks later to bid on another lot from Malherbe’s house, this one containing kitchen pots and pans and another tea chest. At the bottom of this chest, rather unceremoniously turned upside down, was a bronze bust, apparently of Malherbe’s “sister,” by the famous Ukrainian sculptor Chana Orloff.²⁷ Another lot of boxes, later found at a local antique dealer’s shop, also contained mysterious portraits of what seemed to be the same woman, but it was hard to tell: sometimes she appeared as an angel or a dandy or a businessman or a schoolgirl, other times as a weightlifter, a pilot, an executioner, a Buddha.²⁸ While the name

“Claude Cahun” kept recurring in Wakeham's papers, he did not recognize it.

Around this same time, a French historian of surrealism, François Leperlier, procured an edition of Maurice Nadeau's *l'Histoire du surréalisme*, a 1964 reprint of his 1948 *Documents surréalistes*, which gave the greatest space for the year 1934 to a facsimile of a pamphlet entitled *Les Paris sont ouverts* by a “Claude Cahun,” of whom Leperlier had been theretofore ignorant.²⁹ Later, in 1982 or 1983, he discovered in the catalogue of the Éditions Corti publishing house a mention of Cahun's *Aveux non avendus*, and requested a meeting with José Corti, the publisher famous for setting up the Editions Surréalistes in the 1930s and bankrolling Breton's *La Révolution surréaliste* when it could no longer find financial backing. Corti told him that Claude Cahun had been “the pseudonym of a woman born Lucy Schwob, of the family of Marcel Schwob, originally of Nantes.”³⁰ Leperlier wrote to the civil state of Nantes and issued an ad in a Jersey paper, asking if anyone had any information about Claude Cahun or Lucy Schwob. This inquiry yielded up a “little lot of archives: some manuscript notes, a couple of journals, some letters,” and the name of John Wakeham.³¹ In 1984 he flew to Jersey to investigate Wakeham's purchase and found, in moldering boxes and cartons that had been stashed in the garage, “letters, account books, agendas, photographs of all kinds, journal articles, manuscripts, old calendars, designs, revues, bills, [and] prints.”³² While Wakeham and the owners of the other small lots had already sold the greatest part of Cahun's library through Sotheby's and other auction houses throughout Jersey and London in 1973, Leperlier recognized that this archive represented a major find in the history of surrealism, the beginning of the recovery of an “unknown heroine.”

Meanwhile, in the early 1980s, Virginia Zabriskie, owner of the Galeries Zabriskie in Paris and New York City, had acquired an anonymous object—“a small assemblage”—at an auction held by the Gallerie Charles Ratton and previously shown there in its *Exposition*

surréaliste d'objets of 1936. Her research indicated that the object might be by an unknown "Claude Cahun," and she showed it as such in her *Surrealism 1936* show in New York in 1986, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the *Exposition*. Learning of Leperlier's ongoing research, she contacted him and was able to verify that her object was in fact by Cahun, moreover that it was "the only known extant object by the artist."³³ Leperlier also told her about the photographs and other archival material that Wakeham had salvaged, inviting her to come to Jersey to see for herself. Zabriskie accepted his offer in the summer of 1991: "He took me on a harrowing trip to the Isle of Jersey with the plane bumping its way over the Channel to introduce me to John Wakeham, who had a stash of photographs gathered from the floor of Cahun's house after her death. Much of the work had been destroyed but I was able to buy and conserve some of it."³⁴ With the research for Leperlier's soon-to-be published monograph on Cahun, *l'Écart et la métamorphose*, nearly complete, and with this purchase of some of the most striking of Cahun's portraits and photomontages in hand, Zabriskie staged a solo exhibition of Cahun's work at her New York gallery in the spring of 1992 and a slightly enlarged version of the show at her Paris gallery in the winter of 1992, propelling the artist, nearly forgotten, back into the art-historical limelight. The New York exhibition of the photographs was a resounding success, and three articles on Cahun appeared in the American press in the first four months after the show's opening. *Art Forum*, *Art in America*, and *Afterimage* discussed the show and Cahun's pictures at length, and the Parisian exhibition found similar success, with *Le Monde*, *Libération*, and *La Quinzaine littéraire* reporting on the exhibition and raising critical interest in Cahun in France.³⁵ Due to the success of these two shows, there was more written on Cahun in English between 1992 and 1994 than in any language between 1948 and 1984. This "unknown heroine" had begun a second life.

It is not surprising, then, that the majority of the Anglophone criticism written during the first decade of Cahun's revival was almost exclusively concerned with the portraits she produced between 1920 and 1929 and the photomontages she and Malherbe collaborated on for *Aveux non avenues* in 1928 and 1929. Without access to Cahun's literary and theoretical writings, most critics from this period tended to read the photographs and photomontages psychoanalytically, through the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, through the lens of gender and queer theory, in particular the work of Joan Rivière and Judith Butler, or through some combination of the two. The psychoanalytic readings of her visual work, in attempting to read biographical and psychological details out of her portraits and montages, did not—and could not—take account of her written work and explicit commentaries on her own project. One critic in the psychoanalytic vein claims that one can read in Cahun's portraits a compensatory function for a malformed “maternal identification” which forced her to transfer “her original maternal case onto her art,” becoming for herself a “substitute mirror/mother.”³⁶ Another reading argues that her montages display Cahun grappling with her “infantile but utopic self-sufficiency,” her incapacity to give birth to herself, and her castration anxiety.³⁷ Yet another links a few fragments from *Aveux non avenues* to a handful of portraits and suggests that one can read out of them—or, perhaps, into them—“structures of anorexia.”³⁸ And so on.³⁹ These psychoanalytic readings often tell us more about the theories being deployed than they do about Cahun's work, with the added vice of pathologizing her personally and decontextualizing the visual work generally.

The second strand of this early photographic criticism put Cahun's work in dialogue with Rivière's elaboration of “womanliness as a masquerade” and Butler's formulation of “gender performativity.” Most of these commentators emphasize not the psycho-biographical but the social, cultural, sexual, and political stakes of Cahun's portraits, reading them primarily “through

the lens of masquerade and the presumption that gender is a kind of drag.”⁴⁰ In this reading, her photographs become a “denial that any “essential” identity exists for woman.”⁴¹ Instead, they play an incessant and liberatory game with “the instability of identity.”⁴² In these allegedly “self-”portraits, there “is no *single* Claude to be found. Or, alternatively, authentic aspects of the original Claude are to be found in every one of her multiple manifestations.”⁴³ For these critics the virtue of her visual work lies in the fact that Cahun is able to problematize “gender and subjectivity itself by taking on identities as she would a suit of clothes,” alternatively disguising, masking, or constructing herself before the lens in a photographic act that is interpreted as “polymorphic, brave, and exhausting.”⁴⁴ These readings, while opening up the cultural, political, and sexual dimensions of Cahun’s visual work from the 1920s, typically confine themselves to only this period and only this modality of her wide-ranging artistic and political practice.

Both of these approaches tend to ignore her explicitly political theorizing in the 1930s and her resistance work in Jersey against the Nazis in the 1940s. These lacunae in the criticism have a material explanation: much of Cahun’s written work released in her lifetime was signed under various pseudonyms, appeared in regional French dailies, or printed in small luxury editions; her postwar writings were dispersed in numerous archives throughout Europe and America or remained simply unpublished, waiting in Wakeham’s boxes. While critics in this first wave of the Cahun revival brought her to academic prominence, recuperating her as a vital figure in the histories of photography and Surrealism, they were not able to situate their readings within the full context of Cahun’s writings because these writings were simply inaccessible. The situation began to change in 1995, when the Jersey Heritage Trust acquired the bulk of Wakeham’s collection, and a second purchase in 2002 of a smaller body of her work further cemented and centralized Cahun's archive for the first time.⁴⁵ This consolidation of her written

and photographic work was followed in the same year by Leperlier's publication of Cahun's *Écrits*, containing not only reprints of her major articles and books from the 1910s and 1920s but also her political writings from the 1930s and her post-World War II autobiographical and theoretical reflections, finally making Cahun's aesthetic and political project available in its full depth and richness.

What remains surprising, given this more complete archive, is that the vast majority of the Anglophone criticism on Cahun published from 2002 to the time of this writing still mainly concerns itself with her visual work from 1920 to 1929, albeit being more often grounded in a reading of it in Cahun's own terms and with access to a much-expanded written archive. Criticism in this period has turned from the notion of Cahun as a singular artist, unique in her genre, to an investigation of the place of collaboration in her artistic practices. Jennifer Shaw, Julie Cole, and Tirza True Latimer have all looked at the degree of collaboration between Cahun and Malherbe on the montages for *Aveux non avenues* and Cahun's "self-"portraits, and all of these authors, in contradistinction to the first wave of criticism, rely heavily on Cahun's own writings.⁴⁶ This second wave of criticism has also investigated more deeply Cahun's collaborations across different disciplines: Miranda Welby-Everard has fruitfully explored Cahun's relationship with Albert-Birot's theater company, *Le Plateau*, arguing that her turn to performance represented the culmination of what Leperlier called Cahun's "theatricalization of life," while Andrea Oberhuber has explored the working relationship between Cahun and Lise Deharme in the creation of their children's book, *Le Cœur de pic*.⁴⁷ However, despite this general turn toward the question of collaboration in Cahun's artistic practices, taking fuller account of her written archive, the bulk of criticism on her since 2002 has remained focused on her photography to the near-exclusion of her written and political work after *Aveux non avenues*.

A handful of scholars have critiqued this overemphasis on Cahun's visual production. They argue that we need, first, to situate Cahun more squarely in the literary, intellectual, and artistic contexts in which she operated, of which Surrealism was only one, and a rather late addition – she was thirty-seven by the time she met Breton in April of 1932 and officially joined the movement – and, second, to take account of her primarily as a political writer and theorist working at the intersection of avant-garde art and progressive politics, which was how she understood herself and was known and recognized by others in her milieu. Kristine von Oehsen puts it plainly: “Based on Cahun’s public activity, she should be considered as a writer.”⁴⁸ A number of scholars, including Cole, have pointed out that Cahun’s photography was conceived as a private project for herself and for her lover and artistic collaborator Malherbe, alias Marcel Moore. Using the pictures which were accomplished years before her official involvement with Surrealism to discuss its gender politics elides the fact that the portraits “were meant for Cahun and Moore alone, . . . [that] the play of gazes from photographer to subject to viewer existed only between the two of them.”⁴⁹ Taking up this thread, Astrid Peterle recognizes the paradox that this intimate and private project has become the almost-exclusive focus of Anglophone criticism, arguing that the explosion of criticism on Cahun in the 1990s coincided in the American academy with an increasing theoretical interest in “the performativity of gender and the possibility of gender-blurring by shifting hegemonic gender norms”: seen through this critical lens, “Cahun’s gender-blurred stagings seemed to fit ‘perfectly.’” Read as perpetually *avant la lettre*, scholars saw in the photographs both more and less than was there, generating an “academic hype” for Cahun that propelled her into art-historical consciousness but effaced her often-formidable literary and political contributions. Siobhan McGurk acknowledges this myopia of seeing her only in relation to Surrealist photography and to her sexuality, which tends to

present her relationship to her lesbianism “as the most influential aspect of Cahun’s artistic approach to self-representation.”⁵⁰ This overemphasis overwrites her literary productions on the one hand while disguising her deep debt to Symbolist ideas on the other, which was the literary avant-garde she was initially most connected to, through the familial influence of her father Maurice and uncle Marcel Schwob, and to which she constantly made reference. Only one other article has appeared in English that attempts to tie Cahun’s ideas back to this Symbolist milieu, looking at the kinship between Oscar Wilde’s strategies of self-fashioning and Cahun’s photographs of the 1920s.⁵¹ McGurk further argues that ignoring Cahun’s political work with the AEAR and Contre-Attaque in the 1930s and her anti-Nazi resistance work in the 1940s means that researchers are missing the opportunity to examine the success of her “avant-garde tactics in a changed political atmosphere,” an idea that has only very recently begun to receive sustained attention in the scholarship on her.⁵²

Only four articles which deal in depth with Cahun’s theoretical and political work from 1932 to 1950 have appeared in English since the first was published in 2006.⁵³ (Eight articles and two books were published on her photographs and montages from the 1920s in the same time period.)⁵⁴ All of these articles focus almost exclusively on Cahun’s resistance activities against the Nazis in Jersey between 1940 and 1944. They rarely discuss her political positions in the 1920s and 1930s and almost never discuss the considerable corpus of writings she produced after World War II in which she rigorously connects her resistance activities to her longstanding aesthetic, social, and political preoccupations. More seriously, some of these articles make the mistake of assuming that she entered politics late, in 1932, and only as a consequence of aligning herself with Breton and the Surrealists. Michael Löwy, for example, argues that Cahun’s turn “toward Surrealism and revolutionary politics took place in 1932—a belated one,” he claims, as

well as “a rather unexpected one.”⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Lizzie Thynne argues that Cahun turned to politics only after the “Aragon Affair,” in the service of the Surrealists.⁵⁶ What these articles fail to recognize, however, is that Cahun had long been engaged in her own rethinking of the relationship between aesthetics, politics, and subjectivity; her explicitly political engagement with the Surrealists, beginning in 1932, did not represent the beginning of her theoretical or political work but its extension.

Before turning to Cahun’s political engagements with the Surrealists in the 1930s and her anti-Nazi resistance work in the 1940s, I would like to point out—against Löwy’s notion that Cahun entered politics through Surrealism and then only belatedly—that Cahun’s turn toward Surrealism in 1932 and her theorization of the role of poetry in social revolution in 1934’s *Les Paris sont ouverts* and beyond represents an extension of her own rethinking of the role of art that she had undertaken throughout the 1920s and which began with a meditation on Jules de Gaultier’s key concept of *bovarysme*. Bovarysme, defined by Gaultier as the human “power of imagination” that gives each person the ability “to conceive themselves otherwise” is a concept central in Cahun’s intellectual universe but one that has so far received little critical attention. By the time of the publication of *Aveux non avendus* in 1930, Cahun had put the concept of bovarysme at the center of her rethinking of the revolutionary function of poetry and art. There she reconceives of the avant-garde work of art as the privileged site in which the writer and reader can pursue their own becoming-otherwise, their own inner alterity. To the extent that a work of art or a piece of writing has the potential to make people recognize and critique their current structure of subjectivity, granting them the means to pursue a different subjective constellation for and by themselves, it has also a political function, opening on to the possibility—simultaneously personal and political—of creating new regimes of sensibility and

new forms of cultural and political engagement. By provoking a change in individual and collective sensibilities, avant-garde writing can create the mental and emotional conditions in which new social, political, and affective worlds can emerge. This rethinking of the personal and social function of art centered around Gaultier's key concept of *bovarysme* sets the stage for her explicitly political engagement in her work with the AEAR between 1932 and 1933, her polemic *Les Paris sont ouverts* of 1934, her participation in the International Congress of Writers in 1935, her involvement in *Contre-Attaque* at the end of 1935 and the beginning of 1936, and her active resistance against the Nazi occupation of Jersey between 1940 and 1944. Because it is now little-known to Anglophone audiences, I will briefly outline Gaultier's theory of *bovarysme*, then situate this concept in a range of Cahun's texts from 1921 to 1930, tracking the shifting valuations she gives to it before granting it pride of place in her rethinking of the intersection between art, politics, and subjectivity.

* * *

In *Le Bovarysme*, published in 1902 by the *Mercure de France*, Gaultier outlined a theory of human subjectivity and existential change that explored "the power given man to see himself other than what he is" and to which he gave the name *bovarysme*.⁵⁷ He argues that the power to "conceive oneself otherwise" is a natural consequence of the structure of subjectivity itself, which is formed around a core of perpetual internal difference, a center of structural alterity.⁵⁸ The self differs from itself in the first place because "the self" is nothing but a name or a "conventional fiction" that attempts to unify in one conception "a teeming multiplicity of separate realities which already elude our notice and our nomenclatures."⁵⁹ The supposed unity of the self is broken in the act of self-consciousness as soon as one part of the subject takes hold of and attempts to observe another part of itself, turning itself into both a subject of and object

for itself. The self never gets a hold of itself in its totality: the subject can only ever take cognizance of and grasp a particular part of itself in self-consciousness at any given moment, unable to take hold of itself in its integral reality.⁶⁰ The self also perpetually differs from itself because of its situatedness in the flux of time. The ever-shifting aggregate of the elements that constitute a subjectivity is always becoming other to itself as it moves towards the future: one's current self is always moving along a trajectory to the self that one is becoming, and subjects find themselves caught in this state of incessant existential metamorphosis. The potential power of bovarysme, understood as the ability to "conceive oneself otherwise," thus lies in the way it allows subjects to *self-consciously* harness this inner alterity, this "ontological tension" that is introduced by the power of the imagination, in order to use it to project a new model of subjectivity that they wish to become and to plot an existential trajectory by which they can move from subjective constellation to subjective constellation.⁶¹ To the principle of subjective similarity and unity, of being and personal identity, Gaultier counterpoises this "bovaryc" principle of subjective difference and multiplicity, of becoming and existential metamorphosis.

For Gaultier this concept has a negative and a positive application, one potentially dangerous, the other potentially liberatory: it can either make or undo "the becoming of the subject."⁶² Bovarysme can have negative consequences if the power of conceiving a transformative trajectory from self to self outstrips the subject's power of realizing it, as in those "cases in which the different conception a being forms of himself is accompanied by an absolute inability to be realized."⁶³ In these instances the inner alterity that is being sought "may be of a reactive character, passive, an illusory extrapolation, the symptom of a dispossession of self."⁶⁴ The subject who uses bovarysme as a means to *escape* themselves or their current circumstances, as did the namesake of the concept, Emma Bovary, risks seeing their "energy deflected,

diminished and squandered” as “they do not come to equal the model they have proposed to themselves.”⁶⁵ This form of bovarysme finally becomes nothing but a form of unproductive daydreaming or a species of self-delusion, a capitulation to, as T.S. Eliot put it, “the human will to see things as they are not.”⁶⁶

On the other hand, the subject who imagines themselves to be other than they are by virtue of an “excess of energy” and a desire to gain a more creative control over their own becoming can employ bovarysme as a means “to add something to [their] personality, to modify it without destroying it, to displace it without breaking it.”⁶⁷ The recognition of one’s inner alterity and the ontological tension at the heart of one’s subjectivity that it makes appear and puts into play can be employed by the subject as a “spring of individuation, of the conquest of the self,” if they are able to form an imaginative trajectory within themselves between different forms of subjectivity and find a way to use this trajectory to guide their own existential elaboration. This form of bovarysme designates not a diminution of agency or a capitulation to escapism but “a real addition of power, an excess of the will, an advance towards a dynamic synthesis of identifications.”⁶⁸

Throughout the 1920s Cahun meditates on and experiments with “the trying alternations of these two sides of bovarysme,” initially taking the concept in its negative sense and rejecting it as the purview of rarefied “Poets,” before revaluing the concept after her encounter with Pierre Morhange and the Philosophies group in 1924 and rethinking its implications for the interface of subjectivity, art, and social change in her *Aveux non avenues* of 1930.⁶⁹ While it is impossible to date precisely Cahun’s first encounter with Gaultier’s concept of bovarysme, we know that she must have encountered his work at the latest by 1919 when she wrote a report on one of his recent lectures for *La Gerbe*, a Nantes-based cultural review⁷⁰. Gaultier’s works were also

published by the *Mercure de France*, to which Cahun was connected through her uncle and father, Marcel and Maurice Schwob; she had its library and catalog of publications at her disposal, as well as access to its newest titles, which she read avidly.⁷¹ It is clear, however, that by the time of “L’Androgyne, héroïne entre les héroïnes,” written between 1921 and 1924 and published only in 2006, Cahun had enough familiarity with the concept’s negative aspect to dismiss it as the concern of the “Poet,” who, in a section of the work entitled “psychological portraits,” is drawn as follows: “*Bovarysme*. Impotence. No concentration of mind. Little logic: subjective judgments. Enthusiasm and generosity (not goodness). – A few prejudices, but superficial: social vanity. Access of temerity, then of moral weakness (nervous depression).”⁷² The terms used by Cahun to describe the Poet track closely to Gaultier’s description of the aesthete or “snob” who practices the negative form of bovarysme, losing himself in his own self-idealizations and imaginary extrapolations, arraying himself with appearances that permit him to “deceive himself as to his own person”⁷³ The Poet in Cahun’s dialogue loves hearing himself compared to “de G . . . (our national Socrates),” but lacks the kindness, moral strength, and courage required to instantiate the second, more productive form of bovarysme.⁷⁴ Both the Poet and the snob share the mark of imaginative “impotence,” characterized by an ability to imagine themselves other than they are coupled with an inability to realize it, and both of them suffer, as Emma Bovary did, from social vanity, being careful to always hide behind “a mask of superiority” that disguises only their superficiality and illogicality, the utter “incompetence” undergirding their ethical judgments and social prejudices.⁷⁵ The description of the Poet in Cahun’s work is a condensation of Gaultier’s image of the snob and the dangers of bovarysme in its negative mode.

While she was completing this manuscript in 1924, Cahun had, through the intermediary of Jacques Viot, been put into contact with Pierre Morhange, Henri Lefebvre, and Charles-Henri

Barbier, collectively comprising the *Philosophies* group, who had started publishing a revue of philosophy and literature: her exchange with them on the nature of their “literary and metaphysical ideals” provoked her into revaluing bovarysme, enshrining it at the center of her views on subjectivity and art. In May 1924 Morhange invited Cahun to report on a conference that he was giving to the Parisian Cercle des étudiants to drum up support for his newly established magazine. In “Une conference mouvementée,” a report published May 25th, 1924 in Paul Lévy's *Aux Écoutes*, Cahun describes Morhange's speech to the students: “He presents the young review, exposes the tendencies of his friends, their antipathies, their literary and metaphysical ideal.”⁷⁶ The restless students had been taken aback by the outline of the *Philosophies* project as Morhange described it: “*Philosophies* will be the cradle of a new metaphysical system of its collaborators which . . . starts by ‘rehabilitating God.’”⁷⁷ Cahun, intrigued by the concept, was asked by Morhange to elaborate her own metaphysical and literary ideal in a response to an inquiry in the November 15th, 1924 issue of *Philosophies*. There he asked Cahun and several other writers the following question: “May we know that which, in your mind, corresponds to the word God? . . . Does the word God seem to you beautiful, grotesque, humorous?”⁷⁸ Cahun's response to this inquiry of *Philosophies* firmly established bovarysme at the center of her idea of subjectivity, no longer rejecting the concept as an engine of self-delusion for powerless Poets, but accepting it as the very well-spring of subjective change and metamorphosis.

Her response to Morhange's question, appearing as the “Méditation de mademoiselle Lucie Schwob” in the March 1925 issue of *Philosophies*, immediately attacks Morhange's stated project: in response to the question “what in your mind corresponds to the word God?” she answers, ironically but sincerely, “*moi*,” the ego, the self.⁷⁹ Repeating almost exactly Gaultier's

formulation of bovarysme as the power of the subject to conceive and realize “what he ought to become, . . . what he wants to become,” Cahun says that her conception of the self involves seeing herself “not such as I am, obviously, but as I should be – as I would like to be, if you prefer. *Bovarysme*.”⁸⁰ Her avowal of the essential bovarysme of the self signals an important shift in her thinking, from seeing bovarysme as the vain daydream of the frustrated Poet to the recognition that the self is neither stable nor immutable, doesn't partake of metaphysical reality or temporal coherence. She recognizes the strength of this view of subjectivity: it is the most productive, “the most malleable,” the most creative and plastic, signaling, at the very heart of subjectivity itself, “a change that would give the illusion of constancy – or perhaps rather a constancy that would give the illusion of change.”⁸¹ This form of bovaryc subjectivity is always “metamorphosing itself – it is dissolving and coagulating itself.”⁸² We notice here that Gaultier's theory of subjectivity has been taken up with little modification by Cahun and has been turned into a strength, indeed into her subjective and aesthetic ideal. From this point on, Leperlier notes, all of Cahun's work will testify to this central bovaryc insight: all aesthetic “creation demonstrates the action that the subject exercises on him or herself, that transforming virtue, where the subject is its own object.” The writer uses their work not to record or reflect the outer world but as a kind of existential operator, a way “to experience oneself, to test oneself with signs, and be proof of that *imaginary life*” that always conditions and supersedes the existential givens in which one lives.⁸³

One of the greatest theoretical innovations that animates Cahun's *Aveux non avenues*, then, and one which emerges as a direct consequence of her engagement with and transformation of Gaultier's idea, is the way in which she reconceives of writing, “poetry,” as the privileged site in which the writer and reader collude in becoming otherwise, exercising and playing with their

own inner alterity, their own bovarysme. Using writing as an outlet for the writer and reader's bovarysme also has a social and, Cahun will theorize later, a political dimension: insofar as a work requires the active collaboration of the reader, it opens up a space in the aesthetic encounter for them to think themselves otherwise as well, to become aware of the social forces shaping their subjectivities, thereby gaining more control over their own existential elaboration and configurations of sensibility. The logic underlying *Aveux non avenues* is thus not reflective and *autobiographical* but projective and *autofictional*, implicated not in the *revelation* of a self but in its *production* and *transformation*.⁸⁴

While a complete reading of the work lies beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to briefly indicate for the reader the strains of Gaultier's ideas that are present in the portrait of Cahun's autofictional or bovaryc double "Aurige" that physically and intellectually centers the work and is a rewriting and extension of her "L'Androgyne, héroïne entre les héroïnes" of 1924. As Jennifer Shaw notes, "the figure of 'Aurige' is, in some ways, Cahun's self-portrait."⁸⁵ But it is simultaneously more and less than that; while incorporating elements of the "real" Cahun, it is not Cahun as she is, but as she "would like to be." We open with Aurige seated before her mirror, cataloging what might be conventionally considered her physical shortcomings: "Redundant breasts; irregular, ineffectual teeth; eyes and hair of the blandest color; hands delicate enough but twisted, deformed. The oval head of a slave; forehead too high . . . or too low; a nose fashioned well enough of its type – a hideous type; the mouth, too sensual; . . . the chin hardly juts out at all; and body-wide the muscles barely sketched."⁸⁶ Aurige comes face to face with "the dilemma of femininity as social constraint": in a society obsessed with shoring up "an ideal of femininity that included resignation, motherhood, hearth and home" through the proliferation of images of "ideal" feminine beauty, this unconventional picture of Aurige could not seem to be more

culturally inadequate.⁸⁷

But the reader soon learns that Aurige's "declared ideals" are "power in all its forms, the will to change, to remake oneself," to become "more and better. My own perfection."⁸⁸ The happiest moments of her life, she tells us, are those in which she is "imagining myself to be different from how I am," when she is playing her own "preferred role."⁸⁹ These bovaryc inclinations lead Aurige to look again into her mirror, to come face to face with her own self-representation and to revalue what she sees: "Triumphant woman!. . . a last-minute deftness corrects a shadow, an unwise gesture – and beauty is reborn. For in front of her mirror," the mirror of her own self-consciousness, "Aurige is touched by grace. She consents to recognize herself. And the illusion she creates for herself extends itself to some others."⁹⁰ Instead of allowing her subjectivity to be shaped by social expectations, instead of rejecting her self-representation as inadequate in the face of social ideals of femininity or drowning in a delusional and "narcissistic self-enchancement," Aurige rethinks the relationship between image and self, "shifting constraint and inadequacy into self-acceptance and possibility."⁹¹ She consents to recognize herself: she, not society, is in control of her image; she delineates for herself her own values; she has exercised, on the terrain of her own self-representation, her own "will to power," "taking pride," Aurige tells us, "in everything I'd like to be, in my own superlative self."⁹² Allied to the bovaryc power of conceiving herself otherwise is thus a radical self-acceptance, a "grace," that leads to the birth of a vital, life-sustaining "illusion," one that can help the writer to achieve not only her "own perfection," but also "everyone else's into the bargain."⁹³ It is at this point that writing as an expression and a means of bovarysme gains a social and political function: the self-conscious personal illusion projected by the writer as they try to escape social subjectivations and attempt to "consciously . . . modify [their] being" becomes an example and an exercise

passed on to the reader in the form of the writing itself, an autofictional illusion that “extends *itself* to some others.”⁹⁴ This form of writing “imagines an alternative universe in which subjectivity is not constrained and structured in advance by conventional images.”⁹⁵ It does not have as its sole aim the expansion and reconfiguration of the writer’s subjectivity and sensibility alone, but that of the reader’s as well. If this form of writing expresses the author’s egoism, it is, Cahun says, “an egoism for two, for many, for all,” one that encourages the reader to critique and reject social models of subjectivity and “place one’s ideal in oneself” instead.⁹⁶

Despite all of the formal and imaginative inventiveness of *Aveux non avenues*, Cahun’s provocation to resist limiting and normalizing models of subjectivity and imagine instead a form of writing that provoked in the reader the “desire to change, to reconstruct oneself,” fell on deaf ears.⁹⁷ “In vain,” she later wrote, “I [had] endeavored – by black humor, provocation, challenge – to bring my contemporaries out of their smug conformism, out of their *complacency*. The ostracism was . . . general. Apart from silence, the basest insults. That’s how literary criticism – except that of *Aux Écoutes* – welcomed the “poems in prose” of this undesirable Cassandra.”⁹⁸ Only Aristide, the literary critic for *Aux Écoutes*, praised the work on its publication, calling it a “harsh and intelligent negation” of social ideals and expectations, a book that crackled “from one end to the other . . . [with] a hundred thousand volts.”⁹⁹ Gabriel Brunet, the literary critic for *Le Mercure de France*, was less sanguine: he sniffed that Cahun was “struggling with a skein of opposing tendencies so tangled that one wonders if she will ever find the thread of Ariadne that will allow her to move forward with certainty in her own . . . psychological labyrinth.” Having misunderstood the book as autobiography, assuming erroneously that Cahun was plumbing the depths of her own psychology as one might try to escape from a maze, Brunet found the book “strange to the extreme,” leading to nowhere but a “world of perplexities.”¹⁰⁰ Missed was the

attempt by Cahun to evade the strictures of autobiography, to escape the confines of *la confession*, to find a way to open up in the reader the possibility of realizing “other morals” and “other loves,” to challenge them to “exist otherwise.”¹⁰¹ Seeing her great work born to deafening silence and feeling the increasing tensions on the international stage, Cahun would resolve soon after to put her talents in the service of Surrealism, in the hopes of finding another avenue by which she could extend her bovaryc conception of art into the realm of revolutionary politics.

Chapter 2: The Stiletto of Poetry

*“Poets act in their own way on the sensibility of people. Their attacks are more devious; but their most oblique blows are sometimes fatal.”*¹⁰²

Beyond the critical rejection of *Aveux non avenues*, increasing tensions on the European stage and France’s heightening domestic troubles conditioned Cahun’s decision to put herself at the service of Surrealism and its political ambitions in 1932. Benito Mussolini had already consolidated his power in Italy, and Adolf Hitler was only a year from ascending to the chancellery in German; the threat of fascism loomed large as the long aftershocks of the Treaty of Versailles made themselves felt. Meanwhile, the rapid industrialization of Russia under Stalin and its rising prominence on the intellectual and political scenes became attractive to French writers and thinkers who were searching for alternatives to what they saw as the capitalist and imperialist democracies of Europe, drawing increasing numbers of leftist intellectuals into official Communist politics and organizations. At the same time as these new political formations posed themselves as challenges to the more entrenched governments of Europe, France was finally beginning to feel the ripple effects of the Great Depression which had begun in America years earlier, in 1929: while initially protected from the vicissitudes of the economic crisis because of its reliance on the gold standard, by 1932 France experienced a drop in production and GDP so severe that it would not be repeated within the decade. The economic malaise of the Depression in France hit the workers the hardest: Morvan Lebesque recalled seeing “thousands of young men, forced out of their jobs by the crisis,” either “struggling on to their last cent,” eating food off the street, or abandoning the fight entirely.¹⁰³ In this worsening political and economic situation, both workers and intellectuals began moving increasingly to the left, eager to explore Communist ideas and organizations.

In 1932 the Russians and the French Communist Party (PCF), seeking to capitalize on this shift in the ideological wind, created the Association des Ecrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR)—conceived as a French analogue to the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (RAPP)—whose function would be to rally leftist thinkers to the cause of socialism and the advent of the worldwide proletarian revolution. Officially unveiled in the pages of *L'Humanité* on January 5th, 1932, the AEAR was conceived as the premier cultural organization in France that would operate at the interface of socialist politics and the arts. Breton, long recognizing and codifying the tensions between the rationalist strictures of bourgeois society and the free play of the human imagination, had explicitly politicized Surrealism two years earlier, in 1930, with the publication of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, and felt the time was ripe to attempt another rapprochement between Surrealism and the official cultural organ of Russian socialism. He appealed immediately to Jean Fréville, the literary editor of *L'Humanité*, to be admitted into the leadership of the AEAR: “I feel that I have an obvious place in [the AEAR]. For ten years I have done everything in my power to help bring about such an organization in France and, within the scope of my capabilities, I believe I’ve succeeded rather well. . . . More than ever I am ready to pursue these efforts.”¹⁰⁴ While he and the Surrealists would ultimately be admitted in the fall of that year, Cahun joining them, Breton’s first overture had been rebuffed by the Communists, who wrote, on February 9th: “We don’t think much of these pretentious intellectuals who won’t lift a finger when repression strikes the working classes, but who move heaven and earth when it touches their precious person.”¹⁰⁵ A little later, on March 22nd, *L'Humanité* published the manifesto of the AEAR: its threefold mission was to “exalt the initiative of the proletariat in the class struggle, to stimulate the combativeness of the masses of workers against fascism and social fascism, [and] to prepare the dictatorship of the

proletariat.”¹⁰⁶ In seeking to recruit the most prominent leftist artists and intellectuals of the day, the AEAR implicitly raised the question of art’s place in social change: how could art contribute to the dissolution of bourgeois society while preparing the ground for socialist revolution? What role could the artist play in advancing the cause of the proletarian revolution? And what forms of expression would be most germane to bringing it about?

At the same time as the AEAR was coming into existence and posing these questions, tensions between Louis Aragon and the Surrealists were on the rise over his recent turn to Soviet propaganda in “Front rouge,” his paean to the glories of the Soviet Union, culminating in the “Aragon Affair” and signaling the final break between Aragon and the Surrealists that would come to exercise a decisive effect on the shape and content of Cahun’s political theorizing within the organization. Aragon’s “Front rouge,” first published in 1931 in *La Littérature de la révolution mondiale*, the literary organ of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers, evinced a dramatic shift in Aragon’s poetics from the unabashed Surrealism of *Le Paysan de Paris* to full-throated Soviet propaganda. In the poem he exhorted readers to look for “Marx and Lenin in the sky / . . . red as the dawn / red as wrath / red as blood,” commanding them to “Fire on Léon Blum / . . . Fire on the trained bears of social-democracy / Fire Fire.” The point of it, he says, is to achieve nothing less than “the violent domination of the Proletariat over the bourgeoisie / for the annihilation of this bourgeoisie / for the total annihilation of this bourgeoisie.”¹⁰⁷ While the poem had gone relatively unnoticed upon its first publication, its reprint in Aragon’s collection *Persécuté persécuteur* led to a public outcry. On January 16th, 1932, Aragon was indicted for “inciting soldiers to disobey orders and . . . murder for purposes of anarchist propaganda.”¹⁰⁸ Breton, though not impressed by Aragon’s “poetically regressive” “occasional verse,” came to his defense, drafting first, with the other Surrealists, a tract

attempting to exonerate Aragon called “L’Affaire Aragon,” then, in February, a longer work called “Misère de la poésie,” which argued that subjecting poets to legal action on the basis of their works endangered the freedom of expression of all.¹⁰⁹ In early March of 1932, Breton showed Aragon the pamphlet the day before it went to press: while consenting to its publication, Aragon requested that a footnote Breton included that mocked the bureaucratic stupidity of the PCF be excised from the manuscript. When the text came off the press the following day, the footnote was still there. Furious, Aragon sent an anonymous note to *L’Humanité*, published on March 10th: “Our comrade Aragon . . . wishes to make it clear that he entirely disavows both the contents of this pamphlet and the attention it has drawn to his name, every Communist being duty-bound to condemn the attacks contained in this pamphlet as incompatible with the class struggle.” As Polizzotti remarks, Aragon’s short, anonymous remark “was the only notice he ever saw fit to give of his resignation from Surrealism.”¹¹⁰

On their side, the Surrealists were equally disenchanted, drafting together a tract, “Paillasse! (Fin de ‘l’Affaire Aragon’),” that attacked Aragon’s shift to Soviet propaganda and his intellectual and poetic “cowardice” for abandoning the tenets of Surrealism.¹¹¹ Paul Éluard drafted his own death “Certificat” for his old friend: at the exact moment that Breton was protesting the indictment of Aragon’s poem, Éluard argued, Aragon had seized upon the opportunity to accuse the Surrealists of “being counter-revolutionary.”¹¹² With this maneuver, “inconsistency becomes calculation, skill becomes intrigue, Aragon becomes *an other* and his memory can no longer touch me.”¹¹³ The break between Aragon and the Surrealists was now complete, and foreshadowed the fight over poetry as a means of Soviet propaganda or as a means of human liberation that would directly influence Cahun in the writing of her famous political pamphlet of 1934, *Les Paris sont ouverts*.

As the Aragon Affair was drawing to a close, Cahun, attentive to and worried by the worsening political and economic circumstances in France, having recently seen her greatest work either rejected or ignored, decided that now was the time to put her ideas in the service of Surrealism and the socialist revolution it hoped to promote: she tells us that she had “chosen the month of March 1932 to put myself at [their] service, . . . to participate in the experiences of this group, who had attracted me more than any other, to achieve through the intervention of a collective effort the universe that I believed I carried in me, . . . [this] illusion of an actual or virtual future.”¹¹⁴ Cahun was no stranger to the Surrealists and their publications; she had met Phillipe Soupault in the beginning of 1919 at Adrienne Monnier’s *La Maison Amis des livres*, and had been invited by him to collaborate on the first issue of *Littérature*, which she declined, alleging her natural shyness: “I excused myself, alleging my incompetence,” “my timidity The first *Manifesto*, . . . the numbers of *La Révolution surréaliste*, *Nadja*. Too late.”¹¹⁵ Her initial timidity seems not to have left her in the intervening years: recently uncovered correspondence indicates that she asked Jacques Viot, an old friend of hers from Nantes, to arrange her first meeting with Breton, “officially,” for April 15th at Cahun’s home, in which she presented him with an exemplar of *Aveux non avenues*.¹¹⁶ Breton must have read it immediately, for he wrote her only two days later, recording his impressions: “I had a look at your book, and my gaze became more quizzical and fixed with every page. . . . It seems to me that it’s fairly serious and it made me intensely agitated for some hours.” The difficulty of the work, the way it evaded the expectations of conventional autobiography, struck Breton to the quick: “All these characters burdened with first names or initials, ruined one after another in the course of these ‘confessions’ – I wonder where the devil they’re all going.” Bewildered and blindsided by a talent whom he had literally never heard of before, he asked: “Whatever have I done to warrant your attentions,

not to mention your overwhelming proposal that I become involved in your projects?”¹¹⁷ His apprehension quickly transformed into fascination, however, and the two began to develop a close intellectual collaboration, one that would see them working together in the AEAR, the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, Contre-Attaque, and the Fédération Internationale de l’Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant, a friendship that would end only in 1954, with Cahun’s death.

After this meeting with Cahun in April of 1932, Breton spent the spring and summer of that year continuing to lobby the Communists hard for admission into the AEAR, and he and the Surrealists, including particularly René Crevel, Tristan Tzara, Éluard, and Cahun herself, were finally admitted that fall, in October of 1932. Mark Polizzotti explains that the move to admit the Surrealists into the Communist fold had less to do with Breton’s political machinations and more to do with a brief “wave of liberalization” sweeping through Moscow: earlier in the year, Stalin had dissolved the RAPP, freeing up the French AEAR to take more initiative on its own and make more liberal recruiting choices.¹¹⁸ Paul Vaillant-Couturier, the president of the AEAR, reversed his earlier negative assessment of the Surrealists and admitted them into the bureau in October, naming Breton to the board of directors. Even Aragon was pleased by this development, saying to Vaillant-Couturier that, “despite everything, he would be glad to work alongside Breton in this new context.”¹¹⁹ The collaboration between the Surrealists and the AEAR was to be a stormy one, however, and between their acceptance in October 1932 and their collective demission in July 1933, one glimpses a working relationship by turns enthusiastic, critical, hostile, and finally untenable.

Cahun, looking back, remembered this moment and its emotional ambiance well: with Breton, Éluard, and Crevel by her side, “I entered the AEAR. On this invidious terrain, the least

congenial to my being, I advanced cautiously and recklessly. . . . In truth, I was precisely, on the political field, of a risible incompetence”¹²⁰ While she had been involved in cultural politics since her journalistic days writing for the republican newspapers of Nantes, working within an explicitly political and bureaucratic organization was new to her, and she found the positions of the hardline Communists too rigid, almost immediately allying herself, as did many of the Surrealists, with the Trotskyist Left Opposition. Despite being singled out for what Paul Nizan, a fellow traveler in the organization, had called her “oppositional divergences,” the extant minutes of the AEAR and her own reflections on her time spent working there draw a picture of a Cahun who is diligent and tireless in her theoretical and collaborative work. At the same time as she lent her name in March to “Protestez!,” and again in May to “Contre le fascisme mais aussi contre l’impérialisme français,” the two great collective declarations of the AEAR in 1933, she was also trying to find a place for her own bovaryc conception of writing in the realm of revolutionary politics while facing the twin pressures of being one of the lone women in the group – her partner, Malherbe, was the other – and being encouraged by Aragon and others to toe the line of Soviet orthodoxy.

The first set of minutes that we have from the AEAR, dated January 17th, 1933, shows us Cahun already struggling against the entrenched members of the organization; a handwritten note on the back of the document in Malherbe’s hand recounts the difficulties they encountered with Vaillant-Couturier, who clearly did not value their presence or their contributions. The minutes themselves give us a glimpse into the bureaucratic rigidity and personal disrespect Cahun encountered. Cahun, on her own initiative, having already begun her dramatic retheorization of the links between poetry and revolution, offers to start and head a “section of poetry” in the organization, which, as the document records rather laconically, “is not retained.” Meanwhile,

Marcel Jean, her fellow Surrealist and, it must be pointed out, a man with more cultural capital than Cahun, immediately follows her request with one to “create a Commission for theater. The idea is approved.”¹²¹ Undeterred by this rejection, Cahun “persists and signs a report on the situation of revolutionary poetry, which will be reprised and enriched in *Les Paris sont ouverts*” of the following year.¹²²

The second set of minutes, dated February 28th, 1933, shows us Cahun fighting against the Communist orthodoxy on the question of Ilya Ehrenburg’s recent contribution to the *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in the article “Jeunesse Russe,” the “Russian Youth,” published January 1st, 1933. The article took the form of a travelogue in which the author, after conducting and combing through “interviews, letters, [and] intimate journals,” had set himself the task of penetrating “the thoughts and feelings of the youth.” Traveling through the country in order to better understand the personal effects of the Revolution on the Russian youth, Ehrenburg came to the striking and heavy-handed conclusion that “the revolution has truly created new men.”¹²³ The value of this sort of obvious propaganda appearing in a supposedly literary journal that had been founded by Gide and which had come to occupy a central place in French intellectual life in the interwar period was debated hotly by the members of the AEAR: Cahun took the side that Ehrenburg’s contribution was “regrettable,” that “the affirmations” he offered “were false, incomplete, dangerous,” denoting “either ignorance or bad faith.”¹²⁴ How could a social revolution bring “new men” into being, wholesale and fully formed? Even if it could – and what kind of men might they be? – the problem for Cahun was still one, not of valorizing this new race, but of finding a means of bringing the revolution to those who were not yet “new,” to those at home, in Europe, in France. What could the poets do, here and now, to incite people to become otherwise?

The relationship between Cahun and the Communist members of the AEAR was deteriorating, not because of her provocations, but because of what the Communists saw as the basic incompatibility between the tenets of Soviet propaganda and the poetics of Surrealism. The Surrealists' remaining time in the AEAR became increasingly fraught with interpersonal tensions: as Breton wrote to Éluard in March, "I'm coming to believe more and more that we must make a loud break from these Commies and resume Surrealist activity with more intransigence than ever. This is where," he says with a note of frustration, "three months of hard work have gotten us."¹²⁵ Meanwhile, Aragon's ascendancy in the organization meant that Cahun had to contend with his increasingly myopic view of the function of poetry in social revolution.

The working rapport between Cahun and Aragon, the newly-minted factotum of Soviet aesthetics, was as hostile as that between Breton and Aragon had been during the "Aragon Affair"; indeed, she would later refer to this time as her own personal "Aragonite crisis."¹²⁶ Two personal confrontations with Aragon provoked Cahun into further rethinking the connection between writing and revolution. The first occurred on June 13th, 1933, during what would be one of Cahun's last meetings with the AEAR, and demonstrates the widening intellectual divergence between Cahun and Aragon on the place of poetry in revolutionary struggle. Cahun, who recorded this exchange on an exemplar of *Les Paris* addressed to Breton—"a souvenir of the AEAR" she writes—had been taken aback by Aragon's contentious and narrow-minded assertion that a revolutionary should only "write a thing because it is useful," not simply because it "passes through their head." If a poem doesn't lead one directly to the Revolution, or at least to an enthusiasm for Russian Communism, "it is not published." Cahun wonders aloud how one can "judge whether it will be useful or not?" What parameters can one use to analyze the personal or political utility of a poem? It will be useful, Aragon replies, if and only if it provokes enthusiasm

“for the construction of socialism.” But, Cahun counters, “how do we realize that it provokes this enthusiasm?” How can one measure the individual, emotional effects of a poem on the reader or listener? “It is very simple,” says Aragon: it attracts crowds, it draws listeners, it makes them “obliged to refuse the world.”¹²⁷ This complete reduction of poetry to the utilitarian role of propagandistic mercenary sharply repelled Cahun. Against Aragon’s argument that poetry’s prime political function was that of stirring up enthusiasm for the Soviets and attracting crowds of sympathetic proletarians, Cahun would return, in a more radical and nuanced way, to her bovaryc conception of art that she had elaborated in *Aveux non avenues* – the main social function of art, she would soon argue, was the way in which it opened up a space for the reader to become otherwise, both extending and politicizing the view of the relationship between art, subjectivity, and social change that she had been elaborating throughout the 1920s.

The by-turns hostile and dismissive attitude to Cahun’s questioning evidenced by Aragon foreshadowed the official rupture between the Surrealists and the AEAR that was to take place only two weeks after this exchange. On June 27th, Breton was summoned before the Executive Committee of the bureau and summarily kicked out for failing to retract his support for a letter published by Ferdinand Alquié in the May 15th issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* that denounced “the wind of systematic cretinism blowing from the USSR.” The Communists, embarrassed to be so publically humiliated by such a prominent Leftist intellectual, said that the gap “between Surrealism and the revolutionary masses” had grown too wide to bridge, that there was no longer a place for Breton in an organization to which he could not give himself as whole-heartedly as Aragon had done.¹²⁸ Not only Breton, but Cahun received her own “letter of demission,” and from that point on neither of them would ever work again within the official party structure.¹²⁹

In December 1933, Cahun would confront Aragon for a second time, this time in the pages of *Commune*, a Stalinist paper that Aragon had been hand-selected to edit, on the position of the revolutionary writer in relation to their own writing. Recalling the famous question of 1919 that the journal *Littérature* had posed – “why do you write?” – Aragon sought an answer to the more contemporary and politically charged question: “For whom are you writing?”¹³⁰ “*Commune*,” Aragon noted, “wants to mark the distance which separates the intellectuals of 1919 from those of 1933.”¹³¹ Explicit within Aragon’s question was a shift in emphasis from the personal, existential reasons for writing – “why do *you* write?” – to the social and political reasons for writing. Cahun opens her response by saying immediately that the question is “badly put”: professional writers can only respond in a “cynical or misleading” way because they must write, first of all, for those who can pay, “however little it may be, for books, revues, [and] newspapers.” Even “Marx and Lenin themselves were reduced to this.” The response of “unsalaried revolutionary writers,” however, could be a bit more genuine, if perhaps a bit more delusional: “With more or less illusions about their power of action or their detachment, they write, in effect, so that the revolution arrives.” Cahun here explicitly recalls the debate she had with Aragon on June 13th, he the “unsalaried revolutionary writer” who had claimed that the only place writing had in social change was to provoke enthusiasm for the construction of Socialism, to write for the coming of the Revolution. Writing poetry “for all those who know how to read,” attempting to turn them into good Communists, gave to poetry too narrow and restricted a role. This approach to poetry as propaganda, Cahun writes, “would seem insufficient to me during the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even after. At all times.” Recalling Leon Trotsky’s *The Permanent Revolution*, which she had been reading at the same time, Cahun would eventually argue that the true revolution “will be permanent or will not be viable,” that writing could not simply provoke

enthusiasm for socialism and call it quits – it has had and will have a much larger and more profound role to play in the evolution of human sensibility.¹³²

After attacking Aragon's positions, Cahun puts forward her own strikingly original answer to the question: "It is *against all those who know how to read* that one must write." Particularly in "a society which is not the classless society," this will amount to attacking the bourgeoisie, who have both "a certain leisure" to read freely and "can pay" for it.¹³³ Cahun recognizes her own class position in this equation and does not exempt herself or make excuses for it; indeed, she says, "it is so readers can derive profit from this [antagonism] that the writer thinks against their past, against her own."¹³⁴ Turning Aragon's original question on its head, Cahun argues that the revolutionary writer must write not *for* someone but *against* someone, and that person is, first of all, the writer themselves. The writer must use writing to interrogate their own ideas, their own feelings, their own attitudes to others and to revolution; only by submitting themselves to this bovaryc process can the writer hope to bring about, for the reader, a kind of "progress" fundamentally rooted in "opposition." "It is enough to say that I write," Cahun says, and, when she writes, "I want to write first of all *against myself*."¹³⁵ This form of writing is the only form, she insinuates, that can *undo* or *rearrange* the effects of the writer's social, economic, and existential positions, the only one that can make them think differently, make them become otherwise. Writing in this sense is not particular to and does not restrict itself only to the class struggle, does not intentionally try to draw crowds: for Cahun, "the choice of the person, of the collectivity to which one addresses oneself is of quite little importance." This form of writing is not propaganda in a direct way, but aims at a rearrangement of sensibility in the reader who encounters it in an *indirect* way. It "is like a remedy [or] a poison . . . carefully prepared for one near and which kills or heals a stranger on the other side of the world."¹³⁶ In attempting to too-

narrowly restrict the social purview and political effects of writing, giving it only a positive and explicitly propagandistic function, Aragon had given poetry no other ambition than increasing membership in the Party, contenting itself—and perhaps himself as well—“with this role of streetwalker” for the PCF.¹³⁷

Aragon’s response in the pages of *Commune* to her propositions was both dismissive and condescending, engaging not with her ideas but with her status as a member of the bourgeoisie: “our comrade makes a quite singular miscounting,” he sniffs, because she responds finally that “it is *against herself* that she wants to write. A proposition which is only externally different from that which we have found in the greatest number of responses. *I write for me* Claude Cahun returns to the same position that she seeks to flee, and which is that of bourgeois individualism.”¹³⁸ Instead of provoking revolutionary enthusiasm, writing for the masses of workers and giving poetic speeches to them as did Mayakovsky, Cahun, Aragon says, has allowed herself to fall victim to her own class position, not truly writing for anyone but herself, proclaiming her bourgeois narcissism under the guise of writing for the people. This was to be the entirety of his response to her ideas about the place of writing in revolutionary circumstances and what it could accomplish, what it could hope to accomplish. While Cahun’s article was an extension of her earlier theorizing in the AEAR, Aragon’s peevish and flippant response to it would provoke her into radically expanding these ideas during the rest of December, as well as January and February of the following year, before finally publishing them in May as *Les Paris sont ouverts*, a polemic explicitly aimed at Aragon that took his view of poetry as propaganda to task.

* * *

Released in May 1934 by the influential Surrealist publisher José Corti, Cahun’s *Les*

Paris sont ouverts sought to distinguish, first, the specific role of poetry in revolution and, second, the revolutionary role of poetry in everyday life, taking the form of a polemic against Aragon's "regressive" view of poetry as nothing but a means to "provoke enthusiasm for the construction of socialism." The title itself announces the duality that structures the book's form and argument, opening itself up to two different but complementary readings. It can be read as *The Parises are Open*: there are two Parises, one in which Aragon encourages the proletariat to "Fire on Leon Blum . . . and the trained bears of social-democracy," one in which poetry plays nothing but the mercenary role of propaganda, and there is the dreamlike Paris of the Surrealists, one in which poetry has the power to transfigure the real, revealing "a more real order of things . . . than the chaos our senses bear false witness to," the Paris of the "sphinx on the belvederes of the imagination" that had once intoxicated Aragon in his own *Le Paysan de Paris* and which he now tried to "disavow in vain."¹³⁹ The second potential translation of the title opens onto a challenge issuing from the tension between the two Parises: *The Bets are Open*. The reader must make a choice, place a bet, "discover how poetry plays and how to play its game."¹⁴⁰ "What part will you play," the title page asks, "in ending the exploitation of man by man?"¹⁴¹ What side will the reader choose? Will they side "with the poetry 'of class' of Aragon and 'Fire on the trained bears of social-democracy' . . . ?" Or will they side with the poetry of imagination of the Surrealists as a means to reduce "the excess of suffering in the world?"¹⁴²

The form of the pamphlet reflects this dialectical challenge to the reader: the covers of the book resemble dominoes, ideological counters in play, with a lucid quote from Breton on the front that keeps the question of poetic humor's place in revolution open matched by an imperious quote from Aragon on the back that tells the reader that "revolutionary poetry" is not made to "please you."¹⁴³ At stake in this game is poetry itself: is it meant to play, as Aragon would have it,

only the “premiere role . . . of propaganda,” submitting itself to its perpetual “prostitution to the proletariat,” exhausting them “by a sort of revolutionary masturbation?”¹⁴⁴ Or is it meant instead to play the part of “an agent of conflict, in other words of *connection*,” provoking in the reader “‘magical’ shortcuts” and “short-circuits” that allow them to see themselves otherwise and become different than they are?¹⁴⁵ Is a truly revolutionary poetry one that *acts*, not by directing the masses toward some universal ideological message, but by “leaving something to be desired” in itself and in themselves, forcing the reader to “go it alone and take one step further than they would like?”¹⁴⁶ Cahun directly addresses these questions in the work and attempts to theorize the specific role that poetry can have in bringing about social revolution; she will also, particularly in the work’s “Post-Scriptum,” think through the revolutionary work of poetry in general, not only within but also beyond politics, ultimately theorizing poetry as an active force for personal and social becoming that counters and transforms the moving ensemble of history itself.

The first part of *Les Paris sont ouverts* seeks to define the specific work of poetry in advancing the cause of proletarian revolution and the forms of action that lie open to it. She opens this part of the work by picking up where her argument with Aragon in the pages of *Commune* had left off, pantomiming his general attitude towards her “bourgeois individualism”: “revolutionary” writers like him see in all these types of poetic attempts only “vestiges of capitalist civilization” and solemnly decree “that we must guide these confused comrades towards the precise tasks of Marxist propaganda.”¹⁴⁷ But poetry, she says, is not unique to the time of Soviet revolution, has in fact “existed historically in all times,” and “seems undeniably an inherent need of human, even animal, nature.”¹⁴⁸ She claims that poetry, the ability to transfigure the world and the self in words, opening up new existential pathways for individual and collective becoming, is universal. But the Soviet realist ideologues like Aragon,

misrecognizing this fact either through ignorance or bad faith, preach a type of poetry “against which we must raise ourselves with a critically appropriate polemical activity.”¹⁴⁹ The form of propagandistic poetry that Aragon espouses has only one requirement, “the requirement of ideological conformism”; to the extent that the poem reflects the official Party line and whips up enthusiasm for Communism, it is deemed good and useful, truly “revolutionary.” But forcing poetry to conform only to the ideological needs of Soviet propaganda would lead to the very “negation” of “all poetry.”¹⁵⁰ “Revolutionary” critics who stress only “the *manifest* ideological content of poems” are also, according to Cahun, “*cheaters*,” constantly attempting to outbid one another in being more revolutionary, who “want to pass for what they are not,” who turn poetry into a game of “ideological one-upmanship.”¹⁵¹ These critics assume that a poem has propaganda value if it brings more workers into the fold of the PCF or the International, but, Cahun says, “the only concrete way to evaluate the propaganda value of a poem would be to find a measure of its action on those whom it reaches.”¹⁵² But this is impossible: even if one could measure “the degree of intensity of the emotional movements triggered by reading or hearing a text in individual and variable physiological conditions,” this measurement would yield nothing about the nature or the “possible application of the triggered emotion,” but would only describe its intensity.¹⁵³ Thus critics like Aragon, so assured in their self-appointed task of separating “good” propagandistic poetry from poetry they deem to be either “reactionary or counter-revolutionary,” have both shortchanged the enterprise of poetry in its wider sense and have assumed, clumsily, that they could predict the individual and social effects of reading or listening to a poem.¹⁵⁴ Recall Aragon’s mechanical view of poetry: it “works” when it draws crowds. Against this simultaneously smug and naïve attitude, Cahun argues that poetry can in fact have a positive propaganda value, but only if we do not presume to know how it will affect the reader or listener.

She moves then to distinguish, provisionally, “three sorts of action to which poetry may lay claim,” classed under the two broad headings of “*direct action*” and “*indirect action*.”

The two forms of direct action to which poetry can lay claim are, on the one hand, “direct action by affirmation and reiteration,” and, on the other, “direct action by misinterpretation” or “contradiction.” The first form, “by affirmation and reiteration,” describes “the great moralizing and generally rhythmic poetry,” the ones learned by heart, to which “you give a heart,” such as the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*, as well as Aragon’s “Front rouge.”¹⁵⁵ Directly propagandistic poetry of this type uses the same method of action as catechisms, prayers, proverbs, and axioms, and “one is not surprised to find repetitions, wordplay, rhymes and all the mnemotechnics” at the base of this poetic art.¹⁵⁶ This form of action is powerful precisely to the extent that it is contemporary and topical: it is capable, because of its allegiance to orthodox ideology, “of circulating in the proletariat the words of *this moment*,” capable as well of introducing clever watchwords into the language of the proletariat that tends to take the place of actual critical thought.¹⁵⁷ Cahun asks, pointedly, to what actions can this type of poetry lay claim? Either this poetry “has no ambition of determining any other action than that of membership to the Party which is itself in charge of triggering an opportune action,” or it provokes the reader into an action that is inopportune—imagine, Cahun says, if someone took Aragon’s commandment to “Fire on Leon Blum” seriously; what would that be, she asks, other than an “isolated act” and a “figure of provocation”? Or, perhaps worst of all, it triggers “no action, exhausting by a sort of revolutionary masturbation the energy of the masses”; happily repeating the watchwords of their party to themselves, caught up in their own revolutionary presumptions, they find that, “when the time comes,” their finger freezes on the trigger—exhausted, they can’t “make love.”¹⁵⁸

The second form of direct poetic action, “by misinterpretation” or “contradiction,” is cleverer than the first, relying on equivocations and conflicting meanings to achieve its aims, but it still has the same problems as the first form: it is still the condensate of an ideology that is trying to gain adherents, and it is still trying to proselytize for a specific way of thinking and acting. This second form works by provoking in the reader, “voluntarily or involuntarily,” an intellectual or emotional contradiction.¹⁵⁹ Cahun cites the famous method of Lautréamont, who described it in a letter to his publisher Verboeckhoven: “I have sung of evil . . . so as to oppress the reader, and make him desire the good as a remedy.” No matter how “evil” the content, the form is designed to provoke a contradiction in the reader and bring him around to the designs of the author, through the backdoor of sense: “in sum, it is always the good of which one sings, solely by a method more philosophical and less naïve than that of the ancient school.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, says Cahun, extending the insight, “one can enlist for morality the immoralists and utilize, for revolutionary propaganda, texts the most counter-revolutionary. We do it very often. Citations from the ‘right,’ provided that they are addressed to the ‘left,’ confirm the ‘left.’” This form of poetic action, more novel and “less poetically worn out than the first,” has its own dangers. It “gives to its victims more of an illusion of liberty” by smuggling ideological intentions under the signs of transgression or immorality.¹⁶¹ To the extent that this form of action forces the reader to adopt some predetermined form of thought or action, it is also, Cahun writes, “a method of cretinization.”¹⁶²

The third form of poetic action is *indirect*: this form of action, says Cahun, is the only one that is “solely efficacious, from the point of view of propaganda, and from the point of view of poetry.”¹⁶³ This form of indirect action does not tell the reader what to do or think, does not attempt to provoke them into coming over to one’s side through the tricks of propaganda or the

ruses of contradiction, does not necessarily have a manifest ideological content at all. The strength of this form is that it puts the powers of the *reader* into play, not the writer: “It acts by setting things in motion and letting them break down. It forces the reader to go it alone and take one step further than he would like. One has carefully blocked off all the exits, except the door of entry, and one leaves it to [the reader] to open it.” The poet utilizing this indirect form knows that they cannot guide or predict the reader’s response to a poem—they “*leave something to be desired*” in the poem so that the reader must make their own connections, take their own steps, draw their own conclusions.¹⁶⁴ The author alone signs the work, but, for it to produce any sort of personal or political effect, the collaboration “of the Other [is] indispensable.”¹⁶⁵ This, Cahun intimates, is the power of what she would later call “true poetry” as opposed to the “‘poetry’ of propaganda.” Instead of forcing the reader into becoming a Soviet apologist or paid-up “revolutionary,” this form of poetic action does not foreclose their becoming in advance, and, in fact, encourages it, without dictating its shape and trajectory.

Having dealt with the issue of poetry’s place in “the defense of the proletarian cause” and its value as propaganda, Cahun turns to the question of the revolutionary power of poetry in general, not only within but also beyond politics, in the postscript that she attached to the work after the Fascist riots that swept through Paris on February 6th, 1934.¹⁶⁶ By 1934 France was experiencing the devastating effects of the Depression full-on, with unemployment rapidly rising and many workers out on the street. While many of these economically dispossessed turned to Communism, “many more at the time looked approvingly on the order and discipline preached by the fascists.”¹⁶⁷ Social tensions reached a peak in early January when it came out that Alexandre Stavisky, a well-connected financier, had been defrauding both the government coffers and the stock market. Although he had fled Paris, police had tracked him to his hideout,

where he was found dead, an apparent suicide; this official version of the story was suspicious to people on all sides of the political spectrum, the common reading being that the police had murdered Stavisky to hide the degree of corruption within the government. As a direct result of this scandal, the then-Prime Minister, Camille Chautemps, was forced from office. On February 6th, 1934, as the Radical Socialist Édouard Daladier was being sworn into office, several politically conservative and fascist organizations, including the Action Française, the Jeunesses Patriotes, and the Croix-de-feu, stormed the Place de la Concorde, marching toward the Chamber of Deputies, “threatening to lynch the politicians inside.” Daladier’s government, fearing a fascist coup d’état, sent in the police; this provocation quickly escalated to a full-scale melee. The fascist protestors took razor blades to the police horses’ legs, while the police started firing directly into the crowd. The scene was violent and delirious. Pierre Unik came upon “a worker’s cap filled with the brains from the man’s crushed skull and brandished it before the crowd”; “by midnight, seventeen people lay dead and over two thousand more had been wounded.”¹⁶⁸ Daladier was forced to resign several days later.

The riots took violent hold of the Leftist imagination: for all the talk of socialist revolution, France had almost been overthrown by a fascist coup. As one historian notes, this impression was not just imaginary: although they failed, the fascists “constituted a serious challenge to the regime, and created a dangerously fluid situation in which a variety of ‘outcomes’ became possible.”¹⁶⁹ In this critical political circumstance, Cahun realized that her “provisional” forms of poetic action might not be enough. As she would later write, her booklet had been meant to demonstrate “the ‘revolutionary’ value of Surrealist poetry [as] opposed to the pious poetry of bad propaganda I was well-aware that the pamphlet left something to be desired, that it was missing the essential,” that it had been made “*dépassé* by current events.”¹⁷⁰

Instead of theorizing solely about the place of poetry in socialist revolution, she was now led, in the post-script she attached to *Les Paris sont ouverts*, to reflect more broadly on the inherent, revolutionary ability of poetry to change *individuals* by provoking them into rearranging their own subjective constellations that might evade the strictures of bureaucratic Communism on the one hand and the enticements of authoritarian Fascism on the other. This was not a theory of poetry within the bounds of revolutionary politics and praxis, but a theory of poetry *as a* revolutionary politics and praxis.

Threaded throughout *Les Paris sont ouverts* is a vision of poetry that exceeds the utility to which it is often submitted by poets, politically revolutionary or otherwise. Poetry in Cahun's conception is no longer a "mercenary" brought in to play a propagandistic role by other historical actors, but is an historical actor itself. Poetry is not reduced to its historicity, to its reduction to a "mechanism of class," but is opposed fundamentally to historicity. Poetry, in transfiguring the subjectivities of readers and, through them, the real, in making them become otherwise, in bearing witness to "a more real order of things," is always in a kind of fundamental conflict with history, that "moving ensemble on which it acts."¹⁷¹ Poetry neither reflects the world passively, as in a mirror, nor proselytizes for a narrowly political cause—it rearranges the sensible itself, directly intervening in the world not as an accessory but as an agent; in short, "IT ACTS." "There is no event in the world," Cahun writes, "that has the power to reduce it to mercenary indignity, . . . to a *role*," to the humiliated role of "the 'poetry' of propaganda."¹⁷²

The heading of Cahun's post-scriptum opens with a single word, "ELLE," poetry itself, announcing Cahun's intention to discuss not poetry in a particular political context, but poetry as it acts within and on human sensibility. Recalling the form of the text itself as a counter in an intellectual bid, as a bet between the Soviets and the Surrealists, between the Paris of the riots

and the Paris of the sphinx, Cahun implores the reader not to reduce poetry to a function, but instead to “discover how poetry plays and how to play its game; this is what is important to us.” The space between the two bets, between the two Parises, “remains open,” precisely because language, insofar as it is a defining feature of human thought and expression, is always playing with us; its “avatars” and its “veils” are never exhausted by any particular interpretation that attempts to pin the world down once and for all.¹⁷³ At the same time as it is an “*an agent of conflict*,” it is also an agent of “*connection*, in the rapport of man with himself, of men between themselves and, consequently, of men with nature.”¹⁷⁴ Like Aurige’s mirror, people see themselves in and through their own self-representations and poetic transfigurations; they also understand others and the world around them through this magic mirror. Unlike science, which is oriented “toward direct knowledge” of the world, and philosophy, which is oriented “toward indirect knowledge of the universe,” poetry is not a form of knowing or reflection, but a form of *making* and *transformation*, a means by which a person can become other than they are. Between these two forms of knowledge, which try, through their “delirious interpretations,” to arrest the flow of becoming of the world and of individuals, “poetry intervenes, here, and there, and everywhere, provoking in human consciousness the awareness of these short-circuits – these ‘magical’ shortcuts.”¹⁷⁵ Poetry, in revealing new ways of seeing the self, others, and the world, short-circuits normative models of knowledge and subjectivity that attempt to declare their “way of being” as “the truth for everyone,” whether those models are drawn from Russian Communism, German Fascism, or French Imperialism.¹⁷⁶ In provoking people into becoming otherwise, on their own terms, poetry also acts as a magical short-cut, as a way to, as Aurige said, “make the impossible happen,” to self-consciously cut across the shifting aggregate of one’s self in search of new subjective constellations, to effect the personal transmutation of one’s self into a

different self, alchemist and philosopher's stone united in one through the poetic act.¹⁷⁷ As she closes the pamphlet, Cahun makes it clear that only *this* form of poetry, an extension of her earlier bovaryc conception, can lead to a reduction of “the surplus of suffering in the world,” insofar as it pulls people out of themselves and toward one another, surmounting social and psychological antagonisms in “the extension and the intensity of the poetic intervention.”¹⁷⁸

Although Cahun would later come to doubt the thoroughness of her presentation in the threatening wake of the Fascist riots, her work became an immediate success. Crevel wrote to her on May 31st: “*Les Paris sont ouverts* is the subject of all our reflections. My friends love this book as I love it. And it comes at this opportune moment.”¹⁷⁹ The next day, Breton delivered a lecture in Brussels, “Qu'est-ce que le surréalisme?,” praising Cahun's work: “The irrefutable conclusions” drawn in this “striking pamphlet” had taken Aragon to task “for the lack of rigor in his present position” while demonstrating that the activity of the Surrealists could not be pursued “within the limits of any one of the existing revolutionary organizations.”¹⁸⁰ A week later, on June 7th, he wrote her directly: “I have read and reread with an incomparable agreement [your] booklet Nothing seems to me more lucid, more inexorable, more moving than this testimony. What we are defending has never been clearer, has never been set higher.”¹⁸¹ “It seems to me,” he added, “to put an end—with a bang—to this absurd debate.”¹⁸² The following year, E. L. T. Mesens and Marcel Lecomte would quote Cahun in *Documents 34*, arguing that her conclusions, in pitting poetry against historicity, could only lead to “the necessary enrichment of materialist thought.”¹⁸³ A little later, Max Ernst would reprint extracts from Cahun's report approvingly in his *Œuvres de 1919 à 1936*.¹⁸⁴ In the pages of *Minotaure*, Breton praised her publically, saying that in the recent polemics with Aragon, Cahun had “filed the conclusions that would long remain the most valid.”¹⁸⁵ Even after the war, he continued to praise the work, saying that it

more than any other could give one “a truly evocative image of that period.”¹⁸⁶ Her own opinion, especially in the wake of the Fascist riots and the increasing political turmoil that was spreading throughout the continent, was less optimistic: “This pamphlet on true poetry takes up too little space,” she wrote at the end of June on a copy of the work dedicated to Éluard. On one given to Gaston Ferdière, at the beginning of 1935, the situation had worsened to the point that she could say that “this brochure . . . seems to me overtaken by current events.”¹⁸⁷ For all her misgivings, Cahun did not abandon the theoretical or practical fight: as we shall see in the next chapter, Cahun would soon attend the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture on the side of the Surrealists before breaking definitively with the Communists, setting the stage for Cahun’s entry into *Contre-Attaque* in the fall of 1935.

Chapter 3: The Perpetual Insurrection

“The Revolution . . . will be permanent or will not be viable.”

Disillusioned with the machinations of Aragon and the Soviets as she had encountered them in the AEAR, but heartened by the overwhelmingly positive response to *Les Paris sont ouverts*, Cahun spent 1935 taking a more and more central role in the promotion and dissemination of Surrealism. Ferdière recalls Cahun and Malherbe spending the beginning of 1935 “organizing surrealist expositions at their home,” an atelier that professed Surrealism even in its furnishings, with “heteroclite objects” and costumed mannequins spread around the magnificent library that was filled with beautiful first editions of Surrealist works.¹⁸⁸ Cahun’s apartment served as an important and neutral meeting ground for the group’s diverse elements. On any given evening one might find, on one side, the increasingly Communist Tzara and Michaux, on another, Breton and Éluard, the general and lieutenant of Surrealism, with queer Crevel and the young members of the Trotskyist Group Brunet, including Jean Lagrande and Pierre Caminade, mixing between them. Like Breton, Cahun vowed to resume with ever greater intransigence the poetic activity which she had theorized in *Les Paris sont ouverts* against the “poetry” of the Soviet propagandists. Indeed, her participation in the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture in late June would lead to her complete disillusionment with official Communist politics, setting the stage for her entrance that autumn into the ranks of Contre-Attaque, which she would help found alongside Breton and Bataille.

In the early summer of 1935, the Communists announced the First International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture, a meeting of anti-fascists writers, intellectuals, and artists in Paris that would again debate the place of art in revolution, not only in promoting communism, but in attacking fascism head-on. Breton had lobbied the organizing committee, including

Aragon, Tzara, André Malraux, and Jean Cassou, for inclusion in the Congress; because of the intervention of Crevel, who had recently joined the PCF but was still sympathetic to Breton and attached especially to Cahun, the Surrealists were accepted in early June. Although they would not be on the official program, they were initially granted “one speech with no restrictions on content.”¹⁸⁹ While the Surrealists and the Communists were not officially collaborating again, the air between the two seemed to have cleared.

Upon learning of their acceptance, and on her own initiative, Cahun convened a meeting at her apartment with Tzara, Crevel, Michaux, and the Group Brunet to draft a manifesto, “La culture, dernières étapes de l’impérialisme,” that would challenge the Stalinist enterprise of the Congress.¹⁹⁰ Germany, headed by now-chancellor Hitler, had announced its rearmament in March; Stalin, fearing this threat and hoping to encircle Hitler geographically, had approached the French government to support France’s own military buildup. On May 2nd, 1935, the government, headed by Pierre Laval, signed an official pact with Stalin that encouraged mutual support between the countries in the fight against German fascism. At the same time as Stalin was encouraging this obvious prelude to international war, the PCF was arguing that Leftist writers and artists should band together under the banner of “the defense of culture,” a culture that Gide, in his opening remarks to the Congress on Friday, June 21st, claimed was the world’s “joint possession,” one that “belongs to us all, that . . . is international.”¹⁹¹ As Cahun had said about Ehrenburg’s article years earlier, these comments were “false, incomplete, [and] dangerous.” What could be the connection between the newly-minted doctrine of Soviet realism and, as Breton wrote in his “Speech to the Congress of Writers,” “the cultural heritage of centuries”? What kind of confusion would class the poetry of propaganda and the “spiritual riches” of Europe together under the generic heading of “culture”? And what truly revolutionary

use “could legitimately be made of our cultural heritage”?¹⁹² While Breton explicitly posed these questions in his speech to the Congress, they were formulated alongside of—and in intellectual collaboration with—Cahun’s manifesto.

A chance encounter between Breton and Ehrenburg on the night of Friday, June 14th, the same night that Cahun and Crevel were drafting their resolution to the Congress, would derail both the writing of Cahun’s manifesto and the tentative rapprochement between the Surrealists and the Communists. In 1934 Ehrenburg had published a book, *Vus par un écrivain d’U.R.S.S.*, that denounced the Surrealists as revolutionary poseurs, as writers who “go in for Hegel and Marx and the revolution,” but who themselves have “nothing to do with work,” who were “too busy studying pederasty and dreams,” their time “taken up with spending their inheritances or their wives’ dowries.”¹⁹³ In 1935 Ehrenburg was in town for the Congress, and, on Friday night, after dinner, Toyen saw him walking in Montparnasse and pointed him out to Breton. Breton immediately accosted him in the street: “I have a score to settle with you, sir,” he said. Ehrenburg responded: “Who are you, sir?” Breton slapped him: “I am André Breton.” Vítězslav Nezval¹⁹⁴ recorded the encounter in his diary: “Breton repeated his name several times, each time adding one of the epithets that Ehrenburg had used in his lying pamphlet against Surrealism. Each of these introductions was followed by a slap . . . Ehrenburg did not even defend himself. He stood there, protecting his face with his hands. ‘You’re going to be sorry for that!’ he blurted out.” The next day, Ehrenburg approached the organizers of the Congress and demanded that the Surrealists be barred from speaking at the conference – if they were not, the Soviets would withdraw their support from the PCF-sponsored Congress. As Pollizotti points out, “an international Communist event without the participation of the Soviets was unthinkable.” Faced with this threat, the Congress committee withdrew their support from the Surrealists.¹⁹⁵

Crevel spent the remainder of the weekend trying to reverse the committee's decision, meeting with them several times and even phoning Breton on Monday, June 17th, asking him to make some kind of "conciliatory gesture toward the Soviets."¹⁹⁶ Breton coldly refused. Later that evening, Crevel tried a final time to get the organizers to reverse their decision on the Surrealists. Ehrenburg simply said that "Breton acted like a cop."¹⁹⁷ The other organizers, including especially Tzara, were forced to choose between the Surrealists and the Soviets, quickly choosing the Russians, for fear of alienating their Communist sponsors. Crevel, whom Dalí had called "the only completely sincere communist" among the Surrealists, failing to bridge these two contradictory forces, "went home, swallowed a handful of sedatives, and turned on the gas."¹⁹⁸ On his jacket, a short note: "Please cremate me. Disgust."¹⁹⁹

Crevel's suicide struck Cahun particularly hard. Although she would attend the Congress in support of the Surrealists and especially in support of Ferdière and the social anarchists who were calling for the release of Victor Serge, the imprisoned Russian revolutionary, this moment would be defining for her, forever souring any notion of working within another political party or bureaucratic structure. Cahun openly blamed the organizers of the Congress, including Tzara, for driving Crevel to end his life, attributing "the pressures exercised on [Crevel] by the Communist Party" as the motivating factor in his suicide. Meeting Tzara in the halls of the Palais de la Mutualité, who only a week prior had been in her atelier drafting a resolution against the ideological underpinnings of the Congress, Cahun "refused, deliberately, to shake [his] outstretched hand . . . I neither would nor could, pulling mine back."²⁰⁰ Later she encountered Nizan, whom she had worked with in the AEAR, among the delegates:

Meeting Nizan alone in a corridor, I pleaded the cause of Serge. That's when he looked at me, silently, looking also at himself. I could read in his direct gaze the confidence he had in me (I had merited it): he let me glimpse the depth of anguish of his own reflections. . . . He sought to make me share the objective confidence that he kept in his party: "If you

think about the existence of Nazism, of the risk of war that it poses to the U.S.S.R., you will better understand the terrible rigor that the Party must impose on its members and the . . . heavy . . . atmosphere of this process.”²⁰¹

This explanation was not enough for Cahun: Crevel was still dead, the French were rearming, the Soviets had formed strategic alliances with the imperialist democracies, and Breton was still barred from speaking to the Congress. Nizan’s anguished gaze told Cahun everything she needed to know: under the swaggering phraseology and the “heavy atmosphere” of the Congress, the PCF and the Soviets were scared. His intervention, she would later reflect, “was not enough to make me accept the hypocritical and disastrous doctrine of ‘socialism in one country’ and even less the ‘methods’ of doctrinaires”: the Franco-Soviet pact, too, “was nothing but a *trompe-l’oeil*.”²⁰² Although her relations with Nizan remained friendly over the years, she officially parted ways with organized Communism, believing in “the doctrine of democracy against that of bureaucracy.”²⁰³ From this point on, all of Cahun’s revolutionary work was carried on outside the confines of party structures and restricted itself to the revolutionary becoming, the perpetual insurrection of *individual* sensibility. She wouldn’t have long to wait: the formation of Contre-Attaque, the “combat union of revolutionary intellectuals” created by the unlikely duo of Breton and Bataille in the fall of 1935 and in which Cahun played a central role, provided her a new kind of radical political organization in which to elaborate and extend her ideas about the place of poetry in revolution, definitively linking a “poetic of the imagination” to a “politics of the imagination” and setting the groundwork for her anti-Nazi resistance work.²⁰⁴

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1935 was a pivotal year for intellectuals on the radical Left; in their eyes, the financial and parliamentary scandals of the previous years had destroyed the credibility of the French democracy, the Laval pact had undermined faith in bureaucratic Communism, and the growing

menace of fascism had provoked the formation of the Popular Front, a purely defensive alliance against Hitler and Mussolini that was necessarily forced to temper its revolutionary aspirations in the face of looming international war. “WHAT DO YOU DO,” Bataille wrote in April, “before fascism, given the insufficiency of communism?”²⁰⁵ As the Writers’ Congress had clearly demonstrated, the strictures of Soviet bureaucracy were fundamentally opposed to the unconditional freedom of thought and action demanded by Cahun, Breton, and Bataille. Moreover, the purely tactical Franco-Soviet pact was seen as a disavowal of Trotsky’s notion of global and “permanent revolution” in favor of Stalin’s “socialism in one country”: it had demonstrated Communism’s Machiavellian side, forcing the French workers into defending the capitalist and imperialist interests that were enslaving them. “Radically opposed to the fascist aggression, unreservedly hostile to bourgeois domination, no longer able to trust in communism,” where, Bataille asked, could the revolutionary writer turn?²⁰⁶

Certainly not the Popular Front, which was seen as a defensive concession to the political exigencies of the moment. Although the Popular Front would not officially take power until May of 1936, it had begun to solidify as a cross-political alliance of Leftists against fascism as early as February 12th, 1934. Bataille reflected on this pivotal moment later that fall:

We must say of the Popular Front that it was born on the Cours de Vincennes on the day of February 12th, 1934, when for the first time the masses of workers gathered to demonstrate the strength of their opposition to fascism, . . . made greater . . . by the menace of slaughter still suspended at that moment over all of the crowd. . . . The Communist masses marched in front of the Socialist masses, and a little later merged with them through an identical cry for unity of action.²⁰⁷

This moment of radical collective effervescence was quickly overtaken, however, by professional revolutionaries and bureaucratic organizers. Utilizing this moment of collective exaltation for their own ends, they had organized what Bataille called “this moving human wall,” “this all-powerful multitude,” this “human ocean” into a strictly *defensive* organization, reuniting

in it “all the forces hostile to fascism” while disavowing its revolutionary commitments.²⁰⁸ This anti-fascist alliance was understood by radical intellectuals as an unmitigated disaster—to the extent that the Popular Front defended France against fascism, it necessarily protected France’s capitalist and imperialist elements as well. To them, “the Popular Front meant nothing more than the revolutionaries’ abandonment of the anti-capitalist offensive; the move to the defense of anti-fascism; the move to the simple defense of democracy; the abandonment, at the same time, of revolutionary defeatism.” Lenin, who formulated the notion of revolutionary defeatism, had argued that in a capitalist war, fought by imperialists who sent the workers into battle and reaped the profits of war for themselves, the proletariat should step aside and allow the imperialists to be defeated; drafting the workers into a war of this kind meant making them “fight while marching in the ranks assigned to [them] by generals and industrial magnates.”²⁰⁹ Now, in France, the Popular Front was urging just that. What was needed instead was “the transformation of the defense against fascism into an anti-capitalist offensive, of the Popular Front into the Popular Front of *combat*.”²¹⁰ Contre-Attaque would be formed in response to precisely this need.

In September, Bataille contacted Breton and arranged a meeting at the Café de la Regence to discuss the formation of an organization of radical intellectuals, one that would be “founded with a view to contributing to an abrupt development of the revolutionary offensive.”²¹¹ Agreeing on the need for such an organization, indeed to such an extent that they were able to put aside years of intellectual, artistic, and political differences, both men began soliciting their friends for membership. From the very beginning, Cahun played a leading role in the group. The inaugural manifesto of Contre-Attaque, dated October 7th, 1936, with Cahun as one of the original fifteen signatories, outlines the “positions of the union on these essential points”: it will not disavow the revolutionary fight against the capitalist and imperialist nations

but will work instead to fight them at the same time as it resists the rise of fascism and Nazism. It is not ideologically exclusionary and will include both Marxists and non-Marxists, all “those who do not accept the race to the abyss – to ruin and to war – of a capitalist society without a brain and without eyes.”²¹² Its goal is not purely theoretical or propagandistic, but concrete and immediate, aimed at provoking an insurrection in what Bataille called “the street, which opposes life, real life, to the schemes as well as to the isolation of the absurdly involuted individual,” fighting against the “poisoned atmosphere of professional congresses and committees, all of which are at the mercy of hallway maneuvers.”²¹³ It is resolutely on the side of the workers and the peasants—the *people* and not solely the proletariat—who “constitute the foundation not only of all material riches, but of all social force”: “We place ourselves in the ranks of the workers, we address ourselves to their proudest and most ambitious aspirations, those which cannot be satisfied in the framework of current society: we address ourselves to the instincts of men who bow their heads before nothing, to their moral freedom, to their violence.”²¹⁴ The movement will not restrict itself to merely nationalistic, self-serving goals, but takes as its aim the diverse “possibilities of human development” through the instantiation of a truly permanent revolution. This will not be a Communist revolution of the proletariat, guided by ideologues and charlatans, but a revolution in a wider sense, a perpetual insurrection that takes on a “profound human signification,” a “universal signification” that “will raise up men, and not through timorous concessions to their egoism, to their national conservatism.”²¹⁵ Social revolution will thus be predicated on two revolts, one social and the other personal. At the same time as Contre-Attaque would fight against the new political forms of fascism and the Popular Front, it also called for a resolutely personal insurrection, what fellow traveler Pierre Kaan would call an “interior revolt.”²¹⁶ In this sense, as Michel Surya points out, “the revolution would *also* be a moral

revolution, which must also be understood as a revolution in morals,” a change in individual sensibilities paving the way for collective social transformation.²¹⁷

Following the Marquis de Sade, Contre-Attaque aimed at a social and personal insurrection in the realm of morality and value, what Sade had called “the perpetual *immoral* subversion of the established order.” For him insurrection was “not at all a *moral* condition,” but had to be a “Republic’s permanent condition.” Those who would ensure this perpetual revolt in sensibility and morality were not called upon to be moral in the traditional, culturally codified sense, but should take up both a political position beyond good and evil and a mental position of “perpetual unrest” that would provoke the fight for “the necessary insurrection in which the republican must always keep the government of which he is a member.”²¹⁸ Just as Cahun had earlier argued that the revolutionary poet had to write against themselves, had to take up an existential position against themselves, at the same time as they sought the magical shortcuts and poetic short-circuits that would allow the reader to get out of their socially-conditioned subjectivities, Contre-Attaque, following Sade, argued for much the same approach: the militant must continually subvert the established order of things, starting first of all with themselves. The terrain of revolutionary politics was not the halls of power or the public forum or the battlefield, but the interior of subjectivity itself.

The intellectual platform of Contre-Attaque dovetailed neatly with Cahun’s prior theoretical and poetic concerns, and we find her, from the inaugural manifesto on, playing an absolutely central and organizing role in the group, trying at the same time to find a way to give the reflections she had elaborated in *Les Paris sont ouverts* immediate and practical conclusions.²¹⁹ Although it is impossible to date with precision her first encounter with Bataille, we know that Breton wrote to her on October 9th and requested the use of her apartment for one

of the first meetings of Contre-Attaque: “Bataille has exposed us to . . . a project of political intervention which he has already concretized with a certain number of his friends and which he is desirous to see us adopt. . . . We made an appointment for Sunday, the 13th of October I thought that we could maybe ask you for the hospitality of an hour or two.”²²⁰ As Cahun’s name had already appeared on the first manifesto of Contre-Attaque a week prior, and which was drafted almost exclusively by Bataille, it seems safe to assume that she had already been in contact with him, or one of his friends. Be that as it may, Cahun hosted the meeting on the 13th and attended another later that month at the Regency café, where she met Roger Caillois and gave him a copy of *Les Paris sont ouverts*, which was still drawing rave reviews. A third meeting was hosted at the apartment of Marcel Jean, although it is unclear if Cahun was present. These three meetings, taken together, were constitutive of the first public face of Contre-Attaque.²²¹

Flora Acker remembered Cahun’s magnetic presence at these meetings: “She was physically petite, blonde, with a fragile appearance, but she seemed energetic and audacious. Breton was attentive, interested and often amused by her interventions.”²²² Bataille too must have been impressed, as he asked Cahun to hold a special meeting of the political commission of Contre-Attaque at her apartment on December 13th, to discuss plans for the “commemoration” of Louis XVI the following month.²²³ After the war, Cahun recounted this meeting in some detail in her private journal:

I am still there in the rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs with Contre-Attaque, where for the anniversary of the death of Louis XVI Georges Bataille had proposed to us [a plan] to disturb the feast of the agitators of the Action Française; of assisting with their sacrosanct mass, of releasing bats in the nave, . . . while Benjamin Péret imagined sliding fleas into the angled collars of the old devotees, and me, seconding this, of putting lice in the golden or jet-black fleece of the “*fine gentlemen*” . . . but how to procure our friendly “vampires?”²²⁴

We see here glimpses of themes that would later become important to Cahun in her fight against

the Nazis: a political intervention “in the street” effected through a poetic act, provoking a witness into asking questions: on the anniversary of the death of a king who represented the very worst excesses of the Ancien Régime and who tirelessly fought, in an age of supposed Enlightenment, for the retrenchment of the aristocracy and the hereditary nobility, what, exactly, was the Action Française celebrating? And if they were celebrating this king in a context of increasing international despair and the ever-growing powerlessness of the people, who were the true vampires, who the fleas? More, the action was opaque, “suggestive, *esoteric*,” open to interpretation; the itchy “gentlemen” of the pro-fascist league would have to put the pieces together, leap from feeling to symbol, perhaps—if they stepped through the interpretive door on their own—from reflection to transformation.²²⁵ Cahun’s recounting of this meeting also shows us a powerful intellectual in her element, joking around with some of the leading lights of the interwar period. As in the AEAR, we also see Cahun as one of the only women in the group, taking an active position in the planning of its political interventions. While Bataille’s plan would not come to fruition—“this romantic project,” Cahun tells us, “resulted in nothing but a paper decorated with a calf’s head, designed by Marcel Jean”—the meeting is important to the degree that it illuminates Cahun’s involvement in the group and demonstrates, quite unlike her time in the AEAR, the personal and intellectual respect she commanded from her male comrades.²²⁶

From October 1935 to February 1936, Cahun remained active within the group, but the tense political scene and especially the attempted lynching of Leon Blum on February 13th, 1936 by pro-fascist militants led Cahun to spend more and more time away from Paris, in Nantes and Jersey. On that day Blum had been dragged from his car in broad daylight by members of the young conservative group the Camelots du Roi and activists of the Action Française with the

intention of publically lynching him: “Death to Blum!” they cried, “Blum to the stake!”²²⁷ While Blum had been rescued from the mob by a Parliamentary attaché, the event struck a chord throughout Paris: the fascists were becoming increasingly brazen, and the collective effervescence that had so fascinated Bataille was manifesting itself publically under the sign of a desperate fascism. On February 17th, Contre-Attaque joined the demonstrations supporting Blum and distributed a tract – “Camarades, les fascistes lynchent Léon Blum!” – around the Pantheon and the place de la Nation that concretized the political position of Contre-Attaque: “Defense is death! Revolutionary offensive or death!”²²⁸ This surge of fascist anti-Semitism undoubtedly rattled Cahun—her father had sent her to England during the Dreyfus Affair, and even there she had had to deal with the insults of the boarding school students—and she would spend parts of February and March of 1936 in Nantes and Jersey.²²⁹ At the same time, the specter of international war was solidifying into a grim certainty: on March 7th, Hitler ordered the remilitarization of the Rhineland, in direct violation of the Treaties of Versailles and Locarno, and another European war seemed not only possible but thoroughly inevitable.

As Cahun was traveling, interpersonal tensions within Contre-Attaque were on the rise. The publication of “Sous le feu des canons français . . . et alliés,” a tract written by Bataille in early March that claimed that the members of Contre-Attaque preferred “in *every case* and without being duped the antidiplomatic brutality of Hitler” to the “dribbling provocation of diplomats and politicians,” had driven a wedge between him and Breton, as Bataille had taken the initiative of putting Breton’s name on the declaration without consulting him.²³⁰ This provocation on Bataille’s part resulted in the Surrealists leaving Contre-Attaque later that month, on the 24th, alleging their discomfort with what they called Bataille’s “surfascist tendencies.”²³¹ Despite this “rupture,” however, Breton wrote Cahun the following day, on the 25th, asking her to

come back. Without her there, he said, “the meetings of Contre-Attaque of March have felt the pinch, with more downs than ups.”²³² Although he was suspicious about continuing a collaboration with Bataille, he implored her to reengage intellectually with the group.

Cahun agreed, arranging a reunion of Contre-Attaque at her apartment for the 9th of April, 1936, in order to discuss “the war.” In a charged political atmosphere in which the threat of war was now apparent and immediate, Cahun entreated the group to “envisage a position *particular to Contre-Attaque* so that our action can be initial and determinate,” regardless, she said, of the various intellectual and political divergences that were threatening to split the group apart.²³³ In a short set of notes detailing this meeting, Cahun reveals the extent to which her earlier theorizing in *Aveux non avenues* and *Les Paris sont ouverts* had been remolded and transformed in the light of her collaboration with Bataille and Breton. She opens the meeting by saying that the question “are you for or against the war?” is “the feather in the wind”—“any principled position on the subject of the war appears, today, untenable.”²³⁴ In a war being fought by the capitalist and imperialist nations against the forces of fascism, neither side could claim moral superiority. Taking a pacifist or patriotic approach to the war was clearly unsustainable and dangerous: men “fanaticized by pacifism,” Cahun argued, were “unsuitable for insurrectional movements” to the extent that their pacifism reflected their inability to come to grips with their own “aggressive drives,” their own ideological “entrainment” leading them to become suspicious of and ultimately to reject what Bataille had called those “direct and violent drives which . . . can contribute to the surge of power that will liberate men from the absurd swindlers who lead them.”²³⁵ Men “fanaticized by patriotism” encountered the same problem: in allying themselves with either the nation or the International, they had become the “marionettes of the imperialists,” had, in making themselves conform ideologically and existentially to the demands of the state or

the Party, denied “a part of themselves,” were thwarting their own “historical becoming.” What was necessary for true insurrection was neither blind faith in nor submission to a particular party or political form, but instead the presence and encouragement of “psychological contradictions [and] complexes,” not ideological certainties but psychological ambiguities. The true revolutionary, embracing their aggressive drives, their own inner alterity, could instantiate a “new consciousness” in man only to the extent that they encountered and transformed their own subjectivities, resolving the mental and material contradictions in which they found themselves “at the same time theoretically *and in action*.”²³⁶ The forms this revolutionary insurrection of sensibility could take would be limited, however, by the political and social forces in play: “the position of Contre-Attaque vis-à-vis the war can only depend . . . on an exhaustive political estimation of the forces in presence” at a given time. This estimation, collectively undertaken, would then dictate “the chances of success of revolutionary defeatism at a given moment,” gesturing again to the notion of revolutionary defeatism put forward by Lenin and valorized by Bataille.²³⁷ Without encouraging the growth of fascism or the machinations of the Soviet machine or the dominance of the double-speaking Popular Front, what approach could the members of Contre-Attaque take that would contribute to “the edification of socialism”?

Cahun’s notes make clear a certain division within the group between those who wanted to forestall the outbreak of the war, those who wanted to hasten it, and those who acknowledged the inevitability and undesirability of the war but were still led to utilize “to our ends *the same war*.”²³⁸ The “most ‘optimistic’ ” of the group – those like Jean Dautry and Pierre Aimery – had argued that the war would be “the sole agent of the revolution” and had welcomed the wartime mobilizations in Germany, France, and Russia, “handing themselves over to it.” Still, despite their “pessimistic optimism,” Cahun pointed out that they would “have little chance of

influencing sensibly the course of the Germany-England-France debates, . . . of rushing the outbreak of a European war.” Despite the hope on the part of Dautry and Aimery that the war would lead to global revolution through the pitiless antagonism and destruction of the capitalists, imperialists, communists, and fascists, this baseless belief concealed a deep-seated anxiety, what Cahun called “a little-communicable despair,” that testified not to their courage or personal power but to their fundamental pessimism and powerlessness. “Unfortunately,” Cahun concluded darkly, “we can count on other forces that ours to trigger the war.”²³⁹

Instead of handing themselves over to the war, or attempting to stop its coming, Cahun argued instead that the members of Contre-Attaque should adopt a political and existential position of “*aggressive pacifism*,” a form of revolutionary defeatism that was still *active*, one that honored the aggressive drives of the revolutionary but turned them into a means of creating a permanent and global insurrection, one that would play out not only on the field of battle and politics but also on the field of sensibility and value. Opposed to naïve pacifism or dangerous patriotism, the revolutionary had to “exalt defeatism,” had to “violently oppose the watchwords of an *aggressive pacifism* to these ideal crusades for the defense of colonialist democracy and the remilitarized U.S.S.R.”²⁴⁰ While the PCF had abandoned revolutionary defeatism in its propitiatory maneuvering within the Popular Front, repeatedly passing “back and forth from a boastful to a conciliatory phraseology,” Cahun saw the danger of picking a side in a war that would ultimately serve imperialist and capitalist interests and the potential in radicalizing the notion of defeatism, turning it aggressive, endowing it with all the pulsional and affective powers of the individual revolutionary.²⁴¹ It was precisely the *ambivalence* in which the members of Contre-Attaque found themselves—“in which we all find ourselves vis-à-vis the war – and also of insurrection”—that would open the door to the kind of perpetual revolution of sensibility

envisioned by Sade, Bataille, and the Surrealists. This political and moral ambivalence, this inability to align oneself wholeheartedly with any one of the various factions on the scene, this always provisional and halting estimation of the political forces in play, could pass from being “a shameful malaise” to “a potential for living forces,” provided the revolutionary was able to “make appear” or “bring out” in the event “ambivalences and *values*.”²⁴² This idea serves as the lynchpin connecting Cahun’s earlier theorizing about the role of the revolutionary poet in *Les Paris sont ouverts* to her wartime resistance work against the Nazis: just as the revolutionary poet earlier had to learn to play the game of poetry, employing it as an agent simultaneously of social conflict and interpersonal connection, they now had to multiply moral and political ambivalences about a fundamentally ambiguous war, at the same time encouraging the universally ambivalent to show out their own values, to make values appear or surge forth that would contradict or exceed those espoused by the dominant political factions hastening the outbreak of the latest European conflagration.

Cahun’s new position on the role of the revolutionary artist both extended and ramified her earlier theorizing on the interface between art, politics, and ethics. The artist was now seen as working directly on individual and social structures of sensibility themselves, reconfiguring through their work regimes of personal and political intelligibility. But, as in *Les Paris sont ouverts*, this action was indirect; the writer had to provoke the creation of values *and* ambivalences, had to intervene, not unilaterally in the transmission of a particular “revolutionary” message, but in such a way that the reader could gain control over their own existential reconfiguration, could gain the power to shift their personal ensemble of sensibility on their own. For Cahun the continual revolution in personal and social forms thus engendered “will be permanent or will not be viable.” Only by fighting for “a complete moral liberation” and a “more

general consciousness of a non-expurgated reality for the use of people and innocence” could the revolutionary artist help to bring about that permanent insurrection of sensibility that Sade had named the truly free Republic’s “permanent condition.”²⁴³ Instead of fighting as a partisan for those hoping to bring about a single and definitive revolution in the name of a particular political ideology or nation, the true revolutionary had to fight for what Cahun called the “*conquest of the freedom of mores,*” that “*most beautiful conquest of man*” in the service of the human community.²⁴⁴ This cosmopolitan strain in Cahun’s work with Contre-Attaque demonstrates the distance she had come from 1932, from putting her work at the service of Surrealism and the international proletariat to fighting for the universal freedom of existential metamorphosis. Echoing Cahun, Bataille would write that “a great many people love their country, sacrificing themselves and dying for it. A Nazi can love the Reich to the point of delirium. We are also able to love to the point of fanaticism but what we love, even though we come from France, is not at all the French community, but the human community; not at all France, but the world.”²⁴⁵

In fact, the intellectual, political, and ethical positions that Cahun outlined in this note to Contre-Attaque demonstrates that her thinking was much closer to Bataille at this time than to that of Breton or the International. While we know relatively little about their personal relationship, the concordance between Cahun’s note of April 9th and a note that Bataille had written on April 4th and presumably circulated to members of the group ahead of their reunion at Cahun’s apartment allows us to glimpse the depth of a deep and fruitful intellectual collaboration. Bataille’s note is a short “Programme” for the revolutionary artist, an eleven-point list of values and existential stances the militant must take up in the face of the looming European war. Like Cahun, Bataille argued that the revolutionary artist must “lift the curse, the feeling of culpability that strikes men, that obliges them into a war which they do not want, which dooms them to a

work whose fruit escapes them.” Instead of being condemned to fight for interests and ideologies they do not share, becoming “marionettes of the imperialists” or the capitalists or the fascists or the communists, the militants of Contre-Attaque should instead encourage people to “fight for the decomposition and exclusion of all other community than [the] universal community,” opposing in turn “national, socialist, [and] communist communities, [and] the Churches.”²⁴⁶ To do so, the revolutionary must eschew communities based on nation-states, political ideologies, or *blut und boden*, must instead “form a creative community of values” built on “creative values of cohesion.”²⁴⁷ Here the similarity between Bataille’s ideas and Cahun’s approach becomes apparent: the revolutionary must encourage community of a particular kind, a community of elective affinities based on creative and self-chosen values. The “function of destruction and decomposition” the militant embodies will thus not only be purely negative, destructive of individual and social form, but will simultaneously be a means of recomposing the social and the political, a way of rearranging the field of the sensible. This work, of endlessly decomposing and recomposing individual and collective regimes of sensibility, can only be accomplished if the militant practices “a positive asceticism and a positive individual discipline,” if they, as Cahun wrote, can “maintain themselves in the greatest receptiveness to adaptation with the stages of a revolution which will be permanent or will not be viable, which will only be that of a form soon felt, soon recognized, of oppression – or which will be made by men who tend to a complete moral liberation.”²⁴⁸ For both Bataille and Cahun, the role of the revolutionary artist was no longer simply to create “political” art, that mercenary, propagandistic art adored by Aragon that plumped for a particular cause or ideology, but to shift the sensible itself, perpetually modifying, destroying, and recreating structures of personal and social intelligibility. For both thinkers, the revolutionary artist created not just works, but subjectivities and their collective supports.

While there is a deep and fundamental agreement between the approach of Cahun and Bataille, the relationship between their ideas might best be described as one of intellectual affinity than direct influence. While the two were intellectually far closer than has been previously acknowledged, their thinking had been elaborated on parallel lines throughout the course of the 1920s and 1930s until finally converging in the prodigious singularity of *Contre-Attaque*. The positions shared by Cahun and Bataille were remarkably similar, emphasizing the productivity of political and emotional ambivalence, the struggle for a perpetual insurrection in sensibility, the desirability of an eternal metamorphosis of individual and collective forms, the injunction for a positive discipline or “asceticism” on the part of the revolutionary, and the widening of the fight from the proletariat to the broader human community, moving away from organized parties and towards the creation of headless collectives. Indeed, Bataille would go on to form the secret society of *Acéphale* in June and publish, between 1936 and 1939, a review of the same name, emphasizing as Cahun did that “secretly or not, it is necessary to become completely otherwise or else cease to be.”²⁴⁹ The bovaryc inclination to become otherwise was enshrined at the center of Cahun and Bataille’s respective political and aesthetic projects. One might reasonably see Cahun’s anarchistic and resolutely individualistic program of anti-Nazi resistance work on Jersey between 1940 and 1944 under the heading of “the soldier without a name and his comrades” as her own instantiation of a headless, acephalic community, one dedicated to rescuing from the trenches of ideology all those who had been “brainwashed” by the unilateral sensibilities and moralities of fascism, National Socialism, Communism, or capitalism, wresting them “from the domination of those who only know how to lead them on to poverty and to the slaughterhouse.”²⁵⁰ Having elaborated her own conception of the radical artist, valorizing their power to perpetually reshape the sensible, Cahun would not have long to wait to translate

her ideas into direct action, giving them a body in the fight against the carnal brutality of the Nazis.

At the same time as I have been emphasizing the points of theoretical continuity between Cahun and her various interlocutors, I would like to point out that Cahun's work in *Contre-Attaque* did not represent a deviation from her earlier theoretical writings so much as their extension, intensification, and practical translation in the face of an international political crisis. If we take Cahun at her word that "the ensemble of my activity during the occupation of Jersey represented the logical continuation of my activity as a writer, in France, at the time of the Popular Front," it is also fair to say that her radical retheorization of the place of the revolutionary artist in 1936 was the logical continuation of her activity as a writer from 1925 to 1936.²⁵¹ We see in her image of the political revolutionary the most important innovations of her previous work constellated in a new way: In Cahun's "Note on *Contre-Attaque*," we see these different refrains preserved and recomposed—the revolutionary artist must now not only create artworks that instantiate these ideas, but must work on the structure of *aesthesia* itself, must take as their point of departure—and also of attack—the sensibility of the other. Making values and ambivalences appear, multiplying them, exercising a personal discipline in the fight for "the freedom of the conquest of mores," endlessly decomposing and recomposing social and existential forms in the pursuit of a truly "permanent revolution," a perpetual insurrection of sensibility—the image of the militant that Cahun draws during her time in *Contre-Attaque* is nothing less than a transfigured self-portrait.

* * *

While we see in Cahun's address to *Contre-Attaque* her most fully formed conception of the powers and responsibilities of the revolutionary artist, the theoretical effervescence of the

group was finally overtaken by irresolvable personal tensions between Bataille and Breton that would lead an exhausted Dautry to “pronounce the dissolution of Contre-Attaque” at the Chez Dupont on the 14th of April in the presence of its remaining members.²⁵² Despite the resonances between her work and that of Bataille, Cahun resolved instead to continue her collaboration with Breton and the rest of the Surrealists throughout 1936. Later that month, ahead of the May opening of the *Exposition surréaliste d'objets* at the Galerie Charles Ratton, Breton asked Cahun to contribute a text on the “surrealist object” to a special issue of *Cahiers d'Art* devoted to the show:

You know that we are preparing for the 20th of May an exposition of (surrealist and para-surrealist) objects. On this occasion will appear an issue of the *Cahiers d'Art*. . . . One finds it paradoxical that at present none of the texts in question concern surrealist objects, strictly speaking. . . . I thought that you alone would be capable of treating such a subject in a perfect manner . . . and I do not doubt that you know better than anyone how to untap the theoretical meaning of this sort of research.²⁵³

Cahun agreed, contributing the incandescent “Prenez garde aux objets domestiques” to the review, praising the magical power of the surrealist object to defamiliarize the world of the everyday, that ambient but pervasive atmosphere of capitalist *things* that surrounds us, to open up a pathway through the artistic manipulation of everyday objects to “discover where reason stops, to seize matter and to hold onto it with the awareness of our liberation.” She called for the fabrication of these “irrational objects” by everyone, not just the overspecialized artist: “I insist on this primordial truth: one must oneself discover, manipulate, *tame*, and construct irrational objects to be able to appreciate the particular or general value of those displayed [at the Galerie Charles Ratton] And that is why,” she says, turning to face the reader, “you are beginning to dig into your pockets, and perhaps to empty them out on the table,” telling them “to construct (to destroy + *x*) with your own ideas and feelings,” using this practice to become more “ductile—good conductors of liberating forces.”²⁵⁴ Making the world otherwise by playing with its most

common or banal elements, disrupting the sensibility of the everyday, making strange, suggestive, esoteric objects, open to interpretation, advocating for “the generalization of their production in a ‘poetry made by all’”—these are familiar themes in Cahun’s universe, now translated to a theory of the surrealist object.²⁵⁵ Turning entreaty into practice, Cahun produced three small assemblages for the Ratton show, *Souris valseuse*, *Un Air de famille*, and *La Marseillaise est un chant révolutionnaire. La loi punit le contrefacteur des travaux forcés*. Following the success of this exposition, she accompanied Breton to London in June for the *London International Surrealist Exposition* at the Burlington Galleries and quietly helped him organize it, meeting there, among others, Roland Penrose, David Gascoyne, Hugh Sykes Davies, and Mesens.²⁵⁶

Alongside writing “Prenez garde aux objets domestiques,” fabricating the three assemblages for the Ratton show, and proselytizing for Surrealism in England, Cahun had also begun collaborating with Lise Deharme, the famed “lady of the glove” from Breton’s *Nadja*, on a collection of poems for children, to be written by Deharme and illustrated with photographic tableaux by Cahun. The work, initially titled *L’Heure des fleurs* and later renamed *Le Cœur de pic*, was realized in Paris and Jersey between July and September of 1936 and featured twenty photographs by Cahun depicting domestic scenes and objects rearranged and recomposed to suggest the images and themes of Deharme’s poems. Much like the public reception of *Les Paris sont ouverts*, Cahun’s photographs for the work drew immediate and wide praise, with Ferdière and Éluard counted among its admirers. In August, Éluard wrote Cahun, praising the way her photographs captured a form of the Surrealist *merveilleux* intended for children and for the childlike: “It is a great pleasure for me to involve myself in writing to you. Your photos are ideal for the poems of *L’Heure des Fleurs*. I think that this little book will be an immense success. . . . Your photos . . . are pure marvels that flatter that which still remains in us of the very

childlike.”²⁵⁷ While the book, published in 1937 by José Corti, was a minor success, it was also the last work that would appear under Cahun’s name in her lifetime.

Although Cahun remained active in the promotion of Surrealism throughout 1936 and 1937, the worsening “ideological climate, the mounting of bellicose tensions, anti-Semitism, the difficulty of recapturing the level of activity of Contre-Attaque, weakened health,” what she felt as “the ‘physical need’ . . . to leave Paris, which ‘fatigued’ her,” contributed to her and Malherbe’s decision to quit Paris and install themselves definitively on the Channel Island of Jersey.²⁵⁸ She tells us that already, by the end of 1936, “the project [had] formed itself in my spirit” of escaping the suffocating political atmosphere of Paris, and, given a choice between England and Jersey, she chose the latter, a frequent vacation spot in her childhood and one she had summered in yearly since 1916.²⁵⁹ In March 1937, Cahun and Malherbe traveled there with the intention of securing a suitable property and acquired, on July 24th, La Rocquaise, “a beautiful residence in Jersey granite, built at the end of the Middle Ages, and subsequently modified, in one of the most beautiful sites on the island” in St. Brelade’s Bay, subsequently renamed “la Ferme sans Nom” during the Nazi occupation.²⁶⁰

Splitting their time between Paris and the island throughout 1937, the two moved to Jersey permanently in May 1938. In that same month, Breton visited Trotsky in Mexico and drafted with him “Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant,” the founding manifesto of the Fédération International de l’Art Révolutionnaire Indépendant (FIARI).²⁶¹ In the draft of this manifesto, Breton calls for the complete freedom of art in the face of ideological conformity, an argument that mirrors almost exactly the conclusions drawn in Cahun’s *Les Paris sont ouverts* against “the poetry of propaganda”:

Art cannot, without degenerating, bend itself to any foreign directive and obediently fill the parameters that some believe they can assign it, for the benefit of extremely

shortsighted pragmatic goals. . . . To those who would urge us, whether for today or for tomorrow, to consent that art should submit to a discipline which we hold to be radically incompatible with its nature, we give a flat refusal.²⁶²

He concluded the pamphlet with a call to action that echoed Cahun's pronouncement to *Contre-Attaque*: "Our aims: The independence of art—for the revolution; the revolution—for the definitive liberation of art!"²⁶³ Cahun would lend her signature to the first public declaration of the FIARI in the pages of *Clé* the following January, as well as give her name to "A bas les lettres de cachet! A bas la terreur grise!" in June 1939, FIARI's call to all those "who dare to think freely" against dangerously jingoistic imperatives for the "national defense" that ran roughshod over individual liberties and consciences.²⁶⁴ Although Cahun would sign the major declarations of the FIARI out of fidelity to Breton, her involvement was cursory and lacked the intensity of her time in *Contre-Attaque*. While she appreciated the aim of the group to put itself "at the service of poetry and of history," she had already resolved to face the coming war in a resolutely singular, anarchistic way, preparing, perhaps, to "go it alone" and "take one step further than [she] would like."²⁶⁵

At the same time that Breton was bringing the FIARI into existence and conscripting his friends into its ranks, he had also been entreating Cahun to publically continue her theoretical and literary activity—to no avail. On September 21st, 1938, in a revealing letter, he wrote to her in terms of the highest praise: "You are possessed of a very extensive magical power. I find also – and will not stop repeating it to you – that you should write and publish. You know very well that I think you are one of the most curious spirits of this time (of four or five) but you hold your tongue with pleasure."²⁶⁶ Despite this encouragement, and despite her assurance that of all people Breton alone could have convinced her to publish, Cahun responded that she would only resume her public activity if she could be sure that "the true me would remain hidden."²⁶⁷

Having previously put so much energy into political organizations that succumbed to blind conformism or interpersonal strife, seeing her literary work practically ignored and her political work drowned out by the clamor of the Popular Front and the beating of the war drum, Cahun resolved to face the war alone and head on, driven by what she called a “crushing feeling of responsibility,” desperate to find a way to put her theoretical ideas into insurrectional practice.²⁶⁸ By an unexpected throw of the dice, she wouldn’t have long to wait—the Nazi invasion of Jersey in July 1940 would propel her into forming one of the most daring and inventive resistance movements in the war—“the nameless soldier and his comrades”—and give her the ultimate opportunity to see, as she would put it after, her “word made flesh.”²⁶⁹

Part II: The Nameless Soldiers and their Friends

Chapter 4: The Nameless Conspiracy

*“Freedom or death! For my adversaries as for me.”*²⁷⁰

By the beginning of the summer of 1940, the ominous political winds that Cahun had sensed blowing through the meetings of Contre-Attaque had intensified into a raging international tempest. The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and Russia on August 23rd, 1939, a treaty of non-aggression between the two regimes, had made clear the strategic cunning of the Communists and left Europe open on two fronts, while the German invasion of Poland the following week signaled the official commencement of the Second World War. France and Britain, declaring war on Germany on September 3rd, 1939, began their own, slow-moving counteroffensive, but, after eight months of fighting, were finally ensnared by German forces at the Battle of Dunkirk, fought between May 26th and June 4th, 1940. While many Allied fighters were rescued in the subsequent mass evacuation, it was all too clear that the threat of German aggression had been confronted too late, and Nazi troops marched through the gates of Paris on June 14th, 1940. Meanwhile, the newly-christened Prime Minister of England, Winston Churchill, was being pressed for a decision on the Channel Islands—while they were some of the oldest possessions of the British Empire, they were also much closer to France than to England and were of relatively little tactical value. Churchill and his war council quietly made the decision on the 15th of June to demilitarize the Channel Islands, including Jersey, and privately declared them “open islands.” All of Jersey, where Cahun had settled to escape the bellicosity of the continent, was now “an open town.”²⁷¹ With this order, a dependency under the aegis of England since medieval times had been turned over to the Nazis wholesale, without the firing of “a single shot.”²⁷²

The islanders were faced with a choice: they could ready themselves for the official

evacuation boats that were set to sail for England between the 20th and 23rd, or they could stay on Jersey and take their chances. Cahun and Malherbe, faced with this absolutely critical decision, did not hesitate: “when they were faced with the choice of evacuation . . . they deliberately decided to stay and stand their ground. This was in itself a position rather similar to Christians who believed that the Occupation was a time to put to the test their religious convictions.”²⁷³ Cahun’s own testimony corroborates the tenor of this historian’s description. Instead of fleeing Jersey for a neutral country, moving away in a panic from the fascist threat she had been fighting theoretically and politically for a decade, she realized that the decision to stay and fight had already been made, that it was ultimately “the result of an anterior ‘choice’ – the instinctive choice to quit Paris for Jersey, the deliberate choice to remain in Jersey in lieu of evacuating myself to England, in June 40, or in 39, of taking refuge in a neutral country.”²⁷⁴ As she would say after the war, if only this principled digging in of the heels had been the universal response to the German aggression, “if fascism, for all those so-called ‘anti,’ had been beaten by everyone in their place and according to their means with the same heart without compromise, with the same spirit, without a false bottom,” the Nazi terror would have been impossible.²⁷⁵ Now was the time, Cahun decided, to put her theoretical and political convictions to the test.

While the Nazis did not learn of the demilitarization of Jersey until June 30th, a week after the final evacuee boats had left for England, their invasion of the island was swift, definitive, and brutal. On the 28th of June, with reconnaissance flights over Jersey and Guernsey providing no clear information on the state of the islands’ fortifications, the Nazis dispatched the Luftwaffe to bomb the main ports, killing 44 people in an attack that was neither announced nor expected. Guernsey surrendered two days later, on June 30th, with Jersey capitulating on the 1st of July. On July 2nd, the new *Kommandant* of Jersey, Albrecht Lanz, issued the following

proclamation on the front page of *The Jersey Evening Post*:

We will respect the population in Jersey; but, should anyone attempt to cause the least trouble, serious measures will be taken. All orders given by the Military authority are to be strictly obeyed. . . . All rifles, airguns, revolvers, daggers, sporting guns, and all other weapons . . . must, together with all ammunition, be delivered at the Town Arsenal It is forbidden to listen to any Wireless Transmitting Stations, except German and German Controlled Stations.²⁷⁶

In addition to restrictions on the circulation of information, the ownership of weapons, the movement of vehicles, and the consumption of spirits, the *Kommandant* also instituted an island-wide curfew of 11 p.m. and advanced the time on Jersey by one hour to conform to Central European time. Within two weeks of the demilitarization of the Channel Islands, Jersey had been definitively occupied by the Nazis.

The reaction of the locals of Jersey to the Nazi occupation was measured and cautious, but, as Cahun would come to resent, ultimately passive: “There were no political militants of any sort in Jersey The natives . . . confined themselves to hoping for their deliverance, to waiting outside, to expressing by their docile comportment the ‘neutral’ attitude of citizens of an ‘open city.’ ”²⁷⁷ Worse, although undoubtedly to make the situation easier on themselves, many people in Jersey had decided to approach the Nazis courteously, forbearingly, treating them as so many summer tourists: “Visitors! That was the term: the same which had designated the tourists before the war. Yes, the invader was for a considerable class of the population regarded and treated as a tourist: a good client The rules of hospitality, Christianity and commerce were agreed upon for a ‘normal’ welcome – that is to say with the respect due to distinguished guests.”²⁷⁸ The situation was exacerbated by the sheer size of the invading force: one islander calculated that there were about 41,000 Jersey citizens to 20,000 German soldiers.²⁷⁹ Moreover, resistance to the Nazi invaders was hampered by at least three factors: first, the British government, in contrast to its policies for other countries, did not support resistance work on the

islands; second, Jersey's local government "discouraged resistance to the occupiers for fear of retribution"; and finally, the relative isolation of the island meant that "it was complicated to export information; . . . escape was hazardous and needed to be arranged carefully in advance."²⁸⁰ In this unique geographic and political situation, it is not surprising that the attitude of most residents was one of quiet circumspection.

Although Cahun would eventually be galvanized by the unilateral impositions of the Nazis into forming a powerful resistance movement against them, her initial reaction was one of depression and despair. In a letter to Jean Schuster written after the war, she records her near-constant feelings of suicidal ideation at this time, the nauseating emotional oscillation between rage at the Nazis and a desire to kill herself that seemed, by contrast, "agreeable if not favorable."²⁸¹ Malherbe was her saving grace, providing her with the emotional support to keep from "sinking into the despair of my powerlessness."²⁸² Bolstered by Malherbe's encouragement to not capitulate internally or emotionally to the Nazis, Cahun's feelings of despair quickly transformed into a kind of manic anger: several weeks after the invasion of Jersey, Cahun flew to the attic to search for a pair of revolvers given to her by her uncle, Marcel Schwob, inspecting them with a view to executing a bold plan: "it was necessary to ensure that they were of a good caliber, that they functioned. . . . It seemed urgent to me that we practice. Suzanne found me absurd and bedeviling – but gave in. I chose La Pointe du Frêt, the top of the big cliff to our left in the bay, . . . [posing] a carton against a rock."²⁸³ There she diligently practiced firing her revolvers, preparing for a direct—perhaps suicidal—confrontation with the Nazi forces. A little later, a meeting of Nazi officers was to take place in the military cemetery that bordered La Rocquaise, and Cahun, coming down from La Pointe, saw that "the opportunity to shoot a German, the *Kommandant* of the island, [was] practically in my scope."²⁸⁴ Perhaps for the first

time in her years of political activity, she felt directly and viscerally those “aggressive drives” that she had earlier said were key to the instantiation of the perpetual insurrection, those aggressive drives that “men fanaticized by pacifism . . . [are] ideologically entrained to repress in themselves.” With her finger on the trigger, eye on the *Kommandant*, that living symbol of all that she had been combatting ideologically and theoretically, Cahun found herself torn between “this most-violent impulse to fire the revolver” and what she had previously understood as her “pacifism” – “a contradiction of the human heart.”²⁸⁵ But she was able, for the moment, to tame what Klossowski had called that “share of affectivity in us the most refractory to an intelligible organization,” finding the superhuman discipline to resist firing Schwob’s revolver in an act that would have only been an isolated one, a useless “figure of provocation.”²⁸⁶ Taking a breath, she tells us, “I saw him – and myself – *in complete lucidity*.”²⁸⁷ Killing the officer would have been a sure death sentence for herself and almost certainly for Malherbe; it would not have ended the occupation of Jersey; it would have undoubtedly brought reprisals upon the other islanders; and, most importantly, it would have lowered Cahun to the level of the Nazis themselves, turning her into a partisan who butchered for a cause. This was simply unacceptable—“we poets,” she would later write, “do not admit the divine right of force.”²⁸⁸ Lowering the revolver, knowing that resistance against the Nazis could not ape their forms of combat, could not outbid them through the deployment of “surfascist tendencies,” as Bataille had tried to do, Cahun returned to a notion she had first described in *Les Paris sont ouverts*: “Poets,” she had said, “act in their own way on the sensibility of people. Their attacks are more devious; but their most oblique blows are sometimes fatal.” A head-on confrontation with the Nazis was certainly out of the question; what oblique strategies, what nameless weapons could she find instead to defeat them?

The beginning of an answer came to her shortly after, late one night at the end of July,

“towards the dawn, I don’t know what hour.” The idea of systematic resistance to the Nazi invaders, modeled upon her earlier formulations of revolutionary defeatism, suddenly struck her:

The idea [of a resistance movement] had come from a coincidence. An issue of the illustrated journal: *Le Crapouillot*, dated either 1932 or 1933, I do not know, but in any case consecrated to a Germany on the edge of becoming Hitlerian. I was reading it for the first time. With an understandable curiosity. The German words struck me. . . . They had been presented in the journal as the slogan of the Nazis before their seizure of power. The phrase was: “Schrecken ohne Ende oder Ende mit Schrecken!” [“Terror without End or an End to Terror!”] The topicality . . . of this dilemma was flagrant. . . . How to bring the Germans to see this truth, to read the phrase as I had read it? The words “*ohne Ende*” were inscribed in some kind of italics. . . . I picked up a paper, a pencil, I was writing: “Sieg? Nein: Krieg! *ohne Ende!*” [“Victory? No: War! *without End!*”] . . . It would be better to make do most of the time with the words *ohne Ende* – it would reach more humanely those who had found far-off permissions [for themselves]. It would reek less of propaganda and would be a faster track anywhere. . . . Later on, we would search for something more precise.”²⁸⁹

This was to be the beginning of what one historian has called “the most active political resistance by women” on the Channel Islands throughout the war.²⁹⁰ The German phrase “Schrecken ohne Ende oder Ende mit Schrecken!” – “Terror without end or an end to terror!” – would become the rallying cry for Cahun’s project of embodied resistance to the Nazi threat, “the Soldiers without names and their comrades.” How to make the German soldiers see that Hitler’s promise of 1932 to either suffer terror without end or to put an end to terror was being realized, ironically, by those very same soldiers? To see that they were perpetuating the endless cycle of “FIGHTINGFIGHTINGFIGHTING WITHOUT END . . . HORRIFIC FIGHTING WITHOUT END and TERROR and DEATH,” as she would put it in one of her premier anti-Nazi propaganda tracts?²⁹¹ To see the bombing of Jersey and Guernsey and the unilateral imposition of a singular fascist way of life not as the accomplishment, but as the definitive defeat of the great German ideals of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, of Friedrich Nietzsche, of Heinrich Heine? To make the enemies see their far-off “victory” as less certain than the endless war that might take their lives at any time? The discovery of the phrase “without end,” its potential to make the

Germans realize the abyss into which they had unknowingly plunged themselves and all of Europe, was the beginning of the nearly half-decade long resistance movement that Cahun, fighting with Malherbe in “an individual battle for two,” would undertake against the Nazi occupiers from 1940 to 1944.²⁹²

Transmuting her despair into fury, turning her suicidal self-aggression into an “aggressive pacifism” aimed at the Nazi invaders, Cahun began her first campaign of anti-fascist propaganda, engaging herself, as she would later say, in “the way of *revolutionary-defeatism*.”²⁹³ Taking up the tack of her theoretical work in *Contre-Attaque*, Cahun realized that the only way to influence the actions of the Nazi officers would be to make them doubt the validity of the present war, to force them to bring out their own ambivalences towards Hitler’s government, to “bring down to earth [their] delusions about the nature of a war in which they and their compatriots were being sacrificed by an abusive regime.”²⁹⁴ Cahun had the beginnings of a resistance project: she started to scrawl the phrase “ohne Ende” on “cartons of cigarettes, packages, pieces of wood, . . . facades and walls,” repeating it over and over in the most public and heavily trafficked parts of the island to begin to plant doubts in the occupiers’ minds.²⁹⁵ Later, she would inscribe the phrase and its cousin – “Neider mit Krieg,” “down with war” – on coins she had loaded into machines at the amusement park in St. Helier, knowing that the German soldiers would get their change—and more than they bargained for.²⁹⁶ Yet despite these small, symbolic acts of resistance, Cahun was still careful to avoid antagonizing the Nazis directly; having landed upon a grand strategy of provoking the Nazi soldiers to become good Germans again and stop fighting for Hitler, to give up this monstrous “work whose fruit [escaped] them,” she had not yet developed the suite of tactics that would come to be embodied in her “phantom,” later to be dubbed “the soldier without a name.” “At the beginning of the occupation of Jersey in 1940, the soldier without a name could

only . . . extol revolutionary defeatism. To assert the annoyances of war, even victorious, the perpetual remoteness of definitive victory, such was his refrain. In the margins of this refrain, isolated acts – acts of provocation – could be hazardous.”²⁹⁷ But how to move from a position of revolutionary defeatism to something stronger, how to control and amplify her feelings of aggressive pacifism?

Despite the clear danger of engaging directly with the Nazis, Cahun had a new idea: she decided to start a news service for the German soldiers in order to make them fully understand the scope of the wartime deprivations they were undergoing and to help disabuse them of the pretensions of the Nazi propaganda to which they had been subjected. Shortly after the war, Cahun described the genesis of this “news service” to a reporter for *The Jersey Evening Post*: “It all started in 1940 in a small way and grew as time went on. We always listened to the BBC and any other news we could get which was not tainted by [Nazi] propaganda, and it made us perfectly sick to hear the ‘news’ put out by Radio Paris, so we decided to run a news service of our own for the benefit of the German troops.”²⁹⁸ Instead of allowing the Nazi soldiers to remain lost in the fog of jingoistic propaganda, Cahun wanted to ensure that they knew what they were really fighting for. Like the residents of Jersey, the German rank and file had also been kept in the dark about recent war news, and the edict had gone forth “that such soldiers caught either listening to, or disseminating, such information would be summarily shot.”²⁹⁹ The twin projects of revolutionary defeatism and aggressive pacifism, Cahun understood, could only be realized if the German soldiers were made aware of the true course of the war, undermining their faith in the surety of a *blitzkrieg*-style victory over all of Europe. Working with Malherbe, and soon after the *Kommandant* issued a ban on the circulation of outside information, she began to distribute small tracts to the soldiers that kept them apprised of Allied victories and Nazi defeats. John

Lewis, Cahun and Malherbe's doctor on Jersey, records the story:

Suddenly, soldiers would find in their pockets a small roll of fine paper, about the size of a cigarette, on which was typewritten, in good German, a resume of the last four days' news. This, of course, was circulated with avidity from hand to hand, and the occupying troops soon came to rely upon it as the only source of absolutely reliable information about the progress of the War. . . . These little pieces of paper originated on a typewriter in [Cahun's] bedroom, where they had kept a radio ever since the beginning. . . . The set was kept in an ottoman with a hinged lid, upholstered and covered with multi-colored cushions Most of the time [Cahun] could switch on and, lying on the ottoman, listen to the news which was quiet enough not to be heard outside, or even at the other end of the room. When she was making a typewritten précis of the news, the set was sitting on a cushion beside the typewriter, ready to be whisked into the ottoman at the slightest sign of danger. . . . About twenty copies were made of each newsletter and, after they had rolled them, [they] cycled into town where they mingled with groups outside shops or other places where troops and civilians congregated. There, very skillfully and unostentatiously, they popped their little rolls into knapsacks and unsuspecting pockets.³⁰⁰

Cahun and Malherbe took great risks to distribute their alternative news service, dressing as locals when going into town, taking on the look of the occupiers when they would visit the officer's canteen, the Soldatenheim, located across the road at the newly-requisitioned St. Brelade's Bay Hotel, putting their little tracts under the ashtrays there, slipping them into the coats of the Nazi higher-ups, stashing them in unattended backpacks, and sliding them into magazines on the newsstands in town before quietly retreating to the "safety" of La Rocquaise.³⁰¹

Indeed, La Rocquaise would function throughout the war as an "ideal base" for Cahun and Malherbe's resistance activities, precisely because of—not in spite of—its proximity to several key Nazi strongholds.³⁰² On one side of the property was the local parish graveyard, converted by the Nazis into a military cemetery for their war dead; almost directly behind the house was the St. Brelade's Parish Church, a key meeting place for Nazi officers and frequented by the German rank and file for Sunday services; and directly across the street was the Soldatenheim, an ideal venue, because of its generally lax security, to spread propaganda not

only to the officers, but to the entire spectrum of German troops. The fact that it took the Gestapo almost five years to uncover the source of the anti-fascist propaganda that was progressively destroying their troops' morale is a testament to the power of hiding in plain sight. Who would have suspected that the island's most prominent resistance movement was being run out of the ancient house across the street from the officers' hall? Writing to a friend after the war, Cahun expressed the surprising logic behind her decision to use La Rocquaise as the base for her work: "Did our proximity to the cemetery on one side and the Soldatenheim on the other expose us to suspicion? In my opinion, it also served as a safeguard. Would you imagine such recklessness?"³⁰³ The brazenness of operating a resistance movement while being geographically encircled by the Nazis was energizing for Cahun. Pulled out of her despair by a chance to make an appreciable impact in the course of events on the island, finally given the opportunity to put her long-standing theoretical and political ideas into practice, opposing this "brutal irruption of *historicity*" with her own embodied poetics of resistance, she became increasingly bold with the Nazi officers she encountered.³⁰⁴ Joe Mière, an islander who befriended Cahun in prison in 1944, remembers her taking walks around La Rocquaise and shouting "we hate you!" to the soldiers she found loafing on her property.³⁰⁵ The very presence of the Nazis catalyzed Cahun into taking a stand, into *acting*, into putting her ideas to the test, a test, she would later say, that "can never be made by words or actions alone—apart from each other."³⁰⁶ She knew that now was the time "to incarnate my own revolts and to accept, at the right moment, my destiny, whatever it may be."³⁰⁷

While the "ohne Ende" campaign and the news service were the beginning of Cahun's resistance project against the Nazis, continuing throughout the rest of 1940, "it was the winter of 1941," she tells us, "in which the thing became serious, regular, systematic," as well as

diversified, moving beyond the repetition of “ohne Ende” and the clandestine delivery of wartime news into the creation of “photomontages, posters, bulletins, manifestoes, [and] installations,” turning her scattered acts of defiance into a cohesive and structured anti-Nazi offensive.³⁰⁸ Instead of constantly reminding the German soldiers of the depressing monotony and endlessness of the war, instead of simply providing them with their only source of reliable information about the progress of the war in the hopes of dispiriting them, Cahun and Malherbe began to actively produce counter-propaganda tracts that threw the entire wartime enterprise of the Nazis into doubt. While she had previously excoriated the one-dimensional ideological and emotional stakes of “the pious poetry of bad propaganda,” there remained in this precarious situation to “pose the question of ‘good’ propaganda.” She reflected that “in *Les Paris*, I had vaguely touched on the subject. I was far from having been as thorough as I should have. I was well-aware that the pamphlet left something to be desired, that it was missing the essential.” Pointing out that the war was slow and potentially ruinous was not enough to convince “the (German) soldiers to turn against their (Nazi) officers”; what was needed instead was a form of “good” propaganda that could “touch more humanely those who had found far-off permissions” for their hawkish behavior.³⁰⁹ Maintaining the public appearance of the phrase “ohne Ende,” keeping the underground news service alive, Cahun began to diversify her methods of affective insurrection, producing scores of anti-fascist tracts on her Underwood typewriter, varying the presentation, message, and color of each to more specifically target her chosen audiences:

My Underwood was excellent: subtle and precise. It is not like the unruly Royal. The Underwood allowed for ten to twelve legible carbon copies in one single go. . . . Its precision allowed for excellent decorative designs and a careful presentation of the texts. . . . Knowing that I could not give the police the impression of several typewriters, I made an effort to vary the way of tapping the keys and the presentation to give the impression of several typists. My phantom was an organized group, not an isolated individual.³¹⁰

Cahun and Malherbe varied the paper stock and color for various segments of the Nazi war machine: on pink paper, “dialogues between soldiers”; on light blue, propaganda destined for fighter pilots; on dark blue, messages for the marines; on green, “news and commentaries” aimed at the Wehrmacht; on white, “serious texts,” as well as poems; on vermillion, tracts for the civil and military engineering arm of the invading force, the Organization Todt; and on brown, communiqués for the military prison.³¹¹

They distributed their tracts widely and in the most ingenious ways, inserting them into magazines in town, slipping them into discarded cigarette packs along heavily-trafficked paths, stuffing them into champagne bottles they then sent sailing down the coast line, hooking them onto freshly-installed barbed wire surrounding key Nazi fortifications, tacking them up in militarily requisitioned homes and churches, and sliding them through the cracked windows of the Nazi officers’ parked cars.³¹² The volume of their work was tremendous: when they were finally captured in 1944, the Nazi prosecutors produced a dossier with all the propaganda that they had been able to find. “This dossier,” Cahun tells us, “contained only around 350 notes, which represented only one-seventh (at the lowest estimate) of those that we had distributed. . . . (Four years . . . it’s a long time!)”³¹³ Having resolved to stay their ground and fight, with escape neither possible nor desirable, the two *résistantes* were on the cusp of giving birth to an island-wide “pacifist, antimilitarist, antinazi” movement, “the Soldier without a name,” to become shortly thereafter “the Soldier without a name and his comrades.”³¹⁴

* * *

Throughout 1941 and into the beginning of 1942 one can chart a gradual evolution and intensification in Cahun and Malherbe’s approach to their project of active resistance against the fascist invaders, culminating in the creation of an entire underground movement—“the Soldier

without a name and his comrades”—which marked “the most active political resistance” and “the only long-term political opposition to Nazism by women in the islands.”³¹⁵ The language of their tracts at this time is strident and forceful, inciting the common soldiery to join them. One tract in particular links Cahun’s original “ohne Ende” project to this new instantiation of it, daring the soldiers to go “without” their commanders and the emotional and physical impositions that have been unilaterally forced upon them:

Comrades of the Navy! Soldiers and workers! / Spread our newspaper in the harbor! / Spread it in France / spread it in Belgium / spread it in Holland / spread it in Denmark / spread it in Norway / spread it in GERMANY! / Take them with you on holiday! / Read it every week: / “WITHOUT” the Kriegsmarine / “WITHOUT” the Luftwaffe / “WITHOUT” the Wehrmacht / The week of the “WITHOUT” / Corral the “WITHOUT.”³¹⁶

Emphasizing the “without,” calling on the soldiers to go without their leadership, their army, their navy, their air force, daring them to desert, if even for a week, to corral this “without” and take it on as their own personal project, to spread it among themselves, among others, among the public, internationally: the seeds for “the soldier without a name” were sown. What was needed, Cahun realized, was a kind of conspiracy of the “without,” the creation of a leaderless, headless resistance whose governing ideals and operational structure could pass from soldier to soldier like a virus, each one recreating and becoming the resistance movement itself as they became disillusioned with the machinations of the Nazis and openly or clandestinely defied it. All they had to do to join the resistance was see themselves as and sign their works with “the soldier without a name.”

The choice of the name for this movement was of paramount concern for Cahun, establishing as it would, in true Surrealist fashion, “a privileged imaginary and projective pole around which their operations [would] gravitate, between dream and reality,” and she and Malherbe spent a year and a half deliberating between themselves before agreeing on one,

establishing a continuity between their early resistance work in 1940 and 1941 and their latest efforts:³¹⁷

Starting at the end of 41 or the beginning of 42, we had a signature. I had searched for it for a long time. It was: “der Soldat ohne Namen” which became in 43: “der Soldat ohne Namen und Seine Kameraden.” Suzanne had many objections. First “Namenlos” [“Nameless”] would have been the more correct German. Then she found it enormously more dangerous to put the Gestapo on the trail of a conspiracy than of a diffuse activity. I wanted to link the word “ohne” to my very first formula – in case it had left some impression. As for the invention of a one-way conspiracy, it was for me exactly the essential, fundamental to any hope of a real influence. I wanted not only to give to this soldier without a name that beginning I had identified with myself, . . . a fictive existence, I wanted to provide him with a reality, create him – and then remove myself, give him a hand. He was better qualified than me to know what he had to say.³¹⁸

The language Cahun uses in describing the creation of her phantom soldier might remind the reader of Aurige from *Aveux non avenues*, Cahun’s bovaryc double who recreated herself in front of her mirror each day, exercising the “will to change, to remake oneself,” as she produced a self-conscious illusion that took on for her and her readers a life-sustaining force, the crucial difference being that Cahun now found herself seated in front of the “mirrors of *reality*, . . . [those] decisive echelons.”³¹⁹ The illusionary double of “the soldier without a name,” this poetic transfiguration of Cahun’s ideals into a new image of subjectivity for the Nazi soldiers, this anarchic model of resistance that “spreads *itself* to some others,” given a hand, captured in writing, provided the Germans the same possibilities that Aurige’s radical self-acceptance and “grace” had granted to her readers. To the extent that the soldiers could put into play their own inner alterity while remaining open to the alterity of others, they could follow new subjective transversals, novel affective paths that would lead them away from the pernicious emotional and ideological strictures of Nazism and help them to regain the power to shape their own subjectivities. Indeed, as one scholar has perceptively noted, the atrocities committed by the Nazis were “only possible because of a failure to imagine oneself in the place of the other, to be

able to *identify*. . . . The ability to imagine oneself another, to put oneself in the place of the other, of the ‘enemy,’ was precisely what the German leaders did not have or had suppressed within themselves.”³²⁰ The only way to fight a deranged or dangerous structuration of individual emotion and imagination, Cahun realized, was to take the battle there. As she had written in *Les Paris sont ouverts*, the “secret” of poetry lies in the way it can cut through and short-circuit the defenses of its readers, slipping through the backdoor of their sensibility and engaging them directly on the terrain of their own subjectivity, executing in these maneuvers a kind of “psychological and semiotic sabotage.”³²¹ Poetry’s most indirect, magical paths, its most illogical, emotional short-cuts, its most oblique blows, she had written, were oftentimes its most fatal. Pitting the poetry of metamorphosis against the brutality of historicity, Cahun armed herself with these “weapons of writing in a surrealist circumstance, . . . fighting for the Germans against Nazi Germany in a little village one-hundred percent occupied, . . . fighting without literature: all papers, all poems, all pictures to be destroyed, as soon as they are soon, as soon as they are read.” She tells us that she fought not only for the Germans against Nazi Germany but for the entire “rainbow of values, . . . ranging from ultra-romantic black to iron-red to white,” making submerged values reappear and surge forth, breaking through the Nazis’ interior defenses, attempting always to provoke the perpetual insurrection of sensibility that she had championed in her time with *Contre-Attaque*.³²² The soldier without a name was thus a remarkable reconceptualization of what a resistance movement could be, one that required no leaders, no orders, and no discernable ideology or aim beyond “the overthrow of the Nazi regime and capitulation without combat,” one that worked obliquely, aiming the stiletto of poetry at the hearts and sensibilities of the invading force, one, furthermore, that drew extensively on and united in one stunning configuration all of Cahun’s previous theoretical, political, and aesthetic

concerns.³²³

What I would like to emphasize above all in this chapter is that Cahun succeeded not only in leading “for four years a militant surrealist activity as we had wanted to have during Contre-Attaque,” as she later wrote Breton, but also in weaving together in her singular resistance movement the most productive themes, methods, and perspectives from her writings of the previous two decades.³²⁴ Before turning to the propaganda tracts signed by Cahun’s “soldier without a name,” which will give the reader a clearer picture as to how she deployed her surrealist ordnance on the battlefields of Jersey, I would like to point out the ways in which Cahun *weaponized* her political and theoretical work from 1925 to 1940, making it emphatically practical, embracing an embodied poetics of resistance that completely effaced the split between art and life that had so enchanted and haunted the avant-garde. The aim of the movement was clear, calling on “the German soldiers to overthrow the Nazi and militarist regime” by sowing dissension from within, inciting them to mutiny, provoking them into practicing their own forms of revolutionary defeatism in a war from which they would not benefit.³²⁵ While this goal was circumstantial, made necessary by brute historicity, the strategy, tactics, and organization of the movement had been forecast and prepared in Cahun’s political writings.

The grand strategy of the soldier without a name was to reactive in the Nazi officers and soldiers their latent power of human metamorphosis, their *bovarysme*, that power of the imagination that grants one the ability to imagine oneself otherwise, turning the awareness and exercise of this power within the German soldiers into a revolutionary weapon. The emotional and physical pressures of the Nazi war machine had homogenized the feelings and imaginations of the German soldiers, hardening their subjectivities in the crucible of an inflexible ideology and sensibility. If the propaganda of the nameless soldier was insidious enough, emotional

enough, oblique enough, perhaps the Germans could be called to reflect upon their own structurations of affect, tease out their own ambivalences to the endless war in which they were being sacrificed pell-mell, and push back against the Nazi hierarchy, psychologically and physically. Later, writing to Ferdière, Cahun would make the conceptual link between her resistance project and her earlier preoccupation with the power of becoming otherwise. The nameless soldier, she tells him, is a spiritual descendant of Aurige from Cahun's masterwork: "If you had long ago leafed through *Aveux non avenues*, you would have noted there my tendencies to 'bovarysme.'" Early in the campaign of the nameless soldier, she continues, she had "naturally dreamed with a bovaryc interest of passing as a soldier without a name on the continent." Stepping inside her creation, inhabiting it existentially, Cahun, her project including "in its insatiable ambition its dissemination beyond the island," made tentative plans to leave Jersey and pass through France and England, spreading "my idea . . . with the ways which I had supposed would be at my disposal down there." But the idea of leaving Jersey to engage the enemy on the continent seemed "insane": "I could not overestimate myself to the point of believing in the realization of this dream. . . . Holding on here seemed to me the only valid thing."³²⁶ Instead of becoming the nameless soldier on the continent, Cahun resolved instead to spread the nameless conspiracy on Jersey, fomenting internal revolution in the Nazi camp by seducing the soldiers into practicing their own forms of bovarysme, seeing themselves transfigured in her spectral soldier's magic mirror.

Cahun drew the tactics that would help realize this grand strategy directly from her work in *Les Paris sont ouverts* and *Contre-Attaque*: the only way to get around the psychological guard tower of the common soldier was to make the propaganda aimed at him *indirect*, not telling him what to believe but suggesting to him new ways to feel, think, and react to the

unilateral demands of the Nazi regime. The most effective propaganda, as she had earlier written, “acts by setting things in motion and letting them break down. It forces the reader to go it alone and take one step further than he would like. One has carefully blocked off all the exits, except the door of entry, and one leaves it to [the reader] to open it.” This form of poetic resistance forces the reader to think for themselves, to reflect upon their own values and ambivalences and, crucially, their own psychological and emotional resistances. To the extent that this form of poetry could reactivate the latent aggressive drives of the soldiers and make them bring forth or bring back their own values, it also provided them with a defensive weapon against the kinds of mental entrainments demanded of them by their Nazi handlers. As in her theorizing in *Contre-Attaque*, Cahun realized that this form of personal, internal revolt in value, feeling, and imagination could lay the groundwork for a wider, more social form of insurrection, leading from the individual exercise of aggressive pacifism to a collective movement of anti-fascist resistance.

The organization of this resistance could not ape the militarist forms it was trying to combat, would have to be more elusive, more phantasmatic, more mental conspiracy than battle formation. Echoing Bataille’s thoughts on the headless community of *Acéphale*, that “sacred conspiracy” which had found it “necessary to become completely otherwise or else cease to be,” believing in “the ability and potential of a leaderless fraternity to effect radical political change,” Cahun’s resistance movement resembled more a secret society bound together by a common core of pacifist, anti-militarist, and anti-Nazi values than a revolutionary cell.³²⁷ The soldier without a name and his comrades would practice their resistances in secret, fighting not for a particular political formation but for the wider human community, not for a particular revolution in the power-holders of the state but for a perpetual insurrection in the sensibilities of all. “Our

revolution,” Cahun wrote shortly after the birth of the nameless soldier, “should be made by all, not by one.”³²⁸ Only by encouraging these forms of psychological combat could Cahun protect the viability of what she had been seeking during her time with Bataille in *Contre-Attaque*—“a revolution which will be permanent or will not be viable, which will only be that of a form soon felt, soon recognized, of oppression – or which will be made by men who tend to a complete moral liberation.” The nameless soldier, this bovaryc phantom, this performative illusion halfway between fantasy and reality that “aims at and disrupts the present . . . as it [proliferates] in the subsequent performances of others,” is thus Cahun’s greatest literary and political achievement, fusing together—while blurring the lines between—the political, the ethical, and the aesthetic in what is undoubtedly the world’s first Surrealist resistance movement.³²⁹

While Cahun crafted the nameless soldier out of the literary and political elements of her previous work, she also intended him to be the more humane twin of that other phantom, the Unknown Soldier. The Unknown Soldier had found it sweet and fitting to die for his fatherland, taking the lives of others and giving up his own in the name of his nation, and had been immortalized as a state-sponsored myth throughout Europe after the cataclysm of the Great War. The myth of the grandeur of sacrificing one’s life for one’s nation, and one’s nation alone, struck Cahun as utterly pernicious; a new myth had to be created that glorified not self-sacrifice but peace, not militaristic aggression but aggressive pacifism. The soldier without a name was hostile to a state willing to use him as a cat’s paw of capitalism and imperialism, ambivalent about the chances of long-term victory, absolutely certain about the deprivations of the wartime day-to-day, and lucid about his place in the vast networks of economic and political power that rendered him as helpless as the other soldiers, officers, and civilians. Instead of solemnly and mechanically following the orders he was given, the nameless soldier was “irreverent, refusing to lay down his

life in the name of a dubious patriotism, debunking the rhetoric that [justified] the war and exposing it as futile and exploitative.”³³⁰ While the Unknown Soldier had fought with death-dealing weapons, the nameless soldier fought with emotional, literary, Surrealist ones, “stirring up trouble and derision in the evil brew of military values, destabilizing the hierarchy, undermining the relations of force, demoralizing the adversary, rendering him psychologically vulnerable, pushing him to desertion, if only interiorly.”³³¹ The goal of the soldier without a name was not to conquer the enemy physically but to knock him off balance emotionally, boxing him into a psychological corner from which he would have to escape by rebelling against the mental conditions imposed upon him by his Nazi superiors or to which he would have to capitulate by further suppressing his own feelings and values. The choice was left up to the soldiers: would they be lured to destruction by the siren call of the Unknown Soldier, singing “*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*,” or would they be steered off this reckless course by the nameless soldier who, underneath this suffocating refrain, kept whispering: “you have all been brainwashed”?³³² As we shall see, Cahun’s nameless weapons were devastatingly effective in achieving this aim; the next chapter gives a thorough account of Cahun and Malherbe’s surviving anti-Nazi propaganda tracts and installations.

Chapter 5: The Nameless Weapons

*“These secret, contagious words – ours – [must] put the refusal
in the mouths of the sheep, push back the butchers.”³³³*

While the surviving tracts signed by the soldier without a name represent only the smallest fraction of those that Cahun and Malherbe produced—Cahun put the number, at the low end, at 2,450—all of them bear witness to a rigidly non-violent, anarchist ethos, one that would make the German soldiers realize the true stakes of the war games they were playing and call them back to the “true grandeur of Germany, . . . the great Germany of Goethe that Hitler’s National-Socialist Greater Germany would like to sully in vain.”³³⁴ Fighting the Nazis head-to-head was out of the question for Cahun; even fighting the Nazis “with the means that we were able to employ,” she later wrote, “constituted to my mind, in many respects, an intolerable regression.”³³⁵ Having to fight in this kind of a war at all constituted a betrayal of “the promises that we have made ourselves from revolution to revolution, from civilization to civilization and from generation to generation.”³³⁶ Only propaganda that encouraged the soldiers to engage in their own forms of aggressive pacifism and opened them up to their own revolutionary becoming could adequately fulfill those promises. When, at her trial, Cahun was told by the Nazi prosecutor that her tracts had incited the soldiers to mutiny, she countered that her texts were resolutely “*pacifist*. Incitement to desertion, certainly! With violence if needed, but a minimum of violence.”³³⁷ Using violent means to achieve a peaceful end would have contradicted everything Cahun had thought, said, and written to that point: what was needed against the Nazi war machine was a new kind of weapon, one that acted not on bodies but on sensibilities, one that worked by stealth, that corralled within itself all the powers of the without, of contradiction, of ambivalence, of uncertainty, that marshalled the affective reserves of the German soldiers and

made them want to think and feel differently, to become otherwise. Cahun called this “the weapon without a name”: in tract after tract from 1942 to 1944, she pits “the nameless weapons,” “die Waffen ohne Namen,” against the arms of the Nazis.³³⁸ One of the earliest tracts that we have, and one with the most variations, indicating that it was an often-used template adapted to suit the changing political and military climate on the island, repeats this refrain: against the weapons of the Nazis, “the 00 Weapons”; against the armed SS, “Thew0000000000000.”³³⁹ The nameless weapon is one that works “without” a manifest ideology, without material destruction, without needing to heap innocent bodies on the pyre of a war fought by states with imperialist ambitions, whose limits, represented here typographically, trail off to infinity, to ambiguity, to uncertainty, to nothingness. The partisans of the perpetual revolution which, as Cahun repeated over and over in her tracts, would be made by all, not by one, must “organize [these] nameless weapons” and deploy them collectively, “all together,” in the name of that emergent “*Universalvolk*” that would give the lie to the Nazi policies of *Lebensraum*, *Blut und Boden*, and *Herrenvolk*.³⁴⁰ Against all of the mechanical, psychological, and emotional weapons of the Nazis, then, the nameless weapons, weapons of writing, Surrealist weapons, weapons that incited the soldiers to insubordination and defiance, that appealed to their sense of the absurd, the marvelous, the playful, the nostalgic.³⁴¹ The nameless weapon would not break open bodies but open up minds, encircling the sensibilities of its victims instead of attacking them directly, provoking them into activating their latent powers of existential metamorphosis by calling on them to recognize and act upon the inner and outer alterity that surrounded them.

The surviving tracts and their variants written by Cahun and Malherbe during the campaign of the nameless soldier repeat five fundamental themes or approaches to their project of anti-fascist resistance. First, the tracts work to actively demystify key tenets of Nazi ideology,

throwing their rhetoric of superiority and domination into ironic relief, inverting or satirizing their slogans and watchwords. Second, and relatedly, the pamphlets consistently attack the Nazi leadership, most of all Hitler, who in one tract is portrayed as a death-headed siren luring the Germans to their doom. The old lies and new myths of the Nazi leadership had blinded the Germans to their true intellectual and artistic heritage; the third function of the tracts was thus to reframe for the common soldier the great German past, deploying the *ultraromantiques* writings of Nietzsche, Heine, and Goethe against the vacuous pseudo-philosophies of Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels. Fourth, the tracts provided practical advice to the soldiers on how to go about resisting the Nazi war effort without getting caught, how to build internal defenses against their insidious mental and emotional deformations on the one hand and how to literally sabotage the workings of the occupying force on the other. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the tracts signed by the nameless soldier spoke from the perspective of the Germans themselves, aping their martial language, their psychological tics, appealing always to their shared but hidden emotional vulnerabilities, those occult fears and anxieties that pervaded the military body and could be turned into a powerful spring of action if they could be made manifest, provoking the soldiers into transmuting their inner aggression into outer resistance. It was precisely by taking the side of the soldiers by being *against* them that the nameless weapons would best hit their mark. As Cahun had written in the pages of *Commune* long before, truly revolutionary poetry must be written “*against all those who know how to read.*” The *against* here, understood in its two senses of being *alongside* and *contra*, takes us to the heart of Cahun’s resistance project: she fought on the side of the German soldiers against their Nazi entrainments. To the extent that she felt a kinship with the German soldiers, she felt compelled to break them of the existential dressage they had been submitted to by the Nazi party and lead them back towards themselves,

goaded them into finding new physical, emotional, and existential lines of flight that would lead them away from what were, in effect, their swastika-gilded cages. Cahun, understanding that the soldiers had had to take “their only chance of survival,” that “they are prisoners, like you,” knew that saving them meant fighting them, that fighting them meant saving them, and that maybe, if they could be induced to desert, to fight back against their superiors, the people of Jersey would have the chance to save themselves.³⁴² “Such,” she later wrote, “was my ambitious project.”³⁴³

A number of the tracts seek to undermine the ideological suppositions and watchwords of the Nazi regime, putting the soldiers’ foundational ideals into doubt. One tract figures Goebbels as a kind of social and political conductor, forcing each segment of the German population to repeat in doublespeak the phrase “STRENGTH THROUGH JOY.”³⁴⁴ Goebbels had created the “Strength through Joy” organization to increase German productivity and battle readiness by providing the populace with state-sponsored leisure activities; but what joy, Cahun asked, was there to be found in the unilateral domination of the globe, in the singular imposition of a way of being that persistently sought to round off what the Nazis saw as the rough edges of the human population? Would these “members of the master race” have to “do all the dirty work in preserving the arrogance that suits the master”? If they succeeded in exercising their delirious strength through a kind of blind, hubristic joy, who then would “work in war factories, fight in armies, [and] annihilate all opponents” in order to “remain the masters of . . . what?”³⁴⁵ Goebbels’s gospel of “strength through joy” was really the gospel of “STRENGTH through DESPAIR.” “Now let us say,” Cahun makes him pantomime, raising the emotional pitch, “strength through. . . despair. STRENGTH through DESPAIR. STRENGTH THROUGH DESPAIR.” But this lethal formula could not sustain a war effort, much less a people. Much like her real-life efforts to remind the German soldiers of the useless and endless war in which they

had found themselves, “the soldier without a name scribbled on the walls,” in defiance of Goebbels’s dangerous formula, “make it stop! Make it stop make it stop!”³⁴⁶ The Germans had been turned into “the marionettes of the imperialists” through such rhetoric—only an appeal to their desire to escape this toxic mental environment could make them find joy in their own psychological strength, could make them reject their submission to such an emotionally malignant view of their place in the state’s machinations.

In another tract, she raises the “Alarm! Alarm!! ALARM!!!” for those German soldiers who, blinded by the efforts of the Nazi propagandists, might be unaware of the real state of their country’s war effort. In the dialogue, one soldier asks another why this alarm is being raised. The nameless one responds that “our masters the officers, out of fear of being caught here as at Stalingrad, as in Tunis, expect you to protect them in their air escape with your corpse.” The average soldier, dazzled by the myths of the state that encouraged heroic self-sacrifice for the glory of the Reich, might never have considered the possibility that his use in the eyes of his superiors was as a sandbag or bullet-proof vest against the Allied onslaught, that he was most valuable as a moving shield against the hail of bullets that were intended for his officers. While the officers had kept the common soldiers in the dark about the progress of the war—remember that “soldiers caught either listening to, or disseminating, such information would be summarily shot”—the soldier without a name raised yet another “ALARM!!!” Why? “Because the British, the Americans, the Canadians will be landing at Dunkirk, at Cherbourg, at St. Nazaire, while the uber-powerful Kriegsmarine. . .” of the Nazis sat there, immobilized, unable to handle the rapid influx of Allied ships into the Atlantic theater. Sequestered on a far-flung protectorate of the English empire, moreover one that had been declared in advance an “open island,” what were the chances of the average German soldier surviving a surprise attack by the gunboats and

battleships of the Allied fleet?

Alongside sowing these profound doubts in the minds of the soldiers regarding the validity and power of the Nazi war effort, the soldier without a name spoke as well to the personal, individual effects of being a Nazi conscript. “You bear privations WITHOUT END,” he insinuated, endless “privations. . . [and] for what? So that you have no time to THINK!” Perhaps, the nameless soldier suggested, there was a tactical use in keeping the average soldier in the dark about the real progress of the war and overly optimistic about the chances of success of the regime in whose name he was fighting. Perhaps these calculated mental, emotional, and physical privations were a way to keep the soldiers from thinking too hard about the war, about the ideologies underpinning it and the political and material interests guiding it, and, most of all, about their actual place in the networks of power and influence that were shaping its course. At the end of this tract, Cahun conjures up the ghost of the Unknown Soldier: “they would like to cheat you,” he tells the German soldiers, “as they had cheated us in 1914-1918.”³⁴⁷ The Unknown Soldier—sanctimoniously laid to rest underneath the Arc de Triomphe, honored on Armistice Day, and consecrated as an eternal hero by the governors of the state—had come back to tell the German soldiers to desert, to lay down their arms, to think carefully about the real stakes of putting their lives on the line for a regime that would sacrifice them unhesitatingly, easily, without a glance back from the safety of their fugitive planes. The sudden reappearance of this phantom, marvelous and uncanny, appealed both to Cahun’s Surrealist sensibilities and the soldier’s sense of humor and irony, if not awe and wonder, détourning the presumptions and passwords of the Nazi ideologues through this ghostly reminder of Germany’s fraught military past.

The nameless soldiers raise another kind of klaxon in a later pamphlet, “The Americans

are coming!” The sudden appearance of the Americans onto the European scene in 1942, following the Allied policy of “Europe first” which focused on defeating Hitler as rapidly as possible before concentrating resources on the Pacific theater, had put the surety of a swift and definitive Nazi victory on the Continent into doubt. Moreover, the nameless soldier said, the Americans would defeat the Nazis not only militarily but ideologically, crushing their weapons and bodies along with the entire imaginary of the Third Reich. The nameless soldier quotes a speech of Abraham Lincoln: “Every human being, whatever their language, their lineage, their class, has the equal and unassailable right to pursue unhindered their happiness and their freedom of thought and conscience.”³⁴⁸ Instead of relying on the notion of a *Volk* bound by blood and territory, Lincoln opened up the possibility of a nation predicated first of all on the freedom of *value* and *conscience*, two themes that had been an important part of Cahun’s political work from the beginning. What appealed to the imagination of a truly free people was not the ideal of racial, ethnic, or linguistic purity but the unhindered pursuit of happiness and the freedom to exercise and create one’s own values and feelings, fighting, as Cahun wrote from her cell in Nazi prison, not for “glory or crowns, but only the inalienable right to be what one wants to be.”³⁴⁹ The nameless soldier gave a warning to the Germans: “What Lincoln at that time demanded of the American nation is now demanded by the Americans of the peoples of the entire world. We are still far removed from it, but the time for it will come.”³⁵⁰ The German soldiers, under force of American arms, would eventually have to reckon with this new universe of values, this foreign and seductive cosmopolitan sensibility, and the nameless soldier presented them with the chance to embrace it now, to nurture it within themselves, to find a way to keep this sensibility alive under the duress of the occupation—or else risk finding themselves forced to submit to it at the point of a gun. In counterpoising the American sensibility to that of the Nazis, the nameless

soldiers were asking their German counterparts to think of what a community might look like that was not bound together by naked aggression or a bellicose will-to-power but by the universal freedom of thought, feeling, and value. If the German soldiers could keep this sensibility alive within themselves and protect “the freedom of a quiet conscience,” as the nameless soldier put it in another pamphlet, it might offer them protection against the debilitating dressage of life under military occupation and safeguard the possibility of that perpetual insurrection of value so central to Cahun’s vision of radical community.³⁵¹ It might also, more practically, make the German soldiers hesitate before blindly executing the orders of their commanders, might make them freeze up, finger on the trigger, before turning into the regime’s monstrous factotum.

At the same time as the nameless soldiers’ pamphlets cast the surety of Nazi victory into doubt, undermining the universe of thought and value foundational to the regime, it also persistently attacked the Nazi leadership, depicting them as cowardly, stupid, vacuous, and self-interested to the highest degree. While Hitler receives the lion’s share of the nameless soldiers’ scorn, his supporting cast of characters, from Goebbels to Himmler to Ley to Rommel to General von Kluge, consistently come under fire. In one of the more humorous tracts, the soldier without a name satirizes these Nazi functionaries: “Hitler leads us,” he begins, while Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda, “speaks for us,” claiming to represent the German people as a whole while controlling at the same time the popular press through his introduction, early in the Nazi rise to power, of the *Schriftleitergesetz*, the “Editor’s Law” that enabled the Party to control the dissemination of information by hand-selecting the editors of serial publications, making these selections always in accordance with the Nazis’ racial ideologies. Goering, the nameless soldier continues, “eats for us,” preparing the bodies of the German youth for military dressage and

deployment, cannibalizing them by sending them headlong into battles that he kept losing, much to Hitler's chagrin. Ley, meanwhile, "drinks for us"; as head of the German Labor Front, he was in a position to freely embezzle a sizable portion of the operating funds of the organization for his own personal use, guzzling the wealth of the German workers while living a life more consistent with an American robber baron than the leader of a worker's union, surrounding himself with foreign cars, expensive villas, and "decadent" European art. As the tract moves to its final target, Himmler, the mood shifts: But "Himmler? . . ." Himmler, the man who forged the SS out of nothing, who controlled with an iron fist the police and security forces of the nation and oversaw them in far-off countries, who proposed and constructed the hideous crematoria, what had he done for the German nation? The nameless soldier's tone is unequivocal: "Himmler murdered for us . . ." The brutal shift from humorous metaphor to stark reality was meant to goad the German soldiers into comprehending the true dimensions of the Nazi enterprise, seeing through the fog of official propaganda and realizing the murderous nature of the regime. While Himmler and the rest of the Nazi leadership were speaking, eating, drinking, and killing in the name of the German people, "nobody," the nameless soldier concludes, "dies for us!"³⁵² Cahun would repeat this dismaying sentiment in an installation in a church frequented by the German soldiers, hanging this banner over its altar: "Jesus is great – but Hitler is greater. For Jesus died for the people – but people are dying for Hitler."³⁵³ At the same time as the Nazi higher-ups urged total self-sacrifice from the common soldiery, they had arrogated to themselves all the prestige and material wealth of the regime, living off the backs of those in whose names they were allegedly fighting, finding every way to preserve their own lives while sending countless German youths off to war and annihilation.

Even von Kluge, that long-toothed Field Marshall who had fought successively and

indiscriminately for the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the Nazi regime, came under the gun. One of the nameless soldier's longer tracts describes an imaginary conversation between two German occupiers, with one asking the other, a recent deserter, "why has von Kluge left the Eastern Front?" "That's easy!" the deserter replies: "He fears the Bolsheviks." "But you left also," his companion counters. "Is it for this reason?" Incredulous, the deserter looks at him squarely and asks: "Me? Why should I be afraid of the Bolsheviks? I have done nothing to them." Instead of accepting his commander's orders, instead of putting his body in the Russian line of fire, instead of trudging through the Eastern Front like some hapless specter from Napoleon's doomed army, this nameless soldier has exercised his freedom of conscience, has put into play his own strategy of revolutionary defeatism. Anyway, the deserter responds, and reminding the reader of the tract that forecasted the complete material and ideological victory of the United States, "with the Americans the food is better, and the American cinema is *prima*."³⁵⁴ Why follow the greedy, hubristic, self-satisfied Nazi leadership to the grave, the nameless soldiers asks, when one can instead follow their own conscience, speak and act freely, and live in relative safety and material comfort?

In a variant of this tract, the deserter continues: "Blockhead! You say it's only a small thing that you should die so that the Führer might live a little longer!"³⁵⁵ Inciting his companion to his own inner revolt, his own personal insurrection against these unilateral impositions, the soldier decides that he would rather be captured by the Americans than give his life for the Reich. "If you surrender," his friend reminds him, "you will be shot by the officer." Overcome by his doubts about the Nazi leadership, finally alive to those aggressive drives in himself that have been systematically repressed by his military training, the soldier erupts: "He might come alone! With such an officer I'll shoot first!"³⁵⁶ While the Nazi prosecutors had argued that this tract in

particular had urged the “German soldiers to shoot their officers,” it was instead an incitation to insubordination and desertion, “with violence if necessary,” as Cahun had said at her trial, “but a minimum of violence.” Turning their backs on the Nazi leadership, the soldiers could make the choice simply not to fight, to lay down their arms and walk away from this disastrous and hubristic endeavor. As Cahun understood, making the soldiers lose confidence in their officers was tantamount to making them desert twice, first emotionally and internally, then secondarily in action, a change in their structure of sensibility leading them to take radical, subversive action against the Nazi war machine.

Of all the leaders taken to task for their part in destroying the German nation, none draws so much sustained and merciless criticism as Hitler. Alluded to more than any other player on the international scene, the soldier without a name relentlessly laces into Hitler’s rhetoric, actions, and intentions. “What man,” the soldier asks, “has the right to sacrifice a people to save a government?”³⁵⁷ What kind of leader would relentlessly sacrifice his people in the name of an uncertain and illusory ideal? What leader would water his megalomaniacal aspirations with the blood of the nation’s youth? The soldier without a name sought repeatedly to make clear the vacuous nature of Hitler’s rhetoric, exposing him as a cunning statesman who crafted his public proclamations to suit the needs of political exigency. The nameless soldiers reminded their German friends that “in December 1932 Hitler said: If a government leads the country to its downfall, indignation is not only the right but also the ‘duty of every citizen!’” The nameless soldiers, somewhat playfully, were turning Hitler’s rhetoric on its head, passing the ball from right to left, using his own words against him. In Cahun’s eyes, Hitler was leading the Germans to ruin, feeding the people to the monster of the state. It was the true duty of every German citizen, she argued, to fight back against this state of affairs, to become indignant at these

blatantly imperialist ambitions and do everything in their power to stop them. After his rise to power, Hitler still spoke from both sides of his mouth: “In August 1939 he said: ‘I have been a soldier, and I swear that never again shall a German soldier suffer what I suffered at [the battle of] Verdun.’” While Hitler had promised his compatriots that he would never allow them to see another Verdun, one of the longest and costliest battles in European history, he was now submitting the German people to a war that would ultimately claim more than four million of them, more than twice as many as had died in the Great War. Hitler’s promise had been nothing more than a *trompe-l’œil*, a rhetorical set piece to deceive the German citizenry. The nameless soldier is incredulous: how could anyone continue to believe in him? “What will he say tomorrow?” Against the predictable consistency of Hitler’s lies, the nameless soldiers were incredibly straightforward: “Down with Hitler! Down with Hitler! Down with this un-German vampire swilling down the blood of our youth! Down with war!”³⁵⁸ Cahun reverses Hitler’s notions of racial purity and the law of blood: now Hitler is the vampire, the classic Gothic enemy, feeding on the blood of the nation, gorging himself sick on *Blut*, eating the bodies of the German youth in a war he personally meant to live through.

Another tract amplifies this image of Hitler, casting him in the role of the siren in Heine’s “Lorelei.” In Heine’s poem, the Lorelei’s song is so enchanting that sailors willingly steer their ships into the crags, lulled to sleep by her intoxicating rhythms; in Cahun’s propaganda, Hitler becomes the siren luring the German people to their doom: “I think that the waves finally swallowed up / the boatman and his boat / that is what Hitler did / with his bellowing.”³⁵⁹ The tract on which this détourned poem of Heine appears is one of the few illustrated by Cahun and Malherbe, showing a little deaths-headed Hitler on the prow of a sinking ship, festooned with a swastika in a sea teeming with ravenous sharks. Hitler’s bellowing was luring Germany to its

doom: could the German soldiers resist his treacherous song and embrace his defeat, giving up on the Nazi regime in the pursuit of a better ideal?

Destroying the presumptions of the Nazi ideologues while undermining the blind faith of the German soldiers in Hitler and the Nazi leadership necessitated a third, related maneuver: the soldier without a name would have to remind the Germans of their true heritage, not one built on a spurious racial purity but one dedicated to intellectual openness and existential exploration. Against the nightmarish possibility of Hitler's thousand-year Reich, Cahun asked the soldiers to envision a return to the great Germany of the mind, the Germany that had kindled the flames of Enlightenment, nurtured the various tributaries of Romanticism, and opened up new philosophical pathways in the work of Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Besides Malherbe, she would later write, "the German Romantic poets had been my first collaborators."³⁶⁰ At the same time as she took the Nazi leadership to task for their deceptive and pseudo-philosophical rhetoric that justified a total and suicidal war, she consistently referenced the German thinkers and poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, reminding the tracts' readers of the truly great intellectual traditions that had been occluded by Goebbels's propaganda machine. In one of the most powerful surviving tracts, the nameless soldiers, outlining the work they did and the risks they ran to defeat the Nazi regime, called their comrades to defend with them the borders not of Hitler's Greater Germany but of the Germany of the imagination that had given rise to so many profound artists and thinkers:

Over the daily work we do for this newspaper, we have an additional work. Over the ordinary dangers of the front and the factories we run additional risks. We give our time, our effort, in an emergency our lives, for freedom, PEACE and FATHERLAND! For the true grandeur of Germany! For the great Germany of Goethe, that Hitler's National-Socialist Greater Germany would like to sully in vain. Comrades! Will you hold on to it with us?³⁶¹

The true patrimony of Germany—the only one worth risking one's life for—was its rich

intellectual heritage, one that proclaimed the perpetual freedom to become what one wanted, one on the side of Goethe, Heine, and especially Nietzsche, who had proclaimed the necessity of free spirits powerful enough to endlessly recreate themselves, to transvalue their feelings, thoughts, and actions, powerful enough as well to resist the lure of political formations and demagogues that would thwart what Cahun had called their “historical becoming.” Against the distorted image of Nietzsche as the master-thinker of fascism that the Nazi leadership had carefully crafted, Cahun reminded the German soldiers of the Nietzsche who sought instead “to restore the *innocence* of becoming,” who relentlessly fought nationalism and the state, that “coldest of all cold monsters,” who showed the German citizens how “it gulps and chews and ruminates them,” who asked them to see his thought as a stepping-stone on the way to crafting their own existential constellations.³⁶² “There is a corrosive derision,” Bataille had written in *Acéphale*, “in imagining a possible agreement between Nietzschean demands and a political organization which impoverishes existence at its summit, which imprisons, exiles, or kills everything that could constitute an aristocracy of ‘free spirits.’ . . . Whether it be anti-Semitism, fascism—or socialism—there is only *use*. Nietzsche addressed *free spirits*, incapable of letting themselves be used.”³⁶³ At the same time as the Nazis had marshalled the selectively-edited writings of Nietzsche in the service of a philosophy of domination and destruction, Cahun meant to remind the German soldiers that his philosophy valorized instead the endless reconstruction of sensibility and value so central to that perpetual insurrection in subjectivity that alone could safeguard the future of a truly radical community. The great Germany of the mind that the nameless soldiers were fighting for would be based not on martial discipline and the cold-blooded calculations of the state, but on perpetual self-overcoming and elective affinity. The German soldiers could reclaim this intellectual heritage at any time, provided they were willing

to trade in Hitler's illusion of the *Übermensch* for the reality—and difficulty—of self-overcoming, practicing on the terrain of their own subjectivity that perpetual metamorphosis of existential form that Nietzsche had championed as the keystone of his entire philosophy. Would they find the power within themselves to lay claim to his project and become not just good Germans but—“good Europeans”?³⁶⁴ “Also sprach the Soldier without a Name,” a number of Cahun's tracts concluded hopefully, “also sprach Zarathustra!”³⁶⁵

Calling the German soldiers back to their intellectual heritage also meant undermining the rhetoric that Hitler had used to justify his imperialistic policy of *Lebensraum*, a policy that sought to relentlessly conquer “new land and soil” to give the Nazi party a wider “basis for power politics,” having as its final aim the “ruthless Germanization” of Europe.³⁶⁶ The nameless soldiers vigorously attacked this policy of perpetual expansion through warfare in a tract that undermined the image of the Nazi conquerors as national heroes and derided their pretensions of being the protectors of Hitler's Greater Germany, a nation whose borders seemed to be everywhere except Germany itself:

They will not yield one single foot! Heroes! When they are defending Smolensk, they are defending the borders of Greater Germany! They will not yield one single foot! Heroes! When they are defending Kiev . . . when they are defending Warsaw . . . , they are defending the borders of Greater Germany! Heroes! When they are defending Cherbourg . . . when they are defending Jersey . . . when they are defending Paris . . . , they are defending the borders of Greater Germany! But where are the borders of Old Germany? Where will they be tomorrow? All our comrades are wondering this in secret . . . ³⁶⁷

Hitler's ruthless policy of *Lebensraum* was drawing the Germans into a geopolitical quagmire; at the same time as his pitiless war machine was roaring through Europe and mercilessly redrawing its boundaries, it was also stretching the German soldiers thin, exposing them to danger on all sides. The nameless soldier meant to remind them of Germany's perilous situation after the Treaty of Versailles, in which the Allied powers, retaliating against Germany's belligerence, not

only took back its wartime conquests but also made it cede territories that it had possessed before the war. The situation now, Cahun insinuated, was the same. If the Nazis lost control of their new territories, if they thought that incessant conquest was enough to safeguard their fatherland, all it would take was one dramatic military reversal before the Germans might again find themselves forced to capitulate their *Lebensraum* to the Allies. Moreover, the idea that defending Jersey, a small, defenseless island of little strategic import, was equivalent to defending Germany itself was laughable—while the Nazi leadership had a stake in this kind of rhetorical shell game, the common soldier, Cahun intuited, did not. If the Nazis lost the war, where would Germany be tomorrow? Cahun explicitly brought this subterranean fear of the German soldiers to the surface—if their regime lost, they might not have a home to return to at all. Cahun offered these soldiers a choice: they could continue to fight and die for the kind of patriotic imperialism that had buried the Unknown Soldier, or they could fight to reactivate the idea and promise of that sovereign Germany of the spirit that Hitler and the Nazis had attempted to sully in vain. While all their comrades were anxious about the course and ultimate outcome of the war, wondering and whispering about it in secret, Cahun promised them that “next week the Soldiers without names will answer [their] questions,” provided that they “read all of our newspaper every week,” hailing them through their anxiety into the nameless conspiracy.³⁶⁸ If the German soldiers were willing to turn their back on Hitler’s imperium and embrace the Romantic Germany of Nietzsche and Goethe, they could begin to pose their own acts of resistance as partial and provisional answers to these questions.

Beyond equipping the soldiers to resist the psychological and material pressures placed on them by their leadership in the context of the Jersey occupation, a small handful of the tracts gave them practical advice on how to sabotage the actual workings of the occupying force. To

the extent that outright acts of provocation could be dangerous not only to the individual soldiers performing them but also to the entire nameless movement, putting the officers on the trail of a coherent conspiracy instead of confusing them with isolated acts of resistance, the soldier without a name encouraged his comrades to adopt what one historian has called “the traditional strategy of the powerless – by dragging their feet and working badly, but without attracting attention and punishment.”³⁶⁹ Just as the rhetoric of the nameless soldier had to be oblique, its explicitly ideological content purposefully restrained, the acts of sabotage undertaken by the German soldiers would have to look like accidents, coincidences—or nothing at all. Instead of calling on the soldiers to bomb factories, destroy munitions, or directly defy their officers, Cahun instead enjoined them to work slowly, clumsily, operating their equipment and performing their roles in such a way as to put a break on the smooth operation of the Nazi war machine. One tract explicitly addressed itself not only to the “comrades” and “companions” of the nameless soldiers but also to the “workers,” whether they were attached to the German military or the Organization Todt (OT), the engineering division of the invading force that was notorious for conscripting political prisoners into the ranks of its slave-labor workforce. While the political prisoners needed no convincing to understand the need to undermine the OT’s smooth operation, the nameless soldier warned the Germans that defeat was always unexpected until one saw with one’s own eyes “the flames of hell [burning] our homes to ashes!” What could they or the forced laborers do to confound the Nazi operation without putting themselves or the movement at risk? They could work *badly*: “Let your machines go s l o w e r . . . Corrupt them by stealth. . . STOP them . . . if you want to stop the war!”³⁷⁰ In a regime that prided itself on absolute martial and technical efficiency, performing one’s duties slowly, carefully sabotaging one’s own work, “accidentally” stopping or breaking a machine was tantamount to insubordination, but in such a

way that the workers and soldiers could easily disavow it. The officers might confront them about their work, their inefficiency, or their apparently malfunctioning machines, but proving that these were the result of a calculated strategy would be impossible—and the longer the officers attempted to do so, the more confused, frustrated, and paranoid they would get. So far as the *machines* seemed to be defying the wishes of the Nazi leadership—and not the soldiers or workers—the nameless conspiracy could be carried out openly, in the light of day, the officers unable to understand or explain the sudden and dramatic reduction in efficiency throughout the various branches of the occupying force. One French resister in the OT camp on Jersey put his approach to resistance in just these terms: to stop the Nazi effort, he said, “we go slow, . . . very slow.”³⁷¹ The nameless soldiers thus equipped their comrades and companions to resist the brutalizing day-to-day work that they were subjected to by the Nazis, finding ways to sabotage their machines and routines without drawing unnecessary attention to themselves and the nameless conspiracy of which they were a part.

The most important thing repeated over and over in the tracts—and the approach that gave them their seemingly magical power over the Germans—was the way they directly addressed the soldiers as individuals, playing to their fears, anxieties, doubts, and even hopes, asking them pointed questions about their place in the war and making them pose to themselves these same questions. The nameless soldiers always addressed them personally, as comrades, commiserating with them as they worried about the potential loss of their homes, their families, their time, and their lives, using this moment of emotional vulnerability to plant a seed of doubt in their mind about the war and the Nazi leadership, hoping it would germinate into inner and outer rebellion. While all the tracts we have looked at have utilized this method, whether by casting doubts on the fervent nationalism of the Nazis, the duplicitous and murderous behavior

of their leaders, or the uncertain prospects of military victory for Germany, a number of them address the soldiers more intimately, speaking to their most personal concerns, asking them to think not only of their own safety but also of that of their wives and children. The nameless soldier consistently exploited the Germans' fear of losing their families and homes: by illuminating the consequences of the German soldiers' actions for those closest to them, the nameless one hoped to bring them out of themselves and into the imaginative place of those they had left behind, seeing the prolongment of the present war as an imminent threat to their lives.

One series of tracts—collected under the ominous title “Dark Laughter”—exposes these fears in all their raw intensity and naked emotion, the nameless soldier relentlessly fingering the soldiers' psychic wounds to shock them out of their ideological stupor. In one of the most sinister tracts, Cahun stages a dialogue between two German soldiers, whispering between themselves in secret about a recent tragedy that has befallen one of their own: “Why must Erich not go on vacation?” one asks, oblivious. “He does not know yet,” his companion confides, gingerly, “that his house is burnt, that his children are dead. And our merciful masters want to treat him gently.”³⁷² The “compassion” of the officers in hiding the death of Erich's children from him might be better understood, the soldier suggests, as a kind of casual cruelty, keeping Erich in the dark so that he can continue to perform well as a tool of his superiors. What use would there be in continuing to fight for Hitler when there was nothing left for him in Germany? Even after this tragic news is revealed to him, Erich might, through inertia, persist in helping his masters conquer ever more *Lebensraum*, but his own has been burnt to cinders, along with the bodies of his children. What then, Cahun intimates, is he fighting for, and what kind of motivation might remain to him? The nameless soldier, presenting Erich's story as an archetype and cautionary tale, reminds the Germans that they could share his fate at any time – “the longer the war,” he wrote

elsewhere, “all the longer and confused the inescapable revolution, [and] all the worse the suffering of our women and children.”³⁷³ While the soldiers were putting their lives on the line for Nazi victory, the process of securing that victory only increased the chances that those back home, in whose name they were ostensibly fighting, would not live to see it. The nameless soldier gambled on this paradox: would the common soldier continue to fight “for their families” if doing so put them in mortal danger? And if their families did not survive the war, would they be willing to shoulder the emotional burden of having put them in harm’s way, living with the guilt of having—indirectly, circuitously—murdered them? To the extent that the nameless soldier approached the Germans on the terrain of their deepest anxieties, he also gained access to the most vulnerable part of their minds, bypassing their intellectual defenses by appealing forcefully and directly to their worst, most occulted fears. Dread, panic, fear—indeed, the entire economy of supposedly “negative” emotions—were the footholds the nameless soldier used to gain purchase on the Germans’ psyches, leveraging these intense emotions to reveal to the soldiers the interpersonal consequences of their brutish behavior, their blind conformity, their moral *complacency*. Family or fatherland, the nameless soldier asked: which was truly more important to them, which worth dying for?

Not all of Cahun’s tracts exploited these subterranean fears in the same way: some of them employed searing humor and vicious irony to make the soldiers anxious in a different way about the families—and particularly wives—they had left behind. The most infamous of these tracts, a “Lied” or “Song” for the soldiers composed by Cahun, bears witness to the less-than-savory emotions that might run through the mind of a young recruit as he sacrifices himself for the sake of his family, only to find this fidelity betrayed. Taking on the voice of those particularly overly-enthusiastic and naïve German soldiers who were blinded to the war’s realities by the

twin chimeras of honor and glory, the tract begins with the soldiers' narcissistic paean to the Nazi regime and its wartime victories. "We are the heroes of the master race," they boom, and "we are the German soldiers. We have completely defeated Europe," they slur, drunk on youthful confidence, "and seen the coast of England." And yet, when these soldiers go home on holiday, they are shocked to find their wives pregnant, the sustaining illusion of home and hearth shattered. But "quarrel not my little boy," the wives riposte, for "the fatherland needs soldiers!" After this ironic chorus, chiding the stunned soldier after every stanza, the song delineates the tragicomic consequences of enlisting in Hitler's army, detailing the soldier's ruinous escapades. In Russia, he recalls, he spent three fruitless years pursuing the Red Army through Devil's Country. "At the end," he says bitterly, "I was a prettier man, / Feet and nose frostbitten"—the consolation prize for Hitler's retreat. Alluding next to Rommel's disastrous campaigns in Egypt and North Africa in 1942 and 1943, the hapless recruit remembers being left to bake in the sun in battle formation, "my skin completely fried." Rommel's inept leadership was complemented by the haphazard preparations of the invading force: "The meat was foul and the water stank," and the malnutrition made him "become nearly blind." Hobbled by his sojourns in Russia and Africa, the soldier signs up for what seems an easier mission – the invasion of America. Taking courage again, his regiment looks "forward! To America!" But the journey is hard, and the open seas prove just as treacherous as the taigas of Russia or the deserts of Egypt: "How many were drowned! / For five years we sailed round and round, / And never could land!" The nameless soldier here intentionally distorts the time of the war, pointing up its interminability, its endlessness, showing at the same time its physical and emotional consequences for the German soldiers, revealing each new campaign of the Nazis as one grotesque absurdity after another. After this disastrous voyage, the dispirited recruits hurry back, "empty-handed, / to the new-old

Europe,” only to find “the Japanese in our Berlin, / Devastated with fire and sword!” Recalling the tract in which the Germans were whispering amongst themselves about the post-war fate of Germany, wondering where its borders would be tomorrow, the nameless soldier envisions “the new-old Europe” as one that is complacent in the destruction of the German nation, giving it up wholesale to its “allies,” letting it burn. The Nazi soldier, comprehending the true dimensions of German defeat, bewails his fate, the time he has wasted, the all-too-clear realization, both intellectual and emotional, that the Nazi “warlords” have been definitively “overthrown.” The only person this lost soldier could have power over—and the only person he has left in his life—is his wife, but even then, as the caustic chorus has been repeating, mockingly, he is a cuckold in his own home, a laughingstock of those civilians whose children he has been so graciously raising for the good of the fatherland. Slumping back to his house, utterly defeated, the soldier finds his lover there, “old and dry,” waiting to replenish the imperial stock: “To bed, my little boy, she said, / The Fatherland needs soldiers!”³⁷⁴ The labor of a Nazi soldier, the tract winks, is never truly finished.

While this tract did not take on the baleful tones of “Dark Laughter,” it appealed in a different way to the German soldiers’ anxieties about losing their families. While “Dark Laughter” addressed their fear of losing their children through the physical separation of death, the “Song” addressed their fear of losing their wives through the emotional separation of infidelity, employing a comic perspective that imagined in the most graphic terms the physical and emotional deformations undergone by the typical Nazi conscript. In light of a war that never ended and whose spoils never trickled down to the rank and file, the nameless soldier proposed instead taking on the joy of defeat, telling the Germans to embrace it wholeheartedly and fight for it in secret: “So, we have lost the war!” exclaims an incredulous Nazi to his mute companion.

“But you are happy about it? . . . I don’t understand it. Why?” Because, his nameless comrade confides, happy to lay down his pack, his rifle, his training, his life: “I don’t want to squander my whole life in uniform!”³⁷⁵ Putting down their guns for the nameless weapons, the soldiers were given the chance to save their lives, those closest to them, and the time left to them.

Perhaps no other act of poetic resistance undertaken by Cahun and Malherbe demonstrates this desire to save the German soldiers’ lives better than one they conspired on together in October of 1943, relatively late in the campaign of the nameless soldier, after the death of *Oberlieutenant* Zepernick, one of the island’s high-ranking Nazi officers. Because La Rocquaise—now baptized “the farm with no name”—was adjacent to the military cemetery, Cahun was able to watch clandestinely the burial of this well-known Nazi official. The pageantry of this spectacle, the way the surviving officers played it false, turning this individual tragedy into a national triumph by glorifying the “self-sacrifice” of this “hero” repulsed her: she had to pull back the curtain on this repugnantly propagandistic set piece and expose the proceedings as the hypocritical sham they were. Having caught wind of Zepernick’s funeral beforehand, she and Malherbe made sure the nameless soldier received an invitation, his appearance sure to disrupt the smooth staging of this bit of absurdist theater:

During these big occasions, small cannons [and] machine guns were perched on the hills overlooking the cemetery. . . . Suzanne and I were watching the spectacle – through the cracks of our high-planked wooden door. The sumptuous cars disappeared . . . the honor guard dispersed (probably to feast) . . . when the area remained deserted for a moment . . . one could go see the flowers – and the cards. And withdraw the latter. One could even – at night, defying curfew and the patrols – add one’s own contribution. Ours was a cross, *home-made*, of ordinary form, on which one could read in Gothic characters this materialist assertion (*constatation*): For Him the War is Over.³⁷⁶

Signing the cross with their signature, Cahun and Malherbe watched the attention paid to it by the officers and especially by the young soldiers, the “innocents,” as she would later call them, with an exceptional interest. Something struck the young Germans to the quick about this

“materialist assertion” – the war was well and truly over for this officer, his body interred on a foreign island far from home, and whatever the course of its remainder he was gone forever, unable even to enjoy his recent deification. Were the survivors, the nameless soldier asked, willing to end up the same way? The line on the cross said no more than the barest facts—Cahun had called it a “materialist constatation,” a self-evident truth, a basic principle, an inescapable axiom. But the mode in which this constatation became visible to the soldiers was poetic, indirect, ambivalent; it was not even clear that the cross was a piece of propaganda at all – it could seem from a different perspective to be a sorrowful tribute to the officer from one of his comrades. And perhaps both were true.

The stunt was so effective that Cahun and Malherbe began repeating it with each fresh corpse, putting the officers on edge, making the soldiers wonder silently about what their own crucifix might look like. The nameless ones operated in secret, fresh crosses blooming overnight like sinister flowers:

The St. Brelade’s Church was frequented often by the young soldiers, above all on Sunday mornings. So I would put our cross, preferably on Saturday night, over the freshest flowers and wreaths. . . . The chiaroscuro [of the night] allowed me to slip through the bushes. Suzanne, eye and ear on the watch, opened the door quietly for me – the maintenance door – and closed it quietly. It was an affair of barely a minute One fine morning I had the surprise of perceiving from the road one of our crosses, standing, planted on the grave where I had laid it yesterday. Around it was a small group of silent soldiers, heads inclined. These “innocents” seemed full of respect for our offering – and for our slogan, that of the “Nameless Soldier!”³⁷⁷

The wonder of the innocents must have struck Cahun as a confirmation of her project; instead of becoming angry at this desecration of a supposed hero, their reaction was far more equivocal, veering between silent sympathy for the dead, awed respect for this “nameless soldier,” and quiet thoughtfulness for themselves. Faced with the crude reality of death, its capriciousness, its omnipresence, and its finality, the young German soldiers flinched at the foot of this cross; as the

number of deserters Cahun encountered in prison attested to, many of them must have made the decision, at least emotionally, to lay down their weapons and stop squandering the precious time they had left by goose-stepping their nation to ruin. Appealing to their sense of mortality and self-preservation, the nameless soldier fought to keep them alive, and on the side of life.

These, then, are the characteristic themes and approaches that recurred again and again in the propaganda tracts produced by Cahun and Malherbe. Over and above all, the tracts spoke to the German soldiers as human beings, appealing to their basest fears and highest hopes, to the worst and the best in them, encouraging them to turn against the ruthless conditioning they have been subjected to by the Nazi regime and produce, in themselves and in camp, an insurrection that would fatally undermine Hitler's enterprise. Cahun saw the soldiers for what they were—not insensible, faceless monsters but young, naïve conscripts who had signed up under the pretense of defending home and family and found themselves quickly entangled in an ideological and geopolitical web that was not of their own making. “They are prisoners,” Cahun had written to herself, “[just] like you.” Behind all of the tracts, behind the project of the nameless soldier, behind the entire nameless conspiracy, stood love: only this motivation was pure enough, Cahun thought, to combat the delirium of war, only this intention was strong enough to prevent the needless multiplication of brutality in a war that had already seen enough of it. In the personal and political relationships of life, she later wrote, “reciprocal love (or its collective equivalents, if they exist) appears to me indispensable.”³⁷⁸

Insofar as she believed in the infinitely plastic capabilities of human subjectivity and was invested in a vision of the human that privileged its ceaseless becoming, its latent powers of metamorphosis, she believed also in the ability of the German soldiers to change themselves, to create for themselves, as she had written long before, “several clearly delimited vocabularies,

several syntaxes, several ways of being, of thinking, and even of feeling.”³⁷⁹ In every tract the nameless soldier modelled a new constellation of feeling and value for the German recruits, systematically replacing malevolent emotions with benevolent or ambivalent ones, deranging and rearranging in the same motion the regime of sensibility on which they had come to rely, recomposing for them the entire spectrum of the thinkable and the feelable. On the front of emotion, the nameless soldier sought to replace surety with confusion, trust with doubt, glory with shame, aggression with pacifism. On the front of value, he meant to exchange the Nazi philosophy of domination with an ethics of relation, an identification with the German *Volk* with an identification with the *Universalvolk*, a blind faith in the Nazi leadership with a lucid distrust of their machinations, a vicious hatred of otherness with a receptive openness to it, and the dream of dying gloriously for the nation with the desire to stay alive for their families, for their comrades, and for themselves. The nameless soldier hit his mark best when he approached the soldiers obliquely, slipping the stiletto of poetry through their emotional defenses, opening a door to a different form of becoming that the Germans would have to step through on their own. Looking back on her project, Cahun noted that the most effective forms of propaganda had been “the most subjective, the most sincere, the most romantic, the most ‘disengaged.’ ”³⁸⁰ Instead of confronting the Germans in a frontal assault, the nameless soldier flanked their minds, their feelings, their values, slowly encircling them until they gave under his relentless pressure. This was the nameless conspiracy, halfway between dream and reality, fact and fiction, blurring the lines between art, politics, and life, working to unlock the power of the soldiers to fight against their masters and their indoctrinations by transforming themselves, assuming that power of existential metamorphosis that had been the keystone of Cahun’s thought and writing from the very beginning.

Chapter 6: The Spiritual Sharpshooters of Jersey

*“The main reason for my writing thus is that some of those scattered friends may turn up after all and be curious of my thoughts and behavior during this universal illness Or that some unknown but kindred spirit amongst your countrymen may be curious about ‘the spiritual franc-tireurs’ of Jersey.”*³⁸¹

“To what extent,” Cahun would later ask, “did my project realize itself?” This was the crucial question for her, a question she would be unable to answer completely until years later. During the campaign of the nameless soldier, which lasted from 1940 until her arrest on July 25th, 1944, she tells us that it was alternatively “convenient, reassuring, disappointing, [and] annoying to know so little of the results of our distribution of the tracts.” Insofar as the German soldiers worked hard to conceal their emotional discontent from the populace, hiding their true feelings behind the mask of authority, it was difficult to measure the effect her propaganda was having on them. But there were occasional, scattered signs that the nameless weapons had found their targets, stirring up trouble in the occupiers’ ranks:

The places that we had most frequented were soon surrounded by barbed wire, rendered inaccessible . . . theoretically. We waited and, with surveillance relaxed, envelopes were reappearing: on the inside of the barbed wire. It must have worked well, because we noticed also that the wooden barriers, on which we had inscribed slogans that were difficult to erase, were broken, the parts broken to smithereens – wood to burn.³⁸²

The fact that the soldiers had been ordered by their officers to smash the graffitied barriers, burn them, and install fresh barbed wire around civilian areas indicates that the nameless conspiracy was having its desired effect, spreading paranoia through the ranks. Moreover, Cahun continued, the behavior of the officers and soldiers seemed to be changing over time, becoming more tense, controlling, and anxious, apparently ground down by the relentless emotional assault of the soldier with no name. After a period of heavy pamphleting, Cahun noted that “the officers

seemed much more suspicious [than usual], the soldiers [left] less and less alone and inactive.”³⁸³ Fearing rebellion, the officers began restricting the movements and meetings of the soldiers in order to combat this nameless threat that seemed to emerge from the shadows and melt back into them. Only after her time in prison would Cahun come to understand the true extent of the “spiritual damage” she had done to the German soldiers, as the prosecutor at her trial would so perceptively call it.

On their side, the Nazis had been aware of and troubled by these “nameless soldiers” for quite some time, and had been sweeping the island for information as to their true identities and motivations. As Cahun would later find out, much to her delight, the officers had initially thought that the conspiracy was headed by “an internationalist German intellectual, without doubt in uniform . . . or an agent of the Intelligence Service! . . . or some ‘homeless’ communist or Jew.”³⁸⁴ In the beginning of 1944, the Nazis began calling in for random interrogation islanders who might be foreign-born, Jewish, or of suspicious political tendencies. In March, the *Feldpolizei* sent for Cahun: “At last they had picked up on the name ‘Schwob.’ Summoned to the Kommandatur, I was submitted to a rather bureaucratic interrogation. I pulled through, I thought, to our advantage. I had gone – hardly recognizable – as Lucy Schwob. . . . The bureaucrats had made their excuses to the old lady in black who seemed so ill.”³⁸⁵ It is unclear whether this premiere interrogation was the result of a random search or was more directly targeting Cahun; either way, she was allowed to return home, whereupon she resumed her nameless work. However, and completely unbeknownst to her, the merchant who had sold her the cigarette papers on which she wrote many of her tracts had become suspicious of her purchases and informed the Nazis about her activities. On July 25th, Cahun and Malherbe left La Rocquaise to distribute a fresh bundle of leaflets in the island’s capital, St. Helier. On the return home, their

bus was stopped by the *Feldpolizei*: “A German military took the bus, the one taking us back to St. Brelade. During the trip he inspected the identification documents of the passengers – commonplace enough not to alert us.” Keeping her cool while her bags were being searched, Cahun quietly scanned the bus—and saw the merchant, immediately recognizing her. “It is clear,” Cahun wrote in retrospect, “that this is where it happened.”³⁸⁶ The soldier approached her and, under the guise of checking her identity card, “confirmed the suspect name.” Edward Le Quense, a fellow traveler on the bus that day, remembered that all of the passengers were “cross-questioned,” but Cahun knew this was no ordinary stop: the noose around the nameless soldier was tightening.³⁸⁷ After a tense few minutes, the soldier thanked the passengers, departed the bus, and allowed it to continue on its way, but Cahun had a severe presentiment of danger. “There was evidence against us: the boxes of the cigarettes papers. . . . Even if we had realized what was about to take place,” she wrote, “we hardly had any time to thwart the blow.”

Shortly after their arrival back at La Rocquaise, sitting down to dinner, the two heard a sharp knock on the door. Cahun answered it, finding before her two Nazi officers and a “gangster American.”³⁸⁸ She was unshakeable: “I found myself quite unable to show any surprise at all when faced with an event I had been expecting almost daily for the past three years. So I just said, ‘Good evening,’ and waited for them to state their business.”³⁸⁹ Karl, the head officer, asked them if they knew why they were there. “Of course,” Malherbe replied, “you propose to torture us to death.”³⁹⁰ But it was “too late,” she chided them, for “Germany has lost the war.”³⁹¹ Not expecting the raid to come so soon after their interrogation on the bus, the two had left the Underwood and a suitcase which contained the records of their resistance work in plain sight in Cahun’s bedroom. Still, the bumbling officers took over half an hour to discover them. In the meantime, Malherbe kept throwing verbal jabs: “If you told me what you are looking for, we’d

have finished sooner.” Visibly flustered, Karl replied: “Thank you, I prefer to find it myself.” Taking long drags off her cigarette and eyeing the officers with derision, Malherbe wondered to herself if they would end up finding anything at all. Finally, a call came from downstairs: “Karl! *Wir haben es alles!*” Triumphant, he turned to Malherbe: “[Do] you know what we have found?” “Of course I know it,” she retorted archly, “I’m not an idiot.” Karl, trying to ignore this bit of insolence, boomed “now tell us where the wireless is, or we shall break everything!” Malherbe would later remember these as “the only words of the entire evening which were a little violent,” the only ones that had knocked her the slightest bit off balance. She led them to it, which they summarily confiscated, along with the sisters’ typewriter, suitcase, and camera equipment. “I suppose,” she asked them when they had finished packing up the contraband, “[that] you want us to go with you?” “Yes,” Karl replied: “you will sleep in jail tonight.”³⁹²

While Cahun and Malherbe had been caught unawares by the Nazi raid, they had been preparing for the eventuality of getting caught from the very beginning of the nameless campaign. Instead of letting themselves fall into the hands of the Nazi officers and doctors, the two had made a pact that “in the event of arrest, suicide. In a harmless-looking little box (‘Milk of Magnesia tablets’) a mortal dose of barbiturates.” “We never distributed our notes,” Cahun tells us, “without each having our barbiturates on our person.”³⁹³ Having caught whispers of the concentration camps, knowing all-too-well the kind of cruelty the Nazis were capable of, too proud to bow their heads before Hitler and his insane regime, the two understood that now was the time to put their plan into action. Malherbe, thinking quickly, turned to Karl: “My sister has a heart condition and, if we are going to prison, I must ask your permission to get her tablets from her room.”³⁹⁴ Granted this request, Malherbe went alone upstairs to collect some personal effects and, ever so discretely, a hidden bottle of Gardenal. Cahun and Malherbe were then

unceremoniously herded into the back of the police car, their destination: Gloucester Street prison in the island's occupied capital. Lewis, the physician who attended them there, relates the story:

On their way to St. Helier, [Malherbe] surreptitiously unscrewed the Gardenal bottle and poured a half, as nearly as she could judge, into [Cahun's] hand. The rest she put into her own mouth. Both chewed and chewed as silently as possible, although the taste was horrible, but they managed to get most of it down with the aid of their own saliva. At the prison, it was decided that on account of the lateness of the hour the two women should be put in a cell for the night, and interrogated in the morning. Already they were feeling drowsy, and as soon as the key was turned on them they collapsed on the two pallets, and almost at once slid into unconsciousness. Had no one gone to see them till the morning, they would unquestionably have been found dead. . . . After two days [Malherbe] started to show some sign of recovery, and [Cahun] the following day, but neither woman was able to think properly or answer any questions for over a week. They were then put through a course of rigorous interrogation . . . Had they been arrested and sentenced only a month before, when communications were still open, they would have been sent to serve their term in a concentration camp.³⁹⁵

As Lewis points out, this suicide attempt ironically and fortuitously saved their lives, keeping them off the final Nazi boat destined for the mainland's camps at the moment when Jersey was becoming militarily isolated. After discovering the two unconscious, the Nazis called Lewis in to help stabilize them and assist in their convalescence; despite their precipitous condition, he was able to secure proper medical care for them and nurse them back to life.

Cahun and Malherbe were surprised upon their recovery to find themselves imprisoned primarily with young men who were serving time for sabotaging the Nazi war effort and spreading the latest news from the BBC to the islanders and the German soldiers—might they have been inspired in their resistance, the two wondered, by the nameless soldier? The young prisoners seemed to recognize the two immediately and, as Malherbe later wrote, they “did everything to keep our morale up.” Cahun was particularly struck by their indomitable spirit, the way they would sing patriotic songs to each other through the bars of their cells, exchange bawdy jokes about the Nazis over meals, and send her small gifts in an attempt to humanize the

brutalizing monotony of prison life.³⁹⁶ “The moving experience of fraternal welcome . . . in prison from those in whose name I was writing” touched her deeply, at the same time confirming for her the importance and power of her prior efforts, and she was humbled by the young men’s “impulsive confidence in me, . . . their marvelous gaiety” that gave a personal touch to the experience of being in camp.³⁹⁷ “Keep smiling!” they would tell her: if the Nazis defeat your spirit, they implied, they have defeated you.³⁹⁸ Indeed, being exposed as the nameless soldiers did not deter Cahun and Malherbe from continuing their work; on the contrary, it only spurred them further on. “Being unmasked,” Cahun wrote, “we could use more direct methods. . . . We continued our propaganda close to [the Germans] for the overthrow of the Nazi regime and capitulation without combat.”³⁹⁹ It was also in prison that Cahun realized the true impact of her resistance work, meeting there islanders and soldiers who had been influenced by her propaganda, sometimes even to the point of desertion. “Objective facts,” she later reflected, “have proved that these secret, contagious words – ours – have put the refusal in the mouths of sheep, pushed back the butchers. My phantom,” she continued, amazed, “has incarnated itself in men unknown to us.”⁴⁰⁰ Even in the depths of prison, the nameless conspiracy soldiered on: “Nothing left for us but to brave,” Cahun wrote Malherbe while awaiting trial, “to concentrate on steady and beloved ideas in order to forget this painful present. Patience, when practiced long enough, becomes a kind of genius.”⁴⁰¹

While Cahun and Malherbe were acclimating to prison life, renewing their efforts to sow dissension from within it, the Nazis were pillaging La Rocquaise. On July 25th, the same night the two were arrested, agents of the Gestapo raided their farm, carting away their immaculate library, burning an enormous quantity of Cahun’s literary and photographic work, and impounding their substantial art collection. Rare first editions of Surrealist works and paintings

by Ernst, among others, were stolen, never to be seen again.⁴⁰² Baron von Aufsess, chief administrator of the *Feldkommandatur*, personally supervised the operation, recording the plunder in his diary:

There are very few Jews in the island. The two Jewish women who have just been arrested belong to an unpleasant category. These women had long been circulating leaflets urging German soldiers to shoot their officers. At last they were tracked down. A search of the house, full of ugly cubist paintings, brought to light a quantity of pornographic material of an especially revolting nature. One woman had had her head shaved and had thus been photographed in the nude from every angle. Thereafter she had worn men's clothes I declined with distaste the loan of a book on cubism. . . . At the moment pronouncement of sentence is being postponed. Normally on the charge of inciting the troops to rebellion, they could be condemned to death, but women cannot be executed here. . . . In the library . . . I have found more reading material than I shall be likely to get through in the short time that remains to us here. I have become quite a connoisseur of French literature and shall miss the opportunity to indulge my taste for it when I eventually get back to my own country.⁴⁰³

Von Aufsess's dubious aesthetic and moral judgements aside, there is little reason to doubt the veracity of his description—some of the surviving photographs of Cahun show her with a shaved head, some of them show her wearing men's clothing, and at least one shows her in the nude. It seems clear, however, that his offended sensibilities played the greatest part in his decision to throw the lion's share of Cahun's writings and portraits on the fire. Keeping the best books for himself, allowing his subordinates to either burn or loot the remaining contents of La Rocquaise, von Aufsess wiped out one of the most important archives in the history of Surrealism, with countless pictures, paintings, writings, and letters destroyed at a single stroke. While some of Cahun's work survived, the indiscriminate destruction of her unpublished theoretical writings and photographic works counts as one of the great tragedies in the history of the avant-garde.

Between her arrest in late July and her trial in the middle of November, Cahun was subjected to two official interrogations that concentrated primarily on the propaganda she had circulated as the nameless soldier. The first interrogation focused particularly on her rewriting of

Heine's "Lorelei," while the second focused on her "Song" to the soldiers. However, these rounds of questioning were short, bureaucratic, and in some sense pointless, as the Nazis already had Cahun's diary that recorded in scrupulous detail the distribution of her tracts. Moreover, Cahun had admitted to her involvement with the nameless conspiracy from the very beginning. She did not attempt in the course of these interviews to defend herself or abase herself in front of the Nazi officers and beg for mercy; indeed, what is most striking about her comportment during these interrogations is the way she relentlessly protects those around her, including Malherbe and George and Edna, the caretakers of La Rocquaise. When asked about the potential involvement of the housekeepers in the campaign of the nameless soldier, Cahun was unequivocal:

You can easily make sure that we told you the whole truth about George when you arrested us. That notebook in the suitcase – my diary of the distributions – should make it clear enough: There can be no charge against George. Neither he nor Edna knew that we were writing leaflets or anything of the kind. It is quite obvious they would not be willing to help us in a thing they could not understand."⁴⁰⁴

Queried later about Malherbe's involvement, Cahun became even more protective, willing to shoulder the blame completely for the creation of the nameless soldier and put her life at risk to protect that "other me" who had fought alongside her for five harrowing years. She addressed her interrogator squarely:

It is I alone who am the cause of everything. The typewriter belongs to me and Suzanne does not know how to use it. The photomontages are by me. I have drafted all the texts. I have organized all of it. Suzanne has only translated my texts into German and accompanied me when I was distributing the papers. You have to understand this: my family suffered from the war of 1870 and that of 1914-18. Finally, I am, by my father, of Jewish origin."⁴⁰⁵

Exposing herself completely to the Nazi prosecutor at the same time as she appealed to his sense of humanity, referencing obliquely her personal motivations for crafting the nameless phantom, Cahun put her own death into play in a show of solidarity with all those who had been inspired by her to put their "own conduct to the test of their convictions."⁴⁰⁶ Cahun's altruistic confession

could be seen as an extension of the project of the nameless soldier, indeed as a key part of her larger project of relentlessly renovating human sensibility, taking her own emotions as raw material to be shaped and molded, at the same time demanding of herself that she be willing to put her convictions to the test by living out her ideas on the terrain of reality. “Living (writing)” had always been for her “this impossible acrobatics between poetry and historicity.”⁴⁰⁷ Now, seated in a Nazi interrogation room, balancing her sense of self-preservation with her love for Malherbe and her nameless comrades, soon to be on trial for producing revolutionary propaganda that intentionally blurred the lines between life and art, between poetry and historicity, between performance and politics, Cahun inhabited her values as never before, instantiating for a glimmering moment that permanent insurrection of which she had been so long dreaming. The officer, finishing his perfunctory examination, collected up his notes and rose to leave: the interrogation was over, and Cahun was quietly led back to solitary confinement.

The Nazi officials set Cahun and Malherbe’s trial for November 16. In the meantime, Cahun and Malherbe wrote to each other daily, passing little notes that were handwritten on tissue paper through an intricate underground postal system the inmates of the prison had arranged between themselves. One of these miniature letters from Cahun to Malherbe, dated November 3, reflects on the grim possibilities that lie before them:

As for us, I am starting to wonder if it wouldn’t be better to be judged—unless we prefer being sentenced to death in the winter here, something which might be wise, but that we are not even sure to get. What I’m afraid of is a “magnanimous” sentencing of 10 or 20 years in prison, then, when everyone has shrugged their shoulders and said “it will only be for the length of the war,” they send us to Germany by plane, to show everyone that the rulings of the military court are not a joke. I am seeing things too darkly, maybe, but knowing that their planes can pass, even only twice a month, hit me hard. Getting shot here is nothing compared to what we can fear over there.⁴⁰⁸

Cahun had come to grips with the possibility of execution, but being deported to a concentration camp would have been unbearable. She had heard of “the destructions of personality obtained by

the Gestapo . . . in the concentration camps,” the power they held to “reduce to nothing the notion of good and of evil, the faculty to think, the faculty to enjoy.”⁴⁰⁹ “Man can be destroyed from the outside,” she would later write, reflecting on this dark power, and that is precisely what the camps were engineered to do. Getting shot on the island was nothing to fear—death would be over in an instant—but being murdered slowly, from the inside out, was an absolute cruelty, an “irreparable mutilation.”⁴¹⁰ The Nazis destroyed the spirit first, then the body: “the destruction of meaning, of sentiments, of mental faculties, of conscience and of will, may precede the destruction of life.”⁴¹¹ This was the great fear that hung over Cahun during the hellish weeks that separated her final interrogation from the trial. She slipped another note to Malherbe on the 6th: “I heard another airplane again, early. Impossible to know whether ally or enemy, if arriving, crossing, or leaving. . . Now that I know some German planes are arriving as well, it gives me no pleasure to hear the planes.” Through this interminable waiting, a more personal terror without end, sequestered alone in their cells, Cahun and Malherbe continued to lean on one another and live for one another, prepared as well to die with one another. The majority of their prison letters conclude with a variant of this: “Be brave, my love, through it all. Be brave, above it all. Love.”⁴¹²

The day of their trial came in short order, and the legal proceeding soon revealed itself as something of a farce. The trial was five hours long, and Inspector Bohde, one of the officers who had arrested the two at La Rocquaise, was the only witness. More, the trial was held entirely in German, and Cahun’s court-appointed translator failed to keep up with the proceedings, often leaving her in the dark for long stretches of time.⁴¹³ *Oberst* Sarmsen, the head prosecutor, opened the trial with an unmistakable warning to the two women: “In the Third Reich . . . the role of the Defense is not, as in other countries, to pretend against all truth that the guilty are innocent. It is

limited to stressing extenuating circumstances and pleading in mitigation.”⁴¹⁴ Malherbe would later tell a reporter for the Jersey Weekly Post that “we were taken for trial, if you can call it a trial; all they did was read our statement and sentence us. A German officer was detailed to ‘defend’ us and he told the court that it was most unpleasant to have to defend such people.” The Nazi defender was openly hostile to the pair and frequently insulted them, leading Malherbe at one point to stand up in front of the tribunal and declare that “the defense is much more bitter against us than the prosecution.”⁴¹⁵ Still, a “Testament” they wrote soon after the trial, in expectation of their imminent execution, gives us a glimpse into the kind of defense they must have advanced for themselves before the court: “We’re essentially against nationalisms, separatisms, that is against war.” War represented “the most drastic regression” possible from the revolution in whose name they were fighting. “On our side, on the side of democracy,” the nameless soldiers had done all they could to stop the ruinous course of the war in which all sides had found themselves fatally entangled. “When I tried to induce the German soldiers to lay down their arms,” Cahun wrote, “I was quite true to my principles, was I not? 1st, against war; 2nd, against the regression represented by our enemies. Perhaps Jersey was almost the only place where that luxury could be indulged.”⁴¹⁶ While the prosecution argued that the nameless soldiers’ tracts were designed to incite a mutiny and provoke the soldiers into shooting their officers, Cahun responded that her texts were resolutely “*pacifist*. Incitement to desertion, certainly! With violence if needed, but a minimum of violence.” The pair had been, precisely, trying to stave off further violence and needless destruction: the nameless conspiracy had always been resolutely on the side of the soldiers, of Germany, of peace, of becoming, of life.

Despite the eloquence and simplicity of their defense, Sarmen returned shortly after the reading of their statement with his verdict, one that reflected his own sense of astonishment and

consternation toward the nameless soldiers. Their offenses were not merely personal or moral, he began, but constituted a “political crime” of an absolutely singular kind. “You are *franc-tireurs*,” he continued, snipers, sharpshooters, “even though you used spiritual arms instead of firearms. It is indeed a more serious crime. With firearms, one knows at once what damage has been done, but with spiritual arms, one cannot tell how far-reaching it may be.”⁴¹⁷ For Cahun, Sarmsen’s indictment was the most powerful and important confirmation of her resistance work possible; the nameless weapons had been so effective that they had damaged the morale of the German troops island-wide, sent the officers reeling, spread panic through the ranks. Sarmsen was forced to admit his respect for their efforts: “he considered that we had acted as patriots and that, on a personal basis, he in no way blamed us.”⁴¹⁸ Still, he was obliged to hand down the War Council’s sentence: “For propaganda undermining the morale of the German forces . . . we were sentenced to death.” For listening to the BBC, they were given “six years’ penal servitude” and an additional nine months for concealing their camera and revolvers. As an additional penalty, their house would be requisitioned and their property confiscated.⁴¹⁹ Cahun, having anticipated the death penalty all along, decided to play a final card, one that would fatally undermine the air of gravity and respectability that hung over the proceedings, demonstrating again the incorrigibility and irreverence that had fueled the entire nameless campaign. Rising to give her final statement, unable to resist the temptation of making one last symbolic gesture of defiance in the spirit of the nameless soldier, employing the blackest humor, she made the tribunal “burst out laughing by [her] simulated naiveté: ‘Are we to do the nine months and six years before we are shot?’”⁴²⁰ Sarmsen could barely contain himself and struggled to regain order in the court, telling Cahun angrily—and, given the slightly surreal circumstances, rather humorlessly—that the death sentence would be served first. So much for the Nazi sense of humor.

The tribunal was adjourned, Malherbe and Cahun embraced, and the interpreter turned to address Cahun personally: “You are not afraid?” “I am not afraid of the idea of death. Perhaps I shall be afraid when the time comes. I cannot tell.” “No,” the interpreter concurred thoughtfully, “no one can tell.”⁴²¹ Still, Cahun and Malherbe had steeled themselves for this outcome, spending their time between the bureaucratic niceties of paperwork and signatures by talking to the young members of the *Feldgendarmarie* about “the life of Nietzsche, of his philosophy, of his francophilia.”⁴²² Even in court, below the din of the farcical proceedings, one could still hear the echoes of the nameless soldier: “Also sprach Zarathustra,” he whispered, “also sprach the Soldier with no name!”

Within a week, the Nazis had requisitioned La Rocquaise and seized the women’s property, setting a troubling precedent for Jersey’s local administrators. On November 21st, *Feldkommandatur* 515 sent a missive to Alexander Coutanche, the bailiff of Jersey: “In virtue of a sentence of the military court, the property of the two French Subjects, Susanne MALHERBE and Lucie SCHWOB, La Rocquaise, St. Brelade, has been distrained. I request that the necessary caveat be entered in the Land Registry which will debar a disposal of the real property of the two French women.”⁴²³ Coutanche had been contacted the previous day by von Aufsess, who notified him officially of the sentence of execution that had been passed on Cahun and Malherbe by the Nazi tribunal. Knowing that this sentence was bound to upset the local population—perhaps even provoking them into defying the Nazis more openly, which would only invite further reprisals from the occupiers—Coutanche drafted a carefully-worded appeal on the following day to the *Platzkommandant* overseeing Jersey:

Baron von Aufsess informed me on November 20th, 1944, that sentence of death had been pronounced by the Fortress Court on two women of French nationality for offences against the Occupying Authority, which were not offences of violence. . . . [That] such a sentence has been pronounced is causing anxiety and distress amongst the population . . .

because of a feeling of repugnance against the carrying out of a sentence of death on women. . . . In view of the great difficulties which are facing the civil population in the future and of my desire to avoid anything calculated to arouse passion, I desire strongly to appeal for mercy on behalf of the two women in question.⁴²⁴

Coutanche's appeal was successful. It seems the Nazi officials were anxious at this late stage in the war to "avoid anything calculated to arouse passion" as well—one historian puts it neatly, writing that "the execution of two respectable middle-aged women was unlikely to bode well for postwar treatment by the Allied forces."⁴²⁵ Stuck in a seemingly impossible position—how to cancel the sentence of execution without making the war tribunal look like a joke?—the Nazis decided to make a show of their "magnanimity," telling Cahun and Malherbe that if only they were willing to sign a petition for clemency, acknowledging their wrongdoing and asking the regime for forgiveness, their lives might be spared, their sentences commuted.⁴²⁶ Cahun and Malherbe were not willing to bow their heads before the Nazis, much less sign a false confession and beg for their mercy. The two adamantly refused to sign the proffered appeal, much to the officers' dismay. As Löwy points out, "they considered it dishonorable to ask favors of the Third Reich."⁴²⁷ They saw their execution as the "final element of their resistance," a last act of defiance that would consummate the project, and were unwilling to betray their values at the barrel of a pistol.⁴²⁸ Between the end of November and the beginning of January 1945, they simply refused to sign the document. In early January "the chief warder . . . came to see us to advise us officially that the judges of our trial had undertaken this action without our signatures."⁴²⁹ While "their" appeal for clemency would not be granted until late the following month, they were astonished by this turn in fortune, keeping up their resistance work while bolstering one another's spirits through the harsh winter of 1945, waiting for the end of the interminable war.

That winter was particularly difficult for Cahun and Malherbe. Lewis notes that "the

sisters had to endure . . . in a virtually unlit, unheated prison, on sparse, unpalatable food.”⁴³⁰ The living conditions in the prison were unsanitary, food supplies were dangerously low, and the emotional atmosphere was stifling. While the two had been temporarily granted a stay of execution, the Nazi officers kept them in the dark as to the status of their appeal, implying that they could be deported to Germany and the camps at any time. One of the jailers confided to the two that, “in Germany, the camps were not so bad. The sanitary facilities were good in Germany. There was a lot of coal and food. . . . A shame,” he said, “that there are no more boats for Germany.” The implication to Cahun was absolutely clear: “*there were still boats to take us to Alderney,*” which housed a small but notorious prison camp. To this veiled threat, Cahun replied, witheringly, “Shame. We knew where he was going: the threat of Alderney could succeed where the threat of death had failed.”⁴³¹ Resisting these attempts at emotional manipulation as best they could, the two nevertheless found themselves overtaken by the precarity of their situation, melancholy becoming a familiar companion to them both. On February 19th, the day before they were to learn if their appeal had been granted, Cahun sent Malherbe a “Lullaby / To a woman on death row” that spoke to the physical privation and emotional isolation they were both suffering: “Lullaby / To a woman on death row / In a white cell / It’s the eternal Sunday / Of which never does a Monday / Interrupt the boredom . . . / These eternal Sundays, / And on the bed made of boards / The unending hell of wintry night. / O fourteen-hour long nights / Where dreams are / Our only recourse . . . / Tomorrow maybe at dawn.”⁴³² The following day, they learned that the appeal had been successful, that the Nazis, in their wide mercy, had commuted their sentence from death to life imprisonment. Surely the war could not continue forever. But, they asked themselves, would tomorrow bring about their liberation? Or “were we to be shot, in the end? With them, did we ever know?”⁴³³ In the final months leading up to the Liberation, the threat of

imminent execution remained suspended over them like a dark cloud, the threatening weather in the tableau of prison life. Only their reliance on one another and on their fellow prisoners kept them alive; without them, Cahun writes, she surely would have died.

Finally the end of the war came. Mussolini was executed on April 28th, Hitler committed suicide in his Berlin bunker on April 30th, and immediately thereafter, the Nazis began to release political prisoners from the Gloucester Street prison, one by one. By May 8th, the day before Liberation, only Cahun and Malherbe remained. This moment was one of the most trying times of their imprisonment—“without the support and solidarity of the other inmates,” a historian writes, “they were plunged into a strange and uncertain world.” Still, they braced one another, and on 2:45 pm, May 8th, 1945, just fifteen minutes before Churchill’s famous “this is your victory!” speech, the call came down from the Nazi leadership to release the two résistantes. Malherbe quietly packed up her remaining belongings, including many of the notes and letters that she and Cahun had written to one another in the course of the nearly ten months they had been together in prison, and hid them in the lining of her coat. Saying goodbye to the German guards who had treated her kindly and who had helped keep Cahun alive by sneaking her extra rations of food, Malherbe promised to tell the Allies about their good conduct—a promise she kept. Rejoining Cahun, the two walked out of the prison together, through the courtyard, and out into freedom. They were met at the prison gates by a friend—“Faith”—who accompanied them back to what remained of La Rocquaise.⁴³⁴ They took in the scene, saw the destruction, grieved the looting, attempted to chase down what remained of their belongings, of their pictures, of their lives. They met with scant success.⁴³⁵ So much was gone, so much had to be rebuilt: but Cahun, valuing above all her freedom, stood there, taking it all in, knowing what she had done, what she had almost died for, what she had survived. At this moment of maximum intensity, a thought

passed through her, visceral as a wound, powerful as an emotion: here, “in the ruined farm, I am free.”⁴³⁶ The nameless conspiracy had succeeded; the nameless soldiers had broken through the emotional defenses of the invaders, undermining them at their very core, putting a brake on the destruction; the nameless weapons had, again and again, found their marks. Moreover, she was alive, and so was Suzanne; and, a crowning achievement, the Nazi prosecutor at her trial had called her a *franc-tireur* of the mind, a sharpshooter whose spiritual weaponry had done an incalculable amount of damage to the Nazis on Jersey and the imaginary on which they depended, inciting the German soldiers to inner desertion and outer rebellion. While she had created the nameless soldier to be a life-giving symbol for the Nazis, they had gifted her one back, a symbol that encapsulated for her all that she had accomplished during her years of active resistance—transfigured even in their eyes, Cahun had become “the spiritual sharpshooter of Jersey.”

While I will leave Cahun here, in her ruined estate, finally free, I would like to point out that near the end of her life she returned again and again to this symbol of the *franc-tireur*, finding in it a crystallization of her ideas from the release of her *Aveux non avenues* to her release from prison. Having committed herself to the fight against the Nazis on the side of no one, without a party, without a strict ideology, without answering to anyone but herself, she had come to see the role of the revolutionary artist as analogous to that of the nameless soldier. Whereas the nameless soldier had fought on the side of a perpetual insurrection in feeling and value in the German soldiers, challenging them to bring out their “ambivalences and *values*” and transform their bellicose sensibilities, the revolutionary poet had to fight for a perpetual insurrection of sensibility in the heart of the reader, opening up in them new pathways for existential exploration and metamorphosis, those magical shortcuts and short-circuits of which she had written long

before in *Les Paris sont ouverts*. In a letter to Desnos, written at the height of the campaign of the nameless soldier, Cahun confided that she now saw herself as both a pre- and post-revolutionary, fighting not for a particular political cause but to instantiate a new world of values that were deeply personal to her, “to achieve through the intervention of a collective effort,” she had once written, that “universe that I believed I carried in me.” She told Desnos that the truly revolutionary poet could only “prefigure the highest aims of the Revolution, keep these aims alive. . . . Besides I thoroughly believe that it is the only thing an artist can be – to be of any use in the world. ‘Artist’ again is not quite the satisfactory word for my purpose. So I do not stop at that.”⁴³⁷ The revolutionary artist was also, in their own way, a kind of spiritual sharpshooter, taking aim at the sensibilities of their readers, prefiguring in their work and in their lives the highest aims of their own personal revolutions, nurturing them, keeping them alive. Fighting always for that perpetual metamorphosis of existential form that Cahun had championed under the sign of bovarysme, working obliquely to transform the sensibilities of their readers, having faith at the same time that this inner transformation in feeling would lead to an outer transformation in social and political sensibility, these nameless soldiers shouldered the responsibility for carrying out, in themselves and in the world, that “*irrevocable* perpetual revolution” “which will be permanent or will not be viable.”⁴³⁸ In a personal document written after the war, Cahun reflects for a final time on the image of the spiritual sharpshooter:

The *franc-tireur* who takes the responsibility for the ends and the means, for the orders which he gives himself, for the acts which he accomplishes without hindrances or excuses, this is the wrinkle on the forehead in the fog of national wars foreign to man, this is in the civil war the citizen of the republic humanizing war itself, this is man still free. He who gives himself a mission does not need to enlist himself.⁴³⁹

Here is where we leave Cahun. She would spend the rest of her life with Malherbe in the rebuilt La Rocquaise, recording in minute detail her resistance work against the Nazis, until her death on

December 8th, 1954. I hope to have given the reader a picture of her not only as a revolutionary artist, poet, and writer, but as someone who fundamentally rethought the relationship between art, politics, and subjectivity, finding in the raw material of individual and collective life an artistic challenge par excellence. She had lived this idea to the hilt, pledging her life to it, almost died for it. In the end, she came to this conclusion, one that encapsulated all that she had said, all that she had written, all that she had dreamed of and fought for: “The eternal choice of changing either the world or oneself – and the choice of the means – is at your service.”⁴⁴⁰

Conclusion: Symbolic Misery or Permanent Revolution

At the beginning of the work I emphasized the two goals I had in mind when writing *Plastic / Explosive: Claude Cahun and the Politics of Becoming Otherwise*. My first ambition was purely historical: I wanted to give English-speaking readers the chance to encounter the remarkable theoretical and political work of this avant-garde heroine directly, with a maximum of textual detail and a minimum of critical interpretation. I wanted them to see Cahun's ideas in the forms and contexts in which they were evolved, hoping at the same time that this kind of careful excavation of her thought and activism in their concrete historical circumstances would stand as its own kind of critical commentary. So much secondary work has overwritten Cahun's own theoretical and political contributions, using her as a cypher for a multitude of contemporary concerns. Silenced for so long, it was important to me to let Cahun speak to us in her own voice. For, as I would like to briefly indicate in this conclusion, a new engagement with Cahun's political and artistic legacy might be able to supply us with what Gilles Deleuze called "new weapons" with which to confront the problems of the present historical and political moment.⁴⁴¹

I want to return now to the second aim of the dissertation and reflect on the way Cahun's life and work can begin to offer us provisional answers or approaches to the fundamental questions with which we began—what can be the role of the avant-garde artist in radical political struggles? And what part in them might an avant-garde aesthetic have to play? As we have seen, Cahun not only elaborated a rich and complex network of ideas that attempted to answer these questions theoretically but built an entire anti-Nazi resistance movement dedicated to realizing the power of her formulations on the terrain of real life. What makes Cahun's ideas worthy of careful study is not just their theoretical power or poetic charm but their *existential utility*, their demonstrated power in fighting against the forces of fascism. More than any other Surrealist,

Cahun's theoretical work and political activism offers us a unique vantage point from which to see our twin questions in a fresh light, elaborating in her writings a new way to think of the relationship between avant-garde artists and radical politics and offering a glimpse through her engaged resistance work of what that new relationship might look like on the ground.

I would like to remind the reader of Cahun's main ideas and positions as they pertain to our guiding questions, giving a sense of their mutation and transformation over the twenty-year span that we have covered in our exposition while returning to the themes and critical concepts that I deployed in the introduction. I have argued throughout this work that Cahun's intellectual and political universe is anchored in and develops through a progressive rethinking of the function and role of avant-garde art, politics, subjectivity, and the artist. Taking each in turn: in the 1920s, and especially in *Aveux non avenues*, Cahun tied Gaultier's key concept of bovarysme to her conception of what avant-garde writing is and can do. It no longer has as its main function the realistic reflection of the world or even its poetic transfiguration but instead seeks to interrogate and transform the structures of subjectivity and sensibility of the writer and reader. This form of writing is a powerful vehicle of *trans-subjectivation*, allowing both reader and writer to chart a trajectory from one existential constellation to another, providing them at the same time with imaginative tools and lines of flight that can help them realize this projective or autofictional constellation. Cahun initially connected this new bovaryc conception of art to the medium of writing, but by the late 1930s and especially by the time of her engagement with the Nameless Soldiers she had widened this notion to encompass all kinds of artistic production. While the bulk of the anti-Nazi propaganda that Cahun produced took the form of written tracts, she also made dozens of installations, sculptures, collages, and performances that attempted to

provoke the German soldiers into practicing their own bovarysme, into making them “become otherwise” and reject the existential dressage of their Nazi handlers.

The aesthetic that Cahun deployed in her resistance work stayed true not only to this new, bovaryc conception of art but also to the kind of approach she championed in *Les Paris sont ouverts*. Her tracts tried to free the German soldiers from the cage of their ideological conditioning, but they did so obliquely and suggestively, making the soldiers confront their often ambiguous thoughts and feelings on their own. While a particular tract might have enjoined the soldiers to envision the wives and children they had left behind, it also left it up to them to figure out what to do with this image: would they defect or desert, hoping to return home? Would they fight harder for their superiors in order to bring the war more quickly to a close? Would they remain completely unmoved or even push back emotionally against this attempt to invade their mind through the backdoor of their sensibility? Precisely to the extent that Cahun’s propaganda left the soldiers free to decide how to interpret it and whether—or how—to act on it, it brought their *freedom* into play, opening the door onto a potential future or subjective constellation that they would have to walk through on their own. The point of this poetic form—and one reason, perhaps, why it was so devastatingly effective—was not to foreclose or dictate the becoming of the enemy but to radically *catalyze* it, giving the soldiers the imaginative and affective means by which to both imagine and realize a new subjective arrangement for themselves that could escape the power of the Nazi regime of sensibility.

Cahun’s conception of political engagement changed from her early work with the Surrealists in the AEAR to her involvement with the Nameless Soldiers, becoming progressively more disillusioned with rigid bureaucratic structures and centralized party politics. But running through all of her work is a notion of politics that sees it as fundamentally rooted in what I have

been calling regimes of sensibility or particular configurations of the sensible. The sensible, we recall, refers to those systems of interpretive coordinates that different political regimes create, maintain, and depend upon that delimit who can speak, what can be intelligibly said, what can be seen, what can be heard, what can be thought, and what can be felt. Cahun's great innovation was to see the way these personal and collective regimes of sensibility or arrangements of the sensible could be transformed through the medium of a bovaryc, avant-garde aesthetic: not only could her kind of transformative aesthetic help individual readers interrogate and reform their own structures of sensibility, but it could also produce, through these individual metamorphoses, a kind of bottom-up revolution in sensibility, a molecular revolution in meaning and value. To the extent that every dominant political system maintains and perpetuates a particular regime of sensibility that enables it to master the world symbolically, any counterchallenge to or refusal of this regime and the way it structures individual and collective perception constitutes for Cahun a radical political action.

Particularly during her time in *Contre-Attaque*, Cahun offered a vision of the avant-garde artist that saw her not merely as the creator of individual artworks but as a dynamic participant in the ongoing struggle to define, delimit, or expand the sensible itself. The job of the artist was no longer to create new works of art but new ways of seeing. Cahun called for a permanent revolution in subjectivity and meaning, a perpetual insurrection in sense and value that would help create and protect a symbolic and existential universe capable of resisting the unilateral impositions of fascism. The avant-garde artist could work directly for particular political causes or ideological positions and could fruitfully employ an avant-garde aesthetic in doing so. In one sense, this was what the project of the Nameless Soldier had been fundamentally about. But the avant-garde artist now had to take it a step further and engage the political at a deeper level, was

tasked by Cahun with participating in the endless project of recreating and enriching the sensible itself. No longer—or not only—fighting for a partisan cause, the artist had to intervene on the very precondition of politics, progressively expanding the frontiers of what could be thought, what could be said, what could be seen, and what could be felt, forever testing the limits and pushing the boundaries of individual and collective sensibility. The only way to combat the concretizing tendencies of hegemonic political systems and the regimes of sensibility upon which they relied, Cahun thought, was to foment a kind of democratic insurrection in sensibility and value. The avant-garde artist could not accomplish this task alone, hermetically sealed off from the larger social and political worlds in which she was embedded, but had to collaborate actively with others in this perpetual work of refurbishing the sensible. As Cahun reiterated throughout her writings, the collaboration of the reader—the “collaboration of the Other”—was indispensable in making this project come alive.

None of these formulations would have been theoretically or practically possible were it not for the enriched notion of subjectivity that Cahun drew from Gaultier’s work on *bovarysme* and which she enshrined at the center of her philosophical and political project. Following Gaultier, Cahun saw the “self” as an imaginary entity, a fictive whole; underneath the apparent cohesion of a self lies a teeming multiplicity of drives, affects, desires, ideas, and wills. This multiplicity differs from itself by virtue of its structural heterogeneity and its perpetual transformation through time. The self, in short, is fundamentally otherwise to itself, formed around a core of productive alterity. We recall Cahun’s Rimbaudian formula: “the ‘I’ is another – a multiple always.” Cahun saw subjectivity as a plastic ensemble, susceptible to being passively molded by outside forces but carrying within itself a foundational power of self-transformation and existential metamorphosis that makes it capable of giving itself form. More, it has the ability

to radically refuse and explode given existential patterns and subjective forms: the plastic ensemble is also, dangerously and profoundly, a *plastic explosive*. And herein lies the political import of Cahun's notion of plastic subjectivity: to the extent that a subject is able to control their own plasticity and shape their own becoming, they break free of those normalizing forces from outside that attempt to forestall or control it. Everyone harbors within them this untamable power of existential metamorphosis and self-transformation, and it is the implicit or explicit task of all of Cahun's work to make them become aware of it and help them gain control over it. Her most important legacy to us today, I would argue, is precisely this weapon of personal and collective metamorphosis, this individual and political power of becoming otherwise.

As we reach the end of this work, I would like to return to a small hint I gave in the introduction but passed by in silence: I said that the aim of the study to resituate avant-garde artists and art in relation to radical politics was more theoretical than the pragmatic aim of recovering Cahun's life and activism but was "perhaps more urgent in the face of the present historical moment." I intended only to drop this hint for the reader, hoping they would read the work on its own terms while coming to see the present moment refracted through the prism of Cahun's thought. For the social and political threats that Cahun fought against so bravely continue to haunt us today. We agree with Félix Guattari that "Nazism and fascism were not transitory maladies, accidents of history, thereafter overcome. They constitute potentialities that are always present; they continue to inhabit our universe of virtuality." And today we see the same kind of restrictive regimes of sensibility in operation that Cahun worked tirelessly to conquer and transform. We are witnessing the rise and intensification of an increasingly ubiquitous form of *microfascism* that manifests itself in "racism, xenophobia, the rise of religious

fundamentalisms, militarism, and the oppression of women.”⁴⁴² For all the time that separates us historically, Cahun would find our social and political universe disturbingly close to her own.

At the same time as these forms of microfascism proliferate throughout the body politic, we see also the increasing disenfranchisement of the average person from the circuits of cultural and symbolic production upon which the vitality of the sensible depends. As people become further disconnected from the construction of the symbols and sensibilities that underpin communal life, as they enter increasingly into the condition of what Bernard Stiegler calls *symbolic misery*, the attraction to authoritarian or nationalistic politics grows; the regimes of sensibility that these political formations offer become narrower and more restricted, delimiting ever more sharply those who are authorized to speak and have a share in the community from those who are cast outside the bounds of political and social intelligibility. What we are dealing with, Stiegler says, is a profound and widespread “*loss of symbolic participation*,” a “*loss of participation in the production of symbols*” and, more broadly, a loss of participation in the mutual construction and enrichment of the sensible itself.⁴⁴³ In the political and cultural arena, we see clearly the effects of this “catastrophe of the sensible.”⁴⁴⁴ How can Cahun’s work equip us to fight against this condition of symbolic misery in which we presently find ourselves? And what “new weapons” can we draw from it to combat this accelerating catastrophe of the sensible, this unbearable and nearly universal “*deficit of sensibility*” that threatens to undermine the basis of radically democratic politics?⁴⁴⁵

Provisional answers to these questions might be found in what to me is the most decisive and important aspect of Cahun’s thought: taken to its logical conclusion, it completely effaces the difference between artist and audience, between poetry and discourse, between art and life itself. Every term that passes in front of Cahun’s magic mirror is transfigured in a *radically*

democratic way, opening up the field of each concept's application to everyone. I would suggest that it is precisely in the conceptual anarchism that Cahun brings to the concepts of art, artistry, and politics that we might find new conceptual and existential weapons with which to confront the symbolic misery that surrounds us. "Art," Cahun says, is not a unique modality of human life or production but is instead a basic, even animal need. *Les Paris sont ouverts*, we recall, opened with a meditation on "poetry" as a primeval mode of relation between man and the world, a need inherent to humans to both transfigure the world through language and find, through this poetic transfiguration, new ways to understand it, relate to it, and master it. Poetry is fundamentally an agent of "connection," a vital mediator in the rapport of man to man, of man to the world, and of man to himself. If "poetry" is now the creature of literary specialists, Cahun said, that was no fault of *true* poetry, of the metamorphic potential of language to expand the limits of human sensibility. "Poetry" is not an artifact made by a particular kind of verbal technician but a mode of relating to the world that is always at one's fingertips. "Art," understood only as the concrete material output of an "artist," was no more; the production of artworks was simply one modality among many by which a person could enter into this poetic, transformative relation with the world and enrich the individual and collective storehouse of sensibility.

If "art" disappeared as a discrete category for Cahun, evaporating or proliferating into the interstices of personal and collective life, so did "the artist." So much of modern art's imaginary was taken up with an image of the artist as a unique mediator of meaning and value, a master of the *technē* of language, a virtuoso of sensibility in the purely aesthetic or formal sense. But Cahun saw artistry as a latent tendency or ever-present potentiality available to everyone, at all times—one became an artist each time one entered into a poetic relationship with the world. Sometimes this encounter would result in the creation of a "work of art," but sometimes it would

have a result that was purely affective or existential. The artist was not the master of poetry's transfiguring power but its eternal apprentice: to "discover how poetry plays and how to play its game," Cahun once wrote, "this is what is important to us."

Cahun also submitted the concept of "political engagement" to a radically democratic reformulation, one that confronts directly the problem of individual and collective disenfranchisement from symbolic activity that we, following Stiegler, call symbolic misery. "Politics" was no longer about plumping for a particular political party or ideology with its particular division or partition of the sensible that determined who did and did not have a conceptual or actual place in the community but about intervening in the shape and texture of the sensible itself, finding ways to transform it and enrich it, using the poetic intervention to supplement it "with those who have no part in the perceptual coordinates of the community." The poetic transfiguration of the world or the other or the self can bring us up against the limits of the sensible, but it can also help us plot imaginary trajectories that can take us beyond them. Cahun made this perpetual supplementation and enrichment of the sensible the task of all those who engaged in the poetic relation with the world and named it "the permanent revolution," a revolution that could only be made by those who tended to "a complete moral liberation," who rejected the current partition of the sensible that restricts what it is possible to think, say, feel, and imagine, who rejected, in short, the perceptual mores of a given time and place. This revolution is not—and could not be—once and for all, will have to be perpetually renewed. And this project, which is both political and metapolitical, insofar as it bears upon the condition of possibility of politics itself, this Nameless Conspiracy, remains open to us today.

Taken side by side, Cahun's project of the permanent revolution poses itself as the conceptual and existential counterchallenge to the condition of symbolic misery in which we

presently find ourselves. Against symbolic and cultural dispossession, the eternal enrichment of the sensible; against artistic specialization and industrialization, the universalization and democratization of the poetic relation; against the capture and concretization of sensibility, its endless transformation and metamorphosis. Lautréamont said that poetry will be made by all, not by one, and Cahun said the same of the permanent revolution; the perpetual insurrection begins when one sees these statements as two faces of the same thing. And it is here that I must pose the vital question to myself and to the reader: will I capitulate to the current state of things and continue to endure the condition of symbolic misery that threatens to overwhelm me, or will I side with Cahun and deploy her nameless weapons to safeguard that permanent revolution that aims to perpetually transform and enrich the sensible itself? What side will I choose? “What part will you play?” The present work is a storehouse of nameless weapons, but to discover how to use them the reader will have to “go it alone and take one step further than they would like. One has carefully blocked off all the exits, except the door of entry, and one leaves it to them to open it.” *Les Paris* are—and remain—open.

Notes

- ¹JHT/1995/00045/60A. Further citations beginning with “JHT” refer to items in the Claude Cahun archive on deposit with the Jersey Heritage Trust, accessible at www.jerseyheritage.org.
- ² Foster 118.
- ³ “héroïne inconnue,” Leperlier 2006, 449.
- ⁴ Breton, “Manifesto,” 47.
- ⁵ “Loin de moi l’intention de reprocher à qui que ce soit d’avoir quitté la France au moment de l’occupation. Mais on doit constater que le Surréalisme était absent des préoccupations de ceux qui sont restés, parce qu’il ne leur fut d’aucun secours ni sur le plan affectif, ni du comportement devant les nazis, ni sur celui, pratique, de la lutte entreprise entre eux,” Tzara 1966, 74. Cf Thynne 2010, 1.
- ⁶ Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 202.
- ⁷ Krauss 29.
- ⁸ “Je m’excusais, alléguant mon incompetence,” Cahun 2002, 593. All subsequent quotations from this standard edition of Cahun’s writings will be referenced simply as the *Écrits*.
- ⁹ “J’avais . . . choisi le mois de mars 1932 pour me mettre au service du groupe . . . le désir de participer aux expériences de ce groupe, qui m’avait attiré plus que tout autre, d’atteindre par l’entremise d’un effort collectif l’univers que je croyais porter en moi,” Ibid. 594.
- ¹⁰ “Rien ne me paraît plus lucide, plus inexorable, plus émouvant que ce témoignage.... Ce que nous défendons n’a jamais été mieux dégagé, n’a jamais été mis plus haut,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 272.
- ¹¹ “Je est un autre – un multiple toujours,” *Écrits* 594.

¹² Malabou 5.

¹³ Ibid. 6.

¹⁴ Foucault 222.

¹⁵ Qtd. in Vahanian 5.

¹⁶ Foucault 237.

¹⁷ “Ça oblige le lecteur à faire tout seul un pas de plus qu’il ne voudrait,” Cahun 1934, 14.

¹⁸ “Découvrir comment joue la poésie et comment faire son jeu, voilà ce qui nous importe,” Ibid.

32.

¹⁹ Qtd. in Doy 138.

²⁰ Rockhill 3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Rancière 9.

²³ “d’une révolution qui sera permanente ou ne sera pas viable,” *Écrits* 564.

²⁴ Rockhill 3.

²⁵ “Mais: Cahun? Claude Cahun? Qui connaît cela?” Louis Dumur, editor of the *Mercure de France*, qtd. in Leautaud 311.

²⁶ The circumstances surrounding the auction are recounted in Downie, “Introduction,” 7-9. The books found in Cahun’s library are discussed in Downie, “Introduction,” 8 and Oehsen 2003, 9.

²⁷ Downie, “Introduction” 7-8.

²⁸ Oehsen 2003, 9.

²⁹ Leperlier 2006, 447-48.

³⁰ “Claude Cahun était bien le pseudonyme d’une femme née Lucy Schwob, de la famille de

Marcel Schwob, originaire de Nantes,” Ibid. 448.

³¹ “Je fis passer une annonce dans un journal de Jersey qui suscita quelques envois . . . et fit émerger un petit lot d'archives: des notes manuscrites, des coupures de journaux, des lettres,” Ibid. 449.

³² “Je me revois sous la lampe, plongeant dans des boîtes, des cartons, dans de gros classeurs marquées par l'humidité, où tout n'en finit plus de se mélanger: lettres, carnets de compte, agendas, photographies de toutes sortes, articles de journaux, manuscrits, vieux calendriers, dessins, revues, factures, estampes,” Ibid. 453.

³³ Marcous-Devine 28.

³⁴ Qtd. in Sawin 62-3.

³⁵ For the articles in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, and *Afterimage*, see, respectively, Lichtenstein, Phillips, and Lasalle and Solomon-Godeau.

³⁶ Knafo 41, 45, 48.

³⁷ Lasalle and Solomon-Godeau 12.

³⁸ Colville 263-264.

³⁹ See also Lichtenstein, Bate, and Harris.

⁴⁰ Blessing 186.

⁴¹ Monahan 129.

⁴² Solomon-Godeau 114.

⁴³ Kline 19.

⁴⁴ Blessing 186 and Caws 101.

⁴⁵ Downie, “Introduction,” 8.

⁴⁶ Shaw 2003, Cole, Latimer 2005, 2006.

⁴⁷ Welby-Everard; Leperlier 1994, 18; Oberhuber.

⁴⁸ Oehsen 2003, 9.

⁴⁹ Cole 345.

⁵⁰ McGurk 50.

⁵¹ Thynne 2008.

⁵² McGurk 51.

⁵³ As of 2016, an English translation of a lecture by Michael Löwy on Cahun's "political turn" has appeared, as well as articles dealing with her resistance work against the Nazis between 1940 and 1944 by Follain, Thynne 2010, and Zachmann 2011.

⁵⁴ For books treating the cultural politics of Cahun's photographs and photomontages, see Doy and Shaw 2013. For articles dealing with Cahun's photography, see Apter, Gravano, Josten, Latimer 2006, Morris, Stevenson, Topdjian, Wampole, and Zachmann 2003 and 2006.

⁵⁵ Löwy 66.

⁵⁶ Thynne 2010, 3. See below for the "Aragon Affair."

⁵⁷ Gaultier 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 173.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 108, 93.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 107-08.

⁶¹ "Cette tension ontologique qui s'identifie à notre pouvoir d'imaginer est le ressort même de l'individuation, de la conquête de soi," Leperlier 2006, 163.

⁶² "C'est au cœur de l'expérience imaginaire et projective que se fait ou se défait le devenir du sujet," Ibid.

⁶³ Gaultier 122-23.

⁶⁴ “L'altérité recherchée peut être de caractère réactif, passif, une extrapolation illusoire, le symptôme d'une dépossession de soi,” Leperlier 2006, 163.

⁶⁵ Gaultier 33, 4.

⁶⁶ Eliot 111.

⁶⁷ Gaultier 123.

⁶⁸ “une véritable puissance ajoutée, un excès de la volonté, une avancée vers une synthèse dynamique des identifications,” Leperlier 2006, 163.

⁶⁹ “Claude Cahun méditera et *expérimentera* les éprouvantes alternances de ces deux versants d'un bovarysme,” Ibid. 163.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 58.

⁷¹ Ibid. 162. See also Forth 36-44.

⁷² “*Bovarysme*. Impuissance. Aucun concentration d'esprit. Peu de logique: jugements subjectifs. Enthousiasme et générosité (non pas bonté). – Quelques préjugés, mais superficiels: de vanité sociale. Accès de témérité, puis de faiblesse morale (dépression nerveuse),” Cahun 2006, 85.

⁷³ Gaultier 45.

⁷⁴ “vous comparant à de G. . . (notre Socrate national),” Cahun 2006, 96.

⁷⁵ Gaultier 4, 45.

⁷⁶ “Il présente la jeune revue, expose les tendances de ses amis, leurs antipathies, leur idéal littéraire et métaphysique,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 120-21.

⁷⁷ “*Philosophies* sera le berceau du nouveau système métaphysique de ses collaborateurs qui, par l'intermédiaire de M. Morhange, commencent par ‘réhabiliter Dieu,’” qtd. in Ibid. 121.

⁷⁸ “Pourrions-nous savoir ce qui, dans votre esprit, correspond au mot Dieu? . . . Le mot Dieu vous semble-t-il beau, adorable, grotesque, humoristique. . . ?” qtd. in *Ibid.* 124.

⁷⁹ “*Dieu est pour moi: . . . MOI,*” *Écrits* 479.

⁸⁰ Gaultier 123. “MOI – Non pas telle que je suis évidemment, mais telle que je devrais être – que je voudrais être, si vous le préférez. *Bovarysme,*” *Écrits* 479.

⁸¹ “le plus malléable,” “un changement qui donnerait l'illusion de la constance – ou peut-être plutôt une constance qui donnerait l'illusion du changement,” *Ibid.* 480.

⁸² “Il se métamorphose – se dissolvant ou se coagulant,” *Ibid.*

⁸³ Leperlier 1994, 17, 20.

⁸⁴ “la logique projective, ou <<autofictionnelle>>,” Leperlier 2006, 77.

⁸⁵ Shaw 2013, 145.

⁸⁶ Cahun 2007, 50.

⁸⁷ Shaw 2013, 139, 145.

⁸⁸ Qtd. in *Ibid.* 147. Cahun 2007, 52.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 57.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 50. Qtd. in Shaw 142.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 144.

⁹² Cahun 2007, 53.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 52.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 165.

⁹⁵ Shaw 2013, 139.

⁹⁶ Cahun 2007, 32, 28

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 52.

⁹⁸ “En vain, dans *Aveux non avendus*, je m'efforçai – par l'humour noir, la provocation, le défi – de faire sortir mes contemporains de leur conformisme béat, de leur *complacency*.

L'ostracisme fut à peu près général. À part le silence, les plus basses insultes. Voilà comment la <<critique littéraire>> - sauf celle d'*Aux Écoutes* – voulut bien accueillir les <<poèmes en prose>> de cette indésirable Cassandra,” *Écrits* 710.

⁹⁹ “D'un bout à l'autre, ce livre, c'est du cent mille volts. . . . tout le livre est une âpre et intelligente négation,” JHT/1995/00045/88.

¹⁰⁰ “Elle est aux prises avec un écheveau si emmêlé de tendances opposées qu'on se demande si elle trouvera jamais le fil d'Ariane qui lui permettra d'avancer avec certitude dans son propre dédale. . . . Son livre étrange à l'extrême Une investigation de ce genre conduit à un monde de perplexités,” Brunet 414-15.

¹⁰¹ Shaw 2013, 33.

¹⁰² “Les poètes agissent à leur façon sur la sensibilité des hommes. Leurs atteintes sont plus sournoises; mais leurs coups les plus détournés sont parfois mortels,” Cahun 1934, 8.

¹⁰³ “Cet hiver-là, il neigea, il gela; des milliers de jeunes hommes, chassés de leur employ par la Crise, luttèrent jusqu'à leur dernier sou, jusqu'à leurs dernières forces, puis s'abandonnèrent au désespoir,” Lebesque 125.

¹⁰⁴ Qtd. in Polizzotti 333.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 334.

¹⁰⁶ “d'exalter l'initiative du prolétariat dans la lutte de classe, de stimuler la combativité des masses ouvrières contre le fascisme et le social-fascisme, . . . de préparer la dictature du prolétariat,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 215.

¹⁰⁷ “Marx et Lénine dans le ciel / Vous êtes rouges comme l'aurore / rouges comme la colère /

rouges comme la sang. / . . . / Feu sur Léon Blum / . . . / Feu sur les ours savants de la social-démocratie. / . . . / Je chante la domination violente du Prolétariat sur la bourgeoisie / pour l’anéantissement de cette bourgeoisie / pour l’anéantissement total de cette bourgeoisie,” qtd. in Nadeau 1948, 194-200.

¹⁰⁸ Qtd. in Polizzotti 333.

¹⁰⁹ Qtd. in Ibid. 335.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 336.

¹¹¹ Qtd. in Ibid. 337.

¹¹² “Il n’hésita pas à nous accuser d’être des contre-révolutionnaires,” Éluard 228.

¹¹³ “L’incohérence devient calcul, l’habileté devient intrigue, Aragon devient *un autre* et son souvenir ne peut plus s’accrocher à moi,” Ibid. 229.

¹¹⁴ “J’avais . . . choisi le mois de mars 1932 pour me mettre au service du groupe . . . le désir de participer aux expériences de ce groupe, qui m’avait attiré plus que tout autre, d’atteindre par l’entremise d’un effort collectif l’univers que je croyais porter en moi, . . . illusion de l’actuel ou virtuel avenir,” *Écrits* 594.

¹¹⁵ “Philippe Soupault, rencontré chez Adrienne Monnier, au début de l’année 1919, m’offrit de collaborer à *Littérature* . . . à paraître prochainement. Je m’excusais, alléguant mon incompetence. Ma timidité . . . me faisait rougir plus encore et donnait créance aux contre-sens sur ma véritable nature . . . Le premier *Manifeste* (illustré de *Poisson soluble*), les numéros de *La Révolution surréaliste*, *Nadja*. Trop tard,” Ibid. 593. Cahun 1919, 147-48.

¹¹⁶ Qtd. in Maria 2011.

¹¹⁷ Qtd. in Leperlier 2007, 213.

¹¹⁸ Polizzotti 348.

¹¹⁹ Qtd. in Ibid.

¹²⁰ “J’entrai à A.E.A.R. Sur le terrain ingrate, le moins congénial à mon être, j’avançai prudente et téméraire. . . . En vérité, j’étais précisément sur le terrain politique d’une incompetence risible,” *Écrits* 594.

¹²¹ “Après une suggestion de Cahun, de faire une section de poésie, qui n’est pas retenue, Marcel Jean demande de créer une Commission pour le théâtre. L’idée est approuvée,” AEAR, 17 January 1933, 3.

¹²² “Elle persiste et signe un rapport sur la situation de la poésie Révolutionnaire, qui sera repris et étoffé dans *Les Paris sont ouverts*,” Leperlier 2006, 217.

¹²³ “de pénétrer les pensées et sentiments de cette Jeunesse . . . la révolution a vraiment créé des hommes nouveaux,” qtd. in Alfonsi.

¹²⁴ “Cahun le critique du point de vue culturel: il denote ou l’ignorance ou la mauvaise foi; les affirmations sont fausses, incomplètes, dangereuses. Cahun rappelle la regrettable contribution d’Ehrenbourg à la N.R.F. sur la “Jeunesse Russe,”” AEAR, 28 February 1933, 3.

¹²⁵ Qtd. in Polizzotti 349.

¹²⁶ “cette crise d’aragonite,” *Écrits* 559.

¹²⁷ “À André Breton, ce souvenir de l’A.E.A.R. – séance du mardi 13 Juin 1933: “*Aragon*: Il n’existe pas en URSS d’écrivains qui écrivent ce qui leur passe par la tête. On écrit une chose parce qu’elle est utile; sans quoi elle n’est pas publiée. / *Cahun*: Comment juge-t-on qu’elle sera utile ou non? – Par exemple quand il s’agit de poésie. / *Aragon*: À l’enthousiasme qu’elle provoque pour la construction du socialisme. / *Cahun*: Comment

peut-on se rendre compte qu'elle provoque cet enthousiasme? / *Aragon*: C'est bien simple: quand Maïakovski lisait ses poèmes il attirait des foules; on était obligé de refuser du monde." Aragon expose ce qu'on a fait pour les peuples sibériens les plus arriérés qui n'avaient pas d'alphabet, dont certains (selon lui) n'avaient pas de poésie, pas même de chants. "*Aragon*: Eh bien, camarades, on leur a chanté l'Internationale. Et maintenant ils sont tous poètes," qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 289.

¹²⁸ Qtd. in Polizzotti 349.

¹²⁹ "J'avais travaillé avec Nizan en 32-33 à la stalinisante A.E.A.R. dont j'avais été <<exclue>> . . . au reçu ma lettre de démission," *Écrits* 718.

¹³⁰ "Pour qui écrivez-vous?" Ibid. 538.

¹³¹ "*Commune* veut par là marquer la distance qui sépare les intellectuels de 1919 de ceux de 1933," Aragon 1933, 321.

¹³² "d'une révolution qui sera permanente ou ne sera pas viable," *Écrits* 564. Doy 150.

¹³³ "Écrire *pour tous ceux qui savent lire*, dans une société qui n'est pas la société sans classes, cela revient à écrire seulement pour ceux qui ont un certain loisir et qui peuvent payer, si peu que ce soit, livres, revues, journaux. . . . C'est *contre tous ceux qui savent lire* qu'il faut écrire," *Écrits* 538.

¹³⁴ "Aux lecteurs de tirer profit de ce que l'écrivain a pensé contre leur passé, contre le sien propre," Ibid.

¹³⁵ "J'estime qu'un progress n'est jamais obtenu que par opposition. . . . C'est assez dire que j'écris, que je souhaite écrire avant tout *contre moi*," Ibid.

¹³⁶ "En fin de compte, le choix de la personne, de la collectivité à qui l'on s'adresse a bien peu d'importance. C'est comme un remède, un poison, qu'on a soigneusement préparé pour

un proche et qui tue ou guérit l'inconnu à l'autre bout du monde," Ibid.

- ¹³⁷ "Elle [propagandistic poetry] se contente de ce rôle de racoleuse," Cahun 1934, 12.
- ¹³⁸ "Et il arrive au bout du compte à notre camarade un mécompte assez singulier: c'est qu'elle répond à la fin que c'est *contre elle-même* qu'elle veut écrire. Proposition qui n'est que tout extérieurement différente de celle que nous avons retrouvée dans le plus grand nombre des réponses: *j'écris pour moi* Claude Cahun est ramenée à la position même qu'elle a cherché à fuir, et qui est celle de l'individualisme bourgeois," Aragon 1933, 342-43.
- ¹³⁹ Cahun, *Disavowals* 201. "Encore trois citations, cette fois d'Aragon (première manière), où malgré l'individualisme dont il a fait pénitence, on trouvera sous forme de mot d'ordre (déjà, toujours) l'*irrévocable* révolution perpétuelle, et ces fameuses <<allées et venues de sphinx sur les belvédères de l'imagination>> qu'il désavoue en vain," Cahun 1934, 25.
- ¹⁴⁰ "Découvrir comment joue la poésie et comment faire son jeu, voilà ce qui nous importe," Ibid. 32.
- ¹⁴¹ "Quel parti prenez-vous pour en finir / avec l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme / avec votre propre dilemme: / exploité exploiteur," Ibid. 3.
- ¹⁴² "Avec Lénine et: <<Pour l'expérience d'un gouvernement social-démocrate>>, ou bien / Avec la poésie <<de classe>> d'Aragon et: <<Feu sur les ours savants de la social-démocratie>> . . . ?" Ibid. 13. "l'excédent de souffrance dans le monde," Ibid. 32.
- ¹⁴³ "La poésie révolutionnaire existe à l'heure qu'il est, et c'est une toute autre affaire de savoir si elle vous plaît," Aragon, qtd. in Ibid. 34.
- ¹⁴⁴ "ce grand premier rôle que joue glorieusement la <<poésie>> de propagande" Ibid. 30. "Mais s'il est loin de l'être, je doute qu'il soulève <<des réticences profondes>> chez d'autres

- révolutionnaires que ces Messieurs, qui, entrés dans la carrière et nourris des applaudissements auxquels leur vanité et leur intérêt les poussent à faire un perpétuel appel, vivent, directement ou indirectement, de leur prostitution au prolétariat” Ibid. 26.
- “d’épuiser par une sorte de masturbation révolutionnaire l’énergie des masses,” Ibid. 12.
- ¹⁴⁵ “Le langage étant un *agent de conflits*, autrement dit de *liaison*, . . . la poésie intervient, là, et là, et partout, provoquant dans cette prise de conscience humaine des courts-circuits – ces raccourcis <<magiques>> dont l’amour sexuel et la souffrance extrême ont aussi le <<secret>>,” Ibid. 32.
- ¹⁴⁶ “Ça oblige le lecteur à faire tout seul un pas de plus qu’il ne voudrait. . . . *Laisser à désirer*, dit Breton,” Ibid. 14.
- ¹⁴⁷ “Ils ne verront que des vestiges de la civilisation capitaliste dans les tentatives poétiques, même prolétariennes, et jugeront que nous devons diriger ces camarades égarés vers les tâches précises de la propagande marxiste,” Ibid. 7.
- ¹⁴⁸ “Je réponds que la poésie ayant existé historiquement en tous temps et lieux semble indéniablement un besoin inherent à la nature humaine, voire animale, besoin lié sans doute à l’instinct sexuel,” Ibid.
- ¹⁴⁹ “un grand nombre d’entre nous admettront qu’il existe actuellement une poésie contre laquelle nous devons nous élever par une activité polémique et critique appropriée,” Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁰ “L’exigence des conformismes idéologiques serait la négation même de toute poésie,” Ibid. 9.
- ¹⁵¹ “Je signale ceci: La critique mettant l’accent sur le contenu idéologique *manifeste* des poèmes est favorable aux *tricheurs*, à tous ceux qui veulent passer pour autres qu’ils ne sont, et qui pour cela se livrent à une sorte de surenchère idéologique,” Ibid. On the distinction between the manifest and latent content of a poem, see Tzara 1931, 15-23.

- ¹⁵² “Le seul moyen concret d’évaluer la vertu de propagande d’un poème serait de trouver une mesure de son action sur ceux qu’il atteint,” Cahun 1934, 10.
- ¹⁵³ “Ils ne renseigneront jamais que sur le degré d’intensité des mouvements émotifs déclenchés par la lecture ou l’audition d’un texte en des conditions physiologiques individuelles et variables, qui nécessiteraient qu’on les fit entrer en jeu pour en réduire la diversité. En tous cas, des renseignements obtenus de la sorte ne porteraient naturellement point sur la nature ni sur l’application éventuelle de l’émotion déclanchée; uniquement sur son degré d’intensité,” Ibid. 10-11.
- ¹⁵⁴ “réactionnaire ou contre-révolutionnaire,” Ibid. 7.
- ¹⁵⁵ “1. *L’action directe*, par affirmation et reiteration. A celle-là fait appel la grande poésie moralisatrice et généralement cadence. Celle qu’on apprend par cœur. La chanson qui <<vous donne du cœur>>,” Ibid. 11.
- ¹⁵⁶ “C’est l’action des catechisms, des prières, des proverbs et axiomes. . . . L’emploi de la repetition convient à ce genre de propagande et l’on n’est pas surprise de trouver répétitions, jeux de mots, rimes et tous proceds mnémotechniques à la base de l’art poétique de ceux qui font appel à ce moyen d’action,” Ibid.
- ¹⁵⁷ “C’est un puissant moyen d’action, qui pour avoir une valeur révolutionnaire doit être manié par des hommes d’une conscience politique exceptionnelle, capables de faire circuler dans le proletariat les mots *du juste moment*, et capables – aussitôt que l’actualité l’impose – de détruire par de nouvelles formules l’effet à tout le moins encombrant de formules attardées,” Ibid. 11-12.
- ¹⁵⁸ “On peut objecter que cette poésie n’a pas l’ambition de déterminer d’autre action que l’adhésion au Parti qui se charge de déclancher l’action opportune. . . . Je ne crois pas

qu'un commandement lyrique comme: *Feu sur Léon Blum / . . . / Feu sur les ours savants de la social-démocratie / Feu . . .* puisse susciter autre chose qu'un acte isolé, et qui ferait figure de provocation." "Mais la poésie qui tend à prolonger l'existence de ces formules attardées . . . cette <<poésie>>, à quoi peut-elle prétendre? Ou son effet sera de déclancher une action devenue inopportune; ou ne déclanchant aucune action, d'épuiser par une sorte de masturbation révolutionnaire l'énergie des masses. En effet, je signale au passif de cette poésie un effet *désarmant* de ce genre: Sollicité mal à propos, au théâtre, au cinéma, dans une salle publique, un homme se dépense en désirs; le moment venu, il ne peut faire l'amour," Ibid. 12.

¹⁵⁹ "2. *L'action directe à contre-sens*, par provocation. L'esprit de contradiction est suffisamment répandu pour que les poètes aient toujours, volontairement et involontairement, provoqué la contradiction de leurs lecteurs," Ibid. 13.

¹⁶⁰ "J'ai chanté le mal . . . pour opprimer le lecteur, et lui faire désirer le bien comme remède.

Ainsi donc, c'est toujours le bien qu'on chante en somme, seulement par une méthode plus philosophique et moins naïve que l'ancienne école," Ibid.

¹⁶¹ "Ainsi peut-on enrôler dans la morale les immoralistes et utiliser pour la propagande révolutionnaire les textes les plus contre-révolutionnaires. On l'a fait fort souvent. Les citations de <<droite>>, pourvu qu'elles s'adressent à la <<gauche>>, conferment la <<gauche>>. Cette méthode, poétiquement moins usée que la première, donne à ses victimes plus d'illusion de liberté," Ibid.

¹⁶² "Sans mettre en cause l'équivoque de cette méthode, les hypocrisies qu'elle permet d'imputer à ceux qui s'en réclament, je me vois force de reconnaître qu'elle est comme la première dans la mesure où ses buts avoués sont atteints, une méthode de crétinisation," Ibid. 14.

- ¹⁶³ “L’action indirecte me semble la seule efficace, et du point de vue de la propagande, et du point de vue de la poésie,” Ibid. 15.
- ¹⁶⁴ “Il s’agit de mettre en marche et de laisser en panne. Ça oblige le lecteur à faire tout seul un pas de plus qu’il ne voudrait. On a soigneusement bloqué toutes les sorties, mais la porte d’entrée, on lui laisse le soin de l’ouvrir. *Laisser à désirer*, dit Breton,” Ibid. 14.
- ¹⁶⁵ “Lui seul a signé, mais l’Autre était indispensable. Nous connaissons ce genre de collaboration,” Cahun 1929, 5.
- ¹⁶⁶ “dans l’amour la poésie / et la defense de la cause prolétarienne,” Ibid. 3.
- ¹⁶⁷ Polizzotti 355.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 356.
- ¹⁶⁹ Jenkins 333.
- ¹⁷⁰ “La valeur <<révolutionnaire>> de la poésie surréaliste oppose à la pieuse poésie de mauvaise propagande était démontrée à ma satisfaction, restait à poser la question de la <<bonne>> propagande Je me rendais bien compte que le pamphlet laissait à désirer, qu’il lui manquait l’essentiel” *Écrits* 584. On an exemplar of *Les Paris sont ouverts* addressed to Gaston Ferdière: “Vous vouliez que j’écrive quelque chose sur cette brochure qui me paraît dépassé par les événements actuels et ne l’est pas moins, je l’espère, par moi,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 295.
- ¹⁷¹ “Le problème du <<mécanisme *de classe* de l’inspiration poétique>>” Cahun 1934, 26. “La subversive est agie par l’histoire (par l’histoire dont elle fait partie: par elle-même), par l’ensemble mouvant sur lequel elle agit,” Ibid. 30.
- ¹⁷² “E l l e a g i t Il n’est pas d’événements au monde qui la puissent réduire à l’indignité mercenaire, et somme toute inefficace, d’un *role*, de ce grand premier role que joue

glorieusement la <<poésie>> de propagande,” Ibid.

¹⁷³ “Le débat reste ouvert. . . . Le mystère de la poésie, c’en est toujours un autre. Ses avatars ne sont pas le secret de Polichinelle. Inconnue malgré nous,” Ibid. 32, 29.

¹⁷⁴ “Le langage étant un *agent de conflits*, autrement dit de *liaison*, dans les rapports de l’homme avec lui-même, des hommes entre eux et, par conséquent, des hommes avec la nature,” Ibid. 32.

¹⁷⁵ “La science étant orientée vers la connaissance directe et la philosophie vers la connaissance indirecte de l’univers, la poésie intervient, là, et là, et partout, provoquant dans cette prise de conscience humaine des courts-circuits – ces raccourcis <<magiques>> dont l’amour sexuel et la souffrance extrême ont aussi le <<secret>>,” Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Cahun 2007, 157.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 53.

¹⁷⁸ “Si jamais l’excédent de souffrance dans le monde venait à diminuer, il semble naturel de prévoir qu’une fonction compensatrice se trouverait dans la poésie, dans l’antagonisme surmonté de ces facteurs: l’extension et l’intensité de l’intervention poétique,” Cahun 1934, 32.

¹⁷⁹ “*Les Paris sont ouverts* sont le sujet de toutes nos réflexions. Mes amis aiment ce livre comme je l’aime. Et à quel moment opportun il vient,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 269.

¹⁸⁰ Breton 1974, 139-140.

¹⁸¹ “J’ai lu et relu avec un agrément incomparable la plaquette que vous m’avez fait tenir et qui laisse si loin tout ce qui avait été entrepris dans le même sens avant elle. Rien ne me paraît plus lucide, plus inexorable, plus émouvant que ce témoignage.... Ce que nous défendons n’a jamais été mieux dégagé, n’a jamais été mis plus haut,” qtd. in Leperlier

2006, 272.

¹⁸² “Il me paraît mettre fin avec éclat à un débat absurde,” qtd. in Maria 2011.

¹⁸³ “l’enrichissement nécessaire de la pensée matérialiste,” Lecomte and Mesens 26.

¹⁸⁴ Ernst 117.

¹⁸⁵ “A la fin d’une polémique récente avec Aragon, Claude Cahun me paraît, en ce sens, avoir

depose les conclusions qui resteront longtemps les plus valables,” Breton 1935, 61.

¹⁸⁶ Breton 1993, 132.

¹⁸⁷ “Ce pamphlet où la véritable poésie tient trop peu de place.” “Vous vouliez que j’écrive

quelque chose sur cette brochure qui me paraît dépassé par les événements actuels,” qtd.

in Leperlier 2006, 295.

¹⁸⁸ Cahun and Malherbe “organisaient chez elles des expositions surréalistes, et formaient un

couple extrêmement sympathique. . . . Nous arrivons les premiers et elles nous font

admirer les dernières éditions d’ouvrages surréalistes que, n’ayant pas l’argent de me les

procurer, je feuillette avec envie. Puis elles éclairent pour nous leur loggia aménagé en

grenier, où, au beau milieu d’objets hétéroclites, un mannequin se dressait,” Ferdière 83,

85.

¹⁸⁹ Polizzotti 376.

¹⁹⁰ “[The Groupe Brunet] manifestent leur solidarité, en particulier à l’A.E.A.R., et au Congrès

de 1935 pour la défense de la culture, malgré l’échec d’une tentative de rédiger, à

l’initiative de Claude Cahun, un manifeste, <<la défense de la culture, dernière étape de

l’impérialisme>>, avec René Crevel – qui devait se suicide quelques jours plus tard,”

Caminade 123. Cf. Leperlier 2006, 224.

¹⁹¹ Qtd. in Polizzotti 378.

¹⁹² Breton, "Speech" 237-38.

¹⁹³ Qtd. in Polizzotti 375.

¹⁹⁴ Nezval also records a visit to Cahun's atelier after the Congress; see Nezval 113-14.

¹⁹⁵ Qtd. in Ibid. 376.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Qtd. in Polizzotti 377.

¹⁹⁸ Dalí 339; Polizzotti 377.

¹⁹⁹ Qtd. in Ibid.

²⁰⁰ "Après le suicide de René Crevel que j'attribuai aux pressions exercées sur lui par le parti communiste à l'occasion du Congrès des écrivains, en 1935, je refusai, délibérément, de serrer la main tendue de Tristan Tzara. Je ne voudrais, ni ne pourrais, m'en dédire," *Écrits* 596.

²⁰¹ "Recontrant Nizan seul dans un couloir je plaidai la cause de Serge. . . . C'est alors qu'il me regarda ainsi . . . silencieusement. . . regardant aussi en lui-même. Je pus lire dans son regard direct la confiance en moi (je la méritais): il me laisse entrevoir la profondeur d'angoisse de ses propres réflexions. Pour conclure il cherchait à me faire partager la confiance objective qu'il gardait en son parti: <<Réfléchissez à l'existence du nazisme, au risqué de guerre qu'il fait peser sur l'URSS, vous comprendrez mieux la rigueur terrible que le Parti doit imposer à ses membres et l'atmosphère . . . lourde . . . de ces procès qu'il serait d'une imprudence mortelle de ne pas camoufler. . .>>," Ibid. 718.

²⁰² "Ce qui ne suffisait pas à me faire accepter l'hypocrite et désastreuse doctrine du "socialisme dans un seul pays" et moins encore les "méthodes" des doctrinaires. . . . les événements prouveraient que *j'avais raison maintenant*, le pacte n'était qu'un trompe-l'œil," Ibid.

719.

²⁰³ “Je professais la doctrine de la démocratie contre celle de la bureaucratie,” Ibid. 718.

²⁰⁴ “une *politique de l’imaginaire . . . poétique de l’imaginaire*,” Leperlier 2006, 305.

²⁰⁵ “QUE FAIRE? DEVANT LE FASCISME / ÉTANT DONNÉ L’INSUFFISANCE DU
COMMUNISME,” qtd. in Galletti 124.

²⁰⁶ “radicalement opposés à l’agression fasciste, hostiles sans réserves à la domination
bourgeoise, ne peuvent plus faire confiance au communisme,” qtd. in Ibid. 125.

²⁰⁷ Bataille, “Popular Front,” 163.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. 163, 168, 164.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 164.

²¹⁰ Ibid. 165, my emphasis.

²¹¹ Qtd. in Surya 2002, 220.

²¹² “Une telle composition de forces doit grouper l’ensemble de ceux qui n’acceptent pas la
course à l’abîme – à la ruine et à la guerre – d’une société capitaliste sans cerveau et sans
yeux,” qtd. in *Écrits* 548.

²¹³ Bataille, “Popular Front,” 164, 163.

²¹⁴ “Nous affirmons comme un principe le fait que les ouvriers et les paysans constituent le
fondement non seulement de toute richesse matérielle, mais de toute force sociale. . . .
Nous plaçant dans les rangs des ouvriers, nous nous adressons à leurs aspirations les plus
fières et le plus ambitieuses, qui ne peuvent pas être satisfaites dans les cadres de la
société actuelle: nous nous adressons à leur instinct d’hommes qui ne courbent la tête
devant rien, à leur liberté morale, à leur violence,” qtd. in *Écrits* 550.

²¹⁵ “C’est par sa signification humaine profonde, par sa signification universelle, que la

Révolution soulèvera les hommes et non par une concession timorée à leur égoïsme, à leur conservatisme national,” qtd. in Ibid.

²¹⁶ Qtd. in Galletti 156.

²¹⁷ Surya 2013, 221.

²¹⁸ Sade 315.

²¹⁹ Leperlier 2006, 309.

²²⁰ “Georges Bataille nous a exposé . . . un projet d’intervention politique qu’il avait déjà concerté avec un certain nombre de ses amis et qu’il désirait nous voir adopter... Nous avons pris rendez-vous pour le dimanche 13 octobre à 4h30 de l’après-midi. . . . J’ai pensé que nous pourrions peut-être vous demander l’hospitalité pour une heure ou deux,” qtd. in Ibid. 300.

²²¹ Short 154.

²²² “Elle était physiquement petite, blonde et d’apparence fragile, mais elle semblait énergique et audacieuse. Breton était attentive, intéressé et souvent amuse par ses interventions,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 315.

²²³ Cf. Galletti 177.

²²⁴ “Par là je suis encore rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, à Contre-Attaque, alors que pour l’anniversaire de la mort de Louis XVI, Georges Bataille nous proposait de troubler la fête des agitateurs d’Action Française; d’assister à leur sacro-sainte messe, de lâcher des chauves-souris dans la nef. . . que Benjamin Péret s’imaginait glissant des puces dans le col incliné des vieilles devotes, et moi, le secondant, des poux dans la toison d’or ou de jais des <<beaux Messieurs>> . . . Mais comment se procurer nos aimables <<vampires>>?” *Écrits* 607.

- ²²⁵ “Aux <<moyens directs>>, aux messages unidimensionnels, restrictifs et mystifiants, habituellement utilisés par la propagande politique, on opposera les <<moyens indirects>>, détournés, suggestifs, *ésotériques*, seuls capables de mobiliser la plénitude du *sens*, c’est-à-dire des fins et des valeurs que l’on se donne,” Leperlier 2006, 309.
- ²²⁶ “Du romantique projet ne résulta qu’un papier décoré d’une tête de veau, œuvre de Marcel Jean,” *Écrits* 607.
- ²²⁷ “Amort Blum! Blum au poteau!” qtd. in Winock 32.
- ²²⁸ Qtd. in Surya 2002, 222.
- ²²⁹ Williamson 3-7.
- ²³⁰ Qtd. in Surya 2002, 224-25.
- ²³¹ “Les adhérents surréalistes du groupe <<Contre-Attaque>> enregistrent avec satisfaction la dissolution dudit groupe, au sein duquel s’étaient manifestées des tendances dites <<surfascistes>>, dont le caractère purement fasciste s’est montré de plus en plus flagrant,” qtd in *Écrits* 553.
- ²³² “Il me semble que vous ne revenez plus et qu’entre Nantes et Jersey le temps ne vous dure guère. Les séances de Contre-Attaque du mardi s’en ressentent, avec plus de bas que de hauts,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 317.
- ²³³ “C’est le moment d’envisager une position *particulière à Contre-Attaque* où notre action puisse être initiale et déterminante,” *Écrits* 564.
- ²³⁴ “Toute réponse inconditionnelle à la question: <<Êtes-vous pour ou contre la guerre?>> est de la plume au vent: toute position de principe au sujet de la guerre apparaît, aujourd’hui, intenable,” *Ibid.* 563.
- ²³⁵ “Parce que les hommes fanatisés par le pacifisme, c’est-à-dire idéologiquement entraînés à

refouler en eux-mêmes les pulsions agressives, deviennent impropres aux mouvements insurrectionnels,” Ibid. Bataille, “Popular Front” 161.

²³⁶ “Parce que les hommes fanatisés par le patriotisme, fût-ce le patriotisme dit prolétarien, dit internationaliste, deviennent tôt ou tard les marionnettes des impérialistes, avoués ou masqués, deviennent des militaristes idéologiquement entraînés à nier une part d’eux-mêmes, à contrecarrer le devenir historique. Sans contradictions psychiques, sans complexe à résoudre à la fois théoriquement et dans l’action, aucune conscience nouvelle en l’homme ne saurait se manifester. J’estime que cette conscience peut seule mener à l’édification du socialisme,” *Écrits* 563.

²³⁷ “Selon moi, la position de *Contre-Attaque* vis-à-vis de la guerre ne peut que dépendre essentiellement d’une estimation politique exhaustive des forces en présence, c’est-à-dire des chances de réussite du défaitisme révolutionnaire à un moment donné,” Ibid.

²³⁸ “Employons-nous donc à faire croître les chances, quelles qu’elles soient, d’utiliser à nos fins *la guerre même*,” Ibid.

²³⁹ “Il est clair que même les plus <<optimistes>> d’entre nous – ceux qui, assurant qu’il n’est besoin que de ce <<réveil>> (la mobilisation) s’en remettent à lui . . . auraient peu de chances d’influencer sensiblement le cours des débats Allemagne-Angleterre-France etc., de brusquer le déclenchement d’une guerre européenne. . . . Avant de soutenir la guerre seul agent de révolution (selon eux), faudrait-il au moins qu’ils aient pris la précaution de faire partager leur pessimiste optimisme, qu’ils l’aient fondé sur plus qu’un courage du désespoir peu communicatif. Nous pouvons malheureusement compter sur d’autres forces que les nôtres pour déclencher la guerre,” Ibid.

²⁴⁰ “Exaltons le défaitisme, opposons violemment les mots d’ordre d’un *pacifisme agressif* aux

idéales croisades pour la defense de la démocratie colonialiste et de l’U.R.S.S. remilitarisée,” Ibid. 563-64.

²⁴¹ “ceux qui passent et repassent d’une phraséologie fanfaronne à une conciliante, et vice versa,” Ibid. 564.

²⁴² “L’ambivalence dans laquelle ils se trouvent, dans laquelle nous nous trouvons tous vis-à-vis de la guerre – et aussi de l’insurrection – apparaîtra, non plus comme un honteux malaise, mais comme un potentiel de forces vives,” Ibid.

²⁴³ “Faire surgir les ambivalences et les *valoriser*, c’est encourager les militants à se maintenir dans la pleine disponibilité d’adaptation aux étapes d’une révolution qui sera permanente ou ne sera pas viable, ne sera qu’une forme bientôt ressentie, bientôt reconnue d’oppression – ou qui sera faite pas les hommes qui tendent à une libération morale complete, à la conscience plus générale d’une réalité non expurgée à l’usage du peuple et de l’innocence,” Ibid.

²⁴⁴ “*la conquête de la liberté des mœurs*” Ibid. 716; “*la plus belle conquête de l’homme*,” Ibid. 481.

²⁴⁵ Qtd. in Surya 2002, 220.

²⁴⁶ “2. – Lever la malediction, le sentiment de culpabilité qui frappe les hommes, les oblige à des guerres qu’ils ne veulent pas, les vouant à un travail dont le fruit leur échappe. . . . 7. – Lutter pour decomposer et exclure toute communauté autre que cette communauté universelle, telles que les communautés nationales, socialiste et communiste ou les Églises,” qtd. in Galletti 281-82.

²⁴⁷ “1. – Former une communauté créatrice de valeurs, valeurs créatrices de cohesion,” qtd. in Ibid. 281.

- ²⁴⁸ “3. – Assumer la fonction de destruction et de decomposition mais comme achèvement et non comme negation de l’être. 4. – Réaliser l’accomplissement personnel de l’être et sa tension par la concentration, par une ascèse positive et par une discipline individuelle positive,” qtd. in Ibid. 282.
- ²⁴⁹ “Secrètement ou non, il est nécessaire de devenir tout autres ou de cesser d’être,” Bataille 1936, 3.
- ²⁵⁰ JHT L/C/24/F/5. Bataille, “Popular Front,” 166. There are hints that Cahun was involved with Bataille’s *Acéphale*; see JHT 1995/00045/002 and *Acéphale* 3-4 (July 1938): 34.
- ²⁵¹ “L’ensemble de mon activité, durant l’occupation de Jersey représente la suite logique de mon activité d’écrivain, en France, à l’époque du Front Populaire,” qtd. in Leperlier 1992, 267.
- ²⁵² “N’ayant pas l’habitude de me complaire publiquement dans l’avachissement; Mis en presence de démissions nombreuses et significatives; Je prononce la dissolution de Contre-Attaque,” qtd. in Galletti 297-98.
- ²⁵³ “Ma chère amie, vous savez que nous préparons pour le 20 mai une exposition d’objets (surréalistes et para-surréalistes). À cette occasion doit paraître un numéro de Cahiers d’Art. . . . Il se trouve paradoxalement qu’à l’heure actuelle aucun des textes en question ne concerne à proprement parler les objets surréalistes. . . . J’ai pensé que vous seule seriez capable de traiter d’une manière parfaite un pareil sujet . . . et je ne doute pas que vous sachiez dégager mieux que personne le sens théorique de cette sorte de recherches,” qtd. in Maria 2011.
- ²⁵⁴ Cahun 1998, 60-61.
- ²⁵⁵ Harris 97.
- ²⁵⁶ Leperlier 2006, 318.

- ²⁵⁷ “C’est un grand plaisir pour moi de me mêler de vous écrire. Vos photos sont idéales pour les poèmes de *l’Heure des Fleurs*. Je crois que ce petit livre aura un immense succès. . . . vos photos . . . sont de pures merveilles qui flattent ce qu’il y a encore de très enfantin en nous,” qtd. in Maria 2011.
- ²⁵⁸ “Cherchant à s’expliquer elle-même, elle invoquera tout ensemble le climat idéologique, la montée des tensions belliqueuses, l’antisémitisme (<<l’horreur que j’en ai depuis l’enfance>>), la difficulté de retrouver le niveau d’activité de Contre-Attaque, la santé fragilisée, le <<besoin physique, primordial de vivre à la campagne>>, de quitter Paris qui la <<fatiguait>>,” Leperlier 2006, 377.
- ²⁵⁹ “C’est à la fin de l’année 1936 que le projet se forma dans mon esprit [of leaving Paris]. . . . Je proposai Jersey,” qtd. in Ibid. 378.
- ²⁶⁰ “La Rocquaise, baptisée *La ferme sans nom*, est une magnifique demeure en granit jersiais, construite à la fin du Moyen-âge, et modifiée par la suite, dans un des plus beaux sites de l’île,” Ibid. 379.
- ²⁶¹ Reprinted in Losfeld 335-37.
- ²⁶² Draft version of the manifesto qtd. in Polizzotti 416-17.
- ²⁶³ Qtd. in Ibid. 417.
- ²⁶⁴ “Nous invitons tous ceux que n’atteint pas encore l’abjecte contagion chauvine, tous ceux qui osent penser librement, à se joindre à nous pour protester contre les décrets-lois scélérats qui donnent licence à l’Etat-Major de faire peser dès maintenant sa dictature en faisant passer pour de l’ <<atteinte à la Défense nationale>>, voire à de l’espionnage, l’action d’hommes courageux de l’honnêteté et de la lucidité desquels nous répondons. Il y va non pas de leur liberté, mais de la liberté de tous,” qtd. in *Écrits* 555.

²⁶⁵ “au service de la poésie et de l’histoire,” Cahun 1938, 1.

²⁶⁶ “vous disposez d’un pouvoir magique très étendu. Je trouve aussi – et ne fais que vous le répéter – que vous devriez écrire et publier. Vous savez très bien que je pense que vous êtes un des esprits les plus curieux de ce temps (des quatre ou cinq) mais vous vous taisez à plaisir,” qtd. in Maria 2011.

²⁶⁷ “Si quelque chose pouvait me décider à publier, je suis bien sûre que dès le reçu de votre letter je m’y serais trouvée irrésistiblement entraînée. Mais je dois vous avouer qu’il n’est est rien. Naturellement je me donne maintes raisons dont chacune suffirait, me dispenserait d’en échafauder une autre, si je ne savais que la véritable me demeure cachée,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 261.

²⁶⁸ “Un sentiment de responsabilité écrasant,” qtd. in Ibid. 385.

²⁶⁹ “On ne doit jamais expérimenter avec les seuls mots ou les seuls actions – indépendamment. Pour éprouver l’authenticité des convictions, le christianisme a un symbole spécial: <<Le verbe s’est fait chair.>>,” *Écrits* 768.

²⁷⁰ “La liberté ou la mort! Pour mes adversaires comme pour moi,” Ibid. 657.

²⁷¹ Falla 17.

²⁷² Cruickshank 66.

²⁷³ Sanders 2005, 119.

²⁷⁴ “J’irai jusqu’à dire le résultat d’un <<choix>> antérieur – le choix instinctif de quitter Paris pour Jersey, le choix délibéré de rester à Jersey au lieu de m’évacuer en Angleterre, en juin 40, ou dès 39, de me réfugier en pays neutre,” *Écrits* 581.

²⁷⁵ “Je persiste à croire que si le fascisme, pour tous les soi-disant <<anti>>, avait été combattu par chacun à son poste et selon ses moyens du même cœur sans compromise, du même

esprit sans double fond, . . . tous les imperialismes . . . eussent été impossibles,” Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Lanz 1.

²⁷⁷ “Il n’y avait à Jersey de politique militante d’aucune sorte. . . . Les indigènes . . . se bornaient à espérer leur délivrance, à l’attendre du dehors, à exprimer par leur comportement docile l’attitude <<neutre>> de citoyens d’une <<ville ouverte>>,” *Écrits* 580.

²⁷⁸ “Visitors! c’était le terme; le même qui désignait les touristes d’avant-guerre. Oui, l’envahisseur était pour une classe considérable de la population regardé et traité comme un touriste: un bon client. . . Les règles de l’hospitalité, du christianisme et du commerce tombaient d’accord pour l’accueil “normal” – c’est-à-dire avec les égards dus à l’invité de marque,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 386.

²⁷⁹ Joe Mière qtd. in Hammer.

²⁸⁰ Oehsen 2003, 154.

²⁸¹ “agréable sinon favorable,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 384.

²⁸² “de sombrer dans la désespoir de mon impuissance,” Ibid. 385.

²⁸³ “il faudrait s’assurer qu’elles étaient du bon calibre, que ça fonctionnait. . . . Il me semblait urgent de nous exercer. Suzanne me trouvait absurde et embêtante – mais céda. Je choisis la pointe du Frêt, sommet de la grande falaise, à notre gauche de la baie. . . . J’avais posé un carton contre un rocher,” Ibid. 388-89.

²⁸⁴ “l’occasion de tuer un Allemand, le Kommandant de l’île, presque à ma portée,” Ibid. 389.

²⁸⁵ “cette impulsion la plus violente de tirer au revolver, malgré mon “pacifisme” – contradiction du cœur humain,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 389.

²⁸⁶ “cette part d’affectivité en nous la plus réfractaire à une organisation intelligible,” qtd. in Ibid.

317.

²⁸⁷ “Je le voyais pourtant – et moi – *en toute lucidité*,” Ibid. 389.

²⁸⁸ “Poètes, nous n’admettons pas le droit divin de la force,” *Écrits* 648.

²⁸⁹ “L’idée venait d’une coïncidence. Un numéros du journal illustré *Le Crapouillot*, datant de 32-33 (je ne sais) en tous cas consacré à l’Allemagne en passe de devenir hitlérienne. Je le lisais pour la première fois. Avec un curiosité compréhensible. Des mots allemandes me frappèrent. . . . Ils étaient présentés dans ce journal comme le slogan des Nazis avant la prise du pouvoir. La phrase était: <<Shrecken ohne Ende oder Ende mit Schrecken!>> L’actualité . . . de ce dilemme était flagrante. . . . Comment amener les Allemands à voir cette vérité, . . . à lire la phrase comme je la lisais? Les mots <<ohne Ende>> s’inscrivirent en quelques sorte en italiques Je pris un papier, un crayon, j’écrivis: <<Sieg? Nein: Krieg! ohne Ende!>>. C’était la nuit, vers l’aube, je ne sais à quelle heure. . . . D’ailleurs mieux vaudrait se contenter le plus souvent des mots <<ohne Ende>> - ça atteindrait plus humainement ceux qui trouvaient les permissions lointaines. Ça puerait moins la propagande et serait plus vite trace n’importe où Plus tard, on chercherait quelques chose de plus précis,” Ibid. 678-79.

²⁹⁰ Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 186.

²⁹¹ “KAMPFKAMPFKAMPF OHNE ENDE SCHRECKEN OHNE ENDE oder ENDE MIT SCHRECKEN... KAMPF OHNE ENDE oder SCHRECKEN KAMPF OHNE ENDE und SCHRECKEN und TOD,” JHT/1995/00045/53. The surviving propaganda tracts are accessible online at the Jersey Heritage Trust under this reference number and have been reprinted as an appendix in Oehsen 2003, 255-65. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the tracts are drawn from these sources. My translations of the tracts preserve

Cahun's original formatting and punctuation as much as possible.

²⁹² “une lutte individuelle à deux,” *Écrits* 580.

²⁹³ “Engagée dans la voie du *défaitisme-révolutionnaire*,” Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Sanders 2005, 119-20.

²⁹⁵ “Elle commença à inscrire sur les différents supports qu’elle trouvait – cartons à cigarettes, emballages, morceaux de bois ou encore les façades et les murs – les mots fatidiques: *ohne Ende*,” Leperlier 2006, 390.

²⁹⁶ “Je . . . inscrire très clairement dessus NIEDER MIT KRIEG. . . . Il y avait en ville un <<amusement park>>, fréquenté presque exclusivement par des soldats et marins allemands,” *Écrits* 692.

²⁹⁷ “Au début de l’occupation de Jersey, en 1940, le soldat sans nom ne pouvait encore prôner le défaitisme révolutionnaire. Faire valoir les désagréments de la guerre, même victorieuse, l’éloignement perpétuel de la victoire définitive, tel était son refrain. En marge du refrain, des actes isolés – des actes de provocation – pouvaient être risqués,” Ibid. 648.

²⁹⁸ Qtd. in Follain 83.

²⁹⁹ Lewis 201. See also Sanders 1998, 7.

³⁰⁰ Lewis 201-02.

³⁰¹ Testimony of Mière qtd. in Hammer. *Écrits* 682.

³⁰² Sanders 2005, 120.

³⁰³ Qtd. in Follain 86.

³⁰⁴ “l’irruption brutale de l’*historicité*” Leperlier 2006, 392.

³⁰⁵ Qtd. in Thynne 2004.

³⁰⁶ Qtd. in Zachmann 2011, 38.

³⁰⁷ “Mon rôle était d’incarner mes propres révoltes et d’accepter, au juste moment, mon destin quel qu’il fût,” *Écrits* 594.

³⁰⁸ “l’hiver 1940 que la chose devint sérieuse, régulière, systématique,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 392. “Photomontages, affiches, bulletins, manifestes, dépôt d’objets, installations,” Leperlier in Ibid.

³⁰⁹ “Je m’étais engagée – engagée envers moi seule – à convaincre les soldats (allemands) de se tourner contre leurs officiers (nazis),” *Écrits* 580.

³¹⁰ Qtd. in Oehsen 2006, 20.

³¹¹ “dialogues entre soldats . . . nouvelles et commentaires . . . textes sérieux,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 390.

³¹² Ibid. 393.

³¹³ Qtd. in Follain 85.

³¹⁴ “pacifiste, antimilitariste, antinazi,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 393.

³¹⁵ Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 186, 202.

³¹⁶ “Kameraden der Kriegsmarine! Soldaten und Arbeiter! / Verbreitet unsere Zeitung in den Hafen! / Verbreitet in Frankreich / verbreitet in Belgien / verbreitet in Holland / verbreitet in Daenemark / verbreitet in Norwegen / verbreitet in DEUTSCHLAND! / Nehmt sie auf Urlaub mit! / Leset jede Woche: / “OHNE” Kriegsmarine / “OHNE” Luftwaffe / “OHNE” Wehrmacht / Die Woche der “OHNE” / Koralle der “OHNE.””

³¹⁷ “Ce *Soldat sans nom* . . . va constituer un pôle imaginaire et projectif privilégié autour duquel graviteront les opérations, entre rêve et réalité,” Leperlier 2006, 395.

³¹⁸ “Suzanne avait beaucoup objecté. D’abord *Namenlos* eût été d’une allemande plus correct. Puis elle trouvait énormément plus dangereux de mettre la Gestapo sur les traces d’un

complot que d'une activité diffuse. Je tenais au mot *ohne* pour relier à ma toute première formule – au cas où elle eût laissé quelques impressions. Quant à l'invention du complot à sens unique, c'était pour moi justement l'essentiel, fondamental de tout espoir d'une influence réelle. Je voulais non seulement donner à ce soldat sans nom que du début j'avais identifié à moi, . . . une existence fictive, je voulais lui en fournir une réelle, le susciter – et alors me supprimer, lui passer la main. Il était mieux qualifié que moi pour savoir ce qu'il fallait dire," *Écrits* 693.

³¹⁹ "Ils sont les miroirs de la *réalité*. Ils nous sont échelons décisifs," Ibid 573.

³²⁰ Thynne 2010, 12, 17, my emphasis.

³²¹ Zachmann 2011, 30.

³²² "Nous avons lutté . . . pour l'arc-en-ciel de valeurs . . . allant du noir ultra-romantique au fer rougi à blanc. Lutté pour les Allemands contre l'Allemagne nazie dans un patelin occupé cent pour cent. Lutté avec mes armes d'écrivain de circonstance surréaliste. Lutté sans littérature: tout papier, tout poème, toute peinture à détruire, sitôt vu, sitôt lu," *Écrits* 613.

³²³ Qtd. in Follain 92.

³²⁴ "Nous avons eu pendant quatre ans une activité surréaliste militante comme nous avions voulu en avoir lors de Contre-Attaque," qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 384.

³²⁵ Qtd. in Hammer.

³²⁶ "Tel avait été mon projet ambitieux. Il ne saurait étonner de ma part. Si vous avez jadis feuilleté *Aveux non avenues*, vous y aurez remarqué mes tendances au <<bovarysme>> . . . Des l'automne 42 j'avais naturellement rêvé de l'intérêt bovaryque de passer comme soldat sans nom sur le continent. Mais je ne pouvais me surestimer au point de croire à la réalisation de ce songe . . . de passer en France et rejoindre

l'Angleterre – avec mon idée pour la répandre avec les moyens dont je supposais qu'on disposait là-bas Folie non moindre, par suite de mes anomalies et faiblesses physiologiques. En 43, je ne pouvais même plus songer ces songes. Tenir ici me semblait la seule chose valable” *Écrits* 693. “Mon projet comprenant dans son ambition insatiable la diffusion au-delà de l’île,” Ibid. 694.

³²⁷ Baker 326.

³²⁸ “UNSERE REVOLUTION SOLL VON ALLEN / NICHT VON EINEM /
UNTERNOMMEN WERDEN.”

³²⁹ Zachmann 2011, 33.

³³⁰ Thynne 2010, 11.

³³¹ “semer le trouble et la derision dans le mauvais brouet des valeurs militaires, déstabiliser la hiérarchie, miner les rapports de force, démoraliser l’adversaire, le rendre psychologiquement vulnérable, le pousser à la desertion, ne serait-ce qu’intérieure,” Leperlier 2006, 387.

³³² JHT L/C/24/F/5.

³³³ See n. 400.

³³⁴ “Fuer die wirkliche Groesse Deutschlands! Fuer das grosse Deutschland Goethes, dass das nationalsozialistische Grossdeutschland Hitlers vergeblich besudeln moechte.”

³³⁵ “Combattre les nazis, même avec les moyens que nous avons pu employer, constituait à mon ses, à bien des égards, un recul intolérable,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 397.

³³⁶ “C’est le moment de tenir les promesses qu’on s’est faites de révolution en révolution, de civilisation et civilisation en génération et génération,” *Écrits* 658.

³³⁷ “Notre texte était *pacifiste*. Incitation à la desertion, certes! Avec violence au besoin, mais un

minimum de violence,” Ibid. 740.

338 “die Waffen . . . ohne Namen.”

339 “GEGEN DIE WAFFEN SS ::: DIE WAFFEN 00 / GEGEN DIE WAFFEN SS ::: DIEW-
OOOOOOOOOOOOOO.”

340 “UNSERE REVOLUTION SOLL VON ALLEN, NICHT VON / EINEN [sic], /
UNTERNOMMEN WERDEN. / ... Ein Universalvolk aus welchem alle geistige [sic] /
Durst geboren wird. / . . . organisiert die Waffen 00, . . . die Waffen . . . ohne Namen / . . .
ALLE ZUSAMMEN.”

341 “incitation à insubordination, au défi, sollicitation de l’humour, du sens de l’absurde, appel au
merveilleux, au détournement ludique, à la nostalgie,” Leperlier 2006, 387.

342 “C’est leur seule chance de survie, ils sont prisonniers, comme toi,” *Écrits* 761.

343 “Tel avait été mon projet ambitieux,” Ibid. 693.

344 “KRAFT DURCH FREUDE.”

345 “Des membres de la race des maîtres peuvent-ils faire tout le sale travail en préservant
l’arrogance qui convient au maître? . . . Les maîtres de la nation maîtresse peuvent-ils
travailler dans les usines les maîtres de... quoi?” *Écrits* 763.

346 “Goebbels: “Nein! Nun wollen wir sage: . . .kraft durch. . .Verzweiflung. KRAFT durch
VERZWEIFLUNG. KRAFT DURCH VERZWEIFELUNG [sic]. Aber der Soldat ohne
Namen bekritzelt die Mauern; Macht Geschluss [sic]! Macht Geschluss Macht Geschluss!”

347 “Alarm! Alarm!! ALARM!!! / – Warum? / – Weil unsere Herren die Offiziere aus Furcht hier
wie bei Stalingrad, wie bei Tunis gefangen zu warden, im ihre Luftflucht zu schützen auf
deine Leiche rechnen / Alarm! ALARM!! / – Warum? / – Weil die Briten, die Amerikaner,
die Kanadiere [sic], bei Dünkirchen, bei Cherbourg, bei St. Nazaire anlanden warden,

während ihre Übermächtige Kriegsmarine. . . / Alarm! ALARM!! / – Du erträgst Manöver
O H N E E N D E, Entbehungen, du härmst Dich um die Deinigen. / – Wozu? / So dass
Du zum N A C H D E N K E N keine Zeit hast! / Alarm! ALARM!! ALARM!!! / –
Warum??? / Das Gespenst: “Weil man Dich betrügen möchte, wie man uns in 1914-1918
betrogen hat.”

³⁴⁸ “Die Amerikaner kommen! / Lincoln sprach zu seinem Volk: “Jeder Mensch, welche auch
seine Sprache, seine Abstammung, seine Klasse sein mag, hat gleiches und
unanfechtbares Recht sein Glück in Denk- und Gewissensfreiheit ungehindert zu
verfolgen.”

³⁴⁹ Cahun 2015, 40.

³⁵⁰ “Was Lincoln damals für die amerikanische Nation forderte, das fordern heute die
Amerikaner für die Völker der ganzen Welt. Wir sind noch weit Davon entfernt, aber es
wird mal kommen.”

³⁵¹ “Die Gewissensruhefreiheit.”

³⁵² “HITLER führt uns. . . / GOEBBELS spricht für uns. . . / GOERING frisst für uns. . . / LEY
trinkt für uns. . . / HIMMLER?. . . Himmler ermordet für uns. . . / Aber niemand stirbt
für uns!”

³⁵³ “Jesus ist groß – Aber Hitler ist größer. Denn Jesus ist für Menschen gestorben – Aber die
Menschen sterben für Hitler,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 394.

³⁵⁴ “ – Warum hat von Kluge die Ostfront verlassen? / – Das ist einfach! Er fuerchtet die
Bolschewisten. / Aber du auch hast sie verlassen. Ist es aus diesem Grunde? / – Ich?
Warum sollte ich die Bolschewisten fuerchten? Ich habe ihnen nichts getan. Aber bei den
Amerikanern ist das Essen besser, und das amerikanische Kino ist prima.”

- ³⁵⁵ “Dummkopf! Man heisst Dir nur eine geringe Sache! Dass Du sterben sollst, so dass der Führer ein wenig länger leben möge!”
- ³⁵⁶ “ – Ach wäre ich doch lieber gefangen! / – Wenn Du Dich ergibst, da wirst Du von dem Offizier erschossen werden. / – Er mag nur kommen! Mit einem solchen Offizier schiesse ich das erste!”
- ³⁵⁷ “Welcher Mann hat das Recht ein Volk zu opfern un eine Regierung zu retten?”
- ³⁵⁸ “In Dezember 1932 sagt Hitler: “Wenn eine Regierung das Land zum Umfall fuehrt, ist Empoerung nicht nur das Recht, sondern auch die ‘Pflicht jedes Buergers!’ ” Er sagte auch: Schrecken ohne Ende . . . oder Ende mit Schrecken? In August 1939 sagte er: “Ich bin ein Soldat gewesen, und ich schwöre dass nimmermehr wird ein deutscher Soldat wie ich bei Verdun gelitten habe leiden.” Was wird er morgen sagen? Aber die Soldaten ohne Namen sagen Nieder mit Hitler! Nieder mit Hitler! Nieder mit dem nichtdeutschen Vampir der das Blut unserer Jugend säuft! Nieder mit Krieg! Die Soldaten ohne Namen.”
- ³⁵⁹ “Ich glaube die Wellen verschlungen / Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn / Und das hat mit seinem Brüllen / Der Adolf Hitler getan.”
- ³⁶⁰ “Les poètes romantiques allemands furent mes premiers collaborateurs,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 391.
- ³⁶¹ “Ueber die taegliche Arbeit haben wir fuer diese Zeitung eine Nachtraegliche Arbeit zu tun. Ueber die gewöhnliche Gefahren der Front und den Fabriken laufen wir nachtraegliche Gefahren. Wir geben unsere Zeit, unsere Muehe, im Notfall unser Leben, fuer Freiheit, FRIEDEN und VATERLAND! Fuer die wirkliche Groesse Deutschlands! Fuer das grosse Deutschland Goethes, dass das nationalsozialistische Grossdeutschland Hitlers vergeblich besudeln moechte. Kameraden! Haltet Ihr es mit uns?”

³⁶² Nietzsche 2005, 182. Nietzsche 2006, 34-35.

³⁶³ Bataille, "Nietzsche," 186, 184.

³⁶⁴ Nietzsche 2002, 132.

³⁶⁵ "Also sprach der Soldat ohne Namen / Also sprach Zarathustra!"

³⁶⁶ Hitler 646. Qtd. in Weinberg 27.

³⁶⁷ "Sie werden keinen Fuss breit weichen! Helden! Wenn Sie Smolensk verteidigen, verteidigen Sie die Grenzen Grossdeutschlands! . . . Sie werden keinen Fuss breit weichen! Helden! Wenn sie Kiev. . . wenn Sie Warschau. . . u.s.w. . . . verteidigen, verteidigen Sie die Grenzen Grossdeutschlands! Helden! Wenn Sie Cherbourg. . . wenn sie Jersey. . . wenn Sie Paris verteidigen, verteidigen Sie die Grenzen Grossdeutschlands! Aber wo sind die Grenzen Altdeutschlands? Wo werden sie morgen sein? Fragen sich ingeheim [sic] alle unsere Kameraden."

³⁶⁸ Nächste Woche werden die Soldaten ohne Namen diese Fragen antworten. Leset Alle jede Woche unsere Zeitung. Bitte verbreiten."

³⁶⁹ Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 217.

³⁷⁰ "Arbeiter! Kameraden! Genossen! Erwartet nicht bis die Flammen der Hölle unsere Häuser zu Asche verbrannt haben! Lasst Eure Maschinen l a n g s a m e r gehen. . . Verderbt sie verstoßener Weise. . . HALTET sie AUF. . . wenn Ihr den Krieg aufhalten wollt!"

³⁷¹ Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 217.

³⁷² "FINISTRES LACHEN [sic] – Warum darf Erich nicht auf Urlaub gehen? / – Er weiss noch nicht dass sein Haus verbrannt ist, dass seine Kinder tot sind. Und unsere barmherzige Herren moechten ihn schonend behandeln."

³⁷³ "Die Revolution in Deutschland . . . Gewiss! Und je länger und verwirrter die

unausweichliche Revolution, desto schlimmer die Leiden unserer Frauen und Kinder.”

³⁷⁴ “*Lied*. 1. Wir sind die Helden des Herrenvolks, / Wir sind die deutschen Soldaten. / Wir haben Europa ganz besiegt / Und die Küste von England gesehen. *Chor – Schlüsselreim*. Und wenn ich zu Haus auf Urlaub kam, / Meine Frau war schwanger gegangen. / Zank nicht mein Bübchen, sagte sie, / Das Vaterland braucht Soldaten! / 2. Dann zog ich nach Russland. Im Teufelsland / Bin ich drei Jahre geblieben. / Am Ende war ich ein hübscher Mann, / Die Füße, die Nase erfroren. / 3. In Afrika war ich dann aufgewärmt, / Meine Haut war ganz gebraten. / Das Fleisch war faul und das Wasser stank, / Und ich bin fast blind geworden. / 4. Zur See, vorwärts! Nach Amerika! / Wie viele wurden ertrunken! / Fünf Jahre schifften wir um und um, / Und könnten nimmer anlanden! / 5. Mit leeren Händen schnell zurück / Nach der neuen – alten Europa: / Die Japaneser unser Berlin, / Mit Feuer und Schwert verheerten! / 6. Und für und für um die Welt herum, / Bis keine von uns länger wüssten / Wozu in diesem Totentanz / Uns unsere Kriegsherren stürzten! / *Schlüsselreim*: Und wenn ich zu Haus auf Urlaub kam, / Meine Frau war alt und trocken. / Zu Bett mein Bübchen, sagte sie, / Das Vaterland braucht Soldaten!”

³⁷⁵ “ – So, wir haben den Krieg verloren? . . . Aber Du freust Dich darueber? . . . Das verstehe ich nicht. Warum? / – Weil ich nicht wuensche, mein ganz Leben in Uniform zu verschleudern!”

³⁷⁶ “Lors de ces grandes occasions, de petits canons de D.C.A., peut-être aussi des mitrailleuses, étaient juchés sur les collines dominant le cimetière. Edna, Suzanne et moi, regardions le spectacle – par les fentes de notre haute porte en planches de bois peint. Les somptueuses voitures disparues. . .les gardes d’honneur dispersées (probablement à festoyer). . .quand les environs restaient un moment déserts. . .on pouvait aller voir les fleurs – et les cartes.

Et aussi retirer ces dernières. On pouvait même – la nuit, défiant couvre-feu et patrouilles – ajouter sa contribution. La nôtre était une croix, *home-made*, de forme ordinaire, où se lisait en caractères gothiques cette constatation matérialiste: Für sie ist der Krieg zu Ende,” *Écrits* 738.

³⁷⁷ “Le St Brelade’s Kirchhof était très fréquenté par les jeunes soldats, surtout les dimanches matins. Aussi je posais nos croix, de preference le samedi soir, sur les fleurs et couronnes les plus fraîches. Et, sinon la nuit, dès que le clair obscur me permettait de me glisser à travers les buissons. Suzanne, l’œil et l’oreille au guet, m’ouvrait la porte sans bruit – la maintenait ouverte – la refermait sans bruit. C’était l’affaire d’une minute à peine...sans doute. Un beau matin j’eus la surprise d’apercevoir de la route une de nos croix debout, plantée sur la tombe où je l’avais couchée la veille. Autour un petit groupe de soldats silencieux et la tête incline. Ces <<innocents>> semblaient pleins de respect pour notre offrande – pour notre slogan, celui de <<namenlose Soldat>>!” Ibid.

³⁷⁸ “quant à l’expression de l’irrationnel dans la vie de relation, pour qu’elle soit libre-heureuse, la perfection de l’amour réciproque (ou des ses équivalents collectifs s’il en est) me paraît indispensable,” qtd. in Leperlier 2006, 243.

³⁷⁹ “On se forme plusieurs vocabulaires, plusieurs syntaxes, plusieurs manières d’être, de penser et même de sentir – nettement délimitées,” *Écrits* 485.

³⁸⁰ “Les plus efficaces furent peut-être les plus subjectifs, les plus sincères, les plus romantiques, les plus “dégagés,”” qtd. in Doy 185.

³⁸¹ Qtd. in Follain 94.

³⁸² “Dans quelle mesure mon projet se réalisera-t-il? . . . Il était à la fois commode, rassurant, décevant, agaçant de savoir si peu du résultat de nos distributions de tracts. . . Des

endroits que nous avions le plus fréquentés étaient bientôt entourés de barbelés, rendus inabordables . . . théoriquement. Nous patientions et la surveillance relâchée, des enveloppes reparaissaient: à l'intérieur des barbelés. Il s'agissait bien de ça, car nous remarquions aussi des barrières de bois, sur lesquelles nous avions inscrit des slogans difficiles à effacer, rompues, les morceaux partis – bois à brûler,” *Écrits* 694.

³⁸³ “Les officiers paraissaient bien plus méfiants, les soldats de moins en moins seuls et oisifs,”
Ibid.

³⁸⁴ “la Gestapo ne pouvait que persister à soupçonner un intellectuel allemande internationalise, sans doute en uniforme . . . ou un agent de l'Intelligence Service! . . . ou quelque <<heimatlos>> communiste ou juif,” Ibid. 629.

³⁸⁵ Qtd. in Oehsen 2006, 20-21.

³⁸⁶ Qtd. in Ibid. 21.

³⁸⁷ Qtd. in Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 188.

³⁸⁸ Qtd. in Sanders 2005, 121.

³⁸⁹ Qtd. in Follain 86.

³⁹⁰ Qtd. in Thynne, *Playing a Part*.

³⁹¹ Qtd. in Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 188.

³⁹² Qtd. in Cahun 2015, 46.

³⁹³ Qtd. in Follain 87.

³⁹⁴ Qtd. in Lewis 203.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. 203-04.

³⁹⁶ Qtd. in Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 189.

³⁹⁷ “L'expérience émouvante de fraternel accueil (en 1944, en prison) de ceux au nom de qui

j'écrivais," *Écrits* 584. Qtd. in Carr, Sanders, and Willmot 189.

³⁹⁸ Cahun 2015, 47.

³⁹⁹ Qtd. in Follain 92.

⁴⁰⁰ "Des faits objectifs ont prouvé que ce verbe secret, contagieux – le nôtre – a mis le refus dans la bouche des moutons, a fait reculer les bouchers. Mon fantôme s'est incarné en des hommes inconnus du nous," *Écrits* 651-52.

⁴⁰¹ Cahun 2015, 38.

⁴⁰² Sanders 2005, 122.

⁴⁰³ Aufsess 61-62, 87.

⁴⁰⁴ *Écrits* 729. In English in the original.

⁴⁰⁵ "C'est moi seule qui suis cause de tout. La machine à écrire m'appartient et Suzanne ne sait pas s'en server. Les photomontages sont de moi. J'ai rédigé tous les textes. J'ai tout organisé. Suzanne n'a fait que traduire mes textes en allemand et m'accompagner quand je distribuais les papiers. Vous avez à comprendre ceci: Ma famille a souffert de la guerre de 1870 et de celle de 1914-18. Enfin, je suis, par mon père, d'origine juive," Ibid. 747.

⁴⁰⁶ "Un individu ne peut changer qu'en mettant sa propre conduite à l'épreuve de ses convictions," Ibid. 768.

⁴⁰⁷ "Vivre (écrire) est pour moi cette <<impossible>> acrobatie de la poésie à l'historicité," Ibid. 659.

⁴⁰⁸ Cahun 2015, 37-38.

⁴⁰⁹ "destructions de la personnalité obtenues par la Gestapo . . . dans les camps de concentration," "le pouvoir actuel de réduire à rien la notion du bien et du mal, la faculté de penser, la faculté de jouir," *Écrits* 656, 657.

⁴¹⁰ “L’homme peut être détruit du dehors,” “une mutilation irréparable,” Ibid. 658, 656.

⁴¹¹ “La destruction des sens, des sentiments, des facultés mentales, de la conscience et de la volonté, peut précéder la destruction de la vie,” Ibid. 656.

⁴¹² Cahun 2015, 41, 40.

⁴¹³ Follain 88-89.

⁴¹⁴ JHT/1995/00045/5, 1.

⁴¹⁵ Qtd. in Downie, “Marcel Moore,” 61.

⁴¹⁶ Qtd. in Follain 83-84.

⁴¹⁷ Qtd. in Ibid 89.

⁴¹⁸ “L’*Oberst* Sarmsen précisa qu’il considérait que nous avions agi en patriotes et qu’à titre personnel il ne nous blâmait aucunement,” *Écrits* 720.

⁴¹⁹ Qtd. in Follain 89. Cf. “Le conseil de Guerre nous condamna donc à être fusillées; il nous condamnait, en outre, pour n’avoir pas livré notre radio, nos revolvers, et notre appareil photographique, à six ans de travaux forcés et neuf mois de prison – et à la confiscation de tous nos biens,” *Écrits* 720.

⁴²⁰ “Et moi, pour finir, les faisant de nouveau rire aux éclats par ma naïveté simulée: <<Are we to do the nine months and six years before we are shot?>>,” Ibid. 721.

⁴²¹ JHT/1995/00045/5.

⁴²² “Les adolescents de la *Feldgendarmerie* . . . qui nous tinrent compagnie pendant la délibération du tribunal, . . . bavardant avec nous de la Suisse, de la vie de Nietzsche, de sa philosophie, de sa francophilie,” *Écrits* 721.

⁴²³ JHT BA/W50/183.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Follain 90.

⁴²⁶ Aron 129.

⁴²⁷ Löwy 78.

⁴²⁸ Follain 90.

⁴²⁹ Qtd. in Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Lewis 204.

⁴³¹ “En Allemagne, les camps n’étaient pas si mauvais. Les sanitaires étaient bien en Allemagne.

Il y avait beaucoup de charbon et de nourriture. . . . Dommage qu’il n’y ait plus de bateaux pour l’Allemagne. *Il y avait encore des bateaux pour nous conduire à Aurigny.*

Dommage. Nous savions où il voulait en venir: la menace d’Aurigny pouvait réussir là où la menace de mort avait échoué,” *Écrits* 763.

⁴³² Qtd. in Cone 222-23.

⁴³³ Qtd. in Follain 93.

⁴³⁴ Follain 93.

⁴³⁵ Sanders 2005, 122.

⁴³⁶ “Je suis libre, dans la <<ferme>> en ruine,” *Écrits* 608.

⁴³⁷ Qtd. in Doy 138.

⁴³⁸ “l’*irrévocable* révolution perpétuelle,” Cahun 1934, 25.

⁴³⁹ “Le franc-tireur qui prend la responsabilité des fins et des moyens, des orders qu’il se donne,

des actes qu’il accomplit sans entraves ni excuses, voilà la ride au front du brouillard des guerres nationales étrangères à l’homme, voilà dans la guerre civile le citoyen de la république humanisant la guerre même, voilà l’homme encore libre. Qui s’est donné une mission ne peut plus s’engager,” *Écrits* 769.

⁴⁴⁰ “L'éternel choix de changer ou le monde ou soi-même – et le choix des moyens – est à votre service,” qtd. in Oehsen 2003, 183-84.

⁴⁴¹ Deleuze 4.

⁴⁴² Guattari 266.

⁴⁴³ Stiegler 2014, 8, 10.

⁴⁴⁴ Stiegler 2015, 60.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. 40.

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